



Review: [untitled] of Colm Lennon, Sixteenth-century Ireland: the incomplete conquest (Dublin, 1994)

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Author(s)	Ellis, Steven G.
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lore associated with the Irish wells, extensively researched by the authors in numerous field trips over the last fifteen years, is fast being lost and, as informants told them, everyone is now going to Knock instead of participating in the 'patterns' at the local wells. Mention of Knock brings up a small complaint—the index. In checking just two entries, I find Knock mentioned in the text, but not in the index, and the index lists only one of the mentions of Cruachan (p. 29), but not the other (p. 86). The bibliography, too, could perhaps have listed more Irish material relevant to the subject—the valuable works by Kevin Danaher on the wells of Counties Limerick and Kerry being just one example. But, despite these caveats, the book can be highly recommended as a good and highly readable account which sheds much new 'international' but also 'national' light on a subject of absorbing interest. It should have the effect of making us go out and visit for ourselves the holy wells of the people of Ireland.

PETER HARBISON
Bord Fáilte Éireann, Dublin

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND: THE INCOMPLETE CONQUEST. By Colm Lennon. Pp x, 390. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan. 1994. IR£35 hardback; IR£14.99 paperback. (New Gill History of Ireland 2)

WITHIN the last twenty-five years our understanding of sixteenth-century Ireland has been transformed by a veritable explosion of research and writing affecting almost all aspects of the subject. From being, in effect, a 'Cinderella century', Tudor Ireland is currently one of the most lively, and contested, periods of Irish history—far more so, in fact, than Tudor England, whose historiography has become increasingly introverted. A major actor in this transformation has been Dr Colm Lennon. Over the past twenty years Lennon has published three books and a string of substantial articles focusing chiefly on the English Pale and the development of Catholicism under the later Tudors. In this, his third book, he offers an ambitious and wide-ranging survey of sixteenth-century Ireland which displays a commendable knowledge of the burgeoning secondary literature on the subject.

Given that the present reviewer is the author and general editor of a rival volume and a rival series, I hope it is not merely presumption on my part to offer a few comparisons between the two. For the 'general reader', at whom this series is ostensibly aimed, the New Gill History of Ireland must seem suspiciously like the historiographical equivalent of a one-armed bandit. Enticed by the attractive cover and the well-deserved reputation of its predecessor, the unsuspecting punter discovers, on opening the first volume, that the six medieval volumes of the original series have been replaced by one comparatively thin volume. And if the seventeenth-century volume looks much meatier, its historiographical impact has been equally slight. Thus, having drawn a lemon and a turkey with his first two spins, our punter's hopes for this new volume are buoyed more by the reputation of the author than by the quality of the series. The thrust of research and writing over the previous dozen years meant that in the early 1980s it became possible to write a partly research-based history of Tudor Ireland as a problem of government. Since then, however, much more work has been done on the later stages of the Tudor conquest and on the Gaelic response to conquest and colonisation, and Lennon's book exploits this to good effect. Thus, although it is almost exactly the same length as my own *Tudor Ireland* (London, 1985), in most respects it is quite different.

Perhaps wisely, Lennon interprets his brief literally, starting at 1500. Instead of

surveying the impact on Ireland of the revival of crown government and Poyning's expedition, the book is firmly anchored by three predominantly socio-economic sections on the natural environment, town and county in English Ireland, and society and culture in Gaelic Ireland. The study does not normally cite primary sources, either here or elsewhere, but these chapters are based on a very extensive trawl through the printed literature, and offer a fresh, original approach to the subject, with many new insights. Lennon is particularly good on the towns, trade and urban culture, less so on English administration and manorialism. The next, predominantly political section on the Kildare ascendancy is more uneven, however. There is a lively discussion of the earl's connexion in Ireland, but, divorced from its wider Tudor context, the survey of early Tudor policy is little more than 'one damn thing after another' and includes some factual inaccuracies.

The book is disappointingly weak on the significance of 1534 as a watershed, in part because it treats these developments almost as a postscript to one chapter and an introduction to another. And sandwiched in between is a chapter focusing on the pre-Reformation church, which concludes with a discussion of the initial impact of the Henrician Reformation. Again, there is a very valuable description here of late medieval Christianity in Ireland—far more detailed, indeed, than anything else available—but little attempt to compare the aims and response to religious reform with similar conditions in Wales or the English north. Religious and political reform are combined in the next chapter, which focuses on the rise and fall of 'the constitution of Ireland as a sovereign kingdom' (p. 144). Yet the constitutional implications of the introduction and enforcement of the English Edwardian Reformation legislation or of its subsequent reversal without the consent of the Irish parliament are hardly noticed, and the discussion of aristocratic and religious reaction under Mary is perfunctory. The religious theme is taken up again in the book's final chapter, where there is an important and well-balanced discussion of the transformation of Catholicism and the emergence of Catholic nationalism. More could have been done to tease out the implications for a predominantly non-literate society of the Tudor switch from a visual to a bibliocentric presentation of religion; and supporters of the Elizabethan settlement and prayer book advocated a very moderate, not 'a radical form of Protestantism' (p. 304). Overall, however, the main weakness of the very valuable and thorough treatment of religion here is its structure. The decision to place Elizabethan developments as a kind of postscript to the Nine Years War comes very much as an anticlimax.

Just when *Sixteenth-century Ireland* seems to be running into serious structural difficulties, however, the book is rescued by Lennon's brilliant and imaginative decision to analyse the impact of Tudor reform on a provincial basis. With these four chapters dealing with developments in the period 1556–1603, the book really comes to life. It is particularly impressive in its analysis of what Tudor reform actually meant at a local level, and how the various strategies translated into practice. The structure is not rigid: conditions in the Pale in the 1590s, for instance, are juxtaposed with those of Ulster in a wide-ranging chapter on Ulster and the Nine Years War. The same might have been done with the wave of rebellions between 1568 and 1573 which cut across provincial boundaries. Yet these provincial surveys undoubtedly add an important new dimension to our understanding of the pattern of Tudor reform. The chapter on Leinster, which draws on unpublished theses by Lennon's own students, is outstanding. Overall, by emphasising Elizabeth's continuing devotion to an essentially conciliatory policy of reform, notwithstanding the activities of her New English officials, the analysis also makes a further dent in recent theories alleging a pronounced shift to colonialism and a pattern of conquest established under Lord Deputy Sidney. Where perhaps the implications of Tudor reform do need further consideration (and not just by Lennon) are concerning surrender and

regrant and the introduction of English administrative structures to Gaelic Ireland. Lennon is right to emphasise the essential continuity between the policy of the 1540s and the subsequent modifications which aimed to turn *uir-ríoghtha* and even junior branches of provincial chiefs into tenants-in-chief rather than mesne tenants. Both this modification, however, and the comparatively open and participatory structures of English government which surrender and regrant ostensibly aimed to introduce, also cut across the interests both of the chief and of the New English officials charged with enforcing the policy. Thus attempts to undermine the firmly hierarchical structures of Gaelic society generated considerable resistance, while New English officials attempted to restrict the normal operation of English government by the extended use of martial law.

Finally, what are the wider perspectives and conclusions of *Sixteenth-century Ireland*? Any historian attempting to write a general survey of the period faces some very difficult choices regarding contexts of explanation. Early Tudor Ireland was part of an emerging English nation-state, but the rest of the island lay within the *Gaedhealtacht* stretching across the North Channel into the Scottish highlands and islands. In terms of vertical perspectives too, the sixteenth century saw the first appearance of many of the main ingredients of the modern Irish problem—notably, confessional strife and Irish Catholic nationalism, conquest and colonisation, and the creation of a unified English kingdom of Ireland ruled from Dublin. Yet, precisely because modern Ireland is so contested, the sixteenth century also needs to be viewed both in terms of British state formation and the making of an independent Irish state. Clearly no historian can hope to do justice to all these perspectives within the scope of a single volume. At first sight, the book appears to answer the prayer of the confused and despairing undergraduate student of early modern Ireland who, noting that the course had been taught by Canny and Ellis, and that Bradshaw was external examiner, wanted to know who had primary responsibility for marking his paper. Lennon's style is clear, functional, and non-judgemental: he ignores all controversy and allows the facts to speak for themselves. Thus on the surface there is no interpretation. There is indeed a danger here that the innocent undergraduate who espies a biblical simplicity in history will be encouraged simply to cite chapter and verse from this authorised version of sixteenth-century Ireland, since Lennon appears to reconcile conflicting interpretations by citing old sparring partners in the same footnote.

In fact Lennon's arguments are much more sophisticated than this—his footnote citations refer chiefly to facts, not interpretations—even though they may well disappoint those readers who expect the significance of developments to be summarised chapter by chapter, with an overall conclusion. Close scrutiny of the concepts, terminology and the facts highlighted certainly reveal a good deal about the broader horizons of this survey. For instance, those *Gaedhil* who were based in Scotland, such as Clan Donald, are called 'Scots', while those based in Ireland are often called 'Irish' rather than 'Gaelic', as is the language which Scottish historians call 'common classical Gaelic'. The English of Ireland are described variously as 'Anglo-Norman', 'Anglo-Irish', 'Old English' and 'old colonials'. Thus, together with the meaning attached to 'nationwide' (p. 89) and 'national' (p. 93), and even the description of the eighth earl of Kildare as an 'Irishman' (p. 70), the general effect is to anticipate later developments in terms of a collective sense of Irishness. In this context, the use of terms like 'pan-insular' (pp 179, 185) or 'fellow-islanders' (p. 193) should also be noted. And there are a number of other interesting linguistic innovations: 'Palespeople' (p. 179), for instance, seems rather better than 'clanspeople' (p. 194), since the clan was patrilineal.

Overall, therefore, the book's strengths lie more in the direction of charting the emergence of an Irish sense of nationality than the break-up of the traditional

Gaedhealtacht and the growing divisions between the English of England and of Ireland. Its perspectives work better for the later sixteenth century as Ireland becomes a more meaningful entity with its own political system. In this context, *Sixteenth-century Ireland* is undoubtedly an important, much-needed addition to the literature. It offers a sensible and balanced survey of developments, and it is particularly valuable for its treatment of those topics such as socio-economic change and the impact of Tudor reform in government and religion at local level which have been comparatively neglected in existing accounts. So far as the 'general reader' is concerned, it is worth, in fruit-machine-speak, at least two cherries!

STEVEN G. ELLIS

Department of History, University College, Galway

AIBIDIL GAOIDHEILGE & CAITICIOSMA: SEAÁN Ó CEARNAIGH'S IRISH PRIMER OF RELIGION PUBLISHED IN 1571. Edited by Brian Ó Cuív. Pp x, 246. Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Institute for Advanced Studies. 1994. IR£15.

THE first book in the Irish language to have been printed in Ireland was published in 1571. It has now been reprinted for the first time, in a *de luxe* scholarly edition which presents a facsimile of the original text, made from the copy in Lincoln Cathedral Library. This is printed in parallel with the modern edited text in Irish and is accompanied by a comprehensive introduction in English along with textual notes and a full glossary. Other texts reproduced as appendixes are the 1566 Dublin printing of *Articles of Relygion*, transcribed from the unique Trinity College, Dublin, copy, and the 1571 broadsheet containing the earliest known copy of a printed Irish bardic poem in strict metre, a version of Pilib Ó hUiginn's *Tuar feirge foighide Dhé*. This is thought to have been a trial piece produced by the printer of the catechism, and the broadsheet is here reproduced at its actual size, from the unique copy in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and inserted at the back of the book. Appendix III provides a modern edited version of the poem with translation and textual notes.

The alphabet and catechism as conceived by Seaán Ó Cearnaigh was a simple production, 56 pages long, making available in the Irish language a basic Protestant catechism. The body of the text was derived from the catechism of the *Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1549, and later editions) and also included a range of prayers mostly but not exclusively derived from John Knox's *Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh, 1564, and later editions), as well as the *Book of Common Prayer*. It is likely that Ó Cearnaigh's book was also inspired by John Carswell's Irish-language version of the *Book of Common Order* published as *Foirm na nUrrnuidheadh* in Edinburgh in 1567. Carswell's text was the first Irish-language book printed, though it used Roman type; the relationship between the two texts is comprehensively dealt with by Ó Cuív. Ó Cearnaigh's catechism included an epistle to the reader, which was apparently his own work, and the book concluded with an Irish-language version of the 1566 *Articles of Relygion* which had been published in Dublin.

Since so much of the text was derivative of English-language sources, a translation of Ó Cearnaigh's work into English would have been superfluous in this edition. A translation of the epistle is, however, provided. Ó Cuív devotes much of his editorial introduction to a discussion of the relationship of the contents of this Irish-language catechism to the standard Protestant works from which it derived, drawing together previous scholarship on the subject. Among the textual notes indications are given