

Civilizing Ireland

Ordnance Survey 1824-1842 Ethnography, Cartography, Translation

Dr. Stiofán ÓCadhla

Irish Academic Press 2007

9780716528814

Civilizing Ireland

A unique contemporary analysis of the huge imperial mapping project of the British Government in nineteenth century Ireland, which describes as well as re-interprets the value of science and modernity as practised by the British empire.

The book raises questions about representation and academic discourses and highlights and interprets colonial techniques of observation and description. The nature of "evidence" within colonial archive is also questioned. Focussing on the main aspects of the survey from a contemporary theoretical perspective it both enlivens the original documents and serves as a sensitive critique of it. The main themes are ethnographic description, translation and cartography and the relationship between them in the nineteenth century. Central to this is the emerging 'view' of Ireland and the Irish and the idea of the project as representative of early Irish ethnography. The book contains new findings in relation to renowned scholars such as John O'Donovan and re-engages with the Friel vs Andrews debate on 'Translation and Irish Culture'

The book should be of wide interest to folklorists, cultural sociologists, geographers, historians, ethnologists, cultural studies, Irish language scholars and the general reader with an interest in Ireland.

What is the Ordnance Survey, what does it mean and where did it come from?

It was established in 1791 with its headquarters in the Tower of London under the Master General of the British Board of Ordnance. Ordnance Survey is a historic amalgam of two key terms in the history of ideas and the governance of knowledge. Used since the eighteenth century in combination with the term survey it remains the name for the three official map-making bodies of Britain and Ireland. The first term ordnance or ordinance is derived from the French ordonnance and the Latin ordināre meaning to order, ordain, arrange, regulate or rule. From the fourteenth century it referred to militaristic warlike provisions or the decrees of a sovereign. Ordnance came to refer specifically to the artillery corps of the army and the British military remained in the survey's Dublin headquarters until independence in 1922.

Survey means to oversee, the French *surveoir* combines the stem *sur* or over and *veoir* to see, the Latin *vidēre* or *vidēō*. From the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries it had the sense of a view from a commanding position, an inspection or an examination. A survey was also a comprehensive mental view, a written description or the measurement of a tract of ground. It is a coordination of hand, eye and mind. The contemporary sense refers to any systematic collection or analysis of data, attitudes or opinions. In the first half of the nineteenth century the British Ordnance Survey of Ireland combined all of these senses from ordering to authoring, from inspection to measurement and from voyaging to voyeurism. Not unlike a nineteenth-century Guinness Book of Records it says that Peggy Frizell was a public character and an idiot and that a woman in Aghagallon had twenty-four children. It notes that Fanny Marlin of the village of Curran was a great fighter and a hermaphrodite. At present the Ordnance Survey of Ireland continues to map and pursue raw information, in Cork under the aegis of the Central Statistics Office, unaware of their long lost cousins the folklorists and ethnologists. One of the aims of this work is to retrace this genealogy.

This work takes an overview of the ethnographic or folkloristic aspects of the work of the nineteenth-century surveyors in Ireland. It is the first time that this has been attempted in any comprehensive manner. The work is based on original research and from within the perspective of the discipline of folklore and ethnology, itself an offspring of the earlier ethnological and folkloristic ideas that informed the survey.

Irish Academic Press

44 Northumberland Road Dublin 4 Ireland
Phone: +44 (0) 20 8952 9526
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8952 9242

Email: info@iap.ie

www.irishacademic.com