

***OPW-NUI Maynooth Archive and Research Centre at Castletown***  
**- an impressive new home for the archives of Irish country houses**

### **Background**

A new centre for the care and study of archives and other sources dealing with the history of Irish estates, their houses and inhabitants, was launched by President Mary McAleese at a reception on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2008 in Castletown House in Celbridge, Co. Kildare. The *OPW-NUI Maynooth Archive and Research Centre at Castletown* opened its doors to the public for the first time last November, marking an exciting new collaboration between the National University of Ireland Maynooth and the Office of Public Works.

The Centre is located in a suite of rooms in Castletown House, catering for the preservation, storage and promotion of the unique documents in its care. Facilities include an archival repository, document treatment room, reading room and office accommodation. Work is currently underway on a second strong room which will accommodate further acquisitions over the coming months. The reading room will be open to the public at a later date when professional work on the archival collections has been completed.

Built between 1722 and 1729 for William Conolly, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons and the wealthiest commoner in Ireland, Castletown House is Ireland's largest and earliest Palladian style house. After decades in the care of Desmond Guinness and the Castletown Foundation, it passed in 1994 to the ownership of the Irish State. The Office of Public Works has since refurbished Castletown, and in 2007 reopened it as a major cultural and community resource.

### **Strokestown Park House Archive**

Amongst the treasures of the new Archive and Research Centre is the Strokestown Park House Archive, which provides a unique glimpse into the Anglo-Irish lifestyle of the Pakenham Mahon family in County Roscommon between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Containing both family and estate papers, the collection includes correspondence, photographs, farm accounts and other financial material, estate maps, property deeds, architectural drawings, labour returns, pamphlets, and press cuttings. The archive reflects both the private and public lives of different members of the Pakenham Mahon family, addressing a variety of different subjects including marriage and family life, war, estate management, rent collection, evictions and emigration, agrarian outrages, and local education.

Of particular importance, however, are the papers relating to the Great Famine which provide a truly moving account of Ireland's greatest social disaster on record. Census records, pleas from evicted tenants, and lists of individuals receiving meal, are but a few of the documents contained in the collection from this period.

The Archive is of major importance as it provides a voice to many that were silenced either through death or emigration during this devastating period in Irish history. Speaking at the opening, President McAleese said: "The deposit of the Strokestown Park House Papers at this new research centre will continue to shed light on the history and suffering of the Famine and connect this generation to the forgotten people of the past."

### **Nationwide**

A special feature highlighting the archive of Strokestown Park House and its fascinating journey from County Roscommon to the *OPW-NUI Maynooth Archive and Research Centre at Castletown*, was broadcast on RTE's *Nationwide* programme on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009. This feature coincided with National Famine Memorial Day which took place that weekend.

### **Contact details**

For further information please contact Róisín Berry, Archivist ([roisin.berry@nuim.ie](mailto:roisin.berry@nuim.ie)).