

THE CAMBRIDGE
URBAN HISTORY OF BRITAIN

GENERAL EDITOR

PROFESSOR PETER CLARK (*University of Leicester*)

The three volumes of *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* represent the culmination of a tremendous upsurge of research in British urban history over the past thirty years. Mobilising the combined expertise of nearly ninety historians, archaeologists and geographers from Britain, continental Europe and North America, these volumes trace the complex and diverse evolution of British towns from the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlements to the mid-twentieth century. Taken together they form a comprehensive and uniquely authoritative account of the development of the first modern urban nation. *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* has been developed with the active support of the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester.

VOLUME I 600–1540

EDITED BY D. M. PALLISER (*University of Leeds*)

ISBN 0 521 44461 6

VOLUME II 1540–1840

EDITED BY PETER CLARK (*University of Leicester*)

ISBN 0 521 43141 7

VOLUME III 1840–1950

EDITED BY MARTIN DAUNTON (*University of Cambridge*)

ISBN 0 521 41707 4

Advisory committee

Caroline M. Barron	<i>Royal Holloway College, University of London</i>
Jonathan Barry	<i>University of Exeter</i>
Peter Borsay	<i>St David's College, Lampeter, University of Wales</i>
Peter Clark	<i>University of Leicester</i>
Penelope Corfield	<i>Royal Holloway College, University of London</i>
Martin Daunton	<i>Churchill College, University of Cambridge</i>
Richard Dennis	<i>University College London</i>
Patricia Dennison	<i>University of Edinburgh</i>
Vanessa Harding	<i>Birkbeck College, University of London</i>
Gordon Jackson	<i>University of Strathclyde</i>
Derek Keene	<i>Institute of Historical Research, University of London</i>
Michael Lynch	<i>University of Edinburgh</i>
D. M. Palliser	<i>University of Leeds</i>
David Reeder	<i>University of Leicester</i>
Richard Rodger	<i>University of Leicester</i>
Gervase Rosser	<i>St Catherine's College, University of Oxford</i>
Paul Slack	<i>Linacre College, University of Oxford</i>
Richard Trainor	<i>University of Glasgow</i>
Sir Tony Wrigley	<i>Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge</i>

THE
CAMBRIDGE
URBAN HISTORY
OF
BRITAIN

VOLUME I

600–1540

EDITED BY
D. M. PALLISER



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Bembo 10/12½ System QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 44461 6 hardback

Contents

<i>List of plates</i>	page xi
<i>List of maps</i>	xii
<i>List of figures</i>	xiii
<i>List of tables</i>	xv
<i>List of contributors</i>	xvii
<i>Preface by the General Editor</i>	xix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xxiv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xxv

PART I INTRODUCTORY

1 INTRODUCTION	3
<i>D. M. Palliser</i>	
2 THE ORIGINS OF BRITISH TOWNS	17
<i>D. M. Palliser</i>	

PART II THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES 600–1300

3 GENERAL SURVEY 600–1300	27
<i>Grenville Astill</i>	
4 POWER AND AUTHORITY 600–1300	51
<i>James Campbell</i>	
5 SOCIETY AND POPULATION 600–1300	79
<i>Richard Holt</i>	

Contents

6	THE ECONOMY OF BRITISH TOWNS 600–1300 <i>Richard Britnell</i>	105
7	CHURCHES, EDUCATION AND LITERACY IN TOWNS 600–1300 <i>Julia Barrow</i>	127
8	THE TOPOGRAPHY OF TOWNS 600–1300 <i>D. M. Palliser, T. R. Slater and E. Patricia Dennison</i>	153
9	LONDON FROM THE POST-ROMAN PERIOD TO 1300 <i>Derek Keene</i>	187
10	THE LARGE TOWNS 600–1300 <i>David A. Hinton</i>	217
11	SMALL TOWNS 600–1270 <i>John Blair</i>	245
PART III THE LATER MIDDLE AGES 1300–1540		
12	GENERAL SURVEY 1300–1540 <i>Barrie Dobson</i>	273
13	GOVERNMENT, POWER AND AUTHORITY 1300–1540 <i>S. H. Rigby and Elizabeth Ewan</i>	291
14	THE ECONOMY OF BRITISH TOWNS 1300–1540 <i>Richard Britnell</i>	313
15	URBAN CULTURE AND THE CHURCH 1300–1540 <i>Gervase Rosser, with Scottish material by E. Patricia Dennison</i>	335
16	THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT 1300–1540 <i>John Schofield and Geoffrey Stell</i>	371
17	LONDON 1300–1540 <i>Caroline M. Barron</i>	395
18	THE GREATER TOWNS 1300–1540 <i>Jennifer Kermode</i>	441

Contents

19	PORT TOWNS	
	(a) ENGLAND AND WALES 1300-1540	467
	<i>Maryanne Kowaleski</i>	
	(b) SCOTLAND 1300-1540	495
	<i>David Ditchburn</i>	
20	SMALL TOWNS 1270-1540	505
	<i>Christopher Dyer</i>	

PART IV REGIONAL SURVEYS

21	REGIONAL INTRODUCTION (ENGLAND AND WALES)	541
	<i>Derek Keene and D. M. Palliser</i>	
22	(a) THE SOUTH-EAST OF ENGLAND	545
	<i>Derek Keene</i>	
	(b) THE SOUTH-WEST OF ENGLAND	583
	<i>T. R. Slater</i>	
	(c) THE MIDLANDS	609
	<i>Christopher Dyer and T. R. Slater</i>	
	(d) EAST ANGLIA	639
	<i>Bärbel Brodt</i>	
	(e) NORTHERN TOWNS	657
	<i>Jennifer Kermode</i>	
	(f) WALES AND THE MARCHES	681
	<i>Ralph A. Griffiths</i>	
23	SCOTLAND	715
	<i>E. Patricia Dennison and Grant G. Simpson</i>	

PART V CONCLUSION

24	CONCLUSION	741
	<i>D. M. Palliser</i>	
	APPENDIX: RANKING LISTS OF ENGLISH MEDIEVAL TOWNS	747
	<i>Alan Dyer</i>	
	Introduction	747
	1a Pre-Conquest towns: area within fortifications of Anglo-Saxon	
	<i>burhs</i>	748

Contents

1 b Pre-Conquest towns: number of surviving coins from each mint 973–1066	750
2 Ranking of Domesday towns 1086	752
3 Ranking of towns in farms, tallages and aids 1154–1312	754
4 Ranking of towns by taxable wealth: the subsidy of 1334	755
5 Ranking of towns by taxpaying population: the 1377 poll tax	758
6 Ranking of towns by taxpaying population: subsidy of 1524–1525	761
7 Ranking of towns by taxable wealth: the subsidy of 1524–1525	765
Ranking summary of the more important towns mentioned in Appendices	768
 <i>Select bibliography</i>	 771
<i>Index</i>	789

Plates

Between pages 537 and 538

- 1 The seal of the town of Oxford 1191
- 2 The mace of the town of Ilchester, early thirteenth century
- 3 London, Westminster and Southwark in the mid-sixteenth century
- 4 Burgh seal of Dunfermline
- 5 Southampton: the Bargate
- 6 Bristol: fifteenth-century plan of the town at the time of its foundation
- 7 Holy Trinity church, Hull
- 8 Pilgrim badge of St Osmund
- 9 Royston Cave (Herts.): carvings of saints
- 10 Stratford-on-Avon: the guildhall, chapel and almshouses
- 11 Alabaster head of St John the Baptist
- 12 Merchants' marks, Dunfermline
- 13 Toy soldier on horseback (c. 1300)
- 14 Micklegate Bar, York, in 1777
- 15 Part of the London waterfront c. 1540
- 16 A reconstruction of the London Guildhall
- 17 Statues from the Guildhall porch, London
- 18 Mercat cross, Banff
- 19 Survey of property in Mincing Lane and Fenchurch Street, London, 1612
- 20 A London alderman of the fifteenth century
- 21 Exeter Cathedral Close c. 1590 from the manuscript of John Hooker
- 22 Aerial view of Pembroke
- 23 Aerial view of Caernarfon
- 24 Bird's eye view of St Andrews, c. 1580
- 25 Fifteenth-century view of Stirling

Maps

2.1	The towns of Roman Britain	<i>page</i> 20
3.1	The more important towns in 1086	43
4.1	The Midland counties and county towns in relation to rivers	54
7.1	The four main orders of friars in British towns	146
11.1	Origins and hierarchies of towns in the English South Midlands	269
19.1	Customs headports and jurisdictions in the fifteenth century	473
20.1	Density of small towns in England and Wales 1270–1540	509
20.2	The hinterland of Hedon (Yorks.)	519
20.3	The hinterland of Andover (Hants.)	520
22.1	The South-East of England and its principal towns during the later middle ages	546
22.2	Towns of South-East England by date of first evidence of urban status <i>c.</i> 900–1550	547
22.3	Affiliation of borough customs up to 1256	566
22.4	Towns of South-East England <i>c.</i> 1300 according to their significance as urban centres	567
22.5	Principal English towns 1377	571
22.6	Urban potential in England 1377	578
22.7	Residences of debtors to Londoners, <i>c.</i> 1400	579
22.8	Towns in the South-West of England	584
22.9	Towns in the English Midlands	610
22.10	Towns in East Anglia	640
22.11	Towns in northern England	658
22.12	Towns in Wales and the Marches	682
23.1	Towns in Scotland	717
23.2	Scottish burghs before the Reformation	726

Figures

3.1	Later Saxon Gloucester and Exeter	page 39
3.2	Later Saxon Colchester and Chichester	40
7.1	The churches and graveyards of twelfth-century Gloucester	135
7.2	The churches and graveyards of medieval Chester	136
7.3	The churches, parishes and graveyards of medieval Hereford	137
8.1	The development of Dundee, eleventh, thirteenth and fifteenth centuries	155
8.2	Atherstone: a single-street planned town	163
8.3	Plan analysis of Bridgnorth (Shropshire)	165
8.4	Plan analysis of Stratford-on-Avon	166
8.5	The ecclesiastical precincts of York	179
9.1	London in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries	189
9.2	The City of London <i>c.</i> 1300	193
10.1	The four major <i>wic</i> sites: London, York, Ipswich and Southampton	219
10.2	Hereford: the development of part of the western defences	223
10.3	Oxford: the city's development <i>c.</i> 950–1350	224
10.4	Winchester in the mid-twelfth century	237
10.5	Bristol: plan and foreshore development	239
10.6	Salisbury, <i>c.</i> 1300	242
11.1	Ecclesiastical nuclei and urban growth in early medieval Britain and Ireland: six examples	254
11.2	Plan of Steyning (Sussex): an example of a proto-town around a minster	257
11.3	Twelfth-century planned towns: three examples	263
11.4	Two Oxfordshire 'Newlands'	266
17.1a–c	London's and England's raw wool exports 1279–1543	414
17.2a–c	London's and England's cloth exports 1348–1543	417

List of figures

17.3a–b	London's and England's wine imports 1403–1547	420
17.4a–d	London's and England's goods liable to petty custom, 1399–1547 and poundage 1402–1547	422
17.5	The Company Halls of London, c. 1540	430

Tables

6.1	Estimates of money stock in circulation in England <i>c.</i> 1000–1311	<i>page</i> 119
6.2	Occupations of some citizens in York, Norwich and Winchester around 1300	122
6.3	The twenty wealthiest English towns in 1334, with changes in ranking since 1086	124
14.1	Trade-related revenues from the borough of Newport (Mon.) 1402–1522	317
14.2	Estimates of money stock in circulation in England 1300–1546	324
14.3	Occupations of some citizens in York, Canterbury, Norwich and Chester in the later fifteenth century	326
14.4	The twenty wealthiest English towns in 1524, with changes in ranking since 1334	329
18.1	Characteristics of the greater towns	442
19.1	The relative importance of English headports in overseas trade 1203–1204 and 1478–1482	477
19.2	The relative importance of English headports in the cloth export trade in three periods 1352–1510	479
19.3	The relative importance of English headports in the overseas import trade of non-sweet wine in two periods 1350–1500	481
19.4	The relative importance of English headports in the alien overseas trade 1324–1329 and 1478–1482	482
19.5	The naval service of English and Welsh ships in three periods 1336–1450	488
19.6	The relative importance of English and Welsh ports in the Bordeaux wine-carrying trade in three periods 1372–1483	490
20.1	The small towns of England	507
20.2	Debts recorded in small-town courts	524
20.3	Changes in small-town populations 1377–1381 to 1524–1525	536

List of tables

22.1	Principal towns in the South-East estimated as a proportion of regional values	558
22.2	Counties of the South-East as a proportion of regional values	570
22.3	Most prominent towns in each county of the South-East as a proportion of that county and the region	573
22.4	Densities of population and towns in the South-East 1100–1500	574
22.5	Numbers of towns and the rates of their foundation in the South-East 1100–1500	575
22.6	Rank order of towns in the South-West in 1334	601

Introduction

D. M. PALLISER

THE HISTORY of British towns¹ is a very distinctive one in a European – even in a world – perspective. Until the eighteenth century most of them were small by international standards, yet in the nineteenth century Britain became the first country in the world to urbanise, that is, to have more than half of its population living in towns. The divide is neatly measured by the 1851 census, which showed (depending on urban definitions and boundaries) about 54 per cent of English and Welsh people, and 52 per cent of Scots, town dwellers. No one, therefore, questions the importance of British towns and urbanisation in the last two centuries, and it is indeed possible to write British history since 1850 from an urban point of view.² For the pre-industrial period the subject has understandably seemed less important, since though southern Britain at least has had towns for most of the last two millennia, for much of that long period they were relatively small: relative, that is, both to contemporary continental cities, and to modern towns. Visitors from Venice judged late medieval London to be the only important British city, while Patrick Collinson has described Tudor towns (other than London) as ‘small-scale Toytowns and Trumptions’ compared to the great imperial cities of Germany and the Netherlands.³

Yet if London stood alone in the first division of European pre-industrial cities, other British towns were not therefore unimportant. They housed a substantial

The section on Scottish historiography is by E. Patricia Dennison and Grant G. Simpson.

¹ ‘Town’ is used throughout these volumes to mean ‘that sort of place which, however it was governed and however small its population, fulfilled the functions which are normally implied by the modern use of the word “town” in British English, “city” in American English, *vill* in French, *Stadt* in German, and *città* in Italian’: S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900–1300*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1997), p. 157.

² Notably by P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation: England 1850–1914* (Oxford, 1983).

³ D. M. Palliser, ‘Urban society’, in R. Horrox, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 132; P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 32.

minority of the population (at least in England), larger than is generally believed. Though some writers have put the urban proportion of the population at only 5 or 10 per cent as late as 1500, the best recent estimates are considerably higher: up to 10 per cent in 1086, 15 or more per cent by 1300, 20 per cent in 1377, and after perhaps a fall in the fifteenth century, a return to about 20 per cent by 1524.⁴ Furthermore, they were regular places of resort for the rural majority, whether for economic, social, administrative, judicial or ecclesiastical purposes, and 'it is easy to forget that . . . towns can often seem more important to those who visit them than those who live there'.⁵ Nearly everyone, for instance, lived within easy reach of a market town by the thirteenth century, at least over the greater part of England. This volume is full of examples of the relationships between town and country in the middle ages, a natural feature of an island much of which was becoming commercialised as early as the tenth and eleventh centuries. Studying British and European urbanisation 'requires a lengthy look backward in time. The answers to many questions about the nature of contemporary European cities lie in the medieval period, not in the modern industrial era.'⁶

The work reviewed here, and in Volume II, should help to dispel any lingering 'suspicion that urbanization in the centuries before the period of classic industrial revolution is too petty for study'.⁷ The importance of our theme – indeed of the theme of all three volumes of the *Urban History of Britain* – was justified long ago by James Tait: to trace urban growth 'from the advent of the town-hating Angles and Saxons down to these latter days, when five-sixths of the population of Great Britain are massed upon pavements' was, he said in 1922, 'a task worthy of the best powers of an historian of institutions'.⁸ We might put this slightly differently now. One of the myths dispelled by modern scholarship is that the English peoples who invaded Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries were 'town-hating' folk, but none the less the collapse of Roman urban centres left them little opportunity to live in towns. Now we would perhaps emphasise towns as social and economic communities, and not think of them only as boroughs or institutions. Nevertheless, as a reminder of the huge growth of towns over nearly fourteen centuries, and the consequences it has entailed, Tait's programme can hardly be bettered.

(i) THE IDENTIFICATION AND IMPORTANCE OF TOWNS

An issue to be faced at the outset is that of definitions: what are meant by a town, and by the middle ages? Whatever may be true of later periods, there are great

⁴ R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000–1500*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1996), pp. 49, 115, 170; C. Dyer, 'How urbanized was medieval England?', in J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoën, eds., *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe* (Ghent, 1995), pp. 169–83.

⁵ R. B. Dobson, 'The risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380–1381', in R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston, eds., *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 142.

⁶ P. M. Hohenberg and L. H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 1. ⁷ Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, p. vii.

⁸ J. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough* (Manchester, 1936), p. 358 (from a paper first given in 1922).

difficulties in agreeing on an urban definition valid for all the centuries usually labelled 'medieval'. Over the long time span concerned, functions of 'central places' changed, and definitions valid for one century might not help for another. The functions later concentrated in multi-purpose towns were often separated in the early middle ages, with a royal centre in one, a major church in another and perhaps a market, mint or port in a third. 'A settlement growing up around a royal and / or ecclesiastical site in the seventh or eighth century should not be judged as non-urban by the criteria applicable to a later Saxon burh, just as these latter places should not be judged by the standards of later medieval towns'.⁹ The literature is also confused by the relationship between places with a legal, and those with a socio-economic, identity, between 'borough' and 'town'; and if we adopt a socio-economic definition, as we broadly shall, there is the problem of evidence: criteria in terms of population, or of economic and social structure, cannot be applied in the precise and quantitative way that they can for recent centuries.

A definition is, fortunately, no more than an aid to thought: it has no intrinsic value. As Karl Popper has warned, 'a definition cannot establish the meaning of a term any more than a logical derivation can establish the truth of a statement: both can only shift this problem back'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a working definition may be helpful, and the one we have adopted here – at least for the high and later middle ages – is that of Susan Reynolds. The first part is functional: 'a town is a permanent and concentrated human settlement in which a significant proportion of the population is engaged in non-agricultural occupations . . . A town therefore normally lives, at least in part, off food produced by people who live outside it.' The second part is social: 'the inhabitants of towns normally regard themselves, and are regarded by the inhabitants of predominantly rural settlements, as a different sort of people'. This is, as she recognises, a loose definition, not because it is defective, but because definitions are human constructs and have unclear boundaries.¹¹ We are persuaded that such a definition as hers is a better aid to analysis than taking refuge in a 'bundle of criteria' (*Kriterienbündel*) of the kind favoured in some archaeological surveys, 'one of the less useful concepts that has come to Britain from abroad'.¹²

Our definition of 'middle ages' is that almost universally employed in Western Europe, and in North America, to mean the millennium, or thereabouts, between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the Renaissance. It may seem

⁹ J. Haslam, *Early Medieval Towns in Britain* (Princes Risborough, 1985), p. 6.

¹⁰ K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 4th edn (London, 1962), vol. II, pp. 19–21.

¹¹ S. Reynolds, 'The writing of medieval urban history in England', *Theoretische Geschichte*, 19 (1992), 49–50.

¹² Carolyn M. Heighway, ed., *The Erosion of History* (London, 1972), p. 9; M. Biddle, 'Towns', in D. M. Wilson, ed., *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1976), p. 100; Reynolds, 'The writing of medieval urban history', 49.

superfluous to say that, but a surprising number of British scholars still define the middle ages as beginning in 1066, thus absurdly relegating the six centuries of the 'Anglo-Saxon' period to a kind of limbo. The middle ages are taken here to begin in Britain with the collapse of Roman imperial power around 409–11, though since that collapse seems to have entailed the almost complete disappearance of urban life, our story really begins with the revival of urban life in the seventh century. The other terminal date is the mid-sixteenth century, when the Protestant Reformation marks a decisive break in British urban life. The nine centuries we cover are, of course, only very imperfectly designated by the single term 'medieval': there were enormous changes over that time, and we have recognised this by dividing our chronological treatment into two, with the break at around 1300. It makes, of course, for very unequal time spans, but it can be justified not only by the imbalance in the surviving documentary sources, but also, and more importantly, by the major changes in British social and economic life at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It certainly makes for a better division than the Norman Conquest of England, which is a meaningless divide for Scotland and Wales, and which even in many aspects of English urban life marked no break at all.¹³

We have attempted to balance the volume in terms of what is important – trying, certainly, to summarise established knowledge and recent research, but also to draw attention to problems and lacunae. We have also drawn extensively upon the evidence of archaeology and urban morphology as well as documentary sources, a procedure which is especially (though not only) important for the period before the twelfth century when documentary evidence for most towns is sparse. The point is worth stressing because a document-based approach dominated British medieval urban history until recently, to its considerable impoverishment.

We have also been concerned to envisage urban history in terms of people and places as well as institutions. It is unfortunate that Tait's brilliant *Medieval English Borough* (1936), like much other work published before the 1960s, is concerned so exclusively with constitutions and institutions: as H. M. Colvin has remarked, 'it is as much the failure to envisage towns as actual places as any defect of scholarship' that makes it 'so unsatisfactory an introduction to urban history'.¹⁴ Carl Stephenson's *Borough and Town* (1933), to which Tait's book was partly a rejoinder, had at least the merit of a stimulating topographical chapter with plans, however much he was wrong – and Tait right – over the application of Henri Pirenne's insights to English towns. Helen Cam, in a perceptive and critical review of part of Stephenson's argument, commended him for

¹³ See e.g. S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 42–3; S. Reynolds, 'English towns of the eleventh century in a European context', in P. Johanek, ed., *Die Stadt im 11. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1995), pp. 7–10.

¹⁴ H. M. Colvin, review in *Med. Arch.*, 6–7 (1962–3), 363.

asserting ‘very rightly’ that urban evolution ‘must be approached from the side of topography’.¹⁵ However, Tait’s approach was reinforced by the work of F. M. Stenton, especially his massively influential *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943, 1947, 1971), with his ‘literary approach which relied so little on illustrations, plans, or excavation reports’.¹⁶ It has not been possible to illustrate this volume as extensively as we would wish, but we hope to have succeeded in reflecting some of the riches of archaeological and topographical work which have made us more aware of towns ‘as actual places’ over the past generation or so. Likewise, we must remember always that towns were communities of people, and we have drawn on as much evidence as possible to put townspeople into the centre of the story – not only the relatively well-recorded mayors and town councillors, but so far as possible the ordinary men, women and children they represented. However, we have also tried to avoid the excesses of some recent scholarship which is concerned so exclusively with people and places as to exclude the old, constitutional approach altogether. It is not possible to make sense of medieval towns without considering their government and institutions, their customs and by-laws. Boroughs, charters and guilds should not be excluded by the new urban history.

(ii) HISTORIOGRAPHY: ENGLAND AND WALES

It may help, as background to our present state of knowledge of medieval towns, to sketch the history of the subject. Some investigations of the urban past can be traced back to the later middle ages, including the civic chronicles of London, and the topographical descriptions of towns by William of Worcester in the 1470s, and by John Leland in the 1530s and 1540s.¹⁷ Detailed descriptions of the urban fabric and its past came together first in Tudor London, with the conjunction of early drawings by Wyngaerde, a huge printed plan of the city, probably also by Wyngaerde (1553–9), and John Stow’s *Survey of London*, begun about the same time though not published until 1598.¹⁸ Many other histories of English towns followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, usually with a medieval and constitutional bias, with at least 150

¹⁵ C. Stephenson, *Borough and Town* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933); H. Cam, *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England* (London, 1963), pp. 1, 3.

¹⁶ D. Hill, ‘The Saxon period’, in J. Schofield and R. Leech, eds., *Urban Archaeology in Britain* (CBA Res. Rep., 61, 1987), p. 46.

¹⁷ J. H. Harvey, ed., *William Worcester: Itineraries 1478–1480* (Oxford, 1969); L. Toulmin Smith, ed., *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543* (London, 1907–10).

¹⁸ M. Holmes, ‘An unrecorded map of London’, *Archaeologia*, 100 (1966), 105–28; S. P. Marks, *The Map of Mid-Sixteenth Century London* (London Topographical Society 100, 1964); M. Holmes, ‘A source-book for Stow?’, in A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway, eds., *Studies in London History presented to Philip Edmund Jones* (London, 1969), pp. 275–85; P. D. A. Harvey, *Maps in Tudor England* (London, 1993), pp. 73–7.

being published between 1701 and 1800, and another 90 in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁹

Many early histories were antiquarian and uncritical, but the same period initiated real historical research on English towns, even if largely confined to legal and constitutional aspects. Thomas Madox's *Firma Burgi* (1726) is still of great value, while a century later the debate over municipal reform produced *The History of the Boroughs and Municipal Corporations of the United Kingdom* by Merewether and Stephens (1835), still useful despite its bias.²⁰ Victorian scholars discovered the social and economic dimensions of the subject, revived the serious study of townscape and topography which Stow had pioneered, and in some cases attempted what would now be called rescue archaeology. E. A. Freeman published good local studies (notably *Towns and Districts*, 1883), and launched a series of *Historic Towns* in 1887. His contemporary John Richard Green used town plans helpfully in his *Conquest of England* (1883), and we have his widow's testimony of a day spent with him in Ancona, where 'as was his habit, he made his way first to the Town-hall, and from the fragments of Greek and mediaeval carving built into its walls, from harbour and pier, from names of streets, and the cathedral crypt, he extracted century by century some record of the old municipal life'.²¹ The quotation comes from Alice Green's own masterpiece, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century* (1894), which has, astonishingly, 'not yet been superseded by a work of equivalent length and depth of treatment'.²² By the turn of the century, major publishing enterprises were beginning to tackle the history and historical fabric of towns systematically, notably the Survey of London (started in 1896), the Victoria History of the Counties of England (founded in 1899) and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (1908).

The true founders of medieval English urban history, however, were F. W. Maitland (1850–1906) and Charles Gross (1857–1909), both inspired in part by German scholarship. Gross developed his Göttingen doctoral dissertation into *The Guild Merchant* (1890), besides compiling a *Bibliography of British Municipal History* (1897): both are still standard works a century later.²³ Maitland published much on the legal and constitutional history of boroughs, including *Township and*

¹⁹ R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 9. Welsh town histories are generally later in date: the first known was written (but not published) c. 1669, and the earliest published examples are Newcombe's on Denbigh (1829) and Ruthin (1836): R. A. Griffiths, ed., *Boroughs of Mediaeval Wales* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 1, 2.

²⁰ C. Gross, *A Bibliography of British Municipal History* (New York, 1897), nos. 158, 79. Gross' *Bibliography*, reissued in 1966 (2nd edn., with preface by G. H. Martin, Leicester, 1966), is still the definitive guide to pre-1897 literature. G. H. Martin and S. McIntyre, *A Bibliography of British and Irish Municipal History*, was designed to supplement rather than supersede Gross; only vol. 1, *General Works* (Leicester, 1972) has yet appeared, and not the promised succeeding volumes listing post-1897 work on individual towns.

²¹ A. S. Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1894), vol. 1, p. xiii.

²² R. Holt and G. Rosser, eds., *The Medieval Town* (London, 1990), p. 2.

²³ C. Gross, *The Guild Merchant* (Oxford, 1890); Gross, *Bibliography*.

Borough (1898); he also encouraged Mary Bateson, who edited two volumes of *Borough Customs* (1904–6), while Gross' pupil Morley Hemmeon published the definitive analysis of burgage tenure (1914).²⁴ Bateson had also published an exemplary edition of the earliest Leicester records in 1899, a year which may be taken as initiating really reliable editions of borough archives, for it also saw publication of the first volume of Reginald Sharpe's *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London*.²⁵ Others inspired to enter the field were E. A. Lewis, who published the first synthesis of Welsh burghal history, and Adolphus Ballard, who initiated a series of digests of urban charters, continued after his death by James Tait.²⁶

The 1920s and 1930s were dominated by the rival work of Stephenson and Tait, already briefly noticed. It is unfortunate that Stephenson had invested much of his work in arguing for a late (post-Conquest) development of urban life in England, an argument Tait was able to refute, because the result was that Tait was perceived to have 'defeated' Stephenson, whereas both books still have great merit, and moreover Stephenson's is much the more readable.²⁷ G. H. Martin has commented that 'the subject is a difficult one, and Tait made it sound difficult'.²⁸ That may be why publication of Tait's book signalled, if it did not cause, a thirty-year period when relatively little of the first rank was published, apart from constitutional analyses by Martin Weinbaum.²⁹

Little recognised at the time, however, serious work was beginning in medieval urban archaeology. In Oxford between the 1930s and 1950s important discoveries were made by R. L. Bruce-Mitford, E. M. Jope and W. A. Pantin, and other 'rescue archaeology', as it would later be called, was undertaken after 1945 on sites cleared by bombing, providing important medieval evidence in London, Canterbury and elsewhere.³⁰ Pantin became one of the founders of the Society

²⁴ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), pp. 172–219; F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1898), esp. vol. 1, pp. 634–88; F. W. Maitland, *Township and Borough* (Cambridge, 1898); F. W. Maitland and M. Bateson, eds., *The Charters of the Borough of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1901); M. Bateson, ed., *Borough Customs* (Selden Society, 18, 21, 1904–6); M. de W. Hemmeon, *Burgage Tenure in Mediaeval England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1914).

²⁵ M. Bateson, ed., *Records of the Borough of Leicester* ([London], 1899–1905); R. R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London* (London, 1899–1912).

²⁶ E. A. Lewis, *The Medieval Boroughs of Snowdonia* (London, 1912); A. Ballard, ed., *British Borough Charters 1042–1216* (Cambridge, 1913); A. Ballard and J. Tait, eds., *British Borough Charters 1216–1307* (Cambridge, 1923).

²⁷ For a judicious appraisal of Tait and Stephenson, see Martin and McIntyre, *Bibliography*, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

²⁸ G. H. Martin, 'The English borough in the thirteenth century', in Holt and Rosser, eds., *The Medieval Town*, p. 32.

²⁹ M. Weinbaum, *The Incorporation of Boroughs* (Manchester, 1937); M. Weinbaum, ed., *British Borough Charters, 1307–1660* (Cambridge, 1943).

³⁰ W. A. Pantin, 'The recently demolished houses in Broad Street, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 2 (1937), pp. 171–200; W. Grimes, *The Archaeology of Roman and Medieval London* (London, 1968); P. Ottaway, *Archaeology in British Towns* (London, 1992), p. 10.

for Medieval Archaeology (1956), as well as the author of the first modern study of town house plans in an early volume of its journal,³¹ and it was partly owing to the Society that the serious study of medieval towns revived in the 1960s, accompanied by much topographical and archaeological work alongside the traditional documentary fare. Early fruits included M. R. G. Conzen's pioneering analyses of the town plans of Alnwick, Newcastle, Ludlow and Conwy, and publication of the first British volume of the *Atlas of Historic Town Plans of Western Europe* (1969); the first major urban excavation programme in Britain under Martin Biddle at Winchester (1961–71); Maurice Beresford's detailed analyses of planted towns in England, Wales and Gascony; and his catalogue, in conjunction with H. P. R. Finberg, of all known English boroughs.³²

Since 1970, research and publication in all of these areas has advanced apace. Colin Platt and Susan Reynolds provided the first scholarly surveys of English medieval towns for a generation, closely followed by Ralph Griffiths and others for Wales;³³ their work helped to inspire an increased output of monographs on individual towns, editions of urban records and more recently some excellent surveys incorporating much of the new archaeological data.³⁴ New research has been inspired by a series of lively debates about major issues: the extent of urban continuity in the post-Roman period; the nature of revived town life, including the role of *emporia*, *burhs* and minsters; the relationship of 'feudalism' and towns; the nature of urban communities; the role of women; the existence of urban oligarchy; and the extent of late medieval urban decline. The last controversy, though probably irresolvable, led to very fruitful investigations. Surviving medieval buildings have been thoroughly described in comprehensive inventories of Salisbury, Stamford and York,³⁵ though regrettably such inventories have now been discontinued; and an Urban Morphology Group at the University of Birmingham is building on Conzen's work. And the growing body of archaeological data is now

³¹ W. A. Pantin, 'Medieval English town-house plans', *Med. Arch.*, 6–7 (1962–3), pp. 202–39.

³² M. R. G. Conzen, *Alnwick, Northumberland* (Publications of the Institute of British Geographers, 27, 1960); M. R. G. Conzen, 'The plan analysis of an English city centre', *Proc. of the I. G. U. Symposium in Urban Geography, Lund 1960* (Lund, 1962); M. R. G. Conzen, 'The use of town plans in the study of urban history', in H. J. Dyos, ed., *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1968), pp. 113–30; *BAHT*, 1: M. Biddle, 'The study of Winchester: archaeology and history in a British town, 1961–1983', *Proc. of the British Academy*, 69 (1983), 93–135; M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages* (London, 1967); M. W. Beresford and H. P. R. Finberg, *English Medieval Boroughs* (Newton Abbot, 1973).

³³ C. Platt, *The English Medieval Town* (London, 1976); Reynolds, *English Medieval Towns*; Griffiths, ed., *Boroughs of Mediaeval Wales*; I. Soulsby, *The Towns of Medieval Wales* (Chichester, 1983).

³⁴ E.g. Ottaway, *Archaeology in British Towns*; J. Schofield and A. Vince, *Medieval Towns* (London, 1994).

³⁵ RCHM (England), *Ancient and Historical Monuments in the City of Salisbury: Volume One* (London, 1980); RCHM (England), *Salisbury: The Houses of the Close* (London, 1993); RCHM (England), *An Inventory of Historical Monuments in the Town of Stamford* (London, 1977); RCHM (England), *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York* (London, 1962–81).

increasingly being synthesised, not only in excavation site reports, but also in works setting the finds in surveys more accessible to the urban historian, including fine surveys of the buildings, furnishings and artefacts of London, Winchester and Norwich.³⁶ It is therefore a lively and developing subject at the time of writing, though by the same token it is not an easy time to take stock.

(iii) HISTORIOGRAPHY: SCOTLAND

The nineteenth century bequeathed to us a series of studies of individual towns. Many tended to be strongly antiquarian in approach, and at times rested on scholarship which was unduly influenced by local patriotism. More valuable in the long term has been the work of the Scottish Burgh Records Society, which between 1868 and 1911 produced twenty-six volumes of record material, much of it on Edinburgh and Glasgow and the Convention of Royal Burghs. The nineteenth-century tradition produced massive results in an elaborate study, on which he had been working since the 1880s, David Murray's *Early Burgh Organisation in Scotland*.³⁷ This had the merit of displaying considerable grasp of the archival, constitutional and topographical evidence, but his approach to his subject was diffuse, and his theory of origins, that burghs evolved from pre-existing agricultural communities, was based more on assumption and analogy than on evidence.

The sparseness of early evidence, and some failures of clarity on the part of earlier writers, left the field open in the mid-twentieth century for a strong concentration on constitutional aspects. A useful short survey appeared in W. Mackay Mackenzie's *The Scottish Burghs*. As the title implies, he saw 'burgh' rather than 'town' as the principal element of the subject, and dismissed the David Murray approach with the crisp opinion that 'the key-word to the burgh is creation, not growth'.³⁸ W. Croft Dickinson's magisterial introduction to the early records of Aberdeen analysed the Scottish burghs as a whole, but concentrated heavily on the royal burghs and touched only occasionally on the economic background.³⁹ Further constitutional attention was applied in the valuable and accurate handlist of Scottish burghs by George S. Pryde.⁴⁰ By this era the history of Scottish medieval towns had come to be viewed in a strongly institutional light.

³⁶ J. Schofield, *Medieval London Houses* (New Haven, 1995); M. Biddle *et al.*, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1991); S. Margeson, *Norwich Households: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971-1978* (East Anglian Archaeology 58, Norwich, 1993).

³⁷ D. Murray, *Early Burgh Organisation in Scotland, as Illustrated in the History of Glasgow and of Some Neighbouring Burghs* (Glasgow, 1924).

³⁸ W. M. Mackenzie, *The Scottish Burghs* (Edinburgh, 1949), p. 14.

³⁹ W. Croft Dickinson, ed., *Early Records of the Burgh of Aberdeen, 1317, 1398-1407* (Scottish History Society, 1957). ⁴⁰ G. S. Pryde, *The Burghs of Scotland* (London, 1965).

In the last quarter-century physical evidence has been given much greater attention, an approach stimulated by the work of urban geographers such as Ian Adams, and by George Gordon and Brian Dicks' *Scottish Urban History*.⁴¹ Nicholas Brooks and G. Whittington were, moreover, pointing a way forward, with their article on St Andrews, for assessments of town growth by the use of documentary, cartographic and archaeological evidence.⁴² Archaeological investigation, also, in early towns commenced in Scotland in the early 1970s, albeit at first on a fairly small scale. The steady stream of excavations which has followed, especially in Perth and Aberdeen, and the resulting published reports,⁴³ have contributed vastly to knowledge of the subject: buildings, possessions, pottery, diet, health and other topics have been illuminated on particular sites. It is, perhaps, inevitable, if regrettable, that syntheses are slow to appear in print, as archaeologists generally prefer to build up from minutiae rather than attempt 'the big picture'; a general overview of urban archaeology in Scotland would be welcome.

The Scottish Burgh Survey Series, funded by the then Scottish Development Department, produced some fifty reports on the archaeology and history of individual towns. The historical research of Anne Turner Simpson and the archaeological overview of Robert Gourlay and Sylvia Stevenson were not, however, closely intermeshed. Two perceptive short surveys, by A. A. M. Duncan and G. W. S. Barrow, emphasised the stimulus of trade and the need for a good location as fundamental to early urban activity, and viewed the crown's grant of privileges to a community as a comprehensible but formal part of the process.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Ewan then attempted to fit the urban archaeological material with the documentary evidence for towns as a whole.⁴⁵

Michael Lynch's 'Whatever happened to the medieval burgh?' pointed to a new approach to urban history, and in 1988 the entire subject was given a notable stimulus in a set of essays on *The Scottish Medieval Town*, edited by Lynch, together with Michael Spearman and Geoffrey Stell,⁴⁶ a volume which both summarised current ideas and pointed the way ahead towards areas requiring investigation. Spearman's contribution on Perth, for example, was the first published topographical analysis

⁴¹ I. H. Adams, *The Making of Urban Scotland* (London, 1978); G. Gordon and B. Dicks, eds., *Scottish Urban History* (Aberdeen, 1981).

⁴² N. P. Brooks and G. Whittington, 'Planning and growth in the medieval Scottish burgh: the example of St Andrews', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, new series, 2 (1977), 278–95.

⁴³ J. C. Murray, ed., *Excavations in the Medieval Burgh of Aberdeen, 1973–81* (Society of Antiquaries Monograph Series, 2 (1982)); P. Holdsworth, ed., *Excavations in the Medieval Burgh of Perth, 1979–81* (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series, 5, 1987).

⁴⁴ A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1975), chs. 18, 19; G. W. S. Barrow, *Kingship and Unity* (London, 1981), ch. 5. ⁴⁵ E. Ewan, *Townlife in Fourteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1990).

⁴⁶ M. Lynch, 'Whatever happened to the medieval burgh?', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 4 (1984), 5–20; M. Lynch, M. Spearman and G. Stell, eds., *The Scottish Medieval Town* (Edinburgh, 1988).

of an early Scottish town, following the lines of the seminal study of Alnwick by Conzen.⁴⁷ Individual studies of particular towns continued to be undertaken, with results appearing either in print or in thesis form: Glasgow, Dunfermline, Dundee, Selkirk, Leith and Montrose, for example, have all been the subjects of detailed studies on a variety of aspects.⁴⁸ Indeed, the individuality of towns, as against a sameness of appearance, has come to be given more emphasis.

An interdisciplinary approach to the study of individual towns has been adopted by the new series of Burgh Surveys. These are funded by Historic Scotland and produced in the Centre for Scottish Urban History, Department of Scottish History, Edinburgh University, with Pat Dennison as historian and Russel Coleman as archaeologist. Documentary, archaeological and cartographic evidence is allied to other visual remnants of the built environment in an attempt to recreate the historic town.⁴⁹ And by the year 2000 a two-volume history of the town of Aberdeen, funded by Aberdeen District Council, will add substantially to our knowledge of town life in Scotland.⁵⁰

(iv) PLAN OF THE VOLUME

This volume, like its successors, is designed to provide an authoritative and up-to-date account of British towns within its period, looking at their nature and functions, their origins and development, and the relationships between towns, between towns and their hinterlands and between towns and the state. We have been especially keen to draw wherever appropriate on sources and disciplines other than document-based history, and the balance of our team of authors reflects that. Archaeology, architecture, urban morphology and other disciplines provide vital evidence where documents are lacking, and often greatly enrich our knowledge even after urban documentation becomes available.

⁴⁷ Conzen, *Alnwick*.

⁴⁸ A. Gibb, *Glasgow: The Making of a City* (London, 1983); J. McGrath, 'The administration of the burgh of Glasgow' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1986); S. Stevenson and E. P. D. Torrie, *Historic Glasgow, the Archaeological Implications of Development* (Scottish Burgh Survey, 1990); J. McGrath, 'The medieval and modern burgh', in T. M. Devine and G. Jackson, eds., *Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 17–62; E. P. D. Torrie, 'The gild of Dunfermline in the fifteenth century' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1984); E. P. D. Torrie, *Medieval Dundee* (Dundee, 1990); J. M. Gilbert, ed., *Flower of the Forest: Selkirk, a New History* (Galashiels, 1985); S. Mowat, *The Port of Leith: Its History and Its People* (Edinburgh, n.d. c. 1995); G. Jackson and S. G. E. Lythe, *The Port of Montrose: A History of its Harbour Trade and Shipping* (Tayport, 1993).

⁴⁹ Fifteen towns were assessed in 1994–7: Kirkcaldy, Stranraer, Cumnock, Hamilton, Musselburgh, Dunblane, Coupar-Angus, Stornoway, Melrose, Dalkeith, Forfar, Dumbarton, Linlithgow, Nairn and North Queensferry. Pat Dennison and Russel Coleman are the authors, and the surveys are published by Historic Scotland in association with Scottish Cultural Press. Aberdeen has also been the subject of a survey: E. P. Dennison and J. Stones, *Historic Aberdeen* (Scottish Burgh Survey, 1997).

⁵⁰ E. P. Dennison, D. Ditchburn and M. Lynch, eds., *A New History of Aberdeen* vol. 1 (East Linton, forthcoming); H. Fraser and C. Lee, eds., *ibid.*, vol. II (East Linton, forthcoming).

Temporal and spatial coverage provide even more problems than for the early modern and later modern periods which are the subjects of the following volumes. The ‘middle ages’, as defined above and as followed in this volume, represents a span of time about twice as long as the periods covered by Volumes II and III combined, and changes over that time were enormous. It is true that the bulk of surviving urban archives is much less than for post-medieval times, but the ‘buried archives’ of archaeology have added enormously to our knowledge over the past generation or so. It has not been easy in a single volume to do justice to it all, though we hope that the bibliographical references we provide will enable readers to explore much more of it.

The British coverage of the volume also creates problems, for historians have usually discussed English, Scottish and Welsh towns separately – for the very good reason that medieval Britain was a geographical expression and not a united state. The context of the earliest towns and central places was one of a multiplicity of small states which only gradually coalesced into the kingdoms of England and Scotland. Once they did so, these two kingdoms developed their own political and administrative systems, so that the framework for English boroughs and Scottish burghs was never quite the same: the recent work on Scottish medieval towns listed above has stressed not only many similarities with English towns but also striking differences arising from their political, social and ecclesiastical as well as geographical context – the greater uniformity of burgh law and custom in Scotland, for instance, or the more unified voice of the towns in Scottish national politics (at least by the fifteenth century).⁵¹ The Welsh context was even more complex, since although medieval Wales was ‘an identifiable geographical unit’ by the time that towns developed, ‘it had never known political unity other than the hegemony temporarily imposed by military might’:⁵² even when the last independent principality was conquered by the English king Edward I the country remained divided under different systems of administration. For these reasons a number of chapters have been written jointly by English and Scottish experts, while Part IV includes separate surveys of Welsh and Scottish towns.

The structure of the volume balances the main themes of urban history against these temporal and spatial dimensions. Parts II and III take a broadly chronological approach, dividing the nine centuries or so under discussion, very unequally, in the decades either side of 1300, for reasons already stated: where we have to distinguish the two broad periods, we use ‘early middle ages’ for the period before 1300, and ‘later middle ages’ for the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Within each part the structure is approximately the same, to allow for comparisons between the two periods: an introductory survey is

⁵¹ E.g. Lynch, Spearman and Stell, eds., *The Scottish Medieval Town*, pp. 11–13.

⁵² R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 4, 14.

followed successively by accounts of towns in a political, social and economic context (in the broad sense of those terms); by surveys of the interlocking themes of culture and the Church; by discussion of the physical fabric or townscape; and then by a series of three or four chapters considering the different levels and types of town from London – then as later the largest British town – to the smallest of market towns. In Part IV we shift our focus to the geographical context, looking at the different regions and states within which the towns were located – six English and Welsh regions, and a separate survey of Scotland – where the stress is on the patterns and distinctions between towns in different parts of Britain rather than over time. Finally, a conclusion sums up some of the main themes and findings identified in the volume, and an appendix of ranking tables of towns acts as a point of reference for the volume as a whole.

We hope that the evidence presented here, some of it for the first time, will demonstrate abundantly how much change and development took place over the long time span we cover, so easy to foreshorten when lumping together medieval and early modern towns as ‘pre-industrial’ in the manner of Gideon Sjoberg, whose model, as Peter Clark rightly remarks, ‘is only of limited value for the analysis of the Western European . . . town’.⁵³ David Nicholas, whose richly detailed survey of the medieval European city was published as our volume was being completed,⁵⁴ stresses the same point: he divides the medieval centuries, like us, at around 1300 to stress the great changes of the later medieval period, and his conclusion emphasises how greatly urban life changed between the fourth and fifteenth centuries: ‘the Roman city when it survived at all was only a central core of a settlement that was far more complex socially, economically and topographically than its ancient predecessor had been . . . The urban pattern of the modern period was clearly recognisable by 1450.’⁵⁵ That may be to stress progress and increasing complexity a little too strongly – he himself surveys evidence for retrogression in English towns in the fifteenth century – but he is surely right to stress the great distance in character as well as in time between Roman and late medieval. British towns by 1450, and even more by 1540, had come a long way, and much of what we would find if we could visit an early sixteenth-century town would be nearer to modern urban life than to the distant revival of town life in the early seventh century.

⁵³ G. Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City* (New York, 1960); P. Clark, ‘Introduction: the early modern town in the west’, in P. Clark, ed., *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* (Harlow, 1976), p. 2.

⁵⁴ D. Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City: From Late Antiquity to the Early Fourteenth Century* (Harlow, 1997); D. Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City 1300–1500* (Harlow, 1997).

⁵⁵ Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City*, p. 344.