PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND URBAN AND VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT IN PROVINCIAL IRELAND ca. 1700 - 1845

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Property Ownership and Urban and Village Improvement in Provincial Ireland ca. 1700 - 1845

by

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The front cover shows Church Street, Warrenpoint, *ca.* 1910. Warrenpoint was already well established at the time of the Ordnance Survey of 1830.

(The photograph is from the W. A. Green collection held by the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum)

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Acknowledgements

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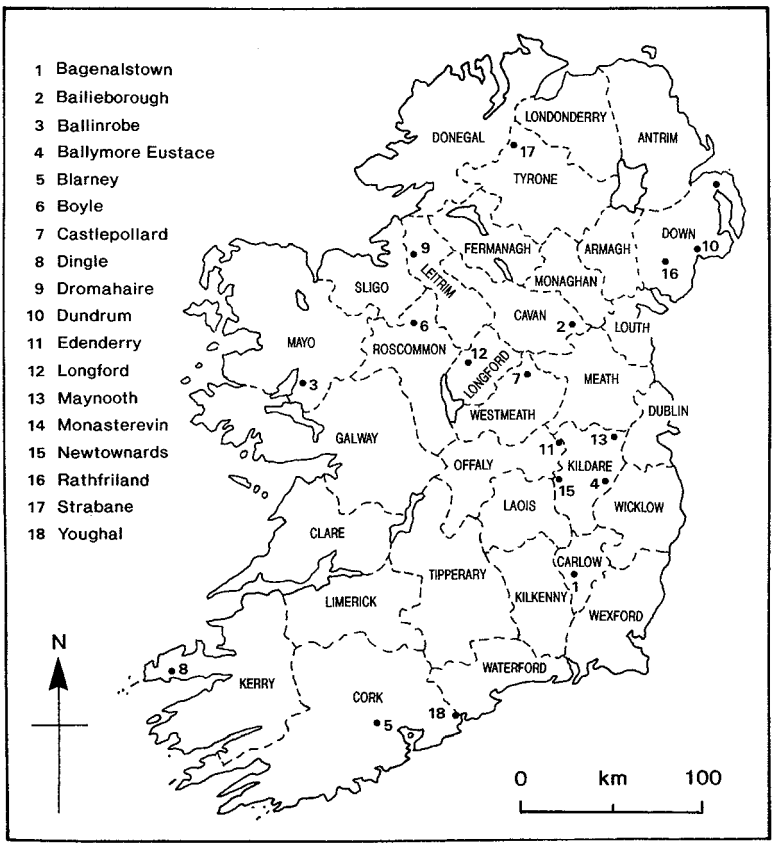
January 1997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INTRODUCTION: URBAN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND PROPERTY STUDIES

The current vitality of urban historical studies reflects the importance which is accorded to the urban past in helping to explain human experience in space and time. Our perceptions of that past, however, are changing. Scholars are no longer certain that towns can be usefully represented as 'generic social objects', independently capable - whether as 'engines of growth' or 'parasites' - of promoting or retarding social or economic change in the social formations of which they formed part (Abrams, 1978, 9-34; Reher, 1990, 1-2). Rather, it has been suggested that they may be better viewed as 'nodalities within these broader systems, where their distinctive characteristics and contradictions were worked out' (Abrams, 1978, 24; Langton and Hoppe, 1983). But in their spatial concentration, these 'nodalities' acquired place-specific identities derived from the interaction between the physical and human characteristics of each location and the structures of the prevailing social formation. Thus each town possessed a unique identity from its inception, and this continued to evolve in response to the continuously changing relationship between the particularities of its place and the structures of the wider social formation. The exploration of the resulting diversity, whether in terms of individual settlements or of the regional variation in urbanisation, has been a hallmark of recent studies in European urban history (Clark, 1995). One broad regional distinction to have emerged for the Early Modern period differentiaties between a relatively highly urbanised 'core' consisting of France, western Germany, the southern Netherlands, northern Italy and Castile, where urban systems displayed a high degree of integration, and a periphery which included most of Scandinavia and central and eastern Europe, where levels of urbanisation - at least in terms of town size - were very much lower. The British Isles stood somewhere in between, displaying relatively low levels of urbanisation in the sixteenth century but moving forward rapidly in terms of the size and number of its

towns by the mid-eighteenth century (Clark and Reeder, 1995, xvii-xx).

These regional variations became more accentuated as time progressed, but they nevertheless still constituted only one aspect of the diversity of European urban experience. At one end of Europe's urban spectrum were the cities, many of which developed according to national economic or constitutional agendas which were absent from the smaller urban centres. Thus although the rate of city growth was regionally and chronologically uneven, between 1600 and 1750 nearly thirty of the thirty-eight fastest growing cities were either capitals like Madrid or Paris, ports such as Bristol or Cadiz, or, like London, both (de Vries, 1984, 136-142). The growth of capital cities was particularly pronounced and some, such as London and Paris, rapidly achieved primate status, arguably as a result of their monopoly of the (absolutist) state apparatus and growing domination of the national domestic market (Carter, 1983, 105). The effects of this growth differed. In Castile, Madrid finally emerged as the national capital in 1561, and its subsequent growth to a population of around 175,000 by *ca.* 1800 was very much at the expense of existing major centres such as Burgos, Toledo and Valladolid (Gelabert, 1995). In England, on the other hand, London's even more spectacular growth seems to have provided new marketing opportunities for the larger towns in its expanding hinterland (Wrigley, 1967).

At the other end of the urban spectrum, the experience of the sort of small towns which form the subject of this paper was very different. The vast majority were very small, with populations of perhaps 5,000 or less. In Clark's phrase, they were "anchored and permeated by rural society", economically unsophisticated, politically and culturally limited, and vulnerable to the effects of economic change and intervention by the state (Clark, 1995, 14-17). Beyond this they defy definition as a generic type, so great was their diversity in size, function and institutional characteristics (Eliassen 1995; Graf, 1995). But as places where the structures and conflicts inherent in the prevailing social formation

were concentrated and given similar but, in detail, uniquely different material form, their diversity becomes comprehensible, and in its analysis offers us an insight into the human condition of which they formed part. Arguably, the most fundamental of these relationships were those which revolved around the ownership and use of property. These encapsulated both the economic basis of society and the authority - and conflicts - which arose from it. In large measure too, property relations affected both the rate and direction of future social change. To simplify the matter almost to the point of caricature, by controlling the access of the property*less* majority to the property they needed to secure their survival, the property*owning* minority could in theory ensure the reproduction of the existing social formation and their own elite position within it. In reality of course, these polarities were rarely so clearly defined or as static. Change - both revolutionary and evolutionary - in the demographic, technological and economic basis of society as well as in its social and political processes, normally acted to ensure that the composition of the elite was in a state of continuous flux (Stone and Stone, 1984).

Property ownership in Early Modern Ireland

We cannot, therefore, divorce the phenomenon of urbanism from its social, cultural, economic and political contexts, and this is a conclusion which has a particular import for Early Modern Ireland. Over much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, urban foundation and growth in Ireland took place within the context of both informal and state-sponsored English and Scots colonisation. The motives for this varied, but the *plantations*, beginning in east Laois and Offaly in 1556 and concluding in 1622 with Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath, were designed by the English government to reassert its strategic political and economic control over Ireland in the face of a growing threat from Catholic continental states. The details of the associated urban foundations have been explored elsewhere (Curl, 1986; Gillespie, 1985; MacCarthy-Morrogh, 1986; Robinson, 1984). Some were garrisoned strong-points; most were were centres of local

government and legal jurisdiction; all provided a market-place through which the value of the agriculture which underpinned the plantations might be realized, and the economic behaviour of the people who depended on it regulated. In aggregate they began to move Ireland forward from a position on Europe's urban periphery in the sixteenth century to a place in its highly urbanised core two hundred years later (Whyte, 1995).

What is important to note here is that together with the Cromwellian and Williamite land confiscations of the 1640s and 1690s, the plantations eventually led to a substantial alteration in the property relations mediated through and aggregated in the towns. The process was neither instantaneous nor regionally even (Clarke, 1976, 170-2), but ultimately, the changes in land ownership gave rise, first, to a new emphasis on economic relations and commercialism generally; and second, to a property owning minority who, though they were themselves far from homogenous and far from unchanging, differed from the majority of Ireland's population in culture, language, religion and ethnicity. Both consequences were to have profound implications for the future.

By the early sixteenth century, Ireland's property codes varied regionally according to the strength of the legacy left by Anglo-Norman feudalism and the degree to which Gaelic inheritence customs had survived. In the most heavily anglicised areas such as the Dublin Pale, a distintegrating manorial system continued to provide the basis for rent-based tenures and for urban markets of uncertain size and vitality, which were themselves increasingly susceptible to economic disruption and cultural dislocation. Elsewhere, in areas such as the Ormonde and Desmond lordships and in west Kildare and Wexford, which were transitional in every sense between the Pale and the more wholly Gaelic or gaelicised areas of the west and north, the English legal system no longer operated and the manorial economy was more or less completely eroded. It was virtually extinct in the Desmond lordship, and elsewhere was undergoing radical change as rent-based tenures were replaced by share-cropping and urban

marketing was forestalled by the activities of 'grey merchants'. In the purely Gaelic districts tenures were different again. Land was owned jointly by members of clans who were descended from a common male ancestor, and was frequently subject to heavy customary exactions by the clan lord. He, in return, was required to honour various social and economic obligations to his kinsmen. Property relations were thus familial rather than commercial, although mechanisms also existed for the periodic redistribution of land among sept members and for its surrender without prejudice to their ownership, if they were unable to meet their economic obligations to their lord (Quinn and Nichols, 1976, 33-36; Sheehan, 1986).

By 1700, Ireland's property code had altered radically. Leases had become the major instrument of tenure for anyone seeking a substantial stake in property, but this had only been made possible by the increasing attention paid to land measurement as part of the modernisation process during the intervening period. At every level, property had become more closely quantified as the new landowners and their sponsoring government sought to know their possessions in Ireland more minutely. Thus, while the Munster plantation of 1586 was notorious for the relative inaccuracy of its surveying (MacCarthy-Morrogh, 1986, 60-8), by the 1650s, William Petty's Down Survey was able to achieve levels of accuracy which were consistently within 10 or 15 per cent of those of the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey (Andrews, 1985, 63-75). The same precision was also applied to the measurement of private estates. By the early eighteenth century, estate surveys were becoming more common, and provided an increasingly exact basis for the negotiation of leases between landlords and their tenants (Andrews, 1985, 83-136).

But leases also involved the demarcation of time as well as space, and this lay at the heart of the distinction between the property-owning minority and the property-using majority. Despite the differences in their wealth, ethnicity, political attitudes and social aspirations, and despite their changing social

composition as a class, landlords shared at least this in common: as freehold or owners in fee of urban and rural estates, they possessed a permanent interest in these which was of an entirely different order to the property interests possessed by their tenants. The latter, irrespective of the generosity of the terms of their tenure, could never possess anything other than a finite interest in it, to be surrendered on terms and at the time of the landlord's choosing.

The nature of the leases which dictated these terms varied according to the prevailing economic circumstances and to the landlords' perception of how best to preserve their interests - not necessarily always through maximising the rent they extracted from each tenancy. Generally speaking, leases tended to lengthen during periods of political or economic uncertainty, and shorten during periods of prosperity. Thus during the troubled conditions of the late seventeenth century, many landlords offered leases in perpetuity or for terms of hundreds of years at relatively low rents, in the belief that conditions were unlikely to improve and that an assured (if low) rent was better than none at all. In contrast, as Ireland's economy strengthened from the mid eighteenth century onwards, many landlords began to shorten leases and subdivide properties, in the realisation that at times of rising prices, long leases effectively deprived them of the increasing value which accrued to their estates (Cullen, 1987, 77-82; Proudfoot, 1993b). Most leases specified either a term of years (frequently either twenty-one or thirty-one) or a period of one, two or three named lives. Unless the lease was renewable forever or there was a concurrent or consecutive term of years, it expired on the death of the last life. The lives were often those of the tenant and his relatives, but were sometimes those of locally or nationally known figures. Most leases also included convenants relating to the construction or repair of the property which the tenant was obliged to fulfill, while entry fines and other obligations such as suit at mill remained common until the mid-eighteenth century (Proudfoot, 1995, 127-134).

In all of this, of course, there was a sectarian and political dimension, which reflected the second major consequence of the plantations and land confiscations - the creation of a class of landowners, most of whom were of English origin, and who were perceived to be ethnically and culturally foreign to the majority of Ireland's population. Under the 'Popery Act' of 1704 and subsequent amending legislation (in 1714 and 1728), Catholics were prevented from taking leases of more than thirty-one years or agreeing rents of less than two-thirds the property's value and were excluded from the Parliamentary franchise. This penal legislation remained in force until the late eighteenth century, when the self-interest of the more enlightened members of the ruling - largely Anglican - landed elite combined with growing British government concern to force the passage of successive Catholic Relief Acts between 1761 and 1793. Under their provisions, Catholics were permitted to take 999-year leases, buy and sell land on the same terms as Protestants (although not within Parliamentary boroughs) and vote, subject to a forty shillings minimum property qualification (Dickson, 1984, 173-4, Malcomson, 1978, 297-303).

Although the real effects of the penal laws remain the subject of lively debate (Power and Whelan, 1990), they are significant for what they indicate about the defensive mind-set of the ruling Anglican caste in Ireland in the early eighteenth century. As the descendents of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century planters and settlers, they had already survived war and rebellion, but in the early 1700s still perceived their position in Ireland to be under threat from a combination of Catholic conspiracy at home and invasion from abroad. Conscious of their minority status, so the conventional account runs, they needed little encouragement to try to reinforce their authority by passing disabling legislation which struck at the basis of Catholic wealth (in land ownership) and at the heart of Catholic identity - the Church.

But this was never the whole story. In a recent powerful analysis, Connolly has stressed both the ambiguities of the ethnic,

religious, economic and political identities which emerged in Ireland during the eighteenth century, and the extent to which informal patterns of co-operation developed between different economic classes and religious groups, based on the recognition of mutual self-interest(Connolly, 1992). He argues that by the 1750s, the confrontational structures of earlier decades had given way to a relatively stable society, in which collaboration between the different orders was encouraged by the eclipse of earlier external threats such as Jacobitism, the general increase in prosperity, the spread of metropolitan standards of behaviour and the decline in lawlessness. Although sectarian tensions never completely disappeared, and indeed resurfaced in the final years of the century in a vicious cycle of disaffection, political radicalism, social protest and official repression which culminated in the United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798, for much of the period, vertical ties of deference and patronage seem to have at least ameleorated the alleged gulf between landlord and tenant. In Connolly's phrase, members of the eighteenth-century landed class "were no more distant from the traditional Ireland over which they had ruled...then were the members of the Catholic bourgeosie to whom they surrendered power" in the nineteenth century (Connolly, 1992, 317).

Property ownership and urban and village transformation

If the property relationships mediated through the towns were fundamental to the organisation and structure of the prevailing social formation, it follows that the urban expression of these relationships should reflect something of these structures. In the context of post-plantation Ireland, therefore, we might reasonably expect to find evidence of the leasehold relationships described above reflected in the development of the urban and village network during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is of more significance than might at first appear. By examining these relationships in detail, we may be able to determine with greater clarity, the role of different socio-

economic groups - landlords and tenants - in the urban modernisation process. This merits attention because of the widespread and, in many cases, uncritical, conventional assumption that this sort of transformation is generally to be ascribed to landlord intervention and authority. Thus for Jones Hughes, these rebuilt or refounded towns and villages are evidence of the landowning elite's role as "supreme arbiters" of local life, while O'Connor has sought an explanation for their social space in terms of the landlords' alleged ability to dominate and order the environments of those around them (Jones Hughes, 1965; O'Connor, 1987, 81-5). Orme, too, has concluded that landlords "completed Ireland's framework of nucleated settlements as it now exists" while Jones Hughes, in characteristically magisterial vein, has further asserted that:

> "the adoption and extension of the urban system for agrarian marketing was the keynote of the landlord era, and in this way the Irish urban network came to owe more to the landlord than to any other single factor".

He concludes:

> "Landlord villages and towns ....represented the major and most enduring contribution which the colonial era made to Irish life" (Orme, 1970, 13; Jones Hughes, 1986).

It must be stressed that not all scholars have been convinced by this view. Some recent contributions by geographers and historians have tended to qualify the unilateral nature of the landlords' role in promoting improvement, but they have still stressed its primacy. Thus in his study of eighteenth-century Tipperary, Power notes the growth of estate villages whose "landlord sponsors hoped would eventually grow into larger centres" (Power, 1993, 53). Similarly, Crawford concludes that much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century settlement transformation that occurred in the Ulster-Leinster borderlands "depended to a considerable extent on the initiative and energy of the landlord class" (Crawford, 1989). Others have been more cautious in their assessments. Both Nolan (1979) and Horner (1994, 1995) emphasize the importance of the role played by

tenants in developing towns as diverse as Castlecomer, Maynooth and Monasterevin; though again within the context of improvement-minded landlords.

But these and other similar studies (e.g. Proudfoot, 1995) have essentially been grounded in *place*, and have explored the outcomes of the interactions between property, society and *locality*. None have tried to assess the overall scale of the phenomenon whose individual outcomes they describe. Those attempts which have been made are few and relatively unsatisfactory. Cullen suggests that the total number of villages and small towns founded or rebuilt by landlords between the Restoration in 1660 and the Famine of 1845 may have reached between 500 and 1,000 "depending on whether formal or informal criteria are used" (Cullen, 1981, 61-3). Precisely what these criteria might be he fails to specify, whereas Lockhart defines his 180 "newly-founded" villages in terms of their planned regular morphologies and economic purpose - the enhancement of the marketing and rent rolls on their founders' estates, a point also stressed by Crawford (Crawford, 1989; Lockhart, 1983).

These twin issues, the nature of the property relationships expressed in the modernisation of Ireland's towns and villages during the post-plantation period, roughly ca. 1700 - 1845, and the extent of this modernisation, form the substance of this essay. In contrast to many previous studies, no prior assumptions are made concerning the social contexts of these transformations. As we have seen, one of the assumptions underlying conventional assessments is that the defining factor determining the place, nature and purpose of these changes, was the settlements' functional dependence upon and status as part of an agrarian estate owned by a member of the landowning elite. Arguably, by assuming the primacy of such contexts, these studies have prejudged their own outcomes. The present study attempts to avoid this circularity by establishing, first, a typology of improvement based solely on settlement function and spatial ordering, which is then used to measure the regional and - as far

as possible - chronological variation in this improvement. The property ownership patterns recorded for the places thus identified are then explored on an aggregate basis for the mid-nineteenth century, the first period for which this is possible, in order to ascertain whether any systemmatic relationship existed between the nature and extent of these settlement transformations and particular patterns of property ownership.

The basic proposition is straightforward enough. If the direct instrumental participation of landlords was necessary to achieve these settlement transformations, it follows that, other things being equal, the changes should have been most extensive - and spatially most coherent - in those places where the landlord's freedom of action was least constrained, whether by lack of capital or credit, existing leases or competing property interests. On the other hand, if landlord participation was necessary but not sufficient, if for example it was mediated in ways which demanded the significant involvement of other property-*using* groups as co-participants in the foundation or rebuilding process, these straightforward congruities between monopolistic property ownership and extensive coherent replanning should be either weak or non-existent.

It is important to note, of course, that "other things" weren't always equal. Legal encumbrances, debt, the cost and availability of capital, as well as less easily quantifiable matters such as the personal inclinations of the landlord, could all act to limit the nature and extent of their involvement in these modernising transformations, even where the property was owned by one family and the tenurial constraints were minimal. For these reasons it is unlikely that there would ever have been a perfect correlation between the incidence of coherent replanning and property monopolies Nevertheless, if the landlords' instrumental role was as all-pervasive as some commentators have suggested, then it is reasonable to expect to find some observable relationship between the extent to which they retained urban property in their own hand and the morphological evidence for extensive interventionist replanning.

The essay concludes with a more detailed exploration of the issues raised by the aggregate analysis. The focus here is on the particularity of individual places and on the role of different socio-economic groups in their improvement. Particular attention is paid to the identity and agendas of these groups, to the ways in which their involvement in improvement challenged or reinforced the prevailing property basis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish society, and to the symbolism of their actions.

2

IMPROVEMENT AND THE MEASUREMENT OF PROPERTY

The key issue addressed in this chapter is how, to paraphrase Cannadine, do we match "shapes on the ground to shapes in society"? (Cannadine, 1982). In short, how, given the diverse and at times fragile nature of the morphological and social data available for analysis, can we establish the extent to which the changing urban and village morphologies of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Ireland were created by members of different social classes in pursuit of their own, presumably sometimes conflicting, agendas? The question is particularly pertinent because in the final analysis, we are concerned not simply with the bricks and mortar of the material built environment, but with the social *meaning* of these - expressed symbolically - for those who built the towns and villages and lived in them.

Each type of data poses its own problems, and this chapter explores the sources and methodologies used to determine both the extent of improvement and the property contexts within which it took place. Central to this is our understanding of what eighteenth-century society meant by 'improvement', and the first section offers a definition of the term as it might have been understood in Ireland, and examines what might reasonably be construed to be the morphological evidence for this in the towns and villages of the period. To this end, a list of criteria is proposed which may be used to identify the extent of urban and village improvement as it existed *ca.* 1845. The final section examines the evidence used to identify the patterns of property ownership which had evolved in the towns and villages in question by the mid-nineteenth century, and outlines the strategies used to relate these to the morphological evidence.

The concept of 'improvement' in Ireland during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

Contemporary observers writing in Ireland in the early nineteenth century were quite certain as to the meaning of 'improvement'. It involved not only the physical transformation of the landscape - the construction of new villages, houses, bridges, roads or canals or the laying out of new farms, but also, if it was to succeed, the transformation of the habits and attitudes of the people. Usually, but not invariably, this was thought to result from the example provided by the local social leadership. Thus Edward Wakefield, writing in 1812, concluded:

> "Where unbounded confidence prevails between the landlord and his agent, and between the agent and tenants, industry will be exerted on the one hand and encouraged on the other; improvement will advance with a steady pace, and the mutual benefits which arise from a system founded on justice and liberality, will tend to cement the bonds of friendship between two classes of society, whose interests are undoubtedly the same" (Wakefield, 1812, i, p. 253).

In this instance, the social conditions which engendered improvement would, along with the benefits resulting from this, ensure a highly desirable social stability. Twenty years later, many of the compilers of the Ordnance Survey Memoirs accompanying the First Edition of the Six Inch Map of Ireland, were equally convinced of the socially beneficial and far-reaching effects of improvement - and the role of local landowners in promoting this. For example, in 1831, Lieutenant Robe, the surveyor responsible for the parish of Ramoan, Co. Antrim, was certain that the residence of local landowners and other social leaders and the employment they provided had resulted not simply in material benefits for "the people", but had also had a distinctly "civilising" influence. He wrote:

> "What has principally tended of late years to promote the civilisation and improvement which has taken place in the

> manners, morals and habits of the people is the residence of so many gentlemen and respectable families, who by their example and the influence they possess over the people, either as landlords, magistrates or being the agents or managers of property, have contributed in great measure towards bringing them to the present respectable rank they enjoy in the scale of civilisation, as also in their circumstances, by the constant employment they afford them" (Day, McWilliams and Dobson, 1994a, p. 98).

Others among his colleagues were equally convinced. At Bovevagh, Co. Londonderry, much of the improvement in the mountainous part of the parish was said in 1834 to be due to the exertions of the principal landlord, Mr. Law, a Dublin banker, "whose liberality is attested by the comfortable appearance of the tenantry of his estate and the superior condition of the houses, fields and farms" (Day, McWilliams and Dobson, 1994b, p. 24). A year later, at Aghaloo, Co. Tyrone, the surveyor, Lieutenant Bailey, concluded that "the exertions of the Earl of Caledon appear to form the most striking cause of improvement in the parish, which has recently been very considerable" (Day and McWilliams, 1993, p. 3). By the same token, the absence of locally resident gentry, as at Ballinderry, Co. Tyrone, was held to be inimical to improvement, as were leases of inadequate length - the "obstacle to improvement" most widely cited by the Ordnance surveyors (Day and McWilliams, 1990, p. 129; Day and McWilliams, 1993, p. 14; Day, McWilliams and Dobson, 1994b, p. 24).

In sum, "improvement" was perceived to be important as much for its social consequences as for its material benefits and even to have a moral dimension - the raising to new levels of "civilisation" of a people presumably previously thought to be in some degree barbaric. Crucially, however, it was regarded as socially-driven and dependent on the local social leadership for its instigation and, within the context of prevailing economic conditions, for the promotion of the circumstances which made it possible at a local level (Day and McWilliams, 1990, p. 64; Day and McWilliams, 1992, pp. 107,127). Once these conditions were achieved, whether through the provision of employment or the offer of suitable leaseholds, improvement became a more socially-

inclusive business involving a much wider spectrum of society than merely the landowning class. Landowners might create the circumstances in which physical improvements could occur and might even be responsible for some of these, but their full realisation required the co-operation of other, tenant, groups.

This contemporary emphasis in Ireland on the social origins and behavioural consequences of improvement finds a resonance in recent discussion of the nature of improvement elsewhere in the British Isles. This is more noteworthy than might at first appear. Generally speaking, and for reasons which are still debated, eighteenth-century tenurial practices in Ireland did not encourage the same degree of direct landlord participation in structural agrarian improvement as in England (Proudfoot, 1993a). Thus, whereas in both countries eighteenth-century improvement was essentially a manifestation of the power of the landed elite to facilitate the transformation of space - whether directly or indirectly, in rural Ireland this was more exclusively expressed in the non-productive but status-enhancing ornamentation of the landscape. By comparison, in England, landlord investment in improving tenant agriculture was both earlier and more widespread (Beckett, 1986, pp. 133-205).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the nature of improvement changed in other ways too, both in England and Ireland. Daniels and Seymour argue that in England, it was no longer synonymous with the management of aristocratic landed estates and the pursuit of aesthetic values, but instead became increasingly pragmatic and incorporated into the vocabulary of municipal and parliamentary reform, where if anything it acquired *anti*-aristocratic and democratic meanings (Daniels and Seymour, 1990, p. 487). In Ireland, the process was more complex. Where they occurred, productive improvements by landlords seem to have been a relatively late phenomenon, and to have been encouraged by the price-led agricultural boom of the Napoleonic War years. On the other hand, the country witnessed increasing investment by both the Catholic Church and the State in the provision of various services both within and beyond the existing settlement network. For the Catholic Church this was

essentially a "catching-up" exercise, as it sought to take full advantage of its new liberty following the repeal of the Penal Legislation to provide an appropriate network of parishes and chapels for its adherents. As Whelan has shown, many of these chapels themselves developed as new rural settlement foci, attracting a range of retailing and other low-order services (Whelan, 1983). State investment also took the form of the provision of rudimentary public services for the relief of poverty, the provision of law and order, health care and the like, but was very much geared to the existing urban and village network. It reflected the growing parliamentary concern over the worsening social conditions in pre-Famine Ireland, and culminated in a mid-century programme of legislative municipal reform which, if anything, anticipated its English counterpart in both its scale and purpose (Daly, 1984, pp. 240-276; Maguire, 1993, pp. 38-48).

The trajectory of improvement in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was thus somewhat at odds with the English experience. Accordingly, while we may accept the general applicability to Ireland of Daniels and Seymour's recent definition of improvement as the progressive "restructuring [of] the landscape for social and economic as well as aesthetic ends and, by extension, [the] restructuring [of] the conduct of those who lived in, worked in, and looked upon it", it is important to recognise that the changing emphasis within this over time - which they established for England - was different again in Ireland (Daniels and Seymour, 1990, p. 487).

Indeed, arguably, the closest parallels with the ethos of Irish improvement are to be found in eighteenth-century Lowland Scotland, and the Scottish Enlightenment. It has already been noted that for some contemporary Irish commentators at least, there was a profoundly moral purpose in improvement, and this same moral sense imbued the practical social and economic agendas which formed part of the Enlightenment in Scotland. By the 1760s, Edinburgh in particular had emerged as the leading provincial centre of enlightened culture in Europe after Paris, and by this time, Scottish (as well as French) thought was influential

among the Dublin *literati* (Christie, 1995; Phillipson, 1981; Yolton, 1995). It seems likely, however, that the social, cultural and ethnic divisions within Ireland gave flavour to the material expression of these ideas which was absent elsewhere. Thus, whereas in Scotland, the Act of Union of 1707 encouraged the pursuit of a socially-inclusive civic morality based on social and economic, rather than political or constitutional principles (Phillipson 1981), in Ireland the socially- *exclusive* nature of the State ensured the opposite. Enlightenment ideas were used both to reinforce the position of the ruling Anglican elite - who mediated them to other, dependent social groups in material forms which reinforced their own elite status - and, by the Volunteers and United Irishmen, to challenge it (Curtin, 1996, forthcoming; O'Brien, 1995). The challenge failed, and as long as the Anglican minority remained the embodiment of the political state in Ireland, their atavastic insecurities demanded that the new thinking reinforce their - ultimately precarious - place in Ireland.

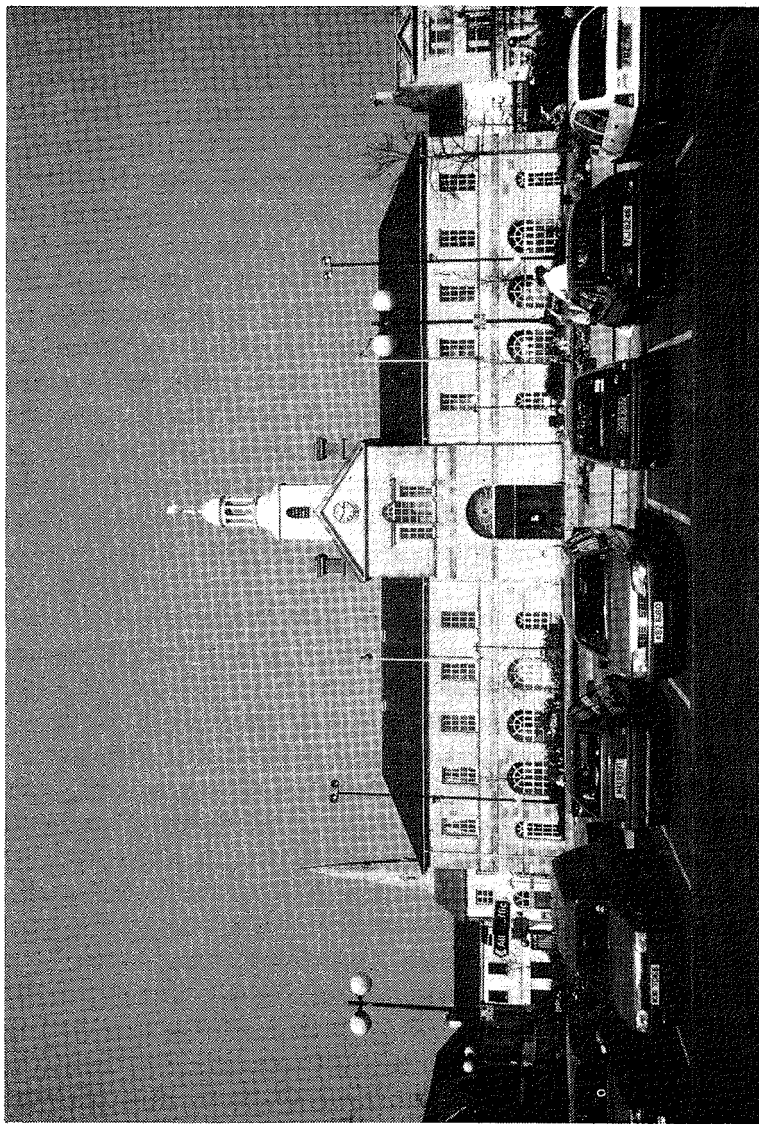
Morphologies of urban and village improvement

If, as Wilmot has recently suggested, improvement consciously involved "a rejection of the physical shape of traditional 'reality'" (Wilmot, 1990, 45), the question now arises of what form this "deliberate rejection" took in Irish towns and villages during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By implication, the "traditional reality" of existing settlements, whether in terms of their functions, public buildings, the quality and pretension of their housing or the visual amenity of their immediate surroundings did not match up to the vision and expectations of those individuals or groups with an interest in their future and the ability to adjust that future to suit their own agenda. In seeking to remedy this situation, it was entirely logical for these decision-makers to adopt an architectural idiom which, in its modernity and fashionability, not only distanced the newly extended or recreated settlements from their antecedent state, but in so doing, encoded in their new morphology a social

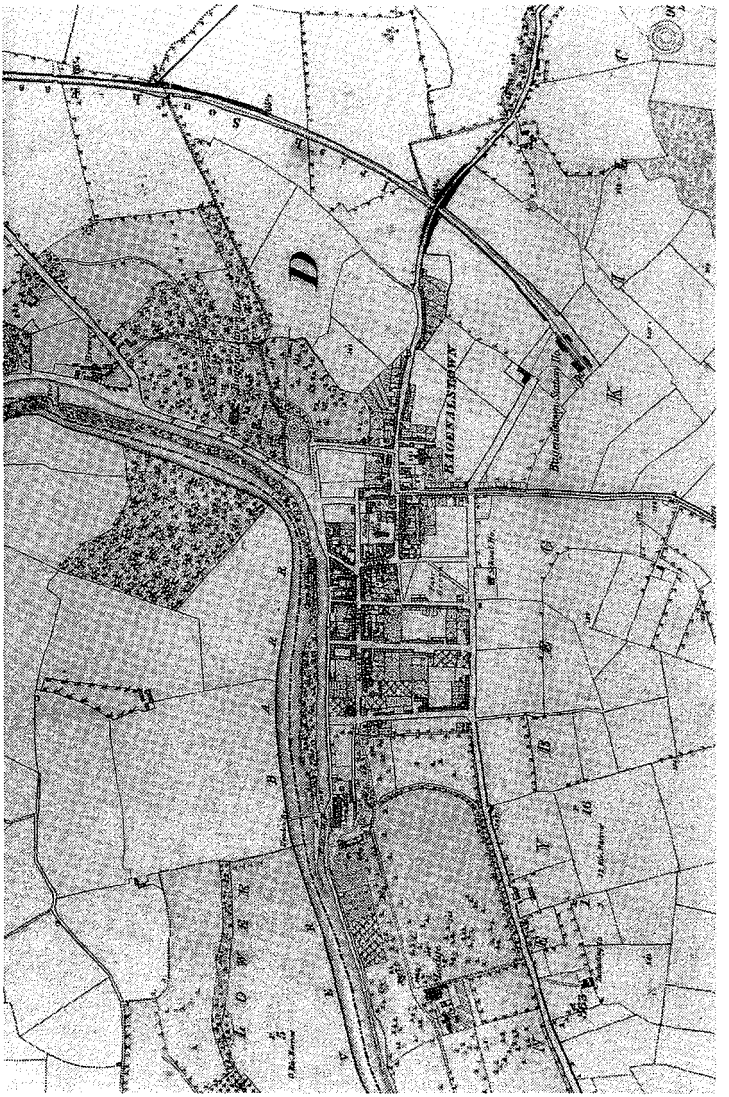
statement about the status and intentions of those promoting this change.

Prior to the Famine, these ends were achieved in Ireland by the almost universal employment of the Classical architectural canon. This label necessarily masks a complex and evolutionary architectural reality, but it suffices to alert us to the external - in this case Renaissance - origins of an architectural vocabulary which was used to impose a superficial visual uniformity on the townscapes of pre-Famine Ireland. Closer inspection, however, reveals that this apparent uniformity masked considerable variation both in the degree of precision with which the style was used and in the coherence of the town and village replanning which accompanied it. In turn, these variations shed light on the nature of the morphological outcomes of urban and village improvement in Ireland which permits us to identify the most important morphological criteria of improvement.

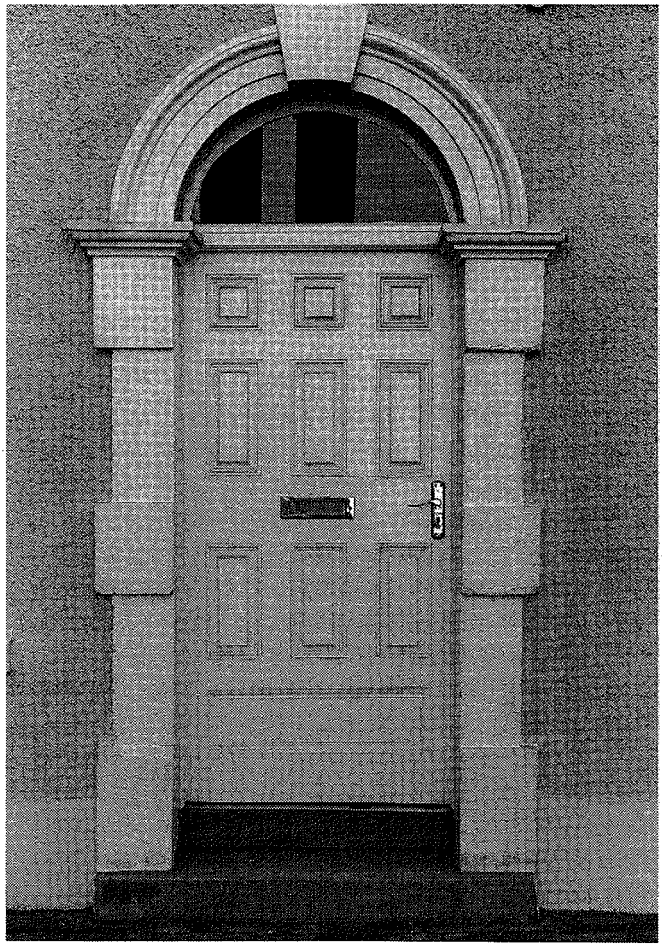
In Ireland, the dissemination of successive styles of Classical architecture appears to have involved a process of hierarchical diffusion. The most sophisticated individual essays in both the Palladianism reputedly introduced into Ireland in the 1720s via the work of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce (McParland, 1995) and the plainer neo-Classicism which largely superceded it, were undoubtedly to be seen in major country houses and urban public buildings. Among Irish country houses, for example, Bellinter House, Co. Meath and Desert, Co. Kilkenny both display the colonnaded wings and pilastered facades typical of Irish Palladianism, while CastleBlunden, Co. Kilkenny and Doneraile, Co. Cork are entirely representative of the restrained porticoes and detailing of the numerous late eighteenth-century neo-Classical 'Georgian box' houses (Bence-Jones, 1988, pp. 39, 62-3, 103, 105-6). Equally outstanding among urban public buildings are the court house at Hillsborough, Co. Down, probably finished in its present form in the 1780s by Lord Downshire, and the market house at Newtownards in the same county, begun between 1757 and 1770 by the Marquis of Londonderry (Figure 2.1).



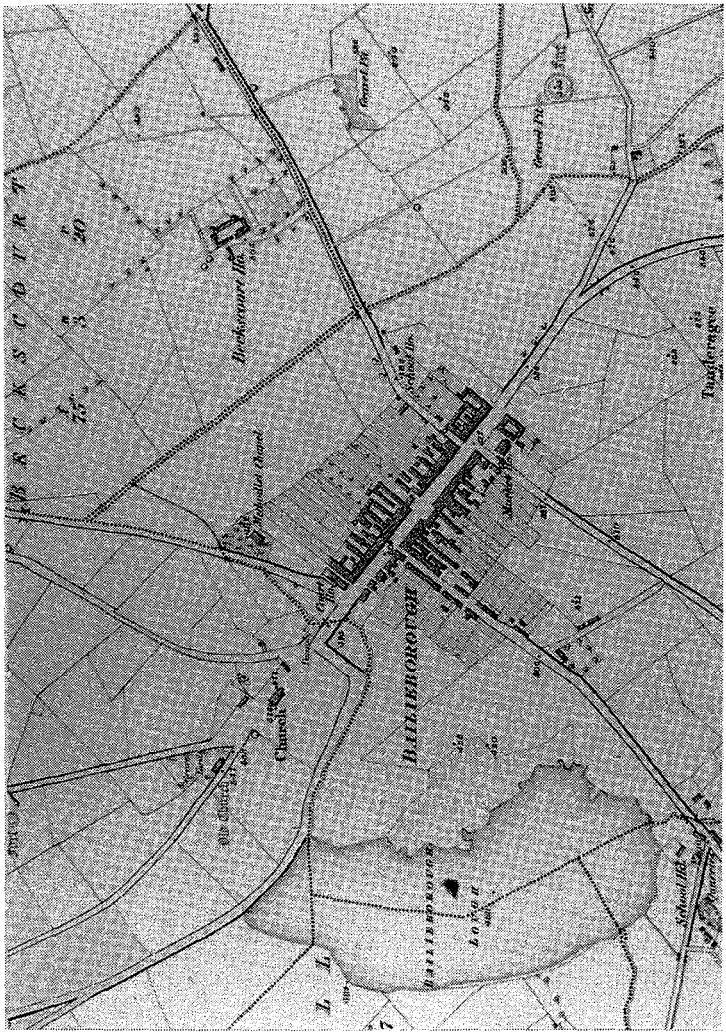
2.1 Newtownards, Co. Down. The Neo-Classical market hall built for the town's proprietor, the Marquis of Londonderry, between 1765 and 1771.



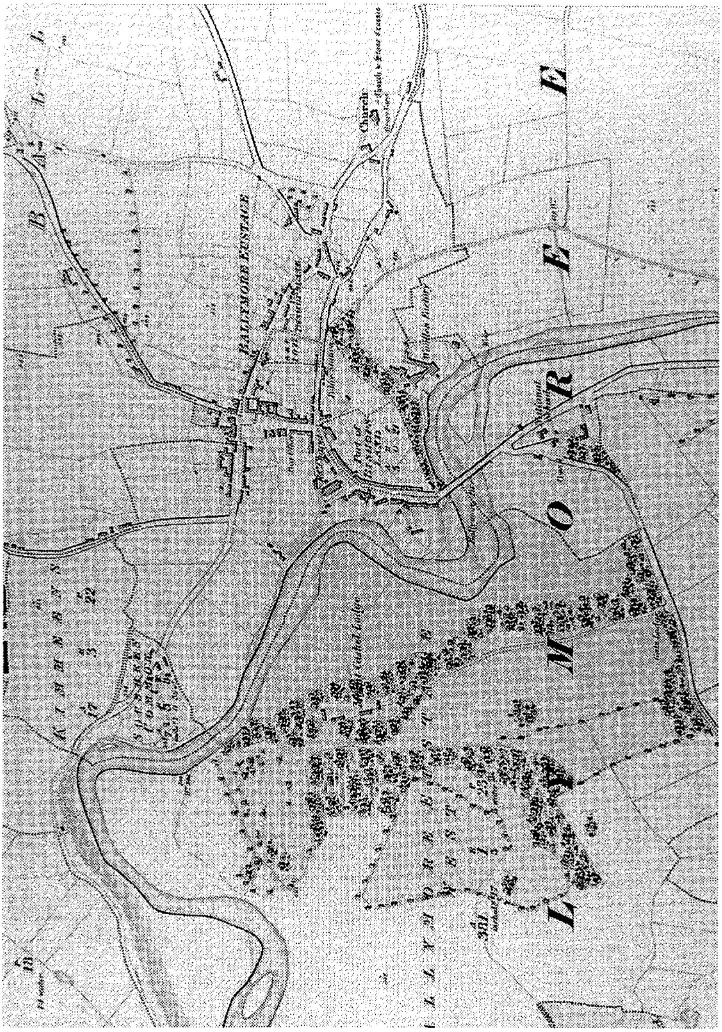
2.2 Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow. An example of eighteenth-century orthogonal planning (First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, c.1840).



2.3 Newtownards, Co. Down. 'Polite' architecture: a late eighteenth-century doorcase with Gibbs surround.



2.4 Baillieborough, Co. Cavan. An example of extreme formality in a smaller village settlement (First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, c.1840).



2.5 Ballymore Eustace, Co. Kildare. An example of an irregular plan probably of medieval date (First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, c.1840).

In these and other similar cases, however, the buildings reflected the informed taste of landowners who, as members of a socio-economic elite, were most likely to be aware of the changing aesthetic values of their peers and best placed to indulge their own preferences in regard to these. In short, this level of architectural sophistication was *their* preserve. At Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow, for example, contemporaries noted that the new eighteenth-century settlement begun by the local landowning Bagnal family was originally intended to possess "considerable architectural pretensions". Although the settlement which was finally built there was more modest then originally intended, it still echoed the aesthetics of the initial concept in the generosity and formality of its orthogonal plan (Figure 2.2; *Paliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, i, p. 115). At Blarney, Co. Cork, the landlord's ambitions were, relatively speaking, even more grandiose. Beginning in 1765, the proprietor, Mr Jeffereys, attempted to establish a manufacturing town on what was described by the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* as a "thoroughly considered but novel and preposterous plan". The centre-piece was a formal square, laid out with walks and statuary, around which were ranged "embellished" houses, several linen and cotton factories, a church and a bridge - without a river. This was intended to be supplied by a leet drawn from the nearby River Martin. The failure of the project was due according to the *Gazetteer*, to Mr Jeffereys making "his town too fine for the taste of operatives, and too grotesque for the fancy of the higher classes; in short he made the place a ludicrous embodiment of frontless and unmeaning gasconade" (*Parliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, i, p. 261).

As the use of Neo-Classical architecture became more widespread among the landowning elite, so the style began to be imitated by less wealthy aspirational groups. Lacking the resources necessary for such pretension, these imitative groups deployed the style in a progressively debased manner. By the early nineteenth century, this resulted in the paradoxical creation throughout Ireland's provincial towns and villages of a vernacular architecture based loosely on Classical proportions and stylistic

forms. The latter were characterised by the repetitive use of string courses, drip moulds, quoin stones, fan-lights and occasionally, in slightly grander houses, Venetian windows and 'Gibbs surrounds'. These used alternating large and small quoin stones to provide a high degree of articulation around doors and windows, and are conventionally associated with the architect, James Gibbs (1682-1754) (Figure 2.3).

The visual uniformity which this widespread use of a debased Classical architecture lent to Ireland's towns and villages did not extend beyond the building facades, which frequently also reflected the variation in the size and regularity of the building plots on which the property stood. The regularity of the latter was a function of the formality of the town or village plan, and this, like the buildings themselves, provided an opportunity for improvers to distance themselves from the "physical shape of traditional reality". Indeed, the whole-hearted application of the principles of the newly-fashionable Classical architecture required that they should do so, as these included precisely articulated ideas concerning the geometrical basis of urban *planning* (Morris, 1979, pp. 121-154).

It follows from this that the analysis of the variation in plan forms is as important in determining the nature and extent of urban and village improvement as the assessment of the buildings themselves. By combining both, it is possible to distinguish between the extent of the improvement displayed by different towns and villages in terms of the degree to which they exhibited a unitary *coherence* of architecture and plan. The significance of this lies in what can be inferred from it about the role of different social agencies in the modernisation process. At one end of this planning spectrum are places such as Nurney, Co. Carlow or Bailieborough, Co. Cavan (Figure 2.4), where the regular formality of the plan *ca.* 1845 suggests that this was laid out coevally, and where the stylistic and morphological uniformity of the buildings suggest that these too were built to some overriding design over a relatively short period. In these cases, it is reasonable to infer the presence of the sort of unilateral interventionism conventionally

ascribed to landowners. The clear implication is that such uniformity was only possible where a single patron had the inclination, opportunity and resources to plan the entire project himself and exert close control over its execution. At Bailieborough, for example, both the town and its surroundings were "much improved" in the early nineteenth century by the local landowner, Sir W. Young (*Parliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, i, pp.116-7; ii, pp. 741-2).

Related to this first group were those more numerous places which were characterised by a recognisably formal ground plan but also by a much greater diversity of building size and morphology. Here, the inference is that whereas the major elements in the town or village plan may have been laid out as a unified scheme, perhaps by the local landowner or his representatives, much of the subsequent building was carried out by tenants in the absence of the sort of strict building controls which the Earl (subsequently Duke) of Abercorn attempted to impose at Strabane, Co. Londonderry, and the Marquis of Downshire insisted on at Edenderry, Co. Offaly. During the widespread rebuilding at Strabane after 1757, the eighth Earl of Abercorn insisted "that only one dwelling house be built upon each lot, that the houses and all their offices be slated, and that (they) be not less than 12 feet high in the side walls next the street" (Gebbie, 1972, p. 300). "The Plan for Improvement on the Estate of Edenderry" of 1810 specified the minimum dimensions of each house, 30 feet wide by 20 feet deep, excluding any covered gateway; its height - at least two storeys, and the materials it was to be built of - stone with a slate roof. Moreover, each intending tenant had to submit plans of the elevation of the new house for approval by the agent, James Brownrigg, before commencing construction (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D.671/A5/6, 5-8).

The absence of such building controls would have encouraged the morphological diversity which characterised these places, irrespective of any other stipulations the landlord may have imposed on his tenants concerning, for example, the

minimum value of the buildings to be erected (Proudfoot, 1995, chapter 6, *passim*). In numerous towns such as Boyle, Co. Roscommon, Ballymote, Co. Sligo and Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, the consequence was extreme variation in the size and ostentation of adjacent buildings constructed on plots of essentially similar dimensions. The only element of formality in towns such as these was provided by the linearity of the plan itself and the construction of market houses, churches or other public buildings as visual foci. Indeed, one may argue that it is this combination of *hetereogenous* buildings sharing a common simplified Classical stylistic idiom and constructed on relatively formal and frequently linear town or village plans, which is the most characteristic product of town and village improvement in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

If it is reasonable to infer from the morphological diversity characteristic of this second group of towns and villages that the degree of unilateral control exercised over their reconstruction was less than in the first category, then by implication irregularly laid-out towns and villages are likely to have evolved without benefit of even this sort of limited unifying planning precept. Places characterised in this way included small villages such as Roundwood (Togher), Co. Wicklow or Quin, Co. Clare, as well as larger towns or villages such as Bantry, Co. Cork or Ballymore Eustace, Co. Kildare (Figure 2.5). Irrespective of their size, all displayed an extreme irregularity of plot size, shape and plan which was in total contrast to the formal regularity of the towns and villages at the opposite end of the planning spectrum.

The criteria of improvement

Table 2.1 lists the criteria which were used to identify the nature and extent of the morphological and planning formality and functional modernisation recorded for Irish towns and villages by the First Edition of the Six Inch Ordnance Survey maps, surveyed during the 1830s and 1840s (Andrews, 1975, *passim*). These maps constitute the earliest source which can provide this

information on a national basis, and they identified 781 provincial towns and villages of all sizes which showed some evidence of

Table 2.1
Criteria for settlement improvement

Spatial Ordering	*Infrastructure*
Origin code	Economic
Medieval	Market house
Tudor / Plantation	Inn
Other	Quays/wharves
	Shambles
Total planning formality	Agrarian Industry
Regular plots	Bank(s)
	Fair Green
Street Plan	
Orthogonal	Functioning Market (1852-53)
Linear	Fair/Market Patent
Double linear	
Concentric	State
Y - shaped	Court House
T - shaped	Police barracks
A - shaped	Army barracks
Cross - shaped	Jail
Crescents/squares	Work house
Irregular	Town hall
	Post Office
Formal Market Place	Dispensary
Linear (widened street)	Other (eg Coastguard)
Rectilinear (square)	
Triangular	Religious
Cross/diamond	Anglican
Multiple	Roman Catholic
	Non Conformist
Demesne/mansion	
Demesne location	
Adjacent	
Separate but proximate	
None	
Demesne size	
Large	
Small	
None	
Triad landscape (Planned settlement, mansion and demesne in unified ensemble)	

formal planning or functional modernisation. "Formal planning" is defined here as the creation of a unified scheme of regularly

structured space in accordance with some preconceived ideal; "infrastructural modernisation" is defined as the recent provision of marketing, transport, industrial, religious, social or government facilities. The analysis excluded Dublin and the major regional centres of Cork, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Londonderry, Waterford and Wexford on the grounds that their size and complexity would obscure the property relations under review.

The status of the criteria listed in Table 2.1 varies, and not all needed to be present for a town or village to be listed as "improved". For example, under "spatial ordering", various alternative types of street plan and market place are listed, and these represent an initial attempt to provide as precise a description as possible of the different plan-types identifiable from the Six Inch Maps. It became apparent, however, that not all of these categories were equally useful as indicators of planning formality. Accordingly, an additional simplified summary criterion, "total planning formality" was added, which identified those towns and villages where all the plan elements - streets, building plots, market places and public buildings were laid out in a completely formal and regular fashion. If the conventional assumption concerning the primacy of landlord involvement in urban remodelling is correct, these settlements should show unequivocal evidence for the existence of a locally-dominant family with the means, opportunity and desire to engage in this form of improvement. The "irregular" category, by contrast, identifies those places with at best only limited infrastructural or other improvement which did not involve the wholesale replanning of any part of the settlement.

The functional criteria identified the presence and total numbers of various economic, government, welfare and religious functions which may be regarded as evidence of modernisation, and which previous research has suggested were sensitive indicators of nodality (O'Connor, 1987, pp. 86-118). Predictably, a strong positive relationship emerged between the complexity of each settlement's functional base and its mid-nineteenth century poor law valuation. The nineteenth-century market data and

information on fair and market patents were derived from the 1853 Government Report on Markets and Fairs in Ireland. It has been used to establish the chronology of previous market and fair grants as an indication of the *intent* by landowners to found or revivify these towns and villages as market centres (O'Flanagan, 1983). Finally, the survey also evaluated the spatial relationship between these towns and villages and local demesnes. Of especial concern were places such as Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon or Hillsborough, Co. Down where the town or village formed an integral part of an ensemble of planned landscape features which also included an adjacent demesne and mansion house. Where this *triad* could be identified, it was inferred that the local landowner played a significant part in at least the design and laying out of the settlement in accordance with his own vision of how this should appear.

Inherited morphologies

The evidence derived from the First Edition of the Six Inch Ordnance Survey maps represents the extent of urban and village improvement as it existed *ca.* 1845, rather than as it occurred throughout the period 1700 - 1845. It thus provides a retrospective "snapshot" of the cumulative morphological and planning consequences of improvement undertaken at various times both within the period under review and before. For this reason, some consideration has to be given to the extent of the morphological legacies inherited from the pre-1700 period. The places where these legacies are likely to be found have been well-attested by previous research, and they are identified in Table 2.1 by the "origin" criterion (Curl, 1986, *passim*; Graham, 1977; Martin, 1981; Robinson, 1984, pp. 150-171). Approximately 33 per cent - one in three - of the towns and villages in the data-set fall into the medieval or Tudor/Plantation categories. In these places, Anglo-Norman towns such as Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim or Plantation towns such as Moneymore, Co. Londonderry, the problem centres on the assessment of *post*-medieval or *post*-plantation morphologies, and their incorporation in a spectrum of

improvement which also includes the extensively remodelled and newly established towns and villages of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Table 2.2 presents a typology which summarises the possible evidence for different periods of foundation and improvement which might be found in the towns and villages in the data-set. The major distinction is between those places which were newly laid out between *ca.* 1700 - 1845 either for the first time or else to replace an earlier decayed settlement, and those which were of more ancient foundation but which were partly remodelled or extended at this time. Thus the new towns included in the first category, for example Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, laid out by the Pratt family in the late eighteenth century, and Dundrum, Co. Down, built by the Annesleys twenty years later, were much more likely to accord with the conventional estate town stereotype than towns or villages of more ancient medieval or Tudor origin. The latter were much more likely to have developed highly complex proprietorial, tenurial and institutional structures which were themselves capable of generating urban improvement. By the late eighteenth century, for example, Youghal, Co. Cork, a port of probable medieval origin, displayed a highly fragmented pattern of property ownership. Here it was the corporation rather than an individual landlord who promoted the extension of the town's wharves. The subsequent re-assertion of landlord control over the town by the sixth Duke of Devonshire in 1822, and the strategems his representatives had to indulge in during the previous eight years in order to achieve this, merely demonstrated the possible complexities of the social contexts for improvement in ancient towns such as this (Proudfoot, 1995, chapter 5, *passim*).

The towns and villages in categories a) and b) in Table 2.2 account for approximately one-third of the 781 settlements retaining identifiable evidence for planning, morphological or infrastructural improvement. The point has already been made that only a small minority of the remaining two-thirds (*ca.* 540

Table 2.2
A typology of settlement improvement

Investment in surviving medieval towns and villages
Refurbishment limited to construction of public buildings and/or individual residential/commercial properties.
As in (i) together with additional limited plan extensions and associated new plot series.
Near-complete remodelling of entire plan and fabric - although probably with discernible elements of continuity.
Investment in surviving Tudor or Plantation towns and villages
Refurbishment limited to construction of public buildings and/or individual residential/commercial properties.
As in (i) together with additional limited plan extensions and associated new plot series.
Near-complete remodelling of entire plan and fabric - although probably with discernible elements of continuity.
Eighteenth or nineteenth century "greenfield" foundations
Characterised by coevally laid-out street network and plot series. Original public buildings typically constructed by founding agency. Morphology and period of construction of other buildings potentially more varied - depending on leasehold obligations between landlord and tenants.
Either:
founded as completely new additions to the existing urban/ village network,
or
founded to replace earlier decayed settlements.

(After Proudfoot and Graham, 1993, p.273).

settlements) possessed highly formal plans. Accordingly, we may conclude that the bulk of the evidence for urban and village

improvement relates to settlements where, for whatever reason, the improvement process did not involve the wholesale transformation of the existing community. In terms of the arguments presented earlier, this suggests that in most of pre-Famine Ireland's "improved" towns and villages, no single social agency was able or willing to invest the necessary amounts of effort and capital to achieve this. Accordingly, we may suspect that where major local landowners were involved in the business, they were frequently content with a modest role and more modest gains. What evidence is available to test this contention?

Property ownership and property occupation

The only source available on a national basis containing detailed evidence relating to the occupation, ownership and value of individual urban and village properties is the Griffith's Valuation, more properly known as the Primary Valuation of Tenements. This was compiled under the direction of Sir Richard Griffith under the 1852 Valuation Act (15 & 16 Vict., c. 63) and was completed for the whole of Ireland with the publication of the County Armagh returns in 1865. The Griffith's Valuation revised methods which had been used in two earlier schemes of franchise and taxation assessment but subsequently abandoned because of their perceived deficiencies: the Town-Land Valuation, also begun under Griffith's direction in 1826, and the Poor-Law Valuation begun in 1838. Thus unlike the Town-Land Valuation, the Griffith's Valuation assessed each tenement separately, but despite Government instructions to the contrary, continued to value land on the same basis as that used for a revision of the Town-Land Valuation in 1844, that is, according to the scale of prices operating in 1826 - 36. Individual buildings, on the other hand, including those in the towns, *were* assessed as instructed at a net annual value based on prices in 1849 - 51, when the economy was depressed through the effects of the Potato Famine. This net annual value was much the same as the concept of a "fair letting value" used by the Poor Law Valuation between 1838 and 1844. It was based on an "average" rent and was net of all

insurance, repairs and taxes which were assumed to be paid by the tenant. The result, as contemporary observers were quick to point out, was that the valuations given by Griffith were anything up to one-quarter below prevailing rents (Theodore Hoppen, 1984, pp. 19-26).

For each tenement, the Griffith's Valuation lists the name of the occupier, the name of the immediate lessor, a description of the property, its area in acres, roods and perches, the net annual value of the land and (separately) the buildings, and finally the combined total of these two. The tenements are listed on a townland basis, and for each townland the total area, land valuation, building valuation and combined land and building valuations are given, together with any exemptions such as schools, work houses and churches. The townlands are listed by parish, the parishes by barony and the baronies by county. The urban and village entries are listed according to the townlands on which they are situated, and, accordingly, the entries for a given town might be listed under various townland headings. The tenurial status of the occupiers and immediate lessors is not specified and could vary, giving rise to questions of definition which explored below. It is sufficient to note here that the occupier might either be the fee-simple landlord himself or one of his tenants (tenure unstated), or a commercial or institutional tenant such as a Railway Company, the Barrack Board or the Board of Guardians of the Local Poor Law Union. Similarly, the "immediate lessors" column identified people who were precisely that: those who either as fee simple landlord or as a tenant holding a lease with a term of at least one life, were legally able to sublet part of their property to others.

Table 2.3 lists the property data that were derived from the Griffith's Valuation for each of the towns and villages in the morphological data set. Although it is recognised that in some places membership of the two groups would have overlapped, the data was restricted to the immediate lessors rather than the occupiers, since it was felt that, as a *group*, it was these who as owners or leaseholders, would have been better able to invest in

improvement. Previous research on the Griffith's Valuation has demonstrated a clear difference between the economic status of most of the occupiers and immediate lessors in towns as diverse as Lurgan, Co. Armagh (textile centre), Bandon, Co. Cork, Enniskillen (Co. Fermanagh) and Tallow, Co. Waterford (agricultural market centres), and Youghal, Co. Cork (port) (Acheson, 1978; Proudfoot, 1995, chapter 6, *passim*). In these places, the occupying tenants were characterised by much more limited property interests, which were almost invariably restricted to the houses they actually lived in. By contrast, the immediate lessors were frequently multiple property holders - a status consonant with a willingness and an ability, whether as owners or leaseholders, to speculate in the property market.

The categories specified in Table 2.3 include the total Poor Law (Griffith's) Valuation, number of functions and number of aristocratic and gentry lessors for each improved settlement, together with the total functions and property value held by these lessors. These last figures are also calculated as a proportion of the respective totals, thus allowing an assessment of the extent of any individual monopoly of property ownership. The aristocratic and gentry lessors are defined as including all members of the aristocracy, baronetage and other titled classes, commissioned military officers and senor clerics, together with any lessor holding more than twenty per cent of the total valuation of the town or village. The classification represents an attempt to identify those immediate lessors who, whether on grounds of wealth or status, are most likely to have been members of the landlord class, with property interests which were sufficiently permanent to be distinguished from the determinable tenant interests. Definitions such as this are notoriously ambiguous, and it is readily conceded that this classification provides an at best very rough approximation to a group whose membership was constantly changing and who were themselves frequently unsure of their own identity (Connolly, 1992). Nevertheless, despite its ambiguities and the consequent fragility of the data it generates, a sample study of Ulster towns indicated that the classification succeeded in identifying all those lessors whose status as fee-

simple or perpetuity landlords could be established from other sources. Only in the very largest and tenurially most complex provincial towns, did it also include a number of minor lessors whose status as tenants or landlords was uncertain.(1)

Table 2.3
Property ownership and value

Property ownership	*Property value*
Total number of aristocratic/ gentry lessors.	Total Griffith's Valuation (£).
	Total value of property held by aristocratic/gentry lessors(£).
Major aristocratic/gentry lessor.	Aristocratic/gentry valuation as a % of total valuation.
	Average aristocratic/gentry valuation.
	Total value of property held by major aristocratic/gentry lessor(£).
	Value of property held by major aristocratic/gentry lessor as a % of total Griffith's Valuation.
Functions	
Total number of all functions	
Total number of functions owned by aristocratic/gentry lessors.	
Aristocratic/gentry-owned functions as a % of total number.	

The data derived from the Griffith's Valuation for the towns and villages in the morphological data set were recorded on a relational data-base.(2) This made it possible to define subsets of towns and villages on the basis of particular morphological, functional, chronological, proprietorial and valuation criteria, and identify each subset's characteristics in summary terms (Table 2.4) for comparison with the overall data-set. In this way it has been possible to test whether, for example, subsets characterised by total planning formality ca. 1845 were also characterised by

Table 2.4
Subset characteristics: summary indicators

Property Ownership & Value

Average total valuation (£)

Average total aristocratic/gentry valuation

Average total aristocratic/gentry valuation as a % of total valuation

Average valuation of main aristocratic/gentry lessor

Average number of aristocratic/gentry lessors

Functions

Average total number of state, religious & economic services

Percentage of total services owned by aristocratic/gentry lessors

Average total economic services

Total subset towns/villages recording:

market houses

functioning market in 1852

agrarian industry

fairs

courts

barracks

jails

Anglican churches

Catholic churches

Morphology

Total subset towns/villages/ recording:

total planning formality

regular plots

orthogonal plans

linear plans

irregular plans

no formal market place

Triad landscape features

unusually high levels of monopolistic property ownership, and whether the relative age of a settlement was reflected in its tenurial and functional complexity and in the size of its poor law valuation.

These aggregate relationships provide the context for the case studies presented in the final part of this essay, which explore the social identity and agendas of the groups actively involved in urban improvement. These studies are based on a variety of sources, but particularly on collections of estate papers. These collections provided urban correspondence, leasehold, rental and survey evidence dating in the main from the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The uses and limitations of these sources have been explored elsewhere (Proudfoot, 1995). On well-managed and well-documented estates, they provide information which can be used to build up a detailed picture of the chronology, management strategies and social, financial and morphological outcomes of the improvement process.

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(1) The analysis was based on a random sample of twenty towns in Counties Antrim, Armagh, Down and Fermanagh which compared the size and identity of the aristocratic/gentry subset which was created using a £25, 10%, 20%, 25% and 40% cut-off point. The 25% and 40% levels excluded known fee-simple landlords; the 10% and £25 levels included all these but also disproportionately large numbers of immediate lessors with very limited holdings - two or three houses at most

(2) Claris FileMaker Pro™

3

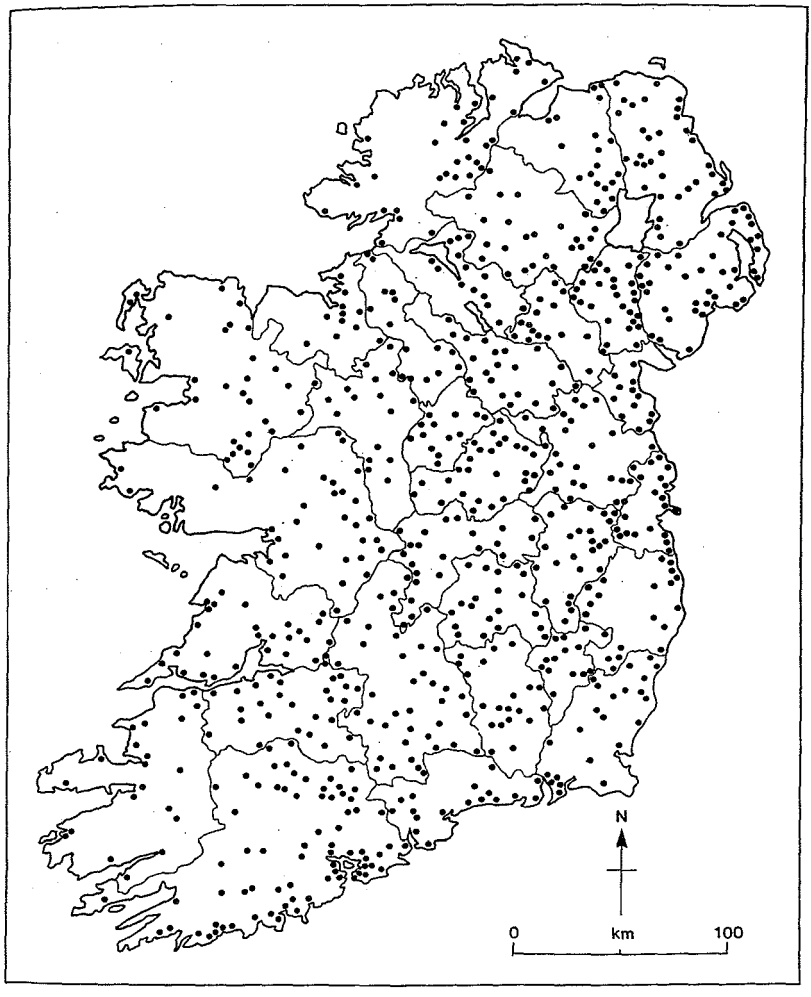
THE REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF TOWN AND VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT

This chapter establishes, first, the overall distribution of the improved and newly-founded towns and villages in both absolute and relative terms *ca.* 1845, and then refines the analysis by considering the regional variation in the Griffith's Valuation for these settlements, and the extent of the inherited pre-1700 morphological and planning legacies among them. Consideration is also given to the relationship between the pattern of settlement valuations and the contemporary agricultural and population contexts, and to the chronology of market foundation.

The distribution of improved towns and villages ca. 1845

Figure 3.1 depicts the overall distribution of improved towns and villages identified from the First Edition of the Six Inch Ordnance Survey Maps. Casual inspection suggests that these settlements were widely located throughout the island, but significant regional variations can be detected in their distribution. The densest concentration lay in a broad zone which ran from central Ulster in the north-east of the island, south through the Ulster border counties of Armagh, Cavan and Monaghan to the eastern Midlands, from Longford in the north to Carlow in the south, before petering out in the far south in Limerick, southern Tipperary and east Cork. To the west of this zone, in the Atlantic counties of western Ulster (Donegal), Connacht (Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Clare), and west Munster (Kerry and west Cork), the distribution was less dense as it also was in Wexford and Wicklow.

Clearly, the determinants for this pattern will have been complex but, given the economic and technological contexts of the

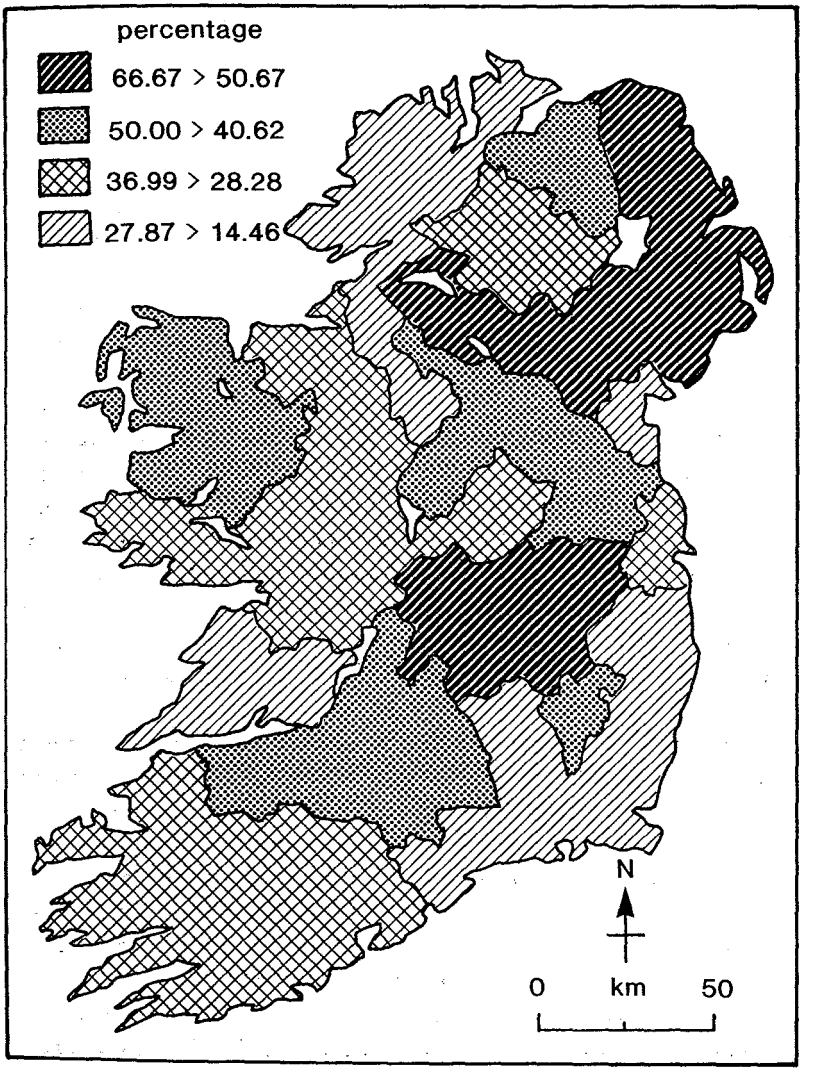


3.1 Overall distribution of provincial towns and villages founded and/or improved under landlord and/or tenant aegis.

period, they will have reflected the regional variation in the nature and intensity of the human exploitation of the physical environment. Thus both within and beyond the main belt of improvement, most of the towns and villages enjoyed fertile riverine or coastal locations and eschewed the bogs of Galway, Longford, Leitrim and Offaly, just as they did the peripheral mountains and moorlands of Antrim, Donegal, south Down, Galway, Kerry and Wicklow. In Ulster, for example, the densest zone of improved settlement lay in the Bann valley, the historic routeway and zone of settlement which runs north-south through the Lough Neagh Basin to the west of the Mourne Mountains and the Antrim Plateau. Similarly, the highest concentration of improved towns and villages in south-east Leinster was in the Nore and Barrow valleys in Counties Kilkenny and Carlow, while the location of the most of the improved settlements in County Cork accurately mirrored the course of the Bandon, Lee and Blackwater rivers.

Settlement foundation and improvement were both capital-intensive. Arguably, their implementation and success required either a burgeoning local economy or, at the very least, the prospect of future economic growth. Given the agrarian basis of the pre-Famine Irish economy, these conditions were likely to be most widely realised in the fertile eastern lowlands of mid-Ulster, the eastern Midlands and the river valleys of Leinster and east Munster. As Figure 3.2 demonstrates, however, not all nucleated settlements even in these relatively favoured areas showed evidence of improvement by *ca.* 1845, and this is an apt reminder that urban or village foundation and improvement was a function not simply of *opportunity* but also of *intent.*

The data in Figure 3.2 represent the improved towns and villages as a percentage of all nucleated settlements *ca.* 1845. The latter have been defined as all named settlement clusters possessing at least one non-residential economic, state or religious function, together with all un-named clusters possessing at least *two* of these. These criteria identified an additional 1,600 small village-type settlements over and above the 781 improved towns



3.2 Improved towns and villages as a percentage of all nucleated settlements ca. 1845.

and villages in the original data-set. While showing limited evidence of minimal first-order centrality, these additional settlements displayed no evidence of the sort of significant functional modernisation or morphological or planning formality used to define the improved towns and villages. Nevertheless, they were still distinguishable from the several hundred cabin clusters or *clachans* which dominated the more marginal rural landscapes of Counties Donegal, Galway, Mayo and Sligo. These clachans had no immediate English parallel. They consisted of irregular clusters of small cottages or cabins inhabited by one or more related kin-groups, who frequently shared joint tenancies and practised some form of co-operative agriculture. Their origins have been the subject of considerable debate. One interpretation sees their growth as a function of the rapid rise in Ireland's population growth after *ca.* 1750, and their demise as the consequence of the halving of the country's population in the fifty years after the Famine. Consequently they have been regarded by some commentators as an essentially ephemeral feature of Ireland's cultural landscape. They were excluded from the present calculation partly for this reason but also because of their characteristic lack of non-residential functions (Turner, 1993).

By *ca.* 1845 improved towns and villages thus constituted rather less than 33 per cent of all nucleated settlements - roughly one in three. However, the proportionate incidence of improvement varied widely in different regions. Figure 3.2 indicates that it was highest - affecting between 51 and 67 per cent of all nucleated settlement - in some of the areas which experienced the densest seventeenth-century colonisation: Antrim, Down, Armagh and Fermanagh in east and south Ulster, and Counties Offaly and Leix in the East Midlands. Secondary concentrations occurred in other areas which also experienced extensive seventeenth-century plantation, such as Londonderry, but also in areas of extensive medieval colonisation further to the south, including Counties Meath, Tipperary and Limerick. Clearly, the inherited morphological legacies from these earlier periods exerted a significant influence here, but it was not all pervasive. Improved towns and villages were relatively important in County

Mayo, which was neither heavily colonised in the medieval period nor during the seventeenth century, while the proportionate incidence of improvement was relatively low - between 14.5 and 28 per cent - in other areas where significant concentrations of nucleated medieval settlement had occurred, including Louth, Kilkenny and east Cork.

The distribution of these inherited morphological legacies is dealt with at length below. It is sufficient to note here that however important their influence was regionally, they nevertheless constituted only one of the factors determining the relative distribution of improved towns and villages *ca.* 1845. This was not least because not all medieval towns and villages *themselves* showed evidence of formal planning. Many, such as Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim or Dingle, Co. Kerry did, but others such as Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow or Ballymore Eustace, Co. Kildare were irregular in both plan and plot pattern. Thus other factors were also important in determining the relative extent of urban improvement. These included social trends specific to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which led to the creation of nucleated settlements by institutions and for reasons which lay beyond the ambit of those social groups conventionally identified with urban and village improvement. The most widespread example of this were the so-called "chapel villages" referred to earlier. These, Whelan argues, grew up around the numerous new Catholic chapels founded in Ireland from the early nineteenth century onwards as part of the Tridentine Reformation of the Catholic Church (Whelan, 1983). Characterised by a complete absence of formality but by the presence of a chapel and frequently a National School as well as a public house and shop, these constituted the largest single additional category of nucleated settlement identified here. Significantly, much of their area of densest concentration - Counties Leitrim and Cavan on the Ulster border, but particularly Counties Wexford, Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork and Kerry in the far south - coincides with the areas depicted in Figure 3.2 as displaying what were among the lowest proportions of improvement, between 14.5 and 37 per cent. The implication is that by *ca.* 1845 and particularly in the far

south east, the revived structures of the Catholic Church encouraged the creation of small villages in sufficient numbers to outweigh the legacy of earlier urban and village improvement.

Regional variations in the valuation of improvement

The discussion so far has dealt with urban and village improvement in terms of its straightforward incidence, but it is useful to qualify this in terms of the variations in these places' rateable value, and relate this in turn to contemporary agrarian and demographic contexts. The Griffith's Valuation figures provide a useful surrogate index of the relative size and, more approximately, economic vitality of the improved towns and villages. Given the agricultural basis of much of Ireland's economy during the period and the rapidly accelerating growth in population after *ca.* 1750, the variations in these figures are likely to be better understood when related to the regional diversity in Ireland's agricultural land resources and in its pre-Famine population growth. However, the significance of these last factors itself varies. Whereas, given the environmental controls discussed

Table 3.1
Improved towns and villages: Griffith's Valuation breakdown by value category

Value (£)	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*
<500	416	5,001<6,000	8
501<1,000	131	6,001<7,000	12
1,001<2,000	83	7,001<8,000	1
2,001<3,000	35	8,001<9,000	3
3,001<4,000	26	9,001<10,000	3
4,001<5,000	11	10,001<27,000	13

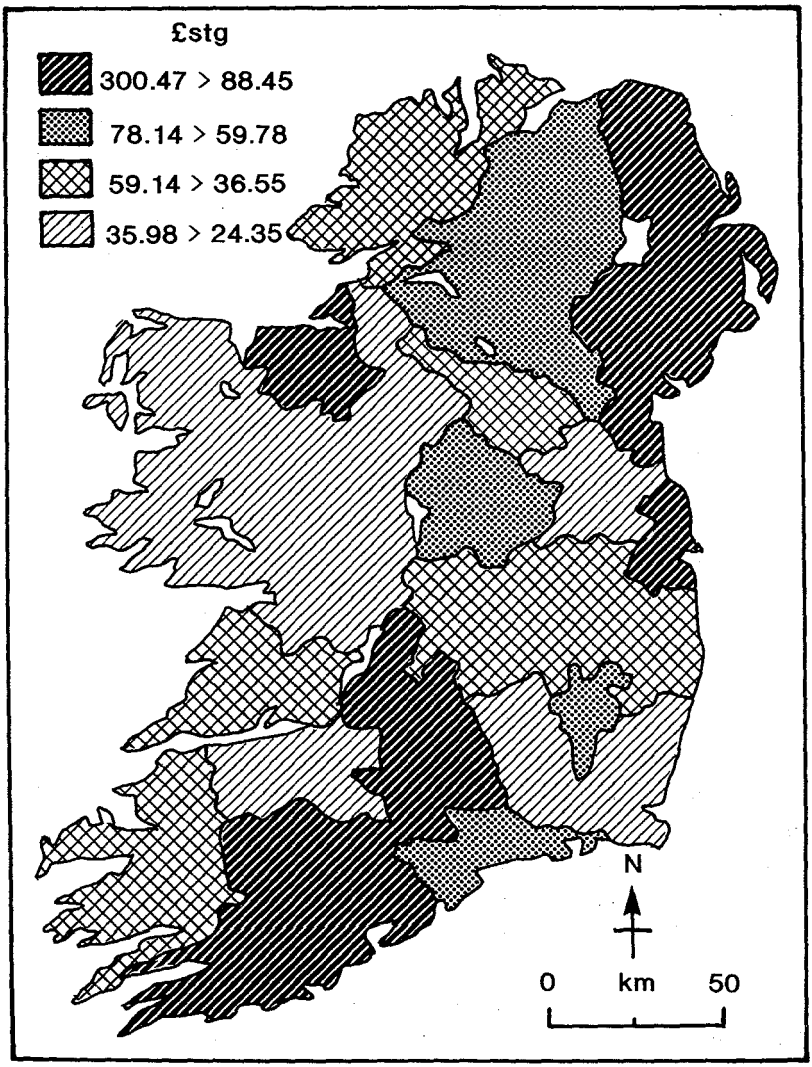
Total: 742

earlier, we would expect a strong positive relationship between the aggregate improved town and village valuations and the

extent of agricultural land, a high ratio value for the 1841 population may well indicate the presence of an economically damaging surplus population of marginal productivity.

Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of the size distribution of the Griffith's Valuation for the 742 towns and villages in the data-set for which this can be separately identified. The overall distribution is steeply pyramidal with a very broad base: 547 settlements - 70 per cent of the total - were valued at £1,000 or less, while only 42, just over 5 per cent, were valued at £5,000 or more. Given this skewed distribution, the average Griffith's valuation, £1,304, does little more than identify the 165 most highly-valued towns. This pattern is very similar to the one identified in the Irish urban hierarchy by earlier analyses using the Hearth Tax Returns of 1798 - 1800 (Clarkson, 1978). Although concerned only with the one hundred or so largest settlements at the time, including Dublin and the four major regional centres specifically excluded from the present analysis, this earlier work identified precisely the same broad basal strata of relatively small and, presumably, functionally simple towns, which were of a totally different and lower order of magnitude to the settlements in the upper part of the hierarchy. The pattern is reminiscent of Carter's concept of a 'primate urban hierarchy', which he argues developed under mature political systems in advanced economies, where "the prime urban role [was] service for a countryside where the activities [were] agricultural and evenly spread rather than industrial and a consequence of point production" (Carter, 1983, pp. 105-7). These factors applied to eighteenth-century Ireland, and the implication is that despite the growth of urban-based industrial production thereafter, particularly in Ulster, the underlying economic structures supporting urban and village improvement during the early nineteenth-century remained overwhelmingly agrarian-based.

In the light of these conclusions, the regional distribution of the total Griffith's valuations and their relationship with the agrarian and demographic contexts described above takes on an added significance. Figure 3.3 depicts the total Griffith's Valuation



3.3 Total Griffith's valuation for improved towns and villages per 1,000 cultivated statute acres (by county).

for the improved towns and villages in each county per 1,000 cultivated acres. It measures the extent to which the agricultural base in different regions proved capable of supporting urban and village improvement as this had been pursued by the mid-nineteenth century. By representing this in terms of the improved valuation rather than simply in terms of the total number of improved settlements, we can weight the distribution according to the size and value of the improved settlements, and thus highlight those districts where the agricultural base supported the most extensive and valuable improvement.

Although Figure 3.3 depicts a north-east - south-west distribution which is roughly consonant with those in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, there are significant differences. Sligo, Louth, Dublin, Tipperary and Cork all emerge for the first time as counties of relatively intensive improvement when this is assessed in terms of the size of the supporting agricultural base. In three of these, Sligo, Cork and Tipperary, the high ratio values are likely to have reflected the incorporation of much of these counties within the hinterlands of the major regional ports of Cork city, Sligo and Waterford. In Counties Louth and Dublin, on the other hand, the number of improved settlements was low in both absolute and relative terms, and the high ratios are likely to have been a more exclusive reflection of the high valuations of individual settlements such as Dundalk, as well as, in County Dublin, of the beneficial consequences for smaller settlements of their proximity to the national capital.

The remaining high-value counties, Antrim, Armagh and Down, were all located in east Ulster. Here, the long-established presence of rural small-town linen production and the profits to be derived from this, helps explain both the high incidence of improvement (Figure 3.2) and the high average valuations of the improved settlements. This was the area, *par excellence*, where the proto-industrialisation of the rural economy had led to a broadening in social access to wealth with the emergence of petty capitalists (Cohen, 1997, forthcoming). Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century, some of the region's most significant

improved towns, for example Ballymena, Co. Antrim and Lurgan, Co. Armagh, were sharing in the general shift to factory-based textile production, and this enhanced their rate of growth (Clarkson, 1985). By contrast, in mid-Ulster the rateable valuations per 1,000 acres were consistently lower, perhaps reflecting the same gradual shift in the province's economic centre of gravity towards the east in general and the greater Belfast area in particular, as the processes of factory-based industrialisation concentrated increasingly in these districts to the detriment of the earlier patterns of rural small-town linen production further west.

Ulster apart, relatively high rateable valuations per 1,000 acres, suggesting a particularly strong link between the local agricultural economy and the extent of settlement improvement, were to be found only in the adjacent Midland counties of Longford and Westmeath and in County Waterford on the south Leinster coast. In the latter, the fertile and long-settled eastern lowlands formed an important and productive part of Waterford city's hinterland, while the growth of functionally-specialist centres such as the cotton factory village of Portlaw and the seaside resort of Tramore reflected newer forms of wealth generation in the area.

Elsewhere, the lowest aggregate valuations per 1,000 acres occurred in three broad zones: in the far west, from County Donegal in the north-west, south through Counties Sligo, Mayo, Galway and Roscommon in Connacht, to Limerick and Kerry in the south-west; in the Ulster border counties of Cavan and Meath; and in south-east Leinster in Kilkenny and Wexford. All of these counties recorded relatively large amounts of cultivable land (everywhere above 400,000 acres), and with the exception of Cavan and Meath, a relatively low incidence of improved settlement. Given the more marginal environments in the west and the known prevalence there of less-commercially oriented systems of agriculture prior to the Famine, we may reasonably infer that the low valuations mirrored regionally-specific disincentives to widespread settlement improvement, which found expression both in the small number and low value of those

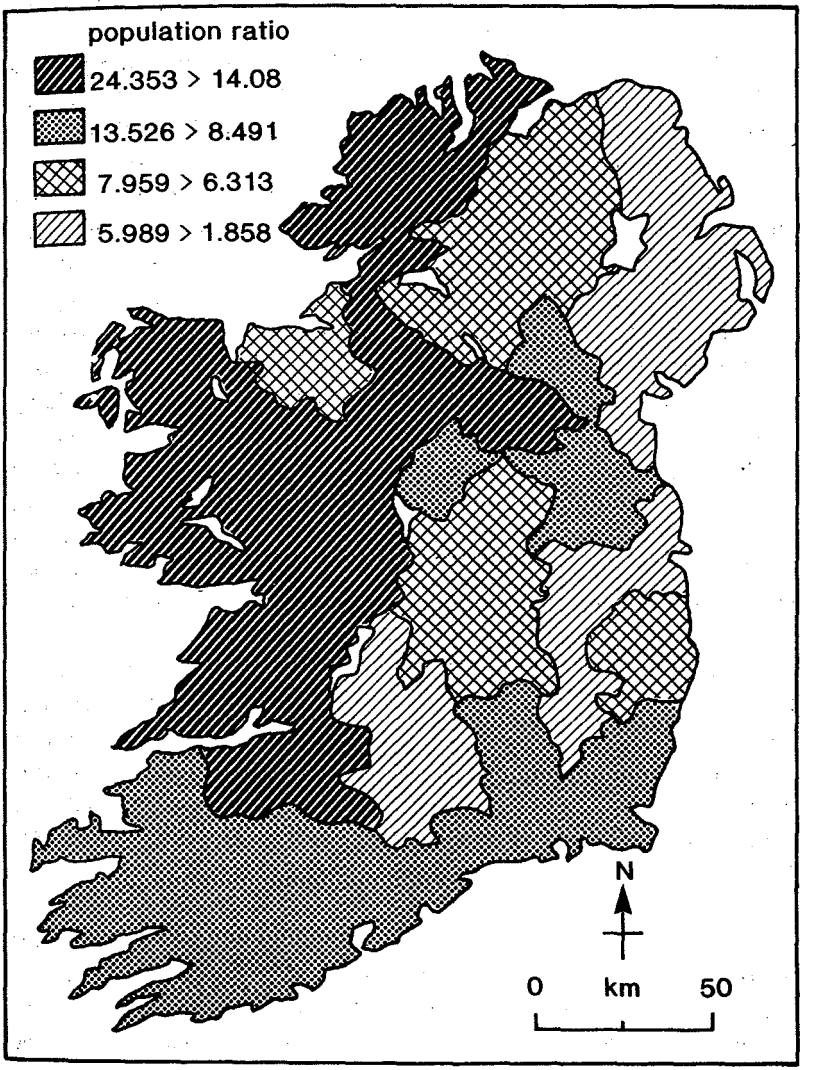
modernised settlements which did exist. Paradoxically, some of the smallest of these were among the most extensively and formally transformed settlements in the country, for example Eyrecourt and Mount Bellew, Co. Galway.

In Cavan and parts of north-west Meath, the effect of environmental constraints on the size and value of improved settlements was likely to have been even more immediate. Here, the ill-drained and heavily-dissected topography of the drumlin-belt formed a historically-significant boundary between Ulster to the north and Leinster to the south. It is reasonable to infer that the difficulties in exploiting even the limited agricultural potential of this region placed severe constraints on the potential for marketing-led settlement improvement, even where landlords and tenants were willing to engage in this. In Wexford and Kilkenny in the far south-east, the low aggregate valuation ratios are likely simply to have mirrored the generally low overall incidence of improved settlement (Figure 3.1) and the absence of any highly valued individual towns. Immediately to the north, in Kildare, Leix and Offaly, the situation was different. These were counties which recorded some of the highest absolute and relative incidences of improvement (over half of all nucleated settlement), yet were in the third lowest quartile as far as the ratio values were concerned. The implication is clear. Although relatively numerous in aggregate, the improved towns and villages in these counties were not individually highly valued by the nineteenth-century assessors. Given that these were also areas of relatively extensive medieval and seventeenth-century settlement foundation, it seems probable that one consequence of this had been the creation of a more or less uniform network of similarly-sized, small but relatively formal agricultural centres, none of which developed a regionally-dominant role during the ensuing 150 years.

In overall terms, therefore, the mid-nineteenth century relationship between the aggregate rateable value of improved settlements and the distribution of agricultural land was characterised by pronounced regional diversity which only partly

mirrored the broad north-east - south-west "axis of settlement improvement" identified in Figure 3.1. When assessed in these terms, the most valuable clusters of improved settlements appear to have been located either in the one area, eastern Ulster, where an admittedly rapidly restructuring textile industry continued to provide significant 'added value' to agricultural production, or in the hinterlands of the major southern ports. All of these but particularly Cork, acted as foci for regionally-based redistributive trade networks within the increasingly well-integrated national economy. The distribution of the lowest ratio values, and therefore the least valuable improved settlement superstructures, is less susceptible to such straightforward explanation, but in the west at least seems to have been a function of environmental and agricultural marginality.

If the relationship between the aggregate value of improved settlement and the distribution of agricultural land can be used as a surrogate index of the 'success' of the pre-Famine Irish economy in supporting urban and village improvement, then it is important to realise that this measures only one aspect of what was a complex nexus of factors influencing settlement transformation. Population growth was another. Figure 3.4 depicts the regional variation in a ratio index which links the Griffith's valuations to the number of people recorded by the 1841 census. The ratio figures represent the number of people recorded in that census per pound sterling of the aggregate Griffith's valuation for the improved towns and villages in each county. In effect, the map shows the regional variation in the numbers of people 'supported' by the improved settlements at what was very nearly the peak of pre-Famine population growth. The comparison with Figure 3.3 is illuminating. Save for a belt of eastern Midland counties extending from Wicklow on the coast through Kildare, Westmeath, Offaly and Leix, the distributions in the two figures are virtually the mirror image of each other. Counties which recorded high improved valuation ratios assessed on the basis of the agricultural area recorded low unit population densities and *vice versa*.



3.4 Ratio of 1841 population to Griffith's valuation for improved towns and villages (by county).

This polarity was most pronounced in Ulster, Connacht and north-west Munster. In the peripheral western counties of the Atlantic margin, and to a lesser extent in south Munster and Leinster and in the Ulster borderlands, the for the most part relatively limited and relatively less valuable network of improved towns and villages had to serve a grossly inflated population. This population growth was a relatively late phenomenon and these very high densities appear to have been characteristic only of the period after *ca.* 1800 (O'Grada, 1994). Accordingly, we may conjecture that whatever the earlier impetus towards urban and village improvement in these areas, by the early nineteenth-century this had been swamped by a rising tide of an under-employed, marginally productive and increasingly pauperised peasantry, who arguably contributed little or nothing to the long-term economic growth of the region. For example, at Dingle, Co. Kerry, the substantial "respectable" houses lining the main thoroughfares had become "neglected and ...the abodes of the lowest classes" by 1844, when the town at large was described as "far from being prosperous... it even exhibits irksome marks of declension, and occasionally of squalid misery" (*Parliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, iv, p. 21). Similarly, in the same year at Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, the "well-edificed" main street gave way almost immediately to rows of paupers' cabins, while the town's "real prosperity" was described as having suffered irreparable harm as a result of the closure of the military barracks which was once its *raison d'etre* (*Parliamentary Gazetteer,* 1846, i, pp. 144-5).

In Ulster the situation was very different. In the economic heartland in the east of the province, a relatively valuable improved urban and village network had to support the lowest numbers of people in 1841, a situation which also characterised counties Louth and Dublin to the south. In the mid-Ulster counties of Derry, Tyrone and Armagh, the same general condition also applied albeit in a less extreme fashion. In these areas the implication would seem to be that by the mid-nineteenth century, a better balance existed between the size and productive capacity

of the improved settlement network, as this was reflected in its mid-century valuation, and the regional population.

Thus in contrast to Connacht, there is no evidence of the existence of an excessive population to be 'carried' by the regional agrarian economy as it was articulated through the improved marketing network. Contemporary accounts emphasized the neatness and prosperity of many Ulster towns. For example, in 1837 in Co. Down, Donaghadee was described by the Ordnance surveyors as "airy and salubrious [in] appearance....The houses are very good. The majority of them are slated and present a neat and cleanly appearance". Nearby Newtownards was described in the same survey as "gradually improving in both appearance and size", a circumstance ascribed to the encouragement given by the landlord, the Marquis of Londonderry, to his tenants to build substantial freestone houses on generous sixty year leases (Day and McWilliams, 1991, pp. 46-8,105-7). Hence once again in contrast to the western districts, in east Ulster in particular, we may reasonably expect to find such instances of urban and village improvement in the early nineteenth century, as landlords and major tenants alike sought to profit from the opportunities for investment created within the rapidly industrialising economy.

In Kildare, Offaly and Leix on the other hand, similarly low aggregate population ratios were recorded for an improved settlement network which has already been shown to have been comprised of relatively numerous but individually small places. Here, it seems, in a relatively fertile but more purely agricultural region, a similar balance had been struck between population, economic growth and settlement development, but on a more modest scale. For example Monastereven, Co. Kildare, prospered considerably from its position on the newly completed Grand Canal in the 1790s, but by 1844 still only possessed "a trivial importance to what its highly advantageous position entitles it and might easily enable it to acquire". Despite the construction of several docks, warehouses and other appliances of commercial exchange", and the townspeople's "taste for urban improvement", the town remained small, its prospects for growth stunted by the

eclipse of Irish canals by the growth of Ireland's railways in the later 1840s and after (*Parliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, vii, p. 792).

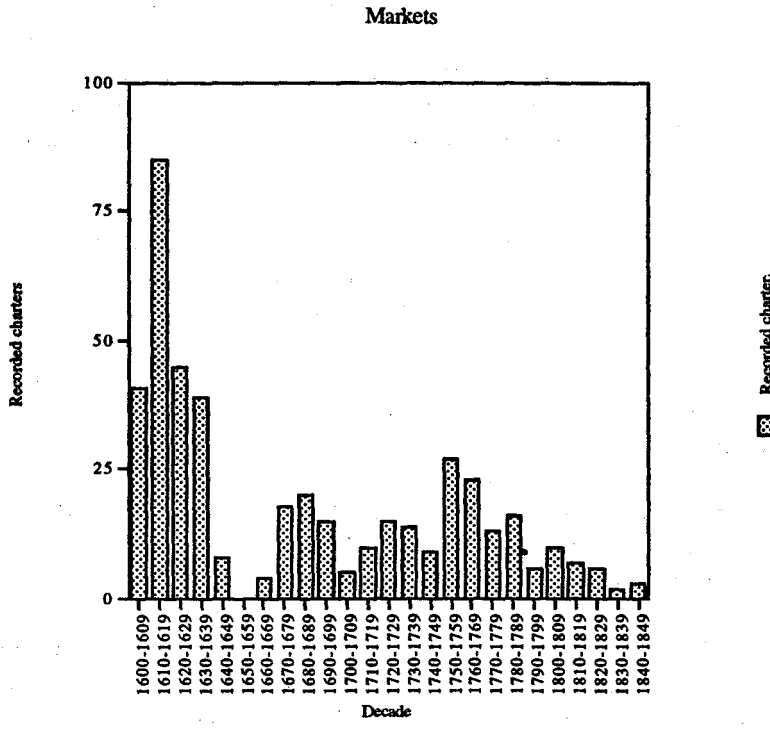


Figure 3.5
Decennial distribution of fair and market charters recorded for improved settlements, 1600-1849

The chronology of improvement

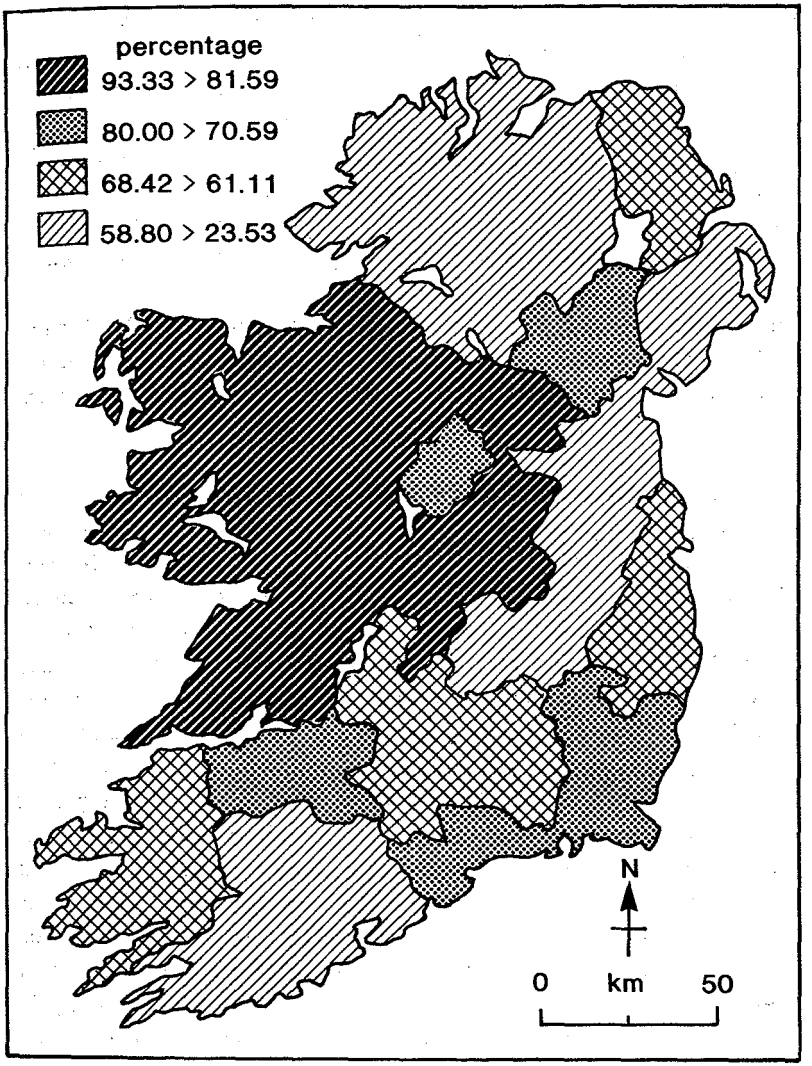
The discussion so far has dealt with the overall regional geography of urban and village improvement, but the point has already been made that one-third of the data-set are known to have been of either medieval or Plantation foundation. In most

cases it is difficult to date a settlement's foundation or refoundation to a given year, although where towns and villages formed part of large and well-documented estates, it is sometimes possible to do this from the later eighteenth century onwards. Accordingly, for many of these settlements we have to rely on indirect evidence such as that contained in the *Report of the Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the State of the Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, published in 1853, to indicate probable periods of foundation or improvement. Figure 3.5 indicates the decennial distribution of the 441 fair and market charters listed in this report for the improved towns and villages in the morphological data-set. These were licenses, granted by the crown in response to an application from a town's seigneur or landlord, which gave the community the right to hold a specific number of annual fairs or weekly or monthly markets (O'Flanagan, 1983). Many smaller towns, particularly in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only ever received one charter, but some medieval towns had their original charters replaced on various occasions during the seventeenth century. Figure 3.5 includes all of these, and this explains the discrepancy between the number of improved towns of pre-1700 origin (260) and the number of seventeenth-century charters (275). By far the greater number of the latter, 210, were obtained between 1600 and 1639, presumably as part of the plantation process. The troubled decades of the 1640s and 1650s (following the 1641 rebellion) were marked by a complete collapse in charter acquisitions, while the rather more settled years between the Restoration and the Williamite wars saw a limited increase. By contrast, the 166 which were granted between 1600 and 1849 were more evenly distributed, though they too peaked during the 1750s and 1760s, before falling away markedly by the immediate pre-Famine years.

Analysis of these patterns requires care. It is important to remember that the acquisition of these charters merely signified the *intention* to endow a settlement with a market or fair, they do not in themselves prove that this ever actually occurred. Moreover, even where markets and fairs were established or re-

established, we cannot assume that these were necessarily associated with extensive rebuilding, even of the market square or market house itself. That said, the congruity between the major events of the seventeenth century - the Plantations, the 1641 rebellion, the Restoration settlement and the Williamite wars - and the incidence of charter acquisition is striking. It suggests that it is reasonable to accept the variation in the number of charters as indicative of periods when, at the very least, relative political and economic stability encouraged the *impetus* towards improvement as evidenced by the extension of the formal market network (Crawford, 1990). On this basis, the post-1700 pattern could be interpreted as reflecting first, the uncertainties of the early years of the eighteenth century, when the threat of Jacobite invasion loomed large and caused widespread uncertainty in the land market; second, the growing prosperity of the mid-eighteenth century; and finally, the increasing political uncertainty and disruption of the 1790s together with the worsening regional imbalance between resources and population growth in the immediate pre-Famine decades. It should be remembered, however, that the 166 charters granted after 1700 represent barely one-third (32 per cent) of the improved settlements identified from this period, which indicates that *formal* market provision of this sort was not an invariable concommittant of improvement. One possible reason for this is suggested by the Griffith's valuations for each group: post-1700 settlements endowed with charters were assessed on average at nearly twice the level (£622) as those without (£342). The implication is that eighteenth-century patrons were only prepared to bear the costs of obtaining a charter if the prospects for future economic growth looked reasonable.

Not all parts of Ireland offered this potential in equal measure, and Figure 3.6 attempts to identify the main regions of urban and village improvement in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It portrays the distribution of these later improved settlements as a percentage of the total number of improved towns and villages in each county. Two points should be noted. First, the high percentage incidence of post-Plantation



3.6 Improved towns and villages of probable post-1700 foundation as a percentage of the total number of improved settlements (by county).

foundations represented by all four quartiles; and second, the pronounced western bias in the distribution of the highest quartile, and the location of the lowest-scoring counties in Ulster, Leinster and south-east Munster. These patterns are consonant with the known geography and character of medieval, Tudor and Plantation settlement in Ireland. The two lowest quartiles, in which post-1700 foundations account for between 23 and 68 per cent of all improved settlement, neatly highlight some of the areas of most intensive medieval and - particularly - seventeenth-century colonisation. Thus Counties Donegal, Tyrone, Londonderry, Fermanagh and Down in Ulster together with Louth, Meath, Kildare and Leix in Leinster and Cork in Munster, all figure in the lowest quartile, while similarly colonised counties such as Down, Dublin, Kilkenny and Limerick occur in the next lowest.

The consonance between the extent of pre-1700 settlement and low percentage scores in Figure 3.6 is not of course absolute. Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford and Limerick were all areas of substantial medieval colonisation but also experienced proportionately extensive eighteenth-century settlement foundation or refoundation. Armagh was one of the escheated counties included within the formal Ulster Plantation, yet it too experienced relatively widespread settlement foundation or replanning after 1700. These anomalies are susceptible to a variety of explanations. In Armagh, where the 27 improved settlements placed the county in the highest quartile for the percentage incidence of improvement (Figure 3.2), the ethos of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century improvement clearly ran deep and arguably either transformed or replaced a significant number of earlier settlements some of whose origins have now been lost. Thus villages such as Charlemont, Loughgall, Mountnorris and Tanderagee all had origins in the seventeenth-century Plantations - if not earlier - but were all subsequently transformed to a greater or lesser extent by eighteenth and nineteenth-century improvers (Day and McWilliams, 1990, pp. 1-12). In Counties Waterford and Wexford, on the other hand, much of the earlier colonial settlement remained outside the ambit of eighteenth-century 'improvement' (Figure 3.2).

The same was also true of many of the counties in Connacht and the western Midlands which recorded the highest percentages of probable post-1700 foundations among their improved settlements. Although this proportion could run as high as 93 per cent, as a proportion of the *total nucleated* settlement, the improved settlements were themselves relatively limited. With the exception of County Offaly, their incidence varied between 14 and 50 per cent of the total settlement in each county. We may

Table 3.2
Proportionate breakdown of pre- and post-1700 foundation subsets by Poor Law Valuation and number of functions

Valuation	*Pre-1700 (N=251)**		*Post-1700 (N=493)**	
	No.	%	No.	%
<£500	76	30.3	340	69.0
£501-1,000	43	17.1	88	17.8
£1,001-5,000	96	38.3	61	12.4
>£5,001	36	14.3	4	0.8
Mean valuation	£2,481		£590	
Standard deviation	(3,660)		(985)	
Average number of functions	16.2		6.0	
Standard deviation	(3.1)		(2.3)	

*Figures for improved settlements with Poor Law Valuations only.

reasonably conclude, therefore, that while in much of Connacht and the surrounding regions settlement improvement was essentially a post-1700 phenomenon, by *ca.* 1845 it had failed to transform the vast majority of the nucleated settlements in these areas. Arguably, given their small size and irregular form, the latter may themselves best be interpreted as an informal and opportunistic response on the part of rapidly expanding local communities to the growing population pressure on land resources.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 demonstrate that these spatial patterns were not the only aggregate characteristic of the later improved settlements. Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of the Poor Law valuations by period of foundation for the 743 improved settlements for which valuation figures are available. Table 3.3 compares the percentage frequency of selected morphological and functional traits in the pre- and post-1700 subsets. Table 3.2 indicates that the valuation profiles of the two subsets differed significantly. While the post-1700 foundations reflected the skewed distribution of the original Griffith's data, the earlier group contained a much higher proportion of more highly-rated towns. Accordingly, both the average valuation and the variation around the mean were markedly lower for the later foundations, which were also, on average, functionally simpler. Table 3.3 explores these functional differences together with some of the morphological traits exhibited by each group in greater detail. With the single exhibition of the 'total planning formality' variable which is marginally more frequent in the later group, the incidence of all of these traits is higher in the earlier group, significantly so in the case of regular property plots, courts, market houses, agricultural industry, jails, barracks and churches.

The import of these tables is clear enough. Towns and villages founded, refounded or improved during the eighteenth and eary nineteenth centuries tended to be smaller, with a less valuable property base and a lower incidence of high-order economic, religious and administrative functions than those established during the medieval or Plantation periods. Arguably, they represented a process of 'infilling', whereby areas which had been more or less peripheral to earlier phases of urbanisation were subject to relatively extensive urban and village foundation or improvement. The implication is clear. The medieval and Plantation periods created the framework of urbanism in Ireland, and accounted for virtually all of the nationally and regionally significant centres. The widespread settlement foundation and remodelling which occurred in the eighteenth century represented the 'fine-tuning' of this system in response to the rapidly

expanding commercial economy and in the face of the rapid and regionally diverse growth in population. This fine-tuning differed in its effects. In parts of the west in particular, it is possible that

Table 3.3
Comparative percentage frequency of selected morphological and functional traits in settlements of probable pre- and post-1700 foundation/refoundation

Trait	*% Frequency in pre-1700 subset (N=253)**	*% Frequency in post-1700 subset (N=526)**
Total planning formality	20.0	23.3
Triad landscape features	34.0	33.0
Regular plots	81.8	65.6
Courts	34.0	11.0
Fairs	22.5	19.0
Market houses	34.8	15.4
Agricultural industry	71.9	53.9
Jails	26.4	4.7
Barracks	62.4	54.8
Anglican church	86.6	59.2
Catholic chapel	70.8	58.4

*Figures for all improved settlements.

by the 1840s, what had been relatively late and individually limited urban improvement was in danger of being swamped by a rapidly growing and increasingly impoverished peasant population of limited marginal productivity. In Ulster, textile-led structural changes in the rural economy created a broader and more socially-accessible pattern of wealth seems to have encouraged urban and village growth, which built on already extensive Plantation legacies. The legacy of the past was important elsewhere too, particularly in the East Midlands and

Cork. But everywhere, the question remains, however, of who led these modernising transformations and who gained most from them.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND IMPROVEMENT

The discussion in the last chapter has demonstrated that considerable regional diversity existed in the origin, incidence and value of urban and village improvement in Ireland by the mid-nineteenth century. It has already been noted in Chapter 1 that with few exceptions, (e.g. Cullen, 1981; Jones-Hughes, 1986), most previous studies have failed to detect and explore this diversity. Arguably, their failure has encouraged the promulgation of the 'landlord as arbiter' stereotype. In the absence of any clear idea of the variation in the nature and extent of urban and village improvement, it has been dangerously easy to assume that the role played by landlords in promoting improvement in the relatively limited number of places which have been closely studied, was typical of the actions of the class as a whole throughout Ireland. In the light of the differences which have now been shown to exist in the nature and extent of improvement, this assumption can no longer be made. Instead, the question to be addressed is what did this diversity signify? Did it merely reflect the varied opportunities for improvement which faced landlords, to which they responded in the conventionally ascribed manner, or did it signify something more, the active involvement of other social groups, whose different agendas encouraged the creation of a variety of urban and village environments? What, in short, were the property relationships mediated through these widespread but individually varied processes of improvement in Irish towns and villages? And if we envisage these places as the locally-distinctive "nodalities" where the "distinctive characteristics and contradictions" of the prevailing social formations were worked out, how did this occur?

These issues are difficult to resolve, and this chapter addresses them from two perspectives. First, it seeks to establish whether any aggregate relationships existed between the nature

and extent of improvement and patterns of property ownership in the improved towns and villages, which might support the idea of unilateral landlord involvement as the major determinant of improvement. If, for example, unequivocal evidence can be found to indicate that in the period after *ca.* 1700, ultra-formal planned foundations were characterised by the retention of most of their property by their main lessor, this would argue for a close degree of tenurial control which, at the very least, would make such coherent planning unlikely without the lessor's immediate involvement. In these places, the opportunities for even substantial occupying tenants to build up a sufficiently strong portfolio of (rented) properties to permit them to determine the timing, scale and pace of change on such an all-inclusive scale would be remote. The implication, therefore, is that the all-pervasive spatial formality of these places reflected their main lessor's ability - as landlord - to impose his own coherent vision on the entire planning project.

Such instances of ultra-formal planning or replanning have already been noted as comprising only part of the spectrum of urban and village improvement (above, Chapter 2). It is worth re-emphasising that only 174 - or just over one-fifth - of the 781 improved settlements displayed the complete formality of plan which is argued here to have been the ultimate statement of unitary interventionist planning. Moreover, if the influence of the planning legacies of the pre-1700 period is removed, this total reduces still further to 123, or approximately 16 per cent. In terms of the conventional model which stresses the primacy of landlord involvement, places where the pattern of property ownership and tenurial control had become dissipated among numerous competing landlords, or where substantial bourgeois tenant interests had developed, should not be characterised by such all-pervasive planning coherence. Instead, if the fracturing of landlord interests indicates the relative *in*ability of any one individual or group to determine the overall scale and nature of improvement, these places should show greater morphological and planning irregularity, although still with some evidence of incremental improvement.

If a consistent pattern of coincidence can be identified between property monopolies and ultra-formal planning, it would go some way to support the conventional view that landlord involvement was essential for extensive urban and village improvement. If, on the other hand, landlord-dominated towns do *not* offer evidence for uniquely-extensive formal planning, or if such formalism is associated as much with fractured patterns of property ownership as with property monopolies, then by implication, ultra-formal planning or replanning need not be conceived of as the inevitable preserve of a locally-dominant landlord family. Either non-economic factors acted to constrain the extent to which wealthy landlords were prepared to invest in this type of improvement, or else their involvement was mediated through the agency of other - presumably tenant - groups.

In either case, the property relations inherent in the mechanisms used to promote improvement, as well as the motivations of the different parties involved and the symbolism inherent in their actions, are important in helping determine how urban and village improvement reflected the "distinctive characteristics and contradictions" of Irish society at the time. Accordingly, the second part of this chapter uses evidence derived from various case studies to explore, in the light of the aggregate analysis, the motivations and mechanisms which were involved in improvement.

Aggregate patterns

Table 4.1 establishes the overall property contexts for the analysis of the landlords' aggregate role in improvement. The table lists a series of correlation coefficients used to determine the strength and nature of the relationship between the total Griffith's assessment for individual towns and villages, and the size of the aristocratic and gentry holdings within them. The latter are assessed in relative and absolute terms for both the main lessor

Table 4.1
Sample Griffith's Valuation Spearman Rank correlations

Total town/village Griffith's Valuation with:-	*Coefficient*	*Confidence Level*
Aggregate aristocratic/gentry (AG) valuation	+0.93	99 per cent
AG valuation as a % of the total valuation	-0.77	99 per cent
Main AG lessor valuation.	+0.82	99 per cent
Main AG lessor val. as % total valuation.	-0.68	99 per cent
Total number of AG lessors	+0.58	99 per cent
Total number of settlement functions	+0.66	99 per cent

Random sample size: 30.

and for the aristocratic/gentry lessors as a whole. The relationship with the number of settlement functions is also shown.

The message of these tests is clear. As the total assessed value of the improved towns and villages increased, so the aggregate value of the property held in them by aristocratic/gentry lessors rose, as did the value of the holding of the largest individual aristocratic/gentry lessor. Conversely, the *proportion* of the overall Griffith's Valuation held both by the

aristocratic/gentry lessors as a group and by the main lessor among them *fell*. The total number of aristocratic/ gentry lessors and the number of functions also increased as the total valuation rose, albeit rather less strongly. Some of these relationships merely confirm what the discussion in Chapter 3 has already shown. Thus the variation in the total Griffith's Valuation may be seen once again as a reasonably accurate index of the relative social and functional complexity of improved towns and villages in mid-nineteenth century Ireland. More highly-rated towns, with all their connotations of relative antiquity and regional selectivity, had not only developed a relatively large and complex functional role within the economy, but also supported relatively large and diverse property-owning elites - at least as defined here.

Other aspects of these relationships are of more interest. In particular, the strong negative correlation between the proportionate value of the main aristocratic/gentry lessor's holding and the overall Griffith's Valuation suggests that *monopolistic* property ownership - the condition which arguably might have provided the best opportunity for extensive formal replanning - was more likely to be found among the less highly-rated - i.e. smaller - settlements than among the larger, functionally most complex towns. Yet the *absolute* value of aristocratic and gentry property was much higher in the latter than the former. Thus the monopolistic property contexts which might be expected to have facilitated the most extensive transformations seem to have been associated with settlements where the value of the property base was lowest. In existing towns and villages, this could be argued to have militated against large-scale capital-intensive replanning. Where towns were entirely new foundations, it suggests that they were relatively unsuccessful, in economic terms at least. In the larger and more complex higher-rated towns, on the other hand, where the absolute level of urban property-based wealth available to aristocratic and gentry lessors was greater, the *opportunity* to use this wealth unilaterally was more likely to have been constrained by the presence of other competing property interests.

Table 4.2

Comparative percentage frequency of morphological and functional traits in selected property-defined subsets

Trait	*Overall data*	*Post-1700 foundations with >75% main lessor monopoly*	*Post-1700 foundations where main lessor owns >£400*
	%	%	%
Total planning formality	22.3	35.7	54.8
Triad landscape	33.5	50.0	48.4
Regular plots	70.8	69.0	90.3
Courts	18.7	2.4	32.2
Fairs	20.1	9.5	29.0
Market houses	21.6	9.5	29.0
Agricultural industry	59.8	28.6	77.4
Jails	11.8	0	22.6
Barracks	57.4	52.4	45.2
Anglican church	68.1	64.3	96.8
Catholic chapel	62.3	59.5	77.4
Number of cases	781	42	31

Our search for a possible link between monopolistic landlord property ownership - with its connotations of opportunities for

the unilateral use of tenurial authority - and the extent of improvement, has therefore to take into account the probability that the constraints on unilateral landlord intervention were fewest in places where the economic incentives for improvement were least. On the face of it, this would seem to suggest that, if anything, the structure of property ownership in Ireland after *ca.* 1700 militated *against* extensive urban improvement, but two qualifications need to be made. First, not all improvement was undertaken solely for economic reasons. The unfortunate Mr Jeffereys' "ludicrous and unmeaning gasconade" at Blarney, Co. Cork, in the 1760s has already been mentioned (Chapter 2), but in fact many improved towns and villages, such as Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow, Bryansford, Co. Down or Virginia, Co. Cavan, show similar evidence for investment in polite architectural forms which can have offered no conceivable economic return (Proudfoot, 1993b). Second, urban and village improvement was not necessarily funded out of the profits made from the towns and the villages in question. On the Duke of Devonshire's estates in Munster, for example, the £71,000 spent on improvements at Dungarvan and the £29,000 spent at Lismore between *ca.* 1793 and 1830, represented respectively 126 and 65 years' purchase at the prevailing rents in these towns (Proudfoot, 1995, 226). Clearly, these improvements were hardly self-funded.

It is important, therefore, to stress where the true significance of the landlord property monopolies lay. It was not that they necessarily represented the concentration of large rental *wealth* in the hands of an individual landlord, although obviously in some towns this might be so, but rather that they represented a concentration of *tenurial power* - the potential ability, if the landlord so chose, to intervene radically to alter the life and environs of an entire community. Thus the inverse relationship identified in Table 4.1 between absolute and relative aristocratic and gentry property values highlights what are in fact two rather different ways of assessing the relationship between the extent of improvement and patterns of property ownership. High *relative* values were evidence of tenurial opportunity for extensive reconstruction, which, if it occurred, may or may not have been

funded from within the settlements in question; high *absolute* values represented significant locally-generated income, which may in itself have provided a sufficient economic basis for landlord involvement, but was likely to be limited in its effects by the presence of competing landlord interests.

Table 4.2 attempts to ascertain whether either of these two measures of property ownership throw light on the conventional view of the primacy of the landlords' role in improvement. The table provides a comparative listing of the percentage incidence of selected morphological and functional traits in two data-subsets defined in terms of the late foundation (post 1700) of their towns and villages, and the presence of either a pronounced main lessor monopoly or a high level of main lessor wealth. The comparative figures for the overall data set are also given. By restricting the analysis to probable post-Plantation foundations, we can control for the influence of inherited morphological legacies from earlier periods and concentrate on the less highly-rated and functionally simpler improved towns and villages. Predictably, the towns and villages in the monopoly-defined subset were significantly less highly-rated than those defined by the presence of relatively valuable main lessor property portfolios, and recorded a mean valuation of £209 (standard deviation, £149) compared with £1,946 (standard deviation £1,480) for the latter.

The key morphological variable records the incidence of ultra formal planning ("total planning formality"). If direct landlord involvement was an essential precondition for the successful implementation of the sort of extensive and architecturally coherent replanning implied by this variable, if in short, the conventional model stressing the primacy of the landlord's role holds true, then we would predict that the incidence of ultra-formality would be uniquely high in the monopoly-defined subset. It was in these towns and villages where, after all, the tenurial opportunities to indulge in this form of far-reaching interventionist replanning were by definition the greatest and survived the longest. Similarly, we might predict that such untrammelled tenurial authority would also provide an

unrivalled opportunity for landlords to ensure that these towns and villages were equipped with whatever range of economic and other functions were thought appropriate to their vision for the future. We might thus expect the towns and villages in the monopoly-defined subset to be particularly well-endowed with the economic, administrative and religious functions identified in Chapter 2 as evidence of modernising improvement.

Table 4.2 demonstrates that this simply did not happen. Towns and villages founded in the eighteenth century or after, and where, by the mid-nineteenth century, one landlord still owned over three-quarters of the property, were significantly less well-endowed with modernising functions than the average, displayed marginally less evidence for regularly-laid out properties, and recorded ultra-formal planning among just over one-third of their number. Only the 'triad' variable, occurring in just over 50 per cent of the cases, suggests that the defining landlord property monopoly was reflected in an unusually high incidence of closely proximate demesnes and country houses. On this reading, tenurial opportunity as reflected by the survival of the bulk of the property in the hands of one family, was neither a sufficient precondition for transformative replanning of existing settlements, nor, in the case of 'greenfield' sites, necessarily encouraged coherent planning from the outset. On average, the major lessors in these settlements still owned over 87 per cent of the property by the mid-nineteenth century, and yet nearly two-thirds of the group showed no evidence by that date of the sort of coherent formal planning that the landlord's possession of such near total control over their property should have made possible. The most we can say is that the defining landlord-dominance of these settlements was often reflected in the presence nearby of the 'big house', but this may well have been because many of these places were no more than small villages, designed to house and service an estate work force.

We must conclude, therefore, that while a landlord property monopoly may have signalled the existence of opportunities for extensive transformative improvement or 'greenfield' planning,

other factors clearly determined the extent to which these opportunities were realised. The second subset identified in Table 4.2 suggests that one of these factors may simply have been the levels of available landlord wealth, but again, this is clearly only a partial answer. It has already been noted that, on average, the settlements in this second group were significantly more highly-rated by the Griffith's assessors than those defined by the existence of a property monopoly. Accordingly, we may reasonable assume that a greater proportion of these places were small market towns like Baillieborough, Co. Cavan, where Sir John Young owned £962 worth of property out of a total valuation of £1,714, or Boyle, Co. Roscommon, where Viscount Lorton owned £1,552 out of £2,911, rather than small villages. In other words, the subset appears to have identified settlements which had experienced at least modest success by the mid-nineteenth century.

Their success is reflected in Table 4.2. This indicates that with the anomalous exception of the police barracks variable, these towns recorded a significantly higher incidence of modernising functions than either those in the monopoly-defined subset or the overall data-set. More significantly still, over half the group - more than twice the overall incidence - were formally planned, while over 90 per cent recorded regularly ordered property plots and nearly half closely proximate demesnes. The implications are clear. By the 1840s, towns which had been founded or refounded in the eighteenth century and which had grown sufficiently to generate at least one urban estate worth at least £400, were more likely to have witnessed investment in formal planning than smaller settlements which, possibly as a result of their lack of growth, remained dominated by one family. Crucially, however, whereas the much lower incidence of ultra-formal planning among the smaller settlements of the latter group can hardly be conceived of as taking place without the involvement of their landlords, and begs the question of why it was not more extensive, the more frequent formal planning among the rather larger towns in the first-mentioned group took place largely in the *absence* of such monopolies. Accordingly, we

must assume that it involved a greater degree of participation among different tenurial groups - landlords and tenants - than the conventional 'landlord as arbiter' model would allow.

Nevertheless, over 45 per cent of the towns and villages in this group show no evidence for formal replanning, and this provides an apt reminder that neither method of measuring aggregate property ownership patterns has identified an unequivocal relationship between the extent of aristocratic and gentry property ownership and improvement. Several things follow from this. First, it is clear that tenurial monopolies in themselves meant little. They survived longest among the smallest improved settlements, and may well have been a sign of their relative failure. It is not difficult to see how a successful community might rapidly develop a complex tenurial structure characterised by widening social access to property-based wealth. By the same token, lack of growth might have inhibited investment in transformative improvement, especially where the motives for this were economic. Even where growth took place, however, and created a relatively wealthy aristocratic/gentry lessor community, there was no guarantee that significant investment in formal planning as opposed to functional improvement would follow. Where it did, it was likely to involve a wider range of individuals and groups than merely one major lessor.

All of which suggests that the role of aristocratic and gentry landlords in the business of urban and village improvement in Ireland requires reassessment. It seems clear that we must distinguish between the tenurial circumstances which made transformative improvement theoretically possible, and the economic and social circumstances which either inhibited or encouraged the realisation of this potential. Moreover, it is also evident that while extensive replanning and functional improvements were more likely to occur in places where either the potential for economic growth or existing property values were relatively high, participation in the improvement process frequently extended beyond the landlord class who were

particular beneficiaries of this wealth. Insofar as this was true, the property relations which were mediated through urban improvement, may well have mirrored the "conflicts and contradictions" inherent in contemporary Irish society. The question which now arises is how were these relations reflected in the motivations for improvement and the mechanisms by which this was carried out?

Motivations

Given the variation which has been identified in the nature and extent of urban and village improvement, and the circumstantial evidence for tenant participation, it is probable that the motivations for improvement were equally varied. At the very least, it seems reasonable to distinguish between the reasons which landlords and tenants may have had for facilitating or participating in improvement. As property-*owners* landlords arguably would have had longer-term perspectives than their tenants, whose conditional and determinable interest in the property they rented would have demanded, that they realise as much of its value as the terms of their lease allowed, within a much shorter period. Thus the pulse towards improvement is likely to have operated on a different time scale for each group, and this may well have conditioned the nature of the improvements each commissioned or carried out.

Previous research has suggested a variety of economic, political, aesthetic and social motives for active landlord promotion of urban and village foundation or improvement (Graham and Proudfoot, 1992; Proudfoot and Graham, 1993; Proudfoot, 1995). It seems likely, however, that all of these simply mirrored the landlords' concern to maintain their dominant economic, social and political position within Ireland. This has already been noted as originating in the Plantations and land confiscations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Chapter 1). Arguably, its continuation depended on the maintenance by landlords of their monopoly of landownership. A

frequently-quoted statistic suggests that by the 1790s, the 5,000 or so major landed families owned over three-quarters of all land in Ireland (Andrews, 1986, 237). In an agrarian economy such as Ireland's, this ensured that they effectively secured control of the major means of production. Anyone wishing to gain access to land to ensure their own existence could only do so through negotiation with the landowners, and it was from this that the latter's social and political authority derived.

The landlords' monopoly of the means of production meant little, however, if the value of agricultural production could not be realised, and this of course required an effective marketing system. It has already been stressed (Chapter 3) that by *ca.* 1700, Ireland's major marketing structures were already in place, having been created by medieval, Tudor and Plantation colonisation, and that the extension of this system in the eighteenth century represented its adjustment in the face of uneven and ultimately conflicting economic expansion and demographic growth. In these circumstances, it was not axiomatic that landlords could only realise the value of the agriculture on their estates through the active foundation of new markets: for many, the existing market network provided a perfectly adequate vehicle for exchange, irrespective of whether they were major property owners in it or not. Moreover, even where locally-inadequate marketing provision encouraged landlords to obtain a fair or market charter and establish a new market centre (Crawford, 1990), it was not necessary for these to be formally planned in order to succeed. Far more important was initial 'pump-priming' investment in the form of the provision of key marketing or production facilities, for it was these - as well as attractive leaseholds - which would encourage growth and tenant investment.

Numerous examples exist of this sort of landlord investment. At Edenderry, Co. Offaly, for example, where the main impetus for improvement seems to have come from the land agent rather than the landowner, the long-running saga of the proposed construction of a market house by the landlords, the Hill family (subsequently

ennobled first as Lord Hill and then Marquis of Downshire), began in 1717 but was not finally resolved until the 1830s. Throughout the episode, the impression given is of one of a fund of tenant enthusiasm for improvement which the local agents tried to tap in the face of a lukewarm response from the landlord. Thus the first proposal (in 1717) came from the then agent, who argued on the basis of the growing prosperity of the town's market that this form of landlord investment would encourage the tenants to construct "good buildings" (Meredyth to Hill, 18 Feb. 1717, Correspondence Minute Book 1707-1719, Downshire Mss, P.R.O.N.I., D.607/A/11).

Despite a subsequent letter from the agent speaking of the "wonderful spirit of improvement got up in the people to build and improve", the scheme lapsed. When it was finally reactivated in 1810 - again by the then agent - as part of a more general scheme for the improvement of the town, the thinking was identical: by funding the market house the Downshires would "encourage the town" ('Plan for the Improvement of the Edenderry Estate, 5 Oct. 1810', Downshire Mss, P.R.O.N.I., D.671/A5/6). Once again, however, nothing was done. And two years later, in a telling letter to the Marquis, the agent outlined the likely consequences of further delay. He concluded: "the Market Square being laid out and a Market House having been promised, in confidence of which being built several persons have erected houses in that situation, and the market having greatly increased of late, it appears to be desirable to make a beginning as well as to keep faith with those who have built, so as to encourage and provide accommodation for those reporting to the market" (*Ibid.*).

Thirteen years later, in 1825, and on a more centrally-located part of the Downshire's estates, at Dundrum, Co. Down, a more generous attitude seems to have prevailed. But as at Edenderry, so too the intention here was to enlist the co-operation of tenants and the use of tenant capital in the enterprise. Picturesquely situated on the shores of Dundrum Bay in the shadow of the Mourne Mountains, the village was intended to

develop as a grain harbour and sea bathing resort. An announcement in the *Belfast News Letter* on the 8th November 1825 made everything clear:

> ....His Lordship has been engaged in the completion of a well considered plan for Dundrum, and already has erected a firmly built and commodious pier of above 300 feet in length, and 50 feet in breadth which has proved of great service to the coasting trade, and very advantageous to consumers in that part of the county. Two large stores have also been finished, with a kiln for drying corn, adjacent to the pier, capable of containing 3 or 400 tons of grain, besides accommodation below on the basement storey for coals, iron, slates and other weightier commodities. An inn and lodging house adjoining are now in progress...which promise... to be as commodious and roomy as any houses that have hitherto been erected in this country, and cannot fail to attract visitors of rank and consideration when they shall be fit for occupation. The warehouses, which have excited a great interest among the grain merchants in various quarters who have been anxious to rent them, have been let to a spirited and wealthy company. The situation of the harbour...and the surrounding country producing the finest grain, make this interesting spot a very desirable settlement and outlet for capital and industry. The lands in Dundrum have been laid out in accommodation for building lodging and other houses....It is intended to erect hot and cold baths on the principle of those most approved in England, and for the use of invalids and other visitors.

Elsewhere, other landed families were equally prepared to invest in marketing, transport and production facilities, in order to enhance the income generating potential of their estates and attract well-capitalised tenants. At Longford, Co. Longford, for example, the eponymous Earl built a shambles, a butter market and a new market house at his own expense, and encouraged the

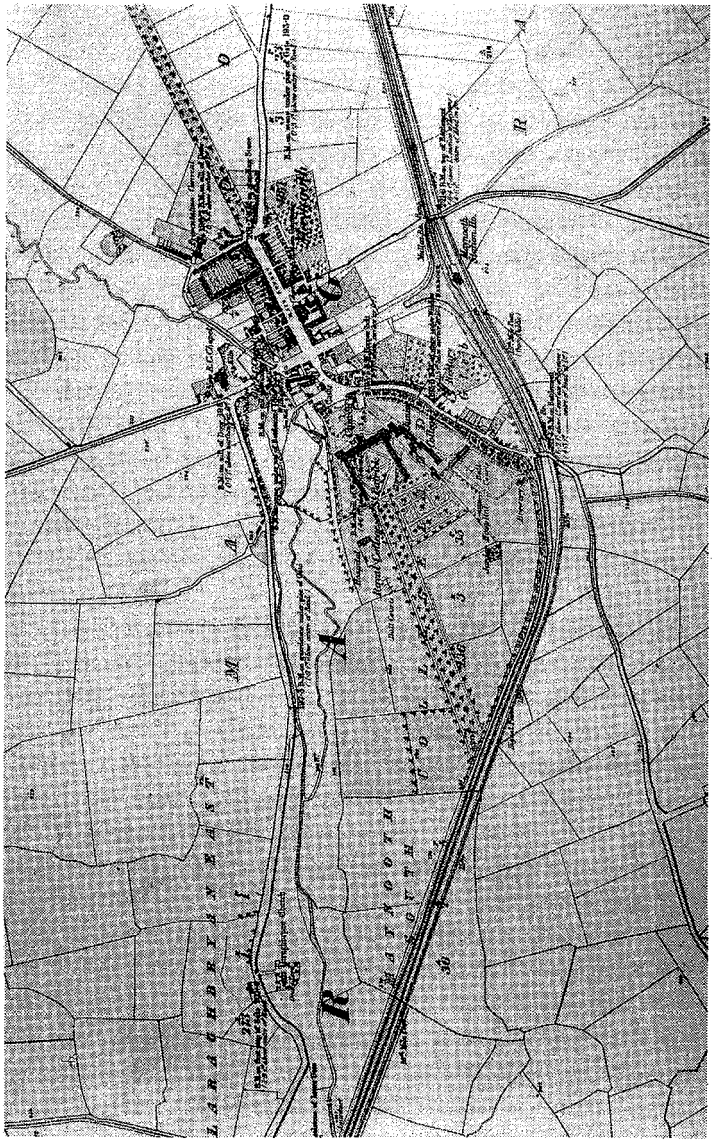
cutting of the Longford branch of the Royal Canal. According to one contemporary commentator, this was a measure of his "judgement and liberality" and resulted in a major improvement in the town's trade in the early nineteenth century, again partly through the attraction of additional tenant capital (*Parliamentary Gazetteer*, 1846, vi, 688-9). On the Lane-Fox estate at Dromahaire, Co. Leitrim, which in the 1820s yielded nearly one-third of the family's total Irish rental of £15,000, over £12,000 was spent in the 1830s and 1840s on improvements, particular attention being paid to roads, bridges, mills and schools (Leeds C.R.O., Lane Fox Mss, CXIV/26, Accounts 1839-1842). The calculation which lay behind these proposals was quite explicit. New roads would give easier access to the new market established at Dromahaire, and thus allow tenants to sell more produce there and pay higher rents (Lane Fox Mss, CXIV.22, Report as to the Dromahaire Estate, 1831). Their participation was further encouraged by the abolition of all market tolls and customs, and by 1838 a number of "capitalists" were "anxious to embark in various speculations in the Town of Dromahaire", including a mill (Lane Fox Mss, LXXXVI.8, Survey, 1838).

But as Figure 4.1 shows, none of this economic investment was accompanied by the planned reordering of Dromahaire itself. As such, it exemplifies the point made earlier, that landlords could realise the value of their estates through improvements to marketing without necessarily creating or recreating formally-ordered settlements, or indeed, as Table 4.2 suggests, by doing more than enhance various key infrastructures. In these circumstances, the key to future success was the willingness of petty capitalist tenants to invest in the project. Much the same applied to the relatively few known cases where political motivations unequivocally prompted landlord involvement in urban improvement. The best-documented of these have been thoroughly explored elsewhere (Proudfoot, 1995), and it is sufficient to note here that the nature, timing and location of this political improvement were all uniquely place specific.

4.1 Dromahaire, Co. Leitrim. An example of irregular village planning associated with extensive infrastructural improvement (First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, c.1840).

The general context for politically-motivated urban improvement was provided by the 1793 Catholic Relief Act and the Act of Union of 1801. The first created an impoverished Catholic freehold electorate who for the first time posed an effective external threat to the Anglican Ascendancy's traditional domination of Irish parliamentary representation; the second made the threat more acute by significantly reducing the number of Irish seats and transferring them to the (for the Anglican Ascendancy) more hostile imperial parliamentary arena at Westminster (Jupp, 1981; Malcomson, 1978). Accordingly, after 1801, the thirty or so remaining borough seats where the traditional Protestant bourgeois electorate retained its dominance, became increasingly important as places where the traditional political 'voice' of the Anglican Ascendancy might still be heard. Not surprisingly, therefore, the clearest evidence for politically-motivated landlord improvement occurs in the years immediately following the Act of Union, and in boroughs such as Bandon or Youghal in County Cork, where internal Protestant rivalries as well as sectarian political tensions between Catholics and Protestants were both acute and finely balanced. The response by politically-minded land agents working on behalf (and sometimes in advance) of their landlord employers, was to promise and if necessary, provide, the minimum number of incremental urban improvements required to secure the tenants' votes. Only rarely, as at Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, between 1801 and 1830, did political investment spiral out of hand and result in the transformative replanning of a significant part of the town (Proudfoot, 1995).

Given this, it seems likely that where ultra-formal planning did take place, it reflected a precise aesthetic agenda on the part of its promoters, and their willingness to invest in the creation of a 'polite' built environment for its own sake. For landlords, this formality may well have reflected their desire to create an ordered architectural environment which, in its Classical allusions, mirrored the civic humanism which lay at the heart of the Enlightenment project (O'Connor, 1987, 81-5; Hewlings, 1995). Thus in places like Castlewellan, Co. Down, Mount Bellew, Co.



4.2 Maynooth, Co. Kildare. An example of formal town planning (ca. 1750-1781) associated with speculative tenant building (First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, c.1840).

Galway and Stratford upon Slaney, Co. Wicklow, families like the Annesleys, Bellews and Aldboroughs laid out architecturally-sophisticated plans complete with squares and crescents. Where tenants participated in the creation of this formality, as for example at Maynooth, Co. Kildare (Figure 4.2), they frequently took their cue from its ordered ethos and indulged in what can best be described as 'aspirational' building. Thus whereas the orthogonal ground plan at Maynooth dates from between *ca.* 1750 and 1781, and was probably laid out by the improvement-minded Earl of Kildare (later Duke of Leinster), much of the building development was undertaken by his tenants, including one Peter Bere, who seems to have acted as a speculative developer in his own right in the late 1750s and 1760s (Horner, 1994, 59-70). By inviting tenants like Bere to participate in the building process through the offer of favourable building leases, landlords were in effect providing them with the opportunity to make their own statements of identity.

The widespread survival throughout Ireland's provincial towns and villages - including Maynooth - of architectural forms of recognisably Neo-Classical derivation, suggests that this was an opportunity which many tenants welcomed. By using decorative features such as string courses, key stones, quoining, rustication, "venetian" windows or fan lights, tenants were indulging in conspicuous consumption which aped the architectural idiom which was then fashionable among the landowning class, and which imposed an apparent visual uniformity on the towns they helped to build. In detail, of course, the houses built by various tenants differed, but the overall impression was one of visual coherence deriving from the use of the same architectural canon. Moreover, this architectural imitation had a social purpose insofar as it signalled social distance. On the one hand, it demonstrated at least some cognitive aesthetic links between these aspirational tenant groups and their acknowledged social superiors; while on the other, it distanced them even more roundly from the growing numbers of the urban poor who were crowding into the peripheral cabin suburbs of many pre-Famine Irish towns.

Mechanisms

If the desire for status assertion explained the architectural forms adopted by many tenants in their participation in urban improvement, then the opportunity for this arose out of their need to negotiate access to property in order to secure their own existence. It has already been noted (Chapter 1) that the key instrument of tenure in these negotiations was the lease, but it is worth emphasising the extent to which these represented a *compromise* between the interests of landlords and their tenants. Although landlords were likely to want to generate as much income as possible from their estates, the more far-sighted among them realised that leases which left tenants with insufficient profit were ultimately detrimental to their own interests, since they reduced the tenants' long-term rent-paying capability (Proudfoot, 1995, 139-40). For this reason if no other, the stereotype of the 'rack-renting' Irish landlord owes at least as much to mythology as history (Vaughan, 1994, 48-63). Tenants, on the other hand, might wish to weigh factors such as security and length of tenure against the rent demanded and the potential income the property might yield. Thus to succeed, leases had to provide for the interests of both parties, and it was entirely problematic whether economic conditions subsequently changed in such a way as to favour one group against the other.

Although some landlords were willing to construct housing on their own account as a speculative venture, as the 5th Duke of Devonshire was advised to do in Lismore, Co. Waterford, in the early 1790s, for the most part, prospective urban tenants were offered building leases. In these, the negotiation of the compromise between the interests of each party took a particular turn: the tenant would be responsible for the construction of the buildings, usually to an agreed specification and to an agreed price within a set period, but might expect a commensurably favourable term of years and rent. The advantages to the landlord were both immediate and long-term. In the first instance, he avoided some of the capital costs of improvement; in the second, by providing

his tenants with a significant interest in the property on the estate, he effectively aligned their economic interests with his own, and, in theory, reduced the likelihood of any form of challenge to them. Thus by delegating some of their property-derived authority, landlords might hope to reinforce their elite position and ensure their own social reproduction.

There are numerous surviving examples of building leases which can used to throw light on the details of the urban property relations which were mediated through improvement. Usually, the length of the leases being offered was directly proportional to the value of the houses which were to be built. In the mid-eighteenth century at Longford, Co. Longford, for example, the Earl offered 31 year leases for those houses he had built himself, but leases of three lives renewable for houses which the tenants had built (*Lands Index,* Registry of Deeds, Dublin, vol. 97, 68157, 69211; vol. 106, 74252). At Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath, on the other hand, the balance between the landlord's and tenants' interests was calculated rather differently. In the 1730s, the landlord offered three life leases renewable for ever for house property in the town itself, but only 31 years or 3 lives for tenancies which also included agricultural land outside the town. Clearly, the latter was considered to be the more valuable asset and one over which the Pollard family were accordingly loath to lose long-term control (Pollard Mss, Leases 1771-72, National Library of Ireland Ms D.18665-D.18670).

Offers of such extremely favourable terms for urban leases were more frequent than might be supposed. In 1762, at Rathfriland, Co. Down, for example, the agent, Henry Waring, argued that perpetuity leases were necessary to attract the rising class of linen capitalists to the town. Offering such leases would "induce men of circumstances particularly linen drapers to set there and build good houses, as their heirs and assigns will forever enjoy the same; and the town parks (which at present pay only six shillings per English acre) will then set, the most contiguous at twenty shillings an acre" ('A scheme for the improvement of the estate and town of Rathfriland, 2 March

1764', P.R.O.N.I., McCracken Mss, T.1181/1). At Killarney, Co. Kerry, the fourth Viscount Kenmare offered similarly favourable leases but out of rather different motives. By providing tenants with building plots at low rents and for leases of lives renewable for ever, he hoped to improve the immediate environs of his own house (which he thought at risk of fire from the existing cabins in the town), and to encourage as many families as possible to remain on his estate, and "increase their substance [by which] they would require additional ground" (*Parliamentary Gazetteer,* 1846, v, 456-8).

In the event, Viscount Kenmare's ambitions for his town were quickly put into jeopardy by the success of its more advantageously located neighbour, Tralee. Similarly, at Castlerea, Co. Roscommon and Bagnelstown, Co. Carlow, extensive investments both by the landlords and some of their capitalist tenants also eventually failed because of shifts in the regional pattern of trade (*Parliamentary Gazetteer,* 1846, i, 115-6, 371). These failures remind us that ultimately, no matter how extensive the provision of facilities by the landlord or how willing the participation of his tenants, a town's economic success also depended, more widely, on economic and social conditions which were beyond the landlord's immediate control.

But in some instances, the success or failure of an improvement programme had more proximate causes. Just as leaseholds represented the delegated use of the landlord's property, so the delegation of those rights was frequently left to sometimes quite complex estate bureaucracies to determine. Almost invariably, on the larger and better-run estates, the day-to-day administration as well as, sometimes, strategic issues of policy, were left in the hands of the land agent. As figures in the popular historical imagination, agents have suffered almost as much excoriation as the stereotyped 'rack-renting' landlord, and this may well reflect communal memories both of the local power many of them enjoyed and their uneasy status in provincial society. In the eighteenth century, Irish land agents tended to be of rather higher social status than their English counterparts, and

many were themselves minor gentry. But as in England, so too in Ireland, the nineteenth century saw the increasing professionalisation of the agents' status, which in no way diminished their authority. Particularly where the landowner was an absentee, the agent effectively acted as a surrogate landlord, and mediated the tenurial relationship between the owner and his tenantry. On many estates, the agent was responsible for collecting the rents and arrears, overseeing any improvements, negotiating new tenancies, compiling the annual accounts, and frequently, if the landlord was politically-active, acting his parliamentary candidate's election agent. All of these activities conferred tremendous local prestige on the agent, which might be reflected in other ways, in his chairmanship of local companies or role as a magistrate or Poor Law guardian. On more important estates, the agent's position was thus one which possessed great potential for either moderation and liberality, or abuse (Proudfoot, 1995, 87-105). But whether liberal or repressive, and employed on magnate estates such as those of Earl Fitzwilliam or the Marquis of Downshire, or on altogether more modest properties, the role of the agent was central to the ideological underpinnings of property relations in post-Plantation Ireland. His mediating role symbolised both the conflicts of interest and the need for colloboration between the different socio-economic groups involved in improvement. How may the symbolic content of this text be read?

5

THE SYMBOLIC CONTENT OF IMPROVEMENT: SOME INTERPRETATIVE CONCLUSIONS

This essay has sought to test the legitimacy of conventional views concerning the nature and extent of urban and village foundation, refoundation and development in post-Plantation Ireland. These views have seen this improvement as the expression of the arbitrary use by landlords of authority they derived from their social, political and economic dominance within the country. As yet another piece of evidence for the allegedly self-interested actions of a powerful but alien 'colonial' elite, the model has resonated strongly in the popular historical imagination. But its power derives from its simplicity - its over simplification of what can now be shown to have been a complex and changing historical reality. The evidence presented here has demonstrated, for the first time, that conventional representations of urban and village improvement have failed to identify either the extent of the variation in its individual physical outcomes or in its regional occurrence. Moreover, the conventional terminology used to describe these places invariably defines them as either 'landlord' or 'estate' towns and villages, assuming that their defining characteristic was their idiosyncratic expression of 'landlord' values and behaviour. Yet as this essay has shown, there is no evidence to suggest that by the mid-nineteenth century, the pattern of formal urban improvement bore any systemmatic relationship to the pattern of property ownership by landlords. Extensive formal replanning - perhaps the clearest expression of a coherent aesthetic 'vision' for a settlement - formed only a small part of the spectrum of improvement, and was as frequently associated with fractured patterns of landlord property ownership as with landlord monopolies. The implication, clearly, is that urban and village improvement was a much more socially-inclusive business than was once realised.

What then, in the broadest perspective, does this imply? To take the diversity in planning and morphological outcomes first, as defined here, 'improvement' occurred virtually throughout the entire spectrum of nucleated settlement in Ireland during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The only exception were the very smallest hamlets and farmstead clusters, many of which may have developed as a relatively recent response to Ireland's accelerating population growth rate after *ca.* 1750. Although demonstrably varied in its extent in individual settlements, the spatial ubiquity of this improvement is testimony to the depth of the modernising ethos in pre-Famine Irish society: there were few regions in the country which did not feel the imperatives of social and economic modernisation.

And yet as Chapter 3 demonstrates, a closer inspection of the regional extent of improvement, whether expressed in terms of its absolute or proportionate incidence, or in terms of its relationship to Ireland's population or the size of the country's agrarian base, indicates that by the mid-nineteenth century, certain regions in the country had experienced much more extensive settlement improvement than others. In short, although ubiquitous throughout the spectrum of settlement size, improvement was nevertheless, to a degree, regionally selective. It has been shown to have been particularly extensive in a zone running from south-east Ulster, through the eastern Midlands to north-east Munster. In broad - and it must be stressed - far from exclusive terms, this zone corresponded with some of the areas where the inherited morphological legacies from previous periods of deliberate settlement foundation survived to the greatest extent. In south Ulster and in Leix and Offaly in the east Midlands, this legacy was essentially a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century one. It reflected the foundation of relatively numerous colonial towns and villages in these areas as a result of both the official Government-sponsored regional planning schemes, or Plantations, and the activities - particularly in east Ulster - of independent colonists. This was also true in County Cork, but here as elsewhere in Tipperary, Carlow and Kildare, the inherited morphological legacies were also in part of even earlier, medieval, date. In

comparison with the later plantation towns, however, many of these medieval morphologies were less uniform in their internal spatial articulation, and thus lack the striking uniformity of plan of some of the sixteenth and seventeenth colonial foundations.

By no means all of the improved towns and villages within this core area of improvement owed their formalism to these inherited morphologies, even in counties where the colonial legacy was most pronounced. Thus in east Ulster, the relatively high aggregate valuations and pronounced social complexity which characterised the improved towns and villages by the mid-nineteenth century, seems to have owed at least as much to the region's developing industrial base as they did to its earlier colonial history. The comparative breadth of the region's economy, derived from its rapid and early proto-industrialisation, and in particular the opportunities this gave for widened social access to wealth, appear to have given rise to particularly sustained settlement improvement. The early predominance within this of the traditional landed elite was quickly eclipsed by the activities of the rising class of industrial capitalists.

These socio-industrial transformations were mirrored in the nature and extent of settlement improvement in east Ulster. During the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of the towns and villages which were being founded or refounded by local landowners had as their primary purpose the establishment of a brown linen market, designed to articulate the rapidly expanding rural domestic linen industry of the period. In so doing, of course, these markets would also enhance their founder's incomes. Thus towns such as Hillsborough, Co. Down, founded by the Hill family *ca.* 1674, Cootehill, Co. Cavan, built by Lord Justice Coote in the 1720s, or New Bliss, Co. Monaghan, established by the Leslie family in the 1750s, were essentially exercises economically-motivated landed paternalism.

With the gradual demise of rural linen production during the early nineteenth century, and the concommittant rise of factory-based linen production in response to the contemporary

structural and technological changes within the industry, the role of these early linen markets declined. In their place, particularly after 1830, specialised mill villages began to appear as one of the characteristic settlement expressions of the new phase of capitalist factory production in the industry. In County Down these places included Annsborough, built near Castlewellan by the Muirland family, and Dunbarton, built by the Dunbar McMaster Company, and in County Armagh, Bessbrook, begun by the Richardsons in 1847. Each of these villages was characterised by the same sort of factory-centred articulation of plan and buildings because in each their morphology reflected their social and functional uniformity. They were model villages, designed by their capitalist founders as ordered environments within which the behaviour and productivity of the factory wage labour force could be closely monitored and controlled.

On either flank of this core area of improvement, that is in south-east Leinster to the east, and along the western Atlantic seaboard from Donegal in the north to Kerry in the far south-west, the incidence of improvement fell away. In the extreme south-east, the low levels of settlement improvement may well be explained by the greater incidence of relatively informal settlements of medieval origin, and by the presence of marginal uplands, such as the Wicklow Mountains south of Dublin and the Knockmealdown Mountains on the borders of Counties Tipperary, Waterford and Kilkenny. In what was essentially one of the heartlands of Anglo-Norman colonisation, we may conjecture that the most viable settlement locations such as those in the river valleys were occupied relatively early on, although some of these may have been subsequently abandoned and re-occupied. Whether for these or other reasons, this south-eastern corner of Ireland consistently emerged as uniquely different when measured in terms of the various indices of settlement improvement and modernity used in this study. Not only was the incidence and value of urban and village improvement relatively low in the area, but the numbers of people to be 'supported' by each of the improved settlements on the eve of the Famine was - for the eastern counties - relatively high.

To the west of the core improvement zone, the number, average value and social and functional complexity of the improved towns and villages also declined, even although some individual places among them had been relatively extensively transformed. Moreover, this relatively limited improvement took place against a regional background of increasingly rapid population growth. By 1841 the ratio of recorded population to improved settlement was higher here than in any other part of Ireland. In contrast, the ratios between the aggregate settlement values recorded by the Griffith's assessors and each county's productive agricultural acreage were among the lowest in the country. Such stark contrasts suggest a settlement network being overwhelmed by a tide of humanity which, given the nature of the regional agrarian economy, it was incapable of supporting. To this extent at least, we may speculate that whatever the impetus had been towards urban and village improvement during the eighteenth and perhaps even the early years of the nineteenth century, by the 1840s this had petered out in the face of the distortions created within the marketing system by an increasing - and increasingly desperate and impoverished - peasant population.

Such regional diversity in the nature and extent of urban and village improvement and in its evident social and economic contexts, should itself give cause for reflection over the likely explanative power of a model of improvement which emphasises the role of a single social group. But this model, predicated on the idea of the "landlord as the supreme arbiter of local life" was a product of its times, and reflected a 'lateral' view of post-Plantation society in Ireland. This emphasised the divisions within Irish society, divisions which demarcated between 'indigenous' Gael and Anglo-Scottish settler, between Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic, between the Anglophone world and the 'hidden Ireland' of the Gaelic bards and their lament for a lost culture, between the State and the people, and between landlords and tenants. In this history, the divisions within society ran deep and divided the powerful from the powerless.

This emphasis on division, separation and conflict is understandable. Irish society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *did* display evidence of considerable polarisation, not least in the distribution of wealth and social status. But in doing so it was no different from any other society in *ancîen regime* Europe. In the context of improvement, English aristocrats like the Duke of Manchester and Irish peers like Earl Fitzwilliam and the Marquis of Sligo *did* possess widespread urban and rural property, which, though it might vary in value, nevertheless set them apart from the vast majority of the country's population. This wealth bought status and this status was expressed in elite values and *mores* which, though they may not have been shared in equal measure by all landowners, still served to distinguish them from the rest of Irish society. The aspirations and values of Mrs Delany, of Dean Swift and the Earl Bishop of Londonderry were not those of the cottagers living beyond their demesne walls (Day, 1991).

But as recent research by Connolly, Power and others has shown, this emphasis on the divisions within eighteenth-century Ireland and among its people, fails to capture the evolutionary nature of that society and its capacity for self-reinvention. The property owning minority may have remained precisely that - a minority - but they were not unchanging. Politics, marriage, inheritence, business acumen and sheer luck combined to ensure a steady stream of admissions to their ranks - and the equally steady erosion of them (Power, 1993). Furthermore, the extent and nature of their property varied enormously, as did its value. Magnate landlords like the Duke of Devonshire, whose Irish rental exceeded £40,000 by the 1840s, or Earl Fizwilliam, whose £48,000 from Counties Kildare, Wicklow and Wexford represented barely one-third of his landed income in the 1860s, formed merely the tip of a steeply pyramidal iceberg of landed income. The vast majority of Irish landlords, numbering perhaps 10,000 by the 1840s, enjoyed a fraction of the income of these true "leviathans of wealth". Many, indeed, were barely distinguishable from wealthier leasehold tenants in terms of their income or style of

living. In politics too, there was hardly a consensus among landlord opinion. As Connolly (1992) has demonstrated, Irish landowners and their politics can*not* be defined solely in terms of a 'Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy", a term which strictly applied only to the political role of some landowners in the period of Irish legislative independence between 1782 and 1801. Issues such as the Militia Act of 1793, the repeal of the disabling legislation against Catholics and the Act of Union with England of 1801, deeply divided landlords along Patriot, Whig and Tory lines.

In the light of such evidence for change and diversity within the ranks of the landowners, we need hardly be surprised to find evidence for more widespread and varied patterns of co-operation between them and other social groups than would once have been predicted, for these too were changing. Earlier tenurial relationships between landlords and their occupying tenants, which were mediated not so much through an estate bureaucracy but via middlemen, - head tenants who lived off the multiple rents generated by the excessive subdivision of their leasehold properties - gave way to more direct relations. As land values rose from the 1750s, so landlords sought to capitalise on these by increasingly letting only to occupying tenants. With the demise of the middlemen, protracted and regionally uneven though it was, the relationship between landlords and tenants became more direct and the role of the land agent as its mediator correspondingly more important. The Penal legislation may have had its effect as well. Wall (1989) argues that Catholic capital, evicted from landownership, transferred to the towns where it funded the rise of a significant Catholic mercantile bourgeoisie. Wall's argument has not gone unchallenged (Power and Whelan, 1990), but it is undeniably the case that the growth of first mercantilist and subsequently petty industrial urban capital constituted one of the most significant changes to the social distribution of wealth in later eighteenth-century Ireland (Connolly, 1992), and was one which was to have far-reaching implications for the landlord's domination of the agrarian economy.

Thus the evidence presented here for tenant participation must be read in the light of these changing contexts. Unequivocally, however, it is evidence for precisely the sort of 'vertical' linkages within Irish society which Connolly (1992) alludes to, and which in this case, tied ostensibly diverse interest groups together in the pursuit of different agendas but a common goal. The argument has already been recited. By delegating some of their property rights to tenants via the mechanism of building leases, landlords ensured that it was in the tenants' own interests to ensure that the structures of the prevailing social formation which legitimised both their own and their landlord's' property rights, survived. Much followed from this. The adoption by many tenants of a status-asserting and therefore socially-distancing 'polite' architectural canon, may be read as their attempt to capitalise upon this alliance. For landlords, it offered an opportunity - if they so needed and so chose - to limit their investment in improvement to the provision of those key production and marketing infrastructures which were essential to the promotion and control of the patterns of exchange on their estates. Accordingly, formal *replanning*, conventionally argued to be the epitome of the improvement ethos, has been shown to have been almost incidental to the whole process - an aesthetic *desiderata* which was not essential to the landlords' social reproduction. Renaissance-inspired plans and sophisticated architecture might display the landlords' awareness of and conformity to peer group values which extended well beyond Ireland and were undoubtedly socially-distancing, despite the aspirational effots of the urban bourgeoisie, but this social distance depended on wealth, not aesthetics. The key to the landlords' social reproduction was the market place, not the architectural ornamentation of the market house.

But within this co-alignment of landlord and tenant interests, there lay a dialectic which was ultimately to ensure the divergence of both. By offering favourable leases as a means of encouraging tenant investment, landlords in effect created a power bloc, which, in certain circumstances, they might be no longer able to control. If trading conditions improved sufficiently,

as they did in the expansionist years of the later eighteenth century, tenant prosperity coupled with tenurial security, might well lead to the decline of deference and the increasing assertion by the tenants' of their *de facto* economic and social independence from their landlords. Moreover, since *any* leasehold for anything other than a named term of years, gave the *lessee* the right to sublet the property and create new, potentially politically active, subtenants, any such assertion of tenant independence carried important political undertones.

The implications of all of this are clear enough. Unless he had specifically forbidden such subdivision, a politically-active landlord might be faced with the possibility of losing political control over his urban property as a direct result of these policies of economic delegation. Thus the landlords' willingness to 'delegate power to ensure its retention' might have unexpected and unwelcome consequences for the preservation of their elite position within Irish society. In the event, this is more or less what happened. The repeal of the Penal Legislation prior to the Act of Union of 1801 began the mobilisation first, of Catholic economic power and, second, of their political influence. As the nineteenth century progressed, this power became increasingly effectively articulated through extra-Parliamentary bodies such as Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association. Culminating in Catholic Emancipation in 1828 if not in the Repeal of the Union, this growing assertiveness by the majority community of their aspirations represented a direct challenge to the - still predominantly Anglican - property-owning minority.

In the longest of views, it was a challenge which eventually succeeded. By the end of the nineteenth century, landlord authority had been effectively destroyed by a combination of democratic sectarian nationalism, British administrative impatience, the economic impact of the Potato Famine, and the consequences of modernisation. In the north-east, the counties of east Ulster began to diversify out of the proto-industrial phase of agrarian-based linen production into a wider range of heavy industries, which were increasingly concentrated on Belfast and

its hinterland. This created new forms and patterns of wealth in a region which has been shown to have been characterised by some of the most extensive and valuable forms of urban and village improvement. No longer dependent on the paternal structures of agrarian capitalism which had underpinned the production and realisation of wealth in Ireland throughout the Early Modern period, the increasingly independent rising class of industrialists who capitalised these developments exemplified these challenges to the social and political authority of the traditional landed elite.

Thus in seeking to maintain their elite status by controlling the articulation of the market economy, Irish landlords adopted strategies of property delegation which ultimately helped to destroy the very authority they sought to maintain. By the mid-nineteenth century, relatively few of Ireland's towns and villages were in the exclusive ownership of a single landed family. Whether through property delegation by the use of leaseholds, or property abdication through outright sale, the vast majority of the 'improved' or modernised towns and villages were characterised by relatively diverse patterns of lessor ownership. This diversity of property was matched in many cases by the diversity of their built form. The varied and fine-textured morphologies of Ireland's improved towns and villages thus stand as a fitting epitaph to a social discourse of power which can now be seen to have been a much more complex, if no less important, part of Ireland's historical geography than was once supposed.

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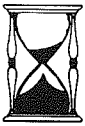

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