

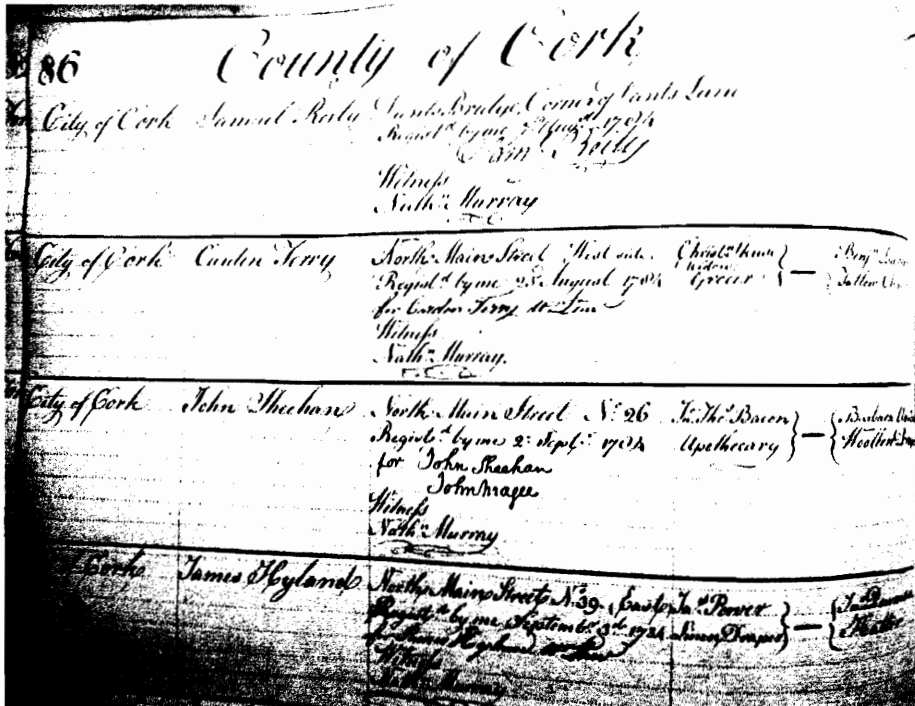
Fighting for a ‘small provincial establishment’: the Cork goldsmiths and their quest for a local assay office

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IN 1782 CARDEN TERRY (1742–1821), one of Cork’s leading goldsmiths (plate 2),¹ advertised that he had just returned from London ‘and different parts of England’ and had stocked his shop with ‘the largest and most elegant assortment of plate, plated ware, jewellery, toys &c ever imported into the city’.² His rhetoric is interesting for a number of reasons. While Cork was second city to Dublin during this period, Dublin was outranked by London in terms of fashion, and technologically, in the field of metal wares, by Birmingham and Sheffield. Like his Birmingham counterpart Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) (plate 3), Terry was selling both sterling silverwares and ‘plated’ goods.³ However, while Boulton was one of the pioneering entrepreneurs of his age, described by Josiah Wedgwood as ‘the first or most complete manufacturer in England in metal’,⁴ Terry was a key figure in a much smaller provincial market.⁵ At the same time that he was sourcing stock from England, he was also sending some plate from his own workshop to Dublin to be tested and hallmarked, a significant round trip to ensure that his goods could boast the added commercial advantage of having been tested for metal purity by an independent body (fig. 8.1). Since the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin administered the only assay office in the country, provincial goldsmiths were clearly disadvantaged in this regard.⁶

While Boulton, with his commercial might, advantageous contacts and good negotiating skills managed to lead a successful campaign for a local assay office for Birmingham in the 1770s, Terry and his Cork counterparts were disappointed in their quest for what was dismissively termed a ‘small provincial establishment’ by an

1 The term goldsmith is used here to describe craftsmen who worked in silver and gold. Individual craftsmen and retailers distinguished themselves in advertising with more specific terms like ‘working silversmith’, ‘goldsmith and jeweller’ but in London and Dublin, where guild records survive for this period, the guilds were known by the collective term goldsmith. 2 *Hibernian Chronicle*, 30 Sept. 1782. 3 Sheffield plate, an eighteenth-century innovation, involved fusing thin sheets of silver onto copper ingots which could then be used to make objects at a fraction of the cost of sterling silver equivalents. For more on the development of plated wares see Frederick Bradbury, *History of old Sheffield plate* (Sheffield, 1968); Helen Clifford, ‘Concepts of invention, identity and imitation in the London and provincial metal-working trades, 1750–1800’, *Journal of Design History*, 12 (1999), 241–55; Gordon Crosskey, ‘The early development of the plated trade’, *The Silver Society Journal*, 12 (2000), 27–38. 4 Rita McLean, ‘Matthew Boulton, 1728–1809’ in Shena Mason (ed.), *Matthew Boulton, selling what all the world desires* (London, 2009), p. 3. 5 For more on assaying processes see Douglas Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver* (London, 1972); Susan Hare (ed.), *Touching gold and silver: 500 years of hallmarks* (London, 1978). 6 Silver scholars have acknowledged that the so-called maker’s mark which occurs on many pieces of wrought silver cannot be taken as an effective ‘signature’, merely an indication of the individual or firm



8.1 Carden Terry's registration with the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, 1784. An Act of Parliament, 23 and 24 Geo. III, C. 23 (1783), required merchants, manufacturers and dealers in gold and silver wares to register their name and address with the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin from and after 9 September 1784 (R. Le Bas, Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin).

advisor with close connections to the Dublin goldsmiths' trade.⁷ This essay sheds new light on the campaign for a Cork assay office over the course of the long eighteenth century. Evidence is presented which indicates that assayed goods were perceived to be superior, that convenient access to an assay office was linked in the corporate imagination to expansion of market share, and that Cork goldsmiths were not just acutely aware of their 'second city' status, but believed that their Dublin counterparts would thwart their campaigns in order to retain a monopoly.⁸

taking responsibility for the piece. ⁷ 'Answers to Mr Abbot's Querys', TNA:PRO 30/9/147. This document is dated 28 Sept. 1801 and is in the hand of Jeremiah D'Olier. I am grateful to Robert Barker for drawing my attention to this material. For more on other assay offices within the British Isles during this period see *Report from the Committee appointed to enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne* (London, 1773); Hare 'Touching gold and silver', J.S. Forbes, *Hallmark: a history of the London assay office* (London, 1999); J. Tann, *Birmingham assay office, 1773-1993* (Birmingham, 1993). ⁸ T.C. Barnard centralizes this issue of the relationship between the provinces and the metropolis in seminal publications such as *Making the grand figure* (London, 2004). See also David Dickson, 'Second city syndrome: reflections on three Irish cases' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Kingdoms united? Great Britain and Ireland since 1500: integration and*

Assaying, the process of testing of gold and silver objects denoted by a 'hallmark', offered customers a unique form of consumer guarantee during this period.⁹ While craft guilds endeavoured to monitor standards (their power increasingly eroded by the latter half of the eighteenth century), and progressive retailers like Wedgwood offered money-back guarantees, no other sector of the luxury trade had such a collective mechanism for branding 'quality'. This helps to explain why goldsmiths in Ireland, England and North America lobbied for the establishment of new provincial assay offices during this period. Their petitions echo one another in asserting that assayed goods were more desirable to the consumer. In 1766 the earl of Shelburne (apparently prompted by Boulton) observed that as Birmingham lacked an assay master, it was very hard on Birmingham manufacturers 'to be obliged to send every piece of plate to Chester to be marked, without which no one will purchase it'.¹⁰ As part of a petition in 1801, Terry and his cohorts claimed that a local assay office would engender 'foreign and domestic confidence attached on the purity' of their wares, 'the natural consequence of a hall established with the authority of government'.¹¹ This was part of a much longer, if intermittent, campaign by Cork goldsmiths on this matter, which ultimately proved fruitless. However, it is interesting that it came in the immediate aftermath of the Act of Union, suggesting that the petitioners may have believed that a British parliament might be more sympathetic to their cause. In England, a statute of 1700 had provided for assay offices in towns where Mints had been established, these being York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester and Norwich.¹² This was in addition to the long-established London assay office, and was ultimately followed by a further three: Newcastle in 1702, and Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773.

In contrast, from at least the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, Cork goldsmiths made various unsuccessful attempts to win support for a regional assay office. The council book of the corporation of Cork records how in 1714 local craftsmen were 'very desirous to have an Essay [sic] Master', believing it would benefit 'all the inhabitants who have the occasion to buy or make up any plate ... there

diversity (Dublin, 1999), pp 95–108. ⁹ The Charter of the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin stipulated that for silver this should be 'his Majesty's standard, otherwise called eleven ounces two pennyweights', it being understood that this referred to the proportion of pure silver in one pound Troy of the alloy. At twenty pennyweights to the ounce and twelve ounces to the pound this translates in modern terminology to 92.5 per cent purity, commonly called sterling standard. Goods that met the required sterling standard of 92.5 per cent pure silver were marked with a series of punches. The harp crowned indicated that the silver was the correct fineness, the maker's or sponsor's mark denoted the craftsman who was asserting his or her responsibility for the piece and, from 1730, a figure of Hibernia was used to indicate the payment of 6 pence per ounce duty, in accordance with an Act of Parliament. Throughout the eighteenth century date letters were also used, but with much more irregularity and selectivity. See K. Ticher, I. Delamer, & W. O'Sullivan, *Hall-marks on Dublin silver, 1730–72* (Dublin 1968); Thomas Sinsted, 'Four selected assay records of the Dublin Goldsmiths' Company', *The Silver Society Journal*, 11 (Autumn 1999) 143–58; and Ida Delamer and Conor O'Brien, 'Dublin Hallmarks: a reappraisal of date letters used', *The Silver Society Journal*, 11 (Autumn 1999), 158–68. ¹⁰ Sally Baggott, "'I am very desirous of being a great silversmith': Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Assay Office" in S. Mason (ed.), *Matthew Boulton: selling what all the world desires* (London, 2009), p. 47. ¹¹ 'Answers to Mr. Abbot's Querys', TNA: PRO 30/9/147. ¹² Hare (ed.), *Touching gold and silver*, p. 29.

8.2 Carden Terry's signature on a letter to John Foster, chancellor of the exchequer, c.1807, seeking support for an assay office in Cork (R. Le Bas, Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin).

having been any such person in this city'.¹³ Despite campaigns extending into the nineteenth century, Cork goldsmiths did not succeed in gaining, in their own words, the sort of 'Establishment long enjoyed by many of the smaller cities and towns in England' (fig. 8.2).¹⁴ Yet, while petitions from Cork were repeatedly blocked, this distinction was, remarkably, granted to a tiny Waterford settlement. In the 1780s, following an urban revolt in Geneva, a plan was conceived to attract Genevois immigrants to Ireland, many of them skilled craftsmen, in particular the internationally renowned watchmakers. As part of the measures to establish a colony in Waterford, aptly named New Geneva, a bill was passed to establish an assay office there. Plans for the colony did not reach fruition and there is no tangible evidence that the assay office opened for business.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is striking that while goldsmiths in Northern England and North America won support for their petitions, Cork was less successful, in spite of clear similarities in the evidence offered by goldsmiths on both sides of the Atlantic campaigning for the same privileges.

13 Cecil C. Woods, 'The goldsmiths of Cork', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 5th Series, 5:3 (Sept. 1895), 218–19, also Richard Caulfield (ed.), *The council book of the corporation of the city of Cork* (Guildford, 1876), p. 363. 14 'Memorial of the Goldsmiths of the City of Cork to the right Honorable John Foster Esq. Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer', Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, MS 131, cited in Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver*, p. 170. Bennett notes (p. 169) in respect of a late eighteenth-century Bill to which a clause was to be added to establish an assay office in Cork, that 'this received the same treatment from Dublin as did the former application of 1714'. 15 Hubert Butler, 'New Geneva in Waterford', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 77:2 (December 1947), 150–5.

Goldsmiths in Cork, Birmingham and Pennsylvania identified a direct correlation between the establishment of local assay offices and the expansion of trade. Craftsmen in Pennsylvania had much in common with their Cork counterparts, since both were actively competing with imported London wares. During the same period that Carden Terry was promoting his English stock, a counterpart in Pennsylvania, Philip Hulbeart, was advertising an impressive range of silver goods 'just imported from London'.¹⁶ Robert Barker has argued that in the period between 1753 and 1770 Pennsylvania goldsmiths attempted to secure the establishment and use of an assaying and marking system, partly because they were actively competing with imported London wares which had been assayed and hallmarked, and partly in an attempt to increase their markets during the 1753–4 recession.¹⁷ At the beginning of the nineteenth century Cork goldsmiths claimed that as taxes were linked to plate, securing a local office, which they had been soliciting 'for upwards of twenty years', would enable them not just to increase the national revenue but to lend their work 'a regular and permanent value'.¹⁸ Both of these examples imply that products without hallmarks were not as highly regarded by some consumers at least. This may explain why certain Cork goldsmiths sent some of their work to be assayed in Dublin, despite the inconvenience.¹⁹ Other evidence suggests that a metropolitan hallmark could lend work in precious metals added 'value'. When a statute of 1854 allowed Sheffield manufacturers the freedom to register their marks at any assay office in the United Kingdom, some firms registered with London, evidently believing that the prestige of a London mark might boost their sales.²⁰

Provincial goldsmiths across the British Isles adopted local marks during this period. The term 'STERLING' used on Cork silver has been associated with a desire to engender public confidence in goods that were not assayed in the capital (fig. 8.3).²¹ In their petition to a Revenue Commissioner in 1801, Cork goldsmiths, including Carden Terry, stated that they had so far sought to earn consumer confidence 'by marking on each article their name and the word sterling'.²² They claimed to have been recently been made aware that their goods could be confiscated if not officially assayed and hallmarked. It seems unlikely that Terry and others were unaware of the tax implications of failing to send work to the assay office, even if they did not always do so regularly or consistently.²³ Under the terms of a Royal Charter, which had been

¹⁶ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 5 Nov. 1761, quoted in A. Cox Prime (ed.), *The arts and crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina, 1721–1785* (London, 1929), p. 72. ¹⁷ Robert B. Barker, 'Proposals for an assaying system in Pennsylvania, 1753–1770', *The Silver Society Journal*, 2 (Winter 1991), 75–9. ¹⁸ 'Memorial of the Goldsmiths of the city of Cork to the right Honorable John Foster Esq. Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer', Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, MS 131. ¹⁹ The cumulative evidence derived from surviving pieces of Cork silver marked with local town marks and the official assay registers of the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin suggests that provincial goldsmiths were not consistently sending work to the capital to be assayed. ²⁰ Hare (ed.), *Touching gold and silver*, p. 32. ²¹ J. Bowen and C. O'Brien (eds), *Cork silver and gold: four centuries of craftsmanship* (Cork, 2005), p. 9. ²² 'Cork goldsmiths to Mountifort Longfield', 17 Aug. 1801, TNA: PRO 30/9/147. For biographical material on Longfield, see E.M. Johnston-Lijk, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692–1800* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), v, pp 116–17. For more on the marks and practices of Cork goldsmiths see Bowen and O'Brien (eds), *Cork silver and gold*. ²³ Thomas Sinsteden, 'A sterling relationship: the Cork goldsmiths and the

8.3 'Maker's' mark of Carden Terry alongside the STERLING mark used on some examples of Irish provincial silver (J.A. Bowen).

STERLING

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granted to the Dublin goldsmiths' guild in 1637, the Dublin guild was responsible for supervising the assaying and hallmarking of all gold and silverwares produced throughout Ireland. In theory, this meant that all craftsmen engaged in the manufacture of plate were obliged to have their goods tested and hallmarked at the assay office; in practice this was not practical. The charter concentrated on the trade as practised within three miles of the city of Dublin, and there appears to have been more than a measure of latitude in how guild officials in Dublin interpreted the terms of their remit. Since 1730 a tax had been levied on all silverware made in Ireland and in 1807 a new stamp, the sovereign's head, was introduced as proof of tax paid. At the very least, goldsmiths like Terry must have understood that they were evading duties if failing to send goods to the assay office.²⁴

Sally Baggott has described Boulton's crusade for a Birmingham assay office as 'one of tension between the metropolis and the provinces, between craftsmen and retailers, between the old and the new'.²⁵ At least two of these comparisons apply in the Irish context. Baggott demonstrates how London goldsmiths endeavored to extend their monopoly, citing their long-standing role as guardians of the standard, 'the fundamental relationship between the metropolis and the nation' and a proven track record of ensuring that the purity of wrought plate was not debased.²⁶ The Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin similarly and repeatedly blocked attempts to support a Cork office, even when pressed to do so by Revenue officials. In describing how in Birmingham's case the new 'challenged the old and won', Baggott alludes to the innovations and entrepreneurship of the city's emerging industrialists. While they were developing pioneering manufacturing processes that streamlined serial production in the field of metalwork, their counterparts in Cork could not make such

Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin' in Bowen and O'Brien (eds), *Cork silver and gold*, pp 18–23, p. 20 provides a useful table of Cork silver recorded as hallmarked in Dublin between 1700 and 1750. ²⁴ For further information on this tax see Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver*, p. 22. ²⁵ Baggott, 'I am very desirous of being a great silversmith', p. 47. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

claims. Although Boulton voiced concern that his 'fresh designs' might be 'communicated to rivals' as a consequence of sending them a distance to be assayed, Carden Terry and his fellow Cork goldsmiths did not even pretend to such novelty. The pattern for retailers in provincial Ireland was to claim that they could be as good as, if not better than, the metropolis, whether that metropolis was Paris, London or Dublin. For instance, in a notice in the *Munster Journal* of 1766 the Limerick goldsmith George Halloran outlined his ability to execute work 'very little inferior to any in London or Dublin'.²⁷ The same applies to the way that Dublin goldsmiths advertised their wares in relation to what could be got in London.

The literature on guild history highlights the protectionist strategies of corporate organizations.²⁸ Undoubtedly, the Dublin goldsmiths' guild actively protected their monopoly as guardians of 'the standard'. In 1801, when Revenue Commissioner Mountifort Longfield wrote to Charles Abbot, Chief Secretary for Ireland, enclosing a memorial from the Cork goldsmiths, the goldsmith-banker Jeremiah D'Olier was consulted to advise on the petition's merit (plates 4–5).²⁹ D'Olier was an interesting figure with key commercial and political connections. He had represented the merchants' guild on the Common Council of the city of Dublin between 1786–9, had been a founder member of Dublin's Chamber of Commerce and a director of the Bank of Ireland, but he was also a pivotal figure in the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, having been elected Master in 1781 (fig. 8.4).³⁰ Evidently, it was felt that this allegiance coloured his views: one of his objections was annotated 'impertinent' by the reviewer, 'savour[ing] too much of the Dublin silver trade'.³¹

D'Olier cast doubt over the professional integrity of a secondary assay office, specifically its ability to uphold standards. His argument echoed a key objection of the London Company three decades earlier. He expressed 'serious apprehension for the consequences' of a small provincial establishment of this kind, suggesting that it would not serve the public interest.³² In their attempt to block the establishment of assay offices in Birmingham and Sheffield, the London Company had argued, 'that if the goldsmiths' manufactory in the towns of Sheffield and Birmingham should be increased, that of London must suffer a proportional decrease'.³³ Since goldsmiths in Cork, Dublin, London and Philadelphia believed that assaying could positively

27 *The Munster Journal*, 4 Sept. 1766. 28 See A. Black, *Guilds and civil society in European political thought from the twelfth century to the present* (London, 1984); I. Anders Gadd and P. Wallis (eds), *Guilds, society and economy in London, 1450–1800* (London, 2002); J.P. Ward, *Metropolitan communities: trade guilds, identity, and change in early modern London* (Stanford, 1997); J.J. Webb, *The guilds of Dublin* (Dublin 1929). For the Irish silver trade, Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver*, pp 167–74 and Sinsted, 'A sterling relationship', pp 18–23. 29 T.W. Moody et al. (eds), *A new history of Ireland*, ix (Oxford, 1984), p. 527. 30 See Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver*, p. 304. It is likely that D'Olier was not active in the trade at this point, or that he was winding up his business. I am grateful to my colleague Professor Jacqueline Hill for information on D'Olier and for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this essay. For further information on D'Olier see P. Butel and L.M. Cullen (eds), *Cities and merchants: French and Irish perspectives on urban development, 1500–1900* (Dublin, 1986), p. 207 and J. T. Gilbert (ed.), *Calendar of ancient records of Dublin* (19 vols, Dublin, 1889–1944), xiv, p. xxxi. 31 'Notes on the proposed assay office for Cork', n.d., TNA: PRO 30/9/147. 32 'Jeremiah D'Olier to unspecified', 28 Sept. 1801, TNA: PRO 30/9/147. 33 *Case of the Wardens and Assistant of the Company or Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London*



8.4 Trade card of Richard and Jeremiah D'Olier (© British Museum, London).

influence the demand for their goods, it is not surprising that the Dubliners wished to protect their advantage. The Cork petitioners claimed to be producing annual quantities in the region of 20,000 ounces in the late eighteenth century, though the veracity of this figure is difficult to verify.³⁴ Over a fourteen-year period between 1719 and 1733, just 4,518 ounces in total were assayed for Cork goldsmiths in Dublin.³⁵ In 1788, of over 80,000 ounces assayed in Dublin, provincial goldsmiths registered none.³⁶ Nevertheless, the survival of Cork silver from this period, without Dublin assay marks, testifies to the fact that only a percentage of what was manufactured in Cork was being registered in this way, and, in the case of D'Olier's evidence the interests of the Dublin guild were undoubtedly to the fore. He identified that the assay office in Dublin was 'the property of the Goldsmiths' Company' and that the Revenue was 'not charged with any Rent for it or any Expense contingent on it'. As the Cork petitioners did not own a suitable property D'Olier claimed that the Dublin guild would 'fairly be entitled to remuneration for the Past expenses they have borne' as well as being discharged from them in future if Cork were to be 'put upon a more favour'd' arrangement.³⁷

(London, 1773). 34 'Cork goldsmiths to Mountfort Longfield', 20 Oct. 1801, TNA: PRO 30/9/147. 35 Sinstedon, 'A sterling relationship', p. 20. 36 Alison FitzGerald and Conor O'Brien, 'The production of silver in late Georgian Dublin', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, 4 (2001), 8–48. 37 Jeremiah D'Olier to unspecified, 28 Sept. 1801, TNA: PRO 30/9/147.

While it was valid to question how a regional office might protect 'the standard', it seems unreasonable to suggest that the Dublin guild might be eligible for compensation. D'Olier argued that ensuring consistent quality control might falter in a context where inexperienced assay officers might preside, or where officers on modest incomes were vulnerable to corruption.³⁸ Similar claims and counter claims had been made in the Birmingham case. Ironically, Matthew Boulton claimed that the London Company with all their advantages was guilty of passing sub-standard silver and thereby defrauding the public.³⁹ He was a powerful adversary with much more commercial clout than his Cork counterparts. The London Company was damaged by the claims that were laid out in a special parliamentary investigation.⁴⁰

In 1807 an Act of Parliament to provide for the regulating and securing the collection of the duty on gold and silver plate wrought or manufactured in Ireland re-energized the debate in Ireland. As well as tightening up accountability through the introduction of the sovereign's head stamp as proof of duty paid on assayed silver, the Act provided for the appointment of a deputy assay officer outside Dublin.⁴¹ Cork goldsmiths seized the opportunity to petition the Chancellor of the Exchequer for support and appraise him of their long-standing campaign, arguing that it was possible to 'import on better terms' than absorb the 'losses attendant on sending their manufactured goods to be assayed in Dublin', and claiming to be producing in the region of 16,000 ounces of plate per annum.⁴² This prompted a letter from the Commissioners of Excise to the Dublin Goldsmiths' Company asking them to appoint a deputy assay master. A resolute refusal was returned.⁴³ The letters went back and forth: the Commissioners insisting, the Company prevaricating. The financial viability of the project was always to the fore. In November 1808 the Commissioners wrote to reassure the Dublin Company that there would not be any loss to the Revenue since the petitioners had undertaken to absorb all contingent expenses, at least for an initial period, should the duty derived from the goods assayed prove insufficient to meet the running costs of a new office.⁴⁴ Yet while the Dublin

³⁸ D'Olier had put forward these arguments in an earlier letter. See 'Mr. D'Olier report on Assay Office at Cork', dated in pencil 9 Sept. 1801, TNA: PRO 30/9/147. Ironically, in 1826 the evidence of a Senior Commissioner to the Board of Stamps in Dublin would later highlight the Board's role in removing 'a man eighty years of age who had been fifty years assay-master, and who was exceedingly incompetent'. *Seventeenth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland, Scotland; &c. Stamp revenue in Ireland*, 1828, [8] HC 1828, XV, I, p. 221. ³⁹ Baggott, 'I am very desirous of being a great silversmith', p. 50. ⁴⁰ *Report from the committee appointed to enquire into the manner of conducting the several assay offices*. Clearly those judged with the decision-making in the Cork case believed that Cork should be granted 'the privilege of assay in the same condition' as provincial English cities. 'Notes on the proposed assay office for Cork', n.d., TNA: PRO 30/9/147. ⁴¹ *An Act to provide for the regulating and securing the Collection of the Duty on Gold and Silver plate wrought or manufactured in Ireland* (47 Geo. III, C.15). See Thomas E. Tomlins, *The statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3 (London, 1809), pp 157–61. See also Bennett, *Irish Georgian silver*, pp 54–60 and Sinsteden, 'A sterling relationship', p. 21. ⁴² 'Memorial of the Goldsmiths of the City of Cork to the right Honorable John Foster Esq. Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer', Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, MS 131. ⁴³ Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, Minute book 7, 26 November 1807–6 October 1824, p. 31. ⁴⁴ Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin, Minute book 7, 26 November

guild was repeatedly pressed to appoint a deputy officer, they stubbornly resisted doing so, with Cork even resorting to source their own candidate. The Dublin guild had reason to question issues of financial sustainability, but nowhere did they acknowledge how disadvantaged their southern counterparts were. Ultimately, the decline in trade throughout Ireland in the nineteenth century would bury the issue, but not before Ireland had its own parliamentary enquiry.

In 1828 the report of an enquiry into the collection and management of the public revenue arising in Ireland was published. Among the issues it dealt with was the duty raised on plate, and as a consequence various representatives of the Dublin trade, including a former assay master, were interviewed. The evidence is interesting for what it reveals of the workings of the goldsmiths' trade, and is interspersed with reminders of Cork's disadvantaged status relative to the capital. The authors of the report concluded:

We were informed upon inquiry, that the Plate Manufacturers at Cork formerly applied for an Assay Office to be established in that city; but the project was not adopted, in consequence of the expense that would have attended it. We are not prepared to state how far (if at all) it may be incumbent on the Goldsmiths' Company, in claiming the benefit of their charter, to grant facilities that might prevent the inconvenience to the trade of transmitting Plate from distant parts to Dublin for the purposes of the Assay; but it seems very desirable for the attainment of those purposes, so far as the Crown is concerned, that the business of the Assay Office and the collection of the King's Duties should be effected immediately by and under the responsibility of some public Department.⁴⁵

In the course of the collated evidence members of the Dublin trade were questioned on the situation in Cork. Their testimony ranged from vague to forthright – no support for a regional office featured. According to Thomas Nuttall, assay master in 1823, many towns in Ireland were retailing plate which had not been sent to his office, but he acknowledged marking 'a good deal from Cork'.⁴⁶ Three years later the retailing goldsmith and jeweller Jacob West reported that while 'a great deal' of work was being sent from Cork for assay, 'one assay office in all Ireland' was quite sufficient.⁴⁷ He reckoned that Cork craftsmen were not unduly inconvenienced in the existing equation, but simply had to absorb modest carriage costs. Certainly, the perceived costs of establishing and maintaining a Cork outpost were a decisive factor in its failure to materialize, but the risks, costs, inconvenience and delays of sending parcels to Dublin for assay seem wholly to have disadvantaged regional craftsmen, even when transport infrastructure improved.

1807–6 October 1824, pp 42–3. 45 *Seventeenth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland, Scotland; &c. Stamp revenue in Ireland*, 1828, [8] HC 1828, XV, I, pp 24–5. 46 *Ibid.*, pp 359–61. 47 *Ibid.*, pp 339–344. According to Bennett, *Irish Georgian*

By the middle of the nineteenth century the issue was no longer relevant. An account of the industrial movement in Cork noted that the silver trade there had 'continued to fall away rapidly since the Union' and was now 'utterly extinguished'.⁴⁸ While things were not quite so bleak in Dublin, the withdrawal of duty on imported plate, the availability of cheap imports, the inability of Irish goldsmiths to keep pace or compete with technologies for serial production undoubtedly dealt a severe blow to Ireland's precious metals' trade. Over the course of the eighteenth century Cork may have suffered as a second city to Dublin but ultimately, when it came to peripheral status, Ireland's position within the British Isles was a much more critical issue.

In David Dickson's characterization of the 'second cities' of Ireland during this period, 'all had distinctive urban personalities ... but the collective behaviour of the governing classes in these urban centres was heavily influenced by the way they measured up their community against rival or more powerful urban places'.⁴⁹ A variety of factors may explain why Birmingham and Sheffield succeeded in their campaign, while Cork did not. In the first place, Matthew Boulton was not just an exceptional negotiator; he had a peerless network of contacts and the additional support of the Sheffield as well as the Birmingham trade. Second, there were precedents in England, for allowing assay offices with modest trade to remain open. The assay office at York was re-established in 1700 despite the declining trade in the city and, although a report by the Inspector General of Stamps and Taxes recommended in 1851 that the office in Newcastle should be closed as it was 'of the most miserable description', it was still allowed to continue trading.⁵⁰ Judging by the evidence, if the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin and those with related loyalties like Jeremiah D'Olier had not blocked them, the Cork campaigners would most likely have been granted an assay office. Ironically, in terms of the market today, the comparative rarity of provincial silver without Dublin hallmarks increases its value for many collectors. But this, of course came too late to be of comfort to the disgruntled goldsmiths of eighteenth-century Cork.

silver, p. 336, West was a freeman of the Company of Goldsmiths of Dublin between 1801 and 1859 and became an alderman in 1821. 48 J.F. Maguire, *The industrial movement in Ireland as illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (Cork, 1853), p. 4. 49 Dickson, 'Second city syndrome', p. 108. 50 Hare (ed.) *Touching gold and silver*, pp 30, 33.