

What were his networks? How representative was he of the clergy in the diocese? Christ Church was the product of a drive to increase church accommodation in Belfast, but we are told little about how many other churches were formed, their location, and their relative success. More could have been said about Drew's relationships with his bishops, not least because they do not conform to stereotypes. Drew roundly criticised Richard Mant as a High Churchman, yet he was a beneficiary of Mant's church extension efforts in Belfast. We also know that before moving to Ulster, Mant had caused controversy as bishop of Killaloe and Kilfenora (1820–23) because his full-throated support of the Second Reformation had outraged local Catholics. Mant's successor, Robert Knox, was an evangelical who twice banned anti-Catholic orators from preaching in his diocese (pp 51 n. 66, 280). Knox was responsible for Drew's move to rural Loughinisland in 1859, yet Drew was also on very friendly terms with the Orange hero of Dolly's Brae, the third Earl of Roden, who appointed him as his personal chaplain. More could also be said about the tensions between Drew's churchmanship and his commitment to Protestant cooperation. Generally speaking, evangelicalism drew Protestants together while also, paradoxically, increasing denominational loyalty. Farrell notes that Drew sometimes offended Presbyterians, and had an often 'tempestuous' (p. 62) relationship with Henry Cooke, though he does not discuss Drew's public dispute in 1840 about the merits of liturgy with James McKnight, the Presbyterian editor of the *Belfast News Letter*. Farrell also suggests that Drew shared Cooke's identity as a 'populist political minister' (p. 299), yet a much better Presbyterian parallel is the Rev. Hugh Hanna who, like Drew, made his reputation as a conscientious pastor of a working-class congregation, staunch advocate of popular education and was more actively involved in the riots of 1857.

These comments should in no way detract from what is a thought-provoking and readable book that succeeds in relating Drew in a meaningful way to the complexity and variety of life in mid nineteenth-century Belfast.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2024.14

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THE GREAT FAMINE IN IRELAND AND BRITAIN'S FINANCIAL CRISIS. By Charles Read. Pp 341. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2022. £25 paperback.

The explanation of policy decisions has long ceased to preoccupy historians of nineteenth-century British politics. The study of financial legislation and institutions has fallen still more decisively out of fashion. Charles Read's book reminds us that we ignore these aspects of politics at our peril. It presents both a radical reinterpretation of the forces behind the Famine, and a wider set of arguments about how we should understand the making and malformation of public policy in modern Britain. It is a powerful and salutary piece of scholarship.

The book is essentially an attempt to rethink a single, seismic move made by the British state: the defunding of Famine relief efforts in the spring of 1847. Read argues that all previous attempts to account for this shift, from nationalist polemics and charges of genocide to versions centred on *laissez-faire* and providential ideologies, have fallen wide of the mark. This, he suggests, is because historians have ignored how the state actually functioned. Read asks us to look again at the elementary questions of where power lay, who wielded it, and what the decisive pressures on them were. He contends that what really lay behind the change of direction in Famine relief policy was acute financial and political instability. Lord John Russell's government could not raise the loan it wanted to because the markets would not have it. The government could not make alternative fiscal provision because its parliamentary position was too fragile. Ministers may have cited *laissez-faire* principles in public, but this was only to cover up the political and financial weaknesses which they all prioritised in

their private correspondence, and which it would have been political suicide to admit. Between Read's forensic reading in personal archives and government documents, and his bold leaps of methodological imagination, the case is compelling.

So, we have a new explanation for why the Great Famine had the consequences it did. But, in patiently building this central argument, the book makes many other striking contributions. Read displaces the civil servant Charles Trevelyan as the villain of the piece, suggesting instead that the banker Samuel Jones-Loyd (Lord Overstone) was primarily responsible for the structural weaknesses in the British financial system that necessitated the volte-face of 1847. Overstone achieved his influence in the context of a wider battle between the world-views of the 'Banking School' and the 'Currency School', which Read shows was at the heart of contemporary economic debate and which had far-reaching policy consequences. The book's last chapter draws an unexpected comparison between the events of 1847 in Ireland and in the British colony of Mauritius. Possible famine conditions faced the latter island at precisely the same time, but the pursuit of alternative financial policies managed to prevent the same disastrous outcome as in the Irish case. Read stresses the vital significance of global connectedness at several other points: indeed, his concluding note is to concur with Christopher Bayly that 'all historians are world historians now'. So much is going on in the book that it is almost possible to overlook the fact that its second chapter provides the most rigorous, vigorous, and original rethinking of Sir Robert Peel's political economy since Boyd Hilton's seminal 1979 reappraisal. Positioning Peel as the principal architect of Ireland's age of instability beginning in the 1840s, the chapter will have to be a new starting point for all future work on the mind and politics of the repealer of the Corn Laws.

Read's book is, as all this suggests, a serious intervention in wider debates about the writing of modern British political history. He argues that the subject requires an understanding of economics and of the institutions that shaped and channelled economic influence. He argues that historians of politics should be more willing to borrow from other disciplines, not least (in his case) the history of science and famine studies. And he argues that we need to reflect further on unintended consequences and 'implementation gaps' between desired and realised outcomes. Nineteenth-century politicians and administrators, Read reminds us, did not invariably understand what they were doing — especially in relation to economic issues — and did not always possess the judgement necessary to make their interventions work as they wished. As Read summarises it, '[an] embarrassment of incompetence, chaos, and confusion may provide a better explanation for policy failures than ideology alone' (p. 295). Or as he puts it in more vivid terms elsewhere, 'the British state behaved more like a beached whale than the mighty, purposeful leviathan of nationalist folklore' (p. 31).

For obvious reasons, the book is likely to stir controversy among specialist scholars of the Famine. But its wider implications for political historians of modern Britain and Ireland must not be missed. Read offers one of the most detailed expositions of the inner working of British government in the 'age of reform' to appear in years, but his approach represents a significant and distinctive advance on older versions of 'high political' history. His is not the only fresh take on the political junctions between early nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland to appear in 2022, and *The Great Famine in Ireland and Britain's financial crisis* can very productively be read alongside Jay R. Roszman's equally innovative *Outrage in the age of reform: Irish agrarian violence, imperial insecurity, and British governing policy, 1830–1845* (Cambridge, 2022), not only because the dates dovetail so neatly. Perhaps this is the beginning of an 'Irish turn' in the historiography of nineteenth-century British politics. Even if not, Read's book ought to become required reading for anyone interested in those basic questions which draw us towards political history in the first place: why do political actors do the things they do, what limits their options, and why are the outcomes of their actions so often so hard to predict?

doi:10.1017/ihs.2024.9

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