

ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN IN IRELAND, 1450–1660. THE ORMOND FAMILY, POWER AND POLITICS.
By Damien Duffy. Woodbridge: Boydell Press. 2021. £75 hardback.

The historiography of aristocratic women in medieval and early modern Ireland has flourished in recent years, with Damien Duffy's book on the Ormond women taking its place alongside those of other emerging scholars including Rachel Wilson (2015), Ann-Maria Walsh (2020) and Frances Nolan (2021). Duffy's book is published in the Irish Historical Monograph series at the Boydell Press, which is establishing itself as a firm leader in the field of Irish women's history in the earlier period.

The book makes an important contribution to a rapidly expanding field. Duffy examines twenty-one women in the Ormond Butler family across six generations and two hundred-odd years and identifies patterns of behaviour that persisted through changing historical circumstances. The roles of heiresses, marriage, widowhood, motherhood, family, property, patronage, agency, influence, and power are some of the key themes addressed in the book. Two of the most famous Ormond women, Margaret Butler and Joan Fitzgerald, are given a chapter each. But standing alongside them is a cast of lesser-known actors ranging from Margaret and Katherine, co-heiresses to the seventh earl of Ormond; the six daughters of Margaret and Piers Butler, including the formidable Katherine, Baroness Power; and the three wives and daughter of Black Tom.

'Not unique', 'not unusual' and 'not exceptional' are phrases that recur throughout the book with Duffy at pains to demonstrate that the activities of the Ormond women were typical of European women of their status, and the analysis is supported with well-chosen contemporary examples of women who shared their experiences. Christine Meek, Mary O'Dowd and the other pioneering scholars of Irish women's history loom large in the book, with Duffy carefully building his work on the foundation they established.

Chapter 1 contextualises the Ormond women by providing a short but comprehensive historiographical overview of women's lives in late medieval and early modern Europe, addressing women's life stages; their legal status, inheritance and property rights; their responsibilities in estate management; their writing, reading and patronage; and their private lives. Chapter 2 focuses on the Ormond wives and mistresses during the Wars of the Roses and illuminates the strategic marriage alliances that were key to consolidating and expanding Ormond interests in England but led to absenteeism in Ireland. Chapter 3 continues this theme by focusing on the English-born Margaret and Anne Butler whose naming as co-heiresses of the absentee seventh earl led to a succession crisis when their rights and those of Margaret's son, Thomas Boleyn, were challenged by Piers Butler. By locating the women's claims within contemporary inheritance law, the chapter argues that Piers's claim would have been unsuccessful were it not for the fall of the Boleyn family after the failure of Margaret's granddaughter's marriage to Henry VIII. Chapter 4 attributes part of Piers's success as earl to the activities of his highly capable wife Margaret whose petitioning, advocacy, estate management and patronage helped the couple consolidate and secure their position in Ireland after generations of absenteeism.

Chapter 5 then turns to Margaret's six daughters and the choice of husbands that reveals a marriage strategy that matched the daughters with men from important Old English and Gaelic families and the wider Butler network, while sons were allied with prominent English families. This meant that the women played important roles in maintaining, improving, and sometimes even damaging the family's position in Ireland. Chapter 6 focuses on Margaret's daughter-in-law, Joan Fitzgerald, and highlights her important role as agent for her son (eventual successor to the earldom), and then mediator between her son and third husband upon which an uneasy peace between the Ormond and Desmond dynasties depended.

Finally, chapter 7 explores the wives, daughter and granddaughter of Joan's son Black Tom, and illuminates how women asserted themselves in circumstances over which they often had little control. Here, Thomas's daughter, Elizabeth, is transformed from a pawn in a religiously and ethnically-inflected power struggle between her father, his named heir Walter Butler, her husband Richard Preston and King James, to someone who not only

understood the rules of the game but played it and won. And this is the model of elite female behaviour inherited by her renowned daughter, the first duchess, with whom the book ends.

Overall the book shows that we can only reach a more complete understanding of Irish history ‘through a rounded and thorough analysis of all parties involved’ (p. 237). In attending to the women of the Ormond dynasty, Duffy has drawn upon a wide range of primary sources. His focus is on the women’s actions but their voices emerge through sources like wills, recorded speech and letters. Letters by Margaret Butler, Joan Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Preston are discussed in the book, and this is an aspect that could be developed further. It is possible that other women’s letters will be found among the Ormond Papers in the National Library of Ireland — the published calendars under-represent the number of letters by women and there is currently no alternative but to sift through the manuscripts one volume at a time.

Duffy approaches the women’s writings as an historian but engagement with literary scholars and art historians who have also made significant contributions to our understanding of women in medieval and early modern Ireland would further support the central argument about women’s agency. Still, he utilises the textual and material culture of the Ormond women very well and vividly recreates the worlds in which they operated. Some illustrations to complement the text (portraits, buildings, objects, writings) would have been welcome, and a family tree would have helped to keep track of the generations of Ormond women and their relationships with one another, but overall this is an important and highly readable book that will be much cited by scholars of medieval and early modern Ireland.

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CIVILISED BY BEASTS: ANIMALS AND URBAN CHANGE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY DUBLIN. By Juliana Adelman. Pp 234. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2020. £80.

The last decade has seen a flurry of publications that challenge the narrative of Irish urban history. For too long the focus was on urban politics and sectarian conflict, with the multi-faceted nature of Irish towns and cities being ignored. Recently several studies have been published that enrich our knowledge of the Irish urban experience, and Dr Adelman’s *Civilised by beasts* is a welcome and original contribution to the field. This book explores human-animal relationships in Dublin from 1830 to 1900. In doing so, she explains that ‘[t]he city past and present has often appeared as a human-only space. Nineteenth-century city views, for example, often excluded urban animals’ (pp 1–2). Dr Adelman provides a fascinating prism through which to explore urban change in nineteenth-century Dublin. Over five chapters, she skilfully explores how animals served the city – from exotic creatures being displayed in the zoo and livestock being slaughtered and butchered for human consumption, to horses transporting residents from the city centre to the expanding suburbs and the growth of keeping pets — and how their relationship with humans changed as the latter sought to tackle the social and environmental challenges that urban dwellers experienced from urban living.

Class conflict is central to this narrative, with the growing power and influence of the middle classes allowing them to have ‘more control over animals and how they were used’ (p. 3). Such command was executed by various means: through the levers of power in Dublin Corporation and the introduction of bye-laws, in addition to increasing national legislation; and the metropolis’s wider associational culture including the Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the revival of the Dublin Sanitary Association in 1872.

A feature of this book that is particularly interesting is the role of the municipal expert — and the growing surveillance state, more generally — in regulating animals in Dublin. The increased awareness and understanding of public health concerns from the mid-nineteenth century led to authorities paying greater attention to nuisances through a combination of