

The Multi-Centred Metropolis: The Social Topography of Eighteenth-Century Dublin

EDEL SHERIDAN-QUANTZ

It is here necessary to remark, that the eastern side of the City, contiguous to the sea, is almost entirely laid out in elegant streets, for the residence of the gentry: and the western side, though more remote from the sea, and consequently not so conveniently situated for the purposes of commerce, is chiefly inhabited by merchants and mechanicks.¹

IN A PORT CITY IT SEEMS RATHER ODD INDEED that the ‘merchants and mechanicks’ should dwell in the landward half of the city, leaving the area towards the coast to the ‘gentry’. As the following demonstrates, Dublin’s east–west social gradient as described in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century accounts, of which a typical sample is given above, was not quite as simple as many contemporaries liked to claim. The eastern and western sectors were fragmented and subdivided by the physical barrier of the River Liffey, so that different neighbourhood characters and subcentres of social and economic activity developed, not only in the eastern and western halves of the city but also within these sectors.

With the Restoration of the monarchy in England and the consequent re-establishment of the Irish parliament in Dublin, the city began to expand rapidly again. Dublin in the eighteenth century was a capital city, nominally of a semi-autonomous kingdom, *de facto* of a state with effective colonial status subject to the English throne; nevertheless, the city had all the associated administrative, legal, cultural and economic functions of a capital. By 1800, Dublin was the sixth largest city in Europe with 182,000 inhabitants, London and Paris being the largest. Eighteenth-century Dublin can be regarded as a metropolis by contemporary standards; a metropolis by its very scale is destined to develop several or multiple centres of economic and social activity, and discrete local loyalties and identities; the sheer distances to be overcome within a large city necessitate this. Multicentredness can be observed in

¹ R. Pool and J. Cash, *Views of the most remarkable public buildings, monuments and other edifices in the City of Dublin* (Dublin, 1780), p. 14.

eighteenth-century Dublin at several levels: in its residential districts of varying character and quality with unique identities and local loyalties; in the distribution of social and cultural activities; in its economic activities; and, related to these, in its sites of consumption, primarily retailing. Spatial differentiation of all these uses and activities of course exists in practically all urban settlements, but to varying extents depending on the scale of the town.

As specific evidence for the social activities and local loyalties of the poorer residents of Dublin in the eighteenth century is weak, this discussion concentrates on the better-documented spatial ties of the city's middle- and upper-class inhabitants. Particular attention will be paid to the governing élite particularly characteristic of a capital city, namely those persons directly associated with parliament.

I

The preconditions for the eastward concentration of new housing for the middle and upper classes in eighteenth-century Dublin had been created by the physical nature of the city site. Medieval Dublin had developed on a small elevated spur of land rising about 55 feet (17 metres) above the confluence of the Liffey and the smaller River Poddle, to the east of an ancient fording point (hence the Irish names Baile Átha Cliath, 'the town at the ford of the hurdles'; and Dubh Linn, 'black pool', after the pool at the confluence of the two rivers).² In the Viking city, the marshy shores of the Liffey extended on the south bank to what is now Cook Street, 100 yards (or metres) from the river-bank, and on the north side to modern Henry Street and Mary Street some 250 yards (or metres) from the present-day quays. Land reclamation in the Anglo-Norman period narrowed the Liffey considerably, but in the late seventeenth century the sea still came up to the grounds of Trinity College.³ East of Essex Bridge the north river banks were 'covered with ouse, and overflowed by the tides', and on the south bank the corresponding areas were likewise 'under the dominion of the water',⁴ so that the eastern area 'contiguous to the sea' was not physically suited to attract development. Only in the early part of the eighteenth century did large-scale reclamation of the eastern marshes under the aegis of the corporation commence, proceeding then fairly rapidly so that by the mid-eighteenth century the quay areas had 'many commodious and some stately houses'.⁵

However, the configuration of actors shaping Dublin's urban morphology in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century resulted in a spatially dichotomous

² See A. Simms, 'Medieval Dublin: A topographical analysis', *Irish Geography*, 12 (1979), 25–41.

³ See A. Yarranton, 'Report and map on Liffey estuary, 1674', reprinted in *CARD*, vol. v, Plate 1 and pp. 573–6; also J.H. Andrews and K.M. Davies, 'Dublin, c.1800', in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne, eds, *A New History of Ireland. Vol. ix: Maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history, Part II* (Oxford, 1984), p. 39.

⁴ W. Harris, *History and antiquities of the City of Dublin* (London, 1766), pp. 101, 102.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

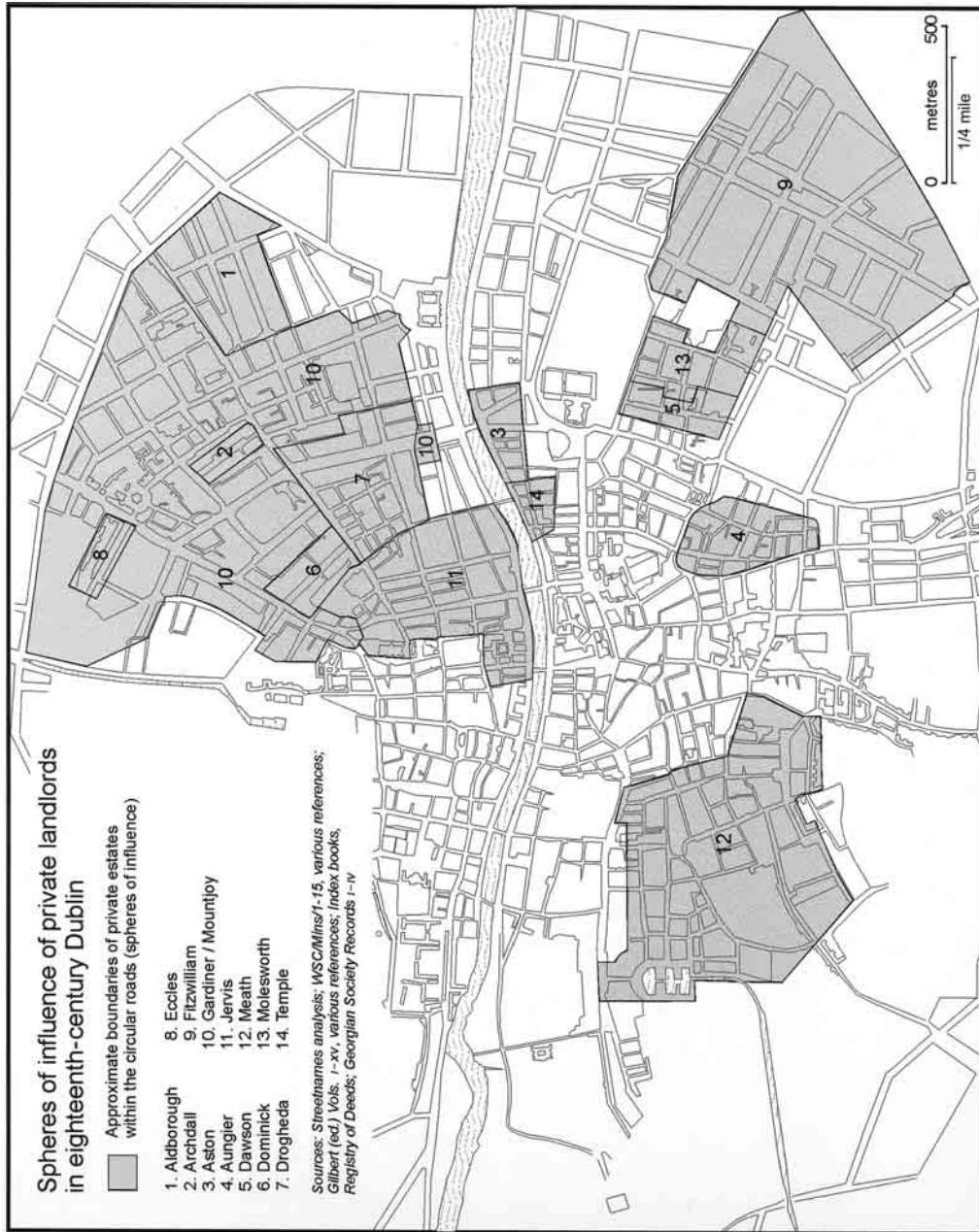


Figure 15.1. Spheres of influence of private landlords in eighteenth-century Dublin.

provision of housing types. This spatial skew was closely linked with the evolution of significant political and social nodes of activity and foci for the development of upper- and middle-class local identity within the rapidly expanding capital. Significant investment in the urban fabric of eighteenth-century Dublin was almost wholly concentrated in the eastern half of the city. Extensive, planned urban quarters as well as notable public buildings were almost exclusively to be found downriver from the medieval core. The planned creation of new urban functional areas directed the evolution of the city's social topography.

As in many pre-industrial European cities, the patterns of land ownership in the area occupied by the growing Irish capital after 1660, and the development policies of the landlords, were crucial to the development of the city's social topography. The corporation itself was an important landlord within the walled city, and to a lesser extent on lands surrounding the medieval core. Trinity College occupied a large tract to the east of the old town, while two very large private estates dominated the eastward expansion of the city from the 1720s on, the Gardiner estate on the north side of the river, and the Fitzwilliam estate to the south (Figure 15.1). These two private landlords further developed the urban square in Dublin, which had been introduced by an initiative of Dublin Corporation when redeveloping St Stephen's Green in the 1660s. These squares were to become important foci for outdoor socialising in fashionable Dublin. Numerous smaller estates were also of significance, while one large estate to the west of the old city, the Meath estate, was notable for the landlords' lack of intervention in urban development. Dublin was furthermore unique in Europe⁶ in the early establishment of what quickly became a municipal planning body with a very modern and spatially coherent agenda, the Wide Streets Commission, founded by act of parliament in 1757.⁷ The new developments were characterised by the eighteenth-century 'spirit for elegance, and improvement'⁸ to such an extent that they were almost solely aimed at occupancy by the more solvent sections of society. The furtherance of accessibility to central government buildings (in particular, Parliament on College Green and Dublin Castle at the eastern limits of the medieval core), through the agency of the Wide Streets Commission, played a large role in reinforcing the eastward expansion of the city.

Dublin Corporation was in 1664 the initiator of a scheme for the development of the first residential square in Dublin, to become a much admired 'scene of elegance and taste', a fashionable promenade and home to 'people of distinction'.⁹ It took financial necessity to drive the corporation to this significant initiative in urban design: in May 1663, members of the commons of Dublin had petitioned the corporation, expressing

⁶ T. Hall, *Planning Europe's capital cities: Aspects of nineteenth-century urban development* (London, 1997), pp. 2, 39.

⁷ *Statutes at Large*, 31 Geo. II, c. 19.

⁸ Pool and Cash, *Views of Dublin*, p. 23.

⁹ R. Lewis, *The Dublin Guide* (Dublin, 1787), pp. 239–40; Pool and Cash, *Views of Dublin*, p. 14.

their awareness of the ‘exhaustion’ of the city treasury ‘by reason of the late rebellion and longe continued troubles of this kingdome’. The commons suggested that St Stephen’s Green, then a large common to the south-east of the city, ‘and other wast lands about this cittie, that now addeth nothing att all to pleasure or profit, may be set for ninetie nine yeares, or to fee farme, and a considerable rent reserved’.¹⁰ Provisions were made for the aesthetic appearance of the Green with sycamore trees to be planted around the central green area and a minimum standard of building laid down, houses to be of ‘brick, stone and timber, to be covered with tiles or slates, with at least two floores or lofts and a cellar, if they please to digge it’.¹¹ The Green, allegedly ‘one of the finest Squares in Europe’, became the ‘common resort of the Beau Monde’.¹² Even the lugubrious and critical Reverend Campbell finds praise for Europe’s largest urban square, where ‘genteel company walk in the evenings, and on Sundays, after two o’clock, as with us in St. James’s Park’.¹³

Urban squares as places for socialising and recreation were to form the centrepieces of the two most important private estates in eighteenth-century Dublin. Large private estates held by landlords loyal to the English Crown had been used in Ireland as a means of colonisation and to maintain stability in the country since the sixteenth century. From the late seventeenth century onwards, wealthy and ambitious citizens of Dublin, such as Humphrey Jervis and Luke Gardiner, set about acquiring the leases of large tracts of land bounding on the old walled city. Other landlords, such as the viscounts Fitzwilliam and the earls of Meath, held large tracts of land as parts of older great estates. This pattern of urban landholding has similarities with the private estates of London.¹⁴

The first Luke Gardiner, a banker (d. 1755), started acquiring property in Dublin shortly after 1710,¹⁵ and by the mid-eighteenth century had a large estate extending in a wedge north-eastwards from Capel Street (Figure 15.1).¹⁶ The earliest planned urban expansion directed by the Gardiners (later with the title Viscount Mountjoy) was Henrietta Street, in the 1720s.¹⁷ The early leases for Henrietta Street show that a

¹⁰ Dublin Corporation, 2nd Friday after Easter 1663, in *CARD*, vol. iv, pp. 256–7.

¹¹ Dublin Corporation, 29 July 1664, in *CARD*, vol. iv, p. 298.

¹² Anon., *Four letters originally written in French, relating to the kingdom of Ireland* (Dublin, 1739), p. 26.

¹³ Rev. T. Campbell, *A philosophical survey of the south of Ireland* (London, 1777), p. 6.

¹⁴ See J. Summerson, *Georgian London* (London, 1945).

¹⁵ Rev. C.T. McCready, *Dublin street names dated and explained* (Dublin, 1892, repr. Blackrock, 1987), p. 40; M. Craig, *Dublin, 1660–1860* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 102–5; A.M. Fraser, ‘Messrs Gardiner and Hill, Bankers’, *Dublin Historical Record*, 19 (4) (1964), 127–33; National Council for Educational Awards, ed., *Gardiner’s Dublin: A history and topography of Mountjoy Square and environs* (Dublin, 1991).

¹⁶ The Gardiner estate was broken up by sale in the Encumbered Estates Court in 1846; as a result there is no longer any comprehensive collection of Gardiner papers relating to the Dublin estate. Little coherent planning took place after the death of the second Luke Gardiner in the 1798 rising, and his son and grandson had left it heavily debt-laden.

¹⁷ The Georgian Society, *Records of eighteenth-century domestic architecture and decoration in Dublin*, 5 vols (Dublin, 1909–13), vol. ii, p. 10.

distinguished and wealthy tenantry was aimed at; all plots are occupied by large houses with coach houses, stables and other out-offices.¹⁸ The manuscript returns of Whitelaw's census of 1798¹⁹ show five peers, one other Member of Parliament, two peeresses, one judge and one doctor, as well as one 'Honourable', in Henrietta Street's twelve houses.²⁰

The chief representative elements of the Gardiner development are Sackville Street and two squares, Rutland Square and Mountjoy Square. Sackville Street, also known as Gardiner's Mall, was developed from the 1740s onwards on an even grander scale than Henrietta Street; Malton calls it 'the noblest street in Dublin' and says it is 'very well built' and 'inhabited by persons of the first rank and opulence'.²¹ A chronicler of Dublin in 1766 declares that 'for elegance of plan and architecture [Sackville Mall] exceeds any street in London'.²² Rutland Square (now Parnell Square), situated on the northern edge of the Gardiner estate, was by the end of the eighteenth century one of the most aristocratic residential areas in the city and 'an elegant square'.²³

One remarkable private venture led to the creation of a social attraction of considerable importance in Rutland Square (see Figures 15.8 and 15.15). Dr Bartholomew Mosse (1712–1759) had in 1745 opened the first maternity hospital in these islands in a house in what was then George's Lane (later South Great George's Street) on the south side of the city, close to the old medieval centre and the Castle.²⁴ In 1748 Mosse leased five acres (2 hectares) north of the newly developed Sackville Street, and commissioned the German architect Richard Cassels to design a new hospital, which was built between 1751 and 1757. In order to fund his charitable venture, Mosse had an area north of the lying-in hospital planned and laid out as pleasure gardens or a 'polite place of amusement', for the privilege of enjoying which a fee was charged.²⁵ These gardens became a tremendously fashionable promenade. Campbell, frequently but a reluctant admirer of Dublin, waxes almost lyrical, declaring that 'this is the Vauxhall, Ranelagh and Pantheon of Dublin. Nay, it is something more than all these, it is a polite place of public resort on Sunday evenings . . . On these nights, the rotunda and gardens are prodigiously crowded, and the price of admission being only sixpence, every body goes'.²⁶ Certainly the 'really romantic' walks in the gardens afforded

¹⁸ Registry of Deeds, King's Inns, Dublin: books of transcripts, 63, 71, 76, 77 etc.

¹⁹ The manuscript returns of Whitelaw's census were burnt in the fire at the Four Courts in Dublin in 1922, but some of the information in these documents had fortunately earlier been summarised in the *Georgian Society Records*.

²⁰ *Georgian Society Records*, vol. II, pp. 28–30.

²¹ J. Malton, *A picturesque and descriptive view of the City of Dublin* (Dublin, 1799; facsimile reprint, Dublin, 1978), text accompanying Plates 21 and 22.

²² Harris, *History and antiquities of Dublin*, p. 101.

²³ Malton, *View of Dublin*, text accompanying Plates 21 and 22.

²⁴ Pool and Cash, *Views of Dublin*, p. 62.

²⁵ Dublin Corporation, 14 October 1757, in *CARD*, vol. X, pp. 298–9; Pool and Cash, *Views of Dublin*, pp. 62–3; Malton, *View of Dublin*, text accompanying Plates 21 and 22.

²⁶ Campbell, *Philosophical survey*, pp. 26–7.

‘delightful recreation’ for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and the hospital became the ‘vortex of all the fashion of that part of the town’.²⁷

Concerts were held out of doors in the gardens and also in a circular building erected in 1784 for that purpose to the east of the hospital, the Rotunda, which gave the hospital its popular twentieth-century name. The Rotunda became the location for ‘a rather singular form of entertainment’ known as a ‘promenade’, where the visitors strolled and conversed indoors.²⁸ Another means of raising money for the venture was the control granted to the Lying-in Hospital over the licences for private sedan chairs. A surviving list of the licensees for 1785 provides an insight into the type of person who identified with the charitable aims and social functions of the Hospital, the Rotunda and the pleasure gardens. Over two-thirds of the holders of sedan chair licences were members of the titled nobility, and thus members of the House of Lords.²⁹ The licensees lived for the most part in Henrietta Street, Rutland Square, Sackville Street, St Stephen’s Green and Merrion Square, and their spatial distribution corresponds closely with that of members of parliament and peers of Ireland in 1798 (Figures 15.2 and 15.3), indicating the continuing loyalty of the governing élite to these sections of the city, and to certain ‘prime’ locations on the Gardiner and Fitzwilliam estates in particular.

Mountjoy Square was the last large-scale project of the Gardiners, begun in the 1790s and completed early in the nineteenth century. The initial plan for the square was one of the grandest in Dublin. Gardiner planned to erect buildings with unified palatial façades on all four sides; the buildings would have entrances to separate dwellings at regular intervals. A new church for the parish of St George was planned for the centre of the square. This plan however proved too expensive to implement, and uniform four-storey brick houses were built around the square.³⁰ English visitors described Mountjoy Square as ‘a distinguished ornament to this fashionable part of Dublin’³¹ and ‘one of the most agreeable city residences in the British Empire’.³²

The viscounts Fitzwilliam of Merrion held a huge wedge of land in Dublin (Figure 15.1), extending eastwards from close to Stephen’s Green to Ringsend, and southwards beyond the city as far as Bray.³³ In 1745 the earl of Kildare (later duke of Leinster) built

²⁷ Malton, *View of Dublin*, text accompanying Plates 21 and 22.

²⁸ Le Chevalier de La Tocnaye, *A Frenchman’s walk through Ireland, 1796–7* (repr. and trans. by J. Stevenson, London, 1917), p. 24.

²⁹ Anon., *An account of the subsisting licences for private sedan chairs, 25 March 1785* (Dublin, 1785).

³⁰ J. Warburton, Rev. J. Whitelaw and Rev. R. Walsh, *History of the City of Dublin* (London, 1818) vol. 1, pp. 466–7.

³¹ T. Cromwell, *Excursions through Ireland* (London, 1820), p. 145.

³² J.J. McGregor, *New picture of Dublin* (Dublin, 1821), p. 295.

³³ Until the early 1990s, the eighteenth-century letterbooks, leases and maps of the Fitzwilliam estate survived as a complete collection in the Pembroke Estate Office in Lad Lane in Dublin (the property passed to the Earls of Pembroke in 1816). During the 1970s and 1980s, research access was allowed to the Pembroke Estate Office. However, in recent years much of the material relevant to eighteenth-century Dublin (letterbooks, leases and maps) was removed to England, and access to any material remaining in Dublin was refused. The map collection and some estate rentals were returned to Ireland and deposited in the NAI in 1995; the correspondence between the Dublin estate agents and the Fitzwilliams has not been traced.

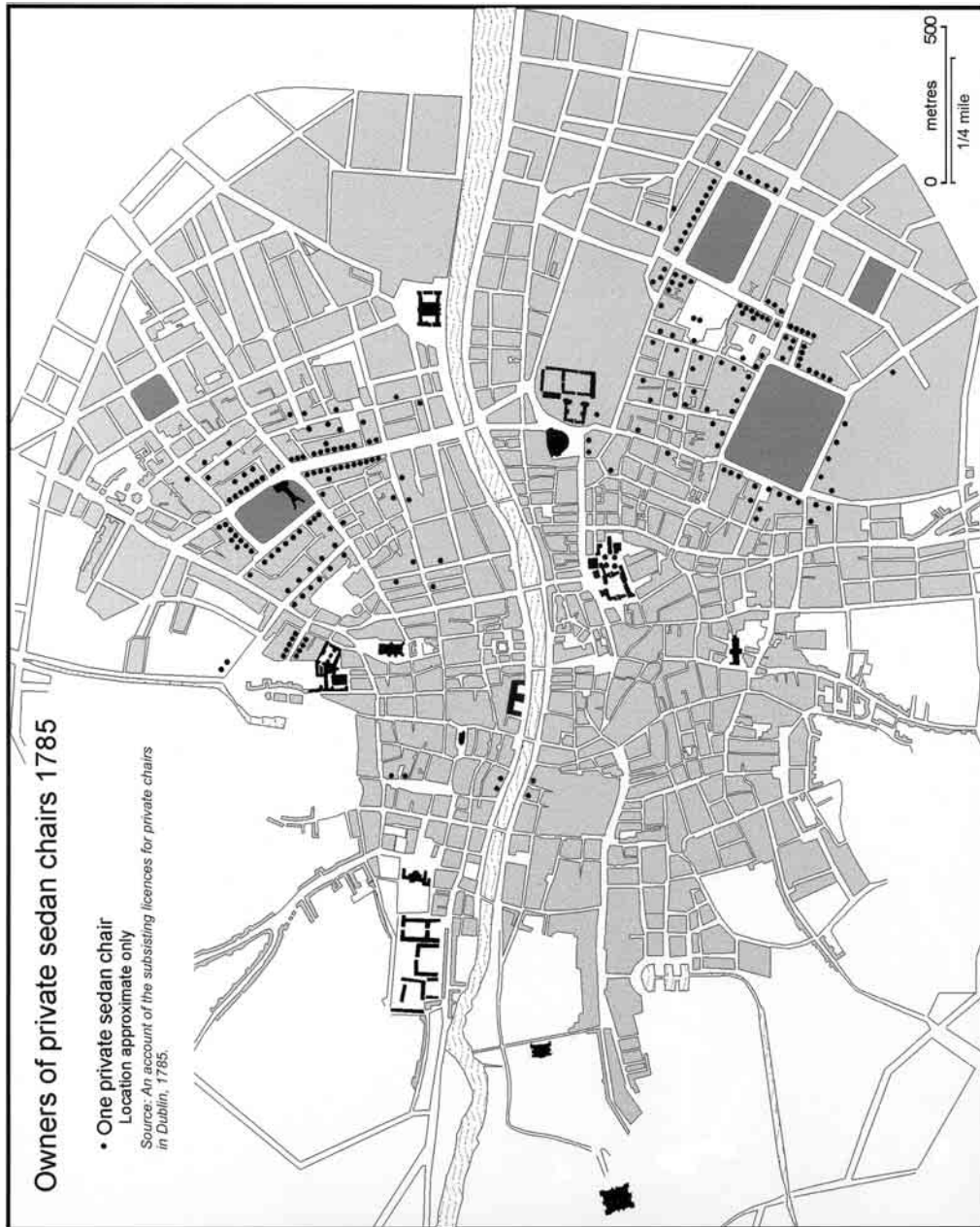


Figure 15.2. Owners of private sedan chairs, 1785.

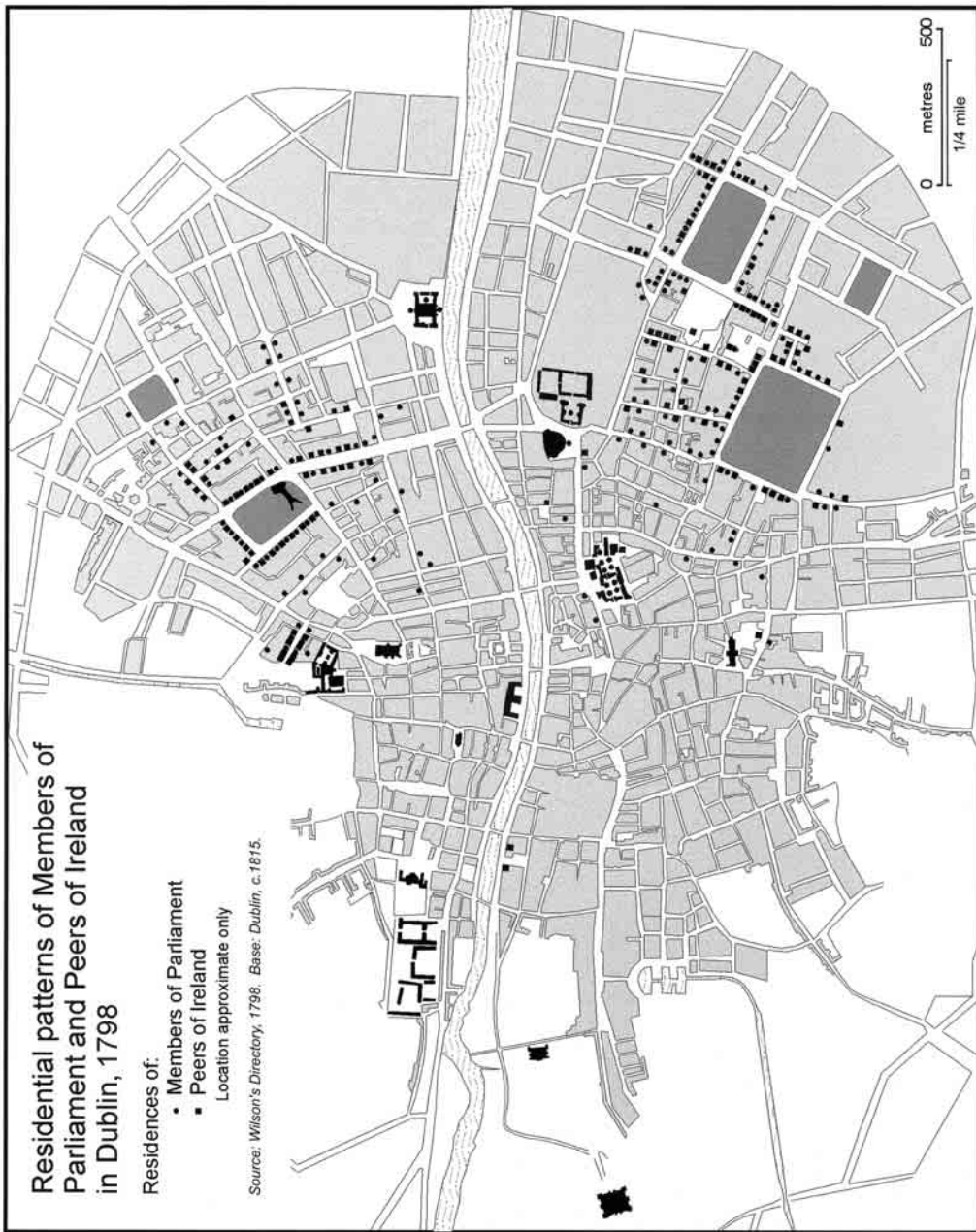


Figure 15.3. Residential patterns of Members of Parliament and Peers of Ireland in Dublin, 1798.

his palatial town house³⁴ in Kildare Street, the lawns of which faced onto the western edge of the Fitzwilliam property, creating a node of attraction for upper-class residential development on the south side of the river, a counterweight to the already flourishing Gardiner estate on the north side. By the 1750s Fitzwilliam had leased out plots beside Leinster House for building. From 1762 on, Merrion Square and the surrounding streets were laid out.³⁵ Of the 61 lessees in Merrion Square in 1791, 18 were members of titled families.³⁶ The stylish buildings in this ‘spacious and elegant area’³⁷ attracted ‘persons of the first rank’.³⁸ The northern footway of Merrion Square was ‘on summer evenings, the fashionable lounge for all the gay and wealthy inhabitants of the neighbourhood’,³⁹ as the Dublin estate agent wrote to Fitzwilliam in London, adding that ‘Merrion Square looks so handsome it is so fashionable a walk and drive . . .— you have nothing in London so handsome as Merrion Square’.⁴⁰ Fitzwilliam Square and Fitzwilliam Street were laid out in the 1790s, and not completed until the 1820s. Fitzwilliam Square was the last and smallest formal residential square to be begun in Dublin in the eighteenth century, with houses similar in style to those of the other, older squares.

The Gardiner and Fitzwilliam estates demonstrate the very great influence which private individuals could have over the development of eighteenth-century Dublin. Like the corporation’s earlier development of St Stephen’s Green in the 1660s, these schemes were intended to make a profit for their initiators, and the provision of actual capital investment in buildings was delegated to the first tenants, who were generally encouraged to build quickly by the convention of ‘peppercorn’ or nominal rent for the early years of their lease. Some leases were conditional on the completion of building within a set period of time.⁴¹ The profit-driven nature of the landlords’ plans combined with eighteenth-century (Enlightenment) notions of ‘improvement’ meant that high-quality buildings were favoured. The only small-scale housing types associated with the eighteenth-century activities of these two landlord families were the mews quarters in the stable lanes behind the large houses on the main streets, in their nature intimately tied up with the life of the lessors in the main house. The houses themselves bear witness to their destiny as arenas of social display, with their often opulent reception rooms, impressive staircases and fine plasterwork.⁴² Thus, on these two very large

³⁴ Kildare House, later Leinster House and now the seat of the Dáil, the modern Irish parliament.

³⁵ J. Ferrar, *A view of ancient and modern Dublin* (Dublin, 1796), p. 73.

³⁶ *Statutes at Large*, 31 Geo. III, c. 45.

³⁷ G.N. Wright, *An historical guide to ancient and modern Dublin* (London, 1821), p. 260.

³⁸ McGregor, *New picture of Dublin*, p. 293.

³⁹ Cromwell, *Excursions through Ireland*, pp. 90–1.

⁴⁰ Letter from Barbara Verschoyle to Lord Fitzwilliam (18 May 1797), transcript lent by Dr Jacinta Prunty, NUI, Maynooth.

⁴¹ E. Sheridan, ‘Dublin and Berlin: A comparative geography of two eighteenth century European capitals’ (PhD thesis, NUI, Dublin, 1993), pp. 166 and 182–3.

⁴² See accounts in the *Georgian Society Records*, vols I–IV.

estates as well as in numerous smaller estates, elegant streets and squares with correspondingly large and commodious private dwellings (four-storey houses with two to five bays) were built, ensuring that large sections of the eastern half of the city — in their original intended use as single-family dwellings with servants' quarters attached — were initially available only to a well-heeled tenantry.

II

Evidence for the degree to which residents identified with their local area in eighteenth-century Dublin can be found in the many petitions submitted by citizens to various authorities, appealing for support in improving streets, retaining the identification of a particular locality with particular functions, or protecting the character of an area. The Wide Streets Commission, for instance, was set up as a direct result of decades of citizens' petitions to the corporation demanding improvement of the streets linking Capel Street, on the north bank — an important shopping and commercial street in the first half of the eighteenth century — with the old Custom House — on what was then Custom House Quay at Essex Bridge (now Grattan Bridge) — and the commercial core of the medieval city on the south bank.⁴³ The merchants' identification with the medieval core was expressed as late as the 1770s in their resistance to the planned building of a new Custom House in a much more easterly location on the north side. The residents of both the Gardiner and the Fitzwilliam estates joined together to sign petitions for measures to maintain the exclusive character of their areas and to participate in commissions for the completion of Mountjoy Square and Merrion Square, acts of parliament being passed in both cases to establish a 'Commission for Inclosing and Improving Merrion Square' in 1791, and a similarly named commission for Mountjoy Square in 1802.⁴⁴

The siting of the new Custom House (Figure 15.12), built 1781–91, was controversial and the circumstances highlight some of the feelings of local loyalty and identity in Dublin at the time. A Custom House had been built in 1707 beside Essex Bridge, but by the 1760s it had become too small, like the quay space, owing to the 'great increase of trade'.⁴⁵ The idea for a new Custom House and new bridges in a more easterly location downriver had been mooted as early as the 1750s, but the merchants of Dublin (their spatial loyalty being to the medieval centre) stubbornly resisted this notion for a long time, arguing somewhat disingenuously in 1774 that the crowds, traffic and other inconveniences associated with commerce would spoil the peaceful upper-class residential areas (on the Gardiner estate) bounding on the proposed site for a new Custom House on the new north quays, and that it would be to the advantage of the nobility

⁴³ See Sheridan, 'Dublin and Berlin', pp. 113–15.

⁴⁴ *Statutes at Large*, 31 Geo. III, c. 45; F.A. Ashe, 'Mountjoy Square', *Dublin Historical Record*, 3 (1941), 100.

⁴⁵ Harris, *History and antiquities of Dublin*, p. 473.

and gentry to continue with the old Custom House in the city centre.⁴⁶ The location of the old Custom House was convenient for the merchants of the city, close to the hub of commercial activity in Dame Street and Capel Street, and to the new Royal Exchange at the top of Parliament Street, built in 1769 at only a short remove from the old Tholsel/Exchange in High Street. Nevertheless, the parliamentary interests—led by the Right Hon. John Beresford, who was married to one of the Gardiner daughters and intimately tied up with the landed interests of the Gardiners in the north-eastern suburbs—won the struggle and in 1781 Beresford laid the first stone for a monumental (and expensive) new Custom House, designed by James Gandon, with new docks immediately to the east.

Several residents' petitions recorded in the minutes of the Wide Streets Commission reflect the willingness of Dublin's eighteenth-century citizens of the middle and upper classes to join together to exclude 'undesirable' activities and individuals from their own districts. In 1792, for instance, one Henry Attivell, holding some of the plots where new houses were being erected along Lower Sackville Street, and trying to make a profit by attracting sub-tenants to his property, wrote to the Wide Streets Commission expressing his own and his tenants' concern at the inclusion of a narrow laneway in the original plans for the terrace; they felt that the laneway would 'create dirt' and 'probably will be resorted to by Thieves, and Night Walkers, that may very much annoy [*sic*] the Neighbourhood—the Tenantry have therefore devised of me to represent it, that it may be shut up for the Public accomodation'.⁴⁷

Later that same year of 1792, the tenants of the northern section of South Great George's Street, around the corner from the already improved and widened Dame Street, requested the intervention of the commission to control activities on the street that were perceived by the residents as anti-social and undesirable. These tenants were occupying new houses built as part of the Dame Street project. The commissioners had promised eight years previously, when the new buildings were first occupied, that the George's Street phase of the plans would be quickly implemented, but had however lacked funds. The development of George's Street was considered a less important improvement than the opening-up of more monumental streets and axes of power linking the Castle and Parliament, and creating a connection from Parliament to the fashionable residential areas in Gardiner's estate on the north side of the Liffey, and the tenants⁴⁸ of South Great George's Street felt that this unfinished planning was contributing to social as well as economic problems. Two 'Waste Lots' had been walled in

⁴⁶ Petition to the Irish Commons, cited in Craig, *Dublin, 1660–1860*, p. 239.

⁴⁷ 15 June 1792: Dublin, City Archives, minutes, Wide Streets Commission, vol. 11, p. 43.

⁴⁸ This memorial to the Wide Streets Commission is signed by Nicholas Kelly 'and many others' (*ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 136). The name Kelly is interesting, as it is possible that he may represent the growing class of increasingly prosperous Catholic merchants in the city, and it is a pity that the commissioners' secretary relegated the other signatories of the memorial to anonymity.

and used as a yard by one of the City Scavengers (rubbish disposal men), and the traffic of his carts was felt to be ‘a most intolerable and offensive nuisance not only destructive to your Memorialists property in depriving them of Lodgers, but injurious to their health . . .’. Behind the scavenger’s yard ‘Vagabonds and Robbers’ lounged, engaging in ‘Ball playing, Pitch and Toss and Fighting matches every day without exception, accompanied with horrid imprecations, Blasphemy and every immorality truly affecting the feelings of your Memorialists, who have Children Apprentices &ca. whose Morals it is their duty to watch and cultivate’.⁴⁹

A sense of local solidarity and the desire to exclude undesirable elements is also expressed in a memorial to the Wide Streets Commissioners from the residents of Rutland Square and contiguous streets on the Gardiner estate in 1798, who held that it would ‘conduce to the Security of that Neighbourhood’ and prevent ‘improper persons meeting at unseasonable times’ were gates to be erected at the entrances to the stable lanes behind the main streets and squares.⁵⁰

In spite of such efforts — by which Dublin’s squares, with the exception of St Stephen’s Green, were effectively private until the late twentieth century, railed in and with keys available only to residents of the surrounding houses — and in spite of the relatively clear east–west gradient resulting from the spatially skewed development of the city described above, exclusivity could not realistically be maintained, and even streets originally planned as very high-quality residential areas had quite a mixture of residents by the end of the eighteenth century, pastry-cooks and perfumers rubbing shoulders with peers in Sackville Street, for instance.

III

Whitelaw’s census of 1798, as summarised in his 1805 *Essay on the population of Dublin*, is the most detailed account of Dublin’s population in the late eighteenth century. Whitelaw, a Church of Ireland clergyman, concentrates in the essay on portraying the wretchedness of some of the poorest parts of the city, as it is his aim to awaken an awareness of the need for assistance for the inhabitants of these slums. However, an analysis of his statistical tables (Table 15.1) shows a more subtle pattern emerging than the more sensational contemporary accounts might lead one to suppose existed. The parishes containing and adjoining the important representative buildings of the capital, have a higher-than-average percentage of upper- and middle-class inhabitants, with in some cases almost 45 per cent of their population (in St Anne’s) falling into this category. Some historically fashionable quarters further to the west, such as St Nicholas

⁴⁹ 16 November 1792: Dublin, City Archives, WSC/Mins, vol. 11, pp. 134–6.

⁵⁰ Acts of Parliament of 1790 (*Statutes at Large*, 30 Geo. III, c. 19) and 1792 (*Statutes at Large*, 32 Geo. III, c. 30) had empowered the commission to control the planning and layout of privately-held lands in Dublin up to half a mile beyond the circular road.

Table 15.1. Whitelaw's 1798 census of Dublin: social class.

Parishes	Percentages			Numbers
	Upper/middle class	Servants	Lower class	Total Persons
St James	11.6	4.8	83.5	6,104
St Catherine	9.1	5.1	85.7	20,176
St Luke	4.1	1.5	94.4	7,241
St Nicholas Without	5.6	1.8	92.6	12,306
St Nicholas Within	28.2	12.2	59.6	1,121
St Audoen	21.2	8.8	70.0	5,191
St Michael	8.9	2.3	88.8	2,599
St John	15.7	4.0	80.4	4,142
St Werburgh	32.0	9.7	58.4	3,629
Deanery of Christchurch	15.0	3.0	82.0	233
Deanery of St Patrick	6.7	2.1	91.2	2,081
St Bridget	34.1	9.7	56.2	8,009
St Peter	33.0	20.3	46.7	16,063
St Anne	44.6	27.7	27.5	7,228
St Andrew	37.3	12.4	50.4	7,682
St Mark	14.8	5.5	79.7	8,692
St Paul	18.0	6.4	75.6	9,904
St Michan	15.0	6.3	78.6	18,092
St Mary	32.8	16.5	50.6	16,654
St Thomas	34.3	20.3	45.4	8,562
St George	35.9	33.4	30.7	5,096
Averages	21.8	10.7	67.4	
Total				170,794

Source: Rev. J. Whitelaw, *An essay on the population of Dublin, 1798* (Dublin, 1805), facsimile reprint in R. Wall, ed., *Slum conditions in London and Dublin* (Gregg International Publishers, Farnborough, Hants., 1974).

Within, St Audoen's, St Werburgh's and St Bridget's, managed to maintain upper- and middle-class populations of 20–34 per cent of the parish total. The remaining western parishes on both sides of the river have well below the city average of 21.7 per cent upper- and middle-class residents (Figure 15.4). One problem of interpretation in Whitelaw's data arises from the difficulty of ascertaining the extent to which servants 'lived-in'. In all likelihood, this depended on the size of the employer's house, but as this cannot be reliably determined for the whole city, the percentage of servants in a parish can only be used with caution as an indicator of wealth or social structure.

Whitelaw records a large majority of 'lower class' citizens in Dublin in 1798. Campbell comments on 'the painful sensations produced by the general mass' of the population.⁵¹ The French royalist Jacques Louis de Bougrenet, Chevalier de la Tocnaye, exiled from

⁵¹ Campbell, *Philosophical survey*, p. 31.

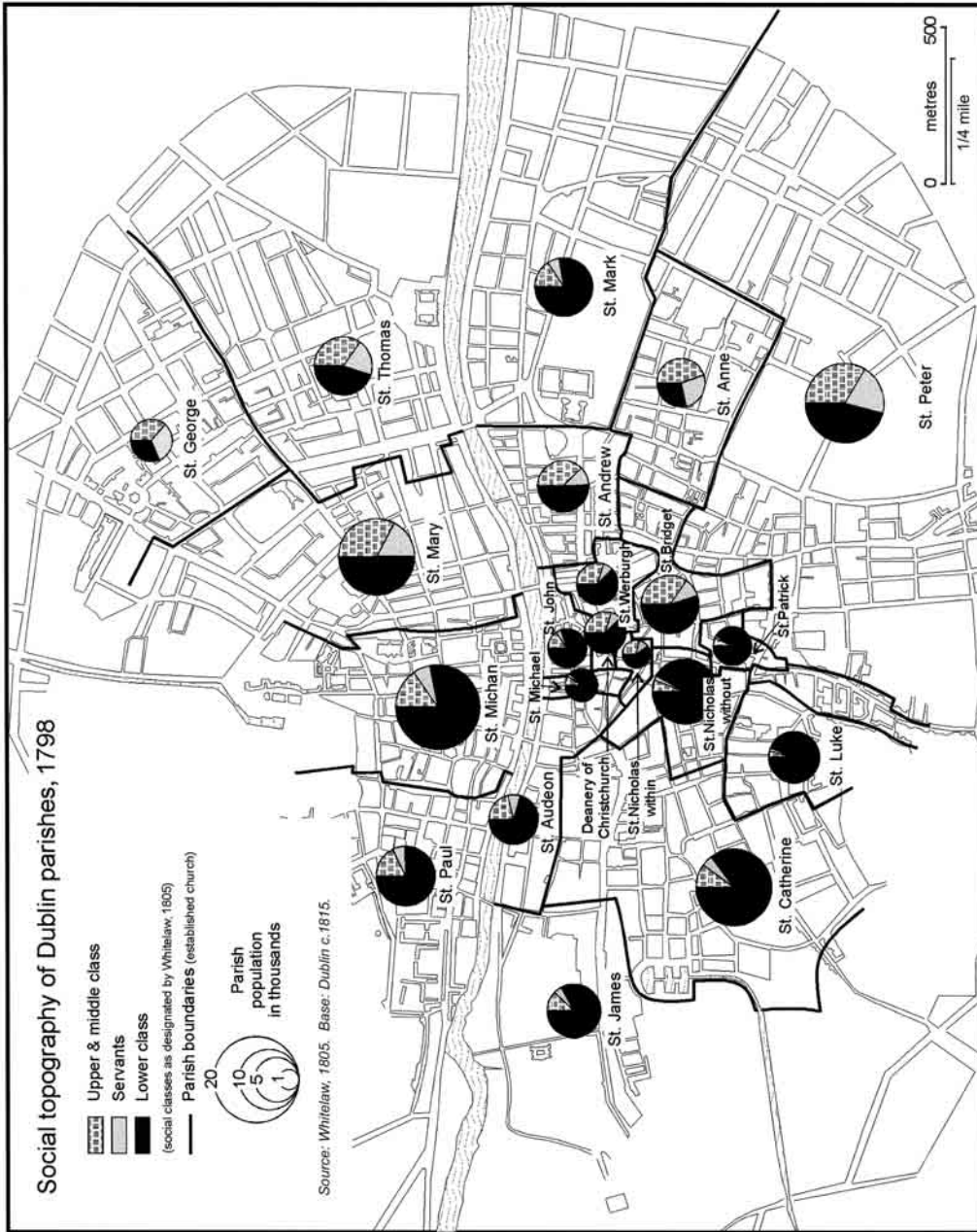


Figure 15.4. Social topography of Dublin parishes, 1798.

France after the French Revolution of 1789, was shocked by the contrast between the quarters of the rich and slums of the poor: ‘although the part of the city where the well-to-do people live is perhaps as beautiful as anywhere similar in Europe, nothing anywhere can compare with the dirt and misery of the quarters where the lower classes vegetate’.⁵² In the Liberties were to be found ‘many large houses, consisting of a number of rooms; each of these rooms is let to separate tenants, who again re-let them to as many individuals as they can contain, each person paying for that portion of the floor which his extended body can occupy’.⁵³

In the context of this general majority of lower-class residents (67.4 per cent of the total population), the high percentages of upper- and middle-class residents in the parishes east of Capel Street and Dublin Castle confirm the general validity of the east–west social gradient. Nonetheless, from Whitelaw’s data the strong mixture of socio-economic groupings in even the most salubrious of residential areas (for example, St Peter’s parish—including St Stephen’s Green, Merrion Square and environs—or the parish of St George—covering Mountjoy Square) becomes apparent; exclusive residential streets were interspersed with more mixed commercial ones.

The distribution of industry and commercial activities in Dublin highlights the development of urban districts with very mixed characters. Here, a selected industry—textile production—and some aspects of retailing are briefly examined as indicators of multicultredness. Dublin’s textile industry was largely concentrated in the area commonly known as the Liberties, the area south-west of the medieval city walls, with a sprinkling in Oxmantown on the north side and in a few smaller less significant streets in the eastern and central parts of the city (Figure 15.5). These are also sections of the city characterised by large proportions of lower-class residents, as defined by Whitelaw, more than 92 per cent in the Liberties parish of St Nicholas Without, for example (see Table 15.1).

The distribution of different types of retailing varied considerably. Low-order goods for everyday use could be bought on the regular street markets and in very numerous small shops; the street markets were held in the medieval core, which together with the Liberties was also characterised by a proliferation of very small shops and many hawkers.⁵⁴ High-order, luxury goods had a very different distribution. Traders with a restricted and prosperous clientele, such as perfumers, gold- and silver-smiths, as well as print- and book-sellers, were to be found at the eastern end of the medieval core and in the shopping streets serving the fashionable Gardiner and Fitzwilliam estates. Three main axes of fashionable consumption can be identified: firstly, Castle Street–High Street; secondly, Parliament Street, Dame Street, College

⁵² La Tocnaye, *A Frenchman’s walk, 1796–7*, pp. 18–19.

⁵³ Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, *History of Dublin*, vol. 1, p. vii.

⁵⁴ See Sheridan, ‘Dublin and Berlin’, pp. 91, 93–5.

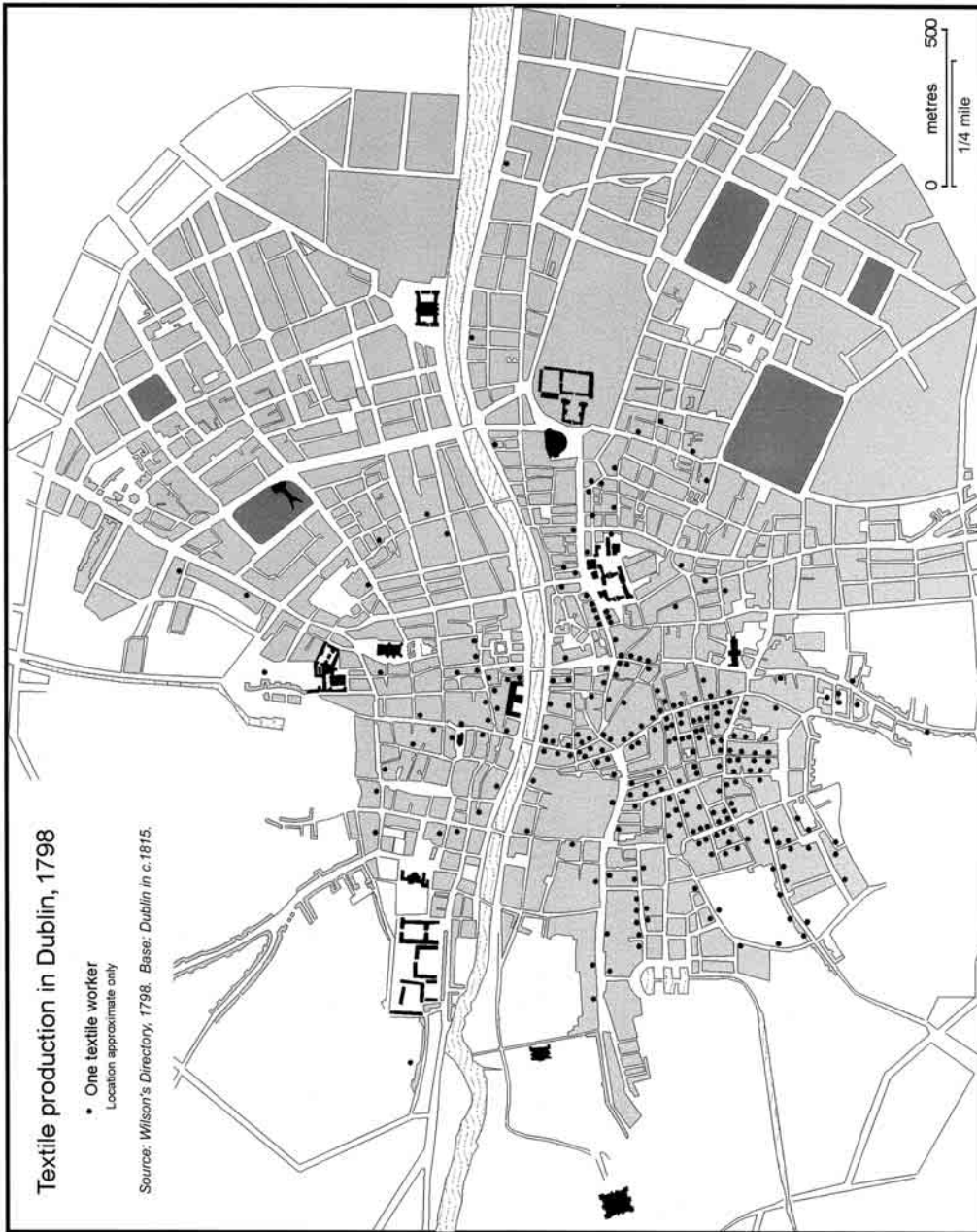


Figure 15.5. Textile production in Dublin, 1798.

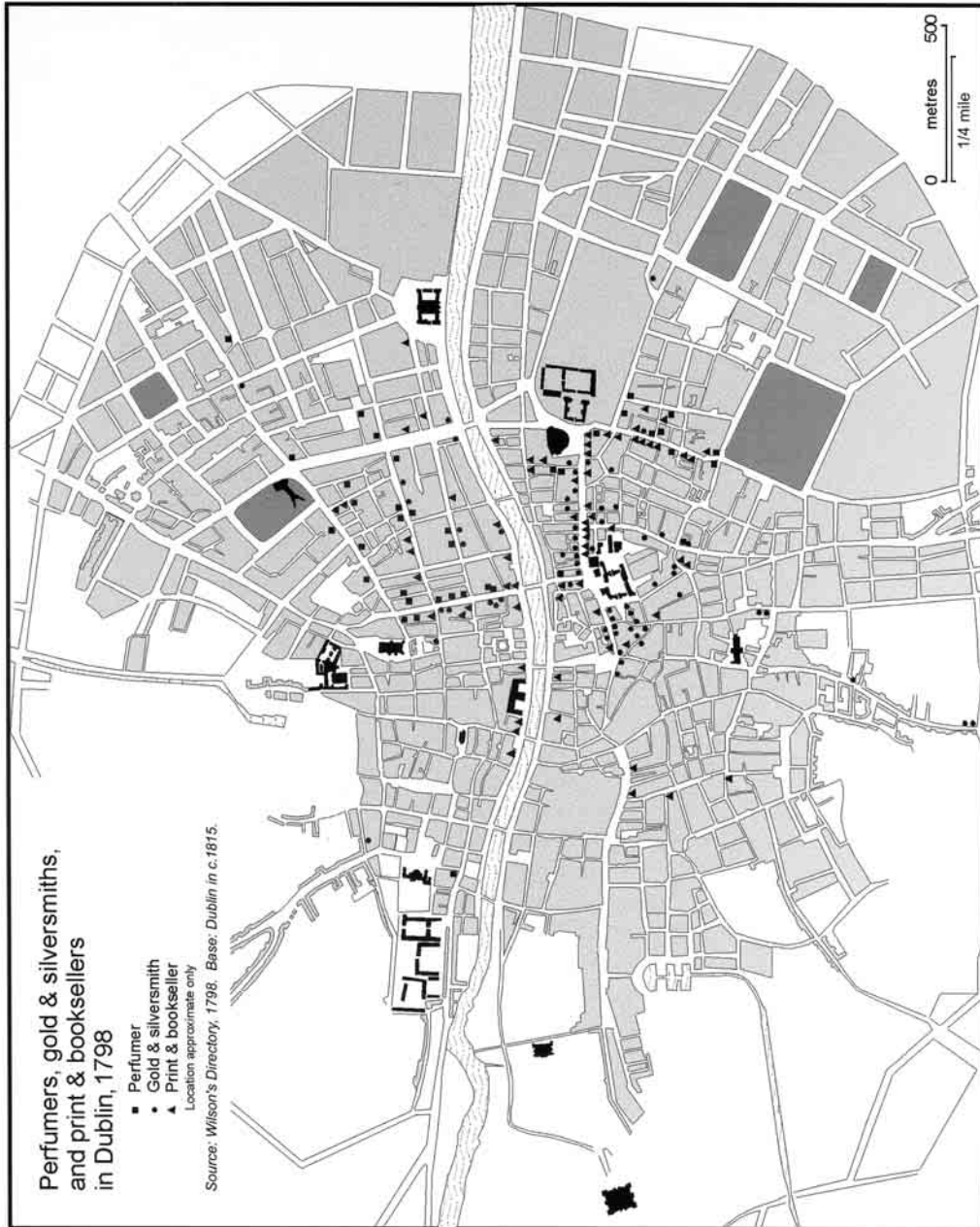


Figure 15.6. Perfumers, gold and silversmiths, and print and booksellers in Dublin, 1798.

Green and Grafton Street; and, thirdly, Capel Street—with, to a lesser extent, Henry Street/Mary Street) (see Figure 15.6).

After the Wide Streets Commission's replanning in the 1780s and 1790s, Dame Street—'the greatest thoroughfare in Dublin for the carriages of the nobility' and 'filled with elegant shops'—provided 'one of the most accustomed and amusing lounges in the city of Dublin', and reputedly bore a strong resemblance to Bond Street in London, with 'numbers of elegant women continually passing and repassing, and the numerous parties of military officers from the barracks (foraging in the fruit shops)'.⁵⁵ Although the physical scale of Sackville Street—and its continuation built by the Commission, Lower Sackville Street—made it 'one of the grandest [streets] in Europe', the mixture of gentry and tradesmen introduced to the southern end by the Wide Streets Commission diminished its 'importance of appearance', the street then housing 'Peers, Pastrycooks, and Perfumers; Bishops, Butchers, and Brokers in old furniture, together with Hotels of the most superb description, and a tolerable sprinkling of gin and whiskey shops'.⁵⁶

Thus in the western parishes, the degree of social mixing was least, with poor housing and industrial activities. In the central area of the capital, around the axis of High Street–Dublin Castle–Dame Street–Parliament, higher-quality commercial activities were to be found, while even the more exclusive areas of the Gardiner estate, for example, were intermixed with retailing and other commercial streets. Dublin's unique eighteenth-century planning commission, established in 1757 and commonly known as the Wide Streets Commission, attempted to impose some coherence on this fragmented urban landscape. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the commission created a network of widened and straightened, or entirely new, streets.

IV

In response to much petitioning and years of effort on the part of Dublin Corporation to deal with growing traffic congestion in the narrow streets of the old city with its inadequate links to the newer suburbs, the so-called Wide Streets Commission was established by act of parliament in 1757.⁵⁷ Thereafter, large parts of Dublin, mainly east of the medieval walls, were transformed by the commissioners' interventions. New streets were built and old ones altered and widened, and the resulting thoroughfares were lined with imposing buildings of great uniformity and harmony of architectural and functional composition. The projects of the commission carried out in the first forty-five years of its existence provided Dublin with a coherent system of major axes linking the

⁵⁵ N. Jefferys, *An Englishman's descriptive account of Dublin* (London, 1810), pp. 54–5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85–6.

⁵⁷ *Statutes at Large*, 31 Geo. II, c. 19.

symbols of power and government with the residences of the powerful and wealthy and the chief commercial areas of the city (Figure 15.7). ‘Order, Uniformity and Convenience’ were the keystones of the commission’s philosophy of urban design.

The emphasis of the early large-scale interventions of the commissioners was concentrated on providing suitable approaches to, and improving the communications between, the Castle and the Parliament. Their first project, Parliament Street, opened in 1762, was not merely a convenient solution to a pressing traffic problem but was also to contribute to ‘the adorning those parts of the city’⁵⁸ and to provide an impressive approach to Dublin Castle from Capel Street and the river. The innovative aspects of the commission’s planning as exemplified in Parliament Street lay, firstly, in their power of compulsory purchase within parts of the city already built up, the lack of which power had hindered the corporation’s earlier efforts to tackle the growing congestion of the old town; and, secondly, in their practical combination of shop space on the ground floors of their buildings with residential quarters above, carefully planned and integrated into uniform blocks of separate houses to appear as one monumental, unified façade. Like the private landlords, the commission restricted its capital investment to the purchase of lands, and the planning and laying-out of streets and plots, and expected the new tenants to bear the cost of building to its designs.

Parliament Street was complemented by the replanning of Dame Street, which had evolved along an old route leading from the Castle to Trinity College. In 1778 the commission began to widen Dame Street in order ‘to open a convenient Street, from his Majesty’s Castle of Dublin to the Parliament House’.⁵⁹ The south side of the street was largely completed by 1784 and the widening and rebuilding of the north side proceeded somewhat desultorily for over a decade longer. The new Dame Street offered vistas from Trinity and the Houses of Parliament, past regular and harmoniously planned shops and residences to the imposing bulk of the Royal Exchange, and on to Dublin Castle (Figures 15.9, 15.11, 15.13 and 15.14). The street ‘from its width and the splendour of its shops, (inferior only to the best in London) has an air of considerable importance’.⁶⁰

The 1780s saw the birth of several important projects which, when completed, would give further coherence and grandeur to the capital’s central streets. In 1782 a plan to continue the line of the widened Dame Street and College Green, cutting through existing houses to link with a new bridge across the Liffey (building what were to be Westmoreland and D’Olier Streets and Carlisle Bridge, now O’Connell Bridge) and joining up with a new continuation of Sackville Mall to the river, was submitted to and approved by parliament.⁶¹ Two years later a plan to widen and straighten Lower

⁵⁸ Wide Streets Commission, *Extracts from the minutes of the commissioners . . . for making wide and convenient . . . streets . . . , 1757–1802* (Dublin, 1802), p. 2; *Statutes at Large*, 31 Geo. II, c. 19.

⁵⁹ *Statutes at Large*, 21, 22 Geo. III, c. 17.

⁶⁰ Cromwell, *Excursions through Ireland*, p. 66.

⁶¹ Wide Streets Commission, *Extracts from the minutes of the commissioners*, p. 5; *Statutes at Large*, 21, 22 Geo. III, c. 17.

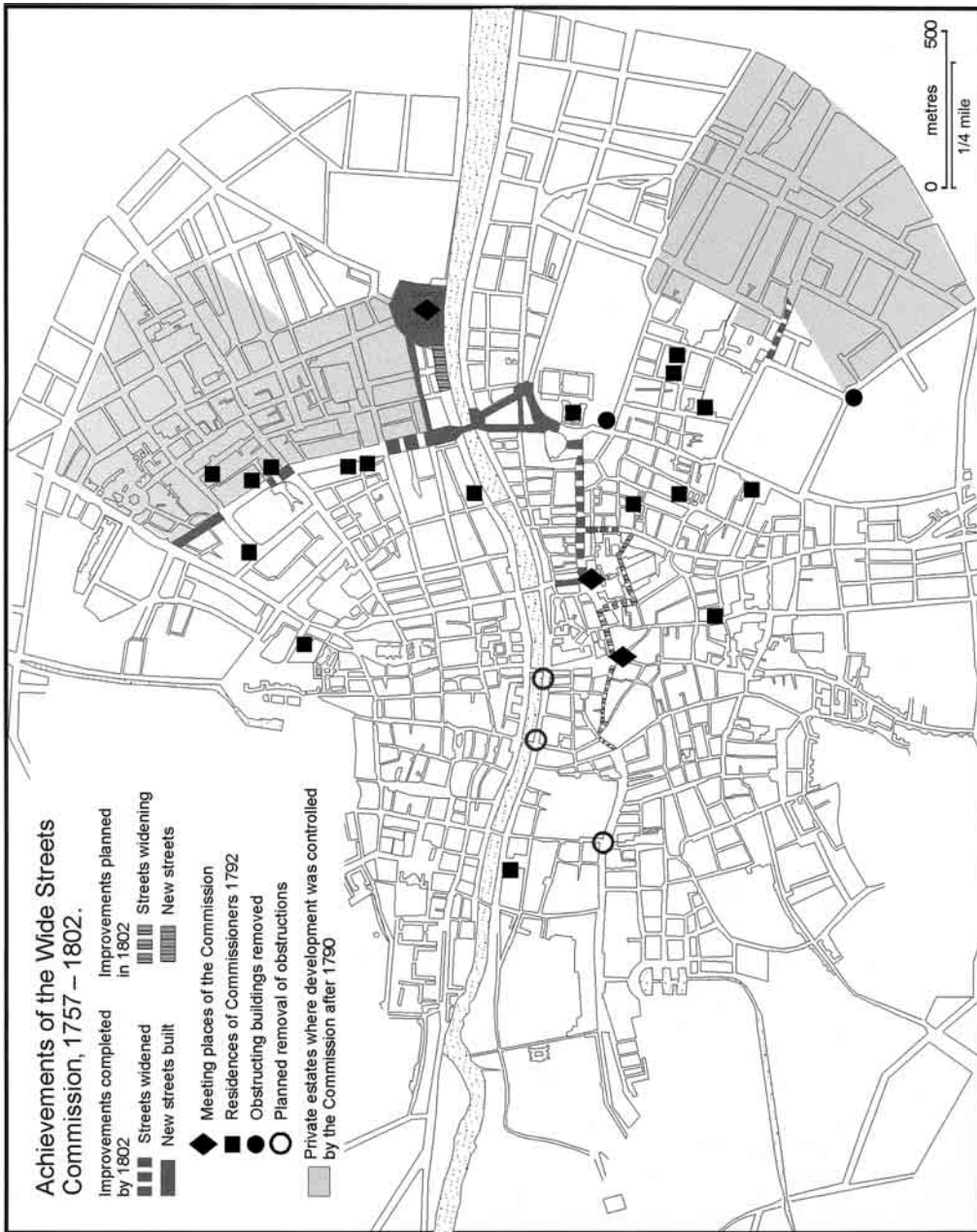


Figure 15.7. Achievements of the Wide Streets Commission in Dublin, 1757–1802.

Abbey Street, and to build a new quay front from Bachelor's Walk to the new Custom House then under construction, was also approved.⁶²

By about 1800 a person wishing to travel from Dublin Castle to Rutland Square could proceed through an urban ensemble which in scale and architectural uniformity rivalled many a continental city.⁶³ The aspect of Dame Street had been entirely altered, by 1801 the new buildings on Westmoreland and D'Olier Streets were complete, and the new bridge (Carlisle Bridge) across the Liffey afforded a prospect eastwards of the Custom House, the emerging quays and a view north all the way along Sackville Street to a vista closed by the Rotunda on Rutland Square. To the west, the dome of the Four Courts (Figure 15.10) could be glimpsed upriver, so that the prospect from the bridge presented to the pedestrian 'such a cluster of architectural beauties grouped together, or scattered in every direction which he turns, as are not to be seen from any other spot in any other city . . . Strangers who visit Dublin are particularly struck with the beauty of this assemblage of objects'.⁶⁴

All of the new buildings erected under the auspices of the Wide Streets Commissioners provided for shops at ground-floor level with residences on the upper floors; commercial functions of the city were thereby linked with the provision of living space and the servicing of some of the most affluent residential areas. These strategies in planning the design of urban buildings to accommodate specific uses meant that Dublin's chief monumental axes became more than just representative façades of officialdom. The integration of varied facilities into the monumental streetscape ensured that the streets would have a commercial and social life linked with their representative functions, and they thereby created new fashionable stages for conspicuous consumption.

V

Dublin is a good example of a combination of forces shaping the urban fabric and determining the evolution of the city's social topography. The city's function as a capital resulted in the erection of public buildings of national importance, which played an important rôle in attracting 'superior' residential development to their vicinity. Dublin Castle (a confused complex of buildings hidden away behind fortifications, at the eastern end of the medieval city) and the Houses of Parliament provided foci of state activity, balanced by the social pole of the gardens and the Rotunda in Rutland Square, and punctuated by regular daily activity in the fashionable shops in Dame Street in particular. Nodes of outdoor socialising were provided by the fashionable residential squares

⁶² Wide Streets Commission, *Extracts from the minutes of the commissioners*, p. 5.

⁶³ Malton, *View of Dublin*, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁴ Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, *History of Dublin*, vol. II, p. 1081.

east of the old city core. Other attractions existed of course in Dublin; a more exhaustive account of the patterns of social interaction in the city's localities would include theatres (the most famous were the two in Smock Alley and Crow Street in the city centre) and concert halls (Händel's *Messiah* had its world première in Dublin in the Concert Hall in Fishamble Street in April 1742), clubs and coffee-houses (famous ones were Daly's Club House in Dame Street, attracting many parliamentarians, and Lucas' Coffee House near the Royal Exchange), as well as the City Bason, the basin off the Grand Canal at the western end of the city,⁶⁵ and parish churches. Unfortunately no statistics are available before the nineteenth century for the relative numbers of Catholics and Protestants in Dublin. There did exist many Catholic chapels even before the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, generally in back streets or lanes, while the Protestant churches (of what was then the established church) occupied prominent positions in the streetscape. The types of allegiance and social activities associated with the two denominations may also have been very different.

Dublin was transformed in the eighteenth century from a relatively compact single-centred walled town with incipient suburbs to what was by the standards of the time a metropolis, with a fragmented, multi-centred structure. The existing political centres of the Castle and Tholsel were supplemented by the new Houses of Parliament to the east of the old town centre, an ensemble completed by the new buildings of Trinity College. New economic hubs developed, around the first new Custom House close to what later became Parliament Street, later around the second new Custom House on what was then the city's eastern edge. Fashionable shopping activity shifted out of the old core first towards Capel Street north of the river and later along Dame Street towards the Houses of Parliament, continuing along the new D'Olier Street and Westmoreland Street, across the Liffey to Lower Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street). The corporation initiated an important urban square to the south-east, St Stephen's Green, while two powerful and very active landlords in the eastern half of the city contributed several more decorative squares to the city's growing number of attractive locations, where fashionable beaux and ladies could see and be seen. The Wide Streets Commission, one of the very first central municipal planning authorities in Europe, implemented several large-scale projects to widen and straighten existing streets and build new ones in an attempt to create a more unified, 'ordered' and integrated urban structure. In spite of numerous 'improvements' in the spirit of the Enlightenment, the city remained divided by the River Liffey into north side and south side, and in its social gradient from the western suburbs inhabited by 'merchants and mechanicks' to the pleasant haunts of the 'gentry' in the east.

⁶⁵ For a detailed presentation of these aspects of Georgian Dublin, see C. Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714–1830* (London, 1936, repr. Dublin, 1997). In spite of its age, this is still the very best treatment of the subject.



Figure 15.8. North side of Rutland Square, with Charlemont House.

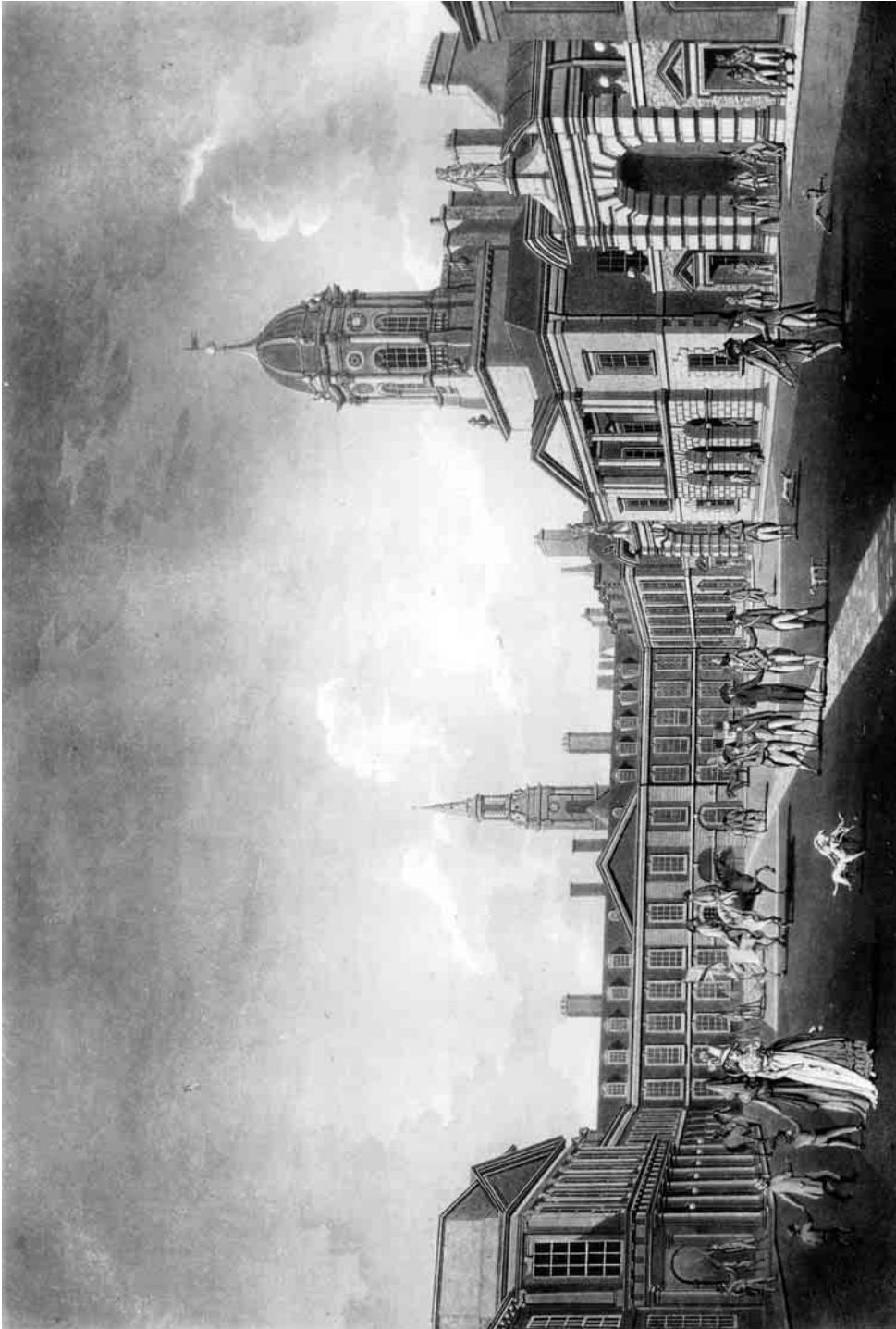


Figure 15.9. Dublin Castle, upper courtyard.

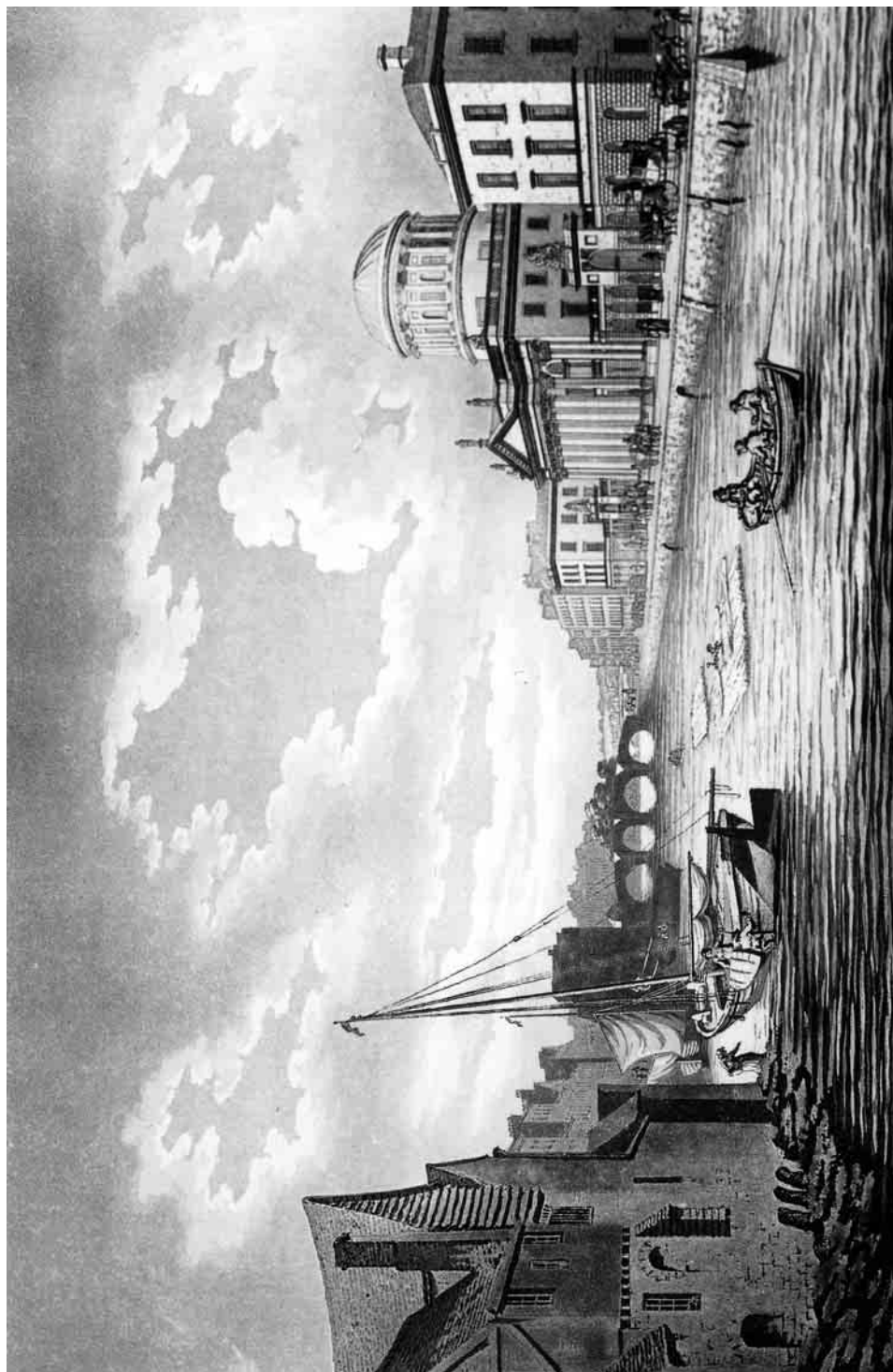


Figure 15.10. The Four Courts.



Figure 15.11. College Green, with Parliament and Trinity College.

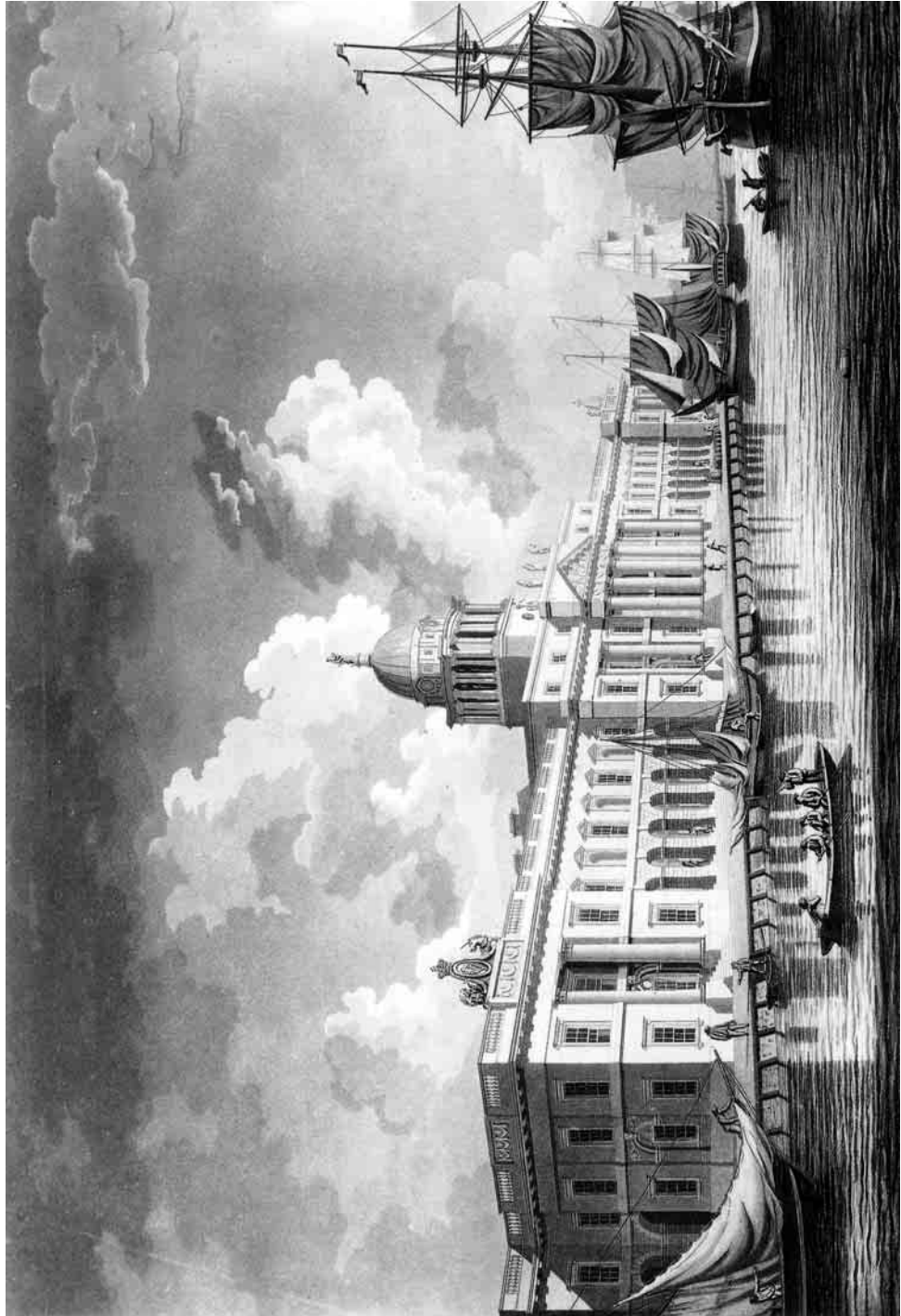


Figure 15.12. The Custom House.



Figure 15.13. The Exchange and Dame Street.

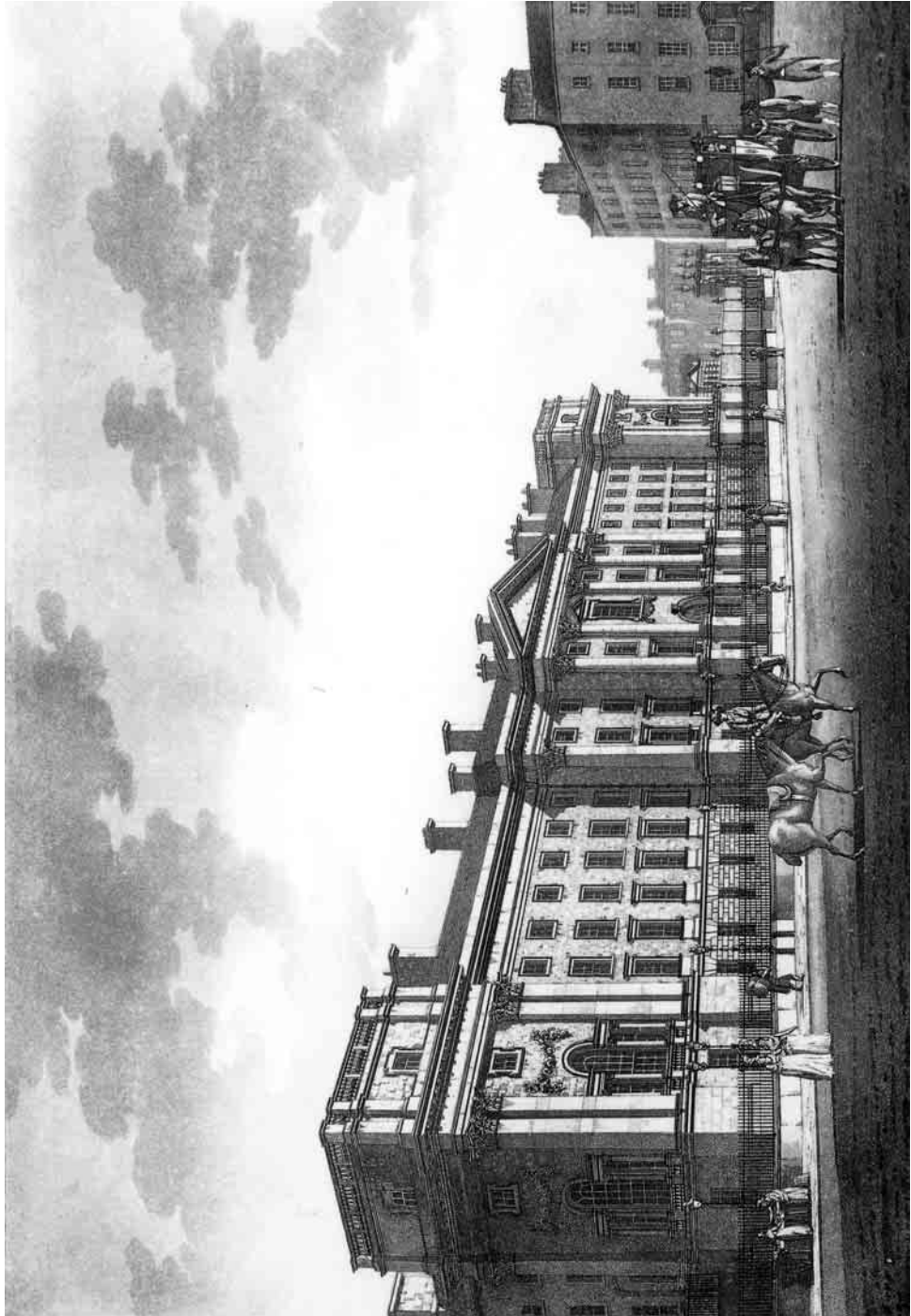


Figure 15.14. Trinity College.

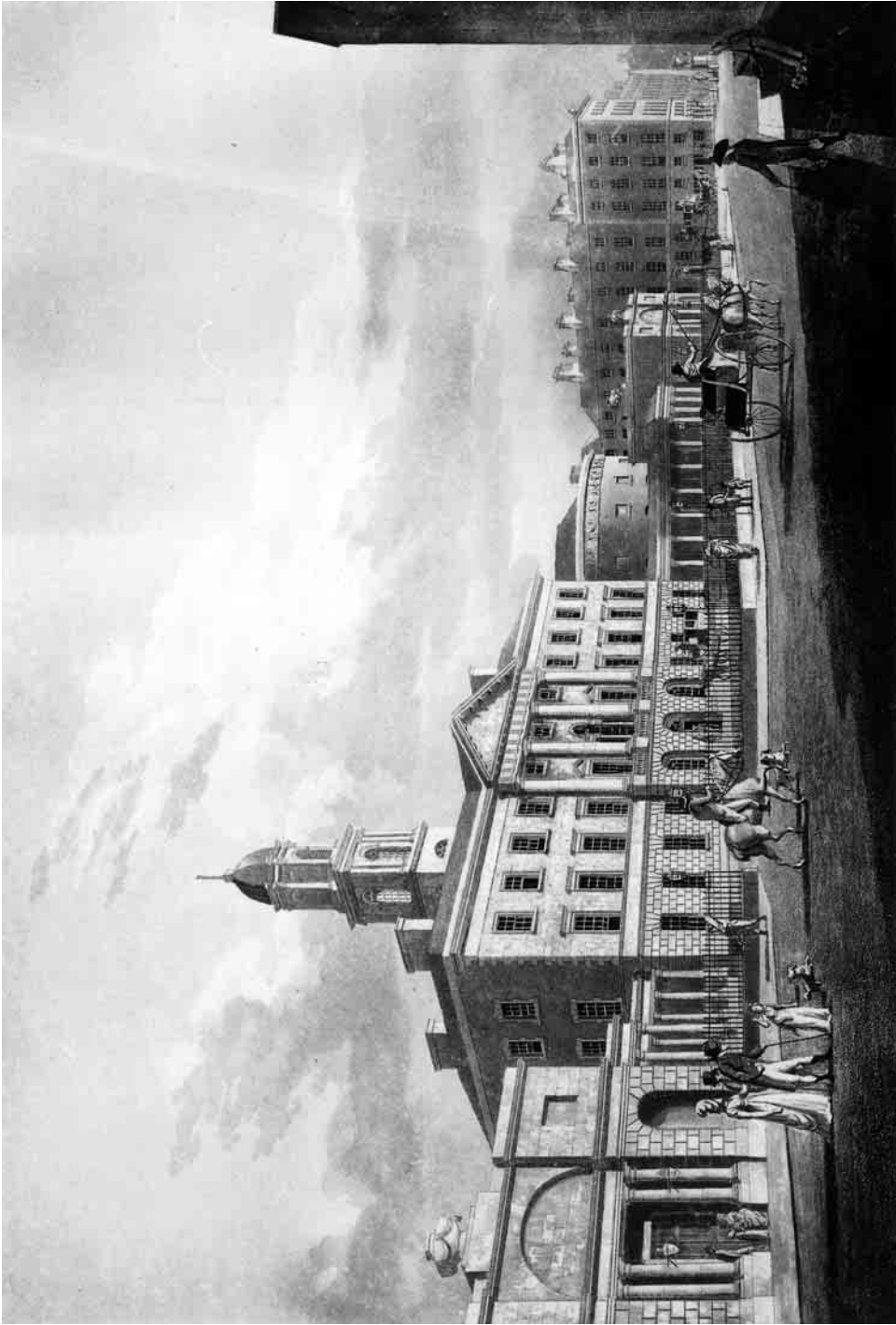


Figure 15.15. The Lying-In Hospital and Rotunda.

List of Abbreviations

<i>APC</i>	<i>Acts of the Privy Council</i>
BL	British Library
<i>CARD</i>	<i>Calendar of the Ancient Records of Dublin</i> , ed. J.T. and R.M. Gilbert, 19 vols (Dublin, 1889–1944)
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
<i>CJ</i>	<i>House of Common Journals, England</i>
<i>CSP</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers</i>
<i>Ec.HR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>HCJI</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland</i>
GL	Guildhall Library
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission</i>
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