



**24th Annual Historic Houses International Conference,
Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates,
History Department, Maynooth University**

11-12 MAY 2026

Historic houses and their residents are frequently defined in terms of generational time. For any elite caste their primary concerns would include family continuity, longevity of occupancy, sound finances, social standing and political authority. Many of these concerns were shared beyond the Big House across the wider estate determining the lives of tenants and staff too.

No one in these rural communities was immune from the cycles of life common to everybody: from birth, marriage and death, to coming-of-age, succession, and inheritance. These were events that affected all families to varying degrees.

The 2026 Annual Historic House Conference will focus on these life-cycle events and associated rituals. Households across an estate ranged from the grand residence of the landlord to cottages and farms occupied by servants, tenants and labourers. How did the birth of a younger generation affect each household, did it signify more than just an expanding family? How were marriages planned whether as love matches, or as economic or dynastic connections, and how might they differ between sons and daughters? What was the experience of death and the protocols of mourning within and beyond the bereaved family?

In addition to such private occasions other public anniversaries and calendar events would frame the existence of an estate and its inhabitants. These might be of local and seasonal significance such as harvests, rent reviews, and Christmas, or of national importance including saints' days, coronations, victories, and civic celebrations. These might be marked by public displays or perhaps ignored altogether by those of different persuasions.





In a patriarchal society to what extent did age and gender determine the focus and make-up of such ceremonies? Did the differing social groups across an estate come together or remain apart on such occasions? How were private and public celebrations distinguished, did they cement, or challenge, the continuity of family authority and the social hierarchy of an estate?

Life Cycles and the Historic House will examine these and other themes relating to how such rites of passage were observed, understood and experienced on country estates. Papers on these or other topics relating to houses in Ireland, the UK, Europe or elsewhere will be considered.

Abstracts of no more than 400 words should be sent to Professor Terence Dooley, Dr Ciarán Reilly or Professor Christopher Ridgway before 1 December 2025 at the following addresses:

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