

instance, tells the story of museum developments in Belfast, Cork and the universities (in Belfast, Cork, Galway and Dublin). It addresses the contribution of antiquarianism to the development of museums, the early and later history of the National Museum of Ireland, and the creation of the National Gallery of Ireland. We also get an insight into the origins of the private collections in Ireland that later went into public institutions. This chronological and institutional approach, underpinned by reference to published histories and archive research, is also adopted in the other sections. With this in mind, the book title is, perhaps, a little misleading. I don't think a single volume (even one that attempts to focus on culture, identity and education) can encompass the story of Irish museums from 1790 to 2000. Reference to late-twentieth century developments is lacking. Despite this, what is provided is well told.

A further challenge, which has not been met in this volume, is in-depth application of the rich academic literature on the concepts of culture, identity and learning to this history. Although some key texts are referred to, the wider museum and heritage studies literature is not. For instance, ideas articulated by international scholars in museum studies (such as Sharon Macdonald's *A companion to museum studies* (2006)) have not been critically applied. Nor has the literature on culture or identity, which has been explored by others at length and applied to other aspects of Irish culture in some depth. In Irish museum studies we need to bring together these different areas of interest to allow us to critically review the significance of the museums around us. Those in the field of Irish heritage studies have applied critical scholarship to the expressions of heritage, with the example of museums often a substantial part (for example, Mark McCarthy's edited volume *Ireland's heritage: critical perspectives on memory and identity* (2005)). Such recent work, that places the Irish museum experience in its social and political context, can only ever be a contribution to this wide-ranging and complex story. The wealth of the field of Irish museum studies lies in the potential for researchers, working in museums and universities across Ireland and elsewhere, to bring momentum to this area of academic scholarship. Bourke's book, both in what it provides and what it lacks, demonstrates this potential.

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THE WEST OF IRELAND: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. Edited by Carla King and Conor McNamara. Pp 240. Dublin: History Press Ireland. 2011. €25 paperback.

In the nineteenth century the west of Ireland was seen both as an archaic repository of traditional Irishness – as imagined variously by Tory nostalgics, cultural nationalists, and would-be improvers – and as a cockpit of agrarian and nationalist agitation. This dual image derived from the slow collapse of landed power as it proved incapable of handling the political and social challenges of the nineteenth century, and the attempts of the British state, political nationalism, the Catholic clergy, and organised interest groups to fill the resulting vacuum. This unusually coherent collection of local studies, bound together by an able introduction by the editors, discusses various aspects of the region's nineteenth-century crises, with particular reference to land agitation and to the problems of social provision and economic development.

The Great Famine has tended to retrospectively overshadow the lesser crises which preceded it, such as the 1822 famine; Conor McNamara's discussion of its impact in nine western counties shows how it exposed the hollowness of landlords' paternalist pretensions and set the scene for the erosion of their powers by agitations from below and an expanding administrative state of which the Poor Law was an early

manifestation. Two other papers focus on administration. Donnacha Seán Lucey's study of medical relief and workhouse infirmaries analyses how hospital provision in the Westport Poor Law Union was shaped by Victorian ideologies of respectability and by the unwillingness of both elected guardians (representing ratepayers) and the central state to undertake the expenditure necessary to modernise the medical infrastructure and provide trained nurses. Carla King's study of 'relief and development strategies in the congested districts', which closes the volume, is a real tour de force; drawing on a wide variety of sources to compensate for the closure of the Congested Districts Board records, she outlines the tensions between immediate relief needs and the requirements of longer-term development, and strikes a nice balance between political opportunism and genuine concern as motivating forces for late-Union state administrators and nationalist activists.

The remaining papers, whose primary concern is different forms of agitation, maintain an equally high standard. Padraig Lane provides an overview of the situation of agricultural labourers in the west and how their specific problems were occluded by a land movement identifying the nation with the smallholder. Andrew Shields discusses the rise and fall of the 1850s Tenant League in the west; while the League could draw on organised tenant farmers in Leinster and Ulster, in Connacht it was forced to rely on a few sympathetic landlords, and more particularly on the Catholic clergy. Its identification with Archbishop MacHale of Tuam, though beneficial in the short term, drew it into more specifically Catholic causes and enmeshed it in the developing rivalry between MacHale and Archbishop Cullen.

Gerard Moran contributes a useful micro-study of the Ballinasloe Tenants' Defence Association (B.T.D.A.), active in east Galway and south Roscommon in the mid-1870s, as a precursor to the Land League; its members included the neo-Fenians (and future Land League officials), Matt Harris and M. M. O'Sullivan, and their radicalism came into conflict both with timider members of the B.T.D.A. and with tenant groups elsewhere in Ireland, more influenced by large farmers and graziers. Miriam Moffitt provides an admirably nuanced account of the attitude of Protestant tenant farmers in north Connacht to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century land agitation, dominated as it was by Catholics and nationalists. While religious and cultural-political ties linked them to the landlords, the majority generally acquiesced in agitation, mainly from pragmatic motives, and even Orange activism did not equate with intransigence; although an embattled minority stood out and were victimised, the rhetoric of Protestant and unionist leaders about Catholic majority tyranny and persecuted Protestants disguised a much more complex situation on the ground.

John Cunningham offers a detailed case study of how herds in parts of Connacht managed to navigate a land agitation whose advocacy of tillage and hostility to graziers might have been expected to make them prime targets; by studying the activity of herds' organisations in more depth than has previously been attempted, he outlines how they took advantage of their scarce skills and mobility to resist landlords' attempts to reduce them to waged employees; in most cases they kept close enough to the tenant protest to avoid being targeted, while retaining their separate identity until reinventing themselves as tenants in the early twentieth century to take advantage of land purchase. The contrast with the hapless labourers described by Lane is revealing.

This volume adds considerably to our understanding of nineteenth-century rural society in the west, and the editors and contributors deserve commendation for the high standard of research and analysis on display.

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