

Introduction: a new agenda for women’s and gender history in Ireland

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ABSTRACT. *In the thirty years since the publication of ‘An agenda for women’s history in Ireland’, the study of women’s and gender history has been transformed. The introduction to this special issue contextualises the ‘Agenda’ within this evolving landscape, underlining the significant role it played in stimulating scholarship by outlining some of the major developments in the field since 1992. The introduction also points to developments that the authors, Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O’Dowd and Maria Luddy, could not have foreseen when writing the ‘Agenda’, such as rapid technological advances and the possibilities they have opened up for scholars of women and gender in Irish history. By tracing these developments, the introduction serves as a gateway into the articles that form the special issue: contributions that demonstrate the wide-reaching and multifaceted impact of the ‘Agenda’ and the three pioneering scholars who authored it, and that provide thought-provoking analysis of existing and future scholarship in the field.*

In May 1992 *Irish Historical Studies* published ‘An agenda for women’s history in Ireland, 1500–1900’, co-authored by three pioneers of the field — Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O’Dowd and Maria Luddy.¹ The ‘Agenda’ was a landmark development, evaluating the state of the discipline in Ireland, interrogating possibilities for future research and providing a blueprint for coming generations of scholars. It comprised two parts: in Part I, MacCurtain and O’Dowd considered the period between 1500 and 1800, subdividing the three centuries into shorter periods, defined by political and social developments on the island. As well as highlighting possible avenues for enquiry and challenging the extant historiography, this approach allowed for a more thorough engagement with surviving sources. In Part II, Maria Luddy examined the potential for scholarly engagement with the nineteenth century, a period for which a ‘great wealth of [source] material’ existed and was ‘available for study and research’.²

In 1992, the authors of the ‘Agenda’ were unflinching in their criticism of Irish scholarship, which they argued was insular and limited in scope. Considering the

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¹ Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O’Dowd and Maria Luddy, ‘An agenda for women’s history in Ireland, 1500–1900’ in *I.H.S.*, xxviii, no. 109 (May 1992), pp 1–37.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

relationship of women's history with 'mainstream' history, MacCurtain and O'Dowd pointed to the revisionist impulses and preoccupation of Irish scholarship with "politics" in the highest Cambridge sense', as demonstrated in *I.H.S.* and elsewhere. They further observed that the Economic and Social History Society of Ireland had 'made little progress in the type of social history which has stimulated research in women's history in other countries' and that the society had not 'been supportive of women's history'. The cumulative effect, they argued, was that the 'the predominant methodology of Irish historiography is not only unsympathetic to incorporating the history of women, but by its very nature excludes women'.³

This situation was compounded by the fact that Irish historians had been trained to 'consider women as historically insignificant' and, thus, unworthy of any serious and sustained investigation; those scholars who had begun to examine the historical experiences of women had to go 'through the painful, if rewarding, experience of acknowledging the limitations of their own intellectual training and its denial of the historical role of women'.⁴ Concentrating on the nineteenth century, Luddy observed that there had been little progress in terms of published research, despite a relative abundance of available source material. There were a number of reasons for this, including indifference in the academy, a dearth of university courses incorporating the history of women and a lack of appropriate explanatory and interpretative frameworks.⁵

This assessment of the state of Irish historical scholarship was bleak but it was also absolutely fair. Without a stable position within Irish historiography, the authors suggested that work on Irish women could be more easily incorporated into international debates on women's history. Of course, this statement focused on women's history alone, reflecting a significant debate in international scholarship around the merits of gender history versus women's history. The authors' reservations about the emergence of gender history and, to an extent, its potential to supersede women's history were not an outright rejection of that approach but an expression of concern around perceptions in the academy that "gender" was considered a more scientific and hence less politically engaged term than "women".⁶

Their concerns that women's history would be further marginalised as politically motivated were valid; as MacCurtain and O'Dowd observed, the advocacy of gender history by some scholars working in Irish history was born of a distrust of 'feminist historians'. This distrust was difficult to address, particularly because scholarship on women in Irish history had not developed in line with international standards in the 1970s and 1980s. The 'Agenda' itself was the product of discussions among the members of the Irish Association for Research in Women's History (I.A.R.W.H.), which was formed in 1988 to promote scholarly engagement with women's history.⁷ In articulating the concerns of women scholars working in the field, it was an unprecedented and urgent intervention, intended to change the

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 19-20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁷ The I.A.R.W.H. was subsequently renamed the Women's History Association of Ireland. The committee in 1992 now reads as a kind of who's who of women in the academy, with Mary Cullen serving as president, O'Dowd as secretary, MacCurtain as treasurer, Luddy as bulletin editor and Caitriona Clear, Rosemary Cullen Owens, Mary Daly, Christine Meek, Katharine Simms and Liz Steiner-Scott as committee members.

course of Irish historiography. The three authors understood the significance of their endeavour and the scale of the challenge confronting them, expressing their hope that their ‘Agenda’ would not ‘go the way of others published in *Irish Historical Studies*: interesting in theory but ignored in practice’.⁸

This special issue marks thirty years since the ‘Agenda’ appeared in *I.H.S.* and at this point in time, it is clear that MacCurtain, O’Dowd and Luddy’s rallying call was not ignored. Rather, the ‘Agenda’ both precipitated a new wave of scholarship and inspired the unprecedented development of women’s and gender history. Since 1992, the number of scholars working on women’s and gender history has increased significantly, and this cohort is continuing to grow. There have, consequently, been significant developments in the field; this includes advances that the authors of the ‘Agenda’ envisaged or hoped for, as well as some unexpected outcomes and, in some areas, a disappointing lack of progress.

I

The primary legacy of the ‘Agenda’ was that it set a blueprint for subsequent generations of scholars. The authors recognised the rich possibilities presented by source material and the potential of the field to eventually change the narrative of Irish history. The authors’ emphasis on unexplored or underexplored sources in the ‘Agenda’ highlighted an issue facing scholars and students interested in historical women — namely, a lack of easily accessible primary material. This was partly a result of a lack of sources, but it was also a product of archival practice, which traditionally prioritised sources pertaining to important men. Since the publication of the ‘Agenda’, the landscape has changed immensely in respect of accessibility. This is a result of a marked increase in the publication of printed primary sources, the emergence of online databases and advancements in archival practice.

One of the most important developments in women’s and gender history since the publication of the ‘Agenda’ was the 2002 publication of the *Field Day anthology of Irish writing, volumes iv and v*. Edited by Angela Bourke, the two volumes were published in reaction to the almost complete absence of women from Seamus Deane’s original three-volume collection (1991). Volumes iv and v include source material spanning from 600 A.D. to the late twentieth century, providing scholars and students with access to the words of hundreds of historical women.⁹

The role of the Irish Manuscripts Commission (I.M.C.) in publishing a number of volumes of primary source material created by or pertaining to women in Irish history cannot be overlooked.¹⁰ The I.M.C. was an early pioneer in the use of

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹ Angela Bourke *et al.* (eds), *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing, iv & v: Irish women’s writings and traditions* (2 vols, Cork, 2002). It is not surprising that the co-authors of the ‘Agenda’ were contributing editors to the *Field Day* volumes, along with a number of their colleagues in the I.A.R.W.H.

¹⁰ *The letters of Katherine Conolly, 1707–47*, ed. Marie-Louise Jennings and Gabrielle M. Ashford (I.M.C., Dublin, 2019); *Charlotte Brooke’s reliques of Irish poetry*, ed. Lesa Ní Mhungehaile (I.M.C., Dublin, 2009); *The Drennan-McTier letters*, ed. Jean Agnew (3 vols, I.M.C., Dublin, 1999); *The poems of Olivia Elder*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (Dublin, 2017); *Infanticide in the Irish crown files at assizes*, ed. Elaine Farrell (I.M.C., Dublin, 2012); *The minutes of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council and Executive Committee, 1911–40*, ed. Diane Urquhart (I.M.C., Dublin, 2008).

digital tools to enable greater accessibility to sources: in 1999, they published the *Directory of sources for women's history in Ireland* on CD-ROM, which was compiled by Luddy, Diane Urquhart, Catherine Cox and Leanne Lane, and was initially hosted on the National Archives of Ireland website.¹¹ The use of CD-ROM to hold and disseminate the *Directory* was highly innovative at the time of its publication. It eventually presented a problem, however, as the pace of technological advance rendered CD-ROM virtually obsolete within a matter of years. The National Archives also stopped hosting the *Directory*, making access even more difficult. Encouragingly, however, Luddy and O'Dowd, with the support of the I.M.C., are updating the *Directory*, which will be made available online through the commission's website.¹² While the *Directory* demonstrated some of the issues around early digital publication, it was also a sign of exciting things to come. In recent years, the use of digital platforms and technologies have simultaneously revolutionised scholarship and widened access to primary source material.

Built upon interdisciplinary collaboration, and reflecting major advances in technology since 1992, digital or part-digital projects have received significant funding and have transformed the field of women's and gender history in Ireland and internationally. These projects often utilise digital platforms as both repositories for primary sources and the circulation and dissemination of innovative research. In terms of Irish women's and gender history, some notable digital projects include Marie-Louise Coolahan's landmark European Research Council-funded RECIRC project, which uses digital tools to analyse the reception and circulation of early modern women's writing; Elaine Farrell and Leanne McCormick's Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Bad Bridget project; and the Magdalene Names Project and Magdalene Oral History Project, both of which come under the Justice for Magdalenes research project. There are also projects which incorporate sources that pertain to women's and gender history in an Irish context, such as Beyond 2022; the 1641 Depositions project; Susan Flavin's FoodCULT project, hosted by Trinity College Dublin and MACMORRIS, led by Patricia Palmer at Maynooth University.¹³ These projects, and others like them, demonstrate the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration and the capacity of digital humanities to revolutionise the analysis, presentation and dissemination of primary sources and scholarly research.

II

The 'Agenda' was intended to provoke scholarly engagement with sources and, in turn, facilitate much needed progress in the study and analysis of women's and gender history in Ireland. The efflorescence of research in the field since 1992 — and particularly in the past two decades — is clear evidence of the pioneering impact of MacCurtain, O'Dowd and Luddy (alongside a number of their

¹¹ Diane Urquhart, Maria Luddy, Catherine Cox and Leanne Lane, *A directory of sources for women's history in Ireland* [CD-ROM] (Dublin, 1999).

¹² The project to update the *Directory* is funded by the Irish government's Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, through the Mná 100 initiative. Frances Nolan is engaged as a researcher on the project.

¹³ See <https://recirc.nuigalway.ie/>; <https://badbridget.wordpress.com/>; <http://jfmresearch.com/>; <https://beyond2022.ie/>; <https://1641.tcd.ie/>; <https://foodcult.eu/>.

contemporaries). Of course, the ‘Agenda’ was just one of their many contributions to the field and its legacy cannot be divorced from the broader legacy of their scholarship and collegiality; indeed, first-hand evidence of their varied and enduring impact is found in several contributions to this issue.

This special issue commemorates more than the ‘Agenda’ as one of the most significant interventions in the field of women’s and gender history in Ireland; it also honours the generational legacy of its authors. The contributors to this issue are from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and career-stages; some are well-established academics, while others are early career scholars. The common denominator is that those who have contributed articles have and continue to produce innovative scholarship on women and gender which has in no small way been influenced by the work of MacCurtain, O’Dowd and Luddy.¹⁴ Reflecting the temporal parameters of the original ‘Agenda’, which spanned the period from 1500 to 1900, this issue incorporates scholarship on late medieval, early modern and nineteenth-century Ireland. It also, through Elaine Farrell, Leanne McCormick and Jennifer Redmond’s contribution, reaches into the first decades of the twentieth century.

One of the most important consequences of scholarship produced since the publication of the ‘Agenda’ is that the debate around women’s and gender history has moved on in an Irish context, to a point where both approaches co-exist and overlap productively, allowing for a greater dimensionality in scholarship. Developments in an international context (underpinned by advancements in feminist, race and queer theory, among others) have highlighted the need for an intersectional understanding of women’s lives — of lives shaped by gender, but also by social and economic status, race and ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Advances made in Irish scholarship over the past three decades make this kind of analysis possible.

III

Fittingly then, this issue opens with a contribution from Sparky Booker, who focuses on the gendered formulation, interpretation and experience of the law in late medieval Ireland. In doing so, she responds directly to the ‘Agenda’, utilising the kinds of sources that MacCurtain and O’Dowd highlighted as valuable. In recognising the potential of legal records, Booker treads firmly in the footsteps

¹⁴ See, for example, Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds), *Women in Irish society: the historical dimension* (Dublin, 1978); Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O’Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991); Mary O’Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland, 1500–1800* (Harlow, 2005); eadem, ‘Women and the Irish chancery court in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’ in *I.H.S.*, xxxi, no. 124 (Nov. 1999), pp 470–87; eadem, ‘Politics, patriotism, and women in Ireland, Britain and colonial America, c.1700–1780’ in *Journal of Women’s History*, xxii, no. 4 (winter 2010), pp 15–38; eadem ‘Women in Ulster, 1600–1800’ in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *Ulster since 1600: politics, economy and society* (Oxford, 2013), pp 43–57; Maria Luddy and Mary O’Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland, 1660–1925* (Cambridge, 2020); Maria Luddy and James M. Smith (eds), *Children and childhood in Irish society, 1500 to the present* (Dublin, 2014); Maria Luddy, *Matters of deceit: breach of promise to marry cases in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Limerick* (Dublin, 2011); eadem, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

of O’Dowd (who authored a pioneering article on the Irish chancery court in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), while also drawing on recent scholarship on the legal history of women in medieval and early modern British and European contexts. While acknowledging the enduring relevance of the ‘Agenda’ as a blueprint for further research, however, she challenges the authors’ ‘unproblematised’ use of women as a category of analysis. This reflects advances in scholarship since the publication of the ‘Agenda’, which recognises differences between women, but does not understand those differences as meaningful ‘barriers to the creation of a “history of women”’.

Booker utilises a case study of late medieval legal history in Ireland to explore how developments in women’s history ‘complicate and call into question the validity of writing histories of women’, asking: ‘is it reasonable to argue that the legal actions and opportunities of a wealthy and influential English widow like Agnes de Valence (d. c.1310) were similar in some significant way to those of Joan Brennan, an anglicised and likely unmarried Irish woman who was a glover’s apprentice in Dublin in 1490?’ Clearly, the multiplicity of circumstances that shaped individual women’s lives and experiences in late medieval Ireland cannot be ignored. However, as Booker demonstrates, the ‘societally embedded nature of law and its implementation’ meant that contemporary understandings and expressions of gender were reflected in court proceedings. Regardless of rank, women utilised gendered tropes, often around female vulnerability, to influence judges and juries in their favour; men, too, recognised the power of such tropes and might employ them to their own advantage to undermine women’s credibility. This article is a powerful call to complicate the narrative — to acknowledge the differences in women’s circumstances and experiences, in order to better understand where and when the term ‘women’ can be used appropriately (i.e. effectively) as a category of analysis.

In the second contribution to this special issue, Clodagh Tait considers women and gender in early modern Ireland from the mid sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, examining some of the thematic foci of the original ‘Agenda’ and highlighting others that were not foregrounded. In doing so, Tait acknowledges the contributions of scholars that have ‘brought the field of Irish women’s history to the point where it “pose[s] a major challenge to mainstream Irish history”’; indeed has become mainstream’. Encompassing the themes of birth and youth, religion and belief, politics, marriage and property, work, and movement, Tait speaks to the spirit of the original ‘Agenda’ by highlighting enduring *lacunae* — gaps in scholarship that present opportunities for further research. Central to this is an understanding of women’s fractured and fragmented presence in the historical record. In considering birth and youth, for example, Tait advocates for greater scholarly engagement with parent-child relationships, childhood, military training of boys, the experiences of children and teenagers in warfare, education, and the training of children for roles in household service and as apprentices. In looking at religion and beliefs, the potential for further research on the continental education of Catholic girls and boys is underlined. So, too, is the space for further enquiry into the gendered experiences of clergymen as men, and greater engagement with the gendered dynamics of supernatural beliefs and experiences.

Tait invokes Patricia Palmer’s concept of ‘fugitive sightings’ in the ‘dispersed archive’ (a term coined by Mary O’Dowd) to encourage historians of women and gender ‘to approach the sources and the practice of writing differently, and perhaps to begin to make peace with what cannot be known’. In taking this approach and in recognising gaps in the historiography, she suggests the potential of surviving sources to contribute to gendered interrogations and understandings of the past.

The potential of innovative approaches is also underlined in Tait's appraisal of scholarship on material culture and her call for further enquiry into how objects 'produced', and spaces 'ordered', gender. Significantly, Tait throughout considers the potential of sources to develop the (relatively underdeveloped) body of scholarship on masculinity in the early modern Irish context.

In writing the 'Agenda', the authors identified *lacunae* in the historiography and envisaged a number of ways in which scholarship on early modern women might develop. Given the pace of technological advancement in the decades that followed, they could not have foretold the possibilities presented by the application of digital tools to historical scholarship. Evan Bourke's article demonstrates the potential of digital tools and interdisciplinary collaboration to transform understandings of the past and, importantly, historical women's lives, roles and experiences. As Bourke observes at the outset, '[n]etwork analysis — the study of patterns of interconnectedness among a set of things — is a potentially useful method for those studying the lives of early modern women, as it can bring to the fore the agency of lesser-known actors, help raise new questions and open new avenues of research'. Providing an overview of different approaches to network analysis and the types of sources best suited to its application, Bourke assesses two extant databases — Tudor Networks of Power (TNOP) and Six Degrees of Francis Bacon (SDFB) — to determine how each accounted for gender in their datasets and to determine what, exactly, these projects can reveal about early modern women.

Bourke then examines the use of network analysis in two 'domestic' projects: first, examining the approaches used by the RECIRC (Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550–1700) project, which was hosted by the University of Galway between 2014 and 2020; and secondly, considering MACMORRIS's analysis of the *Dictionary of Irish Biography (D.I.B.)* and the Bardic Poetry Database (BPD), before discussing the ways in which that project, which is ongoing and hosted by Maynooth University, is trying to overcome the inherent gender bias in the *D.I.B.*'s selection of early modern lives between 1540 and 1691. In addition to using case studies to evaluate the efficacy of network analysis, Bourke also considers a number of issues that scholars encounter when using the approach. This includes difficulties such as access to essential training and opportunities for collaboration, and the volume of labour required to curate and clean data, particularly in the case of larger datasets. In discussing some of these issues, Bourke underlines the potential of network analysis to transform the study of gender history; providing valuable and otherwise concealed evidence of early modern women's lives and, ultimately, signalling new and exciting directions for the field.

In 1992 MacCurtain and O'Dowd observed that one of the major challenges facing scholars working on women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a lack of source material. Considering developments on early modern women's writing since the publication of the 'Agenda', Marie-Louise Coolahan notes that we now have a 'much-expanded view'. In large part, this is thanks to the pioneering efforts of MacCurtain and O'Dowd; it is also a result of innovative methodologies and approaches for analysing female-authored texts, which have opened 'up new seams of historical, literary and interdisciplinary research'. The complementarity of research interests across different disciplines, and the willingness of scholars from those disciplines to collaborate, has transformed the landscape. As Coolahan notes, these developments have given rise to 'wider questions', questions that encompass meaning and identity, viz. what did it mean to be Irish in this period;

what did it mean to be a writer in this period; and how should writing in this period be defined? Coolahan further observes that, in asking these kinds of questions, scholars of early modern Irish women's writing are entering a larger conversation; indeed, developments on women's writing have added to scholarship on a variety of topics, including book history and the history of reading, culinary and medical history, network analysis, the history of the subject, as well as literary history. In consequence, 'the range of innovative directions that have emerged since the 'Agenda' laid down by MacCurtain and O'Dowd feed into broader international and interdisciplinary imperatives'. Women's history is, thus, 'no longer confined to the study of women in history; rather, it has driven new research in a range of historical fields and should be understood in terms of that impact'.

Focusing largely on the eighteenth century, Leanne Calvert's article uses the 'Agenda' as a 'point of departure', highlighting the potential of the Presbyterian archive to transform understandings of women, gender and the family in Ireland. As Calvert notes, '[t]he explanatory potential of religion as a force that determined the lives of women (and men) in Ireland is a recurrent theme in the "Agenda"', but our ability to understand the ways in which religion actually shaped people's lives has been limited by a lack of surviving source material (with the loss of the majority of Irish ecclesiastical court records in 1922 proving particularly deleterious). In 1992, the authors of the 'Agenda' observed an emphasis on Catholicism and Catholic women religious in scholarship, with far less attention being given to Protestant minorities. MacCurtain and O'Dowd recognised the potential in this area, not least because the archives of Protestant minorities have survived in greater quantities. In particular, as Calvert notes, 'the records of the Presbyterian church were highlighted as a ripe source for analysis "from a women's point of view"', with 'the potential to uncover attitudes to women and sexuality'. Calvert's article, thus, introduces the Presbyterian archive and provides an overview of the community who produced it, considering how it satisfies one of the aims of the 'Agenda', by highlighting some of the circumstances of women's intimate lives from 'a woman's point of view'. Calvert concludes by considering the potential of the Presbyterian archive as a source for writing a gendered history of men. Echoing Clodagh Tait's call for further study on concepts of masculinity in the early modern Irish context, Calvert observes that serious engagement with Presbyterian records presents 'a major challenge to "mainstream" Irish history because it underscores why all history *is* gender history'.

Deirdre Raftery's contribution focuses on women religious in the nineteenth century, an area identified by the authors of the 'Agenda' as having significant scope for further research. Raftery responds to a number of the questions raised in the 'Agenda' concerning the potential for scholarship on women religious, noting that '[t]hirty years later, it is both instructional and timely to examine historiographical developments, with a view to seeing whether or not scholars rose to the challenges posed in 1992'. Raftery opens by considering the expansion in the number of convents in Ireland in the nineteenth century, a development that was described as 'nothing if not extraordinary' by Luddy in the 'Agenda'. In acknowledging the pioneering research of Caitriona Clear, Tony Fahey and Mary Peckham Magray, Raftery argues that historians in the field have not built upon this work. There remains, as Raftery points out, much to be done: this includes a need for case studies of families in which multiple members entered convents or the same convent and a need to read sources 'against the grain'. In respect of the latter, Raftery points out that the development of methodologies and languages in recent years can facilitate the discussion of complex topics that remain largely absent from the literature

(for example, women's sexuality; emotions; incest as a factor in girls' decision to enter conventual life; sexual abuse within convents; and homoerotic 'popular' publications on convent life).

Responding to questions from the 'Agenda', like 'Did nuns question their place in Irish society?' and 'Was religious life a protest ... against the role in society allotted to women by the patriarchal church?', Raftery charts the research that has been produced on nineteenth-century women religious and convents since 1992 (including unpublished theses and an emerging and important body of research being produced by early career researchers) and highlights enduring gaps in the historiography. In the 'Agenda', Luddy also asked 'Can we see nuns as feminists?'. This question, which remains largely unanswered, is identified by Raftery as 'perhaps [the] most compelling'; by providing a survey of approaches and theoretical frameworks employed in scholarship since 1992, and by building an argument using theoretical perspectives on 'women's history' and 'feminist history', Raftery attempts an answer.

In the final contribution to this special issue, Elaine Farrell, Leanne McCormick and Jennifer Redmond reflect on the contribution of the 'Agenda' and its authors to Irish historiography and observe that 'The original 'Agenda' discussed tensions between "mainstream history and women's history" yet it is impossible now to refer to "mainstream history" without a level of self-consciousness'. Since 1992, this alteration has been experienced most profoundly in the development of social history, including — prominently — women's social history, and the 'valorisation of histories of the "ordinary" person'. Recognising the pioneering (and ongoing) contribution of Maria Luddy, the authors examine developments in scholarship on poverty and migration, sexuality and crime in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They highlight a shift in understandings of poverty, as scholarship no longer focuses on the role of philanthropists and the victimhood of impoverished people, but offers 'a more nuanced portrayal of people who found strategies to alleviate their destitution'. In particular, the contribution of Lindsey Earner-Byrne to this area is foregrounded.

On migration, the early engagement of scholars with the topic is acknowledged, but aspects of emigrant women's lives and experiences require further development, including more investigation into emigrant women and work (an area highlighted by Luddy) and emigrant women's integration into new communities. Women's sexuality was singled out by Luddy in the 'Agenda' as an area requiring investigation; scholarship on this topic has developed in different directions since 1992, although, as Farrell, McCormick and Redmond observe, there are areas that 'are still ripe for further research'. Scholarship has typically focused on what were considered deviant or criminal behaviours (the history of prostitution, reproduction-related crime, illegitimacy), and on Ireland's history of institutional confinement and abuse. The article's authors point to the challenges faced by scholars working on institutions, particularly the unavailability of records from religious-run institutions, like the Magdalene laundries and mother and baby homes. As they observe, there has been relatively little engagement with what were understood as 'normal' sexual experiences in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland. They also point out the need for greater engagement with same-sex or queer relationships, 'an area which, like so many in women's history, requires a re-reading of sources'. Lastly, Farrell, McCormick and Redmond consider developments in respect of women as victims and perpetrators of crime; this encompasses sexual and physical abuse and violence as it was enacted and experienced in different contexts.

The publication of the 'Agenda' in 1992 had a significant impact on the development of historical scholarship in Ireland. This special issue seeks to recognise its legacy and, through the contributions that follow, to consider the current state of women's and gender history in Ireland, to reflect on the field's contribution to and reception in wider historiography, and to envisage future directions of scholarship. Ultimately, we hope that this special issue will serve as a new agenda for women's and gender history in Ireland, inspiring future generations of scholars to engage in what has become an ambitious and flourishing field of historical enquiry.