



Academic Event Report

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Event: Gerald of Wales: Identity, Afterlives and Wonders — The First Chris Williams Memorial Colloquium on Ireland and Wales

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 21st to 22nd November 2025

In November 2025, the School of History at University College Cork (UCC) held a two-day colloquium, titled ‘Gerald of Wales: Identity, Afterlives and Wonders’. This event was hosted in conjunction with the College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences, to commemorate Professor Chris Williams (1963–2024), who served as Head of the College from 2017 until his passing. Professor Williams was a distinguished historian and a highly regarded and respected member of the University community, remembered for his leadership, scholarship and collegiality.

The theme of the memorial series reflects Professor Williams’s Welsh roots and his life and career in Ireland. In his exploration of the historiography and postcoloniality of Wales, the late Professor Williams (2003, p. 10) noted that the “clearest parallels” of Wales’s post-colonial experience were not to be found in the European colonies of Africa, Asia, or South America, but “are instead to be found with Scotland and Ireland”. Thus, it was very fitting that Gerald of Wales (c. 1146–1223), sometimes latinised as *Giraldus Cambrensis*, a cleric and writer whose family were actively involved in the twelfth-century military conquest of Ireland, and whose grandfather, Gerald of Windsor (c. 1075–1135), was a key figure in the Norman consolidation of south-west Wales, was the subject of the inaugural colloquium in the series.

Organised by Dr Natasha Dukelow, Dr Hiram Morgan and Dr Diarmuid Scully (School of History, UCC), the event welcomed early career scholars as well as more established academics and experts both from across Ireland and internationally. The colloquium consisted of two keynote talks—delivered by Professor Huw Pryce (Professor Emeritus, Bangor University) and Professor Anti Selart (University of Tartu)—and thirteen paper

presentations, divided into five different sessions. Most papers were delivered in person, with two presented remotely online.

Day One

The colloquium began with a speech by Dr Hiram Morgan that paid tribute to Professor Chris Williams as a scholar, colleague and friend. This was followed by a keynote address from Professor Huw Pryce, that focused on the environment in Gerald of Wales's writings on Ireland and Wales. The lecture considered Gerald's depiction of the land, its influence on its inhabitants, his attention to the physical landscape, and his treatment of non-human animals. Professor Price concluded by noting that this research provides a crucial foundation for understanding how Gerald's work can illuminate interactions with the environment in medieval Ireland and Wales more broadly.

Session One

The first session consisted of two papers, which were given by Dr Daryl Hendley Rooney (Little Museum of Dublin) and Dr Jesse Harrington (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies). Dr Hendley Rooney examined how Gerald's representations of the Irish varied depending on whether he was portraying individuals or groups. Dr Harrington's paper set Gerald's assertion that the Irish had no Christian martyrs in the broader contemporary context in the aftermath of the death of Thomas Becket.

Session Two

The second and final session of the first day saw three papers given by members of the School of History. In her paper, Dr DukeLow looked at how material on Ireland was included in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica*—a text that Gerald claimed was intended for the Welsh clergy. This session continued with Dr Damian Bracken's paper on 'Gerald and the Irish Church: Literate Barbarians and Failed Pastors', which considered how Gerald reconciled his worldview, informed by Classical Graeco-Roman ideas of the barbarian, and Ireland as a land of barbarians, with the reality of the Irish 'literate-barbarian'. The session concluded with a paper by Dr Scully that examined how Gerald of Wales addressed Bede's claims about Ireland in the former's *Topographica Hiberniae*.

Day Two

The second day consisted of three sessions, in which eight papers were presented, and concluded with a second keynote address.

Session One

Dr Ben Guy (Cambridge) got the day off to an engaging start, with his paper ‘Gerald, Merlin and Welsh Prophecy’. This paper asked what Gerald really knew about Merlin in Welsh prophecy and explored the relationship between the *Vaticinalis Historia* and the *Prophetia Merlini Silvestris*. Professor Thomas Charles-Edwards (Emeritus Professor, Jesus College Oxford), who presented remotely, offered his paper ‘An Apology for Gerald’ that presented a more sympathetic account of the often-maligned Gerald.

Session Two

This session was constituted of three papers. Nicholas Scollard (Independent Scholar) focused on Welsh Marcher fortunes in Ireland in the twelfth century. Dr Caoimhe Whelan (University of Glasgow) then provided an examination of Philip of Slane’s use of Gerald’s work in the fourteenth century in her paper ‘From Pembrokeshire to Cork: Gerald’s Colonial Shadow. Richard Keyes McDonnell (UCC) gave a paper that examined the treacherous nature attributed to people who live on the peripheries with discussion of Gerald of Wales’s and Henry of Livonia’s (1187–1259) texts.

Session Three

The final session of the day and of the colloquium, featured papers that focused on the reception and afterlives of Gerald’s texts in the early-modern period. Dr Morgan began the session, giving his paper ‘Hooker, Hanmer and Boate, Protestant Uses of Giraldus in the Early Modern Conquest of Ireland’. This was followed by two papers that focused on the refutation of Gerald in the seventeenth century. Dr Jason Harris (UCC) paid particular attention to Steven White. While Dr Felix Levin (Aarhus University), who presented remotely online, presented his paper ‘Refuting Cambrensis in the Seventeenth-Century Historical Narratives: Some

Epistemological Observations’, which focused on comparisons between John Lynch, John Keating and Philip O’Sullivan Beare.

Professor Anti Selart brought the colloquium to a close with the second keynote. In his concluding remarks, he reflected on the similarities and contrasts between Ireland and the Baltic as peripheral regions that experienced forms of coloniality.

Conclusions

The ‘Gerald of Wales: Identity, Afterlives and Wonders — The First Chris Williams Memorial Colloquium on Ireland and Wales’ was a successful event that facilitated exchange among researchers working on various aspects of Gerald of Wales and medieval Irish and Welsh history. The colloquium showcased both the diversity of approaches taken in studying Gerald’s rich literary legacy and illuminated the possibilities for future research. So too, did the colloquium highlight the intersection between Wales’s and Ireland’s shared history. It is hoped that the success of this inaugural memorial colloquium will lead to the organisation of future events as part of the Chris Williams Memorial Series on Ireland and Wales, thereby continuing to honour Professor William’s legacy and fostering scholarly collaboration between Ireland and Wales.

DR NATASHA DUKELOW received her PhD from University College Cork (UCC) in 2025. Her thesis, undertaken at the School of History under the supervision of Dr Małgorzata Krasnodębska-D’Aughton and Dr Diarmuid Scully, focused on the thirteenth-century Franciscan *exempla* collection known as the *Liber Exemplorum*. She is currently the Head Tutor of UCC’s School of History and has been an Editor-in-Chief of *Aigne* since 2023.

RICHARD KEYES McDONNELL holds an MA in History from University College of Cork (UCC). They are an Archives Assistant at the Cork LGBT Archive, and tutor in the School of History at UCC, and has been an *Aigne* editor since 2023.

Works Cited

Williams, C. (2005) ‘Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality’ in Williams, C. and Jane, A. (eds.) *Postcolonial Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 3–22.