

Irish  
Geography



# Irish Geography

May 2015

ISSN: 0075-0778 (Print) 1939-4055 (Online)  
<http://www.irishgeography.ie>



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**How to cite:** Kearns, G. (2015) 'Vacancy and housing in Dublin: 1798-1911'.  
*Irish Geography*, 48(1), pp. 13-36.

DOI: 10.2014/igj.v48i1.524  
8i1.528

## **Vacancy and Value in Dublin 1798-1911**

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**Abstract:** The related issues of vacancy, redundancy and dereliction in the city, raise questions about the conflict between private profit and social use, between exchange values and use values. This paper offers a typology of the causes and forms of vacancy and is the first attempt to map this phenomenon for nineteenth-century Dublin. It also reviews some of the contemporary debates about the management of empty and decrepit buildings and sites. The charge of wastefulness was weighty and suggested strategies that are relevant yet today. These include compulsory purchase, a tax on emptiness, informal occupation, and the temporary appropriation of un-used spaces for socially-useful purposes.

**Keywords:** use value, exchange value, vacancy, redundant spaces, Dublin

### **Introduction**

As explained in the introductory essay, the papers in this special issue address the challenges of Dublin's pop-up Granby Park. The park raised questions about the uses of vacant space in the city, about social use and private profit, and about the contradictions between use and exchange value. The land upon which the park sat had been cleared with the demolition of social housing and this land had been slated for a housing development under a public-private partnership, but with the crash of 2008 those prospects receded. Alongside other academics, a number of geographers, including Till and McArdle (see their essay in this issue), observed the process of planning, making, and managing the park project. The project was also the subject of broad debate in Dublin (see the essay by Lawton and O'Callaghan in this issue).

My own contribution was to develop historical perspectives for the park project. I did this in two ways. First, I researched how, over the past three centuries, the Granby Park area could be placed within the mosaic of changing Dublin localities. I made this historical research the basis for local field-walks that were offered to interested persons as part of the Trade School at Granby Park (Trade School Dublin 2013, Kearns in press). Secondly, I tried to understand the historical contexts in which vacant space arises and has been the focus of debate within the city (Kearns 2013). In developing this historical research in the context of pressing political

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issues, I am not only trying to offer an historical perspective on current debate in Ireland but am also seeking to develop further the style of critical and effective historical geography that is being advanced by scholars attending to the work of Michel Foucault (Kearns 1998, Elden and Crampton 2007).

My argument in this paper is that the issue of vacant space raises questions about how usefulness is decided because unused resources are readily imagined as being put to some better than idle purpose. This more-or-less utopian moment is almost always interrupted by practical considerations, of which the most insistent usually concern the cost of the land. This is the basic conflict between use value and exchange value. An absolute property in land implies that the owner has a right to withhold it from use if it better suits some private purpose to do so. Usefulness, on the other hand, implies a collective point-of-view. Many elements of cities are shared resources and, untrammelled by laws made in the collective interest, the sway of private property all too often shows that public virtues are not best served by private vice.

I begin by providing a simple classification of the types of vacancy that occur in cities. I then take up each of these in turn and show how they were conceptualised and recorded in nineteenth-century Dublin. The earliest discussions of vacancy in Dublin treated it as resulting from dereliction. The system of property rating in the city of Dublin gave remission for empty property and in this way there developed an attention to the extent of idle units. This data was collected in decennial censuses thereby allowing both a temporal and a spatial treatment of empty housing in the city. Analysis of this data suggests that emptiness was fairly general both in time and space with some suggestion that in earlier periods it may even have been slightly higher in poorer than in richer quarters. Then I turn to the somewhat larger units of institutional and commercial redundancy and I describe the social visions that were projected, and sometimes realised, within these spaces. Finally, I consider the general politics of vacancy and make brief comment upon our current moment of urban crisis in the light of this historical record.

### **Causes of vacancy**

To speak of a building or a residential unit as vacant implies that it is not in use although evidently useful. If we can consider a building as having something like a life-cycle, albeit periodically rejuvenated with repairs or re-construction, then, vacancy can occur at all stages. During construction, the building may reach a state where it is usable although not fully finished, or it may be finished but still awaiting its first tenant or owner. This condition is sometimes registered as ‘under construction’ or ‘building’ in directories and censuses. While in use, a tenant or owner may vacate the building and in the interim while the building awaits a new occupier it could be registered as temporarily vacant. This may matter where being empty voids a liability to the payment of rates. As such these ‘vacant’ premises are recorded by the collectors of rates, then noted by the compilers of directories, and listed this way in the building returns for the census. Form B1, the House and Building Return, for the 1911 census asked the enumerator to note, among

other things, for each house or building: 'Whether Built or Building,' '[W]hether Private Dwelling, Public Building, School, Manufactory, Hotel, Public-house, Lodging-house, or Shop, &c.,' and 'Is House Inhabited?' (National Archives of Ireland 2009).

In many cases, a structure produced for one purpose, gets taken up for another. These changes accompany broader socio-economic change in the city. Neighbourhoods change in character. Some areas see the replacement of rich people with poorer people. These changes were central to the Chicago School's version of urban ecology. They wrote of areas changed by the 'invasion' of one area by people of a different sort. For expanding cities, they suggested that the introduction of new groups and new functions at the centre of the city, pushed towards the edge people and functions that find the new arrivals unacceptable as neighbours: 'For example, Japanese immigrants are desirous of improving their status and, when possible, move out of "Little Tokio" into a neighborhood occupied by natives, but in so doing they get "out of place." They, however, are more willing to take rebuffs than to accept inferior status' (Bogardus 1926, 53).

In displacing the higher status inhabitants, the 'invasion' lowers the resistance of the area to the introduction of other stigmatised functions: 'It is well known that the central parts of the city, because of the decaying neighborhoods, have very little resistance to the invasion of vice resorts' (Reckless 1926, 193). 'Decay,' in turn, nurtures alternative uses: 'This gives us the interesting phenomenon of what the ecologists call "succession". [...] Communities may and do grow old and die, but new communities profiting by the experience of their predecessors are enabled to create [new] social organizations' (Park and Burgess 1921, 956-7). These changes are often resisted, not only by existing residents, but also by property owners and landlords, wishing to maintain the social tone of the area, and, it may be, their own social standing and the value of their property. This resistance may slow down the rate of change, producing longer vacancy before the search for new high-status tenants is abandoned and the direction of geographical change accepted.

Housing change has been a central concern of studies in urban sociology, urban geography and historical geography, including excellent work on nineteenth-century Dublin (Freeman 1957, 147-152, 157-167, Martin 1988, Prunty 1998). There has been less work on other aspects of functional changes, including the social and economic significance of vacancy. Houses can generally be adapted for poorer folk simply by allowing greater density, ending ultimately in the one-room family living that was so significant in Dublin about one century ago. Structures made for other purposes may be less flexible, or may require substantial renovation to become so. In these cases, what have been termed 'redundant spaces', may persist for quite some time (Anderson, Duncan and Hudson, 1983a). Because certain uses congregate in particular parts of the city, structural change that devalues these uses produces, in turn, a marked geography of vacancy within the city. In some cases, the persistence of this vacancy has caused people to identify 'shrinking cities,' with, for example, about one-quarter of the world's cities seeing actual population decline in the 1990s (Oswalt and Rieniets 2006). In this case,

too, vacancy is prompting a debate about defining new socially-useful purposes for abandoned spaces (Martinez-Fernandez *et al.* 2012).

Finally, a structure may reach such a condition of disrepair that it seems unsuitable for most uses. These ruinous buildings may yet serve as primitive shelter, or as storage yards, or as improvised play-spaces, or as sites for socially-stigmatised behaviours, such as open-air drinking or injecting drugs. One recent work on industrial ruins described the nostalgia that many felt for them as playgrounds, that is, for ‘informal uses of space, which included arson, vandalism, climbing [...], and alcohol and drug use’ (Mah 2012, 87). The relations between dereliction and vacancy were at the heart of the earliest work on vacancy in Dublin.

### **Dereliction and Waste**

In 1798, James Whitelaw, the vicar of St Catherine’s parish, produced the first modern census of Dublin (Jordan 2011). Responding to the risk of insurrection in Dublin, as the rebellion of 1798 established itself elsewhere in Ireland, the Lord Mayor of Dublin decided to keep tabs on the movement of people into the city. To this end, he required each house to have affixed to the door a list of the usual inhabitants. Whitelaw decided that he could make a census of Dublin by collecting these lists and while this enterprise went well for the better-off parts of the town, in the poorer districts he found the lists inaccurate or absent. Thus he employed a set of searchers and, working from Rocque’s map of 1756 (Lennon and Montague 2010), spent five months from May 1798 visiting ‘every room of [the] wretched habitations’ in the courts and alleys of the poorer parts of the city, noting the population and the condition of the housing (Whitelaw 1805). He counted 182,370 people in Dublin. He also reported that there were 15,199 inhabited houses and 1,202 houses derelict, and thus unoccupied, or in his terms, ‘waste’.

This treatment of vacancy from the perspective of dereliction was given particular force on each occasion that ruinous houses collapsed upon the tenants. On 2 September 1913, at 8.30pm, life on Church Street, Dublin, was interrupted by the collapse of two tenement houses, home to sixteen families:

The crash came with terrible suddenness. There was a loud, rending noise, apparently in the lower part of the premises, and the alarmed people rushed to the windows or out of doors. Almost immediately there was another tearing crash, and apparently a wall had given way. For a minute or so there was no apparent movement, then the walls bulged, and with a terrible crash the whole of the premises collapsed to the ground (*Freeman’s Journal* 1913, 7a).

By 1.30am on the following morning, thirteen people had been dug out of the rubble, five of them were dead. Responding to the tragedy, the Local Government Board, as the sanitary and poor law authority for Ireland, commissioned a report

on the housing of the working classes in Dublin. The appendix to the report contained a series of photographs of poor, derelict Dublin and in several of them we can see children playing amid ruins, as with this image of Chancery Street (see Figure 1; BPP 1914).<sup>1</sup> This shows the type of spaces created when buildings actually collapsed. Such informal playgrounds were clearly quite general throughout the city about one hundred years ago. From *Thom's Directory* for 1910, we can count 322 derelict buildings, which comprised about 1% of the 35,803 buildings in the City of Dublin (Thom 1910).<sup>2</sup> The street directories were concerned, primarily, with the main and commercial streets of the city but the more comprehensive report of the Local Government Board identified 1,382 vacant sites or buildings of which more than half resulted from dereliction (24), dilapidation (138), or ruination (660) (BPP 1914, 321-324).



**Waste ground and ruins near Chancery Street, the houses of which are shown in the background.**

Figure 1. Ruins at Chancery Street, Appendix to the report of the LGB on Dublin Housing. (Reproduced with kind permission of Dublin City Archives).

It is striking that Whitelaw treats vacancy and waste primarily as a consequence of dereliction. By implication, all habitable units were in occupation. He did not report on the number of houses under construction in 1798 although he did note

<sup>1</sup> Image downloaded from Dublin City Archives, and used with permission. Accessed on 28 September 2015 at [http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/galleries/010\\_Chancery\\_Street.jpg](http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/galleries/010_Chancery_Street.jpg).

<sup>2</sup> From the Directory's street-by-street listing of 35,803 Dublin residences and businesses, I have counted 322 buildings described as ruins.



that perhaps 401 houses had been built between his own survey of 1798 and a later municipal survey of 1804 (Whitelaw 1805, 26). This means that a minimum of about 70 houses were built in each of the six years between 1798 and 1804, or that, at any one time, the level of vacancy, or 'waste', was about seventeen times the level of construction. With time, this notion of vacancy as dereliction and waste was supplemented by other ideas that include cases where vacancy was due to a lagged change in land use, either between functions or between social classes. However, as we explore the geography of vacancy within Dublin it becomes clear that vacancy is more general even than this, being in some respects a regular feature of residential and commercial leasehold properties. Whitelaw did not provide any systematic information about the geography of vacancy in Dublin but later sources do.

### **Empty housing**

In Britain, a national census was taken every ten years from 1801 and the practice was extended to Ireland with the census of 1821. Most censuses thereafter reported for the city of Dublin, the number of its inhabitants, of its occupied houses, of its unoccupied houses, and of its houses under construction (BPP 1824, 24, BPP 1833, 4, BPP 1843, 20, 1852-53, 44-45, BPP 1863, 44-45, BPP 1872, 72, BPP 1881, 72, BPP 1890-91, 72, BPP 1902, 1, BPP 1912-13a, 2). This basic data help us to reconstruct the chronology of vacancy and construction. There are a number of difficulties in interpreting this data because although the annual rate of population change and of change in the housing stock are averages for the intercensal period, the data on vacant housing and of housing under construction are annual figures available only once each decade. The census was intended to provide a comprehensive picture of Dublin's housing stock and this is perhaps the best data we have on housing vacancy. The street directories were put together each year but, as Prunty (1998, 147) remarks, it is not clear that the compilers of the street directories had good reasons to give a comprehensive account of the minor streets and courtyards in which many of the poorest Dubliners lived. Taking data on housing vacancy from the census means that we are sampling isolated points from a continuous economic cycle, and there is no reason to believe that the census year would be representative of the intercensal decade as a whole (Parry Lewis 1960).

From Figure 2, it is evident that the changes in housing and in population did not walk in step. The period between Whitelaw's survey and the first census saw modest population growth (about 0.5% per year). The following decade also saw limited population growth, near stasis succeeded in the 1830s, a significant growth in the 1840s but then decline or only slow growth in each decade from 1851 to 1891. The end of the century saw renewed growth in this central city area. However, the most dramatic growth at the end of the nineteenth-century was in the suburbs, some of which were outside the city as defined by its formal, administrative limits (see Kearns in press).

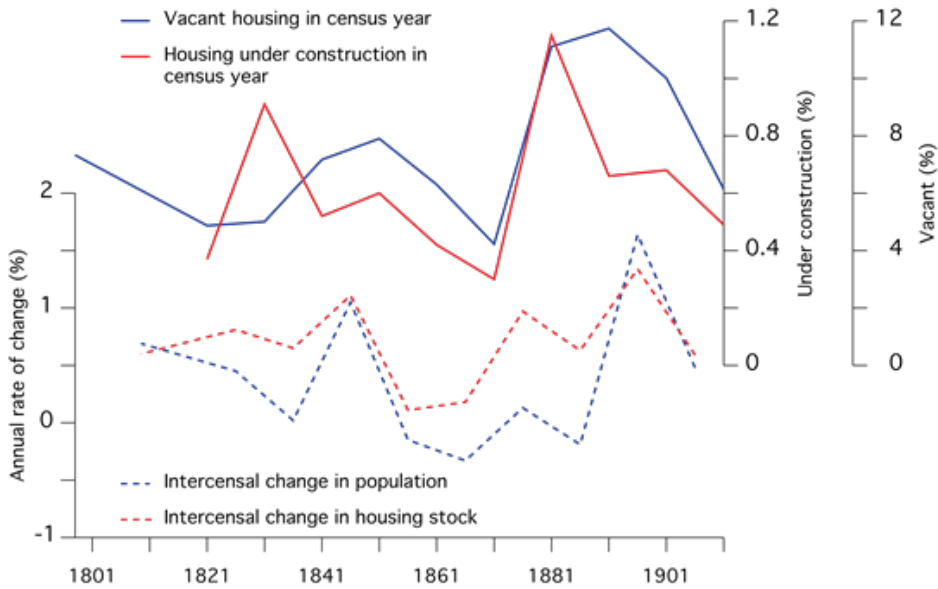


Figure 2. Housing and Population, Dublin City 1798-1911

Accepting, for the moment, this restriction to the space defined by the city limits at the start of the nineteenth-century, there does seem to be some relation between population change and changes in the volume of the housing stock. Periods with substantial increases in population were generally the ones with largest jumps in the housing stock. Vacancy, however, does not seem to be this clearly related to the rhythm of population change. Vacancy peaked in 1851 (about 8%) and in 1881 (about 12%) but these years followed respectively one of the decades with most rapid population growth (the 1840s) but also one of those that even saw a decline in the number of people living in the city (the 1880s). Perhaps the most striking feature of the vacancy data is that at each census no less than 4% of houses were empty. Vacancy was a constant feature of the nineteenth-century city. It is particularly striking that one of the peaks in vacancy followed the 1840s and the dramatic migration of famine refugees from rural Ireland into the city of Dublin. At this time we might have expected every available nook and cranny to be sheltering the desperately poor. If we turn, now, to the geography of vacancy, we can say a little more about the 1840s.

### The Geography of Vacancy

These figures on people, houses, vacancies and construction were recorded for, at various times, the wards and parishes of the city. The twenty-one parishes of Dublin are the most consistent units but they are not used in every census. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, data for Dublin was reported for fifteen wards, and from the 1840s to the 1890s for fifteen rather different wards, and thereafter for twenty somewhat different ones again. The censuses of 1821 and



1831 reported only on the parishes. Neither the wards nor the parishes are ideal for spatial analysis. Very many of them stretch from the center of the city to its edge. This corresponds neither to the pattern of urban growth, mixing young and old parts of the city within each unit, nor to the social geography, combining rich and poor parts of the city. It has to be admitted, though, that the tessellation of the social classes in nineteenth-century Dublin was so fine that any set of large spatial units will fail to reflect the social structure. This is why Connor, Mills and Moore-Cherry (2011) use their own grid to describe the geography of Dublin as suggested by the manuscript returns of the 1911 census. But the manuscript returns do not survive for censuses before 1901. If there is useful material in the published volumes of earlier censuses, then, we must work with wards and parishes.

Figures 3 and 4 show for 1851 and 1911, the general relations between housing vacancy in each ward and the rate of population change during the previous intercensal period (1841-51 and 1901-1911, respectively). In 1851, about one residential unit in every thirteen was empty, but there was no relationship between this and the population pressure in each ward. The wards that had seen the greatest increase in population did not have markedly lower levels of vacancy, for, although the relationship is negative (Spearman's  $\rho = -0.35$ ), it is not one with much statistical significance ( $p=0.20$ ). For 1911, the levels of vacancy were generally lower (about one unit in twenty), and there is even a slight tendency for the areas which had been growing most quickly to have higher vacancy (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.19$ ), but this relationship has no statistical significance ( $p=0.40$ ), being almost as likely to have occurred by chance as not.

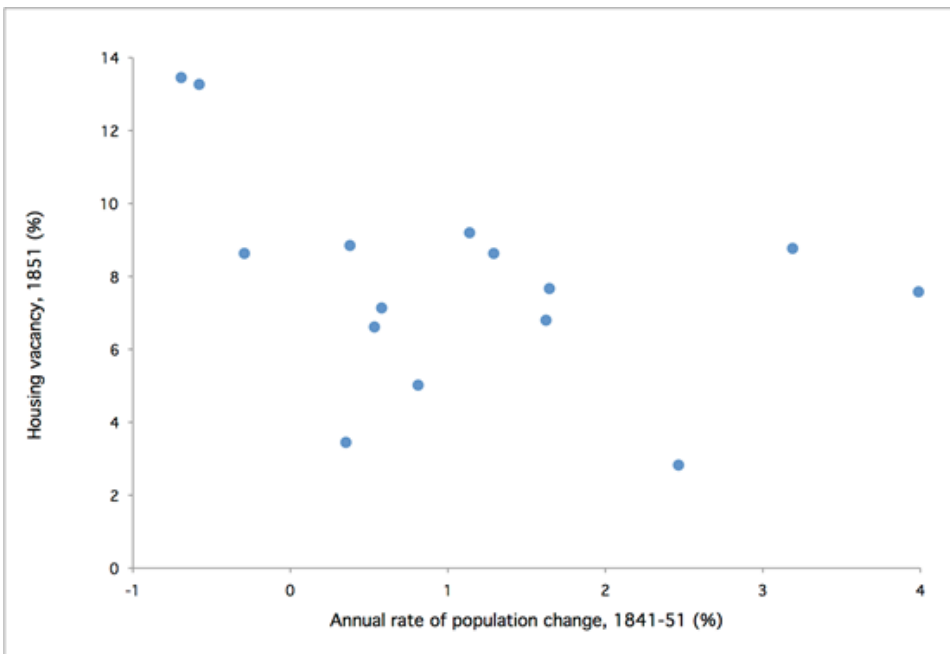


Figure 3. Vacancy and population change, Dublin wards, 1841-51

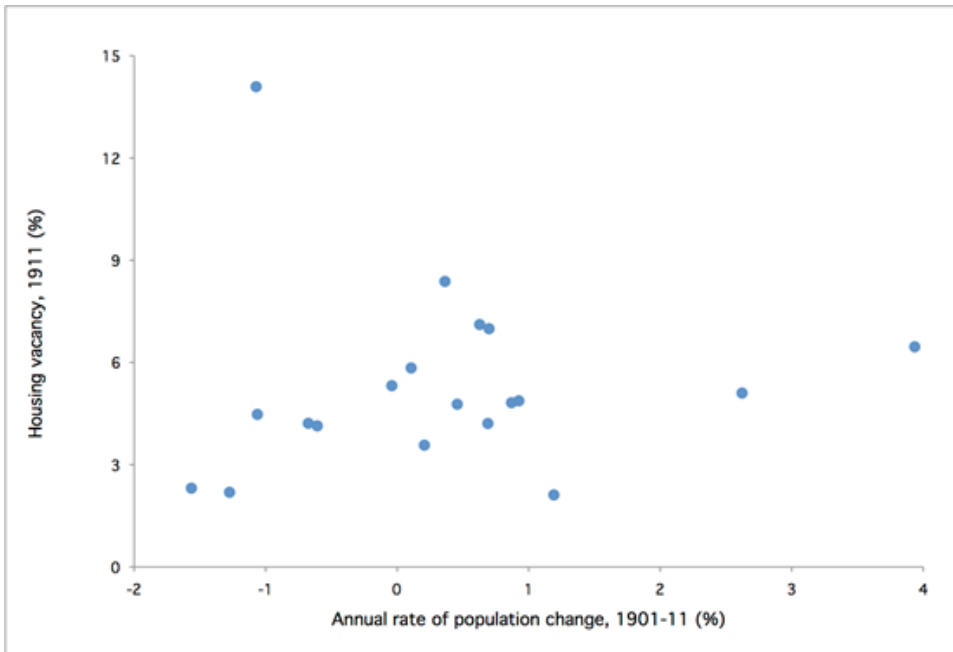


Figure 4. Vacancy and population change, Dublin wards, 1901-11

To take this analysis further, it would be helpful to have information on social class and to be able to explore relations for smaller spatial units. The most common way to study social class for nineteenth-century cities is to make a classification based upon the reporting of occupations (Armstrong 1971). Unfortunately, for most censuses, the published abstracts and summaries provide no tabulation of occupations below the level of the administrative city of Dublin. One exception is the census of 1841, which provided a simple breakdown of the composition of households and a broad classification of the economic basis of families.<sup>3</sup> The census, more or less mirroring the modern definition of household, defined a family as a group of 'several individuals related to each other, with the addition of servants or visitors living together in the same house or part of a house upon one common means of support' (BPP 1843, xvi). In the 'General Table' for the City of Dublin, the 49,511 households of Dublin included 163,613 people who were classified as heads of household or their families (BPP 1843, 16-19). There were also 49,786 people classified as visitors. These were presumably non-relatives sharing the house, perhaps as lodgers, or as live-in employees. In addition, there were 4,346 men and 14,981 women described as servants. Because they were living in the household and this was given as their relationship to the head of

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between families and households is an important one. The word 'family' was used for both in many historical sources although historians, sociologists and historical geographers try to maintain a distinction between families, linked by kin, and households, co-resident groups sharing common resources, such as cooking facilities (Laslett 1972).

household, we might suggest that the vast majority of these are domestic servants.<sup>4</sup> This would give a crude measure of social class: the areas with a ratio of domestic servants to households above the average of 0.39:1 are likely to have had richer families on average than those with a lower ratio.

The census of 1841 reported its results for 15 wards and for 21 parishes. It also gave data for each overlap between parishes and wards, giving 55 ward-parish units (see Figure 5).<sup>5</sup> This matrix was used by Freeman (1957, 147-152) in his work on the social geography of Dublin on the eve of the Great Famine. A few of these ward-parish units are rather awkward in shape as, for example, where the border of a ward and a parish criss-cross each other more than once, producing a number of detached areas for which the same data must be mapped. Some of the original wards and parishes themselves had detached parts. Several of the parishes and wards have serpentine shapes that straddle both inner city and urban fringe. Two of the 55 units were empty: a sliver of Glasnevin (D1) at the northern extremity of Four Courts ward and the part of the parish of St George that fell within Linenhall ward (E8). The ward-parish units are also very uneven in size, ranging from over 600 acres to less than one, and from a population of 18,000 down to as few as 15 in the autonomous religious community of Christchurch Liberties (M5 in Figure 5; and see Figure 6).<sup>6</sup> The units with the largest area are in most cases those with the most people, so that the visual impression is not as misleading as from those maps where sparsely-settled rural areas visually swamp denser towns and cities. More serious, however, is the deceptive character of scatterplots when the data-points need to be weighted to such an extreme degree and mere visual inspection can mislead. This great variation in size also means that there will be a tendency for the larger units to mask internal variation and gravitate towards mean values. For all these reasons, while the 1841 census invites closer analysis, this requires more than usual caution.

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<sup>4</sup> There remains a problem with how institutions were treated in the 1841 census. It is far from clear but it seems likely that the inhabitants of institutions were excluded from this return of people in families.

<sup>5</sup> The ward and parish boundaries have been taken from the first Ordnance Survey six-inch map (OS 1843), accessible at [osi.ie](http://osi.ie). Wards: A. Castle; B. College; C. Custom House; D. Four Courts; E. Linen Hall; F. Merrion; G. Post Office; H. St Andrew's; I. St Audoen's; J. St Catherine's; K. St George's; L. St James'; M. St Patrick's; N. St Paul's; O. St Stephen's. Parishes: 1. Glasnevin; 2. Grangegorman; 3. St Andrew's; 4. St Anne's; 5. St Audoen's; 6. St Bridget's; 7. St Catherine's; 8. St George's; 9. St James'; 10. St Luke's; 11. St Mary's; 12. St Michael's; 13. St Michan's; 14. St Nicholas' Within; 15. St Michan's; 16. St Nicholas' Without; 17. St Patrick's Deanery; 18. St Paul's; 19. St Peter's; 20. St Thomas's; 21. St Werburgh's.

<sup>6</sup> The logarithmic scale can not represent values of zero, so I have plotted the two empty units as each having a single resident simply so that their relatively small size might be noted.

**Ward-Parish units,  
1841**

(for explanation see text)

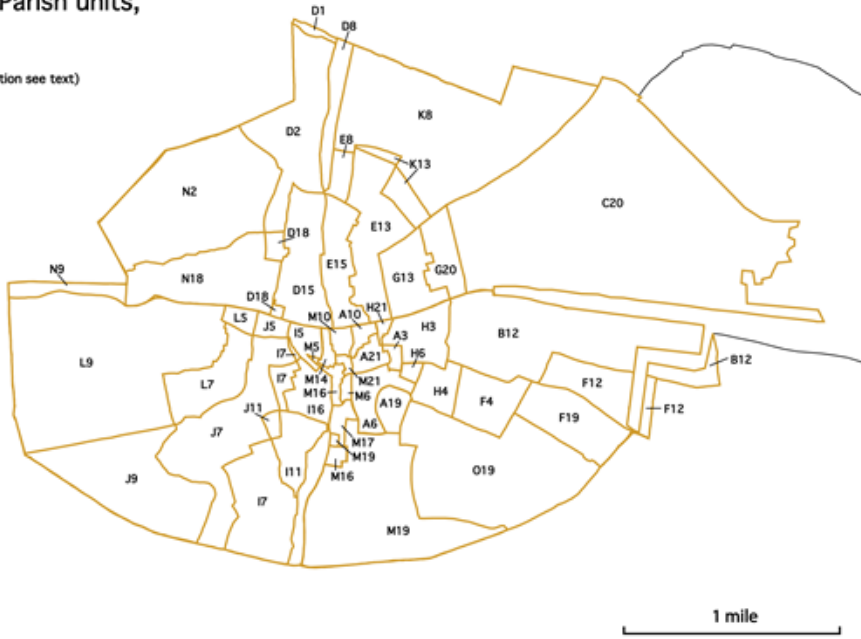


Figure 5: Ward-parish units, Dublin, 1841

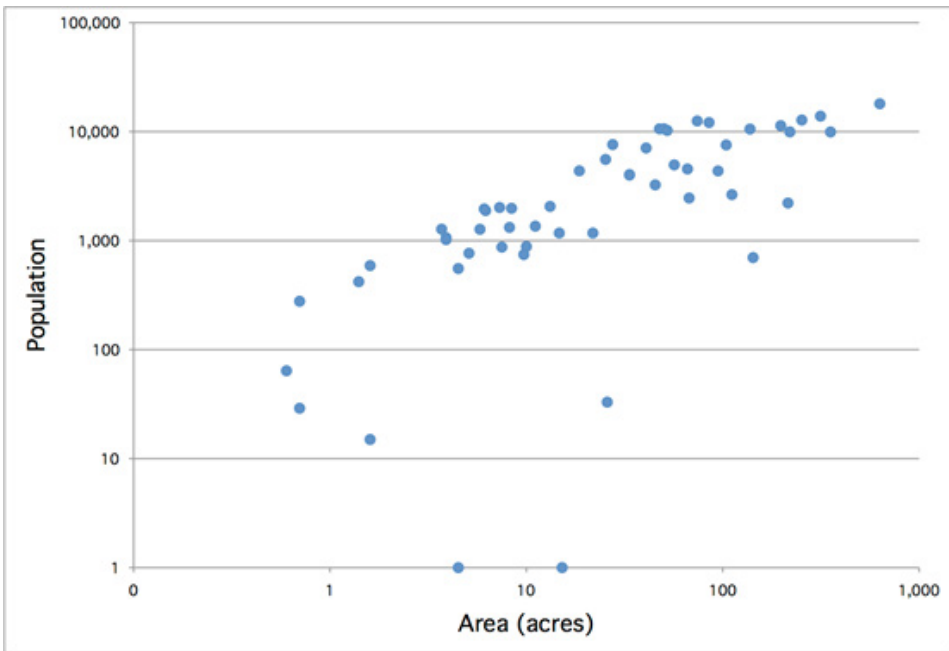


Figure 6: Ward-Parish units, Dublin, 1841

For 1841, the average level of vacancy reported by the census was 7.2% (see Figure 2), and the parts of Dublin with the lowest levels were dispersed widely across the city although there is a concentration in the south-east and towards the north-east (see Figure 7). The highest levels of vacancy are likewise dispersed with some concentration along the river, especially in the dockland and wharf areas to the east. Figure 8 shows the level of living-in servants across the city. The areas are classified into quartiles on the basis of the number of households in each district. About one-quarter of Dublin's households lived in districts where there were fewer than 0.18 servants per household (or roughly one servant for every 5.5 households). Conversely, about one-quarter of Dubliners lived in areas with more than 0.44 servants per household (or about one servant for every 2.3 households). These high-status areas form similar north-east and south-east wedges to those that characterise the distribution of lower vacancy rates. In this group of high-status areas there was on average of one servant for every 1.2 households, compared to one for every 4.2 households in the rest of the city. The average level of vacancy for the high-status areas was one empty building for every 17.7 houses, whereas in the rest of the city there was one empty building for every 12.8 houses.

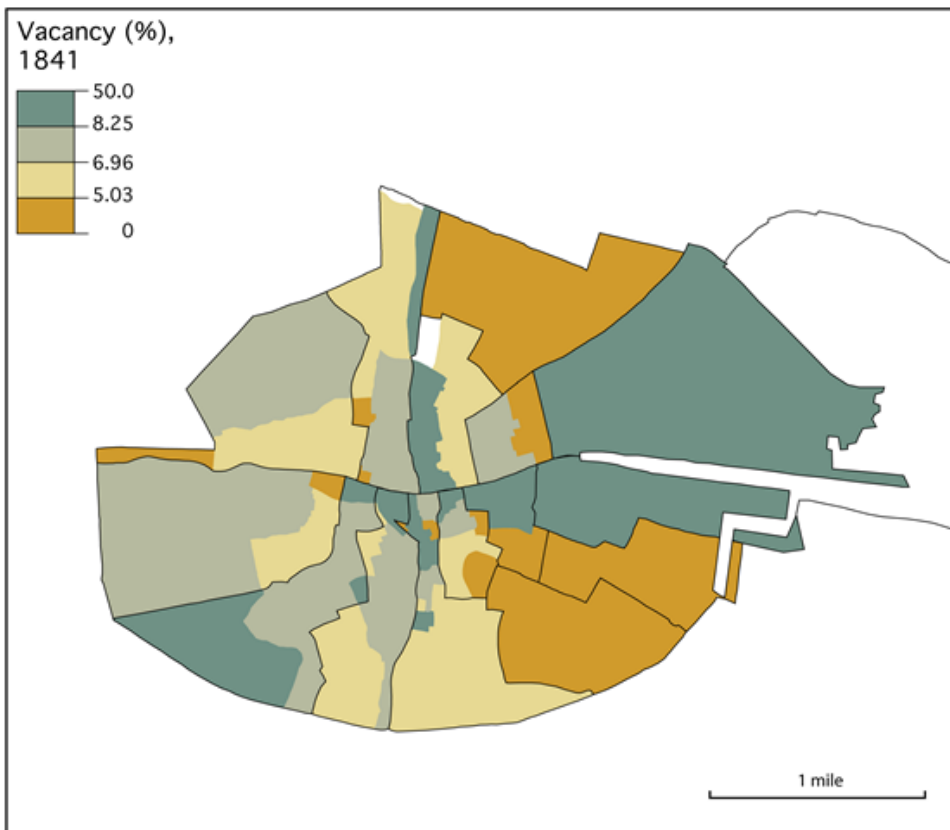


Figure 7: Vacancy in Dublin, 1841

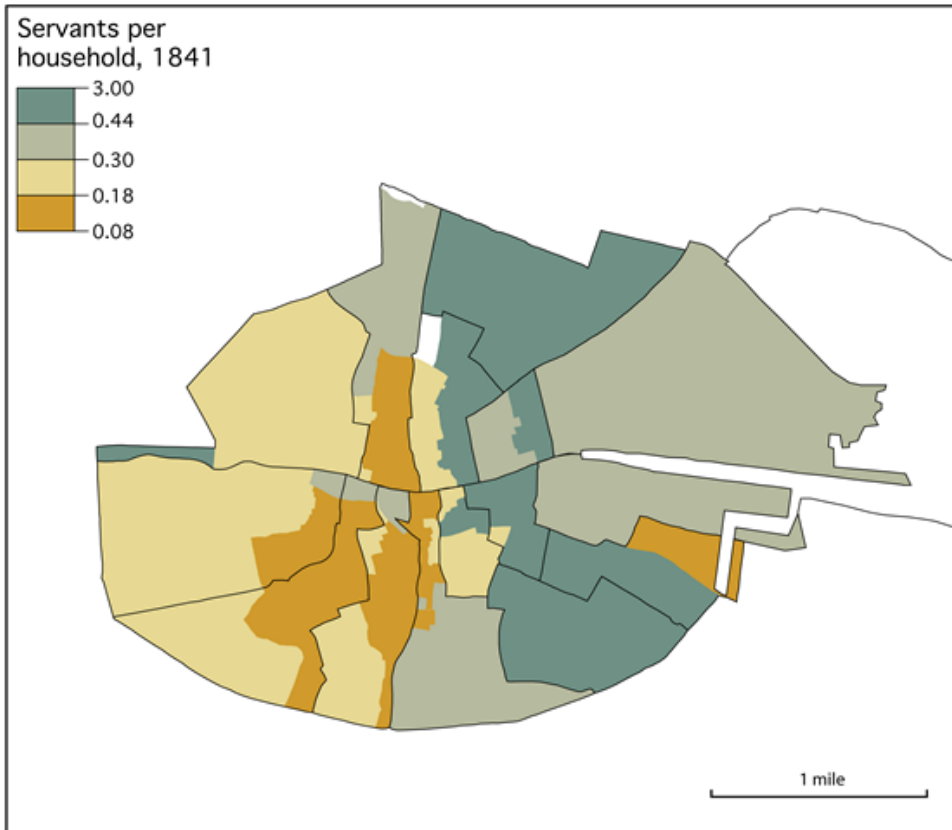


Figure 8: Servants per household, Dublin 1841

As a group, then, the richest areas had somewhat less vacancy, but vacancy was fairly ubiquitous.<sup>7</sup> In the 1840s, there was a mass migration of Famine refugees to Dublin and this was registered in an increase in share of the population living at no better than one room per household. Thomas Jordan (1857, 17) noted the ‘very large numbers driven [...] from the country by distress of various kinds,’ and seeing this reflected in the fact that ‘there were residing [in Dublin] 62,584 persons in 1841, and 101,558 in 1851, who were not born there.’ Despite this, the geography of vacancy in 1851 was very similar to that of 1841 (Spearman’s  $\rho = 0.483$ ;  $p=0.0496$ ) and the general level of vacancy was even somewhat higher (see Figure 2). Despite massive pressure on the housing stock, vacancy was higher rather than lower in the poorest districts.

<sup>7</sup> Excluding an anomalous and tiny outlier, the 15 inhabitants of Christchurch Liberties (M5), the two sets of areas form two distinct groups as shown by the z score for a Mann Whitney U-test comparing the vacancy levels for the two sets of areas (the high-status 13 versus the low-status 36) was 1.97, a value that was unlikely to occur by chance ( $p=0.049$ ). This difference between the two groups is quite clear but there is little evidence of a continuous relationship. Both correlations and regressions detect no clear trend across the range as a whole. There are, then, two groups rather than one trend across all areas.



It is more difficult to explore this relationship for later periods because there is no equivalent tabulation of socio-economic groups for parishes or wards in the published census reports. However, with the forms for individual households now online through the National Archives, a more disaggregated analysis of these questions is possible. The records for the City of Dublin in 1911, which included twenty wards within the new limits of the County Borough established by the 1901 extension, cover 307,201 individuals. If we take 'servant' within the category of relation to head of household, and if we exclude institutions, such as hospitals or asylums, then, there are 6,272 domestic servants within this group.<sup>8</sup> The aggregate figure for the County Borough of Dublin given in the report on the 1911 census identified 11,611 females in domestic service and 1,395 males; together comprising 2.0% of the population (BPP 1912-13a, 17, 24). It is most likely that the domestic servants counted by the census report included many who were not normally resident in the homes of their employees and that this count is thus not really equivalent to the 19,655 servants reported as living-in in 1841 (8.4% of the population). Using the evidence about relation to head of household is, then, a more reliable way of producing a count that is consistent with the earlier definition. On the other hand, the declining proportion of the population residing as domestic servants means that this ratio is perhaps in later periods a less satisfactory indicator of social status.

One alternative is to follow the contemporary work of David Chart, who used the published volumes of the census and drew out the contours of the poorest parts of the labour market (Daly 1998, 37). Chart (1914, 160) suggested that 'at least a quarter of the adult male population of Dublin earn their subsistence by unskilled manual labour,' by which he meant 'porters, labourers, carters, messengers and the like.' The published volumes of the census give about 24,000 males over 20 in this group. My search of the individual returns yields 32,727 males of all ages returned as labourers, carmen, or porters. This is a much larger group than the group of live-in domestic servants and it is reassuring that the ranking of the areas on the basis of the concentration of poverty (the percentage of the population who fall into this group of unskilled labourers) and the classification of the twenty wards on the basis of wealth (the proportion of the population who are live-in servants) produce rank orderings that are significantly the inverse of each other (Spearman's  $\rho = -0.617$ ;  $p=0.00379$ ). Neither measure, not that of poverty nor that of wealth, show any relationship with vacancy for the later period.

In one respect, then, vacancy must be understood as a relatively permanent part of the operation of private residential rental markets. The relatively high levels in the poorer parts of Dublin at both ends of the 1840s perhaps suggests that the dereliction that Whitelaw noted at the end of the eighteenth century continued to make a significant contribution to vacancy, leaving some structures in poorer districts beyond use even during the most intense of housing crises. On the other hand, it is also possible that at any one time, people managed the impossible demands upon limited budgets by flitting as arrears accumulated so that rooms

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<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Martin Charlton for advice and assistance in managing this large file.

were temporarily vacated as a direct consequence of poverty. In 1879, in a paper on the inequity of the contemporary system of rating Dublin property for local taxes, Murrrough O'Brien (1879, 408) remarked upon the particular burden felt by the owners of small property whose rental income was prejudiced by 'the losses arising from such houses being vacant, or from defaulting tenants.' Let me turn, now, from this banal vacancy to the more spectacular vacancy produced by the redundancy of institutions or of manufacturing.

### Redundant Spaces

Both the causes and the consequences of vacancy raise questions about how usefulness is determined. Anderson, Duncan and Hudson (1983b) have written of redundant spaces, sites that have been abandoned by public and private investment and remain as concentrations of unemployment and poverty. They argued that this geography of distressed areas must be understood as a direct consequence of the uneven development intrinsic to capitalism. Anderson, Duncan and Hudson were particularly concerned with the consequences of de-industrialisation in Britain in the 1980s. Something similar happened in Ireland in the early-nineteenth-century and it left a number of vacant manufacturing spaces, as in north Dublin, just beyond the north end of Capel Street, about half-a-mile west-north-west of Granby Park, where the 25-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey map of 1906-9, indicates a large complex of buildings annotated 'Linen Hall Bks. (Disused).' The transition from Linen Hall to Military Barracks, and then once again to emptiness, provides two example of redundancy and their relation suggests something further about the specific contexts of redundancy in nineteenth-century Dublin.

There is a debate about the causes of the collapse of Irish textiles but none about its severity. The decline began early in the century, but its later stages may be traced in the occupational data from the censuses of 1831 and 1851, which show that over those two decades there was a decline of 41.6% in Irish textile employment (Geary 1998, 516). To this day the area of the former Linen Hall has a Linenhall Parade, Linenhall Terrace, Linenhall Street and Yarnhall Street. Recalling the concentration of the linen industry in the north of Ireland, there is also Lurgan Street, Coleraine Street and Lisburn Street; and at one time there was also a Derry Street. A magnificent three-storey building once stood facing Linenhall Street and had been framed by Lurgan, Coleraine, Lisburn and Derry Streets.<sup>9</sup> Erected in 1728 as a place for the sale of linen and for the Linen Board to meet, the Linen Hall complex, as described in one newspaper report (itself occasioned by a royal visit): 'occup[ied] an area of little less than two acres and a half; the Linen Hall contain[ed] 479 rooms, and the Yarn Hall 67' (*Belfast Newsletter* 1821, 4b). After a Belfast Linen Hall was established in 1783, and when the parliamentary grant to the Dublin Linen Board was discontinued in 1827, the Dublin Linen Hall became a classic example of a redundant space (Lloyd Patterson 1907, 122). On his Irish trip of 1842, William Makepeace Thackeray (1843, 475) visited 'the

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<sup>9</sup> The Linen Hall is shown to good effect on Wilson (1798).

Linen Hall of Dublin – that huge, useless, lonely, decayed place.’

This large empty space had a number of subsequent uses. In Europe’s revolutionary summer of 1848, the *Freeman’s Journal* reported that the British government went scavenging through Dublin to find places for housing troops lately brought in from Britain: ‘It was stated yesterday (but we do not give it as positive) that the Tailors’ Hall, Back lane, the Tenters’ in Love lane, and the Weavers’ Hall, Coombe, are to be taken as barracks. These buildings are in a very dilapidated state, and will require a considerable outlay to repair them’ (*Freeman’s Journal* 1848). Even by virtue of their names, each of these redundant spaces bears witness to the general collapse of Irish textiles. In the event, at this time, the vast Linen Hall was chosen, ‘fitted up by the Board of Ordnance at a cost of 4,500*l.*,’ and made ready for at least 1,200 soldiers (*Nation* 1848). During the cholera epidemic of 1848-9, part of the Linen Hall was pressed into service as a temporary hospital (Prunty 1998, 228). Thereafter it was used as a barracks for the British army, and at least by the 1860s, it included a recruiting depot. The published report on the census of 1871 gave the barracks as having 288 males, 116 females; in 1881, 81 males and 81 females; and in 1891, 67 males and 64 females (BPP 1872, 107, BPP 1881, 107, BPP 1890-91, 107). In 1901, the Linen Hall barracks was not listed as a distinct institution in the published volumes of the census, but details can be derived from unpublished census returns.<sup>10</sup> At that time, the main building housed thirty-seven families, with three rooms apiece, forty-four other military personnel, and six new recruits. Of the families, twenty-four were headed by married officers, in the main from the Fourth Brigade of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. A ceremonial emphasis is indicated by the preponderance of trumpeters and drummers among the military and this was probably related to the fact that by then the barracks’ main purpose was as the ‘Dublin Recruiting Depot.’ This temporary function was later immortalised in song:

You know the Dublin Fusiliers, the dirty old bamboozleers,  
They went and got the childer, one, two, three.  
Marching from the Linen Hall, there’s one for every cannonball  
And Vicky’s going to send you’s all o’er the sea  
(Hodnett 1958).

After its indication on the 1906-9 O.S. map, ‘Linen Hall Bks. (Disused),’ there was no mention of a military barracks at the Linen Hall in the census of 1911. In July and August of 1914 the premises were used for a large Civic Exhibition and one newspaper report assured the public that the ‘buildings still retain a considerable degree of their pristine splendor’ and that, while ‘[t]he Linen Hall was not in the best state of repair when the Executive Committee decided to hold the exhibition there, [...] in a short space it has been completely transformed as regards appearance, and its recently deserted chambers and galleries resound with

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<sup>10</sup> There are three surviving Forms H (‘Return of Military, R.I. Constabulary or Metropolitan Police, in Barracks’) for the Linenhall Barracks, and one of these is headed, ‘Recruiting Depot.’ Accessed on 1 September at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003689014/>

the bustle of business, gaiety and pleasure' (*Irish Examiner* 1914, 8a, Bannon 1978). The area given over to the agricultural displays was described as an 'unpromising place,' and 'little better than a derelict waste which had been at one time a parade ground' (*Irish Examiner* 1914, 8b). This Civic Exhibition was part of a broader movement for the improvement and beautifying of Dublin. One of the proposals for Dublin came from Charles Ashbee and George Chettle's *New Dublin: A study in Civics*, who proposed enhancing 'the civic outfit of the city in the matter of public buildings,' by among other things, refitting 'the Linen Hall as a "People's Palace"' (Bannon 1999, 160).<sup>11</sup>

During the rebellion of 1916, and in his first dispatch as commander of the British forces, John Maxwell, reported that, on 27 April, the 'Linen Hall Barracks, which were occupied by the Army Pay Office, were reported to have been set on fire by the rebels and were destroyed' (*Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook* 1917, 95). In 1919, the 'walls and other parts left standing after the fire [were] levelled' (*Freeman's Journal* 1919).

This history of redundancy and adaptation is not exceptional. The third part (1756-1847) of the *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* for Dublin gives further details about the contours of redundant and improvised land uses in the city. With respect to textiles and to the places mentioned above as redundant in 1848, the former Tenters' House, in Love Lane was, in 1861, taken into use by the Carmelite order as St Joseph's Night Shelter for homeless men and women (Butler 1944, 19). From 1842, much of the Tailor's Hall in Back Lane, had been converted to an endowed school for boys (Goodbody 2014, 75). Part of the Weavers' Hall in the Coombe, had been used as a Methodist meeting house from 1825 to 1834, and another part had been an almshouse since 1796 (*ibid.*, 47, 101). The military geography of the city also shows remarkable volatility and adaptability. In addition to purpose-built barracks, both new and old, the military took over various redundant spaces, as where barracks in Essex Street were put into a former customhouse, in Ship Street and also in South Great George's Street into sets of houses taken on lease, in Shelbourne Street and also in Marlborough Street into what had been rather grand residences, in Arran Street into a former sugar house, and in Thomas Street into a former corn market house (*ibid.*, 49). Similarly, where the use of sites as barracks was given up, we find a plethora of new uses, including: a barracks in Arran Street demolished as part of a street widening scheme in 1811, one in Mary Street that gave way for an office of the Paving Board in 1818, and finally the one in Marlborough Street which was taken up in 1815, by the Catholic Church as the site for a new St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, dedicated in 1825 (*ibid.*, 49, 46).

It is notable that very many of these uses have a broadly public character. This association between vacancy and public use comes, I think, from the general belief that the public has a justifiable claim to unused resources. The City of Dublin Borough Surveyor submitted to one public inquiry a list from 1913 that included houses 'absolutely unfit and [which] ought to come down' and other 'vacant

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<sup>11</sup> People's Palaces were cultural centres established in working districts and included one in the East End of London (1887) and another in Glasgow (1898).

spaces from which the Corporation are not receiving any rates at the present time' (BPP 1914, 302). This list gave details of 1,382 buildings or sites that could be considered empty and, as the Borough Surveyor explained, these were places that 'might be regarded as suitable in one sense – I don't mean from the financial point of view – for building' (*loc. cit.*) Of these units, 142 had properties that were described as derelict or dilapidated, 660 were in complete ruin, and 560 sites were described as now without structures (*ibid.*, 321-324). Few of these properties were in public ownership but their ruinous, derelict or vacant state indicated them as 'suitable in one sense' for public or philanthropic housing.

### **The Politics of Vacancy and Dereliction**

Vacancy and dereliction raise political questions about the political economy of cities. In short, under capitalist conditions, they represent an owner withholding a resource from current use in favour of waiting for the possibility of greater profitability. With vandalism or the elements claiming a tribute of their own, leaving assets idle may see further devaluation. It is clear from the ways that empty space was discussed in nineteenth-century Dublin, that neglected properties or sites incited the conclusion that the private waste of socially useful assets was not an unlimited right of property.

In this paper, I have described three main routes to vacancy. In the first place, private owners may lose tenants and be slow to acquire new tenants, creating longer or shorter periods of vacancy. Given the wastefulness of emptiness and given the loss of visual and social amenity with concentrations of dead space, there is a collective interest in devising ways to encourage owners to make haste in finding or accepting new tenants. At any one time, emptiness of this kind was typically between five and fifteen *per cent* of units.

In the second place, changes in the social and economic base of any neighbourhood can tip certain uses into redundancy and thereby drain economic purpose away from existing commercial, industrial and even residential space. Some of these redundant spaces and brownfield sites can be quite large and they require significant investment to prepare them for different and productive use. These spaces are particularly productive of utopian dreams. Although some of the examples I have discussed here were in transition for decades at a time, some sites may be available for only a short period, yet taken together the sum of these temporary spaces constitute a large part of the city. Given the geography of the city, particular types of redundancy are clustered and at various times whole swathes of the city have been or still are ex-warehouses, or ex-workshops, or ex-docklands, or ex-welfare-institutions, or ex-military installations, or formerly religious institutions. In many cases, these shells could be made serviceable with limited expenditure, provided, that is, that no ground rent is extracted. At any one time, this could easily amount to a further five to ten *per cent* of the land area within the city.

Finally, there are those older structures that in their decrepitude no longer serve their purpose. This includes all the houses condemned as unfit or insanitary. These

are the falling-down structures that provided rubble for builders and informal gathering grounds for those unable to pay for their social spaces; children, vagrants, and the very poor among them. At any one time two to five *per cent* of buildings might be in this condition. Where there is a cluster of derelict buildings, sites are sometimes cleared and land gapes until a new round of investment. Old cemeteries can also fall into this category, particularly where their overcrowding incited public disquiet, as did a number of them in nineteenth-century Dublin. These redundant sites are those that most readily excite dreams of urban parks. Taken together, it would seem that, at any one time, perhaps something between one-eighth and one-quarter of the city is out of use. This is an evident waste as long as there could be temporary uses that would not seriously prejudice the longer-term refitting of the sites. We wrestle with this challenge today and it might be worth reflecting a little on what was proposed about a century ago.

In nineteenth-century Dublin, proposed interventions included taxation and compulsory purchase. Giving evidence to a Local Government Board inquiry into the state of Dublin housing, one Dublin socialist, Walter Carpenter recommended taxing vacancy (Yeates 2012). He argued that if empty houses were taxed at the same rate as those that were occupied, then, rents would fall and local tax collection would rise. Moreover, he noted that whereas there was no tax on unoccupied houses in the city of Dublin, there was in some of the independent suburbs:

In Pembroke and in Rathmines, both these districts put a tax on unoccupied property. The result of that is, of course, that the landlords will not stick out for a big rent. They are glad to let their houses at a reduced rate, and you very seldom see an empty house in Pembroke or in Rathmines, but in Kingstown, where they have no taxation of empty houses, you have empty houses in all directions, the same as you have in Dublin, and you have extremely high rents, because the landlords can hold out for an unlimited period, because they have nothing to pay on the houses (BPP 1914, q. 6093, 236).

There is clear merit in the contrast he drew between a suburban district without a tax upon vacancy, Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire), and the suburbs of Pembroke and of Rathmines and Rathgar where there was a tax. In 1911, some 8.3% of the houses in Kingstown were unoccupied, whereas in Pembroke, the comparable figure was 4.7% and in Rathmines and Rathgar, it was 4.3% (BPP 1912-13a, 2, BPP 1912-13b, 4). The average for the County Borough of Dublin was 5.1%. The taxing of vacancy is clearly far from novel.

Dublin currently subjects empty but fit-for-leasing commercial space to a 50% payment of rates and derelict sites may be made subject to a levy of 3% of market value. A working group, reporting to the Lord Mayor of Dublin in July 2013, recommended a vacant site levy for the city (*Memorandum to Department of Finance* 2013). A recent report from the National Economic and Social Council concluded that Ireland had a dysfunctional land market and that high land prices



were a disincentive to investment in cities (NESC 2015). The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, that came into force on 1 September 2015, imposes upon local authorities the obligation of maintaining a register of vacant sites, and, from 2018, of imposing as a tax an annual 3% levy upon the value of the land (*Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, Part 2*).

This could be a significant intervention in urban land markets, depending in part upon how the existing indebtedness of owners and the negative equity attaching to any property is treated. In response to Carpenter's suggestion that Dublin follow the practice of Pembroke and of Rathmines and Rathgar, another witness, Ernest Aston, a founder member of the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland (1911), agreed with the Chair of the Inquiry that this would be 'penalising the owner' and proposed instead that a rateable contribution of £2 per annum would be a suitable levy (BPP 1914, q. 6234, 244). This would more or less eliminate altogether the incentive to accept lower rents for continued use, and shows how the principle of a measure can be devalued by the details of its implementation.

The discussion of vacant or derelict spaces as potential public parks or as the sites for public or philanthropic housing raised other questions about the relations between use and exchange values. In this case, the vacant spaces invited a broader speculation about what purposes might be socially desirable. As illustrated by the discussion of vacant space in nineteenth-century Dublin, there will always be some people who will find offensive the juxtaposition of waste alongside evident need. This, of course, is precisely the challenge that Upstart posed with their Pop-Up park. Dublin's poorer residents deserve secure housing, and need more salubrious green spaces. For a month, Granby Park animated a neighbourhood by asserting a collective and public right over an unused resource. There is a strong relationship between vacancy and alternative visions or urban futures (Pixová 2013). Interventions such as Granby Park re-animate long-standing debates about the contradiction between use- and exchange-values in the city.

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