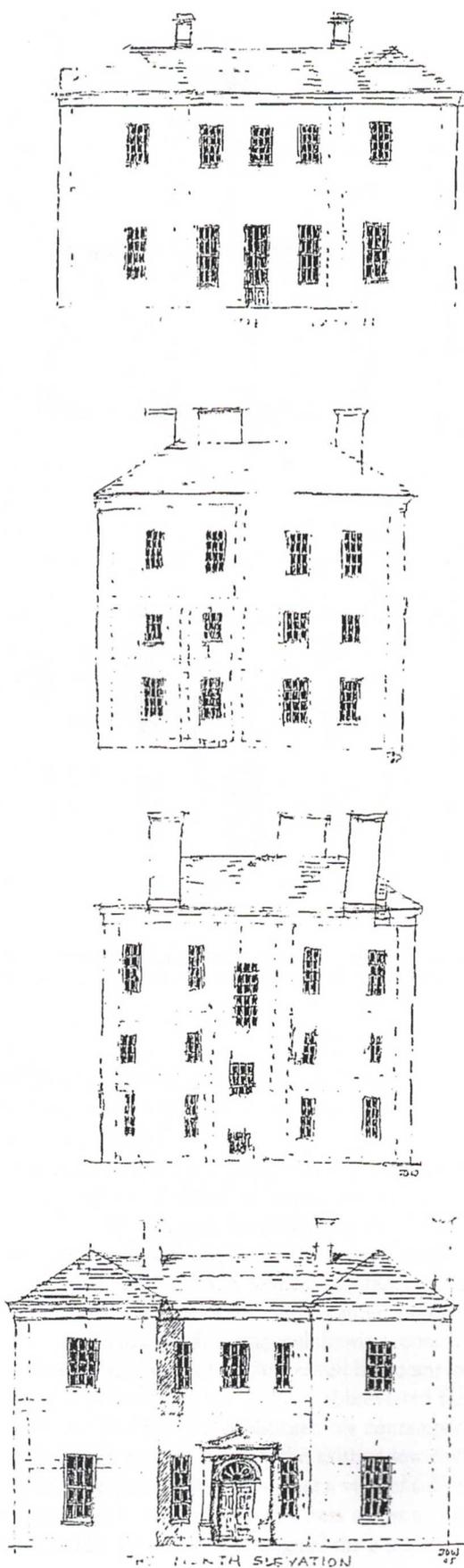


## The Elusive Sir Edward Lovett Pearce



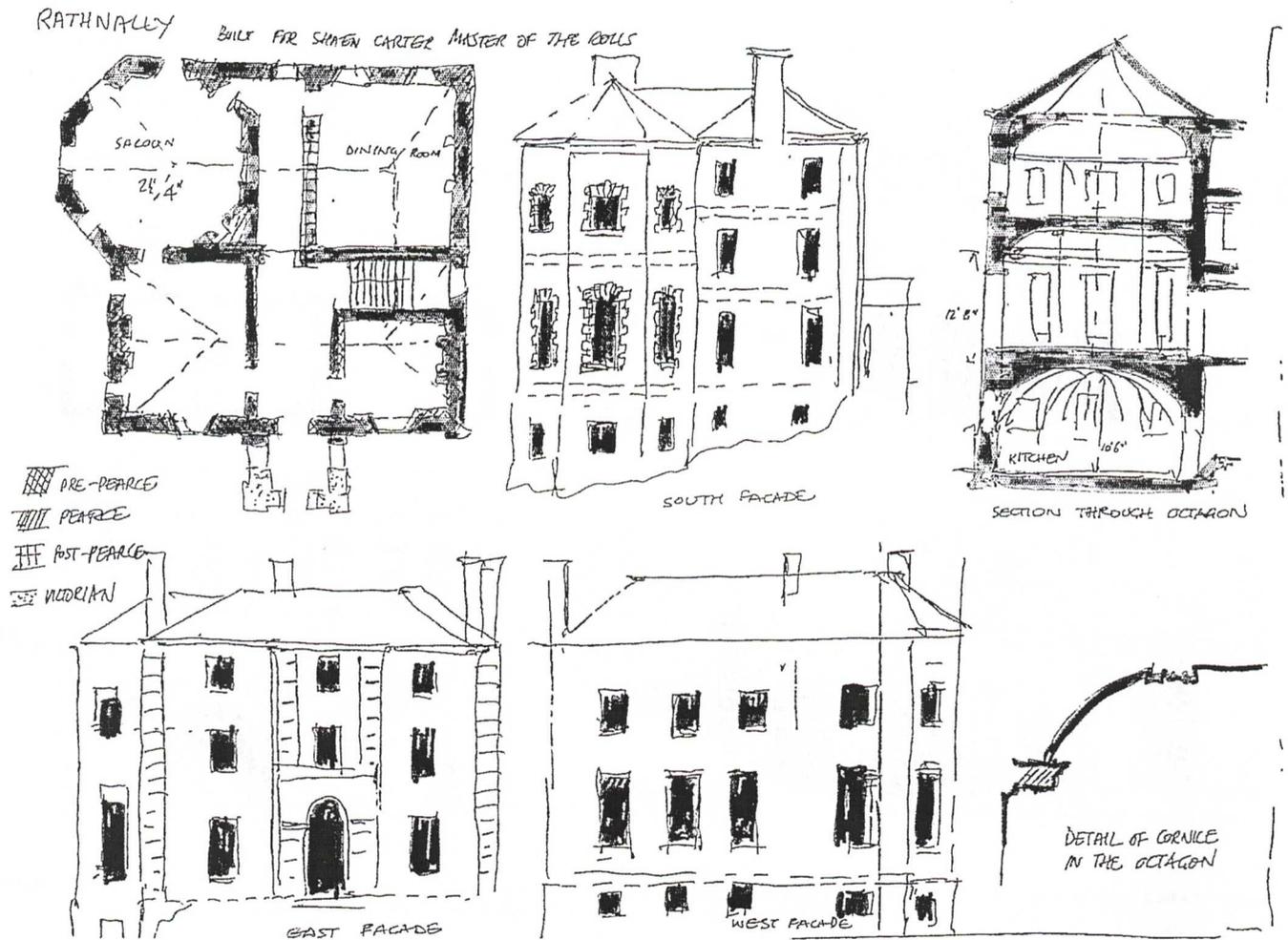
work? Abbeville's remodelling is contemporary with Gandon's new entry for Pearce's House of Lords.

In considering Glasnevin, we approach the inner circle of Pearce's clientele (Fig 6). The authors of the *Irish Georgian Society Volumes*, presumably never invited to tea, denounced it as an ugly red brick house and it has been dismissed as '19th century' in a standard text. Even a recent official survey has failed to disengage the Pearcean villa added to an earlier farmhouse. A 1960 survey that preceded the demolition of the oldest wing revealed that the two-storied farmhouse was raised by a further floor and then matched to a balancing block with a link of equal height. This is only two floors high: a lofty entrance hall below and a salon above at second floor level reached by the staircase of the new wing. This creates a small recessed forecourt to the north which is dominated by a monumental door-case, a modest version of one of the aedicular archways that frame Pearce's forecourt to his Parliament House. The Glasnevin forecourt suppresses all evidence that its wings are three stories but their mezzanines are boldly expressed on the side elevations, as in Pearce's Bellamont Forest. Bellamont was built in 1730 for Pearce's uncle by marriage, Thomas Coote, Lord Justice of the King's Bench. The owner of Glasnevin must have been aware of Bellamont as he was Sir John Rogerson who had been made Chief Justice of Ireland in 1727. The son of Sir John Rogerson, the entrepreneur who developed the quay that still bears his name, the 2nd Sir John inherited a town house in Capel Street. Glasnevin was merely a suburban retreat but its transformation into a sophisticated villa at minimal cost is remarkable. There is another tantalising link: on Sir John's death in 1741, Glasnevin passed to Elizabeth, his eldest daughter, who in 1729 had married the 1st Lord Erne for whom Pearce designed an hexagonal gazebo on an Island in Crom which was probably never built. The Ernes sold Glasnevin to the Lindsay family c.1750 and it was they who commissioned a new range to the south with two superb reception rooms to take advantage of the view and a grander staircase adjoining its 1730 predecessor. As in Abbeville, the earlier double height interior with its wooden fireplace was retained.<sup>7</sup> The Lindsays sold the house to the Holy Faith Order who have added institutions on both sides. But apart from their tragic rebuilding of the east pavilion in 1960 which makes an absurdity of the facade, the nuns have admirably preserved the Georgian interiors of both periods.<sup>8</sup>

In considering Rathnally (Fig 7) on the Boyne below Trim, we move further into the Pearcean orbit and into the homes of his relations. In Glasnevin and Abbeville, succeeding architects have respected the interiors of their predecessors and have adapted the facades to conceal the different phases. Drumcondra demonstrates that Pearce himself was not concerned with superficial consistency. The owner of Rathnally was

6. GLASNEVIN: Elevations of all four Facades. Note the imposing doorcase and the juggling of the floor levels. This is a Pearcean villa added to an earlier farmhouse. The monumental doorcase which dominates the north facade is a modest version of one of the aedicular archways that frame Pearce's forecourt to his Parliament House.

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7. RATHNALLY: Ground Floor Plan, Elevations of the South, East and West Facades and Section through the Octagon, looking West. A triple-tiered folly welded to a conventional house, the Pearcean rear block is boldly asymmetrical so that the view of the Boyne can be enjoyed from the four windows of a double height octagonal drawing room.

his cousin, Thomas Carter, Master of the Rolls and Secretary of State who had already commissioned him to design a town house in Henrietta Street.

Like Glasnevin, Rathnally, although included in the North Leinster volume of *The Buildings of Ireland* (by Alistair Rowan and Christine Casey) has been overlooked as the four-storied front block predates Pearce and has since been Victorianised. The Pearcean rear block, however, remains unaltered and boldly asymmetrical so that the view of the Boyne can be enjoyed from four windows of a double height octagonal drawing room. This is set above a vaulted kitchen and below a coved bedroom; its own ceiling is also coved and framed with an abbreviated floating inner cornice. All this must have shocked his contemporaries, especially if they had entered through the existing low-ceilinged drawing room. A diagonally-sited door gives a view of a fifth window to overlook the river. It also gives access across a curiously unnecessary corridor (that has to be original since it is expressed

in the external fenestration) to a more conventional dining room which is now Edwardianised. The single staircase, also altered, is ingeniously utilised to link the four floors of the old wing to the three floors of the new. All levels are openly expressed on each elevation. The welding of the asymmetrical addition, essentially a triple-tiered folly, on to a conventional house is handled with equal assurance. Here are the three characteristics of the Pearcean villa: the deployment of geometry, the juggling of different room heights, and the awareness of nature.

The particular relation of Pearce's who may have adopted the most cavalier attitude to his architecture was Mervyn Pratt (1687-1751) MP for county Cavan who had married the daughter of Anne and Thomas Coote, Edward's first cousin. Although the youngest son of Joseph Pratt, he ultimately inherited the estate of Cabra (Figs 8 & 9) near Kingscourt through his mother.<sup>9</sup> The demesne still flourishes as a national forest park, much visited by a public unaware of its historical significance. A