

The English and Irish Urban Experience, 1500–1800: Change, Convergence and Divergence

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Introduction

THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS VOLUME ORIGINATED as papers given at the second of two symposia sponsored by the British Academy and Royal Irish Academy in 1998 which explored various aspects of the urban history of England and Ireland during the early modern period. The first symposium focused on London and Dublin and their role as capital cities; the second, on urban life as it was commonly experienced in the provincial towns of both countries between about 1500 and 1800. This division of labour was not unreflexive. It was grounded in the belief that whatever the nature and extent of the flows of goods, ideas and people which may have connected urban settlements of differing size and function in these countries during this period, the character of urban life—the sum total of individual and collective experience, and the breadth and diversity of the mental worlds which were encountered in towns and cities—was conditioned in part at least by the size and complexity of the settlements themselves. In short, the ‘Gin Lanes’ of eighteenth-century London, quite as much as the ‘polite’ and ordered élite spaces of Merrion Square or St Stephen’s Green in Dublin, constituted urban worlds which could not be wholly replicated in the provincial towns of County Roscommon or Herefordshire precisely *because* they were metropolitan in character and mediated social rhythms and cultural identities which found a particular form of expression at this scale.

Participants at the provincial towns symposium were invited to develop their original contributions in the light of the major themes which emerged during discussion. The issue which most consistently surfaced was the extent to which the urban histories of the two countries converged or diverged during the early modern period, and this is a subject to which we return in the final part of this introduction. The essays brought together here offer a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives from geographers and historians on a diverse range of issues relating to the construction and

mediation of provincial urbanity in England and Ireland. Their focus ranges from detailed explorations of the material and social worlds of individual seventeenth-century towns by Borsay (Warwick), Bradley (Kilkenny), Simms (Kells) and Stobart (Chester), to more general surveys which pursue broader regional or national themes. Crawford's account of the evolving network of small Ulster towns during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries situates this firmly within the context of the province's increasingly distinctive regional identity, while Dyer argues for the continuing importance of England's small towns until at least the early nineteenth century, as an essential redistributive element in an urban system increasingly dominated by metropolitan and industrial growth.

Proudfoot picks up this theme of urban exchange in his attempt to reconstruct the geographies of urban market provision in post-Plantation Ireland. His chapter highlights the extent and the limitations of the role played in this by rural landowners—the class conventionally identified as the prime movers and benefactors of Ireland's eighteenth-century 'urban renaissance'. Hood offers some instances where the conventional emphasis on the role of Ireland's gentry as urban patrons would seem to be justified, but also explores evidence for the eventual assertion of tenant identities in opposition to the landlord interest. As Borsay observes, it would be difficult to argue for similarly extensive landlord influence in English towns of the period. Barnard strikes a similar note of caution, and in a wide-ranging survey of the structure, functions and public life of eighteenth-century Irish towns, warns that urban vitality demanded the activism of more than just the town's landlord.

Communal activism implies a communal sense of identity, and Sweet deploys the evidence for the marked discrepancy in the numbers of English and Irish town histories in the eighteenth century to argue that corporate urban identities were much less well developed in Ireland than in England. She cites, as possible reasons for this, the relatively recent origins of much of the eighteenth-century Irish urban network in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Plantations; the consequent failure of Irish towns to develop a strongly independent urban *persona*, and their continuing susceptibility to patronal direction. In this instance, Sweet argues for divergence rather than convergence between the English and Irish urban experience, but other contributors find more that was shared than divergent. Stobart stresses the importance of the Irish trade in structuring the complex local, regional and national 'worlds' of which seventeenth-century Chester formed part; while Barnard suggests that the rhetoric of improvement which characterised the social negotiations of space in so many of Ireland's provincial towns in the eighteenth century would have been instantly recognisable in the 'polite' urban spaces of contemporary England. Even Warwick's experience of catastrophic fire—detailed here by Borsay—was paralleled in Ireland. The conflagration which destroyed much of the town centre in 1694 and which might be thought of as the ultimate expression of local disaster, was mirrored for instance at Tullamore, King's County (Offaly) in 1797, when the

destruction of the town elicited similarly radical replanning initiatives from similar social agencies.¹

This recognition that comparative analysis of English and Irish urban experiences might offer insights into the development of both which would otherwise be lacking, underlay—indeed drove—the 1998 symposia. Geographical propinquity as neighbouring islands in an archipelago situated on the Atlantic margins of North-West Europe provided the physical context for an unevenly-shared history which linked the two countries long before Diarmat Mac Murchada offered fealty to Henry II in Aquitaine in 1167. During the early modern period much of this shared (and contested) experience arose from the reassertion of England's strategic political and commercial interests in Ireland during the Plantations and Land Confiscations, roughly from 1556 to 1703. The implications of this were considerable in Ireland: notably the creation of a pluralist and arguably colonial society which, despite the gradual penetration of Enlightenment metropolitan values, and the achievement of limited constitutional autonomy under the Crown between 1782 and 1801, remained riven by divisions of religion, ethnicity and language, divisions which reinforced the uneven disposition of wealth and power.² If we envisage towns as socially-constructed arenas, through which the ideology of the prevailing social formation was contested and reproduced,³ then this shared but unequal history may be presumed to have been expressed in the mental and physical worlds created and mediated by the towns and cities of both countries; in the *mentalité* of their citizens, the iconography of their buildings, and in the social, cultural and political roles they performed. But to reiterate, the historical relationship between England and Ireland was not one of equality, and several of the Irish contributions to this volume provide evidence of Ireland's subaltern status within this relationship. Thus Bradley's discussion of Kilkenny's gradual evolution from early Tudor 'frontier town' to a seventeenth-century 'Renaissance city' is grounded in the changing geopolitics of the English colonial presence in Ireland, other local urban outcomes of which also constitute a recurring theme in Simms' study of Kells.

This sense of regional difference also underpins Proudfoot's account of the varied success of urban marketing initiatives from the seventeenth century onwards, which makes apparent the characteristically small size of most provincial Irish towns. Size, indeed, mattered, and a recurrent theme in this collection of essays is the marked contrast in the scale of the provincial settlements which played an

¹ *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* (Fullarton, London, 1846), vol. ix, p. 415.

² J.C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London, 1976); S.J. Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 41–73, 103–43; L. Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast, 1996), pp. 1–34.

³ P. Abrams, 'Towns and economic growth: some theories and problems', in P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley, eds, *Towns in Societies* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 9–34; J. Langton and G. Hoppe, *Town and Country in the Development of Early Modern Western Europe* (Historical Geography Research Group Series 11, London, 1983).

urban role in England and Ireland. In eighteenth-century Ireland many such places consisted of no more than a single main street, a court or market house, an Anglican church and a collection of alleys and laneways, and by no estimation matched Dyer's suggested maximum population threshold for small-town status in England *c.*1700 of around 2,500. Rather, they may have been more comparable in size with English towns of the previous century: Langton suggests that over 650 of the 1,000 or so towns he identifies in England, Scotland and Wales in the late seventeenth century contained fewer than 1,000 people.⁴ The reasons for this are obscure, and may well reflect the relative recency of much of the Irish urban network when compared to its English counterpart—itsself a theme in these essays—and the differences in the resource endowment of each country. But it nevertheless still begs the question of how, precisely, do we define the early modern 'small' town and its 'urban role'?

The answer is probably that we do not, at least not with any degree of precision. As Clark has recently noted in *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, there was precious little homogeneity displayed at this time in the social ecology, functional complexity or size of the smaller settlements in Europe which were clearly performing a *supra*-agricultural role—usually accepted as the *sine qua non* of urban status.⁵ Accordingly, we may have to content ourselves with relative rather than absolute criteria, and recognise, moreover, that these were conditional on the modernity and character of the regions concerned. To revert to our previous argument, if towns were essentially arenas for ideological transmission and contestation, then the diverse power relations implicated within different social formations ensured that the towns—large or small—which mediated these relationships inevitably varied in their abstract and material character. Thus in the final analysis, in our search for what constituted a 'small town' we may be able to do no better than reiterate Clark and Slack's enumeration of some possible characteristics of pre-industrial towns, which emphasised their unusual concentration of population, specialist economic function, complex social order, sophisticated political apparatus and local spheres of influence.⁶ But we should recognise that not all of these conditions necessarily applied in every circumstance, nor led to similar outcomes. What passed, for example, in the seventeenth century as 'an unusual concentration of population' in the anciently and densely settled fertile lowlands of the Thames and Severn valleys may have been of a different order of magnitude to the market centres lately founded in the peripheral coastal lowlands of County Donegal or the boglands of counties Leitrim or Longford.

⁴ J. Langton, 'Urban growth and economic change: from the late seventeenth century to 1841', in P. Clark, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Volume II, 1540–1840 (Cambridge, 2000), p. 463.

⁵ P. Clark, 'Introduction', in P. Clark, ed., *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–21.

⁶ P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500–1700* (London, 1976), pp. 4–5.

Early modern Ireland: urban themes and agendas

All knowledge is socially-produced, and the truth of this aphorism is particularly well illustrated by the recent emergence in Ireland of urban history as a separate field of study and its relationship with Irish historiography. Since the 1970s, but with a pedigree that extends back to the work of R.D. Edwards and T.W. Moody in the late 1930s, Irish historians have been engaged on a particularly intense and fiercely-contested process of epistemological and pedagogical self-examination that has passed into public and academic discourse as 'revisionism'.⁷ This portmanteau term in fact embraces a complex and tortuous debate which has moved on from an early Popperian concern in the 1970s with the possibility and desirability of writing 'value-free' history which disentangled 'objective truth' from 'myth', to a more focused engagement by the late 1980s with the issues of national consciousness and cultural pluralism.

At the heart of the debate has been the modern political history of Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, increasingly, questions concerning the inclusivity and legitimacy of representations of Irish nationhood. Arguably, the terms of the debate have been dictated by the relative recency and, for some, incomplete achievement of 'national' independence in 1921, but they reflect too, the decidedly ambiguous attitude on the part of the Irish state and sections of Irish society towards the complex cultural legacies of the country's colonial past. Revisionism thus encompasses the conflicting 'myths' of identity which Moody adumbrated in 1978, and which may be argued to have driven political discourse in Ireland ever since Partition: the separatist, sectarian myth, associated with Ulster loyalism, and the unitary, nationalist myth, which was (and remains) the hallmark of southern republicanism.⁸ Brady suggests, further, that the synchronicity between—on the one hand—the emergence of the modern revisionist debate in the 1970s and—on the other hand—the intensification of political violence in Northern Ireland, the Republic's first encounter with modern Europe in its membership of the European Community in 1973, and the subsequent socioeconomic problems it experienced in the later 1970s, was not coincidental.⁹ Each in their own way highlighted the aspirations, ambiguities and failings of Irish nationalism.

But for revisionists such as R.F. Foster, whose *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (1988) marked an intensification of the debate, the historians' task is to cast a sceptical eye on such 'institutionalised pieties' of (nationalist) Irish history, 'to appreciate half-tones, to be sceptical about imputing praise or blame, (and) to separate contemporary

⁷ C. Brady, "'Constructive and instrumental": the dilemma of Ireland's first "New historians"', in C. Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism, 1938–1994* (Dublin, 1994), pp. 3–31.

⁸ T.W. Moody, 'Irish history and Irish mythology', *Hermathena*, 124 (1978), 7–24. See also B.J. Graham, 'No place of the mind: contested Protestant representations of Ulster', *Ecumene*, 1/3 (1994), 257–81.

⁹ Brady, 'Constructive', p. 23.

intentions from historical effects'.¹⁰ Value-free and far from Whiggish history indeed, but nevertheless a position which has been challenged by Bradshaw and Whelan among others for its historiographical naïvety, Anglo-centric emphasis, present-centredness and methodological sterility.¹¹ The charge of naïvety resonates with the modern acknowledgement of history's hermeneutic status, and particularly with Lévi-Strauss's repeated demolition of the distinction between myth and history.¹² But in essence, the counter-revisionists' challenge is to the pedagogic status of a historiography which, they would argue, denies the subjective authenticity of the lived experience of the majority of Ireland's people in the recent past by divesting it of any moral content.

As Ó Tuathaigh (1994) notes, the emphasis in the revisionist debate on modern Irish political history has marginalised other aspects of historical enquiry which have undergone just as radical reformulation in the same period, and which, moreover, are intimately connected with narratives of political change.¹³ The on-going reappraisal of post-Plantation agrarian class structures and relationships, quite as much as the growth of interest in urbanism as a separate category of historical experience, seems—in Ó Tuathaigh's own phrase—'not to have attracted the same degree of indignation' from counter-revisionists. Yet in the case of urban history, a link can be established between the emergence of the discipline and the nationalist agendas of earlier generations of Irish historians, and its very existence can be seen as an expression of the revisionist turn taken by Irish history since the 1970s.

Interest in Irish urban history only began to burgeon at the end of that decade. In her review of the discipline published in 1986, Daly attributes this relatively late beginning to the earlier preoccupation of Irish historians with the struggle for national independence.¹⁴ But as her own paper in *Etudes Irlandaises* the previous year pointed out, there was also a second, related, factor.¹⁵ The conventional nineteenth- and early twentieth-century signification of rural, and particularly western, Ireland as the repository of 'the marks of the Gaelic race',¹⁶ and thus of 'genuine' Irish (that is Gaelic and Catholic) values, had as its reciprocal the denial of urban culture as an authentic expression of Irish historical experience. Central to this representation was the belief

¹⁰ R.F. Foster, 'We are all revisionists now', *The Irish Review*, 1 (1986), 1–5; R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988).

¹¹ B. Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 26 (1988–9), 329–51; K. Whelan, "'Clio agus Caithlín Ní Uallacháin" i Seosamh Ó Murchú', *Oghma*, 2 (1990), 9–19.

¹² C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (London, 1969); C. Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and meaning* (London, 1978); C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and myth* (Oxford, 1987); cited in Brady, 'Constructive', p. 8.

¹³ M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'Irish historical 'Revisionism': state of the art or ideological project?', in Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History*, pp. 306–26.

¹⁴ M.E. Daly, 'Irish urban history: a survey', *Urban History Yearbook* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 61–72.

¹⁵ M.E. Daly, 'An alien entity? Attitudes to the city in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries Ireland', *Etudes Irlandaises*, 11 (1985), 181–94.

¹⁶ D.P. Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Dublin, 1904).

that Gaelic (meaning pre-Norman) Irish society was profoundly rural in character—‘tribal, hierarchical, rural and familiar’ in D.A. Binchy’s phrase.¹⁷ Accordingly, in this view, it followed that towns were a later, alien introduction, established in Ireland by a succession of foreign invaders and representative of their conquests.¹⁸ For the historians of a newly-independent state which was coming to terms—not altogether easily—with its colonial past, and who were engaged in pursuit of a collective national foundation-myth, there was little to commend the study of some of the most enduring icons of the ‘nation’s’ previous subordination.

By the mid-1980s the narrowly ethnocentric grounds used to assert this urban inauthenticity were no longer tenable.¹⁹ Archaeological excavation at some of the larger pre-Norman monastic sites had begun to show evidence of a functional complexity which could only be described as urban. This had demonstrated the limitations of previous thinking on urban origins which had emphasised a definition of urbanism based on legal criteria and literary evidence. But more importantly still for the growth of Irish urban history, the self-evident stimulus to town foundation and growth provided by successive periods of externally-derived and arguably colonial cultural interaction, by the Anglo-Normans from 1169 and the ‘New’ English and Scots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was no longer regarded as peripheral to some narrowly-conceived narrative of national consciousness. Rather, towns came to be recognised as places where the complex abstract and material negotiations of cultural identity, social and political authority, and economic wealth and power which were central to the reproduction of society in all its forms, were made manifest. Implicit within this was the recognition of the cultural diversity bound up in Ireland’s history and, to borrow Whelan’s phrase, the sterility of narratives which sought to downplay this.

The question, therefore, of whether the majority of Ireland’s towns were ‘colonial’ productions has to a certain extent been sidelined, at least in the sense of whether this diminished their veracity as the expression of Irish identities and experience. Nevertheless, as many of the essays in this volume make clear, the external impulse which drove much of Ireland’s urban history is not to be denied. This perspective certainly underpins the structure of Daly’s 1986 review paper, and continues to provide a convenient lens through which to examine the structures of Irish urban experience during the early modern period. But other characteristics have also defined Irish urban history, notably its emphasis on urban morphology and, overwhelmingly, narrative biographies of individual settlements, and the relative scarcity of attempts to establish a theoretical base for the study of historical urbanism in Ireland. All of these themes are illustrated

¹⁷ D.A. Binchy, ‘Secular institutions’, in M. Dillon, ed., *Early Irish Society*, new edn (Cork, 1969), pp. 52–65.

¹⁸ A.R. Orme, *The World’s Landscapes, 4: Ireland* (London, 1970), pp. 100–12; F.H.A. Aalen, *Man and the Landscape in Ireland* (London, 1978), pp. 269–79.

¹⁹ Daly, ‘Irish urban history’, pp. 61–2.

by the canon of work which has appeared on early modern Irish towns since the 1970s.²⁰

In comparison with the profusion of work that has appeared since that time on early modern English towns, the output on provincial Irish towns has been relatively modest. Although various overviews of the urban development of particular counties or regions after c.1500 have appeared, notably, O'Connor's 1987 account of the urban history of the city and county of Limerick, O'Flanagan's survey of provincial urban growth in County Cork (1993) and Crawford's similar account of County Donegal (1995),²¹ the overall history of Irish urbanism between 1500 and 1800 has yet to be written. There are at present no national texts to compare with wide-ranging English surveys such as P. Clark and P. Slack's, *English Towns in Transition, 1500–1700* (1976), or S.M. Jack's *Towns in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (1996).²² For the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the emphasis, predictably, has been on Plantation urbanism, one exception being Agnew's detailed reconstruction of the intimately linked social and economic worlds of the Belfast merchant community c.1682.²³ Otherwise, the monographic corpus either deals with the morphological outcomes of Plantation urbanism and the decision-making processes this involved, as for example in Curl's compendious study of the planning and architecture of the Londonderry Plantation and Loeber's broader attempt to theorise the practice of English settlement, or else treats towns as part of a broader political, social and economic study of one or other of the Plantation

²⁰ Attempts to establish a theoretical base are listed in D. McCabe, 'Select bibliography of publications printed between 1969 and 1993 on Irish towns in the period 1500 to 1880', in W. Nolan and A. Simms, eds, *Irish Towns: A Guide to Sources* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 201–49. See also A. Simms and J.H. Andrews, eds, *Irish Country Towns* (Cork, 1994); A. Simms and J.H. Andrews, eds, *More Irish Country Towns* (Cork, 1995); H.B. Clarke, ed., *Irish Cities* (Cork, 1995). Classic early studies include C. Maxwell, *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges* (London, 1940), and G. Camblin, *The Town in Ulster* (Belfast, 1951). The morphological trope is well represented by: M. Byrne, 'Tullamore: the growth process, 1785–1841', in W. Nolan and T. O'Neill, eds, *Offaly History and Society* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 569–626; P. Walsh, 'The topography of medieval and early modern Galway City', in G. Moran and R. Gillespie, eds, *Galway History and Society* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 27–96; and the Royal Irish Academy's *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* series (Dublin, 1986–). Studies of Ireland's larger provincial towns and cities include: J.C. Beckett and R.E. Glasscock, eds, *Belfast: Origin and Growth of an Industrial City* (London, 1967); J. Bardon, *Belfast: An Illustrated History* (Belfast, 1982); J.C. Beckett, ed., *Belfast: The Making of the City* (Belfast, 1983); W.A. Maguire, *Belfast* (Keele, 1993); W.G. Neely, *Kilkenny: An Urban History* (Belfast, 1989). Predictably, Dublin has generated its own extensive literature, including: M. Craig, *Dublin, 1660–1860* (Dublin, 1969); C. Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714–1830*, new edn (Dublin, 1974); D. Dickson, ed., *The Gorgeous Mask: Dublin, 1700–1850* (Dublin, 1987); A. Cosgrove, ed., *Dublin through the Ages* (Dublin, 1988); F.H.A. Aalen and K. Whelan, eds, *Dublin: City and County From Prehistory to Present* (Dublin, 1992).

²¹ P.J. O'Connor, *Exploring Limerick's Past: An Historical Geography of Urban Development in County and City* (Newcastle West, 1987); P. O'Flanagan, 'Three hundred years of urban life: villages and towns in County Cork, c.1600–1900', in P.O'Flanagan and C.G. Buttimer, eds, *Cork History and Society* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 391–468; W. Crawford, 'The evolution of the urban network', in W. Nolan, L. Ronayne and M. Dunlevy, eds, *Donegal History and Society* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 381–404. See also: W.H. Crawford, 'The evolution of Ulster towns, 1750–1850', in P. Roebuck, ed., *Plantation to Partition* (Belfast, 1981), pp. 140–56.

²² Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*; S.M. Jack, *Towns in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996).

²³ J. Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 1996).

schemes.²⁴ These studies have been supported by an extensive article literature which has offered wide-ranging geographical surveys of the Plantation urban dynamic,²⁵ broad thematic analyses of its marketing basis,²⁶ and detailed accounts of the regional identity of Plantation urbanism, particularly in Ulster.²⁷

Despite the limitations to certain types of synoptic data noted by Proudfoot (below, chapter 4), eighteenth-century provincial urban studies have witnessed something of a renaissance. In particular, various studies have revisited the so-called 'estate towns'. Proudfoot and Graham have attempted to provide a conceptual explanation for these towns in terms of agrarian class structures and property relations,²⁸ and have also detailed the local processes of social engagement and material change they exhibited.²⁹ Related studies by Horner, Lockhart, Roebuck and Dickson have explored the industrial contexts for eighteenth-century town planning, and the role of landlords and capitalist entrepreneurs in the residential development of larger regional centres such as Belfast, Cork and Limerick.³⁰ These studies reflect the willingness on the part of Irish scholars to invoke the private as well as the public spheres in their exploration of early

²⁴ J.S. Curl, *The Londonderry Plantation, 1609–1914* (Chichester, 1986); R. Loeber, *The Geography and Practice of English Colonisation in Ireland from 1534 to 1609* (Athlone, 1991); P. Robinson, *The Plantation of Ulster: British Settlement in an Irish Landscape, 1600–1670* (Dublin, 1984); R. Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster: The Settlement of East Ulster, 1600–1641* (Cork, 1985); Michael MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland* (Oxford, 1986).

²⁵ R.A. Butlin, 'Urban genesis in Ireland, 1556–1641', in R.W. Steel and R. Lawton, eds, *Liverpool Essays in Geography* (London, 1967), pp. 211–26; R.H. Buchanan, 'Towns and plantations, 1500–1700', in W. Nolan, ed., *The Shaping of Ireland: The Geographical Perspective* (Cork, 1986), pp. 84–98; A. Sheehan, 'Irish towns in a period of change, 1558–1625', in C. Brady and R. Gillespie, eds, *Natives and Newcomers: The Making of Irish Colonial Society, 1534–1641* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 93–119.

²⁶ P. O'Flanagan, 'Settlement development and trading in Ireland, 1600–1800: a preliminary investigation', in T.M. Devine and D. Dickson, eds, *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 146–50; T.M. Devine and D. Dickson, eds, 'Markets and fairs in Ireland, 1600–1800: index of economic development and regional growth', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11/4 (1985), 364–78.

²⁷ R. Gillespie, 'The origins and development of an Ulster urban network', *Irish Historical Studies*, 21 (1984), 15–29; R. Gillespie, 'The small towns of Ulster, 1600–1700', *Ulster Folklife*, 36 (1990), 23–31; R.J. Hunter, 'Towns in the Ulster Plantation', *Studia Hibernica*, 11 (1971), 40–79; R.J. Hunter, 'Ulster Plantation towns, 1609–41', in D. Harkness and M. O'Dowd, eds, *The Town in Ireland: Historical Studies XIII* (Belfast, 1981), pp. 55–79.

²⁸ B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot, 'Landlords, planning and urban growth in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland', *Journal of Urban History*, 18 (1992), 308–29; L.J. Proudfoot and B.J. Graham, 'The nature and extent of urban and village foundation and improvement in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland', *Planning Perspectives*, 8 (1993), 259–81; L.J. Proudfoot, *Property Ownership and Urban and Village Improvement in Provincial Ireland, ca. 1700–1845* (Historical Geography Research Series 33, London, 1997).

²⁹ B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot, *Urban Improvement in Provincial Ireland, 1700–1840* (Athlone, 1994); L.J. Proudfoot, *Urban Patronage and Social Authority: The Management of the Duke of Devonshire's Towns in Ireland, 1764–1891* (Washington, DC, 1995).

³⁰ D.G. Lockhart, 'Planned village development in Scotland and Ireland, 1700–1850', in Devine and Dickson, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 132–45; D. Dickson, 'Large-scale developers and the growth of eighteenth-century Irish cities', in P. Butel and L.M. Cullen, eds, *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development, 1500–1900* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 109–24; P. Roebuck, 'The Donegall family and the development of Belfast, 1600–1850', in *ibid.*, pp. 125–38; A. Horner, 'Maynooth', in Simms and Andrews, *Irish Country Towns*, pp. 59–70.

modern urbanism, and the range and diversity of this material highlights the extent to which early attempts at benchmark studies of Irish urban history by Butlin and Harkness and O'Dowd have been superseded.³¹ Nevertheless, as Smyth has observed, much remains to be done before we can claim to understand fully the workings of Ireland's pre-modern urban network.³²

One particular need is for an adequate theorisation of early modern urbanism in Ireland, and here concepts developed in the context of other urban systems would seem to offer some possible insights into the Irish case. Thus Carter's concept of early modern 'primate urban hierarchies' accords with Butlin's much earlier suggestion that the seventeenth-century Irish urban network operated as a series of semi-autarkic port-systems, which only subsequently coalesced into a functionally-integrated national network during the eighteenth century.³³ Carter envisages these primate urban networks as being dominated by disproportionately large capitals performing a variety of national social, political, economic and administrative roles, and supported by an extensive urban base in which individual towns were small and functionally limited. He postulates that such primacy only developed in a mature political system and an advanced, but predominantly agrarian, economy. These conditions certainly pertained in eighteenth-century Ireland, when Dublin's rapid growth to disproportionate size is well attested. The city probably trebled its population to reach about 180,000 by the year 1800, when Cork, the next largest city, had a population of barely 80,000,³⁴ though Dickson argues that Dublin's rate of growth slowed considerably after c.1760. By then, the city's sheer size may have begun to act as a brake on further suburban expansion, as frictions of distance impaired the ability of existing transport networks to sustain further enlargement of the city's internal market.³⁵ In short, as in other *ancien régime* economies, Dublin's growth as Ireland's primate city was self-regulating, and was limited by the overall ceiling imposed on the size of the urban sector by an agrarian economy which lacked the potential for open-ended economic growth provided—in Britain—by significant fossil fuel and mineral resources.

Primacy implies that much of the urban base was relatively underdeveloped, and this perspective finds implicit support in recent discussions of the rate of urbanisation in Ireland *vis-à-vis* the rest of early modern Europe. Whyte's rank-order comparison of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century urban population growth rates in Scotland and

³¹ R.A. Butlin, ed., *The Development of the Irish Town* (London, 1977); Harkness and O'Dowd, *Town in Ireland*.

³² W.J. Smyth, 'Ireland a colony: settlement implications of the revolution in military-administrative, urban and ecclesiastical structures, c.1550 to c.1730', in T. Barry, ed., *A History of Settlement in Ireland* (London, 2000), p. 159.

³³ R.A. Butlin, 'Irish towns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in Butlin, *Development of the Irish Town*, p. 76; H. Carter, *An Introduction to Urban Historical Geography* (London, 1983), p. 112.

³⁴ Figures from L.A. Clarkson, 'An anatomy of an Irish town: the economy of Armagh, 1770', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 5 (1978), 27–8.

³⁵ D. Dickson, 'The place of Dublin in the eighteenth-century Irish economy', in Devine and Dickson, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 178–9; D. Dickson, 'Capital and country: 1600–1800', in Cosgrove, *Dublin*, p. 66.

Ireland suggests that the latter experienced a faster rate of growth in the seventeenth century—presumably because of the urban imperatives associated with the Plantations. By the later eighteenth century, however, the rate of urbanisation in Scotland greatly exceeded that in Ireland. Whyte argues that this may have had as much to do with the far higher rural population growth rate in eighteenth-century Ireland as with any real differential in the number of new urban foundations in each country.³⁶ The argument is intriguing, but is based on the selection of an arbitrary population threshold (2,500 people) as a surrogate index of urban status. This, as Clark notes, would probably fail to capture much of the small-town experience of northern European countries at this time, including those in the British Isles and Scandinavia. Moreover, it emphasises an earlier period for maximum urban growth than other, admittedly broader, analyses would suggest. Thus Clark argues that although the northern European region—including Ireland—was less developed in terms of the extent of its urbanism when compared to the more highly urbanised core regions of southern and central Europe in the sixteenth century, it nevertheless witnessed pronounced though uneven urbanisation during the eighteenth century, and provincial urban growth rates which sometimes exceeded those of the major metropolitan centres.³⁷

An underlying theme which connects all the Irish contributions in this volume is the distinction between what might be termed 'old' and 'new' urbanism in the process of urbanisation in early modern Ireland. Although the external stimulus to urban foundation during this period is rightly emphasised by Crawford, Hood and Proudfoot, it is important to remember that the new towns founded in the Irish east midlands, Munster and Ulster between c.1580 and 1630, and the more widespread new towns and villages planned or refounded under landlord aegis from the early eighteenth century onwards, were essentially adjuncts to the existing medieval (or earlier) urban network.³⁸ These medieval towns included all Ireland's major ports save Belfast, together with major inland centres such as Cahir and Carrick-on-Suir (County Tipperary), but collectively were fewer in number though generally larger in size and functionally more complex than all but the most successful of the 'new' towns.

These older, medieval communities constituted the basis upon which the urban network developed in Ireland under the combined impetus of modernisation and colonialism between 1500 and 1800. The diverse products of their own varied and complex histories, towns and cities such as Drogheda, Galway and Youghal were nevertheless characterised by a depth of urban tradition which set them apart from the more recent foundations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This difference was expressed in virtually every aspect of their social, political and economic life. In the religious wars

³⁶ I. Whyte, 'Scottish and Irish urbanisation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: a comparative perspective', in S.J. Connolly, R.A. Houston and R.J. Morris, eds, *Conflict, Identity and Economic Development: Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1939* (Preston, 1995), pp. 14–28.

³⁷ Clark, 'Introduction', pp. 1–21.

³⁸ Proudfoot, *Property Ownership*.

of the seventeenth century for example, not only Kilkenny but also most of the ancient medieval ports in Munster supported the royalist and confederate cause. Their corporations were symbolic of a civic dignity which had survived the fragmentation and collapse of centralised English authority in Ireland during the later middle ages. From this, these towns had emerged as beneficiaries, developing their own identities as quasi-autonomous regional centres, which traded the products of a primary economy widely in Europe. Their inhabitants were the Irish and Old English descendants of medieval Anglo-Norman colonists, and both groups were to suffer political, religious and economic exclusion and marginalisation at the hands of the resurgent English interest in Ireland during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁹ 'Planted' towns were central to this resurgence, but so too was the progressive disempowerment of the ancient corporations as centres of political and religious opposition to English authority, particularly during the Cromwellian confiscations of the 1640s and after.⁴⁰

The Plantation new towns were different. As market centres, places of refuge for the 'planted' population, and centres of 'civilising' English influence, they were essential adjuncts to each Plantation, and the metropolitan government in London paid considerable attention to their promotion. Their ideological role in this regard was reflected in the cultural and political spaces they created. Famously at Bandon (County Cork), but also elsewhere, the new borough populations were sometimes prescriptively Protestant; the Catholic Irish being excluded to socially and environmentally marginal 'cabin' suburbs, thus setting the scene for subsequent complex renegotiations of urban space during the eighteenth century.⁴¹ The very urgency with which James I acted to create some forty parliamentary boroughs out of the newly-founded plantation urban networks in 1612–13 is testimony to the political importance of the new urbanism to the English interest in Ireland—and to the new towns' manichaeic relationship with the old corporations.

Between them, the 'old' and the 'new' urbanism thus provided a very uneven basis for urban development in premodern Ireland. The medieval towns were either located as ports around the eastern and southern coasts, or concentrated inland in the heartland of the original Anglo-Norman colony, in Leinster and south-east Munster. The Plantation towns were most numerous in the historic provinces of Ulster and Munster, and in Ulster they represented a significant extension of urbanism into what had previously been a region largely devoid of urban settlement, save along the coasts of counties Down and Antrim. The 800 or so towns and villages founded, replanned or rebuilt by eighteenth-century landlords and their tenants represented a process of adjustment

³⁹ Smyth, 'Ireland a colony', pp. 165–70.

⁴⁰ T.C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English Government and Reform in Ireland, 1649–60* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 50–3, 77–89.

⁴¹ P. O'Flanagan, 'Urban minorities and majorities: Catholics and Protestants in Munster towns, c.1659–1850', in W.J. Smyth and K. Wheland, eds, *Common Ground* (Cork, 1988), pp. 124–48.

whereby these earlier distributions were accommodated to the changing demands of Ireland's expanding and diversifying political economy.⁴² But it is one of the more amiable ironies of Irish urban history that many of the social, political and cultural characteristics that distinguished the 'new' urbanism from the 'old' during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were increasingly obliterated by the same processes of modernisation that now encouraged the expansion of Ireland's urban network during the eighteenth century.

These changes were complex and were nowhere more profound than in their effect on the sectarian composition of urban Ireland. The role of the Catholic community in Ireland's early modern urban history has been the subject of considerable debate. While Barnard has demonstrated the reality of the expulsion of Catholic merchants from a number of towns during the Cromwellian interlude in the 1650s, a widely-held view has been that subsequently Catholic merchant capitalism made considerable inroads into some sectors at least of the urban economy during the eighteenth century.⁴³ The land confiscations of the seventeenth century and the anti-Catholic penal legislation in the century that followed forced the realisation of Catholic landed assets, creating—so the argument runs—footloose capital which was perforce invested in urban commerce.⁴⁴ The argument has not gone unchallenged. Dickson has argued that although Catholics may have formed a numerical majority in a number of Munster towns such as Cork and Waterford by as early as the 1720s, the merchant communities in these and other places remained overwhelmingly Protestant. Where Catholics made significant gains was in the 'lesser' craft occupations. Nevertheless, it is clear that in some towns such as Bandon (Co. Cork), and Tallow (Co. Waterford), the rigid sectarian geographies which had been created as part of their foundation as new towns in the Munster Plantation, had been substantially eroded a century later. By the 1790s they had given way to a much more fragmented mosaic of Catholic and Protestant leasehold interests in what had once been their exclusively Protestant urban cores.⁴⁵ The implication seems clear. In this as in other parts of urban Ireland, the processes of urban social, cultural and ethnic change both reflected and were complicit in the broader transformations experienced by Ireland's pluralist society. Towns were indeed central to the narratives of Irish history.

⁴² Proudfoot, *Property Ownership*, pp. 43–4.

⁴³ Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, pp. 50–3, 77–89.

⁴⁴ G. O'Brien, ed., *Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century: Collected Essays of Maureen Wall* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 73–102. See also: J. FitzGerald, 'Drogheda merchants in the eighteenth century', *Old Drogheda Society Journal*, 5 (1986), 21–36; J. O'Brien, 'Merchants in Cork before the Famine', in Butel and Cullen, *Cities and Merchants*, pp. 221–32.

⁴⁵ D. Dickson, 'Catholics and trade in eighteenth-century Ireland: an old debate revisited', in T.P. Power and K. Whelan, eds, *Endurance and Emergence: Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 85–100.

Early modern England: urban themes and agendas

Over the last three to four decades the provincial early modern town in England has attracted considerable attention from historians, a surge in research that as yet shows little sign of abating. Survey texts,⁴⁶ edited collections,⁴⁷ single-town⁴⁸ and themed studies,⁴⁹ not to mention a proliferation of article literature and doctoral theses, have enriched beyond measure our picture of the town between about 1500 and 1800. If the publication in 1972 of *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* was a harbinger of—and stimulus for—the research to come, then the appearance in 2000 of volume two

⁴⁶ Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*; J. Patten, *English Towns, 1500–1700* (Folkestone, 1978); P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700–1800* (Oxford, 1982); A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns* (London, 1991; 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1995); Jack, *Towns in Tudor and Stuart Britain*; R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999). There are also forthcoming surveys of towns during the long eighteenth century by Joyce Ellis (Macmillan/Palgrave) and Christopher Chalklin (Economic History Society/Cambridge University Press).

⁴⁷ P. Clark, ed., *The Early Modern Town* (London, 1976); P. Clark, ed., *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981); P. Clark, ed., *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns, 1600–1800* (London, 1984); J. Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1530–1688* (London, 1990); P. Borsay, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688–1820* (London, 1990).

⁴⁸ R.G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds, 1700–1830* (Manchester, 1971); G. Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Economic and Social History* (Oxford, 1972); A. Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973); J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760–1800* (Manchester, 1977); J.T. Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich: Politics, Religion and Government, 1620–1690* (Oxford, 1979); D. Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979); C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979); R.S. Neale, *Bath, 1680–1850: A Social History* (London, 1981); M. Prior, *Fisher Row: Fishermen, Bargemen, and Canal Boatmen in Oxford, 1500–1900* (Oxford, 1982); R. Newton, *Eighteenth-Century Exeter* (Exeter, 1984); G. Mayhew, *Tudor Rye* (Falmer, 1987); J.F. POUND, *Tudor and Stuart Norwich* (Chichester, 1988); M. Beresford, *East End, West End: The Face of Leeds During Urbanisation, 1684–1842* (Leeds, 1988); K. Grady, *The Georgian Public Buildings of Leeds and the West Riding* (Leeds, 1989); E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760–1840* (London, 1989); D. Hey, *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and Its Neighbourhood, 1660–1740* (Leicester, 1991); D.H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450–1700* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991); D. Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992); R.M. Berger, *The Most Necessary Luxuries: The Mercers' Company of Coventry, 1550–1680* (Philadelphia, 1993); D. Marcombe, *English Small Town Life: Retford, 1520–1642* (Nottingham, 1993); K. Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993); M.C. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation, c.1530–c.1570* (Oxford, 1993); J. Goodacre, *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy: Townspeople and Villagers in the Lutterworth Area, 1500–1700* (Aldershot, 1994); P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660–1722* (Oxford, 1996); P. Borsay, *The Image of Georgian Bath, 1700–2000: Towns, Heritage, and History* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴⁹ C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England: A Study of the Building Process, 1740–1820* (London, 1974); R. Hyde, *Gilded Scenes and Shining Prospects: Panoramic Views of British Towns, 1575–1900* (New Haven, Conn., 1985); P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989); N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989); D. Cruickshank and N. Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (London, 1990); M. Girouard, *The English Town* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1990); P. Hembry, *The English Spa, 1560–1815: A Social History* (London, 1990); R. Tittler, *Architecture and Power: The Town Hall and the English Urban Community, c.1500–1640* (Oxford, 1991); R.C. Richardson, ed., *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992); K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995); R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997); J. Ayres, *Building the Georgian City* (New Haven,

(1540–1840) of the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, its 900 pages contributed by over thirty historians and geographers, is a marker of how far the subject has developed over the last thirty years.⁵⁰ *Crisis and Order*—and particularly the introduction by its editors, Peter Clark and Paul Slack—reflected and set the early agenda, with the emphasis on the Tudor and early Stuart period, and on the trials and tribulations of towns during these years—though the extent of the vicissitudes was always a hotly contested issue. During the 1980s there was a subtle but distinct shift in focus. The later Stuart and Georgian eras began to grab the limelight, and as they did so a far more positive picture emerged of the English urban system. The four English contributions to this collection reflect this change in emphasis, their attention very largely drawn to the *later* early modern years, and their conclusions, which embrace towns throughout the system, generally of an optimistic nature.

Between 1600 and 1800 England experienced substantial levels of quantitative and qualitative urbanisation. These might not quite compare with the spectacular rates achieved during the nineteenth century, but by the eighteenth century England (together with Scotland) was already the most dynamically urbanising society in Europe and perhaps in the world; in Italy, France and Germany the urban share of the population scarcely shifted during the eighteenth century, and in the Netherlands, Europe's most urbanised society in 1700, it actually dropped. In 1600, about eight per cent of England's population occupied the twenty settlements of over 5,000 people; by 1700 this had risen to seventeen per cent of the population in thirty-two such settlements; and by 1801 to twenty-eight per cent in ninety-one settlements.⁵¹ Such statistics only scratch the surface of change, not least because the vast majority of places that were functional urban settlements, and that contemporaries considered towns, contained less than 5,000 people.

Urbanisation has, therefore, to be seen in the context of the overall urban system. That there was movement at the top was strikingly the case. London increased its population from about 50,000 people in 1500, to 200,000 in 1600, rising to 500,000 in 1700, and about one million by 1800; while in 1500 it had been a medium-sized European city, by 1700 it had overtaken Paris as the largest city in Western Europe, and by 1800 was, with Peking and Edo, the largest city in the world. Whereas between 1500 and

Conn., and London, 1998); C. Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: Cultural Ties and Social Spheres in the Provinces, 1660–1780* (Manchester, 1998); R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c.1500–1640* (Oxford, 1998); P. Collinson and J. Craig, eds, *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500–1640* (Basingstoke, 1998); P. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in English Towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998); C.F. Patterson, *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England: Corporate Boroughs, the Landed Elite, and the Crown, 1580–1640* (Stanford, Calif., 1999).

⁵⁰ P. Clark and P. Slack, eds, *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (London, 1972); Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II.

⁵¹ J. de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (London, 1984), p. 39; E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the Continent in the early modern period', in Borsay, *Eighteenth-Century Town*, esp. pp. 42, 45, 69–70; Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, pp. 8–9.

1700 the metropolis's share of the national population had jumped spectacularly from about two to ten per cent, during the eighteenth century the proportion remained more or less stable.⁵² This reflected the surge in provincial urbanisation fuelled by the growth of industrial towns and ports, so that well before 1800 a number of the more dynamic—such as Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham—had shot up the hierarchy to join the ranks of the traditional provincial capitals. Of these older major cities several were boosted by industrial and commercial growth, such as Bristol and Newcastle upon Tyne; others enjoyed a temporary stimulus, like Norwich and Exeter; and some seemed to slumber—though as Stobart demonstrates in his study of Chester, this could be something of a mirage, since a city might experience comparatively low levels of demographic growth and yet still be economically vibrant.

Chester can be seen to sit on the border between a provincial capital and those towns which occupied the middle ranks of the urban hierarchy, a category which may be termed regional centres. County towns—or those places which acted as commercial, administrative and social centres for a county or a portion of one—were among the most characteristic occupants of this tier. In 1700 several would have contained over 5,000 people, but the majority would not; in 1724, for example, Chichester in West Sussex had a population of 3,721 (and that of Lewes in East Sussex was apparently under 2,000), and Warwick's in 1730 was about 4,600.⁵³ Borsay's study of Warwick in this volume suggests that, small or large, the county towns were favourably placed to benefit from the broad process of urbanisation. It may be that they did so because of an input from the staple industries: boot and shoe manufacture in Northampton, and the hosiery industries in Nottingham and Leicester are cases in point. But of greater general importance was their role as service and craft centres, catering to the increasingly complex and sophisticated needs of their regional economies and societies.⁵⁴

The great bulk of towns occupied the bottom stratum of the hierarchy. Commonly referred to by historians as 'small towns' or 'market towns', they are usually taken to be places with under 2,500 people in 1700 (and many would have contained under 1,000). They are the Cinderellas of urban history, with the larger centres attracting by far the greatest research attention. Yet in 1700 they formed about ninety per cent of the

⁵² P.J. Corfield, 'Urban development in England and Wales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in D.C. Coleman and A.H. John, eds, *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1976), p. 217; Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, pp. 8–9; R. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population growth and suburban expansion', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, eds, *London, 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (Harlow, 1986), pp. 48–9; J. Boulton, 'London, 1540–1700', and L. Schwarz, 'London, 1700–1840', both in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, pp. 316–17, 644, 650–1; J. Black and R. Porter, eds, *The Penguin Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century History* (London, 1996), p. 117.

⁵³ P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550–1851*, rev. edn (Centre for Urban History Working Papers, 5, Leicester, 1993), pp. 150, 152, 158.

⁵⁴ A. Everitt, 'Country, county and town: patterns of regional evolution in England', in Borsay, *Eighteenth-Century Town*, pp. 97–111.

English urban system, which comprised about 800 settlements.⁵⁵ Historians have questioned the significance of such places either by arguing that they were too small to possess truly urban characteristics, or that during the course of the eighteenth century their numbers were rapidly declining as they were shaken out of the system by competition from the larger centres.⁵⁶ But examination of small individual centres has tended to confirm their basic urban characteristics,⁵⁷ and research at the local and national level has come to the somewhat surprising conclusion that small towns—though there were important regional variations—more than held their own during the eighteenth century,⁵⁸ so much so that, in Dyer's words in his contribution to this collection, 'one could claim that the period 1660–1800 saw the small town at the highest point of its development'. Urbanisation—at least in the later part of the early modern period—did not impact simply on an élite of settlements. Though growth and prosperity were unequally distributed, they nonetheless reached every part of the English urban system.

A town's position in the hierarchy depended in part upon its own internal dynamic—meeting the needs of the local population—but even more so on the range and quality of its external contacts. Jon Stobart develops this theme in his notion of 'three histories' based on town, county and country. Chester's high ranking derived from its double role as the fulcrum of a region whose dimensions varied according to the nature of the services provided, and as a 'gateway city' linking this region to the national and

⁵⁵ Langton, 'Urban growth and economic change', pp. 463, 466.

⁵⁶ Corfield, 'Urban development', pp. 221–2; Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, pp. 6, 20–1; P.J. Corfield, 'Small towns, large implications: social and cultural roles of small towns in eighteenth-century England and Wales', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 130–2; A.M. Everitt, 'Urban growth, 1570–1770', *Local Historian*, 8 (1968), 120; J. Chartres, 'Markets and marketing in metropolitan western England in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in M.A. Havinden, ed., *Husbandry and Marketing in the South West, 1500–1800* (Exeter, 1973), p. 64; J. Chartres, 'The marketing of agricultural produce', in J. Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. v, 1640–1750, part 2, *Agrarian Change* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 409–14.

⁵⁷ C.W. Chalklin, 'A seventeenth-century market town: Tonbridge', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 76 (1961), 152–62; C.W. Chalklin, ed., *Georgian Tonbridge* (Tonbridge, 1994); P. Styles, 'Henley-in-Arden in the seventeenth century', in P. Styles, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century West Midlands History* (Kineton, 1978), pp. 205–12; P. Ripley, 'Village and town: occupation and wealth in the hinterland of Gloucester, 1660–1700', *Agricultural History Review*, 32 (1984), 170–8; J. Johnson, *Stow on the Wold: A History of a Cotswold Town* (Gloucester, 1980), pp. 87–112; S. Watts, 'The unincorporated town and the role of the manor court in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 19 (1999), 30–47. Mary Carter, 'Town or urban society? St Ives in Huntingdonshire, 1630–1740', in C. Phythian-Adams, ed., *Societies, Culture and Kinship, 1580–1850* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 77–130, argues that St Ives (Huntingdonshire), with a population of 1,400–1,800 in the early eighteenth century, had a distinctly urban identity, but shared some of its urban occupational characteristics with a distinct group of 'largely agricultural' settlements in its immediate hinterland, which she designates as 'urban villages'.

⁵⁸ P. Clark, 'Changes in the pattern of English small towns in the early modern period', in A. Maczak and C. Smout, eds, *Gründung und Bedeutung kleinerer Städte im nördlichen Europa der frühen Neuzeit* (Weisbaden, 1991), pp. 67–84; Clark, *Small Towns*; P. Clark, 'Small towns, 1700–1840', in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, pp. 733–73; R.W. Unwin, 'Tradition and transition: market towns of the Vale of York, 1660–1830', *NHist.*, 17 (1981), 72–116; J.D. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation of the Cumbrian market town, 1660–1900', *NHist.*, 19 (1983), 128–209; M. Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system: the country towns of eastern Yorkshire, 1700–1850', *UHY* (1987), 1–21.

international world. London was the most spectacular example of an urban gateway, its extraordinary growth—as the capital of a relatively small nation—comprehensible only because of its position as a global metropolis.⁵⁹ However, even the smallest town acted in some manner as a gateway. Shops and fashionable recreational facilities, which brought to provincial society metropolitan and international goods and tastes, were to be found not only in a Chester and Warwick, but also, as Dyer shows, in many small towns, albeit on a lesser scale and in a less sophisticated form.⁶⁰

Given this access role, the quality of communications with the outside world was crucial to any town. Small centres would benefit greatly if they were on an important transport artery, and a number acquired a specialist function as a road, river or canal town. Conversely, the most serious threat to a small town's existence was if it became cut off from the regional and national communications infrastructure. It was at this point that the inherently competitive character of the urban system would come into play, pushing out those settlements unable to connect their localities effectively with the outside world. That said, it should be remembered that the forces of competition were balanced by those of complementarity, and that within an urban hierarchy the greater centres have a self-interest in sustaining the existence of the smaller ones.⁶¹

Urban rivalry was not only an economic matter but also a cultural and political phenomenon. When Liverpool constructed an impressive new Exchange in 1749–54, it did so in obvious emulation of its great west-coast competitor Bristol, to the point of employing John Wood, the architect responsible for the Bristol Exchange, built in the early 1740s. The decision to reconstruct Warwick in a fashionable classical style after its fire in 1694 was in part, as Borsay suggests, an attempt to steal a march on its regional rivals; and later its decision to demolish the converted inn where the corporation met and build a new town hall (c.1724–1730), complete with assembly room for the polite clientele, was all too obviously a response to Worcester's impressive new hall, also containing an assembly room, built in 1721–3.⁶² In a similar vein 'inter-urban rivalry was a dominant feature', as Sweet demonstrates in this volume, in the compilation of town histories in the eighteenth century. Recent years have seen a growing research focus on the 'superstructural' features—religion, politics and culture—of urban life, part of a widening understanding that the impact of urbanisation cannot simply be assessed in quantitative terms. It is widely recognised that from the late seventeenth century there was a surge of investment in the cultural infrastructure of English

⁵⁹ R.J. Johnston, *City and Society: An Outline for Urban Geography* (Harmondsworth, Middx, 1980), pp. 80–5; Sacks, *Widening Gate*, esp. pp. 1–4, 11–12, 357–8; P. Borsay, 'London, 1660–1800: a distinctive culture?', in P. Clark and R. Gillespie, eds, *Two Capitals: Dublin and London, 1500–1840* (London, 2001).

⁶⁰ See also M. Reed, 'The cultural role of small towns in England, 1600–1800', in Clark, *Small Towns*, pp. 121–47.

⁶¹ For the urban system in the north-west of England, see J. Stobart, 'Regional structure and the urban system: North-west England, 1700–1760', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 145 (1995), 45–73; J. Stobart, 'The spatial organization of a regional economy: central places in North-west England in the early-eighteenth century', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (1996), 147–59.

⁶² Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 105–6, 109.

provincial towns. However, measuring the impact of this has proved more problematic. Was it confined to certain types of towns, such as resorts and higher-ranking settlements, or did its effects permeate the entire urban system?⁶³ In this collection Stobart, Borsay and Sweet reveal the impact on larger towns, but Dyer's account suggests that small centres were also affected.

How did cultural change affect the different social orders? The cultural apparatus of towns was certainly upgraded to service the needs of the fashionable élite, but did the middling and lower orders also share in the process of enrichment?⁶⁴ If they did so, was it simply by aping the polite norms of their superiors, or by generating cultural forms specific to themselves? And, in a related set of questions, were provincial towns simply taken over by a generalised 'Enlightenment' style emanating from the Continent and mediated through London and the nation's country houses; or did the local centres use their growing economic wealth to sustain and develop an independent urban identity—in Jonathan Barry's words, was the cultural renaissance genuinely civic or merely urbane?⁶⁵ There can be no simple answers to these questions, not least because experiences varied between—and indeed within—specific communities. Borsay shows that a county town like Warwick was deeply influenced by the tastes of metropolitan and gentry society, whereas Sweet demonstrates how the upsurge in urban history writing was an expression of civic consciousness and independence, and Stobart argues that in the case of Chester's retail sector 'links with London had a profound effect', but architecturally 'the corporation seems to have been reluctant to abandon Chester's most characteristic feature—the rows—in pursuit of a national urban aesthetic'.⁶⁶

The political and religious impact of urbanisation must be read in equally problematic and ambivalent terms. In part this stems simply from issues of documentation and historiography. Historians' attention has focused heavily on incorporated towns

⁶³ P. Borsay and A. McInnes, 'The emergence of a leisure town: or an urban renaissance', *Past and Present*, 126 (1990), 189–202; J. Looney, 'Cultural life in the provinces: Leeds and York, 1720–1820', in A.L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J.M. Rosenheim, eds, *The First Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 483–510; J. Stobart, 'In search of a leisure hierarchy: English spa towns and their place in the eighteenth-century urban system', in P. Borsay, G. Hirschfelder and R.-E. Mohrmann, eds, *New Directions in Urban History: Aspects of European Art, Health, Tourism and Leisure since the Enlightenment* (Münster, New York, München, Berlin, 2000), pp. 19–40; L. Schwarz, 'Residential leisure towns in England towards the end of the eighteenth century', *UH*, 27 (2000), 51–61.

⁶⁴ J. Barry, 'Popular culture in seventeenth-century Bristol', in B. Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1988), pp. 59–90; J. Beckett and C. Smith, 'Urban renaissance and consumer revolution in Nottingham, 1685–1750', *UH*, 27 (2000), 31–50.

⁶⁵ R. Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion in Enlightenment England', in Borsay, *Eighteenth-Century Town*, esp. pp. 251–2; J. Barry, 'Provincial town culture, 1640–1780: urbane or civic?', in J.H. Pittock and A. Wear, eds, *Interpretation and Cultural History* (London, 1991), pp. 198–233; P. Borsay, 'The London connection: cultural diffusion and the eighteenth-century provincial town', *London Journal*, 19 (1994), 21–35.

⁶⁶ A. Brown, ed., *The Rows of Chester: The Chester Rows Research Project* (London, 1999), pp. 95–113, charts substantial changes between 1670 and 1830 to the architectural appearance of the medieval Rows, as many of the properties within them were 'classicized', but nonetheless 'the core of the system remained, protected by the Assembly [the governing body of Chester] who presumably recognised the commercial advantages of the Rows' (p. 113).

(generally the larger settlements, but only between a quarter and a third of all towns), and the 200 or so boroughs, many of which would also be incorporated, which returned roughly four-fifths of the membership of the House of Commons.⁶⁷ Naturally, these settlements have generated by far the richest and best surviving local and central documentation, and this—allied to historians' penchant for the study of 'high' rather than 'low' politics—has ensured that the bulk of towns remain, politically speaking, unexplored territory. For those privileged places that have been examined the evidence, perhaps not unsurprisingly given their integration into the state system, is of high levels of politicisation and conflict. The legacy of the Civil War was a long and bitter one, and there is plenty of evidence (for at least seventy years after the termination of that conflict) of towns being deeply divided along political and religious lines—and the two were intimately connected—divisions whose origins can be traced back to the 1640s.

Despite the accompanying dramatic turn-round in the membership of corporations during the 1680s and an endemic culture of 'rioting', there was no breakdown in urban governance. This raises the question as to whether there existed some notion of civic polity, hidden beneath the surface of political vicissitudes, which held together town government. Peregrine Gauci has hinted as much in the case of Great Yarmouth, Ian Archer has emphasised 'the continuing potency of a transcendent civic ideology' during the years 1540–1700, while Paul Halliday has suggested that by the 1720s mechanisms had been developed that allowed towns to accommodate conflict without jeopardising their internal stability, and David Clemis has argued that in Ipswich the corporation remained, until the late eighteenth century, an institution able to contain political tensions without compromising effective government.⁶⁸ It is tempting also to see the development of a polite urban culture as creating a sort of neutral territory which mitigated the divisive effects of political and religious tensions. However, as Sweet argues, there should be no pretence that towns became any less politicised; the growing voice of independency and resistance to oligarchic corporations, along with a dovetailing of local and national political agendas, ensured that provincial urban politics and governance remained highly contested territories.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Sweet, *English Town*, p. 33; J. Innes and N. Rogers, 'Politics and government, 1700–1840', in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, p. 530; J. Gregory and J. Stevenson, *Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 1688–1820* (Harlow, 2000), p. 82.

⁶⁸ Gauci, *Politics and Society*, esp. pp. 54–5, 255–63; I. Archer, 'Politics and government, 1540–1700', in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, p. 262; Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*; J.D. Clemis, 'Government in an English provincial town: the corporation of Ipswich, 1720–95' (PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 1999).

⁶⁹ Sweet, *English Town*, pp. 115–39; R. Sweet, 'Freeman and independence in English borough politics, c.1770–1830, *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), 84–115; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp. 223–343; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, esp. pp. 287–433; Innes and Rogers, 'Politics and government', pp. 555–68.

Irish and English towns: convergence or divergence?

Early modern England and Ireland were very different societies. Comparisons of the development of their two urban systems would, therefore, be expected to throw up contrasts. However, the obvious proximities and linkages between the two countries, their common membership (touched on in the first section of this introduction) of a peripheral archipelago on the Atlantic edge of Europe, ensured that such contrasts were matched by similarities. It seems appropriate then to sketch the extent to which the two systems, particularly as demonstrated in the contributions to this volume, converged or diverged from each other between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Within the archipelago as a whole the early modern trend towards urbanisation was striking. Even using de Vries' very restricted data—only settlements of over 10,000 people are included (which omits the vast majority of places that contemporaries considered towns)—the proportion of the urban population in the British Isles rose between 1500 and 1800 from two to sixteen per cent, compared to the remainder of Europe where the increase was only from six per cent to nine per cent.⁷⁰ On the one hand, both England and Ireland shared in this process of relatively rapid urbanisation; on the other hand, in the English case it started earlier and from a higher base, and was much more sustained than in Ireland. The net effect was that, whereas by 1800 England and Scotland (which surpassed England in the raw level of urbanisation in the eighteenth century) had joined the top tier of Europe's most urbanised societies (with about twenty per cent of their populations in towns of over 10,000 people), Ireland, with seven per cent, rested somewhere in the low to middling ranks, better than the northern and eastern 'peripheral' areas—Scandinavia, Austria–Bohemia and Poland—and better than Germany, but not quite as good as France, and decidedly behind Spain and Italy.⁷¹

Moreover, it is argued that though for a period in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Ireland was enjoying a phase of rapid urbanisation, more than tracking the Anglo-Scottish experience, its strong rural demographic growth ensured that well before 1800 Ireland's trajectory of urban development was diverging from that of England and Scotland. This trend was reinforced from the second quarter of the nineteenth century as Irish towns began to face a variety of serious problems. Increasing competition from mainland Britain led to the collapse of some traditional industries, such as woollen manufacture, and this erosion of the urban employment base was exacerbated by an influx of rural migrants seeking work. The result was that, though by 1890 Ireland had eighteen per cent of its population living in towns of over 10,000 people, Scotland now had fifty per cent, and England and Wales sixty-two per cent.⁷²

⁷⁰ de Vries, *European Urbanization*, pp. 30, 36, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39; Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change'; T.M. Devine, 'Scottish urbanisation', in T.M. Devine, *Exploring the Scottish Past: Themes in the History of Scottish Society* (East Linton, 1995), pp. 114–32.

⁷² Whyte, 'Scottish and Irish urbanisation', pp. 14–28; de Vries, *European Urbanization*, p. 46.

What factors account for the contrasting processes of urbanisation in early modern Ireland and England? England in the sixteenth century already possessed a relatively dense and mature urban system, which provided the nation with a reasonable if not even coverage of towns. In large measure this was the product of a period of substantial new creations during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ireland also experienced a similar if shorter medieval phase of town foundations; however, these were heavily concentrated in the south-east of the country (south Leinster and east Munster), and only a small proportion of the new settlements developed proper urban functions.⁷³ Therefore, whereas in early modern England town growth and development could largely, if not exclusively, be accommodated within the existing urban system, in Ireland it necessitated a wholesale establishment of new settlements, many of them very tiny. This introduced an element of rawness and volatility to the Irish system, and Proudfoot, Crawford and Hood point to the high levels of market and urban creation and failure during the seventeenth century and beyond.⁷⁴

It may also be true that it was not until the eighteenth century that something approximating to an integrated urban system emerges in Ireland. That such a state of affairs pertained from an earlier point in time in England was due not simply to the established character of the national urban network, but also the impact of London's dramatic growth from the early sixteenth century, so that by 1700 the country's towns *en masse* were engaged in servicing the metropolis's monstrous appetite for food, fuel, raw materials and people.⁷⁵ The great expansion of Dublin—by 1700 it had reached almost 60,000 people (and was probably the second city in the archipelago), and by 1800 it possessed about 180,000 inhabitants—must have had a similar effect on eighteenth-century Ireland. However, as indicated earlier in this introduction, it has been argued that from about 1760 the city's growth slowed down compared with the acceleration in Ireland's rural population. Moreover, by this stage in England the whole notion of an urban network held together by a dominant 'primate city' was being challenged by the growth of major industrial towns and ports in the midlands and north, leading to the development of a more multi-centred and pluralistic system.⁷⁶ This was a process which in Ireland was prefigured, as Crawford demonstrates, in the development of pre-modern Ulster, but which came to fruition only with the large-scale industrialisation and rapid growth of Belfast in the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁷³ H. Swanson, *Medieval British Towns* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 6–21; C. Dyer, 'Trade, urban hinterlands and market integration, c.1300–1600: a summing up', in J.A. Galloway, ed., *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, c.1300–1600*, Centre for Metropolitan History Working Papers, No. 3 (2000), pp. 103–9; B.J. Graham, 'The towns of medieval Ireland', in Butlin, *Development of the Irish Town*, pp. 28–60; T.B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), chapter 5.

⁷⁴ See also R. Gillespie, 'Small towns in early modern Ireland', in Clark, *Small Towns*, p. 151.

⁷⁵ E.A. Wrigley, 'A simple model of London's importance in changing English society and economy, 1650–1750', *Past and Present*, 37 (1967), 44–60; J. Chartres, 'Food consumption and internal trade', and M.J. Kitch, 'Capital and kingdom: migration to later Stuart London', both in Beier and Finlay, *London, 1500–1700*, pp. 168–96, 224–51.

⁷⁶ Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, pp. 10–11.

Though the two countries' urban systems displayed elements of difference and divergence, there were also salient similarities by the eighteenth century: a great capital that far outstripped its nearest provincial rival (though in London's case the gap was always much greater), a middling tier of religious and secular administrative centres and successful port cities, and a mass of small towns that comprised by far the bulk of the urban system. In respect of this last sector, the papers by Hood for Ireland and Dyer for England suggest that in both countries the long eighteenth century was the golden age of the small town, and that—whatever the longer-term effects—urbanisation and modernisation did not in the short term lead to the demise of the generality of tiny settlements. In fact, in both countries similar economic forces were at work in this period, which tended to a measure of convergence in their urban systems: the quickening pulse of internal and external trade; the rapid growth in the urban tertiary sector (consumer goods, shops, professional services, leisure and so on)—something evident in the papers by Barnard, Borsay, Dyer and Stobart; and the multifarious and increasingly busy trading links between the towns of the archipelago, which saw Whitehaven coal shipped to Dublin, which took Irish linen through Dublin to Chester and London, and later through Belfast to Liverpool, and which facilitated the huge transfers of agricultural produce (particularly after the repeal of the Cattle Acts in 1758–9) between Irish and English markets and fairs.

Given such links it is tempting to reject the notion of separate national urban systems, and attribute any measure of convergence to the emergence of an integrated system that stretched across the entire archipelago (including Wales and Scotland).⁷⁷ However, in the period when the Cattle Acts (1663, 1671) and Provisions Acts were in operation, restricting the trade in agrarian products with the British mainland, there is strong evidence that the developing Irish urban market network concentrated its overseas trade on Europe and the British Empire. Moreover, whatever the level of contacts between English and Irish towns, the nature of these exchanges and the predominantly agricultural profile of the Irish economy (Ulster excluded), compared with the increasingly industrial component in the English one, ensured that the character and potential of the two countries' urban development would be very different.

Comparison of the social and political structures of English and Irish towns is likely to reveal contrasts rather than wholesale divergences. 'Ethnic' distinctions within and between towns were likely to be much stronger in early modern Ireland than England, with the former having to accommodate large-scale and recent waves of English and Scottish settlers who experienced only slow and limited assimilation with the indigenous population. That said, English towns were hardly unaffected by non-native migration; not only did eighteenth-century London have sizeable pockets of

⁷⁷ For Welsh and Scottish trade with Ireland see Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, pp. 137, 140, 141, 156, 162, 174, 411, 710; P. Jenkins, 'South Wales and Munster in the eighteenth century', *JCHAS*, 34 (1979), 95–101; J.G. Jenkins, *Maritime Heritage: The Ships and Seamen of Southern Ceredigion* (Llandysul, 1982), pp. 8–9, 16–17, 55, 97.

Scots, Irish, French Huguenots and Jewish migrants (by the 1780s the capital probably had over 20,000 Irish living predominantly in St Giles and the riverside parishes to the east of the Tower), but even a town like Bath had by the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries significant and socially diverse bodies of Irish and Jewish settlers.⁷⁸ In Irish towns the ethnic distinction was not only more marked numerically and spatially, but was also underpinned by fundamental divisions of religion, power and property.⁷⁹ The impact of the landowning élite on the establishment, planning and operation of Irish towns from the seventeenth century onwards was considerable, as is made clear in many of the contributions to this volume.

It is difficult to argue that this was the general experience in England, where towns enjoyed a large measure of self-government and independence. By and large England's ruling class did not locate their primary residences in or even close to towns; in this respect the case of Warwick was exceptional. This is not to say that the local aristocracy and gentry were not influential as consumers of urban products and services; nor is it to argue that they did not fight tooth and nail to control parliamentary borough elections. But the day-to-day government of English towns remained very largely in the hands of their native citizens, and even where there was gentry intervention for electoral purposes, this generally respected the citizens' independence, and involved some measure of reciprocity.⁸⁰ This notion of civic autonomy was the product of the long history and tradition that English towns enjoyed, and the growing strength of its middling orders during the early modern period. For Sweet these factors are manifested in England's earlier and stronger commitment to the production of printed urban histories, and in the greater involvement of the town's middling sort in the compilation of these. Not that the contrasts should be overdrawn: a theme which recurs in several of the Irish essays is the strength of the urban middle classes, not only the Catholic bourgeoisie in an historic city like Bradley's Kilkenny, but also the settlers in the new settlements founded in the eighteenth century, whose development, as Hood demonstrates in this volume and Proudfoot has done elsewhere, was the product not so much of seigneurial domination as of an alliance between landlord and tenant, with the latter given considerable freedom for manoeuvre.⁸¹

Barnard's study of the political culture of eighteenth-century Irish towns—with its emphasis on urban assertiveness, the defence of ancient civic liberties against central government intervention (as at Kinsale), endemic internal conflict between Whigs and Tories and between freemen and oligarchs, and the centrality of ritual and polite

⁷⁸ S. Inwood, *A History of London* (London, 1998), pp. 273–4; G. Davis and P. Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele, 1996), pp. 51, 60, 101; M. Brown and J. Samuel, 'The Jewish community in Bath', *Bath History*, 1 (1986), 150–72.

⁷⁹ O'Flanagan, 'Urban minorities and majorities'; Dickson, 'Catholics and trade'.

⁸⁰ Sweet, *English Town*, pp. 59–62; Gauci, *Politics and Society*, esp. pp. 253–4, 257–8; Patterson, *Urban Patronage*, esp. pp. 233–5.

⁸¹ Proudfoot, *Urban Patronage*, pp. 297–328; Graham and Proudfoot, *Urban Improvement*, pp. 42–52.

sociability as forms of political expression—outlines a territory familiar to historians of post-Restoration English towns, and would suggest that there was a growing convergence, at least in the larger and older centres, between the two countries' experiences. But there were fundamental differences that would in the long term undermine a common developmental trajectory. First, and perhaps most important of all, there was the relationship between towns and the English state. The point here is not that in general English metropolitan government intervened (directly, or indirectly through Dublin) either more or less in the running of Irish than English towns; but rather that the underlying context of the relationship between state and town was different because of Ireland's quasi-colonial status.

Nothing in the early modern English experience could parallel the extensive process of Irish town plantation and formation, enacted between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and facilitated by an English government and a Protestant rural landowning élite (which in the broadest sense could be considered a part of the English state), the central aim of which was to control and civilise. There were new towns in early modern England, but they were few in number, and their formation was economically rather than politically and culturally motivated; and though English regions possessed distinct identities they were not colonies—and English towns were not the agents—of a metropolitan city-state based in the Home Counties. Ireland of course possessed its ancient towns, such as the pre-Norman religious centres of Armagh, Kells and Kilkenny, and the Viking/Hiberno-Norse foundations/refoundations of Cork, Dublin, Waterford, Wexford and Youghal. But 'old' towns were relatively fewer than in England, where the vast majority of urban communities were long-established and deeply rooted in their regional societies, so that though they might mediate national and London influences, they also asserted the interests of themselves and their localities.

Second, and alongside the relationship between town and state, there was the religious factor. Whatever the short-term effects of the Reformation in England—and research suggests that the pace and experience of religious change varied a good deal from urban community to community⁸²—in the longer term Protestantism swept the board. Pockets of urban Catholicism might remain, and might occasionally be the target of mob activity, but—until large-scale Irish migration in the nineteenth century—they were on only a tiny scale. That said, during the seventeenth century deep religious divisions between varieties of Protestantism (crystallised in the Anglican/non-conformist divide) became endemic, and were capable of introducing serious social and political turbulence into the life of the town. However, it would be difficult to claim, whatever the fissures introduced into English urban society by the Reformation, that they matched the depth of those that emerged in Ireland. The Plantation new towns in

⁸² Collinson and Craig, *Reformation in English Towns*, p. 15; V. Harding, 'Reformation and culture, 1540–1700', in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, pp. 268–9; C. Cross, 'The development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull, 1520–1640', *NHist.*, 18 (1982), 230–8.

Ulster and Munster, founded between about the 1580s and 1630s, established in the urban network bastions (many quite literally bastions) of Protestantism which over the next two centuries evolved—as the beliefs of the countryside seeped in—an increasingly Catholic, and therefore divided character.

Bradley's study reveals how Protestantism failed in the Tudor and early Stuart period to take root amongst most of the people of Old English (and Catholic) Kilkenny, how the community became spatially zoned along confessional lines after the 1650s, and how after the Civil War and the 1688 Revolution a non-indigenous Protestant élite was imposed upon the city. The essays by Simms and Barnard reveal that during the eighteenth century accommodation and co-operation between the two sides was possible, and that the Protestant community was itself by no means politically homogeneous. But this can hardly obscure the overwhelming reality that the religious fault-line within Irish towns—and, as Barnard demonstrates, between town and country—was of a more fundamental nature than that to be found in their English counterparts; nor conceal the fact that it was the political character of Protestantism, its association with the English state, that made the divisions of faith so irreconcilable.

It is unsurprising that religion should be an area where the Irish and English urban experiences followed different paths during the early modern period. In the field of secular culture, divergence was less obvious. Urban élites in both countries were following a similar Enlightenment agenda. The contributions of Dyer and Stobart for England, and Barnard and Crawford for Ireland, demonstrate how during the eighteenth century towns came to accommodate a widening range of polite consumer and leisure facilities—fashionable shops, theatre, concerts, horse-racing, walks, assemblies, clubs and such-like—that enhanced their profile as centres of civility. This was reinforced by a common commitment—as is evident in the essays of Borsay, Hood and Simms—to upgrading the urban fabric through the adoption of new building materials, classical architecture, street improvement and planning. The pace and manner in which these developments impacted on the two countries would undoubtedly have varied—the wealth of English towns ensured that change came earlier and penetrated deeper, whereas the newness of Irish towns provided greater scope for forces such as planning—but the common civilising and improving agenda is clear enough. That there was such a convergence in approaches might be attributed to the cultural power exerted over provincial towns by powerful metropolitan centres, with Dublin itself acting as something of a channel for London ideas. However, this underestimates the capacity of provincial centres to look beyond the metropolises for inspiration. Above all, it ignores the wider European influences at work, and the increasing engagement with and involvement of the British Isles as a whole in the cultural life of the Continent.

Any conclusions about the comparative development of English and Irish towns in the early modern era must, given the limited research into the subject, be of a highly tentative nature. The essays in this volume do, however, suggest that there is no simple answer to the question, were the urban trajectories of the two countries converging or

diverging? Their geographical proximity and their occupancy of an archipelago at one and the same time on the edge of Europe but at the centre of a rapidly evolving inter-continental community that stretched across the Atlantic and into the expanding territories of the British empire, encouraged a high level of interaction and a commonality of experience. To some extent this was reflected in the way both countries (along with Scotland) were by the eighteenth century experiencing levels of urbanisation well above the European norm. Both countries possessed urban systems that bore more than a passing resemblance to each other, not least in the presence of a large primate city, and a mass of small but relatively successful towns; both countries were part, by choice or otherwise, of a four-cornered economy and polity in which a seemingly inexorable—if uneven, unequal and by no means inevitable—process of integration was underway, and which towns played a critical part in facilitating; and in both countries cultural change amongst the élite was being driven by a shared Enlightenment agenda, which towns played a critical part in nurturing and disseminating.

However, these forces for convergence were temporarily located; it is arguable that they were at their strongest in the long eighteenth century, had been much weaker before this time, and by the early nineteenth century were losing much of their impact (begging the question for nineteenth-century historians, why this should be the case?). Moreover, they were counterbalanced by forces which tended towards divergence. Ireland and England might occupy a similar geographical space, but there are considerable environmental differences between them, and proximity can generate tendencies that accentuate rather than mitigate differentiation. During the early modern period the patterns of town creation and expansion—England accommodating growth in a predominantly ‘old’ system, Ireland channelling it into a largely ‘new’ one—were markedly different in the two countries. Moreover, their contrasting responses to industrialisation were to ensure that in the long run the two countries also experienced very dissimilar patterns of urbanisation. The quasi-colonial status of Ireland within the British polity, and the refusal of the majority of its peoples to embrace Protestantism, were also bound to place a severe brake on any tendency towards the merging of the social, political and cultural character of English and Irish towns. Further research will be necessary to test the model of convergence and divergence sketched in above. However, it is probable—given the growing volume and complexity of contacts between Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England during the early modern period, which the essays of Stobart and Crawford allude to—that for such a model to carry conviction it will have to broaden its remit to investigate urban networks throughout the archipelago.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
<i>Cal. S. P. Ire</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland</i>
HC	House of Commons
JCHAS	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
JRSAI	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
KTCM	Records of the Corporation of Kells, 1685–1787: NLI MS 25446, 8 vols
LPK	C. McNeill, ed., <i>Liber primus Kilkenniensis</i> (Dublin, 1931)
NA	National Archives [Dublin]
NHist.	<i>Northern History</i>
NLI	National Library Ireland
<i>Parl. Gaz.</i>	<i>The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland</i>
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RO	Record Office
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UH	<i>Urban History</i>
UHY	<i>Urban History Yearbook</i>
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>

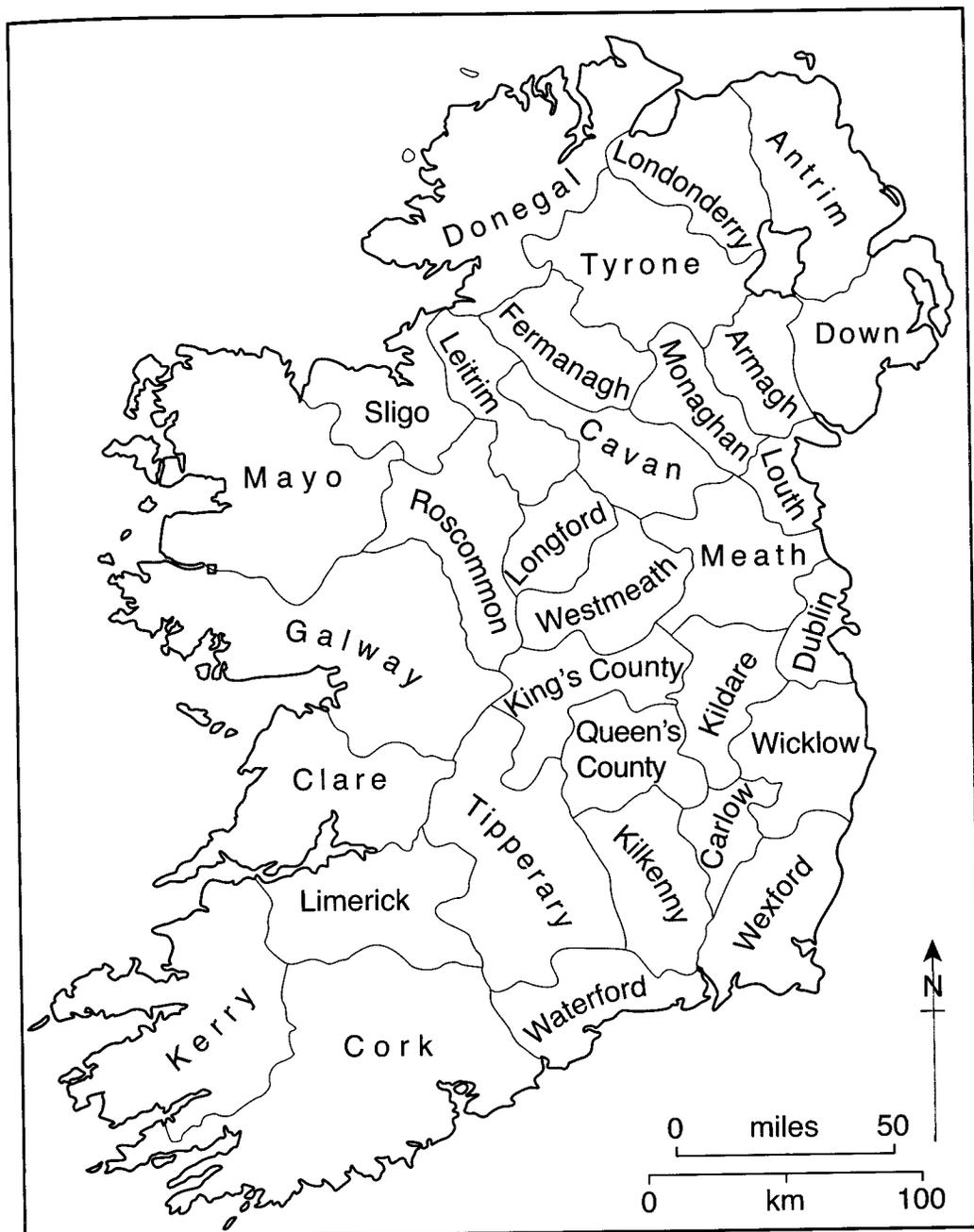


Figure 0.1. Ireland: county map.

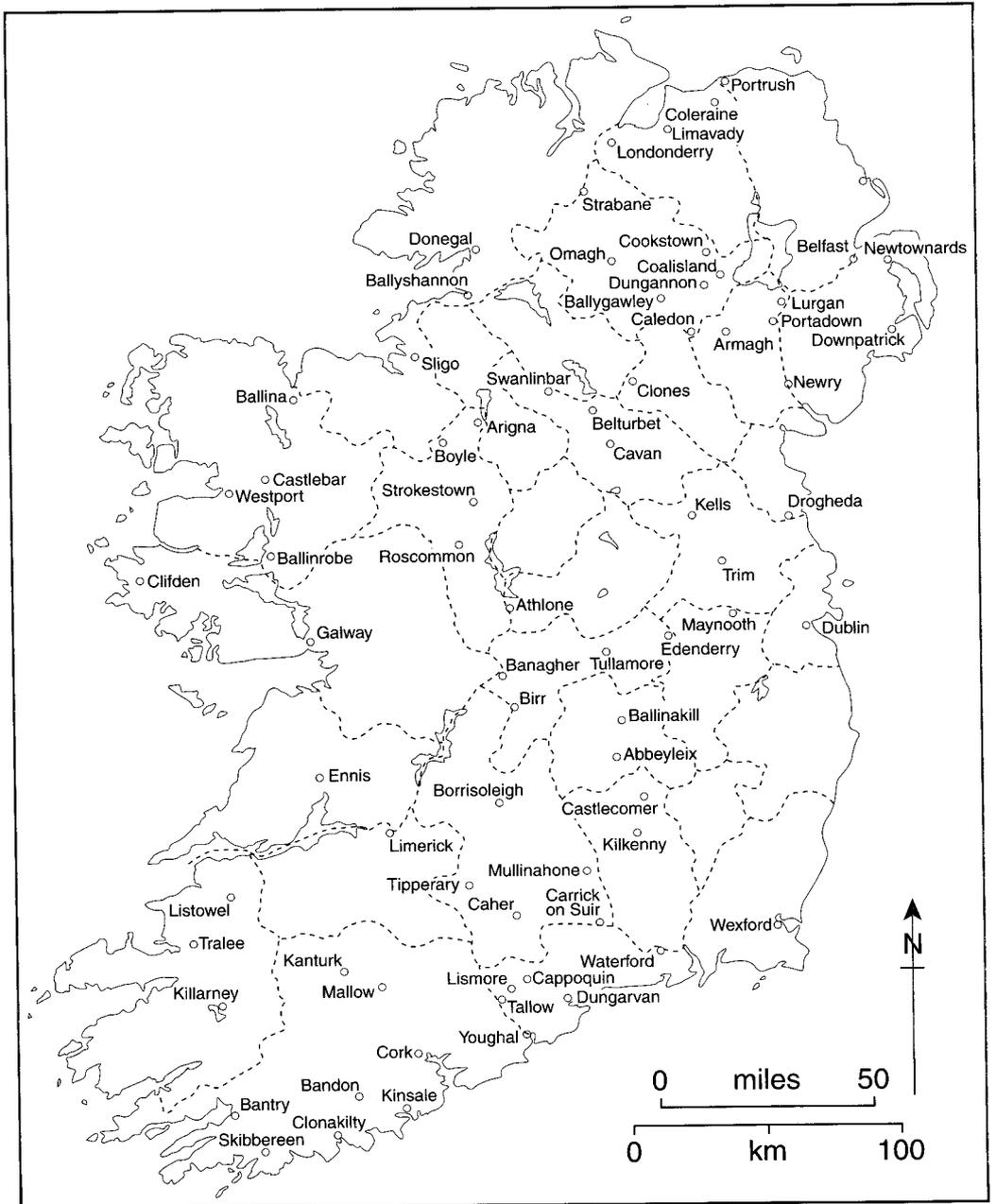


Figure 0.2. Ireland: places mentioned.

