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No. 6

IRISH HISTORIC TOWNS ATLAS

ATHLONE

By HARMAN MURTAGH

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Royal Irish Academy

ATHLONE

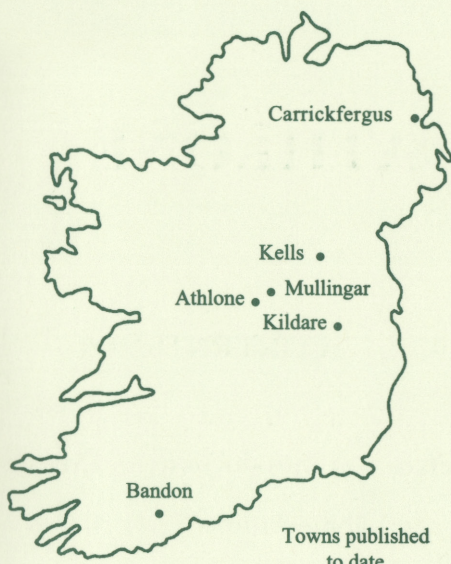
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PREFACE

Urban history is a form of local study which awakens our sense of the past and strengthens our attachment to a particular community. It can also carry the student further, beyond the level of pure description to a more general plane on which ideas and statements of international scope can be formulated and verified. The first step towards this more scientific concept of urban history is a review of comparable data, especially quantitative data, drawn from different towns and different regions. For earlier periods, which have yielded few if any statistics, it is the visible features of a town that offer the most rewarding material for comparison; and even at the present day, when information is available for many other aspects of urban existence, the lay-out of a town and the appearance of its buildings are the first points that a stranger will notice and compare with those of towns already known to him.

Maps must play an important part in recording these visual characteristics, and it was therefore a major historiographical event when the International Commission for the History of Towns extended its programme to include the publication of historic towns atlases. The decision was both optimistic and realistic: such atlases have now been published in a number of countries and others are in preparation. The compilation of Ireland's first historic towns atlas does great credit to Irish scholars, and the result will be warmly welcomed by members of the European Commission for the History of Towns both as a contribution to Irish history and as an addition to our common fund of knowledge.

Ljubljana, 1985

Sergij Vilfan
President of the International
Commission for the History of
Towns

INTRODUCTION

In 1955 the International Commission for the History of Towns recommended that a series of European national historic towns atlases should be produced. The Commission's proposal has subsequently been adopted by most of the countries concerned and a large number of towns have already been mapped and published. This fascicle is part of Ireland's contribution to the scheme.

It was at an interdisciplinary symposium on 'Irish towns and medieval Europe, 900-1250', organised in 1978 by the Board of Medieval Studies, University College, Dublin, that the idea of an Irish historic towns atlas was first broached in the discussion following a lecture by Professor Heinz Stoob on the German towns atlas. In January 1981 the project was further considered at a meeting at Academy House, Dublin, with the encouragement of the President of the Royal Irish Academy, Professor Prionsias MacCana and Professor F.X. Martin (Department of Medieval History, University College, Dublin). The joint editors for the first four fascicles were Professor J.H. Andrews (Department of Geography, Trinity College, Dublin) and Dr Anngret Simms (Department of Geography, University College, Dublin). In June 1981 the Council of the Royal Irish Academy agreed to publish the atlas and the government of the Irish Republic subsequently showed its approval by providing funds for the employment of a cartographic editor. In April 1982 Mrs K.M. Davies was appointed to this post. The production team was completed by an editorial committee in which the above-mentioned officers were joined by Dr Terry Barry (Department of Medieval History, Trinity College, Dublin), Mr John Bradley (Urban Archaeology Survey, Dublin), Mr M.J.D. Brand (Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland), Dr H.B. Clarke (Department of Medieval History, University College, Dublin), Mr Richard Haworth (Department of Geography, Trinity College, Dublin), Dr A.A. Horner (Department of Geography, University College, Dublin), Professor Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Department of History, University College, Galway), Dr Philip Robinson (Ulster Folk and Transport Museum), Dr Katharine Simms (Department of Medieval History, Trinity College, Dublin), Commandant M.C. Walsh (Ordnance Survey of Ireland) and Dr Kevin Whelan (Department of Geography, University College, Dublin). Dr H.B. Clarke became an additional joint editor in 1990. The atlas is indebted to Mr Brand and Commandant Walsh for the practical support promised (and quickly received) from their respective departments. Valuable assistance on points of editorial practice has been received from Mr Richard Hawkins, secretary of A New History of Ireland.

The atlas is planned as a series of fascicles, one for each town in a selection representing various size-categories, various regions of the country from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and various periods of origin and growth, with some bias in favour of the medieval period but not excluding the estate towns, industrial towns and resort towns characteristic of more modern times. The principal map in each fascicle is a large-scale (1:2500) representation of the town as it is believed to have stood at a period as close as possible to 1840. The reconstruction is based on the large-scale manuscript town plans made by the Ordnance Survey in 1832-42 and on the manuscript maps compiled at the same time or soon afterwards by the General Valuation Office. Use is also made of surviving contemporary estate maps and, where necessary, of the earliest (1833-46) published Ordnance Survey maps at six inches to one mile (1:10,560). The reconstructions include buildings, streets, roads, paths, yards, gardens, orchards, parks, fields

and surface watercourses, the less well-authenticated detail being shown by broken lines. Contemporary names are used wherever possible. The base map on which these data are assembled is the most accurate available nineteenth-century town plan, which in most cases is the one published by the Ordnance Survey on a scale of either 1:1056 or 1:500 at some time during the period 1855-95.

A second map shows the town in its mid-nineteenth-century setting at 1:50,000. This has been prepared from the first (1855-95) edition of the one inch to one mile (1:63,360) Ordnance Survey map of Ireland. The third map common to all fascicles is a modern Ordnance Survey town plan at 1:5000. Where possible there are also growth maps and large-scale single-period maps reconstructing significant phases of development before the nineteenth century. Other graphic material includes the town's armorial bearings, if any, a modern air photograph and facsimiles of early maps and views.

The text accompanying the maps comprises an introductory essay, topographical information on the town as a whole and its component parts, selected documentary and literary extracts where appropriate, and a bibliography.

The maps and topographical information are derived directly from primary sources and to that extent are incapable of becoming out of date. But readers may also expect to be given an author's interpretation of his sources, and this is the role of the introductory essay. The latter embodies the judgement of a single scholar and no attempt has been made to enforce complete agreement between one contributor and another in matters of historical opinion. However, each town will be described in relation to its physical site and setting, and its development will be reviewed in chronological sequence from the beginnings of urban life to the end of the nineteenth century. The essays are intended to deal primarily with the form, lay-out and physical topography of the town as expressed in the accompanying maps. Individual buildings may receive attention as topographical entities, but the atlas is not designed to usurp the functions of an archaeological or architectural survey. In the same spirit, political and socio-economic factors are introduced insofar as they seem relevant to an understanding of the townscape and not as ends in themselves.

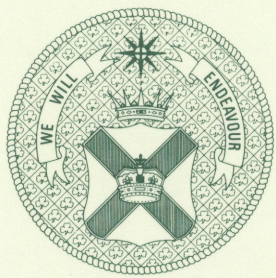
The bibliography lists all important items devoted to a single town, especially those of topographical relevance, and is not necessarily confined to works cited in the footnotes. Other sources mentioned in the footnotes are not separately tabulated, except where their titles have been abbreviated in a way that requires explanation. Abbreviations of more general application are listed inside the back cover of each fascicle. Grid references follow the Irish National Grid as shown on current Ordnance Survey maps, and throughout the atlas placenames are spelt as in the maps of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland or the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland except where the context requires otherwise.

Finally the atlas expresses the belief that large-scale plans constitute the best kind of source material for a comparative analysis of the topography of European towns, whether as a starting point for retrospective topographical research or as a basis for studying the changes associated with modern urban expansion. As such we hope it will prove useful not only to students and teachers of history, geography, archaeology and architecture, but also to planners, conservationists and local government officers, and thus directly or indirectly to all residents and visitors in the towns concerned.

January 1994

Anngret Simms
H.B. Clarke

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