

## Books Section

---

By Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, Colin Rynne, Cormac Ó Gráda, Peter Harbison, Denis Foley, Martin Dowling, Richard Davis, Proinsias Ó Drisceoil, Diarmuid Ferriter, Martin Kenneally, Denis G. Marnane, Marcus Bourke, Virginia Crossman.

**The World of Geoffrey Keating: History Myth and Religion in Seventeenth Century Ireland.** By Bernadette Cunningham (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000), 263 pages. £35.

The importance of Geoffrey Keating, or Seathrún Céitinn, the author of the most single influential manuscript text in seventeenth century Ireland, is beyond dispute, and the absence of an authoritative book dealing with his life and work has long been considered a significant gap in the historiography of the Early Modern period of this island. Doing adequate justice to Keating, however, is a formidable task which has made his neglect by historians unsurprising.

Remarkably little is known concerning his life and family, which makes him a frustratingly shadowy figure who cannot be dealt with in a conventionally biographical fashion. His works certainly represent a rich reservoir of source material, but analysis in their proper context demands a high degree of linguistic competence in Latin as well as the difficult Irish of seventeenth century manuscripts.

This book, therefore, is a remarkable achievement. What it provides is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach to Keating's world and work. It makes a virtue of the scanty biographical details available by considering its subject from many different angles and in a number of different contexts, and combs Keating's writings, both poetry and prose, for usable scraps of information. That is not to imply that it ignores the challenge of laborious historical detective work in investigating his family and social origins.

Part 1 of the book adduces new Chancery evidence to make a plausible case that Keating was the third son of James Fitz Edmund Keating of Moorestown in South Tipperary. It offers a succinct description of the wealthy catholic community into which Keating was born, which was also to be critical for his later career. Keating returned to minister as a priest to his own native area and his extended family network was clearly of great importance in allowing him to function within an officially illegal church.

It was in this environment too that Keating acquired the professional mastery of the Irish language and its rich oral and manuscript tradition which ultimately allowed him produce his most influential work, *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*. Although the Keatings were not one of the traditional bardic families, Geoffrey evidently had close contact with the bardic elite. Cunningham makes a convincing case that the Mac Craith family were the young Keating's most likely conduit to the complex riches of the Gaelic learned tradition, although she notes that Kenneth Nicholls's intuitive suggestion (something which no early modern historian would dismiss lightly) that his mother may actually have been of the Mac Craith family is not supported by documentary evidence.

The continental milieu in which he was educated is also deftly evoked. Little hard information is available concerning Keating's continental career: he is most often linked with Bordeaux and Rheims, logical destinations for students from south Munster because of long established trading networks. Cunningham quotes a scrap of evidence from Philip O'Sullivan



Beare to suggest that his doctorate in theology was probably from Rheims, but she compensates excellently for the lack of biographical detail with an intelligent generalised discussion of the likely environment which Keating encountered abroad. This is not a case of making bricks without straw but rather making a little straw go a long way, while still creating a solid construction.

Cunningham points out in this section that Keating's sojourn abroad in the different world of continental seminaries must have influenced his later analysis of Irishness. This is all skillfully done, although in a handsomely illustrated book the lack of a map of the Keating heartland showing the baronies of Iffa and Offa where the family lands were located is to be regretted. A map indicating the Munster trading routes to France, which linked the two chief components of his world, would in addition have been welcome.

The book is also sure-footed in its analysis of Keating's important if theologically conventional religious texts, *Eochair-sgiath an Aifrin*, a handbook in Irish on the Mass, and *Trí bior-ghaoithe an bháis*, a meditation on death, original sin, and purgatory and the need for reform and vigilance to ensure the maintenance of moral order in society and individual salvation. Although due attention is paid to these aspects of his *oeuvre*, not surprisingly the vastly influential *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, Keating's history of Ireland from the creation of the Norman conquest, represents the book's centre of gravity.

The analysis of the scholarly network and the manuscript sources on which Keating depended in compiling his historical synthesis is superb, as is the discussion of his extensive use of non-Irish material. In particular, Cunningham highlights a certain discrepancy between Keating's dismissal of foreign denigrators of Ireland in his famous preface and the actual working method within the text itself. She points out that on occasion the authors whom Keating attacked in the preface are actually used as references to support points in his own history.

There are many riches also in Part Two of the book, which provides a thematic analysis of his writing in the context of the society which formed him. Keating's inclusiveness as a historian who produced an acceptable origin myth for all Irish Catholics, whether of Gaelic Irish or Old English extraction, has been recognised by modern scholars as particularly significant, and this aspect of his legacy is done full justice here. The topographical detail which abounds in *Foras feasa* is imaginatively analysed: Cunningham convincingly represents Keating's constant evocation of placelore as a strategy which, by constantly linking the narrative back to particular territories and the peoples who inhabited them, blended the known and the unknown to increase interest and credibility.

The manner in which the genealogical lists within the text operated to create a sense of pride and identification within Keating's intended audience is also astutely noted. Nor does Cunningham omit a discussion of the significance of language and identity within *Foras feasa*, although, in light of the importance of the subject, perhaps greater space could have been devoted to this topic, and the analysis orientated back towards a consideration of the complexity of Old English identity in general and Keating's in particular.

Part Three of the book examines the transmission of drafts of Keating's work, identifying diverse textual communities who read, copied, translated and eventually published versions of *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*. The huge popular success of the manuscript made it one of the most significant texts in Irish history. Indeed, Cunningham makes the bold but sustainable assertion that Keating's influence on Irish language and literature was commensurate with that of Shakespeare in relation to English.

She counts no fewer than thirty extant manuscripts which contain the text of the history, which indicates that it entered the traditional scribal circulation network for historical texts in



Irish almost from the date of its completion. She demonstrates also that his Gaelic rendition of Irish history within a consciously catholic framework was not only translated and read by English-speaking co-religionists, but was ultimately explored and utilised, even by the nascent protestant Ascendancy of the island, who had evolved into a self-conscious social elite in the latter part of the seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century *Foras feasa* had become established as perhaps the core text concerning the investigation of the Irish past, and the sources, which had become accepted as most important and authoritative, were generally connected in some manner to the history.

In conclusion, this is an important book which offers an ambitious and wide-ranging analysis of a vitally important figure and his writings. Cunningham combines the necessary linguistic competence with a keen eye for historical detail and a refreshing breadth of method. The book is also clearly written and well structured, although at times the provision of translation of Irish and Latin quotations is a little eccentric. In the main, an English version is provided, but this is not invariably the case. That, however, is a very minor flaw in a fine piece of scholarship.

*Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (UCD)*

**Clonmel 1840-1900: anatomy of an Irish town.** By Séan O'Donnell. (Geography Publications, 336 pages) £25.

Integrated studies of the development of Ireland's towns after 1800, as the author points out, are somewhat thin on the ground, a rather curious lacuna in Irish geographical and historical studies that is not easily explained. As Séan O'Donnell suggests in his introduction, the lives of Ireland's rural dwellers have traditionally been seen as more relevant (and perhaps more "Irish") than the inhabitants of Ireland's towns. Indeed, it is only very recently that the rich and compelling urban folklore of Dublin and Cork has begun to be collected by professional ethnologists.

Moreover, the less than dramatic physical expansion of most of Ireland's county towns after 1800 has certainly not grabbed the attention of either historians or historical geographers. There is, therefore, a serious gap in our knowledge of the development of our larger inland towns, as commercial, administrative and cultural centres. This is a truly curious oversight, but in his fine monograph on the town of Clonmel Dr O'Donnell has shown how sound scholarship can be used to claw back this deficit.

In the first of eleven chapters Dr O'Donnell outlines the main factors affecting the physical development of Clonmel. Direct access to a navigable river facilitated its development as an inland port, which in turn provided a commercial focus for its rich agricultural hinterland. By 1841 it was the most populous inland town in Ireland. Eighteenth-century entrepreneurship, largely by local Quaker families such as the Grubbs and the Malcomsons, had led to it becoming the most important flour milling centre in Ireland. The development of the urban infrastructure of Clonmel, including the streets, laneways and land-holding within its immediate environs, are also closely examined, as are the town's trade, employment and demographics.

Its importance as an administrative centre in county Tipperary is discussed in Chapter 2, as is that of the local military barracks. The presence of British and Irish regiments was widely welcomed in all Irish towns during the nineteenth century, both as a fillip to the local economy and for the way they enriched local sporting and cultural events. The Curragh of Kildare was the focal point of Gaelic games before the early twentieth-century ban on the membership of the British armed forces, and in its own way the Clonmel barracks enamoured itself to local



sporting fraternities. The townspeople, for their part, were certainly delighted with the new skating rink, which a British army captain had helped to set up on Queen's Street in 1876.

Clonmel, indeed, also provided one of the settings for the celebrated Tichbourne Claimant case. Lieutenant Richard Tichbourne of the sixth dragoon guards had been stationed in Clonmel in the early 1850s, but had drowned at sea *en route* to Australia after leaving the army. Tichbourne's mother could not accept that he had died, and advertised in national newspapers for news of his whereabouts. This attracted the attention of a clever Queensland butcher called Arthur Orton, who was attracted by the deceased Richard Tichbourne's estates. Orton "reappeared" as Richard Tichbourne and conned the unfortunate Mrs Tichbourne into believing that he was her son.

Richard Tichbourne's will had previously been proved, but as Orton became more bold as the resurrected Richard, he began an action to recover the Tichbourne estates. Orton became known as the "Tichbourne Claimant" in a celebrated and personally disastrous court case of 1871, in which a Clonmel barber called Thomas Dorney testified that he remembered a scar similar to that on Orton's head on Lieutenant Tichbourne's head some twenty years earlier. Orton was found guilty of perjury and was given fifteen years' penal servitude.

Chapter 2 also examines the development of Clonmel's gaol, workhouse and educational institutions, along with its transport and financial infrastructure. The gaol featured in a popular song (of reputed eighteenth-century date), *Priosún Chluain Meala*, and in Kickham's *Knocknagow*, to which Mat the Thresher was committed for a while. Clonmel was also the focus of Charles Bianconi's remarkable national coaching empire, Bianconi becoming one of the town's main patrons as well as an important local supporter of O'Connell's Repeal Movement.

Chapters 3 and 4 take a rare look at how nineteenth-century municipal government functioned in Ireland, in which the structure of Clonmel's urban council and its finances are examined in detail. The maintenance of the urban fabric – street repairs, rubbish collection, water supply, sewerage, cemeteries, street lighting, fairs and markets – is thoroughly examined. It will be interesting to compare Clonmel's urban infrastructure at a future date with that, for example, of Birr or Ardee, and this book will certainly provide a useful model for future urban histories in Ireland.

The remaining chapters deal with local politics, and I was fascinated to see how national trends manifested themselves in an Irish county town. Beginning in Chapter 5 with Reformers and Repealers, in which the author cleverly charts the Conservative (i.e. Protestant) disapproval of the O'Connellite movement, he concludes with a lively account of the Home Rule movement and land agitation in the period 1870-1890. The political career of the local Tory, John Bagwell, makes interesting reading. John O'Connell, the Liberator's son, represented the borough in parliament in the 1850s, by which time Bagwell had changed his political allegiance to the Whigs and was elected liberal MP for Clonmel in 1857! Politics in county Tipperary thus has a long tradition of mavericks and oddities who have effortlessly bucked national trends.

This book is very well illustrated with excellently reproduced period photographs and fine maps and line-drawings and exhibits throughout, the fine production values we have come to expect from Geography Publications. There are also eight extremely useful appendices, which include biographical notes on many of the main characters referred to in the text. Local people should account themselves well served by Dr O'Donnell's account of nineteenth-century Clonmel, and one hopes that Geography Publications are considering other definitive accounts of Ireland's country towns to complement their county series.

Colin Rynne (UCC)



**The Great Famine in Nenagh Poor Law Union.** By Daniel Grace. (Relay Books, 2000). 320 pages. £15.00.

During the last decade or so the list of local studies of the Great Famine has been growing longer and longer. Though some of these studies preceded the famine sesquicentennial (e.g. those of Killaloe, Fermoy, Rathdrum, Killarney, Kilrush), the commemorations seem to have prompted the completion and/or the publication of many more (e.g. Ennis, Lurgan, Irvinestown, Killarney, Mullingar, Galway, Dunfanaghy, Newtownards, Leitrim, south Tipperary, Roscommon, Waterford). In addition, the National Famine Research Project produced studies of a further eight poor law unions (Enniskillen, Birr, Kinsale, Ennistymon, Dublin South, Inishowen, Ballina). These remain unpublished, but in due course will serve as building blocks for other research.

At this rate it may not be too long before most of the country has been covered, whether at parish, poor law union, or county level. Daniel Grace's study of Nenagh and its hinterland in north-west Tipperary is one of the latest and best of these local famine studies. It follows a tried and trusted formula – combining both classic sources and general works, on the one hand, and an array of specifically local sources such as newspaper accounts, relief commission papers, and workhouse records, on the other. The narrative is informed by an intimate knowledge of its locale and accompanied by several useful, mostly unfamiliar, illustrations.

Nenagh poor law union was badly affected by the famine; nearly 5,000 people died in its workhouse and auxiliary accommodation and its population fell by almost one-third between 1841 and 1851. The decline was uneven across the region. Toomevara's particularly big population loss was due to the eviction of nearly 600 villagers in May 1849 (pp. 182-4). Most of the deaths occurred in 1847 and 1848, though it is notable that of the 30 or so cases of starvation described in the local press, half occurred in 1849 (p. 166). It is also significant that neither the Catholic *Tipperary Vindicator* nor the Tory *Nenagh Guardian* carry any reports or even claims of deaths from starvation before late 1846 (p. 163).

Though the Nenagh workhouse admission books have not survived, the author makes good use of union minute books and other sources in his analysis of the conduct of the board of guardians. The two newspapers are particularly rich and lively sources of information and comment. As seems to have the case across the country, board meetings were poorly attended. There were, admittedly, lots of them, leading one guardian to complain in April 1847 that "very shortly a man can't stay at home at all to mind his own business" (p. 24), and others referred to the considerable journey time involved. Croneysism loomed large: relieving officers tended to be related to guardians, and guardians often doubled up as contractors (p. 25). Moreover, according to a hostile *Guardian*, "nearly all the rural guardians are closely connected by ties of relationship or intermarriage". However, the humanity of individual guardians also comes across (e.g. pp. 133-4). One can only suppose that the paupers admitted to the Nenagh workhouse were much like those admitted elsewhere: newspaper accounts of early admissions suggest as much (pp. 27-8).

Daniel Grace's account of relief committees and the public works are very good, full of vivid detail and useful information. He notes the role of the weather in intensifying the hardship of outdoor relief, and how both tory and repeal commentators condemned the scaling down of the works, with "not one drop of soup yet for the destitute" (p. 92). As elsewhere in Ireland, the famine provoked a sharp rise in crimes against property initially. By 1849, however, a judge spoke of the "profound tranquillity" of the area, which the *Guardian* explained by land being "neither worth quarrelling over nor committing murder for" (p. 187).

Some gaps remain. Though the administrative side of the story is very well told, the chapter



on emigration is rather thin. This is understandable, given the lack of source material. Nor is there much on rent, or on traders, or on the course of wages over the famine.

This fine study invites a few remarks about the relation between local and national histories of the Famine. Sometimes local micro-history offers a useful corrective to the over-generalisations of macro-history. Sometimes (though not here), the lack of a firm, comparative focus has meant that local historians of the Famine risk writing national history in the guise of local history. The goal of the National Famine Research Project was an overall assessment based on the study of a small but representative sample of unions, selected with a view to spatial spread and data availability.

In the same spirit Tim Guinnane and I have tried to infer the quality of workhouse management from a cross section analysis of all the country's original 130 unions. We tried to control statistically for the prevailing destitution in each union and for its relative backwardness on the eve of the famine (Guinnane and Ó Gráda, 2000). By today's standards the management of most unions was incompetent or scandalous. But in assessing the management of, say, Nenagh, we need to know how other unions in areas similarly circumstanced fared. Daniel Grace strikes a comparative note on several occasions: e.g. as regards mortality both before and during the famine, and the incidence of cholera (pp. 30, 132, 160-1).

Much more work needs to be done along these lines, and the growing number of local studies subjected to comparative analysis. The outcome will be greatest than the sum of the individual studies.

The book ends rather abruptly. A hint, maybe, of more from the author in another place on post-famine Nenagh? Readers of *The Great Famine in Nenagh Poor Law Union* would welcome the prospect.

**Reference:** Timothy Guinnane and Cormac Ó Gráda, "Workhouse mortality during the Great Irish Famine", UCD Centre for Economic Research, Working Paper 2000/4.

Cormac Ó Gráda (UCD)

**Medieval Ireland, An Archaeology.** By Tadhg O'Keeffe. (Tempus, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 192 pages). £19.99 sterling.

**Cahir Castle, Co. Tipperary.** By Henry Wheeler and Dave Pollock. (Dúchas, 40 pages). £3.00.

**Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary.** By Conleth Manning. (Dúchas, 43 pages). £3.00.

The appearance of Tadhg O'Keeffe's book *Medieval Ireland* is timely. More than a decade has passed since Terry Barry's initial survey of the subject, **The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland**, appeared in 1987. In the intervening years much has happened, and plenty of relevant research – including the author's own – has been published, an amount of which has been built into O'Keeffe's update. The ever-increasing pace of urban development has meant that many archaeological excavations being conducted in Ireland are being done to keep ahead of the JCB in the country's medieval towns, and Cork and Waterford in particular deserve credit for getting out fairly quickly the results of major parts of these digs in attractive published form.

In a richly-illustrated text of 160 pages, it is not possible to be comprehensive. But that is not the aim of this volume, produced by an English publisher new to the Irish archaeology market. In O'Keeffe's own words, the book is "an attempt to wrest memories about Ireland's medieval past from the things and places which have managed to make it to the present" and, in dealing with the material thematically, and balancing description, discussion (and a certain amount of speculation), O'Keeffe provides a very reasonable overview of Irish archaeology in its broadest sense, and in a style that is somewhat more discursive than Barry's.



In the Preface, the period 1100 to 1600 is defined as *later* medieval, so the word medieval without qualification in the title should, by rights, also cover an *earlier* medieval period as well, which the text does only very selectively; round towers, for instance, do come in for attention, with some individualistic views on the subject. But otherwise the period before 1100 is left untouched in the text to such an extent that, in my view, the book's title would have better encompassed its subject-matter if it has been "Later Medieval Ireland".

However, the period after 1100 is well covered, bringing us up to date with recent work of which the general public (for whom this book is intended) would scarcely be aware, and it is well to have so much research summarised so usefully here. In particular, the chapter on craft, industry and trade has benefited from new discoveries, and there is much of interest to be learned here about the range and origin of foreign pottery imported into Ireland during the Norman, or what the author (irritatingly in my view) calls the colonial, period.

In a book subtitled "An Archaeology", it is understandable that the more artistic aspects of the later medieval period are given a mere two pages at the end. My preference would have been to make up for the brevity by adding relevant references in an admittedly already extensive bibliography to items such as Catriona MacLeod's articles on statuary or John Hunt's valuable booklet on the O'Dea mitre and crozier. In the discussion on Newtown Trim I would also liked to have seen a reference to Christine Casey and Alistair Rowan's treatment of the Cathedral (with illuminating plan) in their North Leinster volume either instead of, or in addition to, the author's own article – one of the many which takes up almost one-fifteenth of the whole bibliography, and even then omitting one referred to on page 143 as 1999d.

The illustrations (particularly the black-and-white photographs) are a mixed bunch, with captions infuriatingly omitting a final full-stop throughout (the publisher conforming presumably to the latest international editorial fad), but the graphics succeed brilliantly, and are one of the delights encountered in the perusal of this volume. Flicking through the pictures shows that O'Keeffe's definition of archaeology includes a great deal on stone monuments (which obviously I approve of), and these play an important role in this survey, which goes into considerable detail on the nature and development of churches, castles and defensible houses.

Here, the author brings Tipperary very much to the fore, for instance, in ascribing the surviving façade of St. Cronan's church in Roscrea to the 1120s, inferring thereby that it is earlier than Cormac's Chapel. In the unresolved question of the origin of the Irish tower house, O'Keeffe pleads for the circular Anglo-Norman donjons, including the Tipperary examples of Ardfinnan and Kiltinan, to have played a role in their development, a suggestion which will certainly help to add fuel to the long-flickering debate.

This brings me appropriately to the other two items under review here. Each deals specifically with County Tipperary monuments, in Cahir and Cashel respectively, and both are attractively produced by *Dúchas*. Cahir Castle is one of the finest in Ireland, with a history going back to the Norman period – and an Irish name which suggests that the site's origins go back to an older Irish past. The earliest surviving parts are thirteenth century in date, and the easily-readable history of the castle in the booklet covers its subsequent development, and its one and only siege in 1599. The detailed description of the castle is partly based on Henry Wheeler's original text, with new insights, particularly on the walls, being given by Dave Pollock. What characterises both booklets is not just the valuable text and coverage of other medieval monuments in each tower, but also the quality of the illustrations, and the imaginative reconstructions which will help people greatly in understanding the monuments as they once were.

The text of the Cashel volume is by Conleth Manning and it benefits from his clear and well-



reasoned discussion. He has researched his subject thoroughly, and many will welcome his frankness in disposing of the old notion of a Cathedral allegedly built on the Rock in 1169, for which a seventeenth-century account seems to be the only source. He also brings us up to date with recent revelations concerning Cormac's Chapel, including the wooden structure (church?) beneath it which is dated here to the ninth or tenth century – a period when the Rock is likely to have experienced some religious activity long before it was handed over to the Church in 1101, an idea supported by the discovery some years ago of a ninth-century High Cross base which is not specifically mentioned here. Manning also draws attention to the recently-uncovered frescoes in the Chapel's chancel – two layers of them, as he tells us – which show the quality and colourfulness of mural painting in twelfth-century Ireland, while the rarely-noticed early seventeenth-century stucco in a window embrasure in the Cathedral's nave deserves the airing it gets here.

The reading list on the inside back cover refers the reader to earlier works contained in Roger Stalley's useful bibliography in *The Archaeological Journal* of 1996, and adds a few more for good measure. But one may well ask how many punters – or indeed libraries – in Ireland are in possession of this English Journal which is unlikely to be well known outside purely archaeological circles. This small carp aside, these two booklets are to be heartily recommended as the latest in a series in which *Dúchas* is excelling itself in comparison to its predecessor's dull guidebooks of the forties and fifties, and they will enhance any visitor's appreciation of the Cahir and Cashel monuments which are truly jewels not only in Tipperary's – but also in the nation's – crown.

Peter Harbison (RIA)

**Tipp Co-op: origin and development of Tipperary Co-operative Creamery Ltd.** By William Jenkins. (Geography Publications, 214 pages). £9.95.

The invention of the cream separator in the 1870s meant that the manufacture of butter, practically the only dairy product then and for the next sixty years, would be transferred from farm to factory. Creameries were then set up all over Munster, but it was not until the 1890s that the "co-ops" entered the scene. By 1896 there were 280 creameries, of which 72 were "co-ops", and for the next 30 years there was constant strife between them, each system competing for the farmers' custom. Uneconomic prices were being paid for milk and in 1927 the Cosgrave government, fearing the whole system would collapse, bought out the proprietaries in order to hand them over to "co-op" ownership.

Tipperary Co-operative Creamery was always a regional rather than a village "co-op". Although it did not commence until 1908, by which time its area was well studded with creameries, by 1925 it had absorbed, or had churning arrangements with, six other "co-ops". This strength was much diluted by having the largest and wealthiest proprietary (Cleeves) situated in its area. For two decades the two systems were operating side by side, within and without: at war until 1927 and then in peaceful co-existence until 1972 when they merged under "co-op" ownership.

Tipperary "Co-op's" history has now been written, by an academic. And it shows: every statement is ascribed, every source documented. Trawling the narrative for mistakes – a delightful exercise for the pedantic reviewer – yields but a trifling catch. Page 37 states it is "widely accepted" that the spread of the "co-op" movement was due to the pioneering work of Horace Plunkett; it is an undeniable fact. Page 111 mistakes the death by amalgamation of South Tipperary Farmers Co-op (1974) for its birth (1967); page 181 claims Tipperary "co-op"



knew early in 1983 that that year was going to be the deciding period for milk quotas. If they did, they cleverly kept that improper and very valuable information to themselves!

Accuracy in a history is a *sine qua non*, but it is not everything. Comment, as we know, is free and may be invidious; perhaps that is the reason why there is none of it here – which is a pity. Its absence makes for some unremitting reading, at least for the uninvolved. We never really get the flavour of this “co-op”. In the first half of the 19th century county Tipperary was the most violent part of the then United Kingdom and needed policing on an unprecedented scale. Traditionally, you “tangle” with a Tipperaryman on the hurling or football field at some personal risk. In the hundreds of “co-op” meetings held up to the ‘70s there must have been many hot words, personal remarks and corresponding retaliation about which we learn nothing. Some humour would not have come amiss. One would love to know what caused the resignation of the two young and highly-qualified chief executives in 1972 and 1974.

How much of a co-operative spirit existed in the 92 years portrayed in this book? There is very little to indicate involvement even by most of the committee members. This, it must be said, was not unusual; the credit union movement has been much more efficient in this respect. The rather large area of the “co-op”, and with itself and Cleeves for years operating in the same parish, did not help matters.

But in 1970 there was a spectacular explosion of unpaid participation. In 1969 the “co-op” had a trading loss of £10,000 and, despite having a multiplicity of discussions with neighbouring creameries about diversifying further from butter-making, was clearly going nowhere. The committee, after decades of dithering, finally handed over its powers to five of its members who reorganised the business from stem to stern, setting it on the road to incredible success. This is acknowledged in the book, but not excessively praised: I reckon their statues should adorn Main St., Tipperary, alongside that of Charles Kickham!

Moreover, those who were at the helm since then, managers and farmers, leading the “co-op” to employing 250 and, whilst paying a very competitive milk price, managing to retain sufficient funds to expand overseas, surely merit more recognition than is accorded here. With milk quotas firmly in place, expansion must be elsewhere and the “co-op’s” support for non-dairy activities in forestry and mushroom growing is co-operative in the best sense. On the other hand, the purchase of a local supermarket has nothing to recommend it.

There have been hundreds of local histories written in Ireland in the recent past, most only catering for their own constituencies. This publication is assuredly not one of these: it is easily the most comprehensive history of any individual Irish “co-op” and will have an appeal not only to dairymen everywhere but also to those who would like a first-hand account of how the workers and farmers survived in the impoverished century up to 1950.

This beautifully turned out hard-back book is an extremely, almost excessively, modest history of an institution that has many reasons to be proud of itself. With storm clouds now hovering over the agricultural scene, its farmers have a proven and now powerful ally to look after their interests.

Denis Foley (Mullinahone)

**Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine.** By Cormac Ó Gráda. (Princeton University Press). 272 pages. £11.50 (paperback).

Ó Gráda's latest monograph was produced during the hectic period surrounding the famine's sesquicentennial in the middle of the last decade. This surge of activity resulted in a number of important local studies, and the opening up of new perspectives on the famine. As a



result, we know much more about the roles of the church, of the Irish landlord class, of successive governments, and of English public opinion in the horrible story of Black '47. In addition, there have been important new explorations of the themes of representation and memory. Ó Gráda has been at the centre of this activity, publishing a wide range of work, much of it represented here for a wider readership.

One popular tendency during the sesquicentennial year was to view the Great Irish Famine as *a* famine, not *the* famine. This is the theme with which Ó Gráda opens the book, emphasising the distinctiveness of *An Ghorta Mhor* in global and historical contexts. It killed more people in proportion to the local population than any other; it occurred within the boundaries of the most productive, efficient, and wealthy nation-state of its time; and it ran its vicious course during a period when the governing elite held to the ideology of bourgeois "political economy" with a well-nigh religious fervour. The Great Famine had long been held by professional historians as well as others to be a singular event and a defining moment of Irish history and identity.

It was not a genocide, as Ó Gráda and others correctly argue, but it was nevertheless *our* holocaust. By seeking a comparative focus wherever possible, and employing the tools of the economist and the demographer, Ó Gráda knocks the famine off this pedestal. Though he is anxious to distinguish his work from those virulent strains of revisionism that have "sought to talk down the Irish famine", the move from the Irish context to the context of the "world history of famines" has a similar effect.

This is perhaps appropriate to the times, as Ireland rapidly and irreversibly moves from out of its singular shell of experience into the European polity and the global economy, leaving behind its insular concerns and monolithic history. Yet this approach has its limits. Just how much has our historical understanding been enhanced by comparing Whitehall policy makers to Mao Tse-Tung, or the standard of living in Victorian Britain to Somalia in the 1970s?

The book moves through five thematic chapters, beginning with the economic context of the potato failure itself, followed by a critical analysis of relief measures, some fresh takes on the demography of the famine (including new research on New York City famine refugees), an examination of the operation of markets in land, consumables, and money-lending, and a stand-alone chapter on the famine in Dublin based largely on the evidence from a number of hospitals, workhouses, and prisons. The book closes with a fascinating departure from the expected economic analysis of dry and sometimes scrappy data sets that are the hallmark of Ó Gráda's writing. Here we see the author don the folklorist's cap and put his facility for the Irish language to use in a fascinating exploration of the oral history collected from famine survivors by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and 1940s.

But first, the lowly potato itself, and the still unresolved questions surrounding Irish potato dependency and the inevitability of the famine. Joel Mokyr's ground-breaking but inconclusive study *Why Ireland Starved* casts a long shadow on Ó Gráda's discussion, and much of the opening chapter concerns Mokyr's unanswered question, "was Malthus right?" While Mokyr gave a heavily qualified "no", Ó Gráda has countered with a heavily qualified "yes". True, Ireland was not by international and historic standards overpopulated, and its population and economy had already been showing signs of adjustment that would have continued without a "positive check" on the population like the famine.

Mokyr's conclusion from his comparative analysis of data from all thirty-two counties was that there was no strong relationship between population density, potato dependency, living standards, and famine mortality. This never did sit well with Irish historians. In a classic move of one-up-man-ship that is typical of the way economic historians behave, Ó Gráda puts data



from 305 baronies ("a finer, previously unexploited grid") through the econometric mill. Fortunately, the numbers have come out better this time.

One suspects that this preoccupation with Malthus has not helped clarify the question of whether Irish society was careening inescapably towards a disaster of this type. There are bits and pieces within Ó Gráda's book which suggest lines for future research. Both Mokyr and Ó Gráda have intimated that there was a link between Irish rural poverty and the entrepreneurial failures of the landlord class. In a context where the Irish climate "gave it a comparative advantage in potato cultivation", where the productive opportunities available in the countryside were hemmed in by incompetent management, potato dependency takes on an air of inevitability.

Perhaps Ó Gráda makes too much of the evidence which suggests consistent potato yields in the pre-famine decades. That there was not a historic tendency toward crop failures does not disprove the inevitability of the complete failure that occurred. Perhaps the key to the story lay in the rapid shrinkage in genetic variety of the crops in the same period. Ó Gráda emphasizes the range of varieties under cultivation in the eighteenth century, all of which had been largely supplanted by the infamous Lumper by the 1830s. Ó Gráda writes that "The lumper was adopted for its reliability and its flexibility, . . . but unfortunately was particularly susceptible when the blight struck in 1845." A socioeconomic context which forced masses of the population toward potato dependence, and a genetic context which forced them toward extreme monoculture, cast an inevitability on the famine that has little to do with Malthusian positive or preventive checks.

Whether the potato failure itself was inevitable may be an open question, but there is no question about the inevitability of the horrible toll in lives. The revisionist thesis that the British state did what it could in the face of the enormity of the famine—given the available resources and prevailing administrative difficulties—has been recently lowered into the grave. Ó Gráda pounds a couple of fresh nails into the coffin. He takes an honest look at the business of government relief in order to assess what he calls the "'agency hypothesis,' which holds that the allocation of relief was characterised by endemic waste and corruption." Lacking the type of data needed for a properly quantitative judgement on this question, Ó Gráda enters a terrain more familial to social and political historians and adjudicates the "battle of quotes" surrounding the behaviour of relief committees, focussing on County Clare where the debate was most intense.

A level of favouritism, maldistribution, and leakage of relief to the undeserving was to be expected; but Ó Gráda concludes that this was not the fundamental issue. Overriding it in importance were the fundamental weaknesses in government policy, both in their design and their scale. "A dogmatic obsession with the moral hazard and 'pauperization' arising from gratuitous or over-generous relief. . ." led to policies that were doomed to fail. Primary among these was the resort to a "cash for work" system whose success was predicated on the existence of enough food to feed everybody. As Ó Gráda writes, "forcing masses of half starving and poorly clothed people to build roads and and break stones in all weathers, often for less than a subsistence wage, was no way to minimize mortality." The Great Irish Famine stands out in global and historical terms because the government refused to commit itself to direct relief of the starving.

More fundamental still was the government's unwillingness to commit resources anywhere near the required level. Here the comparative and economic perspectives produce the most damning argument. The British government misspent £9.5 millions on the famine. How much was needed? Ó Gráda gives us one of those deft back-of-the-envelope calculations that are a



hallmark of his writing and argues that £50 millions would have compensated Ireland for the lost potatoes.

This was a considerable sum, amounting to roughly 2% of national income, and much more than Ireland would have been able to raise on its own. How does that compare with other major government expenditures in the Victorian era? £20 millions were spent in the compensation to slave owners after abolition in 1833, and £70 millions on prosecuting the Crimean War. The British state was clearly capable of marshalling enormous sums to further projects consistent with its doctrinaire interests. John Mitchel's famous claim that "Ireland died of political economy" is now completely vindicated by contemporary economic analysis.

The book closes with an analysis of a completely different set of evidence, and ends up in a different world altogether. Here we have the experience of the famine, as told by the storyteller Peig Sayers or the farmer-poet Peatsaí Ó Callanáin, in all its harrowing intimacy. The concerns are local in context, the silences are significant, and the memories are flawed, but Ó Gráda argues persuasively that historians have wrongly avoided folklore. (Ó Gráda's suggestion that we have avoided this terrain because "the best of it is in Irish" is particularly stinging for a cadre of professionals whose second language is more likely to be French or statistics). Compared to the writings of English-speaking Dublin radicals, London political economists, or government ministers, these recollections reveal more closely the reality of the famine experience.

Ó Gráda's readers have accustomed themselves to a style which careens from terse narration into dense thickets of data analysis and modelling. The reader experiences a baffling trajectory from well wrought prose into a thicket of technique and pages of data, both raw and cooked. He has often led the reader to the edge of a high precipice of a cliometric think-piece only to leave her hanging there with no choice but to make a dangerous leap to the next section, hoping for a soft landing into comforting conclusions and context-building. One feels that the narrative moves on with a wink and a nod from the expert, in whom we place our trust.

But Ó Gráda has in fact earned our trust over two decades of writing, and his style has become more engaging with each new book. For example, the central chapter entitled "Winners and Losers" includes some harrowing passages of econometric modelling designed to shed light on whether markets worked to properly allocate supplies of food and credit according to price signals. As is often the case, these exercises fail to provide clear conclusions. But Ó Gráda does not stop there, and attacks; he questions from another more accessible and revealing angle by investigating the surviving letters of two Cork grain merchants.

The last chapter on folklore brings us from the rather abstract global context with which the book opens right down to the immediacy and singularity of the famine experience. Ireland is fortunate to have a quantitative economic historian with such a sure touch and easy facility for the realities of historical experience. He is not only an economist of the first rank who has taken an interest in Irish history, but also one of Ireland's most important living historians.

*Martin Dowling (N. Ireland Arts Council)*

**William Smith O'Brien and the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848.** By Robert Sloan. (Four Courts Press, 2000), 320 pages. £39.50.

Since Professor Denis Gwynn in 1949, the vast collection of Smith O'Brien papers in the National Library and elsewhere has failed to inspire much Irish research on Young Ireland. Apart from Brendan Ó Cathaoir's biography of John Dillon, most interest, even after the sesquicentenary of the 1848 Rising, has come from Australia and North America. The author of the latest work, Robert Sloan, is based in England.



Dr. Sloan takes O'Brien's story from his early days as the scion of a powerful Clare Protestant family of royal Gaelic antecedents through his education to his election to parliament, first for Ennis and then for Limerick. O'Brien's work as an independent parliamentarian in the 1820s, '30s, and early '48s is covered in detail. The chequered relations between O'Brien and O'Connell are effectively demonstrated in the years before O'Brien joined the latter's Repeal movement in 1843. The rest of the work, from page 105, deals with O'Brien's membership of the Repeal Movement, his break with O'Connell in 1846, the establishment of the Young Ireland Confederation in 1847 and the path to rebellion in July 1848.

The scholarship, marred somewhat by the publisher's bunching of footnotes, is extremely impressive in range and comprehensiveness of documentation. Dr. Sloan writes well and provides many shrewd comments on the actions and attitudes of his subjects. The field covered is comparatively well known, but Sloan gains depth by the inclusion of material from lesser-known sources and more intensive scrutiny of traditional documentary collections.

The treatment of the insurrection which climaxed at the Widow McCormack's house near Ballingarry, is probably the best attempt to achieve order out of the chaos of differing accounts and sworn statements. Dr. Sloan is proud of his documentation and rebukes former writers on the subject for failing to match it. However, he appears curiously reluctant to engage his predecessors in sustained debate on their interpretation of O'Brien.

The book is not a full biography of Smith O'Brien. Ending, somewhat abruptly, with the failed insurrection of 1848, it implies that failure as an insurrectionary leader was the most significant feature in O'Brien's career. Sloan's insistence that 1848 "had no heroic aspect that could be recalled" and that O'Brien was forgotten in 1916 sits uneasily with the Republican Proclamation of the latter year. In fact Sloan's complete dismissal of the 1848 Rising is too judgemental. The ill-armed and disorganised rebels at Widow McCormack's house faced, for a surprisingly long period, the fire of well-equipped police ensconced with hostages in a well-protected building. Sloan accepts O'Brien's personal courage on the occasion.

Throughout the book Sloan makes frequent reference to O'Brien's idealism, but how would O'Brien's reputation have fared had he burned the police out of the house at the expense of innocent children? Again, had O'Brien given general orders to commandeer food and property, it is doubtful whether Ireland would have then achieved freedom. But it is almost certain that the launching of a class war, perhaps comparable to the recent attacks on white farmers in Zimbabwe and South Africa, would in 1848 have provided an excuse for brutal government repression. O'Brien's status as an idealist would have quickly collapsed.

Dr. Sloan presents only the briefest mention of O'Brien's life in penal exile and return to Ireland. Failing in the entirely uncharacteristic role as a revolutionary leader, O'Brien in this period showed himself a most effective nationalist martyr. Despite the efficient use of many family letters, Sloan presents little sustained analysis of Smith O'Brien in the context of his close relations; indeed Sloan rejects the suggestion that O'Brien was a man on a tightrope, attempting to balance the Protestant conservatism of his parents, on whom he was dependent for finance, and the need to appeal to the Catholic nationalist constituency of Daniel O'Connell. Again, Sloan provides many of the details of O'Brien's relations with O'Connell, but has nothing to say on the less obvious long-term influence of the latter on the former, especially in the idea of restricting armed resistance to defence. O'Brien's concern for the Irish language receives scanty mention.

The vital education issue is certainly treated, but its implications for O'Brien's belief in a non-sectarian nationalism need more probing. O'Brien's strong, and apparently inconsistent, interest in British imperial themes is dealt with only perfunctorily. As Dr. Sloan ends in 1848, O'Brien's major published work, the two-volumed *Principles of Government; or Meditations in*



*Exile* (1856) is not mentioned. Effective in gathering considerable documentation to provide a narrative of events, Sloan is less concerned with O'Brien's general ideas and long-term philosophies.

Dr. Sloan, despite his new sources, comes close to accepting a traditional view that O'Brien, as in the Tipperary conflict, was a "byword for incompetence" but "the most noble, honourable, principled and patriotic politician of his age". To this reviewer, O'Brien was not quite so saintly, not quite so foolish, and a great deal more interesting, with some long-term messages for the Irish people. Far more than John Mitchel's famed *Jail Journal*, sometimes regarded as the essence of Young Ireland achievement, O'Brien's writings represent a tolerant, non-sectarian, Gaelic-oriented, civic ideal of considerable relevance to the present.

Within its own limits, however, Dr. Sloan's book is an excellent piece of scholarship and likely to become a standard authority and documentary guide.

Richard Davis (University of Tasmania)

**The Cooper's Wife is Missing: The Trials of Brigid Cleary.** By Joan Hoff and Marian Yeates. Basic Books, Oxford, 458 pages. £21.99.

Perhaps a review seeking to give a sense of this book should simply quote the opening paragraph:

The place was Clonmel, located on the River Suir in the south of County Tipperary, Ireland – that long-suffering, long-disloyal domain of Queen Victoria's grand and growing empire, where if the stout-hearted, stout-loving men of South Tipperary had their way there'd be few tears if the Queen, her empire, and the royal family too, for that matter, were suddenly to sink beneath the icy waves of the north Atlantic.

The reduction to one-dimensional stereotype of an area which enjoyed as rich a diversity of religious and political formations and opinions as did south Tipperary in the 1890s serves, unfortunately, as an accurate augury of the tone and contents of *The Cooper's Wife is Missing: The Trials of Brigid Cleary*. What the quoted paragraph does not do is to prepare the reader for the book's versions of verifiable historical fact.

The Fenian Rising took place in 1868. The I.R.B. derived its organisational method from the numerology of the *Tuatha de Danann*. Michael Cusack, founder of the G.A.A., doubled up as secretary of the Slievenamon Land League. Camogie is an ancient form of 'field-hockey'. Mullinahone is near the 'Slievemagh hills'. Women in the Ballyvadlea area sported double-barrelled names such as 'Brigid Boland Cleary' and 'Joanna Kennedy Burke'. The discovery of Bridgid Cleary's body led to those arrested being charged with 'murder in the first degree', a charge unknown in British law.

Social conditions in Clonmel can be demonstrated by newspaper accounts of the Templemore petty sessions. The English, we are helpfully informed on page 96, were the 'Sasanaigh' - 'Sasanaigh' presumably being one of those Celtic words from which, we are told, the words 'Caravats' and 'Shanavests' derive. As for the queen of the Sasanaigh, when renewed famine threatened in 1878 Victoria 'looked on with imperial indifference... apparently relishing the opportunity to dispatch another one or perhaps two million Irish Catholics to the New World or to the next world – it mattered not'.

Yeats's phrase 'the indomitable Irishry' is quoted and re-quoted by the authors as being synonymous with 'peasant' or 'the ordinary people'. It is nothing of the sort. As the fifth section



of 'Under Ben Bulbin' makes obvious, it represents Yeats's ideal alliance of peasants and 'hard-riding country gentlemen' against Paudeen and the middle-classes.

The authors presume throughout that the Clearys were politically defined by the questions of land tenure and landlordism, issues in which, as a cooper and seamstress, they had no direct economic interest. The landlords are depicted as storybook ogres who 'had stolen more land from the Irish and had sent in soldiers to protect their ill-gotten property rights', a dated caricature which comes just as the nuanced history of landlordism developed by W.E. Vaughan and others has won wide acceptance.

Indeed, Protestants generally tend to find themselves deprecated in this book, none more so than the great Kilkenny essayist and nationalist intellectual, Hubert Butler, whom the authors choose to describe as a 'British writer', perhaps on foot of his membership of the Church of Ireland. Similarly we are told, in defiance of easily verifiable fact, that 'only the very wealthiest' belonged to the Church of Ireland, something which was untrue in the 1890s, as it is untrue today.

There are extremely surprising inclusions in the list of primary sources, none more so than *Photographing Fairies*, a 1997 film directed by a certain Nick Willing. Material from the *Evening Mail*, which one would expect to be sourced in newspaper archives, is credited in a footnote to Angela Bourke's *The Burning of Brigid Cleary*. A particular irony attaches to the use of the latter source given that the authors display a considerable anxiety to disagree with Bourke, specifically rejecting her speculation about a possible affair between Brigid Cleary and the 'emergency man', William Simpson, and deeming 'suspect' her view of John Dunne as someone whose 'symbolic capital', his ability to negotiate the web of fairy narrative, had become redundant in an increasingly literate society.

For secondary source the authors draw on an extremely mixed range of material. Mark Tierney's *Croke of Cashel* is indeed a masterful biography, but a book on the Brigid Cleary affair hardly needs to spend endless pages synopsising its text – nor is the palace in Thurles a particularly revealing vantage point from which to view folk life and belief in Ballyvadlea. A similarly lengthy synopsis is made of W.Y. Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, a book which scholars of mythology are likely to utilise marginally, if at all, as background to the specifics of belief in the semi-modernised Irish context in which the Clearys lived.

Just as the Templemore assizes illustrates social conditions in Clonmel, examples drawn by Evans-Wentz from Sligo, Fermanagh, Donegal and Armagh are marshalled as proof of fairy belief in the South Tipperary of the 1890s. And we are told without the slightest evidence being produced that when Cleary believed his wife to be two inches taller 'the increase in physical size could be taken as a sign that the spirit in possession of Bridget's body was one of the *Tuatha de Danann*'. Perhaps Michael Cleary was a member of the I.R.B.!

The book is jointly written by the director of the Contemporary History Institute of the University of Ohio and by a Ph.D. graduate in American History.

Await the film.

*Proinsias Ó Drisceoil (Arts & Adult Education Committee, Kilkenny)*

**Blazing tar barrels and Standing Orders; North Tipperary's First County and District Councils 1899-1902.** By Donal A. Murphy (Relay Books, Nenagh, 1999). £5.95.

**Tipperary South Riding County Council 1899-1999: A century of local democracy.** Researched and compiled by Brendan Long (Tipperary S.R. County Council, 1999). No price stated.

The centenary of the 1898 Local Government Act and the first local government elections in



1899 provided an opportunity for an assessment of the significance of the legislation and the practice of local government in Ireland in its aftermath. On a national level the National Archives, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, staged an exhibition entitled *Lovers of Liberty? 100 years of local government in Ireland* which successfully toured the country, giving a flavour of the milestones during a century of local democracy and an opportunity to view original documentation dealing with all aspects of the practice of local government.

This exhibition reinforced the observations of Mary Daly in her seminal history of the Department of the Environment, *The Buffer State*, that

"For the majority of Irish people who lived in the countryside and in small towns, local government was the institution of state that impinged most closely on their lives. Twentieth century Irish society has been extremely dependent on the state to meet its economic, social and even cultural needs. Since it was the department responsible for providing services such as roads, water, sewerage, housing, libraries, parks and swimming pools, the demands were almost infinite".

While Daly's main concern was with how central government reacted to these challenges, for individual local authorities the emphasis for the centenary year was on producing regional surveys and histories of their own experience, and the resultant publications vary greatly in quality, quantity and focus.

Tipperary provides a particularly interesting case because of its unique division into two ridings, to which the author of *Blazing Tar Barrels*, Donal Murphy, had already turned his attention in the first of the Relay Regional Studies in Political and Administrative History. Writing such history provides particular challenges, as there is often a temptation to analyse and document the local without sufficient cognisance of the wider picture or national context. Writing local government history to coincide with a centenary also raises the question as to whether the publications are commemorations or celebrations. The former tend to be more critical and academically superior, while the latter can be orgies of self-indulgence, conveniently ignoring many of the utter failures of local government in practice.

Murphy, who received his historical training with the Institute of Public Administration, does not fall into this trap. Rather than survey the century, he chose to look specifically at the birth of local government in North Tipperary and has produced a book which is challenging, thoughtful, insightful, and most importantly, places regional events in a broader context.

Murphy gives a good overview of the background and genesis of the local government legislation and in particular the degree to which the practice of local government, despite the contemporary rhetoric presenting it as the dawn of a significant measure of home rule, was essentially dictated by finance. In this sense it vindicated the view of the first parliamentary leader of the Ulster Unionists, Edward Saunderson, that "When an Irishman...is confined within the lines of common sense and shown that if he chooses to indulge in eccentricity he will find it an expensive enjoyment, that Irishman is seen to be as sensible as any other man...".

This warning was to underline the fact that the arrival of local government was to be marked in general by significant conservatism rather than a radical reappraisal of local priorities. Notwithstanding, there was considerable organisational sophistication prompted by the first elections and the widening of the local government franchise, and a certain opportunity to give vent to sectional grievances, accounting for the involvement of priests in selection conventions, and disputes between farmers and labourers, where the emergence of trade and labour associations were an indication of considerable class tensions. A nascent labour movement,



short-term as it may have been, was an indication of the potential of labourers to form effective coalitions with the men of medium property in town areas. Murphy also indicates that the County Council assumed the role of "bossy elder sister" to the subordinate districts, with the main emphasis on tight expenditure, and that "local government in 1899 was very local, as... seen in the question of district versus Riding-at-large chargeability".

Much of the early council business can be seen to have been conducted with remarkable unanimity and, as with other councils, Tipperary North Riding was quick to use the landed unionist element who had far greater administrative and financial management experience. Also, in common with other councils, they unashamedly operated the spoils system in the allocation of council employment, in the process offering much entertainment for the public gallery, though significantly an early convention of the Trade and Labour Association, far ahead of its time, proposed that the council be called upon to open for competition all public offices under council control in the manner of the civil service system, it being sarcastically noted that, in the allocation of employment county and district councillors had "too many cousins belonging to them".

In terms of the evolution of early council policy, significant concerns were roads, particularly in the context of the demand for direct rather than contracted labour, agriculture, boundary and land issues, and the question of public transport by railway. For the urban district councils, which were essentially semi-independent, the issues of sanitary conditions and other elementary services such as water supply dominated the agenda.

A good indication of the level of research underpinning this book is that Murphy provides a detailed breakdown of the attention given to themes that engaged the councillors during the inaugural three years. The chief concerns were policy, chiefly roads (23% of council business); finance, mainly rates issues (20%), organisation and procedure (17%) and the supervision of district councils (10%).

Murphy's conclusions are extremely significant, not just in a regional, but a national context. He considers that good work was done with regard to roads, housing and labour and that the councillors were generally diligent "in an atmosphere of mainly boring, deadly detail"; that their attention to detail was commendable, as was their constant openness to public scrutiny, which is why such detailed newspaper accounts of their activities survive.

But the most important points made in this book concern class, which is ultimately what the whole century of local government in Ireland revolved around, and Murphy's focus on this is refreshing. He raises the fundamental question of who could afford to engage in public business, and notes that "the first council was far from being a representative sample of the community, even after leaving women and landless labourers out of the question". The composition of early councils made it clear that poorer people were prevented from meaningful participation in public service; the vocational profile of the first 30 county councillors included 15 farmers, 4 landowner/gentlemen farmers, 1 landowner and land agent, 1 farmer and auctioneer, 1 farmer and mill owner, 4 farmers-cum-merchants, 2 merchants, 1 solicitor and 1 hotelier.

Murphy notes that "the incremental approach to housing improvement, town and country, by the men who paid the rates and owned the sites, as well as the borrowing limits for water and sewerage capital works, ensured that there was no social revolution". It could be argued that the introduction of local government in Ireland was by no means revolutionary but rather "the regrading of rulers from wealthy landowners to the very comfortable farming owners and tenants".

Brendan Long's journalistic survey of Tipperary South Riding County Council is very



disappointing in light of the quality of Murphy's book. Long's compilation, based on his experience of 50 years' reporting on local government business, falls into the category of "celebration" rather than "commemoration", which is perhaps not surprising given that in his introduction he contends that "made as we all are in the image and likeness of our maker and harbouring thereby within us the spark of divinity, it has been my experience to have glimpsed the tell tale glint of that spark most often in those who have taken upon themselves the political service of their electorate". It doesn't improve much thereafter.

Most of this publication is in the form of lists – of election candidates and results and resolutions adopted by the council, along with excessively lengthy reproductions of council minutes, which become tedious and repetitive. The prose is truncated by far too many sub-headings and undermined by the absence of footnotes and index.

While there is a mass of detail, the main weakness in Long's approach is the lack of a broader context and a suitable, consistent framework in which to place his information. As a result, too many questions are left unanswered.

For example, a particularly interesting episode in the history of this council was its dissolution in 1934 as a result of a 'no rates' campaign waged under the auspices of the Blueshirts. The responsibility of administering the local authority area was left to Commissioner P.J. Meghen, who presided until 1942. He was widely regarded as being enormously successful in tackling issues of housing, finance and unemployment to the extent that the *Nationalist* newspaper decried his departure and the return to an elected council. This is an example of an opportunity to place the events in Tipperary in the wider context of debates about local autonomy versus centralisation and the obvious complete inefficiency of some local authorities; but the issue is not explored to any significant extent.

There are various pieces by other contributors. Eileen O'Brien, daughter of Councillor John Kearney, recalls what it was like to be a member of a county councillor's family. Do we really need to know that he broke his thighbone when "the fresh young farm horse, Nancy, had reared, causing him to be thrown from the cart?" One of the more entertaining episodes recounted is of the trial of 2 men in December 1960, charged with kidnapping Councillor Patrick Brett, to prevent him from voting at a council meeting at which three rate collectors were appointed. The men were acquitted, and the prosecution's case was hardly helped by the fact that Brett was witnessed getting uproariously drunk with his 'kidnappers' in Cork. Past officials also contribute accounts of the Council's work in such areas as agriculture, vocational education, the development of hospitals and library services, but again the main emphasis is on listing rather than enlightening. One suspects the appeal of this book will remain strictly in the local domain.

*Diarmaid Ferriter (St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra)*

**Prince of Swindlers: John Sadleir M.P. 1813-1856.** By James O'Shea (Geography Publications, Dublin). 510 pages. £25.00.

The Sadleir family had connections to the household of Henry VIII, later served in the household of Thomas Cromwell and was rewarded with extensive land grants. Colonel Thomas Sadleir came to Ireland and served as Adjutant General under Cromwell in 1697. He was rewarded with confiscated lands and civic office and became MP for the county in 1661. His cousins, who had acted as godparents to Shakespeare's children, acquired lands in Laois, Kilkenny and Tipperary in 1654. As in England, the Sadleirs augmented their property and consolidated their position through marriage and established a tradition of legal practice.



The banking connection came through marriage with the Scullys – Catholics and extensive farmers in Tipperary – whose wealth enabled them to establish the Tipperary Bank in 1803. The Scullys have a checkered history in 'national' politics. James Scully offered to raise a troop of horse to help quell the 1798 rebellion. His son Denys – one of the first Catholics to enter Cambridge in 1794 – was a barrister who authored an influential book on the Penal laws and became a key figure in Catholic Emancipation. Denys's sister Joanna married Clement Sadleir in 1805. Their son John, the subject of this book, was born in 1813. He was educated at Clongowes Wood College and then joined his cousin's legal practice in Dublin and commenced a five-year legal apprenticeship in 1832.

The Tipperary Bank had managed to survive the great banking crisis of 1820 due to its special relationship with the Bank of Ireland and its owners' wealth and reputation for prudence. By 1845 it had acquired 9 branches, which was reasonably extensive by the standards of the time, particularly given its geographical concentration. John used his accumulating legal expertise in conveyances, trusteeships and receiverships to advance his own position and that of the bank. He engaged in sharp practice, arranging bank mortgages on distressed estates at unfavourable, at times fraudulent, terms that allowed him to gain a subsequent hold over clients' property.

In expanding the bank's business he increased his own influence over its affairs. His brother, James, became managing director of the bank under a new deed of partnership that John helped to draw up for the re-constituted Tipperary Joint Stock Bank. As the Sadleir influence and holdings in the bank grew the Scully influence waned. Vincent Scully, although alarmed at the failure to conduct an annual audit, took no effective action to remedy it. Scully was pre-occupied with his own brother's assassination in 1842 following evictions he had made at the Kilfeacle estate. The bank initially prospered in the wake of the 1845 Irish Banking Act, despite the onset of the Great Famine.

John's ambitions required a larger stage. He moved to London at the onset of the railway boom and acted as parliamentary agent. He used that expertise to acquire executive positions and shareholdings in a plethora of emerging domestic and international railway companies and also became chairman & shareholder in the London and County bank. He was elected Liberal MP for Carlow in 1847. In keeping with his background and class interests his politics was liberal and market oriented.

He was lukewarm towards Repeal, opposed to violent agitation and rebellion and to the Young Irelanders. He supported the 1848 Act that made felons of those breaching public orders and carried transportation as its penalty. For a period, he supported the suspension of *habeas corpus*. The evidence suggests, however, that he behaved honourably towards Irish tenants during the famine and also pressed parliament for relief. A burgeoning workhouse population, of course, assisted in clearing estates of famine-stricken paupers, and parliamentary relief eased the local fiscal burden on Irish property owners.

John Sadleir contributed to legal reforms, notably the Incumbered Estates Act, that enhanced the efficiency of land transfer. Using the Manchester Land Company and the Irish Land Development Society as vehicles he became a principal beneficiary in the five million acres that consequently changed hands. He swindled owners of encumbered estates and his own relations in a succession of land deals. Widespread tenant evictions and the collapse of the Repeal movement led to the launch of the Irish Tenant League in 1850. Carlow, however, was relatively immune to the League's influence and Sadleir deftly trod between self-interest as a landlord and sympathetic murmurings on tenant rights in 1851.

He had an honourable parliamentary record in separating religious and temporal powers as



demonstrated by his contributions on jury selection and the oath required of Jewish MPs. He played a notable parliamentary role in opposing the Ecclesiastic Titles Act that gave rise to the Catholic Defence Association. He acquired a newspaper – the *Telegraph* – that undercut the *Tablet*, the *Nation* and the *Freeman's Journal* and for a period exceeded their combined circulation. It also assisted in his electioneering efforts when Lord Russell's Whig government fell. Five grandsons of James Scully were elected in the ensuing July 1852 election: John by a narrow margin, after having had one of his opponent's key supporters – Edward Dowling – arrested on a writ bearing a forged signature. The law suit that followed would later play a key role in his downfall.

The election result reinforced Tenant League suspicion that a Sadleir family clique would manipulate the Irish party of MPs for their own advantage. The Leaguers skillfully and publicly bound Sadleir to support the Sharman-Crawford land reform principles. They believed that they had also secured from him an undertaking of principled parliamentary opposition as a means of securing of land reform. When it became clear to the Irish group of MPs that they were being duped by the Derby government and would not secure the reform they sought they combined with the Whigs, Peelites and Radicals and brought it down in December 1852. Sadleir, however, had accepted a government offer of Irish Lord of the Treasury. This was seen as a clear breach of his 'pledge' and provoked outright hostility amongst the Irish MPs, who feared it would fragment the balance of parliamentary power held by them. Sadleir was upbraided publicly and narrowly defeated in the ensuing election.

Sadleir's public credibility and prospects of gaining a vacant Irish seat were dented when Lord Russell denied his assertion that he had re-canted the Titles Act or had given Sadleir assurances that he intended legislating for religious equality. In conditions of near riot Sadleir was nominated for a vacant Sligo seat. He scraped home with eight votes to spare after a bruising public campaign in which he was opposed by three Dublin newspapers. From then on his career was menaced by litigation and investigation. His evidence in the Dowling case was dismissed as an insult to common sense and the jurors found in favour of Dowling. Sadleir resigned his Treasury appointment. He was tainted but not officially censured by a Parliamentary corruption committee investigating the conduct of the Sligo election. Dowling successfully sued him for complicity in his false arrest and was awarded £1,100 damages in March 1854.

Towards the close of 1853 important shareholders in the Tipperary Bank began to offload shares due to Sadleir's lack of accountability and his role in the Kingston estate scandal. Vincent Scully, "being entirely ignorant of its [the bank's] affairs and having lost confidence in its management", obliged Sadleir to agree to purchase his bank shares. The transfer, held in trust, was registered in December 1854 with payment due in July 1857. In January 1855 a large Sadleir borrowing from the Carson's Creek mining company, in which he had an interest, fell due for repayment. He lodged land deeds in lieu of cash at the London & County Bank, which he later illegally removed and used as security against further borrowings.

He needed £67,970 to pay for the Glengall estate, purchased by him at the end of 1853. By October he was forced to assign 14,000 acres to wealthy in-laws, the Eyres of Bath, who had by then loaned him £54,000. He had also run up considerable debts at the London & County bank and the Tipperary bank. His debt at the latter ran to £200,000 in 1855. He offered his brother James real estate as security but, in order to maintain public confidence, the agreement was unregistered. This proved to be disastrous to shareholder and depositors interests as, in July, he used the same land securities to secure a further £95,000 advance at London & County and persuaded the Tipperary bank to act as guarantor. Half of the advance was lodged with the Tipperary bank's London clearers in a desperate effort to forestall impending disaster.



He used forged securities to release lands for a cash sale, sold bogus shares in the Tipperary bank using falsified financial information, misappropriated funds held in trust and transferred funds from a small Newcastle bank he had acquired an interest. During 1855 the Tipperary bank advanced Sadleir £177,000, bringing his overdraft to £247,000 and by January 1856 it had risen to £288,000.

On February 12 the game was finally up: Tipperary bank drafts were refused by its London clearers. This triggered runs on the Irish branches which they managed to withstand until Saturday 16 February 1856, when the Bank of Ireland also refused its drafts, which were being discounted at 25%. Sadleir wrote some letters acknowledging his misdeeds and then poisoned himself on Hampstead Heath.

Winding up of the bank's affairs proved a slow, legally contested and expensive business. London & County was awarded title to the Sadleir loan securities and recovered most of its losses. The loss of these securities and legal expense amounted to around 10 shillings in the pound of Tipperary bank losses. Tipperary bank shareholders established their entitlement to limited liability and the 1,700 creditors were thus obliged to accept a larger shares of the losses. Sadleir friends and relatives suffered or were destroyed. James Sadleir fled the jurisdiction and was expelled from parliament *in absentia*. His cousin Robert Keating, also a bank director and MP, resigned from the London & County bank and did not contest the 1857 general election. The Sadleir family influence on Irish political life was broken forever.

Mr O'Shea has provided a painstaking, scholarly and fascinating account of the life of John Sadleir – lawyer, banker, landowner, industrial entrepreneur, newspaper proprietor and MP – that greatly adds to our knowledge and will complement more generally based accounts of famine times in Ireland. Some mysteries inevitably remain; only about a third of Sadleir debts of around £1,500,000 can be accounted for in terms of known or estimated expenses and commercial losses. Disastrous speculation is blamed for the remaining £1m, but we know little of its details.

Most of the banking laws and regulations that facilitated Sadleir's frauds have long since been amended: modern bank regulation and surveillance seeks to ensure that such practices are now technically impossible. And yet we observe bank failures, based on fraud and property speculation, in modern times. And although Sadleir and Robert Maxwell differ widely in personality and family background they also share much in common. While Mr O'Shea's accomplished book will delight the scholar these mysteries, parallels and modern resonances should help to ensure that it obtains the wider readership it undoubtedly deserves.

*Martin F. Kenneally (UCC)*

**Kilcash A History, 1190-1801.** By John Flood and Phil Flood (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1999), 135 pages. £9.

Ireland is replete with placenames, but in each county no more than a handful transcend their spatial limits and transmit aspects of the country's history. Kilcash is such a placename, and this book is a comprehensive examination of the place behind one of the country's best-known Irish language poems/songs, with its plaintive opening line: *Cad a dheanfaimid feasta gan adhmadaid* . . . .

Kilcash is a townland of just under 1,116 acres, in a civil parish of the same name. It lies to the south of another resonant placename, Slievenamon, and around half-way between Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. This excellent and tightly focussed book deals with neither townland nor parish, but very specifically scrutinises the storied and hallowed corner containing Kilcash



Castle, and the associated house, church, graveyard and mausoleum. The site is, of course, closely associated with the Butler family, a link not ended until as recently as 1997.

The first part of the book deals with the physical remains on the site and is illustrated with very clear and well-chosen black and white photographs. In detailing the various ruins, the authors have benefited from expert archaeological advice and their presentation of what can be dry information is both lucid and interesting. With regard to the graveyard, in two appendices the authors map and list all of the burials, giving the headstone inscriptions, many of which are from the eighteenth century.

The second section of the book looks at the early history of the site – flesh and blood rather than mortar and stone. Before the Butlers added the site to their empire, it was in the hands of the de Valle or Wall family. Much is made of Dame Alice Kyteler, a de Valle marriage connection, though her link to the site seems tenuous. However, a good story is hard to resist. Kilcash passed into Butler hands in the early 1540s, but there was an earlier link, the Butler-inspired *Statutes of Kilcash*, drawn up in the 1470s. It is typical of the paucity of records that it is unclear if the now ruined tower-house was built by a later de Valle or an early Butler.

Probably the Butler most associated with the site was Walter of Kilcash, the successor of Black Tom. Walter, 11th earl of Ormond, suffered imprisonment because of his catholicism and because he was in the way of powerful individuals with their own designs on Butler property. Walter's grandson and heir was the famous James Butler, 1st duke of Ormonde, but Kilcash was inherited by the duke's brother Richard "of Kilcash", who lived through most of the seventeenth century.

It is inevitable that this book has far more to say about these individuals than about Kilcash itself. Thanks to Cromwellian record-keeping, the tower-house comes into sharper focus mid-century, suffering major damage, though thanks to the grit of Richard Butler's wife, Kilcash was not in fact lost. When the writers deal with Kilcash church, they present an amount of specific detail indicating that Kilcash generally was an important centre of catholic activity, not least a refuge.

The descendants of Richard of Kilcash (d. 1701) dominate the third section of this book – a varied cast of characters, the most adventurous of whom was Richard's grandson Thomas, who held on to both Kilcash and his religion. One would like to know more about the deft footwork that made such retention possible. The authors quote from a letter by Butler in which he makes reference to "Coln Hamerlon", who was ill and who owed Butler money. This presumably is Robert Hamerton who died in 1733 four years after this letter and was typical of the new dispensation. Thomas Butler's brother was Christopher, archbishop of Cashel during the first half of the century. One imagines Thomas in Kilcash, looking resolutely towards his brother the archbishop, all the time keeping an eye on the God-fearing men in Clonmel. Thomas appears to have been fortunate in his choice of wife, a woman whose virtues are commemorated in the song *Cill Chais*.

Their son, however, lacked his parent's heroic resolve and conformed. When he died in 1766, his heir was a first cousin, Walter Butler of Garryricken, who did not live at Kilcash, moving instead to the much grander Kilkenny Castle, which he also inherited from his cousin, the main line of the Butlers having died out in 1760. It took another 31 years before the Ormond earldom was restored, to Walter's son John, who enjoyed the title for just four years before he died. (A genealogical table is provided to guide the reader through the profusion of Butlers.) This John Butler, 17th earl, was the last of the family to be buried in Kilcash, in 1795. At this point, the story more or less ends.

The final note is apt – the sale of Kilcash trees in 1797 and 1801. Over the following centuries,



Kilcash fell into decay. This entirely natural process was helped when in 1922, during the Civil War, the Free State army shelled the castle in the belief that it was occupied by Republicans. The final section of this book examines a number of songs/poems associated with Kilcash, chiefly of course *Cill Chais*. With help from Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, the text of the song is subjected to historical and literary analysis.

The publication of this book is timely. In 1997, the site was purchased from the Ormonde Estate by the Irish state, and *Kilcash a History, 1190-1801*, by describing the context of the site, is an important contribution to any discussion regarding the development of what is one of the county's key heritage sites.

Denis G. Marnane (St. Anne's College, Tipperary)

**White Knights, Dark Earls: The Rise and Fall of an Anglo-Irish Dynasty.** By Bill Power. (Collins Press, Cork, 2000), 240 pages. £14.99.

This attractively produced book is a study of the Mitchelstown-based family of King, earls of Kingston and their property, chiefly their neo-Gothic pile, burned in 1922. Was any corner of the country blighted by the presence of a nastier family? The 2nd earl was tried for murder. The 3rd earl, in charge of the North Cork Militia during '98, perpetrated numerous atrocities and, in an effort to consturct a monument to his ego, built Michelstown Castle on the backs of his unfortunate tenants.

His eldest son, who pre-deceased him, had a mania about Pre-Columbian Mexico and lavished a fortune on a series of books, dying of typhus in a debtor's prison. His brother, who succeeded to the title as 4th earl, was more interested in buggery than books. Like his father, he had his day in court and, something of a family tradition, became insane. His successor as 5th earl was his brother, who only enjoyed the title for two years, dying in 1869.

In telling the story of these individuals and their impact on the region, the writer is fortunate in having the evidence of such exceptional witnesses as Arthur Young the great English agriculturist, who briefly managed the estate, and Mary Wollstonecraft, feminist icon, who looked after the Kingston children for some years. In being fair to the King family, the author perhaps is too generous. His description of the 2nd earl as "the most outstanding and reforming aristocrate in the history of the three-county Galtee region" seems excessive.

Contrast this encomium with the writer's statement that the plight of the tenants shocked Wollstonecraft. The author's determination to mitigate extends to the attempts by the 2nd countess to proselytize and of the 4th earl to use his dominant position to prey sexually on his tenants. More seriously, the impact of the Famine on the estate is inadequately dealt with.

Chapter Eight provides a kind of interlude between the two parts of the Mitchelstown story and, apart from the obvious interest in a tale of such monumental excess and eccentricity, this chapter provides the Tipperary connection. Templetenny, a civil parish of over 18,000 acres in the extreme south-west of the county and including Ballyporeen, was part of the Kingston estate. This was sold through the Incumbered Estates Court just after the Famine and much of it came into the hands of an English industrialist Nathaniel Buckley. The author provides a straightforward account of the conflict between Buckley and his tenants and the roles played by a local agitator John Sarsfield Casey and the Cork-born journalist and later MP, William O'Brien, whose inquiry conducted for the *Freeman's Journal* and later published as *Christmas on the Galtees*, did so much to draw attention to the misery of uneconomic holdings.

The second part of the Mitchelstown story has two main protagonists, the widow of the 5th earl, who married William Downes Webber. Together they ran what was left of the once vast



estate, after chunks of it had been sold in the Incumbered Estates Court. Another Tipperary connection, dealt with clearly by the author, was the role of John Sadlier in taking advantage of the estate's financial difficulties.

The dowager countess died in 1909, her husband surviving until 1924, long enough to witness the destruction of their pomp and circumstance by virtue of land purchase legislation and the flames of civil war. During their time in the 1880s the estate was at the centre of concerted tenant agitation, leading to the famous cry: "Remember Mitchelstown". The author's account of the circumstances of the burning of Mitchelstown Castle is of great interest and the reader is left in no doubt about the writer's position on the matter.

Given the larger-than-life quality of many of the King family, it is not surprising that some of them appear in works of fiction. While the author makes use of many anecdotes about the family, he does not deal with this topic. For example, D.P. Conyngham refers to them in his novel, *The O'Mahony: Chief of the Comeraghs*. With regard to the King family in real life, the author has obviously metaphorically lived with them for years, more often than not referring to them by Christian names.

There appear to be very few slip-ups. The DNB is happy to refer to the botanist 'John K'Eogh' as plain John Keogh (p.7). The title held by the Moore family of Moorepark is more usually given as one word "Mountcashell" and the Glen of Aherlow based family is Massy-Dawson (p.87). Robert Peel was Home Secretary rather than PM during the 1820s and the Incumbered Estates Court continued until 1858. This review opened with a question. Buy this book and decide for yourself.

Denis G. Marnane (St. Anne's College, Tipperary)

**St. Joseph's Hospital, Clonmel: An Historical and Social Portrait.** By Eamonn Lonergan (Published by the author at 4 Shamrock Hill, Clonmel). 261 pages. £40.

Eamonn Lonergan has now firmly established himself as the hospital historian of Co. Tipperary. This is his third such book, as thoroughly researched as the two previous ones and full of local colour to balance what is essentially a chronicle of human ill-health.

Above all, it is a book for Clonmel, its people and their hinterland. This reviewer counted no less than 50 pages of photographs, or over one-fifth of the book. Everybody and anybody who (or whose relatives) have or had any connection with St. Joseph's, from the humblest employee up to the most distinguished medical personage, should find himself or herself here; and this as it should be, surely.

But this is not merely a dull story of a hospital and what went on inside its gages. As the subtitle claims, it is also a social history, telling how such an enormous institution played an important role in the life of a big provincial town and of the lives of inhabitants of South Tipperary. Nor is there any covering up of the warts. Poverty and famine, cruelty and incompetence stalk the early pages.

The role of Clonmel's Quaker community is not overlooked. Nor is that of the Sisters of Mercy, who had served St. Joseph's for 115 years when they left as recently as 1998. Daniel O'Connell and Sir William Wilde make brief appearances in this story; so do local families, like the Bolands, the Bearys, the Bagwells and the Creans – not to mention John Hassett of Cashel and his £100 fine!

The death of the fanatic General Liam Lunch is recalled, as are the antics of Fr. John Barry of



*Life in an Irish Workhouse.* The nepotism of the Victorian Ascendancy can be compared with the shameless jobbery of the 1920s under the (so-called?) Free State regime. Had Eamonn Lonergan not been busy researching his story, he could have contributed a scholarly article to this Journal's recent Famine series, detailing what seem to have been enforced emigration schemes often of young girls to Australia.

This fine book concludes with four Appendices, lists of sources, a bibliography and a useful index of names. It should be in every literate Clonmel person's home.

*Marcus Bourke (Editor, Tipperary Historical Journal)*

**"A Lamp Kindled": The Sisters of Mercy and Tipperary Town.** By Denis G. Marnane. St. Anne's Secondary School, Tipperary, 2000, 158 pages, no price given.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were eleven convents in Ireland housing 120 nuns. By the end of the century there were 368 convents housing over 8,000 nuns. This growth both reflected and advanced the Catholic revival of this period. From a loosely organised and relatively weak body, the Catholic Church developed into a highly centralised and immensely powerful organisation that was central to Irish society. As the century progressed, women increasingly opted to join active congregations engaged in work within the local community such as teaching, nursing or other welfare work, rather than contemplative orders. This enabled them to play a part not only in bringing Catholicism to the people but also in helping to shape the character and values of Irish society. Through the work of historians such as Maria Luddy and Mary Peckham Magray, we have come to appreciate the central role played by nuns in furthering the Devotional Revolution in Ireland. Now, through the work of Denis Marnane we have an awareness of their contribution to and impact on a particular locality, that of Tipperary town.

Marnane's study of the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Tipperary provides a fascinating picture of the interaction between the religious and the local community over the period from the establishment of a Mercy congregation in the town in 1864, up to the amalgamation of the Tipperary convent with other Mercy convents in the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly in 1973. The Sisters of Mercy began their work in the town on a relatively small scale, concentrating on visitation of the sick and the provision of primary education for infant girls and boys. By the 1870s, however, the Sisters were running two primary schools, a fee-paying school for girls and an industrial school, and were providing nursing care at St Vincent's Hospital and in Tipperary workhouse infirmary. In the twentieth century a commercial laundry was established in the town and later a retirement home. As Marnane observes, a "meaningful history of the Sisters of Mercy in Tipperary town has to tell the story of both the Sisters and the town", and it is in the skilful interweaving of these stories that the significance and originality of this book lies.

The Mercy congregation which was founded by Catherine McAuley in 1831 did not have a centralised structure. Each congregation was to respond to the needs of the poor in the locality in which it was established, subject to the authority of the local bishop. The Mercy nuns in Tipperary were lucky in that they had a strong supporter in Archbishop Croke. (Two of Croke's sisters were Mercy nuns.) Good relations between female religious and local Catholic clerics were essential to the success of a congregation. Catherine McAuley herself only decided to found the Sisters of Mercy after her efforts to engage in philanthropic work amongst the Dublin poor met with opposition from the Catholic clergy in Dublin. The Mercy convent in



Tipperary was established at the suggestion of Fr William Quirke, then a senior curate, who invited the Mercy Sisters to the town in 1863. He was later to become Dean of Cashel and remained an important friend to the congregation.

The women who joined the Mercy congregation in Tipperary were typical of those joining religious congregations throughout Ireland in coming from farming, business or professional backgrounds. These were women who were making a positive choice about how to live their lives' choosing a life of religious devotion and community service over that of motherhood and domesticity. Life as such was not easy. As Marnane notes, the middle-class background of the Mercy nuns emphasises the extent of their sacrifice and commitment. "Poverty smells and can have lice and nits". Nevertheless, entry into a convent did not mean leaving all social distinctions and privileges behind. Class and labour divisions existed within religious communities in the same way that they did in society outside the convent walls.

Women from middle class families joined the congregation as choir sisters bringing with them a dowry, generally of a few hundred pounds. Women from poorer families entered as lay sisters. Domestic work within the convent was performed by the lay sisters. When one young Wexford woman opted to enter as a lay sister "by choice" in 1875, her decision merited a special mention in the convent annals. Of the 61 women who entered the Tipperary convent in the period from 1864 to 1899, 19 were lay sisters. While the majority of entrants were drawn from the locality, some came from considerably further afield, including two women from Louth and one from Antrim.

One of the most interesting aspects of this study is the way in which the work of the Mercy Sisters is discussed as an aspect of local administration. The Mercy congregation was one of a number of bodies that contributed to the organisation and administration of the local community. Its leading members often came from families with a tradition of local service. Sr M Francis Cantwell, Mother Superior of the Tipperary congregation from 1892 to 1925, was the daughter of the Clonmel corn merchant and coal dealer, Edward Cantwell, who was an active member of Clonmel corporation and served as mayor of Clonmel on a number of occasions.

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, local government in Tipperary town consisted of the Town Commissioners and the Board of Guardians. The powers and responsibilities of these bodies were limited; so too were the aspirations of their members. The desire to save money, and thus keep rates low, tended to take precedence over that of improving local amenities. It was left to organisations such as the Sisters of Mercy to provide for the marginalised and the powerless within Irish society. The way in which they did this may seem harsh by modern standards. Institutions run by nuns were strictly regulated and paid little attention to the individual needs of inmates whether children or adults. Nevertheless, such institutions provided services and facilities that would not otherwise have been available.

Religious congregations in nineteenth-century Ireland provided an image of stability and continuity and thus a reassuring contrast to the rapid and far-reaching social, economic and political changes that were taking place. This contrast was more imagined than real. The work of the Mercy Sisters in Tipperary extended into new areas as the nineteenth century proceeded and the nature of their involvement in the local community changed as the community and the wider society of which it was a part changed and developed. The history of the industrial school in Tipperary town is a good example of this. The school was set up under an act of 1868 to cater for children whose parents were unable to care for them. The aim was to prevent such children becoming a danger or a burden to society by providing them with a moral and practical education.

The industrial school in Tipperary was attached to a national school (St Joseph's) which the



girls attended together with pupils from the parish. Of the 51 girls in the industrial school in 1872, four were orphans and 41 came from single-parent households. The parent or parents of almost half the girls were described as "destitute or criminal". The training provided in the school was primarily a practical one. The girls were taught needlework and cookery and also helped with domestic tasks around the school. Indeed some farmers complained that children in industrial schools received a better practical training than their own children. By 1891 the school was home to 86 girls.

Numbers, however, declined in the early decades of the twentieth century. When the school closed in 1922 it contained 40 children. In the light of the negative picture of industrial schools that has dominated the media in recent years, it is interesting to note the positive experiences and happy memories of a woman who spent much of her life in St Joseph's industrial school, having entered at the age of two and leaving in her twenties when the school closed. The site of the industrial school continued to be used for educational purposes, housing both St Anne's Secondary School and St Joseph's Primary School, and until 1936 the town's technical school.

This is one of those rare books that is of equal interest to the popular and the academic historian. It can be read both as a local history of Tipperary town, and as a case study with national implications and significance. There is plenty of fascinating and entertaining local colour, and there is much to inform and stimulate anyone studying the religious history of modern Ireland.

*Virginia Crossman (Staffordshire University)*



and attended together with pupils from the parish. Of the 21 girls in the industrial school in 1872, four were orphans and 17 came from single-parent households. The parents of parents of almost half the girls were described as "destitute" or "indigent". The training provided in the school was primarily a practical one. The girls were taught needlework and cooking and also helped with domestic tasks around the school. Richard Jones, a carpenter, employed the children in industrial schools, receiving a better practical training than their own children. By 1881 the school had grown to 35 girls.

Richard Jones was described in the early history of the township as one of the best of the school. In 1872 a committee of children in the light of the negative picture of industrial schools that had dominated the media in recent years. It is interesting to note the positive response and happy memories of a woman who spent much of her life in St Joseph's industrial school. Having worked in the age of poverty living in her tenting when the school closed. It is also interesting to note that the school continued to be used for educational purposes, housing both St Mary's Secondary School and St Joseph's Primary School, and until 1978 the town's technical school.

The school of those days was built in an open space to the south of the town and the school. It was built on a large plot of land in the town and as a first step with various improvements and equipment. There is plenty of evidence and information both in the town and there is much to suggest that the school was a success in many ways.

Richard Jones, 1872-1881