

regarding the best mode of relieving them. Some of this has already appeared in book chapters and journal articles, some is new. The result is a fascinating study that examines the operation of the inquiry from its inception to its conclusion and aftermath. There is a brief explanation of the background and wider context of the commission, but discussion focuses primarily on its mode of operation, the evidence collected, and what this can tell us about perceptions of poverty in early nineteenth-century Ireland.

It is a pleasure to read a book by someone so totally in command of their source material. Consequently, Ó Ciosáin has much to say that is both informative and enlightening. He is particularly interesting on the oral evidence taken by the inquiry. While many committees and inquiries questioned witnesses and recorded their answers, the poor inquiry was unusual in sending assistant commissioners around the country to hold open sessions. Local people were gathered together and asked their opinion on different topics rather than being questioned separately, or in any particular order. The resulting evidence, Ó Ciosáin claims, constituted a ‘massive survey of opinion’ unique not only in scale but also in the insight provided into popular attitudes and oral culture at a particular juncture in nineteenth-century Ireland. Separate chapters are devoted to particular aspects of the inquiry, for instance, the evidence taken on vagrancy and begging which reveals popular attitudes to have been much more tolerant of both vagrants and beggars than either government or the law, and the attitudes and involvement of the Catholic church. The views of Catholic clerics were particularly canvassed and proved in many respects much closer to official than popular opinion.

Some readers will be disappointed by the narrow focus adopted throughout the book. We learn a tremendous amount about the inquiry but very little about the political context to it. There is no discussion of the views of the chairman of the inquiry, Archbishop Whately, or his aims and objectives, and there is no mention of the other members of the commission. Indeed we are never even told who the other members were. The decision to ignore the politics of the inquiry is perhaps understandable since this has been systematically explored in Peter Gray’s monumental study, *The making of the Irish Poor Law* (Manchester, 2009). Nonetheless, it is striking that Ó Ciosáin neither discusses nor engages with Gray’s analysis, even when it is germane to his argument. Ó Ciosáin notes, for example, that unlike the reports of other royal commissions, the poor inquiry report made no direct link between the evidence taken and its conclusions. The commissioners amassed a vast amount of information but appear to have lacked both the means and the will to analyse it. To discover the reason for this, however, we have to turn to Gray who shows how the political divisions on the commission meant that an agreed report was always going to be problematic. Rather than a consensus view based on the evidence, therefore, the final report took the form of a summary of Whately’s views on Irish poverty followed by a number of unrelated proposals to which individual members of the commission were personally attached. None of the above detracts from the significant achievement this book represents. *Ireland in official print culture* is a well written, and deeply scholarly, study and will be of interest to all social and cultural historians of Ireland.

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THE IRISH LAND AGENT: THE CASE OF KING’S COUNTY, 1830–1860. By Ciaran Reilly.
Pp 192, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014. €45.

In 1847 James Devery, agent on Frederick Ponsonby’s estate was described as ‘beloved by the tenantry, a thing rare in Ireland in the instance of any agent’ (p. 13). This opening

quotation in a long overdue scholarly study of land agents in Ireland reveals an accepted contemporary notion of bitter relations between land agents and tenants. Social memory similarly recalls antagonism resulting in an often-unchallenged stereotypical negative portrayal of land agents.

Ciaran Reilly's excellent and important study of the topic in *The Irish land agent: the case of King's County, 1830–1860* sets out 'to test the historical validity of their representation in social memory' (p. 23) over a pivotal thirty-year period. Consequently, reference is made to the introduction of the National Board of Education 1831 (incorrectly referred to as the National School Act 1831, p. 77), the 1832 Reform Act (incorrectly dated 1837, p. 80), and the Encumbered Estates Courts (referred throughout as Incumbered). The archivally dense study of King's County (Offaly) examines approximately 100 land agents, contains three maps and eleven illustrations from local history societies. One of the many strengths of the publication is the author's use of local history sources. Several typos in the text and footnotes occur, including 'importation of Ayrshire cattle and other breeds ?????' (author's question marks, p. 87) and 'It may seem strong [strange?] then' (p. 103). The manuscript record of footnote 40 is incomplete (DP, D/671/c/9/???) (author's question marks, p. 90). However, these detract little from the overall study.

In order to illustrate how agents were represented in social memory, the author uses examples from poetry, fiction, drama, folklore, Irish traditional music, and ballads. Typically agents emerge as 'being rapacious, dishonest and in general the villains of the Irish countryside' (p. 9). The author believes that part of their 'later representation in Irish social memory' was due to the 'inactivity' of many agents during the Famine (p. 166). He rightly argues that 'collectively they had no method, or at times even the will, to act in unison' (p. 160). However, a footnote (23) reveals that the will for collective action existed among agents during the tithe controversy of the 1830s (p. 166). Conversely, their activity also influenced their negative immortalization. The murder of William Ross Manifold in 1852 occurred after he had secured ejection proceedings against a number of tenants (p. 9). In reference to the murder of another agent called Pyke the author states 'Once again the motivation for the crime can be traced to the agent's estate management policy' (p. 138). Pyke's predecessor John Corcoran was reinstated after Pyke's murder although the landlord thought Corcoran 'too lenient' (p. 137). Corcoran retained his popularity despite the policies he 'implemented' (p. 167). Between 1838 and 1852 four landlords and seven agents were murdered in King's County (p. 135).

Agents occupied a highly important position in the hierarchical estate management system, acting as the landlord's representative amongst the tenantry. Consequently it is not always apparent whose policy they were actually implementing – their own or the landlord's, a matter which may have been teased out more, especially in the conclusion. Nevertheless, the author does concede that 'Many were simply restricted or dictated in their policies by their employers' financial position' (p. 163). In the final chapter, the author concludes that within King's County, 'both good and bad' agents operated (p. 167). Care must be taken when using the simplistic binary of 'good' versus 'bad' for classification purposes. The subjectivity of such terminology is apparent when perspective is considered; a 'good' agent from a tenant's perspective may grant abatements, while a 'bad' agent in the eyes of the landlord fails to collect all rents due. Reilly also asserts that 'findings for King's County more-or-less substantiate Eric Richards's argument for the Victorian English case that "some agents had the grace and tact of the landlord" while others "were of a rougher breed"' (p. 161). This comment implies, incorrectly of course, that all landlords had tact.

The glowing account of Ponsonby's agent Devery in 1847 referred to at the beginning of the review was contained in a report for Earl Fitzwilliam. Two later identical footnotes clarify that the report was commissioned by Ponsonby who sold his estate to Fitzwilliam the same year (pp 149, 161). A year later in 1848 under the new landlord Fitzwilliam, Devery –the man 'beloved of the tenantry' – was 'attacked and robbed of three stone of flour, oats and a donkey' and his wife was assaulted (p. 142), an

unfortunate occurrence which raises more questions in relation to the formulation of estate policy. Reilly's highly commendable and in-depth study of land agents will prove compulsory reading for all with an interest in the topic.

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NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSMAKERS: THE DUBLIN NATIONALIST PRESS IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Ann Andrews. Pp 286. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014. €95.

As Ann Andrews notes in this welcome addition to the growing work on Irish media history, many historians have focused their attention on the political machinations of the nineteenth century to the exclusion or bare mention of the unappreciated but integral role of the press and political journalism. Where the press is mentioned it tends to be in passing or quoted without the context of the newspaper's heritage or editorial outlook being thoroughly examined. But, as Andrews ably demonstrates, the press and political journalism played a central role in the rise of nationalism, Irish identity, and in the making and breaking of political careers and movements. This text puts the press back where it should be, at the centre of any discussion about politics – how political personages and parties were nothing without a press behind them, how politics was communicated to the masses and, as Andrews points out, gave followers something to affiliate to. It also highlights the perennial disputes that erupt between politicians and journalists over press coverage of particular movements or politics. In so doing, the book adds to our understanding not just of the politics of the time, but also the role of journalism and the press in that, often fraught, political process.

This detailed and thorough monograph fills a gap in the literature as there is a severe lack of any coherent overview of the Irish press in the period in question. Much of the work that has been done to date is fragmented and the strength of this book is that, by taking a concentrated long view, it provides a comprehensive overview of the nationalist press and its central role in Irish political life over the period in question. The fact that it is based on much original research on the newspapers themselves is also a unique selling point – as many people appreciate, it is extremely time consuming to plough through such material.

In terms of content the focus is on aspects of the newspapers that had an ideological impact on the development of nationalism and identity and the four chapters do this in a very coherent and very readable fashion. The chapters are broken up in terms of substantive topics and events that form the narrative of nineteenth-century Irish history and each is effectively self-contained which makes it not just readable but valuable as a reference resource to dip into to check the heritage, lifecycle, or contribution of a particular newspaper. All the main participants of mid-nineteenth century Irish history are there and the interplay between politics and the press, and the intrigue that was played out within that relationship, will be of keen interest to scholars of Irish history generally and press history in particular.

Chapter one gives a detailed account of the origins of *The Nation* and its importance to O'Connell's Repeal Movement. This symbiotic relationship – wherein politicians need the press and the press needs a politician or at least politics to report on – is examined here. The life of the paper – its *raison d'être*, the context in which it appeared, its reportage, its features – its whole identity – is outlined, as is the mutually-dependent relationship of the Repeal Movement and the Repeal Press. Chapter two examines the disintegration of the relationship between O'Connell and *The Nation*. The intrigue is fascinating, as is the manoeuvring that took place between politicians and journalists and the role of religion in the split is vividly illuminated. Chapter three looks at the vagaries