

HIU31104, Reading the 1641 Depositions (Ó Siochrú)



Assessment: One essay

The 1641 Depositions (Trinity College Dublin, MSS 809-841) comprise over 8,000 witness testimonies by Protestant settlers from all social backgrounds, concerning their experiences of the 1641 Irish rebellion. The testimonies document the loss of goods, military activity, and the alleged crimes committed by the Catholic Irish insurgents, including assault and murder. This body of material is unparalleled anywhere in early modern Europe and provides a unique source of information for the causes and events surrounding the 1641 rebellion and a unique window into the social, economic, cultural, religious, and political history of seventeenth-century Ireland, England and Scotland. A recent project transcribed all the original depositions in the Trinity College library, making them available and fully searchable online at <http://1641.tcd.ie>.

The depositions vividly document English colonial and 'civilizing' processes in Ireland, which included the spread of Protestantism and the introduction of lowland agricultural and commercial practices, together with the native responses to them. Moreover, they constitute the chief evidence for the sharply contested allegation that the 1641 rebellion began with a general massacre of Protestants and as a result, they have been central to the most protracted and bitter of Irish historical controversies. Propagandists, politicians and historians have all exploited the depositions at different times, and the controversy surrounding them has never been satisfactorily resolved. This module draws on recent research and historiographical debates to engage with a crucial and exciting primary source.