Essay cluster: Medieval forgeries / Forging the medieval

Forging the medieval amidst loss: The Public Record Office of Ireland and Ireland's medieval history

Elizabeth Biggs
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland.

Abstract In the aftermath of the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland (PROI) in June 1922 during the opening battle of the Irish Civil War, and with it seven centuries of records, historians and archivists have had to be creative in their search for sources for medieval Irish history. In response to this loss, they have forged a distinctive historiographical tradition using records now in English collections, as well as antiquarian transcripts and publications. Beginning with the work of Edmund Curtis in the 1920s, this tradition has sought to list, identify, and edit for publication replacement sources for records lost with the PROI for an Irish and international audience. More recently, scholars have made these collections digitally and publicly accessible worldwide with the *CIRCLE* and *Beyond 2022* Projects at Trinity College Dublin. This article looks at how the lost records and a century of recovery efforts have shaped understandings of Ireland's medieval past and its colonial relationship with England.

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2024) **15,** 529–547.
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-024-00320-7

Forging iron requires a smith to apply precise heat and pressure to create a finished, stronger, worked piece of metal in the intended shape. The

medieval archives of the English colony of Ireland kept in the Public Record Office of Ireland (henceforth PROI) in the Four Courts complex in central Dublin certainly had both heat and pressure applied to them on June 30, 1922, although no one could say that it was either precise or produced anything directly or immediately. Indeed, it was profoundly destructive. Only a small handful of original medieval records survived the explosion and subsequent blaze, which was a product not of metal-working but of war.[1] Munitions had been stored among the records and amidst the opening battle of the Irish Civil War (1922–1923), the archive treasury and its contents went up in flames. The building that had been so carefully constructed fifty-five years earlier to minimise the risks of fire spreading from other nearby buildings was utterly destroyed (Connolly 1996, 137). The loss of the records became bound up with the establishment of the new Irish state, founded by the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921, which soon after was embroiled in civil war. In the century that followed, Ireland's medieval history has been understood through the lens of this central loss, and through Ireland's imperative as a new country to reconstruct what had been on the archival shelves in 1922. Herbert Wood explicitly linked the two when he wrote that 'the Irish Record Office is starting again like a new country almost without a history' (1930, 48). What was available for this recreation of Ireland's history is worth considering. The replacement records were themselves shaped by the institutions of English colonial government and the interests of previous generations who had used the records. Often, they had been used for very different purposes than those for which they had been made. In turn, the last century of writing medieval history has produced a distinctive historiography interwoven with the modern history of Ireland as an independent state.

1 Listed in the 55th Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland's Report, Appendix IV (1928).

This essay engages with forging and forgery along two interrelated axes. My exploration of forgery, whether in the technical sense of shaping metal or the creation of documents, is as a craft and a material act of making. In the example of the smith with which I began, there is raw material to which forging is done. Similarly, historians of medieval Ireland have created new histories and archives out of the scattered pieces that had been removed from, lost from, or copied out of the older, now-lost archive. As Jennie M. England's piece, with which this cluster begins, observes, Osbert of Clare and the other medieval monastic forgers created documents that—they believed—*should have been* in their collections and hid that they were doing so. They did this in part to support their understandings of the past. To reconstruct an archive and work around its loss, both as professional historians and archivists, and also as a wider community, is to seek out alternative documents that speak to those lost while showing clearly where they have come from. These documents may be those that

s*hould have been* there, but for whatever reason were not. They may be those originals taken by antiquarians and kept with their own papers. They may be copies taken from the lost documents. They may be the other side of correspondence kept in other contexts. Their materials may be parchment, paper, photostats, or in today's world, pixels on a screen. Collectively, they provide a forgery of the lost archive. They are not *that* archive, but they are a creative and material response to what is known to have been there. Irish medieval historiography has also been forged—in the sense of created and shaped—by the losses of 1922. Ireland's medieval past is bound up with the materials available for its study, and so these two axes intertwine. Many of the historians whose interpretative work has been highly influential have also contributed to the efforts to create a new archival basis for the study of Irish history.

This brief essay can only touch lightly on a vast array of materials and secondary scholarship which relate in some way to its themes: modern Ireland's understanding of its history, the sources for medieval history of the island, and the institutions which have shaped the current state of the historiography. It deals primarily with the direct efforts to reconstruct the original records rather than the wider penumbra of important editions and scholarship relating to the lost PROI records. The English medieval colony in Ireland is understood by the public as well as by its historians in relation to the later colonial government and then the creation of the modern Irish state (Ellis 1986, 2). The often-commented on through-line from medieval invasion in 1170 to the decade c. 1912 to 1923, when activism and war created the independent Irish state expresses a binary: English invaders and Irish inhabitants (Ellis 1991, 289). While that is a simplification of a much larger set of narratives and the complexities of the relationships between different ethnic and religious groups in Ireland over seven centuries, it gives force to the forging of medieval Ireland's history and understandings of the past. Fortunately historians have already been self-reflective in the wake of the archive's loss, which allows for thinking about how the personal, the institutional, and the political intertwine to create our understandings of Irish medieval history. Key players in the work of recreating and reforging Ireland's medieval records, such as Peter Crooks and H.G. Richardson, have written commentaries on the historical significance of the work of gathering together replacement materials.[2] Howard B. Clarke (2017) briefly surveyed the attempts to reconstruct the losses of 1922 while looking ahead to the work still to be done. The administrative historians Richardson and G.O Sayles commented 'that the history of Ireland is imperfectly known arises not so much from lack of material as from imperfect exploration of what is available' (1961–1963, 99). This essay turns this last comment on its head to consider the creation of the sources for this 'imperfect exploration.'

2 See the various comments of Crooks (2013, 308–9) and Richardson (1945, 254).

The raw materials

The records stored in the PROI in 1922 were the focus of protection efforts by historians and archivists in the months from Easter Sunday in April to June 1922 when the Four Courts complex was occupied by anti-treaty forces opposed to the Dáil's acceptance of the Anglo-Irish treaty setting up the new Irish Free State. The recently retired deputy keeper of the PROI, Michael J. McEnery, wrote to the leaders of both the Dáil and the anti-treaty forces in May: 'how disastrous it would be for the nation if any of the archives […] should suffer any harm.'[3] He also said that it would be impossible to characterise the contents of the archive briefly. What McEnery, the historian Eoin MacNeill (who went in person to appeal to the occupiers), and others were attempting to protect was seven centuries of Irish history, as seen from the vantage point of English colonial administration and the legal system. The medieval documents created for that government in the centuries after the invasion of Ireland in 1170 included the legal and financial records of English administration: the records of chancery, exchequer, and the law-courts, as well as the Irish parliament. These were the records of what English administrators needed for their work, with additional ecclesiastical and guild records which had been deposited for safekeeping in the archive. But it was not a complete archive and not every record created made it into PROI. Much had already been lost by fire or accident or theft. While the memoranda rolls of the exchequer and the plea rolls of the law-courts existed in large numbers, only five issue rolls (the records of payments out of the exchequer) out of several hundred written were catalogued in the PROI (Connolly 1998, xiii). What was present and destroyed in 1922 was already a sifted collection full of silences, whether purposeful or accidental, made for a particular set of official needs.

The loss of the records in Dublin highlighted the earlier historical, antiquarian, and archival collections which had been drawn from the state records over the centuries, both before they were transferred to the PROI after 1867 and during its lifetime. Because of Ireland's legal status as a contested colony of England and a series of accounting scandals, records relating to Ireland were regularly sent contemporaneously to England for a variety of reasons and were absorbed into the records of the English state, now kept at The National Archives of the United Kingdom in Kew (henceforth TNA) (Connolly 2002, 34–37). Other collections were much less official. Some collections, such as those now preserved in the British Library's Cotton Titus MS B XI, held original documents removed from Dublin Castle, where the records were held in the seventeenth century. Other collections, such as the Harris Collectanea now in the National

3 Michael J. McEnery to Éamon de Valera and Arthur Griffith, quoted in Ciarán Wallace, 'McEnery, Michael Joseph,' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/index.php/biography/mcenery-michael-joseph-a10289> . Accessed May 14, 2023.

Library of Ireland, held copies made of the records. Some copies, such as that in Lambeth Palace Library Carew MS 603, were notarised by the clerks who had copied them as being true copies of the public records. A now-lost example, of the 1395 general submission of the Irish lords of Thomond (modern co. Clare) to Richard II was copied in 1792 for the adventurer, antiquarian, and family historian, Thomas O'Gorman, the Chevalier O'Gorman, and authenticated by the keepers of the records in Dublin, which was then notarised in turn as being a true authentication.[4] All of these varied collections were drawn out of the records made by English government in Ireland, but were archived in very different contexts than their equivalent items in the PROI. O'Gorman was interested in Gaelic Ireland, collected important Irish-language manuscripts and sought to compile records relating to his family's history as Connacht nobility. He also made considerable sums of money before the French Revolution in researching other people's pedigrees among the Irish Catholic exiles in Paris. His searches of the English government's records were one part of his efforts to draw together and reconstruct his illustrious Irish past in the context of Irish and French politics of the late-eighteenth century (Hayes 1941). Carew MS 603 was material for a history of Ireland in the early-seventeenth century compiled by a Jacobean administrator, while the records now at TNA speak to legal and administrative entanglements between the colonial government in Dublin and that of Westminster.

4 Printed by Ronan (1937); the photostat of the edition is Dublin, National Library of Ireland MS 8750 (1).

Activity intensified after the opening of the PROI made the records much more accessible to researchers and other interested parties. Building on the earlier work and calendaring done by the Irish Record Commissioners, the staff of the new archive continued the work of creating finding aids and summaries of the medieval records. McEnery himself was among those who calendared the medieval legal records known as the plea rolls and the Christ Church deeds, the records of the Augustinian friary in Dublin dating back to the twelfth century.[5] His colleague and successor Herbert Wood published a guide to the records in 1919, the fullest single description of which collections were housed in the PROI, and thus of what was lost three years later (Wood 1919). The list of calendaring and cataloguing work done appears in the yearly reports of the deputy keepers, including McEnery himself until his retirement in 1921. Alongside the cataloguing work to understand and make accessible the records, archivists and historians continued to draw out in their publications and research notes specific interests that cut across the collections and linked the PROI's records to other archives in Ireland and abroad. Professor Edmund Curtis of Trinity College Dublin had a copy of notes made in 1912 about the Delafield family in Ireland, carefully marked up with the archival references to the PROI and other sources in London, in similar

5 Wallace, 'McEnery, Michael Joseph.'

ways to the extracts made in earlier centuries for O'Gorman and Carew (Dublin, Trinity College MS 2425a). An anonymous author supplemented James Ferguson's work to produce 'Court of Exchequer Records relating to Kerry,' where they went through some of the medieval records in the PROI to extract the local history material of interest to the members and readers of the Kerry Archaeological Society (Ferguson and Anonymous 1917). Ferguson had calendared the medieval compendium of the Red Book of the Exchequer for a different local history society (1854). McEnery worked in collaboration with the Royal Society of Antiquarians of Ireland, of which he was later president, to produce a calendar of the Gormanston Register, which was then still in private hands (Mills and McEnery 1916).

The forgers: Personal and institutional

Curtis complained in a letter that he, a historian, 'in a properly constituted country would not be serving my days at work which a Record Office should be doing,' by which he meant transcribing, translating, and editing records to make them available more widely (Dublin, Trinity College MS 7962). In other record offices and other countries, that would often mean making it possible to find and use original medieval documents in their current archival context, with the listing and description being an internal finding aid or handbook for users. That was exactly the work the keepers at the PROI had done for almost fifty years. Now that it was gone, there was no single institutional descriptive effort that would chart the records and condition historians' understandings. Instead finding replacement records became a detective exercise across many institutions, each with their own collecting histories, archival structures, and finding aids. Consequently, the distinctive nature of Irish medieval history in the past century has been its concern with the records and archives, particularly in publishing editions and close, careful work with primary sources, and in innovative use of later or parallel sources to reconstruct lost records. This tradition came from the imperative of the loss of the PROI, and from the path set by the earliest historians and archivists to grapple with the problem of re-creating the lost archives and then using the replacement records to interpret medieval history. Personal research interests, institutional mandates, and the interplay of politics have provided the context in which this work has been carried out over the last century.

In 1922, in the immediate aftermath of the destruction the deputy keeper of the records, Herbert Wood, surveyed the losses and looked ahead to where replacements might be found by historians and archivists who might want to use or recreate the lost collections (1922). Its

importance to him was such that he also returned to this theme more fully in retirement (Wood 1930). He was drawing on the work done by his colleagues in the PROI and published in the yearly reports. These documents turned from cataloguing major collections within the archive to identifying substitutes from 1923 onwards (Connolly 1996, 140). In doing so, the archivists and Wood began to shape a programme of re-creation of the medieval archives that has continued for the subsequent century. He called attention to the known major collections of what we might call surrogate records for what had been lost—the collections in England and Ireland that related in some way to the collections of the PROI. He was an archivist who knew the institutional and administrative histories that had created the collections he had once had responsibility for and the archival byways that had brought major collections into other institutions such as the British Museum (now the British Library), the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the National Library of Ireland, and others. As Wood himself noted, 'documents of a public nature have ever had a tendency to escape from their proper custody in the past' (1930, 46). Wood particularly highlighted the range of materials that were already known to be at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, London (now the UK National Archives). He was especially drawing on the formative work of H.S. Sweetman at the end of the nineteenth century. Sweetman had worked through the collections of the English government as they became available, looking for materials relating to Ireland. Sweetman's calendars, often very extensive translations of original material, were published for the period 1170 to 1307 in five volumes (1875–1886). His early death stopped this work, but the range of material he looked at across the various departments of government for those years suggested where to search for the subsequent centuries for sources that would relate to lost material in the PROI.

For all his complaints and other concerns, Curtis was very active in the first generation of those who shaped the available archival material into modern medieval Irish history. In the foreword to his 1923 *A History of Medieval Ireland*, Curtis commented that the loss of the Four Courts in the previous year was 'an irreparable disaster' (1923, v). After completing this book, Curtis shifted to editing documents that foregrounded the possibilities of replacement records to write the history of Gaelic Ireland, first in his *Richard II in Ireland 1394–5: And Submissions of the Irish Chiefs* (1927), which drew on records he had first used in the *History of Medieval Ireland*, and which partially allowed the Irish kings to speak for themselves across five hundred years and from within the records of the recently removed English government, as they were drawn from the English memoranda rolls, now at TNA. He published for the first time in full the agreements made in 1395 between Richard II and the majority of

the Irish kings on his first expedition to Ireland in both Latin transcription and English summary. While many of the documents in the corpus speak of English overlordship and give the texts and terms of the oaths sworn by the kings to Richard II, they also include the letters sent by major kings such as Niall Óg Ó Néill of Ulster and Toirdelbach Ó Conchobhair Donn of Connacht to Richard, along with letters from their allies and dependents. Their self-fashioning and political interests within and without the Gaelic world come through vividly. Curtis himself noted the political implications in his foreword, where he spoke of the 'Gaelic revival' of the late-fourteenth century, as English effective control shrunk to the areas closest to Dublin, and in his choice of words, foreshadowing the efforts of his own day to make Irish once again a national language (1927, v).

In the service of making available records for Irish medieval history, Curtis also edited letters from Richard II about Ireland, and documents from a later set of agreements between Irish kings and Richard, Duke of York, the king's lieutenant in Ireland in 1449 (1924–1927; 1929–1931; 1931). Himself a nationalist, committed to Irish independence, he argued against the central thesis of G.H. Orpen's *Ireland under the Normans* that the Normans had brought good English law and order to Ireland. In a 1923 letter to Curtis, Orpen commented that he felt Curtis was too severe on the Normans in his *A History of Medieval Ireland* from that year (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 2452, no. 10). Curtis did this work even with an imperfect knowledge of the technical Latin, and a speed of working that introduced errors, as he himself acknowledged in reference to his subsequent calendar of the Ormond deeds in the 1930s (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 7962). Another stumbling block was direct access to records not in Dublin, even if they were 'well worth editing' according to Orpen, who showed a shared interest in the records despite their differing intellectual commitments (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 2452, no. 12). Curtis acquired a photostat (an early form of a photocopy) from the Public Record Office in London of the Richard II submissions. Others also responded to his politics. The review by the English medievalist T.F. Tout of *Richard II* cavilled that Curtis was more interested in the Irish side than in the English records. He argued that they would have shown greater details of Richard's itinerary and his household, for example, although that was not actually what Curtis was doing: rather it was what Tout himself would have done in a very different historiographical and political context in England. Tout echoed then the oft-repeated complaint that Irish history was driven by ideology and noted approvingly that Curtis had been very even-handed to both the Irish and the English (1928, 109–10).

By publishing these documents, Curtis set a path on which others built by finding more documents that related to the kings' submissions,

including the publication in 1937 by Myles V. Ronan, of the submission of the men of Thomond, which had never been sent to England and thus was not among the records Curtis edited (Ronan 1937). More recently, when Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith published a handbook of sources for Irish history held at TNA, one of its core elements was calendars of the fifteenth-century agreements between Irish kings and English rulers, which showed the later history of this type of negotiations (2005). Curtis' publication of the Richard II submissions was hugely important because in it, as Tout also noted in his review, he publicised and made available an important and little-known set of sources, that had great potential, and which have been taken up widely. Dorothy Johnston's exploration of the expeditions of Richard II in her Trinity College PhD thesis is just one example of the secondary work on Richard II that Curtis' editions enabled. The thesis is also a major contributor to the debate over what the submissions meant for English policy towards Gaelic Ireland (Johnston 1976).[6] Simon Egan has shown that the submissions fitted into a wider sea-world that linked together Ireland, western Scotland and the western islands of the Hebrides and the Isle of Man (2018). Was it a moment where a new relationship between Gaelic and English Ireland was possible, and the difference between invader and colonised might have lessened, if only for a brief time, or was it one of many pragmatic border agreements that meant fairly little in the wider context of intermittent warfare?

6 See also the comments of Otway-Ruthven (1968, 333).

Materials for the reconstruction of the lost archive needed to be publicised and published before they could be widely used. Unlike Curtis' earlier, shorter efforts, which were published in the Trinity College Dublin Classics journal *Hermathena* and the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, both well-established publications, later authors had a direct institutional infrastructure within which they were engaged. In 1928, the Dáil created a new government-funded body, the Irish Manuscripts Commission.[7] Headed by the historian of Gaelic Ireland, Eoin MacNeill, who was also active in the independence movement, a former government minister and former member of the Dáil, this new institution was to identify replacements for the lost records, publish editions and facsimiles, and actively seek to preserve collections both inside Ireland and beyond that were of historical significance for Irish history. It was to sit under the Ministry of Education, but to draw on scholarly and archival expertise. A founding member was James Morrissey, then the assistant deputy keeper of the surviving records at the PROI, and it was quickly to build links to the equivalent institution created after partition in Northern Ireland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, known as PRONI.[8] Under MacNeill's leadership, the commission's busy programme of activity in the first decades produced among other things, a new journal, *Analecta Hibernica*, where much of the archival listings and shorter editions by

7 Oireachteas, Dáil Éireann Debates, Volume 26, October 17, 1928, Ceisteanna—Questions.

8 For the early history of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, see the discussion of Kennedy and McMahon (2009, 1–20).

James Lydon, Philomena Connolly, and others have been published. Longer book-length records, such as Edmund Curtis' *Calendar of Ormond Deeds* and Connolly's *Irish Exchequer Payments*, have also been published by the Irish Manuscripts Commission (Curtis 1932–1943; Connolly 1998). In its early years, the commission also paid for researchers to be sent to find new documents in overseas repositories, producing work such as Charles McNeill's listings of manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in Oxford (1931a; 1931b). The breadth of the work done and the lack of commentary was deliberate and set against intense ongoing political use of Irish history. Edmund Curtis complained about the polemical use of medieval history and T.W. Moody with R.D. Edwards led a campaign against its use, which culminated in the foundation of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* (Curtis 2008, 64; Edwards 1978, 4–6).

In addition to extensive editions, such as Curtis', which opened up sources for broader debates about the nature of English colonialism in Ireland, a key and important area of medievalist publication has been the creation of published handlists directing students and scholars towards relevant materials in archives that otherwise would be difficult to survey due to their breadth and scale of holdings. Because the voluminous medieval English public records now at TNA are organised in ways that parallel what was in the PROI, much attention has been given to working through its various series and collections looking for Irish material. The medieval Irish chancery and exchequer were in regular communication with their English counterparts, and so the English records preserved documents relevant to Ireland among those that dealt with other parts of the crown's dominions. Philomena Connolly of the National Archives of Ireland spent years working through, listing, and calendaring these items, drawing on her own knowledge of the lost records to shape her awareness of what was relevant for Irish history (1984; 1987). A second approach to the work of listing was taken in one instance by James Lydon, Connolly's doctoral supervisor at Trinity College Dublin, where he searched through the known repositories of Irish medieval material to list all the fragments of a record type that had been almost entirely lost in 1922, the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer (1966). Its promise for medieval history has never quite been fulfilled in that it sets out a roadmap for understanding the use of these records over the centuries by the Irish Record Commissioners, various interested antiquarians, family historians, and more, and subsequently for considering what the gaps might show us about the spread of these sources before their loss, whether in 1922 or earlier. The memoranda roll listings also include details of copies made in almost every post-medieval generation from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century, across England and Ireland.

Lydon's work suffered from the limitations and constraints of a print article, as did another article in *Analecta Hibernica*, where Elizabeth Dowse and Margaret Murphy produced a trial effort at reconstruction of a single, lost roll for the reign of Edward III (1992). Their work provided a test case for allowing historians to once again work with the records as they once existed rather than through multiple, scattered surrogates. Digital Humanities and computing advances have realized the potential of direct reconstruction efforts by making it possible to create larger and more searchable collections of texts, as seen in the work of CIRCLE, the project to reconstruct the rolls of Chancery, the writing office of medieval government, from the surviving copies, English records, and other sources.[9] This project, based at Trinity College Dublin, brought together the calendar made from the originals by the record commissioners in the 1820s, forty years before they were deposited in the PROI, and the surviving medieval and later copies found in England, Ireland, and the USA, to create a new summary calendar and point to where the records can be found if the originals need to be consulted. While it started as a card catalogue under the direction of Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, it then grew into a database and a website, linking together a vast amount of material, which can now be used to work with what has survived from the rolls collectively rather than as scattered, isolated individual extracts. It served as a case study in the possibilities of large-scale reconstruction of an entire class of document from the PROI (Crooks 2013). As Robin Frame commented in his survey of the value of the Chancery documentation for historians to mark the project's launch, it promised to make possible wider histories of how Ireland's records worked, how the personnel of government related to the wider English world and how Ireland's peoples encountered government (2013).

9 Description of Sources for CIRCLE: https://chancery.tcd.ie/content/reconstructing-rolls-medieval-irish-chancery. Accessed May 14, 2023.

In June 2022, to mark the centenary of the loss of the records in the Four Courts, the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, and the Minster for Culture, Catherine Martin TD, launched a new Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland at Dublin Castle. This project, underway since 2016, and funded by the Decade of Centenaries programme since 2019, aims to bring as many records as possible back onto the (virtual) shelves from across as many libraries, archives, and other collections as possible, including the core partner institutions of the IMC, the National Archives, Ireland, PRONI and The National Archives (UK) with Trinity College Library. It has been noted for the scale of the recovery (millions of words available to read online) and the sense of creating something where the general perception had been that there was only destruction amidst a larger calamity (the Civil War).[10] Here, I have to declare an interest because I have worked for the project on the medieval strand since 2020, editing and making publicly available records of English medieval government that were written in

10 See Davies (2022).

Ireland and brought to Westminster and thus archived in the archives in London, not Dublin. The bulk of the medieval team's work to date has been on the exchequer receipt rolls, the rolls with details of who paid in money to the treasury, which thus give glimpses of the individuals who interacted with medieval government, including those from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. Our work sits very much in the tradition that Curtis and his successors established, and that the IMC has consistently supported, but we can use the latest technology to combine the large-scale archival work of listing replacement sources with the work of editing the records, and then also put our editions alongside the digitised images so that they are as widely accessible as possible on the web. And we then combine the ability to look at these archival survivors in depth with digitisations and machine transcriptions of other medieval sources, such as those in the Ferns Diocesan Archives and the College of Arms in London, to name just two. As more material is digitised and translated, it can be added and be made searchable, linked, and otherwise associated with the existing contents. For example, being able now to work across the receipt rolls and some of the records of the law courts has allowed me to find more information about individuals and build the type of cross-record picture that contributes to our wider understanding of the lordship of Ireland, towards which CIRCLE and Lydon's memoranda roll work pointed.

We have also gone back to Curtis' project on the submissions of the Irish kings, in a way bringing the century of work full circle. We are editing and translating the records of the 1395 submissions that Curtis did not edit for his *Richard II,* either because they were in other collections, unknown, or damaged to the point of not being editable. We are also bringing them together with the fifteenth-century indentures held at TNA and in copies elsewhere, including the British Library's Cotton Collection and Lambeth Palace Library's Carew Papers.[11] The new, wider corpus will allow historians and anyone interested in the voices of the Irish kings to ask new questions about the relationships of Gaelic Ireland with the rulers of the English colony in a wider perspective than was possible when they were scattered in undigitised copies across multiple collections. When they were published, they tended to be in Latin transcription only. The ten original documents from the Richard II agreements that Curtis noted as existing, but being damaged, were the originals brought from Ireland and then copied by the clerks onto the English rolls. They thus preserve a record of a particular moment where their contents were agreed and authenticated by those present.

By using the latest imaging techniques on the damaged documents, particularly multi-spectral imaging, they too can be translated and made available, alongside the digitised images. Multi-spectral imaging uses

11 London TNA C 47/10/25; TNA E 30, London, British Library Cotton MS Titus B XI part 1, ff. 26, 38, 40; and London Lambeth Palace Carew MS 603, ff. 87, 132, 236, 138–39, 143–46.

photographs taken under six bands from full range of visible, ultraviolet, and infrared light to bring up details that are invisible to the eye, and thus can often 'see' beneath damage or galling.[12] Increasing the contrast on images of damaged documents imaged in this way can also help improve legibility. By working with heritage science colleagues, and testing other techniques, notably hyper-spectral imaging, we are able to make these documents accessible but also to identify those new scientific techniques that will help make other damaged and illegible documents readable and publishable in the future.

12 See the descriptions in 'Old Documents, New Technology: Illuminating Lucia Pereira Pardo's Work at TNA.' https://virtualtreasury.ie/hidden-stories/dr-lucia-pereira-pardo. Accessed May 14, 2023.

The forged history

Turning back to the metaphor of forging as creation under heat and pressure, what has come out of the century of reconstruction work prompted by the loss of the medieval records in 1922 in terms of understanding Irish medieval history? The first is a clear sense of the possibilities of reckoning with lacunae in the records, and of working with a deep understanding of the circumstances that formed the existing modern collections. No one has bettered in this respect the scholarship of Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, who after first showing what could be done to reconstruct the English archives of the office of secretary in her PhD and first book, then came to Trinity College Dublin and took up the task of understanding medieval government in Ireland through its lost sources and their replacements (Crooks 2008, 42). In addition to her work on the beginnings of CIRCLE, her other publications focus on the institutional workings of English government in Ireland. Her *A History of Medieval Ireland*, written as an introductory survey for students and specialists alike, provides a detailed examination of the institutions that attempted to rule English Ireland (1968, 144–90). Similarly, James Lydon's publications, including his early study of the Irish exchequer and his work on the memoranda rolls, used the surviving material as a frame around which an understanding of the lost archives could be layered to see what had once been there (Biggs, Crooks, Dryburgh, and Kilgallon forthcoming).

The second observation about changes in historical work in light of the events of 1922 is in the types of history that scholars have chosen to highlight. For English medieval political history, the trend from the 1950s onwards was to move away from institutional studies to the types of networks and communities studied by Bruce McFarlane and his students (Richmond 1983). In Ireland, as Crooks observed, partially because of the interests of Lydon and partially because of the nature of the sources, that shift did not occur in the same way (2008, 49). Instead, the need to work with a range of replacement sources, many of which had frustrating gaps,

and which did not easily allow for the type of network studies that the unusually high survival rate of local sources in England allowed, meant that focus has tended to remain on episodes, institutions, and offices when not working on the scale of the big surveys. For example, on episodes that can serve as micro-histories of larger trends and attitudes we have Philomena Connolly's chapter on John de Burnham or Robin Frame's work on the MicMurchadha's relationship with English government, to name just two examples from the edited collection presented to James Lydon (Connolly 1995; Frame 1995). Frame also observed that CIRCLE's recreation of the Chancery rolls would help elucidate the connections created by the personnel of English government to the wider Plantagenet world of England, France, and Wales, in which these clerks also served (2013, 216–17). More recently, as the availability of the replacement sources has increased, the ability to work across records sources has improved. For example, Peter Crooks has been able to write a larger history of the role of faction within Anglo-Irish government in the fifteenth century (2007).

This essay deals with the recreation of one type of lost medieval source and the histories it creates—the state archives of a colonial power, which had uneven control across the island and across the period as the power of the Irish kings waxed and waned. Other types of sources that medievalists now work with to understand the wider histories of the island were never in the PROI, not least the collections of Irish manuscripts now at Trinity College Dublin and elsewhere. Gaelic Ireland was barely represented in the lost PROI and large chunks of medieval life and experience on the island left little traces in the records stored there. For its histories, Katharine Simms and others have had to go to the bardic sources and the registers of the archbishops of Armagh, among others (1987). But the story of the lost records destroyed at the very start of Ireland's modern history is a story that has dominated institutional and public understandings of the medieval past in Ireland. James Lydon was reportedly told that there was nothing much to interest him in the National Archives of Ireland, so profound was the sense even there that all was lost in the fire of 1922 (Crooks 2008, 49). That in fact was not true, as Lydon's own publications and the catalogues of materials in the archives itself today testify. As conservation and imaging work continue, even the scraps of the salved records pulled from the rubble by the staff of the PROI in 1922 and 1923 and then wrapped in brown paper parcels will become available (Crooks, Reid et al. 2023). Perhaps now as the surviving medieval records become more accessible, and the histories written from them increase, the story of Ireland's lost records will instead become the story of Ireland's rich, complex tradition of engaging with its records through the centuries, producing the many copies, originals, and notes which are and will be

accessible on the digital shelves of the Virtual Record Treasury, the print publications of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, and in other journals and books. It will not and cannot be a perfect analogue of what was lost to fire in June 1922. It is a collection of material that in some way relates to what was on the shelves, that reflects what we know about the archives and its creators, and that will continue to be shaped as more is found and new questions asked. To think of forgery in relation to this project is to engage with the parameters of what is possible and the many and creative ways that scholars work with the materials of the medieval past.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to my colleagues on the *Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland* Project, and to the archivists of the PROI who worked through the ruins to salvage what could be saved and catalogued the losses in 1922 and 1923.

Funding

Open Access funding provided by the IReL Consortium.

Open Access

About the Author

Elizabeth Biggs is currently a research fellow based at The National Archives (UK) for the *Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury*

Project at Trinity College Dublin, editing the medieval Irish exchequer rolls for digital publication. Since completing her doctorate at York in 2017, she has held a series of postdoctoral research positions and taught at the University of the West of England. She has published widely on medieval government and the church, including a monograph (Boydell, 2020), and is interested in the creation and use of medieval archives. E-mail biggsel@tcd.ie.

Works Cited

Manuscript sources

Dublin National Library of Ireland MS 8750

Dublin, Trinity College Special Collection and Archives MS 2425a

Dublin, Trinity College Special Collection and Archives MS 2452

Dublin, Trinity College Special Collection and Archives MS 7962

London, British Library Cotton MS Titus B XI

London, Lambeth Palace Library Carew MS 603

London, The National Archives of the United Kingdom C 47

London, The National Archives of the United Kingdom E 30

Printed sources

55th Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland's Report. 1928. Dublin: Public Record Office of Ireland (PROI).

Biggs, Elizabeth, Peter Crooks, Paul Dryburgh, and Lynn Kilgallon, eds. 2024 (forthcoming). 'The Irish exchequer in the thirteenth century: an unpublished essay by James F. Lydon (1928–2013).' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquarians of Ireland*.

Clarke, Howard B. 2017. 'Making Up for Lost Time: The Impact of the Destruction in 2017 of the Irish Public Record Office.' In *Identity and Loss of Historical Memory: the Destruction of Archives,* edited by Igor Filipov and Flocel Sabaté, 289–302. Bern: Peter Lang.

Connolly, Philomena. 1984. 'List of Irish Material in the Class of Chancery Files (Recorda) (C.260) Public Record Office, London.' *Analecta Hibernica* 31: 1–18.

Conolly, Philomena, 1987. 'Irish Material in the Class of Ancient Petitions (SC8) in the Public Record Office, London.' *Analecta Hibernica* 34: 1–106.

Connolly, Philomena. 1995. 'The proceedings against John de Burnham, treasurer of Ireland, 1343–9.' In *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays presented to J.F. Lydon*, edited by Terry Barry, Robin Frame, and Katharine Simms, 57–74. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Connolly, Philomena. 1996. 'The destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland in 1922: disaster and recovery.' *Archivum* 42: 135–46.

Connolly, Philomena. 1998. *Irish Exchequer Records 1270–1446*. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission.

Connolly, Philomena. 2002. *Medieval Record Sources*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Crooks, Peter. 2007. 'Factionalism and noble power in English Ireland, c. 1361–1423.' PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin.

Crooks, Peter. 2008. 'The Lecky Professors.' In *Government, War and Society in Medieval Ireland: Essays by Edmund Curtis, A.J. Otway-Ruthven and James Lydon,* edited by Peter Crooks, 23–54. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Crooks, Peter. 2013. 'The Case of the Medieval Irish Chancery Rolls.' In *Lawyers, the Law and History: Irish Legal History Society Discourses and Other Papers, 2006–2011,* edited by Felix M. Larkin and N.M. Dawson, 281–309. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Crooks, Peter, and Zoë Reid, with Jessica Baldwin, Ciara Fahy, and Brian Gurrin. 2023. 'The Salved Records of 1922.' *Analecta Hibernica* 53: 15–58.

Curtis, Edmund. 1923. *A History of Medieval Ireland, 1110–1513*. London: Macmillan.

Curtis, Edmund. 1924–1927. 'Unpublished Letters from Richard II in Ireland, 1394–5.' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 37: 276–303.

Curtis, Edmund. 1927. *Richard II in Ireland, 1394–5: And Submissions of the Irish Chiefs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Curtis, Edmund. 1929–1931. 'Sheriffs' Accounts of the Honor of Dungarvan, of Tweskard in Ulster, and of County Waterford, 1261–63.' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 39: 1–17.

Curtis, Edmund. 1931. 'The "Bonnaght" of Ulster.' *Hermathena* 46: 87–91.

Curtis, Edmund. 1932–1943. *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172–1603,* 6 vols. Dublin: Irish Manuscript Commission.

Curtis, Edmund. 2008. 'Irish History and its Popular Versions.' In *Government, War and Society in Medieval Ireland: Essays by Edmund Curtis, A.J. Otway-Ruthven and James Lydon,* edited by Peter Crooks, 55–64. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Davies, Caroline. 2022. 'Lost Irish History Reclaimed.' *The Guardian*, June 27, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/27/beyond-2022-immersive-3d-experience-brings-lost-irish-history-to-life.

Dowse, Elizabeth, and Margaret Murphy. 1992. '*Rotulus clausus de anno 48 Edward III*: A Reconstruction.' *Analecta Hibernica* 35: 87–154.

Dryburgh, Paul, and Brendan Smith. 2005. *Handbook and Select Calendar of Sources for Medieval Ireland in the National Archives of the United Kingdom*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Edwards, R.D. 1978. 'An Agenda for Irish History, 1978–2018.' *Irish Historical Studies* 21: 3–19.

Egan, Simon. 2018. 'Richard II and the Wider Gaelic World: A Reassessment.' *Journal of British Studies* 57: 221–52.

Ellis, Steven. 1986. 'Nationalist Historiography and the English and Gaelic Worlds in the Late Middle Ages.' *Irish Historical Studies* 25: 1–18.

Ellis, Steven. 1991. 'Historiographical Debate: Representations of the Past in Ireland: Whose Past and Whose Present?' *Irish Historical Studies* 27: 289–308.

Ferguson, James Frederick. 1854. 'A Calendar of the Contents of the Red Book of the Irish Exchequer.' *Proceedings and Transactions of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society* 3: 35–52.

Ferguson, James Frederick, and Anonymous. 1917. 'Court of Exchequer Records Relating to Kerry.' *Kerry Archaeological Magazine* 4: 124–46.

Frame, Robin. 1995. 'Two Kings in Leinster: The Crown and the MicMurchadha in the Fourteenth Century.' In *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays presented to J.F. Lydon*, edited by Terry Barry, Robin Frame, and Katharine Simms, 155–76. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Frame, Robin. 2013. 'Rediscovering Medieval Ireland: Irish chancery rolls and the historian.' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 113C: 193–217.

Hayes, Richard. 1941. 'A Forgotten Irish Antiquary: Chevalier Thomas O'Gorman 1732–1809.' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 30: 587–96.

Johnston, Dorothy Blane. 1976. 'Richard II and Ireland, 1395–9.' PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin.

Lydon, James F. 1966. 'Survey of the Memoranda Rolls of the Irish Exchequer, 1294–1509.' *Analecta Hibernica* 23: 49, 51–134.

Kennedy, Michael, and Deirdre McMahon. 2009. *Reconstructing Ireland's past: a history of the Irish Manuscripts Commission*. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission.

McNeill, Charles. 1931a. 'Rawlinson Manuscripts (Class C).' *Analecta Hibernica* 2: 1–43.

McNeill, Charles. 1931b. 'Rawlinson Manuscripts (Class D).' *Analecta Hibernica* 2: 44–92.

Mills, James, and Michael J. McEnery, eds. 1916. *Calendar of the Gormanston Register c. 1175–1397*. Dublin: The University Press.

Oireachtas, Dáil Éireann. 1928. Debates. Volume 26, October 17, 1928. Ceisteanna—Questions.

Otway-Ruthven, Annette Jocelyn. 1968. *A History of Medieval Ireland*. London: Ernest Benn.

Richardson, H.G. 1945. 'Agenda for Irish History.' *Irish Historical Studies* 4: 254–58.

Richardson, H.G., and G.O. Sayles. 1961–1963. 'Irish Revenue, 1278–1384.' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 62: 87–100.

Richmond, Colin. 1983. 'Review: After McFarlane.' *History* 68: 46–60.

Ronan, Miles V., ed. 1937. 'Some Mediaeval Documents.' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Seventh Series 7: 231–34.

Simms, Katharine. 1987. *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer.

Sweetman, H.S. 1875–1886. *Calendar of Records relating to Ireland, 1171–1307*. 5 vols. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Tout, T.F. 1928. 'Review: Edmund Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland (1394–5)* and *Submissions of the Irish Chiefs*.' *English Historical Review* 43: 109–11.

Wood, Herbert. 1919. *A Guide to the Records deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland*. Dublin: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Wood, Herbert. 1922. 'The destruction of the Public Records: the loss to Irish history.' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 11: 363–78.

Wood, Herbert. 1930. 'The Public Records of Ireland before and after 1922.' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13: 17–49.