

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Business archival sources for the local historian by Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh

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encourages favours the alpha-male. The authors do not attempt a socio-economic or ideological profile, but the information is now available for researchers robust enough to take on what would be a useful project. There is a sense in which history is, ultimately, biography, and one cannot understand a party without understanding its leaders. This collection is a vital contribution in that respect, and will be of enormous value to all those with even a passing interest in labour history.

Emmet O'Connor

Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, **Business archival sources for the local historian**, 93pp, (Dublin: Four Courts 2010), €35.00 hb, €14.95 pb.

This, the most recent volume of the Maynooth Research Guides in Irish Local History series, brings together the expertise troika of the socio-economic historian, the accountant and the accounting historian. The result is a valuable combination of the 'who,' 'what,' 'where' and 'how-to' of business history. The authors are already well-immersed in such research: they have singly and jointly published much related work, and have together compiled a database of business-related material in the National Archives of Ireland, a copy of which is reproduced at the end of the volume.

This slim volume (totalling a mere 45 pages of text with a further 29 page list of sources) tackles its subject in the broadest possible manner, discussing a variety of business and related sources ranging from the records of private firms, large companies and landed estates, through small retailers' and household accounts, to printed material including trade directories and newspaper advertisements. It outlines how auditing standards may be brought to bear on documentary analysis, thus casting light not only on the minutiae of business life but also on the life of the wider community both locally and beyond. The authors identify the main archives in the island that contain business-related material. Most attention is given to the National Archives of Ireland and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, but there are also several pointers towards local archives like the Cork City Archives and the archives of bodies as varied as the Quakers and the Institute of Chartered Accountants. The footnotes are particularly informative in the practical matter of archive address, access, and opening times, and there are further valuable pointers towards catalogues and available published and on-line guides.

In general, *Business archival sources* categorises the usefulness of, and the methodology required by, sources in two ways. Firstly, direct light can be cast on the world of business through an analysis of banking records; the files of the extensive milling industry; canal company records; the account books of grocers and merchants; trade directories; and shareholders' lists. Such sources allow individual businesses to be put under the microscope, facilitating an assessment of the level of activity over time, tracing changes in accounting practices and commercial networking, and identifying the workings of credit and attempts at debt recovery. The second function of business record analysis, discussed throughout the study, is to *use* business records to illuminate the wider society outside the individual business concern. Such an approach can, as the authors show, clarify the interplay of economics and politics (using, for instance, the records of canals and insurance companies), gauge the expansion of tourism (through hotel registers), explore the relationships between convents and other religious institutions with the business world and the wider community, and trace fluctuations in business and employer-worker relationships through the analysis of trade union and other employee body records.

Though this study is aimed specifically at local historians, it shows how an analysis of business-related material can extend far beyond the immediate locale. It not only suggests avenues for business-related historical research, indicating those concerns (ranging from small retailers to large bodies like Telecom) that still await their researcher, but it also outlines how historians to date have

utilised business archives. For instance, research to date in the financial records of individual firms and families reveals the links between the upwardly mobile merchant class of Irish urban centres like Cork and Waterford with continental Europe, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Particularly useful in this regard are two case studies briefly outlined in the work: (1) the evaluation of customer credit ratings by McBirneys of Dublin in the 1920s (a window into ideas of class and status as well as finance) and (2) the accounting skills of the Carlow teacher in New South Wales (exploring the process by which business-related skills were exported from the old to the new world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries).

In summary, this is a very readable book, well-grounded in the research expertise of its authors, clearly and logically arranged, and an invaluable guide for anyone considering the use of business records in historical research.

Maura Cronin

Allan Armstrong, **From Michael Davitt to James Connolly: 'internationalism from below' and the challenge to the UK state and British Empire from 1879-95**, 204 pp, (Glasgow: Intfrobelt Publications, 2010) £7.99 pb.

This is an interesting, polemical, and well-researched book. Its first thesis is that Davitt supported alliances with progressive forces and mass movements, whereas Parnell settled for alliances with ruling class parties in Britain, usually the Liberals, though once with the Conservatives. The author characterises Davitt's approach as 'internationalism from below,' and the book is one of a set of four which sets out to make a case for 'internationalism from below' as the necessary strategy for working class and oppressed populations. To prove his point, the author gives a potted history of the parallel political lives of Parnell and Davitt. In doing this, he very much takes Davitt's side, seeing him as being on the right track until he took the anti-Parnellite side in the leadership crisis of 1890-91.

Davitt was largely responsible for the greatest mass movement in Ireland since O'Connell's time. With an agreed strategic turn by the Fenian movement, dubbed the 'New Departure,' the Irish National Land League was set up in 1879. Its great impact in Ireland prompted agrarian agitation in Wales and Scotland, and spurred the development of early labour and trade union bodies. In the process, there was a breaking down to some degree of the hold of sectarian religious attitudes where these held sway, especially in the North of Ireland and the islands of Scotland.

Parnell is represented as a charismatic, bonapartist figure, presiding over both the Home Rule party and the Land League and manoeuvring between different factions, the Catholic church and the bourgeois parties in Britain, so as to be seen as indispensable by everyone. In spite of his rhetorical phrase, 'no man has a right to set the boundary to the march of a nation,' he took care to distance himself from Fenianism, which provided the sinews of the movement. One major disagreement between Davitt and Parnell was over land nationalisation. Davitt wanted the land nationalised while Parnell, backed by conservative elements and by the Catholic church, wanted peasant proprietorship. Davitt was defeated in part by a cynical assertion by his opponents that nationalisation meant ownership by the British state.

The Kilmainham treaty is seen as one of the decisive junctures where Parnell's strategy won out. Here the author sides with Parnell's sisters, whose Ladies Land League was dissolved by Parnell as too radical. This mass women's movement, set up to replace imprisoned male leaders, had the potential to become an early feminist movement. Parnell also moved to set up reformist labour movements to weaken and sideline the more radical bodies supported by Davitt. There is some mention of the American reformer Henry George, who visited Ireland and Britain in the early 1880s and campaigned actively on the land issue. A now forgotten figure, George was probably more