



Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin

THIS, THE TENTH VOLUME OF *IRISH ARCHITECTURAL AND DECORATIVE STUDIES*, IS dedicated to Desmond FitzGerald for his 70th birthday. The launch of Volume X rather pleasingly falls in early 2008, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Irish Georgian Society by Desmond and Mariga Guinness.

Desmond FitzGerald, the 29th Knight of Glin, is a scholar of international repute. He studied in Canada and at Harvard, and worked for eleven years at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, before returning to Ireland. Desmond is married to Olda FitzGerald, and has three daughters, Catherine, Nesta and Honor. He farms at Glin Castle, which he has restored to its former splendour and which houses his collections of Irish paintings, furniture and the decorative arts. The Knight serves as a governor of the National Gallery of Ireland, and sits on the boards of the Irish Architectural Archive, the Irish Landmark Trust, Irish Heritage Properties and the Castletown Foundation. He is passionate about the history, and future, of Irish country houses, parks and gardens, and has been one of the instigators of the new Irish Heritage Trust. Desmond acted for many years as Christie's representative in Ireland, and has been involved in the Irish Georgian Society from its earliest days, now serving as its president. Among many other accolades, he was awarded a Doctorate of Letters by Trinity College, Dublin, to whom, with Prof Anne Crookshank, he donated an important archive of photographs on Irish art. More recently he was honoured as a 'Hero of Conservation' by the Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust.

Here, however, it is specifically the Knight's contribution to Irish scholarship that is celebrated, the depth and breath of which is manifest in the bibliography of his publications which is listed here for the first time. Desmond's researches have been pioneering, his writing always fresh and lively. Pioneers in scholarly research inevitably run the risk of their publications becoming outdated by subsequent findings. Hardly ever has this been the case with the Knight, and on the rare occasion that it has, he has been the first to admit 'we got that wrong!' The arguments in almost all of his publications have stood the test of time. It is quite simply impossi-

ble to even begin the study of Irish painting without engaging with the several volumes he has co-authored with Prof Crookshank. This applies equally to his architectural researches. To quote from a re-evaluation by John Logan of the architect Davis Dukart, published elsewhere in this volume:

What is now known of Dukart owes much to two pioneering 1967 articles by Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin. He proposed a basic chronology, a seminal set of attributions and an assessment of Dukart's achievement, particularly as an architect of country houses in a distinctive, late Palladian manner. Subsequent studies have added detail and proposed further attributions (and de-attributions), but the general chronology of Dukart's career and FitzGerald's assessment of his significance remains largely unaltered.

The impact that his scholarship has made is, however, far greater than a list of works, no matter how impressive, can convey. The Knight has been a seminal figure in the scholarship of our art, architecture, landscape and material culture. He has inspired and encouraged research in a wide variety of areas, and many of the subsequent generations of scholars have taken his writings as the starting point for their own. Time and again, young, and not so young, scholars cite his work as the standard, often the only, source on a given topic of eighteenth-century Ireland. Closely related to this is the Knight's generosity with his scholarship, again a point that does not come across in a simple list of publications. He always takes time from his busy schedule to answer the many detailed enquiries he receives, be it from students or distinguished overseas professors. He is a tireless lecturer, here and in America, promoting Irish scholarship and learning at every opportunity. By this, as much as by his own writings, he has directly moulded the remarkable vitality of scholarship that currently exists in the study of the Irish visual arts.

Far from being a summation of the Knight's scholarship, the bibliography that follows is very much a work in progress. Desmond is as busy as ever in pursuing his scholarly goals. In the last year or so, in addition to the magnum opus on Irish furniture, he has written on the neglected artist Michael Ford, whose only surviving portrait he identified, and on the shameful neglect of Vernon Mount in Cork. He is currently hard at work co-ordinating a volume on the village and castle of Glin.

As usual, things can rarely be put better than by Prof Roy Foster. At the launch of *Painting Ireland* he paid tribute to the Knight:

He isn't a professor, though if he had stayed at Harvard he would no doubt have become one. However, he would probably have published much less and much less excitingly, and we would not be in such great debt to him as we are. Desmond FitzGerald would not have been contained by a university

department. By following his own furrow, he has contributed an enormous amount to Irish scholarship.

It is hoped that the essays in this volume dedicated to him, touching on many of his own favourite subjects, will serve as a suitable testimony to his remarkable achievements. All those involved in the study of Ireland's past hope that many further publications will flow from his pen.

— WL

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