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## FEATURE MOOREHALL AND THE MOORE DYNASTY

▲ **POTENTIAL** A digital image of how a restored Moorehall might look and, below, the once-stately mansion as it currently stands.



# REVIVING A COLOURFUL PAST

Quality time, quality paper

which were being offered by President McAleese on April 24 last. Mr Alan Gannon, solicitor for the two defendants, said he had on October 11. He added that recommended from the DPP on August 10. The direction was sent to the State solicitor said the hearing of the case would go ahead at the next sitting of Belmullet District Court on December 12.



# Patience will be needed, but historic Moorehall may yet be returned to its former glory

CLAIRE EGAN

DESCRIBED as a 'jewel in the crown' of central Mayo, the magnificent Moorehall overlooking the shores of picturesque Lough Carra, is a hidden beauty. Nestled between acres of lush green forest, the stately mansion, ancestral home of the swashbuckling Moore clan – landlords, soldiers, politicians, business tycoons, nationalists and writers – remains in a desolate slumber since it was destroyed in the War of Independence.

'The Big House' lies untouched, engulfed by a blanket of foliage while beneath its crumbling façade a rich and fascinating tapestry tracing the trials and tribulation of one of Mayo's most famous families remains dormant. Locals however, under the auspices of the Moorehall Restoration Foundation, are determined to return the historical residency to its 'former glory'.

Ambitious plans including tourist boat trips on Lough Carra, an interpretative centre, an educational and research unit linking with the National University of Ireland, Galway not to mention numerous other initiatives, have been tossed about.

However, serious multi-million euro investment and a strategic plan of action is needed if Moorehall is to return to its previous splendour.

"The restoration committee is very much alive and hoping to develop the building and the grounds. There are so many angles that we can approach it from, whether it be the historical dimension of the Moore family, not to mention their political and literary work. However, we need the approval of Coillte, who now own the grounds. The Moores were held in very high esteem in the local area and regarded as good landlords. The main objective is to secure state funding for the restoration and identify a key element of the Moore dynasty that we want to focus on. It is a dream for most people in this area to restore the house and grounds," explained Al McDonnell, local councillor.

George Moore, the first son of George and Jane Moore, emigrated to Spain in the mid-18th cen-

tury. During this time, he amassed a tremendous fortune, totalling over £200, 0000 through a lucrative wine and brandy trade. He also manufactured iodine, a valuable commodity at this juncture and, furthermore, had a busy fleet of ships trading between the west coast of Ireland and continental Europe. Needless to say, he returned to Ireland a wealthy magnate and built a magnificent Georgian house on Muckloon, overlooking Lough Carra, ten miles south east of Castlebar, on a sprawling 650-acre estate enveloped by the peninsula.

By 1860, the stately residence had expanded to include racing stables and coach houses, a magnificent orchard, rolling lawns, boathouses and a large farmyard. The Moores were known as kindly landlords, and unlike most landlords of the time considered 'decent'.

George's son, John, a man profoundly influenced by the principles of the French Revolution, took an active part in the 1798 Rebellion and was captured at Castlebar. He died, while under arrest, and was buried at Ballygunner in Waterford. In

1961 his body was exhumed and returned to its final resting place, under military escort at The Mall, Castlebar. John's brother, George II, inherited the family home and lived, for the most part, a rather uneventful existence in contrast to his older brother.

His son, George Henry, forged an illustrious career as a horse racing enthusiast and later as a politician. Indeed, in the case of the former a great win with 'Coranna' in the Chester Cup in 1846 resulted in George Henry spending the money on relief for his tenants. He was to the forefront in the formation of a Home Rule party and was heavily involved in politics up until his death in 1870.

Co-incidentally, as testament to the importance of a family whose members in successive generations sponsored huge changes in the west of Ireland over four centuries, The Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies was established at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

One man worthy of special mention is George IV (son of George Henry), a major literary figure in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In addition, his brother Maurice was a prominent nationalist in the War of Independence and was elected to the Senate in 1922.

"George Moore was responsible for transforming the European novel into English and for bringing to it a number of the 19th century elements of French naturalism while also bringing poetic symbolism to the novel, at a later time. He had a huge awareness of the visual arts and was an extremely distinguished writer. who also compiled some of the most humorous books ever on the Celtic Revival," explained Professor Kevin Barry, Dean of Arts at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

"We have our own Moorehall here at NUI, Galway in terms of cutting-edge research exploring arts, history, politics and social studies while in Ballintubber 'the' Moorehall is located. Obviously, one could explore the possibility of a conferencing type centre being established," he added.

Indeed, placing the life and works of George Moore, an iconic literary figure, at the heart of the Moorehall restoration project has been touted.

"When you approach a project of this nature you need to have a specific key attraction. In the case of the Country Life Museum at Turlough House, we secured the folk collection from the National Museum of Ireland, which has been the flagship of the museum at Turlough. There are many elements of the Moore family which you could pursue. I mean, there is a fantastic historical dimension to the family, not to mention artistic and literary work. The reality remains though that you need to get large crowds to come and visit and make it commercially viable," explained Mr John Condon, County Secretary.

The potential of bringing to life, once more, an historically rich building is immense. However, for those anxious to see Moorehall and its environs restored, patience will be required.

"The reality of the matter is that this will take a lot of time. In the case of the Museum of Country Life at Turlough, from purchase to opening, the whole project took over eleven long and difficult years, which involved a huge amount of lobbying state bodies. If this project is to be achieved there is a long way to go. Really, the first thing that we have to do, when it comes on the agenda of the Council, is decide what is the best angle to approach it from. If Moorehall were to be developed it would indeed be a fantastic achievement," concluded John Condon.

