

THE PORTRAITS OF KING'S INNS

The portrait collection in King's Inns consists of over sixty paintings as well as a number of bronze and marble busts. The subjects of the portraits are all men from the top ranks of the legal profession in Ireland. The paintings range in date from the late seventeenth century to the present day, although the majority are of the nineteenth century. The collection is housed in King's Inns on Constitution Hill, Dublin, and in its adjacent library in Henrietta Street. The main body of the collection hangs in the Dining Hall which has remained unaltered both in appearance and function since its foundation at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The first Irish inn of court was established at the end of the thirteenth century at Collett's Inn in St. George's Lane (now Exchequer Street). The Inn was a voluntary association of judges and barristers. It was not until the sixteenth century that King's Inns was established as an official institution. The judges and law officers of Ireland lodged a petition with the Privy Council in England in 1541 suggesting, among other things, the need for a single house where lawyers could have board and lodging together during term time. Lands formerly belonging (before the dissolution of the monasteries) to the Black Friars in the parish of St. Michan were granted by Henry VIII to the Inn which took the name of the King's Inns.¹ King's Inns remained a voluntary society until 1634 when membership became compulsory for barristers, and later² for attorneys and solicitors as well. Its primary function was in dealing with matters related to the legal profession but it also maintained strong links with the courts of law and with the administration of justice in Ireland.

According to a scroll of 1743 in the King's Inns Library the various buildings erected by the Society on its own lands were by that time in a decayed and ruinous state and were in danger of collapsing. It was not, however, until 1800 that the Benchers finally got around to commissioning James Gandon to design a building for the Society (Gandon's Four Courts had been completed in 1796 on lands leased to the Crown by the King's Inns).³

The site chosen for the building was situated between Henrietta Street and Glassmainoge Road (now Constitution Hill). Gandon resigned from the project in 1808, and his pupil and partner Henry

Portraits of leading members of Ireland's legal profession from the seventeenth century to the present day hang in the Dining Hall of King's Inns on Constitution Hill. **Wanda Ryan-Smolin** has catalogued the collection and here discusses some of its highlights.

Aaron Baker continued the work. Gandon's design consisted of a building with two wings separated by a narrow courtyard on the Henrietta Street side and joined together beneath a cupola on the western facade. Placed at an odd angle to Henrietta Street, it was originally intended that the north wing be a dining hall and the south a library. This proved to be too costly and in 1814 work on the south wing was taken over by the Office of Public Works for the Registry of Deeds under the supervision of Francis Johnston. Johnston also completed Gandon's cupola and designed around 1820 the entrance arch and screen, which now separates King's Inns from Henrietta Street. In the middle of the nineteenth century wings were added on either side of the building on the Constitution Hill side. The library eventually designed by Frederick Darley and situated in Henrietta Street was erected between 1826 and 1830. There were also plans for building chambers for living accommodation for members but these never materialised.⁴

Although the King's Inns portrait collection contains images of members of the Irish judiciary from as early as the seventeenth century its origin is in the early nineteenth century. An account of the Dining Hall in the King's Inns of 1818⁵ mentions two portraits which were the only paintings there at the time. These were *Barry Yelverton, first Viscount Avonmore* (1736–1805) which was commissioned by the Honorable Society of King's Inns from Hugh Douglas Hamilton about 1800⁶, and *Thomas Manners-Sutton, first Baron Manners* (1756–1842) by an English artist, William Russell⁷, who was commissioned by the Society in 1812. The portrait of *William Downs, first Baron Downs* (1752–1826) by Martin Cregan was added in 1823. *Charles Kendal Bushe* (1767–1843) and *William Conyngham Plunket, first Baron Plunket* (1764–1854)

both also by Cregan came in 1842, and Sir *Thomas Staples* (1775–1865) by Stephen Catterson Smith the Elder followed around 1865. All of these paintings are full-length and life-size, and were commissioned by the Benchers.⁸ Apparently Gandon had intended that portraits be hung in the blind windows that face the real windows in the interior of the Dining Hall⁹ and this would explain the homogeneity of the early commissions.

Probably the most significant event in the history of the collection occurred in 1872, when a committee was appointed 'to consider the most suitable steps to be taken to have Portraits of Legal personages received and placed in the Hall'.¹⁰ The zeal of the members of the Portrait Committee, as it became known, is clearly demonstrated by the pace at which works were acquired for the Inns during the following years. By 1874, at the time of the second report¹¹ of the committee only two years later, six more had been added to the collection. Of these, five were presented by individuals. Between 1874 and 1889 a further eighteen portraits were donated and the third and final report of the Portrait Committee (1889)¹² could proudly state that 'we now possess the nucleus of what must soon become a very interesting and valuable gallery of Irish Legal Portraits.'

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century more than thirty portraits hung in the Dining Hall. At this point it was considered necessary to have the collection catalogued. Serjeant Hewitt Poole Jellett (1825–1911), whose own portrait by Walter Osborne was presented to King's Inns by the Bar in 1899, was elected to carry out the task. Jellett's catalogue, published in Dublin around 1900¹³, is an invaluable source of information on the portraits and their provenance.

Since the publication of Jellett's catalogue, a further thirty-five paintings and drawings have been acquired for the collection and the present catalogue, of which this article is a product, has been prepared at the request of the Council of King's Inns primarily to update and expand the original summary catalogue.

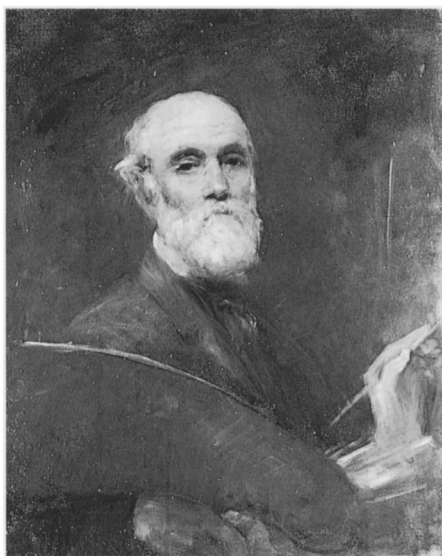
Although the collection cannot claim to be fully comprehensive, it does include many of the most prominent figures from the history of the Irish legal world. The earliest portrait in the collection is that of *James Barry* (1603–1673) who, in 1660, was promoted by Charles II to the posi-

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tion of Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench and created Baron of Santry. Barry was chairman of a convention which met in Dublin in 1659, in defiance of the Council of State in England, and voted for the unconditional Restoration of Charles II.

Another early work is the portrait of *Sir John Povey* (1620–1679). Inscribed "Chief Justice, Sir John Povey Knt./tempore Caroli IIst/Sir Peter Lely Pinxit." The quality of the painting suggests rather than it is 'studio of' Lely, the inscription having been added later. As a period example of an Irish legal portrait it is extremely interesting, however, as it illustrates Povey in his robes. Apart from the traditional scarlet robes trimmed with white fur of the office of Lord Chief Justice, he also wears a black skull cap and is holding in his hand a black hood. The use of a black skull cap by judges went out of fashion in the eighteenth century with the introduction of wigs, while the black hood continued to be carried, though worn only when passing the sentence of death. The most interesting aspect of Povey's dress is his gold 'collar of Ss' which is very distinctive in that, while it conforms to the norm of having the Ss joined by garter knots, it has no portcullis, and instead of the Tudor rose has a plain gold harp without a crown.¹⁴ Povey may have inherited the chain from his predecessor James Barry, who is also shown wearing a 'collar of Ss' but due to the darkened condition of the painting it is impossible to see the detail. Also traditionally attributed to Sir Peter Lely¹⁵, is the portrait of *Michael Boyle* (1609–1702), the last of the ecclesiastical chancellors. He was Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland and, from 1663 to 1686, Lord Chancellor. During his evidently very successful career he was also appointed Lord Justice three times.¹⁶

The collection contains not surprisingly few eighteenth century portraits. The portrait of *St. George Caulfield* (c.1700–1778) is one of the very few paintings recorded¹⁷ among the works of Philip Hussey (1713–1783). It is not signed or dated but most probably dates from the 1750s or 1760s. Hussey first practised as a portrait painter under the patronage of Lord Chancellor Bowes and, presumably, it was through him that he made the acquaintance of the notoriously rich and unpopular Caulfield. Caulfield was Lord Chief Justice from 1751 to 1760.



John Butler Yeats,
Self-portrait, 74.5 x 62 cm.

A fine example of Robert Home's (1752–1834) early Irish work is *Theobald Wolfe* (1710–1784) painted in 1781 or 1782.¹⁸ Wolfe was a barrister and became a Freeman of Dublin in 1749.

Many, if not most, of the men whose portraits adorn the walls of King's Inns were both successful members of the judiciary or bar, and prominent politicians at the same time. Typical examples are *Barry Yelverton, first Viscount Avonmore* (1736–1805) by Hugh Douglas Hamilton and *John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare* (1749–1802) by Thomas Jones.¹⁹ Yelverton was Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer and Attorney-General. Fitzgibbon succeeded Yelverton as Attorney General in 1784, and was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1789. Both men were very active parliamentarians, initially of opposing opinions. Yelverton, a friend of John Philpot Curran and supporter of Grattan, advocated legislative independence for Ireland but ultimately changed his alliance and voted for the Union. Fitzgibbon, on the other hand, was one of those most responsible for the passing of the Act of Union. A portrait of *John Philpot Curran* (1750–1817), Fitzgibbon's arch enemy both privately (they fought a duel in 1785) and publicly, also belongs to the Inns. The portrait, which was purchased for the Inns in 1962, was painted between 1806 (the year of Curran's appointment as Master of the Rolls) and

1815.²⁰ Curran was called to the Irish Bar in 1775. By 1782 he had become King's Counsel and in the following year was returned to the Irish House of Commons as a member for Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath. Curran's reputation as a gifted orator both in court and in Parliament won him great fame in his own day. He gained widespread popularity with the public for his defences in state trials, the most famous of which occurred in 1798, after the insurrection, when he defended nearly all its leaders.

One of the most pleasing portraits in the King's Inns collection, painted only a few years before the Curran portrait, is that of *Robert Day* (1746–1841) by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (c.1739–1808). It is a small painting and displays a freshness and freedom uncommon in legal portraiture. Day was noted as a man of academic distinction. Called to the Bar in 1775, he had a varied career, eventually becoming Justice of the King's Bench in 1798. Almost half of those represented in the King's Inns collection are individuals of the nineteenth century and they include such well known personalities as *Charles Kendal Bushe* (1767–1871) by Martin Cregan and *Sir Maziere Brady* by Thomas Jones. Bushe was made Attorney-General in 1805 and Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1822. The portrait, one of at least three that Martin Cregan painted of him,²¹ was commissioned in 1842 by the Benchers, and exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy in the following year.²²

Maziere Brady was successively Solicitor General, Chief Baron of the Exchequer and Lord Chancellor of Ireland. He was a man of many interests and is particularly revered today for his involvement in the arts. He was president of the Academy of Music and of the Irish Art Union which was instrumental in setting up the National Gallery of Ireland. In 1856 he was responsible for securing the purchase of thirty-nine paintings for the Gallery by providing an interest-free loan from his own personal funds. These paintings, mostly seventeenth century Italian, formed the nucleus of the collection.²³ Thomas Jones was one of a number of prominent Irish artists for whom Brady sat. His King's Inns portrait of Brady is, like many of the works hanging in the Dining Hall, full length and life-size. It was painted posthumously in 1872,²⁴ as was another rather similar portrait of

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Brady by Jones which is now in the National Gallery of Ireland (cat. no. 132).

Members of the judiciary, who chose to have their portraits painted during the nineteenth century, commissioned many of the leading Irish portraitists of the period. As a result, the collection now stands as an interesting example of the development of Irish Portraiture. Given the serious nature of the profession of the King's Inns sitters the paintings are on the whole very formal and they conform to a certain stereotype common all over Europe in the period. This makes it difficult to judge the individual qualities of the various painters involved, but it also points to the high standard and professionalism achieved by artists such as Martin Cregan, Stephan Catterson Smith the Elder and Thomas Alfred Jones.

Martin Cregan (1788–1870) studied at the Dublin Society's School before going to London where he became a pupil of Martin Archer Shee. On his return to Dublin in 1822 he became one of the founder members of the Royal Hibernian Academy where he was a frequent exhibitor and whose president he was for twenty three years. Apart from the above mentioned portrait of Charles Kendal Bushe he also executed three further life-size paintings for the Inns at the request of the Society.

Stephen Catterson Smith the Elder (1806–1872) in many ways succeeded Cregan as leading portrait painter in Dublin in the 1860s. He was born in Yorkshire and studied at the schools of the Royal Academy and later in Paris. He practised as a portrait painter in London and Derry before coming to Dublin in 1845. Like Cregan, he was appointed portrait painter to the Lord Lieutenant, and, in 1859, became President of the RHA. He painted two of the King's Inns portraits, those of *Sir Thomas Staples* (1775–1865) and *John Edward Walsh* (1816–1869), Master of the Rolls from 1866. His portrait of Staples, who was Queen's Counsel and reputedly the last surviving member of the Irish House of Commons, is a very confident and accomplished painting. It was painted in 1865 at the request of the Benchers²⁵ and exhibited at the RHA in the same year.²⁶

Thomas Jones (1823–1893) followed Catterson Smith as President of the RHA in 1869, and like Smith and Cregan before him carried on a most successful



John Butler Yeats,
Judge James Whiteside (1804-76) speaking in
the Fitzgerald Will Case. 20.2 x 20.5 cm.
(NGI cat. no. 2575)

practice as portrait painter in Dublin. He was a very industrious artist and he produced a huge volume of work not all of which is of an equal standard. The best example of his portraits in the Inns (there are five in all) is his *Hedges Eyre Chatterton* (1820–1910). Chatterton is portrayed in the splendid black and gold braided robes of his office. This impressive painting was exhibited at the RHA in 1869²⁷, two years after Chatterton had become Vice-Chancellor of Ireland.

The portrait painters of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are also well represented in the collection, with works by Augustus Burke, Sarah Purser, Sarah Cecilia Harrison, Walter Osborne, John Yeats and William Orpen. Osborne painted three of the King's Inns portraits: *John Thomas Ball* (1815–1898), *Hewitt Poole Jellett* (1825–1911) and *Edward Gibson, Lord Ashbourne* (1837–1913). John Thomas Ball is depicted in his robes as Lord Chancellor of Ireland, a post he held between 1875 and 1880. The painting is signed but not dated and, illustrates how formal and meticulous a painter Osborne could be when the commission required it.

Perhaps the most unexpected painting in the collection is the self-portrait of John Butler Yeats (1839–1922). The painting is not signed or dated but judging by Yeats's appearance, it is a late work, possibly executed shortly before

(or indeed shortly after) his departure for America in 1908. It is not altogether inappropriate that his image now hangs in the Inns. He himself entered King's Inns as a student in 1862 and was called to the Bar in 1866. He worked for a short time for Isaac Butt, who was a friend of his father's and whom he greatly admired. During his period at King's Inns, Yeats was an active member of the Debating Society. At the Bar, his concentration was not on legal matters but rather on making satirical drawings of the judges and counsels. These drawings were often passed around the court room causing great amusement to some and embarrassment to others.²⁸ A good example of Yeats' court room activities is the sketch of *James Whiteside speaking in the Fitzgerald Will Case* (1866) in the National Gallery (cat. no. 2575). Although Yeats gave up law altogether in 1867 to pursue his career as an artist, he kept in contact with his former colleagues, as confirmed by a letter to his daughter of 1902, in which he mentions having dined at King's Inns.²⁹

Of the twentieth century portraits, one in particular is of as much historical as purely legal interest. It is *High Treason*³⁰ by Sir John Lavery (1856–1941), and illustrates the court room scene at the appeal against the conviction of Sir Roger Casement in 1916. During the First World War, Casement went to Berlin to negotiate support for the cause of Irish Independence. In 1916 the Germans sent a ship with arms for the rising which was captured by British warships and subsequently blown up by its own crew. Casement, who had been following the ship in a German submarine, was arrested and later found guilty of High Treason and hanged on the 3rd August 1916. In the picture Casement is shown in the middle background behind bars. The main focus of attention in Lavery's monumental canvas is on the presiding judges and the debating lawyers. A much reduced version of *High Treason* is in the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art and was referred to in William Butler Yeats' poem *The Municipal Gallery Revisited*, 'Casement upon Trial, half hidden by the Bars, Guarded'.³¹ Lavery was a keen observer of Irish affairs and he painted a number of subject paintings which illustrate his interest in Irish politics including *Love of Ireland* (the lying-in-state of Michael Collins), *The Ratification of the Irish Treaty in the English House of Com-*

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mons (1921) and *The Blessing of the Colours* (1923).

Later twentieth century Irish portraiture is well represented in the collection with works by Sean O'Sullivan, Leo Whelan, James Le Jeune and David Hone. Leo Whelan (1892–1956) studied at the Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin, under William Orpen, and became one of Dublin's best known portraitists from the 1920s. King's Inns has three of his works: *Hugh Kennedy* (1879–1936) of 1925, *Cecil Lavery* (1894–1967) of 1939 and *John Aloysius Costello* (1891–1976) of 1949. These offer the visitor an insight into the development of his style over the whole of his career. His portrait of Cecil Lavery is very striking and is a good indication of his ability as a painter. He managed to create, in what is a formal portrait, a feeling of alertness and tension by the forcefulness of the sitter's pose as well as by the sharp contrast between the shiny gown in the background and the red of the garment draped on the chair.

Thomas O'Higgins' portrait by James Le Jeune (1910–1983) was painted in 1977 when O'Higgins was Chief Justice (a post he held until his appointment to the



James Le Jeune, Thomas O'Higgins, signed, 'Le Jeune', 96.5 x 72.2 cm.

European Courts of Justice) and is in the light palette and lively brushwork so characteristic of Le Jeune.

In addition to the many oil paintings in King's Inns there are also a number

of drawings, watercolours and busts. Most of the busts are nineteenth century and are placed in niches clearly designed by Gandon for the display of sculpture in the entrance hall. The busts are by various sculptors including, Christopher Moore (1790–1863), Timothy Butler (1806–c.1879) and Thomas Woolner (1825–1892). The overall effect of the Inns, therefore is one of unity, the paintings and busts forming an integral part of the design of the building. There is also a great sense of history preserved and of continuity. The tradition of placing portraits of eminent members of the legal profession in the Inns is still in evidence today with the most recent addition to the collection being the portrait of the present Chief Justice, Thomas Finlay whose portrait by John Kelly, RHA was commissioned by the Honorable Society of King's Inns in 1989.

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NOTES

1. The definite article was apparently later dropped from the name.
2. By the 18th century.
3. See Daire Hogan *The Honorable Society of King's Inns*, (Dublin 1987) for further information on the history of King's Inns and for a bibliography of the subject.
4. For a detailed account and description of the building of King's Inns, see Edward McParland, *James Gandon*, (London 1985), chapter 6.
5. Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, *History of the City of Dublin*, (London 1818), Vol. 2, p.1019. I am grateful to Colum Kenny for bringing this reference to my attention.
6. Minutes of King's Inns.
7. Russell exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1805 and 1809 and Baron Manners sat for him in London in 1812, according to King's Inns Minutes.
8. King's Inns Minutes.
9. Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, *op. cit.*, p.1019.
10. *First Report of the Portrait Committee, 1872*. A printed report held in the King's Inns Library.
11. Printed reported held in the King's Inns Library.
12. Printed report held in the King's Inns Library.
13. H P Jellet, *The Catalogue of the Portraits in the Hall of the King's Inns*, (Dublin, no date). The catalogue records Jellet's own portrait presented in 1899 but not that of Hugh Law presented in 1901.
14. V T H Delany in *The Law Quarterly Review*, (1961), vol 77, pp. 169–72. I am grateful to Neil Osborough, Professor of Laws TCD for bringing this article to my attention.
15. H P Jellet, *op. cit.* p.21.
16. John Thomas Gilbert in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, (London, since 1917), vol. II. pp. 1020–21.
17. W Strickland, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*, (Dublin and London 1913) vol.I, p. 540.
18. *Ibid.* Strickland mentions two identical portraits of Wolfe by Home painted in 1781 and 1782 respectively. The King's Inns portrait is signed R. Home 1781 (2), the last digit is unclear.
19. After a portrait of Fitzgibbon by Charles Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) which now hangs in the Examination Hall in Trinity College.
20. This painting was engraved in 1815 by Samuel Freeman (1773–1857) after a drawing by John Byrant Lane (1788–1868) of the original painting then in Curran's possession. This information has not to date led to an identification of the artist. It was purchased as a work by Hugh Douglas Hamilton and although it is of a high quality it was not listed by Strickland (*op. cit.*) as by Hamilton nor does Fintan Cullen, 'The Oil Paintings of Hugh Douglas Hamilton' in *The Walpole Society*, (1984), vol.L, pp.165–208, include it among the works of Hamilton.
21. Two are in the National Gallery of Ireland, cat. nos. 865 and 1375.
22. A M Stewart, *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts index of exhibitors and their works 1826–1979*, (Dublin 1986).
23. M Wynne, *Later Italian Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland*, (Dublin 1986).
24. King's Inns Minutes and Strickland, *op. cit.* It is also indistinctly signed T.A. Jones 1872.
25. King's Inns Minutes.
26. A M Stewart, *op. cit.*, vol.III, p. 164.
27. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 127.
28. See William M Murphy, *Prodigal Father, The Life of John Butler Yeats*, (London 1978).
29. *Ibid.*
30. Bequeathed by Sir John Lavery to The Royal Courts of Justice in London and on indefinite loan from the government picture collection to King's Inns since 1951.
31. Hilary Pyle, *Yeats at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin*, (Dublin 1988).



Studio of Sir Peter Lely, Sir John Povey, 117 x 94.5 cm.



Philip Hussey, St George Caulfield, 75 x 61 cm.



Hugh Douglas Hamilton, Robert Day, 73 x 62 cm.



*Walter Osborne, John Thomas Ball, signed 'Walter Osborne',
125.5 x 102.5 cm.*