

Irish Community Archives Network

Local History: Research, Sources and Methods

Dr Tomas Mac Conmara

February – March 2022

LECTURE 1 & Lecture 2 Slides





Course Objectives



Support practitioners of local history research, who are members of the Irish Community Archive Network, focusing on:



(1) Research, Preparation and Sources



(2) Context and Analysis



(3) Presentation and Writing Skills

Lecture 1



Discussion of participant aims



Sources for local history



Place and History



Planning research



Maintaining records



Referencing & Source Citation 1

Lecture 2



Referencing & Source Citation 2



Time and research



Understanding Sources



Potential drawbacks with sources



Analysing sources

Lecture 3

Using Local Archives & Rules and Policies

Comprehensive searching

Optimising your search

Archive Sampling

Discussion on

Contribution from guest Archivist



Lecture 4

Oral History, Personal Testimony
and tradition

Interview dynamics

Sample audio and analysis

Using oral history and memory

Lecture 5



The Written Record



Writing and Publishing



Creating a plan for a written piece



Characteristics of a well written history

Lecture 6



Review of key learning outcomes



Feedback and class exercises



Contribution to history



About the Course



All lectures will be recorded and made available to participants



Responsive



Participatory



Please ask questions

Course Outcomes

Identify	Identify key primary sources for the study of local history
Engage	Critically engage with a range of primary sources, visual, documentary and oral.
Illustrate	Illustrate an understanding of key methodological issues.
Demonstrate	Demonstrate a familiarity with key phases in the historical development of their region/subject area
Illustrate	Illustrate an understanding of local history from a variety of perspectives (social, cultural, economic and political).
Understand	Understand where local history sits within the broader field
Appreciate	Appreciate the importance of a coherent and credible presentation of findings

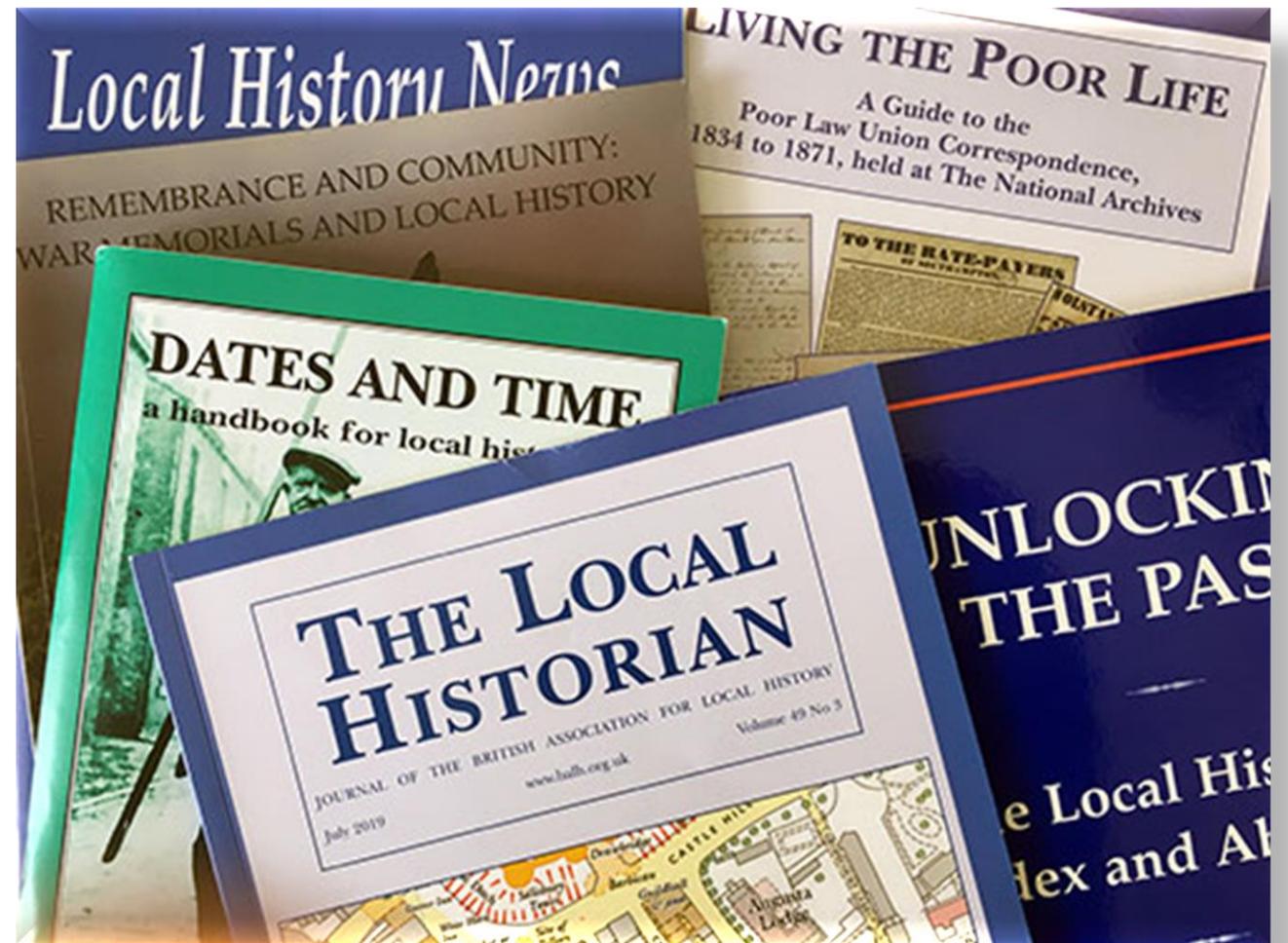
Why Are you
really here?



Local History

- What is local history?
- Is there a hierarchy?
- National to local
- Place
- The feeling of a community
- Difference between knowledge and understanding

- What is the purpose and value of **YOUR** work?



'His feeling for it'

'His feeling for it. He is at one with it. As he makes his way towards some appointed hillside or hidden nook, the names of the rocks, the wells, the streams, the cumars he encounters seem almost to sing to him: their associations, their very dressings of moss, or holly, or basil, he almost fondles. It is obvious they always have been part of his consciousness, of the depths of it; one and all they cannot now but counterpoint the excitement that is possessing him ... such scholarship as it needs is also in the possession of his every neighbour in this Irish speaking countryside.'

'They remind us that the tensions that still stir in our depths are not due to the discussions of historians but the remembrance of very living local instances: the grabbing of territories, the laments of poets, the desecration of holy places, previous attempts at insurrection.'

Daniel Corkery, Foreward to O'Suilleabháin, Mícheál, *Where Mountainy men have sown, War and peace in rebel Cork in the turbulent years 1916-21*, (Kerry, 1965), pp. 8-9.





Place

- Makes the past present in a certain way
- The *genius loci* (guardian spirit of a place)
- One of deepest needs is for identity and belonging
- Human attachment to landscape
- We find identity in landscape and place.
- Landscape is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing
- We see it with our eye but interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to landscape for intangible – spiritual – reasons.

Features Of
Local
Landscape
(that can be a
focus of
research)

Canals

Trains

Walls

Historical development

Historical events

Landlords – Dynamics

Cultural memory

Trees

Bridges/Boundaries

Influences
(on the
course of
local history)

Events

Religion

Immigration/Emigration

Change

Personality

Leadership

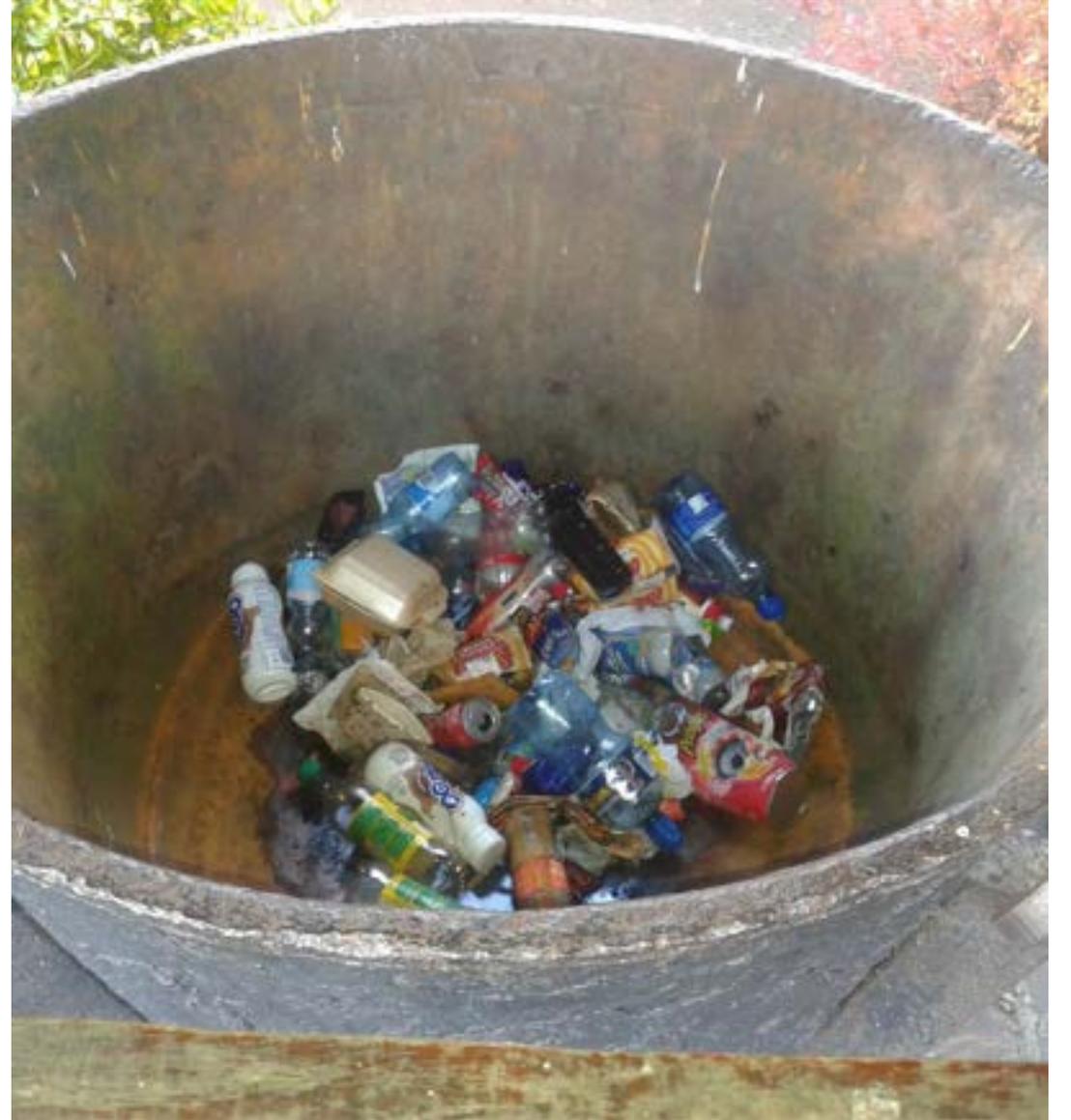
Industry

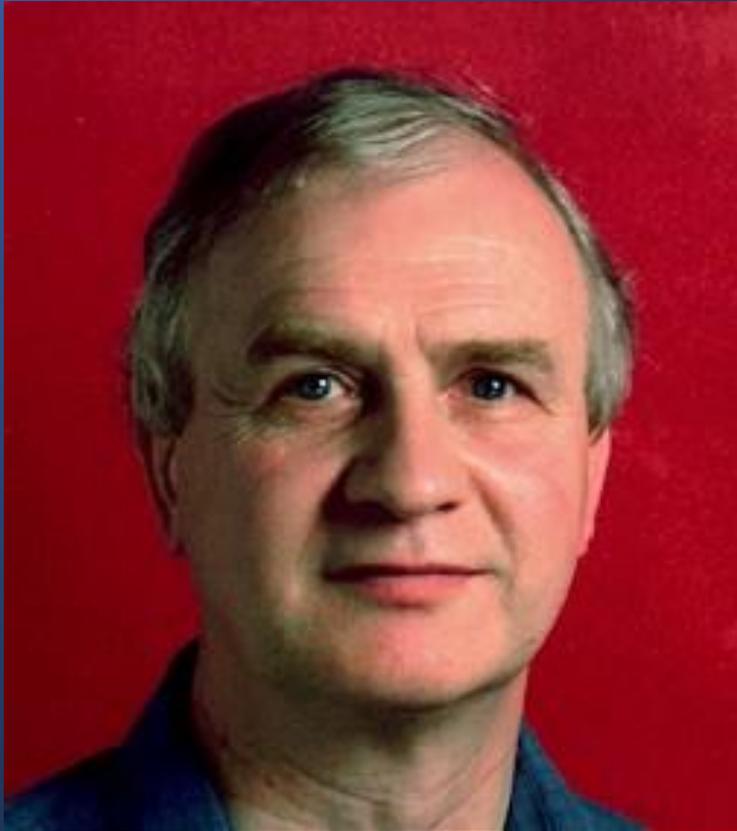
Cultural Influence

Cultural Identity

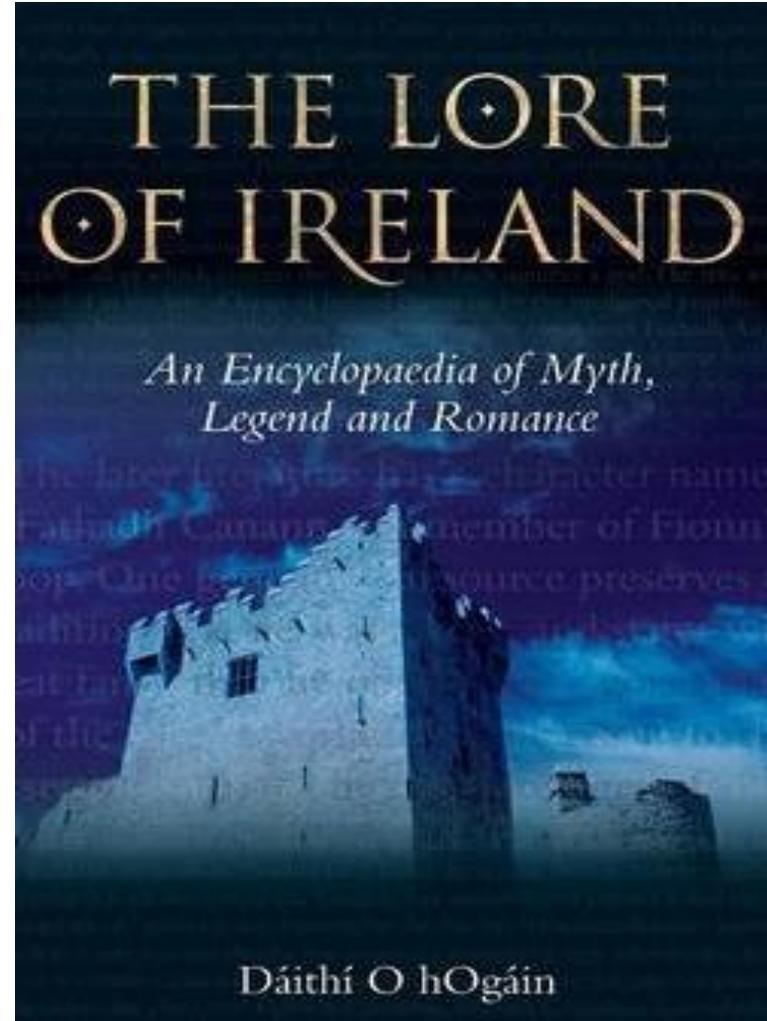








- Value of great nineteenth-century local studies (Carrigan's history of the diocese of Ossory) was their encyclopaedic knowledge of the source material for their own area.'









Start at the beginning

What can go wrong with local histories ?

1. No clear thesis
2. Poor structure
3. Lack of background research
4. Little analysis
5. Sources are questionable
6. Using evidence uncritically
7. Sloppy with chronology
8. Quote excessively & improperly
9. Failure to underline findings
10. Unsupported generalisations
11. No proofreading
12. Wordy
13. Anachronistic moralising
14. No author given
15. Poor or no referencing/citation

Problematic attitudes

- Starting out with a conclusion
- Objectivity
- Presumption of detail
- Any secondary source will do ...
- Timing
- Overdependency on a name
- rely overly on sources without interpretation or explanation.

Planning Your Research

What topic are you trying to research?

Choice of topic is critical

Best research is driven by a desire or a need to research

You need at the beginning are two things:

- (a) a problem that you are genuinely interested in
- (b) a specific issue, controversy, period, person, etc. that is likely to offer a fruitful way forward for exploring your problem.

In the early stages, it's often a good idea to be general about (a) and very specific about (b).



Steps

- Desktop research (Record Keeping!)
- Visit your **local** studies library.
- Visit your **local** museum.
- Visit your **local** archives.
- Join a **local history** society.



General to Specific



Perspective



Keep the big picture in mind



Consider where your subject/theme sits within that bigger picture



As you progress your research, you should be narrowing in on your central theme



Think about broad trends and cultural themes that impacted the subjects you're studying

Keep Records/Take Notes



Always take notes!



When researching historical or cultural phenomena, you will be bombarded by facts



Keep information manageable - develop a note-taking habit.



Keep hard copy journals



Create digital files and add and develop – file name clearly



Physcological benefit to good record keeping



Reference/Reference/Reference

Planning Your research – Steps

Begin collecting basic facts about person/topic you are interested in.

Background reading about period to contextualise archival sources.

In person research comes later

Investigate secondary to find primary

Confirm their location prior to in person research

Considerations



Don't try find out everything about your topic: pick aspects that are likely to prove most fruitful for the direction of your research



Remember the best history almost always depends on developing new approaches and interpretations, not on knowing about a secret archive.

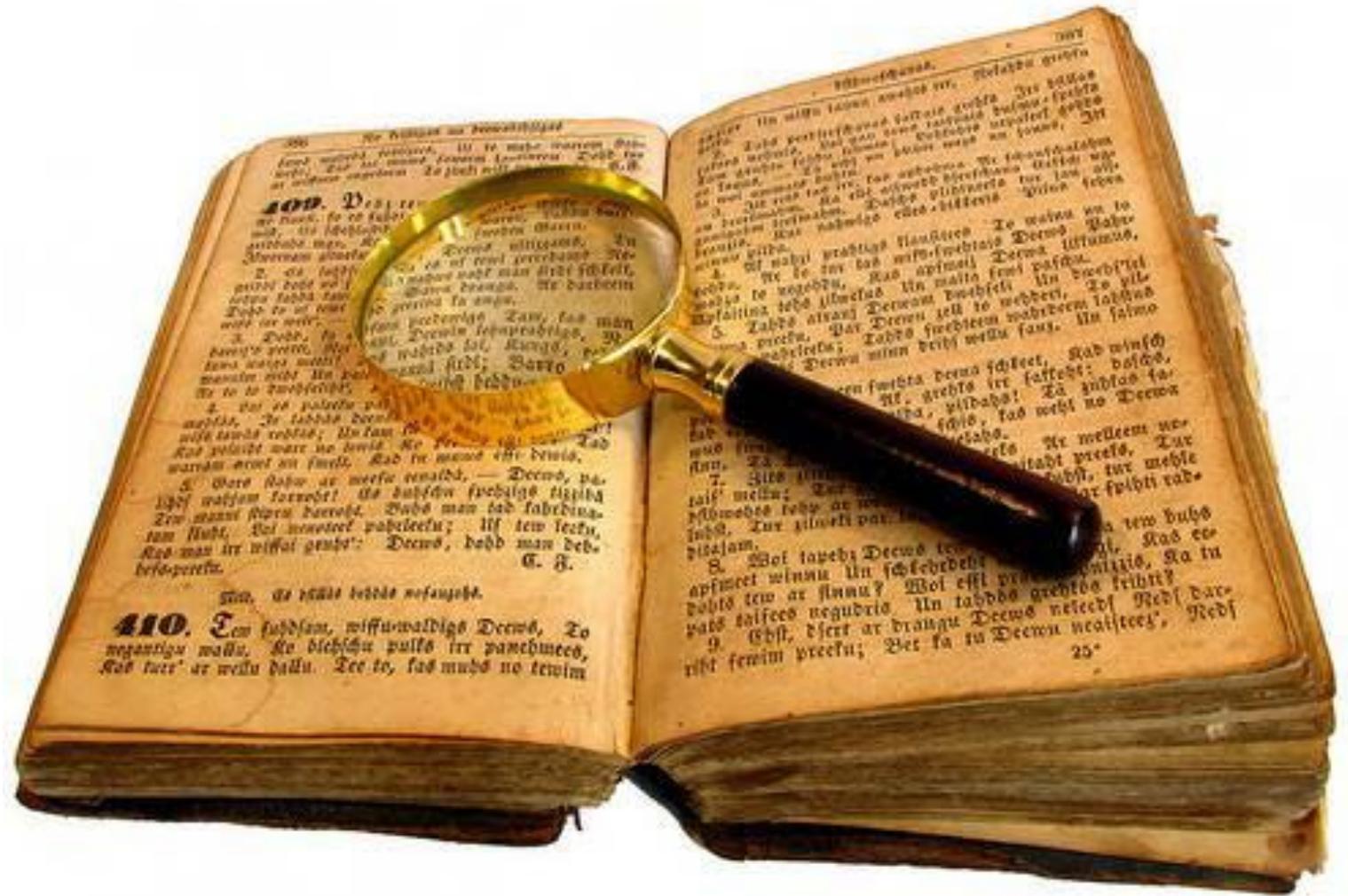


As you become familiar with topic, you are likely to find evidence you dug out at the beginning of your project is more significant than you thought it was.



You are never more prepared to begin than when you are ending!

Sources



Sources for Local History

- New avenues - Effective use of non-documentary sources such as oral history folklore, architecture and visual material.
- The smallest geo unit (townland) can be fount of immense information with intensive trawl through surviving evidence
- How this material can be meaningfully interpreted and attractively presented.
- SOURCES

Printed and online guides
Secondary sources (books, journal articles, etc.)

Hardcopy guides

- Richard J. Hayes (ed.), *Sources for the history of Irish civilisation : articles in Irish periodicals* (9 vols., Boston, 1970)

Bibliographies

- See for example the various volumes of *A new history of Ireland* (Oxford)
- Local bibliographies sometimes exist

Secondary Sources



When beginning research project, go to the source by reading, viewing, or listening to historical documents from the era you are studying.



Secondary sources like history textbooks can be fantastic resources



They still reflect the biases of their authors.



Good research rely more on primary documents than secondary sources (but not always).

Finding
PRIMARY SOURCES
in History



Tuesday, April 12, 12:15 - 1:05

Consult primary sources

- A primary source is something that was written, filmed, or recorded during the era you are studying
- Letter
- Treaty
- Photograph - visual culture and historical evidence (L 3)
- Newspaper article
- Government documents
- Oral history from someone who lived during the time period.

Remember Colleagues and Peer Groups



Referencing/Citations



Why are references/citations important?



DOES YOUR WORK AND EFFORT
JUSTICE



DOES THE SUBJECT YOU EXPLORE
JUSTICE



UNDERMINES THE WORK OF THE
HISTORIAN BY PLACING DOUBT IN
THE MIND OF THE READER



GIVES PROPER CREDIT TO THE
AUTHORS OF THE WORDS OR IDEAS
THAT YOU INCORPORATED INTO YOUR
RESEARCH.

Continued...



Allows those who reading your work to locate your sources, in order to learn more about the ideas that you include in your research.



Citing your sources consistently and accurately helps you avoid committing plagiarism in your writing.



No **historian** ever works in isolation; scholarly inquiry is an endeavour carried on within a community of **historians**.

Review



- Your aim/ambition
- Place
- Local History
- Planning
- Record Keeping
- Sources
- Referencing
- Enjoy your work!

Irish Community Archives Network

Local History: Research, Sources and Methods

Dr Tomas Mac Conmara

February – March 2022

LECTURE 2





Review and discussion



Referencing & Source Citation 2



Understanding Sources



An Image as a Source



Obair Bhaile

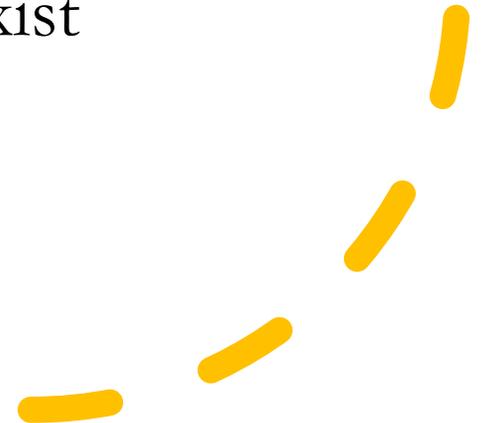
Printed and
online guides
Secondary
sources (books,
journal articles,
etc.)

Hardcopy guides

- Richard J. Hayes (ed.), *Sources for the history of Irish civilisation : articles in Irish periodicals* (9 vols., Boston, 1970)

Bibliographies

- See for example the various volumes of *A new history of Ireland* (Oxford)
- Local bibliographies sometimes exist



Examples

- *Irish Historical Studies (IHS)* guidelines
- <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/57597b33fdacd191593ca09e/IHS-rules-for-contributors.pdf>
- Forename Surname, *Book title* (Place, Year), p. xx.
In Bibliography:
 - Surname, Forename, Book title, (publisher, place, year)
- If you are referencing a journal article, it will look like:
- Forename Surname, 'Article title' in *Journal title*, Volume (Year), pp xx-xx.



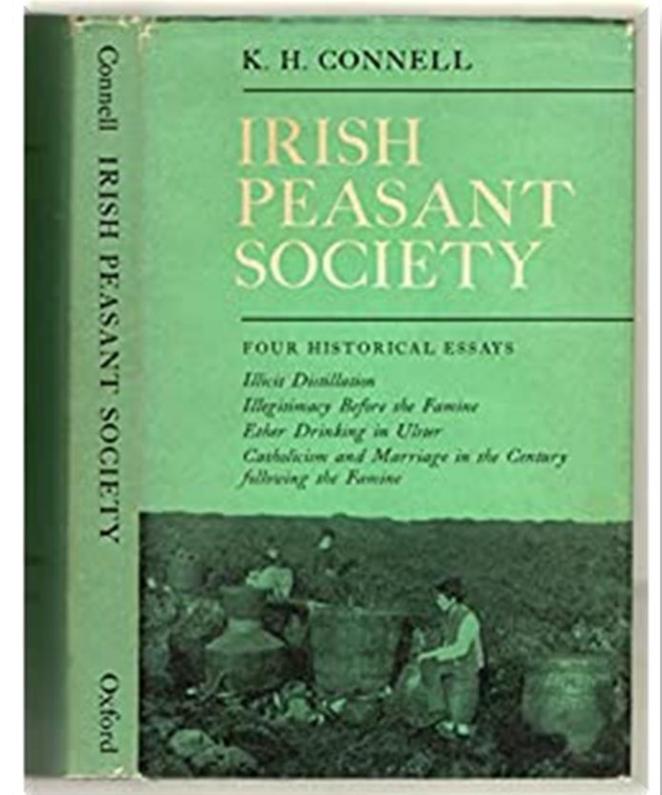
Example of footnoting a book

First name Surname, *Title of book in italics* (place, date of publication), p. numbers.

K. H. Connell, *Irish peasant society* (Oxford, 1968), pp 2-4.

Subsequent references of same source:

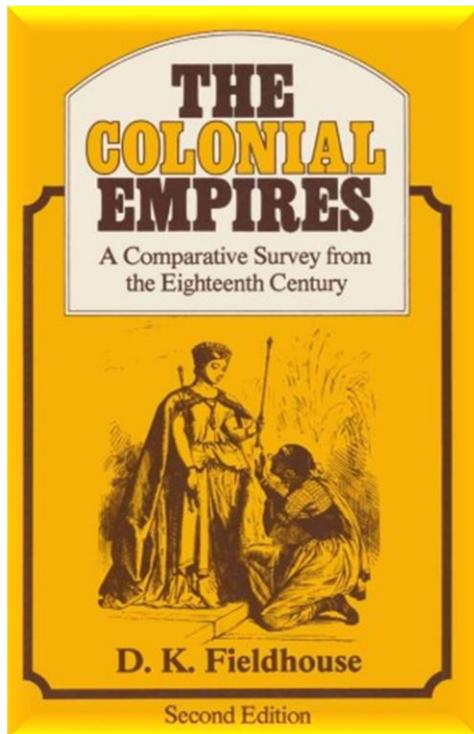
Connell, *Irish Peasant Society*, p xx



Example of footnoting a book – 2

First name Surname, *Title of book in italics* (place, date of publication), p. numbers.

D. K. Fieldhouse, *The colonial empires: a comparative survey from the eighteenth century* (2nd ed., Basingbroke, 1982), p. 12.



Subsequent references of same source:

Fieldhouse, *The colonial empires*, p xx

Footnoting an article

First name Surname, ‘Title of article in single inverted commas’ in *Title of journal in italics*, vol number, issue number (date), page numbers.

C. Whyte, “‘Freedom but nothing else’: the legacies of slavery and abolition in post-slavery Sierra Leone, 1928-1956’ in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 48, 2 (2015), pp 231-50.

Subsequent references of same source:

White, ‘*Freedom but nothing else*’, p xx

Citing a web article or website

- Name of the author
- Year of publication
- Title - in italics followed by '[online]'
- Details of publication - volume number etc
- Website address (URL)
- Date the resource was accessed - e.g. [Accessed 7 October 2005].

Secondary Sources



When beginning research project, go to the source by reading, viewing, or listening to historical documents from the era you are studying.



Secondary sources like history textbooks can be fantastic resources



They still reflect the biases of their authors.



Good research rely more on primary documents than secondary sources (but not always).

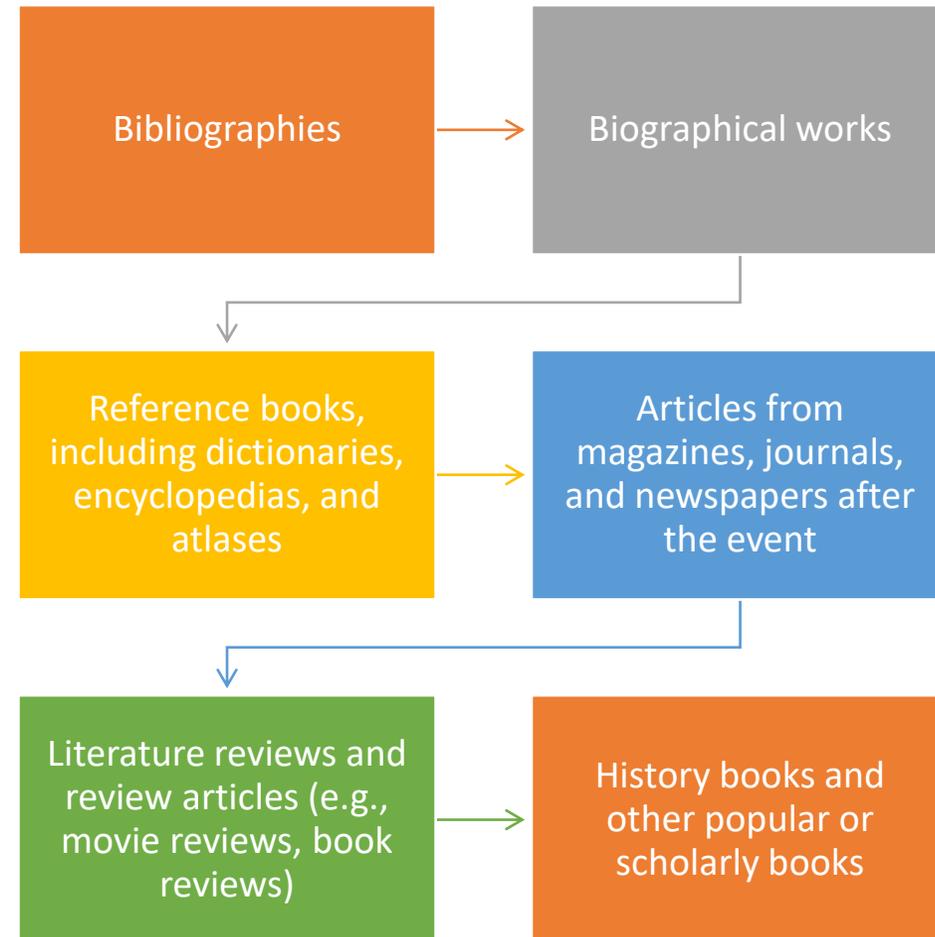
Secondary sources

Second-hand information and commentary from other researchers.



Describes, interprets, or synthesizes primary sources.

Examples of Secondary Sources



Finding
PRIMARY SOURCES
in History



Tuesday, April 12, 12:15 - 1:05

Consult primary sources

Something that was written, filmed, or recorded during the era you are studying

Letter

Treaty

Photograph - visual culture and historical evidence (L 3)

Newspaper article

Government documents

Oral history from someone who lived during the time period.

Remember Colleagues and Peer Groups



Should we
believe
everything
we read?



TOM REILLY
CROMWELL

An Honourable Enemy

"A terrific job of research to make a case for Cromwell
against the verdict of history."

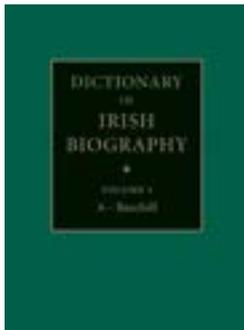
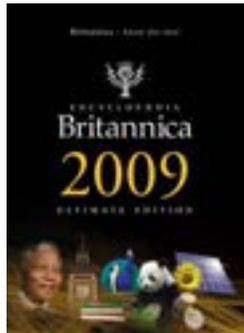
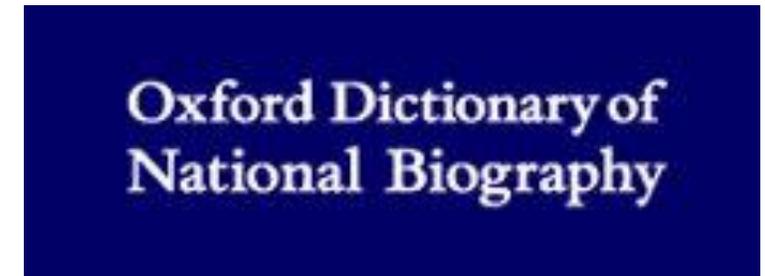
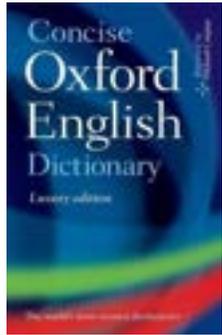
IRISH INDEPENDENT



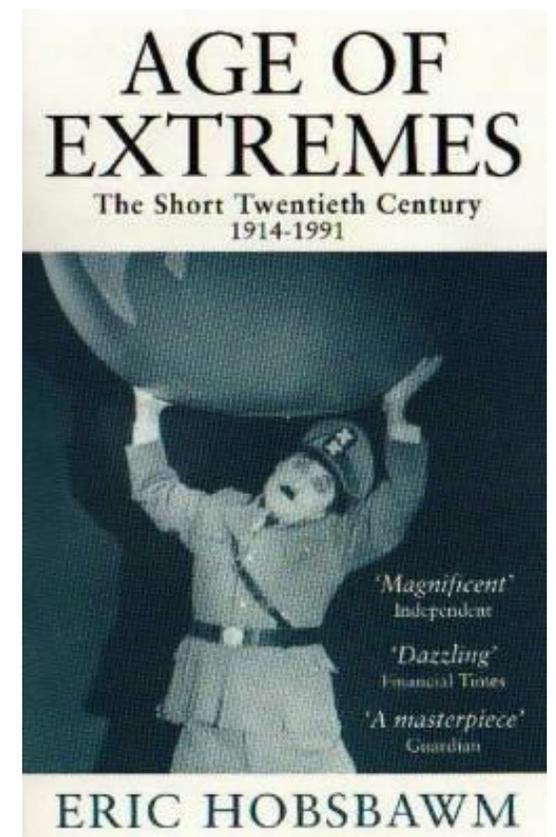
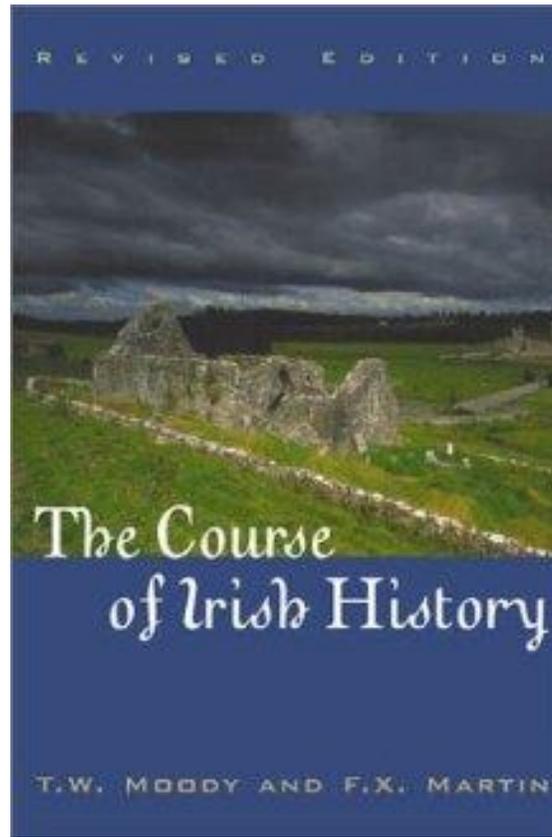
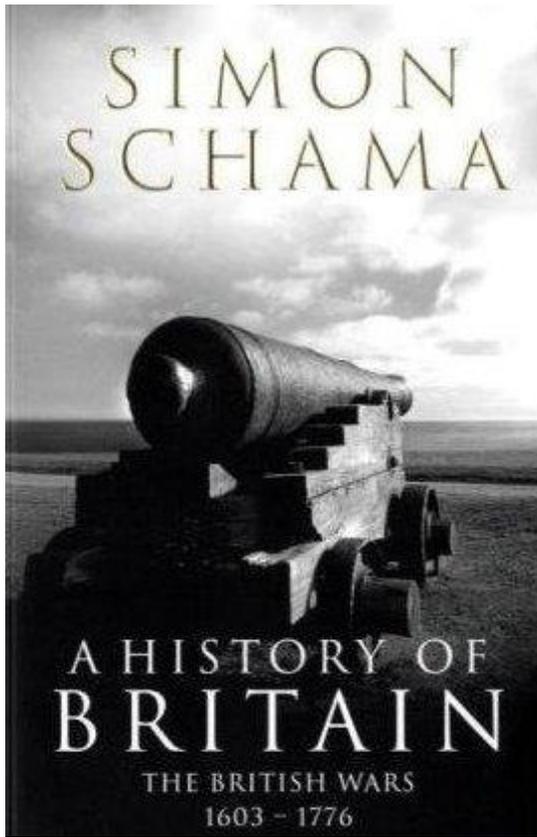
**GOD'S
EXECUTIONER**

Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland

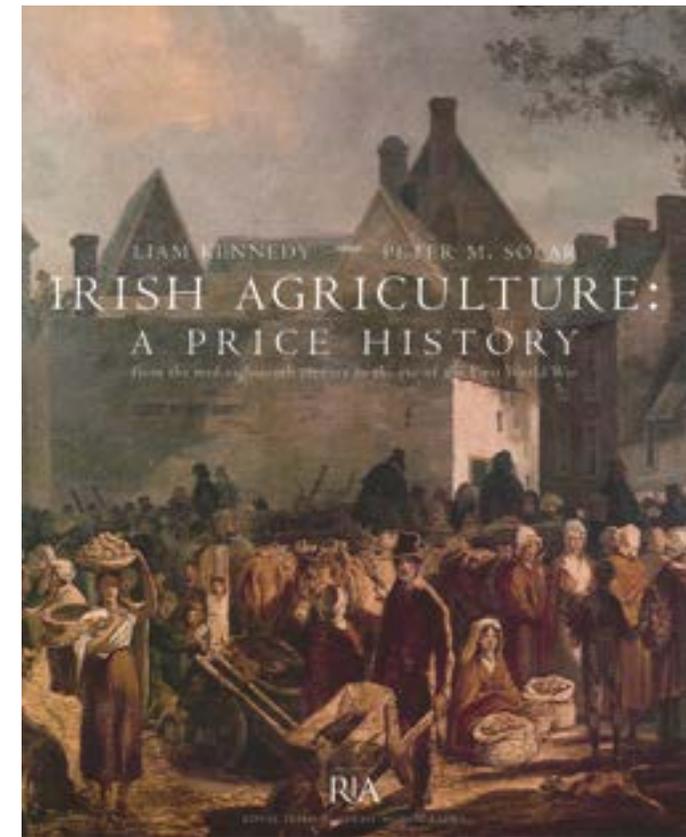
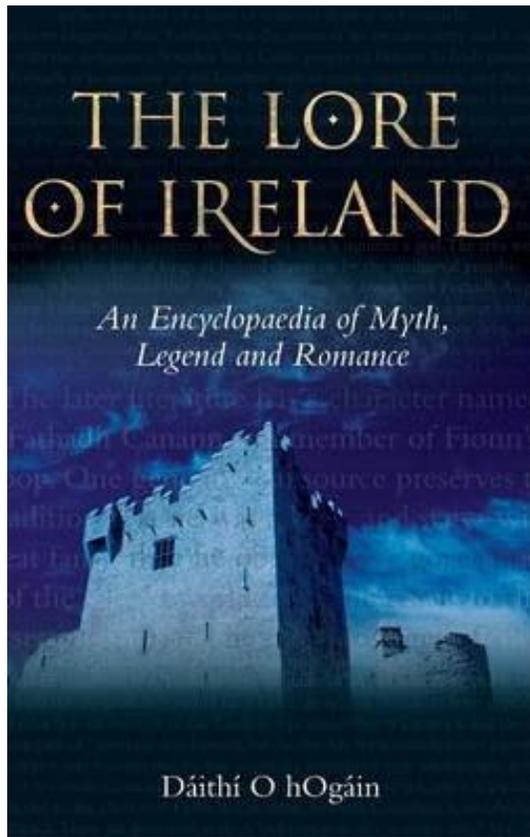
MICHEÁL Ó SIOCHRÚ



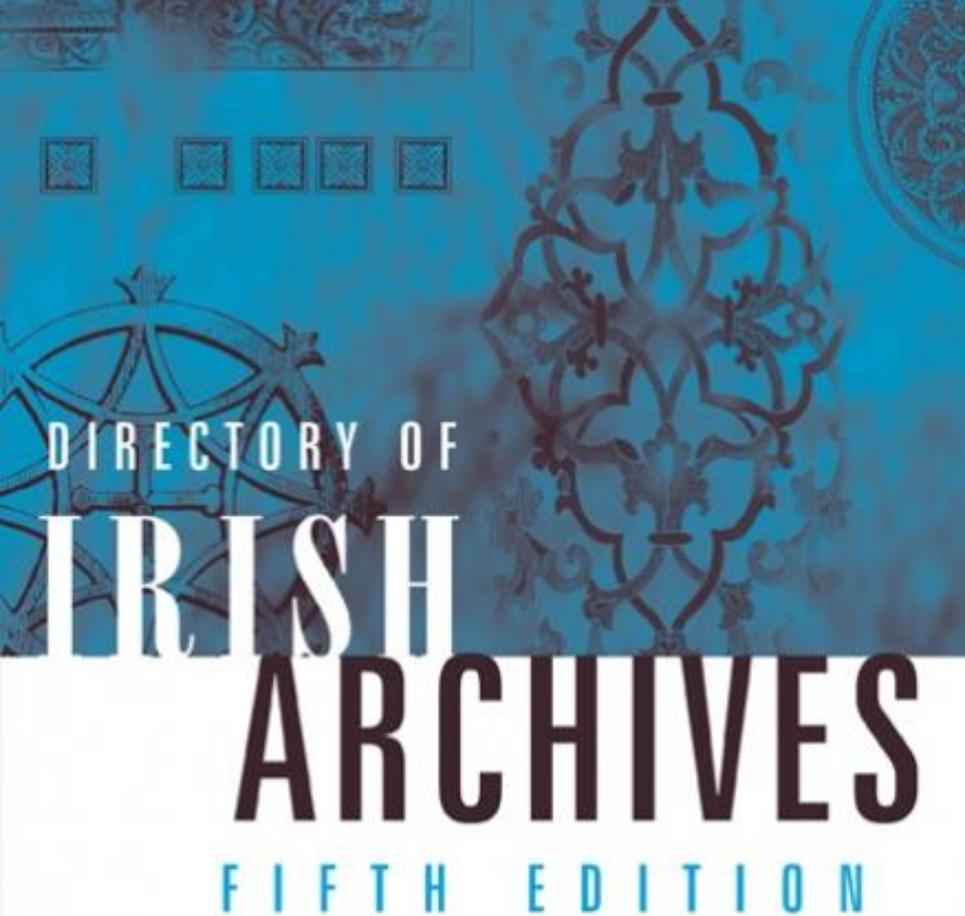
Works of reference



Surveys of general history

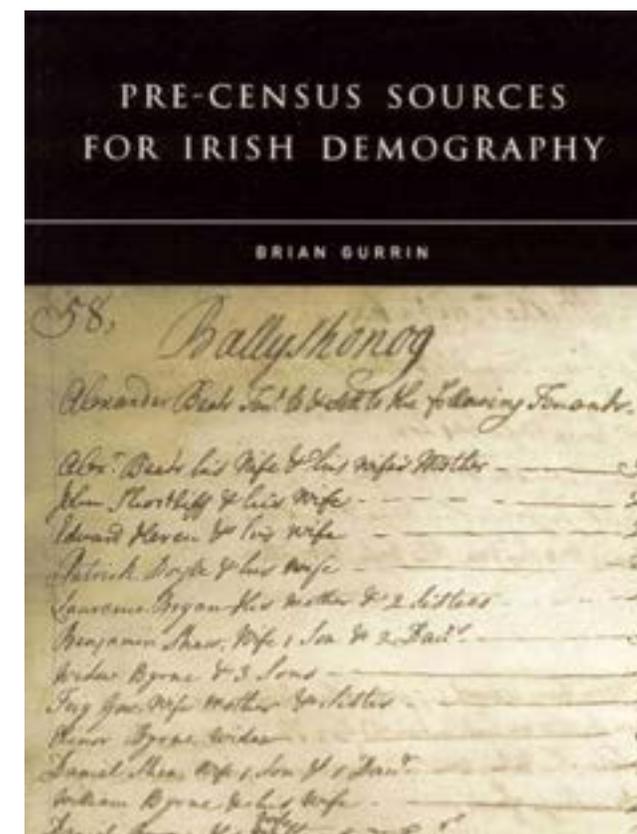
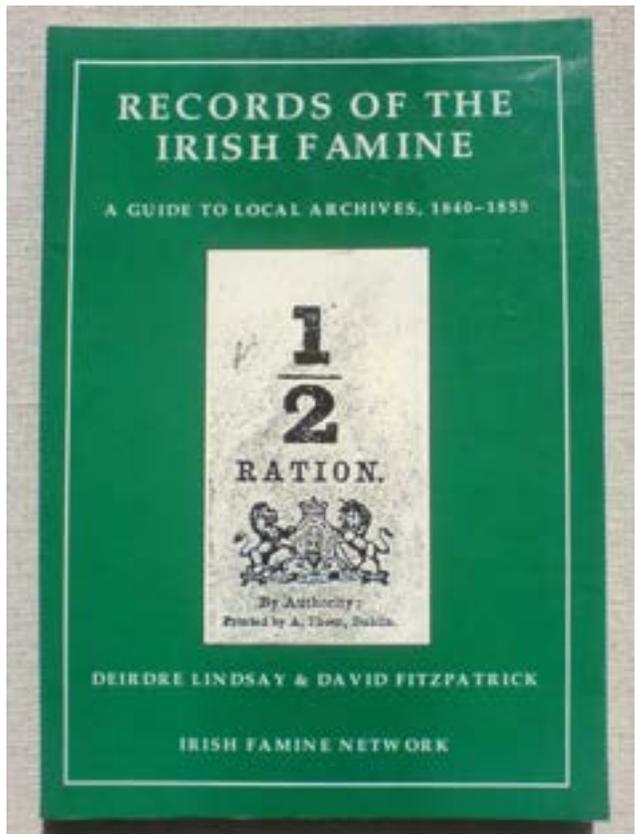
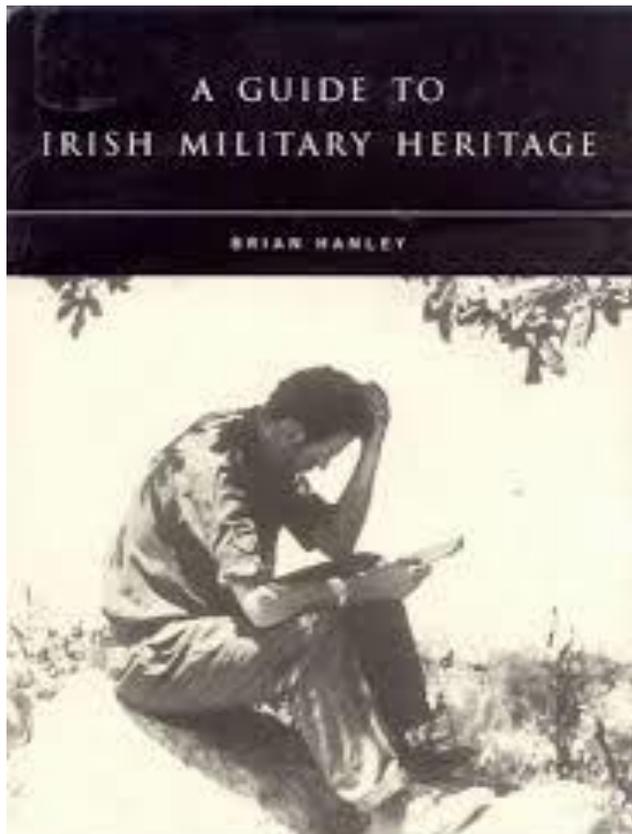


Monograph (book)



- S. Helferty and R. Refausse (eds), *Directory of Irish archives* (Dublin, 2004)

- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/ - directory of British, Irish and worldwide archives



Guides to Sources

Archive
guides
(sometimes
know as
libguides):

Landed Estate records

<https://www.nationalarchives.ie/article/guide-landed-estate-records/>

Multiple guides to the sources of The National Archives, London.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/#find-a-research-guide>

Library of Congress research guides

<https://guides.loc.gov/>

German Archives Guide

<http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/reading/Archives/germanarchivesnew.htm>



Finding primary sources in archives

Catalogues

- mostly online (but some only in hardcopy)
- Could be multiple types of catalogues
- Items not catalogued (ask)



Online catalogues

- <http://www.a2a.org.uk>
- Access to archives provides a searchable catalogue of archives in Britain and Ireland

- www.proni.gov.uk
- contains vast amount of Irish official and family papers

- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- contains ten million descriptions of documents

- www.limerickcity.ie/archives
- mostly official corporation papers

SOURCES

A NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND
DATABASE FOR IRISH RESEARCH

BETA

[All Fields](#) [FIND](#)

Start searching the National Library's database for Irish research, or find out more.

ABOUT

[Contents](#)
[Background](#)
[The Project](#)

BROWSE

[by Archive](#)
[by Journal](#)
[by Subjects](#)

HELP & TOOLS

[Help](#)
[In your browser](#)

FEEDBACK

[Contact us](#)
[Send us feedback](#)
[Report an error](#)

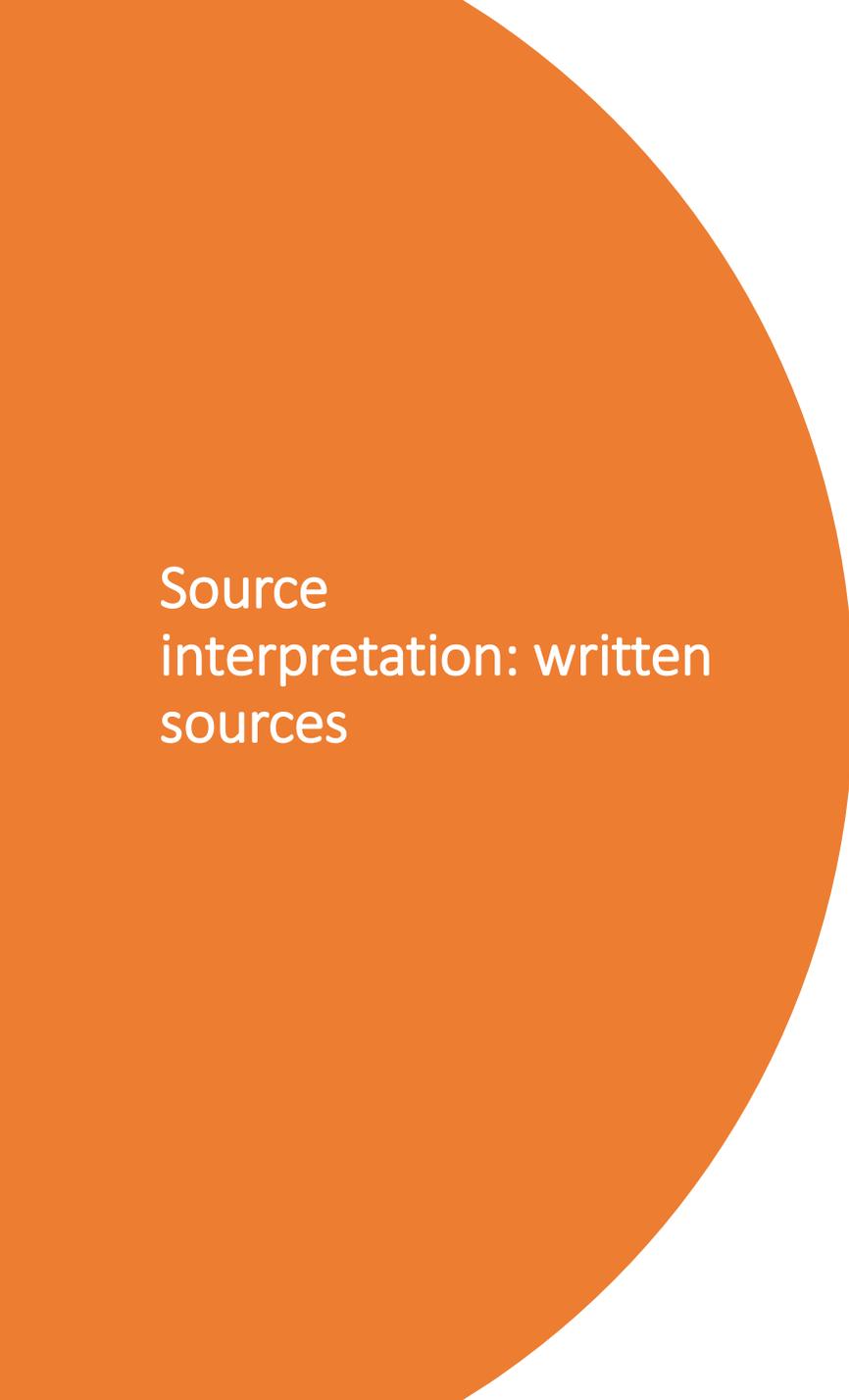


How do you find
sources?

Look for them



Now that you have
found them?



Source
interpretation: written
sources

- Identify the source.
 - Is it primary or secondary?
 - Who wrote it?
 - When was it written?
 - What kind of document is it?
 - Where was it published?
 - How widely was it circulated?
 - What is it about?
- 

'Close Reading'

- What claims does the author make?
- What evidence does the author use?
- What language (words, phrases, images,) does author use to persuade the document's audience?
- How does the document's language indicate the author's perspective?



Considerations

- Who wrote this?
- What is the author's perspective?
- Why was it written?
- When was it written?
- Where was it written?
- Is this source reliable? Why? Why not?



Contextualization

- Locate a document in time and place and to understand how these factors shape its content.
- When and where was the document created?
- What was different then?
- What was the same?
- How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?



Put it in its context

- What events had happened or were happening when this was written? Specifically, what was happening where this was written?
 - Who was the intended audience and what bias might they have had?
 - Consider their race, gender, religion, nationality, heritage, party affiliation, socio-economic class, and their job.
- 

Continued

- Is the author trying to persuade, incite, enlighten, explain or deceive their audience?
- Why was it written and for whom?
- Was the author paid to write this? Or bribed or threatened?
- Where did it first appear: a newspaper, a diary, a letter or a propaganda flyer?

Using Images as sources

Pros

- Captures a moment in time in a visual medium
- Quickly and concisely informs about people, places, objects, and events
- Provides information that is difficult to convey through written formats (fashion, decor, art, etc.)
- Sometimes records details of everyday life of people that are not captured in written records
- Can evoke memories and/or emotions in the viewer

Cons

- People, place, date, and the name of the photographer are often not identified
- May reflect the bias or perspective of the photographer
- Photographs must be studied in conjunction with other evidence.
- Photographs are taken for different purposes. Not all photographs were taken with documentary intent and some are heavily manipulated

ANALYSING IMAGES

‘Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us, without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable....The whole process of observing, describing, repeating and then imagining has been accomplished.’

- Walter Lippmann



When examining an image?



Content



Origin



Motive



Analysis

Considerations

- Identify the source.
- Was the artist an eyewitness or is this image secondary?
- Who created it?
- When was it created?
- What medium is it?
- What is it portraying?
- Where was it published?
- Who would have seen this image?
- How long after the actual event portrayed was the image created?
- Who was the intended audience and what bias might they have had?



Considerations

Is there a caption or a title? Is it captured in a particular style? If yes, what associations can you make with this style?



What does the scenery, the action, the people and the details tell you about this period in time?



What is the overall theme?



Continued

- How similar is it to other images from the same period?
 - If it is unusual for its period, why might the artist have chosen to be different? What assumptions does the author make?
 - Is the author expecting any resulting action, feeling or opinion from the audience?
- 

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Captures a moment in time in a visual medium
- Quickly and concisely informs about people, places, objects, and events
- Provides information that is difficult to convey through written formats (fashion, decor, art, etc.)
- Sometimes records details of everyday life of people that are not captured in written records
- Can evoke memories and/or emotions in the viewer

Weaknesses:

- People, place, date, and the name of the photographer are often not identified
- May reflect the bias or perspective of the photographer
- Photographs must be studied in conjunction with other evidence. Without context, a photo may be interesting but not informative.
- Photographs are taken for different purposes. Not all photographs were taken with documentary intent and some are heavily manipulated
- Many decades of photographs are in black-and-white or the color has faded and is no longer accurate

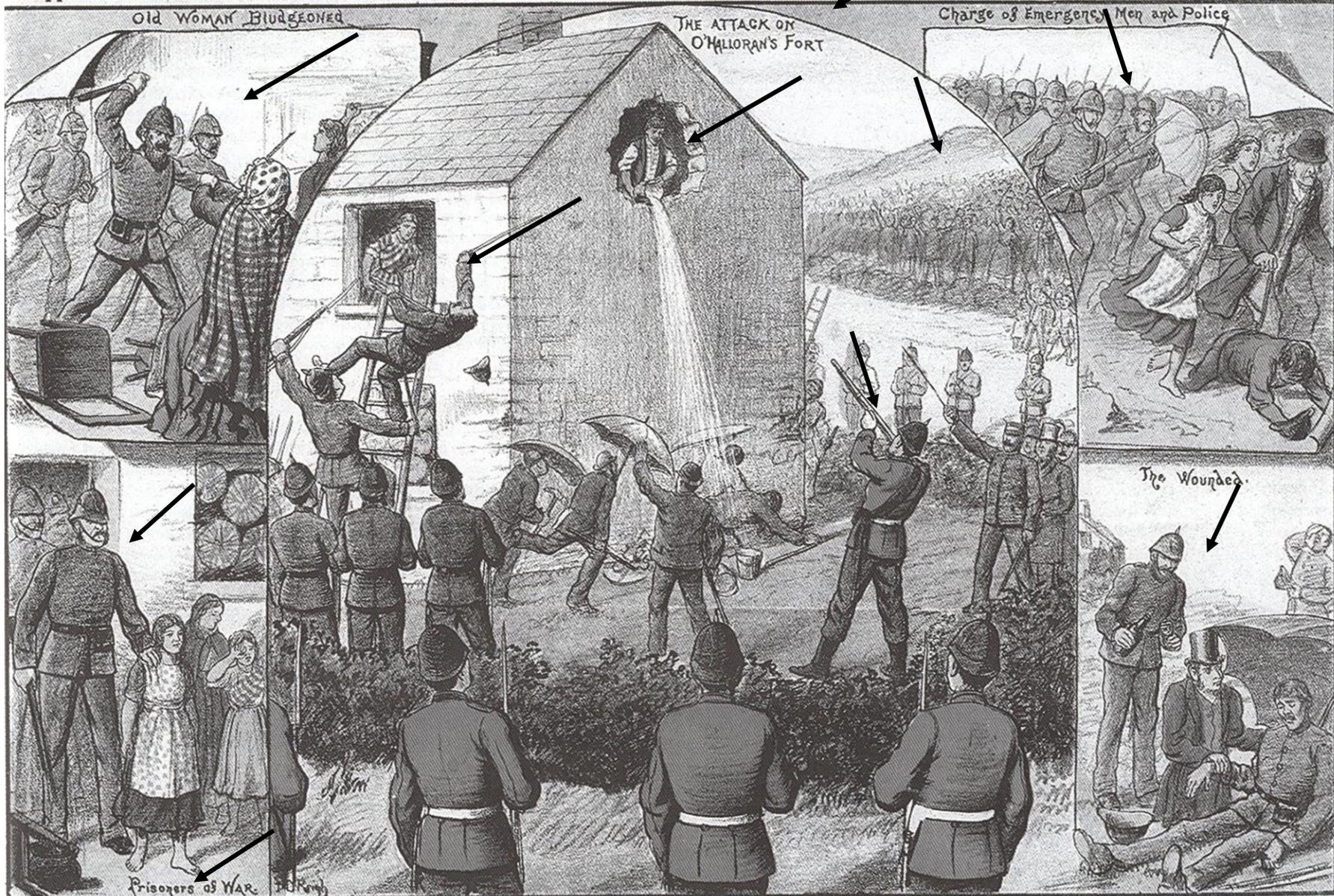


Lawrence Collection Eblana 2662

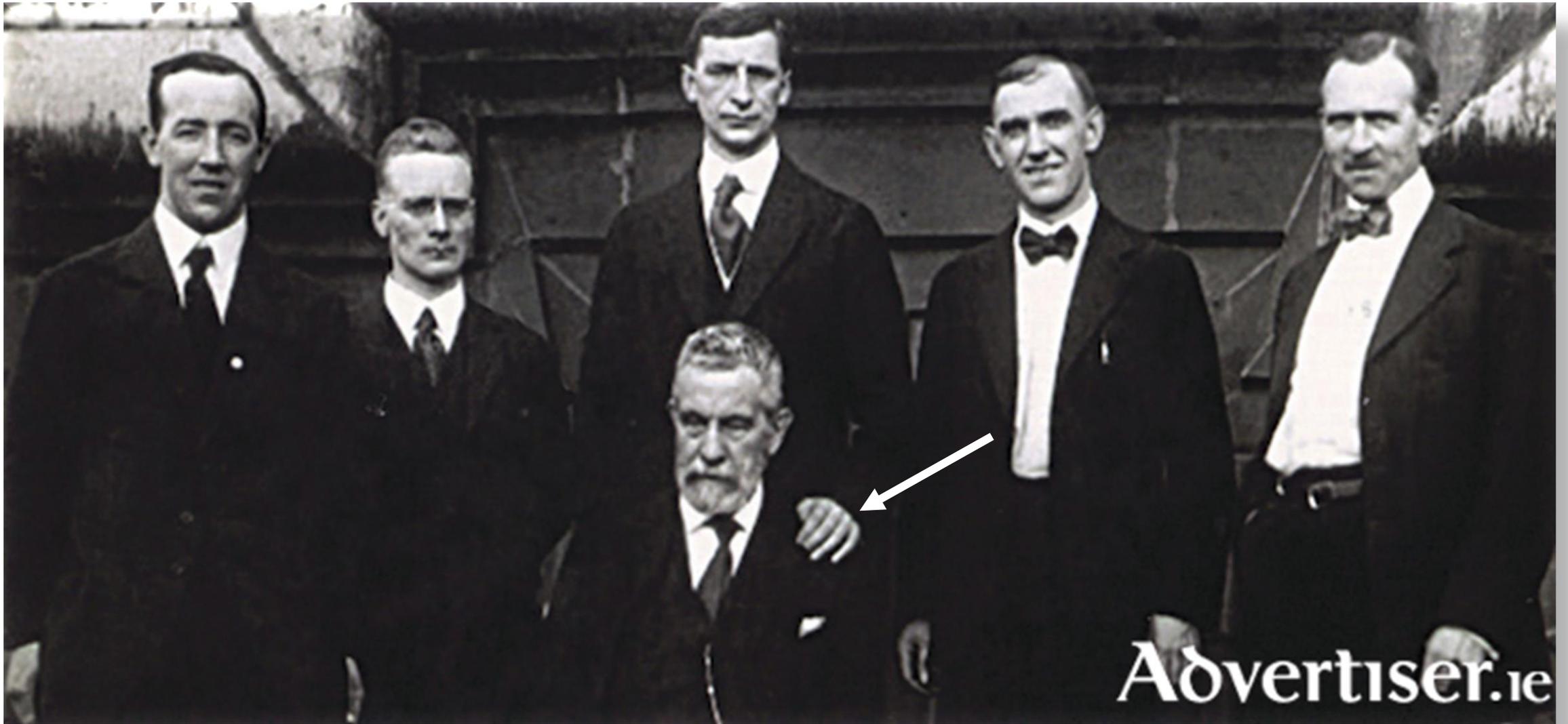
Supplement Gratis with

“UNITED IRELAND.”

Saturday, June 18th, 1887.



BODYKE EVICTION SCENES.



Advertiser.ie



Obair Bhaile