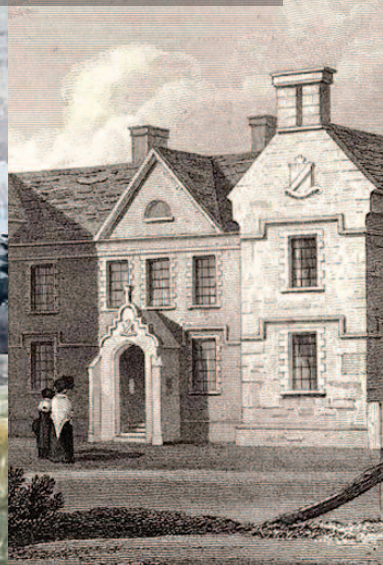


SEMINAR | FRIDAY 9th OCTOBER 2026 | 9.30am - 5.00pm



NORTH KERRY'S 18TH-CENTURY HISTORIC HOUSES: ARCHITECTURAL & LANDSCAPE TREASURES

VENUE: Kerry's Writers Museum, 24 The Square, Listowel, Co. Kerry, V31 RD93



Attendance is free but advanced booking essential. **Booking via Eventbrite**

This is an Architecture Kerry Festival 2026 project, funded by Kerry County Council and the National Built Heritage Service, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.

NORTH KERRY'S 18TH-CENTURY HISTORIC HOUSES: ARCHITECTURAL AND LANDSCAPE TREASURES

North Kerry has a rich historic cultural landscape, with a wealth of country houses and designed landscapes, ranging from the homes of minor gentry to the mansion house of the Earl of Kerry, Lord Fitzmaurice. This seminar, delivered by the Irish Georgian Society and Kerry County Council, will focus on the legacy of these houses and landscapes, and promote greater awareness amongst the public and key stakeholders of their importance. It aims to advance the potential of these cultural assets, as well as highlight the threats to their survival in the 21st century.

This one-day seminar forms part of Kerry County Council's Architecture Kerry Festival 2026. Additionally, it forms an action of the Irish Georgian Society's Conservation Education Programme, which is supported by the National Built Heritage Service, as well as The Heritage Council through its Heritage Organisation Support Fund 2026.

Architecture Kerry Festival 2026 extends our thanks to the Irish Planning Institute and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland for recognising the seminar as continuing professional development for their members.

SPEAKERS



Kay Caball

**Crotta 1669-1920:
From Big House to Ruin**

Kay Caball's presentation is on the history and lives of the occupants of the Great House at Crotta. From its foundation as a Norman Fitzmaurice Castle through its 1669 original great house and 1819 re-design by Richard Morrison to derelict ruin in 1921, Crotta housed a number of distinguished names including the Ponsonbys, the Kitchener family of Horatio, later Earl Kitchener of Khartoum and the Galvins of Crotta.



*Drawing of Crotta by John Preston Neale.
Engraving published 1821, London, by Thomas Barber.*

Kay Caball is a native of Listowel, County Kerry, and is a professional genealogist and local historian. Kay's publications include 'The Kerry Girls: Emigration and the Earl Grey Scheme' (2014), 'Finding your Ancestors in Kerry' (2015), 'The Fall of the Fitzmaurices: The Demise of Kerry's First Family' (2020). Kay has contributed to several local history publications and is a Council Member of the Kerry Archaeological & Historical Society.



Tom Dillon

**The Road to the Big House:
Avenues, Trees and Landscape
Design in North Kerry**

Drawing on examples in North Kerry this talk explores the role of avenues to the houses of the gentry and nobility as an integral part of the visitor's experience, examining how their layout and planting reflected changing fashions in landscape design from formal, single-species avenues to more naturalistic compositions. Today, many of these avenues survive as living monuments to the era of the Big House, often outlasting the houses themselves and preserving the last visible traces of a vanished social world.

Tom Dillon is a historian and educator who has researched and lectured widely on the history of his native County Kerry. A graduate of the University of Limerick, he served two tenures as Kerry County Council Historian-in-Residence. Tom is currently completing his research on heritage trees in County Kerry with emphasis on their historical and cultural importance.



The avenue of lime trees at Ballyhorgan (East) House, near Lixnaw.



Professor Declan Downey

Between the Woods and the Waters: Tarbert House & Demesne, from 1698 to 1798

Tarbert House is one of the few survivals of late Stuart-Early Georgian buildings in Ireland that is still owned and occupied by the Leslie family who had it built as their principal seat between 1698 and 1720, and extended it during the 1740s and 50s. This presentation will explore the architecture, décor and landscape of Tarbert House within the first century of its three hundred and twenty-eight years' existence.

Declan M. Downey, RAH, of Tarbert, lectures in Early Modern European & Japanese Diplomatic History at University College Dublin, where he directs the BCL degree programme in Law with History. His research publications and leading roles in major international projects have been recognised with honours, distinctions and awards, including the Austrian Order of Merit (2003), the Spanish Royal Order of Isabel la Católica (2008), and the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation (2021).



*Watercolour of Tarbert House c.mid-1970s
by Francis Coleridge*

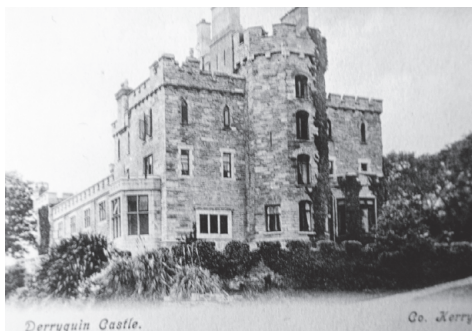


Professor Terry Dooley

The Irish Land Commission and landscape change in post-independence Kerry, c.1923-94

Professor Dooley's talk will focus on the work of the Land Commission in Kerry in the post-independence period, examining its impact on country houses and demesnes, including the demolition of the former and the redistribution of the latter in order to make way for more economic farms and to facilitate the migration of congests from west to east.

Terence Dooley is a Full Professor of History at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, where he is also founder and Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates (2003-present). He was elected Member of the Royal Irish Academy in 2025 and is currently Parnell Fellow at Magdalene College Cambridge for 2026-27. He is the author of many books and peer-reviewed articles; his most recent book is 'Burning the Big House: the Story of the Irish Country House in a Time of War and Revolution' (Yale University Press, 2022).



Derryquin Castle, demolished 1969



Professor David Fleming

The Lost Great Garden of Tralee

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, a great garden was laid out in Tralee by Arthur Denny. Situated to take in views from the Denny seat, Tralee Castle, its scale and ambition displayed Denny's tastes. This lecture explores this rare example of a garden situated in a county town, and how ultimately it was subsumed by it.

David Fleming is Professor of History at the School of History and Geography, University of Limerick. He is an historian of eighteenth-century Ireland, concentrating on political and social history. He has previously published on the emergence of nurseries and nurserymen in eighteenth-century Ireland. He is currently working on producing an Irish Historic Towns Atlas for Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.



Detail of a map of the Town of Tralee with the Improvements of Arthur Denny Esq. of P.I. Thompson, August 1735 (courtesy of Irish Historic Towns Atlas project).



Dr Erika Hanna

The Earl of Listowel's Steward and the Social History of Listowel, 1885-1935

Dr Hanna's paper explores the biography of Paul Sweetnam, who was steward to the Earl of Listowel from 1885-1918. During this period, he was central to the day-to-day running of the estate in Listowel and the surrounding countryside. However, after independence he struggled to find a place within the new political dispensation. His story is used to discuss broader themes of how the lives of those who worked for the landed estates changed over the period of social and political revolution, and how the large-scale political changes of independence became manifest locally in debates about access to land and water.

Dr Erika Hanna is Associate Professor in Modern History at the University of Bristol. She is author of Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957-73 (Oxford University Press, 2013) and Snapshot Stories: Visuality, Photography, and the Social History of Ireland, 1922-2000 (Oxford University Press, 2020).



William Hare, 3rd Earl of Listowel by Camille Silvy, 1860. Image reproduced courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



Jane O'Hea O'Keeffe

The Big House in Kerry: A Social History

What was life like in Kerry's big houses at the turn of the nineteenth century? Drawing on oral history accounts, photographs and documentary sources, this talk will chart the origins, development and decline of some of North Kerry's most well-known estates and provide an insight into the lives of those who lived and worked in them. It will focus also on some of the remarkable women who lived in these houses, women whose strength, foresight and hard work left an enduring impression on their localities.

Jane O'Hea O'Keeffe and her late husband, Maurice O'Keeffe, set up Irish Life and Lore in the late 1990s to record oral history in Ireland. A native of Bandon, Co. Cork, she has published six books drawing from or complementing their oral history collections on a range of subjects, regions or professions. Her publications include 'Chronicles of Cork: An Oral Record' (Tralee, 2010), 'Voices from The Great Houses: Cork and Kerry' (Mercier Press, 2013) and 'The Big House in Kerry: A Social History' (Tralee, 2022).



*The Denny family at Churchill House c.1870
(Reproduced courtesy of the Denny Collection)*



Dr John Knightly

The Big Houses of North Kerry during the War of Independence and Civil War 1919-1923

Dr Knightly's talk will explore the destruction and survival of Big Houses in North Kerry during the "Troubles", the motivation behind destruction and expropriation and the reasons for survival and endurance. Six major Big Houses in North Kerry were destroyed during this period but thirty more survived. How did these families react to the New Ireland and what was their fate?

Dr John Knightly a native of Kerry, is a historian whose area of interest is the social world of the Kerry landed gentry of the 19th and 20th century. His PhD was on the Godfrey Family of Milltown and he has recently catalogued the Leeson Marshall Papers, now in Muckcross House. Dr Knightly heads up the World Heritage Unit in the National Monuments Service at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



*Sallowglen, County Kerry.
Photo courtesy of Dr John Knightly.*



Professor Finola O'Kane

The Conservation of Lixnaw's Historic Landscape - A Blueprint for Ireland's Future Heritage?

This paper will explore the historic landscape of Lixnaw, Co. Kerry, by estimating its significance when compared with Ireland's other major Baroque landscapes and the towns they generated. It will touch upon the challenges faced by large designed landscapes in Ireland and advance some approaches for protecting and communicating their outstanding universal value. It will also consider the advantages that might stem from identifying and prioritising the greatest of Ireland's landscapes. Ireland is renowned throughout the world for the quality and significance of her landscapes- why then are they so hard to protect?

Finola O'Kane is a landscape historian, architect, and Professor at the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin. Her books include 'Landscape Design in Eighteenth-

Century Ireland: Mixing Foreign Trees with the Natives' (2004), 'Ireland and the Picturesque: Design, Landscape Painting, and Tourism, 1700–1840' (2013) and the recent 'Landscape design and revolution in Ireland and the United States 1688-1815' (2023). She has also published on plantation landscapes, with the co-edited volume 'Ireland, slavery and the Caribbean: Interdisciplinary perspectives' (2023).



Cornelius Varley (1781-1873), 'Lixnaw Castle Co. Kerry', 1842. Ulster Museum, Belfast.

CHAIRS



Donough Cahill

Donough Cahill is the Executive Director of the Irish Georgian Society and oversees the strategic and day-to-day operations of the IGS and of its Dublin based office. The Irish

Georgian Society was founded in 1958 to promote and protect Ireland's architecture, allied arts and designed landscapes.



Jane Wales

Jane Wales is a Senior Architectural Advisor at the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), National Built Heritage Service.

The purpose of the NIAH is to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland, including the delivery of the Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes Survey: initiated to document Ireland's rich gardening and demesne heritage (dating from the 17th century onward).

