

BOOKS

Inspiring us to get to know Ireland better

INIS OÍRR

BY MICHAEL O'FLANAGAN
MERCER €29.99

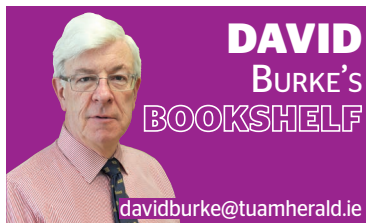
EVERY so often readers comment on our *32 counties in 32 months* project, which runs in the last issue of every month. Recently one observed that, in contrast to most of the travel articles in the national press, you could actually get into your car and visit the places featured as a daytrip or a weekend away.

We try to find at least a few places that are not well known, and the three books reviewed here might point you in similar directions.

Inis Oírr, or Inisheer for the non-gaeilgeoir, is the smallest of the three Aran Islands and from this side of the bay anyway, the least visited. On the other hand, for Clare people it's only a short boat ride from Doolin.

That's why Michael O'Flanagan from Ennis started going there as a scholar at the Irish college in 1969. He's been going back ever since and began photographing the island and its people in 1971.

So, this photo book, which he subtitled "The Jewel of the Aran



DAVID
BURKE'S
BOOKSHELF

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Islands", is more than 50 years in the making.

While most of the photographs are in colour, a few in black and white date back to his early days. One, from 1978, shows three young people on a Honda 50 - a mode of conveyance still in use on the island, although some cars have arrived since then.

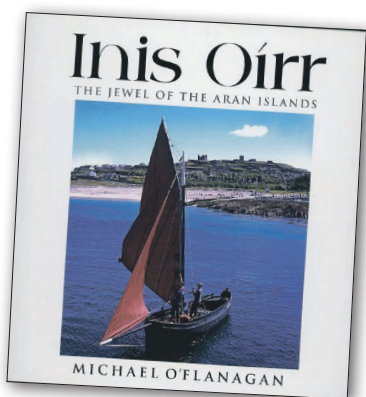
Hardly surprisingly, a high proportion are taken under blue skies. The author maintains that Inis Oírr does not get as much rain as the mainland because it is so low-lying, but still it's hard to imagine that it does not have its share of cloud cover.

But if you want to show off a jewel, you'll find the best light, and this book is a comprehensive survey of the island, from all viewpoints, land, sea and air.

In a way it's an Ireland in miniature, with a beautiful sandy beach, ancient stone monuments, a 19th century watch tower, and outstanding views.

The island's best-known feature is one that is liable to shift position every few years as a storm hits - the wreck of the Plassy, a cargo ship that ran aground in a storm in 1960.

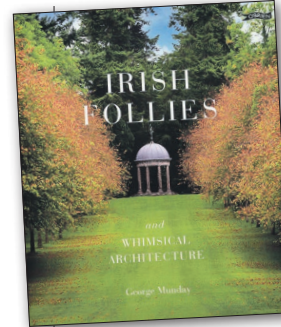
Every visitor to the place has to see it and be photographed beside it. Don't leave it too long before you make the trip: bits of the rusting ship are falling off and disappearing every year.



IRISH FOLLIES

BY GEORGE MUNDAY
O'BRIEN €32.99

YOU won't need a boat to visit most of the sights featured in this unusual book of photographs by George Munday.

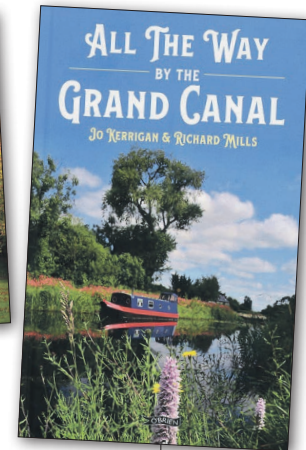


Follies are picturesque, essentially decorative, buildings, but Munday has broadened his field to include "whimsical" buildings, which allows him to include a police station in Co Waterford built in the Scottish baronial style alongside more conventional follies like O'Brien's Tower on the Cliffs of Moher or the Stepped Pyramid at the Neale, over the border in Mayo.

He has divided his book into five sections - the four provinces and Dublin - and for the sake of brevity we'll look at some of the examples in Connacht.

One is the Bellevue folly in Lawrencetown, near Ballinasloe, which I believe is locally known as the Volunteer Gate. He describes the Gothic arch, "with pointed ogee windows, pinnacles and flying buttresses" transforming the landscape long after the landlords and their house have vanished.

Even closer to home is Ballycurrin Lighthouse, on Lough Corrib near Headford, built by Sir Henry Lynch around 1772. It's the only inland lighthouse in Ireland. One reason was to guide boats to the nearby quay to offload his provisions; the other was to help him find his way home from the



pub.

Another, which reminded me of our recent visit to Leitrim, is the Tynte Lodge Folly overlooking the sea at Tullaghan on the county's four-kilometre coastline.

One of the joys of the leisurely tour is going on the road less travelled: this book is an inspiration to do that, no matter where you are in Ireland.

ALL THE WAY BY THE GRAND CANAL

BY JO KERRIGAN AND RICHARD MILLS
O'BRIEN €19.99

A VERY leisurely way to travel is by canal barge. While you don't need to be on the water to enjoy this book, it certainly evokes the lap of water and the sounds of nature.

The authors refer to it as a long-distance walking and cycling way, and they traverse its 132 km length from Ringsend in Dublin to Shannon Harbour near Ballinasloe.

There was a branch canal to Ballinasloe, but it is now almost overgrown. The authors suggest that if you have time and can explore by car, you might find a remaining bridge or two.

Reopening the towpath along that stretch might make a good Community Employment Scheme.

This book is a charming mix of travelogue and history, and a deserves its place in the car-boot library if ever your travels take you near the route of the Grand Canal.

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Adults can use a range of services. The Hublets let you browse thousands of e-magazines via the library app Libby or read newspapers from across the world on Press Reader. Borrowbox can also be accessed, so readers can continue reading their eBook or audiobooks in the comfort of the library. Adults can use the internet via the library's free Wi-Fi services. The Hublet lets you watch your favourite TV programmes over lunch and do your online shopping.

The children's setting is great for learning and play. The apps are fantastic fun and will keep kids entertained while you work, read, or browse the bookshelves. Children can't access the internet, but they do get to play lots of pre-loaded games.



There are a number of Lego apps, like Creator Island, Animals, and Commander. These digital building games develop hand-eye coordination, help children to think logically, and to follow instructions. In *Lego DC Superheroes*, players race around on bikes as Batman, building points and speed. It's so fun, the librarians can be found playing it on their lunch!

The handy purple casing around the tablet means little hands won't do damage and big hands have an easy grip.

Other apps include *Pepper's Paintbox*, *Moomin Bubble*, *Lingo Kids*, and *Crayola*



Color Alive. We would always say books are best, but sometimes it's fun to crash out on a beanbag and play games with mum and dad.

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