

ITS FINEST HOUR: TRINITY COLLEGE
IN THE 18TH CENTURY

by Elizabeth Muller

Trinity College, Dublin, has witnessed many fascinating moments since its foundation in 1591: Elizabeth I's interest and protection, Thomas Davis's inspiration of the Young Ireland movement, Tom Moore's appearance among the first Roman Catholics to matriculate after the 1795 Act, Oscar Wilde's study of classics - and superciliousness - under Mahaffy. But it is the eighteenth century that spans most of Trinity's glory, in men, buildings and in spirit.

The course of study was revitalized about mid-century; the same discipline continued for the most part, but the emphasis was placed on individual training, so that in time it could be said of Trinity that "it specializes in the individual". In 1951, D.A. Webb writes: "The one thing common to Trinity men is that they have nothing in common." The strong concentration on mathematics that had been a unique feature of the curriculum (and the bane of less disciplined students like Oliver Goldsmith) was attacked by John Kely Hutchinson, the century's last great provost.

Hutchinson deserves a study on his own: his career was explosive and marked by his determination to have his way. His appointment was marked with disfavor by the faculty; he was an "outsider" who had disrupted a regular pattern of promotions among the fellows. Despite the controversy, however, Hutchinson remained a firm, determined figure in establishing Trinity's reputation.

He presents quite a contrast to his predecessors: the aristocratic Baldwin and the bon vivant, Francis Andrews. The witty Andrews established a "civilized" Trinity, and Baldwin is responsible for the physical condition of the college. It was through Baldwin's planning that the Park area was arranged, and it was under Baldwin that plans for the most magnificent buildings on campus were drawn up.