REVIEW ARTICLE

Medieval Ireland and the Wider World[1]

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I

'British History has been much in the air of late; but it
still seems strangely reluctant to come down to earth.'[2]

How times—and academic fashions—do change. In the years
since R. R. Davies made this pronouncement at Gregynog in 1986,
the medieval strain of that polymorphous project, the 'new British
history', has become something of an academic creed and, for
publishing houses, big business. Now that we have reached the point
when early modernists are beginning to ask whether the 'British'
approach is old hat,[3] it is well to recall that, as late as 1993, Conrad
fifth earl Russell was insisting that the archipelagic cap would not fit

the medieval British Isles at all. '[T]here is no case', he averred, 'for a medieval British history, which would be as much an abstraction as European history, and a slightly less logical one.'[4] The work of the past decade and a half suggests that Russell was mistaken.[5] For historians of medieval Ireland, it has been invigorating to discover that the Irish experience mattered, that what happened on the fringes of Latin Christendom was important to the story as a whole. This shift in attitude is evident in many of the volumes under review. Not all the authors are Irish specialists, nor do they all locate themselves self-consciously within the framework of the 'new British history'; but each of their works expounds, reflects upon, or (in the case of primary texts) illustrates some aspect of the theme of medieval Ireland and the wider world. In an era obsessed with the quantification of academic output, it is not the number of publications on this subject that is impressive, but their quality—an encouraging sign that, despite considerable institutional and infrastructural pressures, medieval Irish history is thriving.

Among the more dynamic subsidiaries of 'British History Inc.' is the historiography of the 'Irish Sea World', which, after more than a decade of steady growth, now boasts an impressive portfolio of work.[6] *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages* is the product of just one conference among many to have addressed itself to this theme since Seán Duffy began to open up the subject in the early 1990s.[7] The volume is exceptional not only for its display of multi-

[4] Conrad Russell, 'John Bull's other nations', *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 4693 (12 March 1993).

[5] See Seán Duffy, 'The British perspective', in S. H. Rigby, *A companion to Britain in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), esp. 167: 'Once admitted, Cinderella has stubbornly refused to leave the ball, which has been immeasurably illuminated by her presence.'

[6] The emphasis has been predominantly on the North Channel. Of recent books, see Benjamin Hudson, *Viking pirates and Christian princes: dynasty, religion and empire in the North Atlantic* (Oxford, 2005); idem, *Irish Sea Studies, 900–1200* (Dublin, 2006); and Clare Downham, *Viking kings of Britain and Ireland: the dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh, 2007).

[7] See Seán Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea world, 1306–29', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 21 (1991), 55–86; idem, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', *Ériu*, 43 (1992), 93–133; idem, 'Ostmen, Irish and Welsh in the eleventh century', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 378–96; idem, 'The 1169 invasion as a turning-point in Irish–Welsh relations', in Brendan Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: insular responses to medieval European change* (Cambridge, 1999), 98–113; idem, 'Ireland and Scotland, 1014–1169: contacts and caveats', in Alfred P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), 348–56; idem (ed.), *Robert the Bruce's Irish wars: the invasions of Ireland, 1306–1329* (Stroud, 2002); idem, 'The lords of Galloway, earls of Carrick, and the Bissetts of the Glens: Scottish settlement in thirteenth-century Ulster', in David Edwards (ed.), *Regions and rulers in Ireland, 1100–1650: essays for Kenneth Nicholls* (Dublin, 2004), ch. 4;

disciplinarity and the distinction with which the editorial work has been accomplished, but also for the magisterial 'overview' by the late Proinsias Mac Cana (†2004) with which it opens. Stepping back from the weft and warp of Hiberno-Welsh relations, Mac Cana regards a whole tapestry of social, cultural and political interactions across a millennium from Tacitus to the later Middle Ages. His five-fold categorization of the 'continuing traffic between Ireland and Wales' (p. 22)—which we might further compress to traders, fugitives, mercenaries, raiders and saints—sets up the remaining eleven contributions very well. These include commendable essays on political connections by Alex Woolf ('The expulsion of the Irish from Dyfed') and Colmán Etchingham ('Viking-age Gwynedd and Ireland: political relations)', and on the cult of saints by Karen Jankulak. After c.1100 the collection begins to fizzle out, leaving the impression that a more realistic title would have been *Ireland and Wales in the early Middle Ages*. Only two essays tackle the period after the invasion of Ireland in the late 1160s, and an opportunity was perhaps missed to engage with the substantial corpus of work that has already been undertaken on the later period, as well as to identify the corners that remain to be swept.[8]

While the thrust of much recent work on the English invasion of Ireland has been to de-emphasise its significance as a hiatus in Ireland's political development, research on the Irish Sea region as a whole has tended to affirm the importance of 1169 as a watershed. This is just one of many subjects addressed by R. Andrew McDonald in *Manx kingship in its Irish Sea setting, 1187–1229: King Rögnvaldr and the Crovan dynasty*.[9] Despite being one of the larger islands in

idem, 'The prehistory of the galloglass', in idem (ed.), *The world of the galloglass: kings, warlords and warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (Dublin, 2007).

[8] A preliminary bibliography of comparative works on the later period might have included (on political history) James Lydon, 'Lordship and crown: Llywelyn of Wales and O'Connor of Connacht', in Davies (ed.), *British Isles, 1100–1500*, 48–63; (on economic developments) A. D. Carr, 'Medieval Ireland: a view from across the water', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 15 (1988), 94–8; and (on social history) R. R. Davies, 'Frontier arrangements in fragmented societies: Ireland and Wales', in Robert Bartlett and A. MacKay (eds), *Medieval frontier societies* (Oxford, 1989), 77–100. The transition from 'medieval' to 'modern' in both countries is examined in Ciaran Brady, 'Comparable histories? Tudor reform in Wales and Ireland', in Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest and union: fashioning a British state, 1485–1723* (London and New York, 1995), 64–86. Note also Robin Frame's important essay on franchisal institutions in Ireland and Wales, which appeared in the same year as *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages*: Frame, 'Lordship and liberties in Ireland and Wales, c.1170–c.1360', in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and identities in the British Isles: essays in memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), 125–38.

[9] On this subject, see also R. Andrew McDonald, 'Man, Ireland, and England: the English conquest of Ireland and Dublin–Manx relations', in Seán Duffy (ed.),

the archipelago, the Isle of Man has been relatively little studied
from an 'archipelagic history' perspective. McDonald's book is
a conscious attempt to rectify this and, in the author's words, to
'reverse traditional perspectives so that the periphery becomes the
centre and the centre becomes the periphery, thus placing the Isle of
Man in the interesting position of a cultural crossroads in the middle
of the Irish Sea, open to influences from all sides' (p. 37). This is
an exciting point of departure. Rögnvaldr son of Guðrøðr, king of
Man (1187–1229), features prominently in the title and text, but
this is emphatically not a traditional royal biography—an exercise
that the sparse documentary and narrative sources would scarcely
have allowed. Instead, McDonald attempts something far more
challenging and absorbing: a thematic account of Manx kingship
that touches on such widely dispersed topics as kin-strife, royal
self-representation in charters, inauguration rituals, relations with
the church, and the growth of 'bureaucratic' kingship. The author
explores these themes by working outwards from the familiar (the
Manx chronicle and a Gaelic praise poem addressed to Rögnvaldr
[*alias* Raghnall] are among his staple sources),[10] adding layer upon
layer of contextualizing detail drawn from an eclectic range of primary
sources. Moreover, like the 'super-viking' (p. 30) about whom he
writes with verve, McDonald raids and trades with any number of
national and supranational historiographies. The result is a success,
and the two chapters on Man's interactions with its neighbours
make for particularly satisfying reading, although the label 'foreign
relations' perhaps rather begs the question. A key interpretative idea
is an old chestnut of Scottish historiography: the balance of new and
old.[11] Manx kings, we are told, were 'Janus-like' in their ability to
straddle the 'old' Gaelic-Scandinavian world and the 'new' Frankish
culture (pp 30, 67, 69, 221). Cultural exchange is undoubtedly one of
the aspects of Rögnvaldr's career that will continue to fascinate. But
how appropriate are the (value-laden) terms 'old' and 'new'? And to
what extent does the metaphor of the two-faced Janus arise from the
categories of the sources rather than the social reality of the time?
That McDonald provokes these questions, among others, is a sure
sign of the value of his work.

Medieval Dublin VIII (Dublin, 2008), 131–49.

[10] G. Broderick (ed.), *Cronica regum Mannie et Insularum: Chronicles of the kings
of Man and the Isles* (Douglas, 1979; 2nd ed., 1995); B. Ó Cuív (ed.), 'A poem in
praise of Raghnall, king of Man', *Éigse*, 8 (1955–7), 283–301.

[11] G. W. S. Barrow, 'David I of Scotland (1124–53): the balance of new and old',
in idem, *Scotland and its neighbours in the Middle Ages* (London, 1992). Cf. Steve
Boardman and Alasdair Ross, 'Introduction', in idem (eds), *The exercise of power in
medieval Scotland,* c. *1200–1500* (Dublin, 2003), 15–22, esp. 19.

De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, by Steve Flanders, should serve as a useful complement to McDonald's volume, since both authors are gnawing on some of the same bones. The most famous son of the de Courcy family, John (†1219?), the conqueror of Ulster, married Rögnvaldr's sister, Affreca, and fled to Man after his expulsion from Ulster by Hugh (II) de Lacy in 1205.[12] Flanders traces the de Courcy pedigree back to its origins in Normandy, and his particular concern is to distinguish the Norman branch of the family, whose *caput* was at Courcy-sur-Dives in Calvados, from the de Courcys of Stoke Courcy (Stogursey) in Somerset. On this and related topics, he has been industrious in the archives. It is regrettable, then, that one of the more conspicuous features of the volume is its limited apparatus, especially since this brand of forensic genealogical investigation demands close footnoting. The treatment of the secondary literature is also curious. Flanders betrays no anxiety of influence when he remarks that 'John [de Courcy] was evidently well-informed of the history of the region ... which comprised Ulster, Galloway, the Isles, Man, Cumbria and, perhaps, north Wales, all linked by that motorway of the medieval world: the sea' (p. 19). This is the first of several opportunities to direct the reader's attention to Seán Duffy's landmark essay on the importance of de Courcy's Cumbrian connections in the so-called 'first Ulster plantation'.[13] In the event, the reader must wait until the final chapter for the first citation of this work (p. 127). Should the author write further on his subject (and one earnestly hopes that he will do so), the addition of comprehensive references to all his authorities would be most welcome.

[12] Flanders (unlike John de Courcy?) is more at home in the Anglo-French world than in the Celtic peripheries: the unfortunate Ruaidrí Mac Duinn Sléibe, king of Ulaid, who was expelled by John de Courcy in 1177, appears variously as 'Mac Duinn Shléibe' (p. 19), 'Mac Duinn Schléibe' (p. 137), 'Mac Duinn Schlibe' (pp 140–2), and 'MacDunleavy' (pp 162–3). The Gaelic and Anglicized forms of the name are entered separately in the index without a cross-reference (p. 199).

[13] Seán Duffy, 'The first Ulster plantation: John de Courcy and the men of Cumbria', in T. B. Barry, Robin Frame and Katharine Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of James Lydon* (London, 1995), 1-27. Note also the absence of a citation when the author states that 'the myth of John de Courcy haling [*sic*] from the West Country of England can be discarded' (p. 46). Likewise, the author's discussion of the church (e.g., pp 154–6) might have included a reference to the important work on that subject by Marie Therese Flanagan: 'John de Courcy, the first Ulster plantation and the Irish church men', in Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland*, 154–78. Both works are, however, cited in the bibliography. James Lydon's colourful sketch of de Courcy's career is not: Lydon, 'John de Courcy (*c.*1150–1219) and the medieval frontier', in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Worsted in the game: losers in Irish history* (Dublin, 1989), 37–46.

Citation of authorities is not a problem in Paul MacCotter's remarkable *Medieval Ireland: territorial, political and economic divisions.* If all recent publications were avowedly in the 'British history' or trans-regional mould, it would make for a monochrome historiography. Refeshingly, MacCotter's book is a contribution to the discipline of *dinnseanchas,* a venerable tradition that explores Ireland's topographical lore—though here too the author demonstrates a marked concern to place the Irish evidence in the wider context of insular and European developments (ch. 7). The volume takes as its subject the political geography of medieval Ireland, focussing on the spatial unit known in Gaelic sources as the *tricha cét* and, in post-invasion colonial Ireland, as the cantred. MacCotter's command of the primary sources and onomastic evidence is nothing short of breathtaking. His technique (to borrow Maitland's term) is 'retrogressive':[14] by working backwards, often from colonial record sources, he seeks to reconstruct the territorial divisions that constituted pre-invasion Ireland. At least half of the volume is comprised of a gazetteer of the cantreds, *tricha cét*s and local kingdoms of Ireland, as well as a colour 'Atlas of the cantreds and *tricha cét*s of Ireland, *c.*AD 1200'. This alone would be some achievement, but the tightly-written analysis that occupies the first half of the volume also represents a major contribution to scholarship. MacCotter demonstrates convincingly that the cantred of post-invasion Ireland was the lineal descendant of the *tricha cét,* which in turn preserved the boundaries of Irish local kingdoms from the early historic period. As the author puts it, 'the Anglo-Norman colonists inherited the topography of the Irish system of local administration, thus preserving—in amber, as it were—for centuries afterwards the boundaries of the *tricha cét* under the guise of cantreds and, in some cases, baronies' (p. 44).

MacCotter dedicates his volume to a host of eminences including John O'Donovan, William Reeves, Goddard Henry Orpen, Hubert T. Knox, Edmund Hogan, James Hogan, Paul Walsh and Liam Ó Buachalla. But, in his knowledge of arcane manuscript sources, he is perhaps most reminiscent of his mentor and erstwhile collaborator, Kenneth Nicholls.[15] Indeed, MacCotter sometimes seems more Nicholls-like than Nicholls, not least in his facility with the flick-knife aside. While this book supersedes all previous examinations of the subject, the author might have been more generous to the work of

[14] The phrase occurs in the preface to F. W. Maitland, *Domesday book and beyond: three essays in the early history of England* (Cambridge, 1897).
[15] Paul MacCotter and Kenneth Nicholls (eds), *The pipe roll of Cloyne: Rotulus Pipae Clonensis* (Cloyne, 1996).

scholars who have struggled with the issues before him, among them A. J. Otway-Ruthven and her pupil C. A. Empey.[16] If MacCotter takes no prisoners, he may also have left a few hostages to fortune. He is sensitive to the fact that his analysis is unfashionably schematic (pp 45, 103), doubtless in anticipation of the *odium scholasticum* of carnivorous Celticists. And despite the trouble he takes over definitions, there are still some elements in his lexicon that may cause readers to stumble, among them 'late *tuath*', 'feudal barony', and the distinction between 'administrative' and 'original cantreds'. Such cases of ambiguity are, however, unusual, and the reader who persists will usually find enlightenment. The author can rest assured that scholars from the early historic period to the early modern will find themselves reaching for this volume time and again to find out 'what MacCotter has to say'.

II

We can approach the subject of 'Medieval Ireland and the wider world' from a different angle by taking another trend in medieval Irish studies, namely the production of critical editions and calendars of primary texts. 'Sadly, the age of calendaring has largely passed', Paul MacCotter remarks, 'and it is to be regretted that so little of the not-inconsiderable quantity of calendared manuscripts which remain has been published' (p. 27). Quite so. Since the incineration of the records in the treasury of the Public Record Office of Ireland in 1922, the attitude of successive Irish governments to the state's archival heritage has not been enlightened.[17] The latest, and as yet unfinished, chapter in this sorry story is the proposed merger, pending legislation, of the National Archives and Irish Manuscripts Commission into the National Library of Ireland. The loss of one national archive was a misfortune. To lose a second looks, to coin a phrase, like carelessness.[18]

[16] Otway-Ruthven's institutional approach may be felt in Paul MacCotter, 'Functions of the cantred in medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 19 (2005), 308–32; cf. A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century', in Peter Crooks (ed.), *Government, war and society in medieval Ireland: essays by Edmund Curtis, A.J. Otway-Ruthven and James Lydon* (Dublin, 2008), ch. 5. Empey's many essays on the cantred are cited in MacCotter notes and bibliography, but one further item has appeared since the latter's volume went to press: Adrian Empey, 'The liberty and counties of Carlow in the high Middle Ages', in Thomas McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2008), ch. 6.

[17] Gerard O'Brien, *Irish governments and the guardianship of historical records, 1922–72* (Dublin, 2004).

[18] After an initial flurry, the public response has been muted, a sign (one hopes) of silent despair rather than apathy. Note, however, Prof. Donnchadh Ó Corráin's letter

Against this background, it is instructive to note a different attitude across the water. The National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew) has, in recent years, facilitated a host of projects to make its medieval records accessible to researchers and the general public. These projects bear on the development of later medieval Irish history because of the intimate relationship that existed in the later Middle Ages between the colonial administration based (mostly) at Dublin and its 'mother' administration at Westminster. To name but three resources that are especially rich in Irish material, we have a new edition of the rolls of the English parliament;[19] an online calendar of the series of Ancient Petitions, complete with images of the manuscripts;[20] and a project, in progress, to calendar the Fine Rolls of the reign of Henry III.[21] All three have been riding the wave of 'digital humanities'. Time will tell whether, amid the current general crisis, we can detect the 'melancholy long withdrawing roar' of research funding in the humanities.

It is in the nature of research projects that they tackle the better-known and more prestigious series first; but documents relevant to Ireland are scattered across dozens of classes of record that are yet to be calendared, some of them highly artificial and miscellaneous in character. The task of locating such documents has become significantly easier of late due to the production of handlists, calendars, editions and guides to 'Irish material' in English archival repositories. In this, the late Philomena Connolly (†2002) was a pioneer.[22] At the time of her death, she was in collaboration with Brendan Smith of the University of Bristol on a major project to trawl the National Archives at Kew in search of material relating to the

to the *Irish Times* in which he protests strenuously at the 'ill-judged and impractical proposal'. He continues: 'The library and archives are not quangos, but venerable anchor institutions of Irish culture that trace their origins back to the eighteenth century [...]' (*Irish Times*, 20 Oct. 2008). See also Fintan O'Toole, 'A state hell-bent on wiping its collective memory' (ibid., 1 Nov. 2008).

[19] Chris Given-Wilson (ed.), *The parliament rolls of medieval England, 1272–1504* (16 vols, Woodbridge, 2005).

[20] Accessible through the website of the National Archives of the United Kingdom. The petitions relating to Ireland are surveyed in Philomena Connolly, 'Irish material in the class of ancient petitions (SC 8) in the Public Record Office, London', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 34 (1987), 1–106. Editions of some of them are published in G. O. Sayles, *Documents on the affairs of Ireland before the King's Council in England* (Dublin, 1979).

[21] Paul Dryburgh and Beth Hartland (eds), *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of Henry III* (Woodbridge, 2007–).

[22] Philomena Connolly, *Medieval record sources* (Dublin, 2002), is a minor masterpiece and the standard introduction to its subject. See also Brian C. Donovan and David Edwards, 'British sources for Irish history before 1485: a preliminary handlist of documents held in local and specialised repositories', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 37 (1998), 191–220.

history of medieval Ireland. The result was a *Handbook and select calendar of sources for Medieval Ireland in the National Archives of the United Kingdom*, prepared by Smith and his collaborator Paul Dryburgh, which appeared in 2005.[23] The same editors have now produced a companion volume, *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, which provides a calendar of inquisitions taken by the royal administration primarily to establish the crown's rights and prerogatives *vis-à-vis* the Irish estates of lay tenants-in-chief who also held lands in England.[24] This calendar, which is accompanied by a superb apparatus, is a model of its kind. Lest the title should unintentionally mislead, it is worth emphasising that the volume does not exhaust the material of this nature from medieval Ireland: extents (that is, surveys or valuations of land) also survive in seigniorial and ecclesiastical archives, while the Dublin administration kept its own files of inquisitions. The latter are no longer extant, but they can sometimes be reconstructed from antiquarian transcripts and calendars.[25] The appearance of *Inquisitions and extents* will, however, doubtless excite new interest in this genre of record, which has been put to such productive use in an English context.[26]

The editors scarcely need an advocate to speak in defence of these endeavours, but there may be value in pre-empting one curmudgeonly objection, namely that the production of calendars discourages the next generation of students from engaging in archival work and, worse, obviates the need to study Latin. The argument, I would submit, is specious. One reason why the period before 1307 in Ireland enjoys such a rich historiography is surely the existence of H. S. Sweetman's five-volume *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland*.[27] Consequently, the efforts of Smith and Dryburgh—

[23] Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith (eds), *Handbook and select calendar of sources for medieval Ireland in the National Archives of the United Kingdom* (Dublin, 2005). See also idem (eds), 'Calendar of documents relating to medieval Ireland in the series of Ancient Deeds in the National Archives of the United Kingdom', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 39 (2006), 1–161.

[24] For an excellent guide to this class of record, see the general introduction by Christine Carpenter to the new series of inquisitions *post mortem* for the reign of Henry VI: Kate Parkin, (ed.), *Calendar of inquisitions* post mortem *and other analogous documents preserved in the Public Record Office*, xxii: *1 to 5 Henry VI* (Woodbridge, 2003), 1–42.

[25] Cf. the introduction to *Inquisitions and extents*, where it is stated that 'the depletion of Irish records over the centuries means that evidence ... in Ireland is also lacking' (p. iv).

[26] See, e.g., B. M. S. Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000); idem and K. Bartley, *England on the eve of the Black Death: an atlas of lay lordship, land and wealth, 1300–1349* (Manchester, 2006).

[27] H. S. Sweetman and G. F. Handcock (eds), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, 1171–1307* (5 vols, London, 1875–86).

undertaken with the purpose of facilitating further archival work, not of rendering such work redundant—augur well for the future of the late Middle Ages in Ireland, a period that has never quite escaped from the doldrums.[28] To be sure, intellectual access to medieval English record sources requires competence, at a minimum, in dog Latin and law French. In this regard, the decline of Latinity is worrisome. But historians of an older generation, who could parse Caesar's *Gallic Wars* while still in their short pants, must do more than wring their hands at the standard of students emerging from second level today. If we are serious about maintaining interest in medieval studies then we must labour at third level to encourage (dare I say 'incentivise'?) the learning of languages in general, and Latin in particular, among undergraduates.[29] Aside from the obvious enrichment this would bring to a humane education, it would have the functional benefit of making the next step into original research in medieval studies far less daunting.

The era when a late medievalist could live on administrative sources alone has long since passed, and the last decade has witnessed a remarkable efflorescence of work on the narrative sources emanating from the English colony in Ireland.[30] Credit for this must go in large part to Bernadette Williams, who has now produced a critical edition of the annals of the Franciscan John Clyn, last edited 160 years ago by Richard Butler for the Irish Archaeological Society.[31] This new

[28] Note their conclusion that 'the harvest ... is even richer than has previously been assumed': Dryburgh and Smith (eds), *Handbook and select calendar*, 275.

[29] It is precisely the mindset of 'if it's not in the exam, I don't need to know it'— an attitude sadly encouraged by current second-level (and increasingly third-level) examination procedures—that university courses must overcome. For a provocative discussion of this issue, see John J. Cleary, 'The price of education', in T. A. F. Kelly (ed.), *What price the university? Perspectives on the meaning and value of higher education, from the National University* (Maynooth, 2006), esp. 26–7.

[30] Bernadette Williams, 'The "Kilkenny chronicle" ', in Barry, Frame and Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier*, 75–95; eadem, 'The Dominican annals of Dublin', in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin II* (Dublin, 2001), 142–68; Alan J. Fletcher, 'The annals and chronicles of medieval Dublin: an overview' and Raymond Gillespie, 'Dubliners view themselves: the Dublin City chronicles', both in Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin VIII*, 194–212, 213–27; Alan J. Fletcher, 'The earliest extant recension of the Dublin chronicle: an edition with commentary', in John Bradley, Alan J. Fletcher and Anngret Simms (eds), *Dublin and the medieval world: studies in honour of Howard B. Clarke* (Dublin, 2009), 390–409. Meanwhile, interest in the Gaelic annalistic compilations shows no sign of abating. Witness the major study by Daniel P. McCarthy, *The Irish annals: their genesis, evolution and history* (Dublin, 2008); and a useful introduction by Katharine Simms, *Medieval Gaelic sources* (Dublin, 2009), ch. 1.

[31] R. Butler (ed.), *The annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn, of the Convent of Friars Minors, Kilkenny; and Thady Dowling, Chancellor of Leighlin, together with the Annals of Ross* (Dublin, 1849). There is still material of interest in the notes to this volume, many of which were prepared by the distinguished antiquarian Rev. James Graves (†1886).

edition is generally of a very high standard, although (as anyone who has put matter into print will know) it can be as difficult to decipher minims on the printed page as in a medieval manuscript.[32] In 1330, Clyn's laconic account of the demise of Roger Mortimer, first earl of March (†1330) [Lat. *morti damnatur R. de Mortuo Mari comes Marchie*] is rendered, by a slip of the pen, 'Richard de Mortimer, earl of March, was condemned to death'. The report under the year 1349 of 'a great shortage of corn and spices; for a pound of corn was selling for twenty pence and pepper and ginger for forty pence' [Lat. *In magna karistia sere et specierum, nam libra sere vendebatur xx^{ti} denariis et piperis et zinsiberis xl^{ta} denariis*] causes the editor some concern because corn is not normally measured by the pound (p. 252, n. 4). Could the problem be resolved by translating *sere* as 'wax' [Lat. *cera*]—a commodity measured by the pound in murage grants of the period?[33] The entry, then, suggests that the import of goods, such as wax and spices, was disrupted by arrival of the Black Death in 1348, causing a spike in prices.[34]

These are relatively minor matters and should not detract from the editor's considerable achievement in providing not only a fresh collation of the manuscripts, but also a translation with copious explanatory footnotes. It is, of course, Clyn's account of the arrival of the Black Death in Ireland that has won for him some celebrity.[35] This and other matters are addressed by Williams in over one hundred pages of prefatory analysis, including an important interpretative chapter with the evocative title: 'Clyn, a window on counties Tipperary and Kilkenny'. This region, the heartland of the Butler family, has been much studied, especially since Edmund Curtis began the publication of the Ormond deeds in calendar form in the 1930s.[36] Williams adds a new dimension to this body of work by

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[32] See, e.g., 'castrurn' for *castrum* (p. 209), 'scilicet' for *scilicet* (p. 213), 'comrnunionem' for *communionem* (p. 249) and 'infirrnitate' for *infirmitate* (p. 249). At page 201, n. 126, 'vacabatur' should perhaps read *vocabatur*.

[33] To take an example from the region with which Clyn was familiar, a murage charter to Thomastown, co. Kilkenny (1 March 1375), grants the town a licence to take ½d. from every two pounds of wax for sale in the town: *Chartae, privilegia et immunitates, being transcripts of charters and privileges to cities, towns, and other bodies corporate,* [...] *1171–1395* (Dublin, 1889), 68. For the demand for spices and other exotic commodities in the fourteenth century, see Avril Thomas, 'Financing town walls in medieval Ireland', in Colin Thomas (ed.), *Rural landscapes and communities: essays presented to Desmond McCourt* (Blackrock, 1986), 72–3.

[34] Cf. the prices for wax in Scotland and England tabulated in Elizabeth Gemmill and Nicholas Mayhew, *Changing prices in medieval Scotland: a study of prices, money, and weights and measures* (Cambridge, 1995), 300.

[35] The relevant extract from Clyn's annals (*s.a.* 1348) is translated in Rosemary Horrox (ed.), *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), no. 23.

[36] The subject is one that C. A. Empey has made his own. See, esp., his overview:

delving into perceptions and attitudes as revealed by Clyn, whose account is valuable precisely because his depiction of life on the frontier stands in stark contrast to the world of the Dominican annals being compiled contemporaneously at Dublin. Drawing on recent research in England, Williams touches on a range of issues that have been neglected in Irish historiography. So much of what she has to say is new that it is likely that this chapter will date more quickly than the edition itself; but if Williams provokes further work that modifies or amplifies her conclusions then she will have done Irish historiography a great service. Take knighthood, a subject on which Williams is intrepid in an Irish context. It is not quite true to say that Clyn's annals 'are unique in Ireland for the information they contain about the making of knights' (p. 106). The Dublin annals record how Edward III's son, Lionel of Antwerp, celebrated a victory over the Gaelic Irish of Leinster in 1361 with a knighting ceremony, while the chronicler Henry Marlborough notes that Roger Mortimer, fourth earl of March, did likewise in 1397.[37] We might also quibble with the conclusion that 'Clyn was writing a military history of the geographical area of Kilkenny and Tipperary' (p. 72). Much of Clyn's parchment may have been consumed by local affairs, but his world-view was not unduly narrow and his annals are punctuated with reports of English dynastic politics and the crown's adventures in France and Scotland. Every great conflict has its spectators, and Clyn's annals add a morsel of further detail to the larger picture of the 'domestic response' of the English political nation to the first phase of the Hundred Years War.[38]

III

One occasion when the English of Ireland were truly participants rather than spectators was in the reign of Richard II. As the only

Empey, 'The Anglo-Norman community in Tipperary and Kilkenny in the Middle Ages: change and continuity', in Gearóid Mac Niocaill and P. F. Wallace (eds), *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway, 1988), 449-67.

[37] J. T. Gilbert (ed.), *Chartulary of Saint Mary's Abbey, Dublin* (2 vols, London, 1884–6), ii, 395; James Ware (ed.), *Ancient Irish histories*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1809), ii, 15. In very similar circumstances, Richard duke of York (†1460), rewarded his colonial supporters after winning submissions from the Gaelic Irish in 1449 by knighting a number of lords and gentry from Dublin, Meath and Louth at 'Symondeswode in O Bryns contre' (Kiltimon, co. Wicklow): British Library, Cotton Titus B XI, pt 1, no. 38v. The record is printed in Edmund Curtis, 'Richard, duke of York, as viceroy of Ireland, 1447–1460; with unpublished materials for his relations with native chiefs', in Crooks, *Government, war and society in medieval Ireland*, 241.

[38] Cf. W. Mark Ormrod, 'The domestic response to the Hundred Years War', in Anne Curry and Michael Hughes (eds), *Arms, armies and fortifications in the Hundred Years War* (Woodbridge, 1994), 83–101.

regnant English king to visit Ireland between 1210 and 1690, Richard
has received a good deal of attention from Irish historians, but the
last book-length study was that produced by Edmund Curtis in 1927,
which included editions of the submissions the king received from
the Gaelic chiefs on his expedition of 1394–5.[39] It was also Curtis,
indulging his poetic side, who wrote of the second royal expedition
of 1399: 'And so Art Kavanagh, having first wrought the death of
Mortimer, now, by delaying Richard in the wilds of Leinster, let in
usurping Bolingbroke [soon-to-be Henry IV] and wrecked the unity
of England for a hundred years.'[40] It is the latter events that are
subjected to close scrutiny by Douglas Biggs in his recent volume,
*Three armies in Britain: the Irish campaign of Richard II and the
usurpation of Henry IV, 1397–99*. Biggs writes with the benefit of a
renaissance in Ricardian scholarship in England. This has involved
forays into the Irish evidence by the king's most recent biographer
Nigel Saul,[41] as well as a stimulating essay by Michael Bennett
on 'Richard II and the wider realm', which argues persuasively
that 'Richard clearly had a vision of his realm which was richer,
broader, and more transcendental than the nation-state whose
increasing definition and integration have been assumed to be the
main concerns of English kings from the later Middle Ages on'.[42]
Biggs's approach is that of a military historian. The three armies of
his title are the expeditionary force led by Richard II to Ireland in
1399; the army commanded by Edmund, duke of York, keeper of the
kingdom in Richard's absence; and the army that flocked to Henry
Bolingbroke after he landed at Ravenspur in July 1399. The bulk
of the text is taken up with a detailed analysis of each army in turn,
together with a blow-by-blow account of the events of the usurpation
itself. All this serves the greater purpose of presenting readers with a

[39] Edmund Curtis (ed.), *Richard II in Ireland, 1394–5, and the submissions of the
Gaelic chiefs* (Oxford, 1927).

[40] Edmund Curtis, *A history of mediaeval Ireland from 1110 to 1513* (1st ed., Dublin,
1923), 318; ibid. (2nd ed., 1938), 277.

[41] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London, 1997), ch. 12. Richard II's
second Irish expedition is also examined in a sexcentenary reappraisal of the events
of 1399: Michael Bennett, *Richard II and the revolution of 1399* (Stroud, 1999).

[42] Michael J. Bennett, 'Richard II and the wider realm', in Anthony Goodman and
James L. Gillespie (eds), *Richard II: the art of kingship* (Oxford, 1999), 187–204.
Bennett also makes the following intriguing (albeit unprovable) suggestion concerning
a miniature island depicted in the Wilton Diptych: 'The assumption has been that it
represents England. It could equally well, if not more appropriately, represent Ireland'
(ibid., 203, n. 66). On the Wilton Diptych, see Dillian Gordan, *Making and meaning:
the Wilton Diptych* (London, 1993). An early article by Maude V. Clarke—a Belfast-
born historian who deserves to be reclaimed for Irish historiography—remains
useful: Clarke, 'The Wilton Diptych', in L. S. Sutherland and M. McKisack (eds),
Fourteenth Century Studies by Maude Violet Clarke (Oxford, 1937), ch. 8.

bold reappraisal.[43] Far from being an unstable and impulsive tyrant, Richard II is portrayed as a man of considerable military acumen. By contrast, his nemesis Henry Bolingbroke is not K. B. McFarlane's 'perfect knight', but a 'wastrel' (p. 15) from whom Richard had little to fear. This, in effect, turns the traditional story of the Lancastrian revolution of 1399 on its head. I was reminded of Sir Geoffrey Elton's wry confession, concerning the revolutionary upheaval of the 1640s, that 'some of us wonder whether there really was a civil war since its famous causes have all disappeared'.[44]

As with the revisionist trend in early Stuart historiography, the merit of Biggs's approach lies in the challenge he presents to the seeming inevitability of crisis and his insistence on contingency and pure luck in the shaping of events. Nonetheless, his argument seems to overtax the evidence. It is startling, for instance, to learn that Richard II's decision, after returning from Ireland late in July 1399, to abandon his army and move into north Wales 'might be considered a display of one who possessed a sound grasp of political and military strategy' (p. 213). Was not the proof of that pudding in the eating?[45] Perhaps this issue might be left to the arbitration of English specialists; but so much of the depiction of Richard as a successful soldier hangs on Biggs's interpretation of the two royal expeditions to Ireland that some detailed comment is called for. Readers are likely to find aspects of the author's discussion of Ireland quaint, not to say disquieting, among them the repeated allusions to 'the Emerald Isle' (pp. 31, 35, 198) and references to the work of 'Jack [sic] Lydon' (p. 34).[46] The latter is one of many infelicities, responsibility for which must be shared by the editor of the 'History of Warfare' series.[47]

[43] Here the author builds on his earlier work: Douglas Biggs, ' "A wrong whom conscience and kindred bid me to right": a reassessment of Edmund of Langley, duke of York, and the usurpation of Henry IV', *Albion* 26 (1994), 253–72.

[44] Quoted in Conrad Russell, 'The British problem and the English civil war', in idem, *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London, 1990), 231.

[45] Cf. Chris Given-Wilson (ed.), *Chronicles of the revolution, 1397–1400: the reign of Richard II* (Manchester, 1993), 37.

[46] The article by Lydon cited here ('Richard II's expeditions to Ireland') did not appear, as Biggs states (p. 31, n. 4; p. 284), in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, but rather in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*. It is reprinted in Crooks (ed.), *Government, war and society*, ch. 13.

[47] See, *inter alia*, 'Sir Gronwy [=(John) Goronwy] Edwards' (p. 39); 'Rees Davis [=Davies]' (p. 42, n. 45); 'Dorothy Johnson [=Johnston]' (p. 201); 'G. O. Salyes [=Sayles]' (p. 269, n. 18). Medieval personalities fare little better: 'Claire [=Clare] earl of Gloucester' (p. 32); 'Laceys [=Lacy] of Meath and Ulster' (p. 32); 'lord of Ruthien [=Ruthin]' (p. 33 and *passim*). Unless it is a scribal error, 'Sir Robert Hefford' (35) should probably be Sir Robert Herford. The location of Roger Mortimer's death in 1398, given in the text as 'Kells [=Kellistown] near Carlow' (p. 40), is transposed to Kells, co. Meath, on the map of 'Richard II's campaign in Ireland 1399' (p. 81).

Their cumulative effect is most unfortunate, making one chary of the serviceable appendices, based primarily on English exchequer records, which anatomize the composition of the army Richard brought to Ireland in 1399. When it comes to the interpretation Biggs proffers, one has some sympathy, since here he follows James Lydon and Dorothy Johnston in viewing the royal expedition of 1394–5 as a military success,[48] although he goes beyond those cautious scholars when he describes Richard as 'the only commander of English forces in the fourteenth century to have any military success in Ireland' (p. 269). As long ago as 1982, however, Robin Frame poured cold water on the myth of Richard II's Irish triumph. 'Ireland', he wrote, 'was no exception to Richard's record of misjudgments. Even his military success was deceptive. It took no genius to bring the Leinster chiefs to heel.'[49] However that may be, there is a prior question to be addressed: what would have constituted 'success' for Richard II? The king actively cultivated the image of the lover of peace, and Biggs recurrently describes Richard's desire to 'pacify' Ireland and subdue those whom he describes at one point, rather insensitively, as 'roving bands of Gaelic terrorists' (p. 32). *Si vis pacem, para bellum.* The adage rings hollow in any century.

How then should we interpret the policies, attitudes and actions of the English in late medieval Ireland? This question is at the core of a volume of essays edited by Brendan Smith in honour of Robin Frame, one of the most eloquent interpreters of the history of the medieval British Isles. Frame's historiographical achievement is multifaceted, but one consistent preoccupation has been to break away from the insularity that characterized much of Irish historiography in the earlier twentieth century. To some extent it is possible to bench-mark his success by setting this *Festschrift* alongside the essays that James Lydon edited to mark the retirement of Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven in 1980. If one were to judge books by their jackets alone, it would seem a small step indeed from *England and Ireland in the later Middle Ages: essays in honour of Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven* (1981) to *Ireland and the English world in the late Middle Ages: essays in honour of Robin Frame* (2009). Beneath the covers, too, there are striking similarities ranging from the superficial (the size and format

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[48] However, Dorothy Johnston's important article on 'Richard II and the submissions of Gaelic Ireland' (*Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1980–1), 1–20) seems to have been neglected. Another work by the same author is cited in footnotes but does not appear in the bibliography: Johnston, 'Richard II's departure from Ireland, July 1399', *English Historical Review* 98 (1983), 785–805.

[49] Robin Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318–61* (Oxford, 1982), 338.

of the two volumes, and their respective lists of contributors),[50]
to matters of substance, such as the prevailing historiographical
mode, which in both is one of traditional empiricism and theoretical
innocence. The principal difference—and here Frame's contribution
to scholarship emerges—lies in the mindset of the contributors.
The Otway-Ruthven *Festschrift* is, by and large, an introspective
volume focussed on the activities of the English *in* Ireland. Not so
the Frame-*schrift*. If there is any navel-gazing by Irish historians
here, the objects of contemplation belong to the midriffs of Ireland's
insular and continental neighbours. As well as opening up medieval
Ireland to the wider world, Frame's interpretation of the character
of political society in the colony is notably more subtle than that of
his predecessors. Michael Prestwich's 'appreciation', which opens
the volume, alludes more than once to Frame's Ulster background.
Is this what made Frame more receptive than his peers (including
his doctoral supervisor, James Lydon) to nuance and to what he has
called 'the practical complications and contradictions of "being" '?
In his address to the Royal Historical Society, delivered in May 1992
against the backdrop of the Northern troubles and an acrimonious
debate on historical revisionism in the pages of *Irish Historical
Studies*, Frame remarked of the English in medieval Ireland that
their embattled Englishness 'has something in common with the
strengthening of the British strand in the brittle self-image of Ulster
Protestants during the traumatic decade 1969–78'.[51] The same link
between the historian and his history emerges from Frame's remark,
made in 1994, that 'Irish Englishness [of the mid-fourteenth century]
was not a straightforward phenomenon ... But it was more than just
a reflection of the fact that there was no alternative label available,
of the sort that enables modern Ulstermen to maintain a "British"
allegiance while articulating a loathing of the English equal to
anything to be heard in a Glasgow bar'.[52] There is fodder here not
just for students of the medieval British Isles but also historians of
modern Ireland, for whom issues such as 'colonial nationalism',
'patriotism' and 'identities' remain hotly contested.

  The editor is to be congratulated on producing a coherent
compendium of essays, all of which touch on themes close to the
heart of the honorand. Of the twelve contributors, four examine
aspects of English governance in Ireland, including essays on chief

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[50] Not counting Robin Frame himself, the following contributors are common to
both: Katharine Simms, Steven Ellis, J. R. S. Phillips and James Lydon.
[51] Robin Frame, ' "Les Engleys nées en Irlande": the English political identity in
medieval Ireland', in Frame, *Ireland and Britain, 1170–1450* (London, 1998), 141.
[52] Robin Frame, 'Overlordship and reaction, *c.*1200–*c.*1450', in ibid., 175.

governors (by Paul Dryburgh and Beth Hartland), the judiciary (Paul Brand) and the exchequer (James Lydon). Royal government is a subject that Frame resuscitated from the deadening institutional approach of H. G. Richardson, G. O. Sayles and Otway-Ruthven, and, appropriately, the essays in this volume focus on personalities rather than administrative procedures. Two contributions help us to locate the place of Ireland in the gamut of English 'imperial' pretensions. J. R. S. Phillips presents a fascinating glimpse of what might be termed the 'apologetics of empire' with his edition of a manuscript containing 'three thirteenth-century declarations of English rule'. Here the juxtaposition of Aquitaine with Ireland and Wales reminds us that, while France may seem to have been edited out of Rees Davies's account of the 'first English empire', the continental possessions in fact played a central role in shaping royal policies.[53] The latter point is taken up by Steven Ellis, who shows how English priorities shifted after the loss of France (Calais excepted) in 1453, leading ultimately to a renewed zeal under the centralising Tudor dynasty for subduing the 'barbarous' Celtic peripheries.[54] A further two essays deal with early Lancastrian Ireland, and they are particularly welcome since the period after 1399 remains something of a black hole in the historiography. Katharine Simms muses on the possibility that there was an anti-Lancastrian dimension to the revolt of the Gaelic chiefs of Ulster in 1403–4: her account brings out the resilience of English settlement in the earldom of Ulster, as well as the interconnection between events at the core and the periphery—two themes that recur in much of Frame's work. Elizabeth Matthew examines an intriguing but neglected episode from 1421 when the Irish parliament dispatched messengers to Henry V, the victor of Agincourt, with a proposal that he should request the pope to authorise a crusade [Fr. *croysorie*] against the king's Gaelic enemies. The overture came to nothing, but, by exploring its European context, Matthew argues convincingly that the proposal was neither naïve nor impractical, but rather offers evidence of the vibrancy and sophistication of political life in English Ireland in the early Lancastrian period.

Medieval Scotland features in a pair of essays that reflect the British dimension to Frame's work. Ruth Blakely displays much of

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[53] Cf. R. R. Davies, *The first English empire: power and identity in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000).

[54] The author has also explored aspects of this theme in Ellis, 'From dual monarchy to multiple kingdoms: unions and the English state, 1422–1607', in Allan I. Macinnes and Jane H. Ohlmeyer, *The Stuart kingdoms in the seventeenth century: awkward neighbours* (Dublin, 2002), 37–48; and idem (with Christopher Maginn), *The making of the British Isles: the state of Britain and Ireland, 1450–1603* (Harlow, 2007).

her teacher's characteristic sensitivity to nuance in her discussion
of conflicts of loyalties and the nature of borders in Galloway,
which found itself playing the role of piggy-in-the-middle during
the Anglo-Scottish wars of the early fourteenth century. Steve
Boardman's offering is a marvellous essay on language and
identity that runs in contraflow to the normal direction of Scottish
(nationalist) historiography. Boardman mines the 'original chronicle'
of Andrew Wyntoun—a metrical history composed in English in the
late fourteenth century—for what it reveals of the extent to which
English-speaking Scots celebrated their Anglo-Saxon past and
traced the origins of the Scottish ruling dynasty back to the union
of Malcolm III [Mael Coluim *Ceann Mór*] and the saintly Margaret
(†1093), daughter of Edward Aetheling. Can we, perchance, look
forward to a monograph entitled *The English identity of the kingdom
of the Scots in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries*?[55] The absence
of a similar Welsh perspective is a poignant reminder of the death in
2005 of Rees Davies, 'whose work', Frame himself once remarked,
'must inspire all students of the medieval British Isles'.[56]

   The two remaining essays—one by the editor himself, the other by
Andrea Ruddick—dwell on British history 'as subject'. Both concern
themselves with whether the paradigm can be usefully pursued into
the late Middle Ages, when the acquisitive and expansionist character
of the English state becomes less conspicuous, at least within the
archipelago. Their arguments may be seen as complementary.
Brendan Smith's piece on 'shaping the regions' argues that, amid
the hardening of national sentiment and economic dislocation of
the fourteenth century (both of which pose challenges to a holistic
treatment of the British Isles), there is a place for the history of non-
national constituent units—a history of the 'regions'. Ruddick uses
Gascony to test the 'limits of British history'. Elaborating on Frame's
much-quoted line that, in writing British history, 'as well as looking
over the partition walls, we need to do some thinking about the design
of the building itself', she suggests that 'the building plans might
from now on include an annexe for the king of England's French

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[55] Cf. Dauvit Broun, *The Irish identity of the kingdom of the Scots in the twelfth
and thirteenth centuries* (Woodbridge, 1999). Boardman also explores some of
these issues in his contributions to another *Festschrift*: 'Robert II (1371–1390)'
and 'Robert III (1390–1406)', in Michael Brown and Roland Tanner (eds), *Scottish
kingship, 1306–1542: essays in honour of Norman MacDougall* (Edinburgh, 2008),
chs. 3 and 4. The contents of these chapters range much more widely than their
titles suggest. See also idem, 'Late medieval Scotland and the matter of Britain', in
Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish history: the power of the past*
(Edinburgh, 2002), 47–72.
[56] Frame, *Political development*, p. viii.

possessions' (p. 83). One imagines that J. G. A. Pocock would be willing to grant the necessary planning permission.[57]

These suggestions for the future of medieval British history are a fitting salute to Robin Frame, who has done much to shape the development of the subject; but, taken together with the other essays in the volume, they also highlight the continued ascendancy in the existing historiography of high politics, cultural and institutional links, and dynastic and aristocratic networks.[58] In this respect, the volume inadvertently suggests an alternative route forward. 'Comparison', Chris Wickham has recently affirmed, 'is essential', both as a means of avoiding 'cultural solipsism' and because it is 'the closest that historians can get to [quasi-Popperian] testing, attempting to falsify, their own explanations'.[59] As we should expect, Rees Davies anticipated these comments at the Gregynog colloquium in 1986 when he presented his bipartite vision for the development of medieval British history, which was to consist of 'comparisons and contrasts' on the one hand, and, on the other, 'connections'.[60] With important exceptions, it is the 'connections' that have been most fully investigated.[61] Many of the nagging doubts about the efficacy of the British approach for the late Middle Ages melt away if the object is not to treat the islands integrally but rather comparatively. Divergent experiences cease to be an impediment, but serve instead as a means of finding the right questions to ask and as a source of instructive contrasts. For those in pursuit of the future of the subject, there may be profit in returning to the agenda Davies tabled at Gregynog in

[57] Pocock's conception of 'British' history, as he presented it in 1973, was not restricted to the archipelago, but embraced all of Britain's entanglements: J. G. A. Pocock, 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975), 601–21, esp. 617–21. For a reappraisal, see David Armitage, 'Greater Britain: a useful category of historical analysis?', *American Historical Review* 104 (1999), 427–45; and Pocock's riposte, 'The new British history in Atlantic perspective: an antipodean commentary', ibid., 490–500.

[58] There are important exceptions to the rule. On social and economic matters, see Richard Britnell, *Britain and Ireland, 1050–1530: economy and society* (Oxford, 2004); and an outstanding essay by B. M. S. Campbell: 'Benchmarking medieval economic development: England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, c.1290', *Economic History Review* 61 (2008), 896–945 (with *corrigendum*, ibid. 946–8).

[59] Chris Wickham, *Problems in doing comparative history: the Reuter Lecture 2004* (Southampton, 2005), 2–3.

[60] These 'twin aims' are set out in Davies, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500*, 1–2.

[61] For two excellent comparative studies, see Keith Stringer, 'States, Liberties and Communities in Medieval Britain and Ireland', in Michael Prestwich (ed.), *Liberties and identities in the medieval British Isles* (Woodbridge 2008), 5–36; David Green, 'Lordship and principality: colonial policy in Ireland and Aquitaine in the 1360s', *Journal of British Studies* 47 (2008), 3–29.

order to discover which items remain outstanding.[62] The ageing 'British' history, like this review, may find an end in its beginnings.

[62] Davies, 'In praise of British history', *passim*. See also R. R. Davies, 'The history of the British Isles?', *Welsh History Review* 21 (2002), 357–60.