

# The Lure of Greece

Irish Involvement in  
Greek Culture, Literature,  
History and Politics

A selection of papers presented at a Conference organised by  
the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens, and held in  
the National University of Ireland, Galway  
19–21 September 2003

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# Preface

The Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens held its first conference on the topic of ‘Irish Involvement in Greek Culture, Literature, History and Politics’ in the National University of Ireland, Galway, on 19–21 September 2003, and the papers in the present volume are drawn from some of the sessions at that meeting.

The organization of a conference and the subsequent preparation of papers for publication is always the work of many hands, and it is a great pleasure on behalf of the Institute to express thanks to the many individuals who helped to make both the conference and publication possible. The National University of Ireland, Galway, offered a most hospitable location for the conference, and a very appropriate one since the meeting also marked the centenary of George Thomson (Seoirse Mac Thomáis), Professor of Greek through Irish at Galway (1931–4), whose own researches spanned the key themes of the conference. We thank NUIG President Iognáid Ó Muircheartaigh for opening the conference, Professor Brian Arkins for a delightful keynote speech, and our colleagues from Galway’s Department of Classics for their help: Brian Arkins, Andrew Erskine,

Anne Neville, and, in particular, Edward Herring for his assistance with practical matters and for marshalling students to help. In the earlier stages Conn Murphy played a key role with ideas and practical help, Gay Conroy gave generously of her time in helping with bookings over the summer of 2003, and Peter Liddell and Jason O'Brien also provided support at key moments.

The sessions from which the papers presented here are drawn were organized by Christine Morris (on Travellers and Philhellenes), by Christina Souyoudzoglou-Haywood (on Antiquarians, Artists and Collectors), and by John Dillon and Christine Morris (on The Classical Tradition in Ireland). We express our thanks to all the speakers for their papers and to everyone who attended for making the conference such an enjoyable occasion.

John Luce, who also spoke at the conference, kindly offered his services to work with the Institute on preparing papers for publication. The Institute is deeply grateful to him for his belief in the importance of this project and for his devotion to the task. He has worked closely with our publisher, Ross Hinds, who has undertaken the production of the volume and given most generously of his time and expertise.

The starting point for exploring the links between Ireland and the Greek world is always W. B. Stanford's masterly survey, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*. The current volume explores a selection of relevant themes in greater detail, yet it is also clear that we have only scratched the surface of these intriguing connections. It is to be hoped that these studies will stimulate many more explorations of the myriad personal, political and scholarly threads and connections between these two cultures.

Dr Christine Morris  
Chair  
Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens  
June 2006



# Introduction

*The Lure of Greece* is a fine theme with which to inaugurate what I hope will prove to be a prolific series of publications of the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies in Athens. This volume, the product of a conference held in Galway in September 2003, brings together the papers delivered in one of the two sections into which the conference was divided, the other concerning Greek influences in Irish literature<sup>1</sup>.

Under the able chief editorship of J. V. Luce, himself a major authority in the field, there has been assembled here an impressive panorama of case-studies of the interaction between Irishmen (including honorary Irishmen such as George Thomson, and the Rev. Basil Zula) and Greece over the last two centuries and more, which constitutes a study of a significant part of the Northern European love affair with Greece — or perhaps more accurately, the *idea* of Greece — during that period. This is not to say that the realities of the new Greece that

<sup>1</sup> This latter topic, fascinating and fruitful though it is, will probably not merit a distinct Institute volume arising out of the conference, since it has been, and is being, so well covered already in a series of publications by Prof. Brian Arkins of Galway, a valued member of our Managing Committee.

was emerging in the 1820s and 1830s were entirely neglected: Sir Richard Church, after all, on whom we have a fine study in this volume by Patrick Comerford, played a key (if slightly cantankerous) role in the establishment of the modern Greek state<sup>2</sup>; but it is fair to say the main focus of interest of our philhellenes was the glories of *ancient* Greece.

John Luce himself has contributed a most enlightening study of that remarkable Meath man, Robert Wood, who made a significant contribution, prior to the more generally celebrated German scholar Friedrich August Wolf, to our understanding of how the Homeric poems were composed, as well as conducting extensive travels in Greek lands, and as far afield as Palmyra, wherein he was ably supported by the artistic genius of Giovanni Battista Borra, on other aspects of whose work Michael McCarthy has contributed a fine essay.

That other great traveller in Greek lands, James Caulfeild, Lord Charlemont is celebrated, amongst others, in Aideen Ireland's contribution on collectors and collecting in 18th and 19th century Ireland. While the removal of antiquities from the lands to which they belong is an activity now rightly frowned upon, it has to be recognised also that in earlier days many precious objects were rescued from a fate worse than removal, and an appreciation for the artistic glories of Greece and Rome was thus introduced among the publics of Northern European lands; so one must see the great collectors in their historical context.

Indeed, the story of Professor Henry Browne, and his role in the creation of the fine archaeological museum attached to the UCD School of Classics, told here by Christina Haywood, as well as William Dunlop's account of K.T. Frost's contribution to that in Queen's University, Belfast, are part of this story also. Both Browne and Frost were Englishmen, but the Fates contrived that they both contributed significantly to the Classical holdings of their adopted country. In connexion with Queen's, the more recent contribution of such a figure as Henry Campbell McElderry, is also rightly emphasized by Dunlop.

To go back somewhat in time, we are indebted to Jo Day for a delightful account of that extraordinary figure, the Rev. Basil Patras Zula, Moravian pastor at Kilwarlin, Co. Down, and his creation of a 'Thermopylae Garden' in the

<sup>2</sup> His house in the Plaka, currently being restored from a ruinous state, remains the object of a distant dream of the Institute, as an ideal base for its operations.

1830s, just as his homeland was attaining its freedom. From the latter part of the century, Patrick Sammon, himself a distinguished philhellene, brings us a study of what Greece meant to Oscar Wilde, while Andrew Smith dwells on the very different figure of Gerard Manley Hopkins, (another adopted Irishman, and not an entirely comfortable one), as well as giving us further insights into Fr. Henry Browne.

A contemporary of Hopkins and Browne, but very much of a hands-on philhellene, is rescued from obscurity in a fine study by Christine Morris. James David Bouchier, from Co. Limerick, became very much of a hero to the people of Crete in the 1890s and later by reason of his support for the cause of Cretan independence through his eloquent articles as correspondent of *The Times*. As a friend of both Sir Arthur Evans and Prince George of Crete, he was instrumental in obtaining permission from the latter to allow the former to dig at Knossos.

More recent figures, both remarkable in their way, are celebrated by Peter Gathercole and Brian McGing. George Thomson, alias Seoirse Mac Thomáis, discussed by Gathercole, was a romantic British Marxist Classical scholar, who came over to the West of Ireland in the 1920s in search of indigenous peasant culture, and found it triumphantly in the Blasket Islands, where he actually stimulated the publication of two of the classics of Modern Irish literature, while himself becoming lecturer in Classics in University College, Galway before going back to Britain to preside over a most innovative Classics programme in the University of Birmingham. Peter Gathercole actually concentrates mainly on an incident from Thomson's later career, but one that illustrates admirably what manner of man he was.

Lastly, Brian McGing contributes a portrait of a rather different figure, my distinguished predecessor William Bedell Stanford, Regius Professor of Greek at Trinity College from 1940 to 1980, who, besides contributing significantly to Greek studies in Ireland, fostered ties between Ireland and Greece to such an extent that he was in 1980 accorded the rare honour, for a foreigner, of being granted by the Greek Government the title of Higher Commander of the Order of the Phoenix. Brian McGing well brings out the ways in which Stanford, like Mahaffy before him, was innovative, while speculating illuminatingly on why he was not as effective as he might have been in other areas of scholarship. From

the philhellenic perspective, however, the most important feature of his life was probably his long-standing relationship with Swan's Hellenic Cruises, in the course of which he introduced a generation of well-heeled visitors to the glories of Greece.

I have certainly found much enlightenment and entertainment in this series of studies, and I have no doubt that this will be the experience of every reader of them. Of course, this cannot aspire to being a complete survey of the relations between Ireland and Greece: two figures that spring to mind who figure only incidentally in this collection are Lord Charlemont and John Pentland Mahaffy, but they have both had biographies devoted to them<sup>3</sup>. However, what we have here is a fine conspectus of the range of characters involved in the area of Irish philhellenism, and I am glad to welcome it on behalf of the Irish Institute at Athens.

John Dillon  
Director  
Irish Institute for Hellenic Studies at Athens

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia O'Connor, *The Pleasing Hours*, Cork: Collins Press, 1999 (properly a study of Charlemont's travels in Greece, but also a biography); and W.B. Stanford & R.B. McDowell, *Mahaffy: A Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. Stanford, we may note, also published *The Travels of Lord Charlemont in Greece and Turkey, 1749, from his own unpublished Journals* (with E.J. Finopoulos), Trigraph, London, 1984. See also M. McCarthy (2001), *Lord Charlemont and his Circle*, Four Courts Press, Dublin.

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