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THE DUBLIN GROUP;

IRISH MEZZOTINT ENGRAVERS IN LONDON, 1750-1775

by David Alexander

This article accompanies an exhibition of the work of the Irish mezzotint engravers at Castletown, June-September 1973.

Cover: Front door of Roundwood, Mountrath, Co. Leix, 60 miles from Dublin on the Limerick Road, property of the Irish Georgian Society, that is open for you to stay in. Write to Mr. Brian Molloy. (Telephone 0502 32120).

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"All the Scrapers", noted the Irishman Doctor Campbell visiting London in 1775, "have been Irish except one; *Earlom! M'ardell* was the first of his time then Fry, now Watson, Fisher Dixon Burke &c".¹ The 'scrapers' to whom Campbell referred were mezzotint engravers, whose work in London was sufficiently dominant between 1750 and 1775 for an Irish group to be recognised, and in later years sometimes called 'the Dublin group'. In recent years Eighteenth century portraiture has been less fashionable than it was and the Irish engravers who reproduced it have largely been forgotten. The material about them here is not new, but it has been put together in the belief that their achievement deserves to be recalled, especially as the beauty of mezzotint as a whole is becoming appreciated once again.

Mezzotint is a tone, as opposed to line process; it is capable of subtle gradation, giving it great interpretative possibilities, and it is particularly suited to portraiture, for which it was used from its earliest days. Briefly, the engraver worked on a roughened, or 'grounded' plate, scraping a smoother surface which would hold less ink where he wished the lights to be. In practice it was seldom so simple as this, and various methods of engraving and etching were often used to assist the process.²

The first century of mezzotint

Mezzotint was developed by a German officer, Ludwig von Siegen, who showed it to Prince Rupert in 1654. Engravers in the Low Countries dominated mezzotint at first, and the earliest engravers in England were predominantly foreigners or amateurs, like Prince Rupert or Francis Place, one of the York 'Virtuosi'. The first important English professional engravers in mezzotint were Isaac Beckett (fl. 1680-88) and John Smith, who were primarily associated with Kneller. Smith, and the equally brilliant George White, had ceased work by 1730, and the leading engraver in the next two decades was John Faber, jun., son of a mezzotint engraver who had come over from The Hague. Faber was an able engraver whose own work continued to develop, but his large output and his preoccupation with the pedestrian portraiture of his time probably explain why he did not produce masterpieces to match those of his predecessors. Chaloner Smith quotes the opinion of Rouquet, a member of the French Academy of Painting who had been long



Johnathan Swift D.D. Dean of St. Patrick's DUBLIN
Bindon del.

Plate 1. Dean Swift, mezzotint engraved by Andrew Miller after Francis Bindon.

resident in England; in his work on the state of the arts published in 1755, he observed that at the close of the half-century, "mezzotinto engraving was very much upon the decline in England". At the time Rouquet's work was published this decline was in fact being reversed by a number of Irish engravers who were arriving from Dublin.

Brooks in Dublin and London

Isolated work in mezzotint had been done in Dublin before 1740, but it was not established there until an Irish line engraver, John Brooks, visited London in that year and learned the technique. His London master was possibly Faber, for whom he published prints after returning to Dublin in 1741. He took several pupils, including James McArdell, Richard Houston, Charles Spooner and Richard Purcell, and in 1742 announced an ambitious scheme for publishing one hundred mezzotint portraits by subscription. Brooks' main assistant was Andrew Miller, a Londoner of Scottish parentage and a former pupil of Faber. Miller's mezzotint of Dean Swift after Bindon published in 1743 as shown in Plate I. It is presumably because he left Brooks to set up on his own that Brooks' project was not completed. As Strickland puts it, "Miller had been the mainstay of Brooks' studio, and it is probable that the brilliant pupils trained there owed far more to him as an instructor than to Brooks. Deprived of Miller's assistance Brooks probably found it difficult to maintain his business, and early in 1746 he left Dublin and established himself as an engraver in the Strand".³

While Miller stayed in Dublin until his death in 1763, Brooks took his ablest pupils, McArdell and Houston, with him to London. But Brooks had other ideas than mezzotint; in 1751 he made a petition from Birmingham for a patent to protect a method of transfer-printing.⁴ He later returned to London and found the backing that led to the establishment of the York House Works in Battersea which produced transfer-printed enamels between 1753 and 1756. Its short life seems in part to have been due to his unreliability; nevertheless his work established something of a fashion for Irish subjects as decoration, and he appears to have been the first to have successfully carried out transfer-printing of this kind.⁵

McArdell and his colleagues

By 1750 McArdell, then about 21, was working on his own and it is his independence which marks the establishment of the Irish engravers in London. His ability was outstanding, and he had the imagination to turn on occasion from contemporary portraiture to the more challenging work of earlier artists such as Rubens and van



Plate 2. James Mc Ardell, mezzotint engraved by Richard Earlom after Mc Ardell.

Dyck (see Plate 3), which gave him a better opportunity to show his virtuosity, especially in reproducing fabrics. But contemporary portraiture was rapidly improving; in 1753 Joshua Reynolds opened his studio, and McArdeU was soon engraving his pictures. In 1754 he made a mezzotint of Reynold's portrait of Lady Charlotte Fitzwilliam which was published by Reynolds himself, presumably as an advertisement of his skills as a portrait painter.⁶

One indication of the success of McArdeU and Houston, also making a name for himself, was the way they began to produce larger plates than their predecessors; another was the way that they attracted more of their Dublin colleagues to London. Spooner appears to have gone there in 1752, and Purcell followed a little later. Neither fulfilled early promise, being undisciplined and given to drink. The same seems to have applied to a lesser degree to Houston, whose work could be quite as good as that of McArdeU, with his best work probably that after Rembrandt. Purcell later fell through debt into the power of Sayer, one of the leading print-sellers, and engraved many plates for him; many of these were copies of other men's work, in particular McArdeU's, and some were under the alias of 'Corbutt'.⁷

More sober and substantial workers were Edward Fisher, born in Dublin in 1722, and James Watson, born in Ireland about 1740. Fisher went to London about 1756 and Watson about 1760; both seem to have spent some time working with McArdeU. Fisher's first identified plate in London was published in 1758, and his talent was soon recognised. His plates are on the whole more powerful than those of Watson, but he produced fewer. Both exhibited at the Society of Artists one of the groups of artists preceding the Royal Academy, Fisher from 1761 and Watson from the following year. While attracting other Irishmen the earlier arrivals kept up their Dublin connexions. McArdeU did commissions for the Dublin print-sellers, for example in 1754 he engraved a pair of plates of Lord and Lady Kildare after Reynolds for Michael Ford, who had probably been a fellow pupil under Brooks.

The revival of mezzotint

By 1762 Horace Walpole could write that "Houston, McArdeU, and Fisher have already promised by their works to revive the beauty of mezzotint".⁸ Walpole, who had had his own portrait by Reynolds engraved by McArdeU, was an enthusiastic collector of mezzotints and employed agents to buy him fine impressions. The particular brand of connoisseurship that the mezzotint requires had developed well before the hey-day of mezzotint collecting between 1880 and 1930.⁹ Writing in 1759 Doctor Johnson gave a non-collector's view of



And. Van Dyck. Sculp. Pinx.

J. M. Ardell. Sculp.

Plate 3. *The Countess of Southampton*, mezzotint engraved by James McARDell after Anthony van Dyck.

print collecting: "The novice is often surprised to see what minute and unimportant discriminations increase or diminish value ... The fate of prints and coins is equally inexplicable. Some prints are treasured up as inestimably valuable, because the impression was made before the plate was finished."¹⁰

In the case of mezzotints the collector's anxiety to secure early impressions was far from being inexplicable; it was important because the freshness of contrast was quickly *lost* as the surface of the copper plate, or burr, became worn in the printing. It is difficult to say how many impressions may have been taken off a plate; it is probably more than often imagined, since the majority of purchasers were not collectors and the practice of reworking plates shows that they were often satisfied with a second-grade *product*.¹¹ We know from the sale catalogues of print-sellers going out of business that they could hold large numbers of individual prints, including impressive numbers of proofs, that is impressions taken from an unfinished or recently finished plate before the descriptive lettering underneath had been added in its final form.

Mezzotints increased in price as the century went on. McArdell small half-lengths usually sold for around two shillings in the fifties; within a few years many of the larger prints were selling at half a guinea for the ordinary print state and proofs were more *expensive*—hence the market for the cheap versions produced by Purcell and Spooner. The best mezzotints catered for the top end of the market; in many houses there were mezzotints, in portfolios or pasted into albums, of people the family knew or *admired*—politicians, actresses and other beauties, military heroes and other celebrities. Oliver Goldsmith wrote to his brother in 1770, "I will shortly send my friends over the Shannon some *mezzotinto* prints of myself and some more of my friends here, such as Burke, Johnson, Reynolds and *Colman*".¹²

In the absence of an illustrated press it was through prints that people came to know both the leading artists and the leading personalities of the day. As the major portrait painter Reynolds was the artist most engraved in mezzotint. He was unchallenged in his ability to present his sitters in the way that they wished to appear to the world, which is what happened *when* they agreed, or arranged, for their portraits to be engraved. It is clear that Reynolds was very conscious of the importance of the engravers to him and he took a personal interest in their work. Other people saw this as well; in his memorandum of 1775 complaining of the exclusion of engravers from membership of the Royal Academy the line engraver Sir Robert Strange was to remark that "I know of no painter the remembrance of



Plate 4. A turbaned Man, mezzotint designed and engraved by Thomas Frye.

whose work will depend more on the art of engraving than that of Sir Joshua Reynolds". Up to 1775 the great majority of mezzotints after Reynolds were engraved by the Irish engravers, which reflects their dominating position. As to the extent to which Reynolds was engraved in mezzotint, in his catalogue of mezzotint portraits Chaloner Smith listed some five hundred after his work, whereas few of his contemporaries approach one hundred. However the importance of Reynolds to the Irish engravers can be exaggerated; McArdell engraved nearly forty of Reynolds's pictures, of which the Lord Rothes is shown as Plate 5, but he engraved another two hundred mezzotints after other artists.¹³

Frye's life-sized heads

Nearly all mezzotint was reproductive, but there was one Irishman of the period who was responsible for original work in mezzotint. This was Thomas Frye, who occupies a position apart from the other engravers. He was not a full-time engraver; he is probably best known for the important part he played in the development of 'bone-china', and was manager of the Bow porcelain works from 1744 to 1759.¹⁴ Born in the Dublin area in 1710, he originally went to England in the 1730's as a painter, and his work was included in the exhibition of Irish Portraits 1660-1860 held in 1969-70. Between 1737-41 he produced a few mezzotints, but it is not clear where he learned the process.

Frye did not engrave any mezzotints during the fifteen years he was at Bow, but by 1759 his health obliged him to retire and he decided to turn his energies to the production of a new type of mezzotint. An advertisement in the London Chronicle for June 3-5 1760 announced his plans for engraving twelve heads, "drawn from Nature and as large as the Life from Designs in the manner of Piazzeta of Rome"; the advertisement made much of their originality in contrast to the work of mere copying.¹⁵ The turbaned man (shown as Plate 4) comes from this series; it gives an idea of Frye's dramatic use of light, which was more explicit in two plates where he introduced a candle. Except for a self-portrait the heads are anonymous and are portrait studies rather than portraits. In 1761-2 Frye produced a second group, of six large heads of ladies; these are also un-named but are more like portraits and possible identifications with various leading society beauties have been hazarded.

Frye engraved over twenty plates in the last three years of his life; this represents an impressive output compared with that of other engravers. He was assisted by his pupil and partner William Pether, who finished at least one of the plates after Frye's death in April 1762.

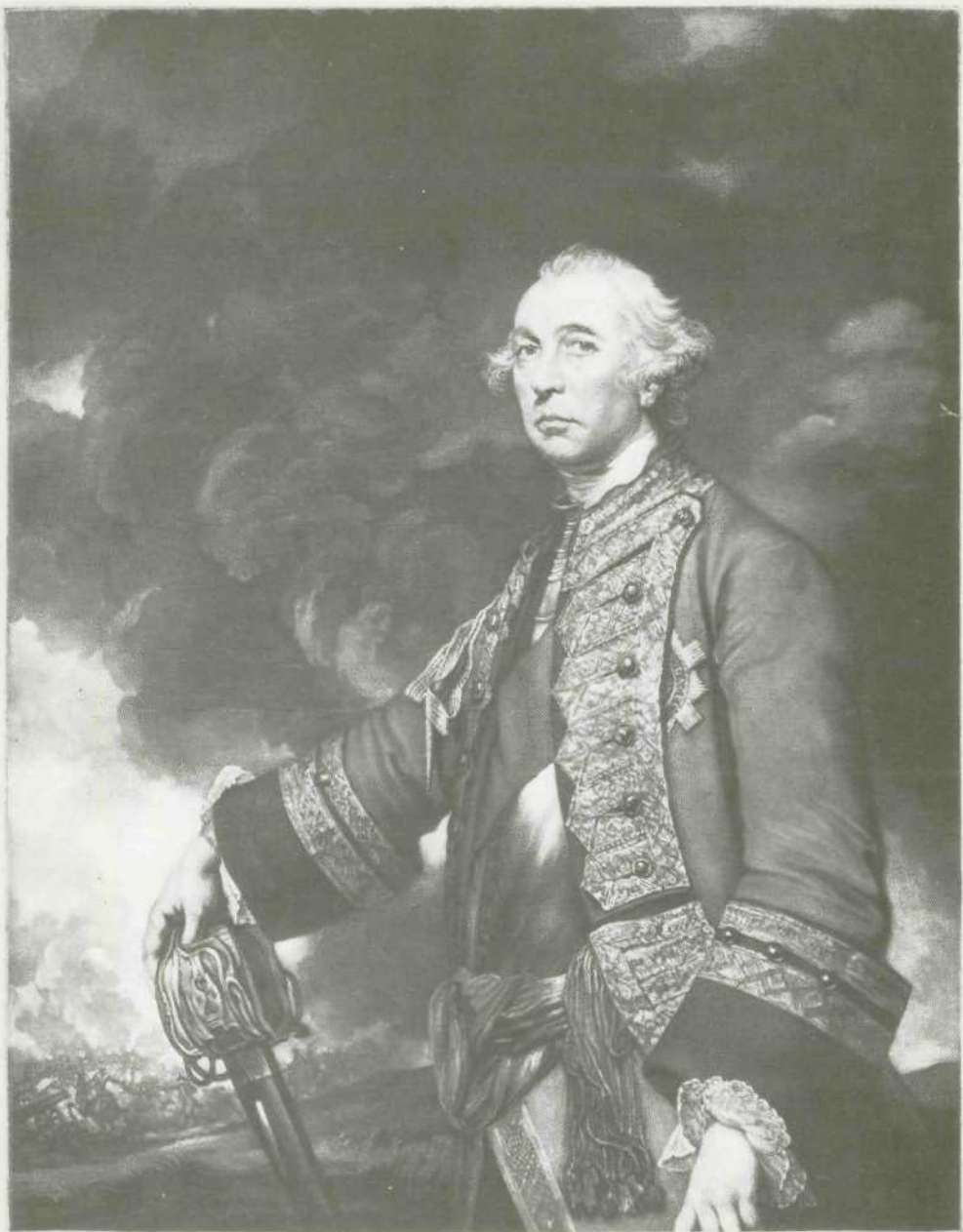


Plate 5. Lord Rolhes, mezzotint engraved by James McArdeU after Joshua Reynolds.



C. Read fecit

R. Houster fecit

R. Houster fecit

Miss Harriet Powell

London: Printed by W. Wood, in Pall-mall, near St. James's Church, in the Strand, 1779.

Plate 6. Harriet Powell, mezzotint engraved by Richard Houston after Catherine Read.

Pether later engraved several of the chiaroscuro groups by Wright of Derby.¹⁶ In his standard work on Wright, Benedict Nicolson has drawn attention to the influence of Frye's heads on Wright, and illustrates them beside his groups to show the similarity of facial attitudes and use of light.¹⁷ It may be that it was Frye's example which encouraged McArdell's not altogether successful production of a few large heads after 1760, for example of Charles of Brunswick and his bride Princess Augusta. Thus Frye had a certain influence as well as success, but most engravers were too busy on reproductive work and too lacking in creative power to follow his example and take the risk of designing as well as executing plates.

McArdell's successors: 1765-1775

In 1765, three years after Frye, McArdell died in his 37th year. His position as the leading mezzotint engraver had been unchallenged; he was, for example, one of the Directors of the Society of Artists, and a highly regarded figure. His own portrait, now in the National Portrait Gallery in London, was painted by Reynolds in the late 1750's. The portrait shown here (Plate 2) is based on a drawing done by McArdell himself in the year of his death, and shows him with scraper in hand engraving van Dyck's 'Time clipping the wings of Love'. It was engraved in 1771 by Richard Earlom, an Englishman, who has been called, without any apparent evidence, a pupil of McArdell.

Both Purcell and Spooner, upon whom McArdell appears to have been a restraining influence, died soon after McArdell, and Spooner's last request was to be buried next to him in Hampstead churchyard. McArdell's early death was a sad blow, mitigated only by the skill of his pupils and surviving colleagues. Reynolds continued to be engraved by the Irishmen, Houston, Fisher, and above all James Watson, who engraved over sixty pictures by Reynolds, of which Lady Spencer and her daughter, engraved between 1761 and 1765, is shown as Plate 7.

The Irish group was enlarged about 1765 by the arrival of James Wilson and John Dixon. Wilson worked in London until 1774, mostly in copying. Dixon was a more important figure; like Watson he received his early training in West's academy, the schools of the Dublin Society. The engraver William Wynne Ryland told Doctor Miller that Dixon's drawing was "better than any other mezzotincto scraper's". He had worked as an engraver in Dublin for about five years, which perhaps explains his immediate success in London. He followed Fisher and Watson in becoming a frequent exhibitor and Fellow of the Society of Artists, and became a Director in 1772.¹⁸ The



Plate 7. *Lady Spencer and her daughter*, mezzotint engraved by James Watson after Joshua Reynolds.



William Duke of Leinster
EARL OF KILDARE and OPHALY,
and BUCKINGHAMSHIRE &c.
(*Marquis of Kildare*)
VISCOUNT LEINSTER, TAPLOW,
(*Baron of Ophaly*)

Plate 8. The Duke of Leinster, mezzotint engraved by James Dixon after Sir Joshua Reynolds.

last mezzotint he sent to the Society, of the Duke of Leinster, is reproduced (Plate 8), partly because of its Irish interest, and partly because it was considered one of his best; Horace Walpole went as far as saying that it was "a masterpiece of art and has never been excelled."¹⁹ The print shows Dixon's exact technique, and his use of dry-point, that is work with a sharp point to produce a line of burr, on the fur and coat in finishing the plate.²⁰ Dixon had at least one pupil, Thomas Burke, who left Ireland aged about 16 in 1765. His name is on a number of mezzotints produced between 1771 and 1775, after which he concentrated upon stipple and the growing demand for prints of fancy subjects.

1775: the end of Irish pre-eminence

Burke marks the end of the line of Irish engravers forming the Dublin group. The year 1775, when Doctor Campbell made his proud observation about all the scrapers but one being Irish, saw the end of their dominance. It was the year of Houston's death, and of Dixon's retirement from full-time work after his marriage to Mrs. Kempe, a rich and handsome widow. Wilson's last dated work was in 1774. This left Watson and Fisher as the only Irishmen at work; neither sent any further prints to the Society of Artists after 1776, and neither produced much after 1780. Other Irishmen continued to be attracted to mezzotint; there was the versatile amateur Captain Baillie (1723-1810), and two engravers who were linked, John Murphy (at work in mezzotint 1778-1809), and George Keating (at work in mezzotint 1784-97), but one can no longer talk in terms of an Irish group of connected engravers working almost exclusively in mezzotint.

A number of talented Englishmen had begun work in the late sixties and the break between them and their Irish predecessors is emphasised by the way that none of them, with the possible exception of Earlom, appear to have been connected with the Irish engravers. After 1775 mezzotint was dominated by English engravers; it was John Raphael Smith, William Dickinson and their compatriots who made the most of the opportunities provided, not simply by the full-length portraiture of Reynold's maturity, but by the development of English painting as a whole. By the 1770's a change was coming over the market for mezzotints as subject pieces became increasingly popular. The engravers who met this demand were above all Earlom, and Valentine Green, who for example engraved nearly thirty subject pieces after Benjamin West, the leading History painter. At the same time many of these later mezzotint engravers worked in other media; the print market was rapidly expanding, and the development of

stipple and of aquatint met the new demands for prints in imitation of drawings and of sketches. 1775 saw therefore not merely the end of the Irish group but a change in the position of mezzotint itself.

Can one attempt an explanation of the period of Irish pre-eminence? Groups of expatriate artists are not uncommon; in a similar way stipple engraving was dominated by the Italians who had established themselves in London. For the Irish group an important factor must have been the technical nature of mezzotint, which made apprenticeship to a skilled master of such importance. As has been shown the link of pupil and master can be traced, and the initial success of McArdell and Houston attracted further talented Irishmen to join them and maintain the Irish domination for a generation. As we look at their work we may be inclined to believe the frequently absurd Anthony Pasquin when he wrote of Ireland that "If our sister-kingdom had produced such great men, in other branches of the fine arts, as she has, in mezzotint engraving, she might say to Italy, I too have been the mother of immortal painters."²¹

* * * * *

The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art has kindly provided a grant for the illustration of this article. The mezzotints shown have been photographed by Jim Kershaw of York and are in the possession of the writer, who would be grateful to hear from anyone who has new information about mezzotint engraving in general.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Doctor Campbell's Diary, ed. James L. Clifford, 1947, p. 59.
- 2 For details of the process and its development see, for example, A. M. Hind, *A History of Engraving and Etching*, (reprinted as a Dover paperback), or the books on mezzotint by C. Davenport and A. Whitman.
- 3 W. G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*; most of the biographical details here are taken from Strickland, or from J. Chaloner Smith, *British Mezzotinto Portraits*, which is the standard catalogue. Smith (1827-95) was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and an Irish railway engineer; he lived in Co. Wicklow.
- 4 See Bernard Watney, *Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle*, Vol. 6 Part 2 (1966).
- 5 See Therle and Bernard Hughes, *English Painted Enamels, 1951*, pp. 49ff. for a disappointingly documented account; this mentions Henry Delamain as Brook's partner until 1754. Delamain was engaged in the manufacture of Dublin Delft 1752-7; see Ada Longfield, *Irish Delft*, I.G.S. Bulletin July-September 1971.
- 6 E. K. Waterhouse, *Reynolds, 1941*, p. 10.
- 7 See the Connoisseur, March 1906, for James Watson's complaints about the copy of his mezzotint of Pine's portrait produced by Spooner in 1764 (both reproduced). The Engraving Copyright Act of 1734 was strengthened by further Acts in 1766 and 1777.
- 8 H. Walpole, *Vertue's Catalogue of Engravers, 1786 ed.*, p. 245.
- 9 The period of greatest interest was between the publication of Chaloner Smith, 1878-83, and the volume of additions and corrections by C. E. Russell, *British Mezzotint Portraits and their states, 1926*.
- 10 The Idler, Number 56, May 21st 1759.
- 11 For example, McARDell's plates fell into the hands of Sayer after his death; 117 prints by McARDell are listed in Sayer and Bennett's *Catalogue for 1775* (reprinted by Holland Press 1970).
- 12 Quoted in Malcolm C. Salaman, *Old English Mezzotints, 1910*, p. 32.
- 13 G. Goodwin, *James McARDell, 1903*, list subject plates as well as portraits.
- 14 Accounts of Frye's work are given in standard works on porcelain; see also the catalogue of the exhibition 'Bow Porcelain 1744-76', held to commemorate the bi-centenary of Frye's retirement, British Museum 1959. Michael Wynne's article in the *Burlington Magazine*, February 1972, discusses his work as an artist.
- 15 Quoted in full in Therle Hughes, *Prints for the Collector, 1970*, p. 120.
- 16 See Charles E. Buckley, *Wright of Derby in Mezzotint, Antiques, 72*, pp. 440-2 (November 1957).
- 17 Benedict Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby, 1968*.
- 18 Algernon Graves, *The Society of Artists and the Free Society, 1907* (reprinted by Kingsmead 1969).
- 19 Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting, Dallaways ed. Vol III*, p. 936, quoted by Strickland.
- 20 Hind, *op. cit.* p. 274.
- 21 *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Ireland, 1796*.

THE IRISH ENGRAVERS IN CONTEXT:

AN OUTLINE OF MEZZOTINT ENGRAVING IN ENGLAND 1730-1780

(The first entry of each Irish engraver is made in *italics*. The figures in square brackets are the approximate number of plates attributed to each engraver by Chaloner Smith, who excluded most subject pieces.)

Predecessors: Mezzotint was developed in mid-17th century. The ablest engravers in the early 18th century were George White (fl. 1714-32)[60], and John Smith (fl.c. 1685-1730)[290].

- 1730 John Faber, jr. (fl.1712-56)[500] the principal engraver.
- 1740 *John Brooks*, [34], a Dublin line engraver, visited London and probably worked under Faber.
- 1746 Brooks left Dublin for London with pupils *James McArdell*(fl.1747-65)[200] and *Richard Houston* (fl.1747-75)[160]; both set up on their own shortly afterwards.
- 1750 Period of Irish pre-eminence began; other pupils of Brooks went to London, *Charles Spooner* (d. 1767)[43] about 1752, and *Richard Purcell* (d. 1765)[90] about 1755, both minor figures.
- c. 1753 McArdell engraved first plate after Reynolds, whose work was primarily engraved by Irish mezzotint engravers until 1775.
- c.1756 *Edward Fisher* (1722-c. 1785)[74] left Dublin for London.
- c.1760 *James Watson* (c. 1739-1790)[170] left Dublin for London; both probably worked initially under McArdell.
- 1760-2 *Thomas Frye* (1710-62)[25] produced two series of life-sized heads after his own designs; assisted by William Pether, (1731 -post 1800)[50].
- 1765 Death of McArdell.
- c.1765 *James Wilson* (fl. to 1774)[26], a minor figure, and *John Dixon* (c.1740-1811)[38], last important Irish engraver to go to London, both left Dublin.
- 1766 During the late 1760's increasing numbers of English engravers began work, including Valentine Green (fl. 1766-post 1800)[165], Richard Earlom (fl.1767-post 1800)[55], William Dickinson (fl. 1767-post 1800)[95], J. R. Smith (fl.1769-post 1800)[200], and Thomas Watson (fl.1770-81)[45].
- 1774 Dickinson and J. R. Smith engraved their first plates after Reynolds.
- 1775 End of period of Irish pre-eminence; death of Houston, retirement of Dixon, *Thomas Burke* (1749-1815)[7] gave up mezzotint.
- 1780 James Watson and Fisher virtually ceased work; over 20 mezzotint engravers of note at work.

Successors: The English engravers were reinforced by such able workers as John Dean (fl.1776-89)[28], John Jones (fl. 1780-97)[87] and William Ward (fl.1786-1826)[105]. Isolated work by Irishmen *George Keating* (fl.1784-97)[11] and *John Murphy* (fl.1778-1809)[20]. Later engravers, Charles Turner (1774-1857), S. W. Reynolds (1773-1835), and Samuel Cousins (1801-87) saw the introduction of steel plates and the increasing use of mixed methods.

LIST OF THE MEZZOTINTS EXHIBITED AT CASTLETOWN

Full particulars are attached to each print.

Predecessors of the Irish Engravers

Wallerant Vaillant (1623-1677)

- 1 Van Dyck with the Compasses, self-portrait (W 35).
- Abraham Blooteling (c. 1640-90)
- 2 Charles, Earl of Derby (W 13), probably engraved 1673-6.
- Francis Place (1647-1728)
- 3 John Moyser, of Beverley, after Place (CS 9).
- Isaac Beckett (1653-1719)
- 4 Adrian Beverland, after Du Bois (CS 6), probably 1681-88.
- John Smith (1652-1742)
- 5 William Wissing, self-portrait (CS 278), 1687.
- George White (c. 1671-1732)
- 6 William Dobson, self-portrait (CS 16).
- John Faber, jun. (c. 1695-1756)
- 7 Henry Gale, after J. Whood (CS 151), 1742 or after.
- Andrew Miller (fl. 1738-63)
- 8 Dean Swift, after Francis Bindon (CS 53), 1743 Dublin. PLATE 1.

The Irish Engravers in London

James McArdell (c. 1728-1765)

- 9 John Pine, after Hogarth (CS 143), 1755-7.
- 10 The Countess of Southampton, after van Dyck (CS 168), 1758. PLATE 3.
- 11 Lords John and Bernard Stuart, after van Dyck (CS 174).
- 12 Rubens and his family, after Rubens (CS 159).
- 13 Lord Rothes, after Reynolds (CS 157), 1763. PLATE 5.
- 14 Charles, Prince of Brunswick, after Ziesenis (CS 32), 1764.
- Richard Houston (1722-1775)
- 15 Man with a knife, after Rembrandt (CS 146), 1757.
- 16 Charles, 2nd Duke of Marlborough, after Reynolds (CS 77).
- 17 Harriet Powell, after Catherine Read (CS 99), 1769. PLATE 6.
- 18 Harriet Powell, after Reynolds (CS 100), 1771.
- 19 William Chambers, after Cotes (CS 20), 1772.
- Thomas Frye (1710-1762)
- 20 Young man with opened book by candlelight, from first series of 1760 (CS 11).
- 21 Turbaned man, 1760 (CS 13). PLATE 4.
- 22 Fashionable lady with pearl necklace and headdress, from second series (CS 25), 1762.
- Charles Spooner (d. 1767)
- 23 George III, after Frye (CS 16).
- Richard Purcell (d. 1766)
- 24 Mrs. Chambers, after Reynolds (CS 14).
- Edward Fisher (1722-c. 1785)
- 25 Nathaniel Hone, self-portrait (CS 30).
- 26 Paul Sandby, after Cotes (CS 55), 1763.
- 27 Hugh, Earl of Northumberland, after Reynolds (CS 48), 1763-5.
- 28 Master Seymour Conway, after Reynolds (CS 10), 1771.
- 29 Hope Nursing Love, after Reynolds (CS 63), 1771.

James Watson (c. 1739-1790)

30 Lady Spencer and daughter, after Reynolds (CS 132), between 1761 and 1765.
PLATE 7.

31 Lady Stanhope, after Reynolds (CS 135), 1767.

32 James Paine and son, after Reynolds (CS 111), 1767.

33 The Marquess of Granby, after Reynolds (CS 64), between 1766 and 1769.

34 The Duchess of Marlborough and daughter, after Reynolds (CS 99), 1768.

35 Mrs. Abington as the Comic Muse, after Reynolds (CS 1), 1769.

36 Samuel Johnson, after Reynolds (CS 82), 1770.

37 Miss Moore, after Falconet (CS 104), 1772.

38 John Hely-Hutchinson, after Reynolds (CS 79), 1778.

James Wilson (fl. 1764-1774)

39 Elizabeth, Countess of Ancrum, after Reynolds (CS 3).

John Dixon (c. 1740-1811)

40 Henry, 10th Earl of Pembroke, after Reynolds (CS 28), 1769.

41 Lady Pembroke and son, after Reynolds (CS 27), 1771.

42 Henry, 3rd Duke of Buccleugh, after Gainsborough (CS 9), 1771.

43 William, 2nd Duke of Leinster, after Reynolds (CS 22), 1775. PLATE 8.

Thomas Burke (1749-1815)

44 Hector's Tomb, after Angelica Kauffman, 1771.

Contemporaries and Successors of the Irish Engravers

J. G. Haid (1710-1776)

45 Samuel Foote in the Mayor of Garratt, after Zoffany (CS 2), 1765.

William Pether (c. 1738-1821)

46 Fiamingo, after Le Brun (CS 12).

Valentine Green (1739-1813)

47 A Philosopher showing an experiment on the airpump, after Wright of Derby (CS 163), 1769.

48 Sir William Chambers, after Reynolds (CS 21), 1780.

Thomas Watson (1743-1781)

49 Henry, Lord Apsley and brother, after Dance (CS 1), 1776.

Richard Earlom (1742-1822)

50 James McArdell, self-portrait (CS 28), 1771. PLATE 2.

51 Concert of the Birds, after Mario da'Fiori, 1778.

William Dickinson (1746-1823)

52 Sir John Fielding, after Peters (CS 20), 1778.

John Jones (c. 1745-1797)

53 Edmund Burke, after Romney (CS 11), 1790.

John Raphael Smith (1752-1812)

54 Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh, after Reynolds (CS 142), 1775.

55 Colonel Tarleton, after Reynolds (CS 161), 1782.

56 Lord Tyrawley, after Cuming (CS 165), 1802, Dublin.

Gainsborough Dupont (c. 1755-1797)

57 Colonel St. Leger, after Gainsborough (CS 10), 1783.

George Keating (fl. 1784-1797)

58 Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and daughter, after Reynolds (CS 3), 1787.

John Young (1755-1825)

59 Lady Charlotte Greville, after Hoppner (CS 29), 1796.

John Murphy (c. 1748-post 1820)

60 A Tigress, after Stubbs, 1798.

Plate 1. Dean Swift, mezzotint engraved by Andrew Miller after Francis Bindon.

Miller, a London trained engraver, came to Dublin about 1741. Initially he worked for John Brooks, but set up on his own about 1744, after which Brooks went to London with his ablest pupils. This mezzotint was published in Dublin in 1743 after the portrait painted in 1739; the scroll refers to the extension, in which Swift played a part, of Queen Anne's Bounty to Ireland. The west door of St. Patrick's is seen in the background.

Plate 2. James McArdell, mezzotint engraved by Richard Earlom after McArdell.

McArdell was one of Brooks' pupils who left Dublin for London in about 1747, and with his Irish colleagues gave new life to mezzotint engraving. This self-portrait appears to have been slightly adapted to show him with scraper in hand at work on the plate 'Time clipping the Wings of Cupid' after van Dyck. It was engraved in 1771, six years after McArdell's death, by Richard Earlom, one of the most versatile of the English engravers who came into their own after the pre-eminence of the Irish engravers ended about 1775.

Plate 3. The Countess of Southampton, mezzotint engraved by James McArdell after Anthony van Dyck.

Lady Southampton (1603-1640) was daughter of the Huguenot nobleman Daniel de Massue and wife of the 4th Earl of Southampton, much of whose property descended to the Dukes of Bedford. The picture, dated 1636, was engraved by McArdell in 1758, and the mezzotint is a good example of the engraver's skill, particularly in his treatment of fabrics; it reminds us that he was not dependent upon contemporary painters for his success.

Plate 4. A turbaned Man, mezzotint designed and engraved by Thomas Frye

This mezzotint was published in 1760 as one of the first of two groups of 'lifesized' heads engraved by the Irish artist Thomas Frye after he retired as manager of the Bow porcelain works. It measures 490 × 355 mm. and is the largest of the prints illustrated here. Frye's work represented an attempt to use mezzotint as a medium for original work rather than reproduction. His plates had a certain influence, particularly through their chiaroscuro effects, but few engravers had sufficient creative power to follow his example.

Plate 5. Lord Rothes, mezzotint engraved by James McArdell after Joshua Reynolds.

This is a good example of McArdell's work at the height of his powers. Reynolds painted the portrait in 1763, and McArdell exhibited a copy of the mezzotint at the Society of Artists in the same year. By this time the majority of Reynolds' pictures were being engraved by Irish engravers, 37 of them by McArdell when he died two years later. John Leslie, 10th Earl of Rothes (c. 1698-1767), became commander-in-chief of the forces in Ireland in 1754; he was present at the battle of Dettingen, to which the battle scene may refer.

Plate 6. Harriet Powell, mezzotint engraved by Richard Houston after Catherine Read.

Richard Houston went to London at the same time as McArdell and was in some ways as equally talented; this is one of his later productions, published in 1769. Popular actresses and beauties were frequently engraved in mezzotint; Harriet Powell (d. 1779), said to be the daughter of an apothecary, was an actress and singer who married Lord Fortrose, created Earl of Seaforth in 1771.

Plate 7. Lady Spencer and her daughter, mezzotint engraved by James Watson after Joshua Reynolds.

James Watson left Ireland in about 1760 and may have been a pupil of McArdell's in London. He was the most prolific of the younger members of the Dublin group and engraved over sixty of Reynolds' pictures, this one between 1761 and 1765. Professor Waterhouse has called the picture 'one of the great masterpieces of English portraiture'. Lady Spencer's daughter Georgiana was to become famous as Duchess of Devonshire. The impression illustrated is, like Plate 5, an unlettered proof; mezzotint proofs and early impressions were sought after as the technique of mezzotint meant that the depth of contrast was soon lost.

Plate 8. The Duke of Leinster, mezzotint engraved by James Dixon after Sir Joshua Reynolds.

This print, particularly admired by Horace Walpole, was the work of John Dixon, who left Dublin for London about 1765. Dixon's talent was not fully realised as he gave up full-time engraving on his marriage to a rich widow shortly after this print was published in 1775; with the death of Houston in the same year the Dublin group ceased to exist. William, 2nd Duke of Leinster (1749-1804), is remembered for his opposition to the Act of Union. Reynolds' portrait of him as a young man was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1775.



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