

rapidly. In 1840 the family business relocated to Castle Place. Another member of the family, George Hyndman, was first president of the Belfast Naturalists Field Club. Among the Hyndmans' competitors was John Devlin, who operated on a much smaller scale, while other auctioneers included John Cramsie, Hugh Clarke and John Cowan. Of these Cramsie was the most enterprising, and in 1859 he established a partnership with a Belgian art dealer named Henri Everard. A notable sale held at Cramsie's in 1867 included around fifty paintings from the Earl of Shannon's residence, Castle Martyr, in county Cork. In common with other smaller cities in Britain and Ireland, societies for the encouragement of the visual arts were established, including the Belfast Association of Artists, the Northern Irish Art Union and the Belfast Fine Arts Society. These were mainly founded in the buoyant years of the late 1830s and early 1840s, but only the Fine Arts Society was to last. Even the School of Design, established with great optimism in 1849, lasted less than a decade. However, the commercial side of the art business in Belfast flourished in the 1860s, with Hugh Hamilton the most prominent of the ten new firms founded during that decade. The opening of the Ulster Hall in 1862 provided valuable exhibition space, both for art societies and auctioneers. Two years later, the city's first proper commercial art gallery, Marcus Ward, opened its doors for business. The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw a plethora of new auction houses being established, but many lasted a short time. The twelve or so firms that endured included Clarke and Cramsie, James Morton and Walter Watson. This book, and the trilogy of which it forms part, are the fruits of many years' research and are valuable additions to the cultural history of Ireland in the nineteenth century.

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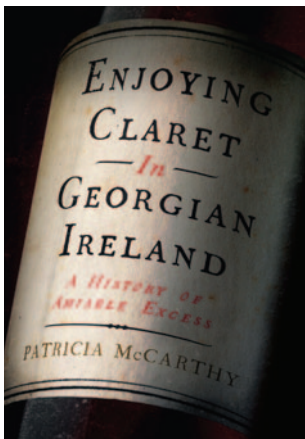
Patricia McCarthy

## ENJOYING CLARET IN GEORGIAN IRELAND:

### A HISTORY OF AMIABLE EXCESS

(Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2022) isbn 978-1-80151-013-4, 224pp, 24x17cm, 63 illus, €40 hb

review by Terence Dooley



PATRICIA MCCARTHY'S NEW BOOK *ENJOYING CLARET in Georgian Ireland* opens with the following: 'Much of the blame for the spread of drunkenness in eighteenth-century Ireland was laid, according to Revd Samuel Madden, with the landed gentry'. As the landed gentry have been blamed for every other social ill in Irish society – admittedly mainly by nationalists, of which political persuasion Madden did not belong – why not drunkenness as well?

The blame, it seems, stemmed from the Irish gentry's near obsession with fine wines from the Bordeaux region – their penchant towards 'amiable excess' – and they were well supported by associates in the military, the

*PUNCH CURES THE GOUT*  
by H. Humphrey, 1799



Anglican clergy, lawyers, bankers and wealthy merchants who comprised the urban elites.

McCarthy tells us that this book had its genesis in her previously well-received *Life in the country house in Georgian Ireland*, and one can see why: the country house was the quintessential venue of aristocratic hospitality, architecturally designed and built to facilitate the same. Sometimes the more impressive dining interiors, as in the Gold Salon in Carton, had lavish stuccowork, the intricate design of which reminded family and guests of the importance of good food and fine wine. Thus, in chapters three and four McCarthy lucidly explains the design of the country house for hospitality, the importance of the dining area, the significance of the material culture around wining and dining – cisterns, fountains, decanters and glasses – and the role of the staff, especially the butler. It is little wonder the latter was often stereotyped in anecdote and literature as an imbibor of great quantities of wine.

Prior to these chapters, McCarthy begins by more broadly tracing the history of alcohol consumption in Ireland. More specifically, she describes the emergence of Irish families' involvement in the wine trade in Bordeaux; most were descendants of the so-called Wild Geese émigrés who left Ireland for political and religious reasons during the Penal era, and who immersed themselves in the French wine trade, becoming central to the supply chain of claret back to Ireland. By the 1770s Ireland was importing huge amounts of wine – some 35 million litres – double the amount of England, Scotland and Wales combined. More detailed analysis would have been welcomed here, rather than broad conclusions anecdotally based: 'Stories abound about the amounts of wine consumed'; in 1745 the 4th earl of Chesterfield considered the obsession with Claret to be the ruination of 'nine gentlemen in ten in Ireland', who, he argued, were wasting resources on claret that would have been better spent on estate improvements. It may very well have been the case that at Borris House in county Carlow, the 1818 wine cellar accounted for seventeen percent of the Kavanagh's assets, but was this an investment or an exorbitance? A forensic examination of the Borris estate papers might have been revealing in this respect.

Chapter two develops the history of storage and distribution (from auctions to

smuggling). It tells the story of bottling, labelling and recording in cellar books. The title of chapter five reveals its central theme, 'Male bonding and toasting', the inextricable connection between drinking, toasting, politics and masculinity, the latter often judged by the amount a man could drink. The observation that 'The old habit at dinner parties of men settling themselves down to serious drinking sessions after the women had departed to tea and coffee in the drawing room, which was carried on well into the twentieth century, has finally died out' is hardly necessary, and neither are many similar observations throughout the book.

Chapter six moves the setting from the country house to Dublin Castle, the centre of British administration in Ireland. In the Georgian period, Dublin emerged as the second great city of the empire during a period of relative political stability and economic prosperity, a perfect climate for the spread of hospitality which went hand-in-hand with consumption. Creating the right impression began with what a good host had to offer; thus, lords lieutenant in their viceregal entertainments provided extravagant hospitality and claret flowed freely.

Chapter seven moves away from the world of the gentry to that of the religious orders, particularly the Benedictines and the Cistercians, who specialised in the creation and tending of vineyards. Finally, chapter eight looks at the inevitable health consequences associated with amiable excess and how they were 'medically' addressed.

This is a most enjoyable read, which brings the reader on a convivial journey appropriate to the title. Those interested in wine drinking per se will be entertained by the stock of anecdotes and amusing fables which originate in the witticisms of Jonathan Swift, the sarcasm of Sir Joshua Reynolds or Jonah Barrington, stories about the viceroy who died of over-eating and over-drinking at thirty-three, the image of the bishop of Clogher, Robert Ponsonby Tottenham, bathing in wine to cure his skin condition, and more so the thought of the poor unfortunate villagers who later drank the bath-wine bottled by an entrepreneurial servant!

From a more academic perspective, unlike a good claret this book may not age as well. It is a pity, for example, that so little is devoted to 'Women and alcohol', a mere two pages. There are gaps that could have been filled. The decline in the drinking culture in the 1840s might have been more fully developed to take into account that Fr Mathew, the founder of the temperance movement, was strongly supported by the Duke of Leinster. The book overflows with anecdotal evidence, taken for example from Maria Edgeworth's novels or Edward Wakefield's tours of Ireland, that might have been balanced by more forensic examination of estate papers and correspondence. Rather disappointingly, there is no bibliography of primary sources consulted.

But these are mere quibbles and should not take away from the quality of the scholarship that underpins this book. And mention should be made of the fact that once again Four Courts Press have done an excellent job in producing a beautifully designed and very well-illustrated book.