

The Ireland Fund of Monaco Residential Bursaries

The Ireland Fund of Monaco Residential Bursaries were established to enable writers born or living in Ireland to pursue a current project during a one-month residency at the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco. We are pleased to present excerpts from the personal reflections of three recent recipients about their experience in Monaco. Their full essays can be read on our website at www.theirelandfunds.org

Robert O'Byrne

Although the event was not due to take place until some four months after I had departed, the wedding of HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco and Charlene Wittstock was a constant presence during my residency at Monaco's Princess Grace Irish Library.

Prince Albert's summer wedding likewise seemed to dominate many of the conversations one had with both residents and other visitors to the area, the occupant of Monaco's Palace apparently being a source of endless fascination to native and tourist alike. The only person who gave the impression of being impervious to this anticipatory excitement was the groom: at a gathering in the library to mark St Patrick's Day he remained calm and courteous even when quizzed about his impending marriage.

Those same qualities were presumably required by him the following day when it was announced that his aunt, HSH Princess Antoinette of Monaco, had died at the age of 90. Prince Albert duly declared two weeks' mourning for his aunt's death in Monaco which introduced an uncustomary air of solemnity to the place, at least until after the Princess's funeral, a day on which I temporarily absented myself from the library since its propinquity to the Palace would have rendered access well-nigh impossible.

Monaco does not suit the serious however and before too long the customary focus on fun had returned, aided by the advent of another wedding, princely in spirit if not in fact. A young Indian couple, 'deux jeunes héritiers de riches familles indiennes' as they were described in subsequent press reports, chose to hold their wedding in the Principality and in doing so, it was declared, had transformed 'Monte Carlo en Bollywood.' Well, not exactly: there were no lines of synchronised dancers and singers on the streets but the groom arrived to claim his bride on a white horse and an elephant was led into the Place du Casino. Yet one more colourful occasion, in other words, although in a location where colour is the norm it scarcely seemed unusual.

Two weddings and a funeral: not quite enough for a Richard Curtis film but plenty to engage one's attention over the course of a month. And between these distractions, there was the necessity for work to be done in the Princess Grace Irish Library, hardly a challenging task in such agreeable surroundings except for one almost irresistible temptation. I packed a number of books in my luggage, and on crossing the library's threshold immediately realised this had been unnecessary. The problem was not what to read first, but how to stop reading and start writing instead. Somehow, aided by support from Judith Gantley and Géraldine Lance, the temptation was overcome and a gratifying amount of work accomplished. And, as can be seen in the photographs taken to mark my stay in the Principality, over the course of my month there I would like to believe I even managed to bring a little colour to Monaco.

