

The Ireland Fund of Monaco Residential Bursaries



The Library,

which houses one of the finest collections of books of Irish interest in the world, is a hub of cultural and scholarly activity, making it much more than a library in the traditional sense of the term. It is, in fact, a cultural centre, hosting a year round series of lectures and talks, exhibitions, occasional classes for nearby lycée students and trips for its diverse habitués to places of cultural interest. It plays a pivotal role in disseminating information about Ireland, past and present, and supports the endeavours of a wide range of artists, designers, writers and scholars working in the region. Organizing and overseeing all of this requires a well informed, imaginative administrator with considerable interpersonal skills and a keen interest not only in the arts but in current affairs and history. The library is fortunate enough to have such a person: Judith Gantley.

Within hours of arriving in the library for the first time on April 20th, Judith provided a good deal of information about ways of making the most of my stay in the Principality. It was a great start. I sat at my desk in the book lined office, windows thrown open onto the rue Princesse

Marie-de-Lorraine below, poring over the extraordinary array of events and activities in which the library is both directly and indirectly involved. Any questions I might have had in advance about what to do and see at weekends were answered in one fell swoop. Meanwhile, it was down to work on the novel, *Talking to Strangers*, which I came to the library to complete. I could not have asked for, or even imagined, better working conditions. There was no excuse but to launch in, which I did, sustaining momentum for the month I spent there.

My late wife, Caroline Walsh [Literary Editor of the Irish Times 1999-2011] and I had tried to arrange a visit to E1027 [Eileen Gray's modernist 'house by the seashore'] at Roquebrune Cap Martin in the summer before her death. Judith was aware of this and in the individualistic way she goes about things—a phone call or two, some online checking and, I suspect, some subtle persuading—we, my son Matt, daughter Alice and other friends visiting for the weekend, found ourselves part of a small group, the first visitors into E1027 after many years of restoration. This was the high point of the residency.

Awarded biannually, 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 this personal reflection written by author James Ryan on his experience in Monaco

About the Author: James Ryan is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin. He is Director of the Creative Writing Programme at the School of English, Drama and Film in University College Dublin. His novels include *Home from England* (Phoenix, London 1995), *Dismantling Mr Doyle* (Phoenix, London 1997), *Seeds of Doubt* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2001) and *South of the Border* (Lilliput, Dublin 2008). The novel on which he is currently working, *Talking to Strangers*, is due for publication in 2015.

There were, of course, many other memorable aspects to the residency, but what I think will be the most lasting of these is the insight I got into the way of life in the Principality; the joy and pride on the occasion of the baptism of five-month-old Hereditary Prince Jacques and his twin sister Princess Gabriella—Children of TSH Prince Albert II and Princess Charlene, the colour and drama of Port Hercules, the shared sense of excitement as everyone geared up for the Grand Prix, the daily food market in Beausoleil, the gilded opera house with its great south facing windows overlooking the Mediterranean and, most of all, the friendliness I encountered at every turn.

It was an opportunity for which I'm very grateful to The Ireland Funds, the ever helpful library team, Géraldine Lance and Síle Jackson and, in particular, to our unofficial cultural ambassador in Monaco, Judith Gantley.

—James Ryan