

# LEITRIM: HISTORY & SOCIETY

INTERDISCIPLINARY ESSAYS ON THE HISTORY OF AN IRISH COUNTY. EDITED BY MONSIGNOR LIAM KELLY & DR BRENDAN SCOTT

Prof William Nolan *summarises the book's contents*

*Leitrim: History and Society* is the twenty-seventh volume in the *Irish County: history and society series*. It is the first attempt to encapsulate within one book the essential shaping forces of the county from the earliest times to the present. The first volume in the Irish County History and Society Series was *Tipperary: history and society* published in 1985. I was the series editor. A native of Tipperary, I organised a collection of scholarly essays from a number of academics based outside the county and local historians resident in Tipperary. It was planned to publish the book to commemorate the centenary of the foundation of the GAA in 1984, but the book was not published until 1985. It has formed the template for the twenty-seven volumes, published since then. Edited by Monsignor Liam Kelly and Dr Brendan Scott, *Leitrim: History and Society* is a substantial volume comprising thirty-five chapters that begin with an introduction by Vincent Woods. There follows an exploration of the county's geology (Hegarty) before moving into prehistory (Gilligan) and then extending across time up to the present day. The relevance of the volume to the modern world is exemplified in the chapter by Ruth McManus that explores the quest for a sustainable future for Leitrim.

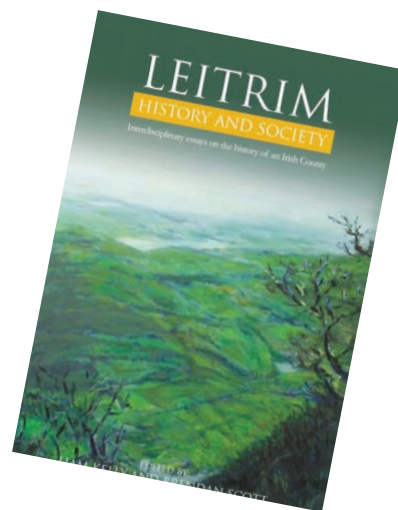
The papers on Medieval archaeology provide a well-balanced and comprehensive review of the country during that time and both secular and sacred aspects of life during the period are investigated. Ruth Curran's chapter brings a range of modern landscape techniques to bear in her review of the archaeology of Early Medieval Leitrim, which nicely sets the scene for the chapters covering Later Medieval erenaghs (MacCotter), settlements (O'Connor), Gaelic strongholds (MacDermott), parish churches (Scully) and the Franciscans (Liam Kelly). As we move into the tumultuous sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the impact of the Plantation on the county is considered with

chapters focusing on both Planter (Rooney), the Protestant population (Miller), native perspectives (Scott) and the Spanish Armada and Leitrim (Francis Kelly).

A range of fascinating topics are also explored throughout the Early Modern period, all of which have helped shape Leitrim as we know it today. Topics such as the Irish language (Ó Suilleabháin), the Great Famine (MacAtasney), the Clements family (Malcolmson), the Godley estate photographs (Fitzpatrick), place names (Ó Muraile), sweat houses (Foley), mapping (Horner), the evolution of local government (Potter), Leitrim and sport (Moran) all form valuable chapters. Indeed, the deeply rooted and long-standing arts traditions of Leitrim are demonstrated through the inclusion of chapters on Medieval scribes and scholars (Cunningham), early modern historians of the county (Gillespie) and the work of Tadhg Ó Rodaighe (Mac Muiri). A later chapter deals with John McGahern (Doyle) whose books contain many evocative landscape descriptions of his native county.

The essays on Fr Tom Maguire (Proinnsias Ó Duigneáin) and the Leitrim election of 1852 (McNiffe), presents a flavour of nineteenth century politics. Neither does *Leitrim: history and society* shy away from more recent political topics and several chapters focus on the early twentieth century but again from a very balanced perspective with, for example, a paper dealing with the Protestant experience of the revolution (Moffitt), while other chapters are devoted to Seán MacDiarmada and Republicanism (Liam Kelly), Leitrim and the First World War (Logan) and politics in the years 1916-22 (McGarty). The creation of the Free State was not a panacea for Leitrim's population and economic and social problems persisted as evidenced in the extraordinary story of Jimmy Gralton (Wrynn).

Leitrim's modern history has to be interpreted



in terms of the cataclysmic and continuous population loss suffered by the county since 1841 when it had a recorded population of 155,297. The census of 2016 recorded a population of 32,044. The ebb and flow of population in the twentieth century is the subject of an essay here (Gilmore). The volume fittingly concludes with an account of the origins and development of Leitrim County Library and its resources (Conefrey).

The variety and intensity of the chapters included within the volume all come together to provide a rich flavour of County Leitrim. As one of the smallest and least populated counties on the island, the book will serve to remind readers of the county's deep history and rich artistic traditions. As always, with the volumes in the History and Society series, the texts are complemented with an array of high-quality maps and illustrations. The mix of outsider and insider has produced what is probably the most comprehensive history of Leitrim yet published. The book is a successful partnership between the publishers Geography Publications and Leitrim County Council, with assistance also from the National University of Ireland.

The publication of this volume will mean that another county in the province of Connacht has been published, complementing the volumes that have already appeared on Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Its nine hundred pages will add considerably to our understanding of Leitrim's history and the county's relationship with the rest of the island. It will be warmly welcomed, not just locally, but nationally and internationally.

*The book will be launched in Áras an Chontae, Carrick-on-Shannon on 6 December 2019 by Bryan Dobson (RTE) at 6.30 pm.*