

Robin Frame, *Plantagenet Ireland*. Trinity Medieval Ireland Series 5. Dublin: Four Courts, 2022. 384pp. €55 ISBN 978-1-84682-794-5.

This is a book of essays by the historian, Robin Frame who, after completing his Ph.D on Trinity College Dublin, went on, as he himself says here (p. 349), to dwell ‘for some forty years on the eastern side of the neighbouring island, in Durham, where I have at least acquired some experience of introducing medieval Ireland to English audiences.’ Frame has published widely on the nature and characteristics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Irish history. This particular book is a collection of essays from both his earlier and later work and the overarching theme is the way in which English law and institutions shaped not just the area under direct English control but also the various forms of interplay between royal colony, marcher lordships, and kingdoms under native Irish-speaking rulers (p. 15) The author anticipates that ‘Many — perhaps most — readers will dip into individual chapters rather than reading their way through the entire book’ and notes that there has been little revision of the ten previously published papers (which are augmented by five new essays) except for correction of factual errors and the updating of references. In this regard, particular mention is made of the need to incorporate the work of Philomena Connolly, the online CIRCLE database produced by Peter Crooks, and the calendars of Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith.

The reference to English audiences seems particularly relevant to Part One which is summed up as ‘a long view of various aspects of Ireland’s relationship to England and the wider Plantagenet scene.’ Of the seven papers in this section, the first is a newly composed introduction to the present book, followed by four which each began life within general studies of Norman expansion, government and aristocracy, power, identity, and the nation. Not surprisingly, the author needed to sketch out the medieval Irish world for the benefit of the

readers of these wider compilations. Despite the concern to emphasise different aspects of the Lordship within Ireland, therefore, the result is considerable repetition of key facts. Perhaps because four of the eight papers in Part Two were produced for Irish publications (and three were originally articles in journals), they suffer rather less from this problem and, in consequence, the discussions of government and society in later medieval Ireland in this section appear more stimulating.

As in many parts of Europe (including much of Britain) during this period, 'In Ireland, stability was precarious; sources of authority were many, culturally varied, sometimes mutually supportive, often not' (p. 27). There are two sources of authority that are discussed at length in the book: namely, the English crown (and the royal lieutenants who represented this in Ireland) and the English legal system. Unlike other countries under Plantagenet rule, it was English common law rather than any hybrid localised system which was first introduced in 1204 and used by the official courts from 1210. In Frame's view this had various implications but the most important was the way in which large numbers of the Lordship's 'not-Irish' (p. 66) residents were engaged in operating and reinforcing an explicitly English rule of law. Fourteenth and early fifteenth-century sources contained, so we are told, 'thousands of local office-holders, revealing hundreds of families engaged in Irish adaptations of the self-government at the king's command which has been seen as one of the distinguishing features of local administration in England' (pp. 176–77). This resulted in difficulties in absorbing Gaelic leaders into the Lordship's administrative systems except in so far as these latter were petitioners for a legally defined English identity and/or seekers of royal favours (and, in particular, cash).

The introduction of these two twin forms of authority is dealt with in chapter two under the heading of acculturation. This chapter opens with historiographical concerns with processes of Anglicisation versus

Gaelicisation that is framed, in the first instance, by an English debate about the transition from a Norman leadership to an English identity (p. 62; see also p. 117). The difficulties that southern Protestants such as Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven and Goddard Orpen had with the label 'English' and their preference for the term Norman (p. 63) are highlighted, but it is suggested that this is not a problem for 'younger Irish medievalists' (p. 217). The two 'younger medievalists' cited are Seán Duffy and Brendan Smith, both also Trinity graduates and both heavily involved in English historiographical debates. Their views are contrasted with those of Adrian Empey who uses Norman 'even up to 1500.' It remains the case that the terms 'Norman,' 'Anglo-Norman' and 'Cambro-Norman' to describe the incomers, certainly in the period of the formation of the Irish Lordship are still the most widely used. I myself see no evidence that this 'unsettling' debate for Irish historians (as the author sees it, p. 62), has attracted much scholarly attention in Ireland outside a tightly defined school within Trinity College Dublin.

One of the fascinating and slightly disappointing aspects of the book is the lack of any in-depth exploration of the origins of these 'not Irish' (p. 66) or 'English in Ireland' settlers and colonists despite the importance this group plays in the book as a whole. On page 71, it is stated that the crown and the great lords introduced 'many lesser men with English backgrounds, chiefly, though by no means exclusively from western England'. On p. 123, it is stated that 'the assertion of control by Henry II in 1171 ensured the participation of a far wider range of beneficiaries, mostly from the western side of England but including men from East Anglia and the Home Counties.' Neither of these statements are footnoted and the latter may be intended to include major lords such as the de Burghs who had connections with Norfolk. On the other hand, it seems likely that these general statements have their origin in Frame's earlier work on settlement in *Colonial Ireland 1169–1369*, his volume for

the Helicon History of Ireland, where he discussed thirteenth-century colonisation in some depth (1981, pp. 69–91). In that earlier work, it is stated that ‘the immigration of large numbers of peasants marks the experience of Anglo-Norman Ireland off from the earlier Norman conquest of England’ and it is suggested that the greater lords may have used agents to arrange the movement of people (*ibid.*, pp. 77–78), although, in point of fact, the only evidence cited for this is a reference to ‘plebeian English’ brought in by Thomas de Clare and taken from an early translation of *Caithréim Thoirdealbhaigh*. (The original Irish term used in this text was *Glasgail* which literally translates as grey/green Foreigners, a term which is rather more ambiguous, although the *Dictionary of Irish language* does list a subsidiary meaning of *glas* as plain, unpretentious or unassuming). In addition, Frame’s preliminary analysis of the Dublin Guild Merchant Roll in his earlier work suggests that ‘the preponderance of names [there] point to origins in south Wales and the March, south-western England and the west Midlands’ (1981, p. 88).

There appears to be an implicit assumption throughout the present book that every non-Irish surname, at least of thirteenth-century date if not later, represents an incomer; the possibility that some, at least, of the personal names drawn from Latinised sources might represent bilingual men of an Irish-speaking background is nowhere considered here although mooted briefly in 1981 (p. 80). Nor is there any attempt to discuss the possibility that names such as Fleming or Walsh/Bretnach may refer to people whose ancestry in those countries lay in a remote past: the nearest Frame comes to this in *Plantagenet Ireland* is in his identification of John Lombard, mayor and sheriff of Cork in the 1350s who was ‘a descendant of an Italian banking family that had served Edward I in Ireland’ (p. 321). There is considerable potential here for extensive and detailed studies of medieval surname adoption in Ireland which would add much to our understanding of the nature of the

‘English in Ireland’ and this, in my view, is a subject that future scholars of the Lordship could profitably revisit.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the present collection is the exploration of northern English identity and culture, particularly in the fourteenth century. As part of a wider concern to question and recalibrate an older emphasis on administrative matters (pp. 41, 85, 89, 152–54 and 356–58), the book provides a biography of G.O. Sayles (pp. 223–34), whose works, both alone and with H.G. Richardson, represent the acknowledged highpoints of that particular approach to date (pp. 87, 224–25, 228–9, 234). In addition, Frame is particularly interested in the social and political contexts in which the ruling élite of the Irish Lordship operated as well as the administrative systems which they operated. Three governors appointed by Edward III are studied in depth: Anthony Lucy, Ralph Ufford, and Thomas Rokeby (pp. 235–328) and two of these three, Lucy and Rokeby, were northerners, ‘blooded by service in the Anglo-Scottish wars’ (p. 18). The paper on Lucy, in particular, draws fascinating analogies between Ireland and the rich lowlands and mountainous districts of Cumbria with its predominantly stock-raising form of agriculture, border raiding, and militarised aristocratic power. Rokeby’s interest in castle-building in north Leinster is explicitly compared with the heavy encastallation of the Anglo-Scottish border (p. 326) while Lucy’s custodianship of two *peles* at Naworth and Staward (p. 243) is also mentioned. Drawing on Terence Barry’s work, it is suggested that the influence of these men may have fed ultimately into the development of tower houses in Ireland (p. 325). While British-based historians have long been concerned with identifying parallels between Ireland and its ‘Celtic’ neighbours in Wales and Scotland, the importance of the regional identities of England in this cultural mix have been almost totally disregarded on both islands. It would be fascinating, for example, to learn more about whether there were feelings of ‘alienation’ from the

crown (p. 263) in fourteenth-century Somerset and even Worcestershire and Cheshire as well as in Cumbria.

The essay on Ralph Ufford, royal governor of Ireland between 1344 and 1346, is one of two dating back to the 1970s (the other being a short piece on the 1331 ordinance, *Una et eadem lex*, pp. 135–42). It shows similar interests to the later papers on Lucy and Rokeby: the social background and personality of the governor, his relationships with the greater magnates, his military campaigns, and the revenue gathering capacity of the Irish lordship under his leadership. What distinguishes this paper are the tables in the appendices (pp. 296–308) which, in a collation of various sources, provide a detailed itinerary of Ufford's travels in Ireland; the cost of the men at arms, as well as the archers, both mounted and on foot, who formed his retinues; the leaders, men at arms, hobelars and foot in his army and their wages through time and finally the fees of the knights and squires, their length of service and expenditure on bows, arrows, bolts, bridles, and horses. Much of this fascinating detail is drawn from unpublished materials in the national archives of both Ireland and the United Kingdom and demonstrates the wealth of such untapped sources for medieval Irish historians. Illustrative anecdotes of particular events in many of the other essays, though drawn from the same materials, do not have the same impact, perhaps because they lack the strong statistical detail found here.

The reconstruction of what remains of the nineteenth-century Irish Record Commission calendars as well as surviving originals from the Irish chancery rolls and the concomitant creation of the CIRCLE database under the direction of Peter Crooks is the subject of another paper (pp. 200–222). It is hard to disagree with the statements there that 'late medieval Ireland remains under-investigated' and that this 'has led to the perpetuation of old textbook simplifications and has made it difficult for Ireland to find the place it ought to have in the wider history

of European political societies in the later medieval period' (p. 208). However, not all scholars will necessarily agree with Frame that the development of government within the English Lordship c. 1350–c.1450 is the most important desideratum currently facing the field. My own preference, for example, would be for an alternative objective put forward elsewhere in the book: 'the study of regions, regional lordships and lineages, using all sources of possible relevance' (p. 234). The sources newly provided by CIRCLE, together with more detailed exploitation of the nineteenth-century transcripts in the Irish National Archive have the potential to clarify the nature of this patchwork landscape and create a far more detailed understanding of Irish regional history in the Middle Ages. Such work might help to clarify the lives actually lived by 'English in Ireland' as opposed to the unending rhetoric of woe with which they bombarded centralised authorities in their search for cash and favours. It would also help to break down some of the existing divisions between those who study medieval Irish architecture and settlement and those who study historical documents, to the mutual benefit of both. The works of Billy Colfer on Wexford, for example, are sterling examples of the merits of such an approach.

Key to many papers in this book and the particular subject of chapter three (pp. 85–101) were the great magnates whom Frame identifies as vital for the administration of the later medieval Lordship, particularly outside of the immediate hinterland of Dublin. Many of the papers in Part Two deal with a nuancing of the traditional story of decline and retraction after the Black Death and the Bruce invasions and place emphasis on the highest ranks of the aristocrats. The earldoms of Ormond and Desmond are prominent and discussion of the de Burghs is also heavily weighted towards their role as earls of Ulster with only occasional reference to their Munster possessions; de Burgh activities in Connacht, for example, are discussed mainly in the context of Cathal

Crobderg and the pro-English policies of thirteenth-century O'Connor dynasties (pp. 79–80) or simply characterised as absorbing the energies of knightly families from Leinster and Munster (p. 167). Careful distinctions are drawn between the different families involved: the many royal and English connections of the later thirteenth-century de Clares or the fourteenth-century Butlers are contrasted, for example, with the more rebellious history of the Geraldines of Munster (pp. 354–57). Overall, however, it is the more positive aspects of great magnate rule, their importance as agents of royal policy and their relative lack of independence within their liberties, which are stressed. (This last is the topic of a paper in its own right, pp. 102–15). This seems a very conscious choice of perspective on Frame's part, designed to re-evaluate the accounts of 'unruly magnates, absentee landholders, venal officials and distant rulers' (p. 27) found in earlier works. Irish historians of Richard II are said to have identified 'the colonial aristocracy... as the villains of the piece' (p. 157) and 'for much of the twentieth century, the aristocracy received little attention from historians whose neglect was sometimes accompanied by a barely veiled hostility' (p. 85).

In point of fact, there are very few villains to be found within the pages of this book. The approach is one which favours nuance and balance and the search for a broader understanding of the pressures acting on individuals and societies. Even the degree of 'othering' involved in the treatment of Gaelic-speaking Irishmen as intrinsically different from and alien to the 'English in Ireland' is accompanied by sentences such as: 'it is easy to forget that [Art MacMurrough] too had his difficulties of which the chief was to keep the delicate balance that allowed him at one and the same time to maintain himself as *rí Laighean* and to achieve recognition from the crown' (p. 345). The studies of thirteenth century Irish-speaking leaders such as Donnchad Cairprech O'Brien or Cathal Crobderg O'Connor (pp. 77–80) as well as the



fourteenth-century Art MacMurrough (pp. 329–48) uses Anglicised nomenclature for their names and concentrates, almost exclusively, on their relations with the English crown and its representatives. Irish-language annals and bardic poetry appear sporadically in the footnotes to various papers as does the lengthy mid-fourteenth-century text, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, although in the main text it is as often cited under its nineteenth-century English title as ‘the Triumphs of Turlough’ (pp. 68, 90, 98, 354).

Descriptions of collectives in Irish-speaking Ireland seem somewhat negative as in ‘Gaelic rulers were predatory, expanding at the expense of rivals upon whom they imposed tributes, mostly in cattle; nor were they slow, as northern episcopal registers reveal, to batten upon the wealth of the church’ (p. 34 and similar descriptions at pp. 121, 178 and 196). This is perhaps an unsurprising attitude in a historian who has spent his professional career reading about military campaigns waged against such groups. On the other hand, such ideas contrast in tone and content with the statement at p. 347 that the raising of sums by the town of Castledermot to pay Art MacMurrough in 1392 ‘differed little from that of Kilkenny when at the same period it taxed itself in order to pay the troops of its protector, the earl of Ormond’ (p. 347). It is absolutely true that the ‘slant of the sources does not make it easy to reconstruct this broad middle ground’ (p. 348) but incorporation of the work of scholars such as Caoimhín Breatnach, Anne Connon, and Geraldine Parsons on later medieval Irish literature, Fergus Kelly on the early fourteenth-century Mac Egan legal treatise, Pádraig Ó Macháin on codicology, Kieran O’Connor and Thomas Finan on settlement or Ann Buckley on liturgical materials should make the task much easier for future scholars.

Finally, the digital scanning of historical materials in Ireland and the opening of access to a globalised internet world, as elsewhere,

proceeds apace. It is now possible, for example, to download Robin Frame's original Ph.D thesis, completed in 1971. This raises the question of the intended readership and market for books such as *Plantagenet Ireland*. Journal articles are increasingly available through online databases even if some lie behind pay-walls. Articles in edited collections are rather less readily available in similar collections but are circulated through online bibliographies such as ResearchGate or Academia. Since the Covid lockdowns, there has been a noticeable increase in the informal circulation of papers between interested scholars as facilitated by Facebook groups or even Twitter. All of this undermines the traditional gathering of a scholar's oeuvre as a bound and printed copy of reprints of earlier articles (as witnessed, for example, in the *Variorum Collected Studies* series published by Routledge). The financing of academic book publication is under pressure and we are rapidly approaching the point where detailed academic works, fully footnoted and referenced, will cease to become a commercial proposition. It might, therefore, be argued that the scholarly world needs to consider more carefully the financial implications involved in publishing and to save its shekels for those cases where the works are not already available and/or have appeared relatively recently in print.

That is a pragmatist's view and most professional scholars in the humanities love books. Digitally scanned articles, at least for my generation, simply do not cut the mustard in the same way. There is a delight to be savoured in a full bookshelf, whether its contents are read or unread and there is a physical ease in reading the printed word which is often lacking on screen. To be able to carry to dip in and out of a volume at leisure is something which can bring enormous satisfaction, particularly when it brings new facts to light and provides deeper insights into topics which fascinate. G.O. Sayles is quoted here as pointing out 'that medieval Irish history suffered not from a shortage of

sources but from a shortage of competent historians willing to use them' (p. 234). This book should help considerably with both.

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