



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



Governing Hibernia and the Making of a Historian of Ireland

A Lecture given in connection with the Award of the
National University of Ireland's Irish Historical Research
Prize in 2017

By K. Theodore Hoppen



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OPENING REMARKS



As Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, I am delighted to welcome you all here this evening for this lecture, by K. Theodore Hoppen, winner of the Irish Historical Research Prize for 2017.

This prize, first awarded in 1922, is offered in alternate years for the best new work of Irish historical research, published for the first time by a graduate of the National University of Ireland. NUI sees it very much as part of its mission to promote scholarly research, particularly in areas related to Irish history and culture.

This year's winner is K. Theodore Hoppen's wonderful book *Governing Ireland: British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921*. The book is an outstanding piece of scholarship by a master craftsman who provides fresh insights on almost every major debate of the nineteenth century. Particularly striking and commendable features include the maturity of Professor Hoppen's reflections and interpretation, the ambitious scope and sophistication of the conceptual framework that he has constructed to interpret the evolving relationship between Britain and Ireland, and the clarity with which he manages to recount that story. Constructed on an exceptionally strong evidence base, it is further complemented and expertly contextualised by a wealth of secondary literature. The book is ambitious in scope and makes a very substantial contribution towards advancing our understanding of this subject. Complex and protracted developments are recounted in a coherent, accessible manner that demonstrates the author's confident mastery of his sources and of his subject matter.

In his introduction to *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine*, for which he was awarded the first NUI Irish Research Prize, the legendary George O'Brien, using Grattan's metaphor of the Union as the marriage of the two countries, poses the questions, "Why was it that a bride who had in popular phraseology "married money" refused to become reconciled to the union which she had contracted? Why did she seek a divorce or at least a separation from an eligible spouse?" Theodore Hoppen's book gives us some new perspectives on those questions.

As a graduate of University College Dublin, and as a historian who had close connections as an external examiner with the constituent universities of the National University of Ireland, Theodore Hoppen is particularly welcome here this evening. When we hear the details of his personal and family history in Ireland, where he arrived as a five-year old refugee from Germany in 1947, we can appreciate that we are welcoming him home in more ways than one.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maurice Manning". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr Maurice Manning, Chancellor



Dr Attracta Halpin, Registrar NUI, Dr Maurice Manning, Chancellor NUI, Professor Theo Hoppen and Dr Margaret O'Callaghan

Professor Theo Hoppen, Dr Margaret O'Callaghan, Professor Mary Daly and Dr Carla King



Dr Maurice Manning and Professor Theo Hoppen

GOVERNING HIBERNIA AND THE MAKING OF A HISTORIAN OF IRELAND

K. Theodore Hoppen



Let me say first of all how delighted, pleased and grateful I am to have been awarded the Irish Historical Research Prize. While it would be hypocritical to pretend that the handsome nature of the prize was not a matter of considerable appeal, its source – the National University of Ireland – renders it for me something of very special pleasure indeed.

I entered University College Dublin in the Autumn of 1958 aged all of sixteen years: as long – at least then – as one became seventeen by the 1 January of the year after entry one was allowed to matriculate. My birthday is on 27 November so that was possible. Of course, in many ways this was rather too young. Even at the age of 75 I still feel insufficiently mature to deal with some of the challenges that life throws my way. All in all, however, time is a great teacher and my years at UCD taught me much, not only about History and Economics (what was then known as the VIIIIC degree – a rather select category), but about life generally.

When it was suggested that I give this talk I put forward the idea that it should deal not simply with the book for which this prize has been awarded, but also say something about my own personal background, not, I hasten to add, because of any strident egocentricity on my part, but because that background is rather unusual for a historian of Ireland and possibly therefore of some interest more generally. I will, therefore, I hope be forgiven for devoting the first part of my talk to this background before saying something about my book *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921*, its genesis and its chief arguments.

One of the things I am most proud of is having become an Irish citizen. And people who, like me, have been granted this particular rite of passage often find it easier to wear their feelings on their sleeves than those of you who have been Irish from birth and to whom such a state must seem no more than ‘natural’. Well, it was not at all ‘natural’ in my case. Instead it was contingent, unexpected, surprising, and – as it turned out – rewarding beyond measure. As my surname indicates I cannot – even by the wildest genealogical fantasies – claim to be ethnically Irish with connections to mythical ancestors such as – shall we say – the O’Hoppens of County Tipperary. No: I was born in November 1941 in the German town of Mönchengladbach which is on the west side of the Rhine only twenty or so miles from Holland: indeed, Napoleon designated the area a full Department of France – the so-called ‘Lower Rhine’ and the local dialect still retains a number of French words – thus *portemonnaie* for *Geldbeutel* or ‘purse’ and *trottoir* for *Bürgersteig* or ‘pavement’. As the date indicates the war – for me always the ‘war’ not the ‘emergency’ – had entered its third year, a development of massive consequences for my family. My father was Paul Ernst Theodor Hoppen and my mother Edith Margareta Hoppen (nee Van Brüssel). In this part of the world where a number of countries – Holland, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Germany – lie closely packed together it was not unusual for my mother’s family to have come originally from Belgium.

My father worked in *his* father's business which consisted of a number of shops selling cutlery, glassware, china, and (oddly) sporting guns – what generally is known in Germany as *Geschenkartikel* – rather higher class I think than the now-redundant English equivalent of 'fancy goods'. My mother's father had originally been an undertaker and joiner who had 'made good' by becoming a partner in a small insurance company specialising in insuring undertakers. Altogether a background that in Germany would have been described as *gutbürgerlich* ('solid middle-class').

My parents married in 1938. Their world fell to pieces in the course of the ensuing war. My father – unlike his son a distinctly athletic and handsome man – had I understand, initially at least, shown some sympathy for national socialism. This created tensions in what otherwise was clearly an extremely happy marriage because my mother (and her whole family) took a clean different line. They were Catholics (my father was Lutheran) and opposed the Nazis largely – but not exclusively – on religious grounds. This was especially the case with my grandmother whose outspokenness caused a good deal of nervousness in the family at large.

My father served as a private in the German army and was killed in the first week of the attack on Russia in June 1941.¹ A few years ago I went with my family to Lithuania where he is buried. Although the Russians had understandably neglected the cemetery they had not desecrated it, so that the German equivalent of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was able to undertake restoration after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was strange and moving to stand there before the grave of a father who had died five months before I was born and who bore Christian names very like my own.² The cemetery was in a town called – in German – Taugoggen or – in Lithuanian – Taurage: as it happens a famous place in German history because it was there that the Prussian General Yorck changed with his army from the French to the Allied side in December 1812. It was also not far from the spot where Napoleon had met Czar Alexander I on a raft on the river Niemen in 1809 and had then persuaded the czar to move in the opposite direction.

1 I once talked to a German historian whose own father had been on the German General Staff at the time who told me that – given how unprepared the Russians were at the time it is highly likely that my father was killed accidentally by – for example – being run over by a German tank or truck or killed by what is known as 'friendly fire', though my mother was of course told that he had died heroically fighting for the Fatherland.

2 As a footnote it might be worth mentioning that the cemetery also contained the bodies of soldiers of the First World War or – as the cross over their remains stated – 'Erster Weltkrieg 1914-1917' – because of course that war had come to an end in the East in 1917 not 1918.

So, I was therefore a posthumous child. But my father's death was not the only war-induced death in the family. One of my mother's brothers was almost certainly killed at Stalingrad (he was never heard of again) and her own mother (my devout grandmother) was killed in 1944 when the train in which she was travelling was strafed or bombed probably by the RAF.

During the last months of the war my mother and I (her only child) wandered around the western parts of Germany between the Lower Rhineland and the northern Black Forest seeking shelter and relative safety. As the allies moved into Germany from the west my mother, who spoke good English, was able to obtain some work and food by acting as a translator.

In the late 1920s my mother's oldest brother, Leo, had as a young man emigrated to England – entirely for business rather than political reasons. Mönchengladbach was (and to a lesser extent still is) a textile town specialising in the production of worsteds and woollens generally and Leo went to London as the young representative of one of these firms, a business he soon extended by obtaining agencies for a number of other German and international manufacturers. This was an ideal job for someone with little or no capital: you held only samples and then transmitted the orders obtained – his first big breakthrough was with Montagu Burton the tailors – and you were paid in commission set at various levels – usually about 3 or 4 percent. He proved to be a genius at the job and quite soon became – I use the technical word – 'rich'. In England my uncle married and through the support of his father-in-law (a Yorkshire carpet manufacturer with – so I gather – influence in the Conservative Party) became a naturalised Englishman – something that had become increasingly difficult for Germans to become in the mid-1930s. The result was that he served in the British Army during the war, his surname van Brüssel (though he soon dropped the umlaut) making his comrades assume that he must be Belgian or Dutch. At the same time of course both his younger brother and his brother-in-law (my father) served in the German Army. Also, curiously, he managed for a time to stay in touch with his mother (of whom he was very fond) through intermediaries in Italy because Mussolini – trying (as it proved incorrectly) to work out who was going to win – did not join in on Germany's side until June 1940.

After the end of the war my (English) uncle began to try to move my mother and myself out of Germany where times had become extremely hard and difficult. Curiously, Hitler, never very confident about the support of his own people, had taken much longer than Churchill to introduce really serious rationing, with the result that when shortages in Germany became inevitable they proved very severe indeed. My mother clearly remembered how – together with other women – they had once laid hands on a pig which they then themselves butchered with the help of a 'Do-It-Yourself' manual on how to slaughter a pig. And when my uncle eventually came with a joint Anglo-American force to his own home town he (so he later told me) could not in certain areas even recognize the street patterns as they had once been, for not only had the town been heavily bombed but parts of it had also been fought over on the ground.

My uncle first asked the British if they would take us in, which (understandably enough) they refused. He then asked the Swiss who also refused. And then he asked Ireland largely because he had maintained a small branch office of his business in South William Street in Dublin since the mid-1930s. De Valera was then still at the head of a government which quickly responded positively – an act of generosity and kindness for which I shall forever be grateful.

However the occupation authorities (Mönchengladbach was in what became the British Zone) took longer to give us permission to leave. Eventually in April 1947 we were allowed to go and were taken by a British Army car to the Belgian border. We walked across what was then a fairly deep No Man's Land only to find that the Belgian business associate my uncle had asked to meet us was nowhere to be seen. My mother became frantic because the army car had departed and this was of course long before mobile phones had been invented! Eventually he turned up and explained that there was then a two-hour time difference between the two countries which the British driver had seemingly made no allowances for.

We were taken to Brussels for the night, flown to Northolt in London where we were put into a special locked transit lounge (I always – rather imaginatively – think of Lenin in his sealed train) and then flown to Dublin. I was five years old.

On arrival, stateless though we were, the Irish immigration officials gave us a document declaring that we could 'reside in Ireland without restriction as to time'. My mother burst into tears.

Dublin was of course a totally strange place for both of us. A first extraordinary astonishment for my mother took place as we were driven into town and passed a little van emblazoned with a swastika and bearing the name 'Swastika Laundry'. These vans belonged, we later found out, to a firm that had been founded before the First World War and which had never seen any reason why it should change its name and with whom, by a curious twist of fate, I spent some weeks when – years later – I was pursuing a brief, inglorious, and indeed – on my part – incompetent career as a trainee-chartered accountant.

Although my mother spoke good English, I spoke none. We were first placed in a hotel in Howth full of visitors from England anxious to eat the food not yet available at home. My first words of English were in response at breakfast to the waitress asking whether I wanted a fried egg. 'No', I said, 'Scrambled eggs' – a display of interest in food that has remained with me for the rest of my life.

After some weeks the owner of the hotel (who was doing well out of his hungry British visitors) told my mother that we would have to leave in a few days' time. The only contact we had in Ireland – my uncle's Irish accountant – had gone abroad for a few weeks. Understandably my mother was at a complete loss as to what she should do, not least because the funds at her immediate disposal were not large.

By this time, it was late June. The weather had improved and there was a beach just outside the hotel. As little boys do – even little boys who do not speak the same language – I had become friendly with and was now happily playing with two Irish boys of more or less the same age. When their parents (they lived in a house not far from the hotel) heard of our plight they said that we – more or less total strangers from a foreign land – must come and stay with them. This act of simple but enormous kindness in part explains why – even to a small child – Ireland became, to all intents and purposes, a land of generosity inhabited by a people for many of whom one could immediately feel liking and respect. We lived with this family of a Dublin solicitor for several months and although my mother helped in the house, we were in no way treated other than as guests. And for many years thereafter we spent Christmas Day with them (Germans make more of Christmas Eve), visits and a friendship which are still capable of bringing tears to my eyes.

I went to school. First to Santa Sabina Convent in Sutton run by the Dominican nuns where I was – very lovingly – more or less adopted by Sister Theodora who – at least in those days – cannot have encountered many children with more or less the same name as herself. We had brought few things from Germany. One exception was a rather lovely little white woollen suit for myself with dinky belted jacket and shorts. But Irish boys then wore very long shorts while my German shorts were indeed short. Some of the nuns thought this improper and tried at my first communion to make me wear a coat on top of them: words fail me but that is the way it then was. But the noble Sister Theodora denounced them and I was allowed to proceed with much of my little legs exposed.

Soon, however, my uncle sorted things out and we moved to a flat in Pembroke Road which to my mother's delight actually had coal-fired central heating, common in Germany but not so in Ireland where many friends told her that central heating was bad for one's health and indeed debilitating in general. I then went to St Conleth's School in Clyde Road where I encountered both a lovely headmaster, Mr Shepherd, and the rather unlovely Irish and British devotion of those days to corporal punishment.

And as a small digression I might mention that it was at this time that my mother and I were photographed on O'Connell Bridge by the famous street photographer Arthur Fields (originally Abraham Feldman), my six-year old self every inch the little Irish schoolboy: blue raincoat, shorts, tie, and – on my head – the then ubiquitous school cap. Some of you may know that a book of Fields's photographs was published by The Collins Press in 2014. Well three years later a second book of photographs appeared, among them that of mother and myself in 1948, she looking very happy and smart, I looking rather solemn and wary.³ And in the background one can see Nelson's Pillar, then still dominating the thoroughfare.

3 Ciarán Deeney and David Clarke, *Man on the Bridge: More Photos by Arthur Fields* (Cork: Collins Press, 2017), p. 51.



Theodore Hoppen and his mother, O'Connell Bridge, 1948. (Ciaran Deeney & David Clarke, *Man on the Bridge: More Photos by Arthur Fields* (The Collins Press, 2017), p.51)

Although boarding schools were and are little known in Germany we gathered that they were more the 'thing' in Ireland and indeed our Howth friends were sending their sons to a Benedictine School in County Limerick, which turned out to be somewhat less bleak than were most such establishments in the 1950s: indeed, I would describe its character then as 'autocracy tempered by anarchy'. The headmaster called on us in Dublin a few months before I was due to go. After haranguing my mother he asked whether she had any questions. Nervously she queried whether I could continue my piano lessons at school. 'Oh', the headmaster barked, 'He's one of those'. And indeed, my previous lessons constituted a very modest and unmerited claim to at least indirect fame in that they were given by a lovely but eccentric man, John Beckett, first cousin to the great writer.

Anyway, I survived school despite my dislike of organised games. Perhaps I would have liked rugby more had I been fast enough to be a nippy wing. But, no, all I could aspire to was being a prop forward – a regular Calvary which I still remember with horror. To say I enjoyed school would be an exaggeration. But I survived it, which is more than some managed to do. University was, therefore, a wonderful and totally enjoyable change and I took to it like a duck to water, not least because, though still very young, I had already done some ‘growing-up’ in the shape of a solo journey through Spain in the months after leaving school, a country that then still demanded an entry visa and represented the kind of distant Shangri-la which later students found in Asia or South America. The UCD History Department of the time was notable for the eccentricity of its leadership and the high quality of its staff. Both of these things turned out to be important for me. The one showed that conformity, despite its many values and advantages, is not the be all and end all of life. The other that good teaching and good scholarship could (indeed should) go together and that History as a subject could be exciting, varied, and deeply interesting.

However, my uncle (to whom we owed so much) wanted me to go into his business and had decided that I should become a chartered accountant in order to make my time with him useful and valuable. And so, in 1961, I became what was then called an articled clerk. It is no false modesty to say that the whole business of double-entry book-keeping completely baffled me. It was not that I had any feelings antipathetic to the career. It was simply that I could not understand the processes involved. And so, greatly daring, after some nine or ten months, I announced my own unilateral declaration of independence and undertook an MA in History at UCD. This eventually turned into my first book published in 1970 and helped me to obtain a scholarship to Trinity College Cambridge. From there in 1966 I moved to the University of Hull – I was lucky in that academic jobs were not as difficult to get then as they later became. And I happily remained there for the rest of my career. In some ways I would have liked to come back to Dublin, but I was never terribly patient with the somewhat Byzantine procedures which at that time seemed an integral part of appointment processes at Irish universities.

My first book was a study of the Dublin Philosophical Society, the earliest Irish scientific society which flourished between 1683 and 1708. This was an interesting topic but I felt that my weakness in the areas of mathematics and physics in particular would make it difficult for me to continue work in the field of the history of science, although I should just say that in retirement I am actually returning to an aspect of that subject in the shape of an examination of the book collecting habits of early Irish natural philosophers.


Since then I have published various books on Irish and British History, the most recent of which is that for which the National University of Ireland has very generously awarded me its Irish Historical Research Prize. This book *Governing Hibernia* was originally intended as – and to some extent turned out to be – a matching study to a book I published in 1984 called *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885* which was an examination of Irish politics from, as it were, the bottom up, examining factors that influenced voters and non-voters at the constituency level.⁴ It was, in part at least, intended as an antidote to those books which saw versions of Irish nationalism moving inexorably upwards throughout the nineteenth century to an eventual apotheosis in 1916-1921. In no way did I want to deny that various forms of nationalist mobilisation by, for example, O'Connell, Parnell, the Irish Parliamentary Party, the Fenians, and the IRB, were not central to the history of Ireland in these years. It was merely my intention to suggest that this was only a *part* of the story and that all sorts of developments of a local, contingent, modest, and immediate nature also clamoured for attention and needed to be taken into account: elections at the local level, bribery, corruption, inward-looking violence, the politics of immediacy, the obtaining of jobs and positions and so on and so forth. Contrary to what some readers seem to have thought, my approach was not one of 'Either/Or' but of 'Both/And'. In no way did or do I assert that the kinds of topics and the trajectory which tended to feature in much Irish historical writing had or have become redundant. I simply wanted to put things into a wider context, in which long-term aims mattered a good deal less than immediate needs and immediate requirements. This too was in many ways the argument – now placed into a longer time frame – of the book *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* which I published in 1989.⁵

I had also been commissioned by Oxford University Press to write a volume in their 'New Oxford History of England' series devoted to the period 1846-1886. Although I thought that the name of the series was plain silly and misleading and indeed I deliberately avoided the word 'England' in the title of my own book, this was too flattering an invitation to refuse and the volume eventually came out in 1998.⁶ Unusually for the series I included a chapter on 'The Experiences of Scotland and Wales' and also one called 'The Island of Ireland'. I hope you will not think it self-indulgent of me if I quote its opening paragraph:

4 Published by Oxford University Press.

5 Published by Longman Ltd. A revised second edition was published in 1999.

6 *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).



From the perspective of British and even more so of English history, nineteenth-century Ireland has been seen primarily as the home port of a troublesome pirate ship, the *SS Irish Question*. Apart from stereotypical notions suggesting that it was also a land remarkable for the violence, religious intensity, laziness, and jollity of its inhabitants, neither the mid-Victorian nor subsequent generations in Britain have known much about the island of Ireland itself. And it is precisely out of this smooth avoidance of any real engagement with the close and reciprocal connections between developments within Ireland and the changing nature of the Irish Question that many of the misunderstandings and complications of modern Irish-British relations have grown.⁷

Already I was thinking of a companion volume to my study of 1984 on *Elections, Politics, and Society* looking at the whole matter from the perspective of British politicians and especially of those given the task of dealing more or less directly with the affairs of the smaller island.⁸ The resulting book took a long time to produce, in large part because the illness and death of my first wife in 2002 took a heavy toll, but also because the topic itself was a large one demanding extensive research of various kinds. Thus the book published in 2016 looked at matters over the whole period of the Union and did so from what might be called 'the top down', analysing the attitudes and intentions that informed the ways in which those in charge of the new United Kingdom established in 1800 conducted and approached the government of Ireland (without, I hope, neglecting developments in Ireland itself) and how these interacted with the preoccupations of an 'imperial' government with a very wide geographical reach. The very title, *Governing Hibernia*, was deliberately chosen for its linguistic ambiguity. In one mode it could mean the task of ruling Ireland; in another it could imply that it was Hibernia that actually did the 'governing', an interpretation that was by no means invariably incorrect.

Broadly speaking I argue that the approach of British politicians to Ireland under the Union fell into three distinct phases, though I would in no sense argue that every single development over this long period can be neatly fitted into so possibly restricting a historical portmanteau. It is hardly novel to point out that the Union was, most immediately, a response to the rising of 1798 and the perturbations this created in government circles at a time of war with France. But the Union, while encompassing a good many minor matters, rather glossed over the business of how Ireland should be governed. In 1707 the Anglo-Scottish Union, while allowing Scottish particularities over religion and legal matters, had provided for a more or less seamless political and administrative integration. In the case of Ireland – for reasons that are not altogether clear – a separate administrative machine was allowed to continue in Dublin under a viceroy or lord lieutenant and represented in the House of

7 Ibid., p. 559.

8 Published by Clarendon Press.

Commons by a government minister called the Chief Secretary for Ireland, offices which had no equivalents in the Scottish case until the 1880s when a Secretary of State for Scotland was appointed. This was not, in any sense, the total integration which had been implied by some of William Pitt's early speeches on the matter which had recruited Virgil in promises to make Ireland an equal, full, and undifferentiated part of the new United Kingdom. In a parliament where everyone knew Latin he had declared in January 1799:

Non ego nec Teucris Italos parere jubebo,
Nec nova regna peto; paribus se legibus ambae
Invictae gentes aeterna in foedera mittant.⁹
[I shall never command Italians to obey Trojans, nor do
I seek any new royalty; Let two nations,
Each unsubjected, enter into an everlasting compact
Under equal terms].

But in practice this is not what happened and Ireland retained significant elements of what would now be called 'devolution', something certain ministers in London were soon to lament (and indeed to make what amounted to ineffective efforts to overturn). Why this should have happened remains far from clear. There were certainly elements – of which Lord Clare and the Englishman, Lord Redesdale (the post-Union Lord Chancellor of Ireland) were prominent members – who believed that London-based politicians were too remote from the fractious and internecine character of Irish politics and denominational relationships and that only hard-nosed Irish or Irish-based ministers could deploy the necessary forcefulness which the unstable and dangerous character of Irish politics required. There was, in other words, a curious and destabilising contradiction between London and pro-Union elements in Ireland fearful that the former might prove too 'soft' in their dealings with Irish discontents. The latter therefore rejoiced that the franchise rights which had been granted to Catholics in relation to the Irish Parliament in 1793 were now withdrawn with the result that Catholics were not permitted to vote for members of the Westminster parliament until 1829.

At the same time Ireland was being 'discovered' and interpreted for a British public by means of both factual and imaginative literature. Many post-Union writers soon persuaded themselves that the best way to sell their wares was to be seen as translators of a hidden, strange, and hitherto unknowable Ireland into what might be called the 'plain' language of British conversation while at the same time those charged with the governance of Ireland perceived themselves to be either immediately or indirectly in charge of a neighbouring island of distinct, almost shocking, peculiarity. What all this rendered particularly strange was that very similar

9 [William Cobbett], *The Parliamentary History of England from the earliest period to the year 1803*, 34, 285 (31 January 1799).

vibrations were being created within Ireland itself, especially among the notable tribe of post-Union novelists such as Morgan, Edgeworth, Maturin, the Banims, Lover, and Lever, who so insistently portrayed both their characters and the surroundings they inhabited as wild, distinct, and picturesque that one eminent critic has convincingly described the predominant stance of their fiction as one of 'auto-exoticism' or the looking for one's own identity in the 'unusual, the extraordinary, the exotic aspects of experience, to conflate the notions of one's distinctness and one's distinctiveness'. Even so, the 1820s undoubtedly mark a watershed between a fiction attempting 'to reconcile a celebration of cultural' difference 'with the possibilities of reconciliatory union' and later Irish novels of a distinctly 'more complex and disillusioned' character¹⁰. Overall, however, there seems to have existed in the early nineteenth century a species of unrealised conspiracy between two very different groups – one in Ireland and one in Britain – both equally determined to present, to explain, and if possible to understand Ireland in terms emphasising that, whatever else Ireland was, it was not England.

Then, from the 1830s until the late 1860s the predominant perceptual framework among the governing classes in London with regard to Ireland depended on the belief that the overall stability of the United Kingdom could best be served if Irish conditions were rapidly altered so as to match the political, social and economic norms widely held to be characteristic of Britain itself. Although this shift in opinion clearly coincided with the end of Tory and the beginning of Whig/Liberal hegemony at the centre, it was not wholly party-political in nature. Nor was it exclusively a direct product of Whig attempts to bind Ireland to the Union by conciliatory rather than merely coercive means. Not unimportant to this shift was, for example, the manner in which utilitarian universalism – the belief that, at bottom, all human beings are best understood as behaving according to the same passions and desires – had begun to infect important elements in the higher political world.

The new approach amounted to something like a programme by which Ireland should either be treated more or less exactly like the rest of the kingdom or, where this was not yet feasible, in a fashion designed to eliminate its distinctiveness in as short a time as possible. It was underpinned by the conviction that Irish problems – albeit more difficult politically – were fundamentally the same as English problems and therefore required either similar solutions or solutions specifically designed to liberate those latent similarities still disguised beneath superficially distinct appearances. Although the translation of intentions into practice proved more difficult than had been anticipated, the prime example of this approach was the translation of the New English Poor Law of 1834, with only a few tweaks and adjustments, to Ireland in 1838, a country that had no existing poor law and where a Royal Commission had recently recommended a very different approach. And even when in 1831 Ireland was provided

10 J. Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Interpretation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp 37-8, 43, 225; R.F. Foster, *Words Alone: Yeats and his Inheritances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 40.

with a national education system which had no parallel in England, the stated aim behind the enterprise was to reduce religious tensions and thus bring to Ireland the blessings of British good feeling and up-to-date modernity.

Lord John Russell, prime minister from 1846 to 1852 and again in 1865-6, was a leading proponent of this approach. In 1837 he rounded upon those in parliament who took a different view: 'Scotland is inhabited by Scotchmen, and England by Englishmen, yet, because Ireland is inhabited by Irishmen you will refuse them the same measure of relief that you have applied to Scotland and England'.¹¹ The Great Famine of course significantly watered down the enthusiasm and consistency with which he and others pursued this agenda, while at the same time persuading him and many others that they should now proceed to refashion the social and economic circumstances of the Irish countryside (to which they largely attributed the terrible disasters of the mid- and late 1840s) along English lines. What this amounted to was little less than a project of social engineering: small farmers and cottiers were to be allowed to fall into their 'natural' position as labourers, labourers were to be paid money wages, a prosperous middle class of shopkeepers and merchants would then spring up to service their needs and Irish counties would become bucolic Hibernian versions of Hampshire, Suffolk, and Kent.

To help achieve this the so-called Gregory Clause in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1847 barring from public relief anyone holding more than a quarter of an acre of land was designed to bring about a *bouleversement* in Irish society, while the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 was to weed out bankrupt and inefficient landlords (and it is a mistake to see London administrations as uncritical admirers of the landed classes in Ireland) and replace them with new and aggressive economic operators imported, in the main, from Scotland and England. While the former measure was not without some success, the latter failed to bring about any but minor adjustments in landed society as a whole. The rather ineffective apotheosis of this approach can be seen in two acts of parliament passed in 1860 the Landed Property (Ireland) Improvement Act and the Landlord and Tenant Amendment Act, generally known as Cardwell's Act after the then chief secretary and Deasy's Act after the Irish attorney general. These attempted to place tenurial relationships entirely on statutory rather than customary grounds. Neither had much success and soon the political weather with regard to Ireland underwent significant and substantial change and the agenda introduced more than thirty years earlier of treating Ireland as if it were – or could rapidly be transformed into – a sort of England of the West began to be abandoned. The reasons for this are complex and not yet fully understood. Certainly, shifts in the broad intellectual climate of the time played a part, in particular the move away from classical political economy with its emphasis upon immutable general principles and towards a greater sympathy for historicist views which emphasised cultural relativism, envisaged social phenomena as historically determined, and displayed a profound respect for traditions of almost every kind. Historicist ideas had undoubtedly begun to appeal to Gladstone, now the rising man of the Liberal party. In particular certain writings

11 *Parliamentary Debates*, Series 3: 36, 207 (7 February 1835).

which offered comparisons between traditional tenurial systems in India and in Ireland influenced the preparations of Gladstone's first Irish Land Act of 1870. Nor were such views confined to Liberals like Gladstone. Indeed, as early as October 1869 a recent Tory Cabinet Minister and future party leader (Stafford Northcote) told the Social Science Association that:

The facts are stubborn and cannot be bent ... [The Irish] national idea of the relations of landlord and tenant is something totally different from the national idea in England ... It is one so rooted in the Irish mind that it is impossible to remove ... [Therefore] you must provide for it accordingly.¹²

From then until the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 (and beyond) British politicians of all parties began once again – as had been the case immediately after the Union though now in a very different manner – to base their Irish policies upon the axiom that Ireland should be treated as a special case. Of course, Gladstone's main intention regarding the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, the Land Act of 1870, the second Land Act of 1881 (in which he deliberately ignored the advice of the Bessborough Commission that 'the same Land Laws should prevail ... in every part of the Kingdom'), and the Home Rule Bill of 1886 may well have been to defuse discontent and so ultimately strengthen the connection between Britain and Ireland. But the inevitable effect of the new approach was to encourage notions of difference and eventually perhaps even of separation.¹³ If in 1820 Ireland had been something like a *de facto* colony to be kept firmly in check, fifty years later it was once again being regarded as a distinct entity, as a place needing special forms of treatment and not the broadly 'English' remedies that had been tried in the intervening years. Save in unusual cases (such as the Scottish Land Act of 1886) the sauce now considered suitable for the Irish goose was no longer thought appropriate for the British gander. Not only Gladstone, but the Unionists too, had become convinced that this was so – hence the expensive land purchase schemes introduced by Tory and Unionist administrations from 1885 onwards. What, after all, were such schemes if not an Irish solution to an Irish problem? The main difference between Gladstonian Liberals and their British Unionist opponents was not about the direction of travel – both were moving unambiguously in the direction of treating Ireland differently – but in the fact that the latter were always prepared to throw bags of money about while the Liberals – and especially Gladstone – kept a far firmer grip on Irish political and

12 Cited E.D. Steele, 'Ireland and the Empire in the 1860s', *Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), 64-83, 77; also Northcote to Disraeli, 5 March 1870, British Library Northcote Papers Add. MS 50016.

13 K.T. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp 180-208.

administrative expenditure.¹⁴

If changes in the intellectual climate had something to do with inaugurating the great shift in attitudes towards Ireland which begins to appear in the late 1860s, then so also perhaps did the arrival of a new generation of Prime Ministers. Between 1830 and the 1860s governments of all stripes had largely been led by men with substantial personal knowledge of Ireland, as chief secretaries, as landlords, as frequent visitors. Melbourne, Russell, Peel, Derby, and Palmerston all fall into this category. However, when Disraeli and Gladstone both reached the top of the greasy pole in 1868 it ceased to be the case. The former never visited Ireland at all, while the latter's two visits lasted four weeks and a single day respectively. Neither Salisbury, Rosebery, Asquith, nor Lloyd George had much personal knowledge of Ireland, and Balfour, who had, did not let this stop him from consistently seeing Ireland as a wild and foreign country deserving wild and foreign remedies for its ills.

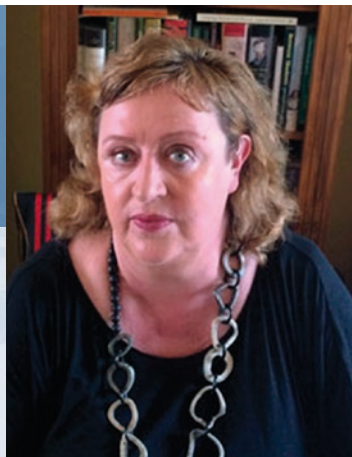
Thus, during the 121-year history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland – an entity which, by the way, never had a single snappy appellation – not only did the character of the Irish periphery change out of all recognition, but so too did the mind-set of the British governing class. Those who knew Ireland most intimately had from the 1830s onwards been anxious – for all sorts of reasons – to see that country as an integral and largely undifferentiated part of a united polity. Their successors, with fewer direct experiences to hand, felt differently. For them – Liberals and Unionists alike – Ireland had once again become a place of special measures and special solutions. Of course, this did not mean that the main British political parties had begun to sing unitedly from the same hymn sheet, that Irish differentiation had become the only act in town, or that, with this coalescence, the future that was the follow had been ineluctably laid down. But it did mean that, in the end, this new version of an old song turned out to be no neutral melody (however much the singers have sometimes argued otherwise) because reintroducing 'special solutions' – whether economic, administrative, or political – on to the Anglo-Irish bill of political fare eventually made it more rather than less difficult successfully to resist the most special solution of all – independence for at least the major part of Ireland and the break-up of the Union itself.

And now, in conclusion, I hope I might be allowed very briefly to return to my earlier account of our first arrival and generous acceptance in Ireland with a quotation from the Bible – something which, in the case of sermons (which this most definitely is not) usually occurs at the beginning rather than at the end of proceedings. It is from the Gospel of St Matthew Chapter 25: 'For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger and you took me in'.

14 Ibid., pp 209-288.

RESPONSE

Margaret O'Callaghan



Professor Hoppen, Chancellor, all gathered here, it is an honour and a privilege to respond to the wonderful lecture of so brilliant a historian. Theodore Hoppen's range as a historian is remarkable. From early work on the nineteenth-century English convert to Catholicism, William George Ward, to an examination of the seventeenth-century Dublin Philosophical Society *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century*, he has changed every area in which he has researched and written. But above all he has made his reputation as a towering figure in the study of the long nineteenth century. He is recognised as a key figure in modern British historiography, a position epitomised by his magisterial volume in the New Oxford History of England, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846 to 1886*, a book which has been accurately described as one which 'will define these pivotal forty years in British history for the next generation'.

But it is as an astonishing historian of Ireland that we come to honour Theo Hoppen today and tomorrow. In three arresting books and countless important articles he has changed how we see nineteenth-century Ireland. His characteristically modest claim in relation to his book on nineteenth-century Irish elections was that the parish pump was his focus but he opened up for the first time the everyday world of the poorer social classes of the countryside. Nineteenth-century Ireland is one of the most intimately documented societies in the world, but the documentation is difficult to master. By bringing us into the extraordinary complexity and peculiarities of the Irish franchise – who could vote and who could not – by using this and other evidence to categorise the shifting numbers of the cottier class, small farmers, every category of the rural poor, Theo Hoppen fundamentally changed how we could think about and write about nineteenth-century Ireland


The sources that he found and used in his book of 1984 *Elections Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885* and in his later scintillating *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* display a capacity for detailed research that is remarkable. Personal papers, estates papers, published blue books, minutes of evidence, electoral enquiries, franchise lists; it seems impossible that any one human being could have looked at so many sources. Some people who can research at this range and intensity are swamped by their source material, incapable of ordering it or making it amenable to anything other than a narrative of bewildering detail, incommunicable to others. But Theo Hoppen writes brilliantly – his prose sparkles, his sketches of people, situations, political ideology are so telling that you travel with him in rapt focus.

When he came to give a paper in Queen's University Belfast in 2010 and told me that he was in the process of looking at British policy to Ireland from the Union – or from 1800 to the end of that Union in 1921 – by going through the papers of every significant figure who shaped Irish policy and every significant office holder in Ireland from the Union to its end, and through parliamentary debates on key issues throughout that period, I was shocked. I didn't really think it was possible to do this. But he has done it. *Governing Hibernia British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921* is that book.

The book is both incredibly funny and sobering in parts as it documents the almost unbelievable contempt and hatred in which the Irish of all social classes were held by almost every single British politician. It begins in the 1800s with politicians in a state of paralysed horror at what – from the British point of view – was the strategic necessity of the Union and the actual task of governing Ireland. Exploring a place, they almost all defined as incorrigibly alien, they were angered and enraged in equal measure. Some however like Robert Peel applied themselves to stalwart reading lists to acquaint themselves with their new tasks. Theo Hoppen lists the range of literary, antiquarian, agricultural and topographical tomes, now bound together in the House of Lords library to which Peel so assiduously applied himself. Many of the British politicians evoked here despised the landlord class and the Orange faction (through whom for some decades they attempted to run the country) just as much as they did the people who followed O'Connell.

Successful Irish politicians marked their elevation in British society by internalising, mimicking and recycling English attitudes towards their former fellow countrymen. The book shows that while Irish society looked poor and exploited but perhaps not extraordinary by the standards of European peasant societies of the time, it looked very strange indeed when compared with the wholly singular society that was mid-nineteenth century Britain. The chapter on the famine is harrowing and reveals Lord John Russell, Charles Wood and Trevelyan at their worst.

Governing Hibernia is truly an astonishing book. It is possibly – accidentally and incidentally – the greatest scholarly indictment of British rule in Ireland under the Union written by an academic historian. It is the most important book published on that long period that I can think of. It stands for all time as a deeply documented forensic dissection of the treatment of Ireland by British, mainly English, politicians in the nineteenth century. Who is to say how Ireland was governed under the Union? I think the answer is Theo Hoppen. He does not suggest that the Irish catholic upper classes might necessarily have been particularly better rulers as he shows us how O'Connell's son and his cronies fought to protect their own material interests during the famine.



If there are any heroes in this grim story they are the Irish rural poor whose plight he has to some degree documented. Contrary to fashionable acronyms like MOPE (Most oppressed people ever) ostensibly amusingly deployed in the present to undermine claims to Irish historical exceptionalism and to suggest that Irish historical experience was not that bad – this book shows that for the Irish rural poor it really was atrocious.

Assimilated or exceptionalised, tolerated or remade, reformulated and rejigged by upper class English rulers, Theodore Hoppen's Ireland is a gift that he has given to the country that was lucky enough to almost by accident benefit from his remarkable intellect, labour and scholarship. Theo Hoppen's lecture that we've just heard will be made available to other historians and the wider public through publication, but more importantly every Irish and British politician and politically interested individual should read *Governing Hibernia*.

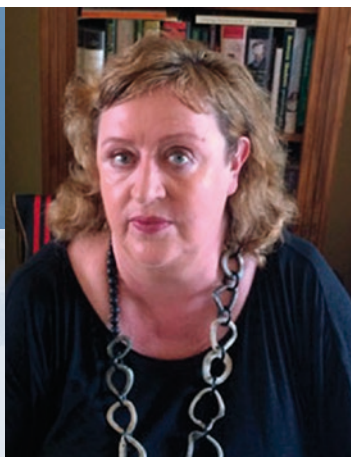
PROFESSOR K. THEODORE HOPPEN



K. Theodore Hoppen was born in Germany and moved to Ireland in 1947. He was educated at Glenstal Abbey School, University College Dublin, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He worked in the History Department at the University of Hull from 1966 to 2003. In 1985-6 he was Benjamin Duke Fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina and in 1988 a Visiting Fellow at Sidney Sussex College Cambridge. From 1994 to 1996 he was a British Academy Research Reader and in 2001 was elected a Fellow of the Academy. In 2010 he was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy. His publications include: *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century: a study of the Dublin Philosophical Society, 1683-1708* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1970); *Papers of the Dublin Philosophical Society, 1683-1709* (Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2008); *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885* (Clarendon, 1984); *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (Longman, 1989) and *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (Oxford University Press, 1998); with Mary E. Daly he edited *Gladstone: Ireland and Beyond* (Four Courts Press, 2012).

DR MARGARET O'CALLAGHAN

Margaret O'Callaghan, MA (NUI) PhD (Cambridge), is an historian and political analyst at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast. A former Laski Research Scholar at St John's College Cambridge and a former Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, she has taught at the Universities of Cambridge and Notre Dame. She is the author of many articles on aspects of British high politics and the state apparatus in Ireland from the late nineteenth century to the revolution, including the monograph *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork University Press, 1994). She also wrote the section on the political position of women in independent Ireland for *the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol 5. With Mary E. Daly she edited *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising* (Royal Irish Academy, 2007), while her most recent publications are on the politics of commemorating the 1916 Rising in the 1970s, on Roger Casement, British imperial policy and the First World War. She is currently working on the Irish historian Alice Stopford Green and the writing of Irish history.





NUI Publication Prizes in History 2017
Winners: Professor Tadhg O hAnnrachain, Dr Carla King, Dr Niamh Wycherley, Professor Karl Theodore Hoppen and Dr Conor Mulvagh (back row)

Dr Martin Mansergh,
Frank Callanan SC,
Dr Margaret O'Callaghan
and Professor Mary Daly



Charles Lysaght,
Dr Maurice Manning
and Dr Martin Mansergh

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The 2017 Irish Historical Research Prize has been awarded to:

Professor Karl Theodore Hoppen for

Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921 (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Special Commendations to:

Dr Carla King for

Michael Davitt: After the Land League, 1882-1906 (University College Dublin Press, 2016)

and

Professor Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain for

Catholic Europe, 1592-1648, Centre and Peripheries (Oxford University Press, 2015)

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The 2017 Publication Prize in Irish History has been awarded to:

Dr Niamh Wycherley for

The Cult of Relics in Early Medieval Ireland (Brepols Publishers NV, 2016)

Special Commendation to:

Dr Conor Mulvagh

The Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, 1900-18 (Manchester University Press, 2016)

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