

Citation Katharine Simms



Dr Katharine Simms, MRIA, is a Fellow Emeritus of Trinity College Dublin, where she served as Senior Lecturer in Medieval History from 1980 until her retirement in 2010. Born in Dublin in 1946 and educated at Alexandra College, an inspiring history teacher and a brief period of home-schooling kindled a passion for history that shaped her future academic career. Katharine’s mother had been an Italian lecturer at Trinity College and read *The Introduction to the Decameron* to her around the age of eight. She remembers being struck by its account of The Black Death in Florence as an early encounter with history as something immediate and alive.

Katharine studied History and Political Science at Trinity College where she cheerfully admits to having underperformed in anything that did not appeal to her. Her undergraduate dissertation on the O’Neills in the later Middle Ages resulted in her gaining a first and being awarded the Lyster Prize. Her PhD, awarded in 1976, was entitled “Gaelic lordships in Ulster in the Later Middle Ages” and supervised by Professor James Lydon. Several years after completing her doctorate, Katharine authored the paper for which she is so well known within the field of food studies, “Guesting and Feasting in Gaelic Ireland.” When she presented it to Professor Lydon, his response was characteristically blunt: “I don’t know what that is. That is not history,” he said, before adding, “but it is very good.” It was published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* in 1978, and went on to be widely cited within the realm of Irish food history.

Katharine is the author of *From Kings to Warlords: the Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (1987), *Medieval Gaelic Sources* (2009), and *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: History, Culture and Society* (2020), together with a prolific body of articles and book chapters on the kings, clerics, and learned classes of Gaelic Ireland from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. As a Junior Research Assistant from 1977 to 1980 at the School of Celtic Studies, at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, she developed an electronic catalogue of the extant corpus of Irish bardic poetry from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It was one of the earliest applications of computer technology to a literary/historical project. The work was continuously updated and is now published on the School of Celtic Studies’ website where it serves as a search engine for the electronic texts of the corpus of surviving bardic poems assembled by Professor Damian McManus, Dept of Irish and Celtic Studies, TCD, as part of an interdepartmental group of projects organised by the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative and funded by the HEA. Today Katharine is an elected Member of the Royal Irish Academy and contributed a chapter entitled “Banqueting and the Medieval Gaelic Chiefs” to the award-winning publication, *Irish Food History: A Companion*, edited by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire and Dorothy Cashman, and published by the Royal Irish Academy in 2024

The Dublin Gastronomy Symposium Fellowship Award is being presented to Dr Katharine Simms in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Irish food history, and for her pioneering paper “Guesting and Feasting in Gaelic Ireland,” published at a time when food studies was yet to become the academic discipline we know today. In light of all the above, the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium is delighted to present the 2026 Fellowship Award to Katharine Simms.

