

The Cultures of Eighteenth-Century Irish Towns

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Impressions of Irish towns

THE BROTHERS BOATE DID NOT THINK MUCH of Irish towns. In the 1640s, they surveyed the urban scene. Galway, Waterford, Limerick, Cork, Drogheda, Kilkenny and Bandon were praised as ‘passable and worthy of some regard both for bigness and handsomeness’.¹ The remainder could not compare even with ordinary English market towns. This theme—of likening Irish settlements, to their detriment, with English (or continental) equivalents—continued over the next century. In the interval more towns had been founded and incorporated; others had been enlarged and improved. Yet the typical traveller not only rode along well-trodden ways but seemed to see through the eyes of predecessors, and certainly wrote in the same language. Itinerants customarily visited the main ports, such as Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Limerick, and smaller townships. Visitors were also fed and watered at country seats. They requited this hospitality by eulogising what their public-spirited hosts had accomplished, whether on their farms or in model towns.² This chorus of praise was swollen by occasional Irish voices. The younger Sir Richard Cox, for example, bruted abroad his own achievements at Dunmanway in County Cork.³ This tendency to applaud individual initiatives simplified

¹ G. Boate, *Irelands Naturall History* (London, 1652), pp. 9–10.

² J. Beeverell, *Les délices de la Grande Bretagne* (Leiden, 1727), vol. viii, pp. 1506–35; E.P. Shirley, ‘Extracts from the journal of Thomas Dineley, esq.’, *JRSAI*, 4 (1856–7), 143–6, 170–88; 5 (1858–9), 22–32, 55–6; 7 (1862–3), 38–52, 103–9, 320–38; 8 (1864–6), 40–8, 268–90, 425–46; 9 (1867), 73–91, 176–202; F.E. Ball, ‘Extracts from the journal of Thomas Dineley, esq.’, *JRSAI*, 43 (1913), 275–309; J. Dunton, ‘The Dublin scuffle’ in *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (London, 1818), vol. ii, pp. 492–639; Dunton’s letters printed in E. MacLysaght, *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* (Cork, 1939), pp. 321–90; J. Loveday, *Diary of a Tour in 1732 through Parts of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1890); A. de la Mottraye, *The Voyages and Travels* (London, 1732), vol. iii, pp. 289–95; *Richard Pocock’s Irish Tours*, ed. J. McVeagh (Dublin, 1995); *A Tour through Ireland in Several Entertaining Letters* (London, 1748); J. Verdon’s tour, copies in BL, Add. MS 41769; Cardiff Central Library, MS 4.3.70.

³ *A Letter from Sir Richard Cox, Bart. to Thomas Prior, Esq.* (Dublin, 1749); *A Letter from Sir Richard Cox, Bart. to the High-Sheriff of the County of Cork relative to the present state of the Linen-Manufacture in that County* (Dublin, 1759), pp. 16–18, 35–8.

the processes through which both the rustic and urban environments were altered by attributing most to the endeavours of public-spirited improvers. In addition, these chorographers tended to take the landed at their own high estimates. Country gentlemen were depicted as uniquely the agents of civility, with culture and refinement diffused from their holdings. In this spirit, even modest urban improvements which forwarded Anglicisation and prosperity were more likely to be traced back to the culture and refinement of country mansions, than to the distinctive values of municipalities and their leading citizens.

A century after the Boates toured the island, an army officer, Adolphus Oughton, made his progress through the provinces. Ballyshannon, where for a season he was stationed, was described as an ordinary little town of a single street, possessed of little or no trade. The town of Donegal was in 'wretched condition', again lacking trade; Killybegs was peopled entirely with 'barbarians'; Limavady, 'poor and ill-built'; Loughreagh, 'a small, dirty, ill-built town'; the county town of Roscommon was similarly derided. Oughton most witheringly dismissed those places, the mean appearance of which mirrored (he supposed) the poverty and primitivism of their inhabitants. Nevertheless, some otherwise uninspiring spots—such as Augher in County Tyrone, although 'a poor little town'—were redeemed by a single presence. The bishop of Clogher, John Stearne, had made it his home. Stearne's learned talk and unaffected hospitality charmed Oughton. The bishop, rather than expose his guests to the hazards of the local inn, housed them at his own simple residence. At the same time, he compensated the Augher innkeeper for loss of custom with an annual allowance of £40.⁴ That Augher already possessed such an amenity suggested that it was perhaps not as benighted as Oughton implied. Experienced travellers alternated between surprised pleasure and horror at the state of Irish hostelryes.⁵

Oughton, like the Boates before him, serves to introduce outlooks and vocabulary common among Hibernian perambulators. In general, the modern, regular and 'rational' were approved. Before the late-eighteenth-century growth of romantic sensibilities, the ruined or antique were rarely admired. Oughton followed the convention by which externals could be read as signs of inner merit. An orderly look to a town was thought to denote regularity in its government and the worth of leading inhabitants. Conversely, the run-down and chaotic connoted human failings. So much was concluded by a traveller who halted at Newcastle in County Limerick in the 1750s. There, dirt and sloth struck the sightseer most forcefully.⁶ Yet, Oughton and his kind found some towns to commend. Size usually helped: Galway, Sligo and Strabane possessed amenities missing in smaller communities; Ennis and Philipstown were each viewed as 'a pretty, neat little town'.⁷ This response to Philipstown attested to the success of its

⁴ National Army Museum, memoir of A.J. Oughton, MS 8808.36.1, pp. 42–4, 52, 59, 77, 82, 86.

⁵ S. Derrick, *Letters written from Leverpoole, Chester, Corke, the Lake of Killarney, Dublin* (London, 1767), vol. II, pp. 46, 52, 58–9, 81–2.

⁶ Friends' Historical Library, Dublin, diary of Joseph Wight, 1752–4, s.d. 13 Jan 1753.

⁷ B. Ó Dálaigh, *Ennis in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1995).

former owner, Lord Molesworth, in beautifying it according to Dutch taste.⁸ Ennis had responded to a longer process as locals, such as the Bindons, profited from the disengagement of the nominal proprietor.⁹ Leading burgesses strove to advance the trade and smarten the look of their domicile. Laboriously they attended to the minutiae of market regulation, public hygiene, roads, pavements and lights.¹⁰

Whatever might be contended about the value of enlightened proprietors eager to invest in their urban estates, towns—if they were to survive and thrive—needed more (and more active) inhabitants. By the 1720s, general merchants proliferated in the provinces. When a Church of Ireland incumbent in Kerry died in 1760, his principal account was with a shopkeeper in the nearest town, Tralee, to whom a substantial £75 19s. 3d. was owed.¹¹ Accounts had also been kept with a local apothecary and a wine merchant. These traders attracted custom primarily from the middling and labouring sort, both within and beyond the immediate town, rather than from the landed.¹² They retailed cheaper and sometimes locally-made versions of what the modish acquired in Dublin, London or Paris. Provincials still bought at fairs and from peddlers. Nevertheless, permanent shops added to the role of the town as bridge between the remote metropolis, even the exotic empire, and the backwoods. Shopping was becoming quintessentially an urban activity. Unfamiliar goods were not all that these places offered. There, too, novel experiences and ideas were to be had.

This multiplicity of services and goods was one ready reckoner of what distinguished a town. However, just what other denominators counted varies from England to Ireland and from eighteenth-century travellers to modern analysts. Stringent criteria, such as functions or population, which define towns in England, are relaxed in Stuart and Georgian Ireland. Tests which enable 725 communities in eighteenth-century Ireland to be termed towns recognise underdevelopment and the thin spread of people.¹³ Qualitative as much as quantitative evaluations increasingly suggest what

⁸ Historic Manuscripts Commission, *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections*, VIII (London, 1913), pp. 273, 369–70; F. O'Kane, "'Mixing foreign trees with the natives": Irish demesne landscape in the eighteenth century' (unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Dublin, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 51–2; D.M. Beaumont, 'The gentry of the King's and Queen's counties: Protestant landed society, 1690–1760' (unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1999), vol. II, p. 9.

⁹ Ó Dálaigh, *Ennis*; C. Ó Murchada, 'Ennis in the seventeenth century', *The Other Clare*, 8 (1984), pp. 65–8.

¹⁰ B. Ó Dálaigh, ed., *Corporation Book of Ennis* (Dublin, 1990); K. Milne, 'The corporation of Waterford in the eighteenth century' in W. Nolan and T.P. Power, eds, *Waterford: History and Society* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 331–46.

¹¹ NA, Herbert of Kerry MSS, M. 1854, executors' accounts for Rev. Arthur Herbert, 29 Oct 1760. Another shopkeeper, in an unspecified town, was owed £11 6s. 2d.

¹² T.C. Barnard, 'The world of goods and County Offaly in the early eighteenth century', in W. Nolan and T.P. O'Neill, eds, *Offaly: History and Society* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 371–92.

¹³ R. Gillespie, 'Small towns in early modern Ireland' in P. Clark, ed., *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 148–65; B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot, *Urban Improvement in Provincial Ireland* (Athlone, 1994), pp. 22–3; W.J. Smyth, 'Towns and townlife in mid-seventeenth-century Co. Tipperary', *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1991), 163–8; I.D. 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.

towns meant to inhabitants and visitors. These factors have particular relevance to the Irish scene. In the sixteenth century, the foundation of towns had been regarded as essential if Ireland were to be pacified and enriched.¹⁴ Contemporary debates about the unique value of the town in introducing its inmates to fraternity, order, civility, industry and urbanity echoed through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland. By 1753 it was confidently stated that ‘corporations were in their institution, the best school for the vulgar to learn and to practise virtue and public spirit’. Under the uncorrupted arrangements, they were the places ‘to enjoy liberty, power, pre-eminence and distinction’. Only ‘new-fangled’ arrangements had corrupted them into agencies of ‘thralldom, slavery and ignominy’.¹⁵ The vitality of urban political awareness, clear from studies of pre-industrial towns in Britain and continental Europe, has less often been discerned in Ireland, at least outside Dublin.¹⁶

Structures and functions

In comparison with English towns, not only were their Irish counterparts smaller and more humble in aspect, they generally contained a simpler occupational structure. The ‘pseudo-gentry’ of professionals and affluent merchants, which many English country towns housed by the early eighteenth century, appeared more slowly and generally in attenuated form in the Irish provinces.¹⁷ By 1749, Sligo and Athlone possessed a sprinkling of the quality, living near rather than in the middle of the boroughs. Lower in formal ranking, but often more active in the affairs of the place, were functionaries of the state and church: tide-waiters, barrack-master, gauger, vestry-clerk, school-masters and mistresses. Merchants and shopkeepers as yet rarely specialised in a single commodity. Alongside them were a few—apothecary,

¹⁴ Gillespie, ‘Small towns’, pp. 149–50; R. Gillespie, ‘The origins and development of an Ulster urban network’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 24 (1984), 15–28; 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. 55–80.

¹⁵ ‘A Briton’, *The History of the Dublin Election in the Year 1749* (London, 1753), p. 9.

¹⁶ P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660–1722* (Oxford, 1996); P.D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: partisan politics in England’s towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998); T. Harris, ‘The parties and the people: the press, the crowd and politics “out-of-doors” in Restoration England’, in L.K.J. Glassey, ed., *The Reigns of Charles II and James VII and II* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 125–50; F. O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: the unreformed electorate in Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989); N. Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998); K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People: politics, culture and imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995). For Ireland: J.R. Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists: Dublin civic politics and Irish Protestant patriotism, 1660–1840* (Oxford, 1997). On the continent, see, for example: W.H. Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁷ P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: culture and society in the provincial town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989); P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700–1800* (Oxford, 1982); G.S. Holmes, *Augustan England: professions, state and society, 1680–1730* (London, 1982).

surveyor, cabinet-maker, silversmith, clock- or watch-maker—catering to diversifying wants.¹⁸

Smaller Irish towns may have been slower than English ones to develop complex societies and economies. Nevertheless, such diversification as did occur was evident first in the towns. The varied goods and services were matched by proliferating institutions, associations and amusements. Some of the innovations characteristic of the English urban renaissance after 1660 touched Ireland. Horse-races were sponsored by enterprising landlords and entrepreneurial corporations, such as Youghal and Belturbet. By the mid-eighteenth century, at least seventy-two locations have been noted where races were run.¹⁹ But the sport highlights some of the problems in deciding what was distinctive about urban recreations and culture. Race-cards with rich plates and prizes aimed to entrap the pleasure-bent indifferently from countryside and town. Sponsorship again raised the rival claims of proprietors and urban developers as the initiators. It was a pastime which, of its nature, smacked of the pasture and plain. The courses, located in or near towns, added to the large green spaces which survived in the midst of even the largest Irish towns throughout the eighteenth century. With these unbuilt tracts reaching deep into the boroughs, it was not yet necessary to plant something artfully sylvan in the city. Other than where walls still encircled a stronghold—increasingly ruinous by the eighteenth century—town and country imperceptibly merged.

Other urban diversions had equally commercial aims. Belatedly Ireland witnessed a secularisation of pilgrimage, consecrated now to corporeal not spiritual health. Spas close to Dublin, Wexford, Kilkenny and Limerick were intended to staunch the flow of health freaks to the better-favoured English resorts such as Epsom, Tunbridge and (above all for the fashionable and valetudinarian Irish) Bristol and Bath. In 1684, a doctor urged the God-given duty to develop these natural resources. Specifically he suggested how the springs close to the viceregal retreat at Chapelizod outside Dublin could be exploited. Among improvements would be two rows of tents flanking a green, as 'suitable to the occasions of the more modest of the modest sex'. Other facilities would be 'the divertisements of music, bowling, pins, lotteries, shooting . . . to disengage the mind from too serious or melancholic thoughts'.²⁰ By 1690, the mineral waters of County Wexford were being recommended to visitors from Wales, 'for several that have drunk of those do aver ours to be as good if not to exceed' those in

¹⁸ NA, M. 2466, census of the diocese of Elphin, 1749, pp. 147, 168–9, 396–421. Cf. Beaumont, 'Gentry of the King's and Queen's counties', vol. II, p. 15; L. Clarkson, 'Armagh, 1770: portrait of an urban community' in Harkness and O'Dowd, *Town in Ireland*, pp. 98–101.

¹⁹ Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, Lismore MSS, diary of second earl of Cork, s.d., 10 Mar 1655; Court book of Belturbet, s.d. 18 Apr 1738, formerly NA, M. 3572, now in Belturbet public library; Beaumont, 'Gentry of the King's and Queen's counties', vol. II, pp. 50–2; R. Caulfield, ed., *The Council Book of the Corporation of Youghal* (Guildford, 1878), pp. 365–6, 369–70, 436, 507; C. Maxwell, *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*, 2nd edn (Dundalk, 1949), p. 32.

²⁰ P. Bellon, *The Irish Spaw* (Dublin, 1684), pp. 50–1, 67, 74–6.

Britain.²¹ Apart from the shrewd commercialism of the entrepreneurs, patriots involved in popularising domestic products urged a resort to Irish watering places. In 1758, Dr John Rutty prefaced his compendium on Irish spas with the rueful admission that he was unlikely to introduce 'our own waters in opposition to the fashion, established with the growing luxury of the times, of preferring all foreign productions to our own'.²² Through an elaborate analysis of the properties of the different springs he sought to show that many Irish sources were more efficacious than Bath, Bristol, Spa or Aix-la-Chapelle.²³

Some of the first to be developed, such as Ballyspellan in County Kilkenny, failed to attract adequate custom owing to their rusticity. Used by the smart Veseys in the 1720s, Ballyspellan possessed a 'large dancing-room'.²⁴ But, perched in a 'cold mountainous tract, it was not so well provided with accommodation' as more genteel and beguiling Kilkenny.²⁵ From the 1720s, the development of Mallow in County Cork and Swanlinbar in County Cavan beguiled the polite and genteel. A programme of sociable diversions emulated Bath. How pallidly was suggested by a Quaker who, in 1753, stayed at Mallow. He praised the excellence of the hot wells, but added, 'notwithstanding all this, a mere shattered broken town, no repairs of the buildings that are scarcely able to keep up'.²⁶ By the 1760s, the popularity of the resort had pushed up house rents.²⁷ Races added to the fun: these spectacles were reputed to draw a vast concourse of ladies and gentlemen of fortune. Every evening they could repair to assemblies in the long room.²⁸ Popular among the fanciers of the turf from Clare, Limerick and Cork, this regular event gave a more raffish feel to Mallow.

Rakes may have been less in evidence at Swanlinbar in County Cavan. In 1742, when John Digby enquired about the facilities there on behalf of a daughter with a scorbutic disorder, he knew nothing of the place.²⁹ Yet a few years later, the baronet of

²¹ University College of North Wales, Dept of Manuscripts and Palaeography, Penrhos MSS, v. 438, W. Owen to J. Owen, 29 Jul 1690.

²² J. Rutty, *An Essay towards a Natural, Experimental and Medicinal History of the Mineral Waters of Ireland* (Dublin, 1757), p. v.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. xv, 137, 204, 287, 364.

²⁴ Loveday, *Tour*, p. 46; 'The Ballyspellan Spa', in Cambridge University Library, Hib. 3.730.1 (52); NLI, de Vesci MSS, J/14, Agmondisham Vesey to Sir T. Vesey, 27 Apr 1725; also *ibid.*, J/11, 11 Apr 1727; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Carte MS 227, fo. 72, Mountgarret to Barrymore, 3 Aug 1732; cf. TCD, MS 1178, fo. 23; J. Burgess, *An Essay on the Waters and Air of BallisPELLAN* (Dublin, 1725); P. Henchy, 'A bibliography of Irish spas', *Publications of the Irish Bibliographical Society*, 6 (1957), 98–111.

²⁵ Rutty, *Essay*, p. 177.

²⁶ Friends Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 16 & 19 June 1753; National Army Museum, MS 8808.36.1, Oughton memoir, p. 62; J. Buckley, 'The journal of Thomas Wright, author of *Louthiana* (1711–1786)', *County Louth Archaeological Journal*, 2 (1908–11), 185.

²⁷ Cork Archives Institute, PR 3, Crone of Byblox MSS, box 1, A. Worthevale to J. Crone, 18 May 1767, 6 Jun 1767.

²⁸ National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Puleston MS 3580E, E. Spencer to F. Price, 24 Jun 1746.

²⁹ NLI, Smythe of Barbavilla MS PC 445/13, J. Digby to W. Smythe, 19 Jun 1742.

Kells, Sir Thomas Taylor, was in the habit of drinking its sulphurous waters.³⁰ In the summer of 1758 the Irish lord chancellor, John Bowes, reported that he was just leaving Dublin to drink the Cavan waters.³¹ The regime which Edgeworth, a County Longford squire and also a veteran of Bath waters, encountered in 1767 was strict. Edgeworth, now an elderly widower, arrived with his daughter and a servant. Lodging and diet for a week for this party cost £5;³² a long room accommodated those who took the waters.³³ In 1769, Edgeworth returned for another three weeks, again with his daughter and now with four servants. The party lodged with Beatty or Batty, the entrepreneur who had developed the spa. Its attractions included public breakfasts and musical evenings in Batty's room at which healthy lemonade was served.³⁴ The Cavan resort may have been a feeble replica of Bath, but it was more easily accessible from Edgeworthstown. The affectations of the genteel company at their breakfasts would soon be satirised in verse. Miss Clackitt, Miss Screech, Miss Pert, Lord Snuffle and Mrs Bumshuffle jostled for the best seats.³⁵

It was useful to graft onto existing, often sickly, towns special functions. Medical tourism on its own could hardly support any sizeable conurbation. Mallow certainly received an extra fillip from the discovery and exploitation of its chalybeate springs in the 1720s, but it already had its markets and services.³⁶ What inhabitants and visitors valued in towns clearly varied. In the 1730s, Katherine Benson, a widow from the circle of Speaker Conolly, removed herself to the city of Derry. With an annual income of £40 she rented and furnished 'a little house' for herself and two sons. Its attraction was proximity to the school attended by the boys, and to the church.³⁷ Similar attributes were mentioned by a clergyman, William Preston, newly arrived in County Carlow. He enthused over his new home of Tullow, a market town garrisoned by a troop of cavalry. 'There is a good neighbourhood and most of the neighbouring clergy reside here for their convenience'.³⁸ Quickly enough Preston's delight evaporated. He hankered after Kilkenny or the English home counties. Tullow, he concluded, was famed chiefly for its onions. Otherwise, it seemed, the town acted as 'a nest for a swarm of the most infamous vermin in Ireland', perhaps because its inhabitants were overwhelmingly Catholics.³⁹ The Reverend Philip Skelton, ministering in remote County Donegal, craved rational

³⁰ NLI, Headfort MS F/3/24, T. Taylor to Sir T. Taylor, 30 Jul 1749, n.s. See too NLI, Hatch MS 11327/8, T. Barry to H. Hatch, 20 Jun 1759; Ruddy, *Essay*, pp. 363–401.

³¹ Chatsworth, Devonshire letters, box Jan–Oct 1758, J. Bowes to Devonshire, 21 Jul 1758.

³² NLI, Edgeworth MS 1533, Edgeworth account book, pp. 169–70.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 170–3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, MS 1535, Edgeworth account book, pp. 228, 232, 233–5.

³⁵ G.S. Cotter, *Poems consisting of Odes, Songs, Pastorals, Satyrs, &c.* (Cork, 1788), vol. 1, pp. 197–9.

³⁶ H.W. Gillman, 'The rise and progress in Munster of the rebellion, 1642', *JCHAS*, 1 (1895), 542; M. MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English migration to southern Ireland, 1583–1641* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 56–7.

³⁷ NLI, Smythe of Barbavilla MSS, PC 435, K. Benson to J. Bonnell, 4 Jul 1738.

³⁸ NLI, Southwell MS 730/11, W. Preston to E. Southwell, 3 Dec 1738.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, MS 730/19 & 20, same to same, 17 Dec 1738, 2 Mar 1740.

company which alone a town could provide.⁴⁰ Eventually Skelton escaped from this world that he had likened to Siberia, and lodged in Enniskillen with a physician. By the 1770s the ageing cleric divided his year between lodgings in the Fermanagh town of Fintona and wintering at the port of Drogheda. At Fintona, his landlord was a shop-keeper. Fellow-boarders included another clergyman and the local squire, for whom apparently the comforts of the small town outweighed the splendours of his seat at Ecclesville.⁴¹ Yet another Ulster cleric, the Reverend John Leathes retreated from the wild environs of Magilligan to the congenial purlieux of Hillsborough in County Down.⁴²

Those keen to live in provincial centres aspired to respectability or fretted about status. Almost always Protestants, they found not least among the attractions the denser concentrations of their co-religionists. In more placid periods, ease of access and more frequent church services in town than in the country pleased the devout. (The same may have been true for Catholics too.)⁴³ However, the allure of the town for the respectable extended beyond divine worship. The range of activities and amusements easily surpassed that in the countryside. The clerical family of Story regularly sallied forth from their country house into Cavan town and Crossdoney, where, in the 1750s and 1760s, plays, dances and assemblies enlivened the season. Crossdoney even boasted a club.⁴⁴ Army officers, customarily from England, on garrison duty in Ireland also attested to the varied urban world. Most could plunge happily into rural sports and the ample hospitality dispensed by the squirearchy. But soon enough these diversions palled. Humphrey Thomson, originally from Monaghan, disliked his quarters at Tullamore and was dismayed by Donoughmore, 'a sorry village'. Kilkenny, however, charmed him. It boasted what the other spots had lacked: the *beau monde*, which thronged into several open spaces of the city. The group to which Thomson gravitated was content to meet in public houses and refresh itself with porter and oysters. Its members were characterised by 'ease, elegance and naturalness'. What Thomson valued and discovered among this urban circle were 'ease, retirement, decency and tranquillity', and conversation 'lively, sensible and improving'.⁴⁵ These epithets echoed Oughton. At Strabane, for example, the latter had met 'several genteel people'. Their 'civility and industry' expressed themselves in arrangements, both physical and cultural, described as 'cheerful, comfortable and neat'.⁴⁶ For Thomson, as for many other sojourners in the country towns, his time at Kilkenny

⁴⁰ S. Burdy, *The Life of Philip Skelton*, ed. N. Moore (Oxford, 1914), pp. 117–18, 129.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141–3, 155, 169–71, 175.

⁴² Suffolk RO, Ipswich, de Mussenden-Leathes MSS, HA 403/1/6, 28, 29, 30, 49, J. Leathes to W. Leathes, 1 Jul 1719, 17 Aug 1719, 8 Oct 1719, 18 Mar 1726.

⁴³ W.P. Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford, 1907), p. 330.

⁴⁴ Bingfield, Co. Cavan, Story MSS, account book of J. Story, 1753–66.

⁴⁵ Bodleian, MS Eng. Hist. d. 155, Thomson memoir, fos. 38v, 40v.

⁴⁶ National Army Museum, MS 8808.36.1, Oughton memoir, p. 52.

was interspersed with spells in other, less desirable towns, the capital and the countryside. All had some consolations.

Lesser towns were liked as places where costs could be cut. The squire of Fintona, Eccles, may have shut up his own house and lodged with a shopkeeper in order to economise. Drogheda was viewed as a healthy and cheaper alternative to Dublin.⁴⁷ By the 1750s, Mountmellick and Portarlinton were similarly approved, not least because of their sober Protestant ethos.⁴⁸ The indigent but ferociously genteel Povey sisters eked out an existence in a series of lodgings in provincial towns including New Ross and Enniscorthy. The assembly and card rooms at Enniscorthy were occasionally visited by no less a figure than Lady Anne Hore.⁴⁹ For the Povey sisters, provincial obscurity was an unwelcome necessity. Their ambition was to return to the smart society of Dublin, but, without the funds, they sampled it only rarely.⁵⁰ Luckier were those able, thanks to family, friends and money, to participate in the several overlapping worlds of the city, town and country. Characteristic of this easy movement was the Reverend James Smythe, beneficed first in 'the cold country' of north Antrim and then in the wealthy living of Kells in County Meath. Smythe in his youth had been accounted a great traveller: justifiably, since he had reached Rome on a grand tour. Thereafter his circuit still embraced London and Dublin. Even when marooned in the north, he was stimulated by membership of a society of savants based in London but extending into Scotland and Ireland. At times, he seemed a caricature of the hard-drinking and worldly squarson. Much of his company came from the landed of the Route of north Antrim.⁵¹ But not only did he use the nearby towns of Coleraine and Portrush to provision his household, his clerical duties brought him regularly to Armagh.⁵² Once removed to Kells, he enjoyed a more extensive choice of country houses in the environs. Additional circuits were offered by his sizeable congregation of Protestants and by the borough.⁵³

⁴⁷ NLI, Smythe of Barbavilla MSS, PC 448, H. Crofton to W. Smythe, 17 Jul 1723, 15 Sep 1729; *ibid.*, PC 436, Mrs F. Crofton to same, 8 Jul 1727; E. O'Leary, 'The O'More family of Balyna in the County Kildare, by James More of Balyna, circa 1774', *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society*, 9 (1918–21), 321–2, 326.

⁴⁸ John Rylands Library, Manchester, Bagshawe MSS, B 2/3/244a, 247, 249, 252, 270, Lady Caldwell to S. Bagshawe, [1751], 9 Feb 1754; A. Caldwell to same, 25 Feb 1752, 14 Mar 1752. For Portarlinton: Beaumont, 'Gentry of the King's and Queen's counties', vol. II, pp. 25–6; E.P. Burrows, 'Portarlinton', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 6 (1858), 337–8; J.S. Powell, *Portarlinton, a planted town* (York, 1990).

⁴⁹ NLI, Smythe of Barbavilla MSS, PC 448, S. Povey to W. Smythe, 6 Aug 1748, 26 Oct 1748, 27 Jan 1753, 18 Dec 1763.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, same to same, 24 Jun 1758, 7 & 27 May 1760.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, PC 449, J. Smythe to W. Smythe, 2 Oct 1723, 2 Aug 1726, 6 Jul 1731; T.C. Barnard, 'Improving clergymen, 1660–1760', in A. Ford, J.I. McGuire and K. Milne, eds, *As By Law Established: the Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 147, 149–50.

⁵² NLI, Smythe of Barbavilla MSS, PC 449, J. Smythe to W. Smythe, 28 Jun 1728.

⁵³ For Kells: A. Simms, 'Kells' in J.H. Andrews and A. Simms, eds, *Irish Country Towns* (Cork, 1994), pp. 21–33; Royal Irish Academy, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1996).

Public life

Towns purported to offer diversified and morally uplifting societies. For Irish Protestants, worship was more regular in urban than in country churches. The denser congregation of Protestants reassured physically. Consciously conceived as citadels of the elect and industrious, towns—certainly in comparison with the surrounding countryside—harboured more Protestants. Back in the 1670s, Petty had reckoned that half the Protestants in Ireland were town-dwellers. At moments of panic, which recurred throughout the eighteenth century with a frequency not always appreciated, these larger numbers heartened the insecure. Thus, in 1762, Thomas Hutchins removed his family from their isolated habitation in west County Cork to the nearest township: Bantry. Hutchins' action recalled the flight of Protestants into the nearest towns in 1641 and 1689. Georgian Bantry was guarded by 100 soldiers. There, too, 'all the Protestant families of the county (were) to assemble'. Hutchins dramatically concluded, 'we should be glad to be all together to stick to each other to the last'.⁵⁴ Urban parishes offered spiritual and practical services. Their operations paralleled, and occasionally converged with, those of the civil community. Each, for example, furnished charity and education on a greater scale than in scattered and less populous rural areas. Each also catered to social needs. Yet each also betrayed the atomised structures of most Irish towns. Access to the chief benefits of the parish was necessarily restricted to its communicants. In the corporation, full citizenship—with rights and duties of political participation—was enjoyed only by freemen. Even among these privileged groups, cliques emerged. Parish activists were directed into a select vestry. The body of freemen was widely regarded as too large and unwieldy to be easily controlled. Better, it was thought, would be an inner knot of burgesses or aldermen, numbering typically about a dozen. Not only did full enjoyment of the privileges and responsibilities of the town as institution fall to a small minority, but its unique pleasures were reserved for those with the money to buy. Full participation was never freely bestowed. Yet, even for the poor, for religious dissenters and Catholics, towns had attractions unknown in the countryside. Chances of work and alms were greater. The curious and hedonists were drawn like moths by the lambency of the town. Spectacle abounded.

Much centred on the ritual year of the established—and other—churches; more arose from the civic calendar. Extra dates were added by the craft guilds and voluntary associations, such as the freemasons, the Friendly Brethren of St Patrick and the Incorporated Society. These festivities, although dedicated to conformists in state and established Church, could be savoured, at least vicariously, by many more. Those who processed from mayor-making or the allocation of the assize judge to pray in the parish church, robed according to office and degree, preceded by pompous emblems of their

⁵⁴ NA, Herbert of Kerry MSS, M. 1857, T. Hutchins to T. Orpen, 7 & 8 Apr 1762.

power, clearly differentiated themselves from the commonalty.⁵⁵ Assizes and quarter sessions, occasions when towns hosted the routines of the county, spawned ceremonies. Incorporated boroughs, although some existed only on parchment as a legal fiction to pack the Irish parliament with docile Protestants, annually selected office-holders and—less often or predictably—members of parliament. Many occasions generated excitement and attracted crowds running into hundreds. In 1715 and 1727, polls enticed about 250 freemen into the otherwise somnolent County Kildare borough of Harristown.⁵⁶ Elections resembled much else that happened in urban locations: the rural and urban met, often harmoniously, but sometimes in conflict.⁵⁷

Townsppeople, in voicing their concerns, developed a distinctive political culture. Urban institutions professed fraternity, but revered hierarchy. Large assemblies of freemen, deemed awkward, had their powers and meetings docked; frequently, however, the push towards oligarchy was resisted. Provincial boroughs saw movements which paralleled, and sometimes anticipated, those of Charles Lucas in mid-eighteenth-century Dublin. These encouraged political activism. Also, where a town was populous enough to sustain more than a single guild—as in Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Kinsale and Youghal—rivalries could erupt. Members were touchy about precedence and so alert to imagined (or real) slights. They vied to surpass one another in the public shows. With ample libations, these occasions could degenerate into bloody *mêlées*, the memories of which embittered for more than a season. At the same time, the prospect of fun drew participants and spectators from the countryside. In some cases, as at Kanturk in the 1730s or the Caldwells' Fermanagh properties, jubilees consciously linked town and country. Richard Purcell, the agent of the owners of Kanturk, the Percevals, had fostered textile-making. Its merits were proclaimed in an elaborate pageant. Floats depicted stages of the process and invoked the tutelary saint, Blaise. Also represented were other occupations of the area: salt-making and tobacco-rolling and -dressing. An estimated 2,000 thronged the square of Kanturk.⁵⁸ Early in the 1770s, the benevolent but eccentric Sir James Caldwell marshalled his tenants on their rare days of leisure. Like other killjoys, he dropped customary sports, notably horse-races, as being merely pretexts for drunkenness and mayhem.⁵⁹ Much symbolism was invested in the procession of Caldwell tenants which wound its way (joyously or wearily) from divine worship in Belleek through the featureless countryside to Ballyshannon. Fiddlers and pipers

⁵⁵ M. Mulcahy, ed., *Calendar of Kinsale Documents*, vol. 1 (Kinsale, 1988), p. 45; S. Pender, ed., *Council Books of the Corporation of Waterford, 1662–1700* (Dublin, 1964), pp. 36, 42, 311, 351; P.D. Vigers, 'Extracts from the old corporation books of New Ross, Co. Wexford', *JRSAL*, 5th ser., 11 (1901), 59.

⁵⁶ PRONI, Leinster Papers, D 3078/4/1, corporation book of Harristown, s.d. 8 Nov 1715, 22 Sep 1727.

⁵⁷ For English examples and an argument that there persisted an inherent antagonism between urban and rural well into the eighteenth century: C.B. Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: cultural ties and social spheres in the provinces, 1660–1780* (Manchester, 1999).

⁵⁸ BL, Egmont MSS, Add. MS 46982, fo. 98, J. Perceval to Lord Perceval, 11 Jun 1731.

⁵⁹ W.H.G. Bagshawe, *The Bagshawes of Ford: a biographical pedigree* (London, 1886), p. 335; Derrick, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 97–8; *A letter from Sir Richard Cox* (1749), p. 6.

sought to put a spring into the step of the trudging crocodile. Near Ballyshannon, a military band met the party.⁶⁰ Kanturk, Belleek and Ballyshannon, although nominally towns, were too small and too similar to the surrounding districts to breed a strongly urban culture.

Different was the larger town of Limerick. Every May, a sequence of rituals embodied the bucolic and urbane. The first of May, as a Quaker mordantly observed in the early 1750s, an 'old heathenish custom which ought to be broke and never renewed', was kept. A 'great maypole' was carried through the city, 'attended with great number of spectators'. Whitsun, in 1752 on 17 May, saw an even greater influx of country folk. 'Many thousands' of labourers, cottiers and husbandmen, regimented according to their 'several degrees of agriculture' and armed with the requisite props, processed through the streets.⁶¹ This array entertained bystanders, but amused Limerick craftspeople less. Clothiers and other traders asked the mayor to ban the farm workers from the parades. So great was the protest that the mayor belatedly complied. Uproar resulted in which one person was killed. The country visitors, infuriated by the prohibition, decided to process for a second time the next day. Inhabitants of counties Clare and Limerick 'joined together and were very particular in their representations of personating the several orders of husbandry'.⁶² What had perhaps been planned as an apt display of the interdependence of the town and its hinterlands had vividly reminded of the underlying rivalries between producers and suppliers. It could be that the waves from the countryside surged spontaneously through the city, impelled by the spring tides. But the alacrity with which they adopted their pageantry suggested guiding hands. Limerick, like any other county town or regional capital, attracted the squires of the adjacent shires. Moreover, some were struggling to wrest civic power from a supposedly corrupt oligarchy. These encounters resembled the numerous occasions when English and Welsh towns were similarly disturbed by country-dwellers.⁶³

Dean Charles Massy, director of these bids to recover ancient rights for Limerick's freemen, looked to the country gentlemen to assist. According to his recollection, the reform movement sprang from talk in 'a weekly club'. Whether this was the same as the Limerick and Clare Society, the latter became the vehicle of Massy's programme. The society spanned town and countryside. If much of its membership consisted of landed proprietors, it assembled regularly at a Limerick vintner's.⁶⁴ Massy in his own career and interests—an urban professional high in the church hierarchy but a country

⁶⁰ Bagshawe, *Bagshawes*, pp. 335–7.

⁶¹ Friends' Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 1 May 1752; M. Lenihan, *Limerick: its history and antiquities* (Dublin, 1866), p. 342.

⁶² Friends' Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 18 May 1752.

⁶³ Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 187–94; Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England*, pp. 67–70; Gauci, *Politics and Society*, pp. 129–72; B.W. Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: the gentry of south-west Wales in the eighteenth century* (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 125–34, 187–92; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 288–433.

⁶⁴ [C. Massy], *A collection of resolutions, queries, &c.* (Limerick, 1769), pp. 10, 16, 20.

landowner on his own account—shows the difficulty of disentangling the urban from the rural. He enlisted backers among the merchants and freemen of the municipality and from the farmers of counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary.⁶⁵ These reformers cared about the trade of the entire region. They aimed, too, to embellish the city with the fashionable adjuncts of respectability and politeness, notably promenades. Whereas Waterford, Cork and Kilkenny possessed them, Limerick did not.⁶⁶ To what extent these reformers, anxious to call in the old agrarian world to purify the corrupted town, orchestrated the elaborate parades can only be guessed. But, no less than the artful contrivances of Purcell in Kanturk or Caldwell at Belleek, those in Limerick spoke of impresarios.

Neighbouring gentlemen may have imported some of their tastes and preoccupations into the county towns such as Limerick. The willingness of country squires to disport themselves engendered another club—the Badger Society—which met in Limerick and sponsored theatrical performances there.⁶⁷ In these encounters, county grandees might sneer at the citizens. In the 1740s, Lady Theodosia Crosbie, on her way to visit the family of her new husband in the fastnesses of Kerry, was briefly entertained by a tradesman and his wife in the city. Derisive hoots greeted these well-intentioned but unpolished efforts. The hospitable but maladroit townfolk served as the butt of the fastidious. More appreciative was another visitor to Limerick in the 1760s. Samuel Derrick as master of ceremonies in Bath confidently arbitrated contemporary modes and manners. The dinner which he received from the sheriff, mayor and an alderman of Limerick was approved: ‘a table well served and furnished with excellent wines; . . . the company agreeable, sensible and well-bred’.⁶⁸ The 1750s allow glimpses into the associational and convivial circle of Limerick. The decade also marked the moment when classical ideals of rational and symmetrical building first spread into private projects for housing. Derived from continental Europe rather than contemporary England, these were incorporated into St John’s Square. Yet the uniform apartments hardly served as the urban *hôtels* of the regional aristocracy. Instead they accommodated town worthies in the style to which they now aspired.⁶⁹

The hybrid nature of a large town such as Limerick, at once attractive and repellent, owed as much to the garrison as to what the county élite introduced. So much was revealed by the morose Quaker in 1752. The May festivities continued with a series of military reviews. Especially on the red-letter days of church and state, the military

⁶⁵ *A letter from a free citizen of Limerick to his friend in Dublin* ([Dublin], 1760), p. 4.

⁶⁶ [Massy], *A collection of resolutions*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ W.S. Clark, *The Irish stage in the county towns, 1720–1800* (Oxford, 1965), p. 37.

⁶⁸ D. Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, ‘Three eighteenth-century letters of Lady Theodosia Crosbie’, *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, 17 (1984), 76–8; Derrick, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 5.

⁶⁹ NLI, Pery MSS, MS 16094a; Friends’ Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 20 Jun 1752; J. Frost, ‘The building of St. John’s Square, Limerick’, *Journal of the Limerick Field Club*, 3/9 (1905–8), 41; J. Hill, *The building of Limerick* (Cork, 1991), p. 72.

contingent was to the fore. The officers, once drink had been taken copiously, goaded those who failed to show the appropriate zest. In these provocative demonstrations, not only the excluded Catholics or dissenters were affronted, but members of the corporation with politics different from those of the aggressive garrison.⁷⁰ The soldiery unsettled as well as enriched and protected the places where they were quartered. At best, as at Limerick in 1752, they added splendour to the Prince of Wales' birthday. Led by eighty-one officers they had marched through the streets and then lined the city walls, which twice in the seventeenth century had seen a protracted defiance of the English monarchy. As the salvos reverberated across the Shannon, even the gloomy Quaker was cheered by these defenders of the English interest in Ireland.⁷¹ In a crisis, they would man the defences, and ensure that these bastions did not fall. In more relaxed times, they added to the prosperity, society and frenzy of the towns.⁷²

The parades in Limerick in the 1750s, ostensibly demonstrations of solidarity within the freeman community if not across the entire Protestant interest, exposed worrying tensions. These, it may be supposed, were common to most towns of any size. In the processions of 1753, the guilds 'showed themselves in as grand manner as possibly they could by a distinction . . . which they are very ambitious to uphold at certain times'. On a second day of street theatre, the separate trading companies strove 'to exceed what was passed . . . in a very exalted manner, all in ranks and files with glittering swords and firearms all day and till evening, continually marching'.⁷³ Jealousies between and within guilds, far from being defused by these licensed discharges, may have been deepened. Further, even those fraternal ideals to which the guilds subscribed often led to sibling squabbles. The internal workings of the provincial guilds in eighteenth-century Ireland are largely unknown. Other than the plausible suggestion that they retained an economic role longer than their English counterparts, the loss of routine records makes it hazardous to generalise about either their vocational or social functions.⁷⁴

The Masons' Company in Limerick busied itself between 1747 and 1757 about standards of workmanship. It also allowed convivial gatherings in which some country members could join. Henry Ievers, squire of Mount Ievers a few miles outside the city, happily participated.⁷⁵ The guild was one of the fourteen into which the craftsmen and

⁷⁰ T.C. Barnard, 'Athlone, 1685; Limerick, 1710: religious riots or charivaris?', *Studia Hibernica*, 27 (1993), 71–5; T.C. Barnard, *The Abduction of a Limerick Heiress: social and political relations in mid-eighteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 11–12, 18–19; A.J. Guy, *Oeconomy and Discipline: officership and administration in the British army, 1714–63* (Manchester, 1985), p. 41; *A True State of the Present Affairs of Limerick* (London, 1726).

⁷¹ Friends' Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 22, 23, 24 May 1752, 11 Jun 1752; 12, 14, 18 May 1753.

⁷² John Rylands Library, Manchester, Bagshawe MSS, B 3/1/3, 6, S. Bagshawe to C. Cauldwell, 5 & 12 Jul 1751; S.G.P. Ward, 'The letters of Captain Nicholas Delacherois, 9th Regiment', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 51 (1973), 7.

⁷³ Friends' Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 11, 12, 13 Jun 1753.

⁷⁴ C.D.A. Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom* (London, 1994); J.R. Hill, 'Corporate values in Hanoverian Edinburgh and Dublin' in Connolly, Houston and Morris, *Conflict, Identity and Economic Development*, pp. 114–24.

⁷⁵ Limerick Civic Museum, minute book, Limerick guild of masons, 1747–57, 14 Jan 1749, 19 Feb 1750.

freemen of the borough were organised. Fewer than the twenty-five of Dublin, the total in Limerick nevertheless surpassed the generally undifferentiated guild structures in the majority of Irish boroughs. For some members, the guild gave a ticket for entry into the civic mutuality of bargains and aid. If it was only a means to these material ends, then the commensality of the hall did not mean much. Yet, potentially each guild was itself a forum where serious matters could be aired.⁷⁶ Inevitably, perhaps, disagreements also surfaced. A refractory Limerick brother retorted to an injunction from the masons' officers, 'it would serve him to wipe his arse'. Another dissident was fined 20 shillings for insulting the master of the company.⁷⁷ Gradations existed within these fraternities: between the officers and the brethren; between the latter and the quarter brothers, usually Catholics, who paid for second-class membership; and between the free, the apprentices and the unfree.

Among the nominally equal, the obligation to array themselves and turn out for the civic jollities uncovered minute distinctions. Uniform dress did not preclude telling markers of status. Cloth of a finer quality or dyed a more desirable (because costlier) shade, grander boots, wig, nag or sword: all could be read by the knowing to denote either superiority or inferiority. Sometimes, the officers charged their extravagances to the whole corporation: a divisive practice, which was much resented. The Limerick Masons had no room of their own in which to meet. Instead their gatherings shifted between the premises of leading brethren. In 1755, the Limerick Masons, along with the other guilds, were to greet the itinerant lord lieutenant. Brethren were instructed to equip themselves with blue scarves fringed with white. Those reluctant to buy were reassured that there would be future occasions to don these smart accessories.⁷⁸ Members were also exhorted to purchase two standards which would be carried at the head of their phalanx. Although forty-two freemen had appeared at one meeting, no more than twenty-five now paid towards the banners.⁷⁹ The number of defaulters casts doubt on just how well such events unified guilds and corporations.

Politics

Towns had long been treated as seminaries for an English brand of civility. They were reserved for special treatment in the aftermath of the reconquests of 1649–52 and 1689–91. Their government and profitable trade became Protestant monopolies. Extra obstacles were set in the way of Catholics retaining property, especially in the larger ports. The beneficiaries united to preserve these favours. Otherwise, they were not

⁷⁶ E.B., *The Defence of the Whole Society of Wool-combers of the City and Liberties of the City of Corke* (Cork, 1722).

⁷⁷ Limerick Civic Museum, minute book, Limerick guild of masons, 1747–57, 2 Feb 1749; 12 Oct 1753.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1755.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 Oct 1753, 24 May 1755.

notably united. Of course, townspeople were not alone in being querulous and quarrelsome. But the excitability of the town, its inhabitants dwelling hugger-mugger, cannot be gainsaid. A problem is to decide which was the more typical of the borough: the angry explosions or placid routines. In the nature of the record, contentions leave traces. The prolonged passages during which little stirred should not necessarily be written off as proof of urban torpor. Since locals strained to avert contests, quiet may, paradoxically, indicate feverish politicking.

The lively political culture of towns can be illustrated from Bandon and Kinsale. These boroughs were often hailed as model Protestant settlements. Bandon, very much the creation of Richard Boyle, earl of Cork, the greatest planter in early-seventeenth-century south Munster, embodied the ideals of English and Protestant industry explicitly promoted in the plantations of Ulster and Munster. Its symmetry displayed the rationality championed by the new order.⁸⁰ Its inhabitants—overwhelmingly if not exclusively Protestant—were praised by Oliver Cromwell and victimised by James II and Tyrconnell.⁸¹ Its economy thrived, thanks to a fertile hinterland and to the development of a textile industry. But its prosperity, in common with that of so many provincial towns, faltered when agriculture failed or when the vagaries of international trade and British policy depressed sales of woollens. The statutory ban on exports from Ireland in 1698 hit hard. Townsmen bestirred themselves to avert more restrictions. In 1707, the current head of the Boyles was engaged to lobby the Westminster parliament on behalf of the local industry.⁸² A fragile recovery, geared to supplying durable wares to customers within Ireland, was endangered by the famine conditions of the late 1720s and 1740–1.⁸³

Realists appreciated that little help would be forthcoming from the quondam proprietors, the Boyles. Others on the spot, such as the Bernards and Coxes, enlarged their own holdings in Bandon at the expense of the senior Boyles. At first sight, then, it seemed that one landlord, an absentee, had been replaced by others, more often resident and therefore more meddling. The turmoil of the 1750s owed something to the political ambitions and personal rivalries of notables in the county, such as Speaker Henry Boyle, the restless Cox and the Ponsonbys. Kinsale also resounded to similar squirearchical manoeuvres. Its principal proprietors, the Southwells—unlike the Boyles—derived the bulk of their Irish revenues from the town. Yet, as they too were transformed between the 1650s and 1750s from habitual residents to permanent absentees, other squires—the Meades, Stawells, even the Coxes—scented prey. Kinsale's

⁸⁰ M. MacCarthy-Morrogh, 'The foundation of Bandon, Co. Cork', *JCHAS*, 91 (1986), 55–62.

⁸¹ T. Barnard, 'Irish images of Cromwell', in R.C. Richardson, ed., *Images of Oliver Cromwell: essays by and for Roger Howell* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 189–90; J. Buckley, ed., 'The landing of James the Second at Kinsale, in 1689', *JCHAS*, 2nd ser., 3 (1897), 146–8.

⁸² Chatsworth, Waite letterbook, 1706–8, J. Waite to D. Foulke, 13 Mar 1707; same to R. Musgrave and T. Baker, 13 Mar 1707.

⁸³ BL, Egmont MSS, Add. MS 47000B, fo. 63, W. Perceval to Lord Perceval, 21 Aug 1740.

affairs were also affected by the sizeable garrison, part in the barracks on the edge of the town and the rest in the nearby Charles Fort. By the 1720s and 1730s, the busy port resounded to political clangour. Yet in neither Bandon nor Kinsale were the townspeople meek creatures of the country gentry or army commanders. Their apparently parochial worries, replicated in other towns, could fuse with national defences of liberty and ancient constitutions. Urban assertiveness, written off as venal opportunism by the unsympathetic, is worth re-examining, not least as evidence of an ethos which towns uniquely nurtured.

By 1752, Bandon was believed to have recovered its old prosperity: 'a thriving country town and the best peopled with Protestants of any in this part of Ireland'. Blankets and worsted, the specialities of the place, were made with 'good success'. Most families in the town owned or rented plots of land near by, on which they kept a cow for milk and grew enough corn for bread. Each also had a potato garden. Thereby, it was noted that the artisans and craftworkers avoided dependence on farmers for staples. What was missing from Bandon in the 1750s was affordable fuel. To this end it was proposed to link the town to the navigable stretch of the Bandon River by a canal: the craze of the moment.⁸⁴ Aspirants for the parliamentary franchise of borough voters were expected to further public works of this kind.⁸⁵ Gentlemen in offering such amenities were credited with public spirit; voters in seeking them were reviled for their venality. Far fewer voted at Bandon than at Kinsale: in the first, twelve burgesses and the provost (or mayor); at the second, the freemen. In 1725 at Kinsale, 159 freemen are known to have voted.⁸⁶

Despite the striking disparity in numbers, neither borough was easily controlled. Whereas country gentlemen were quick to justify their own stratagems in the terminology of honour, patriotism and the common weal, they were loath to concede that similar principles animated their opponents, especially 'the inconsiderable' of the towns.⁸⁷ Among urban electors, a language of deference was not always matched by the same behaviour. As early as the 1690s, the proprietor, Lord Cork and Burlington reproved the insubordinate Bandonians.⁸⁸ Would-be members, aware how easily the balance could be tilted by a single vote, watched and schemed tirelessly to fill vacancies among the burgesses. These ambitions involved more than the dozen burgesses with votes. Partisans, in order to prepare the ground, by the 1750s were said to have introduced the practice of treating into the hitherto ascetic corporation. As a result, drunkenness and idleness infected the industrious Bandonians. Local gentlemen, irritated by the

⁸⁴ John Rylands Library, Bagshawe MSS, B 15/1/25, S. Bagshawe to Hartington, 23 Jan 1752.

⁸⁵ Chatsworth, Lismore MS 36/29, petition from Dungarvan, 25 June 1727; T.C. Barnard, 'Landlords and urban life: Youghal and the Boyles', *Newsletter of the Group for the Study of Historic Irish Settlement*, 5 (1995), 1–5; Beaumont, 'Gentry of the King's and Queen's counties', vol. II, pp. 30–1.

⁸⁶ *The Case of Sir Richard Meade, Bart.* ([Dublin, 1725]).

⁸⁷ In 1686, Bandon's inhabitants were reputed to be 'industrious and given to manufactory, but poor; they are esteemed to be naturally of a stubborn disposition'; P. Melvin, ed., 'Paul Rycout's memoranda and letters from Ireland, 1686–1687', *Analecta Hibernica*, 27 (1972), 132.

⁸⁸ Chatsworth, letterbook of Cork and Burlington, 1694–5, Cork and Burlington to E. Riggs, 13 Jul 1695.

recalcitrance of the townspeople, bewailed the resultant confusion and corruption. Other testimonies, in contrast, hint at the political wiliness of alert townsfolk. A pivot in the organisation at Bandon was George Sealy, several times provost of the town. Sealy wished to confine the burgess-ship to residents: a move to reduce outside interference which occurred elsewhere. Sealy's party also agitated for an enhanced role for freemen. This meant substituting the 'ancient constitution' of the 1622 charter for that of 1631.

Sealy belonged to a Somerset family which had migrated to the Bandon area in the second half of the previous century. The tribe grabbed the opportunities afforded by leases and mortgages, but also colonised the emerging professions, such as medicine and the established church. An elder brother, Armiger Sealy, 'a woollen draper' in the town, was reputedly worth £6,000 in 1743.⁸⁹ After his death in 1745, much of his business may have passed to his younger brother, George Sealy. The latter merchant drove a trade which extended through the city of Cork into western England and London. The confusing way in which, at least in clerks' descriptions, he slipped between the designations of 'merchant', 'gentleman' and 'esquire' suggests a social mobility common to those who flourished in the town. It may, also, have betokened some ambiguities as to where his principal focus lay: in the commerce and life of the town or in the countryside, whence supplies and manufactures came and where he was acquiring properties.⁹⁰ Comparable ambivalence is implied in his elder brother's given name of 'Armiger'. Did it attest to an armigerous ancestry in the west of England or an aspiration in Ireland? In time, George Sealy's wealth and status enabled his offspring to marry into local landed dynasties.⁹¹ The likes of the Sealys come closest to the pseudo-gentry found in eighteenth-century English towns.

Meanwhile, at Kinsale, resolutions were passed by the assembly of freemen (the court of d'oyer hundred or 'deer hundred') to allow only those who dwelt in the borough to become freemen or burgesses. But, as the advantage moved rapidly from one group to its rival, the bans were rescinded.⁹² These skirmishes were pointedly linked with the warfare against oligarchic usurpation being conducted in Dublin by Lucas. Provincial boroughs echoed the slogans against corrupt courtiers directed primarily against the viceregal regime of Dorset, Primate Stone and the Money Bill controversy of 1753.⁹³

⁸⁹ PRONI, Shannon Papers, D 2707/B1/34, R. Langrishe to Lady Shannon, 28 Jan 1743. For his death, Representative Church Body Library, Dublin, P. 140.7, Ballymodan parish register, 1695–1796, s.d. 1 Mar 1745.

⁹⁰ Genealogical Office, Dublin, MS 810/20; Registry of Deeds, Dublin, memorials, 114/280/78946; 158/150/105293; 174/1/114944; 209/564/139580; 286/384/188861; 301/137/199397; 318/279/213669; 358/270/240251; 359/45/240832.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 349/435/235287.

⁹² NA, Calendar of Southwell MSS destroyed in 1922, M. 3036, J. Stawell to E. Southwell, 9 Apr 1734; M. Mulcahy, ed., *Calendar of Kinsale Documents*, vol. III (Kinsale, 1994), pp. 46, 54, 101–3; vol. VI (Kinsale, 1998), pp. 13, 74.

⁹³ G.H., *A Genuine Letter of a Freeman of Bandon to George Faulkner* (Dublin, 1754), pp. 13–15; H.G., *A Just and True Answer to a scandalous pamphlet call'd a genuine letter from a freeman of Bandon* (Dublin, 1755), pp. 7–15.

In Kinsale, the freemen happily appealed to 'ancient custom' to justify their demands.⁹⁴ By 1758, in reflecting on a protracted battle which had seen the corporation suspended for a year and legal costs of at least £640, the representatives of the townspeople insisted that they had been defending the 'liberty, freedom and independency of this corporation'.⁹⁵ At Bandon, the group keen to recover lost power for the freemen coordinated its activities. The Bandonians gathered in an inn. Subscriptions were levied; an agent was to be despatched to London; through print their case was broadcast.⁹⁶ The thirty-three said to have met in a tavern of the town allow a tantalising glimpse into this urban world where sociability and politics meshed. The chair was taken by a writing master. Four shopkeepers, an apothecary, the innkeeper and an attorney perhaps formed the upper echelon of this society. Two-thirds (twenty-two) of those who attended were concerned with textiles as drapers, weavers, combers and clothiers. Another five were involved in the drinks trade. In addition, a butcher, a miller, two barbers, two maltsters and a joiner came.⁹⁷ In print, supporters of the freemen approved the motley band of 'weavers, combers, shopkeepers, blue dyers, attorneys, farmers, &c', for their prudence, charity and public spirit.⁹⁸

Bandon was restless partly because of its internal divisions. So were other boroughs. Sixty-four corporations had survived in which the parliamentary franchise belonged either to the freemen or to a larger body.⁹⁹ After 1715, general elections were rare, precipitated only by the sovereign's death. Vacancies occurred haphazardly; polls remained exceptional.¹⁰⁰ In each year of George II's reign it has been calculated that in Ireland—on average—twenty-three vacancies were filled at by-elections.¹⁰¹ Few were contested. Despite these scanty opportunities for parliamentary selections, numerous occasions arose for choosing new members of the corporation. These places were eagerly sought, in part because they might determine who was then sent to parliament, but also because they mattered in themselves. One sign of the feverish competition was the treating, which—to the chagrin of aspirant MPs—drove up the costs of entering

⁹⁴ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. vi, pp. 40, 53, 96.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. vi, p. 95. Cf. *A Few Words of Brotherly Advice to the free and independent electors of the town of Kinsale* ([Dublin], 1754), p. 6; *A Narrative of the Dispute in the Corporation of Kinsale* (Dublin, 1756), pp. 1, 17.

⁹⁶ G.H., *Genuine Letter*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12. Eleven of the participants followed more than one calling, a further reminder of the lack of occupational specialisation and the precariousness of many employments.

⁹⁸ H.G., *A Just and True Answer*, pp. 6, 15.

⁹⁹ There were 46 Irish boroughs in which the franchise belonged to the freemen; 11 pot-walloper boroughs; seven in which all freeholders of the manor voted. J.L. McCracken, 'Irish parliamentary elections, 1727–68', *Irish Historical Studies*, 5 (1947), 223–9. However, other estimates have only thirty-three or thirty-six freemen boroughs. A.P.W. Malcomson, 'The Newtown act of 1748: revision and reconstruction', *Irish Historical Studies*, 18 (1972–3), 319–20; E.M. Johnston, *Great Britain and Ireland, 1760–1800* (London and Edinburgh, 1963), p. 167.

¹⁰⁰ In the general election of 1761, only twenty-six polls occurred in Ireland. E. Magennis, 'Politics and administration of Ireland during the Seven Years' War, 1750–1763' (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1996), p. 231.

¹⁰¹ McCracken, 'Irish parliamentary elections', p. 212.

parliament. Equally, it burdened all who undertook civic office. Guests rejoiced. Conviviality accompanied civic, military and companionable gatherings. It stretched from obviously public to private occasions. At Kinsale, it would be difficult to distinguish between what was staged by the sovereign for his daughter's wedding in 1713 and that organised by the officers of the garrison a few months later on Queen Anne's birthday.¹⁰² Soon the coronation of the queen's successor, George I, sanctioned more high jinks.¹⁰³ Declarations of war also merited civic largesse. Habituated to such feasts, the denizens of Kinsale in 1765 obliged Agmondisham Vesey to lavish £816 8s. 1d. on them before he was elected for the borough.¹⁰⁴

All were not treated uniformly on these red-letter days. So far from obliterating or inverting the usual hierarchical distinctions, banquets reminded of rank and worth. Separate categories were refreshed at different venues and with different fare. At Kinsale in 1765, four parties were held simultaneously. A ball had also been staged, and musicians hired. The rising costs of elections owed much to the multiplicity of comestibles and diversions which now, as a matter of course, voters expected. The most elevated, eighty 'gentlemen', were accommodated at the Southwells' town house. Each was allowed two bottles of wine. Twelve bowls of punch were drained and much ale quaffed. The acute knew that 'talking and laying schemes over a bottle will never procure votes'.¹⁰⁵ However, freemen expected to be gratified in this fashion. Back in 1703, meals for electors were included among inducements to vote at Dungarvan. Colonel John Hore arranged for barbecued joints of meat to be served at twenty-four tables in his own garden. This pleasantly *al fresco* refreshment contrasted with the more exclusive gatherings at which 'good claret and extraordinary good white wine' were dispensed to the select.¹⁰⁶ In Longford town, the economical squire of Edgeworthstown, Richard Edgeworth, expended more than £100 on the fare offered in three taverns. The main guests were the voters who returned him to parliament in 1737. However, others — soldiers, servants and 'the mob' — although not enfranchised, benefited. A few years later, as Blayney Townley Balfour rebuilt his family interest in the Louth borough of Carlingford, he too provided communal junkets. Here, ninety-three could be fed at the reasonable rate of 2s. 6d. per head.¹⁰⁷

Even so, the show and exuberance integral to these feasts notoriously warred against the urgings of moderation and civility. The feasts at Carlingford threatened to degenerate into routs. Two flint mugs and a brown earthenware punch bowl were

¹⁰² Boole Library, NUI, Cork, Kinsale manorial papers, 1698–1764, J. Dennis to E. Southwell, 7 Jul 1713; *Dublin Gazette*, no. 975, 13–16 Feb 1714.

¹⁰³ *Dublin Gazette*, no. 1050, 2–6 Nov 1714.

¹⁰⁴ NA, Sarsfield-Vesey MSS, accounts, no. 54, bills of 1765; 'Memo on the Sarsfield-Vesey documents', *The Fifty-sixth Report of the Keeper of the Public Records ... in Ireland* (Dublin, 1931), pp. 347–9.

¹⁰⁵ NLI, Fownes MS 8470, G. Deyos to Sir W. Fownes, 11 Jun 1745.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Lismore MS 13243, J. Barry to R. Power, 3 Aug 1703; J. Hore to same, 15 Sep 1703.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Townley Hall MS 10276/3, bills of J. Curphy, 27 Oct 1757, 14 Dec 1757.

smashed. A linen table cloth, a pewter dish, seven plates, five knives, seven forks, two pewter spoons and thirty glasses were purloined.¹⁰⁸ Participants might experience gustatory or cultural novelties unknown in their more austere domestic settings. At Carlingford, the diners were introduced to the niceties whereby each was furnished with cutlery, plate and glass rather than having to share utensils. No doubt some in their own houses had already adopted these habits, but for others they—along with the assorted fare—were new.

Sociability and irritability

By the late seventeenth century, Kinsale was visited only irregularly by the Southwells. As the chief proprietors, the latter, even when absent, affected the place. So, more immediately, did its institutions, society and commerce. The long survival of a representative body of the freemen, the deer hundred court, and—even better—the serial publication of its records, allow some insights into the locality. Little in the annual presentments is calculated to fire the historical imagination. Yet, as in other boroughs, entries angrily scored through or pages ripped from minutes, remind of how high passions could rise. The suspension of the Kinsale charter by the Dublin government in 1755 and the enormous bills incurred by the corporation show how resolutely provincials might dig in behind ancient liberties. Outsiders hoping to infiltrate Kinsale offered baits. In practice, however, it fell to the freemen and burgesses to improve the harbour, the fisheries, the towns' markets, the public buildings, health and safety. Like other ports, it catered to transients as well as the residents. Efforts were made to shut the brothels, ban the bummers who sold sub-standard goods to the vessels in harbour, and curb smugglers of the alluring booty from the East Indiamen.¹⁰⁹ However, these illicit trades, the first and second seemingly followed by the same women, were integral to the vitality of Kinsale.¹¹⁰

More orthodox corporate concerns related to Kinsale's bowling green. Designed originally to relax the freemen, by 1731 it was believed that the facility contributed 'greatly to the pleasure and profit of the inhabitants by frequently drawing a concourse of gentlemen to it'. To meet the needs of *habitués*, it was agreed to provide a billiard table.¹¹¹ By the middle of the century it was the hub of a bosky recreational complex.¹¹² In these verdant surroundings, matters of consequence were thrashed out, especially during the tempestuous 1750s.¹¹³ In 1739, a new Exchange was planned, 'both

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, bills of J. Curphy, 10 Jan 1760 and J. Salmon, 10 Jan 1760.

¹⁰⁹ Friends' Historical Library, Wight diary, s.d. 20 Jul 1756, 4 Sep 1756; PRO, CUST 1/64, fo. 16v.

¹¹⁰ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. I, pp. 101, 107–8, 118; vol. II (Kinsale, 1989), pp. 12, 25, 27, 60; vol. III, pp. 4, 13, 19, 27.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 35; vol. III, p. 101; vol. VI, pp. 5, 15.

¹¹² Smith, *Cork*, vol. I, p. 226.

¹¹³ *A Narrative of the Dispute in the Corporation of Kinsale*, p. 3.

advantageous and ornamental to the town'.¹¹⁴ Accommodation was also offered to the Latin schoolmaster in a room at the corner of the cornmarket. In 1750, it was admitted that he had only four pupils. However, the corporation paid him a yearly £15 by way of encouragement.¹¹⁵ Such schools could draw extra custom into a town as well as educating its own young.¹¹⁶ Less enthusiasm was shown towards travelling actors or dancing masters. Only in 1745 did demand for that vital ingredient of the polite town—an assembly—make the authorities relent.¹¹⁷ Before that, in 1727, a play was included in the official fun at George II's accession.¹¹⁸

The Corporation of Kinsale financed a cycle of entertainments. These supplemented what the Protestant and (clandestinely) the Catholic churches decreed, and were in turn expanded by the London and Dublin governments. When wars were proclaimed, gravity and festivity were appropriate.¹¹⁹ The impact on the town could never be confidently predicted. Gains—with more soldiers passing through on the way to embarkation and more ships to provision—might be cancelled out by the disruption of regular traffic. The large military contingents in and about the town ensured that wars quickly made an impact. As at Limerick and their other stations, so at Kinsale, the soldiery lent solemnity to state and topical holidays, but in so doing sometimes could rupture the always delicate relations between the garrison and its hosts. The recipients of civic hospitality were primarily members of the Church of Ireland, to whom, in Kinsale as in other boroughs, full citizenship was confined. How far others participated—as spectators, gate-crashers or guests—is hard to know. Inconveniences in any case attended so large and wayward a body of perhaps 150 freemen. On the scale of English boroughs, this was small. Yet in Ireland, it was enough to generate regular collective activities in which, as in eighteenth-century England, a backward-looking civic pride blended with aspirations to urbanity.¹²⁰

Urban oligarchs and squires wanted effective power to reside in a much smaller group: ideally, as at Bandon, a panel of a dozen. Any narrowing of participation was resolutely resisted. In 1746, when the worthies of Kinsale ordered a new table capable of seating thirty, it is unclear whether this was for deliberations or feasts (or both?).¹²¹ A more obvious sign of a continuing commitment to an expansive fraternal conviviality

¹¹⁴ Mulcahy, *Kinsale documents*, vol. vi, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. vi, pp. 67, 80. Cf. vol. vii, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Evidence of schooling in Kinsale occurs in 'Conner Papers', *Analecta Hibernica*, 15 (1944), 156–7.

¹¹⁷ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. ii, p. 101; vol. iii, pp. 6, 76, 85; vol. vi, pp. 48, 60.

¹¹⁸ P. McSwiney, 'Georgian Kinsale: garrison and townfolk', *JCHAS*, 44 (1939), 103.

¹¹⁹ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. vi, p. 53; vol. vii (Kinsale, 1998), pp. 14, 27–8, 83.

¹²⁰ J. Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism: urban association and the middling sort' in J. Barry and C. Brooks, ed., *The Middling Sort of People: culture, society and politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 84–112; J. Barry, 'Provincial town culture, 1640–1780: urbane or civic?' in J. Pittock and A. Wear, eds, *Interpretation and Cultural History* (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 199–223; R. Sweet, 'Freemen and independence in English borough politics, c.1770–1830', *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), 84–115.

¹²¹ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. vi, p. 65.

is the provision of pewter cutlery for mayoral entertainments. In 1728, six dozen knives and forks scarcely sufficed; double that number was ordered in 1746.¹²² Having paid for these items, the civic officials manifested a proprietary interest: so much so that their cleaning, storage and inspection themselves were turned into rituals. Engraved ‘K[insale] S[overeign]’, they were intended for use in specific locations. In handling them, it is improbable that freemen gained a heightened pleasure from being so palpably of Kinsale. However, such occasions, with the paraphernalia of eating and drinking, brought the respectable Protestants of the towns closer to the genteel and differentiated them from *hoi polloi*.

The days when these articles were used were intended to remind of the physical and mental spaces inhabited by the fortunate in Kinsale. The church at rogation-tide delimited the parish, with its bounds beaten. Similarly, corporations—edgy about any encroachments—annually rode their bounds. Each Monday after Whitsun, the mayor with the town’s functionaries and a gaggle of supporters, undertook this ceremony. It culminated in the official party being ferried across the river to Dunderrow Green, two miles from the town, where, it was believed, the settlement of Kinsale had started. There a trumpet was sounded, and the company generously refreshed. As with the extravaganzas in Georgian Dublin, so in Kinsale, the austere preached economy. However, the day out in early summer at corporate expense was not axed. Yet, who thronged to Dunderrow Green, as to the other public places in the borough—the purpose-built markets, quays, exchange and court-house—again puzzles. Promiscuous resort to the green was not encouraged. Repeatedly, the civic fathers tried to clear the unsuitable from sensitive spots. Intruders were seen as uncouth and menacing: redolent of the strange worlds of Catholic Ireland and the countryside.

Fissures within the urban Protestant interest, arising from variations in wealth and rank, were unavoidable. They were to be contained and rendered harmless through the institutional and recreational routines of the town. Guilds were one device.¹²³ As late as 1746, a new chartered company—of peruke-makers, apothecaries and barber-surgeons—was to be incorporated at Kinsale.¹²⁴ Yet, sometimes what was designed to unite dramatically divided. About 1680, a new freeman celebrated his entry into the elect by inviting others to a vintner’s. Mocking healths to Charles II’s Catholic queen, Catherine of Braganza, his heir presumptive, the Catholic duke of York (the future James II) and St Patrick, as yet more associated with Catholic than Protestant Ireland, offended some. Violence ensued. Throughout the 1680s, with the prospect of Catholic resurgence, the confessional and ethnic differences created tensions which drink might release.¹²⁵ This friction could never altogether vanish in urban communities where

¹²² *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 70, 77, 87; vol. VI, pp. 41, 63, 65.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, vol. V (Kinsale, 1996), p. 10. Cf. Youghal Corporation records, Cork Archives Institute, U 138, G1–4, guild charters, 1656–97.

¹²⁴ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. VI, p. 62.

¹²⁵ Boole Library, Cork, Kinsale manorial papers, 1676–92, deposition of E. Roche, Kinsale, 28 Apr 1686.

Protestant minorities were installed and kept in power by legal legerdemain. Boroughs, founded (it was believed) to bring the virtues of civility to Ireland, were threatened with recapture by the Irish (and continental) Catholics. Indeed, it was at Kinsale that James II, a fugitive from his other kingdoms, landed in 1689.¹²⁶

Throughout the next century, names like 'Catholic Walk' or 'Mass Chapel Lane' kept alive the differences.¹²⁷ Freely voiced prejudices, such as that 'only a parcel of Irish pagans . . . followed the shoemaker's trade', hardly helped intercommunal harmony.¹²⁸ Moreover, these local events were written into the calendar. In 1695, following a plot to kill William III, Kinsale announced that henceforward 29 September 1690 should be kept 'as a day of public rejoicing by making bonfires, illuminations and other marks and celebrations of joy'. The date marked the anniversary when 'by the great mercy of almighty God and His Majesty's victorious arms, the Protestants of this corporation were delivered out of the hands and power of their implacable enemies of Roman Catholic persuasion'.¹²⁹ Soon enough, however, the freemen were more active in hunting outlawed Catholic priests and schoolmasters, and in sorting out the terms on which Catholics might trade within the town. Still, anything untoward might reflexively be blamed on the unfortunate Catholics. Catholic householders paid the bounties when Tories and rapparees were apprehended.¹³⁰ The disturbances of 1755 were predictably attributed to 'a popish mob'.

Whether the dominant feeling was unremittingly anti-Catholic may be questioned. Within the formal framework of legal proscription of Catholics, compromises had to be negotiated.¹³¹ Any who invaded the liberties of the corporation incurred its wrath. In this sense, the governing body of Kinsale defined itself by reference to other Protestant groupings as much as to the Catholic majority.¹³² Unruly Protestants and licentious soldiers endangered good order. The disunity of the Protestant community might be regretted but it was inescapable. In 1710, a 'gentleman' was killed during the riding of the liberties. To prevent any repetition, the company for the immediate future would dine in the court house.¹³³ Soon enough the open-air entertainments were resumed. The affray in 1710 might be dismissed as exceptional, the product of the evanescent animosities between Tories and Whigs. These accounted also for the unpleasantness at the sovereign's feast in 1714. Sir Richard Cox, a local boy made good—once the recorder

¹²⁶ *A Full and True Account of the Landing and Reception of the late King James at Kinsale* (London, 1689).

¹²⁷ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. vi, p. 37.

¹²⁸ Boole Library, Cork, Kinsale manorial papers, 1676–92, deposition of J. Story, Kinsale, 28 Apr 1686.

¹²⁹ Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. i, pp. 106, 112–13, 116, 120.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. vii, pp. 39, 68–71, 85–6, 88–9, 94–6. More surprising and perhaps indicative of relaxed inter-confessional relations, was the requirement in 1716 (when the possibility of Jacobite invasion recurred) that the Catholics contribute men for the duties of watch and ward. *Ibid.*, vol. ii, pp. 86–7. In 1761, arms were to be entrusted only to the Protestants of the militia. *Ibid.*, vol. vi, p. 106.

¹³¹ NA, Calendar of Southwell MSS, M. 3036, J. Dennis to E. Southwell, 13 Feb 1705.

¹³² Mulcahy, *Kinsale Documents*, vol. ii, p. 27; vol. vi, pp. 34, 72.

¹³³ R. Caulfield, ed., *Council Book of the Corporation of Kinsale* (Guildford, 1879), p. 214.

of the borough, then lord chancellor of the kingdom and now a judge—but also a Tory zealot, proposed the health of the controversial Tory leader, Lord Chancellor Phipps. Immediately he was interrupted by the self-appointed leader of the Whigs in the county, who offered an alternative toast. Swords were about to be unsheathed, but Cox calmed tempers.¹³⁴ Other provocations occurred as officers in their cups cried up rival causes.¹³⁵ It might seem as if hapless Kinsale chanced to be the location for these outbursts of the passing soldiery and visiting squires. It was, indeed, of the essence of towns that they hosted gatherings attended by numerous outsiders.

In Kinsale, as at Bandon, burgesses and freemen did not slavishly adopt the opinions of social superiors. A long history of civic irascibility prepared for the partisanship of Queen Anne's time. Back in the 1650s, the elder Robert Southwell was mortified by the discourtesy of leading citizens in a town which, he averred, owed so much of its prosperity to his patronage.¹³⁶ Thereafter, he eyed local opponents malevolently. 'They are a dangerous people', he confided in 1668, 'and may as well be ready to head any faction upon any other account'.¹³⁷ In 1672, the wish of the Dublin government to breach the newly created Protestant ascendancy by readmitting Catholics into Irish boroughs' trade was passionately opposed. This question underlay a dispute over Kinsale's next sovereign.¹³⁸ The resulting wrangle led the lord lieutenant to note sourly that Irish municipal corporations lay under 'some ill star, which make them disorderly and tumultuary'. The viceroy's hope of disabling the mutinous by concentrating authority in fewer hands was fully endorsed by the Southwells.¹³⁹ The ploy did not succeed. The habits of defiance proved tenacious. More than eighty years later, in the 1750s, the government could do no better than suspend the Protestant government of Kinsale for a season so that heads could cool.

By the 1750s, if social and economic change was accelerating and international trade and warfare touched the town more directly, constants remained. In particular the ambivalences in a triangular relationship between the municipality, local proprietors and the soldiery survived. Protestant corporations like Kinsale insisted on their cultural superiority over hinterlands ineradicably tainted with primitivism. Oases in a vast Catholic and Irish desert, towns could not afford to ignore or antagonise those who dwelt in the often despised countryside. The municipality, despite its extreme sensitivity over its own space, willingly shared it with outsiders. At the same time, it

¹³⁴ BL, Cox MSS, Add. MS 38157, fo. 77, Sir R. Cox to E. Southwell, 24 Mar 1714.

¹³⁵ Boole Library, Cork, Kinsale manorial papers, 1698–1764, J. Dennis to E. Southwell, 7 Jul 1713.

¹³⁶ BL, Egmont MSS, Add. MS 46937, fos. 77, 104, 110, 117v; NA, Calendar of Southwell MSS, M. 3036, V. Gookin to sovereign and burgesses of Kinsale, 3 May 1659; and vindication of R. Southwell.

¹³⁷ Boole Library, Cork, Kinsale manorial papers, 1665–75, R. Southwell to R. DeLaune, 26 Feb 1668. The theme was reprised in 1685 when supporters of the rebellious Monmouth were alleged to have gathered in a Kinsale hostelry. Bodleian, Clarendon MS 88, fo. 186, narrative of R. Clarke, 29 Jan 1686.

¹³⁸ NA, Calendar of Southwell MSS, M. 3036, papers about the disputed election, 1672–3.

¹³⁹ Bodleian, Essex Papers, Add. MS C. 33, fos. 38v–39, 39, 145v, Essex to Arlington, 8 Oct 1672, 7 Jun 1673; same to Orrery, 8 Oct 1672.

sought to regulate how and by whom the public areas, and particularly those which had been improved by its investment—bowling green, markets, quays, exchange, court room—were used. Increasingly, with the practice of enfranchising non-residents, freemen lived beyond the liberties. In 1714, when the coronation of George I was to be celebrated, gentlemen from the surrounding districts were explicitly invited into Kinsale.¹⁴⁰ Kinsale also delighted the casual tripper. The heir of Edgeworthstown, Richard Edgeworth, brought thither by a law suit in 1722, enjoyed the sociability of the tavern where he lodged. He subscribed to play at the bowling green, frequented the coffee-house and clubbed together with other bachelors for meals.¹⁴¹

Nearly twenty years later, the novice officer, Oughton, hastened to Kinsale to salvage the goods of a kinsman. Oughton commended the customs officers and found their company congenial. Himself intimately identified with the British administration in Ireland, it was perhaps inevitable that he should gravitate to others with similar orientation—the revenue functionaries and the garrison officers.¹⁴² They leavened many an Irish town. The large customs establishment reflected the value of Kinsale as a port. Its officers lent tone. Yet, in their duties, they were often obstructed by those from whom aid might have been expected. Citizens and their wives happily crammed their homes and bellies with contraband. Soldiers stood aside as the customs men tried to track smugglers. Protestant residents viewed the garrison ambivalently. Comparable frictions snagged relationships in the countryside as much as in the town. Nevertheless, the close quarters of boroughs such as Kinsale brought more frequent encounters in which the awkwardnesses had to be faced. Furthermore, the intimate urban topography contained collective as well as individual histories. Ruins emphasised the fallen state of the Roman religion. Walls, citadels, the men of war riding at anchor, the British ensign fluttering above the lavish wedding feast, the uniforms of the drilling soldiers: all yielded diverse meanings to those who beheld them. But Kinsale, like other Irish towns, was slow to connect these relics into a coherent narrative of the place.¹⁴³ In the absence of any written history, the state, the church and the rituals of the borough offered ways in which the local could be comprehended. But the interpretative systems on offer left much latitude to the imaginative and argumentative. Notwithstanding a full communal life, the place hardly prescribed to its leading inhabitants how they should regard themselves in relation to time and place.

Kinsale, although the resort of interlopers, lacked the developed traditions, such as those of Limerick, or the administrative functions of an assize town, which regularly

¹⁴⁰ 'Manuscripts of the old corporation of Kinsale', *Analecta Hibernica*, 15 (1944), p. 198.

¹⁴¹ NLI, Edgeworth MSS 1507, 1508, Edgeworth account books, s.d. 15, 22 & 23 Aug 1722, Sep 1722.

¹⁴² National Army Museum, Oughton memoir, MS 8808.36.1, p. 63.

¹⁴³ Apparently the first history of an Irish provincial town to be published, G. Wilson, *Historical Remarks of the City of Waterford, from 853, to 1270* (Waterford [1736]), offered a list of civic functionaries but little more. In 1749, a more expansive and modern history of Youghal was prepared. see R. Day, ed., 'Cooke's history of Youghal, 1749', *JCHAS*, 9 (1903), 34–63, 105–17.

invited in countryfolk. Risks as well as custom arose from these occasions. Ugly manifestations periodically threatened towns. It is possible, but has yet to be shown persuasively in the contexts of mid-eighteenth-century Ireland, that these demonstrations obeyed their own disciplines. The same may be true of incursions into towns which seemed more directly to challenge Protestant power. In the spring of 1762, three south Munster towns long admired as models of urbanity—Tallow, Lismore and Cappoquin—were terrorised. ‘The fairies’ descended—it seemed—from the surrounding hills. An apparently token piece of levelling, knocking down a wall seventy yards in length, would test ‘whether the army and Protestant inhabitants of Tallow would give them any opposition’. Meeting none, the demonstrators—now numbering 600—turned on Lismore, which they had ordered be illuminated in preparation for their appearance. ‘Their hideous howl was heard an hour before their vanguard arrived’. All wore linen, ‘their usual dress’, probably as a patriotic statement. The procession terminated with ‘their queen’ enthroned ‘in a horse chair’. She and her attendants were also draped with linen. The improvements of a Protestant proprietor were destroyed. Meanwhile, two hundred horsemen from the protestors were despatched to Tallow, ‘who secured all the streets, tendered an oath to all they met, frightened the Protestant inhabitants, broke open the jail and set prisoners loose’.

The alarmed reporter was unsure how to read these actions. Pertinently enough, he supposed the fairies’ tactics were to accustom locals ‘to violence and a contempt of the laws’. Derisive of the legitimacy of the English Protestant state in Ireland, the ring-leaders were thought to harbour alternative, foreign loyalties. The Protestants of these small, inland settlements were too cowed to quell the trouble. Only in the more distant port of Youghal, like Kinsale long a bastion of the English interest, was greater steadfastness apparent.¹⁴⁴ The adherents of ‘Queen Sive’ upheld an order—both legal and moral—at odds with that which prevailed in Hanoverian Ireland. They shared—and sometimes varied—characteristics of the better documented troubles in neighbouring County Tipperary.¹⁴⁵ What is of relevance here is the way in which the rioters confronted Protestant townspeople. The boroughs were prime targets for attack. Much more concretely and concentratedly than manor or village, they embodied the apparatus of the ascendancy which the Protestants had erected since 1649.

The political, judicial, regulatory and exemplary tasks heaped on the Irish boroughs invested them with multiple functions and attributes. This diversity could not transform Kinsale or Bandon into a Bristol or Bath. It did, however, place them high on any regional scale: higher than, for example, Bantry, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Enniskeane and Skibbereen. For resident and visitor alike, life in the bigger towns had a quality not encountered in smaller and rural settlements. Those athwart international shipping lanes or constructed to articulate a dense Protestant plantation possessed rare attributes.

¹⁴⁴ John Rylands Library, Bagshawe MSS, B 15/1/38, J. Kirby to S. Bagshawe, 2 Apr 1762.

¹⁴⁵ T.P. Power, *Land, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 179–80, 184–5.

Enthusiasts transformed the attributes into virtues: Bandon and Kinsale served as locations where politeness and gentility could be practised. Their political structures allowed a participatory culture. Buildings, such as council chambers and assembly rooms, expressed and refined a communitarian pride. Inns accommodated political debates; in time, responding to higher expectations, they were better appointed.¹⁴⁶ Sociability, although exclusively male, was channelled into the masonic lodges and the knots of the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick. The second appeared early in Kinsale.¹⁴⁷ Novelties supplemented the fun in these towns. It became possible for apologists to depict towns as the only places where virtue could be fully developed.¹⁴⁸

These innovations accentuated tensions between those indulging a conviviality so boisterous that it bordered on boorishness and those who practised polished restraint. By 1749 a rambler could contrast Youghal unfavourably with Mallow. The latter, groomed as a spa, appealed consciously to both men and women as a site where the genteel and polite could congregate.¹⁴⁹ Such a discrimination warns of the assorted criteria by which towns might be ranked. Not all, being based on subjective evaluations, are now readily retrieved. An urban renaissance of the splendour seen in England may not most accurately describe the haphazard and halting developments in Ireland. Nevertheless, extra and better amenities enabled towns to draw further apart from local competitors and from the surrounding countryside. Assembly rooms, spas, horse-races, seasons of plays, shops and more salubrious hostelries proliferated. The predominance of the boroughs within the Protestant interest began as a legal fiction. In time what the state had engineered turned into a demographic reality. Close quarters also fostered a culture at once derivative—from Britain, Europe and the adjacent gentry—and distinctive.

¹⁴⁶ Inventory of a Cork 'inn lady', 6 Dec 1741, TCD, Caulfield MS 2015/371.

¹⁴⁷ S.H. Dorman, 'The Kinsale knot of the Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick, A.D. 1754–1856', *JCHAS*, 20 (1914), 178–83; Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin, MS 81/88, M. Wills' notebook, opening 84.

¹⁴⁸ 'A Briton', *History of the Dublin Election in the Year 1749*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ *A Tour through Ireland*, pp. 122–4.

JON STOBART

County, Town and Country: Three Histories of Urban Development in Eighteenth-Century Chester

To fully understand the changes seen in individual towns and the wider urban system during the eighteenth century, we need to place our subjects at the centre of a stage which has geographical as well as social, economic, cultural or political dimensions. This paper focuses on a single town, Chester, and places it in three distinct but related spatial contexts. Beginning with the town itself, attention is focused on the changing structure and geography of its socio-economy, particularly the proliferation and concentration of cultural, leisure and retail functions, and the related transformation of the physical infrastructure, especially the improvement of the main streets and buildings. Next, the position and role of Chester as a metropolis for the county and region are explored through analysis of personal, social and business links, and the notion of 'county community' is critically assessed. Finally, Chester is placed in the context of the whole country, or rather three countries in one: England, Wales and Ireland. The city enjoyed good communications and extensive ties with London through its position as a county and garrison town and cathedral town. However, it was also important in helping to integrate both north Wales and Ireland into the national space-economy. These three histories of eighteenth-century Chester underline the importance of the geographical context of urban development. No single history tells us the whole story.

TOBY BARNARD

The Cultures of Eighteenth-Century Irish Towns

This paper looks at the varied functions—recreational, associational and political—of eighteenth-century Irish towns. In many respects, these characteristics resembled what has been found in contemporary English and Welsh towns. However, in Ireland, towns had long been conceived not just as centres of civility and urbanity, but of English and Protestant values. These features meant that they were sites of strong cultural and confessional differentiation by the eighteenth century. Some of the resulting tensions, both within particular towns, and between town and countryside, are explored.

ROSEMARY SWEET

Provincial Culture and Urban Histories in England and Ireland during the Long Eighteenth Century

This paper considers the strength of provincial culture and urban identity over the long eighteenth century through a comparison of the urban histories of English and

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>

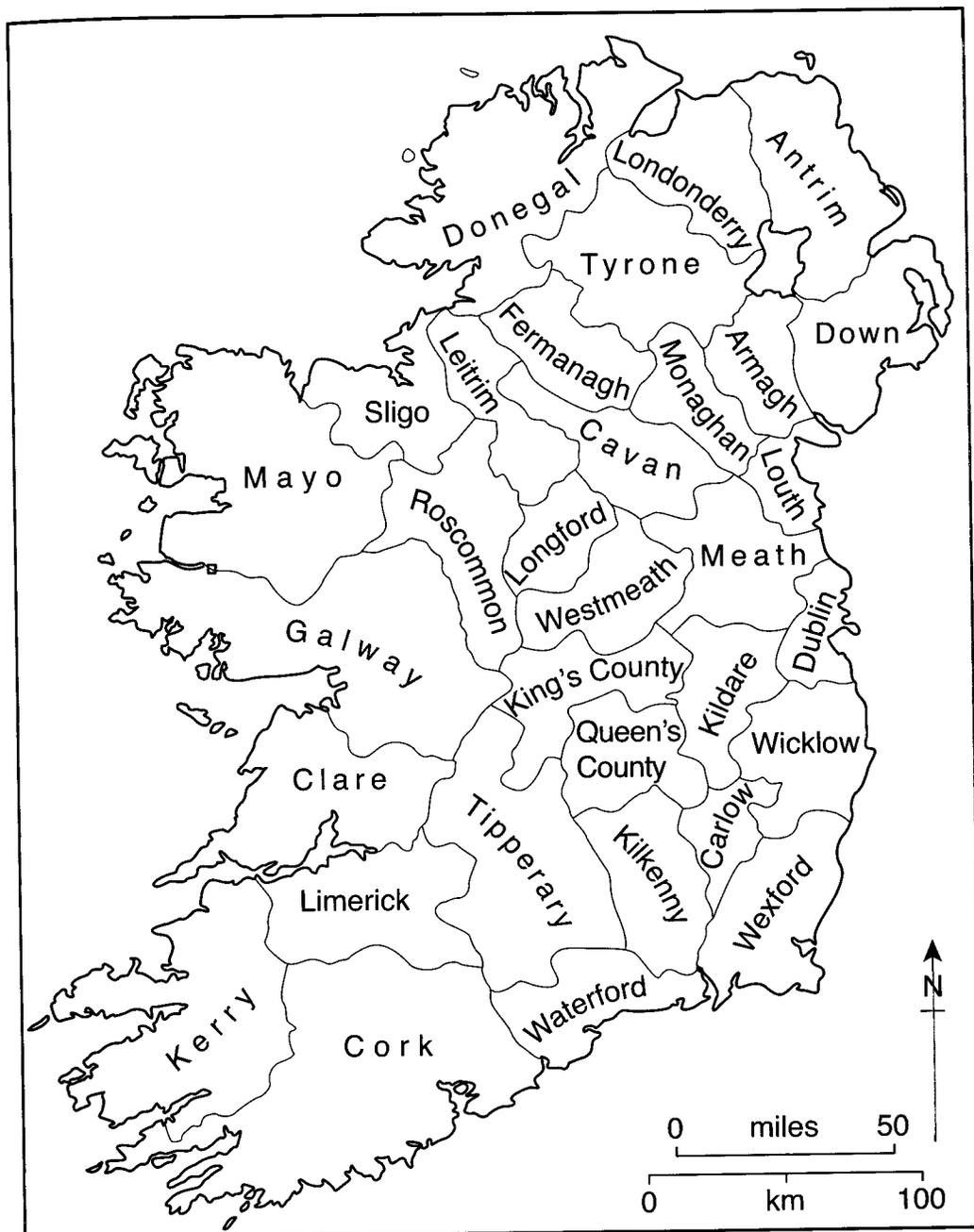


Figure 0.1. Ireland: county map.

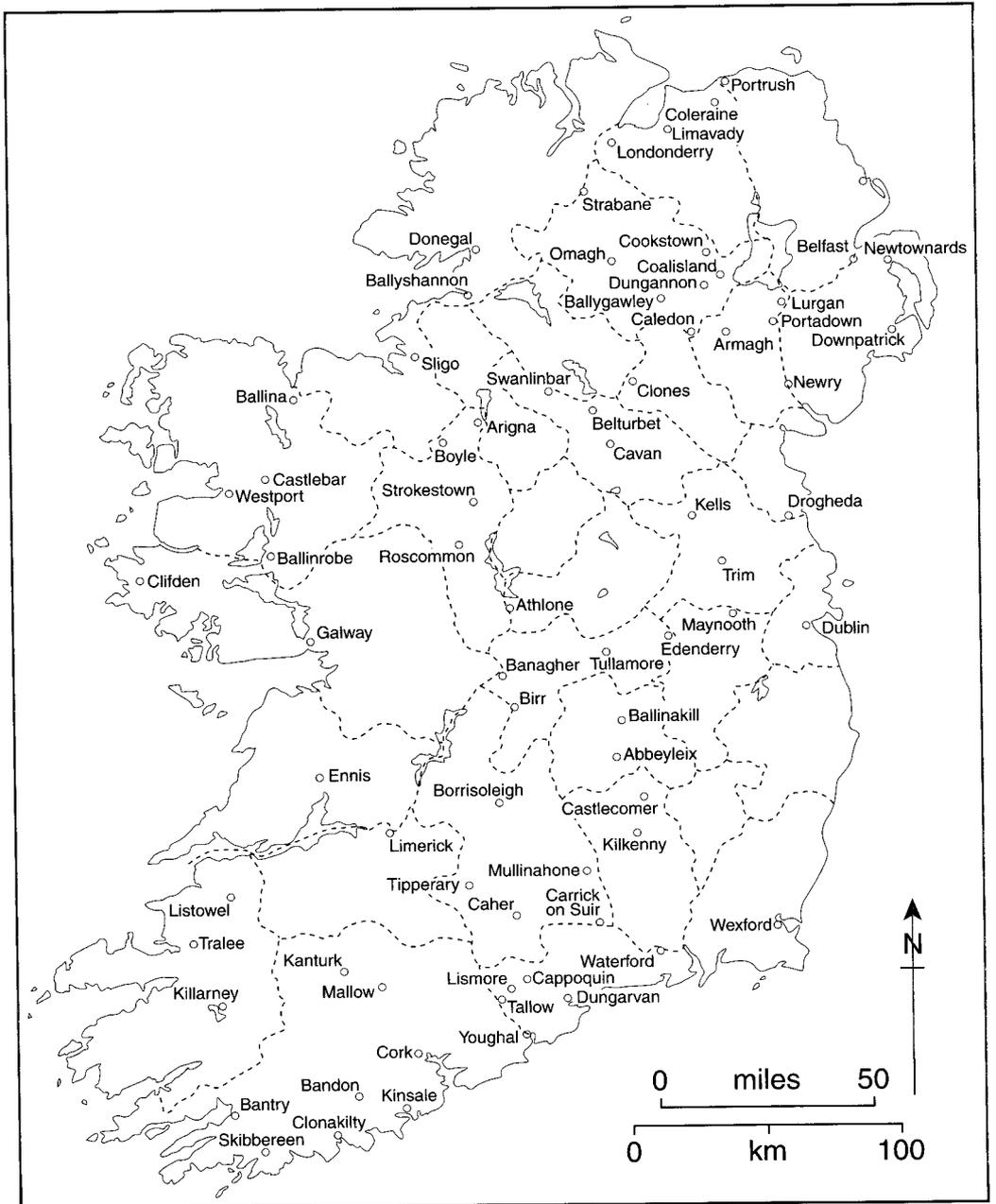


Figure 0.2. Ireland: places mentioned.