

County, Town and Country: Three Histories of Urban Development in Eighteenth-Century Chester

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West Chester town . . . is mostly timber buildings, the trade and concourse of people to it is chiefly from the intercourse it has with Ireland . . . and also the intercourse with Wales which is parted from it and England by the River Dee.¹

AS THIS QUOTATION FROM CELIA FIENNES ILLUSTRATES, contemporary observers were very conscious of the geographical setting of towns and the importance of geographical interaction in shaping their fortunes. Today, we too easily view towns as individual and unlocated (unconnected, even) or conceive them in generalised terms of economy, government, society and culture. In this chapter, I want to draw on the example of Chester to argue that we must locate urban history firmly in geographical space. But it is more complex than this. Towns lie in a number of overlapping spatial contexts, so that one single reading of their historical geography is inevitably partial. We therefore need to construct a series of urban histories that reflect these varied geographical contexts.

The growth, prosperity and character of a town clearly owed much to the nature of its own internal economy, society, system of government, physical infrastructure and demographic regime.² The development and character of Sheffield, for example, clearly owed much to its iron- and steel-making industries; Bath was shaped by its growing leisure infrastructure and Plymouth by its dockyards. Detailed analyses of the internalities of such places can tell us much about their development as towns. This forms my first perspective on urban history. Here, the geographical context is the town itself:

¹ C. Morris, ed., *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes* (London, 1947), p. 147. Fiennes was probably writing here about 1698.

² See M. Daunton, 'Towns and economic growth in eighteenth-century England', in P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley, eds, *Towns in Societies: Essays in History and Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 245–77, on the relationship between industry and urban growth; R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840* (London, 1999) on the ways in which government, culture and society shaped towns; J. Langton, 'Urban growth and economic change from the seventeenth century to 1841' in P. Clark, ed., *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 758–813, on the varied growth of different types of town.

its changing morphology and appearance, and its internal linkages and divisions. Yet such an approach isolates the town from its broader settings and contacts. Its fortunes were determined in no small measure by its economic, social and political commerce with other places: a point not lost on Defoe, who assessed many towns in terms of their trade and communications.³

The diverse forms of interaction which could stimulate urban growth can be seen in the variety of towns which flourished during the eighteenth century. Manufacturing centres, resorts, ports and coaching stations all grew as they connected with supplies and markets, merchants, customers and visitors beyond their immediate bounds.⁴ The spatial definition of these linkages has implications for the growth of individual towns; it also shapes the ways in which we conceptualise and theorise urban, regional and national development.⁵ For Alan Everitt, the crucial ties were those between towns (especially county towns) and their surrounding regions.⁶ He identified two types of region in early modern England: 'country' was a natural region, defined by its physical and landscape characteristics, and by the particular ways of life of its people;⁷ 'county', meanwhile, was an essentially human creation, but also a 'self-conscious society' by Tudor times. The two occupied overlapping but different geographical spaces; they came together and were united through their focus on the county town.⁸ The geographical setting drawn by Everitt is essentially local and areal, and in that sense Christallerian.⁹ It is the interaction between town and country/county which shaped the fortunes and identity of both, binding them together in an organic regional unit.

This conceptualisation of town and country is attractive, but problematical. The notion of county which underpins Everitt's argument has been challenged in recent years, with particular doubts being raised about the extent to which shire towns 'drew

³ D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6, Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, Middx, 1971), passim.

⁴ Langton, 'Urban growth and economic change'.

⁵ See E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the continent in the early modern period', in E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 157–96; M. Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system: the country towns of eastern Yorkshire, 1700–1850', *Urban History Yearbook* (1987), 1–21; J. Stobart, 'An eighteenth-century revolution? Investigating urban growth in north-west England, 1664–1801', *Urban History*, 23 (1996), 26–47.

⁶ A. Everitt, 'Country, county and town: patterns of regional evolution in England', in P. Borsay, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Town, 1688–1820* (London, 1990), pp. 83–115.

⁷ These ideas relate closely to those of the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blanche. See his *Principles of Human Geography* (London, 1924). See also D. Hey, *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its Neighbourhood, 1660–1740* (Leicester, 1991), pp. 300–2.

⁸ Everitt, 'Country, county and town', pp. 94, 111.

⁹ Christaller portrayed towns as central places providing goods and services to the surrounding countryside. Growth would be stimulated by increased demand from the town's hinterland. For more detailed discussion of Christaller, see J. Stobart, 'The spatial organization of a regional economy: central places in North-west England in the early-eighteenth century', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (1996), 147–59, and K. Beavon, *Central Place Theory: A Reinterpretation* (London, 1977).

on a specific and rigorously defined county community'.¹⁰ Some have emphasised the cross-county influence of certain towns, whilst others have questioned whether urban influence in reality spread much beyond the town boundaries. Joyce Ellis, for example, has demonstrated that Nottingham's influence extended into Derbyshire and Leicestershire, but appears to have been more limited in the northern districts of Nottinghamshire. In contrast, Carl Estabrook argues that Bristol and its surrounding villages occupied separate social, cultural and economic worlds in the century after the Restoration. Certainly, he notes little of the interchange or synergy expected in a regional community.¹¹ Notwithstanding such arguments, the local region forms an important geographical context for urban histories, both specific and general, and offers our second approach to the history of Chester.

Whilst valuable, this offers only a partial picture of the externalities of the town. They were intimately tied to their surrounding areas, but towns also interacted with other more distant places. Thus, as Bernard Lepetit argues, there is a need to complement local 'bipolar analysis (town/country)' with 'a multi-polar analysis capable of accommodating a whole range of towns and their territories in a system of interrelations'.¹² This broader geographical context can be imagined in terms of structured systems of closely interdependent centres whose inter-linkages are shaped by hierarchical as well as spatial relations, or as looser networks of towns linked through the activities and geographies of key 'gateway cities'.¹³ Both approaches emphasise the importance of regional, national and international interaction in shaping both the fortunes of individual towns and wider economic development. The nation (or country) thus forms the third geographical context, and the final perspective on urban history to be considered here.

What I will present, then, are three histories of Chester focusing on the changing character of the city's internal geography, its regional context and its national linkages. All, of course, are particular histories and there are many gaps in each story. More is said about service industries than manufacturing, and there is relatively little on the government of the city or its political ties with the county or the capital. Nonetheless,

¹⁰ Borsay, *Eighteenth-Century Town*, p. 83. See also A. Hughes, 'Warwickshire on the eve of the civil war: a "county community"?', *Midland History*, 7 (1982), 42–72.

¹¹ J. Ellis, 'The stocking country: industrial and urban growth in Nottingham 1680–1840', in J. Stobart and P. Lane, eds, *Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, 1700–1840* (Leicester, 2000), pp. 93–115; C. Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: Cultural ties and social spheres in the provinces, 1660–1780* (Manchester, 1998).

¹² B. Lepetit, *The Pre-Industrial Urban System: France, 1740–1840* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 97.

¹³ Urban hierarchies were the subject of much geographical enquiry in the 1950s and 1960s—see, for example, B. Berry, *Geography of Market Centers and Retail Distribution* (New Jersey, 1967) and W. Davies, 'Centrality and the central place hierarchy', *Urban Studies*, 4 (1967), 61–79. More recently, historical studies have also productively employed this method of enquiry to analyse urban systems at a national scale: see B. Robson, *Urban Growth: An Approach* (London, 1973); A. Pred, *City Systems in Advanced Economies* (London, 1977); Lepetit, *Pre-Industrial Urban System*; and on an international scale: J. de Vries, *European Urbanisation, 1500–1800* (London, 1984). The concept of gateway cities is introduced in J. Vance, *The Merchant's World: The Geography of Wholesaling* (New Jersey, 1970).

the importance of seeing eighteenth-century towns in these broader contexts is apparent: the linkages are clear and their importance should not be underestimated.

Chester: the town

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Chester was one of the most important provincial towns in England. It was small in comparison with Norwich, Bristol and Newcastle, but its population of 8,000 to 9,000 made it easily the largest centre in the north-west. Moreover, its position as a county town (and indeed a county palatine), head port, garrison and cathedral city enhanced its status and boosted its economic development.¹⁴ With these varied stimuli Chester maintained its position as an important regional centre through into the nineteenth century, despite significant industrial, commercial and demographic growth in the towns of south Lancashire and east Cheshire. Nonetheless, like many county towns, Chester's economy, society and physical structure changed considerably during the course of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Traditional industries—such as metal-working, textile manufacturing and leather trades—declined in importance in Chester: between 1650 and 1675 they accounted for approximately every second admission to the freedom of the city, but by 1750–75 they made up just one-fifth of admissions. By the early nineteenth century, the only heavy industries in the city were two leadworks and a small iron foundry.¹⁶ In contrast, the port continued to prosper in the eighteenth century, despite long-term problems with silting. This prompted a navigation scheme in 1732 and the construction of a new quay shortly afterwards (which, in turn, stimulated development to the west of the city), but larger ships were increasingly obliged to use outports at Neston and (later) Parkgate. Nonetheless, the decline of Chester's port was only relative, in comparison to the rapid growth of Liverpool. Coastal traffic and the Irish trade remained strong throughout the eighteenth century and the city's shipbuilders still employed over 250 men, constructing vessels up to 500 tons in the early nineteenth century.¹⁷

Increasingly, though, Chester was characterised by high-skill craft industries such as clockmakers, silversmiths, cabinet-makers and cutlers, by professions and service activities from architects and attorneys to hairdressers and musicians, and by a growing number of specialist merchants and retailers, including tea dealers, tobacconists and

¹⁴ For a general introduction to Chester in the eighteenth century, see A. Kennett, ed., *Georgian Chester* (Chester, 1987).

¹⁵ For a good overview of such developments, see P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989).

¹⁶ J. Stobart, 'Shopping streets as social space: leisure, consumerism and improvement in an eighteenth-century county town', *Urban History*, 25 (1998), 3–21, Table 1; Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, p. 18; R. Craig, 'Some aspects of the trade and shipping of the River Dee in the eighteenth century', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 114 (1962), 99–128.

toyshops.¹⁸ Together, these crafts and trades accounted for more than half the freemen admitted between 1750 and 1775, compared with just thirty per cent in the previous century. They grew not just in number, but also in the range and quality of goods and services on offer: Pierce Davis advertised a wide range of teas bought at the East India Company's sale, whilst George Lowe offered cutlery, watches, jewellery, snuff boxes, tea urns and 'an extensive range of the most fashionable items' purchased in Sheffield, Birmingham and London.¹⁹ In effect, Chester was transformed from a manufacturing into a service and leisure town. During the course of the eighteenth century it experienced its own urban renaissance which, as Peter Borsay has argued so persuasively, encompassed both the creation of a new leisure/cultural infrastructure and the improvement of the physical environment.²⁰ It also involved the development of sharp divisions of urban land uses and the creation of new flows of goods and people through the city space.

As with many county towns, the leisure infrastructure of Chester built up gradually from the late seventeenth century. By 1779, when James Boswell 'passed a fortnight in mortal felicity' in the city, it was a flourishing centre of fashionable entertainment. Assemblies first took place in the Exchange around 1698, but were subsequently held in rather grander accommodation in Booth Mansion on Watergate Street and then in purpose-built rooms in the Talbot Inn (later the Royal Hotel) on Eastgate Street (see Figure 8.1 for locations). By the early nineteenth century, assemblies were also held at the Albion Hotel on Lower Bridge Street and, more modestly, at the Blossoms Hotel on Foregate Street.²¹ A new theatre was constructed off Northgate Street in 1773, and there was a subscription library at the Exchange, a music festival at the cathedral and a growing number of coffee-shops by the 1770s. In addition, Chester had three bowling greens, two cockpits, a tennis and a fives court, several billiards rooms and a race-track on the Roodee.²² The city walls offered a unique promenade (the corporation made great efforts to retain and maintain the complete circuit),²³ but walks were also found in the Groves and the Cherry Gardens at Boughton.

Taken together, these activities did much to shape the character of eighteenth-century Chester and its attraction as a social and cultural centre for wealthy visitors and residents. They also had a big impact on an urban landscape which was being transformed in line with national trends for urban improvement.²⁴ The corporation

¹⁸ See P. Broster, *The Chester Guide* (Chester, 1782).

¹⁹ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 5 July 1785; *Chester Courant*, 1 July 1794.

²⁰ Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*.

²¹ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, p. 36; Broster, *Chester Guide*, p. 69.

²² Stobart, 'Shopping streets', 7–10.

²³ Funds were raised through a murage duty levied on Irish linen entering the port: Broster, *Chester Guide*, p. 14. When the medieval gates were removed during the eighteenth century, they were replaced by elegant neo-classical bridges to maintain the integrity of the walk.

²⁴ M. Falkus and E. Jones, 'Urban improvement and the English economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in Borsay, *Eighteenth-Century Town*, pp. 248–73.

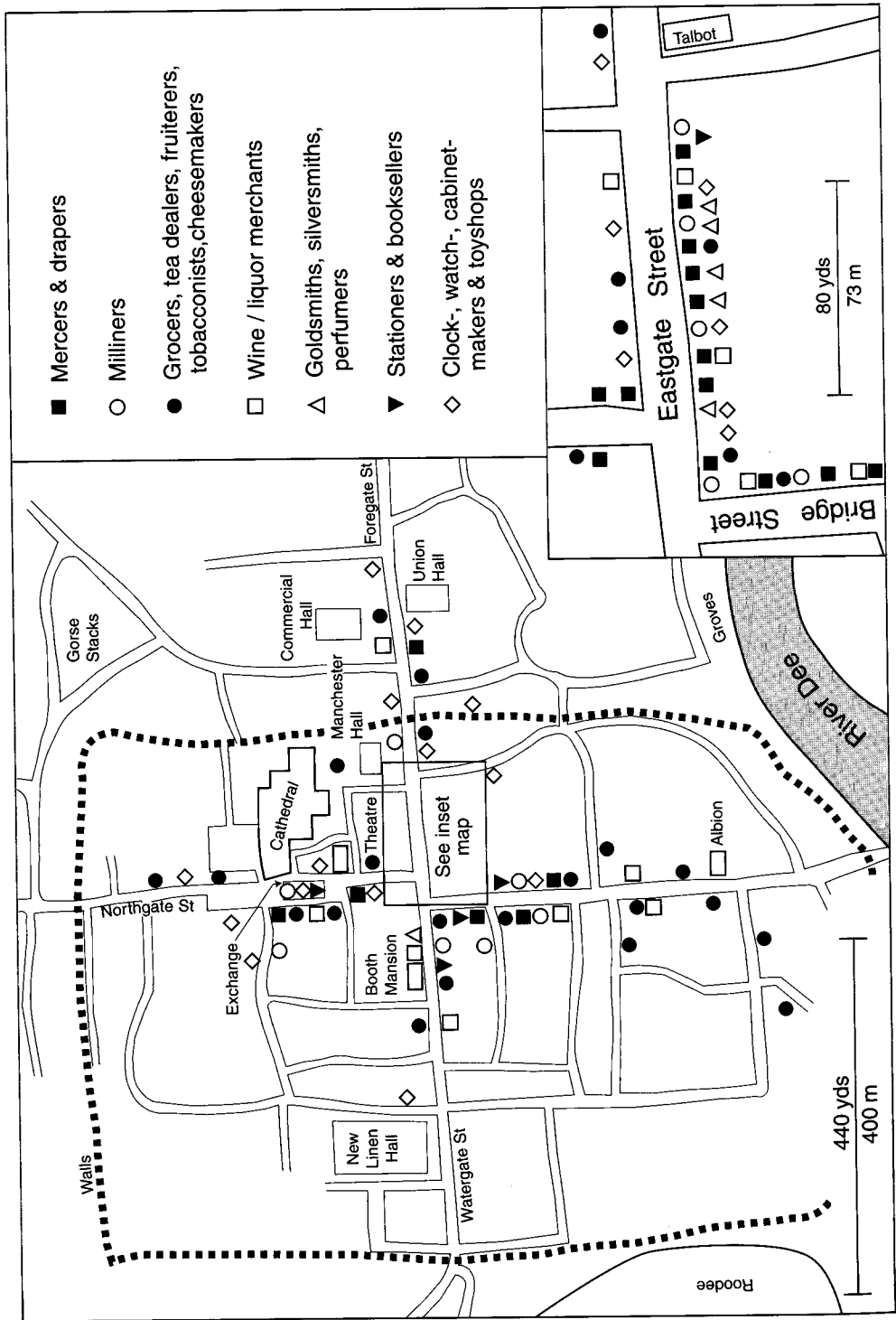


Figure 8.1. High-status retailing in late eighteenth-century Chester (from E. Dyke, ed., 'Chester's earliest directories', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 37 (1949); Broster, sketch plan of Eastgate Street).

appointed its first official pavior in 1584 and, by the middle of the following century, all of the main streets and several lanes were paved and regularly maintained. From 1670, cleaning was in the hands of three scavengers who removed all 'dirt and ashes' at least twice weekly. Streetlamps were installed in 1725 and were gradually augmented as the century progressed. Such activities were united in 1762 under the auspices of the newly created Improvement Commission. At the same time, the urban environment was subject to the modernising influence of neo-classical and palladian architectural make-overs. Initially these were largely restricted to prominent public buildings or the mansions of the wealthy, but by the mid-eighteenth century had spread to residential and shopping streets. The medieval rows along the central streets, long held to 'make the city look both old and ugly',²⁵ were refaced with plaster or brick, and often realigned to produce a modernity in keeping with Chester's status as a social and cultural centre.²⁶

As elsewhere, environmental improvements went beyond the physical structure of the streets, and efforts were increasingly directed towards regulating the use of these modernised spaces. This in turn created a new economic geography in the city, as land uses became more specialised and differentiated. Traditionally, Chester's markets and fairs had taken place on the main thoroughfares. From the 1750s, however, elements of the fairs were being moved into new trading halls (Figure 8.1) and the markets were progressively shifted from the principal streets. The livestock market, for instance, was moved to Gorse Stacks, whilst the butchers were firstly corralled into shambles on Northgate Street and in 1829 into the new market hall.²⁷ As permanent shops superseded markets and fairs in the shopping habits of the middling sorts, so also they replaced them within the city space. By the end of the eighteenth century Bridge Street, Northgate Street and especially Eastgate Street were characterised by high-status shops. The geography of retailing was very detailed, however, and the best shops were closely concentrated on the east side of Bridge Street and the south side of Eastgate Street (Figure 8.1, inset). In contrast, the shops opposite were more mixed and the west side of Bridge Street was said to have long been a 'desert wilderness, so far as business is concerned'.²⁸ Moreover, there was a strong vertical dimension to this geographical specialisation, with row-level shops on Eastgate Street being occupied by mercers, drapers, goldsmiths and toymen. Those at street level housed large numbers of victuallers.²⁹

Such changes in the structure and geography of Chester's trading and leisure economy helped to reshape temporal and spatial movements through the city space. Fairs remained significant events in the eighteenth century and those of Chester were probably at their height in the 1760s to 1780s. The influx of Irish linen traders in

²⁵ Defoe, *Tour Through Great Britain*, p. 392.

²⁶ See Stobart, 'Shopping streets', 15–18 for more detailed discussion.

²⁷ For early nineteenth-century comments on the relocation of fairs and markets in Chester, see J. Seacombe, *The Chester Guide* (Chester, 1836), p. 139 and J. Hemingway, *History of the City of Chester*, vol. II (Chester, 1831), p. 24.

²⁸ T. Hughs, *The Stranger's Handbook to Chester and its Environs* (Chester, 1856), p. 64.

²⁹ P. Broster, sketch plan of Eastgate Street (c.1754), Cheshire RO, Z CR 63/2/133/17.

particular helped to attract a range of other itinerant dealers and gave a general fillip to the local shops. However, the centrality of fairs to shopping and as a source of goods for retailers was diminishing from about the middle of the century. One Chester resident wrote to a friend in Flint that 'there is no occasion to be in a violent hurry for there is always great variety of choice in the shops and full as cheap as what the people bring to the fair'.³⁰ For residents and visitors alike, goods were evidently available from shops throughout the year and, by the early nineteenth century, the seasonal influx of traders was greatly diminished.³¹

Although the seasonality of the fairs was replaced to some extent by that of the social season, flows of goods and people probably became more even in terms of time. And yet they remained concentrated in space. The relocation of markets and fairs to peripheral streets and halls served to refocus activities such as food-purchasing, but the central streets took on extra significance and new meanings. The emergence of shopping as a leisure activity (at least for the wealthy) made shops and shopping streets social as well as commercial spaces. Indeed, 'in major towns, especially resorts, the association of redefined shop spaces and leisure activities was extensive and axiomatic'.³² Walking the principal shopping streets of Chester provided opportunities simultaneously to purchase novel goods, to view the latest fashions (both in the shops and on fellow promenaders) and simply to be seen.

Chester's changing socio-economic character was clearly reflected in internal changes, but it is impossible to understand this transformation without reference to the city's wider context. At one level, we can see these changes as local manifestations of national processes. The shift of manufacturing away from county towns, urban improvement and the commercialisation of leisure were country-wide phenomena. But these national trends and influences were being played out in distinctive geographical settings and involved particular interactions between town and hinterland. It is this second context that I want to explore next.

Chester and its region

Following Everitt's arguments, the county appears to form the most obvious local region for Chester. As the shire town it would form the political, administrative, social and economic focus for an increasingly self-conscious county region.³³ The evidence, though is equivocal. In political and administrative terms the interaction between

³⁰ Letter from Mrs Read (1775) quoted in S.I. Mitchell, 'Urban markets and retail distribution, 1730-1815' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1975), p. 51 (see also p. 42).

³¹ H. Holland, *General View of the Agriculture of Cheshire* (London, 1808), p. 313.

³² P. Glennie and N. Thrift, 'Consumers, identities and consumption spaces in early-modern England', *Environment and Planning A*, 28 (1996), 33.

³³ Everitt, 'Country, county and town', p. 94.

Chester and Cheshire was close. The city was the centre of polling and much electioneering activity in county as well as borough elections. Conversely, many of the freemen who made up Chester's electorate were resident outside the city. In part, this arose from the ability of the mayor and assembly to admit new freemen at their discretion, but it reflected the real importance of rural interests (and especially the Grosvenors) in Chester's political affairs.³⁴ Of the 2,000 or so freemen eligible to vote in the 1730s and 1740s, only two-thirds resided in Chester itself. Most of the others lived in Cheshire, but in all they were spread across eight counties,³⁵ so that, whilst the core relationship was between city and county, a much larger region could also be drawn for the city.

In terms of administration, Chester was the location of the assizes and, from 1759, one of just two Cheshire towns where quarter sessions were held. Naturally, the geographical jurisdiction of these courts was closely defined by the county boundaries; so too were the linkages which they engendered. The ninety or so justices of the peace who served in Cheshire during the middle decades of the eighteenth century were mostly drawn from the county's rural gentry and clergy. The interests of county and city were thus closely tied together.³⁶ And, of course, these legal and administrative links were strengthened by the social interaction and seasons which developed around the sittings of the assizes in particular. In addition to a growing body of resident gentry and pseudo-gentry, Chester therefore formed the natural social centre for many of Cheshire's rural gentry, a number of whom had substantial houses in the city.³⁷ However, Chester's influence as an administrative centre spread well beyond the county boundaries. The diocese of Chester encompassed parts of Westmorland, Cumberland, Yorkshire and north Wales, as well as the whole of Lancashire and Cheshire. Whilst the northern section of this area was under the semi-autonomous authority of the archdeacon of Richmond, the consistory court at Chester formed an important legal centre for Cheshire, Lancashire south of the Ribble, and certain parts of Denbighshire and Flintshire. As well as encouraging many lawyers to reside in the city (adding to its pseudo-gentry), this made Chester an important location in the distribution and redistribution of property and wealth in the north-west, linking it to commercial developments in the towns to the north and east.

The social sphere of Chester was similarly extensive. As a cultural centre it drew visitors from across the north-west and north Wales, and, on an individual level, its residents had personal contact with people from a wide area. A measure of the geography of these individual social links can be gained by mapping the distribution of the

³⁴ See R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 212–14; Sweet, *The English Town*, pp. 119–20.

³⁵ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, pp. 20–1. See also S. Baskerville, 'The establishment of the Grosvenor interest in Chester, 1710–48', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 63 (1980).

³⁶ *VCH Cheshire*, vol. II (Oxford, 1996), pp. 61–2.

³⁷ A. de Lavaux, plan of the city and castle of Chester (1745), *Chester City Library*, MF 5/3.

executors and administrators named in the probate records of Cestrians.³⁸ These people included friends and family, business associates and fellow professionals. Although many of them were fellow citizens, a significant number came from outside Chester. Their distribution suggests strong interaction between the city and its immediate surroundings—most of the places linked to Chester were less than 20 miles (32 km) away—but a wider hinterland stretching across Cheshire and into Lancashire, Shropshire and north-east Wales is also apparent (see Figure 8.2). Naturally, no single individual enjoyed such extensive links, but it is evident that wide social networks were centred on the city, nurtured by its well developed urban institutions—guilds, newspapers, assemblies, courts of law and so on. These networks tied Chester's fortunes to those of the villages and towns of its own and neighbouring counties. Whilst the interaction between city and county was evidently close and mutual, its region cannot be identified simply as the Cheshire community. Its geographical position and varied functions meant that linkages spilled beyond the tightly defined county boundaries. Models from economic geography suggest that the sphere of influence of a town is determined by the threshold and range of the goods and services offered there.³⁹ In essence this means that larger centres containing more and higher-order goods and services will have concomitantly larger hinterlands. This intuitive truth is complicated in reality by, *inter alia*, the presence of neighbouring centres offering similar goods; the nature of the local economy (and the type and structure of demand this might generate)⁴⁰ and the possibility of multi-purpose visits to a town. The ways in which these factors were important in shaping Chester's relationship with the county and its wider region can be illustrated by considering the market areas of various different types of goods and services.

Most individuals travelling to Chester to purchase horses at the city's markets in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries came from within twelve miles (19 km)—less than a day's journey (Figure 8.3).⁴¹ Of the 259 buyers listed in the records, 154 came from Chester itself, forty from Cheshire (all but four from the west of the county) and a further ten from neighbouring Flintshire and Shropshire. This relatively limited

³⁸ Probate records are economic, social and cultural as well as legal documents and so reflect many aspects of an individual's life world. Executors and administrators were undoubtedly individuals well known to the deceased and thus form a useful measure of their networks of social interaction. For discussion of the use of this type of data in recreating social networks, see J. Stobart, 'Social and geographical contexts of property transmission in the eighteenth century', in J. Stobart and A. Owens, eds, *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700–1900* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 108–30.

³⁹ Threshold is defined as the local population needed to generate sufficient demand for a good to locate in a particular centre; range is the maximum distance people are willing to travel to obtain that good. Those goods with a large threshold and range are high-order. See Beavon, *Central Place Theory*, 19–20.

⁴⁰ See, for example, J. de Vries, 'Between purchasing power and the world of goods', in J. Brewer and R. Porter, eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), pp. 85–132, and L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture, 1660–1760* (London, 1986).

⁴¹ A. Everitt, 'The marketing of agricultural produce', in J. Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500–1640* (London, 1967), p. 498, suggests that markets were generally located about 10 miles (16 km) apart. Rural dwellers could travel to and from market in a single day.

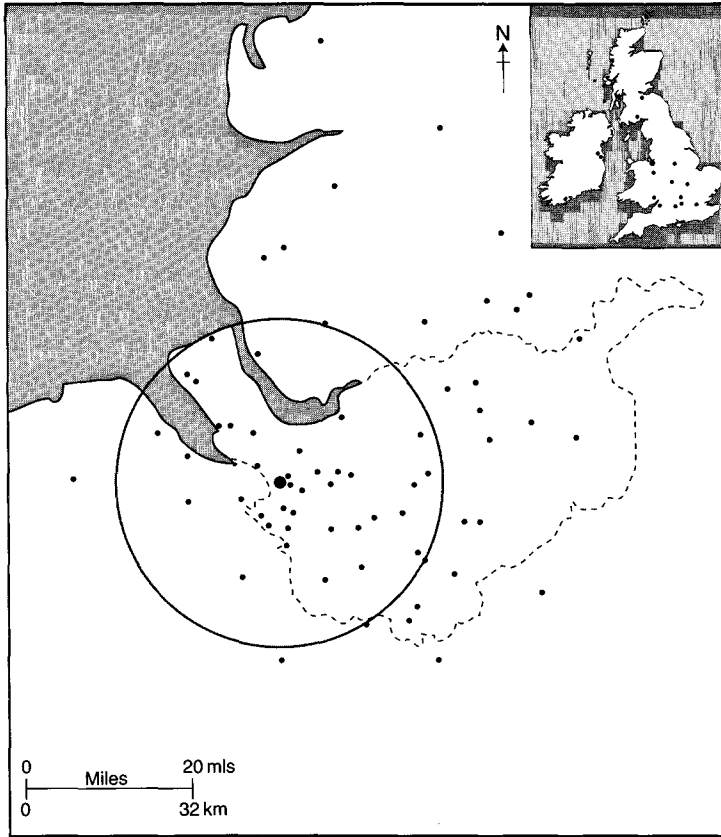


Figure 8.2. Location of executors and administrators named in probate records of Cestrians, 1701–60 (*from probate records proved at Chester, 1701–60*).

hinterland reflects in part the strong demand for horses in Chester and the surrounding countryside (for riding, haulage and agriculture) and also the presence of horse markets in several neighbouring towns including Shrewsbury, Nantwich and Wrexham. In this way, it was probably typical of the market area for many everyday goods and services offered by Chester traders. Lower-order trades, such as shoemakers, tailors, butchers and innkeepers were present in smaller towns and could be accessed locally, making longer journeys to a high-order centre like Chester unnecessary except for those in the immediate vicinity.⁴² Where the quality of the goods or services offered was especially high, the market areas of Chester's traders, and the area brought within the

⁴² Stobart, 'Spatial organization of a regional economy', 153–4. See also Everitt, 'Agricultural produce'.

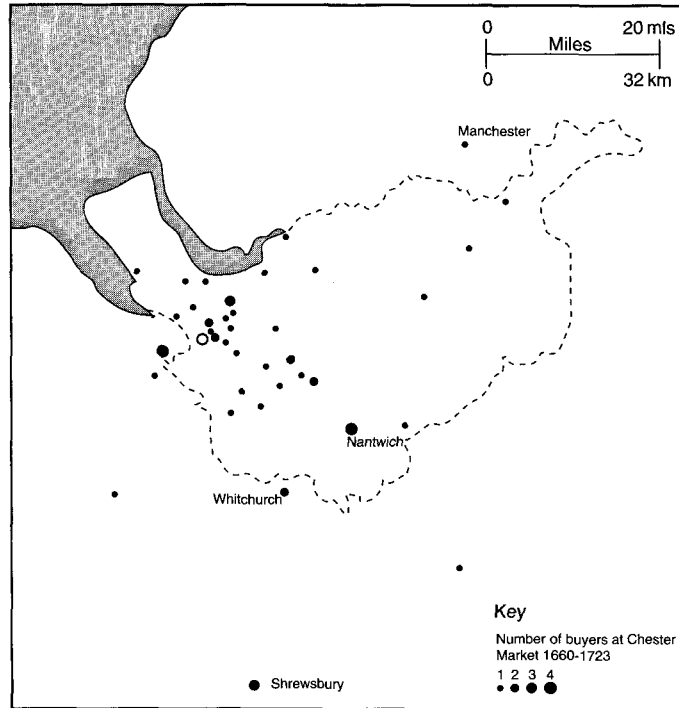


Figure 8.3. Origin of buyers at Chester horse markets, 1660–1723
(*Cheshire CRO, Z SBT12, Chester Horse Market*).

city's sphere of influence, could be much larger. The business activities of the upholsterer Abner Scholes involved a large number of customers and considerable amounts of money. His probate inventory details an extensive range of finished pieces and materials, as well as £1,134 19s. 6d. in book debts owed by 151 individuals. Sums of between £13 10s. 0d. and £38 12s. 8d. were owed by upholsterers, suggesting that Scholes may have supplied other craftsmen with materials, but there were also debts of up to £89 14s. 10d. from customers who included two baronets, five ladies and thirteen esquires.⁴³ These people were spread throughout Cheshire and much of north Wales, as far afield as Bangor, and were evidently willing to overlook the service available at smaller towns such as Ruthin, Denbigh, Wrexham and Frodsham (whose market areas effectively nested within that of Chester) in order to acquire furniture from what was clearly a high-quality craftsman. The economic interaction represented by the customer networks of Scholes and other traders effectively tied Chester to a region which incorporated Cheshire, adjoining areas of neighbouring English counties and much of north Wales.

⁴³ Cheshire RO, WS 1756, Abner Scholes of Chester, upholsterer.

But this interaction itself relied on several other forms of linkage for its successful articulation. Notably, there had to be a passage of information between the craftsman or retailer and the (potential) customer—people had to know of the products on offer and be aware of their quality and worth—and there had to be a physical means of bringing together supply and demand.

By the end of the eighteenth century, transport services to and from Chester included regular canal boats along the Chester Canal to Nantwich and the Ellesmere Canal to the Mersey. The latter was particularly busy with both passengers and freight making the three-hour journey to Liverpool,⁴⁴ but it was as a coaching and carrying centre that Chester linked most closely with its region. Services were especially frequent to towns in Cheshire and neighbouring counties, marking the intensity of interaction with these places (Figure 8.4). Thus the *Universal British Directory* listed fifteen coaches and wagons a week to Nantwich, nine to Frodsham, fourteen to Liverpool, seven to Wrexham and twelve to Whitchurch. These services defined Chester's immediate hinterland, but the geography of its wider carrier and coach network was perhaps more telling. Direct services to east Cheshire and Lancashire were relatively limited (although connections could, of course, be made) whereas there were thirty-three coaches and more than twenty-six wagons each week connecting Chester to (at least) twenty-three towns and villages in north Wales, including places as far afield as Bala, Pwllheli, Beaumaris and Holyhead. Some of these tied in with the boat service to Ireland, but most were essentially transporting goods and people to and from their regional centre.

Much the same was true of the growing amount of coastal shipping which linked Chester to a number of Welsh ports. In 1775, a total of 285 vessels cleared Chester for destinations in north and west Wales, carrying a variety of goods shipped through the city's port. By 1792 there were regular sailings to Caernarfon, Conwy, Barmouth, Amlwch, Greenfield (for Holywell), and Beaumaris. Coastal traders also cleared Chester for Pwllheli, Aberystwyth, Holyhead, Cardigan and Aberdovey.⁴⁵ The passage of goods was not in one direction only, of course, and Chester was the main port for the export of lead and coal from north Wales, and cheese, salt and (sometimes) corn from Cheshire. In the early eighteenth century, Daniel Peck was sending out large quantities of all these goods to a variety of destinations throughout England, Wales and Europe.⁴⁶ Chester faced competition in these spheres. It lost the salt trade to Liverpool with the opening of the Weaver Navigation in 1735 and Whitehaven became increasingly important in the Irish coal trade, but Chester remained an important distribution and redistribution centre throughout the eighteenth century.⁴⁷ These

⁴⁴ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ *Universal British Directory*, vol. II (London, 1792); Craig, 'Trade and Shipping', 115.

⁴⁶ Daniel Peck's Letter Book, Cheshire RO, Z CR 352/1.

⁴⁷ Craig, 'Trade and shipping', 115, 119–25.

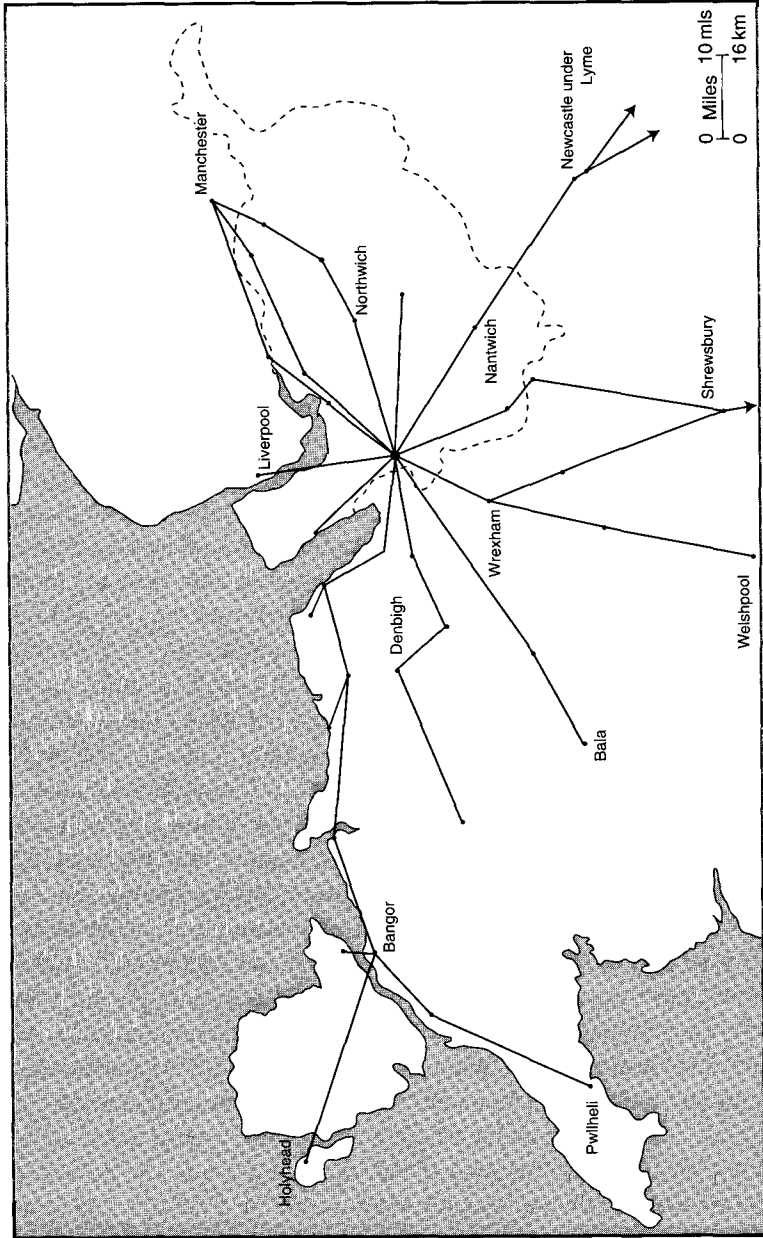


Figure 8.4. Coach and carrier services to Chester (from Broster, Chester Guide; Universal British Directory, vol. II).

two-way linkages were vital in both defining and integrating Chester's region. That they spread so far into Wales reflects not simply the lack of urban development in the principality, but also the enormous attraction of the city's commercial and social infrastructure.⁴⁸

Information about the cultural and consumer delights of Chester came by word of mouth and personal experience, but was broadcast most widely by advertisements in the city's newspapers.⁴⁹ Naturally, papers were read most widely by the middling sorts, but these formed the principal customers of the higher-class retailers and professionals who were coming to characterise Chester's economy in the eighteenth century. The places mentioned in these advertisements give a good impression of both the geography of the newspaper's readership and the extent of the city's hinterland for higher-order goods and services. This stretched from Beaumaris to Buxton and from Preston to Shrewsbury, and thus overlapped with the hinterlands of other major centres as well as encompassing those of numerous lesser towns (Figure 8.5). Significantly, though, the greatest concentration was in west Cheshire and north-east Wales, corresponding closely with the real patterns of demand and distribution. Thus, as a centre for consumer information and consumer goods, Chester was tied to its county and to large parts of neighbouring counties as well.

To reiterate, these varied economic and social linkages were vital to Chester's prosperity in the eighteenth century. Constructing the image and reality of Chester as an attractive resort for the middling sorts and gentry was central to many of the processes which shaped it and other county towns during this period.⁵⁰ However, the transformation of the economic, cultural and physical structure of towns like Chester was also intimately tied to demand in, and interaction with, its region. The city looked out to Cheshire and to Wales, north Shropshire and south Lancashire—areas with which there was regular contact and mutual interdependence. From these places as well as Chester itself came visitors to its cultural attractions, voters in its elections, plaintiffs to its courts and, most importantly, customers to its retailers and professionals. But Chester was also part of much wider networks of interaction which encompassed the country as a whole. Flows of goods, people and information linked Chester to London, Dublin and Bristol as well as Nantwich, Wrexham and Liverpool.

⁴⁸ North and mid-Wales experienced little urban development in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century: see the useful series of maps in Langton, 'Urban growth and economic change'.

⁴⁹ Chester's first newspaper, the *Chester Journal*, was established in 1727, but seems to have folded quite quickly. *Adams Weekly Courant* (from 1734) survived much longer and the *Chester Chronicle* (1775) was still being produced 200 years later. I am grateful to Andrew Hann for allowing me use his data on Chester newspaper advertisements.

⁵⁰ Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*. See also Sweet, *The English Town*, pp. 75–114, 219–55.

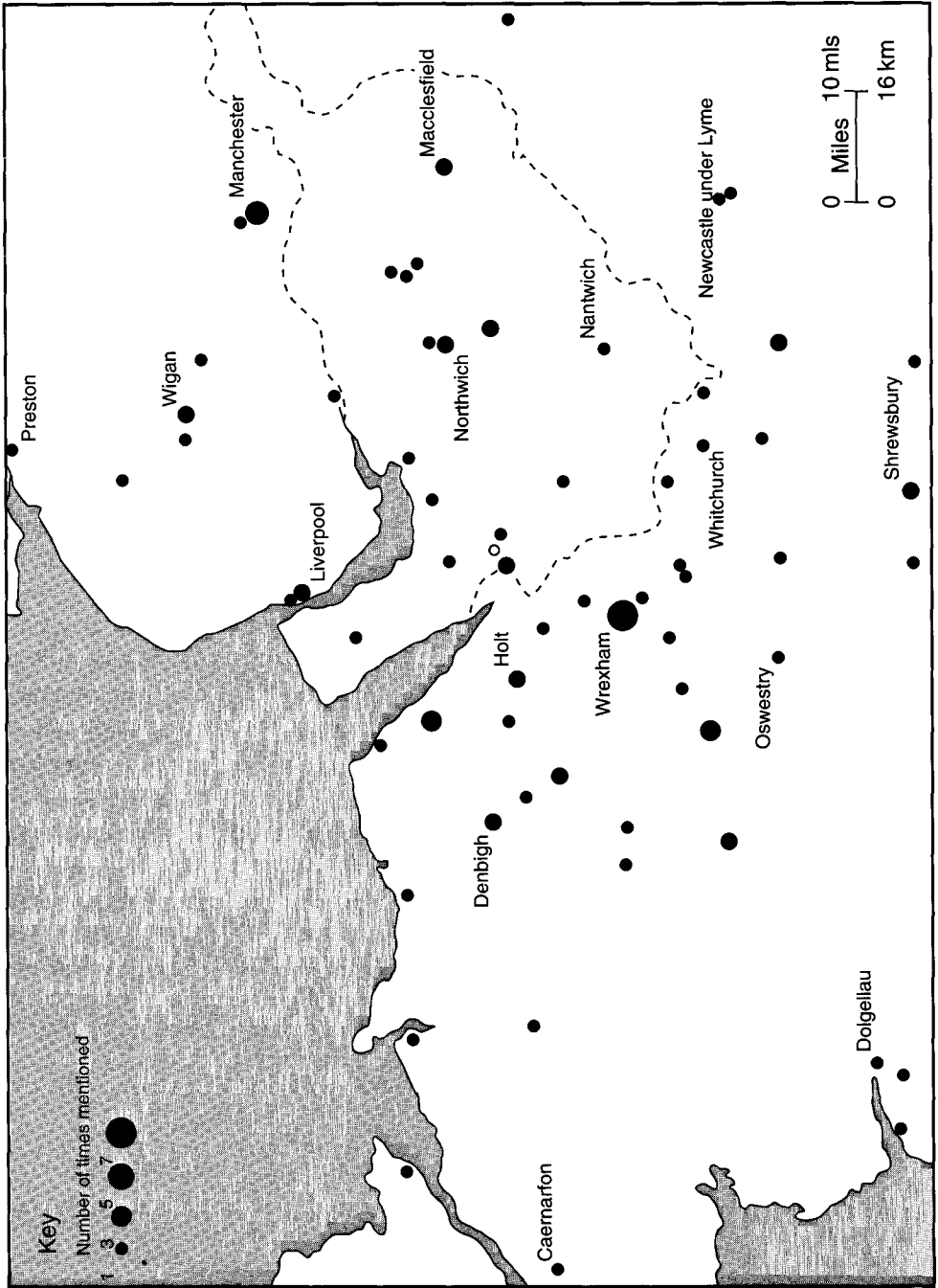


Figure 8.5. Places mentioned in Chester newspapers and advertisements, 1739–49 (from Adams Weekly Courant).

Chester and the country

Provincial cultures and identities remained strong during the eighteenth century, and attitudes to London were often equivocal.⁵¹ It was seen as the arbiter of taste and fashion and the engine of economic growth, but also as the ‘embodiment of urban depravity and crime’, and an ‘overgrown monster’ which threatened the social and economic well-being of the nation.⁵² Notwithstanding this, links to London were often important to the prosperity of a town and were much-trumpeted by its tradesmen and women.⁵³ So it was in Chester. Its status as a garrison, cathedral and county town undoubtedly served to strengthen political, administrative and social ties with the capital. Although relations between the military and civic authorities were not always amicable, the presence of officers in the lists of those owing debts to city traders suggests that the garrison brought welcome custom. The corporation was certainly prompt and assiduous in celebrating royal birthdays, marriages and coronations, and in providing soldiers, seamen and supplies during times of war.⁵⁴ More concrete ties with London came in the form of regular coach and mail services. As early as 1673 there were thrice weekly coaches. A century later there was a mail coach every day but Wednesday, a ‘flying machine’ three times a week and at least six other coaches and nine wagons.⁵⁵ By this time, Chester was an important coaching centre on the route from London to Holyhead, a position which continued to strengthen until the completion of Telford’s Shrewsbury to Holyhead road in 1830.

With this increased contact came greater flows of goods, people and information. London newspapers were available in Chester’s newsrooms and coffee-shops, and architectural pattern books from the capital helped to disseminate the latest ideas of the leading architects.⁵⁶ That said, the corporation seems to have been reluctant to abandon Chester’s most characteristic feature—the rows—in pursuit of a national urban aesthetic. Many people petitioned for the right to remove or enclose their rows, arguing that their new houses would ‘contribute to the uniformity of the street’ and give Chester a more fashionable and modern appearance.⁵⁷ These requests were generally granted, on payment of a fine, away from the main streets, but around the central cross the rows were largely preserved despite the condemnation they received from

⁵¹ Sweet, *The English Town*, pp. 257–66.

⁵² E.A. Wrigley, ‘A simple model of London’s importance in changing English society and economy, 1650–1750’ in Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth*, pp. 133–56; Sweet, *The English Town*, pp. 258, 225. See also J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997).

⁵³ See P. Borsay, ‘The London connection: cultural diffusion and the eighteenth-century provincial town’, *London Journal*, 19 (1994), 21–35.

⁵⁴ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, pp. 9–13.

⁵⁵ Broster, *Chester Guide: Universal British Directory*, vol. II (London, 1792).

⁵⁶ Kennett, *Georgian Chester*, pp. 39, 43.

⁵⁷ Assembly books, Cheshire RO, Z A/B/4/25.

metropolitan visitors. Clearly, London fashions did not completely dominate local tastes and economic considerations.

By contrast, in Chester's retail sector, links with London had a profound impact. Amongst the higher-class retailers, awareness of the latest fashions was paramount, and publicising their London contacts and credentials became central to many advertisements. Drapers and tailors were perhaps the most conscious of fashions. James Williams, for example, confidently announced that he had 'All kinds and colours of silk, satin, hair, worsted and cotton goods, which are now so much the fashion for waistcoats and breeches'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Richard Ormes advertised 'Josephs, Jackets, and Ridinghabets of all sorts after the best and neatest manner, as in London', and Henry Hancock proudly proclaimed his links with M. Pussenoors (tailor to the Prince of Wales) and his ability to supply clothes in accordance with the fashions at court.⁵⁹ In many instances, such knowledge came from personal visits to the capital. Thus, Williams and Barth informed 'the Ladies of Chester and its neighbourhood, that the latter has returned from London, with Fashions suited to the present season'.⁶⁰ As this announcement hints, the London connection was also important in acquiring the goods themselves. Susannah Brown was more explicit, advertising 'as elegant an assortment as could possibly be selected from some of the finest Stocks in the Metropolis'.⁶¹ Other types of retailer also went to London for supplies. Much of John Poole's extensive range of books and music came from metropolitan printers and book sellers; George French stocked his toyshop in Eastgate Street with 'Goods of any kind whatsoever in the Toyshop Business, intirely new, from London', and even bulky items like furniture were brought from the capital.⁶²

Although the profile of London certainly rose in Chester's shops, it had long been important in commerce through the port. Problems with silting and competition from Liverpool restricted the growth of overseas shipping, but coastal traffic increased significantly from 1750 with London prominent in the trade. By the 1760s it was sending large amounts of groceries to Chester, taking lead and cheese in return.⁶³ Links to the capital were thus an important factor in the prosperity of Chester's port and the industries of its hinterland. Moreover, they were strengthened by the City of London's role in providing ancillary services such as insurance, although, as Daniel Peck noted, it was possible to 'gett it done att Rotterdam cheaper than in London'.⁶⁴ Chester's merchants did not trade only via London; nor were its shops stocked only with London

⁵⁸ *Chester Courant*, 18 Feb 1794.

⁵⁹ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 6/17 Dec 1746; *ibid.*, 6 Jul 1784.

⁶⁰ *Chester Chronicle*, 22 Apr 1841. Interestingly, the advertisement was clearly aimed at readers outside Chester as well as Cestrians themselves.

⁶¹ H. Willcock, ed., *Browns and Chester: Portrait of a Shop, 1780-1946* (London, 1947), p. 37.

⁶² Mitchell, 'Urban markets', p. 381; *Adams Weekly Courant*, 17/28 Apr 1750; *Chester Chronicle*, 18 Mar 1806.

⁶³ Craig, 'Trade and shipping', 115 and 125; G. Place, *The Rise and Fall of Parkgate, Passenger Port for Ireland, 1686-1815* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 207-8.

⁶⁴ Daniel Peck's letter book, Cheshire RO, Z CR 352/1, entry for 16 Feb 1703.

goods. As well as a significant trade with north Wales, business was also transacted with ports all along the west and south coast. Daniel Peck dispatched several consignments of cheese to Plymouth and had dealings with merchants in Milford, Pembroke and Bristol. He even considered establishing links with Harwich to facilitate his trade with Rotterdam. The port books of 1775 show ships arriving at or departing from Chester for at least seventeen English ports as far afield as Carlisle and Arundel.⁶⁵ Although dwarfed by the trade with Liverpool and north Wales, these shipments represented significant links with specialist economies elsewhere in the country. Such non-metropolitan links were also strengthened by the provision of regular and increasingly frequent coach and wagon services running direct to Shrewsbury, Worcester, Bath, Bristol and Oxford as well as a large number of towns on the routes to London.

These linkages reflected the importance of Chester as a regional centre and transport node, but in turn they brought in a greater number of visitors (thus boosting demand for goods and services, especially victualling) and helped to spread Chester's trading links over a large area. The Lancashire trade was so strong by the mid-eighteenth century that Eastgate Street became known as 'Manchester Row' and a Manchester trading hall was constructed around 1750. Half a century later these traders and their Yorkshire counterparts were provided with larger halls off Foregate Street (see Figure 8.1). About the same time, George Lowe was ordering cutlery, silverware, watches, buckles and tea-urns from Sheffield and Birmingham as well as London, whilst earthenware from north Staffordshire was being sold to Chester dealers from the 1750s or earlier.⁶⁶ The broader geography of this inter-regional trade is clear from the distribution of sellers at the city's horse markets (Figure 8.6). Within England, the importance of London is immediately clear, but so too is the wide spread of contacts with towns and villages, particularly in the midlands. The movement of goods and people represented here again reflected and bolstered Chester's status as a regional centre; it also indicates that this longer-distance commerce was not hierarchically structured. The evidence here is far from certain, but markedly hierarchical interaction would involve Chester being linked to a small number of distant centres, each of which would be the focus of its own local hierarchy of linkages.⁶⁷ Rather, it seems to have been sufficiently important as a retail, trading and social centre to short-circuit these hierarchical structures. In effect, Chester constituted a key 'gateway city'.

Crucial to this status were its links with Ireland, especially in terms of the through traffic from London. Although vessels left Chester for ports across Europe, Ireland dominated its foreign trade, accounting for over eighty per cent of overseas ships and tonnage.⁶⁸ Daniel Peck exported large quantities of lead, coal and salt to Dublin—

⁶⁵ Chester Port books, PRO 190/1442/5.

⁶⁶ Mitchell, 'Urban markets', p. 376; 'Sales ledger of John Wedgwood', Potteries Museum, Hanley.

⁶⁷ See Lepetit, *Pre-Industrial Urban System*, pp. 178–81, and Beavon, *Central Place Theory*, for a more detailed theoretical treatment.

⁶⁸ Craig, 'Trade and shipping', 109 and 112.

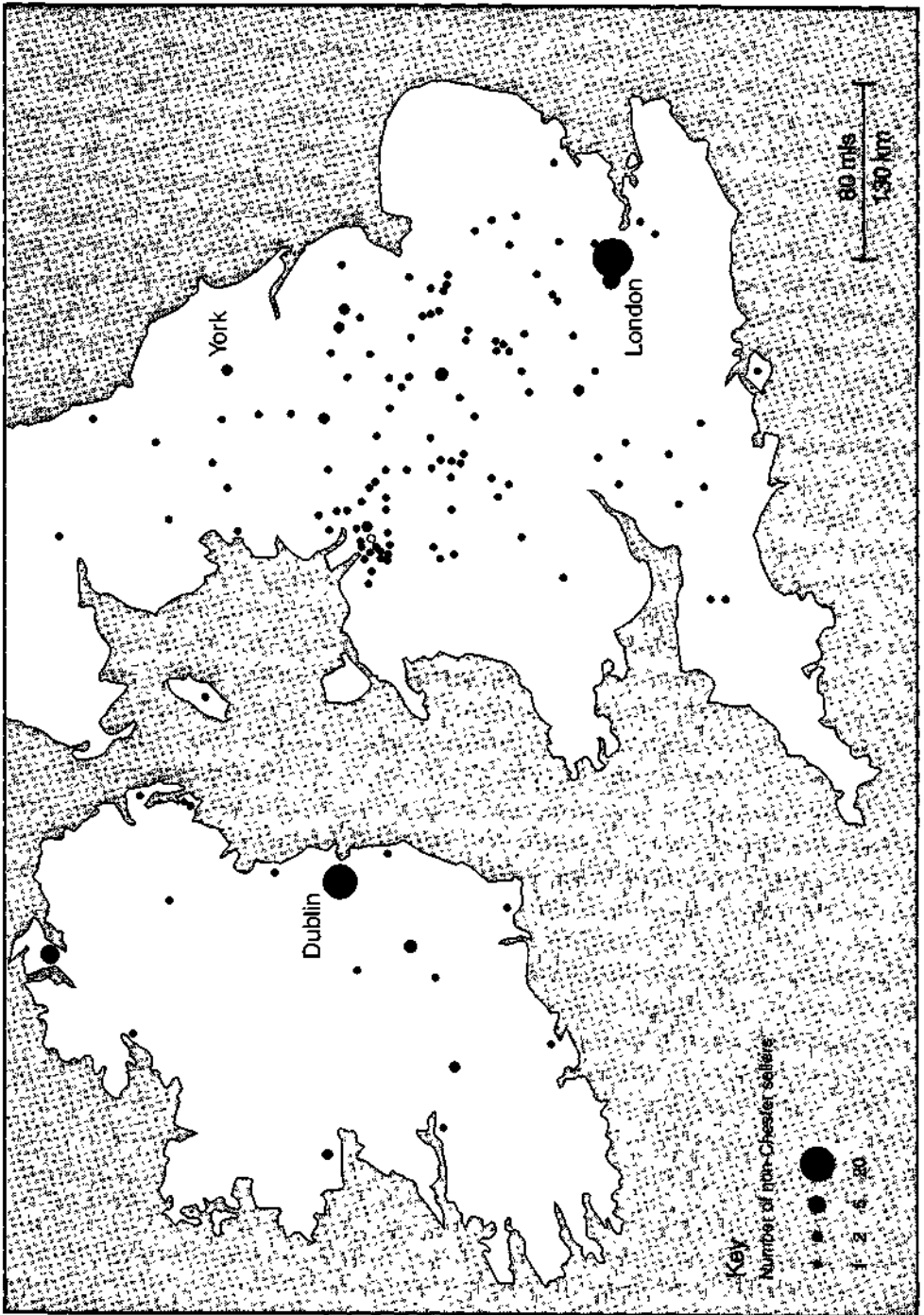


Figure 8.6. Origin of sellers at Chester horse markets, 1660-1723 (Cheshire CRO, Z SBT12, Chester Horse Market).

often as part of a three-way trade involving either Rotterdam or Lisbon where he obtained manufactures, and fruit and wine respectively.⁶⁹ Whilst the shipments of salt declined from the 1730s, traffic in coal and lead remained strong, not least because both formed convenient back freight on the vigorous Ireland-to-Chester trade.⁷⁰ This consisted of three main commodities: horses, animal products and, above all, linen. The strength of the horse trade is apparent from Figure 8.6. The records of the horse market show that one seller in six came from Ireland, mostly from Dublin, but others from as far afield as Londonderry, Galway and Tipperary, reflecting the importance of Chester as a general as well as livestock market. The trade in horses was reinforced by growing imports of cows and sheep through Parkgate at the turn of the nineteenth century, but for much of the 1700s there was a ban on Irish livestock (except horses) entering Britain.⁷¹ This encouraged the trade in animal products and in the 1760s and 1770s large quantities of cowhides, calfskins, tallow and sheep's guts (for making whips) came to Chester.⁷²

Important as these shipments were, they were dwarfed by the trade in linen. Exempted from British duty in 1696, this quickly came to dominate Ireland's exports to Britain. Chester enjoyed a sizeable share of this trade: 449,654 yards (411,160 m) came in through the port in 1736; 1,121,628 yards (1,025,620 m) in 1765, and an estimated 5,500,000 yards (5,029,170 m) by 1786.⁷³ The linen trade brought considerable wealth and, especially during the midsummer and michaelmas fairs, a large number of merchants, retailers and shoppers to Chester. A linen hall was built about 1755 off Northgate, but the continued growth of trade led to the construction of the New Linen Hall in 1778 for which the corporation donated a clock. This had thirty-six double and twenty-four single shops, which were let to Irish merchants and drapers. The rents collected over the following thirty years or so closely mirrored the fortunes of Chester's linen trade with Ireland (Figure 8.7). From its peak in the mid-1780s, income fell suddenly after 1788 and again in 1811 as the Ulster linen manufacturers increasingly traded not via Dublin and Chester, but through Belfast to Liverpool. Moreover, they began to sell directly rather than rely on fairs.⁷⁴ Chester thus lost some of its status as a 'gateway city' and its fairs became still less important in the commercial life of the city.

As well as the traffic in goods, Chester was the principal focus of passenger movements to and from Ireland, although embarkations generally took place at Parkgate or Holyhead. Passengers also fell into three groups. First and most important in the records were the wealthy travellers — owners of Irish estates and their guests, those on official

⁶⁹ Daniel Peck's letter book, Cheshire RO, Z CR 352/1.

⁷⁰ The lower rates charged on this back freight allowed Flintshire coalmasters to compete with supplies from Cumberland and south Wales which enjoyed little traffic from Ireland; see Craig, 'Trade and shipping', 120–1.

⁷¹ Place, *Rise and Fall of Parkgate*, pp. 199, 211.

⁷² Chester Port books, PRO 190/1439/3 and PRO 190/1442/5.

⁷³ Mitchell, 'Urban markets', p. 44. The last figure is probably too high.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49 and Place, *Rise and Fall of Parkgate*, p. 206.

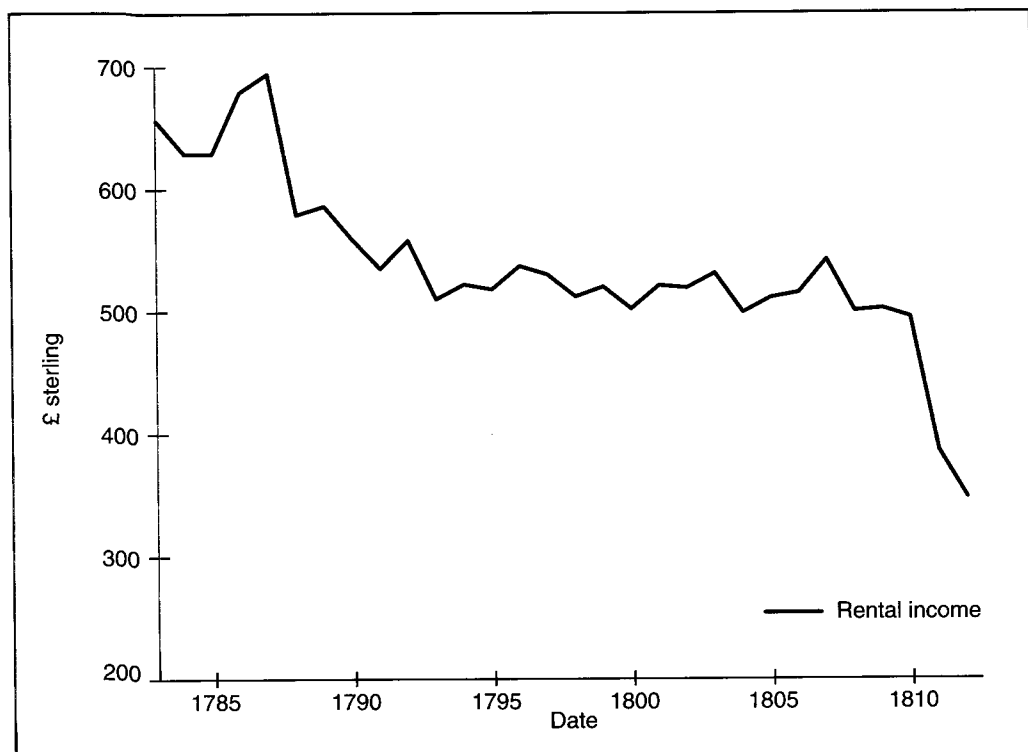


Figure 8.7. Rental income of New Linen Hall, Chester, 1783–1812 (*Cheshire CRO, Z G/MC/11, Linen Hall Account Book*).

postings, merchants and the like—who journeyed in the twice-daily coaches linking Chester to these ports or even took their own carriages with them. The Parkgate Subsidy Book records growing numbers of coaches, post-chaises, phaetons, gigs and so on being taken to and from Ireland, together with substantial quantities of personal belongings including furniture, pictures, silver plate and musical instruments.⁷⁵ Such people undoubtedly boosted custom in the city's inns and shops, and helped to foster close links between Chester and Dublin. The second group using Chester as a route to Ireland were the military. Apart from the regular traffic, large numbers of soldiers were assembled there in 1689 prior to William III's Irish campaign, and about a century later a regiment under Sir William Watkins Wynn (later mayor of Chester) embarked for Ireland to deal with the 'rebellion'.⁷⁶ In the opposite direction came the third group of travellers: migrant Irish labourers seeking seasonal employment, especially in the home counties.

⁷⁵ Parkgate Subsidy Book, Cheshire RO, Z CAP/4.

⁷⁶ Hemingway, *History of Chester*, vol. II, p. 254.

Many were making the journey by the 1720s, but numbers increased significantly in the 1740s so that the Old Key House at Neston was converted into a House of Correction for holding these people prior to their repatriation for vagrancy.⁷⁷ In the following fifty years 25,325 passed through on their way back to Ireland.

In terms of goods, people and information, there was two-way interaction between Chester and the society and economy of the country as a whole. London was prominent in national linkages but did not dominate to the extent seen in some other provincial towns. Indeed, much of the prosperity and vitality of Chester came from its interaction with the 'peripheral nations' of eighteenth-century Britain. Its close contacts with Wales and Ireland (especially Dublin) drew Chester into wider economic, social and political spheres and distinguished it from other English county centres. Indeed, it could be argued that Chester was uniquely placed during this period in helping to integrate these Celtic regions with the English economy and state. These long-distance circuits were locked into local webs of interaction with Chester acting as 'a sort of provincial metropolis, not only for its own county but to neighbouring counties'.⁷⁸ It focused national influences onto particular localities and projected local products, ideas and concerns on to a larger stage. The city prospered as a result.

Epilogue

Each town is unique, but, just as our personality as individuals is shaped by our social interaction with other people, so the character of towns is influenced by their interaction with other places. It is impossible to understand the development of a town without reference to those other places, both within the local region and throughout the country. Chester in the eighteenth century was thriving because of its external linkages. As a cultural, administrative, retail and commercial centre, it looked outwards for its prosperity. By about 1830, though, many of these external links were gone or much diminished.⁷⁹ Irish linen merchants no longer came to Chester; few ships made the difficult journey along the Dee; through coaches increasingly went to Liverpool or took Telford's Holyhead road; the growth of Manchester and Liverpool also undermined its significance as a regional centre; and its function as a leisure town declined with the improved accessibility of London and the spa resorts, and the general retreat of the gentry from towns.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Place, *Rise and Fall of Parkgate*, pp. 182–3.

⁷⁸ J. Aikin, *The Country from Thirty to Forty Miles round Manchester* (London, 1795), p. 388.

⁷⁹ See J. Herson, 'Victorian Chester: a city of change and ambiguity', in R. Swift, ed., *Victorian Chester* (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 13–51.

⁸⁰ Herson, 'Victorian Chester', p. 17; E. Willshaw, 'The inns of Chester, 1775–1832' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1979), pp. 59–60; J. Ellis, 'Regional and county centres, c.1700–c.1840', in Clark, *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, pp. 1129–86.

These changes combined to produce a crisis over the identity and function of Chester. As John Herson records, there were heated debates in the town council between those who argued that 'Chester must henceforth depend on the introduction of manufactories' and those who resisted the social decline that this would entail.⁸¹ Although some industrial development did occur, it remained a modest and contested process. Instead, it was a re-emphasis of external links which helped to revive Chester's fortunes in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The coming of the railways in 1840 was greeted with much enthusiasm in the city. They brought employment and some industrial development (especially in engineering), but more importantly they revitalised Chester's links with its region and the country as a whole. This encouraged the expansion of its service economy and a revival of its leisure functions, now as a tourist centre for the picturesque beauties of north Wales.⁸² In the eighteenth century, nineteenth century and also today, it is external linkages that have shaped the city of Chester.

⁸¹ Herson, 'Victorian Chester', pp. 19, 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

JON STOBART

County, Town and Country: Three Histories of Urban Development in Eighteenth-Century Chester

To fully understand the changes seen in individual towns and the wider urban system during the eighteenth century, we need to place our subjects at the centre of a stage which has geographical as well as social, economic, cultural or political dimensions. This paper focuses on a single town, Chester, and places it in three distinct but related spatial contexts. Beginning with the town itself, attention is focused on the changing structure and geography of its socio-economy, particularly the proliferation and concentration of cultural, leisure and retail functions, and the related transformation of the physical infrastructure, especially the improvement of the main streets and buildings. Next, the position and role of Chester as a metropolis for the county and region are explored through analysis of personal, social and business links, and the notion of 'county community' is critically assessed. Finally, Chester is placed in the context of the whole country, or rather three countries in one: England, Wales and Ireland. The city enjoyed good communications and extensive ties with London through its position as a county and garrison town and cathedral town. However, it was also important in helping to integrate both north Wales and Ireland into the national space-economy. These three histories of eighteenth-century Chester underline the importance of the geographical context of urban development. No single history tells us the whole story.

TOBY BARNARD

The Cultures of Eighteenth-Century Irish Towns

This paper looks at the varied functions—recreational, associational and political—of eighteenth-century Irish towns. In many respects, these characteristics resembled what has been found in contemporary English and Welsh towns. However, in Ireland, towns had long been conceived not just as centres of civility and urbanity, but of English and Protestant values. These features meant that they were sites of strong cultural and confessional differentiation by the eighteenth century. Some of the resulting tensions, both within particular towns, and between town and countryside, are explored.

ROSEMARY SWEET

Provincial Culture and Urban Histories in England and Ireland during the Long Eighteenth Century

This paper considers the strength of provincial culture and urban identity over the long eighteenth century through a comparison of the urban histories of English and

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
<i>Cal. S. P. Ire</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland</i>
HC	House of Commons
JCHAS	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
JRSAI	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
KTCM	Records of the Corporation of Kells, 1685–1787: NLI MS 25446, 8 vols
LPK	C. McNeill, ed., <i>Liber primus Kilkenniensis</i> (Dublin, 1931)
NA	National Archives [Dublin]
NHist.	<i>Northern History</i>
NLI	National Library Ireland
<i>Parl. Gaz.</i>	<i>The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland</i>
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RO	Record Office
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UH	<i>Urban History</i>
UHY	<i>Urban History Yearbook</i>
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>