

15TH–21ST JULY, 2009

The Last Troubadour

The inaugural
Percy French Summer School
at Castlecoote House





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Percy French Summer School
Castlecoote House

15th to 21st July, 2009

The School is supported by
Roscommon County Council

It is intended that the School
becomes an annual event



Percy French events at Roscommon Library

To launch, support and celebrate the inaugural Percy French Summer School at Castlecoote house, Roscommon County Council Library Services will be hosting two events at the County Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon. The Library is also marking the occasion with a two-week-long exhibition, *French Miscellany*. This collaboration between the Library and the new school is intended to become an exciting annual event.

W E D N E S D A Y • 1 5 T H J U L Y

- 7.00 pm Percy French Summer School launch
The Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon
- 8.00 pm Performance: *Songs of Percy French*,
Toni Walsh with Áine Ní Dhubhghaill (harpist)

T U E S D A Y • 2 1 S T J U L Y

- 8.00 pm Performance: *Songs of Percy French*
The Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon
Courtney Kenny (grand nephew of Percy French)



The Percy French Summer School at Castlecoote House, 2009

FRIDAY • 17TH JULY

- 7.00 pm Percy French Summer School reception
Opening Address: Michael D. Higgins, TD
- 8.00 pm Performance: *Recitations and Songs of Percy French*
Simon Morgan and Dick Hogan with Teresa O'Donnell (harpist)

SATURDAY • 18TH JULY

- 9.30 am Illustrated talk on Percy French's paintings: *Lead Kindly Light*
Bernadette Lowry
- 10.40 am Coffee
- 11.00 am Lecture: *What made me a writer*
Carlo Gébler
- 12.00 pm *Percy French in the novel 'Death and Nightingales'*
Reading and talk by the author, Eugene McCabe
- 1.00 pm Gardens open
- 3.00 pm–5.00 pm Film: *The Last Troubador* starring Bill Golding
Panel discussion with Brian Munn and Joan Egan
- 8.00 pm Performance: *Percy French Concert*
Simon Morgan and Dick Hogan with Teresa O'Donnell (harpist)

SUNDAY • 19TH JULY

- 11.00 am Lecture: *Percy French in Ireland from 1957 to today*
Liam Byrne
- 12.00 pm Coffee break
- 12.15 pm *Commemorative Service*
Fr Francis Beirne, Chairman of The Percy French Society
- 1.00 pm Gardens open

Principal lectures and performers 2009



Simon Morgan

Simon Morgan is a Classically trained singer much in demand – he has performed on every continent with venues ranging from *The Royal Albert Hall*, London, to the *Great Hall of the People*, Beijing.

Along with being an established opera singer he enjoys considerable success in other styles. He sang at the inaugural Irish Night at the *BBC Proms* and his jazz singing has been appreciated both in intimate clubs (including *Don't Tell Mama*, New York) as well as in big band venues with full orchestras across Ireland and the UK. He toured China and Japan as a lead singer with *Riverdance*.

His operatic work includes the title role of *Eugene Onegin*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, and Silvio in *Pagliacci*. At Dublin's Gate Theatre he performed the role of Antony in Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* (winner of the Best Opera Production at the *Irish Theatre Awards 2008*). He has frequently toured as a singer in the USA where he has received much critical acclaim and has two albums on release.



Dick Hogan

Dick Hogan says he can never remember a time when he didn't sing. As a trainee technician in the then Department of Posts and Telegraphs his first foreman was Frank O'Dowda, a brother of Brendan O'Dowda, the famous singer of Percy French songs. He introduced him to 'The Brendan O'Dowda Circle'.

Dick is currently producing a compendium of 15 albums straddling many aspects of the traditional repertoire and they will include two albums devoted to Percy French. They are being recorded at live sessions all over Ireland and abroad and all will be unaccompanied.

Dick has toured in many parts of the world, including Europe, Russia, South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong and China.

His songs have been played many times on BBC and RTÉ radio and is frequently heard on local radio stations all over the country. He has appeared on RTÉ television as a singer and numerous times as a set dancer on BBC and RTÉ television.



Michael D Higgins

Michael D Higgins is a former Minister for Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht (1993–97).

He played a significant part in establishment of the Gaelic language TV channel *TnaG* as well as *Raidió na Gaeltachta*. Has supported Galway Arts, Galway Arts Festival, and also many sports developments.

He was first elected to the Dáil in 1981 and has been a deputy from 1987 to present. He was a senator for the NUI constituency from 1982–87 and was a Taoiseach's nominee to the Seanad between 1973–77.

Michael is the Labour Party President and Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs, and is currently a sitting deputy for Galway West.



Carlo Gébler

Carlo Gébler is the Dublin born author of many novels including *The Cure* (1994) and *How to Murder a Man* (1998) and *A Good Day for a Dog* (2008). His short story collection *W.9. & Other Lives* (1996), the memoir *Father & I* (2000), the narrative history *The Siege of Derry* (2005), and two travel books, *Driving Through Cuba* (1988) and *The Glass Curtain* (1991). *My Father's Watch*, a memoir co-written with Patrick Maguire, youngest of the Maguire Seven, came out in 2008.

He has written plays for both radio and stage, including *10 Rounds* which was short listed for the Ewart-Biggs Prize in 2002.

He has taught at Trinity College, Dublin (where he was twice Writer Fellow), Queen's University Belfast, and HMP Maghaberry where he has been writer in residence since 1997. He is currently the Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Queen's. He is chairman of the Irish Writers' Centre and was elected to Aosdána in 1990. His film *Put to the Test* won the 1999 Royal Television Society award.



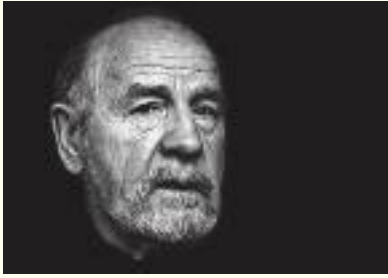
Teresa O'Donnell

For the past ten years, Teresa has worked as a freelance harpist and singer throughout Ireland, Europe and USA, having graduated with an Honours Degree in Music and Irish from Trinity College Dublin and a Masters in Performance and Musicology.

Teresa began her harp studies with the late Sr. Eugene McCabe at Mount Sackville School, and later studied with the renowned French harpist Sebastien Lipman, and attended masterclasses with Professor Witsenberg, Han Ann Liu, and other international harpists.

Although from a classical background, she is at home in many genres, including jazz, pop, traditional Celtic music, and Broadway shows. She has appeared on stage with Andrea Bocelli, Sinead O'Connor, The Chieftains, The Celtic Tenors, Brian Kennedy, Tommy Fleming, and Katherine Jenkins, and has appeared on BBC, RTÉ, and CNN.

She is currently studying for a PhD in Music Education at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, where she is also a lecturer.



Eugene McCabe

Eugene McCabe was born in Glasgow in 1930. He was educated in Ireland. His novel *Death and Nightingales* was described by Michael Ondaatje as 'a deeply moving, powerful, and unforgettable book'. John Banville said that it 'should put Eugene McCabe in the first rank of contemporary Irish novelists', and Colm Tóibín called it 'clearly one of the great Irish masterpieces of the century'.

He has been a farmer most of his life and started writing in 1962. He calls himself 'a farmer who happens to write, or a writer who happens to farm'. His plays include *A Matter of Conscience*, *King of the Castle*, *Pull Down a Horseman* (1966), *Breakdown* (1967); *Swift* (1969), and his plays for television include *Some Women of the Island*; *A Matter of Conscience*; *The Funeral*; *Victims*, *Gale Day* (1979) commissioned by the Abbey and RTÉ; *Death and Nightingales* (1992), a tragic pastoral novel set in 1883 in the wake of the Invincibles; *Heaven Lies Around Us* (1997); *Tales from the Poor House* (1998), four dramatic monologues set in famine Ireland, commissioned and screened in Irish and English versions on RTÉ/TnaG.



Toni Walsh

Toni Walsh is an award-winning soprano. Since 1997 she has worked as assistant lecturer in the Department of Vocal, Operatic and Dramatic Studies at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama.

Her operatic roles include Annina in Verdi's *La Traviata* and Inez in *Il Trovatore*, and the Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. She has also appeared in the NCH Summer Opera Series playing leading roles in *Operatic Scenes*, including Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutti*, and Rosie McCann in A. J. Potter's modern opera *The Wedding*. She has toured with Opera Theatre Company in their revival tour of *Love Potion* based on Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Her oratorio work includes Brahms' *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus*; Hayden's *Stabat Mater* and *Little Organ Mass*; Mozart's *Requiem*, *Vespers* and *Great Mass in C minor*; Vivaldi's *Gloria*.

She has given solo recitals and concerts throughout Ireland including the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, the National Concert Hall and the Hugh Lane Gallery.



Courtney Kenny

Courtney Kenny was born in the West of Ireland and his great-uncle was Percy French. He was educated in England and studied at the Royal College of Music in London. His began his career in light music and musical theatre and then entered the world of opera becoming a much sought after *repetiteur*. As a conductor he has worked with New Sadler's Wells Opera, London, and The Ohio Light Opera. He has also traveled the world as *cabaret artiste*.

Courtney has made several tours of Ireland with appearances at *The National Concert Hall*, *The Wexford Festival* and *The Belfast Festival* and has performed on RTE's *Late, Late Show* on many occasions.

He studied at the famous Cabaret Symposium at the *Eugene O'Neill Theatre Centre*, Connecticut. In New York he has performed at 88's in Greenwich Village, *The Fire Bird Café*, *Judy's Cabaret*, *Danny's Skylight Room*, and at the famous *Cabaret Convention*. In London, he has appeared at the *Pizza on the Park*, *The Jermyn Street Theatre*, and *The Purcell Room*. He has appeared at *The Edinburgh Festival* and *The Wexford Opera Festival*.



Bernadette Lowry

Bernadette Lowry is a freelance curator, writer and teacher. From 2001–2004 she was curator, catalogues writer and picture researcher at the Oriel Gallery where she edited the biography of Percy French, *Lead Kindly Light* published in 2000. She holds MA in English and Diploma in the History of European Painting from UCD.

She is currently working on an extended biography on the life of Percy French and researching the influence of Percy French on James Joyce for The James Joyce Research Centre at UCD.

For the Oriel Gallery she has given many talks on Percy French throughout Ireland. In 2001 she assisted artist and curator, Dr. Michael Casey, Government of Ireland Post-Doctoral Fellow, in mounting the exhibition *Fotografia Metasisica, Landscapes, Symbols Correlations* at the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny, and in 2008 co-curated an exhibition of the leading Finnish artist, Kristian Krokfors at the Finnish Embassy, Dublin and Lemonstreet Gallery, Dublin.



Brian Munn

Brian Munn has been an actor and broadcaster since the age of twelve, when he played his first role in a BBC Drama production. He has worked in all areas of the business from stage actor to television game show host, from Radio Drama Producer with RTÉ, to film actor.

In films, he has been husband to Helen Mirren in *Cal*, flirted with the star of *Misery*, Cathy Bates, in *P. S. I Love You*, and even had to beat up Tom Cruise in *Far and Away*. Over the past thirty-five years Brian has been the voice-over on Irish radio and TV commercials for an extraordinary range of products and services—you might not know the face but you will more than likely know the voice!

However, his greatest professional joy is in reciting poetry. He presented a series of poetry programmes for *Lyric FM*.



Liam Byrne

Liam Byrne is passionate about history. He is a member of Roscommon Heritage Group, Roscommon Historical & Archaeological Society, The Old Athlone Society, The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, and The Ephemera Society. His history essays have been published in many magazines and has won the Seamus Kelly Memorial Award.

He has a regular feature on documents and ephemera in *Roscommon Life*, the Annual of the Roscommon Association in Dublin. Liam holds a Certificate in Local History from NUI (Maynooth) and has recently completed a Diploma in Archaeology with NUI (Galway).

He also maintains a website dedicated to County Roscommon publications, documents and ephemera and Roscommon people everywhere. It is at: www.roscommonhistory.ie

Percy French

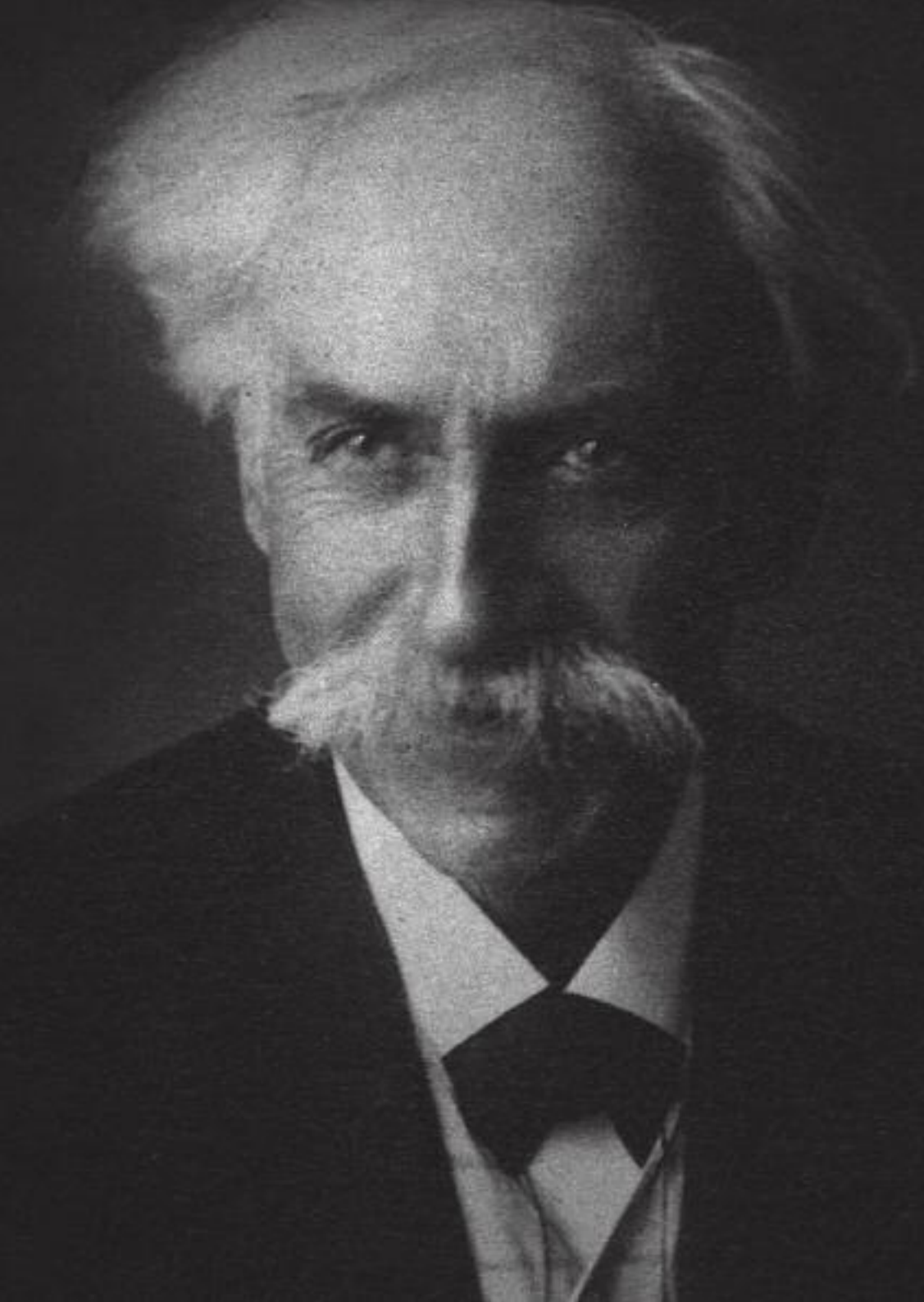
William Percy French was born in 1854 at Cloonyquin House, County Roscommon. He was the second son of landowner Christopher French and his wife Susan Emma (nee Percy).

He was educated in Ireland and England. In 1872 he began an engineering degree at Trinity College, Dublin. There he developed his talent for songwriting. Percy French is perhaps best known as a writer of humorous songs, but he was active also as an editor, concert promoter, landscape painter, sketch writer, poet, banjo player, and stage entertainer.

He qualified as a Civil Engineer but continued to develop his interest in music, drama, and especially painting which he then considered to be his true vocation. When later became well-known, his paintings from this time were sought after. Many depicting the Irish landscape but others provide a record of his travels in Switzerland, Canada, the USA and the West Indies. In 1887 French became the editor of a comic weekly magazine in Dublin, *The Jarvey*, and he promoted a series of concerts and advertised his many comic songs under the title of The Jarvey Concert Company. When *The Jarvey* failed after two years, French turned to the stage full time. He wrote, produced and played the major part in the revue *Dublin up to Date*. He also wrote the libretto for two comic operas and he played the leading role in both works. In 1891, his wife, Ettie died in childbirth, just a year and a day after their marriage, and their baby daughter died some days later. In 1894 he married Helen Sheldon, an English chorus girl. They had three daughters.

From 1900 he toured theatres and music halls throughout Britain and in 1910 he and Dr. W. Houston Collisson, his friend and musical collaborator, successfully toured Canada, east coast USA, and the West Indies. French was now based in London but performed at the holiday resorts and towns of Ireland each year and occasionally the ski resorts of Switzerland.

In 1916 he was dragged by a train and injured and his health subsequently deteriorated. Against his family's advice he continued to tour. In the winter of 1920 he began a tour of Scotland but while performing in Glasgow he took ill; he went to the home of his cousin in Formby, Lancashire and some days later died from pneumonia on 24 January 1920, aged 65.



The Percy French Society in Roscommon



At Cloonyquinn House, 1957

BACK ROW

Mickey Beirne, Michael Finnerty, Frankie Rushe,
Mickey Croghan, Fergus Beirne, Michael Peter Padian,
Harry Connor, James Kelly, Jim Dalton, Rita Croghan,
Kate Dalton, Patsy Cunnane

THREE MEN STANDING

Seamus De Nash, John Joe Burke, Mehaul Beirne

MIDDLE ROW

May McGrath, Sonny Cunnane, Marie Kelly,
Teresa Keenan, Carmel Kelly, Rita Beirne, Bride Connor,
Ms H. French, Nancy McGrath, Alice Beirne,
Teresa McGrath, Marie Beirne, Mary Kate De Nash,
Rita Kelly, Molly Brady, [Unknown], Tom Beirne,
Peter Carney, Mary Carroll

FRONT ROW

Robbie Kilgallon, Mrs Kilgallon,
Ettie French, Harry French, Joan French,
Paddy Dillon, John Finnerty, Tom McHale



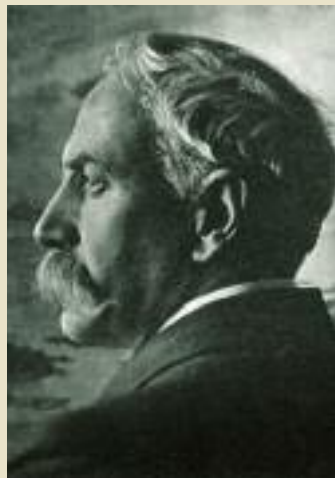
Top: Percy French, *Cloonyquinn House*

watercolour on paper, 1895, signed and dated lower left 'W.P.F. 95.'

The Percy French Society of Roscommon was conceived as far back as 1957 when a week-long summer festival was held by the then committee at *Cloonyquinn House*, the ancestral home of Percy French. Another concert was held the following year. They showcased French's songs, poetry and paintings (and also saw the launch of the late Brendan O'Dowda's musical career). Their successes inspired many events both in Ireland and abroad.

With a fund seeded by the money raised at the two festivals, the committee established a *Percy French Scholarship* that is open to pupils local to Cloonyquinn; in 1967 the first award was made. Additional annual funding is provided by Killina Parish. The award is made every six years.

The society's work and continuing renown encouraged the use, for the first time, of the Cloonyquinn man's name on a building in Strokestown, the *Percy French Hotel*; in 1967, a large mural depicting the stages and facets of French's life was completed there by the local artist Bernie Harris Chapman. An international poetry festival is held there every May bank holiday weekend commemorating the poet's lasting legacy. In 1970 the society's founding members organised a Percy French concert at the old *Amethyst Ballroom*, Elphin, with Brendan O'Dowda again taking the leading role. The current chairman of *The Percy French Society*, Fr. Francis Beirne, together with *The Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society*, unveiled a memorial to Percy French on the site of *Cloonyquinn House* in 1984. Evenings and concerts continued unabated in Roscommon, and on May 1st, 2004, a grand celebration was organised to mark the 150th year of the poet's birth with major events throughout the county, and an exhibition in King House, Boyle, brought over 30 of his watercolours under one roof for the first time ever.



As part of our commitment to supporting a range of cultural events throughout the county, *Roscommon County Council Library Services* are delighted to be associated with *The Percy French Summer School*.

We believe the school to be a significant step in the continuing effort to have Percy French's contribution to art, literature and the world of entertainment fully appreciated.

This school can provide an opportunity to further the recognition of French's life and works, to inspire future events, study and research, and to help to perpetuate the memory and status of this remarkable man both nationally and internationally.

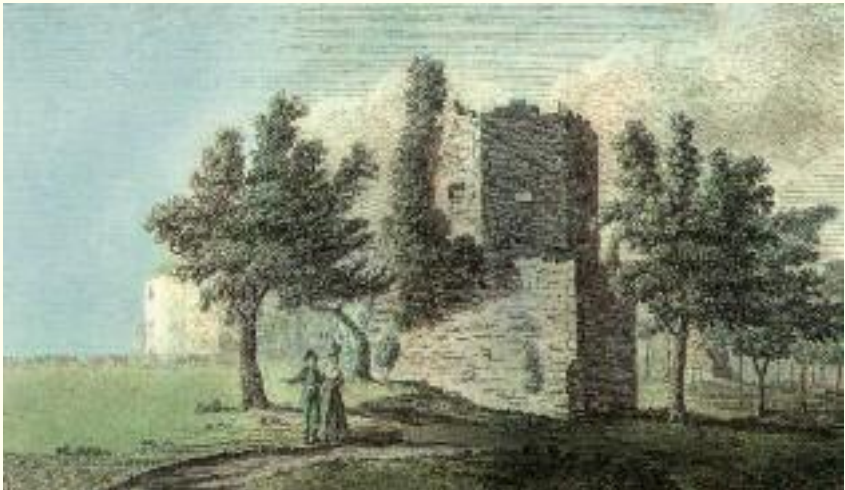
*Roscommon County Council
Library Services*

Castlecoote House

Castlecoote House is a magnificent Georgian Palladian mansion. Encircled by the River Suck and surrounded by woodland and unspoilt pastoral countryside, the site has a fascinating and turbulent history. In the 14th and 15th centuries, a fort of the Mageraghty Clan stood there guarding the river's strategic pass. It was refortified in the 1580's by Sir Nicholas Malby, the President of Connaught, (who also built the impressive Roscommon Castle nearby). In 1616 the castle was granted to Sir Charles Coote. During many ferocious battles in the Confederate Wars of the 1640's both the castle and its original entrance bridge were destroyed. Between 1690 and 1720 Castlecoote House was reconstructed from the ruins: the castle's portal screen was converted to a Palladian facade but the asymmetric tower rooms in the North and East wings were retained as were the stone flagged floors and musket chambers of the lower ground floors.

The Gunning sisters

During the early 18th century Castlecoote House passed into the ownership of John Gunning and was the childhood home of his beautiful daughters, Elizabeth and Maria. They took London by storm and were celebrated by George II. They married well, one becoming the Duchesses of Hamilton and Argyle and the other the Countess of Coventry. During the 1750's they sat for all the leading portrait artists of their day, including Francis Cotes and Sir Joshua Reynolds. A copy of Reynolds' favourite painting of Elizabeth can be viewed in the Hall at Castlecoote House.



Maria died aged only 27. It is said that her funeral, in London, was attended by 10,000 mourners. Elizabeth had a long, illustrious life, becoming Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte. She was a patron of Roscommon's renowned poet and playwright Oliver Goldsmith. A copy of Reynold's famous portrait of Goldsmith, the original of which is in the National Gallery in Dublin, can be viewed in the library at Castlecoote House.

Percy French

It is well documented that Percy French performed in the drawing rooms of big houses throughout Ireland, and it is quite likely that he performed in *Castlecoote House* so close to his home. The house is owned by the son of one of the society's founding fathers and he has set up *The Percy French Summer School* to continue the legacy of his father's work, and that of the many other wonderful people, striving to bring Percy French to the people. It is intended that Roscommon's permanent Percy French Room will be established at the house in conjunction with Roscommom County Council.

The Gardens

Three look-out towers remain almost intact, and today present commanding features overlooking the beautifully landscaped gardens. The grounds also contain an orchard of rare apple trees, an ice house and medieval bridge ruins, all encircled by the beautiful River Suck.



ADMISSION

For ticket availability and purchase please contact Castlecoote House
Telephone: 090 6663794. info@castlecootehouse.com
Castlecoote House, Castlecoote, Co. Roscommon

FRIDAY

Evening concert: €40 including light refreshments

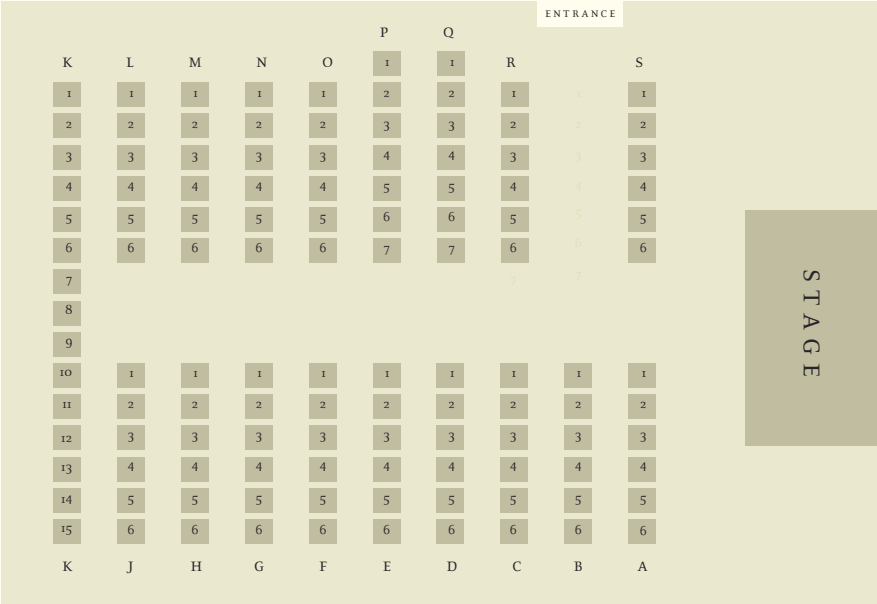
SATURDAY

Individual daytime events: €12 per event (€10 concession)
Evening concert: €30 including light refreshments
Full day including evening concert: €50

SUNDAY

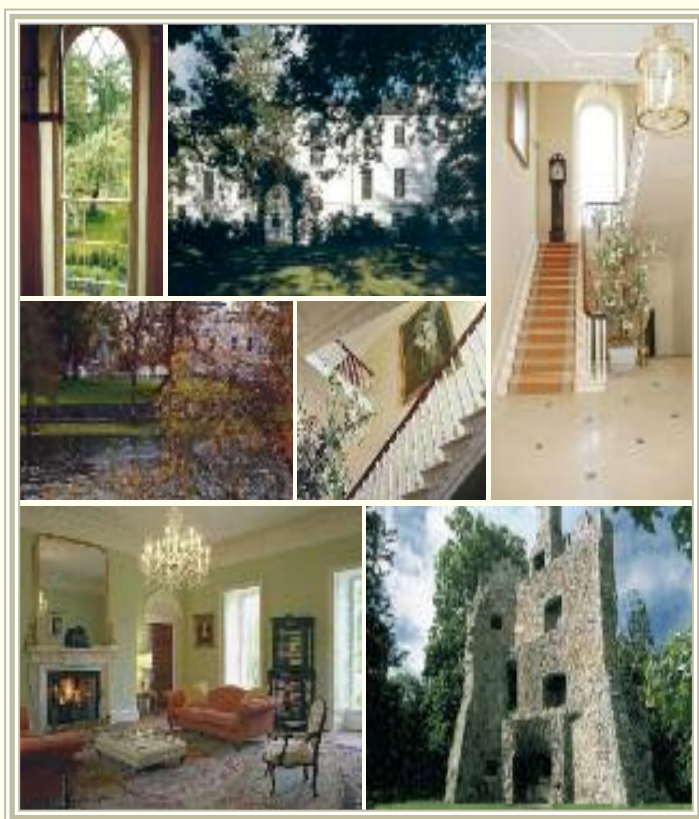
Individual daytime events: €12 per event (€10 concession)

CASTLECOOTE HOUSE CONCERT & LECTURE SEATING PLAN



Facing: Percy French playing a five string banjo (date not known)





CASTLECOOTE HOUSE

is situated in the picturesque fishing village of Castlecoote
8 kms from Roscommon Town and a two hour drive from Dublin

FROM APRIL TO OCTOBER

The Tea Rooms are open from Tuesdays to Sundays
and Guided Tours of the House & Grounds are available
between 2pm and 6pm

CASTLECOOTE HOUSE, CASTLECOOTE, CO. ROSCOMMON

Telephone: 090 6663794 • info@castlecootehouse.com

www.castlecootehouse.com