

## Press release

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# Castletown House delighted to announce the launch of 'Portrait of a family' a new publication and exhibition on the Conolly family

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Castletown House is delighted to announce the official launch of 'Portrait of a family: the Conollys of Castletown', a new publication and exciting exhibition that examines the eclectic mix of characters from the Conolly family tree during their 250 years of association with Castletown House. Curated by Sandra Murphy, Dave Hartley and Mary Heffernan and the associate book written by Dr. Ruth Thrope, explores the family connections of the owners of Ireland's finest Country House and wider connection across the world.

Speaking ahead of the opening, Rosemary Collier, Head of Heritage Services and Capital Works Delivery, said:

"This is an important historical and cultural exhibition that chronicles the lives of one of Ireland's celebrated families. It is meticulously researched and I would invite everyone to come and enjoy the exquisite and entertaining lives of the many characters within the Conolly family."

This exhibition explores the history of the Castletown lands from their ownership by the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Kildare (who as Lords Deputy governed Ireland during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), to their loss during Tudor rule, to confiscations and

forfeiture in the times of Cromwellian rule, the Restoration and the Williamite Wars. This publication takes up the story when William Conolly, a scion of the rising Protestant Ascendancy, acquires the lands and proceeds to create what is regarded as a European masterpiece of Palladian architecture.

At the height of William Conolly's power and wealth he owned some 150,000 acres of land over ten counties. Ruth Thorpe outlines for us the loss of this fortune down to a few hundred acres by the time the family sold Castletown in 1965.

Investigated here are the legacy, politics and social mores of Conolly's class and that of his heirs which supports and strengthens the interpretation of the history of the House through the eight generations of Conollys that had resided there.

The Exhibition can be visited as part of the Castletown House tour, open 7 days a week.

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High-quality images of highlights from the exhibition and the event will be available from Mark Reddy Photography at [trinitydstudios@gmail.com](mailto:trinitydstudios@gmail.com) (<mailto:trinitydstudios@gmail.com>) or [pressoffice@opw.ie](mailto:pressoffice@opw.ie) (<mailto:pressoffice@opw.ie>).

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## Notes

## Listings information

- exhibition: Portrait of a family (part of the House Tour)
- location: Castletown House, Celbridge, Co. Kildare W23 V9H3
- tour times: Daily, 10am until 4:30pm Tickets can be purchased on site at reception
- website: [castletown.ie \(https://www.castletown.ie/\)](https://www.castletown.ie/)

## Biography for Ruth Thorpe

Ruth Thorpe is an historian with expertise in eighteenth-century Irish landed elites and their houses. Having studied at Trinity College Dublin and Maynooth University, she was awarded her PhD on elite women and material culture in Ireland by Queen's University Belfast. Her publications include *Women, architecture and building in the east of Ireland, 1790–1840* (Four Courts Press), articles in *Irish Arts Review* and *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, and she contributed to *Art and Architecture of Ireland*, vol. IV (Yale University Press).

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