

Sara Day, *Not Irish Enough: An Anglo-Irish Family's Three Centuries in Ireland* (New Academia Publishing, Washington, DC, 2021), 591 pp., \$34 paperback, \$48 hardback

It is problematic for historians to generalize from their own or their family's experience. Yet that experience, along with everyone else's, provides raw material for history.

William Nolan, editor of *Tipperary: History and Society* (1985) 1985, touched a raw nerve, when he chided scions of the Tipperary gentry for the sparse literature on the Big House, noting how few had cast a critical eye over their (former) place in the county. The writing of this well-researched book was further spurred by a desire to reply to a polemical chapter on Sara Day's grandfather Charles Head entitled 'The Unknown Unionist' in Terence de Vere White's 1972 book *The Anglo-Irish*. She wanted to recapture the idyllic childhood memories of her father and aunts pre-1914. She acknowledges courtesy and cooperation from local people around her family's former estates, when researching the book. The editor's appeal last year for more family histories to be published has partially been answered.

Sara Day, US resident and a former curator in the US Library of Congress, is writing about the Head family, resident in north Tipperary for 200 years from the early 18th century, but with roots in Waterford city back to the mid-17th century. The family's life in Ireland came to an abrupt end in June 1921, when before the truce the IRA sought to assassinate her grandfather, Charles Head, and burnt his home Derrylahan Park.

This reviewer acknowledges a similar background in south Tipperary, and shares some relations with the Heads, notably in the Otway and Going families. His grandmother's first cousin married Helen Head, daughter of Colonel Tribe, suggesting some direct connection. The narrative diverges, though, between landed families that left, whether by choice or necessity consequent on the Irish revolution, and those who in part at least remained.

This book contains much general history familiar to Irish readers, suggesting that the intended market is more an American one. Although the image of Irish-America is almost exclusively Catholic, census information paints a different picture, with equivalent numbers of Americans

being of Irish Protestant/Ulster Scots descent. The author's laudable purpose is to encourage people from her background living in America to volunteer their story.

The same first and middle names tend to recur in families, making any account difficult to follow in the absence of genealogical tables, which is where my great-uncle's Burke's *Landed Gentry of Ireland* 1904 edition, with its 'Head of Derrylahan Park' entry, was helpful.

The degree to which family history can be made interesting depends on available sources, including family papers going beyond estate management, property deeds, and records of vital events. The early part of the Head history before 1800 is fairly formal and official in character, and covers the transformation from late 17th century participation in the civic life of Waterford to the status of a landowning family, with branches and family seats in north Tipperary. Head family members typically had military careers. Colonel Michael Head fought in the Peninsular War, incurring some controversy in 1811 in Spain. Despite conservatism in politics, individual members backed calls for Catholic emancipation and abolition of tithes.

The key figure is Charles Head (1869-1952), a younger son and military man, who bought back the Derrylahan estate after disastrous mismanagement by his older brother. He adopted a high political profile after returning from the Great War, was a vocal southern Unionist, and member of the Irish Unionist Alliance. In 1943, long after leaving Ireland, he published a memoir expressing diehard views not exclusive to him. He considered conquest and colonization the natural order, England's forceful actions over the centuries mainly justified, and the Black and Tans a fine body of Englishmen. He wrote: 'Small nationalities are an unmitigated nuisance all over the world and deserve no encouragement... They... should place themselves under the protection of their big neighbours, while retaining any characteristics and privileges not injurious to their protectors'. Written during the Second World War, this doubtless reflected Anglo-American irritation with Irish neutrality, but makes for hard reading during a Russian war of aggression to wipe out Ukraine's independence.

Is the title *Not Irish Enough* a complaint or recognition of an unpalatable reality? There was too little appreciation amongst Irish unionists of the potential price to be paid for attempting unsuccessfully to obstruct the march of a nation, to use Parnell's words, by treating Irish democracy as entirely subordinate to the interests of Empire. That said, a constructive unionist

nominated a Free State Senator gave the Anti-Treaty IRA a double reason to burn down his house.

Irish leaders copied practices from the American revolution, when loyalists, 50,000 of whom emigrated to Canada, had their property attacked rather than their persons. While not always the case elsewhere, in Co. Tipperary history has not highlighted a single member of a landed family who lost their life during the Irish revolution, even if Charles Head was lucky to escape. This is vastly different from the fate of 'former persons' following the Russian revolution or of guillotined aristocrats during the French revolution, even if financial compensation was limited. The somewhat chastened and seriously diminished class remaining after the Irish revolution still retained material advantages, found that there was life after the Union, and slowly integrated into independent Ireland, about which Sara Day is agnostic.

Reviewed by Martin Mansergh