

35th International Byron Conference September 6th-13th 2009
Athens – Messolonghi, with a tour to Mycenae, Epidaurus and Nafplio
Theme: Byron and History

Anna Reynolds



The Byron Study Centre, Missalonghi.

Sunday evening held the first event of this magnificent conference – the award of an Honorary Doctorate to Professor Jerome J. McGann by the University of Athens. Professor McGann gave a well-crafted talk entitled *Byron Awakening and the Dream of Greece*. This was followed by a most generous reception.

Monday morning started (at the old parliament chamber in the National Historical Museum) with an excellent illustrated talk by William St. Clair on The Parthenon as it was seen in Byron's Day. It was followed by a vivid playlet, edited by David Roessel and acted by Patrick Judd, entitled *Athens holds my Heart and Soul*. Then all repaired to the new Acropolis Museum, a huge, splendid and discreet environment, round which we were given a highly informative tour.

On Monday evening, to the British Embassy for a reception by the Ambassador, Dr David Landsman.

We were bussed to Missalonghi on Tuesday morning for the academic proceedings, stopping off at the Corinth Canal. There were many papers, given in the K.Palamas and G.Drosinis halls of the Nomarhias Ktirio. Delegates were from Armenia, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Poland, Saudi Arabia, the U.K., the U.S.A., and Zululand. The variety of perspectives we glimpsed on Byron's life, work, and reputation was dizzying. So many countries see him as bound up with their national self-image.

Highlights were Maria Schoina (Thessaloniki), who gave a paper on how, in the time of the Colonels, Byron was quoted with equal validity by both right-wing and left-wing factions. Nina Diakonova, the Russian nonagenarian (Petersburg), was to have been there but couldn't be, so Professor Byron Raizis (Athens) read her paper, which was about the famous Gulag-bound Byron translator Tatyana Gnedich: a well-known story which bears constant repetition. Peter Cochran (Liverpool) gave a downbeat paper, on how Byron's use of both historical evidence and personal evidence was often inaccurate. Madeleine Cannon (Durham) and James Potts (Cambridge) gave papers of a refreshingly old-fashioned literary critical cast, placing Byron's poetry at the centre of attention.

In the intervals between sessions there were excursions to the superb Messolonghi Byron Society's International Research Centre at Byron House (see picture above); to the Garden of Heroes; to the Municipal History Museum and Art Gallery; and to the Homeric hillside town of Plevron, a fascinating archaeological site. A tasty lunch was provided on the Friday by the Higher Technological Educational Institute. We then left Messolonghi for Nafplio, from whence, on the Saturday, we were bussed to the spectacular sites of Mycenae and Epidaurus. Here a surprise rendition of Shakespeare was offered: and we all then dispersed at Athens.

Rodanthi-Rosa Florou (Executive Director) and Peter Graham (Academic Director), together with their teams, are to be congratulated on their flawless organisation of another memorable Byronic event, showing yet again that of all English poets Byron is the one whose appeal, on so many levels, reaches more areas of the world than the rest.