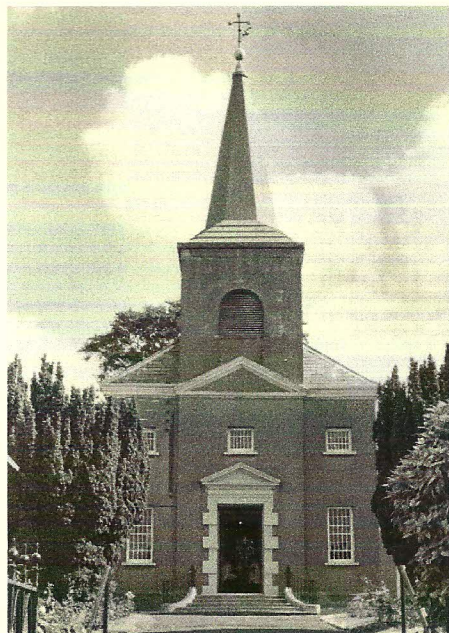




MMT News

Newletter No.14 Spring 2006 The Mausolea & Monuments Trust



1. Knockbreda Parish Church of 1735,
by Richard Cassels, photographed in 1980 (JSC)

The Knockbreda Mausolea *James Stevens Curl*

Most mausolea in Ireland are found in graveyards (as opposed to cemeteries)[1]: they are relatively common, and may be counted among the most favoured types of architecture in that country, not confined to either caste or sect (although some of the most handsome exemplars were erected to contain the remains of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy)[2]. They are often discovered among what James Joyce (1882-1941) called the 'moongrey nettles', the 'black mould', and the 'muttering rain' of the Irish graveyard[3], overgrown, crumbling, and redolent of terminal decay and ineffable melancholy.

An astonishing array of funerary monuments may be found in the Parish Churchyard of Knockbreda, once out in the County Down countryside, but now within suburban Belfast. Four large examples were erected in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, all square on plan, with elegant Adamesque arrangements of Classical columns, pilasters, and entablatures[4]. Above the crowning cornices are inventive superstructures of domes, steeply-pitched

pyramids, and urns. These mausolea comprise the oddest and finest of all buildings in the genre in Ulster, and cannot be surpassed architecturally as a group, although one has already been demolished, and the remaining three are in a parlous condition, with weeds and trees growing out of the tops, pilasters and lumps of stone being displaced, and the fanciful upper works suffering rapid disintegration. Urgent action is imperative if these splendid memorials are not to prove ephemeral.

Now these fine tombs stand in a churchyard, that of the Parish of Knockbreda in the Townland of Breda at Newtownbreda. The Church itself, assured in its detail and massing, and with a fine Gibbs Surround doorcase (Plate 1), was designed by Richard Cassels (c.1690-1751)[5], erected in 1737, and paid for by Anne, Dowager Viscountess Midleton (died 1747)[6]. The site was presented by Lady Midleton's son by her first marriage, Arthur, Viscount Duncannon[7].

As with the Parish graveyard of Drumbeg, Co. Down, many members of the Georgian landed gentry and merchants of the Belfast area chose to be buried there. The Knockbreda tombs commemorate Thomas



2. The Greg Mausoleum in 1987.

It has since lost most of its urns and is rapidly deteriorating, not least because of the jungle growing out of the roof which has done immense damage (JSC)



3. The Waddell-Cunningham-Douglas tomb (*above*) and Greg Mausoleum (*left*), photographed in the 1980s. Both are now badly overgrown and much deteriorated (JSC)

4a & b. Two views in South Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta, showing the streets of handsome tombs. Photographed by the late Mr K. T. Groves at the request of the Author in the 1970s (Collection JSC)



Greg of Belfast (died 1796) and members of his family; John Rainey of Greenville (died 1782) and his family[8]; and Waddell Cunningham (whose 'integrity as a merchant, generosity as a patron, and whose steadiness and hospitality as a friend will long be the objects of the most respectful and grateful remembrance') (died 1797) and his family, including that of Waddell Cunningham Douglas of the 17th Lancers (died 1904)[9].

Let us take the Greg tomb first. Essentially square on plan, its corners are pulled out at 45 degrees and emphasised by full-height paired Roman unfluted Doric columns carrying the elegant entablature, the frieze of which is embellished with garlands of husks (or bellflowers) and horizontally elongated paterae. Above, fluted urns (most of which have fallen off since the photograph was taken in 1978) decorate all four corners and the top of the composition (Plate 3). Materials are finely cut sandstone and Compo (a type of Roman Cement or Stucco).

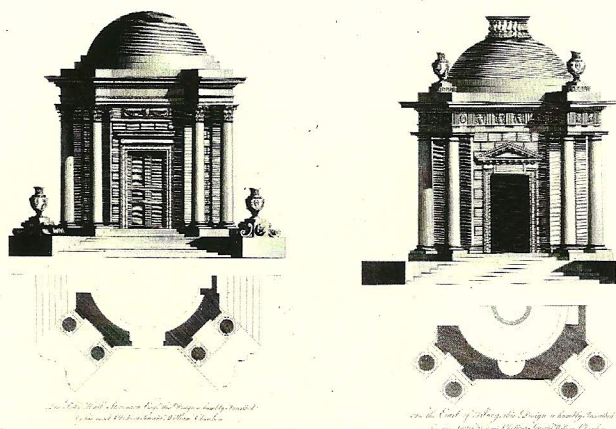
The Waddell-Cunningham-Douglas tomb has a brick core, covered with sandstone and Compo, and is in a truly dreadful state. Crowned by pretty urns and very tall spiky pyramids (similar to the simplified unadorned Gothick pinnacles found on Georgian Gothick Anglican Churches in Ireland), it is still recognisable as a fine composition, but needs urgent and informed repair. (Plate 3) shows the Waddell-Cunningham-Douglas tomb in the foreground, with the Greg Mausoleum to the left.

Now what prompted these remarkable monuments? It should be remembered that Belfast was and is a port, and that many families provided merchants and soldiers who served British interests all over the world, not least in India. It was in India, that Europeans were able to erect large mausolea from early days (note the tombs at Surat, for example), and even the South Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta (laid out from the 1760s) had whole streets of elaborate tombs (Plates 4a and b). Those returning from India could hardly help comparing the possibilities for commemoration in India with those at home, and it seems clear that Vanbrugh (who had lived in India for a time) proposed cemeteries in the early eighteenth century for London, quoting the example of Surat as the model to be followed.[10] South Park Street Cemetery in Calcutta had numerous mausolea finished in Compo, clearly based on competent designs, and a careful examination of these demonstrates that the Knockbreda tombs have so many points of similarity that this cannot be accidental[11]. Another source, obviously, is published designs. If one looks at the designs for tombs by Sir William Chambers (1723-96) published in his *Treatise on Civil Architecture*

(1759)[12], the key to the Knockbreda mausolea may become clearer, although Chambers's designs are very sophisticated (Plates 5a and b), and the Knockbreda exemplars are somewhat attenuated and less robust. The essentials of the South Park Street and Knockbreda tombs are all there, however, and although it would be tempting to attribute the Knockbreda monuments to a local architect such as Roger Mulholland (1740-1818), the documentary evidence simply has not been discovered: nevertheless, Mulholland must remain a possibility as their designer, as he was well-connected, and Belfast was a small place in the 1790s. What seems most likely is a combination of published sources (e.g. Chambers), memories of Calcutta (we know that Greg was a ship-owner too), and local man designing from perhaps several published sources (though Chambers is a strong presence in the finished work).

These Knockbreda mausolea are sumptuous, yet refined; ostentatious, yet delicate; and all are in great danger (Plate 6). They were threatened with complete destruction in 1986, and early in 1987 they were Listed[13], but not before one was destroyed[14]. The problem is that such buildings are simply not appreciated, and the level of visual education in Ireland is not high. Rather than bother with repair, flattening will usually be preferred. The loss of much fine eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ironwork from the graveyard is to be deplored: this was also clearly prompted for reasons of tidiness, but Death is not a tidy thing.

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5a & b. Two designs for mausolea by Sir William Chambers from his *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1759) (Collection of JSC)



6. Waddell-Cunningham-Douglas tomb in the early 1980s. Since then the deterioration has progressed, and the top is almost under a veritable forest of plants (JSC)

Notes:

- [1] Maurice Craig (1975): *Studies* (Winter).
- [2] James Stevens Curl (1978): *Mausolea in Ulster* (Belfast: Ulster Architectural Heritage Society).
- [3] Maurice Craig & Michael Craig (1999): *Mausolea Hibernica* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press Ltd.) 48 and passim, a charming little book, elegantly illustrated, and full of pithy comment.
- [4] James Stevens Curl (1978a): 'Built in Remembrance: Mausolea in Ulster' in *Country Life* (13 July) 126-7.
- [5] Or Cassel or Castle, a native of Hesse-Cassel, who established a successful architectural practice in Ireland, inheriting that of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce (c.1699-1733-arguably Ireland's greatest architect), a relative of Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726).
- [6] James Stevens Curl (1980): *Classical Churches in Ulster* (Belfast: Ulster Architectural Heritage Society) 8. See also Simon Walker (2000): *Historic Ulster Churches* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast) 53.
- [7] William Patrick Carmody (1929): *History of the Parish of Knockbreda* (Belfast: Carswell) 13-15.
- [8] Illustrated in Curl (2002): *Death and Architecture: An Introduction to Funerary and Commemorative Buildings in the Western European Tradition, with Some Consideration of Their Settings* (Thrupp, Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd) 172.
- [9] R.S.J. Clarke (1968): *Gravestone Inscriptions ii: County Down, Baronies of Upper and Lower Castlereagh* (Belfast: Ulster-Scot Historical Society, printed by The Northern Whig Ltd.) 48-101.
- [10] James Stevens Curl (2004): *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Thrupp, Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd.) 28-32. See, for example, Bodl. MS Rawl. B. 376, ff.351-2, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. See also James Stevens Curl (Ed.) (2001): *Kensal Green Cemetery: The Origins and Development of the General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London, 1824-2001* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd.) 2-3.
- [11] James Stevens Curl (2002) 136-45.
- [12] Sir William Chambers (1759): *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* (London: Haberkorn).
- [13] C.E.B. Brett (2002): *Buildings of North County Down* (Belfast: Ulster Architectural Heritage Society) 276-7.
- [14] Illustrated in Curl (1978) 5.

Professor Emeritus James Stevens Curl is the author of many books, including 'The Victorian Celebration of Death' (2000 and 2004), and he edited the monograph on Kensal Green Cemetery (2001). His 'The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt and the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West' was published by Routledge in 2005, and his 'Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture' came out from Oxford University Press in February 2006. Later this year, his 'Victorian Architecture' is to be published by Spire Books Ltd.

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Events

The Secretary, resplendent in silk hat and weepers, welcoming guests to the Melancholic Afternoon held at St Giles-in-the-Fields Vestry Room in November. The event was held in candlelight and led by Jane Wildgoose of the Wildgoose Memorial Library. Artifacts and printed ephemera were on display and after a Victorian-style tea, members were able to go into the church to look at the many historic and interesting monuments.

The Secretary, John St Brioc Hooper

The Annual General Meeting of The Mausolea and Monuments Trust

will be held at 6:30 pm on Tuesday 25th April 2006 in the Lecture Room, 70 Cowcross Street, London.
Please join us for a drink and presentations on the restoration of the Heathcote Mausoleum, Hursley and our gazetteer of mausolea soon to be launched on our new website.

We will also be running a series of events this year including:

Saturday 27th May

Afternoon visits to mausolea of the Twickenham area including Kilmorey, Burton and Bazalgette

Sunday 4th June

Dorset day including visits to the Packe Mausoleum, Poole & the Weld Mausoleum, Chideock

Saturday 9th September

Open day at Heathcote Mausoleum, Hursley

30th September & 1st October

Suffolk weekend including visits to the Hatcheston, Framlingham & Arcedenchne Mausolea

21st November

Evening at Sir John Soane's Museum, London

For more information please contact The Secretary at the address below.

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