

inspirational Anthony Cains and, incidentally, to the persistence of the then keeper of manuscripts, William O'Sullivan, in securing Cains's appointment. In this generation, the absence of vain-glory, the clear-sightedness of the objectives and the fervour and effectiveness with which individuals fought for values which benefited so many readers and researchers suggest a golden age. In practice, Pollard, O'Sullivan and (no doubt) their successors were infuriated and scarred by ignorance and obstruction among superiors in the college hierarchy. Budgets were tight so that every improvement and many accessions had to be fought for. There are hints that at Trinity, no less than in other copyright and scholarly libraries, the tension between access and satisfying the everyday requirements of students and staff, together with the growing throngs of visitors, and the maintenance of curatorial excellence has become an acute one. For any library that unites the functions of serving a large undergraduate community and exigent scholars from across the globe, the juggling with priorities is a Sisyphean task. The tart warnings in the concluding chapter from Charles Benson, lately retired as keeper of early printed books, have applications far beyond Trinity. Present-day library committees and custodians, expert in information technology rather than palaeography, diplomatic or bibliography, may prefer suites of rooms furnished with comfy sofas and buzzing with chatter rather than hushed reading-rooms. Neither eye-catching coups nor a profusion of data-bases and water-dispensers should displace carefully-planned purchasing and cataloguing and elucidating what the generous bequeath. In the end, as this constantly entertaining and instructive collection demonstrates, a library's holdings – printed, manuscript and miscellaneous – will outlive evanescent technologies.

T. C. BARNARD  
*Hertford College, Oxford*

BLASPHEMERS & BLACKGUARDS: THE IRISH HELLFIRE CLUBS. By David Ryan. Pp 320. Dublin: Merrion. 2012. €45.

Hellfire clubs have long held a public fascination and whether the activities of these clubs are real or imagined they are linked with geographical locations all over Ireland. While the English Hellfire clubs have undergone investigation in several studies, David Ryan's is the first in-depth look at the Irish clubs. *Blasphemers & blackguards: the Irish hellfire clubs* is an investigation of the Dublin and regional hellfire clubs but also undertakes an analysis of later rakish clubs active in Dublin such as the Cherokee and Pinkindies.

Ryan puts forward three reasons for the emergence of these Hellfire clubs in the 1730s; the country had a strong drinking culture, Protestants were insecure despite the military success of the previous century and Ireland was a violent society. 'Faced with these realities, sections of the elite manifested "a certain savagery of mind", engaging in excessive and abandoned behaviour, particularly when it came to socializing.' He adds that 'Anglo-Irish gentry proved to be more willing to engage in violent altercations and encounters than their English counterparts.' Unfortunately, the evidence he provides for this is contemporary comments and he does not embark upon a comparison of English society and manners. While the Anglo-Irish elite were undoubtedly still dealing with the after-effects of the violence of the seventeenth century the extent to which this made Ireland, and the Anglo-Irish community in particular, more violent than other societies is open for debate.

The weakness in this book is that in drawing his conclusions, Ryan treats the Anglo-Irish community in too simplistic a way. He concludes that 'members of the Protestant elite of eighteenth-century Ireland were rooted in a culture of drunkenness, dissipation and violence. Possessing large disposable incomes and considerable leisure time, these gentlemen and noblemen chose to divert themselves through hedonistic indulgence and

aggressive behaviour' (p. 166). This model can not be applied to the vast majority of the Anglo-Irish elite. The numerous charities, improving societies and other institutions founded in the eighteenth century by members of the Protestant Ascendancy can be used to argue the opposite. Although we can't be sure of the exact numbers of men involved in the original Dublin Hellfire club, we know their numbers were exceptionally small and if drunkenness and violence was as widespread as Ryan claims there would be no need to join a small, elite and somewhat secretive club to engage in these activities. His treatment of the Pinkindies club, a student club active in the later eighteenth century, reinforces this. He concludes that 'for many collegians ... violent misconduct was part and parcel of everyday life, and gangs of students frequently involved themselves in factional warfare, the vandalism of theatres and shops, and attacks on individuals'. While there are well known instances of Trinity students engaging in gang-like and violent behaviour throughout the eighteenth century it can not be claimed that this was the norm for students.

While Ryan comments on the difficulty in securing arrests, prosecutions and imprisonment of these members a possible reason for the upper class engaging in this behaviour may simply be that many believed they were above the law. The case of Lord Santry, who evaded prosecution for numerous violent crimes, is a case in point. Although he was eventually tried in the House of Lords for manslaughter and found guilty, he was given a royal pardon. An investigation of prosecution rates, or trials of members of the upper class for violent crimes who were not engaged in these clubs, would have drawn this out and would have allowed Ryan to make greater conclusions on the nature of the Anglo-Irish community and the extent to which the elite believed they were above the law.

One of the interesting aspects of the book is Ryan's examination of the myth and folklore surrounding the clubs. He points out that despite a strong folklore link of the Hellfire club with the Montpelier hunting lodge in the Dublin mountains, contemporary accounts of the club locate the Hellfire club firmly within the city centre. Ryan charts what is known about the construction of Montpelier hunting lodge, the decline of the building, which was in ruins by the 1760s, how the lodge became connected with the Hellfire club and its entry into the folklore tradition of the area. His investigation of the material objects which the club left behind, from corkscrews to clocks, paintings to punchbowls, as well as the uniforms which members of some of these clubs wore adds a further interesting dimension to this study.

Despite some of the broad claims of this study, the core of the book is engaging and a welcome addition to the club culture studies which have emerged in the last few years. It offers a thorough review of the Hellfire clubs and associated rakish gangs of the capital and is an interesting enquiry into the extant sources which these clubs and their contemporaries left behind. Ryan draws on a large number of studies and sources to recreate the activities and members of some of the most intriguing clubs in eighteenth-century Ireland. While we know frustratingly little about some of these clubs, his follow-up analysis of how some of the folklore surrounding these clubs emerged completes the study in a very satisfactory manner.

LISA MARIE GRIFFITH  
*National Print Museum, Dublin*

THE 'NATURAL LEADERS' AND THEIR WORLD: POLITICS, CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN BELFAST, c.1801–1832. Jonathan Jeffrey Wright. Pp xii, 284. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2013. £75 hardback.

Jonathan Wright is one of the foremost of a new generation of historians of Belfast who seek to advance beyond existing narratives of the city and show, in his own words, that 'there was more to nineteenth-century Belfast than civic disturbance and confessional