

Book Reviews

Anon, **Facts About Ireland**, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin 1978. Price £3.00.

The publication of this revised and updated version of the controversial 1963 first edition is to be sincerely welcomed. In it the reader will find brief, succinct accounts of most important aspects of Ireland and Irish life today, all expertly presented — it is a pity that officialdom seems to have prevented its author, or authors and editor, being given the credit deserved. Credit is given for the illustrations, even for the caption to one of them, but otherwise only the book's designer is acknowledged. Apart from this, and the absence of a proper title-page, the Department of Foreign Affairs are certainly to be congratulated on its production.

The information it supplies ranges from details on the geography, archaeology and history of Ireland, through information on its language, arts and sports, to an outline of its economy, services and international relations. Taken all round, there is very little of relevance and of major significance which one will not find in some way or other dealt with or touched upon. It might, in fact, be best regarded as a sort of ready-to-hand digest on everything the enquirer wants to know of Ireland.

Although rather small (octavo) and thick, with a glossy but artistically designed stiff paper-back cover, this book is well bound and handles well — it looks as if it might crack down the spine, but will, in fact, survive much use and re-use, and even continuous travel in the dashboard of a car.

The Contents only lists six of the seven maps (Rainfall, on page 13, is the missing one), and incorrectly places and describes the first! However, all the maps seem adequate for what they set out to provide, except that the railway lines shown on the Communications map, on page 217, are misleading optimistic. One might also query the inclusion of the Newry Canal with the major rivers shown on the map on page 11 — surely the Ordnance Survey can do better?

Apart from the maps, there are well over two hundred illustrations. These are all of a high standard, and many are in first class colour — technically and artistically they excel and are far superior to many to be found in much more pretentious publications.

Taken all-in-all, this publication is well worth acquiring, not only for oneself but perhaps even more so as a present for the intending visitor to our shores.

ETIENNE RYNNE

Claire O'Kelly, **Illustrated Guide to Newgrange and the other Boyne Monuments**, privately published, Cork (Printed by John English and Co. Ltd., Wexford) 1978. Price £3.10.

This third edition of Claire O'Kelly's *Guide to Newgrange*, is a comprehensive and greatly enlarged and revised account of what is arguably the most impressive of all European Passage Graves [see this *Journal*, 10:2 (1967), 228, for review of the first edition]. The tomb itself was excavated by the author's husband, Professor M. J. O'Kelly of University College, Cork, during the years 1965-80, and restored, under his direction, to something of its former magnificence and glory of about 5,000 years ago. Mrs. O'Kelly has been deeply concerned in her husband's work since their student days together, and so she brings an intimate knowledge of her subject to this excellent publication.

As an archaeologist in her own right, Mrs. O'Kelly has made a particular study of the art of the Passage Graves, and here she discusses and contrasts Newgrange with the other Boyne Valley sites, not only from the point of view of art, but also the methods of its application to the stone. Of course, since the publication of the second edition of this *Guide* further interesting examples of the art have come to light. For example, the author shows an interesting parallel between the ornament on stone K 67 and that on a sherd from the Scottish Neolithic village of

Skara Brae, which poses the possibility of a connection between the Grooved Ware of the Orkneys and the megalithic builders of the Boyne. As Mrs. O'Kelly points out, this correspondence has been cited before, latterly by Euan Mackie in *The Megalith Builders* (Oxford 1977).

An important additional dimension has been added to our knowledge of Newgrange by the description here of the chamber vault as a free-standing structure surrounded by its own small cairn. The building of the cairn is now thought of as structurally separate.

The earlier part of the book provides a very satisfactory guide for the visitor to Newgrange who wished to study the general lay-out and art of the monument, while the later excellent chapter on "Brú-na-Bóinne in Literature and in History" is of added general interest.

The remainder of the *Guide* is scholarly without being either pedantic or patronising, and is, therefore, of interest to those who wish to understand Newgrange and its ambience more fully. The list of the sites of the Boyne Passage Grave Cemetery is comprehensive, and we are also given a list of other Irish Passage Grave cemeteries.

The Plates, which deserve special mention, are superb and the Text-figures, Index and Bibliography excellent while the aerial photographs pose new and intriguing questions. This updated version of Claire O'Kelly's book is much more than a guide, it is a significant contribution to archaeology. Would that there were more guides of this scholarly calibre available for other Irish sites!

MARY McDONAGH

George Cunningham, *Burren Journey*, Shannonside Mid-Western Regional Tourism Organisation, Limerick 1978. Price £1.00.

This is the type of tourist guide which is becoming essential nowadays. A specific circuitous route is mapped out and annotated bit by bit, as it were, in such a way that the modern tourist can join the trail at whichever point he pleases. It is clearly orientated towards the motorist or cyclist, as it seldom wanders far off the main roads, but that is the way that the majority of our tourists visit a region. The particular route this little guide covers is the run from Kilfenora, down the Corkscrew Hill towards Ballyvaughan, up again past Aillwee Cave and Poulmabrone Dolmen of Leamenah Castle and back to Kilfenora, all-in-all one of the more picturesque and informative one-day tours anyone could make through the Burren.

The history and archaeology of the area gets full and generally accurate coverage, though unfortunately there are some rather serious errors, errors which will doubtless be corrected in future editions. For instance, the suggested interpretations in the captions for the photos of the two main faces of the Doorty Cross, Kilfenora, are not entirely justified. Nor is it entirely fair to describe Caherminnaun cashel as either a castle or "a heap of ruins and rubbish", while the Early (not Middle) Iron Age fort Caher Ballykinvarga neither is nor ever was bivallate nor has it two terraces inside it.

A more serious error is on page 26 when it is stated that the entrance to wedge-tombs is to the east of a north-south line — it is *invariably* to the west.

The small standing cross mentioned on page 26 and illustrated on page 28 is not a common type of monument in the Burren — nor has this particular one "a forgotten story" [see this *Journal*, 15 (1972), 61]. Another minor error is the descriptive term "multiple cist graves" which would not of itself imply a covering cairn as at Poulawack — *recte* "multiple-burial cairn". The hunting kings painted on the rock face near Ballydoora Crossroads can hardly be mistaken for cowboys or Norman one would think, nor are they likely to be of medieval date — I seem to recall a story that the late George U. MacNamara, the noted antiquarian, painted them well under a hundred years ago, but I could be mistaken and only re-painting may have been involved.

The large manor-like addition to the tower-house at Leamenah can probably be dated

somewhat more closely than "early 17th century" — it surely dates to the period of Máire Rua MacMahon and Conor O'Brien, which would place it between 1639 and 1651, and, indeed, probably was erected at the same time (1643) as the ornate gateway leading to it (removed to the grounds of Dromoland Castle in 1908 — not "in the last century"). And Sir Donat was *not* "the son of the builder of the tower-house", but the son of Conor and Máire Rua, builders of the very much later addition.

It may perhaps be thought a bit unfair to pick on so many seemingly not altogether important details, but this is a useful publication which will be kept and widely read, and as such deserves to be constructively criticised. Its author has supplied a wealth of relevant information in a readable and interesting way, and even caps the excursion text with equally useful extended notes on local placenames, local families, local flora, and a worthwhile bibliography. All-in-all, this is a booklet to be welcomed and, we understand, the first of a set of three such guides to the general area. Not only the author and Bord Fáilte are to be congratulated on its production, but also its printer, the Limerick Leader.

ETIENNE RYNNE.

Mainchín Seoighe, *Dromin and Athlacca: the Story of a Rural Parish in Co. Limerick*, Glór na nGael, Áth Leacach, Co. Luimnigh, 1978. Price £3.00.

The bi-lingually fluent pen of Mainchín Seoighe, a long-time member of our Society, has been active again, this time in the production of a major collection of the local history of the parish of Dromin/Athlacca which is situated roughly between Bruff, Bruree and Kilmallock. Almost every possible aspect of the area's past is covered and recounted in clear, easy to read and well-organised chapters — this book indeed, might well serve as a near-perfect model for anyone venturing to undertake such an admirable project as recording the stories, the historical and not-so-historical events, and antiquities and the topography, not to mention the local people, of their own area.

The quantity and quality of the information contained in this book suggests that not only must its author have been actively engaged in its collection and checking-out for several years but also that he must surely have had a whole legion of friends assisting him! This work, in other words, seems to be so comprehensive that one might be forgiven for suspecting that it may have been at least partly a community effort — indeed, one way or another the result is one of which the whole local community can be justly proud.

This is not to say that everything in the book is without flaw. One might criticise, for instance, the manner in which the inscriptions on the headstones in the churchyards in Dromin and in Athlacca are presented (pp. 176-181 and 181-182 respectively). In neither case is any attempt made to list them either chronologically or alphabetically, and we are furthermore told that "It can be taken that practically all of the inscriptions have been abbreviated to a greater or lesser degree". While the Index at the end of the book helps the researcher to find the name he might be looking for, it only directs him to the page — not to where in the cemeteries he might find the relevant headstone. When the work of transcribing the headstone inscriptions was done (and it has a value even in the form and manner in which it appears here), it was a pity that the work of those such as Henchion [see, for instance, *J. Cork Hist. Archae. Soc.*, 79 (1974), 26-58] was not used as a model.

Unexpected items of interest crop up everywhere. To give but one example: who, for instance, would expect to find a note at the end of a chapter on "Gaelic Games" which seems to describe a form of Rugby? The note describes nineteenth-century cross-country football matches between parishes, usually Athlacca and Fedamore, in which the winning team was that "which would succeed in carrying the ball home to some agreed point in its own parish"

(italics mine, *E.R.*). Maybe there's more to the oft-asserted theory that the English schoolboy William Webb Ellis "first took the ball in his arms and ran with it" (thus instituting the game of Rugby) because of ideas picked up while on holidays in Tipperary!

It should be clear that not only can this book be used as a history book for the locality, and read as such, but that it can also serve as an entertaining collection of data which can be dipped into for miscellaneous nuggets of fascinating information by the not necessarily so locally orientated readers; it provides not merely a parish history but also a slice of national history.

Comhgairdeas! a Mhainchin, as ucht an leabhar seo — go mba fada buan thú i n-ár measg agus i measg na gnath-chaoine ded cheantar féin!

ETIENNE RYNNE

Michael MacMahon, **Portumna Priory**, privately published, Portumna 1978. Price 50p.

The Irish countryside is studded with ecclesiastical foundations which are a source of curiosity not only to the foreign visitor but also to the native whose knowledge of them is generally confined to one or two 'traditions' that have suffered in transmission. There is an urgent need for brief, accurate, monographs of such sites in each locality. This need has been admirably met in Portumna, where the author of this booklet, one of our members, has rescued the old Priory ruins from oblivion and makes them live once again the six centuries of the varied history. He traces for us the story of the original foundation by the Norman, William de Cogan — not, however, of a Dominican Priory but of a Cistercian chapel affiliated to the Abbey of Dunbrody in the far-away diocese of Ferns, Co. Wexford. This Cistercian foundation was abandoned in the fourteenth century to be replaced in 1414 by a Dominican priory, the ruins of which, nave, transept and domestic buildings dating from the late fifteenth century, including two exceptionally fine traceried windows, are since 1951 a National Monument; the thirteenth century Cistercian chapel forms the choir of the church.

The Priory managed to survive the sixteenth century dissolutions and was occupied periodically during the following century. After the defeat of Aughrim in 1691, the friars were forced to retire to Boula, one and a half miles away, where they survived until 1899. During the later Penal times until 1832 they served as parish priests of Portumna. The whole story is sketched in detail and makes pleasant reading. The booklet is tastefully produced, with good pictures and a ground plan of the ruins.

REVD. MARTIN RYAN

A. E. Went, **Irish Coins and Medals**, The Irish Heritage Series: 4, Eason & Son Ltd., Dublin 1978. Price 90p.

This "pop" version of Irish Numismatic history covers the subject at a hop-skip-and-a-jump pace, something which is not said here to denigrate the author or his work — Dr. Went has over the years contributed many papers to various journals on different aspects of Irish coins and medals.

The scope of this subject is so vast that scholars from Aquilla Smith, in the nineteenth century, to Michael Dolley of today have published volumes on many facets of it. However, over the years not many booklets of a general nature have appeared, suitable to the needs of the casual reader, the junior collector or those generally interested in the subject. Some well illustrated catalogues are in print, but though these show all the principal varieties of coins issued they are generally somewhat sketchy on background information. This little booklet does not illustrate quite so many coins as a catalogue, but it does give the history linking each period of issue, from the Hiberno-Norse period to the modern decimal issues.

Irish coinage began in the Norse kingdom of Dublin about 995 A.D. to facilitate trade between Dublin and other Norse settlements abroad, but the native Irish themselves did not use coinage. The Anglo-Normans were the next to issue coinage, commencing with Prince John in 1185 who was, at that time, Lord of Ireland. The last Anglo-Irish coins were struck in 1823 during the reign of George IV. After this, Irish coinage was abolished, and English coins circulated here — as they still do. After covering this period, Dr. Went gives a brief account of the nineteenth century token coinage and a brief resumé of modern Irish coinage which was instituted in 1928.

The medal section starts with a double page illustration showing most of the official medals awarded in this State — military, naval, garda and Red Cross medals, accompanied by a brief background note. The author then furnishes us with a profusely illustrated run-down on Irish medals — historical, political, scholastic award, agricultural, abstinence society, and Orange Order medals, with some brief biographical notes on some of the best known designers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century medals.

In all, some one hundred and ninety coins, tokens, medals and coin weights are illustrated.

As I have hinted earlier, this booklet is intended to fill a vacuum in Irish numismatic literature for the general reader. However, there would seem to be justification for some reservations: most of the pieces illustrated are not shown actual size, some are greatly enlarged, some greatly reduced — reduced too small, in fact, to be fully clear; very few of the coins have been individually photographed — many of the coins have been photographed together with the result that some of the coins at the top and bottom of each photograph appear out of focus. More importantly, perhaps, is why more prominence was not given to Ireland's only gold coins, the double pistole and pistole — they look very insignificant in the photograph amongst the gold medals. Despite these criticisms, however, the book is value for money and worth acquiring.

PAUL DUFFY

Brian M. Walker (editor), **Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922**, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1978. No price stated.

W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick (editors), **Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971**, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1978. No price stated.

These two ancillary publications of that major project, *The New History of Ireland*, are useful collections of information which should prove of value to all Irish historians of the last century and of this. It is helpful to have, in compact form, tables which, while reasonably accessible in our major libraries, are not always to hand when one needs them. However, one must always be aware of the pitfalls of transcription. For example, an obvious error occurs in the population table for the Republic of Ireland, *i.e.* Table 4. There, an increase in population between 1946 and 1951 is recorded as a decrease. More important, perhaps, than such a misprint is the decision of the editors, without any explanation, to exclude the statistics of religion which are available for 1831 and 1834 and to confine their tables on this topic to the period since 1861. Most of the tables of population relate to ages and conjugal status and to emigration statistics. Indeed, these topics fill two-thirds of the volume.

The volume on parliamentary election results, though it does not make this clear, is confined to elections to the United Kingdom parliament. It does not include elections to the parliaments of Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland in 1921 and does not give the result of the 1922 general election to the U.K. parliament in the Northern Ireland constituencies.

The editor has done a very good piece of work in compiling the information for this book. However, I noted many discrepancies between the population which he gives for certain areas

and those given in the companion volume of census returns. The result of the 1918 election in Limerick City is given as being won by Michael Collivet with the total electorate, both living and dead, voting for him. In fact there was no contest in that instance, so Collivet did not get 17,121 votes. I noted a number of omissions in the list of vacancies in the 1918 to 1922 period. Those caused by the deaths of Terence MacSwiney and of Arthur Griffith in Mid Cork and West Cavan are listed, but Griffith also held a seat in Tyrone although the vacancy arising there is not mentioned. Neither are the vacancies caused by the deaths of Pierce McCann, Cathal Brugha, Harry Boland and Michael Collins.

In the very useful index of candidates I failed to find the name of Desmond FitzGerald, though he is recorded in the election returns for Pembroke Division of Dublin, 1918 to 1922. Michael Davitt's resignation in 1899 is wrongly recorded, and so too is Eamon de Valera's tenure of the Mayo East seat from 1918 to 1922. A number of M.P's get two entries in the index. Dr. John Gray and Sir John Gray are the same person and so too are Timothy Harrington and T.C. Harrington. The two John Dillons and the two John Mitchels (both misspelt) refer in each case to well-known Irish political figures. Entries relating to Dr. Patrick MacCartan appear widely apart from each other under "Macartan" and "McCartan". Peers are particularly confusing as they climb the ladder. The sixth Earl of Mayo appears under "Bourke, R.S." and under his title, Lord Naas, for different periods in Parliament. A clear system of cross-reference is needed in these cases. One may note that even those who get two entries in the index may not be covered fully. For example, The O'Gorman Mahon's parliamentary career appears under "Mahon" and "O'Gorman Mahon" but neither of the two entries refer to his election for Carlow in 1887.

Despite the minor defects mentioned, these two volumes are valuable additions to our reference shelves. Of the two I consider Dr. Walker's compilation on elections as the more important. The information which he has brought together is much less readily available than the census returns summarised in the volume of population statistics. I look forward to the promised continuation of Dr. Walker's work on Irish elections from 1922 to 1976.

THOMAS P. O'NEILL

Laurence Walsh, O.Cist., **Richard Heaton of Ballyskenagh 1601-1666**, Parkmore Press, Roscrea 1978. Price £2.00.

This illustrated volume by Laurence Walsh, O.Cist., of Mount Saint Joseph's Abbey, Roscrea, documents the life and times of Richard Heaton, onetime owner of the lands whereon Mount Saint Joseph's now stands. Born in 1601 into a Protestant family in rural Yorkshire, and educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, Richard Heaton came to Ireland as a chaplain in the army of Wentworth and was appointed Prebendary of Iniscattery, *i.e.* Scattery Island including Kilrush, and Rector of Birr. On the outbreak of rebellion in 1641, he returned to England where he remained until the Restoration. On return to Ireland he was appointed Dean of Clonfert, conferred with a Doctorate in Divinity at Trinity College, and successfully pursued a claim to the lands of Ely O'Carroll. These lands were inherited by his son Francis, who changed the name of Ballyskenagh to Mountheaton in Memory of his father, and built the Heaton mansion which to-day serves as the guesthouse of the Abbey.

Richard Heaton's claim to a place in history is based on his discoveries as a botanist, he being generally regarded as the first Irish botanist. His eight published Irish records appeared in How's *Phytologia Britannica*, published 1650, and are of interest in that not only are they the earliest printed records of Irish plants but also they include some of the most interesting and rare species in our flora. *Gentiana verna*, Spring Gentian, and *Dryas octopetala*, Mountain

Avens, he recorded from the eastern part of the Burren, which is the centre for these species in Ireland, while from nearer home, in a bog near Roscrea, he recorded '*Pyrola vulgaris*, *Winter Green*', probably *Pyrola rotundifolia*, a species with its headquarters to-day in Co. Westmeath. These and other discoveries caused him to be held in high regard by his contemporaries, and prompted John Ray, the English Naturalist, to write of him as "a man of competent skill in Botanicks".

Despite the obvious claim to fame of his subject, the task of the biographer in this instance was unenviable because of the dearth of available sources. Even in 1790, Pulteney, an English botanist, was forced to write of Heaton: "I cannot collect any anecdotes of him". Despite these difficulties, the author has succeeded in documenting the principal events in the life of his subject, and in the process reconstructs the great religious and constitutional struggles in England and indicates how they impinged on Heaton, a Royalist and a clergyman of the Established Church.

This work not only charts the career of Heaton but also tells us much about the milieu in which he lived. Student life in Cambridge is vividly reconstructed, Birr and Roscrea of the time are depicted, and Dublin, at a time when it could scarcely consider itself a capital city, is described. Likewise, the state of and the relationships between the various churches in Ireland in this very unsettled period are also considered. In parts, indeed, there is probably an over-indulgence in these digressions, but, by and large, they contribute to rather than detract from the overall work.

Published in 1978, this, the first biography of a pioneer in Irish botany, certainly deserves greater publicity than it has received to-date.

MICHAEL O'CONNELL

Meda Ryan, **Biddy Early**, The Mercier Press Ltd., Cork and Dublin 1978. Price £1.40.

This book, subtitled *The Wise Woman of Clare* on the cover (but nowhere inside), tells the story of Biddy Early's life, her ups and her downs, her "good" deeds and what some may, and did, see as her "bad" deeds. She lived from 1798 to 1874 among the hills of East Clare, an area still rampant with traditions of all periods.

During the early nineteenth century the Irish people were living under the stern and oftentimes unjust rule of the landlord class and in awe of the clergy. Hearing of two hardship cases as a child, one an eviction and the other relating to a priest who left a sick child "to the power of Almighty God" (p. 15), seems to have had a deep and lasting impression on young Biddy's mind. This, together with the fact that as a child she collected herbs for her mother in an area where there was a prehistoric standing-stone, led to the belief locally that she was in communication with the fairies. The beliefs and stories about her grew, endowing her personally with supra-natural powers, real or imaginary, in the minds of the country people. The power of the widow (she was widowed four times) further added to this mysticism.

The book is full of anecdotes relating to Biddy's famous blue bottle and her varied powers — always expressed in the name of "The Holy Trinity". She cured people and beasts, could tell people where to find lost animals, warned others of future misfortunes and how to avoid them, and she consistently astounded her visitors by telling them of their problems and movements before they could tell her. When the priest, doctor or veterinary surgeon failed, Biddy Early was consulted and her services called upon. Even the great Daniel O'Connell called on her prior to the 1828 Clare Election! One of her own problems was her inability to apply her curative powers to her own family — three of her four husbands died from alcohol in one form or another.

The author ends her book in a quandry (as all of us must do since the surviving evidence is

for both a "good" and an "evil" Biddy Early), with the statement that "The title that Biddy Early should be given rests in the hands of the individual reader" (p. 103).

This is an apparently well researched book. The author has gone to primary sources, only occasionally referring to secondary works, all of which are post-1959. The archives of the Folklore Department in University College, Dublin, local newspapers, State and county records, and original manuscripts were consulted. Furthermore, she has gone into East Clare to talk to the older men there, just as Radio Éireann had previously done (she has also made use of their most important archives), to record the living tradition today, as it is found a century after Biddy Early's death.

One might fault this book for not questioning the various traditions relating to its subject. Only seven pages are devoted, again without questioning, to other people with supra-natural powers, and none of these were from Clare, though such as "Peadar Taidhg Buidhe" or "Peadar Táille Buidhe" might have been mentioned. But lest we deride Biddy Early's powers, we should consider carefully a story told to the book's author by Sonny Walsh of Bodyke concerning a new car which refused to start (p. 5), the fact that an R.T.É. tape on Biddy Early got lost (pp. 93-94), that a television documentary on her was blacked out by a lightening strike in R.T.É. on the night it was to have been transmitted (p. 94) — and then, having considered, proceed to wonder

MARTIN TIMONEY

Caoimhín Ó Danachair, *A Bibliography of Irish Ethnology and Folk Tradition*, The Mercier Press, Dublin and Cork 1998. Price £12.50.

Arising from his own research work over the years, Dr. Ó Danachair has succeeded in unearthing from a multiplicity of scattered sources a wealth of published material relating to Irish Folk Culture. This material, supplemented through additional information provided by others, as acknowledged in the foreword, is presented in two forms in the bibliography.

In the first section the entries are arranged according to the subject headings and sub-headings as set out in Seán Ó Súilleabháin's *Handbook of Irish Folklore*, with two extra headings at the end for 'Miscellanies' and 'Study and Research'. The second part of the bibliography contains a full list of the publications under authors' names, alphabetically arranged. Where an author has used two or more forms of name, these are conveniently grouped together under one of the forms, with cross references where necessary — a most commendable arrangement.

The bibliography meets a long standing need and Dr. Ó Danachair, in addition to being congratulated on a job well done, is to be thanked for making this essential research instrument available. With a hard cover and good binding, this book is designed to stand up well to the constant use that undoubtedly will be made of it by all who are involved in the study of Irish Folk Culture.

JOHN C. O'SULLIVAN