

## Reviews and short notices

DUBLIN: THE MAKING OF A CAPITAL CITY. By David Dickson. Pp 718. London: Profile. 2014. £30.

Any intending historian of Dublin faces huge challenges. The story of the city is so intertwined with that of Ireland itself that separating them too ruthlessly would weaken the account. The documentation is vast, although uneven in its chronological coverage. Similarly, analyses of the material vary in quantity and thoroughness. Evidence ranges from the geography and geology, through the excavated and scholarly reconstructions, to what either still stands or survives in libraries. Only the bold, or maybe the foolhardy, would take on such a formidable task. David Dickson has done so, and completed it triumphantly.

By imagining what notional Roman invaders would have found, Dickson at the outset establishes the physical setting. Despite the hazards of the harbour, with its shallows and sand bars, the site attracted settlers from within the island and from overseas, notably Norse, then Anglo- and Cambro-Normans. Convenient of access, the settlement grew rapidly and was soon integrated into international trade and warfare. It was unsurprising, therefore, that Dublin was chosen as the headquarters of the English lordship and, later, kingdom in Ireland. Dickson stresses the benefits that this status conferred, as well as tensions which arose between the administration and the civic authorities, local grandees and the generality of inhabitants. Utilizing the rich archaeological finds, he is a confident guide through the speculation and hypotheses about the vitality and hardships of the emerging city.

Dickson weaves together the numerous threads that went into the expanding fabric of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He shows how the local, national and transnational interacted. First Dutch, then Huguenot and eventually Jewish immigrants brought specific skills, as well as their wider commercial contacts. Dublin traders, thanks to their long-standing and easy links with Chester and London, dominated the export of linen. As a result, in both eighteenth-century Ulster and the capital, reciprocal influences were strong, as buildings and street-names proclaimed. Justice is done to the architectural and cultural innovations of the Georgian period, with an economy of musical and theatrical performances, the development of charitable and medical institutions often connected with recreational novelties, in which Bartholomew Mosse and his Rotunda and Lying-In Hospital were conspicuous. Parliamentary winters and the social scene, magnets for provincials and milch-cows for entrepreneurial Dubliners, are delineated. Dickson understands the economic dynamics, sketching the important developments in banking and the gradual emergence of specialist rather than general merchants. He handles confidently the contested matters of demography and occupational statistics. He is equally at home with the political scene, stressing the importance of Dean Swift and the furore over Wood's Halfpence and then Charles Lucas in enlarging participation in public politics. He sees the printing presses as contributing greatly to this process, when regular and partisan newspapers were established, and satirical and scurrilous pamphleteering flourished. He detects too the reviving visibility of the Catholics, combining a necessary circumspection with vibrancy arising from the sheer numbers of their adherents.

These themes in the volatility of the late eighteenth century – and others – also articulate the nineteenth-century capital. Attention is directed onto a proliferation of

informal and sometimes clandestine clubs; more newspapers and topical tracts, and more able to read them; young men whose habits of criticism and debate had been incubated in Trinity College or the King's Inns; a concentration of professionals, traders and skilled artisans; the apparent inflexibility and intermittent incompetence of the local regime. Despite a dire prognosis that the extinction of the Dublin Parliament in 1800 and the wholesale application of British laws to Ireland would empty and impoverish the capital, some at least of its vitality survived. If peers and the country gentry departed, lawyers and doctors took their places. Hotels and clubs replaced aristocratic town-houses. Catholics, shaking off legal shackles, flexed their muscles, as was demonstrated by the successes of O'Connell (eventually lord mayor), by the building of a pro-cathedral, the public pomp of Archbishop Troy's funeral in 1823, and election results. Communication between the capital and England improved, thanks to steam-power and better roads and bridges, and the shift of the port of embarkation from Howth to Dunleary, renamed Kingstown.

Judiciously Dickson weighs up the gains and losses from Union. While not glossing over severe problems and failures, he portrays a city that coped constructively with poverty, disease and the influx of provincials seeking sustenance. Canals, railways, tram lines, harbours (improved or silted), exhibitions (successful and disappointing), water supplies, even sewerage, and department stores are all dealt with. He moves easily from zoo to commemorative statuary and cemeteries, via public baths and libraries, taking in Croke Park, the G.A.A., the Abbey Theatre, Jammets' restaurant and Bewley's cafés. Those responsible for suburban development, especially along the coast south of the city, are characterized, as are those who struggled with the problems of public health and housing. Traversing the twentieth century, he balances decades of neglect and stagnation against the bursts of hectic destruction and often botched regeneration. National figures deeply rooted in Dublin, such as Seán Lemass and Charles Haughey, are evaluated. So, too, are activists like Tony Gregory and Larry Dillon, and entertainers including Jimmy O'Dea, Maureen Potter, the Chieftains and U2.

Events occurred in Dublin because it had symbolic as well as strategic importance. Plots to seize the Castle or to take over the city – as in 1641, 1663, 1798, 1803 and 1916 – failed. Dickson offers succinct explanations for each of these complex episodes. Yet, during other troubled times, Dublin avoided fierce fighting, sacking or sustained bombardment. Also, although violence and crime were endemic, riots, while regular throughout much of the eighteenth century, did not develop into the dangerous risings seen in other European cities of comparable size. Only the insurgency early in the 1920s took a heavy toll of lives and buildings in the capital. Without obtruding comparisons from elsewhere, he is constantly alert to how Dublin developments resembled or differed from those in Belfast, Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. On occasion, too, revealing references are made to continental European and American cities.

Writing as an insider, Dickson is sensitive to the nuances of atmosphere and look between neighbourhoods and the north and south sides of the Liffey. Such impressions are grounded in statistics of house size and value, densities of population and levels of mortality and income. He addresses the slippery issue of identity and how a sense of being a Dubliner could be created and sustained. Dublin's grip on power, trade and culture was often resented. Numerous provincials and some immigrants prospered there; others came reluctantly for training, specialized services and business or simply to survive. Sometimes a stay there was no more than a stage in a sequence which might return temporary sojourners to the countryside or take them further afield to Britain, its empire or the Americas. Unwilling visitors hankered after the places that they had left, imagining them as simpler, purer and cheaper. Dickson does not ignore the subjective impressions of Dublin life, but occasionally more from the subjective testimonies of reluctant and transitory residents might conjure up lives that were variously constricted and humdrum or exhilaratingly liberated.

Professor Dickson, author of a highly sophisticated regional study of Ireland (south Munster) and what remains perhaps the most satisfying guide to eighteenth-century

Ireland, now adds this dazzling account of Dublin across more than a millennium. It has the merits of his earlier books: a clear and direct style; a temperate tone when faced with historians' disagreements and the villains who peopled and profited from Dublin; assurance in evaluating evidence and rival interpretations; the smooth integration of the political with economic and ecological factors; alertness to place; and deftness in seizing on vivid details. All in all, it is a prodigious achievement.

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THE ENGLISH ISLES: CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1100–1500. Edited by Seán Duffy and Susan Foran. Pp 184. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2013. €55.

This book has been a long time coming. It comprises some of the papers delivered at a conference entitled 'The First English Empire: cultural transmission and political conflict in the British Isles, c.1100–c.1500', held at Trinity College Dublin, 14–16 September 2007. (One of the contributors to the conference and the volume, Matthew Hammond, dates the conference to 14 November 2007 (p. 68, n.1), but this is a slip of the pen.) While the conference poster described the gathering as 'interdisciplinary', and the introduction to the volume also proclaims its 'interdisciplinary' nature (p. 9), all of the essays are reassuringly grounded in the discipline of history.

The title of the conference makes more clear than does that of the volume that the inspiration for this enterprise is the late Rees Davies's 1998 Ford lectures, published as *The first English empire: power and identities in the British Isles 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000). (One wonders at what stage, and at whose suggestion, the 'British Isles' of the 2007 conference became the 'Britain and Ireland' of the 2013 volume of conference proceedings.) Davies's book garnered positive reviews, among the most enthusiastic of which was that published by one of this volume's editors, Seán Duffy, in *English Historical Review*, 118 (2003). Duffy's review was not uncritical, and his reservations about Davies's treatment of Scotland expressed therein are amplified in the contributions to this volume by Matthew Hammond and Dauvit Broun. The thrust of their careful and persuasive pieces is that while Davies was correct to emphasise – as he did at every turn – that 'Scotland, of course, was different', he erred in underestimating the extent of this difference, and in mistaking its origins and nature. It seems we may have to incorporate a new, inelegant, word into our historiographical lexicon to comprehend the phenomenon at issue – 'Scoticization' – but that is a price worth paying for enlightenment in this regard.

The contributions of Níav Gallagher on the growth of national sentiment among members of the mendicant orders, Katharine Simms on the use of classical and Arthurian tales in bardic poetry, and Freya Verstraten Veach on the adoption by Gaelic nobles of English customs, add nuance to our understanding of the process of cultural interaction in medieval Britain and Ireland. In focusing on sixteenth-century re-imaginings of the nature of power in the late medieval lordship of the Isles, Steve Boardman approaches Davies's work from an oblique angle, but with exciting and original results. The same may be said of Patrick Wadden's fascinating account of what the Irish thought about the Normans after the conquest of England in 1066. Davies did not write at length about the Church, though he did integrate developments in the ecclesiastical sphere into his broader argument concerning the spread of English cultural and political power throughout the British Isles. John Reuben Davies is probably correct to argue that the fashion for dedicating churches in Wales to 'international' saints in the twelfth century need not be viewed as part of a more thoroughgoing attack on what was perceived to be an inferior Welsh religious tradition, as Rees Davies suggested. To go further and assert, as he does, that an