

Dublin Slums, 1800-1925: A Study in Urban Geography. By Jacinta Prunty. Pp xvii, 366, maps, illus. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 1997; reprint, 1999. IR£39.50 hardback; IR£22.50 paperback.

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This study of the development of the Dublin slums over a period of a century and a quarter investigates the interrelated themes of public health, housing and poverty, as well as the reaction thereto by central and local government, religious denominations and private charities. The study involves in-depth analysis of several issues: early nineteenth-century mortality trends and their impact on contemporary opinion; attempted sanitary improvements from the early nineteenth century onwards; faltering steps into the provision of public authority housing after the enabling legislation of the late 1870s; slum 'clearance' and its social and environmental effects; the role of denominational competition in the progressive amelioration of the lot of slum-dwellers; social analysis of both the practitioners and the recipients of private charity; and changing attitudes to the slum question on the part of both central and local government. Considerable attention is paid to the process whereby, on the heels of de-industrialisation from the late seventeenth century onwards, the prosperous classes moved to the growing suburbs, leaving whole reaches of Dublin city to decay into tenement zones. The city's poor and those fleeing rural deprivation moved into in-fill housing in the back gardens and stable lanes attached to former grandee houses or into one-room accommodation in rapidly demoted genteel streets like the appropriately named Fade Street. The inexorable progress of such conditions through the city over the course of the nineteenth century resulted in 25,000 individuals - 35 per cent of the city's population - living in slum conditions by the eve of the First World War.

The sources for this study range through government reports (central and local), valuations, maps, photographs, trade directories, diocesan records, papers of charitable organisations and newspaper evidence. All this makes for a very extended study of over 340 pages. This length has its negative and repetition, particularly between chapter and the previous chapters, while a considerable poor law and available in other published sources) or omitted. On the other hand, the wealth of early valuable research instrument in its own shows just how much flesh can be put on the records by a skilful historical geographer and particularly evident in the series of maps which provide a model for other historians and chart the growth or decline of other Irish urban learned a great deal from the way in which painstaking and insightful mapping - a beneficial geographer to the social historian. In particular, Dublin (already mentioned) is an example of very best, providing a possible model for other of housing, public health and urban growth and decay.

If the social historian does have a quibble about Dr Prunty's own admission that the sources used slum problem from outside - i.e. from the vantage-corporation investigations and the records of testimony can only be useful for the later chronological it is difficult to suggest how this imbalance might that there should have been more recourse sources. The writings of O'Casey, though coming might have been tapped for some inside view of and early twentieth centuries. Similarly, newspaper heckling at public meetings could throw some self-perceptions of those classes who were more than witnesses in their own right.

Dublin slums is a particularly reader-friendly accessible; links are clearly formed between plates; and the use of footnotes rather than elusive endnotes makes checking of sources easy for the research-conscious reader. the book is, however, frustrating. A comprehensive bibliography is provided, but there is no corresponding list of primary material, through footnotes in attempting to build up a composite picture of primary sources.

All in all, Dr Prunty's study is a work which will be welcomed by geographers and historians alike. It gives a comprehensive and insightful account and analysis of Dublin's inexorable transformation into a slum city, it provides a template for researchers in Irish urban history; and it awakens social historians to what they have to learn from the historical geographers.