Irish Historical Studies (2017), 41 (159), 135–161.

Reviews and short notices

HUGH DE LACY, FIRST EARL OF ULSTER: RISING AND FALLING IN ANGEVIN IRELAND. By Daniel Brown. Pp 309. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2016. £75.

This book represents a welcome addition to a number of studies published within the past few years concerned with important figures in the conquest of Ireland in the two generations after 1169. As recently as 2014 the careers of the father and brother of the individual considered in the work under review, Hugh de Lacy (d. 1186) and Walter de Lacy (d. 1241), were scrutinized in Colin Veach's excellent *Lordship in four realms: the Lacy family, 1166–1241* (Manchester, 2015), while the conqueror of Ulster, John de Courcy, and the leaders of the Geraldines, who spearheaded some of the earliest colonial successes in Leinster and Munster, have also been the subjects of worthwhile studies (Steve Flanders, *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries* (Dublin, 2008); Peter Crooks and Seán Duffy (eds), *The Geraldines and Ireland: the making of a myth* (Dublin, 2016)). A noticeable and positive feature of such works is their recognition of the fact that these lords had commitments and ambitions that were not confined to Ireland, and that involvement in the conquest of Ireland might increase rather than reduce these geographically diverse concerns. Daniel Brown's study of Hugh de Lacy, earl of Ulster, increases further our awareness of this key theme, and our understanding of its operation and implications.

Hugh de Lacy was the first of the conquerors to be awarded an Irish earldom, being belted by King John as earl of Ulster in 1205. As Brown explains, this was an unlikely elevation which resulted more from the immediate concerns of the donor than from the background or achievements of the recipient. Hugh was a younger son of Hugh de Lacy, lord of Weobley, in Herefordshire, who was granted the Irish kingdom of Meath by King Henry II in 1172. Brown does not speculate on when the younger Hugh was born, but since his brother, Walter, who appears not to have been much older than him, came of age in 1189, it is likely that Hugh was born in the late 1160s, probably in Herefordshire. This is of some interest, since Brown is reluctant to describe Hugh as 'English'. While it is true that he never held land in England, the fact that he referred in one of his charters to the conquest as 'the coming of the English to Ireland' (p. 5), suggests that such hesitancy is excessive. (On the other hand, it at least avoids the clumsiness apparent in the reference to 'mainland Britain' on the previous page.) Given the prominence of his family in England since the Norman Conquest, and in Ireland from 1171, the modesty of Hugh's 'modest beginnings' (p. 1) have been exaggerated by the author. Nevertheless, his ascent to the ranks of the titled nobility in 1205 was, as Brown convincingly argues, as unexpected as it was unprecedented. It was John's anger with William Marshal's disloyalty in the aftermath of the loss of Normandy to the French in the previous year, and the wish to nurture support in Ireland to counter the influence there of the Marshal lord of Leinster, that prompted John to make Hugh de Lacy an earl. The decision had much less to do with royal suspicion of the actions of the man de Lacy usurped in Ulster, John de Courcy, or any attempt to bring Ulster more firmly under the crown's control. The terms on which de Lacy was granted Ulster were as generous as those that de Courcy had enjoyed, and even the royal expedition to Ulster that drove de Lacy out in 1210 was not motivated by a wish to absorb the earldom permanently into royal governmental structures in Ireland.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2017.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Developments beyond Ireland's shores were to continue to have a decisive influence on Hugh's career. One of the strongest features of Brown's account is its command of a wide range of sources and the manner in which he explains the influence of events in places as distant as Norway and Aquitaine on the life of his subject. Drawing upon and extending the pioneering work of Seán Duffy, Andrew McDonald, Richard Oram and others, Brown gives us a rich and fascinating portrayal of a north Irish Sea political world in one of its most febrile periods. In particular, the links with Chester and its earl in the early thirteenth century stand out as worthy of future analysis in their own right. Ulster remained the centre of Hugh's ambitions, even during the fifteen-or-so years of exile from Ireland he experienced after 1210. Much of this time he spent in southern France, fighting heresy under the command of Simon de Montfort, and acquiring, for a time at least, French estates. Upon his reinstatement in Ulster in 1227, as Brown explains, Hugh's French interlude manifested itself in his choice of design for the new castles he built there.

As a student of Marie Therese Flanagan, one would expect that Daniel Brown would display sensitivity and sure-footedness in his handling of charter material, and this is indeed another positive aspect of this impressive book. A particularly strong section of the third chapter, on 'Ascendancy', argues that Hugh broadcast his claims to legitimacy as earl or Ulster in the years immediately after 1205 by the manner in which he constructed the text of the charters he issued. Historians who use charter evidence in their analyses of Irish history after 1170 have a good template to follow here, as Brown interrogates the material thoroughly, without pushing his conclusions too far. The book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Irish history in the early thirteenth century, and also contains insights that will be of value to historians of the wider Angevin world.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2017.8

Brendan Smith
Department of Historical Studies, University of Bristol
Brendan.Smith@bristol.ac.uk

The Templars, the witch, and the wild Irish. By Maeve B. Callan. Pp xxi, 280, maps, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2015. € 35.95 hardback.

At first sight, this work's rather sensational title might put off the academic reader. The three topics grouped together have too often received non-academic treatment, less-than-serious method and debatable conclusions. However, in this case, the author has a solid reputation and her introductory arguments quickly dispel such negative suspicions. Callan displays from the onset a remarkable blend of competent research, firm grasp and knowledge of the sources, as well as an open, all-round approach to the themes. She examines three events in fourteenth-century Ireland: the local offshoot of the international legal action that brought the Templar order to an end (1308–1310); the complex witchcraft trial orchestrated by the bishop of Ossory, Richard Ledrede, against a Kilkenny noblewoman, Alice Kyteler (1324), and the separate executions of Irishmen on charges of heresy: Adducc Dubh O'Toole (1328) and two members of the MacConmara clan (1353).

The common denominator is the topic of 'heresy', as suggested by the work's subtitle ('Vengeance and heresy in medieval Ireland'). The grouping together of these events is in itself a fresh approach: since Herbert Wood (1907), few scholars have dealt with the trial of the Templars in Ireland until recent comprehensive studies by Helen Nicholson (2007, 2009, 2010). The Kilkenny case did attract considerable attention since the publication of the trial's proceedings by Wright (1843). As for the O'Toole case, the author provides an interesting historiographical summary (p. 203 and n. 75), highlighting how several scholars either accepted the charges against the victim at face value, or partially challenged them, thanks to a proper work of contextualisation.