

Book Reviews

Matthew Potter, *The Municipal Revolution in Ireland, A Handbook of Urban Government in Ireland since 1800*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2011, xvii + 491pp. ISBN 978 0 7165 3082 4 Price €49.95.

The latest work by Dr. Potter on the Municipal Reform of the Irish local government system over the last two centuries is a *vade mecum* for any student in that study area. His prodigious research and wide range of reference sources is a boon for any such student and arguably, qualifies Dr. Potter as one of the most authoritative commentators in that field. He argues convincingly in a pleasant narrative style and felicitous language, how the Municipal Revolution, which began with the Act of Union (1800), unfolded in three stages and illustrates its effects on eleven municipalities selected to support his claim that, as a result, Irish municipal government has become in that process 'one of the weakest in Europe and North America.'

The case studies were based on two criteria: form of urban government and geographic spread and included three cities, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, all governed by City Councils, three large towns, Wexford, Clonmel and Drogheda, governed by Borough Councils and five smaller towns, Tullamore, Ballina (Co. Mayo), Bandon, Tuam and Donegal, with varying forms of civic government. In the first stage he shows how in all eleven municipalities invariably 'corrupt and incompetent', the traditional Protestant/Unionist hegemony in Irish local government was usurped by the Catholic/Nationalist merchant class, who, although precluded by the Penal Laws from owning any land, were not prevented from renting it or leasing it from its Protestant owners.' They did this with telling effect and became, thereby, the conservative, middle-class bourgeoisie, 'the Shopocracy', which O'Connell used so successfully for support in his Repeal Campaign.

The Second Stage which the author describes as 'The Golden Age' (1871 – 1923) of Municipal Reform, during which Ireland benefitted from the political reforms introduced in England, Scotland and Wales as a result of the Liberal Party policy of the extension of civil and religious rights and the utilitarian policies of the political reformer, Jeremy Bentham.

Jaundiced observers in Ireland, however, would go even further and attribute these to the ripple effect in Britain of the cross-channel Revolution in 1789. This is the period in which the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898 introduced the establishment of democratically elected Councils and 'the emergence of Labour in urban politics for the first time'. This followed the extension of the right to vote to the ordinary adult man and woman and so corrected political abuses which were 'grotesquely out of date, whereby the vast majority of the population were ruled by small, unelected self-perpetuating cliques'. The example of Limerick is cited where an electorate of only 709 had the right to vote out of a population of 37,000.

The third and longest phase from Independence to the present has been marked by stagnation and relative decline, according to the author, who argues his case effectively based on his impressively meticulous research. He maintains that the traditional suspicion by Dublin Castle of Local Government was also held by the native Irish Government post independence, who noted the part these Councils had played in the Nationalist campaign to expel the British Government from Ireland. He argues convincingly also,

that the traditional attitude of native Irish government was formed by its image of Irish society as being largely rural, Gaelic and Catholic and that despite the intense urbanisation over the last twenty years or so, the first of these opinions 'has a major influence on the collective psyche, although the latter two have faded in importance.' The latent hostility of Irish rural society to urban municipalities is also touched on.

He details painstakingly the development of his eleven case studies in the areas of Social Housing, Water Supply, Sewerage, Gas Supply, Urban Renewal, Library and Art-Gallery facilities. By far the most urgent of these was the area of Public Housing. A 1919 Report to the Local Government Board in Dublin stated that 'there were four thousand families in Limerick City living in one room to each family' with one local political activist noting 'that all the human bodily functions were carried out in one room.' A distinguished Mayor recounts that in the Limerick of the 1940s and 1950s he 'grew up in a tenement where thirteen families had to make do with one tap and one toilet'. Nonetheless, progress was made, albeit slowly, when Fianna Fáil took power in the 1932 General Election with the support of Labour's seven deputies; the price for their support was an agreed programme of forty thousand houses.

The centrepiece of this arrangement was 'The Housing Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions Act (1932)', described by one Local Government official as 'a super' Act, because it allowed, inter alia, for the demolition of houses which had been medically condemned, leading thereby to the slum clearances programme. Labour's benign influence nationally was not acknowledged in local elections, however, because as the author proves, nationalist parties consistently attracted the majority support of the Irish electorate.

Dr Potter demonstrates impressively, the gradual emasculation of the Irish Local Authority system by Central Government over the last ninety years, in comparison with municipal systems in Britain and Europe. He resists the temptation to be downhearted however, reminding us that 'Western Civilization is the only one to have a lasting indigenous democratic tradition.' He sees the German *Laender* system of government based on the principle of subsidiarity as the model for Ireland. After all, this is the political philosophy which underpins the concept of the European Union, of Strauss and Monnet, and is the ultimate expression of the democratic concept of politics.

This masterpiece *sui generis*, should be required reading for those charged with the present reform programme of our Regional and Local Government system. The Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland and the Irish Research for the Human and Social Sciences are greatly to be thanked for their generous collaboration in so eminent a labour of practical scholarship.

Frank Prendergast

Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine, Ireland's Agony 1845-1852*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2011, xx + 252pp. ISBN HB: 978-1-8472-5217-3. Price €20.

Ciarán Ó Murchadha has for many years been publishing original and valuable accounts of the Great Famine in Clare in local journals and most notably in his full-length monograph *Sable Wings over the Land* (1998) a detailed study of the area in the years 1845 to 1852. He has now produced a wider study, which in addition to presenting the fruits of his own extensive research also incorporates and synthesises the work of other scholars on this subject in recent years. The result is a most impressive and extremely valuable contribution to the historiography of this tragic era in Irish history.

In the first chapter a succinct account of the state of the country on the eve of the famine is provided. The poverty of the bulk of the population is emphasised, illustrated by the comments of travellers such as the Frenchman Gustave de Bedaumont in 1838 and the German Johannes Kohl in 1841 and supported by evidence from government enquiries and official statistics. The complex structure of society is shown by the fact that in the rural economy a man might simultaneously be a tenant, a labourer and be renting a potato plot to others. Even tenants with relatively small amounts of land often sub-let an acre to landless labours to grow potatoes on. This 'conacre' system, along with subdivision of land holdings had facilitated and encouraged the huge increase in population from the late eighteenth century. In his discussion of the increasing reliance on the potato by the labourers in particular, the author suggests that they practised 'a kind of creativity' in how they dug the ground, planted the crop and 'took an aesthetic satisfaction in the shape and strength of their ridges'. This provides an interesting contrast to the frequent contemporary condemnations of this class as being careless, dirty and lazy.

Succeeding chapters outline the familiar story of crop failure, starvation, disease, official intransigence, inadequate relief measures, death and emigration. The author's own research is expertly integrated with the work of other scholars to produce a detailed and incisive analysis of all these issues. Specific studies are focused on Hunger, Fever, the Poor Law response, Public Works and Soup Kitchens. A tragic aspect of the latter, in addition to their general inadequacy, was the fact that through queuing in large numbers epidemic disease was spread more quickly and widely than might otherwise have been the case. The disgraceful record of landlord and agent evictions is catalogued and robustly condemned. The charge made against some recent historians of the famine period of being too cold and dispassionate in their analyses certainly cannot be levelled against this author who pulls no punches when dealing with men like Marcus Keane 'the Clare exterminator' or in describing in graphic and moving detail the suffering of those evicted.

The famine emigration, we are reminded, was on a scale unparalleled anywhere in the nineteenth century and one of the greatest movements of population in human history. Taking the decade 1845-55, over two million people, or a quarter of the entire population of the island, left, never to return. The author takes issue with those historians who describe this phenomenon as 'voluntary' emigration. While this is strictly true in the sense that it was a conscious decision to leave, he suggests that it is stretching the meaning of the word 'to its semantic limit' to apply it to the circumstances in which most people found themselves. He also passes harsh judgements generally on the assisted emigration schemes of landlords and the Poor Law unions describing them as 'little more than eviction by another name'. The surviving examples of letters from such emigrants expressing gratitude and appreciation, which are often cited in support of the schemes, are he argues unrepresentative and were retained by landlords and workhouses 'for future self-justification. Indeed he further claims, though on what basis is not clear, that many of these letters were dictated to the writers and did not reflect either their true feelings or experiences.

When the famine actually ended is a matter of interpretation and debate. This work is at pains to point out that it continued into the 1850s, indeed it is stated that the 'last starvation death of the Great Famine' was that of an unnamed man in Ennis at the end of April 1851. The total loss of population as a result of the catastrophe has been variously estimated. In terms of census figures, from a population of over eight million in 1841 the number had dropped to just over six and a half million in 1851, however on the assumption that the latter figure would have been over nine million if the famine had not

happened, the total loss is nearly two and a half million. In terms of those who died either from starvation or disease, the figure is around 1.1 million though statisticians who add in a figure for 'averted births' raise that to 1.5 million. A further one million is considered a conservative estimate for those who emigrated.

In the final chapter there are many quotations from contemporaries on the aftermath of the disaster. These emphasise the changes that were evident in social life, with an absence of music, dancing, sport and less neighbourliness. Deserted homes and villages emphasised the loss from death and emigration. While it is clear that the lowest stratum of society, the labourers and cottiers were the main victims the author emphasises that many from the classes of tradesmen, shopkeepers and tenant farmers also died especially as the disaster continued. The reputation of the large farmers, often criticised in modern historiography, is defended in this work with the testimony of their charity to the starving emphasised. That they were the ultimate beneficiaries however seems clear, often increasing the size of their holdings and able to take advantage of the move to pasture from tillage and increased prices. They were also significant in the development of a new conservatism in Irish society linked to the increased power and influence of the Catholic Church.

Overall this study of the Great Famine is underpinned not only by strong feelings of empathy with those who suffered but also with strong criticism of the inadequacies and omissions of those in positions of power. This latter point is emphasised in the conclusion where the charge of genocide is raised and certainly not dismissed. Depending on its definition, it is argued that there is a case to answer. John Mitchell's notorious comment that 'the English sent the Famine' is even quoted with something close to, if not outright, approval. The use of a line from the West Clare song *Lone Shanakyle* as the title of the chapter 'the murdered sleeping silently', further underlines this point. Many will, no doubt, share this viewpoint but whether it is a fair and balanced conclusion to this excellent work of scholarship is, as always in historical topics, open to debate and disagreement.

Liam Irwin

Tim Boland, *Father John Kenyon, the rebel priest*, published by the author, Nenagh, 2011, x + 272pp. ISBN 978-1-901370-36-2. Price €20.

Fr John Kenyon is remembered today, if at all, in the city of his birth through the name Kenyon Avenue in Killeely, where a street is also dedicated to an equally controversial priest, Fr John Creagh. Born in 1812 to a middle-class family in Thomondgate, Kenyon grew up in a relatively privileged environment. His father ran a profitable stone and marble cutting business while his mother operated the family pub and grocery. Five of their six children entered the service of the church. Two daughters joined the Presentation Order in Sexton St while the other became a Mercy Sister, originally in Killarney and later in Australia. A younger son, Patrick also became a priest.

John Kenyon was a brilliant student, obtaining distinctions in logic, philosophy and the classics during his time in Maynooth where he was ordained in 1835. After a brief initial appointment as a curate in the parish of Doorra and Templemayley, he was transferred to Ennis in 1836. While there his argumentative nature and talent for controversy soon manifested itself. His condemnation from the altar of a woman who had her child baptised in the Protestant church and subsequent harassment of a family who had converted to Protestantism aroused tensions. His use of terms such as 'scurvy Protestant' did

not help his case and in 1839 the Bishop, with whom he had already quarrelled on other issues, moved him to the small and remote parish of Kilmore [Silvermines] and in 1842 he became curate of Meenagh, later renamed Templederry, in north Tipperary where he was to remain for the rest of his life, becoming parish priest in 1860.

Always a strong nationalist, he joined the Repeal Association in 1843, and from the beginning sided with the more radical Young Ireland movement against Daniel O'Connell. He was particularly critical of the latter and condemned his insistence on non-violence to achieve political ends, describing it as a 'vile profanation of holy patriotism'. These views were published by him in a pamphlet *Physical and Moral Force* in 1846. In the following year he joined the newly founded Irish Confederation, serving on its council. He was soon involved in further controversy when, in defending the acceptance of money for the Confederation from American slave-owners, he described slavery as 'a supposed evil'. He noted that 'the Scriptures do not condemn in any form or in substance; nay, that they do actually both in substance and in form, acquit it of all guilt'. His comments on the death of O'Connell in May 1847 caused further outrage when he wrote that his demise was no loss to Ireland, dismissing him as an unprincipled huckster. This was reflected in the hostile reception he received in Limerick during the general election the following August where he attempted to sway opinion against John O'Connell. His response to the opposition he had faced from the crowd was typically combative 'you have acted like a set of savages: you are slaves and your children's children deserve to be slaves'.

When Kenyon openly encouraged armed rebellion at a public meeting in Templederry in April 1848 his bishop suspended him. While initially refusing to submit, eventually he backed down, agreed to moderate his stance and was reinstated. As a result he refused to support the rising in July 1848 though he later claimed that was for practical reasons, mainly lack of proper planning, rather than acquiescence to his bishop's instructions. This stance has always been the main source of criticism made against Kenyon though somewhat ironically he continued to be known as the 'patriot priest of 1848'. His disapproval of the military debacle of 1848 also influenced his attitude to Fenianism which he did not support. While this was largely due to his belief that it too had no hope of success, his attitude may have been influenced by his rejection as the funeral orator for Terence Bellew McManus in 1861 and the generally indifferent attitude of the IRB members to him. In poor health in later years, he died on Palm Sunday 21 March 1869.

Tim Boland expertly covers the career of this controversial Limerick-born priest. Using a variety of original sources, official and diocesan excellently supplemented by national and local newspapers he covers in detail the many twists and turns in his eventful life. Admirably fair, balanced and impartial, he is also properly sympathetic and empathic to his subject. On the central issue of Kenyon's failure to support the 1848 Rising, the author is non judgemental. Pointing out that the absence of any documentation in the diocesan archives limits a full understanding of the agreement made with his bishop, he feels, from the limited evidence available, that as a priest Kenyon felt that compromise was in the end inevitable. However the author also seems to accept his later claim that had the armed rebellion been sufficiently well organised, he would have supported it.

Proper consideration is also given to the non-political aspects of his life. Despite the religious controversy early in his career in Ennis, he was not sectarian or religiously intolerant of other faiths. He was a much loved pastor in his parish, noted for his concern for the poor and the sick. He had worked tirelessly to relieve distress during the Great Famine. He was a gifted orator, a talent employed not only in his political activities, but

also in his sermons and homilies. Highly intelligent and well read, he amassed a substantial library.

The parochial house erected by Fr Kenyon in Templederry is deservedly given a separate chapter. Initially he lived in the sacristy of the church but his expanding library eventually necessitated the provision of larger accommodation. Having acquired some land through lengthy and tortuous negotiations, he began by erecting a cow-house. On observing the comfort in which this animal now lay, he decided to evict her and move in himself. This structure was subsequently expanded, an upper storey added and various eccentric elements incorporated. With a quaint porch, corkscrew-like spiral stairs and a variety of windows, some at floor level and of different shapes, sizes and positions the end result, named Chapel House, was a unique architectural achievement. Having survived until 1986 it was demolished without warning. It was reported that the incumbent parish priest had authorised this and as the author pertinently notes 'ironically, in death, as in life, some of Kenyon's greatest adversaries were not his despised overlords – the British – but his fellow Catholic clergymen.'

Mary Ryan

Martin Breen, *The History of Bunratty Castle*, Ruan, Co. Clare, 2012, 90pp. ISBN 978-0-09519551-4-7. Price €7.99.

Three successive stone castles were built at Bunratty in the medieval period while an earlier fortification, erected when the Normans first occupied the area in the mid-thirteenth century, was a wooden structure possibly a motte and bailey. No trace of this survives and its suggested location, identified in 1915 by the antiquarians, G.U. Macnamara and T.J. Westropp, was shown by a later excavation to be a mid-seventeenth-century emplacement for cannon. The grandson of the original builder, faced with attacks from the native Irish and deriving little profit from his lands, returned them to the King and in 1276 they were granted to Thomas de Clare, a younger son of the Earl of Gloucester and a direct descendant of the great, if controversial, Irish King, Dermot MacMurrough. The first stone-built Bunratty Castle (in this book as elsewhere, described as the 'second' castle) was erected by de Clare soon afterwards. The author suggests that he may have been influenced in this speedy decision to emulate his brother, who had built the impressive Caerphilly Castle in Wales in 1268-71 though the necessity to defend his newly acquired territories against the Irish was clearly paramount.

We have little information about this structure beyond a terse description of it as 'a castle of dressed stone, girt with thick outer walls, containing a roofed impregnable donjon'. That this was an idle hope was shown decisively in 1332 when the O'Briens and MacNamaras assaulted and destroyed the castle. It was rebuilt or, perhaps more correctly, repaired, as the 'third' castle in 1353 not by its owners but as a general security measure for the area by the Chief Governor of Ireland, Sir Thomas de Rokeby, who placed a garrison of English soldiers there. His efforts were to be in vain as within a few years it had been attacked and at least partially destroyed again. Its subsequent history is not recorded but it was clearly of little strategic or military value but it appears to have survived in some form to become the core of the castle which survives today.

This appears to have been erected in the mid-fifteenth century though no precise date is available. While it has sometimes been credited to the O'Briens, it is now generally considered to be a MacNamara work. This attribution is not based on any documentary evidence – some similarities with the architecture of Quin Abbey noted by John Hunt are

cited in support here. However the author issues a salutary caution on accepting uncritically this new orthodoxy, noting not only the lack of clear evidence but also the fact that the O'Briens had patronage of the parish church of Bunratty as early as 1444 though he notes that most clerical appointments were to MacNamaras. In any event by the early sixteenth century it had been acquired by the O'Briens though not the senior branch, the Earls of Thomond. It was Donough O'Brien, 4th Earl, who made the castle his home sometime in the 1580s. The magnificence of the place at this time is shown by the effect it had on Archbishop Rinuccini, the papal nuncio to the Confederation of Kilkenny in the 1640s who wrote 'I have no hesitation in asserting that Bunratty is the most beautiful spot I have ever seen. In Italy there is nothing like this palace and grounds of Lord Thomond, nothing like its ponds and park, with its three thousand head of deer.'

After the disruption of the Cromwellian period, none of the earls lived at Bunratty again and the title became extinct in 1741. Already in 1725 the castle had passed into the hands of the Studdert family who held it until 1953 when it was purchased by the 7th Viscount Gort. An attempt by the Studderts in 1915 to have the Board of Works preserve the castle, whose great hall had lost its roof in a storm during the 1880s, had come to nothing. Now with the energy and enthusiasm of its new owner work began and by 1960 the castle had been restored and opened to the public. Its new role as one of the most popular visitor locations in Ireland had begun.

In addition to the main narrative, a comprehensive list of historical references to Bunratty from 1248 to 1369, compiled by the noted Co. Clare antiquary Dr George Unthank Macnamara and published by him in the *Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society* in 1915, is printed as an appendix. This is followed by an inventory of the contents of Bunratty Castle made in 1639 after the death of Henry O'Brien, 5th Earl of Thomond, first published by Brian Ó Dálaigh in *NMAJ*, 1995 and a further inventory of property taken from the Castle at that time by the executor of the earl's will, also published originally in *NMAJ* (2004) by the same author. Two further appendices reproduce and discuss drawings and plans the castle made by Richard Ball in the early seventeenth century, by Thomas Dineley in 1684 and by T.J. Westropp in 1906 and 1914.

Martin Breen expertly tells this long and complex story. Based on a very wide variety of sources and incorporating the work of many writers, antiquarians, historians, archaeologists and geographers it provides a scholarly concise, accessible, up-to-date account of the castle and its history. His own unrivalled knowledge of the history of the area and in particular of the castles of the county is utilised to full advantage. While its main market will undoubtedly be the many visitors to the castle who have not hitherto had such a work available, it should also be of great interest and use to local historians, students and the general public interested in the fascinating history both of the castle and the Bunratty area.

Liam Irwin

Hugh Carthy, *Burren Archaeology, A Tour Guide*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011, ix + 166pp. ISBN-13: 9781848891050. Price €12.99.

Paul Clements, *Burren Country, travels through an Irish limestone landscape*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011, 248pp. ISBN-13: 9781848891173. Price €12.99.

The Burren, as Paul Clements observes in his engaging account of the area, can drown a person in statistics. Nevertheless the unique importance of the area cannot be overstated and given the various pressures, even threats, facing its future it is timely to remind our-

selves of some of its most vital characteristics. Although the Burren consists of just 1% of the total landmass of the country, 70% of our native species is found there. The biggest turlough in Europe is at Carran, longest cave system in Western Europe at Polnagollum and the largest free hanging stalactite at Pol an Ionáin near Doolin. Thirty species of butterflies, twenty-four of dandelions and at least 700 different plants have been recorded. And then of course there are the monuments, two thousand in total with perhaps five hundred ring forts and over eighty wedge tombs.

Burren Country however is not a guide book; the author calls it a love letter to the area. It defies easy description being a travel journal of sorts, a descriptive account, a series of interviews interspersed with the author's observations and insights. There is a delightful chapter on the roads of the area, another on Mullaghmore, interviews with and discussion of painters, musicians and writers resident there. It is written in a very accessible and attractive style as befits a former BBC journalist.

Hugh Carthy, on the other hand, aims to provide a practical tour guide, which he informs us, began life as a two-page introduction to the archaeology of the area for a website. The structure of the guide is based on location with four distinct areas defined as East, North, West and Central. Within each geographical area, each site is given a symbol to indicate whether it is open to the public or on private property and in the latter case whether it is visible from a public space or not though of course in either case, as is made clear, permission of the landowner should be sought.

Monument locations are indicated by names, grid references and GPS coordinates. The datum used for the grid references was 'Ireland 1965' and that for longitude and latitude was 'WGS 84'. The GPS coordinates were compiled using a Garmin eTrex H hand device. For those not equipped for such modern technology there are clear, colourful maps and throughout the book the author's excellent photographs enliven the text and whet the appetite to visit and see the reality.

The main gazetteer section of the work is preceded by a brief but excellent summary of the various archaeological periods from the Palaeolithic to the Medieval. This succinctly brings together the essence of modern scholarship in each era though whether the Iron Age should be dated as beginning as early as 600BC might raise more than one eyebrow. However the text makes it clear that until c.300BC everything in Ireland is obscure for this 'dark age' period of Irish prehistory.

There is also a short but useful glossary and up-to-date bibliography. Unusually for a guide in this format, references notes are provided to indicate sources and to allow those interested in follow up reading to consult the relevant literature.

The Collins Press is to be congratulated for producing two contrasting books on the Burren which are individually distinct in their aims and purpose but which also complement each other. Standards of production are to the usual high standard and both are competitively priced. We now have two high-quality additions to the already extensive bibliography of the Burren and both are strongly recommended.

Patrick O'Brien

Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A social and cultural history*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2011. 286pp. ISBN 9781859184806. Price €39.

The Munster rugby union side has become a sporting behemoth with a retinue of commercial copy writers, journalists, partisan fans and rugby administrators keen to portray today's star-based set-up as of a piece with Munster's 'glorious' amateur tradition. In this

welcome and important work, O'Callaghan successfully spears the more outrageous claims of contemporary, commercial interests to ownership of the Munster rugby 'myth', and identifies today's Munster rugby 'union' as a coalition of Limerick's locale-based, class-loose clubs, Cork's locale-light, bourgeois tradition, provincial town rugby exceptionalism and, most recently, the professional turn that has produced a provincial team to match, and best, the top clubs in Europe.

Before addressing the Munster story, O'Callaghan outlines the main themes propelling the nineteenth-century project of standardisation and codification of what was previously custom-based leisure, including the various strands of football. He then lists the different social and economic factors at play in Great Britain's emerging sport infrastructure, and demonstrates that Ireland, and Munster in particular, did not match British industrialising, urbanising and modernising trends. Despite the contrast in social and economic experiences of the two islands of the U.K., O'Callaghan explains the diffusion of, what I term the Cosmopolitan or Metropolitan, model of organised sport into Ireland, and puts this cultural transfer down to the influences of a British educated social elite, railways that reached physically into Ireland, and mass media that reached culturally into the island.

Chapter one offers a chronological narrative of the interactions between a customary, indigenous football culture and the varieties of codified football arriving from Great Britain. The first half of this chapter outlines the British origins of modern team sports; presents the available evidence for Irish forms of football, with particular attention to Kerry, though Tipperary and Cork are also included; and examines the various interpretations, by partisans of Rugby Union and Gaelic Football, of Irish football's pre-codification era, and highlights the partisans' attempts to claim this heritage for their code of football. The remainder of the first chapter describes the growth of clubs, the Dublin-centred I.F.U. and the Belfast-centred N.F.U., and their merger into the Irish Rugby Football Union in 1879. In what O'Callaghan labels a "maelstrom" of activity up to 1880, pastoralism vied with urban sophistication, codified centralism was checked by localised interpretation, formal affiliation rivalled casual arrangement, and it was the tension between these forces that disallowed a smooth path for rugby union's growth.

The growth of rugby union football in Munster from 1880 to 2011 is examined in the second chapter, but the key period of interest to O'Callaghan is the period from 1880 to 1938. In contrast, the other periods he identifies as significant, 1939 to the mid-1950s, receives little attention, and the much longer period, from the mid-1950s to 2011, even less. O'Callaghan's justification for this early-years focus is that the period between 1870 and 1940 was when most change occurred: 'this was the era when social and cultural patterns of the game emerged that did not alter a great deal in subsequent decades.' The growth of clubs; the competitions that glued them into a union; and the administrative machinery the rugby union men constructed to promote the game, receive most attention. O'Callaghan does not foreground the move to professionalism in 1995 in this discussion, an alteration in the social, cultural and financial patterns of the game to rival any other in the history of the game, but he does give it a good rattle in his chapter on the professional era at the end of the book.

The themes of class and community receive a comprehensive treatment in chapter three, as he describes the variety of representative functions rugby union possessed in different places, depending on the 'social geographies' of the cities of Limerick and Cork and the key provincial towns that hosted clubs. Representing one's locale was a key driver of the appeal of the sport, but this sporting localism must be viewed carefully, a

task O'Callaghan tackles with clarity and nuance. The representative function of sport is also investigated in chapter four, this time his focus is the theme of masculinity, and its shadow, violence. Under scrutiny here is the significant gap between what was preached in value terms by rugby union's promoters and what was demonstrated in reality by many of its practitioners; violence thus becomes the theme through which O'Callaghan offers an assessment that enriches our understanding of both twentieth century machismo and sporting localism.

Though chapter six examines the growth of the 'apparatus' of the game, and how club and provincial structures were built and managed, to become the mix of professional and amateur infrastructures we see today, there is no escaping the gravitational pull of place. Time and again throughout the twentieth century, following a famous *Fianna Fáil* dictum, rugby union administrators from Cork or Limerick, all things being equal (and sometimes not), favoured their home base. Localism is, therefore, a powerful driver of inter-club (and place) rivalries that fuels passion for the game, but was also a road-bump on the path to administrative harmony and efficiency in twentieth-century provincial sporting politics.

The extra-local focus of chapter five places the game in its political and cultural contexts and challenges, in particular, some historical Gaelic sports promoters' assessments of the game as anti-national and anglophile. Rugby's fortunes, growth and progress against the background of the G.A.A 'ban' mentality are examined, and the political complexion of Limerick rugby is demonstrated to be more of a broad church than its detractors, or what may be better termed, its envious admirers, claimed. In this discussion, the phenomenon of Limerick Sunday rugby in the late 1800s and Garryowen F.C. receive signal attention, but there are some omissions of significance from the story, for example, rugby administration *wunderkind*, W. L. Stokes deserves a greater focus.

O'Callaghan includes, for example, John Daly's assessment of Stokes as a Unionist, but in Daly's estimation, many moderate Nationalists could be similarly described. More significantly, Stokes and Shaw, someone else he identifies as important, were, in the 1880s, in the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association. So, when Stokes was acting as the 'Atlas' under Limerick F.C. in the late 1870s and as the midwife to Garryowen F.C. in 1884, he was, in sociological terms, an agent of bridging social capital. He was a bridge between the farmer and the merchant prince in his job as a butter merchant and between Loyalist and Nationalist Limerick in the excitement of the Parnell decade. Cork's middle class, in contrast, exhibited the contrary habit of bounded social capital.

Quite simply, Stokes followed a modestly open house in Limerick County Football Club (despite local Loyalist concern) – most likely for practical reasons as well as sporting ones, and his achievement in bedding down a football culture in Limerick business circles for a decade before the arrival of the G.A.A. was a tribute to his energy and practicality. Limerick County, like most 'County' clubs in the country had pretensions to represent the cream of Limerick, but under Stokes's stewardship the core of his rugby fraternity was diluted to what might be termed, in 1980s-speak Yuppies, or 1990s/ 2000s-speak Tiger Cubs. The organisational head start for the union game led by Stokes was a great advantage, many Limerick people accepted it as 'football', an 1870s iteration of the game they knew from the country; so by the time G.A.A. advocates developed a critique of rugby union on political lines their arguments could be easily dismissed by pointing to Stokes's and Alexander Shaw's 'soundness' on the question of a national parliament etc. The IPHRA group in Limerick, small as it was, was among the more enthusiastic bodies gathered to greet Michael Davitt on his 1887 visit to Limerick, and perhaps as notable,

Shaw was once a member of the Tory, anti-Home Rule vehicle, the City and County of Limerick Constitutional Association, a body he left with some publicity, announcing his support for Home Rule. In Limerick's case, it can be argued with much justification, no Stokes, no Limerick rugby union, and more pertinently to O'Callaghan's discussion of professional rugby in chapter seven, no Munster rugby union phenomenon.

A key omission from this Munster history is the exceptional treatment of Limerick man and Garryowen star, Paddy Reid, gifted a lifetime ban from rugby union for playing the rugby league game in the north of England for a few years after his contribution to Ireland's first Grand Slam victory in 1948. This manifestation of union's 'ban' mentality is an important corrective to the assumption that bans were the preserve of the *ochtóceatharnaigh* of the G.A.A. Coupled with the I.R.F.U.'s ultra-bourgeois attitudes to another Garryowen alumnus, Tony Ward, there is a compelling case for an even more sceptical assessment of rugby union's value claims than O'Callaghan offers in this book. For sheer entertainment value a treatment of Munster's 1960 and 1970 games against the Springbok representatives of apartheid South Africa would also have added to the scope of the book, adding complicated international, political and cultural fibre to the white bread history many rugby union followers seem to consume.

The book's chief strengths are O'Callaghan's assumption-battering instincts; a balanced and distant tone; clarity of thought and argument and, mercifully, a lightness of touch with some of the more dreary administrative details that otherwise have the potential to make even the most passionate reader feel bogged-down. They say a cynic is someone who, when he smells flowers, searches for a coffin, but in this case Liam O'Callaghan, smelling the roses of success, has instead tilled the field from which they came to find the secret of their bloom. His discoveries are a necessary corrective to the commercialised romanticism of Munster's Ultras, and are a valuable contribution to Irish sports historiography.

Tom Hayes

Peter Harbison & Valerie Hall (eds), *A Carnival of Learning*, Cistercian Press, Roscrea, 2012, xvi + 264pp. ISBN 978-1-900163-40-0. Price €20.

This collection of essays has been produced to honour George Cunningham and the fifty conferences, two each year for the past twenty-five years, on medieval Ireland that he has organised at the Cistercian Abbey of Mount St Joseph, Roscrea. The delightful title captures the essence of these conferences, combining serious scholarship, convivial company and above all enjoyment. After a short foreword by the current Abbot, Peter Harbison provides a comprehensive, generous, even eulogistic account of the multifaceted life of the man being so deservedly celebrated. While all aspects of his busy life are covered, there is understandably an emphasis on the conferences, which are inextricably linked in format, structure, character and success with their organiser and director. His classmate from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, John Coolahan, where both trained as primary teachers, provides a second mini-biography with an emphasis on the central role that education has played in his life.

Peter Harbison's academic contribution is a discussion of the base of the Seir Kieran High Cross in Co Offaly. Its remote location today is misleading as in the early Christian period it would have been a very important monastic site. There is a detailed description supplemented by the author's own excellent black and white photographs. While accepting the argument of Nancy Edwards, and before her Francoise Henry, that there is a

strong similarity between this base and High Crosses at Lorrha, Kilkieran and Ahenny, he nevertheless emphasises that there are also iconographical details which connect it to Crosses at Clonmacnoise, Kells and Monasterboice. Among the many original, stimulating and challenging arguments put forward in the paper are that these latter Crosses are earlier than generally thought and belong to the same, relatively short time span of the Ossory Crosses: even as concentrated a period as a decade around the 880s. A key element in this argument is his 'strong hunch' that the iconography of the biblical panels on the major scripture Crosses, especially at Clonmacnoise and Monasterboice are a direct borrowing from France. He speculates that French craftsmen may have come to Ireland after the death of their patron Charles the Bald in 877, perhaps encouraged to do so by the famous Irish philosopher John Scotus Eriugena, head of the king's palace school.

The twelfth-century Life of St Crónán is discussed by two contributors. Edel Bhreathnach uses it as one of her sources in a wide-ranging essay on the politics of the period as it affected the monastery of Roscrea. She discusses conflict among and between various royal families in the kingdom of Éile along with the involvement and incursions of outsiders, notably the Osraige, Uí Briain and in 1151 Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair of Connacht. Among the many original and stimulating suggestions in this paper is the possibility that the claim by Roscrea for Episcopal status at the Synod of Kells in 1152 was promoted by the latter. Pádraig Ó Riain, in his contribution, sees this ambition as the main reason for the production of the Life though he does not exclude claims to property as subsidiary factors. The designation of Crónán's mother as a member of the Corca Bhaiscinn of south-west Clare is also, it is suggested, possibly linked to the attempt to gain a bishopric. Scattery Island had jurisdiction over this area and it too was claiming diocesan status, as shown by the records of the Synod of Kells and may therefore have been working in tandem with Roscrea to become separate Sees rather than being merely part of the large diocese of Killaloe as had been laid down at the Synod of Rathbrasil in 1111.

Conleth Manning discusses the impressive medieval tomb in the Dominican friary at Strade, near Foxford, Co Mayo, noted not only for the skill and beauty of its carvings but also for the charming smiling faces depicted on it. He suggests that it may have been made for the Ó hUigín family of bardic poets. This is based on some annalistic references to members of the family being buried there, notably Tadhg Óg Ó hUigín, described as the 'chief Preceptor of the Poets of Ireland and Scotland' on his death in 1448 and also the carving of a weaver's shuttle hanging from the belt of a bearded layman on the front panel of the tomb. Noting that a weaver is unlikely to have had the resources to erect such a tomb, he speculates that the shuttle might be the emblem of a poet, given that the verb *fighim* in Irish can mean both weave and compose a poem. The suggestion of Katharine Simms that the carving might be a poet's rod of office rather than a shuttle is also presented as a possibility. Either way, the tomb is unlikely to be that of Tadhg Óg Ó hUigín as he died in 1448 and the tomb is likely to date to the post-1500 period, based on parallels with tombs in Kilkenny, termed the Ormond School, which are discussed in the second half of this stimulating paper.

Elizabeth O'Brien provides an outline of the historical references to the monastic site at Durrow, founded by St Columba in the sixth century, and demonstrates that almost the entire extent of it survives. This was shown by limited excavation in 1985 and in particular by a geophysical survey undertaken in 2000, which the author analyses to correct the general impression that only the graveyard with its early grave slabs and High Cross remain. Heather King provides some additional information on the same site. She

suggests that a secondary double-ditched enclosure on the north-west side of the main monastic complex may have been the site of the guesthouse.

Colmán Ó Clabaigh analyses the list of sixteen books specifically reserved for the use of a friar in the Franciscan friary of Youghal in the early-sixteenth century. We know nothing else about Friar Maurice Hanlan but he would appear to have been a lector, the person responsible in each friary for the intellectual and spiritual formation of the novices and the ongoing academic life of the friars. The books show how the Franciscans of that period were in touch with European thought on spiritual and ascetic theology. The strong emphasis evident on pastoral works also illustrates the role of the friars in medieval Ireland in providing spiritual guidance to the wider lay community, which helps explain their popularity and affection among the ordinary people.

Ann Buckley write about liturgical offices for Irish saints based largely on the evidence from Irish hagiography though reference is also made to the European-wide study of the subject in which she is engaged. She demonstrates how important the liturgical poetry contained in the Lives can be, a fact not always recognised by scholars or editors of these documents and how fruitful greater collaboration between historians of hagiography and liturgy might be.

Niamh Whitfield explores a passage from an Old Irish saga *Táin bó Fraích*, which describes stringed musical instruments decorated with snakes, birds and hounds. The instruments were lyres, four-sided with strings parallel to the sound box, rather than harps, three-sided with strings perpendicular to the sound box. Lyres were common in Ireland until superseded by harps during the tenth or eleventh centuries; the earliest Irish depiction of a harp is on a metal shrine dating to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. On another aspect of early Christian artwork Michael Ryan analyses ornament motifs, with special reference to animal ornament.

Raymond Gillespie revisits a sixteenth-century mystery surrounding the alleged theft of the most important relic of the church of Monasterboice, the head of its reputed founder, St Buite. While such relics were very rare in medieval Ireland, the existence of one here could be explained by an incident in one of the lives of the saint. In this he performs a miracle by restoring to life a decapitated man though he somewhat petulantly has him beheaded again when the man does not show sufficient gratitude to the saint. The possible reasons for the theft, monetary gain from its reliquary or for use to combat plague in the Pale are discussed as well as the possibility that there was actually no theft; merely that it was hidden and the controversy used as part of a power struggle between the clergy of local parishes. In any event the head thereafter disappears from history though a cult of the saint survived in the area until the mid-twentieth century.

Etienne Rynne, in what turned out sadly to be his last publication before his death, writes a typically engaging essay on a, now lost, *púirín* at the Roscam monastic site, near Galway city. This opening in the boundary wall of the enclosure had a two-stone triangular top similar to those of some windows in Round Towers. This feature can be linked to Anglo-Saxon architecture and this leads him to reiterate a suggestion he had made originally in 1980 that Early Saxon round towers might be the prototype for Irish Round Towers.

Christy Cunniffe focuses on the geometry used in the design of the Romanesque portal at Clonfert. He shows that the mason, either on his own or in collaboration with others, was adept at applying geometric formulae and techniques. It is perhaps reassuring to note that the basic mathematical concepts employed are the same as those which would be used today in a computer-aided design. Roger Stalley takes the opportunity to

update material from his classic 1987 book on Irish Cistercian monasteries, based on research and publication in the intervening years. Much new light has since been shed both on the history of the Order in Ireland and particularly on individual houses such as Mellifont, Grey Abbey and Tintern Abbey.

In other contributions Timothy O'Neill discusses the somewhat rarefied art of calligraphy, particularly the production of manuscript books in the twenty-first century, while John Feehan offers a reflection on the geological and ecological aspects of trees in honour of the deep interest and extensive library that George has in this field. Ragnall Ó Floinn discusses the making of replicas of Irish antiquities in the nineteenth century and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel writes about Walter Butler, the Roscrea man who arranged the assassination of Wallenstein during the Thirty Years' War and arguably thereby changed the course of European history. There are also short contributions from Terry Barry and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín.

This work is both *festschrift* and celebration. Unlike most such volumes, it also has a selection of photographs of George, both formal and informal as well as many of the contributors to the book and of conference lecturers and participants. These are confined to the past five years as there has already been a publication celebrating the first forty conferences, published in 2007. One looks forward to the number 60 and presumably another publication to celebrate this remarkable man and the outstanding success that the Roscrea conferences have been.

Liam Irwin

Úna Nic Éinrí & Milo Spillane, *Seán Ó Tuama ó Chromadh an tSubhachais*, Coiscéim, Baile Átha Cliath, 2012, ll. 351. Pragas €15.

Is seoid liteartha an leabhar seo ar an bhfile Seán Ó Tuama le Úna Nic Éinrí agus Milo Spillane. Leabhar toirtiúil é a thosaíonn le réamhrá gairid. Ansin, tugann Dr Milo Spillane cuntas cuimsitheach, i mBéarla, ar chúlra stairiúil an fhile i gCromach agus sa tír máguaird. Ainsin, leanann an Dr Nic Éinrí ar aghaidh leis an roinnt: 'Seán geal Ua Tuama, dalta na *Muse*' agus sa chuid seo den leabhar pléann sí cúlra liteartha an fhile agus cás na Cúirte Filíochta. Tagann croíchorp an leabhair chun cinn le 'Téacs na nDánta', 43 díobh ar fad, agus roinnt eile a bhfuil amhras faoina n-údar. Leantar ar aghaidh, ainsin, le 'Nótaí Téacsa' agus is mór an chabhair a thugann siad seo don léitheoir dul i ngleic le saibhreas theanga an fhile agus abairtí neamhchoitianta. Pléitear gach dán faoi leith chun eolas a thabhairt ar a fhoinsí, ar a mheadaracht, agus ar a bhrí, ar mhaithe leis an léitheoir.

Scríobh Seán Ó Tuama an Ghrinn faoi chúrsaí soisialta, polaitiúla agus reiligiúnda a linne agus ar mhionrudaí an tsaoil. In a dhánta, áfach, d'éirigh leis meanmna na ndaoine a ardú ón saol crua ainniseach a bhí acu and teagmháil a dhéanamh le ré órga na mBard agus na bhfilí i dtráth ríthe agus flatha Éireann. Bhí meas ag cuid den chléir agus ag roinnt de na daoine saibhre ar an dúchas agus is cosúil go raibh patrúntacht de shaghas éigin le fail aige uathu siúd.

Is íontach go deo go bhfuil leabhar mar seo tagtha ar an saol i nGaeilge – sárshaothar acadúil agus obair thaighde thar barr.

Seán Ó Duinn