

## Book Reviews

Colm Lennon, *An Irish prisoner of conscience of the Tudor era: Archbishop Richard Creagh of Armagh, 1523-86*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000; pp 166, Price: £25.00; *The urban patriciate of early modern Ireland: a case-study of Limerick*, Dublin, National University of Ireland, 1999, pp 27, Price: £5.00.

Colm Lennon has pioneered the study of Dublin's patrician classes in the early modern period in a series of books and articles. More recently he has turned his attention to Limerick. His study of the Limerick-born Archbishop of Armagh, Richard Creagh, raises important questions concerning the urban patriciate's response to Tudor centralisation and the state-sponsored reformation. Through Creagh, Lennon is able to juxtapose continental links, the role of education and humanism and politico-religious allegiances, which together help explain the decision of Creagh, and many of his Limerick peers, to embrace the Catholic/counter-reformation.

Creagh was born into a prosperous commercial family in Limerick in 1523, where the young Richard began his career as a merchant. However a conversion experience (later to form the basis for hagiography) encouraged a change of career. From the start Creagh represented a new breed among the Irish clergy, he was one of the first to study at Louvain. This continental training provided an introduction to the humanism of the Counter Reformation. On returning to Limerick he opened a school in the city, in part encouraged by his ideas of social advancement through education. Creagh (with another Limerick native, David Wolfe) was later central to the effort to establish a university in Ireland (Pius IV supplied a bull to this effect in 1564). In 1562 Creagh was called to Rome where he (reluctantly) accepted the position of Archbishop of Armagh. His first attempt to reach the diocese failed when he was arrested and imprisoned. But his escape from prison was a transforming event both for his own life, and for his reputation. Creagh returned to the continent where he received both Irish and foreign support. His second attempt to reach Armagh was successful, but his relations with the Gaelic Irish leader Shane O'Neill were extremely volatile, especially while the attempts of the Elizabethan state to deal with O'Neill suffered a meltdown. Creagh then was placed in a precarious position. On a visit to his family in Limerick in 1657 he was arrested, and apart from a very brief interlude, remained in prison until his murder in the Tower of London (by the administration of poisoned cheese) in 1686. Imprisonment (and the failure of the state to secure a conviction) only encouraged the development of Creagh's reputation among Irish Catholics. The Privy Council reported in the year before his death that Creagh was 'a dangerous man to be among the Irish for the reverence that is by that nation borne unto him' (p. 108).

Despite his lengthy imprisonment and his very brief spell in Armagh, Creagh was central to the development of the counter-reformation in Ireland. His rejection of the idea that the Limerick patriciate could outwardly conform to Protestant services, while inwardly remain loyal to Rome, signalled the emergence of a conflict between competing religious structures. Lennon ably uses Creagh to demonstrate two important facets of the early counter-reformation. First, the mission of Creagh was obviously imbued with a sense of reforming zeal, both through education and the inculcation of Tridentine-style mores. Creagh felt that this 'civilising' element of his mission would ultimately strengthen the Tudor administration in Ireland. Second, and closely linked, Creagh remained loyal to the Elizabethan administration in Ireland, even after the excommunication of the monarch in 1570. This effort to remain loyal politically to the monarch while formally attached to the

papacy remained an important consideration of the Old English in Ireland during the early seventeenth-century. Lennon has provided a fascinating picture of the early counter-reformation through his chosen subject. It is all the more remarkable for the nature of the available source material (most of Creagh's scholarly work has been lost). Moreover, as a case for the importance 'the humanising spirit which may come with good, up-to-date biographical studies' (p. 9), this book makes a very strong case.

Lennon's work on Richard Creagh demonstrates the importance of his background in sixteenth-century Limerick (see especially chapter two). The welcome reconstitution of the National University of Ireland's O'Donnell Lecture series in 1999 afforded the author an opportunity to develop these views. In his lecture, Lennon analyses the 'durability' of the patrician class in Limerick from the late Tudor period. Because of their rejection of the Protestant reformation many of these families lost direct political control during the mid-seventeenth-century and yet managed to emerge into the eighteenth-century as a powerful commercial force. Lennon illustrates that a central factor in this story of 'endurance and emergence' was the existence of a 'corporation spirit' (as one late eighteenth century commentator put it) or 'civic living' (p. 20) among wealthy Limerick Catholics. Both these works demonstrate the high levels of inter-marriage among the Limerick patrician families themselves; the Creaghs, Sextons, Arthurs and Whites in particular were at the heart of a web of family alliances and associations. The sense of identity forged through social connections was further cultivated by a stress on ancestry and genealogy (illustrated by Creagh among others) which bolstered their image of themselves as a political and economic elite. Close continental links assisted in the emergence of significant educational enterprise among the same families, who supported schools and sent their children there. One seventeenth-century visitor noted that: 'The High Streete is builte from one gate to the other in one forme, like the colleges in Oxford, so magnificent that at first my entrance it did amaze me.' (p.14) Church patronage provided a further outlet for civic pride, and was crucial in preserving the position of the clergy after property had been alienated.

The reformation made slow progress in Limerick, but one prominent patrician, Edmund Sexton, conformed in the mid-sixteenth century. After his death and burial in the 1550s, members of a number of prominent families removed the body from its resting-place and desecrated it. The body was accidentally discovered three years later hanging in the chancel of the Cathedral. Lennon suggests that there was more to this shocking act than religion. Sexton's conversion had allowed him to take full advantage of Tudor centralisation, especially of religious property. Such aggressive expansionism was an important factor in the enmity suffered by Sexton and his successors. The Sextons threatened the carefully constructed urban unity which maintained the patrician families in their ascendant position. However, as Lennon demonstrates, the power and influence of what became the Sexton-Pery dynasty allowed the old patrician families to survive and re-emerge as significant commercial powers in Limerick. The protection of the Sexton-Pery's, combined with the strength of their civic identity, meant that even after they lost effective political power (only in the 1650s), the Catholic merchant elite were able to maintain a position of commercial importance. The depth of civic traditions and the survival of this important group meant, suggests Lennon, that they 'had a more abiding role in the formation of modern Ireland than is conventionally thought.' (p. 20).

Overall, these two works present important insights into the history of early modern Ireland, and set a benchmark for further work on Limerick during this crucial period.

Liam Chambers,  
*Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

David Sweetman. *The Medieval Castles of Ireland*, The Collins Press, Cork 1999, pp 214. 170 figs + 30 plates. ISBN:1-898256-75-6 Price £25.00

Castle studies in Ireland can be likened to waiting for the proverbial No. 15 bus, nothing for ages (H. G. Leask; *Irish Castles* 1941) then two come along at once. First out was Tom McNeill's *Castles in Ireland* (1997) and now the present volume by the Senior Archaeologist with Dúchas: The Heritage Service.

The book is divided into six chapters along fairly conventional lines. The first three deal with the early medieval period, separated into earth and timber castles, the larger stone castles, and the lesser hall houses. The last three deal with the later medieval period divided up into larger castles, tower houses, and fortified and strong houses. The book is lavishly illustrated with plans and black and white photographs, while some of the colour plates are stunning. The text, as one would expect given the writer's position, contains up to the minute details of recent archaeological excavations, e.g. at Trim, Dungarvan and Dunamase, as well as the results of recent unpublished survey work.

So does the book work? The answer is yes for a general reader with a passing interest, but otherwise I think not. In the preface the writer expresses the hope that the book "will form a basic framework and reference from which the student can progress the subject". In order to progress, one needs access to the existing body of work on the subject, and this book fails completely to deliver on that score. I should not have a colleague, with this book open in front of him, phoning me up to ask for the published references to my site at Dunamase, as happened while this review was being compiled.

The best example of the problem is footnote 3 to chapter 5 (on p. 202), which deals with Leask's views on the dating of tower-houses. It starts, "Many students and authors writing on this subject have been at pains to alter this simple basic picture by trying to push the origin of the tower house back into the fourteenth century"; it then proceeds to give no clue whatsoever as to who these students and authors may be, but concludes that Leask's thesis still stands. The means to make up one's own mind on the matter are not given and one is expected to take the writer's opinion as correct. Another example of extremely poor referencing is the writer's use of the excavation reports archive at Dúchas as the only source for details on recent excavations. *Excavations*, the yearly publication of summaries of all licensed excavations in Ireland for the given year, is ignored. This omission is quite surprising because, apart from being more accessible to the general public, *Excavations* is published by Dúchas and it is now a requirement of an excavation licence to publish such summaries. A third example combines a failure to provide proper references with sloppy scholarship. On p. 137 it is stated, "Attempts to divide tower houses into regional groups based on their plans has [sic] not been convincing. For example "type 1A" which includes Bouchier's Castle, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick is the commonest type and is said to be found in a limited area south and west of Limerick City". It then continues to knock this idea on the head. A reference is given to McNeill's book, but only on checking it does it become clear that the typology referred to is not McNeill's but Colm Donnelly's and that the work referred to is a thesis on the tower-houses of Limerick, not Ireland as a whole. Donnelly's work does not make the bibliography.

There is one minor category missing from the book. Polygonal stone enclosures form a short section in McNeill's chapter on the lesser stone castles. It would be interesting to know whether their omission was an oversight or whether the writer does not think them worthy of inclusion.

In short I find this a very frustrating book which unfortunately fails to live up to its promises.

Brian Hodkinson  
Limerick Museum

Brian Austen (ed.) *Irish Furniture* Furniture History Society, Sussex, 2000; pp 52 ISBN 0 903335 09 3 Price £8.95. *An Exhibition of Irish Georgian Furniture* Johnston Antiques, Dublin, 2000; pp 79, No price stated.

The Furniture History Society, founded in 1964 and based in Britain, is the leading international body for the study of furniture and historic interiors. In February 1999 it organised a major symposium on the subject of Irish Furniture at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The papers presented on that occasion have now been made available to a wider audience. As the Knight of Glin points out in the introduction relatively little work has been done in the past on this subject and while there is a welcome and encouraging revival of interest much more research needs to be undertaken. The increased popularity of Irish furniture with resultant high prices has stimulated some of this work and the publication of this pioneering study marks an important milestone.

In her study of Dublin cabinet makers of the early nineteenth century Angela Alexander points out that despite the loss of prestige which the city suffered as a result of the Act of Union it continued to expand after 1800 and the rise of a prosperous middle class provided a steady market for furniture makers. While the landed class faced continued vicissitudes throughout the century many of them continued to build, extend and repair their houses. Sir Edward O'Brien instructed his wife in 1825 to get an estimate for furniture for Dromoland from the Dublin firm of O'Brien but to see if she could get equally good workmanship in Limerick at a lower price. The church of Ireland bishops, it is pointed out, were also important patrons while the 550 glebe houses erected between 1808 and 1829 provided another major source of demand.

Eilish Munday makes a detailed examination of one of these Dublin firms, the Butlers. Specialising in reproductions of Chippendale, Adam and Sheraton styles, their most important commission was to provide furniture for the Vice-regal Lodge in advance of the royal visit in 1903. Photographs taken by the firm at the time help to identify these pieces, some of which are still in Áras an Uachtaráin. Fionnuala Carragher contributes a similar study of the furniture making tradition in the north of Ireland which she shows was centred in Belfast and Derry with important smaller production in the larger towns of Ulster.

Nessa Roche, author of a valuable book on Irish windows, contributes a pioneering paper on Irish eighteenth-century looking glasses. The scarcity of documentary sources, lack of drawings and the fact that pictorial views of Irish interiors rarely include mirrors makes definitive conclusions on this subject very difficult. She notes that any attempt to define Irishness in these objects is hampered by the fact that most designs are merely adaptations of those used in England. Distinctive features in Ireland tended to be in minor details or in the continued use here of designs which had gone out of fashion in London.

Claudia Kinmonth, the leading authority on Irish country furniture, supplements her highly acclaimed 1993 study with further research in a paper titled 'aesthetics and the Irish vernacular interior'. Using paintings and illustrations, which have recently been discovered, she expertly analyses their representation of domestic interiors. Her work is a fascinating demonstration of the value of art as a historical source. She is keenly aware of possible pitfalls in this approach and counsels that it must be pursued in an interdisciplinary context supplemented by other available sources. Her paper is an excellent example of how this should be done.

Nicola Gordon Bowe traces the history of the arts and crafts movement in Ireland in the period 1894-1935 with specific reference to wood carving and furniture. She notes the presence at the 1907 Irish

International Exhibition in Dublin by the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland of work from the Clonkeen woodcarving class at Barrington's Bridge. At their 1910 exhibition Limerick was represented by the Misses Barrington's woodcarving class from Ahane while Mrs Vere O'Brien designed a firescreen inset with embroidery from her school at Ballyalla near Ennis. While the author acknowledges the dominant position of the Hicks firm during this period she is critical of their work which she sees as lacking originality in conception and design. She reserves her praise for the architect William Scott who, alone of his contemporaries, sought an integration of architecture and interior design and appreciated the importance of the vernacular tradition as a source of inspiration in design.

Only about thirty Big Houses in the Republic still contain some of their original contents and there has been a similar wholesale loss of vernacular furniture. After decades of neglect dealers, collectors and private individuals are taking a renewed interest in these objects. This has been matched by a renewed scholarly effort to classify, document and study this aspect of Ireland's heritage. While it might seem invidious to name one individual, given the increased number of labourers in this rarefied field, few will, I think, deny the important role that West Limerick man and member of our society, Desmond Fitzgerald, the Knight of Glin has played in promoting interest and scholarship in this area. A quick glance through the footnotes of all the contributors to this volume shows their indebtedness to his extensive and impressive research and publication. His introduction to the Johnston Antiques catalogue of their second exhibition of Irish Furniture provides another example of his erudition and is a valuable guide to source material for this subject. In addition his encouragement of other scholars, generous sharing of his knowledge and tireless campaigning for the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage has played a major role in developing the greater appreciation that now exists. It is clear that the publication of these valuable volumes is a source of pleasure to him as they will be to all those fortunate and sensible enough to acquire them.

Liam Irwin

*Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

Mainchín Seoighe, *From Bruree to Corcomohide*, Bruree/Rockhill Development Association, 2000, pp xxi + 562 Price £20.

Devotees of Limerick local history have long been indebted to Mainchín Seoighe, (or Mannix Joyce, the English version of his name). Bruree (1972), Dromin-Athlacca, (1978) Kilmallock (1987), and Co. Limerick at large (1982) have been the subjects of previous books by this author. But Mainchín is not one to rest on his laurels. A weekly deadline is quite unforgiving in that regard; so we may thank that record-setting weekly column of his in the Limerick Leader (fifty-six years!!) for keeping him on his toes. He has always kept abreast of new publications of Limerick interest, always collected and researched new material himself, so it was perhaps inevitable that he should want to up-date one of his older books.

This book, however, does much more than give his earlier history of Brú Rí a facelift. That slim volume has shed its collection of poems and the graveyard inscriptions (so don't throw it away!), but the body of the book has been considerably expanded in content, as well as being extended geographically. Mainchín always made room for his native and much-loved Tankardstown (once

Bruree's neighbouring parish, but now part of Kilmallock). A large new section on Corcomohide extends it substantially to the west. In medieval terms (see chapter 4), he might be said to have assimilated neighbouring tuatha under his sway and called them Corca Mhainchín! Corcomohide (originally Corca Muichead) was a very large pre-Reformation parish, which extended westward from Bruree parish almost to Dromcollogher and Kilmeedy. It covers the area of Ballyagran, Castletown and Feenagh.

The book thus falls into two natural, if unequal, parts. In the first (pp 1-335), the author neglects no aspect of his beloved parish –prehistory, archaeology, middle ages, Norman and Gael, high and low, and his heroes –the Maigue poets and Dev. He takes a hundred pages to reach the eighteenth century, a rich section in which the reader receives a good understanding of medieval Gaelic society and is guided through the transition from Gaelic and Norman-Irish hegemony to English dominance – the Geraldine rebellion, the Nine Years War (1594-1603), and the 1641 Rebellion with its Cromwellian denouement and the consequences of this in terms of changes in land ownership.

The eighteenth century is not one that any author has much to say about; due to scarcity of sources it is known as the silent century. The Penal Laws and the Maigue poets fit in here. The nineteenth century gives the local perspective on the main themes of that century –railways, landlord and tenant, whiteboys and faction fights, famine and fenians. The latter leads into the struggle for Ireland's independence in the twentieth century, especially the personal, local roots which influenced Éamon de Valera growing up in Bruree. The remaining 175 pages or so of the first part deals with all aspects of parish life, mostly in the twentieth century. Its famous people and its institutions receive attention, especially Bruree's most famous son and institution, de Valera and his Museum, but so, too, do the storytellers and the sportsmen, the language and the culture, the lives of the ordinary people who are the parish.

The second part of the book is more focussed on antiquity and on the family that once dominated Castletown and the surrounding area, held on to it when the Normans came, survived both the Geraldine Rebellion, the Nine Years War and the 1641 Rebellion: the Mac Enirys, or Mac Enerys. The author is as puzzled as the rest of us about their eventual loss of possession and power. The ingenuity which had stood them in good stead in earlier times –they got their lands back after both Geraldine Rebellion and Nine Years War- would seem to have disappeared in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century either in Cromwell's plantation or in the subsequent forfeitures after the siege of Limerick in 1691. The author is rightly certain that the McEnirys were not transplanted; indeed they were not asked to go. It is not even clear that they were involved in the 1641 rising. The author named several families who played a prominent part in it, and 'safely assumes' that the McEnirys did likewise. The assumption is understandable, given their past record, but one wonders why it would have gone unnoticed even by those who were quick to punish such participation. I merely wonder; I do not disagree! Coincidentally, this issue of the Journal contains a list of those who were ordered to remove themselves and their households to Connacht in 1653, and it makes no mention, either, of the families who would normally be found playing a supporting role to the McEnirys in any undertaking –the Noonans, Gormans, Cullanes/Collins, or Cahills. Whatever the explanation, they did lose their lands and moved away from their ancestral seat though only as far as nearby Castlemahon.

There is more to Corcomohide than the McEnirys, of course. Treatment of the seventeenth century upheavals is again to the fore and accomplished. Later events are dealt with more briefly than in the Bruree section, but there are some interesting contributions, especially an excellent discussion of the identity of the famous Captain Rock who was behind so much whiteboy activity in the early nineteenth

century, and an account of the famous Lloyd-Odell duel from the same period. One of the charms of this book is the author's willingness to give generous space to family information which is quite difficult to obtain elsewhere. I refer to families such as the Langtons, the Hardings, the de Lacys, the McShehys, and the Dalys.

The author's sound knowledge of the Gaelic language always assures confident treatment of placenames and early geography. It also explains his fascination and fine treatment of the transition from Gaelic Ireland to the ascendancy of colonial settlers. His long-standing active interest has resulted in his amassing a great quantity of data and stories on people, battles, places and much else besides. It is inevitable that in the way of things it should be easier to amass information on the more recent people and events, while the very nature of local history makes it difficult to fit these into any pattern; there isn't any to fit them into. Then there is the need to entertain and the perfectly laudable need to preserve local memories of people and events that do not form part of any systematic treatment of parts or aspects of the history of these parishes. One has to understand such needs.

All in all, the thorough presentation we have received from the pen of the gentle and learned scholar that Mainchín Seoighe is has distilled a wealth of research, the author's and that of others, so scrupulously and respectfully acknowledged in endnotes. It will preserve much about Bruree and Corcomohide that would otherwise fade from people's memory, and will also provide those writing the history of other parishes with ideas about areas of research which are worthy of greater attention than they usually receive.

S.C. O'Mahony.

Thomas J. Byrne, Tom Donovan, Bernard Stack (eds.), *Home Thoughts From Abroad: The Australian Letters Of Thomas F. Culhane*, Glin Historical Society, Glin, 1998 pp 219. ISBN 0 9530373 0 4. Price IR£6.99.

Thomas Francis Culhane was born into a farming family in Ballyguilteneane near Glin in 1891. From the local national school he went to Mungret College and it would appear from a reference in one of his letters that he continued his studies in Dublin but it was from Queen's University, Belfast that he obtained a B.A. degree. Later in his life he was awarded an M. A. from Melbourne University for his study of an Aboriginal tribe.

Having turned down a cadetship in the British army, he took part in the War of Independence and in the early 1920s became a Gaelic League teacher of Irish in his native area. Following his marriage in 1927 he went to Australia where he remained for the rest of his long life, dying in Melbourne in 1969. It was a decision that he regretted and there is a poignant reference to emigration, in a letter to a friend in Croom written in 1954, as the worst fate that can befall anyone and the greatest mistake of his life. After difficult initial years working as a farm labourer, he joined the staff of a Melbourne catholic paper, *The Advocate* in 1936 eventually becoming its editor. This gave him an opportunity to write articles on various aspects of Irish history but his main scholarly activities were devoted to the history, folklore and heritage of his native place.

The major publication from his lifetime of research and study appeared in the *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society* just before his death in 1969. In this article, 'Traditions of Glin and its neighbourhood' the impressive range of his knowledge and erudition is superbly demonstrated and it is sad to realise that it contains only a fraction of the local knowledge that he took with him to the grave. Not

all of his learning and lore however was lost. He was a prolific letter writer and his correspondence contained a plethora of local information, reference and comment. Glin Historical Society is to be warmly commended for taking up the suggestion of the Knight of Glin that this material should be published.

The letters are principally to four individuals, Desmond Fitzgerald the Knight of Glin, Kit Ahern of Ballybunion, Maighréad McGrath of Athea and Pádraig de Brún of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies though there are some important communications also to others. The letters to the Knight are the earliest in the collection, dating to the 1950s, and were written in response to queries about the history of his family and the locality. In addition two essays on Irish history, from an unapologetically nationalist viewpoint, are included which presumably he felt that the Knight could benefit from. The letters to Kit Ahern begin in 1962 when she went to Australia in her capacity as President of the I.C.A. They show his continued fascination with Ireland, both contemporary and past and his comments on the issues of the day are both witty and well informed. In a letter to Seán O'Sullivan in 1963 he refers to Jim Quin, on whose family land the Ardagh Chalice was discovered. Quin, who had emigrated to Australia in 1872, spent the last months of his life living with the Culhanes. On the night before he died he had a dream that all the bishops and priests who had ever used the chalice appeared to welcome him. Culhane was aware of, and it would appear amused by, the controversy about whether it was Quin or the farm labourer digging potatoes with him who deserved the credit for finding the chalice.

The letters to Maighréad McGrath contain valuable information on the history of Athea and its families as well as a general history of the O'Briens. He informs her in December 1964 that James O'Brien of Scart, Glenagragara, Glin, an overseer in the roads, is 28<sup>th</sup> in descent from Brian Boru and the real owner of lands near Rome, which the Pope had given to Brian's son in the eleventh century.

The largest number of letters, and the most valuable for the historian, are those written to Pádraig de Brún between 1963 and 1969. He provided sources for de Brún's M.A. thesis on the Gaelic poets of North Kerry and their friendship continued thereafter. Almost every one of these thirty-four letters contains valuable information on a range of scholarly topics particularly relating to Gaelic poetry, scribes and manuscripts.

The text of his major article in the *Kerry Journal* is reprinted as well as a list of his publications in *The Advocate*. There is a short profile of his life by his daughter Mary Ita Collard and an obituary by Mainchín Seoighe first published in his *Limerick Leader* column. This collection of letters is a sobering reminder of the economic circumstances of the 1920s which forced a man like Thomas F. Culhane to leave the new State that he had helped to found and to which he had so much to contribute. Some of the letters make heart-rending reading with their sense of exile and loss and a yearning for all matters relating to Ireland. While it may be speculated that had he been able to remain in Ireland his contribution to scholarship and particularly to local history might have been more substantial, fate determined otherwise. On the other hand perhaps it was as a result of his enforced absence from the country, to which he never returned, that his interest was sustained. At the very least it is due to these circumstances that we now have this valuable collection.

We are indebted to the fortunate recipients of his letters for their preservation and for making them available, to those who generously financed their printing and to the editors for their painstaking work in preparing them for publication. The choice of title, from the famous poem by Robert Browning, himself an unhappy exile, via the Clifford T. Ward song, very effectively captures the essence of the man and his lifetime of dedication to his native place.

Liam Irwin  
*Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

Seán Spellissy, *The History of Limerick City*, The Celtic Bookshop, Limerick 1998; pp vi+ 370, ISBN 0 9534683 0 5. Price £20 (hard cover); £12 (paperback).

In the course of running "The Celtic Book Shop", Pat and Caroline O'Brien noticed a gap in the market for a popular history of Limerick city. When they decided to publish such a book they had little difficulty in choosing an author. Sean Spellissy the prolific Clareman, had produced *Limerick the Rich Land* in 1987, in conjunction with John O'Brien. That was a history of both Limerick city and county, and is now out of print. The same authors had published a similar work on County Clare entitled *Clare County of Contrast* in 1987 and *A Portrait of Ennis* in 1990. Seán then published *Suicide: The Irish Experience* and *The Merchants of Ennis* in 1996 and *The Ennis Compendium* in 1998.

*The History of Limerick City* is an impressive production. It is written in the accessible style that one has come to expect from Sean Spellissy. The story of the city is divided into six main sections. It starts with a chronological overview from the development of an island settlement by the Vikings and on from the medieval twin towns to the eighteenth century new town to the modern city. The remainder of the book has a geographical structure. The areas of Englishtown and King's Island, Irishtown, Newtownperry, South Liberties and Thomondgate and the North Liberties are the divisions used to make up the other five sections. These provide a pleasant blend of history, biography, archaeology, architecture, folklore and placenames. Interspersed among all this are the charming comments, diversions and anecdotes for which the author is justly famous and popular.

Each of these sections is subdivided into headed paragraphs, which invites the casual reader to dip in and browse. The book is full of interesting photographs, both old and new, of artifacts, advertisements, old buildings and personalities. Acknowledgement is given to various sources, but the main credit must go to Larry Walsh of Limerick City Museum, for his input in this regard. The extensive bibliography is an indication of the exhaustive research done to produce this work. A good index is a marvellous addition to any historical work, and in this case there are eighteen pages of tightly packed detail. Despite modern developments in computerised indexing the system is still not flawless, so the author's own tried and trusted method cannot be surpassed. Anybody who visits his bookshop "The Book Gallery" in Ennis, can witness this unique shoebox method of indexing.

The curse of Saint Munchin famously prophesied that in Limerick outsiders would always prosper at the expense of the natives. I am sure that even Limerick people would agree that in this instance it has worked to our advantage. Seán has justified the confidence placed in him by his fellow Clare couple Pat and Caroline O'Brien when they commissioned him to write this book. He has fully complied with their brief to produce a concise, informative and entertaining account of the history of the city. We are indebted to all three of them for this co-operative venture in producing such a valuable and useful volume for both the domestic and tourist market.

Tom Donovan

Seán Murphy (ed.), *Remember Limerick, Ballads, Poems and Songs of County Limerick*, Limerick, 1999 pp xvi + 320. Price £12.99

This compilation of songs and poems relating to Limerick has been assembled by Seán Murphy, a well known G.A.A. columnist and sports presenter on local radio. He has written a number of books on

sports history most notably *The Story of Limerick G.A.A. 1884-1984*. As Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, the Limerick born, Galway based historian, points out in the introduction, the book highlights two interlinked aspects of the Irish cultural experience. There is the strong sense of place coupled with the rich tradition of popular song.

The author has trawled very widely indeed both in time and space. Both the city and most areas of the county are represented while the range of authors is similarly broad. The ballads and poems chosen are both by distinguished literary figures such as Aubrey de Vere or Gerald Griffin and men who are largely unknown and forgotten like James Moran and Paddy Hayes. While female writers are in the minority, presumably mirroring reality, contributions are included from writers such as Charlotte Grace O'Brien, May Moran Lynam and the prolific Maureen Sparling.

The criteria for selection appear to be either that the item is about a Limerick place or is by a Limerick author. The latter would explain the presence of songs such as *The Boys of Wexford* or *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, both penned by Robert Dwyer Joyce. Even the briefest reference to a Limerick place or incident in a song seems to qualify as instanced by the inclusion of *The Old Fenian Gun*. In general the compiler provides little information about either the material or its authors. No biographical details are supplied apart from giving dates of birth and death for the occasional person. It is not made clear, apart from some limited clues in the preface, whether most of the authors are alive or dead or indeed to what century they belong. Neither is there any indication of where they come from or the circumstances in which the selected pieces were composed. The lack of any structure makes the compilation difficult to use especially in the absence of an index or table of first lines. No chronological, geographical or thematic framework has been employed, even works by the same author are not grouped together.

Despite these irritations, *Remembering Limerick* performs a valuable function in preserving and making available to a wider audience an interesting part of our heritage. While the ballad performers and street singers have long since disappeared and the general milieu and way of life in which they flourished is gone forever, the celebration through song and poetry of local place and especially sporting heroes is still alive. While much of the material collected here is of doubtful literary merit, its social role was and arguably remains, important. Whether it can be regenerated or even survive in the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger, remains problematic but at least a representative selection is now preserved of this aspect of Limerick distinctive identity and way of life.

Eibhlín Ní Chonail

Paul D. Fennell, *The Fennells of Manister, Co. Limerick*, Privately published Florida, 2000. Pp 300. No price given.

This book tells the story of John Fennell who at the age of 60 emigrated with his wife and family from a smallholding in Manister to Canada. They sailed on the ship, the *Cordelia* from Limerick in May 1840 and after a 36-day journey, arrived in Saint John, New Brunswick. Eight of their nine children, ranging in age from nine to thirty five years, accompanied them. Their other son John who was aged thirty two remained in Ireland.

The family ultimately travelled up country, some fifty miles from the port of Saint John, to settle at

White's Mountain in the Kennebecasis River Valley. Friends and neighbours from County Limerick, who had travelled with them, Ryans, Shanessys, Gallaghers, Elders, Hanleys and Boyds, also settled in that same area. By the 1850s four of the sons, Thomas, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Patrick had acquired land at White's Mountain. Collectively, they owned close to a one thousand acres during the 1850s and early 1860s. This was only after each took advantage of all opportunities, by working as labourers on building Canadian roads and with the railroad - trolley system in the United States. They went as far south as Portland and Boston to earn the money to buy further land.

P. D. Fennell has spent 15 years exploring the travels and careers of the descendants of John Fennell or Big John, as he was known to his family, to compile this book. In it he gives a brief history of the Manister area and conditions there in the early nineteenth century. He describes the family's Herculean task of converting a rocky, pine laden mountain in New Brunswick into a productive farm interspersed with many individual stories of various Fennells, their spouses and families. He has included over two hundred family photos to supplement and enliven the text. The book can be ordered directly from Paul D. Fennell, 8527 Black Mesa Dr., Orlando, Florida, 32829, USA

Tony Browne

Frank Prendergast, **St. Michael's Parish: Its Life and Times**, Limerick, 2000; pp 24. Price IR£3.

The parish of St. Michael, which can be traced back to 1205 though it may be even older, is one of the five medieval parishes of the city. Both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches each retained these names after the reformation though the boundaries changed over time particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While many histories of parishes in the county have been written no such work has been done for any of the city parishes. Frank Prendergast's short account of St. Michael's Catholic parish is therefore to be warmly welcomed.

He points out that the original church was built on an island in the Mardyke and churches built on islands or hilltops were often dedicated to St. Michael, a favourite saint of the Normans. This was outside the city walls and when they were demolished in the mid eighteenth century and the new town developed, the parish expanded in tandem with it. The merchants who pioneered this development built the present church in 1779-81, though it was enlarged in 1805 and substantially rebuilt in 1881. This parallels the growth and expansion of the city in the nineteenth as the decline of the parish in the twentieth century mirrors the movement of people to live in the suburbs though the creation of St. Joseph's parish in 1973 has been another factor in its reduced size. There are currently about four hundred families in the parish though whether the construction of new apartments in the precincts of the church will have the revitalising effects suggested here is debatable. The author is far too nice a man to comment in any way on the major, some might say ruthless, reorganisation of the interior of the church after Vatican Two. It is certainly a stark (one uses the word deliberately) contrast to the previous rich Victorian ensemble.

The author notes the survival of the parish records back to 1770 and comments on the early age of death recorded for so many married women due to childbirth complications. He records the achievements of the parish in various fields, sport, music, drama and, in particular, the St. Michael's Temperance Society. Two former priests of the parish, Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer and

Monsignor Michael O'Riordan, are singled out and interesting short biographies provided. Indeed quite an eclectic range of historical figures make an appearance here: Edmund Burke, Pope Pius IX, Winston Churchill and Princess Diana to name but a few of the more unexpected. Famous Limerick people from the parish are not forgotten ranging from Dr Thomas Arthur and Catherine Hayes to 'gentle, grámhar, pleasant Angela'. The value of oral history and tradition is appositely shown in the sad case of the cabin boy, Tim O'Brien from Thomondgate. This unfortunate young man was cannibalised by his ship's crew in 1836. The author's record of his great grandmother's memory of her parents seeing the boy's mother publicly cursing the captain, on her knees, in Denmark St. as he went to mass in St. Michael's illustrates how such things endure in the public mind. We also learn that when a member of the noted Limerick Quaker merchant family, the Unthinks, entered the Presentation order in Sexton St. in 1848, her dowry was the ground rent of Cannock's store.

This booklet is not intended to be a full-scale history of the parish. Within its limited scope and aims, it succeeds in providing a wide range of fascinating information. It is excellently produced and printed with numerous interesting colour illustrations. It provides a wealth of readable and useful information that will be of value to all Limerick people not just those who live in or have family connections with this ancient and historical area.

Mary Ryan

B73338