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Colony and State

In 1570, Sir Thomas Smith hosted company at Hill House in Theydon Mount, his Essex home. The purpose was a debate rooted in a close reading of the Roman historian Livy and focused on the subject of ‘Elizabethan military strategy’. The Cambridge humanist Gabriel Harvey recorded the meeting, noting that ‘Thomas Smith junior [Smith’s son] and Sir Humphrey Gilbert [debated] for Marcellus, Thomas Smith senior and Dr Walter Haddon for Fabius Maximus.’ They did so ‘before an audience’ that included Harvey ‘and several others of gentle birth’, Harvey recalling that ‘At length the son and Sir Humphrey yielded to the distinguished secretary [Smith]; perhaps Marcellus [“the more powerful”] yielded to Fabius [“the more cunning”]’ (Grafton and Jardine 1990, 40–3). The company included some of the foremost humanists of the day. Sir Thomas Smith and his protégé Harvey have already been introduced in previous chapters (at the time of the debate Smith was about to be made principal secretary to the Privy Council and Harvey had been elected to a fellowship in Pembroke College, Cambridge); Haddon, like his friend Sir Thomas, was a Cambridge-trained civil lawyer and an important reformer in the Edwardian and early Elizabethan regime; Gilbert was a soldier, adventurer and accomplished political theorist; and Smith’s son was an ‘intellectual companion and close friend’ of Harvey (who called him ‘cousin’ and thought him ‘a young man as prudent as spirited and vigorous’) (41). No doubt William Johnson would have found the company amenable: three of the four discussants had strong links with Eton, and the fourth, Smith junior, was probably educated there while his father was Provost.

As well as Livy the companions also had the English presence in Ireland in mind. Gilbert had just returned from active service in Munster where he had adopted Machiavellian strategies to suppress the Fitzgerald rebellion and terrorize the populace at large. He had been knighted by the Lord Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney, for his pains. More pressingly, the Smiths were preparing to establish a colony in Ards in north-east Ulster – the company was part of a longer process of theoretical gestation involving ‘a full-scale reading’ of Livy by Harvey and Smith junior. As Harvey observed about their week spent ‘on Hannibal’

We were freer and sometimes sharper critics of the Carthagians and the Romans than was fitting for men of our fortune, virtue or even learning, and at least we learnt not to trust any of the ancients or the moderns sycophantically, and to examine the deeds of others, if not with solid judgement, at least with our whole attention. (41)

There was nothing exceptional about this (Fitzmaurice 2003). On the contrary, since Henry VIII had declared himself its king in 1541 Ireland had attracted humanists like wasps to a dollop of jam; and the drone had grown only louder over time (Brady 1994; Canny 2003). The expansion of educational opportunities and greater social mobility in England made for something approaching a surfeit of gentility after 1570; for all its dangers, Ireland and the New World were obvious outlets for new generations of educated young men – especially younger sons deprived of the certainties of inheritance – seeking riches and honour (Rapple 2009, 55, 58). As a result, the colleges of Cambridge and Oxford were quite as well represented in the companies and councils of colonial ventures as they were in *England’s Parnassus*. Thomas Smith was one such man; Harvey’s close friend from Cambridge, Edmund Spenser, another. Spenser had progressed from service with the Earl of Leicester to become secretary to the new Lord Deputy of Ireland, Lord Grey, in 1580. It was there that he would write *The Faerie Queen* and secure his prominent position in *England’s Parnassus* (Hadfield 1997). It was also in Ireland that Spenser and other ‘New English’ humanists (as Tudor *arrivistes* to Ireland are described) applied ‘ancient and modern’ theory to the Irish situation – a tradition that continued into the seventeenth century with the likes of the soldier-poet Thomas Blenerhasset and the poet-lawyer Sir John Davies (another contributor to *England’s Parnassus*) (Shuger 1994; Canny 2003, 1–7). Leicester himself – Spenser’s patron and the era’s most energetic supporter of humanist authors (and the concepts of ‘modern’ and ‘society’ they

promulgated) – had long maintained an interest in Irish affairs through his brother-in-law Henry Sidney (who knighted Gilbert in 1570); his nephew, the soldier-poet Philip Sidney (another acquaintance of Spenser and Harvey); and Spenser's employer, Lord Grey. Indeed it was on account of Leicester's literary patronage and Irish enthusiasms that the brilliant humanist (and future Jesuit martyr) Edmund Campion dedicated *The History of Ireland* to him in 1571 (Spenser 1596). More to the point, it was as Leicester's client that Sir Henry Sidney had decisively shifted the emphasis of royal policy in Ireland from *de facto* containment to the forceful reformation of civil and religious life by 1570 (Braddick 2000, 380–4).

Smith's company encapsulates the symbiotic relationship between humanism and colonialism *circa* 1570, his learned and influential companions seeking 'to work out anew in debate the Roman relationship between morals and action' (Grafton and Jardine 1990, 40). One outcome of the debate was Smith's *A Letter from I. B.* (1571), 'the first piece of sustained argument for colonization to be published in England' and a point of reference for future undertakings – in Munster in the 1580s, Ulster in the 1610s, and the New World (Fitzmaurice 2003, 35; Quinn 1945, 550). In terms of the wider argument of this book, the timing of *A Letter* is striking: the 1570s were pivotal in terms of the vernacular dissemination of terms like 'modern' and 'society' (and all that implied). So, too, was the publisher of *A Letter*. It was none other than Henry Bynneman, the man also responsible for Digges's *Stratoticos* and Barston's *The Safeguard of Societie*. Indeed, even as Smith was plotting to colonize north-east Ulster he was also joining a joint-stock company with Leicester and Cecil to support a project to develop alchemy. That it should be the key protagonists of the Renaissance 'commonwealth' to establish and attempt to implement the basic principles of English colonization is telling. That Spenser – Harvey's friend, Leicester's client, England's foremost 'modern poet' – should develop these principles for the next generation in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* is more striking still (Spenser 1596). Colonialism in general, and Ireland in particular, was a major preoccupation of the educated elite in early modern England and a crucial dimension of the humanist project. As importantly, the hesitant and often inglorious attempts to expand the boundaries of English commonwealth were symptomatic of changes and conflicts closer to home, in the English localities.

The aim here is not to provide another account of English colonialism so much as extrapolate the importance of early modern notions of 'society' and 'company' to the process. This is not as obvious as it might sound. In a way that is reflective of early modern

historiography more generally, the importance of purposeful association has tended to slip between two interpretative tools. On the one hand, colonization is one manifestation of ‘the early modern state’, which Michael Braddick has defined with some suppleness as ‘a network of offices exercising political power’. Viewed in these terms, ‘the state’ refers not so much to the organization of a centralized and professionally bureaucratic authority – the state in its modern form – as a loose and variegated alliance of local and metropolitan elites who recognized the reciprocal benefits of political cooperation and delegation (Braddick 2000, 45; Smyth 2006, 15). Colonies were a particular expression of this more general relationship. On the other hand, colonial historians have stressed that ‘English colonization, although conducted under royal patents, was always pursued by private companies’. As a result, ‘the success or failure of the enterprises rested entirely on the ability of private interests to raise capital and personnel’ (Kupperman 1993, 19; Fitzmaurice 2003, 7). Indeed, it was precisely because people had to be persuaded to risk their lives and credit in such ventures that promotional literature – and the humanists who tended to write it – played such a large part in the English colonial process. This was true for Ireland before it was true for the Americas: just as the ‘Enterprise of Ulster’ established ‘private principalities in Ireland’ so Smith’s ‘private undertaking’ was an early experiment in ‘private colonization’ (Bagwell 1885, II, 211; Morgan 1985, 263, 265, 266, 267).

There is an element of truth in both interpretations: colonialism clearly extended the *res publica* while profiting its undertakers (Ohlmeyer 2001, 137). However, to focus simply on ‘the state’ or ‘private interest’ elides the mode of social organization – that is voluntary and purposeful associations of ‘free men’ – through which government and profit were to be achieved. It also obscures the collective action and identity attendant on companies and societies themselves – groupings between (as it were) ‘the state’ and ‘the family’. What follows develops the insight that after 1570 the formation of ‘companies’ to fund and organize colonial ventures created alternative sources of corporate power and identity which could either complement the interests of ‘the state’ or, as Hobbes was well aware, conflict with and rival them. More complicated still, ‘companies’ were responsible for settling ‘societies’ on the land itself. Whether they were in Ulster, Virginia, Providence, or Massachusetts, these ‘societies’ required and developed their own nexus of associational structures, interests, and sources of loyalty which engendered, in turn, alternative political cultures and loyalties. That companies and societies also accrued their own sense of ‘commonwealth’ makes it easy

to see how assumptions and practices of citizenship could be exported beyond the seas – not as functions of ‘nation’ or ‘empire’ but as an attribute of corporate life itself. Recent studies of the East India Company, Massachusetts, and the city of New York have shown that, well into the eighteenth century, the imperatives of purposeful association engendered civic identities, powers, and responsibilities that were specific to company and city rather than ‘the state’ *per se*. And for the members of all three societies and companies, citizenship and profit were inextricable (Stern 2008; Winship 2006; Middleton 2006).

The antecedents of this corporatism have not received the attention they deserve. The corporate virtuosity of the Dutch is one obvious source – they were, after all, the founders of New York and architects of the greatest trading companies of the era (Prak 2002, 99–101; Vink 2007). English corporatism, though much less recognized in the historiography, is another. This is all the more so because, increasingly over the seventeenth century, it was allied to a centralized military and fiscal capacity that the Dutch were eventually unable to match. As this suggests, what follows does not offer ‘society’ as an alternative model to the ‘state’ for understanding English colonial expansion. Rather it was a complementary dynamic which deserves more recognition than it has received. As James Mather notes of English commercial expansion after 1580, ‘it was of necessity a cadre of self-starting merchants, rather than the sinews of the state, which gave practical effect to the new spirit of adventure’: in this instance the Levant Company (Mather 2009, 36). This chapter accordingly outlines the corporate dynamics of early colonization of Ireland and its close relationship to national incorporation back home. It also considers the role of humanism in galvanizing these developments. While humanists certainly did not invent English corporatism they theorized it, gave it a ‘modern’ (i.e. classical) gloss, and encouraged its implementation as government policy (Slack 1999, 163). Conceptions of company and society were integral throughout and in this respect Hill House in Essex in 1570 is a more obvious point of departure than might first be apparent. Smith used one kind of ‘company’ to discuss the settlement of Ireland; he specified others as the ‘facility’ (as he termed it) for colonizing in practice. Spenser likewise relied on the civilizing potential of corporate institutions; he also recognized, from direct experience, the associational basis of Irish cultural and political resilience. The first part of what follows highlights the role of society and company in the plans of Smith and Spenser for Ireland. The second half then considers the proximity of this agenda to social and political developments closer to home – in

particular the consolidation of the English commonwealth after 1549 and the pronounced corporatism and urbanization this involved. It was precisely such developments that presaged and shaped the subsequent settlement of America and commercial expansion in the east.

Facilitating Colonialism

One of the many problems facing Elizabethan councillors in 1570 was how to 'civilize' Ireland without the requisite fiscal or military resources. In his *Letter Sent by I. B.* Sir Thomas Smith outlined the 'facility' to square the circle – one which would play a large part in the English colonial experience (and that of the colonized) for the next 130 years. As he put it:

There be many that not considering what facility it is by good order and willing means to bring great things to pass, but wondering rather at the greatness of the sum, which must furnish so many soldiers, carry them over, and maintain them there for a year or there about (that must necessarily be supplied from England) are of the opinion, that it cannot be done without the Princes pay. But I will inform you an easy way, to bring this without her majesties expenses to pass. (Smith 1571, E.III)

The 'facility' Smith invoked was company. Organized as a joint-stock, the enterprise was to be funded initially through 'common charges', 'the common stock', and 'the company's stock', with 'every man putting in a share' (Eiii, Fi). This was intended to 'furnish' in Ulster

a company of Gentlemen, and others that will live friendly in fellowship together, rejoicing in the fruit and commodity of their former travails, which (through noble courage) for estimation sake, and the love of their own country the first enterprised [sic], deserving if I may speak it, that am resolved one of the same company, to be crowned with garlands of honour and everlasting fame. (Fiv)

Readers were encouraged 'to be a partaker with him [Smith] in person'; they would find him 'vigilant and careful, coveting more the well doing hereof, and the safety of his company, than the glory of victory in any rash attempt, more desiring to please and profit every man, than looking for ceremonious courtesy and reverence' (Gi). Rules and orders were nevertheless needed to ameliorate those petty feuds that inevitably 'disturb the whole company' and these would

‘be drawn by the advice of the best captains, and shall be read unto the whole company’ (Gii). Hiram Morgan has rightly observed that in its basic approach, *A Letter* was conceived very much in the spirit of Smith’s *A Discourse of the Commonweal of the Realm of England* (Morgan 1985, 269–70). This argued that personal profit and the common good were not irreconcilable, as medieval and mid Tudor moralists claimed, but reciprocal. What Morgan fails to stress is that for Smith ‘profit’ should be pursued and organized not through ‘private’ possession but rather corporate association. It was through this facility that the settlers were ‘motioners and ring leaders of so many English families, to be planted forever in the *Ardes*’.

A Letter initiated, in effect, an extenuated process of corporate association. Anticipating Hannah Woolley’s advice to women over a hundred years later, Smith instructed ‘all men willing to adventure in this most honourable and profitable voyage’ to ‘resort into Paul’s churchyard to the Sign of the Sun’. There he could view ‘the Indentures of Covenants’ authorizing the project, ‘pay such money as he is disposed to adventure’, and ‘receive his assurance from Thomas Smith the son’. Draft proposals for the institution of colonial society show that in *Ards* itself one half of the colony was to be organized along classically military lines, with ‘a Chieftain’, ‘Deputy Colonel’, ‘Captains’, ‘footmen’ and ‘horsemen’ led by a ‘Centurion’ and ‘Decurion’, and other military officers (ERO 1572). These officers and ‘their companies’ were represented by a ‘Privy Council of Martial Affairs’, which took decisions of military significance on a consultative basis. However, the colony also consisted of ‘adventurers’ and their tenants: the ‘artificers to work in the town’, ‘husbandmen in the field’, ‘merchants to travel into fairs and markets’, and the ‘Fathers of the Colony’ – ‘the first founders of the Colony from which honour the poorest and meanest of all adventurers is not to be excluded’. These were represented by a common counsel, a body which formed the political centre of the colony: it made laws, set taxes, chose officers, and was responsible for ‘all weighty affairs’. The chieftain required ‘the consent of the more part of them’ before doing anything ‘of consequence’ and a select group of 12 common councillors were responsible for advising the Privy Council about ‘making of war, or concluding of peace with the enemy’. Historians have noted the debts to the classical Roman colony (Canny 2003, 121–3). However, in terms of its civil organization the plantation was also remarkably similar to English incorporated boroughs and cities (see below).

In these ways the projected colony was the *antithesis* of ‘private’, which Smith took to mean two things. First, it referred to anything not ‘public’ in the political (*res publican*) sense of that term. As he

put it, 'the division of these which be participant of the commonwealth is one way of them that bear office, and which bear none, the one be called magistrates, the other private men' (Smith 1583, 65). 'Magistrate' here meant lowly office-holders such as juror or constable as well as sheriffs, aldermen, and privy councillors: it was not a term of distinction so much as the means of ensuring civil government for all and by all. Second, 'private' described not merely abstention or exclusion from public office but the opposite of 'society'. Smith explained that:

if one man had as some of the old Romans had (if it be true that is written) v. thousand or x. thousand bondmen whom he ruled well, though they dwelled all in one city, or were distributed into diverse villages, yet that were no commonwealth: for the bondman hath no communion with his master, the wealth of the Lord is only sought for, not the profit of the slave or bondman.

The relationship was equivalent to 'instruments of the husbandman' like 'the plough, the cart, the horse, ox or ass': 'though one husbandman had a great number of all those and looked well to them, yet that made no commonwealth nor could not so be called'. This was because 'the private wealth of the husbandman is only looked for and there is no mutual society or pact no law or pleading between the one and the other'. In the same way 'the bondman or slave which is bought for money' was 'not otherwise admitted to the society civil or commonwealth, but is part of the possession and goods of his Lord' (Smith 1583, 57). For Smith as for John Barston, 'private' was antithetical to the principles upon which commonwealth and society rested and which colonialism, as acts of society, was designed to extend. Indeed, if 'private' described anything it was Gaelic Ulster, where men lived not in 'society' but feudal *septs* (clans) and in which, as Smith was informed by his Dublin correspondent Roland White, the warrior aristocracy enjoyed effective possession of their 'churls' (Shuger 1994, 494; Morgan 1985, 262, 274–5).

The Ards venture failed and Smith junior died trying to make it work. However, its imprint can be found on the much larger projects to colonize Munster from 1583 and the Ulster plantations in the 1610s. Edmund Spenser was a direct beneficiary of the Munster initiative in terms of office and lands; the Nine Years War, which provided the backdrop to *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, imperilled these benefits (indeed Spenser's household was destroyed by insurgents in 1598). Written in the midst of this interminable and occasionally ferocious conflict, *A View* was clearly not a promotional

tract like *A Letter*. Rather it used the dialogic form in order to debate and resolve the practical problem of what he perceived to be Irish ‘incivility’. In this respect it was much more akin to Smith’s *A Discourse of the Commonweal* (which confronted the problem of early modern ‘dearth’ (inflation)) and *A Communication or Discourse of the Queen’s Highness’s Marriage*, which discussed the problem of Queen Elizabeth’s marital status and was ‘one of the most widely copied tracts in Elizabethan England’ (Dewar 1969, 4; Shrank 2003b, 139; Withington 2009a). This format allowed Spenser to develop the thesis that Irish incivility was manifest socially and politically; afflicted both the ‘mere Irish’ (the Gaelic inhabitants) and ‘Old English’ (the medieval settlers); and was deeply embedded in the ‘manners’, ‘customs’, and ‘habits’ of the people. The result was a prognosis that was quintessentially ‘modern’ in its advocacy of civility as well as profoundly attuned to the power of associational life.

Much of the dialogue is spent identifying these barbarisms and the genealogies that produced them – *A View* is, among other things, a work of historical anthropology. As befits England’s foremost ‘modern poet’, Spenser’s central character, Irenius, imposes a schema of Irish historical and cultural development that beautifully conforms to the Renaissance conception of ‘modernity’. This is despite the evidence of his own ‘neo-classical’ methodology and previous intimations in *The Faerie Queen* that the Irish and English shared the same ‘British’ ancestry (Bickerman 1952, 71; McCabe 2002, 149–50). Irenius explained to his suggestible listener, Eudox, that the cultural ancestors of the Gaelic Irish are the Scythians, who in early modern historiography represented the quintessence of ancient barbarism (McCabe 2002, 147). The ‘Old English’ had degenerated, in their turn, ‘from their first natures, as to grow wild’: they embodied the unfortunate divergence between ancient and post-Roman civilization (Spenser 1596, 44). It was now for the ‘New English’ colonialists – the ‘modern’ revivalists of ancient civilization – to wreak the necessary reformation. That is not to say the people were without ‘wit’. On the contrary, Irish poets ‘savoured of sweet wit and good invention’; Irish men were ‘hardy’ and ‘valiant’ and, when trained in modern warfare, ‘makes as worthy a soldier as any Nation he meets with’; the common people were ‘subtle-headed’, ‘wily headed’, full of ‘subtleties’, ‘every corner having a Robin Hood in it’ (Spenser 1596, 53, 51, 16, 100). There were Irish Aesops a-plenty. What they lacked was civility.

No one was more aware than Spenser of the difficulties this agenda posed. As Andrew Hadfield has argued, sixteen years in Ireland left Spenser less the ‘strident and self-confident imperialist’ and more the

‘deeply conflicted representative of the New English’ (Hadfield 1997, 200–1; for alternative perspectives see Brady 1986; Canny 1988). Irish incivility was intractable because it had become habitual as to be almost natural: ‘bred in the bone’ according to Barnaby Riche (McCabe 2002, 147). This *habitus* was engendered, in part, by various kinds of company which not only encouraged ‘barbarous’ practices but also excluded potentially civilizing influences (such as ‘New English’ Protestants). For example, the problem with Brehon Law (the Gaelic Irish legal system) lay not simply in its precepts and codes but in its practice, which involved ‘whole nations and septs of the Irish together, without any Englishman amongst them, [where] they may do what they list, and compound or altogether concede amongst themselves their own crimes’ (Spenser 1596, 4). Some of the most uncivil aspects of Irish culture likewise stemmed from forms of male sociability which at once empowered companions and endangered outsiders. These most obviously included associations of ‘gallowglass’ (foreign soldier) and ‘kern’ (Gaelic soldier) – military companies which perpetrated ‘the most barbarous and loathly conditions of any people (I think) under heaven’ (48–50). However, Spenser also identified ‘carrows’, ‘horse-boys’, ‘jesters’, ‘bards’, and Irish gallants as pivotal players within mobile and exclusionary networks of sociability, feasting, and exchange (53, 101). This sense of the power of Irish company distinguished Spenser from Smith, for whom Gaelic social relations were simply slavish. Writing from experience rather than hearsay, Spenser outlined the company to be displaced as well as the society to be established in its stead.

In so doing Spenser juxtaposed the kind of indigenous association revered by Morris as ‘Gothic’ with its civil and ‘modern’ alternatives. However, the superiority of modern ‘society’ over customary ‘company’ was not necessarily straightforward even for a humanist of Spenser’s intensity. His recognition of Irish wit has already been mentioned. Moreover, one of the most striking instances of vacillation in the dialogue – and the only time Eudox repeatedly questions the judgement of Irenius – centred on the merits of a key institution of Irish associational life: the ‘rath’. Irenius complained that ‘There is a great use amongst the Irish, to make great assemblies together upon a rath or hill, there to parley (as they say) about matters and wrongs between Township and Township, or one private person to another’ (Spenser 1596, 54). Eudox conceded Irenius’ point that such ‘meetings’ gave the Irish occasion ‘to confer of what they list, which else they could not do without suspicion, or knowledge of others’. However, he also observed the sites were ‘at first ordained for the same purpose, that people might assemble themselves thereon, and

therefore anciently they were called Talk-motes [or Folk-motes], that is, a place for people to meet or talk of anything that concerned any difference between parties and Townships'. This 'seems yet to me very requisite' (54). Irenius agreed 'the first making of these high hills was at first indeed to very good purpose for people to meet'. However, 'things being since altered' and 'Ireland much differing from the state of England, the good use that then was of them is now turned to abuse': 'it is very inconvenient that any such be permitted'. Unusually, Eudox persisted:

It is very needful (me thinks) for many other purposes, as for the countries to gather together, when there is any imposition to be laid upon them, to which they then may all agree at such meetings, to divide upon themselves, according to their holdings and abilities. So as if at these assemblies, there be any offices, as constables, bailiffs, or such like amongst them, there can be no peril, or doubt of such bad practices. (55)

Irenius was forced to reiterate that, far from providing civil governance (as in England) local assemblies in Ireland merely facilitated Irish autonomy from English rule, 'the constables and offices, being also of the Irish'. Likewise, should 'any of the English happen to be there, even to them they may prove perilous'. Whatever their original purpose, current circumstances meant 'they were best to be abolished' (56).

This was one tactic in a general strategy of social disaggregation. Irenius argued that, once the Irish were defeated at war, the surviving inhabitants should be 'dispersed wide from their acquaintance, and scattered far abroad throughout the country: for that is the evil which now I find in all Ireland, that the Irish dwell together by their septs and several nations, so as they may practice or conspire what they will' (87). Another tactic was to deprive men of 'the name of their septs, according to the several Nations' and enforce instead 'a several surname, either of his trade or faculty, or of some quality of his body or mind, or of the place where he dwelt'. This way 'everyone should be distinguished from the other, or from most part, whereby they shall not only, not defend upon the head of their sept . . . but also in time learn quite to forget his Irish nation' (109). It was hoped, thirdly, that the breakdown of traditional bonds would enable 'a union of manners and conformity of minds' between the Irish and English that would 'bring them to be one people, and so put away the dislikeful conceit both of the one, and the other'. This 'intermingling of them' would 'bring them by daily conversation, into better liking of each other' and 'also to make them both of them less able to hurt' (106).

In particular, it would weaken the malign influence that the 'Lords and Captains of Countries' currently exerted over 'the common people'. Irenius argued that rebellion in Ireland was invariably the consequence of 'pride and wilful obstinacy' among the Irish and Old English elites, who were able 'draw with them all their people and followers, which think themselves bound to go with them' (103). In England, in contrast, 'noble men' exerted 'no command at all over the commonalty, though dwelling under them, because every man stands upon himself and builds his fortune upon his own faith and firm assurance' (103). What Spenser and other commentators now offered the Irish commonalty was, as Debora Shuger puts it, the possibility of 'passing from feudal bondage to the status of a "free subject" with full legal rights and protection' (Shuger 1994, 515).

The destruction of septs and other kinds of customary association went hand-in-hand with the creation of 'societies civil'; and for Irenius as for Smith the 'facility' was urban corporatism. Just as strategically placed garrisons were the ultimate guarantors of order in colonial Ireland, so 'at every of these forts I would have the seat of a Town laid forth and encompassed, in the which I would wish that there should inhabitants of all sorts as Merchants, Artificers, and Husbandmen, be placed, to whom there should Charter, and Franchises granted to incorporate them' (88–9). The obvious prospect of 'much profit' and 'great commodity' meant 'it will be no matter of difficulty to draw out of England, persons which would very gladly be so placed'. The establishment of these and other urban communities would galvanize the country as a whole. Irenius explained that 'there is nothing doth sooner cause civility in any country than many market towns, by reason that people repairing often thither for their needs, will daily see and learn manners of the better sort' (116). He argued that 'there is nothing doth more stay and strengthen the country, than such corporate towns, as by proof in many Rebellions hath appeared, in which when all the countries have swerved, the towns have stood fast'. As importantly, 'there is nothing doth more enrich any country or Realm, than many towns, for to them will all the people draw and bring the fruits of their trades, as well to make money of them, as to supply their needful uses' (116). Networks of incorporated market towns meant that 'everyone that is not able to live of his free-hold' could be apprenticed in 'a certain trade of life, to which he shall find himself fittest'. They meant that 'keeping of cattle' ('very barbarous and uncivil') could be superseded by 'tillage and husbandry' ('peace and civility') (109–10). They also allowed the building of parish and grammar schools, whereby the 'youth... in short space grow up to that civil

conversation, that both the children will learn their former rudeness in which they were bred, and also the parents will even by the example of their young children perceive the foulness of their own behaviour' (111). It was, moreover, symptomatic of Irish barbarism and degeneracy that most of the towns originally 'seated' in Ireland were 'utterly wasted and defaced' or in the thrall of 'lords and gentry'. Irenius now opined that 'as I wished many corporate towns to be erected, so would I again wish them to be free, not depending on the service, nor under the command of any but the Governor'. There could be no better example than 'all those free-boroughs, in the Low Countries, which are now all the strength thereof' (116–17).

Thomas Blenerhasset deployed similar arguments a decade or so later. Like Spenser, Blenerhasset was a product of 1570s Cambridge. He gained a minor reputation as a soldier-poet (he was an editor of *The Mirror for Magistrates* and translator of Ovid) before joining the ranks of the New English community in the early 1590s. His *A Direction for the Plantation of Ulster* was part of a promotional campaign to encourage joint-stock companies to colonize the province; and like Smith, Blenerhasset understood personal profit to be inseparable from corporate association. As he put it: 'Oh this word Myne is a strong warrior, every man for his own will adventure far', though only if 'he will rather increase then decrease his number': 'in this our undertaking, let all the people be such as shall enjoy every man more or less of his own' (Blenerhasset 1610, C2). More specifically, isolated garrisons were expensive and ineffective. If (for example) 'Lifford and the lands adjoining [in Donegal] were undertaken by many, their many helping hands (everyman respecting his own profit) they would not regard charge, nor be weary with labour and pains to frame a perpetual security, and good success to their business' (B2ii). He explained that the only way to succeed in Ulster was to construct 'so many goodly corporations, as it would be a wonder to behold'. He insisted that by replacing garrisons with 'corporations' the undertakers and 'old worthy soldiers' alike would find 'their security . . . much better, and the society far excel' (B2i). With corporations 'there would be instead of popery true religion; & a comfortable society' (B2ii). In 'a scattered plantation, for many undertakers to be dispersed three score miles in compass, alas they shall be now at the first like the unbound sticks of a brush faggot, easy to be gathered in, neither shall there be true Religion, sweet society, nor any comfortable security amongst them' (C). Encrusted with corporations, 'Ulster which hath been hitherto the receptacle and very den of Rebels and devouring creatures, shall far excel Munster, and the civilest part of that country . . . in civility and

sincere religion, equal even fair England herself, with a Christian and comfortable society, of neighbourhood' (D). They also ensured that 'the generation of the Irish . . . be sufficiently bridled' (B2ii).

The contrast between 'neighbourhoods' and 'bridles' points, finally, to the fundamental and glaring contradiction of colonialism so conceived. Its humanist perpetrators demonstrated an especial faith in the civilizing power of corporate society rooted in classical and Protestant virtues. Yet while William Johnson may well have luxuriated in the 'modernization' so described, the pathological consequences for those unable or unwilling to 'intermingle' (as Spenser disingenuously described it) are also crystal clear. Nor were conditions necessarily better for those Irish who chose to embrace the commonwealth on offer. Writing in 1571 Smith was confident that Irish churls would in 'great numbers' 'come and offer to live under us, and to farm our grounds: both such as are of the country birth, and others, both out of the wild Irish and the English pale' (Smith 1571, D2 – D4; Morgan 1985, 274–5). This was largely because legal tenancy, waged labour, and the possibility of being 'Master of his own' seemed eminently preferable to the state of slavery in which they currently lived. However, the choice between feudal bondage and commonwealth was not as straightforward as Smith intimated. We saw in Chapter 5 that in 1547 Smith in all probability drafted legislation whereby enforced slavery became an institution to combat vagrancy and idleness and to compel men, women and children into 'service'. Moreover, slavery was an incipient feature of modern social relations in any case. As he noted in *De Republica Anglorum*, 'necessity and want of bondmen hath made men to use free men as bondmen to all servile services: but yet more liberally and freely, and with more equality and moderation, than in time of gentility slaves and bondmen were want to be used' (Smith 1583, 142). From the very start, therefore, the 'Irish' were perceived as potentially slavish in at least three respects: as 'private' bondsmen; vagrants; and servile workers. The rapid marginalization of Irish tenants to the poorer areas of the Ulster colony after 1613 suggests that these perceptions were rapidly institutionalized in practice, the ferocity of the Irish rebellion in 1641, with plantation society as its principal target, all the more so.

National Incorporation

The corporatist arguments of colonial writers did not go unheeded. In 1613 the citizens of London were persuaded to form the 'The

Society of the Governor and Assistants, London, of the New Plantation of Ulster' (the 'Irish Society'). This was a joint-stock company in the manner of Smith's Ards venture and the more recently incorporated East India Company (1599) and Virginia Company (1607). With the twelve great livery companies as its constituent members, its purpose was to organize, fund, and govern the most systematic and ambitious project of English and Scottish colonial settlement yet (Moody 1939; Robinson 1984, 80–2). The spokes of this new society was a network of corporate and market towns, its hub (in terms of both material resources and political authority) the most powerful 'societie civil' in the British archipelago: the city of London. The arrangement conformed in most respects to the prognoses of Smith, Spenser, and Blennerhasset. More to the point, it was redolent of developments in England over the previous century. Blennerhasset's readers knew what he was talking about; he was speaking their language.

Since the coinage of the category 'early modern', the simultaneous incorporation of the 'nation-state' and an integrated market economy has been a central concern for historians of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. This is as true for Johnson and Morris as it was for Alice Clark or the editorial of the *Economic Historical Review*. One of the central themes of the 'new social history' has consequently been, as Keith Wrightson puts it, the 'intensified interaction between the locality and the larger society, which both drew together provincial communities into a more closely integrated national society and at the same time introduced a new depth and complexity to their local patterns of social stratification' (Wrightson 1982, 222–3; Smith 1984, 144). Recent accounts of the process have emphasized its implications for 'the state' and class identities. As Andy Wood puts it, the century after 1549 witnessed 'the incorporation of wealthier social fractions, via the medium of office-holding, into state structures which, while open to the 'better sort', remained closed to the poor' (Wood 2007, 188; Hindle 2000). The economic context for this was, as Richard Smith notes, 'national economic integration' and 'the polarization of wealth locally' (Smith 1984, 144). The cumulative pressure of high population, rents and prices as well as unprecedented commercial and marketing opportunities meant that the fortunes of yeomen, husbandmen, master craftsmen and tradesmen permanently diverged from those unable to survive or actively exploit new economic circumstances: cottagers, wage labourers, and 'the poor' (144). The social problems that ensued required major programmes of government regulation to be implemented locally, leading to a massive expansion in the infrastructures and business of government on the ground. Crucial in this respect were

Justices of the Peace in the county, constables and overseers of the poor in the parish, and common councils in cities and boroughs (who assimilated the powers of county magistrates) – unsalaried office-holders in the vanguard of the early modern quest for ‘order’. In the meantime, office-holding became a mark of status and distinction for county gentry, parish notables, and urban citizens alike. The result by 1640 was the formation of ‘a relatively inclusive, participatory state which relied for its legitimacy and functioning upon local elites drawn from beyond the parameters of the gentry’ (Wood 2007, 188) – what Patrick Collinson termed ‘the monarchical republic’, Elizabethan books of statutes denoted as ‘the weal publique’, and Thomas Smith knew as ‘the commonwealth of England’.

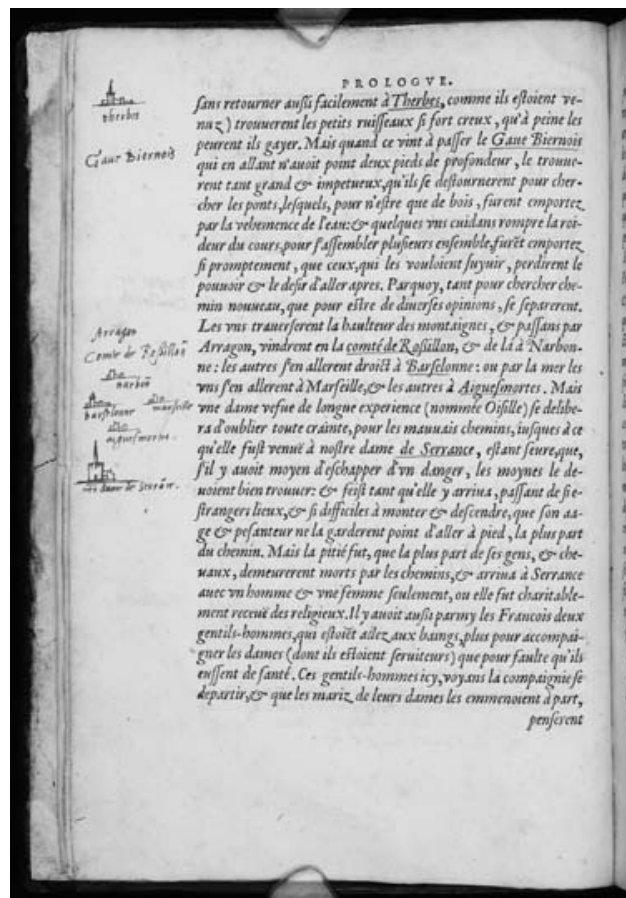
The process can be described as ‘state-formation’ in the sense that, as with English colonialism, it describes the extension of the English *res publica* in the absence of centralized and salaried bureaucratic agencies. Indeed for Michael J. Braddick the only real difference between state-formation in Gaelic Ireland and England was that in Ulster, as in America, ‘local elites did not provide the basis of civil government’. Instead they were forcibly displaced and ‘New English’ servitors (and subsequently lowland Scots immigrants) filled the gap (Braddick 2000, 379, 388). Yet as with colonial expansion, so with national incorporation: emphasis on ‘the state’ can elide or subsume the ‘facilities’ by which the process happened. Moreover, there is the danger that the language of ‘state’ should invoke either the kind of homogenous ‘Leviathan’ of which Hobbes dreamed or the centralized bureaucratic and military power characteristic of modern discussions about the state (Skinner 1989; Pincus 2009, 9). As we saw in Chapter 5, the reality in early modern England was much more messy and indeterminate: there were concerted attempts to centralize political power, not least in the 1630s and 1680s, but these were always hedged by the claims of ‘political bodies’ (Slack 1999, 53–76; Pincus 2009, 216). As a result, what Paul Slack describes as ‘the problem of agency’ – the ‘vexed question of where, in practice, responsibility for the common weal lay’ – can remain elusive (Slack 1999, 27). This is a ‘fundamental issue’ because, as with colonialism, the ‘facility’ of national integration from the 1530s was in large part purposeful and voluntary associations – companies, societies and ‘body politics’ imbued with a sense of ‘commonwealth’ that could be distinct from sovereign authority even as it was sanctioned and ostensibly regulated by it. It was precisely on the basis of this sense of place and agency that leaders of rural and urban communities engaged in the civil war in 1642, the restoration of 1660, and the conquest of 1688 – not as enemies of ‘the state’ so much as active representatives of the societies

and companies through and by which they understood the state was governed. The rapid establishment of the ‘fiscal-military’ establishment’ after 1689 was due, in turn, to the reconciliation of these societies with a Protestant monarch attuned to the realities of corporate power (Brewer 1989, xx).

The structural importance of companies and societies to this story of national incorporation is evident in at least three respects. In the first instance, it was companies of men within communities who exercised public authority and had, from the 1570s onwards, increasingly more power and responsibility devolved onto them. These associations were sanctioned by central authority and structured around office-holding; they also entailed degrees of autonomy and discretion. In the county, the Justice of the Peace was emblematic of this new authority. In the parish, constables, churchwardens, and, most innovatively, overseers of the poor personified the local penetration of central governance. In cities and boroughs, the mayor, aldermen and common councilmen controlled urban decision-making; were invested with the magisterial powers of their county neighbours; and coordinated the everyday running of urban parishes. In all three locales – parochial, urban, and county – there were two basic trends in the exercise of these public powers. On the one hand, the sociology of ‘political bodies’ became more exclusionary over time: participation was closely related to economic ‘ability’ and/or ideological affinity to the extent that historians usually describe the development of local governance in this era as oligarchic (Wrightson 1994; Tittler 1991). On the other hand, the *modus operandi* of debate and decision-making within these political companies increasingly conformed, or was expected to conform, to the dictates of civility and ‘civil conversation’ (Withington 2009b). Indeed it was the demands of civility that served to justify the enclosure of public power from those incapable of fulfilling its strictures – an argument that reached its apotheosis in Spenser’s discussion of Ireland. In the second instance, the wider associational networks and groupings from which these ‘political bodies’ were drawn were also constituted through varieties of company and society. These networks included the so-called ‘county communities’ that defined the friendships and affiliations of the gentry and provincial nobility – ‘our society’, as Sir John Hotham described the east Yorkshire gentry in 1641. They included the ‘neighbourhoods’ and ‘societies’ of rural village life, in particular the ‘society’ of the godly ‘better sort’ which people like Ralph Josselin, the seventeenth-century minister of Earls Colne in Essex, identified with (Josselin 1991, 252; Wrightson 1982, 51–7). And they included the networks of burgesses, freemen and citizens residing at the symbolic

and physical centre of English 'urban communities' (Barry 2000; Tittler 1991; 1998; Withington 2005). In each instance, political oligarchy was expressive of social and cultural solidarities that were in turn forged and sustained through the daily round of sociability, hospitality, and mutuality. Public authority was exercised through company; so, too, was the social and cultural power on which it rested: in this way society and company were constitutive of class consciousness – not simply for the gentry but also the 'middling sort' broadly defined. Third, the essential corporatism of the English commonwealth was evident in the quite specific sense of 'intermediate bodies, most of them corporations, which were created by royal patent' (Slack 1999, 26). As Paul Slack notes, these 'bodies "corporate and politic" proliferated' from the 1540s, resulting in 'a multitude of little commonweals as susceptible to the ideals of civic humanism as the corporation of London itself'. As a result, the topography of early modern provincial England was rapidly pockmarked with corporate towns, grammar schools, professional bodies, hospitals and almshouses, not to mention commercial and colonial companies and 'a whole miscellany of groups of governors and trustees' for 'the management of public welfare'. These were, in effect, medieval institutions appropriated for 'modern' times, and 'their survival and formal evolution were essential ingredients in the dissemination of civic and civil consciousness in the sixteenth century' (26–7).

The most influential accounts of national integration have been rural in focus, taking England's 'county communities' or 'parish republics' as the key agencies of political change (Morrill 1974; Fletcher 1975; Wrightson 1982; Wrightson and Levine 1995; Jenkins 1983; Hindle 2000; Goldie 2001). Given this focus it is worth emphasizing that, just as templates for colonizing Ulster had a significant urban aspect so national incorporation was, at least in part, a process of urbanization. This is reflected demographically, London's share of the national population quintupling to over ten per cent between 1500 and 1700 and the provincial urban population increasing at the same rate as the population as a whole (Barry 1990, 2–3). However, English urbanism is more apparent when viewed culturally and institutionally (Vries 1984, 10–17; Borsay 1990, 4). Culturally towns and cities were as diverse, of course, as the companies and societies that inhabited them, this diversity only increasing over time. For humanists, however, cities represented one of the key interfaces between ancient and modern culture. In 1586 the humanist Angel Daye took 'urbanity' to mean 'civil, courteous, gentle, modest, or well ruled, as men commonly are in cities and places of good government' (Daye 1586, 38). A year earlier, William Cecil celebrated 'good towns' with



13 Prologue from Thomas Smith's copy of Marguerite de Navarre's 'Heptameron', 1560.

'their discreet preachers, very zealous towards God' and 'watchful of her Majesty's safety' (Slack 1999, 29). His friend Sir Thomas Smith likewise saw them as beacons of modernity. Not only did he build his colony around one. He singled out citizens and burgesses for special mention in *The Commonwealth of England* and when he read Marguerite de Navarre's *L'Heptameron* (1560) he copied the names of Tarbes, Narbonne, Barcelona, Marseilles, and Aigues-Mortes in the margin and drew urban skylines underneath. There were good reasons for this predilection. Just as the associational culture of medieval citizenship first engendered the language of commonweal, so it spawned the first coherent statements of civil company in the vernacular. The bailiffs and tradesmen of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Shrewsbury justified, for example, the formation of craft companies on the grounds that currently 'each man rule and govern himself after his own free will and lust' to the 'great hurt and hindrance and oppressing of the aforesaid crafts'. This was as true for

carpenters as it was for vintners. They now looked ‘to set all men of the said crafts in good rule and governance as all crafts in every good Town is used’; this would guarantee ‘their proper labour’ and ‘the common good’ (SRO 3365/67, 1, 72r, 86r). It was no coincidence that Thomas More wrote *Utopia* not only as a leading humanist but as a citizen of London: the text is laced, as Sarah Rees Jones has shown, with the assumptions of corporate citizenship (Rees Jones 2001, 119). Nor is it surprising that *Utopia*’s translator, Ralph Robinson, should be a London goldsmith whose translation was patronized by a reading company of London citizens as well as dedicated to William Cecil (Robinson 1551, Preface). Likewise it was entirely predictable that the stories Londoners told themselves in their increasingly extravagant Lord Mayor’s Pageants should revolve around the conceit that they were Romans revived (Manley 1997, 276–7).

The cultural convergence of urban citizenship and humanism had its infrastructural corollaries. Commerce, colonialism, markets, manufacture, litigation, printing, clubs, education, governance – all increased exponentially in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, largely through urban-based resources and infrastructures. The result was not necessarily bigger urban settlements – though clearly this was the case with London – so much as greater movement across the ‘urban system’: between towns and their rural hinterlands; within provincial urban networks (between provincial capitals, ports, county towns, market towns, manufacturing centres); and across the urban networks centred on London (which by 1620 included Londonderry and Coleraine in Ulster as well as Jamestown in Virginia). The result was a significant enhancement in urban resources and civic consciousness among urban inhabitants that was exemplified by the process of public building traced by Robert Tittler and Peter Borsay (Tittler 1991, 14; Borsay 1989, 323–50). This re-fabrication of English towns and cities went hand in hand with a massive expansion in the corporate resources available to townsmen. As Figure 7.1 shows, it was entirely predictable that urban corporations should play such an important role in the plantation of Ulster; they were already facilitating the incorporation of England. The figure shows that England and Scotland enjoyed broadly similar levels of urban incorporation before 1540. Thereafter England completely outstripped its northern neighbour as townsmen looked to consolidate or expand their political, economic, and jurisdictional powers with grants and charters from the crown. This they did on the back of unprecedented opportunities: the glut of land and property caused by the Reformation; greater purchasing power (in terms of cash and especially credit) generated

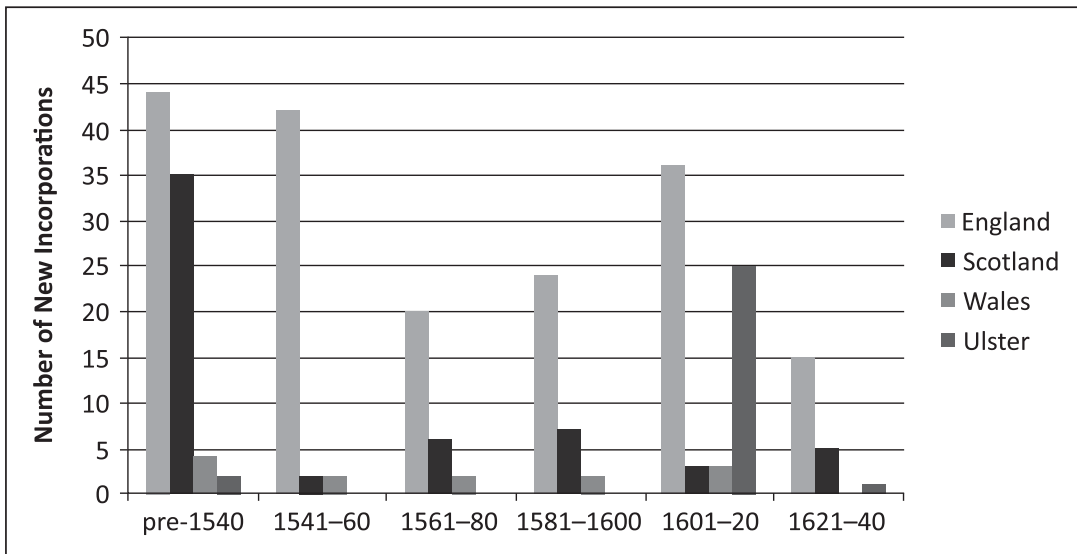


Figure 7.1 Rates of Incorporation in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ulster, 1540–1640.

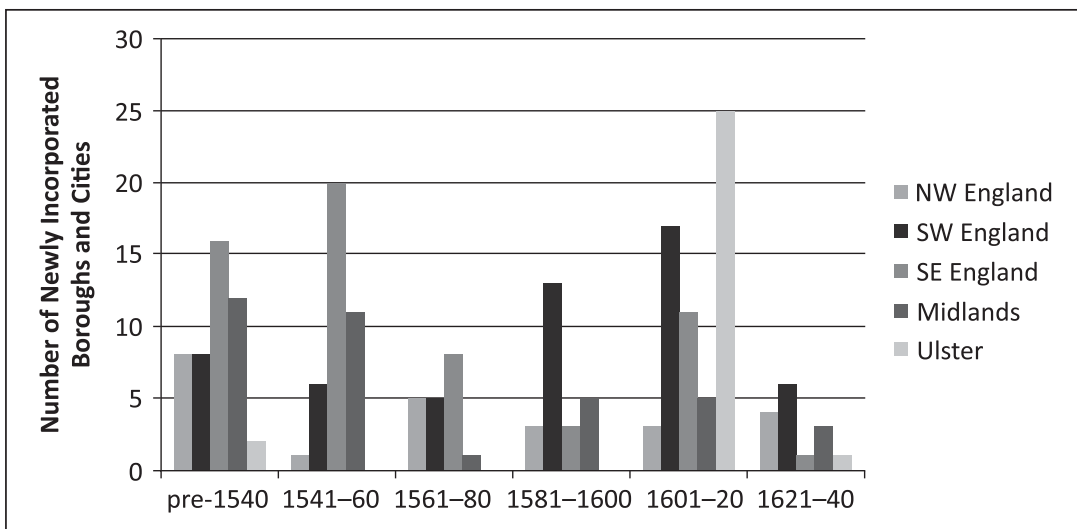


Figure 7.2 Rates of Urban Incorporation in Ulster and English Region, 1540–1640 (Source: Withington 2005, 19).

by commercial expansion; and the explicit support of humanist councilors in London (Tittler 1998; Withington 2005).

Viewed in these terms, the plantation of Ulster was an especially intensive example of a more general process – one designed to make Gaelic Ireland another English province (see Figure 7.2). The major difference was that, while companies of English townsmen actively sought and purchased incorporation for the ‘commonwealth’ of their

city and country (as they saw it), in Ulster the process was enforced and imposed on the indigenous population (Withington 2005, 18–19). Indeed when Smith, Spenser, and Blenerhasset envisaged the creation of ‘comfortable societies’ in Ulster they probably had something along the lines of Tewkesbury in mind. As we saw in Chapter 3, it was in Tewkesbury that John Barston dedicated *The Safeguard of Societie* to the Earl of Leicester in 1576. He did so in recognition of Leicester’s efforts in securing the borough’s charter – other gifts from the burgesses included a silver cup worth £16 and ‘a great ox’ (GRO TBR/A1/1). Leicester was also appointed High Steward of the borough, an official position that formalized the relationship between the burgesses and the Privy Council. Leicester acquired, in fact, fourteen High Stewardships and fostered informal influence in a further four cities and boroughs over the course of his public career. This was more than any of the other great corporate patrons of the early modern era – William Cecil, his son Robert Cecil, and Leicester’s protégé, Robert Devereux – and was comparable to his intensive patronage of printed humanist works (Adams, *ODNB*; Patterson 1999, 32). Until recently historians have tended to follow the authors of *Leicester’s Commonwealth* and explain this kind of patronage in terms of personal status and parliamentary influence. There is probably truth in this, although Tewkesbury did not become a parliamentary borough until 1610 (and so did not benefit Leicester in this respect) (VCH 1968, 153). That said, issues of status and influence were not incompatible with an ideological commitment to making England ‘modern’ in the humanist and Protestant sense of that term. On the contrary, they were a prerequisite of getting things done. Even more importantly, there were certain sorts of men in Tewkesbury who clearly shared in Leicester’s reformatory agenda and, in the case of men like Barston, actively shaped it. While the civic humanism of *The Safeguard of Societie* fits easily in the context of St John’s and the Inns of Court, it also resonates with the place in which, in all likelihood, Barston was born and bred. Certainly ‘Barston’ was an established local name: another John Barston was one of the Masters of the Company of Cordwainers when it drew up a new set of ordinances in 1562 (four years before Barston went to Cambridge) and Edward Barston served as constable of the parish in the 1580s (GRO D1/1, 1; TBR/A1/1, 1577). When Barston returned to Tewkesbury in the 1570s to take up the post of town clerk that he helped create (he was paid £27 for soliciting the charter) he thereafter served as chamberlain (treasurer) and bailiff (mayor) of the borough, in effect practicing the ‘society’ that he preached (GRO TBR/A1/1, 1580, 1589).

Barston's acquisition of the charter was paid for by 'the collection of the whole town'. As in other boroughs and cities, the result was a structure of government built around the 'principal burgesses' listed on the charter. These local merchants, craftsmen, and minor landholders now became the 'common council' of Tewkesbury; their efforts nicely illustrate at once national incorporation in practice, and the role of company in the process. The first point to note is that their campaign for incorporation was precipitated by the tighter organization of urban trade into craft companies a decade earlier. For example, from 1562 a series of ordinances were 'fully countenanced and agreed by the voice of the whole company or fellowship' concerning 'the occupation and Mystery of Cordwainers'. These were designed at once to regulate the wages of 'journeymen' (salaried workers), enforce the system of apprenticeship outlined in the 1563 'Statute of Artificers', and prevent 'strangers' – persons 'not free and compounded with the Masters and Company' – from practicing 'the trade art and science of cordwaining within the town or bounds of Tewkesbury' (GRO D1/1, 1–5). The company became, in effect, the conduit of Elizabethan political economy as conceived by Smith, Cecil, and the 'weal publique' (Wrightson 2000, 153–8). The ordinances also encouraged corporate cohesion among the town's nineteen enfranchised 'brothers and sisters' (widows of freemen became company members although they never held office). To this end, company meetings were compulsory, company office-holding obligatory, company 'drinking days' encouraged, and the business of the company enclosed: 'if any person or persons of this company shall discourse or utter . . . things spoken among the company at the common hall which shall concern the same company' they would be fined (GRO D1/1, 20). The charter of 1575 placed the regulatory powers of the company on more secure footing. Apprentices and freemen were now double registered with the 'common council' and 'company'. 'Brothers and sisters' swore 'before the bailiff and council' to use 'the utmost wit and power maintaining and supporting the said fraternity and craft and all common charges'. And it was 'ordered and agreed by the full consent of the whole company that none of the same company shall have their shop windows or window open at any time upon the Sunday' after the bell had rung for church (GRO D1/1, 16–19). Incorporation suited, that is, the independent master cordwainers of Tewkesbury, reflecting their own conception of corporate practice and power. As such, it is hardly surprising that two of their company were named as 'principal burgesses' on the 1575 charter (GRO TBR/A1/1, 1574).

Their priorities were accordingly encoded in the ‘Acts of Ordinances counselled by the common council as well for good ordering themselves as for government and common weal’ on 21 April 1575. As the preamble to the Acts suggests, they outlined rules of civic association as well as the business of governance. The emphasis in terms of governance was primarily economic. Ordinances designated the time and place of market, specified the tolls and charges ‘strangers’ should pay to the Bailiffs, and outlawed the ‘evil use of market houses’, whereby sellers made their deals in secret and manipulated the price of corn and grain. A second set of ordinances reiterated the rules concerning apprenticeship and urban freedom; the ordinaries of particular companies, like the cordwainers and haberdashers, were also recorded. As striking, however, is the emphasis placed by the common council on ‘the good ordering themselves’. Indeed the first two pages of ‘Acts’ were concerned purely with making civic governance *civil*. Common counsellors were required to be punctual and regimented in their time-keeping: the ‘common council of the borough shall weekly on the Tuesday about 8 of the clock in the forenoon assemble them together to the common chamber’ and occasional meetings could be called ‘at the discretion and appointment of the Bailiffs’. Public decisions were deliberated through civil conversation:

At all such assemblies and meetings every one of the counsel shall go and sit in his room and place in the chamber and going out and coming in according to his course and calling; And likewise shall speak answer and give his opinion in all things there to be propounded by the like course and order [damaged] the young or lowest of the company shall begin by speaking to their elders and Bailiffs without quarrelling or uncomely speech. (GRO TBR/A1/1, 1574)

They also needed to dress and behave with appropriate decorum: gowns were compulsory and any counsellor ‘wilfully and vainly swearing’ would be fined. Like the cordwainers, they should be constantly conscious of corporate boundaries: ‘if any of the counsel shall at any time be lawfully considered of eight burgesses . . . to have uttered or discoursed any matter of counsel out of the chamber’ they would be fined 20s. If they continued they would eventually be ‘removed utterly from the office and calling of a counsellor within the borough except the same by good discretion and consideration of the same eight Burgesses shall be in any wise remitted or else qualified’. The common councillors immediately implemented a public building programme which embodied their conception of ‘modern’ urban society. By 1578 a town hall with a clock (the ‘Tolsey Court’)

had been constructed. This was quickly followed by a ‘free school house’ for the grammar established in the 1530s (and where Barston was probably educated). Like the charter, it was financed by a collection of the whole town and the ‘common chamber’ (GRO TBR/A1/1, 1574–8).

The preoccupations of Tewkesbury’s ‘common counsellors’ – with civility, with political economy, with the rule of discreet and discrete company – encapsulate the more general story of the integration of the English commonwealth. They acquired further powers over the following decades: the power to muster the town militia (the burgesses took an avid interest in events in Ireland), appoint Justices of the Peace (from their own number), and elect two representatives to parliament. They also purchased the manor of Tewkesbury for the town (VCH 1968, 146–8). As this suggests, urban incorporation was striking for the concentration and range of resources (institutional and material) it endowed companies of men. However, the underlying principle of ‘societies’ taking responsibility for their local and national commonwealths was quite as apparent in the parish of Terling in Essex and the county community of Warwickshire as Tewkesbury (Wrightson 1994; Cust 2007a, 191–6). In each instance, ‘modernization’ was retrospective in terms of its classical underpinnings; it was also symbiotic rather than extraneously imposed. In parishes, counties and towns the normative framework for governance – at least among reformers – became the rule of meritorious aristocracy (as they liked to perceive themselves) or straightforward oligarchies (as their opponents and social historians have tended to describe them): the ‘better sort’ in terms of not merely wealth (though that helped) but *habitus* more generally. In towns at least, the commonwealth so defined generally equated with the economic interests of enfranchised master tradesmen at the expense of journeymen and wage labourers compelled to work for others, who were left without associational resources of their own. Exclusion on other grounds – religious, moral, gender, inhabitancy – was also likely, the more so if ‘counsellors’ also regarded themselves as God’s ‘elect’. Moreover, as the many bitter civil disputes that characterized early modern communities suggest, one man’s ‘civil aristocracy’ was another’s ‘private oligarchy’: the rule of the corrupt few for their own (rather than the common) weal. There may well have been discontent in Tewkesbury itself, the common council expanding from twelve to twenty four to forty eight counsellors by 1610 (VCH 1968, 148). There was certainly bitterness in the Shropshire borough of Ludlow, where an entrenched oligarchy prompted the formation of a ‘company’ of burgesses agitating for civic ‘democracy’ – through the assembly of all free (enfranchised)

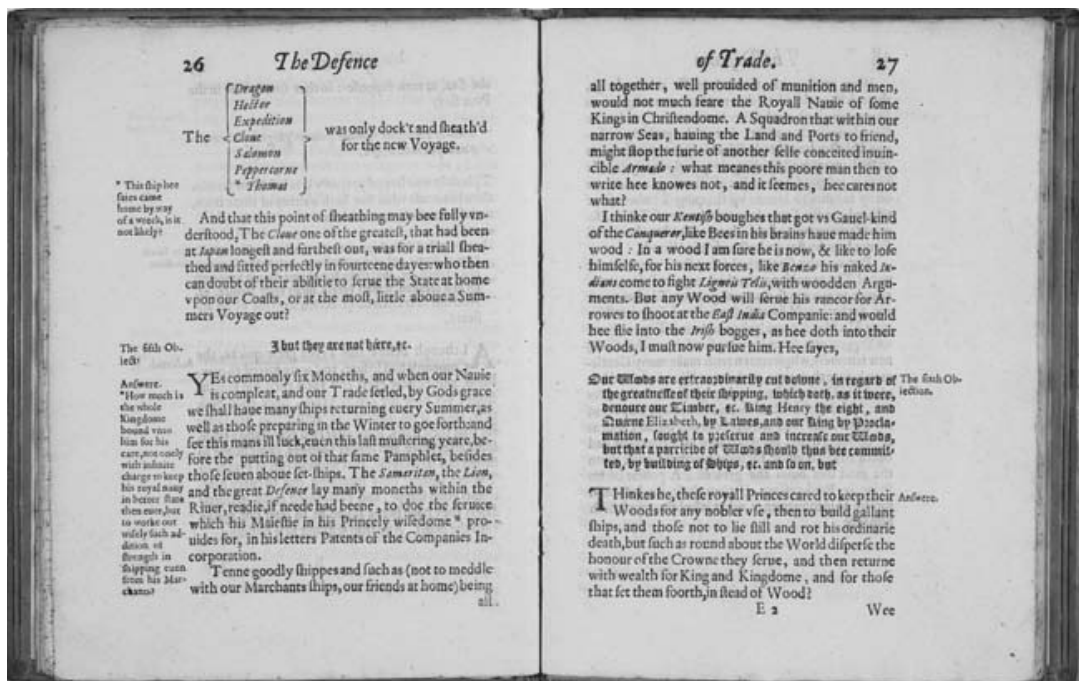
burgesses – by the 1590s. Yet even here, ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ were defined within the parameters of the ‘city commonwealth’ rather than extended willy-nilly (Withington 2005, 66–75). As the Irish in Ulster and Amerindians in America soon learned, ‘society civil’ was a corporate privilege rather than a universal right (Middleton 2006, 4–9).

Conclusion

Given their fond memories of the Earl of Leicester it is, perhaps, unsurprising that when Tewkesbury’s common council was first empowered to select parliamentary representatives in 1610 it chose Leicester’s godson. It was to do so regularly thereafter until 1628, suggesting the relationship was one of mutual respect and benefit; indeed the said representative, while not a resident burgess, was a benefactor of the free school and very active in his parliamentary role. The godson was Dudley Digges, son of Thomas Digges – the mathematician and soldier who wrote *Stratoticos* and who was (as we saw in Chapter 3) the first author to use ‘modern’ on a vernacular printed title-page. That John Barston was still alive and probably participated in the 1610 election is fitting given the shared cultural antecedents and resonance of ‘society’ and ‘modern’. It is not, however, with Tewkesbury’s hitherto unsuspected centrality to the formation of modern Western society that this chapter concludes (not a sentence I expected to write when I started this book). Dudley Digges’s investment in provincial urban ‘societie’ was part and parcel of his more general commitment to companies that served, as he saw it, the interests of the ‘state’, ‘common-wealth’, ‘country’, and ‘prince’. While his father had been an important theorist of modern warfare – and English intervention in the United Provinces’ war against Spain – Dudley Digges was a proponent of ‘modern’ trade, by which he meant aggressive commercial expansion at the expense of other European nations (Digges 1615, 5). And while Thomas Digges saw military companies trained in classical discipline and virtues as one of the keys to military success, his son regarded corporately organized ‘*Merchants liberal Adventures*’ as the facility most likely ‘to advance the reputation and revenue of the *Common-Wealth*’ (2). To this end Dudley Digges was not only a stock-holder in the East India Company. He was also one of its most vociferous defenders in parliament and print.

Digges sketched out his position in the 1615 treatise *The Defence of Trade*, which was framed as ‘a letter to Sir Thomas Smith, Governor

of the East India Company' from 'one of that societie'. (Smith was the most prominent merchant of his day and no relation to Sir Thomas Smith of Hill House). *The Defence* answered the charges of an unattributed pamphlet, *The Increase of Trade*, against the eastern trade in general and the East India Company in particular. As Miles Ogborn has shown, Digges, the Privy Council and the East India Company knew full well the offending tract was by Robert Kayll; Digges's printed response was part of a larger strategy (including arrest and imprisonment) to nullify Kayll's criticisms at a time of delicate trade negotiations with the Dutch (Ogborn 2007, 113–20). Kayll's main points were threefold: that England was conceding valuable trading opportunities to the Dutch in its own backyard – most notably the herring fishing – by supporting companies like the East India Company; that the East India Company was a drain on England's natural and human resources; and that the very existence of companies amounted to the privatization of commerce (Ogborn 2007, 110). Digges's reply was typically controversialist in that extracts from the offending pamphlet were repeated verbatim and then followed by his damning riposte. In this instance the juxtaposition of arguments served to emphasize Digges's modernity at the expense of his opponent's conservatism – a contrast visually enhanced by the use of Gothic type for his adversary's text. Digges accordingly noted that, according to the anonymous pamphlet, the East India



14 From Dudley Digges, *Defence of Trade*, 1615, pp. 26–7.

Company was overseeing the destruction of the kingdom's timber resources to build ships for its fleets; it was diverting ships and 'treasure' eastwards, leaving the kingdom defenceless and poor; the demand of the huge fleets bound to the Indies increased prices, especially of essential victuals, domestically; and it returned with mostly 'unnecessary wares' that were superfluous to the commonwealth (Digges 1615, 40). The author also noted the large number of ships lost by the Company (in comparison to other routes); the high mortality rates among its mariners and other workers; and the implications for families, friends, and creditors at home 'clamouring for the dues of the dead'. The enrichment of merchants was, in short, 'paid in blood' and through the 'parricide of woods' (38, 10).

In refuting these arguments Digges wore his 'new humanism' on his sleeve, drawing especially on Tacitus and the 'reason of state' arguments associated with him (Fitzmaurice 2003, 177–8). This concern for 'matter of state, secret of merchandize' was combined, however, with an explicit empiricism, Digges reassuring the reader that 'the substance of this which you have read, was taken out of custom-books, out of the East India Companies book, out of grocers, warehouse-keepers, merchants books, and conference with men of best experience' (50–1). The result was a series of classicized declarations about the Company's 'good service to the State' and what, indeed, 'the state' or 'commonwealth' should be. These were interspersed with exercises in political arithmetic demonstrating, among other things, how many ships the Company had really commissioned (and how much wood this required) and how many mariners and other employees had really been lost over the past fourteen years trading. In this way Digges even solved 'the Mystery of the East India Merchants merit to the Commonwealth, even out of her unnecessary wares' by showing the balance between initial investment in a fleet, the value of the returning stock, and the profit made from re-exporting 'superfluties' into Europe (41). All of which was predicated on the unprecedented exploitation of natural resources for commercial ends. Trees were no longer the symbols of Saxon resolution in the face of would-be conquerors (5). The realities of global commerce meant there was no 'nobler use' of the royal forests than 'to build gallant ships, and these not to lie still and rot his ordinary death, but such as round about the World to disperse the honour of the Crown they serve, and then return with wealth for king and kingdom' (27).

This combination of political economy (reminiscent of Digges's father's military arithmetic) and 'new humanism' (privileging Tacitus over Cicero) marked a qualitative shift from the exegeses of Smith,

Spenser, and, indeed, Barston. The triangle of company, commonwealth, and private profit nevertheless remained clearly in view – the more so because of Kayll’s damning representation of modern companies as the antithesis of the Ciceronian conception of ‘society’. As far as Kayll was concerned, all the ‘companies and societies’ facilitating English expansion east and west represented nothing more than ‘the common wealth being made private’ (Kayll 1615, 53). He explained in conventional Ciceronian terms that

Society first began, and knowledge and civility, by communication. But if the world in his infancy had been resolved to have held private what they had in possession, and to have concealed what they knew, there had not only been no civility, but no society. (55)

Digges eschewed this idealism for a hardnosed and materialistic approach. The East India Company was a voluntary association of ‘Good men, good-minded merchants [who] fetch and bring the honey to the Hive’. Like ‘laborious Bees, they clothe and feed the poor, and give the willing man employment to gain with them, and with the Common-wealth, the honour, and the riches that Venice first enjoyed by their Trade over land’. ‘This was the first intention, this is still the endeavour of that famous fellowship’. Indeed, what worried Digges was not so much the public credentials of the Company, which were self-evident, as what made people want to join and work for it in the first place. He feared that rather than ‘spend both time and money in any action that may good the Common-wealth’, the ‘East India Merchant’ would ‘give that Traffic over’ and ‘look at private profit only, and employ his stock for swifter, and for surer, and perhaps more gain’ (Digges 1615, 16). This was part of a more general problem concerning ‘service to the State’: why should people live in ‘Cities visited with Sickness,’ for example, ‘or go into the Wars’ (31)? Good pay was one motive, Digges noting the ‘extraordinary wages’ paid by the East India Company to mariners and other employees and how, even if they died, ‘yet the good money soon dries the eyes of friends and creditors, as it might do widows’ (38). Patriotism was another, though not necessarily in the positive way assumed by early generations of humanists: as Digges explained, ‘the commonwealth esteems not of the life of any but good men, such as do good, the rest are Tacitus his *Purgamenta Urbium*, their death to her is nothing but an ease’ (32). The East India Company (like the Virginia Company with which Digges was also deeply embroiled) institutionalized both these possibilities. It was, in effect, the modern incarnation of the ‘perfect wisdom in all Commonwealths’: the facility for ‘honour, pay,

and privileges to invite the private man into such dangers, for the publique good' (32).

Digges's corporate conception of the 'publique good' did not make him an especially pliant subject. He is usually noted by political historians for his increasingly aggressive attitude towards the Stuart court during the 1620s – as an opponent of court monopolies, a supporter of war against the Spanish, and an opponent of the Duke of Buckingham (a monopolist, Spanish conciliator, and 'favourite' renowned for his venality). As the parliamentary representative of Tewkesbury he was imprisoned in May 1626 with Sir John Eliot after comparing Buckingham to Sejanus (and so Charles I with Tiberius). Two years later he helped draft the Petition of Right, an important statement on the limits of the royal prerogative and defence of 'ancient liberties'. In the meantime he continued to defend the corporate privileges of merchants (especially the East India Company), advised on Virginian affairs, and lobbied for a West Indian Company (Kelsey ODNB). Another collaborator of the Petition of Right, John Pym, was also involved in corporate initiatives from the 1620s, becoming a founding member of the ill-fated Providence Island Company in 1630. As Karen Kupperman notes, the company 'provided these [future] Long Parliament leaders with an invaluable education in administration and finance, as well as forging a strong working relationship among themselves' (Kupperman 1993, 13). It was also a natural expression of his civic humanism and godly Protestantism – a *habitus* which ultimately drove him to war against his monarch. The free burgesses of Tewkesbury, despite their many privileges and powers granted by the crown, likewise sided with parliament in the civil war and regularly elected Whigs at the Restoration (VCH 1968, 154–5). In this they emulated the majority of their London counterparts, who became jaded with the rule of the Stuarts, not least because of the disregard for corporate autonomy and privileges shown by Charles I and his sons. Political historians have quite rightly warned that coincidences like these did not make the civil war inevitable. Nor were all corporate citizens or company shareholders parliamentarians (Digges's son was a royalist propagandist). What they do demonstrate is that political decision-making in early modern England – like the more general exercise of public authority – was embedded in companies, societies, and incorporated bodies. In more ways than one, the political history of early modern England is also the history of society.