

for Scotland on the position of Northern Ireland. It brought many people up short when former Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey wondered aloud if Scotland's departure from the union might 're-ignite' the conflict in Northern Ireland; yet on reflection such a fear cannot be dismissed as outlandish.

Jackson reprises to some extent his previous work on the reasons for the Union's survival in Ireland until the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. He shows how the same institutional bulwarks that underpinned the Scots Union – parliament, monarchy, armed forces, empire – also helped to regularise the Union project in Ireland; the long-standing strengths of Union – its flexibility and capacity to accommodate – applied in the Irish case as well as the Scottish, if to a significantly lesser extent. He is as adept at assessing the role of the railways in the functioning of the Union as he is at delineating the contribution of intellectuals to the 'commonsense' around it. On Scotland, Jackson wisely builds on the insights of historians such as Graeme Morton and Colin Kidd around the blurring of the unionist and nationalist borders in the country's modern political thought. The subtleties of unionist politics in Scotland are well caught. As Jackson valuably points out, civil society in Ireland did not serve, as in Scotland, to defuse separatism (pp 213–14).

The book is marked by colourful depictions of Scottish and Irish political culture at various points in time. One such, drawing on the records of the Western Conservative Club in Edinburgh in the Edwardian era, conjures a world where the Nicky Fairbairns of the day drank and frolicked. In fact, as Jackson hints, it was Labour that was more serious in its commitment to Union in Scotland as the twentieth century wore on. Certainly, it is only now becoming clear how valuable Labour's 'constructive unionism' has been to the U.K.

In this connection Jackson might have said more about key figures such as Donald Dewar who was responsible for the legislation delivering devolution to Scotland at the end of the twentieth century. Dewar, in political science terms, believed in a 'union state' that was de-centralist and accommodated diversity. This version of the U.K. as opposed to the 'unitary' model that fetishised Westminster sovereignty and basked in Diceyan nostalgia, has prevailed, although the question remains whether it has laid the ground for an ultimate break-up. Regardless of this, the 'union state' or small 'u' unionism school that advanced the case for devolution and quasi-federalism in the late twentieth century paid more attention to Northern Ireland's place in the union; moreover, its advocates often argued for a deeper, more expansive notion of citizenship. Jackson joins many others in seeing little credible ideological content in unionism. It would have been intriguing if he had addressed the arguments for union that have identified virtues in the U.K.'s state of 'permanent negotiation', and have stressed the desirability of a polity which involves such diversity especially given the way the largest and as yet undeveloped part of it – England – is by far the most diverse ethnically and culturally.

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THE IRISH COUNTRY HOUSE: ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE. Edited by Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway. Pp 268, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2011. €55.

The jacket design of *The Irish country house: its past, present and future* incorporates two images of Clonbrock House, Galway. The country house of the past provides an illustrious backdrop to a wedding party. However, hopes of a fecund future appear unrealised in the ivy-clad corpse of Clonbrock today. Both images set the tone for this chronologically-expansive volume of essays jointly edited by Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway. Comprised of eleven chapters, thirty-eight illustrations, and a foreword from R. V.

Comerford, this collection of essays – while offering a synthesis of divergent mindsets – retains, according to Comerford, ‘some of the same tensions and contradictions’ as previous scholarship (p. 13). Themes include the construction, destruction, adjustment, and representation of these houses.

Comerford’s reference to contradictions may allude to the title of the volume itself. Reminiscent of Bence-Jones’s and FitzGerald’s studies, the descriptor ‘Irish country house’ carries a political charge perhaps not immediately evident. Peppered throughout the volume are references to country houses, big houses, historic houses, and even great houses (though not ‘estate houses’). Whether terminology is dictated by the period under consideration – an eighteenth-century ‘great house’ (p. 21), nineteenth-century ‘big house’ (p. 137), twentieth-century ‘country house’ (p. 128; p. 158) and twenty-first century ‘historic house’ (p. 187) – or whether it points more towards developments in Irish historiography with the ‘house’ moving into a more Anglocentric, socially-orientated paradigm, is unclear. Consequently, this publication also proves a meditation on the evolutionary nature of the nomenclature, both historically and historiographically, of the Irish landed estate.

The physical construction of great houses inevitably coincided with the construction and reinforcement of the status and reputation of their distinguished owners. Patrick Walsh, perhaps provocatively, argues that William Conolly’s decision to build Castletown house at a time of economic crisis added to his ‘contemporary reputation as an improving landlord’ (p. 39). Finola O’Kane’s reference to William Fitzwilliam’s building of Merrion Street and Square, along with Judith Hill’s study of the development of Adare by the second Earl of Dunraven reveals how the improvement of areas in the immediate vicinity of great houses not only enhanced the reputation of some landlords, but also ensured a lasting legacy. The ultimate destruction of estate houses and concurrent partial resolution of the Irish land question followed the two well-worn and often intersecting routes pursued in addressing any of the ‘Irish questions’, namely constitutional and physical-force means. The constitutional blow dealt by the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, as Patrick Cosgrove rightly argues, ‘perpetuated [a] continuation in agrarian conflict’ (p. 90). This agrarian agitation, Dooley maintains, fuelled the burning of some three hundred houses in the twenty-six counties from January 1920 to May 1923. Ciarán J. Reilly’s study of the contemporary incendiary campaign in Offaly supports Dooley’s argument, although he does note how some rebels admitted they simply sought to ‘burn imperialism out of the country’ (p. 127).

In the post-revolutionary period, adjustment to the new political landscape was a major concern of country-house residents. Olwen Purdue highlights how an active and prominent role within Northern Irish society facilitated the continuation of traditional social codes for the landed gentry while, in the Irish Free State, Dooley notes how a more precarious socio-political role evolved. Tellingly, during the ‘Emergency’ the Irish National Army was able to sequester Castle Hyde from its then owners to be used as a military headquarters.

The contemporary and future representation of historic houses also occupies a significant portion of the volume. Karol Mullaney-Dignam, and Danielle O’Donovan and Jennifer McCrea, indicate the importance of these houses from a heritage, tourist, and educational perspective, while the future of historic houses is addressed by Christopher Ridgway and Allen Warren, with the latter calling ‘to put aside, for the present, the existing interpretative tradition and adopt a more outward-looking approach, acknowledging diversity and difference’ (p. 252). Such a move would appear propitious at present. In light of this, it may also prove timely to emphasise the need for more research on the many labourers who built these enduring edifices.

The restoration and preservation of historic houses proves intricately linked with historiographical concerns. In the immediate future, preservation projects will undoubtedly be influenced more by fiscal realities than ideological concerns. Hopefully, financial constraints will not, in a similar fashion to the ivy steadily encroaching

Clonbrock House, stifle the course of Irish country-house history. Notwithstanding such concerns, *The Irish country house: its past, present and future* nonetheless provides a firm foundation for future research in this field.

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THE CASTRATO AND HIS WIFE. By Helen Berry. Pp xiv, 312. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011. £25.

*The Castrato and his wife* adopts the conventions of a genre of historical writing that has recently come into vogue, certainly among publishers and maybe with readers too. A bizarre story, which raises numerous puzzles about attitudes and behaviour in the past, is told in a way to appeal to 'general' readers without compromising intellectual sobriety. It is a difficult balancing act to sustain. Unobtrusively but effectively, Helen Berry deals with a multiplicity of topics: from the look of Neapolitan theatres to the curriculum and reputation of musical academies, through techniques of *da capo* and *bel canto*, the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and castration, to the nature of life in eighteenth-century Arezzo, Tuscany, London, Edinburgh and Dublin. Succinctly she sets out the background to the strange career of Tenducci, a successor of Farinelli as one of the most celebrated castrati singers. She demonstrates how the ambivalent responses of contemporaries can illumine notions of the body, masculinity and virility. She is caustic about parents and a Church which condoned and sometimes encouraged mutilation. She shows, too, the powerful imperatives behind sometimes unscrupulous promoters who invited Tenducci first to London and then to Dublin. His initial reception and subsequent difficulties add to an already complex picture of recreational life in metropolitan and provincial England, Ireland and Scotland. Unexpectedly, Tenducci's career seems neither to have suffered nor to have benefited greatly from the notoriety that surrounded him.

In 1765, Tenducci came to Ireland as the latest in a sequence of entertainers, enticed thither by a large wage. Soon a more permanent association arose. He was engaged to teach music to the adolescent daughter of Thomas Maunsell, a judge and member of a prominent County Limerick family. Mutual attraction culminated in marriage, at first clandestine by an aged Catholic priest in County Cork, but eventually regularised. The Maunsells alleged abduction. However, the stubborn daughter insisted that she had acted voluntarily. Her assertions eventually prevailed, and the odd couple were allowed to set up house together. Some features of the episode resembled those in other cases of abduction and forced marriage among the mid-eighteenth century Irish squirearchy. But, as Helen Berry shows, the Tenducci–Maunsell imbroglia had distinctive elements: in particular, the uncertain sexual identity of Tenducci and his exoticism as a singer and Catholic foreigner.

Notable, too, is the fact that a vindication of Dorothea Maunsell's conduct was rapidly published. It was alleged to have been written by the girl herself. Other violent seizures had been detailed in print, such as that which resulted in the death of Mary Ann Knox in Donegal in 1761. It is unresolved whether Dorothea Maunsell herself possessed precocious literary abilities which enabled her to adopt the current epistolary format. At all events, the publication ensured continuing publicity for the couple, who, for a time, were welcomed into respectable society and even shared stages together. The romance did not last, leading Helen Berry to contend that the marriage had been entered into as a device by which the bride would escape from paternal domination. The expectation, given the law of marriage, was that in time it would be annulled. So it proved. Dorothea Tenducci met a more attractive prospect (in Italy) with whom she had children and whom she married.