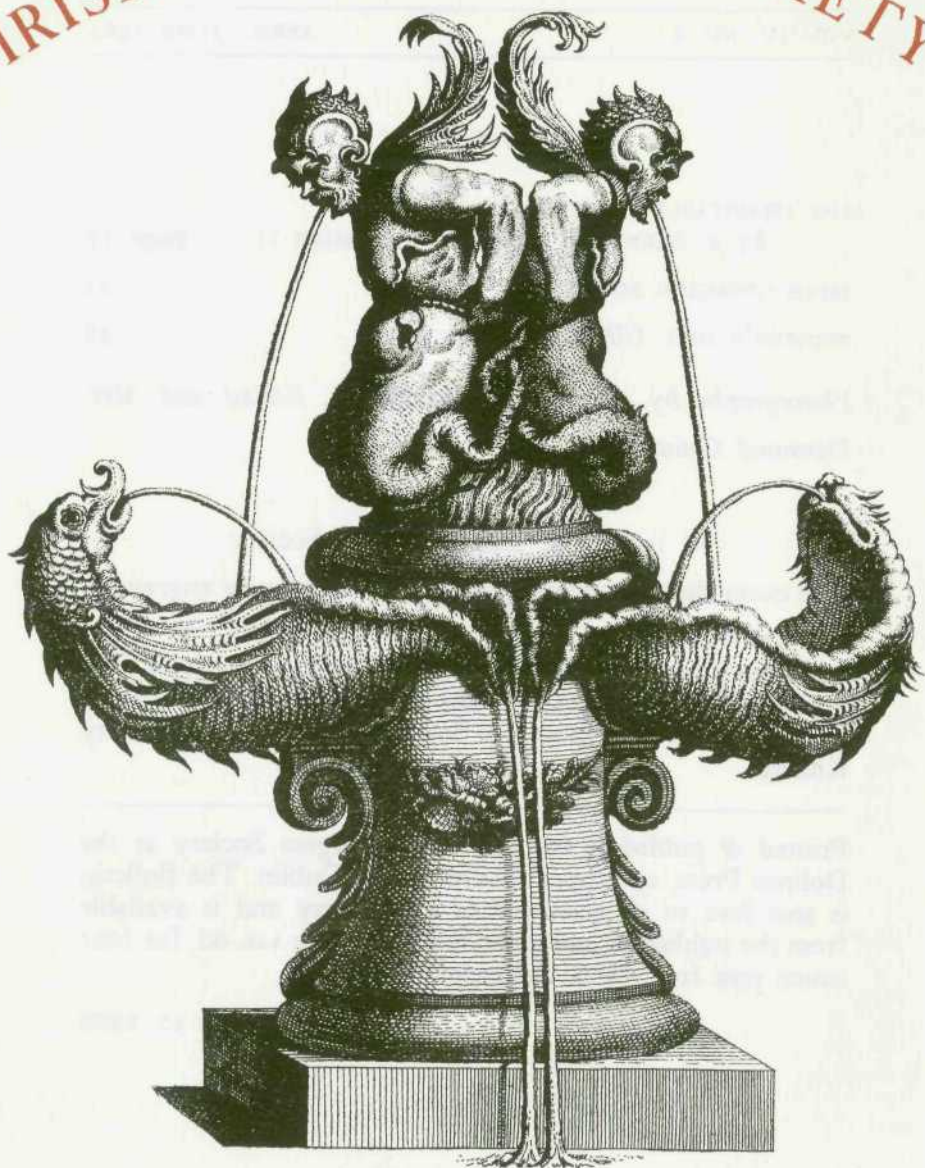


IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY



VOL. IV

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THE CHARITABLE INSTITUTION, BELFAST.

R. GRENFELL MORTON.

The Charitable Institution is the oldest public building in Belfast, if we except the **former** Exchange at the Four Courts, sadly metamorphosed into the Belfast Bank in the early nineteenth century. To-day, as Clifton House, it still serves one of the original purposes of the **Belfast** Charitable Society, namely, the care of the aged. Such continuity of use is a pleasant reminder that Belfast is not wholly a product of the Industrial Age.

It was Arthur Chichester, 5th Earl and 1st Marquess of Donegall, who granted " a convenient plot of ground in a healthy and beautiful situation opposite the head of Donegall Street " to the Belfast Charitable Society as a site for their projected Poorhouse. The ground was cleared, and the **foundation** stone laid on 1 August 1771, a date commemorated in the pleasing wrought iron gates erected in the late nineteenth century. As was so often the case in Belfast the bricks were burnt on the site, while stone was imported from Ballycastle, Cumberland and Scotland. As for the plan on which the Charitable was built there is disagreement. A competition was held, and plans submitted by Francis Johnston, Robert **Mylne** and Thomas Cooley were among those considered. Finally, it would appear that plans prepared by Robert Joy, son of the Francis Joy who had founded the Belfast News-Letter in 1737, were adopted. Amateur they may have been, modified as the erection proceeded, but pleasing in their proportions, having a graceful and dignified elegance.

" Through the whole business, still the active man; —
Here stands the Poorhouse built on Robert's plan."

The Charitable Institution stands on an eminence completing the prospect along Donegall Street, just as the fine **façade** of the Commercial Buildings (1820) marks the other end of that street. It is a ' plain but handsome building ' its brickwork

a rich red, the pointing carefully maintained. It consists of " an extensive front range and two wings, the former three storeys (including; basement) and the latter two storeys in height." Above is the distinctive spire. This replaced the proposed cupola, and was ' unanimously approved of ' by the committee. Cut stone was brought from Scotland, and " Mr. Watson, the coppersmith, was paid £4. 14s. 3 ½d. for the vane which was probably at that time the highest point in Belfast."

It was in three rooms " in the north-east corner of the cellar storey " that Robert Joy, Thomas McCabe, and Captain McCracken (father of Henry Joy and of the redoubtable Mary Ann) began cotton spinning in 1779. "In pursuit of this business they cast their eyes on the children of the Poor-House, as easiest to be instructed in the rudiments of a new manufacture. " The children were first instructed, then bound apprentice for the usual term of years. So successful was the venture that the Royal Dublin Society awarded a premium to the product of £12 in 1780; more important, cotton spinning spread, so that by 1800 there were at least a dozen small mills in or near Belfast. The Charitable is, therefore, one of the cradles of the Industrial Revolution in the north-east.

The Hall is a virtual museum of Belfast history, for on the walls, like a Roll of Honour, are brown wooden boards on which are inscribed the names of the patrons and benefactors of the House. Here the inquirer may see the names of such people as Valentine Jones, Sam M'Tier, Dr. Drennan, Robert and Henry Joy, the McCrackens, Narcissus Batt, Waddell Cunningham — in short an epitome of the lively merchants, burgesses, and philanthropists who built Belfast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just off the Hall is the ' Black Hole ' in which sturdy beggars and vagrants caught by the Society's "Bangbeggar," and his dreaded Black Cart, were incarcerated. Genuine beggars were badged by the Charitable Society, like the Scottish Gaberlunzies.

The ' Black Hole ' reminds us that the Charitable Society was virtually a Welfare State in miniature. Not only were

the sick and aged poor cared for, but also children, the insane, and prostitutes came under the Society's statutory powers, as well as the sturdy beggars. The Society depended, and still largely depends, upon private charity for its **finance**. There were also other sources. For instance, in 1785 under the Act establishing the Ballast Board for Belfast Harbour, all **profits** from shipping were to be paid to the Society. Then in 1797 a New Burying Ground was opened off Henry Place, adjoining the Barracks, and plots were rented to the leading families of the growing town.

Indeed this hallowed ground is the Westminster Abbey of Belfast. Here lie William and John Ritchie, the founders of "a regular system of shipbuilding" in Belfast; in the centre is the Cholera ground, filled during the appalling epidemics of 1832-33 and 1845-46; William Steel Dickson, Dr. Drennan and Mary Ann McCracken all remind one of the tradition of Ulster radicalism. Joys, Braces, Batts, Heyns, McLaines, Stephensons — all are here, and, symbolic of Belfast's outward-looking maritime **importance**: James Chapman, Master of the Brig 'Tyne' of Cardiff.

Many of these citizens have their portraits upstairs in the Board Room. This is a dignified room, still utilised for its original purpose. In one corner there is an Indenture of a female orphan "to serve and to sew" to Samuel Nelson of Carrickfergus. By the fireplace a plan of the Society's **water-course**, and two sections of wooden water-pipe, remind us that the Charitable Society was responsible for the town's water **supply** right up to 1840. This was intended to be a source of profit to the Society, and in fact the Water Commissioners still pay £800 per annum to the Society's funds.

In some ways the most interesting relic in the room is the Board of the "Poore's Money." This board, which originally hung in the Old Parish Church, was inscribed in 1680, when "Black George" Macartney was the Sovereign of the Borough. It records the names of persons who had subscribed moneys to the poor, beginning with Edward Holmes, "died in June 1631 and left to the poor decayed inhabitants of

Belfast 40 lib." This was the germ which eventually led to the establishment of the Charitable Society.

The Charitable Institution to-day stands not just as a gracious museum, but as a living part of Belfast history. Beautifully maintained, and recently re-decorated with the advice of the Irish Georgian Society, it is the focus of Belfast's development. The care of the poor, the sick, the aged; the social problems of prostitution and sturdy vagrancy; the development of the early docks; the beginning of Belfast's textile industry; the supply of water; United Irishmen and solid Tories — all these had their common ground at the Charitable. Few Georgian buildings can claim so distinguished a history, few have played such a continuing role in such a rapidly evolving community. It is pleasant to reflect that Belfast has a truly Georgian heart after all!

IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

Members of the Irish Georgian Society should know that the Committee has been approached from two quarters about the opening to the public of private houses of historical or architectural interest in the Republic. These approaches have come on the one hand from organisations interested in the commercial exploitation of the tourist possibilities which these houses present, as has already been shown elsewhere in the British Isles. On the other hand they have come from the Irish Tourist Board who are showing awareness of the same possibilities and whose aim of course, is to develop the tourist industry. It has seemed to your committee that these developments are to be welcomed. There are certainly many houses in the Republic which tourists would like to see and whose doors are at present closed to them. But to us the prime consideration is the preservation of these houses for posterity against the tide of economic forces which undoubtedly threatens them. If the owner of such a house were to open it to the public in the present circumstances, he would face increased expenditure in the form of maintenance, insurance, staff, cleaning, advertising, etc., without any guarantee that he would be reimbursed by the proceeds from admission fees, or indeed that these would not be regarded as income for taxation purposes. The owner would also have to reckon with a loss of privacy which is impossible to assess in money terms.

Your committee feel strongly that the owners of private houses of historical or architectural interest in the Republic would be ill advised to open them unless and until they receive from the government assistance in some form which will ensure that this step does not involve them in personal financial loss, but on the contrary helps them to maintain their houses as worthy examples of Irish architecture. This view has been put, with supporting arguments, in a letter which the President and Vice-President have addressed to 65 owners of private houses, and of which we print the text below :

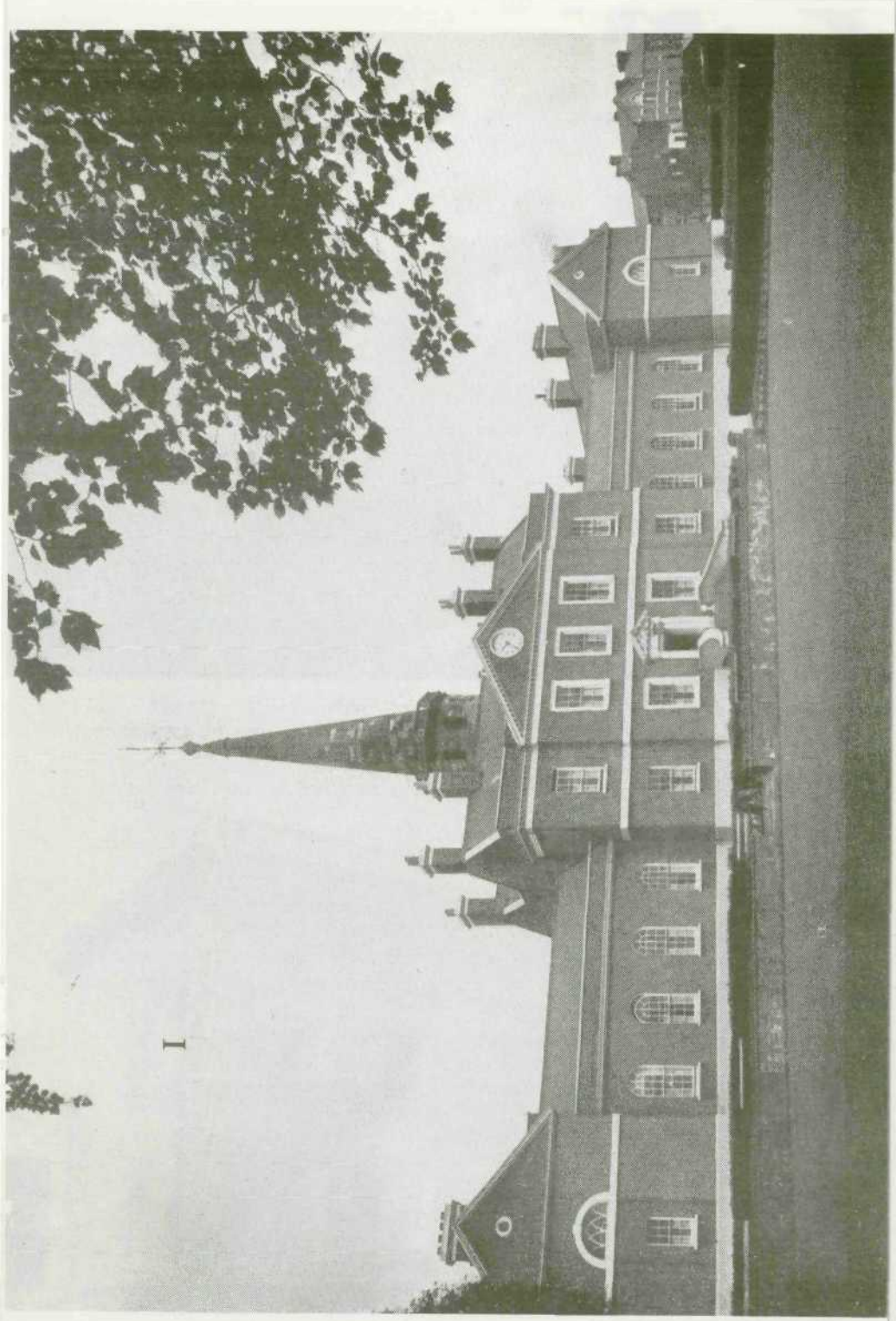
November, 1960.

Dear

As you perhaps know, the Irish Tourist Board have begun to show an interest in the opening to the public of houses of outstanding architectural or historical interest in this country. Private houses are shown to tourists in most countries of Western Europe, and on a large scale in Great Britain. They provide a strong tourist attraction, stimulate interest in architecture and cultural history, and are often by this means preserved for future generations. We are writing to you as President and Vice-President of the Irish Georgian Society, which has for one of its principal objects the preservation of the Georgian houses of Ireland.

2. The attitude of the Irish Tourist Board is straight-forward. They want to attract as many tourists to this country as possible. While sympathizing with this overall purpose, we cannot regard the venture in so simple a light. We believe that if the owners of the beautiful and historic houses in this country open them to tourists, they are entitled to receive assistance from the government to maintain those houses in a good state of preservation. Indeed it is in the government's interest that they should provide this assistance, for otherwise economic forces will sooner or later, here as in other countries, destroy what tourist attraction those houses still represent.

3. The basic justice of this proposition has long been recognised in other countries, including the U.K. We enclose a short note describing the benefits available to owners of historic houses there if they are prepared to open them. The circumstances are woefully different here. The National Trust has no powers to take over inhabited houses. The Irish house-owner is not even able to claim relief for the cost of structural repairs and maintenance of his house. We understand that Bunratty Castle, strategically situated on the road between Limerick and Shannon Airport, had nearly 20,000 visitors between May 1st and September 30th of this year; but Westport, which is in a less frequented area, had



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little more than 2,500 between July 1st and September 18th, and the **four** principal houses belonging to the National Trust of Northern Ireland averaged roughly 1,000 visitors each in the 1960 season. It is obvious that returns on this scale at half-a-crown a head, or whatever the fee may be, would not go far to assist owners in preserving their houses **after** paying for guides, advertising, cleaning, etc., and would be a very small recompense for the inconvenience which must be caused by admitting tourists to the house.

4. We believe that house-owners would be best helped to keep their houses up by the reinstatement of a maintenance claim, preferably not restricted to Schedule A but allowable generally against the owner's whole taxed income. This would involve legislation, but an opportunity might occur for taking this step within the framework of any wider changes which the Government may introduce on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission on Taxation. The Irish Tourist Board, who have certain funds at their disposal, might on the other hand favour giving any assistance in the form of a direct grant. We do not believe that this would be either so helpful or so fair in operation as a maintenance claim; but the idea of a grant, based perhaps on the annual value of a house, and varying e.g. with the number of days it was opened or the number of visitors admitted, might form a suitable basis for discussion.

5. We should be very interested to hear your views, if you can find the time to let us have them, and in particular to know whether they agree generally with ours as set out in para. 2 above. If they do, we should be glad to receive any further suggestions on the lines of those in the preceding paragraph. The moment may come when it may seem profitable to meet and discuss these with a view to agreeing on a common line of approach to the Irish Tourist Board.

Yours sincerely,

DESMOND GUINNESS.

TALBOT DE MALAHIDE.

NOTE ON THE OPENING OF HOUSES IN THE U.K.

If the owner of a house of outstanding architectural or historic interest in the U.K. is willing to open it to the public, he can secure important tax reliefs. Should he be disposed to go so far as to make the house over to the National Trust, the house will escape future death duties and the owner and his heirs can continue to live in it. In return the Trust requires that the house be opened at pre-arranged times and that the owner provide an endowment fund adequate to maintain it. But this fund also escapes death duties and the income it produces is exempt from both income tax and surtax.

2. Should the owner, on the other hand, wish to retain possession of his house, he will be taxed on the nett income he receives from admitting members of the public. The nett figure will depend on whether the Revenue Authorities regard the owner's occupation of the house as its dominant use, and its opening to the public as a secondary enterprise; or whether he can convince them that the house is maintained primarily as a show place. In the former case the nett income is calculated by deducting from the gross receipts simply the costs of showing the house, e.g. guides, cleaners, advertising, etc. But in the latter event it is possible to have the income from admitting visitors assessed for tax purposes under Case 1 of Schedule D as the profits of a trade. This means that all reasonable costs of maintaining the house and its contents and of the gardens, which in practice includes all expenditure on e.g. wages of domestic staff, fuel, light, etc., would be allowed as a deduction in calculating the profits. Moreover, if a trading loss is incurred in any one year, relief from tax on the amount of that loss is allowed by setting it against the owner's other income for the year, or by carrying it forward and setting it off against assessable profits from the same trade in the six **following** years of assessment.

So far, 31 replies have been received to this circular. They all show general agreement with the point of view in it. The next step will be to call a meeting of the recipients of the circular letter, at which it may be possible to Form a committee to undertake the task of negotiating with the government over the form of assistance the latter might be willing to provide if they wish to pursue this matter. It is hoped that members will approve the line being taken by their committee and, if so, that they will do their best to win general support for this point of view.

WESTMEATH OUTING

There will be an outing to Co. Westmeath on Sunday July 30th. Details will be announced later.

CRICKET MATCH

The annual match at Georgian cricket between the Society and the North of Ireland National Trust, will take place at Malahide Castle on Saturday 19th August.

LECTURE

Sir Shane Leslie will lecture on Mrs. Fitzherbert, at 8 p.m. on Thursday 14th September in Trinity College, Dublin.

TAILOR'S HALL

We are glad to announce that a preservation order has been made so that the Tailor's Hall is now out of danger.

CUSTOMS HOUSE

The authorities who have cleared away the unsightly clutter of concrete buildings from the east side of the Customs House are to be congratulated.

BROWNE'S HILL, CO. CARLOW.

[see illustrations]

One of the finest houses in the Republic is to be demolished if a buyer does not come forward within the next month. Situated in a large park with fine timber, Browne's Hill is in first rate structural repair and would make a lovely, easily run family home. Although it is on top of a hill with panoramic views, it is not remote, the town of Carlow being only $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away, and Dublin 50 miles.

The house was built in 1763 by an architect named Peters for Robert Browne, in whose family it remained until recently. The three reception rooms have rich plaster ceilings and the original mantlepieces, the front hall is paved with black and white squares, and the kitchen (with Aga) is on the ground floor. The grand staircase leads up to ten bedrooms of various sizes, the principal one being octagonal, with windows facing in three directions. There are two bathrooms, three lavatories, oil fired central heating and E.S.B. main electricity.

The courtyard comprises 15 stables, garages, loose boxes, dairy and groom's house with excellent living accomodation, approximately 5,000 square feet of lofting, all in good condition. For permission to view apply to— WILLIAM MULHALL, Auctioneer and Valuer, 60 Dublin St., Carlow (Tel. Carlow 121).

Price: £2,500 with five acres.

A further 68 acres is available, if required, £7,000.

"ANDREA PALLADIO"

VICENZA ITALY
VICENZA ITALY

THE CENTRO INTERNAZIONALE DI STUDI DI ARCHITETTURA
THE CENTRO INTERNAZIONALE DI STUDI DI ARCHITETTURA

announce their third summer course on the buildings of the Veneto, which will be held in the Tiepolo-frescoed Villa CORDELLINA-LOMBARDI, near MONTECCHIO MAGGIORE, VICENZA, from August 20th to 9th September. One of the twelve lecturers this year will be Maurice Craig, whose book on Dublin 1660-1860 is the best there will ever be; his theme is "The spread of Palladian architecture in Ireland." Visits will be made to all the principal Palladian buildings in the area; private villas such as the Malcontenta, Maser, Emo, Rotonda, Piovene and Rocca Pisana, as well as town palaces and churches. Palladio's contemporaries, Falconetto, Sanmicheli, Sansovino and Scamozzi will also be studied, and there will be lectures on Palladian architecture in Germany, Poland and Russia, as well as Ireland, showing the international character of the Palladian movement.

The cost, including board and lodging at the Villa Cordellina Lombardi, is 60,000 lire, or £35, for the three weeks. Further details may be obtained from the Italian Institute, 11 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin.

18th CENTURY IRISH ARCHITECTURE.

I am collecting material for a Ph.D. thesis on XVIIIth Century architecture and social history in Ireland. Old photographs, letters, plans, and any 'gossip' about these matters would be much appreciated by the undersigned:—

Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin,
c/o The Dept. of Fine Arts,
Harvard University,
Cambridge,
Mass. U.S.A.

WESTPORT HOUSE

Superbly situated on the Atlantic Coast between Connemara and Donegal, Westport House is a fine Georgian Mansion built in 1734 by Richard Cassels and added to by James Wyatt in 1780 on the site of an old O'Malley Castle. It has been occupied by the family of the present owner for 300 years and contains exquisite plaster work by James Wyatt, family portraits by Reynolds, Beechy and other old masters, old Irish Silver, Waterford Glass, a magnificent collection of early Irish Landscapes, Historical Documents and other exhibits associated with Ireland. Surrounded by a beautiful park it has a view of Croagh Patrick across the bay (Ireland's Holy Mountain).

1961 SEASON

*Open to visitors June to September
Daily 2-6 p.m.*

House and Grounds: Adults 2/6, Children 1/-
Grounds: Adults 6d. Children 6d.

Coach tours and large parties at reduced rates by special arrangement.

Teas and light refreshments at house.

Dublin 160 Miles; Shannon Airport 100 miles;
Galway 50 miles.

For other details apply . . .

The Secretary, Westport House, Co. Mayo.
telephone: WESTPORT 171.

IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name

Address

.....

I enclose £1 for my yearly subscription which entitles me to attend lectures, expeditions, and to receive the quarterly bulletin. A reduced subscription, 5/-, is offered to holders of Student Cards.

Irish Georgian Society
Leixlip Castle Co. Kildare

BANKER'S ORDER

To

(Name of Bank)

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(Address of Bank)

Please pay to the account of the Irish Georgian Society at the Bank of Ireland, College Green, Dublin, the sum of one pound (£1) to-day, (date), and again on January 1st each year until further notice.

Name

Address

.....

r □

(Signed)

2d. stamp

Date L J

Irish Georgian Society