

local individuals who corresponded to these descriptions and had existing bad reputations and often physical deformities. Sneddon suggests plausibly that she was advised in choosing her victims – none of whom she had previously met herself – by an accomplice in her household, and here he points the finger tentatively at a maidservant called Margaret Spears. The latter was suspiciously closely associated with dramatic series of poltergeist activities which had recently beset the household concerned, and were associated with the death of its mistress. Spears was sole witness to many, and present during most, though Sneddon acknowledges that this was not true of all. Dunbar convinced most of the community of Islandmagee, Presbyterian Scots who had brought a fear of witchcraft from their native land. The local minister took a leading role in prosecution, supported by a Church of Ireland clergyman and the mayor of the nearest town, Carrickfergus. This credulity among the key local officials enabled the case to be brought to a secular court, where the accused would have been sentenced to death had not one of the judges been sympathetic and arranged matters so that they were tried on less lethal charges. As it was, they were gaoled and pilloried, which was quite bad enough.

As a good historian, Sneddon not only tells the tale well but puts it into context, especially the political one. He shows that, as in England, the case was caught up in partisan rivalry. It reversed the English pattern, however, in that it was Whigs who drove on the prosecution and Tories who expressed scepticism; a proof that party attitudes to witchcraft were largely opportunist and situational. Sneddon's subtitle of the 'real' history suggests a bellicose attitude towards some fellow writers, and to some extent this is sustained. He rebukes other scholars for not appreciating that demonic possession was central to the Islandmagee case, and for underestimating the number of accusations of witchcraft actually made in Ireland; but since he does not name them it is hard to tell how just this is. At the same time he actually reinforces a sense that the Irish did not much hunt witches, not only by agreeing that the Roman Catholic majority did not, but by showing (valuably) that the Presbyterian Scottish settlers, in sharp contrast to their fellows at home in Scotland, strove to keep accusations out of the criminal courts; it would have been nice had he speculated further on why this might have been. To a reader familiar with witch trials in the English- and Scots-speaking world in the period between 1680 and 1730, what is most striking about the Islandmagee case is its normality, having a similar cast of characters, motivating factors, partisan religious and political factors, demonological aspects and confluence of unusual local circumstances to several of the others. This is itself a helpful revelation, and another achievement for which Andrew Sneddon can be thanked.

RONALD HUTTON

*Department of History, University of Bristol*

A VERY INDEPENDENT COUNTY: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND POLITICS IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1750–1800. By C. F. McGleenon. Pp xii, 324. Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2011. £24.99.

Both the freeholders and a majority of those who represented the county during the second half of the eighteenth century revelled in Armagh's reputation as 'a very independent county'. This image was cultivated by the patriot interest, which sought to promote this aspiration as an ideal that others might emulate, but it was in truth largely a product of circumstances. County Armagh was entitled to return six representatives to the Irish House of Commons – two for the county constituency, which was brought into being as a consequence of the shiring in 1605 of the 'territory of Airthir', and two each for the boroughs of Armagh and Charlemont which were incorporated in 1613. As corporation boroughs with an electorate of thirteen burgesses and a handful of borough officials,

neither Armagh nor Charlemont was easily distinguished from the various close boroughs singled out in the 1780s by the advocates of parliamentary reform as an affront to a properly functioning representative system. Both were controlled by single patrons – the primate of the Church of Ireland in the case of Armagh, and the first earl of Charlemont in the case of the borough settlement from which successive members of the Caulfeild family derived their title. Moreover, Armagh returned a succession of officeholders, officials and reliable members of the Castle phalanx, and it does not, as a consequence, figure large in the thoroughly researched and comprehensive narrative of parliamentary elections and politics presented here. Charlemont features more prominently, for the simple reason that its patron for the duration of the period addressed in this book – James, first earl of Charlemont (1728–99) – was the commander in chief of the Volunteers, the country's leading Patriot peer, and the man responsible for returning a succession of major liberal voices, among whom Henry Grattan, Francis Dobbs and William Conyngham Plunket stand out, to the House of Commons. He also declined to follow the lead of other Irish Whigs in 1797 and withdraw from parliament in protest at the inability of the legislature to recognise that an unaccommodating reliance on coercion was more likely to intensify rather than to ease the breakdown in the political consensus that was a distinguishing feature of the 1790s. McGleenon's helpful account of Charlemont's management of his borough at this time demonstrates how the local can amplify a larger national issue, but this emerges still more clearly from the history of the county constituency, which is this work's primary focus.

For most of the period in which County Armagh could return six M.P.s, the landowners who identified the candidates and who instructed the combination of burgesses and freeholders who were entitled to vote did so free of compelling internal demands or externally generated pressures. County Armagh was electorally quiescent in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with the result that the representation was monopolised by a handful of major families and contested elections were rare events. However, the deference accorded the landlord then was never unconditional, and it visibly weakened in the second half of the eighteenth century, based upon the evidence of the polls for County Armagh in 1753 and 1768, which indicate that a significant proportion of freeholders defied the direction of their landlords and voted according to their own desires. It is not clear how widely this practice was replicated, but there are good grounds for concluding that the electoral politics of County Armagh were more precocious than those in many other counties, though McGleenon declines to pursue the comparisons that might prove revealing. It is illustrative of an approach that does not prioritise causation, or multi-factorial explanation. Indicatively, McGleenon opts (following W. H. Crawford and David Miller) to ascribe the activities of the Peep O'Day Boys to 'social and economic rivalries' (p. 215) and declines to assess the impact of rising political expectations generated by a decade of participation in the Volunteers.

The reasons for County Armagh's political precocity are not readily identifiable, to be sure, but it is improbable that the unique spatial distribution of Protestant, Dissenter and Catholic, the rapidly rising population, and growing economy did not intersect with the particular configuration of landownership in the county which meant that there was no single dominant presence, more than is allowed for here. This is not to suggest that McGleenon evades explanation. His conclusion, epigrammatically presented (p. 31), that 'the electoral strength of a property was ... a function of acreage, location, denominational composition of tenants, ... residence of the proprietor, and the intensity of his political drive and activism' is a valuable interpretative formula that can be usefully employed to explain the rise and fall of electoral dynasties. Furthermore, McGleenon's account of the electoral process and electoral contests in the county is authoritative and generally persuasive, though some allowance might be made for the eventfulness of the county's electoral history. Commencing (chapter 2) with an account of the extraordinary by-election of 1753 (the highpoint of which is an ingenious reconstruction of the relative electoral strength of the county's main landowners), the study engages by turn with the

impact of the rise of the Patriots, the Octennial Act, residential viceroys, the allure of preferment, the impact of participation in the Volunteers, and the unrealised aspiration advanced in the early and mid-1780s to reform the political process. These were all features of an era during which William Brownlow (1726–94) and Lord Charlemont were not only strong presences in the county but also figures of consequence on the national stage, and it is not a coincidence that it was during this time that the county's 'independent' reputation was at its strongest. It was not to survive the 1790s, for though the determination of Charlemont ensured that the Patriot-Whig interest was not eclipsed, the forging of a conservative interest around the first earl of Gosford wrought a transformation which meant that the county could hardly be described as 'very independent' by 1800.

Writing the electoral history of a county can be a challenging undertaking for evidential as well as interpretative reasons. D. F. McGleenon has gleaned great riches from the impressive register of family, personal and political papers listed in his bibliography of primary sources. There are, to be sure, moments when his eagerness to follow the politicians that are his focus into every avenue of political activity that they pursued takes one away from the world of electoral politics that are his focus; some sections on the parliamentary activities of Armagh M.P.s, on agrarian disquiet, even those devoted to the Volunteers might profitably have been combined or elided, and the summary conclusions to chapters shortened. These criticisms notwithstanding, this work is to be welcomed as an illustration of the value of the county as a unit of study of parliamentary politics, and how the local patterns and trends that are thereby revealed can amplify national tendencies.

JAMES KELLY

*Department of History, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra*

RE-IMAGINING DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS: AMERICA, FRANCE, BRITAIN, IRELAND 1750–1850. Edited by Joanna Innes and Mark Philp. Pp xii, 240. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2013. £60 hardback.

Deciding to place Ireland alongside America, Britain and France as one of the relevant case studies in a study of democracy in the age of revolutions raises some interesting questions. The O'Connellite movement is clearly one of the most striking incidences of democratic mobilisation in early nineteenth-century Europe or the Atlantic world, but was the Irish experience of accommodation to the new, or at least newly revived, idea of democracy specific enough to throw light on the democracy as a general phenomenon? Was democracy re-imagined in a particular way in Ireland that helps us understand the limits and possibilities of the idea in other contexts?

This volume, the first fruit of a major project run by Innes and Philp, has the virtue of allowing us to define that question far more specifically. The essays in this volume underline that democracy only became a genuine political option in the late eighteenth century. Even then it remained an ambiguous and highly contested notion. In America, France and Britain ideas of democracy developed as a consequence of the rise of the democrat, the representative of the people; political identity preceded the articulation of political principle. Even after the rise of the democrat no singular political principle drove the new democratic movements. Equality was the goal of democratic politics, but there was far more consensus on what that was not, a return to primitive agrarian simplicity, than what it was. In America and Britain a defined idea of democracy developed out of reflection on the popular element in republicanism. In Britain democratic energies focused on political reform, on expanding the franchise and lifting barriers to political participation. In both jurisdictions democracy focused on the constitution. In France proponents and critics agreed that the goal of democracy was not limited to equal access