

Editorial

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FOR MANY IRISH PEOPLE, CASTLETOWN HOUSE DEFINES THE IRISH EIGHTEENTH-century country house and demesne. It also conveys the complexities of Irish conservation and the role that the Irish Georgian Society has played in that history. This twentieth volume of *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies* commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Desmond Guinness's purchase of Castletown and his subsequent donation of the house, together with a substantial portion of its demesne, to the Irish nation for current and future generations.

The man who built Castletown, William 'Speaker' Conolly, was extraordinarily successful in the buccaneering environment of early eighteenth-century Ireland. Followed by his wife Katherine Conolly, his grand-nephew William Conolly II and then by the well-known Louisa Conolly and her husband Tom, this period has tended to be the most appreciated and the most reiterated. After its heyday in the eighteenth century, Castletown soldiered on through the nineteenth century, escaping a proposed transformation into a barracks in 1808 and enjoying a relatively sedate and conservative period of country-house pursuits until the early decades of the twentieth century. Thanks to the efforts of Desmond Guinness and friends, the Irish Georgian Society, the Castletown Foundation and more recently, the Office of Public Works, Castletown remains a great Irish country house.

This volume aims to broaden our understanding of Castletown House and the political, cultural and social contexts that created it. Castletown's social history is documented to an exceptional degree for an eighteenth-century Irish estate, thanks to Desmond Guinness's and Lena Boylan's skip-hunting efforts. It has tried to address, where possible, areas where less research has taken place, in particular the early and late periods of Castletown's history and the lives and interests of the less familiar characters. It also pushes beyond the physical boundaries of Castletown's reach towards the Wonderful Barn and Dublin's city centre. We have also tried to include the varied viewpoints of art and architectural historians, architects, archaeologists, curators, conservators and historians. Kyle Leyden's essay explores the strategic agendas behind Ireland's early eighteenth-

century architecture while Neil Crimmins reminds us that there was a Castletown before the Conollys and that the Dongan family, in losing their estates in both Kildare and New York, invested in a block of land on James's Street in Dublin. Patrick Walsh's essay brings William Conolly II, the Speaker's grand-nephew, out of obscurity while Patricia McCarthy describes Tom Conolly's equine pursuits with care and enthusiasm. The wider Castletown, suggesting the estate's influence far beyond the demesne wall, is explored by Cóilín Ó Drisceoil in his essay on the planting and farming history of the corkscrew Wonderful Barn.

Aidan O'Boyle revisits the history of Castletown's art collections, now being assiduously reassembled or sympathetically suggested by the Castletown Foundation and the OPW. Christopher Moore reveals the painstaking work involved in restoring just one aspect of Castletown's layered history in his essay on the conservation of the silk wall-hangings of the Red Drawing Room by the Castletown Foundation, a project that commemorates the life and work of our distinguished past president Kevin B. Nowlan. The complex past and ongoing work of Castletown house and demesne's conservation and restoration by the Office of Public Works is told by Dorothea Depner. Our past editor, Nicola Figgis explores the auction of Ann Conolly's collection at Christies in 1797 and Jeanne Meldon writes on the lost Castletown demesne portraits that were sold at that sale to a Mr. Ewan. Would that Castletown had them still.

This volume is also dedicated to the architectural, literary and landscape historian Rolf Loeber (1942-2017), who made an outstanding contribution to Irish scholarship through his many publications. From his early and seminal 1973 essay 'Irish Country Houses and Castles of the late Caroline Period: an unremembered past recaptured' published in *The Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* and *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Irish Architects* (1981), to the groundbreaking *A Guide to Irish Fiction 1650-1900* (2006, co-authored with Magda Stouthamer-Loeber and Anne Burnham) and, more recently, as co-editor of *Architecture 1600-2000*, volume IV of *Art and Architecture of Ireland* (2014), Rolf's publications have helped generations of Irish historians, architects and engineers to understand this country's environment. That he accomplished this while continuing to work as a distinguished professor of psychology speaks of a truly humane cast of mind, one shared by his wife, co-author and distinguished scholar Magda. An advocate and practitioner of interdisciplinary research, well before it was dreamt of, Rolf always brought the acute sensibility of an intrigued and critical visitor to bear on innumerable aspects of this country. Always a Dutchman, emigré not in Ireland but in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, his sympathetic yet detached point of view will be greatly missed. He supported the Irish Georgian Society from its early years, living with Magda in Castletown House in 1972-73, where they helped Desmond Guinness to begin the long conservation journey that this journal aims to document. *Ní fheicimid beo ar a leithéid arís.*