

Foreword

SIR DAVID DAVIES

THIS HANDSOME VOLUME OF THE IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY JOURNAL IS DEDICATED to Castletown, and marks the fiftieth year of its rescue by Desmond Guinness and its opening to the public. Our editor, Finola O’Kane, introduces its contents more fully elsewhere in the volume. I congratulate her on the difficult task of pulling together such an interesting themed issue, and thank the Castletown Foundation and the Office of Public Works for working with us on this volume.

It seems extraordinary that this is the twentieth volume of this series, which was launched in 1998 when a decision was made to expand the old and much loved *Bulletin*. At the time Desmond Guinness explained its extended remit: ‘The new manifestation of the *Bulletin* acknowledges the importance of the entire spectrum of Ireland’s post-medieval architecture and its special need for protection, interpretation, understanding and appreciation.’ Some years later, the Knight of Glin articulated the centrality of this journal to the IGS: ‘The scrupulous scholarship that this journal promotes permeates and informs all our activities.’ I thank the series of editors who have maintained the scholarly rigour of the Journal for two decades – Seán O’Reilly, Nicola Figgis, William Laffan and Conor Lucey – and also its distinguished editorial board who oversee it. Thank you, too, to our publishers Gandon Editions who have been responsible for the design and production of each of the twenty volumes published so far – in itself quite an achievement.

The Journal has been fortunate in attracting sponsorship, and we are grateful to the generosity over the years of the Apollo Foundation, the Ireland Funds, the Mark Fitch Fund, the Esmé Mitchell Trust and the School of Irish Studies Foundation. For many years we received generous support from the J. Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust and the estate of the late Paul Mellon. We thank Jim Thompson for his generosity, as well as a supporter in the United States who has helped fund the Journal in recent years, and who wishes to remain anonymous.

This year marks one of the great highlights of the Irish Georgian Society’s history – the restoration of the City Assembly House – the first, purpose-built public art

gallery in either Britain and Ireland, and possibly in Europe – and the wonderful exhibition that opens in June, honouring the Society of Artists who built it in the mid-1760s. The exhibition includes some eighty paintings by artists who exhibited with the Society, including great names of eighteenth-century Irish art such as Robert Carver, Robert Healy and Hugh Douglas Hamilton. Many of the exhibits were first exhibited in this great octagonal exhibition room 250 years ago, for example Thomas Roberts’ bravura *Frost Piece*, exhibited in William Street in 1769, or William Ashford’s masterly *View of Gibraltar*, included in the 1775 exhibition. The exhibition has been made possible through the work of its curator, Dr Ruth Kenny, who worked with William Laffan in tracing works for the show, and a steering committee led by Dr David Fleming. It has been realised through the generosity of the public and private lenders and those who have donated funds to ensure its success. *Exhibiting Art in Georgian Ireland: the Society of Artists’ exhibitions recreated* will open in the great Exhibition Room – newly dedicated to the Knight of Glin whose vision and persistence has contributed so much to the success of the exhibition. We remember the Knight and also pay tribute to our distinguished founders Desmond and Mariga Guinness for their years of work that has taken the IGS from a tea party in Carton sixty years ago to the dynamic organisation it is today. I hope this will be further demonstrated in September when we launch a major exhibition of the work of the contemporary artist John Nankivell who has produced the most extraordinary body of work exploring the Irish country house and related buildings. This exhibition has been made possible through the great generosity of one of our American benefactors.

William Ashford (1746-1824) A View of Gibraltar

1775, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 92 cm (detail) (private collection)

This painting was one of the original exhibits of the Society of Artists exhibition which is being returned to the Exhibition Room where it was first put on public display. It was included in the 1775 exhibition and was singled out for praise in the review by the critic for the Hibernian Journal: ‘Though Gibraltar is but a barren rock, no other than a fertile hand could lay before us so good a portrait of it’.

