

## Book Reviews

Peter Harbison, **Ireland Before St. Patrick**. Irish Heritage Series: 14, Eason and Sons Ltd., Dublin 1978.  
Price £1.00.

The Irish Heritage Series has filled something of a gap with its well illustrated and (usually) authoritative treatment of specific features of Ireland's past; topics have been small enough for the available space, and the coverage sufficiently detailed to be informative. It therefore seems extraordinary that the attempt should be made to force the whole of Ireland's prehistoric past into the Procrustean bed of one such booklet, all the more since certain parts of the past, the megaliths, the art, the goldwork for example, are almost ideally suited to the style and format established in earlier volumes.

The cuts involved in squeezing Irish prehistory into less than 4,000 words are necessarily savage, and the author, perhaps inevitably, adopts a rather traditional line. The treatment is in chronological order from Mount Sandel to King Loegaire, and is arranged around a listing of the most important types of artifacts and burial and settlement sites. Neolithic and Bronze Age burials, crannogs and forts, gold, bronze and iron work are all mentioned, and the author is to be congratulated on cramming so much into so small a space. But the price to be paid is high. If the reader learns that dolmens and court cairns are two types of neolithic burial monument, he must surely ask why there are two types, how many of each there are, where they are to be found, what sort of society built them, and what they might have meant to that society; but there is no room for such questions to be asked, let alone answered. The types of sites and objects discussed are indeed those most visible in the field and in the museum, but they are equally those most in need of being placed in their proper context.

The illustrations are, as was to be expected, of a high standard and well chosen. Though they are mostly of familiar subjects, it is good to see the sheet metalwork of the Late Bronze Age illustrated by objects from the Hunt Collection in Limerick, as described in the last issue of this *Journal*.

T. C. CHAMPION

Rev. John Ryan, S.J., D.Litt., **Clonmacnois, A Historical Summary**. Issued by the National Parks and Monuments Branch, Office of Public Works. Published by the Stationery Office, Dublin 1973. Price £1.30.

The extent and complexity of the history and archaeology of Clonmacnois defies description or interpretation in a brief work. Professor Ryan recognised this fact in his book, and consequently it serves its purpose as an excellent stimulus for a thorough historical study of the site. In essence it represents his life's work on Clonmacnois in summary. By summarising his work he has made available to the public a recommendable guide to the site, covering the foundation of Clonmacnois, its administration, the bishops and abbots associated with the site, and finally the antiquities.

Chapters I and II treat generally of the establishment of the site by Ciarán, and the survival of monasticism at Clonmacnois despite native and Viking incursions. Chapter III is a brief and generalised account of administration, in which he describes the functions of the abbot, Secmabb, Fer Tigis, Fer Legind and the archinnech in organising the monastic community. This generalised treatment ought not to be misinterpreted by the critic, as in his foreword Professor Ryan stresses the dual purpose of this work, namely to stimulate the scholar and to add to the pleasure of the visitor to Clonmacnois. Perhaps the most useful chapters for the student of the site is Chapter V which is a valuable compilation of successive abbots at Clonmacnois from A.D. 545 to 1127. This is one of Professor Ryan's standard works which he originally put forward in *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin mhic Néill, Essays and Studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin 1940), where (pp. 490-507) he closed the list at the coming of the Norse in 799; now, however, he continues until 1127, with some comments on even later claimants. This list of abbots is drawn from the annals and the cross-slabs at Clonmacnois, and gives rise to several questions and conclusions which he tackles at the end of the chapter.

His description and interpretation of the structures at Clonmacnois (Chapters VI and VII), however, is rather inadequate. He is inclined to summarise previous scholars' interpretations of the antiquities. Despite this inadequacy, or lack of attention to the archaeological detail, Professor Ryan's book stands its ground as a good historical summary and, more importantly, an incentive for further scholarly work on *Mainistir Ciaráin*, Clonmacnois.

ELIZABETH FITZPATRICK



Michael MacMahon, *A History of the Parish of Rath*, The Clare Archaeological and Historical Society, Ennis 1979. Price £1.65.

"Where is Rath?" you might ask. It is the countryside you would pass through going from Corofin to Ennistymon until the road meets the main Ennis to Ennistymon road. It is a small rural parish, therefore, and a daunting prospect for anyone bold enough to write its history. Michael MacMahon is such a man, and his little book shows what assiduous research and ingenuity can accomplish.

The story ranges from the far-off days of the *Tuath* and monastic Ireland, through the Reformation and Cromwell to the hunger and agrarian unrest of the nineteenth century, and the struggle for national independence in the twentieth. With the exception of some school statistics, the book ends where the living memory of the older generation begins.

At first sight the Reformation and Cromwell might appear to have little to do with Clare, let alone Rath. But Murrough O'Brien's surrender of lands to King Henry VIII and Cromwell's "to hell or to Connacht" policy remind us that Clare had reason to know of such things (Clare, for Cromwell's purpose, was considered part of Connacht).

Facts relating directly to Rath down the centuries are not exactly plentiful. But the author achieves continuity of narrative by arranging available data chronologically and dressing them with background information. This is skilfully done, and the background is never allowed to take over. Indeed, one would have welcomed a little further explanation at times. At least the present reviewer is not knowledgeable enough to understand how the Poor Law system "was further impoverishing the people" (p. 67).

The author is to be congratulated on his successful handling of a difficult task, as is the Clare Archaeological and Historical Society for their support of the undertaking.

CHRISTOPHER O'MAHONY

Fr. John Fleming, *Ardpatrick—Reflections, Historical and Topographical on*, privately published, Limerick 1978. Price £5.00.

This is a very fine history of the parish of Ardpatrick. The author, Fr. John Fleming, a native of the parish, is at pains to point out that the book is *a* history of Ardpatrick, not *the* history of Ardpatrick. Fr. Fleming visualises much more material about the parish coming to light in the future.

From a lyrical opening about the setting of Ardpatrick at the foot of the towering Ballahoura mountains, the author goes on to sketch briefly the mythology and very early history of the area, putting special emphasis on the Déis Bheag, the ancient people who once occupied the territory in which the parish is situated. The account in the *Tripartite Life* of St. Patrick's visit to the hill of Ardpatrick is examined. While agreeing that there still may be reservations about accepting the *Life* as incontrovertible evidence that the Saint visited Ardpatrick, Fr. Fleming is not prepared to dismiss the account, or the great body of tradition which connects the saint with the hill. He says: "I would venture to suggest that when new insights, fresh evidence and greater expertise have been brought to bear on these questions the Patrician tradition of Ardpatrick will stand firmer than most others". In this regard it is a pity reference is not made to Edward Keane's article on the subject in *North Munster Studies* (Limerick 1967, pp. 168-171).

The ninth century *Tripartite Life*, which describes St. Patrick's visit to Ardpatrick, was concerned with promoting the claims of Armagh to be the principal church in Ireland, and also with identifying the other churches throughout the country that were believed to have been founded by St. Patrick and forming them into a kind of league of Patrician churches known as *Paruchia Patricii*. In the 11th and 12th centuries, Fr. Fleming tells us: "Ardpatrick became the chief centre of the *Paruchia Patricii* in Munster, and was second only to Armagh, at a time when the *Paruchial* system played a dominant rôle in Ireland. The monastery of Ardpatrick collected the taxes for Armagh in Munster; indeed a Northern family named Ó Longáin were settled in Ardpatrick for the express purpose of looking after these revenues".

The book, however, is not exclusively devoted to the story of the monastery. It covers numerous other aspects of the history of the parish, right down to the present day. It treats of the coming of the Norman family of Fitzharris to Clonodfoy; their expulsion at the time of the Cromwellian Plantation and the granting of their estates to the Oliver family, who subsequently built the striking red sandstone mansion called Castleoliver. And there is an account of the celebrated Lola Montez, whose mother was one of the Olivers. Lola, who took up Spanish dancing for a profession after a failed marriage, became a favourite of Ludwig I of Bavaria, and virtually ran that country for a brief period.

Other matters dealt with in the book include the social history of the parish; the literary and historical works of P.W. and R.D. Joyce—Fr. Fleming quotes liberally from the poems of the latter; the placenames; the ancient churches; distinguished people of the parish, including the late Bishop Henry Murphy and the late Judge P.D.



Fleming. A feature which will interest many people is the list of inscriptions from the headstones in the old burial ground on top of Ardpatrik Hill.

*Ardpatrick* is well illustrated with photographs and drawings, and is well produced. It is a welcome and valuable addition to our gradually expanding library of local histories.

MAINCHÍN SEOIGHE

Jorgen Andersen, *The Witch on the Wall: Medieval Erotic Sculpture in the British Isles*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1977. Price £12.95.

The author, a Dane with Irish connections, in this book deals comprehensively with one of the more fascinating—and daunting—types of sculpture known in these parts, that depicting the intriguing, mildly erotic, female displaying her sexual parts and generally known as 'Sheela-na-Gig'. He catalogues 118 specimens of these, of which 69, well over half the total number, are from Ireland, 31 from England and Wales, 4 from Scotland, 11 from France, and 1 from Czechoslovakia/Germany. Indeed, with such an overwhelming number from this country one can be forgiven for wishing that the term 'British Isles' used in the book's sub-title had been replaced by 'Ireland and Great Britain' (reversing the more usual order to emphasise where most of them are found).

Dr. Andersen has covered the subject in far greater detail than hitherto—in fact, one might legitimately say that his work not only synthesises all the numerous publications which deal with, or touch upon it, but adds very appreciably to discussion of the many problems with which the Sheelas are associated. His book, moreover, inevitably will for a considerable time be regarded as the standard work on the subject.

The text is excellent and well-argued, even though some students of the questions posed by the sculptures may disagree in detail with some of Dr. Andersen's comments as to origins, dates and purposes—the onus of proof, however, rests with them, and we must await their own comments in print before rejecting Dr. Andersen's suggestions.

In two chapters in this book the author seems to toy with the idea of a very early, perhaps even pagan, origin for these exhibitionist figures. Elsewhere, however, he states his own conviction that they are Medieval, a twelfth century introduction: "...that Norman motif, the sheela" (p. 70). For Dr. Andersen however, "Norman" seems to be almost a synonym for "Romanesque" (and so it is, architecturally speaking, in England, though not in Ireland), as on page 130 he refers to the Sheela as "a decorative motif developed out of Romanesque settings". Personally I prefer to believe somewhat more strongly than does Dr. Andersen in a pagan Celtic background (though not necessarily origin), in which regard I sort of regret that my comment on the matter, published in this *Journal* (vol. 14 (1971), 81), although listed in the Bibliography (on p. 166), is not noted anywhere in the text, not even with his references to the carving on Adomnan's Stone at Tara (Fig. 60, one of the very few poor illustrations in the book).

Whatever their origin, these female figures are mainly Medieval in date. The vast majority of those accepted as Sheelas by the author are, furthermore, from churches: all 11 from France, 30 of those from Britain, 30 of those from Ireland, and also the one from Czechoslovakia/Germany. Only in Ireland are they associated in any quantity with any other type of structure: 32 are from castles. All of which raises the question as to their purpose—after all, explicit carvings of females blatantly displaying their genital organs, often in a definitely pornographic manner, do not appear to be particularly appropriate to churches!

Questions as to fertility cults, pictorial representations of the deadly sin of lust, and of guardianship against evil by a display of the female genitals arise. The latter possibility is one much favoured by Dr. Andersen, particularly in his closing chapter which is entitled 'Powers of Display'. In this chapter he ranges widely, both chronologically and geographically, and terminates with an eighteenth century French engraving of a young girl raising her skirts and displaying herself to an affrighted devil. Although a facile modernistic judgement might deem this aspect to be rather unrealistic, Dr. Andersen quotes Freud, Fraser, and others in support, while a letter published recently in *The Irish Times* (23/9/1977) described how in 1913, near Athenry, Co. Galway, a woman frightened off a group of men attacking her home by employing exactly the same method as the girl in the engraving!

The whole production of this book, of slim but large format, is first class. It is not only set in clear, easily-read typeface, is provided with a very full bibliography, a workable index and distribution maps, but has other worthwhile features too. The interspacing of the catalogue portion with small photographs of the relevant Sheelas, even when already elsewhere used in the main text, is an example of this. Unusual, too, but an excellent idea and thus worthy of comment here, is the use of a wide margin to the text. This has been utilised for some of the smaller illustrations and also as the place for the footnotes and captions to the illustrations—footnotes at the bottom of the page may be preferable but are possibly more expensive to print, while footnotes placed at the end of each chapter or collected together at the end of a book are an abomination.



One can easily find fault with many minor details (many are editorial, *e.g.* in the Bibliography) throughout this book, not least with the fact that the illustrations accompanying the text are nowhere referred to in it. This causes the occasional problem, as, for instance, when on page 130 we are told that "The illustration shows . . .", but not that the illustration in question is Fig. 8—on page 29! Then there's the fine and very relevant illustration which closes the text proper on page 138 but is only referred to four pages earlier. At least one illustration (Fig. 94, p. 136) is not referred to at all in the text. One could further dispute the relevance of this latter illustration, despite its caption which describes it as a female "holding dagger and serpent and with her garment raised, leaving an open view of the genitalia"—the dagger has more the appearance of a shears while the serpent is surely only the hem of the upraised garment, while what is displayed is not distinctly genitalia—it looks more as if the rather forbidding-looking female is lifting her garment and about to cut loose a cod-piece or whatever she has concealing her genitalia, thus presenting a threat rather than an actual Sheela-type display.

It is problematical whether Dr. Andersen or Dr. David Wilson ought to be blamed for misinterpreting the three (not four) human figures as sitting "with their legs crossed" when (even if one could argue in favour of four-legged men!) the so-called crossed legs seem clearly to be the interlocked jaws of snake-like reptiles. This illustration is therefore irrelevant, and likewise the arguments based on it *vis-à-vis* the Seir Kieran, Co. Offaly, Sheela-na-Gig (p. 88).

Such criticisms, however, should not be allowed to detract from the real merit of this book which is that it supplies a long-felt need: it not only gives us as nearly complete a list of these enigmatic but fascinating carvings as is at the time possible, but it also takes the subject out of the academic journals, presenting it to the public at large. The publishers are further to be complimented on the book's plentiful and excellent illustrations. For far too long publications dealing with Sheela-na-Gigs have eschewed good, clear photographs, and it is not only academically useful but—dare one say it without being socially branded?—a pleasure to have such illustrations readily available to the scholar and interested reader. The book's cost is not too high by modern production standards, but perhaps too high for the general public, nonetheless—let us hope that all public libraries will invest in a copy.

ETIENNE RYNNE

Brian de Breffny and Rosemary ffolliott, **The Houses of Ireland**, Thames and Hudson, London 1975. Price £4.75 (stg.).

Brian de Breffny and George Mott, **The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland**, Thames and Hudson, London 1976. Price £6.50 (stg.).

Brian de Breffny, **The Castles of Ireland**, Thames and Hudson, London 1977. Price £6.95 (stg.).

Brian de Breffny has written three books, specifically on Irish architectural subjects, in the space of three years. First came *The Houses of Ireland*, with Rosemary ffolliott, which was the first book on Irish architecture to adequately cover the subject from early medieval times to the twentieth century. It is a remarkable fact that no worthwhile general history had been written before, but then the study of post-medieval architecture in Ireland is still in its infancy. The authors trace the development of Irish domestic architecture through a personal selection of houses ranging in size between the great mansions and the vernacular cottages. In each case the social background and history of the builders helps to put the building in context and gives a historical as well as an architectural depth to the study. The authors have unearthed a considerable wealth of detail concerning buildings and owners from building accounts, inventories, and an assortment of family documents.

The book should be of special interest to North Munster readers since the authors cull much of their material from this area. County Limerick has a particularly rich heritage of houses, starting with the architectural achievements of the Earls of Desmond at Askeaton and Newcastle West. Tracing the development of building form through families, it is noticeable that the Odell family were inveterate house builders in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. They built The Turret, Ballingarry, in 1683 and were related to Captain William Kenn of Cahernarry, a professional architect, who designed the well-documented Burton Hall at Liscarrol for Sir John Percival in 1665.

Attention is drawn to the mysterious Morgans, a strange naive house on the banks of the Shannon, and Castletown Conyers which is compared with Springhill, Co. Derry. That two houses at either end of the country could be so alike suggests that architectural ideas spread rapidly even in the seventeenth century. Shannongrove is given its rightful place and is attributed to John Rothery, architect of the magical Mount Ievers in Co. Clare.

Space is given to key figures in Irish architectural history—Pearce, Castle, Gandon, Wyatt, Johnston and Morrison—but the authors also have a talent for picking up the small, unpretentious houses which dot the Irish countryside and often give a more accurate picture of the architectural art than the great mansions. They were built by architect-craftsmen whose names are rarely ever recorded. Prior Park, Co. Tipperary, Mellon, near Limerick, Ballynoe, near Ballingarry, and Glenwilliam, Co. Limerick, exhibit features which are typically Irish,



such as a concentration of windows in the centre of the facades, bows, battered walls, and crisply cut stonework.

Nor do the authors ignore the valuable vernacular houses built of locally available materials by unsophisticated craftsmen. I have watched the two-storey, mud-walled house at Cross-guns, Nobber, Co. Meath (illustrated here), disappear over the last five years.

The book has a fresh, direct approach to the subject, uncluttered by the minutiae which often tend to obscure the work of more pedantic historians.

Without the success of *The Houses of Ireland*, it would probably not have been feasible to consider the publication of *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (the photographs by George Mott are of a standard to merit the joint authorship). Medieval ecclesiastical architecture has been covered exhaustively by the late H. G. Leask, but the Post-Reformation period has received scant attention. The eighteenth century is disposed of with alacrity, while the author plots a careful course through the minefield of Victorian mediocrity to give the reader a clear picture of the nineteenth century. And it is refreshing to see the great, gothic-revival churches of the late nineteenth century considered on equal terms with medieval abbeys. While *The Houses of Ireland* stopped at 1914, church-building is traced to the present. It is difficult to give recent work a historical perspective, and the job is hindered by the erratic development and character of twentieth century architecture. However, the author exercises his critical faculties to a greater extent in this chapter than elsewhere, which makes it essential reading for prospective church-builders.

The third volume, *Castles of Ireland*, is an A-to-Z of Irish castles, covering a wide variety of buildings from medieval Anglo-Norman fortresses to the glamorous Victorian fantasy castles. There is a short historical introduction, but the main body of the book consists of individual entries varying in length from a few lines to a couple of pages. County Limerick is a microcosm of the whole country, with Limerick Castle being representative of the great medieval castles, Rockstown and Ballingarry of the tower-house, Glin of the pasteboard gothic castle, Glenstal, Castle Oliver and Dromore of the archaeologically inspired Victorian castles. All the entries are illustrated by photographs taken by George Mott who has worked hard to capture the atmosphere and character of the many varied locations. As with the other two volumes, *The Castles of Ireland* owes much of its success to the imaginative eye of George Mott.

These are books of interest to the amateur and professional alike. They have helped to clarify and categorise Irish architecture, thereby opening up the field to a second wave of scholars. But more important is the fact that copies should be found in school and public libraries, and in many houses which would have no other book on Irish architecture.

WILLIAM GARNER

Clíodna Cussen, *Gearóid Iarla*, Clódhanna Teoranta, Baile Átha Cliath 1978. Luach 60p.

Leabhar beag gleoite é seo, ina dtugtar mórán eolais dúinn ar an bhfear iontach sin a dtugtar Gearóid Iarla air. Sé a bhí i nGearóid Iarla, Gearóid Mac Gearailt, an 3ú Iarla Deasmhumhan, fear a chuaigh i gcionn chomh mór sin an mhuintir na hÉireann go maireann a chuimhne go beo briomhar fós sa bhéalóideas. Bhí mórchuid caisleán ag Gearaltaigh na Mumhan i gCo. Luimnigh—i Seanad, in Eas Géitine, i gCill Mocheallóg, i Loch Gair, sa Chaisleán Nua, agus i roinnt mhaith áiteanna eile.

Duine de na Normanaigh a bhí 'níos Gaeilaí ná na Gaeil féin' ab ea Gearóid Iarla. File maith Gaeilge ea é. Sé a deir Clíodna Cussen, údar an leabhair, faoina chuid dánta: "Dánta pearsanta is ea iad a thugann léargas ar charachtar grámhar, éirimiúil, meabhrach—fear uasal a bhí ag scríobh dá chairde féin". Ach ní ag cumadh filíochta a chaith Gearóid a shaol. Fear stáit agus ceannaire airm ab ea é, a d'fhulaing go leor cruathain i rith a shaoil. Tá an taobh sin dá scéal ríomhtha go cumasach ag an údar. Fuair Gearóid bás ina theach féin sa Chaisleán Nua sa bhliain 1398.

De réir an bhéaloidis, áfach, ní bhfuair Gearóid bás; ach maireann sé i gcónaí faoi dhraoíocht i Loch Gair, "i dteannta a mharcshlua agus iad ag feitheamh le filleadh chun Éire a shaoradh ó smacht na nGall". Gach seachtú bliain téann Gearóid trasna an locha agus é ag marcaíocht ar each bán.

This delightful 32-page booklet, in nice simple Irish, gives the background, and tells the story of that remarkable character, Gearóid Iarla, Justiciar of Ireland, 3rd Earl of Desmond, fine poet in the Irish language, and reputed magician, who is traditionally held by enchantment under the waters of Loch Gur.

MAINCHÍN SEOIGHE



T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (editors), *A New History of Ireland, III: Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691*, Oxford University Press (for the Royal Irish Academy), 1976. Price £17 (stg.).

Those who subscribe to the 'extended olagón' interpretation of Irish history will, no doubt, regard it as peculiarly appropriate that the production of a major nine volume series on that history was itself bedevilled by unforeseen problems, broken promises and disappointed hopes. Conceived as far back as 1962, the *New History of Ireland* project was formally organised in 1968 with the aim of "harvesting the best contemporary scholarship available for each period up to the end of 1974". Due to the multiplicity of problems attending the project, it is Vol. III, "Early Modern Ireland", which has appeared first, and it seems likely to remain the sole production for the foreseeable future.

This is cooperative history, sixteen scholars in all having laboured to produce it. It has twenty-three chapters with only four devoted specifically to the Tudor period, fourteen to the Stuart age, and five dealing with themes relevant to the entire era. Given the highly uneven quality of the contributions this imbalance can only be seen, in the circumstances, as providential. No one would seriously dispute that 1534 was the appropriate date to choose as the beginning: the advent of the Tudor monarchy in 1485 marked no fundamental change in Ireland. The exact significance of the events set in motion in 1534 can, however, be debated, and the view expressed in this work, both in the introduction by T. W. Moody and in the text by G. A. Hayes McCoy, that it marked the beginning of the Tudor conquest, would find a limited amount of support. It can, nonetheless, be agreed that it forms the most convenient dividing line between Medieval and Early Modern Ireland.

In retrospect, it was a mistake to adopt the title 'New History'. Apart from the pejorative overtones of such terminology, it would inevitably become anachronistic. What the editors failed to anticipate was that even as the presses rolled a different new history for Tudor Ireland had appeared. The nature and significance of the political, religious and constitutional developments in sixteenth century Ireland have been critically re-evaluated by a new generation of scholars, most notably Brendan Bradshaw and Nicholas Canny. In the context of our present knowledge and available talent, it is simply sad to find that the three main chapters devoted to the period 1534-1603 are written in a dull, outdated and poorly integrated narrative. Silken Thomas is still the angry young man tricked into rebellion, Henry VIII takes the title King of Ireland partly to extend his conquest and partly through fear of the Pope, St. Leger continues the policy of Surrey and James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald remains the religious crusader. As a historiographical period piece it has some interest, as *A New History of Ireland* it is sadly misplaced.

This criticism does not apply to the first chapter, an attempt to describe the state of Ireland in 1534. D. B. Quinn and K. W. Nicholls make a valiant and valuable attempt to present a coherent picture. Their task is daunting, given the dearth of work on the social and economic history of Tudor Ireland. The scarcity or non-existence of source material cannot totally explain nor excuse this neglect. In the light of such unfavourable circumstances, their work is to be commended though it remains a very generalised survey, as does the corresponding chapter by R. A. Butlin, 'Land and People c. 1600'.

The seventeenth century is favoured not alone by the space allocated to it but also in the calibre of its historians. The period 1603-41 is brilliantly analysed and stylishly presented in four essays by Aidan Clarke who contributes a further illuminating interpretation of the Irish economy for the period 1600-60. From an economic viewpoint, he clearly demonstrates that the Cromwellian conquest and plantation must be seen as progressive in that it loosened traditional restraints on the use of land and allowed freer responses to market conditions. There was, of course, a social price to be paid for this, but in the past we have concentrated solely on the negative aspect. In a similar vein, Monsignor P. J. Corish, who dealt with the 1641-60 period, reminds us that the most complete casualty of the Cromwellian regime was the Old English culture. Gaelic Ireland was wronged, persecuted and weakened but its culture survived, and his placing of the 1650s in a general European context of religious war gives us a welcome wider perspective than either Connacht or Hell. He incorporates recent research also in demonstrating that the 1641 rebellion was not simply a revolt of dispossessed Ulster Irish but was organised and led by Gaelic Lords who had mortgaged their lands consequent upon improvidence and bad management. The complex nature of the rebellion and its aftermath in the confederate period is skilfully explained.

The neglected period of Restoration Ireland is covered by its main historian, the late Dr. J. G. Simms, who also takes the political story to its conclusion in 1691. A rather weak section on 'Land and People c. 1685' further reflects the preoccupations of Irish historians with politics and religion. The general surveys cover coinage, the Irish and English languages, Irish literature in Latin and the Irish abroad. A very valuable bibliography of the entire period, covering printed source material and secondary work, is also provided by the indefatigable Dr. Simms. The painstaking accuracy and enviable clarity of his work serve as a fitting monument to his memory.



Despite its shortcomings, *A New History of Ireland* is a useful contribution. It provides a stocktaking of the achievements in Irish historiography during the past forty years. It serves as a fitting memorial to the pioneering scholars of that generation and makes the fruit of their labours readily available to a wider audience. Even its limited pre-occupations, unavoidable omissions and undisguised flaws can be utilised to highlight the areas of sparse or uneven scholarship and spur the new generation of scholars to remedy the defects.

LIAM IRWIN

Paddy Lysaght, *The Comic History of Limerick*, The Mercier Press, Dublin & Cork 1979. Price £1.50.

There are few modern historians—at least those of any consequence, anyway—who adhere to the outmoded belief that history is about things that happened. It is, indeed, a rare pleasure to be able to welcome and recommend a work on local history which is so obviously the fruit of long study and the careful application of the most modern principles of historic methodology. Indeed, this reviewer is aware of no similar study of local history in Ireland. It can truly be said that what Professor Ladurie has done for Montaignou, Mr. Lysaght has done for Limerick, Lough Gur and Mountcollins, to mention but a few of the latter author's topics.

It is a further pleasure, and indeed a personal one, that this reviewer can state authoritatively, that Mr. Lysaght has diligently sought out and absorbed this reviewer's own studies and writings on historical matters. It is a sad, but well known fact, that because of jealousies and intrigues, not unknown in the groves of Academy (or indeed in the committees of antiquarian societies) the writings of P. Shogue have been ignored and consigned to obscurity for far too long, but now, in Mr. Lysaght's book, the work and thought of P. Shogue stands vindicated!

History as a subject has for far too long been a byword for deadly seriousness and lack of humour. Readers of Begley and Linehan, attenders at the meetings of antiquarian societies—especially committee meetings—will readily concur. Mr. Lysaght has changed all that albeit in a slim volume. The reader may object that history is no laughing matter, the Treaty of Limerick, for instance, not to mention the Sieges, was certainly no laughing matter, it may be contended. Mr. Lysaght refers in his book (page 23) to this reviewer's writings on the *Treaty Stone*. It has been for many years this reviewer's contention that the *Treaty Stone*, because of its enigmatic smile—so accurately reproduced on the cover of Mr. Lysaght's book—occupies a place alongside the *Sphinx* and the *Mona Lisa*. A great deal of further research and study is required before this view becomes generally accepted. Prospective Ph.D. students could well address themselves to the following lines of enquiry: (a) is the Treaty Stone smiling? and (b) if so, who or what is it smiling at?

Mr. Lysaght has made a not inconsiderable contribution to the questions raised above and indeed to the 'other' history of Limerick.

"P. SHOGUE (Rev'd. Professor, Rtd.), University of Limerick".

James O'Connell, *The Meaning of Irish Place Names*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast 1979. Price £1.25 (paperback).

This little book meets a real need: that for a small *vade mecum* providing reliable information on the meanings of the commonest Irish place names. Although in his foreword the author disclaims any pretension to a work of scholarship and although some of the meanings given are open to dispute, the majority of the 2,300 listed may be accepted with confidence. The names are arranged under their anglicized versions. The Irish forms are not given but there is a reasonably comprehensive glossary of the Irish root elements, each followed by its anglicized version or versions. There are a number of misprints/misspellings, e.g. Aghlish for Aglish (p. 3) and Fort [of the two roads] for Fork (p. 46), but these do not detract seriously from the usefulness of the book to the public for which it is intended. The same cannot be said for the publisher's blurb on the back of the cover: a deplorable patronizing snippet of nineteenth century stage-Irishism, totally out of harmony with the content and purpose of the text which it is designed to introduce to potential purchasers and readers. Its lapse from dignity may, for members of this Society at least, be partially redeemed by the aptly chosen photograph of the signpost on the front of the cover, bilingually indicating the roads to Ennis, Ennistymon, Lisdoonvarna, Ballyvaughan and Kilfenora, all of which have their meaning explained in the text. For tourists, travellers and many members of the home public, young and old, this little guide could add a fresh interest to the Irish countryside.

A. T. LUCAS