

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE COUNTRY HOUSE



23rd Annual Historic Houses International Conference,
Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates,
History Department, Maynooth University

19-20 MAY 2025

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Architects have always strived to build country houses that would function efficiently, comfortably and healthily, an aspiration memorably captured in Le Corbusier's dictum that 'a house is a machine for living in'.

They were domestic residences and places of employment, with a broad base of staff tending to an elite few. The 23rd Historic Houses Conference, which will take place on 19-20 May 2025, will look at the ways in which country houses were designed, modernised, managed, financed, powered, provisioned and occupied with a view to being a functioning communal unit.

In what ways did the design of a house with specified zones for work and leisure reflect these social and work structures? How segregated were leisure, comfort, and domestic service?

How were household finances managed both above and below stairs? Who authorised purchasing and expenditure, and who was responsible for balancing the books? To what extent did cash or credit finance this lifestyle?

How and when did houses adopt advances in various technologies? Open fires giving way to

central heating systems; running water making life more convenient and hygienic; gas and electricity improving lighting and power. What benefits and risks did these changes bring?

How were houses provisioned? From food-stuffs, whether homegrown or purchased, to linen, household utensils, clothing, and many other essentials, how was consumption in the big house linked to local or distant suppliers?

In an era before modern health provision how was medicine understood and dispensed? When were doctors, pharmacists or dentists called upon? To what extent were sickness and health understood in terms of hygiene, infection, diet, and even emotional wellbeing?

Behind the fine architecture, opulent décor and assembled art treasures, the country house was a well-regulated organism where occupants would go about their lives and duties in different ways. Were these households organised or chaotic, harmonious or discordant, efficient or wasteful?

Everyday life will examine these and many other themes relating to the experience of living in country houses.





Courtesy of Castle Leslie Archives



Mary Evans Picture Library

DAY 1 MONDAY 19 MAY

8.30-9.15 Registration

9.15-9.30 Welcome and opening

9.30-10.40 **SESSION 1**

Elizabeth Jamieson 'And who is to look after the horses, eh?': exploring the duties, accommodation and wages of country house stable servants

Paula Martin Provisioning the country house: a case study of Saltram and Plymouth

Kerry Bristol 'Servants nowadays are so inconsistent as to behave well in one place and ill in another': (mis)managing the eighteenth-century household at Nostell, West Yorkshire

10.40-11.10 Tea/coffee

11.10-12.20 **SESSION 2**

Rachel Daley 'The ladies are not exactly excluded': social networks through the Tatton Park Library

Emma Arthur The bound music book and the everyday musical life of women in the country house

Hanneke Ronnes Letters and literature on country house living: social and discursive space in the writings of Dutch-Swiss noblewoman Isabelle de Charrière

12.20-13.20 Lunch

13.20-14.30 **SESSION 3**

Angela Alexander Furnishing the Irish country house as a home in the early 19th century: inventories, letters and diaries

Margaret Fox 'A finger on the pulse': examining Mary Ravenscroft's diary of life at Traquair, 1782-83

Meinir Moncrieffe Country house confinements: the forgotten histories of a female gentry underclass

14.30-15.40 **SESSION 4**

Adrian Tinniswood To catch a thief: crime and the country house

Robert O'Byrne Diocesan domesticity: daily life in Cashel Palace during the episcopacy of Charles Agar, 1779-1801

David Murphy Sir William Johnson and his Johnson Hall in the Mohawk Valley

15.40-16.10 Tea/coffee



Courtesy of Castle Leslie Archives

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- 16.10-17.00 **SESSION 5**
Meg Nichols The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and the rescue of an American icon
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- 18.30 Dinner
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DAY 2 TUESDAY 20 MAY

- 9.20-10.30 **SESSION 1**
Simone Donders The Irish country house basement: a survey of floor plans
Jeremy Hill Tobar na gé and a light-bulb moment at Monksgrange
Fiona White Space, order and commemoration: the built heritage of Moore Hall demesne
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- 10.30-10.50 Tea/coffee
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- 10.50-12.00 **SESSION 2**
Jon Stobart Everyday lives: servants in the Georgian country house
Elizabeth Macknight The provisioning of estates or estates that provisioned?
Hélène Bremer The Ginkel family: two castles, one household?
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- 12.00-13.10 **SESSION 3**
Daniel Watkins Anthony Salvin's great kitchen at Alnwick Castle
Alyssa Myers Comfort and convalescence in the 18th-century suburban London villa
Kevin James 20th-century incarnations of Duff House, Scotland, 1906-1990
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- 13.10-14.00 Lunch
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- 14.00-15.10 **SESSION 4**
Fergal Browne The two 'lives' of Ballintober
Louise Calf Backstage at the country house: the construction and management of Chatsworth's theatre, 1895-1902
Georgina Laragy Suicide in the country house in 19th- and 20th-century Ireland
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- 15.10-16.00 **CLOSING PANEL AND FORUM**
Terence Dooley, Ciaran Reilly, Christopher Ridgway
Researching life in the country house: current and future trajectories
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- 16.00 Closing remarks and end of conference
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Courtesy of Castle Leslie Archives

Wellcome Collection

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CSHIHE 23rd Annual Historic Houses International Conference, Maynooth University, 19-20 May 2025

(RIAI CPD approved)

REGISTRATION

TO REGISTER ONLINE (WHERE PAYMENT CAN BE MADE BY CREDIT OR DEBIT CARD) PLEASE GO TO <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/everyday-life-in-the-country-house-tickets-1270803069189?aff=erelexpmlt>



BOOKING OPTIONS

Live two-day conference fee	€80 per person
Live two-day conference fee and conference dinner	€140 per person
Live two-day student conference fee	€30 per person

PLEASE NOTE: Parking permits are not required for the duration of the conference. Attendees may park on South Campus, outside of the designated pay parking areas without charge.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Places will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis for the conference and dinner. Payment of conference registration fee and/or conference dinner fee must be received to guarantee a booking. Receipt of payment will be acknowledged by e-mail unless otherwise requested. Refunds for cancelled bookings will not be made.

PLEASE NOTE TICKET SALES CLOSE ON 12 MAY 2025

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