

Introduction

Aims and sources

As Marylynn Salmon has noted, women's ownership and management of property is 'an important baseline for learning how men and women share power in the family'.¹ Until the 1990s, women featured in the historiography of the landed class in Ireland either as bearers of assets to advantageous matches or as potential drains on family estates as a result of long widowhoods.² When the lives of women from this class have been examined by biographers, these tend to be uncritical narratives of exceptional women from prominent families. The interests of these women have been regarded as inseparable from the interests of their family, and there is little consideration of the impact of gender on women's lives in this class.³ Two exceptions examine the position of women in more detail: Stella Tillyard's biography of the Lennox sisters, which explores women's lives in the Fitzgerald and Conolly families, and Sean Connolly's consideration of the life of eighteenth-century single women in his study of the life of Letitia Bushe.⁴ Furthermore, by 2008 there has not been any comparative work on the lives of well-known women from landed families, or a consideration of how women's experience of property and family in this section of society may have differed. This book seeks to contribute to existing historiography by looking beyond the dynastic and economic concerns that dominate the current history of the Irish elite.

This book explores the legal, familial and social factors that influenced women in Ireland in their experience of property in the period 1750–1850. The evidence is drawn from the personal and legal documents of twenty landed families, an approach which facilitated legitimate comparisons and made possible the use of a wider range of sources than a study that focused exclusively on landed records. Each family received an annual rental of at least £10,000 at some stage in this period. To place this figure in perspective, the equivalent purchasing power of £10,000 in 1850 was £720,000 in 1998.⁵ These families were therefore amongst the wealthiest in Ireland, which restricted the field of research to those who

were more likely to have shared financial backgrounds, rather than including the wider landed class, which contained greater variations in wealth and lifestyle. The wealthy landed class were more likely to have shared financial backgrounds and to have used similar methods to provide for family members. It was also necessary to choose a date range that would make possible a survey of the practices employed by this class in making provision for women. The date range 1750–1850 was selected as, by the beginning of this period, methods of settling estates and of arranging pin money and jointure for women were in place in the wealthy landed class; after 1850, the impact of the Great Famine on landed estates changed the economic context within which landed families existed.

The limited sample facilitated a wide use of sources, making it possible to compare the legal and theoretical position of women and property in different families with their actual experience. In common with many of their class, these families left vast archives of sources, composed of personal letters, estate correspondence and diaries as well as the legal documentation of a large landed estate: marriage settlements, last wills and testaments, mortgage bonds and account books. Consultation of such sources is essential as it reveals the types of property women had access to and what they had the power to bequeath, as well as offering some insight into the impact of these property arrangements in the daily lives of women.

Because of the primacy of land as a source of income and status in the period 1750–1850, it is impossible to consider the experience of women and property in landed families without considering the income from landed property. This is particularly important for the purpose of comparing amounts of jointure received in comparison with the one-third life interest in their husband's property which women would have been entitled to had they been able to claim dower. Late nineteenth-century landed estate rentals compiled by John Bateman, for example, are available in published form.⁶ However, rental in the period before 1850 raises problems for the historian as it was not uniform practice for landowners to record gross rental in this period, at least not in a form that has survived in family papers.

When gross rental is recorded, a further problem of ascertaining net rental, the actual income of landowners, arises. It has been argued by David Large that the period 1790–1815 was one of 'greatest affluence' for Irish landowners owing to rising rents, while the period after 1815, following the Napoleonic wars, was one of comparative hardship. Rent rises were small and were 'much more difficult to get in than they had been in the previous twenty-five years'.⁷ Furthermore, as Anthony

Malcomson notes, 'the financial situations of great landed families were constantly shifting, in the light of births and deaths, marriages and mortgages, inheritances and bequests'.⁸ Therefore, there could be a significant difference between the gross rental from a landed estate and the actual income of a landowner. If we also consider changing rent levels throughout this period and contemporary disparities between acreage values on different estates, establishing correct figures for rental income appears to be impossible.⁹

For the purpose of this study, I have estimated rental based on a variety of sources when gross rental figures are not available in family and estate papers. One method, used by A. T. Harrison as a means to estimate the rentals of the estates of the Marquess of Downshire, the Marquess of Londonderry and Lord Dufferin, was to take figures published by Bateman and reduce the late nineteenth-century figures by one-third, in order to estimate early nineteenth-century rental.¹⁰ Therefore, although the figures used are in some cases estimates, in the absence of reliable figures they provide an impression of family rental and facilitate comparative study of provision for women from the families in this study.

The Irish landed class, 1750–1850

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the majority of wealthy landowners in Ireland were English or Scottish settlers, their land acquired during plantations or as royal grants for services to the English Crown. These families, an Anglo-Irish protestant elite, comprised a small proportion of the population which owned a vast proportion of land in Ireland. A survey of the Irish peerage, published in 1799, listed thirty of the wealthiest landowners in Ireland, all of whom took at least £14,000 from their estates in rental income.¹¹ Throughout this period the greatest number of large estates were in Ulster: by 1876 these numbered nineteen out of the forty-one landed estates in the whole of Ireland that were valued at £20,000 or more.¹² It is therefore fitting that out of the twenty families surveyed here, the estates and family houses of fourteen families were located in the nine Ulster counties. The remaining six families were dispersed throughout counties Dublin, Cork, Wicklow, Kerry and Kildare.¹³

These families settled in Ireland at different times. Of the fourteen Ulster families, nine acquired land in the seventeenth century. These were mainly acquisitions derived from the grants of Charles II or James I, or plantation grants. The two exceptions were the Donegalls, whose land was based on the dealings of the family adventurer Chichester, and the Ernes, who purchased land later in the seventeenth century. Three

families, the Wards, Lords Bangor, the Alexanders, Lords Caledon, and the Blackwood family, Lords Dufferin, all amassed sufficient wealth through marriage and other dealings to purchase their estates after settling in Ireland in the eighteenth century. The wealth of the Caledons was based on the first Lord Caledon's fortune, made by his work for the East India Company. The connections of the remaining two Ulster families, the Meades, Earls of Clanwilliam, and the Hill family, Marquesses of Downshire, predated the seventeenth century. The Meades were of Gaelic descent and can be traced to fourteenth-century Cork. The family's estates were in County Tipperary and County Down. The Hill family arrived in Ireland some time in the sixteenth century and acquired land through grants and purchases.

The six families located in the counties south of Ulster included the Fitzgeralds, Dukes of Leinster, the oldest Irish family in this study, whose Irish connection dates from the Anglo-Norman settlements in the twelfth and thirteen centuries. The Wingfield family, Viscounts Powerscourt, derived their land in the sixteenth century as payment for acting as marshals. The Boyle family, Earls Shannon, received their estates as grants from Charles II in the seventeenth century and the Westenras, Lords Rossmore, acquired their estate through marriage in the eighteenth century. Out of the remaining two families, the Conollys of Castletown in County Kildare were the only non-peerage family. They arrived in Ireland at least as early as the seventeenth century and their vast estates were based on purchases made by William Speaker Conolly in the late seventeenth century. The Browne family, Earls Kenmare, of County Kerry are the only Catholic family in this study. They arrived in Ireland in the sixteenth century and were an active Jacobite family. Their title was, in a limited way, recognised by the eighteenth-century Irish parliament. With two exceptions, the Conollys and the Earls of Kenmare, all the families in this study were protestant peers. All the remaining peerages were Irish, except for the Duke of Abercorn, who held a Scottish title.

As the wealthiest section of society, these families were also the most powerful. In 1852, 68 per cent of Ireland's 104 MPs were from landed families, and in all elections up to 1880 landlord influence played an important role in returning candidates.¹⁴ In County Down, Arthur Hill, the second Marquess of Downshire, has been regarded as 'the most powerful political magnate in late eighteenth-century Ireland' as well as one of the wealthiest men in Ireland.¹⁵ Politics in County Down was dominated by the Hill family, and the only serious opposition to this power came from another wealthy landed family, their neighbours, the Stewart family, Lords Londonderry.¹⁶ Yet there were great differences between families. In County Down, the wealth and power of the Hills and

Stewarts was on a greater scale than that of their neighbours. Although the Blackwoods, Lords Dufferin, were the sixth richest family in County Down, their wealth was significantly less than that of the Hills and Stewarts.¹⁷ On the marriage of Mary Sandys to Arthur Hill in 1786 the Downshire rental was £17,104.¹⁸ In 1818, on the marriage of Frances Anne Vane-Tempest to Charles Stewart, the future Marquess of Londonderry, the Londonderry estate was £31,500.¹⁹ The rental of the Dufferin estate by 1800 has been estimated at £10,000, and by the 1840s, during the minority of the fifth Lord Dufferin, this had risen to an annual rental of £18,000.²⁰

The Irish wealthy landed class shared a similar lifestyle with their English contemporaries, and this set them apart from other Irish landed families as a distinct social group. Ireland was more expensive to live in than England.²¹ Eight out of the twenty families held additional land in England, and all would have lived at least part of the year in England. Many made marriage alliances in England, sent their sons to English schools and universities and participated in the round of social engagements that was the 'Season', residing for part of the year in Dublin and increasingly, after the Union, in London. They travelled abroad, wore the latest fashions and read the latest books. They bestowed patronage on their estates and entertained the local gentry when at home.²² The Londonderrys are the one example here of a family with connections to industry: they had a lucrative mining interest in County Durham, England. Another factor that led to residence in England was the reality of pursuing a career in British politics. It has been argued that the British policy of excluding Irishmen from top jobs meant that 'they had no alternative but to quit Ireland if they were to rise in the world'. The Lord Lieutenancy, for example, was held only five times in the eighteenth century by an Irish landlord, each of whom was an absentee landlord with good English connections.²³

Although the connection with English life was a crucial element of Irish elite culture, there were also important differences between Ireland and England. The Irish peerage, for instance, which by 1810 numbered 129 Irish peers, was distinct from the United Kingdom and Scottish peerages. It has been noted by one historian that 'common estimation . . . set Irish peers on a lower rung of the social ladder than English peers'.²⁴ An Irish peer could not sit in the British House of Lords without an additional English, Scottish, United Kingdom or Great Britain peerage, a distinction that was regarded as 'degrading' by some commentators.²⁵ To acquire an English peerage, even at a lower level, was a mark of social advancement, and Irish peers have been characterised as having feelings of provincial inferiority.

This complex group of people lived a lavish lifestyle that was not sustainable and the period 1750–1850 was one of increasing indebtedness for Irish landed families. There were many reasons for this. The wealth of Irish landowners derived almost exclusively from rents. Unlike their English contemporaries, they had little opportunity in the period covered here to supplement rental income with industry or mining.²⁶ The sole exception was the Londonderrys, who derived a significant proportion of their wealth from the Durham coalfields brought to her marriage by Frances Anne Vane-Tempest Stewart, Lady Londonderry. The Irish practice of leasing land for lives renewable has also been cited as one reason for the lack of investment and control exercised by landlords over their estates.²⁷ However, while some landlords did not invest in their estates, it has been noted that after 1830 a small number of landlords took increasing interest in estate improvements. Lord Dufferin, for example, was one of a number of landowners awarded a medal by the Royal Agricultural Society in Dublin for his work in encouraging his tenants to drain their land.²⁸ Such interest in estate improvement was due to the decline in leasing and the desire of landlords to reverse the trend towards subdivision on their estates. It also was influenced by developments on English estates, where drainage was regarded as an investment which would benefit the landowner.²⁹ Existing problems on Irish estates peaked in the 1840s when the Great Famine devastated parts of Ireland and led to a widespread reorganisation of landed estates, as landlords sold off land through the encumbered estates courts to pay debts. However, the long-term the impact of the Encumbered Estates Acts was limited: by 1876, 20 per cent of Ireland was owned by landlords with estates ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 acres, while over 50 per cent was owned by less than 1,000 landlords.³⁰

Women in the wealthy Irish landed class

The comparison of legal theory and family settlements with the actual experience of women is an approach favoured in histories of women and property in England published in the 1990s. In her study of the ideology that informed the legal development of married women's separate property in England, Susan Staves uses equity cases concerning women's property issues alongside printed legal treatises. Staves's aim is to compare the theoretical position of women with what actually occurred in the Court of Chancery in practice.³¹ A similar concern with theory and practice is central to Amy Erickson's study of women and property in early modern England. Erickson's main sources are probate records and marriage settlements as well as printed legal treatises.³²

The legal position of women and property in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland was the same as that of their English contemporaries: it was based on the English common law doctrine of coverture, by which a woman lost her legal identity and the right to own property upon marriage. However, although English common law was established in Ireland by the sixteenth century, Irish statute law on marriage and property developed along different lines. One of the problems of coverture, from the perspective of the Irish political elite, was the impact it had on the protection of protestant property interests. This is illustrated by the problem of the abduction of heiresses in Ireland.³³ In the history of abduction, women feature as victims of their gender and legal status. The reputations, and sometimes the lives, of propertied women were endangered by the opportunism of socially and economically marginalised lower gentry, who regarded abduction, although illegal and often violent, as ‘strategies through which property could be gained’.³⁴ Clandestine marriages presented a similar problem for the Irish elite, and, in a bid to protect their property interests, this led the Irish parliament to introduce statutory measures to intervene in the previously private act of marriage. This unprecedented intervention in the marriage contract, which declared some marriages legally invalid, is explored in chapter 1 within the context of the development of statute law on marriage in the seventeenth century in Ireland. Statute law also intervened in the structure of the family, increasing the power of fathers over the marriage choices of their children. There were therefore two concurrent ideologies at work, as the authority of a father over his children was strengthened, while at the same time the patriarchal family structure could be overturned in the case of catholic–protestant intermarriage in order to protect protestant property interests.³⁵

Women’s status in law was, however, only one facet of their experience of property. An important feature of recent histories of women and property is the acknowledgement that there may be ‘vast differences between the official rules under which women are supposed to live and the actual conditions of their lives.’³⁶ English law was made up of four separate systems, the most prominent being common law and equity. While common law enshrined the dependence of a married woman on her husband, equity enabled the same woman to have access to separate property during her marriage, for her own use and free from the control of her husband. Women from wealthy families were therefore spared some of the financial disadvantages inherent in the subordinate position accorded to women by law. This situation has led to an assumption among some historians that rank and wealth were the defining features of upper-class women’s experience of property, and that upper-class

women were defined by their class, rather than by their gender.³⁷ There has been an assumption that women from this class 'had always been protected by elaborate family and marriage settlements'.³⁸ As one historian has noted, '[e]ven if the dominant discourses of femininity were belittling, the reverence for rank, wealth and position remained overwhelming'.³⁹

Similar assumptions are evident in existing studies that include women in the Irish elite, where there has been a predominant focus on wealthy heiresses.⁴⁰ However, the experience of women in these families was more complex.⁴¹ Not all women who married into landed families were heiresses, and not all had access to large incomes settled as separate estate. Also, the assumption that all women from wealthy families were well provided for by separate property arrangements, and therefore escaped the gender constraints experienced by their lower-class contemporaries, is problematic and has been questioned by other historians. For example, the ideological basis for the development of family settlements has been investigated in recent histories of women and property in England, and it has been concluded that while upper-class women were often economically independent, their actual place in the family property hierarchy diminished as common law right to dower was replaced by jointure.⁴² In order to explore the relationship of women to the family estate, chapter 2 outlines provisions made for women in marriage settlements and last wills and testaments. In Ireland, as in England, the most important aspect of family property arrangements in this period was inheritance, the procedure by which both landed and moveable property is transmitted between generations.⁴³ Irish elite women, like their English contemporaries, were placed firmly within the family, and the basis of their experience of property was determined by the nature of provision made in family settlements.

Having established the boundaries within which women's experience of property operated, the remaining chapters consider the property experience of women in relation to the family estate, how women related to the concept of the family interest and in what contexts their interests differed. The third chapter will consider instances, in this class, when the traditional structure of the family was suspended, such as when the heir to the estate was a minor, or insane. The consequent reorganisation of family affairs resulted in a broader scope for the involvement of women in financial business.

The guardianship of a minor or of a mentally incapacitated family member was an acceptable role available to women. If the ward was heir to the family estate this was also a potentially powerful role. The remit of guardianship depended on arrangements made within the family. After

the death of Price Blackwood, Lord Dufferin, in 1841, his widow, Helen, Lady Dufferin, was appointed only as guardian of the person of the only child of the marriage, Frederick Blackwood, the future fifth Lord Dufferin, while other family members managed the Dufferin estate. However, Mary Hill, Marchioness of Downshire, was guardian of her eldest son's persons and estates after her husband's death, as also was Jane Brownlow, Lady Lurgan, from Brownlow House, County Armagh.

Another type of guardianship which had the potential to elevate the importance of informal property relations began when the head of a family was declared legally insane. This occurred in the Ward family, Lords Bangor, of Castle Ward, County Down. When the second Lord Bangor was declared legally insane in 1781, years of bitter feuding within the family followed, and Arabella Ward, widow of Lord Bangor's younger brother, Edward, entered into disputes with Lord Bangor's brother, Robert, and sister, Ann Catherine, over her role as committee of the estate and person of Lord Bangor.

Chapters 4 to 6 consider the roles taken by single, married and widowed women. The family property relations illustrated in these chapters are indicative of the types of formal and informal power available to elite women. Individual women feature as landowners, prominent in estate management and local politics, either in their own right or as deputies for under-age sons. The income that resulted from the rent of a landed property was not the only benefit of landownership in this period. The social and economic power that resulted from the interconnectedness of the franchise with property benefited disenfranchised landed women as well as men. In addition, political power and patronage were to a large degree facilitated by family connections.⁴⁴

The interconnectedness of family and politics in this period provided elite women with opportunities to exert their social and family influence for political ends. Elite women acted as political hostesses, and balls, dinners and private correspondence could provide useful political gossip, as well as opportunities to lobby for political patronage and promote their family's interests.⁴⁵ Some women, thanks to their personal wealth and influence within the family, exercised significant power in their locality. In the Ulster Museum in Belfast there are two portraits on display of Theodosia Meade, Countess of Clanwilliam, painted in 1765, the year of her marriage, by Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. As two portraits by such eminent society painters suggest, the Countess of Clanwilliam occupied an elite social and economic position in County Down society. She was the daughter and heiress of Robert Hawkins-Magill and his wife, Lady Anne Bligh. In 1765 she married John Meade of Gill Hall, County Down, the future Earl

of Clanwillian and heir to estates in counties Tipperary and Down. The Countess's economic position, and therefore her social and political position in County Down, was assured by a settlement made during her marriage by which she arranged, despite her coverture, for the property she had brought to her marriage as portion to be transferred into her ownership.⁴⁶

Another exceptionally wealthy woman was Mary Hill, Marchioness of Downshire, the only daughter and heiress of Martin Sandys and Mary Blundell. As the heiress of her mother, her father and her uncle, Edwin Sandys, Baron Oombersley, Mary Sandys brought a large portion to her marriage and also owned a substantial landed estate in England as separate property. In 1786 she married Arthur Hill, Lord Fairford, the future second Marquess of Downshire. The Downshire estates included land in counties Down and Antrim, as well as land outside Ulster in counties Kildare and Wicklow. On her husband's death in 1801, the Marchioness of Downshire managed the Downshire estates, and she played a prominent role in County Down politics during the minority of her eldest son, Arthur Blundell Sandys Hill, the third Marquess of Downshire.

Women in the MacDonnell family, Lords Antrim, were similarly wealthy and were also prominent in local politics. The Antrim estate was located in counties Antrim and Londonderry. Anne Katherine MacDonnell, Countess of Antrim, was the eldest surviving daughter of Randall MacDonnell, Marquess of Antrim, and inherited a portion of the Antrim estate, and title, on her father's death in 1791. Her sister, Charlotte Kerr, inherited the title Countess of Antrim, as well as an additional portion of the Antrim estate, on Anne Katherine's death. Frances Anne was the only daughter, and heiress, of Henry Vane-Tempest and Anne Katherine. In 1819 Frances Anne married Charles Stewart, Lord Stewart and the future third Marquess of Londonderry, as his second wife. In addition to the valuable mines in County Durham that Lady Londonderry brought to her marriage, she owned an estate in County Antrim. She was prominent in the management of her estate as well as local politics and was also regarded as a leading Tory hostess in London.⁴⁷

In 1747, aged fifteen, Emily Lennox, the third daughter of Charles, second Duke of Richmond, and his wife Sarah, married James Fitzgerald, twentieth Earl of Kildare, and moved to live in Ireland at Carton House, County Kildare, and Leinster House in Dublin. After her husband's death in 1774, Emily scandalised Irish society, and the Fitzgerald family, when she married William Ogilvie, the tutor of her children. In 1758, Emily's sister Louisa Lennox married Thomas Conolly and moved to Ireland to

live at the Castletown estate in County Kildare. Conolly was the nephew of Speaker Conolly and heir to vast estates that included land in counties Kildare, Donegal and Londonderry. The Duchess of Leinster and Louisa Conolly managed the households of two of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Ireland at this time, and their social influence was such that they continually received petitions requesting patronage and political intervention in parliamentary matters.⁴⁸

Despite the undoubted wealth and influence of some women in the landed class in this period, their experience was diverse, and this is apparent within families as well as between families. One example is the Blackwoods, Lords Dufferin, from Clandeboye, County Down. Dorcas Stevenson Blackwood, Baroness Dufferin and Clandeboye, was the eldest daughter and the heiress of James Stevenson of County Down. In 1751 she married John Blackwood. In 1800 Dorcas was created Baroness Dufferin and Clandeboye and was succeeded by her eldest son, James Stevenson Blackwood, Lord Dufferin. In 1801 James, the future Lord Dufferin, married Anna Foster, the daughter of Margareta, Viscountess Ferrard, and John Foster, Baron Oriel of Ferrard. James was succeeded by his brother Hans Blackwood, whose eldest son, Price Blackwood, became the fourth Lord Dufferin in 1839. In 1825 Price Blackwood married Helen Sheridan, the daughter of Thomas Sheridan and his wife Caroline Henrietta Callendar. Helen was also the granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, playwright and politician, and the sister of Caroline Norton and Georgiana Seymour, Duchess of Somerset.

The title conferred upon Dorcas, Baroness Dufferin and Clandeboye, which then passed to her eldest son, indicates her powerful status within the Blackwood family. She was a very wealthy widow, retaining a life interest in her father's estate that had been brought as portion, after her husband's death. Helen, Lady Dufferin, was in a much less powerful position within the family, as she had no income settled as separate estate, and appears not to have brought a portion to her marriage. Of the three Blackwood women, Helen is the most well-known figure in local history. She was the author of songs such as 'The Irish emigrant', and Helen's Bay and Helen's Tower, both in County Down, and the latter of which was built during famine relief works on the Clandeboye estate in 1847, were named after her.⁴⁹ However, less powerful women in this class also had access to the informal power inherent in family connections and the nature of appointments in institutions such as the navy that made knowing the right people an advantage. Helen, Lady Dufferin, who in other ways was one of the least powerful women in this study, was instrumental in furthering the Blackwood family interests by promoting

the careers of her son and other Blackwood men through her uncle Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty.

Informal roles available to women included those in advice and loan networks, household and family financial management and charitable benevolence, and these applied to single, married and widowed women. Lending and borrowing between families was an acceptable practice at least from the seventeenth century, and there was a good market for moneylenders in this period in Ireland as indebtedness was part of life for Irish landowners. One of the most dramatic examples was the second Marquess of Donegall, who inherited about a quarter of a million acres of land in Ireland, becoming, as one account of his life describes him, 'the greatest landowner of his day', and who in 1791, before he inherited the family estate, reportedly had debts of more than £30,000.⁵⁰ There were, however, many more mundane examples. The payment of debts was an important part of estate financial management, and many marriage settlements made arrangements for this. The estate finances of the relatively modest Dufferin estate, for example, were so worrying that by 1825 the Blackwood family, who were not known for their flamboyance, had established a sinking fund to pay for debts and further expenditure, such as jointures of future wives. When Price Blackwood informed his father that he was to marry the portionless Helen Sheridan, his father protested that he could never approve such a match, as it was Price's duty to gain a portion with a wife, in order to help pay family debts.⁵¹

The arrangement of loans between members of the same class also occurred because, as has been noted by David Large, the principal business of the Irish banking system in the eighteenth century was exchange dealings, and the only exception to this was the La Touche bankers, who offered rent remittances to absentee landlords.⁵² However, the trend was towards private loan arrangements. Furthermore, it was a normal part of family life for people in this class to use the services of solicitors. Marriages, last wills and testaments and estate conveyances were all managed by the family solicitor. Access to legal bonds and familiarity with the language of conveyance were part of aristocratic family life. Aristocratic women, as well as men, were involved in generating income, either from estate rental, if they were landowners, from rental of property or from investments in stocks. The more formal side of moneylending, which included lending money to friends and family via mortgage, charging interest and therefore making a profit, was an extension of these other activities. It was simply a good investment.

Single, married and widowed women all loaned money. There are, for example, several loan bonds among the papers of Lady Elizabeth Alexander, a wealthy single woman who was the daughter of James

Alexander, first Earl of Caledon, from County Tyrone. Married women who owned landed property in their own right, such as the Countesses of Antrim and Frances Anne Lady Londonderry, for example, borrowed money via bonds secured by mortgage on their estates. In fact, the widespread use of private settlements in this period rendered the lending of money by all women, whether single, married or widowed, unremarkable. Furthermore, married women borrowed money as a way to help other family members. For instance, in order to raise money to finance the entry of one of her younger sons into the navy, Arabella Ward, mother of the third Lord Bangor, sold some jewellery and borrowed some money or, as she expressed it, laid herself 'under obligation to two friends'.⁵³ However, the most extensive list of loans among the women surveyed were those due to a widow: Jane Creighton, Lady Erne, in 1800. These bonds are a lone example in the Erne papers of Lady Erne's income from moneylending. The existence of such a substantial loan network indicates that this form of financial business took place beyond the informal boundaries of family loan networks, as all of the recipients noted were from outside Lady Erne's immediate family. Born Jane King, she was the daughter of John and Rebecca King, of Charlestown, County Roscommon. She married firstly Arthur Acheson and secondly, in 1768, Abraham Creighton, Baron Erne of Crom Castle, in 1762, as his second wife. The Erne estate was in counties Fermanagh, Donegal, Mayo and Sligo and the family seat was Crom Castle, County Fermanagh. Between 1772 and 1799 Lady Erne conducted an extensive loan network, and her personal accounts indicate the extent of her charitable contributions to the poor on her estate and to public charitable institutions, as well as providing valuable information on her attitudes towards charity.

Charitable work was clearly another acceptable financial outlet for women. From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century this was essentially conservative and paternalistic in nature, being confined to alleviating the circumstances of the poor rather than challenging the structure of society. In addition, the voluntaristic ethos that informed philanthropy by the end of the eighteenth century focused on the promotion of self-help and self-improvement among the poor.⁵⁴ Such activities connected ideas of maternal benevolence with the perception that women had a natural propensity for the provision of moral and spiritual guidance.⁵⁵

Poor-relief in Ireland was locally based until the 1840s, was commonly administered by local landowners on a voluntary basis and was characterised by ideals of self-help and self-improvement.⁵⁶ Government intervention was limited to support for local relief initiatives.⁵⁷ The problem

of the indigent poor was dealt with by establishment of houses of industry, while the sick poor were dealt with by the establishment of dispensaries, county infirmaries and fever hospitals.⁵⁸ Private philanthropy offered a more socially acceptable outlet for women than institutional charity, and attracted women from all social backgrounds and from rural as well as urban areas.⁵⁹ Women were involved in a wide-ranging number of charitable causes, such as the establishment and maintenance of hospitals, schools or refuges for the care, education and moral guidance of the poor.⁶⁰ Upper-class women provided financial support through subscriptions and raised money through bazaars and fund-raising events. The role of women in the building and maintaining of schools was an important part of female charitable behaviour in this period. Elizabeth La Touche, wife of Peter La Touche, for example, was 'the great promoter of schools'.⁶¹ In County Tyrone, in the early nineteenth century, Lady Mountjoy and Miss Gardner established a school for twenty-four girls. Sewing and spinning were taught, and 'moral duties' were 'strictly attended to'.⁶² Such benevolence was not confined to women. Men also founded schools: Lord Mountjoy founded a night school 'for the purpose of instructing the labouring boys of the demesne, as planters' in 1783.⁶³ Although employment of such boys was an aim, 'the great object is, the preventing of idleness, which is always best accomplished by filling up the scraps of time.'⁶⁴ The foundation of the Magdalen Asylum by Lady Arabella Denny in 1765 was one of the earliest examples of women who had access to substantial financial resources reaching beyond fund-raising to establishing new institutions. However, in this period, despite the growth and development of institutional charities founded and run by women, the largest outlet for female charitable behaviour appears to have been private donations to the poor.⁶⁵ The six daughters of Henry Boyle, third Earl of Shannon, and Sarah Hyde, the 'ladies Boyle' from County Cork and Lady Elizabeth Alexander are examples of wealthy single women who directed some of their wealth towards charitable causes.

The primary concern of this book is to portray the diverse experience a group of women in the wealthy landed class had of property, and the complexity of familial power relations in this period. Within the small sample of families surveyed here there were significant differences in the wealth of women, their power within the family and the type of influence they exercised. Women's experience of property was therefore more complex than the arrangements laid out in family settlements suggest, and must be regarded within the multiple contexts of the law, family relationships and contemporary attitudes towards women and property. This survey therefore begins with an overview of women and the law in Ireland from the seventeenth century.

Notes

- 1 Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the law of property in Early America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. xii.
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