

The Glebe House and Gallery

VISITORS' GUIDE



Churchill, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

The Glebe House and Gallery

Glebe House, the home for nearly thirty years of the renowned artist, Derek Hill, is situated on rising ground, beside Lough Gartan, east of Glenveagh National Park, Co. Donegal.

Background: Glebe House and Gallery

Glebe House, originally known as St Columb's was built in the Regency style in 1828 as the rectory to St Columba's (Church of Ireland), Churchill, in the Parish of Gartan. The first Rector lived in the house for less than three years to be succeeded, in 1831, by the Rev. Henry Maturin.

In 1861, Reverend Maturin was closely involved in the event that brought the names of Gartan and Church Hill to national prominence. John George Adair, owner of the Glenveagh Estate, believed that his tenants were stealing his sheep, had killed his steward, John Murray, and were even threatening his own life. Consequently, he was determined to evict them. Maturin acted as mediator and joined with Father Kerr, the Catholic Parish Priest, in sending an open letter to Adair appealing for clemency for the tenants. Their appeal fell on deaf ears and in April 1861, 244 people from 46 families were evicted. For his ecumenical action Reverend Maturin was censured by the Dublin Protestant press.

Following the death of Reverend Maturin in 1880, the Glebe, now too large and expensive for the Church to

keep up, was leased to tenants for some years before eventually being sold. After renovations, it opened in 1898 as St Columb's Hotel, taking guests for the salmon and trout fishing in spring and summer and for the shooting in the autumn. Apart from the years 1916-1922, when the hotel was taken over for a short while by the IRA and later by the Royal Irish Constabulary, the hotel was open every year until the death of its owner, Mrs Kitty Johnstone in 1950. It was then run by her daughter until it was acquired by Derek Hill.

Derek Hill was born in England in 1916 and educated at Marlborough College, where he showed an early interest in painting. However, he was persuaded by his father to concentrate on stage design and studied in Munich, Paris, Vienna and Russia. He returned to Paris in 1937 to paint and at the outbreak of World War II, Hill returned to England



Right: Derek Hill, Glebe Gallery



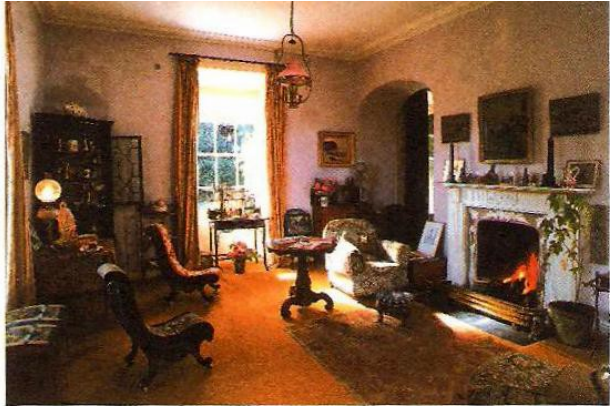
Donegal Late Harvest, By Derek Hill, 1959

and, as a conscientious objector, volunteered for farm work. During those years, he met many of the leading British artists and began buying the works of painters of the Euston Road School.

In 1946, Hill was in to Ireland for a whole year, painting in Galway and Mayo. In 1949 he visited Italy, and, for the next five winters, he stayed in the home of the art historian Bernard Berenson outside Florence. In Italy he also met Henry McIlhenny, who invited him to visit Glenveagh Castle. Hill visited in 1949 and 1951 and hearing that St Columb's was for sale, eventually bought it in 1953.

Derek Hill re-converted St Columb's into a home once more, with the help of his brother John, an interior designer and director of a design company. He added heating and electricity and converting the stable block into a studio and extra accommodation for his guests and housekeeper. Hill also began to create an informal woodland garden out of the previous working garden.

Hill's love of landscape painting was matched by his interest in portraiture and over the years he painted a wide range of subjects. His paintings of Tory Island stimulated a number of the islanders to paint and the "Tory Island School" has now achieved international acclaim in its own right. In 1981, Derek Hill



The Drawing Room

donated St Columb's, its contents and the gardens to the Nation. Hill's studio and guesthouse were transformed into the Glebe Gallery displaying items from the Derek Hill Collection as well as providing a location for travelling exhibitions. The house and gardens are displayed in an informal manner, as though Derek Hill was still in residence. In recognition of his unfailing support of the Arts in Ireland, Hill was awarded an honorary doctorate by Trinity College, Dublin and made an honorary citizen of Ireland in 1998. In England, he was appointed CBE in 1997. He died in London in August 2000.

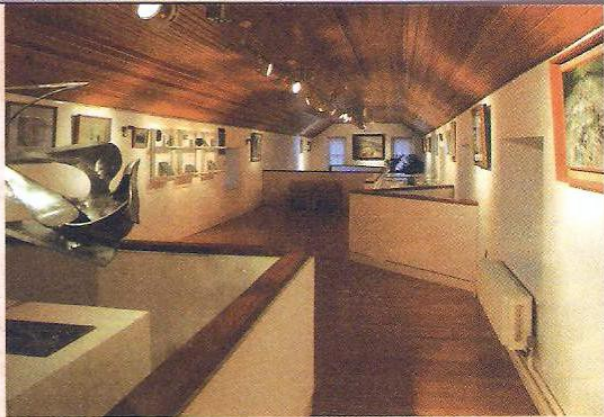
Visiting the House.

The Hall and Morning Room.

The brilliant blue of the Hall gives a dramatic introduction to the house, and was chosen to match the blue in the two Chinese scrolls which Hill brought from Peking in 1936. By the front door hangs *Study of Fruit* by Louis le Brocquy while over the door to the morning room is a framed square of *Willow Boughs* wallpaper, designed by William Morris in 1897. The Morning Room continues the Chinese theme with wood-block prints of two warriors, scenes from traditional Chinese theatre and oriental bamboo and lacquer furniture. An old display stand contains Victorian and Edwardian postcards while



Tile. Iznik, Turkey, late 16th century



Glebe Gallery Interior

the loving-cup on the table is a fine example of Wemyss Ware.

The Dining Room

Designed especially for evening use, the dark green wallpaper and the glow of the lamps give this room a cosy, relaxed feeling. The richness of colour is enhanced by the Turkish paper in the alcoves and the wealth of items in the room. The four paintings are by Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-73), famous for his 'sentimental' paintings of animal scenes.

The inlaid dining table, of Continental make, depicts the various Arts. It dates from the mid-19th century. The tiles set into the mantelpiece are by William de Morgan while the painting above the fireplace of the Dromara Hills in Co. Down is by the Antrim artist Basil Blackshaw.

The Drawing Room and Japanese Room

Warmed by the rich gold of the carpet and the Turkish paper in the alcove, the pale lavender of the walls is complemented by the many purple and mauve objects in the room. To the left of the window, a display cabinet contains decorative pieces from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Above the fireplace, which came from Lough Veagh House, the painting, *Evening Thames at Chiswick* was painted by Victor Pasmore in the 1940s. On either side, the two small paintings are by the Italian painter Antonio Music. To the right of the fireplace a Chinese cabinet with ceramic insets holds a collection of shells. The two largest paintings in the room are by Derek Hill. Over the couch is *Donegal, Late Harvest* (1959) painted from the bridge on the way to Church Hill; the other is of Hill's favourite dog, Ceasar.

To the left of the fireplace, an archway opens into the Japanese Room. The oriental feel is enhanced by the Chinese Lacquer writing desk while the mainly 19th-century Japanese wood-block prints hanging on bamboo-printed paper include works by leading Japanese artists.

The Kitchen

This has changed little since St Columb's was a hotel. The dresser, containing a variety of Wemyss Ware has been brightened by painting it a deep red with blue and white stripes on the backboard. The pipe work has also been painted different colours. The paintings around the kitchen are mainly by the

Tory Island Painters while, by the window, the portrait by Derek Hill is of his housekeeper, Gracie McDermott.

Downstairs Cloakroom

Against a wallpaper of Turkish design, hangs a collection of posters with amusing or ambiguous titles. There is also a portrait of Derek Hill painted in Rome in the early 1950s by Derrick Greaves.

Back Hall, Stairs and Landing.

The walls of the Back Hall and Stairs are covered with paintings, mainly the works of Hill's contemporaries and friends. The wallpaper around the window on the return is a William Morris design called *Apple*. On the upstairs landing is a cartoon for a stained glass window, *Christ in Judgement*, by the Irish stained glass designer Evie Hone (1894-1955).

The Rose Bedroom

This bright and airy guest bedroom has strips of patterned pink and grey wallpaper at intervals around the room. These colours are continued in the selection of Wemyss Ware. The screen, made for an Edwardian nursery, is decorated with Christmas cards and pictures of interest to a small child. The two large windows allow fine views of the gardens and lake.

The Study

The walls and ceiling are covered with a William Morris *Blackthorn* design paper with bookshelves filled with books,

periodicals, paintings, Staffordshire figures and family photographs. William de Morgan tiles surround the fireplace above which hangs *Waves in Sicily* by John Bratby (b.1928). The bronze head of Derek Hill was sculpted by John Sherlock about 1958.

The Morris Bedroom

The wallpaper, carpet and curtains are all William Morris and Co. products. The wallpaper is called *Golden Lily*, the carpet is hand-knotted and close in style to those produced by Morris in the 1880s. *The Peacock and Dragon* woven woolen fabric of the curtains was the most expensive produced by the company.

The mahogany Half-tester bed was bought from Lough Veagh House and the American appliqué quilt from Alabama dates from the 1830s. Beside the bed hangs John Bratby's *Jean in Bed with Jaundice*, the brilliant colours and feverish atmosphere characteristic of his work.

The Master Bedroom

Derek Hill's former bedroom is hung in a striking blue and grey wallpaper. The bed was bought locally but the embroidered bedspread came from India. The large wardrobe of satinwood dates from around 1890. The many small paintings and drawings hanging in the room are by friends of Hill's and served as mementos of them.



The Entrance Hall of St. Columb's



The Kitchen Dresser with Wemyss Ware



The Dining Room