

BRIDES OF CHRIST

WOMEN AND MONASTICISM

IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY
MODERN IRELAND



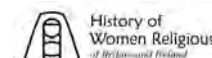
..... FIFTH
GLENSTAL
HISTORY
CONFERENCE
2-4 JULY 2021

ONLINE CONFERENCE

historyconf@glenstal.com

[eventbrite ticket](#)

ORGANISERS: Dr Tracy Collins Dr Bronagh McShane Br Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB



CONFERENCE WEBINAR OPENING

15.00 - 15.15 **WELCOME TO THE FIFTH GLENSTAL HISTORY CONFERENCE** Abbot Brendan Coffey OSB

15.15 - 15.40 **INTRODUCTION** Abbess Máire Hickey OSB, Kylemore Abbey

SESSION 1

15.40 - 16.20 **DR TRACY COLLINS** *Aegis Archaeology*
'On the Brink of the Wave':
Towards an Archaeology of
Female Religious in Early
Medieval Ireland.

16.25 - 17.05 **DR ELVA JOHNSTON** *University College Dublin*

Locating Female Foundations
in the Early Medieval Irish
Martyrologies.

17.05 - 17.30 **Q&A**
Close of day

18.00 **VESPERS** from
Glenstal Abbey *

* [Glenstal Webcam Link](#)



FRIDAY
JULY 02

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SESSION 2

10.50 Webinar Opening

11.00 - 11.40 DR EDEL
BHREATHNACH *Independent*
Devotees, Mothers, Sisters
and Virgins: Seeking Female
Monastic Communities in Early
Ireland.

11.45 - 12.25 DR CATHY
SWIFT *Mary Immaculate*
College UL
St Macrina, St Brigit and St Ite:
Models of Female Charism in
the Early Irish Church?

12.30 - 12.50 Q&A

12.50 - 13.00 BREAK

SESSION 3

13.00 - 13.40 DR DAGMAR
Ó RIAIN RAEDEL *Independent*
The Other *Peregrinatio*: Irish
Pilgrim Nuns in Medieval
Germany.

13.45 - 14.25 PROFESSOR
YVONNE SEALE
SUNY Geneseo
Order, Order!': Identity,
Belonging and Women's
Monastic Communities in
Ireland and France, Twelfth to
Fifteenth Centuries.

14.30 - 15.10 DR GILLIAN
KENNY *Trinity College Dublin*
'Paragon(s) of the Gael?':
Medieval Irishwomen~
Patronage, Piety, Propaganda
and Power.

15.10 - 15.30 Q&A

15.30 - 15.40 BREAK

SESSION 4

15.40 - 16.20 PROFESSOR
MARIAN LYONS *Maynooth*
University
Keeping it in the Family:
Female Religious and Familial
Relations in Late Medieval
Ireland.

16.25 - 17.05 DR COLMÁN
Ó CLABAIGH OSB *Glenstal*
Abbey
Women on the Margins?
Vowesses, Anchoresses and
Tertiaries in Medieval Ireland.

17.05 - 17.30 Q&A
Close of day

18.00 VESPERS from
Glenstal Abbey *

* [Glenstal Webcam Link](#)

SATURDAY JULY 03

SESSION 5

11.50 Webinar Opening

12.00 - 12.40 PROFESSOR
EMERITUS COLM LENNON

Maynooth University

Sisters of the Priory
Confraternity of Christ
Church, Dublin, in the Late
Middle Ages.

12.45 - 13.25 ULTAN LALLY

*National University of Ireland,
Galway*

Hora Determinata: Dominican
Nuns and Catholic Identity
among Galway City's Elite
in the Seventeenth and
Eighteenth Centuries.

13.30 - 13.50 Q&A

13.50 - 14.00 BREAK

SESSION 6

14.00 - 14.40 DR BRONAGH

McSHANE *National University
of Ireland Galway* AND
COLLEAGUES

A Reflection: Remembering
Margaret MacCurtain.

14.45 - 15.25 BISHOP

ANNE DYER *Diocese of
Aberdeen and Orkney*

Ladies of Fame and Women
Worthy of Praise.

15.30 - 16.00 Q&A

16.00 - 16.10 CLOSE OF
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SUNDAY JULY 04

Introduction :: 2 July 2021

INTRODUCTION

15.15 - 15.40

ABBESS MÁIRE HICKEY

Kylemore Abbey, Galway

Máire Hickey is a Benedictine nun based at Kylemore Abbey, Connemara, since 2008. After studying Classics at Cambridge, she entered the Monastery of St Scholastika at Dinklage, Germany, where she served as abbess from 1983 to 2007. From 1997 to 2006 she was leader of the Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum ~ the International Communion of Benedictine Women.

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THE BENEDICTINE Community at Kylemore was originally founded in Ypres, Belgium, in 1665. It is one of the longest established religious communities for Irish women.

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Session 1 :: 2 July 2021

SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 1**

15.40 - 16.20

On the Brink of the Wave: Towards an Archaeology of Female Religious in Early Medieval Ireland.

DR TRACY COLLINS

Aegis Archaeology Ltd

Dr Tracy Collins is an archaeologist and director of Aegis Archaeology Limited, an archaeological and heritage consultancy. She has a special research interest in female monasticism and has published on this subject. She was awarded her PhD in 2016 and in 2017–2018 she held an Irish Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellowship, hosted by the Department of Archaeology, UCC. Her monograph entitled Female Monasticism in Medieval Ireland: An Archaeology will be published by Cork University Press in October 2021.

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THIS PAPER CONSIDERS the current archaeological evidence for

female religious in early medieval Ireland and discusses the evidential issues, problems, and future archaeological possibilities that this corpus presents.

16.25 - 17.05

Locating Female Foundations in the Early Medieval Irish Martyrologies.

DR ELVA JOHNSTON

University College Dublin

Elva Johnston is an associate professor in the School of History, University College Dublin. Her monograph, Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland (Woodbridge, 2013), was awarded the Irish Historical Research Prize (2015) for the best new work of Irish historical research. She is a general editor of Peritia: The Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland and a member of the Irish Manuscripts Commission. continued~

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MÁEL MUIRE UA GORMÁIN (d. c. 1181), abbot of Knock Abbey in County Louth, was the author of an extensive verse martyrology, generally known as the Martyrology of Gorman. Fortunately, Máel Muire identified two of his key sources, the ninth-century Martyrology of Tallaght and the closely connected Féilire Óengusso which was composed by the eponymous Óengus ua Iobléin; others can be inferred from his text. Máel Muire's text is a product of a distinct Irish martyrological tradition, extending back several centuries. This paper will take that tradition, as defined by Máel Muire, and analyse dedications to women and to female foundations between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. How many female saints are commemorated when compared to men? And, to what extent can we begin to map a female monastic landscape in pre-Norman Ireland? The role of topography, familial connections and gendered networks will be considered alongside the ability of cults to adapt to religious and political changes.

SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 2**

11.00 - 11.40 Devotees, Mothers, Sisters and Virgins: Seeking Female Monastic Communities in Early Ireland.

DR EDEL BHREATHNACH
Independent

Dr Edel Bhreathnach is an independent scholar who is currently working on a volume relating to monasticism in Ireland AD900-1300. She is the author of Ireland in the Medieval World AD400-1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion (Four Courts Press, 2014) and an editor (with Dr Malgorzata Krasnodebska-D'Aughton and Dr Keith Smith) of Monastic Europe: Communities, Landscapes and Settlements (Turnhout, 2019).

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THE LIVES OF St Brigit and those of her successors in Kildare are most frequently quoted as evidence of female monasticism in early Ireland.

St Brigit and Kildare are likely to have been exceptional and while the literature around Brigit herself provides us with signals of the lifestyle and priorities of female religious in the early Irish church, much can also be detected from the lives of male saints, and also from the myriad of references to female saints in other texts. This paper seeks to explore the various possible monastic models that existed for women from the conversion period to the arrival of the international orders in eleventh-century Ireland.

11.45 - 12.25 St Macrina, St Brigit and St Íte: Models of Female Charism in the Early Irish Church?

DR CATHERINE SWIFT
Mary Immaculate College

Catherine Swift completed an MPhil on the archaeological evidence for Irish

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monasticism in the Hebrides at Durham University and a DPhil on Tírechán's Life of Patrick at Oxford and has published a book on ogham stones as a source for early Irish Christianity with Maynooth University in 1997. She currently teaches Medieval Studies at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

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DESPITE THE international fame of St Brigit, there has been little attempt to explore the nature of the female community of Kildare beyond the occasional reference to Northumbrian double monasteries and Abbess Hild of Whitby while the (often rather different) lives of other Irish female saints are even more rarely examined. A common model found in writings by the early western Fathers depicts female communities as being led by close family members of the local bishop while the influential rule of Caesarius of Arles *continued~*

SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 3**

~continued focuses on enclosed female communities, located in the immediate vicinity of the episcopal complex. Such material is difficult to match with the traditions of extensive travel, independence of action and the occasional references to teaching and missionary activity found amongst the lives of Irish female saints. This paper examines the depiction of St Macrina in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and St Basil as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* indicates that writings by both these Cappadocian Fathers were known to early eighth-century Irish writers. It is argued that the model of family-based establishments and co-operation between male and female communities found therein appears to provide an important contribution to the portrayal of early female sanctity in Ireland.

13.00 -13.40 THE OTHER *PEREGRINATIO*: IRISH PILGRIM NUNS IN MIEVEAL GERMANY.

DR DAGMAR Ó RIAIN RAEDEL
Independent

Dagmar Ó Riain Raedel studied German, English and Celtic Philology at the University of Bonn, finishing with a thesis examining Celtic motifs in Middle-High German Arthurian literature. She has been a member of the Department of History, UCC, with a special research interest in Medieval History and has lectured and published widely on the connections between Ireland and Europe from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.

FOUR NAMES ARE ALL we have: Gertrud, Sophia, Beatrix and Bertha, recorded as members of the aristocratic convents of Ober and Niedermünster at Regensburg. Only thanks to the necrology of the Regensburg

Benedictine Schottenkloster, which provides them with the epithet 'scotigena' or Irish-born, can we identify them as Irish. The lecture will look at the historical background in twelfth-century Bavaria and suggest a possible provenance for these Irish pilgrim nuns.

13.45 -14.25 'ORDER, ORDER!': IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND WOMEN'S MONASTIC COMMUNITIES IN IRELAND AND FRANCE, TWELFTH – FIFTEENTH CENTURIES.

PROFESSOR YVONNE SEALE
SUNY Geneseo

Yvonne Seale is an assistant professor of History at SUNY Geneseo in western New York State, where she teaches courses in medieval history and digital humanities. Her research focuses

on the involvement of women with the development of religious institutions in medieval France, particularly the Premonstratensian Order, and on digital manuscript editions. She holds a BA in History, Ancient History and Archaeology from Trinity College Dublin; an MLitt in Medieval History from the University of St Andrews, Scotland; and a PhD in History from the University of Iowa.

THE CONCEPT OF THE *ordo* is an integral one to the study of medieval monasticism, whether conceived of as a normative way of life or a network of corporate relationships. Yet as many historians of women religious such as Constance Berman and Catherine Mooney have explored in recent years, it can be a highly problematic one. Who gets to define an *ordo*—in the Middle Ages or in contemporary scholarship? What makes a community's adherence to or membership of a particular *ordo* a legitimate one? Are men's voices always the dominant ones when it comes to shaping an *ordo*, or can there be parallel—even contradictory—definitions proposed by *continued~*

~continued female monastics? And why does assigning women's monasticism to a particular ordo seem to spark a kind of category anxiety still? This paper will explore these questions in a comparative mode, contrasting the history and historiography of the (supposedly) Cistercian community of Loughsewdy, County Westmeath with the (supposedly) ephemeral Premonstratensian female communities of northern France.

14.30 -15.10
'PARAGON(S) OF THE GAEL?': MEDIEVAL IRISHWOMEN~ PATRONAGE, PIETY, PROPAGANDA AND POWER.

DR GILLIAN KENNY

Trinity College Dublin

Gillian Kenny is a Research Associate at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies in Trinity College Dublin. Her specialism is women's lives in medieval

and early modern Ireland and particularly in cultural exchange between Gaelic and 'English' cultures on the island. She is also interested in the lives of those considered outsiders in the medieval world and is currently researching that topic. She has taught in both UCD and TCD and has appeared in and written on various historical topics both on TV and in newspapers/magazines as well as working on her own books and papers.

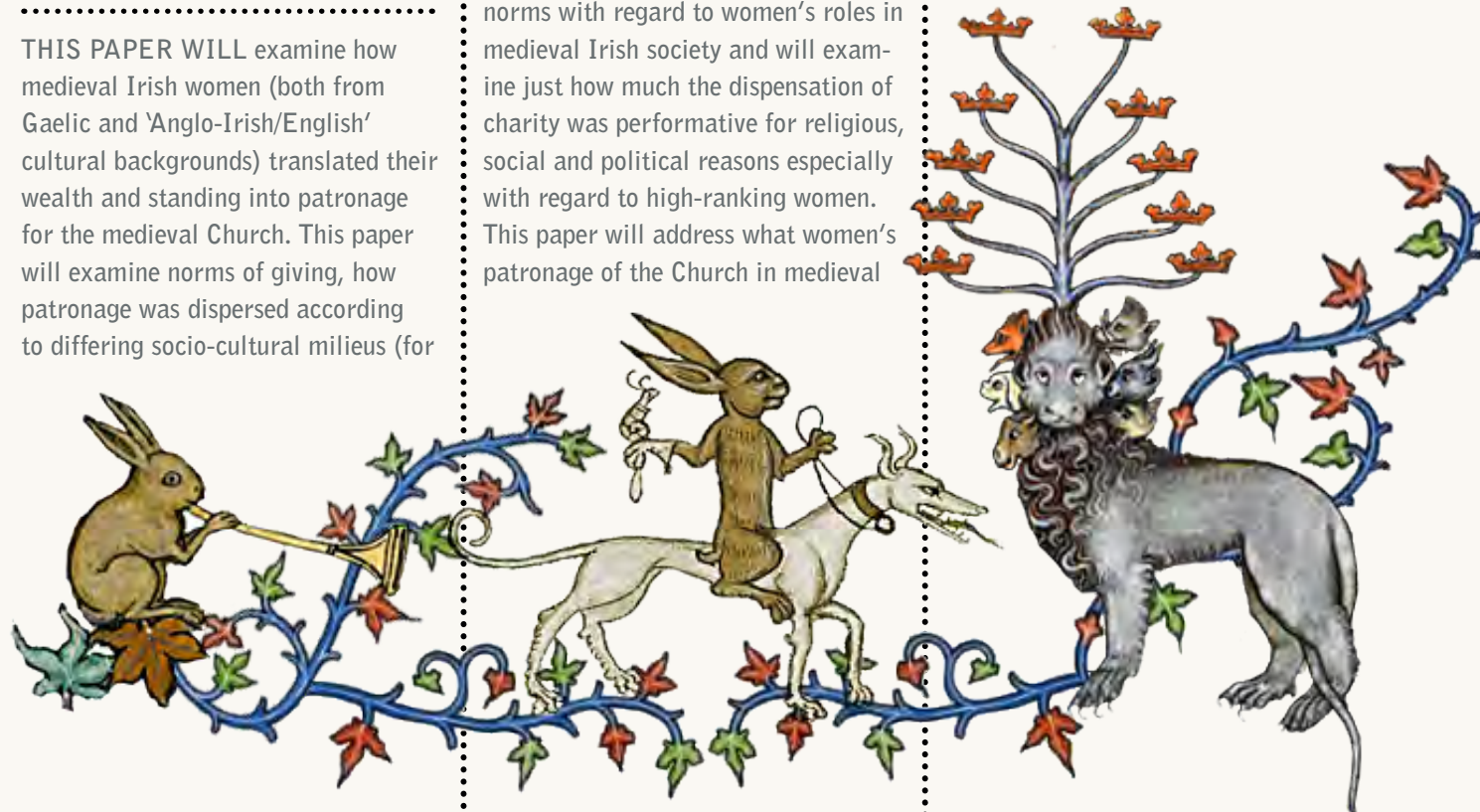
THIS PAPER WILL examine how medieval Irish women (both from Gaelic and 'Anglo-Irish/English' cultural backgrounds) translated their wealth and standing into patronage for the medieval Church. This paper will examine norms of giving, how patronage was dispersed according to differing socio-cultural milieus (for

example, which foundations and orders women chose to give to) as well as the reasons for their giving. Was their patronage always simply due to piety or was such patronage a valuable tool in an often-troubled political landscape? The political ramifications of patronage and its uses were often powerfully felt and expressed in medieval Ireland. The paper will also look at how female-led patronage fit with established cultural norms with regard to women's roles in medieval Irish society and will examine just how much the dispensation of charity was performative for religious, social and political reasons especially with regard to high-ranking women. This paper will address what women's patronage of the Church in medieval

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Ireland tells us about politics, family, power, the uses of propaganda and the effects of cultural interchange in the later medieval Irish world?



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SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 4**

15.40 -16.20 **KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY: FEMALE RELIGIOUS AND FAMILIAL RELATIONS IN LATE MEDIEVAL IRELAND.**

PROFESSOR MARIAN LYONS
Maynooth University

Marian Lyons, FRHS, is Professor of History at Maynooth University. She has published extensively on Franco-Irish relations and on Irish migration to continental Europe in the early modern period, as well as on various aspects of Irish history including the Kildare dynasty, religion in late medieval and early modern Ireland, women, and the emergence of professional medicine from the early 1600s onwards. Her recent publications include The Proclamations

of Ireland 1660–1820, edited with James Kelly (5 vols, Dublin, 2014), Representing Irish Religious Histories: Historiography, Ideology and Practice, edited with Jacqueline Hill (Cham, Switzerland, 2017) and 'The onset of religious reform: 1460-1550' in Brendan Smith (ed.), The Cambridge History of Ireland, I. 600-1550 (Cambridge, 2018).

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THIS PAPER explores the agendas and dynamics behind relationships between female religious, particularly abbesses and prioresses, and their families in both English and Gaelic districts of late medieval Ireland. Drawing on case studies of convents including Kilcreevanty (Galway) and Lismullen (Meath), the role of abbesses and prioresses in particular in bolstering their families' economic, political and social standing through their management of convent assets and patronage is highlighted. Since

..... relations were not always harmonious, the paper also examines the circumstances and motivations for the involvement of senior-ranking female religious, such as Alice Butler, abbess of Kilkulliheen convent (Kilkenny), in disputes with their families over their management of convents.

16.25 -17.05 **WOMEN ON THE MARGINS? VOWESSES, ANCHORESSES AND TERTIARIES IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND.**

DR COLMÁN Ó CLABAIGH OSB
Glenstal Abbey

Colmán Ó Clabaigh is a monk of Glenstal Abbey and a medievalist

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specialising in the history of monastic and religious orders in medieval Ireland. He is the author of The Friars in Ireland 1224–1540 (Dublin, 2012) and co-editor (with Martin Browne OSB) of Households of God: the Regular Canons and Canonesses of St Augustine and of Prémontré in Medieval Ireland (Dublin, 2019).

.....
UNTIL RECENTLY the historiography of monasticism has sought to impose order on disparate and contested origins. This is particularly evident in the treatment of female monasticism, particularly forms that defy ready categorization. This paper explores the evidence for such expressions in medieval Ireland by examining the lives of its anchoresses, vowesses and tertiaries who form an integral if elusive part of its rich monastic heritage.



Is mairt mairt fua we ceipis fupabys fuis 2ffru facte treamcefe

SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 5**

12.00 -12.40 SISTERS OF THE PRIORY CONFRATERNITY OF CHRIST CHURCH, DUBLIN, IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES.

PROFESSOR COLM LENNON
Maynooth University

Colm Lennon is professor emeritus of history at Maynooth University. He has researched and published in the field of society, culture and religion in early modern Ireland, and the history of Dublin. Among his publications are The Lords of Dublin in the Age of Reformation (Dublin, 1989); Sixteenth-Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest (Dublin, 1994),

and, Confraternities and Sodalities in Ireland: Charity, Devotion and Sociability (Dublin, 2012).

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THE BOOK OF OBITS of Christ Church cathedral contains the names of over 200 women who were enrolled as members of the late medieval confraternity associated with the cathedral priory. This paper examines the basis of their membership, especially the pattern of their benefaction of the cathedral, and their participation in the liturgical and devotional milieu of the priory. The extent to which the strength of the women's familial ties to the civic and mercantile community of Dublin may have contributed to the survival of the cathedral, if not the priory, at the Reformation is also assessed.

12.45 -13.25 *HORA DETERMINATA**: DOMINICAN NUNS AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY AMONG GALWAY CITY'S ELITE IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES.

ULTAN LALLY
National University of Ireland,
Galway

*'At the appointed hour': opening words of 'De Receptione ad Sanctum Habitum' in *Libellus... apud sorores secundi Ordinis S. Dominici*.

Ultan Lally is currently completing a PhD at NUIG on the Dominicans in Connacht in the seventeenth century. With his late father, Micheál Lally, he co-authored The Tan War in Ballyovey, South Mayo (2008).

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THE CESSATION of Catholic worship in St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, Galway, in the closing decades of the sixteenth century represented a catastrophe for the city's leading citizens, the so-called 'Tribes'. This loss however, inadvertently encouraged fresh avenues of pursuing the Old Faith, avenues notably followed by the numerous Galway women called to the religious life in subsequent decades.

By the 1640s, Augustinian, Dominican and Poor Clare nuns each possessed communities in Galway, making the town the most important centre of female monasticism in *continued~*



~continued Ireland and Britain at that juncture. A century later, Galway city's preeminent position in the context of female monasticism was still evident in its various religious communities.

The success of the Early Modern female religious of Galway depended on the support their respective foundations received from the 'Tribes' of the town. Most of the novices of the Dominican community of Jesus and Mary in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries hailed from 'Tribal' families associated with their native city for centuries. This paper examines how the Dominican Order offered its own particular monastic calling to the first three generations of Galwegian novices, women who would play a pivotal role in the religious inheritance of their native town, as well as subsequent Dominican female experience throughout Ireland.

SESSION PRESENTERS **SESSION 6**

14.00 -14.40 A REFLECTION: REMEMBERING MARGARET MACCURTAIN.

DR BRONAGH MCSHANE
National University of Ireland,
Galway

Bronagh McShane is a social historian specialising in the history of women, religion and confessionalisation in early modern Ireland and Europe. She completed her PhD (Irish Research Council-funded) at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth in 2015. She has published articles on aspects of her research in leading peer-reviewed journals, including British Catholic History, Archivium Hibernicum and the Journal of Historical Network Research. Between 2015 and 2018 Bronagh was employed as a postdoctoral researcher on the project 'RECIRC: The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550-1700',

directed by Professor Marie-Louise Coolahan and funded by the European Research Council. From 2018-2019, Bronagh held a National University of Ireland Research Fellowship in the Humanities at the Moore Institute, National University of Ireland, Galway. Her monograph, Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700, is forthcoming with Boydell and Brewer.

A REFLECTION on the life and scholarly contribution of the late Margaret Mac Curtain, Dominican sister, historian, author, and educator, by several her friends and colleagues.

11.45 - 12.25 LADIES OF FAME AND WOMEN WORTHY OF PRAISE.*

RT REVD ANNE DYER
Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney

* 'No one will reside except ladies of fame and women worthy of praise', Christine de Pisan, *City of Ladies* (1405).

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Anne Dyer is the Anglican bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, in the Scottish Episcopal Church. She is the first and only female bishop in Scotland. Previously she was the principal of an Anglican seminary in England, the first woman to hold such a position. Anne's research interest is the interface between theology and fine art, often lecturing on subjects related to the visual and material culture of women.

This paper reflects on the material presented in the conference considering the complexity of roles and identities through which women religious lived and worshipped. It examines how this diversity in being can result in the empowerment or disempowerment of female vocations, colluding with or challenging accepted religious norms.

