



Book Reviews

Joseph P. Haughton and Desmond A. Gillmor, *The Geography of Ireland*. Aspects of Ireland/Gnéithe dár nDúchas 5, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin 1979. Price: £2.95.

Presumably the aim of this slim glossy volume is to acquaint the more intelligent outsider with the salient facts and features of Irish geography. This it attempts to achieve by a series of succinct illustrated accounts of such topics as climate, population, fishing, transport, and tourism. As individual vignettes, many of these are excellent of their kind. Where the work fails is in the choice of topics and in the relative weighting attached to each. Soils, vegetation and fauna are lumped together and allotted a mere three pages, whereas transport is given a similar quota. Regional development is awarded more space than either forestry or fishing. Worse still, certain relevant basic topics, e.g. religion, education, archaeology, historical geography, cultural geography, and place-names, are excluded from consideration. The non-Irish reader might easily conclude that the island is occupied totally by totem-worshipping Red Indians, by black ancestor-worshippers, or by Chinese Buddhists for all the enlightenment he will find in these pages. There is not a single mention of language.

One the whole, the maps are good, simple, unfussy, though curiously they lack scales. In some cases, their usefulness is marred by incomplete titles (e.g. Fig. 11, Map of State Forests—no year given) or by vague symbolism (e.g. Fig. 16, Regional Employment in Manufacturing—not clear which colour relates to new industry). Faulty editing has resulted in the wrong positioning of many maps so that text and illustration are often mis-matched. Thus the fishing text on p. 35 is faced by forestry photographs on p. 34, while the fishing illustrations illuminate the section on Mineral Resource Industries! The Transport map on p. 44 faces the section on Manufacturing Industry. The problem of matching is avoided altogether in the section entitled 'Soils, Vegetation and Fauna' by the simple expedient of omitting all maps! There are many minor omissions and errors too, e.g. according to Fig. 1 (General Map) Tory Island, Arranmore Island, Inishbofin and the Blaskets have ceased to exist, while Rathlin Island and Lambay Island have become submerged! It is hard to grasp the basis on which settlements have been included or omitted from that same general map; thus Lurgan, Banbridge, Dungannon, Magherafelt, are missing where Carrickmacross, Ballycastle and Clones are shown. Loughrea, Athenry, Gort and Balbriggan have vanished whereas such 'major' urban centres as Kilkee, Portumna and Belmullet have merited inclusion. 'Ceannanas' floats in mid-air, unattached to any symbol. Nor are the other maps altogether free from similar faults. In Fig. 12 (Fishing Ports), for instance, the 'major' port of Rosaveal is unmarked whereas miniscule Clarinbridge is shown. Travellers to Derry may be disconcerted to note, if Fig. 15 (Transport) is to be believed, that the railway to that city runs through the sea from Coleraine onwards!

The illustrations vary wildly in quality. Some are excellent, e.g. most of those on page 16 (which, incidentally, is erroneously headed 'Climate'), others (e.g. Fig. 75 and Fig. 78) are so poor that the work would have benefited by their omission. The numbering system is quite confusing.

It is most disconcerting in a 'showpiece' of this kind to encounter a slip listing *errata*. The bad impression this creates is certainly not dispelled by the discovery that it is by no means complete. There are minor misprints in pages 5, 17, 18 and 27. Some print is misaligned on pages 5 and 41. The headings on pages 14 and 16 are erroneous. The page numbers given in the Contents for Climate, Soils, Vegetation and Fauna, Urban Settlement, Agriculture, Electricity Generation, and Transport are all incorrect. More careful editing, and the elision of a handful of poor quality or poorly chosen illustrations, could have transformed this work and made it possible to link more satisfactorily the illustrations with the appropriate text.

The work lacks life. It somehow manages to evade the human dimension, despite the fact that only a third of the entire is devoted to the physical background. The bibliography, too, is curiously selective. With all its faults there is more of the real Ireland, the permanent Ireland, to be found in Joyce's *Irish Names of Places* than in O'Hagan's *The Economy of Ireland: policy and performance* or in O'Mahony's *The Irish Economy*. It is more than difficult to justify the omission of all non-English language works relating to Ireland—particularly such key studies as those of Flatres and Verrière.

Given the authors' choice of topics, inevitably much of the material has dated. Such a risk attaches to all 'economic' material, but it is particularly acute in times of depression. Already the sections on mineral resource industries and manufacturing industry could do with substantial revision. Irish farmers might well query the claim (page 32) that "the welfare of the farming community has increased [improved?] dramatically.

For some strange reason or other the blank pages at the end have not been utilised to draw attention to the other works in the series. The price seems excessive for such a tiny work, even if the quality of the paper is excellent. All in all, the impression given is of a great opportunity missed.

BRENDÁN S. MAC AODHA

E. Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland: Habitat, Heritage and History*, 2nd edition, Blackstaff Press Ltd., Belfast 1981. Price: £3.95 (stg.).

When first published by the Cambridge University Press in 1973, this book received wide, and for the most part, favourable acclaim. Apart from a new preface, a postscript and the insertion of 17 more photographic plates, the new 'expanded' paperback edition differs little from the original. As it has not been reviewed previously in this journal some comment may be of interest here.

In contrast to a number of comprehensive surveys of Ireland by other geographers in the last twelve years—A. R. Orme, *The World's Landscapes: Ireland*, London 1976, and F. H. A. Aalen, *Man and the Landscape in Ireland*, London 1978—this book is primarily a critical review of theories and approaches to the study of Ireland's historical personality. In essence, it is the personal testimony of a man who has devoted over fifty years of research to the landscape, history and material culture of his adopted home—the island of Ireland. However, Emyr Estyn Evans is no conventional geographer. Since his arrival in Belfast in 1928 from Wales, he has pioneered the multidisciplinary approach to the study of human settlement in Ireland, past and present. Thus, for him, the personality of Ireland is composed of a number of distinct but interrelated strands—climate, geology, soils and its human settlement patterns as revealed by archaeology, history and anthropology. These strands he categorizes as habitat, heritage and history. Though the study of any one of these fields of research will offer important insights, it is Professor Evans' contention that "it is at the fences, along the borders [between academic disciplines] that discoveries are likely to be made" (p. 2).

Using his 'anthropogeographic' approach, Evans casts us some thought-provoking ideas and lays to rest some well-worn myths about the characters of Ireland in the past. For instance, on page 59, he lucidly demonstrates the pitfalls of which conventional history and narrow nationalistic writings have been guilty—that "fifteenth century Ireland remained, in great part, a country of wandering pastoralists" (*Cambridge Econ. Hist. of Europe*, vol. 1); or the myth that Early Christian Ireland was a society of freehold family farms, free from the taint of anything resembling landlordism or slavery! This unblinkered attitude allows him to draw interesting parallels between a neolithic settlement at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, and the agricultural 'clachans' or house clusters which survived in many parts of the country until the present century, and also to reflect on the continuity suggested by the similarity in plan and dimensions of excavated neolithic houses and the traditional Irish house (p. 64).

The "somewhat provocative form" of the book, to use Evans' own phrase, reflects its genesis as a series of four talks delivered in 1971 for the annual Wiles Lectures. However, though it is generally a most informative, stimulating and frequently witty discourse, it is dotted with the occasional erratic interpretation. To the archaeologist, the statements that Wedge-Tombs "evolved" from the north Irish Court-Tombs (p. 75), or the argument that "the paucity of domestic pottery, save in the north-east of the country, suggests that meat was a major item in the diet" of the early Christian Irish (p. 58), will be unacceptable.

Whilst kite-flying of this sort can be excused in a work of this kind, a more perturbing aspect of the book is the over-emphasis placed on the "separate identity" (p. 26), "regional consciousness" (p. 79), and "long tradition of proud independence" (p. 81), of Ulster, from prehistoric to modern times. Though the north-eastern part of Ireland has developed a strong regional consciousness since the 17th century, one which Evans rightly points out has been ignored and misunderstood by many Irishmen (p. 81), to claim that this is rooted in prehistory could be interpreted as support for northern nationalism. Yet the frequent interchange of the terms 'Ulster' and 'the north-east' when describing the topography of the whole northern part of Ireland (pp. 26-27), coupled with the emphasis placed on the northern distribution of the Court-Tombs, and the as yet little understood Black Pig's Dyke (pp. 28-29), gives a misleading impression of an ancient, culturally distinct entity in that corner of the island. While this region has, because of its proximity to Scotland, recurrently fostered intrusive cultures and ideas at different periods in the past, these have little common thread or continuity. To cite the intrusive neolithic culture which built the Court-Tombs and the native Gaelic chiefdoms of the Earls of Tyrone and Tirconnell as evidence of Ulster's fiery independence, as Evans does at various points in the book, glosses over a 3000 year gap when Ulster was very much an integral part of the whole island. Indeed, the omission of any mention of the Early Iron Age La Tène material, the distribution of which throughout the whole northern half of Ireland ignores the "border landscape" (p. 27) of the drumlin belt, is illuminating in this regard.

Moreover, the bias towards Ulster which is so prevalent in this book blurs the distinctive regional character of other regions in Ireland, past and present. See, for instance, chapter 14 of Orme's *Ireland*, already cited, for an excellent assessment of regionalism in Ireland. Though Ulster is the most noticeable regional variant in Ireland today, the numerous physical monuments of Anglo-Norman settlements in Leinster, and the concentration of Late Bronze Age artifacts of gold and bronze in North Munster, indicate that, for long periods in the past, the eastern and south-western parts of the country displayed a strong regionalism of their own.

Professor Evans also argues that the plantation of Ulster in the 17th century cannot be held totally responsible

for its present problems (p. 78). While this is a very valid point, his comment that "the hills and bogs" to which a sizeable part of the native population were displaced "were the preferred environment for the traditional pattern of rural life" (p. 78), gives an impression of callousness to the hardships and sufferings experienced by those so dispossessed. Despite his initial plea for a broader and less political view of Irish history (Preface, xii), Evans' treatment of Ulster shows, in the words of one review of the first edition, "what seems to be an ambivalent attitude [which] may seriously confuse the general or unwary reader and introduces an element of inconsistency which mars an otherwise excellent publication" [M. Ryan, in *Archaeol. J.*, 130 (1973), 315].

As already mentioned at the outset, the differences between the first and second editions of this book are minimal. The new preface contains a biographical note detailing Evans' career in Ireland. It also considers some recently published material which, it seems, could not be conveniently slotted into the text—however, the works referred to in it are regrettably omitted from the Book's bibliography. The completely new postscript, though only two pages in length, packs some incisive comment on the development of megalithic studies in Ireland. Reviewing the controversy over the point of entry of the Court-Tomb builders into Ireland—Killala or Carlingford—Evans suggests (p. 112) that in the western entry theory one can detect "a reluctance on the part of the Dublin school to admit that Ireland was ever civilized from Britain". In his view, the dense concentration of Court-Tombs on the north Mayo coast reflects a long survival of megalithic practice in "a prehistoric 'congested district'" rather than a landfall by seafarers from some unspecified homeland in France. Fair point!

Finally, one of the most pleasing aspects of the new edition is the inclusion of the new photographic plates which greatly expand the visual quality when added to the five plates and 14 line-drawings retained from the first edition. Those showing the 'clachan' settlements in Gweedore, Co. Donegal (plates 19-21), are particularly evocative of way of life which disappeared so recently, yet which seems so alien to us today. The book is tail-ended by a fascinating appendix on the same area which details the survival until the 19th century of a community which clung to the ancient rundale system of tillage and a complex form of transhumance.

All in all, despite (or possibly because) of its northern bias, this is a tremendously stimulating book, and one which can be highly recommended to all.

PAUL GOSLING

Barry Raftery, **Stone Age Ireland**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 34, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Barry Raftery, **Bronze Age Ireland**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 66, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Barry Raftery, **Iron Age Ireland**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 58, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Charles Doherty, **Early Christian Ireland**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 51, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Michael Herity, **Gold in Ancient Ireland**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 15, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

The first three of these booklets provide a most useful general introduction to Ireland's prehistoric past as deduced from archaeological research; the fourth brings us into the Early Historic Period and, as such, is treated more from the historian's viewpoint, though does not ignore altogether that of the archaeologist; the fifth presents us with a brief account of the major types of gold artifacts found in this country, ranging in time from the so-called sun-discs of almost 2000 BC to the Wicklow Gold Rush of 1795. Although the standard of each is high, they were not produced as a closely co-ordinated series and one gets the impression that the aim of the series was altered somewhat as time progressed: the earlier numbers seem to be directed towards a younger and less well-informed readership than the more recently issued numbers—it is very regrettable that none have publication dates, but they are numbered according as they appeared over the last few years.

Barry Raftery, in being the author of the first three listed above, has thus succeeded in obtaining some cohesion between them, though even these three did not appear in proper chronological sequence. Generally speaking, the outline he presents is excellent, though one might quibble with some minor points, e.g. the statements that the first Neolithic farmers came to Ireland directly from France, landing in Co. Mayo near Killala, that the capstones of Portal Dolmens were raised by hauling them up a ramp, that the sheet-bronze cauldrons of the Late Bronze Age might have been used for cooking, that the *chevaux-de-frise* at Dún Aengus was to give extra protection to those "living [sic] inside the fort".

Charles Doherty's *Early Christian Ireland* is written to a somewhat more adult standard than the others and all-in-all is a most useful background account for all interested in the period, by no means excluding the average undergraduate student. An archaeological companion-booklet is surely called for to properly flesh out some of the details, and hopefully such will appear—together they would serve as a most useful general introduction to the period from about 400 to 1200 AD.

Ireland is noted for the quality and quantity of the prehistoric and early historic goldwork to be seen in our National Museum. In his *Gold in Ancient Ireland*, Michael Herity informs us briefly and concisely about the numerous types and about some of the more interesting individual pieces. As gold objects were being made ever since the introduction of metallurgy into Ireland, this booklet conveniently complements and in some ways unifies the other four.

All five booklets have a full page of illustration for every page of text. The illustrations in that on the Stone Age are by Charles McNeill, those in the booklets on the Bronze and Iron Ages by Terry Myler, and those in the other two booklets by Mary O'Connell. Although their appearance is generally somewhat gaudy and often approaches sentimentality, the illustrations are for the most part adequate and useful. Some have small but unfortunate inaccuracies, errors which ought not to have crept in and which more expert supervision should have eliminated. *In toto*, however, these five booklets are worthwhile and very suitable reading for the uninitiated or to provide background reading for the average non-specialist member of local archaeological societies all over Ireland, and they can be confidently recommended as such.

ETIENNE RYNNE

Anthony Weir, *Early Ireland, A Field Guide*, Blackstaff Press Ltd., Belfast 1980. Price: £7.95 (Stg.).

Anyone who has ever taken a copy of a six-inch scale Ordnance Survey sheet in his or her hand cannot but have realised that Ireland is extremely rich in monuments of the past. The book under review is a recent addition to the list of *Guides* to finding and learning about these monuments. Packed into this book of 245 pages is a 91-page introduction, sections on place-names and the folklore of sites, a gazetteer of 140 pages in a smaller type-face, a rather short bibliography which includes several archaeological journals (though not ours!), a glossary and an index.

The main part of the book is the gazetteer. The book covers all 32 counties, *i.e.*, 6 more than Harbison's *Guide* [reviewed in this *Journal*, 13 (1970), 59-60]. Sites ranging in time from the earliest times to the Romanesque churches of the twelfth century are dealt with. A few later monuments reflecting the author's personal interests, mainly Sheela-na-Gigs and sweat-houses, are included. Castles, abbeys, manors, Big Houses and vernacular architecture, for example, are not included, nor are all the National Monuments which fall within the stated scope of the book. With the shorter time-span covered, there is a greater concentration on earlier monuments.

The format of the book is the same as Harbison's *Guide*: sites in the gazetteer are alphabetically arranged within alphabetically arranged counties. Adjacent sites are mentioned at the end of many entries. Entries will generally be adequate for most people, but endless minor inaccuracies will infuriate the experienced field-walker and speculative or facetious comments estrange even the less well qualified archaeologist. Measurements are in metric followed by the imperial equivalent. Comparable sites and features inside and outside this country are mentioned, something which has seldom, if ever, been attempted before in such a guide. The book seems to have been written completely afresh, from personal experience.

When reviewing Harbison's *Guide* in this *Journal*, this reviewer suggested the use of road numbers and compass directions for locating sites. Weir gives details of location along these lines and also distances from adjacent towns. Despite this, planning a tour using this book is difficult. The few maps are all of local interest. A major omission from the book is a set of at least ten maps covering the entire country. With such a set of maps one could plan a route from one end of the country to the other, visiting several sites along the way, or, alternatively, perhaps visit all the sites in a given area. It is, unfortunately, not possible to do this using this book without doing quite a lot of homework before setting out.

There are many photographs, most of which are by the author; as such, these present new views of sites and monuments and are to be greatly welcomed. Unfortunately, however, poor dark-room work, over or under developing, or excessive cutting, has rendered several of these virtually useless. For many carvings a flash was used; this gives uneven lighting, but proper dark-room work could have remedied this to a great extent. This is regrettable, especially for the many and excellently varied early cross-slabs, many of which have not been published in photographic form before. There is a photograph of the high cross at Clonca, Co. Donegal (fig. 52, p. 63), which has recently been restored, the arm having been found in Sligo town. The court of the Creevykeel, Co. Sligo, court tomb is seen as a patch of grass surrounded by a wall, and the court of the court tomb at

Clontygora, Co. Armagh, as a few upright rocks showing in stark outline against a cold sky (incidentally this site is the one in the colour photograph spread across the back and front cover, though I can not find reference to this fact anywhere in the book!). The illustrations in the gazetteer are not numbered. Some of the line-drawings call for special attention: fig. 1 is unbelievable, fig. 13 is useless, and fig. 8 is simply erroneous in that the chamber of Carrowkeel 'K' is shown as being within the body of the cairn whereas it is actually built on the ground. Weir's illustration is apparently based on that published by Macalister *et al.* (1912).

There are some strange entries in the Glossary. Cromlechs and portal tombs (p. 236) are not necessarily synonymous. The correct name for a 'double court tomb' (p. 236) is 'dual court tomb'.

The book is titled *Early Ireland, a Field Guide*. However, when one reads the preface one is confronted with the startling statement that the "book concentrates on stone monuments, there are few references to raths—except, for example, at Tara". The largest type of monument in the country, earthen hillforts, are therefore excluded from the gazetteer, although *Emain Macha*, *Dún Ailline* and Tara do get a mention in the introduction (p. 36-37). Incidentally, hillforts number closer to 3,000 in Britain than the highly inflated figure of 20,000 cited on p. 37. Earthen barrows and linear earthworks, which are very common on the Irish landscape, are not within the scope of the gazetteer.

North Munster, the area so well served by this *Journal*, is poorly served in this book. Tuamgraney, Cahercommaun and Oughtmama are not included for Co. Clare; Moghane may well be best seen from the air (as mentioned on pp. 37 and 109), but is still well worth the scramble through the scrub needed to gain access to the exposed sections of the ramparts and the cashels. Limerick is even less well served! A single page of text, over half of which is devoted to Lough Gur, is followed by a poor map and two over-developed photographs. Archaeological regions cannot be dealt with selectively, but only 13 of the 28 sites listed by Harbison for the Lough Gur area are noted. Ardagh and Ardpark are not mentioned. Tipperary benefits by the inclusion of both Bauradomeeny and Shanballyedmond megalithic tombs.

With Killanin and Duignan's *Shell Guide* out of print for far too many years, and Harbison's *Guide to the National Monuments* confined to only the major monuments, a book of this sort was inevitable. I have a copy since it was published, but I find the *Shell Guide* or Harbison's *Guide* more useful and more reliable. Perhaps a severe editing for a later edition will completely change the appearance and the content; the greatest fear arising from its publication is that publication of the third edition of *The Shell Guide* may now be deferred.

MARTIN A. TIMONEY

Maurice Craig, *Architecture in Ireland*, Aspects of Ireland/Gnéithe dar nDúchas 1, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin 1978. Price: £2.95.

Nicholas Sheaff, *Iveagh House*, Aspects of Ireland/Gnéithe dar nDúchas 2, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin 1978. Price: £2.95.

Architecture in Ireland is an unusual book, being basically of twelve chapters each consisting of considerably less than one page of text, ten of which are followed by three pages of photographs and two by five such pages (fifty photographs in all). Generally speaking, however, the information contained so briefly is concise and informative, and is supplemented by long captions to the photographs.

The architecture so summarily dealt with ranges from the megalithic tombs of over 2500 BC (the architectural nature of which is, to quote the author, "open to question") to some of the most recently erected buildings in Dublin and elsewhere. Interesting general comments are to be found here and there throughout the text, some obvious, others less so. For instance, we are reminded that the advent of the Cistercians and the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century "revolutionised architecture in Ireland. From now on Irish building was to be much more directly related to that of the rest of Europe"; that the seventeenth century was a period of great expansion for Dublin and also for lesser towns such as Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Drogheda; that only a few towns, Ennis included, retain their medieval ground-plan, most Irish towns being "almost completely rebuilt in the 18th and early 19th centuries" presenting fine "examples of rational and spacious town-planning", notably Limerick; that "the great period of country house building begins just after 1720". A less generally acceptable comment, however, is to be found in the chapter on Castles, where we are informed that the late castles of tower-house type "are paralleled in Normandy, in the Anglo-Scottish border country, and in north-western Spain", the continental part of which statement is somewhat open to question. Space ought, moreover, to have been found in this chapter for some mention of the earlier castles such as those at Trim, Carrickfergus, Athenry and Limerick.

The illustrations are excellent, many presenting unusual views of well known buildings. There are many of North Munster interest, including Poulmabrone Dolmen, Cormac's Chapel, Cashel, Ennis Friary, Kilcooley

Abbey (detail of a tomb carved by Rory O'Tunney), and Mount Ievers. Especially interesting is no. 29, an aerial view of the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin, in which can be seen the charming and most attractive house incorporated into the surrounding wall—this building, clearly intended as part of the whole architectural complex, is now in a terribly uncared-for condition, as can be seen at a glance from St. John's Road, near Heuston Station, and it, too, is surely deserving of the same excellent restoration as is at present being lavished on the Royal Hospital by the Office of Public Works. Perhaps the only photograph to which one might object is no. 46, that showing portion of the old (1846-49—the caption gives 1846-50) University College Galway building. In omitting the corners and any sign of life the photograph presents an air of almost unrelieved and forbidding severity, more suitable to a prison than to a seat of learning.

If the intention of the Department of Foreign Affairs in publishing this little book was to supply our diplomats and suchlike with a useful handout to attract and inform prospective visitors to Ireland, then it fits the purpose. Indeed, this attractive publication is in such excellent taste that it might equally serve as a cultural souvenir to be given to a departing visitor, and as such is to be recommended. Its value to an Irish resident, however, is questionable.

The second book in this interesting new series, *Iveagh House*, is perhaps much more easy to rationalise. A detailed account of the headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs, it clearly serves as an ideal gift for foreign diplomats and others officially visiting the Nation. Although many the average Dubliner, never mind the average Irish countryman, might not be fully aware where Iveagh House is, much less be the slightest bit interested in its history or its interior, this book is so excellently researched and so beautifully illustrated that it would have been a pity were it available to such foreigners alone. After reading it and admiring the photographs of its splendid interior, "something worthy of the most glittering of Oscar Wilde's final acts" (as the author so correctly states, p. 21), every Irishman can feel proud and happy that such a magnificent building exists, that it now, through the munificence of the second Earl of Iveagh, Rupert Edward Cecil Guinness, belongs to the State, and that it serves the dual purpose as a Government Department and as a most suitable showpiece for special occasions.

The elegant frontage in the centre of the south side of St. Stephen's Green is not quite what it seems. It is largely an 1866 enlargement and alteration by Benjamin Lee Guinness of a building designed in 1736 by the great Richard Castle, but not carried out in the style of its period, mid-Victorian, but rather in the somewhat Italinatate late Georgian style of over half a century earlier—for which we can all, I believe, be grateful. The otherwise excellent photograph of the building (cover and plate 8) would have been much improved had the front door been opened, flags been flying from its three flagstaffs, and the lady's bicycle parked against its very decorative railings been removed!

This book, though almost certainly commissioned with the purpose suggested above in view, is one which can be safely recommended to all interested in beautiful buildings. The text is solid, scholarly and most readable, giving first the history of the building and its former owners and then a description of it room by room; it also deals with St. Stephen's Green and with Iveagh Gardens, is well foot-noted and has an index. All-in-all, a production for which the publishers, author, photographers and printers cannot be faulted—congratulations all round!

ETIENNE RYNNE

Denis and Josephine Holly, *Tarbert on the Shannon*, The Donegal Democrat, Ballyshannon 1981. Price: £4.70.

Only someone who has attempted the secular and ecclesiastical history of an insignificant Irish parish can appreciate the difficulties involved in unearthing worthwhile and accurate information which such a work demands. The annals of many an Irish parish are, indeed, "the short and simple annals of the poor". A few enigmatic references here and there, more significant information in the various census returns, perhaps a paragraph or two by some travel writer who happened to pass that way, a page in Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary*, some recollections in a local paper—these are the bare bones from which such histories are fashioned. The temptation to pad these meagre facts with irrelevant details, or what is worse, speculate on what may or may not have occurred, is something which local historians, those unique people who devote so much of their time to the place they love best, should avoid if what they write is to be worth the paper on which it is written.

Denis and Josephine Holly, have, I believe, avoided these pitfalls. They have kept to facts; they have collected, assembled and collated a surprising amount of information without overburdening us with notes and footnotes. Everything they have written must be of enormous interest to everyone from that corner of North Kerry in and around Tarbert.

Having first given us a readable account of the history of the parish to the present day, the second part of the book deals with the meaning of the townlands and any legends or events connected with them. A third part, a miscellany, gives an interesting word-list of Irish words still used in everyday conversation, a list of past and present family names in the parish, a poignant account of a drowning tragedy in the Shannon in 1893, as well as thumb-nail biographies of Tarbert's most prominent sons. The book of 124 pages closes with an imposing bibliography.

To my mind, the book contains one defect: it does not contain a modern map of the parish which would focus the whole area for us. But this apart, it is a factual, unprepossessing work containing twenty-six illustrations, and even its cost is not, I suppose, in these days over-expensive.

PATRICK B. LYSAGHT

Sharon Bohn Gmelch, **Irish Fairs and Pilgrimages**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 57, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

While the booklets in this series provide lucid and excellent reading for the youthful readers for whom they are designed, that dealing with *Irish Fairs and Pilgrimages*, since it treats of living social institutions and concrete facts, probably will leave the most lasting impression on the minds of the readership. The treatment is at once attractive and authoritative, the various fairs and pilgrimages to mountain tops, holy wells, church-sites and other places of real or legendary religious association, being traced back to their known or probable origins, with mention of the earliest documentary evidence of their existence. All the more famous gatherings of present or recent times are briefly described, usually with some picturesque details about each. In particular, the important social role played by them in the forming of new friendships and the renewal of old, the exchange of news and gossip, in addition to the sale and purchase of farm animals and assorted domestic goods and wares, all culminating in a final outburst of entertainment and hilarity is emphasised with understanding and sympathy.

So comprehensive is this brief overview of a little known aspect of Irish social history that it can be read with profit by an audience much more mature than the readership to which it is primarily directed, including interested laymen and even some academic personnel.

Possibly the only questionable statement in the whole text occurs on page 52 where it is alleged that: "Gatherings at holy wells and other pilgrimage sites were disrupted in the ninth and tenth centuries when Vikings began raiding Ireland's rich monasteries". This statement arises from a widespread view of the Vikings as animated by a virulent hatred of Christianity, an antagonism for which the present reviewer, at least, has failed to find a shred of documentary or archaeological evidence. But this minor personal criticism in no way detracts from the general excellence of this informed and refreshing account of a country-wide web of events vital to the life of the rural community, many of which are at the point of passing into oblivion.

The booklet is lavishly and generally speaking adequately illustrated by Michael McNamee, though members of this Society will find it frustrating that the holy well at Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, illustrated on page 57, is nowhere mentioned in the text.

A. T. LUCAS

Brid Mahon, **Irish Folklore**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 54, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Brid Mahon, **Irish Myths and Legends**, The Irish Environmental Library Series, no. 38, Folens & Co. Ltd., Tallaght n.d. Price: £1.03.

Unlike its German cognate *volk* which has maintained its status in current speech as the ordinary word for people the corresponding Anglo-Saxon *folk* had already become so much an archaism by the time the term 'folklore' was adopted to describe popular traditions and beliefs that there was a widespread, if only sub-conscious, resistance among the educated public and students of stricter academic disciplines to take the subject seriously. Old wives' tales, ghost-stories, the cavorting of good or mischief-making fairies, gnomes and goblins, quaint customs, outlandish cures and simples: these and the like were, in popular estimation, the meat and drink of folklorists who were themselves all-too-likely to resemble some of the aberrant creatures whose deeds they so enthusiastically recorded.

If it did nothing else than dispel any residue of this attitude still lingering among the Irish public, Brid Mahon's booklet on *Irish Folklore* would have performed a noble service. But it does much else besides. First and foremost, it provides a perspective on the material, a perspective which enables the reader to comprehend

the real significance of the individual items and the way they intermesh to reveal themselves as part of a pattern often stretching spatially over half the world and backwards in time to the earliest recorded legends and pseudo-history. By an almost incredible stroke of good fortune, for instance, interest in collecting folklore here began just in time to allow the recording of the tales recited by some of the last great story-tellers and tradition-bearers still living in remote Irish-speaking communities on the western seaboard. Seen in perspective it becomes evident that these men were the last of a line going back through recorded history to the unrecorded prehistoric period, their tales and their counterparts throughout the world being the stuff from which were forged the great verse epics of the Mahabata and the Ramayana of India, the Iliad and Odyssey of ancient Greece, the heroic epics of Montenegro and Finland, the Beowulf of Anglo-Saxon England, the whole corpus of Norse and Icelandic sagas, the Táin Bó Cuailgne and other heroic tales of ancient Ireland.

The repertoire of these shanachies included tales of another kind too, those of international provenance, each possibly the creation of some now nameless genius and some of which have spread across the whole Eurasian landmass, from India to the Atlantic shores of Europe. The analysis of the motifs of these and other types of popular stories and legends found world-wide has become a science in itself. Attractive summaries of many of the types found in Ireland are given, and make fascinating reading. Folklore studies also embrace the rites and rhymes associated with certain religious feasts, saints' days and days of immemorial significance in the yearly calendar such as May-Day, St. John's Eve, Lughnasa, Hallow E'en, Twelfth Night, and others, all of which are mentioned in the text. Add to these, accounts of the annual and daily cycle of work in house and on farm, and there are still left unmentioned many other aspects of life embraced in folklore studies.

In her *Irish Myths and Legends* Bríd Mahon performs a similar service in providing a scholarly foundation for the assessment of the material and its historical import. Many older readers will remember having been taught in school the various legendary invasions of the country, by Parthalón, the Nemedians, the Firbolg, the Tuatha de Danann, and lastly of all by the Milesians, as if these were real historical events. Here they are shown to be pseudo-history, their manuscript pedigrees being clearly traced, as indeed are those of all the other many and varied types of legends and stories which, so fortunately, have survived from ancient and medieval Ireland for our enjoyment today. The spectrum is a wide one, embracing origin myths, sagas both romantic and heroic, the great corpus of stories gravitating around Finn and the Fianna, and the strange survival of Oisín and Cailte to Patrick's time when in their joint wanderings through the country they regale the saint and his clerical entourage with the most astonishing miscellany of reminiscences of the feats and adventures of the Fianna in the brave days of old. The author quotes or summarises typical examples of the chief categories of the myths, sagas and stories which are such a precious part of the national literary heritage.

If a note of criticism is to be voiced of this series of booklets as a whole, it is about the illustrations, in the case of these two booklets by Mary O'Connell. These are provided on a lavish scale, occupying both front and back of the cover, both centre pages, and a full page facing each page of the text. To this reviewer's taste the colouration is always garish, the treatment often whimsy and not infrequently mawkishly sentimental. They are totally out of keeping with the intellectual level of the texts of the individual booklets. Indeed, it would not be unduly harsh to say that they are more suited to a tiny tot's Annual than to their present environment. In sum, they seriously detract from the dignity of the texts and their purpose would have been more gracefully and economically fulfilled by well executed line-drawings taking up half their space or less.

A. T. LUCAS

Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *The Massacre at Dún an Óir 1580*, Cló Dhuibhne, Ballyferriter 1980. Price: £1.50.

In this commemorative essay Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh has succeeded admirably in his stated intention of drawing together the recent work of historians on the massacre at Dún an Óir, a fort at the extreme western tip of the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, on the 10th of November, 1580, and its tragic aftermath. The massacre of over five hundred unarmed men, women and children (Spanish, Italian and Irish), is set clearly by Ó Tuathaigh in the context of the Elizabethan state's determination to curb the power of the local lords and to impose a uniform legal and administrative system in Ireland. Behind this, the wider canvas of counter reformation Europe, the excommunication of Elizabeth (thus releasing Catholics from allegiance to her), and the Irish search for aid in France, Spain and Italy, is sketched in. Throughout runs the story of the Munster Geraldines, especially that of Gearóid, Earl of Desmond, from his imprisonment in the Tower of London, through his "weak and timid struggle for survival", his weary entry into rebellion, and finally to his subsequent defeat, death and attainder.

The ensuing reconstruction and plantation of Munster, with its effects stretching, according to Ó Tuathaigh, into the present century, finally swept away the powers and privileges of the old Irish lords, though even now the rebellion, and this "act of grave iniquity" at Dún an Óir, have the capacity to provoke feelings of "what might have been" and of horror.

This excellent, reasonably priced, and appropriately illustrated book follows a format that could most usefully be adopted by many other communities in the country.

GEARÓID LAIGHLÉIS

Fr. Ignatius Murphy, **Father Michael Meehan and The Ark of Kilbaha**, 1980. No price given.

The Ark of Kilbaha, a portable chapel resembling a large sentry- or bathing-box, in which Father Meehan said Sunday Mass for years at the cross-roads leading to the quay at Kilbaha, because Marcus Keane, the landlord's agent, demanded "instant and clear possession" of the two adjacent houses where the priest was wont to say Mass, is thankfully, still to be seen in a side chapel in Moneen (Kilbaha) church.

Probably because of the uniqueness of the Ark itself, its story, reminding us of the bad old days in West Clare, is very widely known, and deservedly so. But the story of Father Meehan (1810-1878), a talented man who spent his life ministering to the people he loved, was largely unknown 'till the publication of this 22-page quarto booklet by Father Ignatius Murphy whose scholarship is evidenced by the imposing bibliography it contains. Well illustrated with some photographs, and especially with reproductions of line-drawings from the *Illustrated London News* of the time, it brings home to us the fight against famine and the fight for the Faith in the Loophead peninsula of West Clare in the 1840s and 1850s.

Its price, publisher, date of publication, and where it can be had, are nowhere stated, and it lacks a proper title page. A pity; such incidentals are important if it is to be as widely read as it deserves.

PATRICK B. LYSAGHT

