

**THE 1641 DEPOSITIONS: RECORDS OF MASSACRE, ATROCITY  
AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND**

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On 22 October 1641 a rebellion broke out in Ireland, which triggered a decade of bloody civil war. Incidents of extreme violence accompanied the rebellion as Catholics attacked, robbed and murdered their Protestant neighbours. The Protestants retaliated using extreme violence. This became one of the most brutal moments in Irish history. We will never know the exact death toll. What we do know is that more people lost their lives in the 1640s than in the rebellion of 1798 or in the civil wars of the twentieth century.

The 1641 Depositions are witness testimonies mainly by Protestants, but also by some Catholics, from all social backgrounds, concerning their experiences of the 1641 Irish rebellion. They have been dubbed the most controversial records in Irish history. It is a body of material unparalleled anywhere in early modern Europe, which has now been conserved, digitized, transcribed and made available online for teaching and research (1641.tcd.ie).

In this talk I will explain why the Depositions are so significant, and will then consider the development of the '1641 Depositions Project' from a modest digitization project into a major EU flagship initiative. I will reflect on the relevance of the 1641 Depositions for contemporary Ireland and the modern world, where the importance of understanding why atrocity, massacre and ethnic cleansing occurs can not be overstated. By studying past occurrences of extreme violence and by attempting to unravel why they occurred, how the victims survived, how they remembered, how perpetrators were punished, and how communities were reconciled (or not) our understanding of the present can be more fully informed.

A version of this paper has been published in Jane Ohlmeyer and Micheál Ó Siochrú, *Ireland 1641: Contexts and Reactions* (Manchester University Press, 2013); also see 1641.tcd.ie where the Depositions are published in full.

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