

language on the part of the Catholic Church. One contributing reason for this, not discussed here, is the fractious legacy of Protestant Bible societies in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century, leading in many cases to a suspicion of all printed material in Irish.

This is an important and highly commendable volume of essays which, through a deft combination of survey and case-study, allows for a much welcome reappraisal of the historical relationship between Irish and English.

FIONNTÁN DE BRÚN

Scoil Theanga agus Litríocht na Gaeilge, Ollscoil Uladh

BELFAST 400: PLACE, PEOPLE AND HISTORY. Edited by S. J. Connolly. Pp 392. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2013. £14.95 paperback. £35 hardback.

'Belfast, as a town, has no ancient history.' So began George Benn's *History of the town of Belfast* (1877). Like Benn, most modern scholars dated the place to 1613 when a royal charter was granted to the new city of Belfast. There was, of course, political resonance to denying the medieval precursor of the plantation settlement. As Philip Macdonald tells us in chapter 3, this mentality fitted with the 'Elizabethan colonial myth, which portrayed Ulster as a depopulated wilderness ripe for plantation'. We can certainly date British Belfast to this moment, for this was the root of the city which by the later nineteenth century was so strikingly modern and British that the Victorians – who needed no excuse to declare themselves at the apogee of civilisation – delighted in their imperial citadel.

The rise of a place so singularly different from Cork, or Dublin, and so much greater in its industrial prowess than anywhere else on the island, sets Belfast into a particular United Kingdom framework. This, in turn, underpins its modern dating. Focusing on 1613 makes its subsequent history of conflict inevitable because it was a planted Protestant settlement. In the modern period, inhabitants resisted the socio-economic and cultural incursions of incoming Catholics, as the late Tony Hepburn's path-breaking works of urban demography showed.

Sean Connolly and his team recognise all the modern, post-1600 associations of the immigrant, implanted, sectarian city and write about them lucidly. However, this is not the full story. The editor has put together a distinguished team whose aim is to present a much more nuanced picture. The first three chapters by Connolly himself and Gillian MacIntosh, Ruairí Ó Baoill and Philip Macdonald, in particular, combine to expose a vastly larger vista than can be captured by a post-charter history. The first chapter is a clever attempt at that – a wide-ranging framing movement of history, culture and historical overview: a neat introduction to what comes next. In chapter 2, Ó Baoill shows how, for more 9,000 years, humans have inhabited the area around Belfast. Archaeological digs continue, each piecing together new fragments of the story. Neolithic gems like the Malone hoard of porcellanite axes show what these ancient people were capable of. The same can be said of the stunning gold jewellery of the Bronze Age period. It is here that the financial support of the universities, council and local businesses and individuals come to the fore in allowing beautiful colour reproductions in such a well-priced and lavish book. If the richness of life and art in the early settlements around the lough are established, so too is the pre-1613 presence of a recognisable urban settlement. This dates to the Norman period. Following on, Macdonald's chapter is a fascinating examination of the pre-1600 period, guiding us from seventh-century references to the *Fearsat* – ford – in the Lagan (which subsequently formed part of the name *Bel-fierste*) to 'the earliest historical references to the place that would subsequently become Belfast' in the fifteenth-century *Annales of Ulster*. Politically, the decline of the earlship of Ulster and the rise of the Clondeboyes form key components of this chapter.

From the point of the charter, Raymond Gillespie skillfully analyses the rise of Chichester's Belfast. The chapter meticulously charts the planning and building of the

physical settlement, the development of its waterfront and of the trade carried out there. The shifting, transient nature of the early seventeenth-century population is nicely drawn: people feared disease and danger amidst floating populations and the authorities sought to control such movements. Yet it was a town of planters – mostly from Scotland – who brought their families and trades with them. Ties with Scotland remained strong and enduring, again underpinning one community's modern self-image. Gillespie's chapter also charts the emergence of corporation governance, religion, social life, and is thoroughly wide-ranging in all dimensions of its history. Connolly himself picks up the story in the mid-eighteenth century in a fascinating chapter which describes the trajectory of what a visiting judge in 1759 called 'the London of the north of Ireland' on account of its merchant activity. The three decades after 1760 were, in Belfast (as in both Manchester and Liverpool), an age of rapid growth. Culture, politics, and the socio-economic life of the fast-growing Georgian city are described with verve. Civic buildings, institutions such as the *Belfast News-letter* and the Lyceum emerged then, and its people conversed and socialised. A plethora of associations, organisations and sites of discourse and conviviality sprung up and bore witness to the age of the talkative citizen.

Stephen A. Royle tackles the great Victorian, industrial city – the place probably closest to the hearts of Belfast folk today. This was the city which employed more shipyard workers than any other town or city; for a time produced more truly huge ships than any of other stretch of water in the world; and which built upon the pillars of textiles, ships and printing a plethora of other ancillary trades, all of which helped make Belfast – like Glasgow or Liverpool – an epic, imperial centre. However, under the crust of all this subsequent wealth and beyond a middle class doing very well, there was, as Royle says, 'real poverty' at the bottom. At the top, too, the local aristocracy shared that general Anglo-Irish proclivity for eye-watering debt. Connolly and McIntosh then take on the urban morphology of Victorian Belfast, exploring the character and culture of its people. Here, labour, sectarianism and gender are given their due place. This chapter will chime considerably with people seeking the inherent nature of the city subsequently and its modern rendering of structural sectarian division.

Sean O'Connell's exploration of the 'conservative modernity' of the period between the outbreak of two wars – 1914–18 and 'The Troubles' – continues the social themes introduced by the nineteenth-century chapters. O'Connell paints a vivid picture of war, class, suburbia and others aspects of people's lives. Readers will find the short but terribly intense period of the 'Belfast blitz' described in careful detail within a wider analysis of living conditions, the workforce and housing problems. Some of the best passages draw upon O'Connell's own acknowledged specialism on leisure and consumption. The churches held back the swinging sixties, but cannabis use was rife; living standards increased after 1945, though economic decline was a theme. The baton is then passed to Dominic Bryan for a sharp account of the city through 'the Troubles' and beyond. Bryan provides stark details on the number of deaths and injuries caused by paramilitaries in the small war zone at the interface of east and west Belfast. The strategies and activities of the security forces are also mapped with precision. Bryan's specialism on the geography and anthropology of the conflict comes to the fore in the middle sections of his chapter. But he ends his study on a more optimistic note by looking at the post-Troubles period and the rise of 'Titanic town' – a new Belfast for a (largely) peaceable period.

All told this is an excellent, readable and informative work of sustained scholarship. With lavish illustrations, carefully written prose, and with the depth of research worn lightly in each chapter, *Belfast 400* is a fitting marker of the city's anniversary, as well as a clear reminder that humanity lived there before the plantation. It is, moreover, a wholly suitable product, rendered at a very reasonable price, for both public and academic consumption. The editor and his contributors, as well as those who subsidised it, deserve our appreciation.

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