

Ghan House, Carlingford
A little bit of our own history & our social history

Welcome to Ghan House.

Ghan House is an eighteenth century Georgian house built in 1727 by William Stannus, a politician from Dublin who was of Scottish descent.

The drawing room in the main house is actually an extension to the original property. Built in approximately 1747, you can see from outside the differently sized windows. Also outside, just 20yds from the front door, is a hollow just before the pond. This was discovered 25 years ago when excavating the pond. Archaeologists think that is an ancient private bathing area. There is a tunnel linking this to the other lawn, probably to bring in the seawater.

There are 2 busts on the ceiling of the drawing room, apparently of William Stannus' daughters – however we have been told that he only had one daughter, so who the other lady is....we can only guess!

2 tunnels once upon a time ran from the bottom kitchen – one to the bakery in Carlingford & the other to The Heritage Centre behind us. The kitchen also used to have a brick vaulted ceiling – taken out by the previous owners sadly. Monks here used to bake bread in the brick oven and deliver it via the tunnel to the bakery.

Ghan House, an eighteenth century Georgian house run by Paul Carroll and our 'family' of loyal chefs, service & office staff – Stephane & Allan in the kitchen, Olavi, Dearbhlaith & Louise front of house, Elizabeth, Orla 2 & Dara serving breakfast & housekeeping, Bernie & Lisa bedrooms and Sarah & Orla in the office! Paul's now semi-retired mother Joyce attends to the herb garden and looks after the flowers in the house.

Joyce and her husband John bought Ghan House in 1991 and rescued it from near dereliction. After 2 years of restoring and replanting, Joyce opened the cookery school in 1993. Along with bedrooms in the main house and a full vegetable garden (where the garden annex is now) and herb garden, she ran Ghan House virtually single-handed.

At that time surplus vegetables were sold from an honesty table at the end of the drive and the cookery school was only the 3rd one in Ireland – the 1st started in 1977 then Ballymaloe in 1987.

It was a time before the Celtic tiger was even conceived and decommissioning was not on anybody's radar screen. The 2 years of extensive renovations and subsequent opening was done prior to this. In hindsight it was the right move at the right time. However, whatever foresight there was, surely the extent of the excitement and liberation to come could not be foreseen.

In 1994 the ceasefires produced an influx of tourists into the area – Carlingford always suffered by being too close to the border. Ironically, nowadays, the converse is true as the situation in the North has mellowed and matured.

However in 1997, after 6 years of hard work, Joyce felt Ghan House was too onerous to run by herself and decided to sell. Fortunately Mr. Celtic tiger was not here yet and pitiful was the offer for all her hard work. Also fortunately, her son Paul was able to make a clean break from his career – his studio lease was up for 3 year renewal and he decided not to renew, provided that if Joyce moved out, he'd move in!

Thus it was that on 17th September 1997 that the ship had a new joint captain, Joyce was still very active. The restaurant opened in 1998, with Joyce as head chef, the garden bedrooms were built and opened in April 1999.

In 1999, we were recognised by John McKenna – Bridgestone Guide – Best 100 places to Stay in Ireland and have been in his guide every year since – 17 continuous years.

Organic gradual growth has continued every year since. The foot & mouth crisis in March 2001 led to a very dark, tough time for the area. A small active group from Carlingford, including Paul, addressed the government to put together a package to counteract the initial negative publicity for the area, once foot & mouth had been eradicated. Thankfully €250,000 was put in place to publicise the area and later that year – as soon as June – tourists returned and in the long turn, it gave credence to the little known term "Cooley Peninsula".

.....Cont overleaf

....continued from overleaf

However, later that year, September 2001, the world watershed of modern industrial times happened. Interestingly, despite it being 3,189 miles away the commercial effects were longer lasting – Corporates tightened their belts and consequently meetings (Ghan House is often used by multinational companies for team meetings) became a victim of international commercial squeezing.

Interesting at this very time, Exxon Mobil was booked in at Ghan House for a 2 night/3 day team meeting. They had flown over from Leatherhead, near London and on the morning of their 2nd day they received faxes from USA grounding all personnel wherever they were in the world. Fortunately the no fly ban was lifted the very next day.

In 2002 the kitchens were totally stripped and upgraded and a generator installed for times when nobody admitted to turning off the electric to Carlingford. 2003 the bar was installed – previously the kitchen to the house.

2004 saw us being nominated as “Best Restaurant in Leinster” by Food & Wine magazine readers. 2006 Georgina Campbell’s guide to The Finest Places to Stay in Ireland included Ghan House in her smaller guide – “Best of the Best”.

Sadly in February 2006 Joyce’s husband, Paul’s father, died at the age of 62 of Alzheimer’s. March 2007 Joyce had 2 new hips – one 8 days after the other. Tough lady. She still actively helps in the house – interviews, the flowers and choosing wallpapers.

Ghan House is a founding member of *Good Food Ireland* – promoting the use of top class local produce and great hospitality. Paul was part of their advisory executive committee helping protect and promote these assets nationally and internationally at government and Fáilte Ireland levels.

He was also instrumental in the summer of 2008 securing the win for Carlingford of “European Destination of Excellence” and being flown out to Bordeaux to receive the prize with Carlingford’s tourist officer, by Fáilte Ireland.

2007 saw Ghan House being nominated as “Best Country House in Ireland” by Good Food Ireland and Paul nominated as “Wine Person of The Year” in 2008 by the same body – up against the likes of 5* Merrion and The Clarence as well as Ballymaloe!

September 2008 saw the beginning of the 10 year recession (it’ll take 10 yrs to work through all the negative equity on mortgages). For 9 whole months we did not have a single corporate meeting. Then when they did start to return in July 2009 – it was just for daytime meetings – no dinner, no wine, no drinks! Nowadays a little more – dinner, staying overnight, ‘break-the-ice’ cookery and drinking allowed!

In May 2009 we connected into the mains sewers – previously we relied on a very old septic tank system, which did work, but the pipework to it needed rodding by Paul every now and again. We took the plunge and replaced the whole underground pipework around Ghan House – resulting in, thankfully no more rodding!

The Restaurant Association of Ireland deemed us good enough in 2010 the win ‘Best hotel & Country House Restaurant’ for County Louth.

And again in 2011. And also in 2012. We gained our 1st AA Rosette for the restaurant in March 2011;-

“The Restaurant at Ghan House, Carlingford, Co. Louth received 1 AA Rosette in celebration of their great use of local and artisan produce, good technical skills and their admirable “everything from scratch” practice which includes ice creams, breads, chutneys and home grown vegetables and herbs.” AA Guide inspector

...and added to it in 2012 – 2 AA Rosettes – retained the 2 AA Rosettes for 2013/2014 & 2014/2015 and 2015/16

It is indeed very reassuring to receive recognition on a national level. However, we really do want every experience here at Ghan House to be as rewarding for you as it is for all of us. Occasionally we may fall short, sometimes we may be in the middle of improvements and sometimes you can help us improve by telling us. We strive to treat our guests with the welcome, service, enjoyment of living that we would wish whenever we travel. We would love to know not just how good we sometimes are! But how to improve also...

We all hope you enjoy your stay.