

VIEW OF CORK John Butts (1728-1765)

John Butts was born in Cork. He was a talented painter of the local landscape. He spent much of his youth sketching and painting scenes of Cork and copying romantic scenes from local works. He taught art in Cork and two of his pupils were Nathaniel Grogan the Elder (to whom this painting was for some time attributed) and James Barry. James Barry later described John Butts as an inspirational teacher. In 1757, Butts moved to Dublin but was not met with success. He had a large family to support and found he had to work at sign painting, copying and any jobs he could find, to sustain himself. He worked as a forger for a time and produced excellent forgeries, but his own, signed work is very rare. He died young and poor in 1765. His work is to be found in Tate Britain and in the Crawford Art Gallery.



View of Cork is a panoramic view of the city seen from an elevated position to the north of the River Lee. It was painted in the later half of the eighteenth century. It is actually an amalgamation of two separate viewpoints and it is a measure of the artist's talent as a landscape painter that he managed to weld them together in a convincing way. Two travellers look down at the prosperous city, one pointing out the landmarks and drawing our attention to St Ann's Tower in Shandon. The painting is an important

record of the city's history, of a time when Cork played an important role in trade with the influential Dutch in the North Atlantic. The Dutch appearance of the quayside houses was echoed in New York and other towns of New Netherlands. On the left we see one of the waterways that coursed through the marshy land over which the city expanded in the eighteenth century. We can trace its route by the broad curves of the city's main street. In the centre of the painting is the Old Custom House, now the Crawford Art Gallery.

DISCUSSION

- Look at the two men in the foreground of the painting, what sort of clothes are they wearing? How can you tell they have been travelling?
- What do you think they are looking at and talking about?
- Do you think they are happy to see such a city? Why do you say this?
- How would you describe the landscape around the city? Is the area around Cork still like this?
- What landmarks really stand out? Do you recognise any of the places in the painting? What are they?
- When you first look at the city in the painting, does it seem to be a nice place? Why do you get that feeling even before you look closely at the detail?
- This painting was made in the artist's studio, how do you think he managed to get so much detail in the painting, without having the scene in front of him?

- The main route through the town is the river and the boats can go right up to the quayside houses. Can you describe these houses? Who do you think lives here?
- How are they different to the houses on the right hand side of the painting? Who do you think lives in those houses?
- The artist has created a sense of great depth (distance) in the painting by having the colour get lighter towards the background, how else has he created depth?
- What are the main colours in the city itself? Are these the colours you would have in a city today? How would you describe the colours he uses, are they warm or cool, harsh, dark, light... What words would you use?
- The artist has created beautiful textures in the painting, the fuzzy gorse, the flat brick buildings, and the smoky hills, what other textures can you see?

WORK IN THE GALLERY

Find this James Barry painting. Barry was a student of John Butts, can you see anything here that is painted in a similar way in *View of Cork*?

Do you think Barry's painting is a view of Cork?
Where do you think these characters are?

In Barry's painting, the colour gets very light towards the background, what does this add to the painting?



HANDS ON

From memory, draw the route you take to school most days, put in as much information as you can think of: buildings, trees, rivers, bridges etc... The next day you are going to school, take a notebook and sketch or note what you see on the way and compare this information with your original drawing. How close were you?

Imagine you are a bird looking down on your town or village; draw (imagine the bird has a pencil!) what the bird sees. Draw in or paint where you live and everything important to you.