



Welcome to the second VOICES Newsletter!

Jessie Buckley's [Bafta](#) and [Oscar](#) wins for her performance as Agnes in Hamnet, are putting a rare focus on the lives of 17th-century women. Buckley said at the recent Bafta awards ceremony: "I believe in storytelling. I believe in women's voices to tell those stories."

It is this storytelling that is at the core of the VOICES project, funded by Advanced European Research Council Grant. VOICES is bringing the stories of marginalised ordinary Irish early modern women to life. AI and Knowledge Graph technologies are enabling us to draw together the stories of these women from numerous sources including the Court of Chancery documents in the National Archives and the Funeral Entries in the National Library.

Now mid-way through the project, we can confirm that it's not that these women weren't there. It's just that details of their lives were buried in documents held in diverse places. They were, in fact, hiding in plain sight.

In this newsletter, we'd like to share some of our latest progress with you. We look forward to continuing to shed light on their roles, experiences and lives.

We'd also like to thank you for your support thus far. Do sign up for [more information](#) and see our [website](#) for the latest news.

Professor Jane Ohlmeyer
VOICES Principal Investigator



Celebrating Women's Voices:

Exploring the VOICES Project Knowledge Graph

By Dr Lucy McKenna and Prof Jane Ohlmeyer

Much of the historical data for VOICES – our ‘digital windfall’ – is unstructured and exists in ‘digital silos’ or what one of the founders of the WWW described as a ‘data wilderness’. The challenge is to turn this ‘data wilderness’ into knowledge that is interoperable. VOICES addresses this by creating a ‘Knowledge Graph’ (KG), which exploits the power of the Semantic Web and Linked Open Data to answer the research questions that underpin VOICES. In the field of computer science, KG technologies are increasingly proving their worth but have rarely been adapted for the challenge posed by ‘messy’ historical data like ours.

The VOICES KG builds on the foundational infrastructure developed by the [Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland](#) (VRTI) project. The VRTI KG for Irish History currently models over 10,000 notable Irish historical figures, primarily men, from the Dictionary of Irish Biography (DIB) as well as a present-day geo-stack of Ireland. The power of the VOICES KG is enhanced because it sits within the VRTI KG, which allows us to interlink to geographical entities and entries from the DIB already contained in the graph (many of whom are the husbands and sons of women listed in the VOICES KG). We can also access and link to digitised records (e.g. PROB 11 wills) held within the treasury itself. For the VOICES KG, we have so far focussed on adding women from four archives to the KG: The 1641 Depositions, records of the Dublin Statute, records of the freewomen of Dublin, and a selection of wills from The National Archives (TNA) UK, PROB 11. This resulted in the creation of 2,345 KG entries for ordinary Irish women from the early modern period. Prior to incorporating the VOICES KG into the VRTI KG, there were only 54 entries for early modern Irish women in the KG.

The effectiveness of the KG, of course, depends on the quality of the data that underpins it. Prior to uplift to the Knowledge Graph, the data is curated according to a bespoke person schema developed for VRTI and VOICES in collaboration with historians. The schema contains 53 fields grouped into categories such as: Names and aliases (modernised and variant spellings), Biographical dates and places, Familial relationships, Occupations and social status, Links to external identifiers and references

The minimum requirements for an entry in the person schema is a last name, an address and dating information (i.e. floruit, date of birth, date of death), however, most entries contain much more detailed information. We capture a woman’s maiden name (where known) as her headline name, and her married name(s) as an alias. Names are modernised but variant spellings are also captured. The address is captured using a URI (uniform resource identifier) from the present-day geographical dataset in the VRTI KG. The data will, in time, be linked to an early-modern geographical dataset currently in development. Data on male relatives, primarily husbands, is also captured using the person schema but these are typically stub entries that meet the schema’s minimum requirements. Where possible, there is also a link to the original historical sources and transcripts. We hope that we can connect, through the KG, with other relevant digital projects.

To read the article go to: <https://voicesproject.ie/impact/celebrating-womens-voices-exploring-the-voices-project-knowledge-graph/>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmgFPLpBwL4>



VOICES of Brigid

By Dr. Clare McNulty



In celebration of St Brigid's day on Feb 2nd, we looked at some of the Brigids in early modern Ireland.

Bridgett, Briggett, Brigid, Brigitt, Brigitte: These are just some of the Brigids known to have lived in seventeenth-century Ireland. They were pregnant widows in the aftermath of the 1641 rebellion, they were rebels who stole 'English sheep' from gentlemen, and they were daughters who lost mothers to smallpox.

The VOICES project is currently working to uncover the lived experience of such women in early modern Ireland. During a period of intense economic, political, and

cultural transformation (1550 – 1700), what role did women play and how have their experiences of social upheaval, bloody civil war and extreme trauma been documented? Harnessing the power of AI, as well as more traditional historical approaches, sources such as the 1641 Depositions, Funeral Entries, wills, and court records (digitised but unstructured) are currently being interrogated to transform our understanding of the history of women in early modern Ireland. The project aims to utilise previously digitised, and yet relatively untapped, records such as the Funeral Entries now housed under the Genealogical Office at the National Library of Ireland. Compiled by the Ulster King of Arms across the long seventeenth century, the Funeral Entries document the names, deaths, and family networks of c. 3800 people, of whom 38-42% were women. The 1641 Depositions (now TCD MSS 809-841) are a collection of witness testimonies (digitised and transcribed) recording the losses of the Protestant community during the Irish rebellion, from the loss of goods and property to crimes of assault, stripping, imprisonment, and murder by Catholic rebels. Roughly 8000 testimonies survive today across thirty-one bound volumes, totalling 19000 pages. In 958 witness testimonies, mostly Protestant women (majority of whom were widows), recorded their experience of violence in the aftermath of the rebellion.

As we celebrated St Brigid's Day this year, we began thinking about the many women named Brigid (and the many ways their names were spelt) in sources such as the Depositions and Funeral Entries. Saint Brigid was the reputed foundress and abbess of Kildare dating to c. 450-524. Saint Brigid was well documented in the annals, saints' lives, genealogies and literature for Ireland where she was often presented as 'a woman of power in the early Irish church'.^[iv] While the cult of Saint Brigid was said to be in decline from the mid-twentieth century onwards, the records for early modern Ireland indicate that Brigid, or Bridgett, Briggett, Bridget, Brigitt, Brigitte, was a popular name amongst Catholics and Protestants, Gaels and English. From a diversity of religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds, we have captured some of their stories.

To read the remainder of the article go to <https://voicesproject.ie/impact/blog-10-voices-of-brigid/>



Innovative use of Machine Learning and both ‘traditional’ and ‘generative’ AI.

Prof Declan O’Sullivan

Although originally not part of the project plan, out of necessity (due to the nature of the data) we have explored the extent to which automated transcription and NLP techniques, particularly named entity recognition (NER), can extract persons, places and other key entity types. We have been evaluating Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) and NER models for their ability to cope with early modern orthography, multilingual naming practices and manuscript variability. Results illuminate the constraints of existing tools but also how benchmarking can generate reusable workflows, inform the creation of annotated gold standards and support the production of FAIR-aligned humanities data.

Transkribus, is a traditional AI tool, which generates automatic transcriptions of manuscript images. Depending on the handwriting and the model, the results vary. We used it on 1167 Irish Chancery pleadings with women (using Egerton.4 model) and on 17 volumes of Funeral Entries (using ‘Super Model’, Text Titan I), with c. 4,000 men and women named.



Chancery NAI

Our initial analysis suggests that around 38 to 42 per cent of entries concern women, a strikingly high proportion by early modern standards. The quality varies depending on the manuscript’s quality, handwriting, layout and language.

These transcriptions, however, provide us with an essential starting point for **NER**, another form of traditional AI, to explore how information about people, places and relationships might be automatically extracted from the digital texts.

Generative AI: We are very aware of the ethical and environmental challenges of using Generative AI but have undertaken some initial experimentation using ChatGPT.4o to correct Transkribus output. The results, while good, clearly require prompt engineering to guide the output. Our next experiment with OpenAI’s GPT-4o was with the 1641 Depositions freely available at <https://1641.tcd.ie/>, to explore its capability to ‘recognise’, categorise and analyse types of information for economic losses and ‘death events’, both mass death events and individual deaths.

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1641 DEPOSITIONS
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And in other News...

VOICES's PI, Professor Jane Ohlmeyer's article, *Archives of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones*, co-authored with Rosemary Byrne and Stephanie McCurry was published in *Law and History Review*, along with her contribution on 'Women and Sexual Violence in the "1641 Depositions"'. You can view the articles here:

<https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/women-and-sexual-violence-in-the-1641-depositions/3C095F74E34E9C28A96A93DA255A1D47> and

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/archives-of-sexual-violence-in-conflict-zones/146D57E4E12F6CB3D9146743C762BE75>

'Digitising Death: Benchmarking Genealogical Data and Recovering Women's Histories in Early Modern Ireland' in *Journal of Open Humanities Data* special issue on Benchmarking in the Digital Humanities.

<https://doi.org/10.5334/johd.491>

<https://openhumanitiesdata.metajnl.com/articles/10.5334/johd.491>

Professor Jane Ohlmeyer delivered a lecture at [Royal Historical Society](#), UK on 21 November 2025. The lecture, on 'Visible | Invisible: Voices of Women in Early Modern Ireland' was the Society's 2025 Anniversary Lecture. <https://voicesproject.ie/impact/royal-historical-society-visible-invisible-voices-of-women-in-early-modern-ireland/>

On 17 November VOICES Research Fellow Dr Daniel Patterson delivered a **paper at the Trinity Centre for Early Modern History Research Seminar**, entitled *Women waging law: The Chancery Pleadings revisited*. <https://voicesproject.ie/impact/women-waging-law-the-chancery-pleadings-revisited/>

On 20 November Professor Jane Ohlmeyer delivered a **lecture at the Institute of Historical research** entitled: *Making a living in early modern Dublin: women and work*.

<https://www.history.ac.uk/news-events/events/making-living-early-modern-dublin-women-work>

In July 2025, Research Fellow Dr Bronagh McShane, delivered a **keynote lecture at the [annual Catholic Record Society Conference](#)**, entitled 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Women, Agency and Catholicism in the Early Modern Courts'.

Also see Clodagh Finn's article in the *Irish Examiner* 'The dung queen of Ireland-and other Irish women alive in the time of Hamnet' <https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/columnists/arid-41800460.html>

Forthcoming articles

- 'Digital Humanities and AI in Women's History' in the *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Gender and Women's History*



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