

Title	Settlement development and trading in Ireland, 1600-1800
Authors	O'Flanagan, Patrick
Publication date	1983
Original Citation	O'Flanagan, P. (1983) 'Settlement Development and Trading in Ireland, 1600-1800', in Devine, T. M. and Dickson, D. (eds.) Ireland and Scotland 1600 - 1800: Parallels and contrasts in economic and social development, Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, pp. 146-150. isbn 0859760898.
Type of publication	Book chapter
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Download date	2024-04-20 13:58:09
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/5319



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IRELAND and SCOTLAND 1600-1850

Parallels and Contrasts
in Economic
and Social Development

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JOHN DONALD PUBLISHERS LTD
EDINBURGH

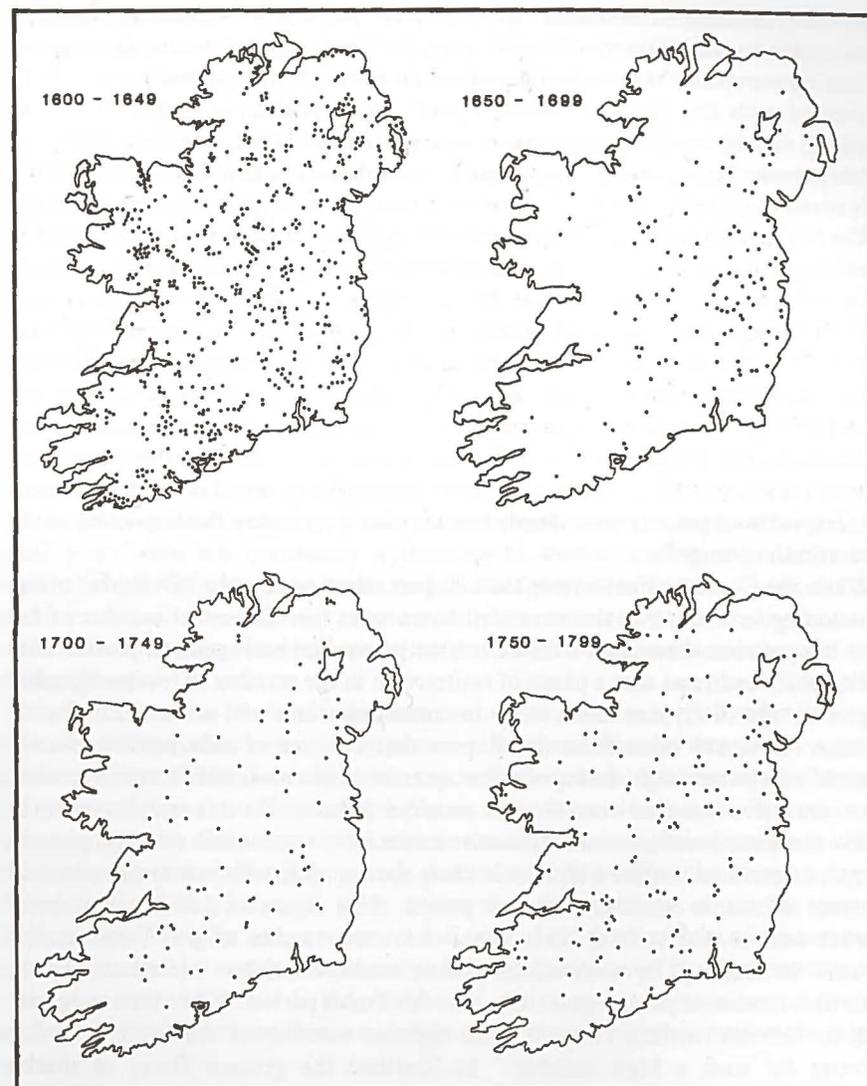
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*Settlement Development and Trading in
Ireland, 1600-1800: A Preliminary
Investigation*

Patrick O'Flanagan

THE significance of trading activity as a stimulus to the growth of new settlement and indeed to the expansion of existing settlement has been recognised as crucial in many societies, past and present.¹ But in Ireland little or no attention has been paid to trading activity as a catalyst of urban or proto-urban evolution.² The study of settlement form rather than of settlement function has acted as the focus of most rural settlement studies in Ireland, and hence the analysis of generative processes has been relatively neglected. Recently Irish settlement studies have become more broadly based, with a wider range of investigative approaches being applied,³ and results from some of these approaches are revealing the existence of much more complex and varied conditions affecting settlement trends, with massive and profound changes even in the most recent past. Our task here in this preliminary review is relatively simple; it is to suggest that an examination of the changing patterns of market location may provide a general pointer to shifts in regional economic performance over time; secondly, we wish to make an initial exploration of the general impact of market functions on settlements themselves.

As is the case for Scotland and indeed for most parts of Western Europe, the source materials detailing market foundation in Ireland are by no means comprehensive.⁴ There are many gaps in the information set out in the 1853 Report on Irish fairs and markets, which is the most comprehensive compendium on the formal development of markets in Ireland.⁵ This Report provides some general data on the site, licensee and patent date of each market, but little else. There was no systematic information gathered on the current or former activity at individual markets, which seriously qualified the Report's value. We have little information, there or elsewhere, on the degree to which specialised markets developed, or on the volume, type and nature of transactions. Few quantitative data are available in any form relating to tolls, fines, taxes, rents or turnover, especially during the seventeenth century, and it is difficult to reconstruct the networks and trade flows generated by such markets; changes in the hierarchy of market centres in Ireland over the past two hundred years must, as yet, remain elusive. We are left at present



Dates of Market Foundation

with the fairly comprehensive evidence relating to the dates on which patents were granted for the holding of individual markets. The problem is of course that many market places were already in existence prior to being awarded a patent, so that the confirmation of a patent and the germination or growth of a settlement were by no means synchronous. There is the obvious temptation to assume some relationship between patent confirmation and urban growth when in fact it is often impossible to distinguish between cause-effect dichotomies. There is also the problem of estimating the number of unlicensed centres, seemingly quite large at least in the

nineteenth century; furthermore, records rarely indicate when centres ceased to trade or when some of them came to be revived. With so little information to go on, we are by no means near a position where trading hinterlands since 1600 can be delineated with any degree of accuracy, nor can we at present judge how far the changing density of market centres may be used as a barometer of regional economic development. Legal, social and political considerations may have significantly influenced the timing of formal market creation, in some areas more than others.

The beginning of the seventeenth century did not of course witness the start of marketing at fixed, licensed centres in Ireland. The Anglo-Normans established, in some areas at least, a complex and dense network of market centres, where later hierarchical arrangements often became apparent.⁶ Gaelic society had by this time also devised a series of trading institutions which in organisation may have been not unlike those observed in some so-called underdeveloped areas in Africa and elsewhere.⁷ It would be an almost impossible task to ascertain how many of these medieval centres actually managed to retain market functions up to the seventeenth century, or even to Tudor times. Several of the centres recorded in the 1853 Report as being without patents were clearly market sites long before the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁸

When the Commissioners made their Report, there were only 349 market places functioning in Ireland; at the same time there were four times that number of fair sites in operation. Less than a dozen market places had been granted patents after 1800, which indicates that a phase of contraction in the number of market sites had begun by that date, due most likely to communications and other technological changes. It would seem from the Report that the rate of new market creation reached an all-time high during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, when more than five hundred centres were awarded patents. To this number must be added those medieval creations still active in the early seventeenth century, plus the illegal, unpatented centres which most likely sprang up in response to the relatively buoyant economic conditions at that period. This figure of five hundred 'new' market centres was at least three times the total number of pre-Tudor market patents. In England, by contrast, the peak of market density — as indicated by the recorded number of patents granted — was the Tudor period.⁹ It has been suggested that the intense localism of the English agrarian economy at that stage helped to account for such a high number.¹⁰ In Scotland the greatest flurry of market foundation was slightly later than in Ireland — in the post-Restoration period.¹¹ Can these periods of highest market-patent confirmation be regarded as critical stages in the economic development of their respective economies? There are problems of comparison: in England the average population of the market towns by the seventeenth century was in the order of 600 to 1000 people, whereas in Ireland and Scotland market settlements with over a hundred people were relatively rare.¹² Desertion of centres was commonplace in Scotland and England, and Everitt makes the point that the studies of deserted market centres may be as significant as those of other types of deserted settlements.¹³ But in Ireland complete desertion of post-Elizabethan market centres was unusual (although it would be difficult to suggest a broadly acceptable definition of 'desertion'). However, this may not be so true of

medieval and sixteenth-century creations; the study of market origins and development before the seventeenth century should help to indicate the degree to which the marketing and internal trading structure in Ireland of the post-plantation period was shaped by earlier events.

Certainly, by comparison with many other countries in Europe during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, market density in Ireland was relatively high, suggesting that many people were directly or indirectly participating in commercial economic activity with varying degrees of intensity. It is also true that, given the relatively high density of markets, the production of saleable surpluses must have been a constant rather than a sporadic occurrence, as few markets could have survived with an irregular supply of materials. Between 1600 and 1649 the 'turnover' rate of market sites seems to have been at its highest, helped perhaps by the economic and political instability at the end of this period: in Co. Mayo, for example, thirty-one of the forty-odd markets granted patents during this period had failed by the mid-nineteenth century. The Map for 1600-49 shows that the density of markets over the country at that stage was quite uneven — with some perplexing concentrations, notably in parts of the west of Ireland. Lower densities of markets in other areas were not necessarily a function of weaker trading organisation or institutions, for in some areas larger and more vigorous markets may have already eliminated local competition; in some districts unprocessed or semi-processed commodities may have been shipped directly overseas without passing through any market place.

Market foundation after 1650 was never to be as rapid or as spatially 'footloose' as before (see Maps). Few new market patents were granted in the very poorly served areas until after 1750. More often than not, centres in such 'disadvantaged' districts were located close to existing market places, and after a short career they seem to have been usually obliged to abandon their market functions, being unable to offer effective competition, Binghamstown's surrender to Belmullet (Co. Mayo) being a case in point. There can be little doubt that the intensity of market patent confirmation over time acts as a general indicator of the development of the national economy, but major regional and local processes are concealed by concentrating on national trends. Indeed it is the analysis of the changing regional incidence of market patent grants that offers some of the more tantalising challenges in this kind of study.

There remains the problem of what contribution these marketing activities made to the overall character of settlements in which they were sited. By comparison with other European countries, especially England, formally planned market towns seem to have been quite rare in Ireland. Market functions often developed long after the foundation of many settlements. Buildings directly associated with marketing activities are quite rare throughout Ireland, except in larger centres, but they are sometimes found in smaller, often landlord-developed villages or towns, Glanworth (Co. Cork), with its market-house overlooking a triangular green, being a good example.¹⁴ Other marketing accoutrements such as pounds, fairgreens or fairgrounds are sited as a rule on the edge of, or at a small distance from the edge of, settlements. Rarely, as at Kilpatrick, Co. Cork, are fairgreens sited in a central

position dominating the morphology of an entire settlement. In general the contribution of marketing activities to the formal layout of settlement has been slight, and as an influence such activity has tended to modify rather than reshape or re-organise the morphology of settlements. It is also of importance to note that in at least the counties of south Munster there is invariably a correspondence between civil parish centre (church, graveyard, etc.) and the market site, implying that here and probably elsewhere in Ireland many of these parish centres retained an important economic function to the end of the eighteenth century, serving as significant foci for many small communities, despite their religious background. Given the existence of close on five hundred market villages or towns in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the view that there was a weak development of central places in pre-nineteenth century Ireland requires some modification.

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Scottish-Irish Trade in the Eighteenth Century

Laura E. Cochran

ALTHOUGH the aim of this paper is to identify sources of growth for the Scottish and Irish economies in their mutual trade, it must be recognised from the outset that commerce between these two countries in the eighteenth century was not of major importance to either country. It is thus apparent that any sources of expansion in Scottish-Irish trade are unlikely to have had a major impact on the national economies of Scotland and Ireland. This discussion, therefore, will concentrate on the impact of Scottish-Irish trade on certain regions of Scotland and Ireland and on particular aspects of agriculture, industry and commerce.

In common with both the Irish and Scottish economies in the early eighteenth century, Scottish-Irish trade showed few signs of marked growth in the first three decades of the century.¹ From mid-century, however (when statistics are once again extant), until the end of the century, Scottish-Irish trade grew at 2.4 per cent per annum. A considerable part of this growth was, of course, a reflection of population increase and general economic development. Trade growth was also encouraged by the increasingly complementary nature of Scottish and Irish production and by the proximity of the two countries and their separation by sea which, in the eighteenth century, gave this commerce a marked cost advantage over land-based exchange. The general growth of trade within the British imperial territories, as well as the beneficial effects of certain pieces of commercial legislation — notably the Treaty of Union of 1707, the Linen Bounty Acts from 1742 onwards and the repeal of the Cattle Acts in 1758/9 — had identifiably positive effects on Scottish-Irish business relationships. Within this context four main issues will be considered: first, the additional or distinctive demands which Scottish-Irish trade placed on agriculture, industry and commerce in the two countries; second, the importance of the raw materials and foodstuffs which the trade provided; third, its significance in the development of ports and the shipping industry and, finally, the relationship of trade expansion to the evolution of the mercantile community.

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Trade with Scotland placed few distinctive demands upon Irish agricultural and industrial production. Indeed, Irish trade with Scotland was so similar in