

Reviews and Short Notices

SOCIAL LIFE IN PRE-REFORMATION DUBLIN, 1450–1540. By Peadar Slattery. Pp 304. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2019. €45.

There is an established tradition of studies on medieval Dublin, most notably the work of Seán Duffy and Brendan Smith. Duffy researches the political life of medieval Ireland and focuses on the archaeological history of Dublin, while Smith specialises in the economic life of Ireland. Peadar Slattery seeks to add to these studies by examining a broad range of Dublin's inhabitants and occupations, including merchants, brewers, clergy, guildsmen and their apprentices. In essence, this book shows how various citizens, predominantly successful merchants, managed and controlled Dublin from 1450–1540. The focus on this specific ninety-year period appears to be determined by the available sources and a sense that this is an under-researched time in Dublin's history. During the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47) and the Irish Civil War (1922–3) many medieval Irish sources were destroyed. Slattery recognises the scarcity of medieval Irish sources directly related to pre-Reformation Dublin, and the resulting difficulties and limitations. Nevertheless, he has still examined a broad variety of material. An important source used is the *Calendar of ancient records of Dublin*. This source consists of royal charters and grants, and is important for illustrating the history of Ireland and its relations with England. Likewise, the *Wills and inventories of Dublin* are also used and provide insight into the social condition of the various classes of testators. Indeed, the core strength of this book is the sheer volume of material with which Slattery engages.

There are two discernible sections, with the first four chapters concerned with the administration and economy of the city, while the remaining chapters examine commodities for the body and soul. The first chapter examines Dublin as a royal town. During this period Dublin was the centre of English administration in Ireland and consequently, Slattery argues, an English-style conurbation. Numerous comparisons are thus drawn with towns in England, such as Bristol, Coventry and London, in order to stress similarities in religious institutions, food industries and guilds. However, while Dublin was a thriving commercial city, there were problems particular to its geography and ethnic make-up. Slattery addresses how the Irish in Dublin were often disparaged and excluded, being viewed as a threat to the English crown ('the Irish problem'), a thesis that draws notably upon the work of Sparky Booker. Additionally, while Dublin received commercial privileges from the king, the flow of money to the exchequer was less than expected and finances were closely monitored.

The second and third chapters concentrate on merchants and the Irish Sea trade. By 1450 Dublin had established itself as a city where merchants traded successfully, which was facilitated by a network of settlements and access to roads. While Dublin was undoubtedly the mercantile hub, trading extended to the hinterlands of County Dublin, such as Balscadden and Finglas. Slattery examines how and why Dublin was so popular with English traders, arguing that it was primarily due to close links with Chester, rather than Bristol. He is the first historian to stress the importance of this Dublin-Chester connection. This Irish Sea connection gave merchants access to Chester and consequently the markets of the English midlands. However, in the 1460s Dublin merchants experienced numerous challenges with trading in England, not least discrimination in attitudes and laws. Dublin merchants were often arrested in England for 'feigned and imagined quarrels' and had to pay a fine to be released.

The latter half of the book is concerned with the body and soul. Dublin had a population of around 6,000–8,000, most of whom were not food producers. The assembly members were well aware that responsibility fell on them not to let the city starve, and through a series of

laws and fines they maintained food supplies and civic hygiene. Slattery argues that it was the desire to shorten one's stay in Purgatory that encouraged many, including merchants, to give donations to Dublin's churches and religious houses. Ultimately, this resulted in the church becoming highly influential in medieval Dublin, with parishes receiving generous financial donations. Slattery highlights the importance of the infrastructure of the church in Dublin, with many making donations to religious buildings, such as St Audoen's church. This building was particularly important to Dublin as the high tower was visible from a long distance and Slattery argues that it may have offered reassurance to the faithful and was a permanent reminder to Dubliners of the importance of the church and the need to donate. The livelihoods of Dublin's merchants were also underpinned by the guilds, which were embedded into the religious fabric of the city. This book admirably showcases the lives of Dubliners, primarily the merchants and clergy. It is a useful introduction to the opportunities that Dublin had to offer its inhabitants and visitors in the later fifteenth century.

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THE OLD ENGLISH IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND: THE PALESMEN AND THE NINE YEARS' WAR, 1594–1603. By Ruth A. Canning. Pp 200. Woodbridge: Boydell. 2019. £75.00.

For many years the Nine Years War (1593–1603), also known as Tyrone's rebellion appeared to be an unwanted orphan of Irish academia. Detailed descriptions and analysis of the war had been left to G. A. Hayes-McCoy's *Irish battles* (London, 1969) and Cyril Falls's *Elizabeth's Irish wars* (London, 1950), which remained the standard go-to texts for the subject. Others examined key moments during the conflict, such as John Silke's *Kinsale* (Liverpool, 1970) and Hiram Morgan's *Battle of Kinsale* (Bray, 2004). Many others looked at key protagonists, such as Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, Lord Mountjoy and Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, among others. Morgan's *Tyrone's rebellion* (Dublin, 1993) was pivotal in establishing the bedrock of study on the conflict, but it (most tantalisingly) stopped at 1596, just as the war was getting serious. Yet this just was not enough to explore the conflict. Indeed, in 2009 Eoin Ó Néill called for a root and branch re-examination. In this respect, Ruth Canning has very much stepped up and provided something new and necessary in the historiography of this often ignored or side-lined conflict.

Rather than examine the key belligerents of the war, the Irish confederation or English crown, Canning opts for the more nuanced and possibly more confusing aspect of the conflict: the experience of the Catholic Old English, a community trapped between competing military, economic and political demands of the English crown and Tyrone's Irish confederation. Canning starts the work by placing the Old English community in context with the prevailing historiography of the period and notes quite presciently that while there has been substantial work done on the Old English over the last forty years, somehow the role and position of the Palesmen in the conflict remained untouched, something the author set out to redress, and she does not disappoint.

After the introduction there are five thematic chapters, the first focusing on the role of the Catholic clergy within the Pale. While some encouraged the Catholic Palesmen to join Tyrone's war against the crown, with some showing steadfast dedication, the clergy was not homogeneous in the support of Tyrone's pretensions to a Catholic crusade. Many did not support him, preferring to remain loyal to their sovereign and chose religion over rebellion. Following on from this Canning looks at the complicated world of loyalty in the Pale, which was far from clear. The gulf between the Protestant New English and Catholic Palesmen did not necessarily force them into Tyrone's camp. Moreover, loyalties could be fluid, where avowed fidelity to the crown did not preclude the trade of information or munitions to the Irish for personal profit.