

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

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While every city and town, nay almost every village and hamlet, in Great Britain, can boast of its history, or illustrative description, the efforts of the pen or the pencil, in a similar way, in Ireland, may be enumerated in a summary note; and to this deficiency it is that the imperfect knowledge of this part of the empire, above alluded to, may be principally attributed.<sup>1</sup>

JAMES HARDIMAN, WRITING IN 1820, was painfully conscious that, to the foreign observer, Ireland appeared extremely backward in comparison with her sister kingdom of England, and that her potential contribution to the empire remained largely untapped. A variety of reasons might be adduced for this state of affairs—and he subsequently elaborated his own version in the remainder of the history. He never addressed directly, however, the reasons why the towns of Great Britain, and particularly England, were so abundantly supplied with historical accounts, whilst the urban histories of Ireland were few and far between.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, the case of ‘convergence or divergence’ in provincial culture and urban identities will be explored and illustrated through the medium of urban histories—a genre of literature which, as Hardiman’s comments suggest, became particularly popular during the eighteenth century.

One of the many indications of the flourishing condition of English towns in the eighteenth century is the abundance of descriptive urban literature—directories, guides, tours and, most eloquently, histories. During the eighteenth century, at least 150 histories of English towns were published, the biggest increase taking place in the last three decades. A further ninety were issued in the period 1800–20.<sup>3</sup> A number of towns were the subject of more than one historical account—there were seven different published histories of Bristol, for example, between 1700 and 1820. However, remarkable

<sup>1</sup> J. Hardiman, *The History of the Town and County of the Town of Galway* (Dublin, 1820), p. v.

<sup>2</sup> Hardiman listed in his footnote 13 publications, which included Ledwich’s brief notes on Kilkenny—published in vol. III of Charles Vallancey’s *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, 6 vols, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1786)—and five separate accounts of Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 9.

though Bristol was in its historical profusion, the general phenomenon of writing and publishing urban histories is suggestive both of a high degree of urban self-consciousness and of the importance of history in the construction of urban identities. The writing and publication of urban histories may be seen as part of a much longer-standing tradition of civic record keeping, but urban histories also reflected the contemporary optimism and confidence of urban society, and—in the rhetorical construction of a community with a historical identity—they offered a point of anchorage in a time of urban growth and change.

Ireland by contrast had far fewer urban histories and those which were published are heavily concentrated towards the end of our period.<sup>4</sup> Even so large a town as Belfast—large by Irish standards, that is—had to wait until the nineteenth century to read its own history.<sup>5</sup> This is a striking difference, and cannot be explained entirely in terms of Ireland's smaller urban population. Although Cork had a population of about 53,000 by 1753, rising to between 70,000 and 80,000 by the end of the century,<sup>6</sup> and was the second city of the kingdom and a cosmopolitan port, it could boast only one history; and, moreover, it was not one that stood alone but was published as part of a county history. Ports of similar importance in England, such as Hull or Newcastle (whose populations were actually considerably smaller than that of Cork), were the subject of not just one but several histories. Of the other six Irish towns with populations over 6,000, Limerick was the only town which was the subject of a history in its own right, as opposed to being simply the subject of a chapter in a county survey. Belfast was not the subject of a history until 1817, and there were no histories of Drogheda, Kilkenny, Lisburn, Londonderry, Newry or Wexford during our period. All of these were towns which, in terms of population, would by English standards have been likely to have produced a history. The spas and health resorts, modelled on the success of Bath and Tunbridge Wells, such as Mallow and Connell Springs, apparently did not see the need to acquaint the visitor with the antique origins of the town. Other forms of urban literature were similarly rare: with the exception of Dublin, the *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC) records

<sup>4</sup> The histories discussed in this article are: James Stuart, *Historical Memoirs of the City of Armagh* (Newry, 1819); *Historical Collections relative to the Town of Belfast: from the earliest period to the union with Great Britain* (Belfast, 1817); [George Benn], *The History of the Town of Belfast with an accurate account of its former and present state* (Belfast, 1823); Samuel McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of the County and town of Carrickfergus, from the earliest records to the present time*, 2nd edn (Belfast, 1823); Charles Smith, *The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Cork*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1774); James Hardiman, *The History of the Town and County of the Town of Galway* (Dublin, 1820); John Ferrar, *An History of the City of Limerick* (Limerick, 1767); John Ferrar, *The History of Limerick, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Military* (Limerick, 1787); Charles Smith, *State of the County and City of Waterford* (Dublin, 1756); R.H. Ryland, *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the City and County of Waterford* (Dublin, 1824). The first edition of the history of Carrickfergus, published in 1811, was unobtainable for the purposes of this essay.

<sup>5</sup> There was an earlier edition of the 1823 Belfast history, published in 1819, but it was not possible to consult it for the purposes of this essay.

<sup>6</sup> P.M. Hohenberg and L.H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 227; L.M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), p. 85.

directories for only two towns (Limerick in 1769 and Cork in 1795) and no guides at all. In England and Wales, by contrast, forty-nine different urban directories had been published between 1731 and 1800, excluding the metropolis.<sup>7</sup>

These differences indicate a stronger, more self-confident provincial culture in eighteenth-century England, and one which was firmly rooted in a strong sense of the town's history. Provincial urban culture in Ireland, as reflected through the glass of urban histories, was a much weaker flower with shallower roots, which failed to tap inherited historical traditions, as in England. It was not until the early nineteenth century that Irish towns began to participate less erratically in the production of local historical and topographical literature, and at the same time began to use the format to address a variety of other issues—political, religious, economic—offering an agenda and a cause with which the provincial urban historian could engage and to which the growing middling urban readership could respond.

Urban histories as a genre (including both the Irish and the English variants) are a somewhat heterogeneous range of publications, produced in widely different circumstances, by a diverse range of people. At one end of the spectrum a town history could be little more than a glorified guide for visitors or a town directory with grandiose pretensions; at the other end it could be a substantial antiquarian tome, bearing a closer resemblance to the weighty county histories of the period—in terms of size, price and content. Authorship was similarly varied, encompassing the enterprising printer-cum-publisher, the local clergyman, the hack writer, the loyal citizen or the antiquarian scholar.<sup>8</sup> In terms of content, urban histories offer insights into the construction of urban identities, the expression of civic pride and the strength of provincial culture. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that they can never offer more than a partial view of urban life, and were often overtly partisan, they nevertheless demonstrate that there was a market for such expressions of urban pride and an interest in the history of the *locus natalis*. The occasional history broke the mould: James Wallace's history of Liverpool was written in reaction to the excessive puffing which the author had encountered recently in other publications, and was deliberately aimed to cut Liverpool and its mercantile citizens down to size.<sup>9</sup> Historians of towns which had seen better days, such as Malmesbury, might deplore the present state of misgovernment and attack the iniquities and inadequacies of contemporary society, but only to highlight more sharply the contrast with former periods of better fortune and prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> P.J. Corfield with S. Kelly, 'Giving directions to the town', *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> For the occupations of English urban historians, see Sweet, *Writing of Urban Histories*, pp. 288–92. Amongst the Irish historians, Smith was a physician, Ferrar a printer/publisher, Ryland a clergyman, Hardiman a lawyer and subcommissioner of public records in Dublin and Benn was from a Belfast brewing family (information from *Dictionary of National Biography*).

<sup>9</sup> James Wallace, *A General and Descriptive History of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Liverpool*, 2nd edn (Liverpool, 1797).

<sup>10</sup> J. Moffatt, *The History of the Town of Malmesbury and of its Ancient Abbey* (Tetbury, 1805).

In general, even the driest of urban histories could be charged with exhibiting at least a modicum of pride—a pride in the town or city which could contribute to a sense of community, which fuelled a sense of independence and supported the construction of an urban identity.

## Urban pride

Common to almost all the histories, English and Irish, was the importance attached to founding myths. It is a truism that an essential component of national identities is the creation of founding myths and national histories: the same, not surprisingly, is true of urban communities. Past achievements and former glories were the key elements of any history, building up a sense of historical continuity and an inherited tradition, which provided the foundations for the construction of a community. English and Irish towns alike celebrated their historic credentials and strove to prove their antiquity. Not all urban historians were in a position to trace back their city's origins to its original foundation—for many, this was 'shrouded in the mists of time' and had to be passed over rapidly, but for those like the historians of Hull, who could recount the tale of Edward I surveying the land before locating the site for the king's town upon Hull, it was a matter of considerable *amour propre*, to be related in full and careful detail.<sup>11</sup> John Ferrar asserted triumphantly that Limerick's charter had been granted in 1197, ten years before London's, whilst Dublin and Cork did not receive theirs until 1308 and 1318 respectively, thus indicating Limerick's national importance in an earlier period for which no records remained.<sup>12</sup>

In England many writers still recycled the legends of Geoffrey of Monmouth, or at the very least included an explanation as to why the myths were no longer tenable. More reliable were the accounts of the classical observers: Caesar, Agricola, Tacitus and Ptolemy were plundered for what they could reveal about the ancient state of Britain, and allowed the town temporarily to bask in the reflected glory of classical civilization. Ireland fared less well for accounts of the earliest periods of its history. The marauding Danes of the ninth century were held responsible for the destruction of every record, which left the period prior to their invasions surrounded with speculative uncertainty. Although a lively debate was being pursued in antiquarian circles at the time as to the supposed civility or barbarity of the earliest 'Milesian' culture, none of the histories discussed here ventured into such controversial territory.<sup>13</sup> In general, the

<sup>11</sup> This story is related in full detail in both George Hadley, *A New and Complete History of the Town and County of the Town of Kingston upon Hull* (Hull, 1788), and John Tickell, *The History of the Town and County of Kingston upon Hull* (Hull, 1796).

<sup>12</sup> Ferrar, *Limerick* (1787), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> On antiquarian controversies, see C. O'Halloran, 'Irish re-creations of the Gaelic past: the challenge of Macpherson's Ossian', *Past and Present*, 124 (1989), 69–95.

Irish urban historians appeared more reluctant than their English counterparts to become engaged in scholarly antiquarian debate.<sup>14</sup> Fewer sources were available for them in print on the subject, and—as James Hardiman asserted—the duty of a topographer was not to become involved in literary warfare, but to state facts.<sup>15</sup>

Urban pride was not predicated upon an insularity or introspection, nor did urban identity demand the subordination of all alternative constructions of identity. English and Irish citizens took pride in belonging to a greater whole—and their expression of patriotism was often in the form of panegyrics on the achievement of their native town and its contribution to the nation–state. Urban histories were particularly suited to this sort of exercise as the role of the town in the formative events of national history (as the site of battles or the holding of parliaments, for example) could be rehearsed, whilst the town's present contribution to national greatness could be celebrated concurrently. Indeed, the writing of an urban history was often presented not only as a tribute to fellow citizens, but as a patriotic duty and a public service in itself. Non-resident readers, it was suggested, could not fail to find such histories—which touched the national interest so closely—gratifying. As Hardiman wrote of his own town of Galway, a place which had seen better days, 'every Irishman, concerned for the honor and prosperity of his native land, may perhaps feel a more general interest in the annals of an Irish city of ancient celebrity, in which so many affairs of public importance had formerly been transacted'. He even ventured that an English reader would be interested to read of the progress of so flourishing a colony of his own nation.<sup>16</sup>

Self-importance and self-confidence run through a large number of these histories (particularly those which did not have pretensions to antiquarian scholarship). Critical though some were of the local authorities, most histories rejoiced in recent urban expansion and improvements, and looked forward to future growth accompanied by the cultivation of ever increasing civility. Urban historians waxed eloquent on the public buildings, the growth of trade and the productivity of the manufactures, and boasted of the quality of the products, the elegance of the buildings and the extent of the improvements achieved. Such 'puffing' was often more muted in Irish towns, and tempered by consciousness of Ireland's relative backwardness in development—the emphasis being as much on the potential for improvement as on what had already been achieved. The historians of Cork and Limerick found plenty to boast of in terms of

<sup>14</sup> James Stuart, author of the 1819 history of Armagh, offers a partial exception in that one of his concerns was to rescue the reputation of St Patrick, the acclaimed founder of Armagh, after Edward Ledwich had cast doubt upon his historical existence, claiming that he was the creation of 'visionary monks' of the ninth century, pp. i–lxx.

<sup>15</sup> Hardiman, *Galway*, p. 32. Ryland, *Waterford*, p. 10, was similarly circumspect: 'The history of Ireland has ever been a subject of dispute. Between those who trace back her records to the age immediately succeeding the flood, and those who refuse to Ireland any ancient history, there can be no compromise or agreement; the one party is said to be romantic, the other is accused of incredulity. To obviate the difficulty, let us commence this sketch at the era of Henry II's invasion of Ireland. This will enable us to glean something of the traditional antiquity of the county, without involving us in doubtful or ill-founded surmises.'

<sup>16</sup> Hardiman, *Galway*, p. vii.

improvement and the progress of polite society, but McSkimmin candidly admitted that in Carrickfergus there was as yet 'no society of a literary or scientific kind; no library, book-club, nor even a common news-room in the parish.'<sup>17</sup> James Stuart may not have been able to find much that was distinctive to celebrate in Armagh, beyond the town's reputed foundation by St Patrick, but he was at least able to claim that 'it would indeed be extremely difficult to find, in the British empire, a single town whose affairs are more ably or more honestly managed than those of Armagh'.<sup>18</sup>

The most immediate difference between the production of urban histories in England and Ireland is, of course, their rarity in Ireland. The first history to be published of a provincial town (the metropolis, Dublin, is something of an exception) was the history of Waterford in 1753. This was followed three years later by a similar history of Cork. Both of these were the work of Charles Smith, a doctor and member of the Physico-Historical Society, established for the gathering of information on the political economy of Ireland. They were published as parts of county histories, whose remit—whilst including the recovery of the urban past—was framed much more generally in terms of providing an overall account of Ireland. This approach was hardly foreign to English urban topography—but in England, where a considerable number of county histories had already been published, the sections dealing with the larger towns were frequently issued separately for the urban market. Thus histories of Coventry and Warwick were extracted from Dugdale's *History of Warwickshire*, histories of Thetford and Norwich were published separately from Francis Blomefield's uncompleted *History of Norfolk* and Samuel Rudder published expanded accounts of Cirencester and Gloucester based on the relevant passages of his county history.<sup>19</sup>

Following Smith, the only other Irish history of the eighteenth century was John Ferrar's history of Limerick, which appeared first in 1767 and was reissued, with additions, in 1787. Then in the early nineteenth century, histories of Carrickfergus (1811), Armagh (1819), Belfast (1817) and Galway (1820) made their appearance, and a second history of Belfast followed soon after in 1823 and another account of Waterford in 1824. None of these histories, it may be noted, could approach the lengthier dissertations upon the English urban past. There was nothing to compare with Francis Drake's *Eboracum* (1736), William Barrett's *History of Bristol* (1789) or John Brand's *History of Newcastle* (1789), the latter of which ran to two substantial quarto volumes.

Given that the prime purpose of the urban history was to celebrate the urban achievement and the urban way of life, one would expect its readership to be heavily weighted towards the 'polite and commercial' middling sort. In England, the evidence

<sup>17</sup> McSkimmin, *Carrickfergus*, p. 251.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart, *Armagh*, p. 743.

<sup>19</sup> W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Coventre* (London, 1765); J. Sharpe, *The Antiquities of Warwick and of Warwick Castle* (Warwick, 1786); Samuel Rudder, *The History of the Ancient Town of Cirencester* (Cirencester, 1780); Samuel Rudder, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester* (Cirencester, 1781). For other examples see Sweet, *Writing of Urban Histories*.

of readership and sales, as well as the content, strongly indicates that this was in most cases a product for the urban élite and the middling sort, rather than purely the gentry who happened to frequent a town. Although, as Toby Barnard shows in this volume, a class of ‘pseudo-gentry’ was slow to develop in Irish towns, the middling sort was smaller and less wealthy than in the majority of English centres, and would therefore have been more weakly placed to compete in terms of spending power with the surrounding gentry. The comment of the contemporary English traveller, Richard Twiss, that ‘the indigence of the middle class of people is visible even in Dublin’ has been confirmed on a more empirical basis.<sup>20</sup> L.M. Cullen has shown that the number of towns where a majority of the inhabitants contributed to the hearth tax (which would indicate middling status) was a small minority. Overall, it has been estimated that 85.5 per cent of the population lived in houses with only one hearth, or were exempt from the hearth tax. Of the remaining 14.5 per cent, only 6.7 per cent would have fallen into the ‘middling’ category—as compared with figures of 30–40 or even 50 per cent which have been suggested for England during the later early modern period.<sup>21</sup> This has obvious implications for the market for urban histories. Charles Smith’s histories of Waterford and Cork were both presented as parts of a county history because he was aiming at the educated gentry, who spanned rural and urban society, rather than the purely urban population. The history of Limerick was similarly targeted at an audience of urban gentry, to whom John Ferrar paid constant tribute: ‘it is therefore no wonder, that men of landed property, every day find it their interest to let their lands, and come to reside in Limerick, where they can be accommodated with good houses, and where their children can be well educated.’<sup>22</sup>

The influence of the gentry was critical, not least because Irish municipal corporations had always been much weaker bodies than their English counterparts, and many were recent creations of the seventeenth century: artificial implants, with no history to sustain them. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that none of the Irish histories had anything like the civic component of English histories which is to be found in the histories of the older corporate towns such as Izacke’s history of Exeter, Francis Drake’s history of York, or Henry Swinden’s history of Great Yarmouth.<sup>23</sup> An entire subsection of the genre is effectively missing in the Irish context. Although, as its historian pointed out, Belfast’s history could be traced back to a very remote period, its history proper did not commence until the seventeenth century and its growth, which catapulted it into the place of third city in Ireland, did not begin to accelerate

<sup>20</sup> R. Twiss, *A Tour through Ireland in 1775* (London, 1776), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760–1801* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 38. Figures for England suggested in Jonathan Barry, ‘Introduction’, from J. Barry and C. Brooks, eds, *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ferrar, *Limerick* (1787), pp. 92–3.

<sup>23</sup> R. Izacke, *Remarkable Antiquities of the City of Exeter* (Exeter, 1724); Francis Drake, *Eboracum* (London, 1736); Henry Swinden, *The History and Antiquities of the Ancient Burgh of Great Yarmouth* (Norwich, 1772).

until the last third of the eighteenth century, by which time the corporation had lost any serious claims to effective leadership in the town. What gave the citizens of Belfast their common identity was the current commercial and manufacturing success, the expansion of the town, and the city's role in the Volunteer movement combined with recent politics, rather than the historic traditions of the corporation.

Whereas in cities such as York, Newcastle, Yarmouth or Bristol, the corporation had subsidised and encouraged the publication of a history, there is no evidence of any such collaboration in the Irish histories, even in the towns where the corporation could trace their origins back to the Anglo-Norman conquest. Charles Smith dedicated an engraving of a prospect of Waterford to the 'gentlemen of the common council', but their assistance in the history was not acknowledged; nor does the history of Cork bear any imprint of the corporation's concern. In England many urban histories were based upon collections of records, abstracts and manuscript chronicles kept during the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. A number of town clerks in the early modern period (and other members of the civic élite) drew up these histories—not simply because of a general vogue for record keeping, but because of the importance of precedent in administrative procedure and litigation, and the didactic value.<sup>24</sup> With the exception of Dublin, no comparable references to manuscript histories have been identified in Ireland. James Hardiman purchased the records of the corporation of Galway, but his interest in them was antiquarian rather than civic—he used them to illustrate the manners and customs of the time, and to demonstrate the damage of corporation rule in Galway, rather than valuing them for reasons of civic pride. Similarly in the history of Belfast, the corporation had become administratively redundant and a few extracts only from the corporation records were included, in order to 'shew the importance which once attached to the decrees of the corporation, as well as the ceremony which accompanied all their proceedings' and to illustrate the 'arbitrary' quality of its rule.<sup>25</sup> Civic culture was never more than a muted presence in these Irish urban histories.

The comparative weakness of the place of the corporation in Irish urban culture is again reflected in the narrative of the text: whereas in England—in a town such as Liverpool, Bristol or Norwich—the corporation played a very active role in urban life, leading the way in improvement and acting as a figurehead for cultural and philanthropic activities, the role of the Irish corporations appears much more peripheral. None of the Irish histories included the set pieces, often found in English histories, on the various officers of the corporation, their functions and duties; a list of officeholders, or a brief outline of the structure of the corporation, as in the history of Waterford, is the most that we find. Civic ritual was inevitably less important in Irish incorporated towns, where the corporation dated back only to the seventeenth century and had not acquired the sanction of tradition as the embodiment of the town. In this respect the Irish

<sup>24</sup> For examples of this kind of activity, see Sweet, *Writing of Urban Histories*, chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> [Benn], *Belfast* (1823), pp. 74, 79.

histories resemble, for example, Martin Dunsford's *Historical Memoirs of the Town of Tiverton* (1790). Late incorporation and limited financial means had left the Tiverton corporation with little influence or authority, and in addition the town had spent much of its history under the influence of the local Redver family. Dunsford considered that it was futile to record the rituals and ceremonies of the corporation as 'they have generally been conducted alike and are not peculiar to Tiverton'.<sup>26</sup> In Galway the corporation was regarded as defunct, the processions and feasts in Carrickfergus had long since ceased by the time McSkimmin was writing, whilst in Belfast the 'ceremony' surrounding the corporation—such as their procession to divine service in scarlet robes—was presented simply as an illustration of the ancient state of the city.<sup>27</sup>

### Why so few Irish towns published histories

The weakness of the civic tradition must therefore account, at least in part, for the feeble showing on the part of urban historiography and the brevity of what was published, but this civic weakness in itself demands further explanation. The history of Ireland during the medieval and early modern period was much less stable than in England. Towns were more vulnerable to the influence of the perennially feuding nobility, whose armies could besiege and sack them. Although English antiquaries gloried in the fact that urban incorporations had been the means of breaking feudal oppression by creating islands of freedom within the feudal system and, with the provision of luxury and entertainments, had distracted the nobility from their martial pursuits and provided a counterweight to their power, in Ireland this interpretative model broke down.<sup>28</sup> Irish towns had failed to prosper and challenge noble hegemony, and instead had found themselves and their trade at the mercy of warring factions. It was a commonplace, amongst Irish and English observers alike, that the economic and cultural development of Ireland had been critically impeded by the internal dissensions of the past. As John Ferrar put it in his *View of Antient and Modern Dublin*, 'The constant feuds among the Irish themselves; the unconquerable jealousy of their wealthy neighbours; the frequent struggles for property and power between the English chieftains; all contributed to make it a depressed and neglected history, and it is not to be wondered at if the people are many years behind their neighbours in all the improvements of civilised life'.<sup>29</sup> Amongst the improvements, we might include the writing of urban histories.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Dunsford, *Historical Memoirs of the Town and Parish of Tiverton in the County of Devon* (Exeter, 1790), p. 261. See also Sweet, *Writing of Urban Histories*, pp. 173–83, 220, 224.

<sup>27</sup> [Benn], *Belfast* (1823), pp. 79, 112; McSkimmin, *Carrickfergus*, p. 186; Hardiman, *Galway*, pp. 285–6.

<sup>28</sup> This argument was developed by, for example, William Robertson in *The History of the Reign of Charles V*, 3 vols (London, 1769).

<sup>29</sup> John Ferrar, *A View of Antient and Modern Dublin, with its improvements to the year 1796* (Dublin, 1796), p. 7.

Even the larger port towns, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, were repeatedly victims of the chronic political instability and civil war. Descriptions of the 'present state' of the Irish towns inevitably included the fortifications and the military barracks; in England, the fortifications were described as features of historical interest, and barracks were rarely to be found. The prolonged condition of lawlessness had also inhibited Irish towns from developing comparable traditions of autonomy. The intervention of Charles II and James II in the Irish boroughs did not generate the same levels of hostility and protest as in England. Whereas many English urban histories covered these events as the invasion of chartered rights and privileges, as a platform from which to trumpet the inviolability of corporate tradition and civic values, none of the Irish histories expressed comparable sentiments. John Ferrar's account of seventeenth-century Limerick was refracted through the prism of national politics, and the impact of James II's interventions in 1686—when twelve Roman Catholic merchants were made free of the council—was merely incidental to the grand narrative of the constitutional struggles occurring in Great Britain as a whole. Similarly, whilst expressing his disapproval of the attempts to reform the corporation in 1761 with a bill to 'subvert the charter of the city and to alter the mode of electing magistrates', Ferrar's condemnation stemmed from the danger of disorder which he feared would follow the introduction of popular elections, rather than the threat such elections might pose to the authority and government of the corporate body.<sup>30</sup>

This is not to say, of course, that the authority of English corporations went uncontested and untrammelled throughout the eighteenth century; the legitimacy of corporation rule was challenged recurrently and with increasing frequency, and this struggle in itself could give rise to—and certainly promoted—the publication of urban histories: either to prove the case for or against corporation. Philip Morant used his history of Colchester to defend the record of the corporation which had recently been dissolved and attributed the vicissitudes of the town to the lack of corporation governance; Joshua Toulmin, author of *The History of the Town of Taunton* (1791), however, had an entirely different agenda, using his history as a platform to argue *inter alia* for the redundancy of corporations, substantiating his case with reference to the behaviour of the Taunton body.<sup>31</sup> Histories were compiled and published with the explicit avowal of rescuing fellow citizens from ignorance, alerting them to their rights, or as an inspiration to win back privileges usurped by corporate bodies.<sup>32</sup> From the evidence of the

<sup>30</sup> Ferrar, *Limerick* (1787), p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Philip Morant, *History and Antiquities of the most Ancient Town and Borough of Colchester* (London, 1748); Joshua Toulmin, *The History of Taunton* (Taunton, 1791).

<sup>32</sup> Editions of the governing charters were often also published separately for similar reasons. For example, *Free Thoughts on the Offices of Mayor and Common Council of the City of Bristol* (London, 1792); *Charter of the City of Chester, granted by King Henry VII* (Chester, 1772); W. Holmes, *A Translation of the Charter granted to the Inhabitants of the City of Exeter* (Exeter, 1784); *A Correct Translation of the Charter of Liverpool, with Remarks and Explanatory Notes*, by Philodemos (Liverpool, 1757); *A Copy of the Charter of the Town and Parish of Maidstone in the County of Kent* (Canterbury, 1748).

histories, there would appear to have been less debate in Irish towns about the nature and scope of urban government, and about the extent of the franchise. At the very least, Irish citizens had not developed the English habit of expressing their grievances through civic histories.<sup>33</sup> This reflects the fact that the issue of the franchise, which loomed so large in England, was in Ireland generally subsidiary to the issue of the position of Catholics under the Penal Laws. It is also worth remembering that the capital-heavy projects of urban improvement, which not infrequently gave rise to disagreement and conflict within the English urban community, in Ireland were more frequently being funded by external bodies (such as the Irish House of Commons) or private individuals, rather than from the resources of the inhabitants through local taxation. Thus one of the key factors which led to the questioning of accountability and probity of urban governance in English towns was of far less significance in the urban politics of most Irish towns.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas in England the cause of independence and parliamentary reform provided a powerful incentive to maintain the traditions of chartered rights, and contests over the franchise ensured that repeated appeals were made to historical precedent, the political structure in Ireland had created a rather different configuration in the urban political culture. Although some Irish boroughs traced back their parliamentary privileges to the reign of King John, far more were the creations of the seventeenth-century plantation. The rhetoric of the Anglo-Saxon constitution—enshrined in Magna Carta and local borough charters across the country—could not capture the imagination of the Irish, whose historical agenda addressed a very different set of issues.<sup>35</sup> Elections in Ireland, until the Octennial Act of 1768, were contested with far less frequency. In only seven of the 117 parliamentary boroughs was there anything approaching an open franchise. The Irish urban electorate was not as lively or as politicised as the electorates of the larger freeman franchises in England, where chartered rights and historic precedents formed a staple of election propaganda. One of the most powerful forces in stimulating a ‘popular’ consciousness of the history of the town was therefore lacking. When the founding charters were associated with the emancipation from feudal bondage, this fed in to the traditions of urban independence. Charters granted freedoms which were part of the townsman’s heritage, a tradition which was not just enshrined in the historic annals of the town but was regularly revived during contested elections, giving a strongly individual flavour to the political culture of provincial urban life.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Dublin provides an obvious exception to these generalisations. On Dublin’s history during this period and the importance of civic identities and traditions, see J. Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> On the problems of funding local improvement, see R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 105–7, 133–7, 142–7.

<sup>35</sup> O’Halloran, ‘Irish re-creations of the Gaelic past’ and J. Hill, ‘Popery and Protestantism, civil and religious liberty: the disputed lessons of Irish history, 1690–1812’, *Past and Present*, 118 (1989), 98–109.

<sup>36</sup> These arguments are pursued at greater length in R. Sweet, ‘Freemen and independence in English borough politics, c.1770–1820’, *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), 84–115.

The independence movement in England was firmly rooted in a sense of historical legitimacy, rather than abstract principle, and much of the secret of its appeal lay in the resonance it had with traditions of urban autonomy and pride, directed at a historically defined community of freemen or inhabitants.<sup>37</sup>

The chequered history of Irish towns had important consequences; not least because it had left the eighteenth-century urban inhabitants a legacy of contested history. The majority of those in power in the eighteenth century had displaced the urban élites of the seventeenth century, whereas in England—although there had been considerable disruption in many boroughs during the seventeenth century—even the most factionalised societies showed greater continuity in personnel and the narrative of urban history gave existential expression to the myth of continuity and community.<sup>38</sup> English urban histories often attempted to paper over the fissures of urban society with language which belied the reality of past and present conflict; religious disputes were not mentioned, political conflict was passed over in silence, and the institutions and societies which celebrated polite and civilised social intercourse were lauded as the finest achievement of the age and the ultimate proof of eighteenth-century civility and refinement. Such historical, and rhetorical, sleight of hand was much harder to pull off in Ireland. The divisions and turmoil of the past were a powerful check on the expression of communal sentiment. A shared belief in a common past is essential for a sense of identity, but for eighteenth-century Irish towns—of which all except Dublin had a majority of Catholics with minority Protestant government—this would have been painfully difficult to achieve.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the urban histories without exception welcomed the onset of greater toleration and the relaxation of the penal laws, and were optimistic for the future. John Ferrar's history of Limerick offers a clear illustration of an attempt to overcome the 'jealousies which have divided men' in an attempt to 'unite his fellow citizens' in a celebration of their town, collecting together 'every remarkable transaction relative to Limerick'. He followed the English model of constructing a polite and harmonious image of the town. Whilst noting that 'other cities are frequently disturbed by party disputes, Limerick enjoys peace and tranquillity'. He strove to persuade his readers that the inhabitants were 'eminently possessed of politeness and suavity of manners. The men are sociable and hospitable; the women, fair, amiable and accomplished.'<sup>39</sup> In this respect Ferrar's history bears comparison with

<sup>37</sup> This may illuminate the greater success of French revolutionary ideology in Ireland amongst the United Irishmen. Dublin, as ever, was the exception. See Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists*, pp. 238, 300.

<sup>38</sup> Perry Gauci's study of Great Yarmouth shows how, even in the face of deep sectarian divisions in the late seventeenth century, in the day-to-day running of the borough the common council members were capable of achieving a *modus vivendi* between Anglicans and Dissenters in the interests of the corporation; *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660–1772* (Oxford, 1996). The changes suffered by English corporations in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are discussed in further detail in P.D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: partisan politics in England's towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998). In comparison with Ireland, English corporations were generally more inclusive and therefore inherently more stable.

<sup>39</sup> Ferrar, *Limerick* (1787), pp. xii–xiii, 92–3.

any English product. In the early nineteenth century, when pressure for repeal of the Penal Laws was mounting, the advocates of emancipation deliberately distanced themselves from the sectarianism of the past and stressed the toleration and inclusiveness which had been achieved within recent memory. The issue that might have blocked the writing of urban history in the past had now become a cause to be defeated, and in the process it opened up the possibilities for a history of a town such as Galway. Hardiman was confident that 'a faithful narrative of local transactions, free from any feelings of political or religious prejudice (which are here totally disclaimed) can have no other effect at the present day, than that of exciting the surprise and commiseration of every liberal and enlightened mind, at the excesses committed by one party, and the miseries endured by another in those distressing times.'<sup>40</sup>

The position of Ireland within the empire was another agenda which urban historians addressed through their histories—particularly as it could usefully be deployed to explain any signs of economic underdevelopment or performance. Hardiman, like all his fellow urban historians, was acutely conscious that Ireland's place in the British empire was one of inferiority. They shared a crusading belief in the potential of their own country to do better and win a higher profile in the empire and in Europe. Seventy years before Hardiman wrote his history, Charles Smith was claiming that the kingdom could maintain eight times its present population.<sup>41</sup> We may also detect differences in how towns located themselves within a 'national' culture, and in relation to each other. The historian of Belfast was confident that the city would soon be able to take its place in the firmament of imperial cities, whereas even in Liverpool, the ranking of the city within the empire was hardly presented as an issue. Whilst English urban historians would frequently emphasise the contribution of their town to national prosperity, or its historic role in national history, the wider framework of the imperial superstructure was rarely mentioned. The meaning of 'empire' for English citizens has still to be fully elucidated, but a comparison between English and Irish urban histories certainly confirms the greater significance of the empire for Ireland.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, all the Irish urban histories showed a distinctive awareness of their hierarchical position, not just in Ireland or the empire, but also within Europe. Charles Smith, commenting on the buildings on the banks of the Lee, argued that 'Although the banks of the Seine and Thames are adorned with magnificent structures, the Lee, far less opulent, and more humble, presents the eye with plain neat houses, small pleasant gardens, and pretty plantations, which begin to rise in proportion as the traffic of the city of Cork increases. The rising grounds, on both sides this river, have, of late, assumed an air of improvement, scarce to be met with out of our sister kingdom.'<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Hardiman, *Galway*, p. 167.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Waterford*, p. ix.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Bob Harris, "'American idols': empire, war and the middling ranks in mid-eighteenth-century Britain', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), 111–41.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Cork*, p. 356.

Ireland's trade with Europe in provisions encouraged comparisons upon the European scale: even whilst being acutely conscious of her backward state, the Irish were also more aware of the proximity and power of Europe. Whilst welcoming the commercial benefits that membership of the British empire could bring to Ireland, it was important also to maintain Ireland's sense of independence, embodied in trading relationships with other European countries, rather than trading simply with the mother country and her dependencies. English complacency and 'Little Englandism' seldom saw the need to draw comparisons with continental cities: the number of references to other European cities to be found in English urban histories is far fewer, proportionately, than in their Irish counterparts.

There are of course explanations for difference which have more to do with broader cultural patterns. Antiquarianism (which stimulated so many of the English urban histories) was less highly developed in Ireland. The aspiring local historian in Ireland did not have such a rich range of historical and antiquarian materials on which to draw as his English counterpart. Camden's *Britannia* resided upon the shelves of gentlemen's libraries and provincial book clubs across the country in England and provided an immediate starting point for the local enthusiast, but the coverage of Ireland was patchy and brief. The section on Ireland in Richard Gough's *Anecdotes of British Topography* (1768 and 1780) was similarly insubstantial compared with the detail on other parts of Great Britain, reflecting the paucity of antiquarian and topographical literature. The antiquarian network based around the Society of Antiquaries (founded 1707) which spread across England and into Scotland, was far sparser in Ireland, even after the foundation of the Royal Irish Academy in 1780. Charles Smith had commented that inquiries into the state of the counties in England had been underway for many years, with considerable advantages for the kingdom, but little of the kind had been attempted with any success in Ireland.<sup>44</sup> As late as 1786, Edward Ledwich published 'An essay on the study of Irish antiquities' in which he bemoaned the fact that 'while every nation of Europe is polishing its antiquities, and making new discoveries, Ireland abounding in learned men and in curiosities of very kind, remains to the naturalist and antiquarian a terra incognita, a region unexplored. A few sparks of patriotic ardour are alone wanting to show its latent treasures, and elevate it to a rank it has always justly claimed, but never enjoyed.'<sup>45</sup>

The limitations of the antiquarian tradition provided another reason why there were fewer published 'tours' recounting travels through Ireland. (The ESTC records only nine published tours which described Ireland.) Despite the wealth of antiquarian remains in Ireland—described, debated and discussed by the antiquaries of the day—and despite the picturesque qualities of the landscape, Ireland did not enjoy the kind

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Waterford*, p. vii.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Ledwich, 'An essay on the study of antiquities' in Vallancey, *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. II, pp. 86–7.

of popularity with visitors which Scotland and Wales experienced. Although Irish roads were reputedly excellent in many areas (the system has been described as considerably more sophisticated than Ireland's level of economic activity required),<sup>46</sup> the transport infrastructure was limited. Domestic tourism, which fuelled the demand for topographical literature of all varieties on the mainland, was much less developed and less fashionable. Those who could afford to travel in Ireland were more likely to make the journey to England. In this respect, Ireland was again suffering from her semi-colonial status. As a result, there was nothing comparable to the barrage of guides, directories, road books or published tours to be met with. We do not find in any of the Irish histories the formula so common in the English variant, which excused the author's presumption in going into print, by claiming the history had been written to answer the enquiries of curious travellers and visitors.

### Civic competition

In England, the much higher levels of domestic traffic and the greater volume of information published pertaining to towns created a more self-conscious culture, in which towns were acutely aware of what was going on in other centres. To fall behind in the progress of improvement meant loss of trade, loss of investment and loss of status. Inter-urban rivalry and competition was a dominant feature of these histories.<sup>47</sup> Towns compared themselves with each other (not generally with London); they emulated improvements, they cross-fertilised each other culturally with book clubs, musical festivals, literary and philosophical societies; they borrowed solutions for philanthropy and for law and order. The author of a history of Berwick upbraided his fellow citizens on their failure to cultivate literary pursuits, telling them that towns half their size had public libraries and coffee-houses.<sup>48</sup> Samuel Rudder went into some detail on Gloucester's recent improvement act, with the complacent suggestion 'that it might excite a spirit in others to apply to Parliament for the improvement of the respective places, after the laudable example of the Citizens of Gloucester'.<sup>49</sup> Urban histories documented and fanned the flames of this cultural competition: more than one author prefaced his history with comments on the inexplicable lack of any kind of historical account of his native town, which as a loyal citizen he could not see continue.<sup>50</sup> One reason for the delayed appearance of some of the familiar attributes

<sup>46</sup> R. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1660–1972* (London, 1988), p. 204.

<sup>47</sup> J. Ellis, "'For the honour of the town': comparison, competition and civic identity in eighteenth-century England", unpublished paper given at the Centre for Urban History, Leicester, November 1998.

<sup>48</sup> T. Johnstone, *The History of Berwick and its vicinity; to which is added a correct copy of the charter granted to that borough* (Berwick, 1817), pp. 158–9.

<sup>49</sup> Rudder, *Gloucester*, preface.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Alexander Hay, *The History of Chichester* (London, 1804), preface.

of an 'urban renaissance' in Irish towns may have been that there was not the same pressure to keep up with other towns in the region, and the introduction of new ideas and fashions was slower and more erratic. Provincial Ireland did not yet have the critical mass of urban centres outside the metropolis to sustain independent urban cultural life, such as was to be found in England. In a competitive arena there is more pressure for self-definition, to find a niche in the market-place. English towns were certainly at pains to distinguish themselves through their histories from the rank and file of other towns.

The argument that Irish urban culture was derivative of Dublin, which in turn was dependent upon London, is therefore persuasive.<sup>51</sup> Less convincing, however, is the equivalent interpretation which was for many years applied to English provincial culture. The suggestion that the key fact about provincial culture was its repudiation of provinciality in favour of the metropolitan version looks increasingly dubious.<sup>52</sup> The strength of provincial culture is currently being reassessed and a number of recent works have drawn attention to its vitality, such as John Brewer's *Pleasures of the Imagination*. Brewer's interpretation shows that there was a thriving cultural life in provincial Britain which was not slavishly dependent upon London; London, he suggests, rather than representing the pinnacle of achievement, was just one of many brightly shining stars in the cultural firmament. 'While a London artist or critic saw the nation as a cultural hierarchy with London at its pinnacle, the provincials saw it as a collection of roughly comparable places, comprising a more egalitarian nation.'<sup>53</sup> London was not able to dominate the culture of the provincial towns in England for a variety of reasons. Economically, London's position—despite the anxieties of contemporaries—was not hegemonic, and complex regional economies existed independently of London. Other towns were showing even more rapid rates of growth, and centres such as Liverpool and Manchester were well aware that in certain areas they had out-classed the capital. London's administrative, political and social consequence was undeniable, but in terms of the day-to-day management of affairs, the traditions of local autonomy made it a distant presence. Historians have recently been allowing greater agency and creative initiative to the provincial towns of England.<sup>54</sup> The prosperous economies of the provincial towns of Georgian England and growing provincial self-consciousness created a self-confident urban culture with distinctive values, fostered and articulated in the improving, philanthropic and intellectual activities of provincial

<sup>51</sup> R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 145–7.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Roy Porter's assessment that 'The key fact about provincial opinion in the eighteenth century is that — unlike later — it repudiated its own provinciality. Painfully aware that they existed in the shadow of the metropolis, the provincials' prime aim was to assimilate metropolitan culture and values. Provincial culture was more imitation than innovation.' R. Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion in Enlightenment England', in P. Borsay, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Town* (London, 1990), p. 251.

<sup>53</sup> J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (London, 1997), p. 497.

<sup>54</sup> D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700–1870* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 57–84.

urban life.<sup>55</sup> From a reading of urban histories, there is plenty of material to substantiate Brewer's estimation in the English context — not least from evidence of people's sense of the past, and the sentiments of pride and independence which that cultivated.

In the Irish context, during the eighteenth century at least, it is harder to find the substantive evidence with which to challenge such an interpretation of cultural dependency. It is very easy to take at face value Charles Smith's comment that 'every entertainment that has the authority of fashion in Dublin (which place also takes its example from London) prevails here'.<sup>56</sup> English travellers continually griped about the cultural desert which they claimed to find outside Dublin. Twiss complained that 'out of Dublin, and its environs, there is scarcely a single capital picture, statue, or building to be found in the whole island. Neither is music cultivated out of the above-mentioned limits, to any degree of perfection; so that nothing is to be expected in making the tour of Ireland, beyond the beauties of nature, a few modern-antiquities, and the ignorance and poverty of the lower class of the inhabitants.'<sup>57</sup> One should not, of course, read too much into subjective sources such as those cited here, and this is only an impressionistic survey, but in the histories studied here, there are few passages which articulate a sense of urban identity comparable to those found in England.

Uncovering the reality of the Irish urban experience in the eighteenth century is much harder than for England, given that the printed materials are so much rarer. By the early nineteenth century, however, Irish towns would appear to be acquiring the attributes of a more dynamic and creative society. The 1823 history of Belfast fits most neatly with this model, for by the nineteenth century this was the town showing the fastest growth and with the most dynamic commercial and manufacturing sector. It is the only history in which we encounter any kind of opposition between urban 'middling' values and the 'aristocratic' refinement and luxury of genteel culture. The political spirit of the inhabitants, and their concentration on industry and commerce, it was argued, accounted for what observers saw as the weakness of literature and the fine arts within the city. Significantly, Belfast did not compare itself with Dublin or London, but with Glasgow and Liverpool.<sup>58</sup> The recent unification of the political institutions of the two countries was thus in certain respects mirrored in the development of Irish urban culture, as it began to show signs of greater convergence with — rather than divergence from — the English experience.

<sup>55</sup> Dror Wahrman characterises this development as the communal local alternative in 'National society, provincial culture: an argument about the recent historiography of eighteenth-century Britain', *Social History*, 12 (1992), 43–72.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Cork*, p. 400.

<sup>57</sup> Twiss, *Tour in Ireland in 1775*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Belfast* (1823), pp. 128–31.

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

Irish towns published during this period. Although Irish urban development lagged far behind that of England, there were a number of towns which compared favourably in size with those of England. However, even in these towns the evidence for a strong and self-confident urban culture, which is visible in the histories written of English towns, is much less substantial. Whereas English urban identities were strongly articulated and informed by historical traditions of independence and autonomy, Irish towns, in general, did not subscribe to the same collective myths of freedom or appeal to the rhetoric of freeborn Englishmen. Their historical heritage was often more problematic, involving periods of intense conflict and subordination to neighbouring landlords: the past was something to be contested, rather than providing the basis for a collective identity. Rather than championing local particularity, their culture was portrayed as derivative of Dublin and London. Towards the end of the period, however, there are signs in some towns of efforts to produce a history compatible with 'polite' society. As commercial and manufacturing prosperity began to take off in Belfast in the early nineteenth century, a history of the city's manufacturing and commercial growth could be written, celebrating the dynamism, superiority and unique qualities of the town, in terms which echoed those of the growth cities of eighteenth-century England.

SUSAN HOOD

**The Significance of the Villages and Small Towns in Rural Ireland during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

The paper examines the instance of village and small-town building in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the villages and small towns of Ireland make up the bulk of the present Irish urban network, relatively little is known about their complex history. The paper attempts to explore the origins and functions of villages and small towns in Ireland, with particular reference to the role played by Irish landowners in their creation or re-modelling during the period, and the co-operation and mutual interest of urban tenants in the process. The distinctive characteristics of these centres are examined, and particular attention is devoted to the mindset of the people who lived in them — the small-town and village tenants. The last part of the paper examines the specific grievances of this social group during the latter half of the nineteenth century, whose somewhat sensational, yet short-lived, campaign, manifested in the form of a Town Tenants' League, emphasised the social and economic distinctiveness of the settlements they occupied.

# 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>