


structure. Four consecutive phases of O'Connell's career are defined and briefly introduced, then developed over fifteen chapters. These are divided into sub-sections with headings, and such tools make this an indispensable resource for undergraduate teaching. Colantonio's prose is crystalline and effortless, and well within the reach of readers with a solid reading comprehension of French, especially anyone knowledgeable on the topic. The unfolding of familiar episodes (such as the Magee trial, the Doneraile conspiracy and the repeal monster meetings) are instantly recognisable, as too are the author's own clear translations from English of telling phrases from O'Connell's early journal or speeches. There are some black and white illustrations, and this portable softback volume with its attractive cover is very keenly priced.

Without overburdening an undergraduate reader with dense theoretical argumentation, *L'homme-nation* provides some original and compelling reflections on deconstructions of leadership and the fusion of O'Connell with the Irish nation. The traditional approach has been to see O'Connell as the driving force of change, and Colantonio references Hegel's 'great man' theory. He also draws some inspiration from Max Weber's sociological approach to leadership and charisma, creating an alternative reading of this case study. The interaction between leader and group is frequently considered, as is the mutual conferral of legitimacy, and not only in a one-way process, from the figure of authority down.

In another vital exercise, the book scrutinises how previous authors have approached facets of the O'Connell years, by no means rejecting their assessments as outdated, yet rightly questioning their interpretation of the sources. Colantonio takes greater critical distance than others have in the past — namely, when weighing up so-called evidence from adulatory memoirs, such as John O'Connell's or O'Neill Daunt's, published in the 1840s. The former of these was the original source for the dubious anecdote, taken at face value for generations, about O'Connell (quite conveniently) running into the Sheares brothers on the boat fleeing France immediately after the regicide, brandishing a handkerchief dipped in regal blood. This sensationalist caricature conflating 'the French Revolution' with the Terror had sufficed to underpin O'Connell's rejection of revolutionary violence. As to whether he had joined the United Irishmen, it is stated here that it was quite plausible, but certainly not indisputable, based on the scant surviving evidence.

The book ends with O'Connell emerging, in his own lifetime, as both a Gaelic hero and the first popular hero of modern times. It is here that the Ellen Courtenay paternity case, accusing O'Connell of roguish infidelities, is scrupulously deconstructed. It is held up as a test case for the historian, and Colantonio references how Erin Bishop and Geoghegan had departed from the authors before them, for whom these calumnies were fabricated to weaken the great hero or extract money from him. Like Geoghegan, this author clearly admires his subject while not engaging in hagiography, documenting when and how he was a ruthless and opportunistic demagogue, yet all the while restoring dignity to the Irish people. While not unveiling any major new material, *L'homme-nation* certainly offers many fresh and sharp perspectives. If intended to make O'Connell more known in France, it is equally a most valuable addition to Irish history.

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COMMANDERS OF THE BRITISH FORCES IN IRELAND, 1796–1922. By Tony Gaynor. Pp 398, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2023. €54.

This is a long-overdue study of the succession of senior officers who served in the crucial role of 'commander-in-chief' of forces in Ireland during this period. In total, thirty-six officers of general or field-marshal rank served in this appointment, overseeing all military business during periods of political turmoil and rebellion in Ireland, and also international conflicts that involved Britain and its empire. This volume confirms Ireland's growing military

importance during this period as both a location for the recruitment and training of soldiers, and as a logistical hub during a succession of wars from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars up to the outbreak of the First World War. The key decision-making responsibilities throughout these phases rested with the commander-in-chief, who was usually based at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

During the course of this volume, Gaynor refers to all of these senior officers and some are better known to us than others. They include significant figures such as the marquis of Cornwallis (commander-in-chief, 1798–1801), General Sir George Brown (1860–65) and Field-Marshal, the Duke of Connaught, the son of Queen Victoria (1900–04). Gaynor dispels some of the myths that have become associated with this office. For example, it has been suggested that Ireland was a military backwater and that those chosen for the role of commander-in-chief here were somehow second rate. However, to take just two examples, Field-Marshals Lord Wolseley (1890–95) and Lord Roberts (1895–1900) were considered among the best senior officers in the British Army during the late nineteenth century. Indeed Wolseley, known for his mental abilities and organisational skill, became a byword for military effectiveness; he was Gilbert & Sullivan's inspiration for the 'the very model of a modern major-general' in the *Pirates of Penzance*. Interestingly, both Roberts and Wolseley had Irish family connections and were seen not only as being competent, but also conciliatory figures during a period of increasing political tension. Both would go on to serve as commander-in-chief of the British Army. Having Irish family connections was, on occasion, sometimes an important qualification for the role. Lt-Gen. Sir Bryan Mahon, from County Galway and the former commander of the 10th (Irish) Division, was seen as a less contentious candidate to take on the appointment in 1916.

This is not a straightforward series of biographical studies, however, and the volume is divided up into a series of chapters on thematic subjects. These include chapters on relations with the civil power, society, culture and trade, and religion, among others. This is an intelligent approach and, by adopting a broader 'war and society' methodology, this study offers much to those researching or interested in wider aspects of Irish history during this period. There has been a long-established and general tendency to compartmentalise military history within the wider historical discipline, which entirely misses its importance in the context of wider political, social, and economic activity. Gaynor's book illustrates the extent of the wider connections and emphasises how the considerable level of military activity on the island impacted on all aspects of society, economy and politics. The successive incumbents to the role of commander-in-chief in Ireland, therefore, exercised a level of influence across Irish society that would be totally unfamiliar to us today. Indeed, the modern Irish Defence Forces have effectively no political influence or wider social impact.

The volume raises some interesting questions that are worthy of further research. For example, Gaynor refers to a series of pre-First World War military exercises that were conducted successfully and included the use of aircraft for reconnaissance. The effectiveness of these manoeuvres are in marked contrast to the performance of the British Expeditionary Force in Belgium in 1914 during the opening phase of the First World War. This was a campaign marked by the incredible tenacity and resilience of the common soldier but also the less than certain command of Field-Marshal Lord French. This is worth, I would argue, some further consideration — why could pre-war military effectiveness not be transferred to a live operational situation in 1914? There has been much discussion in recent years on the British Army as a learning organisation during the First World War, largely led by the research of Dr Aimée Fox. Ireland as a location for military experimentation, and the role of the commander-in-chief in that process, could well be explored further in this context.

A constant theme for any prospective commander-in-chief in Ireland was the possibility for rebellion and revolution, a point noted by Gaynor and addressed in this book. In the context of United Irishmen, Fenian and Irish Republican Brotherhood activity, some commanders rose to these challenges better than others. The last commander-in-chief of Ireland, General Sir Nevil Macready (1920–22), faced a very modern form of revolutionary war that was ultimately beyond the military resources at his disposal and the level of political backing that he enjoyed.

This is a useful and timely volume. It will be of use to those interested in British military administration in Ireland and also those who wish to understand how this military activity had an impact across Irish society.

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A DUBLIN MAGDALENE LAUNDRY: DONNYBROOK AND CHURCH-STATE POWER IN IRELAND.

Edited by Mark Coen, Katherine O'Donnell and Maeve O'Rourke. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2023. £21.99.

Donnybrook Magdalene Asylum was the first in Ireland to change from being 'an institution under lay management to one located within, and controlled by, a convent'. So, as Coen, O'Donnell and O'Rourke note, it is the 'template for what would become the archetypal Irish Magdalene laundry', both owned by and supervised by nuns (p. 6). Therefore, *A Dublin Magdalene laundry* is both a vital study of one laundry in Dublin and an investigation into much larger and pervasive culture of 'social and gender inequalities' across the Ireland and the world.

The book is in three sections. Section one, entitled 'Political, cultural and social contexts of Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry', builds a picture of the laundry and the society in which it was created and operated. Mark Cohen contributes two chapters, constructing the history of the order who would go on to own and operate Donnybrook, charting the Religious Sisters of Charity from their foundation in 1815, their major works and their governance, as well as the accusations of child abuse, institutional abuse and controversy around the adoption processes utilised in the asylum. His second chapter is a useful history of Donnybrook itself, which he calls 'emblematic of the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism' (p. 92).

Chapter two, written by Lindsey Earner-Byrne, is an excellent 'history of respectability', a 'key element in defining and deciding moral and social worth' (p. 42) which in turn normalised the institutionalisation of women. Earner-Byrne also identifies a 'hierarchy of women', in which the 'deserving' poor were separated from unmarried mothers and sex-workers (considered, by some, to be unworthy or incapable of saving). Chapter four, by Katherine O'Donnell, has the vital job of introducing the oral history and the survivor narratives that inform the history of Donnybrook. O'Donnell strove to 'generate a rich collection of narratives that would inform future generations, inspire artists, and provide enough material for the work of historians and social scientists in their analyses of the interviews' (p. 111). Given the government's disregard for oral testimony, as documented in the introduction, O'Donnell demonstrates a crucial understanding of the nuance and unique perspectives of oral testimony, and ensures it stands strong amongst the other methodologies used in the book.

The second section, 'Social, commercial and legal significance of Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry', looks at the functionality of Donnybrook as an asylum and a laundry. Chapter five is an exploration of the architecture of Donnybrook, which examines further the 'architecture of containment', asking how much architects knew 'of the abuses perpetuated by with and enabled by their designs' (p. 145) and whether they could or should have known the repercussions of their labour. These questions are refreshing and uncomfortable and epitomise the book's holistic approach to understanding these institutions. In one particularly haunting conclusion, Chris Hamill writes:

it is clear from the architect's drawings and the very purposeful way in which the circulation of various occupant groups was directed by the site's architecture, that the person at the drafting table knew, at a minimum, there was a subordinated class of women within this complex, and that this group were required to work in the laundry (p. 144).