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Medieval Irish Settlement,

B.J.Graham
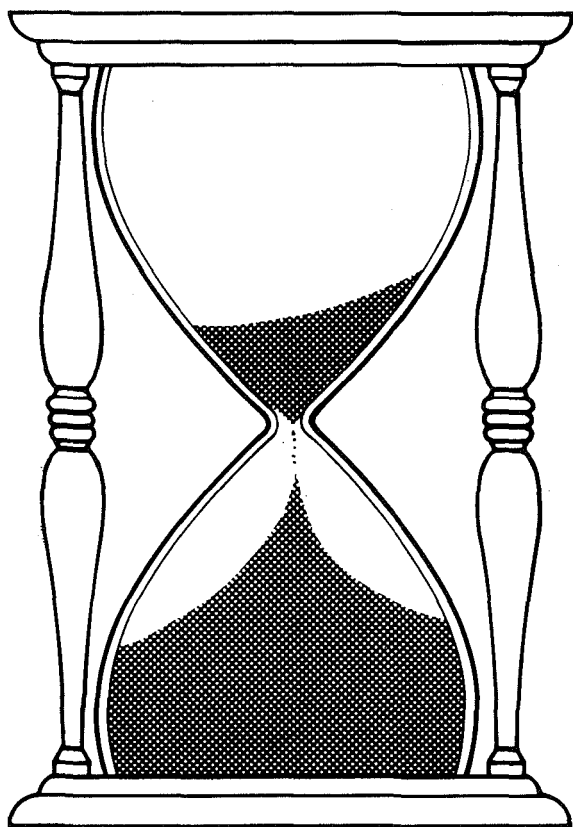
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MEDIEVAL IRISH SETTLEMENT : A REVIEW

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the context of settlement studies, the medieval period in Ireland can be defined as commencing in 1169 with the onset of the Norman occupation. Many examples of the resulting settlements, both rural and urban, survived until *circa* 1650 when the impetus of the Cromwellian re-conquest initiated widespread landscape alterations. Both the disciplines of Historical Geography and Archaeology have, until comparatively recently, been characterised by a consistent neglect of the medieval forms and functions of settlement, particularly those of Norman Ireland. This is perhaps a reflection of the ethnocentricity of much Irish historical and archaeological research which has led to an artificial demarcation between alien and Gaelic cultures and a concentration of study (notable for its pre-Norman emphasis) upon the latter. However, there has been a recent output of work which considerably redresses both the lack of balance between cultures and between periods. The impetus for this originated from Professor Otway-Ruthven's seminal paper, *The Character of Norman settlement in Ireland*.[1] It should be noted that earlier workers such as Mills,[2] Hore,[3] Orpen (in particular),[4] Curtis[5] and Brooks[6] had uncovered a considerable body of information on various aspects of settlement in Norman Ireland but Otway-Ruthven's paper clearly demonstrated for the first time the existence of a pattern of land-holding based upon the manorial system with associated boroughs, villages and openfields. Much of the considerable development that has taken place since this point is due to the work and influence of Glasscock.[7]

The emphasis of this recent research has been almost totally empirical, being concerned with the identification, description and definition of medieval settlement forms and functions and, more recently, with the analysis of patterns and linkages, both within the Norman settlement system and between it and that of Gaelic Ireland. Empiricism in this context can be defended because the very lack of basic research in the past has required that the elements of the spatial structures be understood (or even identified) prior to being integrated into a much wider economic and social framework. The results have been widely dispersed in a number of theses, volumes and journals and the initial aim of this paper is to present an interim consensus of the forms and functions of Norman settlement, drawn from this disparate material. This is extended in order to assess the relationships of the spatial structures to (and their role within) the medieval colonial economy. Thirdly, Gaelic settlement is discussed with particular stress being placed on its role as an indicator of the interrelationships between Norman and Gaelic Ireland. Finally, problematical areas and subjects which require future or further research are indicated.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the work which is
reviewed is its interdisciplinary nature, the linkage of Geo-
graphy and History being of particular significance. Archaeology
is however something of an exception to this development for it
has yet to realize its potential in the study of medieval settle-
ment to the point where a synthesis could be presented. The most
notable contributions to date are included in the Archaeological
Survey of Northern Ireland's volume on Co. Down[8] and in a number
of reports on individual excavations.[9] A considerable amount of
excavation has recently been carried out in urban settlements
such as Dublin, Cork and Carrickfergus although (with the excep-
tion of Dublin)[10] this is as yet unpublished.[11]

SOURCES

The general lack of archaeological interest in the medieval
period is especially serious in view of the paucity of contempor-
ary documentary sources, a problem which constitutes the most
serious obstacle in the study of settlement. Although the de-
ficiency is not as serious as is sometimes claimed, many original
documents were destroyed in the P.R.O., Dublin, when the Four
Courts was shelled during the Civil War of 1922, the loss being
compounded by the lack of lists or calendars of both destroyed
and surviving material. Fortunately, some documents, at least,
were calendared in the nineteenth century although the suspicion
remains that as the entries were summaries, considerable details
concerning settlement and society were not included. However,
an intensive study of the calendars does yield a substantial if
spatially random corpus of evidence relating to settlement. By
far the most indispensable of such sources are the five volumes
of the *Calendars of documents relating to Ireland 1171-1306*[12]
and the *Calendars of justiciary rolls, Ireland 1295-1314*.[13]
Again, some documents are contained in the P.R.O. London, the
most valuable being the *Inquisitions Post Mortem*[14] (the originals
clearly revealing the inadequacies of the calendared versions)[15]
and the Minister's Accounts for Wexford, Meath, Kilkenny,
Tipperary, Carlow and Kildare which principally relate to the
period between 1280 and 1294.[16] There are other random survivals
such as Pipe Rolls[17] and Account Rolls[18] but on the whole, little
economic data has survived to aid the interpretation of the
socio-economic framework of the Norman colony. In contrast, for
example, to English medieval sources, the sole extant taxation
return is the *Ecclesiastical taxation of Pope Nicholas IV* which
details the wealth of the Anglo-Norman church at the beginning
of the fourteenth century and therefore, in turn, provides an
indication of population distribution.[19] The most detailed dis-
cussion and example of the use of this source is contained in
Barry's work on moated sites in south-east Ireland.[20] Another
important source is the recent translation of *Expugnatio Hiber-
nica,* the account by Giraldus Cambrensis of the invasion and
early Norman settlement.[21] MacNiocaill's collection of borough
charters contains an immense amount of information but it would
have been of considerably greater value if the commentary had
not been written in Irish.[22] There are a number of invaluable
printed sources for particular areas although these tend to be

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restricted to the later medieval period.[23]   The most notable are
The red book of Ormond[24] and the *Calendar of Ormond deeds*[25] con-
taining deeds and manorial extents for the lands of the Ormond
family, principally in Tipperary and Kilkenny and undoubtedly
the best documented area of medieval Ireland.

The other principal source of contemporary data is provided
by the Irish Annals, particularly those of Connacht,[26] Innis-
fallen,[27] Loch Cé[28] and Ulster[29] although the translations of
the latter two are particularly bad.   In addition, the *Annals of
the four masters,* a seventeenth-century summary of the earlier
works, are of some value.[30]   The Annals were compiled by monks
and are generally markedly regional in their content.   Entries
tend to be brief and their relevance to medieval settlement is
limited because of their almost exclusive concern with the
affairs of the church and dynasties.   Further, the information
on settlement which is recorded is often difficult to evaluate
as it generally lacks precision.   The principal value of the
Annals in this context lies in documenting the diffusion of the
Normans and in locating the shifting frontiers between Norman
and Gaelic Ireland.

The generally unsatisfactory nature of medieval sources is
to some extent mitigated by the partial survival of the
seventeenth-century surveys, made to facilitate the redistrib-
ution of land which followed the Cromwellian re-conquest of 1649.
The most important of these is the Civil Survey (1654-56)[31] which
was a survey by inquisition of the entire country (with the ex-
ception of Cos. Clare, Roscommon, Galway, Mayo and Sligo for
which the Strafford Survey, made *circa* 1636 in connection with
the proposed plantation of Connacht, was available).[32]   Much of
the Civil Survey was destroyed by fire in 1711 but the surviving
records (covering ten counties) contain information on land-use,
settlement and land-owners and also constitute an invaluable
place-name source.[33]   The Civil Survey can be used in conjunction
with the Down Survey (not to be confused with Co. Down), Sir
William Petty's mapped record of the Commonwealth period
(1654-56).[34]   This covers 22 counties and contains information
similar to the Civil Survey although generally in less detail.
The data contained in these two sources can be regarded as re-
presenting the end-point of the medieval rural settlement pattern,
just prior to the impact of enclosure and the period of maximum
desertion.   Consequently, the seventeenth-century surveys are of
immense value in locating rural medieval settlements and place-
names although it is essential that, wherever possible, they are
used in conjunction with the piecemeal medieval documents in
order to satisfy the assumption that they essentially record
Norman settlements of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is fortunate that the history of the Norman colony in
Ireland has been documented in three classic works written by
historians with particular interests in settlement and society.
Still invaluable are the works of Orpen[35] and Curtis,[36] the

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former being particularly relevant for settlement studies, but
the definitive work is likely to remain Professor Otway-Ruthven's
A history of medieval Ireland.[37]   Unfortunately, the history of
medieval Gaelic Ireland has been much less intensively studied
which reflects not only the past general lack of interest in the
specific period but, more seriously, the problem of sources. By
far the most useful and succinct account is contained in
Nicholl's *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the middle ages.*[38]

        At the onset of the medieval period, Ireland was a land of
dynastic overlordship in which the greater kings had developed
power-based territorial lordships much like the feudal kingdoms
of Europe.[39]   However, due to the indeterminate laws of succes-
sion, the spatial patterns of kingdoms, supremacy and sub-
ordination were constantly changing. Consequently, there was no
concept of centralized political power, the High King being no
more than the most powerful provincial king at any particular
time.   This is an indication of the lack of unity which was the
principal factor preventing successful Irish resistance to the
Normans.   In addition to political divisions, the island had
also been divided into dioceses during the early part of the
twelfth century, a direct result of the European reform movement
within the church.

        The initial Norman penetration into this society was neither
strictly Norman nor a planned attempt at colonization.   The
soldiers who came to Ireland in 1169 were mainly Welsh, Flemish
and Norman mercenaries enlisted by the deposed king. of Leinster,
Dermot McMurrough, in an attempt to regain his territories.[40]
At the same time, however, the Norman leaders such as Robert Fitz
Stephen and Richard de Clare saw an opportunity to gain power
and prestige in Ireland, a country beyond the immediate control
of the English Crown. A planned colonization and settlement only
came about after the Crown became reluctantly involved, an inter-
vention brought about by the fear that the barons were becoming
too independent and too powerful.   Richard de Clare, for example,
through his marriage to McMurrough's daughter, Aoife, succeeded
to the lands of Leinster on Dermot's death in 1171. Thus, Warren
believes, Henry II's visit to Ireland late in that year, during
which both Irish kings and Norman barons paid homage, was a
forced necessity rather than representing any great desire by the
Crown to institute a conquest of the island.[41] However, by 1175
when Henry II and Rory O'Connor, the last and nominal High King,
divided the island between Norman and Irish in the Treaty of
Windsor, a direct expansion of Norman interests was imminent.
Under the terms of the Treaty, Dublin, Meath, Leinster and Water-
ford as far west as Dungarvan comprised the delimited region of
Norman influence and, generally, these were the first areas to
be colonized and settled. However, the Norman advance rapidly
moved beyond them with the invasion in 1177 of east Ulster by the
adventurer, John de Courcy and the occupation of east Cork and
Uriel (modern Louth) in the 1180's (Fig. 1). By 1190, therefore,
the coast from Dundalk to Cork was controlled by the Normans and
in Meath and north Leinster occupation extended far inland
although in other areas, particularly along the Wicklow Mountains

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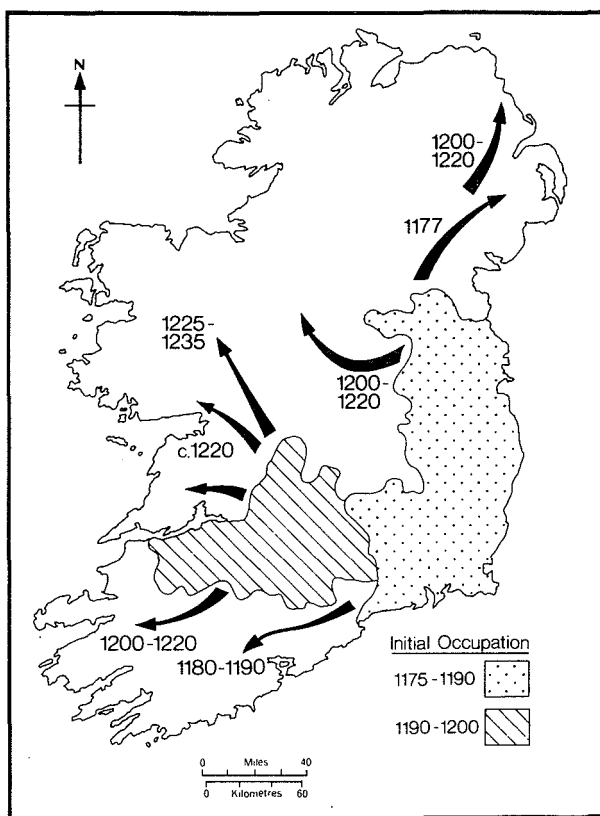
Figure 1. The Norman occupation of Ireland

to the south of Dublin, their authority was confined to a narrow
coastal fringe. Further major advances were made by 1200 with
the consolidation of occupation in Limerick and Tipperary, the
final major region over which Norman influence was to be pro-
longed. After 1200, the impetus of territorial expansion slowed
as the invaders began to occupy areas in which they were unable
to exert the control necessary to institute the radical alter-
ations in the landscape and settlement patterns which were char-
acteristic of early medieval eastern and south-central Ireland.
The first tentative movements occurred across the Shannon and
west into Kerry whilst later *circa* 1220, there was a further
diffusion into Clare. The final area to be at least partially
settled was Connacht, the conquest of which was as complete as
was ever to be achieved by 1235. By this date, the Normans con-
trolled two-thirds of the island, the maximum extent of their
territorial expansion and consequently, certain areas, specif-
ically most of Ulster, the west coast and almost all the interior

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uplands remained beyond at least their direct influence. In
these areas Gaelic political autonomy was more or less preserved
and a socio-economic and settlement system rather different from
that of the Norman colony existed.

However, the spatial relationship between the dual medieval
cultures was complex and dynamic and it would be very wrong to
think of the island as two distinct closed systems for there was
constant contact between Gaelic and Norman, both violent and
peaceful. When the historical evidence of this contact is re-
viewed, the only interpretation that can be placed upon it is
that the concept of dual medieval cultures must be treated with
caution. Gaelic society was undoubtedly altered by the Norman
invasion and underwent a retreat as a result. Over most of the
island it was, through time, resurgent. The invading culture
and its innovations were eventually partially incorporated into
Gaelic society which was thereby further altered. In much the
same way, Norman society in Ireland was altered by the Gaelic
presence.

The spatial manifestation of this complex set of societal
interrelationships were the shifting frontiers which existed be-
tween the two societies. Lydon, in the only paper to have dis-
cussed this phenomenon, has claimed that the incastellation of
Ireland by the invaders produced what was to be one of the first
systematically fortified frontiers in Europe, separating the
feudal and non-feudal worlds.[42] This is an overstatement because
it insinuates a permanent feature for although a frontier existed
and the Crown was continuously concerned with protecting the
colony, the location of the frontier altered rapidly, first in
expansion and then retreat, separated only by a period of com-
parative stability between 1250 and 1300. Although a number of
Norman settlements had been established in Connacht, the effective
frontier at this time seems to have been the Shannon, protected
by the royal castles of Limerick, Athlone, Rindown and Roscommon.
However, there was more than one frontier because even within the
general Norman-controlled region, there were areas, particularly
the mountains, which remained in Irish hands.

The retreat of the frontier of that general region of Norman
control was already under way before the Bruce invasion of 1315-
18 and as Lydon says 'it began to contract and it went on con-
tracting during that century (fourteenth) of war, plague and
famine'.[43] The retreat of the Normans is normally referred to
as the Gaelic resurgence which is an ethnic over-statement. The
significance of this period was the loss of *Crown* control which
by the fifteenth century was restricted to the east coastal strip
of the Pale. However, numerous Norman barons retained their
lands or achieved independence of the Crown by allying themselves
with the Irish. For example, in the Barrow-Nore-Suir basin, the
Butler lordship survived through the fourteenth and fifteenth
centuries as virtually an independent state.[44] As Frame has con-
vincingly argued, the 'Gaelic resurgence' was the working out of
innumerable new compromises and balances between the Government,
the Anglo-Irish and the Irish. Essentially power passed to the

hands of those who were in a particular region and who could grasp it.[45] The result, as Quinn and Nicholls have shown, was that by the mid-sixteenth century, the distribution of territorial power and influence was so complex that generalization is not really possible.[46]

Using the concepts of shifting frontiers and balances of English power as a simple classificatory device, medieval Ireland can be held to have been divided into three major types of settlement regions. First were the areas of intensive Norman colonization (such as Meath, parts of Leinster and south Tipperary) and settlement, partially innovative but also displaying direct continuity from the pre-existing societal and settlement systems. Second, in the west and north were areas of Gaelic settlement, partially retaining the pre-medieval societal norms but at the same time adapting from and therefore being changed by the invading culture in the east. In between were what Jones-Hughes calls the hybrid zones, the areas into which the Normans advanced and settled but over which Crown control was lost during the Gaelic resurgence.[47] Consequently, these had complementary characteristics to the areas of intensive Norman settlement but muted and adapted in their long-term impact by the eventual Gaelic success. In addition, because of their strategic vulnerability the hybrid zones also had certain Norman innovations which were not to be found in other areas.

ANGLO-NORMAN SETTLEMENT

CONTINUITY, LOCATION AND EVOLUTION

It is argued therefore that while the Norman invasion of Ireland undoubtedly precipitated radical developments and alterations in the settlement and social geography of the island, the dichotomy between alien innovation and the pre-existing cultural structure has certainly been over-stressed in the past. Whilst there was a considerable degree of Norman innovation in settlement, social and economic contexts, there was a co-existing trend of settlement and social adaptation. Consequently, the Norman conquest was only partially a colonization in the sense of a pioneer movement into an under-populated and under-utilized environment for, in addition, a marked degree of direct continuity from the pre-existing culture was also characteristic.

The invasion of Ireland, as in Wales, led to the creation of a number of lordships, the boundaries of which were often identical to those of the pre-existing Irish territories.[48] For example, Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (better known as Strongbow) in effect inherited the McMurrough kingdom of Leinster and, again, Henry II's charter granted Meath to Hugh de Lacy to hold 'as Murrough O Melaghlin (the Irish King of Midhe) or anyone else before or after him most fully held it'.[49] When the lordships were later subdivided, their internal boundaries also often followed pre-existing divisions. Similar examples of continuity

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can be found when actual settlements are considered.

At the advent of Norman colonization, the Gaelic settlement structure is presumed to have been a composite system of dispersed farmsteads (some of which may have been located in ring-forts and crannogs) and a nucleated rural form, the probable precursor of the settlement now classified as a clachan.[50] The most obvious element of continuity has always been recognized as the direct Norman takeover of the coastal Viking towns of Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick, the scale and functions of which have only been recently recognized as a result of the excavations of Viking Dublin. It is not surprising, therefore, that they acted as the first ready-made fortresses in the attempted Norman conquest of the island.[51] More contentious in terms of urban continuity is the role of the monastic sites of the Irish Early Christian church. Until recently, it was commonly held that urbanization was alien to the pastoral, tribal society of Celtic Ireland and that it remained 'quite foreign... ......until it was more or less imposed.........by foreign conquerors'.[52] However, if a city is accepted as a form of social organization based on occupational specialization and social stratification of a territorially based population,[53] it can be clearly seen that the preconditions for urbanism were present in pre-Norman Ireland with its rank stratified society and accompanying territorial, political and legal institutions. This type of social organization is generally associated with a redistributive economy involving a flow of goods or even the establishment of rights over production to support the activities of an élite.[54] Characteristically, redistribution necessitates a flow of goods into and out of a centre and urbanism is therefore possible.[55] Doherty has convincingly shown that some of the pre-Norman monastic sites fulfilled this role of urban centres where the flow of surplus, generated by the redistributive economy, was controlled.[56] Butlin[57] and De Paor[58] have also discussed some of the documentary evidence derived from the Irish Annals concerning these settlements and whilst it is often ambiguous (with the notable exception of the very positive evidence for Armagh), the balance points to a pre-Norman indigenous origin for Irish urbanization.

This is emphasized by the remarkable degree of correlation between Irish monastic and Norman settlement sites. In Co. Meath, for example, it was found that the two distributions were statistically significantly related and that the correlation for the most important settlements in both time phases was almost 100 per cent.[59] In some instances, continuity was direct although for others the evidence is less certain. An example of the former was Clonard in Co. Meath. In 1045, 'the town of Clonard, together with its churches, was wholly consumed, being thrice set on fire within one week'.[60] Again, in 1170, 'the town and abbey of Clonard was burnt by MacMurcha, who was aided and assisted by the English under the command of Earl Strongbow'.[61] That Clonard became a Norman settlement is witnessed by its extant and substantial motte-and-bailey (built *circa* 1182). Again Simms has carried out a case study of Duleek, Co.

Meath, where she has convincingly shown direct morphological continuity, the circular enclosure of the pre-Norman monastic site being incorporated into the street plan of the medieval borough.[62] In other cases, the pre-Norman monastery may have been deserted and, therefore, the continuity was of site rather than settlement.

The evolution of an economic and social complex and its internal settlement interrelationships upon this base was a direct function of the Norman power structure. Power can be defined as a varying system of constraints, imposed by differential access to scarce resources where these resources are taken to include the locational attributes influencing the development of a settlement in the colonial economy. Access to these resources was dependent upon the position of the landlord in the social hierarchy, the spatial representation of this being the stratified land-holding system. The initial step in its development was the allocation of lordships by the Crown to several major grantees, a process particularly characteristic of eastern Ireland. The two outstanding examples were Henry II's grant of the Liberty of Meath (the modern counties of Meath, Westmeath and parts of Longford and Offaly) to Hugh de Lacy and the even larger grant of much of Leinster (the modern counties of Wexford, Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny and parts of Offaly and Leix) to Richard de Clare. The magnates further subdivided their grants amongst various tenants in the subinfeudation process, retaining significant areas for themselves as seignorial manors.[63] The subinfeudated areas were often of a substantial size. For instance, when the eastern part of the Liberty of Meath was subinfeudated *circa* 1174-5, seven of the principal grants were equivalent to a future barony in extent, De Lacy himself retaining about one-quarter of the area as seignorial manors.[64] In some regions such as Uriel (modern Louth) and north Munster, the land was directly parcelled out to tenants by the Crown without the preliminary major territorial grant to a single magnate. Again, substantial areas were involved, one notable example being the grant of the entire northern half of the modern county of Tipperary to Theobald Walter. In addition, considerable areas were given to the Church or retained by the Crown (particularly in the Vale of Dublin). Whatever arrangement was used, the significance of the subinfeudation process was that the delimitation of these large land units pre-dated the establishment of settlements which, consequently, could only be sited with reference to desirable locational characteristics if the latter occurred within the boundaries of the land units. Obviously, this was more likely to occur in the seignorial manors than the principal land grants as the former were held by landlords of maximum power and influence in the social system.

The early establishment of this territorial framework, allied with the likelihood that the most desirable sites within them would be used for settlements established by seignorial lords or principal grantees, indicates the probability of such settlements possessing significant locational advantages, particularly for urban development, compared to those associated with

the further and later subdivision into manors. In addition, evidence indicates that manorial subdivision was contemporaneous with the establishment of settlements on seignorial manors and principal land grants, thereby investing these with significant temporal advantages as well. Very little direct evidence has survived on the dating and formation of manors but the clear identification of manor with parish sometimes permits the pattern of post-subinfeudation division of land to be traced from documentation concerning the parochial structure. Developing the example of the Liberty of Meath, Otway-Ruthven charted the development of parishes (and hence by inference, manors) in two of the principal land grants, the Baronies of Skreen and Deece.[65] By the end of the twelfth century, these two areas had been subdivided into approximately 16 parish/manors, the process considerably postdating subinfeudation and being contemporaneous with the first records of settlements on the seignorial manors and principal land grants.

Therefore, it can be argued that because landlord influence was instrumental at all levels in settlement foundation, the land-holding system (in that it was the physical manifestation of power distribution in the society) constituted an overriding constraint upon the processes of settlement evolution. Within these confines, a study in Meath indicated that three major, if subservient, locational processes could be used as surrogates of settlement development potential.[66] The first of these, the influence of continuity, has already been discussed but in addition, the invaders seem to have had a primary concern with strategic factors, particularly the need to defend communications links along and across major rivers. Finally, strategic factors were replaced in favour of emerging economic concerns as the military state of the colony rapidly stablized. This was most clearly reflected in the importance of coastal locations, the ports acting as the linkage with the wider economic systems of Britain and Europe. Although these processes are separated for discussion, it should be stressed that any combination of the three could be operating simultaneously.

The importance of strategic considerations in Norman settlement location can only be assessed by deduction and extrapolation from distributional characteristics, the environmental factors mentioned below being obviously no more than measureable surrogates for what must have been a very real concern. At the onset of Norman colonization, Ireland was well-wooded with poor road communications[67] and the principal river valleys provided the easiest means of movement. Consequently, those parts of the Boyne, Liffey, Slaney, Barrow, Nore, Suir, Blackwater and Shannon which were navigable were of obvious significance for communications.[68] However, they were also of vital importance for the future economic potential, both of individual settlements and of the lordships generally, a factor which must have influenced not only the pattern of subinfeudation land grants but also the location of settlements within them. In this respect, sites at the mouths of navigable rivers were of particular significance. However, rivers can also act as barriers to movement and it was

therefore necessary to fortify major crossing points both to
protect lines of advance and communication and also to defend
the newly conquered areas from any Irish resurgence. Where these
considerations did not apply, other strategic locations such as
commanding sites were often chosen for initial settlement and
there was the further influence of centrality within the land
grants.

Certain desirable locational characteristics favoured by
the Normans for settlement siting can therefore be isolated.
The most important of these appear to have been river crossing
points, navigable rivers, coastal locations (particularly at the
mouths of navigable rivers) and pre-existing settlements which
offered an opportunity for rapid adaptation. It is argued that
access to these characteristics, all of which would have been
influential in economic development, was controlled by a land-
lord's standing in the social hierarchy and that, consequently,
the locational characteristics were only of significance within
the confines of the land-holding system.

MOTTES AND LATER FORTIFICATIONS

The initial innovatory settlements within the conquered
areas, their quite extensive documentation considerably pre-
dating that of any other forms, were earthen motte-and-bailey
castles. It was only in 1906 that Orpen first made it clear
that these were of Norman origin;[69] prior to that it was popu-
larly believed that they had been built by the Danes. In 1907,
he published the first list of mottes together with documentary
evidence of their construction, compiled from both Norman sources
and the Irish Annals.[70] In addition he included a map in *Ireland
under the Normans* which summarized the results of his 'tentative
survey', pointing out the high density in the Norman lordships
of Meath, Leinster and Ulster and, conversely, the almost total
absence in areas which remained under predominantly Irish con-
trol. Orpen noted that the map provided a good index to the
general area of Norman domination *circa* 1220 and also the loc-
ation of the most important manorial centres at that time.[71]
However motte-building probably ceased in the very early thir-
teenth century[72] and in those areas settled later such as east
Cork, Limerick, Clare and Connacht, the Norman impact was much
greater than might be suggested by a motte distribution map.

Since Orpen's pioneering work, little progress has been made
on a systematic study of mottes. A number of examples were sur-
veyed in Co. Down and some were excavated[73] but it is only re-
cently that an attempt has been made by Glasscock to extend
Orpen's list.[74] Unfortunately this is restricted to extant
mottes (in 1973) and Glasscock's map (Fig. 2) is therefore not
directly comparable with Orpen's in which both extant and des-
troyed examples were included. As Glasscock points out, a fur-
ther defect is that to a certain extent his list reflects work
done, particularly in Antrim[75] and Meath.[76] In addition, Barry
has since extended the list of extant mottes in Wexford, Tipper-
ary and Kilkenny.[77] A minor complication to using the motte

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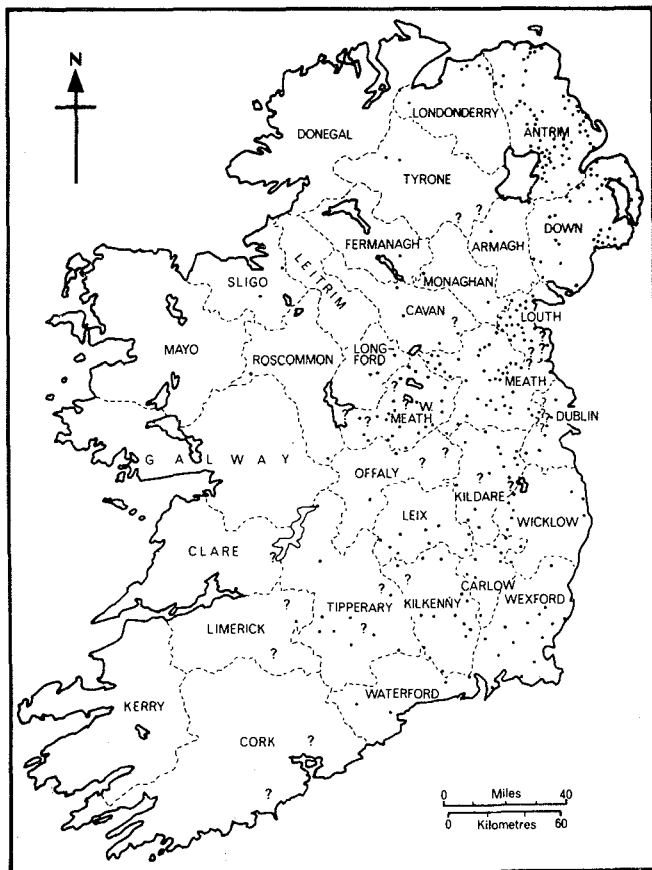
Figure 2.   Ireland : distribution of mottes (After
            Glasscock, 1975)

distribution map as an index of Norman settlement is the dis-
covery by McNeill that in Antrim a number were Irish copies of
an alien innovation.[78]   Elsewhere, however, it can be assumed
that almost all mottes were of Norman construction because they
rarely occur in other fringe areas.

        Relatively little work has been carried out on the functions
and locations of mottes.   Orpen noted that in Ossory all the
largest mottes were associated with seignorial manors and the
principal subordinate manors.[79]   Exactly the same pattern was
found in Meath where although large motte-and-baileys were assoc-
iated with almost all the seignorial manors and principal land
grants of the subinfeudation process, or with defensive locations

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on the periphery of the lordship, the majority of examples were
substantially smaller and lacked baileys.[80] A sample field sur-
vey, carried out to determine the extent of the variation, showed
that the mottes of the liberty could be grouped into four classes
(Table 1). Class 1 comprised major fortifications with baileys,
constructed during the initial settlement of the area. Their
distribution was related to the delimitation of seignorial manors
and principal land grants and within these to strategic loc-
ations and pre-Norman monastic sites (or both together).

Table 1. Classification of mottes in the Lordship of Meath

Class	Height (m.)	Bailey Yes	No	Seignorial Manors/ principal land grants	Peripheral location	Both
1	>11	9	0	7	8	6
2	9-11	4	6	4	7	1
3	7-9	1	12	1	12	0
4	<7	0	9	0	2	0

Class 2 mottes were either *capite* of principal land grants
(those with baileys) or large mottes in the western more exposed
half of the liberty. The examples in class 3 lacked baileys and
were also peripheral but in contrast to those in class 2, the
majority were in the less vulnerable eastern part of the liberty.
Finally, class 4 contains a number of small mottes, mostly loc-
ated in the secure eastern and southern areas of Meath. It is
likely that their function was to offer protection on a local
scale to the manorial lord and his settlement. Some, however,
are so defensively insignificant that they may have been no more
than status symbols.

     McNeill also notes that few of the mottes in Ulster possess-
ed baileys and where they did, the feature was not a manorial or
residential one but a fortification for a military garrison. In
addition, he makes the important point that motte possession ex-
tended quite far down the social scale in comparison with England.
He suggests that they may represent an appropriate adaptation of
the hall and manor to the dispersed Irish land-holding system.[81]

     The discussion of mottes is complicated by evidence of two
additional settlement forms with apparently similar functions.
It is possible that the Anglo-Normans sometimes fortified ring-
forts (perhaps through the construction of stone walls) or else
constructed features which although morphologically similar
(possessing circular fossess and banks) were more obviously mili-
tary in function. Tentatively, these have been called ringworks
in parallel with similar features found in Wales. A site at
Pollardstown in Co. Kildare, for example, which morphologically
appeared to be a ring-fort, produced an assemblage of twelfth to
fourteenth-century material typical of an Anglo-Norman military
encampment. The habitation material and the construction of the
site were broadly contemporary, thereby clearly indicating a

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medieval date.[82]   It is possible that the gaps in the motte dis-
tribution might be complemented by such ringworks but this is no
more than speculation as work on the settlement form is in its
infancy.   Nor can any convincing explanation be advanced as to
why ringworks apparently replaced mottes in areas like Tipperary
and east Cork.   Again, a further group of earthworks occur which
are commonly known as platform or raised raths (most known
examples are in Ulster).   Most of the excavated sites such as
Ballyfounder and Lismahon in Co. Down have yielded evidence for
medieval utilization.   It has been postulated that these represent
the transformation of the Gaelic ring-fort into an imitation of
an alien settlement form during the medieval period.[83]   Much
archaeological work remains to be done to determine the exact
functions of both ringworks and platform raths and their relation-
ship to mottes.

    Leask regards the cessation of motte building and the simul-
taneous construction of large stone castles such as Trim and
Carrickfergus as being evidence of greater security and the per-
fection of Norman organization in Ireland.[84]   It is worth noting
that in Ulster, always on the fringes of the colony, motte con-
struction may have continued until 1270-80 and occupation well
into the fourteenth century.[85]   Elsewhere construction apparently
ceased soon after 1200.   According to Leask, the first wave of
stone-castle construction from *circa* 1180 to 1310 owed much to
the Crown wishing to curb the power of the barons.   These were
true military castles and more than any other features, they
demonstrate the continuing insecurity of the Norman colony both
from within and without.   This is particularly true of the royal
castles on the Shannon, especially Roscommon, built towards the
end of the thirteenth century and incorporating, as Stalley notes,
the latest innovations in defensive design.[86]

BOROUGHS

    The establishment of Norman military control represented in
the landscape by the distribution of mottes, permitted the migra-
tion of settlers to Ireland, the foundation (or adaptation) of
settlements and the organization of agriculture, the basis of the
island's trade.   The mottes, the first innovative settlement
form,   also emphasize the strategic constraint on the evolution
of the settlement pattern, the dominant components of which were
the boroughs.   Through these the economy and its redistributory
circulation systems were established, organized and controlled.

    Bloch has argued that in what he calls the 'second feudal
age' there were two separate if superimposed circulation
systems.[87]   In one, redistribution was local within the manorial
system or larger fiefdoms, a system which did not necessarily
require urbanization.   The other was long-distance trade which
necessitated the concentration of activities at controlled centres
and thereby stimulated the process of urbanization.   The organ-
ization of this trade was in the hands of merchants who existed
in an ambiguous relationship with the feudal nobility.[88]   This
could lead to antagonism between town and country, leading Postan

to describe medieval towns as 'non-feudal islands in a feudal sea'.[89] There is ample documentary evidence for the operation of merchants in medieval Ireland[90] but there is no indication of urban isolation or conflict between urban and rural. The urban merchants and the Anglo-Irish feudal nobility must have had close links, underlined by the paramount importance of the landlords' role in urban foundation.

In structural terms, therefore, the concept of two circulatory systems provides a generalized concept within which medieval Irish urbanization can be discussed. The ports and major towns of the interior, particularly those located on navigable rivers, were the centres through which long-distance trade was controlled. In addition, local redistribution occurred within the component territories of the colony, leading to the development of an ambiguous settlement form, neither urban nor rural, which makes a definition of *urban* somewhat problematical.

Otway-Ruthven noted that a large number of small boroughs were established throughout Norman Ireland and invested with the elements of an urban constitution with burgage holdings, their own hundred courts and usually the Law of Breteuil.[91] However, in spite of their legal status, these settlements may never have been more than villages which, Otway-Ruthven suggests drawing a parallel with medieval colonization in continental Europe, meant that burgess standing was widely used as a lure to attract settlers.[92] Glasscock used the term, *rural-borough*, to classify such settlements, defining them as boroughs where there are some documentary references to burgages or burgesses but which were probably agricultural in function and never true towns.[93] The principal problem with this is that 'true towns' are not defined although the term suggests that occupational specialization should be used to delimit urban from rural. However, all boroughs had agricultural functions and data is too deficient to assess the balance between these and non-agrarian urban functions for individual settlements. Therefore, the rural-borough designation cannot be applied on any objective basis. It has been argued that because of this deficiency, there is no alternative but to equate borough with town and that the latter had to be defined as a settlement which possessed both borough status with a corporation and privileges conferred by a charter and the right to hold a weekly market. Therefore, whatever their eventual morphology, functional array and population composition, rural-boroughs could be considered as part of the medieval new-town building and adaptation movement and could consequently be regarded as urban speculations which failed for various spatial, economic and historical factors.[94]

This equation can be considerably refined and one proposal has approached the problem through the use of a model (Fig. 3).[95] This attempts to account for the location of boroughs and their differential development through time and to develop a classification that is relevant both to the Norman social structure and economy. It is argued that the key element was the land-holding system, the physical manifestation of the distribution of power
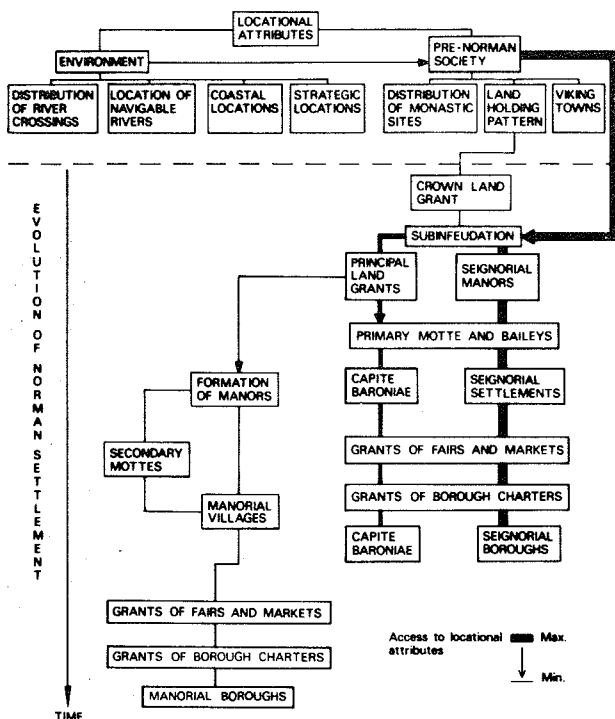
Figure 3. Model of medieval urban evolution

in the society, from which stemmed comparative locational choice
or constraint and the temporal advantages which boroughs might
possess.   The seignorial lords and to a lesser extent the prin-
cipal grantees had more power (see page 9) and hence had fewer
constraints in location, combined with advantages of time.   In
addition, they presumably had more influence and resources to
promote settlement development.   Consequently, true urban settle-
ments associated with the long-distance circulation system, were
most likely to evolve within the macro-scale land units.   Con-
versely, through the later institution of the manorial system,
associated settlements were not only temporally disadvantaged in
achieving the functional development necessary to compete with
those located earlier on the macro-land grants, but were also
spatially constrained by the smaller size of the land units.   It
is also probable that manorial lords had less influence and fewer
resources, either political or economic, to develop their settle-
ments to compete with those located on the subinfeudation grants.
Consequently, these were likely to be concerned with no more
than local redistribution.

Therefore, it is suggested that the most realistic class-
ification of Irish medieval boroughs is one based upon the seig-
norial, principal land grant and manorial levels of land sub-
division. Seignorial is defined as land held directly from the
Crown and therefore includes the settlements on the manors re-
tained in Meath and Leinster by the De Lacys and De Clare res-
pectively, the centres of the large grants made by John in Uriel
and Munster, the headquarters of De Courcy and De Burgo in
Ulster and Connacht respectively, the boroughs which developed
around the major royal castles and finally, the centres of the
largest areas of church land. The term, *capite baroniae*, is
used to refer to boroughs on the large grants (the principal
land grants in Meath and Leinster and the largest subdivisions
elsewhere) of lords who were tenants of the barons holding land
direct from the Crown. Principal land grants and seignorial
manors in Meath, for example, were of comparable area. Finally,
the self-explanatory designation of manorial is given to boroughs
on the much smaller grants of sub-tenants of either of the other
two categories. Such a classification isolates the most signif-
icant relationship in the evolution of medieval urbanization,
the clear link between settlement and the hierarchical feudal
social organization. It also stresses that processes which
could account for actual settlement location and, therefore,
influence functional development, were subsidiary to it.

In all, about 180 boroughs have been identified from docu-
mentary sources. Two criteria were applied:

1) the existence of a charter of incorporation, and;

2) documentary evidence of burgesses and or burgage rent and
   or burgage land, evidence fulfilling either or both
   justifying the classification of a settlement as a borough.

Consequently, it is likely that a number of settlements
which were actually incorporated are excluded because of the
non-survival of documentary evidence. In addition, it is known
that about 60 further settlements received grants of markets and
fairs which represents strong but not definitive evidence of the
attainment of borough status.[96] The differential impact of
medieval urbanization is clearly apparent from the distribution
shown in (Fig. 4), the pattern being directly related to the
intensity of Norman colonization. Maximum density of boroughs
occurred in those areas such as Meath, Uriel, Leinster and north
Munster which were settled thoroughly and early in the Norman
diffusion and which represent the heartland of the colony. Con-
versely, with the exception of some isolated settlements, con-
siderable areas of the island including Ulster, most of the west
coast, Connacht and all the interior uplands were precluded from
the characteristic widespread evolution of boroughs either be-
cause they were not attractive to the invaders or else were be-
yond the area which they were able to control militarily.

It has already been noted (see page 10) that certain desir-
able locational attributes (pre-Norman monastic sites, river
crossings, navigable rivers and coastal sites), attractive to

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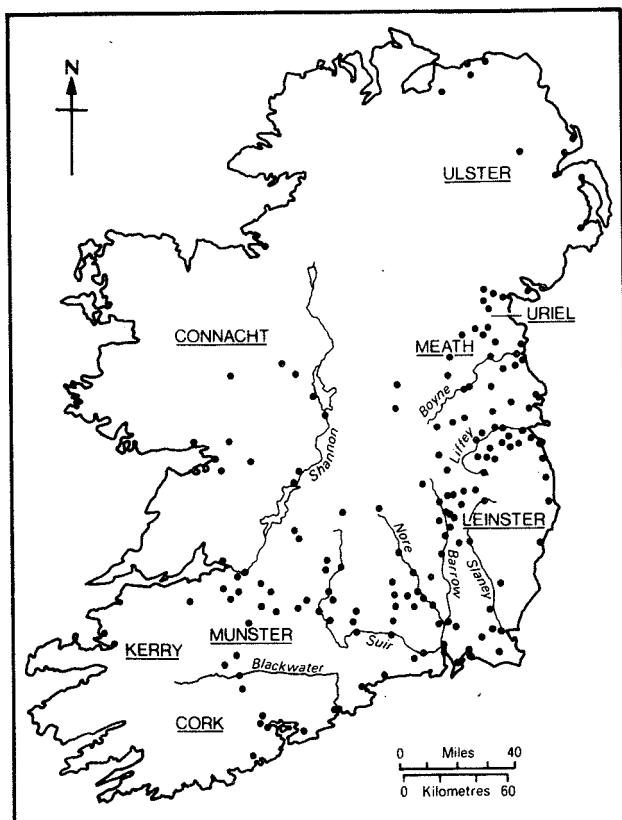
Figure 4.   Ireland : distribution of boroughs

the colonizers, can be isolated.   The postulated relationship
between these and the borough categories is shown on Fig. 3.
Table 2 presents an analysis of the correlation between the loc-
ational attributes and the three-fold classification.   It can be
clearly seen that seignorial boroughs were most over-represented
in all four locational categories, *capite baroniae* did not dis-
play a marked variation from the overall percentages whilst
manorial boroughs were markedly under-represented in each case.
Consequently, seignorial boroughs were undoubtedly more likely
to possess the locational advantages which could underpin genuine
urban development as the economy evolved.   Conversely, the poss-
ibilities of manorial borough development were hindered by their
lack of correlation with the locational characteristics, thereby
underlining their local role of even failure.   On an aggregate
level, *capite baroniae* did not possess any locational advantages
or disadvantages.

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Table 2. Relationship between boroughs and locational attributes

Borough type	Number	Percentage of those identified	Locational attributes (percentage of boroughs in each category)			
			Pre-Norman monastic site	River crossing	Navigable river	Coast
Seignorial	40	24.6	27.5	52.5	35	30
Capite Baroniae	53	32.5	24.6	32.1	15.1	20.8
Manorial	70	42.9	8.6	18.6	10	21.5
Overall	163	-	18.4	31.3	17.8	23.3

        The model also suggests that seignorial boroughs and *capite baroniae* had significant advantages of time which encouraged their economic development. Verification of this is much more difficult because of the nature of the documentary evidence. Charters, for example, were often granted at the end of the process of urban development and are therefore of little use in developing a chronology of urban evolution. However the evidence for a number of areas has been examined and this suggests that seignorial boroughs had distinct advantages of time over manorial boroughs, being established and operating as economic units long before many of the latter were even founded.[97] Again, *capite baroniae* were in an intermediate situation, some being contemporary with seignorial and some with manorial boroughs.

        This classification and its internal variations does not of course define what is urban (beyond the equation of borough and town) but it is compatible with another approach, adopted by an archaeologist, Bradley, who defines a town (as distinct from a borough) using morphological criteria.[98] A town 'is a settlement occupying a central position in a communications network, represented by a street plan with houses and their associated land plots........; it incorporates a market place and a church and its principal functions are reflected by the presence of at least three of the following:- town walls, castle, bridge, cathedral, a religious house, hospital or leper house......., an area of specialist technological activity, quays, a large school, an administrative building or suburbs'. There are some problems with this definition, notably the arbitrary use of three characteristics and their relative weighting in comparison with each other. However, the use of such an empirical definition within the context of the classification outlined above, which places boroughs within the framework of the social structure, could lead to a comprehensive classificatory-definitional structure of medieval Irish boroughs. The role of boroughs within the economy is considered below (see pages 27-30) but rural

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settlement and agriculture must be examined and discussed first
because of the fundamental agricultural orientation of production
and trade.

RURAL SETTLEMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Social Organisation

An adequate discussion of the rural economy of Norman Ire-
land must be preceded by a description of the feudal social
structure because, not only was this reflected in differing
settlement forms but also in the type of agriculture conducted
and the prevailing field systems. In addition to burgesses,
five other classes of tenants were to be found on Irish manors.
As Otway-Ruthven points out, not every manor had all of these
but all had most of them.[99] The most important group in status
after the burgesses were the free tenants who held land in fee
and inheritance, the amount, which varied widely, occasionally
extending into several thousand acres.[100] They generally had
names of Anglo-Norman or Welsh origin but some Irish names do
occur in manorial extents. The *firmarii*, a number of whom were
Irish, had a lesser status than the free tenants, holding land
on lease at a money rent for a specified term of years and often
also owing labour services. Beneath them in the hierarchy were
the *gavillari*, again both Irish and Norman tenants-at-will who
owed labour services as well as paying rent although they were
personally free. Not very different were the *cotagii* (or cot-
tiers) who were presumably employed on the demesne lands as
labourers. They were usually Irish and held only their cottages
and crofts for which they paid a money rent and owed labour ser-
vices. At the lowest social level were the *betaghs* who generally
comprised the most numerous group within a manor's population.
They were bondsmen, almost invariably Irish and were similar to
the unfree villein of medieval England. The most detailed dis-
cussions of the social organization of medieval Irish manors are
to be found in Curtis' paper on Lisronagh, Co. Tipperary,[101] and
O'Loan's work on Cloncurry, Co. Kildare.[102]

Rural Settlement

Associated with this social structure were three principal
forms of rural settlement, the manorial village, the moated site
and the *betagh* hamlet. Glasscock, using the techniques of Beres-
ford and other English researchers into deserted medieval vill-
ages, was the first to clearly identify field evidence of the
manorial village, the most important element of the medieval
rural settlement pattern.[103] In the main, they are undocumented
and, consequently, identification depends upon the recording of
church and castle sites from the First Edition Ordnance Survey
Six Inch Maps of *circa* 1840 and subsequent field survey. Occas-
ionally, the Ordnance surveyors recorded earthworks at these
sites as, for example, at Kiltinan in Co. Tipperary (where the
surface remains were destroyed by ploughing in 1978). Such
features constitute the principal evidence for the morphology of
manorial villages as none have been excavated. A few have been

identified from air photographs (mostly obliques of the *Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography*)[104] but, on the whole, the coverage of Ireland is extremely poor. Glasscock recorded a number of manorial villages, mostly in Counties Tipperary and Kilkenny while 98 have been identified in Co. Meath alone.[105] Although similar densities were probably characteristic of any region intensively settled by the Normans, the village appears to have been absent in the fringe areas of the colony, McNeill for example, finding no trace of the settlement form in Ulster.[106] Elsewhere, there has been no systematic survey although a number of sites could possibly be identified using the seventeenth-century Civil and Down Surveys, sources which generally proved to be reliable in Meath when cross-checked by field survey. The drawback, of course, is that their use invokes the assumption that there were no major alterations in the late-medieval rural settlement pattern, a period which is notoriously badly documented.

The manorial village can be defined as a nucleated settlement, containing a church and generally, but not necessarily, a castle with a population primarily involved in agriculture and supportive local industry such as milling. In the early medieval period, the castle, the home of the manorial lord, would have been a secondary motte (or perhaps a moated site or ringwork) although from the fourteenth century onwards, a tower house was often constructed, this being the Irish equivalent to the English manor house, its fortified character reflecting the increasingly precarious nature of the English colony. Extant documentation in the form of manorial extents is certainly pertinent to an analysis of the social and economic role of the manor but reveals little about the morphology of the settlements themselves. However, there is still a considerable volume of material which has yet to be analysed, the most obvious being the *Inquisitions Post Mortem*. Two typical manorial extents which illustrate the problem are those of Dowth, Co. Meath (1253)[107] and Moycarkey, Co. Tipperary (1304).[108] Nine free tenants, some of whom were Irish, lived on the Manor of Dowth, 'both within and without the vill' (which presumably refers to the settlement). In addition, there was an unspecified number of *cotagii* but there is no indication in the extent as to whether they lived in the village or elsewhere on the manor. Associated with (presumably) the village were a garden, dovecote, two mills and a fishery on the Boyne. There are traces of earthworks at Dowth (including a sunken way) which indicate the site of the village. Similar field evidence is to be found at Moycarkey where there were 39 free tenants who had mostly Norman names. Some of these held only a messuage and courtyard and were therefore probably craftsmen who lived in the village. There were also six *firmarii*, three English and three Irish, and four *cotagii*, two of whom were Irish. Undoubtedly some of the free tenants and *firmarii* lived in the village but, equally, some probably lived on dispersed farmsteads or clusters of farmsteads elsewhere on the manor. It should be stated that ethnic identification by name is rather equivocal as some Irish could have taken Norman names to derive social benefit.

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Although the documentation for manorial villages is not therefore very satisfactory, it is vastly superior to that for the second major rural settlement form, the moated site, despite which, paradoxically, the forms, functions and dating of the latter have been more intensively studied. Orpen made a passing reference to a type of earthwork consisting of a rectangular platform and surrounded by ditches and ramparts[109] and Hadden later wrote a short paper discussing similar features in Co. Wexford.[110] However, the first systematic study of the settlement form in the island as a whole was by Glasscock who compiled a distribution map drawn from the First Edition Ordnance Survey Maps (Fig. 5).[111] This shows that the most intensive concentrations of rectangular earthworks were in Wexford, eastern Tipperary, a north-south zone extending from Co. Limerick into east Cork together with a less dense cluster in Westmeath. The study of the settlement form has subsequently been much advanced by Barry, working in the four southern counties of Wexford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Tipperary.[112] He found (despite an intensive search) that because moated sites are so poorly documented, their study can only be undertaken through field survey which undoubtedly imposes considerable limitations on discussion of their functions and relationship to the social structure. The most common morphological feature was a site possessing a platform area of less than 2000 sq. m. with a moat width of between three and seven metres. Barry believes that the considerable degree of uniformity in morphology across four counties may suggest the optimum size for a well-functioning farm and outbuildings in the medieval period.[113]

The dating and functional evidence for these sites is, to quote Barry, 'pitifully small', only two sites having been excavated. At Kilmagoura, Co. Cork, little occupational evidence and few dateable artefacts were found.[114] However a Carbon[14] sample, obtained from the timbers of the causeway across the moat, gave a date of 1225 ± 70.[115] At Rigsdale, also in Co. Cork, Sweetman found good dating evidence for occupation including polychrome pottery dating to 1260-1320 and two Edward I pennies (1272-1307) one under an internal bank and one on the platform, again suggesting late thirteenth-early fourteenth century occupation.[116] Such findings, together with some further circumstantial evidence (for example, the accounts of the construction of a moat, fence and gate at Ballyconnor in the Manor of Old Ross, Co. Wexford) permitted Barry to place the construction and occupation of moated sites in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which corresponds well with England.[117]

Barry also puts forward a number of hypotheses to explain the functions of Irish moated sites. One variant of the settlement form which does not occur in England is the type with large platform areas, massive banks and wide moats, often sited in strategic locations. Most of these were found in the west and north-west of his field area where the Irish had always been more active but some, found in more easterly areas, may well have been built as a response to the greater insecurity of the fourteenth century.[118] The one detailed documentary account of an
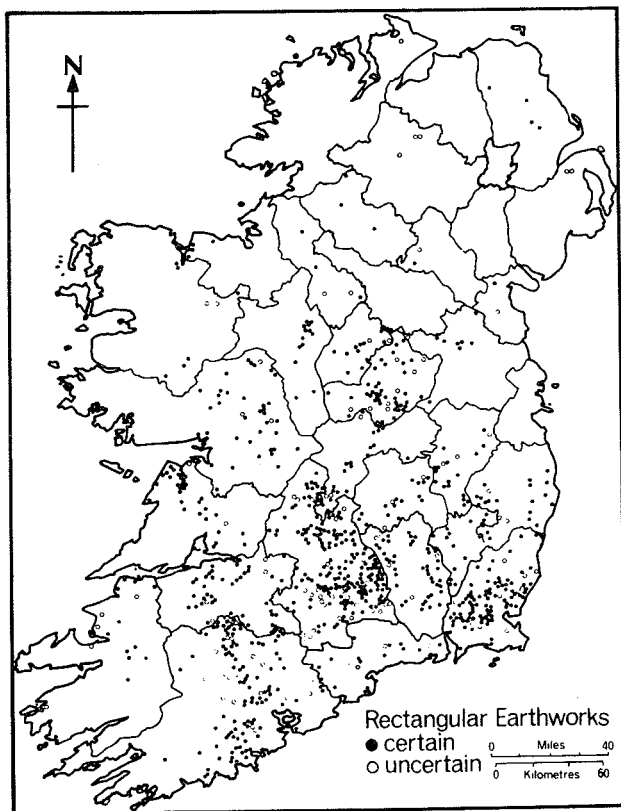
Figure 5. Ireland : distribution of rectangular earthworks
           as shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey
           Six Inch Maps (1832-40). (After Glasscock, 1970).

Irish moated site, Ballyconnor, gives a very clear picture of
the settlement being an 'out-farm' unit, located in a large
forest clearing and Barry suggests that many of the sites may
represent extension of cultivated land due to population pres-
sure, the moated form being necessary for protection.[119] It is
also possible that a few moated sites may, as in England, have
been monastic granges but Barry could find no evidence to support
this.[120] Finally, he suggests that the settlement form provided
a compromise for small and even quite large landowners who re-
quired a protected farmstead but could not afford the expense of
a stone castle. The moated sites were therefore very much an
innovatory settlement form limited to the hybrid zones. When
Barry compared their distribution with the total Norman settle-

ment pattern, he found that they most commonly separated
securely-held Norman from Irish areas. On this basis, he hypo-
thesizes that at least some moated sites may have been relative-
ly late, built in the fourteenth century as a response to the
Gaelic resurgence.

An interesting aspect of the moated site as a settlement
form is that its function can in many ways be compared to the
manorial motte. It is possible that it became the localized
defensive form, characteristic of the period between the cess-
ation of motte-building *circa* 1230 and the widespread construc-
tion of small tower-houses in the late fourteenth and fifteenth
centuries. If the distribution maps of mottes and moated sites
are compared, they are essentially complementary (see Figs. 2
and 5). The densest motte distributions are in Antrim, Down,
Louth, Meath and Dublin, all of which have virtually no moated
sites. Conversely, moated sites occur most frequently in Wex-
ford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Cork and Limerick where mottes are
relatively sparse. Only one or two counties such as Westmeath
and, less obviously, Kildare have appreciable concentrations of
both.

Finally, there was a third rural settlement form of problem-
atical origin. In various sources, there are references to nuc-
leated settlements existing on manors in which there were also
manorial villages. These consisted of a small number of cottages
and it is most likely that they were *betagh* settlements as it is
known that this social group lived on their own separate town-
land within the manor[121] (see pages 39-41).

Field Systems and Agriculture

The subject of medieval Irish field systems is one which
has received comparatively little attention although there is
undoubtedly a considerable amount of documentary material that
has yet to be analysed. The traditional view, largely unchal-
lenged even if it is largely unsubstantiated, is that the Normans
adopted a three-field system of the type supposedly common in
the English midlands which contrasted with the indigenous *rundale*
infield system, the origins of which lie in prehistory.[122]

As Otway-Ruthven points out in a paper which must be treated
with extreme caution, one of the principal problems is that no
detailed terrier or survey has survived and therefore, it is
impossible to discover how the lands of any manor were originally
laid out.[123] Nevertheless, she claims that the available evi-
dence (from charters) shows the clear existence of scattered
holdings, consisting of many strips in a number of different
fields. Whenever such documentary evidence exists, Otway-
Ruthven claims that it can be assumed with confidence that the
manorial lands were laid out in open-fields and that this was
true throughout the heartland of the Norman colony. She suggests
that each social group amongst the tenants often held land in
separate parts of the manor. Burgage and demesne land were
commonly separate entities but, as Buchanan notes, lands of free

tenants were usually scattered.[124] Otway-Ruthven records an example of a free tenant holding 69 acres at Callane, Co. Kilkenny in 52 parcels at 17 separately named locations.[125] Sometimes, the *firmarii* held land individually in compact lots or in parcels inter-mixed with those of the free tenants, perhaps in a joint tenancy with other *firmarii* and occasionally with *betaghs*.[126] It has been suggested that *betaghs* cultivated their land on the native infield system[127] and also that the *firmarii* who held land in a joint tenancy may have followed the same practice.[128]

On the rest of the manor and demesne, Otway-Ruthven suggests that a three-course rotation was followed which might indicate a three-field system on the English model.[129] Leister also claims that the Normans introduced large openfields, organized for three-field rotation, in southern Tipperary but makes the point that they did not suppress the peasant openfields. The *betaghs*, although obviously acquainted with the three-course rotation system through labour, continued to use their small infields as one-crop units.[130] If this was generally true and bearing in mind that *betaghs* were usually the largest group in the manorial population, this infield land would have formed a sizeable proportion of the land of each manor. In addition, some of the larger free tenants probably had compact holdings. Charters give the impression that a good deal of land was held in comparatively large blocks which may have been due to the original laying out of land or to the consolidation without enclosure which was going on as early as the thirteenth century (or both).[131] Some of the larger blocks may have been due to individual enterprize in clearing lands for cultivation.

However, in a recent paper, Butlin points out that at least some of these suggestions must be discounted. Indeed he goes so far as to state that the 'native *betagh* rundale and Norman three-field models have to be relegated to the realms of mythology'.[132] It should be noted that this polemical conclusion is not based on documentary analysis and therefore remains as unsubstantiated as the earlier hypotheses. Nevertheless, Butlin does point out that the analogy with an idealized, midland English field system is outmoded, given recent work on that subject and that the ethnic division of field systems is unhelpful. He notes that detailed studies might show a far greater complexity of field systems, associated not with the ethnic factor, but the 'social, economic and environmental inputs'.[133]

The agricultural practices of Norman Ireland constitute a further aspect of this general topic which is still awaiting detailed analysis of documentary evidence. However as Lydon argues, the new techniques, methods and even crops of the settlers led to a vastly increased level of production. The area under tillage expanded and sheep-farming, to some extent stimulated by the Cistercians, produced large amounts of wool for export.[134] In general, at least in the early period of Norman colonization, a mixed agricultural economy with an emphasis on arable seems to have prevailed. The Pipe Roll of 14 John (1212)

shows, for example, that in Meath the most important feature of
the agricultural economy was the amount of grain retained for
sowing.[135] The same document also provides the only recorded
use in Ireland of eight-ox plough teams on the manors of Clonard,
Kilmore, Ardmulchan and Nobber. Stock-rearing of cattle, sheep
and pigs was also of some importance on these Meath manors.
Pollen analysis of samples from Littleton Bog, Co. Tipperary,
also shows that between 1169 and 1300, cereal cultivation was of
primary importance.[136]

Oats seem to have been the most important grain crop,
followed closely by wheat with barley a poor third. Both grain
and animal products were being produced for export and around
the end of the thirteenth century, to supply the English armies
in Scotland and Europe.[137] Yields on the manors were probably
fairly low although no doubt there was considerable variation,
depending on the amount of fertilization.[138] The most common
method was the burning of stubble. The pollen evidence indicates
that cereal growing began to contract (at least in Tipperary)
after 1300, accompanied by a marked complementary expansion of
pasture. This may have been due to the more unsettled conditions
of the fourteenth century. In the east, cereals continued to be
important as is shown by the Dublin manors of the fourteenth
century when the three-course rotation was winter corn (wheat
or rye) spring corn (oats) and fallow.[139]

MONASTIC SETTLEMENT

A large number of monastic houses were established by the
Normans in Ireland although the movement of continental orders
into the island considerably predated the invasion (as did the
parochial organization). About 100 houses were established for
foreign monks (particularly Augustinian and Cistercian) between
1127 and the arrival of the Dominican friars in 1224.[140] Only
30 of these were founded after 1169 both in Norman and Irish
areas. The new mendicant orders (Dominican, Franciscan,
Carmelite and Augustinian) had 85 houses by *circa* 1340, many of
which were located in Norman boroughs.[141] No town of importance
was without at least one order and Dublin and Drogheda, for
example, had houses of all four. (A list of medieval houses,
complete with exhaustive documentation, can be found in *Medieval
religious houses : Ireland*).[142] All orders, as revealed by the
records of the dissolution,[143] held land and property in both
boroughs and rural manors. The settlement and agricultural
organization of the monastic estates differed, at least in the
early days of the colony, from the surrounding secular lands.

In theory, Cistercian and Augustinian houses like Mellifont,
Jerpoint and St. Thomas in Dublin would have divided their land
into granges, independent monastic farms, each unit being worked
by lay brethren. These can be visualized on the English model
as economic units, designed to yield a surplus for the use and
enjoyment of whichever monastic communities owned them.[144] It
is not clear, however, if this system was as perfectly developed
in Ireland as it was in England. Certainly, the English

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Augustinian house of Llanthony Secunda (in Gloucestershire) had
a cell at Duleek in Co. Meath and in the Irish cartularies of
the abbey is one of the most detailed extant descriptions (tent-
atively dated to 1381) of any grange in the British Isles.[145]
The buildings 'lay about a single great court flanked by build-
ings and a stream. On the east .... the domestic quar-
ters of the grange occupied the whole of one side......... a
variety of agricultural buildings and two substantial gatehouses
occupied the remaining three sides of the court'. These build-
ings included a granary, thatched pig-sty and ox-house, a sheep
house and a stable. Outside the court were gardens, a dovecote
and a watermill.

However, evidence of this type is very rare. More indirect-
ly, records of lay brethren provide a good indication of direct
farming by the monastic house and there were, for example, sub-
stantial numbers at both Mellifont (Co. Louth) and Jerpoint
(Co. Kilkenny) when the abbeys were visited by Stephen de
Lexington in 1228.[146] Again, Christchurch in Dublin was still
directly involved in running its estates in the fourteenth cen-
tury.[147] However, it is unclear whether the grange system was
a long-lived or even widespread phenomenon. For example, the
Cistercian house of Mellifont had an enormous estate along the
lower Boyne valley, divided into units which averaged 1000 acres
in size. It is possible that by the fourteenth century some of
these had ceased to be monastic farms because there is a steady
decline in the documents of areas designated as granges.[148]
Speculatively, it is possible that in the later medieval period,
granges may have been rented to lay tenants and differed little
from the secular manors in settlement forms or social organiz-
ation. However, this is an aspect of Irish medieval settlement
which still requires careful evaluation of the evidence. Un-
doubtedly, archaeological enquiry would help to establish the
chronology of the grange, two obvious sites being Duleek and one
of the Mellifont possessions, Hurcle (or Doe), both of which have
very obvious earthworks. The same comment can also be made about
another virtually unresearched topic, the economic functioning
of the monastic estates.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The peasant agricultural and settlement system, including
the monastic estates, was very much the basis of the economic
structure. Whatever the original motivation of Norman involve-
ment in Ireland, an economy rapidly developed in which the agri-
cultural surplus (principally hides, skins and grains) plus fish
were the chief exports with cloth, salt, wine and some foods
being the most important imports from England and Europe.[149]
As the ports of the east and south coasts were deeply involved
in this long-distance redistribution, they rapidly developed
under the aegis of landlord and merchant as the most important
economic centres and largest boroughs. The southern ports of
New Ross, Waterford, Youghal and Cork were linked with Bristol
in particular whilst further north, Dublin and Drogheda traded
with Chester and the Ulster ports (of which Carrickfergus was

dominant) with Scotland and the north of England. Galway, iso-
lated on the west coast, developed an extensive wine trade with
Bordeaux and later, in the fifteenth century, with Spain and
Portugal.

The principal evidence for the volume of trade is derived
from the customs receipts for the period 1276-1333.[150] It is
impossible to verify the accuracy of these data but it would be
unwise to believe that they show all trade for undoubtedly much
smuggling and customs evasion occurred. However, this in itself
need not disturb the relative standing of the boroughs in the
customs returns. Nevertheless, it is possible that the very
low amounts paid, for example by the Kerry ports or Galway, were
a reflection of the difficulty of collecting customs revenue in
the far west. The data in Table 3 must therefore be treated
with some caution. Apparently New Ross, Waterford, Cork, Drog-
heda and Dublin accounted for over 90 per cent of Irish trade,
New Ross and Waterford having over 50 per cent alone. The re-
maining ports named, Youghal, Galway, Limerick, Wexford and
those in Kerry (Tralee and Dingle) and Ulster accounted for only
7.54 per cent.

Table 3. Customs Receipts 1276-1333

Port	Total Customs paid (to nearest pound)	Percentage of total customs paid	Rank
New Ross	5,928	26.08	1
Waterford	5,514	24.31	2
Cork	3,909	17.24	3
Drogheda	3,115	13.73	4
Dublin	2,512	11.10	5
Youghal	691	3.05	6
Ulster Ports	408	1.80	7
Galway	341	1.50	8
Limerick	142	0.63	9
Kerry Ports	88	0.39	10
Wexford	40	0.17	11

One factor which does suggest that the customs returns may
be relatively accurate is that there are no obvious anomalies.
New Ross at the confluence of the Nore and Barrow and Waterford
just to the west of the confluence of the Barrow and Suir, were
linked to the whole of the area from south Kildare to south
Tipperary which comprised the major part of the Norman heartland
(Fig. 6). Throughout the early medieval period, they waged a
bitter commercial rivalry, the men of New Ross going so far as
to obstruct access to Waterford. Cork was the obvious outlet
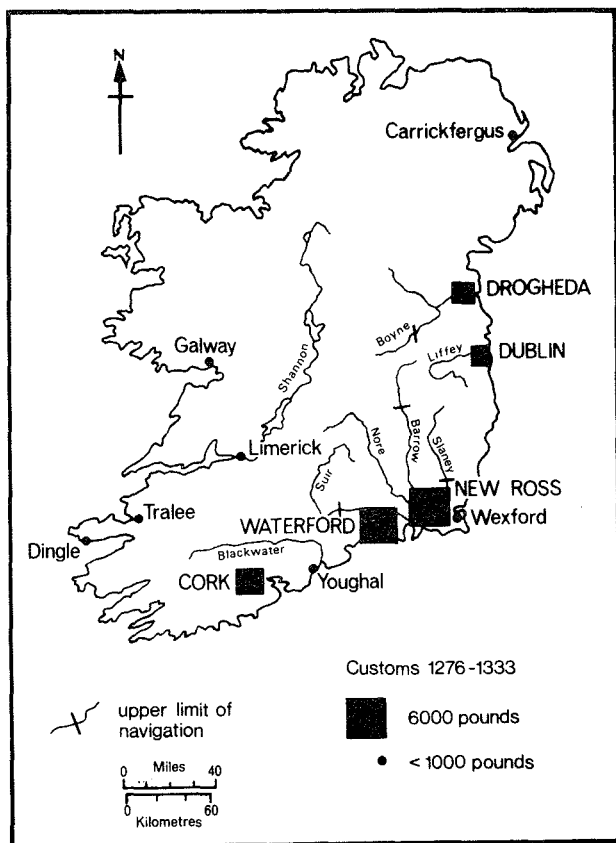for the fairly dense Norman settlement in east Cork. Although

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Figure 6. Ireland : medieval ports, navigable rivers and limits of navigation

this area is very poorly documented, the customs receipts in-dicate a considerable intensity of settlement. Dublin and Drog-heda, in contrast, had more restricted hinterlands. Dublin, although the centre of government and by far the most important borough, served only a relatively small area in counties Dublin and Kildare to which it was linked by the navigable Liffey. How-ever, its trade may have been restricted by the proximity of the Irish-held Wicklow Mountains to the south and the consequent low productivity of the manors around the mountain edges which were prone to attack, even in the thirteenth century. Drogheda (actually twin boroughs) at the mouth of the Boyne served both the fertile eastern part of the Liberty of Meath and Louth but again the hinterland was restricted to the west because secure Norman control never extended more than about 40 kms. inland in

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this area. The remaining ports with the exceptions of Youghal which served a localized area on the south coast and Wexford with a very restricted hinterland, were located in areas of the country where the intensity of Norman settlement was much less than in the east and south-east. In Connacht, for example, there were few colonists and Galway, as O'Sullivan notes, virtually developed as a medieval 'city state', the merchants trading with the Irish.[151] Settlement in Ulster was restricted to Antrim and Down and although productivity of the manors was surprisingly high, they were few in number.[152]

The larger inland boroughs acted as the links between the interior and the ports. The royal charter, conferring the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair, was the most important economic attribute which a settlement could possess although this had to be combined with an advantageous location in order to make it effective. It is often difficult to determine if charters were converted into reality. The interior markets acted as transhipment points through which produce could be moved to the ports and imported manufactured goods distributed. The typical goods exchanged in the borough markets were corn, cattle, hides, fish, cloth, metals and food-stuffs.[153] Many markets could only have operated at a local scale, served perhaps by travelling traders, the most likely location for these being in the manorial boroughs. However, boroughs such as Kilkenny, Clon-mel, Trim and Carrick-on-Suir which were located on navigable rivers must have been important commercial towns. Although their sites may have been chosen for strategic reasons, the economic potential must have been obvious from the beginning. A consider-able amount of work remains to be done on the economic organ-ization of the colony for despite it being reasonably well docu-mented, no more than a general outline has yet been developed.[154] The same constraint applies to an assessment of the demographic structure of early medieval Ireland.

Russell has estimated that the total population of the island between 1275-1300 was about 650,000 although the accuracy of this is unverifiable.[155] Hollingsworth regards this as a not unreasonable figure, given his estimation that the late thirteenth-century population of Ireland could have been between 400,000 and 800,000.[156] There seems to be no possibility of estimating the ratio of Normans to Irish. Again, it is difficult to generalize about the available evidence concerning social composition and relations between Norman and Gael because there appears to have been considerable variation. What does seem clear is that the Normans had no systematic policy of moving Irish populations from the areas which they settled. To the contrary, evidence con-cerning agricultural practices (see page 25) suggests that they had a policy of retaining the Irish as *betaghs* which pre-sumably suggests that the latter were, at least partially, acquie-scent.

As Otway-Ruthven has pointed out, the English Crown probably never intended to institute a complete conquest of Ireland and consequently, the principle of two distinct administrative and

legal systems was adopted from the outset.[157] John may have granted English law to Ireland but this was a charter for settlers only; an individual Irishman who wanted to use English law had to obtain a royal charter.[158] This insinuates that at least the upper strata of the social hierarchy such as burgesses and free tenants would have been settlers but this may represent an ideal which was not achieved. Obviously, a spatial and social separation of settler and Gael depended upon the intensity of migration to Ireland and this is a facet of the colony's history about which virtually nothing is known. Certainly, Curtis notes that from the outset, the earliest populations of many of the towns contained Irish, especially in those boroughs like Kells and Trim in Co. Meath which represented Norman adaptation.[159] Again, the earliest civic records show many Gaelic names; Gilbert, for example, notes that in the early thirteenth century, Dublin and Drogheda were neither distinctively English nor Irish and that in the thirteenth-century Dublin guild rolls, Irish, English, Welsh, Scottish, French and Flemish names appear.[160] This is not to imply, of course, that the Irish had a role in urban society equal to the colonists but it does suggest a level of integration. However, there was almost certainly a degree of residential segregation although it is impossible to say how far this was enforced. The charter of John to Dublin in 1192 was to the citizens both within and without the walls[161] and at New Ross, burgesses again lived both inside and outside the walls.[162] It is possible that Irish burgesses were to be found in these extra-mural settlements, distinct from the Normans who lived within the walls. A parallel may be found in the descendants of the Norse (known as *Ostmen*) who lived in separate settlements, often referred to as suburbs, outside the port towns such as Waterford.[163]

Estimations of population size of settlements are restricted by data deficiences to boroughs alone. Burgage rents can be used as each burgess, subject to the Law of Breteuil, generally paid one shilling per annum for his burgage plot.[164] In addition, documents often provide the number of burgesses for particular dates. However, this only provides a partial answer to the problem of medieval urban population because such data only relates to actual burgesses and not to households. Otway-Ruthven has suggested that an assumed mean family size of five can be used and this seems eminently reasonable in view of what is known of Irish demographic history.[165] However, a further problem is that burgesses and their households may not have been the only inhabitants of the boroughs. The population of Forth, Co. Carlow, for example included 29 cottagers in addition to its 75 burgesses[166] while the population of Swords, Co. Dublin, was composed of 122 burgesses, 16 free cottagers and 28 gavellors.[167] This does not of course mean that these other social groups lived in the borough because they may have been dispersed in their own settlements on the borough land. However, the occurrence of such groups does indicate that agriculture was closely associated with the boroughs and that, at least in the case of some of the smaller settlements, incorporated status did not indicate a separation of urban and rural functions. A final problem with the popu-

lation data is that it is not contemporaneous, few settlements
have a sequence of statistics and rapid changes in population
size are known to have occurred over short periods of time.

An attempt has been made by Russell to estimate the popu-
lations of medieval towns. However, due to the complementary if
incidental attempt to prove the rank-size rule by arbitrary
grouping together of settlements in defiance of historical evi-
dence (for example, the rival ports of New Ross and Waterford),
and to a number of inaccuracies in identification of settlements
and in population sizes, this paper must be treated with extreme
caution.[168] Unsurprisingly, calculation of burgess household
populations confirms the pre-eminence of the ports in the urban
hierarchy and of the major fortified inland towns such as Kil-
kenny, Nenagh and Thurles (both in Co. Tipperary).[169] Russell
estimates that Dublin had a population of approximately 10,000
by the late thirteenth century[170] (the figure was necessary for
his theory) while Hollingsworth, in an effort to show the in-
accuracy of this, arrives at a figure, based on somewhat dubious
calculations, of 25,000.[171] After Dublin, New Ross with a bur-
gess household population of 2,530 in 1307 seems to have been the
next largest centre although it should be noted that there is no
accurate population data at all for such important boroughs as
Limerick, Cork, Drogheda and Waterford. In all there are extant
data for 82 medieval boroughs. Only 15 had burgess household
populations in excess of 1,000, 25-30 had between 500-1000 and
the remainder less than 500.[172]

Analysis of the few instances of boroughs for which there
are sequences of population data and also references to waste
burgages, indicate that after *circa* 1290, symptoms of urban de-
cline began to occur. In Ferns, Co. Wexford, for example, there
were 49½ waste burgages out of a total of 160 in 1298 while Wex-
ford had 128½ waste out of 365½ in the same year.[173] This could,
of course, indicate either over-ambitious development of some
boroughs or a localized problem in Wexford, but it seems more
likely that such evidence points to the increasing difficulty of
attracting migrants to Ireland and even perhaps to some return
movement.

There are however, many aspects of decline and relatively
little work has been done on any. As Frame has argued, the
political decline of Crown control is not to be equated with
demographic or settlement decline.[174] The problems of general-
ization of the distribution of power in fourteenth and fifteenth
century Ireland also apply to the settlement of the period.
Lydon regards the Bruce invasions of 1315-18 and their consequen-
ces as the watershed of the colony. Most of all, the invasions
exposed the lack of revenue available,[175] a constraint that had
been noticeable since the beginning of the fourteenth century.
Much of the revenue in the form of provisions was being exported
to support Edward II's war in Scotland.[176]

This latter factor may partially explain the drop in customs
returns (Table 3) but the trends are so conspicuously downward

that they may also represent a rather more widespread economic decline in Norman Ireland. The overall total returns for 1301-2, for example, were less than half those of 1276-7 and although there were fluctuations, the trend was consistently downwards. The increasing problem of protecting Norman areas from the Irish, internecine warfare amongst the colonists and the Bruce invasions combined to accelerate decline of a number of settlements, either due to increasing movement out of the island or a redistribution within as colonists moved to safer areas. It seems likely that declining numbers of immigrant burgesses would have increased the role of the Irish in the towns. The customs returns show a steep drop after the Bruce invasion as the scale of economic activity apparently failed to return to its former level.

Undoubtedly, urban populations were further decimated in the Black Death of 1349-50, the factor which Otway-Ruthven believes made any recovery of the Norman colony impossible.[177] This is an event of which little is known but the only contemporary account by Friar Clynn talks about the cities of Dublin and Drogheda being almost destroyed and 'wasted of man'.[178] Rural populations were much less effected but even so, it is possible that the Anglo-Irish population could have been almost halved by the end of the fourteenth century because of plague.[179] This, combined with the escalating level of warfare led to a large-scale retreat of the Norman frontiers and the desertion or shrinkage of a number of small boroughs (for example, those of Ulster) and presumably many rural settlements whose demise was undocumented.

STUDIES OF PARTICULAR AREAS

Consequently, the period of Anglo-Norman political hegemony in Ireland was relatively short-lived in a number of areas although, along the east coast and in parts of the south, their occupation and settlement achieved a lasting impact. The characteristics of this varying impact and the functions of the various Norman settlement forms in specific areas have been considered in a number of theses and papers, the most important of which are mentioned here. The overall impact of Norman settlement in the hybrid zones, the areas colonized by the settlers but later characterized by a complex mixture of Anglo-Irish and Gaelic influences is discussed by several researchers. Barry's work on moated sites, (some of which may have been related to the ever-increasing defensive needs of the fourteenth century), contains extensive references to and discussion of overall Norman settlement in Counties Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary.[180] He has dealt separately with moated sites in Waterford[181] and Wexford,[182] while for the latter county there is Hore's monumental six-volume work (valuable because it is based on primary documentation).[183] Empey's doctoral thesis on the Butler lordship contains a mass of information on Norman settlement in Tipperary and Kilkenny, and is particularly useful as an example of an area where Anglo-Irish control was maintained through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[184] A further doctoral thesis by McNeill provides the definitive analysis of Norman settlement

in the Earldom of Ulster.[185] This is of considerable value be-
cause it relates to a fringe area in which Norman settlement was
limited and did not involve radical socio-economic alterations
and for its emphasis on Norman-Gaelic relationships. Orpen also
studied Ulster and this series of papers is still of value for
its documentary evidence.[186] The documentation for Connacht,
another fringe area, was discussed by Knox[187] and there has been
some recent work on the role of the Normans in this region.[188]
Virtually nothing has been published on other areas such as east
Cork, Limerick and Kerry.

In contrast to these studies of areas in which Norman and
Gaelic settlement and society were intermixed through time and
space, a smaller number of studies had been made of the areas in
which Norman settlement was most (although not totally) dominant
and over which the Crown maintained at least partial control in
the later medieval period. These include Otway-Ruthven's paper
on the medieval county of Kildare,[189] one by Brady on Meath[190]
and Graham's doctoral thesis on the same county.[191]

GAELIC SETTLEMENT

At the outset of any discussion on Gaelic settlement in
medieval Ireland, it must be stated that the most pressing prob-
lem is to point to any settlement forms at all which can be un-
equivocally attributed to the period and related to its society.
Speculation centres around two forms, the ring-fort or rath and
a nucleated rural settlement, presumably similar in morphology
and function to the clusters which became known as clachans in
the nineteenth century. A number of factors explain the vagaries
of knowledge of the settlement system of medieval Gaelic Ireland.
Foremost amongst these is the nature of the society and the
sources. Gaelic Ireland remained essentially tribal and auto-
cratic and its history was recorded, if at all, by monks. The
sources are consequently preoccupied with the church and the
ruling families and more or less ignore the social and economic
organization of the vast majority of the population. Gaelic
settlement forms are therefore essentially undocumented and the
major source of data is provided by the nineteenth-century relict
distributions recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Six
Inch Maps of *circa* 1840. Their use necessarily involves the
assumptions that there were no major changes in the distributions
between the end of the medieval period and 1840 and further, that
the individual settlements recorded were contemporaneous in the
past. Secondly, the nature of the settlements themselves must
be considered. As Nicholls has pointed out, the insubstantial
nature of most Irish dwellings, plus the practice of summer
transhumance, militated against the formation of sizeable settle-
ments.[192] Added to this is the endemic flexibility of Gaelic
settlement forms through time which bedevils attempts to compare
distributions.[193] Finally, ignorance of the period must be
partially attributed to the record of Irish archaeology because
excavation information is vital in view of the insubstantial

nature of the documentary sources. The past lack of interest in the medieval period by that discipline accounts for the deficiencies of chronology which, particularly in the case of the ring-fort, have led to errors of interpretation.

A considerable corpus of research relating to Gaelic settlement forms and society does exist although much of this is concerned with a search for origins and is therefore not directly relevant to this discussion. However, the recent work on the medieval Norman society indicates that a critical re-evaluation is necessary.[194] In part, this has already been done by McCourt in a valuable paper which reviews the entire ring-fort/clachan debate and advances a number of hypotheses concerning Gaelic-Norman settlement interrelationships.[195] Research into Gaelic settlement was essentially initiated by Evans who, in a paper on west Donegal, put forward the idea that both dispersed and clustered settlement forms co-existed in Ireland from the Iron Age and that under certain conditions, the possibility existed of the former reverting to the latter and *vice-versa* at any time.[196] The dispersed component, the ring-fort, is by far the better established, both by archaeological and spatial analyses. Morphologically, it can be defined as 'a space most frequently circular surrounded by a bank and fosse'[197] and some 30,000 still survive in the present Irish landscape of which only about 120 have been excavated if not published (a number of the earlier excavations would not have satisfied the current standards of scientific archaeology). The most recent reviews of the archaeological evidence are those by Proudfoot which discusses almost 70 excavated sites in terms of chronology and origins[198] and a doctoral thesis by Barrett on ring-forts in south Donegal and the Dingle Peninsula in Kerry which examines the evidence for almost 80 excavated sites.[199] This overwhelmingly points to these structures having been dispersed farmsteads, the homes of freemen and operating a mixed agricultural economy in which the dominant element was cattle-rearing.[200]

The dating of ring-forts is made rather difficult by the scarcity of closely dateable finds (particularly of pottery) although certain artefacts such as some types of ring-pins are characteristic of the Early Christian period (in archaeological terms, 400-1100 A.D.). Some sites can be attributed to the same period by the occurrence of post-Roman imported pottery. In addition, a very few sites have been dated by Carbon[14]. On the basis of those sites which can be closely dated, most excavated ring-forts including those which have produced no dateable finds, have been attributed to the Early Christian period. However, Proudfoot notes that medieval and post-medieval pottery found on some sites has provided reasonably secure evidence for the use, if not the construction of some ring-forts in the medieval period.[201] This evidence has been discussed in detail by Barrett and Graham.[202]

The entire question of the medieval occupation and/or construction of the ring-fort has been and is one of considerable debate.[203] Archaeologists claim that it ceased to be an element

of the Irish settlement pattern *circa* 1000 A.D., a phenomenon
which would have involved major changes in society. However,
the postulated abandonment of the settlement form at this early
date leaves the rather intractable problem of what replaced the
ring-fort as the settlement form of freemen. The unlikely situ-
ation presented by archaeological orthodoxy is that at the onset
of the Norman invasion, the Irish lived in a hypothetical nucle-
ated rural settlement form and around the monasteries. This is
incompatible with what is known of the nature of society because
it can be strongly argued that the nucleated settlements were
the homes of bondsmen and, therefore, in archaeological terms,
a major social group, the freemen, is unaccounted for. However,
in spite of this, Lynn estimates the possibility of occupation
or use of any individual ring-fort continuing into medieval
times at 5-15 per cent and for construction at 0-5 per cent,
'allowing for personal bias'.[204]

    The questions which must be asked of the admittedly defic-
ient archaeological chronology are underlined by various analyses
on ring-fort distributions. Glasscock, for example, posed a
number of questions because one of the most obvious distribu-
tional features is that although ring-forts are found almost
everywhere in Ireland, there is a significantly less dense dis-
tribution in most of the Norman heartland, notably in Counties
Louth, Meath, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford.
(Fig. 7). Glasscock asked if these areas had a denser distrib-
ution prior to the spread of Anglo-Norman settlement or altern-
atively, were ring-forts gradually destroyed by the process of
Norman settlement and later agricultural improvement? A further
possibility which he noted was that ring-forts could have been
built and occupied until much later in the west (where Norman
influence was less), thereby giving a denser distribution in
that area.[205] These points emanate from a consideration of the
nineteenth-century relict distribution and there are alternative
explanations for the relative lack of ring-forts in the Norman
heartland. Some pre-Norman societal or economic variation may
have meant that eastern Ireland always had a significantly
lower density of ring-forts or, alternatively, post-medieval
changes in the relict distribution, due perhaps to enclosure,
may have been responsible. It is worth noting that since the
seventeenth century, the former Norman heartland has always been
the most agriculturally advanced area of Ireland.

    The hypothesis of Norman influence upon the ring-fort dis-
tribution was studied in some depth by Barrett who found, for
example, that environmental variables which were conducive to
ring-fort settlement in western Ireland did not prove significant
in 'those areas which exhibit prolonged and intensive Norman
occupation'.[206] Such results, combined with the characteristics
of the general-ring-fort distribution led Barrett and Graham to
test two hypotheses; that ring-forts may have been occupied and
constructed in the medieval period, both outside areas of Norman
influence and in those areas over which the invaders' hold was
transitory and secondly, that ring-fort construction within the
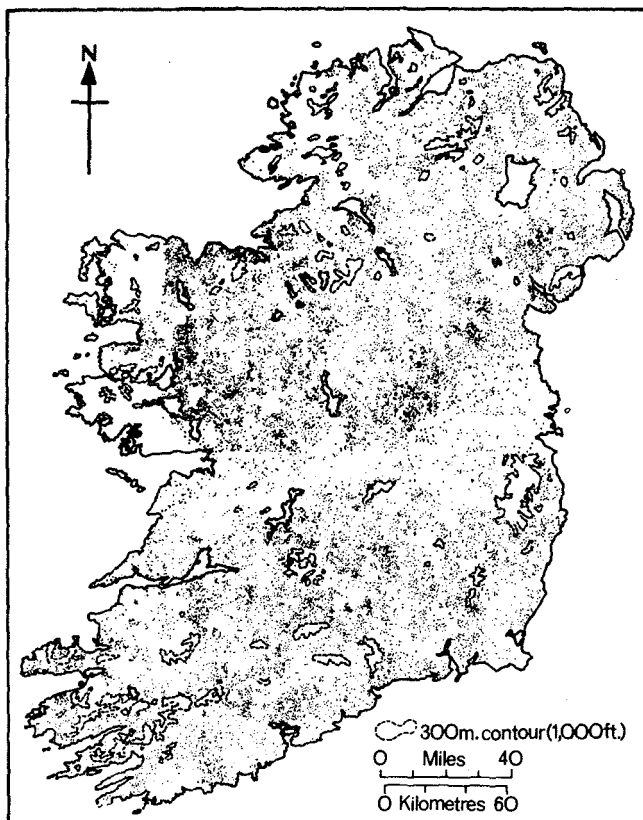Norman heartland ceased and that some settlements were des-

troyed.[207] When these hypotheses were tested for Co. Meath, a
clear negative correlation was found between the low ring-fort
density in that part of the area which always remained under
English control and, conversely, a high density in the western
area of the county where Norman settlement was more limited and
prone to attack by the Irish throughout the medieval period.
Study of air photographs also provided evidence of ring-fort
destruction in the Norman area although, obviously, this could
not be dated. However, when the vertical air photograph cover-
age of the Irish Republic is complete, a method of comparing
rates of ring-fort destruction between Norman and Gaelic areas
will be available. Although the hypotheses tested in Meath
would have to be applied much more widely, spatial analysis

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seems to favour the suggestion that outside the intensively Normanized areas, ring-forts were occupied and perhaps constructed during the medieval period.

Such evidence is not accepted by archaeologists although some of the arguments used, for example by Lynn, are spurious.[208] The major defect of the archaeological evidence used to argue against the medieval ring-fort is the spatial bias of the distribution of excavated examples. About 50 per cent of these are located in Ulster and Lynn uses the evidence from this area in an attempt to refute the medieval hypotheses. However, as McNeill has clearly shown, the Norman settlement of Ulster was no more than a military overlordship and no attempt was made to re-organize the settlement pattern or population.[209] This is in direct contrast to the situation which prevailed in the Norman heartland where conversely, virtually no ring-fort excavations have been carried out. Consequently, the value of the archaeological evidence is diminished. Lynn further argues that the distribution of moated sites can be used as an index of Norman settlement and that, therefore, Anglo-Norman settlement forms themselves do not correlate well with areas avoided by ring-fort builders. Consequently, it was not the Norman settlement which caused the lack of ring-forts in the area that comprised the Norman heartland. This contention can be discounted because Barry has clearly shown that the moated site distribution is in no way a viable index of Norman settlement.

However, there are undoubtedly areas such as Tipperary, Limerick and east Cork which were intensively settled by the Normans and which also have dense ring-fort distributions. This suggests that there is a need to consider the distribution of ring-forts not against Norman areas as indexed, for example, by the distribution of mottes but against both the density of Norman settlement in terms of population and settlement and its intensity through time. This is extremely difficult given the paucity of data on medieval population but there is some evidence to suggest that there was both a spatial and temporal gradation of intensity of Norman settlement. The areas in which the ring-fort distribution is least dense appear to have had more settlers, more and larger settlements and a much longer period of Norman influence than those areas further west which were both Normanized and had a dense ring-fort distribution. It is noteable that the lowest ring-fort densities of all occur in the counties of Louth, Meath, Kildare and Dublin, precisely the same area which remained under English control throughout the medieval period.

Lynn eloquently argues that the ring-fort was abandoned prior to the Norman invasion, perhaps in the 'breakdown of public morality' and the increasing internecine warfare which resulted from the Viking raids.[210] This is yet another hypothesis, perhaps as likely as Norman influence, which cannot be proven. The principal problem in evaluating the various hypotheses and thereby assessing the existence and therefore functions of medieval ring-forts, is the corpus of archaeological evidence. This is

ambiguous in terms of the interpretation of individual sites and unsatisfactorily spatially biased in terms of the island as a whole, thereby militating against the development of a convincing chronology for the settlement form. The case for the medieval ring-fort is neither proven nor disproven and the discussion clearly shows the considerable problem of determining the nature of medieval Gaelic settlement, given the almost total lack of documentary evidence. This problem is even more graphically illustrated in any consideration of a nucleated Gaelic rural settlement form.

Evans' contention that such a feature existed from the Iron Age through the Early Christian, medieval and enclosure periods to be recorded in the nineteenth century as the clachan is not one that is based on archaeological or documentary evidence. For the sake of convenience, this settlement form is referred to here as a clachan although that word (of Scottish origins) was not used until the nineteenth century. Proudfoot's accepted definition of the settlement form describes a clachan as a small cluster of farmsteads and associated outhouses, grouped without any formal organization.[211] A number of attempts have been made in particular areas to trace their origin and to determine the relationship between the settlement form and the Gaelic rundale (infield-outfield) system of agriculture. However, firm evidence from estate maps and other documents can only be pushed back as far as the seventeenth century. Further, there is no archaeological evidence to supplement the inadequate documentary record as only one example, Murphystown in Lecale, Co. Down, has ever been excavated. The finds did not permit the dating of the clachan although occupation of the site dated back to 'Early Christian or medieval times'; however, it proved impossible to determine the form of the settlement then.[212] Consequently, the study of the clachan as a medieval settlement form is reduced to the level of unsubstantiated hypotheses, based upon very limited and conflicting evidence which derives, not from Gaelic Ireland, but from what is known of Norman settlement. A final problem is the well-known flexibility of the form so that if there is continuity through the medieval period, it is as Leister points out, continuity of tradition rather than of actual settlement.[213]

The general consensus is that the unfree inhabitants of the hypothesized Dark-Age clachans simply became the serfs of immigrant Anglo-Norman overlords.[214] There is no direct evidence that clachans, as defined by Proudfoot, were part of the medieval landscape in Norman Ireland although it does seem likely. It is known for example that *betaghs* farmed their land in a manor on the native system. However, as Glasscock has noted, there were few clachans in the wider area of Anglo-Norman Ireland in the nineteenth century which might suggest that the settlement form and its associated social characteristics had all but disappeared under the influence of the Normans.[215] The validity of such a hypothesis may be nullified by the existence of clusters of clachans in such Normanized areas as south-east Wexford and the lower Boyne valley and by the impact of seventeenth and eighteenth-century enclosure which would have militated against clachan survival. Further, *betagh* settlements on Norman manors were

probably of the clachan type and McCourt notes that nineteenth-century clachans in former Norman areas may have been *betagh* settlements which survived the enclosure period.[216] He contends that the *betagh* class was already probably strongly localized in pre-Norman Ireland in areas long associated with tillage and that the Normans made no attempt to dislodge them or their settlements. In support of this, Buchanan believes that in Lecale, Co. Down, the nucleated cluster of farmsteads was the dominant settlement form before and after the Norman invasion and likewise in the southern Ards Peninsula, the existence of an established native community under Norman protection led to the survival of the clachan.[217]

There is some slight evidence that the *betagh* clusters may have been of two types. A number of the settlements recorded in, for example, the seventeenth-century Civil Surveys of Meath and Tipperary, contained castles or houses with stone bawns in addition to cabins. These may have been of Norman foundation as distinct from representing continuity from pre-Norman society.[218] Consequently, it seems probable that a clachan-type settlement form existed within Norman Ireland, inhabited by the *betagh* class but associated with the Norman social and agricultural system. In Meath, it was found that the most potent control on the location of these settlements was the location of manorial villages in that nearly all occurred on land suited to arable agriculture and less than four kms. from manorial villages.[219] By extension, therefore, it seems likely that a similar settlement form was to be found in Gaelic Ireland, inhabited by much the same social class but associated with a very different agricultural system. Therefore, those settlements recorded in the nineteenth century as clachans may have derived from three sources: a continuity of bond settlements from pre-Norman society through the medieval period, settlements established by Norman landlords but lacking a church, the distinguishing feature of the manorial village, and assumed continuity through the medieval period in Gaelic Ireland. This hypothesized chronology further underlines the dangers of considering medieval Ireland as being characterized by dual cultures, each with its own specific settlement system.

One major source of evidence which has been used to study the clachan distribution and clearly shows the need to re-evaluate past research conducted on a strictly ethnic basis, is provided by place-names. Proudfoot, developing Evans' hypothesis of the ring-fort co-existing with the proto-clachan, suggested that the townland prefix, *baile* (Anglicized as *bally*), which he chose to translate as *town*, indicated the former existence of nucleated settlements.[220] He derived this idea from the work of MacAirt (in Co. Armagh) who, while correctly noting that *baile* has not been attested as a place-name element before the eleventh century, nevertheless suggested that it might have been a very old pre-Goidelic word.[221] Proudfoot developed this by assuming that *baile* was an old plebian term for a nucleated settlement and claimed that ring-forts and baile-townlands had a complementary distribution although this has never been adequately tested. Proudfoot explains the rarity of *baile* before the twelfth century

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by claiming that it indicates that plebian settlements of this kind were of no importance to early Irish writers.[222]

If, however, the study of *baile* townlands is freed from the search for origins and is instead placed in the context of Norman-Gaelic interrelationships, a much more convincing explanation emerges. Jones-Hughes has made a very useful study of the most common place-name elements.[223] As he notes, *town* is by far the most common English suffix, its distribution map displaying a very clear correlation with Counties Louth, Meath, Kildare and Dublin, the area of maximum Norman influence. *Baile* is by far the most common Gaelic prefix and can be equated with *town*. A major deficiency of Proudfoot's hypothesis is that Price has clearly shown that both mean a piece of land and that under no circumstances can they be assumed to indicate the former existence of nucleated settlements.[224] Further, Jones-Hughes shows that *baile*, although fairly ubiquitous, is most densely concentrated in the hybrid zones. Price suggests that in areas overrun by the Irish after periods of Norman occupation, the place-name element, *town*, was retained but was translated in everyday speech to *baile* in which form it was eventually recorded. He notes that *baile* placenames are least dense in areas in which there was never any English influence and which, therefore, retained Gaelic settlement forms throughout the medieval period.[225]

In conclusion, therefore, recent research has indicated that the study of Gaelic settlement forms can be extended by regarding medieval Ireland, not as two separate cultures, one alien and one indigenous, but as a more complex cultural mesh in which settlement forms altered spatially and temporally. The mesh involves medieval alterations in distributions (the ring-fort, for example), elements of continuity both of tradition and actual settlement (as exemplified by the clachan), the inadequacy of accepted definitions of the clachan which place the settlement form solely within a Gaelic context and, finally, the evidence of place-names, perhaps the most useful indicator of cultural inter-mingling.

CONCLUSIONS

The research which has been summarized in this paper has considerably extended knowledge of medieval Irish settlement and society, particularly in the case of the Norman colony and, to a much lesser and unsatisfactory extent, of Gaelic Ireland. Almost entirely, this work lies within the empirical mainstream of Irish historico-geographical research. Phenomenology of landscape as embodied by Carl Sauer, has been the consistent and unquestioned methodological principle of the sub-discipline, the infusion of more advanced analytical tools having, if anything, merely strengthened the positivistic nature of research. When the unquestioning acceptance of this methodology is combined with a nationalistic tendency to regard Ireland as an ethnically- and historically-unique entity, it can only be said that Irish his-

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torical geography is itself in danger of becoming unique. That
radical re-appraisal is necessary, is obvious enough. Concep-
tualization is essential and is beginning, for example, in the
study of urbanization and the development and organization of a
colonial economy. An infusion of ideological debate is necessary,
coupled with a refusal to be exploited by a nationalist myth that
uses cultural separateness as its cornerstone.

Qualifications must however be made to these comments be-
cause of the constraints brought about by the substantial diff-
iculties imposed through data availability. Whilst it is un-
doubtedly true that documentation is deficient and inconsistent,
it is equally true that a much more intensive study of surviving
sources, particularly in their original as distinct from
calendared versions, could underpin the methodological re-
appraisal of the medieval period that is necessary. For example,
the rural basis of the economy, trade, population composition,
the role of boroughs as the centres of imposition and organiz-
ation of the colony and the medieval frontier are all important
socio-economic issues that can be taken much further within the
documentary limitations. Conversely, there are areas where docu-
mentary deficiencies will never be even partially overcome and
field survey has to be resorted to as an even more deficient sub-
stitute. Barry's work on moated sites, for example, is likely
to remain the definitive account of that settlement form and its
socio-economic role in the absence of virtually any documentary
record. The study of medieval Gaelic society is so hindered by
documentary deficiencies that it seems unlikely that any signif-
icant advances can be made. The only possible path is archaeo-
logical investigation on a considerable scale in order to develop
convincing chronologies which could perhaps be placed within a
wider societal context. The same point could be made about
Norman rural settlement forms such as moated sites and manorial
villages.

More optimistically, the linkage between history and his-
torical geography is and will be a profitable one. Irish eco-
nomic history is being reappraised and the realization that his-
torians are often the victims of their own chronological categor-
ization, has led to an emphasis on societal continuity. This
concept might seem obvious but in a state where cultural separ-
ation is so important, it is not necessarily desirable. For
example, the study of urban evolution and development is being
advanced by examining continuity between pre-Norman and Norman
society, combined with the realization that this can be concept-
ualized in terms of general theories of urban development. This
again seems to be a statement of the obvious but the power of
historical compartmentalization in Ireland has been such that
evolutionary development of society and societal attributes over
long time periods has been virtually ignored. This appears to
emanate from a fairly simple desire to emphasize the Gaelic con-
tribution to cultural development whilst diminishing that of the
colonists. Again, a stress on the interrelationships between
Norman and Gaelic Ireland is valuable, not only in understanding
settlement functions, but in evaluating the considerable changes

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in society which occurred in the medieval period, changes which are still of importance today. There is little point in treating Norman and Gaelic Ireland as separate entities because such a construct both over-simplifies and distorts the evidence. Finally, there is a growing realization that settlement must be seen, not for itself but as a repurcussion of deeply complex and interrelated cultural, economic and political forces which *do* have parallels outside Ireland. Empiricism has provided the basic foundation to historico-geographical knowledge in the past but, in future, this must be preceded by the construction of a conceptual-ideological framework.

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