THE PROCLAMATIONS OF IRELAND, 1660–1820. Edited by James Kelly with Mary Ann Lyons. 5 vols. Pp lxxxii, 483; lxii, 742; lxii, 567; lxi, 552; lxii, 596. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2014. €250 the set; €60 individual volumes.

The twin destructions in 1711 and 1922 of the records of the Irish Privy Council have, as the editors of these volumes point out, 'served as a major impediment to the appreciation of the significance' of proclamations as instruments of government and to an understanding of the constitutional and administrative importance of the Privy Council generally in 'late early modern Ireland'. This has had the effect of making it sometimes difficult to comprehend and follow governmental processes and the manner in which these interacted or did not interact with the wider concerns of the political and social communities of the time. Not only, however, were proclamations the items of official print culture most commonly encountered in Ireland in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but being – unlike acts of parliament – generated by a variety of official bodies they became clothed in an unusually wide resonance reaching well beyond the immediate concerns of those at the head of government and into the worlds of, for example, military and local affairs more generally. A large majority of proclamations were, nonetheless, issued by the Privy Council itself and it is these which constitute the bulk of those included in the present edition mostly *in extenso* but occasionally, when full texts are missing, in summary.

The editors broadly accept the definition of a proclamation put forward by P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin in connection with the English/British Privy Council in the Tudor and Stuart periods as 'a public ordinance issued by the sovereign in virtue of the royal prerogative, with the advice of the Privy Council, under the royal seal, by royal writ, and actually proclaimed'. Of course, the range and nature of what is presented here were shaped by the fact that, apart from 1689–90, when James II was in Ireland, and 1690 when William III was briefly present, the 'royal prerogative was exercised in Ireland by a Lord Lieutenant, a Lord Deputy, or Lords Justices'.

Because during the period covered by these volumes it became accepted theory that proclamations were subordinate to statutes (although equally binding on the subject provided they did not 'contradict' existing or 'establish' new law) the political elite began to operate on the principle that they should first and foremost be seen as instruments to *effect* statute law. In other words, the specific value of proclamations and the chief reason why the present edition constitutes so important an addition to our understanding of the political and social history of the period 1660–1820 lies in the fact that they reflect, not so much the initial ideas of government, but the consequent working-out of ways in which such ideas might in practice be enforced, modified, and adjusted with respect to the ambient realities of the time. And the fact that for certain periods (notably between 1666 and 1689) the Irish parliament was not convened at all, meant that both the number and significance of proclamations could at times reach especially high levels of visibility and importance. As the editors point out, the character and ubiquity of proclamations 'provide a distinct window onto the security, administrative and political concerns of the era in which they were promulgated'. Indeed, the importance of proclamations as mediums of communication and instruments of policy can be seen in the fact that the wagon train of the Williamite army included a printing press and that Edward Jones, the king's printer in England, was simultaneously engaged to produce proclamations and other notices in Ireland.

Official practice evolved over the years. In the eighteenth century, the increasing acceptance of the precedence of statute meant that lords lieutenant and the like began to defer more and more to parliament as to the subject matter of proclamations. Indeed, some proclamations were authorised in response to direct requests from one or both houses of parliament such as, for example, those issued in response to the so-called 'anti-union' riot of 3 December 1759. In general, however, proclamation became, as

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time went on, primarily an administrative device concerned with everyday issues such as coinage, quarantine, days of fasting, and rewards for 'the apprehension of the perpetrators of a diverse range of offences including arson, affray, abduction, houghing, robbery with violence, resisting the law, murder', and so forth. In other words it was precisely the quotidian aspects of the business that makes so many of these documents, even – perhaps particularly – the more mundane, a crucial source with regard not only to the political, but to social, cultural, and economic history of the time.

Unsurprisingly the proclamation issuing machine (if one may so call it) went into overdrive during periods of political uncertainty and especially so as the eighteenth century drew to a violent end. No less striking is the fact that, once the Union had been enacted, proclamations issued by the Irish Privy Council between 1801 and 1820 (the year in which this edition terminates) continued to echo the preoccupations of what was still a Dublin-based executive and to retain an obviously Irish character, confirmation that many of the promises of closer integration made during the Union debates proved, initially at least, more fanciful than real. Certainly, the Union at first did little to alter British ministerial opinion that Ireland was a faraway country with idiosyncratic and violent characteristics best ruled by frequent applications of the prefect's cane from London.

What is so valuable about the present edition – quite apart from the high scholarly expertise and technical skill with which it has been put together – is that its range and scope so fruitfully illuminate those landscapes of the past where 'rulers' and 'people' interacted and in certain very circumscribed ways formed a 'community'. Most proclamations were targeted at a fairly broad audience with the task of actual promulgation delegated, as appropriate, to the sheriffs, mayors, magistrates, justices of the peace, and bailiffs in counties, and to the principal officers of every city and town corporate, all of them charged with ensuring that the relevant texts were 'published and fixed up' in the principal cities and towns. Special care was even taken that proclamations should be printed 'off in one sheet' to facilitate their posting in public places, a right jealously guarded as part of 'the tight control that the state exercised over print in Ireland' in these years, not least because Whiteboys, Rightboys, and other secret societies were also inclined to post up notices and threatening letters in order to enforce their own versions of authority and intimidation. And although the gradual extension of newspapers inevitably diminished older forms of publication, proclamations continued to be separately printed, though after about 1775 smaller print runs became 'increasingly normative'.

By the early nineteenth century, with Dublin Castle conveying more and more substantial sums to national newspapers in return for favourable puffs and the dissemination of official pronouncements, proclamations had, more than ever before, become a

> point of contact between government and people, the centre and the periphery, on a great variety of issues, different certainly than those that demanded attention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but still relevant for those charged with enforcing the law and administering the country, and, one may assume, for the increasing proportion of the body politic to whom they were addressed.

And it is such developments and changes that highlight the very substantial importance of the edition under review. This presents the texts of some 2,400 proclamations and allied items 'emanating from, or authorised by, the Irish executive' during the reign of eight monarchs over a period of no less than 160 years. Useful and relevant annotation and source notes are provided by the editors and (in each volume) brief biographical lists of the chief officials involved. The editorial work, both as to compilation and annotation, is of the highest standards. The topics covered range so widely that the edition furnishes an extraordinarily rich source for many otherwise discrete aspects of Ireland's past. No serious library can afford to be without these volumes which have been published in full accordance with the high standards of production one has come

to expect of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, a body that has in recent years established itself more and more firmly as a crucial facilitator – perhaps one might in the present context say a crucial 'proclaimer' – of the value and importance of Irish historical scholarship in all its richness and diversity.

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Elite women in ascendancy Ireland, 1690–1745: imitation and innovation. By Rachel Wilson. Pp xii, 208. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press. 2015. £60. (Irish Historical Monographs series).

Recent decades have seen a pleasing flurry of publications on women's history with respect to England and Scotland. Although the subject has not been completely neglected by historians of Ireland – one might in particular mention the pioneering work of Mary O'Dowd – it has featured less prominently in scholarly examinations of Ireland's past. Rachel Wilson, in this excellent study of elite women in ascendancy Ireland between 1690 and 1745, has made a distinctly valuable contribution to our understanding of the role of women in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century Ireland. That she is concerned – as the title indicates – with elite women has more to do with the sources that are available than with agenda of any kind. As a result, neither the poor nor the middle orders make an appearance, nor (except in very minor ways) do Catholics or Presbyterians.

The particular importance of this book lies in the fact that it is more than a case study and that it adopts a tighter timeframe than that employed by existing general analyses. 'The book', Wilson announces, will question how far women's 'lives changed, and situate its findings within the wider historiography on the rest of the British Isles to establish to what extent women in Ireland were influenced by their closest neighbours'. Indeed, throughout an awareness is shown of the fact that, while 'the lives of these women may have been informed by and in some cases mirrored that of their English and Scottish counterparts, they were not dictated by the British example'.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each concerned with a significant aspect of the matter in hand, and this thematic arrangement works well. Wilson opens with a discussion of marriage, its preliminaries, its experiences, and (occasionally) its collapse. Some of the findings are unsurprising, not least the importance of money and status. Yet even so Wilson convincingly insists that the likes and dislikes of the women involved were never entirely disregarded even by parents determined on making a 'good match' and that this became more and more obvious towards the end of her period. Here and elsewhere she is an acute observer of the complex and 'national' positions occupied by the Irish ascendancy: not completely Irish, certainly not completely British, perhaps at best located in some indeterminate no man's land often marked by nervous uncertainties and worrying relationships. The chapter on marriage is followed by equally interesting and well-informed discussions of mothers and children, the lady's position in the house, widows, guardians, and estate managers, 'society queens', and institutional philanthropy. All contain valuable findings and equally valuable interpretations. And this is so because Wilson, in addition to her scholarly expertise, never loses sight of the human aspects of what she is about. Thus, in the discussion of mothers and children, she includes a wonderfully touching comment by William Connolly Junior (1706–54) on the birth of a daughter (he and his wife had hoped for a son): but four weeks old 'the little one can already express her thoughts, or at least we pretend to understand her'.

Without ever losing focus Wilson lays out her findings so as to cast light on all sorts of related matters: child mortality, finance, relationships between and within families, education, female networks, 'alliances' and tensions between spouses, women managing