

Press Information

A RICH HISTORY

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“The Merrion is one of the most significant restoration projects which has taken place in Dublin over recent years. The Georgian architecture lends itself perfectly to the needs of a hotel: the elegantly simple and dignified exterior of the houses give presence and a wonderful sense of arrival, to The Merrion. Mornington House has transitional interiors of great magnificence which provide an exciting backdrop for the activities of the hotel and its guests. These four important Listed houses have been sympathetically restored and brought back to life to be enjoyed by people from all over the world.”

Peter MacCann, General Manager, The Merrion

A PLACE IN HISTORY

The Merrion is set in the heart of Georgian Dublin on Upper Merrion Street, opposite Government Buildings, the home of the Irish Government. The Main House of the hotel is comprised of four meticulously restored Grade I Listed Georgian townhouses and a specially commissioned contemporary Garden Wing is arranged around two private period gardens.

The houses were built in the 1760's by Lord Monck (Charles Stanley Monck) for wealthy Irish merchants and nobility. He lived in No. 22, which became known as Monck House. The most important of the four houses is, however, No. 24 Upper Merrion Street. This was leased to Garrett Wellesley, Earl of Mornington, in 1769, it has since been known as Mornington House. The house is remembered historically as being the birthplace of Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington.

All four houses had been in use as state offices for most of this century. The well-known Irish writer, Flan O'Brien, (also known as Myles na Gopaleen) author of “The Third Policeman,” allegedly worked in the buildings when he worked for the government.

DUBLIN IN THE 18TH CENTURY, A RENAISSANCE

During the course of the 18th century, Dublin was transformed from a mediaeval town into one of the finest Georgian cities in Europe. It was an exciting and vibrant time. Peace and stability in the country had given rise to great social and economic activity. Dublin became a thriving capital city with a glittering social scene. Architecture was one of the major outward expressions of this vigorous revival of spirit. Dublin owes many of her great civic buildings to this era, and most of the imposing rosy brick streets and grand squares for which the city is famous were built at this time. Government dignitaries and the aristocracy built townhouses of impressive scale. Parallel with the burgeoning architecture, there was an upsurge in the intellectual life of the city. One of the results of this was the forming of the Dublin Society in 1731. The Society encouraged many different disciplines; it opened the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin in 1731 and founded schools of drawing, ornament and architecture.

Large private houses and palatial public buildings provided the backdrop for a society enhanced by luminaries such as Dubliner Jonathan Swift, author of "Gulliver's Travels;" the composer Handel (whose "Messiah" was first performed in Dublin in 1742), Anglo-Irish playwright and novelist, Oliver Goldsmith (The Vicar of Wakefield was published in 1766), and Dublin-born dramatist Richard Sheridan, (his "The School for Scandal" opened in 1777).

Lord Mornington himself contributed to this revived interest in the arts. In 1757, he established a musical society for "the entertainment of the aristocracy". He later became the first Professor of Music at Trinity College.

The planning of Georgian Dublin was assisted by the establishment, in 1757, of the "Commission for Making Wide & Convenient Streets" which left an enduring legacy in the city's wide and gracious streets - Upper Merrion Street measures 102 feet across. The Paving Board, set up in 1773, for "paving, cleaning, lighting, draining and improving the streets", was another example of careful planning. Classical principles were applied to buildings. Symmetry and spaciousness were considered an appropriate background for power.

THE HOUSES, HISTORIC DETAIL

The four houses forming the Main House of The Merrion are typical of domestic Georgian architecture in Ireland. The plain exteriors rely for effect on the carefully worked out classical proportions of the timber sash windows and their relation to the whole façade. The doorcases, with their varied treatment and intricate beautiful fanlights, were where the builder could impose some individuality on the building. In most other areas, the normal lease laid down strict requirements.

Internally, there were no such restrictions. This explains the wealth of varied plasterwork and woodwork contained in the houses. The architectural detail of the houses clearly indicates the progression of their construction. No. 21 has intricate rococo plasterwork and a particularly heavy staircase. The detail lightens as one progresses along the terrace, although No. 22, the first to be built, is an exception. Here the main stair hall and the principal reception rooms have much lighter detailing, in the neo-classical, Adam style. In the midst of this lighter decoration, there are examples of heavier detail, such as the intricate Corinthian cornice in the stairwell, and the superb third floor room with coved ceilings and dramatic rococo plasterwork. Monck House was "modernised" in the late 18th century or the beginning of the 19th century.

No. 23 was also “modernised” thirty or forty years after completion. The reception rooms in particular changed after 1790 when the windows were enlarged, window boxes and shutters modified and connections made to the front room. The removal of the principal stairs and hall inside the front door may have been done later in order to increase the number of rooms in the house.

Since all four houses are Grade 1 Listed, immense care was taken before work began on the site. Planning Permission was granted after two years, with the Architect dealing with all relevant bodies including An Taisce (The Irish National Trust). Work eventually started in October 1995.

The Merrion comprises 123 rooms and 19 suites. The interior is designed using Irish fabrics and antiques to reflect the architecture and original interiors of the Main House. Throughout the hotel guests benefit from the latest technology. There is a choice of two restaurants and two bars. A luxurious Spa and swimming pool, six magnificent meeting and private dining rooms, and a private car park complete The Merrion’s impressive list of facilities.

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