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There is a continuous history of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ireland from the early 1650s onwards, especially after William Edmondson established a meeting in Mountmellick, Co. Laois.¹ In this current volume in the *Brill Research Perspectives in Quaker Studies* series, Coutts and Watson significantly add to our knowledge concerning the Friends in the country. In this work, they demonstrate a determination to ‘resurrect’ the life and experiences of a lesser-known member of this Society. Within seven chapters, they not only vividly expose the life and character of John Boles, but they carefully locate him and his family in the community in which they lived. The work is thorough and provides rich details of his lineage, property transactions, engagement in the various meetings to which he and they were attached alongside the harsh realities of being a Quaker in a persecuting world.

The volume begins with a discussion on the nature of Quaker biographies, and how these studies have often ‘focused on ministers, the influential and wealthy’ (p.1 Abstract). They note that many biographies can be ‘unstructured’ or ‘unselective’. As a result, they can lead to ‘gaps in the narrative’. Their investigation concerns one person from the largely ‘anonymous Quaker majority’ (p.1 Abstract), namely John Boles, a Quaker for fifty years in the heady days of early Quakerism. As such, Coutts and Watson are providing a template for a meaningful biographical study and explain the way to reconstruct the forgotten from ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’ as E.P. Thompson famously remarked.² It is good to see this bottom up approach being adopted as the investigation is enriched with the deeper insights into individual enterprise, family decision-making, wealth accumulation and status, and thereby the authors offer a better understanding of the complexity of recreating a Quaker biography/family history in contrast to previous investigations into Irish Quaker history (pp.4–8).

The introduction sets out the parameters of the work, outlining the themes to be explored as well as a purposeful discussion concerning the nature of Quaker biographies. Attention is then usefully drawn to the research strategy required to undertake such an investigation, as well as the sources of information required before providing the wider historical background to the Boles family. This is accompanied, as is much of the book, with appropriately placed maps and detailed statistical information, charts, tables, and comprehensive footnotes. The next section (Chapter 4) fleshes out the study with a thorough examination of the Boles family in North Cork before moving on to the collaboration with other Quakers, including William Penn. I particularly enjoyed the discussion concerning John Boles, a ‘Landlord, Farmer, and Friend’ (Chapter 6) as it

¹ For details see Thomas Wright and John Rutt, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers, in Ireland, from the Year 1653 to 1700* (London: William Phillips, 1800).

² Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Toronto: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 958.

adds considerable information regarding day-to-day activities, persecution, notably on account of the non-payment of tithes, again with useful charts provided. As the authors note, John Boles's 'relative wealth made him a target'. From 1692 onwards, while living in Castlemore in County Carlow, he regularly had crops, wool and livestock taken for his refusal to pay tithes to the Church of Ireland (pp. 93–94). There is also a fascinating, albeit brief, speculative commentary on the dietary habits of the Boles family. In contrast to most of the population who existed on milk and milk products and little meat, the Boles family may well have had access to mutton, pork, possibly a decent array of vegetables, cereals, especially oats, and potentially baked bread (p.95). The book thoughtfully summarises the findings at the end. Throughout, there is good attention to detail to ensure a very good series of observations into the social, economic and, naturally, religious history of Irish Friends. Overall, the volume is a worthy addition to this new series of Brill books on Quaker Studies as it offers good resources and bibliographical data to take the wider history of Quakerism in Ireland forward.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

