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Book Reviews

Land, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary. By Thomas P. Power. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993). 376 pp. IR£44.

The traditional and still widespread view of the eighteenth century, from a Roman Catholic perspective, is one of persecution and suppression. With the increased assertiveness of the catholic nation after 1829, it became useful to emphasise the darkness of the eighteenth century and by contrast to highlight the distance an increasingly triumphant nationalism had come since those dark days. This view of the eighteenth century was in large measure created and propagated by concentrating on the savage letter of penal legislation, and not on the altogether more casual and at times haphazard spirit in which that legislation was enforced. This point of view can be seen in the work of such an important Tipperary historian as Canon William P. Burke.

The book under review by the Waterford-born Thomas Power, and based on his 1987 Trinity College Ph.D. thesis, challenges popular assumptions about the eighteenth century, and for exposing one Irish county to academic scrutiny anyone interested in Ireland's past has reason to be grateful to him. It is a comment on the underdeveloped state of local or regional history in Ireland that it is still found necessary to justify such a study, even though the time is long past when comfortable national generalisations on certain topics adequately illuminate the past. By taking this county as his area for study, Dr Power has not only opened out a hitherto murky period but has also cast a new light on the better known nineteenth century.

Land, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary makes few concessions to the general reader, something which undoubtedly lay more with the publisher rather than the author. There are no illustrations and more importantly, there are no maps, with the exception of one very general map of the county. The book would certainly have benefited from a map or maps showing the estates dealt with in such masterly detail by the writer. Given the amount of family history extracted by Dr Power from the (literally) dusty volumes in the Registry of Deeds, it has to be regretted that there are no genealogies in tabular form of many of the families who dominated eighteenth-century Tipperary. Only three families are so treated in the book, namely, the Mathews, Pritties of Kilbooy and Butlers of Cahir, the genealogy of whom is well known. In mitigation there is the fact that this book was not published for a local readership, or indeed for a specifically Irish one.

The first substantial section of the book deals with economic development and details the integration of the local economy into the wider market economy. For over 100 years, from the 1660s to the 1770s, sheep-farming dominated agriculture in Tipperary. This was due to a combination of the cattle acts of the 1660s and market trends, and in the decades after the Restoration sheep-farming was exploited by the new settlers. Pastoral farming also benefited from the leasing policy of landlords who were prepared to let large grazing farms, in some cases as much as 8,000 acres, especially in the south of the county.

Some of the best known of these head-tenants (thanks to the writing of Arthur Young) were catholic. The means whereby such families as the MacCarthys of Springhouse (Kilshane) retained such amounts of land in spite of penal legislation is examined by Dr Power elsewhere in this book. Another reason for the concentration on pastoral farming was the fact that such lands were tithe-free from the 1730s. Then as now profit defined economic development and grazing allowed head-tenants pay their head rents, while leaving a substantial surplus for themselves.

Serious food shortages in the 1750s led the government to introduce subsidies on the inland carriage of grain and flour to Dublin, and in time there was a move to cereal production, mainly



on the part of small and medium-sized farmers rather than the large graziers. By 1776 Tipperary was receiving 17% of the total subsidies paid. Commercial cereal growing was most intense along the River Suir and gave rise to the spread of flour mills. The ending of the subsidy system in 1797 did not damage the strength of arable farming; the ongoing wars with France from 1793 to 1815 created a whole new demand and vastly increased prices.

Given the importance of sheep farming in the late seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, the establishment of woollen manufacturing in Carrick and Clonmel was a reflection



Thomas P. Power

of the spirit of capitalist enterprise on the part of some of the new settlers. As with the cattle acts of the 1660s, an act of 1699 prohibiting the export of woollen goods from Ireland was an example of England looking to its own interests and forced the Irish industry to concentrate on the home market. Carrick in particular developed as a textile town and, with some setbacks, the industry flourished in the county up to the 1770s. The contraction in sheep numbers in the latter part of the century was part of the reason why the industry declined.

One of the sources made much use of by the writer is the papers of the Scully family, now in the N.L.I. The number of sheep shorn by Scully of Kilfeacle declined from 2,800 in 1786 to 1,150 in 1808. With a reduction in wool supply, its price increased threefold between 1776 and 1806. With this downturn in the industry, a town like Carrick was especially badly hit.

With the decline in the woollen industry, Clonmel in particular was able to retain a large degree of prosperity because of the growth in the grain trade and flour milling, due in large measure to the involvement of the Quaker community. The 1770s was a decade of transition, with an eightfold increase in the volume of flour sent to Dublin between 1771-2 and 1791-2. By this latter date there were 47 mills in operation. Related to this economic development was the growth of towns and the writer's ranking of Tipperary's towns is of interest in that it provides a standard against which their subsequent economic history can be measured.

Clonmel was the largest, followed in order by Carrick, Cashel, Roscrea, Thurles and Nenagh, each about half as important as Clonmel in size and population. Tipperary, Cahir, Clogheen and Templemore were each about one quarter or less in size. The substantial growth of Tipperary town in the nineteenth century was mainly due to the development of the dairying industry generally and butter production in particular. Given the present importance of dairying in the county, readers of this book will be surprised to learn of its relative unimportance in the eighteenth century.

This work has the term 'society' in its title and has a chapter headed 'Landed Society', but it does not deal with a topic of considerable interest to many readers, namely, the social history of this upper crust. The focus of interest on the part of the writer is economic, not social. No reference is made to such nineteenth century writers as O'Reilly, Maunsell or Walsh, for example, each of whom had interesting things to say about the high jinks of an earlier generation of Tipperary bucks. Dr Power does, however, give a comprehensive account of the



changes in land ownership brought about by the Cromwellians and during the subsequent Restoration and Williamite periods.

The key figure in this was the duke of Ormonde (from 1661) who used his very considerable political power to consolidate the interests of his own extended family. Catholics who supported the Jacobite cause in the county did not fare adversely as a result of the Williamite land settlement. The writer uses T.U. Sadleir's account of the 1775 Kilbooy manuscript in order to construct "a four-tier structure for the landed class", based on the incomes given for 130 named individuals. This had at its apex a handful of very wealthy landowners such as the earl of Clanwilliam (£14,000 p.a.) and at the base, a large group of well-off freeholders.

Using data from 1816, the writer shows that the county was very wealthy, having a higher proportion of farmers holding more highly valued lands than elsewhere. The writer postulates that at the beginning of the eighteenth century the landed class in the county consisted of about 100 families, increasing to 150 by the 1770s and to about 200 by the close of the century. To this book's Tipperary readership it would have been of great interest to have these families named and, for example, the ramifications of their marriage alliances examined. But (as stated above) the book is not aimed at a specifically Tipperary readership.

The increase in the number of landed families owed a great deal to the sale of three large estates in the first half of the century: Ormonde, Everard and Dunboyne. The Ormonde family had accumulated enormous debts, nearly £100,000 when the first duke died in 1688. Among the families who took advantage of the resultant sale of lands were Moore (Chancellorstown), Sadlier, Langley, Baker, Cleere, Dawson, Dancer, Mathew and, establishing themselves as large landed proprietors for the first time, families such as Lowe, Carleton, Carden, Latham, Toler, Roe, Bayly and Armstrong.

The disposal of the Everard property introduced two important families to the county, the Bartons with their background in trade and the O'Callaghans with a background in the law. This latter family prospered in the county, obtaining a peerage in 1785 (Lismore), and by the mid nineteenth century were the county's largest landowners with nearly 35,000 acres. The sale of the property of the catholic family of Dunboyne (Butler) was the making of the Clonmel merchant John Bagwell, a descendant of whom, Richard Bagwell of Marlfield, was a prominent apologist for the landed class at the end of the nineteenth century when their position was most under attack.

Rental income increased during the century, being most marked in the 1750s and 1760s, but it was likely that due to the pattern of leases those holding land from these landowners benefited most. Family settlements absorbed a good deal of landlord income, though this of course very much depended on individual family circumstances. Little income was spent on estate improvements. Some landlords such as the Mathews of Thomastown spent lavishly on their mansion and demesne, though the writer seems to be of two minds regarding the impact of this on the family's indebtedness (pp. 97-98).

Among the families to benefit from the sale of part of the Mathew estate in the early years of the nineteenth century were a number of catholics such as Nicholas Maher, Daniel Kinahan and James Scully. Scully also purchased land from the indebted estate of the earl of Clanwilliam, situated near Thomastown. The main beneficiaries of this sale were the MacCarthys of Springhouse (not McCarthy), who purchased the fee simple of their estate.

One of the most interesting sections in this book is the writer's examination of the way in which catholic families like Butler of Cahir, Ryan of Inch and the aforementioned MacCarthy of Springhouse all managed (by various stratagems) to hang on to their lands. Much depended on the good fortune of there being a single male heir, or at least brothers who agreed with each other. When John Ryan of Inch died in 1723, he left a single male heir. This latter died in 1767



leaving three sons, two of whom were abroad, and there was no partition of the property. (Surprisingly, from a publisher like Clarendon Press, the index has no 'Rs', so that one is presented with a phenomenon – Tipperary without Ryans!)

Other devices allowing catholics hold their lands included assignment of estates to friendly protestants, preferential leasing arrangements and, when all else failed, conversion. In this latter regard, the experience of the Mathew family was "crucial". The Thurles branch had a succession of three single male heirs, the last of whom did not convert until 1740. This allowed him to inherit both the Thurles and Thomastown estates, following the death of the heir to the latter property. An earlier heir to the Thomastown estate had converted in 1702. The Annfield branch remained catholic and avoided partition due to the agreement of the younger sons. Thomas Mathew of Annfield converted in 1755 and five years later inherited the property of the Thomastown and Thurles branches when George Mathew died without a male heir.

The chapter on land tenure perhaps sounds as if it might be dry and technical and, while a simple explanation of the legal terms involved would have been a useful concession to the non-specialist reader, the story of the build-up and exploitation of the county's estates is of great interest. Such was the economic climate at the close of the Williamite War that landlords had difficulty attracting tenants. In fact much land remained untenanted. The Ormonde estate was more successful than others, but the price paid was the permanent alienation of considerable amounts of land through the granting of leases in perpetuity.

Among the families who took advantage of this and became established as landowners in their own right were the Bunburys of Kilfeacle and the Southcotes of Greenane (not Southcoot). The difficulty in getting tenants meant that landlords were glad to have or keep catholic tenants who, like the MacCarthys on the estate of the earl of Clanwilliam, were limited to 31-year leases. Eventually the success of such families and the support of sympathetic landlords like Mathew of Thomastown produced a protestant backlash.

The situation in the second half of the century was different because of greater prosperity. Land values rose and there was more competition for access to land. The 1780s was a crucial decade. Catholics were allowed to take longer leases, and those tenants who secured leases were well placed to benefit from the agricultural prosperity in the period up to 1815. In retrospect it was clear that it was not to a landlord's advantage that a good deal of land came on the market for letting during that decade when there was a temporary downturn in the economy.

During this same period, with the appointment of professional agents, landlords tried to manage their property more scientifically. Examples of this new breed were various members of the Cooper family of Killenure. (The diary of Samuel Cooper, used as the basis for this reviewer's article in the 1993 *Tipperary Historical Journal*, was not available to Dr Power). Even the most diligent of agents found it virtually impossible to prevent subletting, so that land temporarily out of a head landlord's control proliferated tenants in spite of contractual prohibition.

Probably the most powerful legacy from the eighteenth century was the association of Tipperary with agrarian violence, an association that exercised a powerful influence on subsequent public opinion. The various eighteenth-century episodes of this violence have been investigated by, among others, the American historian James Donnelly. Dr Power gives a masterly synthesis of the four episodes of this violence, as Tipperary was affected, in 1760-6, 1770-6, 1785-8 and 1799-1803. These outbreaks after 1760 are related to the unequal effects of economic change and the move to cereal cultivation which was more marked in some parts of the county.



A variety of issues animated various combinations, some issues being of consequence to a limited social class while others such as tithe aroused widespread opposition. For peasants, conacre rents, access to common land and employment generally mattered; for farmers rent levels and eviction mattered. Regarding tithe, the fact that potatoes were not exempt affected the peasants, just as tithe on cereals angered their betters. Rubbing the faces of both groups in it was the fact that grassland was exempt.

Two important locational factors are identified, namely, the building of new turnpike roads which caused dislocation, and ease of access, which latter benefit was used by outside labourers, especially from the south-west of the country, whose competition for work aroused resentment. While the story of these disturbances spread over several decades is of interest, much more valuable is the understanding offered to the reader as to why the county was such a cynosure of violent protest.

A more comprehensive discussion regarding the impact of this violent protest on urban centres would be of interest. For example, in 1786 a landlord from outside Tipperary town described large numbers of the inhabitants of that town being sworn into a combination. James Donnelly, writing about the Rightboys of the late 1780s, makes the point that a large number of the movement's leaders lived in towns, citing for example, Michael "Prince" Bourke of Tipperary town. Incidentally, Dr. Power makes no reference to the work of Dr Maria Luddy on agrarian violence in County Tipperary during the eighteenth century (M.A., U.C.C. 1985).

In the context of popular memory, no single event in the eighteenth century had a greater impact than the execution of Fr Nicholas Sheehy on 3 May 1766. This story has been treated by a number of writers, most notably by Canon Burke in his *History of Clonmel* published in 1907. Dr Power's treatment provides the clearest explanation why Sheehy died. In the early part of the century protestants appear to have been rather casual towards the enforcement of the penal laws, not least because of the sheer number of catholics. From time to time protestants stirred themselves, for example when there was a real or imagined threat from the French and/or Jacobites.

The Mathew family, identified with the catholic cause, had been involved in county politics earlier in the century but had been uninvolved from 1736 until 1761, when Thomas Mathew stood as a candidate. His bitter opponent was Thomas Maude of Dundrum, a committed protestant who promoted protestant settlement on his estate. Of the three candidates in the 1761 election for two seats, Maude came third but won the seat on petition. Though catholics could not vote or be elected, they could influence the outcome of elections by nominal conversion by influencing protestant freeholders, some of whom were their tenants, and by attempting to vote when unqualified. Thomas Mathew himself had only converted in 1755, the sincerity of his conversion being questioned by Maude.

For protestants like Maude, everywhere he looked in the 1760s catholics appeared both assertive and threatening. By then some catholics had become wealthy, and attempts to introduce legislation allowing catholics invest in mortgages on land seemed further evidence of the kind of influence such catholics as MacCarthy of Springhouse could exert. This family had links with influential catholic merchants in Waterford and in France, and seeming to confirm Maude's nightmare was MacCarthy's close ties to the Mathew interest.

One consequence of the push against catholics in the period in question was the rise in the number of conversions to protestantism in the 1760s – 90 Tipperary people between 1762 and 1765. In spite of this (or because of it), there was always the suspicion about sincerity. Nevertheless, refusal to conform made some catholics marked men. Fr Sheehy's family connections, together with the outbreak of Whiteboy activity in his parish, marked him out for special attention.



Dr Power argues that militant protestantism over-reached itself by its activities in the 1760s and became discredited. If by this he means the lunatic fringe, then he is correct; but subsequent history surely indicates that protestantism in its political manifestation still had teeth. One of the conundrums of Tipperary history, given the willingness of some of its people to use violence as a means of protest in both the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the relative calm that marked Tipperary in the fateful year of 1798. The key word is "relative". In comparison with Wexford for example, the county was calm.

This is not to say that there were no incidents. Early in the year, for example, there were "pitched battles" at Dundrum and near Holy Cross. On 2 April the entire county was proclaimed. This had some success; nevertheless, in July there were potentially dangerous episodes around Cashel and at Slievenamon. Also, of course, throughout that year there was the zealous work of the sheriff Judkin Fitzgerald, whose excesses have attracted too much attention from later writers at the expense of identifying more pertinent underlying factors.

According to Dr Power, the key factor was the change in the attitude in the county since the 1760s, allowing recognition of the social and economic aspirations of the catholic establishment and thus keeping members of this elite from leadership positions in the United Irishmen. As with much else in the county, there was something of a north-south divide, with influential protestants like Prittie and Toler in the north of the county opposing concessions to catholics, while liberal protestants such as the Mathews and Lords Lismore and Donoughmore in the south supported concessions.

The writer sees the opportunist support for such concessions from the likes of John Bagwell as evidence of the strength of the catholic position, at least in the south of the county. Certainly, concessions were made to catholics; but was it not more likely that the difficulty with which concessions were extracted alienated as much, as if not more, than it reconciled? The writer makes reference to a period of rural unrest in the years 1799-1803 in the context of rural unrest generally, but does not adequately tie it into his discussion of 1798.

In so far as this book has heroes, various members of the Mathew family fit the bill. In spite of their adoption of protestantism, they remained partial to the catholic cause politically. One of the fascinating things about this book is the extent to which Dr Power has uncovered so much information about the personalities that dominated Tipperary life in the eighteenth century, a period which, before the publication of this book, denied easy understanding.

The fact that *Land, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary* is comprehensively sourced will be a boon to subsequent writers curious about aspects of their own locality in the period. The book is well edited, though the word 'ancestors' as used in the first paragraph on p. 18 is hardly correct. Over the past number of years a large amount of material has been published on the history of the county, but nothing as important as the book under review. It is expensive and unfortunately is unlikely to be published in paperback. However, no one with a serious interest in the history of Tipperary county should be without a copy of this book.

Denis G. Marnane

Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology through Irish Case Studies. By Marilyn Silverman and P. H. Gilliver. (Columbia University Press, New York, 1992). 428 pp. IR£14.85.

There are two ways of approaching this book; first, as a discussion of ways of looking at and understanding the past, and second, as a wide-ranging collection of case studies of the pasts of



different places within Ireland. The difference between these and standard historical case studies is that they were undertaken as ways of illustrating a variety of approaches to studying the past, especially for historical anthropologists. To help them in their soulsearching, the anthropologists met with a number of practitioners from other disciplines to engage in discourse about their mutual interests in examining the Irish past. One of the contributors to this discussion was Professor W J Smyth, the historical geographer from University College Cork, who is well known to readers of this Journal.

There are important themes recurring in the Introduction and in some of the articles, which find significant echoes in the work of Smyth and others. One of these is the theme of continuity – the extent to which there are threads linking elements of life and landscape today with the past. Another is the significance of place and locality in studies of the past.

Professor Smyth's essay is entitled "Making the documents of conquest speak: the transformation of property, society and settlement in seventeenth-century counties Tipperary and Kilkenny". Some of this will be familiar to readers of *Tipperary – History and Society* (1985) and *Kilkenny – History and Society* (1990). He reviews much of his earlier work in the context of the sources and what they can tell us about the structure of settlement and society and the changes which took place following the Cromwellian settlement.

The essay is valuable for teachers and students of the period and the place. The Civil Survey, Down Survey, Transplantation certificates, Book of Survey and Distribution, the Poll taxes of 1660s (including the 1659 "census"), the hearth taxes and the Ormond deeds are all described and assessed succinctly. As documents of conquest, he notes how they simplified the earlier world of complex ethnic networks, how all Gaelic and Old English elites were henceforth classified as "Irish Papists". The documents also simplified a complex landscape of medieval legacies, reducing it to its skeletal parish and townland framework.

In spite of this, Smyth's informed and imaginative use of the sources gives us a rich analysis of "this deeply humanised part of Ireland". It can be broken down into an Old English world, a Gaelic world, the hybrid worlds in between, and the eventual intrusion of the new English Cromwellian world of the 1650s and after.

The great distinctiveness of this region hinged on the role of the Ormond territories. The Gaelic world was largely gone out of Kilkenny in the face of Ormond attrition by 1640: It survived strongly, however, in north Tipperary; indeed, Smyth points to the effect of the "Butler shield" in protecting the Gaelic frontier here from infiltration by the new English of the midlands plantations, unlike many other parts of Ireland in the first half of the seventeenth century, which succumbed to commercial infiltration by New English opportunists from plantation areas.

Smyth's major contribution to Irish historical geography is in his reconstruction of the property units to provide a basis for understanding social and settlement structures. This is also perhaps his most controversial contribution – where some of the anthropologists, and not a few of his fellow geographers have difficulty keeping up with him! He uses his intimate knowledge of the nooks and crannies of the region in the 19th century and today to illuminate further the shadows and silences of the 17th century sources. He also uses his 17th century sources to speculate fearlessly backwards and forwards in time, a characteristic which has always added excitement to his teaching. The tax returns of the 1660s, he suggests, highlight the resilience of "the hidden urban Ireland ... these old and battered towns had weathered the storms of the medieval period and were still in place to benefit from the upswing in the economy from the mid-fifteenth century onward".

He comes up with a threefold division of the region's settlement – the manorial region of



south Tipperary and mid Kilkenny, a zone of old and new settlements running from the baronies of Clanwilliam to Ikerrin and in north and south Kilkenny (which comprised hills and bogs, gaelic and old English legacies) and, finally, poorer marginal and long-established Gaelic areas, with a weak nucleated settlement structure, in north and west of Tipperary. Using the Down and Civil surveys, hearth tax records, and even aerial photography and oral records, he constructs a model of settlement that suggests centripetal tendencies in Gaelic areas with their fragmented and dispersed pattern of landownership; and centrifugal trends in feudal districts, where villages of 20 hearths can be discerned, based often on a landowner's tower house and/or parish centre. The village culture of Kilkenny, still strong in the south, continues in the folklore of the north of the county to the present day, pointing to the presence of many deserted "streets" and settlements.

Smyth finally assesses the transformations that took place in landscape and society following the Cromwellian settlement, the cause of most of the surveys and tax returns undertaken in the mid-seventeenth century. The most radical change was the takeover of the towns as economic focal points and the extensive property transfers in the countrysides.

Most successful Cromwellian takeovers were in north and middle Kilkenny, but the old world of the Butlers reasserted itself in the post-Cromwellian period, and this – in conjunction with a significant amount of absenteeism among the new elite – meant that many aspects of landscape and settlement survived. Absenteeism meant absence of landlord houses, demesnes and villages, absence also of Protestant head tenants, and the persistence of "old ways of managing territories and societies".

The distinctive approach of the geographer is apparent here, one which will appeal to many local historians. Indeed, much will be grist to the mill of local history, littered as it is with detailed local topographical references – often baffling to a "foreigner" from south Ulster! Smyth constantly keeps his eye on the landscape, which is as important a document as the meticulous surveys of the Commonwealth where "old settlement centres buried under landlord demesnes." in north and mid-Kilkenny can be detected. Property units, he argues, provided crucial territorial structures that shaped the location and character of most human activities – a fact missed by most historians and anthropologists.

The other notable feature notable about Smyth's essay which generally characterises the geographical approach is the placement of the Tipperary/Kilkenny region in a broader regional and national context. The anthropologists debate the importance of local studies, building up and testing broader concepts at micro local level. Gulliver and Silverman, for example, have examined the minutiae of life in Thomastown.

Many of the processes of change in 17th and 18th century Ireland, however, were universal, expressed through local agents like landowners, tenants, merchants, not to mention increasingly as the century progressed, parish priests. The estates model is the best example of this. The park and house, with possibly a neat estate village, were found everywhere, with local variations. The market town, the parish centre, the chapel village, indeed the parish itself and of course the townland, are all structures to be found throughout the country.

There are other interesting case studies in the book; Silverman and Gulliver, authors of *In the valley of the Nore*, will be familiar to some readers. Gulliver has written an important study of the relations between shopkeepers and farmers in south Kilkenny since 1841, exposing many conflicts with the usual model of shopkeeper-farmer relations – a classic anthropological study which seems to focus on the unique characteristics of a local area. Its future value will depend on similar studies being undertaken elsewhere. Silverman looks at the salmon fisheries of the Nore in the 19th century and the loss of customary rights as the fishing became privatised.



In the end, out of the broadranging issues discussed in the book one can select the themes of local case studies and continuity as being of most significance. Most of us in Ireland have been brought up on a diet of recurring discontinuities, with an emphasis always on a national picture of sweeping changes. Smyth's article especially distinguishes the geographer's approach. This relies on an interest in the landscape. By studying landscapes we are made aware of the slowness of change and the carry-over from earlier periods, essentially continuities.

Events may be sudden, even cataclysmic; but they get bogged down in the detail of the landscape. The most cataclysmic event of the 1650s was undoubtedly the proposed transplantation to Connacht. Its draconian drawing-board efficiency was modified in the real world, however, where a great many of the Butlers, for example, who were scheduled for transplantation, survived.

In the landscape, as Smyth points out, many of the estates and property boundaries, not to mention houses, villages, churches and mills survived – albeit in many cases with different owners. While the placenames were 'englished' in many cases, they were still essentially the medieval legacy. There were certainly many "lost worlds" of the 17th century, but the lessons of geography are that a great deal survived – much more than many historians formerly realised.

There is a great deal of truth in Gulliver and Silverman's opening discussion on how we create history to fit the ideologies of the present. We have been taught a history full of national events of great moment, and our local pasts are made fitting in with "the Cromwellian confiscations", "the 1798 rising", and the "1916 rising". Most of these events had few reflections in Thomastown, in Kilkenny, for example, or (dare I say) in Clogheen-Burncourt. Life in these local landscapes moved slowly, absorbing and shrugging off the big happenings. Trees were cut and planted, fields were fenced and cropped, houses built and slowly decayed, villages grew and slowly declined.

As Smyth says, in a final schedule for future research, "we need to have a much greater appreciation of the *terrain* (not just physical but infrastructural and cultural) in which people in these societies worked and made a living. We need to know more about where the populations actually lived, about the lie of the roads and about communications generally, about the role of the towns, about the nature of agricultural production, about trading patterns and linkages... before we can provide a fuller picture of seventeenth-century Irish society and its transformation".

P. J. Duffy

Mullinahone Co-op: The first one hundred years. By Denis Foley. (Mullinahone Co-operative Dairy Society Ltd., 1993). 178 pp. IR£10.00.

The oldest co-op in Ireland, Mullinahone Co-operative Dairy Society, celebrated its centenary with this publication by Denis Foley, manager from 1945 to 1982. In the so-called era of "big business", the continued existence of this small independent co-op, owned and controlled by local farmers, and with only 53 milk suppliers but a trade network reaching as far as Japan, is something of an enigma. These facts alone should make anybody studying Irish rural economy and society in the twentieth century interested in this book.

A book such as this is invaluable because for almost half the period under review it is an eye-



witness account of how the society responded to postwar pressures for change within the Irish dairy industry, and how this response affected social conditions in a small Irish rural community. There are also valuable anecdotes that seemingly only the manager can provide; see Foley's account of the auditor on p. 74, and of the "over-run" problem on p. 55.

There are nine chapters in this book, and a foreword, a short introduction, and a lengthy appendix. The foreword by Patrick Bolger, author of *The Irish Co-operative Movement*, notes the lessons to be learned from Mullinahone's history in the context of contemporary rural development initiatives. Following this, each chapter is subdivided into sections of roughly 2-3 pages which make for easy reading. Helpful notes are included at the end of each section.

The opening chapter discusses landownership and rural economies in nineteenth-century Ireland, butter-making methods and the birth of the Irish co-operative movement under Sir Horace Plunkett. The following two chapters chart the often turbulent early days of the co-op up to the 1930s. Foley's source-material includes the early committee meeting minutes-books as well as correspondence between the co-op and Plunkett's umbrella body for the Irish co-ops, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. It all paints a fascinating picture of an embryonic rural co-op bedevilled by a local proprietary creamery, farmers' opposition to butter testing, managerial incompetence, and the infiltration of non-co-operative persons. Mullinahone's experience also presents a good example of the occasionally dictatorial Catholic Church influence on the early co-ops.

Chapters four, five and six discuss the fortunes of the co-op from the economically depressed 1930s to the amalgamation debates of the 1960s. These chapters provide evidence of the innovative spirit, the willingness to experiment, and the determination to succeed that is responsible for the current success of this small co-op. An important figure (besides Denis Foley) in these respects is Jerry Barrett, the agricultural advisor appointed by the society in 1959.

There were failures (the "White Elephant" steam engine and threshing mill, the attempts at sheep, pig and blackcurrant farming); but there many successes too – agricultural machinery, cattle ear-tags, the invention of the automatic cluster remover, the "Seven Acres" farm. Given these attempts to make the co-op mean more to the local farmers than an outlet for their milk, it is not surprising that the Mullinahone committee were (and still are) anti-amalgamation when the issue surfaced, first with South Tipperary Farmers in 1967, and again in Avonmore in 1973.

The last three chapters include the latter theme, and there are sections on the society's entry into diesel distribution as well as their return in 1985 (since 1919) to cheesemaking, its success not presenting them with any worries regarding the imminent liberalisation of world trade. The forty-page appendix is an excellent collection of facts and figures on managers, employees, milk suppliers, milk prices, committee meetings, and co-op-related social events extending back over the last hundred years.

My criticisms are few. The map on p. 10 could have been presented better, as Mullinahone is poorly located to those from outside the counties of Tipperary and Kilkenny. Likewise, the graph on p. 164 is rather sloppy. However, the timely appearance of this book, during a period of stagnation in many an Irish rural community, serves to indicate the opportunities for regeneration through local self-help and business enterprise that exist on their own doorsteps.



Denis Foley



One hopes that this book will achieve a high degree of readership. It is an important contribution to Irish co-operative and social history, and one on which all concerned with its publications, most notably Denis Foley, are to be congratulated.

William Jenkins

Past Perceptions: The Prehistoric Archaeology of South-West Ireland Ireland. Edited by Elizabeth Shee Twohig and Margaret Ronayne. (Cork University Press, 1993). 183 pp. £17.95.

This book is the published proceedings of a conference held in University College Cork in February 1992. The editors are to be congratulated on the speedy appearance of the volume and also on the quality of its contents and production. The first time around, this reviewer read through the book at one sitting, something that cannot often be achieved with archaeology books!

It is a book of major importance for our understanding of Irish prehistory and because of its regional perspective. Anything said below should be seen in the light of that statement. The eighteen contributions can be divided into three sections – eleven papers that look in detail at various aspects of the prehistory of south-west Ireland, three that deal with different archaeological surveys (the Co. Cork archaeological survey and the wider implications of archaeological survey in Ireland; the Co. Limerick Sites and Monuments Record; the South West Kerry Archaeological Field Survey) and four that focus on our perception of the archaeological record and what it tells us about the past.

The south-west of Ireland is a region where major advances are being made in our understanding of prehistory through archaeological research, and many are documented here. At the risk of being invidious, it seems to this writer that the paper that gets closest to the themes discussed in the introductory and concluding statements about how we should be looking at the past is William O'Brien's paper on "Aspects of Wedge Tomb Chronology".

Here, arising from the excavation of two wedge tombs and an associated programme of radiocarbon dating, the author links the specific use of monuments with their long-term role and significance for people and society. The striking continuity seen at these sites in terms of human activity is a reminder of the importance of places in structuring human behaviour.

This is taken up in many of the other papers, but the focus more often seems to be on documenting the nature and problems of particular aspects of the archaeological record. As this is the first time that a volume like this has been produced for south-west Ireland, we should not be surprised if the overall impression given is the richness and diversity of the archaeological record, setting right false perceptions of the region being a marginal one in prehistory.

Writing this review for a Tipperary publication I was struck, however, by the varying definitions of what constitutes south-west Ireland. To some of the authors it meant Cork and Kerry, to others the whole of Munster. So, for example, sites in counties Limerick and Tipperary are central to Martin Doody's consideration of Bronze Age ceremonial sites in Cork and Kerry. While recognising that the question of the identity of south-west Ireland as a region is very much an open one and that there may have been changes over time in the perception of this region, it does make it difficult to address such issues if, for example, in some contributions Lough Gur can be seen as a vitally important settlement focus while in others the ceremonial monuments at Lough Gur are not considered as relevant or even within south-west Ireland.

The issue of how south-west Ireland articulates with the rest of the island is also one that



might have been addressed more frequently, and that would have benefited discussion. Thus the assertion by Ann O'Sullivan and John Sheehan that Irish rock art is predominantly a phenomenon of peninsular Kerry may be true in some numerical sense, but it belies the extent of the distribution of rock art in Ireland and its importance in understanding the prehistory of other regions such as Co. Donegal and north Leinster, particularly in north Louth and the adjoining area of Co. Monaghan.

The four papers that deal specifically with perceptions of the past, two by the editors and two by Professors Bradley and Woodman, are very useful in reminding us about the complexities of interpreting the archaeological record; but there is no overview of what all this new information means. While agreeing with the editors that there can and should be many perceptions of the past, there is now also the exciting prospect and challenge of being able to present an interpretation of how prehistory was created by people in a very distinctive way over several millennia in south-west Ireland. This book provides the basis for attempting any such interpretation.

Gabriel Cooney

The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion. Edited by D. Dickson, D. Keogh and K. Whelan. (Lilliput Press, Dublin). 378 pp. £25 hardback, £15 paperback.

This volume, attractively produced and – in paperback – modestly priced, displays current scholarship on the 1790s. The 22 contributors range from the veteran R. B. McDowell, who distills the wisdom of his many decades in writing on Burke, to the young on the threshold of promising careers.

The essays concentrate on the intellectual genealogies, linkages and characteristics of the United Irishmen; on their local contexts, notably in Ulster and Dublin; strengths and weaknesses in organization, leadership and strategy; and on the extent of continuity between the activities in the early and later 1790s. One or two adversaries of the radicals, such as Fitzgibbon and Archbishop Troy, are re-examined.

Some contributions, avowedly miniaturist and technical, will chiefly delight (or anger) other specialists. Several, however, treat important subjects with such panache that all can savour them. Thus, in the opening chapter, Tom Bartlett warms up readers with a sparkling rehabilitation of Wolfe Tone. Utilizing recent writing on republicanism and civic humanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he argues persuasively that Tone, responsive to American and French ideas, decisively repudiated British sovereignty. Similarly, David Dickson traces, exactly and convincingly, how topical developments in France and England, this time in the shape of Paine's provocative publications, caught and then heightened the radical mood in Ireland.

Dickson's piece introduces a theme common to several others, the importance of the printed word, usually imported, and both the extent and the limits of its reach into a society still largely rural and in which levels of literacy may have been falling rather than rising. With equal authority, Marianne Elliott and Bill Crawford analyse respectively the socio-economic conditions which would impel the aggrieved catholics of southern Ulster towards mass protest and the prosperous traders and professionals of Belfast into constitutional complaint.

Historians continue to be fascinated by the most striking aspect of the decade, mass politicization. Some stress its suddenness and novelty; others the links with earlier stirrings. The ancestry of the beliefs which edged the United Irishmen into activism is traced



painstakingly for the generality of Ulster Presbyterians by Peter Tesch; by Ian McBride, who finds behind William Drennan the rational and Scots-educated new light presbyterians; by Jim Smyth, through remarking the numerous masonic lodges revived in the 1780s; and – in one of the most original essays – by Jacqueline Hill, through unravelling the protracted squabbles of the privileged municipal corporation of Dublin.

The book successfully shifts the traditional perspectives away from Dublin Castle and Westminster. Unfortunately, no one chooses to consider the prevalent philosophies within the ruling ascendancies, other than through the cases of Fitzgibbon and Troy, or the impact of those – notably the clergy of the catholic and presbyterian churches and the established Church of Ireland – who formed opinion by disowning insurrection and upholding authority and hierarchies.

More regrettably, we learn little of what happened in Munster, Connacht or the Midlands. A conspicuous absentee from the volume is Tom Power, whose local knowledge might have corrected this imbalance. As it is, the traditions of agrarian and rural disaffection are assumed rather than discussed. A couple of the most arresting contributions do set their subjects in a longer context. Nancy Curtin shows not only how the wish among the leaders of the United Irishmen simultaneously to preserve secrecy and inspire mass participation hampered the movement, but also how the energizing of Ulster prefigured the later campaign for catholic emancipation and of physical force republicanism.

Kevin Whelan, with characteristic verve, explores the tension between the secularizing and mainly anglophone rationalism popularized by Drennan, Paine and Tone, and the indigenous, often oral and Irish-speaking traditions of disenchantment and alienation, and connects it with contemporary Europe, where elite and popular cultures similarly diverged. Although other studies in the book challenge his contention that late eighteenth-century Ireland possessed only one intellectual current (the others, presumably, were un-Irish), he rightly insists on the powerful counter-revolutionary attitudes among the rural population. Furthermore, in sketching so suggestively some of the realities of provincial life, he indicates where future research may best be directed: into exact analysis of the variegated patterns of settlement, occupation, religion and wealth; into recovering the memories and habits of protest, disorder, panic and prophecy.

Let us hope when those sign-posts are followed, Tipperary, as well as Dublin and Ulster, will beckon to the curious. Until then, however, the latter can sample the diversity and quality of recent research in this excellent collection.

Toby Barnard

Cashel & Emly Heritage. By Walter G. Skehan. (Abbey Books, Holycross, 1993). 465 pp. £10.95.

Recent times have witnessed a notable upsurge of interest in local history throughout the entire country. Even our centralized educational system has come to acknowledge and encourage the study of the local environment. Formerly it was left to the local priest or teacher to kindle interest in the history of the local scene, many of whom helped preserve much that is valuable for posterity.

Few, however, could equal either the quantity or quality of the written legacy of material which was bequeathed to the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly by the late Father Walter G. Skehan, who died in 1971. In editing and presenting *Cashel and Emly Heritage* Dr. Thomas Morris has made available to the public a small but important part of that rich legacy.

This book contains biographical notes on all the parish priests of Cashel and Emly since the



beginning of the 18th century. In some cases there are notes on some of their predecessors of the previous century or earlier. The entire Skehan Index contains many hundreds of additional entries on diocesan and religious priests who served in the archdiocese without becoming parish priests. A second volume containing these entries is badly needed.

Understandably, the biographical notes focus primarily on the lives and work of the priests. But the interest is not narrowly clerical. The book provides a valuable insight into many aspects of parish and local life generally. It is an irreplaceable source for the religious, social, political and cultural history of the parishes of the archdiocese during the past three centuries or more. The biographies also furnish valuable evidence for a broader assessment of the contribution of the Church and clergy to Irish life during this period.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this historical source material for the study of the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly and of the role of the clergy in Irish life. One can only regret that many of those who today choose to see only what is negative in the contribution of the Catholic Church to Irish life in recent centuries do not take the trouble properly to inform themselves about such matters.

The evidence these biographies testifies to solid commitment and solid achievement by the clergy as they helped a poor, deprived and wronged people assert their rights in the slow and painful struggle towards justice and self-respect. Even in contemporary Ireland few fair-minded people can doubt the continuing energetic commitment of its clergy to the welfare of their people and their communities. History, one suspects, will be kinder in its verdict on their achievement than many latter-day critics.

There is no ideal way to present biographical material such as is in this work. Dr. Morris has opted for presentation according to parishes. This approach renders the material easily accessible to those for whom the book is primarily intended – local historians and those interested in the history of their native parish. Such presentation more than compensates for partial duplication of entries where a particular priest served as pastor in more than one parish. In editing these biographical notes Dr. Morris has updated the work of Father Skehan by the inclusion of the biographies of priests who have died since 1971.

Cashel and Emly Heritage is a timely and valuable source-book for the history of the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly and its parishes. It is, above all, a human story. A multitude of characters, diverse and colourful in their own right, cross the stage as the story unfolds. Much of life is reflected in these pages with its triumphs and tragedies, its achievements and failures. This book is testimony to the rich diversity of personalities who have served in the archdiocese and whose memories and efforts deserve to be recorded.

This is a book to be periodically sampled, rather than read from cover to cover. It is a book which will whet the appetite and encourage the reader to return again and again to delve into its many entries of the colourful and varied characters who have helped shape the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly and its parishes in the past three centuries. At £10.95 it represents very good value for money and is recommended as a wise and worthwhile investment by anyone interested in the history of the archdiocese.

Pobal Ailbe, the people of Cashel and Emly, have much to be grateful to Father Walter Skehan for his industry in researching so much of this material. Our indebtedness also extends to Dr. Thomas Morris for editing and updating the material and presenting it in attractive and accessible form. All interested in the history of Cashel and Emly look forward to a second volume including the remaining hundreds of biographies of priests of the archdiocese.

Christy O'Dwyer



A Fool for Christ: the Priest with the Trailer. By James A. Feehan. Mercier Press, Cork, 1993. 160 pp. £7.99.

This biography of the late Fr. James Meehan will be welcomed by his friends and acquaintances and by all who would seek to understand the life, work and contribution of a priest in late 20th century Ireland. The story of James Meehan is recorded in these pages by the person best qualified to do so, his friend and colleague of almost half a century.

James Meehan was a colourful and multi-faceted character. Behind his pleasantly roguish exterior there was a deeply spiritual and committed priest who devoted his entire energy to the temporal and spiritual welfare of his people. In this well written and readable biography the author succeeds admirably in providing an insight into his subject, who was undoubtedly a legend in his own lifetime.

The story of James Meehan takes us from his boyhood days in Clonmore, Co. Tipperary, through his College days in Thurles and Maynooth and thence through his various pastoral placements from his first appointment in Glasgow to his final posting in New Inn, Co. Tipperary. We learn much about James Meehan from the colourful stories and anecdotes which abound in this biography. Many are destined to become part of the lore of the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly.

This biography is based primarily on the personal experiences and recollections of those who knew James Meehan well. In capitalizing on these recollections while the memory is still fresh the author has succeeded in depicting the essential James Meehan - a man with a generous and warm heart, a priest of simple but profound faith, a lover of people, especially the poor and disadvantaged. Apart from his devotion to the ordinary parochial ministry James Meehan showed exceptional care for the travelling community. His concern for the wider Church was manifested by his interest in, support for and visits to the missionary fields of Africa and South America.

Like every prophet in his own time and place James Meehan had his critics, both in life and in death. This may not be a profoundly critical study of its subject; but it is a valuable account of a truly remarkable priest.

Christy O'Dwyer

Culture in Ireland – Regions: Identity and Power. Edited by Proinsias Ó Drisceoil. (Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast.) 242 pp. £4.95 sterling.

Edited by a Thurles man who has written for this Journal and is an arts officer in Kilkenny, this is a record of a two-day conference in 1992 on all aspects of regionalism in this island, organised by a body which studies Irish cultural diversity. Participants from both sides of the Border first heard ten addresses and then took part in twelve workshop sessions.

Among the topics discussed were regionalism as seen in Northern Ireland and from Europe; the border areas; regional identities; minorities; heritage; local government; and even sport. Inevitably the quality of addresses and standard of debate varies greatly. Specialists contributed much more than those content either to explain their own interests or to be merely autobiographical. Some of the latter displayed a sense of humour somehow out of place against the grim background of the Northern 'Troubles'.

The keynote address was by Dr. Kevin Whelan, once of the National Library and now of the RIA, known to many readers of this Journal for his stimulating views on modern Irish political



and social affairs and his trenchant counter-revisionist stance. His wide-ranging paper runs to some 60 pages, almost one-quarter of this book, and is copiously footnoted with over 100 detailed references. To a large extent it constitutes a massive attack on centralisation, but it also contains some positive ideas for halting the spread of centralisation and giving power back to the regions.

As so often with Dr. Whelan's polemics, he tends frequently to over-state his case, and one doubts if the faceless bureaucrats in Brussels are likely to be stopped in their tracks, even momentarily, to consider his remedies. Yet this address is a remarkable *tour de force*, rushing headlong from one point to the next, with liberal use of academic jargon. He jumps from Donegal fiddling to the geography of hurling, from the influence of the parish priest to the emasculating impact on local government of Jack Lynch's abolition of rates, from the value of retaining the county unit to the abuses of political clientilism.

Surprisingly, this record has not been dated by recent events such as the quest for peace. Among the better-known names who contributed were Edna Longley, Lelia Doolan, Prof. Ó Tuathaigh and Helen Lanigan Wood.

Marcus Bourke

The Road to Freedom; Photographs and Memorabilia from the 1916 Rising and Afterwards. By Michael Kenny. 48 pp.

Early Celtic Art in Ireland. By Eamonn P. Kelly. Both published by Town House and Country House for The National Museum of Ireland.

Metal Craftsmanship in Early Ireland. By Dr. Michael Ryan. 47 pp.

Megalithic Art in Ireland. By Dr. Muiris O'Sullivan, with photographs by John Scarry. Both published by Town House and Country House. 46 pp. All £4.95.

These four slim well-produced books are a welcome addition to the Irish archaeological library. They have in common a concern with objects ranging from prehistoric works of art, both sculptural and portable, through fine metalwork items of the Early Christian period, to photographs and other memorabilia associated with the 1912-1923 period in Irish political history. The materials and methods of production of the various archaeological objects are discussed in detail. While Michael Kenny's book provides a general account of historical events in the 1912-1923 period, the other three books discuss an archaeological topic in some detail.

The inclusion of recent discoveries and new theories makes the books especially interesting. They are profusely illustrated and are well produced. They should be of interest to the general public, though readers of the three archaeological books would probably benefit from a slight prior knowledge of the topics covered.

It is appropriate to welcome the co-operation of commercial publisher and national institution in the publication of two of the books. Such a symbiosis should be of advantage not only to the participants but also to the public, who deserve attractive, informative and reasonably priced publications such as these.

Patrick Holland

