

Book Reviews

Fergus Kelly (ed.), *Marriage Disputes – a fragmentary Old Irish Law-Text*. Early Irish Law Series vol VI Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2015, x+ 157pp. ISBN 978 1 85500 227 2. Price €35.

Professor Fergus Kelly is the quintessential ‘gentleman and scholar’. Through his publications, he has transformed his field from a tiny branch of élite Old Irish scholarship to one now at the forefront of university teaching and interdisciplinary research into Ireland’s medieval past. In this, his fourth volume in the Early Irish Law series, he has edited a text which sets out a wide variety of disputes arising within marriage contracts. In so doing, he allows us to perceive something of the family realities for married men and women in this period. This is a topic of increasing interest to Irish historians but the material covered in this book highlights how study to date has hitherto focussed attention on questions of polygamy, adultery and marriage break-up. In *Marriage Disputes*, by contrast, we are introduced to the expectations that early Irish partners and their kin brought to the complicated business of making the marriage contract a success.

The edition is of a text made up of thirty-six Old Irish citations interspersed with extensive Middle Irish commentary which Kelly dates to the late twelfth century, together with many other citations translated and discussed in accompanying notes. Despite the chronological range involved, Kelly sees no fundamental differences in the texts and makes the crucial point that ‘it seems justifiable to treat Irish marriage of the pre-Norman period as essentially a single institution’ (p. 2). The edited text covers a multitude of social situations including the active lifestyle enjoyed by some unmarried girls, bewitching cattle, a heavily pregnant woman’s right to avoid intercourse, the onset of leprosy, fosterage and funerals. In early Ireland, it was customary to hold a *fled chrólige* or ‘feast of death-lying’ a month after the death which would be paid for out of the deceased’s assets. As Kelly points out, the comparisons with the ‘month’s mind’ in modern Irish culture are remarkable (pp 118-20). Some spouses were apparently buried together while others would be buried with their original families.

The topics covered are largely united by the principle that, within a marriage contract, a key payment was the *coibche* or bride price (p. 126). This was calculated as half the honour-price of the woman’s father. In the case of the lowest ranking lord, the *aire désa*, this was the equivalent of three in-calf cows, two milk-giving cows and three dry cows (p. 45) while for a *bóaire* or commoner, payment was one milk-giving cow (p. 57). This gift would be given by the groom to the bride’s father but he would generally pass much of it or its equivalent to his daughter. (An older woman, entering into second or third marriages would get an increasingly high percentage of the *coibche* directly from the groom.) Serious failures within marriage continued to involve payment of the sums involved in a couple’s *coibche*; these included hiding an illness affecting either work or intercourse, failure to feed a doctor and his retinue when he came to treat a spouse (p. 31), a false accusation or declaration about menstruation leading to lack of sexual intercourse (p. 33), destruction of food (p. 43) or the failure to prepare a dead person properly for their transport to the cemetery (p. 51). Failure to provide a *dillat lige* or bed-blanket (p. 37), a woman’s kiss with someone not her spouse (p. 33), an attack on a wife by one of her in-laws (p. 43), a wife disposing of jointly owned household goods without per-

mission (p. 35), providing too much meat for guests without a husband's prior agreement or secretly going out at night without a head-covering all had penalty-fines equivalent to one half of the *coibche* (pp 37, 39).

If, however, a married woman was put out of her home, forcing a return to her kin and she and her family are prepared to swear to this, she is deemed free of all future liability to her husband (p. 45) and if a man brought another woman to her bed, she was entitled to a divorce (p. 47). The legal principle involved here appears to be that no matter what her failures may have been, this was not justifiable behaviour. The same idea, bolstered by reference to the seventh-century Spanish writer Isidore and St Paul, also occurs in the contemporary Irish canon law collection (Bk 46:X of *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*). Though a woman was legally the weaker partner in a marriage and might have to resort to fasting to enforce her rights (p. 115), this book makes it clear that she enjoyed a degree of financial resources and social support in her adopted environment. A woman's pro-creative role was vital in the underpopulated and often relatively inhospitable landscape of early Ireland but her labour in providing both food and clothing for the household was to be considered a valuable resource in the successful running of any establishment. It takes a gentleman to acknowledge it.

Catherine Swift

Pádraig Ó Riain, *Four Tipperary saints: The lives of Colum of Terryglass, Crónán of Roscrea, Mochaomhóg of Leigh and Ruadhán of Lorrha*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2014. 160pp. ISBN: 978-1-84682-550-7. Price €17.50.

When Pádraig Ó Riain blessed the Irish people with his *Dictionary of Irish Saints* in 2011 we thought that the ultimate had been composed, but not at all. It only whetted his appetite. And here he comes, Corkman and all, with his *Four Tipperary Saints*, Colum of Terryglass, Crónán of Roscrea, Mochaomhóg of Leigh and Ruadhán of Lorrha. Leigh is in the parish of Twomileborris, archdiocese of Cashel and Emly, 8km due west of Thurles. The other places are in the diocese of Killaloe.

Latin lives of these four Saints were compiled in the twelfth century, principally under the influence of Augustinian Canons, and possibly in Mochaomhóg's case under Cistercian influence. These Latin lives were handed down in manuscript form, a number of them surviving in Marsh's Library and in Trinity College, Dublin, in the Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, and in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Moreover the Irish life of Ruadhán is preserved in Brussels and in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

It was at one of his fifty-six biennial conferences at Mount Saint Joseph, Roscrea, that George Cunningham pointed out to Pádraig the great need there was for English translation of those lives of Irish saints seeing that so few people can read Latin with ease now-a-days. The response was this beautiful English translation of the lives of these four Tipperary saints.

A great deal of information can be gleaned from this book, where it is presented with the absolute exactitude of immense scholarship and research, and to make it more appealing to us the uninitiated, in the midst of top class colour photographs of places and objects relevant to the stories, there are photos of the beginnings of three of the manuscript lives.

We all knew bits of their stories, but now we have these wonderful translations, based on deep scholarship, but presented in clear simplicity. We can hide with St. Crónán in the milk cart, when unknown to his monks he stole away from his remote monastery near Roscrea to the royal highway where he could be easily found by guests. We learn too the

interesting short cut to a medical degree when: 'a certain young man ... of Munster who wished to study medicine came to Ruadhán ... who blessed his hands, eyes and mind and therewith became expert in the art of medicine.'

Hagiography, the technical term for these lives, is often fun, but it is never foolish, as is demonstrated by the abundant and meticulous notes which accompany the translation of the texts. Besides it often gives a deeper insight into a situation than does a mere relating of facts. One other interesting lesson from *Four Tipperary Saints* is the extent of travelling the holy men of the time were involved in, and how widespread was devotion to them, thus Ruadhán was venerated at Regensburg in Germany.

Besides being a must for Tipperary readers and place-lovers, this book will be of great value to anyone interested in place names, genealogy and early Christian Ireland in general with its rich monastic heritage. Finally, it seems to me that it also implicitly asks questions of our Ireland of today.

Laurence Walsh oco

Luke McInerney, *Clerical and learned lineages of medieval Co. Clare: a survey of the fifteenth-century papal registers*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2014. 346pp. ISBN 978-1-84682-391-6. Price €55.

This book on the learned families, mainly clerical but also secular, of the late medieval lordship of Thomond represents an extraordinary and inspiring achievement. Its author, Luke McInerney, an independent and self-made scholar based in London, uses the limited number of documents available from the period 1198-1521, consisting of papal letters, annates and petitions sent to Rome seeking dispensation for canonical irregularities, to piece together one of the most detailed studies ever made of a group of learned families. Beginning with a brief account of Clare's early monastic foundations, the author brings together what is known of the county's termon lands, grouping them according to the early territorial divisions of the region, and identifying the clerical lineages that controlled them. He then explores over several chapters the connections between the system of land tenure and succession to such clerical offices as those of erenagh and coarb – otherwise the chief tenants of the church's termon lands – who were under obligation both to support bishops through annual payments and also to provide hospitality. Thomond's coarbial families, the Uí Chiaróg and Uí Ógáin of Rath, the Uí Dheaghaidh of Dysert, the Uí Chuinn of Killinaboy, the Uí Ghráda of Tuamgraney, the Uí Mhaoir of Drumcliffe, the Clann Chatháin of Scatterry and many others pass under detailed review, as do their duties, status and income.

The offices these families held remained essentially hereditary throughout the late medieval period, which meant that sons were needed, if succession were to continue. Using the diocese of Kilfenora as a microcosm, representative of the Gaelic dioceses as a whole, the author shows that clerical concubinage and illegitimacy among clerics, who were usually sons of clerics, was both high and socially acceptable.

Building on descriptions by early seventeenth-century English functionaries, the author also draws attention to the 'multi-functional' character of the Irish learned classes, who might act as scribes, clerics and church tenants, not only in Ulster, where the English functionaries gathered much of their information, but also in Co. Clare. The survival of the papal correspondence used by the author, which was due to the practice of Curia officials of keeping copies in Rome, underlines the presence in the Gaelic dioceses of notaries, well equipped to petition papal offices and transact all forms of business. Despite

the numerous indications in the correspondence as to the absence of a university in medieval Ireland, it was nonetheless possible to study Canon Law in the form of *studia privata*, probably provided by cathedral schools or other church-funded colleges, while secular studies were available in schools run by the learned classes.

The hereditary clerical families were not only linked to native monastic churches but also to the foundations of the continental orders, Augustinian canons, Franciscan friars and Cistercian monks. As a consequence of this, such abbeys as Killone, Clare Abbey, Corcomroe and Ennis, can be seen to have succumbed to the Gaelic practice of hereditary control. A case in point is Clare Abbey, whose abbots during the whole of the fifteenth century, the Clann Chraith, often used their high office as a stepping-stone to the episcopacy of Killaloe.

From papal correspondence, it is also possible to identify various secular lineages without coarbial or erenagh backgrounds, which monopolized appointments to parish churches. Included are such leading dynastic families as the Clann Chonmara and Uí Bhriain, who actively sought to dominate vicarages and rectories as well as provide candidates for many of the higher clerical posts at Killaloe and Kilfenora. This conformed to the pattern of growing dominance of the chief dynastic lineages throughout the period at the expense of the lesser lineages.

The several secular learned families who settled in Co. Clare in the later medieval period are also discussed. Most of these had associations with Thomond prior to the fifteenth century, but some, notably the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire chroniclers and poets of Ardkyle, appear to have first settled there in the early sixteenth century. Among previously established learned kindreds were Clann Bhruaidealha, Clann Chraith, Uí Íceadhá, Uí Nialláin, Uí Dhuibh Dá Bhoireann, Clann Chruitín, Uí Dhálaigh and Clann Fhlannchadhá. Each of these families is identified and discussed and, wherever possible, very useful genealogical tables are provided, as well as maps of estates. Some families, for example the Clann Bhruaidealha, also held ecclesiastical lands, which raises the possibility that they were once associated with a monastic school or church site.

Had the author done no more than publish the five appendices to his book (pp 219-82), and his glossary of technical terms (pp 295-303) he would have earned the gratitude of all those interested in the ecclesiastical history of the Thomond lordship. He also provides a very useful discussion of the manner in which papal officials presented Irish nomenclature, including titles, placenames and personal names.

Four Courts Press is to be commended for its decision to publish Luke McNerney's study. The book serves as a timely reminder of the continuing importance of papal correspondence as a source of evidence of how Gaelic society coped with the circumstances that obtained after the arrival of the external orders in the early to mid-twelfth century, followed by the English conquest of Ireland. While much work remains to be done, Luke McNerney has certainly shown the way.

Pádraig Ó Riain

George Cunningham, *d'Opera: The illustrated story of Roscrea Operatic/Musical Society*, Roscrea, 2013, viii + 208pp.

This history of the Roscrea Operatic/Musical Society was researched and edited by George Cunningham, renowned historian, author, one-time principal performer and Society secretary and clearly the project was a labour of love for a man who has lived all his life in the town. He has been ably assisted in the task by Seamus Mullaney, Tadhg

Maher, Pat Bourke and Siobhán Bowe. The book runs to 208 pages and is produced in a reader-friendly Quarto size.

The Roscrea Operatic Society was launched in 1940 against the backdrop of World War 2, so the founding members were brave, determined and undoubtedly optimistic. The book recalls the excitement which gripped the town late in 1939, when it emerged that a new musical society was being formed. The first production was *The Pirates of Penzance*, which was performed at the Abbey Hall, in aid of parochial funds, for just three nights, on April 21/22/23, 1940. From then until now, a total of 73 annual shows and 5 children's productions have been presented and are classified thus: Act 1 (1940s/50s), Act 2 (1960s/70s/80s/90s) and Act 3 (2000 to Modern times and Curtain call). The opus is presented in chronological running order, complete with hundreds of captioned photographs, personal profiles, illustrations, show programmes and other related ephemera. It means you may start where you wish and dip in and out as you fancy. Indeed, a glance at a favourite show article will refresh the mind, with the dramatis personae list and the moment in time photographs. It is to the credit of so many people, that this extensive range of memorabilia was available, so long after the event.

The profiles are a touch of genius and over one hundred of the Society's personnel are featured in this way, complete with dates and other specifics. It is delightful to see so many members acknowledged for their input behind the scenes. Roscrea's Abbey Hall hosted all of the shows but despite its advantages, there were physical limitations and restrictions. However, the ingenuity and innovation of the producer, stage manager, props team, set and scenery creators always surmounted the obstacles. The front of house team smiled all the way, while the makeup team and costume mistresses worked diligently back stage.

My earliest memory is of the Oklahoma show in 1963 which ran from March 17th to March 31st. The colours and designs of the cowboy outfits were breath taking, as we had only seen them as black and white in Western films on the fledgling RTE television. Naturally, that was my opening chapter, but the memories of other shows came flooding back as I turned the pages and studied the names and photographs. Other personal favourites through the years were: *South Pacific* (1967), *My Fair Lady* (1973), *Oliver* (1978), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1985) and *Annie* (1998). They are portrayed exactly as I remember them and the respective chapters rolled back the decades. I might as well have been back in my primary teacher's, Brendan Carmody's (1967/68) fourth class, with the hand painted *South Pacific* scenes displayed on the walls. Brendan's appearance in every show from 1955 to 1989 remains a Society record. He was one of the many legends who helped to establish the Society's tradition.

One of my favourite opera season activities was to watch rehearsals, especially when the curtain was only a few days away and perfection was proving elusive. The producer's instructions would echo around the Abbey Hall and with Musical Director, Frankie Bergin, ensuring the notes were sweet and prompter, Bridie Power, responsible for delivery of every word, it always came together for opening night.

A read through *d'Opera* is impossible without multiple stops for reflection. There is always someone you recognise as the pages are turned and that is no surprise, because most local families were involved in one way or another through the years. There is a warm feeling of friendship throughout the pages, as all of the facts, figures, personalities, and a slice of Roscrea's social fabric for almost 75 years is proudly presented for inspection. We knew so many of them ... was it really that long ago? Details of enduring friendships, romances and weddings are recalled and add to the sense of contentment and warmth.

The tales of temptation and escapes to a nearby Public House enhance the excitement, as you visualise the curtain rising and the chorus members dashing back to base! There are also little gems in the personal recollections, not least the annual delivery of the Bishop's chair. The standard was always high, so it was not surprising that patrons came from far and near to book their seats with Al and Gertie Monahan. The goodwill towards the Society is demonstrated throughout these pages and it is no transient culture. The lengthy list of *d'Opera* patrons confirms the Society's current standing, with its many supporters domiciled in Ros Cré and beyond.

I read the book from start to finish over three nights and have flicked through it again several times. There is the feel of a thriller about it first time round and readers retain a compelling urge to keep going, because you don't know what is coming next. *d'Opera* was my favourite book of the year, not only for inducing bouts of nostalgia but more significantly for its inclusiveness. The book has recorded the facts in an historical sense, but by clever use of related material, it brings every show to life, as we drift seamlessly from one act and generation to the next, leaving the black and white era behind and entering the world of glorious colour.

Like the rebranded Roscrea Musical Society (née Roscrea Operatic Society), this book reminds us of what can be achieved by a group of committed people, working together for a common purpose and the enduring greater good. In this review, I failed utterly to separate the book from the shows – the dancer from the dance. Could there be any greater compliment to *d'Opera*? *Ad multos annos*.

Seamus O'Doherty

Seán Hogan, *The Black and Tans in North Tipperary, policing, revolution and war, 1913-1922*. Untold Stories Publishers, Dublin, 2013. xx+492pp. ISBN 1901370454. Price €22.50.

This comprehensive and significant regional study of the pivotal period in the story of modern Ireland, presented in a most professional manner is warmly welcomed. Despite its somewhat misleading title – the Black and Tans did not enter the picture until early in 1920 – this massive, handsomely produced work of over 500 pages will long remain the definitive starting point for future researchers of this revolutionary period in North Tipperary. This work, adding to the seminal literature from the south of the county, balances somewhat the lacunae from the north of the county.

As with all great books this one was a long time in the making with the author, a native of Puckane, near Nenagh, engaging in almost a lifelong study of the period in his native county. In the 1980s he had the foresight to interview and record historical recollections of some thirty-five people who had been locally actively involved in the period under review. Since then he has additionally pursued and researched every source available both from the documentary evidence and from relatives, neighbours and acquaintances of other activists on all sides of the conflict.

As Prof Eunan O'Halpin said at an event in the Royal Irish Academy to mark the book's publication, 'it pursues some very important themes which also need to be explored systematically for other regions in respect of the history of that era.' He emphasised once again that the real story of Ireland's early twentieth-century revolutionary period cannot be told until the actual events are thoroughly researched, using every possible source as Seán Hogan has done.

Some 500 individuals are featured in the book, making detailed biographical notes on

each almost impossible even if the information was available. To help with the deficiency the author has created a website www.untoldstories.ie where additional information on people, places and events is offered and sought. To date the response has been poor.

The book is well constructed tracing the struggle in nineteen chapters from 1913 down to 1922 with the author at all times attempting to be impartial and deeply conscious of his pioneering efforts to tease out the background to RIC personnel and their activities. The first five chapters provide the background to the role of the RIC, the dwindling support for Home Rule, World War 1, the Volunteers, 1916 and the rise of Sinn Féin, then Conscription leading to the War of Independence. In the following ten chapters Hogan records in great detail the armed struggle as it was played out in North Tipperary as the IRA successfully improved its guerrilla tactics against the increasingly isolated and ostracised Crown Forces. Harrowing accounts of atrocities on both sides explain why, almost a century later, they still linger in some people's memories. No doubt the heavy-handed response, to put it mildly, from the authorities led to further retaliation, and on then to the 'Anti Murder Gang' who carried out 'seven killings and numerous other shootings,' all silently condoned by the Crown. All of these atrocious acts of violence, fatal in some cases, are sketched out in full by Hogan. But so too does he detail the murders of the six ordinary policemen and once again paraphrased the circumstances of the fatalities: 'as the policeman approached his front door coming home to his family; in a quiet village pub having a drink at the end of a patrol; coming from devotions in the chapel and cycling to prosecute routine summonses.' Was it any wonder that the retaliation grew more vicious on both sides?

An indication of the predominately non-urban nature of the conflict is indicated by the forced closure of fifteen rural RIC barracks by 1920. The increasing effectiveness of the IRA campaign is clearly indicated by the augmentation of Crown Forces, regular police, Black and Tans, auxiliaries and military to almost a thousand members. In compiling these statistics the author concludes that they were arraigned against an IRA active service unit (ASU, later to be popularly known as a Flying Column) of not much more than fifty members but drawing on the support of well over a thousand volunteers of both sexes and of course an increasingly sympathetic population.

Some light relief is provided by some events, not least the bizarre circumstances surrounding the bleeding statues and the holy well at Curragheen during the summer months of 1920 at Templemore. Jarveys and hackneys bringing pilgrims the six miles to the well had to pay the local IRA a levy of two shillings and sixpence a day. This yielded over £2000 in two weeks.

During the truce, the tale is told of how IRA volunteer, the Ginnit Murphy, engineered a situation so that he could have dinner each evening with Lord and Lady Dunalley in Kilboy House. Unfortunately it didn't prevent its wanton destruction and that of its library of 6000 books and its archival treasures of Irish heritage. Too many others, including The Abbey, Templemore suffered a similar fate. The truce period also recorded too many cases of armed robbery, land grabbing, arson and intimidation which Hogan records in an end chapter, 'The Drift to Anarchy'. It shows just what a daunting task the soon to be fledgling state faced.

The book is attractively produced and very well illustrated with contemporary photographs, explanatory tables and nineteen specially drawn maps of North Tipperary, many pinpointing ambushes, attacks and fatalities. The absence of significant IRA activity in the Roscrea area is starkly highlighted in these. In a recently published study of Ned Quinlan, the IRA commander of the 7th Battalion in Roscrea during the War of Independen-

dence, Gerard Dooley puts forward two reasons for this: the lack of young men at the time in Roscrea and the relatively large non-Catholic population. Ironically, two of the major political figures of the time were from the Roscrea area. Count Patrick O'Byrne, Corville House (site of Sean Ross Abbey), 'the only man to be arrested in North Tipperary following the 1916 rising', Sinn Féin Director of Elections in 1918, Chairman of North Tipperary Co. Co. from June 1920, a TD in the 2nd Dáil and the Republic's envoy to the Vatican, as well as a host of nationalist activities. Seamus Burke was both an activist and national politician, being TD from 1918 and a government minister following the Civil War. He wrote his political treatise, *The Foundations of Peace* while on the run in 1919. His support for the Treaty led to the destruction of his home, Rockforest House, east of Roscrea near the village of Knock during the Civil War.

The author's concluding emphasis on the actions of the police and military seem to me to be out of tune with the tenor of the work. His is the first major study to explore locally the role of the police, to give their human story, and to detail the final disintegration of the RIC in 1922 as their members - 'the silenced voice of Irish history' - were abandoned by their political masters. An end hastened no doubt by the book's well-documented foul deeds of the Black and Tans. But while these, Ireland's modern Cromwell, remain the number one enemy in Irish popular eyes, the book clearly shows that all branches of the Crown Forces, including the regular RIC, engaged in atrocities. And, yes, the Crown's retaliatory murderous actions did cause terror among the affected communities but large numbers of the population lived in fear and silence from Republican activities too. Throughout the book the author shows successfully that the emerging Republican strength lay in silencing by intimidation those (minority) communities or individuals who were against them; that it was reaction to the IRA attacks that brought change. As he put it, 'the IRA's ability to survive the attempts to suppress them was where their real strength lay.'

In his concluding chapters the author analyses the fatalities during the conflict and ends with his reflections on this pivotal period of modern Ireland where the mood changed from settling for Home Rule in 1913 to seeking independence over two and a half years of bloody struggle from 1918 onwards. Although very conscious that the eighty-six deaths have to contrast with the 1415 Tipperary dead of the World War he makes a nice point in dedicating the work to them and to all who suffered. He regrets that the lack of research or documentary evidence available at his time of writing did not allow him to portray properly the role women played. The book ends with a detailed bibliography and indices of people, places and subjects. An indication of its value may be gleaned from the fact that while 2000 copies were printed it quickly went out of print. It is indeed a major work by any standard.

George Cunningham