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Book Review

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Book Reviews

Bridges of Dublin – The remarkable story of Dublin’s Liffey Bridges by Annette Black and Michael B. Barry, Dublin City Council and Four Courts Press, 2016, 256 pp., €35 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-907002-21-2, €25 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-907002-25-0

A city that develops on both sides of a river is asking for trouble. While rivers are excellent at facilitating transport and travel along them, it is a different story when goods and people have to be transported across them. Kostof (1992)¹ noted that many river towns focused development on one bank and even major cities did not have any significant activity on the other bank until modern times because of the problems posed in making river crossings. Buda and Pest are perhaps the best known example of two cities which developed on either side of a river. They had separate existences for most of their history and were not linked by a permanent bridge until 1849. Dublin took another path. Speed’s map of 1610 shows development on both sides of the Liffey, though to a far greater extent on the southside. However, it was the northside property that proved to be attractive to the speculative developers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century and since then Dublin has had two cores that needed to be connected. The problem was not helped by the development of the port on the northside while industry and commerce stayed on the southside. It is no surprise, therefore, that bridges and the need for them have played a significant part in the development of the city. Despite this, information on them was scattered and it was time consuming to put together a complete picture. This is, therefore, a welcome book because within its 256 pages we are given a consistent, entertaining and informative account. There are twenty-four bridges that span the Liffey within the city and county and this book aims to tell the story of each. The city and county focus is particularly welcome because the bridges west of Parkgate Street tend to be neglected. Not many people will know where the Anna Livia Bridge is located, let alone its story. Farmleigh Bridge must be even more obscure and even the more functional West Link deserves its place in the discussion. A chapter is given to each of the bridges and there is a standard format. A location map is provided and there is an essay that outlines the history and importance of the bridge from its building to the present day. The essay is enlivened by photographs, engravings and a mix of both present-day and historical images. While some of the images will be known to students of the city, many others will not and it is clear that the authors have gone to considerable effort to find new and interesting ones. For example, the two pictures showing Blood Stoney’s reconstruction of Carlisle Bridge in the late 1870s are

¹ Kostof, S. (1992) *The city shaped: urban patterns and meanings through history*. London: Thames & Hudson.

fascinating and show very well how Stoney approached the problem of keeping a functioning link between north and south city while widening and flattening the roadway (p.154). Equally, there is a marvellous photograph of the Swivel (later Butt) Bridge under construction and an interesting vista of the Custom House in the short interval between the completion of the Swivel Bridge and the Loop Line Bridge. Many of the present-day photographs are equally valuable, not just because of their excellent quality, but also because they capture a moment in time. The arrival of the Sean O'Casey Bridge by barge or the assembly of Calatrava's Samuel Beckett Bridge are but two such examples.

Each essay provides a short history of a bridge and it will appeal particularly to those who are interested in the detail of its construction; not a surprise given the genesis of the book. So we learn that 'the Ha'penny Bridge is a single elliptical-arch structure with a span of 42.8 metres... The cast-iron superstructure is composed of three parallel arch ribs... The ribs are cruciform sections offering greater resistance than a flat plate' (p. 146). For those anxious for more of the same, there are drawings of the bridges with cross-sections and elevations at the end of the book. It would be wrong, though, to suggest that the essays are only for the technically minded. That information is there but the essays are written in a clear and engaging style and we learn how each bridge came to be built and we get a short survey of the issues that might have surrounded the building and its use. There are little snippets of information which engage the reader. Did you know, for example, that the death of Lawrence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin, was attributed to an earlier fall from the 'Dublin Bridge' or that the O'Casey Bridge is the 'quiver in the river' (p.202); quite an appropriate tag for anyone who has used it! If anything, the essays are a bit too short and there are a lot of tantalising aspects that deserve further exploration. One way of satisfying such interest is to visit the complementary website www.bridgesofdublin.ie.

Bridges tell the story of the development of Dublin and anyone interested in that story will enjoy owning this book. For others, it will be the photographs and the images that will draw them in, while the engineer will find much to enjoy. It is an elegant production with high quality images on very good paper in a format that does them justice. It is a joint production of Dublin City Council and Four Courts Press and both have an excellent track record in producing quality publications.

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