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Food and Power in Sixteenth-Century Ireland: Studying Household Accounts from Dublin Castle

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Abstract

Studying the food practices of one vast and prominent Irish household reveals a complex history of consumption, status, and power in sixteenth-century Europe. This article is a close analysis of the little studied but unusually detailed household accounts of William Fitzwilliam, lord deputy of Ireland during 1572–5 and 1588–94. It first discusses how early modern historians have probed similar records and how these examples can be interpreted. The following sections examine the specific foods consumed at Dublin Castle and the high cost, distinctive rhythms, and deep symbolism of grand-scale dining at the viceroy's primary residence. This study of the everyday life of one of the most powerful officeholders in England and Ireland offers fresh perspectives on the region's political history. It also adds to the burgeoning study of Irish consumption, showing that the country was connected to continental developments. More than an Irish story, this article offers evidence of Europe-wide changes, like the elaboration of courtly cuisine and the shifting associations of foodstuffs, and how these changes were filtered through local circumstances. It suggests too how historians can make productive use of household accounts, sources well suited to comparison and combination with other disciplinary approaches.

It was a typical Tuesday in 1574 at Dublin Castle, the grey-stoned medieval fortress to the south of Ireland's capital. From the kitchens halfway up one of the castle's towers, staff ferried food the short distance to the dining chamber in the recently refurbished lodgings of the lord deputy, the head of the country's English government. The incumbent, Sir William Fitzwilliam, took dinner and supper at a longboard supported by trestles, beside his family and guests. Meanwhile, the household's chief officers dined at tables of their own and lesser employees sat or stood elsewhere. The more than fifty people fed twice that day consumed a prodigious amount: a whole carcass of salted beef and a fifth of one bought fresh, seven and a quarter sheep, ninety-three

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rolls of white bread, the same number of large, coarser loaves, and 540 pints of beer. There were finer foods probably destined for the lord and his officers: four and half lambs, a calf, fifteen young rabbits, twelve hens, several dozen 'small birds' and 'stints' – a delicate, little wader.¹ In the days before, they had relished other waterfowl like curlews, godwits, and gulls, along with expensive fresh fish and seafood, like salmon, mullet, bass, razor clams, and cockles.² This diversity and volume reflected the lord's high status as well as English might: the queen's representative in Ireland was expected to maintain a grand residence at a certain scale and degree of magnificence, whatever the financial burden. On exactly this April day, Fitzwilliam wrote to the English privy council, begging for extra funds. 'Otherwise I knowe not howe to feed my self or my people', the viceroy wrote.³

This article is a close study of the food consumption of one vast and prominent sixteenth-century household. It uses the detailed household accounts of one Irish lord deputy to consider the significance of what and how he and his retinue ate. These records have been largely overlooked by historians of early modern Ireland but, as Ciaran Brady has pointed out, the neglected evidence of how English governors managed their households 'may yield very important insights into the viceroy's role'.⁴ Studying food practices can be especially productive. It deepens our knowledge of the material foundations of English rule in Ireland, particularly because of the cost of hospitality for a cash-strapped colonial government. It also shines light on the cultural significance of grand-scale dining and the consumption of specific foods. Until recently, the history of consumption in Ireland was underdeveloped, based on the perception that this was an isolated country disengaged from European culture.⁵ Concurrently, most historical and archaeological research into early modern Irish food has relied on the highly stereotypical accounts of foreign visitors and commentators.⁶ The financial records of households and institutions offer evidence of actual consumption, despite surviving patchily in Ireland as in much of Europe.⁷ Of the few Irish examples that endure, the Fitzwilliam records are by far the most extensive. Their analysis adds to the growing body of scholarship showing that, in reality, Ireland in this period contained complex cultures

¹ Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO), Fitzwilliam MS 51, entries from 27 Apr. 1574.

² NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51, entries from 21 to 26 Apr. 1574.

³ The National Archives (TNA), SP 63/45, fo. 23r.

⁴ Ciaran Brady, 'Viceroys? The Irish chief governors, 1541–1641', in Peter Gray and Olwen Purdue, eds., *The Irish lord lieutenancy, c. 1541–1922* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 15–42, at p. 19 n. 15. For an earlier summary, see Irish Manuscripts Commission, 'Fitzwilliam manuscripts at Milton, England', *Analecta Hibernica*, 4 (1932), pp. 287–326.

⁵ Susan Flavin, *Consumption and culture in sixteenth-century Ireland: saffron, stockings and silk* (Woodbridge, 2014), p. 6.

⁶ For historical studies, A. T. Lucas, 'Irish food before the potato', *Gwerin*, 3 (1960), pp. 8–43; L. A. Clarkson and E. M. Crawford, *Feast and famine: a history of food and nutrition in Ireland, 1500–1920* (Oxford, 2001), ch. 2; L. M. Cullen, *The emergence of modern Ireland, 1600–1900* (London, 1981), ch. 7. In archaeology, see Liam Downey and Ingelise Stuijts, 'Overview of historical Irish food products – A.T. Lucas (1960–2) revisited', *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 22 (2013), pp. 111–26.

⁷ Some of these have been edited and published, such as Raymond Gillespie, ed., *The proctor's accounts of Peter Lewis, 1564–1565* (Dublin, 1996).

of consumption and food. In turn, a deeper appreciation of how people consumed offers new perspectives on the country's political history. The Fitzwilliam manuscripts are a rare and rich source for examining the everyday life of the most powerful officeholder in early modern Ireland and the networks in which he was entangled.

The manuscripts tell more than an Irish story. They provide evidence of developments in food taking place across Europe, such as the transformation of courtly cuisine, the introduction of exotics from the New World, and the shifting associations of foodstuffs. They allow us to see how these broader changes gained significance in a specific context, how wider trends were filtered through a community's social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances. Additionally, the article suggests how historians can make more productive use of household accounts. Such documents are established features of scholarship, but their systematic study has been limited and they have terrific potential for original insights beyond the topic of food. As part of the present article, a modernized transcription of the Fitzwilliam daily accounts from 1574 – one of the documents central to the analysis – is being made publicly available, so it can be explored by academics and their students in the future.⁸ In this spirit, before discussing consumption at Dublin Castle, this article considers the account books themselves, how they fit into the conventions of such documents, and the layers of meaning they contain. The second and third sections discuss the range and significance of the foods served to Fitzwilliam and his entourage, and the expense, rhythms, and symbolism of dining at the lord deputy's residence. Scratching the surface of these accounts reveals a nuanced and meaningful story about food, social status, and power in early modern Europe.

I

Household accounts have been used by historians in diverse ways. Scholars have either looked at several sets of accounts, dipping into them as qualitative or anecdotal evidence to illuminate the nutritional content of diets, food's connection to class, the aristocratic milieu, and the culture of hospitality.⁹ Or they have used the records as the basis of micro-histories. At their simplest, these micro-histories are focused studies of individual families, taking the form of transcriptions preceded by a lengthy introduction.¹⁰ At their most sophisticated, they reconstruct a household's consumption practices and how they constructed identities and meanings. Such works include Jane Whittle and

⁸ The transcribed accounts will be available via www.foodcult.eu.

⁹ Craig Muldrew, *Food, energy and the creation of industriousness: work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011); Paul Lloyd, *Food and identity in England, 1540-1640: eating to impress* (London, 2015); Lawrence Stone, *The crisis of the aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965); Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁰ For example, see Lloyd Bowen, ed., *Family and society in early Stuart Glamorgan: the household accounts of Sir Thomas Aubrey of Llantrithyd, c. 1565-1641* (Cardiff, 2006); Judith M. Spicksley, ed., *The business and household accounts of Joyce Jeffreys, spinster of Hereford, 1638-1648*, *Records of Social and Economic History*, New Series, 41 (Oxford, 2012).

Elizabeth Griffiths's exploration of gender through the seventeenth-century account books of Alice Le Strange of Hunstanton, Norfolk, and Melissa Calaresu's research into Welsh artist Thomas Jones, whose memoirs and financial records during his stay in Bourbon-era Naples open a window on the material culture of urban kitchens and their links to the wider city.¹¹ Notably, these latter studies emphasize the sources themselves, ruminating on who was keeping the accounts, how they were organized, and what this might mean.

Though they are sensibly grouped as a documentary category, household accounts took multiple forms. In the twelfth century, elite households began to keep written records, which became more elaborate over time.¹² Accounts were as basic as an oral statement reported to a superior; in more complicated systems, clerks recorded departmental activities on a weekly or daily basis, with these accounts then summarized. From the late fourteenth century, as aristocratic households became more settled and their structures more regular, the paper trail was massive, especially for great magnates.¹³ Whatever system was in place, the accounts were generally audited by a clerk, the steward, or the lord himself. This was a key step because these books were the 'evidence, data, fodder' for the summary record compiled for the year, typically by the household's accountant or comptroller.¹⁴ Receipts and expenses passed through a process of refinement, beginning with specific items in day books, and moving upwards towards overarching ledgers that informed strategic decisions about management.¹⁵

Fitzwilliam's Irish accounts match these late medieval models. By the sixteenth century, as elite households shrunk and embraced simpler forms of cash accounting, the multi-tiered system of recording became less common.¹⁶ The lord deputy's records could therefore be seen as a throwback or proof that complex structures retained utility for larger institutions. The most detailed accounts cover Fitzwilliam's first term in office (1572–5), and, of these, the most granular are two daily books from 1574 and 1575 (the latter runs until Fitzwilliam's deputyship ended in early autumn).¹⁷ Within these, a page is

¹¹ Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and gender in the early seventeenth-century household: the world of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford, 2012); Melissa Calaresu, 'Thomas Jones' Neapolitan kitchen: the material cultures of food on the Grand Tour', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 24 (2020), pp. 84–102. See also Mark Dawson, *Plenti and grase: food and drink in a sixteenth-century household* (Totnes, 2009). Such works build on rich studies of the medieval period including Chris Woolgar, *The great household in late medieval England* (New Haven, CT, 1999); Barbara F. Harvey, *Living and dying in England, 1100–1540: the monastic experience* (Oxford, 1995).

¹² C. M. Woolgar, ed., *Household accounts from medieval England. Part I, Records of Social and Economic History*, 17 (Oxford, 1992), p. 10; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of living in the later middle ages: social change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 49.

¹³ Kate Mertes, *The English noble household, 1250–1600: good governance and politic rule* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 7, 80, 83–4; Woolgar, ed., *Household accounts*, pp. 7, 55–6.

¹⁴ Mertes, *English noble household*, pp. 85–6; Woolgar, ed., *Household accounts*, p. 33.

¹⁵ On the multiple texts typical of early modern accounting forms, see Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 65.

¹⁶ Woolgar, ed., *Household accounts*, pp. 64–5.

¹⁷ NRO, Fitzwilliam MSS 51, 52.

dedicated to each day (for example, see [Figure 1](#)). The major foodstuffs and drinks are listed down the left-hand side, split into those deriving from the household's stores, those purchased, and those received as gifts. There are three columns for each entry, recording the quantity received, consumed, and remaining. For items purchased, the cost in pounds, shillings, and pence is noted. Marginalia record food sent elsewhere and the names of those who sent presents. At the bottom of the page are the arrangement of boards at dinner and supper, the names of guests, and the number of messes served at both meals. At the end of each week, expenditure is totalled on a summary page. Every four weeks, these are followed by monthly totals from the spicery, saucery (for salt, vinegar, and oil), and cellar (wines). For 1574, we also possess a book itemizing regular payments such as wages, occasional payments for labourers, staff expenses, and objects, and bulk purchases of provisions.¹⁸ These accounts, along with those for other departments that have not survived, fed into a roll for the calendar year.¹⁹ These fine-grained documents are the focus of this article's analysis. For 1574, the daily and monthly entries have been transcribed, modernized, and entered into a single spreadsheet. Each spreadsheet row records an item of food either received from the household's stores or from a guest, purchased fresh, consumed within the household, or sent elsewhere. Columns were added to divide the foodstuffs into categories useful for analysis or to carry out calculations to express, for example, the estimated weight of the food and any financial outlay in pence. For just a single year, the table contains more than 12,000 entries.

To place these records in context, there are differently organized daily and weekly accounts from 1571–2, which include a period before Fitzwilliam was first appointed as lord deputy, and some monthly and annual records from 1590 to 1593, during his second stint in the role.²⁰ Other sixteenth-century lords deputy kept similar records. The accounts of Henry Sidney, who served before and after Fitzwilliam, are calendared but access to the original documents for quantitative research is difficult.²¹ A few other fragments remain in the State Papers.²² This means the Fitzwilliam accounts offer by far the most accessible and extensive body of material for analysing food consumption in early modern Ireland. In their day-to-day nature and precision – down to quantities of flour used in bread, and malt and hops used in beer – they are among the most detailed evidence of their kind in Europe for this period.

There are many reasons why a household like Fitzwilliam's kept such voluminous records. Running a substantial domestic operation, involving tens or hundreds of staff across multiple departments, required organization and planning, which would have been supported by orderly note-taking and accounting. Such priorities were heightened at certain moments. In the medieval

¹⁸ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 55.

¹⁹ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 56.

²⁰ NRO, Fitzwilliam MSS 30–7, 50.

²¹ For the calendared documents, see Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle & Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place. Volume one* (London, 1925).

²² TNA, SP 63/7, fos. 76r–79r; SP 63/125, fo. 73.

Monteux den 5th Februaire

	Fer.	Exp.	Fem.
Manuscates	100	100	100
Recomyter	tu	tu	tu
Scyre	tu	tu	tu
Beaxos	tu	tu	tu
Munkon	tu	tu	tu
Hoskes	tu	tu	tu
Haron	tu	tu	tu
Builes	tu	tu	tu
Luffes	tu	tu	tu
Neales Bon	tu	tu	tu
James Bon	tu	tu	tu
Jacob Bon	tu	tu	tu
Edwards Bon	tu	tu	tu
Thomas Bon	tu	tu	tu
William Bon	tu	tu	tu
Malard Bon	tu	tu	tu
Small Bird	tu	tu	tu
Mcroes Bon	tu	tu	tu
Levies Bon	tu	tu	tu
Egges Bon	tu	tu	tu
Wheat	tu	tu	tu
Grass	tu	tu	tu
Milk	tu	tu	tu
Wast	tu	tu	tu
Charles Bon	tu	tu	tu
Neales ex dono	tu	tu	tu
James ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Jacob ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Edwards ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Thomas ex dono	tu	tu	tu
William ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Malard ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Levies ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Wheat ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Grass ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Milk ex dono	tu	tu	tu
Wast ex dono	tu	tu	tu

De sum^o de conwode a square lord for my L.
 & the rent. The steward a gift of the lord, ordm^o m^o
 my. m^o p^o m^o g^o r^o s^o t^o and labor^o by m^o p^o s^o
 de sum^o & gent^o of the lord's lands as at sum^o
 ordm^o m^o s^o my. m^o p^o m^o g^o r^o s^o t^o and labor^o by m^o p^o s^o

page 18. v. 18.

Figure 1. Page from daily account books from Dublin Castle in 1574. Source: NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51. Reproduced with permission of Sir Philip Naylor-Leyland Bt and Milton (Peterborough) Estates Company.

period, most accounts derive from when lords' incomes were falling or nobles had to make tough choices about reorganizing their estates.²³ There were other, less practical motivations. In her study of English noble households, Kate Mertes suggested such accounts were 'arguments', claims that an officer was spending their lord's resources with honesty and responsibility.²⁴ In a similar vein, Adam Smyth included financial accounts in his examination of early modern life-writing. He proposed that they were not merely cold, objective financial documents, but textual constructions that demand close reading attentive to their genre, adherence to and deviance from norms, and broader significance. Making an account took just as much 'selection, interpretation, and evaluation' as writing a diary.²⁵ This notion that accounts of large households are a form of communication is critical for their interpretation. They were created for distinct purposes and conveyed information to those inside and beyond the household, and implicit within their form was a sense of thoroughness and morality. The patchiness of their survival may not simply be due to their status as working documents and the uneven effects of time's passage. Household accounts that have lasted may be those that were preserved in order to pass on a message to contemporaries and for posterity.

This concept of communication offers a way to read Fitzwilliam's documentation. He had an interest in demonstrating that running a lord deputy's household was cripplingly expensive and that he and his officers, far from being corrupt, were doing the best they could. Born in 1526 into a landowning family in Milton, Northamptonshire, Fitzwilliam grew up to marry Anne, the sister of Henry Sidney.²⁶ In 1554, his administrative career in Ireland began when he was chosen as commissioner into alleged financial wrongdoing by the then lord deputy, Anthony St Leger. His investigation contributed to St Leger's downfall and replacement by Thomas Radcliffe, who became earl of Sussex. Fitzwilliam was appointed Ireland's vice-treasurer and treasurer-at-war, remaining in post even after factional struggles saw Sussex dismissed in favour of Sidney in 1565. On several occasions when Sidney returned to England, Fitzwilliam stepped in for his brother-in-law as lord justice. It is evident, however, that he was not relishing his time abroad. He was blamed for the wretched state of the crown's finances, personally racked up thousands of pounds of debt, and suffered from persistent illness, all of which meant that, when Queen Elizabeth was seeking Sidney's successor, Fitzwilliam pleaded not to be tapped. In one letter, he wrote that additional time in office would 'beggar my selfe, and leave my wyffe and children in the miserable state which unhappy husbandes and fathers do'.²⁷ These complaints fell on deaf ears and Fitzwilliam was named lord deputy on 13 January 1571/2, on the condition that the queen reduced his debts. Financial concerns were also central to his

²³ Dyer, *Standards of living*, pp. 92–3.

²⁴ Mertes, *English noble household*, p. 77.

²⁵ Smyth, *Autobiography*, pp. 69, 86–7.

²⁶ The details of this short biography are taken from Mary Ann Lyons, 'Fitzwilliam, Sir William (1526–1599), lord deputy of Ireland', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*; Terry Clavin, 'Fitzwilliam, Sir William' (2009), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.003258.v1>.

²⁷ TNA, SP 63/33, fo. 72v.

mandate: Fitzwilliam was instructed to cut the English state's military and public spending in Ireland, though historians have regarded his reforming efforts as, at best, half-hearted and ineffective.²⁸ By 1575, he was asking again to be sent home, dispatching his wife to petition Elizabeth in person. In September, he was finally allowed to return to England. But his service was not yet complete. In 1588, he was appointed lord deputy once more, embarking on a disastrous second term. His heavy-handed military interventions and blatant corruption fomented the fractious environment that led to the brutal Nine Years' War. Leaving a mess behind and suffering further stomach pains and gout, Fitzwilliam departed Ireland for good in 1594.

However his time in office is evaluated, the personal and political circumstances are essential for understanding the significance of the household accounts. One of the unusual features of the Dublin Castle records is that their contents can be set alongside the lord deputy's own letters, which describe conditions in Ireland and his own state of body and mind. Drawing a connection between Fitzwilliam's physical health and his diet is a stretch, because the accounts do not say what each individual was served. But the documents collectively reveal the all-important context of the food consumption they describe. In both periods that Fitzwilliam spent in office, English power in Ireland was precarious. The lord deputy was charged with sustaining the crown's foothold and expanding its sphere of influence deeper into more strongly Gaelic Irish regions like Ulster and Munster, which required maintaining a military presence and acting with the grandeur and magnificence befitting the queen's representative. This was expensive and the finances of the English state in Ireland and those of the lord deputy were persistently perilous. Thoroughly kept accounts like those from Dublin Castle were documentary evidence of the difficulty and high cost of ruling the country. While they were primarily records of management, they were also public documents. Their readership may not have been large, but they were intended for an audience. This becomes obvious when examining the pages themselves. Those now surviving in the Northamptonshire Record Office are good copies, presumably written up from paper scraps or rough books where staff scribbled down stocks and transactions. Even on the daily pages, the structure of the entries is systematic and regular, and the hand is exceptionally neat. These were records that could be swiftly audited and maintained for future reference. As we mine them for details about food and drink, we need to be aware that these documents were produced to state emphatically the extent of the household's consumption and the financial cost it entailed.

II

As well as differing in their approaches to governing and waging war, Ireland's sixteenth-century viceroys varied in style. Despite the lord deputy possessing one of the most powerful offices in English government, on either side of the Irish Sea, Dublin Castle never held the status of a royal court, an unrivalled

²⁸ For example, see Brady, 'Viceroys?', pp. 29–30.

centre of high politics and culture structured around an authoritative figure.²⁹ Only from the later seventeenth century did holders of the office consistently conjure courtly splendour, in the form of architecture, banquets, costumes, and entertainments.³⁰ But in the previous century, some lords deputy did attempt to project power and status. Sidney was the prime example. He made ostentatious progresses around the country and encouraged works of literary propaganda to his good name, including John Derricke's *Image of Ireland* with its woodcuts of Sidney leading forces, making triumphal entries, and receiving surrenders while sat under a cloth of state. He also restored the tomb of the Norman conqueror, Strongbow, built a bridge over the Shannon at Athlone, and renovated Dublin Castle.³¹ By comparison, Fitzwilliam has been characterized as a hair-shirted functionary less concerned with self-promotion.³² That did not mean he lived a threadbare existence. Fitzwilliam patronized performers such as the Dublin waits, retained a harpist, and owned instruments such as virginals.³³ In the 1590s, we know he kept a parrot, plus some hawks and greyhounds for hunting.³⁴ And he maintained the lord deputy's grand homes in and around Dublin, the castle chief among them.

By the time Fitzwilliam moved into Dublin Castle, around six months into his first term, the residence had begun its journey towards improvement. First built after the Norman conquest, in the sixteenth century it largely remained a military complex in form and function, distinguished by thick walls and tall, round towers. At times, it also enclosed the Irish courts of justice, the privy council, parliament, the exchequer and treasury, mint, state archives, and a prison. Because the castle lacked the comforts of a palace or country house, most early Tudor viceroys lived elsewhere.³⁵ Sidney was the first officeholder to make major improvements. In a laudatory passage in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Richard Stanyhurst recounted how the lord deputy had taken over a building that was 'ruinous, foulle, filthie, and greatly decaied' and turned it into a 'verie faire house'.³⁶ Sidney's refurbishment likely affected how and where the Castle's residents dined. According to a plan from the first decade of the seventeenth century, the 'Deputies house' was on the inside of the south wall. This probably contained the dining room, where Henry Brereton later described 'is placed the cloth of estate over my Lord deputy's

²⁹ On the power of the office, see *ibid.*, p. 18; Hiram Morgan, 'Overmighty officers: the Irish lord deputyship in the early modern British state', *History Ireland*, 7 (1999), pp. 17–21, at p. 17.

³⁰ Joseph Robins, *Champagne and silver buckles: the viceregal court at Dublin Castle, 1700–1922* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 6–8.

³¹ Brady, 'Viceroys?', p. 31; Morgan, 'Overmighty officers', pp. 18–19; Hiram Morgan, "'Never any realm worse governed": Queen Elizabeth and Ireland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (2004), pp. 295–308, at p. 300.

³² For example, see Daniel Elliott, 'The embodiment of the queen's majesty and splendour: the court and household of the lords deputy of Ireland' (M.Phil. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2014), pp. 56–8.

³³ Alan J. Fletcher, *Drama, performance, and polity in pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork, 2000), pp. 219–20.

³⁴ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 30.

³⁵ C. Litton Falkiner, 'His majesty's castle of Dublin', in C. Litton Falkiner, ed., *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly of the seventeenth century* (London, 1904), pp. 3–40, at pp. 17–18.

³⁶ Raphael Holinshed, *The first and second volumes of chronicles* (London, 1587), p. 152.

head, when he is at meat'.³⁷ The Castle also had a 'Hall', an edifice raised on pillars along the inside of the west boundary.³⁸ As this space was used frequently as the law courts, it is unlikely that dining took place there apart from on special days. In alignment with wider trends, the lord, family, and high-ranking guests probably dined in a separate chamber, with officers and other staff eating at tables elsewhere, rather than all together.³⁹ Wherever the meals were situated, we can be more confident that they were prepared in the kitchens housed in the second storey of the Castle's south-west tower. On the earliest existing plan, the area close by was noted as the 'kitchen yard'.⁴⁰

The foods consumed by Fitzwilliam and those around him were connected to European patterns. With royal courts settling down in fixed locations, the everyday life of palaces created opportunities for displays of wealth and taste, which contributed to the elaboration of cooking and eating.⁴¹ Over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, courtly cuisine became increasingly refined, departing from the mingling of flavours of medieval cookery with multiple dishes served at once, in favour of contrasts in taste and texture, emphasis on garnishes and decoration, a narrowing of ingredients, and a shrinking number of dishes.⁴² Because the daily books for Dublin Castle do not reveal how foods were readied and put together, we have no indication of the gastronomic flair on show.⁴³ However, we can consider the foodstuffs that ended up on the Castle's boards. On the whole, these fitted the pattern of a large household of English influence. Bread, hopped beer, beef, mutton, and dried fish were the basics, but there was a marvellous variety of fish and fowl for those at the top of the social hierarchy.⁴⁴ We can examine how the Dublin Castle diet upheld or broke contemporary norms and made sense in the context of early modern Ireland.

Take, for example, the staple of meat. Not only was there a huge volume consumed at Dublin Castle, but an unusually large amount came from cattle. Based on standard estimates of the edible weight of different animal carcasses

³⁷ William Brereton, 'Travels of Sir William Brereton in Ireland, 1635', in Falkiner, ed., *Illustrations of Irish history and topography*, pp. 365–407, at pp. 380–1.

³⁸ James L. J. Hughes, 'Dublin Castle in the seventeenth century: a topographical reconstruction', *Dublin Historical Record*, 2 (1940), pp. 81–97, at pp. 84–6; J. B. Maguire, 'Seventeenth-century plans of Dublin Castle', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 104 (1974), pp. 5–14, at pp. 5–7.

³⁹ Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 40–2.

⁴⁰ Hughes, 'Dublin Castle', p. 93; Maguire, 'Seventeenth-century plans', pp. 5–7.

⁴¹ On the structural changes leading to this cuisine's development, see Ken Albala, *The banquet: dining in the great courts of late Renaissance Europe* (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 2007), pp. vii–viii; Stephen Mennell, *All manners of food: eating and taste in England and France from the middle ages to the present* (Oxford, 1985), p. 108.

⁴² Albala, *Banquet*, pp. 14–15, 22–3.

⁴³ Fitzwilliam's letters make no mention of specific meals. Books were purchased for his Irish household, but we lack evidence for whether or not they concerned food and cookery. See Irish Manuscripts Commission, 'Fitzwilliam manuscripts', p. 304.

⁴⁴ On this pattern of foodstuffs and how it had developed from the medieval period, see Stone, *Crisis*, p. 559; Albala, *Banquet*, pp. 33, 36–7; Woolgar, *Great household*, pp. 132–3; Lloyd, *Food and identity*, p. 178.

used widely by historians of food in early modern England, it appears that in 1574 around 57 per cent of the meat eaten in Fitzwilliam's household was beef, followed by mutton at 33 per cent (see Table 1). During his second term, the proportion of beef was even higher. Records of other lords deputy show the same bovine predominance. Even if Irish cattle were slightly smaller than their English equivalents – Fynes Moryson called them 'in general very little' – which might lead us to reduce the average weights, the picture does not shift fundamentally.⁴⁵ In England, mutton has been described as the most commonly consumed meat, before beef crept into first place by the seventeenth century, but evidence from household accounts suggests this trend was underway earlier and there had always been regional differences.⁴⁶ In Ireland, it appears that beef's prime position was entrenched by the mid-sixteenth century.

The findings from Dublin Castle are striking for several reasons. In this period, physicians and writers on dietary matters began to read the advice of Galen and other classical authorities through a local lens. The English became the best-known beef eaters, building a mythology around their status as great carnivores in possession of the largest cattle.⁴⁷ This looked past the current state of England's agriculture, which saw relatively little improvement in livestock productivity until subsequent centuries.⁴⁸ The English who came to Ireland may have been able to more easily consume large quantities of beef than they were able to back home, much like Spanish settlers in the Americas.⁴⁹ At Dublin Castle, the English occupiers were able to manifest this emerging feature of their national identity. Although cattle had deep economic and cultural importance in Gaelic Ireland, historians have broadly concluded that they were raised for their products, like milk, and that meat was not widely eaten. Such readings relied on descriptions like one English account from the 1670s that noted how the Irish 'seldom eat Flesh', but consumed a diet largely based on milk, butter, curds, and whey.⁵⁰ While offering evidence of an English household's preference for beef, the Fitzwilliam kitchen books also highlight that there were, in fact, plenty of cattle kept for slaughter in Ireland. Other evidence, such as account books revealing the diets of workmen and analysis of animal bones found across the island, suggest that beef was

⁴⁵ Fynes Moryson, 'A description of Ireland', in Falkiner, ed., *Illustrations of Irish history and topography*, pp. 214–32, at pp. 221–2.

⁴⁶ On mutton's prominence, see Joan Thirsk, *Food in early modern England: phases, fads, fashions, 1500–1760* (London, 2007), pp. 237, 240–1. For examples of meat consumption in different English households, see Stone, *Crisis*, appendix 24; Dawson, *Plenti*, pp. 87–8, 103; Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and gender*, pp. 88–9; Lloyd, *Food and identity*, p. 53–4.

⁴⁷ David Gentilcore, *Food and health in early modern Europe: diet, medicine and society, 1450–1800* (London, 2016), pp. 86–7; Ken Albala, *Eating right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), pp. 230–1.

⁴⁸ Mark Overton, *Agricultural revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy, 1500–1850* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 111–16.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Earle, *Body of the conquistador: food, race and the colonial experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 74.

⁵⁰ Anon., *The present state of Ireland: together with some remarques upon the antient state thereof* (London, 1673), p. 151. For examples of such accounts, see Cullen, *Emergence*, pp. 147–8; Clarkson and Crawford, *Feast*, p. 25.

Table 1. Consumption of major meats in the households of Irish lords deputy

Meat	Earl of Sussex at Kilmainham, six weeks in 1562		Household of William Fitzwilliam, Mar. 1571/2–Dec. 1572		Household of William Fitzwilliam, 1574		Household of Henry Sidney, 1576–7		Household of William Fitzwilliam, year to Apr. 1591	
	Carcasses	Weight in pounds (% total)	Carcasses	Weight in pounds	Carcasses	Weight in pounds	Carcasses	Weight in pounds	Carcasses	Weight in pounds
Beef	131.5	31,592 (74.2%)	333.5	80,120 (65.1%)	267.35	64,228 (56.6%)	519	124,685 (77.0%)	423.75	101,802 (68.6%)
Veal			141.95	5,337 (4.3%)	85.5	3,214 (2.8%)			43.25	1,626 (1.1%)
Mutton	454	10,978 (25.8%)	1,027.55	24,846 (20.2%)	1,557.15	37,652 (33.2%)	1,403	33,925 (20.9%)	1,281	30,975 (20.9%)
Lamb			287.75	2,581 (2.1%)	507.25	4,550 (4.0%)			148	1,328 (0.9%)
Pork			119.3	6,013 (4.9%)	51.4	2,591 (2.3%)	66	3,326 (2.1%)	145.25	7,321 (4.9%)
Pig			332	4,183 (3.4%)	103	1,298 (1.1%)			419	5,279 (3.6%)

Note: The calculations of edible weight used the estimates for carcass sizes proposed by Barbara Harvey in *Living and dying*, pp. 226–30. Harvey's period of study is earlier and early modern revisions have been suggested by Mark Dawson and Craig Muldrew among others. But her list of weights offer a standard for comparison and, in any case, such calculations will always be crude. Zooarchaeological research associated with the present study is producing a new set of Ireland-specific carcass size estimates.

Sources: Columns from left to right: TNA, SP 63/7, fos. 76r–79r; NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 50; NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle & Dudley*, pp. 436–7; NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 30.

eaten in a range of locations and communities.⁵¹ On the ground, national distinctions were blurry.

Within the household, social divisions were expressed through particular foods. The waters of Ireland were home to well-exploited fisheries, especially in the south of the Irish Sea and off the south-west coast, areas in reach of Dublin.⁵² But only higher-ranking diners were able to enjoy this piscatorial plenty. At the castle, the delectable variety – fresh sea fish such as haddock, plaice, flounder, gurnard, ray, whiting, and sole, river fish like trout and salmon, and shellfish like oysters, cockles, lobsters, and razor clams – were most likely consumed by the lord and his chief officers, because their overall volume was relatively low (see Table 2). Part of the prestige of these foods was that, being perishable, they had to be bought and consumed fresh. Generally, they were only available to those in coastal or riverine regions or with the funds to cover overland transport.⁵³ Meanwhile, the bulk of seafood served was preserved cod, ling, and herring, cornerstones of a more monotonous fast day regime that most of the staff suffered.⁵⁴

Dietary divisions were most discernible around poultry and game. Apart from chickens and rabbits, these foods were expensive, not always obtainable on the open market and could only be hunted legally by elites, which meant they were never staples and were consistently associated with high status.⁵⁵ In the case of birds, there was the added connotation that, according to the medieval concept of the ‘Great Chain of Being’, creatures of the wing were linked to the more noble element of air.⁵⁶ These distinctions played out at Dublin Castle. In 1574, average weekly spending on poultry and game was 31s when Fitzwilliam was away on an expedition into Munster. This almost doubled to 61s upon his return, a relative increase that exceeded all other categories of food (see Table 3). Though their share of overall household consumption was small, the diversity of these foods served to the lord deputy and leading staff was extraordinary.⁵⁷ Castle diners ate game birds like mallards, ducks, woodcock, and partridge, small birds like larks, curlews, and

⁵¹ The only meat the masons at Christchurch cathedral were served was beef; see Gillespie, ed., *Proctor's accounts*. Analysis of animal bones will be included in an archaeological database currently being compiled, as described in Susan Flavin et al., ‘An interdisciplinary approach to historic diet and foodways: the FoodCult project’, *European Journal of Food, Drink, and Society*, 1 (2021), pp. 21–54, at pp. 33–5.

⁵² Colin Breen, ‘Marine fisheries and society in medieval Ireland’, in James H. Barrett and David C. Orton, eds., *Cod and herring: the archaeology and history of medieval sea fishing* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 91–8, at pp. 91, 94–5, 97; Patrick Hayes, ‘The history of Ireland's fisheries, 1500–1603’ (2 vols., Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2020), I, pp. 62–3, 182–3, 239.

⁵³ Muldrew, *Food, energy*, pp. 105–6; Thirsk, *Food*, pp. 265–7.

⁵⁴ For this similar division in English households, see Lloyd, *Food and identity*, p. 77.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77–8, 86–7.

⁵⁶ Allen J. Grieco, ‘Food and social classes in late medieval and Renaissance Italy’, in Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, eds., *Food: a culinary history from antiquity to the present* (New York, NY, 1999), pp. 302–12, at p. 312.

⁵⁷ Using Barbara Harvey's figures for edible weights, the volume of chickens, conies, goose, hens, and rabbits was 18,541 pounds. The combined weight of beef, mutton, lamb, pork, pig, and veal was 113,533 pounds. For the weights and justification, see Harvey, *Living and dying*, pp. 226–30.

Table 2. Numbers of fish consumed at Dublin Castle in 1574

Preserved fish					
Herring, salt	8,162	Cod	611		
Eels	1,544	Ling	477		
Herring, red	1,280				
Fresh fish					
Herring	4,274	Eels	172	Roach	25
Flounder	3,354	Trout	153	Conger	24
Whiting	2,012	Sole	146	Turbot	20
Plaice	1,849	Salmon	94	Mackerel	19
Haddock	825	Codlings	92	Hornfish	6
Knowd	511	Thornback	63	Shad	2
Cod	312	Mullet	35	Bream	2
Gurnard	226	Bass	33	Pike	2
Ray	180	Grayling	29	Halibut	1

Note: Numbers represent individual fish. Species arranged in descending order of volume consumed.

Source: NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51.

Table 3. Food spending when William Fitzwilliam was away on a journey and on his return home, 1574

Food category	Average weekly spending in pence		Change
	Lord away – week nos. 31–8	Lord resident – week nos. 39–46	
Bread and flour	347.9	543.0	+56.1%
Beer	316.2	558.5	+76.6%
Meat	1,108.2	1,513.6	+36.6%
Poultry and game	375.1	726.1	+93.6%
Fish and seafood	386.9	505.8	+30.70%
White meats (dairy and eggs)	192.9	230.3	+19.4%

Note: Weeks 31 to 38 cover the period when Fitzwilliam was on an expedition to Munster; he returned to Dublin during weeks 39 to 46. Prices are in Irish currency and have been converted to pence.

Source: NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51.

blackbirds, and waterfowl like herons, cranes, gulls, barnacle geese or brants, oyster catchers, rails, godwits, and bitterns. Most of these species were cooked at elite residences in England, but it is significant that, in Dublin, a wide range

was served throughout the year.⁵⁸ The assortment of waterfowl was most conspicuous. Early modern Ireland was abundant in such birds, with one French visitor witnessing ‘flocks on the seashore, and sometimes the air for leagues together darkened by these fowl’.⁵⁹ Dietary writers tried to turn readers off such foods, because Galenic theory explained that the muddy, insect- and amphibian-filled environments where they lived diminished their quality as foodstuffs.⁶⁰ As they embraced Ireland’s natural resources, diners like Fitzwilliam either ignored such advice or encouraged their cooks to prepare their ducks, herons, and rails with methods and ingredients that rendered them more wholesome and redressed their humoral imbalance.⁶¹

They also took a flexible attitude towards dietary recommendations in the case of fruit and vegetables. In Gaelic Irish literature, root vegetables in particular were associated with coarseness and rusticity. English accounts of Irish diets often suggested that the native Irish population relied on roots and foraged herbs, which was proof of their incivility. For historians, there are ‘serious issues’ in accepting such assumptions as evidence of actual consumption, as similar stereotypes were employed across Europe.⁶² Another complication is that English elites in Ireland consumed plenty of plant foods themselves. In Fitzwilliam’s daily books from 1574 and 1575, different fruits and vegetables appear throughout the seasons: apples were eaten from September through to March; autumn and winter introduced alliums and roots like onions, parsnips, and skirrets; as the weather warmed in spring, leeks, fresh peas, and miscellaneous ‘herbs’ appeared on the menu. In June and July 1572, just after he moved into Dublin Castle, Fitzwilliam was served artichokes on six days.⁶³ Consumption was higher in reality than such accounts state.⁶⁴ The range expanded in the records of Fitzwilliam’s second term, which mentioned more unusual fruits, like wardens, codlings, bullaces, cherries, and walnuts, and vegetables like cabbages, lettuce, samphire, and radishes.⁶⁵ This household was taking part in a European culinary trend, proliferating throughout the sixteenth century but reaching England relatively late, by which fine, expensive fruit and vegetables became fashionable features on the menus of the rich and sophisticated.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ For example, see Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and gender*, pp. 91–2; Dawson, *Plenti*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Jorevin de Rocheford, ‘Description of England and Ireland after the Restoration’, in Falkiner, ed., *Illustrations of Irish history and topography*, pp. 409–26, at p. 419.

⁶⁰ Albalá, *Eating right*, pp. 72, 122–5; Gentilcore, *Food and health*, p. 20.

⁶¹ On rectifying such foods, see Paul Lloyd, ‘Making waterfowl safe to eat: medical opinion, cookbooks and food purchases in early seventeenth-century England’, *Food & History*, 11 (2013), pp. 35–55, at pp. 41–2, 45–7.

⁶² Susan Flavin, ‘Food and social politics in early modern Ireland: representing the peasant in the parliament of Clan Tomas’, *Food & History*, 20 (2022), pp. 9–40, at pp. 19–20, 33–7, 39.

⁶³ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 50, entries for 5 June, 6 July, 8–9 July, 20 July, 22 July 1572.

⁶⁴ Pears and plums were received as gifts, and money was paid out for garden seeds and garden labourers, as described in NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 55, 56.

⁶⁵ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 30, 31.

⁶⁶ Gentilcore, *Food and health*, pp. 65, 118–22; Paul Lloyd, ‘Dietary advice and fruit-eating in late Tudor and early Stuart England’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67 (2012), pp. 553–86; Thirsk, *Food*, pp. 288–9, 294; Muldrew, *Food, energy*, pp. 106–12. On later developments

The Fitzwilliam accounts show that the culture of consumption in Ireland was advanced, at least in elite circles. While residing at Dublin Castle, the lord deputy had little difficulty getting hold of the luxuries and exotics to which he was accustomed. In the 1570s, turkeys were mentioned in the kitchen books on several occasions, not just at Christmas time. Whether they were really the creatures brought back from the Americas in the early sixteenth century or another large bird from the eastern Mediterranean, they were a fixture on noble and gentry tables.⁶⁷ In 1574, Fitzwilliam's household drank 787.5 gallons of fortified wine or sack and 472.5 gallons of Gascon wine, as well as some Malmsey. Much of this was probably sweetened with a proportion of the 672.5 pounds of sugar spent during that year.⁶⁸ An indication of its restricted status, sugar was sometimes given and received by Fitzwilliam and his wife as a gift.⁶⁹ Though we cannot be certain how his cooks used them, Fitzwilliam also spent heavily on spices, with pepper, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and mace consumed in the greatest volumes. Because of the detailed nature of the accounts, we can track how different spices were used throughout year (see Table 4). With further analysis, these findings might be connected to the changing consumption of foodstuffs from season to season and related to contemporary recipes, offering insights into early modern cooking. They may also reveal adherence to contemporary medical and dietary advice: more than agents of flavour, spices were used to correct foods with problematic humoral effects and cope with a supposedly harmful climate, like Ireland's dampness and cold bemoaned by English travellers.⁷⁰ More broadly, the accounts are further proof of what we know from recent accounts of Irish trade, that parts of the country, especially the more urban and commercial south-east, were well integrated into mercantile networks with mainland Europe.⁷¹ In the middle of the sixteenth century, Irish consumers engaged in the continent's culinary transformations.

III

Feeding Dublin Castle was a major operation. In 1574, the household consumed approximately 16,088 pounds of fine white bread, 40,237 pounds of so-called yeoman's bread, 207,684 pints of beer, 267 carcasses of beef, and 1,557 carcasses of mutton. For fish days and other fasts, there were more than 13,716 herring, and several hundred dried cod and ling. This is before counting any

in Ireland, see T. C. Barnard, 'Gardening, diet and "improvement" in late seventeenth-century Ireland', *Journal of Garden History*, 10 (1990), pp. 71–85.

⁶⁷ For examples of turkey consumption during summer, see NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 50, entries for 28 July, 24 Aug., 26 Aug., 31 Aug., 7 Sept. 1572. On turkeys, see Thirsk, *Food*, p. 254.

⁶⁸ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 56.

⁶⁹ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 27.

⁷⁰ For such a description relating to foodstuffs, see Moryson, 'Description', p. 221. On the use of spices for correction, see Albala, *Eating right*, pp. 62, 91, 210–11, 245–6. For similar anxieties about food, bodies, and the environment, see Earle, *Body*, pp. 5–6.

⁷¹ Susan Flavin, 'Food, drink and society in sixteenth-century Ireland: cultures of consumption', in Eve Campbell, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, and Audrey Horning, eds., *Becoming and belonging in Ireland, AD c. 1200–1600: essays in identity and cultural practice* (Cork, 2018), pp. 212–43 at pp. 241–2.

Table 4. Consumption of major spices at Dublin Castle in 1574 by weight

Spice	Weight consumed (pounds)											
	4 weeks ending											
	28 Feb.	31 Mar.	30 Apr.	22 May	19 June	17 July	14 Aug.	11 Sept.	9 Oct.	6 Nov.	4 Dec.	31 Dec.
Aniseed				1								6.5
Carraway		0.5										
Cinnamon	2	1.5	1.125	0.875	1.125	0.75	0.5	0.5	0.75	1	0.75	3.75
Cloves	0.4375	0.4375	0.5	0.375	0.3125	0.1875	0.125	0.0625	0.125	0.15625	0.125	0.3125
Ginger	0.625	0.625	0.5	0.375	0.3125	0.25	0.25	0.125	0.125	0.25	2.5	3.1875
Licorice												6
Mace, large	0.15625	0.09375	0.09375	0.0625	0.09375	0.0625	0.0625	0.0625	0.09375	0.0625	0.125	0.25
Mace, small	0.25	0.28125	0.1875	0.125	0.1875	0.15625	0.09375	0.0625	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.3125
Nutmeg	0.5	0.5625	0.5	0.4375	0.375	0.1875	0.25	0.125	0.25	0.5	2.5	
Pepper	3	2.25	2.5	2	1.75	2.25	3	2	2.25	2.75	3	5
Saffron												0.25
Total	6.96875	6.25	5.40625	5.25	4.15625	3.84375	4.28125	2.9375	3.71875	4.84375	9.125	25.5625

Source: NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51.

other meats, poultry, wildfowl, game, and fresh fish.⁷² The total expenses of Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam's household amounted to £3,464, of which food was the largest section of expenditure (see Table 5). For Fitzwilliam and his chief officers, it was a dramatic step up from his previous decade in Ireland. Between March 1570/1 and February 1571/2, a year that includes ten months before he was appointed to the top position, the consumption of foodstuffs was a fraction of later levels.⁷³ The lord deputy received an allowance from the state, which Fitzwilliam repeatedly exceeded, forcing him to dip into his own coffers. In a 1573 letter to the privy council, he noted that 'to furnish myself' for the office of lord deputy had personally cost him £1,600 along with the 'growing charge by the continuance therein'.⁷⁴ He did not cut his cloth accordingly when it came to his second term. Full year accounts from the 1590s suggest that running the lord deputy's household still cost roughly the same amount of money, with the overall expenditure on foodstuffs slightly higher. The lord deputy was expected to preside over a large and impressive residence, however much of a burden this became.

Set in context, the extent of the consumption was remarkable. First, it was in line with what other lords deputy doled out, despite Fitzwilliam's complaints about money and lowly reputation among historians. The summary of the expenses of John Perrott in 1586 show that he was spending around £1,300 a year on food for himself, his officers, and other staff.⁷⁵ In running his house, Fitzwilliam was not shirking his responsibilities as viceroy. Secondly, his household was consuming a huge amount even from an international perspective. None of the noble households whose consumption was surveyed by Lawrence Stone in his study of sixteenth-century aristocratic life came close.⁷⁶ In the mid-1570s, at the Hertfordshire home of perhaps the most influential politician in England, Lord Burghley, the kitchens butchered just 55 beef carcasses and the diners swilled down just 89,280 pints of beer on a yearly basis.⁷⁷ On the evidence of the food being served, Dublin Castle was not merely the largest household in Ireland; it was possibly the biggest in all the lands under the English crown except the royal court. Put another way, the Castle's kitchens were one of the most substantial culinary institutions in this part of Europe, making its accounts all the more worthy of scrutiny.

There were certainly many mouths to feed. Records of wages for each quarter of 1574 indicate there were at least 108 people on Fitzwilliam's payroll, before counting the lord, his family, and any other nobles within his

⁷² NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51.

⁷³ In these twelve months, the household consumed just 2,172 pounds of manchet, 11,118 pounds of yeoman's bread, and 69,552 pints of beer. These are recorded in NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 50.

⁷⁴ TNA, SP 63/42, fo. 99r.

⁷⁵ TNA, SP 63/125, fo. 73r. Over six weeks in 1562, Sussex spent £418 on food and fuel, but this exceptionally high figure may be explained by hosting guests or garrisoning soldiers. See TNA, SP 63/7, fos. 76r–79r.

⁷⁶ Stone, *Crisis*, appendix 24.

⁷⁷ Lord Burghley's household book, Oct. 1575–Sept. 1577, Hatfield House Archives, Cecil papers, vol. 226.

Table 5. Spending in the Irish households of William Fitzwilliam

	Household of William Fitzwilliam, 1574	Household of William Fitzwilliam, year to Apr. 1591
Total spending	£3,464 4s 5d ob	£3,116 2s*
Wages and liveries	£694 12s 9d qua	£581 33s 5d
Stable and horses	£150 19s 9d qua	£416 16s 3d
Fuel (wood, sea coal, charcoal, faggots, furze)	£270 7s 7d ob	£147 8s 1d ob
Total of major food categories listed below	£1,157 15s 11d ob	£1,500 18s 1d ob
<i>Fresh foods purchased</i>	£332 12s 7d ob	£577 11s 6d**
<i>Beef</i>	£181 4s	£335 15s 10d
<i>Mutton</i>	£98 19s 4d	£25 15s
<i>Fish from store (cod, ling, herring, salmon)</i>	£48 15s 1d ob	£45 11s 10d ob
<i>Butter from store</i>	£30 15s 4d	£19 19s 1d ob
<i>Wheat (bread and other uses)</i>	£108 9s 10d ob	£147 4s 8d
<i>Malt and hops for brewing</i>	£172 13s 5d	£202 15s 8d ob
<i>Wine</i>	£105 6d ob	£97 11s 3d
<i>Sugar, spices, groceries, and fruit</i>	£78 25s 8d ob	£48 13s 2d

*The bottom of the page is damaged so any pence or fractions of pence are missing.

**Includes all retail purchases of foodstuffs, not just perishables like poultry, seafood and butter.

Note: Prices are in Irish currency, with 'ob' representing a halfpenny and 'qua' a quarter. The subcategory totals do not necessarily add up to the overall total because minor or less relevant expenses, such as journey costs, are not included.

Sources: NRO, Fitzwilliam MSS 30, 56.

retinue.⁷⁸ Another list from the 1590s suggests the household may have reduced in size, but still included dozens of staff split into different departments typical of aristocratic residences, from the chief officers – steward, comptroller, and secretary – down to water carriers, a laundress, and a gardener.⁷⁹ A household of this scale was smaller than the sprawling aristocratic homes of late medieval England, where the likes of the duke of Buckingham and earl of Northumberland had 500 or so followers.⁸⁰ But it was at the top end for the mid-sixteenth-century nobility whose power had been curtailed by the centralization of authority by the state. The richest and most

⁷⁸ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 55.

⁷⁹ In 1590–1, there were 103 staff on the payroll. See NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 30.

⁸⁰ Dyer, *Standards of living*, pp. 50–1; Mertes, *English noble household*, p. 188; Woolgar, *Great household*, pp. 9–15.

influential, dukes and earls, had between 40 and 160 retainers.⁸¹ The office of lord deputy put its holder on a par with the greatest nobles in the region.

As far as we can estimate, all those mouths were well fed. While Fitzwilliam's kitchen books from 1574 and 1575 list for each day the total messes served at dinner and supper, with each mess indicating a group of four eaters, they do not reveal the exact number of diners.⁸² How many people were served at the lord's table and those of his steward and other officers is not stated and undoubtedly varied. Furthermore, the number of messes does not count anyone who took meals less formally. During 1574, on days when both meals were offered, the total messes served across the two sittings ranged from 9 to 52, with a median figure of 28, which equates to 56 diners. Even if we take a more expansive figure of 100 people consuming the castle's food each day, to account for the wider household and the building's many functions, the quantities of food available to each person remain extremely high. By this measure, the house consumed per person per day the equivalent of seven ounces of best white bread known as manchet, just over a pound of the lower quality yeoman's bread, and five to six pints of beer, and a little under three pounds of beef and mutton. These are the high food volumes habitually consumed by physically active people in this period, comparable to what English soldiers in Ireland received as rations.⁸³ Fitzwilliam was more than able to satisfy those around him.

By spending all this money on food, he was living up to the aristocratic ideal of hospitality. In the late middle ages, lords across Europe presented themselves as excellent hosts, capable of acquiring and bestowing plenty. Keeping house with appropriate style and generosity became a core expectation of good lordship, an ideal that retained force in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁸⁴ As they monopolized power and patronage, royal courts became the definitive centres of hospitality. John Adamson has argued that in England, uniquely, hospitality was the 'prime form of courtly magnificence', ahead of architecture, other artistic patronage, and public spectacles. Up to the mid-seventeenth century, the royal court fed over 1,000 people.⁸⁵ This culture of hospitality helps make sense of the expenditure at Dublin Castle. In Ireland, viceroys like Fitzwilliam hosted a table that demonstrated their status as the

⁸¹ Mertes, *English noble household*, p. 18; Paul V. B. Jones, *The household of a Tudor nobleman* (Urbana, IL, 1918), p. 10.

⁸² Peter Brears, *All the king's cooks: the Tudor kitchens of King Henry VIII at Hampton Court Palace* (London, 1999), p. 27.

⁸³ For examples of remarkably similar food quantities served in wealthy households in England, see Dawson, *Plenti*, p. 234; Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and gender*, pp. 88–9. Several hundred English foot and horsemen sent from Chester to Ireland in 1579 were each assigned for their voyage a daily ration including 1 pound of biscuit, 2 pounds of beef, and 1 pottle of beer (4 pints), as listed in TNA, E 351/152.

⁸⁴ Massimo Montanari, *Medieval tastes: food, cooking, and the table*, trans. Beth Archer Brombert (New York, NY, 2012), pp. 188–9; Mertes, *English noble household*, pp. 102–3. On the ideal's endurance, see Heal, *Hospitality*, p. 19; Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 556–7.

⁸⁵ John Adamson, 'The Tudor and Stuart courts, 1509–1714', in John Adamson, ed., *The princely courts of Europe: ritual, politics and culture under the ancien régime, 1500–1750* (London, 1999), pp. 95–117, at p. 100.

leading power in the country. This was critical because English dominance was still contested in the second half of the sixteenth century, as the occupying forces attempted to suppress the power of the Gaelic lordships. Since the medieval period, Irish lords maintained their own tradition of hospitality, the centrepiece of which were the great feasts for vassals held between New Year and Shrovetide.⁸⁶ Feeding his followers was part of the lord deputy's engagement with this ongoing political struggle.

This feasting and fasting had a distinct set of rhythms. Dense and detailed household accounts, like the Fitzwilliam kitchen books, allow us to examine how dining patterns shifted on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Throughout 1574, rather than a sit-down supper, a 'drinking' was held most Fridays and on certain other fasts, like the Wednesdays during Lent.⁸⁷ Fitzwilliam left Dublin for three extended stretches, totalling seventy days. He presumably took with him a proportion of the staff, because the number of messes served at dinner and supper plunged.⁸⁸ On seventeen occasions, Fitzwilliam and his wife dined out at the homes of resident or visiting notables, such as the mayor of Dublin, the dean of Christ Church cathedral, and the earl of Essex. In line with the reciprocity integral to the culture of hospitality, many of these guests were also invited to the castle. The earl of Essex, in Ireland to lead a military campaign in the north, was the most frequent invitee, present on nineteen of the twenty-three times that visitors were noted. The presence of guests coincided with spikes in consumption, which suggests that some brought their followers too. For example, on 12 June, 'two earls and their trains' – which magnates these were is not stated – dined with the lord deputy at the manor of Kilmainham, a few miles from the castle. That day, 282 manchets and 1,944 pints of beer were consumed, both quantities just under three times the mean daily figure for that month. Despite the Saturday fast, diners were also served a parade of birds, including capons, quails, and pheasants, and fish, including flounders, soles, trout, salmon, and rays.⁸⁹

Like most eaters across Christendom, Fitzwilliam and his household did not consume meat every day. Beef disappeared from the Dublin Castle tables during the fasts scattered through the year. So did almost all the veal and pork. Mutton and lamb reduced too but some were still eaten, while poultry was not affected.⁹⁰ To make up some of the deficit, consumption of fish, both

⁸⁶ On this tradition, see Katharine Simms, 'Guesting and feasting in Gaelic Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 108 (1978), pp. 67–100, at pp. 79–82, 86, 89.

⁸⁷ On changing meals during fast periods, see Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and feast: food in medieval society* (University Park, PA, 1976), pp. 31–2.

⁸⁸ On days when two meals were served, the median messes served between both meals was 12.375 when the lord was away and 28 when the lord was resident.

⁸⁹ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 51, entries for 12 June 1574. The mean figures consumed in the calendar month of June were 97 manchets and 1.58 hogsheads of beer (around 683 pints).

⁹⁰ Outside of Lent, just 1.4 (0.5 per cent) of the 266.85 carcasses of beef the household consumed in 1574 were eaten on a Friday and Saturday and that was only on special days, Christmas and New Year's Day. Similarly, only 2 young pigs (2.0 per cent of total consumption) and 1.15 mature pigs or 'porks' (2.2 per cent) were consumed on those two weekdays and no veal was eaten. By contrast, 8.2 per cent of mutton consumption took place on those days.

preserved and fresh, leapt at those times. Throughout 1574, every Friday and Saturday, with a handful of exceptions, were held as a fast. Altogether, along with Lent and observances like the eves of major feasts, more than a third of the year was set aside for abstinence. In regions under the English crown, fasting regulations changed after the break from Rome. Declarations and statutes adapted the ritual, with dairy produce exempted from restrictions and a new fast each Wednesday added in 1563, though the latter innovation proved unpopular and was repealed two decades later. The Fitzwilliam accounts allow us to study, at a fundamental level, how fasting, a religious practice infused in everyday life, functioned in an English residence after the Reformation. Therefore, matching similar evidence from England, it seems the general practice of fasting remained robust at Dublin Castle and covered a large proportion of the year.⁹¹ The retention of mutton and poultry on the menus also reveals how abstinence was far from total. We might reflect too on the meaning of these fasts. The Reformation changed attitudes towards the practice, as Protestant thinkers challenged the notions that some foods, like fish, were inherently holier than others and that good works had any impact on a believer's prospects for salvation. Fasting continued, but for more ambiguous, flexible reasons. When the Elizabethan government introduced the Wednesday fast, it stressed political and economic justifications, like supporting the nation's fishermen and the navy through the injection of greater demand.⁹² Though the extra day had been dropped as it had been elsewhere, Fitzwilliam's household was taking part in this crown-sanctioned fast. In this way, Dublin Castle's dining rooms were a paragon of royal authority and Protestant virtue.⁹³

The quantitative nature of the household accounts also allows us to examine the economics of feeding a large number of consumers. Acquiring the great quantities of food served at Dublin Castle contributed to Fitzwilliam's financial anxiety. Unlike landowners in England who had home estates close at hand, the lord deputy was forced to seek provisions elsewhere. Some food he received as gifts. In 1574, the household was given 168 different items of food as presents, for most of which Fitzwilliam issued a small cash payment, described as a reward, to the sender or carrier. In the early modern period, food gifts were powerful mechanisms for reinforcing social bonds and hierarchies.⁹⁴ In less commercialized areas of Ireland, gifts also remained an important medium of exchange, and this English engagement with the gift economy highlights how making sharp delineations about the country's

⁹¹ The same Friday and Saturday fast is visible in the consumption figures listed in Hatfield House Archives, Cecil papers, vol. 226. For another example, see Dawson, *Plenti*, pp. 220–3.

⁹² Alec Ryrie, 'The fall and rise of fasting in the British Reformations', in Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie, eds., *Worship and the parish church in early modern Britain* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 89–108; Eleanor Barnett, 'Reforming food and eating in Protestant England, c. 1560–c. 1640', *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), pp. 507–27, at pp. 513–16.

⁹³ For a rare discussion of fasting in Ireland, see Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 44–50, 85.

⁹⁴ On this culture, see Felicity Heal, 'Food gifts, the household and the politics of exchange in early modern England', *Past & Present*, 199 (2008), pp. 41–70.

economic structures is foolhardy.⁹⁵ At Dublin Castle, gifts only accounted for a tiny proportion of the total food supply, though they were more important for certain luxuries, like venison, halibut, pheasant, partridge, capon, and pigeon.⁹⁶ In the margins of the account books, the senders and receivers of the gifts were usually listed, the study of which is yet another avenue for deeper exploration.

For the most part, Fitzwilliam and his officers paid for the household's food. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Dublin region had a well-developed commercial economy, with ample production of cereals within carting distance of the capital, markets and fairs that facilitated long-distance trade in livestock, and dairy and garden produce grown not far from the city.⁹⁷ Occasional payments listed in the castle accounts reveal business connections the household forged, on top of regular visits to the city's markets for fresh fish and poultry. Preserved cod, ling and herring were bought in bulk from fishermen and merchants. Between 4 August and 23 December 1574, the household purchased 65 Irish pecks of wheat on the open market, the prices fluctuating before and after harvest. Fitzwilliam paid the expenses of his butcher, Richard Taylor, to buy sheep and cattle at Naas and Navan, trading hubs deeper into the country.⁹⁸ This reliance on the market echoes a transition taking place in aristocratic households from the late middle ages, as personal landholdings shrank and many lords paid for their food and fuel requirements in cash.⁹⁹ Fitzwilliam's household was involved in the market economy and was a major source of demand.

Unlike most noble residences, however, the lord deputy had an advantage. Through a system known as 'cess', the viceroy was able to purchase a given volume of key foods from landowners in counties around Dublin known as the Pale, paying them a cheaper, fixed rate called the 'queen's price'. While it is related to purveyance for the royal household in England, the early workings of the practice in Ireland are hazy, but its remit expanded from the 1540s under St Leger, Sussex, and Sidney, with the aim of supplying military forces as well as the lord deputy and his immediate followers. This became a burden for those obliged to give up produce and was tainted with claims of corruption, which contributed to rising animosity towards the Dublin government from Old English residents as well as the Gaelic Irish.¹⁰⁰ The Pale landowners

⁹⁵ Raymond Gillespie, 'Economic life, 1550–1730', in Jane Ohlmeyer, ed., *Cambridge history of Ireland, II: 1550–1730* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 531–54, at pp. 532–5, 541–2.

⁹⁶ Out of the 168 gifts listed in the kitchen books in 1574, 128 were poultry and game. For the specific luxuries listed, gifts accounted for between half and all of the annual supply.

⁹⁷ On the Dublin agricultural region, see Margaret Murphy, 'Feeding another city: provisioning Dublin in the later middle ages', in Matthew Davies and James A. Galloway, eds., *London and beyond: essays in honour of Derek Keene* (London, 2012), pp. 3–24, at p. 23.

⁹⁸ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 55. On the similar system of provisioning for livestock in the 1590s, see NRO, Fitzwilliam MSS 30, 31. These wheat purchases were roughly equivalent to 162.5 English bushels, 12 per cent of the total used for bread that year.

⁹⁹ On this transition, see Dyer, *Standards of living*, p. 69; Woolgar, *Great household*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ Ciaran Brady, *The chief governors: the rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland, 1536–1588* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 221–2, 226, 240–1.

forewent hefty sums. A 1577 document drawn up to show the financial toll revealed the difference between cess prices and market values: 1,000 beef carcasses were taken each year for 9s a piece, when they could fetch 21s in open trade; similar discrepancies were recorded for wheat, malt, mutton, and other basic provisions.¹⁰¹

In common with his predecessors, Fitzwilliam made the most of this cheap supply.¹⁰² The full year accounts for 1574 show that he received 231 beef cattle from cess and another 56 from tithes, equivalent to 95 per cent of the total number killed and consumed in the Castle in those twelve months. The proportion for mutton was only slightly lower. He bought more pork at the reduced price than he needed.¹⁰³ Because Fitzwilliam was still grumbling about his expenditure despite benefitting from low-cost provisioning, it is reasonable to suggest that the bountiful food consumption at Dublin Castle would not have been possible without this extractive system. He used the system to his financial benefit in other ways. He sold off cattle and pigs – despite some of the latter being ‘measled’ or wormy – along with the by-products of cess purchases, such as 1,814 sheep skins and 240.5 stones of tallow. These sales were worth £50–60. A further 337 cattle hides were delivered to a Dublin merchant, the same importer who provided Fitzwilliam’s wine, in exchange for a mark, which might have been used to offset future orders.¹⁰⁴ These efforts to squeeze every shilling out of forced purchases indicate the double-sided nature of the cess. Taking this food from the surrounding community was a demonstration of legal authority and military heft. In requiring the surrounding landowners to feed his household, Fitzwilliam was acting like a supreme lord and, in his viceregal role, exemplifying English power abroad. But the household’s reliance on subsidized supplies and the way Fitzwilliam clawed back cash and avoided any waste were signs of fragility. The household accounts of Dublin Castle also communicate the financial weakness of the English state.

IV

In June 1575, Fitzwilliam wrote to Lord Burghley, asking the administrator once again to encourage the queen to let him step down and come home. Fitzwilliam protested that his long-term maladies had intensified:

If I be not licensed to have the help of the baths this September next and sum other help of fysick, a lytell tym after I looke for no better than to lose the use of my arms, beside such other danger as the paynes of my syde and grefe of my stomack may thro upon me.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ TNA, SP 63/23, fos. 92r–93r.

¹⁰² For specific cess accounts kept for Sidney’s household, see Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Manuscripts of Lord De L’Isle & Dudley*, pp. 408, 421–2, 431–2, 435–6.

¹⁰³ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 56. In 1574, 1,064 mature sheep or ‘muttons’ were received from cess, while 1,484.5 were consumed. This is equivalent to 71.7 per cent. The household received 66 porks and consumed only 64.4.

¹⁰⁴ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 56.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, SP 63/52, fo. 60v.

From the distance of several centuries, it is tempting to diagnose Fitzwilliam's illness as connected to the indulgent diet he consumed at Dublin Castle. He ate astonishingly well in a country blighted by war, the extraction of resources, and widespread hunger. Setting aside moral or medical judgements, his complaints to Burghley were certainly motivated by the financial cost he bore as viceroy. The daily books and other financial accounts from his time in office show that, while he may not have left a positive legacy as lord deputy, Fitzwilliam did attempt to live up to the grandeur that the role demanded. The food practices are also revealing about the exercise of English power abroad. Successive officeholders spent huge sums to convey the impression of might and wealth. In Ireland, the English were able to consume large amounts of symbolically rich foods such as beef, thanks to a system of forced levies. Describing excessive consumption, patterns of feasting and fasting, and precariousness, the Fitzwilliam kitchen books are a vital source for deepening our understanding of the political history of Ireland and the early stages of England's imperial expansion.

There is great value in studying institutions such as aristocratic households. Clearly, the foods served at the top tables at Dublin Castle were not indicative of sixteenth-century Irish society at large. But such households forged social and economic relationships with the community around them. They were a potent source of agricultural demand for the wider region and bought supplies from numerous merchants and tradesmen.¹⁰⁶ Feeding the lord deputy and his retinue was a complex and sizeable operation that touched the lives of potentially thousands of people. Fitzwilliam's household was itself enormous, staffed by dozens of workers. As we have seen, the majority ate a mundane diet, based on bread, meat, and beer, which was more reflective of what ordinary people consumed. Most employees would have been aware of the splendid cuisine enjoyed at the loftier tables and, perhaps, sampled such foods on occasion. Finally, though the castle was predominantly an English residence, some of the staff possessed Gaelic Irish heritage. The wage lists from 1574 include names like Shane O'Reilly, Patrick Gorman, and Cowley O'Neill.¹⁰⁷ This should make us wary of generalization. Rather than 'Irish' and 'English' types of consumption, it might be more productive to consider the diversity of food practices within the country of Ireland.

As forms of evidence, household accounts have limitations. Ordinarily, the several tiers of records do not survive and extensive, unbroken temporal series are uncommon. Like in the Fitzwilliam examples, most accounts do not reveal how food was prepared, cooked, and served, and individual items appear as commodities. Institutional records of this type are also impersonal, telling us little about the preferences of individuals, even the household head. But they do provide unique insights that more qualitative records do not offer: their financial basis is suited to quantification and measurement, their

¹⁰⁶ For similar arguments in an English context, see Mimi Goodall, 'Supplying the kitchens of the earls of Devonshire in the mid-17th century', *Family & Community History*, 22 (2019), pp. 101–26, at pp. 123–4; Dawson, *Plenti*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, Fitzwilliam MS 55.

conventional structure allows analysis of patterns across days, weeks, and seasons, and their formulaic nature enables comparison across time and space. While examining matters of social status and power, this article has only dipped into the profound possibilities that the records contain. Beyond the examples mentioned above, there is a deep well of data on prices, wages, and markets, which would be highly relevant to historians of the early modern economy. Historians of animals and the environment could find richly textured information about the exploitation of different species and natural resources like furze and coal.

To tell a fuller history, accounts need to be used in combination with other documents. In the first instance, these could be similar sets of household records, which could be transcribed and analysed in the same systematic manner and linked to look at consumption patterns and practices across a wider geographical area and over time. These could also be documents in different genres. In the case of Fitzwilliam's time in Ireland, his letters reveal the monetary, political, and physiological pressures that he endured. They are significant background to the way his household was run, while also demonstrating how the household's consumption was pertinent to other contemporary issues. In regions like Ireland, where evidence of consumption like household accounts is sparse, interdisciplinary approaches are needed as well. Historians can use rich sources like the lord deputy's records to anchor their analysis, while working with colleagues such as archaeologists to identify broader patterns in the material remains and practice-based scholars and scientists to replicate and study centuries-old foodstuffs.¹⁰⁸ The history of feeding Dublin Castle does not narrate the complete story of food consumption in Ireland, but it grounds our understanding in a specific, human story and offers directions that other historians, of Ireland and elsewhere, can follow.

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¹⁰⁸ For an introduction to a project employing this approach, see Flavin et al., 'Interdisciplinary approach'.

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