

game they played was simply wrong. As O'Callaghan writes, the presentation of the clash between rugby and the G.A.A. as rooted in two opposing modes of political or cultural belief – the 'Gael' versus the 'Shoneen' – was not grounded in reality. Rather 'it can be read as a conflict between two modes of thought: those who saw as imperative the expression of nationality through sport and those who were swayed by personal conviction and social context.'

In all of this, O'Callaghan has been particularly careful not to overstep his sources. This is most admirably demonstrated in his expert handling of the origins of rugby football in Munster, shaped as it was by issues of class, Sabbatarianism, commerce and the spread of the railways. The absence of the minute books of the Munster branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union before 1927 – and of almost any minutes of the clubs of the province – pushed the author into the arms of the newspapers. He accepts the limitations of this recourse to the press and what emerges is a convincing analysis of the evolution of rugby in Munster: its politics, its place in social life, its institutional attachments and its regional diversities. The culture that it evokes is compelling in its complexity; it is a culture which is brilliantly described and analysed by Liam O'Callaghan in a book which is a worthy history of rugby in Munster.

PAUL ROUSE

*School of History and Archives, University College Dublin*

FILM EXHIBITION AND DISTRIBUTION IN IRELAND, 1909–2010. By Kevin Rockett with Emer Rockett. Pp 652. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2011. €55.

Consciously or otherwise, it appears that Kevin Rockett has been engaged on a project to construct the definitive record of Irish cinema – in all its aspects – for a quarter of a century. His contribution to the seminal *Cinema and Ireland* (1987) offered the first detailed history of film production and policy in Ireland. The 1996 *Irish filmography* listed over 12,000 films made in or about Ireland, whilst his 2004 work, *Irish film censorship*, remains the definitive work on the subject.

*Film exhibition and distribution in Ireland, 1909–2010*, written with his wife Emer, addresses an area which often falls beneath the radar of academic enquiry. And, evincing the all-embracing ambition of Rockett's approach, it was published contemporaneously with a study delineating the development of pre-cinematic visual entertainments: *Magic lantern, panorama and moving picture shows in Ireland, 1786–1909*.

The book is structured in three parts. The first creates a historical narrative around the emergence of mainstream commercial cinema exhibition and distribution in Ireland from the opening of the Volta in 1909 (year zero for permanent Irish exhibition venues) up to a discussion of cinemas which, as of 2012, remain on the drawing board. The second part looks at alternative exhibition modes from the Irish Film Society in 1936 and the National Film Institute (now the Irish Film Institute) in 1943, to the Light House cinema in 1988, and a variety of film festivals from 1956 onwards. It also examines the role of the Catholic Church (and especially that of John Charles McQuaid) in attempting to regulate what constituted acceptable viewing in the middle years of the twentieth century. The final section offers a definitive list of every permanent cinema exhibition venue ever established in Ireland.

From the outset it is clear that the book is the result of a long and assiduous research effort: 120 of its 650 pages are devoted to footnotes. Every conceivable source of information has been examined. For example, a discussion of pre-Volta entertainments in 1907 draws on a 1955 *Daily Evening Mail* interview with the operator of the Grafton Station (a mock railway carriage where audiences were treated to film scenes from the perspective of a rail passenger).

The first section is primarily structured as an industrial history outlining where, when and by whom cinemas were opened, tracing along the way the sometimes surprising impact of technological shifts: the arrival of sound required costly cinema conversions but also allowed exhibitors to save money in the long term by firing their – expensive compared to other staff – musician employees. In a similar vein, the more recent shift to digital projection promises not just better quality images but also a dramatic saving for distributors who need no longer strike celluloid prints. Yet while the political economy of exhibition is fascinating, the book is at its most compelling when reflecting upon the changing social context for cinema-going. Thus the Rocketts note how significant class divisions operated across early cinemas: prestigious city-centre cinemas like the Provincial on O’Connell Street and the Grafton were exclusively middle class, whilst working-class kids frequented the Phoenix (‘Feeno’) on Ellis Quay.

Class also influenced the struggle for Sunday opening. Cinemas serving working-class patrons were more likely to be allowed to open on a Sunday than those with a middle-class clientele because they offered an alternative to public houses. This struggle took on a different dimension in the north of Ireland where Protestant churches actively campaigned against the notion on Sabbatarian grounds.

Having earlier debunked the myth of high levels of Irish cinema attendance in the 1930s (six annual visits per capita as compared with twenty-two in the U.K., in part due to the relative expense of tickets in Ireland), the Rocketts also make the point that – in contrast to the U.S. and U.K., where audiences began to fall immediately after the Second World War – attendances in Ireland doubled between 1944 and 1950 and continued to increase until the mid-1950s. This is ascribed to the increasingly urban nature of the population but also the indirect impact of post-Famine sexual mores: ‘It was a significant dynamic in the expansion of audience numbers that so many young Irish men and women were unmarried and free to attend cinema regularly’ (p. 144). This concern with the social context for cinema-going continues into the fifth chapter on multiplexes. The Rocketts blend cultural studies with political economy to explore how multiplexes address their audience as consumers who fashion different identities from the wide menu of films on offer. This approach also permits a discussion of the relationship modern audiences have with the cinema space, one influenced by the ubiquity of screen entertainments in the domestic sphere which encourages the transposition of behaviour appropriate to the private sphere (talking, munching noisily on nachos) into the public sphere constituted by cinemas.

Yet, for all this, it may be that the most important long-term impact of this book will be in having laid the groundwork for future work on the consumption of screen media in Ireland. Irish media studies remain dominated by textual analyses. This is not problematic in itself but, nonetheless, audience studies – how the Irish have actively used screen media and integrated them into their lives – remain a rarity. In particular, our understanding of the place of cinema in Irish daily life from the 1910s through to the present is largely based on the anecdotal recollections of individuals from accounts in memoirs. It is often asserted that exposure to Hollywood output in rural Ireland in the mid-twentieth century offered audiences a glimpse of another way of living (to the consternation of the forces of conservatism in the church and state) but there are few academic studies to assess this. *Film exhibition and distribution in Ireland, 1909–2010* offers a data-rich springboard on which to base such research.

RODERICK FLYNN

*School of Communications, Dublin City University*