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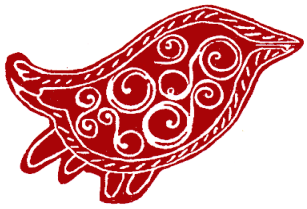

Title: Review: "The medieval castles of Ireland", by David Sweetman (Cork: Collins Press, 1999)
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marriage to the widow of Sir Maurice Fenton, interested himself in the estate. That interest is reflected in Petty's papers, now in the British Library. Also, in the 1690s, the then head of the Boyles, the second earl of Cork and first earl of Burlington, tried to steer the Kings into Protestant conformity by having the young baron enrolled at Eton College. In the event, it was Lord Kingston's funeral and interment, not his schooling, for which the earl paid. The fourth baron, prominent as a freemason, patron of the erudite John K'eogh (his chaplain) and founder of the college in Mitchelstown, showed greater public spirit than the majority of his relations. Thanks to the size of the patrimony, and the periodic campaigns of planting, building and improvement, many in the neighbourhood depended on the Kings for their livelihoods. In consequence, an unpredictable sequence of residence and absences alternately depressed and invigorated the town. Strangers were tempted from England to work for the dynasty, notably the agriculturalist, Arthur Young, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Soon they fell out with their wayward bosses. Other underlings fleeced their masters and mistresses. Even by the standards of profligacy current among the Irish peerage, a trial for murder before the House of Lords, a litter of bastards, a spell in a debtors' gaol, two lunatics, trial for homosexual assault and indecent exposure in a railway tunnel constitute an unusually lurid chronicle. The anthropological antiquarianism of the heir in the 1830s, publishing nine lavish volumes on the history of Mexico, although a testament to scholarship, smacked of obsession and worsened the already grave financial embarrassments of the family.

In the main, Bill Power does not rush to judgements. Understandably, he regrets the destruction of the pile created by the Pain brothers for the third earl, the subsequent desecration of the demesne and the plunder of paintings and furniture. Other than in mass and opulence, it is unclear that the Kings' buildings or collections showed particular discrimination. On the walls of Mitchelstown, it is true, there hung canvases by Gainsborough and Phillipe de Champaigne, but nothing of the quality assembled by the Howards at Shelton Abbey, the Leesons of Russborough or the La Touches. Some episodes in this bizarre story have been told before, notably in J. S. Donnelly's study of nineteenth-century estates. The latest account may not aspire to the analytical or statistical rigour of Donnelly's classic. Nor does it attempt to compare the Kings with their equivalents in either the Irish or non-Irish aristocracies. Nevertheless, the book admirably meets its modest objectives and will amuse and inform.

Toby Barnard
Hertford College, Oxford

The medieval castles of Ireland. By David Sweetman. The Collins Press, Cork, 1999. Pp. 214. ISBN 1 898256 75 6 (hardback).

David Sweetman's work is a most welcome addition to the small corpus of published texts on Irish castles and is an important milestone in the development of Irish castle studies. It comes hot on the heels of Tom McNeill's *Castles in Ireland* (1997), and together they mark the maturing of a discipline which had lacked a major study since Leask's title of some fifty years ago. It is a well-produced volume, liberally illustrated with photographs and plans, an essential component of any work on castles. The castles are divided into six groups, 'earth and timber castles', 'Anglo-Norman stone fortresses', 'hall-houses', 'later medieval stone fortresses', 'tower houses' and 'fortified houses and strong-houses', with a separate chapter devoted to each type. Within each chapter, the author gives detailed descriptions of numerous examples of the type, drawing extensively, as he acknowledges, on the records of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. The approach is chronological and marks the progressive development of castles in Ireland throughout the Middle Ages and down to the seventeenth century.

While this study is timely and necessary, one would welcome a work which

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concentrates more on analysing the wider context in which castles operated and explaining how castles functioned in society during times of peace, rather than concentrating so strongly on the defensive capabilities of the various sites. We are sometimes inclined to forget that castles were not just the fortresses of an armed soldiery. They were also the homes of the great lords, along with their wives, children, retainers, servants and so forth, as well as occasionally being courts and centres of administration. To concentrate, therefore, on their military nature is to underestimate the multifaceted role they played in society.

Indeed it may well be time to begin reassessing the defensive capabilities of many castles. A case in point here is Liscarroll Castle in North Cork, which takes the form of a large quadrangular enclosure with projecting three-quarter round towers at each angle, features whose *raison d'être* is normally assumed to be the provision of flanking fire along the adjacent curtain walls. At Liscarroll, however, a projecting garderobe tower at the north end of the west wall is located only two metres away from the corner tower, and precludes any possibility of flanking fire from that tower. Projecting masonry at the south end of the wall suggests that a similar tower originally existed there, making the southern corner tower equally ineffective. Details such as these suggest that the military and defensive capabilities of some castles may have been overestimated in the past.

Such minor quibbles should not, however, detract from this book's value as an in-depth guide to typology and chronology in Irish castles. This work will be as indispensable to future generation of 'castle students' as Leask's was to past generations. In addition, it will be an excellent guide for the general reader, and I have no doubt that it will fulfil the author's hope, as expressed in his preface, that it will provide a 'basic framework' from which further studies can progress.

Éamonn Cotter

Kilcrea Friary: Franciscan heritage in county Cork. By Denise Maher. Tower Books for the Bride Valley Community Association, Cork, 1999. Pp. xii + 54. ISBN 0-902568-31-0. Available from Ann Lenihan, Ballygroman, Ovens, Co. Cork, or Eleanor Hosford, Ballygroman House, Ovens, Co. Cork.

This attractive monograph describes the background to, the development and legacy of an important Irish Franciscan centre. It is a synthesis of work published to date on the subject, supplemented by original contributions, particularly photographs and sketches suggesting how the foundation appeared in the 1500s prior to its destruction (for instance Ill. 7, facing p. 19). The overview of a celebrated Cork landmark presented here may be of assistance in ways alluded to in conclusion below. Equally, however, a reading of the book indicates that there are other questions to be addressed if one's understanding of Kilcrea's traditions is to be deepened. Certain of these are also averted to briefly in what follows. The Franciscan order was set to become the foremost in later medieval and particularly Gaelic Ireland after its introduction in the thirteenth century. Its fortunes down to and beyond the Reformation are traced in the publication. The story of Cormac Láidir MacCarthy's establishment of Kilcrea in the 1400s, together with the adversity it experienced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, form part of the same opening chapter (pp. 1-8). The second section (pp. 11-19) deals with the foundation's layout, comprising ecclesiastical structures and domestic quarters, and it is here that the aforementioned thought-provoking reconstruction drawing appears. The focus on the buildings' scope and functions would have provided an opportunity for comment on the size of the Kilcrea community. An estimate of this kind might have facilitated the task of quantifying Franciscan manpower throughout the country at large during pre-Reformation times.

Chapter Three (pp. 21-31) looks at writings previously associated with Kilcrea, especially the valuable topographic lore, saints' lives

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