Published on *Reviews in History* (http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews)

# John Rocque?s Dublin: A Guide to the Georgian City

**Review Number:**
1022
**Publish date:**
Saturday, 1 January, 2011
**Author:**
Colm Lennon
John Montague
**ISBN:**
9781904890690
**Date of Publication:**
2010
**Price:**
£15.00
**Pages:**
108pp.
**Publisher:**
Royal Irish Academy
**Place of Publication:**
Dublin
**Reviewer:**
Arnold Horner

John Rocque (c.1705?62) was a cartographer and engraver of European repute, who could count among his achievements maps of London, Paris, Berlin and Rome. In Britain, his many projects included plans of great gardens, several county and provincial city maps and a great, highly innovative, survey of London which resulted in a 16-sheet map of London and its immediate hinterland (1746), and an immense 24-sheet map of the city itself (also 1746), laid out at a very large scale close to 200 feet to an inch. With much already to his credit, it is perhaps no surprise that in 1753, as John Montague shows in this volume, he briefly contemplated retirement, passing on his business as a going concern to a nephew then based in Mannheim. When that relative showed no interest, however, Rocque continued with renewed vitality, spending six of the last nine years of his life based in Ireland.

Rocque?s Irish work between 1754 and 1760, included a remarkable series of c.170 manuscript estate maps for the earl of Kildare, and a range of commercially-driven projects that resulted in finely-engraved and printed surveys of the cities of Dublin, Cork and Kilkenny, a town map of Thurles, county maps of Dublin and Armagh, and a general map (derived mainly from already-existing sources) of Ireland.(1) It is with his earliest, and arguably most significant, project that this book is concerned. Rocque?s *Exact Survey of the City and Suburbs of Dublin* commenced in the autumn of 1754 and was published in four sheets just two

years later. Beautifully-engraved and apparently surveyed with great accuracy, the map was drawn to a similar scale to his London masterpiece, two hundred feet to an inch (1:2400), and portrayed ?all publick buildings, dwelling houses, ware houses, stables, courts, yards &c?. Shown too are a disparate range of places of worship (taking in, besides the established (Anglican) church, ?Roman chappels?, French churches, Presbyterian, Quaker and other meeting houses), while various buildings associated with manufacturing and community activity are identified by name.

With this map Rocque captures the framework of a great city at a important stage in its development. With a population of around 100,000 in 1756, Dublin had enjoyed nearly a century of steady expansion. The small mediaeval city was now surrounded by expanding suburbs, many of them planned developer-driven ventures that occupied sites once the property of great monasteries. Commerce and culture were buoyant, an administration and parliament provided a social focus, and the prosperity of the city was expressed in the style, standard, and general self-confidence of much of its new development. The cathedrals and the law courts were wedged within or near the narrow streets of the old city, but the sustained accumulation of capital was being given expression in a new more spacious architecture, harbingers of which were the great Royal Hospital, on a western rise beyond the city limits, and the signifiers of eastward development, the new parliament house and several large private mansions. A further four decades of expansion were to follow, during which the population doubled and parts of the city were remodelled by specially-appointed wide streets commissioners. Rocque?s great achievement is that he portrays the city on the eve of its morphing, when the compact development of early modern times is beginning to be complemented to the east by great new tracts defined by wide streets and dignified squares.

To appreciate Rocque?s Dublin map, it is necessary to visualise it. One feature is its detail. In contrast to the representation of buildings by blocks, the convention used on the London maps, the Dublin map attempts, apparently with considerable but not total accuracy, to represent individual buildings, together with the gardens, plots, walls and sites to the rear of streets and lanes. The detail is immense. Piles of timber appear in timber-yards, headstones are shown in graveyards, bollards are shown along streets. It seems as if individual trees are represented. No doubt there is a licence in much of this, but the overall effect is to produce a feeling of authenticity. That feeling is developed further by the conventions used to identify different building types: stipple for residences, diagonal lines for warehouses, cross-hatching for public buildings. Add to this the sensitive, immensely-fine engraving by Rocque?s principal associate, Andrew Dury, and the result is an unforgettable impression. As on his Kildare estate maps, Rocque creates the impression of seeing Dublin as if from the air - while simultaneously maintaining the highest standards of planimetric accuracy. So impressed was the king of the day, George II, that he ordered the map to be hung in his own apartment.

Although first published in 1756, the *Exact Survey* was subsequently subject to various minor, piecemeal revisions, some of them corrections, others to take account of some of the new developments. These revisions continued after Rocque?s death in 1762 until at least 1769. A second edition, with more extensive revisions by Rocque?s brother-in-law Bernard Scalé, was issued by the London publisher, Robert Sayer, in 1773. Professor John Andrews explored the various ?states? associated with the first edition in his 1977 introduction to Rocque?s 4-sheet maps of Dublin city and county.(2) These variations have been further reviewed by Andrew and Charlotte Bonar Law in their monumental 2005 listing of the printed maps of Dublin.(3) In the present work, a mix of states and dates may be incorporated, so that the map, although bearing the date 1756, may incorporate later alterations and developments.

In recent decades, the *Exact Survey* has been the focus for several publishing initiatives. In 1977 Harry Margary published elegant versions of it and the four-sheet county map, together with the already-mentioned reflective analysis of both maps by Andrews. Two decades later, the map librarian at Trinity College Dublin, Paul Ferguson, edited a new book-format edition of these maps, again published by Margary.(4) On this occasion, the maps were given added value by the A to Z place-name index meticulously prepared by Ferguson. More recently again, in 2008, a composite, reduced-scale version of the Exact Survey has been published as part of the elaborate *Part II* of the Dublin component of the *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* (*IHTA*) being produced by the Royal Irish Academy. *Dublin Part II*, by Colm Lennon, professor of history at the

National University of Ireland, Maynooth, covers the period 1610 to 1756 and includes a general essay, an inventory of detailed topographical information, reproductions of 17 maps from the period, and 11 plates depicting contemporary views.(5) This assemblage, and its interpretation and analysis by Lennon, now provide a very significant resource for future explorations of the *Exact Survey*.

In the present venture, Lennon is joined by John Montague who in 2009 completed a PhD at Trinity College Dublin on the making of the Exact Survey. The aim here is to highlight the historical value of Rocque?s map by focusing on 40 extracts, many of them greatly enlarged from the original. These extracts present particular buildings and localities, and the intention is that they will facilitate a better appreciation of both the map and the city in 1756. The extracts are amplified by a further 49 text illustrations, most of them contemporary or near contemporary views, plans or architectural drawings, including seven made by the gifted Joseph Tudor during the period 1749?53.

In their short introductory chapters Montague provides a short but informative briefing on Rocque and his survey, and Lennon gives an overview on Dublin in 1756. The extracts follow, each being placed on a left-hand page, with the right-hand facing page being given over to a short commentary on some aspect of the area featured in the commentary. Except for the two-page select bibliography which appears at the end, the commentaries are unreferenced, and it is not possible to determine directly the information sources, for example if use was made of contemporary almanacks or if recourse was had to the property data embedded in the Registry of Deeds. Presumably this rather generalised presentation is in the hope of avoiding too much textual overburden, the reasoning being that those interested can refer to the very comprehensively-referenced material in *Dublin Part II*.

The extracts take in large sections of the map, working systematically across it from the north-west sheet round to the south-west. A wide variety of buildings and themes are featured and explained. In the north-west the disintegration of the old medieval commons at Oxmantown Green is given prominence, with attention also to the huge Royal Barracks dating from the 1700s and to the mix of commercial and residential developments that competed for dominance in the markets area around Smithfield and around the Linen Hall. Henrietta Street, ?the grandest of all streets in Dublin depicted by Rocque?, is rightly given its own page. Moving east through the planned streets of the late 17th-century Jervis estate, the places of worship close to the site of the once-formidable St Mary?s Abbey are shown, and then the focus shifts to the expanding Gardiner estate, to the great mall along Sackville Street and to the nearby initiatives of the lying-in hospital and the then-fashionable Marlborough bowling green. Further east again, the scene shifts to ?Worlds End?. Long in the future this locality would figure (with some streets re-named) in Joyce?s *Ulysses* as Nighttown. In Rocque?s Dublin it was a market gardening area with, closer to the river, several industrial sites.

Moving south of the river, the extracts feature several of the most prominent buildings, including the parliament house, Trinity College, St Andrew?s church, the mansion house home of the lord mayor, Dublin castle, the Tholsel, the city workhouse and some peripheral hospitals. Shown too is the early Aungier suburb, the industrial quarter in the Liberties and the adjacent ?tenterfields? used by the local weavers. Another extract draws attention to the cluster of Catholic chapels at or close to the western edge of the old medieval city. Yet other extracts depict the elegant developments flanking the planned redevelopment of another old medieval common, St Stephens Green. Much further west, the city basin, built in 1724 to sustain the expanding city, is shown close to the bridewell and the city workhouse with its great hall and dedicated ?bedlam?. Each commentary provides much useful information, but inevitably some eye-catchers are passed over. The commentary is especially selective when dealing with some of the smaller features, for example on the edge of Oxmantown Green, it is the bowling green but not the tennis court that gets a notice. Close to the city workhouse, it is left to the reader to speculate upon the ominously-named ?Cutt Throat Lane?, prominent on the city basin page, and on its equally ominous extension ?Murdering Lane? (which appears on two extracts). On the extract focusing on St. Thomas Street, the tellingly-named Dunghill Lane with its adjacent large mounds may well have been one of the most significant locations for the well-being of the city, but here it receives no comment. This book captures or hints at much about the diverse life of the expanding city. If a limitation has to be identified, it is perhaps that there is little allusion to the underworld

and underclass that must have lurked in parallel to the commercial vitality and the growing aristocratic pretensions.

In prompting such observations, this short book presumably achieves its aims. Its purpose is not to be comprehensive but to introduce, and to arouse interest, and in this it succeeds admirably. The reader is given a rapid, visually-stimulating primer on the topography of the mid-18th-century city and, now prepared, he or she can proceed on to explore more substantial analyses such as *Dublin Part II*. The present work is an enjoyable and authoritative introduction, and this reviewer?s main reaction is that a few more extracts may have been justified, for example to show the coaching inns of Bolton Street and the still incomplete Dominick Street north of the river, and in the south-east to show riverside activities (north of Lazars Hill) and perhaps also to give a more complete image of Kildare (now Leinster) House with its lawn fronting on to Merrion Street.

Among the very few lapses, it might be noted that the present Custom House is west, not east, of Matt Talbot bridge (p. 23), and it is not so much the Moravian church which survives (p. 51) as the Moravian church building. The writing style is generally clear, although the separate commentaries for each extract occasionally induce some repetition. Most of the illustrations have reproduced excellently, although the choice of a couple is puzzling (for example it is not clear why much of figure 40 ? extracts from an extract ? uses the same or a lesser scale than on the main extract opposite it). It is unfortunate that the two references cited for the seminal work of Professor John Andrews both contain inaccuracies. The purpose of the present work is mainly descriptive, yet it is clear that Lennon and Montague can draw on a scholarship that has raised the study of Rocque?s map to a new level of quite forensic interpretation. Among his other contributions Montague has employed the computer application MapAnalyst to verify the accuracy of the Exact Survey.

Montague differs from Andrews in some of his dating of Rocque?s arrival and early years in Dublin. He suggests that Rocque was spurred to his Exact Survey in late August 1754 in order to thwart a competing proposal made earlier that month by the city surveyor, Roger Kendrick. Given that (as Andrews showed in 1967) Rocque?s associate, Andrew Dury was already established in Dublin by June 1754, it seems possible that it was news of Rocque?s intentions that goaded Kendrick. The studies that have been the immediate stimulus for the present work have undoubtedly represented major advances. Nevertheless, explicit and generous recognition deserves to be offered to those earlier contributions, by Andrews, Ferguson and the Bonar Laws, which have done much to facilitate the present studies.

When this volume is considered overall, these are very minor considerations. As ?a guide to the Georgian city?, its subtitle, this book works well as an introduction. Most importantly, it will whet the appetite, and so should stimulate greater interest in the development of Dublin. As well as being of value to those Irish readers already with an interest in their capital city, this book can be recommended to a more general readership, who will find in it much of relevance for a general appreciation of Dublin in the wider context of city development and city planning in north-west Europe during the 18th century.

# Notes

1. J. H. Andrews, ?The French school of Dublin land surveyors?, *Irish Geography*, 5, 4 (1967), 275?92. Back to (1)
2. J. H. Andrews, *Two Maps of 18th century Dublin and its Surroundings by John Rocque* (booklet to accompany Rocque?s four-sheet maps of Dublin city 1756 and of County Dublin 1760, also reproduced in Ferguson (1998, below)), (Lympne Castle 1977).Back to (2)
3. A. Bonar Law and C. Bonar Law, *A Contribution Towards a Catalogue of the Prints and Maps of Dublin City and County, Volume 2: Maps.* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 345?59.Back to (3)
4. *The A to Z of Georgian Dublin: John Rocque's Maps of the City in 1756 and the County in 1760*, ed. P. Ferguson (Lympne Castle, 1998).Back to (4)

5. C. Lennon, *Dublin, part II, 1610 to 1756*. Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 19, (Dublin, 2008).Back to (5)

The authors are happy to accept this review and do not wish to comment further.

**Other reviews:**
[2]

---

**Source URL:** http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1022#comment-0

**Links**
[1] http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/5236
[2] http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews