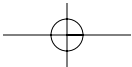
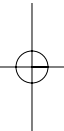
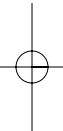


Part One

BECOMING CITIES



1

The Traditional City

I am standing on the battlements of the impressive Norman-built city walls looking into the city of Canterbury, Kent, in the south of England. The walls, constructed by an organised system of civic contributions (*murage*) in the eleventh century, were placed there to protect its citizens and preserve the local faction of Norman power. The walls were made of flint and each flint was carefully shaped to expose would-be assailants to its many razor-sharp edges. It is hard to think of any modern material that could be more effective – and last so long – for these flints still have a keen edge. (*City Life* observation notebooks)

This massive effort and expense by the citizens of Canterbury was not excessive. It relates to a long-term investment in safety and risk management. But it also points to something important. Premodern towns like Canterbury might be linked to wider social formations but they existed first and foremost, as Max Weber (1958) argued, *for themselves*: cities were independent, tightly linked economic, administrative, ritual and political *associations*.

Most of the inhabitants had important stakes in the city; they held privileges and in return they owed duties to the collective body. They gave service in key areas of social life: ritual and religious ceremony, administrative and political office and military and defensive forces. They were required to contribute to the upkeep of their collective defensive walls. To its citizens Canterbury was the centre and repository of economic, political and social life and we can see it as a culmination and a concentration of a social corporation that had existed in this area for millennia, from the tribal times of the powerful Cantiaci, through Iron Age warfare with neighbouring kingdoms, their Romano-British experience as a thriving town and through the dangerous times of the Dark Ages. This provides a good baseline to measure just how much city life changed in our modern period.

Roman Canterbury

Before the Norman invasion of 1066, the Romans had also built a fortification of approximately one hundred acres of land across this good bridging point on the River Stour, and some of their fortifications can be seen within a short walk from my viewpoint here on the wall. In fact they are still a part of the defensive structure. The Roman-built fortress town was called Durovernum Cantiacorum and it was the hub town for the defence of the important coastal region of Romano-British Kent. The Roman name for this place suggests in an even stronger way that these early cities were places built by, and for, very specific people. Before the Romans invaded Britain this region was the kingdom of a powerful tribe, the Cantiaci.

The style of Roman imperial expansion was not to replace defeated neighbours by Roman citizens or colonists but to Romanise the inhabitants, or at least assimilate them while not undermining their own culture and religion. And indeed we know that Roman invaders often assimilated to styles of local culture, taste and religion. Thus, according to www.roman-britain.org, 'The Romano-British name for Canterbury then, could be translated as 'the Enclosed Settlement of the *Cantiaci* near the Alder Swamp'. It was emphatically not a city made and renamed anew – not New Rome or New Herculaneum, after the style of later European imperialists.



Image 1.1 The medieval city wall around Canterbury, UK (photo Adrian Franklin)

Prior to the Romano-British period, this settlement was the Cantiaci's military defensive hub built against other Iron Age neighbours with whom war was an on-going state of affairs. It did not prove much of a defence against the Romans, but with Roman help and know-how, it became impregnable. In the third century AD, when Roman Britain came under threat from across the North Sea, there is evidence of rebuilding and strengthening of this wall at around the same time that coastal sea forts were constructed.

Romano-British Canterbury became an *oppidum*, a town with its own mint, temples, basilica, bath house, forum and (two) theatres, one of which held an estimated audience of 3000 (to put this in perspective, the present day Marlowe Theatre seats 1000). The computer graphics of the town that followed the major archaeological digs of the past five years probably do not overdo the precision, planned lines and rationalisation of the original buildings, straight roads and urban infrastructures. Here was a highly organised town, built to last and building considerable stores of wealth. Archaeologists have found substantial caches of coins buried under the postholes of new buildings which are believed to be part of a ritual blessing of the new home by affluent merchants or administrators. The most important houses had impressive tiled floors, underground heating and luxurious plumbing.

Medieval Canterbury

The transition from Roman to medieval Canterbury was relatively peaceful and it thrived as a semi-independent, autonomous social entity. Max Weber's *The City* (1958) demonstrated how the occidental cities of the Mediterranean and northern Europe grew to become powerful independent social institutions in the absence of a rational administration of superordinate political associations such as the modern state/nation (Weber, 1958: 106). As Weber argued:

In the middle ages the emergence of the autonomous and auto-cephalous city association with its administrative sponsor and its 'konsul' or 'Majer' or 'Burgermaster' at its head is an occurrence differentiating it from both Asiatic and ancient civic development. ... [w]here the polis first developed its characteristic features, the urban constitution represents a transformation of the power of the city king on the one hand and the clan elders on the other into a reign of notable persons from 'families' fully qualified for military service. (1958: 107)

City life in medieval times was not merely defined by location, residence or current occupation; it was the origin and locus of one's very life chances, one's self-identity, and the basis of one's religious cult and social network. True, there was an important degree of immigration and recruitment to such cities but to stay put carried with it many advantages and privileges as well as duties. The medieval city sensibility, whilst orientated to trade and economy, was in cultural terms and in terms of its social relations, relatively inward-looking.

Canterbury was no *ordinary* place however. Cities seldom are. It had been a political, ritual and religious centre for thousands of years and this was considerably strengthened through the ties between the merging nation-state and organised religion. Through the original patronage of the early Christian missionary Augustine by its local Anglo-Saxon king, Aethelred, and his Christian queen, Bertha, Canterbury acquired a very sophisticated medieval religious apparatus, including the cathedral, St Augustine's abbey, and two other monastic orders within the city wall. Aside from their religious functions these were also the loci of major landholdings, the accumulation of wealth and the organisation of labour markets and industry.

Canterbury later benefited considerably from the close relationship between its cathedral and the monarchy. Its archbishops were chosen from among the country's elite and this brought valuable other connections and ties. But perhaps the greatest asset Canterbury was to possess was the martyrdom of one of its archbishops, Thomas Becket, in 1170. He rapidly became very prominent in the cult of saints in medieval Europe and the astonishing movements of pilgrims to their shrines. Pilgrimage to Canterbury was one of the most important in Britain and northern Europe and

for the next several centuries his tomb was the destination of vast numbers of pilgrims ... The holy blissful martyr – Englishman, soldier, priest, and saint – symbolized for medieval Christians the manliness, goodness, grace, and mercy that were possible for them all. Three centuries later Chaucer's countrymen – including his king – were making frequent and devout pilgrimages to Thomas's tomb. They went in search of a cure for physical or spiritual illness, in search of guidance, in search of peace. (www.the-orb.net/textbooks/anthology/beidler/becket.html)

According to the cathedral's own records, the numbers visiting Canterbury at any one time were on an unprecedented scale and were a spectacle in their own right. In 1470, for example, it was estimated that over 100,000 pilgrims moved on their knees through the nave to the Pilgrim's Steps (www.historylearningsite.co.uk/canterbury_cathedral.htm).

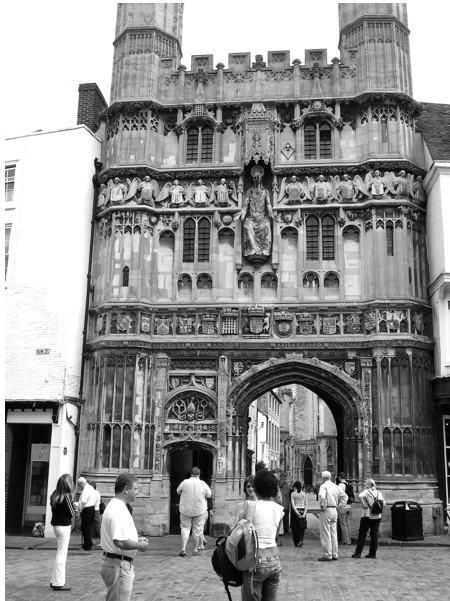


Image 1.2 Christ Church Gate, Canterbury Cathedral (photo Adrian Franklin)

Like many cities of its day, Canterbury was therefore cosmopolitan in its make-up and atmosphere; it had an unusual tempo, it was prone to the excitability of tourists and people away from the everyday, and, owing to its sacred status, it was a liminal space where transformation and ritual change took place. Massive investments were made in accommodating, feeding, watering and selling to the great tides of visitation and many of the remaining large buildings were the accommodation houses and hospitals.

Modern Canterbury

As I look towards the centre of Canterbury today, however, all the signs are that this city is now merely one little cog in a much bigger wheel. When Henry VIII waged war on the monastic order he smashed Canterbury's source of independent wealth and prestige. Although the cathedral continued to convey great status to the city, it went into a slow decline and could aspire to nothing more than to be a market and administrative hub for Kent. Its historic role as a regional hub bequeathed to it the meeting of many roads, and these roads now ensure that it is a retail and service centre and that its traffic is mostly at a standstill. Like most other cities today,

it is one of the institutional means of ordering *national*-level social relations. Few of its shops are owned by, and very little of its trade is organised among, its residents. Instead, the somewhat reduced buzz of its centre is only that of well-known national and international retail chains, reproduced across countless other towns in a national and international grid. Its residents enjoy no privileges not extended towards visitor-shoppers and, indeed, there is very little to bind its residents to any kind of socially distinctive institutional life. Instead, Canterbury is but one place among many where *nationally* and *internationally* orientated lifestyles might be located. The symbols of traffic and movement all indicate that the true social centre is elsewhere: the key signages in Canterbury are directions to the major motorways to London, the West, the North, south to Dover and the Continent. The ancient route west along the Stour valley now terminates at the EuroStar terminal at Ashford and the M20 motorway connecting the airports with the Channel sea ports. At best it services traffic between London and Paris.

Its one great ritual symbol, the cathedral, which was once the hub of its monastic and pilgrimage economy, is not the heart of *its* communal life but the seat of the dominant *national* religion, the Church of England. Critically, its principal, the Archbishop of Canterbury resides not in Canterbury, but in Lambeth Palace, London.

As I walk from the wall into the centre of the city, through the opulent Dane Jon gardens, I can see some of the remaining dwellings of the medieval merchant families (though I have to imagine how they once stood in their own substantial grounds). At the hub of medieval Canterbury, on the bridge over the River Stour on St Peter's Street, close to the Eastbridge Hospital, the Old Weaver's House still occupies its water frontage and is now a major tourist attraction. The streets around it are conspicuously well endowed with late medieval buildings, often four storeys high. However, at a relatively short distance away one begins to see the homes built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Canterbury began to grow from the nation's industrial expansion. There are a few large homes here and there but it is clear that something profound had happened: the social elite were no longer based in such towns, or at least present as a dominating force of the social formation. They had moved to the national capital or to the centres and headquarters of nationally orientated organisations elsewhere. Apart from the cathedral, Canterbury has no such institutions and thus is significant mainly as a market for goods and services produced elsewhere. It is now a retail and service centre, literally a distributing point for larger flows of things and for a much larger entity.

The town's residents are now predominantly working class and lower middle class, commensurate with the downgrading of the city's standing as

a social organisation, or rather its lack of it. The University of Kent, that has been built since 1968, went a long way towards restoring Canterbury as a seat of learning and has made it a desirable location, for its rather sedate 'cathedral city' life, a status that gained considerably from the revival in history and heritage after the 1960s. This form of city life is very different from that normally referred to in urban sociologies. Instead of a culturally creative and change-oriented pulse of the new, cathedral cities and small towns with similar social tones have recreated themselves in the latter half of the twentieth century, but in their case by drawing on their more significant role in the past. They have hitched a ride on the heritage bonanza; the valorisation of national pasts, traditions and history and the ending of a modernity that simply rejected its past and tradition. It is precisely in such towns that a large proportion of buildings are original, and even though they had often experienced modernisations in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, from the late 1970s onwards they enjoyed a strong period of renovation and conservation, exposing and highlighting rather than hiding and eliminating the past.

The city life of Canterbury has fed off its historic past with regular 'recreations' of the medieval past, the pilgrimage period and historic re-enactments (there are re-enactments of local battles, local armour and military uniform, jousting and falconry). Places like Canterbury have also reinvented their own carnivalesque pasts, especially through reviving old May Day festivals and bonfire societies. These are places where neo-tribal activities find strongholds, where paganism has been revived as a cult (and its revival is a relatively important shift in religious behaviour) and where the old habit of Christian pilgrimage has come back into fashion. Occasionally there is an air of unreality about such places and this of course comes from the compression of time in the spaces of heritage, the theatricality and street-orientations of city life as well as the incongruity between participation and belonging.

Is it all just a show for the tourists, a means of keeping the tourist flow flowing or, does it do something for the participants and their collective experience of the city? Arguably it does change city life and is no different really to any other episode in the invention and performance of 'tradition'. It indicates a new-found drive to find collective expression and coordinates of belonging. It is the willing into being, rather than the objects and narratives, that sociologists should keep their eye on, for the latter are merely props for the former, essential though they are. And indeed we might go so far as to say that their availability and their distribution in places like Canterbury enable them to act in the becoming of tradition. There is not room here to illustrate or analyse the agency and activity of tourist objects in Canterbury, but it is important to

flag the role they play here, as elsewhere (see for example Lury, 1997; MacDonald, 1995).

The efflorescence of these activities gave residents a performative and political habitus in the city that was missing until quite recently. They still elected their own council and organised a great deal of social and cultural activity, but this was mere housekeeping compared to the economic, ritual and even military independence that was once organised here and which constituted a strong sense of belonging and identity. One can become excited by the traffic ordinances and petty misdemeanours that seem to dominate the local newspapers, but by and large the town's population were mainly orientated towards national and international events and media for the information that really mattered. Since the 1970s and the arrival of a more refined and extended form of heritage sensibility, it is possible to live in Canterbury and appreciate its own specific past and how that past can be drawn more into the present. Having at least a creditable shopping centre, Canterbury's consumer-residents are also prototypical of what Bauman has described as liquid modernity. They have very few solid elements that bind them together (they are unlikely to organise warfare, trade or religion, for example), they have few if any stable social bonds based on marriage, kinship, locality, ethnicity or industry. Instead, they engage in serial rounds of self-making, finding new selves among the proliferation of possible elements to historical and cultural identities, many of them now local, even if they are today only temporary and highly provisional forms of commitment. One of the most interesting and widely distributed is that loose form of belonging to a local pub. Pubs in Canterbury, as elsewhere, develop their own character, often from their own sense of the past; they typically used old artefacts, photos of pub outings from the early part of the twentieth century, and expose older layers of their past to galvanise a present day community of imbibers. To drink at the City Arms, the Old City, the White Hart, the Seven Stars or the Dolphin is a sociologically meaningful and distinctive experience and an important part of Canterbury's city life. But this is also the capital of 'the Garden of England' (the County of Kent) and this too provides performative as well as symbolic capital on which new identities are made. This tie with the countryside and nature generally is celebrated far more, through farmers' markets, bird watching (the Stour Valley has a concentration of wetland sites and rare birds), fishing, rambling (often along the old Pilgrim's Way) and open garden schemes. Visitors from other cities around the world cannot quite believe that healthy populations of trout, dace and chub can be seen from King's Bridge at the heart of the city, and their astonishment is a feature of the crowds of tourists who assemble to see the Old Weavers

and St Thomas's Hospital on Eastbridge. But it is no accident. Rather it is an expression of the importance of the river to the city (stone for the cathedral was brought up the River Stour from France and it has a legendary run of White (sea) Trout).

City life lost?

In the high modern period, around the middle of the twentieth century, places like Canterbury were declining economically, politically and culturally. As Don Martindale argued in the 'Prefatory Remarks: Theory of the City' for Max Weber's *The City* in 1958: 'The modern city is losing its external and formal structure. Internally it is in a state of decay while the new community represented by the nation everywhere grows at its expense. The age of the city seems to be at an end' (Martindale, 1958: 62).

After reading Weber's sociological treatise on the historic emergence of the city, Martindale had every right to pen such pessimistic lines. In 1958, with post-war reconstruction under way, modern welfare states emerging everywhere, a new socio-technical order organised under the auspices of the nation state and a state of cold war between the two modernities dominating world affairs, the ordinary and even the larger cities must have looked redundant by comparison. This was also a modernity that looked forward and buried rather than celebrated or tolerated the past.

Is this how we find contemporary cities today, as a linear extension of this mid-twentieth century position? I think not. First, as we have seen in the case of Canterbury, the generalised relaxing of a futuristic modern imperative and a reconsideration of the relevance of the past has recreated new forms of life there. As we will see in future chapters, the emergence of this new, more tolerant sensibility owes its origins to the expansion of countercultural influences from the 1970s onwards. Crudely, this culture rejected many of the mantras of high modernism and instead tried to be more culturally sensitive, experimental and tolerant. It rejected monolithic standardisations and modernisation drives in favour of a more heterogenous set of influences for the creation of a new form of life; for *lifestyles* in fact. These were then able to draw on culturally specific places, their pasts and their presents within a more sensitive appreciation of the multiplicity of cultures and places.

Second, it is also clear, for example, that the pre-eminence of the nation-state has not lasted even if it is still important. Rivalling the great nations now are the 'great companies', international corporations that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and the smaller, leaner, mobile but equally significant firms of the 1980s. The critical thing is that they have to operate in space somewhere, but where? What sort of city would they prefer to locate to?

The locus of power and influence tends to follow *their* location decisions, for many others follow in their wake, but their location decisions have tended to shift and change in the past 40 years. At first they concentrated and then they decentralised but now they are merely mobile or, as Bauman (2000) put it, *liquid*: free to choose wherever to locate but having no ties to any particular space for any length of time. Nonetheless, there is logic to their decisions and at least one aspect of this is how *attractive* different cities are to them, and as Richard Florida (2003a) has argued, to their key employees.

With concentration now producing congestion and aesthetically unpleasing living and working conditions, decentralisation and even more mobile means of transport and communication mean that companies competing for key workers have to think about locations that will attract and retain the best in the labour force, especially among what Richard Florida (2003a) calls the creative class. Somehow or other, and this is something this book will investigate, cities had not all experienced a common decline relative to the nation and its various hubs. Some had indeed become dull and repetitive places, others mere backwaters. But others seem to have seen an alternative trajectory for themselves or at least alternative cities emerged somehow through the agency of new groups with fresh ideas, and these were based on a menu of great variety, great social excitement and change, on cultural efflorescence and cultural growth, on lifestyle and lifestyle choices, on social tolerance and diversity. Somehow, in the late twentieth century, a growing number of cities had become distinctive and proactive once more, to the extent that one could begin to talk of distinctive and even opulent and independent civic cultures. It was by no means a return to the independent and self-enclosed cities of the medieval period but perhaps it was a rebirth, a relaunch into something that had at least, in cultural terms, emanated from within the city and enlivened the city with a new lease of life and energy.

Some but not all re-merged in the past thirty years as different types of city where 'city life' became distinctive, attractive and economically significant if not imperative. They had somehow managed to transform themselves from the standardised, planned modern city; made themselves *more* than merely machinic cities for making things and housing people, and returned to a state where the city existed by and for itself, where its citizens managed their fortunes and their risks and saw themselves in competition once again, with other 'player' cities. I see the recent research on places such as Manchester, Baltimore, Seattle and Bristol emphasising these features and others trying to emulate them, for obvious reasons (Brown et al., 2000; Hannigan, 1998; Ley, 1996).

In order to achieve this new and exciting state they had traversed an extremely difficult and enduring idea: that cities were first and foremost inert, passive, machinic effigies to the modern order. Built against nature and designed to contain and control humanity they were places where humanity lost its agency and became insulated and alienated from nature. Beyond work and residence it was difficult to see what other purposes cities were to serve *or become*. As always, change was not ushered in by those who controlled the levers but those on the margins whose interests had become alienated and who practised different values. But in any case the tightly controlled planned city did not sit well with growing demands for freedom and liquidity and the new creative cities manifested a freer, more tolerant, consumerist and entertaining ethos. But before we can appreciate this efflorescence of city life it is important to remind ourselves how the city was transformed by modernity. This is largely a story of the building of new cities and the various makeovers of older cities after their likeness.