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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART  
AND DESIGN**

**FACULTY OF DESIGN  
DEPARTMENT OF FASHION AND TEXTILES**

**Irish Dolls House Design  
1730 - 1980**

**By  
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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis breaks new ground in the study of dolls houses in Ireland. This thesis documents the development of Irish dolls house design from 1730 - 1980, mainly from the social and historical standpoint. In this thesis Irish Dolls Houses, whose contents are of virtually original condition, are examined as it is only in these miniature models that we are given an even partially correct picture of how Irelands gentry once lived. ?

An examination of all the dolls houses documented in this thesis was carried out, rather than relying on written references and photographs as photographs are notoriously unreliable and what appears to be a particularly well-made specimen, often on close examination is seen to have been roughly made by a local handyman.

Ireland is the home to numerous dolls houses. These miniature houses are in the hands of two public collections and many private collectors. The most magnificent collection is that of Madame Joanne Mollereau, founder of The Museum Of Childhood. Mme Mollereau has many antique dolls houses and dolls housed in her Museum which is buried in her own back garden in Palmerstown Park, Rathmines, Dublin 6. Mme. Mollereau's dolls houses are equipped with dozens of pieces of rare and expensive furniture, dinnerware and accessories. Her rarest furnishings are a dozen pieces of Diessen metal filigree furniture made in the later half of the nineteenth century. They include a piano with leoine legs and a swing cradle. She has developed a remarkable collection over the past many years, however she says that adding to it in Ireland is difficult. Many fine old Irish dolls houses are often just thrown out and burned, children who inherit estates and sell off the furnishings don't realise the remarkable value of these miniature models.



# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears in the records of the Court.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court at the City of New York, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_.

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Clerk of the Court

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Judge of the Court

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Another public collection is housed in The National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. This collection consists of four very impressive nineteenth century Irish dolls houses, The Strahan House, The Domville House, Lady Mayo's House and The Wilson House, which are all copies of mansions in which the wealthy people of Ireland once lived. When visiting this Museum, I found many books and articles which formed an important part of my research for this thesis.

The Strahan House, The Wilson House and Lady Mayo's House are today part of an exhibition of home life in Dublin 2 1790 - 1820 at Number Twenty-nine, Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2. Here the owners, Electricity Supply Board and The National Museum of Ireland, have sought to recapture the atmosphere and furnishings of a typical comfortable home of the general period 1790 - 1820.

An important private collector, who was interviewed as part of the research for this thesis, is The honourable Desmond Guinness, who houses two splendid miniature houses at Leixlip Castle, Co. Kildare. His two books "The Collectors Guide to Dolls Houses and Miniatures" and "Family Dolls' Houses" formed an important part of my literary survey. Kate Beaumont, a miniature maker of today, was another lady whom I visited and interviewed about her work.

While there are many books written documenting American and Continental dolls' houses and their contents, unfortunately there has been little written on the many Irish specimens. The main text used were Desmond Guinness's two books "The Collector History of dolls' Houses" and "Dolls Houses and Miniatures". The many articles written by the dolls house enthusiast Charlotte Raftery also formed an important part of my research.

This thesis firstly examines the idea and concept of the doll house and the national variations of these models. The focus of the thesis is Desmond Guinness eighteenth century doll house, which was originally housed in the nursery at Newbridge House, Donabate. This baby house excellently captures the idea of elegant living which is associated with the Georgian Age. Chapter





three examines the exteriors of nineteenth century Irish dolls houses. The many fine examples of nineteenth century houses which survive today shows us how fashionable these miniature houses were in this era. Chapter four looks at nineteenth century interiors of dolls houses. Chapter five deals with the twentieth century Irish miniature palaces i.e. Titania's Palace, Tanya's Palace and Tara's Palace.





# CHAPTER ONE







## Background : The Idea and Concept of Doll's Houses

Everything one sees on earth is doll's stuff and nothing else

All that man finds, he plays with like a child.

Ardently he loves for a short while what he throws away so easily thereafter,

Thus man is, as he finds,

not only once but always as a child

(King, 1978, pp. XXV)

A recurring fact in the history of dolls houses is the preoccupation of adults with these fascinating structures, at certain periods almost to the exclusion of children. In the earliest recorded stages of their development, princes and court ladies commissioned and in turn furnished the decoration of such models. These furnished structures only sometimes shown to children as they remained, because of their value completely the province of adults and were displayed in museum-like curiosity rooms, art chambers or reception areas, where their unusual and expensive valuables could form a focal point for discussion.

Dolls houses and miniatures had and always will have an irresistible fascination for both adults and children; adults are totally intrigued by the skill and artistry involved in the making of tiny objects, while children are quite simply entranced by their magic when the doors of dolls house are opened revealing comfortably furnished and elegant room, equipped with every utensil imaginable, the magic is complete.

Early dolls houses were not made for use as children's playthings but were solely a display of taste, wealth and social standing. This fashion continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and only gradually the joy of the miniatures began to be shared by the children of these households. Initially, they were not so much toys as aids to education in life and household management. In those days, it must be remembered







that there were no books for children that weren't written with a view to instilling virtue and knowledge into the poor little children, rather than entertaining them. However, by the mid nineteenth century the dolls house was at last a plaything, though only for the children of the wealthy. At this time, no well equipped nursery was complete without one. The arrival of the Victorian Age saw the beginning of mass production. From then on, the dolls house was truly a toy and it was for this market the miniatures were produced in quantity.

What makes the early dolls houses such unique records of the interiors and domestic habits of the period is that many of the miniature models of household objects are direct and accurate copies of implements of which the originals have not survives such as ironing boards, brooms and peat baskets etc.

However it is important to remember that the everyday lives of the original owners may not be correctly mirrored in their dolls houses as the rearrangement of furniture, redecoration , later additions and basic wear have all contributed to the diminution of the original effect, so what remains is simply a broad sketch of the century in which it was created.

Journalists are particularly fond of the comment that in a dolls house, Victorian life for example, can be viewed in detail. However, the opposite is sometimes true. We see life that Victorian parents saw prudent or desirable while the sordid or ugly were kept out of sight. Even a lavatory, a feature of most middle-class homes by 1870, was only occasionally provided in dolls houses before 1900 , while the dirt, drudgery and sexual tension of daily life was kept out of the picture of comfortable and very perfect family life.

In nineteenth century houses, there was little or none of the realism of witchcraft, the arrangement of living-in rooms or the drunken card playing parties that appear in the seventeenth and eighteenth century homes, made solely for adult appreciation, as the whole concept was aimed completely at the appreciation and taste of an innocent child.







In the few cases where an adult was engaged in creating settings mainly for his own personal enjoyment, a greater degree of authenticity is obvious. But the majority of houses made in the last 150 years offer only a light feel of the period and it is much too easy to overrate their importance as documents of social interest. Like in the stories of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan the world of the dolls houses was also that of an idealised one.

Dolls house collections are in the good company, princes and princesses, dukes and duchesses have all fallen under the spell of this absorbing hobby. The undoubted fascination of dolls houses is hard to explain adequately. It cannot be entirely put down to the attraction of smallness, or the desire to escape from the everyday world. Other ideas have been suggested; an interest in architecture, a love of fine craftsmanship and nostalgia for a lost childhood perhaps. However, for many of us who enjoy studying social history, dolls houses are a three-dimensional reflection in miniature of the way we once lived, they are almost little theatres bringing domestic history to life, and we are grateful that so many have survived in museums, collections and private houses to tell the tale. Whatever reason one has for appreciating them, dolls houses have captured our imagination for over four centuries, encouraging grown men and women to spend hours, and fortunes, on the creation of these miniature houses, an idea which has continued well in modern times.

The sense of the miniaturisation of life is so strong that, peeping through a chink in the curtains or looking into a hall through a half-opened door, one longs to escape from a world of civil wars and terrorism to an age when lace edged tablecloths were invariably used at tea-time and when the maid giggled with her followers outside the kitchen door. Dolls houses do not engender the worn love of an infant feels for a soft-bodied doll or animal it could take to bed as a companion, and they have inspired few literary excursions in either verse or prose. The dolls house was never a toy to be cosseted and loved but an object that could be made to dance to the child's or adults own tune and invested with the characteristics of real life.





The cost of constructing a good model house was high even in the eighteenth century. This sheer value of the object was probably instrumental in ensuring its survival. It is little wonder that people who commissioned the models guarded them and treated them and treated them as a respected item of furniture. Cheap miniature houses became available in the nineteenth century from toy shops and many were made by local craftsmen. In comparison with the number of dolls that were sold, the dolls house was a much more unusual toy and one searches in vain through the pages of magazines and novels for interesting references. Writers were obviously aware that dolls houses were owned by so small a section of the public that their readers would not relate to them as they would to that more popular toy, the doll. ( King, 1983, pp. 170 )

In the sixteenth century, the habit of "forming collections" began throughout Europe. Cabinets, beautifully made by expert craftsmen with the greatest skill and artistry, were commissioned by all the leisured and the rich to hold the treasures they amassed. In the hey-day of the collecting craze in the seventeenth century, the art cabinets housed remarkable stores of curiosities and priceless works of art. The description of these lavishly filled cabinets shows that from their beginnings until the end of the eighteenth century, baby houses contained masterpieces which were made by craftsmen of the highest quality, tiny models of all the necessary furniture and accessories required in the life of that period. The first dolls' houses, or more properly baby houses( The term 'baby house' was in general used in both Europe and America during the eighteenth century. This term lingered, as an outdated expression , until the middle years of the nineteenth century. The word 'baby' was in common use instead of the word 'doll', making the title 'baby house' self-explanatory. ) are German and originated in the sixteenth century. They were furnished with miniature reproductions of furniture. Porcelain, silver and their wax inhabitants were fashioned in the image of their owner's friends and relations. ( Colclough, 16 Dec. 1990, I 42 )







In the seventeenth century, they spread to France and Holland, the Rijksmuseum in Antwerp has a house of 1686 made as a marriage gift for Petronella Oortman. Its doors and furniture are of Rosewood and the walls are decorated with Arcadian murals. [Plate 1 ] (Colcough, 16 Dec. 1990, I 42 )

The oldest English dolls house was probably the one given by Queen Anne to Ann Sharp, daughter of Archbishop of York, and the fashion spread rapidly across the country, Ann Sharp's house was less formal and less splendid than the German and Dutch cabinet houses, this house was a child's plaything rather than a costly toy for an adult, which is one of the reasons why it is so charming. [ Plate 2 ] ( Jackson, 1988, pp. 36 )

The best Irish eighteenth century example is probably the baby house from Newbridge House. [ Plate 3 ] The development of the dolls house in the eighteenth century closely reflects the order and stability of a society that is perfectly mirrored in the controlled and splendid architecture of this period. Girls of this period were expected to be trained and educated for the eventual management of their own houses in a similarly controlled manner. There was no excuse for a badly run establishment and even the richest of women were expected to participate in the basic organisation of her household. It was not uncommon for gentlemen to work with the servants in the dairy or kitchen and there were frequent complaints regarding the difficulty of telling mistresses and servants apart, as many employees did not wear special uniforms and were often dressed in their mistresses' cast-offs. Even in dolls houses, it was not always clear whether some of the more plainly garbed figures were family or servants. It was difficult for the mistress to set herself completely apart while she shared in wine-making, pickling and the preparation of medicine with her servants. In the rooms of the dolls' houses, we see this relaxed mingling of the social classes that was to end in the Nineteenth Century, when servants were banished to the basement kitchens, and were kept firmly in their place.







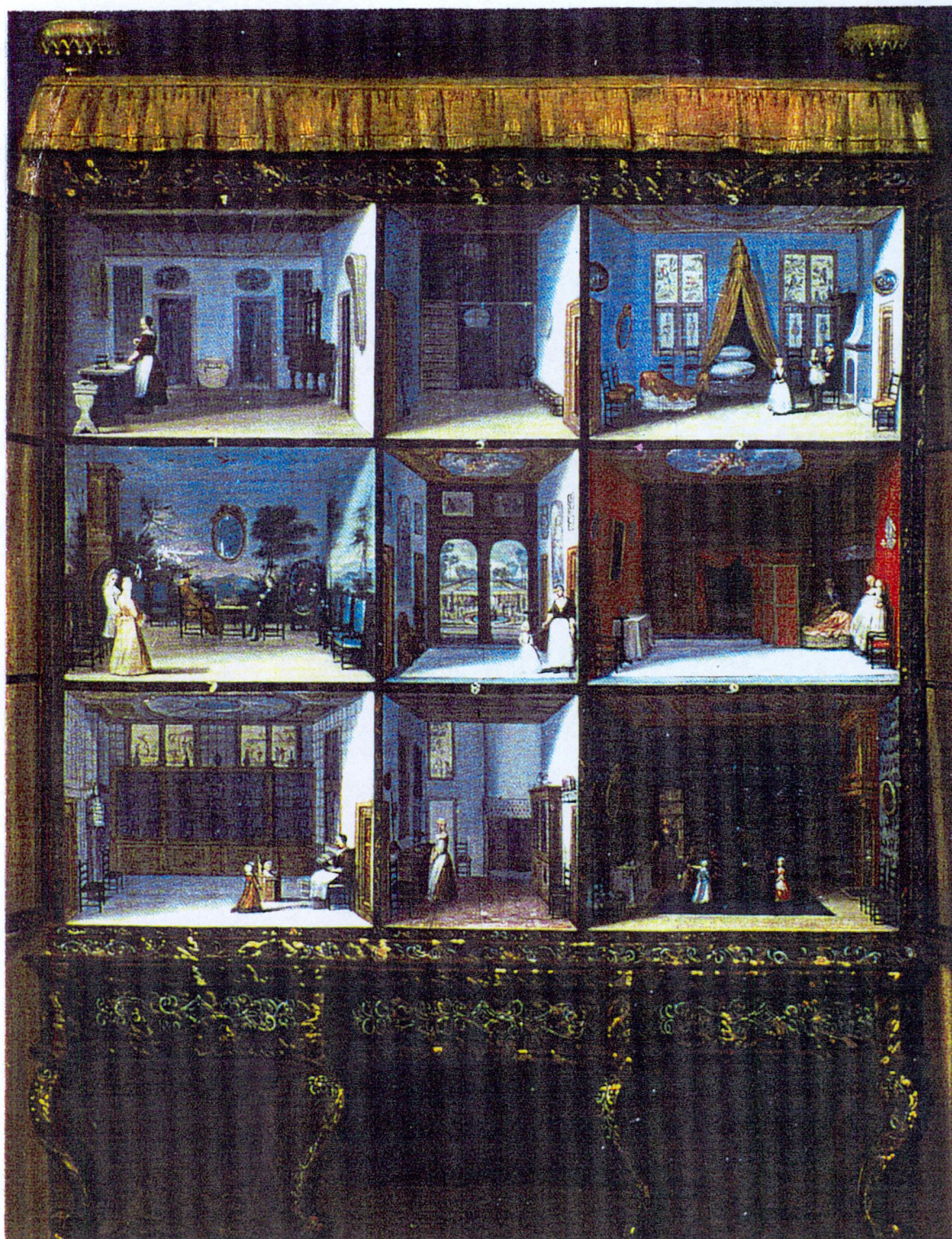


PLATE 1

Petronella Oortman's dolls House - 1686







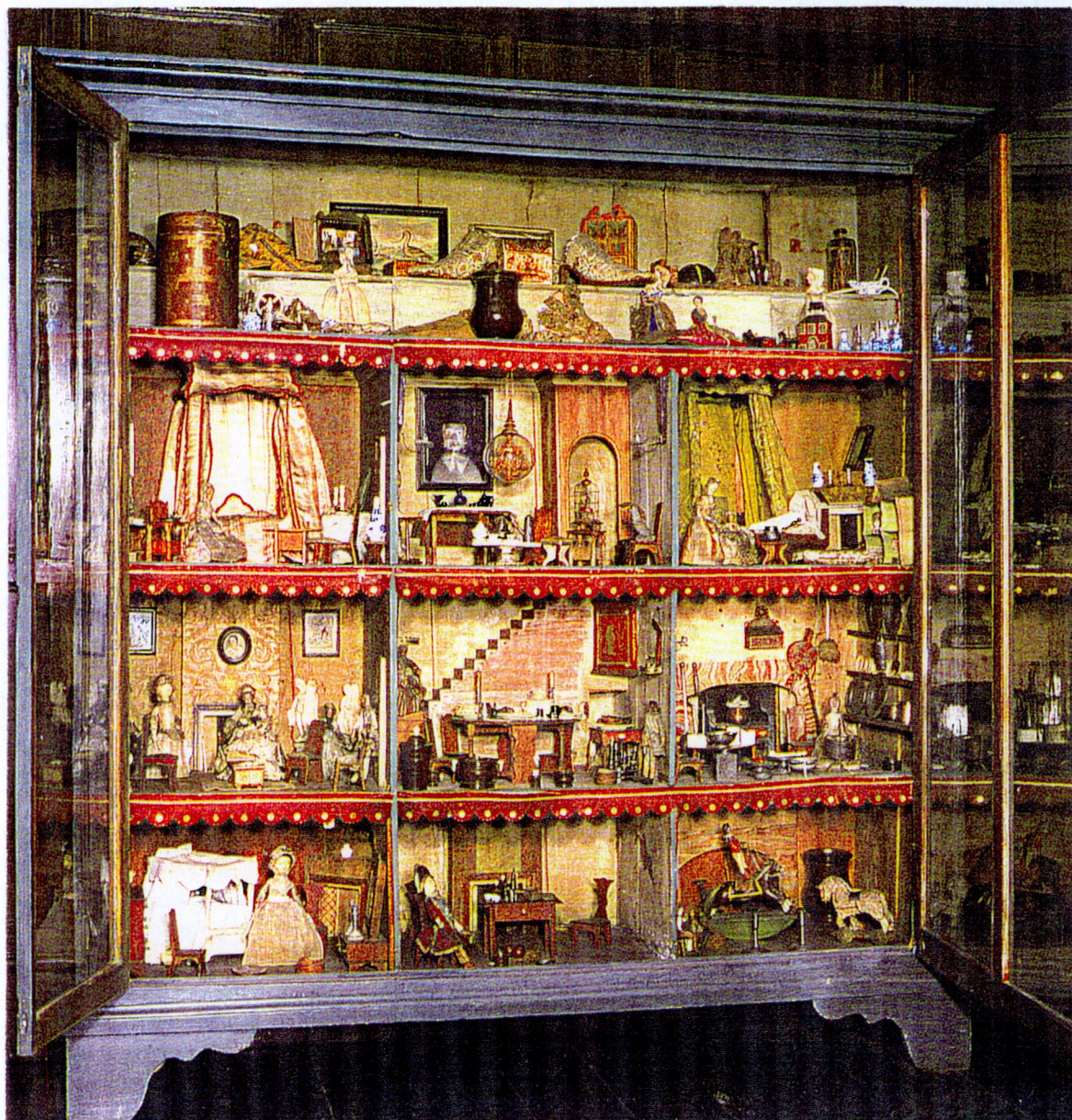


PLATE 2

ANN SHARP'S DOLLS HOUSE - OLDEST  
ENGLISH DOLLS HOUSE









PLATE 3

Newbridge Dolls House-  
18<sup>th</sup> Century Irish Dolls House







When studying household arrangements and the deposition of furniture in a room, we are constantly aware of the basic belief in rational thought organisation and foresight that was basic to the lifestyle of the eighteenth century. Nursery life in the first half of the nineteenth century was greatly influenced by the idea of ' Practical Education '. ( King, 1974, pp. 243 ) The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of the more commercially made dolls house. From this time onwards, many dolls houses were meant for the delight of children, however, there is some evidence to suggest their use as object lessons in the training of young girls in house craft, in preparation for marriage and motherhood, similar to the German tradition. Parents of the nineteenth century rarely did anything for merely play or pleasure, a didactic element was usually involved.

Most dolls house collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lived in Germany, Holland or in England. The interiors of their miniature houses reflected their own daily lives, illustrating how their homes were furnished. However, the type of casing chosen to house the collections differed from country to country. An excellent example of a seventeenth century German dolls house is the Stromer House 1639.[Plate 4] It is in the Germanische National Museum in Nuremburg. It got its name from its last owner Baron Von Stromer. (Jackson, 1988, pp. 13) An important feature of the Stromer House is its domestic detail. It contains over a thousand small objects, giving a unique picture of domestic life in a prosperous seventeenth century German house. Many German women believed that it was important to teach their young daughters how to be good housewives, hence this miniature house was most probably used as an educational toy. However, this is not to say that the children were allowed to treat these small houses playthings, as in many cases only the room settings that were furnished as kitchens served in this dual capacity, but at least the children were allowed some involvement with what were essentially adult treasures. The Stromer House, like most German houses were fully equipped with every household necessity [Plate 5]. Like the Stromer





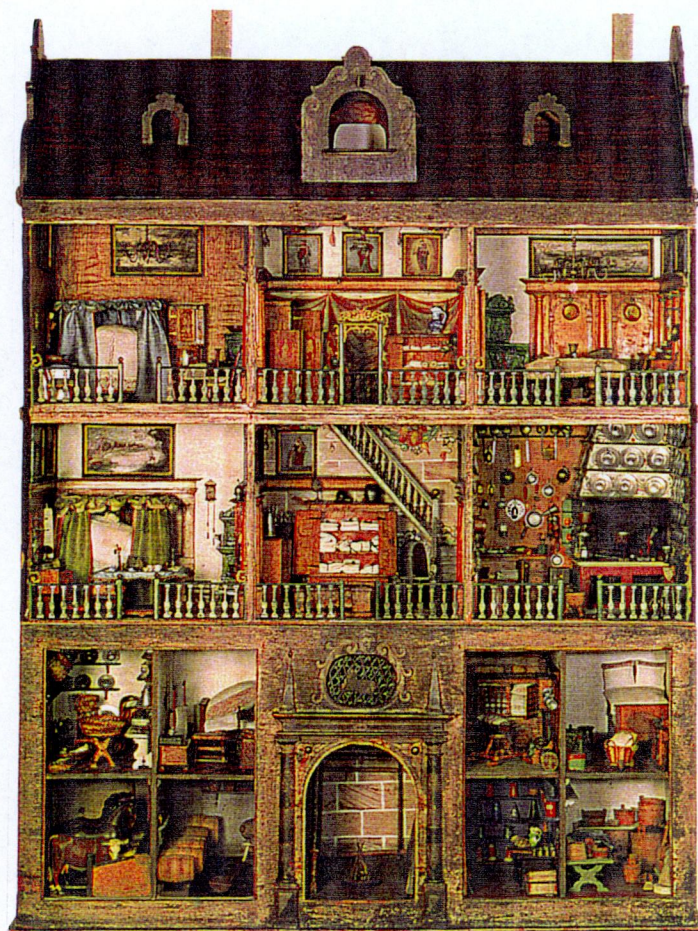


PLATE 4

Stromer house -  
17th Century German Dolls House









PLATE 5

Kitchen of Stromer House





House, most of the miniature German houses had realistic roofs and sidewalls. However, they often lacked fronts, as the importance of the miniature houses lay with their contents and furnishings, so a facade would have served no particular purpose.

An excellent example of a Dutch cabinet house is Petronella de la Court' late seventeenth century cabinet house .[Plate 6] This cabinet house reflects the splendour and elegance that epitomised many affluent Dutch collectors homes. The cabinet itself is a magnificent piece of furniture, and most of the miniature pieces it contains are beautiful objects d'art. Wealthy Dutch men and women were ardent collectors of fine porcelain, paintings and furniture as well as miniature houses. As miniature replicas were often very valuable, they were sometimes housed inside a fine cabinet or cupboard that had been designed to resemble the interior of a real house as with the Petronella de la Courts cabinet house. Dutch cabinet houses like German dolls houses, lacked a realistic house facade. The cabinet doors hid and protected the miniature contents within and also highlighted the value of the collectors possessions.

Many English collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a quite different attitude. For them, a baby house was exactly what the description suggested, a small replica of a house loosely based on, or even deliberately designed to look like their own home. English dolls houses of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century were probably also made for the amusement of adults but by the end of the eighteenth century, they had become playthings for the children of the rich. The Nostell Priory baby house is one of the most magnificent and well preserved examples of an English mid eighteenth century miniature house.

During the mid nineteenth century, when Irish miniatures were in fashion, Victorian ladies preferred two-and-three story Georgian style houses. The elegant eighteenth century Georgian homes, which were perhaps Ireland's greatest contribution to residential architecture, were popular. Some titled and wealthy







PLATE 6

Petronella de la Court's Cabinet House -  
Late 17th Century





families actually duplicated their own mansions as dolls houses for their children. (Webster, 1980, pp.22)

A large number of early dolls houses and rooms still exist today. These are displayed in museums, both national and privately owned, in both Europe and North America. They offer a fascinating insight into lifestyles and fashions over the Centuries.





# CHAPTER 2





## Eighteenth Century Newbridge Dolls House

Richard Castle is the architect responsible for Newbridge House [Plate 7] which is located in Donabate, Co. Dublin. Newbridge House is one of the only eighteenth century houses which has remained in the possession of the family for which it was built. The Rev. Charles Cobbe, eventually to become Archbishop of Dublin, purchased Newbridge in 1736 and set about building in the following year. While the property has now been acquired by the County Council, the Cobbe family will continue to reside at Newbridge House from time to time, due to the unique arrangement which had been entered into between the family and Dublin County Council.

Ireland's most fascinating dolls house which survives today was also constructed by Richard Castle. It was originally built for the children of Thomas Cobbe in 1737. The buildings of Richard Castle tend to be rather ponderous both inside and out, in comparison with English work of the same date. This was perhaps a reflection of his tontonic nature, for he was of German origin. These ponderous elements are also evident in his dolls' houses.

The last member of the Cobbe family to live in Newbridge House before the County Council bought it was Thomas Cobbe. Thomas never married and had no children, and so had no use for this dolls house. In the early 1970s Thomas Cobbe needed the space which had been occupied by this dolls house and so he sold it to an antique dealer in Dublin. The dolls house got slightly damaged when it was being removed which may suggest that it was actually constructed in the room where it stood for more than two hundred years. Desmond Guinness, who is now the proud owner of this dolls' house bought it almost twenty-five years ago from the Dublin antique dealer.

In the eighteenth century, a model house was as appropriate in the drawing room beside the specimen cabinet and console tables as in the nursery. This position has been regained in recent years, and today, the miniature enthusiast Desmond Guinness







PLATE 7

Newbridge House-  
Donabate, Co. Dublin





displays this 'baby' house in the setting of his fine home of Leixlip Castle, Co. Kildare. This dolls house is of enormous proportions .[Plate 8] Its facade may be opened in six separate sections , five of these sections contain two large windows each. The section in the centre contains a fine weighty doorcase which carries a bolt as well as a lock. Each section has a keyhole as well upon brass handles, and all are original. Two pretty brass escutcheons survive in the lowest wings but are handleless. There are four receded and marbled ionic-style giant orders which front this baby houses. The entire exterior has been marbled and at some stage painted in squares to resemble ashlar. The paint work is somewhat erratic. The rather ugly bay window at the left was probably added in fairly recent years. [Plate 9]

It may have been used, in part as a nursery cupboard as there is a utilisation shelving concealed behind the upper windows, and the front door is suspended in mid air above two rows of drawers. The main floor consists of three rather large rooms, two of which have black fireplaces of the plain simple type that are often seen in bedrooms of old Irish dolls' houses. The front hall has a chair rail of mid eighteenth century type, there is no staircase, the upper floor, in any case, would have been out of reach. The interior is, otherwise quite sparsely decorated apart from scraps of pale floral wallpaper that is today rather worse for wear, and the paper borders which remain have seen better days. [Plate 10]

The miniature house at Leixlip is a baby house which could be furnished and played with, forbidding as it is, and still have room for toys and books, for dolls and curtains too in the drawers so that the playthings could be locked away when the schooling began and the ink pens and books were brought down from the shelves. And how wonderful this house would have been to play with, as its magic would begin to unfold when the light would pour in through all its fourteen tall windows.

This house excludes personality, it is not any one detail that draws us to it but the sum of all the details of all the evidence of loving care that has been lavished on it since fit was first played







PLATE 8

Facade of Newbridge Dolls House







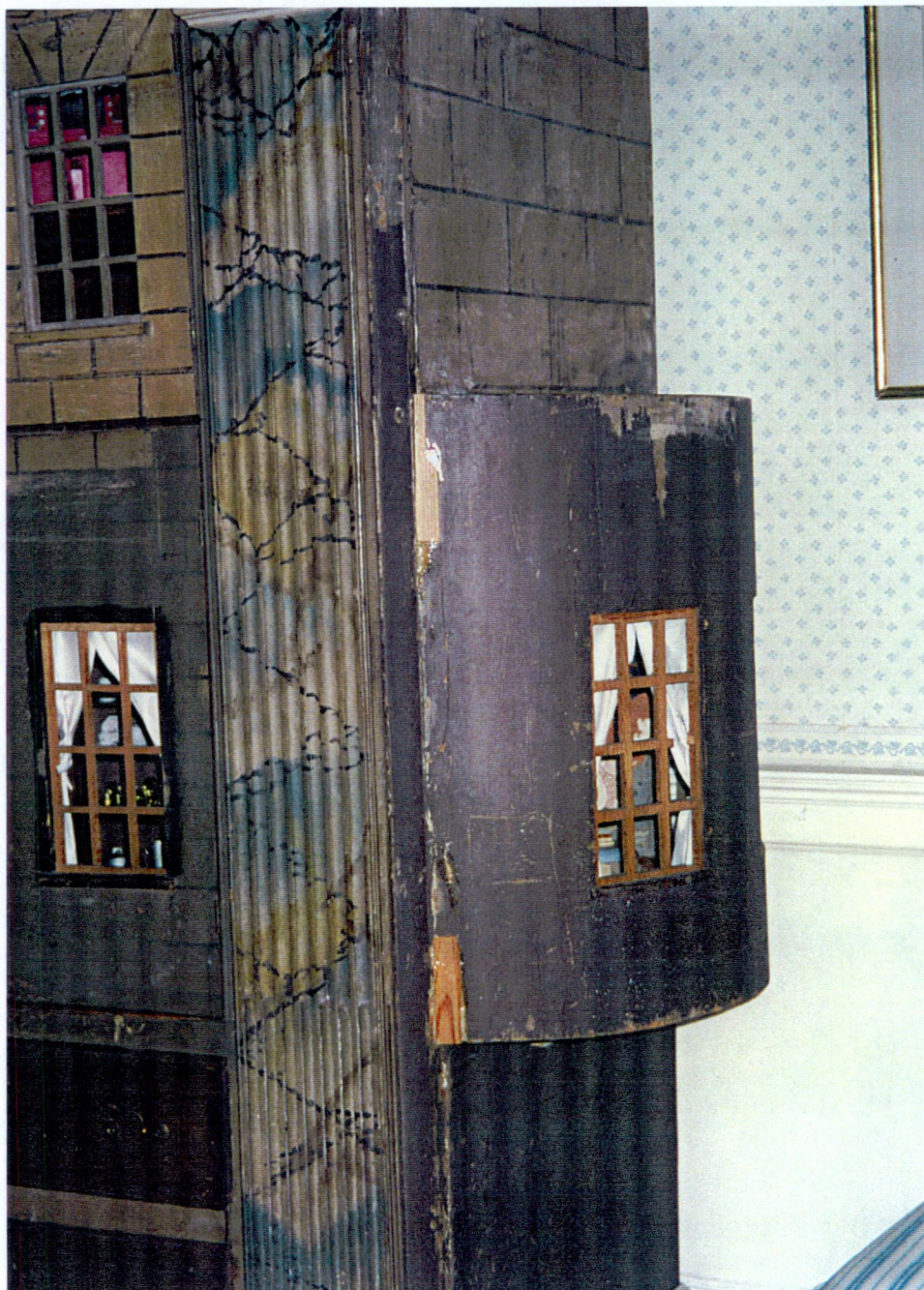


PLATE 9

The Ugly Bay Window of  
Newbridge Dolls House







PLATE 10

One of The Rooms of  
Newbridge Dolls House





with by the Cobbe children in the eighteenth century. this great Irish baby house is a living reminder to us, of the richness of the Irish culture during the Georgian period of elegance.

It is true that doll-sized houses are exactly like people-sized houses in that they take on personality with age, price has nothing to do with the personality , most of us know of a real house of rather imposing stature, furnished with exotic pieces that have it been collected from the four corners of the world, and have little personality and conversely we have all entered modest homes that may have struck us immediately with warmth and ingenuity, even though they were probably furnished with cast-offs. (King, 1974, pp. 47 - 48)

It is exactly the same with dolls' houses. One house that comes to mind is this eighteenth century Newbridge dolls house.





# CHAPTER 3







## The Exteriors of Irish Dolls Houses in the Nineteenth Century

Ireland's Industrial Exhibition of 1852 and subsequent exhibitions stimulated the production of jewellery, furniture and perhaps even the dolls' house, much of which reflected the current interest in the national past.

The elegant eighteenth century Georgian homes, which were perhaps Ireland's greatest contribution to residential architecture, providing the nineteenth century dolls house makers with much inspiration needed to create fine miniature houses. Many titled and wealthy families actually duplicated their own mansions as doll houses for their children.

The exteriors of the Irish dolls house changed quite dramatically in this century. They became perfectly scaled models with far more elaborate facades. The facades no longer opened onto separate rooms but in one or perhaps two section, windows now had in some cases single panes, and since in many cases the dolls' house ceased to contain many valuables, it was no longer necessary to fit backs. By the middle of the nineteenth century, dolls' houses were characterised by their well-made decorative facades, displaying pillars, mouldings and low unpanelled doors. By the end of this century, there was little indication of stone or brick work and many of the windows were of unpleasant proportions. Mass produced dolls houses were no longer display pieces but were of minimal decoration and many were only realistic enough to satisfy a child's requirements. However, there were exceptions, of course, as some nineteenth century miniature houses which are documented in this chapter have exteriors and interiors as aesthetically pleasing as those of earlier times.

The Strahan House [Plate 11] is an excellent example of nineteenth century Irish dolls' houses. It is the oldest house in the National Museum of Ireland. It was created in 1820 by the firm owned by Miss Strahan's family and which had been founded as cabinet makers by Robert Strahan in 1776. It was extremely interesting because it architecturally correct for this







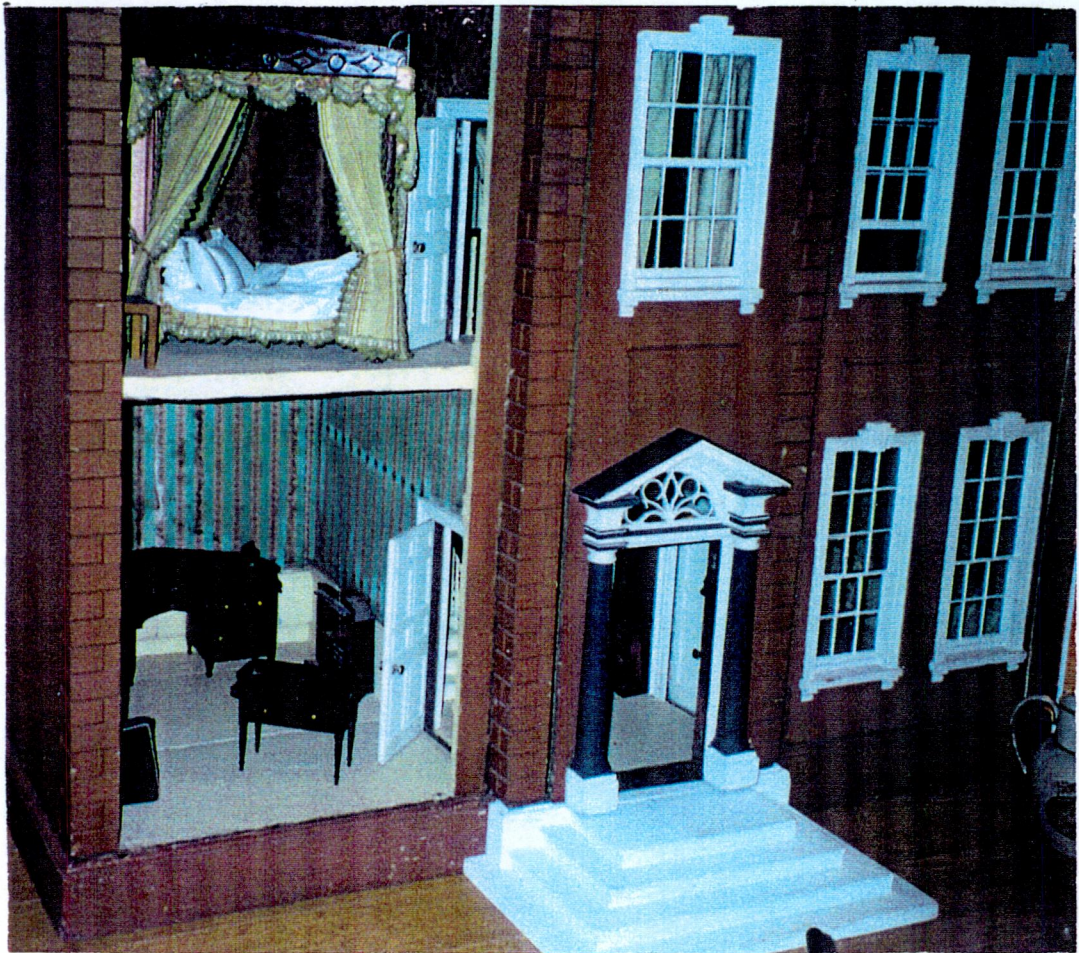


PLATE 11  
The Strahan Dolls House





period. It is made in the Georgian style. It is constructed of three separate parts, each divided into two stories and each with its own removable front. It is made of pine and stands 1.88 m high, is 2.07 m wide and 91.5 cm deep from front to back.

The hipped roof has a parapet along the edge and lifts off as a unit. Each of the three parts of the front of the house is defined by side quoins and the centre section which projects slightly is provided with a pediment. The whole front is painted a brick colour and there are four moveable steps which lead up to a double door of panelled mahogany which is framed with two large black rounded columns and a decorative pediment. Each side of the door has a lions' head knocker and door knob, the latter placed below the former. [Plate 12] The knockers still have their little round discs under their ring handles. The keyhole has a well-made lock and this and the brass bolt inside, ensured the safety of the contents and the persons of the house. Nine windows and a fan light and clear glass lit the hallway and the front rooms. The windows appear to have been sash windows which probably once worked, the two sections in each window are now struck with several layers of old paint.

A house of similar appearance but of somewhat later date was given to the National Museum in 1901 by Misses M and G Domville of Loughlinstown, Co. Dublin. It was originally displayed at the Great International Exhibition of 1851 in the Crystal Palace, London. The back and front of the Domville House are attached as hinged panels, the exterior is painted in terracotta and the two cornices are white. Four white steps in stimulated grey and white terrazzo lead up to the Georgian style panelled door which is flanked by two black half columns with ionic capitals. A modillion style moulding forms a border across the top of the facade. Two large chimneys rise from the sides of the roof. Nine large windows decorate the facade of the Domville House. [Plate 13]

These two houses may be described fairly as mansions of the "doll gentry" but there were other dolls' houses of a somewhat







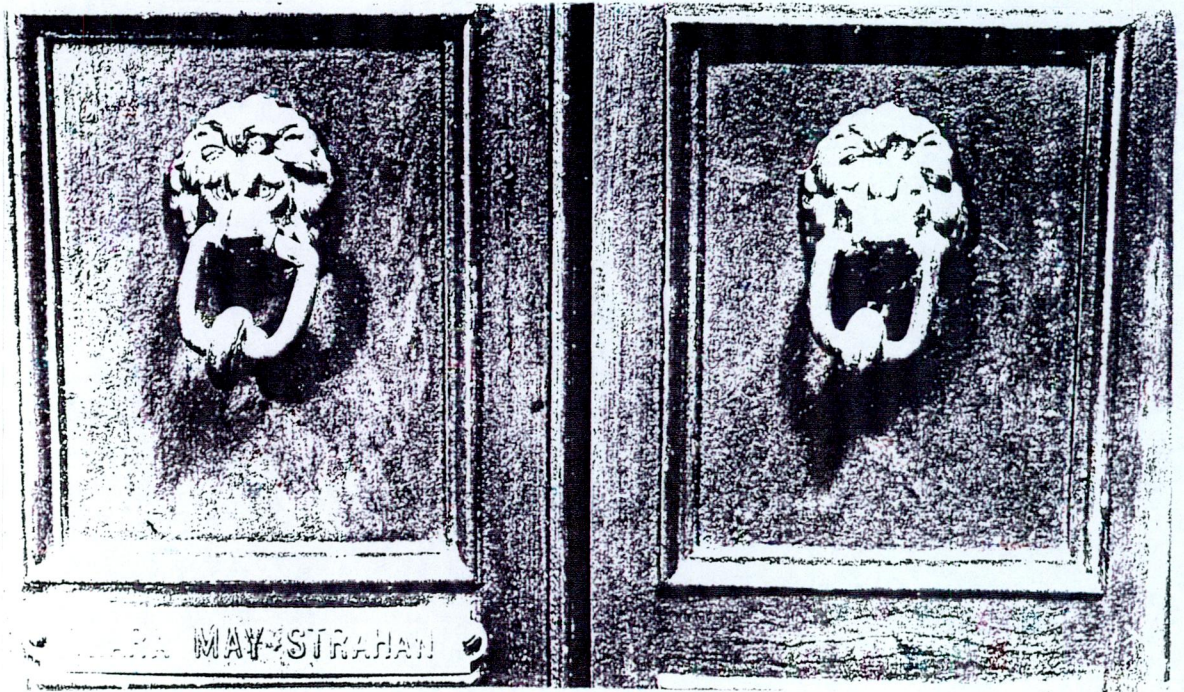


PLATE 12

Lions Head Knockers and Brass Door Knobs  
of Strahan House





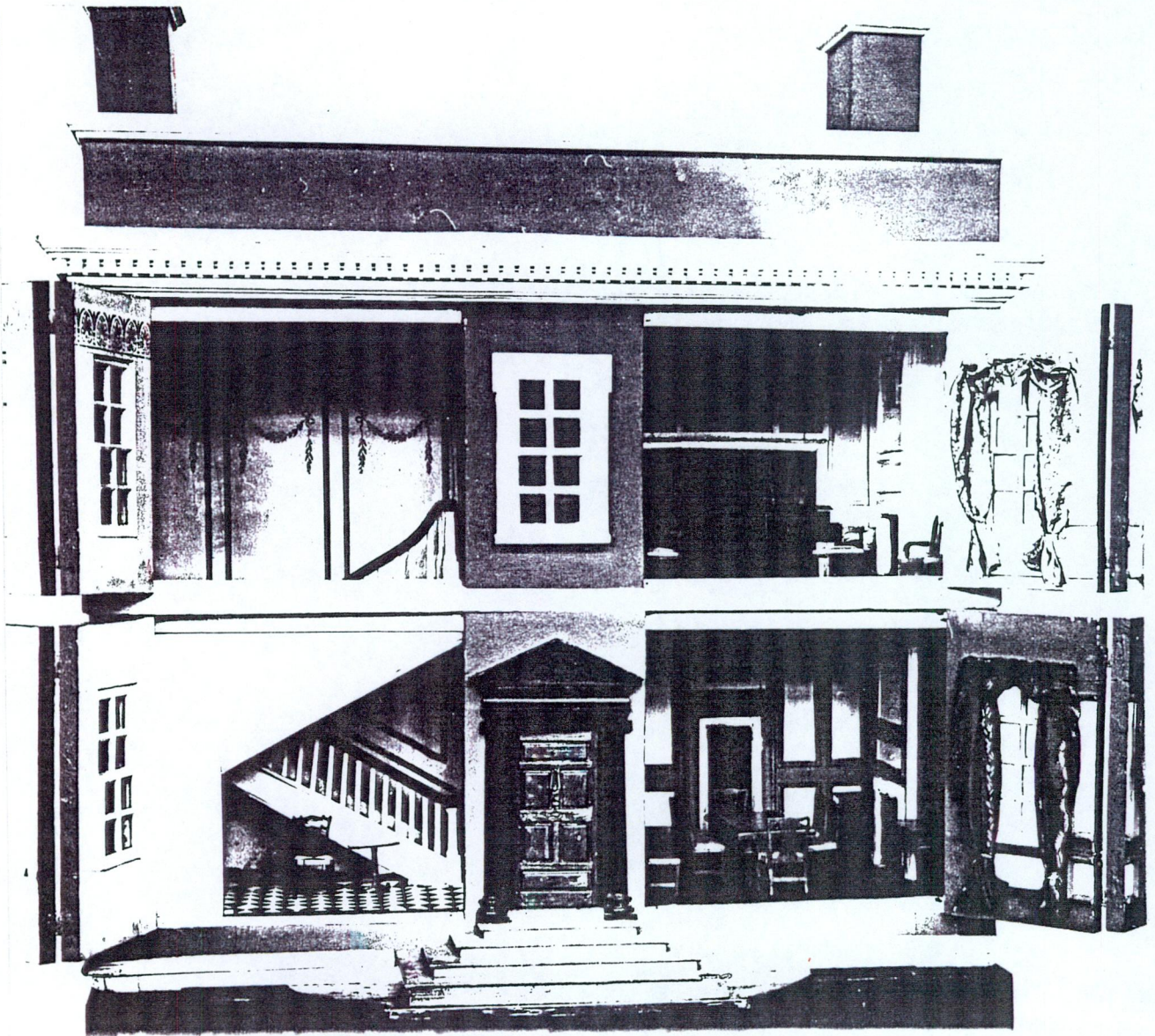


PLATE 13

The Domville Dolls House - 1830





lower social order. These were reproductions of good solid homes of the affluent middle class of this era. One is an elegant house made about 1830 and given to the National Museum by Lady Mayo. She and her husband, the Earl of Mayo, helped to establish the Irish <sup>R</sup>mural industries section of the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904, and among their exhibits was a scale model of the cottage which belonged to the ancestor of President McKinley.

Lace making and hand embroidery were two of the most widespread handicrafts in Ireland in the nineteenth century. The best known group or institution in the field of art embroidery was the Royal Irish School of Art Needlework which was based at 23 Clare street in Dublin. It was inaugurated in 1882 by the Countess Cowper, the wife of the Lord lieutenant. For various reasons, the school ran into financial difficulties and closed in 1894. The Countess of Mayo collected £400, reorganised the school completely and re-opened it in 1894 with a new supervising committee under her presidency. The school according to Lady Mayo was "in correspondence with some of the best designers of the day" (Larmour, 1992, pp. 13)

Lady Mayo's house stood at 70 cm high and 85 cm wide. [Plate 14] It is a two storey house with an elegant white facade decorated with five pilasters. There is a balcony made up of balusters outside each of the upstairs windows and two steps lead up to the front door which has a beaded pilaster on either side of it and above it, a rectangular fan light of clear glass. It has a flat roof with no chimneys. The front is divided into two parts which are hinged to open.

Another fine nineteenth century miniature house, also from the National Museum's collection is the Wilson house [Plate 15] which dates also from the 1830s. It was presented to the









PLATE 14

Facade Of Lady Mayo's House - 1830







PLATE 15

Facade of The Wilson House - 1830





museum by Mrs. A.H. Wilson of Monkstown, Co. Dublin. It measures 58 cm from back to front. The facade and pitched roof are painted white and in front there is a small porch, the roof of which is supported by two columns. The front door is made of mahogany, has sunken panels and is unpainted. Although it does not open, the door is decorated with a tiny brass knocker, a keyhole and a lock, just like a real door.

The concept of a cabinet house was also maintained in some of the Irish nineteenth century miniature houses, where several interesting interiors were created in rather basic cupboards. A fine example of that which is from Mme. Mollereau's collection. It dates from the mid nineteenth century. It is a Chester-type sandstone house. **[Plate 16]** Its decoration and furnishings are in original 1880 style. The exterior is quite impressive with a fine porch whose roof is held up by large columns on either side and five steps approaching the front door. The methods of opening nineteenth century houses varies even more than in the eighteenth century, though there is now less concern to protect the contents. The complete front of this sandstone house swings open in one piece and simply locks shut at the side. This is the same for Lady Mayo's House and The Wilson House.

A rather later, more commercial type dolls' house is that illustrated in **[Plate 17]**. It was auctioned by Hamilton Osborne King in Dublin in November 1995. It originated in the late nineteenth century and was valued between £700 - £900. Its' old worn appearance only added to the great sense of personality that it portrays. Much love has evidently been lavished on it over the past century. Five large uneven paned windows and a low cut door are surrounded by solid white wooden pieces. The entire exterior has been repainted red. It has a pitched roof which has been grooved to imitate slates. Two small chimneys rise from the black roof.







PLATE 16  
Facade of Sandstone House -  
Mid 19th Century







PLATE 17  
Exterior of Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Dolls House





# CHAPTER 4





## The Interiors of Irish Dolls Houses in the Nineteenth Century

The interior design of the Irish dolls house also saw many changes in the nineteenth century. Silverware was being replaced by practical wood and pottery, largely proportioned rooms and staircases gave way to divisions into three or four rooms. By the end of the nineteenth century, walls had become thinner, the paper was splitting over the cracks and the cheap wood used to form walls.

The Strahan House of the National Museum is big enough for a child to play in and according to Miss Strahan, the stairs were often climbed by herself and her brother as small children. This huge dolls house was quite unusual for this period. Little of the furniture has survived but the century or so of use has left hardly a mark on this sturdy and excellently made toy. The furniture that remains in the house is of fine workmanship but constructed to varying scales and is not all of the same period. (Irish Arts Review, 1985, pp. 35)

The front door opens on to a narrow hall with an apsidal wall at the back. From the grand floor a magnificent white painted cantilevered curved staircase rises. This has turned banisters and a curved mahogany handrail. A round headed window half way up the stairs on the back wall lights the apse at the back of the hall as well as the stairs themselves. The walls are painted green and two panelled doors opposite other open from the ground floor and the landing on the first floor. The doors are painted white and have brass knobs and latches which still function adequately today. The doors open into the four rooms of the house. Of the two upstairs rooms, that on the right, it is presumed, may have been intended as a drawing room, unfortunately, the furniture in the house is so meagre and its original positions so uncertain that it cannot be stated with any confidence what purpose the four rooms in the house may have served. What could have been the drawing room has the only fire-place left in the house. It has a wooden chimney piece







painted black and white to stimulate mottled marble. The walls are covered with a striped red and fawn furnishing damask, edged with matching braid.

On the opposite side of the landing from the drawing room is what could have been the bedroom. As with the drawing room, there are here also skirting boards and moulded wooden cornices. The brown cloth wall covering, and that in the drawing room also, date about 1900, when the house may have been redecorated. The glory of this interior is its beautiful four poster bed.[Plate 18] It was made for Clara May Strahan in the family workshop. It is an exceptional example of a late nineteenth century child's plaything. It measures 56 cm in maximum height, it is constructed of mahogany and rests on four globular feet. It has a domed canopy with carved pediments, there is a carved honeysuckle pattern on the foot board. The mattress, now missing, rested on a frame of loose wooden laths. The inside of the bed and the canopy are lined with pink fabric and there is an interior valance of the same material edged with a matching pink and green braid. Green brocade curtains are matched by top valances with green braid and tassels. The bed is covered with four neatly hemmed cotton sheets. Two white satin bolsters are filled with lamb's wool within a white cotton bolster case which has a drawstring through one end. There are also two square pillowcases trimmed with valenciennes lace and fastened with mother of pearl buttons.

On the ground floor, opening off the hall, there are also two rooms, each with a different green wallpaper and with a painted dado and a moulded chair rail above. Of the spare kitchen furniture, the tin grate is the most noteworthy. It is nineteenth century in date and of German provenance.

Several other pieces of furniture were given to the Museum with the Strahan house. These include a mahogany tilt top table and a mahogany pedestal sideboard etc. [Plate 19] The real importance of this miniature house lies in its known history and in its undoubted Irish Provenance.





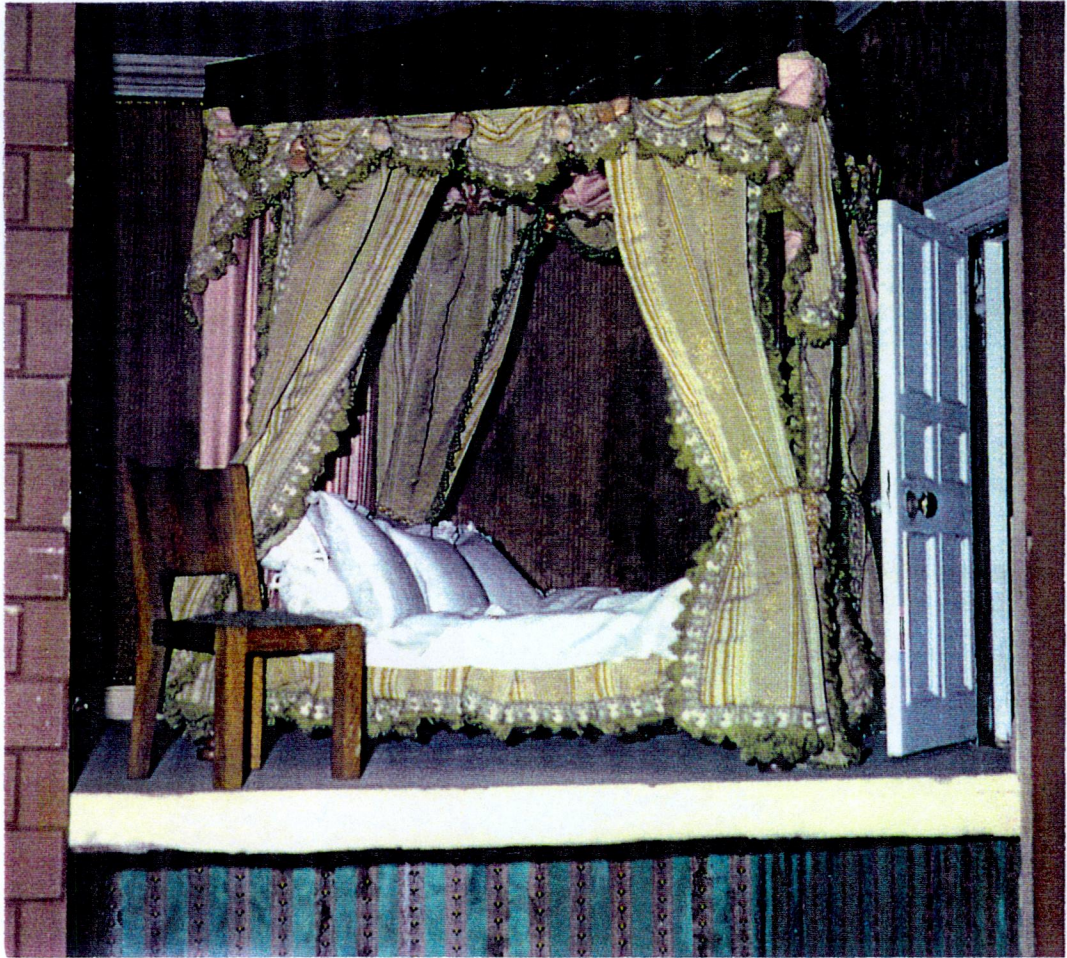


PLATE 18

The Four Poster Bed of The Strahan House







PLATE 19  
Mahogany Furniture of  
The Strahan Dolls House





There are six rooms in the Domville House, three on each floor. These are divided between the front and the back sections of the structure , on the ground floor front is the dining room with its Chippendale style furniture and at the back, a study and a kitchen. On the second floor, at the front is a music or drawing room and, at the back, a boudoir and the bedroom. Downstairs, the study walls are white with blue-green panels and the carpet is painted blue velvet, the curtains of painted maroon silk.

Upstairs, the music room, is an elegant chamber with painted honey-yellow walls with panels, a painted blue velvet carpet, yellow silk curtains and a pair of drapes of the same colour and material flanking the wide door leading into the boudoir at the back. The walls of the back room are also honey-yellow, set off with white mouldings round the panels. The door portieres are suspended by small brass rings from a heavy brass rod and are matched by the curtains on the window.

In the kitchen, the walls are white and there is a brown dado over a black skirting board. The furniture in this room is also rather meagre- a good dresser, a table and three Windsor-type chairs. This tiny house also houses miniature paintings done by Mabel Hurse, which are all copies of originals in the National Gallery of Ireland.

When Lady Mayo's House is opened, it reveals four rooms inside, a bedroom and a parlour on the upper floor and a kitchen and dining room below.[Plate 20] The first impression the viewer has of this house is one of light and gaiety. The wallpapers and their borders in all the rooms are original . Each room is fully furnished, but the plenishings vary in date. Some are earlier than the date of the house itself - 1820 ~ 1830 , and some are slightly later.

The early nineteenth century furniture is very well made and mostly of German origin. The home made four-poster bed is very effective. [Plate 21] Lying on it is lady doll with porcelain head and stuffed body. She is dressed in a beautifully sewn long night









PLATE 20

The Interior of Lady Mayo dolls House





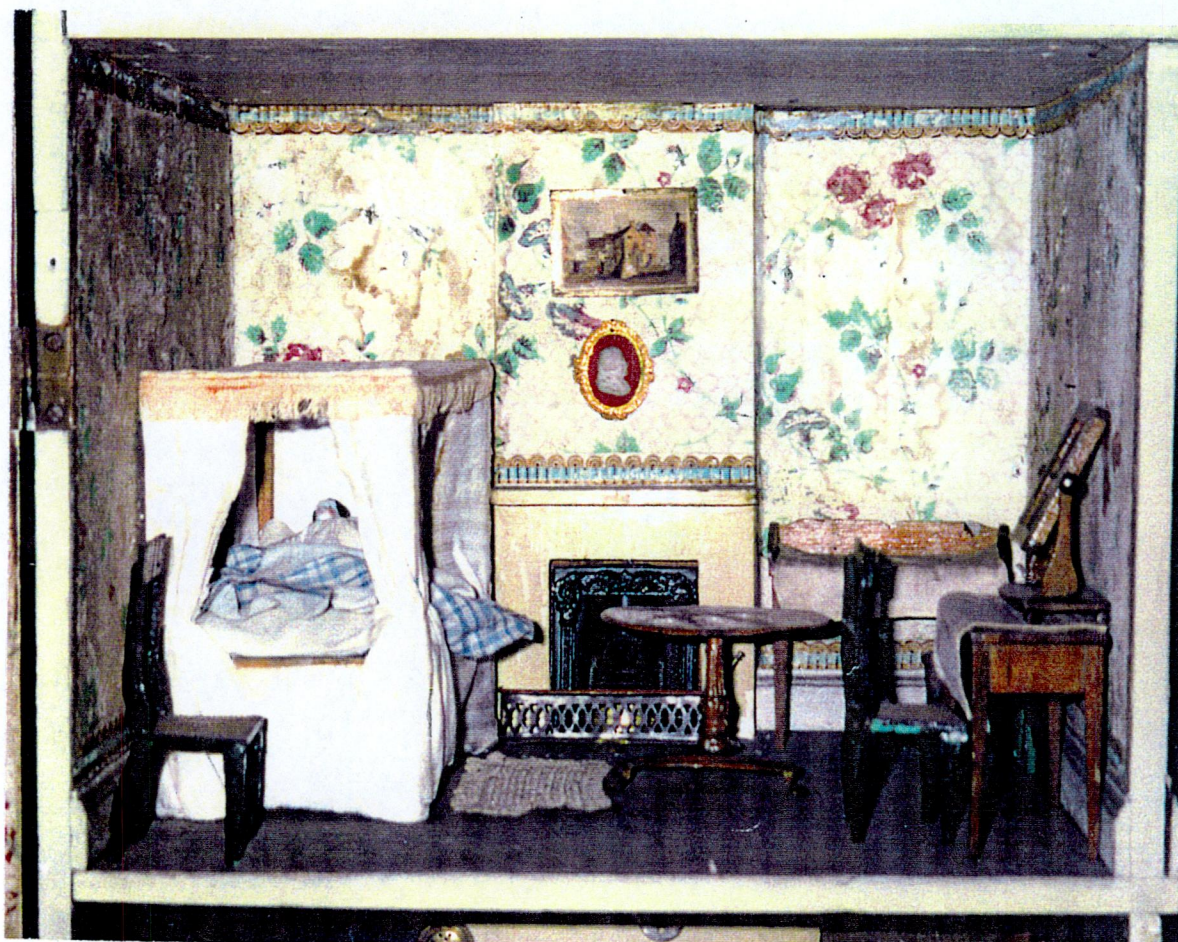


PLATE 21

The Bedroom of The Lady Mayo  
Dolls House





gown ,and she, the bisque baby and the wooden Gradnectal doll on the regency chair in the parlour are the only accounts of the house. This Gradnectal doll wears a yellow satin dress of later date than herself. On the chair beside her lie two home-made hand screens embroidered in petit point on single canvas and lined with the same satin as her gown [Plate 22] Noteworthy in the dining room are the wooden bird cage, the pewter tea urn and the green and amber wine bottles in the white metal holders dating from 1820. [Plate 23]

The kitchen is the glory of this house in the completeness of its furnishings. [Plate 24] The fine tin range with boiler, tap and four-bar grate, flanked by a red-brick bread oven of wood on one side and a simulated wooden cistern and tap on the other side are charming. The tin hastener, still complete with bottlejack and lidded well inside is rarely found in dolls' houses. In a real home they stood, open to the fire, with the roast suspended from the bottlejack, which turned the meat when wound by a key. The cook could open a door at the back to baste a joint, while being sheltered from the heat of a fire made with what was called sea coal.

This little house of the Lady Mayo, exudes in miniature, all the charm and calm serenity as well as the prosperity of a well ordered middle class household of the nineteenth century.

There are two rooms in the Wilson House, a bedroom on the first floor and a parlour below. [Plate 25] well made, painted chimney pieces with the original brass fire grates and fenders are still in position, each with its full set of pewter fire irons. The majority of the furniture is of high quality. In essence, the house appears to be unchanged since it was first played with.

In the bedroom, there is yet another fine four poster bed. The hangings, made of fawn chintz with a coral or seaweed pattern and bordered with faded blue ribbon, are original. All the bed linen is sewn so finely, that it would be very difficult to find a needle and thread as delicate as those used in this Victorian stitching.





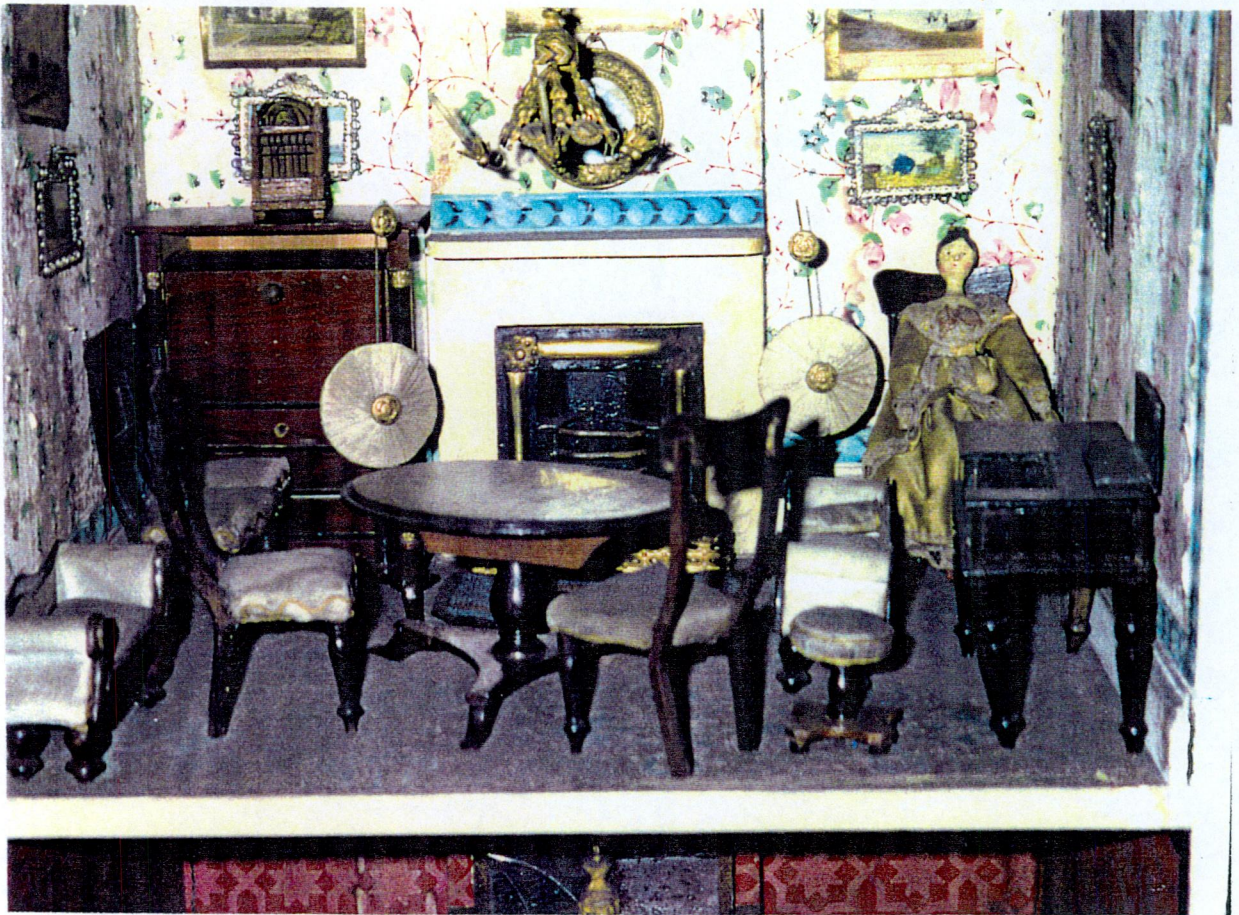


PLATE 22

The Parlour of Lady Mayo's Dolls House





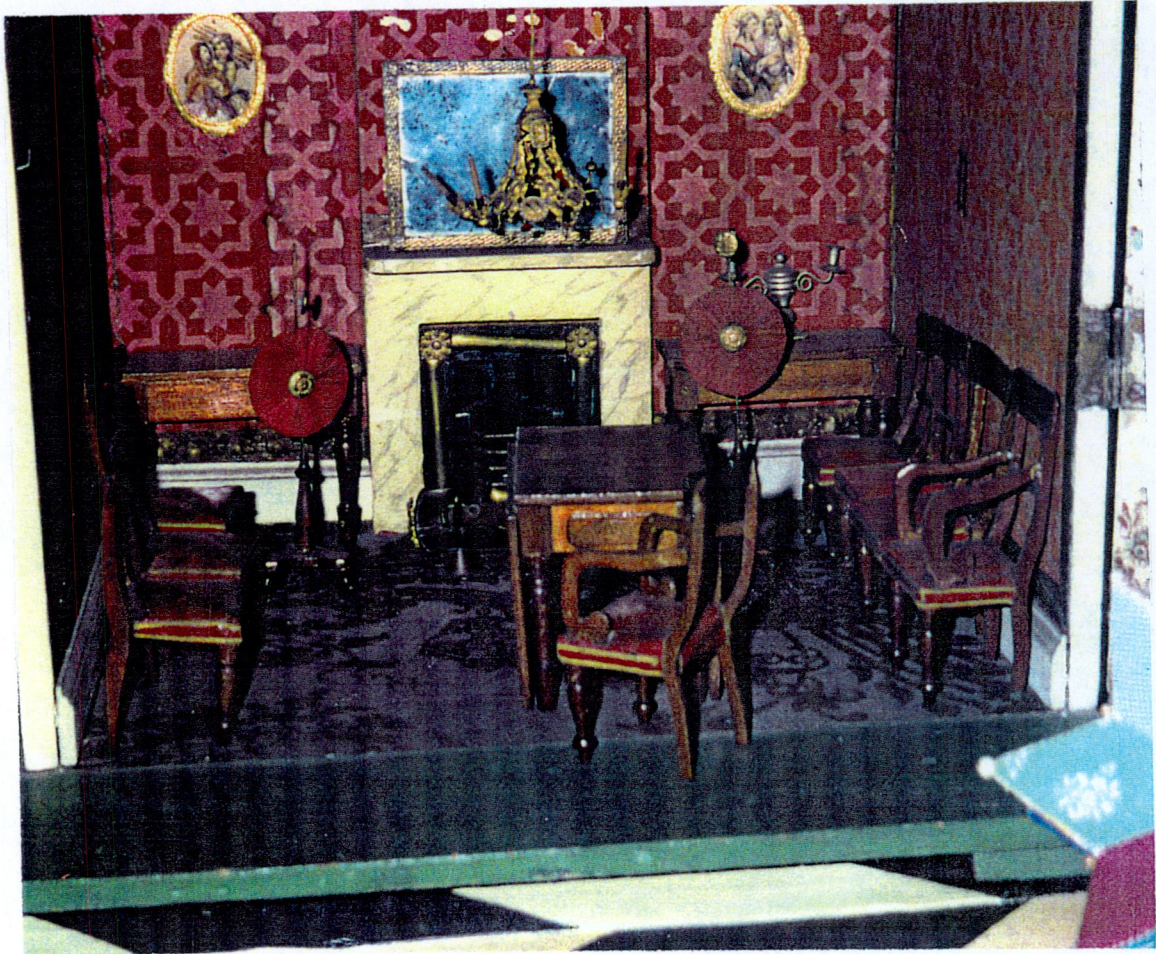


PLATE 23

The Dining room of  
Lady Mayo's Dolls House







PLATE 24  
The Kitchen of  
Lady Mayo's Dolls House









PLATE 25

The Interior of  
The Wilson Dolls House







The scroll rend sofa is covered with the same chintz as the footstool which has a deeply gathered valance on the cover of its drop-in cushion. The beautiful bell pull hangings beside the chimney piece is made from the perforated and embroidered card which is lined with mauve silk. At the top, there is a loop of silk covered beads and at the bottom it ends in a silken tassel.

The parlour, which is on the ground floor, seems to have lost some of its fine furniture. Like the furniture in the bedroom, the items here are also of rosewood. Perhaps the most outstanding object in the parlour is a concert harp. Because it is so disproportional in size to the other items in the room, it seems likely that it was a later addition to the house. The lack of proportion between the harp and the furniture occurs frequently in dolls' houses. Such harps were often made by the mother, aunt or grandmother of the first owner of the house in the first half of the nineteenth century. (Raftery, *An Irish Dolls' House*, pp. 91)

In each of the two rooms of the Wilson House, there is an exquisitely gowned lady doll and, without exaggeration, these can be described as the glory of the house. They are jointed wooden dolls, characteristic of the Grodnertal in the Tirol. They were sold widely from the early nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe and America.

The bedroom doll, dating from the early nineteenth century, wears a patterned mauve taffeta gown, trimmed with pink ribbon, now faded, and a purple feather stitching. Under the dress, the lady wears a white cotton petticoat, a flannel petticoat, finely hemmed and long white lace-edged drawers. A "gold" chain is wound twice around her neck and a large white hat with silken tassel sits on her head. The parlour doll is even more sumptuously attired. She is dressed in the finest outfit, as if she was going visiting. Her two-tier grey and pink taffeta gown is mounted on stiff net and has two rows of black lace on her skirt and net line. Mauve silk ribbons are used also to make a belt with long streamers in front. The underclothes comprise three waist petticoat which fit well one on top of the other, giving a





fashionable fullness to the dress itself. A green head necklace is worn around the neck and a jauntily black hat with a red feather completes the very elegant costume of this doll.

The Wilson House is a valuable historical record. It gives us visually an impression of the domestic architecture of the early nineteenth century, of the sort of people associated with the buildings and the furniture they used.

Mme. Mollereau's finest example of a nineteenth century dolls' house interior is that illustrated in [Plate 26] Many of its furnishings, carpets and paintings were originally made for her by Lady Armstrong, the lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. Among its many valuable furnishings is a petit point carpet in which Lady Armstrong duplicated in miniature, a large carpet woven for Buckingham Palace and a Wedgwood jug which queen Victoria gave to Lady Armstrong. However, Mme. Mollereau has herself added to this collection with period furniture and a dinner sat especially painted for her by the English spade china artist. Like many nineteenth century dolls' houses, it is made up of four rooms, so the decorators were forced to decide which essential rooms to represent. In this case, the four rooms are the nursery, the bedroom, the kitchen and the dining room.

Another nineteenth century dolls' house of Joanne Mollereau's fine collection is one which originated in the north of Ireland. [Plate 27] It was made by a fine carpenter in the early part of the nineteenth century. It houses many examples of fine, elegant French furniture from the 1840s. Fortunately, the interior of this fine house was also furnished with great enthusiasm and remains virtually untouched since the mid nineteenth century. It consists of nine rooms altogether. The walls of some of the rooms appear to have been painted while the others are papered with floral patterned paper. The red velvet covering on many of its tiny chairs help to richly decorate the rooms. A large fireplace occupies six of the nine rooms. The kitchen is rather sparsely furnished in comparison to that in the Lady Mayo House.







PLATE 26

19th Century Dolls House Interior-  
Mme. Mollereau's Collection







PLATE 27

North of Ireland Dolls House





Perhaps the most unusual dolls' house which is documented in this thesis is that from Mme. Mollereau's collection. It belonged originally to the Empress Elizabeth of Austria. It was a travelling dolls house of her Royal Highness Empress Elizabeth. This house travelled everywhere with her and was a gift of a French cabinet maker to the Court of Louis XVII on her marriage in 1854. She, in turn, gave it as a memento to her Irish governess and hence it came to Ireland. It is a gem a fine craftsmanship. This dolls house packs into and travels in its own box [Plate 28] It is made up of two elaborately furnished rooms. [Plate 29]









PLATE 28

Box in which the Empress Elizabeth's  
Dolls House Travelled In









## PLATE 29

The Two Rooms of the Empress  
Elizabeth's Dolls House





# CHAPTER 5





## The Twentieth Century Irish Miniature Palaces

One cannot attempt to write about dolls houses without mentioning one of Irelands' greatest twentieth century houses, Titanias' Palace. It is filled with craftsman-made miniatures of the baby-house tradition.

Major sir Neville Wilkinson tells us not to look at Titanias' Palace as a plaything, as he believes it to be far more than it is, he suggests an attempt to lead the dainty fancies of children, too often wasted, into a channel in which their thousand stream lets may be united and turned to a useful purpose. Fairyland has always occupied the first place in a child's imagination, and must have a power of influencing action and thought. Therefore the first necessity is to try to make fairyland suggest to every child a kind thought leading to a good and useful deed. Here you have Titanias' secret. (Wilkinson, 1926, pp. 3)

Titanias' Palace was designed and made in Dublin. It was begun in Mount Merrion House, co. Dublin in 1902, by the artist, soldier, historian sir Neville Wilkinson, as a whimsical gift to his three year old daughter Guendalin. However, it expanded and became a magnificent and celebrated miniature museum. Designed by Wilkinson, and built by the brilliant James Hicks of Lower Pembroke Street, the place took fifteen years to complete. Each article of furniture was meticulously made, or perhaps collected for the house. It was indeed a paladin miniature, measuring 9 ft. x 2 ft., built around a courtyard laid out as a garden and designed to be viewable from all four sides. It is in eight sections, each with a removable front, so that it fits into packing cases when it travels, something it has done frequently to raise money for children's charities. The style of the architecture used to create the miniature palace is quite varied, with a Greek influence showing in the columns, an English influence in the Inigo Jones windows, and an Italian influence in the Palladian frieze and in the Florentine-inspired state apartments. The eighteen halls and rooms are decorated with more than 3000 miniature items, many of which are real copies of furniture, paintings and antiques.







Much time and care has been spent on the four state apartments of the Palace. The Hall of the Fairy Kiss [Plate 30], the chapel, the Hall of the guilds [Plate 31] and the throne room, are all richly decorated with inlay and mosaic, marble and ornaments.

As suggested earlier, fairies were never far from Sir Nevilles thoughts when he created his miniature palace. There are no dolls living in the palace, so that the palace would be free for Titania and her court. There is no kitchen as fairies do not need food. The baths have no drains or taps because fairies bathe in dewdrops, and none of the doors have handles because fairy doors open themselves. The princesses bedroom in Titanias' Palace [Plate 32] contain cupboards for the storage of spare fairy wings. The washstand holds a set of Limoges china and monogrammed linen hangs from a silver towel rack. (Jackson, 1988, pp. 148)

Titanias' Palace was built in eight parts. Sir Neville, until his death, kept adding to the Palace's decoration and contents. Eventually, however, the Palace had to leave the Wilkinson family. It was brought in 1967 by Mrs. Olive Hodgkinson who exhibited it for charity at her home in Somerset. She later moved to Jersey and the Palace became a tourist attraction there. In 1977, on her death, the famous Palace went for auction at Christies and was bought by Legoland for £350,000 and then it was recognised as a unique and extremely valuable work of art. Ms. Mairead Dunlevy of Ireland, describes its loss to Ireland as "tragic. It is absolutely phenomenally interesting and important and it would have been a great attraction to tourists as well as of interest to the Irish public." Rumour had it that Mrs. Hodgkinson had, before her death, offered it to the Irish Government for £30,000. She would have liked to see the house back where it had been created. The Government showed no interest.

Returning disappointed from that Christies auction, Dublin antiques dealer Ronald McDonnell began to consider building another miniature palace on the lines of Titanias'. The idea met with some success. A committee was formed, schemes were discussed and a programme launched. The committee laid down







PLATE 30

Titania's Palace -  
The Hall of The Fairy Kiss







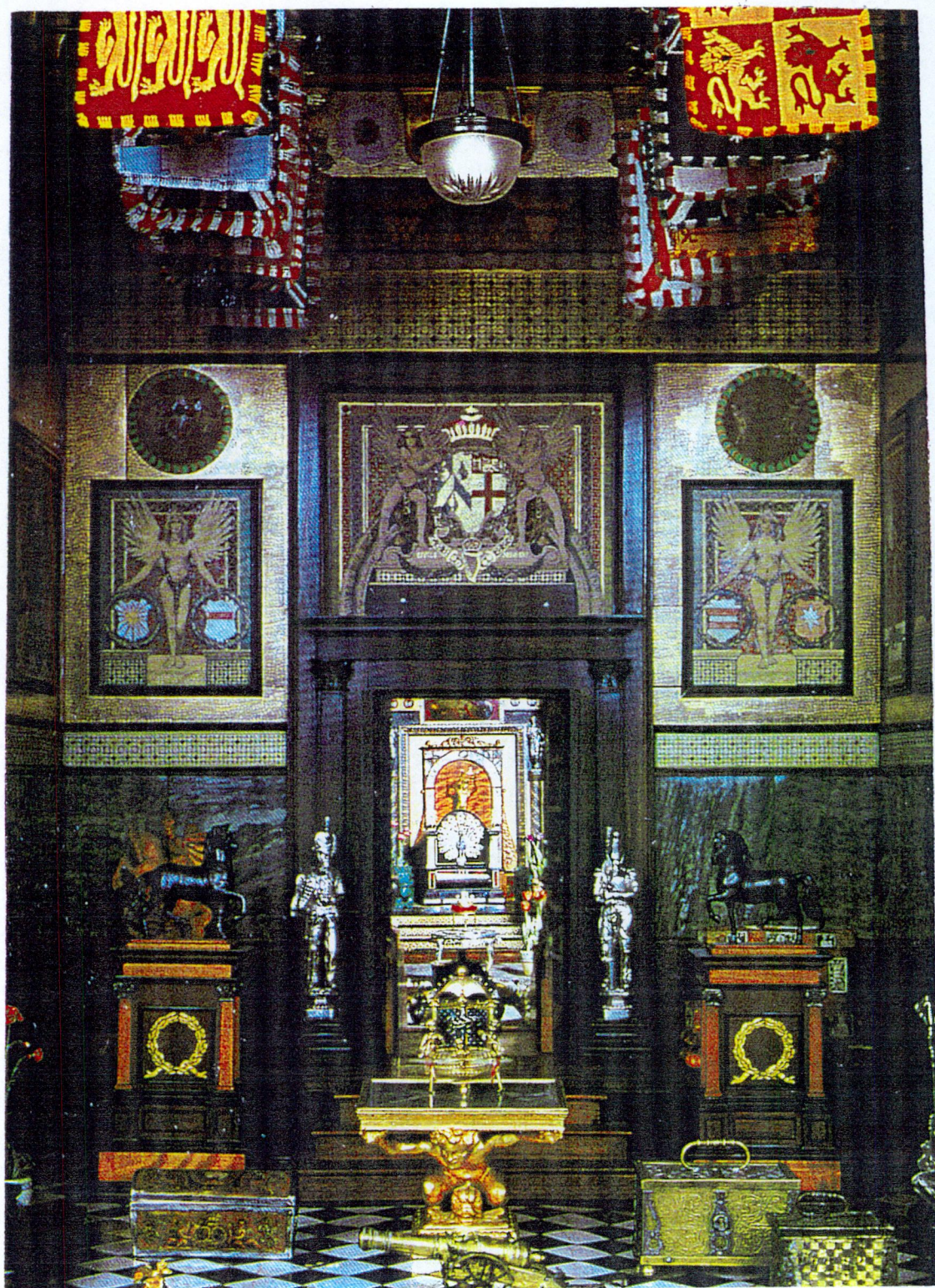


PLATE 31  
Titania's Palace-  
The Hall of Guilds







PLATE 32

Titania's Palace-  
The Princesses Bedroom





rules that the house, when completed should be exhibited to aid children's charities. It was to be built and furnished to a very high standard of craftsmanship, and was to be called Taras' Palace.

Taras' Palace [Plate 33] is today exhibited in the Writers' Museum, off Parnell Square, Co. Dublin. Its' measurements are 12" x 8' x 3' high. The long frontice is a splendid replica of Leinster House facade, one side a copy of Castletown House and the other of Carton Mansion. The rear of the house is devoted to kitchens and stables. In the fine central courtyard, architect John O' Connor and Helen Quinn designed and introduced a miniature formal garden and pond. [Plate 34] The Palace is made up of 25 rooms decorated in various styles. The house and the facade are constructed from board with mahogany trimmings. [Plate 35] The floors of the rooms are made from varying materials. For example, the floors in the hall, the Church and the Ivory Room are made of marble, the floor in the Elizabethan Pine Room is made from pine wood removed from an eighteenth century Dublin house and the bathroom floor is tilted with lifesize tiles and cut down to miniature.

A combination of fortunate circumstances enable the trustees to purchase a superb collection of mahogany and satinwood miniature furniture made by Mr. Fred Early. Fred early was an excellent cabinet maker of the early twentieth century. Many of the items of furniture he created were in the Georgian style, for example, his miniature mahogany four poster bed with drapes.

Yet another fascinating miniature palace belongs to Mme. Mollereau and is housed in her wonderful unique museum. It is called Tanyas' Palace. This palace houses 7,500 tiny items of furniture dating from 1797 to 1980. It contains the smallest Waterford Glass set ever made, the smallest glass swan and three cowboys and an Indian in a walnut shell. It was made and furnished by Joanne Mollereau and has items that originally belonged to Queen Victoria.







PLATE 33  
Taras' Palace







PLATE 34

Miniature Garden and pond  
Which Forms The Centre of  
'Taras' Palace







PLATE 35

Exterior of Taras' Palace





It is made up to sixteen individual rooms, each with its own glass front, which is used to protect the miniature valuables within it. Like many of the early dolls houses, it was solely constructed for adults only as it would be far too valuable and delicate for the hands of any young child.

The dining room [Plate 36] consists of French furniture which were made for the London Exhibition in 1856, a pewter table setting, some Bristol blue glass vases from about 1894, enamel plates by Japanese artists and an elegant silver table centre.

The elegant drawing room [Plate 37] of Tanyas' Palace consists of a French Bisque doll from the 1840s, some French provencal furniture , beautiful mahogany gaming and Pembroke tables, some Staffordshire figures, a large silver mirror, a tapestry woven rug and some delph plaques on the pint papered walls.

The kitchen [Plate 38] is quite modern in appearance with its proper cast iron furniture from America around the 1920s, a pair of Irish sughan chairs and food by Hope Elliot, a U.S. miniature sculptor.

The blue bedroom [Plate 39] is furnished with a Duncan Phyffe desk bureau and sewing table, a beautiful Japanese miniature screen, a bed carpet with Irish lace coverlet and French furniture also from London exhibition of 1856.

The music room [Plate 40] is furnished with a fine silver nineteenth century harp, some St. George silver also dating from the nineteenth century, a marconi radio and a Duncan Phyffe commode and piano from the 1880s.

The nursery [Plate 41] is made up of these wooden dolls, from the family of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1830, crepe paper dolls from the 1850s, some tiny lead soldiers, a tiny train set and some boy and girl dolls.

There are many other rooms also, most of which are excellently









PLATE 36

Dining room of Tanyas' Palace



PLATE 37

Drawing room of Tanyas' Palace









PLATE 38

Kitchen of Tanyas' Palace



PLATE 39

Blue Bedroom of Tanyas' Palace









PLATE 40

Music Room of Tanyas' Palace



PLATE 41

Nursery of Tanyas' Palace





decorated with fine furniture much of which is from the nineteenth century.

After looking at the above three palaces, constructed in the early twentieth century, it is quite difficult to examine the dolls house world of today. Although the plastic baby and sindy dolls houses seem to dominate the toy market, it is good to know that there are still people like Kate Beaumont who continue to produce high quality dolls houses, many in the Georgian style.

Kate Beaumont ,who resides in Co. Kildare, Ireland, has been making dolls houses and miniature furniture over the last ten years or so. She lived in England where she worked as a fine crafts worker. She came to Ireland in 1986 and began her wood work in 1988. Kate says she just "hit on it", the idea of making miniature furniture, that is. she sold her first house, bought a new machine and so on. She regarded it as a "paying hobby". She used it to produce dolls houses and miniature furniture for a shop in St. Stephen's Green, Co. Dublin. However, this shop went out of business. Kate is not, at the moment, involved in miniature making, but does intend to return to it within the next few years. [Plate 42] and [Plate 43]







PLATE 42

Miniature Houses by Kate Beaumont







PLATE 43

Miniature Furniture by Kate Beaumont







## Conclusion

The subject of Irish Dolls House design is wide, diverse and fascinating. Irish dolls houses and their contents despite the great number of collectors involved are as yet a lightly researched subject. It was, indeed, a fascinating task examining. The many Irish dolls houses which this thesis documents. This thesis documents Irish dolls houses from 1730 - 1980, paying particular attention to the eighteenth century Newbridge dolls' house in chapter 2 and the many nineteenth century examples which are carefully examined in chapters 3 and 4, for example the Strahan House and Lady Mayos' House. The Georgian style architecture is evident in many of the dolls' houses which are documented.

The subject of Irish dolls house design is without end and constantly challenging, so it is little wonder that the number of dolls' house enthusiasts seems to increase almost daily, despite the growing cost of acquisitions. To most antique collectors, the interest in twentieth century houses is minimal, however, from the standpoint of, the historian perhaps they are of considerable relevance, thus, suggesting the taste of living conditions of a particular period which is yet too close for sensible evaluation.

The dolls' houses documented in this thesis were all meant for adults and children alike , but for instruction as far as the children were concerned. All the same , the children must have found some moments in every day life caught in these miniature rooms like Sleeping Beauty in her magical palace.

Even though the dolls house of today is much less elegant and perhaps less fascinating than those of earlier days, one has to agree that the children of today are also much different than those of the eighteenth, nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The child of today, is better fed, more generously entertained and much less likely to be, physically chastised, and seems to have less need of these substitute beings. Both dolls houses and miniature dolls are of declining importance. In the early twentieth century, large department stores offered the





child, a large selection of miniature houses and a wide variety of furniture, but the modern girl is lucky if she can choose between three or four models, as the plastic furniture is depressing in its uniformity. Maybe one should feel glad that the children of today no longer need to search for substitutes for unhappy homes, but it is impossible not to feel that a society cannot be completely healthy when its young find it rather tedious in indulged in make believe.

This thesis clearly breaks new ground in the study of Irish dolls house design, offering us great insight into our past lives.







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