

Female alliances in Cromwellian Ireland: the social and political network of Elizabeth Butler, marchioness of Ormonde

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ABSTRACT. *Elizabeth Butler, marchioness of Ormonde, came to prominence during the middle years of the seventeenth century as a result of her care of Protestant refugees in the aftermath of the 1641 rebellion; her royalist exile in Caen; her successful claim to a portion of the confiscated Ormonde estate; and her subsequent retirement to Dunmore in County Kilkenny. Her letters from the 1650s and 1660 provide valuable insight on her role as an influential Irish royalist, and specifically reveal the importance of women in the social and political network that supported her through this tumultuous period. Prominent among the women in her network include the anonymous 'JH', a kinswoman who acted as Ormonde's intelligencer and spy in Cromwell's court in London in the early 1650s; Katherine, Lady Ranelagh, an acquaintance who wielded significant influence with the Cromwellian administration in Dublin and acted as Ormonde's intermediary in the mid 1650s; a group of pre-eminent British noblewomen from prominent royalist families with whom Ormonde maintained a relationship of mutual support from the 1650s into the 1660s; and finally Anne Hume, Ormonde's friend, confidante and long-serving waiting gentlewoman, who acted as her agent and messenger as Ormonde prepared for the Restoration in May 1660. Offering a more granular examination of Ormonde's activities during the 1650s than has been undertaken to date, this article shows that women were of primary importance to Ormonde's survival and indeed thriving through the Interregnum. More broadly, it indicates that female alliances were key to women's political agency in Cromwellian Ireland and that women were central to royalist political activity during the Interregnum.*

The field of women's history and writing in early modern Ireland has expanded in recent years, and thanks to the efforts of a growing community of feminist scholars we are learning more about early modern Irish women's social, political, cultural, and intellectual achievements; their roles in pre-eminent Irish families; their activities and experiences at key moments in Irish history; and their writing, especially letters and other forms of life writing.¹ Elizabeth Butler, marchioness

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¹ See, for example, Marie-Louise Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language in early modern Ireland* (Oxford, 2010); Julie A. Eckerle, 'Women representing Ireland in the 17th century: from English idyll to Irish nightmare' in *Literature Compass*, xv, no. 10 (Oct. 2018) (available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12494>); Julie A. Eckerle and Naomi McAreavey (eds), *Women's life writing and early modern Ireland* (Lincoln, 2019);

of Ormonde, is critically important in all of these areas, yet she has received little detailed attention in her own right.² She was the wife of James Butler, marquess of Ormonde, the most significant Irish royalist of the seventeenth century. In the 1640s he had served as commander of the king's forces in Ireland as well as lord lieutenant. In the 1650s he went into exile and became one of the king's closest advisers. His wife, meanwhile, returned from exile to petition Cromwell for restitution of a portion of her own inherited estate. Elizabeth Ormonde is mentioned in studies of mid seventeenth century Ireland, particularly in terms of her care of Protestant refugees in the aftermath of the 1641 rebellion; her status as a high-profile royalist exile in Caen; and, most famously, her successful claim to a portion of the confiscated Ormonde estate and her subsequent retirement to Dunmore in County Kilkenny for the final years of the Interregnum.³ Yet even as her importance in Confederate and Cromwellian Ireland is acknowledged, she is under-represented in the historiography of the period. This is despite the fact that she left a sizeable archive, including her own handwritten letters. Since so many prominent royalist men were in exile during the 1650s, women like Ormonde are critical to our understanding of royalist experiences in Cromwellian Ireland. Only by attending to women's lives and writings can we hope to obtain a fuller understanding of this critical period, and ensure that Irish women are not overlooked in the important reassessments of women's activities during the civil war.⁴

Ormonde's letters of the 1650s and 1660 provide valuable insight on her position as an influential Irish royalist. They indicate that rather than a passive figure subject to her husband's guidance, she was an active agent in her own right. She was a subtle and astute political actor who built and maintained a social and political network that she utilised to her advantage. The relationships she cultivated with a variety of men — from high-profile figures like Sir Edward Nicholas, Oliver Cromwell, Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill, and Henry Cromwell, to agents and servants like John Burdon — require further scrutiny: in this article I am interested in her relationships with women. Ormonde's letters provide evidence of the importance of her female alliances, which included prominent English royalists like Charlotte Stanley, dowager countess of Derby, and Christiana Cavendish, dowager countess

Margaret Mac Curtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1991); Mary O'Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland, 1500–1800* (Harlow, 2005); Ann-Maria Walsh, *The daughters of the first earl of Cork: writing family, faith, politics and place* (Dublin, 2020).

² I adopt the terminal *e* because this was the spelling used by Ormonde herself. Her personal preference for the terminal *e* is captured in a memorandum written to her close friend Anne Hume in May 1660 in which she requests that her husband be acquainted 'that such recommendations as comes from mee, in the behalfe of Persons done rathar out of Complianse then respect, shallbee subscribed with the leauinge out of the leter E, at the Ende of the word ormond': Elizabeth Ormonde to [Anne] Hume, [May 1660] (Bodl., Carte MS 214, ff 221–2). Soon after, a recommendation for one Mr Burneston was duly signed 'E:ormond' to signal that it was written under duress: Elizabeth Ormonde to James Ormonde, 20 May 1660 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2324, no. 1339, p. 235).

³ See, for example, John Cunningham, *Conquest and land in Ireland: the transplantation to Connacht, 1649–1680* (Woodbridge, 2011); Jane Ohlmeyer, *Making Ireland English: the Irish aristocracy in the seventeenth century* (New Haven, 2012); Mark R. F. Williams, *The King's Irishmen: the Irish in the exiled court of Charles II, 1649–1660* (Woodbridge, 2014).

⁴ See, for example, Hero Chalmers, *Royalist women writers, 1650–1689* (Oxford, 2004); Ann Hughes, *Gender and the English revolution* (Oxford, 2012); Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (eds), *Women poets of the English Civil War* (Manchester, 2017).

of Devonshire; parliamentarian sympathisers like Katherine, Lady Ranelagh, who was also connected to the important Irish Protestant settler family, the Cork Boyles; women in the Ormonde Butler family network, including those with associations with Confederate Catholics; and female companions and agents with long-standing connections with the Preston branch of her family. Many of these women performed as intermediaries between Ormonde and powerful men, but many also acted directly on Ormonde's behalf. Together they show that a female network spanning the three kingdoms was key to her survival through the challenging years of the Interregnum and they more generally demonstrate the importance of women in Irish royalist activity at this time.

In shining a light on Ormonde's female alliances and friendships during the Cromwellian period, I contribute to a topic that is flourishing in the field of early modern women's history. Recent scholarship, especially in the digital humanities, has turned its attention to female networks.⁵ This has built upon the work of feminist scholars who in the past twenty years have demonstrated the centrality of female relationships to the lives of early modern women. Such relationships are typically described as female alliances, which Susan Frye and Karen Robertson have defined as 'a formally recognized relationship, activated or chosen to the political advantage of its members'.⁶ Amanda Herbert uses the term to 'encompass the wide variety of women's social activities and broadly positive interactions' and the 'many dimensions and meanings of female relationships and friendships'.⁷ Such friendships are, for Christina Luckyj and Niamh O'Leary, 'imbued with political significance'.⁸ I adopt the term 'alliances' to describe the range of female friendships that Ormonde used to her political advantage during the Cromwellian period. These encompass relationships with a waiting gentlewoman, a kinswoman and women from her wider social circle, including those from noble families throughout the three kingdoms, women who shared her royalism and those who did not. These women acted as intelligencers, as intermediaries and as providers of mutual aid. Relationships were cemented by the exchange of information, money, gifts, and favours. All of these relationships were mobilised to optimise Ormonde's political position under the Cromwellian administration, and ensured her adaptability and survival through the Interregnum.

In what follows I first introduce Ormonde's life and letters; then I provide an overview of her activities and experiences during the Interregnum; finally I showcase the women who are cited in Ormonde's correspondence as providing valuable support during these difficult years. Here I move from the anonymous 'JH', a kinswoman who acted as Ormonde's intelligencer and spy in Cromwell's court in London in the early 1650s; to Lady Ranelagh, an acquaintance who wielded significant influence with the Cromwellian administration in Dublin and acted as Ormonde's intermediary in the mid 1650s; to a group of pre-eminent British noblewomen from prominent royalist families with whom Ormonde maintained

⁵ This is summarised by Catherine Medici, 'Using network analysis to understand early modern women' in *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, xiii, no. 1 (fall 2018), pp 153–62.

⁶ Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds), *Maids and mistresses, cousins and queens: women's alliances in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999), p. 4.

⁷ Amanda E. Herbert, *Female alliances: gender, identity, and friendship in early modern Britain* (New Haven, 2014), p. 15.

⁸ Christina Luckyj and Niamh J. O'Leary (eds), *The politics of female alliance* (Lincoln, 2017), p. 10.

relationships of mutual support from the 1650s into the 1660s; and finally to Anne Hume, Ormonde's friend, confidante, and long-serving waiting gentlewoman, who acted as her agent and messenger as Ormonde prepared for the Restoration in May 1660. Offering a more granular examination of Ormonde's activities during the 1650s than has been undertaken to date, I show that women were of primary importance to Ormonde's survival and, indeed, her thriving through the Interregnum. I suggest that her actions demonstrated a distinctly gendered response to her husband's exile as she built a predominantly female network to support her through the turmoil of the Interregnum. My study of the marchioness of Ormonde ultimately demonstrates that female alliances were key to women's political agency in Cromwellian Ireland and that women were central to royalist political activity throughout the Interregnum.

I

Elizabeth Butler, née Preston, Baroness Dingwall, and countess, marchioness, then duchess of Ormonde (1615–84), is the author of the largest body of extant correspondence of any woman from seventeenth-century Ireland, and was arguably the most powerful and well-connected Irish woman of her time.⁹ Her importance has long been recognised, yet under-explored, although this is likely to change with the imminent publication of her correspondence.¹⁰ She was the only child of Elizabeth Butler, sole surviving legitimate child of Thomas Butler, tenth earl of Ormonde, and Richard Preston, Baron Dingwall, later earl of Desmond, a Scottish court noble and favourite of James VI and I.¹¹ After the death of her maternal grandfather, the tenth earl, her father laid claim to the Ormonde title and estate in his wife's name. Although he failed to obtain the earldom, which was entailed in the male line, Preston and his wife were awarded more than half of the Ormonde estate at the expense of the eleventh earl, a Catholic, thanks to the personal interventions of King James. Ten years later, in October 1628, the estate was inherited by the couple's thirteen-year-old daughter when she was bereaved of both parents. Plans were quickly revived for her to marry her second cousin, James Butler, grandson and heir to the eleventh earl of Ormonde, who had also been raised as a Protestant. The couple married at Christmas 1629, and the reunification of the

⁹ On the 'Irishness' of Ormonde, particularly during the Interregnum, see Naomi McAreevey, 'The place of Ireland in the letters of the first duchess of Ormonde' in Eckerle & McAreevey (eds), *Women's life writing and early modern Ireland*, pp 159–81.

¹⁰ *The letters of the first duchess of Ormonde*, ed. Naomi McAreevey (Toronto, 2021). Toby Barnard and Jane Fenlon (eds), *The dukes of Ormonde, 1610–1745* (Woodbridge, 2000), remains the definitive work on the seventeenth-century Ormonde Butlers, but its attention to Lady Ormonde is limited. Barnard called for further research, which he rightly argued 'is likely to raise higher the stature of the first duchess' (T. C. Barnard, 'Introduction: the dukes of Ormonde' in *ibid.*, p. 33). Eleanor O'Keeffe responded to the call in 'The family and marriage strategies of James Butler, 1st duke of Ormonde, 1658–1688' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000), but her thesis remains unpublished. More recently, Damien Duffy touches upon the first duchess at the end of *Aristocratic women in Ireland, 1450–1660: the Ormond family, power and politics* (Woodbridge, 2021).

¹¹ The subsequent account is indebted to David Edwards, 'The poisoned chalice: the Ormond inheritance, sectarian division and the emergence of James Butler, 1614–1642' in Barnard and Fenlon (eds), *Dukes of Ormond*, pp 58–64.

Ormonde title and estate in Protestant hands was secured when the groom inherited the earldom in 1633.

As Ireland's only duchess, as well as a high-ranking Stuart courtier and three-times Irish vicereine, Ormonde sat at the pinnacle of Irish society through more than six decades of extraordinary social and political upheaval, unmatched by any other Irish woman of the period in terms of her wealth, social standing and political sway. Her substantial correspondence reflects her importance within the Ormonde Butler family, and in the social, cultural, and political life of seventeenth-century Ireland. Her 300-plus surviving letters are addressed to her husband and family, agents and servants, and friends and clients, and span the years between 1630 and 1684, traversing the 1641 rebellion, the wars of the three kingdoms, royalist defeat and exile, the Interregnum, and the Restoration. Together they offer an important Irish female perspective on these key decades of three kingdoms' history; and they illuminate her crucial involvement in the protection and advancement of her family's interests during a period of unprecedented crisis and change.

II

Ormonde rose to prominence during the Cromwellian period. Her successful claim to part of her family's estate in Kilkenny is well known and often cited by historians.¹² Her autograph letters from the period have been under-utilised, however, even though they provide valuable insight on Irish royalist experiences of continental exile as well as of Cromwellian Ireland.¹³ In 1649 Ormonde was living in exile with her young family in Caen while her husband commanded the royalist army in Ireland. Upon its defeat by the parliamentarians under Cromwell, the marquess joined his wife in Caen, at which time she began to make plans to return to London to claim a portion of the family's estate.¹⁴ By 2 May 1652 she had received sufficient assurances of Cromwell's sympathy to address the lord protector himself.¹⁵ She obtained the necessary passes to return

¹² Letters and documents relating to the claim of Elizabeth, countess of Ormonde, wife of James Butler, first duke of Ormonde, to restitution of lands confiscated by the Commonwealth (N.L.I., Ormond papers, 2499–2503).

¹³ Ormonde's exile letters can be found in a number of locations and a tiny proportion have been published. Her letters to secretary of state, Sir Edward Nicholas, can be found in the British Library (B.L., Egerton MSS 2533–4); letters to a number of Irish and British royalists can be found among the Hastings-Irish papers in the Huntington Library (H.L., Hastings-Irish papers (Rawdon papers), HA 14109–10, 14112); and her petitionary letter to Cromwell is preserved by the Society of Antiquaries of London (S.A.L., MS 138). A significant number of letters survive from the period after Ormonde returned from exile, including a large number of letters written throughout the 1650s to her agent, John Burdon, from various locations in both England and Ireland, in the Ormond papers in the National Library of Ireland (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2321–4, 2484); some letters to Henry Cromwell can be found in the British Library (B.L., Lansdowne MS 823); and a series of pseudonymous letters written to her husband in exile from the end of the 1650s can be found in the Bodleian Library (Bodl., Carte MS 213–14) and the National Library of Ireland (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2482). The letters in the Ormond papers have been particularly neglected, partly because the material has not been comprehensively catalogued, yet they provide detailed and sustained insight on Ormonde's interactions with the Cromwellian administration in Ireland.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Ormonde to Edward Nicholas, 19 Jan. 1650/1 (B.L., Egerton MS 2534, f. 44).

¹⁵ Elizabeth Ormonde to Oliver Cromwell, 2 May 1652 (S.A.L., MS 138).

to England and, on 1 February 1653, the commissioners of parliament in Ireland were instructed to set aside Dunmore House, County Kilkenny, with £2,000 per annum out of the lands of her own inheritance for the use of her and her children on the condition that no part of the revenue should be diverted to her husband.¹⁶

As early as June 1653 she wrote to General Charles Fleetwood of her ‘apprehensions of the prejudice I am like to suffer by the strict interpretation that is made upon the words of the Parliaments order and the giving me lands wast and in severall places farr distant from the howse assigned mee’.¹⁷ She had reason to be fearful, for when the schedule of lands and rents assigned for her maintenance was examined in December 1653, it became clear that the income produced fell far short of the promised £2,000 annuity: in some cases taxes absorbed half of the rents, and in other cases nearly 80 per cent was lost to taxes.¹⁸ Ormonde, therefore, spent the middle years of the 1650s between London and Dublin, trying to negotiate the conditions that would make her move to Kilkenny possible. These negotiations involved the navigation of complex political situations in London and Dublin, particularly between Cromwell and his Irish commissioners. The circumstances were particularly fraught given that the Down Survey of Ireland was being taken at the time. This sought to measure all the land to be forfeited by Irish royalists, mainly but not exclusively Catholic, in order to facilitate its redistribution to merchant adventurers and English soldiers.¹⁹ Her letters reveal the difficulty of these circumstances.²⁰ Ormonde was not able to bring her young family to Kilkenny until September 1657, by which time she described the preceding period as having ‘Cast greater difficulties upon mee, then canbee well imaginede, but by thous, whoe has bine a wittnes what a Laborious and Sad time I have had, to suport my selfe, and Familie, Free from fallinge undar anye Contempt, or Clamor of Mene persons’.²¹ In Dunmore House she and her youngest children lived quietly, and reasonably contentedly, for the rest of the Interregnum, while her husband and eldest sons Thomas, earl of Ossory, and Richard, later earl of Arran, remained on the continent.

In her seminal study of women and war in early modern Ireland, Mary O’Dowd touches on Ormonde’s claim in the context of women’s broader experiences of the Cromwellian land settlement, and makes the case that Ormonde would not have been successful without the support of high-profile men in Ireland and England, including Cromwell himself.²² Evidence from Ormonde’s own letters and archives confirms O’Dowd’s argument, for enclosed in her letter to Fleetwood is a copy of a

¹⁶ See H.M.C., *Calendar of the manuscripts of the marquess of Ormonde*, new series (8 vols, London, 1902–20), ii, 373–5; and also Conleth Manning, ‘The 1653 survey of the lands granted to the countess of Ormond in Co. Kilkenny’ in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxxix (1999), pp 40–66.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Ormonde to Charles Fleetwood, June 1653 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2499, no. 17, p. 173).

¹⁸ This account is drawn from Winifred Gardner (Lady Burghclere), *A life of James, first duke of Ormonde, 1610–1688* (2 vols, London, 1912), i, 438, where more details can be found.

¹⁹ ‘The Down Survey of Ireland’ (<http://downsurvey.tcd.ie/>) (10 Dec. 2020).

²⁰ See, for example, Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 21 Sept. 1655 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2321, no. 1147, p. 225).

²¹ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 16 Sept. 1657 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1240, p. 413).

²² Mary O’Dowd, ‘Women and war in Ireland’ in Mac Curtain and O’Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland*, p. 103. O’Dowd compares Elizabeth Ormonde’s position with that of Lady Inchiquin, who lacked this powerful network.

letter from Cromwell to Fleetwood in which he wrote: ‘This lady is a person of soe much honor and merit as I hope I need not presse any other Arguments for the shewing her any lawfull and just favour in this particular.’²³ Her letters also show-case the importance of Lord Broghill’s advocacy and support, particularly during negotiations with the Dublin commissioners.²⁴ Letters to Burdon indicate the importance of his loyal service during the long negotiations with Cromwell’s administration in Dublin. In her letter of September 1657 she identified Burdon as ‘one of the prinsepall’ of her servants who ‘has Sarvede mee industerouslie and fathfullye’.²⁵ And at the Restoration she recommended him to her husband’s service, asking the marquess ‘to louke with favour upon your ould Sarvant John Burdon whoe is Now as Sober and abbell a Secretarye as anye that I doe beleve you Cane light upon and willbee very ussfull to you upon Sondrie ocations’.²⁶

Evidence from other contemporary sources indicate the support Ormonde received from titled Irishmen who were barely mentioned in her own letters. Richard Boyle, the second earl of Cork, wrote in his diary of 17 October 1654 that he and Edward Brabazon, second earl of Meath, accompanied Ormonde to the Court of Claims where Sir James Barry ‘did very well plead her cause’.²⁷ There is evidence in Cork’s diaries that he and Ormonde became close during the Interregnum, when he paid her visits at Dunmore, although he makes little impression on her own writing of the period. The earl of Meath is slightly better represented. In September 1657 she mentioned to Burdon the ‘Curtisie’ she received from Meath in the form of a £200 loan.²⁸ In an undated letter from around the same period she asked Burdon ‘to Present my Sarvise unto My Lord of Meath and Let hime know that I sent ~~to know~~ ~~he~~ you to inquier after his Lordshipp’s health’.²⁹ But then she instructed Burdon to ‘deliver the inclosede unto his Lady, but not when hee is presant, because it Consarnes [their daughter] My Lady Jeane Moore’.³⁰ The enclosed letter to Lady Meath is no longer extant, and its content remains a mystery. Yet, even as the reference indicates the vast number of letters between women that have been lost, it also opens up a window to a less documented network of women that existed alongside, and perhaps even in opposition to, Ormonde’s network of men — one that is often found in the margins of her letters through postscripts, commendations and endorsements.³¹ None of these letters

²³ Elizabeth Ormonde to General Charles Fleetwood, June 1653 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2499, no. 20, p. 85).

²⁴ See, for example, Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 27 Jan. 1656/7 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1210, p. 231).

²⁵ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 16 Sept. 1657 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1240, p. 413).

²⁶ Elizabeth Ormonde to James Ormonde, 21 May 1660 (Bodl., Carte MS 214, ff 87–8).

²⁷ *The diary of Richard Boyle, 2nd earl of Cork and 1st earl of Burlington, 1650–73*, eds Coleman Dennehy and Patrick Little (Dublin, forthcoming). Thanks to Patrick Little for sharing these references from the work in progress.

²⁸ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 16 Sept. 1657 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1240, p. 413).

²⁹ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, [1657?], (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 214, p. 61).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ For example, in letters to Nicholas, Ormonde mentions receiving a letter from Lady Inchiquin (B.L., Egerton MS 2534, f. 44); and of waiting for correspondence from Lady Jane Nicholas (B.L., Egerton MS 2534, f. 129).

appear to have survived. Nevertheless, the references indicate Ormonde's position within a matrix of royalist connections that span Ireland, Britain and continental Europe, and indicate the importance of women at every level of royalist activity.

All of Ormonde's surviving letters from the 1650s are addressed to male correspondents, and this reflects the correspondence throughout her lifetime. Only four of the 300-plus extant letters are addressed to other women. This is not unusual for a period when women's letters tend to be preserved among the archives of men and are, therefore, more likely to survive if they are written to men. But within the letters to men is evidence of Ormonde's relationships with women. References to women are often fleeting, sometimes insubstantial, and occasionally inscrutable, but they offer an opportunity to identify and begin to unpack her relationships with women during her continental exile and then her quiet retirement in Kilkenny. The evidence suggests that women played an important, yet overlooked, role in the life of Ormonde during her long estrangement from her husband in the 1650s, acting as agents and advocates, and as a crucial source of material, social and political support.

III

Evidence that Ormonde mobilised female networks to advance her interests extend from the early 1650s, when she used an unidentified female kinswoman to send intelligence from Cromwell's court, to May 1660, when she sent messages to her husband via her waiting gentlewoman as she made preparations to be reunited with him in the court of the newly restored King Charles II. Letters from the intervening years indicate that she leveraged the support of a wide range of women including those from prominent Irish families who supported the new regime, to those from pre-eminent noble families in Britain who were staunchly royalist, in order to protect her and her family's interests during this period of crisis.

The first of Ormonde's significant female agents was a woman who sent messages to her in Caen from Cromwell's court in London. These messages preceded the handwritten petitionary letter that Ormonde sent to Cromwell on 2 May 1652 in which she said that she had 'by a very generall Fame' received assurance of his sympathy to women in her position and had 'heard that some Expretions have fallene from you' that her particular request might be favourably received.³² It is known that the marquess had received reports that his wife enjoyed Cromwell's support: in a letter written to him on 6 May 1650, for example, Michael Boyle divulged that Cromwell 'pretends to be a great servant of your lady, and much to pittie her condition; the estate which she brought Your Lordship they openly profess shall not be given from her'.³³ But Ormonde's correspondence indicates that she had agents of her own to report from London before she ventured to make her claim.

One such intelligencer was the author of a letter sent to Ormonde in Caen in or around November 1651: a woman who signed herself 'JH'.³⁴ The letter was

³² Elizabeth Ormonde to Oliver Cromwell, 2 May 1652 (S.A.L., MS 138).

³³ Cited in Burghclere, *Life*, i, 391.

³⁴ 'JH' to Elizabeth Ormonde, [Nov. 1651] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2482, no. 329). The letter writer informs Ormonde of Lord Cleveland's 'pardon,' and 'poore' Lady Derby's

addressed ‘Deare Sister’, and there may be some truth in the sibling relationship that was invoked by the letter-writer. She was not a sister by birth or marriage, certainly: Ormonde was an only child and none of her husband’s Catholic sisters are likely candidates. But if we widen the net to include what Clodagh Tait has called ‘fictive kinship’, there are a few possibilities.³⁵ Tait describes ‘fictive kinship’ as the ‘social and emotional ties that bring together people unrelated by blood or marriage in ways that mimic those forms of kinship’.³⁶ Her work focuses on wet-nursing and fosterage practices but it is possible that the concept might be broadened to include wardship also. If so, the letter might have been written by one of the four surviving daughters of Henry Rich, earl of Holland, to whom Ormonde had been ward: Frances, Isabella, Diana or Mary.³⁷ At least one of the daughters, Lady Isabella Thynne, née Rich (1623–57), had remained a close friend of Ormonde. Thynne is known to have acted as a royalist spy, but she escaped England shortly after her father’s execution in March 1649: in a letter to the marquess of Ormonde, Nicholas names Thynne as one of three royalist women ‘so severely pursued by the rebels in England’ but he confirms that she had recently arrived in Caen.³⁸ We learn elsewhere that in Caen Thynne was given refuge in Ormonde’s house and that she was there in late 1651/early 1652.³⁹ If this does not entirely rule her out as the woman behind ‘JH’, her identification is shaky.

Whoever was the real ‘JH’, she had clearly been acting as Ormonde’s spy, albeit one sharing relatively low-stakes information about the political situation in England and Ormonde’s particular interests. She acknowledged that she had sent at least one earlier letter to Ormonde and also that she had received one from her: it is, therefore, likely that the two women maintained a regular correspondence. We learn from the letter that ‘JH’ was enmeshed in the world of royalist intrigue, whether real or perceived. She told Ormonde of the ‘trobble we are like to be in, by the acusatione of a footman that did serve my mother, houe very falsly sayth my lord had a hand in that unfortunat busnes, for which my deare father died’.⁴⁰ She also shared news that ‘my poore lady darby is taken, and the soldier so hasty

‘surenther’ of Castle Rushen: these contextual details date the letter no earlier than late October 1651 and probably soon after.

³⁵ Clodagh Tait, ‘“Kindred without end”: wet-nursing, fosterage and emotion in Ireland, c.1550–1720’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xlvii (2020), pp 1–26.

³⁶ Tait, ‘Kindred’, p. 2.

³⁷ ‘JH’ to Elizabeth Ormonde, [Nov. 1651] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2482, no. 329). My reasons for attributing the letter to one of the Rich sisters are circumstantial. The letter is addressed ‘Deare Sister’; Ormonde had been the ward of the earl of Holland. He had been executed in March 1649 for his part in the second civil war; the letter-writer refers to ‘that unfortunat busnes, for which my deare father died’.

³⁸ Edward Nicholas to James Ormonde, 7 June 1649 in Thomas Carte (ed.), *A collection of original letters and papers, concerning the affairs of England* (2 vols, London, 1739), i, 290–2. On Thynne’s royalist activities, see Nadine Akkerman, *Invisible agents: women and espionage in seventeenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2018), pp 43–5; Hilton Kelliher, ‘John Denham: new Letters and documents’ in *British Library Journal*, xii, no. 1 (spring 1986), pp 1–20.

³⁹ Burghclere, *Life*, i, 420. Kelliher, ‘John Denham’, includes letters written from Denham to Thynne in Dec. 1651 and Feb. 1652 in which he speaks of Thynne’s friendship with Lord and Lady Ormonde (*ibid.*, p. 9). He also asks Thynne to share information with Ormonde about money that is due to her from the king (*ibid.*, p. 11).

⁴⁰ ‘JH’ to Elizabeth Ormonde, [Nov. 1651] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2482, no. 329).

upon a surether, they would not sufer her to make anny kind of Condistions', and added: 'I feare she is in a sad Condistione.'⁴¹ Overall, the letter emphasises the precarious position in which royalist women in England found themselves after 1649.

'JH' reported that during her recent stay in London she 'saw nothing dun in your busnes, but faire words, sence it hath bin moved, and admitted of a long debait'.⁴² She assured Ormonde that her case remained on the agenda, however, claiming that Cromwell himself 'semed much troble about it, and I am persuaded will not thus give it over'.⁴³ She also professed her hope that the government 'will be sivelor to Ladys' than it has been hitherto.⁴⁴ She provided little detail, however, acknowledging that Ormonde had already received intelligence from other sources: 'your servant hath given you the full relatione of, so I will not repeat besids another tould me he did it to[o]'.⁴⁵ But she implied that she might be in a better position than Ormonde's other intelligencers. She wrote: 'I know no thing Can make me visit the Gennarall, unless it may be to sarve you, he being a person I yet never say [saw] but onse by chance, pasing by, nor ame I so mambistious to desire such high things, if I can avoyd them and yet for all this, if I can find I may serve you by a sight of him, I will be armed to doe it'.⁴⁶ The suggestion that she needed to be 'armed' (metaphorically at least) before a visit to Cromwell indicates the perilous circumstances in which a royalist woman like 'JH' remained in London. But it also implies that as a woman she was less conspicuous and able to remain there because she did not draw attention to herself. Her relative invisibility was what gave her access to Cromwell's court and this enabled her to gather valuable information on Ormonde's behalf. Her gender made her the ideal spy.⁴⁷

Although the identity of 'JH' might never be known, what is known is that 'JH' was the nomenclature that Ormonde used herself when she secretly wrote to her husband from Dunmore at the end of the decade.⁴⁸ Her 'JH' was a male persona, however, signed as the 'fathful frind and Sarvant' or 'fathfull humbell sarvant' of her husband, whom she addressed as 'Sir'. The choice of the initials 'JH' appears purposeful, perhaps an attempt to implicate the original 'JH' in her own secret correspondence or at least to obfuscate in case her letters were intercepted. Clandestine correspondence such as hers always had the potential to be misattributed, as she knew only too well. Broghill's earliest biographer recounted how, when Ormonde was in London in the mid 1650s, Cromwell had intercepted a letter, apparently in her hand, that suggested she was conspiring with her husband against the regime, upon which Cromwell in a 'fury' renounced her award, saying, 'I find she is a wicked woman, and she shall not have a farthing of it; and I will have her carted

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, p. 4, argues that women 'were automatically above suspicion' as spies, which meant that 'they enjoyed a freedom of movement often denied to men during wars, an essential attribute for an intelligencer'.

⁴⁸ 'JH' to James Ormonde (Bodl., Carte MS 213, ff 103–04, 168–9, 202–03, 244–5, 508–09; *ibid.*, MS 214, f. 42; N.L.I., Ormond papers 2482, no. 115 (p. 321), no. 117 (p. 337)). On the use of nomenclature in royalist correspondence at this time, see Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, pp 143–8, esp. p. 145.

besides'.⁴⁹ Apparently Cromwell's rage dissipated only when Broghill was able to convince him that the incriminating letter he had intercepted, and which he had believed was written by Ormonde, was in fact in Thynne's hand.⁵⁰ Whether she liked it or not, Ormonde was dangerously associated with royalist spies and conspirators. Indeed, simply by writing in cipher Ormonde was engaging in treasonous activity that was punishable by death.⁵¹ Ormonde's sense of her own vulnerability under Cromwell perhaps explains why, in August 1656, she described him to Burdon as 'that one Persone that is by all soe much fearede'.⁵² The following month she wrote to tell Burdon of 'the imprisonment of my Eldest Sone, that was Carriede to the Tower one this day ^Last^ was Sennight last where hee has bine ever Sense and is still, but nothings alledged aganst hime Nor I am most Sartane cannot bee, soe as I dout not to obtayne his release in a while, sense his restrant is suposed to bee only upon distast of his Fathars present actings'.⁵³ So, despite ostensibly enjoying Cromwell's support, Ormonde always risked being viewed as a threat to his regime and due to her royalist connections she could not avoid being implicated in royalist plotting. The earlier letter from the anonymous 'JH' shows that she had the means to engage in such intrigue.

From the shadowy 'JH', where we find evidence of Ormonde's activities in just one coded letter, we turn to probably the best-known member of Ormonde's female network and the woman whose support is by far the best documented: Katherine Jones, née Boyle (1615–91), Lady Ranelagh, daughter of the first earl of Cork and sister to Richard, second earl of Cork and Roger, Lord Broghill, later earl of Orrery. Described as 'an Oliverian in politics', Ranelagh was acquainted with leading figures in Cromwell's government, including the president of his council and Cromwell himself.⁵⁴ It is possible that Ranelagh used her influence with Cromwell to help secure Ormonde's award, although any such intercession in 1652–3 is not substantiated. Friends of the marquess alluded to the support that his wife received from Ranelagh and her brother Broghill in putting pressure on Cromwell's government in Ireland. Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, emphasised that Broghill's 'obligations and civilities to your family haue been very extraordinary, as likewise hath my Lady Ranelagh's, to whose interests with the present governors the preservation of the fortune is much to be imputed and the protection that

⁴⁹ Thomas Morrice, 'The life of the earl of Orrery' in *A collection of the state letters of the Right Honourable Roger Boyle, the first earl of Orrery, lord president of Munster in Ireland* (London, 1742), p. 24. For a more nuanced account of Broghill during this period, see Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian Union with Ireland and Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2004).

⁵⁰ O'Keeffe, 'Family', p. 26, persuasively suggests that the letter is evidence that James Ormonde had resumed his affair with Lady Isabella Thynne by whom he had an illegitimate son. An undated letter from Lady Isabella Thynne to her husband (Longleat House, Thynne papers IX, ff 39r–40v) shows a resemblance between her handwriting and Elizabeth Ormonde's, as well as similar orthography, which may provide another explanation for Cromwell's error.

⁵¹ Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, p. 4.

⁵² Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 5 Aug. 1656 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2321, no. 1166, p. 387).

⁵³ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 23 Sept. 1656 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2321, no. 1170, p. 417).

⁵⁴ Sarah Hutton, 'Jones [née Boyle], Katherine, Viscountess Ranelagh (1615–1691)' in *O.D.N.B.*

is now enjoyed'.⁵⁵ And Thomas Page, secretary to the marquess, later wrote of 'the great obligations [the Boyle] ^family^ has layd upon my lady in her straightned condition, particularly the Lord Broughill, and the Lady Rannlagh, which later to my knowlege may be sayd to have saved her estate from destruction'.⁵⁶ According to these sources, Ranelagh's key intervention seems to have been protecting Ormonde's estate from the ill intentions of the Dublin administration rather than interceding with Cromwell.

There is some evidence that Ormonde and Ranelagh maintained a correspondence throughout the 1650s but it does not appear to have survived.⁵⁷ Ormonde's own letters indicate that Ranelagh used her influence with her brother Broghill to Ormonde's advantage. She informed Burdon in August 1657: 'I have great obligations unto the Ladys Brothar whoe is now goeing over, and will I am Confidint befrind mee as farr as hee Cane in all my Consarnes soe as by hir Menes, I would have you to addrese your Selfe to hime as you find ocaation, for hee has a great intrrest thar, as well as heare with thous in greatest power.'⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that Broghill was identified as Ranelagh's brother and not the brother of Ormonde's other friend Cork (with whom she had lived in close proximity in Caen), which not only reveals Ormonde's understanding of the dynamics of friendship and influence among the Boyle siblings, but also shows that she saw Ranelagh, another woman, as her point of access to the family. Ormonde's letters also suggest that Ranelagh's favours extended beyond her sway over Broghill. Ormonde seems to have borrowed money from Ranelagh and several letters betray her eagerness to repay the debt.⁵⁹ Ranelagh also helped with the removal of goods, probably papers, from Ireland to England: in August 1656 Ormonde advised Burdon that Ranelagh, who was due to leave Ireland imminently, 'will Let your tronke goe bee Sent with hir owne Goods which ^and^ willbee the Securest way, for shee is to goe in a Shipe of warr'.⁶⁰ Ormonde was evidently indebted to Ranelagh for material and practical support that helped her survive her prolonged and expensive stay in England.

Ormonde made every effort to return the many favours she had received. In one letter to Burdon, she referred to Ranelagh as 'a Lady that you know has a great power with mee'.⁶¹ So, when Ranelagh recommended a kinsman as a tenant on Ormonde's estate, Ormonde was eager to oblige.⁶² As early as 1653 Samuel Hartlib noted that Ranelagh owned a 'watch-dial without a clock' that had been

⁵⁵ Edward Hyde to James Ormonde, 15/25 Oct. 1659 (Bodl., Clarendon MS 65, f. 238v).

⁵⁶ Thomas Page to James Ormonde, 13 Oct. 1659 (Bodl., Carte MS 213, f. 368).

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 29 June [1657?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 229, p. 177).

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 8 Aug. 1657 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1236, p. 385).

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 2 Dec. [1656] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1192, p. 103); Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 6 Jan. [1656/7] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 228, p. 169); Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 29 June [1657?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 229, p. 177).

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 2 Aug. [1656?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 215, p. 65).

⁶¹ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 13 Jan. [1656/7?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 221, p. 115).

⁶² Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 29 June [1657?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 229, p. 177).

a gift from Ormonde.⁶³ It is tempting to conclude that this gift was an acknowledgement of her friend's role in helping her obtain the award in February of that year but it might also have been presented in order to begin to cultivate a relationship with the well-connected Boyle woman in anticipation of a return to Ireland. Either way, the unusual present shows that Ormonde was familiar with Ranelagh's interests in science and reveals at least some understanding or engagement with it herself.⁶⁴

Gifts presented by Ormonde to other women at this critical time were more conventional but similarly designed to strengthen the bonds of friendship. Lady Ann Fanshawe wrote in her memoir that when Ormonde returned to London from Caen 'she presented me with a ruby ring set with two diamonds, which she prayed me to wear for her sake, and I have it to this day'.⁶⁵ Fanshawe remembered how, in presenting the gift, Ormonde 'told me she must love me for many reasons, and one was, that we were both born in one chamber': Fanshawe had been born in the house in St Olave's, London, that her father had rented from Ormonde's father, Lord Dingwall.⁶⁶ It is possible that the gift was an acknowledgement of more than their shared birthplace, however. Like 'JH', Fanshawe had also been in an ideal position to share intelligence with Ormonde during her time in Caen and it is possible that she was another of her intelligencers.⁶⁷

Ormonde's relationship with both Fanshawe and Ranelagh continued into the Restoration and beyond. In May 1660, Ormonde wrote of Ranelagh's 'kindnes to Mee' and asked the marquess to 'presarve a faire Corespondansie and show a respect' to Ranelagh for her sake.⁶⁸ When her husband was elevated to ducal status and appointed lord lieutenant of Ireland, Ormonde was able to provide further assistance to her friend. In a letter dated 2 March 1666, Ranelagh sought her friend's intervention in the acrimonious split from her husband.⁶⁹ Specifically, she asked Ormonde to use her influence with the duke to put pressure on Lord Ranelagh to agree fairer terms for the separation. Only two letters exist, but since Ranelagh admitted 'presumeing upon that Charetie and patienc that has al along prevayled with your Grace to endure Such adreeses from me and Improue them by your management to my advantage', it is clear that Ormonde had long been working on her friend's behalf.⁷⁰ Ranelagh hoped that a favourable outcome would 'put an end to those troubles your Grace has Suffered by the Continual delays

⁶³ Samuel Hartlib, *Ephemerides*, 1653 (Sheffield University Library, Hartlib papers, 28/2/72B), available at 'The Hartlib papers' (<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/>) (15 July 2019).

⁶⁴ On the role of gift-giving in the building of female alliances, see Herbert, *Female alliances*, pp 52–77. On Ranelagh's engagement with science, see Michelle DiMeo, 'Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh (1615–91): science and medicine in a seventeenth-century Englishwoman's Writing' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 2009), available at University of Warwick (<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3146/>) (8 Aug. 2019).

⁶⁵ *Memoirs of Lady Anne Fanshawe*, ed. Charles Robert Fanshawe (London, 1830), pp 81–2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ On Fanshawe's covert activities, see Geoffrey Smith, 'Surviving the Cavalier winter: the experience of Richard and Ann Fanshawe' in *Parergon*, xxxii, no. 3 (2015), pp 99–121.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Ormonde to [Anne] Hume, [May 1660] (Bodl., Carte MS 214, ff 221–2).

⁶⁹ Katherine Ranelagh to Elizabeth Ormonde, 2 Mar. [1666] (Bodl., Carte MS 217, ff 454–6). See also Ruth Connolly, 'The politics of honor in Lady Ranelagh's Ireland' in Eckerle & McAreavey (eds), *Women's life writing*, pp 137–58.

⁷⁰ Katherine Ranelagh to Elizabeth Ormonde, 2 Mar. [1666] (Bodl., Carte MS 217, ff 454–6). See also Ranelagh to Ormonde, undated [Apr. 1666?] (*ibid.*, ff 452–3).

therein. upon my Score', which indicated that she had borrowed money from Ormonde during this period of financial hardship.⁷¹ Ormonde and her husband's pre-eminent position in Restoration Ireland meant that she was in a unique position to help Ranelagh in her troubles, and it is noteworthy that her assistance took the same form as her friend's before her — namely, lending money and interceding with powerful male relations.

As well as being able to leverage the support of a parliamentarian sympathiser like Ranelagh in Ireland, Ormonde also activated an elite network of royalist women in Britain. In a short letter, dated 7 May 1660, Ormonde wrote to Stephen Smith, an agent of the family, with instructions for a 'Cousen', one 'Lady Turner'.⁷² In this letter, Ormonde wrote: 'It beinge liklie that you will See My Cousen the Lady Turner befor I shall I doe desier that when Shee Comes to Towne you willbee hir remembransier to visset thous persons of qualitee that was soe perticularlie kind and Frindlie to Mee.'⁷³ Ormonde then provided a list of those friends that her 'Cousen' should visit and they were all women. 'Lady Turner', however, was most likely a pseudonym for the marquess who was returning to London at this time.⁷⁴ It is not surprising that Ormonde adopted a female persona for her husband as she asked him to perform the somewhat feminine role of paying courtesy visits to other women.

Ormonde's letter to Smith is similar to one by Elizabeth Throckmorton, Lady Raleigh, where a list of women's names was added as an endorsement — something Karen Robertson describes as a 'tantalizing example of collective activity by women'.⁷⁵ In identifying the names, Robertson suggests that the 'list marks an informal alliance of women based in a kinship network'.⁷⁶ The women in Ormonde's list also represent a network, not of her kinswomen but of other elite women. As well as her old friend Ranelagh, Ormonde named the dowager countess of Devonshire, Christian (Christiana) Cavendish, née Bruce (1595–1675); the dowager countess of Derby, Charlotte Stanley, née de La Trémoille (1599–1664), and her two daughters, the countess of Strafford, Henrietta Maria Wentworth, née Stanley (1630–85), and the marchioness of Dorchester, Katherine Pierrepont, née Stanley (b. 1631); the dowager countess of Peterborough, Elizabeth Mordaunt, née Howard (1603–71); the elder Lady Anne Savile, née Coventry (d. 1662); and the countess of Dysart, Elizabeth Tollemache, née Murray (1626–98). All part of British high society, the women were mostly royalists, but with at least one parliamentarian sympathiser (Ranelagh) and others who had been close to Cromwell (Dysart). The nature of their friendship is, for all but Ranelagh, frustratingly unsubstantiated in this letter or elsewhere in Ormonde's correspondence, but the women were important figures during the civil war and Interregnum, either

⁷¹ Katherine Ranelagh to Elizabeth Ormonde, 2 Mar. [1666] (Bodl., Carte MS 217, ff 454–6).

⁷² Elizabeth Ormonde to Stephen Smith, 7 May 1660 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2324, no. 1334, p. 199).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The letter pre-dates the first 'avowed address' she sent to her husband without using a code name by four days: see Elizabeth Ormonde to the marquis of Ormonde, 11 May 1660 (Bodl., Carte MS 30, f. 645).

⁷⁵ Karen Robertson, 'Tracing women's connections from a letter by Elizabeth Raleigh' in Frye & Robertson (eds), *Maids and mistresses*, p. 149.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

through their familial associations or in their own right, so they were well placed to offer political support during Ormonde's time of need. Ranelagh seems to be the only one of the women with any interest or influence in Ireland, and this perhaps explains why she is the one whose support is most fully documented. The women were simply listed in the letter without any additional context, which implies that the marquess understood why he was being asked to visit them, but also that he may not have done it without his wife's instruction. In other words, these women were important to her, but not necessarily to him: they were part of her social and political network.

Among the women named by Ormonde are royalist conspirators, intelligencers, and spies. In Nadine's Akkerman's fascinating study of women's engagement in intelligence and espionage practice, Devonshire is described as 'that master contriver', although she is given no detailed attention in the study.⁷⁷ We know that Devonshire's house in Roehampton, Surrey was a centre of royalist intrigue; that she actively supported the court in exile, sending funds abroad, supporting its members and plotting for the return of Charles II; and that she maintained a secret and ciphered communication with General George Monck as he began to arrange the restoration of the king.⁷⁸ Like Devonshire, Dysart was also 'enmeshed in the thick of espionage', as Akkerman's research confirms.⁷⁹ It has long been accepted that Dysart was a leading member of the Sealed Knot, a secret royalist organisation, but Akkerman's research points to her involvement in a later secret organisation, the Great Trust, which was established after Cromwell's death.⁸⁰ Dysart had been close to Cromwell, and Akkerman shows how their relationship had aroused the suspicion of leading royalists including Nicholas and Hyde (with whom Ormonde corresponded) who doubted whether she was using her influence with Cromwell to assist royalists or whether she was acting as a double agent.⁸¹ Yet, royalist friendships with Cromwell were not unusual, as Akkerman points out, citing the example of Devonshire who attended the wedding of Cromwell's daughter in 1657.⁸² Ormonde's relationship with Cromwell might not have been as warm as that enjoyed by her friends, but she shared with them the ability to reconcile her royalism with the need to maintain Cromwell's favour; she may even have depended on them in building a relationship with Cromwell in the first place.

Most of the woman named by Ormonde were politically active during the civil wars, and some even engaged in military activity in the king's name. Derby (whose surrender of Castle Rushen in the Isle of Man was reported to Ormonde by the anonymous 'JH' in November 1651) is particularly renowned for her defence of Lathom House in Lancashire, with one chronicler praising her 'more than

⁷⁷ Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, p. 146.

⁷⁸ Victor Stater, 'Cavendish, Christian, countess of Devonshire (1595–1675)' in *O.D.N.B.* See also Daniel Ellis's entry in Carole Levin, Anna Riehl Bertolet and Jo Eldridge Carney (eds), *A biographical encyclopedia of early modern English women: exemplary lives and memorable acts, 1500–1650* (Oxford, 2017), pp 229–31. For a contemporary biography, see Thomas Pomfret, *The life of the Right Honourable and Religious Lady Christian, late countess dowager of Devonshire* (London, 1685).

⁷⁹ Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, p. 156.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 118–57. See also Rosalind K. Marshall, 'Murray, Elizabeth, duchess of Lauderdale and suo jure countess of Dysart (*bap.* 1626, *d.* 1698)' in *O.D.N.B.*

⁸¹ Akkerman, *Invisible agents*, pp 125–7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Feminine Magnanimity'.⁸³ Her two daughters, later Strafford and Dorchester, had been present with their mother during the siege of Lathom House, and in May 1650 they had been imprisoned by the parliamentarians because of their association with their father, the seventh earl, a leading royalist who was executed for high treason in October 1651.⁸⁴ Like Derby, Savile also lost her husband to the royalist cause and she too became celebrated as a heroine of the civil war when she was besieged by parliamentarians in Sheffield Castle: she was subsequently described as a 'gallant Lady, famous even for her warlike Actions beyond her Sex'.⁸⁵ Ormonde did not enjoy the same heroic reputation as her friends, but she did engage in the war effort in Ireland. She housed, fed and clothed Protestant refugees in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary, and Dublin.⁸⁶ She also helped to fortify Dublin against the parliamentarian army when, according to her husband's biographer, 'the idle were put to shame by Lady Ormonde, who, at the head of a band of noble ladies, herself carried baskets of earth to rebuild the fortifications'.⁸⁷ Like her friends, Ormonde was thrust into the political and military sphere by her association with her royalist husband, and like them proved herself highly capable.

The women listed in the letter to Smith together represent an incredible network of women spanning the three kingdoms. The majority of the women listed here are not named elsewhere in Ormonde's correspondence, and the letter represents the sole evidence that she had a relationship with them. Apart from Ranelagh, friendships with only two of the other women are known to have been maintained after the Restoration. The closest of these seems to have been with Devonshire, whom she regularly visited.⁸⁸ Ormonde's second daughter, Mary, married Devonshire's grandson in 1662 in a ceremony that took place in her own house at Dunmore (the house that had provided refuge to her and her daughters in the Interregnum). She also entertained Strafford and her husband in Ireland.⁸⁹ Her granddaughter Elizabeth, the daughter of her eldest son, would marry Strafford's nephew, William Stanley, ninth earl of Derby. Records do not appear to have survived to substantiate Ormonde's continued relationships with the other women. In naming Derby, Devonshire, Dorchester, Dysart, Savile, Strafford and Peterborough as valued friends during the Interregnum, therefore, Ormonde's letter to Smith provides a unique and important snapshot of her social and political network at a critical time in her life.

'Lady Turner', who delivered the letter, might have been the marquess of Ormonde in disguise, but a short time later Ormonde did employ a female agent in the restored court: this was the last of the significant female friends and allies

⁸³ See John Callow, 'Stanley, Charlotte, countess of Derby (1599–1664)' in *O.D.N.B.*, and Richardine Woodall in Levin *et al.* (eds), *A biographical encyclopedia*, pp 224–5. See also Colin Pilkington, *To play the man: the story of Lady Derby and the siege of Lanthom House, 1643–1645* (Lancaster, 1991).

⁸⁴ Cited in Antonia Fraser, *The weaker vessel: woman's lot in seventeenth-century England* (London, 1984), p. 202.

⁸⁵ See Peter Barwick, *The life of the Reverend Dr. John Barwick, D.D. sometime fellow of St. John's College in Cambridge* (London, 1724).

⁸⁶ See H.M.C., *Ormonde MSS*, n.s., ii, 368–72.

⁸⁷ Burghclere, *Life*, i, 315.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Ormonde to George Mathew, 6 June 1671 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 67).

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Ormonde to Thomas Ossory, 29 Sept. 1677 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2368, no. 3993, p. 49.).

she used during the Interregnum. Among a flurry of letters of recommendation sent to the marquess in May 1660 is a list of ‘remembrances’ intended to be delivered in person to her husband by a messenger. Fourteen separate instructions represent an eclectic assortment of nine broadly ‘public’ and five ‘private’ concerns. The ‘private’ concerns range from the negotiations for the marriage of her eldest daughter, to reminding her husband to write to his mother; from finding a home for her eldest son and his new wife, to securing a domestic cook. The ‘public’ concerns focus overwhelmingly on the distribution of patronage.

The person tasked with delivering the sensitive content of the memorandum to the marquess was evidently a trusted friend of his wife. In an edition of the letter published in *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, it is noted that the intermediary ‘is unknown but was probably Lord Ranelagh’: however, the manuscript is clearly endorsed as ‘My Ladys remembrance to Mistress Hume’.⁹⁰ So, who was this woman who has even been written out of Irish women’s history? It seems she was Anne Hume, née French (d. 1701), a close friend of Ormonde, and perhaps also her former ward.⁹¹ Described as a ‘great heiress’, Anne French had married Thomas Hume, a favourite of Ormonde’s father, who had himself been a courtier of James VI and I.⁹² In an early but undated letter, Ormonde wrote to an agent, Edward Comerford, ‘Consarninge a wardshipe, which I undurstoud by you, dous of Right belonge unto the kinge’, and she shared her hopes that Sir Philip Perceval, Master of the Irish Court of Wards, ‘^might^ doe mee a Curtisie ~~in it~~, by preferinge my Sarvant humes to it’.⁹³ The ward to whom she referred must be Anne French, and, if so, the letter shows that Ormonde had a hand in the promotion of her father’s Scottish friend through marriage to the heiress. The two women became close after the younger woman’s marriage. Hume is identified as Ormonde’s gentlewoman companion in 1644. In a postscript to a letter to Burdon, Ormonde’s agent Walter Plunkett wrote: ‘I pray present my most humble service to my noble Lady to My Lady Elizabeth, and Mrs Hume.’⁹⁴ Hume was evidently an important member of Ormonde’s household at this time, coming second only to Ormonde’s daughter Elizabeth. There is evidence that Thomas Hume served Ormonde in the Interregnum but no record of his wife again until May 1660.⁹⁵

The choice of Hume as messenger to the marquess in the early weeks of the Restoration reinforces the importance of women in Ormonde’s political activities at this critical period. Only one of the instructions concerned Hume directly, when Ormonde told her: ‘If you Cannot be Sudanlie at London I pray send a

⁹⁰ Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Mairín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O’Dowd and Clair Wills (eds), *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, iv–v: *Irish women’s writings and traditions* (Cork, 2003), v, 32.

⁹¹ An undated letter from an Anne French to the earl of Ormond can be found in N.L.I., Ormond papers 2486, no. 249. John Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the commoners of Great Britain and Ireland* (4 vols, London, 1836), iii, 389, identifies her as ‘her grace’s ward’.

⁹² Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, iii, 389.

⁹³ Elizabeth Ormonde to Edward Comerford, n.d. (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2485, no. 284, p. 47).

⁹⁴ Walter Plunkett to John Burdon, [c.1644] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2485, no. 219).

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Ormonde to John Burdon, 6 Apr. 1657 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2322, no. 1222, p. 295); same to same, 13 July [1657] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 230, p. 189); same to same, [1658?] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 234, p. 217).

way My leter unto My Lady of Ranalagh by the Post.⁹⁶ Here we see a female friend and agent used to maintain the relationship with another valued female ally. The memorandum also indicates that a personal visit by an intermediary was preferred above the delivery, by post, of a handwritten letter, although this preference was balanced by the need to pay her respects quickly. In the longer term, Ormonde requested that her husband ‘show a respect unto My Lady of R[anelagh] upon the accompt of hir kindnes to Mee’.⁹⁷

A letter was not considered an option for conveying the politically-sensitive content of the memorandum, though, which Hume was tasked to deliver in person to the marquess. The first instruction directed the marquess ‘to bee as sparinge as possible hee Cane in grantinge of Suites offises or employments to anye perticuler Persons at the first, untell hee bee fullie and Rightlie possesed how farr they have Sarvede, or is Capabell to Sarve the Intrest now Established’.⁹⁸ Ormonde later made it clear that she was the person to supply such information to the marquess, advising him that by her means he would ‘reseve an impartiall accompt of Evrye ons Carrage and Intrest wherby the kinge and himselfe may the beter know how to Plase favours and rewards where they are most ^desarvedlie^ dew which I shall make it my bussenes to procure; by the healpe of some Frin whous that knows beter then I doe, and by my owne perticuler observation’.⁹⁹ There was no question that she was ‘best equipped to identify those Irish men who should be rewarded for loyal service’, given her residence in Ireland during her husband’s prolonged exile.¹⁰⁰ In the memorandum she commended Colonel William Flower and Major Thomas Harmon to her husband’s service; she recommended Sir Paul Davies, Sir James Barry, Colonel Arthur Hill and Sir John Clotworthy for public offices; and she warned the marquess against the encroachments of one ‘ME’ (possibly Sir Maurice Eustace) whom she suggested ‘willbee very Cravinge’: her relationships with all of these men should be further explored.¹⁰¹ Ormonde even directed her husband how to handle the patronage requests that he received, suggesting that, without committing himself, ‘hee shouldbee generalie plausibell ^to all^ and admitt of the applicati[ons] of such as ^has^ relatione unto this Contry’.¹⁰² She planned to follow this advice in her own role as intermediary to her husband, first apologising for the number of recommendations she had sent to him, then warning him that ‘such as recommendations as comes from mee, in the behalfe of Persons done rathar out of Complianse then respect, shallbee subscribed with the the Leavinge out of the ^Leter^ E, at the Ende of the word ormonde’.¹⁰³ Ormonde obviously recognised the continued utility of cipher, as well as the critical role of trusted female agents in making her activities possible.

Ormonde’s friend Hume enjoyed social advancement during the Restoration, perhaps thanks to her mistress: in 1665 Thomas Hume acquired large tracts of lands in County Tipperary and was knighted by the duke of Ormonde.¹⁰⁴ After

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Ormonde to [Anne] Hume, [May 1660] (Bodl., Carte MS 214, ff 221–2).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ McAreevey, ‘The place of Ireland’ in Eckerle & McAreevey (eds), *Women’s life writing*, p. 176.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Ormonde to [Anne] Hume, [May 1660] (Bodl., Carte MS 214, ff 221–2).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, iii, 389.

he died in 1668 his widow married Captain George Mathew, Ormonde's half-brother-in-law, estate manager and regular correspondent. Hume later claimed that she had brought to her second marriage an estate worth nearly £10,000, which her husband Mathew 'oft promised should be secured for her, but it was not'.¹⁰⁵ This proved disastrous for her in the wake of the Williamite-Jacobite wars. In a petition presented to the House of Commons on 6 December 1690 — and discussed by Frances Nolan in her important work on Jacobite women and the Williamite confiscations — Hume claims that upon the outbreak of the wars 'she was forced to repair out of *Ireland* into this Kingdom, for the Safety of her Life, from the Designs of her late Husband Captain *George Mathews*' Relations, who were Papists, and averse to the present Government there'.¹⁰⁶ She had returned to Ireland following the Williamite victory at the Boyne to claim her widow's thirds 'but was disappointed by her husband's daughter-in-law, who hath gotten and converted the same for her own use'.¹⁰⁷ Hume sought 'such Saving in the Bill of Attainder, as shall be thought fit' and was evidently successful.¹⁰⁸ When she died more than a decade later, Hume's estate was bequeathed to Sir Henry Wemys, Ormonde's kinsman through her father, and Thomas Hume, a nephew of Hume's first husband, who also served as her executors.¹⁰⁹ Clodagh Tait has recently made the case for wills as 'charts of meaningful relationships ... highlighting testators' particularly close relationships among wider groups of relatives and friends'.¹¹⁰ Applied to Hume's will, Tait's argument suggests that Hume remembered her friendship with Ormonde through her continued relationship with Ormonde's paternal kinsmen and friends, who were cast in opposition to the surviving Butler/Mathew network.

Hume and Mathew's interests were more closely aligned when Ormonde was alive. Hume is mentioned frequently in Ormonde's letters to Mathew in the late 1660s and early 1670s.¹¹¹ When her friend returned to Ireland, presumably to marry Mathew, Ormonde informed her brother-in-law that she had 'intreated My Lady Humes if Shee Finds it for hir Conv[eniense] to Stay at My House at kilkenye [Dunmore] as Longe as shee pleases and to Make uss of what Ever provistione is

¹⁰⁵ *Commons' jn*, x, 500–01. For a subsequent petition to the House of Lords dated 30 Dec. 1690, see H.M.C., *House of Lords MSS, 1690–1* (London, 1892), p. 242. Hume took legal action against Sir James Butler in 1698, the details of which can be found in T.N.A., C 10/515/44. Thanks to Frances Nolan for all her help with Hume.

¹⁰⁶ *Commons' jn*, x, 500; Frances Nolan, "'Jacobite' women and the Williamite confiscation: the role of women and female minors in reclaiming compromised or forfeited property in Ireland, 1690–1703" (Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2015), pp 32–3.

¹⁰⁷ *Commons' jn*, x, 500.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, iii, 389.

¹¹⁰ Clodagh Tait, 'Writing the social and cultural history of Ireland, 1550–1660: wills as example and inspiration' in Sarah Covington, Vincent P. Carey and Valerie McGowan-Doyle (eds), *Early modern Ireland: new sources, methods, and perspectives* (New York, 2019), p. 39.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Elizabeth Ormonde to George Mathew, 19 Sept. 1668 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 2); same to same, [Nov./Dec. 1668] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 130); same to same, 5 Dec. 1668 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 11); same to same, 10 Jan. 1668/9 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 30); same to same, 6 Feb. 1670/1 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 60); same to same, 2 Apr. 1671 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 63 [incorrectly numbered 62]); same to same, 6 June 1671 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 67).

Ther'.¹¹² After her marriage, Hume was named in letters to Mathew as simply 'your wife' or 'my sister', but evidence indicates that the two women remained close. On 30 July 1670 Ormonde wrote to Mathew: 'I am come Just now from Seeinge My Sister Cloncarthy [Clancarty] whoe tells mee that your wife was dayngeroslie Sicke Latlie [/] I pray Let mee know by the Next what it was that ayllid hir; and how Shee dous Now, for I shall remayne in great unease untell I heare of hir Recovrye.'¹¹³ This example once again demonstrates the centrality of female relationships, in this case a kinship relationship, in sharing news and bolstering family connections. Hume continued to act on Ormonde's behalf after her second marriage. As part of her attempts to manage the crisis of the duke's removal from the lord lieutenancy in February 1669, Ormonde engaged her friend in diplomatic efforts with the new vicereine. On 9 March 1669 she wrote to Mathew: 'I pray tell my sister Mathews that my Lady Roberts [Robartes] did inquier for hir with great kindnes and promises [*sic*] hir selfe much Content in haveinge hir Companye and Esteime for shee knows Non ther but hir Selfe and My Lady of Desmond [She is a very] vertious and a worthye Person and goes preparede to bee verye oblidginge to all our relations and soe I doe hope thay will all bee to hir.'¹¹⁴ Ormonde once again utilised her female networks and feminised practices of courtesy and hospitality for the protection and advancement of Ormonde Butler interests, just as she did in 1660.

IV

Ormonde's letters provide some evidence of the female relationships she maintained during the Interregnum and for the rest of her life. Her letters indicate that women were critically important to her public and private activities by providing direct material and emotional support, and acting as agents, intermediaries and spies. Relationships were maintained with women to whom she had long-standing connections through the Butler and Preston families, and with women to whom she became acquainted through the unique circumstances of the civil war and Interregnum periods, and reciprocated through gifts, courtesy, intercessions and favours. Although they have not been examined here, there is also evidence of her enduring relationships with her Catholic kinswomen, including her mother-in-law, Elizabeth, Lady Thurles; Lady Frances Butler, the wife of Richard Butler of Kilcash, the marquess's youngest brother; and Margaret, Lady Mountgarret, the widow of the marquess's great-uncle, all of whom had their estates confiscated and were transplanted to Connacht. Letters show that, after her own successful petitionary process, Ormonde assisted her Butler kinswomen by interceding with the Cromwellian government on their behalf (Mountgarret) or providing a place to live (Butler).¹¹⁵ In other words, Ormonde provided support to women in need just as she had received it from others.

¹¹² Elizabeth Ormonde to George Mathew, 5 Dec. 1668 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 11).

¹¹³ Elizabeth Ormonde to George Mathew, 30 July 1670 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 48).

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Ormonde to George Mathew, 9 Mar. 1668/9 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2503, no. 15). For more on Ormonde's role in managing the crisis of the duke's removal from the lord lieutenancy, see Naomi McAreevey, "'The government of the familie": the first duchess of Ormonde's understanding of the role of vicereine' in Myles Campbell (ed.), *Vicereines of Ireland: portraits of forgotten women* (Dublin, 2021), pp 18–39.

¹¹⁵ For a detailed account of Lady Frances Butler's experiences, see Cunningham, *Conquest and land in Ireland*, pp 105–06; John Flood and Phil Flood, *Kilcash, 1190–*

There is little detailed evidence about Ormonde's relationships with these women, however. On some occasions we have little more than the woman's name and for the anonymous 'JH' we do not even have that. For almost all the women listed in the letter to Smith, there is little or no corroborating evidence of a relationship. The gap in the historical record may indicate that the evidence was not preserved; that it was actively destroyed; or that it yet remains to be uncovered, perhaps in the archives of the many families to whom Ormonde was connected. Still, letters uncovered already identify important and hitherto unknown connections, as well as flag areas for further research. It is clear that historians of women in early modern Ireland need to explore a wider range of resources to be able to piece together the lives of women, even one as widely recognised as Ormonde. Examining the fleeting references to women in Ormonde's letters has shown her connections with prominent English and Scottish royalists, with New English Protestant women, with her Catholic kinswoman, and with the Scottish clients of her father, and that this female network was key to her ability to maintain the estates and political interests of the Ormonde Butler family. Overall, attending to Ormonde's female network shines a light on the centrality and effectiveness of women's social and political alliances in seventeenth-century Ireland.

1801 (Dublin, 1999), pp 42–7. For evidence of Ormonde's interventions on Butler's behalf, see Frances Butler to Elizabeth Ormonde, 31 Jan. [1655] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2481, no. 283); Frances Butler to John Burdon, 31 Jan. 1655 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2481, no. 289); Elizabeth Ormonde to [John Burdon], 10 Feb. [1657] (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2484, no. 231, p. 193). On Lady Thurles' experiences, see O'Dowd, 'Women and war', p. 105. See also Elizabeth Ormonde, certificate on behalf of Margaret Butler, Viscountess Mountgarret, 2 Jan. 1654/5 (N.L.I., Ormond papers 2500, no. 68, p. 129). I would like to thank Ann-Maria Walsh for her insightful feedback on an early draft of this article and the anonymous readers whose astute suggestions were invaluable.