

Irish  
Georgian  
Society

Conserving Ireland's Architectural Heritage

WESTPORT HOUSE



*aquilae in umbra*  
WESTPORT TOWN COUNCIL



HISTORIC TOWNS INITIATIVE 2013

## WESTPORT STUDY DAY

VENUE: THE DRAWING ROOM, WESTPORT HOUSE, WESTPORT, CO. MAYO

DATE: FRIDAY, 11TH OCTOBER 2013    TIME: 9.00 AM - 5.30 PM



***An Roinn  
Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta***  
***Department of  
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht***

# WESTPORT STUDY DAY

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## PROGRAMME

- 9.00 am Registration**  
*Registration with tea and coffee in the Main Hall of Westport House*
- 9.30 am Tour**  
*Tour of Westport House led by Muriel Barry, House and Guide Supervisor*
- 10.30 am Welcome**  
*Martin Keating, Town Manager and Director of Services to Mayo County Council & Patrick Guinness, President of the Irish Georgian Society*
- SESSION 1: THE BROWNES AND WESTPORT HOUSE: SETTING ITS HISTORIC & SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**  
*Chair: Patrick Guinness (President, Irish Georgian Society)*
- 10.45 am The Brownes of Westport House: aristocracy, politics and the exercise of power in County Mayo; 1780-1830**  
*Dr Gordon Kennedy (Dublin City University)*
- 11.15 am Westport House: why has it survived?**  
*Professor Terence Dooley (Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates & Senior Lecturer, Department of History, NUI Maynooth)*
- 11.40 am Questions & Answers**
- SESSION 2: WESTPORT HOUSE - ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS: SIGNIFICANCE & CONSERVATION**  
*Chair: Jacqui Donnelly (Architectural Conservation Advisor, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht)*
- 11.50 am Westport House's Architecture: problems in classicism**  
*Dr Edward McParland (Fellow Emeritus, Trinity College Dublin)*
- 12.15 pm Tracing the Architectural Development of Westport House in the Context of Recent Conservation Works**  
*Kevin Blackwood (Grade I RIAI Conservation Architect)*
- 12.40 pm Questions & Answers**
- 12.55 pm Lunch (Soup and Sandwiches)**
- SESSION 3: THE INTERIORS & COLLECTIONS OF WESTPORT HOUSE**  
*Chair: Donough Cahill (Chief Executive Director, Irish Georgian Society)*
- 2.00 pm From Canton to Westport: the importation and use of Chinese wallpapers in eighteenth-century Ireland**  
*David Skinner (David Skinner & Sons, historic wallpaper conservator and historian)*
- 2.25 pm Decorative Plaster and Paint at Westport House: design and conservation considerations**  
*Richard Ireland (historic plaster and paint consultant)*
- 2.50 pm Assembly, Display and Dispersal of Westport House's Collections**  
*Dr Aidan O'Boyle*
- 3.15 pm Questions & Answers**

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## PROGRAMME

### SESSION 4: WESTPORT'S LANDSCAPE & URBAN MORPHOLOGY

*Chair: Colm Murray (Architecture Officer, The Heritage Council)*

- 3.25 pm      **Understanding Westport's Designed Landscape through the Paintings of James Arthur O'Connor**  
*Dr Finola O'Kane (School of Architecture, UCD)*
- 3.50 pm      **Westport House in its Setting with an Introductory Survey of the Ornamental and Productive Areas within the Demesne**  
*Belinda Jupp (historic garden consultant)*
- 4.15 pm      **Westport Town: its personality, architecture and civic character**  
*Patrick Shaffrey (Director, Shaffrey Associates Architects)*
- 4.40 pm      **Westport Town Today: heritage led regeneration, twenty years of community and civic success**  
*Simon Wall (Town Architect, Westport Town Council)*
- 5.10 pm      **Questions & Answers**
- 5.20 pm      **Close and Thank You**  
*Siobhán Sexton (Architectural Conservation Officer, Mayo County Council)*



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES & ABSTRACTS

**Patrick Guinness** was appointed President of the Irish Georgian Society in 2012, a charity that works to promote and protect Ireland's historic architecture and decorative arts. A historian, Guinness has authored a biography on his ancestor Arthur Guinness, the founder of the Guinness brewery dynasty. He has lectured on genetic genealogy relating to the early Irish dynasties and Viking Ireland, and has sponsored academic research on Irish genetics. He is a council member of the County Kildare Archaeological Society and of the Order of Clans of Ireland, and a trustee of the Iveagh Trust.

**Dr Gordon Kennedy** lectures on Irish history at the Boston University Overseas Programme located at Dublin City University. He completed his PhD thesis (St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra) in 2010. His doctoral thesis examined the role of the Brownes of Westport House in the suppression of revolutionary violence in the west during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It also focused on the family's economic and social endeavours during that period. He is currently working on publishing his thesis with the co-operation of a leading Irish academic publisher.

**Abstract:** Any myopic view of the Brownes' historical legacy should be challenged and counter-balanced by a broader understanding of the family's political impact during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The family was vigorous and violent in the aftermath of rebellion and in the face of threatened agrarian outrage. But it was also actively involved in several key political questions of the period, from the Patriot parliament and the regency crisis to the Catholic question and the viability of Ireland's economic prosperity. Denis Browne was an extremely capable and active parliamentarian, magistrate and land owner: Lord Sligo was the archetypal 'improving landlord', whose contributions to Westport town and its environs can still be seen and enjoyed today. Historical memory tends to dwell on the darker aspects of life. However, if both the negative and positive aspects of the Brownes' lives are examined, then a more balanced appreciation of the family's historical legacy can become apparent.

**Professor Terence Dooley** is Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at NUI Maynooth. He has published extensively on the Irish country house including *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland* (2001); *The Big Houses and Landed Estates of Ireland: a research guide* (2007) and most recently edited with Christopher Ridgway, *The Irish Country House: its past, present and future* (2012).

**Abstract:** In recent years, the decline of the Irish country house has featured extensively in Irish historiography. Simultaneously, there has been a growing awareness of the need to preserve what remains of this important aspect of the Irish built heritage. This paper examines the historical reasons for decline but asks why some houses such as Westport were fortunate to have survived.

**Jacqui Donnelly**, BArch, MA (Conservation Studies), MRIAI, is an Architectural Conservation Advisor at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. She is a graduate of the School of Architecture, UCD and the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York. She currently chairs the Historic Towns Initiative Working Group which is piloting a heritage-led regeneration initiative in Westport, Youghal and Listowel.

**Dr Edward McParland** retired in 2008 from the Department of the History of Art in Trinity College Dublin. His publications to that date, such as *James Gandon, Vitruvius Hibernicus* (1985) and *Public Architecture in Ireland 1680-1760* (2001), had concentrated on 18th-century architecture in Ireland. His more recent research has concentrated on more general problems in Western classicism. He founded, with Nicholas Robinson, the Irish Architectural Archive, and is on the board of the Irish Landmark Trust.

**Abstract:** Language - with its strict rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation, its rhetorical devices, its dependence on tradition, and its constant reinvention, is a useful parallel with classical architecture. How are strict rules and invention, and how are imitation and originality, integrated in Westport House and town?

**Kevin Blackwood** is the Principal of the Grade I RIAI conservation practice, Blackwood & Associates. Kevin was responsible for overseeing Heritage Council grant aided conservation report and the recent DoAHG roof repairs to Westport House.

**Abstract:** This paper will elucidate the complex building chronology of Westport House, the architecture of which encompasses the work of three celebrated Georgian architects: Castle, Wyatt and Ivory. Understanding the architecture of the house is critical to ensuring appropriate conservation planning. Using architectural drawings, additional primary sources and close inspection of the building fabric, Blackwood will explain how understanding the history of Westport House informed his supervision of the recent Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht funded roof repairs. Consideration will also be given to future phases of conservation works required to ensure this fine country house survives into the future.

**Donough Cahill** is the Executive Director of the Irish Georgian Society, where he oversees its strategic and day-to-day operations and works with the Irish Georgian Foundation's Committee of Management, its sub-committees and working groups and with the Society's North America and UK based membership in promoting the appreciation and protection of Ireland's architectural heritage and allied arts. Most recently he was responsible for overseeing the restoration of the City Assembly House, which now serves as the Society headquarters and as a hub for promoting heritage and culture in the heart of the Georgian city.



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**David Skinner** specialises in printing, conserving and writing about historic wallpaper in Ireland. His studio has produced many hand-printed reproductions of Irish patterns which have been used in restoration projects, homes and film productions across the world. He is currently working on a history of wallpaper in Ireland, to be published in Spring 2014.

**Abstract:** This talk will discuss the techniques, materials and iconography of the wallpapers manufactured in China for use in Europe, and their route to the walls of Irish houses via ships of the East India Company. Using both the Westport paper and examples at Carton and other sites, the relevance of the subjects depicted to contemporary life in China will be examined, as well as attitudes to Chinoiserie among Irish consumers.

**Richard Ireland** is a leading conservator of historic plaster and paint. He works for many public bodies across Ireland and the UK, led the interior project at Headfort House, which the Irish Georgian Society part grant aided. He has recently completed the interiors at Kenwood House, London for English Heritage. His projects typically involve a combination of archaeological investigation, scientific analysis, and contextual historic research. He teaches and lectures in his subject and is widely published including the new English Heritage Mortars, Renders & Plasters (Ashgate, 2012) and the new introductory chapter on 'Plaster Materials And Techniques' in the reprint of Geoffrey Beard Decorative Plasterwork In Great Britain (1975, reprinted Donhead, 2011).

**Abstract:** The Dining Room at Westport House provides one of Wyatt's most complete and extant Irish interiors. Research from a wide range of eighteenth century interiors indicates that the original designs are not always a reliable source of the original scheme. Understanding and conserving such schemes requires a multi-dimensional research approach incorporating archaeological investigation and a broad reach of contextual material. Examination of select interiors from town and country will be used to contextualise Wyatt's Dining Room with other neo-classical executed designs. Buildings referenced will include Headfort House Kells, Rathfarnham Castle Dublin, Russborough House Wicklow and Kenwood House London.

**Dr Aidan O'Boyle** is a graduate of the Department of Art History at Trinity College Dublin. He was awarded a PhD from the University of Dublin for his thesis on the formation, arrangement and dispersal of Irish art collections 1750-1950. He is conducting on-going research on the Powerscourt, Leinster and other collections and has published on related subjects.

**Abstract:** This paper examines the collecting activities of successive generations of the Browne family throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the process which led to the dispersal of most the collection since the 1950s.

**Colm Murray** is the Architecture Officer of the Heritage Council. He previously worked with Duchas, and in private architectural practices in Dublin and Portugal. His current projects relate to climate change, curtilage, conservation plans, the economic value of the historic environment, fostering built heritage conservation skills training and to connect heritage with sustainable development. Colm is a director of the Rothe House Trust, a seventeenth-century house museum in Kilkenny, currently being 're-presented'. He is a member of the ICOMOS Ireland Executive Committee.



## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

**Dr Finola O'Kane Crimmins** lectures in the School of Architecture UCD where she is co-director of the MUBC programme. An architect, landscape historian and conservation specialist, her first book *Landscape Design in Eighteenth-century Ireland: Mixing Foreign Trees with the Natives* (2004) was awarded the inaugural J.B. Jackson Book Prize by the American Landscape Foundation in 2007. Her most recent book *Ireland and the Picturesque: Design, Landscape Painting and Tourism in Ireland 1700–1840* (2013) was published by Yale University Press on behalf of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. In 2013, she was appointed a fellow of Dumbarton Oaks by the Trustees of Harvard University, embarking on a research project entitled 'Revolutionary Landscapes: Ireland, France and America 1700–1810'. She is currently completing the manuscript of her next book entitled *Landscape and Revolution in Ireland: 1798 & 1916*.

**Abstract:** As landscapes of improvement diminished in attraction over the long eighteenth century, those of a more picturesque and romantic character increased. For the more anthropological and sensationalist tourist of the nineteenth century, Connacht's exotic Gaelic customs and disquietening poverty gave it a voyeuristic appeal. Slowly both Connacht and Conamara were included in Ireland's canon of picturesque sites and tours. This paper will examine James Arthur O'Connor's achievement in representing Mayo in his series of estate paintings of Westport and Ballinrobe. The two key designed landscapes of Westport House and Robe Villa will be explored. It will also touch upon Connacht and Conamara's evolution as key Irish tourist landscapes and discuss how this design expertise could be re-employed today.

**Belinda Jupp** is a consultant garden historian. She has surveyed numerous notable parks, gardens and demesnes and undertaken research for conservation and restoration projects; as well as compiling several National Inventory of Architectural Heritage surveys.

**Abstract:** Westport House in its setting with an introductory survey of the ornamental and productive areas within the demesne.

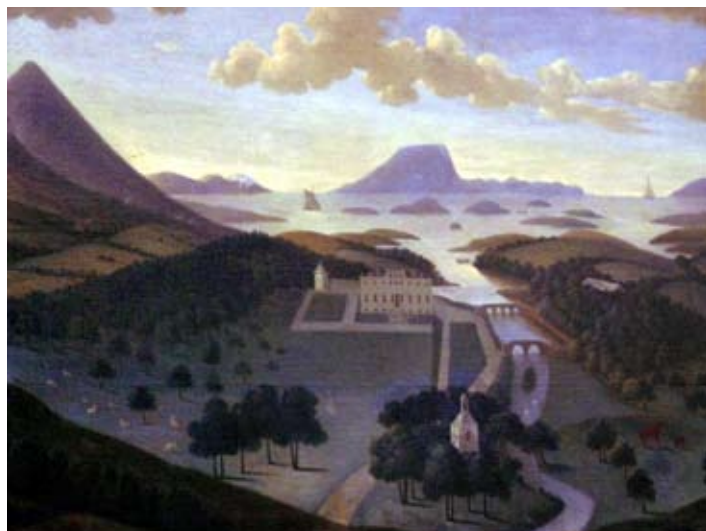
**Patrick Shaffrey** is an Architect and Town planner. He has a long standing commitment to the development and conservation of Irish towns and villages. He established Shaffrey Associates in 1967 with his late wife Maura Shaffrey. The practice is known for its architectural, urban design, conservation, and planning projects throughout Ireland with a particular knowledge of Irish towns and cities. Patrick is the co-author of several seminal publications which have had a major influence on architectural and urban design attitudes in Ireland to include, *The Irish Town - An Approach to Survival* (1975) and *Buildings of Irish Towns - Treasures of Everyday Architecture* (1983).

**Abstract:** Westport is Ireland's first 18th century planned town. Patrick will explain its urban morphology, examine its architectural heritage and consider challenges for its conservation

**Simon Wall** has been Town Architect to Westport for almost two decades; he is responsible for the built environment as part of the Town Management team.

**Abstract:** In recent decades, Westport has experienced its largest building programme since Georgian times, from Section 23 tax designation, through the 'Celtic Tiger' years to the present day, during this period the town has won many accolades including, three national Tidy Towns wins, and was last year assessed by *The Irish Times* to be 'The Best Place to Live in Ireland'. Westport has recently been designated a pilot town as part of the Department of Arts Heritage & Gaeltacht 'Historic Towns Initiative' and national 'Smarter Travel' demonstration town by the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport. The Town is a pioneer in the development of urban and rural greenways, including the award winning 45km Great Western Greenway linking Westport and Achill Island. Simon will discuss Westport's contemporary development and the town's working relationship with Westport House.

**Siobhán Sexton**, BA(Hons)Arch. Dip. Arch. MRIAI, is the Architectural Conservation Officer at Mayo County Council. She previously worked in private architectural practices in Dublin and London. She is a graduate of the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. Her current projects relate to the Historic Towns Initiative in Westport, the promotion of built heritage conservation skills and other conservation-led projects in Co. Mayo.



## INFORMATION ON PARTNERING ORGANISATIONS

**Westport Town Council** is responsible for the management of the town of Westport, the third largest town in Mayo with an urban population of 5,543. Westport is a planned Heritage Town and one of the islands premier tourism destinations, it has an excellent record in Environmental and Heritage Competitions, having won the Tidy Towns Award in 2001, 2006 and 2008. Westport is one of three designated pilot towns in the national 'Historic Towns Initiative' and is also designated a national 'Smarter Travel' demonstration town. In 2013 Westport was awarded the Irish Times title 'Ireland's Best Place to Live'.



**Westport House:** there has been a 'big house' on this site since the 1500's, when Grace O'Malley, the famous Pirate Queen, built one of her castles here. The current house built in 1730 by the Browne family who still own it today has an abundance of artefacts, artwork and original antiques. A total of 30 rooms and 5 exhibitions are open to the public providing tremendous insight in to this well-preserved and significant piece of Irish heritage. From small beginnings of 2,700 visitors when it first opened in 1960, it has become one of Ireland's best loved attractions welcoming over 125,000 people annually. We look forward to welcoming you too.



**The Irish Georgian Society** aims to protect and conserve distinguished examples of architecture and the allied arts of all periods in Ireland. It achieves this through undertaking and supporting building conservation projects, through its conservation education programme, through promoting scholarly research, and through campaigning for endangered buildings of architectural interest. The Society's conservation education programme aims to promote best practice in the conservation of historic buildings. This programme includes an annual traditional building skills exhibition, seminars on good conservation practice, and an online register of craftsmen and professionals. The Westport Study Day, presented in partnership with Westport Town Council and Westport House is an action of this conservation education programme.



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