

widens the scope of the debate, arguing that the social and economic conditions created by this policy rested on Ireland experiencing a ‘continual haemorrhage, even an annual blood sacrifice, of its surplus citizens in order to validate its social structure and to offer (barren) consolation to those held unworthy to wed and thus deemed surplus’ (p. 330). He makes comparisons between the Ulster unionist government’s strategy in the O’Neill years of ‘modernising economically without reforming politically’ (p. 488) with those advocated by Irish Protestants in the late eighteenth century, notably John Foster, and by British unionists who after 1886 sought to kill home rule with kindness.

Bartlett is not afraid to make these deeper-level investigations. His reputation as a foremost historian of Ireland enables him to act as a forerunner of a new kind of Irish history, secure in the knowledge that he cannot be ignored even by those who do not ask such questions or acknowledge their existence. Here is an exciting and intellectually rewarding debate for Irish historians – if they can answer yes to this question: have you looked in Bartlett’s *Ireland*?

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EDWARD II. By Seymour Phillips. Pp xvi, 679, illus. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2010. £25.

Supposed sexual deviancy, military humiliation, catastrophic famine, bloody civil war, marital breakdown, invasion, deposition, obscene murder, rumoured survival: Edward II’s career and the troubled course of English history in the early fourteenth century have generated interest among historians and fiction writers over the centuries for reasons that need little elaboration. It was not until the publication in 2003 of Roy Martin Haines’s fine *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon, his life, his reign, and its aftermath* (Montreal), however, that a reliable, full-length biography of this king became available, and Seymour Phillips’s book now raises the level of scholarship for the subject to new heights. Phillips’s work has not been confined to this topic – his *Medieval expansion of Europe* (Oxford, 1988) displayed the full range of his interests and insights – but since the publication of his ground-breaking *Amyer de Valence, earl of Pembroke, 1307–24: baronial politics in the reign of Edward II* (Oxford, 1972), most of his writings have been concerned with Edward II and his reign.

Phillips observes that ‘The “Middle Party” has largely disappeared from historical treatments of the early fourteenth century’ (p. 304), yet is too modest to note that its virtual disappearance, along with the Whiggish constitutionalism that spawned it, is to a large extent the result of his labours over thirty years. Welcome, from an Irish perspective, has been his according of due prominence to the role of Ireland in the politics of the king of England’s domain in the early fourteenth century. In *Edward II*, Phillips deals comprehensively with the many moments – usually moments of crisis – at which Ireland impinged upon the reign: it was to there that Edward sent his favourite, Piers Gaveston, as lieutenant in 1308, travelling to Bristol to see him off on what was supposed by his enemies to be a lifetime’s exile; in 1321 the king considered sending his then current favourites, the Despencers, to Ireland for safety; and it was almost certainly to the lordship that Edward was fleeing before being captured in 1326 – indeed, one of the fantastic stories that circulated following his murder in 1327 had it that Edward did reach Ireland, spending nine months there, after escaping his captors in 1327, before travelling as a hermit to the Continent. The Scottish invasion of Ireland between 1315 and 1318, Phillips insists, is one of the most important, and until recently one of the most neglected aspects, of the reign. The failure of the invasion, he argues, can be attributed to a significant extent to the skilful handling of the crisis by Edward’s government both in Ireland and in England. The Battle of Ardscoil in January 1316, in which little happened and few casualties were suffered by

either side, may, Phillips suggests, have been as important an event as Bannockburn in determining the future political alignments of Britain and Ireland; one awaits with interest the response of English, and particularly Scottish, historians to this proposition.

This is a book that offers persuasive answers to many of ‘the riddles in which the reign of Edward II abounds’ (p. 491), and constitutes ‘an attempt to rehabilitate him to some degree’ (p. 4). This is no easy task, but future accounts of the reign will, at least, need to accommodate the persuasive evidence presented by Phillips that Edward possessed political skills of a very high order – skills that were most clearly displayed in 1316–17 when he undermined the authority of his cousin and foe, Thomas, earl of Lancaster. Edward became king at the age of twenty-three, was well educated, and contributed significantly to the development of the English universities. In his reign, also, a university was established at Dublin in 1312, and functioned in some flickering form from 1320. He was anything but a reluctant warrior, participating in five Scottish campaigns before the debacle at Bannockburn in 1314. Phillips highlights the extent to which the reign was marked by bad luck. At a mass knighting conducted by Prince Edward in May 1306 at Westminster, two knights were crushed to death, while another was killed at the same venue when a wall collapsed during his coronation. It was not Edward’s fault that his father left him with no money and a war with Scotland that was going badly, or that between 1315 and 1321 western Europe experienced the worst famine and cattle epidemic of the Middle Ages. Phillips’s discussion of the circumstances surrounding the kidnapping of the earl of Pembroke in France in 1317 offers a pithy assessment of the larger topic: ‘The episode was somehow typical of the reign of Edward II, involving as it did both financial confusion and dysfunctional personal relations’ (p. 289).

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THE IRISH FRANCISCANS, 1534–1990. Edited by Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon and John McCafferty. Pp xix, 413, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €60 hardback; €29.95 paperback.

This substantial volume of eighteen essays on the Irish Franciscans was inspired by two anniversaries: the four hundredth of the foundation of St Anthony’s College, Louvain/Leuven in 2007, and the eight hundredth of Francis of Assisi’s application for papal approval for what became the Franciscan orders. The work is presented as the fruit of collaboration between the Franciscan province of Ireland and the Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute at U.C.D., though the editors gathered together an impressive team of contributors from across Ireland and one from the Catholic University at Leuven in Belgium.

The book is divided into two parts. The first comprises eight essays that survey the history of the Franciscans in Ireland from 1534 to 1990. The second examines the manifold legacies of the Franciscans. The editors make it clear that the book is ‘far from being definitive’ and it aims to encourage further research (p. xvii). Nonetheless, the reader is presented with a panorama of the Franciscans’ story that is complex, sophisticated and compelling. The historical surveys by Colm Lennon, Raymond Gillespie, Joseph MacMahon O.F.M., Patrick Conlon O.F.M. and Mary Daly focus on the Franciscans over successive chronological periods. Though my own interests inclined my attention towards the earlier centuries, it was the essays on the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries that I found most interesting because they venture into virtually virgin territory in terms of historiography, and present unexpected insights. Joseph MacMahon shows how the Franciscans were most resilient during the worst of the penal days, but began ‘tumbling into annihilation’ from the mid-eighteenth century. He acknowledges the detrimental impact of such external factors as the penal laws, the papal prohibition on receiving novices, and the assault on their colleges in Continental Europe, but he points to an internal crisis of identity and mission as the ‘main