

Ep. 6: Anarchy in Medieval Ireland w/ Tom Jenney

[Lisa] Dia dhuit! (Hello!) This is a special episode of Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Irish Library. I'm your host, Lisa, the Assistant Librarian, with Tom, the Library Executive Director. In March Tom and Jim Boyle, a trustee of the Irish Cultural Center, will discuss Anarchy in Medieval Ireland.

[Lisa] What can you tell listeners about this event, Tom?

[Tom] Well, I could tell you hours of things about this event if we, if we want to dig too far into the content, uh, but this is going to be a discussion and what we'll end up doing, uh, Jim Boyle and I will start off kicking around a few questions about what in the world was going on in ancient or medieval Ireland and we will we'll kick that around for about 20 minutes or so, and then open up to audience questions.

And I think it'll be a fun discussion. I'm not an expert on anything, but I do have an interest in Ireland, and I have an interest in the medieval period, and I have an interest in, uh, in anarchism and, and what goes on around that. So. I'm interested in those things and I pitched it to Jim and the good news is that Jim is actually a bit of an expert.

So he has a PhD in medieval Irish archaeology. So he has read up quite a bit and when I told him, okay, here are some of the sources I'm looking at on this question. He said, Oh, you should definitely check out, uh, this book. And I thought he literally meant check it out from the library, but we don't have it yet.

So I bought a copy of a book. Uh, and I'm trying to remember the scholar's name right off the top of my head, but I can't, uh, Oh, actually it's right here on the invitation that we have on the, on the pamphlet. Yeah. There's a book by a guy named Fergus Kelly on a guide to early Irish law. So I found this thing on Amazon and I've been reading it and it's, it's full of fascinating things.

And I think Jim Boyle is going to have a lot of fascinating details as well. Uh, and you know, a lot of it's going to be, I think the huge point of this event is to get people interested in things Irish, in Irish history and culture and, and, and the society that was going on a thousand years ago, up until about 500 years ago.

Uh, I think that's the main hook of this whole thing. And the anarchy thing is sort of an added, okay, uh, you know, anarchy sounds interesting, you know, to a lot of people. Like, ah, it's crazy. What is, what in the world is going on with that? So, uh, that's kind of

a hook to get people in. But the, the big thing is getting people interested in all things Irish.

[Lisa] Yeah, this might be a good stepping stone for people, like, to come out here, um, if they've never been here before, um, and just to see what it's like to go to the castle and see what it's like.

[Tom] Yeah, we're going to have the event up in the, in the keep, which is an appropriately medieval room. You know, it has a balcony going out on a, on a balustrade on the castle that has, uh, and of course the castle, for those of you who have not been here, the castle is built, uh, at least the outside is built with stones that actually came from Ireland and it's built in the style of a Norman castle and, uh, and so. That it's an amazing place and fun place and I, I think the keep is a good room for that and so we'll, we'll have fun in there.

[Lisa] Yeah.

[Tom] And you know, Lisa, I was just before you asked me about all the details and stuff like that about, about how to get here and, and when it's going to be and all that.

[Lisa] Yeah.

[Tom] I just wanted to say that medieval Ireland was full of really fascinating things. Uh, as I've been learning about the law, I, I've learned that satire was effectively against the law, and now some of you are saying well wait if it's an anarchy there wasn't any law was there. But actually there was there's there's laws in every society.

[Lisa] Yeah.

[Tom] You know if you go to a prison the prison gangs have laws that they enforce, you know so any [?] that pirate ships have laws so and so ancient Let's assume it was an anarchy, which I think we're going to, I think Jim and I are going to push back a lot on that concept. But, uh, if you, if you look at Ireland, there were, uh, there were Kings. There were people who called themselves Kings, uh, chieftains. I believe the term Tishach, which they use in modern Irish for the, for the head of the Irish government, uh, refers to a chieftain. And so there were a lot of these Kings running around.

And one of the questions is, did they really run governments as we understand it? Did they run, did they do law enforcement in the way that we understand it now? But there's

all kinds of things that are really odd in, in Irish society. And I was going to tell you, that just as an example, I've learned that satire was effectively against the law.

So that's where, that's kind of where I got to that whole divergent thing on, on, uh, uh, that whole detour about what is law. But to the extent that there was law and there was in ancient Ireland, uh, satire was one of the things that was a no no. So you had a society built very much around honor. And everybody had an honor price and, and there was a big ranking in the society and, um, but one of the things you could do to really hurt someone's honor, uh, was to do a malicious mockery, uh, satire of that person.

And so, you know, growing up in America and in America right now, we're, we're pretty well, I'm your librarian. We're very much into the first amendment. Freedom of expression, things like that, and satire is done all the time.

[Lisa] All the time.

[Tom] Every day, every day, but in ancient Ireland, it was apparently something that you didn't do without a lot of careful, you know, you probably had to assemble your lawyers, and in that case, that often meant Uh, heavily armed people who were your lawyers effectively, you know, so if you were going to do satire, you had to make sure that you had your ducks lined up because, uh, that was a, that was a serious offense.

There were all kinds of odd, odd things in the law that I've found so far. Uh, you know, Kings could get into trouble, uh, for not displaying, for not engaging in hospitality. Yeah, there's just all kinds of weird things that were going on.

[Lisa] Yeah, yeah.

[Tom] And you know, some of this stuff comes out of, out of folklore, but a lot of it is backed up by, by, uh, legal documents and people writing about uh, about the way things worked back then. And a lot of those people were priests, uh, who of course, as we know, "How the Irish Saved Civilization", a lot of these priests and monks were, uh, some of the first librarians in that part of the world.

[Lisa] Yeah.

[Tom] So I wanted to tie it back to the library thing.

[Lisa] Always have to do that. Very interesting. Just some questions about the event itself. Is there a fee for it?

[Tom] There's no fee. Uh, everyone's welcome to come, uh, and Um, yeah, there's no fee. If you, uh, we'll have Irish tea and, and coffee available. Uh, and I don't plan to charge for that. Uh, and our friends at the Irish Cultural Center will have more interesting beverages available for people who partake in those.

[Lisa] And then when will it be?

[Tom] It's gonna be March 2nd. I think you said that at the beginning, but it'll be maybe it'll be Thursday, March 2nd And it's right here at the at the McClelland Irish Library. It'll be up on the third floor and it'll start at 7 o'clock and go to about 8:30 if the side discussions last for a long time I guess we could take it next door to a bar or something like that, but maybe we'll go over to the Foundry if it people really want to keep talking this out, but but for about an hour and a half we'll we'll kick this around up there in the keep on the third floor of the library.

[Lisa] Do listeners have to register for the event or can they just?

[Tom] We would really prefer, so even though we're talking about anarchy. Well, I did say there's, there's law everywhere, even, even under things that are called anarchy. Let's, uh, let's try to make this a bit orderly, and so we'd prefer that you, you reach out and email us. The main email for this library is info at azirishlibrary. org.

[Lisa] Yes.

[Tom] So, info at azirishlibrary. org, that's probably the best place to, uh, to drop us an email and then I don't have to give everyone my, my personal email.

[Lisa] Yeah.

[Tom] Uh, for that. Or my library personal email, so.

[Lisa] Yes. Yeah.

[Tom] I'll guard that for a while.

[Lisa] Okay. Yeah, and then once we get your email, we'll sign you up and then you'll be on your way to the event.

[Tom] Yeah, we'd love to have folks come down and whether your interest is, is things Irish or, or history or the medieval period or you're, uh, a narco curious, uh, whatever, whatever brings you in, we'd love to have you.

[Lisa] Okay. Well, thank you so much for listening and we hope to see you soon at McClelland Library. Slán! (Bye!)