

Three

# ‘Sketches of their Boundless Mind’

## The Marquess of Buckingham and the Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle, 1788–1838

Myles Campbell

Such, Egypt, were thy sons! divinely great
In arts, in arms, in wisdom, and in state.
Her early monarchs gave such glories birth,
Their ruins are the wonders of the earth.
Structures so vast by those great kings design’d,
Are but faint sketches of their boundless mind …[1]

Thursday, 18 September 1788, was a day no more remarkable in Dublin than any other. Readers of the city’s newspapers would learn of the usual cycle of life’s beginnings and endings, which are no less familiar to their twenty-first century successors. In Earl Street, a fire had put an end to a soap and candle business.[2] In Back Lane, a woman’s career as a pedlar of forged coins had been cut short by a vigilant shopkeeper and a column of policemen.[3] Yet one or two beginnings and endings were perhaps more particular to this Georgian city than others. One was the death of a doctor’s servant from the excessive consumption of pears.[4] The other was the beginning of an architectural transformation at the city’s designated focus of fashion, Dublin Castle. According to the optimistic correspondent of *The Dublin Evening Post*, this architectural apotheosis would soon render the Castle equal to the richest royal residences of ancient Egypt. The ‘seat of Vice-Majesty’, he gushed, ‘will no longer be branded with imputation – as the assylum of sober dullness – and shrival economy – nor his Excellency [the

Facing page: Fig. 03.01. Entrance to the State Apartments, Dublin Castle. Photograph by Davison & Associates, courtesy of the Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle.

lord lieutenant, or viceroy] considered to imitate the Persian Monarch, who hides his royalty to encrease the veneration of the world'.[5]

The viceroy in question was the English peer and politician George Nugent-Temple- Grenville, 1st Marquess of Buckingham (1753–1813). He would play a central role in this kingly production. Its main act would be the making of a new Presence Chamber at the Castle. Buckingham had previously served as Irish viceroy from August 1782 to May 1783 (as Earl Temple) and following his elevation to a marquessate, he was re-appointed in November 1787. 'All', wrote the correspondent, 'will be splendour and magnificence ... and in the language of the poet – the representation of Majesty will "throw all his glories open to their view"'.[6]

The somewhat oblique allusions to a poet and to the ancient King of Persia in this account are obscure but significant. They have their source in the work of the English poet and playwright Edward Young (1683–1765). Like the epigraph that introduces this essay, they are drawn from Young's long-forgotten play, *Busiris, King of Egypt,* which was first performed in 1719. *Busiris* is the story of the mythological Egyptian king who aimed to eclipse the splendour of the neighbouring Persian court. In order to do so, he created a kingdom rich in palatial architecture and 'Blazing to heaven in diamonds and gold'.[7] Secretly reviled as cruel and proud by his courtiers, he was ultimately blinded by the lustre and artifice of his own court, failing to recognize his loyal courtiers as the conspirators who would bring about his downfall. In his dying moments, he proclaimed his immortality, asserting that his name would live forever in the 'Triumphant columns' he had built.[8]

It has been observed that 'by castigating Busiris's love of riches and passion for power' in the early 1700s, Edward Young was creating a piece of 'political propaganda' that challenged the legitimacy of King George I, as the Hanoverian successor to the British throne.[9] By the same token, Young's play was now being invoked in the Dublin of the 1780s to mount a veiled but vituperative attack on the legitimacy of the Marquess of Buckingham as Viceroy of Ireland. Viewed in this context, the colourful announcement of Buckingham's new Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle takes on a different hue. By casting him in the role of the tyrannical Busiris, it would appear that *The Dublin Evening Post* heralded his great new room not as the Castle's apotheosis but as its nadir. Beneath the surface, it seemed to greet it as little more than a veneer, concealing an unpopular viceroy's apparently narcissistic motivations in creating it. In this context, the





Presence Chamber can only be fully understood in relation to the turbulent social, political and cultural climate of Ireland in the 1780s that contributed to Buckingham's unpopularity. The aim of this essay is to explore the room's creation and legacy, as well as the motivations behind its inception, as a means of better understanding that climate and the minds that shaped it.

**Hair-dressers and Grizettes: The Old Guard Chamber**

To understand the factors that influenced the creation of the Marquess of Buckingham's new Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle is to first understand what it was designed to replace. Despite its unique significance as the nucleus of royal ceremony in Ireland before 1922, surprisingly little is known about the origins of the Presence Chamber, which is today more commonly referred to as the Throne Room. Tentative references have linked its inception to campaigns of improvement at Dublin Castle in the late 1780s, but little substantive evidence has emerged to indicate a precise date. New evidence makes it clear that the room was conceived by the Marquess of Buckingham as a replacement for the existing old Presence Chamber at the Castle, in September 1788. A few days after Buckingham's ambitious plans to transform the State Apartments were vaguely announced in *The Dublin Evening Post*, *The Freeman's Journal* could confirm that the creation of the new Presence Chamber was to be part of his scheme.[10] Buckingham had given orders for the room to be laid out 'in a stile of superior elegance'.[11] It would be created in the space then occupied by the Castle's Battle Axe Hall, or Guard Chamber.

Relatively little is known about this old Guard Chamber. Located behind the pedimented entrance to the State Apartments, it occupied the five central bays of the first floor, on the south side of the Upper Castle Yard (Fig. 03.01). Its central position, at the summit of the grand imperial staircase leading to the state rooms, made it a suitable space for the screening and filtering of courtiers by the viceroy's Battle Axe guards. Having successfully passed through the Guard Chamber, visitors could then enter the dining room to the west, if attending a dinner, or the Presence Chamber to the east, if arriving for a viceregal levee or drawing room. A plan of these spaces drawn by Euclid Alfray in 1767 illustrates the convenience of the arrangement (see Fig. 02.04). This sequence of regal apartments, accessed from a guard room, was entirely analogous to the disposition of spaces in English royal palaces, such as Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.

The physical and visual character of the old Guard Chamber is more difficult to evoke. In March 1746 it was said to be 'not only in a most ruinous Condition' but, in common with the rooms adjacent to it, 'in immediate Danger of falling'.[12] Following its deliverance from this fate through a subsequent campaign of rebuilding, from 1746 to 1747, it was later described, in the 1780s, simply as 'spacious'.[13] A late-eighteenth-century commentator recalled it, perhaps with a tinge of nostalgia and bias, as 'a magnificent hall' that had been obliterated to make way for the 'totally unnecessary' Presence Chamber that took its place.[14] As the space representing the nominally defensive but largely ceremonial Battle Axe Guards, and as the first state room encountered by courtiers at Dublin Castle, the Guard Chamber was almost certainly lined with weaponry to create an appropriate, if somewhat fictive, impression of fortification. An early-nineteenth-century watercolour of the Guard Chamber at Windsor Castle offers some idea of how this arrangement, which was typical in English royal palaces, might have been applied at Dublin Castle (Fig. 03.02).

Fig. 03.02. Charles Wild (after), *King's Guard Chamber, Windsor Castle*, published 1818. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.





Something of Buckingham's motivation in replacing the Guard Chamber with a new Presence Chamber might be gleaned from two descriptions of the less than dignified use to which it was being put by the late 1780s. Its conversion, according to one priggish critic would, in future, 'preclude the male and female mob of hair-dressers and grizettes [flirtatious, working-class women], who generally crowded the hall on days and nights of public solemnity'.[15] This supposedly courtly space was likewise satirized by another commentator, as a room that 'on festivals only served for a receptacle for servants, the crowds of whom exceedingly embarrassed the company in their access to the state apartments'.[16] Few viceroys were as sensitive to the regulation of court etiquette as Buckingham. Acutely aware of the power of the press in Dublin, his letters show that he followed newspaper reports of his courtly entertainments with keen interest, sometimes cutting and keeping a report if it flattered him, or writing in dismay to his brother, the future British Prime Minister, William Grenville (1759–1834), if it did not.[17] Buckingham is very likely to have greeted these judgements on his Guard Chamber as an affront to his high standards and a threat to his court's reputation. Towards the end of his first viceroyalty, in March 1783, he had written with bluster to his brother of the splendour of the court he had kept at Dublin Castle:

> We shall have quitted this space at the very pinnacle of our glory; and shall leave a great many friends jealous of our honour and regardful of our memory; and who will not patiently suffer any slur to be thrown on the splendour of these six months of your brother's government, which I am confident are not to be paralleled.[18]

Notoriously conceited and self-indulgent, Buckingham revelled in the pomp and pageantry of his viceregal position. It has been observed that during his first term in office, from 1782 to 1783, 'the splendour of the Irish court reached new heights of ostentation …'[19] His second term, from 1787 to 1789, was to be no different and it remained important to him that the viceregal apartments at the Castle 'should reflect the opulence of the court's regime'.[20]

Buckingham had good reason for encouraging high standards of social etiquette at Dublin Castle, principally on account of his need to salvage an ailing reputation, and reverse his growing unpopularity as viceroy. From the beginning of his first viceroyalty in 1782, he had worked hard to ensure his popularity, but with only limited success. As part of these efforts, he had persuaded King

George III to establish the Order of St Patrick, an Irish order of chivalry designed to cultivate the support of Irish peers. Surviving letters of thanks from the first knights to be admitted to the Order, in 1783, have come to light in the National Library of Ireland. They demonstrate the immediate success of Buckingham's strategy, and the personal gains it brought him. In thanking him for the honour, Henry de Burgh, 12th Earl of Clanricarde (1743–1797), swiftly pledged his loyalty to Buckingham in return:

> Fully satisfied of your Excellency's friendly Disposition towards the Interests of Ireland, I shall consider it as much a Duty, as it is my inclination, to give my utmost support to your administration, in every measure which may correspond with that Idea.[21]

Henry Loftus, 3rd Earl of Ely (1709–1783), in his letter of thanks, gave Buckingham a similarly large share of credit: 'I shall at all times be mindfull that it is to your Excellency I am indebted for this Distinguished mark of his Majesty's Favor'.[22] Despite its brilliance, this popularity would soon fade. Notwithstanding his selection as one of the first knights of the Order, James Caulfeild, 1st Earl of Charlemont (1728–1799), in his criticism of Buckingham, captured the growing drift. 'He knows a great deal', Charlemont noted, 'but is too fond of communicating that knowledge ... He is proud and too apt to undervalue his equals ...'[23]

Compounding Buckingham's flaws was the fact that he also 'lacked charm', and was 'vain and impetuous'.[24] His personal circumstances did not help matters. In 1775, he had married the Irish heiress Lady Mary Elizabeth Nugent (*d.* 1812), daughter of Robert Nugent, 1st Earl Nugent (1709–1788). Although the marriage was economically advantageous, it has been said that his wife was 'seen as a closet Catholic, and this contributed to Buckingham's unpopularity in Ireland'.[25] There seems to be some evidence to support this claim. A newly identified inventory of the Viceregal Lodge at the Phoenix Park during Buckingham's first viceroyalty, records an unusually high number of religious pictures. The inventory was taken on 31 October 1782, and differentiated between items that were the property of the state and those that belonged to Buckingham and his wife. Among the family's numerous religious pictures in the Saloon were 'St Francis'; a 'Madona'; the 'Holy Family, Virgin Mary, Elizabeth and Child Jesus'; and 'Our Saviour in the Garden'.[26] In the Dining Room were representations of the 'Magdalene





full length'; 'Abraham looking for Rebecha'; and 'Our Saviour tortured by the Soldiers'.[27] This high concentration of religious imagery may indicate the kind of devotional practices that are more closely associated with the Roman Catholic than the Anglican Church.

Extremely hungry for social advancement and having 'already failed to make a success at Westminster', Buckingham knew that the Irish viceroyalty was a step towards elevation in the peerage.[28] He could little afford any slur on the manners of his court at Dublin Castle if he was to achieve his life's goal of attaining a dukedom. At the end of his first viceroyalty in 1783, he wrote to his brother, William, listing the roll call of former viceroys who had been awarded for their services in this office, and pressing him to solicit honours from King George III on his behalf. 'Lord Shelburne has the Garter', he complained, 'Lord Thurlow a pension, Lord Grantham the same, Townshend a peerage, as marks of the King's satisfaction; would it be improper or impossible to state that I am returning (such as I am) without any feather?'.[29] Hopeful of the dukedom, he settled for a marquessate. Yet all was not lost. A return to power as viceroy in 1787 presented him with a lifeline that, if carefully exploited, could yet lead to his ennoblement as the Duke of Buckingham.

In this context it was now more imperative than ever that Dublin Castle should present an image of the viceroy's exceptional good manners and discernment, in the hope that the King might interpret it as an image incommensurate with the position of a mere marquess. Politically astute and a very hard worker, Buckingham was a man of 'considerable ability' but it was 'his tragedy' that these abilities 'were not matched by personal equilibrium, self-control and discretion of language'.[30] As part of a campaign of sweeping reforms in 1788, Buckingham attempted to bring about a radical reorganization of the Church of Ireland based on Church of England models. This swiftly brought him into serious conflict with senior clergy, including the influential Archbishop of Cashel, Charles Agar (1735–1809). Agar objected to many of Buckingham's ideas, condemning them as 'very ill-suited' to the established Church in Ireland.[31]

Further clashes were to come when Buckingham launched a full enquiry into the finances of the Irish Ordnance Office at Dublin Castle. 'All is bustle and confusion at the Castle', wrote one contemporary observer, '[and] words cannot express the consternation that prevails in every department in the Ordnance ... the various officers remain in a state of the most humiliating suspense'.[32] According to a contemporary report, this enquiry came about after Buckingham

had been on his way to dine with John Scott, Baron Earlsfort, later 1st Earl of Clonmell (1739–1798) and his wife, one evening in 1788. While passing through Harcourt Street, Buckingham's carriage had suffered a delay due to the volume of coaches drawing up outside a grand house where a ball was taking place. On later enquiring about the owner of the house, he was informed that it belonged to a clerk of the Ordnance Office. Buckingham was suspicious of this lavishness and may well have feared being overshadowed by someone of such junior rank. 'That's very extraordinary', he is said to have remarked, 'if, without any other resources, he can keep such an expensive house and see such splendid company, he must be a surprising manager!'[33] His controversial ordnance enquiry soon followed. As relationships between the viceroy and the Irish ecclesiastical and administrative institutions began to break down, a damaging rift also emerged between Buckingham and King George III. 'I cannot say what I suffer', wrote Buckingham in October 1788, 'while my situation and the public service are trifled with ... by the King's jealousy'.[34] The stakes could scarcely have been higher for Buckingham, as he now set about repairing and rebuilding his profile. It has been said that by this time he had made himself 'almost universally obnoxious' in Ireland.[35] It is perhaps no coincidence that at this critical juncture he resolved to magnify his majesty through the creation of a new Presence Chamber and a remodelled St Patrick's Hall at Dublin Castle. In such a necessarily noble setting, there could be no place for the old Guard Chamber with its imputations of vulgar or uncivilized assembly.

In addition to improving the social tone of Buckingham's court, the removal of the semi-public Guard Chamber allowed for the design of a larger, more tasteful Presence Chamber than the existing one of 1749. It has been noted that, 'Unexpectedly, for an upstairs room or a presence chamber', the architectural order of the 1749 Presence Chamber was Doric.[36] The second most plain and primitive of the five orders of classical architecture, its squat proportions and military associations lent the room little of the majestic character associated with its function. The slender forms and elegant volutes of the Ionic or Corinthian orders would have struck a much more regal note. Compounding the old Presence Chamber's architectural unsuitability was its old-fashioned rococo ornament (see Fig. 02.15). The anachronistic and naive style of this room and the possible suggestions of aesthetic ignorance to which it might easily give rise, could scarcely have escaped the attention of so discerning an aesthete as Buckingham. Always mindful of the power of architecture to shape the image





of its patron, he 'believed that a great family demanded great houses'.[37] New evidence shows that in addition to directing the creation of the new Presence Chamber, Buckingham defrayed the entire cost of it 'at his own expence'.[38] This would suggest that he applied the same dictum when shaping a great palace for a great vice-king. At a fraction of Buckingham's vast fortune, the new Presence Chamber, and the positive publicity it might generate, would be cheap at any price, particularly for a viceroy 'whose excesses were renowned'.[39] Such a room, with him enthroned at its centre, would serve as a more fashionable, formal and fitting backdrop to the majestic profile he had been at pains to cultivate since first arriving in Ireland, in 1782. His intention is clear from a letter written to his wife at this time. 'Dublin', he noted, 'is thinning very fast but my fête will keep many in town. The magnificence of it will be beyond every thing ever seen in Ireland'.[40] At a stroke, two old spaces would now be confined to memory and a new one conceived, as *The Freeman's Journal* put it, in a manner more 'suitable to the necessary state of the Viceregal residence'.[41]

**Gay though not Gaudy: The New Presence Chamber**

Work on Buckingham's new Presence Chamber began at the end of September 1788 and was completed in January 1789. An obscure engraving of it published exactly six years later, in January 1795, provides the only known visual record of how it would have appeared in Buckingham's time (Fig. 03.03). As part of Buckingham's interventions, the doors that formerly opened into the old Guard Chamber from the great staircase had been blocked up. In their place, a new carved timber canopy of state, featuring a lion and a unicorn each clutching an Irish harp, had been installed in the middle of the south wall. Either side of this canopy, above the twin chimneypieces, were large mirrors surmounted by crowned harps and classical swags, presumably executed in timber or plaster. At the centre of the room was a chandelier described by James Malton as 'an elegant glass lustre, of the Waterford Manufactory'.[42] It had been purchased for the old Presence Chamber by Buckingham's predecessor, Charles Manners, 4th Duke of Rutland (1754–1787), in 1787. At a cost of £277, its monetary value alone deemed it worthy of recycling. The entire space was articulated by a giant order of fluted Corinthian pilasters supporting a frieze of oak-leaf swags and lion masks, all crowned by a beefy modillion cornice. That none of these architectural elements were carried over from the old Guard Chamber is clear from a newly identified account of the room, published in the autumn of 1788:

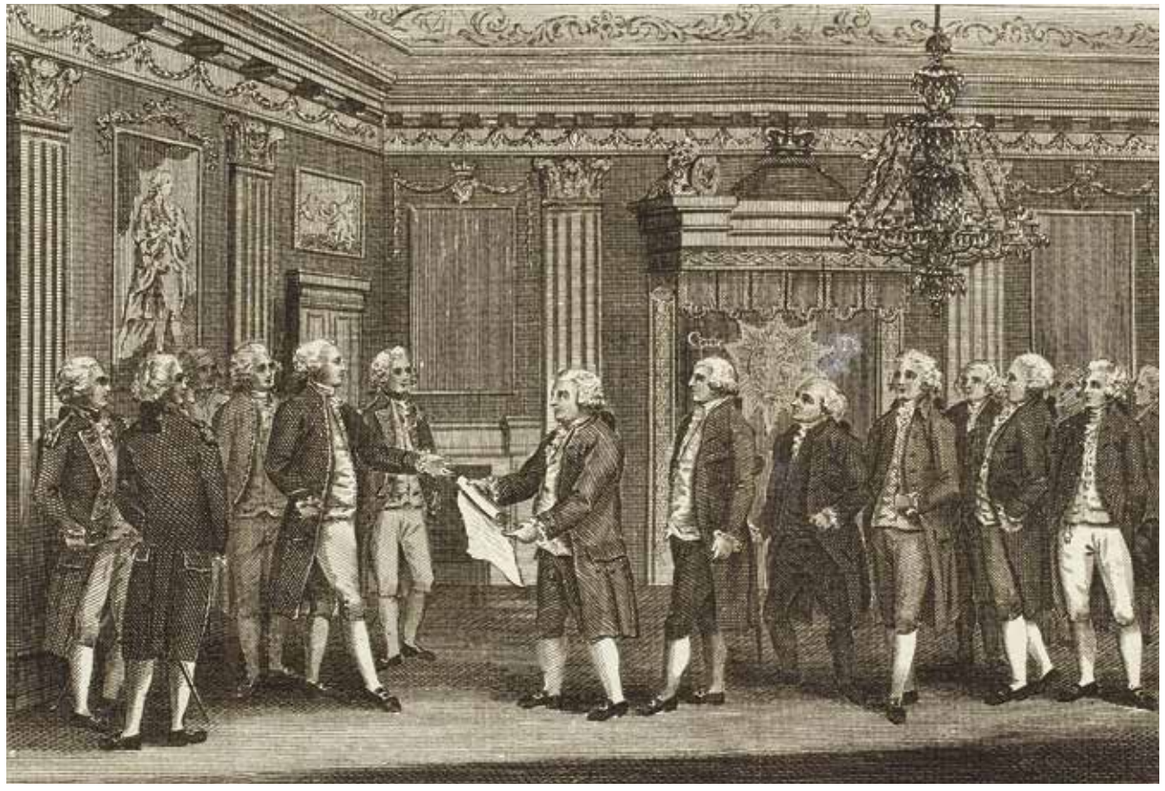

Fig. 03.03.
'Catholic Congratulation, 14th January, 1795'. *Walker's Hibernian Magazine: or, Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, January 1795.
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.





> The new Presence Chamber is adorned with a number of Corinthian pilasters, four on each side, in white and gold; the cornice is composed Corinthian, and the cieling [*sic*]... is not to be painted, but finished in gilt stucco.[43]

Another observer noted that the pilasters were 'fluted' and reported that the two fireplaces opposite the windows, which on account of the room's size were 'not more than was necessary', were about to receive 'statuary marble chimney-pieces'.[44] As the transformation of the room neared its climax and progress became apparent, the expectations that had been entertained of an architectural metamorphosis began to be met. 'The Castle', it was optimistically stated, 'will, when finished in the superb taste originally designed, be inferior to few houses of Royal residence in point of elegance'.[45]

To his undoubted satisfaction, Buckingham was soon being hailed in the press as something of an architectural tastemaker, who had fashioned 'a very fine reception-chamber'.[46] The room's modern, elegant and rational Neoclassical forms were the full expression of the tentative ideas represented in the astylar Wedgwood Room, which had been built in the State Apartments a decade earlier. As such, they represented an architectural advancement for Dublin Castle and bore all the necessary hallmarks of Buckingham's discernment. An indirect product of the recent studies of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) and of the excavations at Pompeii, which 'had so attracted ... Buckingham on his Grand Tour of 1774', they symbolized his progressive cultural outlook.[47] In their scale and form, they made the spaces adjacent to them, which only forty years earlier had been *de rigueur*, seem archaic and provincial. Enlightenment architecture had come to Dublin Castle and Buckingham was credited as its chief luminary. The gilded stucco ceiling, only a tantalizing sliver of which is visible in the 1795 engraving of the room, was lauded as 'an elegant composition, light though magnificent, and gay though not gaudy'.[48] The marble chimneypieces were heralded similarly as 'superb'.[49] Buckingham could now enjoy full credit for what was reported as 'the magnificence suitable to the audience chamber of the Representative of Majesty in Ireland'.[50]

Amid this initial fanfare of praise for the architectural fabric of Buckingham's new Presence Chamber, none was reserved for the room's architect, whose name went entirely unrecorded and who does not appear to have left behind any drawings for it. Although it was repaired and remodelled by degrees in 1825, 1839, 1959 and in the 1960s, much of the room's original architectural fabric

Fig. 03.04.
Canopy of State, Throne Room, Dublin Castle, *c.* 1788. Photograph by Davison & Associates, courtesy of the Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle.





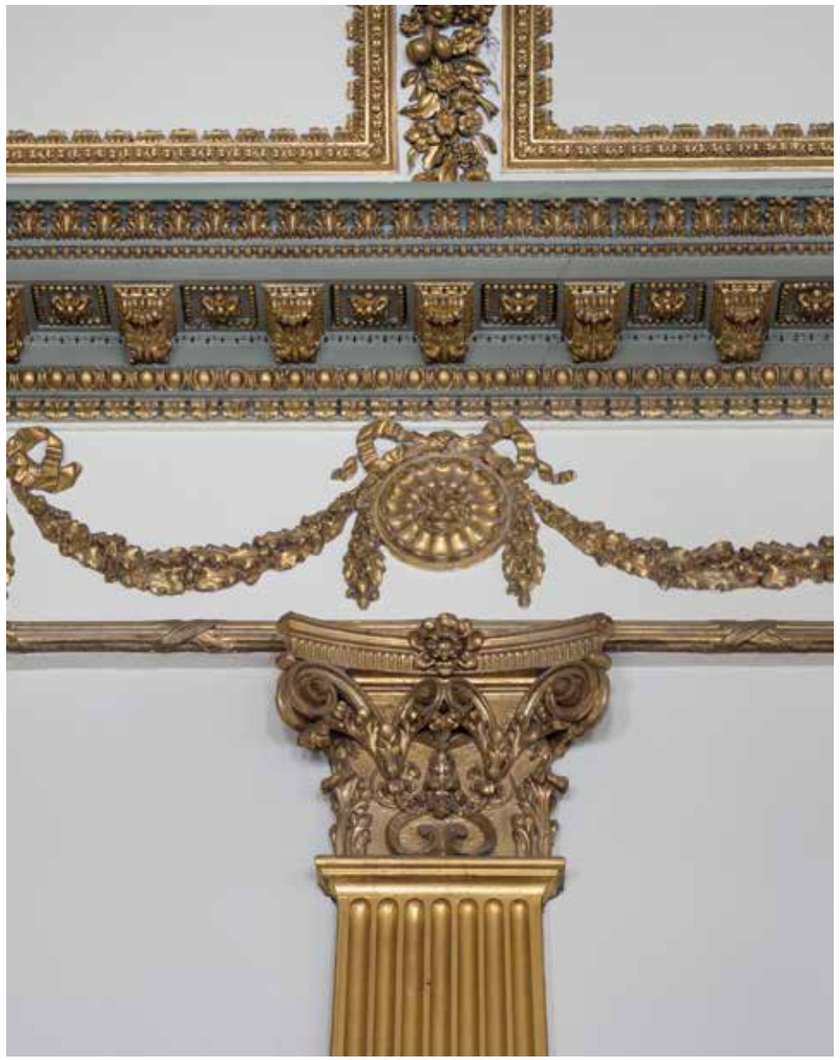

Fig. 03.05.
Pilaster and entablature, Throne Room, Dublin Castle, 1788, detail.
Photograph by Davison & Associates, courtesy of the Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle.

still survives as a clue to its authorship. Buckingham's canopy of state remains largely as it appeared in the engraving of 1795. It features a crowned half-dome, which projects on a robust entablature carried by generous consoles (Fig. 03.04). It also has running guilloche ornament that once framed the embroidered royal arms behind the throne. The pilasters, frieze and cornice have also endured (Fig. 03.05). In several respects, their forms recall the work of the highly influential British architect James Wyatt (1746–1813). In particular, the swagged frieze with its lion-mask paterae has parallels with that found inside Wyatt's Darnley Mausoleum in Kent. It also appears to anticipate the comparable forms of the frieze in the Saloon at Castle Coole, Co. Fermanagh (Fig. 03.06). The inventive capitals of the pilasters, too, might be said to have a loose relationship to the stylized and rather 'novel' Corinthian capitals of Wyatt's Cupola Room at Heaton Hall, Lancashire (Fig. 03.07), themselves rough quotations from the Italian Renaissance architect Donato Bramante (1444–1514).[51] Yet for all its approximate similarities to Wyatt's work there is a naivety in the handling of the

Left: Fig. 03.06. The Saloon, Castle Coole, Co. Fermanagh.


Right: Fig. 03.07. The Cupola Room, Heaton Hall, Lancashire.
Courtesy of Country Life Picture Library.





Presence Chamber that betrays a less assured hand. The positioning of the lion masks in the frieze directly over each of the capitals is a confident response to the verticality and weight of the pilasters below them. However, their placement in the angles of the frieze, as a means of acknowledging and attempting to define the corners of the room, which are without pilasters, is rather more gauche (see Fig. 09.24). It leaves the whole relationship between pilasters and frieze feeling unresolved. That one of the standard hallmarks of Wyatt's practice, the repetition of the patterns of the frieze in the entablatures of the doors, appears to have been eschewed, doubles the dissonance and almost certainly rules out his involvement.

In several recent studies, the room has been confidently attributed to the Irish architect Thomas Penrose (1740–1792).[52] Though circumstantial, the evidence is compelling. From 1784 until his death in 1792, Penrose served as Inspector of Civil Buildings, which would have automatically placed him at the viceroy's disposal in the event of any modifications being ordered at Dublin Castle. Perhaps more significantly, Penrose worked as James Wyatt's Irish agent for fifteen years, from 1772 to 1787.[53] This may readily explain the Wyattesque character of the room. In that capacity he executed a drawing for the bedroom lobby at Lucan House, Co. Dublin, which shows a pair of grisaille overdoors of a type similar to those illustrated in the 1795 print of the Presence Chamber (Fig. 03.08). The drawing for Lucan is signed and dated April 1776.[54] Crucially, Penrose produced a signed plan of the first floor of the State Apartments at Dublin Castle in November 1789. The plan clearly identifies what had been the old Guard Chamber as the 'Audience Chamber', thereby confirming Penrose's familiarity and probable association with the recent work (Fig. 03.09). A newly identified record demonstrates that Buckingham and Penrose enjoyed some form of professional or personal relationship. It was a relationship that was sufficiently healthy for Buckingham to appoint Penrose to the responsible position of Commissioner of the State Lottery.[55] The appointment was made on 19 August 1788, just a month before the commencement of works on the new Presence Chamber. Convincing though this body of evidence is, there is still room for speculation.

Having undertaken to pay for the work himself, Buckingham would have been eager to ensure that his investment represented good value for money. This very personal influence over the project may well have extended to the selection of the architect. It also cannot be ignored that at the time of the room's development, Buckingham's protégé, the Italian artist and architect Vincenzo Waldré (1740–1814), was working on his colossal ceiling paintings just two rooms away,

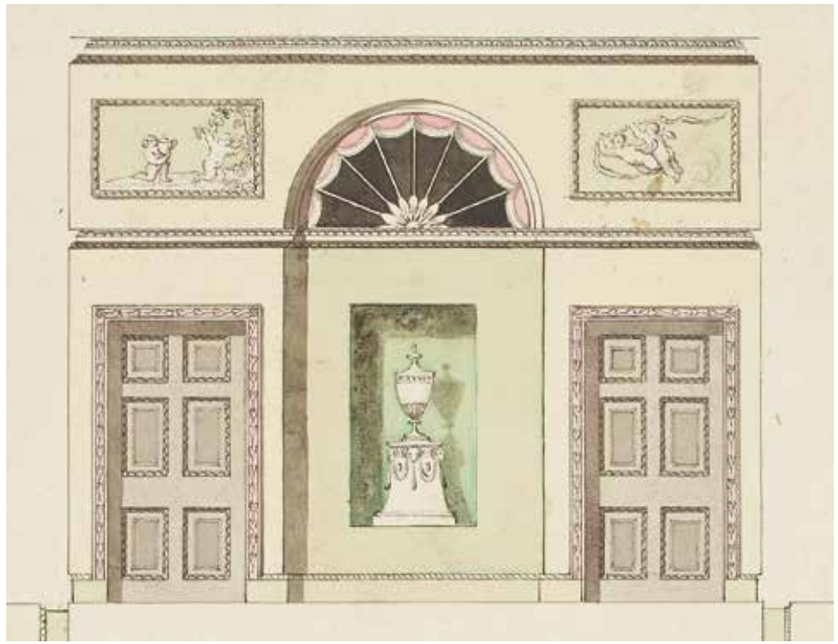

Fig. 03.08.
Thomas Penrose, design for the Bedroom Lobby, Lucan House, Co. Dublin, 1776, detail.
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

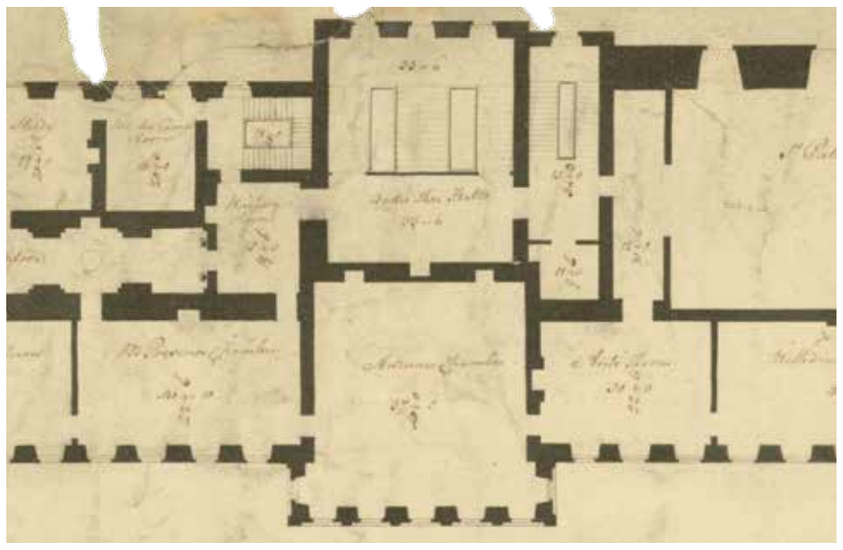

Fig. 03.09.
Thomas Penrose, plan of the first floor of Dublin Castle, 1789, detail of the Presence Chamber.
© The National Archives, UK, WORK 31/20.





in St Patrick's Hall. Waldré was very familiar with Buckingham's preferred Neoclassical idiom, having designed a spectacular music room for him at Stowe, Buckingham's palatial country seat in Buckinghamshire (Fig. 03.10). After Penrose, he is the most likely contender for the distinction of having designed the Presence Chamber. In any case, regardless of its uncertain authorship and certain minor imperfections, the new Presence Chamber was in keeping with Buckingham's ambitious aims for his 'fête' at Dublin Castle. It was the general impression rather than the individual effects that carried the day. Buckingham had made what was viewed as a bad room a good one and, at the expense of

Fig. 03.10.
The Music Room, Stowe House, Buckinghamshire.
Courtesy of the Stowe House Preservation Trust.

his anonymous architect, had taken the credit for it. The extent to which he did so is evident from a contemporary newspaper article. In a glowing account that would undoubtedly have prompted Buckingham to reach for his scissors and scrapbook, *The Dublin Journal* trusted that the Presence Chamber, together with the ongoing improvements to St Patrick's Hall, would be interpreted as a triumph that was fully 'creditable to the Viceroy'.[56]

**Happy for the Kingdom: Buckingham as Patron of the Arts**

It has been observed that for the German philosopher Georg William Friedrich Hegel, 'architecture was a medium only half articulate, unable to give full expression to the Idea, and hence relegated to the level of pure symbolism, from which it must be redeemed by statuary and ornament'.[57] Similarly, for the Marquess of Buckingham, architecture was not the only channel through which an idea of his taste, erudition and largesse could be conveyed. An enthusiastic patron of the fine and decorative arts, he was fully alive to the power of art as a tool in the fashioning of his public image. The grandiose architectural settings he devised were only as expressive as the paintings, textiles, sculpture and decorative schemes he routinely commissioned to complement them. Only through the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or 'total work of art', could the true breadth of his patronage achieve its full manifestation. The new Presence Chamber was to be no different and Buckingham would set out to furnish it with items that reflected his support for the arts in Ireland. The benefits of this were self-evident, and strongly influenced his approach to design, decoration and furnishing at Dublin Castle. In August 1788, *The Freeman's Journal* issued a robust defence of his support for Irish artisans:

> His Excellency … has constantly almost appeared in the manufactures of this country, in private as well as public, giving the most extensive orders for various rich suits, and strictly enjoining, that all the cloaths of his household, as well as every article of refitting up, and furnishing the Castle, should be of Irish manufacture. Happy for the kingdom, had her own nobility and gentry shown a tenth part of this zeal![58]

A month later, there was more praise when he arranged for an order of linen to be commissioned from John Carleton and Co. of Lisburn, Co. Antrim, for the household of King George III at Windsor Castle. The action was greeted as a 'very





valuable and distinguished compliment' and a gesture of 'friendship' towards the country.[59] A measure of the story's import was that it was also reported outside of Dublin, in the Kilkenny-based *Finn's Leinster Journal*, where the products commissioned were referred to as 'the finest sets of house linen'.[60] Buckingham's insistence on sourcing Irish furnishings and fabrics for Dublin Castle not only helped to augment his own popularity, but also helped to set a trend that would be followed by other conscientious viceroys in the nineteenth century. Newly identified letters show that at least two later viceroys followed his example. In February 1831, the new viceroy Henry William Paget, 1st Marquess of Anglesey (1768–1854) wrote to the Board of Works (later the Office of Public Works or OPW), which managed Dublin Castle. In his letter, he stipulated that 'every article' commissioned for a state building in Ireland, including Dublin Castle, 'should be of Irish Manufacture'. [61] Similarly, in September 1838, a directive was issued by the then viceroy Constantine Henry Phipps, 2nd Earl of Mulgrave, later 1st Marquess of Normanby (1797–1863), that new furniture for the State Drawing Room at Dublin Castle 'should be purchased in Dublin, when such can be obtained sufficiently well executed'.[62]

Buckingham's support for Irish textile manufacturers can be traced to his first viceroyalty, as Earl Temple, from 1782 to 1783. Among the lucrative commissions awarded in that period was one for 'four new suits of Irish manufacture … for each of his numerous retinue', whom, it was said, he would 'not permit to wear any cloaths … other than the produce of Irish looms'.[63] A year later, he was ordering 'several hundred yards of figured linings' for his house at Stowe.[64] The order was given to the Master of the Corporation of Weavers in Dublin. The original records of the Corporation of Weavers in the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland allow the Master in question to be identified as Henry Williams. The records show that Williams was first elected Master on 26 March 1781 and was re-elected for a second year on 25 March 1782.[65] Even small orders were invariably placed with local manufacturers. An original record of one such order has recently come to light. On 8 April 1783, Hannah Lagraviere of 13 Skinner Row (now Christchurch Place), Dublin, received a payment of £60.0.4 from Buckingham, for trimmings for the household livery at Dublin Castle.[66] According to her signed bill, which has survived among Buckingham's papers, she provided twelve dozen pieces of broad livery lace, fourteen dozen pieces of narrow livery lace, fourteen 'baggs' for the grooms of the chamber, twenty-six 'baggs' and thirteen yards of ribbon for the footmen, and three orange sword


Fig. 03.11.
Bill for Dublin Castle livery, 1783, detail. 'Inventory of the Furniture in the Lord Lieutenant's House in the Phoenix Park taken October 31 1782', STG CL&I, box 13, folder no. 12, Stowe Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

knots for the pages.[67] Remarkably, a rare sample of her trimming has survived with the bill. It suggests a rather vivid palette of orange, green and yellow for Buckingham's livery at the Castle (Fig. 03.11).

Buckingham's efforts to source local products such as these are easily understood in the context of the challenges facing the arts and the manufacturing industry in Ireland in the eighteenth century. By the 1780s, the castigation of Irish patrons for their eschewal of Irish products and services, in favour of European imports, had reached fever pitch. 'Is there a prince in *Germany* or *Italy*', enquired one writer as early as 1729, 'who may not, without Disparagement to his Rank or Grandeur, Ride in such a *Coach* or *Chariot* as I can have made or finish'd in *Dublin*? Is there a Subject of *Britain*, that need blush to appear dress'd in a choice of *Irish Holland* or *Broad-Cloth*?'[68] In 1738, Samuel Madden offered a chilling summary of the problems as he saw them:

> Betwixt the monstrous Mismanagement of the Splendour and Expence of the Rich in foreign Countries or Commodities and the Idleness and Laziness of the Poor, the Tradesmen, Labourer and Husbandmen (chiefly for want of Encouragement) we have been ground to Pieces as between the upper and the nether Millstone.[69]





By 1759, the argument was still evolving. 'In the case of building', wrote Henry Brooke, 'and in truth, in many others; we are (from our inherent hospitality) apt to set too high a value on foreigners: of whom some have appeared to be nothing more than forward prating, superficial pretenders'.[70] To his benefit and credit, Buckingham made sure that he was on the right side of this argument.

Continuing his publicity-winning formula as he prepared to decorate his new Presence Chamber, Buckingham visited what was referred to as 'the Glass House on the North Strand', in November 1788.[71] This visit was said to be 'preparatory to his bespeaking a set of magnificent lustres, for St. Patrick's-hall, and the new rooms at the Castle'.[72] The premises in question can be identified as those of Messrs Chebsey and Co.[73] Whether any of these lustres were ultimately commissioned and installed in the new Presence Chamber is not known but the report, which mentioned that Buckingham was attended on his visit 'by a number of the nobility', sent out the correct message of patriotic example regardless.[74] Later in the same month, it was communicated that in another patriotic gesture, Buckingham had engaged 'the uncommon talents of Mr. De Grey' to paint four pictures 'to be placed over the doors in the new presence chamber at the Castle'.[75] The artist in question was the chief exponent of grisaille painting in Ireland, Peter de Gree (1751–1789).[76] Praised by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) as 'a very excellent painter in chiaro-oscuro in imitation of basso-relievos ...', de Gree was a Flemish artist who was invited to Ireland in 1785.[77] He had come to Dublin at the invitation of Buckingham's popular predecessor, the 4th Duke of Rutland. Under Rutland's auspices, he had been designated keeper of an intended new national gallery, which failed to materialize due to Rutland's sudden death in 1787.[78] By the beginning of December 1788, de Gree's commission for the Presence Chamber was being reported in detail:

> The basso relievo figures which Mr De Gree is painting by order of his Excellency the Marquis of Buckingham, to be put up over the door[s] of the new Presence Chamber, are the Four Seasons, strikingly designed, and rendered so seemingly independent of the canvas, that to the nicest eye, they are the deception of relief, highly finished by the sculptor's chisel, and starting forward with unexampled beauty and boldness.[79]

Notwithstanding de Gree's nationality, his employment by Buckingham was cited in the newspapers as another example of 'how warmly' the viceroy was

'inclined to countenance the arts' in Ireland.[80] By the time of de Gree's death in January 1789, only one of the four pictures, *Autumn*, had been completed.[81] Its whereabouts are unknown.

In commissioning the grisailles from de Gree, it is possible that Buckingham was inspired by the Saloon at Buckingham House (later Buckingham Palace), London, which had been ornamented with similar grisaille overdoor paintings only a year earlier (Fig. 03.12).[82] Buckingham would almost certainly have been familiar with the space on account of its function as a presence chamber for Queen Charlotte, and may have been seeking to pay the King and Queen a compliment by emulating it at Dublin Castle. De Gree's untimely death was an initial blow to any such intentions. However, as the 1795 engraving of Buckingham's Presence Chamber shows, a similar scheme for the spaces over the doors does appear to have been carried out. The full-length male portrait illustrated in the same engraving is almost certainly the painting of

Fig. 03.12.
James Stephanoff, *Buckingham House: The Saloon*, 1818.
Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.





King George III referred to in a later description of the room from 1821.[83] It was placed opposite a matching full-length portrait of Queen Charlotte. This practice had parallels with the display of portraits of King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria in the Presence Chamber at the Castle during the viceroyalty of Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford, in the 1630s. There can be little doubt that these twin portraits are those from the studio of Allan Ramsay (1713–1784) that remain in the Dublin Castle collection today. They may have been installed in the new Presence Chamber by Buckingham as a further paean to the royal couple, but given his often turbulent relationship with the King, they may have been more useful to him as illustrations of the weight of his own office. The 1821 description of the room records two additional features that almost certainly dated from Buckingham's scheme of 1788; walls of a 'light blue colour' and 'elegant' window cornices 'emblematic of the order of St. Patrick'.[84]

Fig. 03.13.
John Keyse Sherwin, *The Installation Banquet of the Knights of St Patrick*, 1785, sketch.
© National Gallery of Ireland.

During the festivities surrounding the foundation of the Order of St Patrick in 1783, Buckingham had proudly used Dublin Castle for the grand installation dinner on St Patrick's Day, 17 March. A painting of this assembly in St Patrick's Hall was produced at Buckingham's request by the English artist John Keyse Sherwin (1751–1790), in 1785 (Fig. 03.13).[85] In common with a portrait of him by Robert Hunter (*c.* 1715/20–1801), now in the Deanery of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, it depicts Buckingham in his distinctive light blue robes as the Grand Master of his new order of knights (Fig. 03.14). Buckingham felt a deep sense of pride in having convinced King George III to establish what he flippantly and frequently referred to as 'my Order'.[86] Strictly speaking, it was, of course, the sovereign's order. Throughout the nineteenth century, Buckingham's Presence Chamber would be used periodically for the investiture of new Knights of St Patrick (see Fig. 04.22). This practice is a reminder of the Presence Chamber's little-known but important connection to an order that is more commonly associated with St Patrick's Hall and St Patrick's Cathedral. Much like the emblems of the Order that once enriched the room's window cornices, and the inimitable shade of St Patrick's blue that appears to have coloured its walls, it is a legacy that reflects Buckingham's pride in the Order, as much as in himself for creating it. It has been said of St Patrick's Hall, that 'the provision of opulent premises, appropriately decorated, was key to lending this new chivalric body a veneer of "history and legitimacy"'.[87] The same may be true of Buckingham's new Presence Chamber of 1788.

It would be misleading to claim that self-promotion was the only motivation that shaped Buckingham's approach to ornamenting the Presence Chamber and benevolently patronizing the arts in Ireland. There can be no doubt that he was naturally generous and paternalistic and there is much evidence to demonstrate this. During his time in charge of Stowe, this extraordinary house is said to have 'reached the heights of its numerous house parties and extravagant entertainment, with dinners and dances for hundreds at the slightest excuse'.[88] Buckingham also nursed a genuine passion for art, architecture and music, and sought to create interiors and entertainments that would inspire and delight. Despite these altruistic motivations, there is also evidence that he was aware of the political gains to be made from using the arts to build his reputation, and that he acted accordingly. This was most apparent in a celebration held during his first viceroyalty at Dublin Castle. In honour of the Queen's birthday, St Patrick's Hall was 'new fitted up ... and ornamented with painted festoons of flowers'.[89] There





Fig. 03.14.
Robert Hunter, *George, Marquess of Buckingham, first Grand Master of the Order of St Patrick*, 1783. Photograph by Davison & Associates, courtesy of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

Fig. 03.15.
Vincenzo Waldré, *King George III flanked by Hibernia and Britannia*, 1788–1802.
Photograph by Mark Reddy, Trinity Digital Studios, courtesy of the Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle.

was a lavish banquet in the Gothic Supper Room, where a 'new scene of splendor was exhibited'.[90] In addition to the delights of the tables, one of the most striking features singled out for comment by *The Dublin Evening Post* was a transparent painting:

> The room was well decorated round with numerous beautiful and well-engraved devices; in the middle window was a transparent painting, representing Britannia and Hibernia plighting faith to each other ... with Peace descending from above with an olive branch.[91]





Fig. 03.16.
Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Temple Family*, *c.* 1780–2.

The day after the ball, Buckingham wrote to his brother, William, expressing satisfaction at the effect of this transparent painting. Its subject had apparently been selected for political effect. 'Our ball', he bragged, 'was the fullest and most splendid ever seen ... hardly a lady of quality absent; and on my part every thing was done as you will imagine. The enclosed which I have just cut from the *Dublin Evening* [*Post*] will shew you that my transparency has its effect'.[92] The theme of Britannia and Hibernia in a state of concord was evidently one he considered especially effective. It would later form the centrepiece of Vincenzo Waldré's ceiling paintings in St Patrick's Hall, which, it is now clear, were commissioned by Buckingham not in 1787, as has been thought hitherto, but in September 1788.[93] Executed on a scale that dwarfed the efforts of 1783 and bordering on political propaganda, this astonishingly precocious work would be the ultimate realization of Buckingham's aspirations as a patron (Fig. 03.15). By the time he came to commission the Presence Chamber and the ceiling of St Patrick's Hall, Buckingham had fully grasped the power of the arts to forge his public persona.

In the years between 1782 and 1788 there had been numerous grandiose artistic projects. There were portraits. One, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, showed him, together with his artistic wife, who was reputed to have been a pupil of Reynolds, very much as 'the eighteenth-century Grand Seigneur' (Fig. 03.16).[94] The inclusion of the Borghese Vase in the background speaks of their cultivation and affinity with antique classicism. Several portraits of Buckingham found their way into private, civic and national collections.[95] Others took the form of more modest prints that appeared in Irish periodicals, and helped keep his genteel image alive in the public consciousness (Fig. 03.17).[96] There was also music. In 1783, having discovered that the trumpeters and drummer responsible for the Irish State Music were now living in England, Buckingham suggested that the band should be reorganized and expanded. The result was an enlarged band of six trumpets, seven violins, two French horns, two hautboys, fours bass viols, a dulcimer and a kettle drum.[97] However, with the remodelled St Patrick's Hall still incomplete by the end of January 1789, nothing had yet compared to the ambition of the new Presence Chamber. In early January 1789, *The Dublin Evening Post* thought it 'very doubtful' that the Presence Chamber would be completed in time for the opening of the new

Fig. 03.17. 'Earl Temple'. *The Hibernian Magazine: or, Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, October 1782. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.





session of the Irish Parliament, when it would be required for viceregal levees.[98] Its fears proved unfounded, and the room was fit to host its inaugural levee by the end of the month, on Sunday, 25 January.[99] Dour Doric in the old Presence Chamber had been eclipsed by courtly Corinthian in the new one. Buckingham, from mediocrity, had made majesty. The architecture and decoration of the new Presence Chamber proclaimed his social, political and cultural position at the apex of Irish society. But who would heed that proclamation?

**Something Preying upon his Mind: Buckingham's Collapse**

For a brief interval during the winter of 1788/9, Buckingham's new Presence Chamber appeared to be ameliorating the reputation he had recently damaged through public quarrels with the Church of Ireland and the Ordnance Office. As has been demonstrated, it cast him in the role of a master of court etiquette, a connoisseur of modern architectural fashions and a philanthropic patron of the arts in Ireland. Despite this, not all the newspapers expressed unreserved enthusiasm for the new room. One commentator opined that the doors were 'poor and paultry, and utterly inadequate to a room of state', recommending that their panels should instead be 'formed of looking glass'.[100] Another was critical of the lack of Irish artists working on the Presence Chamber project, noting that '*foreign manufacture* at the fountain of fashion – the Court' could be 'productive of no good influence'.[101] Others deplored the effect the new room had on circulation in the State Apartments. 'Instead of the former grand entrance', wrote one columnist, 'you must now pass through a lobby which was before merely the landing ... of the great stair-case, which at present resembles the confined lobby of a decent prison'.[102] This new space on the landing at the top of the main imperial staircase had been created as a surrogate lobby for the Battle Axe Guards (see Fig. 03.09). The guards had been displaced by the works to turn their old Guard Chamber into the Presence Chamber. There is little record of the new lobby other than a contemporary account describing it as a space 'inclosed in glass cases to form a contemptible waiting-room', the creation of which was 'exceedingly to be lamented'.[103] Notwithstanding its evident unpopularity as an aesthetic blight on the Castle's principal staircase, the OPW Papers show that this makeshift area remained in place until as late as 1864. On 27 June of that year, a plan was agreed to remove it and restore the staircase to its original appearance.[104] The work was estimated at £65 and involved the provision of a new timber handrail and cast-iron balusters, all of which remain in place today.[105]

Some critics also used Buckingham's relocation from the Castle to temporary lodgings at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham during the creation of the new Presence Chamber, as a further source of criticism in this period. When Lady Buckingham had the misfortune to go into labour in the less than salubrious surroundings of this old soldiers' hospital, in January 1789, before she and her husband had returned to the Castle, satirists wasted little time in sketching a bawdy cartoon. It illustrated the level to which the King's representative in Ireland had sunk (Fig. 03.18). Yet in spite of these minor tribulations, Buckingham carried on, confidently anticipating the new Castle season that would allow him to display his improvements. In jubilant spirits, he had little expectation of the crisis that was about to befall him.

Fig. 03.18.
William Holland (published by), *The Vice Q –'s delivery at the Old Soldier's Hospital in Dublin*, 1789. © The Trustees of the British Museum.






Towards the end of 1788, King George III had begun a slow descent into a bout of serious mental illness. By November 1788, his condition had worsened and the daily business of the British and Irish parliaments had become severely impeded as a result. On Thursday, 19 February 1789, the Irish Parliament resolved to transmit an address to London, inviting the Prince of Wales to assume the government of Ireland in place of his ill father. That evening, at four o'clock, members of both houses of Parliament processed to Dublin Castle to deliver their address to the viceroy, for transmission to London. It is ironic that this, the event that sealed Buckingham's fate in Ireland, is almost certain to have been one of the first that took place in his new Presence Chamber. Responding to the parliamentary delegation, Buckingham stated that he was 'obliged to decline transmitting this Address to Great Britain', claiming that he did not consider himself 'warranted' to do so.[106] He would later write in confidence to his brother that he had taken this fateful step in the context of pressure brought to bear on him by, among others, the Prime Minister, William Pitt (1759–1806). Having been pressed to take action, he had reached a judgement that he felt was 'essential to the King's service' and 'in every point of view … indispensable'.[107] Later that evening, *The Dublin Evening Post* informed its readers that such was the boldness of Buckingham's move, that impeachment was already being talked of.[108] The situation deteriorated rapidly. Two days later, it was being said that a more daring measure had seldom been attempted by any viceroy in Irish history, than Buckingham's move to 'wantonly' and 'weakly' block the Parliament of Ireland in this way.[109] By 26 February, it was the view of the press that Buckingham's position as viceroy was no longer tenable and that he must be removed from office. It was said that this would 'mark the spirit of the people, and be a caution to his successors not to dare to provoke the indignation of Irishmen'.[110] Buckingham's administration was in crisis. Brazenly he hung on until a reprieve came in the form of the King's recovery, in early March, but the damage had been done.

Several newly identified records show that Buckingham served his final few months as Viceroy of Ireland in much the same state as he had always done. There were balls and banquets, and fireworks in celebration of the King's return to health, but they were too little too late. The artifice of pomp and ceremony that had sustained him before was now found wanting at every turn. His fireworks display at St Stephen's Green on St Patrick's Day 1789, recognized by the newspaper as 'an effort to remove an expiring popularity', was thoroughly ridiculed as 'destitute of taste in the design', and dismissed as 'mean and

disgusting'.[111] His ball at the Castle that night saw the new Presence Chamber appropriated for 'cortillons' and 'French dances' in an attempt to maintain the usual gaiety.[112] There was some praise for a transparency of the King's arms, which appeared in the exterior pediment of the Presence Chamber:

> The front of the Castle, over the great entrance, was distinguished by a very handsome transparency, the king's arms, well painted, supported on one side by a figure of Britannia, and on the other by that of Hibernia, and underneath the words, LONG LIVE THE KING.[113]

However, the prevailing interpretation of the event was negative.

In one final attempt to curry favour, Buckingham wrote to his brother in May to announce a spectacular ball he was planning. 'I have ordered', he chirped, 'a most magnificent *fête* for the Queen's real birthday on 18th May; pray take care that the compliment is not lost. We serve upwards of 560 covers, all in St. Patrick's Hall, to a supper partly hot, the rest cold'.[114] Although still clearly working to maximize the publicity value of his artistic endeavours in the highest places, he was now beset by a telling sense of unease and insecurity. 'I am anxious', he conceded, 'for many reasons, to establish the reputation of the … most splendid entertainments, which I shall have given this winter'.[115] Buoyed by the prospect of this event, Buckingham became delusional:

> I can quit this wretched kingdom with a high head; I can deliver to my successor the King's sword in full vigour and powers; and I feel that I have taught to the Government a lesson on the subject of this Aristocracy which is invaluable, if properly used.[116]

In the event, the ball was spectacular but it was Buckingham who had been taught the lesson. Vincenzo Waldré excelled himself in the design of a massive arcade crowned by 'the best fancied scroll-work' supporting a 'Regal Coronet'.[117] He decorated this arcade with 'illuminated suns ... which, with stars that accompanied them, seemed to float in the air'.[118] There were copious quantities of fresh flowers, strawberries, nectarines, peaches and pears. There were orange trees that extended to twelve feet in height. A band played in the Presence Chamber, and at either end of St Patrick's Hall, there were also Buckingham's trusty transparencies, which featured images of the King and Queen. These,





along with the rest of the decorations, were also the work of Waldré.[119] Though undoubtedly impressive, they were still not enough. A final, poorly attended and lacklustre celebration of the King's birthday prompted *The Dublin Evening Post* to conclude: 'Such a celebration … is worthy [of] the Lord of –Bucks'.[120]

Faced with an unforgiving public and parliament, Buckingham descended into what can now be understood as a bout of acute depression. On 5 June 1789, he wrote to his brother of the onset of this debilitating state of mind:

> I cannot describe to you how much my health has already suffered, and how much I lose ground hourly by reflexions of the most unpleasant nature which hourly press upon me. In this unfortunate state of mind I have looked impatiently to Hobart's arrival [Robert Hobart (1760–1816), 4th Earl of Buckinghamshire, Chief Secretary for Ireland], that I might go … to any new scene sufficiently removed from Dublin … I feel how much you will be distressed by this letter, but it is really made necessary by my situation, which is only relieved by the affectionate and constant attentions of my wife. I struggle against it, but I fear that nothing but … a cessation of business and of anxiety can relieve me.[121]

On 9 June, the Irish attorney general, John FitzGibbon, later 1st Earl of Clare (1748–1802) wrote that Buckingham was 'very much out of order' and 'so much depressed' that even minor exertion was affecting him to 'a very alarming degree'.[122] That same day, Lady Buckingham outlined the deterioration in his condition and what she saw as the probable reason for it, in a letter to his brother: 'The dejection of his spirits is greater than you can have any idea of … there seems to be something preying upon his mind which retards his recovery … From what he sometimes drops, I think he is much hurt at the King's not having *marked* any satisfaction at his conduct'.[123] In the context of this advanced level of personal and social insecurity, and desperation for acclaim, it is perhaps understandable why Buckingham had lavished so much time, money and energy on creating a more impressive Presence Chamber and courtly environment at Dublin Castle. But it had all come to nothing. Dejected and desolate, Buckingham resigned as Viceroy of Ireland and departed Dublin Castle in October 1789.

In the final analysis, he was not judged kindly and several satirical rhymes were penned at his expense. One unpublished verse offered a bleak assessment of his

tenure. It threw into sharp contrast his inadequacies, in comparison to the virtues of his predecessor:

> Ye Papists & Ye Presbyters, your tythes are in the lurch still
> For tho' his wife's a Roman, he'll make Ye pay the Church still...
> At length he'll leave our Country as same as Wales or Scotland
> O what a mighty difference between Buckingham [and Rutland].[124]

To make matters worse, King George III was 'adamant in his refusal of a dukedom'.[125] Buckingham was crestfallen and described himself as 'the most disgraced *public man* ...'[126] Following George III's final descent into a total mental collapse later in life, the old King is reputed to have said in one of his soliloquies, 'I hate nobody, why should anybody hate me?', before pausing and adding, 'I beg pardon, I do hate the marquess of Buckingham'.[127] Like Busiris, King of Egypt, Buckingham had been defeated by the equals he had undervalued and those whose loyalty he had taken for granted. He would never hold high political office again. Having withdrawn to the shadows, he died of diabetes on 11 February 1813.

**Surmounted by the Crown: The Presence Chamber after Buckingham**

After Buckingham's lifetime, his Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle continued to be the principal stage for royal and viceregal ceremonial in Ireland, until the twentieth century. Under the custom established by Buckingham, courtiers entered the Presence Chamber from the east through the ante-room, or old Presence Chamber, before proceeding through the space and into the Dining Room, or Portrait Gallery, to the west. Many of its functions changed little over the years, with viceregal inauguration ceremonies and levees generally following the same pattern until the twentieth century. However, there were occasional deviations from the established programme of events, such as the christening of the son of the viceroy, Charles Chetwynd-Talbot, 2nd Earl Talbot (1777–1849) in the room, in March 1818.[128] The selection of the Presence Chamber for a religious ceremony of this nature has parallels with similar practices in Buckingham Palace, where Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Victoria, Princess Royal, was christened in the Throne Room. Other novel events included the State Trumpet Dinner of 1826. It was given in what was referred to as 'the Grand Presence Chamber, in the first style of elegance'.[129] One of the most controversial





moments in the room's history came in April 1833, when a new government coercion bill, roundly criticized as a 'curfew law', was introduced by the then viceroy, the 1st Marquess of Anglesey.[130] It was designed to curb recent outrages in Co. Kilkenny and had received royal assent in London a few days earlier. The use of the Presence Chamber for the announcement of a political measure of this sort was highly unusual. However, it is worth remembering that since Ireland's assimilation into the United Kingdom in 1801, a vacuum had been left behind by the abolition of the Irish Parliament, which had served as the forum for political discourse. Notwithstanding the profound nature of such events, lighter moments did occasionally punctuate the solemnity. At the inauguration of the new Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mr Alderman Hodges, on 30 September 1836, an excitable crowd undermined the regal dignity of the space. 'At the conclusion of his Lordship's address', it was reported with some amusement, 'the crowd in the Presence Chamber, forgetting the place, broke into a simultaneous cheer'.[131]

The unrivalled highlight in the room's history in the early nineteenth century came on 20 August 1821, when it accommodated the state levee of the new monarch, King George IV. It was in preparation for this momentous occasion that a new throne was installed. Little is known about the earlier throne it replaced, other than that it had been 'covered with crimson velvet, richly ornamented with gold lace ...'[132] For all the physical and symbolic prominence of the new throne, which remains in the room today, there is a similar paucity of original information relating to it. Its maker was not recorded and no evidence of its design has yet been identified, despite careful analysis of contemporary Board of Works records. Its grandiose Regency form was clearly developed with reference to its function as a receptacle, not only for the viceroy and British monarch, but also for the Irish Sword of State, which rested on two specially designed projecting tendrils (Fig. 03.19). An account of the Presence Chamber issued in advance of George IV's levee also failed to mention the exact circumstances in which the throne had been commissioned. However, it provides much detail on the room's appearance by this date:

> The throne is most richly gilt, burnished in oil gold, and picked out with white – The top, of a most gorgeous and glittering canopy, is mounted with the Royal lion and the unicorn, and these are surmounted by the Crown – the back of the Throne is covered with the richest crimson velvet, with the Arms of the Sovereign most splendidly embroidered in pure gold. The drapery

Fig. 03.19. Throne, Throne Room, Dublin Castle, *c.* 1821.
Photograph by Davison & Associates,
courtesy of the Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle.





> round the canopy is profusely embroidered, and edged by a deep gold fringe; the chair, or seat, is elevated, and there are two easy ascending steps, forming a circle round the Throne. The cushion, which is edged with gold, is of a crimson colour. The platform is covered with a Turkey carpet.[133]

As has been mentioned, light blue walls formed a backdrop to twin portraits of the late King George III and Queen Charlotte at this time. Apart from the introduction of the new throne, the Presence Chamber appears to have remained virtually unchanged since its completion by Buckingham thirty-two years earlier.

**Extravagance even in Small Things: The Marquess Wellesley, Buckingham's Heir**

In October 1839, the room would undergo a radical overhaul designed to reflect Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom. New evidence in the OPW Papers shows that before these major interventions, there was one final, significant alteration to Buckingham's original scheme. On 26 May 1825, the Secretary to the Board of Works informed its architect, Francis Johnston (1760–1829), that he had received proposals from several builders for taking down and reconstructing the front of the Presence Chamber, including the portico, which, by then, was at risk of collapse.[134] The correspondence shows that by 10 June the proposals of Messrs E. Carolin had been accepted. The cost of the building work was estimated at £2,833.10.2 and an additional £204.15.0 was set aside to cover the cost of new chimneypieces for the room.[135] These twin chimneypieces, slightly altered, remain in situ today (see Fig. 04.11). Their simple Roman fasces have connotations of power that are consistent with the room's original function. Significantly, the building works also necessitated the replacement of Buckingham's original ceiling of gilded stucco. The task of executing a replacement ceiling fell to George Stapleton (1777–1844). He was awarded the commission, on the basis of his estimate of £221.0.10.[136] Stapleton's new ceiling was said to be 'remarkable for its delicate tracery and exquisitely carved devices, illustrative of the Order of St. Patrick'.[137] Some impression of its appearance can be ascertained from an early Ordnance Survey map, the survey work for which was carried out in 1838. It shows a florid decorative composition that was somewhat at odds with Buckingham's restrained Neoclassical space (Fig. 03.20).

Work progressed swiftly and on 1 December 1825, the viceroy, Richard Colley Wesley, 1st Marquess Wellesley (1760–1842), was petitioning the Board of Works to have the newly restored room 'new canvassed and papered'.[138] His request was

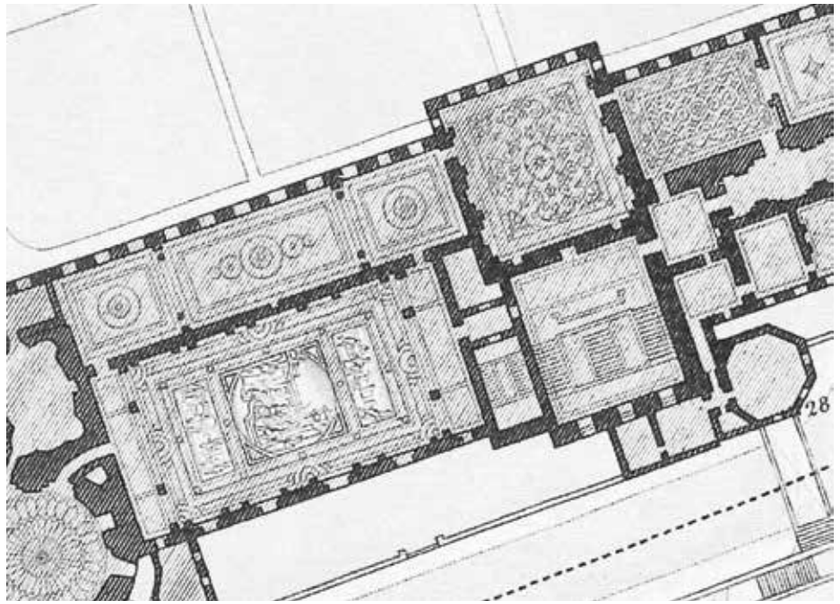


Fig. 03.20. Ordnance Survey Map of Dublin, surveyed 1838, published 1844, the 'Castle Sheet', detail of the Presence Chamber. Reproduced with the permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin.

duly granted at the beginning of 1826. A surviving set of estimates produced by Francis Johnston for finishing the work shows that the new wallpaper was patterned and had been selected as an alternative to the 'coloured' [painted] walls that, according to Johnston's notes in the margin, had 'required to be renewed every two or three years'.[139] No record of the pattern or colour of this new wallpaper has survived. Seven new roller blinds for the windows, crimson cloth for covering the dais supporting the throne, and paint for the woodwork in the room, were also estimated for. The total cost was £149.16.0.[140] By 30 March 1826, the finishing touches were being applied. These included 'ten looking glasses, to be placed behind the lustres', as requested by Wellesley, for the modest cost of £35.00.[141] The only other piece of furniture known to have been commissioned for the room before the remodelling of 1839 was a double ottoman of a somewhat domestic character. It can be seen in later nineteenth-century photographs of the space (see Fig. 04.02). Its production was sanctioned by the Secretary to the Board of Works on 12 March 1829, following a specific request from the then viceroy Hugh Percy, 3rd Duke of Northumberland (1785–1847).[142] Its introduction into





the Presence Chamber hints at slightly more comfortable and perhaps less formal arrangements for levees and presentation ceremonies during Northumberland's viceroyalty.

It was fitting that, as the viceroy who presided over the alterations to the Presence Chamber in 1825, the Marquess Wellesley had been a close personal friend of Buckingham. The elder brother of the Duke of Wellington, he had been one of the fifteen men selected by Buckingham to become the founding Knights of the Order of St Patrick. During his two terms as viceroy, from 1821 to 1828 and again from 1833 to 1834, Wellesley maintained the grand traditions of his earlier stint as Viceroy of India, by spending prodigiously. Unlike Buckingham, he did so not from his private purse, which was always depleted, but from the rather healthier public one. It has been said that his jewellery, heavy facial rouge, painted lips and artificially blackened eyebrows 'betrayed extravagance even in small things'.[143] His official portrait at Dublin Castle would appear to corroborate this interpretation (see Fig. 06.04). Wellesley 'no doubt believed that the trappings of power were essential to the exercise of power'.[144] Abundant evidence of this survives in the OPW Papers. It shows that in addition to directing the costly refurbishment of the Presence Chamber, he was frequently engrossed in developing lavish furnishing schemes and entertainments for the rest of the State Apartments.

In March 1824, Wellesley requested new furniture for the State Apartments to the value of £444.17.9.[145] In February 1825, he petitioned the Board of Works for a suite of new carpets, at an estimated cost of £290.6.8.[146] However, these requests paled into insignificance when, in December of that year, his extravagance reached new heights with a request for furniture and works in the State Apartments, to the value of £1,377.4.1.[147] In 1826, he submitted numerous requests, seeking, among other things, the restoration of Buckingham's vast ceiling paintings in St Patrick's Hall.[148] Wellesley's extraordinary spending continued unabated until the beginning of 1828, when the Under-Secretary for Ireland, William Gregory (1762–1840), brought the situation to a head. On 27 January, the Secretary to the Board of Works was obliged to write to Gregory to justify the spending on the viceroy's apartments, which, he conceded, was 'certainly very great'.[149]

In many ways Wellesley's tenure at Dublin Castle had echoes of Buckingham's grand regime of the 1780s, but by the late 1820s, no doubt as a result of Gregory's intervention to curb Wellesley's profligacy, the executive powers of the viceroy in matters relating to interior decoration, were curtailed. The dilution of

this privilege was made almost absolute on 15 October 1831, when the Board of Works was abolished and replaced by the Office of Public Works. Radical changes in personnel soon followed. Overseeing the day-to-day activities of this new institution was its parsimonious secretary, Henry Paine. As the early records of the OPW show, Paine would operate a scrupulous system of financial controls within which there was little room for discretionary viceregal splendour.[150]

**Defer Repairing: The Dwindling of Funds**

A mark of this new, more conscientious approach to the management of finances at Dublin Castle can be perceived in the discussions surrounding proposed improvements to the interior of the Presence Chamber in the late 1830s. By 1838, Henry Paine had, under a certain amount of duress, allowed some funds to be re-allocated towards the construction of a new balcony on the room's exterior.[151] As well as providing a viewing platform for the viceroy, the balcony would offer shelter to those alighting from carriages at the main entrance to the State Apartments below it. Paine's decision was taken in response to a direct

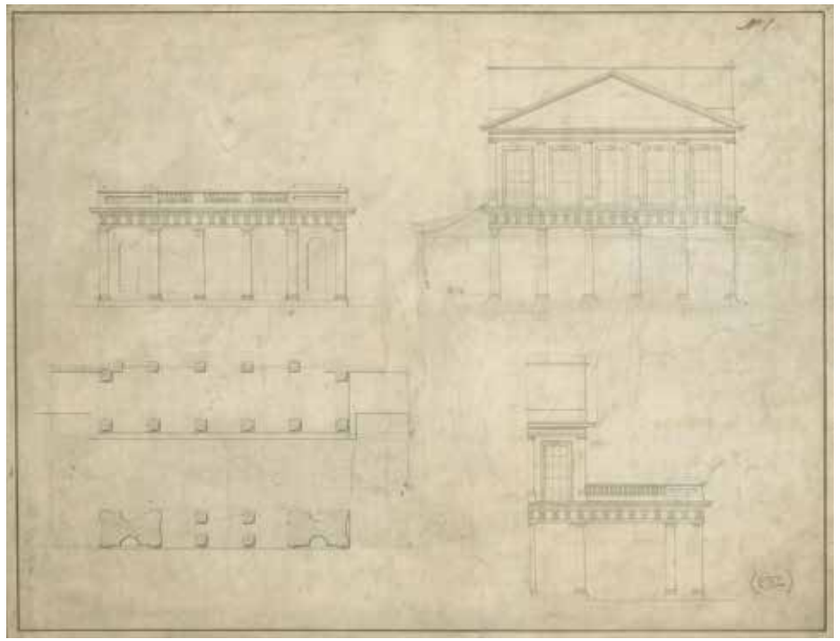

Fig. 03.21. Jacob Owen (attr. to), design for Throne Room balcony, Dublin Castle, 1837–8. Courtesy of the Office of Public Works Library.





request from the then viceroy, the 2nd Earl of Mulgrave and his wife, Maria, Countess of Mulgrave (1798–1882).[152] An unexecuted design from this period, for a projecting five-bay Doric balcony, survives in the OPW Library (Fig. 03.21). This grandiose early proposal featured a central three-bay loggia flanked by piers containing niches, and supporting a balustrade. Although unsigned, the design was almost certainly the work of the OPW architect, Jacob Owen (1778–1870). On 24 January 1838, Henry Paine expressed concerns about the suitability of the design, on the basis that it would render the Entrance Hall in the State Apartments 'very dark'.[153] It was promptly rejected.

A compromise was eventually reached whereby a shallow balcony with a cast iron and glass canopy was constructed later that year. Although architecturally incongruous and undistinguished, the new balcony extended the reach of the Presence Chamber into the public sphere and cost less than the original design (see Figs 04.01 & 09.05). The additional expense incurred in the balcony's construction, coupled with inaccuracies in the architectural estimates for 1838, provided Paine with the leverage he needed to cancel the planned remodelling of the interior of the Presence Chamber. On 4 May 1838, Paine wrote to Jacob Owen, stating:

> As the funds in the Estimates were not intended to cover the cost of the Workmen applied for you must postpone improvements in the Presence Chamber … Perhaps His Excellency [the viceroy] would think it right to defer repairing the Presence Chamber until next year …[154]

Thus was Buckingham's room given a stay of execution for one additional year. To any of the naturally profligate or design-conscious viceroys of the 1820s and 1830s, like Wellesley and Mulgrave respectively, the extravagant era of Buckingham and his palatial Presence Chamber at the Castle, must have seemed like a golden age and a distant memory.

**Conclusion**

In attempting to characterize architecture as an art form, Roger Scruton has observed that it 'imposes itself whatever our desires and whatever our self-image' and that, moreover, 'it takes up space: either it crushes out of existence what has gone before, or else it attempts to harmonize'.[155] As he took one last look at his newly minted Presence Chamber in Dublin Castle, in October 1789, the Marquess

of Buckingham was very likely conscious of a similar truth. He had sought to crush and expunge the memory of an undignified guard chamber through the making of a great new room. In doing so, he had attempted to conjure a novel self-image that would be as beguiling and fresh as the new Presence Chamber itself. Yet, ultimately, he had gained little from his efforts. His dividend could scarcely have been more than the memory of a costly personal investment that had never been given the time to bear fruit. In the final analysis, it was perhaps evident that all but the architecture of the room would endure and impose itself. With the inevitable erosion of cultural memory surrounding the room's history that followed over the centuries, which was compounded by the extinction of its original function in 1922, it could hardly have been otherwise. With the passage of time, the circumstances of the room's development and the reasons behind its creation have become obscure, whatever Buckingham's possible aspirations to the contrary.

In seeking to retrieve them, this essay has demonstrated that despite the focus on his well-publicized faults and foibles, the ultimate judgement of Buckingham should arguably take into account his rich and enduring legacy as an architectural patron. His great painted ceiling by Waldré in St Patrick's Hall remains the most important eighteenth-century scheme of its type in Ireland. Now, the Presence Chamber, too, can take its rightful place among the catalogue of personal contributions he envisaged, resourced and made tangible at Dublin Castle. As this essay has shown, Buckingham's legacy as a patron of the arts, in the case of the Presence Chamber, was built on the confluence of various complex factors in late eighteenth-century Ireland. These were at once, social, cultural, political and, perhaps above all, personal. The richness of his endowment is a reminder that such viceregal legacies cannot, and should not, be simplified or conflated. The case of Buckingham underscores the very active and influential role of the viceroy as a patron of the arts in Ireland and the example this could set, as a means of stimulating Irish artistic production. The benefits of this for artisans such as Hannah Lagraviere, Chebsey and Co., Peter de Gree and Henry Williams were not merely abstract but took the form of real commissions for real money. New evidence has shown that Buckingham's insistence on sourcing Irish furniture and fabrics for Dublin Castle would later be echoed by Irish viceroys in the nineteenth century. Their influential support for Irish cultural production, which has often gone unnoticed, challenges the notion of the viceregal court as a mostly Anglo-centric entity that routinely deferred to Britain in matters of elite consumption.





Yet whatever the benefits for Irish artisans, the Presence Chamber of 1788–9 was, first and foremost, about Buckingham. It was an idea conceived in his mind, as an expression of his self-image and a product of his private purse. By the 1830s, the appropriation of this viceregal prerogative by a reformed public administration, meant that the Presence Chamber would never again express so emphatically the character of one individual. It had become an expression not of narrow self-interest but of the wider interests of the expanded United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, an entity bigger than any single personality or nation within it. As such, the room's evolution offers an insight into the freedoms once enjoyed by the most powerful men in Georgian Ireland, to use the architecture of the state as a tool in the making of majesty. Like Busiris, King of Egypt, to whom he was so memorably and amusingly compared, Buckingham's name has indeed been written as much in 'triumphal columns' as in the annals of Irish history.[156] Yet the paucity of cultural memory surrounding aspects of his story over two centuries is a useful reminder that, in the words of Edward Young, 'Structures so vast by those great kings design'd, Are but faint sketches of their boundless mind'.[157]

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