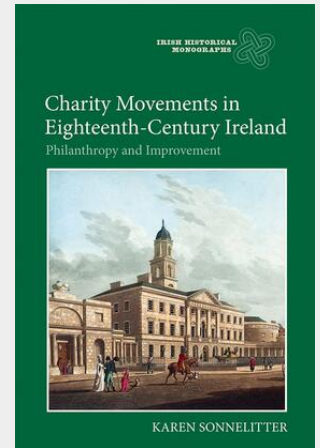


Sonnellitter

Charity Movements in Eighteenth-Century Ireland

Philanthropy and Improvement

Relates charity movements to religious impulse, Enlightenment 'improvement' and the fears of the Protestant ruling elite that growing social problems, unless addressed, would weaken their rule. The philanthropic impulse to engage in charitable work and to encourage economic "improvement" was sharpened in eighteenth-century Ireland as Irish Protestants became increasingly aware of the threat that social problems, such as poverty, disease and criminality, posed to their rule. One response to this threat was the establishment of a number of voluntary societies which sought to address the different problems plaguing Ireland. This book examines a number of these voluntary societies, including those concerned with promoting education, supporting hospitals, and improving agriculture and manufacturing. It shows how these movements differed from earlier efforts in organisation, method and aims and demonstrates the connection between religiously motivated charities, Enlightenment-inspired scientific societies and the Irish government. It pays particular attention to the role of women, both as supporters of, and objects of, charity. It argues that, together, these movements aspired to purge Ireland of what they saw as destabilising factors that weakened the Anglo-Irish state. Improvers reflected Enlightenment-era optimism about the perfectibility of society and saw themselves as serving the interests and aspirations of the nation. Karen Sonnellitter is Assistant Professor of History at Siena College, Loudonville, New York. She completed her doctorate at Purdue University.



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