

A Spirit of Place



Rockhill House has a long and intriguing history, which stretches back to the early 17th Century and encompasses tales of love, war, triumph and tragedy. Explore the **Rockhill House Estate** timeline inside...



ROCKHILL HOUSE ESTATE – A Spirit of Place since 1610



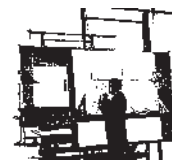
1610

The first house was built at Rockhill during the Plantation of Ulster circa 1610. The estate seems to have been linked with the Pratt family of Cabra Castle in County Cavan.



1832

Daniel Chambers sold the property and 237 acre estate to John Vandeleur Stewart – a noted Irish naturalist with Dutch merchant family roots, and a member of London’s fashionable **Carlton Club** for gentlemen – for £900



1853

With access to a huge fortune, Vandeleur Stewart substantially altered and extended Rockhill, engaging one of Britain’s most famous architects, John Hargrave, to carry out the work.



1917

Rockhill passed into the hands of Sir Charles John Stewart (1851-1932), John Vandeleur Stewart’s nephew, a London-based barrister and well-connected businessman. Just two years earlier his young sons and heirs, John Maurice Stewart and Gerald Stewart, had been killed on the World War I battlefields at Ypres.

1660

The estate passed to Captain Thomas Chambers who built a new house – parts of the current structure date to this time.



1837

From its earliest days, Rockhill attracted admiring glances. An 1837 book describes it as a ‘beautiful estate’ – the description was written in the year that John married Lady Helen Toler, the daughter of the 2nd Earl of Norbury, in Co Laois.

Following John Vandeleur Stewart’s death, Rockhill became the ‘occasional home’ of his only son Colonel Alexander Charles Hector Stewart (1838-1917). After a career in the British Army, he became High Sheriff of Donegal and a Justice of the Peace.

1872



1922

Rockhill was lucky to come through the Irish Civil War without being completely destroyed, a fate that befell many of Ireland’s ‘big houses’. Taken over by Anti-Treaty rebels, it was won back by Pro-Treaty forces on the 22th of June 1922, in a battle that cost the life of a local soldier, Lt. Daniel Harkin of Ballyconnelly and which caused Rockhill significant damage.

1927

At the age of 77, Sir Charles Stewart left Rockhill for the final time in 1927, putting the estate up for sale and shipping the contents to a new home at Balcardine House, in Oban, Argyll, Scotland.

1936

After a brief period in use as an Irish teaching college run by the Mercy Order and a four-year period of no occupancy at all, Rockhill was taken over by the Defence Forces. Its use primarily by Volunteer reserve forces began an almost 80-year military connection between Rockhill and the State. The house and 103 acres of land was bought by the Commissioners of Public Works in 1936 for £1,730.



1969

As the Troubles developed just miles away in Northern Ireland, Rockhill became a strategic base for the Irish Army and it was used by the 24th Battalion from 1969 to 1973 and then by “B” Coy of the 28th Infantry, which settled there in 1973. The barracks covered 29 acres of land. Rockhill was once again an important focal point in the region, with the stationed soldiers playing a key role in contributing to the local economy in Letterkenny.



2014

Following a public auction the house and 100 acre estate came under the ownership of the Molloy family, who immediately set about sensitively reversing the significant decline the property had suffered in the intervening years. Major structural and infrastructural works have ensured the house will remain standing for generations to come.

1932



Sir Charles’s death took place on September 4 in Scotland. At his funeral, an oration was read in Irish and a well-known tenor Neil Maclean sang an Irish ballad called ‘The Song of the Passing Soul.’ An obituary in the London Times spoke of how Charles was ‘full of Irish energy’ and had a great grasp of public affairs.

1939

The Volunteer Force, which had been using the estate for training, now occupied the house. The house was altered to accommodate 200 men and a number of new structures were built in the estate.



2009

As part of a series of cutbacks, the Irish Army closed its barracks in Rockhill on January 28. The final inspection of troops took place, followed by ceremonial lowering of the flag. For the first time in its proud history, Rockhill suffered a prolonged state of unoccupancy and the house fell into serious disrepair after the departure of the Defence Forces.

2017



A new era begins with the opening to guests of this historically important Irish Georgian Country House. Work continues on the estate to restore the woodland walks and revive the walled garden.



Rockhill House - A Place in History

Rockhill House can trace its roots to the 17th Century plantation of Ulster. Seat of the Chambers family for 172 years, the property was acquired in 1832 by the aristocratic ornithologist, John Vandeleur Stewart. Stewart engaged famed Dublin architect, John Hargrave, to design a radical extension and remodelling of the house, and the new owner carried out comprehensive draining, planting and cultivation of the lands to create the lush, Georgian idyll that remained in his family until the 1936 break-up of the Estate and sale of the property and 100 acres to the Commissioner of Public Works.

A headquarters of the Irish Defence Forces through to early 2009, the Army's exit began a period of vacancy that allowed Rockhill House to slip into disrepair and decay. The Estate, too, was a shadow of what it was during its days of care and plenty under the Stewarts.

When today's owners, the Molloy family, got the keys in 2014, a vast task met them. When they first stepped into the house, it was possible to stand in the basement and see the roof, three storeys above!

This began a three-year labour of love for the Molloys, whose sensitive restoration, while being true to Rockhill's rich past, now takes it into a great new heyday. Once again, the great halls and galleries of the Big House are filled with light and the colours and textures of its Georgian tastemakers.

Original features - from cornices, ceiling roses, and spiral staircases to picture rails, ironwork and fireplaces - have been salvaged where possible, and historically replicated wherever the original has been lost to time. The Estate is springing back to life, with verdant gardens adorned with Temple and fountain; and lost woodland walks uncovered for new exploration.

And it is here that you find us - at the start of an exciting new chapter for this special place. A chapter that will be written by you in Rockhill's Era of Warmth and Welcome!

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