

high politics. He examines Irish divorce bills and acts, some of which have been discussed previously by A. P. W. Malcomson. While the number of divorces is too small to constitute a general study of marital breakdown – as Malcomson pointed out – the essay sheds light on the fascinating lives of those involved in these unusual transactions. Much of the essay is taken up with legal procedure, but the rich evidence marshalled by Bergin supports the rather surprising conclusion that ‘eighteenth-century Ireland was remarkably indulgent of sexual and marital irregularity’ (p. 109).

The final two essays in the book deal with well-known historical figures. Patrick Geoghegan argues that Daniel O’Connell’s prime objective was always repeal of the Union, even before the granting of Catholic emancipation. James Quinn writes a revealing study of Thomas Davis’s work on the ‘patriot’ Parliament of 1689. He shows how Davis’s nineteenth-century concerns influenced his reading of the late seventeenth century, though he ultimately passes favourable judgement on Davis as historian.

Overall, this is a stimulating collection of essays that showcases some of the current strengths of early modern Irish history. We know much more today about the Restoration period, the workings of the Irish Parliament and the history of the first half of the eighteenth century than we did thirty years ago. Of course, James McGuire’s influence reaches beyond the historiography of early modern Ireland, through his work with this journal, the Irish Manuscripts Commission and, above all, his editorship (with one of the contributors, James Quinn) of the monumental *Dictionary of Irish biography* (2009). This volume is a fitting tribute to an exceptional historian and, as Art Cosgrove puts it in his affectionate ‘personal memoir’, ‘a real gentleman’ (p. 15).

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POLITICS AND PROVINCIAL PEOPLE: SLIGO AND LIMERICK, 1691–1761. By D. A. Fleming. Pp xiv, 272. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2010. £60.

The self-confidence radiating from the features of those members of the Limerick ‘Hell-Fire Club’, who stare out from the dust jacket of Dr Fleming’s book, suggests a provincial elite complacent in its control of the power structures of local society. And this is, broadly speaking, the picture painted in the text, but with important and subtle reservations. Dr Fleming offers a pair of local studies of two western counties remote from the great world of Dublin and, at first glance, promisingly different: Sligo – relatively poor, with a declining population and dominated by a handful of landowning families of recent vintage; Limerick, by contrast, larger (six times as populous as the town of Sligo), more prosperous – its economic life centred on a substantial port, its political power diffused among a broader circle of landed proprietors – and more richly documented. Yet despite these differences, political life in each county followed a similar pattern. The greater gentry families dominated county politics (in the case of County Limerick, the smaller boroughs of Askeaton and Kilmallock as well) while the county towns were ruled by a commercial and professional oligarchy closely connected with, and often subservient to, landed interests.

Yet, as the work of other historians has suggested (notably, Dr Fleming’s supervisor, Dr Toby Barnard), the *menu peuple* were not ‘inconsiderable’. The party conflict of the first two decades of the eighteenth century, by arousing sectarian prejudices, had induced citizens and freeholders to support Whig and Tory candidates for ideological reasons rather than deference to social superiors. Later ‘patriotic’ agitations, in the 1720s over Wood’s Halfpence and more intensively in the controversy over the money bill in the 1750s, also involved ‘ordinary’ voters, their opinions influenced by the increased availability of politically charged reading matter, and their involvement in public affairs encouraged by social interaction in guilds and clubs (though here Limerick was well in advance of Sligo). Dr

Fleming is careful not to exaggerate the 'ordinariness' of voters in parliamentary elections, but also points up the opportunities for political activity 'out of doors'. He affords tantalising glimpses of a popular anti-oligarchical tendency among urban dwellers to which maverick landed proprietors could appeal, ostensibly in promoting an 'independent' interest against the dictates of the few, though, as he shrewdly remarks, this could often be a cover for a campaign by one proprietorial interest to unseat another. Two conflicting processes may be detected during the period: a tightening of patronal control over borough elections while at the same time the less wealthy inhabitants were occasionally mobilised in support of patriotic causes. There are even indications of the participation of some Catholic inhabitants, which is intriguing, though, again, not overstated.

Having discussed at some length county and borough politics, and the emerging 'associational culture' of coffee houses and clubs, Dr Fleming considers the relationship between his 'provincial people' and the machinery of the state. As in England, power was devolved from the centre; or, rather, government was constituted as a co-operative enterprise with administration largely in the hands of unpaid local agents, ranging from the governor, at the apex of the county hierarchy, down to the parish vestry. Here, a scrupulous sifting of the evidence shows up the relatively high status of many parish officials and a Catholic presence in some vestries. Professionalism intruded in the form of Revenue officers and soldiers. Dr Fleming is highly informative on the local activities of these representatives of the emerging fiscal-military state, making excellent use of the surviving materials relating to the Revenue in the National Archives of the United Kingdom at Kew. Naturally, tensions arose, especially with the military, but relationships seem to have been harmonious and mutually beneficial. Not even the riotous behaviour of Whig army officers in Limerick in 1710 against the Tory Bishop Smyth could upset a pattern of peaceful coexistence. In the long term, changes would occur in the nature of governance, and a clearer distinction would emerge between rulers and ruled, but Dr Fleming is not inclined to locate in his period any fundamental shifting of the ground.

A first book, worked up from a doctoral thesis, *Politics and provincial people* has the strengths and weaknesses of the genre: on the one hand, the sources are fresh and the findings new and interesting, and presented with care; on the other, the argument can sometimes be a little too cautious and the rehearsal of detailed evidence a little too full. This is especially true of the early chapters covering municipal and parliamentary elections, although this kind of subject matter would probably test the narrative powers of any historian. It is to Dr Fleming's credit that he has eschewed meretricious dramatisation of his subject, producing in consequence a book whose modestly phrased conclusions are convincing. He has made a contribution to understanding not just of the history of Counties Sligo and Limerick but of Irish politics and society more generally in the half-century after the Williamite revolution.

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ATLANTIC GATEWAY: THE PORT AND CITY OF LONDONDERRY SINCE 1700. Edited by Robert Gavin, William Kelly and Dolores O'Reilly. Pp xvii, 382. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €55.

*Atlantic gateway* surveys economic development in the port and city of Derry/Londonderry since 1700. Gavin, Kelly and O'Reilly deserve commendation for the book's ambitious long-run scope, and this feature alone makes it a worthwhile addition to the literature. Overall, the authors have produced an interesting work of what can best be described as 'long-run regional history'; it is consequently a book that university libraries should stock, but it will be of most interest to the general reader. Readers of *Atlantic gateway* expecting