

Allegations are a 'stick to beat Limerick with'



Clr Maria Byrne, Jim O'Donnell, chairman Limerick Civic Trust, Mayor Sadlier and Denis Leonard, director Limerick Civic Trust at the launch of the new guide

By MAIRÉAD NÍ CHAOIMH

LIMERICK CIVIC Trust believes the allegation that the Hunt family were linked to Nazi art dealers was a "story that should never have gotten off the blocks."

Trust chairman Jim O'Donnell said, "Very serious allegations, and I stress the word allegations, have been made which are having a profound effect not only for the Hunt museum, the Hunt family, but also for Limerick City."

An anti-Nazi group, the

Simon Wiesenthal Centre, claimed in February that the Hunt family were linked to

notorious dealers in art looted by the Nazis. Mr O'Donnell took the opportunity of the launch of the Limerick City Attractions Guide on Tuesday night in the Georgian House to make his comments.

"This has been another stick to beat Limerick with, the Hunt family has been hurt by it and everyone has been hurt. Unsubstantiated criticism is never good. This was a puff of smoke taken up by the media and blown out of all proportion," said Mr O'Donnell.

"We are 100 per cent behind the Hunt family. We wish them well in

their efforts to eliminate once and for all these unfounded and unsubstantiated allegations which a handful of people are kiting for their own ulterior motives. We believe that in time all of the allegations will be proven false. The Hunt Collection has been a gift to the people of Ireland and Limerick is the big winner in this regard with the siting of the collection in the magnificently restored Custom House."

The new Limerick City Attractions Guide launched by Mayor Dick Sadlier is "imaginatively designed, simple, lovely, eloquent and easy to read."

"This is another great boost for Limerick and an important milestone in

the history of the Civic Trust. On the twenty-first birthday of your organisation this is a great coming of age," the Mayor said.

The brochure details ten of Limerick city's top visitor attractions and includes details of opening hours, websites and contacts.

The contribution of an anonymous donor to the cost of the guide was "the difference between the publication or shelving of this magnificent guide", according to Mr O'Donnell.

"In our view this is the best brochure of its kind for Limerick ever; it really is top class," he added.

A total of 50,000 copies of the guide have been printed.

THE LIMERICK historian who wrote an essay on John and Gertrude Hunt has claimed her words were taken out of context, Judith Hill was commissioned by the Hunt Museum to write an essay on the Hunts in 1998. In the following letter, Ms Hill explains how her essay was leaked and used to lend credence to claims by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre among others that the Hunts had links to Nazi art dealers.

□ I WOULD like to clarify a few points relating to an essay I wrote for the Hunt Museum on John and Gertrude Hunt which has been quoted and referred to in a number of recent articles and broadcasts.

In 1998 I was commissioned by the Hunt Museum to write a 2,000-word biographical essay on John and Gertrude Hunt. The essay I wrote briefly covered the career of the Hunts as dealers and collectors, their involvement in the restorations of Bunratty castle and the setting up of Craggaunowen, and of John Hunt's activities as an archaeologist and scholar. I submitted the draft with a list of references to the museum to fulfil the commission. If they had wished to pursue the matter towards publication I would have gone through the process of rereading, checking and adding footnotes, and done any rewriting that we jointly considered necessary.

Once my draft was acknowledged I heard nothing further from the museum. The essay was never published. Since then the essay has been leaked, used without my knowledge or permission, and has formed the basis of several inaccurate and misleading public statements. In the article printed in The Irish Times on 7 February 2004 two sentences from two separate paragraphs of my essay were put together and quoted to give a misleading

impression of my account of the Hunt's activities. The quotation as it appeared in The Irish Times was as follows:

"Wide scale Nazi thefts and the looting endemic in wars exacerbated the hazards of art dealing, causing many items to lose provenance: this too coloured the environment in which art changed hands in the mid-twentieth century. The Hunts fitted seamlessly into this world."

In the essay the first sentence was at the end of a paragraph which attempted to describe the conditions existing in Europe in the 1930s and 40s, making it a relatively favourable place in which to deal in art. I focused on Germany and Ireland where the Hunts had family and business connections. I mentioned the release of art from private collections in Germany due to the fear of war in the 1930s, and in the aftermath of the war. I mentioned the auctions of Anglo-Irish estates in Ireland, and the relative ease with which individual items could be exported. I mentioned the availability of art looted by the Nazis and the looting endemic in wars. In the following paragraph I argued, using examples from the Hunt archive, that the Hunts, well-connected and highly proficient art dealers, were able to take advantage of these conditions.

The quotation in The Irish Times gave the misleading impression

that I was focusing on the Hunts as dealers in looted European art, whereas I only included the reference to looted art as background to the European art market in which they operated at the time. The issue of whether the Hunts were directly involved in dealing with illegally acquired objects was one that I did not confront and investigate in the essay. Consequently I have no proof that this was the case, and in no place in my article did I claim that this was the case.

It has been said in several radio broadcasts that my essay clearly stated that John and Gertrude Hunt were Nazis. It has also been stated that the essay claimed they had relationships with known Nazis. At no point in my essay did I state that John and Gertrude Hunt were Nazis. At no point in my essay did I state that John and Gertrude Hunt had relationships with known Nazis.

Finally, it has been brought to my attention that alterations were made to my essay, and that a second draft version has been produced. The changes were such as to make the essay unintelligible in places. This version was typed and circulated under my name. All this was done without my knowledge or permission.

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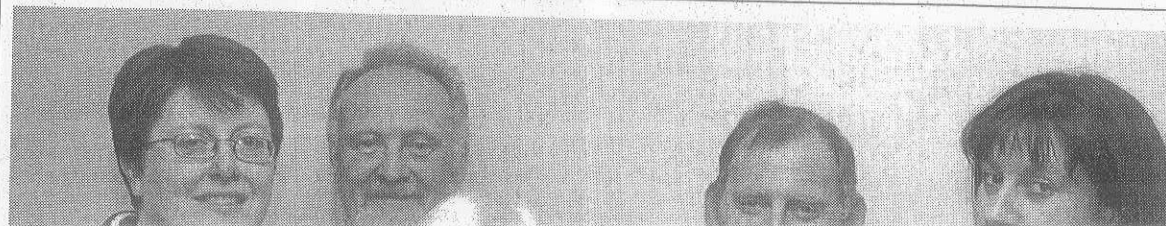
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