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Anniversary Essays: Forty Years of Geography at Maynooth, Volumes I & II, edited by Alistair Fraser, Maynooth, Department of Geography, NUI Maynooth, 2012, viii & 454 pp. (Volume I), 442 pp. (Volume II), price unspecified (pbk), ISBN 9780992746605

Over the years, Geography departments across the island of Ireland have marked commemorative milestones in various ways – usually by means of guest lectures, seminars, receptions and/or reunion dinners. On some rare occasions, special anniversaries have also yielded up some attention-grabbing ephemera. The Golden Jubilee of Trinity College Dublin’s Geography Department, for example, was marked in 1986 by the production of a 48-page booklet by Gordon L. Herries Davies, entitled *This Protean Subject: The Geography Department in Trinity College Dublin 1936-1986*. University College Cork’s Geography Department marked its own Golden Jubilee in 1999 with the production of a 36-page booklet, entitled *The Geography Department: A Half Century of Teaching and Research*. This was compiled by its Geography team and written by Barry Brunt and Raymond O’Connor.

Together with a growing number of biobibliographical studies and *festschriften* in honour of eminent retirees, special publications arising from departmental anniversaries have much to offer scholars interested in carrying out research on the discipline of geography’s nature, history and philosophy. With contributions from past and present members of staff, *Anniversary Essays: Forty Years of Geography at Maynooth* commemorates the 40th anniversary of the establishment in 1971 of the Department of Geography at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth (later renamed as NUI Maynooth and now known as Maynooth University). The two substantial volumes under review run to a grand total of 896 pages. As is to be expected, the content bears testimony to the department’s highly-distinguished local, national and international profile. Fittingly, there are 40 chapters across the two volumes – matching the number of years that the department has been operating. As is the case with other publications of a commemorative nature, the tone of *Anniversary Essays* is characteristically celebratory at the beginning. There are warm tributes to those who have made major contributions to the evolution and expansion of the department, a sense of pride in its accomplishments to date and an optimism about venturing into the future.

Readers interested in Maynooth’s prominent role in geography’s growth as an academic discipline in Irish higher education will find much of interest in the five-page ‘Foreword’ written by Patrick J. Duffy. Having spent four

decades working there (starting in 1971 as a Junior Lecturer and retiring in 2011 at the rank of Associate Professor), Duffy is ideally placed to synthesise the story of Geography's blossoming from 'humble beginnings ... into one of Ireland's leading academic departments'. William (Willie) J. Smyth's 'seminal' contribution as a team-building Head of Department from 1973-1977 is kindly acknowledged, while key milestones in the subsequent expansion of staff and student numbers in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s are dealt with in a chronological fashion. One also gets a strong sense of the collegiality that has epitomised the department's operations at Rhetoric House. Fundamental in this regard have been the running of Friday afternoon seminars, the organisation of social events and the production of an annual magazine, *Milieu*. Maynooth's substantial contribution to the committee work of the Geographical Society of Ireland is also covered, as is its role in hosting the annual Conference of Irish Geographers on five separate occasions since 1979. The contribution of departmental personnel to the creation and operation of research centres is also highlighted, including: Rob Kitchin's directorship of the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) and John Sweeney's directorship of ICARUS (Irish Climate Analysis and Research Units). Importantly, the outreach activities of various staff members are also noted, including: Sweeney's role as a President of An Taisce and his and Shelagh B. Waddington's involvement with the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland.

An insight into the gestation of *Anniversary Essays* is offered in the engaging 'Introduction' by the editor, Alistair Fraser. Whilst he concedes that the collection of essays 'is an odd mix', he makes the convincing case that this is 'perfectly appropriate', because of the diversity of 'objects, forces and ideas' that lie at the heart of geography's concern with spatial analysis. In addition to functioning as a 'unique heritage document' of geographical scholarship, Fraser argues that the volumes' 'wider resonance' will derive from their significance as a learning tool for 'students of the history and philosophy of science in general, and geography in particular'.

The vast bulk of the two volumes is made up of a wide-ranging set of essays covering specialist topics on the human and physical geography of Ireland and the wider world. As a general principle, staff with departmental service of less than five years are confined to contributing just one essay to the collection, while some of those with longer service have multiple contributions. Examples of the sub-disciplines that crop up in the different chapters include the following: historical geography (e.g. William [Willie] J. Smyth's exploration of landed estates in County Tipperary, Patrick J. Duffy's work on Gaelic landownership in County Monaghan and W. J. [Seamus] Smyth's study of flax cultivation); rural geography (e.g. Proinnsias Breathnach's research on community development co-ops and Caitríona Ní Laoire's scrutiny of farm masculinities); spatial planning (e.g. James Walsh's work on space and place in the *National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020*, Sinéad Kelly's dissection of the National Asset Management Agency's property portfolio); climatology (e.g. John Sweeney's investigations of climate change),

flood hazards (e.g. a hydrological modelling study by Rosemary Charlton, Rowan Fealy, Sonja Moore, John Sweeney and Conor Murphy); urban geography (e.g. Cian O’Callaghan’s scrutiny of urban potentialities through photographs); medical geography (e.g. Dennis Pringle’s mapping of cardiovascular disease mortality and Elizabeth S. Mathews’ critique of discourses of d/Deafness in the Irish medical system); computing software and ICT (e.g. Rob Kitchin’s research with Martin Dodge on code and space, and Steve McCarron’s personal experience of sport as a ‘coded space’); geoarchaeology (e.g. Paul J. Gibson’s geophysical survey with Dorothy M. George of monastic remains at Clonard); geographical education (e.g. Shelagh B. Waddington’s study of syllabus change in secondary school geography); political geography (e.g. Mary Gilmartin’s overview of the Rosport Five and the ‘Shell to Sea’ campaign against the Corrib Gas pipeline, Mark Boyle’s work on the role of Christianity in international relations, Karen E. Till’s research on ‘wounded’ cities and the politics of memory, Adrian Kavanagh’s analysis of the politics of the Eurovision Song Contest); the political economy of food (e.g. Alistair Fraser’s detection of flaws in the Hunger Task Force’s report to the Irish government); geographies of poverty (e.g. the work of Jan Rigby and others on spatial inequalities and poverty in contemporary Britain); and cultural geography (e.g. Ronan Foley’s appraisal of therapeutic landscapes, Gerry Kearns’ thematic analysis of the ‘geographical imagination’ inherent in Luka Bloom’s songs).

Whilst most of the essays chosen for the final sample have been published previously (as articles in journals like *Irish Geography* or as chapters in edited books), bringing them all together in the two volumes serves as a valuable testament not only to Maynooth’s impressive track-record in conducting geographical research, but to the expansive range and breadth of the discipline of geography itself. The inclusion of three essays derived from ‘blog posts’ (by Kelly, Kavanagh and Kearns respectively) is a unique feature of the volumes, as is the inclusion of a chapter listed (at the time of publication) as ‘Forthcoming in *Irish Geography*’.

Taken as a whole, the volumes serve as a fitting tribute to the wide-ranging accomplishments of Maynooth geographers over the course of four decades. Unfortunately, there is no index to either of the two volumes. The absence of the latter will make navigation more difficult for readers who may wish to swiftly pinpoint the precise location, within the volumes, of key concepts in the geographical tradition. Of all of the 40 core chapters, only the final one is listed as an ‘Original essay for this collection’ (namely Steve McCarron’s innovative contribution on ‘Spaced and Timed in the New York Marathon’). Given the editor’s introductory remark about the volumes representing ‘a landmark contribution’ to the study of geography’s history and philosophy, perhaps a more fitting ending might have been a specially-commissioned essay to compare and contrast the Maynooth experience with key intellectual trends and developments in academic geography since the early 1970s. Some photographs of staff and students – past and present – would have been welcomed as well. These could have added another dimension to the volumes’ role in documenting the department’s ‘heritage’. Such

criticisms do not detract in any way from Alistair Fraser's impressive editorial feat of assembling the component parts, patiently re-formatting fonts and styles, polishing the appearance of some of the illustrative materials and converting references into footnotes.

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