

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Craggaunowen and the Hunt Museum. A Recreation of Celtic Ireland by Elizabeth Healy

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REVIEWS

Craggaunowen and the Hunt Museum. A Recreation of Celtic Ireland *Elizabeth Healy. Shannon Heritage Ltd.*

In 1965 the noted medieval art expert John Hunt purchased a ruined castle at Craggaunowen in the rolling drumlin and lake lands some 10km south-east of Ennis, Co. Clare. Unlike others before and after him who have bought and re-furnished castles for private use and prestige value, Hunt's aim was typically altruistic and far-seeing: the re-creation of ancient dwelling places, and in particular of an Irish crannog or lake-dwelling. With its lofty tower perched on a rocky knoll close to the wooded shore of a small lake, Craggaunowen offered an ideal setting for what has since become known as the Craggaunowen Project.

Under the guidance of this non-profit making organisation, Craggaunowen developed into Ireland's first archaeological park. This pleasant booklet is a companion guide to the monuments and exhibits of not only the archaeological park but also of John Hunt's other great bequest, the Hunt Museum. This diverse

collection of artefacts is housed at the University of Limerick some 25km to the south-east. Through its clear photographs and friendly text, this booklet conveys something of the delights of a visit to both places. The contrast between the museum and the park could not be more striking. Yet the sophisticated, air-conditioned exhibition space of the Hunt Museum neatly compliments the earthy experience of a stroll amongst the tree-shaded and water-lapped monuments at Craggaunowen.

However, it is the rich empirical experience of the sight and touch, as well as the sound and smell, of a full-scale ancient settlement that sets a visit to Craggaunowen apart from that to any conventional museum. In the booklet the text is laid out around the monuments at the park - the crannog, the ringfort, the fulacht fiadh and the wooden trackway.

However, it must be emphasised that the booklet is not a guide. Rather, through

its text and photographs, an impression is conveyed of each monument; its construction, use and the activities which would have taken place there. Many of the photographs show young people actively involved in the recreation of life in the settlements, dressed appropriately for the occasion. Others illustrate the crafts of spinning and pottery making. And then there is *The Brendan*, the doughty leather-covered boat in which Tim Severin sailed from Ireland to Newfoundland in 1977 in order to prove the feasibility of St Brendan's voyage to the 'Land promised to the Saints' almost 1500 years ago.

Though archaeological or 'heritage' parks are now coming on stream at other places in Ireland, most notably at Ferrycarraig, Co. Wexford and at the Ulster Folk Park, Omagh, Co. Tyrone, Craggaunowen remains the best, the raw edges of its reconstructed monuments now well rounded by use and the seasons.

Paul Gosling.

Kilkenny: History and Society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county. *Edited by William Nolan, Kevin Whelan. Geography Publications, Dublin 1990. 715+xx pp. IR£37.*

This is the third and certainly the largest to date of a new series of books on individual Irish counties; those on Tipperary and Wexford have already appeared. As with the latter two the Kilkenny volume is very varied and wide ranging in its content. The twenty-five contributions range from aspects of history, historical geography and archaeology of the county to aspects of folklife and the Irish language. It concludes with a modern artist's impression of the county followed by a list of books of Kilkenny interest.

Though Kilkenny has been well served by historians over the years, there are many aspects of its history and archaeology which have either never received proper attention or which need major revision and updating. This new book on Kilkenny helps to fill out many of these gaps and contains the results of much recent research.

The first two essays are devoted to purely archaeological subjects: 'The archaeology of early settlement in county Kilkenny' by Michael Gibbons and 'Some crosses of county Kilkenny' by Nancy Edwards. The first of these is an excellent account of prehistoric and early historic monuments in the area, containing much new evidence derived especially from aerial photographs. The work of Mr. Gibbons and his team in the Sites and Monuments Record Office has greatly increased the number of known sites in the county and distribution maps of some of these are published here. Ms. Edwards' essay again contains the first account of a newly reconstructed cross from Kilkeran and a detailed study of the Kilree and Killamery crosses.

There are three essays dealing with the medieval period: one on the town of Kilkenny by John Bradley, an excellent account of the county in the Anglo-

Norman period by C.A. Empey and one on Kilkenny's earliest chroniclers by Mrs. Phelan. The remaining and greater part of the book deals with Kilkenny over the last four centuries. This book is not and does not claim to be a history of the county and it is probably a better book because its editors did not try to cover all periods and aspects of Kilkenny's history. The aspects it does deal with are well covered because they are the subject of on-going research by their authors. The only faults I would find are the number of typographical errors and the fact that the index is not complete. Printed and bound in Kilkenny, the book is well illustrated and beautifully produced, and must be seen as good value for its size. It is particularly a must for anyone interested in the history of the county.

Conleth Manning