

Scotland and the Easter Rising: Fresh Perspectives on 1916
Eds. Willy Maley and Kirsty Lusk

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Lusk and Maley's thought-provoking collection of essays and poetry by twenty-eight contributors attempts to delve into Scottish connections in Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916. This is a rather complex task, and yet, for the most part, it is well done, providing perspectives by various authors whose writing almost always spurs some additional question to Scottish involvement in Ireland's war. Despite the editors' comment to not make James Connolly the "sole focus", the book relies heavily on his connection, though how strong that connection is begs a debate in itself. Connolly was born to Irish parents in an area of Scotland with a high population of Irish immigrants. He spent his most formative adolescent years into adulthood, from age fourteen until twenty-one, in the British Army in Ireland. In fact, there seems to be little tying Connolly into the Scottish world. His ties seem clearly more Irish, especially when considering that he thought of himself as an Irishman. This is the heart of the complication in compiling such a book. Does Scottish birth alone justify including a historical figure as proof of a Scottish side to the debate? If so, there are many lesser known historical figures that are also worthy of such attention.

The beginning of the book starts with a six-page timeline laying out key points leading up to the Easter Rising and to the present day. While the timeline is beneficial to those who might not be knowledgeable on Irish history, bringing some Scottish facts in, such as 80,000 Irish immigrating to Scotland during the famine years of 1845-9, it does not represent the content of the book. The writing of key historical figures in the timeline are left out. Perhaps this is what is meant by the subtitle of "fresh perspectives" as modern writing is the focus of the compilation. Yet as a reader, it would still be satisfying to find a chapter with writing by one of the key figures mentioned initially. The timeline tends to arouse a curiosity of events and people which are not appeased by subsequent pages in the book. Some of those who had Irish-Scottish connections, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who thought of himself as an Irishman despite his birth in Edinburgh and

who pleaded against the execution of Sir Roger Casement, are mentioned in the timeline, yet only again briefly, such as in one paragraph by contributor Shaw. The book seems to miss a sense of cohesion, particularly with the construction of its timeline.

In the introduction, the editors state that it is their intention to provide Irish-Scottish terms to the debate, as most often it is given by Anglo-Irish or Anglo-Scottish. This is a noble intention that would best be possible if at least half of the contributors were connected to Ireland through familial or academic interests. By the descriptions of the contributors in the back of the book, at least eleven fit that requirement. This is close to half of the overall contributors, and the reader does get a sense that the perspectives are balanced. One such contributor with ancestral ties of Scottish immigrants to Ireland, Joseph Bradley, points out both the invisibility of the Irish in Scottish history and that the Scottish were sometimes the enforcers of British military power, as in the instance of the Black and Tans. Giving an Irish voice to the discussion is imperative. Since it is an Irish war, it would be interesting if more Irish views could be included, especially in regards to Scottish independence and its relation to the Easter Rising.

The essay 'A Terrible Beauty' by Alan Bisset offers a narration in Scots providing the perspective of someone against the vote for Scottish independence in 2014. While difficult to read at first, the linguistics soon become the epitome of the Scottish voice which might otherwise be lacking in the academic tones of the essays overall. By providing a personal and modern opposition to independence, the reader gains more of an unbiased perspective to the issues at hand. There still does remain the issue of how this connects to the Easter Rising. They are still after all, two distinct cultures, sometimes overlapping, but taking up different fights. There might be common themes in their struggle, but Irish wars and Scottish wars were fought for different reasons, in different times, and in different places. Just how similar the two struggles are exists as a suggestion and not a thoroughly addressed fact.

What we do have in the content of the book are well written essays and verse, especially those which are devoted exclusively or rely heavily on James Connolly for proof of the Scottish element to the Easter Rising. There are many lesser known elements which could be examined in an essay. For example, we also do not hear much more about the Irish prisoners held in Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow in 1916 beyond the introduction and timeline. Michael Collins had friends with Scottish connections, including those who took the oath to Irish Republican Brotherhood. Among

these, Irish-born Daniel Branniff, indicated in his witness statement that he spent nine years (1907-1916) assisting in the recruitment and training of about two hundred men in and around Glasgow and of the existence of Scottish Sinn Fein Clubs. A contributing writer, Shaun Kavanagh, notes that by 1919, there were “roughly 75 branches of Sinn Fein in Scotland.” Apparently, there was a whole “Scottish Brigade” in the General Post Office during the Easter Rising. These are little known truths that are worth expanding on. The female perspectives, like that of Nora Connolly and Margaret Skinnider, also deserve further elaboration. Such stories should be highlighted in additional essays or in other separate compilations, perhaps in continuation of this subject. It is much to the credit of Lusk and Maley that the Irish-Scottish connection in the Easter Rising is even brought to light, but it is only the beginning to understanding this part of history. The nearly invisible elements overshadowed by James Connolly should now be brought to the forefront of the discussion.