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IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

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*Cover taken from a map of Ireland by John Senex, 1720.*

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Application for membership (£1 annually, which entitles members to lectures, expeditions and other functions) should be made to the Irish Georgian Society, Leixlip Castle, County Kildare.

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# IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

*by*

DESMOND GUINNESS

Membership of the Society has now grown to 1,200, of whom 150 live on the far side of the Atlantic. Most of the £1 annual subscription has to be spent on publications, notices of outings and so on, and the only way we can help the actual work of preservation is by organising an appeal. We have collected approximately £600 between the Kinsale Courthouse restoration, the Georgian restoration in the Wexford theatre, the Mount levers repair fund, roof repairs at No. 9 Henrietta St. (St. Vincent de Paul), and the Conolly Folly. The beautiful sculpture group by Wilton on the island at Dartry, Co. Monaghan, has been made weather and damage proof at a cost of £16. We have sent token grants of £10 each as an encouragement to the Kilmainham Gaol restoration, the Roscommon Development Association for restoring the former courthouse, and the Convent of St. Joseph of Cluny, Belview Park, for their dome. We have repeatedly offered to pay for mending gaps in the roof of Mountrath Courthouse, a fine building on the main Limerick road, but it appears to be difficult to arouse local interest in it.

Apart from ecclesiastical edifices, the local Courthouse is often the most distinguished building in the Irish country town; when disused, as at Mountrath, it could very well be turned into a cultural centre. The local archaeological society might have its headquarters there and objects of local interest, perhaps lent by the Museum in Dublin, could be assembled and displayed. There would be travelling exhibitions and meetings of all kinds, and the historically minded tourist could use this as a centre for guidance and information on the locality. This dream has become a reality at Kinsale, the old harbour town in Co. Cork, thanks to the untiring efforts of Mrs. Lucas and a splendid local committee who are an example to the rest of the country.

Although the Irish Georgian Society would like to have country houses open to the public, as we know at first hand from our visitors that there is a genuine desire to see them, we feel that there is nothing to be gained by their opening unless it helps to guarantee the preservation of the houses for the future. As their opening ought to constitute a considerable tourist attraction, the Government should, if it wishes to benefit the country as a whole, contribute in some way to the upkeep of these houses. If a house is properly organised for regular public visits, there have to be at least two people fully employed to look after the visitors, which would soon use up the small trickle of half-crowns paid at the gate. A party of four American tourists who pay 10/- to see over a house such as Westport or Florence Court, might easily spend £400 during their stay in Ireland. The Irish Georgian Society wrote to all country house owners in 1961 urging them not to open to the public until the Government promised assistance in some form in return. A separate committee representing the house-owners has now been formed to deal with this question, under the chairmanship of Lord Rosse, and is in touch with the Government departments concerned.

There have been two recent developments favourable to the future of Irish country houses: firstly, the large influx of foreign buyers, and secondly, a welcome change of policy on the part of the Land Commission. Cahir Park and Kilkea Castle, both recently acquired by the Land Commission, have been left with enough land to retain their attraction as country houses, and after being properly advertised were sold by public auction. Only last year, a house of the architectural importance of Browne's Hill, in first rate condition, was advertised without an illustration for sale to the highest tender, with only 5 acres of land, so that the only people who turned out to be interested were demolitioners. Fortunately we were able to have the sale postponed for six

months; we published in our bulletin photographs and a fixed price (which at £2,500 was higher than the best offer from the demolitioners but so low as to arouse immediate suspicion among our members). The story was taken up in the press, and a local business man, on reading about it, bought the house on the spot and turned it into one-room flats without harming the ceilings. He has stated that it would have been impossible to provide an adequate house for his wife and eight children for £2,500. Let us hope, however, that the policy of depriving a house of every scrap of agricultural land, so that it can only be demolished or at best bought by an institution, will not be allowed to continue. It is in the interest of the Land Commission, as well as the local community, to advertise such properties with full details and photographs so that a suitable buyer may be found to preserve the house.

One of the chief attractions at Browne's Hill is the very fine entrance arch, but the Land Commission want to sell it to make a road where it stands. As it is unlikely that anyone will want to buy it, it will almost certainly be bulldozed. Surely the new road could just as well be put elsewhere and the archway left as an ornament even if it had to be blocked up.

Bowenscourt is in a pitiable state—most of it is pulled down and as the roof has gone, what remains of the interior must by now be ruined. People still deplore the vandalism that allowed Lady Gregory's house, Coole Park, the first literary house in Europe of this century, to be demolished, while the former home of our greatest living writer, Elizabeth Bowen, is being slowly murdered.

A new society called the "Society for the Preservation of Historic Ireland, Inc." has been formed by Dr. Edward Keelan, 32 Imperial Avenue, Westport, Connecticut, U.S.A. Dr. Keelan is canvassing Irish-Americans for support in 'preserving the monuments and buildings of historic and cul-

tural Ireland'. This news from the United States is most welcome, since American opinion carries considerable weight in Ireland and they can do so much to help. At the moment they are applying for tax-exempt status.

This group is already stirring up public opinion in the U.S. about the sixteen Fitzwilliam St. houses that the E.S.B. intends to demolish and replace with a modern office block. If this scheme is carried out it will show the complete disregard which there is for our architectural heritage, and the scant attention that has been paid to the outburst of public opinion against demolition. A special Protest Group was formed, consisting of representatives from the various cultural bodies including, of course, the Irish Georgian Society, under the chairmanship of Mr. Edgar Deale. Nine hundred people were crammed into the Mansion House for the Protest Meeting in January and three hundred were turned away as there was no room for them. Thousands have signed our petition, and are now signing the petition organised by the Old Dublin Society which can be found in the following Dublin Shops: Brown Thomas, Pirms, Arnott's, Clery's and McBirney's. This healthy response is an indication of the great public concern that the vistas of what is one of the three finest neo-classical cities in Europe should be preserved. It will be disastrous if the present pattern of destruction is allowed to continue without interference from a responsible native government.

## PORTRAITS OF IRISH HOUSES

*by*

ANNE CROOKSHANK

An interesting sidelight on the history of painting, and indeed of society in Ireland, can be studied in the paintings of Irish houses which one finds scattered about the country and which turn up fairly regularly in sale-rooms even in London. For the most part these are of slight artistic quality, rarely enough by known artists, but they always have charm and are sometimes of great interest to the architectural historian. Outside Dublin, even as late as the first quarter of the nineteenth century, painting was a rare art carried on by amateurs and visiting artists. The term 'itinerant' must be used with caution, as there seems little evidence that many of them travelled from place to place; they settled for some considerable period in a particular town, usually as the result of a commission, and then seem to have returned to Dublin when work ran out. It seems possible that in some cases the country-house portraits may have been the work of talented surveyors; the beautiful title pages and maps which are to be found in estate books are evidence that surveyors were frequently quite good artists. This theory, in part, accounts for the fact that in the early period no two houses seem to be painted by the same hand and that even if the name of the artist is given no other works by him are known elsewhere. Of course this may be merely the result of chance.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Dublin artists began to be commissioned outside the immediate metropolitan area and a great many topographical views exist by Sir William Ashford, George Barret, and Thomas Sautelle Roberts. Indeed, the painting of house portraits seems to have been the mainstay of many a landscape painter. The quantity of volumes with views of Ireland and Irish houses which were published and republished in the first half of the nineteenth century is an indication of the popularity of this art. The

vast output of a man like Andrew Nicholl, who worked in watercolour and painted every conceivable stretch of the Antrim coast not once but scores of times, is another witness of the paying qualities of topography in the pre-camera era.

Among the earliest views are two at Westport of the house in 1760 which are actually signed by an artist called George Moore. (FIGS. 1 & 2.) We know absolutely nothing about Moore but his paintings are delightfully naive, and, though accurate in their rendering of the Cassels façade, they distort the proportions of the house, making it appear much taller in relation to its length than it is. The view showing the back of the house has great interest as this side of Westport was entirely rebuilt by James Wyatt later in the century. It shows that Cassels favoured bow fronts, or was he, as at Powerscourt, forced to make the best of an earlier structure, namely Grania O'Malley's Castle? This would account for the asymmetrical fenestration between the bows. The parkland in these paintings is obviously fairly recently laid out, and, strangely enough, the various features of the river differ wholly from one view to the other. In one the river is full of weirs and falls and rocks, but in the other only the two bridges are the same and the river has turned into a series of beautiful calm pools on which swans are elegantly swimming. It would be fun to know why. Were they painted before and after landscaping, were they purely imaginary, or were they plans by or for the landscape gardener? Pococke, writing in 1752, indicates that the waterfalls were artificially created. He says that Mr. Browne 'has built two handsome bridges, and has formed Cascades in the river which are seen from the front of the house'. (Pococke's Tour of Ireland in 1752, p. 98.)

A series of four views which used all to hang in Florence Court may be slightly earlier in date than the two by Moore at Westport. The Florence Court landscapes are of Devenish Round Tower and churches with a funeral in the fore-

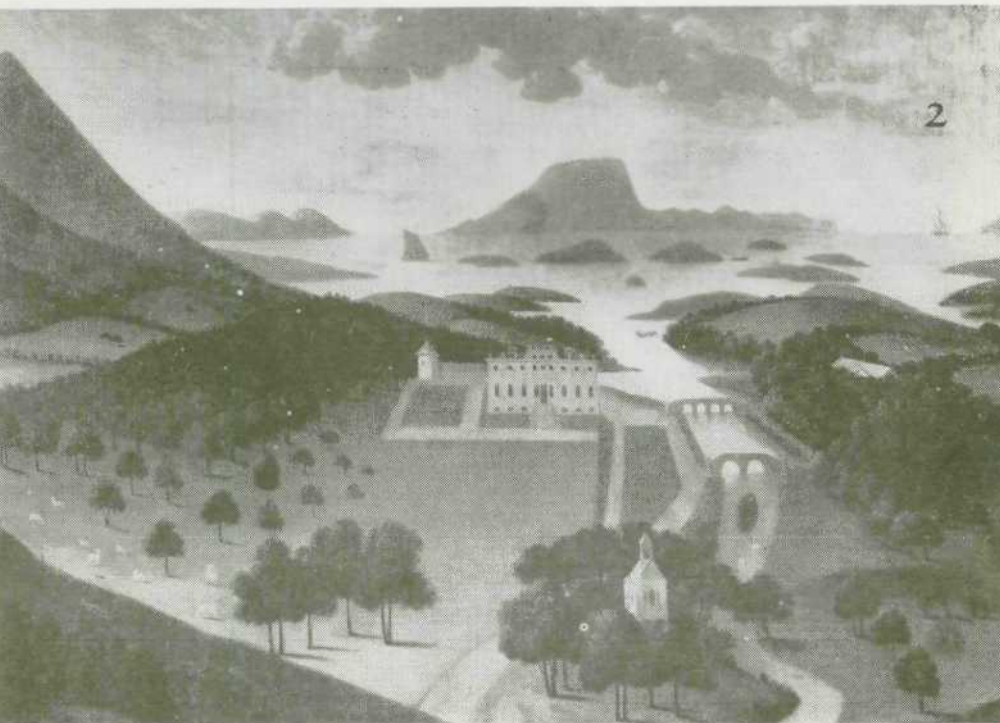
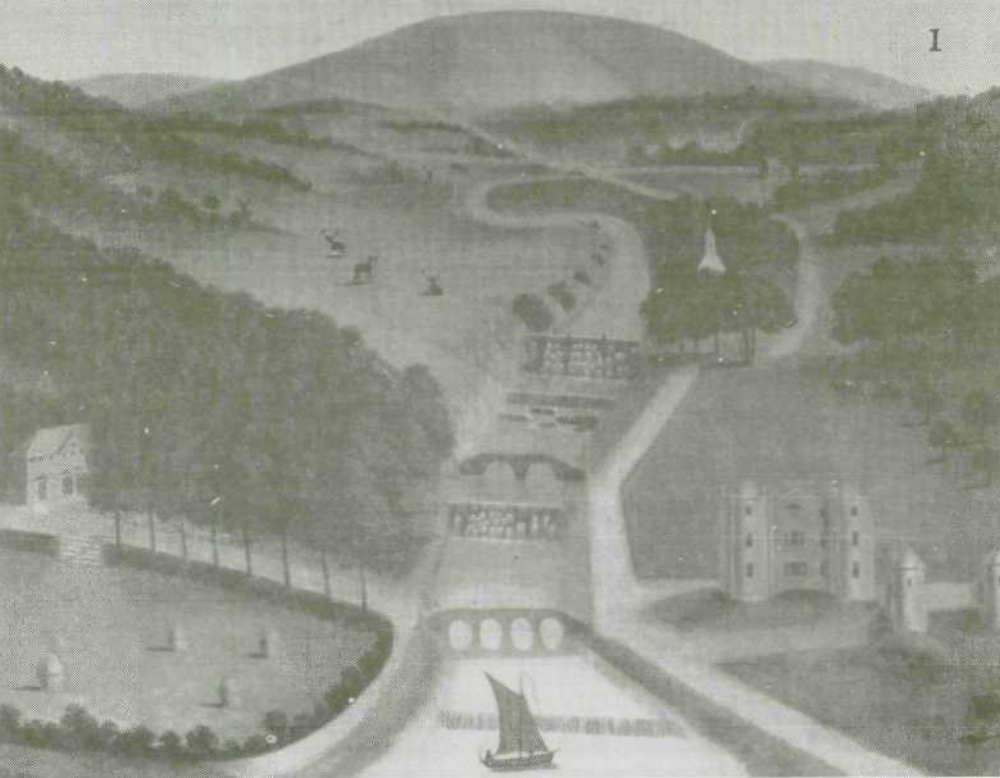


ground (FIG. 3); Ballyshannon salmon leap; Enniskillen town with Maguire's Castle and Watergate, the Cathedral and the seventeenth century West Bridge and a view of Old Crom Castle. This last picture now hangs at Crom. Whether there was ever a view of Florence Court itself is not known but it does seem odd that it was left out. If we are to judge from the picture of Devenish, the one place which is still in roughly the same condition, these views are reasonably accurate even if there is the usual tendency to exaggerate the height of the buildings. They are clearly by a professional artist trained in the classical landscape school. He has been taught to establish his space with carefully balanced trees in the foreground and to lead the eye into the background by a series of well placed points of interest. He has a fine sense of the hazy infinity of the Lough Erne countryside and is undoubtedly more interested in landscape than houses, as he squeezes Crom into the extreme right-hand corner of his picture. John Butts, the Cork artist who died in 1765, has been suggested by Mr. James White as the author of these pictures. Unfortunately too little is really known of his work to make a firm attribution, though it is interesting to note that Strickland mentions as his only example a "View of Kilkenny", so he may, in fact, have specialised in town views. There are one or two pointers as to the date of the series, the most valuable being that Old Crom Castle was accidentally burnt down in the summer of 1764 (*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. II, 1896, p. 7). The first mention of the spire on Enniskillen Cathedral is in 1721 but this spire was replaced during the century at an unknown date and the spire in our picture looks like the second spire which is known from a drawing dated 1796 and illustrated in W. H. Dundas, "Enniskillen Parish and Town". The pictures must therefore date in the middle of the century before 1764. Life seems to have been very idyllic on Lough Erne with gay parties boating and charming little summerhouses at convenient view

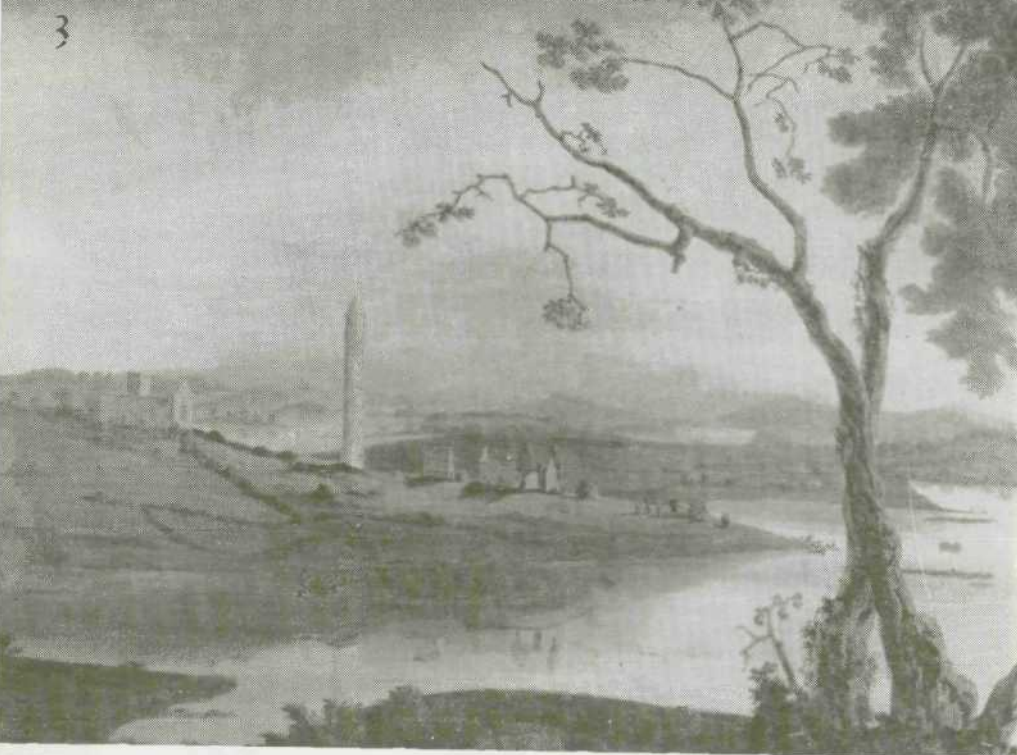
points, not to mention shepherds and shepherdesses who might have walked out of a Boucher.

Far less professional is a spirited view of Shanes Castle (FIG. 4) which has survived all the disasters which have overtaken the Castle and is still at Shanes. It is impossible to date it at all accurately as so little is known of the pre-1816 castle which it depicts. Most of the figures are peasants but those which are less ragged seem to be wearing full skirted coats and it may therefore date from the 1750's. The Castle would seem to be mainly a seventeenth century building with crow-stepped gables and eighteenth century additions in the form of doorways and windows. But the artist does not seem to be very skilled and the view may be much distorted. The village of Edenduffcarrick which was demolished in 1815 is shown and a great deal of activity is taking place on the shore in front of the cottages. A number of horsemen are galloping rather aimlessly about. Have they come to meet a guest from the very smart boat which is approaching the shore in full sail and which has every intention of beaching itself rather than notice the jetty near the Castle itself? It is really little wonder that all the figures are so very agitated: disaster is certain to occur.

At Glenarm Castle there are two views of the village and the Castle from the Glen (FIG. 9) and from the sea, as well as a landscape of the deer park, the ruins at Dunlucc and the White Rocks. Again nothing is known of the artist but he appears from the costume to have worked late in the century. The costume changes in the various scenes which must therefore have been done at different dates—the latest being the view of Dunluce which is probably early 19th century. His landscape with Glenarm Castle does not help to date the picture as it appears to be largely imaginary. Two handsome colonnades ending in pavilions flank the main block of the house and as far as is known these never existed. In the painting these wings are shown as curiously miniature in



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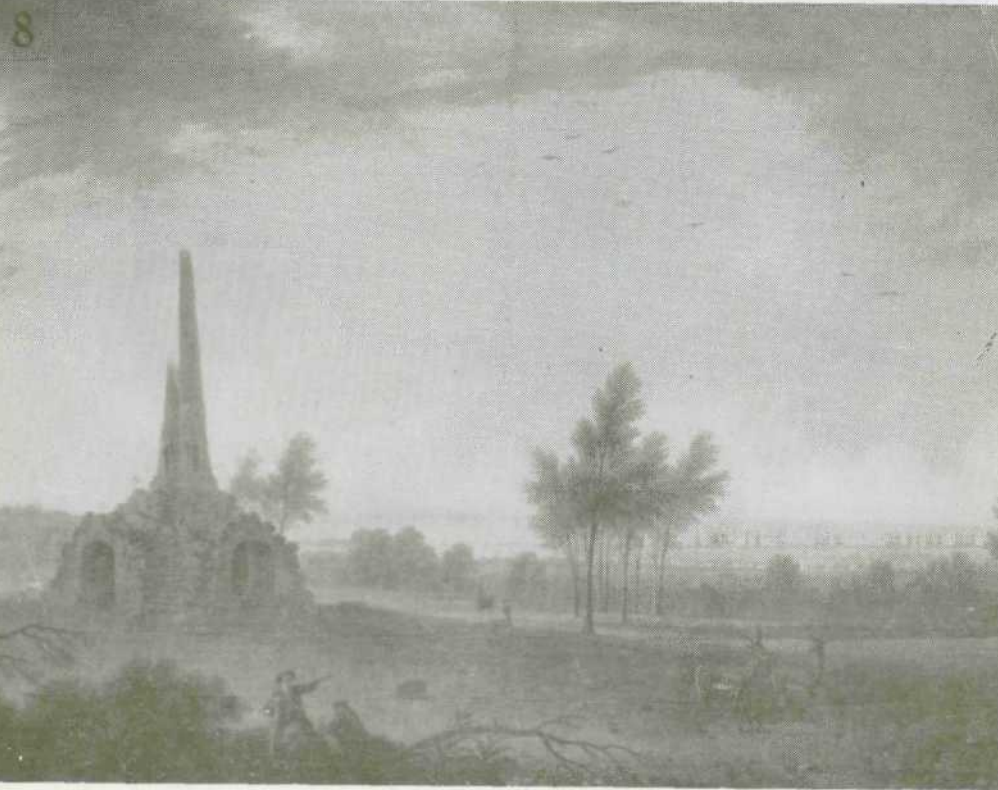




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scale in proportion to the main block, as in the pavilions two stories equal one in the central part of the house. As the drawing of the house, the church and the village is very precise, this change of scale may not be the result of incompetence or inaccuracy but it may indicate that these wings were suggestions for grand summer houses rather than serious additions to the house. The whole landscape might almost have been started as a splendid architectural sketch made to convince an employer of the value of a suggested layout. Certainly the skill, if not the charm of the artist declines in the purely landscape views and he has acute difficulty in rendering cliffs. The only clue to dating that we have is the Presbyterian Chapel which is seen behind the Castle and which the Rev. George Jackson informs me was built in 1759.

In the view of Dunluc we are diverted by the courage of a young man in the foreground who is hurling a rope to some shipwrecked mariners. This scene may represent an actual event as the weather is accurately reported. Despite the storm in the foreground the sun has come through, and there is a fine rainbow.

The pictures at Castle Ward of the house are again by an unknown artist but from their quality he was undoubtedly a professional. The present Castle Ward House was finished late in 1772. The fascination of this house lies in the extraordinary fact that one facade was built in the classical manner with a portico and pediment whereas the facade facing Strangford Lough is in the Gothic manner. These two facades are clearly shown in the pictures, though of course the charm of the interior with its ceilings which are splendidly original and spirited renderings of eighteenth century classical and gothic formulas is left to the imagination. All that can be shown is the pointed windows and battlemented cornice. The views of Castle Ward have a similarity with the series of engravings of houses in or near Belfast published in 1832

from drawings by Joseph Molloy. No *certain* works other than sepia sketches for these engravings are known by Molloy, but an oil painting of Malone House which is undoubtedly connected with the engraving could be by him. Unfortunately this work has suffered a good deal and could not be used as a definite indication of *Molloy's* style. These engravings of Belfast houses make one realise how many we have lost as so much that should have been preserved has been swallowed up by the expanding city. Judging from other views owned by the Belfast Harbour Office the scenery around Belfast Lough and elsewhere must have been delightfully park-like; the early industrialists had a great feeling for their own peaceful and beautiful houses. Happily Malone House has survived with its grounds and is now a public restaurant and park called *Barnett's* Park.

I have not so far mentioned any works by the more famous artists as pictures by Barret, *Ashford* and Roberts are all well known and they worked mainly in and near Dublin painting-pictures of houses which are more familiar than those I have mentioned in the north and west. An example of Barret's work in this genre is the picture of Castletown with the river Liffey in the foreground (FIG. 6). It is interesting to note that Barret has taken the liberty of altering the fenestration for the purposes of his painting. He has added three windows to the thirteen across the central block and reduced the number of windows in the wings from seven to six. *Ashford's* delightful view of Leixlip Castle and village is to be seen in the National Gallery and much of its charm lies in the introduction of real villagers. Apart from the view of Shanes, the local inhabitants were generally neglected in favour of landscape and architecture. *Ashford* is normally more interested in surroundings than in people, and there is a sweeping calm about his pictures which reflects the dignity of the great Georgian houses which are often their focal point. Many of the best of these pictures were engraved,



which made the artists familiar to a wide public before the advent of the art gallery.

The nineteenth century artists approached landscape in a completely different way. The passion for nature altered their vision and as a rule houses became a secondary part of a landscape. The pictures by James Arthur O'Connor illustrate this very well. His work in this field is best seen at Westport House, where he was employed by Lord Sligo and Lord Clanricarde in 1818-19. Seventeen of his views of landscapes and houses near Westport are still there. He was clearly not interested in architecture and had romantic notions about the superiority of nature to mankind, and magnificent as the scenery in the west is, he successfully gave it overtones of romantic grandeur which make the houses seem unimportant. Charming buildings like Delphi House turn into curious little garden chalets set against a tortured mountainside. His pictures are splendid essays but in another language. The straightforward and simple eighteenth century approach has been dropped for something more poetic. His picture of Westport Quay where his imagination cannot take hold is probably much more accurate if more pedestrian (FIG. 7).

Views of towns have been studied much too little. We all know Malton's views of Dublin but there are many surviving views of other smaller towns, of which perhaps the best is a view of Armagh by James Black painted in 1810, now in the museum at Armagh. This is a fascinating document by an artist who is thought to have been Scottish and is otherwise known by portraits he painted in the district. The rural character of the town is very noticeable. Another artist who, according to Strickland, flourished between 1783 and 1790 is H. Hulley who is known as the painter of two views of Coleraine. He exhibited at the Royal Academy in London and is of considerable merit. Probably most of his productions are now black with dirt and wholly unconsidered, but

if he was one of those rare itinerants it would be most useful if we could find more work by him. Especially in the north, so little is known about the architects of towns and houses that any material which helps us to know even their dates is of value. So many houses too were altered extensively in the mid-nineteenth century that pictures are often the only means we have of knowing what the original architects intended.

Ashford painted several panoramas of Dublin, as did many other well known artists. Less familiar is Gabriele Ricciardelli, who was employed at the Court of Charles de Bourbon in Naples c. 1743. Strickland records that 'In March, 1758-9, he (Ricciardelli) advertised engravings of Dublin from the sea and from Phoenix Park'. The paintings he did for these views exist but they were never, so far as is known, engraved. There are two views by him of Stillorgan House and Obelisk (FIG. 8), and it is to be hoped that more works **will** be identified, as these pictures have been attributed to Dominic Serres and no doubt most of Ricciardelli's work is given to other artists. The Obelisk, which still exists, was designed by Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, the principal architect of the present Bank of Ireland in Dublin.

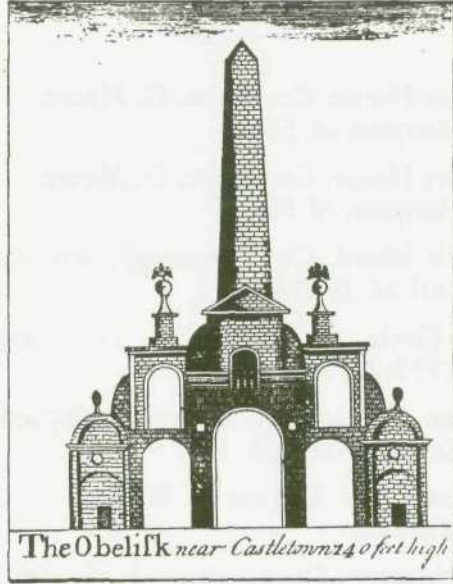
This brief introduction to a fascinating subject merely touches it at one or two relatively unconnected points with which I happen to be familiar. I am fully aware that I *have* left out a great many pictures of houses which deserve mention and that I have neglected a score of fine artists including Jonathan Fisher, and Fraser, a northern Irish artist of considerable merit. All I *have* tried to point out is what a joy these pictures are, the problems they raise and the problems that they could solve.

LIST OF PLATES

- 1 Westport House, Co. Mayo; G. Moore.  
(The Marquess of Sligo.)
- 2 Westport House, Co. Mayo; G. Moore.  
(The Marquess of Sligo.)
- 3 Devenish Island, Co. Fermanagh; attr. to John Butts.  
(The Earl of Enniskillen.)
- 4 Shanes Castle, Co. Antrim, c. 1750; artist unknown.  
(Lord O'Neill.)
- 5 Glcnarm, Co. Antrim, c. 1770; artist unknown.  
(The Earl of Antrim.)
- 6 Castletown, Co. Kildare; G. Barret.  
(Lord Carew.)
- 7 The Westport Quay, 1819; J. A. O'Connor.  
(The Marquess of Sligo.)
- 8 Obelisk in Stillorgan Park; Gabriele Ricciardelli.  
(Sir Richard Proby.)

Photographs: FIGS. 1, 2, & 7 by courtesy of Bord Fáilte; 3, 4 & 5 by courtesy of The Belfast Museum; 6 & 8 by Hugh Doran.

*The Irish Georgian Society, in conjunction with the Municipal Art Gallery, Dublin, and the Ulster Museum, Belfast, hopes to arrange an exhibition of Irish Topographical Paintings of the period, in 1963.*



# THE CONOLLY FOLLY

## RESTORATION FUND

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BOOKS TO READ ON  
GEORGIAN IRELAND

DUBLIN 1660-1860, a social and architectural history *by* Maurice James Craig. (Illustrated: Cresset Press, 42s.)

CORRESPONDENCE OF EMILY, DUCHESS OF LEINSTER *by* Brian Fitzgerald. (Illustrated: Irish Manuscripts Commission.) Vol. I (1949), £1 10s.; Vol. II (1954), £2 2s.; Vol. III (1957), £2 10s.

THE DURLIN CITY CHURCHES OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND *by* H. A. Wheeler and M. J. Craig. (Illustrated: A.P.C.K., 2s.)

BIANCONI, KING OF THE IRISH ROADS *by* M. O'C. Bianconi and S. J. Watson. (Illustrated: Allen Figgis, 21s.)

LITTLE TOM DRENNAN, an account of a Georgian childhood in Dublin and Belfast, *by* Mary McNicill. (Illustrated: Dolmen Press, 21s.)

DUBLIN UNDER THE GEORGES *by* Constantia Maxwell. (Illustrated: Faber & Faber, 30s.)

COUNTRY AND TOWN IN IRELAND UNDER THE GEORGES, *by* Constantia Maxwell. (Illustrated: W. Tempest, Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, 23s.)

CADENUS, a study of Swift, Stella, and Vanessa, *by* Sybil Le Brocquy. (Illustrated: Dolmen Press, 18s. 6d.)

# IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

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Irish Georgian Society

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EUROPEAN SOURCES"

*by*

ULICK O'CONNOR

Wednesday, 19th December, 1962, at 8 p.m.

"GILBERT STUART" (Illustrated)

*by*

CHARLES MERRILL MOUNT

Wednesday, 9th January, 1963, at 8 p.m.

(Annual General Meeting 7.30 p.m.)

"DUBLIN MUSICAL LIFE IN THE LATE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY"

*by*

DR. H. S. CORRAN

Wednesday, 20th February, 1963, at 8 p.m.

*(Illustrated with musical excerpts.  
Display of Music scores etc.)*