



**TIPPERARY HISTORICAL JOURNAL
1995**

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ISSN 0791-0655

Book Reviews

Maurice Davin (1842-1927): First President of the GAA. By Séamus Ó Riain. (Geography Publications, Dublin 1994). 237 pp. IR£11.99.

Maurice Davin, Tipperaryman and first president of the GAA, has been almost forgotten, and more is the pity. Séamus Ó Riain's admiring and beautifully produced book makes amends. Happily many of Davin's papers and memorabilia have survived, and Ó Riain makes good use of them here. Davin's background, growing up near Carrick, was a comfortable one, typical of a Catholic middle class then becoming ascendant in rural Ireland. Though he may have flirted briefly with Fenian ideas in his youth, Davin, a moderate, was always much more interested in sport than in politics.

Moreover, though the main claim to fame of this calm, serious man must be his leading role in preserving – or resurrecting – hurling and Gaelic football, it turns out that he had no background himself in either. As sportsmen Maurice Davin and his younger brother Pat were athletes of world calibre. Maurice was a noted boxer, rower, and weight-thrower, while Pat for a time held the world record for the high and long jumps simultaneously. This aspect is very well covered by Ó Riain. It explains why Maurice Davin took the "athletic" in Gaelic Athletic Association very seriously.

Indeed, without pressure from Michael Cusack, Davin and others might never have given the "native" games the priority they ultimately received in the GAA. Both hurling and football were almost dead in the early 1880s, and Davin would have known little of them in his youth. The southern version of hurling, formerly patronized by the gentry, had all but died out in Tipperary before he was born. Hurling had also died out in Kilkenny, but still survived in pockets in Wexford and Cork, and the hurlers of east Galway had developed their own "Killimor rules". These influenced the rules devised by Davin in the mid-1880s, rules that were far from perfect, but which Davin and the fledgling GAA were flexible enough to adapt and evolve.

At the outset the skills of most of the new hurlers must have left something to be desired. The very low scores reached in some of the early games tell their own story; sometimes two teams would battle it out for an hour and twenty minutes with only a single score resulting. Eventually, with match practice and better rules the essence of the old game gradually shone through. Davin's rules allow the "solo" experts of today to emulate those "gamesters" described by a visitor 300 years ago, "carrying the ball, tossing it for 40 or 50 yards in spite of all the adverse players". And the seventeenth-century player who, "if he miss his blow at the ball, knocks one of his opponents down", has his modern descendants too.

The new version of the old game caught on and gradually evolved into the greatest field game of them all. That it quickly caught on in those areas where it is still most popular today had less to do with tradition than with luck. As for what would become known as Gaelic football, but for Davin it might never have been codified and thereby "saved from oblivion" (p. 218). A free-for-all version of football was still being played in south Tipperary around the time Davin was born. Davin discussed its merits with "old people who said that only hurling exceeded it as a trial of men". His own view was that both games were dangerous and required rules (p. 65).

To state that Davin and Cusack succeeded because they had a fertile nationalist field to play on is not to devalue their achievement. Their vision and energy were unique, and neither Davin or Cusack alone would hardly have been enough. Yet their efforts should also be set in a



broader international context. The second half of the nineteenth century was the era for codifying sports as different as boxing, soccer, tennis, and athletics. Ó Riain highlights Davin's "all-star" tour of the U.S. in 1888, and two surviving photographs of the touring party show a bunch of young fit-looking hurlers.

Almost from the outset the GAA was caught up in politics, infiltrated by an earlier "militant tendency" before it could walk. Inevitably then much of the book is taken up with internal wrangling in the fledgling organization, and the efforts, eventually successful, of the Irish Republican Brotherhood to control it. This marked the end for Davin, but he continued to enjoy the game. Archbishop Croke, peacemaker, and Michael Cusack, difficult and impetuous but enormously creative, are never far from centre-stage here.

Reading some "revisionist" treatises about modern Ireland with their barbs at the GAA, it is all too easy to forget the pleasures, punctuated on a good day by thrills and sheer exhilaration, that the amateur games that Davin and Cusack built have given to countless thousands since the 1880s. That is the crowning achievement of the association, for all its internal squabbles, mistakes, and other imperfections. Séamus Ó Riain, once a fine hurler himself, does not fall into the trap of ignoring this. He has produced the definitive study of Maurice Davin, a fine complement to recent studies of Cusack.



Séamus Ó Riain

Cormac Ó Gráda

The Two Tipperarys. By Donal A. Murphy. (Relay Publications, Nenagh, 1994). 342 pp. £25.

Distance, lawlessness and the dedication of the Protestant landlord *elite* were responsible for the division of Tipperary into two separate ridings in 1838. There may have been other counties such as Cork where the centre of local administration and legal jurisdiction was as far removed from the periphery of the county as Clonmel was from the tip of North Tipperary. But, as Donal Murphy shows, these were more peaceful and did not contain the likes of Benjamin Bloomfield and others who fought tirelessly for the division of the county into two manageable entities, thus allaying the hardship caused by exhausting travel in a horse carriage age.

In a most readable and thoroughly researched book, Murphy traces the evolution of the two ridings from the early palatinate to the intrigues surrounding the split in 1838. The struggle was not only between the north and south of the county, but also between Nenagh and Thurles for ascendancy in the north.

The next stage was for Catholics to translate their success in the 1829 Emancipation Act into real influence at the local level. They succeeded in doing this in the case of Town Commissionerships and also Poor Law Guardianships; and Murphy provides a fascinating picture of O'Brien Dillon from Nenagh, one of the most successful operators in that area. The Catholics, however, failed to make much progress on the Grand Juries and had to await the 1898 county council legislation for openings there.

The latter part of this book, dealing with the 20th century, is not as coherent as the first. It provides a *pot-pourri* of information on a wide variety of local government issues – a veritable

treasure trove for the curious, but unfortunately loosely construed. Still, despite that reservation the entire book is essential reading for students of local government and of public administration. It should also provide much pleasure and illumination for all interested in county Tipperary and also for those interested in local issues in general.

John B. O'Brien

Times to Cherish: Cashel & Rosegreen Parish History 1795-1995. Edited by Bernie Moloney. (Parish of Cashel & Rosegreen). 224 pp. £11.95.

This handsome book is a model of local history in almost every respect. Hung on the peg of the forthcoming 200th anniversary of the parish church of St. John the Baptist in Cashel, it appeared some seven months before the actual bicentenary and is a credit to its editor and the team of local people involved. A judicious mixture of genuine history and miscellaneous more trivial information will ensure that the book, which contains 24 essays, will be treasured locally as a handy and reliable reference work for many years.

Understandably there is a strong emphasis on religion, with a fine opening essay by Dean "Christy" Lee giving the history of the church, followed by other chapters on such topics as the Christian Brothers, the Presentation Sisters, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and church music. Local teacher Seamus King contributes three essays – on sport in the parish, on how Cashel lost its Westminster seat and on Dr. John Lanigan DD (1758-1823), probably Cashel's most illustrious son. Another in that category, the nationalist Michael Doheny, is covered by Eamonn Grogan, while the distinguished Franciscan historian Fr. Benignus Millett sketches the career of the recently beatified John Kearney (1619-1653).

The book is profusely illustrated by no less than 52 pages of black and white photographs (some of which will have locals 'tracing' for a decade or more) and, almost incredibly, by eight full-age coloured prints. There is also a wealth of miscellaneous local information in six Appendices comprising 16 pages.

Marcus Bourke

Irish Prehistory: A Social Perspective. By Gabriel Cooney and Eoin Grogan. (Wordwell, 1994). 221 pages. £25.

This book marks a new departure in Irish archaeology in that it interrogates existing evidence to reveal the long-term processes and people behind the material deposited in the archeological record. Social archaeology has been evolving since the 1960s, but this is the first time that such an approach has been applied on a comprehensive basis to Irish prehistory.

To a large extent this book is a compendium of the research interests of its authors, and therefore lacunae are to be expected. The result is a strong focus on landscape economy, and the role of prestige items in the context of social organisation. A striking case is made for a continuity of settlement and subsistence without major upheavals throughout the prehistoric period. This sedentary settlement pattern was certainly established by the Neolithic Age, and continued relatively unchanged until the introduction of Christianity when, the authors claim, a significant transformation of society occurred.



Cooney and Grogan (both of whom have contributed to earlier issues of this Journal) see communities developing an allegiance to specific places on the landscape which manifests itself in the repetitive use of certain sites for housing, burial and ritual. Lough Gur, which demonstrates a pattern of unbroken occupation from the earliest Neolithic down to the last Bronze Age, is not exceptional. Several sites produce evidence of prolonged use.

When viewed as part of an integrated landscape, many cemeteries attest to a continuity of settlement, even in the absence of house sites. At Cush, co. Limerick, there is evidence of funerary activity extending through the Bronze Age into the Early Iron Age. Similarly, dendrochronological evidence indicates that Emain Macha enjoyed a period of use between 800 and 100 B.C., which would seem to disprove the notion of a major collapse of Irish society at the end of the Bronze Age.

In contrast to this continuity of the mundane, where settlement patterns and modes of subsistence hardly change over millennia, the complexities of society are played out in the areas of burial ritual and access to prestige goods. The shift from communal burial in megalithic tombs is seen as signifying an increasing emphasis on the individual. In the single burial tradition of the Early Bronze Age, social distinctions may have been displayed by highly decorated pottery. Later, as metalwork supersedes the pottery in prestige value, deposition becomes divorced from the burial sphere, indicating a change of focus from the dead to the living.

Later Bronze Age hoard deposition is well documented elsewhere, but here Cooney and Grogan give serious consideration to regarding stray finds as objects of deliberate deposition, and sites such as Keelogue on the Shannon become important centres where formal, and probably public, deposition metalwork took place in a ceremonial manner. Many of the large assemblages from wet contexts, such as the Dowris hoard, are considered by the authors to be the result of prolonged deposition in one place.

In this light the Bog of Cullen in co. Tipperary, which yielded 100 gold objects, must be seen as an area of intense ritual activity during the Later Bronze Age. If hoards from Mooghaun and Askeaton are included, the lower Shannon can be regarded as a major depositional zone in this period.

Overall there is much that is stimulating in this book. However, a major omission is the authors' failure to treat the southwest region in any depth, despite their acknowledgement that, as the only known source of metal production in the Bronze Age, this area would have played a pivotal role in inter-regional exchange. Social archaeology is set to have a long career in Ireland. This book is a good start.

Cora O'Grady

Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages. By Ragnall O Floinn.

Irish Furniture and Woodcraft. By John Teahan.

The Fenians. By Michael Kenny. National Museum of Ireland in association with County House (Dublin 1994), 46, 46 and 47 pages, respectively. £4.95 each.

These three publications are a continuation of the series already noted in a previous issue of this Journal. It is heartening to see such attractively produced booklets being published by a national institution in association with a commercial publisher. The museum-visiting public deserve and are seeking such publications.

Ragnall O Floinn's book not only notes many interesting items but also discusses the roles and context of these reliquaries as battle talismans, economic indicators and expressions of



political power. There is also a list of reliquaries and the custodian families associated with them. It is a most interesting and accessible summary of the topic. As a minor point, am I being too particular when I wonder would the inclusion of dimensions in the illustration captions in this (and the succeeding) booklet be of assistance to anyone not familiar with the items in question?

John Teahan's book discusses the development of Irish furniture and woodcraft from prehistoric times to today. This may have been too broad a canvas to paint; this reviewer, in looking at the quality of the fine pieces seen in the excellent reproductions, was conscious of the desire to learn more about the later works. It is a pity that, for example, the modern section was dealt with in two pages of text. The lack of a bibliography would hinder further research by a beginner to the subject. Nevertheless it is again an interesting and finely illustrated introduction to the topic.

The third book, by Michael Kenny, in contrast with the other two, mostly concentrates on photographs and documents illustrating a concise history of the Irish Republican Brotherhood from 1858 to 1916 and would be a very suitable introduction to the topic. The National Museum and the publishers are to be commended again on this venture, which one hopes will be continued so as to provide the public with a series of attractive guides to parts of our cultural heritage.

Patrick Holland

Providence: The Life and Times of John Grant. By Jacqueline Grant. (Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, New South Wales.). 204 pp. IR£18.00.

This is the story of an 18-year-old Moyne youth transported to Australia in 1811 who became one of the richest landowners in New South Wales. Having narrowly escaped the hangman's noose, Grant was the youngest of 181 convicts led manacled on to a prison ship. Of the 181, eight others also came from Tipperary – Matthew Byrne, Patrick Healy, John Gilligan, John Massey, Michael Spann (Spain?), John Ryan Peters, Elizabeth Glynn and Mary Power.

Grant was lucky to have been forcibly distanced from the family feud with the Moyne landlord Gilbert Maher. The year before he left, John's sister Mary was hanged in Clonmel for having beaten out with a stone the brains of Maher's son, whom (not for the first time) she had lured to her bed. For this killing their mother was also found guilty, but apparently pardoned. Five years after John's departure his older brother Jeremiah, "Captain Grant the Highwayman", whose escapades ranged from Drogheda to Newfoundland, was hanged in Maryborough, now Portlaoise.

Once in Australia Grant was lucky to find friends and patrons, principally among the latter a Dr. Redfern, then doctor to a liberal Governor of NSW, Lachlan Macquarie. A model convict, Grant duly earned his ticket-of-leave status, became a constable and eventually a free man. He married twice, his first wife being a Dublin convict Jane O'Brien and his second Mary Ann Barry, sister of an academic he met in Mauritius. When he died in 1866 Grant, then 74, had been 55 years in Australia and was survived by 11 children, 64 grandchildren and 191 great grandchildren.

The author of this book, who is Grant's great great-grandson's wife, has skilfully woven an extraordinary career into the broader historical background of the infant State of NSW. It is a useful addition to the growing store of knowledge on Tipperary's links with Australia – for which see Richard Reid elsewhere in this issue of this Journal.

Marcus Bourke



Protestant Dissent and Controversy in Ireland 1660-1714. By Phil Kilroy. (Cork University Press, 1994). 300 pp. £27.50.

This book makes an important contribution to the history of Protestant dissent in Ireland in a formative stage of its development. Its strength lies in Dr Kilroy's painstaking reading, summarising and assimilation of the large corpus of writings by religious dissenters in Ireland in the fifty years following on the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. She has studied the controversies within the dissenting tradition (between Independents, Quakers, English and Scottish Presbyterians) as well as dissenter controversies with the state and the established church. She frequently allows the primary sources to speak for themselves, with controversy piling on controversy.

If at times the reader feels a little overwhelmed, the overall impression must be a sense of indebtedness to Dr Kilroy for her achievement in providing what is a comprehensive account of the intellectual and theological reasons which led some Protestants to dissent from the Church of Ireland and, every bit as interesting, what led dissenting Protestants to disagree among themselves. In this respect this is the first sustained and authoritative account of the theological and ecclesiastical differences between English and Scottish Presbyterians in Ireland, between Presbyterians and Independents, and the shared and reciprocated antagonisms between all shades of dissent and Quakers. If this book is primarily about controversy, it also provides a useful account of the origins of Protestant dissent in Ireland and the roots established by the four main dissenting groups from the middle years of the seventeenth century. Protestant dissent was by no means confined to Ulster, and instances are to be found throughout the country.

Some references will be of particular interest to readers of this Journal – though they are not always easy to find because of gaps in the index. For example, there is reference to the English Presbyterian congregation in Tipperary town seeking successfully in 1702 to have the right to appoint a minister of their own, thereby obviating the necessity of travelling to Clonmel for services; perhaps the presence in Tipperary of Joseph Damer, the immensely wealthy Presbyterian sheep farmer, helped to gain a sympathetic response from the committee of ministers who had to make the decision. Also in Tipperary an Independent minister, James Wood, was permitted to run the local Erasmus Smith school despite his refusal to conform himself to the established church; presumably he had endeared himself to local interests by publishing in London in 1680 *Shepardy spiritualised*, which he dedicated to his “beloved friends the sheepmasters and shepherds in the county of Tipperary and Ireland”.

In making available the fruits of her research to both historians and the informed general reader Dr Kilroy has been well served by her publisher. This is a handsome and well produced book.

James McGuire

The Land War and its Leaders in Queen's County, 1879-82. By J. W. H. Carter. (Leinster Express, Portlaoise, 1994). 352 pp. £25.

The general perception is that the Land League was a West of Ireland organisation that looked after the interests of tenant farmers in Connacht. Only in 1979 did Paul Bew in *Land and the National Question, 1858-82* argue that in the late spring of 1880 the Land League moved its emphasis to that of a large farmer movement in the east and south of the country. What Carter



sets out to do (and does very effectively) is to show that the League had an important role in the lives of the people of Queen's County; instead of being peripheral and low key, its contribution was significant.

This book should act as a model for other local historians throughout the country, because all areas were involved in the Land War, and it is important that this point be acknowledged. In many counties – the most glaring is Tipperary – a detailed study of the Land War needs to be made and its leaders' role analysed. An important point to emerge is that divisions existed in the League, as in the case of Michael Brady, president of the Maryborough branch, who was forced to resign in December 1880 because he had paid a rent over the Griffith Valuation, the level which the League had set the payment of rents at.

In his analysis Carter paints a picture that contrasts greatly with that in the West. He argues that prior to 1879 Laois farmers were not rack rented, not subjected to eviction and not living in permanent poverty. He is correct in his statement that agricultural labourers were not as secure as other sections of society and that the Land War was the result of a combination of factors: rising expectations, the agricultural depression, the credit crisis, emigration curtailment, but most important of all the leadership of Davitt and Parnell.

While League meetings were held in Laois as early as October 1879, the first branch was not formed until May 1880. The fact that the League was so late organising itself in Laois must be attributed to the opposition of the local bishops – Moran in Ossory and Walsh in Kildare in Leighlin. Only after the autumn of 1880 did clerical opposition subside and 24 branches in the county were established. Carter argues that a large proportion of the county's population did not join the movement and that its leaders mainly consisted of the middle-classes who had been involved with the Queen's Co. Independent Club in the 1870s. There are excellent accounts of Fr. Thomas Feehan, the Rathdowney curate who was imprisoned in 1882 for organising the tenants against Lord Castletown, and of the case of John Reddington, chairman of the Maryborough branch of the League, also jailed.

One of the strengths of this book is the great array of documents the author has consulted in his efforts to highlight the League's working in Laois. They range from shopkeepers' records in private collections to the more conventional police reports and parliamentary papers. However, the work is myopic in its approach and fails to put the county into a national context. Considering the proximity of counties like Tipperary and Kildare, it is a pity these are not mentioned. Nevertheless the book is a major addition to our knowledge of the land question, not alone in Laois but in the country as a whole.

Gerard Moran

British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forster and Balfour. By Margaret O'Callaghan. (Cork University Press, 1994). 256 pp. £30 hardback, £16.85 paperback.

This book gives a fresh perspective on a familiar landscape. Over the past thirty or so years a great deal has been published about Ireland in the 1880s, especially the overwhelming figure of Parnell. Margaret O'Callaghan surveys this same ground but from the perspective of Whitehall and Downing Street rather than from that of the more familiar nationalist orthodoxy.

As the rather unwieldy title of the book suggests and as the writer makes clear, very different views of the Irish Question were taken by the Liberals, exemplified by W. E. Forster, who was Chief Secretary 1880-82, and by the Tories with A. J. Balfour as their man in Dublin Castle 1887-91.



The Liberals in the early part of the decade O'Callaghan sees divided between their need to maintain law and order and their sympathy for the plight of the poorer Irish tenants.

Added to this basic tension was the growing rift between the way their man on the spot, Forster, saw the situation as a criminal conspiracy that had to be contained and the recognition by Gladstone that the nationalists had a case which had to be addressed, which was done through his 1881 Land Act. The writer sees in this latter action by Gladstone a recognition of the nationalist definition of the land problem. When in 1886 the Liberals supported Home Rule it was confirmation of how successfully the nationalists had sold their message.

The reaction of the Tories was very different. O'Callaghan sees in the "Parnellism and Crime" articles in *The Times*, and the subsequent Special Commission set up to investigate these charges, evidence of the Tories' determination to regard the entire nationalist establishment as engaged in a criminal conspiracy against both property rights and the Union. As Chief Secretary, Balfour had the strength of belief to take whatever action was needed to deal with this "conspiracy", and in their refusal to undermine property rights which they regarded as politically rather than economically motivated, the Tories concluded that allowing tenants to purchase their holdings was much more ideologically sound. One of the most stimulating sections of this book is the detailed argument that the Special Commission, far from being a sleazy and ill-considered attack on Parnell and the National League, was in fact central to the Tory plan to destroy nationalist aspirations to political credibility, at least at Westminster.

It is not unusual when advancing a somewhat novel point of view that the case is overstated. O'Callaghan claims that the Tory emphasis on constitutional nationalism as a criminal conspiracy destroyed the "viability" of the parliamentary party as a political force at Westminster. While this may be true with reference to the Tories, who were never going to concede Home Rule, the *raison d'être* of the parliamentary party, the post-Parnell ineffectiveness of the party at Westminster was due more to their divisions and the fact that parliamentary arithmetic was not in their favour until 1910.

This book, while stimulating, is not an easy read. It is not a history of the 1880s, but rather assumes a knowledge of the period on the part of the reader. It began as a PhD thesis and gives the impression that due to publishing constraints several pints of material are being poured into a pint container. There are a few incidental references of Tipperary interest, including a letter from Lord Donoughmore, writing on behalf of fellow landlords, to William Forster on 8 October, 1880. However, neither Tipperary nor Donoughmore is mentioned in the index. For anyone with a reasonable knowledge of the 1880s this book certainly provides stimulation.

Denis G. Marnane

Urban Improvement in Provincial Ireland 1700-1840. By B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot. (Irish Settlement Studies No. 4, Athlone, 1994). 68 pp. £4.00.

This monograph by two geographers arises out of a research project on landlords and urbanisation in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ireland, and represents another significant contribution by these authors in the reassessment of popular topics in Irish historical geography. They are already notable as the editors of the revisionist *An Historical Geography of Ireland*; here the focus is on explaining the processes and chronology of urban improvement in provincial Ireland between 1700 and 1840, the social contexts in which these occurred and the implications for the town and village landscapes.



The complexities of urban improvement in provincial Ireland between 1700 and 1840 have meant that the previously-employed classifications of “landlord” or “estate” towns and villages, used to describe town and village development generally at this time, are insufficient here. The reasons for this (given on pp. 11 and 12) include the fact that other social groups apart from landlords participated in town modernisation, the contribution of the latter in many cases being no more than “sporadic interventionism” over considerable periods of time. The first chapter concentrates otherwise on the morphology of urban improvement, reference being made to Templemore’s unusually large marketplace.

The vision of a grasping exploitative Anglican landlord controlling his property in eighteenth-century Ireland has, the authors argue, played down the role of the Catholic gentry as well as the diversity within the landlord class itself. In county Tipperary the landed community increased from 100 families in 1700 to 200 in 1800, with the release of land from indebted estates such as the Dunboyne, Everard and Ormond estates. Thus, general terms such as “Protestant ascendancy” or “Anglo-Irish” are criticised in Chapter 2. The alienation of property to middlemen interests and other long-lease tenurial arrangements also limited the landowner’s opportunity to intervene in the management of property.

Chapter 3 presents the authors’ typology of settlement improvement with its associated criteria of urban improvement. The older provincial towns of Ireland had more complex proprietorial, tenurial, and institutional relationships, which constrained as well as promoting urban improvement in the 1700-1840 period. This point is central to the authors’ typology, where the scale of urban improvement is applied to firstly, mediaeval towns and villages; secondly, Tudor plantation towns and villages, and thirdly, eighteenth- to nineteenth-century newly-planned or refounded settlements. Tipperary, which has a rich mediaeval heritage (note *erratum* on page ii), has many towns (Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir explicitly mentioned here) in the first category, with Littleton, a re-founded eighteenth-century creation, in the third category (p. 30).

Chapter 4 examines the ways in which the landowning élite viewed town/village improvement in the eighteenth century from economic, social, and political perspectives. Market houses were a common form of proprietorial intervention in small-town economies. Dungarvan is cited as an example of where improvement occurred to solicit electoral support. The symbolic landlord landscapes were created by a desire to emphasise the future durability of the class. This latter aspect weakened throughout the century, however, with a transfer of wealth that shifted from landlord to tenant between 1740 and 1815, a period marked also by the relaxation of the Penal Laws.

The subsequent increased participation from tenants, middlemen, and others in urban improvement is discussed in Chapter 5, where the landlords’ symbolic landscapes were now regarded as ones of oppression. On a smaller scale, industrial villages (such as Silvermines) developed. The variation in leasing policies is discussed, the most interesting example being that of Clones, where leasing terms depended on the location of properties within the town. Cashel is cited as a town in which many of the head tenants negotiating building leases directly with the landowners were primarily either middlemen farmers or *rentiers*.

Chapter 6 deals with similar themes such as the early nineteenth-century characterised by shorter leases as short-run profit aims dominated landowners’ economic strategies. The post-1815 depression marks the emergence of new actors in town improvement such as the reinvigorated Roman Catholic Church (Thurles and Cashel, although not mentioned, being good local examples here) and the State (through the provision of workhouses and dispensaries).



The book is well written and well illustrated, providing a new understanding of the processes responsible for shaping our provincial towns during the important period of improvement. A map showing the distribution of improved towns and villages according to the authors' exciting classification would have been a worthy addition, instead of the dot map on p. 21. The south-east of Ireland (Tipperary included) is rather neglected in the illustrations, in contrast to the Midlands and county Cork. However, the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement is to be complimented for publishing a book deserving the attention of anybody interested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland.

William Jenkins

The Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland. By Lisa M. Bitel. (Cork University Press, 1994). 268 pp. £12.95.

Ms. Bitel's book, the paperback version of her hard-cover book of 1993, makes available to a wider public a valuable contribution to our understanding of early Christian Ireland. Applying the methods of anthropology, archaeology and history, she analyses every aspect of monasticism and conveys the results in a manner and language satisfying to both scholar and lay-reader. She traces the evolution of monasticism from the marginalised pockets of Christianity to the power and glory of the 8th century. With a wealth of detail that illustrates but never confuses, she presents a system that formed an integral part of European Christianity, not one in isolation from it, as is sometimes suggested.

Then, as now, politics and religious were seldom separate. The author studies the monasteries in their political context, giving a clear explanation of the intricate relationships that existed between the two spheres of influence. The lives of the saints, often in the past dismissed as propaganda and of little value, are now recognised as a valuable guide to the politics of the time in which they were written. Few scholars have succeeded in interpreting these lives as well as Ms. Bitel. For her they give a unique insight into the monastic mind, as well as supplying material which she used to recreate the physical and spiritual environment of the monasteries. Tipperary readers will be interested in the reference to Ailbe of Emly and Ruadhan of Lorrha, as well as in the efforts of the Dál gCais to politicize the monasteries in their territories.

Liam Ó Duibhir

W. E. H. Lecky: Historian and Politician, 1838-1903. By Donal McCartney. (Lilliput Press, 1994). 271 pp. £19.95.

In Ireland as in other countries the liberals of the nineteenth century possessed an importance quite out of proportion to their numerical strength. Daniel O'Connell was a liberal of one kind. The historian W. E. H. Lecky is best understood as a nineteenth-century liberal of another variety. Like many other liberals he was attracted to nationalism. As depicted in this book Lecky and his undergraduate friends in Trinity College Dublin in the later 1850s celebrated Irish nationality as fulsomely as James Stephens and his fenian associates might have been doing some streets away.



Like two of his well-known co. Tipperary contemporaries, the historian Richard Bagwell and the fenian John O'Leary, Lecky was a *rentier* (his rents came mostly from co. Carlow and the midlands) who used his affluence to support a life largely devoted to books. While O'Leary generally preferred reading to writing and Bagwell composed carefully-shaped books on early modern Ireland, Lecky wrote exuberantly on European history from the time of Augustus, on Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth century and on nineteenth-century Ireland. In elucidating English history he wrote sections on the American and French Revolutions that were so admired as to merit separate publication.

It is, however, principally for his work on Ireland that Lecky is now remembered. In the 1860s and 1870s he gave classic formulation to what might be called a "Whig interpretation" of Irish history, at once nationalist and liberal. As a liberal Protestant he condemned the penal laws in more colourful language, and with more emphasis on their iniquity from the point of view of principle, than any Catholic. He poured all of a liberal's detestation of *ancien regime* corruption into his denunciation of the bribery that secured the passing of the Act of Union. Lecky placed the Irish golden age not in the ancient Celtic past or in the era of the early Irish church but in the age of Grattan's parliament. When Gladstone sought historical justification for his conversion to home rule in the 1880s he found it readymade in Lecky's writings.

Lecky rejected the argument from the past in favour of home rule, because he could not support the home rulers of the 1880s. Rather like Kickham, he was alienated from Parnell's movement by the Land League's assault on landlord rights. Of course, Lecky's reaction can be put down to self-interest; but McCartney argues convincingly that more than this was involved. Respect for the rights of property was a cardinal principle of liberalism, and in Lecky's view property in land was as sacrosanct as any other.

In attacking the rights of the landlords the home rulers had shown themselves, in Lecky's eyes, to have abandoned one of the principles on which freedom depended. His disillusionment was not without parallels. In country after country the liberals of the mid-nineteenth century found that a later generation developed their limited notion of democracy into something they found alien and menacing but which enjoyed the support of the masses = radicalism, socialism, confessionalism or exclusivist nationalism.

Over a number of years Donal McCartney (until recently professor of Modern Irish History at University College, Dublin) has published various articles and pamphlets that have whetted the appetite for this book. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the links between Irish history and the writing of Irish history.

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