

The New Conservation Grants Scheme

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The Irish Georgian Society is delighted to announce the successful completion of the first year of its new Conservation Grants Scheme. This scheme has been made possible with the support of the London Chapter, through their activities and members' generous bequests. The €50,000 available through this scheme helps owners to fund essential works which may not otherwise be possible without the support of the IGS.



We were overwhelmed by the level of interest in the scheme: we received 68 applications from across the country, from a wide range of building types and ages. It was particularly challenging to determine how the limited budget should be spent, due to the high calibre of applications. The Society valued all applicants but, ultimately, it was in a better position to help with certain works.

Enormous costs are involved with the care of large country houses. Utilities alone are a huge expense before maintenance and conservation can even be considered. We are, therefore, pleased to be able to grant aid two of Ireland's most important country houses: Strokestown Park and Curraghmore House.

Masking an earlier 1696 structure, Strokestown Park, Co. Roscommon, was modified c.1740 to form a Palladian house with flanking pavilions, possibly to the designs of Richard Castle, one of Ireland's most celebrated architects (overleaf). The Library wing has major problems with dry rot, an issue which can affect many building types. Several decorative items have been affected, including historic wallpaper (supported on timber battens), and extensive repair works are required.

Curraghmore House, Co. Waterford, is a c.1755 large classical house which contains an outstanding decorative plasterwork ceiling in the Billiard Room attributed to the Lafranchini brothers. One of the finest 18th-century ceilings in Ireland, the works involve the repair of this ceiling as the cornice in the south-east corner has moved away from the wall.

Issues with decorative plasterwork can also occur in other building types, such as St Columba's Church, Co. Dublin. This c.1815 Gothic style church was designed by Francis Johnston (1760/61–1829), the most important architect of his time. In 2013, a section of ceiling collapsed which resulted in the closure of the church. Churches generally have limited funds and so repair works can be particularly financially challenging. Consequently, this building has been offered our core grant (for one larger project) as it was felt it would especially benefit from the support of the IGS.

Two other churches being supported contain fascinating historic features. Agher Church, Co. Meath, is a 1901 church that incorporates a remarkable 18th-century stained-glass window which is in need of conservation. The window originally came from the private chapel of the nearby Dangan Castle, ancestral home of the Duke of Wellington. Designed by Thomas Jervais (d. 1799), the famous 18th-century glass painter, it depicts Paul preaching to the Athenians.

The 1816 Hollymount Church, Co. Mayo, was closed in 1959 and de-roofed in 1962. Although the church lies derelict, it contains a significant cast iron spire that is in need of stabilising and repair works. Although not a Protected Structure, it demonstrates considerable architectural and historical interest as it is the earliest of only three known cast iron spires in the world.

Water ingress can have a detrimental effect on historic fabric and is usually the first problem that has to be acted upon. Beaulieu House, Co. Louth, a c.1715 mansion with Dutch-style dormers, has remained in the Tichbourne family since its construction. Works are required to the eaves and rainwater downpipes as water is causing damage to its striking façades (fig 02).

Two detached regional houses also face similar problems. Milford House, Co. Galway, is a c.1667 house that has also been in the same family since its construction. Its three-sided front porch, which is integral to the internal design of the hallway, is in need of re-siding and new rainwater goods (fig. 3). Bridge House, Co. Mayo, constructed c.1785, faces problems with its roof and the grant goes towards the third phase of roof works.

In contrast, 9/9A Aungier Street is an important Dublin City terraced house. This c.1664 house may be the oldest and most intact domestic structure in Dublin and is one of the first buildings in the Aungier Estate, Dublin's first planned development. The timber staircase is the most outstanding, visual centrepiece of the house but major repair works are required, including the careful repair and reinstatement of the 17th-century newel posts (fig. 4).

Whether caring for a large country

mansion, a smaller regional house, or a church, the diversity of successful applicants highlights the wide range of issues that face owners today. Historic buildings require maintenance and conservation which can put financial burdens on owners. The IGS's Conservation Grants Scheme, therefore, helps to fund essential works for the continued protection of these historic assets.

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