

2019 ICCROM Award

Laudatio to Grellan Rourke

It is with great pleasure that on behalf of ICCROM I have the honour of introducing the winner of the 2019 ICCROM award, Mr. Grellan Rourke. Mr. Rourke is the Senior Conservation Architect, with the Heritage Services for Ireland.

I will try my best with these few words to do him justice.

This award is a recognition of the contribution that Grellan has made to ICCROM and the conservation of cultural heritage in Ireland and internationally.

After graduating from University College Dublin with a Bachelor of Architecture in 1977, Mr. Rourke completed a Diploma in Conservation 1978 at the Collège d'Europe, in Brugge and UNESCO Course in the Preservation and Treatment of Stone, Venice 1981. He embarked on his career with the Office of Public Works in Ireland in September 1978 and retired last June, but such was his expertise, he was engaged as a consultant for another year. He is still working...

Over the course of his career his major work has been on the consolidation, conservation and preservation of the early medieval settlement Skellig Michael. This is a monastic site on the remote Skellig Islands, 18km off the south west coast of Co. Kerry, Ireland. It was designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1996, one of only two in Ireland.

The magnificent site Skellig Michael rises majestically and towers 218 metres above sea level. It is reached by climbing more than 600 steps on a 1,000-year-old stairway. Stone beehive huts, which were round on the outside and rectangular on the inside, were carefully built so that no drop of rain ever entered between the stones. This is where the monks lived and prayed, clinging to cliff edges alongside a cemetery, stone crosses, holy wells and the Church of St Michael. These remains demonstrate the spartan conditions in which the monks lived until they left the island in the 13th century and it became a place of pilgrimage.

Conservation work began in 1978 when some urgent repairs were made to a collapsed wall in the Monastery. The initial programme of works concentrated on the South Steps and the structures within the Monastery itself.

By the mid-1980s the focus turned to the structural preservation of the site and the need to consolidate the retaining walls, some of which were in a dangerous condition. The Small Oratory Terrace was the first of these to be completed. Works were then undertaken to both the Upper and Lower Monks' Gardens and a number of entrances. Once work to the Monastery had been substantially completed the East and the North Steps were repaired.

Since 2004 the works programme has focused on preserving the extensive structural remains on the South Peak. This has included not only a series of terraces and platforms but also other structures relating to two phases of access routes to the peak. This challenging work including full recording was completed by the end of the 2008 season.

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Josepha Madigan TD spoke of the importance of the site: *“Of all our wonderful archaeological monuments, Sceilg Mhichil sits at the highest level in terms of its visibility and prominence, rising majestically from the ocean and filling us with a sense of wonder at its natural beauty and historic isolation and spiritualism. It is the remit of my Department and of the OPW to preserve, conserve and manage this great site not only for the people of Ireland, but for the whole world.”*

During his career Mr. Rourke has published about his work on this project, as with other important projects, and he is currently working on the final edits to his publication on the *Historic and Scientific Study of St. Michael’s Church in the Monastery on Skellig Michael*.

Mr. Rourke continues to share his wide breadth on specialist knowledge with teaching and lecturing in Ireland both at University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin. He is in demand internationally as well and has also lectured at institutions in Hungary, India, the United States, England, Bahrain and China.

Mr. Rourke has long been involved with ICCROM from the time of his participation on the Preservation and Treatment of Stone course in Venice in 1981.

Mr. Rourke was nominated as Ireland’s delegate to the General Assembly in 2003 and from 2005 he was an ICCROM Council Member.

In this role, Mr. Rourke participated in the drafting of ICCROM Governance Policies in 2007, which aimed to assist the Council in playing its role more effectively. These policies outlined the roles and duties of Council, and how the Council interacts with the ICCROM Secretariat, including the delegation of responsibility and monitoring.

In 2012, as Chairman of the Council, Grellan promoted the development of ICCROM Policies in the following areas: Training, Partnership, Expert, Selection, Staffing, Secondment, and Fundraising in order to guide decision-making in the implementation of ICCROM’s strategic directions; ensure consistency and transparency of decisions; and enable evaluation and assessment of ICCROM activities. In addition, he was involved in the Amendments to the ICCROM Statutes and the Director General’s Selection Review Procedure.

I asked one of his colleagues Isabel Magalhaes for her thoughts on her experiences of working with Mr. Rourke on Council at that time

“When we were together at the Council, a lot of good work was done - ICCROM’s Forum for Conservation, LATHAM, and a closer link with ICOM-CC was developed, a fantastic communication with all Council members, always briefing us and encouraging further involvement of all of us. We proposed and discussed a lot of issues in a very participative and democratic way. We were always in contact.”

And although dealing with personal health issues during this period Isabel commented that *“From my time on the Bureau, what I can emphasize is Grellan’s extraordinary kindness, generosity and commitment beyond what was expected.”*

Any of us who have had the privilege of working with Mr. Rourke on a committee, board or council would strongly echo Isabel’s kind words.



In acknowledging Mr. Rourke's contribution to cultural heritage organisations and conservation in Ireland many strands must be brought together to give some idea of just how multi-faceted his contribution has been both in Ireland and further afield.

He was a Founder-Director of the Institute for the Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works in Ireland, now the Institute for Conservator-Restorers in Ireland [ICRI]. He has held roles on the board over the years and is currently in the position of Vice-Chair.

Mr. Rourke has held offices on the board of ICOMOS Ireland since 1993 and is currently a Vice President of ICOMOS International, and since 2013 Mr. Rourke has been a working member of the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel, on the Assessment of cultural World Heritage Nominations.

Since leaving ICCROM's Council Mr. Rourke has continued to be a strong advocate for the organisation, especially with other partner organisations such as ICOMOS. His input to the profession is intricately linked to the organisations to which he has given time, energy, and above all expertise for many years.

I am therefore delighted to be in the position to invite Mr. Rourke, to come to the podium and accept his award from the Chairperson of ICCROM's Council, Oliver Martin.