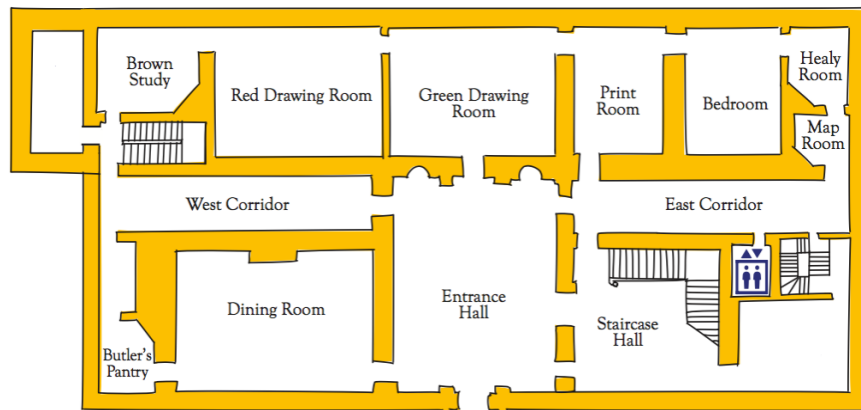


# CASTLETOWN HOUSE



## Floor Plan and Introduction



Access today is to the Ground Floor only.

Castletown House was built between 1722 and 1729 for William 'Speaker' Conolly. It is Ireland's earliest and finest Palladian style house. Initial designs were done by Florentine architect Alessandro Galilei. The design was then completed by Irish architect Edward Lovett Pearce.

Despite his humble beginnings, William Conolly, born in Ballyshannon, Donegal in 1662, He rose through the ranks of Irish society to become Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, Commissioner of the Revenue, and one of the three Lord Justices (the King's representatives) in Ireland. He was the de facto prime minister of Ireland.

His background and social position made him an unlikely founder of the Anglo-Irish dynasty. However, his disadvantages were overcome through his successful manipulation of the opportunities which came his way. In this way, he also became the wealthiest commoner in Ireland.

William Conolly's success was also partly based on his marriage to Katherine, daughter of Sir Albert Conynham, a Williamite hero. The marriage allied him to many of the most powerful Protestant families in Ulster.

William died in 1729 and on the death of Katherine in 1752, she was succeeded by her husband's nephew, William, married to Lady Anne Wentworth, daughter of the Earl of Stafford.

However, William died only a few years after Katherine, and so the house remained unfinished until his son, Thomas, came of age and returned to Ireland in 1758.

Shortly thereafter, he met and married fifteen year old Lady Louisa Lennox, daughter of the Second Duke of Richmond, who was being raised just a short distance away, in Carton House, by her sister, Emily, married to the Duke of Leinster.

Despite her young age, Lady Louisa set herself the task of not only finishing Castletown, but making it one of the most admired country houses in Ireland. Thomas, her husband, or Squire Tom, as he was more commonly known, sat in the Irish Parliament for forty years. He died in his late 50s.

Louisa, like Katherine, outlived her husband by many years, devoting much of her life to the care of the poor.

Upon her death, the house and estate passed to Edward Pakenham, son of Tom's niece, as Tom and Louisa were also childless.

In accordance with the terms of Tom Conolly's will, Edward assumed the name and arms of Conolly.

Castletown was sold by the family in 1965, and was saved for posterity, two years later, when back on the market, it was bought by the Hon. Desmond Guinness.

He, along with the Irish Georgian Society, set about its restoration, before establishing The Castletown Foundation in 1979. The Foundation continued to open the house to the public and to encourage its use for educational and general cultural purposes.

In 1994, the Foundation gifted Castletown to the state and it is now in the care of the Office of Public Works.

# Entrance Hall

The Entrance Hall was designed by Edward Lovett Pearce and is one of the finest features in the house. Two storeys high, it immediately gives an impression of grandeur that is evident throughout the house. The polished limestone floor with its chequered design and the Kilkenny marble fireplace reflect William Conolly's desire to build the house solely of native Irish materials. The Ionic columns on the ground level are very similar to the pillars in the colonnades outside, while on the upper level there are tapering pilasters with baskets of fruit and flowers. These baskets, carved in wood but painted to give the impression of plaster, along with the shell motif on the ceiling have been seen as symbols of wealth and prosperity.

# Stair Hall

The cantilevered stone staircase was built in 1759, under the direction of master builder Simon Vierpyl. Prior to this, the space was a shell. The solid brass balustrade was installed by Anthony King, there are three banisters signed and dated 'A. King Dublin 1760.' The opulent Rococo plasterwork was created by the Swiss-Italian stuccodore Filippo Lafranchini who, with his brother Paolo, had worked at Carton and Russborough. Shells, cornucopias, dragons and masks are included in the light hearted decoration as well as family portraits of Tom Conolly at the foot of the stairs, Lady Louisa and the four seasons.

# Axial Corridor

The statues in this corridor are of William Conolly and his wife Katherine Conolly, the couple who built Castletown in the 1720's. William Conolly died in their townhouse in Capel Street on 30th October 1729 having collapsed in the House of Commons just ten days earlier. Katherine immediately decorated entire rooms of their Capel Street House with black fabric, including the staircase. She organised an elaborate heraldic funeral with 700 mourners including sixty-seven poor men dressed in black to represent each year of William's life. William Conolly had directed in his will that he be buried in Celbridge, cementing the family's attachment to the area. Katherine created a magnificent funerary monument at Tea Lane Church in Celbridge. The monument cost over £2,000, took four years to complete and necessitated an extension to the church to accommodate it. The church was destroyed by fire in 1798 but the extension remains. The white marble statues were made by Thomas Carter of Hyde Park, London and arrived in Ireland in 1736. The large framework to hold them was already in place, and it is believed to be the work of William Kidwell. The statues bear a striking resemblance to the painting of the couple by Charles Gervas which are in the Green Drawing Room. The statues were moved to Castletown House in 2003.



# Healy Room

This room is known as the Healy room because of the photos hanging on the walls. These are photographic reproductions of a set of eight drawings done by the Irish artist, Robert Healy in 1768. They depict Tom Conolly and Lady Louisa with family members and friends on the grounds of Castletown House. The original drawings were sold in 1983. This room originally served as a dressing room or closet attached to the State Bedroom. In the twentieth century, it was the bedroom of Major Edward Conolly. The wallpaper is similar to the one in the State bedroom and the chimneypiece is in carved and painted timber, with a free standing cast iron stove grate.

# Bedroom

This bedroom was part of Speaker William Conolly's bedroom suite, where he would receive guests in the manner of the French court at Versailles. Later, in the 19th century, this room was converted into a library and the mock leather wallpaper dates from this period. The Castletown library was sold off in the 1960's. The 18th century silk tester bed was brought over from Lucca in Italy and was funded by the Dallas & Cleveland branch of the IGS. They also donated the set of four painted side chairs, which are Italian, c 1725 - 1750, Venetian rococo with Florentine upholstery. The dressing chest to the right of the bed, is from Rossmore Castle and is an 18th century walnut veneer with brass carrying handles. On the table is an late 18th century Meissen vase and cover. The rug is a late 18th century Irish needlework rug woven in Wicklow. The painted screen behind it also belongs to the Rossmore collection, is from the 17th century and has four leather panels and a painted oriental scheme. The chimneypiece is of white marble with a polished Kilkenny limestone insert. It is fitted with a brass register grate.

# Print Room

The Print Room is one of the most important rooms at Castletown. It is the only fully intact eighteenth-century print room left in Ireland. During Lady Louisa's time it became popular for ladies to collect their favourite prints and then arrange and paste them onto the walls of a chosen room along with decorative borders. She had been collecting prints since at least 1762, and the Print Room can be seen as a scrapbook of mid-eighteenth century culture and taste. Amongst the artists featured are Rembrandt, Guido Reni, Teniers and Le Bas.



# Green Drawing Room

The main reception or saloon on the ground floor, visitors could enter from both the Entrance Hall and the garden front. Like other state rooms it was extensively remodelled between 1764 and 1768. Originally it was panelled in oak, and the influences of the published designs of Serlio and the leading British architect, Isaac Ware, can be seen in the neo-classical ceilings, door cases and the chimney piece. The walls were first lined with a pale green damask in the 1760s, fragments of this silk survived and the present silk was woven in 1985 by Prella in Lyon, France. As in the Red Drawing Room, the Carrara chimney piece came to the house in 1768 and the woodwork is by Richard Cranfield. Portraits on either side of the main door are of William Conolly, with his wife Katherine and her niece Molly Burton to the left of the door.



Musical clock c. 1742 by Charles Clay

# Red Drawing Room

The eighteenth century practise of women retiring to drink tea or coffee after dinner was well established when Lady Louisa Conolly created the Red Drawing room in the 1760s. By the end of that century the drawing room was also used to assemble before dinner, and family and guests would then form a procession to the dining room. Castletown entertained on many levels and during the 1798 rebellion Lady Louisa wrote to her brother to say 'We have 18 soldiers sleeping in our drawing room'!

The drawing room as seen today was created by Lady Louisa Conolly in the 1760's. The original vaulted ceiling was replaced with an octagonal compartmentalised one based on the published designs of Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1555). The chimneypiece is white Carrara marble and Lady Louisa wrote to her sister in 1768 that 'Our chimney pieces are come over, therefore we shall soon furnish our House, which will be a great diversion to me.' And furnish it she did.

The mirrors were supplied by Thomas Jackson of Capel Street and Richard Cranfield, Dublin. The Louis XV corner cupboards, engoignures, are the work of the Parisian Roger Vandercruse, known as Lacroix. They were purchased for Louisa by her sisters. They are beautifully veneered with panels of cube marquetry in purplewood, snakewood and kingwood and were imported directly from Paris. They were sold in 1965 but the OPW were able to acquire them and return them home in 2014 after a fifty year sojourn in a châteaux in France. The red four colour damask silk from the mid nineteenth century which is on the walls has undergone extensive conservation work in recent years in an effort to retain the integrity of the room. To complement this there are over twenty paintings from the Schorr Collection on loan to Castletown House. These include paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, Lavinia Fontana and Luca Giordano.



# Brown Study

The Brown Study with its wood-panelled walls, tall oak doors, corner chimney-piece, built-in desk and vaulted ceiling is decorated as it was in the 1720s when the house was first built. Indeed, this room may have been intended for William Conolly's study and that is one of the reasons his original oak deed chest box (with his name inscribed on the top) has been placed in this room (under the table Irish mid Georgian mahogany side table)

In Tom and Lady Louisa's time, it believed that this room served as a coffee room. In a ground floor plan produced by a visitor to Castletown, Arthur Young, this space was recorded as a coffee room.

The painting above the bookcase is after Hugh Douglas Hamilton and is of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Lady Louisa's nephew by her sister, Lady Emily, the Duchess of Leinster.

Above the fireplace is a reproduction of *A Modern Midnight Conversation* by William Hogarth and above this, a portrait of William III by Garret Morphey, reputedly gifted to William Conolly by William himself.



## The Butler's Pantry and Dining Room

It was during the mid eighteenth century that the idea of a room designated for the purpose of dining had become popular. Originating in France, the fashion soon followed to England and Ireland and Lady Louisa, with advice from the Duke of Leinster, set to work.

Originally comprising two rooms to form a private apartment, the room was opened up by the removal of the central wall. With a commanding position within the house, wonderful views across the parklands and very much a sense of purpose, this is a room designed to impress.

The original table would have had seating for perhaps twenty four so much larger than the one you see today, this one being a twentieth century hunting or wake table. The footman having laid out the arrangement under the Butler's eye with the best pieces of silver and plate on display both on the table and sideboard all aiming to impress and demonstrate wealth and status, the candlelight enhancing the effect. The gilded mirrors on the wall behind you would surely have reflected the candlelight also. These are original to the house, as also are the two serving tables made for Lady Louisa by Richard Cranfield.

Portraits of George III and Queen Charlotte are on either side of the fireplace and to your left, in the the large gilded frame, the builder of the house, William Conolly.