

Introduction

The Lecky Professors

Peter Crooks

A future generation of historiographers will surely note with interest that, in the roaring years of the early twenty-first century, there seemed to be something rotten in the state of medieval Irish studies. In a letter to the *Irish Times* of May 2003, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, the eminent historian of early medieval Ireland, stepped into the role of Marcellus. With devastating eloquence, Ó Corráin exposed the ‘alarming philistinism’ and ‘appalling neglect’ that had been visited upon Irish medievalism in the recent past.¹ A key symptom of this was the failure of Ireland’s premier universities to make appointments to professorships in Irish studies. Illustrious chairs lay vacant, some falling into complete dereliction. Other academics were soon found – whether in print or university corridors – condemning the conjunction of affluence and philistinism that characterized the Ireland of the third millennium. Before too long, the *Irish Times* had published its own jeremiad under the banner, ‘What future for the medieval?’²

One professorship was particularly prominent in the flurry of correspondence generated by Ó Corráin’s letter. This was the Lecky chair at Trinity College, Dublin, which had been established in 1913 from a substantial endowment made by the widow of the great historian of eighteenth-century Ireland, William Edward Hartpole Lecky.³ A series of correspondents referred to Trinity’s ‘chair of medieval history’,

¹ *Irish Times*, 3 May 2003.

² *Ibid.*, 7 June 2003. See also *ibid.*, 13 May 2003, 15 May 2003, 17 May 2003, 21 May 2003.

³ See McDowell and Webb, *TCD*, pp 412–3. The first Lecky professor was elected on 25 June 1914 (*DUC 1914–5*, pt 1, p. 41).

which by 2003 had been vacant for a decade.⁴ These references to the ‘Lecky’ as a medieval chair are revealing in a way that was quite unintentional. Mrs Lecky’s endowment was for a chair of modern history – albeit modern construed in the broadest sense of history since Constantine – which was to be called ‘the Lecky chair of history’.⁵ The ‘Lecky’ is described in the Dublin University calendar as a chair of ‘modern history’ from 1914 until 1964. In that year, T.W. Moody – Erasmus Smith’s professor of modern history and chairman of the history school committee at Trinity – was on sabbatical leave. In his absence, the then incumbent of the Lecky chair, A.J. Otway-Ruthven, spearheaded the creation of an autonomous department of medieval history.⁶ In the following academic year, the university calendar reverts to the language of Mrs Lecky’s original endowment and describes Otway-Ruthven simply as the Lecky professor of history.⁷ In the course of Otway-Ruthven’s palace revolution, the redundant qualifier ‘modern’ had been silently dropped.

It is precisely that all this is of such marginal interest that is – in the context of the present volume – significant; for it brings home the extent to which Trinity’s Lecky chair has become indelibly, indeed emotionally, identified with medievalism.

⁴ *Irish Times*, 3 May 2003, 7 June 2003, 30 Oct. 2003; 5 Nov. 2003. The chair has since been filled: on 1 October 2006, I.S. Robinson – a specialist on the history of the reform papacy and Germany in the high Middle Ages – became the sixth Lecky professor, arising from the award of a personal chair in history (*DUC 2007–8, pt 1*, p. B18).

⁵ The will of Mrs Catharina E.B. Lecky stipulates that the grant shall be ‘applied to the endowment of a chair of Modern History to be called the Lecky chair of History’. The will is dated 6 Apr. 1911 and probate was granted on 22 June 1912. I am grateful to Dr Seán Duffy for supplying me with a copy of this document.

⁶ Salters Sterling, ‘Professor Otway-Ruthven, FTCD: Lecky professor of history, 1951–81 [sic]’ in Susan M. Parkes (ed.), *A danger to the men? A history of women in Trinity College, Dublin, 1904–2004* (Dublin, 2004), p. 266.

⁷ *DUC 1964–5*, p. 32; *DUC 1965–6*, p. 33; cf. the terms of Mrs Lecky’s will, cited above, n. 5. ‘Lecky professor of history’ was also the title held by James Lydon (*DUC 1980–1*, p. 42).

Just as in the Middle Ages, innovations, unless soon suppressed, become custom immemorial.⁸ That this should be so is undoubtedly a testament to the scholarly contribution not just of Otway-Ruthven, but also two other occupants of the chair she held: her predecessor but one, Edmund Curtis (d.1943); and her successor, James Lydon.⁹ All three were specialists in the field of later medieval Irish history. Between them, they held the Lecky chair across five decades, between 1939 and 1993. The social backgrounds, historical concerns and scholarly styles of Curtis, Otway-Ruthven and Lydon are, of course, highly individual; but there is a unity to their work on medieval Ireland. The present collection of twenty-one of their essays includes several of the most influential studies ever undertaken on the social, institutional and political character of the English colony in Ireland between the invasion of the late twelfth century and the act for kingly title in 1541. To read them is to trace a distinctive tradition in Irish historiography from inception to maturity.

⁸ M.T. Clanchy, 'Remembering the past and the good old law', *History*, 45 (1970), 165–76, esp. p. 172.

⁹ The dates of their tenures of the Lecky chair are as follows: Edmund Curtis (1939–43); A.J. Otway-Ruthven (1951–80); James Lydon (1980–93). For convenience, when I refer to the 'Lecky professors' collectively, it will be in reference to these three scholars. Two holders of the Lecky chair were modernists in the 'narrow' sense. The first Lecky professor, Walter Alison Phillips, held the chair from 1914 to 1939 (T.G. Otte, 'Phillips, Walter Alison (1864–1950), historian' in *ODNB*, xlv, 154–5). Phillips was succeeded by Edmund Curtis who died in 1943. Following his death, Constantia Maxwell – famous as the author of *Dublin under the Georges, 1714–1830* (London, 1936) – was elected as Lecky professor on 6 June 1945 and held the chair until 1951 (*DUC 1945–6*, p. 29; *DUC 1951–2*, p. 27). She was first appointed to a lectureship at Trinity in 1911 and, in 1939, six years before ascending to 'the Lecky', she was granted a personal chair (McDowell and Webb, *TCD*, p. 352).

‘E.C.’

At the risk of being overly schematic, the work of the Lecky professors can be viewed together as a project in three phases. As such, one of its notable features is how little it owed to the ‘revolution’ in Irish historiography that took place in the wake of the foundation of *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938.¹⁰ Long before the ‘impatient young men’ of the 1930s began setting agendas,¹¹ Edmund Curtis had pioneered what he understood to be a ‘scientific’ approach to the history of medieval Ireland.¹² Indeed, it is a mark of Curtis’ success that, at the time of the foundation of *IHS*, it was the historiography of modern Ireland that was most in need of professionalization.¹³ The appreciations that followed Curtis’ death in 1943 make it abundantly clear that his work won him fame and affection from a remarkably broad constituency of readers.¹⁴ Little of that affection remains. Above all, the nationalist sentiment with which his work is infused has tarnished his reputation. There have been some valiant attempts at

¹⁰ For which, see Ciaran Brady, “‘Constructive and instrumental’: the dilemma of Ireland’s first “new historians”” in idem (ed.), *Revisionism*, pp 3–31; Evi Gkotzaridis, *Trials of Irish history: genesis and evolution of a reappraisal, 1938–2000* (Abingdon, 2006).

¹¹ The phrase is that of Brendan Bradshaw, ‘Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, p. 215; 1st pr. *IHS*, 26:104 (1989), 1–18.

¹² See Curtis, ‘Irish history and its popular versions’, *The Irish Rosary*, 29:5 (1925), 321–9; repr. below, ‘Prologue’. Otway-Ruthven also received her training in the days before *IHS*, while the professional rivalry she enjoyed with T.W. Moody is well known. Lydon’s remarks about Moody’s alleged obsession with footnotes are entertaining: see his interview with Seán Duffy, “‘A real Irish historian””, *HI*, 3:1 (1995), 11–14, at p. 13.

¹³ J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 588. It is interesting to note the comment of McDowell and Webb that ‘Curtis ... brought to the school [of history] – albeit at the cost of a certain dryness – a severe professionalism which it had hitherto lacked’ (McDowell and Webb, *TCD*, p. 412).

¹⁴ See, e.g., ‘Edmund Curtis: an appreciation’, *Irish Times*, 14 Apr. 1943; James Hogan, ‘Edmund Curtis’, *AH*, 16 (1946), 387–9.

rehabilitation;¹⁵ and still more might be made of the point that Curtis used the language of ‘home rule’ in a conscious effort to make the late medieval period – which was still virgin historiographical soil in 1923 – accessible to a general audience. Nonetheless, sound bites such as the ‘Anglo-Irish patriot party’, ‘aristocratic home rule’ and the ‘all-but kingship’ of Kildare have proved all too easy to pillory.¹⁶ As Robin Frame has recently observed: ‘Curtis might be said to have become a victim of his gift for encapsulating in vivid phrases views with contemporary resonance: these have proved more memorable than the qualifications that often accompany them.’¹⁷

Curtis was born in Bury, Lancashire, in 1881, to parents of ‘good Donegal planter stock’.¹⁸ The tale of how the talented boy-poet was saved from labouring in a London rubber factory and given an education is familiar and does not need to be

¹⁵ James Lydon critiques the critics in an important reassessment: ‘Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland* (1923, 1938)’, *IHS*, 31:124 (1999), esp 536–9. See also J.A. Watt, ‘Approaches to the history of fourteenth-century Ireland’ in *NHI*, ii, 303–6; and Bradshaw, ‘Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, p. 216.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (2nd ed.), pp 215–7, 288–9, 295–6, 309, 322; idem, *A history of Ireland from the earliest times to 1922: with a new introduction by Seán Duffy* (new ed., London, 2002), pp 95–6, 114, 122–3, 127–37; idem, ‘Richard, duke of York, as viceroy of Ireland 1447–1460’ (repr. below ch. 14); idem in Conway, *Hen. VII & Ire.*, pp 132–3. For criticism, see G.O. Sayles, ‘The rebellious first earl of Desmond’ in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds), *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), pp 225–7; Steven Ellis, ‘Historiographical debate. Representations of the past in Ireland: whose past and whose present?’, *IHS*, 27:108 (1991), 301.

¹⁷ See Robin Frame, ‘Historians, aristocrats and Plantagenet Ireland, 1200–1360’ in C. Given-Wilson, A. Kettle and L. Scales (eds), *War, government and aristocracy in the British Isles, c.1150–1500* (Woodbridge, 2008), 131–47. I am grateful to Prof. Frame for providing me with a copy of his article before publication.

¹⁸ T.W. Moody, ‘Edmund Curtis (1881–1943)’, *Hermathena*, 63 (1944), 69–78, at p. 69.

rehearsed here.¹⁹ In 1900, Curtis went up to Oxford with a scholarship, where he was drilled in Stubbsian constitutional history, a subject he later taught at Trinity.²⁰ He graduated from Keble in 1904 with a first class degree. After a year engaged in journalism, Curtis was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Sheffield.²¹ There he pursued a topic that first attracted his notice at Oxford: the Norman colonization of southern Italy and Sicily. In *Roger of Sicily* (1912),²² many of the skills that mark out Curtis as an engaging historian are already on display, primarily his uncanny ability to find a neglected topic and popularize it – a recurring feature of his work on Irish history.

Even before completing *Roger of Sicily*, Curtis' interests were turning westward to the land of his forebears. After graduating, he paid several visits to relatives in Ireland and took courses in old Irish. In 1908, at the time of the foundation of the National University, Curtis applied for a post at University College, Dublin, but

¹⁹ Moody, 'Edmund Curtis', pp 69–72; Robert Walsh (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish literature* (Oxford, 1996), pp 129–30; Lydon, 'Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland*', pp 539–40; ; Seán Duffy, 'Introduction' in Curtis, *A history of Ireland from the earliest times to 1922* (new ed.), pp ix–x; T.W. Moody, rev. R.F. Frame, 'Curtis, Edmund (1881–1943), historian' in *ODNB*, xiv, 765–6. Curtis also merits also brief entry by Robin Frame in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2002), p. 139.

²⁰ James Campbell, 'Stubbs, Maitland, and constitutional history' in Benedikt Stuchtey and Peter Wende (eds), *British and German historiography, 1750–1950: traditions, perceptions, and transfers* (Oxford, 2000), pp 99–122.

²¹ A relic of Curtis' time at Sheffield is a pamphlet prepared for the Historical Association, which is initialed 'E.C.': *Short bibliography of the history of Sheffield*, The Historical Association, leaflet no. 25 (June, 1911).

²² Edmund Curtis, *Roger of Sicily and the Normans in lower Italy, 1016–1154* (London, 1912).

his application was unsuccessful.²³ His appointment as Erasmus Smith's professor of history in Trinity was something of a spiritual homecoming and a watershed in his professional life. He dedicated his next three decades to the study of medieval Irish history.²⁴ In 1914, this was still an uncharted subject. The neglect was remedied to some extent when the final two volumes of *Ireland under the Normans* by Goddard Henry Orpen (d.1932) were published in 1920, a work that remains indispensable for the period before 1333.²⁵ For the period thereafter, Curtis claimed 'the merits, as I admit the shortcomings, of a pioneer in a stretch of our history where sources are little known, legends many, and guides almost non-existent'.²⁶ Unlike many pioneers, who jealously protect their discoveries, Curtis was not reluctant to go into print. Indeed, he published prolifically both scholarly and popular articles.²⁷ No modern research assessment exercise could hope to frighten so much out of a single scholar, and given that Curtis operated in an academic environment in which many published little or nothing at all, his output is especially remarkable. Mary Hayden (d.1942), who was appointed to the lectureship at UCD in 1909 for which Curtis was an unsuccessful

²³ Moody, 'Edmund Curtis', p. 74, n. 10; Donal McCartney, *UCD – a national idea: the history of University College, Dublin* (Dublin, 1999), p. 29. In 1912, Curtis applied for lectureships in the Universities of London and Newcastle, again without success (TCD, MS 3486 [uncatalogued: 'Memoirs of former years derived from diaries']).

²⁴ His fragmentary memoirs record that he began his residency in Trinity College on 9 September 1914: TCD, MS 3486.

²⁵ Orpen, *Normans*. On Orpen's contribution to medieval Irish history, see Seán Duffy, 'Historical revisit: Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333* (1911–20)', *IHS*, 32:126 (2000), 246–59; repr. Orpen, *Normans*, new ed., 4 vols in 1 (Dublin, 2005), pp xi–xxiii.

²⁶ Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (1st ed.), p. v. He quotes these words again in Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (2nd ed.), p. vi.

²⁷ See T.W. Moody, 'The writings of Edmund Curtis', *IHS*, 3:12 (1943), 393–400.

candidate, published just eight articles between 1913 and 1943 (the last posthumously); in the same period, Curtis published thirty-six.²⁸

This effusion of work began some years before Curtis landed in Trinity. In 1907, while still at Sheffield, he began a correspondence with Orpen. In the decades that followed, the two men – despite their different politics – developed a deep mutual understanding and respect.²⁹ It was Reginald Lane Poole (d.1939), the Oxford don and founding editor of the *English Historical Review*,³⁰ who first suggested that Curtis should write to Orpen for advice about a piece on the Hiberno-Norse community in post-invasion Ireland that he was hoping to have accepted by the *Review*.³¹ A number of daring articles by Orpen exploring the history of motes in Ireland had recently

²⁸ David Dickson, 'Historical journals in Ireland: the last hundred years' in Barbara Hayley and Enda McKay (eds), *Three hundred years of Irish periodicals* (Mullingar, 1987), pp 89–92; Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985*, p. 588. A brief necrological note on Hayden in *IHS* politely states that, after her appointment by UCD, 'she [Hayden] concentrated mainly on the teaching of her subject during the following thirty years' (*IHS*, 3:12 (1943), 401–2). A more positive assessment of Hayden's historiographical contribution – which takes into account the popular success of her *Short history of the Irish people from the earliest times to 1920* (Dublin, 1921) – is provided in Mary O'Dowd, 'From Morgan to MacCurtain: women historians in Ireland from the 1790s to the 1990s' in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women and Irish history: essays in honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin, 1997), pp 51–2. On other aspects of Hayden's career, particularly her role as a founder-member of the Irish Association of Women Graduates and Candidate Graduates, see McCartney, *UCD – a national idea*, esp. pp 79–80.

²⁹ Their growing friendship can be traced in Orpen's letters to Curtis, which are preserved in TCD, MS 2452. The earliest, from 1907 (*ibid.*, no. 1), begins 'Dear Mr Curtis'; by 1921, this had become 'My dear Curtis' (*ibid.*, no. 4).

³⁰ On Poole's career and his involvement with the *English Historical Review*, see G.N. Clark, 'Reginald Lane Poole', *EHR*, 55:217 (1940), 1–7; Doris S. Goldstein, 'The origins and early years of the *English Historical Review*', *EHR*, 101:398. (1986), 6–19.

³¹ It appeared as Curtis, 'The English and Ostmen in Ireland', *EHR*, 23:90 (1908), 209–19; repr. below, ch. 17.

appeared in the pages of *EHR*,³² and Poole gave Curtis the impression that Orpen was now at work on the Ostmen. Orpen assured the young lecturer from Sheffield that Poole was mistaken,³³ and, after answering some trivial queries about the Ostmen, he closed the letter with a generous offer of assistance: ‘If I can be of any further use to you please let me know. You have an interesting field of investigation almost to yourself (since Haliday)³⁴ so far as I know.’

Curtis was to take up that offer many times. Indeed, it was rare for him to commit any major piece of work to print without consulting Orpen, whose responses were invariably courteous and exhaustively detailed.³⁵ In 1923, Orpen provided support of a different kind when he wrote a reference for Curtis testifying to the value of the latter’s *History of Mediaeval Ireland*, which was nearing completion.³⁶ In his

³² Goddard H. Orpen, ‘Mote and bretesche building in Ireland’, *EHR*, 21:83 (1906), 417–44; idem, ‘Motes and Norman castles in Ireland’, *EHR*, 22:86 (1907), 228–54; *ibid.*, 22:87 (1907), 440–67. In his letter to Curtis, Orpen mentions these articles and remarks that their conclusions are ‘deemed in Ireland at least, rank heresy!’ He further comments wryly that ‘there are signs however that the ... old gods are about to be renounced’ (TCD, MS 2452, no. 1 (Goddard H. Orpen [G.H.O.], Monksgrange, Enniscorthy, to Edmund Curtis [E.C.], 12 Aug. 1907).

³³ Poole may have been thinking of Orpen’s masterpiece, the first two volumes of which were then in gestation (Orpen, *Normans*).

³⁴ A reference to Charles Haliday (d. 1866), author of *The Scandinavian kingdom of Dublin* (Dublin, 1881; 2nd ed., 1884).

³⁵ In addition to works by Curtis discussed in the text, Orpen’s comments on the following articles by Curtis are extant: ‘The viceroyalty of Lionel, duke of Clarence, in Ireland 1361–1367 [*sic*]’, *JRSAI*, 47 (1917), 165–81; *ibid.*, 48 (1918), 65–73; ‘The FitzRerys, Welsh lords of Cloghran, Co. Dublin’, *JLAHS*, 5:1 (1921), 13–17; ‘Murchertach O’Brien, high king of Ireland, and his Norman son-in-law, Arnulf de Montgomery, *circa* 1100’, *JRSAI*, 51 (1921), 116–24; ‘Unpublished letters from Richard II in Ireland, 1394–5’, *PRIA*, 37:C (1927), 276–303.

³⁶ By c.1919, Curtis was already well advanced in his work on the volume, as he wrote to T.F. Tout about the possibility of publishing it with Manchester University Press. Tout’s reply

testimonial, Orpen felt bound to admit of their considerable differences of interpretation.³⁷ This caused the well-meaning senior historian some little anxiety: ‘I trust you will not mind my saving clause that, “the facts sometimes make a different appeal to me” ... I think I have expressed the difference in our outlook as gently as possible.’³⁸ A few days later, Orpen had finished reading Curtis’ proofs and he wrote to Curtis again. This time he was more forthright:³⁹

To be quite frank, I do not think you are always fair to the Normans, or give them due credit for the vast improvement produced in the state of Ireland, wherever and so long as their rule was effective. Perhaps I erred, on the other hand, by not displaying more sympathy with the Gaelic element, but I was writing mainly about Norman rule and trying to correct the travesties of history that had too often appeared before I wrote. On the other hand you pass lightly over the dynastic and other conflicts that incessantly broke out among the Irish themselves, and gloss over their raids of plunder and destruction by such terms as the ‘Irish Resurgence’ – a risorgimento that led not to national unity, but to the chaos and retrogression of the 15th century. Well they have got their ‘Great Deliverance’ now, and all I can say is Heaven help Ireland!

In letting this southern unionist cat out of the bag, Orpen exposed the political chasm that could separate two firm friends and colleagues, both of whom were – to use the term that Curtis came to prefer – ‘Irish Protestants’.⁴⁰ For Orpen, the course of events

survives. It states that ‘we would normally be glad to consider such a book, but at present ... we are congested with material’: TCD, MS 2452, no. 3 (T.F. Tout, 1 Oak Drive, Fallowfield, Manchester, to E.C., 27 Jan. 1920). Ultimately, Curtis published with Methuen.

³⁷ TCD, MS 2452, no. 9 (G.H.O., Monksgrange, Enniscorthy, to whom it may concern, 16 Mar. 1923).

³⁸ TCD, MS 2452, no. 8 (G.H.O., Monksgrange, Enniscorthy, to E.C., 16 Mar. 1923).

³⁹ TCD, MS 2452, no. 10 (G.H.O., Monksgrange, Enniscorthy, to E.C., 19 Mar. 1923).

⁴⁰ “‘Anglo-Irish’: what does the word mean? Views of Professor Curtis’, *Irish Times*, 21 Feb. 1933.

since 1916 had been demoralizing.⁴¹ As well as the barbarity (as he saw it) of the war of independence, his own published work had been subjected to public vilification by Eoin MacNeill (d.1945).⁴² Orpen's barbed reference to a Gaelic 'risorgimento' was a private – and, one hopes, satisfying – confutation of MacNeill's proposal that the Norman advance in the thirteenth century was greeted by an 'Irish rally',⁴³ an idea taken up by Curtis in his new history.⁴⁴ The mixture of despondency and indignation evinced by Orpen lies in strong contrast to the mood of Curtis, who was at his most optimistic during these tumultuous years. He was the paragon of what Roy Foster has called that 'odd and little-noted Irish subculture: Trinity College nationalism'.⁴⁵ In 1919, his article on the spoken languages of medieval Ireland appeared. In its way, it is a work of pioneering scholarship, but Gaelic revivalism is a strong subtext in the piece and Curtis' picture of a titanic struggle between the Irish and English languages (Irish naturally emerges triumphant) leads to a certain amount of teleological distortion.⁴⁶ The year after producing this essay, Curtis published an anthology of

⁴¹ Goddard Henry Orpen, *The Orpen family, being an account of the life and writings of Richard Orpen of Killowen, Co. Kerry, together with some researches into his forbears in England and brief notices of the various branches of the Orpen family descended from him* (London [private circulation], 1930), pp 189–91.

⁴² Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history* (Dublin, 1919), esp. chs 11 and 12. MacNeill's comments are analyzed in Duffy, 'Historical revisit: Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*'.

⁴³ MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history*, ch. 12.

⁴⁴ Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (1st ed.), ch. 6, 'Expansion of the colony, and the first Irish resurgence, 1216–1272'; ch. 9, 'The second Irish resurgence'.

⁴⁵ R.F. Foster, "'Colliding cultures": Leland Lyons and the reinterpretation of Irish history', in idem, *The Irish story: telling tales and making it up in Ireland* (London, 2001), p. 48.

⁴⁶ Curtis, 'The spoken languages of medieval Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 8 (1919), 234–54; repr. below, ch. 19. Curtis returned to this theme in 'The decay of English in Ireland', *Irish Statesman*, 14 Sept. 1929 – a review article of St John D. Seymour, *Anglo-Irish*

contemporary Gaelic verse.⁴⁷ It was in these heady days that the first edition of his *History of mediaeval Ireland* appeared, prefaced with a mournful quatrain on Ireland as absentee lordship by the eighteenth-century poet, Aodhagán Ó Rathaile.⁴⁸

It is significant that, in the second edition of his *History*, this poem was cut.⁴⁹ The years since 1923 had been ones of disillusionment and distress: disillusionment with what Curtis saw as the manipulation of history in the new Free State; distress in his personal life. Curtis' marriage broke down during 1924–5 when his wife eloped with the novelist, Liam O'Flaherty (d.1984),⁵⁰ and then caused a sensation by publishing a sexually-charged short story under her maiden name in *To-morrow*, a radical new journal supported by W.B. Yeats.⁵¹ The scandal that ensued was deeply embarrassing for Curtis and pushed him to the fringes of college life.⁵² It was in the midst of this distressing episode, on 17 February 1925, that Curtis delivered a memorable lecture to the Dublin Literary Society in which he complained of the 'lack of historical perspective' in the history curriculum of the fledgling Irish Free State.⁵³

literature, 1200–1582 (Cambridge, 1929), and Jeremiah J. Hogan, *The English language in Ireland* (1927).

⁴⁷ Éamonn Cuirteís, *Cuisle na hÉigse* (Dublin, 1920).

⁴⁸ Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (1st ed.).

⁴⁹ Noted in Lydon, 'Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland*', p. 535, n. 1.

⁵⁰ On whom, see John Cronin, 'O'Flaherty, Liam (1896–1984), novelist and short-story writer' in *ODNB*, xli, 552–4.

⁵¹ Margaret Barrington, 'Colour', *To-morrow*, 1:1 (Aug. 1924).

⁵² For brief discussion, see R.F. Foster, 'The normal and the national' in idem, *The Irish story*, p. 106; R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life, ii: the arch-poet, 1915–1939* (Oxford, 2003), pp 271–2.

⁵³ On the teaching of history in Ireland at this time, see Francis T. Holohan, 'History teaching in the Irish Free State, 1922–35', *HI*, 2:4 (1994), 53–5; David Fitzpatrick, 'The futility of history: a failed experiment in Irish education' in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Ideology and the historians. Historical Studies XVII: papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians held at Trinity College, Dublin, 8–10 June 1989* (Dublin, 1991), pp 168–83.

Will Irish history be, as it was mainly in the past, a fictitious version of the nation's story, one-sided in putting all the blame on the English and other foreigners, unreal in expecting us to believe in a pious, noble, and patriotic race led by gallant, brilliant, and wise soldiers and statesmen, who, strange to say, lost every time? ... Or shall we have what other nations consider 'scientific history', founded on fact and judicial research, putting us in our place as members of the European family ...?⁵⁴

There was nothing original about Curtis' call for 'scientific' history, especially for a historian who received his training before the devastation of the Great War.⁵⁵ His scientific pretensions recall those of John Bagnell Bury (d. 1927) – after Lecky, perhaps Trinity's greatest historian – who enjoined the audience at his Cambridge inaugural in 1903 to remember that 'though [history] may supply material for literary art or philosophical speculation, she is herself simply a science, no less and no more'.⁵⁶ In the Ireland of 1925, however, Curtis' proposition was explosive, and he followed it with a rapid review of the pantheon of Irish heroes and an unceremonious debunking of their associated myths. From his closing remarks, it is clear that Curtis anticipated controversy: 'That this paper will offend many good people, and provoke some bitter people to attack my views and me, is inevitable.' Still, he can hardly have

⁵⁴ Curtis, 'Irish history and its popular versions', *The Irish Rosary*, 29:5 (1925), 321–9; repr. below, 'Prologue'.

⁵⁵ Peter H. Slee, *Learning and a liberal education: the study of modern history in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester, 1800–1914* (Manchester, 1986), pp 122–52; John Kenyon, *The history men: the historical profession in England since the Renaissance* (2nd ed., London, 1993), pp 181–2. For the impact of the Great War, see Christopher Parker, *The English historical tradition since 1850* (Edinburgh, 1990), ch. 5.

⁵⁶ J.B. Bury, 'The science of history', *An inaugural lecture delivered in the Divinity School, Cambridge, on January 26, 1903* (Cambridge, 1903), p. 42. At the time of Curtis' appointment to the Lecky chair in 1939, the *Irish Times* noted that Curtis' editorial projects were 'part of the remarkable advance in the scientific writing of Irish history within the past forty years' (*Irish Times*, 17 July 1939). Similar opinions were expressed at the publication of the first volume of *Ormond deeds* (*Irish Times*, 8 Apr. 1933).

foretold the ‘cat-calls’ and ‘parrot-cries’ with which his address was greeted, nor the extent to which the animosity was predicated solely on the fact that Curtis was a professor in that bastion of Irish Protestantism, Trinity College. The editors of the *Irish Rosary* were moved to mount a robust defence. They described Curtis as one of ‘that group of scholarly and liberal-minded Irish Protestants’, including Osborn Bergin and Douglas Hyde, ‘whose talents and accomplishments would shed lustre upon any country’.⁵⁷ As for Curtis’ detractors, the editors stated that:

There can be no excuse for the unjust and scurrilous attacks that have been made upon Prof. Curtis on the score of his lecture. His anonymous assailants seemed to be incapable of understanding any part of the lecture from start to finish ... The chief libeller, whose knowledge was on a level with his manners, admitted that he knew nothing about Prof. Curtis except that he was a professor in Trinity College.

In light of this episode, it is difficult to accept without significant qualification the assertion recently made by Steven Ellis that Curtis was ‘appropriating the past for the Irish Free State’.⁵⁸ By the same token, Brendan Bradshaw does Curtis a cruel disservice by associating him with Herbert Butterfield’s argument for ‘purposeful

⁵⁷ ‘Professor Curtis and his critics’, *The Irish Rosary*, 29: 5 (1925), 388–9. For Protestant involvement in the Gaelic cultural revival, see esp. David Greene, ‘The Irish language movement’ in Michael Hurley (ed.), *Irish Anglicanism, 1869–1969: essays on the role of Anglicanism in Irish life presented to the Church of Ireland on the occasion of the centenary of its disestablishment by a group of Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker and Roman Catholic scholars* (Dublin, 1970), pp 110–9.

⁵⁸ Steven G. Ellis, ‘The empire strikes back: the historiographies of Britain and Ireland’ in idem (ed.), *Empires and states in European perspective* (Pisa, 2002), p. 108. This is the most recent and most explicit statement of a familiar refrain, dating back to an important article: Steven Ellis, ‘Nationalist historiography and the English and Gaelic worlds in the late Middle Ages’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, pp 162–80; 1st pr. *IHS*, 25:97 (1986), 1–18.

unhistoricity’.⁵⁹ The idea of propagating a ‘received version of Irish history ... its wrongness notwithstanding’⁶⁰ would have been anathema to Curtis – ‘green’ as he was. During the 1920s, Æ’s journal, the *Irish Statesman*, provided him with a soap-box from which to explode historical myths wherever he saw them.⁶¹ In doing so, he was decades ahead of more famous warriors against national pieties and historical mythology.⁶²

The mid-1920s, then, saw Curtis intellectually isolated – embraced neither by the Trinity establishment nor by nationalist Ireland. By the 1930s, his situation seems to have become happier. Two things are likely to have made this so. One was the death in 1927 of Provost John Henry Bernard, who had made strenuous objections to the ‘indecent’ literary endeavours of Mrs Curtis. The new provost was Edward John Gwynn (d.1941),⁶³ a distinguished Celticist and brother of Curtis’ friend and walking-companion, Brian Gwynn.⁶⁴ Although no radical, Gwynn may have eased Curtis’ path within college. Curtis never became a fellow – F.S.L. Lyons describes him drifting

⁵⁹ Bradshaw, ‘Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, pp 213, 216. See also Bradshaw’s interview with Tommy Graham, ‘A man with a mission’, *HI*, 1:1 (1993), 52–3.

⁶⁰ Bradshaw, ‘Nationalism and historical scholarship’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, p. 212.

⁶¹ His interests as critic were wide-ranging. See, for instance, his sending up of a ‘new kind of hero-worship, that of the plain man of humble origin, whose path to greatness lies between the Log Cabin and the White House’ (Curtis, ‘Abraham Lincoln and the cult of the log cabin’, *Irish Statesman*, 16 Jan. 1926).

⁶² See, e.g., T.W. Moody, ‘Irish history and Irish mythology’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, pp 71–86 (1st pr. *Hermathena*, 124 (1978), 7–24); Roy Foster, ‘We are all revisionists now’, *The Irish Review*, 1 (1986), 1–5. Foster’s closing remarks (at p. 5) are close to Curtis’: ‘In a country that has come of age, history need no longer be a matter of guarding sacred mysteries. And to say “revisionist” should just be another way of saying “historian”’. Cf. Lydon’s comment that ‘history is by its nature revisionist’ in Duffy, “‘A real Irish historian’”, *HI*, 3:1 (1995), 13.

⁶³ McDowell and Webb, *TCD*, pp 439–40.

⁶⁴ Katharine Simms, pers. comm. (2008).

‘helplessly in the cross-currents of academic life’⁶⁵ – but he was awarded the degree of doctor in letters in 1931 in recognition of his published work.⁶⁶ Curtis’ rehabilitation may also have been aided by his embarkation on a new project in 1930. This was a monumental calendar of the medieval deeds pertaining to the Butler lordship in Ireland, then in private possession and stored in the muniment room of Kilkenny castle. After the Four Courts blaze of 1922, this was, as Curtis put it, ‘the largest single collection of mediaeval deeds and records now extant in Ireland’.⁶⁷ From the moment the first volume appeared in 1932, it was clear that the calendar of Ormond deeds – which eventually extended to six volumes plus ancillary publications – would win Curtis and Trinity a good deal of fame.⁶⁸ The reception in the British press is particularly noteworthy. The *Times Literary Supplement* still apparently conceived of Ireland as circling in an imperial orbit.⁶⁹

Macauley might think it strange that every schoolboy should know of Montezuma and Atahualpa, while so little interest should be taken in the events that led up to the conquest of India. But it is probable that the average Englishman (and Irishman for that matter) at this date knows more of the beginnings of the English association with India than he does of the mutual history of the two sister islands, of the beginnings of that uneasy partnership that has lasted nearly 800 years to our own day. And it is well to be reminded of those far-off events by the publication of this first Calendar of Ormond Deeds, which takes us back to the very first years of that pregnant adventure.

⁶⁵ F.S.L. Lyons, ‘T.W.M.’ in idem and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the union: varieties of tension. Essays in honour of T.W. Moody* (Oxford, 1980), p. 8.

⁶⁶ *DUC 1932–3*, p. 567.

⁶⁷ *COD*, i, p. v.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., favourable reviews by Maude V. Clarke of *COD*, i, in *EHR*, 49:194 (1934), 329–32; and *COD*, ii, in *EHR*, 51:203 (1936), 518–20.

⁶⁹ ‘Strongow’s Ireland’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 Sept. 1933.

For the readers of the *TLS*, as for the fellows of Trinity College, the calendaring of the Ormond deeds was a thoroughly respectable enterprise. Specialists in Ireland were more prickly.⁷⁰ Charles McNeill (d.1958), the distinguished antiquarian and elder brother of Eoin MacNeill,⁷¹ was particularly quick to tax Curtis privately for his editorial blunders. In reply to his critic, Curtis was restrained and self-effacing:⁷²

I need hardly repeat how gladly I welcome any corrections, suggestions or criticisms of my work especially from a fellow worker like yourself. This is all a question of scholarship and the true scholar tho' he may be saddened by his slips and mistakes must not take criticism in a personal way ... I do not claim to be anything but an amateur in this business doing it entirely in the spirit of 'noblesse oblige' ... I shall be only too glad if you will in any review you write of my book point out all those errors slips or misreadings (in your view) so that scholars may the less be led astray. I am completely without vanity in this matter for I am but an amateur & a man with other work to do & in a properly constituted country would not be serving my days at work which a Record Office should be doing.

Such lack of vanity is extraordinary, but of little avail to scholars today who must pick their way gingerly through the gaps and gaffes in Curtis' calendar.⁷³ The time

⁷⁰ The most insightful review is that of D.B. Quinn in *IHS*, 1:1 (1938), 81–5. One comment therein (at p. 83) has a distinctly 'modern' ring to it: 'The vigorous and elaborate development of feudal organisation on a particularist basis can now be treated by historians of the later medieval period in sufficient detail to balance the older over-emphasis on the decay of English rule and on the phenomenon of the Anglo-Normans becoming "more Irish than the Irish themselves"'.

⁷¹ For a biographical sketch of his life and work, see Aubrey Gwynn, 'Obituary: Dr Charles McNeill', *JRSAI*, 88 (1958), 185–7. See also *Irish Times*, 15 Feb. 1946

⁷² TCD, MS 7962 (E.C. to Charles McNeill, 10 May 1933). Curtis included Charles McNeill's comments in his introduction to the second volume of *COD* (pp viii–x).

⁷³ For some comments and information supplementary to *COD*, especially on the post-medieval deeds, see C.A. Empey, 'Ormond deeds in National Library of Ireland', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 7 (1977), 519–21; Kenneth Nicholls, 'Further notes on Ormond material in National Library', *ibid.*, 7 (1977), 522–6.

has certainly come for the Irish Manuscripts Commission to set in train a new diplomatic edition of the deeds, although even with the benefit of Curtis' spadework it will require a small batallion of editors and a large pot of research-funding simply to match the existing English calendar, which Curtis completed with the utmost economy and expedition. How then should we assess the work of Curtis as editor? A line is suggested by David Knowles, who chose as the theme of his presidential lectures to the Royal Historical Society, 'great historical enterprises'. When it came to the deeply-flawed 'Rolls Series',⁷⁴ Knowles challenged his audience: 'Who, among English medievalists of the past seventy years, could have done without it or would have wished it away?'⁷⁵ Substitute 'Irish' for 'English' and Knowles' judgment could stand as an honest appraisal of Curtis' calendar – undoubtedly one of the great historical enterprises of twentieth-century Irish medievalism – and the use to which Irish historians have put the Ormond deeds in the seven decades since the first of the six volumes was published.

Curtis' most substantial piece of historical writing – the second edition of his *History of medieval Ireland* – was published in 1938, which was coincidentally also the centenary of Lecky's birth. The anniversary was marked by a lecture delivered by the incumbent Lecky professor, Walter Alison Phillips.⁷⁶ Phillips retired at the end of the same academic year, returning home to England, where he died in Surrey just over

⁷⁴ *The chronicles and memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls ('Rolls Series')*, 99 vols (London, 1858–96).

⁷⁵ M.D. Knowles, 'Presidential address. Great historical enterprises, IV: the Rolls Series', *TRHS*, 5th ser., 11 (1961), 159.

⁷⁶ W. Alison Phillips, *Lecky: a lecture in celebration of the centenary of Lecky's birth, delivered in the Graduates' Memorial Hall, Trinity College, Dublin, on 29 November, 1938* (Dublin, 1939). See also, *Irish Times*, 30 Nov. 1938.

a decade later.⁷⁷ A game of musical chairs ensued, as Curtis vacated the Erasmus Smith's chair and became Lecky professor of modern history on 1 October 1939.⁷⁸ The same summer, a young T.W. Moody arrived in Trinity from Queen's and was soon installed as Erasmus Smith's professor of history. More than one scholar has asserted that Curtis was by now 'past his prime' and 'if not a dying man, at any rate a spent force'.⁷⁹ A similar sentiment was expressed some decades later by Otway-Ruthven, who described the appearance of the second edition of Curtis' *Medieval Ireland* in 1938 as the end of an era: 'Curtis had been the principal figure among Irish medievalists since the second decade of the [twentieth] century, and ... his work was almost done.'⁸⁰ In retrospect, it doubtless seemed that way. But, in fact, Curtis' working life did not draw to a natural close. It was cut short tragically in 1943. In no sense did Curtis make way for Moody, nor, in accepting the Lecky chair, was the older scholar being put out to grass.⁸¹ On the contrary, the perception in 1939 was that Curtis' election to the Lecky professorship was a promotion,⁸² made in recognition of

⁷⁷ Otte, 'Phillips, Walter Alison' in *ODNB*, xlv, 155.

⁷⁸ *DUC 1939–40*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ The quotations are taken respectively from Helen F. Mulvey, 'Theodore William Moody (1907–84): an appreciation', *IHS*, 24:94 (1984), 125; and Lyons, 'T.W.M.' in *idem* and Hawkins (eds), *Ire. under the union*, p. 9. Lyons arrived at Trinity 1941, so he would have witnessed first-hand Curtis' deterioration in the winter 1942–3. I suspect this coloured his view of Curtis' position three years before. For Lyons' student career at Trinity, see R.F. Foster, 'Francis Stewart Leland Lyons, 1923–1983', *PBA*, 70 (1984), 464–5.

⁸⁰ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Thirty years' work in Irish history (I): medieval Ireland (1169–1485)', *IHS*, 15:60 (1967), 359.

⁸¹ Indeed, in 1951, Moody applied for the Lecky professorship, but was beaten to the post by Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven (Sterling, 'Professor Otway-Ruthven, FTCD' in *A danger to the men?*, p. 265).

⁸² See, for instance, *Irish Times*, 17 Jul. 1939. The annual salary attached to the Erasmus Smith's professorship in 1939 was only £100 (Lyons, 'T.W.M.' in *idem* and Hawkins (eds), *Ire. under the union*, p. 8, n. 1)

his tireless work on the calendar of Ormond deeds, as well as the enormous popular success of his general *History of Ireland* (1936) and the second edition of *Medieval Ireland* (1938).⁸³ The pace of Curtis' work continued unabated until his final six months when his health deteriorated with terrible swiftness. In the autumn of 1942, he was overtaken by pernicious anaemia and entered a nursing home. Although he still gave lectures in Hilary term of 1943, his health was now beyond recovery and he died on his sixty-second birthday – 25 March 1943. Fortunately, by the time Curtis died, his most brilliant student, Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, had joined the staff at Trinity.⁸⁴

'THE OT'

If Curtis' greatest attribute was his ability to reach out to more than one Irish tradition, Otway-Ruthven's contribution was her unparalleled scholarly rigour. Rigour was the 'first and lasting impression' that the formidable Otway-Ruthven made on F.S.L. Lyons when he and his fellow freshmen 'tremblingly presented [themselves] in

⁸³ Curtis, *A history of Ireland from the earliest times to 1922*; Curtis, *Med. Ire.* (2nd ed.).

⁸⁴ *DUC 1938–9*, p. 28. After Otway-Ruthven's arrival at TCD, she and Curtis began to work together. The fruits of their collaboration survive. See, e.g., TCD, MS 2429: a calendar in preparation entitled, 'Mortimer charters of the earldom of Ulster and lordship of Connacht' (BL, Add. MS 6041). Curtis prepared a typed introduction to the calendar describing the manuscript and its contents, as well as providing an outline history of the earldom of Ulster. There follow two appendices in manuscript booklets written in the hand of Otway-Ruthven, whom Curtis thanks in his introduction for her 'valuable assistance' and 'careful work'. Otway-Ruthven's work on place-names remains of great value. Curtis published the French epitomes of the 'Connacia' portion in his 'Feudal charters of the de Burgo lordship of Connacht, 1237–1325' in John Ryan (ed.), *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill: essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940; repr. 1995), pp 286–95; a note on the 'Ultonia' section appears in the *Report of the deputy keeper of the records, Northern Ireland* (1928), pp 15–16.

her lecture-room'.⁸⁵ Today's freshmen encounter 'the Ot' – as the 'Boadicea of the History School' is still affectionately known⁸⁶ – through her equally formidable *History of medieval Ireland* (1968). Their first and lasting impression is often one of *rigor mortis*. But anyone conducting research on Irish history between 1171 and 1496 will turn, at some point, to Otway-Ruthven for guidance. Curtis had called for a 'scientific' approach to Irish history. It was Otway-Ruthven who did most to make of it a 'science'. As has been remarked of the prose of another 'scientific' historian: 'The biscuit is certainly exceedingly dry; but at any rate there are no weevils in it.'⁸⁷

Annette Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven was born in Dublin in 1909 to Robert Mervyn Otway-Ruthven of Castle Otway, Co. Tipperary, and Margaret, daughter of Julius Casement of Co. Wicklow.⁸⁸ Her career in history arose – in the most literal way – from the ashes of Civil War. On the morning of 3 August 1922, Castle Otway was burned to the ground.⁸⁹ Jocelyn's father had died in 1919 from injuries sustained during the Great War and, with the family now in straightened circumstances,

⁸⁵ F.S.L. Lyons, 'Foreword' in Lydon, *Eng. & Ire.*, p. xi.

⁸⁶ The phrase is that of William Trevor, 'Alma Mater' in idem, *Excursions in the real world* (London, 1993), p. 66. The passage is popularly supposed to refer to Otway-Ruthven, although it is possible that the author intended Constantia Maxwell. In either case, the description captures the Ot very well.

⁸⁷ Lytton Strachey, *Biographical essays* (London, 1948), p. 274, quoted in Robert Brentano, 'The sound of Stubbs', *Journal of British Studies*, 6:2 (1967), 1.

⁸⁸ *Burke's Irish family records* (London, 1976), pp 217, 998. The Dublin census of 1911 includes a record for the young Jocelyn, in which her punctilious father gives her age as 1⁵/₁₂ and records that she cannot read or write. The family was then living in Donnybrook, Co. Dublin (see <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/>, s.n. 'Otway-Ruthven' [accessed, 23 April 2008]). My thanks to Prof. Robin Frame for bringing this to my attention.

⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 5 Aug. 1922.

Jocelyn's mother married for a second time and moved with her family to Dublin.⁹⁰ Academia provided the young Jocelyn with a means of advancement and escape, as well as satiating the 'sheer damned curiosity' that was the motor behind her historical research.⁹¹ In 1927, Jocelyn won an entrance exhibition to Trinity College where she read history and political science. From the moment she entered Trinity, her gifts as a researcher were apparent. She was elected as a non-foundation scholar in 1929 and graduated in 1931 with first class honours and a large gold medal.⁹² By the time she retired as Trinity's Lecky professor half a century later, it was apparent that the overarching theme of that research was her tireless reconstruction of the record sources for medieval Ireland that had been destroyed by the catastrophic fire in the Four Courts of June 1922.⁹³

As an undergraduate at Trinity, Jocelyn encountered Edmund Curtis in his prime. His teaching had a profound impact on her. Years later she dedicated her *magnum opus* to his 'honoured memory' and expressed the hope that her own pupils would remember her 'with as much gratitude and affection as I do him'.⁹⁴ After a glittering undergraduate career, she engaged in a brief stint of research with Alison Phillips before winning a Gardiner scholarship to Girton College, Cambridge, in 1932. The Cambridge phase of Jocelyn's student career brought her into proximity

⁹⁰ The foregoing details are drawn from Salters Sterling, 'In retrospect: Annette Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven', *Search*, 24:1 (2001), p. 61.

⁹¹ This was her reply to a foreign student at Cambridge who asked Miss Otway-Ruthven why she studied history and was surprised not to receive a philosophical answer: Robin Frame, pers. comm. (2008).

⁹² *DUC 1934-5*, p. 584.

⁹³ In her interview with the *Irish Times*, 8 Feb. 1968, Otway-Ruthven notes that her *Med. Ire.* is compiled mostly from records from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, as most of the original documentation was lost in 1922.

⁹⁴ Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ire.* (1st ed.), 'Foreword', p. v.

with Helen Maud Cam (d.1968), one of the most redoubtable minds of her generation of English medievalists.⁹⁵ Cam had a powerful personality and, aside from her historical investigations, she was an active socialist and a champion of women's rights. Jocelyn flourished under her supervision: she was awarded her doctorate in 1936 along with the Thirlwall prize, which, for the first time, went to a woman. 'What luck you are having', wrote Cam from faraway Rangoon on hearing of this run of success,⁹⁶ before pithily setting out what she hoped would be the future trajectory of Jocelyn's career: '(a) PhD; (b) Prize Essay; (c) job?'⁹⁷

The new Dr Otway-Ruthven remained in contact with Cam after graduation,⁹⁸ and the pair became lifelong friends and correspondents.⁹⁹ When Cam died in 1968, Otway-Ruthven published a concise memoir of her former supervisor. It is largely a

⁹⁵ Kathleen Major (rev.), 'Cam, Helen Maud (1885–1968), historian' in *ODNB*, ix, 595–7.

⁹⁶ In 1936–7, Cam was on leave of absence from Girton and toured India, Burma and the Middle East: see Euan Taylor and Gina Weaver, 'Helen Cam (1885–1968): charting the evolution of medieval institutions' in Jane Chance (ed.), *Women medievalists and the academy* (Madison, WN, 2005), pp 255–72, esp. p. 266.

⁹⁷ Helen Cam to Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, c/o Mrs Casement, Clonagh House, Ashford, Co. Wicklow, 15 Oct. 1936. The letter survives among Otway-Ruthven's uncatalogued correspondence in the library of the Medieval History Research Centre, TCD (box labelled, 'Letters to the Ot'). The core of this invaluable research library is made up of Otway-Ruthven's personal collection. The letters have been retrieved from between the pages of the books.

⁹⁸ Helen Cam's 'Dear Jocelyn' of 1936 becomes 'My dear Jossie, You are an angel' within a few short years (Medieval History Research Centre, TCD, 'Letters to the Ot').

⁹⁹ Otway-Ruthven expresses her thanks to Cam in the foreword to A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *The king's secretary and the signet office in the XVth century* (Cambridge, 1939). Helen Cam acknowledges academic debts to Otway-Ruthven in Cam, 'The evolution of the medieval English franchise' in eadem, *Law-finders and law-makers in medieval England: collected studies in legal and constitutional history* (London, 1962), p. 22, note 1; eadem, 'The quality of English feudalism' in eadem, *Law-finders & law-makers*, p. 54.

bland recital of Cam's career and achievements, but it closes with an uncharacteristically emotional salute, albeit one executed with customary precision:

She [Cam] was a convinced Socialist, much interested in local government in the present as in the past. She was at all times a lively and stimulating companion and a devoted friend; as a teacher she was superb, instilling her own exacting standards of scholarship and her own passion for enquiry, and she was always ready to help the humblest scholar. Her work on English constitutional history will long hold an unchallenged place, and at her death she was unquestionably the greatest of living English medievalists.¹⁰⁰

Many of these attributes Otway-Ruthven shared with Cam – first among them her remorseless precision of mind, but also her passion for gardening and especially Alpine plants;¹⁰¹ her advocacy of 'parity of esteem' for women academics; and surprisingly (at first glance, at least) her ardent trade unionism.¹⁰²

With Cam, too, Otway-Ruthven shared an abiding interest in administrative history, specifically the history of local government and franchisal institutions. In pursuing these subjects in an Irish context, she was filling a major gap in Curtis'

¹⁰⁰ Helen M. Cam, *Historical novels*, Historical Association, general ser., no. 48 (London, 1961; repr. with memoir by A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 1968), p. 4. Among Otway-Ruthven's papers in the Medieval History Research Centre, TCD, there is a memorial photograph of Cam from her funeral service in Girton College chapel.

¹⁰¹ Her writings on the subject of Alpine plants are noted in P.W.A. Asplin, 'The writings of Professor A.J. Otway-Ruthven to 1980' in Lydon, *Eng. & Ire.*, p. 255. Her correspondence ('Letters to the Ot', Medieval History Research Centre, TCD) includes a letter thanking her for her subscription to 'The Cyclamen Society' (Gay Nightingale, 'The Cyclamen Society', Lavendar house, 47 Lechmere Ave., Chigwell, Essex, 3 Jan. 1978). In the course of the letter, the secretary apologizes for 'a number of printing slips [in the society's newsletter], such as capital letters for species names. I do hope we shall have no more of these in future'. Clearly, the Ot's ability to inspire punctiliousness extended beyond the walls of Trinity!

¹⁰² Sterling, 'In retrospect: Annette Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven'; idem, 'Professor Otway-Ruthven, FTCD' in *A danger to the men?*

treatment of Anglo-Ireland. In 1938, Henry Gerald Richardson (d.1974) devoted a typically searching review article to the question of English institutions in medieval Ireland, a subject that Richardson considered to be glaringly absent from the second edition of Curtis' *Medieval Ireland*:¹⁰³

I cannot but feel that Dr. Curtis would have learnt much, and his readers would have learnt more, if he had collected such material as is readily accessible on the central and local institutions of government in the area under the control of the English king, and had told a story of each.¹⁰⁴

In a single sentence, Richardson presented Irish medievalists with a research agenda that would dominate the following decades. Much of the work was done by Richardson himself with his collaborator, George Osborne Sayles (d.1994);¹⁰⁵ but among Irish medievalists, it was Otway-Ruthven who answered the call.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ H.G. Richardson, 'English institutions in medieval Ireland', *IHS*, 1:4 (1939), 382–92. Curtis and Richardson, however, still respected each other greatly. In the early 1940s, they were in correspondence on the matter of a compendium of Irish constitutional documents: TCD, MS 2452, no. 36 (H.G. Richardson, High Barn, 14, Sheridan Road, Merton, SW19, to E.C., 28 Aug. 1941). The volume (*IHD*), which Curtis edited jointly with R.B. McDowell, appeared in 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, 'English institutions in medieval Ireland', p. 383. The 'agenda setting' is more explicit in H.G. Richardson, 'Agenda for Irish history, I: Norman Ireland', *IHS*, 4:15 (1945), 254–8.

¹⁰⁵ The key works are Richardson and Sayles, *Ir. parl.*; idem, *Admin. Ire.*; and idem, 'Ir. revenue'. Their contribution is noted in Otway-Ruthven, 'Thirty years' work in Irish history (I): medieval Ireland (1169–1485)', p. 363. A stimulating discussion of Sayles is David N. Dumville, *The mediaeval foundations of England?*, The G.O. Sayles Memorial Lecture, 2005 (Aberdeen, 2006). I am grateful to Prof. Robin Frame who sent me his unpublished lecture, 'G.O. Sayles and Ireland', delivered at a symposium on Sayles held at Aberdeen in 2005.

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., Otway-Ruthven, 'The native Irish and English law in medieval Ireland', *IHS*, 7:25 (1950), 1–16 (repr. below, ch. 6), which expands upon arguments presented by Richardson in 'English institutions'. Richardson was already acquainted with Otway-Ruthven from her Cambridge days (Cam to Otway-Ruthven, 15 Oct. 1936). Before 1941, Otway-

Investigation of medieval civil institutions in Ireland was gravely hampered by the destruction of the records of central government during the Civil War; but it was precisely this calamity that made Otway-Ruthven so superbly equipped to tackle the subject.¹⁰⁷ Her doctoral thesis at Girton took as its subject the office of the king's secretary in the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Hitherto, research on this topic had faced the seemingly insuperable obstacle that the records of the department over which the king's secretary presided – the signet office – were not extant. Indeed, the general consensus was that the signet records did not survive because they had never existed. Otway-Ruthven provided ample evidence that this was so much nonsense. As she noted in her address to the Royal Historical Society in January 1936, the absence of a class of signet records could 'be explained without supposing that they never existed, for a letter of 15 January, 1618/19 states that "the banqueting house at Whitehall was on Tuesday night set on fire ... All the records of the signet and privy seal offices are burnt"'.¹⁰⁹ To compensate for this disaster, Otway-Ruthven undertook an exhaustive trawl of the PRO and other archives for substitute materials from which the records of

Ruthven had been recruited by Richardson to work on a volume of documents illustrative of the history of the Irish parliament in the fifteenth century (TCD, MS 2452, no. 36), which was to serve as the counterpart to Richardson and Sayles, *Parls & councils*, the title page of which reads 'volume 1'. The second volume never appeared.

¹⁰⁷ See Herbert Wood, 'The public records of Ireland before and after 1922', *TRHS*, 4th ser., 13 (1930), 17–49; Philomena Connolly, 'The destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland in 1922: disaster and recovery', *Archivum*, 43 (1996), 135–46. For a highly romanticized account of the PROI fire – one that would doubtless have enraged Otway-Ruthven – see Ernie O'Malley, *The singing flame* (Dublin, 1978), esp. pp. 114–5.

¹⁰⁸ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The king's secretary in the fifteenth century', *TRHS*, 4th ser., 19 (1936), 81–100; Otway-Ruthven, *King's secretary and the signet office*.

¹⁰⁹ Otway-Ruthven, 'King's secretary', *TRHS*, 4th ser., 19 (1936), 83.

the signet office might be reconstructed.¹¹⁰ Historical inquiry of this sort requires, in Flaubert's indecorous formula, 'drinking an ocean and pissing a cupful'.¹¹¹ The cupful proved that Otway-Ruthven was peerless in her terrier-like pursuit of record evidence. It was this that gave her a reputation as a second Tout.¹¹² As one reviewer mischievously put it: 'Miss Otway-Ruthven's book rivals the reconstruction of the Java man. From imperfect fragments she has re-created that masterful Tudor exemplification of *homo sapiens*, the king's secretary.'¹¹³

No training could have better prepared Otway-Ruthven for a second career working on medieval Irish institutional history mostly using substitute source material. There is thus a gratifying symmetry in the fact that her contribution to a *Festschrift* for Helen Cam dealt with the royal chancery of medieval Ireland.¹¹⁴ Despite the arduousness of the work, her publication rate was impressive, culminating with her magisterial synthesis, *A history of medieval Ireland*, which appeared in 1968, precisely three decades after Curtis' work of the same title. 'Thirty years', was the

¹¹⁰ Otway-Ruthven's notes are extant and in the possession of the Medieval History Research Centre, TCD. The range of substitute material can be assessed from J.L. Kirby (ed.), *Calendar of signet letters of Henry IV and Henry V (1399–1422)* (London, 1978).

¹¹¹ John Pemble, *Venice rediscovered* (Oxford, 1995), p. 82, quoted in Richard J. Evans, *In defence of history* (London, 1997), p. 23. The quotation is attributed to Flaubert and occurs in Pemble's discussion of the great Ranke, who seemed to be 'doing the opposite'.

¹¹² Dr Salters Sterling, pers. comm (2008). The reference is, of course, to T.F. Tout (d.1929), author of *Chapters in the administrative history of mediaeval England*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1920–33).

¹¹³ H.L. Gray, review of Otway-Ruthven, *King's secretary and the signet office in the XV century*, *AHR*, 45:3 (1940), 621. Gray notes the similarity between Otway-Ruthven and Tout (*ibid.*, p. 622).

¹¹⁴ A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The mediaeval Irish chancery' in *Album Helen Maud Cam*, 2 vols (Studies presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, nos. 23–4: Louvain-Paris, 1960–1), ii, 119–38; repr. below, ch. 4.

Ot's dry response to the correspondent who dared ask how long she had laboured over it.¹¹⁵ Little wonder, then, that as the work entered its final stages, the Ot began to safeguard against fresh calamities. In the academic year of 1965–6, she was crossing the threshold of the fifteenth century. When spring came, boxes containing thousands of index cards on which she compiled her meticulous notes were taken carefully from her college rooms and deposited in her home in Brighton Road lest something bad happened to Trinity at Easter 1966. Her students found this highly amusing – until Nelson's Pillar was blown up!¹¹⁶

That Otway-Ruthven's approach to medieval institutions owes much to Helen Cam and the school of English administrative history founded by Tout is a conspicuous fact. Less obvious, perhaps, are differences in the character and texture of their histories. Helen Cam was an engaging and imaginative historian. Her medieval institutions are alive and dynamic. A neat illustration of her human orientation on a potentially dry-as-dust subject comes from her discussion of the development of England's legal personality: 'who made the rule of the road?', she asked rhetorically.¹¹⁷ Tout, too, occasionally took vacations from the king's wardrobe to explore the cultural by-products of medieval administrators and what he described as the 'human side' of medieval records.¹¹⁸ By contrast, Otway-Ruthven's institutions are rarefied and austere, even static. This may explain why so few of her students

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 8 Feb. 1968.

¹¹⁶ Robin Frame, pers. comm. (2008), who took Otway-Ruthven's special subject in 1965–6.

¹¹⁷ Helen M. Cam, 'Introduction: the rule of law in English history' in eadem, *Law-finders and law-makers*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ T.F. Tout, 'The English civil service in the fourteenth century', *BJRL*, 3 (1917), 185–214; idem, 'The human side of medieval records', *TRHS*, 4th ser., 11 (1928), 1–16; idem, 'Literature and learning in the medieval civil service', *Speculum*, 4:4 (1929), 365–89.

became devotees of institutional history.¹¹⁹ Her research interests were not, however, restricted to what she termed the ‘government of the Norman-Irish state’.¹²⁰ She was also deeply interested in topography, maps and historical geography.¹²¹ From early in her career, she was employing onomastic evidence in a compelling way.¹²² Likewise, her use of field patterns was extremely original, reminiscent of the ‘retrogressive’ methods of the *Annalistes*,¹²³ although her exemplar was almost certainly not Marc Bloch, but F.W. Maitland – an iconic figure in the Cambridge of her day,¹²⁴ who espoused working ‘from the modern to the ancient, from the clear to the vague, from

¹¹⁹ As noted by Provost Lyons: ‘Medieval constitutional history is perhaps too much of an acquired taste ever to attract a large following in this age of declining Latinity, and Miss Otway-Ruthven had less opportunity to found a school than did her own teacher, Edmund Curtis’ (F.S.L. Lyons, ‘Foreword’ in Lydon, *Eng. & Ire.*, p. x). Likewise, K.W. Nicholls commented of her *Festschrift* that there was ‘little to cavil at, unless it be the absence ... of any essay on a theme which Professor Otway-Ruthven particularly concerned herself with, institutional history’ (review of Lydon, *Eng. & Ire.*, in *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 579).

¹²⁰ Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ire.*, ch. 5.

¹²¹ For samples of Otway-Ruthven’s cartographical work, see the maps that accompany the following works: ‘The medieval county of Kildare’, *IHS*, 11:43 (1959), 181–99; *Dowdall deeds*; ‘Knights’ fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly’, *JRSAI*, 91 (1961), 163–81; ‘The mediaeval church lands of Co. Dublin’ in J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (eds), *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), pp 54–73; eadem, ‘Parochial development in the rural deanery of Skreen’, *JRSAI*, 94 (1963), 111–22; eadem, ‘The partition of the de Verdon lands in 1332’, *PRIA*, 66:C5 (1968), 401–55.

¹²² Otway-Ruthven, ‘Place-names in Ireland’, *Irish Geography*, 2:2 (1950), 45–51. For a discussion of the study of Irish place-names in the past two centuries, see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, ‘Some thoughts on matters onomastic’, *JGAHS*, 53 (2001), 23–46.

¹²³ Peter Burke, *The French historical revolution: the Annales school, 1929–89* (Oxford, 1990), pp 23–4.

¹²⁴ G. Kitson Clark, ‘A hundred years of the teaching of history at Cambridge, 1873–1973’, *The Historical Journal*, 16:3 (1973), 535–53, esp. p. 546. Helen Cam states that she loves Maitland ‘this side [of] idolatry’ in Cam, ‘Stubbs seventy years after’, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9:2 (1948), 129.

the known to the unknown'.¹²⁵ These studies proved seminal and her approach has been embraced not just by records-historians, but also by archaeologists and historical geographers. Consequently, if Otway-Ruthven may be said to have founded a 'school', it is a school for the study of medieval settlement in Ireland.¹²⁶

Otway-Ruthven's *History of medieval Ireland* was published in 1968 to favourable notices in Irish learned journals, although she was occasionally chided for her neglect of Gaelic Ireland.¹²⁷ An incisive comment of a different kind came from a young Joseph J. Lee. He saw Otway-Ruthven's monolithic digest as marking the 'end rather than the beginning of an era' – an era that had been characterized by the 'tyranny of the diplomatic method'.¹²⁸ After two centuries of Irish historical scholarship in which evidence lagged behind interpretation, now for the first time, Lee claimed, 'interpretation lags behind evidence'.¹²⁹ Similar, but more carping, was

¹²⁵ G.R. Elton, *F.W. Maitland* (London, 1985), p. 22 (quotation). See F.W. Maitland, *Domesday book and beyond: three essays in the early history of England* (Cambridge, 1897), cited in Otway-Ruthven, 'Character of Norman settlement in Ireland', below, ch. 17, n. 21.

¹²⁶ Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369* (Dublin, 1981), ch. 4, summarizes research on settlement at the time of Otway-Ruthven's retirement. John Gillingham assesses her contribution in the wider context of Europe-wide colonization in 'A second tidal wave? The historiography of English colonization of Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' in Jan M. Piskorski (ed.), *Historiographical approaches to medieval colonization of east central Europe: a comparative analysis against the background of other European inter-ethnic colonization processes in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2002), pp 303–27, esp. pp 306–7.

¹²⁷ F.X. Martin, review of Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ire., Studia Hibernica*, 14 (1974), 143–60; J.F. Lydon, *IHS*, 17:65 (1970), 123–8. Other reviews are listed in Asplin, 'Writings of Professor A.J. Otway-Ruthven to 1980' in Lydon, *Eng. & Ire.*, p. 261.

¹²⁸ Joseph Lee, 'Some aspects of modern Irish historiography' in Ernst Schulin (ed.), *Gedenkschrift Martin Göhring: Studien zur Europäischen Geschichte mit einem Geleitwort von Jacques Droz* (Wiesbaden, 1968), p. 440.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

the criticism of Brendan Bradshaw, who, in 1989, described Otway-Ruthven's *Medieval Ireland* as 'an extreme example of "extrusion [of national sentiment] by stealth" for the medieval period'.¹³⁰ The comment is misdirected. There was nothing stealthy about Otway-Ruthven's approach: 'to any historian surveying the writing of the last thirty years', she asseverated in 1967, 'there could be no more hopeful sign than the gradual disappearance of the old crude nationalism.'¹³¹ This could hardly be more unequivocal. Nor is her overt extrusion to be understood as anti-nationalist. It is merely a manifestation of the no-nonsense attitude that prevailed among administrative historians of her generation who had rubbished Stubbsian whiggery (though not Stubbs' scholarship)¹³² – an attitude that Tout's disciples shared with the alternative band of medievalists that followed Bruce McFarlane down the garden path of Namierism.¹³³ It is only relatively recently that 'political culture' has returned to the agenda of the new constitutional historians in England.¹³⁴ In Ireland, a remedy for

¹³⁰ Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland' in Brady, *Revisionism*, p. 208

¹³¹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Thirty years' work in Irish history (I): medieval Ireland (1169–1485', *IHS*, 15:60 (1967), 360.

¹³² Helen Cam is laudatory in 'Stubbs seventy years after', pp 129–47. H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles are decidedly critical in *The governance of mediaeval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta* (Edinburgh, 1963), esp. pp v–vii, 1–21, though they praise Stubbs' work as an editor for the 'rolls series'.

¹³³ On McFarlane, see Karl Leyser, 'Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, 1903–1966', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), 485–506. For Sir Lewis Namier's influence, see K.B. McFarlane, 'Parliament and "bastard feudalism"' in idem, *England in the fifteenth century: collected essays with an introduction by G.L. Harriss* (London, 1981), p. 19; Steven Gunn, 'The structures of politics in early Tudor England', *TRHS*, 5th ser., 5 (1995), 62–3.

¹³⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction: political culture, politics and cultural history' in L. Clarke and C. Carpenter (ed.), *The fifteenth century IV: political culture in late medieval Britain* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp 1–20. See also E. Powell, 'After "After McFarlane": the poverty of patronage and the case for constitutional history' in D.J. Clayton, R.G. Davies and P.

the deficit of interpretation identified by Lee and Bradshaw was provided long before in the person of James F. Lydon, who had joined the staff at Trinity in 1959.¹³⁵

‘J.F.L.’

James Francis Michael Lydon was born in 1928 into a Catholic family from Galway, the tenth of eleven children.¹³⁶ His father was a baker who hailed ultimately from Connemara; his mother was a native Irish speaker. The family held a firm conviction in the value of education and all the children were sent to secondary school and on to third level. Lydon took his first degree at University College, Galway, where he studied English and history. English (specifically Anglo-Saxon) at first took

McNiven (eds), *Trade, devotion and governance: papers in later medieval history* (Stroud, 1994), pp 1–16; G.L. Harriss, ‘The dimensions of politics’ and C. Carpenter, ‘Political and constitutional history: before and after McFarlane’, both in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds), *The McFarlane legacy: studies in late medieval politics and society* (Stroud, 1995), pp 1–20, 175–206.

¹³⁵ It is interesting, and important, to note that Lydon’s own review of Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ire.*, is not a world away from Bradshaw in its comment that: ‘[I]f it is true, as the author [Otway-Ruthven] suggests, that we must be careful not to read the attitudes of nineteenth and twentieth-century nationalism back into the medieval Irish church, it is equally true, I think, that we must be careful not therefore to underestimate the pernicious influence of such racial feelings as did undoubtedly exist and which manifested themselves regularly, on every level, to the end of the middle ages. Racialism and national feeling were sometimes real forces, and not just among the Gaelic Irish’ (*IHS*, 17:65 (1970), p. 126).

¹³⁶ With James Lydon, we move from the recorded past towards a period of ‘living history’. Consequently, some of the biographical details in what follows are drawn from personal knowledge and the recollections of students of Prof. Lydon. For sketches of his career, see Sheelagh Harbison, ‘James Lydon: an appreciation’ in *Colony and frontier*, pp xi–xiii; *Irish Times*, 15 June 1965; *Irish Times*, 24 Sept. 1998. I am grateful to Seán Duffy who gave me access to a tape recording of an interview he conducted with Lydon in 1994. The text was published in part as “‘A real Irish historian’”, *HI*, 3:1 (1995), 11–14, but the full interview contains much valuable information that remains unpublished. It will be cited hereafter as ‘Lydon–Duffy interview (1994)’.

precedence and he claims to have ‘damn-near failed history in the Leaving Certificate’.¹³⁷ The leading light in the history department at UCG was Mary Donovan O’Sullivan (d.1966), a respected economic historian who published a fine book on *Old Galway* in 1942, shortly before Lydon entered UCG.¹³⁸ O’Sullivan left a deep imprint on the young Lydon. She placed a premium on research, even at undergraduate level, and emphasized the importance of style and literary expression. After Lydon graduated with first class honours in 1950, he stayed on to undertake research for a master’s degree. It was Mrs O’Sullivan who suggested that Ireland’s contribution to the military activities of the English crown in the thirteenth century might be a subject that would repay investigation – a topic recommended by her work on Italian merchant bankers in thirteenth-century Ireland.¹³⁹

Lydon’s master’s took him overseas to London, where his research was funded partly by a Travelling Fellowship in the National University of Ireland and partly ‘self-financed’ with night work as a railway porter in St Pancras. During the daylight hours, he toiled in Chancery Lane and London’s other libraries, including the

¹³⁷ Lydon–Duffy interview (1994).

¹³⁸ M.D. O’Sullivan, *Old Galway: the history of a Norman colony in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1942). For a sketch of O’Sullivan’s career, see the facsimile reprint of *Old Galway* with an introduction by William J. Hogan (Galway, 1983). Her role among women historians in Ireland is contextualized in O’Dowd, ‘From Morgan to MacCurtain: women historians in Ireland from the 1790s to the 1990s’ in Valiulis and O’Dowd (eds), *Women and Irish history*, p. 53.

¹³⁹ O’Sullivan, *Old Galway*, pp 27–9; eadem, ‘Italian merchant bankers and the collection of papal revenues in Ireland in the thirteenth century’, *JGAHS*, 22 (1947), 132–63; eadem, ‘Some Italian merchant bankers in Ireland in the later thirteenth century’, *JRSAI*, 79 (1949), 10–19. Her work on this subject later grew into a short but well-crafted monograph: M.D. O’Sullivan, *Italian merchant bankers in Ireland in the thirteenth century: a study in the social and economic history of medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1962). The preface to this volume makes special reference to Lydon.

Institute of Historical Research. It was in the convivial atmosphere of the IHR, where students and professors mingle freely away from the dusty tomes, that a memorable encounter took place. When the secretary of the IHR discovered that Lydon was from Ireland, he arranged for him to meet the director, the great Welsh historian, John Goronwy Edwards (d.1976).¹⁴⁰ Lydon and Edwards got on ‘like a bomb’ and their meeting led directly to the next phase in Lydon’s career. After returning to Galway to finish his master’s in 1952, Lydon was astonished to receive a letter from the IHR inviting him to apply for a research fellowship.¹⁴¹ In the subsequent competition, a senior Tudor specialist asked the young Irish student the subject he proposed to research for his doctorate. When Lydon replied that he wanted to continue his work on Irish participation in the king’s enterprises in the Middle Ages, he was informed that he would be wasting his time. J.G. Edwards was also on the interview panel. Ever courteous, but not one to suffer fools gladly, the director asked his colleague to stop talking nonsense and awarded the research fellowship to Lydon.¹⁴² The episode brings out rather nicely the sea-change that has overtaken the historiography since the early 1950s. Such insularity is now scarcely imaginable. A large measure of the credit for opening up medieval Ireland to the academic world outside must go to Lydon and his students.

Lydon used his three years at the IHR to extend his research to the closing years of the reign of Edward II (1307–27). His doctorate was an exercise in military history, though not the history of battles and tactics but rather that specialized branch of the discipline, military logistics – the organization of war, the problems of transport

¹⁴⁰ J.F.A. Mason, ‘Edwards, Sir (John) Goronwy (1891–1976), historian’ in *ODNB*, xvii, 927–8.

¹⁴¹ Duffy–Lydon interview (1994).

¹⁴² J.F.L. pers. comm. (2008).

and supply, finance and purveyance, and the repercussions of the war effort on domestic law and order.¹⁴³ His research on these topics was facilitated by the ‘belly-full’ of training in administrative history, along with advanced palaeography and diplomatics, that he received at the Institute. ‘J.G.’ supervised Lydon’s doctorate, but valuable mentoring of a different kind came from the eminent Oxford historian, Sir Maurice Powicke (d.1963).¹⁴⁴ When Lydon completed his thesis in 1955, he still had a year left to run on a Travelling Fellowship in the National University of Ireland that he had won after the expiry of his research fellowship from the Institute. Powicke advised Lydon to use the residue of the funding to travel on the continent, issuing him with strict instructions to stay clear of archives. Instead, he was to read, visit galleries, listen to music, meet people and generally lift his eyes beyond the confines of the Record Office in Chancery Lane. So the young Lydon was packed off to Rome in the autumn of 1955, with Powicke promising to write letters to the National University testifying that he was working hard and his research was progressing well. Lydon found his ‘grand tour’ invigorating and it added something extra to his impressive array of gifts. From his boyhood proximity to rural Ireland, he had gained an enduring love of the countryside and the Irish language; the intensive seminar regimen of the IHR made him an authority on English record sources; now the Italian experience had

¹⁴³ James Lydon, ‘Ireland’s participation in the military activities of English kings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries’ (PhD, University of London, 1955). See below, chapters 9–12.

¹⁴⁴ R.W. Southern, rev. Alan Harding, ‘Powicke, Sir (Frederick) Maurice (1879–1963), historian’ in *ODNB*, xlv, 148–50. For a more anecdotal account, see Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: the lives, works, and ideas of the great medievalists of the twentieth century* (New York, 1991), pp 233–44.

given him an appreciation of European ‘culture’ in its broadest sense.¹⁴⁵ It was this unique blend of the best of Curtis and Otway-Ruthven that was to enable Lydon to bring the historiography of late medieval Ireland to maturity.

With Powicke’s encouragement, Lydon returned to UCG in 1956 where he taught in the history department through both English and Irish. Three years later, a lectureship opened up in Trinity. The decision to uproot himself from Galway and move to Dublin was made at the urging of Mrs O’Sullivan, who considered that the facilities and prospects for academic advancement in Trinity were more favourable than in Galway. In fact, staff facilities in the Trinity of 1959 were less than salubrious: Lydon’s junior lectureship entitled him to a peg for his gown on the lower level of the 1937 reading room. Soon, however, he was running up the academic ladder: he was made a full lecturer in 1962, elected to fellowship in 1965, became an associate professor in 1967, and eventually succeeded Otway-Ruthven as Lecky professor of history in October 1980.¹⁴⁶

During these decades, Otway-Ruthven was at the height of her powers as a records-historian. Nonetheless, Lydon’s contribution on that level was, if not greater, certainly as important. As a student at Galway, he had travelled to the record office in the Four Courts only to be told by Margaret C. Griffith – then deputy keeper of the public records – that there was nothing there to interest a medieval historian. This view still prevailed in the 1960s, despite earlier advertisements by Richardson and

¹⁴⁵ Duffy–Lydon interview (1994). Sometimes this cultural appreciation is clearly in evidence: note how Lydon – a great lover of opera – says of the Perkin Warbeck conspiracy that ‘in retrospect it might assume the guise of a comic opera escapade’ (Lydon, ‘Ireland and the English crown, 1171–1541’, *IHS*, 29:115 (1995), 284; repr. below, ch. 1)

¹⁴⁶ Harbison, ‘James Lydon: an appreciation’ in *Colony and frontier*, p. xi–xii; *DUC 1962–3*, p. 32; *DUC 1968–9*, p. 33; *DUC 1965–6*, p. 521; *DUC 1980–1*, p. 42.

Sayles to the contrary.¹⁴⁷ In 1966, Lydon unveiled the riches of the PROI and other archival repositories in Ireland when he published a painstaking survey of the surviving materials for the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer.¹⁴⁸ In parallel with this work in Dublin, Lydon's research in the PRO, London, brought another seam of records to notice – this time not substitute materials but original enrolments of audited Irish exchequer accounts. When Lydon first worked on these records, sand fell onto his desk in Chancery Lane: the accounts had never been unrolled – except partially for cataloguing purposes – since the anonymous exchequer clerk filed them away centuries before. They have since become the staple of all histories of the period.¹⁴⁹

Lydon's background in administrative history inevitably led to a centralist conception of English political society in Ireland. In that sense, his interpretation is of a kind with Otway-Ruthven.¹⁵⁰ Where Lydon departs from Otway-Ruthven is in his great imaginative power. In this, he is more akin to his idol, Maurice Powicke, who had reacted against the administrative strictures of Tout and declared himself interested in 'the interplay of experience and ideas in the formation of medieval political societies'.¹⁵¹ Lydon's effervescence as a teacher is well attested. His acting

¹⁴⁷ Richardson, 'Agenda for Irish history, I: Norman Ireland', pp 254–8; *Parls & councils*, pt 1, *passim*.

¹⁴⁸ James F. Lydon, 'Survey of the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer, 1294–1509', *AH*, 23 (1966), 49–134. For the range of archives consulted, see *ibid.*, pp 71–3. On the memoranda rolls, see Philomena Connolly, *Medieval record sources* (Dublin, 2002), p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ Duffy–Lydon interview (1994). Much of this material has since been calendared by the late Philomena Connolly in *IExp*.

¹⁵⁰ The influence of English institutional history on Irish historiography is discussed in Peter Crooks, 'Factions, feuds and noble power in the lordship of Ireland, c.1356–1496', *IHS*, 35:140 (2007), 431–7.

¹⁵¹ F.M. Powicke, *Ways of medieval life and thought: thoughts and addresses* (London, 1949), p. 5, quoted in *ODNB*, xlv, 149. For discussion of Powicke's reaction against Tout, see M.T. Clanchy, 'Inventing thirteenth-century England: Stubbs, Tout, Powicke – now what?' in

experiences as a student in Galway gave him a taste for the dramatic and an enviable ability to capture an audience. Those who heard Lydon lecture recall how he held them spell-bound with abstruse details of medieval administrative procedure and how he sent them from the lecture hall with the impression that they somehow knew the barons and chamberlains who staffed the medieval Irish exchequer.¹⁵² That same enthusiasm is communicated in his compelling prose. Administrative and political history dominate in his work; but Lydon is no arid records-historian and he was combining administrative sources with literary texts – notably bardic poetry (a subject later opened up by his pupil, Katharine Simms)¹⁵³ – at a time when the latter were thought to lack gravitas by ‘serious’ historians.¹⁵⁴

Lydon was also active in opening up Trinity to new influences even before demands for liberalization had become commonplace.¹⁵⁵ Soon after joining the staff in 1959, he became involved in Catholic politics within the college and campaigned to secure the provision of chaplaincy facilities for Catholics on the staff and within the

P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds), *Thirteenth Century England V* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp 1–20, esp. p. 5.

¹⁵² I am reminded of Fredric Cheyette’s comment upon re-reading Georges Duby’s *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise* (Paris, 1953): ‘Duby’s book gave you the uncanny feeling that families you had never heard of, and would never hear of again ... were familiar figures, something like distant cousins that people told stories about at family holiday gatherings’ (F.L. Cheyette, ‘Georges Duby’s *Mâconnais* after fifty years: reading it then and now’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), 293).

¹⁵³ Katharine Simms, ‘Bardic poetry as historical source’ in T. Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness: literature as historical evidence. Historical Studies XIV* (Cork, 1987), pp 58–75.

¹⁵⁴ See esp. Lydon, ‘The problem of the frontier in medieval Ireland’, *Topic: A Journal of the Liberal Arts*, 13 (1967), 5–22; repr. below, ch. 20.

¹⁵⁵ For Trinity in this period, see J.V. Luce, *Trinity College Dublin: the first 400 years* (Dublin, 1992), ch. 15.

student body.¹⁵⁶ The reiteration of the ‘ban’ by Archbishop McQuaid in 1967 resulted in Lydon’s appearance on the *Late Late Show*, which brought the issue to public attention. To some extent, this broadening of horizons is reflected in the historiography of the period. Historical scholarship in Ireland since 1922 had operated, to a remarkable extent, in noble isolation.¹⁵⁷ Lydon was instrumental in increasing scholarly engagement across the Irish Sea. A case in point is the joint meeting of the British Academy and Royal Irish Academy held at Dublin in 1982.¹⁵⁸ This colloquium was the occasion for Lydon’s ‘Middle nation’ lecture – perhaps the finest illustration of his craftsmanship as an essayist – which has been enormously influential both in Ireland and further afield.¹⁵⁹ Although a contribution to a self-consciously ‘British history’ followed,¹⁶⁰ the credit for bringing Ireland into this wider

¹⁵⁶ James Lydon, ‘The silent sister: Trinity College and Catholic Ireland’ in C.H. Holland (ed.), *Trinity College Dublin and the idea of a university* (Dublin, 1991), esp. p. 48. See also *Irish Times*, 15 Apr. 1967.

¹⁵⁷ Robin Frame, ‘The “failure” of the first English conquest of Ireland’ in idem, *Ire. & Brit.*, pp 4–7.

¹⁵⁸ James Lydon (ed.), *The English in medieval Ireland: proceedings of the first joint meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy, Dublin, 1982* (RIA, Dublin, 1984).

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., R.R. Davies, *The age of conquest: Wales, 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1991), p. 103; 1st pr. *Conquest, coexistence and change: Wales, 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987). James Muldoon, *Identity on the medieval Irish frontier: degenerate Englishmen, wild Irishmen, middle nations* (Gainesville, 2003), is less successful in its attempt to translate the concept overseas. The book’s significance for this discussion lies in its demonstration of the extent to which Lydon’s ideas have been internalized. Lydon’s ‘middle nation’ essay does not appear in the bibliography!

¹⁶⁰ James Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown: Llywelyn of Wales and O’Connor of Connacht’ in R.R. Davies (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: comparisons, contrasts, connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 48–63.

framework must go to Lydon's pupils – Robin Frame, above all.¹⁶¹ Yet the medieval branch of the 'British history' industry would scarcely have been so successful had not Lydon's early research and teaching (albeit unwittingly) laid the groundwork. His doctoral dissertation on Ireland's participation in England's wars of domination knitted Irish and English history together in surprising ways. Later work was comparative as well as integrative. The 'frontier' is now so ingrained in medieval Irish historiography that it is difficult to remember how novel it was in 1967 to invoke Frederick Jackson Turner and toy with a 'frontier thesis' for medieval Ireland.¹⁶² Such a conceptual leap was a world away from Otway-Ruthven, who always refused to move an inch beyond the evidence. It was also novel by comparison with other historians of his day. In 1967, J.G.A. Pocock's much-vaunted 'plea for British history' was some years off,¹⁶³ while the great exponent of the 'British' approach among medievalists, Rees Davies,¹⁶⁴ had only recently submitted his doctorate and was still firmly entrenched in the March of Wales.¹⁶⁵ It is only relatively

¹⁶¹ See, esp., Robin Frame, *The political development of the British Isles, 1100–1400* (Oxford, 1990); idem, *Ire. & Brit.*

¹⁶² Lydon, 'Problem of the frontier', *Topic*, 13 (1967), 5–22; repr. below, ch. 20. An early treatment of the subject was Archibald R. Lewis, 'The closing of the mediaeval frontier, 1250–1350', *Speculum*, 33:4 (1958), 475–83, whose work on medieval Europe may have suggested some of Lydon's terminology.

¹⁶³ J.G.A. Pocock, 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *The Journal of Modern History*, 47:4 (1975), 601–21; idem, 'The limits and divisions of British history: in search of the unknown subject', *AHR*, 87:2 (1982), 311–36.

¹⁶⁴ R.R. Davies, 'In praise of British history' in idem (ed.), *British Isles*, pp 1–26.

¹⁶⁵ R.R. Davies, 'The Bohun and Lancaster lordships in Wales in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries' (DPhil, University of Oxford, 1965). Davies' superb monograph on lordship in the Welsh march appeared in 1978: idem, *Lordship and society in the march of Wales, 1282–1400* (Oxford, 1978). The same year a change of direction was in evidence with his move to Aberystwyth: R.R. Davies, *Historical perceptions: Celts and Saxons. An inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth on 22nd November 1978*

recently that exponents of ‘British’ history for the early modern period – finding the archipelago somewhat crowded – have begun to seek out new comparative frameworks and have invented (or rather re-invented) ‘Greater Britain’ and the ‘Atlantic World’.¹⁶⁶ Lydon had reached the New World long before. To this day, the potential for cross-fertilization between medieval and modern historiographies has yet to be fully realized.

All is not idolatry (nor should it be). Lydon’s portrait of the English colonists of the fifteenth century as ‘separatists’¹⁶⁷ – a reincarnation of the ‘patriot party’ of Edmund Curtis – has been criticized by Steven Ellis in his consideration of the nationalist tradition in twentieth-century Irish historiography.¹⁶⁸ Lydon does not, however, consider nationalism to be incompatible with good history, and, if anything,

(Cardiff, 1979). Earlier work hinted strongly at the broader approach that was to come, e.g., R.R. Davies, ‘Marc Bloch’, *History*, 52 (1967), 265–82.

¹⁶⁶ From an ocean of historiography, see esp. David Armitage, ‘Greater Britain: a useful category of historical analysis?’, *AHR*, 104:2 (1999), 427–45; Jane Ohlmeyer, ‘Seventeenth-century Ireland and the new British and Atlantic histories’, *ibid.*, 446–62; J.G.A. Pocock, ‘The new British history in Atlantic perspective: an antipodean commentary’, *ibid.*, 490–500. See also David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (eds), *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 2002); David Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516–1776: essays in Atlantic history* (Aldershot, 2004). The earlier phase of ‘Atlantic’ historiography is best approached through the *Festschrift* for D.B. Quinn: K.R. Andrews, N.P. Canny and P.E.H. Hair (eds), *The westward enterprise: English activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480–1650* (Liverpool, 1978). For dissatisfaction with the inclusion of early modern Ireland within an Atlantic framework, see esp. Hiram Morgan, ‘Mid-Atlantic blues’, *The Irish Review*, 11 (1991/2), 50–55; and the response by Andrew Hadfield, ‘Rocking the boat: a response to Hiram Morgan’, *The Irish Review*, 14 (1993), 15–19.

¹⁶⁷ Lydon, *Lordship* (1st ed.), pp 262–6; *ibid.* (2nd ed.), pp 202–6; *idem*, *Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1973), ch. 5.

¹⁶⁸ Ellis, ‘Nationalist historiography and the English and Gaelic worlds in the late Middle Ages’ in Brady, *Revisionism*, pp 172–3; *idem*, ‘Representations of the past in Ireland: whose past and whose present?’, p. 301.

his nationalist sentiment has become more apparent in recent years.¹⁶⁹ For other tastes, Lydon's 'refreshing downrightiness' can take him a step too far. 'Now and then his very enthusiasm leads him to use exaggerated language ... In the end our responses are dulled; we suspect him of crying wolf; and would welcome a splash of cool analysis.'¹⁷⁰ So cavilled Robin Frame in 1974 with some justice and, one suspects, some trepidation too, since he had only recently completed his apprenticeship with the master.¹⁷¹ And, indeed, the stripping ended on an appreciative note with which few could disagree: 'If at times Professor Lydon is provocative rather than measured, that may be no bad thing. In a sense it is the price we willingly pay for the sheer vigour of his thought and writing.'¹⁷²

When James Lydon retired in 1993, a former pupil observed that 'it is difficult not to sense the end of an era'.¹⁷³ Mrs Harbison was echoing sentiments expressed earlier about both Lydon's predecessors. The extended vacancy of the Lecky chair after 1993 was, however, a constant reminder that the Lydon era had ended without due

¹⁶⁹ See Lydon interview with Seán Duffy, "'A real Irish historian'", *HI*, 3:1 (1995), 13–14. Lydon reaffirms his 'separatist' interpretation in 'Ireland and the English crown', *IHS*, 29:115 (1995), esp. 289–91; repr. below, ch. 1. Noticeably whig is James Lydon, *The making of Ireland: from ancient times to the present* (London, 1999), a book Lydon was commissioned to write to replace Curtis, *A history of Ireland from the earliest times to 1922*.

¹⁷⁰ Robin Frame, review of James Lydon, *Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1973) in *Studia Hibernica*, 14 (1974), 162–6, quotation at p. 163.

¹⁷¹ R.F. Frame, 'The Dublin government and Gaelic Ireland, 1272–1361: the making of war and the making of peace in the Irish lordship' (PhD, University of Dublin, 1971).

¹⁷² Frame, review of Lydon, *Ire. in the later Middle Ages*, p. 166.

¹⁷³ Harbison, 'James Lydon: an appreciation' in *Colony and frontier*, p. xi.

provision for the future.¹⁷⁴ The furore over the ‘Lecky’ in 2003 was not without its heartening aspects. It was revealing not of a general intellectual malaise, so much as a gulf between national and institutional policy-making on the one hand and popular and academic interest on the other. Historiographers of a future generation will note, one hopes, that public concern for Ireland’s heritage has rarely been greater, nor have there ever been so many labourers tilling the field of medieval Irish history. A great many of these scholars are the academic progeny – children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren – of Curtis, Otway-Ruthven and Lydon. In that sense, the legacy of the Lecky professors is assured. ‘This book can be no more than an interim report’, declaimed the Ot of her *magnum opus* four decades ago: ‘on almost every aspect of the Middle Ages in Ireland there is still an infinity of work to be done.’¹⁷⁵ In the ‘postmodern’ world which we apparently inhabit, her statement will always hold true. History *is* an interim report. The present collection of essays by the Lecky professors is offered not with the grand hope that forty more years’ hard labour will bring their work near to completion, but rather with the still grander hope that, in another forty years, students of Irish history will be more curious and inquiring than ever.

¹⁷⁴ Lydon’s own letter to the *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 2003, is particularly poignant.

¹⁷⁵ Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ire.*, ‘Foreword’, p. v.