Abstract
In 1837, the judge presiding over the Assizes in Kerry was annoyed and frustrated by the number of rape charges coming before his bench. He was dismissive: “I have often heard that Kerry cows and other cattle are less [worthy] than in other countries”, he grumbled, adding that “these rape cases belong to the same genus; they are Kerry rapes, but I don’t think they could be considered as rapes elsewhere”. What did he mean? How was violence understood in Ireland between 1830 and 1921? This lecture explores the meaning of sexual violence for individuals, communities, and the nation. In particular, Professor Bourke examines the common belief at the time that accusations of rape in Ireland served certain political and economic ends. Did the crime in Ireland differ from that committed across the Irish Sea? To what extent did its distinctive qualities tar Irishmen and women with being a riotous, ungovernable people?

Joanna Bourke is Professor of History at Birkbeck, University of London. She is the prize-winning author of nine books, including histories on modern warfare, military medicine, psychology and psychiatry, the emotions, and rape. Her works include Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain, and the Great War (1996), An Intimate History of Killing (1999), Fear: A Cultural History (2005) and Rape: A History from the 1860s to the Present (2007). Her book, What it Means to be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present was published by Virago in 2011. She is currently writing a book on the history of pain, which will be published by Oxford University Press in 2014.

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