

either side, may, Phillips suggests, have been as important an event as Bannockburn in determining the future political alignments of Britain and Ireland; one awaits with interest the response of English, and particularly Scottish, historians to this proposition.

This is a book that offers persuasive answers to many of ‘the riddles in which the reign of Edward II abounds’ (p. 491), and constitutes ‘an attempt to rehabilitate him to some degree’ (p. 4). This is no easy task, but future accounts of the reign will, at least, need to accommodate the persuasive evidence presented by Phillips that Edward possessed political skills of a very high order – skills that were most clearly displayed in 1316–17 when he undermined the authority of his cousin and foe, Thomas, earl of Lancaster. Edward became king at the age of twenty-three, was well educated, and contributed significantly to the development of the English universities. In his reign, also, a university was established at Dublin in 1312, and functioned in some flickering form from 1320. He was anything but a reluctant warrior, participating in five Scottish campaigns before the debacle at Bannockburn in 1314. Phillips highlights the extent to which the reign was marked by bad luck. At a mass knighting conducted by Prince Edward in May 1306 at Westminster, two knights were crushed to death, while another was killed at the same venue when a wall collapsed during his coronation. It was not Edward’s fault that his father left him with no money and a war with Scotland that was going badly, or that between 1315 and 1321 western Europe experienced the worst famine and cattle epidemic of the Middle Ages. Phillips’s discussion of the circumstances surrounding the kidnapping of the earl of Pembroke in France in 1317 offers a pithy assessment of the larger topic: ‘The episode was somehow typical of the reign of Edward II, involving as it did both financial confusion and dysfunctional personal relations’ (p. 289).

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THE IRISH FRANCISCANS, 1534–1990. Edited by Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon and John McCafferty. Pp xix, 413, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €60 hardback; €29.95 paperback.

This substantial volume of eighteen essays on the Irish Franciscans was inspired by two anniversaries: the four hundredth of the foundation of St Anthony’s College, Louvain/Leuven in 2007, and the eight hundredth of Francis of Assisi’s application for papal approval for what became the Franciscan orders. The work is presented as the fruit of collaboration between the Franciscan province of Ireland and the Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute at U.C.D., though the editors gathered together an impressive team of contributors from across Ireland and one from the Catholic University at Leuven in Belgium.

The book is divided into two parts. The first comprises eight essays that survey the history of the Franciscans in Ireland from 1534 to 1990. The second examines the manifold legacies of the Franciscans. The editors make it clear that the book is ‘far from being definitive’ and it aims to encourage further research (p. xvii). Nonetheless, the reader is presented with a panorama of the Franciscans’ story that is complex, sophisticated and compelling. The historical surveys by Colm Lennon, Raymond Gillespie, Joseph MacMahon O.F.M., Patrick Conlon O.F.M. and Mary Daly focus on the Franciscans over successive chronological periods. Though my own interests inclined my attention towards the earlier centuries, it was the essays on the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries that I found most interesting because they venture into virtually virgin territory in terms of historiography, and present unexpected insights. Joseph MacMahon shows how the Franciscans were most resilient during the worst of the penal days, but began ‘tumbling into annihilation’ from the mid-eighteenth century. He acknowledges the detrimental impact of such external factors as the penal laws, the papal prohibition on receiving novices, and the assault on their colleges in Continental Europe, but he points to an internal crisis of identity and mission as the ‘main

cause of their decline' (p. 101). Whereas there were almost 600 professed Irish Franciscans in 1700, there were only 185 by 1776, and the decline continued into the nineteenth century. Patrick Conlon shows that although new churches were opened by Franciscan communities in the cities and some of the larger towns in southern Ireland, there were only fifty friars active in the ministry in 1838. Conlon discusses attempts at reform throughout the period from 1829 to 1879. Concern was focused on training, discipline and prayer. The problems were not ones of grievous sins but of the friars living like diocesan clergy, sometimes employing women in their houses, sometimes drinking whiskey with lay people, and sometimes offering a less-than-inspirational pastoral service. A German named Gregor Janknecht was the mastermind behind the transformation of the Irish Franciscans from 1879. A new generation of Franciscans was trained overseas, and they were appointed only to friaries of 'regular observance' in Ireland. Step by step and as their numbers allowed, the 'Brown' friars – who, unlike their predecessors, wore their habits publicly though it was prohibited by law – took charge of friary after friary. The 'Black' friars, despite some popular support, were doomed to extinction.

Mary Daly surveys the 'second golden age' of the Franciscans, from 1918 to 1963. The number of friars rose from 110 in 1900 to peak at 430 by 1965. Interestingly, they came very disproportionately from west of a line one might draw from Derry and Tyrone to Cork and Kerry. New recruits, and money, flowed into the order, despite the economic straits of the country at large. Investment was made in the physical fabric of the order's houses, churches and schools, and friars were dispatched to missions in China, India and South Africa. Daly highlights the considerable contribution of the Franciscans to Irish cultural life throughout the period. They were extremely active in reclaiming their Irish heritage, and also in helping to build a new Catholic Gaelic society. Yet even before the conclusion of Vatican II, the Franciscans in Ireland began to decline. There was a sharp fall in the number of vocations in 1964, and a very high proportion of the small numbers entering the order thereafter did not complete their training. Joseph MacMahon's survey of the years from 1963 to 1990 shows how the Franciscans engaged in an increasingly wide range of activities and yet struggled to forge a new identity for themselves in contemporary Ireland. Numbers had fallen to 244 by 1990. The past two decades can only have seen morale and numbers decline further against the backdrop of growing secularism and the tsunami of scandals sweeping over the Irish Catholic Church.

The other essays of the book include Bernadette Cunningham's engaging study of the Poor Clares, Patrick Conlon's consideration of the secular Franciscans and his overview of the Irish Franciscans' missions and missionaries. Michael O'Neill's fascinating exploration of Franciscan friary architecture of the late medieval and early modern periods is rich in detail and strikingly illustrated with colour photographs. Małgorzata Krasnodębska-D'Aughton presents a study of Franciscan chalices from 1600 to 1650 which is also illustrated with some striking photographs.

Scholarly interest in the seventeenth century is reflected not only in Gillespie's essay but in Mícheál Mac Craith's essay on the foundation of St Anthony's College at Louvain/Leuven; in Mary Ann Lyons's exploration of the roles of St Anthony's College and Irish émigré communities in establishing an Irish Franciscan presence across northern Europe; in Bernadette Cunningham's and Pádraig Ó Riain's assessments of the Louvain achievements in history and hagiography respectively; in M. W. F. Stone's survey of the Franciscans' theological and philosophical achievements; in Salvador Ryan's close study of catechisms and devotional works published at Louvain; and in Ignatius Fennessy's prosopography of some Irish Franciscans on the Continent.

This formidable volume presents the fruits of impressive scholarship focused on an organisation that contributed a great deal to Irish life over the centuries. It should be read by all historians interested in Irish society since 1534.

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