'Regulating the Settlers, and Establishing Industry'

Planning Intentions for a Nineteenth-Century Scottish Estate Village

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There was rural distress in southern Scotland toward the end of the eighteenth century, yet little attention was given to living conditions in the urban places to which rural people were being forced to migrate for employment. Among the enlightened well-to-do, a general responsibility was felt for the standard of living achievable by the common man. This responsibility was expressed in speculations about the amenities of life to which a labourer might properly aspire, and about the best means by which he might be dissuaded from the degradation of the lower classes. Another expression was in various ventures, usually associated with estate improvement, to provide better living places for labourers and artisans along roads and in villages.

The Rev. Robert Rennie in an engaging essay in 1803 sets out to explain

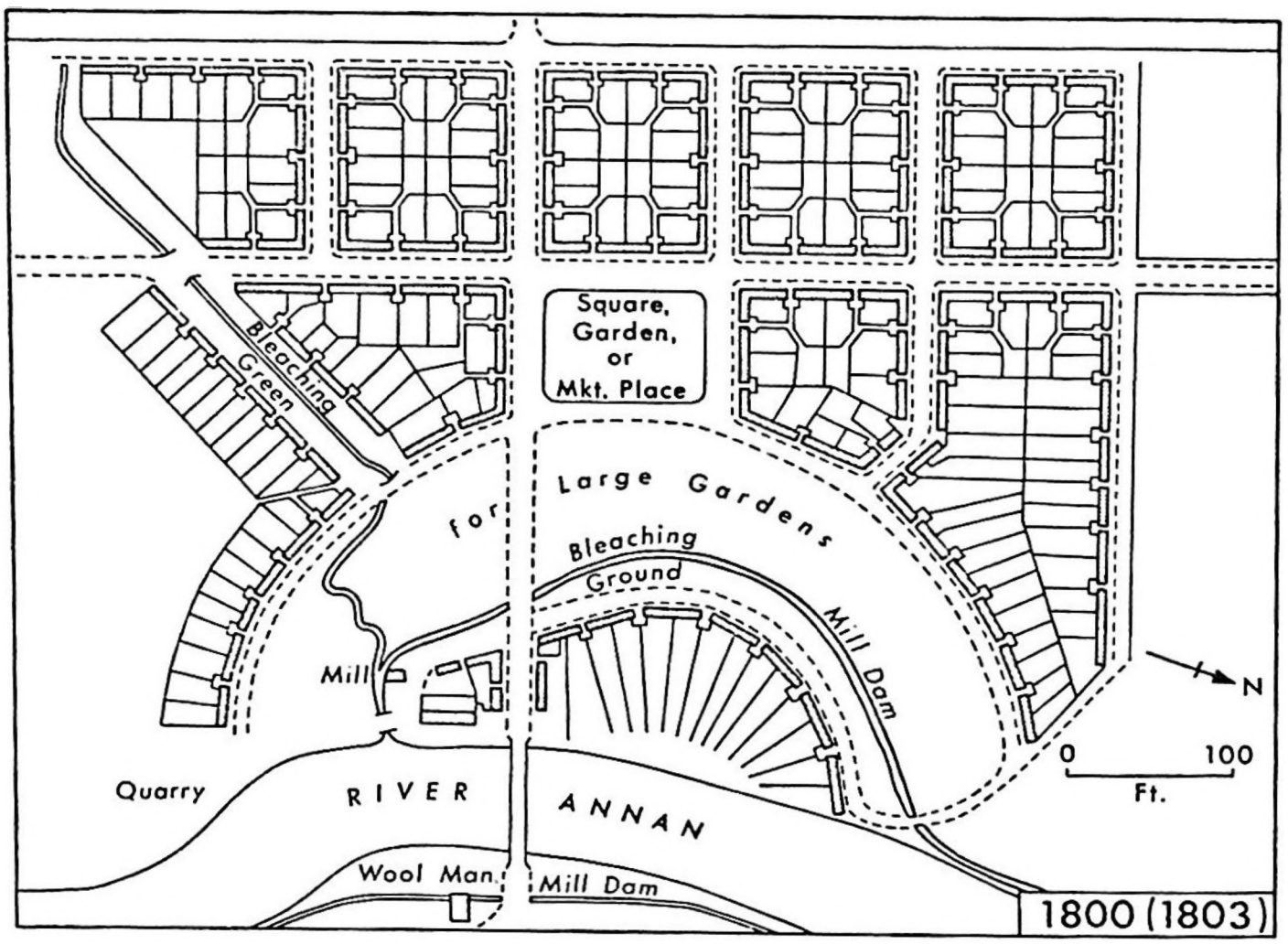
> . . . the most eligible and expedient conditions of feus and leases, directions for building the houses in a substantial manner, for regulating the settlers, and establishing industry among them.

He concludes (in a summary provided by the editor) by noting that

> . . . manufactures, amidst the many advantages which they afford, are liable to one great inconvenience, in a moral view, the production of dissipation and vice among the inhabitants. To remedy, or rather to prevent this evil, he recommends more attention than is commonly paid, to the education of the children, to the encouragement of industry and temperance in the youth, and to the checking and preventing licentiousness and immorality in the more advanced among the manufacturers. (Rennie 1803:250, 265)

There were some practical attempts to apply planning to Scottish towns and villages. Houston has found 150 distinct settlements which were established in the century following 1745 (Houston 1948:129–32). A relatively early example of broadly-based village planning in southern Scotland is to be found in Bridekirk.[1] It was a creation of the local 'improving landlord', Alexander Dirom, who designed the village to enhance the value of his estate (Mt. Annan) in lower Annandale (for locations, see Fig. 3).

This article argues, however, that there were non-economic judgments, the origins



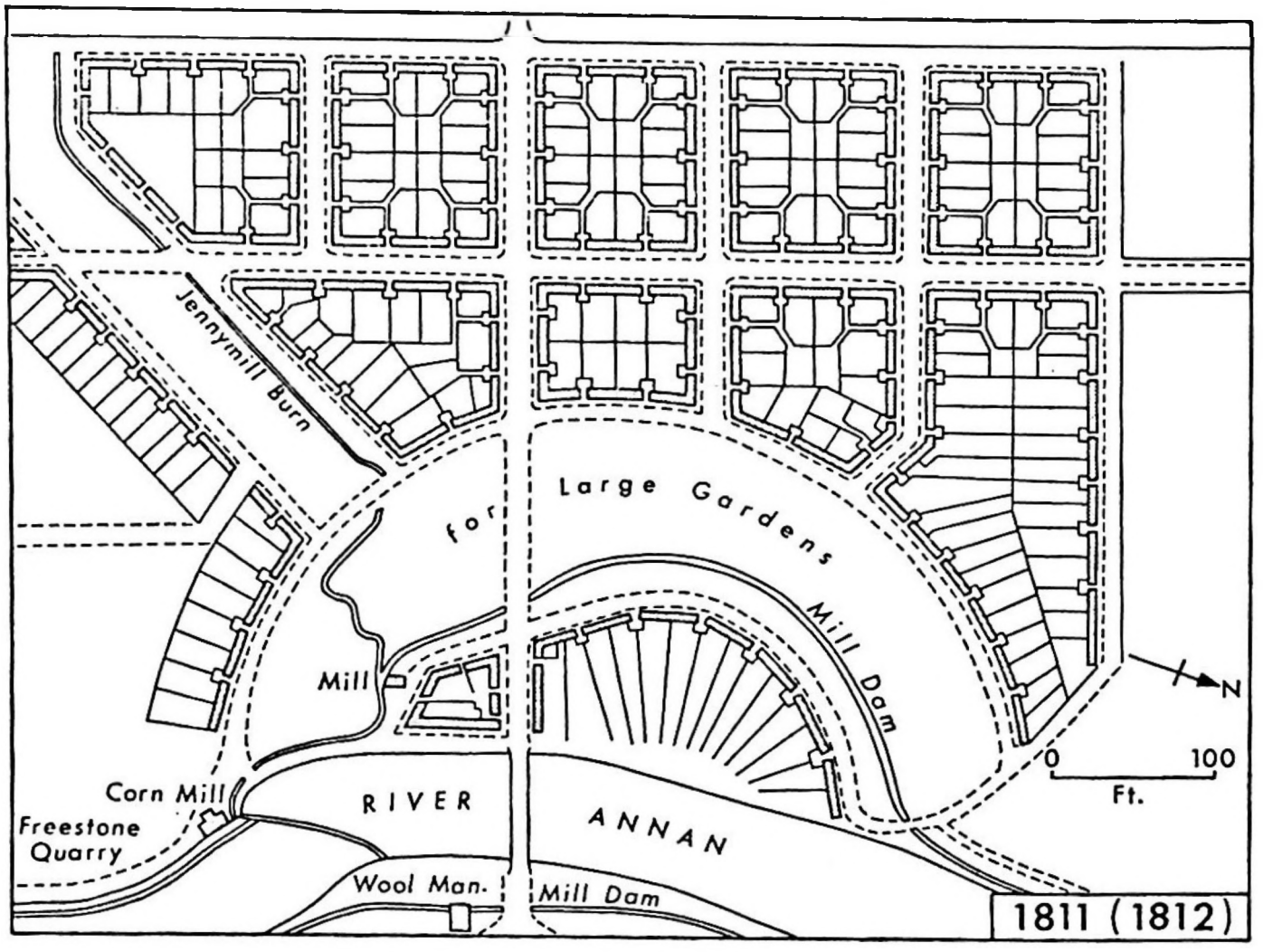
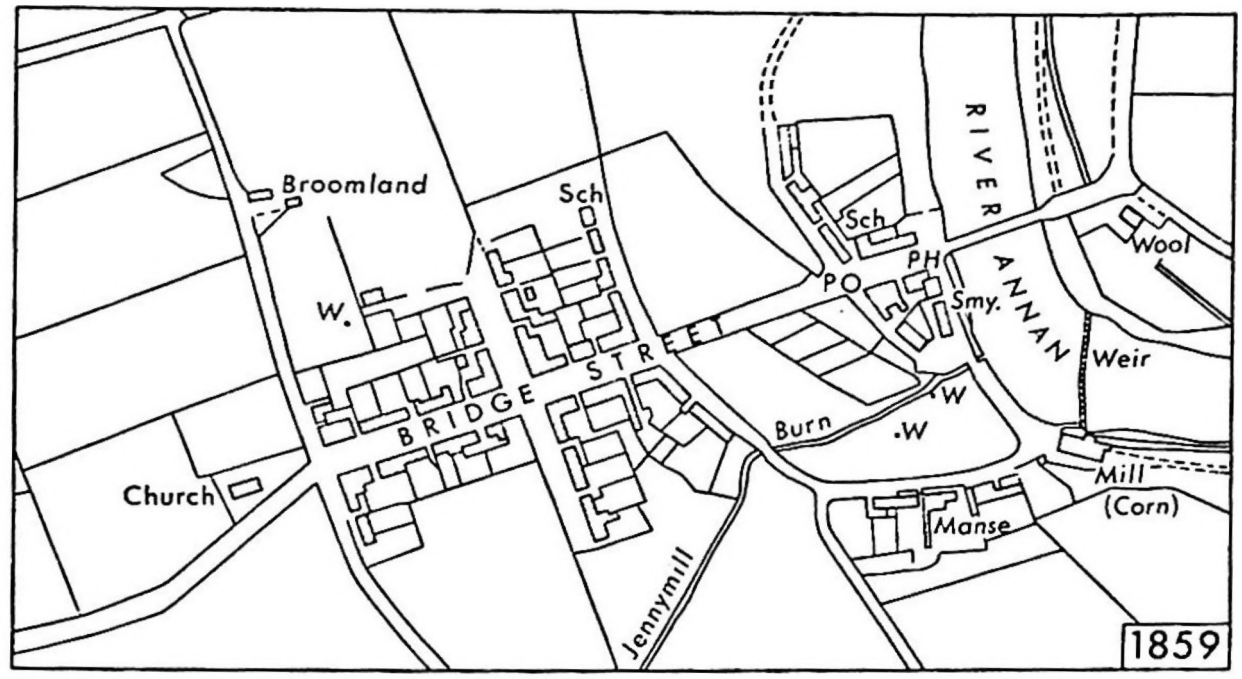


FIG. 1 The landlord's plans for Bridekirk in 1800 and 1811.



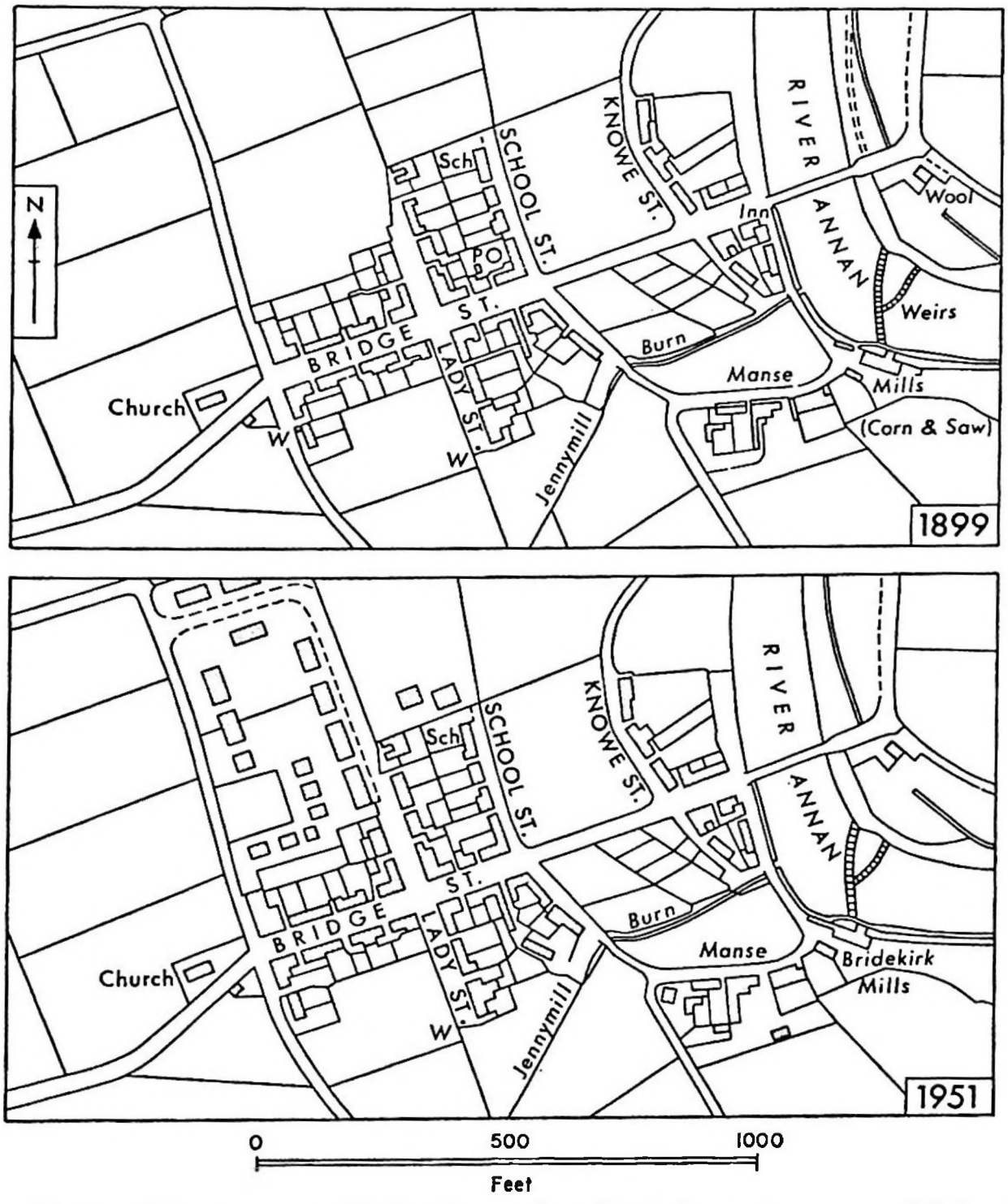


FIG. 2 The actual development of Bridekirk, as indicated in Ordnance Survey maps (*cf.* Fig. 1, in which North is at right side).

of which the landlord may not have been aware of, involved in the setting up of Bridekirk. Such judgments were probably representative of most of the paternalistic village developments of that era in Scotland.

The Career of Bridekirk, Dumfriesshire

(A) The bases for the establishment

The village was begun in 1800, according to the published plan. It is unlikely, however, that many dwellings were constructed until the next year when the factory for woollens was built on the east side of the river. The plan is re-drawn in Figure 1, in both the 1803 and 1812 versions, and also in versions from the Ordnance Survey map editions of 1859, 1899, and 1951 (Fig. 2). In the last, local authority houses appear at the northwest corner of the village.

On what bases did the initiator expect his village to survive? Why was it to be planned rather than to be the more casual kind of outgrowth common in rural areas? Dirom's avowed reasons for creating the village were presented in his report to the agricultural survey of 1812:

> The new [Langholm-Dumfries] road, besides enabling me to open the lime-works . . . has afforded an opportunity for my establishing a village near Bridekirk, on the west side of the river, at the end of the new bridge over the Annan. The river, being large and rapid, affords falls and power capable of turning any weight of machinery; and I have it in view to give encouragement to manufacturers, to whom such a situation is an important object. A woollen manufactory . . . has been established . . . . On the opposite side of the river a situation is feued for corn-mills . . . . the great advantage to be derived from such an establishment is the increased value that lands acquire from having a number of industrious people settled in the heart of an estate. (Dirom 1812:595)

Dirom saw the village as a good business proposition in the improvement of his estate. He expected that under his direction it would survive and prosper chiefly on the strength of water-powered industries, some of which would process rural products. Concomitantly, rents would rise, a labour pool would form, and an agricultural market would grow. It gave the estate economy a broader base in encouraging the settling of varied types of artisan and in abetting the exploitation of limestone in nearby Brownmoor through housing some of the labourers. (See the map of place names, Fig. 3.)

There were other stipulations, however, reminiscent of earlier burghs' regulations, which Dirom the patron placed on his village:

> Each person who feus a house-stead is obliged to build with stone and lime, according to a regular plan . . ., and the whole of the buildings are covered with slate. The feuers are also bound to make a common sewer . . .. No person is allowed to sell liquor of any kind without my permission; nor can any shop or chandlery, tannery, or other work, that might be considered as a nuisance, be set up or built, unless in places allotted for these purposes; and,

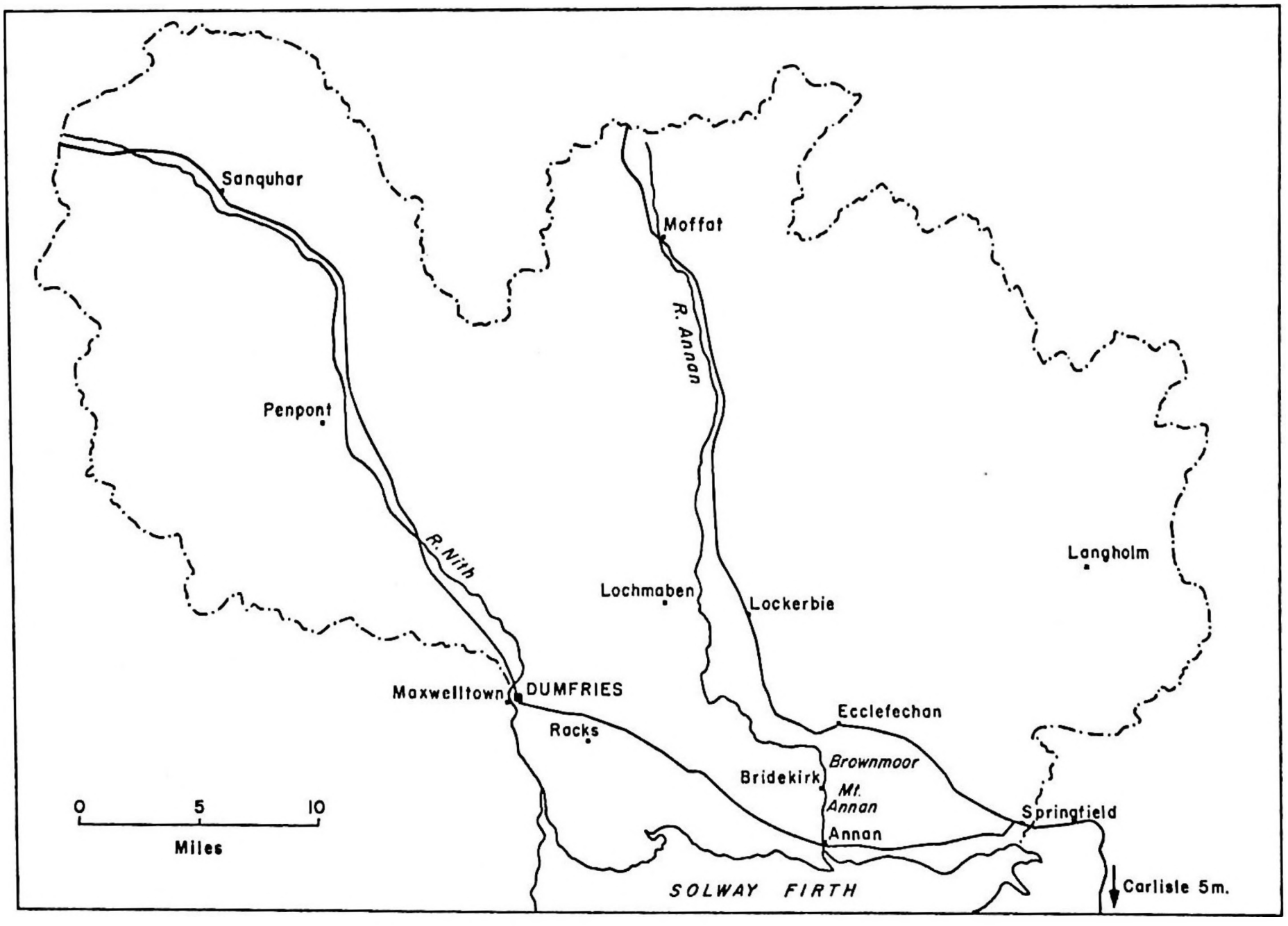


FIG. 3 Dumfriesshire: map of places named in the text.

> to prevent all interference on the part of the feuers, I reserve to myself full liberty to make such alterations as may appear to me or my successors to be proper in the plan of the village. These regulations are the best security against having vagabonds in such a place . . ..
> (Dirom 1912:595, 596; 1803:269)

In an attempt to discover the founder's major motives, let us examine how precisely he had prepared the plan of his village. A count of houses on the 1803 plan (valid for 1800) reveals that he anticipated an eventual population of approximately 1,200 (at an average of 6 per household).[2] This coincides with his expectations for manufacturing: the woollen manufacturing and corn mills used less than half the available water power, so that Dirom foresaw at least a doubling of the power-using enterprises, augmented by others like the quarrying of building stone at Bridekirk and of limestone at Brownmoor.

If we accept that his notions of size would have been based on places with which he was familiar, then we might expect to discover some near-prototypes in Dumfriesshire or among places like Hawick and Galashiels to which he made reference in 1803. About the year 1800 there were only three villages in Dumfriesshire that came close to 1200. They were Sanquhar (*c.* 1050 with Crawick), Moffat (*c.* 1200) and Annan (*c.* 1700); but let us add the county town, Dumfries (*c.* 5000), as a major part of the context within which Bridekirk was conceived. It is relevant to determine whether or not there was a characteristic selection of functions performed by the places on which Bridekirk is likely to have been modelled. It is obvious in retrospect that all these models were prospering central places; they all fulfilled certain needs for their hinterlands in such a way that they were the most promising locations for new functions, and thus they virtually precluded the development of nearby rival centres. The accompanying table reveals the functions, roughly in order of centralising importance, embraced by these four places about the year 1800.

An additional reflection can be gained from a consideration of Galashiels (*c.* 1000) and Hawick (*c.* 2800 with Wilton). Both these centres had markets and fairs, both were foci for local and extra-regional routes, although Galashiels did not have a postal service in the 1790s. These two centres were well-known for their vigorous and successful development of woollen manufacturing, and they provided the range of services noted in the table under the three categories.

The weekly markets noted below occurred on regular days and were the occasions for the transport of not only the farm produce but also the farm folk to the centres. The fairs were a highlight in the agricultural calendar and brought great crowds of rural people together, and with the weekly markets they probably served as the most effective centralising mechanism. There was a cluster of functions under the heading 'route meeting and entrepot point', which included hostelry, stagecoach depots, and postal assembly and distribution. Each of the places listed was the focus for at least five public roads (somewhat diffuse at Sanquhar) all of which served as local arteries but also as links with other districts.

The functional dissection below can suggest a set of characteristics essential to the success of urban nuclei (apart from mining and resort centres) in southern Scotland at the opening of the nineteenth century. The functions common to all six centres

TABLE I

Central Functions of the Large Urban Places in Dumfriesshire, 1800

Function	*Sanquhar*	*Moffat*	*Annan*	*Dumfries*
Weekly market	yes	yes	yes	yes
Major fairs per year	four	four	two	various
Route meeting and entrepot (including post)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Primary Industry	mining	—	fishing	fishing (minor)
Manufacturing	woollen cotton flour & meal	woollen cotton(?) flour & meal	cotton woollen(?) flour & meal	various
Services:				
Professional (medical, legal, educational, religious)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Trades (joinery, masonry, blacksmithing, etc.)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outfitting (Clothing, tailoring, house furn.)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Other	—	health resort	port	port

(Galashiels partially excepted), *i.e.* the minimum set displayed by the kind of nucleus in Dirom's mind when he conceived of Bridekirk, were as follows:

1 Weeklv farm market and two or more annual fairs (Annan from *c.* 1808) (Little, 1853:32).
2 An important confluence of routes, with related stage and postal activities.
3 Manufacturing, especially woollen or cotton and grain milling.
4 A cluster of services, including professional, trades, and outfitting.

It is apparent that Dirom was partially familiar with the available prototypes. The functions he expected of Bridekirk are indicated on the plan (Fig. 1). In the version of 1803 they were an agricultural market, woollen manufacturing and grist milling (both based on water power), a limited amount of quarrying, and the services of artisans whom he intended to attract to the village. Bridekirk had one 'extra' in the quarrying (comparable to Sanquhar's coal mining and perhaps Annan's fishing). The deficiencies, however, are more remarkable: there was no important route confluence, although Dirom had high hopes for the new east-west road that crossed the River Annan at the village; there were few assured services, and notably there was a lack of a church, of medical and legal practitioners, of a school, and of outfitters of any kind. On the other hand, Annan could satisfy these deficiencies; it was only three miles away, close enough for Dirom not to have included a church in his plan. Annan was an effective route focus in the middle maritime parishes: it was the central place that would preclude the development of nearby rival centres. The established church and a parish school were located in Bridekirk in the next generation, but the other kinds of services were not introduced. In fact, by the 1812 plan (valid for 1811), the market place had been removed in favour of more housing. (See the account of the progress of the village, below.) The water power which was to foster the growth of manufacturing was being superseded in Britain, especially for ambitious developments, even before the conception of Bridekirk. (*Cf.* Cruickshank 1965: 247).

Our conclusion at this point must be that in effect Dirom had laid the foundations for only a minor village, and not for the size of place suggested by his published plans. He had not done an intensive investigation into the planning of his village as either a manufacturing or service centre, except in terms of the regulation of residents. He had a glimmering, as an owner of land and capital, of what were the crucial characteristics of a successful town in an agricultural hinterland, and of course such a successful establishment would be an adornment to his career. It seems likely, however, that in common with most of his contemporaries who cared to make statements (*e.g.* Rennie 1803), he was more concerned with what he thought *should be*, rather than what actually were, the characteristics. A pervading motive, not identified by Dirom but probably the most fundamental one, was a profound desire for orderliness. Above all, orderliness was what should be. In town and village planning during the first half of the nineteenth century in Scotland, the heritors were still the predominant initiators,

and it is not surprising that the planning aims they espoused were antidotes to the ambiguous but threatening instability they could sense in the social changes of the period.

(*B*) *The Village site and plan*

Bridekirk was designed for cleanliness and openness, in keeping with the moral and economic expectations for it.

> The plan of my village . . . is varied to suit the shape of the ground; and the offices are meant to be built immediately behind the houses, to which there is access by a common entry between them, of nine feet wide. These offices will be in all respects so convenient, that there can be no pretense for throwing ashes into the street, or for leaving empty carts there even for an hour, it being equally easy to take them into the courtyard . . . . The feuers should be bound to build a common sewer through their property, and to pave ten feet wide, from the side of their houses, with a gutter between the pavement and the public street or road . . .. In order to form a fund for making small improvements in the village, every property should pay from one to five shillings a year according to its size, to be laid out for such purposes as may appear to the proprietor, his baron bailie, or factor, to be most essential for the advantage of the village. (Dirom 1803:268–9)

The shape of the ground to which the plan was suited was that of a steady rise, from the river bank, toward the west. The rise folded around the south end of the site, coming down to the river fairly steeply a few feet downstream from the quarry and weir. Each of the radial streets of the plan extended up a gradual slope, while the concentric streets were nearly level. The site was approximately bounded on its upper side

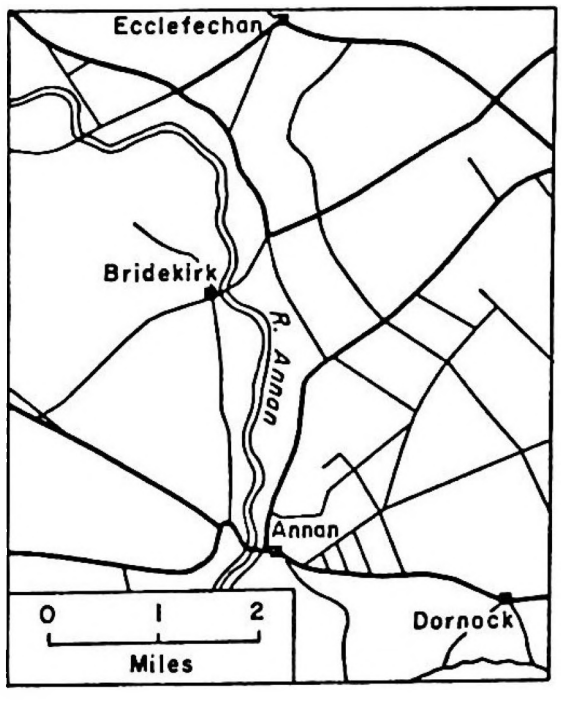


FIG. 4 The roads open to the public in the vicinity of Bridekirk, *c.* 1802 (after Crawford 1804).

by the 100-ft. contour and on its lower side by the river bank, which was a little less than 50 ft. above sea level.

The vital accessibility of the village was to be provided by the east-west turnpike road, the financing of which Dirom organised in the 1790s. He claimed that it was the shorter and more level route between Langholm and Dumfries. The road bisected the village and crossed the river over the substantial, government-financed bridge. The more relevant point, however, is that there was only this one direct road link with the outside world, and the village was three miles from both the major Glasgow-Carlisle and Dumfries-Carlisle roads. As the village took shape, the role of the road became manifest. The spread of the village to north and south, as depicted in the 1800 and 1811 plans, was unfulfilled, and a spread east and west on both sides of the Langholm-Dumfries road provided the predominant shape of the village (*cf.* Figs. 1, 2, and 4).

The plan itself was characteristic of the tradition that had grown up not so much in urban development but in estate planning. Unlike many estates, however, the focus was not to be on the estate house. In the fitting of concentric streets to the site, this proposal was more imaginative than the common attempts to fit a gridiron to a somewhat unamenable site. In this way it was superior to plans like the 'four-square' one proposed by Rennie in the 1803 Transactions of the Highland Society, and to others actually employed in 'planned towns', like Springfield and Racks in Dumfriesshire, Ballater in Aberdeenshire, and Fochabers in Morayshire (*cf.* Houston 1948:130; Walton 1963:95–7). Rennie was unequivocal:

> When I say the figure should be *regular*, I mean that the streets should not only be straight lines, but in length and breadth bear a stated proportion to one another; that the buildings should be as uniform . . . as possible . . . . The figure that naturally presents itself . . . is that of the cross. The common sense of mankind has almost universally fixed upon this. And common sense, if not biassed, will ever point to the common interest.
>
> (Rennie 1803:254, 255)

Rennie was echoing some common attitudes. Dirom's most significant divergence was at this point: he had a feeling for the site which may well have been nurtured by an interest in the laying out of grand gardens. His knowledge of Edinburgh's New Town and his travels south through England and on the Continent could have provided stimulating ingredients to be adapted to his Annandale improvement (*cf.* Abercrombie 1943:64–7; Hughes and Lamborn 1923: esp. Ch. II; Lanchester 1925: esp. Chs. V and VI). Through the geometrical form of the Bridekirk plan, however, Dirom was in the same tradition as Rennie: it was another expression of the desire for orderliness. The village was an ambitious example of estate planning which would have been fully as appropriate to the eighteenth century.

(C) *Bridekirk through Five Generations*

One test of the perspicacity of the village plan would be found in the growth of the village. Rapidly growing urban centres in the early nineteenth century were

doubling their populations in two to three decades. Glasgow and Aberdeen approximately doubled in twenty-five years (from 1800). Industrial towns, like Paisley and Greenock, doubled—and Dundee tripled—between the early 1820s and the 1860s. In Dumfriesshire, the county town (with Maxwelltown) doubled between 1810 and 1860, and what is most significant for Bridekirk, Annan doubled its population during the twenty-five years following the founding of Bridekirk. Meanwhile, ten miles to the north, Lockerbie on the Carlisle-Glasgow road doubled in size between the 1790s and the 1830s.

Bridekirk, by comparison, displayed restrained growth. It grew to 250 by 1811, about 400 by the mid-1830s and then began to diminish, to 360 by 1861, 309 by 1881, and 340 by 1901 when it was listed separately for the last time. It apparently never doubled its population after the influx of its first ten years. Bridekirk underwent population changes that were comparable to those centres primarily serving depopulating agricultural hinterlands. This was especially true of the last half of the nineteenth century when, between 1861 and 1901, Lochmaben decreased from 1544 to 1051, Ecclefechan from 884 to 785, and Penpont from 494 to 383. This was the opposite trend to that of Dumfries (8,626 to 14,441) and Annan (4,620 to 5,812). Bridekirk's status among the burghs and villages of Dumfriesshire, however, remained the same during the half-century (seventeenth).

The commercial composition of Bridekirk is reflected in *Pigot and Company's National Commercial Directory* (1837:345–7) published at the time of the village's peak population. Bridekirk is linked, significantly, with Annan, and the village has entries under fifteen of the fifty-two standard headings employed by the directory.

> Bridekirk is a modern village, 3 miles north of Annan, situated on the west bank of the Annan River. The extent of the parish is about five miles long by three miles broad, the whole of which is cultivated. It is a new formed parish . . . (*op. cit.*:346)

The intent of the quotation is that Bridekirk's role was to serve a small, prosperous, agricultural area. The headings under which Bridekirk is noted, and the number of entries under each, were: Clergy 1, Blacksmiths 2, Boot and Shoe Maker 4, Clog Makers 2, Coopers 1, Grocers and Spirit Dealers 3, Joiners and Carpenters 3, Masons and Builders 4, Millers 1, Tailors 1, Vintners 1, Miscellaneous 1 (flax dresser), Places of Worship (see Clergy) 1.

Annan was represented under most of Pigot's fifty-two headings, and Lockerbie was represented under half of them. The latter town was less than ten miles north of Bridekirk and by way of comparison, it had (for a population less than four times as great) four times as many bakers, blacksmiths, and millers, three times as many joiners and masons, twice as many shoemakers, one more clogger, but six times as many grocers, and thirteen times as many tailors. Lockerbie had, in addition, other services unknown to Bridekirk, like physicians (5), Writers to the Signet (5), watchmakers (3). Even early in the nineteenth century, it would have been wise to ask what were the

dimensions of the market areas of places like Lockerbie and Annan. Another relevant question would have been, what needs did Bridekirk have to satisfy in order for it to become a going concern; or, in modern terminology, what were the threshold requirements of the functions essential to the prosperity of a sizeable central place in a predominantly agricultural setting?[3]

The foregoing questions apparently were not asked by Dirom. Bridekirk never delineated a hinterland for itself. The 'urban network' metamorphosed to a different scale before Bridekirk became well-established, and as a result the village never had a place in the network. Bridekirk's functions were too often usurped by Annan and, somewhat less, by Lockerbie. The expectations for Bridekirk as even a medium-sized manufacturing and/or service centre were ill-founded. It was in the wrong location for the latter, and its power source was too outmoded for the former. Bridekirk as a village faded from the census after 1901 and as a registration district after 1931.

The remaining thread in the story had to do with the people who Dirom predicted would find in Bridekirk an alternative to emigration. It is impossible to identify these people, but it seems likely that they were almost as aware of the winds of change as were the landlords. The numerous individuals becoming redundant to agriculture in the early decades of the ninteenth century were looking not for a short-term solution to their dilemma, but for a solution that promised a long-term improvement in well-being for themselves and their families. Bridekirk did not promise such an improvement but rather a number of restrictions on flexibility.

Reflections on Bridekirk and its Planning

Bridekirk offered a pleasant form of urban living in a small nucleus. It was aesthetically satisfying and for its residents it was certainly a more convenient environment than the majority of the haphazard agricultural hamlets which were its contemporaries at the beginning of the century. In the latter respect it was comparable to a number of other idealistic creations of its era which were designed for visual and social symmetry. Bridekirk does not represent planning, however, such as has been forced on us by the social turmoil of the nineteenth century. It was not planning for the masses, and therefore it was not part of the tradition that has led to the present commitment to planning as a necessity for the survival of our civilisation.[4] Bridekirk is seen more properly as a part of the old order, a relic that had little relevance to the industrial and concomitant social change of the nineteenth century.

The functions designed for Bridekirk were an incomplete copy of those generally found in urban places that were going concerns, whether they were mainly manufacturing or mainly service centres. Indeed, Dirom's awareness of urban functioning was incomplete. The priorities for Dirom, however, were not the same priorities that we might wish to impose from our vantage point. He wanted orderliness and prosperity without soot and noise, and in this respect he was probably representative of estate

owners. His scheme was pre-Christaller and Lösch (central place hierarchy), and even pre-Von Thünen and the intellectual climate of which these analytical proposals are symptoms. Efficient regional or even central place planning were not especially relevant to Dirom's scheme; as a result, Bridekirk rather quickly became 'irrelevant' as water-power was superseded and as the network of urban organisation became more extensive. The village was left as a reminder of a landlord's hobby.

NOTES

1 The modern spelling of 'Brydekirk' dates from the 1830s when a parish of that name was established. *Cf.* alternating uses in *New Statistical Account* (1837). Pigot (1837) retains the older spelling.

2 This calculation is based on the fine report from the Minister of Ruthwell to the *New Statistical Account*: in 1824 the average family size was between five and six. Ruthwell was an agricultural parish five miles west of Bridekirk.

3 A standard 'central place' reference is Berry, B. J. L., *Geography of Market Centers & Retail Distribution*, Englewood Cliffs, 1967. A very lucid statement is found in Marshall, J. U., *The Location of Service Towns*, Toronto, 1969.

4 *N.B.* the *Transactions, Town Planning Conference, London, 10–15 October 1910.* The Royal Institute of British Architects, London, 1911; esp. sections IV & VII. Also Choay, F., *Modern Cities: Planning in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1969, a stimulating assessment which, from a different tangent, highlights the argument made here.

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