1

Introduction

PETER CLARK & RAYMOND GILLESPIE

IF THE CLOCK HAD STOPPED IN 1600 it would have been an act of historical folly to have undertaken a comparison of Dublin and London. In terms of population, economic development, the urban landscape, and much else, the two cities at that time were poles apart. Over the next two centuries, however, their urban trajectories were increasingly convergent. By 1800 they probably had more in common with one another than each of them had with the other cities and towns of their respective islands. In 1600 the population of Dublin lay between 15,000 and 20,000 people, probably no larger than a substantial provincial capital in England; by 1706 this had risen to about 62,000 souls, and by 1800 it had soared to 182,000 people.[1] London's rate of growth was slower, though its absolute increase outshone that of almost every other European capital city. Rising from 200,000 in 1600, the city's population stood at nearly a million in 1800. By then the two cities were the biggest British towns in the Empire, and both ranked in the top ten of European cities.[2] Although London's population may have been more than five times that of Dublin on the eve of the Union in 1800, its proportionate share of the national population was probably no more than three times that of Dublin. By this time the two communities had more than demographic gigantism in common, however. As seats of government they had a growing landowner presence and important service functions. While they both experienced increasing social and environmental problems, they also had reasonably effective administrative structures to contain them. During the eighteenth century in particular they saw the major rebuilding of their central areas, the bright flowering of cultural and leisure activities, and even the emergence of a degree of multi-centredness in perceptions and realities of metropolitan life. It might require different skills to negotiate the social pitfalls of two different communities but the problems of living in a large city were fundamental to both. As early as the 1680s one commentator noted: 'Men live alike in these two cities'.[3]

[1] D. Dickson, 'The place of Dublin in the 18th-century Irish economy', in D. Dickson and T. Devine, eds, *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850* (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 179.
[2] A.L. Beier and B. Finlay, eds, *London, 1500–1700: the making of a metropolis* (London, 1986), pp. 3, 39; also P. Clark, ed., *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, vol. II* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 316, 650; B. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics: Europe, 1750–1993* (London, 1998), pp. 74–6 (Dublin came tenth, ahead of Rome and Madrid).
[3] *CSP, Domestic, 1686–7*, p. 93.

Proceedings of the British Academy, **107**, 1–6. © The British Academy 2001.

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

At the same time, there remained fundamental structural differences between the two cities. While both were governmental centres, Dublin was always perceived from London as the junior partner, in some measure the colonial client of the imperial master. Dublin, naturally, resisted such a view. The corporation took its stand with the Patriot movement during the eighteenth century by resisting what it saw as impositions from London in the Wood's halfpence dispute of the 1720s, by supporting free trade and parliamentary freedom in the 1770s and 1780s, and by opposing the Act of Union in 1800. At a popular level, by the middle of the eighteenth century the Dublin mob was sufficiently politicised to take to the streets on such issues.[4] Dublin's political weakness derived in part from economic inferiority. While both capitals were the largest ports in their two islands, Dublin was in large measure excluded by British protectionism from easy access to those colonial and long-distance trades which so profited London. The accumulation of merchant capital in the city could never match that of London. In late eighteenth-century Irish banking, landed capital was of much greater importance than mercantile capital. The fluid land market led many merchants to invest in Irish land. By the late eighteenth century, as the Irish economy began to recover from the depression that characterised the years before 1740, a good deal of the mercantile capital was in Catholic hands, which effectively separated Dublin's civic political élite from the urban economic élite.[5]

Religion marked another major difference between the two cities. The Reformation had been both 'intense' and 'immediate' in London and by the beginning of the seventeenth century it had brought the vast majority of its citizens to at least a nominal conformity to the Church of England; after the onset of the English Revolution there was a massive upsurge of Protestant dissenting churches. Dublin did not feel the white heat of Tudor reform and by the early seventeenth century the Reformation had failed to make a significant body of converts from the Catholic inhabitants of the city, who were now coming under the influence of the Counter-Reformation.[6] It was only as a result of substantial emigration from England between 1650 and 1750 that the city acquired a Protestant character.[7] Thus while both were leading ecclesiastical centres, in the case of the Irish city, confessional rivalries and Protestant hegemonic pretensions pervaded every nook and cranny of the urban community, its structures and identity: it was what made Dublin Dublin. In contrast, Georgian London was the world capital of religious pluralism.

This volume also sheds light not just on these areas of convergence and divergence, but on a third theme: the forms of dialogue, interaction, and emulation. Many

[4] S. Murphy, 'Municipal politics and popular disturbances, 1660–1800' in A. Cosgrave, ed., *Dublin through the ages* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 77–92.

[5] D. Dickson, 'Catholics and trade in 18th-century Ireland: an old debate revisited', in T.P. Power and K. Whelan, eds, *Endurance and emergence: Catholics in 18th-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 85–100.

[6] S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989); J. Boulton, 'London, 1540–1700' in Clark, ed., *Cambridge Urban History, vol. II*, pp. 336–9; C. Lennon, *The lords of Dublin in the age of Reformation* (Dublin, 1989).

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

contemporaries could move between the two cities and feel at home in each. There were similar institutions in both. The learned, for instance, could find a Dublin equivalent for the Royal Society in the Dublin Philosophical Society and by the eighteenth century much of what could be bought in the London bookshops was also available in Dublin.[8] Centres of sociability such as coffee-houses and a range of clubs and societies thrived in both places.[9] On Sundays, churches in both cities worshipped in similar ways with almost identical liturgies, and similar fashions were on display in both places. It could, of course, be argued that Dublin was simply imitating patterns in London, but imitation was a two-way process. While the first masonic grand-lodge of the Modern order was established in London in 1717, to be emulated in Munster—and later Dublin—during the following decade, the establishment of the new Ancient order in London in the 1750s owed much to Dublin freemasonry. That same decade the Society of Arts was founded in the English capital as an improvement society, with at least part of the organisational inspiration being supplied by the Royal Dublin Society.[10]

Looking first at the changing social topography and construction of the two cities, Derek Keene in chapter 2 highlights the complexity of London's evolving palimpsest, with some areas by the eighteenth century dominated by new first-generation buildings, particularly in the suburbs, whereas other districts displayed two, three, or more generations of construction. The transformation of the capital into a classical-style, brick- or stone-built city was qualified by the survival in many areas of vernacular buildings. Indeed, Keene suggests that the impact of improvement up to George III's reign was not wholly impressive, with the lack of systematic regulation and the power of the commercial imperative creating a world of 'narrow streets, congestion, unplanned development and lack of refinement'. In Dublin, as Colm Lennon shows in chapter 3, there was much less continuity with the medieval city, the catastrophic gunpowder explosion of 1597 having devastated a good part of the inner area and so forcing large-scale reconstruction. Again, by 1700 suburbanisation was starting to spread with new classical-style squares developing to house the influx of gentry, as in London. Here, however, the city corporation, parliament and state may have played a more decisive role than was the case across the sea. Another contrast was in terms of residential topography: the London gentry had started to desert the medieval core for the more fashionable west end of the city by the middle of the seventeenth century, moving to a nascent West End. In Dublin the area of the city associated with high social status remained up to the eighteenth century the medieval core. When it did shift, it was the

[7] P. Fagan, 'The population of Dublin in the 18th century', in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 6 (1991), 121–56.
[8] R. Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire' in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: the 18th century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 240–1; R.C. Cole, *Irish booksellers and English writers, 1740–1800* (London, 1986).
[9] P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: the origins of an associational world* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 89, 92, 131–3.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 87, 311 *et passim*.

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

east end of Dublin which would be colonised by the gentry, whilst the west end became the industrial area.[11]

London's rapid growth and sprawling extension outside the old City limits, large-scale by 1640, generated many social and administrative problems: the prosecution of criminals, policing, the removal of vagrants and poor relief. As Joanna Innes explains in chapter 4, the period from the late seventeenth century saw a proliferation of bodies to deal with these issues. As well as the old City corporation, there was a veritable army of parish vestries, local magistrates, improvement commissions and voluntary organisations. Despite later criticism, this decentralised and relatively fragmented system was, nonetheless, reasonably effective, with parliament and the central government serving (where necessary) as proxy authorities for the metropolis. Dublin seems to have had more riots than London, at least during the early eighteenth century, and this may well have been linked to higher levels of destitution (since, unlike London, the city was flooded with starving poor during the famine of 1740). The matrix of social control was also different with the Protestant city corporation playing a more crucial role in policing. In the 1780s, as fear of disorder mounted, parliament established a radically new police system for the Irish capital with further reform in the 1790s. The outcome, as Neal Garnham demonstrates in chapter 5, was that in Dublin, as in London, public order was generally maintained.

Turning to the economic development of the two capitals, Leonard Schwarz (chapter 6) explores in greater depth than any one has done heretofore, the powerful service role of the capital and analyses how the emergence of specialist retailing and domestic service areas of the capital was linked to specific migration flows, age structures and sex ratios. In London the presence of parliament was a crucial seasonal factor in the influx of landowners and the burgeoning of retailing, luxury industries and leisure entertainments. At Dublin the loss of the Irish parliament (and the vice-regal Court) was feared as a body blow to the city's economy, but—as David Dickson suggests in chapter 7—the impact was less stark. True there was a loss of industry and population (owing to suburbanisation), both similar to trends in London. Yet, despite the Union, there were extensive public works and the consolidation of the city's service and communications role. One lesson that might be drawn from this (and it is equally applicable to Edinburgh, Warsaw and Prague) is: once a capital, always a capital.

Governing these large crowded cities required ingenuity, persistence and luck. More compact than London, Dublin for much of the period was governed by an effective city corporation, jealous of its extensive privileges and with considerable tax-raising powers, and seconded by a range of craft companies which remained active and important until the late eighteenth century. London's experience was different. Already, from the later sixteenth century, suburbanisation posed major challenges to the old City institutions—

[11] L. Stone, 'The residential development of the West End of London in the 17th century' in B.C. Malament, ed., *After the Reformation* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 187 *et seq*.; see also below, ch. 15.

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

the corporation and gild companies. Frightened of the remorselessly expansive metropolis on its doorstep, the Crown under the early Stuarts advocated a policy of extending the City's jurisdiction to include the new areas. The city fathers, for reasons which are not entirely clear, declined, and suburban administration was left to a disparate group of parish and other authorities. However, as Ian W. Archer shows in chapter 8, decentralised administration does not necessarily mean weak or ineffective governance: in fact the suburbs were reasonably well governed during the Tudor and Stuart period. In this Archer foreshadows Innes' argument for the Georgian metropolis. Jacqueline Hill examines in chapter 9 how by the late eighteenth century Dublin was starting to move in London's governmental direction: the powers of the corporation were seriously curtailed by the creation of the Wide Streets Commission in 1758, and in other areas too voluntary and other bodies began to take on important functions in the Irish capital.

Yet, above all, it was cultural brilliance which defined the identity and success of the two capitals during the eighteenth century. In chapter 10 Peter Borsay describes how London's cultural importance was associated with its gateway position, commmercialisation, capacity for innovation, hegemonic influence and self-consciousness. At the same time, he also stresses the fragmenting cultural universe of London with its ethnic and cultural diversity and sub-cultures. Similar themes are also picked up in Toby Barnard's chapter (11) on Dublin culture. Boasting music societies and concerts, learned and improvement societies and great public buildings, Dublin ranked in cultural contention with the greater cities of early modern Europe. Cross-influences between the two capitals were strong but negotiated. In Dublin many architectural ideas were pilfered from London, but local architects were employed and some of their models were continental. However, as Barnard stresses, this was not an open cosmopolitan city like London or Amsterdam, but one whose cultural life was rigged and manipulated by a narrow Protestant oligarchy.

As we have already seen, religion was an essential ingredient in Dublin's urban development and Raymond Gillespie's chapter (13), indicates how the building of churches, along with sermons, charities and religious sociability, helped formulate a sense of civil identity. It was also a key for survival and success in the early modern community. In Georgian London the Church of England had to compete with a host of nonconformist churches as well as secular entertainments, but Viviane Barrie (chapter 12) makes a strong case for the Church and its clergy, seconded by the laity, remaining active players in urban social and cultural life; indeed, in the later eighteenth century the penumbra of religious, philanthropic, educational, missionary and moral reform associations linked to the Church were crucial in setting a new agenda for the cultural and social life of the capital's respectable classes.[12]

As already noted, several chapters point to the social, political, economic and cultural division and fragmentation of London in the period. In chapter 14 Peter Clark

[12] Clark, *British Clubs*, pp. 102–9.

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

suggests that there was also a fragmentation in the perception of the metropolis from the later seventeenth century—changes linked not just to the remorseless expansion of London and political decentralisation, but also to new images and conceptions of private and public space. Dublin—always smaller and with stronger institutional controls—never developed to such an extent as a multi-centred metropolis, but Edel Sheridan-Quantz in chapter 15 pays attention to the development of the eastern districts as a smart residential quarter, with controls to keep out undesirables. At the same time, the work of the Wide Streets Commissioners created a central pivot in the city from Dublin Castle to Rutland Square, with a splendid assemblage of public buildings and fashionable façades—a metropolitan fulcrum so evidently missing from late Georgian London.

The chapters in this volume by no means exhaust the subject. We should like to know more about the vectors of communication between the two great cities—the flows of migrants, the newspaper coverage, the contacts through associations like the moral reform societies, masonic lodges and the like. The role of the state is critical for both cities and we need to have more quantifiable information on the fiscal balance of account, levels of government expenditure, the economic impact of large military bases in their vicinity, and so on. Again, discussion of the changing performance of the two cities needs to take into account the challenge from the expanding cities and towns of their hinterlands. However, the following chapters provide an important introduction to understanding the growth and impact of these two great cities in the English-speaking world.

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

List of Abbreviations

APC	*Acts of the Privy Council*
BL	British Library
CARD	*Calendar of the Ancient Records of Dublin*, ed. J.T. and R.M. Gilbert, 19 vols (Dublin, 1889–1944)
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
CJ	*House of Common Journals, England*
CSP	*Calendar of State Papers*
Ec.HR	*Economic History Review*
HCJI	*Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland*
GL	Guildhall Library
HMC	*Historical Manuscripts Commission*
Lambeth PL	Lambeth Palace Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
PRONI	Public Record Office, Northern Ireland
RCB	Representative Church Body Library, Dublin
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
WAC	Westminster Archives Centre

Copyright © British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved