INTRODUCTION

'The idea of Ireland as a colony, however attractive as an analytical tool, will never be wholly convincing.'[1]

Does the use of the word 'colony' and its cognates add to our understanding of the history of Ireland in the period between the late twelfth and the mid-seventeenth century when the island became home to successive waves of migrants from Britain? Some Irish literary scholars have incorporated one of these cognates, 'post-colonial', into their discourse in connection with more recent times but a note of caution has been sounded by historians. Placing the transition from 'colonial' to 'post-colonial' at the heart of interpretations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, they argue, will not suffice since it does not give due weight to the process of 'modernization' which Ireland shared with the rest of western Europe at the time.[2] The implicit assumption in 'post-colonial' that an earlier period of Ireland's past is adequately explained by the word 'colonial' has also drawn fire from an historian of the early-modern period, Steven Ellis, who argues that 'colonial models for Irish history . . . raise as many problems as they solve'.[3]

   The debate about whether Ireland in the century-and-a-half after 1550 is best regarded as a colony has received an added dimension from

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[1] S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power. The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992), p. 114.

[2] J. Livesey and S. Murray, 'Post-colonial theory and modern Irish culture', *IHS* 30 (1997), pp. 452–61. This is a review article of D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London, 1995) and L. Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996); S. Deane, 'Imperialism/nationalism' in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin (2nd edn, Chicago, 1995), pp. 354–68; Deane's introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of *Finnegans Wake* places Joyce's work in the context of Ireland's attempts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to find for itself 'a future other than that of a peculiar kind of colony within the United Kingdom' (p. xviii).

[3] S. Ellis, 'Historiographical debate: representations of the past in Ireland: whose past and whose present?' *IHS* 27 (1991), pp. 289–308. Ellis is, however, prepared to speak of 'Ireland's experience of an early modern colony planted on a medieval colony' (quotes at pp. 294, 304).

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the work of Nicholas Canny who places the Irish experience in an Atlantic world context which also includes European colonial expansion in North and South America.[4] With Canny's ideas in mind Sean Connolly has questioned the value of applying 'colony' to Ireland in the same period. While not rejecting the term entirely he regards it as flawed on the grounds of the physical proximity of Ireland to Britain and the shared ethnography of the peoples of both islands. These considerations, he argues, prevented the indigenous population of Ireland from being treated in the manner applied to natives of colonies with the result that a colonial model can at best be only partially appropriate to the Irish situation.[5]

In comparison with later periods the application of 'colony' to Ireland in the three-and-a-half centuries after 1170 has raised little controversy. The debate concerning the relative merits of the words 'separatist' or 'loyalist' to describe the political outlook of the English in medieval Ireland rests on shared assumptions among the historians concerned about the colonial character of that group, although Robin Frame has registered some unease about reference to a 'colonial mentality' among them.[6] J. A. Watt in volume two of the *New History of Ireland* explains that he is concerned with 'the medieval phase of Ireland's colonial experience' and goes on to identify this experience as 'the all-dominating theme of Irish history'. Furthermore, he argues, 'virtually any study of medieval Ireland ... is a contribution to the history of medieval colonialism'.[7] 'Medieval colonialism', however, is a controversial notion. Sir Moses Finley would see it as a contradiction in terms since what he calls 'feudalism' is in his mind incompatible with colonialism. In particular he attacks the use of 'colony' and 'colonisa-

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[4] N. Canny, 'The permissive frontier: the problem of social control in English settlements in Ireland and Virginia 1550–1650' in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America 1480–1650*, ed. K. R. Andrew, N. P. Canny and P. E. H. Blair (Detroit, 1979), pp. 17–44; Canny, 'Identity formation in Ireland: the emergence of the Anglo-Irish' in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World 1500–1800*, ed. N. Canny and A. Pagden (Princeton, 1987), pp. 159–212; K. S. Bottigheimer, 'Kingdom and colony: Ireland in the westward enterprise 1536–1660' in Andrew *et al.*, eds., *The Westward Enterprise*, pp. 45–64; J. Wormald, 'The creation of Britain: Multiple kingdoms or core and colonies?', *TRHS* 6th series 2 (1992), 175–94.

[5] Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, pp. 103–14. For a succinct discussion of Connolly's views see J. Kelly, 'From splendour to famine' in *Atlas of Irish History*, ed. S. Duffy (Dublin, 1997), pp. 70–95.

[6] J. F. Lydon, 'The problem of the frontier in medieval Ireland', *Topic: A Journal of the Liberal Arts* 12 (1967), pp. 5–22; Lydon, 'Ireland and the English crown, 1171–1541', *IHS* 29 (1995), pp. 281–94; B. Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland', *IHS* 26 (1989), pp. 329–51; R. Frame, ' "Les Engleys nées en Irlande": the English political identity in medieval Ireland', *TRHS* 6th series 3 (1993), pp. 83–104 (quote at p. 103); Frame, *English Lordship in Ireland 1318–1361* (Oxford, 1982), p. 331.

[7] *NHI*, ii, pp. 312–13.

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tion' in discussions by scholars such as Joshua Prawer of the kingdoms established in Palestine by the crusaders in the twelfth century.[8] This 'wrath-filled analysis', as Prawer described it, provoked lively debate among crusade historians with one specialist, J. H. Pryor, going so far as to assert that '"colony" and "colonialism" are two of the most dangerous concepts in historical writing' and that the word 'colony' 'serves to cloud and distort communication between scholars'.[9] Despite such dire warnings medieval specialists have found colonialism a valuable term to use when discussing the expansion of Europe in the centuries after 1000 and it has served as one of the most important elements in recent work comparing the experiences of Britain and Ireland at this time.[10]

This book is offered as a contribution to this comparative approach to the study of medieval Irish history. It is based on the belief that 'colonialism' is a useful analytical tool with which to tackle the subject but recognises that the problems associated with it restrict its ability to offer a comprehensive account of Ireland's history at this time. 'Colony' and its cognates are imprecise terms, and while this in itself is no reason for historians to reject them, it is helpful to be aware of the difficulties which thereby arise. Perhaps the most obvious of these difficulties concerns the relationship between 'colonisation' and power. An anthropologist has recently phrased the problem thus: '"Colonialism": the word's immediate associations are with intrusions, conquest, economic exploitation and the domination of indigenous peoples by European men.'[11] It was such a link between colonisation and power that Robin Frame stressed by calling his survey of Irish history between 1169 and 1369 *Colonial Ireland*, as he explains in its introduction:

The title of this book is significant in two ways. It seeks to emphasise (if emphasis is still needed) that during this period Ireland underwent not merely a superficial and incomplete military conquest, but a deeper colonisation; and it is designed to indicate that I am chiefly concerned with the colonists rather than with their hosts.[12]

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[8] M. I. Finley, 'Colonies – an attempt at a typology', *TRHS* 5th series 6 (1976), pp. 167–88, esp. pp. 175–6.

[9] J. H. Pryor, 'Symposium – the crusading kingdom of Jerusalem – the first European colonial society?' in *The Horns of Hattin. Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East*, (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 341–66 (quotes at pp. 356, 357, 360). I am grateful to Dr Marcus Bull for his help on this point.

[10] R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993); J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 20–2; R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest. The Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 11–15.

[11] N. Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture. Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Oxford, 1994, repr. 1996), p. 1.

[12] R. Frame, *Colonial Ireland 1169–1369* (Dublin, 1981), p. vii.

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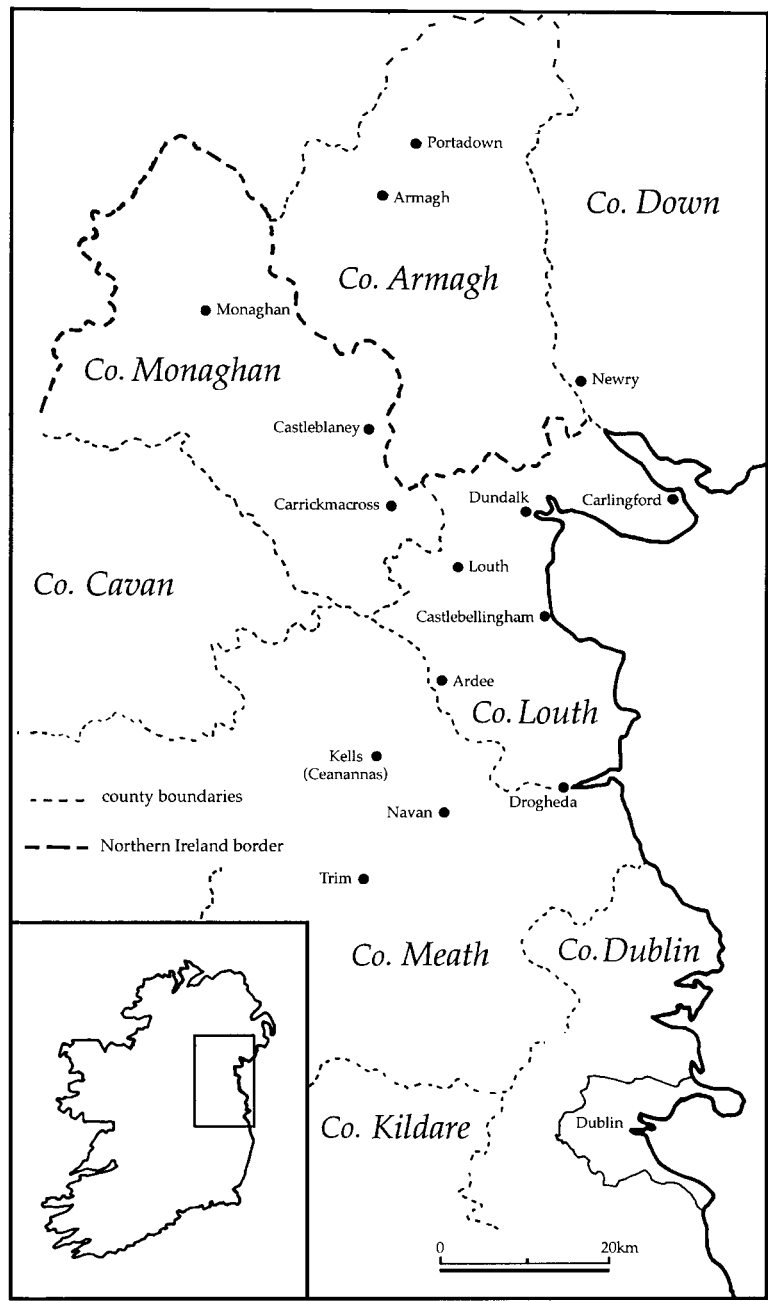
Map 1 Eastern Ireland

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For Frame, therefore, colonisation occurred in the context of the imposition of English power in Ireland and the English who settled in Ireland were as a result 'colonists'. This seems entirely appropriate and throughout this book I have used 'colonist' and 'settler' as interchangeable terms. It is worth noting, however, that 'colonisation' can be used without any attendant connotations of domination or conquest. In discussions of twelfth-century Warwickshire and fourteenth-century Cheshire, for instance, Peter Coss and Philip Morgan are happy to use the term in an economic sense to describe the settlement of previously underexploited land.[13] Economics certainly played a part in the migration of English settlers to Ireland but the 'colonists' of Warwickshire were clearly engaged in a different enterprise from those of Ireland.[14]

Inherent in most discussions of colonisation within Britain and Ireland is the notion of the forced intrusion of alien people onto land previously held by natives. In this context historians have until recently displayed a reluctance to think of England's experience in the years after 1066 as 'colonial' on the grounds that the replacement of one ruling élite by another in the aftermath of Hastings was not accompanied by a sizeable migration of people from Normandy to England.[15] Sir James Holt proudly and correctly claims with regard to the recently published collection of his essays entitled *Colonial England, 1066–1215* that 'No book has ever been written with the title of this book.'[16] Yet his discussion of the colonial character of England deliberately eschews questions of settlement and concentrates instead on the 'cultural' matters of building, language and law.[17] No new colonists have been discovered by Holt, but he has found a way of thinking about England – in his own words a 'vision' – which is predicated on a loose association between colonialism and settlement and which encourages comparison with the experiences of Scotland, Wales and Ireland.[18]

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[13] P. R. Coss, *Lordship, Knighthood and Locality, a Study in English Society c. 1180–c. 1280* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 32; P. Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire, 1277–1403* (Manchester, 1987), p. 80.

[14] J. Gillingham, 'The beginnings of English imperialism', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5 (1992), pp. 392–409.

[15] Finley, 'Colonies – an attempt at a typology', p. 174. Chapter 4 of Brian Golding's *Conquest and Colonisation. The Normans in Britain, 1066–1100* (London, 1994) is entitled 'Settlement and colonisation', but no attempt is made to suggest what difference there might be between these terms.

[16] J. C. Holt, *Colonial England 1066–1215* (London, 1997), p. 1.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 1–24, esp. p. 1, n. 2. The definitive work on the transfer of land and power in England after 1066 is now R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991). An exemplary local study is P. Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship. Yorkshire, 1066–1154* (Cambridge, 1994).

[18] Holt, *Colonial England*, p. xvii.

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Scotland presents at least as many problems as England to those wishing to either adopt or reject a simplistic notion of medieval colonialism. 'I learn nothing from the word [colony] itself', remarks R. C. Smail, 'it is necessary to know what sort of colony.'[19] Although made in the context of Outremer this observation is particularly pertinent to Scotland. G. W. S. Barrow has demonstrated the extensive and sustained nature of the colonisation of lowland Scotland by Flemings and English in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, yet, as R. R. Davies reminds us, 'colonisation does not necessarily lead to the establishment of a colony' and 'Scotland . . . is not a colony.'[20] Recent research suggests that the native hostility displayed towards incomers in Galloway, Moray and the far north at this time constituted primarily a reaction against the extension of Scottish royal influence of which alien settlement was but one aspect.[21] The kings and colonising lords of Scotland were careful to settle foreigners in parts of their estates not coveted by established tenants and because there was no policy of eliminating native political influence within the kingdom a colonist/native division did not take permanent root.[22]

The experience of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Scotland illustrates not only that there was no necessary link between colonisation and the establishment of a colony but also that colonisation could occur without conquest. Robert Bartlett is prepared to describe the Scottish situation as 'colonial' but adds 'we must use the word "colony" here in the sense of a new plantation of outsiders and avoid the modern connotation of political dependence on a foreign state'.[23] Scotland, however, did experience just such a 'modern' form of colonialism before the end of the thirteenth century, when Edward I not only temporarily destroyed the political independence of the country but also established English settlements there. As Michael Prestwich remarks, 'if the word "colony" is taken in a broad sense of conquest, expropriation, exploitation and settlement, and of the creation of a scheme of government dependent upon that of the colonising power, there was

[19] Smail, 'Symposium – the crusading kingdom of Jerusalem', p. 344.
[20] G. W. S. Barrow, *The Anglo-Norman Era in Scottish History* (Oxford, 1980); R. R. Davies, 'Lordship or colony?' in *The English in Medieval Ireland*, ed. J. F. Lydon (Dublin, 1984), pp. 142–60 (quote at p. 151).
[21] For an excellent exposition of this argument and survey of the relevant literature see R. D. Oram, 'A family business? Colonisation and settlement in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Galloway', *SHR* 72 (1993), pp. 111–45.
[22] G. W. S. Barrow, *Kingship and Unity. Scotland 1000–1306* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 43–59, 105–21; B. Webster, *Medieval Scotland. The Making of an Identity* (London, 1997), pp. 21–49.
[23] R. Bartlett, 'Colonial aristocracies of the high Middle Ages' in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. R. Bartlett and A. Mackay (Oxford, 1989), pp. 23–48 (quote at p. 24).

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arguably much that was colonial about English policy towards Scotland under Edward I'.[24]

Does Scotland suggest, therefore, that the late thirteenth century witnessed a transition from one form of colonialism to another more 'modern' variety? This is an argument which has been propounded by R. R. Davies with regard to Wales. The twelfth century had seen significant alien settlement in Glamorgan and Pembroke but for Davies 'colonial Wales' serves to describe the situation only after the Edwardian conquest of 1282. 'Colonial' in this context has less to do with the number of foreign settlers who moved into Wales at this time than with the 'state-directed' nature of such settlement. In an assessment which echoes Seamus Deane's remark that 'colonialism was the early, amateur form of imperialism' Davies says of Edward's conquest of Wales that it 'was much more than a military victory followed by an act of territorial annexation. It was accompanied by an administrative and legal settlement which bears the authentic stamp of imperialism.'[25] In Wales Edwardian colonisation occurred in a context of long-established and carefully maintained distinctions between earlier settlers and the native population and of continued allegiance on the part of the settlers to the English king. In Scotland Edwardian colonisation sought to destroy a tradition whereby settlers and natives had been united by their allegiance to a Scottish king. To the extent that Edward saw no difference between the two situations he was indeed an imperialist.[26]

The settlements established in the west of Ireland in the reign of Edward I represented much less of a new departure than similar enterprises in Scotland and Wales. From the time of Henry II's visit in 1171 the crown had involved itself closely in the distribution of lands in Ireland and Edward's grant of the Ua Briain kingdom of Thomond to Thomas de Clare in 1276 can be seen as a late manifestation of this policy.[27] By the 1270s, R. R. Davies has argued, 'a truly colonial mentality had emerged' among the English in Ireland. It was characterised by the settlers' need to flaunt their 'uncertain superiority' over the natives by refusing to countenance the extension to them of English

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[24] M. Prestwich, 'Colonial Scotland: the English in Scotland under Edward I' in *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, ed. R. Mason (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 6-17 (quote at p. 6).

[25] Deane, 'Imperialism/nationalism', p. 355; R. R. Davies, 'Colonial Wales', *Past & Present* 65 (1974), pp. 3-23 (quotes at pp. 4, 13-14).

[26] R. R. Davies, 'The failure of the first British empire? England's relations with Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1066-1500' in *England in Europe 1066-1453*, ed. N. Saul (London, 1994), pp. 121-32.

[27] *NHI*, ii, pp. 253-6; R. Frame, 'King Henry III and Ireland: the shaping of a peripheral lordship' in *Thirteenth Century England*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1992), iv, pp. 179-202.

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law and found an institutional expression in the country's 'governmental dependence upon the metropolitan centre at Westminster'.[28] We are clearly approaching a situation familiar to students of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism, and J. A. Watt's assertion that 'medieval Ireland fulfils the strictest criteria semantics can impose on the word "colony"' seems difficult to refute.[29]

Even within the Irish context, however, 'colony' and the words derived from it are problematic. Two examples, one from the beginning and one from the end of the period covered by this book, suggest some of its deficiencies and also highlight the value of local studies in this context.[30] The theme of aristocratic colonisation is one which features prominently in interpretations of Irish history after 1169.[31] In the twelfth century Louth experienced aristocratic colonisation twice, first at the hands of the Fir Fernmaige and their ruling dynasty the Uí Cherbaill who incorporated the area into the kingdom of Airgialla of which it was not traditionally part, and second at the hands of the de Verdons and Pipards under whom it joined territories stretching from the Pyrenees to the Solway Firth under the rule of the king of England. The Uí Cherbaill colonisation altered aspects of life in Louth, particularly in the religious sphere, in fundamental ways and left a legacy which significantly influenced the nature of English society there into the thirteenth century and beyond. Yet the current parameters of discussion on aristocratic colonisation in medieval Ireland exclude it from consideration. While it would be absurd not to see English intervention in Louth as qualitatively different from what had gone before, it can be suggested that such intervention will only be fully understood when the colonial ambitions of native aristocracies in twelfth-century Ireland are given the recognition they deserve.

At the other end of the period we are faced with the problem of how best to interpret the behaviour of the English in Louth in the early fourteenth century. This was certainly a colonial community; its members considered themselves to be English and were treated as such by the king of England. They did not assimilate with the indigenous population of the area. But can their interactions among themselves and their propensity at this time for acts of mass violence be attributed to

[28] Davies, 'Lordship or colony?', pp. 151, 154.
[29] *NHI*, ii, p. 313.
[30] 'It is becoming increasingly clear that only localised theories and historically specific accounts can provide much insight into the varied articulations of colonising and counter-colonial representations and practices', Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*, p. ix.
[31] Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, pp. 25–46; Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. viii; Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100–1400* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 50–71; Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, pp. 24–59.

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their 'colonial' character? In thought and deed they often had more in common with their contemporaries in places such as Cheshire or Cumberland than with colonial communities in Wales or even other parts of Ireland. Their frontier experience was clearly crucial but contemporary society in Lancashire and the Midlands of England displayed many similiar characteristics. Indeed the English of Louth were in some ways more closely connected with the metropolitan centre than were the English of many parts of England. We cannot hope to understand them unless we recognise them as colonists, but we must also appreciate that they were always more than that.

1

THE UA CERBAILL KINGDOM OF AIRGIALLA

Louth is the smallest of modern Ireland's thirty-two counties, comprising 82,303 hectares and 827 square kilometres. It is the most north-easterly county of the province of Leinster and borders the Irish Sea from the mouth of the river Boyne in the south to Carlingford Lough in the north, a coastline of roughly 85 kilometres in length. The most westerly point in the county is only slightly more than 20 kilometres from the sea. It is touched to the north and west by the Ulster counties of Down, Armagh and Monaghan, and to the west and south by county Meath, which now lies in Leinster. Within its small confines Louth contains a variety of terrain, but is dominated by a fertile central plain reaching from Dunleer in the south to north of Dundalk and from the coast to beyond the western boundary of the modern county. The south-Ulster drumlin belt extends into the north-west of the county and the north-east is dominated by the mountainous Cooley peninsula with its highest peak, Carlingford mountain, measuring 587 metres. To the south of the central plain an upland ridge runs from Collon in the west to Clogherhead on the coast, and south of this again the land falls away into the fertile soils of the Boyne valley.[1] The medieval county of Louth lacked defined boundaries to its north and west, but its modern limits represent quite closely the extent of English settlement in the Middle Ages, with Inishkeen and Donaghmoyne, which now lie in county Monaghan, being the only notable medieval settlements not now included within its confines.

'Louth' was one of two names used by the English to describe this area, the other being 'Uriel' (or less frequently 'Oriel'). The first name was an anglicisation of 'Lugmad', the town in the north of the present county which was the political and ecclesiastical centre of the pre-

[1] *Archaeological Survey of County Louth*, ed. V. M. Buckley and P. D. Sweetman (Dublin, 1991), p. 5.