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*Hellfire Club*

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*History*

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A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE HELLFIRE CLUB

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he Dublin Hellfire Club, holding breath-taking view of Dublin South, looms over the city masking itself in mystery and secrecy.¶

The building itself is a foreboding ruined hunting lodge and its decaying walls have seen some of the most debauchorous activities of the elite high-ranking members of Dublin Society during the 18th Century. The derelict building has been the source of many myths and stories concerning the mysterious acts of the Hellfire Club, and these stories have remained throughout local folklore since the Club's ultimate demise in 1800. ¶

The Hellfire Club found its origins in the gathering of influential society members in Britain and Ireland in the 18th Century. These select and private clubs were established in order to form an exclusive meeting place for the privileged elite who wished to withdraw from society and take a break from their political

and administrative duties. This 'break', resulting in the consumption of much wine, whiskey and other spirits, provided the context for these powerful characters to engage in activities otherwise deemed inappropriate and distasteful. The level of secrecy practiced by the club began to create the subtle trail of rumours around the neighbouring towns and villages. ¶ These stories began to take a darker tone as people's suspicions started to rise, and this was enhanced by the building's own discomfoting construction. The site is home to not just Mount Pelier Lodge itself but also an old cairn located just behind the building. Local Legend notes that this ancient cairn, which was erected to the old pagan gods of Ireland, was demolished in order to create space for the lodge. ¶ Stones from the cairn were taken and used in the construction of the house, this story only served to heighten the tales and rumours about the infamous activities of the Hellfire Club. ¶

The building, now a shell of its former self, has the resemblance of a Palladian

architectural layout. It consists of two large reception rooms and a hall on the upper floor. The entrance to the hall originally had a flight of steps up to the front door, which are now missing. The ground floor contained the kitchen, servant's quarters and stairs to the other floors. On the eastern side of the building there was a small third level, with timbered floors, which contained the sleeping quarters for the residents. At each side of the house there was a large room where they may have kept their horses. A stone-mounting block on the eastern side is also visible where the residents would have been easily able to mount or dismount their horses. All the windows faced north, commanding a magnificent view of Dublin. ¶

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*PANORAMIC VIEW FROM THE FIRST FLOOR CENTRE  
WINDOW OF THE MONTPELLIER HILL LODGE*

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## *Founders & Participants*

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FOUNDERS AND MAIN PARTICIPANTS OF THE HELLFIRE CLUB

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he Hellfire Club dates back to 1719, where Philip, Duke of Warton established the first club in London. The Duke, an aristocrat and drunkard, maintained the club until it was disbanded in 1921. It was not until his successor, Sir Frances Dashwood (Chancellor of the Exchequer) reinstated the club in 1935, that the reputation of the club grew and Dashwood began to collect 'the most esteemed persons of quality' in Ireland and Britain. The popularity of these clubs increased, as like-minded prominent members of society were able to withdraw from their duties and gather together in a remote location to engage themselves as they see fit with no repercussions. ¶ In 1746 Dashwood acquired the grounds and caves of Medmenham Abbey and transformed them into a self-indulgent playground for the wealthy. Dashwood's influence soon travelled to Ireland, where the gentry of Dublin were eagerly

searching for an escape from their boredom. ¶

The first Hellfire Club in Dublin was founded by Richard Parsons, the 1st Earl of Rosse, and James Worsdale in 1935. Parsons was also twice the Grandmaster of the Irish Lodge of Freemasons during his lifetime, however upon inheriting a million pounds from his grand mother (a huge sum in those days) he resigned his Grandmaster position to travel. Visiting culturally rich places like Egypt and India, he developed an interest into the 'dark arts' and made a name for himself as a 'sorcerer and a practitioner of black magic'. In 1935 he re-emerged onto the Irish Social scene and began to gather Dublin's elite in order to establish the first Irish Hellfire Club. ¶

A painting by the artist, James Worsdale displays the members of the Dublin Club as they are gathered together for one of their meetings. On the left we see Lord Santry, a wild and often unstable character of Irish Society (who was later tried and convicted for murder in 1739).



SOME LAD

*Ch 2 founders and main participants of the hellfire club*

The man standing at the back is believed to be Brigadier General Richard St George, a known member of the Freemasons. His relative, the Honourable Elizabeth St. Leger, was the first known woman to be admitted into the brotherhood. When discovered after accidentally witnessing part of a secret ritual she was forced to undergo initiation and swear to secrecy. The figure in Black is Colonel Henry Ponsonby, the black wigged man beside him is known to be Captain Henry Clements, and finally the Figure in Gold is Simon Luttrell (Baron Imham of Ireland), who's rakish behaviour earned him the nickname "*King of Hell*". Three members of the Hell Fire Club were also members of the House of Commons, the remaining two being involved with the House of Lords. ¶

The Dublin Club decided to hold their meetings in an old hunting lodge, built around 1725 by William Conolly. Mont Pelier Lodge was loaned to the Hell Fire Club members by the Conolly family in the years following William's death in

*Ch 2 founders and main participants of the hellfire club*

1729, however coincidentally, William Conolly has previously purchased Mount Pelier Hill from Philip, Duke of Warton in 1719. The Building itself stands upon a secluded hill, 383 meters high in County Dublin; the remoteness of Mount Pelier's location provides a good example as to why this particular lodge was perfect for the club's activities. ¶

The club was seemingly disbanded following Parson's death in 1741. The Earl's sense of humour remained with him right up to his deathbed. As he was nearing the end of this life he received a letter from a local clergyman, the rector of St Anne's, who wrote to him imploring him to "*repent his evil ways*". Parsons read the letter with much amusement and realised that it had only been addressed as "*My Lord*". Following this, he quickly resealed it and addressed it to Lord Kildare, a man famous for his honesty and faithfulness. At some point during this time the building of Mount Pelier was damaged by fire, resulting in the eventual decline of the club's activities. There are



MEMBERS OF THE MONTPELLIER HILL CLUB,  
c. 1740



several stories as to the cause of the fire. The first, being Conolly's son's refusal to renew the lease of the lodge for the club. ¶ Another story describes that, Richard Chappell Whaley, a frequent visitor and a very wealthy patron, set the building alight. After fire spread and killed many residents, the club then relocated down the hill to Killakee Stewards House, however the club's gatherings eventually declined after this episode. ¶ The Irish Hellfire Club was revived in 1771 and was known to be active for a further thirty years under it's successor Thomas 'Buck' Whaley, son of Richard Chappell Whaley. The term 'Buck' was usually reserved for the sons of rich Gentry, who lived in the shadows of their fathers and had not much to do except wait for their inheritance to be granted to them. These 'Bucks' chose to pursue a life of enjoyment, generally consisting of a great mix of gambling, drinking, violence, blaspheming and the odd touch of Satanism to calm their boredom. ¶

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*Ch 2 founders and main participants of  
the hellfire club*



SIR PHILIP, DUKE OF WHARTON



SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD

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*Aims of the Club*

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REASONS FOR DEBAUCHERY, MURDER AND SATANISM

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Principal aims of the Hellfire Club were laid out quite clearly. It was a private club of certain elite members of Dublin

society, who wanted to find a secluded retreat away from the prying eyes of normal society. ¶

The exclusiveness of the club made it significantly difficult for an aspiring member to be considered let alone becoming initiated. ¶

The Club adopted the motto

*“Fais ce que voudras”*

*(“Do what thou wilt”)*

which was a reference to Francois Rabelais’s famous dictum for the Abbey of Thélème expressed in his novel Gargantua. Dashwood’s Hell Fire Club in Medmenham Abbey had this phrase placed above a doorway in stained glass. ¶

The majority of the members also expressed a deep resentment towards to practices of organised religion, specifically

the Roman Catholic Church, and quite a few members took a severe anti-clerical stance. Many of their gatherings consisted of mock religious ceremonies and ‘black masses’, which only furthered the rumours of devil worship practices which were circulating at the time. ¶

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*Ch 3 Aims of the Club, Reasons for Debauchery, Murder and Satanism*

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*Drinking Activities*

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BUTTERY WHISKEY, SCALTHEEN AND RAGE

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ellfire Club's activities were heavily associated with excessive drinking. The Irish clubs seemed to have been more committed

to violence and disorder than their English counterparts, which could probably be explained by the culture of heavy drinking in Ireland but also the insecurity of the protestant settler ruling class. ¶

The members of the Hell Fire Club would consume almost anything alcoholic, however one of the most famous recipes to survive was the hot drink “*Scaltheen*”, a mixture of whiskey and melted butter which was served in abundance during their meetings. ¶

It became a regular tradition to save the vice-chair seat at the table for the devil himself in whose honour the first toast was always drunk. The Hellfire members each had their own special set of commemorative wine glasses, each

bearing a member's name and honorary title. Worsdale's survives today, inscribed “*The Hellfire Club*” and “*James Worsdale – Master of the Revels*”. ¶

The club spent much of their time making a mockery of Religious activities. While engaging in non-stop drinking sessions, black masses were carried out where defrocked priests performed parodies of the catholic mass. Many of these anti-religious occasions are said to have ended up in sacrifices being made to the devil. ¶ Stories tell of numerous animal sacrifices, specifically black cats, and on one occasion a dwarf was found to be a victim. The clubs mockery of the church was applied to every aspect of their gatherings. They had specific names for the food and drink they consumed, *Hell-Fire Punch*, *Holy Ghost Pie*, *Devil's Loins*, *Breast of Venus*. A “*Holy Ghost Pie*” was an imitation Host made with angelic root. ‘Breast of Venus’ was said to be made with small chickens which had cherries for nipples. ¶

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*Ch 4 Drinking Activities, Butter Whiskey, Scaltheen and Rage*



IMAGE: SOURCED FROM [DRUNKARD.COM](http://DRUNKARD.COM)  
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MIXING DRINKS SIMILAR  
TO THOSE FOUND IN THE HFC, CLICK IMAGE TO  
GO TO LINK.

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*Female Company and Boisterous Activity*

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WOMEN, WHORES AND THE HELLFIRE CLUB

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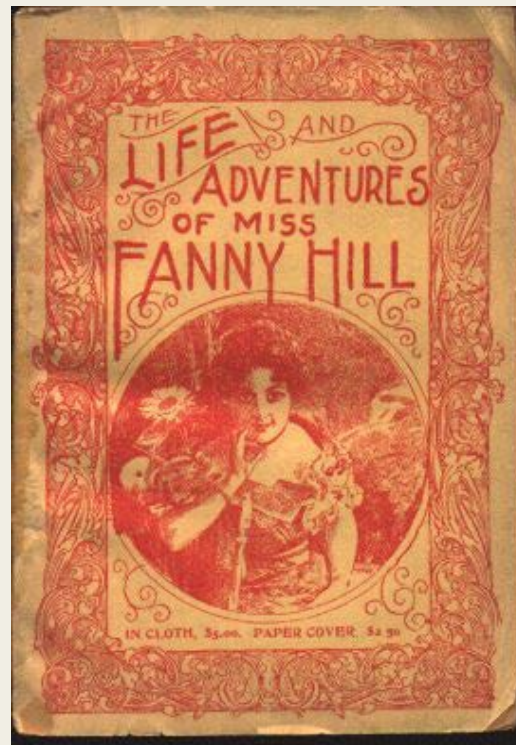


omen were not admitted to become members of these Irish Clubs, with the exception of Mrs Blennerhasset who who was one of the more notorious members of the Limerick Hellfire Club. ¶ However, women attended the gatherings frequently to satisfy the member's more promiscuous needs after a lengthy drinking session. ¶ These club meetings garnered a reputation for engaging in eccentric orgies while some of the women were needed also to engage in particular satanic rites and spiritual rituals. ¶

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*IMAGE RIGHT: 1910 PRINT OF ORIGINAL TEXT  
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IMPACT  
THIS EROTIC NOVELLA HAS HAD ON MODERN  
AMERICAN LITERATURE, CLICK THE IMAGE  
TO GO TO LINK.*

*Ch 5 Female Company and Boisterous Activity*



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*Rumours of Murder*

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GUNPOWDER, FIRE AND KNIVES

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ut of the Dublin Hellfire Club members, Lord Santry was said to be the most aggressive. Being a duelist, the

Lord was said to notch the barrel of his pistol to mark each 'deed of blood' he had committed. ¶

His aggressive reputation was not just reserved for his on field conduct; there are reports that his casual violence proved fatal on several occasions. ¶

In the 1930's Santry inherited a considerable estate and embraced a self-indulgent and drink-fuelled lifestyle. His obsession with alcohol led him to commit many aggressive and violent acts towards innocent bystanders, which only served to increase public outrage and their suspicion of the club. ¶

In Santry's first major scandal he was accused of murdering a sick sedan chairman at one of the clubs gatherings. The chairman was lying in bed when

Santry entered and forced the man to drink a large quantity of brandy, right before setting fire to him. ¶

*"One of the murders laid to lord Santry's charge was o the most wicked complexion to wit, his having forced a poor chairman (that had been used to carry him) lying sick a-bed to drink a quart of brandy, then with kindled spirits, he sat fire to the sheets & the wretch lay in, who soon expired in the most excruciating torture."* ¶

Due to his connections he was never charged for this crime, but in 1738 he did stand trial for the murder of Laughlin Murphy, a porter he had stabbed to death with his sword in blind drunken rage. ¶ Following the incident, Santry had simply tossed the landlord of the tavern a coin, implying how he intended to keep this event quiet. Lord Santry ended up being tried for the death of Murphy by his peers and found guilty. Due to his elite standing and connections, he was pardoned shortly after, although was his titles were revoked upon his death. ¶

Richard Chappell Whaley was also a notoriously impious character that caused many a scandal during this time. His hatred of religion and of the Roman Catholic Church earned him the nickname Richard *Burn Chapel* Whaley as he would ride around Dublin on Sunday's, setting fire to the thatched roofs of Catholic Chapels for his own amusement. ¶

Whaley is also rumoured to be the cause of the fire which set the entire building of Mount Pelier in flames around 1941. The story is wholly similar to the same event caused by Lord Santry. ¶

*"After an unfrocked clergyman had performed a Black Mass in one of the two upstairs rooms in Mountpelier House, the ceremony ending in the usual drunken revelry, a footman picking his way through the sprawling bodies spilt some drink on Richard Whaley's coat. Whaley reacted by pouring brandy over the footman and setting him alight. The man fled downstairs clutching at a tapestry hanging by the hall door, trying to douse the flames. Within minutes the whole house was ablaze."* ¶

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*The Hellfire Black Cat*

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SUPERNATURAL HAPPENINGS IN THE HELLFIRE CLUB

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he Black cat still stands as a symbol of the Hell Fire's hedonistic and nefarious activities. The meetings held by the members were

apparently presided over by black cats, one of which took the chair at the head of the table, usually reserved for the Devil himself. ¶

There were often many stories of black cats being sacrificed during some meetings as a tribute to Satan. One tale mentioning a priest, recounts how he stumbled across the club's events late at night and discovered that the centre of attention was a huge black cat. ¶

“Breaking free from his captors the cleric grabbed the cat and uttered an exorcism which tore the beast apart. A demon shot up from its corpse. Hurtling through the roof it brought down the ceiling and scattered the assembly.” ¶

Even to this day there are many hikers and passers-by that witness

*Ch 7 The Hellfire Black Cat, Supernatural Happening in the Hellfire Club*



the appearance of several black cats wandering around the ruin. ¶

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ARTIST TOM MCASSEY PAINTED THIS IMAGE AFTER SEEING THE GHOST OF THE MONTPELLIER BLACK CAT DURING RENOVATIONS OF THE SITE IN 1960.

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## *Maps*

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ORDINANCE SURVEY, FLOOR PLAN AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE MONTPELLIER HILL HELLFIRE CLUB

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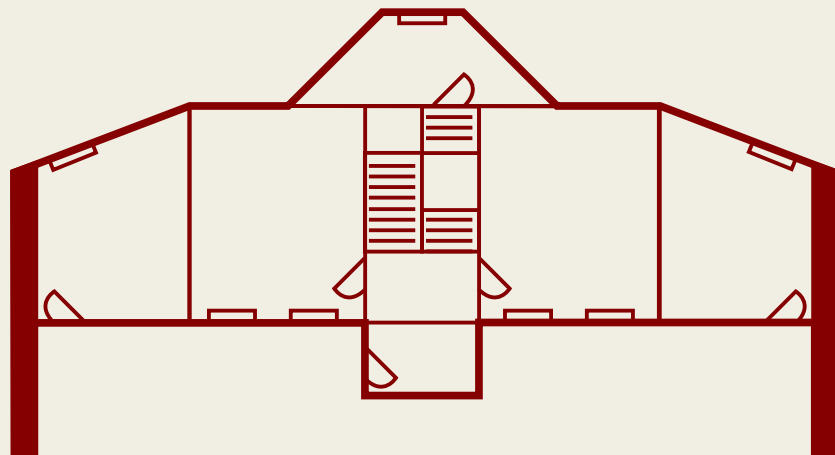
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## *Floor Plan of Montpellier Hill Lodge*

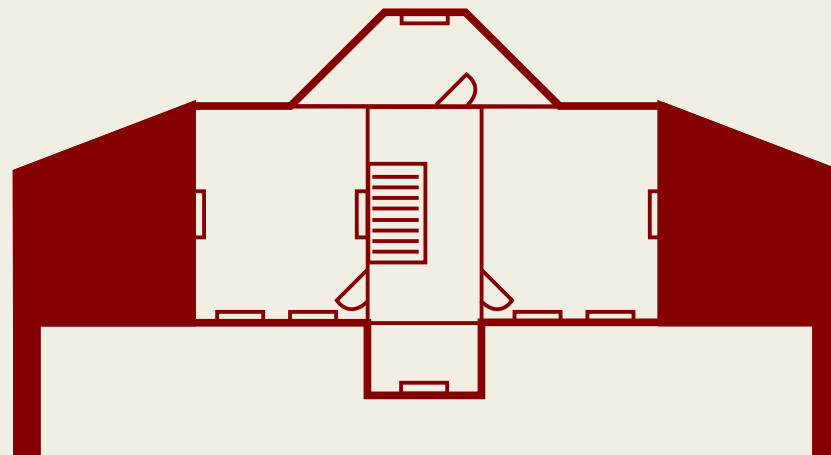
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*A. GROUND FLOOR*

*B. FIRST FLOOR*



*A.*

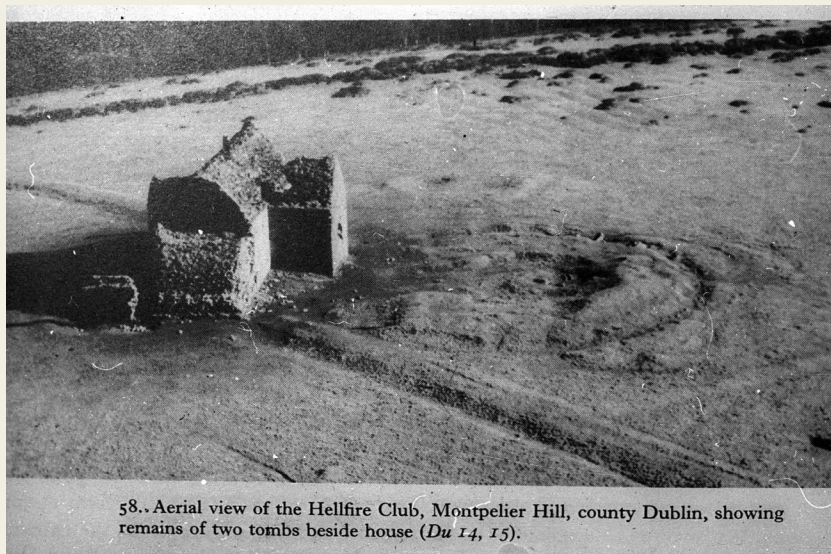


*B.*

## *Floor Plan of Montpelier Hill Lodge*

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C. ARIEL VIEW OF MONTELLIER HILL LODGE C.  
1970



C.

D. CLOSE-UP OF 1779 MAP ILLUSTRATION

E. {ON FOLLOWING PAGE} FULL VIEW OF 1779  
MAP ILLUSTRATION, SOURCED FROM TRINITY  
COLLEGE MAP ROOM



D.



