

Book Reviews

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's greatest king?*, Tempus, Chalford, 2007. 206pp. ISBN 9780752429212. Price £17.99.

Seán Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 2013. 368pp. ISBN 9780717157785. Price €24.99.

Darren McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf Good Friday 1014*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2013. 156pp. ISBN 9781846823848. Price €14.95.

For a man of his fame Brian Boru has been sadly ill-served by historians. But at last the thousandth anniversary of his death is forcing us to come to grips once more with the man, his significance and his legend. Three works have come out about him in the last seven years, each of which brings a different aspect of the man to our attention. McGettigan's is a rough-hewn model of the world and times in which Brian was centred. Ní Mhaonaigh is more scholarly, carefully needling away the veils of mythology to disclose the real man within. Duffy explores instead the power structures of the day: how Brian could achieve what he did and how that related to the outside world.

The first challenge in writing a work on Brian is to decide what audience to address. If it is for a general readership then a certain amount of background must be sketched out to establish the scene. If the readers are not Irish then the immensity of background to be laid down becomes even more daunting. And meanwhile, what of the serious students of medieval history here at home, their attention must be kept engaged as well if the book is to have any real value at all. Well, Duffy has set his shoulder manfully to the wheel. He is clearly very at home with students of medieval history and he handles the background material (roughly pp 15-39) with great confidence. But must we really start practically with Adam and plough through the detailed histories of so very many population groups of Ireland?

McGettigan on the other hand addresses the general history-buff. His prose reads rather like a series of brightly-coloured museum display models: here are the Irish in their ringforts (p. 31), the monastic communities with their schools, craftsmen and fairs (p. 32), the princes (pp 29-30) in their 'well-defended palaces' (p. 29); yonder lies your Hiberno-Norse town with its ships and walls and coins (p. 42). Ní Mhaonaigh chooses to ignore the background and goes straight to the heart of Brian and where he came from, leaving the uninformed to work out the surrounding pattern of society as best they may. She does include a brief history of the Viking involvement in Ireland (pp 15-18), but alas, it is chronologically somewhat tangled, especially compared with the lightning gallop through all that that we get from McGettigan (pp 26-8). Still, hers is decidedly the more reliable: McGettigan, a Donegal man by origin, seems convinced, for instance, that the Northern Uí Néill were the only ones to offer effective opposition to the Vikings (pp 47-50).

Both Ní Mhaonaigh (pp 11 & 12) and McGettigan (pp 18 & 19) discuss sources at the outset, Duffy waits till he is addressing the battle itself before taking up the matter of primary material (pp 174-191), at which point we learn some things that may surprise scholars who work closely with the annals. All three of our authors seem to prefer the Annals of Ulster to the Chronicon Scottorum, complaining of the Chronicon's anti-Brian bias ('pure Uí Néill propaganda,' says McGettigan, p. 19). Yet surely we should rejoice in the diversity of viewpoints presented by our sources? Do they not give us a welcome

window onto the different political parties active in Brian's own day? It is perhaps just a mean thought that the Annals of Ulster are being preferred simply because they present a rosier picture of Brian. But why do they? In fact, Brian's early years as king of Munster seem to be of little interest to the Armagh based Annals of Ulster, but they execute an abrupt *volte face* after Brian's 20 oz of gold appear on Armagh's altar, and positively warble with ecstasy over Brian in their subsequent entries. Of the three authors it is Ní Mhaonaigh who shows by far the deepest understanding of the sources.

Brian's youth is given short shrift by McGettigan: indeed, in a book meant for the public, he is to be congratulated on not letting himself get led astray by the Alfredian stories of the *Cogadh*. In swift tough prose he gives us a strong picture of Brian's early kingship years and what led up to them; there are times, though, when the prose becomes so simplistic that it reads rather like a moralistic children's text. Ní Mhaonaigh gives us a very considered analysis of Brian's brother Mathgamhain and his achievements. If we want to know the *Cogadh*'s story, it is Duffy who gives us the most sympathetic rendering. Duffy and Ní Mhaonaigh both give excellent discussions of Brian's wives, a subject which McGettigan prefers to ignore.

'It is Brian's persistence over these years that appears to have worn Maelsechnaill down,' McGettigan tells us, 'the constant raids must have been very unsettling' (p. 56), but 'the reasons for the collapse of the Uí Néill high-kingship are not clear' (p. 60). Ní Mhaonaigh (pp 34-40) shows greater understanding of what was involved. It is here, however, that Duffy's handling comes into its own. Step by step he shows us exactly how Brian built up his power base (pp 104-135). Ireland was a land of intricate politics, and it is Duffy's knowledge of those intricacies that enables him to guide us sure-footedly through the 'incremental steps ... that tilted the balance of power in [Brian's] direction' (p. 116). There is no discussion, merely an embarrassed hint, of Ireland's 'Golden Age' in any of these three books. Yet current scholarship by Ó Riain, Jaski, and Ó Carragáin is starting to come up with solid evidence that Brian's operations extended far beyond just the military and political sphere, supporting the wider implications of his emperor clause in the Book of Armagh.

By now we are 72 pages or half-way into McGettigan's work, 167 pages, or roughly half-way into Duffy's, and we have done rather a lot of reading to prepare us for what the titles of both works tell us is their subject, the Battle of Clontarf. True to form, McGettigan confines himself to a bold bare action story drawn as much from the sagas as from anything else, though he intones the obligatory mantra that both the *Cogadh* and the Icelandic sagas 'cannot be relied upon for their accounts of the battle' (p. 103). On the whole McGettigan seems to be of the opinion that it was largely brought about by a Dublin/Leinster coalition, even though he precedes his battle chapter by introducing us in extraordinary length (pp 72-86) to a Scandinavian cast of characters some of whom never came next or nigh this country, and, stranger yet, concludes this introductory tour with the minatory reminder that Sigurd of Orkney might indeed have intended to follow up a victory with wider conquest. Sure, McGettigan seems to find the bold Vikings far more inspiring than his supposed protagonist: *vide* his enthralled accounts of Harald Hadrada's completely irrelevant adventures in Byzantium (pp 76-7) as opposed to his picture of Brian's rule as an ephemeral achievement won at great cost. He even captions the last section before the Battle chapters 'Briefly king of the entire Island' (p. 68) just to make sure we understand that all Brian's lifetime of warring and manoeuvring was essentially for naught. Can his vision of Brian really be no more than one of a desperately struggling general whose victory crumbled at the touch?

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McGettigan may be uncertain as to whether the battle was just a Dublin/Leinster coalition or an outsiders' attempt at conquest, but Duffy is not. Duffy is a solid proponent of the external invasion theory. This is what he has taken us through all these pages to prepare us for, and this is what he takes us through some 80 pages more to substantiate (pp 167-248). And there is a great deal in what he says even though he does trawl through some very murky waters indeed for evidence. The truth is, the invasion theory has become rather unpopular ever since it was dismissed by Fr John Ryan way back in 1938, and Duffy is bending over backwards to champion it afresh. Straining at gnats, surely: in our integrated times today it is fashionable to see inter-European connections, a plain outline of the state of affairs here and in the greater Scandinavian world nearly speaks for itself. While Ní Mhaonaigh's analysis of the literary sources is both deeper and clearer than Duffy's, she is not the person to stick her neck out championing an unpopular cause as Duffy has, and she abides by the 'Dublin-Leinster partnership' (p. 57). Note, however, that Dublin takes prime position, for while Fr Ryan considered Dublin to be 'a state small ... in extent and weak in man power' (Ryan 1938, p. 49) few would agree with that assessment now.

'The carnage at Clontarf had a major impact in the Scandinavian world' says McGettigan (p. 117), but he seems less sure about what it did to Ireland. 'The Battle of Clontarf was one of the most remarkable battles in Irish history ... in the wider history of these islands, Clontarf must rank with the battle of Hastings [and] Bannockburn' (p. 120). But why he doesn't say. Two pages later he says that 'the main reason for the important place that the Battle of Clontarf holds in Irish history is the fact that King Brian's descendants ... commissioned a saga account of his life and the battle, that has proved to be enduringly popular' (p. 122). So, is it the battle itself that was important, or just the literature arising out of the battle? After all McGettigan's heroic attempts to dispense with illusions and steer by a true compass, he succumbs at last to the siren song of romantic fiction: the legend overshadows the original events once more. Duffy rests Clontarf's claim to fame on its bloodbath (p. 265) and its claim to importance on Brian's success in stemming the tide of foreign mercenaries. Ní Mhaonaigh prefers not to analyze the significance of the battle itself, except insofar as it ended Brian's career (p. 53).

Brian was, as Ní Mhaonaigh points out, 'the first ruler to be termed "king of all Ireland" in contemporary sources' (p. 130); but she leaves things at that, nor does McGettigan have more to say on the impact of Brian's career. We must again look to Duffy for answers. 'The separation Brian had put into effect between the kingship of Ireland and the kingship of Tara proved lasting,' he says (p. 251). 'The new age that Brian ushered in embodies a new concept of Irish kingship' (p. 255). When push comes to shove, Duffy can come out with clear and firm conclusions about the political scene at work. But what about 'Brian lived through the age when the modern Irish Mac and Ua ... surnames were indeed beginning to take shape. It was a precocious development, and it is not entirely clear why it happened when it did. The probability is that ... it is indicative of a society undergoing major and rapid change.' (p. 271). These are observations that we hear less often. Why did settlement patterns start to change during the following century, giving rise to the *baile* placenames? What was it that was happening, and to what extent was Brian a product of, a parallel development with, or even a causative agent of it all? These are some of the questions which our embarrassment with Brian's iconic status have prevented us from confronting. Duffy alone of our three authors has dared to wave a hand in their direction.

McGettigan's book has excellent illustrations that break up the prose and bring many

of the objects and places to reader's attention. The figure in Plate 7 (p. 35) may be carrying a sword, but his clothing and his context proclaim him a saint and not a warrior; see plate 22 (p. 92) for a better example of what was wanted. Equally misleading are Plates 18 and 19 on p. 83, where Dasent's imaginary reconstruction of Icelandic halls would have us thinking that the Vikings of Brian's day lived in High Medieval splendour. McGettigan's three appendices with excerpts of various accounts are quite amusing, however, and very appropriate. His bibliography is unusually sound and extensive for a work evidently intended for a lay public.

Ní Mhaonaigh's text-based work has quite charming pen-and-ink sketches (not credited) as chapter headings, whose clear, vivacious quality in some way quite catches the feel of her sprightly, lucid prose. Plate 3, showing the first page of the *Cogadh* in the Book of Leinster, is printed back to front. Her concluding table listing Contarf's dead as cited in the various annals is a joy to the heart, given that so many man-hours have gone into analysis of same.

Duffy's maps are greatly superior to those of the other two productions, containing more detail without becoming cluttered and giving some welcome indication of geographic relief. His genealogical charts are lamentably varied in quality. Table 1 (p. 40) supplies us, as does the text throughout, with the modern surname equivalents for many of the families discussed, something that is of inestimable value to the public at large and does much to render his text approachable. Table 2 (p. 63) has only ten of Brian's eleven brothers (all of whose names are known, contrary to what Duffy tells us) and omits his sister Orlaith, even though she has more to tell us about the rise in the family fortunes than any of the rest of her siblings, bar Brian and Mathgamhain themselves. The discussion of this table, by the way, is located far away on page 75. Table 4 (p. 147) would have us thinking that Cerball († 909) is the father of Hlödhvir Thorfinnsson. But of course, it's not meant to tell us that at all, but rather (and this is a very shaky proposition indeed) that he is the father of Eithne, who married Hlödhvir. And it is simply not good enough to register the doubts about this in a tiny footnote appended to – of all things – Eithne's son's name! As for Murchad's offspring, who is his third child? The vertical line that should connect parent with offspring clearly leads to the union between Gormlaith and Amlaíb Cuarán: did Murchad's wife give birth to the pair of them? This may all seem very giggling, but a picture can only paint a thousand words if it is not muddled up.

So which of these books should you read to find out about Brian? That depends on what you're looking for. If you want quick and easy answers, something to tell the children and a general vivid overview of the times and peoples, go to McGettigan. He may not love Brian as much as Brian deserves, but at least he takes a good whack at bashing out the story in fine marching tempo. If you want to know about the sources, where the stories are coming from and what shaped them, Ní Mhaonaigh is the place to go. Her grasp of the literature is unrivalled, and if she has not extracted the last ounce from them yet, she has certainly gone further down that road than anybody else. If you want to know about the politics of Ireland, how it worked and how Brian climbed to power, there is not any work written to date that can map it all out the way Duffy does. In measured, easily-paced prose he not only illuminates how politics and strategy worked within Ireland, he also places Ireland within the context of the greater European scene. His is maybe not quite so much a new twist on what was happening at Clontarf, as an old twist in new clothing, but it is very convincing, and will take some time to digest.

Lenore Fischer

George Cunningham, *The Round Tower at Roscrea and its environs*, Parkmore Press, Roscrea, 2014, xiv + 282pp. ISBN 9780959536897. Price €30.

Round Towers, as the author points out, are Ireland's sole unique contribution to architecture. Despite this, they have never featured as symbols of the country in the same way that the shamrock, harp, or even Guinness is so frequently employed. Nor indeed is their basic function as belfries widely understood with older theories, especially defence structures against Viking raids, still holding a grip on popular perceptions. Misinterpretations of their purpose have a long and fascinating history, ranging from theories of sun-worship structures to phallic symbols and all sorts of even weirder ideas in between. Nor indeed has bizarre speculation ended: the author quotes a recent American writer who defines them as 'conical magnetic antennas' with evidence of their 'paramagnetism' evident from plant growth that he observed in some of them.

There is no definite date for the erection of the Round Tower at Roscrea but it clearly belongs to the late period of native Irish monasticism and the author argues convincingly for the second quarter of the twelfth century. It is first mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters in 1135 when it was hit by lightning. It was not of course an isolated structure but part of a monastic enclosure which also contained an impressive Hiberno-Romanesque church and a High Cross. The author provides a detailed description of the main features of the Round Tower and expertly sets it in its ecclesiastical and political context. He notes the lack of attention often paid by scholars to the actual material used in the construction of the towers and compensates for this deficiency by providing not only a detailed discussion of the Old Red Sandstone used in the Roscrea example but utilises his own unrivalled knowledge of the locality to identify the quarry from which it was most likely obtained.

Interesting and impressive as the Roscrea Round Tower undoubtedly is, the potential reader might well wonder how it could justify the writing of a book of 300 odd pages. The answer is provided by the local Cistercian monk, Laurence Walsh in his preface where he describes the work as 'like a stone thrown into a still clear pool as the circle of ripples takes you wider and wider through Round Towers of the whole of the Irish south-midlands and north-east Munster and well beyond'. Indeed, it is not until chapter Four that we get a detailed account of the Roscrea Tower. Chapter One consists of a general discussion of Round Towers in which their origins, purpose and dating are outlined. The second chapter deals with the monastery of St Cronan, as well as the disart at the small nearby islands of Inis na mBeo and Móin na hInse and also includes discussion of the Roscrea Brooch, Book of Dimma and the Roscrea Pillar or Timoney Stone. To add to the variety it also has two appendices, one a description of the battle of Roscrea written in 1775 (almost certainly largely fictional) and a report from Frank Coyle of Aegis Archaeology of excavations conducted near the Round Tower in 2010. Chapter Three analyses developments in the twelfth century at Roscrea from a variety of sources and angles and finishes with a short account of the revival of the title Bishop of Roscrea in 1970 for the auxiliary Bishop of Elphin and since given to a variety of other prelates in different parts of the world.

In the fourth chapter, we get the comprehensive detail on the Round Tower covering the background to its construction, patronage and dating. On the last point, the author plumps for the period from c.1120 to the early 1130s. He then discusses its stonework, noting in passing the paucity of studies on this aspect of the towers. As with most of the later town of Roscrea the tower is built of Old Red Sandstone and he suggests it came

from a quarry quite close by. The doorway and windows are described in detail and he follows the current orthodoxy in seeing the door and possibly the larger window being very likely used as places to display relics for public veneration and to display other treasures on special occasions.

Other towers from the South Midlands, principally neighbouring Kilkenny, Laois and Offaly, are the subject of the next chapter and this is followed by chapters on eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century references to towers, including but not limited to Roscrea, the emergence of the modern town of Roscrea and the origin and growth of the Black Mills which were constructed beside the tower. The penultimate chapter discusses developments in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and the triumphant final chapter details the rescue of the tower from the buildings which had surrounded it, allowing it to 'proudly stand alone once again'.

In addition to the broad range of material covered and the lucidity of its prose, the book is profusely illustrated. There are over 350 photographs, prints, paintings, maps and cartoons, which enliven and inform the text. As befits a work born out of a love of a sense of place and pride in the locality, all the design work was done by a local woman Andrea Patterson of Walsh printers who are to be congratulated for the excellence of the finished product. But above all this book is a testimony to the life-long dedication and commitment of George Cunningham not just to the Round Tower, which he has celebrated so magnificently in this book, but to his native place. As Fr Laurence Walsh concludes in his preface 'Well done good and faithful servant George'.

Máire Ní Riain

Richard Davis, *Travels of William Smith O'Brien in Europe and the Wider World 1843 to 1864*, Geography Publications, Dublin, 2013, viii+241pp. ISBN 9780906602. Price €15.

Richard Davis, former professor of History at the University of Tasmania, has long had an interest in Irish history and specifically in the career of William Smith O'Brien. Indeed his life of the Young Ireland leader, titled *Revolutionary Imperialist*, is generally regarded as the best available study of his career. While his most famous journey, to Van Dieman's Land in 1849 was neither voluntary nor for pleasure, it was merely one of the many journeys he undertook throughout his life and which he documented in detail. As the title of this work makes clear this is basically a record of these travels interspersed with comment and analysis by the author.

The first chapter provides a potted history of O'Brien's life up to his arrival in Tasmania as the convict colony established in 1803 was renamed in 1856 when it was granted self-government. This is followed by two chapters on his time there and in mainland Australia. It is best described as semi-captivity in that he was free to travel throughout the island, never had to work, wear convict clothing and lived in comfortable accommodation. These chapters are brief and superficial which the author justifies on the grounds that much has already been written on this aspect of his life. Succeeding chapters then discuss the journals he kept on his extended return journey to Europe, divided into sections on Ceylon/India/Egypt 1854; Spain/France 1854 and Brussels 1854-5.

Within a short time of his eventual return to Ireland, he was on his travels again, to France, Italy and Greece in 1855-6. This was followed by a tour of the west of Ireland in 1858. His trip to the United States and Canada in 1859, which lasted for three months was, according to the author, his most enjoyable experience since returning home. He was given a warm welcome by Irish-Americans and even received by the President,

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James Buchanan. He had a busy schedule giving frequent speeches and receiving honours and ovations. Further chapters outline and discuss his journeys to France, Spain and Portugal in 1860, France, Austria, Hungary and the north of Italy in 1861, France, Italy and Greece again in 1862-3 and his final visits to Turkey, Transylvania and Poland in 1863.

His love of travel seems to have been partly a delayed reaction to the refusal of father to allow him to take the Grand Tour in his youth. There was also an element of dislocation and failure to see any role for himself after his return to Ireland and the loss of his estates to his eldest son. While his travels had both the dimensions of entertainment and observation and his comments in relation to those he met and conditions he encountered are interesting and occasionally enlightening, there is still a great deal of tedious mention of the details of travel. It is, at the best of times, difficult for most people to summon up enthusiasm for the accounts of other people's holidays and even for such a significant and interesting traveller the same feelings are difficult to keep at bay when reading this work.

John Murphy

Martin A. Timoney (ed.), *Dedicated to Sligo: Thirty-Four Essays on Sligo's Past*. Publishing Sligo's Past, Keash, Co. Sligo, 2013, 304pp. ISBN 9780957554702. Price €40.

Sligo, we learn from one of the many fine essays in this comprehensive work, is one of the earliest and most reliably attested of Irish place names. It is recorded, in its original Irish form *Slicech*, at least seven times before 1260 in a variety of reliable sources. As such, it is mentioned earlier than the name of every major city and town in Ireland, though it only beats Limerick by about twenty-five years. This information is provided by Dr Nollaig Ó Muiríle of NUIG in an article authoritatively confirming that the name Sligo derives from the Irish *Sligeach* (the modern version of *Slicech*) meaning a place of sea shells and that it originally referred to the local river, now called the Garvoige. The essay was prompted by recent arguments in favour of alternative derivations of the name and there is a barely concealed tone of exasperation throughout the essay at these spurious claims which it is pointed out are based on or result from 'a profound ignorance of the Irish language in its various phases'.

Sea shells are the subject of another interesting essay by Professor Peter Woodman and Dr Nicky Milner who discuss the results of their examination of a large concentration of such sites on both sides of Ballysadare Bay. It shows that they range in date from the Mesolithic to the present day. While often regarded as indicative of the former period, where they are a valuable record in the absence of other archaeological evidence, the authors stress that such middens are complex sites that have been created at different times and played different roles in diet and lifestyle throughout history.

This is one of ten essays in the book devoted to various aspects of the archaeology of Sligo. These range from a short discussion of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland and its work in relation to the county, to four essays on various aspects of the Neolithic period and papers on the Bronze and Iron ages. Mary Cahill provides an up-to-date list of all the recorded gold objects from the latter period in Irish and British museums and describes all of them in detail with accompanying illustrations. The Keash caves contain evidence of ritual activity in the prehistoric period before being used for occupation in the early medieval period. As well as outlining earlier and more recent studies of the caves, Marion Dowd also discusses their place in Irish mythology.

The well-known High Cross near Drumcliff cemetery, frequently ignored or briefly

glanced at by visitors intent on viewing the grave which may or may not contain the remains of William Butler Yeats, is the subject chosen as his contribution by Peter Harbison. Often regarded as belonging to the eleventh or twelfth century, it is argued here that it is more likely to be ninth century in date. This is based on an analysis both of the Biblical scenes depicted and the animal ornament employed.

A number of the essays discuss individuals or families associated with the county. Nollaig Ó Muirle writes about Henry MacCarrick, a scribe from whose pen one important manuscript of genealogies survives, though he admits that beyond his name, itself written in various forms in Irish as if the correct version was uncertain, little is actually known about him and there is no evidence of any other work by him. He would appear to have been a merchant in Sligo, which is an atypical background for a Gaelic scribe of the early eighteenth century. John O'Dea argues that William Higgins (d. 1825) from Coolloney, a pioneering researcher in the area of chemistry, needs to be better remembered in his native county. The Taaffe family, absentee Catholic landlords, and their estate in eighteenth-century Sligo is the subject chosen by Dr David Fleming which shows the complexity of landholding at that period while business history is covered by the reminiscences of a member of the Meldrum family who ran a hardware shop in Castle St from 1871 to 1976. Joyce Raftery English writes about the Sligo-based relatives of W.B. Yeats, principally the Middleton and Pollexfen families and their inter-relationships with the Yeatses.

'God in the Bottle' is one of the popular names for the folk craft of putting representations of the crucifixion and other symbols of the passion in glass bottles, a widespread practice not just in Ireland but in Catholic countries worldwide. There is an interesting example in the De Valera museum in Bruree, should any Thomond reader wish to see one. These objects are the subject of Dr Jim Higgins' paper where he discusses their origin, name, dating and the skills involved in their making. He also includes a useful preliminary catalogue of examples in museums and private collections in Ireland, Britain, Continental Europe and even the USA.

Mary B. Timoney contributes two important articles relating to her own field of expertise. She outlines and discusses the work of the Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead, Ireland, who took their unwieldy title and inspiration from a similar organisation in England, which was founded in Norwich in 1881 though it lasted only ten years there. The Irish association proved more resilient continuing its work and publishing the results in an annual journal from 1888 to 1938. It changed its name to Irish Memorials Association in 1921 along with the title of the journal. The work of the association in Sligo is discussed with valuable information on the members and contributors. The second article discusses the life and work of Rev. Martin Sherlock, a later eighteenth-century author and traveller. This Church of Ireland clergyman was at one stage tutor to Edmond Henry Pery, son of the famous Bishop of Limerick, William Cecil Pery, whom he accompanied on the Grand Tour between 1775 and 1779. In addition to an analysis of his writings, the author also uses her expertise to describe his impressive box tomb in Skreen Church of Ireland graveyard, a good example of the work of the Skreen School of masons whose output is also discussed.

In addition to his Trojan work in editing this major volume, Martin A. Timoney contributes a total of five essays researched and written by himself on a variety of topics. Three of them deal with structures: Cormac's Well at Keash, reputed birthplace of no less a personage than Cormac Mac Art, mythical King of Tara is assigned to its correct location in Cloonagh; the memorial erected by Eleanor, Countess of Desmond, sometime

resident of Askeaton, in Sligo Castle in 1624 to the memory of her second husband and daughter is described and placed in context; while her other monument of the same date to her husband in Sligo Dominican Friary is compared and contrasted with the Aylmer monument at Donadea, Co. Kildare of 1626 which it closely resembles in style and artistic content. The author's obvious fascination with the formidable Eleanor continues with another essay on her will of 1636 where he shows that the family chapel she directed to be built near the Dominican 'abbey' was indeed constructed despite assertions to the contrary. Finally, he publishes and analyses an early-eighteenth-century manuscript by Rev William Henry, a Church of Ireland clergyman, 'Hints towards a natural and topographical history of the County of Sligo' that seems accurately named as it essentially provides an outline of what such a comprehensive work might contain.

This is the second volume of essays on County Sligo edited by Martin A. Timoney following on his 2002 volume *A Celebration of Sligo* which contained thirty-six contributions. He has maintained, even surpassed, that achievement by the high standard of the thirty-two articles in this volume and we learn from his editorial that he has plans for another such publication. Sligo is indeed fortunate in having such a dedicated and indefatigable scholar who through his own research and that of his equally productive and supportive wife and his ability to source such wide-ranging and impressive contributions from other scholars and researchers has made such a major contribution to advancing knowledge of the county's past. While his first loyalty has naturally been to his native county, he has also been a long-time and consistent supporter of our Society with a deep interest in the heritage of North Munster, particularly Co. Clare developed in his undergraduate days in UCG by Professor Etienne Rynne and reinforced by his time teaching in Scariff. He has been a member for over forty years and served on the committee from 1972 to 1975. He has published many articles and notes in this journal over the years including one in this issue. While he will undoubtedly remain 'dedicated to Sligo' we trust that his long and much appreciated support of the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society will continue and that we will benefit from his skill and expertise.

Liam Irwin