Women and personal possessions: 17th-century testamentary evidence from counties Waterford and Kilkenny, Ireland.

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Introduction.

In a recent review article, Maureen Meikle (1994: 71) pointed out that, in general, although "books and articles appear every month" on women in modern history, similar work for the medieval and early modern periods "has been much slower to appear". This problem has been echoed in Ireland where, until the publication in 1991 of a collection of essays entitled Women in early modern Ireland, few authors dealt with the historical experience of women during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (MacCurtain and O'Dowd 1991: 3; Anon. 1989). While some historians of women's history such as Marina Ward (1991: 5) prefer to concentrate on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "because this is the period when Irishwomen were at their most active in the political arena", others are simply daunted by the paucity of historical records pre-dating 1800 that refer to women (MacCurtain and O'Dowd 1991).

The problem of locating historical sources relating to women from this period is an international one, but Ireland's position was made worse when one of its main archives, the Public Record Office, was consumed by fire in 1922 during the Irish Civil War (amazingly, the building had been commandeered by republican forces as a munitions factory! [Wood 1938; Anon. 1992]). This disaster has prompted some Irish historians to search for alternative sources of documentary evidence relating to women, such as the archives kept by convents (MacCurtain 1995: 37-8). However, some of the pessimism felt by MacCurtain and O'Dowd (1991: 3) -- notably that "documentary material such as local parish records and wills ... has disappeared completely" -- is somewhat mitigated by the existence of transcripts and abstracts of some of these documents made by researchers prior to 1922. Furthermore, a few original wills may still be found in family and estate papers, whether these are still privately held or have been deposited in public record repositories in recent years. There are also a few Irish wills available in the Prerogative Courts of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, but these relate primarily to people who owned property in both Ireland and England (ffolliott and O'Byrne 1981: 164; Walton 1981: 40-1). Other original wills have also been acquired from various
solicitors' offices by the National Archives of Ireland (formerly the Public Record Office of Ireland) since 1922 and many of these have been indexed (Walton 1987: 164), though the bulk of them post-date 1700.

From an archaeological perspective, however, research on women in Ireland is rather more sparse, apart from the analysis of skeletal remains and burial practices or the study of *sheela na gigs* (e.g. King 1993; Prendergast 1992). The only general discussion known to this author to appear on the archaeology of Irishwomen was in the context of a brief survey of European prehistoric evidence (Waddell 1990). Little, if any, work has been published on the archaeology of Irishwomen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but this is partly due to the generally weak status of the archaeology of this period in Ireland. Ten years ago, Alan Gailey (1987: 86) commented that "post-medieval urban archaeology remains in its infancy, though a start is evident in Derry City and Coleraine" (in Northern Ireland). There has only been sporadic work throughout Ireland since that time, with a concentration (seemingly) on military aspects of the period in rural areas (e.g. Flanagan 1988; Klingelhöfer 1992). However, the results of urban archaeological excavations carried out since the late 1980s in response to inner city renewal schemes are now coming to light and a proportion of this data (e.g. O'Flanagan 1997; Scully 1997a) relates to the post-medieval period (here understood to mean the years *circa* 1500-1750). However, the historical experience of women has not been targeted in the research agenda of these excavations, the excavators concentrating mainly on the recording or conservation of architectural fabric. Therefore, what may be needed to encourage greater interest in the archaeology of women in Ireland in general, and for the post-medieval period in particular, is a dedicated organisation similar, perhaps, to the Feminist History Forum which was founded at Dublin in 1987 (Luddy and Murphy 1989: 1; Luddy and McLoughlin 1990). Whether such an organisation would ever arise or not, this article is offered as a starting point from which further interdisciplinary research on the archaeology and history of women in Ireland might grow.

More specifically, the purpose of this article is to suggest how a category of documentary evidence (wills) that is archaeologically under-utilised in Ireland, might be used to inform the interpretation of the archaeological record relating to women. It is intended to demonstrate what kind of contextual information can be provided by such documents for objects owned by women in two seventeenth-century counties (Kilkenny and Waterford) in south-east Ireland. It is not a statistical analysis of all known seventeenth-century wills relating to the two counties, but rather a look at some examples of the more readily available or accessible transcripts and abstracts of wills (many of them published) that
were compiled in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. These are chosen here for their accessibility (as published or publicly archived and indexed records) and for their timesaving convenience as collections of testamentary documentation. Nonetheless, original documents are to be preferred where they are known to exist since abstracts (and some transcripts) omit details of interest to the archaeologist. Furthermore, original wills written and/or signed by women are as much material culture as other artefacts with which we deal and their very 'materiality' may give the archaeologist information (such as whether the testator was able to write her own name or not) not explicitly stated in the account.

With regard to testamentary jurisdiction, wills were proved in the ecclesiastical court of a diocese or, in some cases, of an archdiocese of the Church of Ireland between 1536 and 1857. Much other useful documentation, such as probate inventories, could be generated when wills were proved. Probate inventories, in particular, are rich in potentially useful archaeological data, providing "details of furniture, furnishings, clothing, jewellery, plate, cattle, and in fact everything owned [by the testator], with valuations" (Mander 1977: 54). Alas! Whilst ecclesiastical court records may survive well in diocesan archives in Britain -- where they "are still largely untapped as a historical source" (Meikle 1994: 72-3) -- the passing of the Public Records (Ireland) Act in 1867 resulted in the transfer of all wills and associated papers ageing at least twenty years from the consistorial (ecclesiastical) courts to the Public Record Office in Dublin, only to perish there in 1922 (ffolliott and O'Byrne 1981: 159-60). It is not known if probate inventories were among these records, but it is thought that the consistorial courts might not have preserved many of them in their archives in the first place. Whatever the reason, there are no collections of this type of document surviving today in Ireland, though a few individual examples may linger fortuitously in some family papers (Julian Walton, personal communication). Therefore, abstracts and transcripts of wills, whether published or unpublished, now also form a primary source of information on numerous individuals living in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of whom would otherwise be undocumented.

Genealogists were primarily responsible for compiling these (occasionally huge) collections of abstracts and transcripts. Consequently, many of the abstracts are quite perfunctory, supplying little more than the details of the familial relationships of the people specified in the wills. However, I attempt to show here that some transcripts and abstracts can be used by archaeologists seeking a documentary insight into the ownership of objects by women, and the types of artefact involved, in two seventeenth-century Irish counties. Bear in
mind, however, that the documentary examples are presented here only to provide a flavour of this type of record. Therefore, the emphasis of this paper is qualitative rather than quantitative and, in the absence of any previous interdisciplinary research of this kind in Ireland, the observations made here are necessarily preliminary.

Women's history/archaeology in counties Waterford and Kilkenny.

Figure 1 (Click for a larger picture)

Historical literature relating to Waterford (as it appears in the pages of its main antiquarian journal *Decies*) has had a poor showing of material relating to women while its coverage of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in general leaves much to be desired (Fewer 1992a; 1992b). Conversely, its Kilkenny counterpart,

Figure 2 (Click for a larger picture)

the *Old Kilkenny Review*, has traditionally emphasised pre-nineteenth-century history in its pages (Murphy 1992), but its treatment of Kilkenny women's history shares a similar fate to that in *Decies* regarding their Waterford sisters. The *Old Kilkenny Review's* strong showing of early modern history is echoed in the Kilkenny volume of the Irish County History Series of essay collections (reviewed by Fewer 1993) and contains rather more on this period than its Waterford counterpart (Nolan, Power and Cowman 1992) but women's history as a whole receives equally short shrift in both volumes. Turning to the archaeology of women as a specific theme in these two counties, research to date has been non-existent, making this paper the first attempt to deal with the subject.
Locations of the testamentary records (see Note below).

All of the seventeenth-century will transcripts and abstracts (totalling seventeen) published in the Journal of the Waterford and south-east of Ireland Archaeological Society (published 1894-1920) have been examined along with those in the papers of Edmund Walsh Kelly, a Waterford genealogist. In the latter case, unpublished will abstracts relating to Waterford city and county are available at Waterford City Library (Item 30/21), while those for County Kilkenny were edited and published by Julian Walton (1988). The seventeenth-century component of the two Walsh Kelly collections numbered eight each. A random sample of the 952 abstracts and transcripts of seventeenth and eighteenth century wills of County Kilkenny testators that were compiled by Bishop William Carrigan (available on microfilm in the National Library of Ireland; Pos. 904 [this reel covers manuscript volumes 44-56] ) was also analysed, along with the transcript of a single seventeenth-century will in the Power O'Shee papers (these are maintained in the same institution) that was published in the Waterford antiquarian journal Decies in 1993 (Fewer and Nicholls 1993). The number of seventeenth-century wills identified in the sample from the Carrigan papers amounted to seventeen. Published surname indexes to the Carrigan collection were compiled by Hilary Walsh and published in The Irish Genealogist in 1970. In all, fifty will transcripts or abstracts dating to the seventeenth century were examined, of which 19 provided useful data on bequests to women.

English common law and female inheritance in early modern Ireland.

A number of the wills refer only to what was called the 'widow's portion' and do not include an itemised list of possessions. This 'widow's portion' was a fixed proportion of the estate -- normally one third -- that, by law, had to be bequeathed to the widow to hold for the rest of her life. This stipulation was a customary law in the north of England until abolished in 1692 in Wales, and the English colony in Ireland until 1696, the city of London until 1724 (Nicholls 1991: 17-18) and in the American colonies until later in the eighteenth century (Depauw 1987: 93). For example, Paul Fitzpeirse Sherlock
of Waterford bequeathed "one third of property to wife Mary" in his will of 1635 but unfortunately he did not itemise the bequest (Walsh Kelly unpublished: 8). Likewise, Darby Brenan of Ballilannan, near Castlecomer, County Kilkenny, declared in his will of 1679 that:

"It is my will that my married wife shall have ye third part of all my worldly substance as well personal as reall together with all my household stuff" (Carrigan unpublished: [114]).

As Kenneth Nicholls (1991: 18) further explains,

"in the Irish colony (as opposed to the semi-independent Gaelic areas), the rule of succession entitled the wife (if there were children) to a third of the moveable goods on her husband's death after the payment of debts and of his funeral expenses, while the children were entitled to another third, and only the remaining third could be freely bequeathed by the husband. If there were no children, the wife's share rose to half".

An example of a half share is provided by the will of Francis Lumbard of Waterford (dated 1590) in which he declared:

"I give to my wife the half of all my personality [and that] my said brother James assisted by my wife shall distribute the other half of my said goods [in this case, in the form of cash payments]" (Carrigan, 1907: 69).

However, a condition might be made that the widow would only receive her portion if she remarried. This was the situation demanded by John Keating of Richestown, County Tipperary, in 1705; William Wailsh of Licketstown, County Kilkenny, yeoman, in 1675; and Edmund Walsh of Great Birtowne, County Kildare, in 1673 (Jennings 1914: 27; Walton 1988: 518). (Keating and Edmund Walsh both held property in County Kilkenny.) Until their remarriage, these widows would enjoy the rents of certain lands in common with their children, or would receive a yearly maintenance out of the estate.

**Women and property in Gaelic Ireland.**

In those districts of early medieval Ireland where native Gaelic jurisdiction was still practised, a woman could only hold a life interest in land belonging to her
own family or land settled on her by her husband. After her death, the property reverted to the (male) head of the family concerned. During her lifetime, a woman needed the permission of the head of the family that owned the land to alienate any of it, while her own heirs could not normally inherit it either. By the early thirteenth century, however, documentary evidence exists of royal or aristocratic women endowing the Church with part of their marital estates (though, as Katherine Simms points out, it is not clear whether permission had been obtained from the male heirs of the property beforehand (1975: 106)). Within another three hundred years, aristocratic women in Gaelic parts of Ireland were able (in some cases at least) to mortgage or otherwise alienate land held by them (Nicholls 1991: 26). These changes are seen to be a reflection of the growing influence of English common law in the Gaelic districts of later medieval Ireland (Simms 1975: 107-8).

Movable goods were a different matter. The evidence of the medieval annals shows that the daughters of powerful lords and princes could bring much wealth with them into a marriage and dispose of it without their husband's consent. When the marriage broke down and divorce ensued, this property remained with the departing wife (Simms 1975: 104). However, if the wife died childless, only half the value of these marriage goods would be returned to her family (Nicholls 1991: 23-4).

The early Irish law tracts provide an exception to the rule of female property inheritance: if a woman's father had personally acquired land or movable goods in his lifetime, and if neither kind of property belonged to the paternal kinship group, he could leave them to his daughter who could, in turn, bequeath them herself (Ó Corráin 1995: 53). Whether this was observed in the sixteenth, or early seventeenth centuries is difficult to say without further research. In any case, Gaelic land tenure was abolished by a decree of the Irish judiciary in 1605-6 and was soon replaced by common law in the ensuing years (Nicholls 1991: 17; O'Dowd 1986: 141). All of the wills from Counties Kilkenny and Waterford used in this study appear to be based on English common law, a result (no doubt) of the heavy colonisation of this part of Ireland by the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and by later English settlers.

Social status.
In this study, we look at a class of document that predominantly represents the mercantile and gentry classes of the seventeenth century. For the most part, testamentary documents do not exist for small traders, artisans, farmers or labourers prior to the nineteenth century. Occasionally, however, we are able to learn something about property transfer among the lower social orders from this period, as in the case of a Limerick fisherman who was promised an itemised dowry with his wife on their marriage in the 1590s (Nicholls 1991: 25), although it must be said that the document supplying this information is not a will but a marriage agreement. This social class bias is reflected in other kinds of documentary evidence, such as diaries and letters, which in the case of women, were written by the few that were literate in the seventeenth century, notably nuns and aristocrats (Meikle 1994: 72-73; MacCurtain 1995: 37-8).

Nevertheless, although the testators might have been representative of the wealthier classes, some of the individuals to whom they left bequests included the less well-off. For example, the inmates of a poorhouse or hospital might be left a charitable donation. While such unfortunates might not be specified individually by name, some information about them might be provided, including their number, whether they suffered from a disease such as leprosy or were merely indigent, and what goods they were considered to be in need of.

In terms of gender, most of the testators in early modern times were men. The reason for this is that under common law, married women were forbidden to make a will without their husband's consent. This means that most wills made out by women were of widows or (more rarely) spinsters (Burnard 1991: 96). Only two of the nineteen wills from the sample in this study were made out by women, one of whom was a widow, the other possibly a spinster. Furthermore, of the thirty-one other testamentary records examined but not used in this study, only one was of a woman (Joan Ronan of Ballyhoo, Kilbarry, Waterford). In this case, however, it was simply the administration of a woman who had died intestate and no details of her property's re-distribution were noted by the document's abstracter (Jennings 1914: 18).

Heritable property: Buildings.

Figure 3 (Click for a larger picture)
Women might specifically be left the dwelling house (or family home) as was the case in the wills of Richard Madan of Waterford (1602) and Robert Forstall of Kilferagh, County Kilkenny (1645) (Carrigan 1909: 168; Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 13). James Ronan and William Dobbin, esq., both of Waterford, in their wills of 1670 and 1639, respectively, left their dwelling houses to their wives but these had to be shared with their children (Jennings 1914: 18; Carrigan 1908: 91). As it happens, Dobbin's will was not proved until 1663 when his wife Ellen was recorded as the surviving executrix (the other executor was their eldest son Peter who had died by the early 1650s—he was recorded as the proprietor of his father's lands in 1640 according to the Cromwellian regime's general land survey of Ireland of the mid 1650s) (Carrigan 1908: 95; Simington 1942: 151–2). It is important to bear in mind, then, that women becoming property owners for a time following their husband's or father's death, were consequently responsible for the maintenance of this property.

**Figure 4 (Click for a larger picture)**

Furthermore, a widow or spinster might have been responsible for any structural changes (including extensions or even demolition and rebuilding) to such property as the family house. In order to appreciate the impact that women may have had as property owners or leaseholders on the fabric or architecture of certain buildings, it is therefore necessary to clarify the succession of a building's ownership, or else any architectural changes that were made to it may be mis-attributed to a better documented contemporary, or near contemporary, male relative. This is the value that wills have as documentary sources regarding real estate, but Gailey (1987: 87-94) discusses other kinds of records that provide actual descriptions of particular buildings, or at least of classes of building, in seventeenth-century Ireland (the more sparse information relating to County Waterford is considered by Gibbons (1989: 36-7) ). In excavations of Waterford's city centre (1986-1992), portions of four post-medieval houses were identified (Scully 1997a), but no attempt was made by the excavators to ascertain the succession of ownership of these properties. Therefore, the possibility that women may have owned or altered any of these buildings during the seventeenth century remains to be considered.

**Figure 5 (Click for a larger picture)**
Movable Goods: Livestock.

While some records such as marriage agreements, deeds of lease and other transactions can also be used to learn about the succession of ownership of given properties (in so far as they exist among surviving estate papers from early modern times), wills are more important for providing details of the kinds of movable goods that women possessed in the seventeenth century. A particularly important kind of movable property that was bequeathed to women (especially in rural County Kilkenny) was livestock. Cattle come at the top of the list in this group, but other animals include sheep and horses. In Gaelic custom, livestock was for long a part of a woman's personal possessions. For example, when Dervorgilla, wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, king of Bréifne, was abducted by Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster, in 1152, she brought "her cattle and furniture" with her (Simms 1975: 104). By the sixteenth century, when urban merchants provided their marriage goods in the form of cash, Nicholls (1991: 25) considers that:

"It would [...] seem likely in the case of the lesser landowning class that by 1600 the whole farming stock was being provided [as marriage goods] by the wife in the form of dowry, the husband contributing only the land. Forty cows would seem to have been a normal amount among lesser gentry, and double or triple this amount among minor chiefly families."

Women's widespread ownership of cattle obviously had implications for the production of dairy products such as butter and cheese. This association had early origins since, in early medieval times, Irishwomen undergoing a divorce were legally obliged to be compensated for their labour in making salted butter and cheese during the marriage (Ó Corráin 1985: 9). It appears that only when dairying began to be commercialised from the second half of the seventeenth century, did men take a closer interest in an industry hitherto seemingly dominated by women. This did not mean, though, that men were initially proud of involving themselves in what appears to have been regarded almost exclusively as 'women's work'. Samuel Madden, in his Resolutions and reflections proper for the gentlemen of Ireland (Dublin 1738), commented that, formerly, men sold butter "by night and as privately as possible, thinking it disgraceful to make a profit of the industry of their wives" (quoted in Cullen (1981: 149) ).
Some nieces seem to have done well in such bequests: Thady Brophy of Tullaroan, County Kilkenny, left three heifers to one niece and a further heifer to another niece in 1671; while Derby Ryan of Shortalls Graige in County Kilkenny left a heifer to his niece in 1694 (Carrigan unpublished: 24-5; 83). Some daughters were similarly bequeathed cattle such as when James Welch of Ballyneale, County Kilkenny, left a cow to his daughter in 1684 (Carrigan unpublished: 99), but such bequests might have had to be shared with one or more siblings. For example, Richard Wadding of Waterford left "6 cowe calves" and 50 ewe lambs to his son and daughter in 1626 (Carrigan 1906: 152). Another example of a shared bequest is the 15 lambs left to the two granddaughters and one grandson of James Welch of Ballyneale (just mentioned).

Examples whereby sisters received bequests of livestock include the 1682 will of Lucas Brenan of County Kilkenny who left his sister a horse and the 1699-1700 will of Elinor Kelly of Church Clara, County Kilkenny, who bequeathed two heifers to her sister (Carrigan unpublished: 104; Walton 1988: 513). Note that a woman is making the bequest in the latter case -- she also left "cows etc. that are in her brother Peter Purcell's hands to her brother-in-law George Kelly".

Livestock bequests to wives are less commonly specified, though these would probably be included as part of the 'widow's portion' under such general terms as 'property', 'goods' or 'worldly substance'. More specific cases include John Keating of Richestown, County Tipperary, who left "to my beloved wife Margarett Keating an entire third of all stock of cowes, bullocks, sheep & all [...] real & personal Estates with all household stuff" in 1705, or Robert Forstall of Kilferagh, County Kilkenny, gent, whose widow was to receive two horses (one of which was stated to be hers) and a flock of sheep (Jennings 1914: 27; Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14). Keating had bequeathed the remaining two thirds of his livestock to his daughter which she could use once she reached marriageable age. If the daughter died before this, then the two thirds portion would be equally divided between Keating's widow and other (unnamed) relatives.

Women other than relatives were sometimes specified in wills, such as the four maids of Thomas Kealy of Kilkenny, gent, who were each left a cow in 1689. Kealy also left a cow to another woman for no stated reason (Walton 1988: 512). Similarly, Richard Wadding of Waterford left "tou cowes" to a named woman of unspecified relationship to him and "as many" to his sister in 1626 (Carrigan 1906: 152). These cows were described as "all English and yonge[...] reddye the next summer to take the bull".
Since Ireland had a predominantly pastoral economy that did not become highly commercialised until the second half of the seventeenth century (Cullen 1987), cattle bequests to women probably reflect the cow's status as the traditional unit of wealth in most parts of the country (Nicholls 1976: 10; Nicholls 1993: 413-15). Indeed, those cows bequeathed to Kealy's maids probably represented a settling of accounts between the employer and his employees, while some of the other bequests made out to women whose relationship to the testator was unspecified (could they have been nurses?) may amount to the same thing. Since it is clear from the testamentary sources that women owned different types of livestock, an archaeologist might consider what proportion of the faunal bone assemblage recovered during the excavation of a seventeenth-century site represents the number and type of animals that might have been owned by women who once lived there.

**Agricultural implements.**

Moving from livestock to objects associated with their use or maintenance, we find two references to branding irons. In his 1645 will, Robert Forstall of Kilferagh bequeathed a brand iron to his wife, while a Waterford woman, Beale Madan (who makes no mention of any livestock in her 1690 will) left "an iron brand iron" to her unmarried daughter Margaret and her best 'Brand Iron' to her married daughter Mary (Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14; Carrigan 1910: 26-7). Forstall also left his wife "my plough of garrans", the only reference to a plough in the testamentary records examined here.

By the early seventeenth century, ploughing by horse had come to replace the use of oxen in the colonised parts of Ireland. Teams of from four to six horses were used to pull the plough which was attached to their tails on the basis that the animal would respond sooner to an obstruction in the soil (Butlin 1976: 151; Clarke 1976: 173). As one Elizabethan commentator put it, "neither cords, chains nor lines" were needed to pull the plough (Butlin 1976). From the perspective of the archaeologist, this means that little in the way of tackle would be recovered from an Irish site where horses had been kept. Indeed, of the scanty evidence for horse tackle recovered during excavations in Waterford's city centre, none was dated to the post-medieval era (Scully 1997b: 474-7). In the more stony soils of the west of Ireland or in mountainous regions, spade cultivation was more usual for carrying out tillage. That said, no spade is mentioned in the sample of wills examined here. Furthermore, grazing
was (and still is) an important part of Irish agriculture which may account for the rarity of references to ploughs in Waterford and Kilkenny testamentary records of the seventeenth century.

Still on the agricultural theme, Robert Forstall left one third of his "corne in [the] ground or above ground" to his wife (Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14). That grain was a commodity that could be owned by women may be an important point to consider in the excavation of a corn-drying kiln (whose proprietor might thus have been a woman) or in the analysis of carbonised plant remains found on an archaeological site. If stored grain had been destroyed by fire, then it might have been a woman who was impoverished by the event.

**Industrial produce and trading goods.**

We find references to processed agricultural products among the wills of three Waterford testators. Beale Madan left "tenn barrels malt" to her daughter Margaret in 1690 and Richard Wadding left a "dosen barrells of malte made of my English oats" along with " two barrells of barlye" to a woman named Catherine (perhaps a daughter) in 1626 (Carrigan 1910: 26; 1906: 152). There were seven malt houses recorded in the property valuation of Waterford in the early 1660s and these were broadly clustered in the same part of the city as the tanyards (see below). According to this valuation, Colonel Thomas Ceely owned what was then described as "a long house lowe built [with] stone walls and slated[,] used as a mault house" in Waterford. This had previously been owned by Peter Dobbin (mentioned earlier) but the building had passed (along with a stable and a dwelling house) to Col. Ceely through his wife Beale Ceely, Dobbin's widow (Simington 1942: 261). According to the valuation, Beale held the property "as hir thirds", i.e., her standard widow's portion of one-third of her deceased husband's estate.

One testamentary record from Waterford refers to tannery produce. In 1602, Richard Madan bequeathed eight dickets (i.e. parcels of ten hides) plus one extra hide "at Mr Comerford's Tann House" and a further fourteen hides then with George Woodlock FitzBaltazar to his wife, Beale (not to be confused with the Beale Madan of 1690), (Carrigan 1909: 169).

The tanning industry was particularly important in medieval and early modern Waterford (Bradley et al. 1988: 176). Indeed, by the end of the thirteenth
century, Waterford had become the "second greatest exporter of wool, woolfells and hides" from Ireland (McEneaney 1992: 154). Property valuation records from the early 1660s indicate that there were five tanneries clustered in a single district of Waterford -- St John's Street -- and that another existed in the (as yet unidentified) Pierce's Lane (Bradley et al. 1988: 177). The latter property, described as "a Thatcht house used as a Tan house" in circa 1663-64, belonged to the same Colonel Thomas Ceely mentioned previously in right of his wife Beale, the widow of Peter Dobbin of Ballinakill (Simington 1942: 261).

One seventeenth-century tanyard has been excavated in Waterford, though its original owner is, as yet, unknown. The tannery was located inside a late medieval fortified dock (Bradley et al. 1988: 209) that formed a kind of outwork of the city wall close to St John's Street. The excavator, Ben Murtagh (1987: 36), reported that the site comprised of "large stone vats [...], some of which contained material associated with tanning". Knowing that Beale (Dobbin) Ceely had rights in such a premises, archaeologists can begin to rewrite traditional accounts of commerce, ownership and gender by moving between documentary records and archaeological material.

To turn now to mining produce, we find Richard Madan leaving "five tonns [of illegible ore] and one tonn bastard [i.e. impure] ore" to his wife, Beale, in his 1602 will. There were widespread attempts to extract iron ore from various parts of County Waterford in the seventeenth century, especially in the more upland areas to the west (Power 1977; 1978) where the leading landed proprietor, Sir Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, took an active entrepreneurial role in mining. Presumably, the ore bequeathed by Madan was acquired from one of these local mining operations. However, it is known that "old bloomery slag from the Forest of Dean" was blended with local ore at a furnace near the west Waterford town of Tallow in 1608 (Cowman 1978), thereby raising the possibility that Madan's bastard ore had been imported stock. There was already a long tradition of such imports in Ireland since iron was heavily imported during the middle ages from Brittany and Spain (O'Neill 1987: 90).

It is clear that some women could have had a significant part to play in the trade and industry of Waterford during the seventeenth century and that, in Beale Madan's (1690) case at least, this role could pass from mother to daughter. It is also noteworthy that, between marriages, women such as Beale Dobbin/Ceely could be substantial property owners and the proprietors of some important businesses, but the extent of their personal impact on tanning, malting and other industries is difficult to assess from documents alone. Armed with details of a site's changes of ownership over a particular period,
archaeologists might be able to relate certain features and finds discovered during the excavation of an industrial enterprise with the management policies (or even the lack thereof) of any women owners.

Cooking and tableware.

Moving from the agricultural and commercial sector to the domestic environment, we come to kitchen and tableware. Of cooking ware, we learn that Beale Madan (of 1690) owned at least three brass pans, the best going to her married daughter, and one of the second best going to her unmarried daughter. However, nothing more is said of the other pan, or pans (Carrigan 1910: 26-7). Robert Forstall similarly left a "messing pan" (i.e. a cooking pan) to his wife, while Thomas Kealy left his brewing pan to a niece (Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14; Walton 1988: 512). Fragments of two copper alloy vessels described as 'bowls' and dating to the late seventeenth or eighteenth centuries were recovered in excavations in the city centre of Waterford between 1986 and 1992. Parts of another copper alloy 'bowl' given a broader date range of mid-thirteenth to early seventeenth century and an iron 'bowl' of late seventeenth to eighteenth century date were also recovered in the excavations (Scully 1997b: 462, 464). These 'bowls' are probably equivalents of the pans mentioned in the testamentary records and their use as cooking vessels would appear to be indicated by the terms used in Forstall's and Kealy's wills. It is interesting that three of the finds were made of a copper alloy, since this reflects the description of Beale Madan's pans as brass-made (brass is an alloy of primarily copper and zinc). A further documentary example (from another county) is the "brass pan worth 40 shillings" which was among the items included in the dowry promised to Thomas O Heryrie, a Limerick fisherman, in the 1590s (Nicholls 1991: 25).

Also of use in cooking would have been "the playne salte" which Richard Wadding of Waterford left his daughter Mary in 1626 (Carrigan 1906: 152). Salt was an important Irish import from Brittany and Spain in the later middle ages (O'Neill 1987: 84, 86). Interestingly, O'Neill (1987: 88) points out that the "value and importance [of this product] are indicated by the number of surviving wills of the medieval period [mainly from Dublin archdiocese] that mention amounts of salt large and small".
Among the sample of testamentary records examined here, there was no mention of any exotic tableware, though there was a demand in seventeenth-century Ireland for Oriental porcelain as well as for Dutch and English delft (Dunlevy 1991: 208). Indeed, the Duke of Ormonde, whose seat was at Kilkenny Castle, possessed Chinese porcelain, examples of which were recovered from archaeological excavations at the castle (Dunlevy 1988: 14; Sweetman 1981). In contrast, no porcelain was found in Waterford's city centre excavations, though pottery was otherwise represented from England, Iberia, France, Germany, Italy and the Low Countries (Meenan 1997). Here, with regard to the presence of porcelain, the documentary and archaeological records for Waterford appear to corroborate each other, but there is still the possibility that ceramics of this kind will turn up in a future excavation or a reference will be found in a contemporary document not yet available for public scrutiny. Sherds of a post-medieval stoneware vessel from Cologne and a Bellarmine jar were found in excavations at Dean Street, Kilkenny, in 1990 (Cotter 1992: 1072-3), while evidence of imported English pottery of the same date was recovered from this site as well as from a site behind No. 6 John's Quay (Bradley and King 1992: 981).

Tableware mentioned in Waterford or Kilkenny wills included the plate of Richard Madan which comprised of "4 cuppes, 2 juggs, 1 salt [-cellar], [and] 6 spoones" bequeathed to his wife, or the "dishes, plates [... and] pewter" left by Thomas Kealy to his wife (Carrigan 1909: 170; Walton 1988: 510). Forstall left his "smallest bowle of silver [...] for Beere and the cupp of silver [he had] for Wine" to his wife, but this can be contrasted with "the biggest silver bowle [he] had for Beere and [his] cupp of silver for Aquavitae" (i.e. whisky) which he left his eldest son (Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14). Obviously, the sexist expectation that women should drink smaller measures of alcoholic drinks goes back far! As a measure of the wealth of this manorial family, their silver bowls and cups compare well with the wooden drinking vessels and pewter mugs commonly used in seventeenth-century Irish inns (MacLysaght 1979: 254) and, it seems, in Thomas Kealy's household. Nevertheless, Dunlevy (1991: 208) reports that in the 1630s,

"demand for domestic [silver] plate [in Ireland] was becoming greater than for ecclesiastical plate. The range of silver required then matched that of other sophisticated centres throughout Western Europe as beer bowls [...] were assayed in Dublin in 1638".

With regard to drink itself, Richard Madan lists 5 'houete' of "gascoyne wine" valued at £4 each and 5 "houete of aquavita" worth £8 each amongst the
possessions intended for his wife (Carrigan 1909: 169). It is not, however, clear whether this was intended as trading stock or for personal consumption!

Other household goods.

I have not yet found any reference to objets d'art nor to such mundane items as wig curlers, a few of which were found in the course of archaeological excavations in downtown Waterford (Lane 1997: 371) and are now displayed in Waterford Heritage Centre. Wig curlers, of course, could have been used by either men or women during the seventeenth century. There was no mention, either, of tobacco or of tobacco pipes in any bequests examined here, although a specialised clay pipe factory was set up in Waterford during the 1640s (Dunlevy 1991: 208) and a number of contemporary clay pipe fragments have been recovered in the Waterford excavations and at the rural site of Dysart, near Thomastown, County Kilkenny (Lane 1997; Murtagh 1994: 92).

**Figure 6:** An unstratified clay pipe bowl of mid-17th century date from Waterford.

Other household goods bequeathed to Waterford and Kilkenny women include a box left by Elinor Kelly of Church Clara to her sister Mary in 1699/1700; books left by Richard Madan to his wife in 1602 and three items called 'carpletts' left to Robert Forstall's wife in 1645 (Walton 1988: 513; Carrigan 1909: 170; Fewer and Nicholls 1993: 14). That books were bequeathed to Beale Madan (of 1602) may mean that she was literate, but of course, a personal library might also have been viewed as a feature of indoor decoration and, in any case, could also have been sold for cash. It is not stated what material Elinor Kelly's box was made from, but a stone one was recovered from the fill of a post-medieval pit in excavations at High Street, Waterford (McCutcheon 1997: 405, 408).

Beds or bedclothes appear in wills more frequently. In 1626, Richard Wadding left to his "goodwife the soft bed, the best two paire of sheets and coverings and blankets yt she shall like of in my house at Kilbarrye" just outside Waterford city (Carrigan 1906: 153). It is worth noting that while Forstall
decides precisely what items his wife should get on his decease, Wadding allows his wife to take her pick. Of course, Forstall might have discussed with his wife what items he would bequeath to her before writing his will. Other examples of bed bequests include that of Thomas Kealy of Kilkenny, gent., who bequeathed an unspecified number of beds to his wife in 1689, and that of Lucas Brenan of County Kilkenny who left what he seems to have called a 'flack' bed to his sister in 1682 (Walton 1988: 510; Carrigan unpublished: 104). 'Flack', or flock, may refer here to a bed stuffed with waste from fabrics. This is rather unusual, for in rural seventeenth-century Ireland, nobles and commoners alike typically slept on beds of rushes (in the summer) or straw (during the winter) (MacLysaght 1979: 105-6). This means, however, that the recovery of cloth scraps from a dig could represent the remains of bedding material rather than discarded tailoring waste or cleaning rags.

Clothing and jewellery.

Finally, we come to the more intimate area of clothing and jewellery. Clothing bequeathed to women would include their departed husband's own clothes which, supposedly, the widow sold for cash or, alternatively, retained for the use of a subsequent husband, or perhaps a son. Examples include Richard Madan whose entire wardrobe is listed in his 1602 will as a bequest to his wife:

"a scarlett gowne, a gowne guarded with [text missing here], a silk gowne with lambskin, an old gowne, a payre of velvet hose, jerkin and branchet, a payre playne velvett hose, two satteen doublette, a black cloak, a quotidian [i.e. daily] cloak, [and] two capps... " (Carrigan, 1909: 170).

By contrast, John Keating of Richestown left only one set of clothes to a woman in 1705 -- what he called a "Murninge suit" bequeathed to his sister (Jennings 1914: 27).

Poor or infirm women might also receive clothes as charity from a wealthy benefactor. Alderman Nicholas Ley of Waterford made a bequest of a mantle to be supplied to every female inmate of the Kilkenny Leper House in his will of 1585, while each male inmate was to receive a "gowne of frize" (Carrigan 1906: 214). In this case, of course, the clothing would have been purchased specially for this purpose with cash derived from Ley's estate. Sir William Petty reported in 1672 that the clothing of the Gaelic Irish was "made from narrow
strips of frieze, [and] was far better than that of the French peasantry" (Simms 1976: 445). 'Waterford rugs', also made from frieze, were similarly popular on the Continent (O'Neill 1987: 69-70). The value of this kind of reference is indicated by the consideration that it might be the only documentary evidence for what the inmates of Kilkenny Leper House wore towards the end of the sixteenth century, while the archaeological excavation of their graves (if this were ever to occur) might not supply any surviving textiles.

An indication of what a more well-off woman wore a full century later is supplied by Beale Madan, who, in her will of 1690, left her "best silk mantles" to her married daughter. That these garments were, like some of Richard Madan's clothes, of silk rather than of wool, indicates something of the testators' respective wealth (Carrigan 1909: 170; 1910: 27). In later medieval times, silk imports to Ireland were uncommon and tended to be acquired primarily by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities for church vestments, royal standards and the like (O'Neill 1987: 94). It was not until the influx of Huguenots during the seventeenth century that the Irish silk industry became commercialised (Dunlevy 1991: 208) and, hence, silk garments became more common.

Of the circa 200 textile, cordage, basketry and raw fibre finds in Waterford's city centre excavations of 1986-1992, only two pieces of cloth made from vegetable fibres (probably linen in both cases) are assigned post-medieval dates (Wincott Heckett 1997: 753-4), while no leather artefacts post-dating the fourteenth century appear to have been recovered in these same excavations (O'Rourke 1997: 703). That the preservation of textiles and leather items dating from seventeenth-century Waterford was so poor underlines the value of documentary evidence in supplying information on the nature of clothing worn in the city at this time.

While there are a number of general studies about clothing in Ireland (many of them now in need of revision [MacLysaght 1979: 8-9]), testamentary records might reveal directly the kinds of clothes worn by members of a particular family (or at least the fabric that these garments were made of). Such documentary sources could bolster or inform the archaeological record when, for example, textiles are recovered during the excavation of a given property. Of course, an archaeologist might recover textile remains of a fabric or clothing fashion unexpected from the documentary record regarding the property from which it came. In this case, the textile would have added significance in interpreting the site -- did the material belong to a visitor? Or was it lost or simply discarded, thereby evading mention in the testamentary record? As people constitute their social identity through materials such as clothing and
other goods, much can be discerned about the occupants and visitors of the household through this sort of contextual analysis.

Regarding jewellery, references to finger rings predominate, reflecting the archaeological assemblage for Waterford's city centre excavations (Lightbown 1997: 518). John Keating of Richestown left what he called a "Murning Ring" to his sister, while Thomas Kealy of Kilkenny left an unspecified number of rings to his "wellbeloved" wife (Jennings 1914: 27; Walton 1988: 510). Beale Madan, in 1690, bequeathed to her unmarried daughter "one goold ring which she [had given her] in custody", and "two goold rings" to her executors, "her Wellbeloved friends" Edward Brown, merchant, and Michael Sherlock of Waterford (Carrigan 1910: 26-7).

It is worth emphasising that men's rings could thus be owned by women following the death of their husbands or fathers even if they could not be worn by them. In such cases, the rings might have been kept for a future wedding gift or could be sold off for cash. In Beale Madan's case, it seems that the two gold rings she bequeathed to her executors represented a payment to them for executing her will (alternatively, they might have been given simply as a token of her friendship). Three finger rings found in Waterford's city centre excavations included a late sixteenth or early seventeenth-century example made of gold and inset with a sard intaglio. The other two are dated to between the late thirteenth and early seventeenth centuries and were made of copper and iron, respectively (Lightbown 1997: 519, 522). Perhaps these items were once owned by women, though the gold one is large (it bears an internal diameter of 22mm while those of the copper and iron ones are only 16mm and 15.5mm, respectively) and consequently may have been worn by a man. None of the Waterford rings are inscribed with personal names, such as the gold ring bearing the legend Madame de Champagney MDXXIII which was recovered from the Girona, one of the ships of the Spanish Armada that was wrecked off the western coast of Ireland in 1588 (Flanagan 1988: 195). However, if the succession of ownership of the plots on which these rings were found could be ascertained, it might be possible to speculate who wore them (especially in the case of the gold ring which is considered to have been an expensive import).

One other reference to jewellery had a condition attached to the bequest. When Alderman Nicholas Ley of Waterford wrote his will in 1585, he stated that his wife should receive "all the jewells she had of her own, or receaved of myselfe, upon condition that all the jewells that she receaved or had of me shall remaine and bee left by her after her death to any children begotten betwixt me and her" (Carrigan 1906: 215). Although such restrictions legally limited what women
could do with their inheritance, there was no guarantee, of course, that jewellery could not be sold or otherwise dispensed with in practice.

Discussion and Conclusions.

This article has necessarily dealt primarily with the propertied classes of Kilkenny and Waterford because of the nature of the record.

Figure 7: Map of Waterford in 1673. This map was published in a history of Waterford by the Rev. R.H. Ryland in 1824, but the whereabouts of the original document is not known.

However, as we have seen in the case of the inmates of Kilkenny Leper House, the poor need not escape the attention of the documentary researcher. Indeed, the archaeologist excavating the site of any charitable institution should be mindful of testamentary documents since some are likely to include bequests made out to it or to its inmates. Furthermore, although little historical evidence survives about the possessions of poor (or relatively less well-off) women, the law regarding inheritance applied equally across the classes. Therefore, any study of poor women (archaeological or historical) in the early modern period should take account of the legal environment of the time. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that poor and illiterate women would have been able to enforce their legal rights in a court of law if these had been threatened following their husband's or father's death.

Transcripts and abstracts of wills have been emphasised in this article to highlight their usefulness and accessibility in the study of women's property in seventeenth-century Ireland. No attempt was made to examine original wills that survive in family and estate papers though, in some cases, these are now in publicly accessible record repositories such as the Langrishe Papers (in the library of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society) or the Power–O'Shee Papers (in the National Library of Ireland; usefully calendared before their acquisition
There are, of course, other classes of record from the seventeenth century that might provide useful information and which should always be used in conjunction with testamentary documents wherever possible. However, wills, especially in the absence (in Ireland) of more detailed documents such as probate inventories, can provide a lot of information specifically relating to women, especially those women who do not appear in other records. For example, of all the women mentioned in the wills used here, only one (Ellen Dobbin) appeared in the mid seventeenth-century property surveys (the Civil Survey (Simington 1942) and its cartographic equivalent, the Down Survey, the latter lately undergoing publication on a barony-by-barony basis for County Waterford in the local journal Decies). Furthermore, the Civil Survey's coverage of County Kilkenny only survives for Kilkenny City. That said, the surveys did mention the twice-married Beale (Dobbin) Ceely for whom no reference appeared in the will transcript and abstract collections examined here. Another type of record, the inquisitions post mortem are a useful form of legal document that describe the lands held on the deaths of the British monarch's tenants-in-chief. The previous succession to the property is usually detailed, thereby including references to women who had inherited it. However, the inquisitions only cover the period up to the first half of the seventeenth century and are limited to the gentry and aristocracy. Wills, therefore, deal with people who were below this in social class and are particularly useful for the urban merchant community.

Archaeology therefore not only offers the possibility of documenting some of the personal possessions of women (whether well-off or not), but it can also illuminate the historical record by recovering the kinds of objects referred to in the documents. Conversely, an historical understanding can inform the interpretation of artefacts recovered in a dig. For example, branding irons might easily be assumed to have belonged to men in seventeenth-century Ireland simply because of the popular image supplied by Western films that nineteenth-century American cowboys branded cattle. Of course, owning a branding iron did not necessarily mean that its female owner carried out the branding herself, but she most probably authorised it. Similarly, wills directly show that mundane artefacts such as branding irons and metal pans could be passed down from generation to generation, a factor which has implications for the dating of finds recovered during excavations.

To sum up, I hope that this preliminary survey of a class of readily accessible and mainly printed records relating, by way of example, to two Irish counties has indicated their potential value for placing archaeological finds (in this case associated with women) in a historical or documentary context. Although it is
not yet possible to relate the documentary references of particular bequests to individual finds recovered from archaeological excavations in Counties Waterford and Kilkenny, this may one day become possible once post-medieval archaeology receives the same attention in Ireland as medieval and prehistoric archaeology do. At this time, as already mentioned, post-medieval archaeology is still very much in its infancy in Ireland, apart from the extensive work of the various ongoing county and city archaeological surveys and of a few excavations.

Although the geographical area chosen for this paper lies in south-eastern Ireland, it is hoped that archaeologists from further afield who have not yet considered using testamentary records will now recognise them as a source of information that might yield valuable insights into the nature of the archaeological record, or which might inspire certain lines of enquiry. This is particularly pertinent to the study of the historical experience of women when so often it is said that they rarely enter the documentary record. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach combining archaeological fieldwork with documentary analysis ought to provide a more balanced understanding of the relationships between women and objects in the past.

A few historians have pointed out (in some cases, angrily) that recently published general books on Irish history have failed to include women, or have covered women's contribution to Irish history inadequately, despite the publication of a number of studies that deal with women's history, especially since 1800 (Bradley, 1993; Fewer, 1990; Luddy and Murphy 1989; Ward 1991). The position of the archaeology of women is even more lamentable since specialised archaeological research on the subject is rare in Ireland. As a result, the impression given by the bulk of mainstream historical and archaeological scholarship in Ireland is that women's historical experience is not a rewarding theme for study. Yet, as the amount of specialised work increases, surely it will be impossible for general texts to be written in the future which do not take account of this hitherto marginalised aspect of the past.

**Note.**

A word on locating Irish wills or collections of abstracts and transcripts in general: over the last few years, a range of publications have appeared to guide
genealogical hobbyists in the use of testamentary records in Ireland. Two (ffolliott and O'Byrne 1981; Grenham 1992) are extremely helpful in that they refer the reader to both published and unpublished indexes as well as to the records themselves, and they also explain the legal background to the creation of the various types of testamentary document available. Walton (1981) also provides a good overview of the testamentary records relating to Waterford and indexes a number of abstract collections relating to the area in a series of articles published in the local antiquarian journal Decies (these articles are indexed in Fewer 1992a). Using such guides and indexes is critical to navigating this wealth of contextual data on the personal possessions of women in the seventeenth century.

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Acknowledgements.

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JWSEIAS = Journal of the Waterford and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society.


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Appendix: List of wills with bequests to women or by women used in this study

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Greg Fewer is a freelance archaeologist and historian based in Waterford, Ireland, where he offers leisure courses on Local Archaeology at Waterford Institute of Technology. He graduated from National University of Ireland, Cork, with a B.A. in archaeology and history in 1989 and an MA in history in 1993. He is currently applying to do a Ph.D. on women and property in Waterford from 1200 to 1700.

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