

Hunts' son says his mother was anti-fascist and a pacifist

By MIKE DWAN and NORMA PRENDIVILLE

JOHN Hunt, the son of John and Gertrude Hunt who have been accused of Nazi affiliations by a leading anti-Nazi group, has described his mother as "deeply anti-fascist".

Meanwhile, the Hunt Museum is to speed up its project to put the entire collection on the internet, something which was called for by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

Speaking to the Limerick Leader this Wednesday, Mr Hunt Jnr said his mother was born in Germany in 1903 and lived through World War I, was "massively pacifist". "She would be outraged at any human rights breaches, as she went on" and would have considered the vote, as sacred.

"The reason she left Germany before the war was because she saw the way the political situation was going, it terrified her,"

He agreed it couldn't be

and she didn't like it. She wanted out like many thousands of Germans at the time."

He described as "utter nonsense" the suggestion that she and her husband of six years came to Ireland in 1933 "one step ahead of M15".

"The plan had always been to come home to Ireland because my father was Irish and wanted to come back. When they had a few bobs, the plan was to relocate."

"My mother was deeply grateful to be living in Ireland and even learnt Irish," Mr Hunt went on—and she would have considered the vote as sacred."

Mr Hunt said that to the best of his knowledge none of very little of the items in the Hunt Collection were bought in Germany.

The Hunt Collection had been in the public domain for many years, he pointed out—and nobody had come forward claiming that items had been stolen at some time in the past.

"We can't act until we formally receive the letter. When we receive that, we will be in touch with the

"ruled out" absolutely that a search might turn up an item."

"All the museum can hope is to be open and if a problem arises to deal with it according to international law. If, heaven forbid, it turned out there was something dodgy there which was unknowingly acquired we would follow international practice and undo the injustice," he said.

Meanwhile, the letter sent by the Wiesenthal Centre to President McAleese containing the allegations has been forwarded by the Arts Department to the museum.

"We will be working with all the relevant agencies. The Wiesenthal Centre, The Hunt Museum trustees and the Department for the Arts to get clarity on all of this," said Hunt director Virginia Teehan, adding that she had met senior Department officials on the matter on Tuesday.

"We can't act until we formally receive the letter. When we receive that, we will be in touch with the

Wiesenthal Centre and will most likely be looking for further clarification on the issue."

The controversy arose when Dr Shimon Samuels,



Virginia Teehan, curator, Hunt Museum

last year.

Calling on President McAleese to suspend the award, pending an inquiry into the Hunt Collection, Dr Samuels said "knowing of dubious connections between John Hunt and dealers in looted Nazi art, the prestige of the museum's contents at a meeting of the Irish Museums Association

is being impugned."

Speaking to the Limerick Leader, Dr Samuels said the Wiesenthal Centre first became suspicious about the Hunt Collection six months ago following an article in the Irish arts periodical.

Dr Samuels also pointed out that former Hunt

curator Ciaran McGonigal had raised concerns over the provenance of

the museum's contents at a meeting of the Irish

Museums Association

EU must show its young people that it is transparent and doesn't shy away when it comes to hard questions like war crimes and art looting and Ireland's role in them," he stated.

"Ireland has never stud-

ied its neutrality. Now, Ire-

land as President of the

goodwill of collectors and the local community to attract its exhibits.

"The grant we get from the Government only cov-

ers a third of our running costs so we're very dependent on local and national support. Obviously, our reputation and good name is very important to us," she said.

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Accuser is liaison officer at centre



DR Shimon Samuels, the man who wrote to President McAleese asking her to suspend the Hunt Museum's Museum-of-the-Year award, is the international liaison director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is an international Jewish human rights organisation dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement.

Dr Shimon Samuels of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre

educational outreach and social action. Set up in 1977, it also

deals with the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, Holocaust and tolerance education, Middle East Affairs, extremist groups, neo-Nazism and hate on the Internet.

It is accredited as an NGO both at the United Nations and UNESCO.

With a membership of over 400,000 families, the Center's headquarters are in Los Angeles and it has offices in Paris, New York, Toronto, Miami, Jerusalem and Buenos Aires.

Hunt advised on historical sites

A PHOTOGRAPH of John and Gertrude Hunt with their adopted children John and Trudy accompanies a short profile of the couple on the Hunt Museum website.

It is, by any reckoning, an ordinary enough family portrait. But the reputation of the adults in it is now being questioned—and the two children, now adults, find themselves in an enviable position.

"It is rather horrid for your parents to be accused of association with Nazis without a shred of evidence," John Hunt Jnr told one newspaper in the days since the sensational allegations first hit the headlines.

Initially, Mr Hunt Jnr was quoted as saying that the allegations were bizarre.

The man he knew as father was born in London in 1900. John Hunt Snr studied both medicine and architecture before starting a career as an antique dealer opening a shop in Bury Street, London, and developing a reputation as an authority on medieval art.

Gertrude Hartmann was born in Mannheim, Germany, in 1903 and met John Hunt in London in the early 1930s and the couple married in 1933.

They were brought to the Hunt Museum profile

to the public in 1975.

John Hunt also encouraged and advised Lord Gort on the refurbishment of Bunratty Castle in the 1950s. The Hunts moved to Howth in 1956—along with their collection—but by the 1970s began to look for a permanent location.

At the end of the 1930s, their work moved away from that of shop-based dealers to a role as advisors to major collections.

The couple assisted in the formation of international collections by wealthy individuals such as William Randolph Hearst and the Aga Khan and worked as advisors for Sotheby's.

It was in this period, the 1930s and 40s, that the Hunts set about the formation of their own collection.

This is the crucial period which is now being called into question.

In either 1939 or 1940, the Hunts moved to Lough Gur where an extensive excavation of neolithic sites was underway. John Hunt worked on these excavations and "made the first reconstruction of a Neolithic house" at Lough Gur.

This prototype was a forerunner of another at Craggaunowen—the "experimental" centre which the Hunts opened

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