The R.J. Hunter Bursary has supported research activities in connection with my monograph project, (now named) Sex, Scandal and Sin: Presbyterians in Ireland and North America, 1717-1830. The project is also funded by the following bodies and schemes: British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant; Anna Parnell Travel Grant from the Women's History Association of Ireland; and a Research Fellowship with the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA).

Sex, Scandal and Sin: Presbyterians in Ireland and North America, 1717-1830, is a comparative study of the sexual and social worlds of Presbyterians in Ireland and North America across the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries. This period coincided with the migration of approximately 250,000 people from Ireland to North America, the majority of whom were Presbyterians from the province of Ulster. Upon arrival in America, these Presbyterian migrants set about reconstructing the communities that they left behind in Ireland. Crucial to this process, was the establishment of the Presbyterian system of church courts, which underpinned the religious and cultural life of the community. These church courts took responsibility for upholding standards of appropriate behaviour, exerting authority over sexual practices, alcohol use, fights, slander, and the making of marriage.

At the meetings of these courts, minutes were kept as a record of the proceedings. These minutes provide a wealth of information on the intimate aspects of everyday life. Salacious stories of stolen trysts in backrooms, fields and forests; misbehaving ministers riding on horseback and falling down drunk at the pulpit; and brawling church members who physically fought in streets and pews, and exchanged colourful insults, are just some of the cases that the sources reveal. Importantly, these records enable us to access how communities themselves negotiated sex and morality. Discipline in Presbyterian communities was not a top-down process; rather, women and men were very much invested in the process. Acting as agents of discipline, church members used their eyes, ears, noses and tongues to root out the misbehaviour of their neighbours. It was not uncommon for individuals to hide under beds, secret themselves in cupboards, sniff out the smells of whiskey, or listen through floors and doors, as they sought out the sounds, smells and sights of bad behaviour.

Taking a geographically comparative approach, this project uses these minutes to explore similarities and differences in Presbyterian sexual and social values on both sides of the Atlantic. The project employs an
intersectional approach to sexuality, and explores how gender, race, and social rank coalesced to shape experiences in a transatlantic context.

2d. Date report was submitted: Nov 22, 2022

2e. Please provide at least one appropriate image:

[Belfast and Clontarf Presbyterian Church images]

2f. Please outline the objectives of the project:

This project explores the relationship between religion, migration, and sexuality in Presbyterian communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is driven by three main research questions:

1. How similar were Presbyterian communities in Ireland and North America?
2. What effect did migration have on Presbyterian sexual, social, and religious norms?
3. In what ways did religion shape sexual standards?

The project sets out to achieve these aims by:

1. Identifying and transcribing Presbyterian church court minute books in both Ireland and North America across the period under study.
2. Creating an excel database of discipline cases that were heard in the church courts on both sides of the Atlantic.
3. Comparing the data collected, identifying patterns in discipline cases (frequency of particular offences, gendered patterns of discipline, role of social rank and race in determining punishments, change over time).

2g. Please describe the methodology used in conducting the research:

This project draws on the ‘Presbyterian archive’ – a catch-all term used to describe the minute books of the Presbyterian church courts on both sides of the Atlantic. These minute books are housed in archives based in the following locations: Belfast, Northern Ireland; Dublin, Ireland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (USA); and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA). The R.J. Hunter Bursary was used specifically to support research trips to archives in Belfast and Dublin.

What is the Presbyterian archive? The Presbyterian church was organised around a series of three church courts. These were hierarchical in arrangement and included: Synod (or General Assembly), Presbytery, and Kirk Session. While each of these courts was responsible for a particular
area of church business, all were concerned with cases of discipline. The types of offences that came before each of these courts can be divided into three broadly defined categories: sexual offences, such as incest, fornication, and adultery; breaches of marriage norms, that include bigamy, irregular unions, and petitions for divorce; and social offences that upset the harmony of the community, such as slander, brawling, alcohol misuse, and theft. The minutes that detail these offences can be used to build a picture of the moral norms of the communities under study, casting light on their wider sexual and social worlds.

This project draws on the minute books of Presbyterian church courts in both Ireland and North America, tracing continuity and change in the patterns of misbehaviour observed by women and men who shared a common faith. It employs a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative analyses. A sample of minute books from the various levels of church courts on both sides of the Atlantic have been surveyed. This has involved transcribing the minute books and transferring the data to Microsoft Excel databases. Information recorded includes: name of offender, gender, race, social rank, offence, and punishment.

At present, my sample includes material from the following sources covering the period 1700-1840:

Ireland:
• 22 Kirk Session minute books
• 17 Presbytery minute books

America
• 24 Kirk Session minute books
• 15 Presbytery minute books

My database (which is ongoing) currently details:
• Ireland: 441 Presbytery cases; 2,304 Kirk Session cases
• America: 395 Presbytery cases, 462 Kirk Session cases

1. Data-Set
The R.J. Hunter Bursary was used to support three research trips to Ireland: one to Dublin and two to Belfast. These trips have now completed the Irish side of my project.

(i) Dublin
In June 2022, I arranged to photograph the Plunkett Street/Usher’s Quay Kirk Session book (1726-1766), which is held in the private possession of Clontarf and Scots Presbyterian Church, Dublin. I was granted permission to photograph the minute book in full, which meant I did not need to transcribe on site. The minutes are rich in detail on marital breakdown in eighteenth-century Dublin, shedding light on how Presbyterian women and men negotiated the breakdown of their marriages.

(ii) Belfast
I used money from the R.J. Hunter Bursary to visit archives in Belfast on three occasions. This included: June 2022 Union Theological College, Belfast; July 2022 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland; November 2022 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. The trip in July 2022 preceded my return to the USA, where I spent three weeks visiting archives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

During these Belfast trips, I photographed the following records: Burt Kirk Session book (1676-1719); Minutes of Belfast Presbytery (1774-1800), Minutes of Derry Presbytery (1764-96); Ballycarry Kirk Session book (1704-
2. Conference & Symposium Papers

(i) 15 June 2022. I presented a paper entitled ‘Queering the Presbyterian Family, c. 1700-1830’ at the RIFNET: Reconstituting the Irish Family Research Symposium. The full programme of the event may be found here: https://www.ucc.ie/en/iss21/researchprojects/researchprojects/rifnetreconstitutingtheirishfamilyresearchnetwork/#:~:text=The%20network%20brings%20together%20researchers%20interested%20in%20the%20Irish%20Family

Building on the research undertaken for my book project, the paper applied a ‘queer’ perspective to the Presbyterian archive and explored the interpretative possibilities of the case of David Campel (also identified in the records as Elizabeth McIlroy) who was alleged to have dressed in men’s clothing and initiated a sexual exchange with a woman named Margaret McCal. The paper offered a trans-reading of the case and situated David, not simply as a woman dressed in men’s clothing, but as an individual who moved through the world at particular points in time as a man. The paper has since been redrafted as a journal article, which will be submitted to a special issue on ‘A New Agenda for the Irish Family’, co-edited by myself and Dr Maeve O’Riordan (UCC).

(ii) 24 June 2022. I presented a paper entitled ‘“[he] never made any secret of his having a wife in Ireland”: Negotiating divorce and marital conflict in the Presbyterian Atlantic world, 1760-1830’ at the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland annual conference in UCD. The paper presented my book research on marital breakdown in Ireland and North America, revealing the various ways that migration was employed as a tool of marital dissolution. The full programme may be found here: http://ssnci.org/annual-conference-2022/ 3. Monograph

The research undertaken at these Irish archives is embedded into my monograph, which is entitled, Sex, Scandal and Sin: Presbyterians in Ireland and North America, 1717-1830. The monograph is currently in progress and has been reshaped as a result of research undertaken this Summer.

Introduction: Reading the Presbyterian Archive
1. Sensing Sin: Community Surveillance
2. Brawling Brethren
3. The Marriage Question
4. Divorce; ‘Presbyterian Style’
5. Promiscuous Presbyterians? Sex, Intemperance and Licentiousness
6. Misbehaving Ministers
7. Telling Tom’s Story: Race and the Presbyterian Archive

Conclusion

3a. Please provide details of the dissemination of the outcomes from this project (Publications, presentations, outreach, media etc) including details of any social media/web platforms used to publicise this project:

1. Project website is ongoing: https://promiscuouspresbyterian.wordpress.com/ 2. Project Twitter handle: @PPresbyterians

3. Symposium Paper ‘Queering the Presbyterian Family, 1700-1830’ at the RIFNET: Reconstituting the Irish Family Research Symposium. The full programme of the event may be found here: https://www.ucc.ie/en/iss21/researchprojects/researchprojects/rifnetreconstitutingtheirishfamilyresearchnetwork/#:~:text=The%20network%20brings%20together%20researchers%20interested%20in%20the%20Irish%20Family

4. Conference Paper ‘“[he] never made any secret of his having a wife in Ireland”: Negotiating divorce and marital conflict in the Presbyterian Atlantic world, 1760-1830’ at the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland annual conference in UCD. The full programme may be


3b. Number of academic papers/articles published: 0

3c. Number of lectures given/outreach events involved in: 2

3d. Media coverage (articles in newspapers/ University websites etc.): 0

3f. How will you continue to communicate the results of your project?

I intend to keep my project website ([https://promiscuouspresbyterian.wordpress.com/](https://promiscuouspresbyterian.wordpress.com/)) up to date and post to the project twitter handle @PPresbyterians.

3g. What are your publication plans? The publication of a monograph entitled Sex, Scandal and Sin: Presbyterians in Ireland and North America, 1717-1830.

4b. Please tell us about any additional funding that you received from other government sources, Trusts, EU funding, or any other sources including the amount of the award:

British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant (£7,756); Research Fellowship with the Presbyterian Historical Society, USA ($2,500), Anna Parnell Travel Grant, Women’s History Association of Ireland, (€500), Women’s History Network Small Grant Scheme (£1,000).

5c. How did the bursary enhance your professional development (e.g. in terms of specific opportunities, opportunities for enhancing skills, collaboration with others etc.)?

The bursary enabled me to complete the Irish side of my research project, funding three separate trips to Ireland. Moreover, the funding from the RIA meant that I was able to direct the remaining funds I received from the British Academy towards the USA side of my trip, which was very expensive to arrange. The money from the RIA therefore indirectly enabled me to fully fund the USA trip out of other funds.

5d. What plans (if any) do you have to further your proposal/project?

I am on sabbatical this semester and am working through the material collected. I intend to complete my book manuscript by end of 2023. Thereafter, I intend to pursue other projects, which will include (I hope) a collaboration with the Irish Manuscripts Commission to make edited transcripts of Presbyterian church court records available.