

Rector, Coordinador del CSIC, Don Hugo, distinguished participants. This is a large and ambitious undertaking that begins here today and will continue through to 1 November. I would simply like, on behalf of the Embassy and the Irish Government, to wish the conference on “Ireland and the Iberian Atlantic” every success. We are looking forward to hearing many of the contributions and to meeting as many of you as possible during the proceedings.

Collectively, all of you – the organisers, coordinators, hosts and participants – represent a very significant asset in the context of Spanish-Irish relations. Your work, your insights, your publications, afford a deep background to the relations between Spain and Ireland today and a sense of continuity and connection running through those relations over the centuries. We very much appreciate what you bring to the task and are very pleased to be among the Conference’s sponsors.

That sense of continuity and of building on what has gone before was reinforced for me when I saw the record of the First International Symposium on Spanish Irish Relations held in Salamanca in 2004. It is a beautifully produced work – congratulations to Four Courts Press – with a wonderful portrait of Richard Wall on the cover and with a fascinating range of material from medieval times to the 1950s. I cannot resist, as the current Irish Ambassador to Spain, quoting from Michael Kennedy’s account of Leopold Kerney’s St. Patrick’s Day reception in 1936 “he organised a mass and together with his wife hosted a reception for 70 people or so, practically all governesses or teachers, at the Irish Legation. This was the first occasion that many members of the Irish colony had a chance to meet each other...”. And later, more mundanely, “I was able to get off the May accounts with some efforts and with the valuable assistance of Mrs. Kerney”.

Congratulations to Dr. Declan Downey and Julio MacLennan, as editors, and may I take this opportunity to add further congratulations to Declan for the bestowal on him in May this year of a Knighthood of the Order of Isabel la Católica.

I am sure that this second international symposium will produce similarly rich and diverse proceedings and provide another link in the series.

The Conference also represents the second meeting within the Spanish Ministry for Education and Science project on Irish Emigre Groups in Spain. The Director, Enrique Garcia Hernán, has been energetic and tireless in his dedication to this project. He has mined rich and diverse sources in his work on the Irish military presence in Spanish society in the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as the clerical dimension. What is beginning here today in the discussions of economic and commercial links and their broadening out across the Atlantic, is a new and promising dimension.

Spain is rich in archival material – I hardly need to underline that here in Seville with its Archivo General de Indias – and not all of it, perhaps surprisingly, yet fully explored or cross-referenced. I would just like to take this opportunity to mention the recent discovery by Enrique and colleagues of a very large archive – some 25,000 documents – on the *Misión de Irlanda* spread between the Royal Palace, Simancas, and the Diocese of Madrid. I know that some initial contacts have taken place both in Maynooth and in the National Library regarding this, and we hope that arrangements can be made to catalogue and exploit this material. It will no doubt be another fertile field, adding greatly to our knowledge of the Irish clergy trained in Spain.

I should like to add a word of thanks to the Universidad de Pablo Olavide and to Igor Perez Tostado for all the facilities offered to the Conference. Seville is a wonderfully appropriate venue, given on the one hand its Irish connections through the Irish College and the Blanco-Whites and Wisemans who contributed to the varieties of Irishness here; and on the other hand, for its opening to the transatlantic world when the fleet of the Indies was unloading here on the keys of the Guadalquivir.

It is also an appropriate time for us in Ireland, and in Spain, to be looking across the Atlantic in the light of the importance of the electoral outcome there next Tuesday. Both countries, with their frontage on the Atlantic, have felt at times the tension between American and European orientations – the Boston versus Berlin argument in Ireland.

I wish you well over the next few days in bringing some historical illumination to this contemporary conundrum.