

Ir Nation  
ument &  
d Quay

**AN IGNORED  
ISSUE OF  
WOOD QUAY**  
LOATH AS I am to enter the  
emotive Wood Quay situation,  
I feel that an important aspect  
of the whole problem has been  
ignored. I refer to the tenants  
of Dublin Corporation and  
those people who in their thou-  
sands travel long distances to  
the various departments to  
an untold



Sir, — The following  
of a letter sent to  
Education:  
"At our request  
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**DUBLIN 1979**

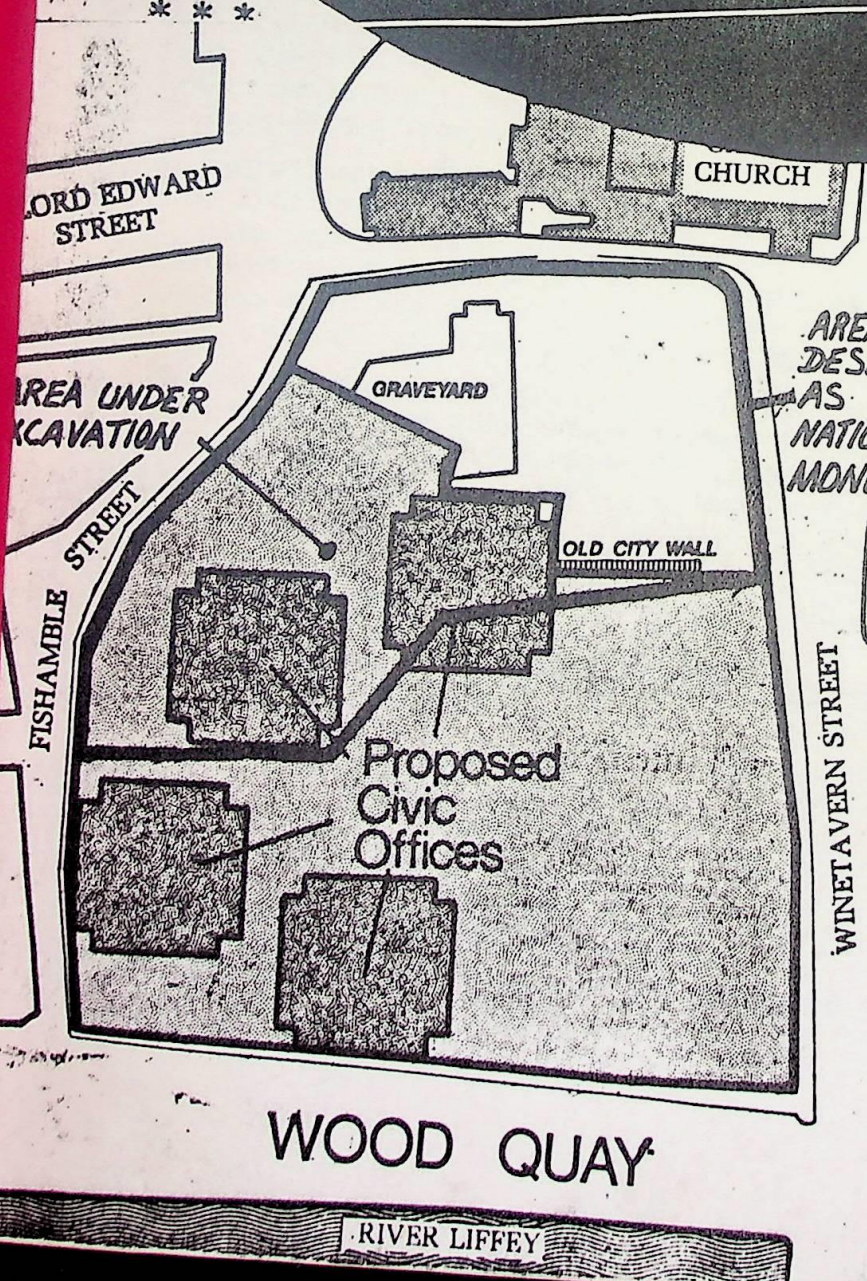
~~destruction~~

Art «» Society

lorcan walshe

**RELIGIOUS  
PRESS AND  
WOOD QUAY**  
We wish to join, in  
strongest possible way  
protest and dismay exp  
so widely following  
decision of the Minist  
State for Finance conce  
the Wood Quay site.  
At a time when we  
trying to make something  
of the E.E.C. — apart  
money — it is surely

City office  
native  
ite



**BRING  
WOOD QUAY  
DEVELOPMENT**

The Friends of Medieval  
Dublin reject the construction  
on any part of the Wood Quay  
site of the civic office build-  
ings as at present proposed or  
any modification thereof, such  
high-rise buildings being in-  
compatible with environmental  
and conservation principles, and  
being against the express be-  
liefs of the many thousand  
citizens who oppose the de-  
struction of a National Monu-  
ment and its environment.

Groups and associations  
represented at the mass demon-  
stration on Saturday, Septem-  
ber 23, are forming a joint  
action committee to monitor  
developments on the Wood  
Quay site and to organise such  
public action as may be deemed  
necessary.

A statement will be issued  
shortly on the archaeological  
and environmental develop-  
ments on the site.

F. X. MARTIN, O.B.A.,

Chairman,  
Friends of Medieval Dublin,  
The decision is contrary to the  
explicit advice of a statutory  
body, the National Monuments  
Advisory Council. Do not two  
Acts of Parliament cover the  
situation: the National Monu-  
ments Act of 1930, and the  
Amending Act of 1954? These  
laws are there to preserve,  
restore, protect and ensure  
reasonable access to national  
monuments. Is the Govern-  
ment above the law?

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to this part o  
of Dublin N  
the Liffey.  
HARSON (Mr  
Rd.,



INTRODUCTION

"At every attempt to study the world and nature man inevitably finds himself confronted with a series of definite questions to which he is unable to give direct answers. But upon his recognition or non-recognition of these questions, upon his way of formulating them, and upon his attitude towards them, depends the whole further process of his thinking about the world and, consequently, about himself.\*" - P.D.Ouspensky

Dublin 1979. For the painter or sculptor there is the dilemma which lies in assessing the ambiguous relationship of his art and society. The actor, writer, dancer and musician appear more fortunate in that they have a more direct, and evident, access to large sections of the populace; whereas the painter or sculptor, when he isn't being ignored, is more often than not the preserve of that despicable minority of his society - the capitalists.

Sometimes, in frustration, the painter or sculptor discards his art and, proclaiming its death, adopts another means of expression - such as performance art - in an effort to outrage society into the acceptance of his vision - whatever it may entail. Another "solution" is to transform frustration into a convenient Marxist formula and heroically apply it to his art. Another is decadence. Another is the refusal to accept, as infallible, the doctrine that society and art are compatible, or at least in favourable circumstances that they necessarily sustain each other—this is the central argument of this paper.

It is unnecessary to include an account of the arts contribution to Irish society as the answer is available, to a greater or lesser extent, in the art forms which this nation's artists have developed. And, if the relationship is to be judged on the degree of contribution which exists between art and society, it is difficult to evaluate Irish society in its contribution towards the arts.

Although it may, for various reasons, display apparently altruistic tendencies - such as that recent mundane publication, *The place of the Arts in Irish Education\*\** there is, in Ireland, no overall policy, governmental or otherwise, which deals with the Arts. However, since Wood Quay has become an issue certain social characteristics have come to light; and it must follow that society's attitude towards Wood Quay differs little from society's attitude towards the arts.

An overall account of the Wood Quay conflict would demand voluminous treatment. Instead only a cross-section of the information relative to the central argument is included in this paper: a description of the social tension which led to the conflict - the destruction of Dublin - and the ensuing fracas involving sympathisers, politicians, academics and the public in general. At the end of the section on Wood Quay, I do not make proposals or offer conclusions - which, in this case, is the readers prerogative.

The final chapter is a philosophical approach to the hypothesis and deals, not directly with Wood Quay but, with what the Wood Quay conflict symbolises - a society ignorant of its identity. Essentially subjective, the chapter views the issue from the standpoint of a painter - but then, surely, that is my prerogative.

In the appendix is an historical note on the Viking invasions; as the reader may find it interesting to make a parallel between politician and plunderer.

April 10th, 1979.

Lorcan Walshe, Fine Art, N.C.A.D. Dublin.

\* A New Model of the Universe p.390.

\*\* by Ciaran Benson, published by the Arts Council, Dublin 1979.



1.

Dublin 1979 - three decades ago an architecturally unique city serving mainly as an administration centre for the government of an agricultural country - undergoing an inevitable and probably irreversible metamorphosis.

To cater for the voracious needs of twentieth century capitalism the physical and social structure of the city, under the auspices of progress and technology, are being altered. The communities of the inner city are dissolved and migrate to a claustrophobic, unimaginative, but never the less functional, suburbia. These migrations are rarely of a voluntary nature - i.e. movement from slum areas to better living conditions - as the expenditure involved in rehousing these communities could, probably at even less expense, adequately transform the existing environment.

Unfortunately, as the inner city happens to be an advantageous location for the commercial interests which the Irish political and legal systems readily accommodate, there is rarely any significant protest when a community is being evacuated. Only when the buildings are being torn down and office blocks being built in their place is there a public outcry - usually from groups such as The Irish Georgian Society - as another historical and irreplaceable area of Dublin bites the dust.

But even such an outcry has little or no effect as the people involved - both the capitalists and the Georgian sympathisers - form a small minority of the population and so the mindless destruction of the city's architectural heritage continues.

A ludicrous compromise is sometimes reached where mock Georgian facades are built, or the existing ones retained, "disguising" the office block. And on the perimeter of the city a new fashion emerges in the estates being built for the middle income bracket - mock Georgian houses, the ironic creation of the same companies which promote the office block. (a)

The insane legal vandalism of what should be a healthy environment is nearly the immediate evidence of destructive capitalism. A community has been destroyed. Its particular way of life, its traditions, its spirit - however rudimentary - has been removed. The nucleus of something which might have had useful consequences is aborted.

In this country there seems to have been little or no investigation into the effects the destruction of his native community has on an individual but in America Toffler noticed: "the test scores of children who had moved across state or county lines from one to ten times were not substantially different from those of children who had not. But there was a definite tendency for the more nomadic children to avoid participation in the voluntary side of school life - clubs, sports, student government and other extra curricular activities." \*

If one of the effects of migration is a tendency towards isolation, then the individuals of a destroyed community will have difficulty finding identity in a new society where social intercourse would appear to depend more on material possession than on social intercourse. With its unequal distribution of status symbols, the indications of an individual's importance, this new society is fragmented into various levels which communicate only out of necessity.

Artificial communication systems (television, newspapers, etc.) cater only for the levels which control them - i.e. if the more deprived levels had control of television the information transmitted would be of a different nature than that to which we are accustomed. If one were eager to discover

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\* Future Shock - p109.

(Information on books mentioned in the footnotes may be found in the Bibliography at the end of this paper.)

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(a) Dublin offers the tourist many fine examples of the mock Georgian facade in almost every central street south of the Liffey. Perhaps the best is in Kildare St, where even the doors are false.



which strata of society controls artificial communications a little observation produces results - again the source is American, but a further observation should indicate unwelcome similarities:

"Nothing, indeed, is quite so purposive as advertising, and today the average American adult is assaulted by a minimum of 560 advertising messages a day. Of the 560 to which he is exposed, however, he notices only seventy six. In effect he blocks out 484 advertising messages a day to preserve his attention to other matters.

"All this represents the press of engineered messages against his senses. And the pressure is rising. In an effort to transmit even richer image-producing messages at an even faster rate, communications people, artists and others consciously work to make each instant of exposure to the mass media carry a heavier informational and emotional freight."\*

Writing about John Logie Baird and Vladimir Zworykin - the inventors of television - Bernard Dixon believes:

"They would be staggered to know of the rate at which the medium has developed. They would also, surely, be bitterly disappointed at the shadier side of television - the rubbish, the pabulum, the profit hunting, advertising, and mental pollution that always threaten to engulf the valuable qualities of the medium. All the more reason for us to consider carefully other new communications channels that are now being created....there is the burgeoning field of videotapes. A direct descendant of television, this potent communications medium has gigantic potential. Yet its development is being dictated not by any remotely democratic process but solely by commercial manoeuvres."\*\*

Progress and advances are made by the level which has the capacity to introduce them, usually with total disregard of their effect on other, less fortunate, levels - the decision to build an oil refinery in Bantry Bay was certainly not made by the fishing community there. Ideas begin to exist only on the level where they originate and so tend to become dangerously subjective. One has only to step back in history or reflect on the words of Adolf Hitler to see the danger.

"I had only to develop logically what social democracy repeatedly failed in because of its attempts to realize its revolution within the framework of democracy. National Socialism is what Marxism might have been if it could have broken its absurd ties with a democratic order....Why need we trouble to socialize banks and factories? We socialize human beings."\*\*\*

If it would appear alarmist to draw a parallel between Hitler's Germany and present day Ireland, it must not be forgotten that, albeit less brutally, we too are being socialized. If economic considerations can decide an individual's environment, purchasing habits, social position, and even thought processes, then that individual is being socialized. And if we are to credit Toffers predictions, socialization is only beginning:

"We are living through the general crisis of industrialism. In a word, we are in the mist of the super industrial revolution... Revolution implies novelty. It sends a flood of newness into the lives of countless individuals, confronting them with unfamiliar institutions and first time situations. Reaching deep into our personal lives, the enormous changes ahead will transform traditional family structures and sexual attitudes. They will smash conventional relationships between old and young. They will overthrow our values with respect to money and success. They will alter work, play and education beyond recognition. And they will do all this in a context of spectacular, elegant, yet frighteningly scientific advance. If transience is the first key to understanding the new society therefore, novelty is the second. The future will unfold as an unending succession of bizarre incidents, sensational discoveries, implausible conflicts, and wildly novel dilemmas. This means that many members of the new society will never feel at home in it. Like the voyager who takes up residence in an alien country, only to find, once adjusted, that he must move on to another, and yet another, we shall come to feel like strangers in a strange land."\*\*\*\*

\* & \*\*\*\* Future Shock p.149 & p.166 / \*\* What is Science For? p.88

III \*\*\* Europe Since Napoleon p.576.



## II.

"One of the reasons why the makers of the film 'The Spy who Came in From the Cold' had chosen Dublin as a location was because it resembled post war bombed out Berlin."

"Someday, someone is going to do a thesis on the significance of the Wood Quay campaign and they will show that it was not a protest by crackpot conservationists but a revolt by the people against bureaucracy and the cannibalisation of their city."

Rev. Prof. F.X.Martin.

## III.

(The Story so far.)

Dublin 1951. Dublin's Corporation offices were scattered over the city and the office accommodation in some places was so bad that the trade unions representing staff threatened industrial action. A centralised headquarters undoubtedly was necessary on the grounds of efficiency and working conditions.

Wood Quay was chosen as the site for the development because, according to the Corporation, the old Dublin area - "the heart of the city's administration for hundreds of years" - was the most convenient and central area. The site was recommended for this purpose by "world famous experts" and over a period of 23 years the Corporation got approval for the civic offices on the site from the Oireachtas. It then acquired the various properties, held competitions for architects to design the proposed offices and advertised for building contractors.

1969. The site, having been cleared for the building of the offices, was offered to the National Museum for investigation before construction commenced.

1976. The National Museum reported that it was finished with its investigations. The Corporation decided to advance the project and a decision to award the contract to John Paul Ltd., for an estimated £6m, was taken by 28 votes to 2. The Friends of Medieval Dublin, under the chairmanship of Rev. Prof. F.X.Martin (Medieval History U.C.D.), claimed that St. Olaf's Church was located on the Fishamble St. end of the site - although National Museum excavations did not verify this - and warned the Corporation not to sign the contract at that stage or public money would be lost. The contract was signed.

1977 (November). Work begins on the Civic offices. F.X.Martin seeks a declaration from the High Court that the site was a National Monument, and an injunction to prevent such a monument from being built on.

1978 (June 28th). In the High Court Mr. Justice Hamilton declared that the site was a national monument but he said that the Commissioners of public Works and not the courts were vested with the power to decide whether national monuments should be preserved or destroyed.

1978 (July 4th). Dublin Corporation applied to the Commissioners for their consent to build on the national monument. Then, in August, consent was granted subject to certain conditions.

1978 (September 24th). Mobilised by the Friends of Medieval Dublin an estimated 14,000 members of the public attended a demonstration at the site.

1978 (September 26th). The Government instructed the Corporation to freeze further excavations on the site "pending a final decision".

1979 (Jan 4th). Bulldozers start work on the site, allegedly to make safe a part of the site which threatened to cave in.

1979 (Jan 10th). F.X.Martin goes to the High Court again looking for an injunction to prevent bulldozers going in on the site. An interim injunction was granted and, after a series of adjournments, Mr. Justice Gannon granted an interlocutory injunction at the end of January and found that the consent given to the Corporation was invalid.

1979 (March 7th). The High Court decision, which was appealed to the Supreme Court, (by the Corporation), was found invalid. Costs (£300,000) were awarded against F.X.Martin. This decision exhausted all legal remedies available to F.X.Martin, unless he takes the case to Strasbourg's Court of Human Rights.



IV.

(Now read on.)

The history of Wood Quay (1951-1979), if it were to be judged by the basic outline given in part III, has the fairy tale innocence of a man - F.X. Martin - challenging bureaucracy, winning a few battles, and losing the war. But the situation isn't so clear-cut and if we read between the lines we find F.X. Martin fighting (I can't resist the metaphor) a political serpent which eats its tail.

Let us return to July 4th, 1978....

Dublin Corporation applied to the Commissioners for Public Works for permission to build on the national monument. The June 28th High Court decision had ruled that the Commissioners had the power to decide whether Wood Quay should be preserved or not. The Commissioners have the machinery to make decisions such as this in The National Monuments Advisory Council, to whom they turned for advice. The Council's recommendations were then considered by the Commissioners and their decision was forwarded to the Minister for State at the Department of Finance - Mr P. arse Wyse.

Mr. Wyse then announced that a further six weeks should be given to the National Museum for the archaeological excavation of the site before the building of the Civic offices commenced. In his statement Mr. Wyse claimed that the Commissioners "had adverted in particular to the advice which they received from the Standing Committee of the National Monuments Advisory Council".

Many people were deceived by this statement into the assumption that the Council supported the Commissioners in their decision to allow the destruction of Wood Quay to proceed until the Irish Independent published the advice tendered to the Commissioners by the Council on July 18th.

The Council's report was contrary to the Commissioners' decision.

In a paragraph titled "Recommendations and Advice" the Council's report stated; "The site is of the highest archaeological and historical importance. In terms of the architectural, traditional and artistic aspects mentioned in the National Monuments legislation it is of major importance. The Council therefore advises the Commissioners: 1) That consent should not be given under Section 14(1,2, and 3.) of the National Monuments Act 1930, for any actions which would lead to the demolition of any part of the monument or the destruction of archaeological evidence.

2) That there should be a phased archaeological excavation of the site designed to recover the fullest information.

3) That consideration should be given to the permanent conservation of the monument and its environs. "

There is probably some political explanation which would allow for P. arse Wyse's - that the Commissioners had adverted in particular to the advice of the Council - statement to masquerade as truth, although it was essentially a blatant lie. If at that time the political climate was suitable the main opposition party, Fine Gael, could have made political out of the incident by further embarrassing the government in forcing the Minister for State's resignation. But at this time the opposition was also in an embarrassing position.

The Fine Gael spokesman on the Environment, Tom Fitzpatrick, aware of his party's middle class and particularly academic support, introduced a Special Bill for the full preservation of the site. This would have been a logical piece of one-up-manship if there had been a unified party position on the issue - but there was a fly in the ointment; a rather large one in the figure of Paddy Belton, Dublin's Lord Mayor, who was a Fine Gael councillor and had the support of the majority of the Fine Gael members of the Corporation.

If, in the Wood Quay conflict, Prof. F.X. Martin is the knight in shining armour then Paddy Belton must be the dragon. Whether his intransigence on the issue is due to being the target of the Wood Quay sympathisers' scorn, the poet Tom Kinsella described him as "ignorant and proud of it", or out of a less reactionary commitment to the project, he has the ability to cement the Corporation's determination to build the offices. In itself this is quite an achievement as the Councillors depend on the public for election and public opinion, in its letters to the papers and telegrams to the parties concerned, had made itself felt.



Among the influential groups who have objected to the destruction of Wood Quay are: The Institute of Professional Civil Servants, The Union of Students in Ireland, The Artists Group of the United Arts Club, The Religious Press Association, The Liberties Association, The Irish Congress of Trade Unions, An Taisce, The Wood Quay site workers IPCS in addition to the editors of the three national newspapers.

As there are local government elections to be held in June 1979 and Wood Quay is clearly going to be an election issue - P.X. Martin hopes to stand as a candidate, one would expect the Corporation to buckle under the pressure of public opinion. Obviously, if the councillors are willing to gamble on losing office, Wood Quay must be much more than an election issue for those whose primary concern is, usually, to be elected.

Although there have been many voices heard since Wood Quay became an issue there have also been remarkable silences.

At a press conference on Wood Quay Mr. Leo Swan, an archaeologist, produced aerial photographs of the site which were taken in 1974 and again in 1978. He pointed out that, although there was a High Court injunction against bulldozers working on the site, Wood Quay was being destroyed in secret - without the knowledge of the public. He believed the reason there was such strict control of admission to the site was to facilitate the illegal operations of those responsible for the bulldozers.

Destruction was particularly bad in three instances: 35 to 40 metres of the Z shaped 180 metre long Viking wall had been damaged and restored in a haphazard manner: 2000 square metres rich in archaeological material had been removed to allow for the setting of foundations; and a 30 metre long trench had been cut through north of St. John's graveyard almost as far as Fishamble St for no apparent reason.

Mr. Swan's allegation was a very serious one as the National Monuments Act, 1930, reads: "It shall not be lawful for any person to do any of the following things in relation to a national monument: (a) to demolish or remove wholly or in part or to disfigure, deface, alter, or in any manner injure or interfere with any such national monument or (b) to excavate, dig, plough, or otherwise disturb the ground within, around or in proximity to any such national monument." A subsection of the act warns that anyone contravening these provisions may be brought before the courts and fined up to £50 or jailed for six months, or both.

Mr. Swan's allegations were met by silence. It was the duty of the Minister for Justice to institute an enquiry but instead he was silent. Dublin Corporation could have offered an explanation but its spokesmen were silent.

Silence surrounds George Colley, Minister for Finance, and one wonders why he left so important an issue in the inexperienced hands of his Minister for State, Pearse Wyse. Silence surrounds the Taoiseach Jack Lynch who, when the embarrassment became too great, announcing he was taking "a deep interest in the subject", avoided making a decision on the issue. Silence from men whose life-blood is publicity.

Perhaps the most remarkable silence comes from Bord Failte, the Irish tourist board. Claiming that it has made its views known to the relevant Minister, it refused to make them public. Yet, while Bord Failte spent millions of pounds promoting Ireland abroad, it didn't react when the Scandinavian delegation, at the International Housing and Planning Conference in Hamburg, walked out in protest after complaining that a matter concerning their heritage had been turned into an Irish political dogfight. Or has it made any comment on the unobstructed view of Christ Church from the banks of the river Liffey. Nor does Bord Failte seem to notice that the Viking site at York, in England, attracted in 1978 no less than 130,000 paying visitors.

Then there is the expected silence of the property developers who own vast areas of the derelict streets surrounding Wood Quay. Have they too like Jack Lynch an interest in the subject?

V.

While Wood Quay was being manipulated by the flexible hands of our twentieth century magicians, in the corridors of power and the courts of law, it was also being fought on the artificial communication systems. Journalists, understanding the printability of the issue, interviewed every 'expert' available. Dublin Corporation even managed to find experts - Prof. M.J.O. Kelly of U.C.C. and Dr. Joseph Raftery, Director of the National Museum - who were in agreement with their policy of destruction.



Soon the public were being "educated" on Wood Quay.

If such an education was useful, in that public interest and support for Wood Quay was kept alive, it also tended to confuse rather than enlighten. As the journalist ultimately was the vehicle for such an education, propaganda tended to overshadow fact. And, because of its biased nature, one cannot balance conflicting propaganda and arrive at a result free of exaggeration.

So when Prof. O'Kelly announced that whatever emerges on the site will be vulnerable to rapid deterioration - as excavation is destructive by nature - unless housed within the ground floor museum proposed in the Civic office plans, the archaeologists in favour of preservation had to give an equally strong reply. Dr. Ruaidhri de Valera countered with the argument that it is possible to reconstitute, or reconstruct, structures in situ after excavation and that such reconstruction in situ is not prohibitively expensive and is of value. Adding that as the mud banks unearthed on the site were probably a defence structure with stone layers, wooden stays and beams, Dr. de Valera maintained Wood Quay was a more strategically important site than the internal residential areas of High Street and Christ Church Place. Prof O'Kelly replied that the banks were no more than banks of silt dykes to hold back the Liffey.

Unless one is an archaeologist, when faced with such conflicting views, it is impossible to form an opinion. Dr. Raftery seemed to understand this when he made a remarkable statement in one of the national newspapers: "The protest is largely supported by a non-Irish element. Geographers, demographers, natural historians..... what do they know about the science of archaeology? This talk of preservation is going to sterilise the city of Dublin. With this sort of financial loss too, its on the cards that builders of the future will be reluctant to report finds they make and that the workers will be instructed to say nothing about it." \*

There is little need to analyse the verbiage of the Director of the National Museum even if it suggests that to be "ignorant and proud of it" is a prerequisite for those in favour of the destruction of Wood Quay. It is, though, noteworthy that the site is of interest to sciences other than that of the archaeologist.

Prof. Frank Mitchell of Quaternary Studies at T.C.D. has been visiting the site on his own initiative, for the past three years in order to study the botanical remains found there. Claiming "there is a wealth of information being uncovered every day about the lives of those people" and that "it is not being properly dealt with at all"; he maintains there should be a site laboratory manned continuously by at least a botanist, a zoologist and a soil specialist.\*\* (Prof. Mitchell's evidence was instrumental in the High Court declaration that Wood Quay was a national monument).

For those who sympathise and are not of the scientific community the issue may be seen from many different standpoints. Yet if there are many who are interested in Wood Quay as a piece of history the media does not reflect their interest. Although "National Heritage" and "Viking Settlement" have become verbal symbols of the protest very little information regarding the original inhabitants of the site has filtered through the media. Perhaps this happens because, as they weren't a literary race, little is known of them or because they are considered a distasteful subject as, like Dublin Corporation, they too destroyed anything that was not pertinent to their existence.

## VI.

"Only in the contemplation of a work of art is the restless mind of man at peace"

SCHOPENHAUER \*\*\*

Dublin 1979. We have, briefly, seen the issue through the eyes of the politician, the archaeologist, the botanist and the public in general. We have also seen that there is no single motive which would explain Wood Quay - nor will I try to offer one. Instead I will conclude by exploring the issue as an artist trying to come to terms with a society which may eventually destroy its past.

\* Irish Times Jan 9th 1979

† \*\* Irish Press Nov 22nd 1978

\*\*\* A History of Philosophy Vol 7 p.52.



For an artist the immediate tragedy of Wood Quay must be the power level's total disregard for the environment. I need not argue that if one neglects one's environment one is not going to support the arts. If, in the past, the arts reached their greatest heights when they had the good fortune to serve a religion, it must be remembered that it was profitable for both religion and art to sustain each other as there was hardly any distinction between religion and state.

Art, then, was essentially used as part of a communications system - the product being sold was the life of Jesus Christ - or previously Celtic Gods - paid for by donation and tax. But today Church and State no longer control the important power levels which instead are occupied by the manufacturer and property developer who, as I mentioned earlier, have a more powerful means of communication in the advertising agent. And because they have the power to structure the environment and decide on the information its inhabitants receive their behaviour must be constantly acknowledged by the artist who, at very least, used the environment and its inhabitants as a reference point.

And it is by no means a twentieth century phenomena for the artist to object to the manner his society is being manipulated. The dogma that daily life is trivial coupled with a denunciation of those who do not agree, has been repeated innumerable times by artists and their advocates.

John Ruskin - artist and art critic, and later (out of frustration) political economist - travelled the British islands announcing to the Victorian industrialists that he had nothing but contempt for their buildings and manufactures. He argued that they were incapable of good architecture because they were not honest and noble, that only a great people produces a great art and that art was an index of social health. Around the same time Matthew Arnold labelled the upper class as barbarians, the middle class as philistine and the wretched working classes as subhuman. Culture, Arnold believed, was the only means of rehumanizing all three.

In the same vein, at the turn of the century, G.B. Shaw remarked "the reasonable man tries to adapt himself to the world. The unreasonable man tries to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

In its reaction against the "unreasonable man" Dadaism - originating in 1916 as a war time phenomenon, and was a protest against the civilization which led to the first World War - set the trend for "protesting" art which has remained in some form or other to the present day.

But then is it possible that the artist is not objecting to the way society is destroying itself but instead to the lack of interest the society has towards the artist himself? Perhaps here we should consider Barzans pessimistic but often accurate observation:

"Facing the unsatisfactory present, it is not hard to sentimentalize about a past in which aristocrats and princes all had excellent taste, or a universal church that knew how to employ great talents, or - best of golden ages - ancient Athens, which was a people of artists. None of these additional fictions will stand up to scrutiny. No system of patronage has ever given satisfaction. Historically the artist has been a slave, an unregarded wage earner, a courtier, a clown and sycophant, a domestic and finally an unregarded, unknown citizen trying to arrest the attention of a huge anonymous public and compel it to learn his name."\*

In arresting the attention of a huge anonymous public, which certain Irish artists such as Robert B. Laugh, Colin Middleton and Michael Farrell have done, an artist must fit into the structure of that society he objects to - he must play the game according to its rules. In adhering to the rules an artist may have a certain guarantee of success but one wonders what effect adhering to the rules will have on his actual art.

Will his art begin to reflect a society which casually accepts or rejects its possessions and where, although the life span of homo sapiens has increased, the life span of its creations grow shorter? Will his art become like the everyday items - once having a life span of years - which now appear on the market as "disposable".

If an object is "new" its predecessor becomes obsolete and unless it becomes a collector's item its existence is terminated. The "newness" of an object, rather than its utility determine its value. Since the advent of Cubism the history of art has witnessed a stream



of new movements appear with ever increasing frequency. The similarity of these movements is not an evolutionary one but rather that they assert their "newness" by emphasising the "oldness" of recent movements.

Again Barzun: "The intellectual agitation surrounding art, energized by the reflex of negation, produces a self-renewing avant-garde. Its purpose is to destroy both academic art and the art of the previous avant-garde. Thanks to these small bands of scouts fighting alone in the forefront of the whole culture, the singularity of genius is not forgotten and the appetite for change is fed. Destruction by novelty becomes an incessant function of art.

"By now the ordinary citizen partakes of this belief as well. Novelty by negation means defeating expectation and being careful to call the result unconventional, off beat, interesting, which with us is an unfailing recommendation. Department stores find their profit in those adjectives when applied to chairs and tables that are unquestionably capable of defeating expectation." \*

This mania for "newness" has fortunately little influence on many artists who, seeing their society, understood its implications. Francis Bacon was aware of the problem when he said: "The difficult thing is to keep open the line to ancestral European painting while producing something that comes across as entirely new."\*\*

In fact the artist may consciously recoil from this "newness". Balzac noticed: "civilizations are bound to suffer from their long memory, their piling up of artifacts and ideas...the cure for this is generally some form of Primitivism."\*\*\* The critic John Rothenstien's remark that: "the products of many "progressive" movements, most particularly perhaps those of the German Expressionists and the Fauves were marked by a conscious roughness, a clumsiness, a quality which owed much to the growing admiration for primitive art" +\*

would suggest that returning to the past is a means of reinforcing the direction of one's art or instead, perhaps, it is a reaction against a society which ignores its origins.

The latter, fortunately, doesn't apply as the evolution of art is marked with incidents where the artist returned to past cultures in order to understand the structure of his art - and often with the risk of upsetting the cultural applecart, as Rothenstein believes: "The work of those who have done most to revitalize European painting - for instance Van Gogh - invariably appeared to their contemporaries as destructive of tradition, especially to the self appointed academic "gaudians" of it. What such men never see is that these madmen rediscover forgotten elements in traditions of infinitely rich and complex legacy." +\*\*

Often it is only when the "primitive" is reincorporated into the mainstream of an established art do we realize how narrow our vision had become, how much it reflects a society so smug in its achievements that it cannot explore outside its cultural cocoon. The initial European reaction towards African Art would support this hypothesis. I quote Dennis Duerden: "When the first great finds were made, for example those of the 1899 expedition to the city of Benin, and the Ife heads rediscovered in 1910 by Leo Forbenius, they were judged by European experts to be works of art, probably because they were more representational. The abstract work, however, was considered to be of great ethnological interest, but of no artistic value. So powerful, indeed was the appeal of the Ife heads that it was even questioned by some that they could be the work of Africans. One of the more remarkable theories advanced to account for their origin was that they might have been made by some visiting Renaissance artist, because of their almost classical elegance.

"The abstract work did not receive its full measure of appreciation until it was discovered by Picasso and Braque in Paris, and Kirchner and the Expressionists in Germany. Much later its influence became apparent in the work of Brancusi and Henry Moore, but it is only since about 1945 that it has, in artistic merit, received its due. +\*\*

\* The Use and Abuse of Art. p.51  
\*\* Modern English Painters p.114  
\*\*\* The Use and Abuse of Art p.80

+\* Modern English Painters p.27  
+\*\* Modern English Painters p.5  
+\*\*\* African Art p.10



It is interesting to note that "probably because they were more representational" the life heads were considered as art while the abstract work was dismissed as "of great ethnological interest". If we are to value the cultural yardstick of today then it must follow that the society which "judged" this rediscovered art had less visual awareness than the society of its origins. Only when, about 1945, the Western "experts" discovered that their own artists had become "primitive" were these pieces of great ethnological interest promoted to the realm of art. Similarly, in his book Celtic Art, Ian Finlay maintains that early Irish art was considered as @ nothing more than decorative until the advent of abstraction.

The experts of 1910 had their vision narrowed by the artistic concept of the ideal representation of man in the Greek manner. In short their "infallible" yardstick measured the history of art by the achievement of one movement - when such a movement was the exception rather than the rule, Desmond Morris: "a trend can be observed

in the drawing of children as they grow older. The figures depicted by very young children are full of supernormal elements, as are the art products of most ancient tribal cultures. Heads are an important part of the body, so heads are shown bigger than normal. Eyes are important, so huge eyes stare out of the drawn or sculptured heads. Only when children approach adulthood do they begin to reduce these exaggerations to an approximation of the natural proportions. And in adult art, only on a few occasions in the history of painting and sculpture have the goals of the artist been to reproduce as accurately as possible the outside world." \*

Similarly, the painter, Christopher Wood had this to say: "All great modern painters are not trying to paint things as they see them through the eyes of experience of a man of forty or fifty or whatever they may be, but through the eyes of the smallest child who sees nothing except those things which would strike him as the most important. To the childish drawing they add the beauty and refinement of their own experience" \*\*

The label "primitive" becomes restrictive, as do many other labels when examined.

"The term 'abstract' is unfortunate" says the painter Stanley William Hayter "as it suggests the abstraction or removal of part of the experience - the attempt to show less of the phenomenon and not more. The non-figurative label again suggests a pretention which is impossible to sustain."

In the light of the above argument, let us consider that, in its nature, art is essentially constant. A phenomenon - while displaying an infinite variety of appearance - which, forever reassertive, is never metamorphic. Fluctuating rather than evolutionary it remains the same in that the effect of a work of great art is out of all proportion to its cause. This was true 4,000 years ago and will most likely be valid in a similar amount of time from now as there is no evidence of an evolutionary process which can increase or decrease the spiritual experience transmitted by a work of art. Discussing aesthetic contemplation Copleston says "the beholder rises above the temporal and changing and contemplates the eternal and unchanging. His attitude is contemplative, not appetitive. Appetite is stilled during aesthetic experience." \*\*\*

If this is true then perhaps we can begin to understand why this transitory society must find in the visual arts a strange bedfellow. And if this Society must progress and advance in order to survive how can it be so blind not to notice that all that survives from countless dead civilizations is the art of those civilisations; not as ruins or flaking frescos but as the actual force within the art of the present. Art survives because its past, present and future are one, but what chance has a society which rushes to the future regardless of its past and even its present? What resources has a society without an identity when faced with a problem its technology cannot solve.

Could this explain Wood Quay?

And if this essay appears pessimistic, it is because it deals with society's weakness not its strength. Here is its strength:

"The voice of the intellect is a soft one but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing. This is one of the few points in which one may be optimistic about the future, but in itself it signifies not a little. And one can make it a starting point for yet other hopes. The primacy of the intellect certainly lies in the far, far, but probably not infinite distance." - Sigmund Freud. +\*

@ see Bibliography

\* The Future of Illusion p.93

\* Manwatching p.129

\*\* Modern English Printers p.77

\*\*\* A History of Philodophy Vol 7 p.44



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## THE VIKING INVASIONS - A Historical Background.

Until around 810 AD Ireland had been spared all the conquests and catastrophes which had swept over western Europe - the Roman, Germanic and Saxon invasions stopped short of the Irish sea. Although Ireland was not exactly peaceful, the internecine strife of the petty Irish dynasties didn't amount to much - being in the nature of family discord and taking place in a society where war had its rules and limits.

Then the Vikings arrived, of them Francoise Henry writes: "They belonged to a different world that knew nothing of unwritten laws. They brought havoc, cutting mercilessly through the network of family relations and established loyalties. Pagans, they violently shocked a society which had become essentially Christian. They plundered without restitution, destroyed without redress" \*

By 840 AD the Norwegians had established a fort in Dublin, which became one of their wealthiest trading posts in the Western world. Then the Danes arrived and engaged in a series of struggles with the Norwegians over the ownership of Dublin. This was resolved in 853 AD with the arrival of a "royal fleet" commanded by one Olav Huit, son of a Norwegian king, whose purpose was to "exact taxes" from the Irish. Firmly entrenched in Dublin, he used the city as a base from which he waged war in England and Scotland.

In 901 AD the Irish, under the king of Leinster, occupied Dublin. The Viking fleet withdrew but returned "victoriously" in 911 AD but by 950 AD Christianity was beginning to penetrate amongst the Scandinavians and they were by that time intermarrying with the Irish. When the kingdom of Dublin passed into the hands of Sitric Silkenbeard, Dublin's first cathedral, Holy Trinity (Christ Church) was built.

Meanwhile (back at the ranch?) an obscure Munster family had grown powerful through the prowess of two of its members - Mahon and his younger brother Brian. They defeated the Norwegian king of Limerick in 968 AD and then the king of Dublin in 1000. Mahon died and Brian unified the country under his rule. He then became known as Brian Boru - Brian of the tributes. His rule lasted ten years. Then in 1014 a Scandinavian army of 10,000 returned and on Good Friday of that year the battle of Clontarf was fought on the northern shore of Dublin Bay. The Irish were victorious, 3,000 Vikings being slaughtered, but Brian Boru was killed while praying in his tent on the evening of the battle.

So ended Scandinavian rule in Ireland.

The effects of the two centuries of Viking invasions and occupation in Ireland were many, especially on the monasteries, again Francoise Henry: "The impact of the Vikings was catastrophic. We hear of nothing but churches set on fire, broken shrines, books destroyed by fire and water. Everywhere the pattern is the same. The Vikings knew very well that the churches contained an accumulation of gold and silver objects.... (which the Vikings) melted and made into coins, or simply cut into fragments of a given weight." \*\*

However while they plundered the monasteries "new towns of a different character were developing, the Viking settlements of Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, all on estuary harbours admirably suited to sheltering the fleets of a hundred or two hundred ships which sometimes gathered there, and also able to accommodate the trading vessels which incessantly called.... ships coming from the Mediterranean brought African slaves, silks from China arrived through Byzantium or across Russia and the trading posts on the Baltic. From these towns in Ireland it was customary to go to Iceland, Greenland and even America" \*\*\*

As such the Vikings introduced cities and towns to Ireland and since then their development, especially in recent times, appears to have been governed by an attitude similar to that of the Scandinavians in their treatment of the monasteries.

In place of the monasteries it is now the historical landmarks of Dublin which are being plundered.

\* p.4; \*\* p.17; \*\*\* p.26:

Irish Art During the Viking Invasions