

John Butts was born in Cork. The artist Rogers who was a landscape artist trained him, and it seems Butts quickly outshone his master. Very little of his work is traceable today. The Tate Gallery in England has two paintings by Butts and a few more are known to exist in Ireland. The National Gallery of Ireland has a painting and a soft chalk drawing of his, a study of trees, which was probably made on one of his sketching trips around the Cork countryside. The work we do know by John Butts is rich, mellow landscape; romantic views of Cork's hills and valleys painted in a lush, dramatic style. His contemporaries remarked on his use of light and shade, which we can see in *View of Cork*. His landscape composition followed the style of Claude and the Dutch masters, where the formula was to help create an idealised landscape in tranquil mood. To create this setting, the foreground of the canvas should be dark to draw the viewer in the painting, the light should recede to a far and lifting horizon and alternating areas of light and shadow within the painting would create a sense of distance as well as giving interest to different areas. Quite often, as in the case of *View Of Cork*, more than one perspective of the chosen landscape was combined to create the 'ideal' view. John Butts was a master of landscape painting, along with Robert Carver, George Barrett and Thomas Roberts he excelled at creating landscape scenes of lush beauty.

Butts also painted genre scenes, history, and figurative works. In Cork, he was supported by the Cooper–Penrose family, who were great patrons of the arts, and he taught drawing and painting. The artist Nathaniel Grogan was one of his pupils, Grogan painted landscape and genre scenes in watercolour and oil. *A View of Cork* was attributed to Grogan, until a signed copy of a drawing for the painting identified the artist as John Butts. Grogan painted in Cork for many years and enjoyed a reputation as the city's foremost landscape painter. Butts' most famous student was James Barry. He was a history painter, adept at creating textures and subtle tonal contrasts similar to Butts. When Barry heard of the death of Butts, (he was at the time enjoying great success in England) he wrote to a friend lamenting the loss of the man who had instilled in him his great love for painting.

Butts moved to Dublin in 1757, at the age of thirty. He hoped to make a break for himself but unfortunately this was not to be the case. He had a large family to support by now and quite probably a drinking problem. When he got work as a copier he worked beside a restorer or 'picture cleaner' called Chapman. It seems they only worked while they had drink to pass between them. As soon as the liquor was gone, so too were the men. Butts lived in a state of constant poverty in Dublin, he tried to establish himself as a landscape and figurative painter and he did sell one of his paintings to the Dublin Society in 1763, but generally he did not do well. He worked as a scene painter in the theatre and took whatever painting jobs he could find, painting alehouse scenes and anything from coach panels to inn signs. As a copier or forger, he reportedly painted wonderful works but was paid almost nothing. He may also have worked in a factory in Dublin, painting landscapes on plates; some pieces from the Delamain delftware factory were signed 'J.B.' and featured beautifully delicate landscapes. John Butts died in abject poverty in 1765.