



THE
HELL
FIRE
CLUB

Sympathy for the Devil

Situated on an island in the middle of Askeaton, the remains of a Hellfire Club can be seen. Established in the 1700s throughout Britain and Ireland, most Hellfire Clubs were soon outlawed and shut down. The Askeaton club, founded in 1738 and the most westerly branch of the organisation, probably stayed in existence until the end of the century and received visitors from near and far. Known as a satirical gentleman's club for the aristocracy, those who met there considered it a way of shocking the outside world. Although members did not apparently worship demons or the Devil, they often called themselves devils. Ceremonial feasts took place, all washed down with alcoholic punch. While lurid tales are often recounted in local folklore of other outrageous rituals enacted, much is unknown about the nature of the Askeaton Hellfire Club. The club building is now inaccessible to the public as the Office of Public Works, the Irish government's heritage service, tries to stabilise the building from continued collapse.

How might this legacy be further interpreted? Artists Stephen Brandes, Diana Copperwhite, Tom Fitzgerald, Sean Lynch and Louise Manifold were commissioned by Askeaton Contemporary Arts to react to the Hellfire Club's presence. After a series of site visits to the town last winter and spring, their inquisitive approaches led to new artworks located throughout Askeaton, each engaging with a relic of history still prominent as a crumbling ruin in the day-to day existence of the town. This publication features documentation of each realised commission.

A variety of contextual material is also featured in these pages, investigating what non-conformist allusions of a secret society of the 1700s might mean today. Small fragments of evidence remain of the Hellfire Club's activities in Askeaton. Most prominent is a painting by James Worsdale from 1738, today in the National Gallery of Ireland, featuring a group of local club members drinking, smoking and in conversation. Bottles of wine sit on a rack in the foreground, along with a large bowl of punch on their table. Worsdale, a founding member of the Dublin Hellfire, appears on the far left of the painting, trying to get the attention of Celinda Blennerhassett, the only woman depicted in the painting and a member of the Kerry aristocracy.

While the unruly revelry that might have subsequently occurred in such a scene is mainly undocumented, featured in these pages is a short passage from David Ryan’s new book *Blasphemers & Blackguards The Irish Hellfire Clubs*, detailing local folklore and rumours uncovered during his research. John Moone, the foreman involved in the preservation and restoration of the club building explains his day-to-day work onsite. Pádraic E. Moore composes a letter set in the 1920s, a fictionalised account of an individual subscribing to another secret society based in Askeaton, one as ritualistic and mysterious as the histories Ryan and Moone spend their time trying to uncover.

An article, reprinted from 1968’s *Hibernia* newspaper details an unrealised proposal by artist and critic Brian O’Doherty to enact a piece of land art upon another Hellfire Club in the Dublin mountains. His idea saw the word ‘one’, rendered in the medieval Irish language of Ogham. It would look down at Dublin, a city then dominated by the staunch Catholicism of archbishop John Charles McQuaid. This text, juxtaposing O’Doherty’s New York encounters with art critic Mario Amaya (who along with Andy Warhol was shot by radical feminist Valerie Solanas) and thoughts of novelist Philip Roth, reveals O’Doherty’s Hellfire as a working method, an unsure starting point that might yield unexpected results. In recent correspondence during the assembly of this publication, O’Doherty wrote that he considered “the scandalous history of the Hellfire Club as a good canvas”.

The viewpoints presented here are suggestive of the multiple resonances and echoes that exist in any history. In this regard, a ruin in a small Irish town and the diverse complexities and outlooks around it become a touchstone for re-activation and re-engagement. I would like to thank all involved for their enthusiasm and ambition in shaping this project and the possibilities it offers.

Michele Horrigan





Stone Rich



The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the day-to-day running of Ireland’s national monuments and historic properties. Within the organisation a heritage service focuses on the maintenance and preservation of buildings in state care, and have recently been involved with a series of conservation projects on ruined castles throughout County Limerick. As part of this scheme, a group of workmen are based on the island complex where the Hellfire Club is sited in Askeaton. Developing appropriate methodologies to preserve over eight hundred years of history onsite, they work with a long-term intention of making the building, along with the nearby castle and banqueting hall publically accessible once again. Michele Horrigan conducted the following interview with site foreman John Moone in May 2012.

What is your official job title with the OPW?

I’m Foreman Grade Two. My responsibilities include the everyday running of the site, organising the work for scaffolders, carpenters, stonemasons, or whoever’s here at any given time. I visit quarries, sourcing particular types of stone, sand and gravel to match the buildings here.

How did you initially get involved?

I was fourteen when I went to England and trained as a bricklayer. I had an apprentice working with me who applied for a job with the OPW as a stonemason. He got the job, left London and came back to Ireland. Four years later I returned to Ireland and decided to call and see how he was doing. When I got there he wasn’t present, but the foreman asked my name so that he could relate it on. When I told him my name, he said, “Have you got a relation called Joseph Moone?” I said “I have, we call him Joe for short”. He said, “I have a sister-in-law always enquiring about this Joseph Moone”. “Ah”, I said, “He used to play in a band”. It turned out she was a fan of his music.

He asked was I enquiring about getting work. He said, “You should apply for the job, it’s good work and I’m sure you’ll enjoy it”. I said, “I might”. He said, “Don’t might, I have an application form here, fill that out and see how you get on”. That was in 1997, and here I am today. I have three years to go and I’ll be retiring then.

You’ll miss it then?

I’ll miss the banter with the boys, I know that, but I have other interests as well - I like to do a bit of stone carving.

How long have you been on site in Askeaton?

About four years. Today we have ten people on site; four masons, including myself, four general operators and two scaffolders. Emergency jobs in other places come up that we have to get men onto, so this will slow down progress here. It can be a bit annoying at times because you plan your work ahead and then an emergency comes up. Last year in Broadford we had to take down the gable of a church and rebuild it because it was in danger of collapse. But we’re now back in Askeaton. We will stay here unless another emergency comes up.

How long do you think you’ll be here for?

We’ve scheduled ten years but with breaks in-between that could stretch it out to fifteen. If we discover any particular details in a wall, we have to stop, inform the conservation architect and wait for him to call onsite. And he’s not available every ten minutes, he’s a busy man. When he comes we get the go-ahead to do whatever work is then necessary. In the meantime we try and keep another section of the job going.

This year, the Hellfire Club is the priority but we’re waiting to get information from a structural engineer. The building is in danger of collapse, not immediately but in the near future.

When looking at the building, now without a roof, one can see large gaps where bay windows, once facing east and west, have both collapsed.

They were prominent features. The windows were very big but structurally were not well built. Placing an arch on top of a circular bay means you lose the purpose of the arch. An arch will take direct weight from above but when it’s a circular bay this pressure is then moving outwards, that’s why the two bays collapsed. We don’t think the builders understood the stresses for that form of structure at the time. To now repair or replace it we have to put other ideas into action... we will have to put reinforcements in there somewhere. It can be done, we can do it. Also, many walls are a random rubble stonework that has lost its’ strength now. A lot will have to be replaced.

Previously, you’ve mentioned various layers of building at the Hellfire site, and the possibility of it being built on top of a medieval hall.

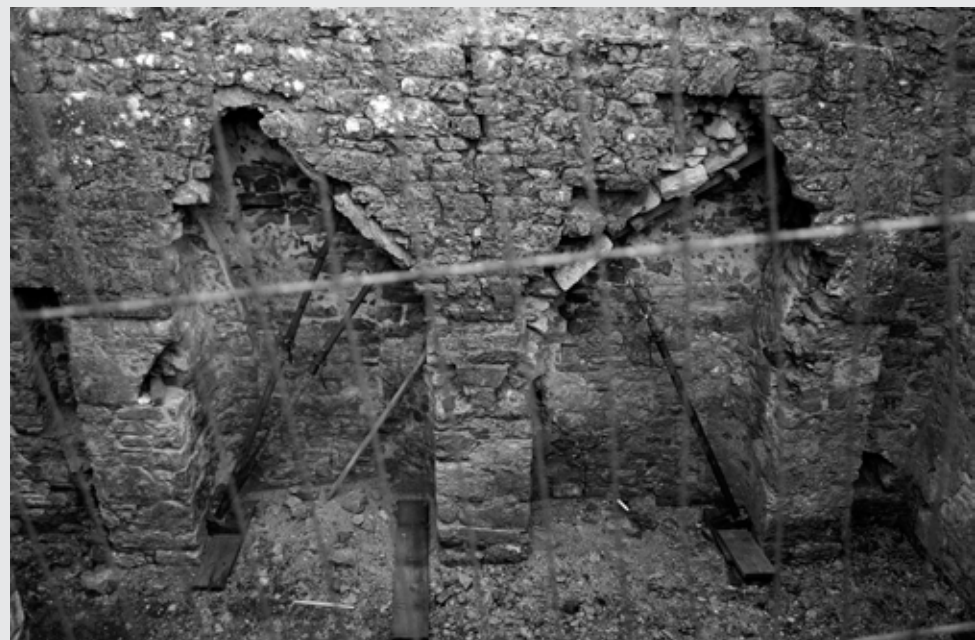
A section of the building is on a medieval wall, the original wall for the castle. There was another earlier structure connected onto that wall. Exactly what that was, I don’t know, but I’m sure that with research we’ll get that information eventually. The Hellfire Club was built on top of that. It is an early example of the use of brick in this area. The bricks were made by hand locally and were laid out in a field to dry. You can still see the imprint of the grass from when they were made in the mould. We have one brick with the imprint of a deer’s hoof, so we now know there were deer around here at that time.

Do you think it was built in a rush in the 1730s or 40s, with a need for somewhere to have these meetings in?

It could have been. You’re getting into a time in the 1700s, when progress was coming on. The builder was probably, as in all buildings going way back, under pressure. Time was the important thing, try get it up quick, and get value out of the club. Whether there was a circulation of money through the club, I don’t know. But it is definitely one of the points in question and would explain why the structure is so weak if it had to be built fast.

Has there ever been an archeological dig on the site?

Not yet. In the ground under the Hellfire Club, we’d probably hit bedrock. As for any secret passages underneath, it’s very doubtful because the castle is on an island and the ingress of water would be just too risky. I think we’d just find rock. As they say, we’re stone rich.



When the artists came for the site visit, we saw a room with kitchen chimneys positioned side by side. What would have been the function of that?

The main hall for the Hellfire Club was upstairs on the first floor, so they had to get warmth from below. There were venting bricks built into the wall, to let the warm air come up and heat the upper room.

And the upper room was where the meetings took place?

That’s where all the sculduggery was conducted.

In its’ heyday, how would the building have looked?

It would have looked really classy. The stone work would have been plastered over, with a red band of brickwork going around the corners and quoins and by the windows. There was a slate roof on it, we have some of the original slates. Over the circular bay the roof went up in a cone shape, another reason why there was a lot of pressure onto the bay.

This leads into my question of what are the short term and long term aims for the OPW on site?

When we get the go-ahead, all hands will be on the Hellfire Club. Eventually it will be opened to the public. Whether the Hellfire Club will actually be used as a visitor center or the reception area for the castle, that I can’t say at the moment.

Do you think it’s ironic that what was once a secret society might now be a visitor centre where everyone is welcome to come in and see the inside?

Well, it’s a history many are interested in. During its’ time, I imagine there was a lot of people who weren’t too happy about it. What exactly went on, we’re not too sure, but they weren’t really proud of it in later years.



Throughout Askeaton, there has traditionally been a stigma attached to the club’s site due to the undocumented behaviour of its members. Do you find the workers here are aware of a possible occult history, does this interest them when they work on site?

Oh yeah, but it’s like everything else, if they were actually alive at that time they would not have much to do with the Hellfire Club. It was the upper classes, the jet set of the time. The average person on the street would have had nothing to do with the club. By all accounts the Dublin Hellfire Club burnt one of the servants, set him on fire. Whether it was through their favourite pastime, whisky with melted butter and cream, maybe they had too much of that or...

That’s scalteen, isn’t it?

Yes, scalteen. How it got out of hand or if it was a regular occurrence, I don’t know, but they didn’t have a very good name locally.

Is there any kind of superstition associated with here? Strange happenings?

Nothing goes bump in the night. I monitor the alarm systems and I’ve often been here at two or three o’clock in the morning. I’ve heard no chains rattling and no-one calls my name. If I did, I don’t know if I’d be here now talking to you.

Everywhere you work there’s always a history of some sort, one that goes back for centuries. Maybe you’re acclimatised to being in that situation...

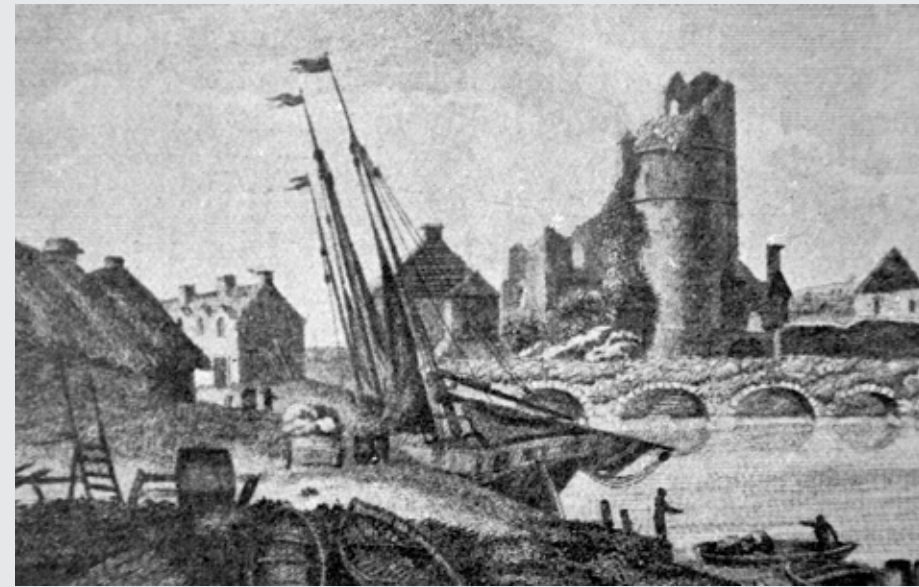
The wish is always there, to go back, just for a day, to see the running of the castle. How many people were here and what were they all doing? Actually the building of it would have been good to see as well, to see the techniques used. We basically know how they did it but to see it in action would be something else.

We’ll have a Hellfire Club again in the future, maybe for your retirement party?

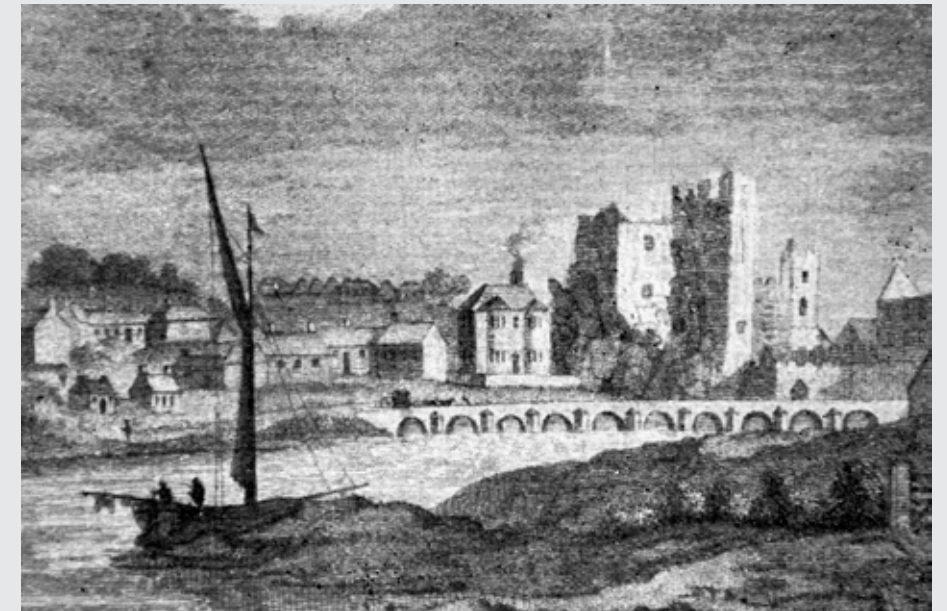
My retirement party... I don’t know about that... the roof won’t be on it by then! We’ll do our best for you but if we rush it in three years you’re going to have a rubbish job, and we’ll be back to where we started. We’ll do the walls first and we’ll see after that. Whether a roof will go on it I cannot really say, that decision will be taken at a later stage. I probably won’t be here by then. Plus, it’s to do with the finances, if the country gets up and running and out of this recession, I don’t see why they shouldn’t put the roof back on it. It would be good to see it that way again.



Installation of Stephen Brandes' *The Hellfire Club*.
Askeaton - A History Continued.



Askeaton, 1797, by George Holmes. Detail

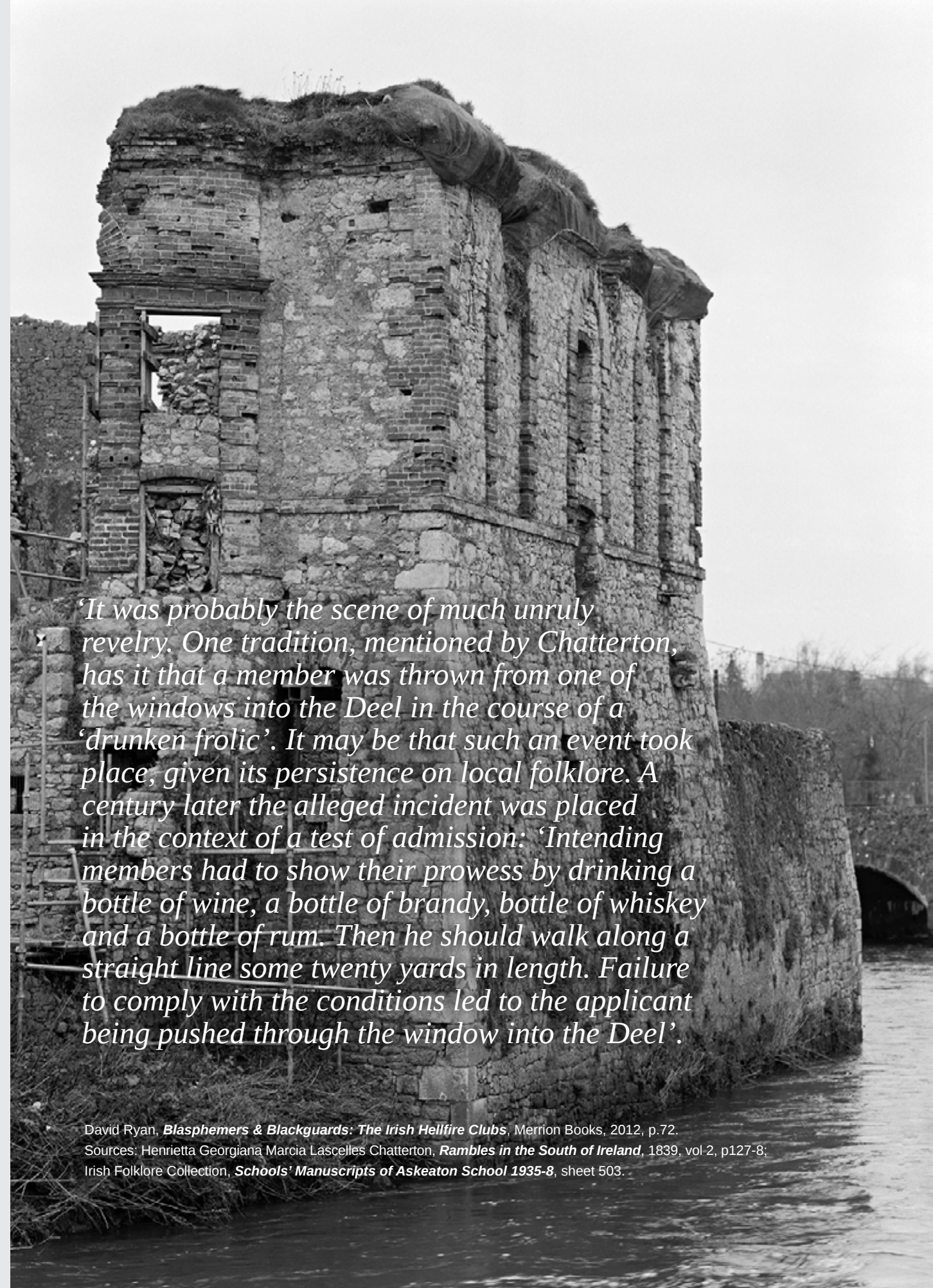


Town and Castle of Askeaton, 1779, by Paul Sandby. Detail

The Hellfire Club building is seen to the left of Desmond Castle in both images.



Louise Manifold, *A Man of Pleasure*. Production stills at Cagney's Bar.



‘It was probably the scene of much unruly revelry. One tradition, mentioned by Chatterton, has it that a member was thrown from one of the windows into the Deel in the course of a ‘drunken frolic’. It may be that such an event took place, given its persistence on local folklore. A century later the alleged incident was placed in the context of a test of admission: ‘Intending members had to show their prowess by drinking a bottle of wine, a bottle of brandy, bottle of whiskey and a bottle of rum. Then he should walk along a straight line some twenty yards in length. Failure to comply with the conditions led to the applicant being pushed through the window into the Deel’.

David Ryan, *Blasphemers & Blackguards: The Irish Hellfire Clubs*, Merrion Books, 2012, p.72.

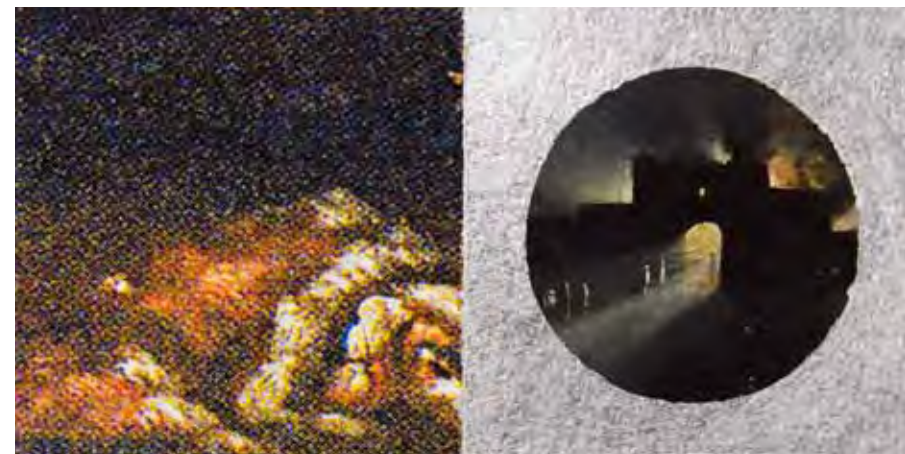
Sources: Henrietta Georgiana Marcia Lascelles Chatterton, *Rambles in the South of Ireland*, 1839, vol 2, p127-8; Irish Folklore Collection, *Schools' Manuscripts of Askeaton School 1935-8*, sheet 503.

Tom Fitzgerald
The House of Earthly Delights

Forty-eight digital prints, complete with silver leaf, are exhibited in Askeaton library. Echoing the presentation of illuminated manuscripts, a different drawing and its allegorical content is displayed each day, as librarian Maria Sheehan alternates each page inside a specially constructed display case.

Fitzgerald appropriated two paintings to produce the series; sections of Worsdale’s 1740 portrait of the Askeaton Hellfire are juxtaposed with details from The Garden of Earthly Delights (c1490-1510) by Hieronymus Bosch. Both artworks might be considered as either moral warnings or a panorama of paradise lost. Fitzgerald, by forensically focusing on and framing specific details, moves beyond these generic propositions and surprising formal intricacies begin to emerge: the curtain drapes, the fleeting glance, a swim at night, a gentle stroke on a chin. His erotic derangement turns all of us into voyeurs, around an intoxicating air of potential liberty.







Louise Manifold *A Man of Pleasure*

Working closely with historians Aisling Tierney and David Ryan, Manifold identified several documents detailing the activities of Hellfire clubs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One discovery, an evangelical magazine of 1811, contained an obituary of Captain Perry, a carousing individual and likely member of a Hellfire Club. He suffered the perils of excessive living and radical thinking, an early death and a desperate fight for repentance. Ryan (author of *Blasphemers & Blackguards: The Irish Hellfire Clubs*, Merrion Books, 2012) considers the article to be written from a moralistic standpoint, acting as a warning to readers of the dangers of being involved in such circles. The article became a point of departure for Manifold to produce a mise-en-scène - an aftermath of a local Hellfire meeting. Using a scripted voiceover, shot in Cagney's Bar with members of the local drama group and employing special effects to feature the River Deel, *A Man of Pleasure* (HD video, 4 minutes 15 seconds) acts as a speculative representation of morality and decadence, given the scant evidence of what might have occurred at the Askeaton Hellfire.





Diana Copperwhite *Magpie*

Diana Copperwhite's sculpture is sited beside the Hellfire ruin. It features polished stainless steel shapes that formally evoke the profiles of James Worsdale's 1740 group portrait of the Askeaton Hellfire Club. Copperwhite transposes the outlines of each figure of the group, back to the club's location, as a reflective, shimmering ghost seen from the town's bridge. Its precise position, in the workyard of the Office of Public Works, is where an active conservation programme continues daily. Here, stones are moved around, lime mortar is mixed and used to reinforce or rebuild walls around the island complex. A sculpture placed at such a site might initially seem like a nuance, but further investigation points to a function similar to the workmen's presence: both are subtle engagements with the fragmented material histories onsite.





Stephen Brandes
The Hellfire Club. Askeaton - A History Continued

Sited in a yard at the rear of the local tourist office, Brandes’ work formally refers to the didactic presence of heritage plaques seen throughout Askeaton. Along with the Hellfire Club, the town features the ruins of a Castle, Abbey, Banqueting Hall and Knights’ Templar Tower, all built between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries and all featuring contemporary explanatory signage. Rather than describing past events, Brandes’ text instead speculates a future for the Hellfire Club in the 23rd century, involving unregulated planning and a revivalist architectural makeover at the site, the Swiss Government, imports from the Ukraine, and giant slugs. When reading this ramshackle vision of the future, the Hellfire building itself remains in view as a site of unexplained mystery and foreboding curiosity.

The Hell-Fire Club, Askeaton

A history continued...



The Hell-Fire Club, shortly before its destruction by freak fireball in 2263. (Photographer unknown.)

2240 AD. The Irish Government sells the site to an undisclosed international syndicate for an undisclosed sum of cash. Planning permission is granted for the complete restoration of the old building, with ‘appropriate modernisation’.

2241 AD. Building begins. Original foundations remain intact after previous years of continued stabilisation, but the shape of the new structure differs dramatically from the original plans. Neither the architects nor the syndicate are available for comment. After further negotiations with both government and planners, the matter is conveniently closed and building continues.

2244 AD, May 31st. The building is completed, in a Vernacular Neo-Brutalist style with a tropical roof-top garden enclosed in a geodesic dome. The function of the building remains a mystery. A few employees are drafted from the locality, but are sworn to secrecy.

2248. AD. September 12th. From the bridge, villagers observe a large black slug, ‘the size of a sheep’ in the roof-top garden. In the days that follow, all of the vegetation is devastated. The dome is destroyed and replaced with a helipad.

2252 AD. More building work creates several underground suites and a tunnel leading to the Shannon estuary. Rumours suggest these new suites have been sold to the Swiss Government.

2253 -7 AD. The premises once again gather a national reputation as a venue for lavish entertainments for a clandestine and select few. Guests arrive by helicopter, gondola and (it is assumed) by the underground tunnels. Nobody is ever reported to have been seen leaving.

2257 AD. After the puzzling appearance of a small Ukranian crate washed in on a tidal current, both the Hell-Fire Club and later the village of Askeaton are evacuated and decontaminated. Several trespassers breaching the cordons describe seeing the silhouette of an obese cat in the windows of the upper floors. Stuttered renditions of “A Whiter Shade of Pale” are reported emanating from the basement. More unnaturally large molluscs appear in satellite pictures of the castle grounds, though none are subsequently found.

2260 AD. After nearly 3 years, government safety officials confirm Askeaton’s habitability and the Hell-Fire Club is investigated for the first time by persons not formally associated with the building. Popular aspirations abound that paraphernalia exposing the building’s secrets may be discovered, and journalists bribe officials for access. Nothing is found other than dog biscuits and an anorak, however several rooms are too well locked to enable a means of entry. One freelance journalist reportedly attempts to hide within the building, but is found six weeks later half-eaten ‘by something with the jaws of a bison’, on the island of Inishloe in the Shannon estuary. Police enquiries follow, but the case remains unsolved.

2262 AD. The Hell-Fire Club is put up for sale. Squatters invade the building and once again parties ensue. The population of Askeaton and its environs increase by 26% over the following twelve months.

2263 AD, May 31st. The building is hit thirty-six times by lightning and consumed by a fireball that lays waste to the interior.

To this day, the island remains closed to the public. Locals however, remain convinced that the Hell-Fire Club is still inhabited, though by whom or what, nobody has yet dared to witness.



Eye-witness drawing by local artist, of the cat reportedly seen in the fire-damaged window in March 2257.

The Hell-Fire Club

A history continued...



The Hell-Fire Club, shortly before its destruction by freak fireball in 2263. (Photographer unknown.)

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Sean Lynch
A Glossolalia

A Latin slogan appears as a relief sculpture upon a gable end in the East Square, Askeaton’s most prominent meeting place. While seemingly appearing as an eloquent use of language, discovery of its translation quickly deflates any sense of grandeur. The text, Ecce Signum, is translated as Behold, The Sign.

A sign about a sign? The bibliography on Hellfire Clubs sometimes reports the use of obscure classical phrases and language by its members. Daniel P Mannix, in *The Hellfire Club* (London, 1978) writes of a “macaroni Latin,” “macaroni being the slang name for an elegant young gentleman (“Yankee Doodle stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni”). Macaroni Latin was a sort of bastard language in which Latin words were twisted to make puns in English or combined in such a way as to create a ridiculous effect.”

In this manner, Lynch’s work might well be a linguistic reaction to the relatively recent dominance of Latin in the Catholic Mass, the mainstay of a small rural community in Ireland. Perhaps it acts as a disruption to other signage on Askeaton’s streetscape. Alternatively, it might simply be a glossolalia: a method of speaking in tongues, lacking any comprehension of meaning.







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IS THIS PAINTING WORTH £350 ?



It is of Limerick's Hell Fire Club, the rendezvous in the eighteenth century of the ascendancy class. The painting, executed about 1740 by James Worsdale, is now offered for sale to the City Manager (Mr. M. Macken, B.A.) for £350.

The painting, in oils on canvas, measures 40½ by 30½ inches. It comes from the collection of a direct descendant of Edward Croker, of Ballinagarde, who is actually in the picture.

Mr. Macken has received a letter from Messrs. Spink and Son, Ltd., King Street, St. James, London, offering the picture for sale to the Corporation for £350.

The letter states that a plaque attached to the frame reads as follows:— Edward Croker, of Ballinagarde, b. 1706, d. 1780; his son, John Croker, d. 1804; Wyndham Quin, of Adare, b. 1717, d. 1789 (father of the first Earl of Dunraven); Royce, of Nanteidan; Bayley, of Debsborough; H. Prittie (father of 1st Lord Dunnally); Pierce Creagh, of Dangan; Blennerhassett, of Riddlestown. All those named held, at different times, the office of High Sheriff and moved, of course, in "high society."

The artist, Worsdale, 1692/1767, worked both in London and Ireland. It was he who painted the picture of the Dublin Hell Fire Club, now in the National Art Gallery.

SHANNON FREE ZONE AND IRISH TRADE ADVISERS

QUESTIONS in the names of Mr. P. Clohessy and Mr. J. J. Collins were put in the Dail regarding the Shannon Airport Free Zone and the recruitment of Irish trade

Will President Coty Give Premiership To de Gaulle?

Previous pages:
James Worsdale, *Limerick Hellfire Club*, oil on canvas, 1738.
Collection of the National Gallery of Ireland.

Front page of the Limerick Leader, 28 May 1958.



Signage on fencing around the Hellfire Club.



Images taken prior to the collapse of the bay window on August 1996.
Presented by the Knight of Glin to the Irish Architectural Archive, 1985.

Viewed From New York

Brian O’Doherty

It’s getting more difficult to distinguish fantasies from what we used to call reality. A dinner guest the other day called and said he’d be late. He arrived with apologies and two bullet holes, small, and blue-rimmed, in his back. (He had turned away from the oncoming bullet and more or less shrugged it off, so that it just nipped his margin, like a badly-drawn tangent). He sat down, had his dinner and apologised when leaving. Two days later, Kennedy was shot, and someone in his entourage was saying with hysterical calm “I wonder who’s going to get...?” Obscenity on obscenity, like white on white.

The Kennedy morning I spent talking to a novelist who was upset that life had pre-empted him. Since his art is based on the maintainance of that membrane between inner and outer, he had the nervousness of one whose subject was disappearing, so that membrane couldn’t be used to underline anything. Manmade nature now could invest better than he could, and he felt humble before it much as 19th century poets and landscapists felt humble before trees.

The old dialectical engines don’t pull art along anymore. Fantasy and “reality” have exchanged places, or labels, so we are all turned inside out, all our enigmas are other people’s prose. Clichés are icons (which we can call mannerism, if we like), and even dying is banal. As the novelist said, when we go out in the morning, we must be prepared to die, not in any religious sense, but just ready to cease or stop without any fuss, as if it were happening to someone else.

So the rhetoric of death has disappeared, just as has the rhetoric of any other privileged moments or spaces, whether it is the space of a heart in a chest or a university president’s office. Above all the ‘60s have invented the democracy of space - any space is as good as another.

The Hellfire Club, Dublin, late nineteenth century.
Lawrence Collection photographs,
National Library of Ireland.



So since this space is supposed to be about art (which if you’re an artist, you have recognised it is) let me live out my fantasy. Some miles from Dublin there’s that mountain like a rotated parabola with the remains of the Hell-Fire club on top. The shoulder of it is fairly smooth. On it, on an East-West axis paint (whitewash) a simple system of parallel lines 70 feet long, 3 feet wide. The interval between lines is 10 feet, and all intervals are equal. They should be seen from Dublin. If this is difficult, double the measurements. This should be done between July 15th and August 15th. Only one such system of lines should be placed on the mountain. That’s all.

Why? Let us provide some specious reasons. There lines may reduce the distance between Dublin and the mountain to a few inches. Or maybe they construct an idea of time in keeping with the mountain’s geology. Or maybe they could change the way planes fly. Perhaps they show how straight lines can’t exist outside the mind. Or maybe they mark the graveyard of Paris in Dublin. They might be a nationalist signature calling for an invasion of the six counties. Or propaganda for the Catholic Church. Maybe they have to do with the union of Trinity and National. Maybe they cancel the landscape and invent a new past. Or perhaps they have to do with nothing at all, or very little, and thus could be art. Maybe they shouldn’t be put on the mountain at all, but if you decide that you’ve made a decision.

Note: When on the mountain, if you go to the mountain, you may find others with the same idea. Or others may come when you have started. Since only one system of lines can be laid on the mountain, this raises problems. These problems may be solved in any way. But since the task is large those who come to the mountain and find it partially completed, may continue the work as far as possible, again leaving it, if incomplete, for the next person to continue.



The Diabolical Masquerade, or the the dragons-feast as acted by the Hell-Fire-Club, at Somerset House in the Strand, c.1721.

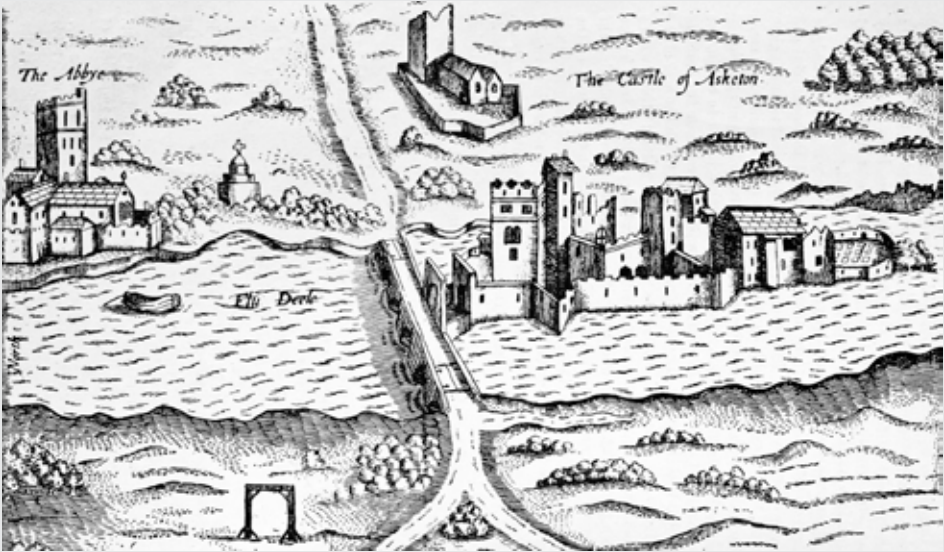


Lawrence Collection photograph c.1890. National Library of Ireland. "It is reputed (I know not if there is the least truth in the statement) to have been a "Hell-fire club," and vague legends existed of orgies celebrated by that ill-reputed association within its' walls. When I first saw it in 1875, some of the roof-timbers remained; ten years alter the arch of the main window had partly fallen; but it is little the worse for the eighteen years that have since elapsed." Thomas Johnson Westropp, *The Antiquities of Limerick and Its Neighbourhood* (Dublin 1903).



Artists' site visit, December 2011.

Map of Askeaton in 1586, from *Pacata Hibernia* (A History of the Wars in Ireland During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Especially Within the Province of Munster Under the Government of Sir George Carew), 1633.



Letter from the Hermetic Order

Pádraic E. Moore

May 19th, 1926

Dearest A.,

I hope this finds you well. Apologies for my delay in writing. There simply hasn't been time since I arrived here almost a month ago. While I expected the daily regime to be intensive I never imagined the extent of the asceticism demanded nor did I foresee how busy I would be. The Order have established themselves in the town of Askeaton, not far from the city of Limerick of which I know you will have heard. Upon alighting there after a dull train journey from Dublin, I was struck by the street names and how the facades near the station evoked familiar parts of England. However there is an atmosphere of extreme melancholy to this place, far worse than anything I've ever experienced at home. I was met at the station by two of the Order who, in accordance with their codes of behaviour, I refer to as brother and sister. The full journey was really rather arduous and I am glad now I was instructed to bring only the most basic of belongings. At first I felt anxious of the enforced frugality but it has become evident to me that so much of what I considered to be essential to my existence is, in fact, of no importance. This has been just one important lesson learned during what has been a truly revelatory retreat.

We took a motorcar to Askeaton, idyllically situated on the banks of the river Deel. It is on an islet in this river that our place of daily worship and our basic yet pleasant living quarters are located. This accommodation is comfortable enough but would be simply uninhabitable in winter months. The Order is located here for four months between May and August for the solstice spell, as conditions would most certainly be too inclement for the rest of the year. I've been told this little island has been considered a sacred site since ancient times, and having been here some time now I can concur that there is a rather unique atmosphere of tranquility present. However, I believe this may owe in no small part to the dramatic ruins of a medieval castle that also stand upon the islet. Next to this stands another ruin, which is rumoured to have once been a Hellfire Club, inside the walls of which have been constructed the temple where our rituals and observances take place. The adepts, also the custodians of the impressive estate upon which these ruins and the temple stands, inform me that throughout the centuries several secret societies have selected this site to congregate. I'm certain that the rather fanciful notion of this ruin being some sort of Hellfire Club must have emerged

from the misunderstanding - or perhaps willful distortion - of rituals or ceremonies spied upon by repressed and puritanical zealots to whom anything would seem depraved and diabolical. On the few occasions that I have met natives of this place I have detected a distinctive obsession with morality. It seems to me that the influence of the clergy over the people of this county is immeasurable and is nowhere more evident than in their sanctimonious piety.

As I have already mentioned to you, our regime is rather severe. There are a couple of newcomers who arrived within a few days of me; they too have found it a challenge to adjust. Every day we begin before dawn with adorations to the sun followed by allotted domestic duties that alternate regularly. The remainder of the day is given to study - a great deal of study - and I am making much progress on my path of learning and self-improvement. In total there are six others like me here who are new to the Order. There are lessons each day except Fridays which - being the day of Venus - is our day of worship and celebration. I have been giving lectures from a great work that I have been studying since last year by Dr. William W. Westcott, whom you may recall me speaking of recently. Westcott passed away last year but he had done such good work in assisting with the foundation of the Order. He may have been surrounded by a degree of controversy at a time but this cannot detract from the values of his contribution. Our study is punctuated by regular ritual practices and group exercises and it has been warm enough in recent days to swim frequently in the Deel.

One of the most physically demanding and rigid aspects of the regime, which all members of the Order must adopt, is the dietary system. While adapting to vegetarianism has not been a challenge and has in fact proved beneficial to my physical constitution and mental temperament, it has been difficult to become accustomed to fasting. Nevertheless, as this is one of the imperative methods of self-discipline, it is mandatory to endure if I am to reach the next stage of my initiation. Since my arrival to the Order I have fasted twice. The first period was a day and a night and the next two days and nights, all in preparation for my final initiation rite when I will not eat for four days and nights. On the fourth day my achievements are to

be celebrated with a procession to the temple, on the fifth day I will cease my fast and my fellow disciples and the adepts who guide us will praise me and we will all break the fast with a feast. These exercises probably seem very strange to you. However, this and other rites have not been taken by everyone here, for the adepts design different systems for each of us, carefully considered to respond to the nuances of our character. Moreover, these actions have already lifted many veils.

The most revelatory of all the experiences I have had since arriving here came during an exercise that I was obliged to endure in order to hasten my abilities in what the Order terms self-observance. At sunrise on my third day after arrival I was led into a bell-shaped chamber carved out of solid rock. Set into the floor of this chamber I saw a narrow square of polished silver, around which ran a broad copper band and ten lamps, set in small stars of iron, giving a faint blue light. When the door closed behind me I was left in solitude and I felt calm at first. With the passing of time each candle burned to nothing and eventually I sat in complete darkness. The hours of total darkness I endured in that chamber were torturous at times but what I initially felt as a strain upon my nerves has, over time, produced a deeply positive reaction within me. Upon reflection I've come to believe that during that seemingly endless night I was in a sense reborn, and the scales that obscured my spiritual sight for so long have since fallen away.

I suspect sharing these experiences with you will cause concern. I do apologise if this is the case and urge you not to worry for my well-being. I know that while you have tried so many times in the past, you cannot understand the reasons that I have for joining this Order and coming alone to this little island where I am literally secreted away in seclusion. Nevertheless, I must tell you that now for the first time in a long time there is something stirring within me that feels like happiness. I need not confess to you what you already know well: that I have been searching so long for a path that I could follow with confidence, knowing that I had found my way. I've never been satisfied to accept as final those accepted beliefs that were foisted upon me since my very beginning. This is perhaps my arrogance - I am still quite young - but at any rate it is a part of me that I cannot dispense with, though I have sometimes wished I could. I suppose that this is at the core of why I am here. I have come here from London because the ideals of the Order and the system that it promulgates are the only option for me if I am to continue.

Much and all as I consider myself modern to the core and embrace what has been afforded to me by this modern world, I also feel that there is a great deal that has been inadvertently hidden from me which I have been deprived of. What I mean to say is, I have long thought that there has

not been enough time for us to adapt to the changes that we ourselves have brought about in these times. Our hunger for progress has eliminated knowledge of certain subtle energies and precious things. Precious things that language cannot communicate. Superphysical things, the loss of which I believe lies at the cause of a substantial fraction of problems in the world today. I believe that my work with the Order is bringing me closer to rediscovering the intuition and potential that I possess but which has been dormant and inactive within. The quiet contemplation, and the process of repeating affirmations and decrees, all of which are integral to the programme upon which I am so very committed, ensures not only my continued growth but my survival. For I have been strengthened by my time here and I am pleased to have found others with whom I can share my beliefs.

Before coming I feared that I was unable to function in the world, I was bitter and my affections weak. In my weeks here the Order has made me realise that one simply must learn to love everybody. For it is our conviction that within everybody there lies a spark of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent creator. EVERY living thing is as a spark from the Divine Flame. I suppose that in many ways this isn't all that different from the Christian dogma that you remain faithful to. Perhaps the difference is that the path I have chosen is one that I actively adore, as opposed to being despondently duty bound.

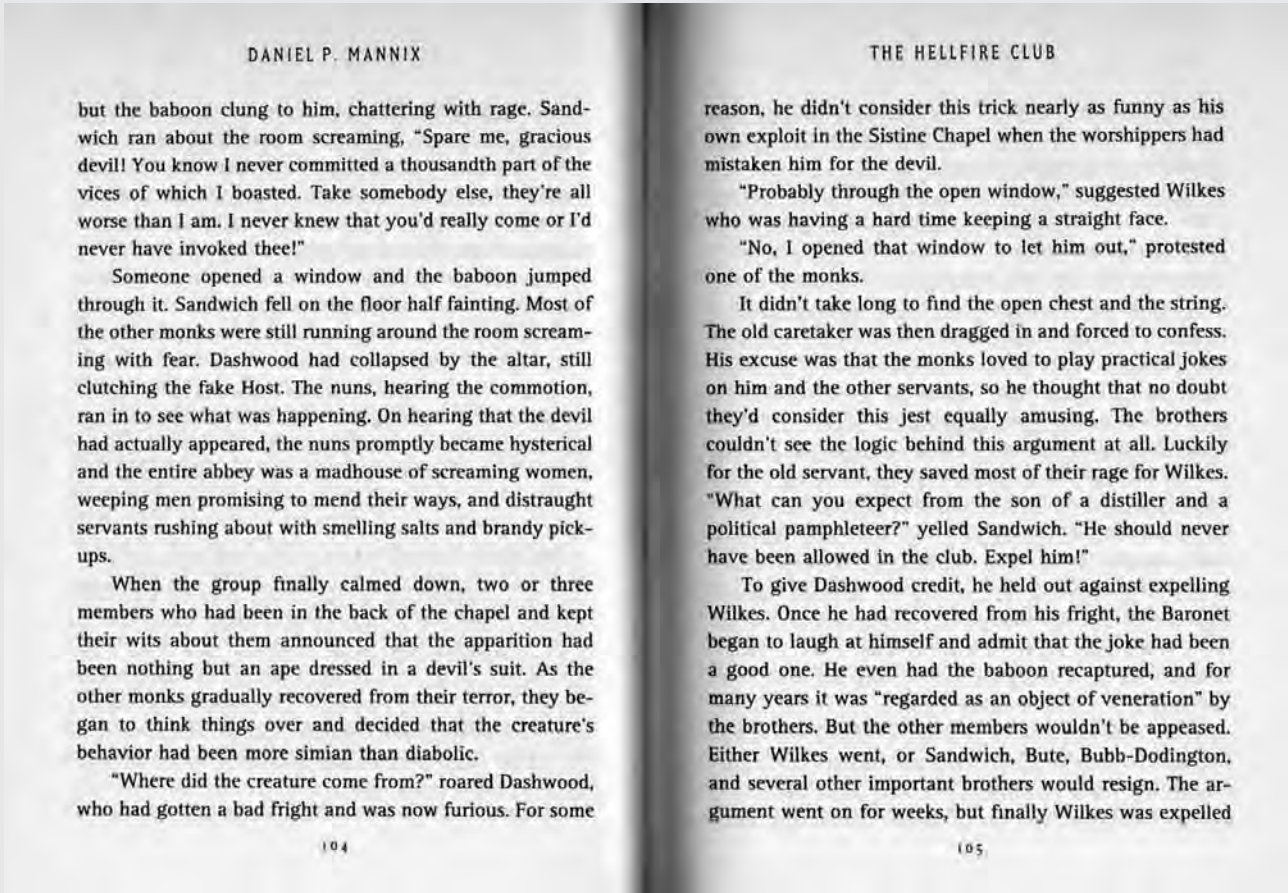
While I am confident and glad that I have come here, I do miss you very much. I expect that even if you write as soon as you receive this, I shall have to wait a fortnight at least before I hear from you. I hadn't thought of this before leaving, I hadn't realised how much I would miss you but now it bulks very large and horrible. I imagine that this is because I know now that you and I have parted ways. Nevertheless, I remain resolute that I must continue to work hard to make the time go and have something to show for it. My mission is to travel and continue my work with the Order. Please know while I am now committed to my new path of learning it will always be you who has had infinitely more influence on me intellectually than anyone, and for this alone I love you, no matter what the future brings. I hope you will get my letters quick and often.

Love is the law, love under will.

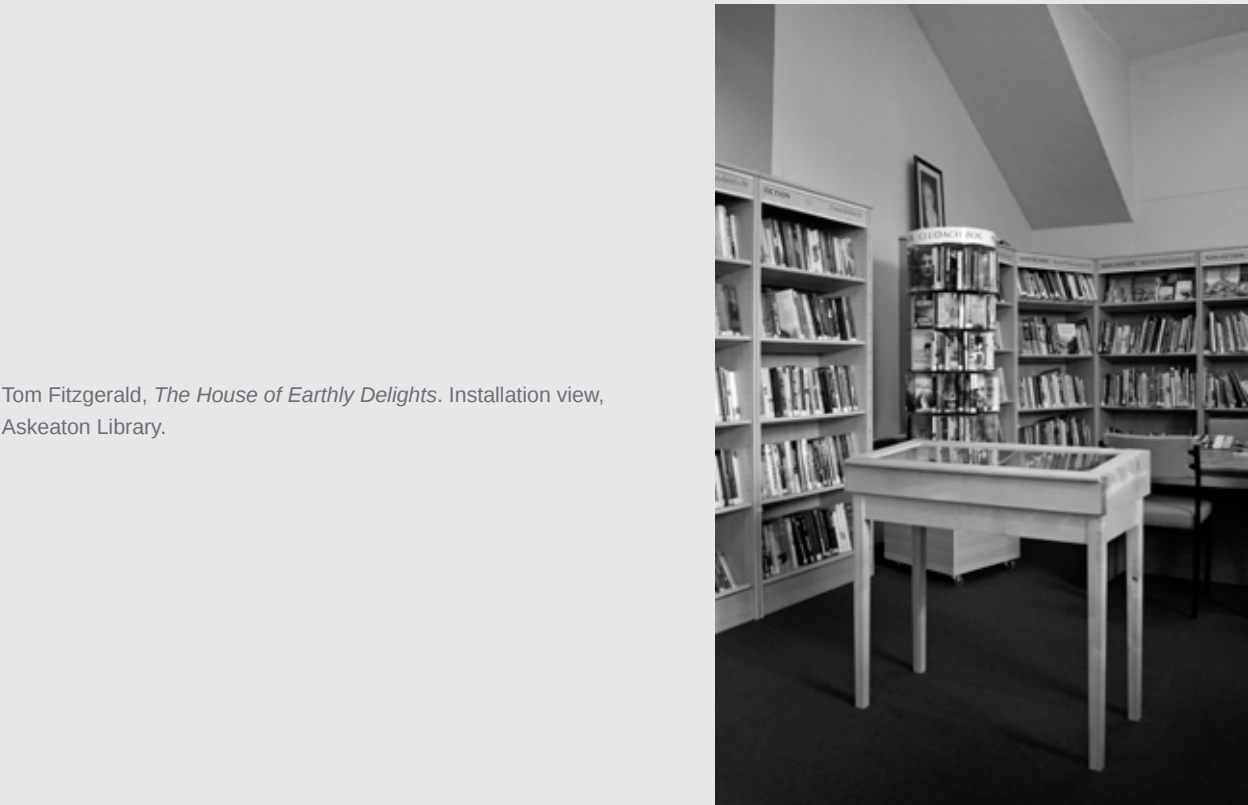
V.



Cover and excerpt of *The Hellfire Club*, Daniel P. Mannix (London 1978).



Opening night, 16 March 2012. Tom Fitzgerald guides an audience through *The House of Earthly Delights*.



Tom Fitzgerald, *The House of Earthly Delights*. Installation view, Askeaton Library.



This publication is produced to accompany The Hellfire Club, an exhibition organised by Askeaton Contemporary Arts of newly commissioned artworks by Stephen Brandes, Diana Copperwhite, Tom Fitzgerald, Sean Lynch, and Louise Manifold, curated by Michele Horrigan in various venues throughout Askeaton, 16 March – 25 July 2012.

Since 2006, Askeaton Contemporary Arts commission, produce and exhibit contemporary art in the locale of a town in County Limerick, Ireland. An annual residency programme, artist commissions and exhibitions frequently occur. To date, over forty projects have been realised in Askeaton.

Please see www.askeatonarts.com for further details.

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