



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

THE FACULTY OF ARTS,  
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INAUGURAL LECTURE

**STORIES FROM THE MARGINS:  
HISTORY AND THE MAKING OF  
MODERN IRELAND**

Professor  
**Lindsey Earner-Byrne**

Professor of Contemporary Irish History  
School of Histories and Humanities

**2025**

FEBRUARY 18



## About me

Lindsey Earner-Byrne was appointed as the Bank of Ireland Professor of Contemporary Irish History in the School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin, in August 2023. She is also the director of the Trinity Centre for Modern and Contemporary Irish History and a Fellow of TCD since 2024. She has researched and published widely on modern and contemporary Irish history with a particular focus on poverty, welfare, gender, sexuality, health and vulnerable and marginalised groups. She has, for example, co-authored a history of Ireland's abortion journey with Professor Diane Urquhart of Queen's University Belfast, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920-2018* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Her other publications include *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Dublin, 1922-50* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

She narrated and co-authored the documentary *Forgotten: The Widows of the Irish Revolution* (RTÉ One, May 2022).

Her work has been cited in key governmental reports and commissions of inquiry including the *Final Report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation Final Report* (January 2021). It has also been cited worldwide in relation to Ireland's historical treatment of women and children in investigative pieces from the BBC, *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* to *Deutschlandfunkkultur.de*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Arte*.

She has been the Chair of the Expert Advisory Panel for the permanent 20th Century History of Ireland Galleries at the Museum of Ireland since 2021 and was President of the Irish Historical Society between January 2022 and December 2024. She is a member of the editorial committee of the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy and the Irish Manuscripts Commission.



Professor

# Lindsey Earner-Byrne

Professor of Contemporary Irish History,  
School of Histories and Humanities.





## Abstract

In 1922, a Dublin mother of seven wrote 'Most Rev. Archbishop I will tell you a secret': she was afraid her husband had lost his sexual and spiritual way in the streets of England and wanted the leader of her church to find him work nearer to home. She was just one of thousands of ordinary people struggling in the margins with the cards life dealt them, working with the resources they had, and, in the process, building a new state out of the vestiges of colonialism and civil war. In this talk, I centre these stories of everyday negotiation and survival from the archives, reflecting upon what they can tell us about gender and class, discrimination and inequality in Ireland. It is in the multiple and layered everyday encounters between intimates and strangers alike that the 'micro-physics of power' are manifest.

Keeping the archive in our line of sight, I look at how we can work against its inherent biases to hear the fuller stories people often tried to tell about themselves and their loved ones when engaging with the power structures of their universe. This is about more than telling different stories, it is an act of reclamation, one that works against the official bureaucratic flattening of complex lives. As Rebecca Solnit cautions: 'Changing the story isn't enough in itself, but it has often been foundational to real changes.'

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TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN INAUGURAL LECTURE

## School of Histories and Humanities, Department of History

Trinity is a leading university internationally for the study of History. The Erasmus Smith's professorship of Modern History was established in 1762 and the various incumbents went on to play a leading role in the creation of a critical school of modern Irish historical scholarship. In 2005 the combined Department of History was linked with Classics, History of Art and Gender Studies to form the School of Histories and Humanities. The History Department retains, however, its distinctive identity and it remains committed to its tradition of rigorous and innovative scholarship. It has recently, for example, been in the forefront of collaborative ventures with IT specialists designed to digitize important historical records.

The present Department of History has over twenty full-time academics, along with several post-doctoral fellows, a substantial body of postgraduate research students, and a thriving group of graduate students following taught M. Phil courses. Consistently rated as excellent in external reviews, the Department enjoys an international research profile in several areas, most notably in the history of Ireland from the Middle Ages to the present day. In addition to its expertise in Irish history, the Department also includes specialists in European history, especially in France and Germany, and in non-European history, including environmental and global history.



Founded in

1740



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# Welcome

*It is the tradition in Trinity College Dublin that newly appointed Professors are invited to give an inaugural lecture.*

*The lecture provides an opportunity to showcase their achievements in research, innovation, engagement and teaching activities before members of the University community, invited stakeholders and the general public. An inaugural lecture is a significant event in an academic staff member's career.*

*The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is proud to present the inaugural lecture of Professor Lindsey Earner-Byrne.*





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