

Obituaries:
Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1942–2017)
Anders Ahlqvist (1945–2018)



Ruairí Ó hUiginn

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DONNCHADH Ó CORRÁIN (1942–2017)

DONNCHADH Ó Corráin, who died in October of last year following a long illness, was Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at University College Cork. He was acknowledged as the outstanding authority in his generation on early medieval Irish history, a field in which he published widely. A native of Killorglin, Co. Kerry, he received his secondary education in St Brendan's College, Killarney, and after a brief period at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, took a first-class honours BA degree in History and Irish at University College Cork in 1964. This was followed three years later by a first-class honours MA in Early Medieval Irish History. He was awarded a scholarship at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (1967–9) where he worked under the direction of Professor D. A. Binchy. Following a brief period in University College Dublin, where he held assistant lectureships in Modern and in Medieval Irish History, he was appointed Statutory Lecturer in Irish History at University College Cork (1972), becoming in turn Associate Professor of Irish History (1979) and Professor of Medieval History (1999), a post he held until his retirement in 2007. He was Visiting Lecturer in Medieval History, Cambridge University (1977), Visiting Professor of Celtic, University of Pennsylvania (1978–9) and Senior Research Fellow, Balliol College, Oxford (1993–94). He was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1982 and was awarded the DLitt. of the National University of Ireland in 1990.

He ranged widely in his field, publishing ground-breaking and seminal articles on early medieval Irish history, canon and vernacular law, the church, social institutions, literature, genealogy and Viking studies. His *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), which he contributed to the Gill History of Ireland series, remains a standard textbook in the field. In many of his other publications he challenged long-held orthodoxies and inspired many young scholars to look at Early Ireland through a different lens. Far from treating it as an isolated backwater on Europe's western periphery, he demonstrated time and again that Ireland in the early medieval period was fully engaged with mainstream European thought and excelled in the intellectual life of the Continent. Ecclesiastical centres such as Clonmacnoise, Armagh and Bangor were powerhouses of learning, possessing extensive libraries, scriptoria and workshops. Irish scholars and artists, through their writing and artwork, made a substantial contribution to cultural heritage of Europe and they were much sought after as teachers in the royal courts of the Carolingian Empire.

Ó Corráin was very much at home in the vast body of literature in Latin and Early Irish that has been transmitted to us from medieval times. In his extensive research on these sources he had an unfailing ability to contextualise a work and to identify the purpose its author had in mind. When asked shortly before he died how he had become interested in the field of study he was to make his own, he confided that as a schoolboy he had been inspired by P. W. Joyce's *Concise History of Ireland* (1903). The intellectual curiosity this now quaint and outdated book aroused in the young Donnchadh Ó Corráin was to

remain with him all his life, and those who knew him will recall the infectious enthusiasm with which he would speak about many aspects of a subject he held dear.

An inspiring and engaging lecturer, he could also be highly entertaining, and was much sought after as a plenary or keynote speaker at international conferences. He was the First Carroll Lecturer at Oxford University (1990), and the O'Donnell Lecturer (1996–7), also at Oxford. He was Foundation Lecturer (1993) in Oslo University's Senter for studier i vikingtid og nordisk middelalder, an honour that reflected the high standing in which he was held on the international stage of Viking Studies.

He cared deeply about the study of medieval Ireland and, apart from his own writing and teaching, contributed immensely to the infrastructure of the discipline. He was founder of *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* (1982–), and edited the first 25 volumes in the series. He founded the Irish Conference of Medievalists (1987) and organised its annual conferences from 1987 to 1994. He established *CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts*, an Internet text-base of Irish historical and literary sources in Irish, Latin, medieval French and English, a resource that has revolutionised the field of study and is testimony to his far-sightedness in seeing at a very early stage the potential which digital technologies held for the humanities. While very proud that medieval Irish learning and literature had been so prolific and profound, he was always mindful of the fact that this primarily formed part of a wider European heritage that it fell to us to preserve and to share with the world. Despite his own many achievements, however, he often expressed his great disappointment at what he saw as the downgrading or total neglect of the study of medieval Ireland in several of our third-level institutions.

When diagnosed with terminal illness three years ago, it would appear that he determined there and then that he would not 'go gentle into that good night'. In the two short years that remained to him he published more than many other scholars would do in a lifetime. Despite failing health and many severe and debilitating courses of treatment, he completed and published his monograph, *The Irish Church, its Reform and the English Invasion* in May of last year. This was followed some weeks later by the publication in three volumes of his monumental *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium*, a work that describes the entire historical and literary output of Irish writers, at home and abroad, throughout the middle ages, from the fifth to the seventeenth centuries. This extensive *opus* of some 2,000 pages will define the study of Early Ireland for generations to come.

Ardscoláire agus togha comhluadair, saoi agus lóchrann léinn a bhí fial flaithiúil lena chuid eolais agus duine ar chás leis go mbeadh tuiscint agus meas ag an bpobal mór ar oidhreacht intleachtúil na hÉireann. Fear é nach ndearna dhá leath dá dhícheall agus é ag iarraidh an tuiscint seo a chur abhaile. Agus má bhí sé fial lena chuid eolais, bhí sé lán chomh fial céanna lena chuid ama, ós beag cuireadh nach nglacfadh sé leis le labhairt le cumainn áitiúla staire agus seanchais i gcéin agus i gcóngar agus é ag iarraidh na tuairimí ba dheireanaí a bhí aige faoi shaíocht na hÉireann anallód a roinnt leis an bpobal

mór. Fear é a spreag spéis daoine san achadh leathan léinn seo. Mairfidh an spreagadh sin ina chuid scríbhinní dóibh siúd a leanfaidh an chonair a rianaigh sé dúinn chomh maith sin ina shaol oibre.

RUAIRÍ Ó HUIGINN

ANDERS AHLQVIST (1945–2018)

WHEN this volume of *Celtica* was at an advanced stage of preparation we received the sad news that Professor Anders Ahlqvist had died quite suddenly at his home in Finland (23 August 2018). Anders Ahlqvist had been Chairman of the Governing Board of the School of Celtic Studies since 2005. He was formerly a scholar in the School (1974–6), before being appointed Statutory Lecturer in Old Irish at University College Galway in 1976, subsequently becoming Associate Professor (1993), and was awarded a personal chair in 2004. Following his retirement from Galway he was appointed Foundation Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney (2008–2013), and since 2014 was honorary Professor in Sydney. In addition to these positions, he held a number of honorary and visiting positions at the Universities of Helsinki and Utrecht.

In the course of his lifetime, Anders Ahlqvist made an immense contribution to the field of Celtic Studies. It is hoped to include a more extensive obituary in the next volume of this journal.

RUAIRÍ Ó HUIGINN