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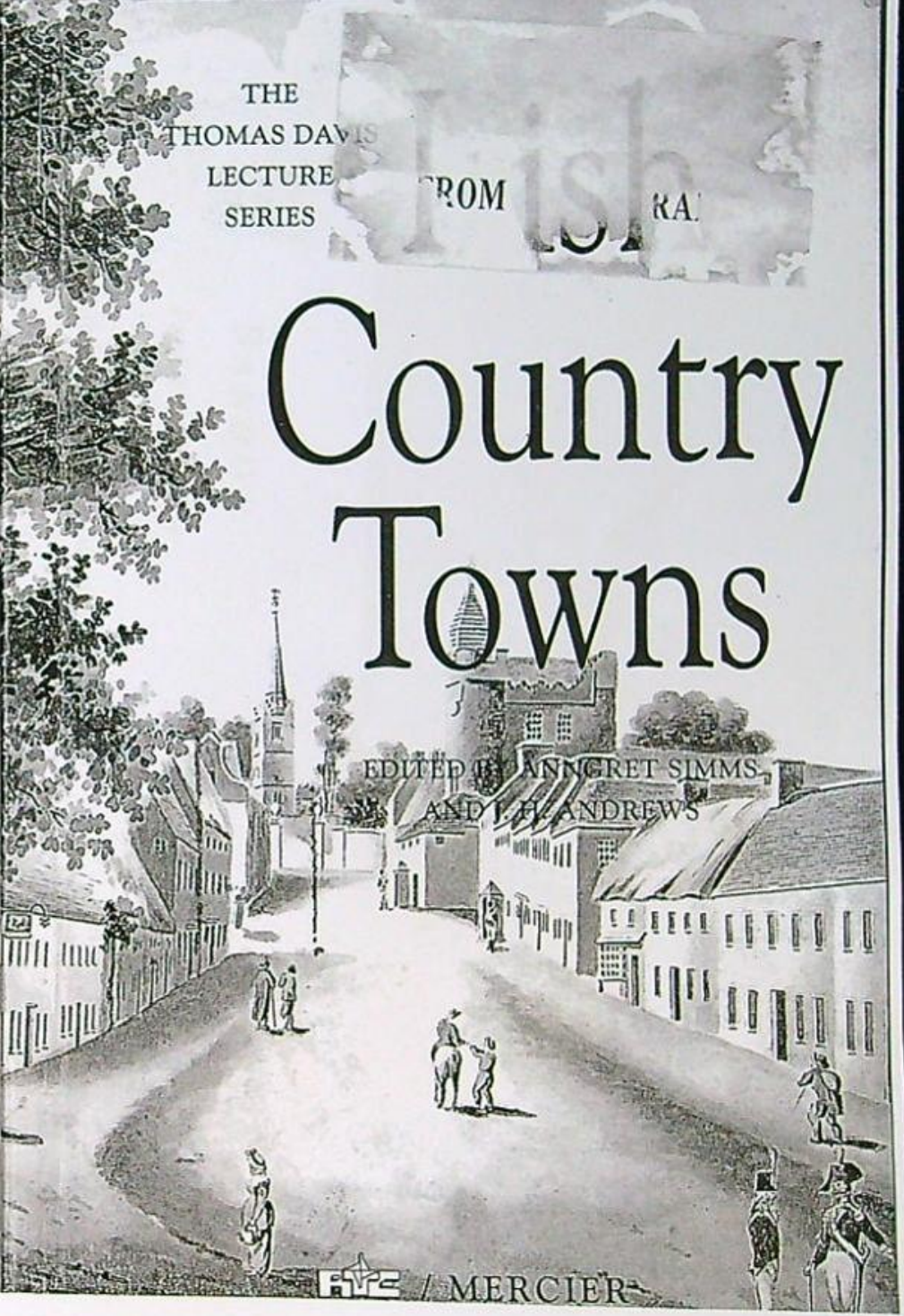
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FROM

Country Towns

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/ MERCIER

BANDON

Patrick O'Flanagan

BANDON, Bandonbridge, Droichid na mBandon, is one of Munster's newest towns. With a population of nearly 10,000 people in 1821 it was the eighth largest town in Ireland, yet strangely, Bandon began its life as two separate self-contained towns in the early 1600s. One of these towns was called Bandon-bridge, the other, on the northern side of the River Bandon, was then known as Coolfada. In the early 1600s there were also two recognisable suburbs on the southern side of the town, namely Ballymodan and Irishtown or Cloghmacsimon. By 1618, however, all four segments of development were in the hands of Richard Boyle, earl of Cork, the most successful entrepreneur active in Ireland in the seventeenth century.

Bandon today, especially in its layout and morphology or structure, still exhibits the influence of its Munster plantation origins. It was intended to be a kind of early 'growth pole', acting as a catalyst to animate the plantation economy of south Munster. It was also designed as a military redoubt: hence its walls, although partly demolished in the late seventeenth century, have acted as a potent containing influence and directional force for subsequent urban development, especially street layout.

The visitor to modern Bandon is also impressed by the names on some of the shop-fronts, such as Herriot, which betoken the presence of the descendants of the original settlers who mainly came from south-western England. One of the earliest gravestones in nearby Kilbrogan cemetery indicates the resting place of Ann Dyke, from Bristol, virgin, aged twenty-nine.

The reconstruction of Bandon's heritage in the broadest sense is made possible by the fact that much documentation has survived. The tradition established by the earl of Cork in the management of his vast estate properties, industries



Bandon from the east in 1775 by Bernard Scalé (Devonshire estate papers, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire)

and investments in Ireland and England has led to the creation of a vast, range of material now available at Chatsworth, Derbyshire, the seat of the duke of Devonshire, whose family acquired much of Boyle's property in Ireland in the mid-eighteenth century. Other material is available at the National Library in Dublin and at Lismore, County Waterford, Boyle's Irish seat. This archive, which begins in the seventeenth century and extends up to the late 1800s, is one of Ireland's most important sources. It is for the historical geographer what Newgrange is for the archaeologist.

If one can mention ambience without being too daring, there is something in Bandon even today that makes it very different to most other southern Irish towns. Twelve per cent of its population is returned in the census as non-Roman-



Bandon 1938, Ordnance Survey of Ireland, 1:2500

Catholic. Admittedly this is a small percentage but when compared to the average southern figure of about two per cent it is significant. The ambience was certainly perceptible when I first visited Bandon in 1960 and it forcibly reminds one in many respects of what is now called Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown where I grew up.

Having disposed of our introductory remarks which have attempted to trace the origins of the town it will be most fruitful first to discuss the general morphology or structure of the settlement and then to examine the major functional changes over the last few hundred years and trace their morphological, cultural and social consequences.

Bandon consists essentially of two main streets, North and South Main Street, one on each side of the river. Each of these settlements was originally endowed with all the requisite paraphernalia for a seventeenth-century town. Each had a large gatehouse – part of the town's walled defences, a magnificent market-house-cum-courthouse, an Anglican church and a spacious main street whose houses had gardens stretching down to the river. All Bandon's major institutions and public buildings were located inside the town walls until after the mid-nineteenth century when a range of Catholic institutions including a church and a convent were built. Cabin suburbs appeared and disappeared on the outskirts of Bandon at various times. Among these was one called Sugar Lane which testifies to the fact that some of the early tenants partly paid their rents in quantities of sugar.

The completion of a series of military barracks, one in 1752 and two others at the end of the same century, made a significant contribution to the quality of the town's housing stock. They all served to prolong the lines of existing streets outside the walls of the town. Residences for officers were developed mainly on the north side of the town.

Industrialisation, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, also brought considerable change: Old Chapel, otherwise Roundhill, developed on the outskirts of the town as a suburb. The development of four breweries and two distilleries at the same time also had important consequences especially in the eastern side of the town. Industry

became a major employer and encouraged new residential development in that area. Finally the arrival of the railway in 1849, again on the eastern side of the town, helped to intensify housing, industry and street development there. Here on the outskirts of the town, on the hills overlooking the Bandon River, the town's native entrepreneurs built a series of imposing detached residences.

It would be fallacious to regard Bandon as an estate settlement. Up to recently its plantation origins have been the most pervasive influence. Although it remained in the Boyle estate and subsequently became part of the Devonshires' vast Irish patrimony, direct landlord involvement in the enhancement of the town, except during the formative period of the early seventeenth century, has been restrained.

The contribution of the duke of Devonshire was relatively insignificant by comparison with the major works he instigated and completed at Lismore and Dungarvan in County Waterford. At Bandon some municipal buildings such as the town hall were renovated by him or rebuilt. In the main his efforts were directed at enhancement rather than radical change. His most telling physical legacy was the erection of Bandon's most remarkable building: a striking fifteen-sided meat market or shambles on the northern side of the town. The rivers flowing through Bandon were embanked and transformed into attractive quays within the town.

To understand why Bandon succeeded when so many other plantation settlements failed and withered away in early seventeenth-century Munster it is necessary to view its early development in the context of the Munster plantation. The lands which were occupied became available for settlement in the period from the 1580s to 1650. They extended discontinuously from Dungarvan to north Kerry. Many areas were excluded, such as Cork city and the then thriving port of Kinsale. Hence, the new planters required a series of settlements which would stimulate the farming activities that were a central condition for the long-term success of the plantation. Bandon developed in this context as the plantation's pivotal settlement in mid-Cork. Other towns to grow

up in this way were Mallow, Lismore, Newcastle West and Tallow. There was no overall plantation regional urban policy but rather a general desideratum that each of the major undertakers should develop one or several settlements. It was in this way that John Shipward and William Newce began building two separate settlements back to back at Bandon in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The early settlement of Bandon was one of a constellation of villages that sprang up in the middle Bandon valley such as Dunderrow, Kilbeg, Kilpatrick, Enniskeen, Crookstown, Castletown, Kinneigh and Newcestown. Some of the planters who came to Ireland were involved in a web of trading and exploration movements that linked south-west England, the south coast of Ireland, the Caribbean and east-coast Anglo-America. In this way Bandon's early trajectory must have served as a model of urban development in the early days of the English colonisation of the New World.

Bandon's leading activity, cloth-making, found no expression in the plan of the town. The cloth was made in the houses by men and women alike and sent to south-west England but principally through Kinsale to the Low Countries for finishing. The nature of this trade still remains to be investigated. The River Bandon powered a giant mill at Coolfadda which was built in 1620. It was one of two trundle mills to which most of Bandon's early tenants were obliged to provide corn and labour as part payment of their rents. Most of the farmers in Bandon's vicinity were obliged to discharge similar service. Early inventories indicate the range of craft workers employed in Bandon, among them bakers, blacksmiths, braziers, butchers, carpenters, clothmakers, comb-makers, coopers, cutlers, dyers, felt-makers, metalmen, silversmiths, tanners, turners and weavers. This skilled group formed the most numerous element in the town's early population. The highest stratum was formed by merchants such as William Wiseman who built for himself an elaborate tower-house on South Main Street. Like several other resident merchants he exported cloth and corn while importing wine, sugar, spices, rice and tobacco. He also supplied, as an artificer, the resident garrison with most of

its needs and was a considerable farmer. Servants and the Gaelic residents of the town, who mainly lived outside the walls at Irishtown, formed the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Still the economic vitality of early seventeenth-century Bandon depended upon the prosperity of agriculture in its vicinity. This was physically exemplified in Bandon's two elaborate market houses. Few farmers resided in the town but nearly all the residents had 'backsides' and gardens outside and within the walls which supplied food and apples for cider making. At this time Bandon exported semi-processed and unprocessed agricultural goods, especially butter, corn and meat, fish, pipe-staves, cloth and agricultural implements. We also know that it was a highly militaristic settlement. Besides its walls, its citadel and a resident garrison it had extra military capacity in that all its male residents were obliged to do military service as horsemen or footmen. Bandon also boasted three different kinds of prison. These institutions provide an interesting sidelight on early capitalism: they or the ground upon which they stood were rented by individuals on long leases to the corporation of Bandonbridge.

Documentary sources and early maps indicate the wide array of house-types which were built at Bandon. The leading gatehouses were the largest and most elaborate domestic residences, followed by sumptuous stone-built 'mansion houses'. There were also timber-framed two-storey gable-hearthed and hearth-lobby houses shown on plans which are datable to 1620. If these were the most common house-type in early Bandon they were larger and more solid structures than those built subsequently in the plantation settlements of Ulster. Cabins were especially frequent in Irish towns although they were not envisaged as an element in the town's housing stock.

Much of the credit for Bandon's early dynamism must go to its major patron and subsequent owner Richard Boyle. By 1622 it had a population of over 1,000 making it larger than any other contemporary plantation town in Ireland. By 1650 there were probably between 4,000 and 5,000 residents,

a number undoubtedly swelled by refugees. In 1643 there were said to be 7,000 people in the town, all English Protestants.

The rebellion of 1641 ruined most of Munster's rural plantation. Bandon survived military assault but the town's vital support, namely a buoyant rural economy, was in shambles and so severe was the recession that many of Bandon's residents left for England and America. Yet in the early 1680s Richard Cox, a native of Bandon, described his birthplace in glowing terms. It was a town

> *built within the memory of man ... fortified by eleven flankers and three of the stateliest gatehouses or castles in any one town in Europe. The rivers are so situated and the streets so placed that every house has a garden backward that reaches the river and the gardens being planted with trees in convenient places, in summer time this town seems to be built in a wood ... The inhabitants are all English and most mechanics who live by their labour which they do neatly.*

Jacobite military activity towards the end of the decade that Cox wrote about was responsible for the partial destruction of the town walls and the total removal of the gatehouses, none of which were ever restored.

In the middle of the eighteenth century most of the town became part of the Devonshire estate, though the former Irishtown was incorporated into the Shannon estate, which belonged to another branch of the Boyle family. Fortunately for us, the Devonshires commissioned two major surveys of the town, one of which was an excellent map produced by one of Ireland's famous Anglo-French land surveyors, Bernard Scalé, which was finished in 1775. Scalé's map and terrier indicate that Bandon retained a population of 4,000 people but there had been few additions to the housing stock since the seventeenth century and little had been added to the ensemble of public buildings.

Significantly, however, analysis of Scalé's work reveals that important but subtle changes had taken place in the settlement's economic structures. In a word, diversification sums up the transformation. The northern side of the town had developed into an industrial suburb. Here there were over a score of tanyards, showing that the processing of

agricultural goods was still a leading activity. The smell from these water-filled pits must have been unbearable for nearby residents whose houses abutted on to the yards. The presence in the same area of half a dozen brewhouses and malt-houses (where beer was both produced and sold) must have been a mitigating factor for some local residents at least.

The area delimited by the town walls remained the most salubrious part of the settlement. Here were located the most valuable and elaborate houses. Many of these had highly ornamented gardens, several of them possessing individual orchards. Slate-roofed, two-storey houses were typical: detached houses and cabins were rare. Many of these houses also boasted stables and offices, some of which were presumably workshops. It is also worth noting that Bandon never saw the emergence of a rentier element within the town. Unlike Youghal or Kinsale, towns with more ancient roots, it had few head leaseholders controlling more than half a dozen houses. The only exceptions were in the context of lowly cabin dwellings of little value on the town's outskirts.

On the leading approach roads into the town a range of house-types was apparent. By and large, thatched cabins were most frequent. Here labourers and servants resided, nearly all of whom were Roman Catholics. Evidence from the Registry of Deeds in Dublin reveals that on some of these roads a new Roman Catholic artisan class of bakers, maltsters, shoemakers, tanners and victuallers had crystallised, some of whom now lived in moderately large houses. This was a new departure, as hitherto people with surnames of Gaelic origin had been associated with the most menial activities and squalid housing conditions.

The centre of the settlement however, remained Protestant. Up to eighty per cent of the residents of the town's main streets are returned as such. We can be in no doubt that throughout most of the eighteenth century Bandon was residentially segregated to a high degree. This spatial segregation is also reflected in deep occupational, social and cultural cleavages about which only inferential evidence has survived.

Protestantism in Bandon was no monolith. Anglicanism was paramount, symbolised by its two magnificent churches. Methodism was very strong. There were also Quakers, Presbyterians, Primitive Methodists and Unitarians, each of whom had their own place of worship and often a school and meeting house as well.

Textile production remained a constant element, conducted by people using looms in their own houses. Before the nineteenth century this industry had little impact upon the fabric of the town. Camlets made from wool formed the most durable product: they were still exported to the continent. Linen production increased towards the end of the eighteenth century and cotton became important at the same time. All of these were initially produced within a 'cottage' context.

The early years of the nineteenth century witnessed profound and intensive changes in the physical, social and cultural morphology of the town. These departures were prompted by a distinctive if relatively ephemeral bout of industrial activity. Again, Bandon's development at this time was interesting. Local entrepreneurial flair and investment acted as the motor for this period of transformation. Landlord involvement was neutral, being confined, as we have seen, to embellishment. Most of the new plants were industries as we define them today. They were labour-intensive production units, largely dependent upon water power to drive their machines. Of these, George Allman's impressive cotton mill at Overton on Bandon's outskirts employed hundreds of skilled people. It was opened in the early 1800s but it closed before 1830. There were other mills at Castlenalact, Derrygarriffe and Old Chapel. To add to this suite of textile units of production there were within the town also another smaller cotton factory, a 'manufactory of fine stuffs', a corduroy factory and a woollen mill as well as several rope walks. An inventory of contemporary occupations reveals the persistence of the 'putting-out' tradition of textile production in many individual residences as revealed by the presence of many spinners and cord-winders as well as those concerned with ancillary activities such as button-makers

and dyers.

The failure of the mill at Overton was precipitated by technological innovation in England and left hundreds jobless. A census of the Anglican parishioners conducted in the 1830s illustrates the consequences of this closure. Many are returned as 'gone to England or America'. Approximately 800 people left Bandon in the 1830s. Within a decade the number of weavers dropped from 2,000 to 30. Most ultimately settled and worked in textile activity in America and nearly all of those who went were Anglicans. The ruins of the enormous factory are set in the middle of green fields outside the town.

All was not lost. The Allmans invested in an elaborate distillery. It was erected on the eastern outskirts of the town and served to transform this previously weakly developed zone, much of the land being reclaimed from the river. With the arrival of the railway in the 1840s a further area of land outside Irishtown was given over to sidings and sheds. Finally, a gas works, Bandon's union workhouse and a large woollen manufactory colonised the newly created open space. Little residential development was however to transpire here except a row of houses built by the Allmans for some of their skilled workers.

In the mid-nineteenth century Bandon could boast of three distilleries and four breweries beside six flour and corn mills, two of which were of considerable size and all of which supplied raw materials to the liquor industries. By and large the bigger industries sought locations on the outskirts of the town to maximise accessibility. Watergate Street, earlier famous for a 'house of call' or brothel, pulled in a sizeable brewery and several tanneries as well, all attracted by the river.

The former walled area of the town which enclosed South Main Street and much of North Main Street recorded a wider mix of activities than heretofore. Residential properties were now interdigitated with retail outlets. Banks had become established on the Main Streets. The building of several new quays by the duke of Devonshire radically transformed the physical structure of the south side of the

town. The south bank of the river was embanked and a road developed which linked this new quay called Burlington Quay to Weir Street and Bridge Street. Market Quay was constructed beside the newly embanked Bridewell River. Access to the back of South Main Street was facilitated and a range of small manufacturing units was established in the former 'backsides and gardens'. Among these can be noted factories which produced soaps, tobacco, coaches, dyes and mineral waters. The western approach roads into Bandon also witnessed considerable industrial development. Here some of the larger space-demanding industries were established: here, for example, on New Road, there was a brewery, a distillery, several flour mills and a large tanyard. The same pattern was repeated in the northern sector of the town. Several of the former tanyards had disappeared and had been replaced by fine town houses, many of which were occupied by officers of Bandon's three military barracks. This was the case along much of North Main Street.

Bandon reached its demographic spring tide in 1821 with a population of over 10,000. The rapid industrialisation of the settlement drew people to it like a magnet. The educational and religious demands of this large population saw nearly all the existing churches being either rebuilt or extensively modified such as St Peter's Anglican church. Bandon's first major Roman Catholic church, dedicated to St Patrick, was opened in 1861 and the Presentation sisters opened their convent in 1829. Still, no Roman Catholic institution is located within the former walled area.

The meteoric industrial growth of the town occasioned fundamental changes in the ethnic and religious composition of the population. Some time between 1796 and 1821 the Protestant majority was replaced by a Roman Catholic one. During the period in question the population increased from 4,600 to 10,000 people.

Bandon's idiosyncratic nineteenth-century historian, George Bennett, throws light upon the residential and wider cultural consequences of these changes. He wrote about the early years of the nineteenth century:

It was about this time that the first Roman Catholic shopkeepers ventured to reside in any of our principal streets ... Previously some Roman Catholics had crept into the town, but they were content with the humblest habitations within the walls and in the most out-of-the-way places.

The ambience of the town took longer to change. The travel writer A. B. Stark wrote in 1850: 'Bandon is in the main an English and Protestant town. Catholics there are in all parts of the place, but with few exceptions, they are hewers of wood and drawers of water.' Even by this time, people with surnames of Gaelic origin equalled those with surnames of English origin on the town's principal main streets.

Bandon's rapid industrialisation was followed by equally precipitate de-industrialisation. This decline persisted for more than a century as highlighted by a continuing demographic haemorrhage. Cotton manufacturing collapsed. This was soon followed by the closure of a distillery and two breweries. Local tradition asserts that a teetotal campaign was responsible for the demise of one such establishment. Some of the corn mills also failed and the last major tannery at East Gully also closed.

Bandon's population fell to a low of 2,005 in 1981 from its crest of 10,000 in 1821. In 1986 a population of 1,943 was recorded but here we are not simply dealing with a continuance of decline. Loss there was from the central zone but several new housing estates and many single houses were built outside the official boundaries of the settlement.

The continuing loss of so many manufacturing units during the nineteenth century was compensated, in part, by a growth in services and in trades brought about through enhanced accessibility conferred by the railway and improved roads. Bandon became the linchpin in overland communication between south-west Cork and the remainder of the county. The presence of at least a dozen pawn shops reflected the more painful side of trading expansion.

Decline too can have its benefits. This is the case in Bandon where most of the town's nineteenth-century fabric has survived to the present day. This has bequeathed to us an interesting ensemble of houses and public buildings of

mainly early to middle nineteenth-century vintage besides many eighteenth-century houses.

While the later part of the nineteenth century like the mid-seventeenth century was a painful period for the town and its communities, the final years of the twentieth century have brought prosperity, dignity and confidence to many Bandonians. There is now a solid awareness that the heritage of the town, in all its aspects, is the property of today's residents which must be understood, treasured and conserved.

Bandon may have been passed over in the early days of rural industrialisation in the 1960s but today it counts several labour-intensive factories including one major multinational. It is the main mart for west Cork and the centre of a garda administrative zone. It has a range of retail and service functions which have captured an extensive hinterland. More broadly based than heretofore, Bandon's range of functions equips it to face the future with considerable confidence.

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