

The Medical World of Early Modern Ireland, 1500-1750
The Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin, 3-4 September 2015

Abstracts

Session One

Marc Caball (University College Dublin)

Transforming tradition in the British Atlantic: Patrick Browne (c.1720-1790), an Irish botanist and physician in the West Indies

This paper will review the career of the Mayo-born physician and botanist Patrick Browne whose research and writings on the botany of the West Indies constituted a pioneering contribution to science in the eighteenth century. Having initially sojourned in Antigua, Browne subsequently studied medicine in Paris and Leiden and practised at London's St Thomas Hospital before returning to the West Indies (1746-55), living first in Antigua and settling in Jamaica. Working as a doctor, Browne also extensively studied the latter island's flora and fauna. His research formed the basis of his *Civil and natural history of Jamaica* (1756). However, it is argued in this paper that Browne is culturally significant not just because of his Caribbean research. On his retirement to the family estate near Ballinrobe, Browne published a study of plants in Galway and Mayo listing their names in Latin, English and Irish (1788). Browne's experience provides a fascinating case study of an eighteenth-century professional raised within a Gaelic environment, educated on the continent and working as a physician and botanist in the West Indies. If Browne succeeded in incorporating knowledge of Gaelic botanical terminology within a contemporary global template of such expertise, his achievement is singular in the context of contemporary Gaelic scholarship which was largely characterised by an insular focus and manuscript dissemination. It is argued that Browne's incorporation of Gaelic scholarship within a comparative context illustrates a broader epistemological weakness within Gaelic intellectual life in the eighteenth century.

Lisa Wynne Smith (University of Essex)

Considering an Eighteenth-Century Account of a Caesarian Operation

In 1738, John Copping, the Dean of Clogher, wrote two letters to physician Hans Sloane about a "Caesarian Operation performed by an ignorant Butcher" on Sarah McKinna four years earlier (British Library Sloane MS 4055, ff. 293-295, ff. 334-338). Copping wanted to share with the Royal Society his account of this medical curiosity, which included no less than a petrified baby and a successful caesarian operation. But his letters also provide a wealth of information about medicine in early modern Ireland. Not only do the letters give details about Mrs McKinna's daily life and hint at divisions in rural/urban and Catholic/Protestant medical practices, but they highlight the early eighteenth-century debate about authority and evidence in medico-scientific discourse.

In this paper, I use a microhistory approach to consider what Mrs McKinna's case reveals about the experience of pregnancy, surgery and chronic illness and what Mr Copping's account can tell us about the construction of early modern medico-scientific narratives. I will argue that what makes the case distinctively Irish is Copping's deliberate evasion of the political significance of several of the local people involved in the case, choosing instead to focus on the rural/urban and Catholic/Protestant tensions.

Alice Marples (King's College London)

Medical Practitioners as Collectors and Communicators of Natural History in Ireland, 1680-1750

Despite being based in London for most of his professional life, the Irish physician, naturalist and collector, Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) maintained extensive links with the medical and botanical world of Ireland, corresponding with former patrons, fellow physicians, apothecaries and surgeons alike. These letters offer intriguing insights into a range of issues including contemporary medical relationships, various representations of Ireland and medicine, and medical practitioners' reactions to political intrigues. However, they should also be situated within the wider Anglo-Irish cultural and intellectual context of early modern medical and scientific exchange. Particularly in Dublin, where collectors, clubs and societies achieved particular prominence in the eighteenth century, there was an increasingly active culture of collecting and exchange within Ireland during this period. In order to understand this development fully, it needs to be explored alongside contemporary trends in Scotland and Ireland through the correspondence networks which united them. By exploring the scholarly interactions and transnational connections within Sloane's networks – considering 'isolated' individuals alongside more established or institutional relationships such as that between the Dublin Philosophical Society and the Royal Society - this paper seeks to explore the growing culture of natural history in Ireland, as well as the role of medical practitioners within it.

Session Two

Phil Gorey (University College Dublin)

The Ecclesiastical and Institutional Regulation of Midwives in Ireland c. 1600-1750

Childbirth has been described as a female 'ritual', which was dominated by male regulation. This regulation usually took three forms – ecclesiastical, institutional and municipal. Three institutions can be identified as having a stake in the regulation of childbirth in Ireland before 1750 – the Church of Ireland, the counter-reformation Irish Catholic Church and the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland. Two key elements of her office determined that the midwife was scrutinized in the management of her practice. On the one hand there was an anxiety by church authorities that she might resort to magical healing in the form

of potions, recipes or verbal incantations. On the other, there was the prerequisite of her knowledge of the rite of baptism should she need to perform the sacrament, as an emergency, if the life of the baby was deemed to be in danger. In Ireland the requirement to carry out emergency baptism was all the more significant since the Established Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church administered religious practice and beliefs alongside one another. This paper will explore the endeavours of both Churches to maintain religious orthodoxy in relation to emergency baptism. It will also consider the role of the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland in regulating midwives from the 1690s.

Éilis Noonan (University of St Andrews)

'Popery, Plots and Polemic': the case of Elizabeth Cellier, a Catholic midwife

Scholars have recently begun to examine how in the case of Elizabeth Cellier, a Catholic midwife in late seventeenth century London, polemic discourses on the controversial figure of the female midwife became entwined with anxieties about popery and the threat of Catholic plots. Cellier became infamous after the discovery of her involvement in the so-called Meal Tub Plot, and in the press she was denigrated not only as a papist, but as a "Popish midwife". This depiction tied into contemporary debates about the position of the female midwife in society. I hope to set this plot and Cellier's role in it into their wider context, with particular focus on their Irish context, and show how in contemporary depictions, the polemic figure of the "Popish midwife" emerged.

Clodagh Tait (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick)

'Measles of a very different kind...and the Disease more mortal than ordinary': Causes of Death in some Seventeenth-century Irish Parish Registers

The loss of a great many of the parish registers of early modern Ireland has severely hampered the development of the type of demographic history possible elsewhere in the British and Irish Isles. However, despite their fragmentary nature, the surviving records can be coaxed to reveal some useful information. Apart from their general use in mapping changing overall levels of births and deaths, it is possible to track within them two kinds of mortality in particular: maternal morbidity and neonatal death, and incidents of excess mortality occasioned by epidemic disease. This paper will focus primarily on the parish of Youghal, where a series of records from the 1690s give the ages of those buried and the causes of their deaths. Comparison of the Youghal registers with other surviving examples from the south and east of Ireland allows us to begin to build a picture of some of the diseases and disasters that threatened the health of the Irish population in the later seventeenth century.

Session Three

Neil Johnston (Independent)

'Being of full age and sound memory': Contemporary Understanding of Mental Health in later Seventeenth-century Ireland

The Restoration of Charles II to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland in May 1660 created a remarkably complicated political situation as the king's government in Dublin sought to retain as much of the pre-Restoration land settlement as possible. Under the terms of the Act of Settlement, which was drafted and passed between 1661-62, a tribunal was created where claims of innocence of involvement in the wars of the 1640s could be presented before a panel of commissioners who were given authority to rule on previous guilt. In particular, Instruction XI of the Act of Settlement declared that decrees of innocence could be issued to Irish Catholics if they had been involved in the wars of the 1640s but were not of 'full age and sound memory'. The commissioners were given power to adjudge them 'an idiot or a lunatick' and their descendants were then free to lodge a claim of innocence before the tribunal. If a decree of innocence was issued, the family was permitted to seek restoration to ancestral lands and estates. This paper seeks to address contemporary understanding of lunacy by examining such cases, whereby madness was used as a pretext and mitigating factor against guilt. It will also consider how the mentally ill were treated in later seventeenth-century Ireland in an effort to compare this to Britain and Europe.

Susan Mullaney (Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland)

'To Enlarge the Minds of Many Physicians': The Application of Robert Boyle's Theory of Specific Medicines in Early Modern Ireland

Robert Boyle published the manuscript, *'Of the Reconcilableness of Specifick Medicines to the Corpuscular Philosophy* in 1685, in which he challenged the use of multiple ingredients in varying forms in medicinal cures. He suggested that the use of a few simple ingredients would have the same therapeutic effect as a mixture with many, often very obscure, components. He believed that proof of this could be found in applying the theory of mechanical philosophy to investigating medicines and their effects, both good and bad. He accepted that this new concept might challenge the authority of practising physicians and institutions, and hence did not overtly challenge contemporary medical practice. There were a number of intellectual links between Ireland and England in the late seventeenth century, notably between the Dublin Philosophical Society and its counterpart in Oxford, and the Royal Society in London. This paper seeks to investigate how, or if, Boyle's theory on specific medicines, and simple cures, was received in Ireland, and whether there is any evidence that practitioners applied this concept in their daily practice of medicine.

Michael O'Dowd (NUI Galway)

James Wolveridge's Speculum Matricis (1670)

The Speculum Matricis of 1670 is Ireland's oldest book on midwifery. The illustrated manual was written in Cork and published in London with a second edition printed the following year. The author was the physician James Wolveridge who graduated MD in 1664 at Trinity College in the University of Dublin.

James Wolveridge was English by birth but his name does not appear in the Alumni rolls of Oxford or Cambridge. The TCD Admissions book entries are incomplete for the period but it is likely that Wolveridge entered the University in 1650 at the age of sixteen. The Caroline Statutes ensured that an aspiring physician's education and intellectual development were thoroughly classical in nature. Seven years of study led to a Master of Arts degree and a further seven to a Doctorate in Medicine.

The Speculum Matricis offers a unique perspective on the sources of Wolveridge's knowledge of anatomy and midwifery, and contains a large number of medications culled from the Pharmacopoeia Londinensis and other sources. A contemporary of Wolveridge's was John Stearne who graduated MD from Trinity in 1658 and became the University's first Professor of Obstetrics four years later.

Session Four

Jonathan Barry, Peter Elmer, Alun Withey, Justin Colson and John Cunningham (University of Exeter)

The Medical World of Early Modern England, Wales and Ireland, c. 1500-1715: Key Aspects of Research on the Early Modern Practitioners Project

This project is developing a ground-breaking database with biographies of all medical practitioners active in England, Wales and Ireland c.1500-1715. The database will be used to produce the first all-round study of the nature and impact of medical practice in early modern Britain, to be published as a major monograph by a leading university press.

In this session, members of the research team on the Early Modern Practitioners Project will offer short presentations on various elements of their work. This will include an overview of the project as a whole, a discussion of the role of digital humanities, and a brief exploration of the possibilities that exist for research on medical practitioners in early modern England, Wales and Ireland.

Session Five

Elizabethanne Boran (The Edward Worth Library)

Collecting Medicine in Early Eighteenth-Century Dublin: Edward Worth's Library

This paper examines the medical collections of Dr Edward Worth (1676-1733), a Dublin physician active in the first three decades of the eighteenth-century. It focuses on the scope of his extensive medical collections and explores what they tell us about Worth's own interests and the factors affecting the development of his collection. The final section of the paper broadens the topic to include an examination of what was available to early eighteenth-century Dublin readers interested in medical works, particularly those of an anatomical nature.

Katherine Browne (Trinity College Dublin)

The Establishment of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland: Defining Surgical Training and Competence

Though it is now widely accepted that the expected endpoint of a surgical qualification is competence, formalized discussion of the assessment process only truly evolved within the past century. Little is known about how surgeons were defined in the 18th century at the inception of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Prior to this, surgeons had trained separately to their physician counterparts, having been frowned upon as a less learned specialty. Their apprenticeship was overseen by the Barber-Surgeons' Guild, the first medical corporation in the British Isles, having been granted a Royal decree in 1446. The growing practice of grave robbing, to ensure adequate anatomical specimens for dissection, further widened the chasm between surgeons and the medical fraternity. The establishment of a regulatory and educational body was a landmark moment for Irish surgery, argued for by those such as O'Halloran and Thorpe.

This paper will examine the move towards formalizing surgical education and arguments leading up to the establishment of the RCSI and its predecessors, the Guild of St. Mary Magdelene and the Dublin Society of Surgeons, with reference to contemporary thought on the assessment of surgical training.

Andrew Sneddon (University of Ulster)

Demonic Possession, Witchcraft and Medicine in late Seventeenth-century Ireland

In Antrim town in 1698, an elderly woman was murdered by her neighbours for bewitching a nine year-old girl by means of demonic possession. Before and after this act of communal violence, there was an unusually high level of involvement of male medical practitioners, and multifarious, commercial magical practitioners, or cunning-folk, were also consulted by the girl's mother. The

'victim' of the witch was eventually cured with a magical ointment based on a recipe procured from a 16th century alchemical work. The Antrim case therefore provides an almost unique opportunity to explore contemporary medical attitudes to witchcraft in Ireland and how cunning-folk and other magical healers dealt with witchcraft cases. All of which will be considered in the context of a contested medical marketplace and a medical system on the brink of professionalization and institutionalization.

Session Six

Áine Sheehan (University College Cork)

Locating Gaelic Medical Families in Elizabethan Ireland

This paper will provide an overview of the results of my research into the appearance of the professional medical families in the pardons of Elizabeth I. Much work has been done on the medical manuscripts produced in their schools. However, fundamental questions regarding the lives of the professional medical families have been passed over. This is mainly due to the inherent difficulties of researching Gaelic Ireland. My research aims to humanise the story of the collapse of Gaelic power in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century through the prism of the literate professionals of Gaelic Ireland.

Using maps, this paper will illustrate the distribution of the medical families throughout Ireland. The image that emerges is of a vibrant community, that was patronised by Gaelic, Old English and New English patrons. The medical families were the best positioned, of all the professional literate groups operating in Gaelic Ireland, to absorb the shock of the erosion of Gaelic aristocratic power in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Their medical knowledge, derived from European sources, gave them valuable and much sought after skills that insulated them from the harshest aspects of the Tudor conquest.

Eithne Ní Ghallchobhair (Royal Irish Academy)

Restoring the Anatomy - the Reconstruction of a Late Medieval Irish Surgical Text

De Anathomia is the opening treatise of the Inventarium sive Chirurgia Magna. This work was completed by the French scholar Guy de Chauliac in 1363 and provides a summary of academic surgical knowledge as it existed in the late Middle Ages. It was considered to be one of the most important works written on surgery in its time. Cormac Mac Duinnshléibhe translated the first two chapters of De Anathomia into Irish in the mid-15th century. This paper will discuss the place of the late medieval Irish medical texts in a European context. It will look at the challenges the scribes and medics faced in translating medical material from Latin into Irish and the subsequent challenges faced by an editor in reconstructing a text such as Anathomia Gydo.

Benjamin Hazard (University College Dublin)

Spanish Military Hospitals in Flanders and Ireland, 1585-1685

This paper considers the influence of military hospitals on the development of medicine and surgery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It offers two examples of Spanish military hospitals, in Flanders and Ireland, illustrating the regimes of care with details of their administration, staffing arrangements, the food and medication prescribed to casualties and to those affected by physical illnesses, the economic activity of a hospital and the provision of surgical teaching.