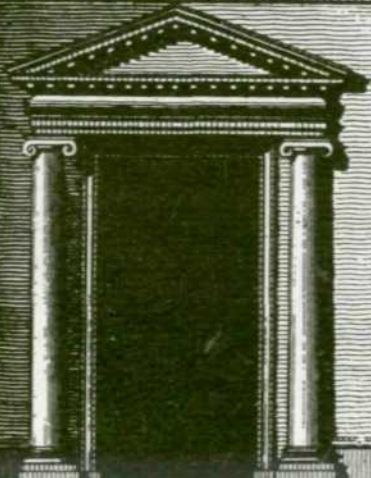
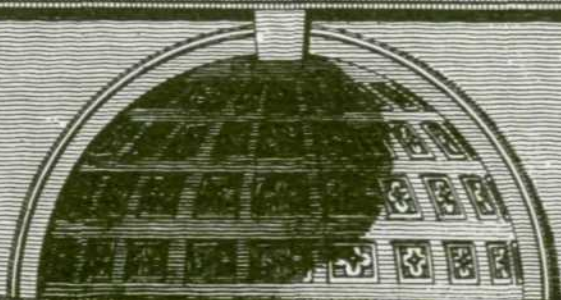


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IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

DESMOND GUINNESS

TOURISM constitutes our major source of income, and ours is about the only country in Europe, except Spain, where it is a real pleasure to motor from one place to another, through the finest scenery in the world. The government is, quite rightly, seeking to increase the tourist trade, and is spending large sums of money **every** year putting Ireland "on the map". The kind of poster they make use of invites the tourist to "take it easy"; probably shows him sitting in a deck chair beneath some kind of palm **tree**, with a lovely empty beach stretching away into the distance. Last summer, in Oslo, railway station, we discovered the best ever "Ireland" poster. It showed no more nor less than mountains, lakes, and millions of fir trees, with a yellow bus in the foreground. The Norwegians who make the lengthy journey to our shores might like a change of scenery when they get here, and the tourist who wants to swim will go where he is sure of getting the sun.

No attempt has yet been made to attract the many civilised culture-seekers who comb Europe from the **Châteaux** de la Loire to the Uffizi Gallery. One by one, our natural tourist assets, the country houses and Dublin streets built in the **18th** Century are allowed to disappear without so much as a murmur **of** dismay from the Tourist Board. We have no National Trust capable of **preventing** this, and the consequence is that in 30 years time, when some enlightened director of the Tourist Board wakes up to the fashionable **18th** century and its national importance, it will be too late. The consequence of this blindness is a very lop-sided tourist load, and when the average tourist has kissed the Blarney Stone and been to the Abbey Theatre, he moves quickly on to warmer climes.

Any owner of an historic house, who is public spirited

enough to **open** it to tourists, should be helped with his upkeep expenses by an abatement of rates. The empty shell of Kilkenny Castle may be visited, but the pictures etc., which would look so lovely on the walls, are kept in **the** stables for fear of the rate collector. Towns and villages which are at present off the beaten track would benefit from a more even spreading of the tourist load, and a concession of this kind would prevent roofs being removed to save rates, which so often happens. We are the only country in Europe that has not yet developed its architecture as a tourist asset.

In Dublin, it is true, many fine buildings are on view to those who are brave enough to bang on the door. It is usually thanks to some long-suffering porter or guardian that one can enjoy the richness and variety of a staircase or a drawing room. But the average visitor can have no idea of what a wealth of beauty there is behind our sober **façades**. No attempt has yet been made to embellish one of these lovely town houses with the furniture of the day, much of which is crammed into the National **Museum** where it looks sadly misplaced in the hideous Victorian rooms. Our fine collection of carriages, beautiful and varied enough to rival those of Munich or Lisbon, are hidden away in Dublin Castle, replaced in the Museum by reproduction Celtic Crosses of rather specialised interest. Who knows when they will next see the light of day?

Large areas of Dublin are much admired and still **unspoilt**, but the future of Mountjoy Square and its neighbourhood does not seem very bright at the moment, indeed, with the general exodus to the suburbs, it is a miracle that it has survived. If only more people would consider that area when looking for offices. The elegant houses lend themselves readily to conversion, the cost is low, there is no parking **problem**, and yet they are central.

The Marquess of **Sligo** is opening Westport House to the public in the summer, entirely on his own initiative. Two years ago he had decided to pull it down to save rates, and this is an experiment that will be closely watched by all who

value our historic buildings. You are asked to help this project attain the **success** it deserves in the first vital year.

The Irish Georgian Society is trying to create a general interest in architecture, in the hope that in this way some of our wonderful heritage may be preserved. In the Eighteenth Century the subject was of general concern and some (like **Agmondisham Vesey** of Lucan) even designed their own houses. The refusal to notice the buildings around us is in pan a defence mechanism, **because** architecture has de-generated so much in the last **100** years, and produced so much that is ugly and depressing. But we cannot hope to improve our modern architecture if we do not arouse a general interest in the subject. We must learn to assess the buildings that we see every day on their architectural merits, and instil a respect for our Georgian heritage into those we **meet**. Modern architecture can be most inspiring, but should be kept away from areas where pure Georgian lines dominate, because the horizontal lines of the modern will clash with the vertical of the eighteenth century. But in these matters it is the public that has the last word, and it is your duty as members of the Irish Georgian Society to try to create that *sine qua non* of good building, a discerning public.



THE GREATEST TRAVELLER IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IRELAND

AGNES GILCHRIST

BY greatest traveller is meant **the** person who visited more places, more times, over more years and who kept a diary and had it published. This traveller was the English clergyman, John Wesley, who made twenty-two trips to Ireland of varying lengths from ten days to six months. He first came to Dublin in **1747** at the age of forty-four and saw it **for** the last time in **1789** soon after his eighty-sixth birthday. During those forty-two years, Wesley spent about six of them in Ireland and travelled more than 25,000 miles as he circled and crisscrossed the island again and again stopping at more than two hundred places.

Like the members of the Society of Architectural Historians on the Dublin Tour in June **1959**, John Wesley saw the sights of Dublin and enjoyed visiting neighbouring country seats. As Wesley was most interested in what was new and the SAH members **were** concentrating on Georgian **architecture**, he and we went to see many of the same buildings and parks. **We** ended our tour in Phoenix Park. Wesley began his description of Dublin by noting in his JOURNAL for Thursday, August **13, 1747**: "We walked in the afternoon to see two persons that were sick near Phoenix Park. That part of it which joins to the **city**, is sprinkled up and down with **trees**, not unlike Hyde Park. Bur about a mile from the town is a thick grove of old, tall oaks; and in the centre of this, a round open green, (from which are vistas all four ways,) with a handsome stone pillar in the midst, **having** a phoenix on the top." (II : 31) Lord Chesterfield as Lord Lieutenant had just had the monument erected earlier that year.

The next week, he was taken to see the town and college.

"The town has scarce any public buildings, except the Parliament house [corner stone laid 1729, completed 1739, now with additions, Bank of Ireland],which is at all remarkable. The churches are poor and mean, both within and without. St. Stephen's Green might be nude a beautiful place, being abundantly larger than Lincoln's Inn Square. But the houses round about it (besides that some arc low and bad) arc quite irregular, and unlike each other. And little care is taken of the Green itself, which is as rough and uneven as a common." Wesley's comments show us vividly that the handsome houses which we now so admire on St. Stephen's Green had not all been erected by 1747.

Wesley then went down to Trinity and noted: "The College contains two little quadrangles, and one about as large as that of New College in Oxford. There is likewise a bowling-green, a small garden, and a little park; and a new-built, handsome library." (II : 32) Eleven years later on Thursday, April 6, 1758, he went to see the new buildings at Trinity. "We walked round the College, and saw what was accounted most worthy of observation. The new front is exceeding grand and the whole square (about as large as Peckwater, in Christ-Church) would be beautiful, were not the windows too small, as every one will see, when the present fashion is out of date." (II : 407)

On July 20, 1749, Wesley wrote: "I saw Dr. Stephen's [Steevens] Hospital, far cleaner and sweeter than any I had seen in London, and the Royal Hospital [Kilmainham], for old soldiers, standing on the top of an hill, not only in good repair, but likewise exactly clean. The hall is exceeding grand; the chapel far better finished than any thing of the kind in Dublin." (II : 107)

In July of 1767, "A friend showed me the apartments in the Castle, the residence of the Lord-Lieutenant. The Duke of Bedford made a noble addition to the lodgings, which are now both grand and convenient. But the furniture surprised me not a little: it is by no means equal to the building. In England, many gentlemen of five hundred a year would

be utterly ashamed of it." (III : 293)

John Wesley seems to have had many friends in **Ireland**, he called the Irish a loving people. IV : 398). Two years before the friend took him to the Castle, he "was desired by some friends to take a ride to **the Dargle**, ten or twelve miles from Dublin, one of the greatest natural curiosities, they said, which the kingdom **afforded**. It far exceeded my expectation." Two days later, Wednesday, July 31 1765, "At the earnest desire of a friend, I suffered **Mr. Hunter** to take my picture. [One portrait by Robert Hunter is in **the National Gallery** in Dublin]. I sat only once, from about ten o'clock to half an hour after one; and in that time he began and ended the face, and with a most striking likeness." (III : 235)

The character of Ireland changed in the **1770's** and 80's. Wesley noted new buildings everywhere and visited gentlemen' country seats with increasing frequency. On his first trip in **1747**, Wesley for the purpose of business went our ten miles from Dublin to see the Archbishop of Dublin at Newbridge II : 30). Archbishop Charles Cobbe (**1686-1765**) built Newbridge, Donabate, in **1737**.

The only private house of merit which Wesley visited in Dublin and described was Lady Moira's House overlooking the **Liffey**, which still stands as the **Mendicity** Institution with its interior much changed from that day in April **1775** when Wesley "waited on Lady Moira, and was surprised to observe, **though** not a more grand, yet a far more elegant room, than any I ever saw in England. It was an octagon, about twenty **feet square**, and fifteen or sixteen high, having one window, the sides of it inlaid throughout with mother-of-pearl, **reaching** from the top of the room to the bottom; **the** ceilings, sides, and furniture of the room were equally elegant." (TV : 42)

During his last visits to Ireland, Wesley visited six country seats near Dublin. One of **these**, he went to see on two different trips. This was Lord Charlemont's country place which the members of the Dublin Tour of the Society of

Architectural Historians also visited and saw all that remains, the Casino designed by William Chambers. The country houses mentioned by Wesley in his JOURNAL are Mr. Simpson's, at James-Town, about two miles from Dublin (IV : 50); "a nobleman's seat, a few miles from Dublin" (IV : 251); Lady Arabella Denny's, "at the Black Rock, four miles from Dublin." (IV : 252); "the **New-Dargle**, a gentleman's seat four or five miles from Dublin." IV : 397. and last of all the country houses which he saw in Ireland was Mrs. Tighe's at Rosanna near Wicklow IV : 477).

On Thursday, July 16, 1778, Wesley "went with a few friends to Lord **Charlemont's**, two or three miles from Dublin. It is one of the pleasantest places I have ever **seen**: the water, trees and lawns, are so elegantly intermixed with each other, having a serpentine walk running through a thick wood on one side, and an open prospect both of land and sea on the other. In **the** thickest part of the wood is the Hermitage, a small room, dark and gloomy enough. The Gothic temple, at the head of a fine **piece** of water, which is encompassed with stately trees, is delightful indeed; but the most elegant of all the buildings is not finished: the shell of it is surprisingly **beautiful**, and **the** rooms well contrived both for use and ornament." (IV : 134f.) Nine years later in 1787 "A few friends took me to Marino, a seat of Lord **Charlemont's**, four miles from Dublin. It contains a lovely mixture of wood, **water**, and **lawns**, on which are **several** kinds of foreign sheep, with great plenty of peacocks; but I could not hear any singing birds of any kind. I a little wondered at this, till I afterwards recollected, that I had not heard any singing bird, not even a lark, a thrush, or a blackbird, within some miles of Dublin." (IV : 396f.)

The next day, Wesley went sightseeing in Dublin again and "saw the **Parliament-House**: the House of Lords far exceeds that at Westminster; and the Lord-Lieutenant's throne as far exceeds that miserable throne (so called) of the King in the English House of Lords. The House of Commons is a noble room **indeed**: it is an octagon, **wainscotted** round with

Irish oak, which shames all mahogany, and galleried all round for the convenience of the ladies. The Speaker's chair is far more grand than the throne of the Lord-Lieutenant; but what surprised me above all, were the kitchens of the house, and the large apparatus for good eating." (IV : 397)

In all, John Wesley mentioned some fifty-six buildings in Dublin. Many of **these** were identified and shown me by the Rev. R. Lee Cole, author of **A HISTORY OF METHODISM IN DUBLIN**. His gracious ciceronage was much appreciated. The passages from Wesley's **JOURNAL** here quoted and the references given are from the **EVERYMAN** edition, **1906**. These pocket-size volumes are recommended as a guide whose terse comments make come alive Irish Georgian society.



IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

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