

CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MODERN BREIFNE/CAVAN. Edited by Brendan Scott. Pp. viii, 241, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €45.

It is a measure of the vitality of Irish, and particularly County Cavan's, local history that three scholarly books on the history of this county have been written within the last fifteen years. In 1995 nine essays on Cavan's history were published under the editorship of Raymond Gillespie; in 2007 Brendan Scott's *Cavan, 1609–1653* appeared; and now, Scott, as editor, presents us with eleven new essays on the history of the county. Moreover, as some of these look at the overlapping but larger Irish territory of Breifne, a contribution is also made to the history of County Leitrim.

The essays vary enormously in terms of the time span they cover, and it has required considerable editorial skill to integrate their disparate subjects. Jonathan Cherry's study of the town of Cavan, for instance, goes back to *circa* 1300, and concludes in 1641. By contrast, Clodagh Tait, using a will and an indenture, describes the social context of an Irish landowner and a leaseholding planter in the single year of 1638. However, when the essays are read together, a clear image of the development of Breifne/Cavan emerges.

What distinguishes this work from its predecessors is that, whereas the 1995 essays looked forward from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, and Scott's monograph covered essentially three decades of the seventeenth century, this book tends to look backwards, although the emphasis is placed on the early modern period. Three of the contributions, which constitute almost a third of the book, examine Breifne before 1540. The first of these, by Nollaig Ó Muraíle, is a study of the fourteenth-century MacGovern Poembook as a contribution to Gaelic learning, the three short prose sections of this manuscript being published and translated for the first time in an appendix. This is followed by Salvador Ryan's innovative contribution to Irish medieval women's history via doctrinal and hagiographical material, and Raymond Gillespie's description of the political and ecclesiastical background to the inauguration of Brian Balloch O'Rourke as lord of his territory in 1536. Gillespie supplements the annalistic evidence with an intricate but persuasive interpretation of sections of a saint's life, the second Life of Maedoc, which is set in southern Ulster and was probably written during the mid-1530s. This Life, it is argued, was intended to defend the rights of the coarbs who, in this case, claimed the right to crown the king of Breifne – an Irish local version, perhaps, of the investiture issue.

The remaining essays deal with the extension of the Dublin government's authority into this part of Ulster, and the society that emerged from the subsequent plantation. Christopher Maginn traces the transformation of the Irish lordship into a county. Jonathan Cherry shows how the colonial town of Cavan had (unique) indigenous roots, and William Roulston examines the Scottish role in the plantation of the county, concluding that the Scots were more successful as settlers elsewhere in the province partly due to Cavan's distance from the ports of entry. All three of these contributors emphasise the influence of the county's proximity to the Pale. Palesmen, for instance, were the initial Crown officers after Cavan's establishment as a county in 1579.

The religious history of the county is addressed in two essays, one on the Catholic diocese of Kilmore and the second on William Bedell, the Protestant bishop of the same diocese during the 1630s. It is well known that the Catholic Church enjoyed a revival in Ireland between 1620 and 1640, but this process, and the structural changes that accompanied it, have seldom been described in such detail as is provided in this instance by Brian MacCuarta. He shows how the 'slide' among the Irish clergy towards the established Church during the first two decades of the century was halted and reversed until, by the 1630s, the Catholic parish system was well established. Much of the credit for this achievement belongs to Eugene Sweeney, bishop of Kilmore from 1630 to 1669. His early career provides an interesting counterpoint to that of Bedell as re-examined by John McCafferty. They were very different men. Scott describes Sweeney as a 'militant' after 1641. Bedell, by contrast, despite strong Calvinist convictions, is shown to have acquired irenic attitudes during his early adult life whilst living in Venice. Yet, the two men faced similar challenges:

both were perceived as outsiders, both faced conservative clergy at the parish level, and both had to contend with unhelpful administrations of their own faith, whether in Dublin or Rome.

The final essay, by Scott, uses the depositions as they should be used to describe events during the early days of the 1641 rising. But one further word should be said about the book as a whole: it is beautifully produced and contains eight coloured illustrations of maps that are expertly discussed by Annaleigh Margey.

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THE PROCTORS' ACCOUNTS OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST WERBURGH, DUBLIN, 1481–1627. Edited by Adrian Empey. Pp 160. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €55.

Adrian Empey is to be warmly commended for editing and publishing this unique series of proctors', or churchwardens', accounts for an Irish urban parish. It represents another major contribution by him to the study of the Church in late medieval Ireland, and it will undoubtedly stand the test of time. In his introduction, Empey provides a detailed discussion of the development of the medieval parish of St Werburgh, Dublin, and he traces the development of the office of churchwarden in Ireland, so far as the evidence allows, from the first half of the fifteenth century. Churchwardens were primarily responsible for maintaining the fabric of the nave of the parish church or chapel (the part where the laity stood and prayed). They also ensured that the church building was suitably adorned with paintings, statues and other religious paraphernalia, and possessed of the required range of liturgical equipment, including chalices, patens and bells, Mass books, psalters and grails, great numbers of wax candles, bread and wine for Communion services, and vestments for the priest(s). In order to finance that range of responsibilities, they managed a portfolio of properties that were bequeathed to their parish church or chapel by pious benefactors over time. They were elected to those responsibilities by their fellow parishioners, and their very existence reflects the power of the laity to shape the life of their parish church or chapel before the Reformation.

Empey observes that the St Werburgh's accounts 'permit us to catch a fleeting glimpse of the interior life of a late medieval urban parish in Ireland' (p. 23). Yet, in his introduction, Empey is strikingly cautious in observing that, 'On the basis of the St Werburgh's accounts one can only say for certain what occurred on a couple of hectares of land adjoining Dublin Castle in late medieval and early modern times. Neither can one use them to gauge popular reception of the Reformation because one sample makes this kind of historical extrapolation impossible' (p. 22). I am more sanguine about the accounts' wider utility for Irish Church historians because not only was the office of churchwarden well established in late medieval Dublin, even in the pocket-sized parish of St Olave, but there were churchwardens, too, in rural parishes and even in chapelries in County Louth and, by implication, across the Pale generally, not to mention in towns as far apart as Callan, County Kilkenny, and in Galway. Their establishment was one reflection of a very much wider pattern of lay people's increased commitment to, and involvement in, the life of the Church across Ireland on the eve of the Reformation. That pattern was reflected, too, in an upsurge in lay investment in church buildings, in the benefactions recorded in their wills, in the establishment of confraternities, and in the physical manifestations of religious devotions in stone, wood, parchment and other media.

The Reformation sundered the popular attachment to the established Church in Ireland, and left it largely abandoned and ruinous by the start of the seventeenth century. The St Werburgh's accounts are broken between 1547 and 1570. The surviving accounts from Elizabeth's reign give an 'impression of carelessness' (p. 37). In the interval, there were