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McDaid, Shaun

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***Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957-1973.* By Erika Hanna.**  
Oxford University Press. 2013. x + 230pp. £60.

Urban change in Ireland is likely to attract considerable attention in forthcoming years. The post-Celtic Tiger era has left a legacy of poorly-constructed apartment buildings in towns and cities, as well as a plethora of 'ghost estates', the by-product of an unsustainable property construction boom, which blight urban and rural landscapes alike. The Celtic Tiger, however, was not the first construction boom in modern Irish history. During the 1960s, a shortage of housing, particularly in Dublin, led to considerable re-zoning of land for residential development. Much of this activity was subsequently scrutinised in Tribunals of Inquiry concerning planning corruption. During that time, some of Dublin city's distinctive Georgian architecture was replaced by modern structures, and satellite towns were constructed on the city's outskirts, the legacy of which are still visible today.

This context provides Erika Hanna with rich material for her book, the purpose of which is to explore the process of social and cultural change in Ireland through an engagement with debates about urban development in Dublin during the late 1950s and 1960s (pp. 2-3). The book focuses on five 'battles' regarding the preservation of eighteenth-century Georgian terraced streets which took place during this time.

The book's scope encompasses what Hanna defines as the 'long 1960s', defined by the tenure of Fianna Fáil in government between 1957 and 1973 (p. 18). Structurally, the book is somewhat idiosyncratic. The first chapter spans the years 1955-75, with no obvious reference to an event in 1975 in the text of the chapter itself. The chapters are also arranged thematically, which may appeal more to readers who prefer a literary style than those favouring a strictly chronological approach.

Hanna persuasively argues that whilst the plans to manage the city of Dublin were presented as rational and technical this masked an implicit political agenda on the part of the governing elites (p. 37). This resulted in an approach to urban planning that was at once outward-looking and insular. The development of high-rise accommodation at Ballymun Towers in the north of the city is a prime example. In Ballymun, Dublin Corporation sought to create developments 'in line with urban renewal projects taking place across Europe'. However, consistent with the state-sanctioned glorification of Ireland's physical force separatist tradition, each of the seven tower blocks was named after a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic (pp. 38-9). (An on-going regeneration plan, latterly plagued by budget cuts, means only one tower block remains standing).

The book also outlines how some prominent architects lamented the absence of a distinctively Irish architectural idiom in the independent polity. Some felt that Ireland was still too dependent on 'English' influence, and that the Georgian architectural landscape of the capital too closely represented the legacy of British rule. It was ironic, then, that Dublin's new, central bus station, blending modernist influences with

Celtic motifs, was built further east than originally intended to enable travellers from rural Ireland get to the docks without having to take a second bus – in the course of emigrating to England (pp. 57-9).

The book discusses a number of instances when the eclectic alliance of preservationists battled to save particular landmarks in Dublin's central district. The protests themselves were quite limited in character and scale. The quasi-aristocratic profile of some of those involved, for example members of the Guinness family, the world-famous brewing dynasty, did little to broaden the appeal of such protests to those outside Dublin's cultural and economic elite (p. 81). However, the protesters were by no means a monolithic group, at times encompassing republican radicals and the former Anglo-Irish establishment.

More notice was taken of the state of Dublin's urban architecture when a number of Georgian properties collapsed in the mid-1960s, tragically resulting in the deaths of some occupants (p. 113). Those protesting the conditions in Dublin's 'slums' did so within a particularly Irish context, appealing to 'conservative, Catholic sentiments' (p. 142) regarding the primacy of the nuclear family structure in Irish life, and how the conditions the tenements dwellers were forced to live in rendered 'normal' family life nigh impossible.

Consistent with the spirit of the time, students played a key role in the preservationist movement. Students saw 'themselves as part of a worldwide environmental campaigning movement'. Some of their campaigning, particularly the occupation of property at Hume Street in Dublin's south city centre, gained considerable support from some of Ireland's intellectual and political elite, drawn from the Fine Gael and Labour parties (p. 180).

The class dimension to these protests is never far from the surface in the book. Working-class communities, 'most affected by the processes shaping Dublin' were 'frequently ignored' or had their voices 'mediated through the discourse of political activists and journalists for a variety of purposes' (p. 206). This, again, highlights the conservative and highly stratified nature of Irish society, something that was not particular to Dublin.

Concluding, Hanna argues that the 'historical profession's' 'present-centred approach to the past', namely the focus on the roots of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland, has led to many of these 'active and influential protest movements' of the 1960s being ignored (p. 206). However, is this indicative of a present-centred approach, or merely a reflection of the difference in the relative importance of these particular forms of protest during this period? Whilst examining neglected processes and events is welcome, it should complement, not supersede, the interrogation of the politics of violence in Ireland, which so marked the political culture of the south as well as the north.

Overall, however, *Modern Dublin* is an interesting and timely addition to the historical literature on Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s. By highlighting the emergence of the nexus between politicians, property developers and protesters during this period, it will doubtless be widely read by those seeking to understand Ireland's economic and urban development in historical perspective.

*University of Huddersfield*

SHAUN MCDAID