

## THE HARP & THE CROWN GEORGIAN DUBLIN & ITS HINTERLAND

SUNDAY 8 – FRIDAY 13 MAY 2022 (6 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£2070

- Introduction to Ireland's troubled history
- Medieval & Georgian Dublin explored
- Wonderful Georgian houses to include Russborough & Castletown
- Day visit to Kilkenny, Ireland's finest medieval city
- Spring gardens to include Jimi Blake's Hunting Brook & June Blake's Tinode
- Visit based at historic Barberstown Castle



The Custom House, Dublin, 1799, from the engraving

### OVERVIEW

Ireland has a wealth of great houses and public buildings of international stature, many of which have remained largely unknown to all but the specialist historian and enthusiast. These date from the Medieval to the Victorian periods. Undoubtedly, many of the finest are of the Georgian era, when Ireland enjoyed a period of unprecedented, though temporary, peace and prosperity.

Our visit will introduce you to these buildings, their architects and owners, their outstanding collections of pictures, furniture and decorative arts and their surrounding landscapes and gardens. This will be done through a series of visits in and around Dublin, one of the great European cities of the eighteenth century where you will be taken on several gently paced walks. Time will also be spent in the picturesque Irish countryside when we visit some of Ireland's greatest country houses including Castletown House and the magical Russborough, which we shall see under special 'connoisseur' viewing conditions. There will also be a day visit to Kilkenny, the best preserved of Ireland's medieval towns with its famous Cathedral and Castle and 'country Georgian' town houses.

We stay at Barberstown Castle, a *very* good four-star country house hotel. The original castle, a defensive tower, was extended several times to create the elegant house of today. It is set amidst quiet countryside, a short drive from Dublin. There will be a free evening on the third day, with transfers into and out from Dublin for those who might like to meet up with friends or attend the theatre.

### ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Sunday 8 May – We fly from Heathrow to **Dublin**, arriving at mid-day and travel by coach directly into the city centre where there will be time for a snack lunch, not included. An afternoon **Introductory Coach Tour** will reveal the historic evolution of the city, beginning with its Viking and Medieval origins. We then explore Dublin's great period of architectural splendour during the Georgian era as we chart the construction of fine public buildings such as the **Parliament House** and the **Customs House** not to mention its renowned terraces and squares of large town houses. We continue to **Barberstown Castle**, where we stay for five nights. We have our first dinner in the hotel - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

**Day 2:** Monday 9 May – We drive into Dublin and visit **The National Museum of Ireland**. It has an unrivalled collection of material related to the early history of Ireland: magnificent metalwork from the Bronze, Iron and Early Christian periods, including such pieces as the Ardagh Chalice and the Tara Broach. After a pause for coffee, we visit the medieval **St Patrick's Cathedral**, the 'Westminster Abbey' of Ireland, with a fine array of monuments, including Jonathan Swift's, its Dean for many years. After some free time for lunch, not included, we spend the afternoon at **Trinity College**, founded by Elizabeth I in 1592. It has a wonderful array of buildings, and we visit the Long Library in order to see the famous **Book of Kells**, now the centrepiece of an exhibition devoted to the introduction of Christianity to Ireland. We return to our hotel and there will be a group dinner this evening.

**Day 3:** Tuesday 10 May – This morning we return to Dublin to continue our exploration of the city’s Georgian heritage. We visit **Newman House**, two adjacent houses with historic interiors which chart the development of classical architecture in the city. These feature remarkable figurative stucco plasterwork, introduced by a family of three Swiss-Italians, the Lafranchini brothers, further developed by local craftsmen. There will be an extended free period for private exploration and lunch is not included. We return to Co. Kildare to visit Ireland’s most important Palladian mansion, **Castletown House**. Built in the early Georgian period for ‘Speaker’ William Conolly, it was completed internally by his great-nephew, Tom and his English wife, Lady Louisa, daughter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke and Duchess of Richmond. It contains a spectacular series of staterooms displaying most of the major styles of the eighteenth century. We return to the hotel and a free evening and dinner is not included. There will be a transfer into and back from Dublin tonight.

**Day 4:** Wednesday 11 May – This morning we visit glorious **Russborough**, where we have a ‘connoisseur’s’ private tour of the house. Russborough contains the finest art collection in Ireland, bringing together many of the original ‘Grand Tour’ treasures purchased by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earls of Milltown and the renowned Beit collection which is particularly rich in Old Master paintings of the Dutch, French and English schools. It also has a superlative decorative arts collection and if that were not enough, the house sits in a landscape which Claude might have designed – heaven on earth. We lunch at Russborough after which we drive a few miles to visit two of Ireland’s best contemporary gardens: **Hunting Brook** is deservedly famous, created in recent years by Jimi Blake. It is an extraordinarily rich and multi-layered experience with swashbuckling cultivars and zingy colours in informal beds creating great richness of form and texture from spring to autumn. In contrast, the nearby woodland glade is an oasis of meditative calm. After tea we continue down the hill to **Tinode**, to visit June Blake, Jimi’s equally talented sister, where her garden is set out amidst winding bark paths with stands of mature beech trees all about. June grows and trials perennials, shade loving plants and ornamental grasses with incredible flair – her annual display of spring bulbs is renowned. We return to the hotel and our group dinner.

**Day 5:** Thursday 12 May – **Kilkenny** was originally an early Christian settlement on the banks of the River Nore, and later the first major inland Norman settlement in Ireland, for centuries held by the Butler family, successively Earls, Dukes and Marquesses of Ormonde. Dominating hilly ground at opposite ends of this ‘marble’ city, its Christian heritage is represented by **St Canice’s Cathedral**, its Norman by the Butler family’s magnificently sited **Castle**, both of which we shall visit. In between, we shall discover a fine Tudor mansion, **Rothe House**, some hidden Georgian gems and other relics of its turbulent history. Lunch is not included today and when we return to Barberstown we have our final group dinner later that evening.

**Day 6:** Friday 13 May – Our last morning will be spent at the recently restored and rehung National Gallery of Ireland. Indeed, here is a collection that truly ‘punches above its weight’! All the major European schools are well represented and there are masterpieces by Caravaggio, Vermeer, the Dutch landscape school, Velazquez, and a magnificent selection of both British and Irish pictures from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We then have some free time for a final lunch in Dublin, not included, after which we drive out to visit the most unusual building we shall see, **The Casino at Marino**. This is not a gambling den but a witty piece of architectural *trompe l’oeil*, designed by Sir William Chambers for his great Irish patron, James Caulfield, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Charlemont, in the new Neo-classical style then sweeping Europe. We continue to nearby Dublin Airport for our early evening return flight to Heathrow.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £2070                      **Deposit** £295                      **Price without flights** £1895

**Single Supplement** £225 (Double for Sole Use)

**Hotel** 5 nights with breakfast at the 4\* Barberstown Castle

**Flights** British Airways

Outward: **BA834** Departs London Heathrow **1035** (Terminal 2) arrive Dublin **1210**

Return: **BA823** Departs Dublin **1840** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **2010**

**Price includes** 4 dinners & 2 lunches with water, wine & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, the services of Tom Duncan

**Not included** Travel to/from Heathrow, 1 dinner & 4 lunches



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