



# Frederick, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, collector and artist (1758-1844)

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FREDERICK PONSONBY, THE ELDEST SURVIVING SON OF WILLIAM, 2ND EARL OF Bessborough (1704-1793) (Plate 1), was born at Ingress Abbey, Kent, on 24th January 1758. When only two years of age he lost his mother (Caroline Cavendish, daughter of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire) and two sisters to an outbreak of cholera. His father's response to this calamity was to abandon this house, whose damp location he attributed to their deaths, and move the surviving members of his family to Roehampton Villa (now Parkstead House), London, designed by Sir William Chambers. From this period onwards, though already a well-known collector of art and antiquities, and a founder member of the Society of Dilettanti, the widowed earl spent much of his time and vast fortune building up collections of art and antiquities with which to adorn his beautiful villa.<sup>1</sup>

Frederick graduated from Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1779 with an MA and a DCL,<sup>2</sup> and like his father, who had made at least one documented Grand Tour,<sup>3</sup> travelled extensively in Italy. Recorded in the sources as Lord/Viscount Duncannon, or more often simply as Duncannon, he first visited Italy in 1777 aged nineteen, accompanied by his tutor, Samuel Wells.<sup>4</sup> During this first Grand Tour (he later travelled more extensively with his wife), he spent ten months in Milan, Naples, Rome and Venice, and began to show a keen interest in collecting prints, a recreation no doubt inspired by his father, whose vast library contained a considerable collection of expensive engravings.<sup>5</sup>

His early forays into collecting were, however, doomed by the seizure of the British frigate *Westmorland* at Livorno by King Carlos of Spain as a war prize in 1778. Three cases of books, prints, architectural drawings, maps and other assorted items acquired during his travels had been loaded onto the frigate to be delivered to his father's London residence in Cavendish Square. The original eighteenth-century inventories for the assorted crates were published in Spanish in 2002 in the appendix to a catalogue for a

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1 – Joseph Grozer (1755-1799), *FREDERICK PONSONBY, 3RD EARL OF BESSBOROUGH* mezzotint, published 1786, after Joshua Reynolds (courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)

major exhibition held in three Spanish centres (2002-03).<sup>6</sup> A decade later, two inventories were reproduced in the catalogue accompanying a further exhibition held at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.<sup>7</sup> The first and largest of Frederick's three boxes contained approximately eighty printed objects, together with some anonymous drawings thought to have been his own works. The second box was a 'smaller crate than the previous one, also with feather flowers', and the third was a 'crate with a piece of tree trunk, partly fossilized'.<sup>8</sup> Among the many items in the largest crate were three which had been repacked and arranged by the English art dealer, Thomas Jenkins, who took the opportunity, while sending the bill of lading to Lord Bessborough (with whom he had previously done business),<sup>9</sup> to compliment him on his son, who 'has gained universal Respect and Affection'.<sup>10</sup> The bill makes reference to 'a Tin Case for the Prints of the School of Athens and for a Case and Packing the things',<sup>11</sup> and while the ship is not mentioned by name, it is clear that these items were part of the *Westmorland* cargo since one of the inventories lists a 'Tin tube with two prints of the School of Athens, by Volpato'.<sup>12</sup> Frederick features prominently in both the Spanish and Ashmolean exhibition catalogues, and what comes across strongly is that he was considered (both by his contemporaries and by modern scholars) to have been a persistent and enthusiastic traveller, as well as a serious devotee of the arts.<sup>13</sup>

Frederick returned to England, and two years later, in 1780, married Lady Henrietta Frances Spencer (1761-1821), daughter of John Spencer, 1st Earl Spencer, and Margaret Georgiana Spencer, Countess Spencer. Though they had a residence in Cavendish Square, for some time after their marriage the couple lived at Roehampton Villa with the 2nd Earl, where their four children were born. On his return from a second trip to Italy (1791-94),<sup>14</sup> Frederick wrote to Henrietta, whom he had left abroad for health reasons, to declare: 'I am ruined in the number of prints that have been published since I have been absent, but they are none remarkably beautiful...'<sup>15</sup> This comment gave rise to his reputation for extravagance in collecting old prints, provoking such comments as: 'on prints he spent in every land so much money he nearly ruined himself.'<sup>16</sup> Another source claims that this was merely spoken in jest, and asserts that Frederick used these engravings to illustrate fourteen volumes of Lysons' *Environs of London*, and that his own copy was interleaved with around 2,000 prints.<sup>17</sup> This is somewhat of an exaggeration, however, since a modern annotated list of this set, which is still in the family collection, indicates that only a single volume contains such additions, amounting to no more than a few pages.<sup>18</sup> One part of Frederick's print collection that he built up over years was the complete and very valuable assemblage of the engraved works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, sold in 1897 by his grandson, the Hon Ashley Ponsonby.<sup>19</sup>

A major cause of Frederick's ruination was his love of gambling, a pursuit shared even more enthusiastically by his wife Henrietta. On his father's death in 1793, he inherited his title and his fortune, and though the amount of his inheritance exceeded £3 million, his debts amounted to £2.7 million.<sup>20</sup> In the same year he visited the family estate in Ireland (Bessborough, in Piltown, county Kilkenny), possibly for the first time. In a letter to his wife he declared: 'I came here yesterday and am indeed very much pleased with

the place ... The mountains are beautiful over fine wood, & the verdure is the finest that can be seen. I hope I shall be able to make a sketch for you before I go; I mean to confine myself to the 3 days.' He also described the house, built in the 1740s to the design of Irish architect Francis Bindon, as 'large & very comfortable, but as you may suppose very old fashioned'. On the subject of the fine collection of art at Bessborough House, he noted that he had 'just discovered a Claude Lorraine'.<sup>21</sup>

News of these treasures, which had been accumulated by his grandfather Brabazon, 1st Earl (1679-1758), soon spread, and their presence in county Kilkenny was subsequently listed in the works of several early nineteenth-century publications.<sup>22</sup> James Brewer's 1825 *Beauties of Ireland* presented the most complete 'catalogue of such paintings as appear to be most deserving of attention', listing works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Holbein, Gerard Seghers, Veronese, Titian, Guido Reni, Raphael, Orizonte, Andrea Locatelli, Claude Lorraine, Jacob Jordaens, Carlo Maratta and Panini.<sup>23</sup> His letter to Henrietta also described the estate's extent as 'very great', with 'twenty seven thousand English acres all lying near together here belonging to me' but with 'a good deal of it in long leases, & you must not from that suppose me very rich'.<sup>24</sup>

By 1801 his financial affairs had reached such critical proportions that Frederick was forced to enter into a settlement arranged by concerned relatives, with a trust set up to pay all his debts. This required the sale of family assets, including property, annual rents and works of art.<sup>25</sup> The disposal of his late father's collection of art and antiquities proved to be a bone of contention with Frederick, who requested that only as many items be sold as would raise the sum of €5,000.<sup>26</sup> It appears, however, that his pleas were ignored, since in the same year, 1801, two separate Christie's auctions were arranged for the sale of the entire assemblage. The first was a three-day sale of his late father's pictures, which took place from 5th to 7th February, and the second, held on 7th April, was a one-day sale of his famous collection of antique statues, busts, Egyptian vases and bas reliefs, with a further eleven pictures.<sup>27</sup> The Countess Bessborough attended the sale of antiquities, and the following day wrote to her lover, Granville Leveson-Gower, 1st Earl Granville (1773-1846) that 'the marbles at Roe[hampton Villa] were sold yesterday – very well I think for between £4,000 and £5,000'.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that the original Christie's catalogues have survived in such good order is invaluable as they allow us to see who purchased each lot, and for what sum. They record the final totals as £9,460 for the paintings and a further £4,235 for the antiquities, thus giving a grand total of more than £13,000, and therefore more than twice the amount Frederick had consented to sell. The art sale was singled out, in *Memorials of Christie's*, as one of the three most interesting sales for the year 1801, and detailed several of the highlights.<sup>29</sup> Two major buyers at these sales were relatives of Frederick – Aubrey Beauclerk, 5th Duke of St Albans (1740-1802), widower of Lady Catherine Ponsonby (1742-1789), eldest daughter of the 2nd Earl of Bessborough, and William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire (1757-1806), who was married to Lady Georgiana Spencer (1757-1806), sister of Frederick's wife, Henrietta. An analysis of the sale catalogues shows that

the Duke of St Albans purchased twenty-eight paintings from the art auction, as well four antiquities and one or two pictures from the second sale. His most illustrious acquisition was a painting by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Aelbert Cuyp, a work described in the catalogue as ‘A Landscape and Cattle, a view from Nature in Holland, a very pleasing picturesque effect, the figures correctly drawn and full of taste’,<sup>30</sup> now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. The Duke of Devonshire purchased nothing from the first day of the February art sale, but acquired six pictures on the second day and nine on the third, including two by Jean-Étienne Liotard (the Swiss portrait artist who travelled to Constantinople with Frederick’s father in 1738) and three by Sir George Kneller. Frederick himself acquired at least four pictures from his own sales:<sup>31</sup> lots 48, 64 and 89 from the third day of the February sale. From the former auction he bought a battle scene by Philips Wouwerman for £39 18s, *Cows in a Landscape* by A. Vanderveldand for £2 2s, and *Pharoe’s Baker and Butler in Prison* by Spagniolet for £157 10s;<sup>32</sup> and from the few artworks in the April sale he bought a marriage scene for £42. The fact that he had to buy back these pictures suggests either the terms of the settlement did not permit him to keep any items from his later father’s collection of art or that he was rigging the auction.<sup>33</sup>

The family portraits were not included in the sale as their presence in Bessborough House was noted in Sadlier and Dickinson’s *Georgian Mansions in Ireland*.<sup>34</sup> An unpublished memoir by Edward, 8th Earl of Bessborough, described how some of the portraits were also repurchased over a century later by the family in 1908:

We bought at Charles Ponsonby’s Sale at Christies March 27 & 28 1908:<sup>35</sup>

- A miniature of a young lady by a French artist. This young lady was Georgina Henrietta Frances Spencer afterwards Duchess Countess of Devonshire Bessborough – price £23.
- George Ponsonby by Liotard – 28gns
- Frederick 3rd Earl – on horseback – by van der Gurch [*sic*] – 60gns
- H.F. Countess of Bessborough by A Kauffman – £105
- Georgina Duchess of Devonshire by A Kauffman.<sup>36</sup>

The earl’s account is not entirely accurate, but these five pictures can be identified from an annotated sale catalogue.<sup>37</sup> Vere, 9th Earl of Bessborough, also listed the art treasures that he personally rescued from Bessborough House in the 1920s.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, later generations of the family had bought back or inherited these artworks, and at some time during the nineteenth or early twentieth century had taken them to Ireland to adorn the saloon and dining room of their Irish home. The 9th Earl recounted how political instability in Ireland led him to take ‘the precaution of moving over to London a dozen of the best pictures, and all the plate, on the plea that the pictures wanted cleaning & that we were short of plate’. He also mentioned that in the summer of 1922 he had succeeded in taking to London twenty or more pictures from Bessborough, as well as miniatures and other small objects, and that in September he managed to remove to London the Chippendale tables, ten of the best of the Chippendale chairs, and six Jacobean chairs. His list of thirty-nine



2 – Table at Bessborough wedding breakfast, Piltown, county Kilkenny, 1901  
*(courtesy National Library of Ireland, Poole Collection, POOLEIMP 824)*

pictures removed from the house gives a good impression of art and taste in Bessborough as late as the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Though most are family portraits, there are other important pieces, such as landscapes by Claude Vernet, Locatelli and Waterloo, and religious scenes by Domenichino and Correggio. Many of these would have come from the 2nd Earl's collection. In a rare 1901 photograph of the interior of Bessborough House (Plate 2) showing a room laid out for a wedding, one of the entries on the list – a pastel portrait of Princess Amelia, by Liotard – can be seen at the top right-hand side of the archway (Plate 3). Amelia was the eldest daughter of King George II and is reputed to have become the 2nd Earl's mistress after the death of his wife. He was executor to her will, and in 1786 she left him two portraits, including this one.<sup>40</sup> It was said that she, Princess Amelia, was 'deaf, short-sighted, garrulous, and given to wearing a jockey's cap',<sup>41</sup> a description that belies this rather flattering likeness.

In the centre of the alcove in the same photograph can be seen one of the most valuable pieces of plate (removed by 9th Earl before the fire) – a Dutch ewer and basin (Plate 4). This is one of the few treasures that can be identified from the illustrious collection of Brabazon, 1st Earl of Bessborough, who, as mentioned above, built Bessborough House in the 1740s. Though dating from the early period of the Van Vianen school (the most similar known work, dated to 1594 and now in the Hermitage),<sup>42</sup> its acquisition must



3 – Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-1789),  
 PORTRAIT OF PRINCESS AMELIA  
 c.1774, pastel on paper, 62 x 53 cm (detail)  
 (courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation;  
 photo: John Cunningham)

4 – Dutch silver-gilt ewer and basin from  
 Bessborough House  
 (Sotheby's catalogue, Lot 172, 26th June 1969, 4)



have been before 1733 since a disc attached to the original coat of arms bears the names of Brabzon Ponsonby (then 2nd Viscount Duncannon; he was not created 2nd Earl until 1758) and his first wife Sarah, who died on 21st May 1733. This beautiful set is now in the Rijksmuseum.<sup>43</sup> As further noted in the 9th Earl's memoir, 'the slight precautionary measures [removing the treasures] did not prove unnecessary for on the night of 22 February 1923, Bessborough was raided at 11pm by 40 armed rebels, who sprinkled petrol through the rooms & then set the House on fire, which after blazing for 20 hours was utterly destroyed.'<sup>44</sup>

Several sources refer to Frederick, the 3rd Earl's artistic skills, albeit as an amateur. In the 1804 edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for example (and repeated forty years later in his obituary), he is characterised as possessing 'a highly cultivated taste for the fine arts, of which he is a patron, and has himself sketched several subjects with the hand of a master'.<sup>45</sup> His artistic merits were also recognised by his contemporaries, with the great collector and connoisseur Sir William Hamilton, after meeting Frederick in Naples in 1778, informing Lord Bessborough that his son's drawings of landscapes were 'more just than any [he had] ever been able to procure from the best artists here'.<sup>46</sup> The family correspondence frequently refers to his pastime of sketching and painting landscapes and country seats. In a letter to his brothers from Naples, William Ponsonby (aged seven) wrote: 'My papa is drawing now, he is drawing a very pretty picture, I think.'<sup>47</sup> In a letter to Frederick, his wife Henrietta says, 'Nothing ever was more

beautiful than this end of the Isle of Wight, the singular appearance of the Needles & the rich verdure & wooding of the island mix'd with the shipping', and adds, 'How beautifully you would draw it...' <sup>48</sup> A decade later, Henrietta writes from Scotland: 'We went to the falls of Moness. While Lord Bessborough was drawing W[illiam] & I scrambled up the rock', <sup>49</sup> and in the same year, when visiting Ireland, she receives a letter from Lady Spencer, who says: 'Your dab [brief note] from Bishops court [county Kildare] would have been a sad disappointment to me if d[ear] Ld. B. had not softened it by his pretty sketch of Bessborough...' <sup>50</sup>

The surviving body of Frederick's work is not prolific and the works relate both to his travels and to the landed estates of his family and friends, for whom they were created, and by whom they were esteemed, one of his greatest admirers being his brother-in-law, George John Spencer (later Viscount Althorp). <sup>51</sup> A recurring theme in his work was the assorted properties of the Bessborough and Devonshire families, and given the general interest in topographical compositions, particularly those containing views of stately homes, it is surprising that so few of his original works (as opposed to engravings inspired by his own drawings or paintings) have been published. <sup>52</sup> Though there may be other collections in private ownership that have not yet come to light, <sup>53</sup> and the whereabouts of the drawings from the *Westmorland* has not been established, <sup>54</sup> the present author has traced five collections of Frederick's original works in the form of albums or sketchbooks. The 1812 album from Frederick and Henrietta's tour of Ireland is of most interest to this article, and is examined below. Of the remaining four, the first relates to Frederick's tour of England in 1786, <sup>55</sup> the second concerns a tour of Italy in the company of his wife (1791-94), <sup>56</sup> and the final two cover part of a Grand Tour of Europe undertaken by Frederick (1835-36), fourteen years after the death of his wife in Florence in 1821. <sup>57</sup>

## THE TOUR OF IRELAND, 1812

FREDERICK MADE A TOUR OF IRELAND DURING THE WINTER OF 1812, <sup>58</sup> WHEN HE WAS accompanied by his wife and other members of the family, including their somewhat reluctant daughter, Lady Caroline Lamb, or 'Caro' (1785-1828), and her husband William Lamb, Lord Melbourne (1779-1848). Though there were various family and estate matters to attend to in Ireland, clearly the main purpose of the visit was to remove Caroline from her embarrassing connection with Lord Byron. As can be seen from the itinerary (Plate 5), before setting sail for Ireland from Milford Haven, the family spent several days travelling through England and Wales, where they stayed at the various residences of Henry Charles Somerset, 6th Duke of Beaufort (1766-1835), including the family seat, Badminton House, Gloucestershire (25th-26th September). The duke's wife, Lady Charlotte Sophia Leveson-Gower (1771-1854), was the sister of Henrietta's lover, Granville, and as we shall see the tour ended with a prolonged stay at Tixall, the latter's home. After a week of travel, the party sailed from Milford Haven on 3rd



		1812				
Aug <sup>r</sup>	24	1812.	Spencerlands	Oct <sup>r</sup>	19	1 <sup>st</sup> P. Newport
	25		Badminton		20	Waterford & Bessborough
	26		3 <sup>rd</sup>		25	Royal Oak
	27		Clifton		26	Boston Hall
	28		2 <sup>nd</sup>		27	Dublin
	29		Marioneth		29-30-31	Trinickick
	30		3 <sup>rd</sup>	Nov <sup>r</sup>	1	1 <sup>st</sup> Day - Dublin
	31		St. Davids	6-7, 18	1 <sup>st</sup> Day - Bessborough	
Sept <sup>r</sup>	1		Trinity	return t	Dublin	
	2		2 <sup>nd</sup>	13	Wolfehead & Spinnick	
	3		Risford & Catlea	14	Expt. Cong.	
	4		Bessborough	1 <sup>st</sup> Day	15 & 16 - Sligo	
	28		Lismore	17-18-19-20	Trinick	
Oct <sup>r</sup>	1		Longhall	21	Dunlough	
	4		Lismore	1 <sup>st</sup> Day	22 & 23 - St. Albans	
	6		Bessborough	24	London	
	13		Kilbrannigan			
1 <sup>st</sup> Day	18		Bessborough			

5 – Itinerary, by Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough from the SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR of 1812 (courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photo: John Cunningham)

September (probably to Cheek Point, county Waterford) and arrived the following day at Bessborough. They remained at their ancestral home for over three weeks, during which time Henrietta wrote entertaining letters to her family and friends claiming that she had developed an Irish brogue, and describing the enthusiastic reception she had received from the locals, who sought to surpass each other in their attempts to please her.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Frederick began work on his two views of Bessborough House (Plate 6), though the first was not completed until 18 October.<sup>60</sup>

From here the family removed to Lismore on 28th September, where they stayed for two days at Lismore Castle, which had been in the Devonshire family since 1753. The estate had recently been inherited by William George Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790-1858), who was related to the Bessboroughs on both sides: Henrietta’s sister, Georgiana Spencer, was his mother, and Frederick’s mother, Caroline Cavendish, was the eldest daughter of his great grandfather, 3rd Duke of Devonshire. From an early age he had hoped to marry their daughter Caroline, and was devastated by her marriage to William Lamb, in 1805.<sup>61</sup> The family spent two days at Lismore, where they found their host ‘doing rather too much all at once’ – a reference to the many building works he had undertaken on assuming his new title, including a proposal to build a town in the neighbourhood of Lismore, to be called ‘Spencer-town’.<sup>62</sup> During this visit, the Duke of Devonshire put into operation a plan to propose their son, William Francis Spencer Ponsonby (1787-1855), as an election candidate for Waterford. He had been

impressed with the young man on his recent trip to Ireland, and promised to help him in this campaign. Though he had great hopes of William's success, he was forced to change the nomination to nearby Youghal, when William's cousin, George Ponsonby (1755-1817), already a distinguished parliamentarian, suddenly proposed himself for the Waterford seat.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Caroline Lamb hoped in vain for a ghostly experience at the castle,<sup>64</sup> and Frederick spent his time painting three views of Lismore – two of the castle (Plate 7) and one of the valley. On leaving Lismore after two days, the family went immediately to Youghal to start canvassing for William's election. Again, while his family were thus occupied, Frederick found time to paint four views of this area – one of Cabel (or Capell) Island, an uninhabited island at the entrance to Youghal Bay, which belonged to the Marquess of Thomond; one of the Collegiate Church of St Mary's, built in the fifth century and rebuilt in Romanesque style *c.*750, and two coastal scenes. They remained in this town for four days before returning to Lismore for a further two, after which they went back to Bessborough for a week.

The itinerary notes that on 13th October the party went to Kilkenny for five days, but it is not clear if this included the city of Kilkenny or whether they confined themselves to the county. The only painting relating to the Kilkenny tour is a view of Kells, taken from the bridge, depicting two mills on the King's River and the ruins of Kells Priory (Plate 8).<sup>65</sup> The large house on the right is the Glebe House, which was completed in 1730.<sup>66</sup> A near contemporary source notes that it was in good repair,<sup>67</sup> and it is conceivable that the party may have stayed there while in the area. As Carrick-on-Suir, county

6 – *Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, A VIEW OF BESSBOROUGH HOUSE*  
from the *SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR OF 1812*



Tipperary, is only five miles from the estate, it was perhaps on their return journey from Kilkenny that Frederick began work on his painting of this town (Plate 9). It depicts a view of the Franciscan Friary of Carrick-Beg, with what is today known as the ‘old bridge’ in the foreground, but fails to include the picturesque scene of Carrick (Ormonde) Castle.<sup>68</sup>

From here they returned to Bessborough for a day, where Frederick spent the Sunday completing his paintings of the ancestral home,<sup>69</sup> and the next day the party set out in the direction of Waterford, where they stayed with the retired politician Sir John Newport, 1st Baronet (1756-1843), and his wife Ellen or Eleanor (*née* Carew).<sup>70</sup> His home was Newpark, a late eighteenth-century house located in Ferrybank, county Kilkenny, on the opposite side of the River Suir to the city of Waterford, and reputed to have had a fine collection of pictures.<sup>71</sup> Over the next few days Frederick painted the following four views: Grannagh (or Granagh) Castle, situated on the northern bank of the River Suir, just outside Waterford, built by the Le Poers in the thirteenth century, granted in 1375 to James Butler, 2nd Earl of Ormonde, and repaired by George Roch in 1827 (Plate 10);<sup>72</sup> two of Waterford city – one with a prospect of the ‘timbertoes’ bridge, constructed in 1794, and Christ Church Cathedral, completed in 1779 (Plate 11), and the other from further away, with the emphasis on the river valley; and the grounds of the now demolished Newpark House.

After Waterford, the family returned to Bessborough for five days before setting out on their return journey to England via Carlow, Wicklow and Dublin. They arrived at Royal Oak, near Bagenalstown, on 25th October, and proceeded the next day to Burton Hall, a magnificent mansion on the borders of counties Carlow and Kildare that was begun in 1712 and demolished in 1930.<sup>73</sup> It is likely that while in this area they stayed in Garryhill House, painted by Frederick, with Mount Leinster in the background and the characteristic tree in the foreground (Plate 12). This house was built by the 1st Earl of Bessborough in the 1740s, on the site of the ancient Garryhill Castle, and was subsequently lived in by John Ponsonby, 4th Earl of Bessborough (1781-1847).

Next, the party went for two nights on the first of three trips to Dublin, where they may have stayed with William Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, 4th Earl Fitzwilliam (1748-1833), who was married to Frederick’s maternal aunt, Lady Charlotte Ponsonby (1750-1822). While their time in the capital is likely to have combined business (estate matters and a continuation of the political plans for William) with a round of social activities, Frederick found time to paint two delightful views of Dublin Bay (Plate 13). From here they proceeded to county Wicklow, where they stayed for three days at Tinnehinch, the property of the Grattan family in Enniskerry. It was while staying here that Frederick must have executed his three Wicklow paintings, the Sugar Loaf Mountain (Plate 14), the Dargle, and Powerscourt Waterfall. From Wicklow they went to Bishopscourt, an estate of 1,000 acres in county Kildare which came into the Ponsonby family through Brabazon, 1st Earl’s marriage to Sarah Margetson. They stayed at this house for three days (6th-8th November), and returned to Dublin for a further four days before sailing for Holyhead on 13th November.



*Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, from the SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR of 1812*

7 – A VIEW OF LISMORE CASTLE, CO. WATERFORD

8 – A VIEW OF KELLS, CO. KILKENNY

*(both: courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photos: John Cunningham)*



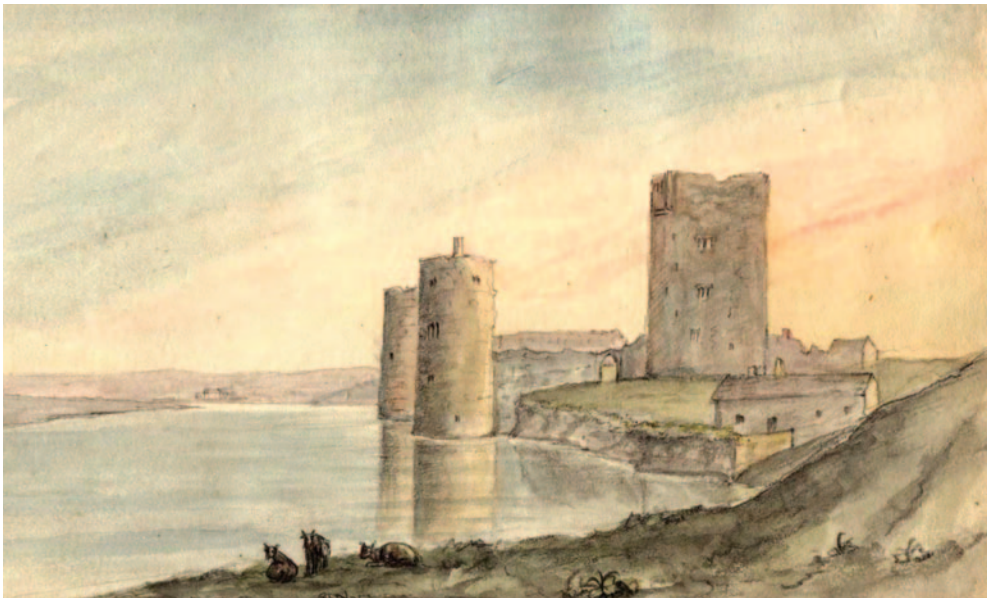


*Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, from the SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR of 1812*

*9 – A VIEW OF CARRICK ON SUIR, CO. TIPPERARY*

*10 – A VIEW OF GRANNAGH CASTLE, CO. KILKENNY*

*(both: courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photos: John Cunningham)*





*Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, from the SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR of 1812*

*11 – A VIEW OF WATERFORD CITY*

*12 – A VIEW OF GARRYHILL HOUSE, CO. CARLOW*

*(both: courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photos: John Cunningham)*





Their return journey to London took another ten days, since they stayed at various places in Wales, including Llangollen, where they would have visited Plas Newydd, the famous home of Frederick's second cousin, Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831) and her companion Eleanor Charlotte Butler (1739-1829).<sup>74</sup> The party also spent four days in Tixall, Staffordshire, the country home of Granville, and while Frederick occupied himself painting several views of the house and grounds – one including a lonely figure of himself at work (Plate 15) – Henrietta was reunited both with her lover and the first of their illegitimate children, Harriet Emma Arundel Stewart, who was born in secret in 1801 and fostered out by her estranged parents.<sup>75</sup> Before reaching their final destination of London, on 24th November 1812, the party stayed for two days at St Albans, presumably with Frederick's uncle by marriage (the Duke of St Albans) who, eleven years earlier, had been one of the most important buyers at the sale of his father's art collection.

In conclusion, evidence from his surviving sketch books, together with the largely flattering comments of contemporary and more recent observers, shows that Frederick was quite a skilful artist, both in his architectural sketches and in his watercolour landscapes. As with many amateur/gentleman artists of the period, he conformed to the prevailing taste, his preferred subject matter being the great houses and estates of his immediate and extended family and friends. However, as can be seen from the art produced on his Continental and Irish tours, he also liked to experiment with more famous and public architectural features such as the bridges, castles and hotels of Paris, as well as the romantic and rugged landscapes and seascapes of popular tours and touring routes in the South of France and Italy. His artwork was a life-long passion, starting with his first Grand Tour and continuing throughout the duration of his travels, and clearly he took

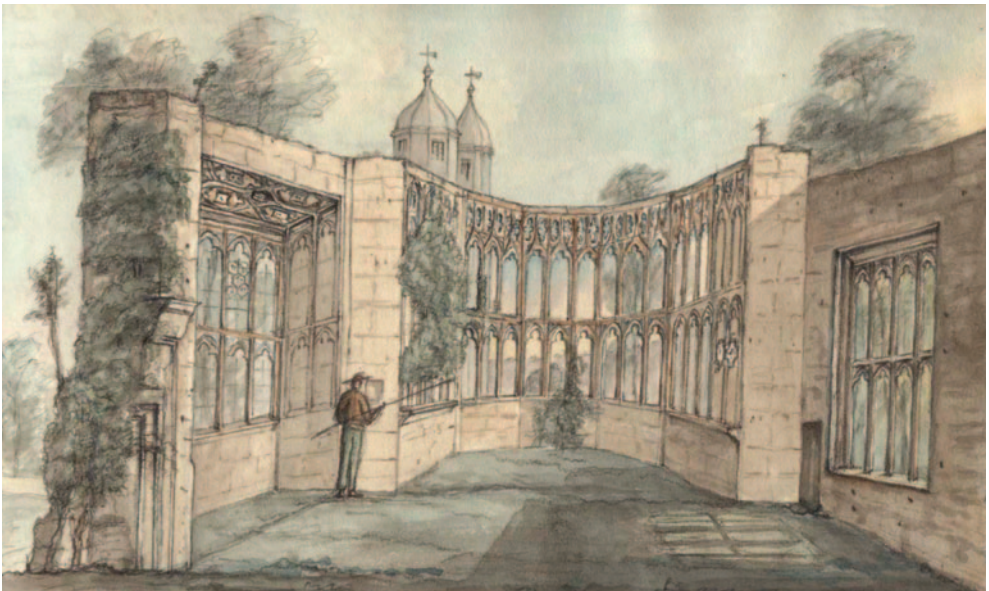


*Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, from the SKETCHBOOK OF THE IRISH TOUR of 1812*

*14 – A VIEW OF THE SUGAR LOAF MOUNTAIN, CO. WICKLOW*

*15 – A VIEW OF TIXALL, STAFFORDSHIRE, with a cartoon of the artist in the foreground  
opposite 13 – A VIEW OF DUBLIN BAY*

*(all: courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photos: John Cunningham)*





pride in his works, many of which he gave to acquaintances, particularly those whose properties he chose to paint or sketch. Though many of the examples from the surviving sketchbooks are quite successful (especially the architectural drawings and landscapes from his foreign travels), those depicted in this article (i.e. related to his Irish tour) are more evidently amateur, especially in his use of perspective and his somewhat unrealistic and naïve depiction of natural features such as trees (for example, in the view of Bessborough House (Plate 6)). Nevertheless, this small collection of Irish views is a significant, if little known contribution to the visual culture of the period, and, in particular, provides evidence of contemporary buildings and views which, in some cases, have undergone significant change or have completely disappeared.

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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See R. Finnegan, 'The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704-1793), *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VIII (Irish Georgian Society, Dublin, 2005) 12-43.
- <sup>2</sup> Obituary of the Earl of Bessborough, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 176 (London, 1844) 87.
- <sup>3</sup> See entry for William Ponsonby in John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997) 781-82.
- <sup>4</sup> See entry for Frederick Ponsonby Duncannon, *ibid.*, 318.
- <sup>5</sup> See R. Finnegan, 'The Library of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough, 1704-93', *Hermathena*, November, 2006, 149-87.
- <sup>6</sup> *El Westmorland: Recuerdos del Grand Tour*, Apéndice Documental: Documento no. 4, 175-201. The exhibition venues were Centro Cultural Las Claras, Murcia; Centro Cultural El Monte, Seville; and Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid.
- <sup>7</sup> María Dolores Sánchez-Jáuregui Alpañés and Scott Wilcox (eds), *The English Prize: the capture of the Westmorland, an episode of the Grand Tour* (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2012), Appendices: Two Inventories, 311-47.
- <sup>8</sup> For the relevant entries in the two catalogues, see *El Westmorland*, op.cit., 186-89, 195, and Alpañés and Wilcox (eds), *The English Prize*, 319-20, 333-35, 342, 345 respectively.
- <sup>9</sup> See Finnegan, 'The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby', for an account of the various transactions that took place between Jenkins and William, 2nd Earl.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter from Thomas Jenkins to Lord Bessborough, 6th June 1778. I am grateful to Myles Ponsonby, 12th Earl of Bessborough, for permission to quote from this letter from the family papers (file 157, 2nd Earl's Correspondence with Thomas Jenkins) and to the Frances Laslow, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, for arranging the permission.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Alpañés and Wilcox (eds), *The English Prize*, 334.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>14</sup> For the itinerary for this trip, see Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy*, under the entry for Henrietta Frances Duncannon, 318-21.
- <sup>15</sup> Letter from Cavendish Square, dated 5th July 1792. See A. Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough and her Family Circle* (London, 1940) 72.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, Ethel Colburn Mayne, *A Regency Chapter: Lady Bessborough and her friendships*

- (London, 1939) 34.
- <sup>17</sup> See Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 11, note 3. See also John Rosselli, 'Ponsonby, Frederick, Third Earl of Bessborough (1758–1844)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP, Oxford, 2004).
- <sup>18</sup> Stansted House Library, Hampshire, 'Stansted Library – Shelf List A – Bookcase 1-9', compiled by Captain John Cunningham, has the following entry: 'D.A. Lysons, An Historical Account of Those Parishes in the County of Middlesex Which Are Not Described in the Environs of London (London 1800): Various prints & captions enclosed at pp 16 67 73 88 122 148 270 & 274'. Entry no. 2315.
- <sup>19</sup> Ashley George John Ponsonby (1831-98) was the son of Frederick's third son, William Francis Spencer Ponsonby and Lady Barbara Ashley-Cooper. See the Christie's catalogue, *The Valuable and Very Complete Collection of the Engraved Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, which was Formed at the End of the Past and Beginning of the Present Century by Frederic, Earl of Bessborough, and has Remained in the Collector's Family down to the Present Time, the Property of the Hon. Ashley Ponsonby...* (London, 15th March 1897).
- <sup>20</sup> Janet Gleeson, *An Aristocratic Affair: the life of Georgiana's sister, Harriet Spencer – Countess Bessborough* (Bantem Books, London, 2007) 219.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in The Earl of Bessborough with Clive Aslet, *Enchanted Forest: the story of Stansted in Sussex* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1984) 105.
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, William Tighe's *Statistical Observations Relative to County Kilkenny, Made in the Years 1800 & 1801* (London, 1802), 586; J.P. Neale, 'Ireland. Bessborough, Kilkenny; The Seat of Frederick Ponsonby, Earl of Bessborough', *Views of the Seats of Noblemen, in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland* (London, 1819), no page numbers; and *The Delineator, A Series of Splendid Engravings of Remarkable Edifices, Places of Antiquity, and Views of Celebrity, in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, with Authentic Topographical, Antiquarian, and Historical Particulars* (London, 1851) 69.
- <sup>23</sup> J.N. Brewer, *Beauties of Ireland: Being Original Delineations, Topographical, Historical, and Biographical, of Each County*, 2 vols (London, 1825) I, 480-81.
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 98.
- <sup>25</sup> Gleeson, *An Aristocratic Affair*, 279-80.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 280.
- <sup>27</sup> Christie's Archives, London, *A Catalogue of the Well Known Valuable and Truly Capital Collection of Pictures, Forming an Assemblage of the Great and Admired Masters of the Italian, French, Flemish, and Dutch Schools, Formed by the Late Lord Bessborough*, 5th-7th April 1801, and *A Catalogue of the Capital, Well-known and Truly Valuable Collection of Antique Statues, Bustos, Aegyptian, and other Vases, Bas-Reliefs, &c., the Property of A Noble Earl, deceased*, 7th April 1801. For an account of the sale of antiquities, see Finnegan, 'The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby'.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter dated 8th April, 1801, quoted in Gleeson, *An Aristocratic Affair*, 297.
- <sup>29</sup> See W. Roberts, *Memorials of Christie's: a record of art sales from 1766 to 1896*, I (London, 1897) 56-57.
- <sup>30</sup> Third day of the sale, Lot 60, Christie's Archive, 5th-7th February 1801, op.cit., 17.
- <sup>31</sup> He may well have purchased more, but the initials 'Lord B' in the annotated catalogue are sometimes difficult to decipher or to distinguish from the initials of other buyers.
- <sup>32</sup> This picture is further described, in the catalogue, as follows: 'these characters are very expressive and finely contrasted with a boldness in the stile of painting and Colouring, well suited to the subject, this with its companion, which is now in the Collection of the Earl of Chesterfield, were made a present by the King of Spain to the English Admiral, who carried Don Carlos to Naples. N.B. Engraved in Mr. Boydell's Collection'. Christie's Archive, op.cit., 5th-7th February 1801, 21,

- <sup>33</sup> The latter interpretation was suggested by the peer reviewer of this article.
- <sup>34</sup> Thomas U. Sadlier and Page L. Dickinson, *Georgian Mansions in Ireland* (Dublin University Press, 1915) 22. The following family portraits predating 1801 are listed: *Princess Amelia* by C. Phillips, *William, 2nd Earl of Bessborough* by Liotard and Copley, *Frederick, 3rd Earl of Bessborough* by Liotard, and *Henrietta, Countess of Bessborough* by Reynolds and Hoppner.
- <sup>35</sup> Claude Ashley Charles Ponsonby (1859-1935) was the son of Hon. Ashley George John Ponsonby, who sold Frederick's collection of engravings by Sir Joshua Reynolds (see note 19, above).
- <sup>36</sup> Stansted Park, Hampshire, see 'Reminiscences' (no date), 3, a collection of unpublished memoirs about Bessborough House by the 7th, 8th and 9th earls of Bessborough, transcribed by Captain John Cunningham. The words struck out in the text are thus in the original. The catalogue for this sale is entitled *Catalogue of Ancient and Modern Pictures: the Collection of Claude A.C. Ponsonby Esq...* Christie's Archives, London, 28th March 1908.
- <sup>37</sup> Christie's Archives, *ibid.*, Lot 1, engraved by Bartolozzi (the confusion in the identity of the sitter owing, perhaps to the fact that a pair of portraits was in the sale, one of Henrietta and the other of her sister Georgiana); Lot 8; Lot 42, a signed portrait dated 1776, by Gerard van der Gucht; and Lots 18 and 17, another pair of portraits of the two Spencer sisters, the second of which fetched £73.10s. See Lady Victoria Manners and G.C. Williamson, *Angelica Kauffman, RA: her life and her works* (New York, 1924) 127, 181 for further details of the Kauffman portraits and the patronage of this artist by Lord Spencer (Georgina's husband).
- <sup>38</sup> Stansted Park, 'Reminiscences', *op.cit.*, 6-7.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> See Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 39.
- <sup>41</sup> See Mayne, *A Regency Chapter*, 28.
- <sup>42</sup> *Catalogue of Important English and Foreign Silver and Plate including The Property of the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Bessborough ... and The Property of Other Owners* (Sotheby & Co, London, 1969), 40.
- <sup>43</sup> Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, object numbers BK-1969-30-K-A and BK-1969-30-K-B.
- <sup>44</sup> Stansted Park, 'Reminiscences', *op.cit.*, 6.
- <sup>45</sup> Obituary of the Earl of Bessborough, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 176, 1844, 87.
- <sup>46</sup> Sir William Hamilton to the Earl of Bessborough, 24th March 1778, quoted in Alpañés and Wilcox (eds), *The English Prize*, 24.
- <sup>47</sup> Quoted in Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 103, letter dated January or February 1794.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 112, letter dated May, 1795.
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 175, letter from Lady Bessborough, dated 28th September 1808.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 179, letter from Lady Georgiana Spencer, dated 4th November 1808.
- <sup>51</sup> See Gleeson, *An Aristocratic Affair*, 48.
- <sup>52</sup> For example, one of Bessborough House engraved by H. Hobson, and published in Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen*. See Finnegan, 'The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby', 28, pl. 12
- <sup>53</sup> There are none, however, in the collection of the Dukes of Devonshire, and I am grateful to Diane P. Naylor, photo librarian, and Charles Noble, curator (Collections Documentation), Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth, for confirming this.
- <sup>54</sup> It is possible that they are in the Academia de San Fernando or another Spanish institution. I am grateful to Dr Catherine Whistler, acting keeper of the Western Art Department, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for assisting me with my enquiries in trying to locate these works.
- <sup>55</sup> This album, entitled 'Drawings', contains thirty-four landscape views drawn in the summer of 1786 when he toured Hampshire and Derbyshire sketching the great houses and parks of his relatives, including Chatsworth and Welbeck. It is in the British Museum, museum no. 2006, 1130.4.1.1-34.

- <sup>56</sup> This album, entitled 'Sketches in the Bay of Naples & Gulf of Salerno', contains forty-six pages of pen and ink sketches of landscapes, depictions of villages, and architectural drawings of palaces, castles, bridges and gates. It was presented to Dundee Central Library by Frederick's great-great-grandson, Sir Herbert Kinnaird Ogilvy, 12th Bart. of Inverquhar, and I am grateful to Eileen Moran, library and information officer, Local History Centre, Dundee Central Library, for providing me with information on the sketchbook and for transcribing the inscriptions.
- <sup>57</sup> These untitled sketchbooks are in Stansted House Library. The first ('Shelf List A', op.cit., entry no. 2613), relates to travels between 23rd November and 10th December 1835 and 5th February to 27th April 1836, and comprises a variety of architectural drawings and paintings of Paris, ranging from exterior and interior views/details of hotels and ecclesiastical buildings to famous monuments and bridges. The second ('Shelf List A', op.cit., entry no. 2612) relates to his travels from 10th-17th January 1836, and represents coastal scenes and landscapes from along the coast of Marseilles.
- <sup>58</sup> Stansted House Library, 'Shelf List A', entry no. 2614. This untitled sketchbook also contains views from a tour of Warwick in October/November 1816.
- <sup>59</sup> Mayne, *A Regency Chapter*, 227-28.
- <sup>60</sup> It is probable that this was the example engraved by Hobson and published in Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen*. See note 51 above.
- <sup>61</sup> K.D. Reynolds, 'Cavendish, William George Spencer, Sixth Duke of Devonshire (1790-1858)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP, Oxford, 2004; online edition, January 2008).
- <sup>62</sup> This is described in Mayne, *A Regency Chapter*, 229.
- <sup>63</sup> See Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 227-28.
- <sup>64</sup> Mayne, *A Regency Chapter*, 229-30.
- <sup>65</sup> I am grateful to Mary Davies for studying this painting and helping to confirm the identity of this place.
- <sup>66</sup> See John C. Erck, A.M., *The Ecclesiastical Register; Containing the Names of the Prelates, Dignitaries and Parochial Clergy in Ireland ... and Exhibiting the Progress Made in Providing Churches, Glebes, and Glebe-Houses...* (Dublin, 1820) 61.
- <sup>67</sup> See the entry for Kells in Nicholas Carlisle, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1810).
- <sup>68</sup> A view by Paul Sandby, entitled *Castle and Town of Carrick and Abbey of Carrick-beg*, was printed in London, in 1778, by T. Cook, and four years later a detail of the castle, taken from that drawing, was engraved by Richard Purcell.
- <sup>69</sup> The view of Bessborough in Plate 25 is dated 18th September.
- <sup>70</sup> I am grateful to Julian Walton for providing me with information about Sir John Newport.
- <sup>71</sup> The house was burnt in 1932. See M. Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (revised edn. London, 1988) 225.
- <sup>72</sup> See B. de Breffny and R. Ffolliott, *The Houses of Ireland: domestic architecture from the medieval castle to the Edwardian villa* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1975; reprinted 1980) 11.
- <sup>73</sup> See Bence-Jones, *Guide to Irish Country Houses*, 50.
- <sup>74</sup> For details of their two petitions to the 2nd Earl of Bessborough for financial help, see Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen* (Penguin Books, London, 1973) 50-51, 63, respectively.
- <sup>75</sup> The couple produced a second child, George Arundel Stewart, in 1804.