

Preface

The idea for holding comparative conferences on English and Irish towns came to the editors while they were walking in the garden of St Patrick's College, Maynooth in 1996. In both countries there has been a major growth in recent years in studies of urban development in the early modern period, but despite the connections and divergences between England and Ireland, there has been no attempt at a concerted comparative approach to the vital urban changes at this time. Hence the initiative for two conferences, the first on London and Dublin in the eighteenth century which took place in Dublin in April 1998, and the second on Provincial Towns held in September 1998 at the Centre for Urban History, Leicester University (a volume of papers from that conference is being edited by Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot as *Provincial towns in early modern England and Ireland: Change, convergence and divergence*). Yet if the inspiration for these gatherings had a spiritual flavour, the support and organisation of the conferences was wholly secular in character, though no less beneficent for that. We should like to thank very warmly the British Academy and Royal Irish Academy for their joint financial support of the conferences. Sir Keith Thomas, then president of the British Academy, was especially encouraging and Rosemary Lambeth was most helpful in London. The Royal Irish Academy graciously permitted the meeting on London and Dublin to have its sessions in their beautiful house in Dawson Street near St Stephen's Green, where they plied the participants with excellent hospitality. We are very grateful to Veronica Barker at the Dublin academy for all her efforts, while Professor Anngret Simms, as ever, provided expert advice and warm enthusiasm in equal measure.

The papers in this volume are substantially revised papers from the Dublin conference. In addition, the editors decided it was appropriate to have two new contributions on the important subject of the Church, which was not fully considered at the conference: Viviane Barrie kindly agreed to write one on the Church of England in London in the period, and its Dublin counterpart has been written by Raymond Gillespie.

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