

Strange bedfellows



To the Irish in America, the irony of using funds from a Fenian club to buy a set of Malton views depicting Georgian Dublin was not apparent, writes **Christian Dupont**

1 Arms of the City of Dublin, hand-coloured aquatint engraving from James Malton, *A Picturesque and Descriptive View of the City of Dublin* (London 1799)

2 Bust of John Boyle O'Reilly, marble, artist and date unknown

What do James Malton and the Fenian John Boyle O'Reilly have in common? Why, the Derry-born architect Charles Donagh Maginnis. Of this improbable triad, surely Malton is the most familiar. Visitors to Dublin are invited to reimagine how the city looked during the reign of George III by following the 'Malton Trail' – a series of placards installed near the various vantage points from which the aspiring architect composed his sketches.

Malton had been apprenticed to James Gandon while the latter was engaged in designing the Custom House. Yet for alleged 'breaches of confidence and many irregularities,' Gandon dismissed him after three years. Confident nevertheless in his abilities as a draughtsman, Malton conceived a plan to publish a lavish series of prints of Dublin buildings by subscription. He executed the aquatint etchings in London between 1792 and 1799, issuing them initially in smaller sets, and then finally as a portfolio or elegantly bound volume.

associations. The association with Maginnis seems fitting; with O'Reilly less so. Maginnis had won the competition to create a master plan for Boston College in preparation for its move, in 1913, from the South End of the city to its present location in the stately suburb of Chestnut Hill. Although only six of the twenty-two buildings Maginnis designed were ultimately constructed, the college library (now home to the John J Burns Library for rare books, special collections and archives) has been frequently acclaimed as one of the most beautiful buildings in America, an epitome of English neo-gothic style.

Born in Dowth, Co Meath in 1844, O'Reilly gained notoriety as a Fenian rebel. He was deported to Western Australia but escaped by ship. He settled in Boston and there resumed his anti-British campaigning as a poet, novelist and editor of a Catholic newspaper, *The Pilot*. Upon his death in 1890, he was succeeded by his associate editor, admirer and biographer, James Jeffrey Roche. As correspondence held by Burns

MALTON CONCEIVED A PLAN TO PUBLISH A LAVISH SERIES OF PRINTS OF DUBLIN BUILDINGS BY SUBSCRIPTION

The complete edition included a total of twenty-five views and accompanying texts, along with folding maps and a frontispiece portraying the arms of Georgian Dublin (Fig 1). Deluxe sets were skilfully hand-coloured. Exquisite and rare, a copy with a provenance traced to Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness, 1st Baronet, sold in a 2013 Adam's auction for €15,000.

Boston College purchased its copy from an English bookseller around 1950 for about \$300. The funds came through Maginnis, who had served as treasurer of the John Boyle O'Reilly Club, a local Irish organization. Realising he was its last surviving member and that the club was therefore defunct, he transferred its remaining balance to the college, given mutual

Library attests, Roche organized a commission to erect a monument to O'Reilly along Boston's Fenway and directed the selection of Daniel Chester French to execute it.

Around the same time, a young Irish sculptor called John Donoghue created a bronze bust of O'Reilly. A casting was later deposited in Burns Library by Boston's Charitable Irish Society, of which O'Reilly had been a member. Yet another likeness in marble greets visitors from a corner of our reading room (Fig 2).

It seems ironic the remaining funds of a club once devoted to promoting Irish heritage in the name of a flamboyant Fenian activist should be directed to acquiring iconic depictions of Georgian Dublin, yet in the telescopic view through which the Irish in America looked toward their homeland, the parallax and paradox were often reduced. ■

This is the second in a series of articles on Burns Library and its collections that seeks to provide context for appreciating the work of Irish artists.

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