Book Reviews


The object of this attractive little booklet is, in its own words, 'to illustrate typical situations in which monuments are placed in danger and to give some idea of the very large number of monuments being destroyed' (p. 4). Its appearance is, indeed, timely, because over the last two decades this island has witnessed an acceleration in the indiscriminate destruction of the field-monuments of a nation whose citizens frequently boast of, and increasingly advertise to others, the wealth and variety of their Irish heritage. That the booklet should have been produced by a voluntary archaeological body, albeit the principal one in the country, is also a sad reflection on those state agencies with responsibilities for archaeological monuments. Apart from a six-page pamphlet, Protecting Ancient Monuments, published by An Foras Forbartha in 1982 but never widely circulated, the main state agencies have not released any booklets of this kind since the 1940s when the Department of Education and the Office of Public Works published Ancient Objects in Irish Bogs and Farm Lands (by H. G. Leask, 1942) and National Monuments: A Concise Guide to Ancient Irish Structures (1945), respectively. Though the former was a pioneering publication for its day (reprinted in 1952) and the latter, under new covers, still occasionally decorates the window of the Government Publications Office in Molesworth Street, Dublin, they are hardly adequate for the problems of the 1980s.

This booklet is thus attempting to fill a rather large gap in archaeological publishing—that of educating the general public in the recognition of monuments and to the dangers which they (the monuments) increasingly face in the late 20th century. It is the opinion of this reviewer that it only partially succeeds in this task. The book's strongest point is its illustrations, in particular the aptly chosen aerial photographs of sites. However, the text is uneven in quality and tends to lack bite at the very points where such is most vital. This is most evident in the sections on 'A New Enemy: The Metal Detector' and 'Urban Decay: Suburban Sprawl' (pp. 5 and 12-14). In the former, it fails to explain in clear and simple terms exactly how and why metal detectors can damage archaeological monuments. To say that removing metal objects from monuments will destroy the scientific value of the information linking these objects with their context' (p. 5) is all very well, but how many of the book's readers will understand such archaeological jargon? The section on urban decay similarly skirts around the most vital aspects of the problems facing the archaeology of our towns. How do 'tall blocks' damage archaeological remains? How can 'planning rules... preserve deposits of medieval material' (p. 12)? What are the lessons of the Wood Quay controversy for the 'several other [nearer 50 to be more exact] Irish towns which have a long history' (p. 14)? Finally, would it not have been more relevant to have listed the addresses of the various local museums mentioned, along with those given for the national agencies, rather than giving details of the Sheppard Trust? It is well known that the public is more likely to report discoveries and/or damage locally, than to contact Belfast or Dublin.

Whether the general readership will notice any of the above absences is doubtful. What they will certainly notice is the attractive presentation, the illustrations, and the excellent sections on the 'Agencies and Statistics of Destruction' (pp. 6-10). However, in the absence of government publications on this subject, members of voluntary bodies must learn to present their arguments to the public of the 1980s as effectively as Leask did to the turf-cutters of the 1940s! Let the local societies follow the Royal Society of Antiquaries' lead. All praise to them for having the foresight to publish this booklet, and to Michael Herity and Fergus O'Farrell for respectively preparing it and the exhibition which accompanies it. The latter will be travelling to various regional centres in the coming years. Don't miss it when it comes to North Munster!

Paul Gosling


In the introduction to this beautifully illustrated book, Shannon Development state their reasons for commissioning the work: it was to be a design source book which would reflect the traditions and visual history of the region. In this way, the company hoped to help in a very practical way the indigenous craft industry to produce saleable objects which would be truly representative of the area. The book, is accordingly sub-titled 'Design Legacy from the Mid-West'.

As a result, Hillary Gilmore has produced, through her quite magnificent illustrations, suitably aided by Cian O'Carroll and Liam Irwin in the descriptive and editorial side of things, a remarkable pictorial history of our art heritage from Bronze Age times to the present century. Indeed, the publication goes beyond being just a
design source-book and becomes one of the better illustrated histories on a wide variety of aspects of the past. The various chapters cover the works of the craftsmen who worked in gold and bronze during the Bronze Age (though only three illustrations of Bronze Age material are shown, none antedating 800 B.C.), the exquisite metal-workings of the early Christian Era, and the highly skilled carvings of the stonemasons in Hiberno-Romanesque and Medieval periods. The products of later craftsmen are also included, and Hilary Gilmore’s own skill with her pen equals the Georgian platerework craftsmanship of the Francini brothers and shows the work of the experts in other media ranging from lace to wrought-iron of the Victorian period and later.

Perhaps, the most charming chapter deals with the simple folk-life objects of everyday life of other times which were made by the blacksmith, stonemason or travelling craftworker. Simple domestic objects such as the old iron cooking-pots, pans and kettles, not to mention the dash churn, come to life again thanks to the skill of the artist. One would certainly have liked to see this chapter expanded even further.

One fault with this otherwise excellent publication is that although it is designated as a design source-book some relevant areas are surprisingly omitted. This reviewer would wish to have seen material from the Early Iron Age included, especially some Celtic La Tène art-work: the thousand years between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D. are altogether omitted! As well, the work would have been enhanced if some material from the illuminated manuscripts of the Early Christian Period was shown. Also, the exclusion of the Gleninshene Gorget and the Mooghan Find because they are included elsewhere is not a valid argument for a work with this title and terms of reference.

As regards the drawings themselves, and they are the whole purpose of the book, a minor irritation is the practice of including the artist’s name in practically every drawing, especially along the pins of the various brooches. This occurs also in the drawing of the terminal of a gold collar on page 13, one of the few not altogether satisfactory drawings as the collar’s disc is tilted slightly out of perspective.

These minor faults, however, slide into oblivion when faced with the expertise evident in the host of other pen-and-ink illustrations which enrich this book. The drawings of the intricate piece of “triangular interlacing” (s.r.) stonework on the North Cross in Kilfenora, the amazing metalwork designs in the Glanenkin Bell-Shrine, the baroque monument to Sir Donat O’Brien, and even the humble iron village pump, are all depicted in uncanny fashion by Hilary Gilmore. Few other artists have the skill to show in their work what objects are made from as well as what they look like in actuality.

The final paragraph of the Introduction to the book pays tribute to the countless fingers and minds which over the centuries devised the patterns of beauty illustrated in the following pages. It expressed the hope that this source-book would assist in maintaining these high standards into our own time. One can say with authority, after reading this book and admiring its wealth of illustrations, that Hilary Gilmore has maintained that standard in her own adopted craft.

PEADAR O’DOWD


"A Monument more enduring than Brass"—so claimed Horace for the written word. But not every archaeologist will appreciate that not every word that’s written survives as well as might an ancient brass artifact—nor does it always deserve to do so! However, there are no doubt exceptions even in this day and age, and there is every reason to believe that the two books to be reviewed here will endure as a better monument to the late Professor M. J. O’Kelly, ‘Brian’ O’Kelly to all who knew him, for far longer than would a brass statue. The first, Irish Antiquity, edited by his colleague in University College, Cork, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, is a collection of papers presented to Professor O’Kelly in his honour only a short time before he died, while the second, Newgrange, is the magnum opus of the great man himself.

In Irish Antiquity there are twenty-six learned papers by scholars working in Ireland, including two from Holland who had worked on aspects of Newgrange with O’Kelly, and also an "Introduction" (to Brian and his work and achievements) by Professor E. Estyn Evans, and a bibliography of O’Kelly’s published work consisting of almost 150 items published between 1940 and 1981 (Newgrange, the last in this list, as “in the press”). The papers proper consist of eight on “Techniques and Method”, thirteen on “General Archaeology” and five on “Ancillary Disciplines”.

Professor O’Kelly was a leading pioneer in the more scientific and technical aspects of Irish archaeology, and it is therefore not surprising that so many of these papers deal with those very aspects. His own researches over the years produced some papers of major importance in those fields, and there is no doubt but that many of
those included here were much appreciated by him—he led the way and the followers are worthy of him. Nonetheless, it is the papers on “General Archaeology” which will probably be most widely read and which are certainly of widest appeal. They range from the post-glacial Mesolithic of almost 8000 B.C. to a Pietà from near Fethard, Co. Tipperary, dateable to the mid-sixteenth century after Christ.

Some of these archaeological papers are of major interest and importance to the study of Irish archaeology, among which one ought to mention the long-awaited paper on “The Flint Javelin-heads of Ireland” by A. E. P. Collins (one can also point to a polished flint javelin-head of his Form A/C from Lochgoin, Ayrshire, a cast of which is exhibited in the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow), the paper summarising present-day knowledge of “Iron Age Burials in Ireland” by Dr. Barry Raftery, the somewhat controversial but innovating ideas on the introduction of iron-working to the southern half of Ireland which Dr. Seamus Caulfeild puts forward [see also this Journal, 21(1978), 9-10 and 24(1982), 17-18], and the O’Kelly-type detailed assessment of the late fifteenth century Kavanagh ‘Charter’ Horn undertaken by Raghall Ó Floinn. Of particular North Munster interest is the paper by Michael Ryan re-assessing the evidence from Poulawack, Co. Clare, in which he places the Central Burial (graves 8 and 8a) among those of Linkardstown Cist type, a late Neolithic type confined to the southern half of Ireland.

Space does not allow adequate comment on the many interesting and valuable papers contained in Irish Antiquity. Nonetheless, note should be made to papers such as that on “The Date of the Moylough Belt Shrine” in which Peter Harbison re-dates the famous metalwork masterpiece so ably examined by O’Kelly himself in 1965, and suggests a date between 750 an 850 rather than one closer to 700 as is generally believed. The paper on “Gold Discs of the Irish Late Bronze Age” by George Eogan is likewise worthy of note, dealing not only with the two Irish finds of such discs but also placing them into context with others from England, Denmark, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Italy. Other worthy papers there are too, but suffice it to state here that they are worthy of the recipient of this Festschrift—the book is a real credit to its publisher, its editor, its authors, and above all a worthy tribute to the work of the late Professor of Archaeology at University College, Cork.

Professor Estyn Evans in his “Introduction” to the above book commented that “Professor O’Kelly will be remembered as the excavator of Newgrange”, adding “Si monumentum requiris, circumspice”—with reference to his then forthcoming book on those excavations. The book has since appeared and it is truly a monument to the man, to his energy, to his scholarship, and to his archaeological standing and ability.

For an excavation report to be published in commercial book-form is unusual, and though this has occasionally happened in Britain and elsewhere it is, it would appear, the first occasion that an Irish excavation has been so published. But then, the passage-grave of Newgrange is sufficiently widely-known and sufficiently important to warrant such treatment.

The book is beautifully produced, in hard-back, with a most dignified, yet attractive, dust-jacket. It is copiously illustrated with superb drawings and photographs, thirteen of which are in glorious technicolor. Perhaps the only photograph one might usefully criticise is plate VII, showing the whole tomb as it now appears, restored to something resembling its original appearance. This photograph presents a rather gaudy appearance, the green grass of the surrounding area and, more particularly, on the shallowly domed top of the monument being quite overpowering—there’s not only too much foreground but the top of the tomb looks almost as if it had been covered with artificial green matting of the type one can purchase as a doormat in any supermarket! The photograph badly lacks a scale—the presence of a person standing near the monument would make its huge size more appreciable.

The text, however, is the most important part of any worthwhile book, and in this book we are provided with a clear exposition of the whole history of the famous tomb, of the excavation, of the finds (rather unusually treated of in an Appendix rather than in the text proper), of the post-exploration conservation and restoration work, with a corpus of the art found carved on many of the stones, and a discussion of the cult of the dead interpreted as a consequence of all the foregoing.

It may well be that it is Professor O’Kelly’s exciting proof of the deliberate orientation of the tomb on the mid-winter sunrise, the first indication of the new year, which will be of greatest interest to most of the book’s less academic readers. This fact was long known and, indeed, was regularly “trotted out” by the monument’s local caretakers over the years (I heard it myself in the late 1940s from the then caretaker, the late Mrs. Hickey, who pointed out to me the spot on the floor of the innermost chamber where the sun’s beam struck at dawn on the 21st of December each year), but it is O’Kelly who has “scientifically” proven it.

Others will take up this book to read Professor O’Kelly’s case (apologia?) for the construction of the near-vertical quartz facade of startling whiteness, an impressive if controversial feature which has so radically changed the whole appearance of the monument that some commentators have been moved not only to express total disbelief but to sneer at and decry it. The case in its favour is well made, however, and carries conviction. Having heard the Professor explain the evidence and propound the arguments many times over the years, I have always accepted it, but it is nonetheless reassuring to know that from now on the onus rests very definitely with the disbelievers should they wish to disprove it rather than with archaeologists who might feel obliged to apologise for it or to
justify it: it can surely no longer be called a fait accompli so much as a fait accepté.

To sum up, this book on Newgrange, a 4,500 years old monument and probably the world’s best-known and finest megalithic tomb, is the type of production every archaeologist dreams of but all too rarely sees. It is a real credit to its publishers, Thames and Hudson, that they even considered such a luxurious publication for a “mere excavation” and we must acknowledge it with gratitude. To them, to its author, and to those who contributed to it (notably the author’s wife, Claire, who provided the historical and introductory material and who also contributed the section on the art of the tomb), one can only say a very sincere “Thank You”.

ETIENNE RYNNE


Up to his retirement in 1977 as Professor of Celtic Archaeology in University College, Galway, Michael V. Duignan’s academic career of over forty years involved him not only in archaeology but also in the fields of early Irish history and philology. Professor Duignan’s publications are remarkable for the standard of their scholarship. His studies of early Irish agriculture and of the art of the Turoe Stone are regarded as classics by archaeologists, while a wider audience will be aware of his contribution to The Shell Guide to Ireland. The collection of sixteen essays under review well reflects the range of Professor Duignan’s interests.

The field of Old Irish is represented by four essays. That by Gearóid Mac Eoin examines the “Early Irish Vocabulary of Mills and Milling” and is particularly interesting in the light of current archaeological interest in the horizontal mills of Early Historic Ireland. Ann Hamlin compliments this well in examining the attitude of the Cúin Domnaig to the use of mills on Sundays. The early Irish laws again provide the resource material for D. A. Binchy’s essay on brewing and Gearóid Mac Niocaill’s examination of base clientship as a form of agricultural investment in early Ireland.

Professor Duignan’s analysis of the decoration of the Turoe Stone showed the primacy of the native Irish contribution to the motifs and their arrangement on the stone. John Waddell’s contribution examines the Kerminia Stone from Brittany and gives it the ‘Turoe treatment’ in what is a very fitting tribute to Professor Duignan’s work. In the second of the two papers in the Festschrift dealing with the intricacies of Iron Age art, R. B. Warner re-examines the Broighter Hoard, the deposition of which he sees as “an act of propitiation for the river or the large or both”, and also analyses the decoration of the collar from that hoard in some detail.

Our knowledge, such as it is, of Ireland’s Iron Age comes in the main from studies of objects—weapons, dress-fasteners, horse-trappings, etc. Our knowledge of the settlement, social organisation, and economy of the period is very lacking. The studies of the various collections of objects and of the art-work of the period have given rise to a number of claims for ‘invasions’ or movements of people into Ireland before and during the Iron Age, and for divisions of the country into provinces based on the distribution of these objects. The frequent tendency has been to look for the explanation of change and development. Timothy Champion’s essay, “The Myth of Iron Age Invasions in Ireland”, is a sensible and well argued demand for Ireland’s Iron Age to be regarded as a distinctive and insular culture, still unclear however, and not as a greatly inferior example of the Iron Age as seen in southern Britain or in Europe.

Three papers examine and classify groups of objects from the Iron Age period in Ireland. Étienne Rynne, Professor Duignan’s successor at University College, Galway, presents us with his long-awaited and very welcome “Classification of Pre-Viking Irish Iron Swords”. Barry Raftery examines knotted spearbutts, and C. F. C. Hawkes gives a very learned and detailed examination of the Irish fibulas, etc.—he opts for this English plural form rather than the more usual, and classical, *fibulae* or dress-fasteners of the period.

Professor Duignan always saw the potential in close co-operation between archaeologists and scholars of Early Irish. J. P. Mallory’s “The Sword of the Ulster Cycle” and B. G. Scott’s “Some Conflicts and Correspondences of Evidence in the Study of Irish Archaeology and Language” show not only the potential and interesting results achieved through this type of co-operation but also the great difficulty in reaching definite and acceptable conclusions when working in this area.

This Festschrift also includes “The Dorsey and Other Linear Earthworks” by C. J. Lynn, “The Origins of Dublin” by Patrick F. Wallace, a Comment on the use of silver in Pre-Viking Ireland by Michael Ryan, and a tribute to Professor Duignan’s contribution to Irish archaeology and history from E. M. Jope.

The quality of the essays in this collection is high and the contribution to Iron Age and Early Historic studies in Ireland is both welcome and timely. The conflicts and difficulties in this field of study are very apparent in reading these essays, and we are still a long way from achieving anything approaching a clear and acceptable overview of this ‘Dark Age’. The Festschrift itself disappoints in its presentation failing to match the high standard of the individual essays. There is no title-page, nor any indication of place and date of publication, the referencing
system is not uniform throughout, and the reproduction of photographs is quite poor. These and other faults may be excused, to an extent, by constraints of time and finance imposed on the editor and on the Association of Young Irish Archaeologists who organised the seminar to honour Professor Duignan in 1980, and undertook publication of the papers presented.

D. A. Ó DRSICEOIL

Éile: Journal of the Roscrea Heritage Society, no. 1 (1982), 1-100. Price: £5.00 (free to members).

All too often newly created and well-intentioned local historical/archaeological societies rush blindly into publishing a journal, and all too often their efforts are done cheaply and amatorishly with the result that eventually not only the series but the society itself founders. Now and again, however, enlightened officers of such societies have their way and, if it is decided to take the huge gamble of publication, advice is sought and listened to and a worthwhile ‘professional’ journal results. The Roscrea Heritage Society has done just this, and their first journal is a credit to them and particularly to its editor, George Cunningham.

The general standard is high, matching the quality of the actual journal itself which is printed on excellent matt art paper and has a stiff attractive cover (though regrettably its title is not printed on the spine). It is, furthermore, copiously illustrated, including, miracule dictu, a full-page full-colour photographic plate for openers! Wisely the Society has not aimed to make the journal an annual event, but intends, rather, to bring it out as an occasional publication, to appear perhaps bi-annually or as often as sufficient material of suitable standard comes to hand.

If the standard of the first number can be maintained, then this new series will appeal not only to the local members of the Society but also to the professional and the more serious amateur archaeologists and historians. For the first two articles, “The Roscrea Brooch” by Michael Ryan and “The Shrine of the Book of Dimma” by Raghnall Ó Floinn, both of the National Museum of Ireland, are of major importance. Not only is much new information about the two objects given, but some interesting new ideas concerning them and related metalwork are mooted. These two articles alone make possession of this first number of Éile an essential for every library, whether private or institutional, which has pretensions towards the study of ancient Irish art and archaeology.

The other articles are of lesser importance, though that on “The Roscrea Missal” by its creator, Finn Ó Neill, will prove of some interest to students of the illuminated books of over a thousand years earlier, while John Feehan’s article on Sheela-na-Gigs presents a new slant on their probable apotropaic functions. Jack Carter describes, with photographic illustrations, six previously unpublished carved stone heads in medieval church buildings in Co. Laois, Fr. Flannan Hogan recounts the building of Mount St. Joseph Abbey Church, Roscrea, while Fr. Lawrence Walsh gives brief biographical accounts of two Roscrea priests who died of ‘yellow fever’ in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1878. Also of local interest is the strange story of “The Roscrea Foundling Case” as told here by Liam Doran, when in 1867 a female infant was baptised Sarah Wall (because she was found on a wall) as a member of the Church of Ireland—but the man who found her was a Catholic and insisted he wanted her baptised as such. Consternation… and eventually the registry was changed, but only after much legalistic haggling; despite the change the Nenagh Guardian came out with the surprising statement that it would not affect in the slightest degree the right of the Protestant Sponsors to have this interesting foundling instructed and brought up an Episcopalian’. One would love to know how Sarah Wall fared later on in life.

The rest of the Journal contains short articles and notes relevant to the Roscrea Heritage Centre and its work, a useful record of how so much was accomplished and which might act as an inspiration to other towns of historic interest—Nenagh, we believe, is following suit!

Once again, congratulations to our member George Cunningham and to the people of Roscrea—this Journal is a welcome and worthy addition to the list of Irish local historical publications.

ÉTIENNE RYNNE


In this book Fr. Ó Riordáin has set himself the task of investigating “the traditions of Irish spirituality” from the arrival of Christianity in the late fourth and early fifth centuries to the present post-Vatican II church. In doing so, he isolates early in the book some of the constant elements which characterise Catholic Christianity in Ireland throughout that period and shows how many of these elements developed in the young Celtic church from pre-Christian practices. In the wake of the Norman invasion there followed centuries of turbulence but
the constants survived, and it is on them that Fr. Ó Riordáin would seem to pin the survival of the declining institutionalised Irish Church.

In the first chapter Fr. Ó Riordáin sketches a bleak picture of the contemporary Catholic Church in Ireland—a church changed beyond recognition from 150 years ago but also a Church with a post-conciliar opportunity to "build a modern faith on a more authentic foundation". Fr. Ó Riordáin outlines this change in the nineteenth century from a 'personal' Church to the institutionalised body that fed off, and is well on the way to devouring completely, the faith of the people on which it must live. It would, indeed, be ironic if having survived the Penal Laws the Church in Ireland was to be destroyed from within by institutionalisation.

The chapter on the synonymity of Catholicism and Irishness impressed this reader most, and it seems a pity that the book barely touches on the twentieth century where even still in that basic document, the Constitution, it is presumed in the Preamble that the people of this State are the descendants of those whom the Lord Jesus “sustained through centuries of trial”. This attitude can be illustrated by the story told in Galway (and perhaps elsewhere) of the dear Sister in a Dublin Training College who, in a conversation on sport, was asked if there was an Irish word for ‘shuttlecock’. "Nil aon Gaeilge ar ‘shuttlecock’—is focal Protastúnach é", she replied! Perhaps we are putting this attitude behind us at last, but one wonders... few of us give phrases like "our Irish Heritage" or "this Catholic country" a second thought, being apparently oblivious to the unintended offense the latter, especially, gives to almost a quarter of the people of this island. What a paradox it is then to learn that Irish Catholics' general attitude to sexuality is a recent intrusion into our tradition—an "Anglo-Saxon puritanical culture" according to Fr. Ó Riordáin, and "the last great British institution" in Ireland not yet dismantled according to John Kelly, the former Attorney-General!

One of the constant elements in Irish Catholicism identified by Fr. Ó Riordáin is penance and self-denial, and he expresses doubt as to the wisdom of the Church in allowing Catholics personal responsibility in these matters. He must, therefore, be heartened by the restatement of the obligation of self-denial operative from Advent Sunday 1983, a restatement which falls somewhere between the "system of legal controls" and personal responsibility.

Reading this book was a rewarding experience for this reviewer, and one could do no better than end with a quote from Anthony T. Padovano’s Preface—"It does Ireland honour to have one of its sons give so much care and love to the soul and spirit of a people that has blessed the world and the Church in remarkable manner". This is, indeed, a remarkably informative and entertaining book, never dull and lifeless but written in an easily understood and readable style. It provides an unusual and enlightened account and analysis of the story of Christianity in Ireland, and is undoubtedly a most useful addition to the library of anyone interested in Church affairs in these transitional times.

GEARÓID LAIGHLÉIS


Since we are well served with histories of Limerick, and especially of the city, we are thankful for the assurance of the author in his Portrait of Limerick that the book is not primarily an historical work, but an attempt to see the town and county in its topographical, social, religious, cultural, sporting and industrial aspects, so that we may fuse all these things into something which we can recognise as distinctive to Limerick and its people.

The author has set himself no easy task. Those indeterminate things which distinguish the people of one area from another, like accents or sporting preferences, are not easily quantified or explained. Yet, Mainchin Seoighe has, I think, succeeded in giving us the feel of Limerick in these pages, because he is an intense local patriot with the literary art requisite to communicate his enthusiasm for his subject to others.

The first three chapters are by way of being an introduction, a pedestal on which the rest of the book is built. Here we get an outline of Limerick's history, here the importance of the part played by the land is emphasised, and Limerick's sporting proclivities are enumerated. The author's penchant for flying off at most interesting tangents is there for all to see in these chapters as is his sentimental attachment to things past, his regret at the demise of the Irish language, his joy at retelling the glories of Limerick's hurling triumphs, or at recalling the hey-day of the Arch Confraternity. Nothing that might add to the glory that is Limerick escapes him.

The guided tour of the city to which he devotes two chapters, is possibly the least interesting part of the book. Essentially a countryman, he is not at his best when describing what the city has to offer. Besides, so much has been written on our Urbs Antiqua that any attempt to add to this knowledge must appear hackneyed. But it is when he takes us on a tour to every nook and cranny of the county, as he does in the rest of the book, that we enjoy and appreciate him most. We can see the sweat on his brow or the rain on his face as he stops here and there to point out some item of interest—a fort, a castle, a river, a crossroads, even a bare hilly to which some story or legend is attached. As he says: "There is hardly a square mile of ground in County Limerick that
has not some tale or legend or historic event associated with it, or a place in Co. Limerick that has not had a song or poem written about it**.

Into his pages he packs a surprising amount of local history, tradition and legend, as well as snatches of song and verse, much of it little known but all well worth preserving. For instance, did you know that Gaitemore is in Co. Limerick? That Limerick was a walled city even in pre-Norman times? That the spire of St. John's Cathedral is the highest (280 ft.) in the country? That the skeleton of the Elk on display in the Natural History Museum was found in a Limerick corcass? The book is full of miscellaneous and fascinating information of this kind.

What he has to say is always interesting, and he has the gift of painting in the background of his pictures with anecdotes, stories and poems which help to galvanise them in our minds. Academic historians may wince betimes. Is the portrayal too enthusiastic? Is the colouring a little brighter than what it might in reality be? Is legend too often invoked to clothe the bare skeleton of historic truth? No matter; his is a conspicuous achievement, an example of what energy and hard work can accomplish when wedded to an enduring love of his native county. This is his Limerick, the city and county he loves, and the twenty-four pages of photographs (two illustrations to the page mostly) are a delightful visual bonus to the text.

If fault is to be found it is in his habit of looking over his shoulder towards the past, rather than seeing the present. The development that is evident everywhere—the bungalow replacing the bothán, the green field replacing the purple heather, the car replacing the cart—deserves a more detailed assessment. A sociological study of the implications of all these changes, by way of an epilogue, would, I feel, have been most appropriate.

And this reviewer with Kerry leanings can be pardoned if he furrows his brow at the information that the River Feale is one of the four Limerick rivers. I wonder!

P. B. LYSAGHT

Thomas MacNamara, P.P., Guide to Mountshannon, no place of publication given, but by Dr. Kurt Reinhold on behalf of The Mountshannon Development Association; n.d. (but 1979); pp. 79. No price given.

Thomas MacNamara, P.P., Guide to Holy Island, no place of publication given, but by Dr. Kurt Reinhold on behalf of The Mountshannon Development Association; n.d. (but 1982); pp. 76. No price given.

In these twin pocket-sized booklets, Fr. McNamara, P.P. of Mountshannon, provides a patchwork history, archaeology, geology, botany etc., of the northeast part of Co. Clare, using the small but beautiful village of Mountshannon and the adjacent island of Inis Cealtra, or Holy Island, as the foci. Included in these booklets are a number of sketches and maps and also contributions by five guest writers. These two Guides are intended for tourists but as they contain masses of interesting details, e.g. the travels of the altar-tomb in St. Mary's Church (H.Is., p. 27), the sources of the parts of the 1981 monument in Mountshannon (H.Is., p. 49), or the origin of the village of Mountshannon itself (M., p. 16), they will be widely used locally.

The monastic remains on Holy Island or Inis Cealtra are a major element of the heritage of Thomond and of Ireland. Liam de Paor, one of our members, has been conducting excavations here since 1970. Fr. McNamara has several tantalising references to the results of these excavations, e.g. prehistoric hunting (H.Is., p. 48), the presence of a lay community (H.Is., pp. 51, 54), and the discovery of two more churches (H.Is., p. 61). We await the full publication of this most important site with bated breath.

Fr. McNamara's great flow of English is evident in his descriptions of nature (M., p. 46; H.Is., pp. 8 and 30-33) or of Madigan and his friends being booked for "drunkeness while in charge of bicycles" on Good Friday (H.Is., pp. 34-35). Regrettably, the author has on occasions been overcome by the desire to pour out too much background information. In doing so, he seems to have lost sight of the purpose of these booklets. Are they to be used out in the field or to be read by the fireside? Finding the relevant passages while at a site would have been made easier by the use of bold face within paragraphs or by an index, but by the fireside they are a joy and should encourage tourists to go and see the riches of northeast Clare for themselves. Some sorting of fact from fiction, lore and anecdotes would be much appreciated by the field-walkers. The inclusion of some passages, e.g. details of the splendid collection of antiquities in Aughrim (not Kilconnell), Co. Galway, National School (H.Is., p. 40), three pages on the flora of Ireland during a tour of Holy Island (H.Is., pp. 30-33), or the defence of Macalister's (not MacAllister's) excavations in The City of David are about as relevant here as a long comment on Ireland's position in the United Nations and the EEC within the pages of a recently published county tourist guide.

The number of typographical errors is quite small despite its being produced in Germany, and most can be corrected by the reader. The description of Carolan as a "Band-Harper" is amusing, and perhaps the word "acDarmustaccurately" (H.Is., p. 14) gives an indication of the place of publication? However, there are a number of factual errors and omissions deserving of special mention. Bog subsidence could not have caused the collapse
of Bohateh wedge-tomb as the tomb would have been built on the ground rather than on the bog. The sketch by Sile O’Beirne of a rather Yeats-like figure at a bullaun-stone at the lake edge (H.I.s., p. 37) fails to show the depression in which metal ore might have been crushed, a possible use not alluded to by Fr. McNamara (H.I.s., p. 36). The *Annals of Inisfallen* are not to be equated with the *Annals of the Four Masters*. The Romanesque in Ireland can be dated within the twelfth century rather than to “somewhere between the Classic and the Gothic” (H.I.s., p. 23). The bibliographies (M., 5; H.I.s., p. 5) are somewhat vague and sketchy in the extreme, and would frustrate any student not acquainted with library systems.

Despite these criticisms these two booklets are very important, indeed are an absolute must, as they give a greater sense of local identity, thereby boosting our flagging local pride, but it would have benefited them greatly had they been vetted by an outsider before being sent to the printer. Fr. McNamara, Dr. Reinhold, and the Mountshannon Development Association are to be congratulated on their production.

M. A. TIMONEY


Killaloe is a lovely town on the River Shannon, one frequented not only by anglers and boatmen but also by all sorts of tourists, including those with an interest in the past. In the town and in the surrounding area are many monuments and sites of major interest. Most of these have long ago been written up in some detail, but it is not easy to travel around with an armful of learned books and journals; the *Shell Guide to Ireland*, that most useful of all guide-books, gives much of the information the antiquarian visitor might need, but far too concisely and briefly to fulfill his needs should he be doing more than merely passing through. No, what is really needed is a handy guide-book devoted specifically to the area, and which briefly but adequately describes what is to be seen and what is generally accepted regarding it. This is what our member, Sean Kierse from the town itself, has now provided.

Though most of the information presented in this little Guide is secondary, it is none the worse for that—quite the contrary as it is thus for the most part authoritative. Many of the illustrations are culled from earlier publications but, again, this ought not to be regarded as a fault—Westropp’s, Leask’s, and O’Kelly’s plans and drawings could hardly be bettered. Photographs, all but one or two of excellent quality, further illustrate this Guide.

There is, of course, much new information to be got throughout the text, the result of the author’s local knowledge and long-standing interest in the area. Indeed, it is this all-round local expertise that makes this booklet especially useful for the visitor who, no matter how well-read, would otherwise miss out much of interest. How many for instance would otherwise find out that the Kilfenora High Cross now rather obscurely attached to the west wall of the nave inside the Cathedral was only put there in 1934, or that the Cathedral’s fine tower had about 4.50m. added to its height by Bishop Knox (1794-1803) and another 1.50m. added as recently as 1900?

There are, inevitably, some few minor blemishes, if one could term them such, but they will hardly be noticed by any other than the specialist. Taken all-in-all, this well-got-out Guide is one to be welcomed and one for which the author deserves our sincerest thanks.

ETIENNE RYNNE


This useful and excellent booklet is correctly titled: it is virtually a mini-compendium of the town’s local history (and folk history?) while still retaining the primary aim of providing a guided walking tour. It contains a wealth of fascinating knowledge which will doubtless be as interesting and often as ‘new’ to the local resident as to the enquiring visitor.

While most members of our Society will know the antiquities of Roscrea, i.e. its Round Tower, Romanesque facade, 12th century High Cross (beautifully photographed on the cover), the Castle, Damer House, Franciscan Friary and late 8th century carved pillar, few will realise that Roscrea has much more of historic interest to offer. It’s all succinctly encapsulated here for us by the omniscient George Cunningham, who not only describes the places encountered on the stroll through the town but provides flashes of intriguing information as he goes along. How many, for instance, are aware that the Round Tower was inhabited up to the 19th century, or that the old mid-12th century church of St. Cronan’s Monastery stood until 1812 when all but its marvellous west facade was pulled down? Or that the first turf-cutting machine in Ireland was made by Fred Williams who owned a bicycle shop in Rosemary Street, a not entirely successful effort but a prototype for Bord na Móna’s big machines
nonetheless. He even explains the reason for the name of the Pathé Hotel—not for any cinema or suchlike reason but because it was the maiden-name of the owner! Now who would have deduced that? And how many know that Fr. Theobald Mathew gave out a pledge against tobacco while giving out one against alcohol?

Roscrea people, like those of many other Irish cities and towns, seem to have in the latter half of this century, turned against old local placenames, whether of Irish or purely popular origin, and to have all too often replaced them with meaningless, 'twee' or 'pious' ones more acceptable to those who consider themselves too grand to reside in places with old names, e.g. Green Lane in Terenure, Dublin, is now Greenlea Road, while Sicken in Galway is now St. Brendan's Avenue. In Roscrea what was Bohreenglas is now Green Street, Bunker's (sic) Hill is Railway View, Knockballymeagher is Rockforest, Burgoo has become Limerick Street, Alley's Lane goes by the much posher name of Golden Grove Road, while River or Monence Lane has been sanitised by the name Lourdes Road. Ah well, pride may well come before a fall!

Let us once again thank and congratulate Roscrea and George Cunningham. Clearly, as he states on page 7, the "Roscrea Castle Complex is coming alive with heritage."

ETIENNE RYNNE


The Parish of Kilmihil is one of a number of local histories that have been published recently by various parishes within the diocese of Killaloe, Co. Clare. Research for the book was funded with the help of an I.C.A. grant. The book provides a broad history that draws substantially upon the work of local historians both living and dead. The result is a wide-ranging treatment of the formative influences that have made Kilmihil what it is today.

The organisation of the book is a roughly chronological one, beginning with Kilmihil before the Penal Days but with the main emphasis upon the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Treatment of the genuinely rich local archaeological heritage is scant, and includes an extract from this journal [Vol. 14, (1971), pp. 37-40] written by our Hon. Editor (whom they erroneously call Etienne Ryan!), but the little that has been touched on only serves to highlight the need for a complete archaeological survey of the area. Particularly laudable is the committal to print the recollections of local inhabitants and the reprinting of extracts from publications that are no longer in print, including an abstract (pp. 61-77) from Thomas J. Westropp's paper on "Cahermurphy Castle and its Earthworks..." published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, vol. 41 (1911), pp. 117-137.

One small quibble, from an outsider's point of view, is the lack of an area map. A title page giving the place, date and authors of the publication would, furthermore, have helped prevent this book being somewhat of a bibliographical curiosity and a librarian's nightmare. However, the authors have collected a tremendous amount of information and this book will be of particular interest to all those living in Kilmihil and to those who trace their ancestry to that part of Clare.

CONOR NEWMAN


This book costs all but £20, which, even in these times of financial inflation, makes it expensive and prospective buyers should be informed by a review what they will get for their money. The format is good: it is well printed on stout paper with 78 illustrations of sites and artifacts, most of which are excellently reproduced photographs, supplemented by reproductions of a small number of 19th century prints and some maps. The front of the dust-cover bears a photograph of the so-called 'Petric Crown', which is an Iron Age object of no possible connection with Brian Boru, and the back, more generally, an illustration of the page in the Book of Armagh where he is styled 'Imperator Scotorum'. The text is followed by 24 pages of 'Bibliography and Notes' arranged by chapter. The book concludes with a glossary and index. The 'Glossary' is not, in fact, a glossary but a list of Irish words and Irish forms of the names of people and places mentioned in the text, each name being accompanied by two guides to its pronunciation for English speakers: one based on the system used in the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English and the other an 'adaptation' of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Having in the preface lamented "that so little reliable source material is available for a student of Brian's life and work", our author proceeds to recount the exploits and activities of his hero over the following 172 pages. The limitations of the sources do not preclude his painting in intimate detail any scenes in Brian's life suggested by the documentary evidence or his own imagination. His account of Brian's early struggles against
the Vikings or 'Land Leapers', as they are frequently called in this curious book, provides an instance of this: "A bag of hide, slung around the neck, would contain provisions for a day, the guerillas relying on daily hunting or the culinary results of a raid... Hunting expectations were not always profitable: the Danes had probably been ahead of them and killed or frightened away the game" (p. 64). The naïve childlike logic of the latter sentence is characteristic of much of the author's reasoning, e.g. "The last years of the sixth decade of the ninth century can hardly have been a propitious time for contemplating marriage, especially in Thomond" (p. 64). A brief show of critical appraisal of the sources does not inhibit the author from inventing a tribute called 'Eidirsceol' and then invoking it repeatedly in his arguments. The notes which accompany each chapter prove on second glance to be little more than a random miscellany of jottings, the purpose of which appears to be to display the extent of the author's reading rather than to illuminate and enliven the text.

If all these shortcomings could be attributed to amateurism, there are others which cannot be so readily excused. Such misspellings as 'uninterupted' (p. 9), 'honary' (p. 11), 'Unimpaired' (p. 32), 'collateral' (p. 33), 'pallisade' (p. 57), 'plumb' (p. 58), 'coracles' (p. 95), 'occurrence' (p. 96), 'ascendency' (p. 129), and 'grieving' (p. 191), do not testify to more than perfunctory proof-reading. The connoisseur of strange, freakish and baffling diction will find much to delight him:

"The various annals, in untranslated form, and notably the composition known popularly as the Four Masters, are prone to wild exaggeration..." (p. 9); incidentally these annals (translated not only by John O'Donovan in 1856 but also, less accurately, by Owen Connellan in 1846) are consistently referred to by the author in the singular, e.g. "as the Four Masters records..." (p. 54).

"The invadors were masters of the art of persuation, both gentle and tortuous..." (p. 30).

"But the long lapse of time so frequent in Irish history turned the victory of Leinster into a squalid internecine war..." (p. 43).

"No annalist, contemporary or in the future, mentioned the presence of a queen at Cashel..." (p. 99).

"It does not deflect from Brian's reputation..." (p. 124).

"...but the fact that within three centuries Ireland was again a mass of pathless afforestation indicates how basic the improvements [attributed to Brian] were" (p. 140).

"Brian Imperatoris' looked forward to spending the rest of his life in peace..." (p. 140).

"Before Brodar left his piratical lair, superhuman ravens with iron beaks and claws had attacked his ships..." (p. 169).

"Maol-Seachlainn was restored, not as titular exponent of Ua Neill grandeur but with the courage he had exhibited in earlier days" (p. 180).

Among the many other inextricacies which jumbled the text, at least one further example deserves to be quoted:

"Upon this stage of Irish history we have now seen, and finally recognised, the principal actors. It may seem a perpetual crowd scene, but even so we may differentiate between the crowds; while, if there is a chorus, as in classical Greek productions, it is the compelling voice of Ireland herself, bemoaning her sorrows but at the same time calling upon us to be wary of the open trap—of looking at the play strictly through glasses of black and white" (p. 65). An Amanda come to judgement.

The publisher's blurb informs us that the author was brought up in Hampshire and "writes for various magazines and periodicals on subjects ranging from rural life to gardening; but Ireland is his first love". It seems a pity to have to say caveat emptor in regard to this labour of love.

A. T. LUCAS


The story of Portuna Castle and its occupants includes not alone the history of the locality on the borders of North Munster, but also encompasses the turbulent history of Ireland itself after the coming of the Normans. This particular history begins with the rise of the De Burgos family, one of the most powerful Anglo-Norman families whose founder, William De Burgos, came to Ireland with Prince John in 1185. William was subsequently granted a large fief stretching from Cashel to Limerick and in time married the daughter of Donal Mor O'Brien, King of Thomond. Thus, having secured his position in the region, he began to cast greedy eyes northwards and established a bridgehead across the Shannon at Portunna, thus commencing the association of the De Burgos with the locality.

From this foothold, Michael MacMahon skilfully traces the progress of subsequent De Burgos in their conquest of Connacht. They were eventually to progress further and obtain the Earldom of Ulster in 1265 in exchange for the Manor of Kilshane and other estates in Munster. This was to lead even to the throne of England itself, as we learn that Richard, Duke of York, father of King Edward IV, was descended from Elizabeth, only child of William De Burgos, the 'Brown Earl' who had been murdered in 1333. Yet another connection with the English
throne occurs in this century when Henry Lascelles, 6th Earl of Harewood and grandson of Lady Elizabeth De Burgh, in 1922 married Mary, the Princess Royal, daughter of King George V. Thus, in the words of Curtiss, according to MacMahon, "the noble blood of Brian Boru flowed through the House of York to the present Royal House of England".

Yet, as the author points out, the De Burgo family story also had its troubled points. After the murder of the 'Brown Earl', we read of Connacht being carved up (against the wishes of the Crown) by Ulick and Edmund De Burgo into the two great lordships of Upper and Lower McWilliam. For the next 350 years or so, the fortunes of the various branches of the De Burgo family were to rise and ebb according to the circumstances of the time and the sides chosen in the multitude of conflicts that plagued the country. Thus, we read of Richard De Burgo, the 4th Earl of Clanricarde fighting on the side of Lord Mountjoy against the Ulster rebels at Kinsale in 1602 and gaining recognition for his valor. On the other hand, at the end of the same century, Ulick, brother of Richard the 8th Earl, commanded a regiment of foot in King James army and was killed fighting at Aughrim in 1691.

Richard, the 4th Earl, from his success at Kinsale gained many honours and titles and it is not surprising to learn that it was he who built Portumna Castle c. 1618. It is here, in dealing with the actual castle itself, that one feels there is a certain weakness in this otherwise excellent booklet. Surprisingly, the actual description of the building itself does not warrant a section of its own, but seems rather lost amidst the general history. Yet, the description of the early layout of the building and that of 1808 by Louise Beaufort, augmented by the Royal Irish Academy plans, must impress on the reader the magnificence of Portumna Castle before it was accidentally devoured by fire in 1826. Despite this, however, an isometric view of the present ruins comparable with the Leask illustration of Derryniven Castle on page 9 would certainly have been more beneficial than the rather poor drawing on page 8 which is just a copy of the excellent photograph on the back cover. Perhaps also a site map of the demesne, showing the Castle and Dominican Priory, and a description of the present ruins and grounds would enhance this commendable work even further.

Despite these minor criticisms, this publication is a most welcome addition indeed to the growing volume of historical works on famous Irish families and houses. In fact, it is better than most in its comprehensiveness of material, and, as such, its author, a member of our Society, is to be sincerely congratulated on his endeavour.

Michael Mac Mahon at the start of his booklet states that "modern development has scarcely intruded and the demesne is still a haunt of ancient peace". Armed with this delightful publication one can stroll amid the ruins and grounds of Portumna Castle and literally walk back into history.

PEADAR O'DOWD


It may be somewhat late to be reviewing this book, which was published in 1981; but for various reasons, including the very good one that its subject has a Limerick connection, it is a book that deserves to be brought to the notice of readers of our Journal. No less than Corkery's famous work, this book deals with a 'Hidden Ireland', the Hidden Ireland of the 18th century Catholic Church as it struggled for survival against the Penal Code.

John O'Brien, the future bishop, was born in 1701, in Ballyvody, in what is now the ecclesiastical parish of Kildorrery. His parents were Thomas O'Brien and Eleanor Mac Eniry. It is virtually certain that Fr. Coombes is correct in his surmise that Thomas O'Brien belonged to the O'Briens of Ara. The evidence for this is contained in an article the late Monsignor Moloney contributed in 1949 to St. Munchin's Folk—Parish Annual, on Terence Albert O'Brien, the saintly Bishop of Emly—and one of the Ara stock—who was hanged by the Cromwellians in Limerick in 1651.

Eleanor Mac Eniry, Bishop O'Brien's mother, provides the Limerick connection, for she was one of the Mac Enirys of Castletown Mac Eniry, that most interesting family who were chiefs of Corca Muihead, an ancient tuath that extended from Dromcollogher almost to Bruree. By the 18th century the Mac Enirys had established ties of kinship, through marriage, with the illustrious de Lacy family of Co. Limerick. A footnote in page 121 of A Bishop of Penal Times refers to the administration of Bishop O'Brien's burses in the universities of Paris and Louvain. With regard to the selection of students, preference was to be given to O'Briens above all others... and, on the maternal side, to 'those of the name Macennry (Mac Eniry) of Castletown, Co. Limerick; Lacey's of same'.

John O'Brien went to France about 1720, and began to study for the priesthood at Toulouse. Many of his friends and kinsmen, exiles who had flown with the 'Wild Geese', were well established in the French service and in the exiled Jacobite Court. After his ordination he ministered for some time in the diocese of Toulouse, before going on to Paris in 1731, to pursue a course of advanced studies at the Sorbonne. He became a Doctor of both Civil and Canon Law, and later graduated with a Licentiate in Theology.
In all, John O’Brien spent eighteen years in France and Spain. In late 1737 or early 1738 he returned to Ireland, as Fr. Coombes tells us, “with degrees in theology and canon law, four or five years pastoral experience and the poise and self-confidence induced by contact with French and Spanish society at the highest level.” In 1738 he was appointed parish priest of the united parishes of Castletown and Rathdown in Co. Down, in place of Dr. Thady O’Brien, who had resigned on condition that he retained half of the parish revenue for his maintenance. Subsequently however, the retired parish priest regretted his decision and appealed to Archbishop Butler of Cashel for redress. Says Fr. Coombes: “Butler’s handling of the case was blundering and inept. Thady O’Brien really had no case... As a member of the powerful Butler clan the Archbishop possibly did not often have to take notice of the niceties of canon law.”

Later, Dr. John O’Brien was to cross swords with another member of the Butler clan, Fr. James Butler, a priest of Cashel, who was being advanced for the bishopric of the united dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. Dr. O’Brien, who had all the qualifications for such high office, announced his own interest, and had friends promote his candidature at the Court of the Old Pretender, James III, who still enjoyed the right to nominate to Irish bishoprics. Dr. O’Brien was appointed Bishop of Cloyne and Ross; Dr. Richard Walsh became Bishop of Cork, which was detached from Cloyne and Ross; Fr. James Butler later became Archbishop of Cashel.

A Bishop of Penal Times provides fascinating insights into 18th century life in Co. Cork. Dr. O’Brien still continued to reside in Castletown after his appointment as bishop. The two powerful families in the area, the Barrymores and the MacCarthy Spáinnaighs, had become Protestant in order to retain their properties, but they still had a soft spot for the old religion. The area also had a Cúirt Eige, a court of Gaelic poetry, and Bishop O’Brien, a great lover of the Irish language himself, was in close touch with the poets, notably Seán Ó Murchadha na Ráithíneach. Bishop O’Brien was, of course, the compiler of a well known Irish-English Dictionary.

He was a reforming bishop, strong-willed and immensely self-confident. He produced a manual of pastoral practice and canon law. He sought very high standards of education and zeal from his priests; he initiated parish missions and organised schools. All this had to be done very tactfully, for the Penal Laws were still on the statute books, and were still invoked from time to time. He had great trouble with a number of priests whose lives were far from exemplary, and who, in some cases, received the backing of powerful Protestant families when the bishop proceeded to move against them.

He left Ireland for France in 1767, stating he was going for health reasons. He died in Lyons less than two years later. Fr. Coombes is to be congratulated on giving us this remarkably fine account of Bishop John O’Brien, and of his times.

Mainchín Seoighe


The old saying that “there’s good goods in small parcels” is true in relation to the content of this excellent history of our Post Office. However, just as a choice stamp can be marred by a carelessly applied frank so too can an excellent text be adversely affected by bad printing and editing. The contents page is atrocious. There are chapter numbers to the left of the page and the chapter titles all finish at the right-hand side, thus causing large irregular blank spaces in the middle. The commencement page numbers of the chapters aren’t stated. Furthermore, surely there is no need to have Chapter 1 or 2 or 3, etc., in large print at the start of each section of the text? It cramps the page. The maps on pages 11 and 12 could do with enlarging, and the map on page 12 is very faint. The print line has a slight but noticeable tilt to the right across the pages in this reviewer’s copy. This sort of bad editing would bring down most books, but fortunately we have Mrs. Reynolds’ excellent text—it rises above all these flaws and reduces them to mere irritants. In fairness to the publishers, they have given the book an excellent cover. The front cover illustration is Thomas Forrester’s “The Irish Mail Car”, in full colour—an inspired choice. The title is set off in a manner evocative of a well addressed letter. The back cover features “Donelle Obrane, the messenger” with Sir Henry Sidney, 1581, reproduced from Derricke’s Image of Ireland.

So much for the packaging, but what about the contents? Starting with the English adoption of the French Royal messenger post system, the author moves quickly to the introduction of a postal system to Ireland in 1559. In 1561 John Apperle of Houlby got the postal contract from Houlby to Dublin. He charted Patrick Tyrrell’s boat for the job (Tyrrel would appear to be a long established seafaring name in Ireland). The first official postmaster in Dublin was Nicholas Fitzsymon, appointed in 1562. During the Munster Rebellion a Milford Haven-Waterford postal crossing was introduced (1579). The assimilation of the words “post” and “letter” into the Irish language by 1600 is testimony to how well the Irish postal system was established by that date. Vaughan’s post road system of the late 1630s, Cromwell’s introduction of censorship and creation of a Government monopoly on postal services,
and Vaughan's replacement by the Commonwealth appointee, Bathurst, are detailed. William and Mary's improved and 'supervised' postal system is also dealt with—they saw the possibility of using the Post Office to help 'scotch' any Jacobite rising in Ireland.

The move around Dublin of the site of the Dublin letter office prior to the opening of the G.P.O. in what was then Sackville Street, in 1818, is plotted. This final resting place did not, it seems, find favour with many Dubliners. The introduction of the Penny Post, the registration of letters and the early franking system are all dealt with. Under this last heading the origin of the 'political representation' letter would seem to date from an Act of William III extending the privilege of free Royal Mail to M.P.'s. Their incoming and outgoing mail was free during the Parliamentary session and for forty days before and after. Many people got their friendly local M.P. to sign or frank their postage, thus ensuring free delivery. By 1718 five times as many 'free' letters were posted in Ireland as those that actually paid postage. Several attempts at reform were made which were partially successful. Is it any wonder that nearly three hundred years on many Irish people are too lazy to write on their own behalf to State agencies, preferring their friendly obliging public representative to do it for them?

The development of the post road system (post-17th century), the mail coaches, packet steamers, introduction of the postage stamp, letter boxes, postal uniforms, 19th century reform, and the emergence of an independent Ireland's "Oifig an Phoist" are all included. Various important individuals get coverage also, e.g. Issac Manley, the Lees Family, and William Mulready. Mulready was born in Ennis on April 1st 1786. Eighteen months later the family moved to Dublin and finally to London. Elected to the Royal Academy, Mulready was a popular painter. He was commissioned to design prepaid letter envelopes. The designs were completed in two days. In the chapter on Mulready his envelope design and also some caricatures of it are illustrated.

The book is profusely illustrated, the bulk of the material being from either the National Museum or National Library collections. Indeed, this prompts the thought that these two institutions should have sponsored the publication of this history. One set of illustrations that caught this reviewer's fancy are the 17th century tokens on page 14—Mathew Bethell, "Postmaster in Antrim" (1671) and Thomas Moore of Carlow (undated). Robert Warner of Ballinasloe issued tokens there, and later on in Galway after setting up as a merchant in that city; he is buried in St. Nicholas Collegiate Church there. Could the Thomas Broughton, postmaster of Loughrea, be the same Broughton who issued tokens in Galway some fifteen years later?

Like all good books this leaves one satisfied with the primary content while opening up a new series of by-ways to be pursued. Truly, as the blurb states, "this book will make absorbing reading for students of public administration, or social, economic and political history'. It is, in fact, probably the finest piece of specialised history this reviewer has read to date.

Paul Duffy


Oddly enough, the pagination of this review copy runs from 65 to 96, though the text is complete—if this is intentional then some explanation might have been offered.

This short account of the history of Ireland's coinage is welcome for several reasons. It provides a useful historical outline from "Barter" and "The Earliest Coins" to the introduction of coins into Ireland. From there it covers the Hiberno-Norse series of coins and the issue of each English Monarch in the Anglo-Irish series from the first issues of Prince John (1185) to the last issue of George IV in 1823. The book finishes with the coinage of Saorstát Éireann/Éire and the introduction of decimal coinage in 1971. A number of tokens from different periods are dealt with in their proper chronological order. This concise yet readable account of our troubled island's coinage provides a good introduction for the beginner collector, and a valuable aid for any one who has a general interest in our numismatic history. It is profusely illustrated and Brendan Doyle is to be congratulated on the excellent quality of the photographs which enhance this publication. Indeed, the long established serious collector of Irish coins will welcome this publication precisely because of Mr. Doyle's outstanding illustrations of some of the treasures of our National Numismatic Collection.

Two 'gripes', however, although the first one is minor in nature. Both the front and back covers illustrate the obverse of a series of Irish coins. Could not the front cover have illustrated the obverses and the back cover the reverses of the coins in question? The second gripe is a little more serious—surely a small bibliography could have been added. It would have enhanced an otherwise excellent booklet.

There is no need to be afraid of the numismatic terminology—the jargon is given in bold type coupled with an explanation without interrupting the flow of the text. The illustrations are captioned fully throughout, the captions containing an expanded English translation of the, normally, contracted Latin inscriptions. All in all, a book to be recommended.

Paul Duffy
These three books, two specialised studies and one more general work on aspects of Irish glass, all by the same author, have in a short space of time added considerably to our knowledge of the subject. Although all three of them have been published within a year or so (none bear the date of publication—inexusable in the case of the National Museum), they are undoubtedly the results of years of long and careful research obviously backed up with the necessary practical knowledge and experience, something which is especially true of the two specialist publications.

While all three deal with Irish glass, only the third book, and to a much lesser extent that on Pugh glass, deals with much other than fine glassware intended for the table. Even in the general book on Irish Glass, stained glass and most ordinary containers such as bottles and other items of everyday use receive scant attention. This, however, is doubtless due to pressure of space rather than to anything else, though the survival rate of the more mundane items might also have been a limiting factor.

The first book starts with a short but concise introduction to the Irish Volunteer glass of c. 1778-1793, and the remainder of the book consists of a detailed descriptive and annotated catalogue of all the known surviving examples of the material, glasswork engraved with Volunteer symbols, motifs, slogans and other inscriptions. Not only is every specimen illustrated with superb photographs but there are also several photographs of relevant subjects in other media which provide useful close parallels, while reference is made to other parallels not illustrated here which likewise assist in presenting a date and background for the glass.

The glass items discussed, sixteen in all, comprise eight toasting glasses, four goblets, two ale flutes, a decanter and a water jug. Six of these are preserved in the National Museum, four in the London Museum, one in the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art, and the remaining four items in private collections—it seems strange that apparently none are in the Ulster Museum. It is to be hoped that the publication of this little book will bring more such objects to attention.

The Volunteer glasswork provides an excellent quarry of material for the study of the symbolism associated with late eighteenth century Nationalism, as well as motifs which overlap with Loyalist symbolism. The great wealth of patriotic motifs can tell us much of the various strands of the political thought at the time, something which, of course, is equally true of other periods too (e.g. W. A. Seaby, *Irish Williamite Glass*, Ulster Museum, Belfast: 1965)—a fascinating subject in itself which has recently received some attention in such books as G. A. Hayes-McCoy, *A History of Irish Flags from the Earliest Times*, Dublin 1979 [reviewed in this *Journal*, 22(1980), 74-75] and J. Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: the Celtic Revival 1830-1930*, London 1980. Indeed, Miss Mac Leod has not let the opportunity pass to discuss this point in both this book and that on the Pugh glass.

Using various criteria, much of it only obtainable from long experience, Miss Mac Leod has identified numerous items which can be attributed to the work of Thomas and Richard Pugh at Potter's Alley Glass Works, Marlborough Street, Dublin, mostly between about 1870 and the closure of the works in 1890. A major difficulty in identifying the pieces was the fact that in keeping with a long established tradition all the records were deliberately destroyed when the works closed. The author had, consequently, to resort to other sources of information, such as exhibition catalogues, newspaper references, National Museum files, Dublin Directories, etc., from which an extraordinary amount of information has been successfully gleaned. Attribution, too, presented difficulties in the absence of manufacturer's marks, though the fact that many items were engraved with patterns by Franz Tieze, patterns which could be identified from his sketch-book now in The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, or were engraved by the second and only other known engraver employed in Potter's Alley, Joseph Eibert, who, like Tieze, was also from Bohemia, helped solve many problems of identification. This book provides not only a catalogue of the now known Pugh glass, but also a marvellously detailed and interesting history of one aspect of the industrial archaeology of Ireland.

The third book, *Irish Glass*, is by contrast a layman's or beginner's book. Because of this and the brevity imposed by the particular series in which it appears, it does not pretend to deal evenly with every aspect of the subject. It starts with an all too brief introduction informing us of what glass is and how it was made. "It was first used in Egypt", we are told, "for making beads in imitation of gems and for glazing small clay ornaments and, by a special process, for making little bottles and jars for precious perfumes and ointments". Prized for its brightness, it was later given the name 'glass' from the Old High German word *glaes*, a word connected with 'gloam' and 'gleam'. Various methods of decoration and other technical aspects are equally briefly but clearly given elsewhere, roughly in the order that they were invented. Most of the book, however, deals with 17th, 18th and early 19th century glass, and various types of objects (such as jugs, cruets, decanters, etc.) are dealt with under separate headings.
The book is well illustrated in colour and black-and-white, but as the illustrations are not numbered it is difficult to refer to them, especially as there are often several on the one page and not necessarily close to the relevant text. An interesting exercise, is to compare the coloured photograph of the Lisburn Volunteers water jug of 1782 on page 125 (this book, being part of a series, is paginated from 97 to 128) with the black-and-white photograph of the same jug on page 5 of the book on Irish Volunteer Glass. A few words only are said about glass in ancient Ireland (on page 99) and regrettably some are not entirely accurate, e.g. Clonmacnoise is not in Co. Laois nor Ballinderry in Co. Tipperary. There is room for an up-date publication on Ireland's ancient glass beads, studs, bracelets, and other items, and it would, perhaps, have been better had this aspect not been included here.

While the above book on Irish Glass contains much that is original and of general use and interest, there is no doubt that it ranks nowhere near the other two publications in academic standard. Both the others are a real credit to the author, and to the National Museum for having produced them, their only fault being their inadequate title-pages: for the book on Volunteer glass being little more than a fly-leaf, without date or place of publication indicated (a blank page at the end of the book shows that it was a lack of space that prevented a proper title-page being included), while the title-page for the book on Pugh glass not only bears no date of publication but also gives a different title than that on the cover! One sympathises with librarians and bibliographers.

JIM HIGGINS


This book is not really correctly titled, but for what it sets out to do it does really well. The author deals only with the late 19th and early 20th century revival of 'Celtic Art' and, in this, it is a pity he did not choose a different title, e.g. Gaelic Revival Art, or even 'Celtic' Ornament, as he describes it himself on the first page—note the important quotation-marks which are vital to distinguish the recent 'Celtic', as opposed to the ancient Celtic, ornament. The account here given is a rather straightforward one with little attempt at art appreciation and with little extraneous comment or theorising, but it is none the worse for that.

The author has well researched the early material decorated in this new 'Celtic' style, and several items of lesser renown are mentioned and illustrated. An example of this is the silver-mounted engraved glass claret jug exhibited in 1878 at the Paris International Exhibition, where, with other glass exhibits, it won the Grand Prix d'Honneur—despite which it seems extremely ugly and unattractive to this reviewer. Also mentioned and illustrated is the Memorial Church at Rathdaire, Co. Laois, built in 1887 to the designs of James Franklin Piller—his earlier (1883) Church of St. Michael and All Angels, near Clane, Co. Kildare, also perhaps deserved honourable mention; these two churches are testimony and a real credit to the Irishness of the Church of Ireland at the time. One is glad, too, to find here the fine 'Celtic' work done in 1900 by an Italian, Signor Orese Amici, in St. Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny, a building built between 1891 and 1901 and which has much 'Celtic' interlace carved on its gate-pillars and doorways, and also some in its stained glass. The extraordinary stained glass of the parish church at Lorrha, Co. Tipperary, also surely deserved commendation.

The influence of 'Celtic' Art on Art Nouveau has been greatly exaggerated and is more widely accepted than is warranted. To this reviewer, as apparently also to the book's author, it always seemed to be the reverse. The Manx artist, Archibald Knox, is barely mentioned though he is undoubtedly the most internationally known of all Art Nouveau artists working in the 'Celtic' style. The finest Irish artist who worked in this style is undoubtedly Art O'Murtaghan, and he receives adequate coverage—it is regrettable, however, that what is probably the least attractive of all the pages of his beautiful, although unfinished, Leabhar na h-Aisirigh (sic, not Aisirigh as spelt here) is illustrated, unfortunately not in colour. What a pity, however, that Micheal Mac Liammoir was not included—his work was of a high standard and, although basically illustrative, it often incorporated much 'Celtic' decoration.

'Celtic' art has lost much of its popularity since the last war. The author blames this on "the increasing cosmopolitan and internationalist world of the mid-twentieth century national tradition in Irish design", but in this he seems to miss the real reason: it was not a change in approach to nationalism which caused it to lose ground, but rather an overdose of sometimes good but too often tasteless 'Celtic' ornament appearing year after year on Christmas cards, certificates, etc., etc., etc., i.e. its popularity got virtually killed by good-will, becoming as boring and uninspiring as the shamrock.

This book is to be recommended highly, like almost all of the Irish Heritage Series. It is instructive and easy to read and enjoy—hopefuly it will help in the appreciation of this style of art everywhere and perhaps encourage Irish schools, on both sides of the Border, to once again turn to instructing students in its production; maybe the National College of Art might too?

ETIENNE RYNNE