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# Cork's International Trade during the First Industrial Revolution

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Submitted as required for the fulfilment of Doctoral Degree  
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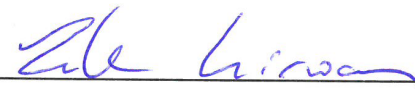
## Contents

<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Accessing the Database .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Figures .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Tables.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Maps.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Images .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Context and historiography.....	2
The Committee of Merchants.....	8
A Relational Database of Cork's Trade .....	11
Database Design .....	14
Transcription Issues .....	17
Website Design .....	19
<b>Chapter 1 Trans-Atlantic Trade .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Cork's Trade with the Americas .....	27
The 'Jay Treaty' (1794) and Cork Merchants.....	29
Caribbean Trade .....	42
Imports.....	44
Exports and Provisioning .....	49
Conclusion.....	60
America.....	61
Trade with the United States.....	61
South America.....	66
Cork's Trade and the Atlantic System .....	69
Conclusion .....	75
<b>Chapter 2 Trade with Continental Europe .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Portugal .....	82
Treaties .....	87
Imports.....	101
Exports .....	115
Conclusion.....	123

France .....	124
Conclusion .....	132
<b>Chapter 3 British Trade .....</b>	<b>136</b>
Scotland and Colonial Transhipment .....	140
Scottish Trade .....	140
East Indies .....	144
Legislative Restrictions, Free Trade and the Union.....	148
Eighteenth Century Restrictions .....	148
Free Trade .....	151
Commercial Propositions.....	155
Act of Union .....	161
Trade Patterns .....	169
Imports.....	176
Exports .....	189
Conclusion .....	203
<b>Chapter 4 Development in Cork .....</b>	<b>207</b>
The Committee of Merchants .....	210
Political Influence .....	210
Butter Regulation.....	216
Discord .....	222
Transportation.....	231
Quays and waterways.....	237
Steam Packets.....	244
Rail .....	249
Conclusion .....	254
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>267</b>
Appendix 1.....	267
Appendix 2.....	268
Appendix 3.....	269
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>270</b>

## Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Signed 

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the impact international trade and commercial agreements had on the economic and industrial development of Cork during the first industrial revolution. From the Act of Union onwards Cork moved from a region where trade became increasingly reliant on Britain at the expense of trade that had been cultivated over the eighteenth century with the Americas and Europe. The legislative underpinnings of Cork's trade is the focus of this research and how this changed after the Act of Union.

It begins by examining the transatlantic trade of Cork city and the issues faced in the West Indies trade due to the growth of the United States. It will also consider the impact of the Napoleonic Wars on Cork's trade with both the Americas and continental Europe. The conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars saw the United Kingdom negotiate treaties and agreements that would have a direct impact upon Cork's merchants. This thesis will address the degree to which the mercantile community in Cork were able to influence policy that directly impacted upon their trade networks. It will then examine the trade between Cork and the United Kingdom and assess the impact of the Union on the ability of Cork's merchants to affect political change. The operation of the Committee of Merchants in Cork is detailed and their responses to the changing nature of international trade. The thesis finishes by examining the underdevelopment of Cork's transportation networks. This work will place Cork's international trade in both its national and international context and argues that Cork's mercantile community were overly reliant on protectionist legislation to further Cork's trade as opposed to investment in industrial development.

Volumetric data on the trade of Cork city has been transcribed and made available in a relational database to support the arguments made in this thesis and to facilitate future research on this subject. This database is accessible at <http://modernirishvenice.com/>.

## **Accessing the Database**

The database can be accessed at <http://modernirishvenice.com/>.

## Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their help in the production of this work. First and foremost I must thank my family for their help and support over the years, most importantly my father, Rock, and my mother, Toni. Without them this would not have been possible.

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## Figures

Figure 1-1 Cork's sugar imports from all parts of the American Continent .....	44
Figure 1-2 Cork's rum imports .....	47
Figure 1-3 Cork's coffee imports compared to Irish total.....	48
Figure 1-4 Slaves transported to Caribbean by European powers .....	50
Figure 1-5 Population of slaves in Caribbean, 1807-1834 .....	50
Figure 1-6 Exports of beef to West Indies from Cork compared to total Cork beef exports with linear progression .....	53
Figure 1-7 Comparison of Beef and Pork exports to West Indies from Cork.....	55
Figure 1-8 Pork exports from Cork to Americas by region .....	56
Figure 1-9 Cork's butter exports to the West Indies compared to national total .....	58
Figure 1-10 Irish tonnage to and from Liverpool .....	60
Figure 1-11 Cork's tobacco imports from the U.S. as percentage of national total..	63
Figure 1-12 Cork's imports of wood staves from the U.S., compared to Cork's total imports .....	65
Figure 1-13 Cork's flaxseed imports from the U.S. compared to national total.....	66
Figure 1-14 Shipping tonnage from Ireland inwards and outwards from the West Indies .....	71
Figure 1-15 Incoming and Outgoing ships from the West Indies, 1804 .....	74
Figure 2-1 Tonnage entering Ireland 1818-26 .....	81
Figure 2-2 Irish balance of trade .....	86
Figure 2-3 Imports of Portuguese and French wine into Cork.....	86
Figure 2-4 British and Irish exports of butter and cheese to Portugal Proper .....	97
Figure 2-5 Irish wine imports .....	102
Figure 2-6 Irish imports of port.....	105
Figure 2-7 Salt imports into Cork .....	112
Figure 2-8 Salt and wine imports from Portugal.....	114
Figure 2-9 Cork's trade and shipping 1831 .....	114
Figure 2-10 Irish balance of trade with Portugal .....	118
Figure 2-11 Cork's butter exports to Europe .....	120
Figure 2-12 British and Irish butter and cheese exports to Portugal.....	121
Figure 2-13 Irish imports from France .....	128
Figure 2-14 Anglo-French trade .....	128
Figure 3-1 Irish commerce .....	170
Figure 3-2 Imports of sugar of all types into Cork .....	177
Figure 3-3 Cork's tobacco imports .....	178
Figure 3-4 Coal imports into Cork .....	179
Figure 3-5 Drapery imported into Cork.....	184
Figure 3-6 Comparison of cotton imports into Cork and British re-exports.....	186
Figure 3-7 Cotton Importation from Britain .....	187
Figure 3-8 Worsted yarn imports into Cork .....	188
Figure 3-9 Irish yarn imports .....	188
Figure 3-10 Corn exports to Britain.....	190
Figure 3-11 Salted beef exports .....	191
Figure 3-12 Barreled pork exports .....	192
Figure 3-13 Irish beef and Pork prices in London .....	193

Figure 3-14 Comparative butter prices .....	194
Figure 3-15 Bacon Exports .....	196
Figure 3-16 Cork's livestock exports .....	199
Figure 3-17 Irish Livestock Exports.....	199
Figure 3-18 Cork's linen exports .....	201

## Tables

Table 2-1 Irish salt imports.....	112
Table 3-1 Bristol Shipping Routes via Ireland that stopped in Cork, 1749-70 .....	175
Table 3-2 Textile employment in Cork .....	201
Table 4-1 Returns Relating to Government and Merchant Steam Vessels .....	248

## Maps

Map 1-1 Caribbean and North America trade .....	71
Map 1-2 Cork's Trade Route with the Americas .....	72
Map 3-1 Petitions opposing the Commercial Propositions .....	159
Map 4-1 Proposed Canal route (in red) overlaid on the 1838 assessment of the Relative quantities of traffic in Ireland .....	234

## Images

Image 1 Home page for modernirishvenice.com .....	22
Image 2 Search Results Page.....	23

## Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CCCA	Cork City and County Archives
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
TNA-UK	National Archives, Kew

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the changing nature of Cork's international trade during the first industrial revolution, from the mid-1780s to the mid-1840s. Cork's trade during this time was fundamentally at the whim of political decision making in Westminster despite a vocal and active local Committee of Merchants. That group, founded for the regulation of the butter trade in 1769, had become the de-facto representative organisation for the merchants of Cork by the end of the eighteenth century. Despite promoting legislation that had potential benefits for Cork's international trade, they were both limited in their ability to affect political change and more concerned with preserving protective duties than developing new and existing foreign trade routes. This examination contextualises the early nineteenth century trade in Cork city in light of a rapidly changing international environment.

The focus centres on legislation and treaties passed by Westminster that directly impacted upon Cork's international trade, as well as the efforts made by the Committee of Merchants to forward the interests of Cork's mercantile community. The structure of the chapters reflects the nature of Cork's international trade. Chapter One examines the trans-Atlantic trade from Cork, where Cork's expertise in provisioning was of great importance for the supply of Caribbean colonies. It also looks at how the nature of British foreign relations with the United States of America was a perennial issue for Cork's trans-Atlantic trade. Chapter Two considers the changing nature of Cork's trade with Europe, with the focus on Cork's main continental trading partner at this time, Portugal. Chapter Three assesses the nature of Cork's trade with Britain, focusing on how the changing political relationship between Ireland and Britain from the free trade movement to the Act of Union fundamentally altered the nature of Irish trade. The final chapter examines the efficacy of the Committee of Merchants as a body and the crucial issues for their dominance of Cork's trade.

## Context and historiography

The thesis places Cork's international trade in the context of Ireland's changing relationship with Britain and the wider geo-political activities of the United Kingdom during the first industrial revolution. Cork's trade depended on political activities in Westminster both in terms of the regulatory legislation passed in Britain as well as British foreign policy. Cork occupied a niche role in international trade for much of the eighteenth century. The success of the provisioning trade relied heavily on the colonial activities of European powers, most importantly those of Britain but also of Portugal and France. Trade with Continental Europe was subject to the political relationship Britain had with those countries at the time and, as in the case of Portugal, Irish trade relationships constituted a secondary concern. Cork's trade with Portugal was its most stable on the Continent due to the longstanding political relationship between Britain and Portugal. Conversely trade with France was incredibly volatile as conflicts repeatedly disrupted Anglo-Franco relations. Furthermore, the important trade with the West Indian colonies was only successful so long as the capabilities of the United States to provision these islands remained underdeveloped. The opening decades of the nineteenth century saw widespread disruption to both Cork's Continental trade and its West Indian trade as the effects of both European warfare, with its related trade restrictions, and the growth of the American economy upset established trade patterns. Bertie Mandelblatt has previously assessed some of these issues with reference to Ireland's trade with France, noting that provisioning networks were closely aligned to national affiliations making them vulnerable to intra-European warfare.<sup>1</sup>

While Mandelblatt's assessment is accurate with respect to the development of Cork's trade networks into the nineteenth century, it overlooks the impact of fundamental political and legislative changes during this period. The proximity of England combined with developments in transportation technology had important repercussions for the changing nature of Cork's international trade.

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<sup>1</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World' in *History Workshop Journal*, lxiii, no. 1 (2007), p. 40.

This was so evident that Léonce de Lavergne argued that ‘had Ireland been cast in a more distant part of the ocean, in place of so near to her powerful sister, her career would have been a brilliant one.’<sup>2</sup> However, Cork and England always had strong trade links. I argue here that more important than the proximity of Britain was the inaction of Cork’s mercantile community to push for the further development of profitable international trade connections. In the main, they were overly reliant on protective duties and legislation to preserve and develop networks and they did not invest in the necessary infrastructure to create a sustained international trade, such as their own mercantile fleet. They remained dependent on shipping under British account as well as access to British credit. There was a misbelief that the Act of Union would strengthen Ireland’s external trade by granting her free access to British markets whilst protecting them from external competition. Irish merchants underestimated the ultimate direction of the free trade movement.

This is not to solely blame Cork’s merchants for their growing dependence on the British market. As denizens of a small provincial city they were very much subject to changes in policy in Westminster and, despite some success lobbying for their interests, they lacked the political and economic clout to force serious legislative changes. The development of Cork’s international trade was very much a by-product of legislative restrictions put in place in the seventeenth century that had pushed the merchants to focus on provisioning rather than livestock export. Conversely this trade was incredibly vulnerable to changes in British foreign relations and policy. Having such a large proportion of the local economy based upon supplying a limited range of goods left them very susceptible to changing tastes and requirements. This issue Cork’s butter merchants would learn to their detriment through the decline of their trade in the late nineteenth century. Although Cork was a wealthy and prosperous city by early nineteenth century Irish standards its commerce remained primarily based on agriculture. The limited industrial enterprises there were never in a position to compete with the larger and more efficient industrial mechanisms in Britain.

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<sup>2</sup> Léonce de Lavergne, *The Rural Economy of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 1855, p. 361

In an article on the Industrial Revolution Patrick O'Brien identifies a salient issue in terms of regional studies. He argues that historians undertaking regional approaches need to fit their research into the wider national contemporary concerns.<sup>3</sup> He writes with reference to the industrial revolution in Britain, but the same point applies to Irish historiography of the nineteenth century. Much valuable work has been produced on Irish industrial and societal development in that period, but it needs to be conscious of not just the national Irish issues, but also the broader context of the Act of Union and political developments in Britain. Cork's trade did not exist separately from the United Kingdom. Its development was intrinsically linked to British politics. The transformation of eighteenth-century Cork into a premier provisioning port supplying the Atlantic colonies resulted from a combination of restrictions placed on Irish exports to Britain at the end of the seventeenth century, the rapid expansion of the Atlantic economy over the course of the eighteenth century and a fortuitously located harbour. The Woollen Acts, Navigation Acts and the Cattle Acts shaped the nature of Irish international trade. Despite a short term depression after the enactment of the Cattle Acts in 1667 by 1701 it had boosted the development of a strong provisions trade out of Cork.<sup>4</sup> What was especially important for the development of Cork's trade networks over the eighteenth century was that the Navigation Acts only stifled direct trade, not outward trade.<sup>5</sup> This enabled Cork's merchants to develop a thriving transshipment trade. The revocation of these pieces of legislation had a significant impact on the nature of Irish political engagement with Britain up to the Union.

The thesis also addresses the level of reciprocity of Cork's foreign trade. A one-way trade has some benefits, but in the Atlantic economy of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the real value was in the return of valuable crops from the New World. Cork sent out a narrow range of produce and imported a large quantity of luxury items, such as tobacco and sugar. However, the bulk of these

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick K O'Brien, 'Modern Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution' in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Mark McCarthy, 'The Forging of an Atlantic Port City: Socio-Economic and Physical Transformations in Cork, 1660–1700' in *Urban History*, xxviii, no. 01 (2001), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, Ireland ; Portland, OR, 2012), p. 103.

luxury goods were imported via Britain rather than directly from the colonies. For most of the eighteenth century this was due to the restrictive Navigation Acts. This was despite the majority of these restrictions being rescinded by the 1780s and there was no prohibition on Cork undertaking direct trade with either the West Indies or the East Indies. In 1855 Léonce de Lavergne asserted that 'a country is enriched through its exports when it receives something in exchange... but when, as in Ireland, there is a constant export, and no return, it is ruinous.'<sup>6</sup> Whether this was true for Cork, bearing in mind its large harbour devoted to international trade, will be assessed to see the real benefits and opportunities that accrued from international trade. No other city in Ireland was as well-positioned economically and geographically to take advantage of a flourishing import trade with the expanding economies outside of Europe. Why this remained underdeveloped in Cork is a puzzling anomaly considering the ready advantages conferred on Cork city by the nature and very structure of the trans-Atlantic economy.

This research builds upon the excellent work undertaken on Cork's indigenous industries by Andy Bielenberg, David Dickson and Colin Rynne. I move the focus away from local innovations and developments and instead examine the international consumers of Cork's produce.<sup>7</sup> One of the major influences in examining Cork's trade in this manner was derived from Thomas Truxes's work on Irish-American trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> This research places Cork city firmly in the appropriate international context. I argue that despite creating the basis for a strong trade network over the eighteenth century, the development of these connections was hindered by both legislation and treaties passed by Westminster as well as the limited vision and foresight of the Committee of Merchants. The current consensus is that Cork's industrial base

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<sup>6</sup> Lavergne, *The Rural Economy of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880 : Development or Decline?* (Cork :, 1991); David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005); Colin. Rynne and Royal Irish Academy., *The Industrial Archaeology of Cork city and its Environs, 1750-1930* (Dublin :, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, 1988); Thomas M. Truxes, 'Ireland, New York, and the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World' in *American Journal of Irish Studies*, viii, New York University (2011), pp 9–40.



stagnated over the course of the nineteenth century due to an inability match increased British competition, a weakening regional dominance and a lack of mineral resources.<sup>9</sup> This is the same trend Louis Cullen identified for Irish trade overall during this period. He asserts that Ireland's proximity to Britain combined with reductions in transportation costs left the nascent industrial developments of the eighteenth century very vulnerable to competition.<sup>10</sup> My thesis supports this view, but examines these changes through the effect of Britain's relationship with the wider world and an increasingly conservative mercantile body in the case of Cork.

In terms of legislative influences on the development of international trade from Ireland the most immediate concern is the impact of the Act of Union. The Union has had a dominant influence on the development of the modern Irish state. It has also prompted debate and discussion from its first conception up to the modern era: To what extent did the Union shape Irish industrial and economic development? Was it ultimately the source of the de-industrialisation and marginalisation of Ireland or did the ultimate reversion of the gains that nascent Irish industries made in the eighteenth century result from a more complicated confluence of factors? Was the decline in Irish industry due to the commercial aspects of the Act of Union or was it part of a longer term restructuring of trade? The extent to which the changes in Cork's international trade can be attributed to the Union will be examined through the lens of broader legislative and diplomatic changes made at Westminster. The city's commercial merchants were heavily reliant on British shipping and finance and it is likely that this was a far more important factor in the gradual restructuring of Cork's trade routes towards Britain and away from trans-Atlantic trade. Restrictions on trade with the European continent and the growing economic development of the United States also influenced this restructuring.

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<sup>9</sup> Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, pp 116–126; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 498–500.

<sup>10</sup> Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988*, p. 18.

The overall shape of Irish trade in this period was a complex series of interdependent parts. The restrictions of the seventeenth century, the development of Britain's geo-political relations and the requirements of foreign nations informed its evolution. The international nature of Cork's commerce also directed future developments, sometimes at a very fundamental level. For example, the growth of pork production in Ireland was related to the changes in Irish dietary patterns due to the introduction of the potato. It helped encourage the rearing of pigs on small holdings. Cullen suggests that,

In this sense, the trade across the Atlantic is a complex development: the demand for salted meat came from new-world settlements and long-distance navigation, and part of the response-the Irish surplus or pork-was based on the root of an American origin.<sup>11</sup>

However, despite this reciprocity the volume of Cork's international trade declined over the nineteenth century. Eric Richards argues that there is no definitive explanation for the decline of some British regions in the face of competition during the industrial revolution. He discusses the issue of previously core regions peripheralising during this period while other regions developed strong local specialisations.<sup>12</sup>

Although there can rarely be a definitive reason for economic and industrial decline, there are several key factors. Cork was never a core region; its role was always on the periphery of the broader trans-Atlantic trade, albeit an important periphery. This left the city very vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy and to competition from both British trade as well as increased productivity in other regions. The narrow specialisation of Cork was in food production and, despite the best efforts of the Committee of Merchants, this was a difficult speciality to protect from external competition. The most successful of their trade goods, butter, depended on several preconditions. It was designed for long transit times, warm Caribbean climates, a rapidly growing colonial population and naval demand. A change in any of these left the product vulnerable to shrinking market demand.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp 112–113.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Richards, 'Margins of the Industrial Revolution' in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 210.

Decreased transit times, especially to Britain, meant that the heavy salting required for long distance preservation became less palatable. A change in the structure of Europe's Caribbean colonies, for example opening access to British West Indian Islands to American trade, could negate the need for transporting foodstuffs from Europe. Any threat of access to Portuguese salt, a necessity for the preservation process, could threaten the quality of the product. Cork's provisioning trade was designed for a particular set of circumstances. The manner by which the Committee of Merchants secured Cork's dominance in this trade, through a strict regulatory regime, was one that ultimately left them inflexible to change and vulnerable to changing market requirements.

This thesis examines how well Cork's mercantile community adapted to a rapidly changing international trade environment and whether or not they had any real agency in the future development of their commercial endeavours. Previous research has provided an excellent insight into how Cork developed trade and commerce within the city. This research provides a valuable insight into how Cork's domestic industries developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I propose to expand upon that to assess how well Cork's merchants turned these local successes into a thriving and adaptable international trade and build upon this previous research to closely examine the international context for Cork's development in the early nineteenth century.

### ***The Committee of Merchants***

The Committee of Merchants was founded by twenty-three export merchants in Cork in 1769 and would survive into the early decades of the twentieth century. The Committee was founded in response to the relatively poor performance of Cork produced butter in English markets. In 1759 British markets were opened to Irish trade but Cork butter was too heavily salted for the British palate. Despite producing Cork accounting for over a third of Irish butter exports less than a fifth of this was sent to England. The Committee established a three tier pricing system that placed a premium on lightly salted butter in an attempt to revitalise exports to Britain. This was a success and by 1774/5 Cork accounted for

34 per cent of Ireland's butter exports to Britain.<sup>13</sup> The structure and grading systems established by the Committee of Merchants remained broadly unaltered throughout their lifetime. Over the course of the nineteenth century the grades of butter were expanded to six and there were some changes to broaden the membership of the Committee, but these changes were relatively minor. This slow adoption of changes was part of the success of the Committee, they favoured careful consideration over rash judgement. It was strict adherence to local regulations that helped the Cork butter market to dominate the Irish butter trade.<sup>14</sup> However, this rigidity also led them to a tendency for acute conservatism and an inability to react quickly to changing conditions.

The importance of the butter trade to Cork allowed the Committee of Merchants to quickly expand their influence in Cork to cover almost all the major trades of the city as well as becoming very influential in the civic and political life of the city.<sup>15</sup> As butter was the cornerstone of Cork's commercial development and financial well-being the membership of the Committee of Merchant's included a large number of individuals that had economic and political clout. This enabled the Committee to carve a particular niche out for Cork's butter trade and successfully secured Cork's butter trade exemptions from legislative interference up to 1829. Such manoeuvring was greatly assisted by the protracted Napoleonic Wars giving Cork a unique position of primacy in the Atlantic economy. Cork was the main conveying point for ships travelling in protective convoys across the Atlantic, and since the American War of Independence had been the centre of British naval victualling in Ireland. The Committee regularly entertained a variety of admirals and other senior military and political figures, which no doubt helped them in their political lobbying. This enabled them to exert an undue amount of influence for a city of Cork's size.

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<sup>13</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 375–377.

<sup>14</sup> James S. Donnelly, 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Irish Butter Trade,' *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11 (1971), pp 133–134.

<sup>15</sup> David Dickson, 'Butter Comes to the Market: The Origins of Commercial Dairying in County Cork,' in Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (eds), *Cork: History & Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, (Irish County History Series v.6, Dublin, 1993), pp 368–385.

After the removal of specific protection granted to Cork produced butter in 1829 the Committee of Merchants, with the support of much of Cork's political and mercantile classes, moved to a system of internal regulation. This involved the voluntary agreement of several interested parties in the city as well as a more vigorous policy of enforcement abroad in major British ports such as London and Liverpool. This maintained both the value and the market for Cork produced butter for several decades. The introduction of butter substitutes from the continent, such as Butterine, improvements in the packaging of continental butter and the Irish agricultural depression of the 1870s had a serious impact on the market for the Cork butter merchants. They were slow to adopt more modern packaging methods, relying on the traditional firkin, and were slow to adopt refrigeration preferring heavy salting for preservation.<sup>16</sup> This spelled the beginning of a period of marked decline of the influence of the Committee. By 1884 control of the butter market in Cork was transferred from the Committee of Merchants to a board of trustees. A declining butter trade, the beginning of the creamery system and poor adaptation of modern production methods led to the end of the Committee of Merchants as a domineering influence on Cork's external trade.<sup>17</sup> New methods of trade, production and sale had passed them by and they were too slow to adjust to the new realities of the trade. The butter market in Cork was still active by 1919, but the massive growth of the commercial creamery system and the co-operative movement damaged their dominance of the butter trade in South Munster.<sup>18</sup> The high point of the Committee of Merchants influence was from the late eighteenth century up to around the mid nineteenth century, which coincides with the high point for Cork's international trade in general. This is unsurprising as the market for butter and provisions were closely related in this period.

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<sup>16</sup> Donnelly, "Cork Market," , pp 146–158.

<sup>17</sup> Liam Kennedy, "The Decline of the Cork Butter Market: A Comment," *Studia Hibernica*, no. 16 (1976), p 175.

<sup>18</sup> Colin Rynne, *At the Sign of the Cow: The Cork Butter Market, 1770-1924* (Cork, 1998), pp 92–98.

## **A Relational Database of Cork's Trade**

The most important primary sources used for this evaluation were the 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports' in the National Library of Ireland that cover the volumes of Irish trade for the period 1764-1823, the 'Committee of Merchants Papers' held by the Cork City and County Archives and the British Parliamentary Papers.<sup>19</sup> The latter two were used to examine the political lobbying and debates that were fundamental to the evolution of Cork's trade during this period. The Committee of Merchants minute books provide an invaluable insight into the political and commercial world of Cork city during the nineteenth century. However, the minute book covering the crucial period of 1818-28 is lost. The 1820s saw distinct changes in Ireland's relationship with Britain and in the lobbying efforts of the Committee. The two extant volumes on either side of the 1820s show a shift in the tone and interests of the committee. From 1829 on they appeared to have less of an interest in international affairs and far more concern with the local interests of the merchants. This is somewhat understandable as the Napoleonic Wars were a major issue for exporters to deal with, but it is interesting that their focus moves from actively petitioning those with political influence, to enforcing and creating local regulations and ordinances. The merchants had moved from trying to improve their commercial opportunities at the highest level of political engagement to instead focusing on local issues. This was a result of two issues, the decline in Cork's international trade and an increasing focus on Britain, as well as the removal of exemptions that had allowed the Committee of Merchants a large amount of freedom to regulate Cork's butter trade as they saw fit. If the 1820s volume was extant such a change in tone might appear more natural.

The 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports' record the volumes of trade for each port broken down by destination and item level. The majority of the data used in the charts throughout the thesis derived from this source and the data for the period 1797-1823 has been compiled into a database (discussed below). Although the transcription of all Cork's trade during this period was laborious it allows for a

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<sup>19</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, in 24 vols, for the period 1764-1823', MSS 353-76 ,NLI; 'Committee of Merchants Papers', U401, CCCA

very detailed level of analysis of the trade volumes during the period, from the trade in major goods such as butter to the trade in luxury items such as sugar. Using a volumetric analysis gives a clear indication of how much demand impacted upon the local export economy. In terms of the valuations and price series excellent work has been done by Liam Kennedy, Peter Solar and David Dickson in this regard, so these price series can be used to show the valuations for the core products.<sup>20</sup> A problem with this series, and one that transcends both the NLI and the Cust series, is that the Act of Union led to a merger of the customs and trade data between Ireland and the United Kingdom. The NLI series ends on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1823 with the Kew series going further by 6 years, though the level of detail of the earlier ledgers is lost. This is due to the Irish trade being classed as a coasting trade after 1823, which ended the recording of separate data for Ireland's external trade.<sup>21</sup>

Creating new digital historical resources provides us with the opportunity to create new perspectives and new interpretations of our past. They also have the potential to create larger agglomerations of research from data sets that may never have been able to interact or be merged whilst in an analogue format. A vast amount of data is being made available online at an exponential rate. In some cases this material is being digitised by cultural heritage institutions as part of larger advocacy and outreach plans that dovetail with contemporary political and public objectives regarding historical events. Examples of this would include the historic Irish census data online through the National Archives of Ireland, the Bureau of Military History Digitisation project and the National Library of Ireland's collection of historic photographs on Flickr. Larger projects such as Europeana aggregate all of these collections and merge them online as part of promoting a wider European cultural resource.

These are all admirable projects, especially if they relate to one's own research. Unfortunately the resources that might interest the public or reflect the

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<sup>20</sup> Liam Kennedy and Peter Solar, *Irish Agriculture: A Price History, From the Mid-Eighteenth Century to the Eve of the First World War* (Dublin, 2007); David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Charles Hubert Oldham, 'Ireland's External Trade' in *19th Century Social History Pamphlets* (London, 1910), p. 10.

prevailing cultural atmosphere are not necessarily those that are of utility to the historian. Unlike digital humanities projects in some other fields historical data is not necessarily readily translatable into a machine readable format. The issues vary from the inability of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to adequately cope with handwriting, poor or unreadable typesets, palaeographic issues and many other problems inherent with historical sources too extensive to list here. This means that for many historians the starting point is at the level of transcription, a very labour and time intensive activity, with very uncertain outcomes at the end. The question remains: why undertake such work?

There are several compelling reasons for doing so. Firstly, the data that I have transcribed for this project has been used by many social and economic historians in the past. The corollary of this is that this is not the first time that an individual has had to examine and transcribe this data for their research. By transcribing the data into a relational database the data used for my own thesis can aid future researchers. If the objective of history is to move our understanding of the past forward, should this not also include providing access to as much of our data as possible? Rather than sitting on silos of data we should provide broad access to our data and see what others can do with our initial work. As previously mentioned one of the benefits of creating a database from this type of material is that it has the potential to allow future researchers to analyse the reasons for the disparities between the ledgers held in Kew and those in the NLI. On a more immediate level it will make a portion of an invaluable resource for Irish economic history more immediately accessible to a wider audience. The ledgers themselves are unremarkable eighteenth and nineteenth century books. As objects they may be ordinary, yet the data that they contain gives a valuable insight into Irish commercial life at a regional level for one of the most remarkable periods in Irish history. They cover a period of unprecedented expansion in the Irish economy, major European warfare and the fundamental political changes that occurred between Grattan's Parliament and the full implementation of the Act of Union. Creating a more accessible resource from this data has the potential to save future



researchers months of painstaking transcription and allow them to focus on further developing and analysing the context in which this trade was conducted.

### ***Database Design***

The design of the database to hold the volumetric data was an iterative process. The first design, based on samples of data taken from a preliminary research trip was broadly similar to the final structure. The main difference between the initial and final designs was that the former was intended to also contain comparative data for Dublin and Belfast when those cities were exporting the same product to the same region as Cork, along with the national totals. The inclusion of the data for Belfast and Dublin in the preliminary design was to provide a comparison with other Irish cities. The sheer volume of data transcription this would have entailed was an impractical undertaking so this had to be omitted. The abstracts for yearly totals were compiled separately in a spreadsheet as a control group to help in the identification of any issues that may have arisen in either the data collation or transcription. From my preliminary research I was aware that the measurements used, as well as the goods descriptions, varied sufficiently for some form of control to be required to refer back to. It was hoped that the combination of the database design and the interface would allow for rapid data entry. The database structure and the web interface were created in conjunction with each other. The objective of this was two-fold: the web interface would ultimately be used for access to the database when put online, but until then it was designed to operate also as the data entry interface. This proved to be a much faster system than either transcribing into a spreadsheet or entering the data directly into the database.

Unfortunately a number of issues arose that required a redesign of the system. The web interface, running through a localhost, was not flexible enough for quick data entry. Approximately every 50-75 entries the interface would crash. This problem was resolved through a redesign of the website. Furthermore, the system was not fast enough for data entry straight from the archives. This was partially due to an underestimation of the amount of material contained in the records and also

to the design of the web interface. Instead of conducting data entry in the archives, I took images of the remaining volumes for later transcription. For reasons of time and the volume of material I decided to forego the collation of the data for Dublin and Belfast. This was unfortunate, but to transcribe all this data would have been impractical. To speed up the web interface several 'placeholders' were inserted in the HTML. These ensure that on each refresh of the page after an entry had been submitted the page would have the cursor ready for the next entry in the 'year' field. This may seem like a minor change, but combined with the more restrictive data capture it at least halved the workflow and the time spent on transcription. The database itself was revised with these changes in mind to streamline it. This helped mitigate against the crashes that I had previously experienced with the web interface.

There are a number of legacies of this previous database that remain in the current system due to issues that became apparent while transcribing the data, such as the 'measurement' field. The concept for this field was that it would link to a separate measurements table. The data was captured as it was written, in imperial units. This was done to ensure the database was as accurate a reflection of the volumes as possible. However, databases and data visualization suites are designed for metric measurement systems. The initial concept was that the measurements table, through some form of Javascript code, would act as an intermediary between the recorded data and a visualization where the data would be converted into more usable measurements such as pounds. However, this was never implemented due to the sheer variety of measurements employed in the data and variances within specific units of measurement, such as a bushel of wheat being approximately fifty-six pounds whereas a bushel of oats could be as low as thirty-eight pounds.<sup>22</sup>

A number of potential uses for the database design should be pointed out. First of all, although the data for Dublin and Belfast has been omitted, it is very easy for fields for any other county or region to be added to this database. It only

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<sup>22</sup> Aashish Velkar, *Markets and Measurements in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge; New York, 2012), p. 32

requires a small revision of the database code. The data can also be incorporated into a larger geographic dataset or to be used to geographically map the movement of goods across nations. In terms of this database there is not a huge amount of new information to be gleaned from doing so. There is a certain amount that can be learned from this, but in terms of a project focused on a single city its value is limited. An expanded dataset containing the data for other Irish regions would make this an invaluable tool, but as this database only contains the information for Cork it is of limited benefit.

This ties into a wider concept of the utility of such databases for historical scholarship. By its very nature this project is focused on a single region in Ireland, though national data is included. By making this database freely and openly accessible, by creating it in an open programming language as free from proprietary tools as possible and by documenting the creation of the database and its limitations fully, there is the potential to integrate the data into other resources. As has been pointed out it would be relatively straightforward to add in data for other Irish counties, allowing this database to function as a readymade resource for historians to compare data for Ireland. There is also no reason why this data cannot be taken and used with other sources of national import and export figures to create trade comparisons. However, there are a few caveats to bear in mind. For goods being exported and imported from Cork the national totals for that market are recorded. But if Cork did not engage with that market in a certain product the data was not captured. This is the result of necessity. It would take far more time than was available over the course of a PhD to capture all that data. For similar reasons the abstracts for Irish trade only capture the totals for each product. All products in the trade abstracts, whether traded in Cork or not, were recorded to create contextual information. The abstracts for Irish trade also record the amount of each product sent to each port, but this data was not transcribed, again due to time restraints. A database of this information alone would be invaluable, but it was outside the scope of this project. I expect that future expansion on this database will include this information.

In many respects it would have been ideal to have the time and resources necessary to solve some of these issues, but identifying them is half the battle for a project such as this. Aside from generating the data required for this thesis the primary goal for creating this database was two-fold; to create a resource for future researchers and to serve as a proof of concept for a database for representing Irish export and import figures that was as accurate and sympathetic to the original as possible. It is important that we make the data we generate over the course of research projects as openly available as possible. By making our research as open and accessible as possible it creates the potential for our data to be re-used in new and unforeseen ways to the benefit of scholarship as a whole. The issues described above notwithstanding it has achieved all the primary objectives. To develop a more interactive database that contains similar data for other Irish regions would be a valuable tool and is deserving of further time and study.

### ***Transcription Issues***

Despite having undertaken a sampling exercise of the data in this series prior to embarking upon the full transcription process a number of issues arose that impacted upon the database's design and outputs. The most apparent issue was concerning the wide variance in the units of measurement for the goods traded. An obvious example of this is the hundredweight measurement. Over the course of transcribing the data the measurement used for hundredweights varied year on year from the division hundredweight-quarters-pounds (CQLB) to hundredweight-stone-pounds (CWT). Although this is not a major issue in itself, it impacted upon how the data was exported for visualisation and created an additional barrier to generating charts and graphs. However, once identified this was easily rectified. A more difficult problem actually surrounds the most stable unit of measurement throughout the series, the barrel. Due to a combination of how goods were measured and local standards the pound weight of a barrel of produce varied depending on a number of factors, including the region in which it was recorded and the goods being measured. Aashish Velkar has produced one of the most comprehensive accounts of British measurement systems and his work has broad

applications to Ireland's trade goods.<sup>23</sup> What complicates the issue of measurement, in terms of the NLI series, is that in some instances the measurement unit used were wrong. It appears that, at least in some cases, the volumetric data and the goods data was entered independently. It is highly likely that the list of goods and measurements was composed from a separate clerk's ledger that contained all goods traded, data was filled under this system and then the final tallies were calculated excluding goods that were not handled that year. This presumption is supported by the CUST 15 account for 1714 in Kew. Here the volume available for that year is actually one of these draft ledgers rather than the final version. It has quite a different structure to the finalised ledgers.<sup>24</sup> It is highly likely that a similar system was in place in the Irish customs for the recording of trade data.

For the data used in this thesis these variances resulted in a number of issues that should be made explicit. To allow comparisons for a number of goods some items, such as wood products, which were recorded in a wide variety of units, were normalised to a standard unit of measurement. In some instances this involved converting goods measured in pounds up to a hundredweight measure of 112 lbs, and in other instances it entailed converting products recorded in *mille* or *thou* down to hundreds, as was the case with many recordings of wood staves. In other instances it was deemed more appropriate to round to the nearest whole number, as was the case with multiple recordings of hundredweights of beef or pork. This has an insignificant effect on the graphs shown as the volumes of goods traded overall negated any discrepancies.

Such discrepancies are not limited to the measurement units being used. Over the timespan transcribed how trade with foreign states was recorded changed. This is understandable as the period was one of dramatic upheaval. Overall it has a limited impact on the data. In the earlier years British possessions in

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<sup>23</sup> Aashish Velkar, 'Measurements, Standards and Transactions: Measurements in Nineteenth-Century British Economy' (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, London, 2008); Velkar, *Markets and Measurements in Nineteenth Century Britain*.

<sup>24</sup> 'Ledgers of Imports and Exports, Ireland 1698-1829', CUST 15, TNA

the Caribbean were simply recorded as the West Indies, but later trade with individual islands was recorded. The most noticeable, and tantalising, change in the recording of foreign trade occurs post 1819 where distinctions are made between foreign and colonial goods imported through England. Some goods are also differentiated by the suffix 'East India' or 'not East India'. A reasonable supposition is that these were goods imported directly into Ireland and that they were not transhipped via England. This assumption is supported by the fact that the East India Company charter contained a proviso for a certain number of ships per year to land directly into Ireland. These variations give us an intriguing, yet unfortunately brief, window into the true extent of Ireland's colonial trade and global connections. These are issues to be addressed in future research.

### ***Website Design***

The database is accessible online from [modernirishvenice.com](http://modernirishvenice.com). In order to create a usable web interface and to facilitate visualisation the data required conversion. The focus of this conversion was on three main areas. Firstly, the measurement units needed to be standardised. The units used for measurement of goods in some instances changed over the course of the nineteenth century. In most instances this was simply converting pounds into stone. This was done to standardise the measurements across time. Secondly, imperial units do not work well in modern graphing programmes. In instances where the measurements contained three divisions, for example pounds, shillings and pence, the unit was converted to a decimal format. It would have also been possible to simply drop the final unit, for example the pence measurement, but converting to decimal units provides a slightly more accurate representation of the original data. Although these conversions could all have been done using SQL quite rapidly the conversion process was actually undertaken in spreadsheet software. The required data was exported to excel and the conversions were undertaken using excel formulae. Although slower this allowed for constant sampling of the data to ensure accuracy as well as an ability to roll back any changes that were incorrect, which would have been more difficult to do using SQL.

The third conversion of the data was far more complex, but was necessary to create a usable search interface. Due to a variety of factors such as recording the data for similar products with a variety of different units and the subdivision of products over the course of the nineteenth century, such as some timber products, the primary database contains 1,552 recorded products. For a functional search interface these needed to be simplified. If this was not done there would have been errors in the returned figures. For example, there were three different entries for hams, measured in *CWT*, *CQLB* and *Barrels*. These needed to be rationalised to ensure all requested data was being returned. Furthermore, there were 142 different entries for wood products, and within those goods there were eight different types of fir timber recorded. This level of detail was unnecessary for this thesis and made the search interface very complex. Such items were normalised to reduce the search list to 639 items. In the case of wood the 142 entries were reduced to 12. Such normalisation was not undertaken in all instances. The level of detail for wood products was unnecessary for the web interface, but the subdivision of wine was left broadly unaltered as the distinction made between French wine and Portuguese wine was desirable. Although all these changes required dramatic intervention in the data as recorded in the nineteenth century they were necessary to create a usable search interface. As the primary database is available for download from the website such intervention is acceptable as any researcher can access the data as recorded in the ledgers. The original list of goods along with the normalised list is also available from the website for download.

This simplification was undertaken to address issues that arose with the reconstruction of the Database of Irish Historical Statistics created by Queens University Belfast in the 1990's, and currently available from the History Data Service.<sup>25</sup> This database was a phenomenal undertaking, recording the Irish agricultural production levels in the mid to late nineteenth century. The data was recorded from the parliamentary returns and is an incredibly detailed data series. However, the data was captured as accurately as possible and this means that

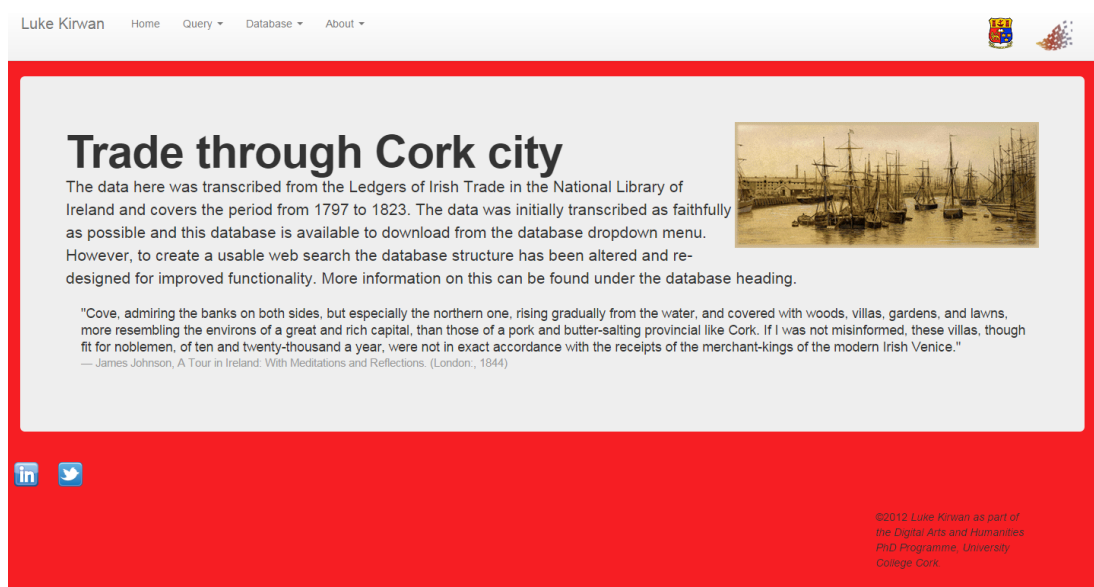
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<sup>25</sup> Clarkson, L.A., Kennedy, L., Crawford, E.M., Dowling, M.W. (1997). *Database of Irish Historical Statistics*. UK Data Service, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-3578-1>.

searching the data can be quite complex. A variety of geographical divisions were employed over the decades for recording the data which cannot be readily integrated with one another, and the level of detail for specific agricultural livestock varies, in some instances the ages of livestock are recorded and in other years they are not. This makes querying a specific item over the decades a very complex piece of SQL code, so in preparation for my own database this database was normalised. This was a partial success. Rationalising the goods produced was relatively straightforward, but the geographic locations was very difficult to normalise to an acceptable system. This was due to the enumerators recording the returns for baronies, poor law unions or electoral divisions. These divisions often crossed county boundaries, so standardising them is no simple task. Fortunately in terms of the database for Cork's trade the geographic entities were straightforward, usually only divisions of countries which could be readily standardised. As Cork undertook the majority of its trade with the coastal countries of Europe the issues regarding the more complicated geographical divisions of early nineteenth century Europe, such as the Holy Roman Empire and the German Confederation, did not arise.

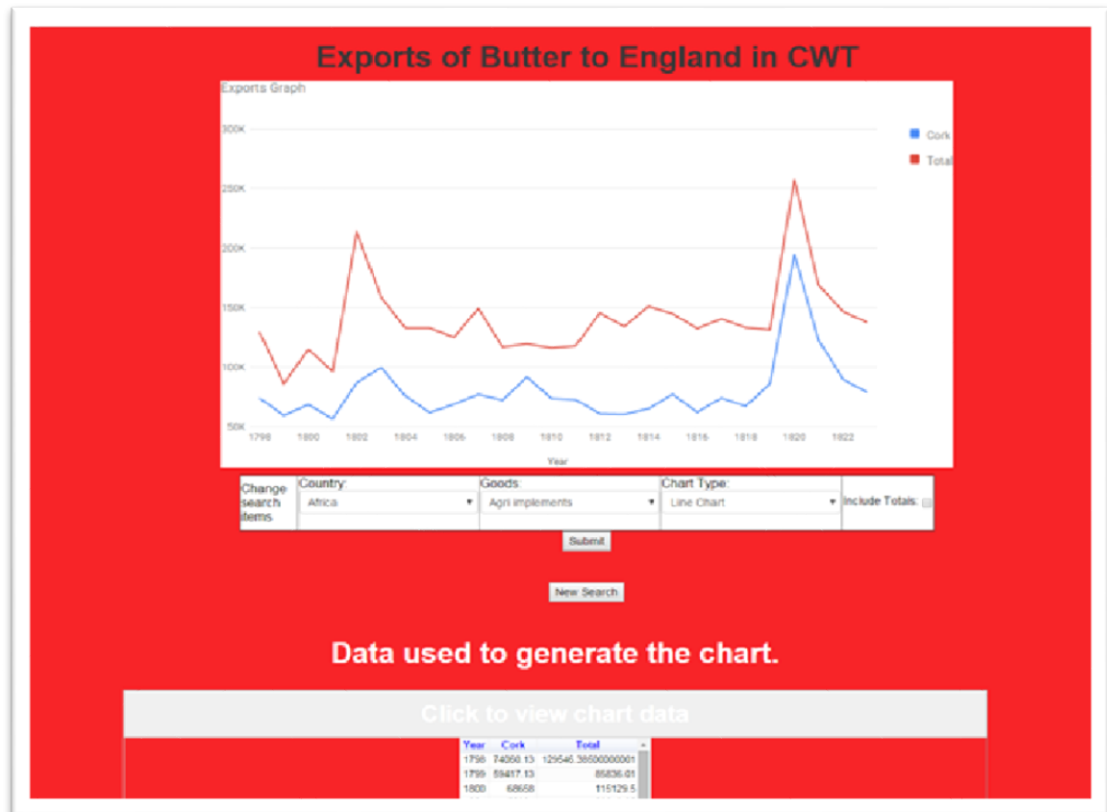
The website itself was designed using the Bootstrap framework. The open source and modular nature of Bootstrap makes the process of designing a dynamic front end interface far more intuitive. It allows for a web page to be adapted for a variety of browser and hardware configurations quite quickly. The homepage can be seen in image 1.





*Image 1 Home page for modernirishvenice.com*

The 'Query' tab contains details on how to use the search interface and provides the user with the option to search exports or imports. Whichever option is chosen will open the search page. There are four options to create a search, 'Country', 'Goods', 'Chart Type' and there is the option to include the total volume of trade from Cork for the specific product. The 'Chart Type' option gives the user the choice between a line or a bar chart. Once the desired search terms have been selected the results page will appear with a populated chart, as seen in image 2. A title is dynamically generated based on the inputted search terms. Below the visualisation there is the option to generate an image based on new search terms and towards the bottom of the page there is an expandable section where the user can view the data in tabular form.



*Image 2 Search Results Page*

The 'Database' dropdown provides the user with details regarding the database and also allows the user to download both the normalised and un-normalised databases. Finally the 'About' dropdown gives information on the site and a select bibliography on Cork's trade. The underlying code used to create the search and retrieval interface, as well as the relevant variables for the visualisations, can be viewed from the 'About this Site' section of the website.

To generate the visualisations the Google Chart API was chosen. Initially Highcharts was to be used, but Google Charts was simpler to implement and provides more functionality, such as the ability to show the data for any point on the chart by hovering over it with the cursor. Google Charts is optimised for use with Google Sheets, Google's spreadsheet software, and some options are not available unless the data is contained in Google Sheets. The data used for this website is generated dynamically from an SQL database so many of the more advanced functions were not available. If there was only a sporadic trade in an item it is recommended that the user select the option for a bar chart. This is due to

Google Charts automatically joining values in a line chart. For example, if there was a trade in a product in 1800 and then no trade in that item until 1820, Google Charts will automatically connect these two data points. Selecting the bar chart option negates this issue if it arises.

The focus in this thesis is on the most important countries that Cork traded with during the early nineteenth century. This is reflected in the structure of the thesis. Cork's part in the transatlantic trade was the defining trade for eighteenth century Cork. The expertise they developed in preserving foodstuffs for the Caribbean was the cornerstone of all their international trade. In order to ensure quality produce they needed access to Portuguese salt. The monetary value of trade with Portugal was small in comparison to that with the Caribbean or Britain, but access to Portuguese salt for preservation was fundamental to ensure the quality of their provisions. Finally Britain was the defining influence for their commerce. Sixteenth century restrictions had led to the development of Cork's transatlantic trade, and political change in Britain was one of the fundamental problems for Cork's provisioning merchants. However, the Committee of Merchants in Cork also bears responsibility for many of the issues that arose for Cork's international trade in the nineteenth century. Cork undertook trade with many different countries at many different points in the nineteenth century, but trade with Britain, Portugal and the West Indies was critical to their success. Any changes in the nature of their commerce with any of these three countries had the potential to be disastrous to Cork's commercial development.

## Chapter 1

### Trans-Atlantic Trade

Ireland's, and specifically Cork's, trade and industrial development was intrinsically linked to the modern world that was taking shape around them. Close ties with Britain integrated Ireland into the world's largest economy, one that would shortly have the power to enforce the *Pax Britannica*. In many respects the loss of Grattan's Parliament and the introduction of the Union with Britain improved Ireland's potential for economic growth. Before the Act of Union protectionist legislation (such as the Navigation, Wool, and Cotton Acts) restricted Ireland's access to imperial markets. However, the implementation of the Act of Union would potentially put much of Ireland's trade on an equal footing with that of Britain. Terms under Article VI limited Ireland's integration for a period, but these limitations were only to apply for a prescribed length of time. Of course this was not the only important legislation passed at this time; it was just one of the few that Cork merchants could influence. Two other major pieces of legislation would come to pass that had the potential to impact Cork's trans-Atlantic trade; the abolition of slavery and the prospective renewal of certain provisions of the *Jay Treaty*. The abolition of slavery had little noticeable impact on the volumes of trade Cork conducted with the Americas, but the *Jay Treaty* and its renewal was a long running issue that posed a serious threat to Cork's transatlantic commerce. This chapter will assess the impact that legislative and treaty changes had on the Cork merchants' trans-Atlantic trade with the West Indies and America. It will also assess their attempts to preserve and increase their access to these markets.

Historians of British industrial development have long debated the importance of the Caribbean trade to the British Industrial Revolution. Mokyr disputes the claim that foreign markets were vital for the rapid expansion in British

industrial growth.<sup>1</sup> By the 1780s the opinion that foreign trade was ‘trivial and dispensable’ was moving towards a perception that it provided a variety of benefits not captured statistically and comprising a significant component of British industrialisation.<sup>2</sup> These benefits comprised of the trades ancillary to the main provisioning industries in Cork, as well as the associated benefits of engaging in international trade such as the profits made in transporting goods across the Atlantic. More recently Mokyr has argued that the importance of foreign trade was twofold: it spurred on economic growth and was a useful tool in British colonial domination through the exclusion of rival European powers. However, he suggests that these factors had lost much of their primacy by 1780.<sup>3</sup>

This debate does not apply directly to Cork, but it is relevant because Cork’s industrial development throughout the eighteenth century was driven by the merchant class. The main business of these merchants was in supplying provisions for both the colonies across the Atlantic and the vessels making the voyage.<sup>4</sup> They developed techniques to ensure that produce lasted for the duration of these trips. The focus on the production of provisions led to specialisation in many trades that were directly related to the provisioning industries, such as coopering, tallow making, and leather work. The only major industry in the region that had a large stake in the trans-Atlantic trade outside of food production was in linen goods. The Cattle Acts had forced Cork merchants to broaden their horizons at the same time that the American economies’ pace of growth increased. Cork merchants had a vested interest in developments across the Atlantic.

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<sup>1</sup> Darity, William, ‘British Industry and West Indies Plantations’ in Stanley L. Engerman and J. E. Inikori (eds), *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, N.C, 1992), p. 250; Joel Mokyr (ed.), *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1985), pp 22–23.

<sup>2</sup> *Provincializing the First Industrial Revolution*, by Patrick O’Brien, 22474, Economic History Working Paper (2006), p. 13 (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/22474/1/wp17.pdf>) (12 Feb. 2014) Quoting from ‘The British Industrial Revolution’ edited By Joel Mokyr, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (The New economic history of Britain, New Haven, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (Studies in Economic and Social History, London, 1972), pp 54–55; R. C. Nash, ‘Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’ in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii, no. 3 (1985), pp 329–356; Francis G. James, ‘Irish Colonial Trade in the Eighteenth Century’ in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, xx, no. 4 (1963), pp 574–584.

## Cork's Trade with the Americas

The trans-Atlantic trade from Cork, to all locations, was primarily in provisions and semi-finished or finished produce, such as linen and shoes. There were small amounts of other desiderata sent to the colonies, such as glassware, but the trade in these items was minute. Restrictions placed on Ireland during the eighteenth century influenced the structure of this trade, moving the focus away from live exports and towards provisioning and limiting the production of wool while favouring linen. Eighteenth century legislation was intended to limit Irish competition on the British market. Richard Pares and Mark McCarthy have argued that the British government had forced South Munster into livestock raising due to these restrictive eighteenth century policies.<sup>5</sup> Although much of the restrictive legislation had been lifted by the turn of the century and the Act of Union promised to grant greater access to the United Kingdom home market, a large proportion of the structure and focus of Cork's trade had already been consolidated. O'Hearn argues that during this period British policy moved from formal colonialism to free trade imperialism and that this was further enhanced in Ireland as the 'Union helped Britain control Ireland politically and subjugate it economically, institutionalising regional unequal development between regions'.<sup>6</sup>

The restrictions of the sixteenth century forced Irish merchants to source economic opportunities elsewhere through the development of alternative industries. As the trans-Atlantic trading environment gained momentum, a new opportunity was presented to South Munster; supplying the colonies. Munster, with fertile agricultural land, a strong tradition of livestock production, one of the largest natural harbours in the world, and positioned on the South Western tip of the European Atlantic, was ideally suited to establish itself in trade with the American colonies. It was also strategically placed for shipping to supply and gather what it needed before making the crossing. It was in the provisioning trade and

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies: 1739-1763* (1936), pp 426–428; Mark McCarthy, 'The Forging of an Atlantic Port City: Socio-Economic and Physical Transformations in Cork, 1660–1700' in *Urban History*, xxviii, no. 01 (2001), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Denis O'Hearn, 'Ireland in the Atlantic Economy' in Terrence McDonough, (ed.), *Was Ireland a Colony? Economy, Politics, Ideology and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin ; Portland, OR, 2005), pp 3–4.

burgeoning trade in American cash crops that Cork developed its enviable, though tenuous, position in the Atlantic economy. In 1853 John Maguire commented on the city's access to American markets while discussing the decline in Irish provisioning at that time. He noted both the 'immense' size of Cork's provisioning industries and their 'peculiar privileges over the...important markets of Newfoundland and the West Indies.'<sup>7</sup>

The following sections focus on direct trade between Cork and the American continent and assess the reasons for its decline after very strong growth during the eighteenth century. This is not to take away from the importance of the transshipment trade. It was indeed a key component of Cork's trans-Atlantic economy that dwarfed the direct trade, but this will be dealt with in following chapters on trade with the Continent and with Britain. The main potential benefit from trade with the Americas was through direct links. This provided the mercantile community in Cork with access to some of the most rapidly developing world economies and to regions of the world whose cash crops were becoming increasingly valuable consumables in Europe. Furthermore, the transshipment trade should be considered under the auspices of Cork's trade with the intermediary nation; the market to which they were gaining access. In many respects it is irrelevant if the majority of the butter being shipped to Liverpool was intended for the American market. Cork derived very little benefit from the ultimate destination of transhipped produce, beyond the fact that there was demand for its particular brand.<sup>8</sup> Cork's merchants did not gain direct access this way to cash crops such as sugar or tobacco. One of the most serious threats to Cork's transatlantic trade came from the newly emergent United States and its proximity to the West Indies markets.

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<sup>7</sup> John Francis Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland: As Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (1853), p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* pp. 133-4 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135

### ***The 'Jay Treaty' (1794) and Cork Merchants***

The economic development of the United States had a negative impact on Cork's Atlantic trade from 1790 to 1830. During the eighteenth century the main products being imported from the United States were flaxseed and timber. During the mid-1780s Reuben Harvey, a successful Cork merchant, corresponded regularly with suppliers in North America providing market conditions for these goods in Ireland. He noted in 1786 that '...staves here are declining owing to great quantities lately landed from Philadelphia'.<sup>9</sup> In this correspondence he also takes care to mention legislative acts that could have an impact upon their business:

An act of Parliament has lately pass'd allowing your vessels and cargoes to be enter'd at our custom houses and discharged... your ships can be sold without any duty, but they are not permitted in the West Indies to land Irish produce of manufactures, tho' they may load such articles in Ireland.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note the specific exclusion of the West Indies. These islands were too valuable to Britain to allow access to the United States, which had until very recently been at war with Britain.

This protectionism, so crucial for Cork's provisioning merchants, would not last. Cork's main exports to the Caribbean were in processed foodstuffs, commodities that America had the potential, but not yet the ability, to supply. Fear of American competition on these markets led the *Freeman's Journal* to complain that 'The States of America are stirring earth and hell to be permitted *our* West India islands with provisions and lumber'.<sup>11</sup> This apprehension about the potential for American interference in colonial markets extended to the highest levels of the British establishment, with a report to William Pitt noting the damage that could be caused:

When America shall be quickly settled, shall have established salt works, and can draw cattle from the back settlements, she may supply the West Indies with provisions, and the injury to Ireland will then extend not only to depriving her of the beef and pork trade, but of those commodities which cattle furnish, such as

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<sup>9</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800: 1775-1800* (Boston, 1914), pp 194–195.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279. This is probably a reference to the Trade with America Act, 1783.

<sup>11</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Feb. 1786



butter, candles, cheese, tanned hides, soap, tallow, shoes, and all other manufactures of leather... This may therefore be the proper time for settling the trade with the West Indies, so that no article of manufacture in which America may at a future day contend with Great Britain or Ireland be suffered now to be imported into the islands from America.<sup>12</sup>

This statement echoes the main points of letters John Foster sent to Thomas Orde around the same time querying the state of the United States relationship with the West Indies and the potential threat of this to Ireland's trade. He maintained that allowing a free trade between North America and the West Indies would benefit 'all those who wish to separate us [Ireland] from Britain.'<sup>13</sup>

The decades between the end of the Revolutionary War and the opening of the nineteenth century were tumultuous times for trade with North America. Leaving aside the changes in Ireland's status after its absorption into the United Kingdom, the Napoleonic Wars' impact on Continental trade and the increasing pressures on Irish domestic industry due to improving production methods in Britain, America was emerging as a real threat to Ireland's trade with the Caribbean. In an examination of the commercial state of the West Indies in 1807 many residents and merchants of the various islands expressed doubts concerning their ability to source goods from Britain during times of conflict. Furthermore they expressed reservations regarding the cost involved in transporting supplies over such a distance.<sup>14</sup> The Jefferson Embargo of 1807 and ensuing economic and military conflicts with Britain stemmed the flow of American goods into the West Indies somewhat, but this merely served to postpone the inevitable. These issues became more pronounced as the years moved on and conflicts increased.

By 1805 this threat had become so apparent that the merchant community of Cork felt the need to petition William Pitt, then first Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, regarding the pressures they were under. In their

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<sup>12</sup> Account of Commodities exported from Ireland to America and the West Indies, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/322 ff 109–113, BL.

<sup>13</sup> 'Trade and Commerce', extracts of letters from John Foster, 28 Sept. and 12 Oct. 1784, Bolton Papers MS 16,356, NLI

<sup>14</sup> *Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies.*, H.C. 1807 (65) iii, 1

petition they noted that the provision trade was declining and under serious threat of being extinguished. Their main contention was that it had become impossible for Cork provisioning merchants to compete with the capabilities of the United States to provision the British colonies and the conquered settlements. Presumably this referred to captured islands during the Napoleonic Wars, as well as Trinidad, which was ceded to Britain under the *Treaty of Amiens*.<sup>15</sup> As with most petitions or correspondence the Cork merchants attempted to frame the issues as an Imperial matter, pointing out how valuable this trade was to the British American Colonies, 'as we was [sic] to the United Kingdom.'<sup>16</sup> They argued that the loss of their provisions trade with the West Indies would also be a serious loss to the remaining British colonies in the region. To put it succinctly, they thought that the treaties made with the United States since the conclusion of the Revolutionary Wars were too generous to the Americans. They pointed to the extra costs for Cork merchants, such as salt duties, as examples of how the trade increasingly favoured American merchants. Indeed they argued that these duties were

so high that the duty upon the quantity necessary to manufacture a barrel of provisions amount [sic] to nearly as much as the freight of the same to Jamaica and act at once as a bounty to the American provisions trade.<sup>17</sup>

Combined with the expense inherent in convoy shipments, Cork merchants were failing to compete against the United States on the Caribbean markets. As was their wont, they argued that the difficulties for Cork would have wider imperial implications, before framing their arguments at a national and then local level. They were quite politically astute and asserted that the Act of Union placed certain obligations on Westminster with regards to protecting their industry. Furthermore, they argued that the loss of the provisions trade for Ireland could lead to a point where British military forces could become dependent on foreign countries for their supplies and that this would be a serious issue if political relations deteriorated

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<sup>15</sup> *The Definitive Treaty of Peace, between His Britannick Majesty, and the French Republick, His Catholick Majesty, the Batavian Republick, signed at Amiens, the 27th of March 1802.*, H.C. 1801-02 (004) iv, 503

<sup>16</sup> 'Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818' 15 Feb 1805, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1 CCCA

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

with said country.<sup>18</sup> This was quite a forceful argument to be sent from the merchants of a port which was a major victualler for the British military.

The subject of this petition was the re-negotiation of the 1794 *Jay Treaty*.<sup>19</sup> It had been signed in light of certain disagreements and omissions from the *Treaty of Paris*, which ended the Revolutionary War, regarding trade and the treatment of merchant sailors. A long-running point of contention between Great Britain and the United States was the impressment of United States sailors and one of the objectives of the renewal of this treaty was to rectify the problem. A letter from Rufus King (American Minister to the Court of St. James 1796-1826) to Lord Hawkesbury (Robert Jenkinson 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Liverpool and at this time the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) from 1801 outlined American grievances during the Anglo-Spanish War. He alleged that American vessels travelling to the Spanish colonies were seized on the basis that they were carrying the produce of a nation at war with Britain. Furthermore, he stated that such seizures 'continue to be the unjust and ruinous interruption of the American commerce in the West India seas... [and] are wasting the lawful commerce of a peaceful and friendly nation'.<sup>20</sup>

British newspapers did not show much sympathy for these allegations. The *Hampshire Chronicle* noted the discontent in the United States due to these alleged practices and the introduction of a bill for the protection and indemnification of American seamen. This newspaper's nitpicking of the bill is quite amusing, its main point of contention being that the government

Seem[s] to make no allowance for the difficulty of distinguishing between real Americans, and the various British seamen who assume that name. The operation of the clause must, therefore, have the effect of protecting every fugitive and deserter, from England, Ireland, or Scotland, who could find shelter on board an American trader. We find, in fact, that the impressing out of an American vessel some person from the North of Ireland, notoriously subjects of his Majesty, has been enumerated in the list of excesses committed by British cruisers. Upon the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Treaty of Peace and Amity between His Britannic Majesty and the United States of America. Signed at Ghent, December 24, 1814*, H.C. 1814-15 (011) xiii, 139

<sup>20</sup> Rufus King, 'Correspondence of Mr King, the American Minister with Lord Hawkesbury' in *Hampshire Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1805.

principle of this clause then, we cannot see what is to prevent the American Masters from giving protection to all the English seamen who are base enough to desert their colours.<sup>21</sup>

This rather ridiculous argument conceals the seriousness of the situation. The tension between the United States and Great Britain over this issue was enough that it could potentially lead to an escalation of economic sanctions or even to war.

The provisions of the *Jay Treaty* were up for renegotiation after a period of ten years. Several of the articles contained within it concerned those involved in the provisions trade in Cork, namely Articles III, XII, and XV. Article III stated:

All goods and merchandise whose importation into his Majesty's said territories in America, shall not be entirely prohibited, may freely, for the purposes of commerce, be carried into the same in the manner aforesaid, by the citizens of the United States, and such goods and merchandize shall be subject to no higher or other duties, than would be payable by the citizens of the United States on the importation of the same in American vessels into the Atlantic ports of the said states.<sup>22</sup>

This reciprocity of duties was a major boost for any exportation from the United States into British possessions in the Americas, and when combined with the much shorter distances goods had to travel was a threat to Cork's provisioning trade with the West Indies. Article XII directly allowed for the exportation of American produce to the West Indies in vessels less than 70 tons. The only restrictions were on sugar, coffee, molasses, cocoa or cotton and Article XV agreed to place no tariffs or duties above those of other nations.<sup>23</sup> In 1800 the average time it took to travel from Cork to Barbados was approximately forty-two days, whereas the sailing time from the United States would have been a fraction of this.<sup>24</sup> This combined with the requirement for convoys during the Napoleonic Wars and transportation and

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<sup>21</sup> 'London, Friday February 28', *Hampshire Chronicle*, 3 Mar. 1806.

<sup>22</sup> 'Jay Treaty (1794)' in *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875*, p. Article III (<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=008/llsl008.db&recNum=129>) (28 Mar. 2014).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. Articles XII, XV.

<sup>24</sup> R. J. B Knight, *Britain against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815*, 2013, p. 132.

preservation costs would have acted as an effective bounty in the favour of American producers, as the Committee of Merchants argued.<sup>25</sup>

However, for a time at least, there was a mutual benefit in the more relaxed trading environment. The *Jay Treaty* gave the United States important concessions, but during the period between the *Treaty of Paris* and this treaty Ireland imported substantial quantities of lumber and flaxseed from the United States which was important for the domestic Irish market.<sup>26</sup> There was a degree of double standards at play in Cork's outrage. Ireland desired to obtain free trade with Britain and to gain greater access to colonial markets, but was not so keen a proponent of free trade to support a more open market with a country that had the potential to interfere with her own interests. This hypocrisy was not unique to Cork's merchants. Many of their arguments exhibit striking similarities to those British producers had made several years earlier when Ireland was on the verge of achieving free trade. They too argued that granting free trade to Ireland would devastate British industry and merchants.<sup>27</sup>

A series of parliamentary debates ensued, focusing on allowing neutral ships to import and export named goods from the West Indies and North American colonies. In essence the issue was whether or not Parliament should allow the United States shipping freedom of access to British possessions and extend the expiring concessions under the *Jay Treaty*. The intention of this bill, as stated by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Charles Fox was

To permit the inhabitants of those islands to be supplied with provisions, and certain other articles of indispensable necessity, with which it was impossible, under a variety of impediments, for British ships to supply them.<sup>28</sup>

This would address some of the concerns expressed by West Indian planters regarding security of supplies. George Rose (who served on the Committee of

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<sup>25</sup> *British and Foreign Shipping*, HC. Deb 30 June 1807 Vol. 9 cc. 682-688

<sup>26</sup> Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish-American trade, 1660-1783* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, 1988), pp 248-249.

<sup>27</sup> List of Petitions Regarding the Relaxation of the Navigation Laws and Irish Trade', The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, 30/8/321, BL

<sup>28</sup> *American Intercourse Bill*, H.C. Deb 22 May 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 336-347

Trade, not his son who was an MP at the same time) argued strongly against the Bill, both on the basis that beef and pork was already being supplied cheaper by the Americans than the Irish and that any relaxation of the Navigation Acts at this time risked further American encroachments beyond those necessary to supply British colonies with provisions.<sup>29</sup> Sir John Newport (MP for Waterford and Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer) believed that this bill would benefit all. His voice carried some weight on this topic as he had recently been in the region, from where he wrote frequently to the Committee of Merchants regarding the need for provisions in the Caribbean region.<sup>30</sup> Arguments were posited by those in favour of the bill that this would not threaten Irish trade and that in fact Irish trade was insufficient to provision these regions. At one point Newport even attempted to argue that this bill was in fact supported by those in the Irish provisions trade on the basis that it would give them more confidence in the trade by setting down a fixed rule. There is no evidence of this in the Committee of Merchants records.<sup>31</sup>

The arguments over this legislation continued, with opponents suggesting that not only would this bill harm the Irish provisions trade, but that it would also place British colonies in a position of dependency on a country with which they had recently been in conflict. They believed this would weaken the entire British colonial system and also threaten the East India Company. Supporters claimed that the lack of such a bill in the previous conflict with the French had led to the death of 15,000 slaves due to starvation because it had been impossible to transport sufficient amounts of produce due to the war.<sup>32</sup> The debate centred on the necessity of American supplies to the West Indies, with Rose suggesting that the initial treaty in 1794 had the effect of collapsing British shipping to the region. This was a pressing issue since the West Indies, devoted as they were to the production of a single cash crop, were unable to supply themselves and a great amount of wealth flowed from these islands into British coffers. In this period British military

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Letters from John Newport to Committee of Merchants Regarding the Want of Supplies in Caribbean 10 June 1806, 13 Nov 1806, Committee of Merchants Papers U401/0419; 0665, CCCA

<sup>31</sup> *American Intercourse Bill*, H.C. Deb 17 June 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 686-730

<sup>32</sup> *American Intercourse Bill*, H.C. Deb 22 May 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 336-347

expenditure was skyrocketing in order to fund the various conflicts with the French. Any threat to colonial trade would be detrimental to British finances.

During the course of these debates Lord Sheffield put forward an interesting argument: he suggested that by taking away the Irish parliament merchants there had nowhere to voice their concerns and that they should have a place of redress.<sup>33</sup> The Union had moved Ireland to the margins of imperial policy. This had begun to manifest itself in the declining influence of the Committee of Merchants in political spheres and the dearth of representation they could muster despite regular wining and dining of senior political and military officials. An Order of Council in 1807 effectively shelved the debate by allowing for the continuation of the *Jay Treaty* until further notice. Though overtaken by a variety of embargoes due to renewed hostilities with the French, it served to highlight that the Irish provisions trade, centred on Cork, was a concern in London due to its importance to the West Indies. This argument would resurface after 1815, when the exigencies of war were not as pressing.<sup>34</sup>

Upon the conclusion of the War of 1812, negotiations opened between Britain and the United States. The general view of the *Morning Post* was that flaws in the initial treaty establishing the United States, the *Treaty of Paris*, had provided them with a nursery for seamen and that past decades of European war had gifted them the potential for the boundless expansion of their commerce.<sup>35</sup> The treaties being negotiated could potentially open new markets for British manufacturers as

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<sup>33</sup> *American Intercourse Bill*, H.L. Deb 6 May 1806, Vol. 6 cc. 1031-1040

<sup>34</sup> *West India Planters' Petition*, H.C. Deb March 12 1807, Vol. 9 cc. 96-101; *Protest against the American Intercourse Bill*, H.L. Deb May 13 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 116-117; *American Intercourse Bill*, H.L. Deb 6 May 1806, Vol. 6 cc. 1031-1040; *Intercourse between America and the West India Islands*, H.C. Deb April 21 1806, Vol. 6 cc. 834-839; *Colonial Intercourse with America*, H.L. Deb March 31 1806, Vol. 6 cc. 592-597; *Trade between the West Indies and America*, H.L. Deb July 4 1805, Vol. 5 cc. 731-736; *West India Accounts Bill*, H.C. Deb June 17 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 676-682; *American Intercourse Bill*, H.C. Deb 22 May 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 336-347; *American Intercourse Bill*, H.C. Deb July 8 1806, Vol. 7 cc. 969-1010; *Committee on Trade and Navigation*, H.C. Deb February 24 1808, Vol. 10 cc. 713-726; *British and Foreign Shipping*, H.C. Deb, June 30 1807, Vol. 9 cc. 682-688; *Irish Customs and Excise Bill*, H.C. Deb June 29 1804, Vol. 2 cc. 887-888; *Copy of an Order of Council, dated 27th May 1807; For Making Regulations with Respect to the Navigation and Commerce, between His Majesty's Subjects and the Subjects of the United States of America*, H.C. 1807 (1(2)), iv, 1; *Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies.*, H.C. 1807 (65) iii, 1

<sup>35</sup> 'Observations on the Application of the Committees of Trade in British North America to His Majesty's Government' in *Morning Post*, 18 Aug. 1814.

well as sources of raw materials for the Empire. This typifies the objectives in 1814 for future agreements with the United States. It was to be a market for the British Empire, a market where they could find new outlets for their growing industrial production. Increasing access to America was of paramount importance for British commercial interests, not the trivial concerns of minor merchants hoping for protection against American encroachment in their West Indies trade.

This was not an isolated case of doubt expressed by the Committee of Merchants regarding the potential impact of further developments in the United States. In 1815 after the cessation of hostilities the Prince Regent made a seemingly innocuous statement in his speech on the dissolution of parliament:

The restoration of Peace between this Country and the United States of America has been followed by a negotiation for a Commercial Treaty, which I have every reason to hope will be terminated upon conditions calculated to cement the good understanding subsisting between the two countries, and equally beneficial to the interests of both.<sup>36</sup>

At once the Committee wrote a petition to the then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Viscount Whitworth. They re-iterated the same concerns that they had expressed ten years previously when the provisions of the *Jay Treaty* were up for re-negotiation. They argued that no condition should be agreed to that would permit the importation, from the United States in any vessel whatsoever, in any of the British colonies or settlements in the West Indies or North America, of any flour, fish, salt provisions, butter, lard, soap or candles, 'in any contingency or under any circumstances whatsoever.'<sup>37</sup> They emphasised that Britain (within which they included Ireland) and her colonies could supply all in abundance, while maintaining that previous treaties providing equal access to the produce of the United States had led to 'the law itself [becoming] the cause of the evil that it intended to correct'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *The Prince Regent's Speech at the Close of the Session*, H.L. Deb July 12 1815, Vol. 31 cc. 1153-1156

<sup>37</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818 20 July 1815, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



At this time it is likely that the merchants of Cork foresaw the potential loss of revenue that the conclusion of a long period of hostilities would create. They went so far as to state that it was Britain's obligation

to afford that protection [from the United States] in, and engagement of the markets of our different colonies which as a member of the parent empire she has eminently earned, by returning to that fundamental principles of colonial connexion [sic], mutual monopoly of market, and material preference of supply.<sup>39</sup>

Cork merchants knew well the loss of revenue caused by peace. With the potential renewal of hostilities with the French in 1803 they had written to express their support for the war and for the reintroduction of various bounties for sailors.<sup>40</sup> Peace — with the loss of high military demands for provisions and weakening interests in the Caribbean — could be bad for business.

The West Indies provisioning trade may have shrunk for the Cork merchants, but perhaps it was never as bountiful as they thought. A private letter detailed some issues American merchants faced at this time. Peace in Europe had led to a stagnation of American commerce and they sustained losses on all exports. Furthermore, the writer alleged that the cost of American flour was so low that any exported to the West Indies was at a massive loss, so great that some American merchants had taken to purchasing American flour on the West Indies market for sale back in the United States.<sup>41</sup> The author perhaps overstated the issues American exporters faced, but no more so than the Committee of Merchants did in Cork. The loss of the West Indies trade was far more complex than simply American merchants taking advantage of the chaos of wartime and a lack of support from parliament to protect Cork's trade. Whereas the Committee of Merchants in Cork bemoaned the opening of the Navigation Laws to allow increased access of American merchants to colonial markets, the Americans complained that Britain had not sufficiently relaxed these laws or opened her colonial system to them. They desired further access, which Britain would not allow.<sup>42</sup> In a contest between the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818 20-21 May 1803, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>41</sup> 'American Commerce' in *Morning Post*, 17 Sept. 1816.

<sup>42</sup> 'American Presidents message to Congress' in *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 13 Jan. 1820.

desires of merchants in Ireland and merchants in America, it is unlikely that the Irish merchants would prevail for long. Concessions to the United States, it had long been recognised, brought raw materials and an exponentially expanding market for manufactured goods. Ireland had very little to offer in competition except for her claims to protection under the articles of the Act of Union.

The fears that Committee of Merchants expressed may have been well founded. By 1831 they petitioned the Board of Trade yet again petitioning with respect to their 'decaying' Caribbean trade, pleading that American provisioning be subject to the same duties in the colonies as they were on importation to Britain. They dismissed the protective legislation that was in place as an 'illusion'.<sup>43</sup> This was one of the last mentions of the West Indies trade in the Committee's minutes up to the 1840s. What had once been a vibrant trade with the West Indies had, to all intents and purposes, been lost. Patrick Nash argues that after the American Revolution Britain was quite successful in protecting the rights of its subjects in terms of merchant shipping, plantations, mineral resources and colonies.<sup>44</sup> If this was truly the case then some of the grievances the Cork merchants felt are understandable as they believed their interests were being excluded. Parliamentary debates from the mid- to late-1810s show increasing frustration expressed by Members of Parliament over the self-interest of Irish merchants. Mr. Hudson Gurney in a speech before the House of Commons noted that 'it seemed to have passed as a matter universally understood, that the people of England were to pay everything, and the people of Ireland nothing'.<sup>45</sup>

The Committee of Merchants used carefully constructed terms and arguments in their dealings with the government. Throughout this period they rarely or solely applied their complaints to the impact upon Cork's trade alone.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1829-May 1837', 17 June 1831, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/2, CCCA.

<sup>44</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 17–18. However, it should be pointed out that Nash includes the right to own and use slaves in this statement and this 'right' was rapidly eroded in the face of moral and political objections to the slave trade during the nineteenth century.

<sup>45</sup> *Irish Butter Trade*, H.C. Deb June 20 1822, Vol. 7 cc. 1211-1216

Instead, they tended to place their interests in an Imperial context, whether or not it should be afforded such a place. Their complaints almost always mention the potential damage to 'our Imperial Enterprise', 'British Wealth', or 'the Kingdom'. In some instances, such as the 1815 petition to Lord Viscount Whitworth, they refer to, 'the separate interest of Ireland (if any part of the United Kingdom can have a separate interest)'.<sup>46</sup> This is the language, tone and style of a body of men completely au fait with the exigencies of dealing with distant London- or Dublin-based bureaucrats and politicians. Their urgency is always clear, but they were aware that using such a tone ensured their complaints would not be treated as simply the bitterness of a distant backwater town. Their arguments regularly progress from placing their opinion at a level with Imperial concerns, before slowly moving to the local specifics of the issue at hand. By 1815 the Committee of Merchants had accumulated several decades of experience dealing with various high level officials, from Admirals to Lord-Lieutenants. This experience was reflected in how they positioned their arguments to the upper echelons of society and it was effective in many, but not all, instances.

However, despite protestations to the contrary, the belief that Ireland deserved a protected trade was not the case. There may have been some argument that by implementing the Act of Union Ireland did deserve certain market protections, but conversely the Union also tied Ireland to Westminster. As early as 1784 Richard Atkinson, the Director of the East India Company, discussed the topic of Ireland's trade with the colonies. In a letter to Pitt, 'Observations on Irish Trade', he noted,

They already enjoy it upon an equal footing with Britain... But it should never be forgot [sic] that they hold this privilege by the favour of Britain; and when therefore their pretensions are advanced to limit the trade of those very colonies to which they themselves only have by favour... The sacrifice made by the sugar colonies in giving the Irish a monopoly of the great staple produce of their country-salted provisions-merits a different return, and it must not be forgot [sic] that the

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<sup>46</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818 20 July 1815, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

commercial importance of the sugar colonies to Britain, is vastly beyond that of Ireland itself.<sup>47</sup>

Given the rapid growth of the American market in the decades between the 1780s and the 1820s such considerations could equally be applied to the United States. The potential benefit of access to such a vast and lucrative market far outweighed the benefits of kowtowing to provincial merchants in Ireland.

The letter from Atkinson is indicative of how the mercantile system in Britain viewed Irish trade. His views (in 1784) can be surmised thusly: firstly, Ireland's trade with the sugar plantations was a gift from Britain and the sugar islands were more valuable than Irish exports to them. Matters of political expediency were not relevant. Secondly, without harmonisation of taxes and duties between Britain and Ireland freedom of commerce between them threatened British interests, either due to price differentials or smuggling. Finally, no benefits should be accrued to Ireland that could threaten any aspect of British trade or manufacture. These considerations pervade the whole letter, but especially with reference to access to the East India trade and taxes on wrought iron. The petitions of the various British manufacturers of the time echo similar views, with complaints focused on the perceived advantages of the Irish manufacturers as well as the potential threat to indigenous British industries. Although all seem to be of the mind that Ireland and the Irish were 'British', they nevertheless feared the lower duties, taxes and cost base of the Irish market.

The pervasiveness of this mercantilist attitude accounts for Cork merchants' grievances at the perceived injustices regarding the lack of protection of their interests in the West Indies after the Napoleonic Wars. The opposition surrounding the relaxation of the Navigation Acts centred on duty differentials and the need to protect the interests of those that benefitted from operating free from external competition. Thirty years later, after tax harmonisation and concession to many of the mercantilists' demands, they found themselves at a loss. The burgeoning

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<sup>47</sup> Observations on Irish Trade from Richard Atkinson, 21 Nov 1784, 'The Papers of William Pitt the Younger', 30/8/321 ff205–206, BL

laissez-faire system had little time for the protectionism and racketeering of mercantilism.

## Caribbean Trade

Ireland might carry on a considerable trade with the West Indies, for which its situation is exceedingly favourable, as there is demand in those islands for almost every production and manufacture of that country.<sup>48</sup>

The West Indies trade was the cornerstone of Cork's export business in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. An estimated 80 per cent of Ireland's trans-Atlantic trade was with the West Indies and, due to its advantageous location, Cork dominated this trade.<sup>49</sup> Figures for direct exports do not fully capture the extent to which Cork produce was used in the region due to transshipment via Britain and the Continent. However, contemporary demand for supplies of 'Rose' butter, one of Cork's quality marks, can demonstrate its extent.<sup>50</sup> This 'Rose' butter was often directly specified in provisioning contracts, with bills of lading for the Beamish and Crawford Merchant business including this designation for their butter, along with the 'mess' beef used in the Caribbean.<sup>51</sup> It also facilitated the creation of a number of interrelated ancillary trades. The direct exportation of produce brought Cork merchants into the centre of one of Britain's most lucrative colonial regimes: the Caribbean sugar trade. The provisions Cork supplied were tied to its position as a major victualling centre for the British navy and thus colonial residents were acclimatised to the produce that British naval forces and merchants carried.<sup>52</sup> Of course it was not just Britain that had a hand in the sugar plantations in these regions; France, Portugal, the Netherlands and other major European colonial powers were likewise invested in the development and exploitation of the

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 2* (London, 1812), pp 30–32.

<sup>49</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 355–6.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Hare, 'Richard Hare Letterbook' (Cork City, 1772 1771) (Cork County & City Archives, CCAU/259).

<sup>51</sup> Donal Ó Drisceoil and Diarmuid Ó Drisceoil, *Beamish & Crawford: The History of an Irish Brewery*, 2015, pp 27–29.

<sup>52</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, pp 54–56; Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (Routledge Explorations in Economic History, 43, London ; New York, 2009), pp 55–57.

Americas. The French in particular recognised the importance of Cork's produce, specifically beef, for the maintenance of their plantations. During the eighteenth century various acts, correspondence and manuals regarding the French sugar colonies all listed salt beef from Ireland and 'negres' from the Guinea coast as necessary exports to the islands in almost the same breath. During the various embargoes of the eighteenth century a variety of methods were used to circumvent trade restrictions such as shipping via intermediary islands in the West Indies.<sup>53</sup> The major flaw in the trans-Atlantic sugar trade was its unsustainable nature. Turning the entire economic structure to produce a single cash crop, which utilised the majority of the arable land and required a slave labour force devoted to its production, meant that the islands required vast quantities of imported goods to sustain themselves. Very little production capacity was left to supply the basic produce required to sustain an artificially increasing slave population. This unsustainable structure created a high demand for the produce of Cork.

As previously mentioned, numerous debates surround the question of the colonies' importance to British economic development.<sup>54</sup> It has variously been considered an unrelated economic development, or that it was a result of the growing British demand for produce from these regions and that this demand, in turn, helped create the massive growth in British industrialisation. Eric Williams proposed that the slave trade *and related trades in plantation supplies* had a substantial role in British industrialisation.<sup>55</sup> In essence Williams argued that the slave trade funded British industrialization, but to support the increased consumption it necessitated the development of improved production methods that eventually superseded the need for slavery.<sup>56</sup> The debate surrounding the relevance of the slave trade and related trades to overall industrial growth in Britain will not be resolved here. However, its influence on the regional development of a

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<sup>53</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World' in *History Workshop Journal*, lxiii, no. 1 (2007), p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Lewis Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (2004); *ibid.*; Williams Eric, *Capitalism And Slavery* (1944)

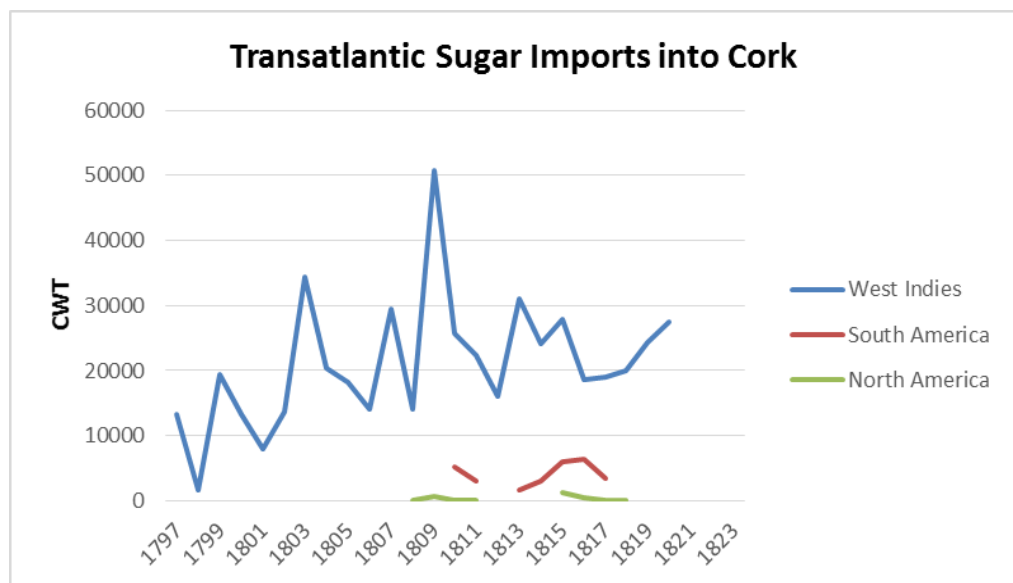
<sup>55</sup> David Richardson, 'The Slave Trade, Sugar, and British Economic Growth, 1748-1776' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xvii, no. 4 (1987), pp 739–740.

<sup>56</sup> Solow & Engerman, *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery*.

city supplying the essential goods and provisions that sustained the population will be examined. This trade had a small but key role in supporting the growth in demand of consumer desirables such as sugar, coffee and cocoa.

### *Imports*

As the most important product of the West Indies, Cork benefitted from the production of West Indies' sugar. Figure 1-1 below demonstrates that no other region came close to exporting the same level of sugar to Cork. Cork did possess its own small-scale sugar refineries and Etienne Coquebert, the French consul to Ireland, noted in the late eighteenth century that the sugar refineries he observed in Cork appeared to run on the same principles as those in France.<sup>57</sup> The indication is that this was yet another industry, along with linen manufacture, that Huguenot families had introduced to Cork.



*Figure 1-1 Cork's sugar imports from all parts of the American Continent<sup>58</sup>*

From an Irish perspective the levels of sugar imports into Cork were quite small. Although Coquebert noted that there were French style refineries in Cork, these would not have been anywhere near the same scale or standard as those of

<sup>57</sup> Síle Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790' in *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society*, lxxviii (1973), p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, in 24 vols, for the period 1764-1823', MSS 353-76, NLI.

Britain or France. Even if they were, the prices fetched on the Irish market were not as competitive as those in a larger urban environment. Jacob Price notes that

Since almost all the sugar produced in the British islands was consumed in Britain and Ireland, it can be logically argued that home demand for sugar indeed kept prices above world market levels and produced the earnings that bought the needed slaves as well as imports from Britain, Ireland, and North America.<sup>59</sup>

The value of sugar production was not in its direct importation, though investment in the large scale refining of raw sugar would have been lucrative. The real benefit lay in the demand the growth of the sugar trade in the British Empire created for Cork's exports. This presented opportunities for the exportation for the principal agricultural produce of the Munster region through Cork. In the context of Wallersteins' World systems theory, Cork (or Ireland) was a semi-peripheral region, Britain was the core and the West Indies the periphery.<sup>60</sup> The West Indies supplied the raw materials and consumed goods produced in the core nation, namely Britain. Ireland supplied semi-finished or agricultural goods for the benefit of both.

The case of rum importation into Cork is interesting (See Figure 1-2). Rum was a valuable consumable, with a significant time devoted to sourcing the most saleable produce.<sup>61</sup> It even impeded the establishment of an indigenous distilling industry in the area, because the Cork palate was more inclined to rum or brandy than whiskey. This led to a large business in the rectification of Irish spirits to try to appeal to the tastes of South Munster.<sup>62</sup> By the early nineteenth century the indigenous distilling industry had made inroads in changing Irish tastes. This could partially explain the peaks and troughs in the importation of West Indian rum. These fluctuations also correspond with the renewal of war with France and the war of 1812 with America respectively, with dramatic falls in 1804 and 1812. Such massive drops in the amount of rum available on the import market provided the

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<sup>59</sup> Jacob M. Price, *What Did Merchants Do?: Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790* (1989), p. 276

<sup>60</sup> Natasha Glaisyer, 'Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire' in *The Historical Journal*, xlvii, no. 2 (2004), pp 452–453.

<sup>61</sup> Hare to Vokes, 3 Aug 1711, Hare to Ewing, 3 Aug 1771., 'Richard Hare Letterbook', CCAU/259, CCCA.

<sup>62</sup> David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 382–393.



breathing space necessary for the Irish distillers to acclimatise the market to their own produce.

The transshipment of produce through Britain explains the differential between total imports of rum into Cork and the importation of rum from America. Discussing eighteenth century rum imports to Ireland, Truxes attributes low levels of growth to issues with the schedules regarding importation duties. These guaranteed lower tariffs if the product was shipped to Britain first. He maintains that Ireland absorbed 90 per cent of Antigua produced rum and 58 per cent of that from Barbados and St. Christopher in this manner during the 1770s.<sup>63</sup> This demonstrates two problems in assessing the importance of the trans-Atlantic trade: First, a large proportion of both exports and imports were shipped via third parties. If Truxes' estimates are correct this vastly alters the picture and it would mean that the consumption of West Indian imported rum was far higher than can be demonstrated from direct importation figures. Second, it demonstrates the distorting influence of having such a large economy as Britain's on Ireland's doorstep, irrespective of the almost dangerous levels of economic reliance on Britain that prevailed.

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<sup>63</sup> Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783*, p. 36; 98.

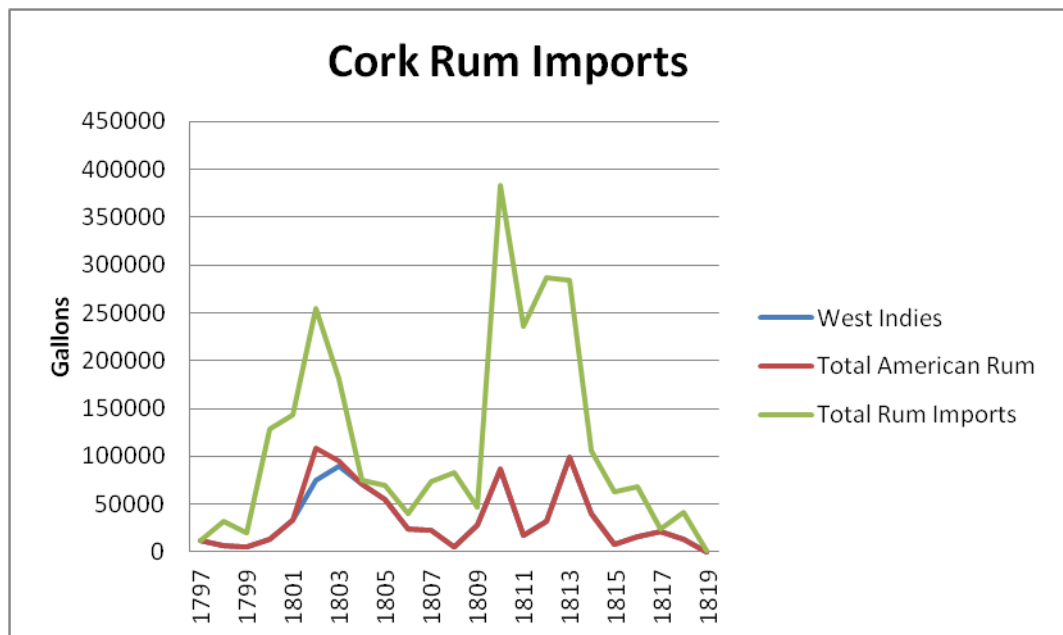


Figure 1-2 Cork's rum imports<sup>64</sup>

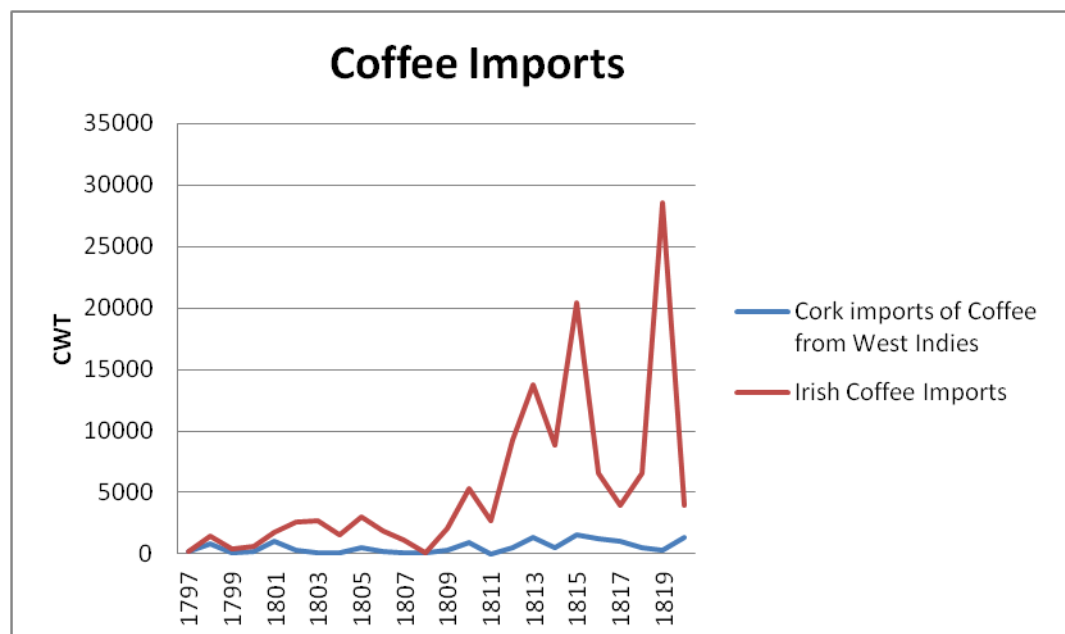
The final cash crop import from the West Indies that Cork was potentially in a strong position to dominate was coffee. In the period before the French Revolution the French colonies dominated coffee production, providing nearly two-thirds of the world's consumption.<sup>65</sup> Considering the importance of Irish beef production for the French colonies, as well as several well placed family connections in the major French ports, it is no surprise that Cork secured quite a substantial amount of the direct coffee imports from the West Indies.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, as was to be the case in many of Cork's international trade dealings, international and domestic affairs overtook the ability of the mercantile community to take full advantage of this gift. Coffee imports into Cork declined from the 1790s onwards (Figure 1-3). A series of uprisings in the French colonial holdings disrupted production and from that point on the decline was further interrupted by the

<sup>64</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>65</sup> This was disrupted by slave revolts at the end of the eighteenth century in Haiti and St. Domingue. Steven Topik, 'The World Coffee Market in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, from Colonial to National Regimes', 2004, pp 16–19 (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/economicHistory/>) (12 Feb. 2014); Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York, 2007), p. 73; 317.

<sup>66</sup> Marie-Louise Legg, "'Irish wine': The Import of Claret from Bordeaux to Provincial Ireland in the Eighteenth Century' in Raymond Gillespie and R. F. Foster (eds), *Irish Provincial Cultures in the Long Eighteenth-Century: Making the Middle Sort: Essays for Toby Barnard* (Dublin ; Portland, OR, 2012), pp 95–105; Mandelblatt, 'A Trans-Atlantic Commodity'.

various outbreaks of conflict between Britain and France. Brief resurgences occurred during times of peace. These were not as a result of direct importation, but of transshipment via Britain and the ability of larger markets, such as Dublin, to capture what had been an imported good that had the potential to be of major consequence to Cork. As the consumption of coffee grew, Cork was left on the sidelines with regards to its importation. While Cork dominated national importation of coffee at an early stage when total Irish imports were low, by a decade later when Irish imports had increased six fold none of this increase led to a growth in Cork's imports. The disruption to the trade by several decades of conflict meant that the initiative was lost. It is possible that had the city's merchants had their own commercial ships they may have been able to take advantage of the massive upswing in Irish coffee imports. However, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in the following chapters, they did not have that option available to them.



*Figure 1-3 Cork's coffee imports compared to Irish total<sup>67</sup>*

<sup>67</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, MSS 353-76, NLI.

### ***Exports and Provisioning***

The structure of the slave trade played a significant role in the development of Cork's provisioning business. The rapidly growing slave population, used to cultivate cash crops, required large amounts of food and other necessities that could not be produced locally due to the preponderance of cash crop production. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 led to a dramatic collapse in the shipment of slaves on British ships to the region.<sup>68</sup> Up to 1807 Britain was the main exporter of slaves to the West Indies region (Figure 1-4). The French shipped small numbers to the region, but after a peak of approximately 50,000 slaves shipped in 1790 the trade collapsed rapidly. The French Revolution saw the Jacobins prohibit slavery and, although it was briefly reintroduced in the early nineteenth century in French colonies, the European slave trade was in general decline.<sup>69</sup> It would be reasonable to assume that this had an impact upon Cork's trade with the Caribbean. However, an examination of the slave population levels for the region shows that, although there was a steady decline in numbers, the population was still around 670,000 twenty-seven years after the trade's abolition. This is a drop of only one seventh from levels on the abolition of the trade in 1807 (see Figure 1-5).

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<sup>68</sup> *A Bill, Intituled, An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, H.C. 1806-07 (68), i, 41

<sup>69</sup> Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, p. 79.

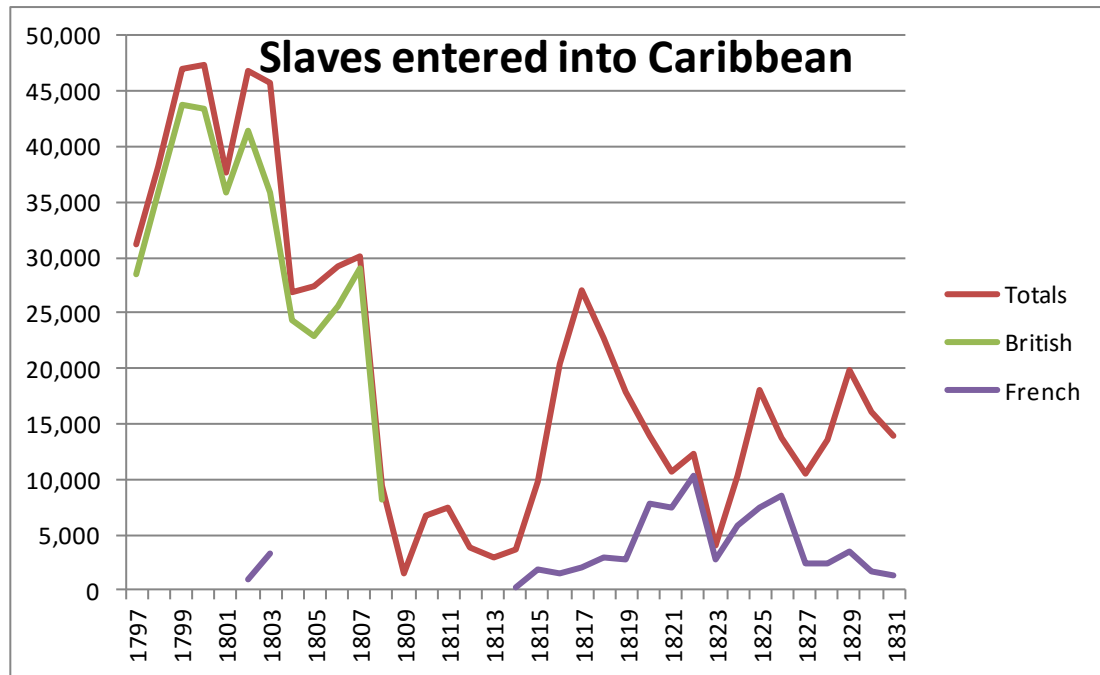


Figure 1-4 Slaves transported to Caribbean by European powers<sup>70</sup>



Figure 1-5 Population of slaves in Caribbean, 1807-1834<sup>71</sup>

What impact did the demographic changes in the West Indies and the abolition of slavery have on Cork's trade with the region? In 1839 a Mr. Connell corresponded with the Committee of Merchants regarding the impact of abolition on West Indian production. He wanted the merchants of Cork to support him in his

<sup>70</sup> Slave Voyages, 'The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database' (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>) (2 Apr. 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

endeavour to secure free emigration of 'Collies and free Africans' to provide extra labour for the production of sugar, rum, and molasses. He promised that this would increase demands for the butter and provisions, but warned that if they did not support his endeavour, 'Rest assured that the trade of your port will be seriously injured.'<sup>72</sup> This suggested that Cork's success depended on production in the slave colonies. Implicit in this was the need for some new form of enforced servitude for both Mr. Connell's endeavour as well as the city's export merchants. Membership of a proposed sub-committee to discuss the topic was rejected by John Hardy and Daniel O'Callaghan, with Hardy rejecting on the basis of,

The inhumanity of such a proceeding which would entice adult labourers from their native land & the bosom of their families to be doomed to a life of labour [is] just short of absolute slavery.<sup>73</sup>

Although the future economic development of the West Indies was of some importance to Cork, at least two of the members of the Committee did not believe it outweighed moral considerations. It is worth bearing in mind though that the Cork West Indies commerce was no longer a hale trade. This is not to question the moral objections of these men, but rather to highlight the dramatic changes that had occurred since 1807. It further indicates that the contemporaneous health of the West Indies would no longer have commanded the same level of importance as it might have even ten years prior to Connell's request. It is likely that most merchants of note in Cork had long since moved their main area of interest to European markets closer to home.

The importance of the long-term development of these colonies, whether through direct or indirect trade, pushed Ireland into a key position in the rapidly expanding Atlantic economy during the eighteenth century. A significant proportion of this trade was conducted via British and French ports for re-export and as such is

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<sup>72</sup> Connell to the Committee of Merchants regarding labour in the West Indies, Dec 1839, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0765, CCCA.

<sup>73</sup> John Hardy to George Atkins from Hardy declining membership of sub-committee regarding emigration to West Indies, , c. 1840, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0307, CCCA; Letter to George Atkins from O'Callaghan declining membership of sub-committee regarding emigration to West Indies, c. 1840, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0308, CCCA

not reflected in the accounts of direct trade. Mandelblatt argues that over the course of the eighteenth century the domestic markets in Britain and France gradually shrank and there was a reciprocal relationship between Ireland and the Atlantic economies.<sup>74</sup> This goes against the views of Cullen and Dickson where they state that there was a move away from the Atlantic economies.<sup>75</sup> However, if such a reciprocal relationship existed between Ireland and the Atlantic economies, it stands to reason that the abolition of the slave trade would have a direct impact on Cork as the main provisioning centre.

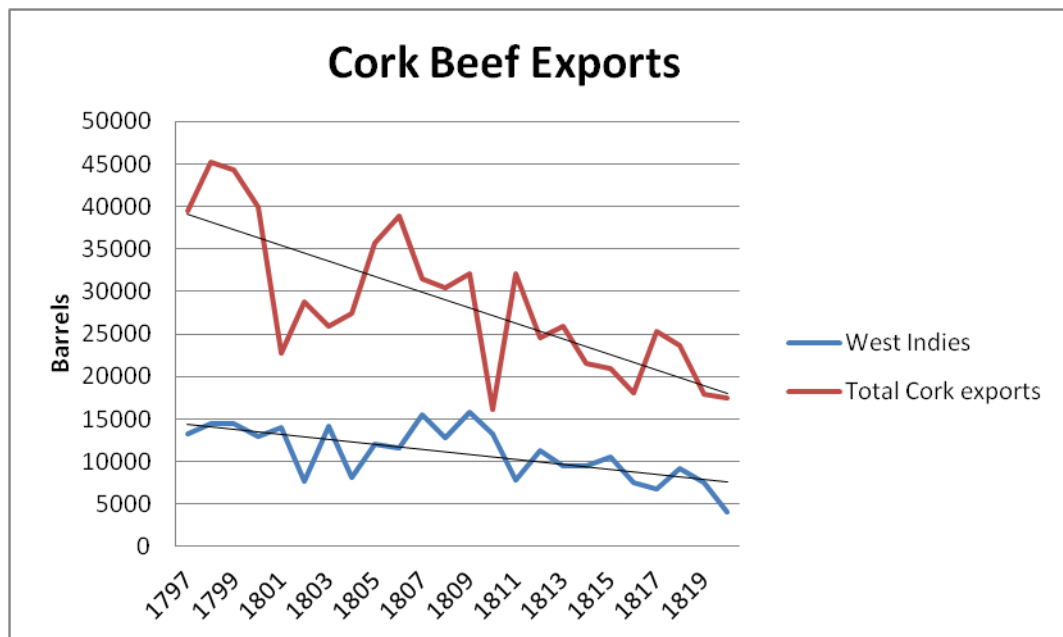
As Figure 1-6 shows, from 1808 beef exports to the West Indies experienced a steady decline. This tallies with the Dickson's assertion that a long term decline in the trade between Ireland and the Caribbean and the restructuring of Irish trade towards Europe began around 1760. This decline is indicative of falling provisions requirements from Cork, and considering that the decline began to take hold in 1808 it relates to the impact the abolition of the slave trade. As there was a preference for using 'small' beef for the provisioning of slaves in the region that likely accounted for the dramatic fall.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately the import and export ledgers do not record the different types of beef product being exported to the region. Three major types were exported: first quality best beef, second quality mess beef for sailors and third quality beef of poorer cuts, sometimes referred to as French beef. The abolition of slavery was not the reason for this decline. It is more related to the trade orientating towards Europe and the implications of a rapidly emerging food industry in America, one that benefitted from the limitations on European states exporting to the Caribbean during the Napoleonic Wars.

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<sup>74</sup> Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity', p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 369.

<sup>76</sup> 'Small' beef was the worst kind, used by the French to feed their slaves. An English commentator in the 1750s noted that this beef was 'not considered fit for use of British government for the colonies' Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity', p. 28.



*Figure 1-6 Exports of beef to West Indies from Cork compared to total Cork beef exports with linear progression<sup>77</sup>*

Although the abolition of the slave trade may have hastened the depression in the beef trade, it was part of a longer term decline. This decline was precipitated by the changes in the nature of the trans-Atlantic trade, as well as decreases in British naval shipping after the American War of Independence. The significance of any fluctuations in the importance of the West Indies beef trade could dramatically impact the total beef trade of Cork, as it represented between 20-50 per cent of the total trade in the product during the opening decades of the nineteenth century (see Figure 1-6). What is surprising is that, although there was a massive drop of the total Irish beef exports after the abolition of the slave trade, this was not reflected in the exports from Cork. The more significant drops in the exportation of beef from Cork coincide with periods of increased hostilities, in 1802, 1804, and the embargo of 1807. Although there is a recovery evident after each of these drops, it gradually decreased over time.

The beef trade indicates that, rather than the abolition of slavery being the significant factor in the development of Cork's export market, the more pertinent issue was the requirement that conflicts and embargoes placed on West Indies planters to source their provisions elsewhere, for example from the United States.

<sup>77</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, MSS 353-76, NLI; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, appendix XI.i.



If slavery had the potential to disrupt the Irish provisioning trade it is highly unlikely that the Committee of Merchants in Cork would have overlooked it in the minutes of their meetings. Instead their major concern was the potential of the United States to annex their position of primacy in provisioning the Caribbean.<sup>78</sup> As was shown, the slave population, although in decline, did not drop dramatically due to abolition, as the effective abolition and freeing of slaves did not completely occur until 1838.<sup>79</sup> This population still needed to be fed. Furthermore, although Cullen argues that the main source for beef demand in the West Indies plantations were the slave populations and ship victualling, an eighteenth century English commentator wrote that the main consumers of salt beef in the British colonies were the planters and the settlers, not their slaves.<sup>80</sup> Although by the nineteenth century many of the larger planters were absentee, there was still a significant planter and settler population that had grown accustomed to Irish beef provisions. Unfortunately, the exports abstracts do not break down the beef production by the various categories, as this is the simplest manner to ascertain what was being exported. Nonetheless the bottom category, French (or small) beef (which was used for the provisioning of slaves), was in decline by the nineteenth century. Therefore it can be reasonably assumed that much of the salt beef being exported was of a quality intended for the white population or to supply ships on the voyage across the Atlantic.<sup>81</sup>

As the exports of beef to the West Indies declined, pork overtook beef as one of the main foodstuffs for export (see Figure 1-7). Coquebert noted this trend during the 1790s, when he commented that ships were beginning to reject salted beef as they found salted pork more digestible and less prone to harden in the salt. Furthermore a combination of rising beef prices and falling pork prices led to pork being an increasingly attractive alternative to salted beef.<sup>82</sup> About the same time

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<sup>78</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

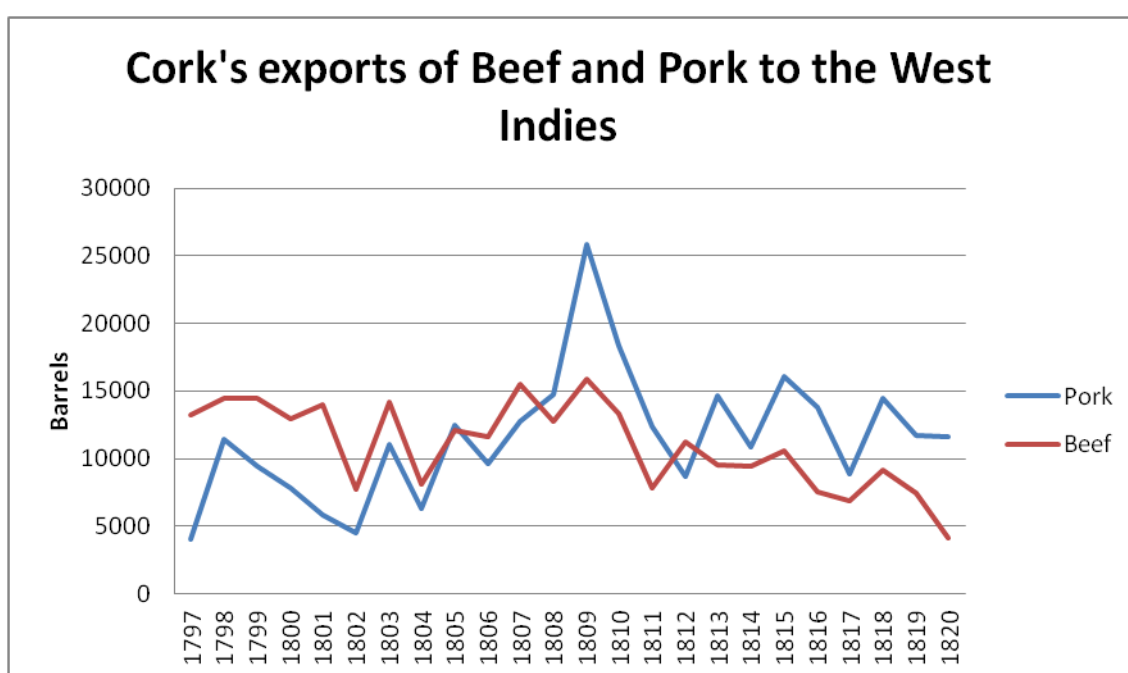
<sup>79</sup> *Slavery Abolition Act Amendment. A Bill, Intituled, An Act to Amend the Act for the Abolition of Slavery in the British colonies.*, H.C. (248) vi, 287

<sup>80</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, pp 54–55.; Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity', p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790', pp 11–12.

<sup>82</sup> Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790', pp 12–13; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 272.

that beef exports from Ireland fell dramatically in 1808, pork exports finally overtook beef as the major provisioning output. If the fall in beef exports to the West Indies was softened by the main market being the planters, rather than the slave population, and naval tastes were moving to pork as an acceptable and more durable alternative, then it is reasonable to assume that this increase in pork consumption resulted from planters and settlers in the West Indies adopting what was becoming the preferred naval diet.<sup>83</sup>



*Figure 1-7 Comparison of Beef and Pork exports to West Indies from Cork<sup>84</sup>*

As with butter and beef, the pork trade focused almost entirely on the sugar producing islands, with insignificant level of exports to other American regions (see Figure 1-8). This region took approximately 20 to 30 per cent of the exports from Cork and consistently around 10 per cent of the national average. Although Beckett has argued that the provisioning industry expanded rapidly from the 1790s, this does not appear to be the case with regard to Cork's supply of produce to the West Indies.<sup>85</sup> Any dramatic increase in the supply of provisions was apparently destined for the markets in Britain. This was a result of the slow, but inexorable restructuring

<sup>83</sup> Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity', pp 28–30.

<sup>84</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, MSS 353-76, NLI; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. appendix XI.i; XII.

<sup>85</sup> J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland: 1603-1923* (New York, 1983), p. 244.

of Ireland's trade towards Britain hastened by the Act of Union, the difficulties of sustaining a trans-Atlantic trade during periods of intense conflict, the growing urban British population's increasing demands for foodstuffs and increasing competition from the United States. Furthermore, favourable prices and improving transit times induced the export of livestock across the Irish Sea. This had the effect of reducing the amount of livestock available for processing for the declining, trans-Atlantic trade.<sup>86</sup> The ultimate result of this decline was that by the 1840s exports of beef and pork outside of the United Kingdom were only 1/35<sup>th</sup> of what they had been in the 1780s.<sup>87</sup>

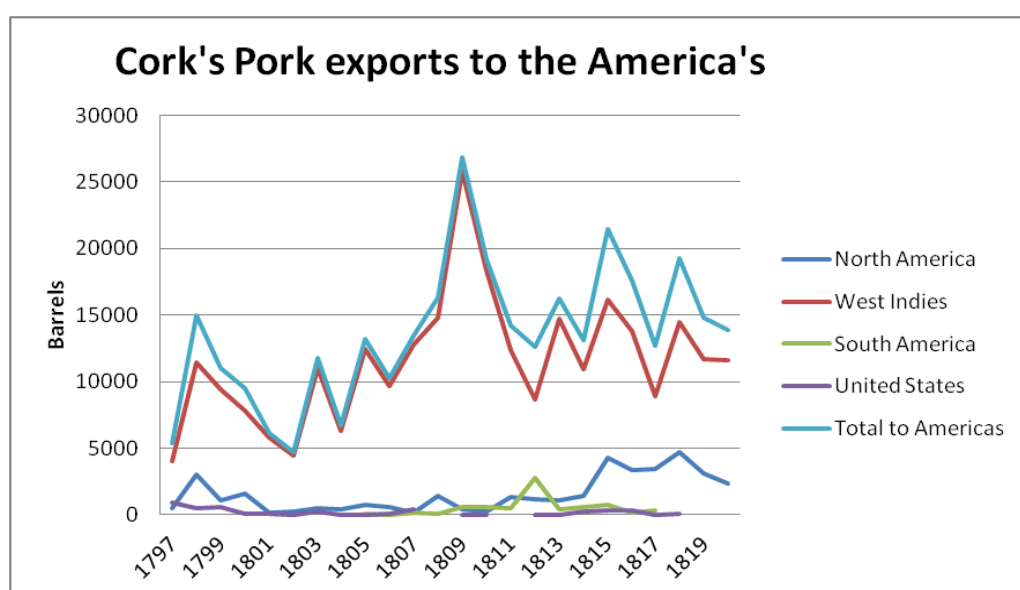


Figure 1-8 Pork exports from Cork to Americas by region<sup>88</sup>

This decline severely impacted Cork as much of the economic output of the region focused on West Indian provisioning. The deterioration of the West Indies trade and the over-reliance on supplying British urban markets was a dangerous situation to develop. Limiting the foreign markets that merchants engaged with had the potential to turn Ireland's export trade into one entirely focused on serving the needs of Britain's growing population. In many respects this also pushed Cork down

<sup>86</sup> James S. Donnelly, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London ; Boston :, 1975), pp 2–5.

<sup>87</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 103.

<sup>88</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI

a route where the city would become the, 'Pork and butter salting provincial'.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that this trade was lost without any comment. The mercantile community in Cork at times became quite exercised about the potential degradation of their trade in the Caribbean, but their political clout was not what it had been.<sup>90</sup> By the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, Britain and Ireland were about to enter a prolonged period of economic depression.<sup>91</sup> The constant requirements for military victualling had ended, at least to the extent that they had been in the past twenty-five years of conflict. The West Indies markets were no longer looking east across the Atlantic for their supplies as they now had a vibrant and rapidly growing market in the United States on their doorstep.

The exception to the fall in provisioning supplies to the West Indian markets was butter. The figures remain remarkably stable over the period, staying between 15-20,000 hundredweight per annum, except for some fluctuations during periods of conflict or embargo (see Figure 1-9). The same is true of Cork's total exports, with no major variations. This is a testament to the success of the Committee of Merchants in regulating the regional butter trade and ensuring consistency and quality throughout. Cork butter had a reputation for quality and one that the Committee worked tirelessly to maintain. No other Irish producer was able to compete with the brand awareness of the quality and consistency of Cork butter. A rather embittered Dublin merchant commented that

I think that Cork butter bore a better price, in consequence of being in better casks capable of holding pickle; we have exported to the West Indies, but could not get

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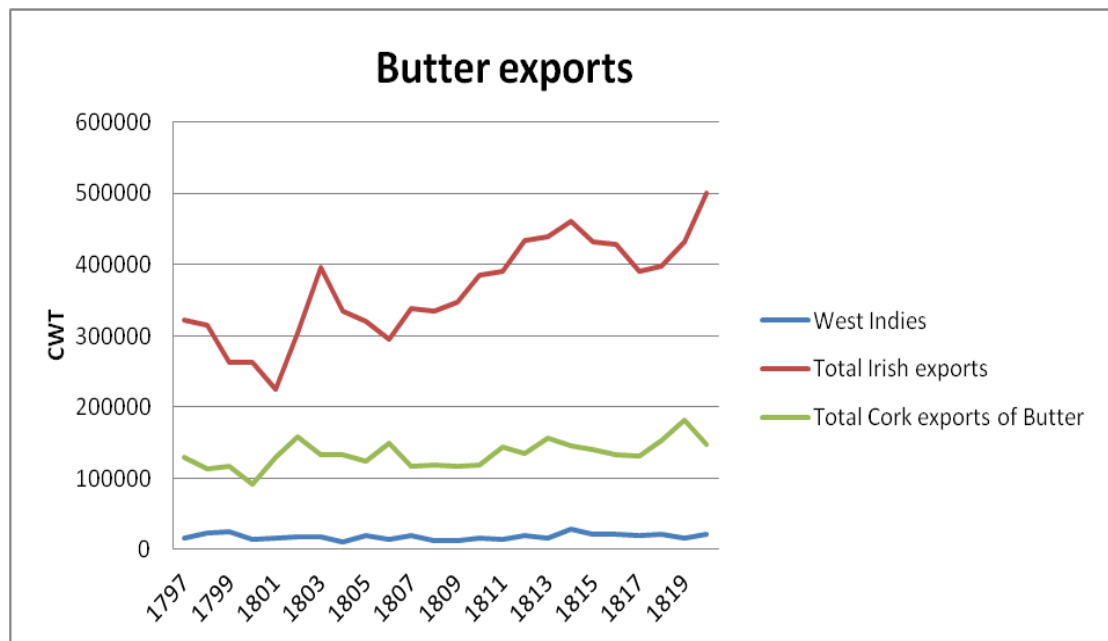
<sup>89</sup> Maura Murphy, 'Cork Commercial Society 1850-1899: Politics and Problems' in *Cities and merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development, 1500-1900* (Dublin, 1986), p. 233; James Johnson, *A Tour in Ireland: With Meditations and Reflections*. (London:, 1844), pp 142-143.

<sup>90</sup> Letter to John Gould & Co. from [unknown], Liverpool regarding an attempt to get differential duties on American imports into West Indies, 4 Jan 1843, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0631, CCCA; Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818; 28 May 1801, 20 July 1815. Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>91</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), pp 13-15; Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1969), pp 229-231; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 375-377.

so good a price for Dublin butter there as Cork butter...Cork Merchants have a distinct trade of their own; it is principally for South America and the West Indies<sup>92</sup>

Much time and effort was spent locating fraud and false brands that could potentially harm the reputation of their output.<sup>93</sup> This diligence secured Cork butter its prominent and respected place on the market. Other suppliers might surpass the quality, but the ability of the Committee of Merchants and Cork's butter market to consistently produce a high quality product was unparalleled.



*Figure 1-9 Cork's butter exports to the West Indies compared to national total<sup>94</sup>*

Although total butter exports were rising, this was not reflected in the volumes crossing the Atlantic. Instead the rise was attributable to growth in the British market. General tonnage shipped from Ireland to Liverpool nearly doubled from the enactment of the Act of Union to the end of the Napoleonic Wars (see Figure 1-10). However, Cork butter was a valuable transshipment commodity, so direct figures hide the real amounts being consumed in the Caribbean. In 1826 a parliamentary committee on Irish trade heard evidence from Thomas Fitzgibbon

<sup>92</sup> *Report from Select Committee on Newfoundland Trade: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee; and an appendix.*, pp.29-30, H.C. 1817 (436), vi, 465

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Whitehall to JJ Murphy regarding false butter branding, 15 Mar. 1842, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1205, CCCA.

<sup>94</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI

that, although the majority of butter consumed in Brazil and the West Indies was from Cork, this was not reflected in the trade figures:

A great deal of our export of butter to Liverpool includes two descriptions of butter; one part for use in England, the other part for trans-shipment to the West Indies and Brazils [sic]. We have an account of the export to Liverpool, which this year has been about 50,000 firkins. Now about 40,000 firkins of those, I think, have been pickled for warm climates<sup>95</sup>

Other Cork butter merchants supported this view. In a *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade in Ireland* they disputed that there had been a decline in the trade with the Americas and argued that considerably more than half of their butter was ultimately destined for foreign markets with a large proportion of the trade being in transshipments through ports such as Liverpool.<sup>96</sup> The Committee of Merchants minutes could provide more detail, but there is a gap in records for this period. The statements provided in this report may have been biased in case parliament attempted to further regulate the butter trade in Ireland. Simply put, there was a decline in the direct trade, but the real growth was through ports such as Liverpool which re-exported the butter. The committee maintained 'brand enforcers' in these ports for precisely this reason.

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<sup>95</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, pp.133-135 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.



*Figure 1-10 Irish tonnage to and from Liverpool<sup>97</sup>*

## **Conclusion**

The importance of Cork's provisioning trade was not solely confined to the values of direct exports to the West Indies. A wide array of allied industries thrived around the creation of the core provisioning items. Textiles, hides, butter, tallow, and other materials were all a direct result of the development of the provisioning industry. Furthermore, Cork developed an expertise in coopering that served the city well, not only in ensuring that high quality provisions were exported, but also in the burgeoning brewing industries. Coquebert, on his visit to Cork, noted,

One branch of commerce attracts another and the colonies send a multitude of orders to Cork for small articles, many of which are not produced in the city itself.<sup>98</sup>

Of crucial importance were the structures that developed to protect these trades, namely the Committee of Merchants. These men maintained stringent standards and controls over the city's produce, while also doing their best to ensure that the mercantile community's concerns were brought up at the highest levels of government. Provisioning was key, as its by-products and developed expertise had a profound impact on the city's development, fostering smaller producers and ancillary industrial endeavours.

<sup>97</sup> Account of the Number and Tonnage of all Ships Entering Liverpool from 1799-1818', The Papers of Lord Liverpool, MS 38368 f. 255, BL

<sup>98</sup> Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790', p. 12.

These trades peaked in the eighteenth century. By the time the Act of Union passed, Cork and Ireland's trade with the West Indies was nearing its end after half a century of re-focusing itself on markets closer to home. Other developments arose outside the Cork mercantile community's sphere of influence: the United States began to develop its economic prowess and powerful liberal and moral forces in Britain stirred to abolish the trade in human capital. Another fifteen years of international warfare was still to come and shifting power balances were about to negate the virtual monopoly Cork had on West Indies provisioning. Cork merchants made great strides in bringing their interests and those of their city to the forefront of one of the most rapidly developing and prosperous trade environments in the world; the Atlantic economy. They also created a niche market for themselves in British global trade. Ultimately these were regional merchants with local interests and they had no force of voice, especially once one of their strongest advocates, Pitt, was no longer in power. This mirrors a wider marginalisation of Ireland over the course of the nineteenth century. There was a price to pay for greater connectivity and access to Britain. That price was the loss of the status of being the 'second kingdom', diminished political representation, and a subsuming of Irish economic interests to those of the greater empire.

## **America**

### ***Trade with the United States***

The export market to the United States from Cork was in many respects inconsequential during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Simply put, there was very little produce that Cork could supply that could not be sourced locally. There was some exportation of linen and textiles and miniscule amounts of provisions and other assorted goods. The real importance of the United States for Cork's trans-Atlantic trade was in its impact on the Caribbean trade and in the importation of a select number of products for the home market. The potential threat that the United States could pose to Irish trade was something that had been debated for many years. In 1782 it was noted:



America is yet so little advanced in manufactures that it is difficult to say in what particulars she will interfere with the trade of Ireland to the West Indies, except in the trade of provisions, which being of the natural growth of the country she may in some time be able to supply the islands... and the injury to Ireland will then extend not only to depriving her of the beef and pork trade, but of those commodities which cattle furnish<sup>99</sup>

It was further noted that America should be prohibited from such from trade with the West Indies unless a scarcity of supply gave no other option. This was precisely what led to the introduction of the United States to the West Indies trade.

The most obvious, high value, high demand product imported from the United States was tobacco. Cork's tobacco imports from the United States were substantial, varying from 10 to 30 per cent of total Irish tobacco imports. This was a respectable figure, especially when taking into account the large proportion of importation from the United Kingdom. However, the tobacco imported, even when processed, was unable to compete with the larger manufactures outside Ireland. This assertion is supported by the distinct lack of any tobacco exports from Ireland during this period. The small scale manufacturing and processing of tobacco that did occur was strictly for domestic consumption and was not produced for exportation. Although the figures for those employed in tobacco production in Cork were only first returned in the 1841 census, they indicate the small scale of such production in the region, with only twenty-six people employed in tobacco manufacture at this time.<sup>100</sup> Tobacco imports were more than likely used to fill space on outgoing or returning vessels. This was a common occurrence, with produce being used to fill empty space on return journeys, especially as the decades wore on. Nash has noted that it was becoming more and more difficult to fill the holds of returning vessels.<sup>101</sup> It is probable that imports of tobacco served a similar purpose as imports of items such as flaxseed or sugar as a high value, low

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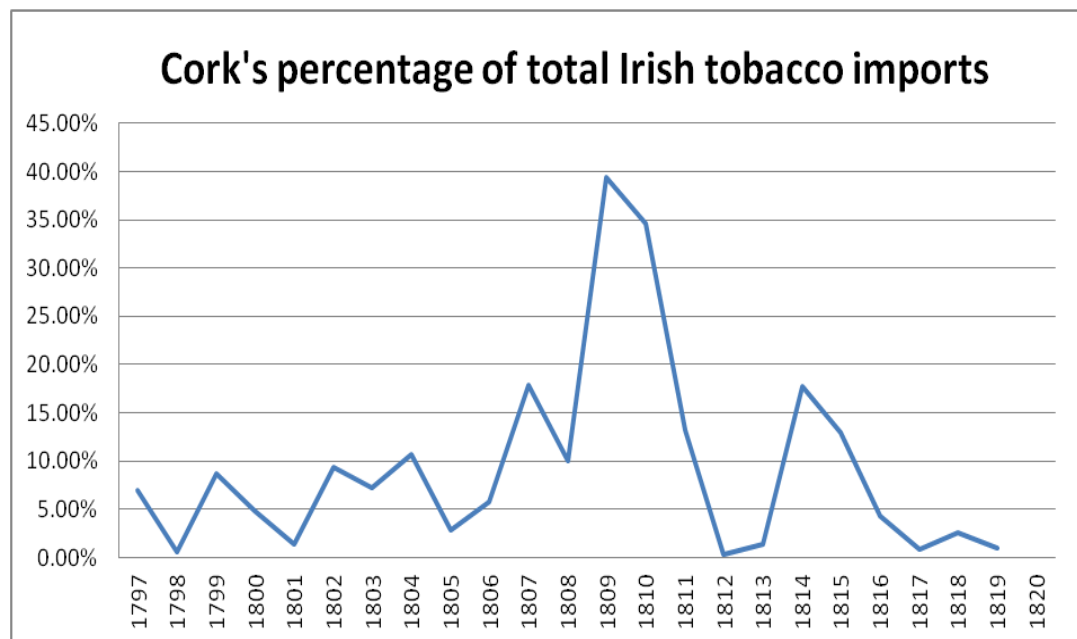
<sup>99</sup> Account of Commodities exported from Ireland to America and the West Indies, 'The Papers of William Pitt the Younger', PRO 30/8/322 ff 109–113, BL

<sup>100</sup> *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to take the Census of Ireland, for the year 1841.*, [c.504] H.C. 1843 xxiv,1; Maura. Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?: The Politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth-Century Cork* (Cork :, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 343–345.

bulk product that could be packed around bulkier goods such as timber. The premium on utilising space can be demonstrated through the refinements made in the condensing and packing of grain for trans-Atlantic shipping at this time.<sup>102</sup>

Imports of tobacco from the United States completely fell away during the War of 1812 and despite seeing a modest reversal in the total Irish tobacco imports, Cork's imports never recovered fully (see Figure 1-11). Tobacco exporters in the United States more than likely went in search of more mature markets, such as London, that paid better prices. The issue of tobacco smuggling should also be taken into account when considering these fluctuations in the market. Cullen attributes the decline seen in 1815 to an increase in smuggling activities.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately most smuggling enterprises do not leave behind quantifiable data with which to assess the impact of the illegal economy!



*Figure 1-11 Cork's tobacco imports from the U.S. as percentage of national total<sup>104</sup>*

Tobacco was a valuable import, but the two main imports of importance to Cork from the United States were wood staves and flaxseed. Cork's mercantile strength derived from its ability to consistently supply good quality provisions to

<sup>102</sup> Aashish Velkar, 'Measurements, Standards and Transactions: Measurements in Nineteenth-Century British Economy' (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, London, 2008), pp 209–210.

<sup>103</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 116.

<sup>104</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

both the colonies and military victuallers. The ability of Cork's merchants to undertake such an enterprise rested on quality packing materials, namely Portuguese salt and appropriate packing casks. The timber for packing casks was predominantly sourced from the Baltic and North America. Correspondence between North American and Cork merchants regularly contained details regarding prices and availability of wood staves and flaxseed.<sup>105</sup> Due to changing importation routes the importation of North American staves superseded those from the Baltic in importance. According to Truxes, by the time of the American Revolution barrel staves from the United States had become indispensable for Irish provisioning, which was essentially Cork provisioning. To support this he quotes Waterford merchants stating that if they were 'deprived of staves to make casks, their export provision trade must be destroyed'.<sup>106</sup> A similar situation existed in Cork, with Beamish and Crawford forced to issue a circular in December 1808 requesting that their agents expedite the return of casks in the possession of their customers. This was due to the 'very great advance that has taken place in the price of Staves, in consequence of the continuance of the American Embargo'.<sup>107</sup>

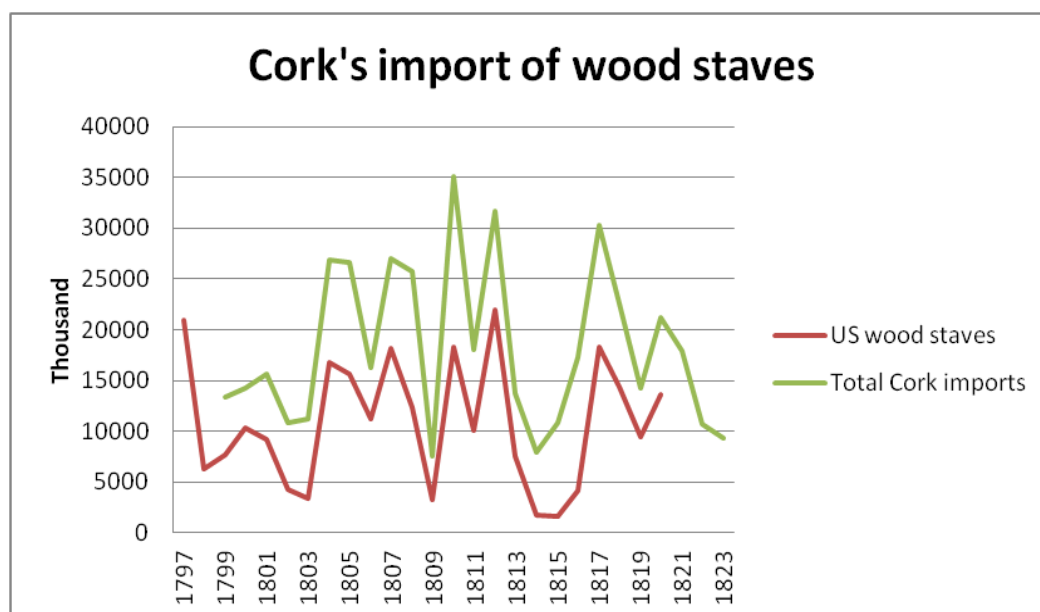
Overall Cork's imports of staves from the United States were consistently circulating around 30 per cent of the Irish total and half to two thirds of Cork's total consumption was sourced from the United States (see Figure 1-12). The value of such goods was quite small in fiscal terms, but its importance in terms of Cork provisioning was enormous. Without a regular supply of quality timber, coopers could not produce sufficient packaging materials for the exportation of provisions. Families such as the Harveys and the Deaves maintained large storage areas to supply this timber to coopers around the city, as well as further afield such as Waterford.

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<sup>105</sup> Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800*, pp 194–195, 279; Hare, 'Richard Hare Letterbook.'

<sup>106</sup> Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783*, p. 132; Quoting from the 'Virginia Gazette', 12 May 1775.

<sup>107</sup> Ó Drisceoil & Ó Drisceoil, *Beamish & Crawford*, pp 71–72, quoting from a circular issued by the Cork Porter Brewery 10th December 1808, Beamish and Crawford Collection, CCCA.



*Figure 1-12 Cork's imports of wood staves from the U.S., compared to Cork's total imports<sup>108</sup>*

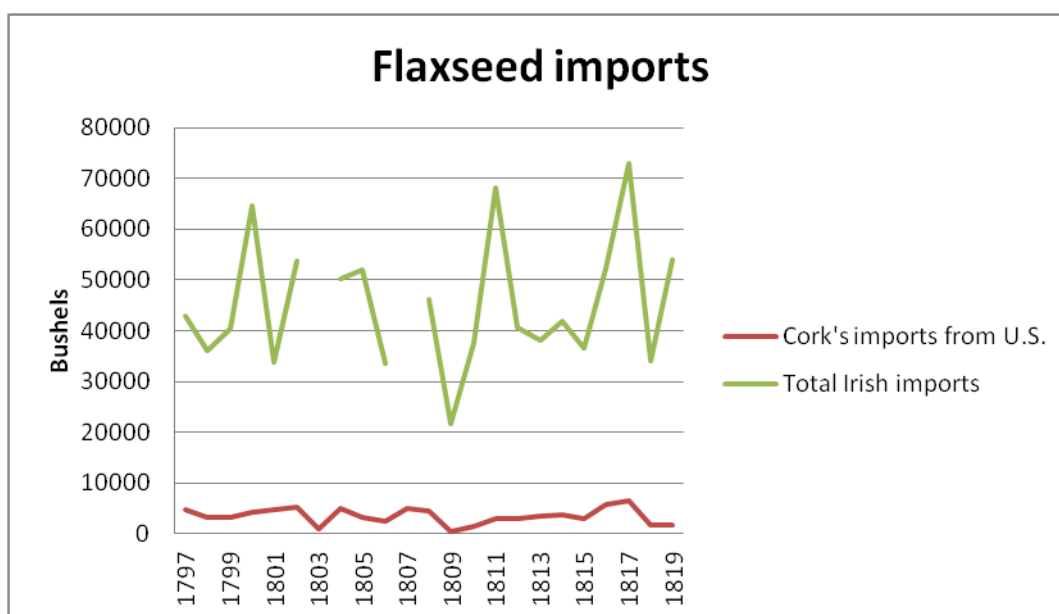
Flaxseed was the other major import from the United States. High quality flaxseed was a pre-requisite for the Irish linen trade and there was a preference in Ireland for North American flaxseed as it was commonly believed to be of the best quality.<sup>109</sup> The main source of flaxseed in Cork was the United States, specifically Philadelphia. Flaxseed was also sourced from other British colonies in North America, but not in significant quantities. Cork's direct flaxseed imports from the United States were quite a small proportion of the total Irish flaxseed imports (see Figure 1-13). By the early nineteenth century Cork's linen industry was in decline, with the North-East of the country being the major producer. The collapse of linen manufacturing in Cork during the 1820s led to a commensurate drop in demand for flaxseed imports.

The importation of flaxseed from North America, as a part of the triangular trade movement across the Atlantic, fits into the broad trend of financing the trans-Atlantic trade. The distances involved and the requirements of using London intermediary houses to finance the trade or shipping meant that wealthy linen merchants were more likely to ship provisions to the Caribbean on their own

<sup>108</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>109</sup> Truxes, *Irish-American trade, 1660-1783*, pp 35–42.

account.<sup>110</sup> Truxes focuses on the northern counties of Ireland with their more refined and developed linen trade. This accounts for the low levels of direct flaxseed imports to Cork. The point here is to demonstrate that the benefits of direct trade with the American continent extended beyond the provisioning industry. Other industries had a vested interest in maintaining a regular trans-Atlantic trade to secure their own industrial concerns. However, these industries were also in quite a precarious position at the turn of the nineteenth century.



*Figure 1-13 Cork's flaxseed imports from the U.S. compared to national total<sup>111</sup>*

### ***South America***

In the opening decades of the nineteenth century Latin America was one of the most promising emerging markets to absorb the increase in British production during the Industrial Revolution. By 1828 Brazil was the third largest foreign market for British produce after the United States and Germany. It also provided a substantial number of imports for British markets. Platt quotes Gallagher and Robinson as stating that the objective was to create 'complementary satellite economies' supplying raw materials, food and opening markets in return for

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp 38–40.

<sup>111</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

manufactured goods.<sup>112</sup> In essence, this resulted in the creation of the type of economic environment Wallerstein discusses in his world system's theory. Latin America was an important emerging market for the United Kingdom. Considering that Cork was in an ideal position to take advantage of any British moves into this region during the opening decades of the nineteenth century and already had nearby trading partners, the question arises as to whether or not its trade was of any significance to Cork.

Direct trade with South America was of almost no consequence to Cork during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Small amounts of linen, beef, butter and pork were exported. The period from 1809 to 1812 saw the largest volume of exports, but still in inconsequential amounts. These variations are possibly attributable to the British invasions of Buenos Aires and increased militarisation leading up to the Argentinean War of Independence. The brief period of British rule would have seen increased supplies of Irish provisions. There also may be some connection to the move of the Portuguese Royal Court from Lisbon to Brazil during this time. 1809 saw the peak of Cork's trade with Latin America: 46,682 yards of linen were exported from Cork, approximately 55 per cent of the year's Irish linen exports to South America and 22 per cent of total Cork linen exports in the trans-Atlantic trade for the year. However, this was a dramatic blip in trade, as Cork's linen exports to the region were generally quite low. The reason for this massive increase in this particular year was that Brazil took 32,800 yards of linen, four times what it had purchased the previous year. The exception to the general trend is explained by negotiations between the Committee of Merchants and Merchants in London in 1808 to conduct convoys from Cork to Brazil.<sup>113</sup>

The reasons that South America did not play a large part in Cork's trans-Atlantic trade are multifarious. First, and most importantly, the major export

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<sup>112</sup> D. C. M. Platt, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations' in *The Economic History Review*, xxi, no. 2 (1968), p. 297; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' in *The Economic History Review*, vi, no. 1 (1953), pp 1–15.

<sup>113</sup> Letter to Mayor of Cork from Committee of Merchants in London regarding organisation of convoys from Cork to Brazil, 9 July 1808, Committee of Merchant Papers, U401/0106, CCCA.

locations for Cork produce across the Atlantic tended to cluster around areas that had been under British rule. Linguistic connections and settlement patterns of Irish merchants facilitated this focus.<sup>114</sup> Trade that filtered out from these English speaking regions generally favoured French colonies, again areas in close proximity to English settlements. The language and practices of the French islands would be familiar to Cork-based merchants as there was a long history of migration between the two. Second, a large proportion of Cork shipping was sent on London tickets, which were more inclined to travel to British regions.<sup>115</sup> Cork goods found their way to French possessions from British holdings in the Caribbean.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, conflict in Europe limited the free transport of goods across the Atlantic and necessitated the use of convoys, further limiting direct commerce. Finally, there was a reasonably strong direct trade between Cork and the Iberian Peninsula. In the early nineteenth century one of the best markets for Cork-produced butter was Lisbon. This was mostly for re-export to Brazil, with exports increasing from 50,000 firkins in the 1820s to nearly 80,000 twenty years later.<sup>117</sup> During this period Brazil became a more important trading partner for Britain after the 1810s *Strangford Treaty*. Cork's produce found its way to South America via Spain, Portugal and Britain. Cork needed high quality Portuguese salt and also had a good wine trade with the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>118</sup> These products were of more benefit to Cork at this time than any produce that could have been extracted from South America.

Yet there were high value imports from the region. The prime import was sugar, a highly valuable, highly desirable commodity. Although large in terms of overall trade with South America, in terms of total sugar imports from the Americas it was miniscule. The dominant point of origin for sugar imports were the West Indies; but that was not the main source of Irish sugar imports. As Irish sugar

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<sup>114</sup> Legg, '“Irish Wine”: The Import of Claret from Bordeaux to Provincial Ireland in the Eighteenth Century'.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas M. Truxes, 'Ireland, New York, and the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World' in *American Journal of Irish Studies*, viii, New York University (2011), pp 12–13.

<sup>116</sup> Truxes, *Irish-American trade, 1660-1783*, p. 147.

<sup>117</sup> James S. Donnelly, 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Irish Butter Trade' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11 (1971), pp 130–133.

<sup>118</sup> Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation*, p. 100; Sean F. Pettit, *This City of Cork: 1700-1900* (Cork, 1977), p. 69; Donnelly, 'Cork Market', pp 130–133.

refining industries were not as well-developed as their counterparts in Britain or on the Continent in general, Irish sugar imports came from other markets; mainly Britain.

Although the Latin American markets had the potential to be lucrative for Cork merchants, they lacked the ability to take advantages of the opportunities. There was no great demand there for Cork's main trans-Atlantic exports. Those that were required could be sourced via Spain, Portugal, or London. While coffee and sugar were consumed in Ireland, there was a dearth of refining plants and other expertise necessary to take advantage of this potential, as well as ready access to the specie that would make this trade viable. Finally, Cork merchants operated mainly through London. They did not operate their own shipping and the limited tonnage of shipping that had an investment from Cork-based merchants mostly operated out of the North American Colonies or Britain.<sup>119</sup> It was unlikely that a merchant community with a demonstrable reticence in investing in risky ventures (which shipping definitely was) would speculate on the potential for development in South America. Cork's merchants were more interested in sourcing high quality salt from the Iberian countries for their lucrative provisioning industries. As a result, most of Ireland's South American trade was conducted via Portugal and Liverpool.

### **Cork's Trade and the Atlantic System**

The distribution of Cork's trade with the American continent shows clear trends. Direct trade destinations cluster around two major areas, the West Indian islands and the northern American states. Map 1-1 illustrates the destinations (with no weighting given for quantities of goods or value). It is clear that the main American trading partners for Cork merchants focused on very specific areas. When the quantities and type of goods are taken into account the focal regions are the larger West Indian islands, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and the more established North American regions of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The focus of

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<sup>119</sup> Truxes, *Irish-American trade, 1660-1783*, p. 70; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 408–409; William O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City from the Earliest Times to the Act of Union* (Dublin ; Cork, 1937), p. 148.



the trade was on the recently independent United States and the established sugar colonies in the Caribbean. However, relatively large amounts of trade were conducted with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and a small amount with the Latin American countries. Cork merchants followed their own triangular Atlantic trade along established shipping lines: departing from Ireland towards the West Indies, then moving up the eastern seaboard of America to procure materials from the United States, before making the voyage home. This follows the evidence that a large proportion of the shipping that departed from Cork for the West Indies did not return directly to Ireland and that in fact continued onwards to American ports before returning (see Figure 1-14). However, this should not be overstated as many of the ships that departed from Cork were on London tickets. During the Napoleonic Wars convoys from many of the major ports in the United Kingdom, such as Bristol, Liverpool and London used Cork as their assembly area and they returned to their own home ports with produce.<sup>120</sup> In the post-war period the tonnage departing from Ireland declined slightly, but rebounded within a few years. However, the tonnage of goods entering the country plummeted. The implication of this is that overall exports stayed reasonably stable overall while imports collapsed. It is hard to pinpoint a precise cause for such a dramatic decline, but the most likely reason is that the end of the Napoleonic Wars saw a marked decrease in ships clearing from Ireland returning with cargo to Cork.

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<sup>120</sup> Letter to John Newport Regarding need for Convoy and Reply Stating Impossibility to Increase Convoys, 3 June 1806, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0668, 0665, CCCA; Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA; Colin. Rynne, *The Industrial Archaeology of Cork City and its Environs* (Dublin :, 1999), pp 11–12; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 366; O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City from the Earliest Times to the Act of Union*, pp 143–148.



Map 1-1 Caribbean and North America trade<sup>121</sup>

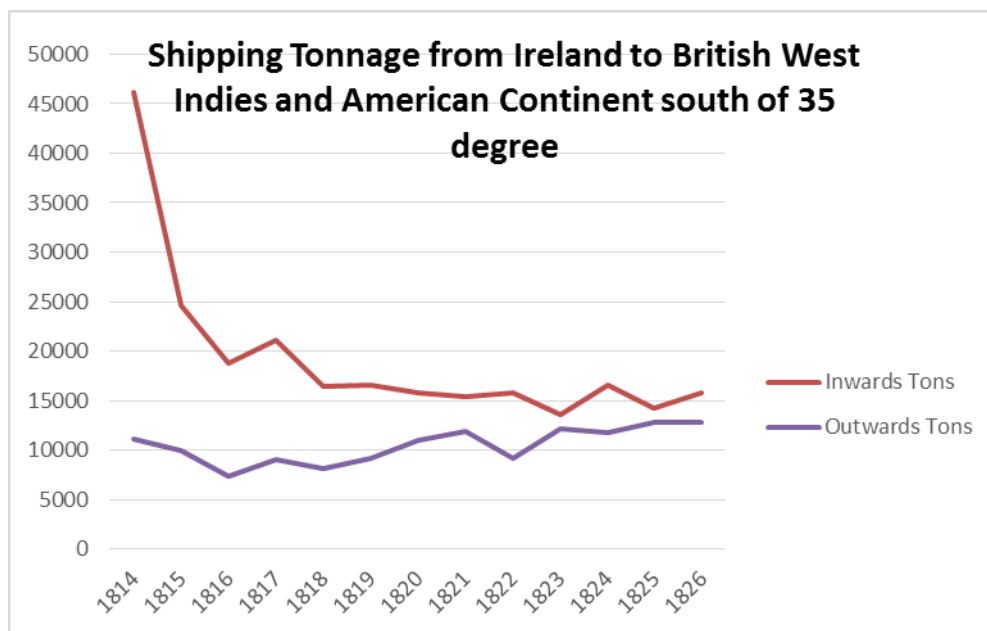
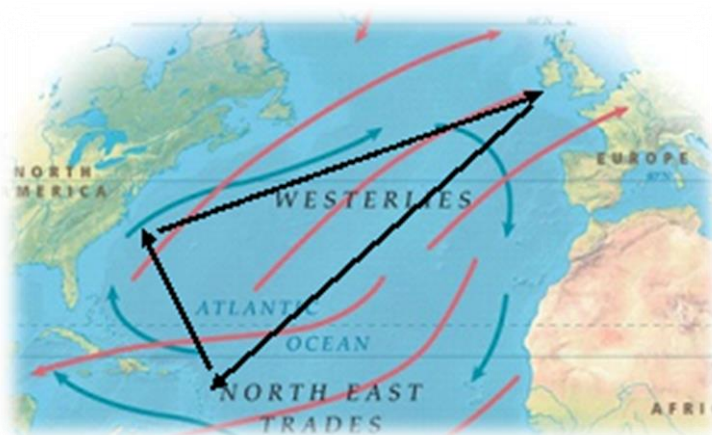


Figure 1-14 Shipping tonnage from Ireland inwards and outwards from the West Indies<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>122</sup> 'Return of the Total Number of the British Ships. Together with Total Amount of their Tonnage which Cleared Outwards and Inwards in the Ports of Ireland, to his Majesties Colonies and Possessions in the West Indies, and in the Continent of America South of the 35th Degree of Latitude, Board of Customs: Statistics: Trade and Shipping', Cust 36, TNA.

This triangular movement was similar to the Atlantic system in place for the slave trade (see Map 1-2). More than likely it developed as Cork merchants followed the demands of the slave route with their wares. The Atlantic system developed in the early part of the seventeenth century following the movement and supply of the slave colonies as well as the prevailing trade winds. Simultaneously, a network of supply for British colonies developed between Ireland, England, and North America.<sup>123</sup> The West Indies requirements for provisions and other desiderata created a demand for Irish produce – such as textiles and foodstuffs – whose export to Britain had been restricted. On the return journey from these regions ships would often return in ballast with produce from the North American colonies. Timber and flaxseed, as well as sugar, a high value, low bulk product, were sourced in the Northern Colonies for consumption and sale at home.<sup>124</sup> Large quantities of timber staves were required to supply the demand from Cork's coopers to create barrels for the provisions exported across the Atlantic.



*Map 1-2 Cork's Trade Route with the Americas*<sup>125</sup>

What the Cork provisioning merchants successfully achieved, for a time, was to carve a niche in this Atlantic system. Price, when outlining the overall structure of the Atlantic slave trade, comments on the impressive nature of the

<sup>123</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, Ireland ; Portland, OR, 2012), p. 103.

<sup>124</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 344–345.

<sup>125</sup> Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

interdependence of the parts in this trade between Africa, Britain, and the Americas.<sup>126</sup> Provisioning constituted a small, but vital component of this trade triangle, one that was considered of great importance, especially by the French with regard to their own sugar colonies.<sup>127</sup> Legislative changes in Britain had a dramatic impact on the changing nature of Cork's trade. War, treaty arrangements with the United States and a growing population in Britain all contributed to the inexorable decline of Cork's trans-Atlantic trade.

It is important not to overstate the control Irish merchants had over this trade. Much of the West Indies leg of the journey was conducted on English account or via English shipping stopping on their way to load provisions. This meant that although Cork merchants exported large volumes of goods to the West Indies, they did not reap the benefits of valuable return cargoes. Instead, the ships that did return across the Atlantic loaded up in the British North American Colonies and the United States with timber and flaxseed. These were important goods to be sure, but they lacked the high value of sugar, tobacco or cotton. There was a distinct triangular trade for Cork, similar to that hypothesised by James and considered by Truxes.<sup>128</sup> The fact that much of this trade was conducted on English account meant that the value to be derived from these regions was not to Cork's benefit beyond the money to be made from provisioning the West Indies. The major capital was derived from the importation of high demand luxury produce such as sugar, which found far more favourable markets in Britain. The difference between the number of ships departing from Cork to the West Indies and those returning in 1804 was quite substantial. This demonstrates that although ships departed Cork to provision the West Indies, they did not return with valuable Caribbean cash crops.

The shipping returns for 1804, illustrated in Figure 1-15, show that three times the number of ships departed from Ireland for the West Indies as those that made the return journey. Shipping figures for Cork account for almost the entirety

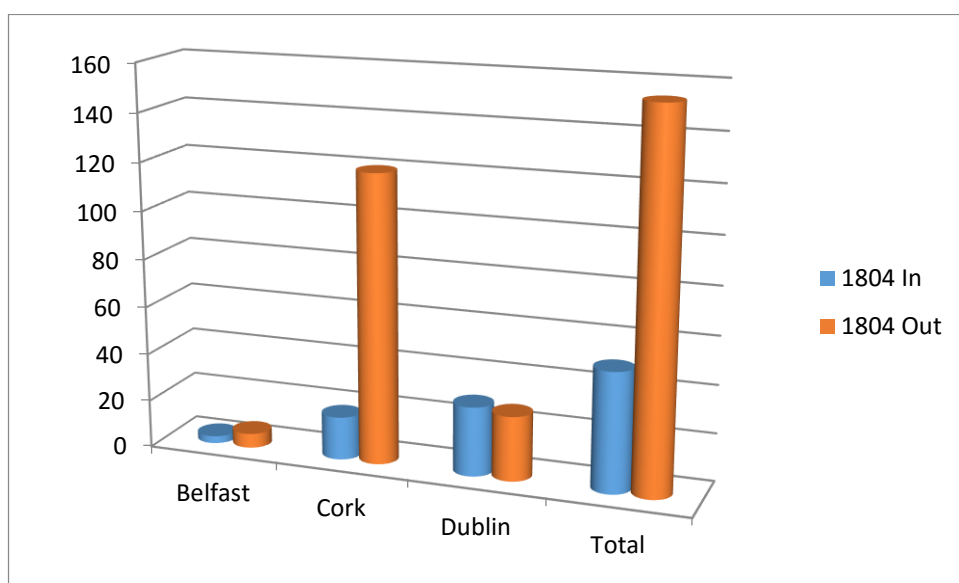
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<sup>126</sup> Price, *What Did Merchants Do?*, pp 277–278.

<sup>127</sup> Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, pp 123–125.

<sup>128</sup> James, 'Irish Colonial Trade in the Eighteenth Century', pp 583–584; Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783*, pp 41–42.

of this difference: the one hundred and twenty vessels that set sail from Cork were only met by eighteen returning vessels. This leads to a number of conclusions: first, the majority of the ships sailing from Cork were British ships provisioning for the journey or contracted by Cork merchants for transportation. Ninety-five of the one hundred and twenty ships that left in 1804 were British. Second, these ships did not return to Cork, at least not directly. Of the eighteen returning ships only eight were from Britain. The implication of this is that while Cork was deemed suitable for sourcing provisions it was not deemed suitable for the sale of the high value produce sourced from the sugar plantations. Finally, as a large proportion of these ships were engaged in a circular trade, on offloading provisions to the West Indies islands they then moved onwards to North America to source materials, such as timber for preservation casks, for the return journey. This can be seen in letters from Deaves' timber merchants to merchants in Rhode Island regarding increasing imports from Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century.<sup>129</sup>



*Figure 1-15 Incoming and Outgoing ships from the West Indies, 1804<sup>130</sup>*

<sup>129</sup> Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800*.

<sup>130</sup> *Accounts, presented to the House of Commons, Respecting British Ships which have Cleared Outwards, and Entered Inwards, to and from the West Indies; &c.*, H.C. 1805 (84) ix, 17

## Conclusion

The decline in the Caribbean trade in the early nineteenth century would in all probability have occurred anyway. As Dickson notes in his seminal work, *Old World Colony*, Cork's trade with this region had declined since the 1760s, the beginning of a long process of refocusing trade from the Americas and Europe to Britain. According to Dickson's sources the fear in the mercantile community at this time was of losing the valuable *French* West Indies markets to Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese or French traders. The *British* West Indies were essentially a protected market for Irish merchants due to legislation such as the Navigation Acts. This adds credence to Mokyr's argument that part of the importance of the trans-Atlantic trade to the British Empire was as a foreign policy tool.<sup>131</sup> By 1815 the British West Indies were no longer protected to the same extent as they had been during the eighteenth century due to the removal of the Navigation Acts and various trade deals with the United States. The eighteenth century mercantilism and market protections were a thing of the past.

Although this decline may have been a long time coming, eighteenth century commentators failed to foresee the eventual collapse. The final disintegration of the Caribbean markets in the 1820s was a result of events during the Napoleonic Wars. Various French West Indies islands had been ceded to Britain during the war, which would potentially secure these markets against their loss to foreign powers. Unfortunately, the Napoleonic Wars saw the requirement for vessels to sail under convoy to protect themselves from privateers and foreign powers. These convoys predominantly departed from Cork, but were limited in their number per year to the chagrin of Cork's mercantile community.<sup>132</sup> To maintain the supplies necessary for their existence, the West Indies planters looked to the former British colonies of North America, which received quite favourable terms from the 1794 *Jay Treaty*. Improved production methods, ease of access and necessity improved the trading links with the United States in an effort to secure

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<sup>131</sup> Mokyr, *The enlightened economy*.

<sup>132</sup> Letter to John Newport Regarding need for Convoy and Reply Stating Impossibility to Increase Convoys, 3 June 1806, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/0668, 0665, CCCA.

sufficient provisions. This would prove a continuing source of frustration for the mercantile community in Cork and Ireland.

At the same time, the Act of Union favoured an increase in Ireland's trade with the United Kingdom, speeding the process of re-focusing attention from the Caribbean. The abolition of slavery lessened the need for Irish provisions, yet there does not appear to be a direct corollary between the termination of the British slave trade and the collapse of trade with the West Indies. The abolition of the slave trade was focused initially on the movement of slaves via Britain, rather than those sent directly to the region. There was still a need for provisions to the area to support the existing population. The acquisition of the French West Indies boosted the number of regions supplied, adding to an increased demand. Most importantly, a large proportion of the goods being shipped were for the planters, rather than the slaves, thus helping to sustain a certain level of demand.

The loss of the Caribbean markets was not due to the Union with Britain or to the declining slave population in the sugar colonies after the abolition of the slave trade. It was due, in no small part, to the inability of small, regional producers to compete with an economically and geographically expanding country in close proximity to the region. With the pervasiveness of the mercantilist attitude in the 1780s, as expressed by Atkinson, it is understandable that Cork merchants would feel aggrieved at their perceived injustices regarding the lack of protection of their interests in the West Indies after the Napoleonic Wars. The opposition surrounding the relaxation of the Navigation Acts centred on duty differentials and the need to protect the interests of those within the 'club'. Now, thirty years later, after tax harmonisation and in many respects having acceded to the demands of the mercantilists, they found themselves at a loss. Furthermore, by this time the Cork merchants faced a more integrated world market. Even before the mass introduction of steam, transit times had shrunk. The United States was no longer a former colony, but a fully-fledged state, while Napoleon's Continental System was instrumental in creating a more unified European continent. Mercantilism could not survive in this new world order.

Despite innovations in trade and communications this was still a world in flux. Since the 1780s innovations in the factory system and production methods had surpassed any potential for Irish manufacturers to threaten British trade. It created a problem unforeseen by those old adherents of mercantilism. Industrial techniques had improved at a rate far faster than consumer spending. The origins of the British Empire, and in fact most imperial systems, did not solely rely on the need for the exploitative extraction of resources. They needed markets to sell produce. This required large-scale borrowing and investment in industry. When war ends, the problems are twofold. Industry is geared to supplying demand that no longer exists, and government is left with debts it must service. Cork was geared towards supplying a number of major military goods, textiles and foodstuffs. A large proportion of the region's textile industry at this point was lower quality manufactures for military consumption. This suited the Cork and Irish market, as the putting-out system fed into it. At the same time burgeoning British industrial machinery was improving in a far more competitive manner. Irish manufacturers relied on low wages while British manufacturers invested in industrialisation.

In the post-Napoleonic War period there was a large economic contraction. The open markets that Irish merchants had so dearly desired nearly destroyed them. Textiles was one of the earliest industries to industrialise in Britain and therefore was a highly refined industrial enterprise by this time. This had a major impact on the lower scale textile manufacturers in the Cork region. British merchants took advantage of the equalised duties and began to dump goods at reduced prices on the Irish market in a large-scale manner during the 1820s. This crushed large numbers of Cork's textile manufacturers for much of the nineteenth century as their antiquated putting out system could not reduce costs enough to compete with the better quality and cheaper industrial manufactures.

Even worse, the long-term refocusing of Cork's provisioning on the military and British market had degraded their domination of the plantation market. Necessity and the restrictions of the convoy system had led to an increasing move towards the United States of America by the West Indies for supplies. No amount of complaints calling for the protection of the Union would change this. Cork was



poorly placed in terms of proximity and poorly equipped due to its reliance on transshipment and British shipping to compete. Mercantilism was dying. Where did that leave the merchant princes? Their business was overly focused on provisioning and textiles. For nearly a century this had sufficed, but they now had to compete in a changed world. The old order would never be the same again. The loss of the Caribbean markets set the stage for a dramatic reversal of Cork's economic fortunes.

## Chapter 2

### Trade with Continental Europe

Over the course of the eighteenth century Cork's trade with continental Europe gradually diminished. Its cornerstone was the ability to provide high quality provisions and foodstuffs that could survive extended journeys. Casking and preservation methods formed the key to the longevity of the produce. Large volumes of salt were required for the butter and salted meat production as well as for the repackaging of imported fish from Nordic states. Cork merchants preferred St. Ubes or Setubal salt from Portugal and it was the most important product imported from the continent into the city. There were alternative sources for bay salt, but Cork producers believed St. Ubes salt was a high quality product ideally suited to their needs. A number of commentators at home and abroad noted this preference. In his 1801 *Account of Ireland* Wakefield wrote that Cork's mercantile community feared the loss of access to Portuguese salt during the Peninsular Wars.<sup>1</sup> In the 1840s a parliamentary account of Anglo-Portuguese relations referred to Portugal's salt exports to Cork and was one of the few examples of a product linked to a location.<sup>2</sup>

The pre-eminence of Cork's provisioning trade saw the accreditation of numerous European consulates in Cork. Not only did Spain, Portugal and France maintain a consular presence in Cork, throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century so did Brazil, Denmark, Holland and Norway.<sup>3</sup> Cork's expertise in provisioning gave it a small but important place in Europe's economy, predominantly in relation to supplying provisions for colonial powers to re-export

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 1* (London, 1812), p. 750

<sup>2</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.* p.37 [c. 547] H.C. 1844 xlvii, 325.

<sup>3</sup> Colin. Rynne and Royal Irish Academy., *The Industrial Archaeology of Cork City and its Environs, 1750-1930* (Dublin :, 1991), pp 11–12; *Archives du Commerce, ou Guide des Commerçans, Recueil de tous les Documens Officiels, Renseignemens, faits et avis, Pouvant Intéresser les Négocians*, 1837, p. 161; Aldwell, Alexander, *Aldwell's General Post Office Directory of Cork for the year 1845: List of Traders, Public Officials and Prominent Citizens* (Cork, 1845); J. Pigot & Co, *Pigot and Co.'s City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory: Containing a Classification of the Nobility, Gentry, Clergy, Professional Gentlemen, Merchants, and Manufacturers of Dublin and Upwards of Two Hundred & Twenty of the Principal Cities, Seaports and Towns of Ireland.* (London, 1824).

to their trans-Atlantic possessions. For eighteenth century France and Portugal this was mainly their West Indian and Brazilian colonies respectively. Cork's trading relationship with these countries skewed towards whichever country had a preferential relationship with Great Britain and for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Portugal held pride of place. However, despite the strong relationship between Britain and Portugal since the Methuen Treaty in 1703 there were times when the stability of Irish and Portuguese trade came under intense pressure. The most notable instance was the period from the formation of Grattan's Parliament up to the Commercial Propositions of the mid-1780s. The importance of Portuguese trade did not impede Cork's trade with other countries, all of which contributed to its own unique character. Despite numerous instances of Cork harbour being placed under embargo to prevent French vessels provisioning there during times of conflict, the city's merchants did trade with France through a number of duplicitous methods, including trading through neutral shipping.<sup>4</sup> Another trading partner of note was Norway, with imports of timber coming in to supply Cork's coopering industry. Although the customs' ledgers record this trade as coming from 'Denmark-Norway' until Norwegian independence in 1814, it is almost certain that the majority of this trade derived from Norway. Once Norway began to be enumerated separately trade with Denmark disappears.

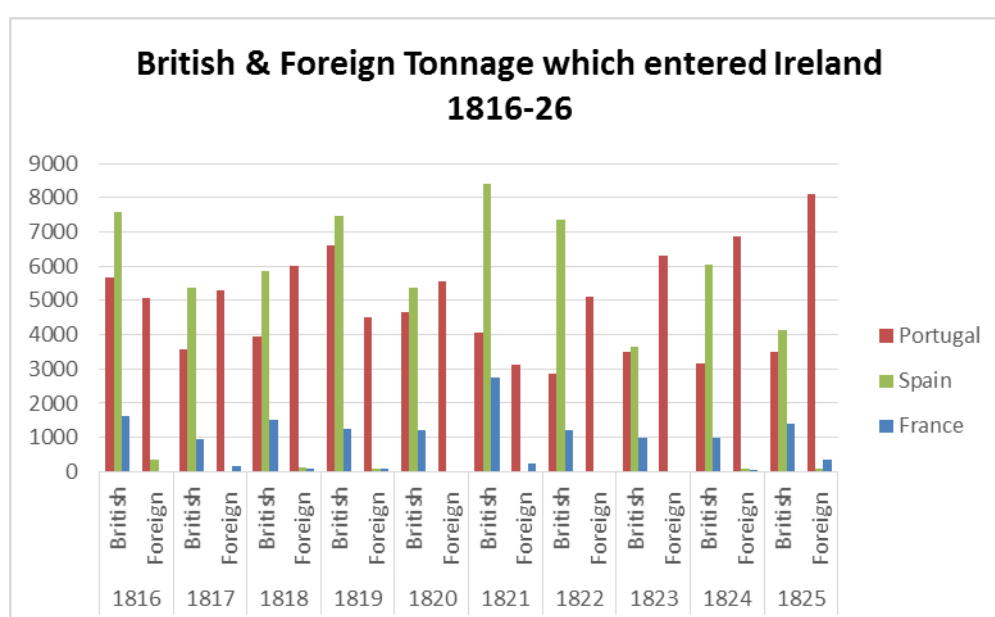
As demonstrated in Figure 2.1 below the total tonnage entering Ireland from the Iberian Peninsula completely overshadowed the tonnage arriving from France. High tonnages also came from Prussia and Belgium, though Cork's trade with these regions was quite limited. Similarly high returns came for Norway and Denmark and later from Norway as an independent entity. By far the largest European trade in terms of both numbers of ships entering Ireland and tonnage, was Norwegian; usually about twice the rate of their nearest rivals.<sup>5</sup> Despite a large share in terms of the volume of goods being imported, the value of these goods from the Nordic regions never surpassed that of Portugal. Norwegian imports were

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<sup>4</sup> David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), p. 368.

<sup>5</sup> Kingdoms and States to which the Foreign vessels in the passing amount belong, Board of Customs: Statistics: Trade and Shipping, Cust 36, TNA.

high volume but low value transactions that, for Cork at least, were almost entirely comprised of timber and wood products. Timber requirements for casks were high in Cork, but timber imports from the Nordic states could always be replaced by imports from other countries, whereas Portuguese salt was a precious and, in the opinion of Cork's provisioning merchants, an irreplaceable product. Without high quality bay salt they could not produce foodstuffs of sufficient longevity to serve their customers.



*Figure 2-1 Tonnage entering Ireland 1818-26<sup>6</sup>*

Dublin, Cork and Belfast comprised two-thirds of national trade with the continent (see Appendix 1). After Dublin, Cork was the preferred destination for continental shipping, maintaining a slim lead over Belfast. Between 1811 and 1823 Cork maintained around 20 per cent of Ireland's total tonnage, with Dublin increasing from 30 to 34 per cent. What these figures conceal is Cork's success in maintaining its share when compared with the figures for Munster as a whole during this period. Munster's share of Irish tonnage plummeted by 15 per cent, down to 26 per cent of the national total, with Cork handling over 70 per cent of

<sup>6</sup> Comparative statement of the British and Foreign Tonnage which have entered the several ports of Great Britain, distinguishing the several countries for the last ten years. A similar return for Ireland, Board of Customs: Statistics: Trade and Shipping, Cust 36, TNA.

Munster's trade. The majority of this collapse for the province was in the tonnage arriving on British ships, with arrivals into Limerick and Waterford being devastated. Although tonnage arriving on British ships into Cork also declined, it was nowhere near as precipitous.<sup>7</sup> There are several reasons for this decline. As the fall mostly centred on goods carried on British shipping it is likely that at least part of the decline was related to a decline in overall tonnages shipped after the Napoleonic Wars. Usage of more isolated regional ports also diminished, a process that can be traced back to the relocation of military victualling to Cork in the 1770s. It is probable that this was due to the economic depression that began to set in during the 1820s and better profits to be made in the larger urban environments. Furthermore, during the Napoleonic Wars Cork had consolidated its position as a pre-eminent port for naval victualling; building on the earlier successes during the American Revolution.<sup>8</sup> In the early nineteenth century Cork maintained its share of the Irish total and cemented its position as the primary transit route for goods out of Munster, as well as being the main market for agricultural goods produced in the region.

## **Portugal**

The broad structure through which Cork would trade with Portugal for the first four decades of the nineteenth century was firmly established by 1787, but its roots go back much further. Ireland had a long standing history of trade with Portugal, but during the period from 1780 to 1787 the foundations of this trade were under serious threat and a question hung over the future connections between the two nations. Ireland had, at least in part, used the opportunity the American War of Independence presented to gain a degree of free trade from Britain. In turn Portugal was going to attempt to use both the relaxation of trade

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<sup>7</sup> An Account of the Number of Vessels, with their Tonnage, that Entered the Ports of Ireland, in the year 1811 and 1823, from the Several Countries on the Continent of Europe, from Norway to the streights of Gibraltar, including the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas, and also Including the Islands of Guernsey, Jersey, Aldenay and Sark, The Countries and Islands from which, and the Ports at which they had with the Number of Vessels, and Amount of Tonnage from each such ..Island to each Port Respectively, the each year, and Further Distinguishing British from Foreign Vessels, Board of Customs: Statistics: Trade and Shipping, Cust 36, TNA.

<sup>8</sup> Joe Varley, 'What was the Effect of the British Army and Navy on Cork 1770-1785?' (University of Exeter, 2012).

restrictions on Ireland and the American War of Independence to leverage more favourable treaty concessions from Britain. Ireland was to be the fulcrum for this attempt.

Since the mid-eighteenth century Portugal was Cork's most important European trading partner and this relationship was maintained up to the 1830s. In his assessment of trade between Cork and Portugal Horta notes that it resulted from 'the unlikely connection between Cork butter and Portuguese salt'.<sup>9</sup> Cork did have a certain level of trade with other European countries, but due to Britain's conflicts with numerous European states the Portuguese trade was one of the most enduring. The imported salt was considered virtually irreplaceable for Cork's provisioning industry, whereas the materials imported from other European could be easily sourced from elsewhere. Imports of wine and exports of butter were meaningful to a degree, but it was salt that made the Portuguese trade so vital, specifically what was known as 'bay' salt from St. Ubes or Setubal. 'Bay' salt was sea salt dried out in large beds, as opposed to the rock salt mined in England, and this process led to larger salt crystals forming, which enhanced its preservative qualities. The preference for bay salt was not specific to Cork's provisioning merchants and was shared by the British fishing industry. The matter came up repeatedly during a parliamentary enquiry on the state of the latter.<sup>10</sup> Both the reputation and nature of Cork's international trade was inseparably tied to provisioning, which required high quality preservation salt.

Sourcing the type and quantity of salt required for the provisioning industry was not easy. In 1781 Lucius O'Brien observed:

tho' we might import it on nearly as good terms from some of the salt islands in the West Indies, from the nearer ports of Spain or from the Mediterranean where the salt of Ivica is said to be near 30 per cent better than that of Portugal, tho' we might manufacture it on our coasts at home.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> José António Gonçalves Horta, 'Images and Representations of Ireland in Portugal (1830-1925): Geographical knowledge and Geographical Imagination', PhD Thesis UCC 2009, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Use of Rock Salt in the Fisheries; &c.*, H.C. 1807 (247) iii, 121

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

However, despite stating claims of alternative and superior sources, they were never availed of even in times of severe difficulty for this trade such as during the Peninsular War. While salt could be gotten elsewhere, such as in the West Indies or Ivica (Ibiza), it was not what Ireland needed or wanted. Despite making statements to the contrary, O'Brien would have been aware of that fact.

O'Brien listed the main commodities that Ireland traded with Portugal, as well as potential alternative sources for these goods. In terms of exports the major goods were:

1. Wheat, flour and biscuit, but only when Portugal was short in supply and Irish prices could stand British competition.
2. 'Beef and butter of which Ireland... has a monopoly in Europe, which neither Portugal nor any other commercial country can do without, which her own country cannot produce, and which Ireland sends from her own manufactures without duty.'
3. Some linen, which was otherwise purchased from Germany.
4. Some woollen goods, for which Ireland competed with France.

In return, he stated that Ireland imported wine, St. Ubes' salt and oil. According to O'Brien Portuguese wine got preferential treatment despite the fact that 'the wines of France have been more admired here, every hogshead of which have been paid for with Irish commodities imported into Bordeaux'.<sup>12</sup> This preferential treatment was due to the provisions of the 1703 *Methuen Treaty* between Britain and Portugal.

Ralph Davis has suggested that three-quarters of the growth in the eighteenth century English export trade depended equally on the Iberian Peninsula and Britain's imperial possessions in America.<sup>13</sup> Fisher countered that this overstated local demand as it depended on Spanish and Portuguese colonial

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<sup>12</sup> Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781 William Pitt, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 12–14, BL.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Davis, 'English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774' in *The Economic History Review*, xv, no. 2 (1962), pp 285–303.

possessions and a large proportion of goods imported from the United Kingdom were ultimately destined for re-exportation.<sup>14</sup> While there was a great deal of re-exportation going on, Cork's trade was heavily reliant on both Portugal and America, though perhaps not in as equal a manner. Lucius O'Brien noted that no matter the state of Anglo-Portuguese trade, in terms of Ireland's trade with Portugal, 'not only the balance, but the whole course of the trade, and the comparative value of the commodities exchanged is in favour of the latter' (see Figure 2-2 below).<sup>15</sup> The balance of trade was so strongly in Ireland's favour by the nineteenth century that Irish goods accounted for approximately ninety per cent of the monetary exchange between the two countries. Horta notes that this was predominantly due to the price differential between salt and butter. He estimates that for 1834-36 Portugal would need to sell at least two tons of salt in order to purchase one barrel of butter.<sup>16</sup> For Cork's merchant trade with the European continent was nowhere near as lucrative as that with North America and its direct value was only a fraction of that of the trans-Atlantic trade, but without strong connections with Portugal and access to Portuguese salt it is unlikely that Cork's trans-Atlantic trade would have been able to maintain its size or longevity. Furthermore, regular and long-standing trade with the Iberian Peninsula had implications for domestic consumption patterns, with Portuguese wine becoming a preferred drink for the merchant classes, as it also had become in Britain. This can be seen in figure 2-3 below, which compares Cork's importation of port to French wines.

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<sup>14</sup> H. E. S. Fisher, 'Anglo-Portuguese Trade, 1700-1770' in *The Economic History Review*, xvi, no. 2 (1963), p. 219; 226.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 11, BL.

<sup>16</sup> Horta, 'Images and Representations of Ireland in Portugal (1830-1925)', p. 110.



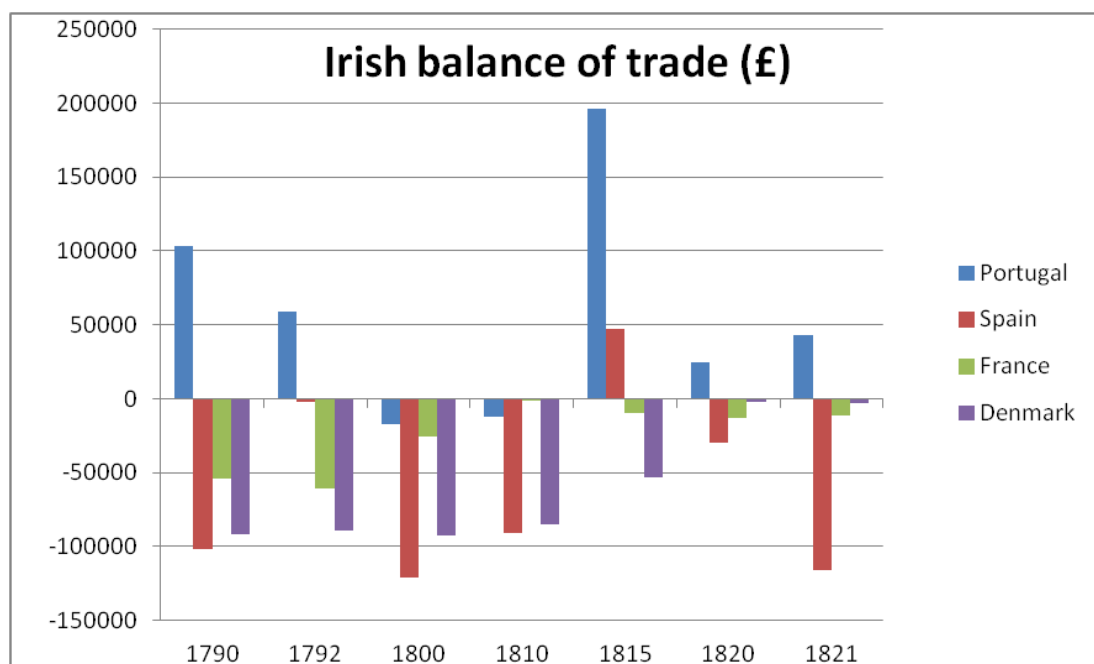


Figure 2-2 Irish balance of trade<sup>17</sup>

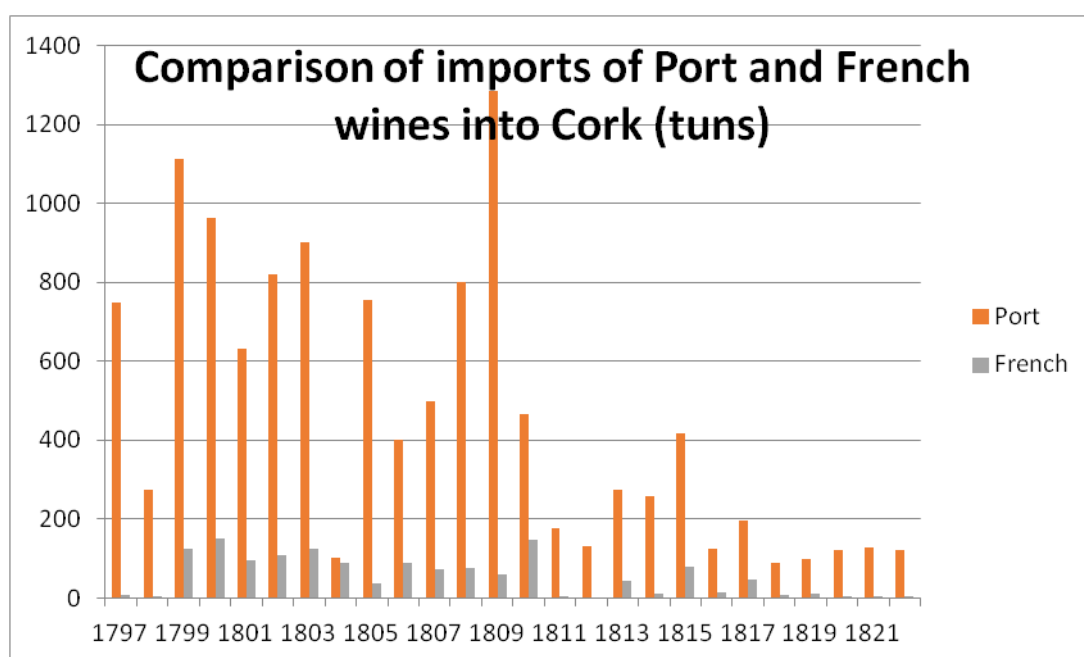


Figure 2-3 Imports of Portuguese and French wine into Cork<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> (Ireland.) Imports and Exports. --(1.)-- A Return to an Order of the Honourable House of Commons, Dated the 8th of March 1822;--for, An Account of the Imports and Exports of Ireland, in the Years 1792, 1800, 1810, 1815, 1820, and 1821; Distinguishing the Countries from which Imported, and to which Exported, with the Official and Declared or Real Value thereof; Stated in Irish Currency. --(2.)-- An Account of the Shipping Entered Inwards and Cleared Outwards in Ireland, from or to all Parts of the World, in the Years 1792, 1800, 1810, 1815, 1820, and 1821; Distinguishing such as Entered Inwards or Cleared Outwards, from or to Great Britain. H.C. 1822 (234), xviii, 473

<sup>18</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, in 24 vols, for the period 1764-1823', MSS 353-76, NLI.

However, before discussing the impact of Portugal's trade with Cork it should be noted that by the late eighteenth century Britain accounted for 74 per cent of Irish imports and 79 per cent of exports.<sup>19</sup> Dependence on Britain means a number of caveats should be taken into account in examining the broader environment for Cork's trade. No market either in Europe or worldwide was as important as the British market, but although its size dwarfed all others, there were still certain crucial goods that were sourced from abroad and upon which specific sectors of the economy relied. For Cork's provisioning merchants, Portuguese salt was indispensable and neither the size nor stated value of imports of salt to Cork's market is proportional to its actual worth. Furthermore, contemporary commentators noted that certain continental goods found their way to the Irish market through Britain with it being estimated that in 1789 half of all trade with the British Isles from Bordeaux was imported via Ireland.<sup>20</sup> A converse trend can be seen for exports to Portugal, especially once the *Strangford Treaty* of 1810 opened the Brazilian market to direct trade from Britain. As a result a proportion of goods that had been previously transhipped via Portugal were instead routed through Britain.

### ***Treaties***

Key to the development of British trade with Portugal was the longstanding history of commercial cooperation between them, with treaties and trade agreements stretching back to the fourteenth century. Although these earlier agreements were of some significance, the most enduring treaty, and the most important for Ireland, was the 1703 Methuen Treaty. Lucius O'Brien argued that the Methuen Treaty was regulated by those that came before it and therefore all these treaties should 'be taken together as parts only of one system'.<sup>21</sup> Building upon earlier seventeenth century agreements, the *Methuen Treaty* created a foundation for the successive one hundred and fifty years of Anglo-Portuguese commercial

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<sup>19</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780-1939* (s.l.), 1992), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> James Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785' in *Journal of British Studies*, lii, no. 01 (2013), p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> *The Parliamentary Register: Or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland* (1784), p. 24; Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 9, BL.

arrangements. It established a system of preferential treatments for the signatory nations and created a stable environment within which trade occurred.

Furthermore, the *Methuen Treaty* was later used as a blueprint for nineteenth century agreements with Brazil. Large proportions of this treaty focused on the sensitive issues of English Protestant merchants trading with Catholic Spain.<sup>22</sup> These religious issues were not of much relevance to Cork's trade with Portugal, but the creation of a stable and well thought out commercial arrangement was, especially because it gave certain freedoms of trade and movement to the British merchant population resident in Portugal.

Initially the *Methuen Treaty* was not considered a significant agreement, but over time it became an important factor in the development of Anglo-Portuguese and Anglo-Franco relationships. It endured in one form or another (with several renewals and re-negotiations) until the mid-nineteenth century. This not only reflects the importance of trading connections between Britain and Portugal (and in many cases this trade was more important for Portuguese interests than British) but also the need for a dependable ally on the continent during the repeated conflicts between France and Britain, as well as during the American War of Independence.<sup>23</sup> Portuguese diplomats repeatedly referred to their support during the latter in their attempts to force Britain to renegotiate the provisions of the *Methuen Treaty*. Duguid points out that this treaty was not always destined to succeed. He argues that in the negotiations for the *Treaty of Utrecht* the British government was willing to abandon the Portuguese treaty to achieve freedom of trade with France; a far more valuable proposition. Ultimately this never occurred as some MPs feared it would lead to the prohibition of English textiles in Portugal. However, it does highlight the uncertainty surrounding the longevity of the *Methuen Treaty*.<sup>24</sup> In exchange for the admission of English woollens into Portugal, this treaty allowed for the importation of Portuguese wines into Britain at two

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<sup>22</sup> Fisher, 'Anglo-Portuguese Trade, 1700-1770', p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.* p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Duguid, 'The Making of Methuen: The Commercial Treaty in the English Imagination' in *História, Revista da Faculdade de Letras*, iii, no. 4 (2003), pp 10–11.

thirds of the French duties 'forever after'. An 1844 report on the commercial tariffs and regulations into Portuguese trade saw this treaty as 'most unwise' for two reasons: first, that Portugal had a small, poor population and second, that it brought them into commercial conflict with France.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that the application of this treaty to Irish trade with Portugal was guaranteed. In the 1780s problems arose in the commercial arrangements between Ireland and Portugal as to the application of the *Methuen Treaty*. The Portuguese claimed that as Ireland had recently secured free trade from Britain it was now a distinct trading entity. Therefore they maintained that previous agreements with Britain no longer applied to Ireland.<sup>26</sup> The source of the disagreement came from an increase in the exportation of Irish woollen products to Portugal in 1780-81, which were stopped by Portuguese customs officials. After a strenuous period of negotiations in the words of Dickson, 'it was discovered, perhaps to no one's surprise, that "Irish camblet" was a long established category of import' in Portugal.<sup>27</sup> This demonstrated that Ireland had always been subject to the same trade agreements as Britain. During a debate on the topic of Irish-Portuguese trade on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1781, Sir Lucius O'Brien stated that it was a mistake to believe Ireland's trade with Portugal was founded upon the *Methuen Treaty*. He attributed Ireland's recently achieved free trade as the trigger for commercial disagreements with Portugal. Some members of the House questioned whether the actions of the Portuguese were out of gratitude to Britain for giving concessions to Portuguese goods on the British market. During the discussion as to whether this suspension of Irish trade with Portugal was due to actions of British merchants, Grattan stated that, 'the King of England has no right to rob the King of Ireland of the brightest Jewel of his Crown, to embellish that of England' and that British ministers were 'neglecting the interests of the merchants of Ireland'.<sup>28</sup> This

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<sup>25</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> David Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv, no. 97 (1986), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> *The Parliamentary Register*, pp 17, 24-30; For an in depth account of these treaties and their relationship to Ireland see: Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781 Pitt, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, pt. 30/8/342 ff5-9, BL.

event serves to highlight the longstanding, yet uncertain, relationship between Ireland and Portugal. Nevertheless their commerce had operated under the provisions of the Methuen Treaty, whether by custom or explicit agreement, for some time.

In 1780 Portugal began to refuse to accept certain Irish goods in her ports, namely textiles.<sup>29</sup> Both Kelly and Lammey suggest that the underlining motive for these tensions between Portugal and Ireland was the desire to force Britain to renegotiate the *Methuen Treaty*.<sup>30</sup> The justification for refusing Irish produced goods was relatively flimsy, but the intention was clear. In a pamphlet circulated in Ireland in 1783, *A Defence of the Conduct of the Court of Portugal*, the author repeatedly takes issue with the *Methuen Treaty* and attempts to attribute the problems between Ireland and Portugal to it. The author claimed that John Methuen (who negotiated the treaty and was simultaneously Lord Chancellor of Ireland and the English ambassador to Portugal) had explicitly stated that Ireland was not to be included in the treaty and that the current British government was refusing to countenance any of the re-negotiations necessary for a renewal of commerce between Ireland and Portugal.<sup>31</sup> The author is quite exercised at the perceived imbalance between Portuguese and British trade, referring to problems with the wine trade and shipping and asserting that the Methuen Treaty was nothing 'but a gilded meteor that glittered for a moment in their commercial horizon, and then totally disappeared'.<sup>32</sup> According to the author, the origins of problems between Ireland and Portugal were twofold. First, London wanted to keep Ireland commercially subjugated to prevent Irish competition in the Portuguese wool market. Second, the Methuen treaty itself contained unfair

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<sup>29</sup> Murray, 'A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland, from the Period of the Restoration', 220,227; For more on this dispute see Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90'; Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87'.

<sup>30</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', pp 44–45; James Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 25 (1990), pp 9–10.

<sup>31</sup> Lusitania, *A Defence of the Conduct of the Court of Portugal: With a Full Refutation of the Several Charges Alleged Against that Kingdom, with Respect to Ireland. Originally Written in the Portuguese, by a Gentleman of Distinction*, (1783), pp 8–9,17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

wording. The author suggested that Ireland was implicitly excluded in the treaty's text and, although apparently sympathetic to Irish complaints, stated that 'it is not the business of the court to enter into metaphysical distinctions, respecting the indivisibility of the British crown'.<sup>33</sup> It is no coincidence that this pamphlet was circulated in 1783, at the same time that the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Chevalier de Pinto, was attempting to convince the Irish government to support a renegotiated treaty.<sup>34</sup> The Portuguese were running a divide and conquer operation, if not officially then at least unofficially. Hugh Shey, a Portuguese merchant that dealt in Irish goods, made similar arguments in the Irish House of Commons, asserting that 'the exclusion of the Irish merchant from sending manufactured goods to Portugal would secure to the English merchant the monopoly he has enjoyed'.<sup>35</sup> This played on both the aspirations of some Irish merchants that Portugal could be a market to extend their woollen trade as well as the inherent distrust of British intentions for Irish commercial development under the new free trade regime.

Marx also assigned responsibility on this issue to British ulterior motives. This was a common sentiment in contemporary Irish opinion with Marx recounting some inflammatory rhetoric from Lucius O'Brien calling upon the King to defend Ireland's trade 'by hostility with Portugal'.<sup>36</sup> Such calls to action were not representative. John Curran took a far more pragmatic view of the matter, expressing the opinion that

If the trade of Portugal is to be abandoned... we [should] find out another market for the exportation of our butter and our woollens, and not continue... [to] be the ridicule of Europe.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp 7–8.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87', p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783 Pitt, *The Papers of William Pitt the Younger*, PRO 30/8/342 ff 27–28, BL.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, 'Ireland from the American Revolution to the Union of 1801 Extracts and Notes' in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: [collected works]* (London, 1975), pp 224–225.

<sup>37</sup> John Philpot Curran, *The Speeches of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran : Curran, John Philpot, 1750-1817*, ed. Thomas Davis, pp 56–58.

He goes on to state that Ireland's response, namely prohibitory duties on Portuguese wine, 'is a tax upon yourselves; you make us pay double for a glass of wine, to revenge yourselves on the Portuguese'.<sup>38</sup> However, Pitt's own papers seem to show that the British government was attempting to rectify this issue, though perhaps not at the pace the Irish desired. A *Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce with Ireland* noted that Irish linens had higher levies imposed on them in Portugal than those on French linen and most Irish woollens were excluded from Portuguese markets. In the observations on this report the commentary noted that the matter was 'under full discussion with the Court of Portugal'.<sup>39</sup> The Portuguese argued that as Britain had prohibited the export of Irish woollens several years before the signing of the *Methuen Treaty* they felt that they had the liberty to refuse the admission of Irish textiles.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Lord Northington, Lord North outlined the main issues for the British government in handling the issue. The Portuguese government had provided four preliminaries that had to be agreed upon: Great Britain had to admit that Ireland had a right to be included in the *Methuen Treaty*; the treaty was not to be used as a baseline for a future negotiation; Irish duties on Portuguese wine had to be fixed; and Portuguese merchants and ships should be allowed access on the same footing as Ireland's.<sup>41</sup> Lord North took issue with the fact that Portugal required these conditions while offering no concession of his own and that as 'Portugal... excluded Irish woollens from the benefit of the treaty of 1703 [she] has no right to claim it for her own wines'.<sup>42</sup> This issue was resolved by 1787, but it

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<sup>38</sup> John Philpot Curran, *The Speeches of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran : Curran, John Philpot, 1750-1817*, ed. Thomas Davis, pp 56–58.

<sup>39</sup> *Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce with Ireland*, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, 30/8/323 ff 117, BL.

<sup>40</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Extract of a letter from Lord North to Lord Northington, 7th Oct 1783 Pitt, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff34, BL. The original letter is in the Northington letterbook in the British Library MS38,716, and a copy is also available in the Bolton papers in the National Library of Ireland in the Bolton papers MS15,842/ 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

highlights the uncertain environment in which Cork's merchants operated. Their successes and failures were built upon precarious grounds.

The truth behind these problems is less clearcut than contemporary commentators suggested. Portugal had been attempting to make a separate commercial agreement with Ireland, along the same lines as the *Methuen Treaty*, but one they believed was more equal to both parties.<sup>43</sup> This interested John Foster, who was the Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1784, as based on reports from William Conyngham's travels in the Iberian Peninsula at this time, there existed the possibility for a mutually beneficial trade with Portugal. At issue was the lack of proper commercial representation for Ireland in Portugal.<sup>44</sup> Lammey alternately concludes that the dispute centred on Ireland's recent freedom to export woollens.<sup>45</sup> Although the Woollen Acts and the exportation of Irish wool to Portugal may have been the excuse used to start this commercial tiff the real motivations were twofold. The balance of trade between Ireland and Portugal was repeatedly referred to as problematic (see Figure 2-2). This was due to the volume of butter exported from Ireland being sufficient to cover the entirety of Ireland's imports from Portugal. Any increased exportation from Ireland would have further heightened this imbalance. However, the crux of the issue was not Irish trade, it was the nature of Portugal's relationship with Great Britain. Lisbon was attempting to force a re-negotiation of the *Methuen Treaty* and very nearly achieved this aim in 1785. The issue of Ireland's trade with Portugal was a sideline, an important one to be sure, but the real issue was with Britain and Ireland served as the proxy through which this disagreement played out. Foster recognised as much, writing,

The idea of Portugal's wish to separate our interest from Britain's or to suppose us not included in every treaty ought to be crushed, and I would humbly advise that

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<sup>43</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', pp 37-38; Lusitania, *A Defence of the Conduct of the Court of Portugal*, pp 47-48.

<sup>44</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 40.



whatever step Great Britain means to take with Portugal may have the conciliatory appearance of being taken for our sake.<sup>46</sup>

For Irish politicians and Cork's merchants this issue was a pressing one. Not only was Portugal an important commercial partner, there was a very real concern that so shortly after attaining free trade these actions 'must form a general precedent for our trade with all other states'.<sup>47</sup> If Portugal would so readily forfeit her Irish trade and Britain was so lacklustre in support for Irish commercial rights, what hope was there to cultivate a strong and meaningful international trade?

The source of the animosity towards Portugal and heavy-handed attitude that pervaded the period can be attributed to the mistaken belief that Ireland's trade was indispensable for Portugal. There was a belief amongst some Irish politicians that Ireland provided Portugal with goods that 'except from us she cannot get at all, while on the other hand we do not get a single article from Portugal which we may not be supplied with from elsewhere'.<sup>48</sup> Hugh Shey contradicted this notion two years later when he suggested that Portugal could source butter from Holland, beef from Denmark and pork from America. He was convinced that Ireland would suffer more if the disagreement between Ireland and Portugal continued, 'because that the salt of St. Ubes is absolutely necessary to the provision trade of this country, and because no one article exported from Ireland is absolutely necessary in Portugal'.<sup>49</sup> Despite this, in 1785 the Irish parliament laid retaliatory duties of £30 per ton on Portuguese wine. The matter was effectively resolved by December 1786, when the Portuguese prohibitions were lifted. This was more than likely due to renewed negotiations with Britain, though it is possible that a non-consumption agreement of Portuguese goods by the Irish Volunteers had some small affect.<sup>50</sup> The prohibitive duties did cause a severe decline in trade

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<sup>46</sup> Extract from a letter by Mr. Foster, 28th Sept 1784, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 29, BL.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 1–15, BL.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. ff14.

<sup>49</sup> Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 27, BL.

<sup>50</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', pp 42–43.

for both Ireland and Portugal, though Ireland was able to partially offset the difference with increased exports to Spain.<sup>51</sup>

The true reasons for the relaxing of restrictions on Ireland's trade with Portugal are still unclear. Although he was probably far more interested in furthering Portuguese interests than those of Irish merchants, Mr. Shey proposed two actions to benefit Ireland that provide insights into Ireland's commercial problems: first, that Ireland needed their own agent resident in Portugal to forward its interests and second, that the Portuguese perceived Methuen as disadvantageous to themselves. He argued that the best course of action for Irish interests would be to make trade with the British Empire as a whole advantageous to Portugal.<sup>52</sup> Essentially to appease Lisbon and have the prohibition on Irish textiles lifted, Ireland merely had to rescind the duties on Portuguese goods. Despite some hand wringing and negotiations between the various representatives, trade between the two countries was cleared within the opening months of 1787. The summer of that year imports of port and exports of Irish textiles resumed.<sup>53</sup>

The provisions of the *Methuen Treaty* were renewed at Rio de Janeiro in 1810 with the *Strangford Treaty*, which also extended the commercial arrangements Britain had with Portugal to Brazil. This was important in terms of Cork's trading relationship with Portugal, as much of its trade was in provisions destined for colonial markets and direct access for British merchants provided an alternative trade route. The provisions in these two treaties were re-negotiated in 1825 after the *Rio de Janeiro Treaty* and Brazilian independence and again in 1842. Articles XXXII and XXXIII of the *Strangford Treaty*, along with its subsequent revisions, stipulated that the treaty was unlimited in duration, but provided for the re-examination and revision of its provisions after fifteen years.<sup>54</sup> The *Strangford*

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<sup>51</sup> Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87', pp 34–36, 42–43.

<sup>52</sup> ; Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/342 ff 27, BL.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87', pp 42–43.

<sup>54</sup> *Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, between His Britannic Majesty and His Royal Highness the Prince Regent of Portugal; signed at Rio de Janeiro, the 19th of February 1810.*, Articles XXXII, XXXIII H.C. 1810-11 (010) xi, 523

*Treaty* had also set the rates on British imports at 15 per cent, as compared with the 30 per cent for other countries.<sup>55</sup> In 1835 correspondence was circulated regarding the Portuguese government's proposed suspension of the treaty. It highlighted weaknesses and disagreements surrounding the arrangements made in the *Strangford Treaty* and the re-negotiated treaty of 1825. This was in response to the British government withdrawing the preferential duties that had long existed on Portuguese wines. Tensions from 1830 onwards, combined with internal instability in Portugal, saw a decline in Anglo-Portuguese trade. The impact of this uncertainty on Ireland's trade with Portugal can be inferred from the abrupt and precipitous decline in Ireland and Britain's combined butter and cheese trade with Portugal from the mid-1830s (Figure 2-4). As the major butter producing and exporting region in Ireland and Britain, much of this decline related to Cork's produce, either in direct or indirect exports. However, due to the abolition of separate customs accounts in the mid-1820s it is difficult to fully detail just how much this decline impacted Cork itself.

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<sup>55</sup> *Rio de Janeiro Treaty. Correspondence Relative to the Proposed Suspension of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and Portugal.*, H.C. 1835 (579), li, 303; *Duties on Imports (Portugal.) Extract of a Despatch from Lord Howard de Walden to Viscount Palmerston, Transmitting Decree Equalizing the Duties on Imports from all Countries.*, H.C. 1834 (318) xlix, 395; *Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, Between His Britannic Majesty and His Royal Highness the Prince Regent of Portugal; signed at Rio de Janeiro, the 19th of February 1810.*, Article XV H.C. 1810-11 (010) xi, 523

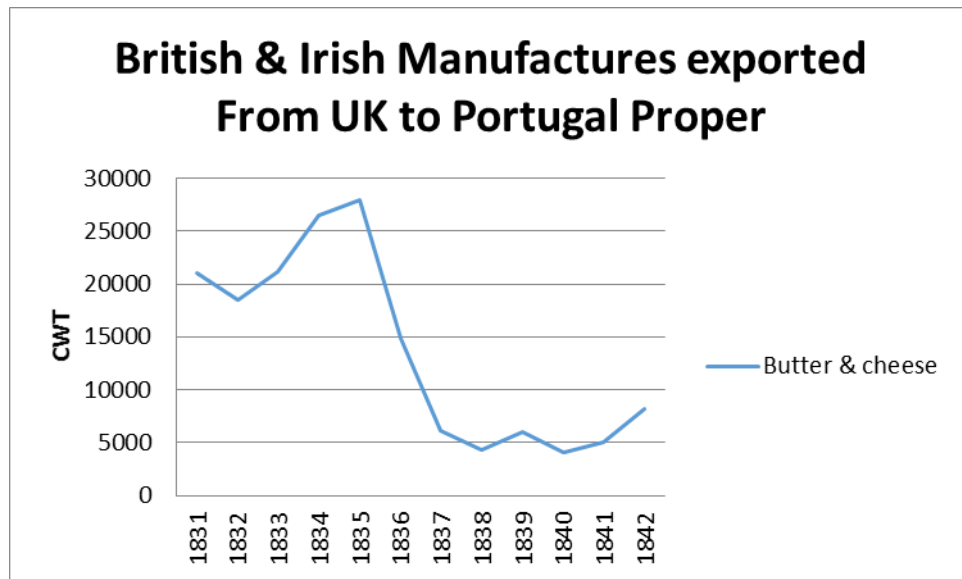


Figure 2-4 British and Irish exports of butter and cheese to Portugal Proper<sup>56</sup>

The *Methuen Treaty* had a noticeable impact on the wine trade, with Britain importing larger quantities of port wine at the expense of French wines. By 1830 Hyde Villieres argued that this had led to the British substituting 'for a wine which was good and cheap, a wine which was dear and bad'.<sup>57</sup> Villieres went on to highlight some of the discrepancies the *Methuen* and *Strangford Treaties* had caused: average imports from Portugal were £34,233,000 per year and exports just shy of £52,938,689, whereas for France imports were just £1,883,844 and export of only £1,227,887. He was astounded that trade with the United States even surpassed that of France by many multiples. He also suggested that Britain should look at trading iron for French wines as there was a demand for British iron in France and French wines were superior to their Portuguese counterparts.<sup>58</sup> Cork could not supply iron, but butter was one product which it exported to Portugal in notable volumes. This trade had been maintained throughout all of the difficulties of the 1780s and the tumultuous period during the Napoleonic Wars.

Villieres comments may have been pertinent in the time he was writing, but they do not hold true for much of the commercial agreement's lifetime. At the

<sup>56</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.*, p. 70,75.

<sup>57</sup> *Commercial Relations with Portugal*, H.C. Deb June 15 1830, Vol. 25 cc. 374-394

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

same time issues surrounding the Oporto Wine Company arose in the early 1810s, European markets were isolated from Britain as Napoleon's influence spread and trade with the continent was restricted. Due to the Napoleonic Wars Ireland's trade with France declined, though there was the exchange of some produce through the Netherlands as an intermediary. Despite some limited attempts to liberalise the European trading environment from the 1780s, the period from 1793 to 1815 saw a return to the old protectionist commercialism.<sup>59</sup> Tensions between British merchants resident in Portugal and the Portuguese authorities compounded problems resulting from the changing nature of continental trade. One of the most egregious disagreements was a series of complaints levelled by British merchants in 1813. They referred to the seizure of accounts and false imprisonment, but the core issue was the nature of the Oporto Wine Company, which had been established to regulate the Portuguese wine trade. British traders resident in Portugal contended that it worked as an effective monopoly under the auspices of being a regulatory body with the aim of improving the region's wine. British traders argued that these rights subjected them

to the examination of mean yet arbitrary judges, appointed by the Company, who are competitors in that trade, and of consequence interested in the depreciation of that particular commodity.<sup>60</sup>

If the quality of the wine was judged insufficient they had nowhere to sell their wine as its exportation and sale was then prohibited, bar to the Oporto Wine Company itself, their business rival. These laws were 'complained of by the merchants, not only as being directly contrary to the express stipulation of treaty, but as destructive of their commerce and discouraging to navigation'.<sup>61</sup> These kinds of commercial disagreements were not favourable to a conducive trading environment. This was not a minor dispute either; the essential product of over a century of commercial agreements between Britain and Portugal was the purchase

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<sup>59</sup> W. O. Henderson, 'The Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786' in *The Economic History Review*, x, no. 1 (1957), p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> *Papers Relating to the Wine Company at Oporto, and other Monopolies in Portugal. List of Papers. No. 1.--Report of the Lords of Trade to the King in Council; March 10th, 1767. No. 2.--Note from Lord Strangford to the Conde das Galveas; Rio de Janeiro, June 12th, 1813. No. 3.--Answer of the Conde das Galveas to Lord Strangford; Rio de Janeiro, Dec. 29th, 1813, p. 3 H.C. 1830, (621) xxxi,1.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and sale of Portuguese wines at the expense of French produce. To have such accusations levelled against one of the major Portuguese commercial wine interests threatened the stability of these agreements.

It is unclear if similar disputes surrounding the Oporto Wine Company concerned Irish merchants, but the existence of these disputes would have introduced an unwelcome uncertainty in their trade. As the economic environment began to return to some form of normality after the Napoleonic Wars, trade with Portugal began to decline and, despite the renewal of treaties in 1825, tensions continued to build between Britain and Portugal. By the 1830s relations between Britain and Portugal had become strained and had been for some time. Britain had a long running dispute over the treatment of British merchants resident in Portugal, in addition to the perceived monopoly of the Oporto Wine Company. By 1831 these tensions had reached a point where serious consideration was given to rescinding the favourable duties on Portuguese wines.<sup>62</sup>

The 1842 treaty between Great Britain and Portugal specifically moved to address some of the grievances that British merchants had previously expressed. The first articles provided for the right to be free from arbitrary searches and confiscations and Article XV promised that trade would not be inhibited by any monopolies. What is far more interesting about Article XV is the concluding statement:

But it is distinctly to be understood, that the present article shall not be interpreted as affecting the special regulations now in force, or which may hereafter be enacted, with a view solely to the encouragement and amelioration of the Douro wine trade... or with regard to the exportation of the salt of St. Ubes'.<sup>63</sup>

The wine and salt trades were of special importance, both in terms of this treaty as an international agreement and for Irish merchants in terms of the key items they desired from Portugal. It is indicative of Portugal's position in Europe's trade

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<sup>62</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 30 September 1831.

<sup>63</sup> *Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, between Her Majesty and the Queen of Portugal. Signed at Lisbon, July 3, 1842*, Article XV [c. 415] H.C. 1842, xlv, 185.

network that its wine and salt trade were specifically exempted and that these were also the goods Irish importers valued most.

However, the Cork Committee of Merchants did not greet this new treaty with much cheer. In an article in the *Freeman's Journal* they complained that they had not been consulted regarding the new arrangements despite their extensive trade with Portugal. To them it appeared that the treaty was 'intended to be favourable alone to England'.<sup>64</sup> In the same article they stated that they had 'directed themselves with an energy which Cork men well know how to exercise', but it was 'utterly in vain'.<sup>65</sup> The problem they had with this new arrangement was that duties on their beef and pork provisions were to remain at 90 per cent and 61 per cent respectively while that on British goods was reduced. They questioned whether 'Irish interests... [were] to be always sacrificed, and sacrificed to those of England?'<sup>66</sup> The Committee of Merchants may have had a point, because in signing this treaty Portugal had given Britain free access to Portuguese colonial ports and diminished the importance of Lisbon in the re-export of butter to the colonies.<sup>67</sup>

The normalisation of duties and the dismantling of the *Methuen Treaty* had a number of effects. It was a destructive occurrence for Cork's exports of butter to Portugal, but it also led to a reduction in wine imports. When the last vestiges of the treaty unravelled in 1860, a journalist referred to this moment as the ultimate 'disestablishment' of port wine.<sup>68</sup> The lower rates paid on Portuguese wines had led to its domination of British and Irish markets, but the equalisation of duties led to a move towards 'better' French wines. It was solely due to the *Methuen Treaty* that merchants

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<sup>64</sup> 'English and Irish Interests' in *Freemans Journal* (Dublin, 2 Feb. 1843), p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Horta, 'Images and Representations of Ireland in Portugal (1830-1925)', p. 116.

<sup>68</sup> Duguid, 'The Making of Methuen: The Commercial tReaty in the English Imagination', pp 10–11;20.

consented to drink scarcely other than the heavy, black, and spirituous wines of Oporto, instead of the clear and wholesome wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne.<sup>69</sup>

At this stage in the nineteenth century the impact of the loss of Portuguese salt was probably less acute than it would have been earlier. In an increasingly connected world market Cork had lost importance as a trans-Atlantic provisioning centre. A preponderance of Cork's trade had moved towards the English market, processed food exports fell in favour of fresher meat or live animal exportation and English preferences moved towards lighter salted butter. Changing tastes, demands, and transportation methods lessened the need for such quantities of provisioning salt, as did the increasing emphasis on supplying the much closer British market.

### ***Imports***

The *Methuen Treaty* opened up trade with the entire Iberian Peninsula. Its major impact was slashing the duties on wine from the region to a third less than those on French wines in exchange for Portuguese preferential treatment of British woollens. This led to dramatically increased volumes of port being imported into Britain.<sup>70</sup> However, in Ireland imports of French wines still surpassed those from Portugal in terms of both revenue and volume. Not until 1787 did imports of port begin to overtake French wines as trade between Ireland and Portugal became officially regulated by the *Methuen Treaty's* provisions. By the 1790s the growth rate of Irish imports was substantial, as seen in Figure 2-5.<sup>71</sup> Some of this trade was due to importation via Britain, reflecting the growing preference of British merchants for Portuguese wines. Notably, imports of Spanish wines also began to overtake their French counterparts, though this growth was much smaller and never reached the heights of the Portuguese trade. It was no coincidence that the growth in Spanish wine imports occurred at the point where tensions between

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<sup>69</sup> *Commercial tariffs and regulations of the several states of Europe and America, together with the commercial treaties between England and foreign countries. Part the fourteenth. Portugal.*, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1969), pp 99–100.

<sup>71</sup> (Ireland.) *Wine. Accounts relating to the produce of revenue derived from wine imported into Ireland; also, the quantities of wine imported and exported; &c. 1801-1822.* H.C. 1823 (132) xvi, 587. From the 5th July 1802 the increases seen in 1803 came into force, and from the 14th July 1803 10% was added on top of former rates.



Britain and France escalated and much of the growth can be attributed to the fall in French imports. Furthermore, in 1785 when duties on Portuguese wines were increased Spanish wine imports briefly overtook those of port. Despite lowering the duties on French wine in 1786 under the Eden-Rayneval agreement, the following year William Pitt reduced Portuguese wine duties commensurately so the duty on French wines dropped from £96 4 s. 1 d. per tun to £29 8 s. 0 d. while Portuguese duties dropped from £45 19 s. 1 d. to £19 12 s. The changed duties achieved little in halting the growth in Portuguese wine imports into Britain.<sup>72</sup> They had a more noticeable impact upon the volume of wine imported into Ireland from France, Spain, and Portugal. There was a dramatic reduction in imports of French and Portuguese wines and a halving of Spanish imports. Surprisingly these changes led to an increase in the importation of Madeira wines, despite similar levels of duty.

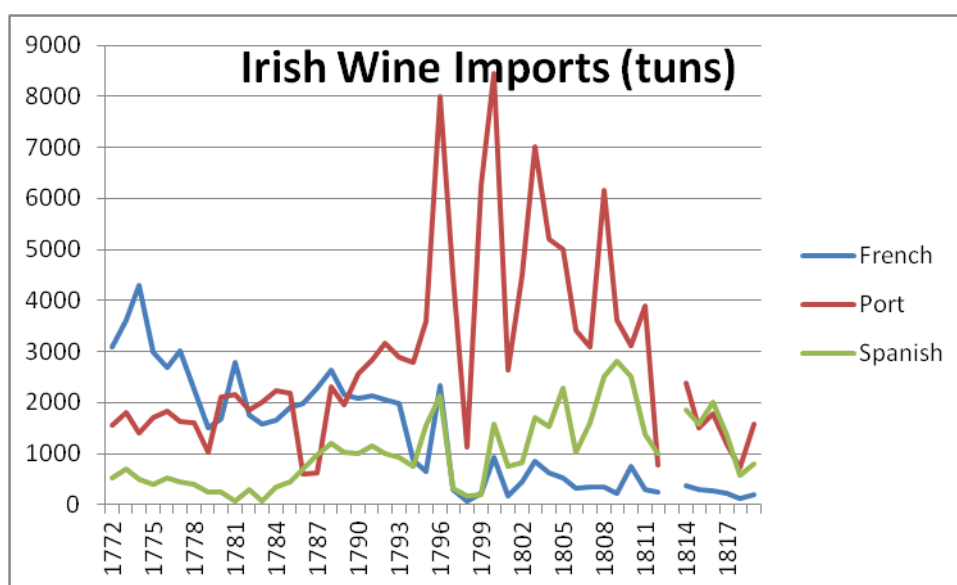


Figure 2-5 Irish wine imports<sup>73</sup>

The agreements and disagreements between the British and Portuguese governments had a direct impact upon Irish trade with Portugal. For much of the

<sup>72</sup> Henderson, 'The Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786', pp 109–110.

<sup>73</sup> (Ireland.) *Accounts of the Imports and Exports of Ireland; from 25th March 1771 to 5th January 1811: viz. [appendix (G. 3.) in the Report from the Committee on the Public Income and Expenditure of Ireland, 14 June 1811.]* H.C. 1823 (472) xvi, 511; 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

1820s and 1830s trade with Portugal declined in both terms of volume and value. This is attributable to Anglo-Portuguese disagreements over wine duties and attempts to levy duties of 30 per cent on goods imported in foreign ships. Although nothing in the treaty extended the 15 per cent rate to goods imported into Portugal in foreign ships, this had always been the rate paid.<sup>74</sup>

Disagreements in Britain regarding the monopoly of the Oporto Wine Company also impacted Irish wine imports, with a decline in total volumes being imported from around 1810. Lord Strangford wrote to the Conde Das Galveas

that unless immediate satisfaction shall be given upon this point, and that British subjects shall be permitted henceforward...to buy and sell, when, where, and how they may think proper, and to re-sell, transport, and export wines, vinegar and brandies...without any impediment, interference, or control on the part of the company or others, according to the plain intent and meaning of the Treaty, His Majesty's Government is fully resolved to propose measures to Parliament for encouraging the importation into the British Dominions of wines from other foreign countries.<sup>75</sup>

The Oporto Wine Company denied accusations that their activities breached the spirit of the trade agreements, though it is not the place here to make a case for or against such recriminations. The impact that the dispute had on the wine trade into Ireland is of greater importance. It is difficult to separate the impact of the activities of the Oporto Wine Company from the European-wide disruptions, but a comparison of Spanish and Portuguese wine imports can provide an indication of the impact of Portuguese actions. Although there was also a decline in Spanish wine imports, which is attributable to the Iberian Wars, by 1815 the volume of Spanish wine imports briefly overtook those from Portugal. This is indicative of the tensions between British wine merchants in Portugal and the activities of the Oporto Wine

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<sup>74</sup> *Papers Relative to Portugal. Correspondence Relative to the British Demands upon the Government of Portugal. (A)*, Lord Douglas to C A Mackenzie 18 Nov 1829, H.C. 1831 (001) xx, 13 ; 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>75</sup> *Papers Relating to the Wine Company at Oporto, and other Monopolies in Portugal. List of Papers. No. 1.--Report of the Lords of Trade to the King in Council; March 10th, 1767. No. 2.--Note from Lord Strangford to the Conde das Galveas; Rio de Janeiro, June 12th, 1813. No. 3.--Answer of the Conde das Galveas to Lord Strangford; Rio de Janeiro, Dec. 29th, 1813, p 25 H.C. 1830, (621) xxxi,1*

Company. In denying such accusations the Conde das Galveas had a rather strong rebuke for Lord Strangford:

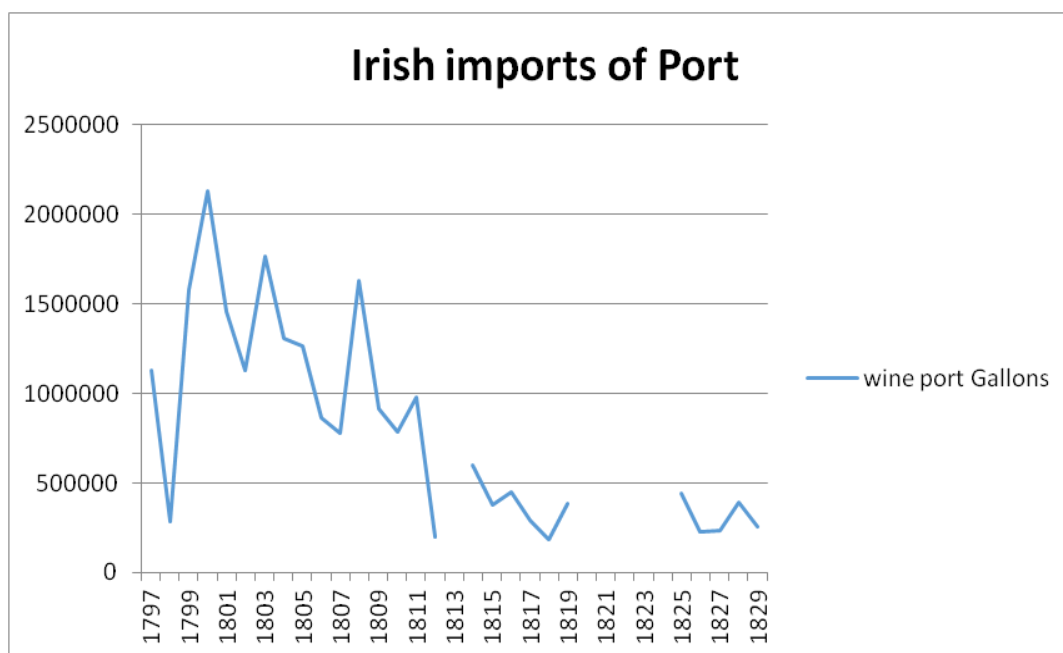
Nor could the parliament have taken any other resolutions concerning these articles, resolved as it was to continue the East India Company in its privileges, (though most unquestionably a perfect monopoly) not to mention many others that continue to exist in Great Britain, which could not be the case if the abolition of the Porto Wine Company had been stipulated, as it would be contrary to the principle of reciprocity<sup>76</sup>

As Figure 2-6 shows, Irish imports of port wine declined overall during the opening years of the nineteenth century. The period around the signing of the *Strangford Treaty* and the disagreements over the Oporto Wine Company mark the point where imports suffered a precipitous decline. It would have been somewhat arrested by indirect importation, as well as the availability of alternative wines, such as those of France. The decline marks the end of one of the pillars of leverage in Irish commercial dealings with Portugal. It may have been grandstanding for the Portugese to dismiss the Irish wine trade as 'of not much consideration' in 1781, but now this truly was the case.<sup>77</sup> 1810 proved a decisive year for trade with Portugal, with almost all the major trade goods declining except that perennial Cork product, butter.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>77</sup> Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87', pp 42–43.



*Figure 2-6 Irish imports of port<sup>78</sup>*

As previously addressed, the most significant and valuable import from Portugal was salt. Until the extraction of rock salt in Carrickfergus in the 1850s nearly all the salt consumed in Ireland was imported, with a fivefold increase in its importation towards the end of the eighteenth century corresponding with the expansion of Cork's provisioning trade. Portuguese salt imports and Cork's provisioning industry had a symbiotic relationship. Colin Rynne attributes the 1825 abolition of the salt duties, which had previously favoured the Irish industry, as causing the provisioning industry to go into decline.<sup>79</sup> The 1825 act to which he refers came about as part of the full implementation of the Act of Union and it repealed all protective duties, drawbacks and bounties on salt and salt products throughout the United Kingdom. Not only did this remove the duties on salt, it also removed certain drawbacks that had been permissible on salted meat products.<sup>80</sup> However, some of the provisioning trade's decline is also attributable to

<sup>78</sup> Ledgers of Imports and Exports, Ireland 1698-1829, CUST 15, TNA.

<sup>79</sup> Colin Rynne, *At the Sign of the Cow: The Cork Butter Market, 1770-1924* (Cork, 1998), pp 39-40.

<sup>80</sup> 5 Geo. IV.--Sess. 1824. *A Bill to Repeal the Duties and Laws, in Respect of Salt and Rock Salt.*, H.C. 1824 (376) iii,1; 3 Geo. IV.--Sess. 1822. (Ireland.) *A Bill [As Amended by the Committee] to Continue the Duties of Customs Payable on British Salt Imported into Ireland; to Repeal the Duties on Foreign Salt Imported into Ireland; and to grant other duties in lieu thereof.*, H.C. 1822 (510) iii,1951

competition in the trans-Atlantic trade and increasing moves in the Irish economy towards increased livestock exports to Britain.

With the equalisation of all duties, tariffs and bounties the Irish market was opened to the full weight of British competition. Increasingly, questions were asked in Britain as to why foreign salt imports were utilised rather than British-produced rock salt. Still, the use of Portuguese salt was considered essential for the provisioning industry, because rock salt was not of sufficient quality. This preference for foreign salt was not confined to Ireland and a select committee report on British fisheries also noted its benefits. Philip Ball, who was involved in the pilchard fisheries in England in 1817, stated that he and others involved in the pilchard trade found French salt superior. It should be noted that the term 'French salt' encapsulates salt from Spain and Portugal as well. He noted that the price for foreign produced salt was higher, so the only inducement for its use was its superiority; it better preserved the fish and was more suited for use in export to warmer climates. This type of preservation salt also led to the produce maintaining its appearance, quality and appeal for consumers far better than the British produced equivalent.<sup>81</sup> These qualities also made it the preferred preservative for Cork merchants, as either directly or indirectly their provisions were ultimately destined for equatorial locations.

The favoured source of Portuguese salt was that from St. Ubes, or Setubal. In the nineteenth century ninety-six per cent of all Portuguese salt exported to Ireland was from there and the majority of it was sent to Cork.<sup>82</sup> Compared with British-produced rock salt, St. Ubes salt was sea salt, often referred to by contemporaries as 'bay salt'. The long time spent extracting the salt produced large, coarse crystals which were slower to dissolve and in consequence preserved meat at the top of a barrel for longer.<sup>83</sup> In 1780 the 361,563 bushels of imported St. Ubes

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<sup>81</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Use of Rock Salt in the Fisheries; &c.*, pp. 33-35 H.C. 1807 (247) iii, 121

<sup>82</sup> Horta, 'Images and Representations of Ireland in Portugal (1830-1925)', pp 112-113.

<sup>83</sup> Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 1*, p. 750; John O'Donovan, *The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland* (Cork, 1940), p. 143.

salt accounted for approximately 96 per cent of the total Irish salt imports.<sup>84</sup>

Writing shortly after the French attempts to invade Portugal, Wakefield noted that there had been a fear that the salt from St. Ubes would be lost due to the French invasion and alternative sources were considered from the Cape de Verde islands.<sup>85</sup>

It is interesting that they were looking towards the Cape de Verde islands rather than the alternatives locations such as Ivica and the West Indies that had been espoused in the 1780s. Obviously much of Europe was inaccessible, but what of England or the West Indies? Although this invasion never took place the fact that alternative plans were envisaged to replace St. Ubes salt specifically, rather than bay salt or Portuguese salt generally, is indicative of the high esteem in which this product was held. Of all the the imports from Portugal, this specific type of preservation salt was the one that could not be supplied sufficiently from elsewhere and in some cases it was absolutely required to satisfy the terms of Ireland's provisioning contracts.<sup>86</sup>

This reliance on foreign-produced salt for the Irish provisioning trade was a recurring theme in nineteenth century parliamentary debates. In an 1804 debate on foreign salt duties Colonel Hutchinson, MP for Cork, objected to any changes in the rates charged, believing that it would exacerbate an already declining provisions trade and create a sense of worry amongst traders. Some support was received from the Louth MP, Mr. Foster, who stated that he would not support any thing that could have an impact on the provisioning trade. To encourage that trade he would introduce a provision to allow the warehousing of salt. This move to put additional duty on foreign salt was soon dropped.<sup>87</sup> However, this was only a temporary respite as once the full implementation of the Act of Union took place regulations on salt duties were changed and by 1825 all duties within the United Kingdom were repealed. Part of the argument posited for increasing the salt duties

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<sup>84</sup> Kelly, 'The Irish Trade Dispute with Portugal 1780-87', p. 19.

<sup>85</sup> Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 1*, pp 750–751.

<sup>86</sup> Reporting on speech in the House of Commons by Eden 06 February, *Freeman's Journal*, 09 Feb 1782; *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 21 March 1801.

<sup>87</sup> *Irish Customs and Excise Bill*, H.C. Deb June 29 1804, Vo. 2 cc. 887-888; *Irish Customs and Excise Bill*, H.C. Deb July 02 1804, Vo. 2 cc. 899-901

was that the duty on salt in Britain was far too high. This led to fraudulent re-exportation from Ireland to Britain, which would be exacerbated when the full union was implemented.<sup>88</sup> If, as Davies ascertains, in the 1850s the cost of a ton of salt for Irish merchants was double what it cost for their English competitors after duties between the two islands were normalised there is some argument for both sides; that lower Irish salt duties had led to re-exportation to Britain and Irish duties were too low. During the Napoleonic Wars a duty of £40 per ton of foreign salt imported into England was applied, whereas the duty on the same amount in Ireland was £4. At the conclusion of the war the British duty was removed and with it one of the advantages of the Irish manufacturers.<sup>89</sup> There was a contemporaneous hope that the discovery of a new industrial salt supply at Carrickfergus would revitalise the flagging Cork provisions trade as the extra expense for salt in Ireland had partially hastened the transition towards live exports and the loss of foreign markets. It also created an excessive reliance on the British market for food exports. According to John Maguire's account for the country as a whole it would be 'a vast gainer by the facility which that most fortunate chance has afforded it of procuring an indispensable article free from the heavy charges of sea transport.'<sup>90</sup>

The changes wrought on Cork's access to Portuguese salt and the lack of alternative sources of salt of a sufficient quality were blamed for the decline of the region's most lucrative trade. This could be interpreted as proving Hutchinson's point made several decades earlier when he alleged that changes in the duties on Portuguese salt would accelerate the decline in Cork's provisions trade, but this is a rather simplistic view. The changes in the fortunes of Cork's provisioning trade depended on a multitude of factors. Access to salt was of course an important consideration, but so too was the changing nature of Ireland's relationship with Britain, improving transportation networks and the changes in the nature of

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<sup>88</sup> *Second Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Laws Relating to the Salt Duties; &c.*, p. 6 H.C. 1801, (142) iii,389.

<sup>89</sup> John Francis Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland: As Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (1853), pp 48–49.

<sup>90</sup> A.C. Davies, 'The First Industrial Exhibition: Cork 1852' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, ii (1975), pp 56–57; Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland*, pp 25–26, 49.

colonial relationships. One pertinent example is how Britain had gained direct access to the Brazilian market with the *Rio de Janeiro Treaty*, bypassing the need to tranship material through Portugal. British merchants were quick to adapt to new opportunities. In the years prior to the negotiation of the *Strangford Treaty* they had moved some of their trade with Portugal to Brazil in response to the relocation of the Portuguese royal family there.<sup>91</sup> While salt was a very important commodity for Cork's merchants, there were wider issues that also impacted upon Cork's provisioning trade.

The push for the equalisation of salt duties between Britain and Ireland ran well into the nineteenth century. A General Gascoyne alleged that the inequality of these duties discouraged British salt manufacturers as they gave an advantage to foreign produce. He maintained that the lower duties in Ireland should be equalised to encourage the use of British salt instead of bay salt. Mr. Foster strongly argued against this as there was no comparison between the two goods, with British salt being unsuitable for packing provisions for trans-Atlantic shipment, which 'had made Irish beef so famous in different quarters of the world for keeping so well in any climate, was the virtue of the Bay salt with which it had been cured'.<sup>92</sup> The importation of salt was a constant concern for those involved in the provisioning trades. Even the period from the resolution of the Portugal trade dispute in the 1780s up to the Act of Union saw many difficulties; the Committee of Merchants repeatedly petitioned parliament and their representatives regarding restrictions on their Portuguese salt trade and unfavourable duties.<sup>93</sup>

The tone in this debate followed a distinct pattern of tensions between British and Irish manufacturers. In some respects it had less to do with the issue at hand than with jealousies regarding duty differentials and potential smuggling. A General Tarleton's opinion epitomises some of this:

England had been on all occasions bounteous and indulgent towards Ireland, in giving her every fair advantage in her trade; and that if it was made out that British

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<sup>91</sup> 'Belfast Newsletter.' 29 December 1807; *Freeman's Journal* 29 December 1807.

<sup>92</sup> *Duties on Salt*, H.C. Deb May 30 1809, vol. 14 cc. 785-787

<sup>93</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, 26 November 1795, 1 March 1797, 1 October 1797, 9 April 1802, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.



salt was as effectual in curing provisions as the foreign salt... Ireland should not object to the equalisation of the duties. The bay salt was the cargo under which brandy in general was smuggled: and perhaps it might be owing to this method of disguising smuggling that the gentlemen in Ireland were able to drink such good wines. He had often been indebted to them for a very hospitable portion of their excellent wines; and he knew them to be very select in their wines in general, indeed they drank it much cheaper and better than gentlemen in this country were able to do; and that they did so, might be owing to the Irish market being pretty abundantly supplied in this way.<sup>94</sup>

These arguments did not solely relate to the lack of Irish support for British manufacturers. They went deeper. The debates were indicative of the underlying tensions of the Act of Union and the requirements to create an equal trading environment within the United Kingdom. However, an 1836 report noted that the greatest quantity of salt used for butter in Ireland was sent from England and that approximately 50-60,000 tons was exported from there.<sup>95</sup> This was after the duty differentials were no longer an issue, but it still calls into question some of the views General Tarleton expressed. He may have had, at least partially, a point with regards smuggling, though perhaps not in wine. In the 1780s disagreement with Portugal the Irish parliament complained of a reduction in the sale of various Irish-made textiles to Portugal, 'which the Portuguese were fond of smuggling as English goods'.<sup>96</sup>

As with many of the parliamentary debates it can be hard to separate personal bias from the truth of the situation. Was it possible that the salt trade was being used to smuggle wine? It would have been an effective method to smuggle wines. However, the question remains, would smuggled wine and brandy from Portugal have been of more value to provisioning merchants than the salt they displaced? That is highly unlikely. Even though the main market in Britain for French wines was in high quality clarets, the value of this wine could not have displaced

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<sup>94</sup> *Duties on Salt*, H.C. Deb May 30 1809, vol. 14 cc. 785-787

<sup>95</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Salt, British India; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix.*, p. 5 H.C. 1836 (518) xvii, 1

<sup>96</sup> Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785', pp 117–118.

either the inherent value of or the requirement for provisioning salt.<sup>97</sup> A more reasonable interpretation is that the individuals the general referred to had excellent connections in the continental wine trade. These familial connections throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century had been important in cementing Ireland's and Cork's access to continental produce.<sup>98</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century Portuguese salt dominated all foreign salt imports into Ireland (see Table 2-1 and Figure 2-7). Even when British white salt imports are included it still comprised well over a third of all imports and this proportion increased into the first decades of the nineteenth century. In the three years from 1799 to 1801 Cork imported 45,080 bushels of foreign salt.<sup>99</sup> Cork's share of Portuguese salt imports dominated; direct imports from Portugal alone generally comprised around half of Ireland's total imports of Portuguese salt. This is not surprising considering Cork's large provisioning trade. However, this salt was not solely for home use. A certain amount of it was re-exported to Newfoundland, presumably for the fishing industry there. In 1804 Mr. Foster proposed that salt imported into Ireland should be allowed for re-shipment without landing from the vessels in which it was imported, duty free, from Waterford, Ross, Cork and Limerick.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For more on British tastes in French wines see John V. C. Nye, *War, Wine, and Taxes: The Political Economy of Anglo-French Trade, 1689-1900* (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World, Princeton, N.J., 2007), pp 32–41.

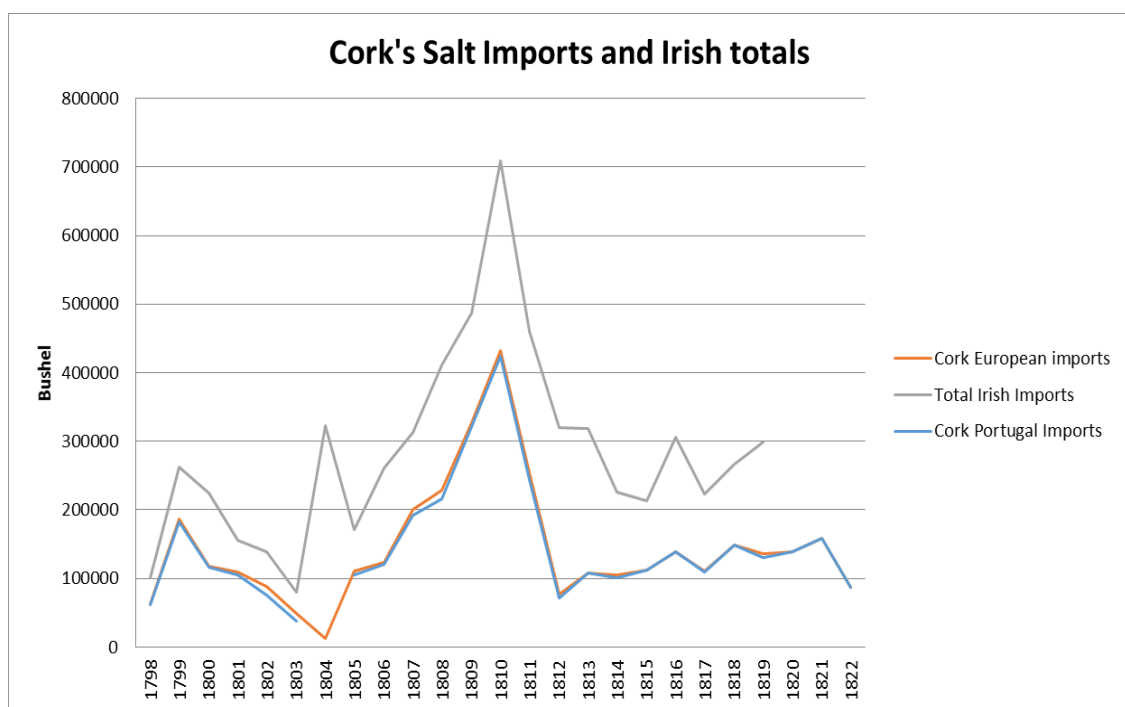
<sup>98</sup> Catherine Harbor, 'New Wine from Old Bottles: Re-examining an Established Database' in *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, xli, no. 1 (2008), pp 3–16; Marie-Louise Legg, "'Irish Wine': The Import of Claret from Bordeaux to Provincial Ireland in the Eighteenth Century' in Raymond Gillespie and R. F. Foster (eds), *Irish Provincial Cultures in the Long Eighteenth-Century: Making the Middle Sort: Essays for Toby Barnard* (Dublin ; Portland, OR, 2012), pp 95–105.

<sup>99</sup> *Second Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Laws Relating to the Salt Duties*, Appendix 10 & 19 H.C. 1801 (142) iii, 389

<sup>100</sup> *Irish Trade with Newfoundland*, H.C. Deb July 12 1804, Vol. 2 c. 1027

Year	Portuguese Imports (Bushel)	All Foreign Imports	Total Salt Imports (Foreign, Rock, British White)
1798	97420	100818	257670
1799	256602	262351	710428
1800	217458	225040	559837
1815	306378	306378	564668
1816	212920	223728	374873
1817	266334	266574	514318

*Table 2-1 Irish salt imports<sup>101</sup>*



*Figure 2-7 Salt imports into Cork<sup>102</sup>*

<sup>101</sup> *Second Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Laws Relating to the Salt Duties, Appendix 10 & 19 H.C. 1801 (142) iii, 389; (Ireland.) An Account of the Quantity of Salt Imported into Ireland; Distinguishing, the Kind, the Place from Whence Imported, and the Duty Paid Thereon; for the years 1815, 1816, and 1817. H.C. 1818 (383) (384) xvi, 331, 333*

<sup>102</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

Figures 2-8 and 2-9 show the relative value of wine and salt in Cork, in terms of requirements for the local economy. Although both goods experienced sharp declines at the turn of the 1830s, the decline in salt was rapidly turned around into growth, whereas wine imports continued to decline. These are the total figures for all imports, so it is impossible to ascertain how they break down for Portugal alone. However, working from the trend that Portugal dominated all of Cork's salt imports, and a large proportion of its wine consumption, the fluctuations seen here are representative of changes in Cork's trading relationship with Portugal more than any other single country.

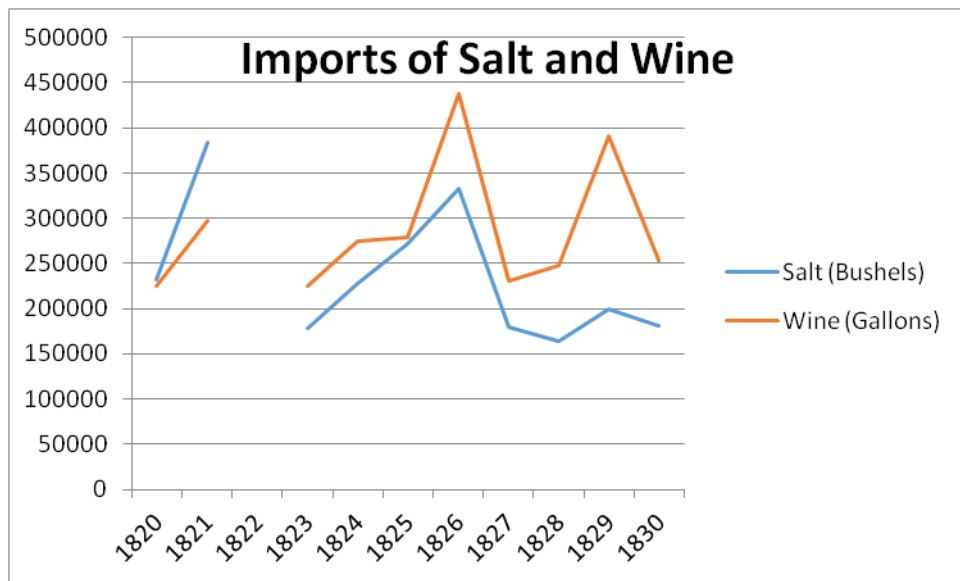


Figure 2-8 Salt and wine imports from Portugal<sup>103</sup>

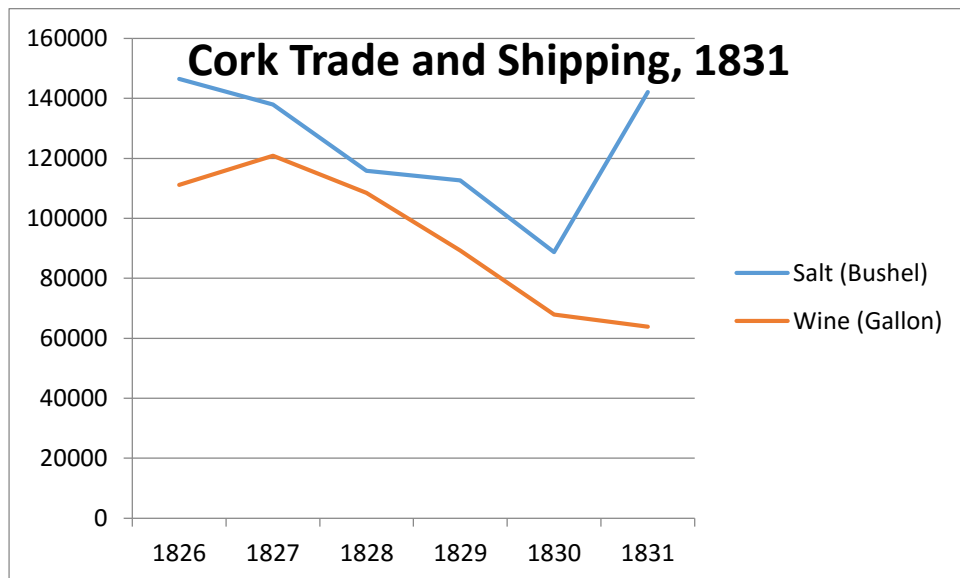


Figure 2-9 Cork's trade and shipping 1831<sup>104</sup>

The Pitt papers contain expressions of concern that Portugal appeared to treat Ireland as a nation separate from Britain. The ultimate intention of this treatment by Portugal was to secure a portion of the export of sugar to Ireland, for which Ireland mostly relied upon Britain. While presenting evidence on the state of

<sup>103</sup> Ledgers of Imports and Exports, Ireland 1698-1829, CUST 15, TNA.

<sup>104</sup> *Cork Trade and Shipping. An Account of the Imports into, and Exports from the Port of Cork, During each of the Last Six Years; and, of the Number and Tonnage of Ships and Vessels Entered Inwards and Cleared Outwards at the same Port, during each of the last fifteen years.* H.C. 1831 (283) xvii, 303

Ireland's trade with Portugal, Hugh Shey, a Portuguese merchant, suggested that a sugar trade could develop between Ireland and Portugal and that 'by Ireland confining herself to purchase sugars only from British colonies in the West Indies she is greatly injured'.<sup>105</sup> This individual treatment of Ireland by Portugal was not entirely beneficial, as Irish-Portuguese trade suffered serious difficulties during the mid-1780s. Exports to Ireland were obviously significant enough for it to be considered a potential major trading partner. The probability of usurping Irish dependence on imported sugar from Britain would have made sense as the trade that then existed between Ireland and Portugal revolved around provisioning Portugal's American colonies, both in terms of Cork's butter exports to Portugal and imports of Portuguese salt. Portugal's attempt at developing a sugar trade with Ireland were unsuccessful, but it would have made for a sensible policy. Portugal's imports from Ireland were mainly southern provisions. Providing more direct access to the required supplies from Ireland in exchange for valuable colonial merchandise would have given Portugal a favourable balance of trade with Ireland as well as guaranteeing more secure sources for the required provisions. It can only be speculated as to how serious this threat was to British interests in Ireland and how interested Irish merchants were. But considering the effort expended to secure free trade for Ireland with Britain's West Indies colonies it could have made a tempting proposition for the mercantile community.

### ***Exports***

From the 1780s exports of Irish butter to all continental destinations fell, but Cullen demonstrates the West Indies and Portugal remained the two major trading partners for Ireland and Britain.<sup>106</sup> Ireland's chief export to Portugal was butter, predominantly from Cork. As previously noted much of the trade from the British Isles to Portugal was ultimately destined for the colonial market and butter was one of the key provisions. For this reason, Cork butter was almost synonymous with the

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<sup>105</sup> Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce With Ireland, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/323 ff 117, BL; Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger., PRO 30/8/342 ff 25, BL

<sup>106</sup> L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (Studies in Economic and Social History, London, 1972), pp 54–56; Fisher, 'Anglo-Portuguese Trade, 1700-1770', p. 219; O'Donovan, *The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland*, pp 117–118.

major moments of importance for the *Methuen Treaty*. During the treaty negotiations Cork butter was used to alleviate a local famine in Portugal and foster good will towards the British negotiating team. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1703 John Methuen requested a convoy of ships to carry provisions from Cork to alleviate the famine. He wrote,

Nothing has served to show the people here, who are all on our side, the advantages of our friendship more than the great quantity of butter, which hath come from Ireland and fish from Newfoundland at a time when their oyle [sic] has failed.<sup>107</sup>

There was a long standing history of the consumption of Irish butter in Portugal. It was used both locally and for re-export. The export of Irish butter to Portugal was of a sufficient volume by 1783 that it paid for all imports from that country. In fact the balance of the whole trade was £60,000 in Ireland's favour. Shey noted in the same year that he was not aware of any other country that sent butter to Portugal.<sup>108</sup> After Cork's trans-Atlantic trade in butter, Portugal was the next favoured international market, with Lammey pointing out that the Cork butter trade had, 'made the New World and Portugal her own particular monopoly.'<sup>109</sup>

Portugal could not get butter and provisions of such quality elsewhere, but this is more a testament to the quality of the Irish provisioning industry than a criticism of Portugal's commercial connections.<sup>110</sup> However, during the trade dispute between Ireland and Portugal in the 1780s Shey argued that better quality butter could be sourced from Holland, but at a higher price.<sup>111</sup> This had always been the case. The success of Cork's butter market lay in consistency rather than quality. Other butter producers could provide a better quality product, but the consistency

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<sup>107</sup> A. D. Francis, 'John Methuen and the Anglo-Portuguese Treaties of 1703' in *The Historical Journal*, iii, no. 2 (1960), p. 116.

<sup>108</sup> Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce With Ireland, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/323 ff 117, BL; Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger., PRO 30/8/342 ff 38, BL.

<sup>109</sup> O'Donovan, *The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland*, pp 117–118.

<sup>110</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 2* (London, 1812), pp 30–32; Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce With Ireland, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/323 ff 117, BL.

<sup>111</sup> Examination of Mr. Hugh Shey in the Irish House of Commons, 25th November 1783 Pitt, 'The Papers of William Pitt the Younger', pt. 30/8/342 ff 27, BL.

could vary widely; Cork's did not. Furthermore, Shey made this comment during a period of intense negotiations between Britain and Portugal regarding their future commercial arrangements. It would be a poor negotiating tactic for a Portuguese merchant to suggest in any way that they depended on Irish produce. Shey's argument underestimated the importance of trade with Cork to Portugal. Horta notes,

Portuguese consuls in Ireland and particularly in Cork were considered fundamental to Portugal's colonial enterprise...The importance of the south of Ireland and particularly Cork became so overwhelming to Portugal that in the early nineteenth century Cork became the main Portuguese consulate, while Limerick, Derry, Belfast, Waterford and Dublin were the location of vice-consulates dependent on Cork.<sup>112</sup>

The sheer volume of consuls appointed to Ireland supports this argument. For almost the whole first half of the nineteenth century Ireland had more consuls than similarly sized countries such as Holland, Belgium, Prussia and Austria.<sup>113</sup> The balance of trade in favour of Ireland was maintained consistently throughout the early nineteenth century, excepting a minor deficit in the first decade (see Figure 2-10). Cork's provisioning capabilities were unrivalled at this time. Its produce was renowned for its ability to survive both the long journeys across the Atlantic and the hot and humid climate prevalent in many of Portugal's colonial possessions.

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<sup>112</sup> Horta, 'Images and Representations of Ireland in Portugal (1830-1925)', pp 101–102.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 103.



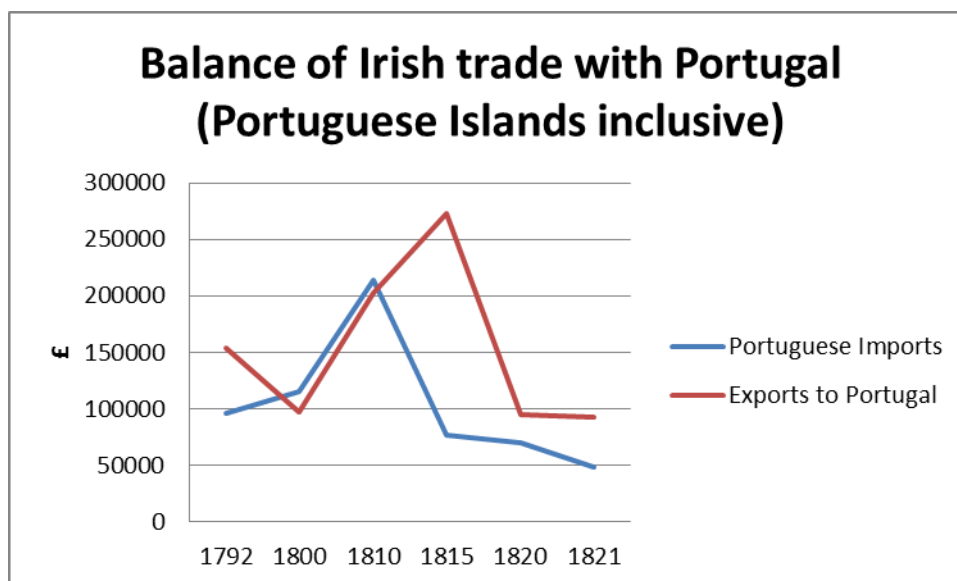


Figure 2-10 Irish balance of trade with Portugal<sup>114</sup>

The Peninsular War from 1807 to 1814 had a dramatic impact on Cork's butter exports to Portugal with exports of butter plummeting from around 50,000 CWT in 1807 to a low of just over 5,000 CWT in 1809, which accounted for almost the entirety of Cork's continental trade (Figure 2-11). However, the recovery of its trade was substantial. Although the total volumes declined over the following decade the direct continental trade in butter remained focused on Portugal. An increasing focus on British trade, the opening of direct trade from Brazil to Great Britain and the changing nature of the West Indies all contributed to this decline. Donnelly estimates that in 1825 the majority of the 77,000 firkins of butter exported from Cork to Portugal were destined for Brazil, making Lisbon by far the most important continental destination for Cork produced butter. By the 1840s the exports to Lisbon alone had almost doubled from 50,000 firkins a year in the early 1820s to some 80,000 by the early 1840s.<sup>115</sup> These comparisons are based on

<sup>114</sup> (Ireland.) *Imports and Exports*. --(1.)-- A Return to an Order of the Honourable House of Commons, Dated the 8th of March 1822;--for, An Account of the Imports and Exports of Ireland, in the Years 1792, 1800, 1810, 1815, 1820, and 1821; Distinguishing the Countries from which Imported, and to which Exported, with the Official and Declared or Real Value Thereof; Stated in Irish Currency. --(2.)-- An Account of the Shipping Entered Inwards and Cleared Outwards in Ireland, from or to all Parts of the World, in the Years 1792, 1800, 1810, 1815, 1820, and 1821; Distinguishing such as Entered Inwards or Cleared Outwards, from or to Great Britain. pp.2-5 H.C. 1822 (234), xviii, 473

<sup>115</sup> James S. Donnelly, 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Irish Butter Trade' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11 (1971), pp 130–131; *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* p. 90 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135; James S. Donnelly, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-*

having a firkin as approximately half a hundredweight (though there were local variations in the exact weight).

In 1839 of the 1,362,680 francs worth of butter imported into Lisbon, 427,300 francs were supplied by England, followed closely by Hamburg. A large proportion of this butter originated in Cork.<sup>116</sup> The equalisation of wine duties in 1842 had a calamitous effect on these exports, with the trade collapsing from 80,000 firkins in the early 1840s to 16,000 by 1852. The treaty negotiations of the mid-1840s between Portugal and Great Britain left the state of Cork's provisioning exports to the region in a disastrous position. The 1844 commercial report noted that Lisbon's importation of butter was almost solely from Cork, sending salt in return. Unfortunately the report does not distinguish between Irish and British shipping, using British synonymously. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the four British ships that arrived in Portugal in 1842 laden with butter and some of the seven departing British ships laden with salt were actually from Cork. Of course not all of the shipping involved in this route was of British origin. Ships leaving the Port of Cork for Portugal were often matched by Portuguese vessels heading in the other direction.<sup>117</sup>

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*Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London ; Boston :, 1975), pp 45–46; Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland*, p. 54

<sup>116</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and regulations of the several states of Europe and America, together with the commercial treaties between England and foreign countries. Part the fourteenth. Portugal.* pp 37, 40, 42.

<sup>117</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal,* pp 37,40, 42; *Freeman's Journal* 23 June 1809.

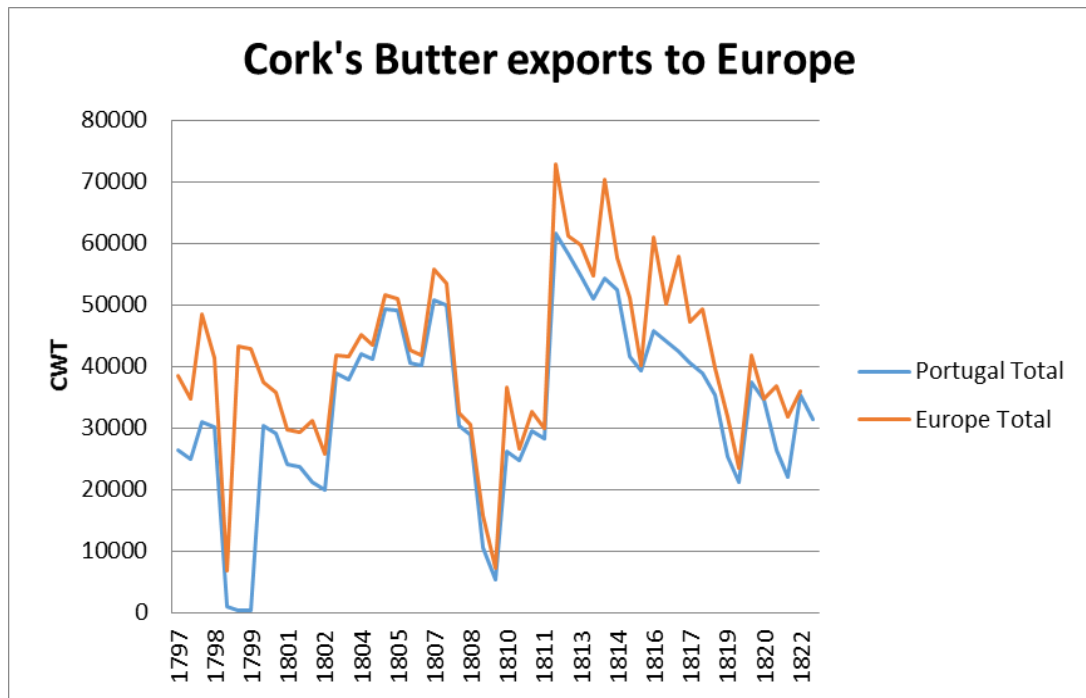


Figure 2-11 Cork's butter exports to Europe<sup>118</sup>

By the 1840s, with the *Methuen Treaty* in its final stages, Cork butter again featured in the debates. In an article in the *Freeman's Journal* titled 'English and Irish Interests' the Committee of Merchants launched a vociferous attack on British negotiations with Portugal. They argued that their trade was in serious decline, 'strangled by some measure of protection, or some provision for the extension of the commerce of "the empire"' and that Britain sacrificed Irish interests 'to suit their own purposes or to tempt the cupidity of strangers'.<sup>119</sup> There is a certain pleasing symmetry to the grievances expressed at this time. During the previous disagreement in the 1780s Portugal had argued that England expressly excluded Ireland in the 1703 negotiations. The Irish Parliament and others had argued at that Britain was not acting in Ireland's interests to secure trade with Portugal. After the full passage of the Act of Union once more we come across the old argument that Irish interests were secondary to those of Britain. In the words of a Mr. Sheil in 1826 the question at the forefront of minds was: 'Shall Portugal be free, and shall

<sup>118</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>119</sup> 'English and Irish Interests.', *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Feb 1843

Ireland be still a slave? Shall treaties be sacred for Portugal, and be nullities for us? Shall treaties be chains of adamant for Portugal and be ropes of sand for us?’<sup>120</sup>

Although the reliability of the data becomes problematic after the mid-1820s, data for British and Irish exports to Portugal can be used to draw some conclusions. Figure 2-11 shows that Cork’s butter exports rarely fell below 20,000 firkins per year, averaging at around 33,500 firkins per annum. From 1810 onwards while a steady decline is evident, there is still a substantial trade going on. Data for the volume of the total exports of butter and cheese combined from Ireland and Britain a decade later shows a trade in a serious long-term decline (Figure 2-12 below). This was not unique to dairy products. Both the total declared value of butter and cheese exports and the total declared value for all exports of Irish and British manufacture to Portugal declined dramatically in the mid-1830s. The total value of exports plummeted from £1,654,320 in 1835 to £1,085,934 in 1836, a loss of over a third of its value from the previous year.

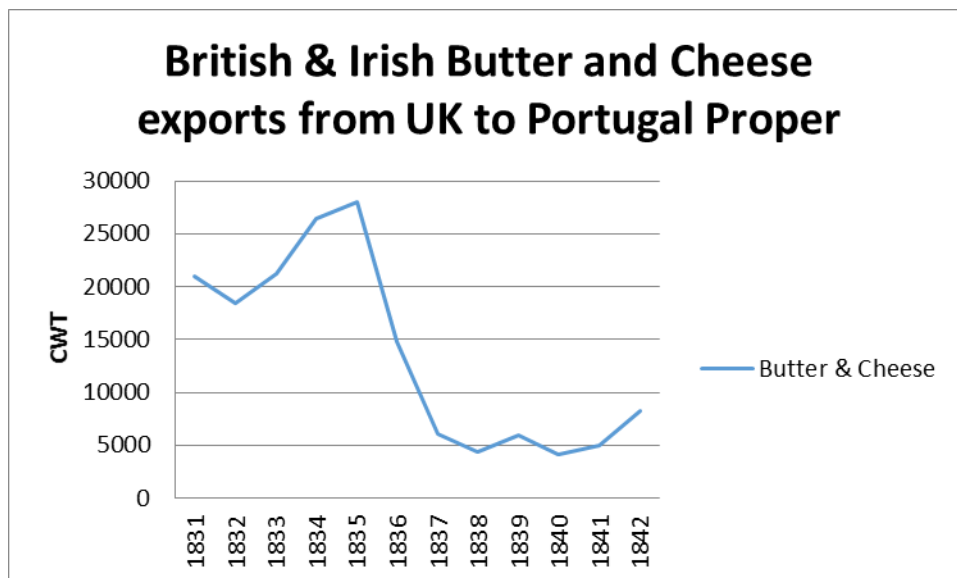


Figure 2-12 British and Irish butter and cheese exports to Portugal<sup>121</sup>

There are several potential causes for such a dramatic decline. The abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade helped to precipitate this collapse along with the

<sup>120</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 20 December 1826.

<sup>121</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.*, p. 70,75.

Portuguese Civil War. However, it is far more likely that the decline resulted from the British government's withdrawal of the preferential treatment of Portuguese wines and the application of new rates of duty on Cork's Portuguese butter exports.<sup>122</sup> The Duke of Palmella noted that this had resulted in 'depriving Portuguese commerce of the most important advantage which it enjoyed in the British dominions' and he furthermore noted, 'Treaties of Commerce ought always to be temporary since the commercial interests of nations are in their nature variable'.<sup>123</sup> Maguire observed that a large proportion of the falloff in the butter trade with Portugal was due the imposition of duties of nearly 40 per cent on Irish butter in response to the disagreements of wine duties with Britain. By the time he was writing, in 1853, he suggested that a large proportion of the trade that formerly went through Portugal now was sent directly to Brazil. William Fagan, the Committee of Merchants representative in London, had made a similar assessment a decade earlier when he estimated that a reversion to the old rates of the 1830s would increase exports by 40,000 firkins; a more than fourfold increase at the time he was writing!<sup>124</sup> The gradual shift of butter exports from Portugal to Brazil is consistent with a decline beginning around 1810. The trade collapsed quite dramatically in the mid-1830s and, although a slight improvement is evident by 1840, it is minor. Figure 2-12 shows combined butter and cheese exports for both Britain and Ireland.

The actual decline in Cork's butter exports alone was even more dramatic. The *Freeman's Journal* commented in 1840 that it had almost entirely ceased.<sup>125</sup> The application of prohibitory duties against the United Kingdom due to disagreements over wine duties had its precedence in the 1780s. These events add credence to the arguments made by the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Chevalier de Pinto, that butter was a luxury good for the Portuguese that they could readily

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<sup>122</sup> *The Cork Examiner*, 01 March 1843.

<sup>123</sup> *Rio de Janeiro Treaty. Correspondence Relative to the Proposed Suspension of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and Portugal.*, p. 2 July 1835, Duke of Palmella to Lord Howard de Walden. H.C. 1835 (579) li, 303

<sup>124</sup> Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland*, pp 53–54; *The Cork Examiner*, 02 March 1843.

<sup>125</sup> *Freeman's Journal* 10 March 1840.

replace it with oil.<sup>126</sup> Cork's butter merchants faced the uncomfortable truth that their produce was both quantifiably replaceable and consistency readily sacrificeable, at least by Portugal, their only European market of note.

### ***Conclusion***

Economic progress in Portugal was tied to supplying the Brazilian market. However, the liberalisation of the Brazilian trade and granting of access to British merchants meant that in 1808 much of this progress was lost. Up to a third of Portuguese industrial establishments were described as in a state of decay by 1811.<sup>127</sup> This decay was not arrested and in 1844 it was noted that,

The separation of Brazil nearly completed the ruin of the Portuguese trade, which in regard to exports, is now chiefly limited to wine, fruits, wood, cork, and salt.<sup>128</sup>

In the eighteenth century Cork had a substantial trade with Portugal (and Spain). This sharply declined following the opening of direct trade between Britain and Brazil after 1810. However, very little of this direct trade applied to Cork. There was a spike in linen exports to Brazil around the time that the Portuguese monarchy left during the French assault on the Iberian Peninsula, but this was a temporary outcome. After 1810 Cork's provisioning trade, which had supplied colonial provisions via Portugal, was moved to British traders shipping directly to South America. Britain's overseas trade with South America rapidly expanded in the early decades of the nineteenth century, increasing in value from £479,000 in 1800 to £5,970,000 by 1810.<sup>129</sup> However, these figures are for British trade with the Foreign West Indies and South America in their entirety, so do not fully reflect the realities of British trade with Brazil alone. They are indicative of an increasing British

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<sup>126</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 29 April 1785.

<sup>127</sup> François Crouzet, 'Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792-1815' in *The Journal of Economic History*, xxiv, no. 4 (1964), p. 574.

<sup>128</sup> *Commercial Tariffs and Regulations of the Several States of Europe and America, Together with the Commercial Treaties between England and Foreign Countries. Part the Fourteenth. Portugal.*, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 311.

commercial presence in the region. Irish trade did track that of Britain, with a similar surplus of trade in Irish-Portuguese trade as with Anglo-Portuguese trade.<sup>130</sup>

## France

Migration from France contributed to the development of many of Cork's regional enterprises, including linen and sugar-refining.<sup>131</sup> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a strong cross migration of French and Cork people was reflected in the city's trading relationship with France. On a visit to Cork in the 1790s Coquebert de Montbret noted that there was a high demand for Cork butter in France to supply the colonies and that Cork's merchants, contrary to custom, paid higher prices to small vessels exporting salted beef to Le Harve as this allowed them to load and offload cargo directly from their stores.<sup>132</sup> However, Coquebert's analysis of Cork's trading relationship with France was composed on the eve of nearly a quarter of a century of intra-European conflict. As with all Irish trade, Cork's trade with France was vulnerable to the state of Anglo-Franco relations. This was an important factor for much of the early nineteenth century.

In previous conflicts between Britain and France a variety of means were used to circumvent trade restrictions.<sup>133</sup> While it is probable that similar mechanisms were employed during the French Wars, due to their clandestine nature, customs officials would not have captured them. Nash points to this issue in his examination of seventeenth and eighteenth century Irish trade, stating that the official statistics on Irish trade with France exclude direct trades with the Caribbean colonies as well as indirect trade via intermediaries such as using Dutch trading houses to supply the French West Indies during the Seven Years War.<sup>134</sup> Smuggling

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<sup>130</sup> Fisher, 'Anglo-Portuguese Trade, 1700-1770', pp 232–233.

<sup>131</sup> Síle Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790' in *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society*, lxxviii (1973), pp 9; L. M. Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, Ireland ; Portland, OR, 2012); Dickson, *Old World Colony*; Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880 : Development or Decline?* (Cork :, 1991)

<sup>132</sup> Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790', pp 10–12.

<sup>133</sup> For further information on eighteenth century embargos on Irish produce see Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, pp 56–59.

<sup>134</sup> R. C. Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii, no. 3 (1985), pp 340–343; Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 57; For an in depth analysis of the shipment of produce to France via the Dutch see: Thomas M.

remained an issue into the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the differences in the quantities of brandy entered in the French custom books as exported to Britain and the quantities listed as imported by the English custom accounts. For example, in 1827 France recorded 2,254,529 gallons of wine as exported to the United Kingdom, whereas the United Kingdom listed 1,697,310 gallons as imported the same year.<sup>135</sup> This analysis should therefore be counterbalanced by a tacit acknowledgement that smuggling and other unofficial trading arrangements are not captured in the existing data.

The exportation of Cork's salted produce to France has a long history. Eighteenth-century French colonial and commercial texts noted the necessity of Irish salt beef for the success of French colonies in the Caribbean. Mandelblatt specifically notes that it was the French colonial ports like Nantes, La Rochelle, and Bordeaux that had the strongest connections to the Irish beef trade.<sup>136</sup> Ireland's trade with France was informed by the requirements of the colonial powers to supply their colonies with high quality foodstuffs that could survive a trans-Atlantic journey. As with most of Cork's international trade it was very heavily influenced by the exertion of Imperial power across the Atlantic. Due to war with Britain, France lost many of her Caribbean possessions, as well as holdings on the continental United States, in the opening years of the nineteenth century. This impacted upon France's requirements for provisioning meat. The type of salt beef that Cork exported to France was only destined for slaves in these regions as it was poor quality mess beef. A nineteenth century Bordeaux historian suggested that Irish beef was the 'Food of sailors, and in our colonies, most importantly that of slaves'.<sup>137</sup> Cullen points out that the high duties within France excluded Irish beef

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Truxes, 'Dutch-Irish Cooperation in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Wartime Atlantic' in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, x, no. 2 (2012), pp 302–303.

<sup>135</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Import Duties; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, an Appendix, and Index*, pp 187–188 H.C. 1840 (601) v, 99

<sup>136</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World' in *History Workshop Journal*, lxiii, no. 1 (2007), pp 20–21.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



from the internal French markets. This further supports the evidence that most Irish beef exports were destined for colonial use.<sup>138</sup>

Cork's beef trade with France in the eighteenth century was one of its most important exports to continental markets. However, poor relations between Britain and France repeatedly restricted this commerce. The expatriate Irish community in France controlled much of the development of this continental trade. Beef was sent out, wine, brandy and prunes were returned. Nantes was the major landing port for Irish produce and beef prices steadily increased over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>139</sup> Cullen attributes the increase in Irish beef prices to the growth of the French colony of St. Domingue and argues that the loss of this colony to revolt in 1804 precipitated the decline of the Irish beef trade with France.<sup>140</sup> The eighteenth century growth in beef and butter exports to France would not last into the nineteenth century.

A combination of factors influenced the character of the trade from the 1780s. These included social and political upheavals in France, growing Anglo-Franco tensions, an improving wine trade with Portugal and uprisings in France's colonial possessions. Unlike Britain however, Irish trade with France was less affected by the *Methuen Treaty*. One notable impact it did have was that the disagreements with Portugal led Irish politicians to push Irish interests in the *Eden Treaty* with France of 1783. To satisfy their concerns Articles fourteen and fifteen explicitly referred to both how the treaty was to apply to the Kingdom of Ireland and the freedom of movement for Irish shipping.<sup>141</sup> Despite the fact that this treaty was short-lived, it is an important indication of how the implications of Portuguese issues such as the conflict over the application of the *Methuen Treaty* impacted Ireland's broader commercial environment. By 1793 the early stages of the

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<sup>138</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 54.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55; Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988*, p. 61; Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity', p. 32.

<sup>141</sup> Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', p. 41; Edmund Burke, *Annual Register*, 1788, pp 272-273.

Napoleonic War had nullified much of this arrangement, as was to be the case for some time. Edward Forbes noted in a letter to Christopher Champlin,

The unparalleled failures throughout G. Britain with some in this Country, together with the War with France hath had a very bad effect on our trade, which caus'd a great scarcity of money and much diffidence amongst traders and manufacturers.<sup>142</sup>

The reasons for this decline from the late eighteenth century may not be solely due to the *Methuen Treaty*. The periods during which Cork was placed under embargo in the late 1770s, as well as the loss of Caribbean possessions in the early years of the nineteenth century, also harmed demand for Irish provisions. These goods were intended for transshipment; there was little penetration of the French domestic market. Although the years from 1793 to 1815 were the culmination of a long period of commercial expansion for Ireland, the boom concealed the true nature of the restructuring of Cork's trade towards England.<sup>143</sup> The high prices of wartime demand hid the loss of the major trading partners that Cork had developed over the eighteenth century. The West Indies, France and Portugal all saw declining trade with Cork. Times may have been good, but the seeds of future commercial difficulties were sown at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Figure 2-13 below shows that the official value of French imports into Ireland collapsed after the French Revolution. Ireland had maintained a high level of imports from France for much of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately the data for exports to France after 1792 is negligible in the parliamentary report on French trade in 1840, yet a number of comparisons can be made using the data for British exports to France (see Figure 2-14). Britain saw the same collapse in the value of French imports from 1793 as did Ireland. However, the recovery was more significant. Whereas the data for Ireland's trade points to a long term decline hastened by events in Europe, Britain's relationship shows a far greater resilience. This is somewhat surprising considering the tensions between Britain and France at this time. British imports quickly recovered to their pre-revolution levels and the

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<sup>142</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800: 1775-1800* (Boston, 1914), p. 464.

<sup>143</sup> Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 100; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 369–371.

balance of trade with France remained at a healthy level throughout all but the most difficult years of the Napoleonic Wars. The data available for Ireland's exports to France shows a generally favourable balance of trade pre-1793, but it also indicates a declining trend for imports.

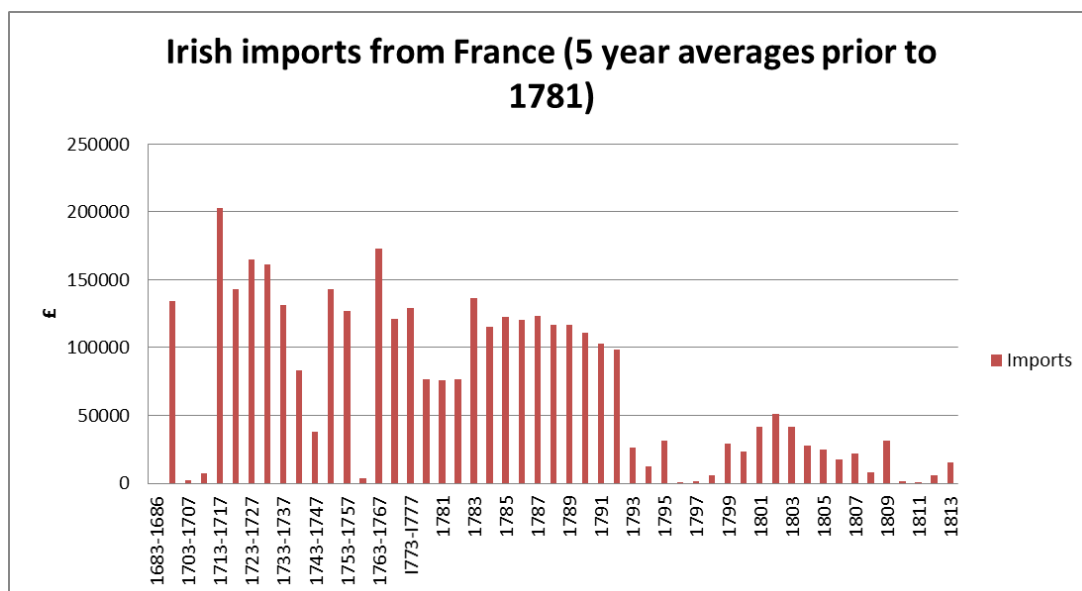


Figure 2-13 Irish imports from France<sup>144</sup>

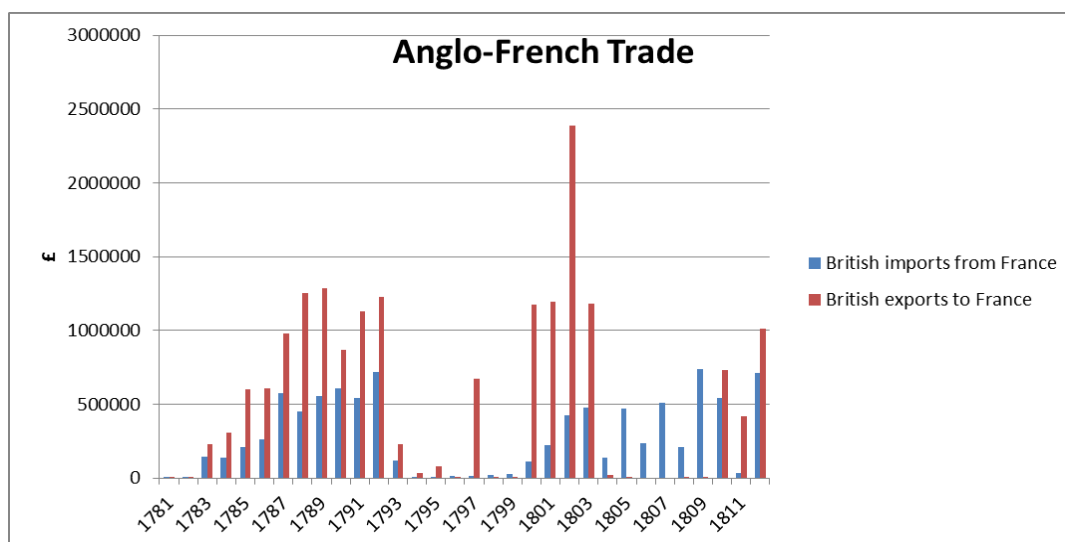


Figure 2-14 Anglo-French trade<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup> *Imports and Exports (France). An Account of the Trade of Great Britain and of Ireland with France, in Each Year, from 1781 to 1813; and of the Trade of the United Kingdom with France, in Each Year, from 1814 to 1839.*, H.C. 1840 (398) xlv, 123; The five year averages for Irish trade with France were taken from Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', p. 342.

<sup>145</sup> *Imports and Exports (France). An Account of the Trade of Great Britain and of Ireland with France, in Each Year, from 1781 to 1813; and of the Trade of the United Kingdom with France, in Each Year, from 1814 to 1839.*, H.C. 1840 (398) xlv, 123

Wine was one of Ireland's main imports from France in the eighteenth century. Legg has pointed to the strong Irish familial connections with Bordeaux as an example of how this trade developed. A number of Irish owned vineyards traded Bordeaux wine in return for Irish goods such as salted meat. As a portion of this trade was destined for re-exportation to Britain, it made Dublin and Cork the principal centres for redistributing claret to Bristol and the colonies. In the six months from July to December 1788 Ireland imported 1,600 tuns, compared to 505 tuns imported into London. 19 per cent of British wine imports from France and a large proportion of the wine imported from Bordeaux were in turn re-exported to Britain, with this facet of the trade comprising half of all Bordeaux-produced goods sold in Britain.<sup>146</sup> It is likely that duty differentials on French wine imported into Ireland as compared to imports into Britain accounted for a portion of this trade. Lower import duties on French wines remained in Ireland until the standardisation of duties and drawbacks in 1824 (see Appendix 2 for comparative duty rates). For some periods these differences were substantial.<sup>147</sup> Personal and familial connections to these Irish Bordeaux vineyards had a part to play in trade with Ireland. Native and expatriate Irish merchants dominated this trade on both sides.<sup>148</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter One, many Cork-based merchants profited indirectly from the slave trade through the provisioning industries. The Tobin Company of Liverpool purchased the gunpowder mills at Ballincollig in the 1830s. It was run by Thomas Tobin. His family's wealth derived directly from African slavery;

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<sup>146</sup> Legg, 'Irish Wine': The Import of Claret from Bordeaux to Provincial Ireland in the Eighteenth Century', pp 96–98; Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785', p. 109.

<sup>147</sup> In 1824 this led to an increase from £135 12 s. per tun on wines imported in British ships to £144 7 s. 6 d. and an increase from £139 13 s. 3 d. to £148 11 s. 6 d. for that imported in foreign vessels. 4 Geo. IV. Sess. 1823. (Ireland.) A Bill [As Amended by the Committee] to Repeal the Several dUties and Drawbacks of Customs Chargeable and Allowable in Ireland, on the Importation and Exportation of Certain Foreign and Colonial Goods Wares and Merchandize, and to Grant other Duties and Drawbacks in lieu thereof, Equal to the Duties and Drawbacks Chargeable and Allowable Thereon in Great Britain., H.C. 1823 (420) i, 677; (Ireland.) Wine. Accounts Relating to the Produce of Revenue Derived from Wine Imported into Ireland; also, the Quantities of Wine Imported and Exported; &c. 1801-1822. P. 4 H.C. 1823 (132) xvi, 587.

<sup>148</sup> Mark McCarthy, 'The Forging of an Atlantic Port City: Socio-Economic and Physical Transformations in Cork, 1660–1700' in *Urban History*, xxviii, no. 01 (2001), p. 33.

both his father Thomas and Uncle John were heavily involved in the slave trade.<sup>149</sup> Two families in Nantes, the Roches and the Rirdans, who were *armateurs* (those who outfitted slave ships) both claimed Cork ancestry.<sup>150</sup> If these eighteenth-century French slavers descended from Cork emigrants it is likely that they had arrived in France in the early to mid-seventeenth century. Rodgers believes that the Roches were in the region by the 1650s.<sup>151</sup> She argues,

The existence of a prosperous and heavily Catholic Irish community in France's Atlantic ports attests to thriving trade links with Ireland, opportunities for new emigrants, a degree of small scale smuggling, the steady development of an Irish presence in the French West Indies... proliferating in white overseers, commercial agents and planters.<sup>152</sup>

Several families that originated in Cork established themselves in both the West Indies and France. These included the McCarthy families and the Delaps. The Irish mercantile presence in France rapidly expanded during the eighteenth century.<sup>153</sup> This settlement pattern exemplifies the nature of Cork's trade with France; providing provisions for the colonies in exchange for wine. These emigrant families were well positioned and connected enough to act as intermediaries for both facets of this trade.

During the eighteenth century France had been one of Ireland's best importers of salted beef. These provisions were ultimately destined for the Caribbean and by mid-century this trade was a mainstay of Irish commercial activity.<sup>154</sup> However, war steadily eroded this trade and by 1800 Cork's exports to France had been completely destroyed. There was a slight recovery by 1815, but a quarter of century of conflict had hastened a decline that had started in the 1740s.

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<sup>149</sup> Robin Law, *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (2002), p. 62.

<sup>150</sup> Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York, 2007), pp 111–112.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 111–112.

<sup>153</sup> L.M. Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses' in T. C. Smout and L. M. Cullen (eds), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History 1600-1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp 167–169.

<sup>154</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 341–342; Truxes, 'Dutch-Irish Cooperation in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Wartime Atlantic', pp 312, 329.

A limited import trade did remain. The main products imported into Cork were French wines, brandies, oil products and glass, but the volumes were insignificant. Cork's trading relationship with France centred on provisions for re-export. As France lost many of her colonial possessions to Britain it no longer had much need for low grade beef provisions. For similar reasons Cork's imports from France were her wines and these were available from Portugal at much lower prices. From 1812 to 1823 French wine was consistently valued at over 8 per cent higher per tun than port.<sup>155</sup> There were no illusions in France as to the reason for the deterioration of the Irish trade. The only way for French exports to penetrate the market of the United Kingdom, including Ireland, was to be allowed to export at the same price as other European countries. Especially as the Napoleonic Wars, according to French commentators, had seen wine replaced by beers and liquors.<sup>156</sup>

In 1800 a French writer pointed to the Englishman's belief in his own superiority. He mentioned that they despised the Scots and the Irish, that they treated all other nations as slaves and they saw the Irishman as beyond help and suffering from a 'low and grovelling mind' and was irredeemable.<sup>157</sup> This was not merely a xenophobic reaction to the contemporaneous conflict with Britain; by 1836 they still referred to the 'misery and oppression' in Ireland that existed due to Britain.<sup>158</sup> This is remarkably similar to the perspectives of Portuguese commentators in the 1780's when they commented on the underdevelopment of Irish commercial representation and capability.

One direct result of the Napoleonic Wars was a small export trade to St. Helena for a number of years after 1815. Beef, butter and pork were all exported there, with troops departing from Cove for that region (presumably to support the

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<sup>155</sup> (*Ireland.*) *Accounts of the Exports and Imports of Ireland; and Official Value Thereof: 1811-1822.* H.C. 1823 (318) xvi, 131.

<sup>156</sup> Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès, *Statistique de la Grande-Bretagne et de l'Irlande* (1838), p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> A. B. F. de P. de Baert, *Tableau de la Grande-Bretagne, de l'Irlande et des Possessions Angloises dans les quatre parties du monde: tome Quatrième* (1800), pp 216–217 'ils Meprisent encore plus les Irlandais a qu'ils Reprochent, outre la Pauvrete, un esprit bas et rampant, que ne Rachete, Selon eux, aucune Qualite'.

<sup>158</sup> Jonnès, *Statistique de la Grande-Bretagne et de l'Irlande*, p. 328.

British garrison that guarded the former Emperor Napoleon).<sup>159</sup> However, this exportation was not one of much benefit for Cork commerce. Reports surfaced regarding the scarcity of provisions available on the island and at least one soldier arrested for desertion attributed his action to the poor quality provisions they were given.<sup>160</sup> In contrast to the quality salted beef Irish commentators always referred to, those on St. Helena complained that they were 'literally starving; or living upon the hard Irish beef... which is so hard as to be susceptible of as high a polish as mahogany.'<sup>161</sup> Over the next few years the condition of Napoleon's supply of foodstuffs and the general state of his confinement were subject to debate, both in newspapers and the House of Commons. Reports suggested that conditions on St. Helena were less than ideal, with even the Emperor Napoleon himself being limited to one bottle of wine per day. However, other records show that in one fortnight Napoleon and his nine adult compatriots consumed seven bottles of Constantia, fourteen bottles of Champaign, twenty-one bottles Vin de Grace, eighty-four bottles of Teneriffe, and one hundred and forty bottles of Claret in addition to forty-two bottles of porter. An allowance of sixty-five pounds of beef, thirty-six pounds of mutton, and three pounds of butter undoubtedly originated in Cork.<sup>162</sup> Cork's merchants may have developed a name for themselves in the supply of provisions for the military and Caribbean islands, but perhaps these were not sufficiently refined for an emperor's tastes. Perhaps it would have been shrewd to re-direct the Portuguese wines they were purchasing at a lower duty than Britain to St. Helena.

## Conclusion

During his visit Coquebert noted some ominous threats to the future of Cork's provisions trade. The French ports of Nantes and Bordeaux were closing to imports of meat and butter from Ireland. An increasing number of ships were

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<sup>159</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 30 December 1818; 20 January 1819.

<sup>160</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 18 May 1818; 30 June 1818.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1816.

<sup>162</sup> Santine, M., 'Napoleon Bonaparte', *Belfast Newsletter* 21 March 1817; 'Treatment of Bonaparte, House of Lords March 18', *Belfast Newsletter*, 25 March 1817; *Freeman's Journal*, 25 March 1817; 10 October 1817.

rejecting Cork's beef supplies as crews found pork more digestible and less inclined to harden when salted. Finally, and of greater significance, was that the colonies in North America, Cuba and St. Dominique were beginning to produce their own beef.<sup>163</sup> The requirements for provisions lessened and the expertise in provisioning these regions that Cork merchants had developed over the eighteenth century became rapidly irrelevant in the new form the Atlantic economy was taking in the nineteenth century.

Crouzet succinctly sums up the impact that the Napoleonic Wars had generally on European development:

The impact of the wars upon the long-run development of industry... was felt mostly through the dislocations in international trade which were brought about by the twenty year long conflict between Britain and France, and by the progressive involvement of all other European countries in this bitter struggle in which economic warfare played a prominent part.<sup>164</sup>

This period led to a number of developments in Ireland's economy, and Cork's in particular, that profoundly affected its development over the course of the nineteenth century. Firstly, the wars hastened the re-structuring of Ireland's economy towards Britain. This was a process that had already begun, but the straitening of continental trade and the convoy requirements for trans-Atlantic shipping pushed Cork's merchants into a closer dependence on Britain. Secondly, demand made provisioning the military a lucrative and easy business venture. The presence of the admiralty's victualling operation in Cork and the sheer volume of military ships and troops passing through the harbour provided a ready outlet for provisions. Combined with rising prices paid for supplies there was very little incentive to seek out other potentially riskier opportunities further afield. This was a myopic view of the long-term potential of military demand, even in such a long-running conflict as the Napoleonic Wars. Military demand would inevitably shrink, leaving Cork's provisioning merchants in a difficult position following a collapse in prices. Finally, the conclusion of the war saw a rapid collapse of both wartime prices

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<sup>163</sup> Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790', pp 12–13.

<sup>164</sup> Crouzet, 'Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792-1815', p. 567.



and wartime demand. Crotty and Foster argue that 1815 can be seen as the true turning point in nineteenth century Irish history, rather than the famine of the 1840s, as cereal prices collapsed putting downward pressure on labour wages.<sup>165</sup> However, Solar points to the early 1830s as a more likely point of change in terms of relative pasture and tillage prices impacting upon production.<sup>166</sup>

Neither Crotty nor Solar is incorrect in terms of dating the point of structural change. Indeed Solar qualifies his analysis with the caveat that although 1815 price changes were not as significant as those in the 1830s, they were still important. The difficulty with this period is that so many changes occurred in the economic, political, and social milieu that it is hard to definitively identify singular causation or dates for these changes. The mid-1820s was the most important turning point for nineteenth century Irish development, when the changing trade patterns of the Napoleonic Wars combined with the final stages of the massive political reforms of the Act of Union. This is similar to the view Oldham expressed in 1910, when he identified 1824 as the turning point in Ireland's industrial history due to the introduction of free trade between Ireland and Britain, combined with the abolition of the post-union ad valorem duties.<sup>167</sup> For Cork's merchants the 1820's were the period which saw the decline in several nascent industries, such as textiles, the removal of several protections on their butter trade, the loss or diminution of foreign markets and an increasing dependence on exports to Britain.

One of the major problems in studying this period in Irish history is the dearth of reliable information. The customs union meant the end of recording separate imports and exports figures for Ireland in the 1820s. In discussing the issue regarding the move from tillage to pasture Solar touches on this problem. He refers to the role of the steamship in transforming Irish agriculture by decreasing transit times and facilitating livestock exports to Britain. Nevertheless the lack of

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<sup>165</sup> Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production, its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966), p. 35; R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), pp 318–319.

<sup>166</sup> Peter Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture before the Famine' (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1987), pp 12, 38–40.

<sup>167</sup> Charles Hubert Oldham, 'Ireland's External Trade' in *19th Century Social History Pamphlets* (London, 1910), p. 10.

quantifiable evidence is problematic.<sup>168</sup> Solar is not the only historian to have grappled with this problem, and it is one that is difficult to resolve. One can infer some probable consequences by comparing Irish data with that of Britain, but this cannot replace definitive proof.

Cork's trade with the Continent deteriorated rapidly over the course of the nineteenth century. Changing trade patterns, the long-term impact of various European conflicts, improving transport connections to Britain, and the loss of a variety of favourable duties and bounties in the 1820s all combined to have a devastating effect. This loss was not entirely surprising to those watching the state of Ireland's commerce. In 1810, a pivotal point of departure for Ireland's Portuguese trade, the *Freeman's Journal* noted that they were 'gratified to perceive such large importations from America and from Portugal, as we much fear from the state of our relations with these countries, that their ports will not long remain open to us'.<sup>169</sup> By the time Anglo-Portuguese commerce was re-examined in the 1840s, Cork's merchants vehemently attacked the exclusion of Irish interests from the negotiations. They maintained that Cork suffered the most from this exclusion due to the level of commercial connectivity between that city and Portugal. They alleged that the exclusion of Ireland from the negotiations led to the question as to whether or not Ireland would be able to retain any commerce whatsoever. William Fagan, the merchants' London representative was emphatic that the problems facing Ireland's butter trade were due to the altered rates of duty.<sup>170</sup> There were two crucial pieces of legislation for Cork's continental trade: the *Methuen Treaty*, which broadly speaking remained in force up to the mid-nineteenth century, and the abolition of the separate customs in 1824 as part of the final implementation of the Act of Union. The *Methuen Treaty* from its very foundation established the nature of Cork's trade with Portugal. Despite a number of setbacks during the 1780s this trading relationship remained mostly positive. The repercussions of the Act of Union, however, would prove to be far more complex.

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<sup>168</sup> Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture', pp 94–95.

<sup>169</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22 February 1810.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 02 February 1843; *The Cork Examiner*, 01 March 1843.

## Chapter 3

### British Trade

Britain has always been Ireland's most important trade partner. That simple fact has had broad implications in terms of Ireland's relationship with her nearest neighbour and engagement with the wider world. In the twenty-first century decisions made in Britain can still potentially impact Irish trade and development. This issue goes back to initial moves for Ireland to broaden her political and economic interests in Europe. Ireland's two attempts to join the European Economic Community in the 1960s stalled due to de Gaulle's intransigent opposition to British entry, which in turn prevented the Irish application from progressing.<sup>1</sup> Ireland's relationship with foreign powers was heavily dependent on Britain, as previous chapters have shown. This reliance can be traced back to the late seventeenth century legislation that restricted the goods in which Ireland could trade as well as her ability to engage in trade relationships with certain foreign powers. From this point onwards Ireland was subject to the whims and vagaries of British foreign policy. Ireland's incorporation under the Union compounded this dependence as her commercial, economic, political and foreign affairs became the affairs of the United Kingdom and vice versa.

Despite these challenges the eighteenth century was predominantly an expansive time for Cork industry and business. The restrictions put in place through the Navigation, Cattle and Wool acts benefitted Cork's provisioning and linen industries. Mark McCarthy has argued that the growth Cork experienced during the eighteenth century derives from some of these prohibitive acts; with the Cattle Acts forcing Cork merchants to move from livestock exports to provisioning the Atlantic economies.<sup>2</sup> Barry Crosbie has pointed to the increase in British commercial and military activities in the Atlantic as 'an important economic platform that was used

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Bielenberg and Raymond Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland Since Independence* (2013), pp 23–24.

<sup>2</sup> Mark McCarthy, 'The Forging of an Atlantic Port City: Socio-Economic and Physical Transformations in Cork, 1660–1700' in *Urban History*, xxviii, no. 01 (2001), p. 26; Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production, its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966), p. 15.

to foster and expand Irish mercantile activity'.<sup>3</sup> British foreign trade expanded an estimated six-fold between 1700 and 1800.<sup>4</sup> Cork was in an ideal position to take advantage of the growing Atlantic trade. Crosbie mentions this in light of Irish activity in the East Indian trade in the late eighteenth century and indeed it was Cork that initially gained from the few concessions handed out in the company's 1793 charter. However, Ireland's commercial gains from British expansion were also financed predominantly on British account, thereby depriving Irish merchants from a large proportion of the profits to be made. In the nineteenth century the impact of warfare combined with increased opportunities in Britain to make the latter a more attractive trade alternative to the trans-Atlantic market.

Ireland's close connection to Britain could be both beneficial and detrimental to Cork's international trade. In the first instance, the removal of tariffs and duties theoretically gave Irish merchants equality on the British market. However, in practice it appears that the majority of the benefits accrued to Britain, as Parnell, Foster and other anti-union campaigners feared. As previous chapters have also mentioned, Cork's location in the Atlantic gave it a valuable place in the victualling of the Royal Navy during the various eighteenth and nineteenth century conflicts in which Britain found herself embroiled and it had unrealised potential as a valuable entrepot in the East Indies trade. This was enhanced during the American War of Independence with Cork city taking the place Kinsale once held in terms of the supply of the British military. In 1776 Robert Gordon was appointed the Commissary for Provisions at Cork, stating that he hoped his, 'very long experience of 25 years in the export business of Cork' would be of benefit.<sup>5</sup> Close connection to the Empire allowed for the importation of both a wide variety of exotic goods from the furthest reaches of Britain's power and, closer to home,

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks : Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India* (2012), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Joel Mokyr (ed.), *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1985), pp 22–23; Darity, William, 'British Industry and West Indies Plantations' in Stanley L. Engerman and J. E. Inikori (eds), *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, N.C, 1992), p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gordon to John Robinson, Cork 2 March 1776, Treasury Board Papers and In-Letters, T 1/525, TNA.

access to the 'workshop of the world'. Taking the subordinate position within the Union came with increased benefits such as these.

Close proximity to Britain also came with serious complications. In the 1780s some British merchants feared that Irish free trade and later commercial propositions could threaten indigenous British enterprise. The crux of the issue was that British producers could not match Ireland's lower cost base, namely labour costs. There was also a fear of the lower level of duties and rates on a number of goods in Ireland. During the 1780s debates on the relationship of Anglo-Irish trade it was pointed out that

When England thinks it necessary to extend these duties for her own protection to the manufactures of so poor and infant a Country [sic] as Ireland, it is still now necessary for Ireland to impose them on a country abounding in still capital and industry, and where manufactures are fully established.<sup>6</sup>

This type of conflict was not conducive to a productive relationship. The commercial propositions were in part intended to regularise trade between Ireland and Britain, but many of those involved in Britain had serious reservations. By the time of the Act of Union, articles six and seven contained details of the commercial aspects of this new relationship. It involved a slow process of merging duty rates, which in practice this meant that the Irish rates were raised to match those of Britain.

British fears about the competitiveness of Irish produce ultimately were to prove to have no basis in the reality of increased political and economic connection between the two countries. By the time of the Union industrialisation in Britain had led to dramatic improvements in the production of goods that were also produced in Ireland, one example being lower quality textiles. In general Irish producers did not invest as much in capital expenditures. Their production of power was also far lower, relying very heavily on water power, such as in the Crosses Green area of Cork city. This may, in part, be attributed to a lack of foresight. However, energy

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<sup>6</sup> Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce With Ireland, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/323 ff. 117, BL.

supply was a far more pressing issue. Although there were limited coal deposits available in Ireland and they were mainly anthracite, which was not suitable for industrial uses. More suitable coal had to be imported at additional costs. In comparison, British producers were able to take advantage of both improved industrial techniques and vast deposits of coal, helping to fuel widespread industrial development. Increasing expertise in engineering, such as the Newcomen engine, and the discovery of new sources of high quality coal combined to advance British industry.

The nature of Cork's nineteenth-century trade was shaped by the realities of the eighteenth-century Atlantic economy and the history of Anglo-Irish relations. Some of the merchants' failures to adapt can be attributed to those structural factors. This is not to solely lay any decline at the feet of a conservative and parochial merchant class. The changes brought about by free trade legislation and the Act of Union had their own part to play. Cullen argues that there was a poor correlation between the loss of protections due to the Act of Union and industrial decline in Ireland. Instead, he points to internal population increases and technological and organisational advances outside of Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the Act of Union was an important milestone in the development of Cork's nineteenth century trade, even if its true implications were not immediately apparent and masked by the booming war time economy. The mercantile community of Cork expected the Union to bring prosperity, but by the 1840s the city was referred to disparagingly as a 'pork and salting provincial.'<sup>8</sup> This resulted from the changing relationship between Ireland and Britain and a conservative merchant class that became overly reliant on trade with Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, Ireland ; Portland, OR, 2012), pp 11–12.

<sup>8</sup> Maura Murphy, 'Cork Commercial Society 1850-1899: Politics and Problems' in *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development, 1500-1900* (Dublin, 1986), p. 233.

## Scotland and Colonial Transshipment

### *Scottish Trade*

Cork did not maintain a significant trade with Scotland. The substantial trade with Britain focused on cities such as Liverpool and London. These metropolitan areas could supply the bulk of Cork's imports as well as absorbing a substantial proportion of exports. There was also a passing trade as Cork was the last stopping point prior to making the trans-Atlantic journey. Scotland was both physically and geographically isolated from this southern port. The bulk of Irish trade with that country was undertaken by merchants in the northern portion of Ireland. Just as geographic proximity and cultural links helped foster Cork's eighteenth century trade with France, similar connections existed between Scotland and the northern counties of Ireland.

Cork's exports to Scotland were hardly surprising, centring on the main produce of the city. A small trade was undertaken in the export of barrels of salted pork, barely large enough to have been noticeable in the context of Cork's pork exports or Ireland's overall exports of pork products and derivatives. What is somewhat surprising about Irish exports to Scotland is that the main bulk of the pork trade went through Sligo rather than the counties of Ulster. The data recorded in 1805 for the 1804 trade, the year which saw Cork reach the peak of its trade in salted pork with Scotland (exporting 148 barrels of pork), saw Sligo export 1085 barrels of pork, from a national total of 1,834. The following year Cork only sent out 3 barrels, whereas Sligo supplied Scotland with 2,422 out of 3,111. This trend remains broadly the same for the opening decade of the nineteenth century. However, by 1810 when Scottish consumption of Irish salted pork began to experience rapid growth, Sligo's dominant share of this trade declined in favour of Belfast exports. For the remainder of the data available Belfast was the pre-eminent Irish supplier of salted pork to Scotland. In many respects the expansion of the Scottish pork trade tallies with Solar's argument that in the post-Napoleonic War period other markets expanded and purchased some of the excess production

left by the contraction of naval demand.<sup>9</sup> The increase in Belfast's engagement with the pork trade could also be taken as a precursor to the decline in Cork's prominence in the supply of pork to Britain as a whole. Solar's estimates for export to London, Bristol and Liverpool for 1838 show Cork's percentage supply of the bacon and ham trade in fifth place at 6.8 per cent, behind all other Irish cities bar Galway.<sup>10</sup> These figures are for bacon and ham; it is possible that Cork pigmeat was still being diverted into salted pork barrels, but it is unlikely that this was the case. What's more likely is that Cork's exports to these major British ports were in fact livestock. However, the decline in navy contracts undoubtedly hit Cork to a greater degree than other Irish cities and combined with a drop off in the Irish salt pork trade to Britain. Some of the decline would have been offset by a rapid growth in the trade in hams, but this was not an area where Cork had much expertise and export figures remained miniscule.<sup>11</sup>

The shift in the export of pork from Sligo to Belfast by the 1820s coincides with the consolidation and shrinking of the Lagan Valley linen industry, increased migration from Belfast to Scotland, and the introduction of steam transports between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Furthermore, the collapse of the handspun textile industry in the northern counties led to a consolidation of smaller farm holdings into larger more productive units.<sup>12</sup> Larger farm holdings were more amenable to an increase in pasturage and an increase in livestock holdings; allowing Belfast and Derry to take advantage of a growing meat trade with Scotland. Many of the Irish migrant workers from Ulster and Connaught emigrated to take advantage of growing urban centres in Scotland and the employment opportunities therein. As merchants in the south of Ireland were well aware, growing urban populations had growing appetites.

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<sup>9</sup> Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture', pp 123–124.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> For further details on the estimates for the Irish pork meat trade see: Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture', pp 143–160.

<sup>12</sup> Collins, 'The Origins of Irish Immigration to Scotland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', pp 5–8.



Although the volume of Irish exports of beef to Scotland were far higher than the volume of pork exports, Cork's share of the beef trade was actually proportionally lower overall than that of its pork trade. Dublin markets dominated, though as the early decades of the nineteenth century drew on Belfast slowly increased its share of exports. Dublin's dominance is unsurprising as it had major cattle markets drawing from all around Leinster and the slaughtering regions of the city were close to the port, and it was in ready reach of Scotland's markets. A similar situation existed in Belfast. Cork maintained a small and sporadic trade in the derivatives of their slaughtering industries, mainly in bones and skins, but again it was of little consequence.

Cork's engagement with the Scottish butter trade was slightly better than in salted meat, though still a small proportion of the trade overall. Dublin, Sligo, and Belfast all maintained a reasonably consistent level of butter exports to Scotland, with Sligo accounting for about half the total. Waterford and Limerick also maintained a sporadic, but at times large, level of trade with Scotland in butter, particularly during times of shortage or excessive demand. As with beef and pork this trade concentrated on the northern counties that were within both close reach of Scotland and Scotland's own trade networks.

Small trades existed in products such as grass seeds from Scotland, which comprised a large proportion of Cork's trade with that country. Some small trades existed in secondary and tertiary products. There was a small trade in various finished and semi-finished iron products from Scotland, but again nothing of major significance. A similar situation existed with Cork's imports of muscovado sugar, yet in terms of either Cork or Ireland's overall trade with Scotland this was miniscule. The importation of print types into Cork saw Scotland contributing a significant proportion of Cork's admittedly small imports, with the rest coming from England. A slightly more significant trade occurred in glass, with Cork importing a small selection of glassware, including windows, bottles, and glass cases. The largest of these was the import of glass cases, with Scottish items comprising the vast bulk of glass case manufactures imported into Cork. In terms of importation from Scotland

Cork had a small level of trade in a few, but nevertheless important products. There were some sporadic imports of tobacco in the opening years of the nineteenth century, as well as occasional imports of rum. However, both of these products could be sourced from elsewhere with greater ease. The same was true for coal imports, which although steadily increasing over the opening decades of the nineteenth century remained below ten per cent of total Irish imports from Scotland.

Cork's most significant importation from Scotland was herring. Cork's proportion of the herring trade from Scotland fluctuated between ten and twenty per cent of the national total importation, but it generally remained around the lower end of the spectrum. If one considers Cork's distance from the producer it is quite a respectable level of trade. Scotland accounted for thirty to forty per cent of Cork's overall importation of herring, with the balance comprising of imports from Sweden, England and Newfoundland. Some of these imports were destined to be re-packaged and re-exported to the Caribbean from Cork. However, most were for domestic consumption as the level of herring export was low and declined further as the years drew on.

Overall trade with Scotland was insignificant. The geographic distance and types of goods on offer, from both parties, meant that any meaningful trade was of little value. The products were readily available from markets closer to home. Scotland sourced much of the key goods that Cork could offer from Dublin, Belfast and Sligo. For Cork it made more sense to purchase sugar, tobacco and other exotic products from London or Liverpool. The only trade of any real significance was in herrings and glass cases. Here again there were other market sources for these. Cork had connections to both the Swedish and Newfoundland herring trades that could easily have been substituted for Scotland's supply. As they were intended for domestic consumption there was no need to source them from Scotland. Similarly glass cases could be sourced from almost any manufacturing base in Britain, or even made locally. Scotland was just too far removed from any of Cork's particular trading specialities to be of real interest.

### ***East Indies***

In the final years of separate Irish customs records the clerks began to specify trade with Britain in 'Foreign or Colonial' products. Some, but not all, goods were further defined to distinguish whether or not they originated from the East Indies. In terms of Cork's imports the goods explicitly defined as originating from the East Indies were in the main relatively small trades, but there was a substantial importation in some high value products, such as pepper, indigo and nutmeg. Other products imported include aloes, coffee, spices, rubber and oils. These were the types of cash crops that made trade connections with Asia so valuable, both for Britain and the East India Company. The implication here is that up to this point the East Indies trade was entered under the English series, which, considering the structure of the East India Company's charters, is unsurprising. For much of the lifetime of the East India Company Ireland was severely limited in how she was able to trade with the company. Despite being prohibited for the majority of that monopoly's existence, representatives were located in Cork and Limerick to secure its own commercial interests. This primarily resulted from Ireland's strategic position on the edge of the Atlantic as well as Cork being a safe port in times of conflict. Commercial agencies had existed in Cork for almost the lifetime of the company, with Cork's agency established in 1706 and Kinsale's in 1708.<sup>13</sup>

Ireland's ability to trade with the East Indies had long been a point of disagreement between Ireland and England. During the negotiations of the Commercial Propositions in 1784 Thomas Orde detailed to William Pitt several of the objections Irish MPs had to his current proposals. In terms of the East Indies trade they argued that the phrasing of the third proposition precluded any possibility of the importation of East Indian goods to Britain from Ireland and a provision was needed to allow for the return of goods to Britain that were damaged or unsaleable. In this correspondence many of the complaints were due to phrasing rather than problems with ideological intent. The main point of contention was the ninth provision:

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<sup>13</sup> Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, pp 24–25, 40–42.

Complaint is made here...of the unreasonable limitations which would hereby put to any possible future trade of Ireland... as in [the] case of the extinction of the E. India's Company's charter many of these countries would be considered of course as foreign, and as it is not the principle of this compact to restrain the foreign trade of Ireland she would not acquiesce in all the extent of restriction... in such case Ireland should agree to be put upon the same footing with regard to the trade to the E. Indies, as she now is to submit to with respect to the commerce to the colonies in the West Indies or America.<sup>14</sup>

Orde suggested that part of the issue at hand was the belief that this provision could grant Britain the power to limit Ireland's foreign trading options, whereas John Foster hoped the provision could allow for the possibility of supplying a proportion of the British goods the East India Company transported to the region.

Foster's attempt to have Ireland designated an accepted warehousing location for East India goods fits into the broader pattern of the Irish free trade movement. It sought to position Ireland as an equal partner in Britain's mercantile network, rather than simply a passive location for sourcing provisions and secondary supplies to support trade. In a 1784 letter to Thomas Orde he detailed Ireland's advantages. He thought Ireland was one of the best customers for East India Company goods and if company ships were allowed to off load there it could be a valuable warehouse for exotic goods for both countries. Ireland, due to 'superior advantages of situation', would be an ideal place to establish such a depot. In the event this occurred British capital would fund it and British ships would transport all goods. Foster asserted that Ireland, as part of the Empire, was entitled to reap the benefits from it and that part of this would be permitting East India ships to land cargo there, rather than having Irish merchants source these goods from third party suppliers in London at inflated prices.<sup>15</sup>

There were conflicting views on the legality of such a trade. Foster saw the East Indies trade as something that was being denied to Ireland as no Irish legislation prohibited trade between Ireland and the East India Company. As Irish

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<sup>14</sup> Letter to Mr. Pitt 6th June 1785, Remarks on the Several Propositions, Bolton Papers, MS 15,860/13, NLI.

<sup>15</sup> Extract of a letter from Foster, 15 Sept 1784 'Trade and Commerce', Bolton Papers, MS 16,356, NLI.

ports were generally the first landing point for returning East India Company vessels, though the cargoes were not off loaded until they reached Britain, those in favour of free trade believed there was a benefit to having company store houses in Ireland. Orde's dismissal of this perspective was both accurate and condescending. Despite the lack of a ban on the importation of East India Company goods into Ireland, the company itself was effectively prohibited from doing so under threat of forfeiting goods, ships and even its charter by the Navigation Acts and the conditions of their charter. The writer suggests that perhaps the Irish had not properly thought about why they wanted this trade opened to them, asking,

to what part of the east would Ireland wish to trade? China is open to them if they consider themselves as not bound by the prohibitions in the charters and acts relative to the East-India Company.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to suggest that the reason that Ireland wished to take part in the East India trade was to 'give opportunity to them [the Irish] to smuggle much more than they now do.'<sup>17</sup> He argued that Britain did not have an unfair advantage over Ireland as the Irish could trade with the same channels that the people of Britain accessed East India Company goods: 'It must be observed also that the East India company are no more connected with England than with Ireland.'<sup>18</sup> Although this may be strictly true the tone of the argument suggests a deliberate bureaucratic mis-representation of what the Irish sought. Proponents of free trade believed that the situation as it stood – having the goods stop in Ireland but not off-loaded, then re-exported back to Ireland from Britain – led to unwarranted extra expense and was patently absurd. There was little appetite in Britain to renegotiate the situation, especially as it would have involved a drastic review of both the Navigation Acts as they applied to the East India Company and the company's charter. Furthermore, as the panic and disruption of the American Revolution subsided so did the incentive to pander to the Irish political establishment.

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<sup>16</sup> *'East India Trade' in 'Trade and Commerce'*, Bolton Papers, MS 16,356, NLI.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

This is not to say that the issue completely disappeared. During various points in the renegotiations of the Company's charters references were made to the potential for smuggling that opening trade to Ireland, as well as Scotland, could cause. During the negotiations for the *East India Act, 1814* the Company's deputation petitioned the Earl of Buckinghamshire, Robert Hobart, to warn of this danger:

How much more [tea], then, is smuggling, beyond all bounds, to be expected, when the ships shall be unlimited in number and size, and may resort to the outports of England, Scotland, and Ireland? This practice would be much facilitated... it would be easy for them to break bulk in the passage home... to put tea... [and] other articles chargeable with duty, on board ships and cutters destined either for the ports of the continent, or the remote coasts of Scotland and Ireland... Ships might stop at intermediate ports for orders, and there smuggle... at Cork and Falmouth... on the Irish and Scotch coasts.<sup>19</sup>

By this point the company's monopoly was breaking up. The *East India Act, 1793* had begun to allow for limited trade between Ireland and the East Indies, with a corollary to the act allowing for the export of goods from the Port of Cork. It also allowed the company to ship eight hundred tons from the Port of Cork between October and February of every year.<sup>20</sup> This provision led Sir John Newport to start a correspondence with the Committee of Merchants regarding its use. However, this brief correspondence ended with the Committee stating that sufficient time had not been allowed to avail of any of the advantages from the provisions of that act.<sup>21</sup> The act was later repealed by the 1813 Act, but only to allow it to be broadened to

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<sup>19</sup> East India Company, *Papers Respecting the Negotiation with His Majesty's Ministers for a Renewal of the East-India Company's Exclusive Privileges, for a Further Term After the 1st March 1814; Together with a Copy of the Bill as Passed by the Hon. the House of Commons and the Right Hon. the House of Lords, for Continuing in the East-India Company, for a Further Term, the Possession of the British Territories in India, Together with Certain Exclusive Privileges; for Establishing Further Regulations for the Government of the Said Territories, and the Better Administration of Justice Within the Same; and for Regulating the Trade To, and From, the Places Within the Limits of the Said Company's Charter* (1813), pp 151–152.

<sup>20</sup> Great Britain, *A Collection of Statutes Relating to the East India Company: With an Appendix, Containing Acts and Parts of Acts, Relating to Shipping, Duties, Regulations for Export and Import, &c. &c. which in General Do Not Solely Relate to the East India Company ...* (1810), pp 1015–1023, 'An Act for Regulating the Trade of Ireland to and From the East Indies under Certain Conditions and Provisions'.

<sup>21</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, 9 & 12 July 1806, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

encompass all properly equipped ports in Great Britain and Ireland. By 1832 this meant that Dublin, Belfast and Cork were approved for warehouses for East Indian goods. Cork's bonded warehouses were approved as special security areas.<sup>22</sup>

However, Cork's commerce with Great Britain was focused almost in its entirety on England itself, especially England's southern and western ports such as London, Bristol and Liverpool. Scotland was too far removed from Cork to become a major trading partner, especially as Bristol and Liverpool would have had far more lucrative markets. In terms of the East Indian trade, although there was limited provision made for ships to land in Cork it would not have been sufficient to represent a major commercial venture. Cork merchants already had long standing connections with London's mercantile community and a pre-existing trade with them. They could purchase colonial luxuries from middlemen there. Cork relied heavily on British shipping to move its produce around the world and this developed partially in response to the inherent cost and risk involved in operating ships. To the minds of such risk averse merchants it would have made far more sense, both financially and commercially, to use these same networks to access valuable colonial produce.

## **Legislative Restrictions, Free Trade and the Union**

### ***Eighteenth Century Restrictions***

Starting at the end of the seventeenth century and continuing up to the 1770s the British political establishment began moving to protect indigenous industrial development. This manifested itself in a number of legislative and commercial restrictions. From 1700 the importation of silks and calicoes were forbidden, the export of textile machinery banned, and the emigration of artisans restricted. The woollen industry was the central concern of much of this legislation. This manifested itself in the limitation of Irish wool exports to Britain.<sup>23</sup> The Cattle Acts restricted the pre-existing live cattle trade from Ireland to Britain.

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<sup>22</sup> David Steel, *The Ship-Master's Assistant, and Owner's Manual.*, 1832, p. 617.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1969), pp 85–86.

Furthermore, the Navigation Acts curtailed the Irish export trade and forced Irish merchants to rely on English merchants to conduct much of their foreign trade. Denis O'Hearn has argued that the Cattle and Wool Acts forced a transition to provisioning and linen respectively that would not have come about otherwise. Ultimately they operated as means for Britain to exert its hegemony not only over Ireland, but also over the Atlantic trade as a whole through the ability to restrict or curtail the supply of such provisions to continental powers.<sup>24</sup>

The Navigation Acts and other commercial restrictions cost Irish merchants dearly. Although the Cattle and Wool Acts helped foster a provisioning trade with foreign powers, they restricted Irish merchants' ability to import from British colonies, instead forcing them to rely on re-exports through Britain. Combined with shipping on British account this cost the Irish merchants dearly, both because of the value of the voyage and the more valuable return voyage with colonial goods accrued to British account. This remained a sticking point until the passage of free trade legislation. Some loopholes temporarily permitted trade with the East Indies and the West Indies, but these were the exceptions to the rule.<sup>25</sup> Cullen argues that this structure of the export trade actually benefitted Cork and Dublin. Shipping on British account increased the mixed composition of the financial sector: it quickened the movement of peripheral trade to central locations and increased the number of commissioned deals being undertake through Cork and Dublin.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the results of these restrictions were detailed in a 1750 report on the state of Irish trade

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<sup>24</sup> Denis O'Hearn, 'Ireland in the Atlantic Economy' in Terrence McDonough, (ed.), *Was Ireland a Colony? Economy, Politics, Ideology and Culture in Nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin ; Portland, OR, 2005), pp 8–10.

<sup>25</sup> Alan K. Smith, *Creating a World Economy: Merchant Capital, Colonialism, and World Trade, 1400-1825* (Boulder, Colo, 1991), pp 153–156; Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York, 2007), p. 96; Steel, *The Ship-Master's Assistant, and Owner's Manual*.

<sup>26</sup> L.M. Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses' in T. C. Smout and L. M. Cullen (eds), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History 1600-1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp 171–172.



But after some years they found [a] way of salting, barrelling, and exporting their beef. So that in lieu of exporting 70,000 head of live cattle to England...which they manufactured afterwards, and exported, and had all the hides and tallow into the bargain. Ireland now manufactures and exports that Beef to the value of £200,000 per annum, of butter near £200,000 more...and about 3,000 raw hides to England and 70,000 raw hides to France, Spain &c where they are tanned to the vast advantage of our enemies and manifest loss of England and Ireland.<sup>27</sup>

Although this extract treats the changes as an abject loss to both Britain and Ireland, this was not necessarily the case. Rather than remaining the food basket for the empire, where primary produce was exported to Britain for further processing, Ireland had readjusted and was now completing much of the processing of secondary produce from the burgeoning provisioning trade indigenously. A proto-industrial environment developed around the provisioning trade and there was nowhere that could benefit more from this than Cork. Moreover, as the authors emphasized, Ireland was also developing trade with other European powers, broadening and deepening connections with the continent established by Irish migration there from the 1600s onwards. However, reliance on British or foreign shipping limited the ability to exploit these connections. Despite an increase in shipping requirements, the tonnage of Irish shipping decreased by nearly twenty five per cent from 1723 to 1772, suggesting a crucial weakness in the potential for Cork's trade.<sup>28</sup> A further trend these seventeenth century restrictions initiated was the increasingly dominant position that Britain began to occupy in Ireland's trade. Exports to England increased from 45 per cent in 1700 to 85 per cent in 1800 and England's share of imports rose from 54 to 79 per cent. Much of this increased importation from Britain was composed of colonial goods, which Ireland could not import directly.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John Perceval Egmont, *A Representation of the State of the Trade of Ireland, Laid before the House of Lords of England, on Tuesday the 10th of April, 1750, On Occasion of a Bill before that House, for Laying a Duty on Irish Sail Cloth Imported into Great-Britain*. (Dublin, 1750), pp 18–19.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland, from the Period of the Restoration* (London, 1903), pp 77–78.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bartlett, 'Ireland, Empire, and Union, 1690-1801' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford history of the British Empire companion series, Oxford ; New York, 2004), p. 64.

### ***Free Trade***

The passage of the Act of Union marked the turn of the nineteenth century, tying Ireland politically and economically to the United Kingdom. For quite some time Ireland and the Irish legislature had been subordinated to the Westminster parliament, especially since the late seventeenth century, but this was nonetheless a radical restructuring of the nature of Anglo-Irish relations. The Irish parliament would be abolished, customs rates rationalised and exchequers merged. No longer would Ireland be the 'second kingdom'. The passing of the Act of Union was the crowning moment in twenty years of dramatic political, economic and social upheaval in Ireland. It was, and still remains, one of the most contentious issues in Irish and British history; it fundamentally altered not just the Irish political system, but also that of Britain. Political stratagems, opinions and disputes that otherwise would have remained Irish affairs became topics for discussion in the Imperial parliament, a fact that politicians such as O'Connell and Parnell took advantage of. The question under examination here is not the political legacy of the Act of Union, but how it impacted Ireland's commercial community. The twenty-year period prior to the Act of Union saw some of the most dramatic shifts for nineteenth century Irish development. Political, economic, and international events, many of which were outside the control of Ireland's mercantile community, set the scene for the future evolution of Ireland's industrial and commercial character. The restrictions in place since the seventeenth century were slowly dismantled. By the late 1770s international affairs set in motion a series of changes that would have a dramatic impact on Ireland's merchants. The American Revolution led to a number of important developments in terms of Anglo-Irish relations. The instability caused by the Revolutionary War in the American colonies provided an added impetus to the push in Ireland for greater autonomy as well as presenting a unique opportunity for Ireland's merchants to seize upon.

Throughout the eighteenth century Britain had placed trade embargos on Ireland during times of war. The practice both served to deprive their enemies of valuable provisions for their colonies as well as boosting the supplies available to the British military. These restrictions were less than popular with Irish merchants,

with numerous petitions sent by representative bodies in Ireland in an attempt to ameliorate them. In 1776 the Committee of Merchants in Cork petitioned the King to ask him to grant permission to provision non-prohibited shipping and they also sought permission to ship to Great Britain without convoy. In one of the 1776 petitions, signed by 488 inhabitants of the city, they stated their position in relation to the embargoes imposed because of the American Revolutionary War:

[We] now most humbly supplicate your majesty to remove those evils of which we complain [the embargo]. To direct the sword to be sheathed. That our commerce may be restored, and that economy, union, peace and liberty may be permanently established thro' all parts of the empire.<sup>30</sup>

The restrictions on Ireland's ability to trade with the outside world, combined with limitations on access to British markets, added fuel to the free trade argument.

With the majority of Britain's colonial markets off limits, and trade with the Continent curtailed, where could they sell their wares? Irish merchants felt that the restrictions they laboured under were destroying indigenous Irish industries. The following year the Cork merchants re-petitioned the Lord Lieutenant arguing that they were close to losing their provisions trade with Spain, Portugal and Holland.<sup>31</sup> At least a portion of the trade going through Holland was re-exported to supply France, so from that perspective there was at least some justification for limiting this trade. Throughout the eighteenth century there was evidence of Irish and Dutch merchants cooperating to evade British restrictions. During the War of the Austrian Succession Irish beef exports to the Dutch rapidly expanded, with beef sent from Cork to the French Caribbean under the flag of Dutch firms.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore in March 1780 the Governor of the Leeward Islands informed the

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<sup>30</sup> Letter to the Treasury transmitting the copy of a representation from the city of Cork for the embargo to be taken off cheese and butter and for ships to be allowed to take on sufficient provisions for their crews, 23 Nov. 1776, Privy Council and Privy Council Office: Miscellaneous Unbound Papers, PC 1/11/30, TNA; Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, 2002), p. 158; Letter to Hobart, 5th Jan 1793; Reply from Hobart, 26 Jan 1793, U401/ 0105, U401/ 0151, Committee of Merchants Papers, CCCA.

<sup>31</sup> Alice Murray, 'A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland, from the Period of the Restoration' pp. 190–193.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas M. Truxes, 'Dutch-Irish Cooperation in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Wartime Atlantic' in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, x, no. 2 (2012), p. 309.

British Treasury that ships cleared from Cork traded with the French through the Dutch colony of St. Eustatius. The following year, due to a declaration of war between Britain and the United Provinces, this clandestine trade was redirected through Ostend in the Austrian Netherlands.<sup>33</sup> In fact Cork had pre-existing ties to Ostend, with one James Tobin having established a short-lived company there. The Tobin family later developed ventures in Nantes and the East Indies.<sup>34</sup> British restrictions were not to stand in the way of a tidy profit. However, the Iberian Peninsula was a valuable trading partner for Irish merchants and its loss would deal a devastating blow to Ireland's commerce. At this time imports from Portugal into Ireland were overtaking those of France, especially imports of port wine. With the loss of the Portuguese trade they would also lose the transshipment market for their colonial provisions to South America.

By 1782 many of these grievances were being addressed. The Irish Parliament had gained greater legislative independence with the repeal of Poyning's Law, which had restricted their activities. Furthermore, a degree of free trade had been achieved. The process of liberalising Ireland's commercial enterprises was not a smooth one. Increased political, social and military agitation had forced the hand of Westminster. The Irish Volunteers had become a thorn in the side of the political powers. The Volunteers were an armed body of Protestants that gathered to compensate for the reduction of the military presence in Ireland due to troops being sent to fight in America. Although they had assembled under the auspices of defending the crown against the traitorous Americans, they also became involved in political agitation, demanding greater Irish freedoms in return. A gathering of Volunteers in College Green in 1779 saw the artillery drape banners over their cannons, with a number bearing the phrases 'free trade or a speedy revolution' and 'Free trade or this'. The implication was neither subtle nor ambiguous and this was one of a number of similar demonstrations in Dublin that

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<sup>33</sup> Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783*, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses', p. 169.

forced the passage of free trade legislation.<sup>35</sup> Fifty-six Volunteer corps were extant in Cork during this period and of these only eleven had existed prior to 1778.<sup>36</sup>

Although the passage of free trade saw the Volunteers march through the city and discharge guns on The Mall, the Cork Volunteer groups were more restrained than their Dublin counterparts. Dickson explains this as partially due to the lack of artisan guilds, present in Dublin and Belfast, to ferment the patriotic cause in Cork.<sup>37</sup> However, despite their restraint the Cork Volunteers were still a potential threat. In 1792, during a period of increased Catholic agitation, the *Cork Gazette* noted that the Cork Volunteer corps were seeing substantial new recruits and a re-established Cork cavalry would be 'of singular advantage for making excursions into the country'.<sup>38</sup> At the same time when Great Britain was losing hold on her American colonies, she also faced potential insurrection in Ireland. James Livesey described it as more of a reflection of the momentary weakness of the British establishment than the power of Ireland's position, but either way it led to the removal of some of the restrictions on Ireland's trade, giving her greater access to the valuable colonial markets.<sup>39</sup>

Although free trade had been established it was far from perfect. Certain restrictions, especially regarding trade with Britain, remained in place. Freedom from the Navigation Acts placed Ireland into increased competition with British manufacturers. Even shortly after a measure of free trade was implemented there were questions as to how 'free' the trade actually was. A Guild of Merchants petition to the Irish House of Commons in 1781 questioned whether the promises of free trade would ultimately prove illusory, since war restricted trade anyway.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, pp 211–214; Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the survival of the United Kingdom, 1707-2007* (1st ed, Oxford ; New York, 2012), pp 71–72.

<sup>36</sup> James O'Donovan, 'The Anatomy of the Volunteers in Cork, 1775-82: Part 1' in *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society*, LXXXVII (1982), p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 437–8, 444–5.

<sup>38</sup> *The Cork Gazette and General Advertiser*, 28 Nov 1792.

<sup>39</sup> James Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785' in *Journal of British Studies*, lii, no. 01 (2013), p. 116.

<sup>40</sup> *The Parliamentary Register: Or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland* (1784), p. 15.

To cap all this off there was uncertainty surrounding whether or not the free trade achieved by Ireland was ever intended to be permanent. In order to rectify some of these issues measures were taken to place the freedoms Ireland had gained on a more clearly defined basis. A series of commercial propositions intended to regulate trade between Great Britain and Ireland were proposed and debated in the mid-1780s. Ultimately the Irish Parliament rejected these propositions, with some fearing they would lead to unification by the backdoor. The debates provide insight into the union that was soon to come. In Pitt's words,

There will never be any real peace between the British and Irish ministry until such a time as there is a final settlement between the two countries in point of trade, for until that happens... the giving of one thing will only cause another to be demanded.<sup>41</sup>

These Commercial Propositions and the difficulties of implementing them served as a testing ground for the Act of Union. Many of the issues that arose here, especially those raised by the British mercantile community, were addressed by that later legislation.

### ***Commercial Propositions***

In 1785 the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Thomas Orde, laid before the parliament eleven commercial propositions on trade. After several months of passing backwards and forwards between parliaments and legislators those eleven propositions swelled to twenty, but the general intention of Orde's propositions is illuminating. Essentially Orde proposed a customs union. Taxes on both foreign and domestic goods traded between Ireland and Britain would be equal, there would be prohibitory tariffs on foreign imports if the same article was produced by either country and surplus hereditary revenue would be paid to support the Royal Navy. Marx, expressing a similar view to John Curran, noted that the changes in tariffs and taxation would sacrifice Ireland's Continental and American trade.<sup>42</sup> John Curran, a

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce With Ireland, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/323 ff. 133, BL.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, 'Ireland from the American Revolution to the Union of 1801 Extracts and Notes' in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: [collected works]* (London, 1975), pp 239–240; John Philpot Curran, *The Speeches of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran*, ed. Thomas Davis, pp 46–47.

definitive opponent of the propositions, argued that the English feared that free trade for Ireland would lead to Irish goods out-competing English goods on the British market. This analysis is borne out by the repeated invectives made by various British representatives. They argued that increased Irish access to imperial markets would both lead to Irish goods undercutting British manufactures as well as supposedly an increase in smuggling of colonial goods via Ireland to take advantage of lower Irish duties. Curran refused to accept the revised twenty propositions as 'each addition [was] a fresh injury.' He dismissed the entirety of the propositions, stating that 'we cannot ratify their slavery.'<sup>43</sup> Curran feared that the propositions would be a stepping stone to the introduction of a union of the two countries, a concept he abhorred as pre-empting the annihilation of Ireland. Despite the propositions being examined and re-examined and debated and re-debated, there was a view that the revised propositions, 'gave us nothing in substance but the re-export trade which we would have gotten without it.'<sup>44</sup>

A letter dated 1784 from Richard Atkinson indicates how merchants in Britain viewed the prospect of free trade for Ireland. As a director of the East India Company Atkinson was a thorough mercantilist. His views can be summarised thusly: firstly, that Ireland's trade with the sugar plantations was a gift from Britain and the sugar islands were more valuable than Irish exports to them. Matters of political expediency were irrelevant. Secondly, without harmonisation of taxes and duties between Britain and Ireland freedom of commerce was a threat, either due to price differentials or smuggling. Thirdly, that Irish labour was so cheap 'that unless the manufactures of Ireland in general are prohibited those of England must be ruined'. Finally, that no benefits should be accrued to Ireland that could threaten any aspect of British trade or manufacture.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Curran, *The Speeches of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran*, p. 47,53.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Grattan, 'An Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled, a Speech to the Earl of Clare, on the Subject of a Legislative Union, between Great Britain and Ireland', p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Observations on the Commercial Propositions by Richard Atkinson,' The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/321 ff 206, BL.

Petitions of contemporary British manufacturers echoed these views. They based their opposition on the perceived advantages of the Irish manufacturers as well as the potential threat to indigenous industries. Although all seem to be of the mind that Ireland and the Irish were 'British', they nevertheless were fearful of the lower duties, taxes, and cost base of the Irish market. Approximately fifty petitions from British merchants and manufacturers survive in the Pitt papers.

Unsurprisingly, these petitions centred on the more industrialised areas of Britain (see Map 3-1). If the petitions from general merchant or manufacturing interest groups are put to one side, the majority of the remaining petitions came from those involved in the textiles industries and to a lesser extent metallurgy.<sup>46</sup> The fears they expressed follow the same lines as those of Atkinson, albeit tailored to their respective industries.

Although they all were 'infused with the sincerest wishes for the prosperity of Ireland' they were 'at same time... justly alarmed at some of the resolutions for a commercial arrangement which has lately passed in the Irish parliament'.<sup>47</sup> One of the complaints was that since the changes in 1779, duty differentials between Ireland and Britain meant that 'illicit importations ha[d] greatly increased, to the manifest injury of the Irish revenue, and the fair traders of both countries'.<sup>48</sup> Duty differentials not only gave 'the manufacturers... in that country a decided advantage... in the American market', they also 'operate[d] as a bounty and induce[d] workmen to leave this kingdom and settle there [Ireland]'.<sup>49</sup> The loss of experienced craftspeople to a potential neighbouring competitor was a disturbing prospect for Britain. Ireland had already demonstrated some success in their native textile industries and a drain of expertise from Britain's textile regions to Ireland would further increase competition. Though this was perceived as a serious threat, by the time of the full Union quite the opposite turned out to be true. Rather than

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<sup>46</sup> Petitions from British Merchants and Manufacturers, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/321, BL.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Petitions from Paisley ff 89-91.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Petitions from Glasgow & Paisley ff 87-88.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Petitions from Nail and Iron Manufacturers Dudley ff 101-102; Petitions from the merchants and manufacturers of Birmingham ff 93-97.



the migration of British textile workers to Ireland, Irish cotton workers from the Lagan Valley areas moved to Scotland to take advantage of the growth of the Scottish textile industry.<sup>50</sup> Of course the objections were also framed in a wider imperial context and Ireland's expectations based on her contribution to the imperial enterprise. It was hard for the British mercantile and landed communities to fathom how Ireland could gain such benefits, because 'not having contributed a proper quota towards the general expenses of the Empire she cannot in justice expect a participation of all its advantages'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Brenda Collins, 'The Origins of Irish Immigration to Scotland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-90* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup>Petitions from the Clergy, Merchants &c. Lancaster, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/321 ff 135-137, BL.



*Map 3-1 Petitions opposing the Commercial Propositions*<sup>52</sup>

How well-founded were such fears? In 1784 Dublin-based merchant Edward Forbes corresponded with Christopher Champlin, his American counterpart, regarding their future trade dealings now that America was independent. He stated that Ireland could produce all of the same types of goods as England and that Irish goods were cheaper than those shipped from London.<sup>53</sup> In some respects this letter echoes many of the fears British merchants expressed at this time. They felt that their Irish counterparts would be able to destroy their industry through lower duties, lower cost bases and access to British goods. However, in terms of provisioning and some textile exports the free trade legislation had a negative

<sup>52</sup> Petitions from British Merchants and Manufacturers, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO. 30/8/321, BL.

<sup>53</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800: 1775-1800* (Boston, 1914), p. 199 Edward Forbes to Christopher Champlin and Samuel Fowler and Son, 10th April 1784.

impact on Ireland's Portuguese trade. At several stages in the early 1780s Portugal had refused to accept Irish manufactures or that the provisions of the *Methuen Treaty* should still apply to Ireland.<sup>54</sup>

Pitt's Commercial Propositions ultimately failed to pass. The Cabinet finally decided to stop the commercial arrangements in 1786 after numerous setbacks and vocal opposition. The failure of the propositions to pass was due to the fears of British manufacturing interests that they granted far too much to Ireland and the fears of some sections of the Irish population that they represented a form of insidious union of the two countries. Orde sought to move Ireland's relationship with Britain to a point where it operated on a more equal level, where the two economies were closely intertwined in a state of 'dependent equality'. This position would not win much support from the industrial areas of Britain. Furthermore, while the hereditary payments proposition was at best problematic in the Irish parliament, Orde's suggestion that it should be used to create a small fleet for Ireland was never going to garner support in Westminster.<sup>55</sup> Alvin Jackson, while acknowledging these reasons for the failure of the propositions, points to a far more fundamental issue that blocked their passage; the Irish economy in the late eighteenth century was vibrant.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, the lessons of the debate would not be forgotten. The petitions and grievances would be somewhat addressed by the Act of Union.

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<sup>54</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, p. 220,227.

<sup>55</sup> James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780s* (Studies in Irish History, Cork, 1992), pp 96, 102.

<sup>56</sup> Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the survival of the United Kingdom, 1707-2007* (Oxford ; New York, 2012), p. 73.

## ***Act of Union***

'This dog-collar union'<sup>57</sup>

The push for full unification began in 1798, though some form of union had been long mooted between Ireland and Great Britain and the Commercial Propositions brought it closer. Opinions on the Union were complex and divided the Irish parliament. There was a popular hostility towards unification, with manufacturers and merchants expressing fears of increased taxation and an influx of cheap British goods. However, legislators were more concerned with the political aspects of unification than the commercial or financial arrangements.<sup>58</sup> Both sides deliberately embellished the truth with hyperbole. Lord Clare stated that by supporting the Union he wished 'to advance [Ireland] from the degraded post of a mercenary province, to the proud station of an integral and governing member of the greatest empire in the world'.<sup>59</sup> On the other side of the debate Grattan argued that the costs of the Union were underestimated and manufacturers felt that Ireland was not in a position to profit from it.<sup>60</sup> The 1780s and 1790s had been a relatively prosperous time for Ireland. It seemed to many observers that a Union could offer little that had not already been gained to some degree by free trade and that in fact they could even lose out in the face of direct competition with British manufacturers.

The commercial and financial aspects of the Act of Union were contained in Articles six and seven. Article six had particular importance for Irish commercial interests as it provided for full access to the colonial trade and a customs union between Ireland and Britain. Some restrictions were maintained, with duties on prescribed articles including textiles until 1821, and full free trade did not come into

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<sup>57</sup> Karl Marx, 'Outline of a Report on the Irish Question Delivered to the German Workers' Educational Society in London on December 16, 1867' in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: [collected works]* (London, 1975), pp 199–200.

<sup>58</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, pp 315–317.

<sup>59</sup> John Fitzgibbon Earl of Clare, *The Speech of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Clare, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, in the House of Lords of Ireland, on a Motion Made by Him, on Monday, February 10, 1800, ...* (1800), pp 83–84.

<sup>60</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, pp 334–337.

force until 1824. Article seven dealt with tax harmonisation and the contribution to the government coffers, setting the ratio at 2/17 for Ireland. Although the debates centred on the political ramifications of the Union, these two articles were not overlooked. Lord Castlereagh, an advocate for the Union, argued that ultimately Article six would benefit Ireland, as it would benefit sail cloth manufacture, though perhaps the cotton industries might suffer from the loss of protective duties. Furthermore, the debt ratio had been based on his calculations of the correct proportions of Irish finances to British.

Foster argued that Castlereagh's calculations failed to consider the respective shipping abilities of both countries and that he erroneously credited the benefits of Irish goods shipped on British account to Ireland. He further contended that Castlereagh deliberately overstated the financial problems in Ireland and any change in duties would destroy Ireland's manufactures to the benefit of Britain.<sup>61</sup> As British merchants financed the bulk of Irish trade, the benefits of returns, such as the import of sugar and other cash crops, accrued to Britain.<sup>62</sup> This argument has plenty of supporting evidence, with the Portuguese pointing to the lack of an indigenous Irish navy, the disparity between departing vessels and returning ships, and simply the locations from where Ireland was importing such goods. This was one of the primary arguments posited against Castlereagh's estimation of the financial benefits of the Union, as he had credited this benefit to Ireland's account.

It is difficult to assess the level of contemporaneous local mercantile support for the Union. Much of the public debate centred on politicians' views and their statements should be taken with caution. Similarly, the newspapers should be treated with care, but they do provide a slightly less biased view than those of the pamphleteers. In the lead up to the Union debates in parliament *Finn's Leinster Journal* had regular front page articles with petitions of support for the Union from much of Ireland, mainly focused on Ulster and North Leinster, though parts of the West and South were also represented. However, the support expressed in this

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp 320–327.

<sup>62</sup> R. C. Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii, no. 3 (1985), pp 338–339.

paper was not universal, with the bankers and merchants of the city of Dublin rejecting any moves towards union and resolving 'that impressed with every sentiment of loyalty to our King, and affectionate attachment to the British connexion, we conceive that to agitate in Parliament a question or legislative union between this kingdom and Great Britain would be highly dangerous and impolitic'.<sup>63</sup> Several months later, representing the same organisation, Dublin banker William Digges Latouche, stated that the Union would make any damage caused by this legislation 'irrevocable'.<sup>64</sup> The fear being generally expressed was that any union between the two countries would be disastrous to the burgeoning Irish industries and be a massive step backwards on the achievements since free trade. This fear took many forms; there was the fear of the loss of protective duties, fear of an inability to compete on the British markets and a fear of increased taxation.

In some cases this fear was of the more mundane legal implications. J.C. Beresford, M.P. for Dublin, brought a petition to the Irish Commons from the Booksellers and Stationers, who argued that union would destroy their trade. However, it was his contention that their petition should be ignored, as their trade was based on continually pirating works on the London market and re-selling them in Ireland.<sup>65</sup> The complaint from the booksellers is an interesting one, as similar objections had been raised by the Speaker, Edmund Pery, regarding the one of Pitt's twenty Commercial Propositions dealing with copyright and potential damage to the Irish printing industry.<sup>66</sup> Similarly the Irish parliament had earlier complained that the usual quantities of hats, stockings and shoes that the Portuguese liked to smuggle from Ireland as English goods were now being rejected by Portugal.<sup>67</sup> The uncertainty was damaging Ireland's more illicit trades. Not all of the commercial opposition to the passing of the Act of Union stemmed from altruistic concern for Ireland's economic growth.

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<sup>63</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 20 December 1798

<sup>64</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 18 April 1799

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 March 1800.

<sup>66</sup> Kelly, *Prelude to Union*, pp 145–146..

<sup>67</sup> Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785', pp 117–118.

Earlier mercantile support for closer ties with Britain had been based on an erroneous supposition. It was believed that the Irish Union would be similar to that of the Scottish Union of 1707 and would give the merchants increased access to British markets, while allowing them to benefit from the protectionism that was a defining characteristic of eighteenth-century mercantilism. The Scottish Union gave access to English domestic and colonial markets, while protecting Scottish production under protective tariffs, which would not continue during the free trade period. Devine argues that the 1707 Union was far more favourable than the 1801 Union as the former left merchants free from English interference. Furthermore, he argues that Scotland was not as dependent on the Union for growth and simply used it to enhance pre-existing systems to create a successful modernisation of the economy.<sup>68</sup> But the Scottish Union was a century earlier and undertaken in a very different political and economic climate. By 1800 the international commercial environment had changed irrevocably. Free trade and more open borders were to define nineteenth-century trade. Although there seems to have been a belief that Irish merchants deserved the protections they felt they were due under the Union, times had changed and laissez-faire was the order of the day.

The depression that hit in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars saw a reversal of the fears of the eighteenth-century British merchants. Overstocked British industries began to dump goods, mainly textiles, on the Irish markets, crippling indigenous industries and effectively devastating them for much of the remainder of the nineteenth century. Textile manufacturers around Ireland were devastated, bar those in Ulster, with the majority failing due to insufficient industrial development and specialisation. The Southern textile regions were most severely hit, with textile towns such as Bandon left in dire straits. The devastation of the Bandon textile manufacturers saw up to 3,000 reliant on charity by 1830, a further 3,000 emigrating to Britain and Bandon becoming one of the prime Irish

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<sup>68</sup> T. M. Devine, 'The English Connection and Irish and Scottish Development in the Eighteenth Century' in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Ireland and Scotland, 1600 - 1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp 13–15;17–18.

recruiting grounds for the British navy.<sup>69</sup> Many of the former textile workers left for the manufacturing regions of Britain to secure employment. It was exactly what British merchants had predicted would happen to British textiles if the commercial propositions had been implemented, except in reverse. Furthermore, the Napoleonic Wars sped up the implementation of the merging of the exchequers. Unexpected war expenditure had led to Irish expenditure ballooning from £41 million before the Union to £148 million by 1815. Amalgamating the exchequers and removing the proportional contribution system remedied Ireland's difficult financial situation.<sup>70</sup>

Liam Kennedy identifies three essential results of the Union: first, the abolition of customs duties. Second, it saw the harmonisation of taxation and the exchequers. Third, it moved economic power from Dublin to Westminster.<sup>71</sup> In terms of the previous arrangements what benefits accrued from these changes? Irish merchants and politicians had sought the abolition of customs duties for several decades. They had already achieved a certain level of this by the 1780s. There was a fear that a full customs union would not benefit some Irish manufacturers, because they would lose the benefits of protective duties keeping British manufactures out of Ireland.<sup>72</sup> Of course much of the contemporaneous debate was rather subjective. The pro-Union advocate, Lord Castlereagh, disputed the Union's potential harm to Irish manufactures. It is a matter of perspective, but with hindsight those reticent about a full customs union were probably closer to the reality of what happened. Without the scant industrial protections available, a spiralling level of debt and loss of investment capital to Britain made it difficult to keep Irish industries afloat. However, no one in 1800 could have foreseen the length or impact of the Napoleonic Wars. Although contemporaneous anti-Union campaigners were generally proved correct, it was in many respects due to the

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<sup>69</sup> Andy Bielenberg, 'The Growth and Decline of a Textile Town: Bandon 1770-1840' in *Journals of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xcvi (1992), pp 111–119.

<sup>70</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, p. 376.

<sup>71</sup> Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland*, pp 315–317.



repercussions of that conflict. If the wars had ended sooner, and had the War of 1812 been averted, it is possible that Irish trade may have rebounded stronger than ever. However, it is important to separate contemporaneous arguments from the nationalistic views on the Union that arose with Daniel O'Connell. Although there is much truth in these invectives they were written in a different context and with a different purpose.

The delay and staggering of the full implementation of the Union's provisions makes it difficult to attribute responsibility for the changes in the structure of the Irish economy to any one event. However, the Irish textile industry's collapse in the 1820s can be taken as an example of the realisation of the fears of some sectors of the Irish economy, especially as it was one of the few relatively successful indigenous industries. A combination of a widespread economic depression in the 1820s, in conjunction with improved production methods in Britain and the lack of Irish protective duties, led to the dumping of British textiles on the Irish market, devastating native industry. It is difficult to definitively attribute this to the Act of Union, but the lack of any customs barriers cannot have helped the ailing Irish textile industry and it certainly enabled the penetration of British goods into the market. Shifting the economic decision-making from Dublin to London took away the merchants' ability to deal directly with their representatives, while also distancing them both in real and political terms from the decision-making process. However, the main issue with the move of Irish representation to Britain relates to the lack of unity among Irish MPs in Westminster. They rarely presented a unified face for Irish commercial interests, more often than not reverting to parochial bickering. Of course they should not be judged too harshly for this. The early nineteenth century was still decades away from a whip-based parliamentary system. In many respects, what more loyalty would a Cork MP have to his Dublin counterpart than a Bristol MP who might be of more use in the future, or a Liverpool MP with similar trade interests?

By 1843 Cork's merchants again queried Ireland's commercial agreements with Britain: 'Are Irish interests, as in this case, to be always sacrificed, and

sacrificed to those of England? Such would be the question of any man who remembered that “those countries” were united.<sup>73</sup> The Union, by giving Britain a greater input in Irish political and economic affairs, created unequal development between the two countries.<sup>74</sup> It forced Ireland into a situation where she had essentially become a peripheral annex within the United Kingdom. This oversimplifies both Irish development in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as well as the Union itself. Irish trade had gone through a gradual re-focusing onto British markets since the mid-eighteenth century. With the victory over Napoleon in 1815 it was unlikely that Ireland would find any other market with such a voracious appetite for her produce. Ireland had been ignoring more distant markets. It was not solely a myopic view of the potential for development in trade with Britain. Despite the many nefarious means used to circumvent British restrictions on trade, the almost constant series of international conflicts during the latter half of the eighteenth century impacted upon trade. Furthermore, Irish industrial expansion in the late eighteenth century relied on external markets that depended on Britain, such as the West Indies and American Colonies. Even after gaining free trade in the 1780s much of Ireland’s trade with these regions went on British shipping and accounts. Ireland did not maintain her own commercial fleet, nor did she have sufficient credit to offer the generous terms that could be had in Britain.

Delays in the implementation of the Union’s full measures make ascertaining its true impact problematic. What is undeniable though is that the Act of Union left one of the most enduring marks on Ireland’s political and commercial character. In 1861 Goldwin Smith asserted that ‘It must readily be granted that unless the Union was for the good of both parties, it was for the good of neither’.<sup>75</sup> For Smith there was greater advantage in the Union of the two countries: Ireland could benefit from what Britain had learned in the art of politics and the Irish would be in a position to support parliamentary democracy. There was no feasible

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<sup>73</sup> ‘English and Irish Interests’ in *Freemans Journal*, 2 Feb. 1843.

<sup>74</sup> O’Hearn, ‘Was Ireland a Colony?’, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Goldwin, *Irish History and Irish Character*, p. 179.

alternative for him as there was 'no basis whereon Irish nationality can be established'.<sup>76</sup> Smith wrote in a period when the foundations of the modern European nation state were being laid.

Was the Union good for Ireland and Cork and, if not, was it to the detriment of both countries? Jackson argues that the Union did not grant Britain economic control over Ireland as that had already been achieved due to the growing eighteenth century dependence Ireland formed on the British economy. He instead points to the Napoleonic Wars as a more substantive changing point.<sup>77</sup> In this regard he agrees with Ó Gráda's argument that the impact of the Union was economically minor, but he does point out that due to the multitude of political issues at the time it is difficult to analyse the role of any single issue in isolation.<sup>78</sup> It is true that the end of the Napoleonic Wars was a far more important event in early nineteenth century Irish development. But would Ireland have suffered as much devastation to burgeoning indigenous textile industries without the access the Union granted British manufacturers? There are a multitude of other factors that have a bearing on the economic depression of the mid-1820s. Nevertheless, the Union marked an important transition point for Ireland, which undoubtedly meant that she lost a fair proportion of agency in her commercial and industrial development. The depression of the 1820s would highlight some of the thorny issues of a union between two economies of such unequal size.

Was the Act of Union a poor choice for Ireland or was it inevitable? C.G. Otway asserted that the old protectionism had been a disaster, that Irish merchants had thought they could create customers by statue through premiums and it was basic weaknesses in Ireland's economy that led to the collapse of the textiles industry.<sup>79</sup> The thirty year period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the onset of the Great Famine did witness a certain amount of de-industrialisation and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp 180–182.

<sup>77</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (2nd ed, Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA, 2010), p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780-1939* (s.l.), 1992), pp 43–46.

<sup>79</sup> Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland*, p. 43.

the foundations of many of Ireland's commercial interests were weakened through overreliance on trade from Britain. There was also a lack of capital investment to develop the limited industrial potential that existed. Some of this may be attributable to the Act of Union, but it can also be linked to improvements in transportation, which brought Ireland much closer to the growing populations of Britain's industrial regions. There was money to be made in supplying the growing British industrial towns and cities and this facilitated a shift towards pasturage in response to market demands. A booming Irish population also meant less incentives to expend capital on fixed investments for small gains in productivity, when it was more expedient to increase the workforce at lower wages than were paid in Britain. De-industrialisation in Ireland resulted from a confluence of many factors, including transport, legislation and population, but it also encompassed credit availability, changes in colonial supply, and wider political and social reform in Europe. Ireland's position so close to the world's largest industrial economy in many respects directed the Irish economy to a position where she supplied the demands of British industrial development, whether this was in terms of labour, raw materials or foodstuffs. It is difficult to support Engel's view that it was, 'the vocation of the Irish people to be shipped over the ocean in order to make way for the cows and sheep', but in rejecting this assertion, it must also be said that it was based on a kernel of truth.<sup>80</sup> Ireland found her position in the Empire and it was mainly to supply the food for industrial cities and soldiers for imperial wars.

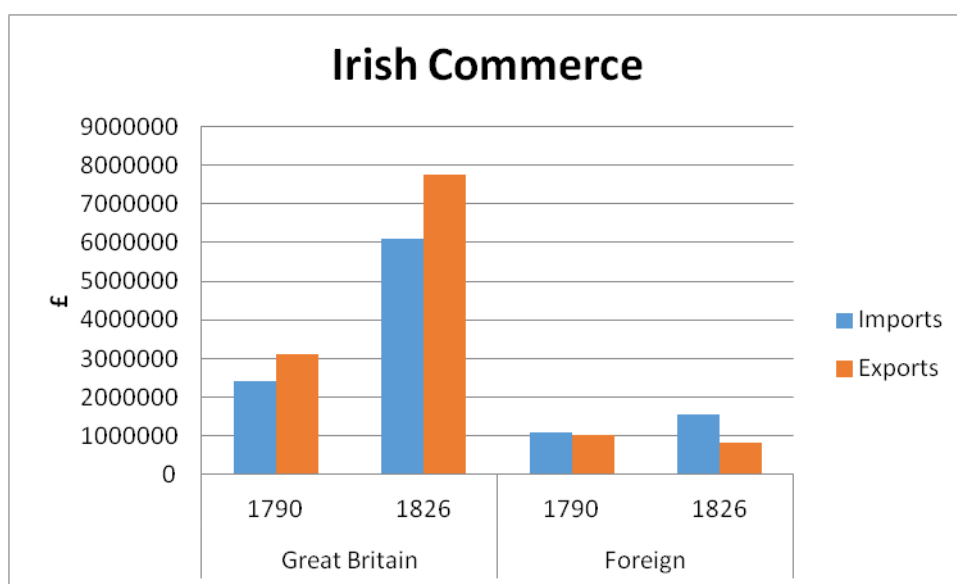
### **Trade Patterns**

As Figure 3-1 shows Ireland's trade with Britain dwarfed that of all other nations combined. In the period between 1790 and 1826 both Irish imports and exports with Britain increased by approximately two hundred and fifty percent. In comparison, trade with foreign powers stayed at a comparatively low level, with some increase in imports, but a decline in the value of exports. This decline is representative of the decline traced in the previous two chapters, partially due to

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<sup>80</sup> Engels, Friedrich, 'The History of Ireland' in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: [collected works]* (London, 1975), p. 161; Here Engels quotes Smith regarding the lack of wheat harvesting in Ireland, Smith Goldwin, *Irish history and Irish character*.

the increasing focus on the British market. In the appendix to the *First Report on the Commercial Relations between France and Great Britain* the growth in Anglo-Irish trade was attributed to the removal of commercial restrictions between Ireland and Great Britain and the languishing of Irish trade with all other parts due to tariffs.<sup>81</sup> The comparative growth rates of trade with Great Britain and trade with foreign powers are quite striking. British trade exploded, whereas foreign trade had stagnated. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: first, there was clearly substantial growth in Irish commerce over this period, with an overall expansion of both exports and imports. Second, this growth depended on the British market and very little had been done to develop foreign commerce. This indicates the level to which the Act of Union had integrated Irish and English commercial interests and increased the dependence of Ireland on Britain, both economically and politically.



*Figure 3-1 Irish commerce*<sup>82</sup>

Much of Ireland's trade was conducted on English account. As discussed in Chapter One the shipping figures for 1804 show over one hundred and twenty vessels leaving Cork for the West Indies, but only a fraction of that number returned. Such a pattern had implications for the manner in which Ireland's trade

<sup>81</sup> First report on the commercial relations between France and Great Britain, addressed to the Right Honourable the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, by George Villiers and John Bowring, with a supplementary report, by John Bowring p. 98 [c. 64] H.C. 1834 xix, 1

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. P. 98 Appendix VI

developed. It added credence to Parnell and Foster's arguments against the Union. They had argued that Castlereagh, in collating his exchequer figures for the benefits of the Union, failed to account for the lost revenue of shipping on British accounts. Money was to be made in shipping trade goods and he had credited this to Ireland's accounts, erroneously or otherwise. More importantly, this meant that although the West Indian trade was lucrative many of the major benefits were not accrued to Ireland, namely the valuable sugar, tobacco and cotton exports to be had from the American trades. Rather than directly importing them from the producing regions, which had been permissible from the 1780s onwards, these goods were shipped in increasing quantities via Britain. The direct trade undertaken was not proportional to the exports sent out from Ireland. Indeed Ireland increasingly relied on Britain for the importation of these commodities.

England had always been the preeminent source for such luxuries, but the dominance of English imports had begun to take on a new character. Until the latter half of the eighteenth century there had been at least a limited trade undertaken between Ireland and Scotland in Scottish re-exports of colonial produce (tobacco and sugar mainly) though admittedly this would not be preferential to a direct trade. For reasons that included a resurgent continental market for Scotland from the 1780s onwards this trade was in decline and not only in a manner that affected Ireland. For a period, when continental markets were essentially closed to British produce, Scotland re-exported much of their colonial imports to Ireland. With the re-opening of the continent to Scottish exports, the relative importance of tobacco exportation to the overall Scottish economy declined and this combined with a greater reliance of Irish merchants on England as the source for such luxuries.<sup>83</sup> As much of this trade focused on the northern counties of Ireland it had few direct implications for Cork, but it exemplifies the increasing dominance of England in Ireland's importation of some of the most valuable consumer goods available in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ireland.

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<sup>83</sup> Laura E. Cochran, 'Scottish-Irish Trade in the Eighteenth Century' in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Ireland and Scotland, 1600 - 1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp 152–153.

An example of these trading patterns is how trade with Ireland's southern region centred on Bristol's trade patterns with the Caribbean. As one of the most important slave trading ports in Britain, and the closest to Cork, it exemplifies the position of Cork's merchant community, both their place in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and their relative position in Britain's larger trading environment with the Americas. Kenneth Morgan, in his excellent work on Bristol's eighteenth century trans-Atlantic trade, details the shipping patterns of the city's merchants throughout that century. The data he gathered demonstrates both the peripheral nature, as well as the inherent value, of Ireland's provisioning industries (Table 3-1). Morgan explicitly identifies the main southern trading ports in this context as Cork, Youghal, Kinsale and Waterford, with Cork having the dominant position. In terms of the trade routes he discusses, only a few do not include Ireland in some regard. These routes in general are approximately twenty per cent of the overall tonnage shipped to these destinations. These figures show that Cork, although occupying an important position in both provisioning these vessels and providing essential information on market prices, was little more than a quick stop to add value to the journey and relay useful information. It was the place where ships could rendezvous with convoys and ensure that the journeys maximised their potential for profit. On none of the voyages that he tabulated did the vessels make the return journey via Ireland. In fact, many of the routes demonstrate opportunism as a deciding factor in stopping in Cork.

This is exemplified by the voyage of the *Sarah* in 1719 from Bristol to the Caribbean via Cork. Three members of the crew stopped in Cork to load three hundred barrels of herrings, which were likely sourced from either Scotland or Scandinavia, as an investment opportunity. These goods were traded in Madeira for wine, which was in turn traded for Muscovado sugar and cotton. Cork-supplied provisions carried weight and it was noted that the ability to supply Irish salted provisions to Caribbean merchants ensured a solid trade of such valuable produce, but it was an ancillary trade to the more valuable goods that formed the basis of these routes. If the prices were too high, the layover in Cork would be abandoned

to maximise profit.<sup>84</sup> Bristol's trade patterns demonstrated in Table 3-1 show that while many vessels may have left Cork for these abundant islands it was not necessarily in their interest to return via the same route. Although Cork was both proximate to Bristol and had reasonably strong trade connections there, only fifteen Irish-owned vessels entered the port of Bristol from 1785-97.<sup>85</sup> Irish merchants conducted their trade on British account and British-owned vessels. Another example of this is in the bills of lading for the Beamish and Crawford firm were mostly for cargoes bound for London, but the other destinations included were Lisbon, Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados, indicating the ultimate destination of Cork produce shipped via Britain.<sup>86</sup> A strong trans-Atlantic provisioning trade did not equate with a high level of Irish owned mercantile ships or a high level of Irish-financed voyages.

Contemporary commentators recognised the problems of how Ireland's foreign trade was undertaken. The Cork-born Richard Cox, who later became Lord Chancellor for Ireland in 1703, wrote to the House of Lords regarding the Woollen Acts and took issue with the structure of the trade, pointing out that much of it was undertaken through English finance and English ships:

they [the Irish] toil for our advantage, they sow and we reap... whatever Ireland gets by trade from the whole world centres in England, and is returned hither by Bills of Exchange from Spain, Holland, France, the West-Indies, and other places. If they gain'd ten millions a year, it would come to England.<sup>87</sup>

Nearly a century later, in 1785, James Laffan noted that because of the interest an Irish merchant paid for a voyage to foreign markets, he was unable to compete with British merchants on the same routes. A British merchant could make a profit of six per cent on a trip, whereas Irish merchants had to sell at a three per cent higher

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<sup>84</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 123–124.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Ó Drisceoil & Ó Drisceoil, *Beamish & Crawford*, p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Cox, *Some Thoughts on the Bill Depending before the Right Honourable the House of Lords, for Prohibiting the Exportation of the Woollen Manufactures of Ireland to Foreign Parts. Humply offer'd to their lordships*. (1698), pp 5–6.



cost on the same goods to break even.<sup>88</sup> In both access to shipping and access to financing Irish merchants had difficulty competing with their British counterparts, so it is understandable that Cork's merchants were willing to transact business for British merchants for a two and a half per cent commission, rather than at their own expense.<sup>89</sup> Cullen contends that this lack of a direct colonial trade and re-export market reduced the need for sophisticated financial institutions.<sup>90</sup> The lack of an indigenous direct trade hampered the development of comprehensive financial institutions that could have provided more favourable terms to merchants. However, in the context of Cork's position in the late eighteenth century it is rather unlikely that this could have happened. A competitive merchant fleet required too much capital and there was little chance that provincial Irish financial institutions could match the prodigious wealth of Britain's major port cities.

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<sup>88</sup> Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785', p. 122.

<sup>89</sup> Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 123.

<sup>90</sup> Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses', pp 170–172.

Destination	Shipping route	Bristol shipping routes								
		1749-55			1756-63			1764-70		
		No. Vessels	Tons	% tons	No	Tons	% tons	No	Tons	% tons
Newfoundland	Bristol-Ireland-Newfoundland-Bristol	3	200	4	5	576	13.2	15	1403	22.2
Newfoundland	Bristol-Ireland-Newfoundland-Europe-Bristol	22	830	16.5	5	490	11.2	3	324	5.1
<b>Total Newfoundland</b>		<b>65</b>	<b>5090</b>	—	<b>49</b>	<b>4369</b>	—	<b>76</b>	<b>6312</b>	—
Philadelphia	Bristol-Ireland-Other Colony-Philadelphia-Other Colony-Bristol	2	190	10.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Philadelphia</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>1780</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Virginia	Bristol-Ireland-Other Colony-Virginia-Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	160	1.4
Virginia	Bristol-Ireland-Virginia-Bristol	—	—	—	1	80	0.5	—	—	—
<b>Total Virginia</b>		—	—	—	<b>101</b>	<b>16117</b>	—	<b>73</b>	<b>11091</b>	—
Jamaica	Bristol-Ireland-Jamaica-Bristol	51	7068	22.5	48	7672	25.2	47	6635	21.4
Jamaica	Bristol-Ireland-Other Colony-Jamaica-Bristol	2	480	1.5	1	200	0.7	2	254	0.8
<b>Total Jamaica</b>		<b>239</b>	<b>31448</b>	—	<b>202</b>	<b>30466</b>	—	<b>215</b>	<b>31028</b>	—
St. Kitts	Bristol-Ireland-St. Kitts-Bristol	6	480	5.1	5	480	6	3	340	3.2
St. Kitts	Bristol-Ireland-St. Kitts-Other Colony-Bristol	6	480	5.1	5	590	7.4	6	804	7.6
<b>Total St. Kitts</b>		<b>96</b>	<b>9400</b>	—	<b>66</b>	<b>7948</b>	—	<b>84</b>	<b>10527</b>	—
Barbados	Bristol-Ireland-Barbados-Bristol	8	660	9.8	7	610	8	2	270	2.7
<b>Total Barbados</b>		<b>76</b>	<b>6731</b>	—	<b>76</b>	<b>7584</b>	—	<b>81</b>	<b>9903</b>	—

Table 3-1 Bristol Shipping Routes via Ireland that stopped in Cork, 1749-70<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.55-88

## ***Imports***

Solar has described Irish trade in the late eighteenth century as a classical trade due to the fact that there was little to no overlap between imports and exports. Agricultural goods, such as provisions and textiles, dominated Irish exports, whereas exotic goods such as sugar and tobacco dominated imports.<sup>92</sup> Nowhere better is this exemplified than in Cork's trade with Great Britain. In fact Cork was probably the best representation of Solar's view in early nineteenth century Ireland due to both the agricultural basis of its export trade and connections with the trans-Atlantic (and to a far lesser extent the East Indies) trade. However, although a quarter of all Irish trade was still with foreign countries in 1780 (Figure 3-2), the value of Ireland's foreign trade remained broadly the same in 1826 and the ratio drastically shifted in favour of British trades in relative terms.

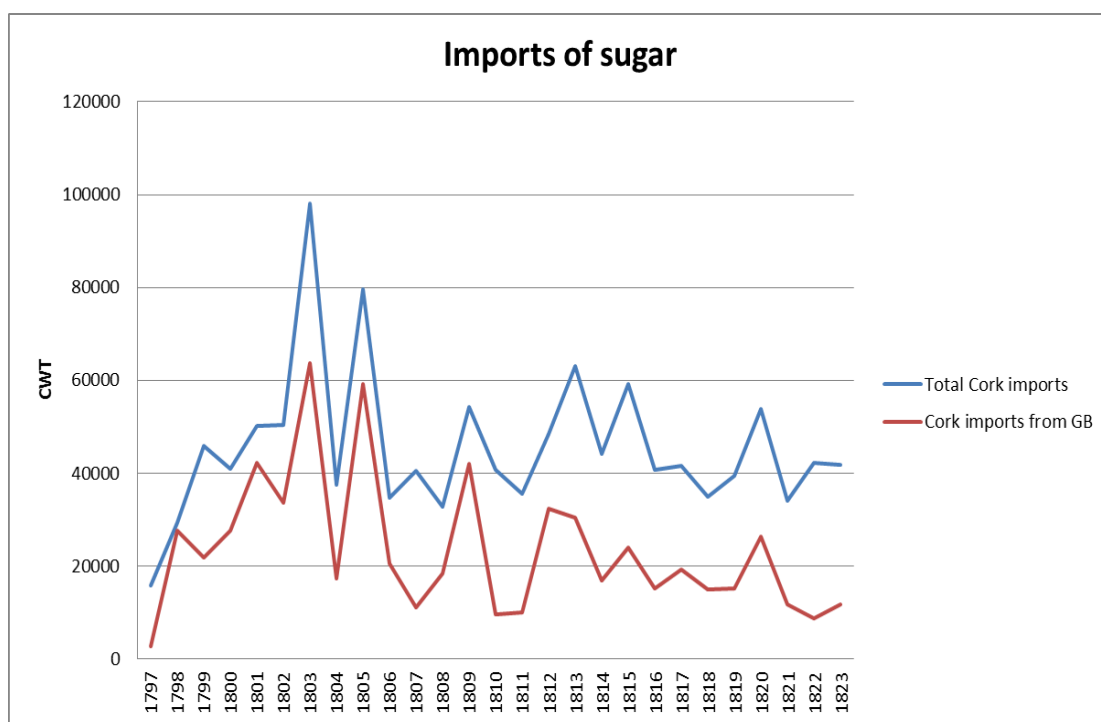
Although Cork was in a position to take advantage of the trans-Atlantic colonial trades, the trade in exotic produce and cash crops was predominantly through transshipments from Britain. Returning vessels rarely stopped in Ireland or, as in the case of East India Company vessels, if they stopped on the return voyage they did not offload their produce there. By the 1830s Cork was a designated warehousing port for East Indies goods, but that permission was not granted until 1824.<sup>93</sup> Two of the most valuable cash crops at this time were sugar and tobacco. Almost the entirety of Cork's sugar importation came through Britain and all of this trade would have derived from colonial possessions. Despite Ireland having legal access to free trade with the Caribbean since the late 1770s the majority of importation was on British account. This only began to change with more direct imports around 1810, with larger volumes of goods imported directly from Barbados and Jamaica. There are a number of reasons why this was the case. Even though direct importation increased, still over half of Cork's importation was via

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<sup>92</sup> Peter Solar, 'Irish Trade in the Nineteenth Century' in David Dickson, L. M. Cullen and Cormac Ó Gráda (eds), *Refiguring Ireland: Essays in Honour of L.M. Cullen* (Dublin, 2003), pp 279–81.

<sup>93</sup> Warehousing ports. Returns of the names of ports to which the privilege of warehousing and bonding has been extended; and of the number of ships belonging to each port. p. 6 H.C. 1828 (244) xix, 583

Britain. It's likely that the requirement to ship via convoys in the first decade of the nineteenth century restricted the return movements of many trans-Atlantic voyages. The convoy system already limited the number of voyages to a handful. Any ship making that trip would look to maximise the potential profits. Those profits were not going to be fully realised by shipping to Cork. Although the volume of sugar imports from Britain declined, the total importation remained relatively consistent from the mid-1800s up to 1822. However, the levels of imports coming through Britain begin to steadily decline from this point onwards. From 1800 onwards the total importation of sugar from all locations, excluding Britain, was increasing and from 1808 it exceeded the quantity imported through Britain (Figure 3-2). It appears that by the second decade of the nineteenth century Cork took full advantage of the ability to ship these goods directly rather than via Britain.

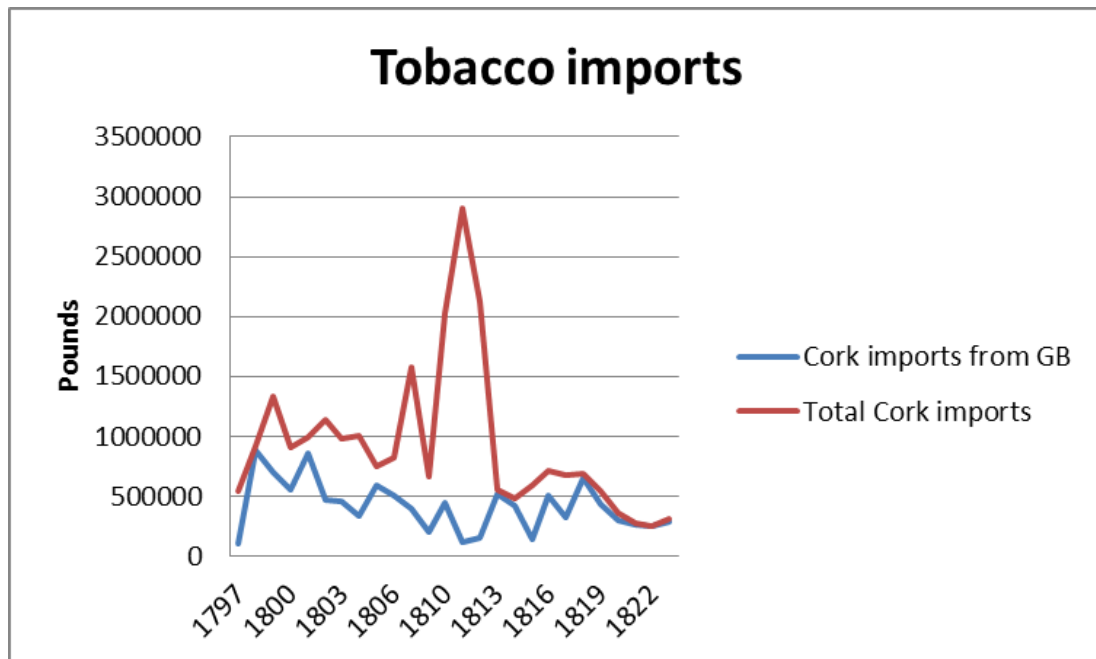


*Figure 3-2 Imports of sugar of all types into Cork<sup>94</sup>*

In terms of the other valuable cash crop, tobacco, the inverse applies. Cork was almost entirely supplied with tobacco from Britain. Only a miniscule amount was imported from foreign countries (Figure 3-3). Excluding a large import from

<sup>94</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports, in 24 Vols, for the period 1764-1823', MSS 353-76, NLI.

Virginia in 1810, the importation of tobacco from foreign ports almost entirely disappeared over the opening decades of the 1800s. The reason for this trend was the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States. As the US was the only other location from which Cork imported tobacco that trade completely disappeared. Despite a small resurgence after the war's conclusion, from this point onwards Cork remained reliant on Britain for the importation of tobacco.



*Figure 3-3 Cork's tobacco imports<sup>95</sup>*

An 1834 Parliamentary report on Anglo-Franco trade detailed specifics of the changes in Ireland's trade. Massive increases were seen in the importation of cotton yarn, cotton wool, woollen yarn and coals. Large decreases occurred in the consumption of foreign wine and spirits, almost certainly due to the changes in tariffs and duties that encouraged indigenous Irish distilling, as well as the disastrous impact of the Napoleonic Wars on foreign wine consumption.<sup>96</sup> Around 1810 there was a dramatic reduction in the importation of wine and after 1815 a massive increase in the importation of cotton yarn. Cork's imports of these products came almost entirely from Britain. Although there was an increase in coal

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> First report on the commercial relations between France and Great Britain, addressed to the Right Honourable the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, by George Villiers and John Bowring, with a supplementary report, by John Bowring p. 98 [c. 64] H.C. 1834 xix, 1

imports, it was nowhere near as dramatic. The lower growth rate in the importation of coal could perhaps be taken to indicate both a lower level of steam driven industrial development as well as the demonstrable dependence of Cork's industries on water power from the river Lee.<sup>97</sup> Figure 3-4 shows that the majority of Cork's coal imports, naturally enough, came from England rather than Scotland. The three largest coal exporting regions in England and Wales were Whitehaven, Liverpool and Swansea, though Llanelly exported only minutely less than Swansea. Whitehaven was by far the largest exporter, sending 173,794 chaldrons of coal to Ireland in 1822, 46 per cent of the total.<sup>98</sup> It is unfortunate that the customs ledgers did not record specific accounts for the Welsh trade, as it would be possible to ascertain the comparative levels of coal sent from Welsh collieries to Cork. The likely sources for the majority of coal imported into Cork would either be Swansea or Liverpool due to geographic proximity and pre-existing trade routes respectively.<sup>99</sup>

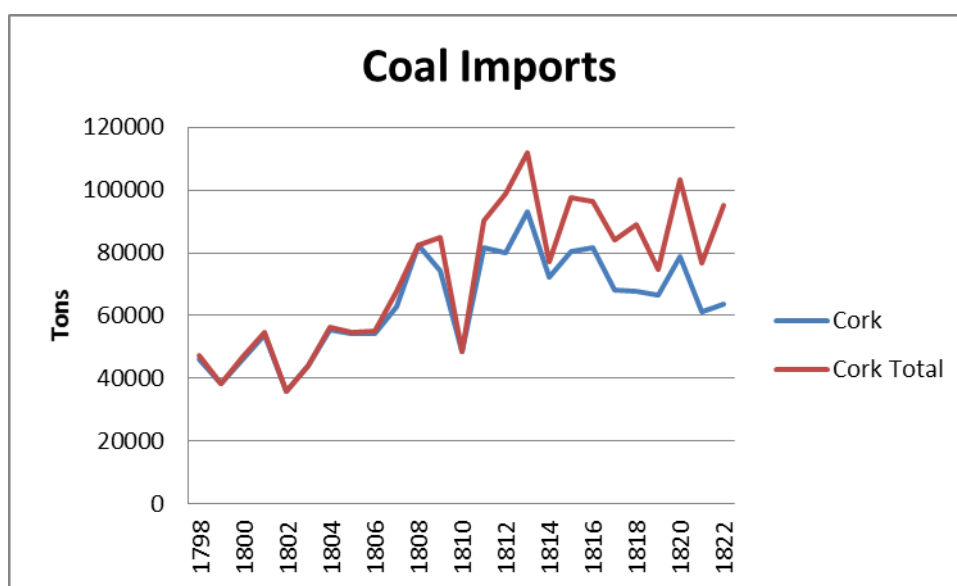


Figure 3-4 Coal imports into Cork<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, pp 404–405.

<sup>98</sup> *Coals. An Account of all Coals Shipped from Great Britain to Ireland, from the 5th January 1822 to the 5th January 1823; Specifying the Ports from whence they are carried, and where landed.* H.C. 1823 (137) xiii, 399

<sup>99</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade 1660-1800* (Manchester, 1968), pp 79–81.

<sup>100</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

An 1822 report on the collection of revenue in Ireland describes the situation of Cork's woollen industry at this time. The officials who drafted the report conducted an interview with Abraham Lane, whose family had been involved in the woollen trade for about seventy years. Abraham Lane handled the financial aspects of the family business from Dublin while his brother, James, ran the mills in Cork. His interview details the state of the business since the Union. Lane stated that his family was almost exclusively involved in the manufacture of military clothing as an earlier venture in fine cloth manufacture had not taken off. He believed that the decline in his family's woollen business was due to recent regulations in the military that gave colonels the power to source clothing where they desired. As they had close personal connections to English clothiers, by 1821 half of the army sourced cloth from England. This occurred despite Lane's ability to supply cloth 2.5 per cent cheaper due to the soon to be extinguished protective Irish duties.<sup>101</sup> Lane also provided details on the structure of the business. Most of the managerial staff were English, whereas the workers were almost exclusively Irish. Bielenberg notes that during the Napoleonic Wars Mahony's Mills, which also fulfilled military contracts in Cork, had hired Yorkshiremen to introduce steam spinning. It is highly likely that Lane did the same.<sup>102</sup> The hiring of English staff implies that there was a certain level of skilled migrants from Britain to Ireland, potentially to take advantage of the lower duty levels. Throughout the nineteenth century skilled workers, such as miners, were brought to Ireland to take advantage of their expertise in their field.<sup>103</sup> This adds credence to the complaints of Britain's commercial interests in the 1780s that a custom's union between Ireland and England could lead to a loss of expertise. However, as the protective duties were to be abolished by 1824, and as the Irish indigenous woollen industry was quite small, the loss would not have had a major impact on British woollen manufacturers. Even

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<sup>101</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland; &c.*, p. 204 H.C. 1822 (634) xiii, 1295

<sup>102</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880: Development or Decline?* (Cork :, 1991), pp 31–40.

<sup>103</sup> Alan J. M. Noonan, 'Wandering labourers: the Irish and mining throughout the United States, 1845-1920', 2013, pp 178–179; Colman O'Mahony, 'Copper Mining at Allihies, Co. Cork' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xcii (1987), pp 76–77.

Lane points out that to him it seemed personal connections played a stronger role than costs in securing contracts.

Two events threatened the future of Lane's business. The ending of protective duties in 1824 led the family to look at selling their business because he believed that the loss of the 2.5 per cent protection would devastate their industry in the face of British competition. The second event was the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the related de-mobilisation of the army. Lane observed:

If the war had continued I should have had a greater chance of demand. The demand of the army was so great, I could come in competition with the trade in England on a fair ground... we should say, that if we are deprived of the army clothing we could not employ ourselves in any other way as manufacturers of cloth... I could import cloth so much cheaper than I could manufacture it.<sup>104</sup>

On a more positive note he suggested that the Union had dramatically increased the sale of coarser fabrics and that instead of exporting wool yarn Ireland was now producing cloth with it. However, by becoming so dependent on the production of these lower quality fabrics they set the stage for future difficulties.

Almost all of Cork's raw wool trade was undertaken through England, reflecting the seventeenth century desire of British interests to restrict the Irish woollen trade. From 1698 an act of parliament constrained the Irish export of woollen goods, prohibiting the export of wool, woollen yarn and drapery to England. One of the goals of this act was ostensibly to discourage the growth of woollen manufactures to the benefit of linen manufacture; the exportation of woollen products only consisted of wool yarn.<sup>105</sup> Imports of Spanish and foreign wool was through Britain rather than directly with the originating country. Both the importation and exportation of unprocessed wool from Cork remained small. The agricultural land that supported the economy of Cork city was well suited to providing raw wool for processing and it is likely that indigenous woollen manufacturers absorbed much of the production of raw wool. Although there was a

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<sup>104</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland; &c.*, p. 6 H.C. 1822 (634) xiii, 1295

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*



slight increase in the exportation of raw wool to England from Cork after the Napoleonic War up to 1820, it does not appear to have been sustained.

Military demand for clothing during the Napoleonic Wars was a boon for various woollen manufacturers in Cork. Mahony's Mills in Blackpool took in up to fifty thousand pounds of wool for army clothing.<sup>106</sup> The vast quantity of wool needed was primarily sourced locally. This helps explain why so little raw wool was exported from Cork, as well as why there was a sudden increase in the export of raw wool from 1815 to 1819. In fact, during 1815 Cork exported 8,680 stone of wool, approximately 70,000 pounds, which potentially was the shortfall in domestic consumption for military clothing. What is striking is the dramatic shift in the consumption of processed woollen goods from England after 1820. Imported yards of British woollen drapery goods exploded from almost nothing to over 200,000 yards per year by the opening years of the 1820s. This explosion is commensurate with accounts of the glut of textile productions on the British markets being off-loaded on Ireland and leading to the devastation of the Irish textile industry. An 1822 report into revenue collection in Ireland noted that, since the Union, Ireland consumed almost the entirety of her output of wool, as opposed to the state of affairs in 1777 when over three quarters of it was exported. It also assumed that due to this there was a boom in the manufacture of finished woollen goods in Ireland.<sup>107</sup>

Bar some minor sporadic importation from Scotland and Guernsey Cork imported all drapery products from England. The importation of drapery products steadily increased over the course of the Napoleonic Wars, peaking in 1809 and 1813. After 1815 importation rapidly fell to about half of the apogees reached during the war (see Figure 3-5). Cork's overall drapery exports were propped up by exports to Portugal at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, this trade dramatically collapsed around 1800. The reasons for such a rapid decline are unclear. It is likely that a combination of British military demand and increasing

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<sup>106</sup> Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, pp 34–35.

<sup>107</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland; &c.*, p. 6.H.C. 1822 (634) xiii, 1295

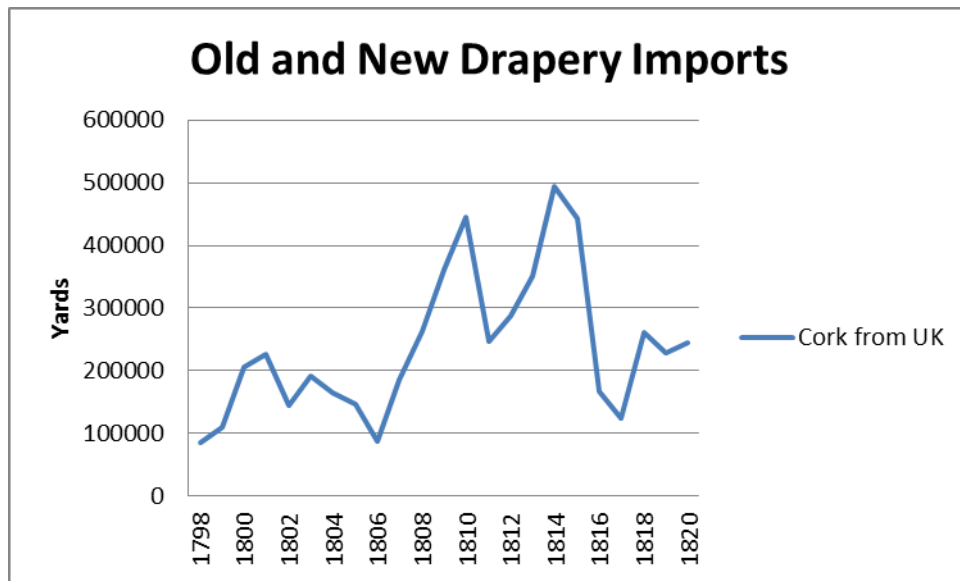
tensions over the fate of the Iberian Peninsula combined to make exports to the region unattractive. Abraham Lane attributed some of the collapse in the trade with Lisbon to trade combinations, as such groups led to contracts being lost to competitors. At the height of the trade Lane exported 500 to 1000 pieces of camblet to Lisbon, each 100-150 yards long.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, under Article six of the Act of Union the duties between the two countries were regularised so that drapery goods traded between the two countries paid the same level as used to be levied on drapery imports into Ireland. However, estimates from 1804 placed the rate of duty on the exportation of new drapery at  $2/6$  *d* per yard and old drapery at  $7/6$  *d* per yard, which decreased to  $1/4$  *d* per yard and 7 *s* per yard respectively after the Union was enacted. This brought the British duties payable by Irish manufacturers on exportation to England down to  $8\frac{1}{2}$  *d* per yard on old drapery and  $2\frac{3}{4}$  *d* per yard on new drapery. At the same time the duty on imported new drapery goods fell from  $2/6$  *d* per yard to  $1/6$  *d* per yard and on old drapery from 14 *s* per yard to 10 *s* per yard (7 *s* per yard by 1803).<sup>109</sup> It is possible that the collapse in the exportation of Cork drapery products derived from two events: the increase in demand for military clothing in Cork and the new lower duty rates making transactions within the Union more attractive. Cork wool merchants took advantage of the wartime growth in the export of wool to Britain. Of the £1,250.13.10 paid for licenses to export to Britain, £1,214 was paid by Cork merchants, Merrick, Persse, Sadlier, and Lecky and Mack.<sup>110</sup> By the 1820s drapery imports began to increase and it is likely that this was due to issues alluded to by Lane; that it was cheaper in some instances for Irish manufacturers to import from Britain than to produce their own products.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 204

<sup>109</sup> *An Account, Presented to the House of Commons, Respecting the Official and the Real or Current Value of the Imports and Exports of Ireland*. H.C. 1803-1804 (93) vii, 443

<sup>110</sup> *An Account of Money Received in the Office of the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, from the 5th of January 1801 to the 30th of May 1805, for Licences to Export Wool to Great Britain*. H.C. 1808 (122) vi, 243



*Figure 3-5 Drapery imported into Cork<sup>111</sup>*

Figures 3-6 and 3-7 below show that the abolition of duties in 1816 led to a spike in the importation of cotton yarn, though from 1808 a period of decreasing importation foreshadowed the reduction of duties. However, comparing the data for cotton yarn imports to that for worsted yarn imports tells a different story. The importation of cotton yarn declined at about the same period as rising tensions in Anglo-American relations, culminating in the War of 1812. At this point there was a sharp and dramatic rise in the importation of worsted yarn. It is likely that tensions with America restricted the supply of raw cotton from the United States to Britain. From 1815 onwards there was a rapid growth in the importation of raw cotton from the United States into Britain, which accounted for somewhere between a third to half the overall British imports of raw cotton. This coincided with rapid growth in the export of cotton twist and yarn from Britain, rising from nine million pounds in 1815 to thirty-four million pounds by 1824.<sup>112</sup> The increased importation of worsted yarn primarily served the increased demands on the region's textile and clothier manufacturing industries to produce goods for the military. The fact that this trade

<sup>111</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>112</sup> Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1959: Trends and Structures* (Cambridge, 1967), pp 18-182.

almost completely collapsed at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars and coincided with the increase in cotton yarn imports serves to reinforce this point.

The volume of cotton yarn imports into Cork from Britain steadily increased up to 1806, at which point there was a precipitous decline that only began to recover in 1812. It is highly probable that the drop was predominantly due to demand on the British market for cotton goods during periods of conflict. The increase in the importation of cotton yarn into Cork coincides with the increase in the re-exportation of British cotton imports.<sup>113</sup> Unsurprisingly, the drop in British cotton imports due to the War of 1812 is reflected in British cotton re-exports but this dates much later than the decline in Cork's cotton importation. The decline in importation does not correspond with any similar decline in British importation. It is probable that it was due to wartime demand in England. The United States formed the majority of Britain's cotton imports and any disruption in this trade would have been reflected in Britain's exports. The Irish trend also reflects the rapid growth of the importation of cotton into Britain in the early decades of the nineteenth century, with cotton imports from 1801 to 1811 increasing by 39.5 per cent, by 93 per cent for 1811 to 1821, and 85 per cent from 1821 to 1831.<sup>114</sup> However, in terms of overall cotton trade Ireland was but a small component, with exports in 1831 being only £76,118 and dropping to £27,399 by 1833. This compares to a declared value of £17,182,936 and £18,459,000 for Great Britain for those respective years.<sup>115</sup>

If Edward Baines's estimates of British cotton production are accurate it is unsurprising that Ireland held such a minute share of this trade: 'the yarn spun in this country in a year would, in a single thread, pass round the globes circumference 263,775 times; it would reach 51 times from the earth to the sun; and it would encircle the earth's orbit eight and a half times!'<sup>116</sup> Baines placed the production of spun yarn at 4.89 billion miles in 1833. Whether or not these

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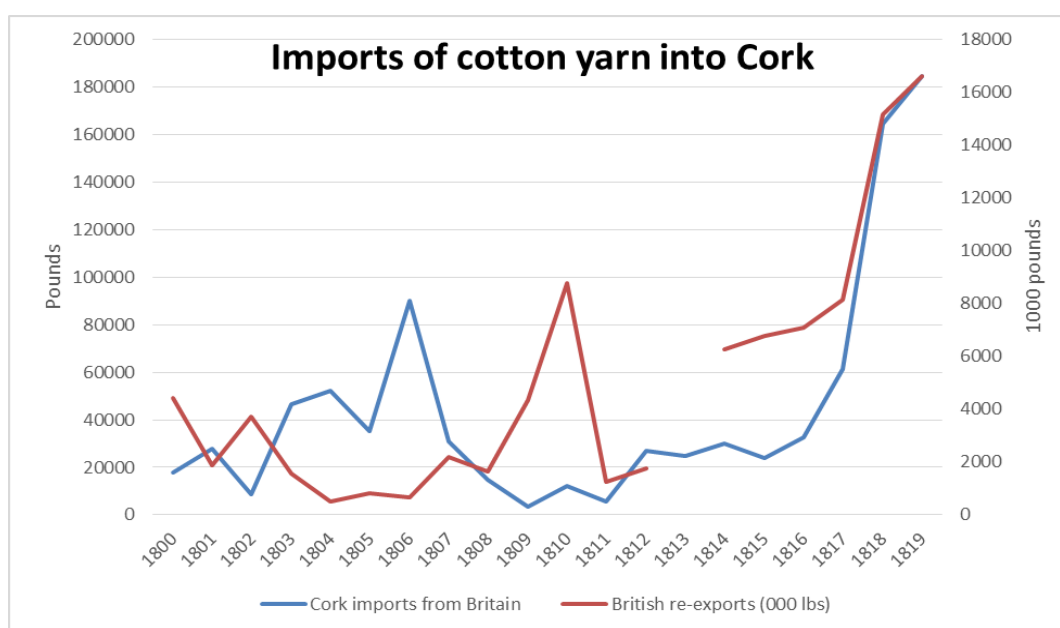
<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>114</sup> Edward Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain* (London, 1835), p. 348.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp 431–432.

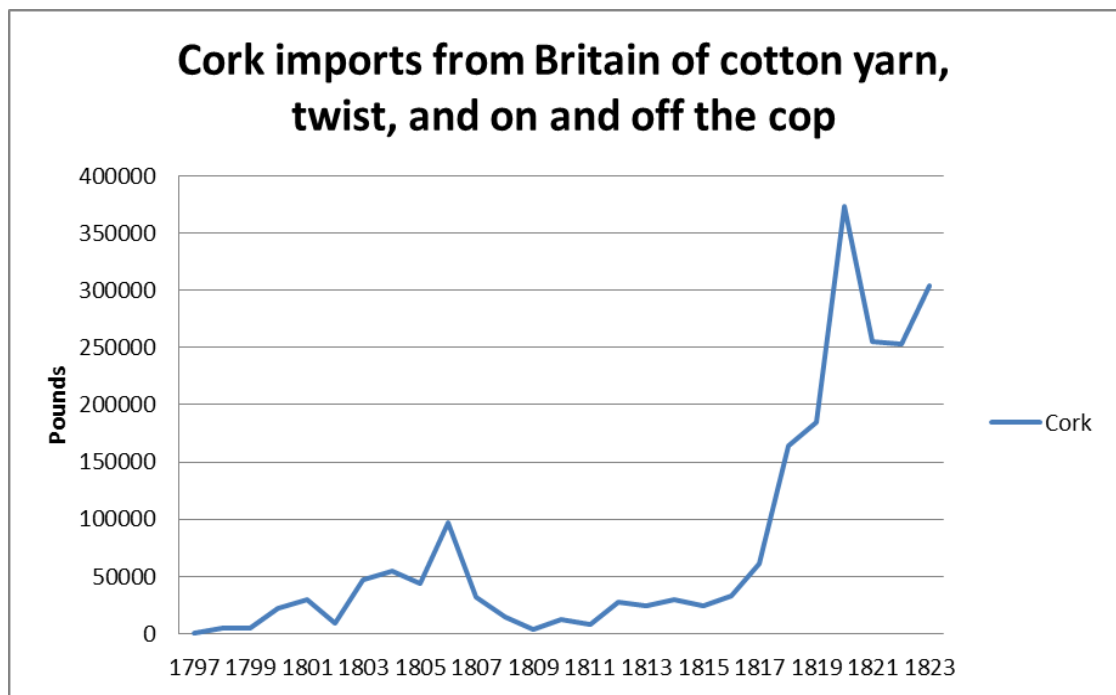
estimates are accurate is beside the point; it would be nigh on impossible for a country such as Ireland to come anywhere close to British textile production levels. Several decades of industrialisation in Britain had left Irish production far behind. By the 1830s the cotton production of Ireland was concentrated in the northern part of the country, with Cork only accounting for one out of the twenty nine mills in operation in 1833. The one was John Wheeler’s mill at Lisnagat and it did not survive the decade.<sup>117</sup> The massive increase in the importation of textiles is almost certainly one of the main reasons for the near complete collapse of the Irish textile industries in the 1820s. It is telling that the largest increases in importations listed here were in cotton yarn, with importation jumping from 2,294 pounds to 630,426 pounds an increase of nearly 27,482 per cent. This is a phenomenal level of growth and one that indicates the extent to which woollen industries in Ireland were devastated by better production methods in Britain. This was especially true in regions in Cork such as Blarney and Bandon that saw their textile industries all but wiped out by lower cost British products.



*Figure 3-6 Comparison of cotton imports into Cork and British re-exports<sup>118</sup>*

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp 393–394; Bielenberg, *Cork’s Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, p. 29.

<sup>118</sup> Deane & Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1959*, p. 178; ‘Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.’, MSS 353-76, NLI.



*Figure 3-7 Cotton Importation from Britain<sup>119</sup>*

The trend in Cork differed from that nationwide. In terms of the worsted yarn imports overall it was broadly similar, with Irish imports spiking in 1808 before dropping again in 1816, though there was not as dramatic a collapse as in Cork (Figure 3-8). Overall Irish imports of cotton yarn increased and the increases can be linked, as was done in parliamentary reports, to changes in duty levels. However, no change in duty levels can account for the collapse in importation, even in what was such a volatile trade. Cork's imports of cotton yarn only took off in 1815/16, as shown in Figure 3-9, with a brief decline followed by a resurgence in importation. Much of the demand for this product throughout the period was probably linked to the more developed textile manufactures in Ulster. The success of the abolition of duties on cotton manufacture led the Manchester Secretary to the Chamber of Commerce, a Mr. Mathews, to explore the establishment of cotton manufactures in Ireland, based in Belfast. The conclusion drawn from 'the only branch of cotton

<sup>119</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

manufacture in which the experiment of free trade has been tried' was that this system could lead to the expansion of foreign markets for Irish produce.<sup>120</sup>

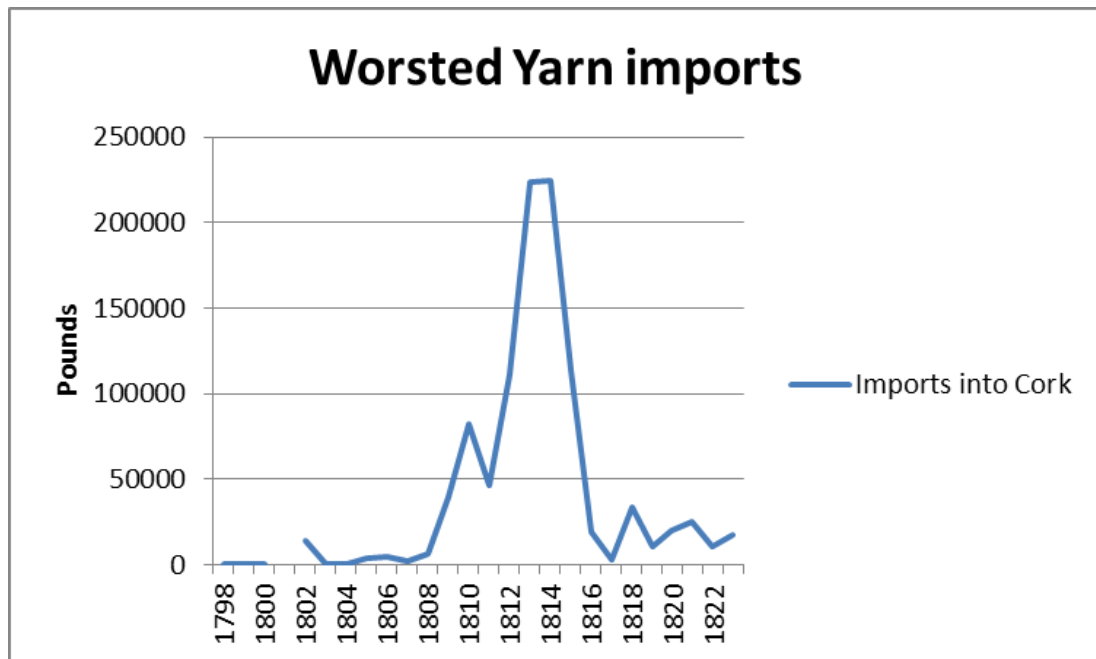


Figure 3-8 Worsted yarn imports into Cork<sup>121</sup>

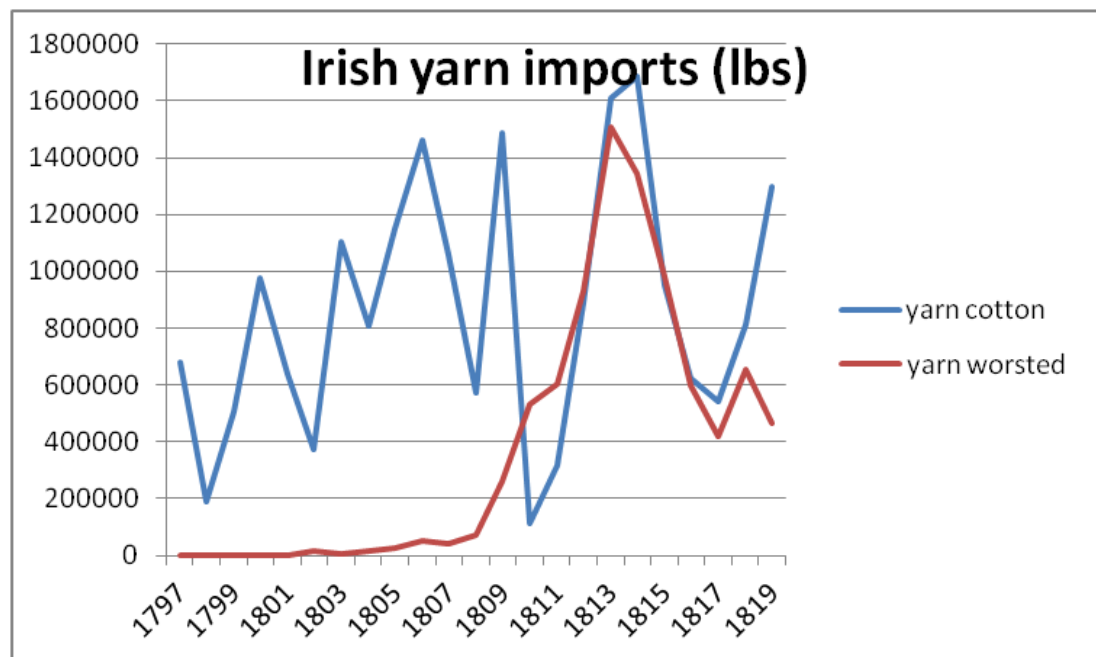


Figure 3-9 Irish yarn imports<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland; &c.*, p. 14.H.C. 1822 (634) xiii, 1295

<sup>121</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

Irish textile exports, although in a reasonably healthy state during the Napoleonic Wars, faced stiff competition by the 1820s. Although the fourth report on the revenue of Ireland celebrated the removal of the restrictions of the Woollen Acts, perhaps their support for unrestricted free trade might not have been as strongly felt by Irish textile manufacturers. Those who drafted the report noted,

It is gratifying to perceive, that the spirit of commercial jealousy in which this erroneous policy [the woollen acts] was founded, is now rapidly subsiding. Strongly as it manifested itself in England in the year 1785, on the question of the commercial propositions, and subsequently in 1800, it is to be observed that... not a complaint has been heard, or a wish expressed, to have recourse to what is called a protecting system.<sup>123</sup>

The abolition of duty on imported worsted yarn led to the collapse of Cork's worsted industry. The report noted that Irish woollen products were not exported as they could not compete on Britain's market. On the Irish domestic market Britain made serious inroads in the sale of higher quality textiles.<sup>124</sup> This was an area in which Cork manufacturers were seriously disadvantaged.

### **Exports**

Exports of corn and meal from Cork steadily increased during the opening decades of the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Britain witnessed an exploding urban population as the Industrial Revolution took hold. The burgeoning working class demanded foodstuffs, which Ireland happily supplied. Secondly, the impact of both the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 created an increased demand for foodstuffs. The latter in particular created a brief boom in Cork's exports to Britain as supplies of corn from the American market ceased and Britain needed to substitute American with Irish imports. As Figure 3-10 shows, the increases and lulls in corn exports corresponded to times of increasing conflict. The initial wartime boom quickly diminished after the peace in 1815, but the introduction of steam transit across the Irish Sea encouraged a rapid increase in

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<sup>123</sup> *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenue Arising in Ireland; &c.*, p. 7.H.C. 1822 (634) xiii, 1295

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9



corn exports as the decrease in transit times led to an improved quality of corn reaching British markets.<sup>125</sup> Such an increase may indicate a move from pasturage to tillage or at least the increasing value of tillage exports compared with a decline in demand for salted meat. Furthermore, the increasing acreage being turned over to tillage encouraged investment in the milling industries.<sup>126</sup>

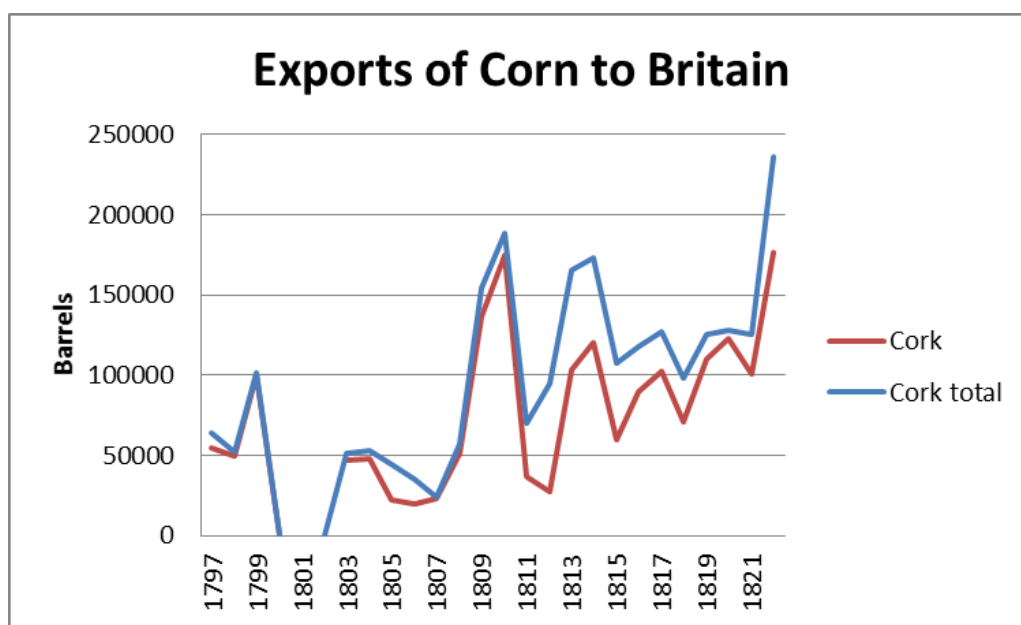


Figure 3-10 Corn exports to Britain<sup>127</sup>

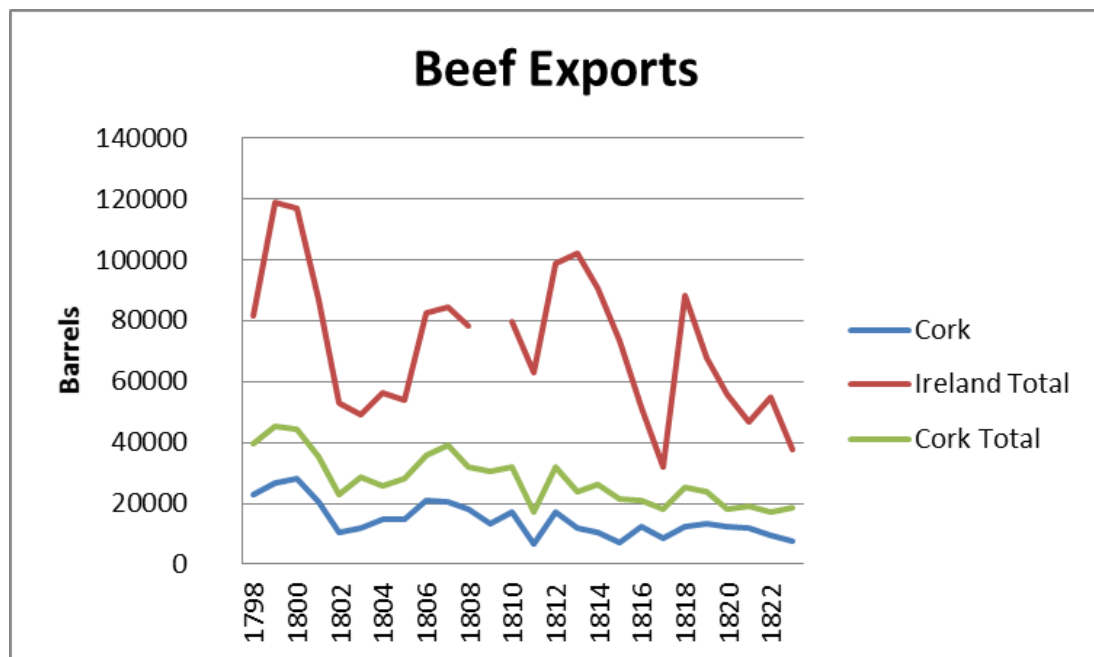
The export of salted meat and other provisions to Britain remained remarkably stable throughout this period. It is surprising that the conflicts of the time did not lead to a marked increase in the export of provisions to Britain. In fact, the exports of barrels of pork and beef, as well as butter, were far more consistent and less prone to dramatic fluctuations throughout the Napoleonic Wars than the total exports for Ireland as a whole in the same goods. This is not to imply that the wars had no impact on these exports. Decreases in the export of salted meat products during the opening two decades of the nineteenth century correspond with lulls in fighting. However, they were far less susceptible to dramatic drops than

<sup>125</sup> Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, p. 44.

<sup>126</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (Routledge explorations in economic history, 43, London ; New York, 2009), pp 58–59.

<sup>127</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

overall Irish exports. This is demonstrated by the massive decline in Irish beef barrel exports seen in Figure 3-11 after 1815, but Cork's exports stayed remarkably stable.



*Figure 3-11 Salted beef exports<sup>128</sup>*

This data leads to a number of conclusions regarding Cork's agricultural produce. The beef supply remained stable and consistent during this period due to its quality. There was always going to be a demand for salted beef for victualling the navy. Cork's produce was of a proven high quality. Massive increases in demand and soaring prices led to the purchase of produce that in peacetime would not have been suitable, but in war necessity led to its purchase. These much larger requirements for salted meat would not have maintained much of a market share after the war, but a demonstrably high quality good would always be able to find a purchaser. Pork exports exhibit a similar, but less pronounced, trend. The marked variability in exports of pork barrels supports the conclusion that the decline in pork and beef barrel exports was closely aligned to military demand. Part of the stability of beef exports came from the demand from colonial possessions for Irish salted beef. Salted pork did not have the same historical preference as beef. Much of the growth in demand was from the British navy, as it was deemed to be a more

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

palatable product than beef. All the major increases and decreases coincided with military actions. Unfortunately the data does not continue beyond 1823. From the data available it is likely that pork barrel exports settled into a level commensurate with peacetime demand and Cork remained the major supplier. As Figure 3-12 shows, the exports of salted barrels of pork from Cork remained far more stable than those of the rest of the country. This indicates that some of the product was sourced elsewhere out of necessity and that such suppliers were not deemed suitable for peacetime needs.

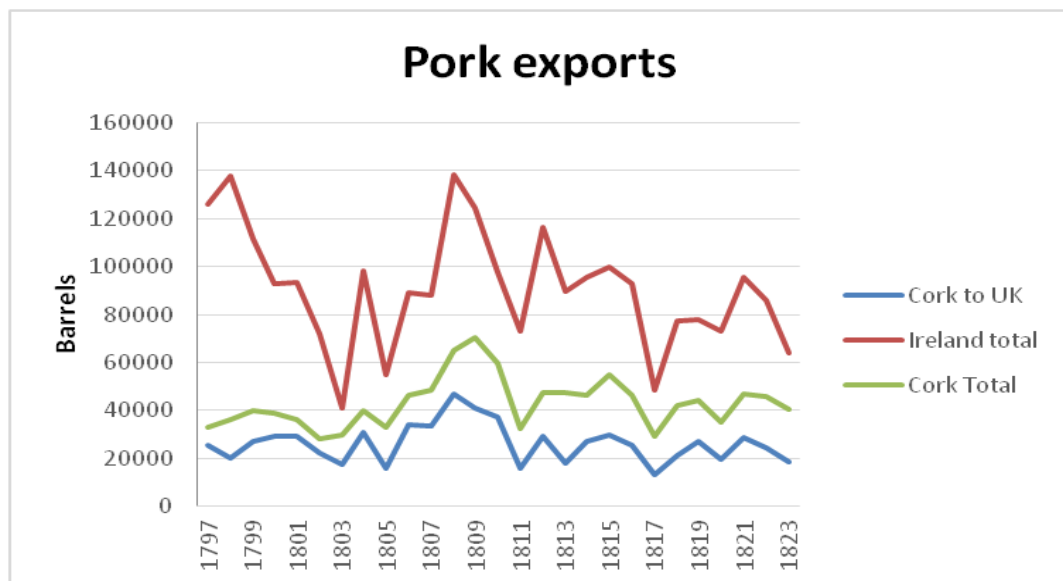


Figure 3-12 Barreled pork exports<sup>129</sup>

The collapse in demand is also represented in price changes. The Napoleonic Wars saw prices for a variety of provisions increase due to demand. Whereas butter and pork prices rose by 144 and 70 per cent respectively, that for beef only rose by 47 per cent. Liam Kennedy questions why the demand for beef lagged behind other provisioned goods, but it is most likely a matter of changing tastes.<sup>130</sup> Beef had been the prime provision export for the eighteenth century, but salted pork became a more popular provisioning meat for the navy and demand for beef declined. Figure 3-13 illustrates that although the price for salted pork readily

<sup>129</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>130</sup> Liam Kennedy and Royal Irish Academy, *Irish Agriculture: A Price History, from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to the Eve of the First World War* (Dublin, 2007), pp 77–78.

tracked that of beef the increases in price, especially during conflict, were far more pronounced. Salted pork prices also appear to have maintained a higher value for longer. The prices for butter on the same market were more consistent, experiencing increases and declines corresponding with outbreaks of conflict or otherwise. After a rather dramatic drop to a twenty five year low in the late 1820s, following the de-regulation of the Irish butter trade, prices remained reasonably stable, though perhaps not as stable as butter producers may have liked. The Napoleonic War truly was the high point for Irish butter sales, with the value staying consistently above eighty shillings a hundredweight and peaking in 1811 at one hundred and twenty five shillings. The market prices in Cork and London for butter remained very close, reflecting the quality of the product Cork was producing. This was markedly different than the case for beef. The price on the London market was, on average, thirty-five to fifty per cent higher than Cork as demonstrated (see Figure 3-14).

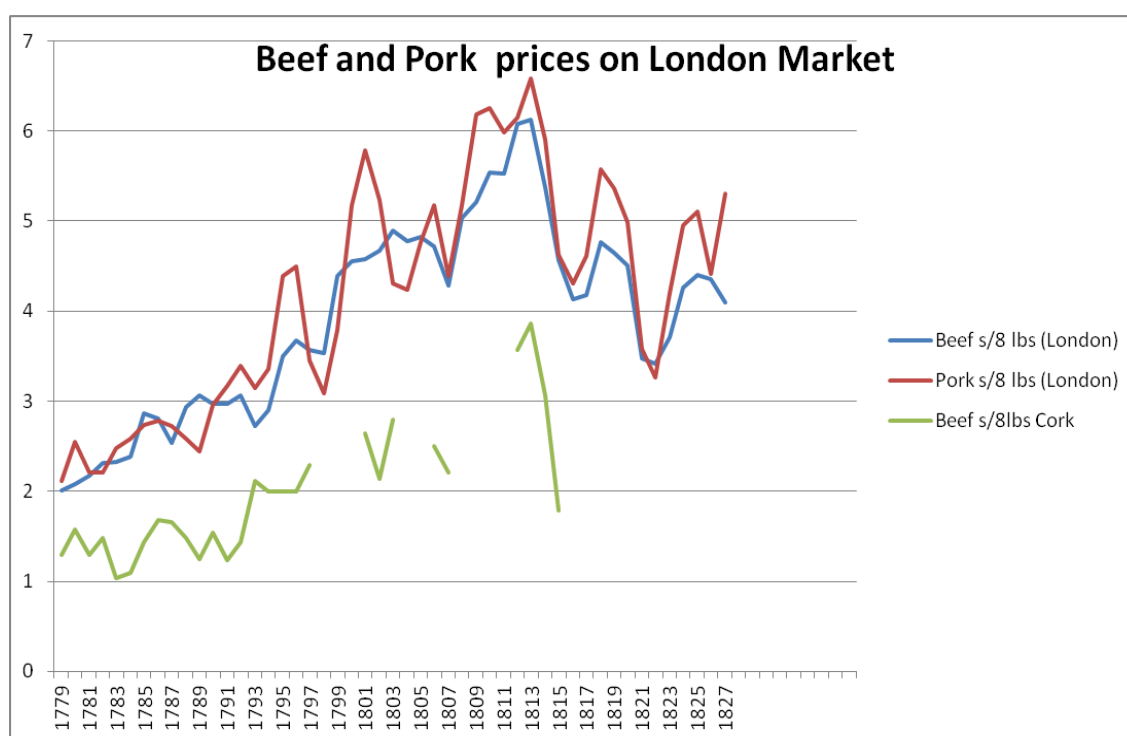


Figure 3-13 Irish beef and Pork prices in London<sup>131</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Peter M. Solar and Jan Tore Klovland, 'New Series for Agricultural Prices in London, 1770-1914' in *Economic History Review*, lxiv, no. 1 (2011), pp 72–87; Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture'; Dickson, *Old World Colony*.

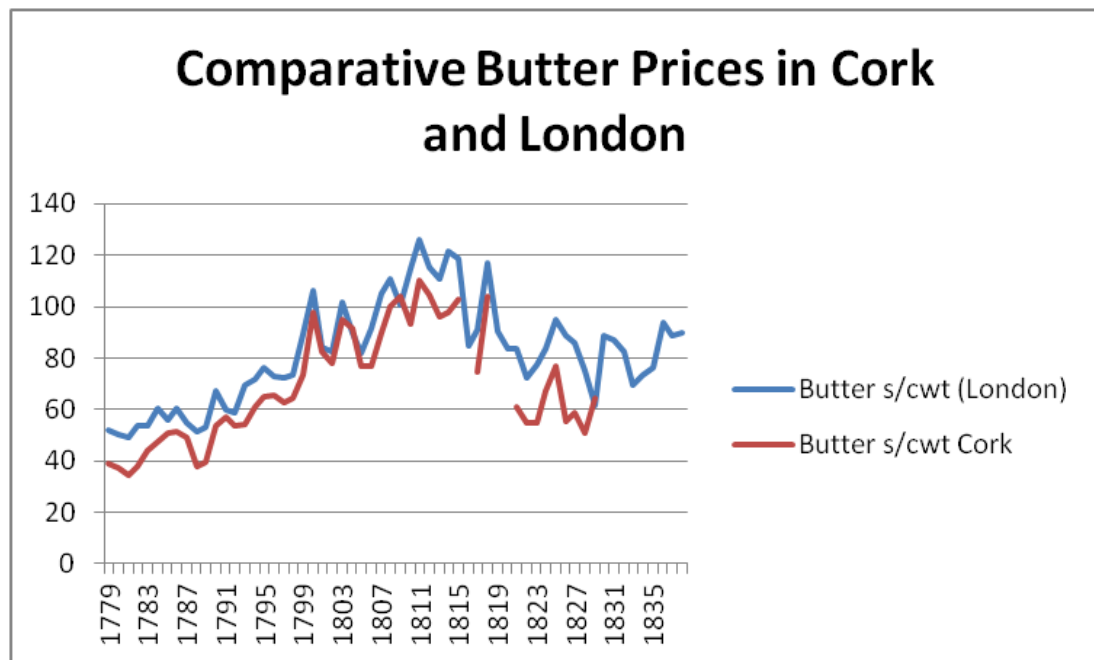


Figure 3-14 Comparative butter prices<sup>132</sup>

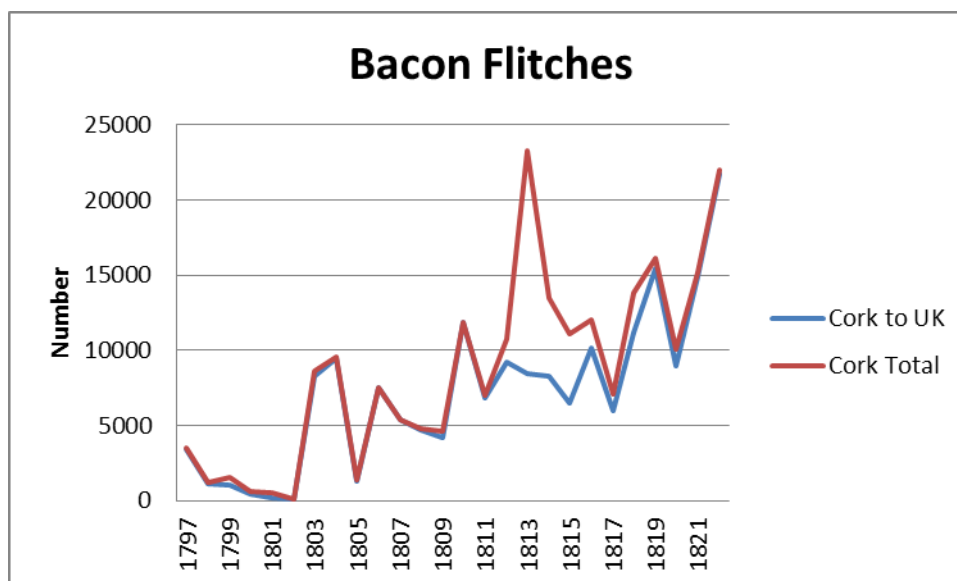
This data can also reveal the preferences of the Royal Navy and the British public. Beef exports remained steady, but they declined noticeably over the course of this period. Pork exports were far more volatile, but increased at the expense of beef exports. Rarely did pork exports drop below 2,000 barrels per annum, peaking at nearly 7,000 in 1808. On the other hand, beef exports struggled to reach 2,000 barrels per year. This demonstrates the changing preference for salted pork over beef. The increase in demand for pork products is also demonstrated by the remarkable increase in demand for flitches of bacon. Barrelled pork and beef were almost certainly destined for re-export, or at least a large proportion were. However, flitches of bacon were mostly destined for the open market in Britain and the increase in bacon exports coincided with the introduction of more factory-style processing plants for that product in Ireland.<sup>133</sup> Exports of bacon flitches from Cork showed a dramatic and inexorable rise to cater for the consumer demands of urban Britain. Whereas a substantial proportion of the total beef and pork exports from Cork were destined for a variety of markets other than Britain, which considering

<sup>132</sup> Solar & Klovland, 'New Series for Agricultural Prices in London, 1770-1914'; Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture'; Dickson, *Old World Colony*.

<sup>133</sup> Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, pp 55–56.

these products longevity and purpose is understandable, exports of bacon flitches were virtually in their entirety sent to Britain.

Though Cork may have dominated the supplies of salted beef and pork exports, the same was not true for bacon flitches. Although exports to Britain steadily increased and experienced remarkable growth over the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Cork exports were only a small proportion of the Irish trade. This market was served by other parts of the country and Cork's rising exports merely echoed the national total, rarely breaking above 3 per cent (see Figure 3-15). Surprising as this may seem given the expertise developed in the provisioning trade, these preservation skills were not necessarily suitable for the British domestic market. Heavy salting for long distance transport meant that the meat was serviceable, if perhaps a little unappetising. The majority of pork produced in Cork was destined for salted barrels intended for victualling use and transportation. That was where the local demand was; flitches would have been much less salted due to the proximity of the British consumer. There simply was not enough excess to service both markets. This is indicative of later problems in the food sectors in Cork. Heavily salted products like beef, pork and butter had constituted the mainstay of market activity for over a century by the 1820s. Merchants saw no reason to change practices that had served for that period. Indeed the Committee of Merchants had been established, in part, to preserve and maintain the standards necessary for these products. Extended periods of war had concealed the dramatic changes occurring in the trans-Atlantic trade.



*Figure 3-15 Bacon Exports<sup>134</sup>*

The Napoleonic Wars had also hidden some of the true costs of the Union and the disparity between Irish and English economic activities. Distances to the markets in Britain were shrinking and would soon seem miniscule with the advent of steam tramp services. Military victualling was a distinct type of service and the domestic British market had neither the taste, nor the need, for the heavily salted products Cork produced. Cork's merchants were by and large a conservative group of men, slow to change tradition in the face of market demands. This issue was one that gradually gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century, to the detriment of the region's traditional butter trade. Furthermore, evidence of the 1838 trade in bacon to London, Liverpool, and Bristol shows that Waterford was the dominant exporter of Irish bacon to these ports. It had a fifty per cent share of the trade whereas Cork barely came up to seven per cent of the same. Solar estimates that from the mid-1840s onwards Cork became increasingly involved in the trade, basing his estimates on London receipts. But in the pre-famine period Waterford absolutely dominated the Irish exports of bacon and ham products.<sup>135</sup> It is possible that Waterford's dominance in this trade came about, at least in part, due to Cork

<sup>134</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>135</sup> Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture', pp 127-28, 137, 139-40.

dominating the victualling of pork products. While Cork focused on her traditional outputs, Waterford took advantage of a market opening.

Where Cork maintained a strong provisioning trade with the wider world, the secondary goods generated by this trade went to Britain. Skins, hides, animal horns, tallow, lard and almost every other by-product of the slaughtering process were sent to England for further processing into finished goods. Cork produced some finished goods from these by-products, such as candles and shoes, but they were, more often than not, exported to the Caribbean rather than Britain. There are several possible reasons for this. First, it is likely that the exports of finished goods such as shoes and candles were used to supply ships that stopped in Cork before making the trans-Atlantic journey. These goods would have had a ready market either on the Caribbean islands or for the journey itself. Such products were possibly used to fill ships to get as much return as possible on their trips. As has been shown in the case of the Bristol trade routes, often the stopover in Cork was used to fill empty space to maximise the profitability of the trip. Second, the ships that travelled between Cork and Britain would have focused on goods with a reasonable rate of return on British markets. It is likely that there was more value in transporting the secondary products of the slaughtering trade, namely leather, skins and tallow, for finishing by superior workshops in London than there was in supplying the finished product. Finally, it is likely that local markets in Cork absorbed many of these products.

Cork was not as invested in the live animal trade as other regions in Ireland. This was probably due to both the distances involved and the necessity of having animals to slaughter for the food trades. Until the advent of regular steam trade between Ireland and Britain, livestock lost value due to the weight lost on a long journey.<sup>136</sup> Even so, Cork's livestock exports saw substantial increases from 1810 onwards (see Figure 3-16). The majority of these increases derived from live pig

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<sup>136</sup> James S. Donnelly, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London ; Boston :, 1975), p. 48.



exports. Donnelly has noted that pig breeding was important in dairy regions such as Cork as a means of disposing of waste. However, he concludes that while nationally pigs were rarely exported to Britain live, this was not the case in Cork.<sup>137</sup> It is possible that such a volume of pigs were sustained by the dairy regions that those exported merely represent the excess. The data from Cork is somewhat at odds with the national picture, shown in Figure 3-17. Overall the trend in live animal exports increased during the period from 1810 to 1816, but not as dramatically as it did in Cork. While nationally the dominant livestock export was cattle, the export of pigs remained a close second. Due to the manner in which the data was collated, data for the United Kingdom in years where Cork did not export certain goods there were not recorded. This is more of an issue for sheep exports, but it is a weakness in the data sets. The data available shows that Cork was the exception. In terms of pig exports Cork supplied the vast bulk of live animal exports to the United Kingdom, which in turn represented the majority of livestock exports. However, exports of live cattle from Cork were miniscule compared to the total number of animals exported. The difference in cattle exports can be accounted for through exports from Dublin, with cattle being driven into the larger markets and fairs that were closer to Britain. Live cattle driven into Cork were diverted to the slaughtering areas of the city for processing. As Devine noted regarding Irish trade with Scotland, Dublin had a distorting effect on the exact provenance of goods exported, with materials transported there from surrounding counties to take

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp 42–44.

advantage of the larger markets and more reliable and frequent transports

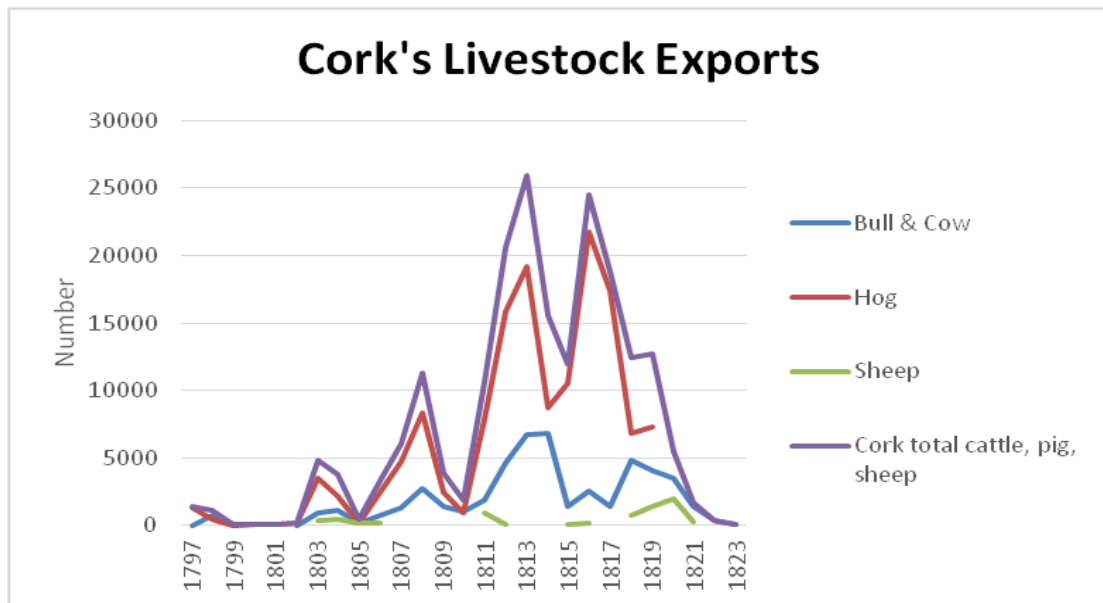


Figure 3-16 Cork's livestock exports<sup>138</sup>

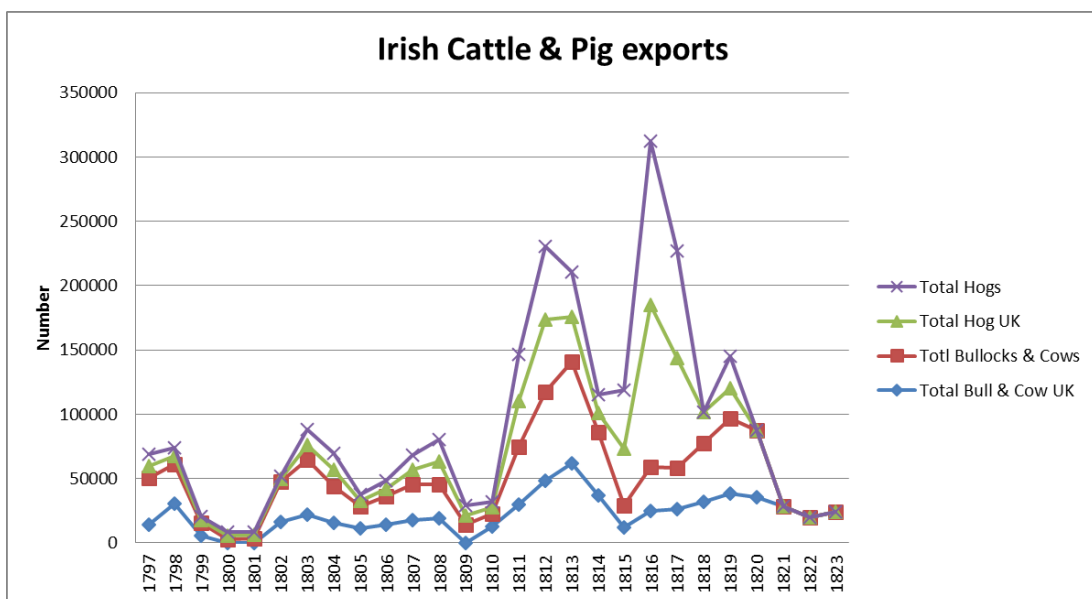


Figure 3-17 Irish Livestock Exports<sup>139</sup>

Cork's linen exports to the United Kingdom were miniscule in terms of the national total, barely exceeding 4 per cent. Cork was not a major player in the linen industry, but Britain was the primary consumer of the region's products. Figure 3-

<sup>138</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

18 shows a dramatic fall in the exports of linen at the turn of the nineteenth century. This fall could be attributed to the collapse of the Sadlier mills and a more widespread economic depression.<sup>140</sup> Linen exports continued to remain volatile until the end of the Napoleonic Wars when there was a dramatic decline in linen exports to Britain. By 1820 exports of linen from Cork collapsed. In the main this resulted from the oversupply of textiles in Britain.

However, from 1821 total exports from Cork rose, when exports to Britain declined. Until this point Cork's linen trade was almost solely supported by exports to Britain, whereas at this time a small but noticeable difference was taken up by exports to Gibraltar, Jamaica, and to a lesser extent Maryland, Barbados and Canada. It is possible that the overreliance on Britain and the devastation British textiles caused on the Irish market had led Cork's linen producers to explore new markets. The collapse of the domestic cotton industry and increasing investment in plant engines to drive production may also have had an effect.<sup>141</sup> Without the data after 1823 it is difficult to see if this was part of a trend or merely a few exceptional years, but Cork had made important strides in the exportation of low cost linen from 1816 onwards. Part of this increase can be attributed to the expansion of Besnard's linen business in Douglas taking in linens from all over the country for processing and re-export.<sup>142</sup> However, the initial success was soon lost; the failure to mechanise and adapt new techniques left Cork's linen producers behind their rivals in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

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<sup>140</sup> Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, p. 14.

<sup>141</sup> Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', pp 344–345.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 11–12, 16–17.

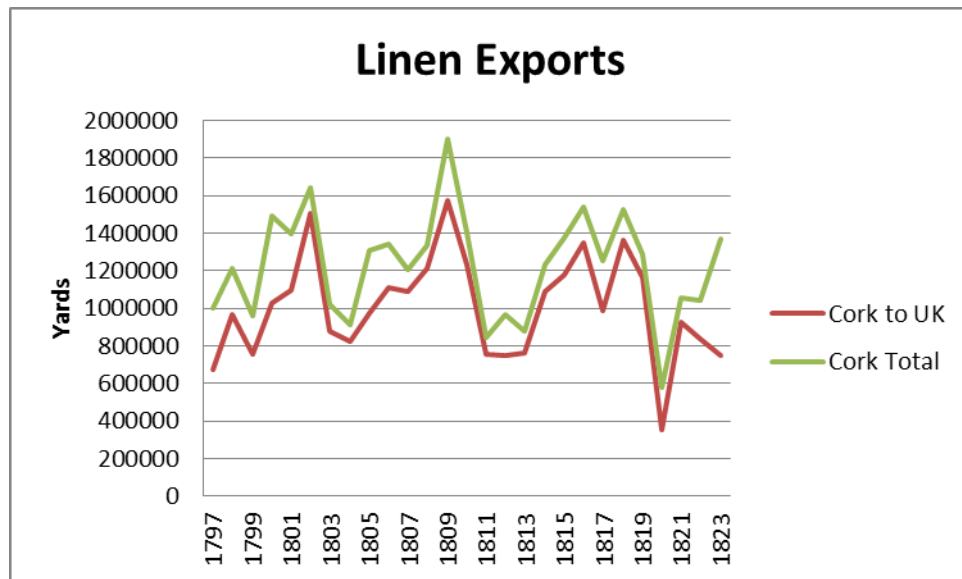


Figure 3-18 Cork's linen exports<sup>143</sup>

The true impact of the British textile industry on Cork's indigenous production can be seen by comparing the employment figures in 1800 with those in 1834 (Table 3-2). Employment in all branches of textile manufacture all but disappeared, with those employed in worsted weaving collapsing from around 2,000 in 1800 to 90 in 1834. This trend occurred across southern Ireland as textile manufacturing collapsed. Mechanisation would have played a part in reducing employment figures, but the limited industrialisation of the Irish textile industry cannot account for the bulk of this collapse.

Cork	1800	1834
Braid Weavers	1,000	40
Worsted Weavers	2,000	90
Hosiers	300	28
Woolcombers	700	110
Cottonweavers	2,000	220

Table 3-2 Textile employment in Cork<sup>144</sup>

Marx attributed the collapse to the consequences of the Union, stating that 'every time Ireland was about to develop industrially, she was crushed and

<sup>143</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish exports and Imports.', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>144</sup> Marx, 'Outline of a Report on the Irish Question Delivered to the German Workers' Educational Society in London on December 16, 1867', pp 199–200. These figures should be treated with caution due to the suspiciously rounded figures, but are still a useful indicator for employment at the time.

reconverted into purely agricultural land'.<sup>145</sup> This assessment is unduly harsh. While it is true that the decline in Irish textiles did relate to the full implementation of the Union in the mid-1820s, that coincided with a general economic depression. Although British competition devastated Cork's textile industries, it is equally likely that in better economic circumstances Irish industries could have adapted and adjusted their business practices to operate successfully. The recovery of the southern textile industries in areas such as Blarney later in the century attests to the ability of Irish textile manufacturers to find, locate and exploit available opportunities. Marx approached the topic from a particular political perspective, overlooking other evidence. In 1848 two other commentators, Pim and O'Kelley saw the collapse of the Irish textile industry through a different lens. Unlike Marx, who attributed the decline solely to British political machinations, they attributed the collapse of the Irish textile industry to the growth of the factory system in Britain:

to conduct a large manufactory with success requires capital, intelligence, unremitting attention and industry. Few persons in the south of Ireland possessing these requisites have been willing to undertake a business involving so much labour, and requiring so large an investment of capital.<sup>146</sup>

To their minds there was a lack of entrepreneurial drive in the South of Ireland and a reticence to invest the necessary time and resources to build successful industry in the region. More recent commentators have considered the slow investment in capital infrastructure, the introduction of steam spinning forty years after Britain, overreliance on low wages, lack of capital and poor quality Irish engineering to produce steam engines.<sup>147</sup> Entrepreneurial development of Cork's industries relied heavily on parliamentary intervention and protective duties. As Chapter 4 addresses, there was difficulty in attracting private capital for the development of infrastructure in the region. While there were many reasons for such a poor level of

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Jonathan Pim and Francis J. O'Kelley, *The Condition and Prospects of Ireland*. (Dublin, 1848), p. 151.

<sup>147</sup> O'Hearn, 'Was Ireland a Colony?', pp 18–20; Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (London, 1985), pp 176–77.

investment at a local level, an underdeveloped financial system cannot have helped matters.

## Conclusion

John MacNeill, quoting a Mr. Fawcett at a public meeting in Shoreditch in 1881, attested that Ireland was

to a great extent, what England had made them... [a] mass of vexatious restrictions were imposed on her industry, and... if any branch of Irish trade interfered with English profits, that branch of Irish trade was immediately to be discouraged.<sup>148</sup>

That was a common sentiment in the burgeoning nineteenth century Irish nationalist movement. Nationalists lay the blame for all Ireland's woes at the feet of a cold and distant Westminster elite that perceived 'the vocation of the Irish people to be shipped over the ocean in order to make way for the cows and sheep'.<sup>149</sup> This debate poses the question: What was the economic relationship between Ireland and Britain in the nineteenth century? Fawcett's assertions come with a grain of truth, as the entire structure of Cork's eighteenth century trade was formed around restrictions imposed on Ireland in Britain. The very nature of Cork's economy was designed to avoid interference with British development and to service British requirements. Some of this was by design and some fulfilled a necessary role in the Atlantic economy. Eric Strauss reiterated these nineteenth century views of Ireland's relationship with Britain, stating that the Union was used to preserve Ireland as a source of food and labour while removing any potential for industrial competition, which in turn strangled Ireland's engagement with the wider world.<sup>150</sup> The central issue is: Was Ireland simply a colonial holding of Britain, the testbed for future colonies or, over the course of several centuries, had Anglo-Irish relations evolved into something more complex?

As has been discussed in previous chapters, Ireland fulfils many of the definitions of a peripheral, or secondary, economy in Wallerstein's World Systems'

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<sup>148</sup> John Gordon Swift MacNeill, *English Interference with Irish Industries* (1836), p. viii.

<sup>149</sup> Engels, Friedrich, 'The History of Ireland', p. 161; Here Engels quotes Smith regarding the lack of wheat harvesting in Ireland Goldwin, *Irish history and Irish character*.

<sup>150</sup> E. Strauss, *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy* (Westport, Conn, 1975), pp 64–65.

Theory. Her relationship with Britain both politically and economically was far too complex to simply be regarded as a colonial possession. According to Wallerstein's definition,

the periphery of the world economy is that geographical sector of it wherein production is primarily of lower-ranking goods but which is an integral part of the overall system of the division of labour, because the commodities involved are only for daily use.<sup>151</sup>

Peripheries supplied the commodities for more advanced economies to process, but were not in a simply extractive relationship. This fits much of the nature of Ireland's relationship with Britain. Smith goes further, however, arguing that if one looks at production in the periphery, it involved production of goods of a low capital investment and a high amount of low-skilled labour investment, but he would not class Ireland as a periphery. Instead Smith has a separate class that he terms dependencies. A dependency had the potential to operate as an independent entity, whereas a true periphery could not. He contends that in a dependency, as the relationship matures a different style of production comes about, which requires more skill and intrinsically develops more value.<sup>152</sup> For Smith, the crucial difference for Ireland in her relationship with Britain was proximity. Although this proximity left Ireland an easy conquest, it also meant that Ireland was a potential weakness in Britain's domestic affairs. There was always an underlying fear of both Ireland's ability to threaten British industry and the military weakness of Ireland that meant she could never be simply perceived as a colonial holding. Furthermore, the Anglo-Irish were a political force in their own right, as either allies or rivals to the British establishment.<sup>153</sup> To put it simply, Ireland's relationship with Britain was unique.

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<sup>151</sup> Smith, *Creating a World Economy*, pp 123–124, Quoting Wallerstein 'The Modern World System vol 1 p199-200 & vol 2 p 17.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., pp 123–124, 151.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., pp 153–55; Alan K. Smith, 'Where was the Periphery?: The Wider World and the Core of the World-Economy' in *Radical History Review*, mcmlxxxvii, no. 39 (1987), pp 36–37.

O'Hearn has argued that the position of Ireland under the Union had led to potentially beneficial industrial developments being exchanged for peripheral ones. In essence, he claims that Ireland was subjugated and transformed to benefit England's global ambitions.<sup>154</sup> Centuries of restrictions had left Ireland in a position where she was unable to compete with Britain. The Cattle Acts, Wool Acts and Navigation Acts all acted as brakes on any natural economic development in Ireland. However, in the context of Cork were these necessarily harmful restrictions? The simple answer is yes. The Navigation Acts curtailed the benefits that could have accrued to Cork if it had full access to the Atlantic trade and the Wool Acts curtailed the region's textile industries. However, in response to the restrictions of the Wool Acts Cork developed a strong linen industry, aided by the recent Huguenot immigrants. It moved from livestock exportation to producing finished foodstuffs for export and developed strong secondary industries around the provisioning trade that soon proved successful. Shipping restrictions and embargoes were also an unwelcome intrusion, but the Cork merchant class became adept at finding alternative trade routes, such as through the Dutch in order to trade with the French. Yes, these restrictions were debilitating, but the region's merchants worked within them to create a strong local economy for much of the eighteenth century.

Given the ability of Cork's merchants to source new business opportunities for themselves, what happened in the fifty years before the Great Famine that led to a reversal of the city's fortunes in the textile and provisioning industries? The simple answer is the Union, but in itself that is not wholly adequate. Many in Cork greeted the Union as an economic benefit at the time. It realised their desires to gain a more equal footing with Britain in the Colonial and Atlantic economy.

A telling sign of things to come was the nature of Cork's Caribbean trade. Although free trade with the West Indies was achieved in 1778, Cork's merchants still traded via Britain. There were several reasons for this. A lack of shipping was a debilitating factor as was the fact that it was safer and more economical to ship

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<sup>154</sup> O'Hearn, 'Was Ireland a Colony?', pp 22–23.



under British accounts. A lack of sufficiently long credit lines was also problematic. These problems could have been managed. Cork has a large and safe harbour with industries well used to equipping and repairing large vessels. There is no real reason why Cork's merchants could not have developed their own small fleet of merchant vessels. Yes, there were convoy restrictions at times, but these convoys were departing from the city. What better place to have a merchant fleet? Shipping under British account made sense – it involved less risk – but there was also less chance of profiting from cash crops, the true value of trans-Atlantic trade. The issue of low levels of access to credit was somewhat more intractable. Cullen concludes that the want of direct colonial trade led to the lack of a fully developed financial sector.<sup>155</sup> This was surely an issue that could have been managed more effectively, yet the Cork merchant class made no attempts to find a remedy for the lack of ships or to establish stronger financial institutions.

Once trade with Britain opened completely Cork and Ireland began to increase their trade with Britain and to allow other foreign trading partnerships to languish. Even though conflicts interspersed the period Cork had both commercial and familial links with all its main trading partners. These lines of communication could have been kept open. However, the most damning evidence comes after the Union was fully implemented and steam transit across the Irish Sea became available. Livestock exports increased while those of processed foodstuffs decreased.<sup>156</sup> Cork's provisioning industry collapsed in the face of both convenience and entrenched local production techniques. Ireland's relationship with Britain had become more colonial in nature and not solely because of British machinations. There is an argument to be made that this occurred due to the acquiescence of Irish commercialists to the convenience of conducting trade with Britain.

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<sup>155</sup> Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses', p. 171.

<sup>156</sup> Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production, Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966), p. 37.

## Chapter 4

### Development in Cork

In 1832 Daniel O'Connell wrote to Thomas Lyons, a textile merchant and later Mayor of Cork, to discuss the repeal of the Act of Union. Referring to the Westminster Parliament O'Connell asserted,

It is equally impossible for that parliament to be sufficiently informed of the wants wishes resources and local interests and capabilities of Ireland-these can be properly attended to solely by an Irish Parliament... The persisting causes of our wealth is all clearly disappearing.<sup>1</sup>

O'Connell created a direct connection between the loss of an Irish representative house and the dramatic changes in Ireland's commercial intercourse in the intervening three decades. However, the Committee of Merchants in Cork had managed to maintain a degree of independence in the regulation of their butter trade from Westminster up to 1829. In this context it is worthwhile examining how the commercial activities within Cork changed over the course of the first industrial revolution. In 1800 Cork butter and hide merchants secured an exclusion from the implementation of prior and successive acts for the regulation of their trade. *An Act for the Better Regulation of the Butter Trade of the City of Cork* found that previous acts had been 'inexpedient' and gave new provisions for separate regulations for Cork.<sup>2</sup> The Committee of Merchants had maintained a sufficient level of power to be exempted from the 1812 act for regulating the butter trade in Ireland with section twenty-seven guaranteeing that nothing in that act would apply to Cork. This exemption continued in the 1824 butter regulation act before being abolishing

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Daniel O'Connell to Thomas Lyons re repeal, 7 March 1832, Thomas Lyons Correspondence SM/775/1, CCCA.

<sup>2</sup> Ireland, *Statutes Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland ... from the Third Year of Edward the Second, A.D. 1310 [to the Fortieth Year of George III, A.D. 1800, Inclusive] ...*: 39 George III, 1799-40 George III, 1800 (1801), pp 392-429 'An Act for the better Regulation of the Butter Trade of the City of Cork, and the Liberties thereof, and for the better Regulation of the said City in other Matters, therein mentioned, and in respect to Lighters and Vessels plying for Hire, and also respecting Sedan Chairs, Coaches, and Chaises plying for Hire within the City and Liberties of the City of Cork'.

by the 1829 butter regulation act.<sup>3</sup> Although these men were far from a representative parliament, they did come from the upper echelons of Cork's political and mercantile classes and wielded considerable influence over policy, at least for a time.

From the beginnings of the repeal movement many Irish people laid the blame for Ireland's economic woes on the Union. Nor was this opinion restricted to Irish repealers. In a letter to Julius Besnard, the Mayor of Cork, the Scottish MP Joseph Hume argued that 'the present restrictions and prohibitions in the Commercial Code of this Empire present serious obstacles to the extension of its trade'.<sup>4</sup> The abolishing of duties and tariffs between Ireland and Britain and the move of political decision making to Westminster had limited Ireland's ability to control the nature of its trade. These changes, most importantly the removal of any protective duties, did lead to long term problems in Ireland's indigenous industries. This was most notable in the devastation caused to the Irish linen industry when the removal of various protections and bounties on Irish linen opened up that industry to the full force of British competition.<sup>5</sup> However, these changes also had the potential to improve Irish access to the British market.

The impact of the Union with Britain in terms of Cork's international trades has already been addressed, but at a local level how did Cork's commercial classes work towards creating a viable infrastructure that could maintain international trade? Furthermore, to what extent can the impact of the Act of Union be separated from the decline in exports of provisions and butter that had been occurring since the late eighteenth century? Why was the North in a position to

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<sup>3</sup> (Ireland.) *A Bill [As Amended] for the Better Regulation of the Butter Trade in Ireland*. pp. 1, 9, H.C. 1812 (312) i, 1207; 5 Geo. IV.--Sess. 1824. (Ireland.) *A Bill for Better Regulating the Butter Trade of Ireland*. H.C. 1824 (382)ii, 165; 10 Geo. IV.--Sess. 1829. (Ireland.) *A Bill [As Amended by the Committee] to Amend the Laws for the Regulation of the Butter Trade in Ireland*. H.C. 1829 (246) ii, 517

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Joseph Hume to the Mayor of Cork, 26 July 1841, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401)\199, Cork County & City Archives

<sup>5</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (Routledge explorations in economic history, London ; New York, 2009), pp 18-19.

capitalise so quickly on the Union, leaving the South in a declining spiral to the extent that it was characterised as being 'in every respect inferior to that of the northern' despite being 'eager for instruction; and readily trained... to habits of order and steady industry'.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of weakening trade had been considered from the early years of the Union. In 1810 the *Freeman's Journal* discussed an ongoing decline in exports and imports. According to the article this could 'easily be referred to the low state of public credit, and the consequent deficiency of means, to enable any trader or merchant to carry on or support that system of speculation'.<sup>7</sup> The report goes on to point out that Cork's butter and provisions were sold cheaper on the London market than in Cork and this indicated the impact poor access to credit had on the city's commercial development. Due to the restricted availability of credit and the narrow trade with foreign nations the article concludes that Cork 'must bear all the profit and losses within itself'.<sup>8</sup> However, despite the article citing the value of Cork butter on the London market as indicative of deficiencies in the Union, it is perhaps more an indicator of the niche role that Cork-produced butter occupied. Cork butter, or at least the vast bulk of it, was not produced for the London market. It was designed to be exported vast distances to warm climates, such as the West Indies. This required heavy salting to preserve the quality. When it came to closer markets, such as London, the Cork product was too salted for popular tastes and this 'gives it a bad flavour'. When a lower salted version went to that market it was 'uncommonly well liked'.<sup>9</sup> It was more an issue of sending the wrong product to the London market than anything else. The low salted butter was demonstrably marketable in London, yet the merchants appear to have persisted in trying to market the heavily salted West Indian butter there. This seems to have been more a result of a lack of market awareness than any insidious political manoeuvring.

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<sup>6</sup> Second Report from the Railway Commissioners in Ireland, p. 5., I.K. Brunel Collection, RAIL 1149, TNA.

<sup>7</sup> 'Cork Commercial Report', *Freeman's journal*, 4 May 1810.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* pp. 237, 265 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135

The analysis in the preceding chapters of Cork's imports and exports reflect the regions strengths and weaknesses. Cork had very strong agricultural production, but lacked a developed industrial base or the natural resources to develop a strong industrial economy. The city and region occupied a niche role in international trade but when the trading environment changed Cork proved unable, or unwilling, to adapt to a new economic reality.

## **The Committee of Merchants**

### ***Political Influence***

'The merchant-kings of the modern Irish Venice.'<sup>10</sup>

Cork's international trade was built around butter and its ancillary industries. The success of Cork's butter depended on the ability to transport it unaltered across long distances to warm climates. This was achieved through the insistence on high quality casks and pickling. Those interviewed for the *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, published in 1826, consistently made this point. The Cork Committee of Merchants – the most powerful body in Cork and one of the most powerful trade organisations in Ireland in the early nineteenth century – had an unprecedented level of control over the economic and political fortunes of Cork city. Founded to properly regulate the butter trade, by the time of the Union their influence had spread to make them the de facto representative body for Cork's external trade. They represented the region's interests at a broad level outside their specific concerns with the butter trade, dealing with regulations on the importation of foreign flour imports, the manner through which import duties were paid on tobacco and the milling industry in general.<sup>11</sup> They achieved this because their members were drawn from the city's

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<sup>10</sup> James Johnson, *A Tour in Ireland: With Meditations and Reflections*. (London:, 1844), pp 142–143.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from John Lecky, president of Cork Committee of Merchants, concerning regulation of foreign imports, 17 Apr 1821, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP/1821/73, NAI; Papers relating to complaints of the Committee of Merchants of Cork City concerning import duties, 15 June 1819, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP /1819/230, NAI.

political and mercantile elite. The membership lists over the years included representation from all the major Cork trading families of the nineteenth century. The membership roll embodied the moniker of 'Merchant Princes' adeptly, both in terms of their wide ranging involvement with Cork's trade networks as well as the almost hereditary nature of their composition. The names of Beamish, Lane, and Crawford all make regular appearances in the minutes. The most powerful of those families' remains etched on the city itself in the names of Cork's streets and laneways. This sweeping membership allowed them to call on support from members of parliament and the admiralty and the location of the admiralty victualing centre in the city gave them a fulcrum from which they could leverage power. Furthermore, the Committee maintained a salaried representative in London to communicate with parliament, who in 1826 was former Cork banker James Roche.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the long life of this organisation they wielded their power to further the interests of Cork city in mostly positive directions. This has been seen in earlier chapters where the Committee would regularly make representations to Westminster or powerful individuals on matters of imperial policy in an attempt to protect their interests.

The Committee of Merchants created a very restrictive environment for Cork butter merchants. Regulations controlled every facet of the trade. Casks were required to be of a specified size and construction, made from seasoned oak, sycamore and beech. They were required to be bound by twelve iron hoops so that they could hold the pickle for preserving the butter. Once brought to market the butter was tasted and branded with a quality mark before being sold. The casks were then inspected to ensure they were appropriately constructed.<sup>13</sup> Every aspect of production, from farm to export merchant, was regulated and even after the point of sale the Committee attempted to ensure that no fraudulent use of their particular marks occurred in ports such as London and Liverpool. This was a highly restrictive trading environment, but one that saw the receipts for butter increase

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<sup>12</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 85–86.

from 100,000 firkins per year in 1770 to a peak of 314,597 in 1820.<sup>14</sup> The success of the Committee of Merchant's regulatory efforts in promoting the export of high quality butter was such that one butter buyer, William Fagan, thought that freeing the trade would devastate the industry. However, his rationale was that without legislative restrictions informing them of the best course of action the country farmer would be unwilling to take the advice of those better attuned to the tastes of the market, the butter buyers.<sup>15</sup> He followed this condescending statement with another one, asserting that the country people wished for the butter buyer to take care of the sale and price of their product as they 'think that unless a person in a good coat assists them, they will never be done justice to in any court in Ireland'.<sup>16</sup> As a member of the elite represented by the Committee of Merchants it would be untoward to suggest that his views would have been in any way biased, but it is noteworthy that at this point there was not one representative of the farming community on the Committee, though apparently this was because the country people neglected to send a representative.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult to precisely gauge the overall efficacy of the merchants' lobbying efforts, as Cork was ultimately a small provincial city. However, they did call on the attention of larger merchant groups in Britain for support with some success. Securing an exemption in 1800 from the majority of butter legislation imposed by Westminster that lasted until 1829 was probably one of their more successful endeavours in the early nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> It helped Cork maintain its hold on the foreign butter trade to the exclusion of other Irish producers. However, both the implementation of the freedoms that the 1800 act gave the Committee of Merchants and the subsequent loss of these exemptions caused many difficulties

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp 95–96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Ireland, *Statutes Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland ... from the Third Year of Edward the Second, A.D. 1310 [to the Fortieth Year of George III, A.D. 1800, Inclusive] ...*, pp 392–429 'An Act for the better Regulation of the Butter Trade of the City of Cork, and the Liberties thereof, and for the better Regulation of the said City in other Matters, therein mentioned, and in respect to Lighters and Vessels plying for Hire, and also respecting Sedan Chairs, Coaches, and Chaises plying for Hire within the City and Liberties of the City of Cork'.

over the decades. The most fruitful exploration of their multifaceted attempts to curry favour and influence political decision-making comes from their minute books. At the turn of the nineteenth century these books contain vast quantities of references to balls, dinners, and assorted events that they either hosted or arranged for military and political figures, as well as details of lobbying on wide ranging topics. However, the detail in the minute books is susceptible to the vagaries of those keeping the minutes and from the late 1820s onwards the previously fastidious collation of these records lapsed. There are tantalising hints of continued lobbying, but the records of such activities are lacking. Accounts in the Committee's papers, as well as various appearances in the Chief Secretary's Office Papers and the British Parliamentary Papers, demonstrate how this body busied themselves with almost every aspect of Cork's trade. Some issues seemed directly relevant to their interests, such as flour, corn, and other agricultural concerns, while others, such as tobacco, fell far beyond their self-appointed remit.

On a political level, the Committee of Merchants were quite vocal in arguing for or against duties and rates that they deemed important to their business interests. The issue of duties on products was a point of contention in the period before the Act of Union and continued to be so up to its full implementation. In a *Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce with Ireland* the issue of reciprocal protective duties in Ireland's trade was discussed. The argument from the Irish perspective was that nascent Irish industries needed some protections from the far more advanced and wealthy British industrial sector. Similarly, it was argued that Britain laid protective duties on goods that were similar to her own manufactures and that Ireland should also have that right.<sup>19</sup> In terms of Cork's interests, the Committee opposed changes in duties on cotton imports in 1794, salt and herrings in 1797, wine in 1800, and sugar in 1831.<sup>20</sup> They lobbied on any trade good that Cork may have had an interest in. Irish commerce relied heavily on protective tariffs

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<sup>19</sup> *Memorandum on Several Points of Commerce with Ireland*, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, 30/8/323 ff 105, BL.

<sup>20</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818 11 Feb 1794, 1 Mar 1797, 6 Mar 1800; Committee of Merchants Minute Book 1829-1837, Feb 1831, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA



and duties to further their business interests, rather than on innovative production methods or an awareness of changing tastes. They were far more interested in preserving the status quo than broadening their market base. During the nineteenth century the volume of trade undertaken with countries other than Britain declined and this increased reliance on Britain and protective duties would prove detrimental.

The Committee regularly expressed their views to Westminster and the Chief Secretary's Office. They vociferously opposed any changes in the duties or tariffs on Irish produce, issuing petitions and sending their London-based representatives to solicit support from members of both houses of parliament and other interested parties. When Robert Peel proposed to change the tariffs in place on imported provisions in 1842 a number of London's provisioning houses wrote to the Board of Trade arguing that duty reductions would deprive the Irish manufacturers of cured beef and pork of their English markets. The language used was just as hyperbolic as that employed by the Committee of Merchants with the petitioners arguing that

The effect of the repeal... is virtually to put an end to all fair competition between the home and foreign manufacturer, and absolutely give the foreigner the monopoly of supplying the British mercantile marine.<sup>21</sup>

They argued that the only consequence of these changes would be for Irish producers to stop all manufacture of salted meat production and lay off all their coopers and labourers. However, the retort from government was that if the matter was so important, why had none of the Irish Members of Parliament opposed the changes. At a meeting in Cork on the subject John Gould, a member of the Committee of Merchants, suggested that it would be 'better far it were for Ireland that she were a colony of England than an integral portion of the empire... Ireland is to be ruined and sacrificed, because, forsooth, America is to be quieted and conciliated.'<sup>22</sup> A more sarcastic attendee added to this that it could be useful to

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<sup>21</sup> 'Irish Provision Trade, *Freeman's Journal* 24 Mar 1842.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

offer the 105 Irish MPs to Peel for they did no good to Ireland. The Committee of Merchants constituted a political force in their own right, with a long-standing tradition of leveraging their connections in Britain to advocate for political change.

It is strange that Gould complained about a lack of any representation by Members of Parliament. One of Cork's representatives at this time was Edmund Roche, no relation to the Roche banker that was at one point employed as an agent by the Committee. The other member for Cork was Daniel O'Connell. Neither broached the topic of duties on provisions. It is probable they were more preoccupied with the repeal movement than with seemingly trivial items like duty rates. Later in life Edmund Roche appears to have been an improving landowner, writing letters in newspapers arguing for the value of giving tenants long leases, criticising excessive sub-letting and arguing for improved funds for Cork harbour.<sup>23</sup> However, in 1842 Roche was a young and inexperienced MP, just elected as a repealer. Despite their position as Cork's elected representatives, neither Roche nor O'Connell broached the topic of the city's trade. In terms of political representation the Committee of Merchants, at least on this issue, was far more engaged with the requirements of Cork as a city and less concerned with the more intangible Irish repeal movement.

In 1860 the Committee of Merchants wrote a memorial to Lord John Russell in his position as Foreign Secretary to lament the *Cobden-Chevalier Treaty*, which secured free trade between France and Britain. The merchants complained that the treaty removed the duties on butter that had protected it on the English market. They explained that they now faced stiff competition from the improvements in both quality and quantity that were being made in France and the United States.<sup>24</sup> This is somewhat misleading as Cork butter had not been selling well on the domestic British market for some time. In the 1820s it had been noted that the levels of salt in Cork's butter did not suit the tastes of the London market and that the lighter salted butter from Carlow or Belfast sold at a better price due to this. It

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<sup>23</sup> *The Cork Examiner*, 08 Aug 1863, 08 Feb 1861.

<sup>24</sup> Draft Memorial to Lord John re duties on and imports of Butter into Britain, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/320 CCCA.

was also noted in 1826 that although Dutch competition on the British market should have had the effect of inciting improvements in the production of Irish butter this had not occurred.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, one London based importer, William Strange, estimated that in 1826 the quantity of Dutch butter brought into London was greater than that of Irish butter.<sup>26</sup> Irish butter had faced competition from Holland nearly forty years prior to the *Cobden-Chevalier Treaty*, but relied on protective duties to preserve its market share rather than producing a product that catered for the British market. Such a reliance on protective duties rather than improving their product was short sighted and ill advised, especially at a time when the foreign market for Irish butter was in decline.

### ***Butter Regulation***

Established in 1769, the Committee of Merchants acted as a regulatory body that would respond to market pressures and ensure that the butter exported from Cork was suitable for the open market. Part of the reason for its establishment was the comparatively small share of the English market that Cork's butter merchants held compared to their share of the Irish butter market as a whole.<sup>27</sup> By the 1820s the composition of the Committee of Merchants consisted of fourteen exporters, seven butter buyers and three representatives of the tanning trade.<sup>28</sup> The control and regulation of the butter trade was the Committee's primary function and it is reflected in their minute books. As well as details of the election and nomination process these records contain a large number of petitions and communications for the regulation of the butter industry. Despite the power of the Committee of Merchants as an organisation, including exacting charges on their services, they operated without any form of statutory powers. This in itself is a remarkable achievement, especially once the scope of their concerns broadened beyond the butter trade. One could even regard the Committee of Merchants as a form of monopoly, in that all sales of butter through the city had to occur through their

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<sup>25</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, pp 96, 135, 147, 202, 236.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>27</sup> David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), p. 375.

<sup>28</sup> John O'Donovan, *The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland* (Cork, 1940), p. 310.

processes and the sale of butter without their marks was dealt with harshly. Their power was only assured through the consensus of the majority of the merchants and buyers of the city.

Considering the tone of the Committee's petitions as previously mentioned, it is somewhat surprising that at times they were quite supportive of parliamentary interference. In 1800 a parliamentary act was passed to regulate the specifics of the butter trade of Cork city. Previous legislation for the Irish butter trade had been found to be ineffective for the Cork butter market, so this new act provided separate legislation for the Cork butter trade. Its most pertinent aspects related to the construction and inspection of casks and the volume of butter within with each cask.<sup>29</sup> In 1804 the Committee noted the benefits of this act for the regulation of the tares of butter casks. Their support of this act was such that they actually warned their members that any changes to it would injure Cork's butter trade.<sup>30</sup> The 1800 act remained in force in Cork, to the exception of all other acts of parliament relating to the Irish butter trade, until 1829. Up to this point the Committee of Merchants were able to maintain exceptions for the Cork butter market at the highest levels of government.

As discussed in Chapter One, large quantities of American timber were imported to supply the coopers for the construction of butter casks. American timber was the preferred material and this preference remained stable throughout the early nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The methods that Cork's mercantile community devised for the provision trade led to it becoming 'the most advanced meatpacking

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<sup>29</sup> Ireland, *Statutes Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland ... from the Third Year of Edward the Second, A.D. 1310 [to the Fortieth Year of George III, A.D. 1800, Inclusive] ...*, pp 392–429 'An Act for the better Regulation of the Butter Trade of the City of Cork, and the Liberties thereof, and for the better Regulation of the said City in other Matters, therein mentioned, and in respect to Lighters and Vessels plying for Hire, and also respecting Sedan Chairs, Coaches, and Chaises plying for Hire within the City and Liberties of the City of Cork'.

<sup>30</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, 15 June 1804, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>31</sup> Síle Ní Chinnéide, 'A New View of Cork City in 1790' in *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society*, lxxviii (1973), p. 10; *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland.*, pp 28, 194 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135.

industry in the eighteenth century world.<sup>32</sup> Cork's coopering methods were ideally suited to handling the high temperatures of the Caribbean. In combination with coopering high quality casks, an appropriate preservative pickle was required to ensure quality and longevity. The exact composition of this pickle is unknown, but Colin Rynne draws a number of clues based on the limited information available. He believes that in England salt was refined through boiling on a slow heat, whereas the salt refined in Cork was heated on a more moderate heat which produced a finer salt.<sup>33</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two the preference for finer refined salt over British-produced rock salt was not confined to Cork's merchants, so it is likely a combination of local refining methods and better quality salt from Portugal created the optimal pickle.

In 1828 Thomas Courtenay, then vice-president of the Board of Trade, wrote to the Committee of Merchants stating his intention to bring a bill before parliament regulating the butter trade. This bill was based on suggestions proposed by the Committee of Merchants which are unfortunately lost.<sup>34</sup> The proposed bill sought to regulate the branding of butter and make it an offence to falsify a master cooper's brand. It would also regulate the penalties that could be imposed for breaching branding or casking regulations.<sup>35</sup> Although this legislation may have been brought through by the machinations of the Committee of Merchants, their influence was still quite limited. By the time the bill had passed the committee stages it had been amended to remove the exemptions that had applied to the butter trade in Cork for nearly thirty years.<sup>36</sup> Alterations to the butter regulations precipitated a number of changes in how the Committee of Merchants regulated the butter trade in Cork and the working conditions of the coopers who relied on

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, 1988), p. 155; Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York, 2007), pp 127–129.

<sup>33</sup> Colin Rynne, *At the Sign of the Cow: The Cork Butter Market, 1770-1924* (Cork, 1998), p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> 'From the Cork Constitution', *The Dublin Evening Mail*, 25 June 1828.

<sup>35</sup> *A Bill to Amend the Laws Relating to the Butter Trade in Ireland* H.C. 1828 (491) iii, 473

<sup>36</sup> *A Bill [As Amended by the Committee] to Amend the Laws for the Regulation of the Butter Trade in Ireland* H.C. 1829 (246) ii, 517

the butter trade for their income. In October 1829 the Committee convened to compose new regulations for the future regulation of the city's butter trade.<sup>37</sup>

From the 1830s onwards Cork's butter merchants became quite concerned with fraudulent Cork branded butter sold on the British market. In April 1833 the Committee of Merchants sent an inspector to Liverpool to report on the sale of fraudulent butter. The inspector was tasked with engaging with Liverpool merchants on the subjects of these breaches. This was part of the Committee's broader push to more stringently control the sale and distribution of Cork-produced butter. These controls were to be applied not only to Cork's merchants and suppliers, but also actively enforced by sending representatives to Britain to enforce Cork's brand.<sup>38</sup> In 1830 they published a notice directing their butter inspectors to remove any of their branding from casks of butter found to have been soaked.<sup>39</sup> The practice of soaking was used to add weight to the packaged butter, and involved leaving the barrel of butter absorb water. This practice damaged the quality of the butter as well as injuring the reputation of Cork-produced butter. The practice had been earlier prohibited under the 1800 Cork Butter Act. It seems likely that the repeal of the exemptions for the Cork butter trade had also had the inadvertent effect of removing the prohibition on the use of 'bog timber' for the construction of butter casks.

In 1831 the Committee of Merchants produced a resolution to be signed by all export merchants in Cork to solely export butter bearing the Cork quality marks. The resolution pledged these merchants would only export butter approved by the Committee of Merchants and they would not damage or in any other way change the assigned quality marks. Forty-six exporters and exporting companies signed the pledge. Furthermore, the butter buyers in Cork, with the support of thirty-one of their members, also resolved to undertake a similar pledge 'to uphold and protect

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<sup>37</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1829-May 1837, 5 Oct 1829, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/2, CCCA.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. April-May 1833.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 29 Oct 1830.

the character of the Cork butter in English and Foreign markets.<sup>40</sup> These were not empty promises and several cases were taken against individuals accused of breaching the resolutions. In 1832 Charles Sugrue was accused of faking brands on butter bound for Lisbon, but it was ruled that though a breach in spirit had occurred it was unintentional.<sup>41</sup> Later that year John Gould was accused of shipping butter to Jamaica without appropriate brand marks, but the Committee ruled that no breach had occurred as he had merely replaced bad kegs with good ones after the branding had been applied.<sup>42</sup> The following year Benjamin Tanner was accused of making or repairing imitation Cork brands and he was found to have violated an agreement made with the export merchants in May 1833, though he was provided with the opportunity to rid his name of 'such infavourable impression'.<sup>43</sup> The Committee actively pursued alleged breaches of their trade rules and the number of reported violations was probably assisted by the promise to reward any notification of breaches of branding regulations. Indeed, shortly after the publication of a notification promising such rewards William Cannon, a blacksmith previously employed by Tanner, accused him of violating those rules.

Over the course of the 1830s and 1840s the Committee of Merchants' minute books noted any breaches of the regulations. In 1838 a letter was sent from London to inform the Committee of how fake casks made to look like those produced in Cork were very nearly sent to Sydney.<sup>44</sup> In 1842 a Richard Townley in Liverpool informed the Committee that Hamburg butter had been shipped abroad branded as Cork butter with the usual markings from the Cork weigh house.<sup>45</sup> Despite the Committee's best efforts frauds continued. Part of the problem was that as much of their product was destined for distant markets it was quite difficult to prevent their packaging from being misappropriated. Furthermore, the Committee relied on self-interest for their enforcement powers. They needed

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 18 & 26 May 1831.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 9 Mar 1832.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 6 July 1832.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 29 May, 18 July, 23 Aug 1833.

<sup>44</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1837-March 1857, 5 Apr 1838 Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/4, CCCA.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 23 Feb 1842.

buyers and sellers to have an invested interest in ensuring that butter was not sold fraudulently under the Cork brand as they had no actual powers of enforcement. By 1850 the situation had become more pressing with the Committee receiving reports of butter being 'frequently' shipped from Cork with misrepresented brand marks and the practice spread throughout the south-western ports of Ireland. In an attempt to halt this practice they sent five hundred copies of resolutions to merchants and traders in London, Liverpool, Bristol, Portsmouth and other ports in England. The Committee pushed for the adoption of measures prohibiting the sale of any butter marked as Cork butter 'except such as bears the genuine marks and brands of the inspectors and weighmasters appointed by the Committee of Merchants of Cork'.<sup>46</sup> In essence they wanted their brand of butter to have an early form of protected food status!

According to William Fagan's statement to the select committee on the butter trade in 1826 false brands were never substituted for Cork brands before being marketed in Britain. He did, however, state that attempts had been made some years prior but the deception was detected and the butter seized.<sup>47</sup> Fagan's assertion is difficult to reconcile with the apparent increase in fraud only a few years later. It is possible that the regulatory changes in Cork precipitated by the 1829 Butter Act were a response to a perception that increased fraud could occur. There was a noticeable increase in the detection of frauds and the prosecution of breaches of regulations from 1830 onwards. However, the increase in detection could have resulted from financial incentives being offered for the reporting of any such activities and an increased investment in security measures to detect potential fraud, both in Cork and in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately the minute books for the Committee of Merchants covering the period 1818 to 1829 are no longer extant. While the earlier minute books showed more concern with the conditions of the transatlantic trade and legislative changes rather than local frauds, the later

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<sup>46</sup> Resolutions of Committee of Merchants Regarding Imitation Cork Brands, 29 Apr 1850, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1276, CCCA.

<sup>47</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, p. 91.



minute books are fastidious in documenting local and foreign breaches of the Cork Butter Market's marks.

The 1829 Act removed a substantial weapon in the prevention of fraud from the Committee's arsenal. In practice up to this point only Cork-produced casks could be used for the transportation of butter and this helped prevent local frauds. It was ultimately the butter firkins that would prove to be the weakness for the Committee of Merchants. The coopering of the casks had been strictly and successfully regulated to ensure that the pickle held over long distances. However, there were no statutory protections for Cork butter and from the 1830s onwards there are regular accounts of fraudulent casks, or even the reuse of old Cork produced casks, being used to pass off inferior products as Cork butter.<sup>48</sup> Moving later into the nineteenth century it was the Committee of Merchants' long-lived insistence on retaining the traditional firkin that helped erode Cork's share of the British market, with British consumers showing a preference for the smaller and neater packaging of continental suppliers.<sup>49</sup> Despite William Fagan's assertion that no fraud was conducted through re-branding of butter, Thomas Fitzgibbon, a former butter merchant, stated that he personally knew of frauds being conducted in the Cork butter trade, with weight added by using heavier hoops for casking.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Discord***

In many respects the Committee of Merchants did their utmost to lobby on behalf of the best interests of Cork's mercantile community. The records show an active organisation that undertook a wide variety of measures to further the interests of their members on a political level. However, such a powerful organisation would not have arisen or had such a long lasting legacy without similar efforts closer to home. In the main the Committee's influence was predominantly positive, but such power opens the potential for abuse as well as criticism.

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<sup>48</sup> James S. Donnelly, 'Cork Market: Its Role in the Nineteenth Century Irish Butter Trade' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11 (1971), p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 146, 152–4.

<sup>50</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland.*, p. 131.

Increasingly over the nineteenth century the stringent application of their own self-created regulatory systems combined with their innate conservatism led to an organisation unable to adapt to changing circumstances. A number of incidences over the early nineteenth highlighted the potential, if not necessarily the reality, of having invested so much power in an organisation that had few checks and balances on their actions. Complaints from individual merchants regarding the conduct of the Committee of Merchants arose on occasion.

Although there were several notable incidents during the lifetime of the Committee, an 1819 letter to the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Charles Grant, from a J.B. Latham details some of the concerns regarding its operation. While some of the claims made are unverifiable, the letter does highlight the more dubious practices of the committee, as well as the potential for abuse. The letter relates to a petition Isaac Hewitt presented to Parliament that year regarding a proposed bill for the improvement of Cork harbour, the Ballast Bill.<sup>51</sup> Although such a legislative act would appear innocuous, especially considering the deplorable state of Cork Harbour at the time, the petitioner was quite exercised on the topic. However, Latham's concerns were not with the substance of the bill, but the relationship of the Committee of Merchants to the passage of such legislation. Latham alleged that the Committee comprised 'a certain number of merchants self-chosen and self-called a committee, neither under control of the merchants at large nor choosen [sic] by them'.<sup>52</sup> Latham continued, complaining that the Committee had appointed themselves to the position of levying tolls and enacting trade legislation.<sup>53</sup> This was true: the political influence of the Committee repeatedly allowed them to gain favourable terms for their interests in Parliament. With regards to the levying of tolls, the Committee charged for the branding and repacking of butter. These fees

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<sup>51</sup> 'Letter from JB Latham to Charles Grant, 8 June 1819, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers' CSO/RP/1819/609, NAI.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

were divided between the Committee, the Harbour Commissioners and the Wide Streets Commission.<sup>54</sup>

Latham alleged that the committee had mismanaged their position of power and that the tolls levied, far from being used for the benefit of Cork's economic development, were 'sometimes misapplied to the purpose of paying what can only be considered private tavern bills'.<sup>55</sup> Neither Latham, nor those he was associated with, objected to the bill itself. They objected to the Committee of Merchants being granted any say in the apportionment of the funds. Latham believed that any funds derived thereof would not be entirely committed to improving the harbour of Cork. It was his desire that

the remaining merchant commissioners purported to be added to them under this new ballast act shall not, as at present, be name by themselves [sic] subject neither to a ballot nor to the control of the merchants at large as all Committee of Merchants ought to be.<sup>56</sup>

This was in no small part due to the nepotism that he perceived to be at the heart of the Committee of Merchants. He noted the 'extraordinary fact that amongst the merchant commissioners in the proposed bill four of them are partners in one mercantile house in this town, three another'.<sup>57</sup> He also observed that surprisingly two of the other merchants had no residence in Cork, instead living in London and Newry.

Notwithstanding any personal grievances or biases Latham may have held it is undeniable that at this point in the nineteenth century the political and economic power of the Committee of Merchants made them almost unassailable. Their unique position in the city's commercial life, as well as their composition coming from the wealthier elements of Cork's commercial class, left them vulnerable to any charges of nepotism or unfair dealings. Latham was not the only merchant to bring

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<sup>54</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland.*, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from JB Latham to Charles Grant, 8 June 1819, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers' CSO/RP/1819/609, NAI.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

to attention some of the more dubious aspects of their dealings. In 1812 a petition was placed before the House of Commons complaining that the exemption granted to Cork from butter regulations had caused ‘unjust and unequal consequences’.<sup>58</sup> This particular petition concerned the manner through which weighmasters were appointed and the funds raised therefrom. The petitioners sought to have one third of the revenue raised from the weighing, branding and inspection of the weighmasters applied to the improvement of the harbour and river channel.<sup>59</sup> This petition pre-empted the establishment of the Harbour Commissioners in Cork in 1813 who from that point received one third of that revenue. The mismanagement of these funds was the source of Latham’s ire. In a further complaint regarding political interference by the Committee, Thomas Fitzgibbon placed the blame for Cork’s decreasing butter in the mid-1820s on restrictions on cask sizes introduced in 1822. Fitzgibbon did not specify that these changes were brought about by the Committee themselves, but it is inconceivable that any such changes could have come about without their acquiescence. He alleged that regulatory changes were surreptitiously buried in an act for paving and lighting the streets, to the surprise of those involved in the butter trade. This change made casks of miniscule variance liable for seizure. When asked if he had heard anyone complaining of this law he said he had not, ‘because we all feel the necessity of violating the law’.<sup>60</sup> Again the implementation of this act fell to the weighmasters, under the jurisdiction of the Committee of Merchants.

One of the most enduring issues the Committee of Merchants faced in the first half of the nineteenth century was their relationship with the coopers of Cork. The coopers held a unique position of power in Cork’s international trade network. High quality barrels were required to export all provisions out of Cork and the barrels had to be of sufficient quality to last for several years while preserving the quality of produce within. The construction, repair and maintenance of barrels was

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<sup>58</sup> *Petition respecting the Regulation of Markets in the City of Cork* H.C. Deb 5 Mar 1812 Vol 21 cc 1169-1201

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* pp. 123-124 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135

an industry in its own right with large volumes of timber imported for barrel staves and large number of hoops imported to bind the barrels. Not only did the coopers provide the barrels for Cork-produced provisions, their expertise was also deployed to repackage goods for re-export, such as herring, as well as to conduct repairs on barrels inspected at the butter market. The coopering trade in the city supported several other businesses, such as Harvey, Deaves & Harvey, which imported timber for the construction of casks. The importance of wood stave imports to Cork's economy was such that by 1807 Cork had over thirty seven per cent of the national stave import business, with that partnership accounting for over twenty per cent of the Cork share in the trade.<sup>61</sup>

There was almost constant tension between the coopers and the merchants, with conflicts arising every few years. Although it was never acknowledged in the Committee of Merchant's papers, they were utterly dependent on the skill of Cork's coopers. Without the proper construction of barrels for export their provisions would not hold the brine for preservation or last during transit. In some respects the Committee themselves were instrumental in giving the coopers so much power. As previously mentioned, the Committee, through their political machinations, had ensured that they were exempt from Irish butter legislation. This exemption focused on allowing the Committee to enforce regulations on the size, construction and type of firkin used for Cork butter. This meant that in practice only Cork-coopered barrels were permitted. Of course conflict between the coopers and the Committee existed before this legislation came into effect. Having such a degree of tacit power in Cork's provisioning trade meant that any dispute with the coopers always had the potential to become a crisis for Cork's commerce.

For almost a decade, starting in the 1790s, the Committee of Merchants faced a series of trade disputes with the coopers. The issue arose with the journeymen, who began agitating over pay and conditions. The dispute had its

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<sup>61</sup> Richard S. Harrison, 'Harvey Deaves and Harvey, merchants : sidelights on Cork's timber trade, 1760-1848' in *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society*, cvii (2002), pp 135, 140–141.

origins in the late 1770s and soon expanded to bridge the passing of the Act of Union. In 1776 the Committee sent notices to Dublin, Waterford and Limerick declaring that they would not undertake trade with any persons found to have employed a Cork journeyman that had broken his agreement with his master. The journeyman coopers appear to have breached the wages agreed upon by the magistrates in Cork and sought extra compensation for their labour.<sup>62</sup> Details on the origins of this dispute are scarce but it relates to the retraction of customary agreements that provided coopers working in the cellars of merchants with an allowance of the produce that was being barrelled. This was known as their 'trimming' allowance. The market price of provisions in Cork city had steadily increased over the years and this trimming allowance was a valuable supplement to the cooper's wages.<sup>63</sup> The merchants themselves wished to either convert the trimming allowance into a monetary figure while removing the allowance on repacking, or to limit the allowance granted. The initial issue was resolved by the summer of 1784 with the journeymen agreeing to forego the allowance in exchange for two shillings and six pence a day for cellar work.<sup>64</sup> However, it arose again in September of that year, with reports arriving to the Committee that some master coopers encouraged their journeymen to refuse the allowance and offered them allowances of beef or pork instead.<sup>65</sup> The dispute was sometimes violent in nature. In 1792 sixty coopers attempted to assault a journeyman cooper who abided by the regulations. Those assembled were only dispersed when the master cooper chased them away and hit one with an axe.<sup>66</sup> In April 1793 the master coopers informed the Committee that it was the intent of the journeymen to apply for a raise in wages and that they would no longer work in the merchants' cellars until they received a 'trimming' allowance of butter.

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<sup>62</sup> *Freeman's Journal* 2 Nov 1776.

<sup>63</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, sec. Appendix V pp. 646–647.

<sup>64</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, May 1794, , Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 26 Sept 1794.

<sup>66</sup> *The Cork Gazette and General Advertiser*, 25 June 1792.

This was the beginning of an escalating series of conflicts between Munster-based merchants and journeymen coopers. Merchants in Waterford agreed to cooperate with Cork's merchants to try and eradicate the combinations. The *Freeman's Journal* called it 'the misfortune of Ireland, to have her prosperity considerably retarded by combination'.<sup>67</sup> Merchants in these cities would send journeymen back to Cork for prosecution if and when they were located. After journeymen in Limerick began to decline work in an attempt to force wage increases the Committee resolved not to employ such men in Cork.<sup>68</sup> The Committee resolved to crush any such combinations in their city and went so far as to pay for the arrest and prosecution of journeymen found to support trade combinations.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore the Committee promised to take action against any master coopers who perpetuated the practice of trimming. They established a fund to support their resolutions and compiled a list of journeyman coopers that could be shared amongst affected merchants.<sup>70</sup>

Agitation by the coopers subsided at times, but periodically re-emerged. However, the nature of the disagreements changed. By the late 1830s the coopers accused the Committee of causing a loss in trade through the repeal of the previous acts regulating the butter trade. The 1829 removal of Cork's exemptions had dissolved the legislative controls in regulating the size and construction of firkins. The changes in the trade environment caused them to labour under 'a condition much worse than that of the Negro apprentice about which we hear of so much laudable sympathy'.<sup>71</sup> They asserted that this change had led to a situation where coopering for the provisioning trade could be undertaken by anyone and the relaxation of the laws had led to a situation where 'any man [was] now able to purchase a few logs, or a sugar hogshead can become a master cooper.'<sup>72</sup> The

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<sup>67</sup> *Freeman's Journal* 5 Aug 1794, 21 Oct 1802.

<sup>68</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, 30 July 1796, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>69</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, 1793-1818, 1 May 1799, 26 Mar 1802, 20 Jan 1803, , Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/1, CCCA.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 4-9 Aug 1794,.

<sup>71</sup> Coopers of the City of Cork to Committee of Merchants, 27 Apr 1838, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/456, CCCA.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to a sugar hogshead referred to the change that removed the restriction on the size of the barrels and on the manner of their construction. A hogshead barrel was six times the size of the traditional firkin and its construction was not as skilled as that required for a butter firkin. The butter firkin was designed to be a liquid tight container and the size was judged best to allow a farmer fill the firkin with fresh butter without a mixture of butter qualities. A sugar barrel was far too large to ensure a product of consistent quality and as it was intended for holding dry goods would not have held the preservative pickle. The coopers may have used hyperbole, but they did touch on some salient points. They accused the merchants of seeing

the evil accruing from an open and unrestricted trade and when you tried (and failed) in your regulations that you would at once throw the aegis of your powerful [sic] protection over the Butter trade of this country, for altho it is true that frauds do not abound as much at present here, as they did, can the same be said for other parts of Ireland.<sup>73</sup>

They accused the merchants of being complicit through inaction against the forging of the Cork brand in England and the reshipment of Dutch butter. The coopers pointed to the contradiction in stringently maintaining the butter acts provisions despite the fact that Cork, according to the claimants, was the only place the acts were actually applied.<sup>74</sup>

The coopers went so far as to bring their disagreement to Parliament. In 1830 they sent a petition to the House of Commons stating that they were close to starvation and sought finance to emigrate to America. They blamed the 1829 Butter Act, which, 'in consequence of it, they had been reduced to a state of the greatest distress.'<sup>75</sup> MP for Cork, Daniel Callaghan, presented the petition. He recommended that funds should be made available to remove them to America, 'not only for the sake of humanity, but also because such a number of distressed persons might at any time occasion much mischief in a large commercial city like Cork'.<sup>76</sup> It should be

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> *Distress and Emigration-Ireland* H.C. Deb 23 Dec 1830 Vol. 2, cc 58-116

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



noted that Callaghan came from a successful merchant family in Cork and was himself a butter merchant. Furthermore, he stated to the *Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* that the previous regulations were too strict and he would have them lessened.<sup>77</sup> It is unsurprising that he would support the removal of coopers as he himself was a proponent of the removal of many of Cork's particular regulations. Callaghan was not alone in entertaining a degree of scepticism regarding the old regulations of the Cork butter market. Thomas Fitzgibbon, a former butter merchant, described to the same committee the work the coopers in the market did as 'abominable' and that it cost far too much. He further alleged that the exemption given to Cork had created a 'monopoly' for the coopers and damaged the city's trade.<sup>78</sup>

Maura Cronin touches on the later stages of the problems Cork's coopers faced. From 1841 to 1901 the numbers of Coopers employed in Cork declined from 725 to 275. Cronin argues that this decline was due to several factors: from the mid-1850s there was an increasing preference for butter boxes over firkins, there was the indirect impact of the post Napoleonic War peacetime slump and finally from 1842 tariffs on imported timber contributed.<sup>79</sup> By 1843 the coopers again began to agitate for more remuneration, but the agricultural society urged the Committee of Merchants to let the butter buyers and the coopers to 'fight it out' amongst themselves.<sup>80</sup> However, the problems Cork's coopers faced, at least in the provisioning trade, are more attributable to the 1829 withdrawal of the exemptions given to Cork's butter producers in the production of their firkins. Cork's coopers had for several decades held a virtual monopoly on the production of casks for the provisioning trade. This is not to detract from their undeniable skill. Almost all commentators on the success of Cork's international provisioning trade cite the construction of the casks as central to its success. However, such a monopoly was

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<sup>77</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland* pp. 292-297 H.C. 1826 (406) v, 135

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p.124

<sup>79</sup> Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft? : The Politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth-Century Cork* (Cork, 1994), pp 20–22, 40–41.

<sup>80</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1837-March 1857, 7 Oct 1843 Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/4, CCCA.

destined to end once the Union came into effect. Giving an exemption to Cork's butter trade in terms of casking their goods was anathema to the free trade movement and the intention of the Union. It would be hard to reconcile such an exemption to the concomitant dismantling of trade restrictions between Ireland and Britain. Furthermore, both Cork's mercantile community and political classes advocated for the removal of such an exemption, though those two groups were to an extent synonymous. The coopers had a degree of power over the Committee of Merchant's business that was intolerable to the merchants and its removal came as a relief. Of course the Committee did try to impose its own regulations on the butter trade to make up for the changes in the 1829 act. Quality had to be assured.

## **Transportation**

No matter how powerful the body or organisation, the development of a strong international trade requires a well-developed and considered transportation network. Even though much Irish trade was conducted on international account the infrastructure to support regular shipping routes needed to be in place.

Furthermore, internal trade networks were required. Cork drew from a vast hinterland, centred on Cork and parts of Kerry, but encompassing most of Munster. Although this land was ideally suited to support the trades that were Cork's bread and butter, it also presented several challenges. West Cork and Kerry have difficult terrain over which pack animals and livestock had to traverse. Improvements in roads were undertaken from the 1760s onwards and, though ad-hoc, they did leave a favourable road network throughout Cork and Kerry. English visitors commented on the quality of the road network and its superiority to the roads in many parts of England. Unfortunately much of this was down to the extremely limited heavy goods traffic on the road so they remained in a good state of repair.<sup>81</sup> However, the cornerstone of the Industrial Revolution, the one defining innovation that immediately comes to mind when it is mentioned, was steam power. The applications of steam were multifarious and refinements and improvements led to

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<sup>81</sup> Rynne, *At the Sign of the Cow*, p. 74.

ever-increasing uses for it, but it was as a motive power that it was best epitomised. Steam-powered shipping and railways connected the world in a manner never previously envisaged and more than any road network these innovations had the potential to revolutionise Cork's trade networks.

Before the introduction of steam-powered navigation there was the potential for an equally important transport innovation that remained underdeveloped in Munster: canals. Canal systems left a far less enduring mark on Ireland than Britain. However, several were completed and for a time they were considered an invaluable method of transportation. The benefits a canal could bring were much the same as those of railways: cheaper transportation, improved connectivity and access to raw materials. Not much evidence remains for the development of a canal system in Cork, but it was considered and work began before the scheme was abandoned. In 1810 Townsend recorded that the only canal implemented in County Cork was in Mallow, with the intention of improving connectivity to the Duhallow collieries. The route of a canal connecting Cork and Limerick had been measured, but he was unable to supply any information regarding the costs or requirements for construction.<sup>82</sup> It is unsurprising that the only constructed canal section in the county was for the use of a colliery. This pattern of development also played out in early infrastructural improvements in Britain, with isolated mines being connected to urban markets by canal and later by rail.

The canal to which Townsend referred was the same that was mentioned by the *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* in 1802. It was to connect Cork to the Blackwater, and from there to Limerick, with an additional dissector connecting to the Mallow collieries.<sup>83</sup> The proposed route was ambitious to say the least. Dickson notes that

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<sup>82</sup> Horace Townsend, *Statistical Survey of the County of Cork, with Observations on the Means of Improvement*, 1810 Addenda p. 23, 27.

<sup>83</sup> 'The Canal', *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 30 Aug 1802. "The canal will run from Cork to Mallow, from the Blackwater to Ballycough where it will also divide the space between Buttevant and Liseaol, will approach within 5 miles of Kanturk, three miles of Charleville, and from the limerick frontier to the Shannon."

this canal would have granted Cork a 'phenomenal trade network'. However, he argues that the endeavour failed because the connection to Limerick would have had a two-way impact. Cork would benefit from improved access to goods and materials, but would also have to share the benefits of imports gained from Cork's port.<sup>84</sup> Reports from the *Mercantile Chronicle* in 1803 support this argument. It mentioned a degree of hostility in Limerick to the proposed canal. The reporter stated,

The advantage of position clearly must be enjoyed by Limerick in the event of making the New Canal. She will draw to herself, from the interior of her own fertile county, many articles now inaccessible to her from the great difficulty of conveying them. She will have the market of Dublin on the one hand, and of Cork on the other, and she can play one against the other, from the ease with which she may supply both.<sup>85</sup>

The hostility in Limerick derived from the opinion that Cork was superior in her export capabilities and would drain away the wealth of Limerick. The reporter argued that Limerick would benefit from the improved connectivity to Cork as well as the improved access to fuel, and ultimately flourish from it. The reporter made comparisons to similar constructions in Holland, Scotland and England, as well as the development of other inland transport networks, such as roads:

Let us suppose that no road had ever existed between this city and Limerick, and that it were proposed to make one, what sort of a dolt would that man be considered, who should object to it, least all the bullocks of the county of Limerick should run away to Cork and leave the city of Limerick without beef? What is a canal but a road?<sup>86</sup>

However, there was a far more compelling reason for the failure of this canal, detailed in a report that submitted to the Chief Secretary's Office. In 1821 a report was compiled on the subject of a railroad for the Dromagh Collieries to improve both the access to coal and lime for the surrounding tillage districts and the sales at the colliery. Sales had collapsed from eighty pounds to eighty shillings a day in a few short weeks due to the banking crisis that begun in Cork in 1820. This report

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<sup>84</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 434.

<sup>85</sup> The New Canal *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 6 Apr 1803.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

detailed the proposed canal network Townsend referenced as it was supposed to connect to those collieries (see Map 4-1).



*Map 4-1 Proposed Canal route (in red) overlaid on the 1838 assessment of the Relative quantities of traffic in Ireland<sup>87</sup>*

The report's compilers, John Killaly and Alexander Nimmo, identified several reasons for the failure of the canal, which had been authorised in the dying days of the Irish Parliament. Those in charge of the works commenced cutting the canal

<sup>87</sup> Irish Railway Commission, J. Gardner, Edward Ross, Richard John Griffith, Henry Drury Harness and Thomas Aiskew Larcom, 'Atlas to accompany 2d report of the Railway Commissioners Ireland 1838.' (London, 1838).

between Dromagh and Mallow for about three and a half miles.<sup>88</sup> The location chosen to commence work was

neither at the sea where as far as it might proceed it would have been of immediate benefit for commercial purposes, not at the collieries to which it would have been of vital advantage, but mid-way where they began a canal of great breadth and depth and after purchasing thro' the best lands and expending many thousands what was executed has never been used.<sup>89</sup>

The idea for starting the work in such a bizarre location was as cynical as it was stupid. According to Killaly and Nimmo's account the work commenced there to force parliament to complete the entire construction and not to withdraw financing after a viable length of canal opened. The outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars improved the levels of employment and the prices available for the produce that was to be transported along this route. This led to the suspension of construction after heavy investment, though apparently work was not abandoned entirely. At this point attempts were made to induce investment from landlords whose estates were contiguous with the route, but this failed and no alternative sources of funding were located when the government of the day declined further support for the project.<sup>90</sup>

It is difficult to see how this canal could have been completed without government financing. If the construction had begun in a more amenable location, rather than one which was chosen for cynical rather than commercial reasons, it is possible that some alternative sources of funding could have been secured. Given a more viable location, some landlords may have seen some benefit in investing in a route that had the potential to generate revenues. However, this is supposition and, as Lee has demonstrated in his work on investment in the Irish rail network, it was not guaranteed that indigenous capital could be found to bear the initial construction costs once government support disappeared. The pattern Lee

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<sup>88</sup> Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837), p. 509.

<sup>89</sup> Report of John Killaly and Alexander Nimmo, concerning proposed railroad from Dromagh Collieries, County Cork, 6 June 1821, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP/1821/724/2, NAI.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

identified was that English investment came in first to bear the initial risk and only once profitability was demonstrated did Irish capital buy out the English investment.<sup>91</sup> The major appeal in investing privately in this canal was government subvention, with the government advancing a third on the subscriptions. This meant that an investment of one hundred pounds by a private individual would gain them canal stock worth one hundred and fifty pounds.<sup>92</sup> The total expense of this endeavour was estimated at two hundred and ten thousand pounds.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, up to the point when the report was compiled, the economy of the region was in rude health, but wartime prices were declining. Funding dried up due to the prices on offer, making the canal appear a diminishing return to government. It is hard to imagine landlords financing an expensive project such as a canal in a period of decline as there was no guarantee it would turn a profit.

Despite the collapse of this canal in the early years of the nineteenth century the topic sporadically arose in newspapers until the eventual opening of rail communications. In 1833 the *Southern Reporter*, while discussing a proposed railroad between Limerick and Waterford, noted that due to this proposed railroad and a government investment of one hundred thousand pounds for the improvement of the Shannon there were renewed calls for the recommencement of work on this canal. The article also stated that they had no idea as to why the canal was cancelled, whether because of Westminster or otherwise.<sup>94</sup> The construction of the canal would have been a phenomenal capital project for Munster as it would have opened up a cheap transportation network between Limerick, Cork and Waterford. As plans were already in place to improve communications on the Blackwater from Youghal the canal would have connected three major ports directly, facilitating improved internal and external trade. However, considering the costs of such a project it is difficult to picture the British

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<sup>91</sup> J.J. Lee, 'Capital in the Irish Economy' in L.M. Cullen (ed.), *The Formation of the Irish Economy* (The Thomas Davis lectures, Cork, 1969), pp 54–55; Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (London, 1985), p. 187.

<sup>92</sup> *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 30 Mar 1803.

<sup>93</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 6 Apr 1803.

<sup>94</sup> 'Extract from Southern Reporter', *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Nov 1833.

government continuing to finance it as the Napoleonic Wars progressed. While the canal would have connected the major commercial towns in the region, it is hard to envisage it having a wider impact. Canals were useful for transporting large bulky materials, such as mineral deposits. Munster had no such resources of major significance. Perhaps it would have changed the dynamic of the relationship between the farmers producing butter and the butter buyers, as it would be easier for the farmers to bring their produce directly to market, but even if that occurred it would be limited to a confined area. It is far more significant to note the inability to secure private finance for this project, despite public discussion of its benefits in the newspapers. This problem in capital investment was one that resurfaced repeatedly over the nineteenth century and made it difficult to undertake large scale infrastructural projects in Ireland without significant government backing.

### ***Quays and waterways***

The proposed canal would have created an invaluable internal route for transport and communication. Of more direct importance to Cork's development was the state of the quays and harbour of the city. As sea connections were the cornerstone of Cork's commercial success it would be easy to assume that this meant a consistent level of care was taken of the port facilities. However, Cork's quays suffered from an inconsistent level of maintenance. The first two decades of the nineteenth century saw repeated petitions for money to improve the port and harbour. By 1815 the situation was such that Lloyds Coffee House transmitted a warning that the river and quays of Cork were deemed unsafe. This led to a memorandum from the port authorities stating that since 1790 the political disturbances in both Ireland and abroad had led to the interruption of many public works and since that time no money had been made available for necessary repairs.<sup>95</sup>

The quays had been in a poor state for several decades by 1813. John Curwen, visiting Cork in that year stated, 'the quays do not correspond with the

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<sup>95</sup> Cork City Port Records, 18 February 1815, PC/1/1/4110/1, CCCA.



opulence and importance of the place, nor did I see these improvements carrying on, which in other places we have noticed with pleasure'.<sup>96</sup> The river was too shallow for larger vessels to make the journey from Passage West to the city and required lighters to carry goods the rest of the distance. The navigation wall was in a poor state of repair and the quays were poorly constructed.<sup>97</sup> The Harbour Commissioners were established in 1813 to maintain and repair the conditions of the upper harbour of Cork, but lack of finances and the poor condition of the facilities meant that for the first fifteen years of their existence they predominantly concerned themselves with repairing existing quays and the navigation wall.<sup>98</sup> The initial establishment of the Harbour Commissioners comprised the membership of the mayor, sheriffs, and twenty-one merchants of the city. An 1820 act expanded this membership to encompass the MPs for Cork city, the mayor, sheriffs, five members of the city council and twenty-five merchants.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the establishment of the Harbour Commissioners many of the maintenance issues remained unaddressed and by 1820 a petition was sent to the Lord Lieutenant seeking money to improve the port's connectivity. The petition lamented that ships were required to discharge cargo to lighters two miles outside of the city due to the shallowness of the approaches and that improving them would 'probably be the immediate occasion of an increased intercourse between this city and England.'<sup>100</sup> This particular entry in the port books is telling, as they specifically discussed the benefits of trade with England rather than elsewhere. This may have been merely diplomatic phrasing, as the Lord Lieutenant was the official representative of the monarch and they were more likely to receive monies for improvements by appealing to the benefits of trade with Britain rather than France

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<sup>96</sup> Patrick J. McCarthy, *An Economic History of the Port of Cork from 1813 to 1900*, 1949, p. 13, Quoting from Curwen, J.C. 'The State of Ireland' (1813).

<sup>97</sup> Colin Rynne, *The Industrial Archaeology of Cork City and its Environs, 1750-1930* (Dublin, 1991), pp 197–198.

<sup>98</sup> McCarthy, *An Economic History of the Port of Cork from 1813 to 1900*, pp 46–47.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 23, 32.

<sup>100</sup> Cork City Port Records, 8 Nov. 1820, PC/1/1/4110/1, CCCA.

or the Continent. However, it may also reflect the increasing volumes of trade conducted with Britain as well as the decline in trans-Atlantic and continental trade.

The state of Cork's harbour was a long-running concern of the city's denizens. The port was the main arterial route for almost all aspects of the city's economy. In 1819 Thomas Cuthbert, then president of the Committee of Merchants, forwarded a solicitation for a parliamentary bill to improve the condition of the harbour. The proposal argued that the river channel had been problematic since at least 1761, with long periods of neglect leading it to becoming choked up and seriously impeding navigation. Although money was provided to rectify some of these issues at the time the finance had not continued. The river and harbour had been neglected since then and the obstructions had returned to the extent that at times parts of the navigable portions of the channel were dry. Although Cuthbert sought a parliamentary bill to improve conditions it is difficult to see this issue other than one related to normal accretion of a river channel and an issue that Cork was simply unable to alleviate on its own. The proposal contained a lengthy discussion of the practice of vessels discharging ballast at will into the river and stated that the people who supplied ballast were 'men of the lowest rank in life' who had no concern regarding the problems they caused, including allegedly removing material from the quay walls for ballast.<sup>101</sup> Some funds were diverted from the weigh house dues for the upkeep of the harbour, river and quays under the management of the Harbour Commissioners, but these limited funds were barely sufficient to maintain the quays. The petitioners sought to secure a fund for the repair and upkeep of the harbour under the management of the Harbour Commissioners and a body of twenty-seven mercantile men (the Committee of Merchants). This was vital to the future of the city as Lloyds considered Cork a riskier harbour than that of London.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> A Bill is Solicited from Parliament for the Improvement of the Harbour of Cork and for rendering available those advantages which it has received from nature, 25 May 1819, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP/1819/242/A, NAI.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Based on the petition, Nicholas Colthurst had brought a bill before parliament to improve the harbour on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 1819.<sup>103</sup> Five days later a petition against the bill was submitted.<sup>104</sup> Over the following month a deep disagreement emerged between the desires of the Committee of Merchants and those of other merchants in Cork. On the second reading of the proposed bill MP for Cork, Christopher Hely Hutchinson, stated that he had letters both supporting and opposing the bill from Cork's mercantile community. Part of the opposition stemmed from the increases in taxation that improvements to the harbour would require. Hutchinson believed that the division in the opinions of Cork's merchants stemmed from finances. He argued that it would not be the wealthy merchant who would feel the increase in taxation, but the more humble merchant. The opposition to this bill, aided by the strength of a petition presented by Isaac Hewitt of the Hewitt distilling family, caused the bill to be voted down at this stage.<sup>105</sup> The Hewitt family were wealthy and influential distillers in Cork city. Their petition protesting the harbour improvement bill was the same one Latham referred to in his protest against the Committee of Merchants. Latham's complaints centred on alleged mismanagement of funds by the Committee of Merchants, whereas Hutchinson stated that the opposition was based on taxation. This can be reconciled by the manner through which the weigh house charges of the Committee of Merchants were distributed, with 1/3 being ostensibly for the maintenance of the harbour. It is likely that this was the cost Hutchinson referred to and the mismanaged funds alleged by Latham. Having Isaac Hewitt present the opposing petition gives credence to the view that the Committee of Merchants, far from representing the best interest of Cork's mercantile community, was in fact a domineering force in the local economy. One letter from a relatively unknown individual called Latham could be considered a fringe, but the Hewitts were not on the fringes of Cork's elite. It seems, at least around the period from 1819 to 1823 that the Committee of Merchants were, in the minds of some residents of the city, over stepping their

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<sup>103</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 10 June 1819.

<sup>104</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16 June 1819.

<sup>105</sup> *Cork Harbour Bill*, H.C. Deb 30 June 1819, Vol. 40 cc. 1424-1428

remit in an unforgivable manner. According to allegations made against them in the 1826 commission into the butter trade, they had slipped extra details for the regulation of the butter trade into an act for improving and widening the streets of Cork.<sup>106</sup> It was difficult to see such actions as anything but a deliberate obfuscation of the remit of purpose of the Committee of Merchants.

In 1821 a civil engineer Mr. Killaly (presumably John Killaly who undertook surveys for the Chief Secretary's Office for public works) submitted a report to the Port Commissioners outlining some of the works required to upgrade the port. His plan outlined creating a new river channel, dredged to eighteen foot, a basin and lock at the terminus of the channel capable of holding twenty-five ships, a floating dock, upgraded quays that could facilitate fifty vessels, and a canal beginning near Blackpoint. Overall he estimated that these improvements would cost £103,500, which he considered 'a sum very small in proportion to the advantages which the trade of Cork and the revenues of the Kingdom would derive there from'.<sup>107</sup> The improvement of the city's quays and docks was a long-standing concern of all parties involved in trade. At various points in the early 1820s ship owners, brewers and the trustees of the corn market met separately with the Port Commissioners to push for the improvement of the city's dock facilities. However, the Port Commissioners remained unconvinced of the importance of dry dock facilities and argued in March 1823 that the erection of a dry dock at Passage West was a private concern and not a matter for public involvement.<sup>108</sup> The following year they decided that a wet dock was of general utility and worth consideration, but the sweeping improvements Killaly advocated did not occur. Between 1827 and 1834 £34,389 was expended improving the city's quays and navigation.<sup>109</sup> A large sum, but nowhere near the £103,000 Killaly estimated proper repairs and improvements would cost.

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<sup>106</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, p. 123.

<sup>107</sup> Cork City Port Records, 8 Nov. 1820, PC/1/1/4110/1, CCCA.

<sup>108</sup> Cork City Port Records, Volume 2, June 1822, July 1822, March 1823, May 1824, Dec 1824, June 182, PC/1/1/4110/2, CCCA.

<sup>109</sup> Colin Rynne, *The Industrial Archaeology of Cork City and its Environs, 1750-1930* (Dublin, 1991), p. 198.

The facilities for shipping in Cork continued to be topical issues throughout the decades. Despite the Port Commissioners rejecting the proposals for a dry dock as something that should be privately funded, agitation continued. In 1832 the Committee of Merchants met to consider an application to Lord Lieutenant W. Packer for assistance in creating a dry dock at Passage West for larger vessels. The Committee of Merchants communicated their support for this proposal as they thought such a construction in Passage West would not interfere with the rights of those about to erect patent slips.<sup>110</sup> The timing of this proposal was almost certainly related to the removal of the naval depot at Cove. MP for Cork, Callaghan presented complaints from Cork's denizens to Parliament. The complainants stated that the Union had deprived them of many advantages, that all nationality had been destroyed and Ireland was now a 'conquered province' rather than a country that was formerly a kingdom. Of course the main element of the complaint was financial. The complainants alleged that as there was chronic underspending from the military budget in Cove, property values would deteriorate due to the removal of the depot and ships of war could no longer be repaired there causing loss of employment.<sup>111</sup> The petition attempted to fill the gap left by the removal of the depot and to enable Cork to have proper ship repair facilities within the harbour. Callaghan alleged that the types of repairs previously carried out in Cork were being redirected to Portsmouth. Frederick Trench supported this opinion, stating that removing the depot from Cove would 'rob the country of the prodigious advantages of having the means to repair ships of war at Cork'.<sup>112</sup>

Although in the early stages of the nineteenth century Cork had one of the strongest ship building and repair facilities in Ireland it suffered from a number of issues that impeded development and by the 1840s Belfast overtook Cork in tonnage built.<sup>113</sup> The poor conditions of the upper harbour prevented larger ships

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<sup>110</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1829-May 1837', 6 Apr 1832, 10 Nov 1832, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/2, CCCA.

<sup>111</sup> *Cove of Cork Naval Station*, H.C. Deb 2 Aug 1832, Vol. 14 cc. 1022-1085

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880 : Development or Decline?* (Cork, 1991), p. 104-105.

from progressing much past Passage. Many of the raw materials for ship construction were imported; ship hulls, masts, oars and trunnels or treepegs from Portugal, Norway, Prussia and the Americas.<sup>114</sup> However, the volumes of these imports were quite small, reflecting the focus of the industry on fishing vessels.<sup>115</sup> More importantly, Cork's industry failed to capitalise on early innovations and developments in indigenous ship construction.

Despite Cork-built ships having a poor reputation a number of innovations occurred in Cork during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1816 William Hennessy, after constructing the first Irish-built paddle steamer, completed a second powered by a Hive Iron Works engine, the first marine engine built in Ireland.<sup>116</sup> A dry dock at Passage West, possibly the same one Packer proposed in 1832, operated by William Brown was completed in the mid-1830s and it could accommodate large ships of up to 1,200 tons. By the 1850s this dock had been expanded and renamed the Royal Victoria Dockyard.<sup>117</sup> One of the most promising developments was the amalgamation of R. J. Lecky's Steam Packet Iron Works and Engineering Establishment with the Beale family's iron mills. This led to the first construction of an iron hulled ship in the city, soon followed by the construction of screw steamers.<sup>118</sup> However, for a port that relied so heavily on shipping for its commerce it is surprising not that such innovations took place, but that there was not a stronger link between the commercial merchants and the burgeoning engineering industry. Cork's merchants had the finance to underwrite such innovations and they also needed shipping. It is interesting to speculate what may have become of Cork's trade network if the Committee of Merchants had invested as much into promoting local engineering enterprises as they did petitioning Westminster to construct new packet stations and railway networks in Britain. The

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<sup>114</sup> 'Abstracts of Irish Exports and Imports', MSS 353-76, NLI.

<sup>115</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (Routledge Explorations in Economic History, London, New York, 2009), pp 128–129.

<sup>116</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880: Development or Decline?* (Cork :, 1991), p. 107.

<sup>117</sup> Colman O'Mahony, 'Shipbuilding and Repairing in Nineteenth Century Cork' in *Journals of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xciv (1989), p. 77.

<sup>118</sup> Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880*, pp 109–110.

surprise in Cork's ship building industry is not in the innovations that occurred there, but that the mercantile community failed to capitalise on them.

### ***Steam Packets***

By 1822 discussions had begun on the viability of opening up a steam packet route between the West of England and the South of Ireland. the Committee of Merchants were vocal in suggesting that if, as proposed, the existing packet station was moved from Milford to Bristol Cork would be a more suitable location for a station in Ireland than Dunmore. They demonstrated the usual zeal for the interests of their city:

I shall not dwell upon the geographic position of our port, it being obviously the centre of the South, but I must take the liberty to observe that its being the naval rendezvous of Ireland, the residence of an admiral, and the chief Irish arsenal, are circumstances which plainly indicate its peculiar fitness for a packet station... and in time of war... the importance of a direct and speedy communication between Cork and Bristol must appear to their Lordships very obvious.<sup>119</sup>

On 25 June 1825 Lecky gave notice to the Port Commissioners that steam packets from Bristol and Liverpool were shortly expected to arrive and carry on a regular trade with Cork.<sup>120</sup> This marked the point when steam transportation made its regular appearance in the trade of Cork city, though a number of years passed before the impact was truly felt. The importance of the steam packet services increased dramatically, but in the early years the service to Cork was far from ideal.

The organisation of the packet station routes to the South of Ireland was a long process. Although issues surrounded the Milford packet station there were still packet routes out of Cork city and they depended predominantly on transporting cargo for their profitability.<sup>121</sup> As early as 1825 petitions from the inhabitants of

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<sup>119</sup> Letter from G Callaghan to Frank Freeling, London and Sir Edward Leer, Dublin, 28 Nov 1822, Chief Secretaries Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP/1822/2690, NAI.

<sup>120</sup> Cork City Port Records, Volume 2, June 1822, July 1822, March 1823, May 1824, Dec 1824, June 182, PC/1/1/4110/2, CCCA.

<sup>121</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office Communication with Ireland; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index*, p. 3, ix H.C. 1842 (373) ix, 343

Pembroke cited the importance of the Milford Haven packet station for ensuring communications with Ireland. They focused especially on Cork as ‘the great rendezvous of the American and West Indian Trade’.<sup>122</sup> In the mid-1820s there was unhappiness with the packet service available; it proved so unreliable that there were reports of the commercial interests in Cork and Limerick relying on sending their post to Holyhead via Dublin rather than from Waterford to Milford.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore there were reports of long delays in dispatches received in London due to the lack of a communication facility with London in Cork.<sup>124</sup> This issue was not resolved appropriately and by 1829 the Committee of Merchants wrote to the Duke of Wellington to complain about the irregularity and insufficiency of the steam packet service between Holyhead and Dublin.<sup>125</sup> Milford was the least frequented of all the routes to Ireland and the most expensive to the public at a cost of £12,000 a year. Abolishing the station was considered in 1834, but rejected both due to the potential opposition in both Milford and Waterford, as well as the need to keep direct communication with the South of Ireland.<sup>126</sup>

By 1836 a new steamship company was established in Cork, The Cork Steam Packet Company, ‘for the purpose of trading and carrying goods, merchandize and passengers between the Port of Cork and such other port or ports’.<sup>127</sup> The new company had an initial capital of £100,000 available for the purchase of vessels. It was a locally created venture. A very large proportion of the initial subscriptions were issued to people with Cork as their place of residence and they comprised of a broad section of Cork society. Of those that provided professions there were merchants, auctioneers, glue manufacturers, ship owners, confectioners, cabinetmakers, farmers, builders, vintners, and servants. There were few

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<sup>122</sup> *Further Papers Relating to Milford packet establishment*, p. 6 H.C. 1825 (103)xxii, 375

<sup>123</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven Communication*, p. 4 H.C. 1826-27 (258) iii, 551

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* p.31

<sup>125</sup> *Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1829-May 1837*, 10 Nov 1829, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/2, CCCA.

<sup>126</sup> *Post Office Steam Packets. Papers Relative to Post Office Steam Packets*, .p. 3 H.C. 1834 (156) xlix, 471

<sup>127</sup> *Articles of Agreement and Co-partnership, City of Cork Steam Packet Co Ltd*, U/370/S/001, CCCA.



nineteenth century occupations that were not represented on the list.

Furthermore, the addresses of those not normally resident in Cork highlight the most important locations for Cork's commerce with investors from Bristol, Liverpool, Dublin and Birmingham listed.<sup>128</sup> Cork was still a prosperous port city and it benefitted foreign investors to have a stake in the transportation of goods from the city to England. Over the centuries there had been a consistent level of shipping between Cork city and England and there was no reason to think that would abate. Furthermore, proposed railway lines tantalisingly promised future increases in trade.

The introduction of steam packet services between Ireland and Britain soon became essential for the further growth of commerce. Cork's mercantile community were active not just in the development of indigenous services but also in furthering the expansion of packet services in England. In December 1841 a meeting of those interested in developing communications between Cork and the South of England met with a deputation from Bristol. This meeting agreed that the packet service that operated between Milford and Waterford was 'totally useless' and that 'any communication from any point of England thro Waterford [would] be useless to the South and South West of Ireland, comprising the great counties of Cork, Kerry, and Limerick'.<sup>129</sup> The Committee gave their support to a proposed packet station at Portishead, as long as it connected to Cork,

but if it shall be designed to [send] the intercourse through any other Irish port, such line of intercourse would decidedly be hostile to our interests and so subversive of every due or first consideration.<sup>130</sup>

It is unsurprising that merchants in Cork and in Bristol showed a preference for opening a new intercourse from Portishead to Cork that would remove the Milford to Waterford packet.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1837-March 1857, 18 Dec 1841, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/4, CCCA.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

Part of the problem with the latter route was that mail had to transit overland from Waterford to Cork. The mail was sent as far as Clonmel on the Limerick coach, was offloaded in Clonmel and then picked up by the Dublin to Cork coach for delivery. This route meant that evening mail that arrived in Waterford could take nearly twenty three hours to make the journey to Cork.<sup>131</sup> An 1842 report on post office communication found that the existing packet route via Milford was inefficient. The report argued that Cork was superior in terms of population, had higher passenger numbers, greater safety within the harbour, and most importantly a rendezvous point for outbound vessels. However, the committee refrained from making any specific recommendation on changing packet stations.<sup>132</sup>

As shown in Table 4-1, by 1838 several regular steam services operated from Cork to trading cities in England. The size and traffic out of Cork was reflected in the number of routes. The Dublin and Glasgow Steam Packet Company stopped in Dublin before continuing to Glasgow, providing an important connection between Cork and the capital. Phearsall has called this period in the development of steam services in the Irish Sea as the ‘first railway’ period.<sup>133</sup> It was predominantly based upon a number of small businesses. Table 4-1 shows four companies that operated often overlapping connections out of Cork.

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<sup>131</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Communication with Ireland: With the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix.*, p. 24 H.C. 1831-32 (716) xvii, 1

<sup>132</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office Communication with Ireland; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index*, pp.vi-vii, ix H.C. 1842 (373) ix, 343

<sup>133</sup> A.Q.H. Phearsall, ‘Steam in the Irish Sea’ in Michael McCaughan and John Appleby (eds), *The Irish Sea ; Aspects of Maritime History* (Queen’s University Belfast, 1989), pp 111–112.

Returns Relating to Government and Merchant Steam Vessels			
Company	Ship	Route	Tonnage
City of Dublin Steam Packet Company	Margaret	Liverpool	370
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Herald	London	174
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Emerald Isle	London	220
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Victory	Bristol	256
The St. George Steam Packet Company	City of Bristol	Bristol	209
The St. George Steam Packet Company	William IV	Bristol	176
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Ocean	Liverpool	207
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Juno	London & Bristol	362
The St. George Steam Packet Company	Sirius	London	411
Dublin and Glasgow Steam Packet Company	Arab	Dublin & Glasgow	213
Dublin and Glasgow Steam Packet Company	Mercury	Dublin & Glasgow	
City of Cork Proprietors	Eagle (Iron)	Cove	119
City of Cork Proprietors	Air	Cove	71
City of Cork Proprietors	Lee	Cove	87
City of Cork Proprietors	Waterloo	Cove & Kinsale	47
City of Cork Proprietors	City of Cork	Cove	59
City of Cork Proprietors	Shannon	Deepening River	57

*Table 4-1 Returns Relating to Government and Merchant Steam Vessels<sup>134</sup>*

As well as furthering their interests in the development of steam packets between Cork and Bristol, the Committee of Merchants again demonstrated that they were not prone to sentiment. Only a few short years after they had lent their support to a Portishead route they sent a memorial to the commissioners in charge of constructing harbours of refuge along the English coast. They sought more direct communications between Cork and London so they could capitalise on the new railway lines being constructed in Ireland. As always if their petition was not

<sup>134</sup> *Second Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Consider and Recommend a General System of Railways for Ireland*, 1838 Appendix B pp. 62-63, I.K. Brunel Collections, Rail 1149, TNA.

acceded to, they maintained that 'this great commercial city will lose the position it has hitherto maintained as the Southern Capital of Ireland'.<sup>135</sup> The source of this complaint was the tidal nature of the River Avon, which meant that at certain times it could add over twelve hours to the journey to London. This weakened the potential value of rail travel in England to Southern Irish merchants. The merchants desired improvements to the port at Padstow as it was closer to Cork. Not only that, the petitioners wanted a London to Padstow railway and to reduce the transit time from 'the Capital of the South of Ireland' to London to twenty hours.<sup>136</sup> This would make the transit between Cork and London almost the same as between Cork and Dublin.

Rail was arguably more important in the development of Cork's commerce than steam services. A reliable steam service had great advantages in granting rapid transit across the Irish Sea and helped improve Cork's connections with the major British ports. However, Cork already had strong connections and regular sail services to these ports. The introduction of internal rail networks, first in Britain and then in Ireland, gave greater opportunities for penetrating the internal British market. Furthermore, it helped to encourage increased exportation of more perishable goods as well as increasing the livestock trade. It was well and good to get produce to the British ports as long as re-exportation to foreign destinations was the intent, but penetrating the British market required railways.

### ***Rail***

'Do not talk about the broad streets of Cork, when the question is of the broad gauge through Ireland.' — Benjamin Disraeli<sup>137</sup>

One of the earliest discussions of rail in Cork in the Committee of Merchants minutes was in 1834, though undoubtedly private discussions had taken place prior to this. The Committee received a delegation from England, which had come to

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<sup>135</sup> 'Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1837-March 1857' 18 Mar 1845. Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/4, CCCA.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 14 Mar 1845.

<sup>137</sup> *Railways (Ireland)-Adjourned Debate*, H.C. Deb 15 Feb 1847, Vol. 89 cc, 1353-1434

discuss the Great Western Railway Company and a line connecting Bristol and London. The Committee resolved that the idea was 'an object of great interest to the landed proprietors of Southern Ireland'.<sup>138</sup> A rail link between Bristol and London would increase the connectivity between Cork and London, because, combined with the steam tramps across the Irish Sea, Cork would be in a position to profit from Bristol's connectivity with the Imperial capital. The 1830s saw much petitioning from Cork and Bristol based merchants to improve their respective cities' connections both to London and each other. The commercial interests of these two cities presented a unified force and a testament to their long-standing partnership in the trans-Atlantic trade. A year and a half after this the Committee approved fifty pounds to survey a potential railway route between Cork and Limerick, though their reticence in investing in the ultimate expense of such a project is indicated by the caveat that the sum would only be paid upon completion of the survey.<sup>139</sup> If the Committee truly believed that there were substantial gains to be made from such a route they would have been more forthcoming with their finances. As demonstrated by the failure to secure private funding for the Cork to Limerick canal, Cork's wealthier classes exhibited an inherent reticence to finance such immense projects. They were more than happy to lend their support to projects undertaken at others' expense or projects in Britain that would benefit their interests, but this support did not mean they would finance such projects themselves.

Their fiscal conservatism was seen in a discussion of the project in December 1835, where they suggested that the

Committee should attentively observe the course of these proceedings and cautiously examine into the probable success of the undertaking, previous to giving it sanction as an advantageous investment of capital.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> 'Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1829-May 1837', 10 Jan 1834, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/2, CCCA.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 9 June 1836

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 1 Dec 1835

Rail connections may have been the future, and the merchants could see the potential gains in term of British rail connectivity, but they were not men who easily parted with their money without a guaranteed return. Yet again this is an example of a perennial issue in terms of Irish investment patterns that Lee identified.<sup>141</sup>

The *Second Report of the Second Railway Commissioners of Ireland* contains valuable information regarding the state of trade and transport in Ireland for the mid-1830s. However, this data contains over-estimations of the true figures for Irish trade, though mainly related to trade goods.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless it provides a good sense of the contemporaneous state of Cork's transport infrastructure. The report puts the population of Cork at 110,000 and estimates that the city handled 400,000 tons of traffic per year.<sup>143</sup> It supports the trend of declining exports of processed meat products discussed in earlier chapters, but suggests that this was balanced by increased exports of livestock and cereal exports, as well as increased importation of tea and textiles. The advent of steam vessels had led to some of these changes, as it was previously impractical to transport some goods by sailing vessels.<sup>144</sup> An example of such a trade is livestock. The transportation of livestock by sail vessels, combined with the requirement to both herd them across land to the point of embarkation and again to their destination from the point of discharge led to the loss of weight in transit and a commensurate decline in market value. The advent of both steam tramps on the Irish Sea and improved rail connectivity internally in Britain decreased the time in transit and therefore the loss of value. The Railway Commissioners held the opinion that

to give full effect to this superior means of transport, and to render in advantages generally and extensively available to the country, it is of the first importance to improve and extend the communications from the great ports to the interior.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> J.J. Lee, 'Capital in the Irish Economy' in L.M. Cullen (ed.), *The Formation of the Irish Economy* (The Thomas Davis lectures, Cork, 1969), pp 54–55.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Solar, 'The Agricultural Trade Statistics in the Irish Railway Commissioners Report' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vi (1979), pp 24–40.

<sup>143</sup> 'I K Brunel Collection' 'Second Report from the Railway Commisioners in Ireland', p. 15.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

Due to the population distribution of Ireland and the structure of the Irish economy their recommendation was to send the main trunk line through the centre of Munster and on to Cork. The proposed railway route was to undertake a 'highly objectionable' gradient into Cork city, but by connecting the railroad to the harbour it would take advantage of the new quays constructed in Passage West.<sup>146</sup> The arguments in favour of the Cork and Limerick railway were the same as those made for the canal. It would greatly benefit rural agriculture, improve connectivity to Dublin and England, and benefit distribution from the main shipping ports.

The Railway Commissioners' report considered the viability of improving Irish internal communications. They concluded that Ireland was of little importance for the trans-Atlantic trade by the 1830s as they saw no way that vessels leaving Irish ports could compete with those leaving Britain. However, there was an inherent value in developing a railway connection between Cork and Dublin to facilitate British ships calling there on the trans-Atlantic voyage. Cork was identified over Berehaven, Valentia and the Shannon as it united the advantages of a well situated port with the benefits of improved internal Irish communication. The Commissioners estimated that a Dublin to Cork line would reduce the transit time for packages from London to Cork from three days to twenty-nine hours and similar savings in time would be made for other major British cities. Improving the communications of Cork would create

a more certain, expeditious and convenient, if not a cheaper communication would be effected with America than from any port of Great Britain directly... we may then safely urge the construction of these railways as a consideration of national importance.<sup>147</sup>

Part of the reason this construction of a packet station in Ireland was considered of 'national importance' for the United Kingdom was the potential loss of American commerce to continental Europe due to the growth of Le Harve. Improving Ireland's internal communications and the transit across the Irish Sea opened the possibility

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, Appendix A p8, 30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 63-66.

for trade with North American being 'accelerated to the utmost degree'. It was agreed that Cork was the most convenient port in Ireland for trans-Atlantic trade.<sup>148</sup> Although the nature of the trans-Atlantic trade had changed dramatically during the early nineteenth century Cork's position on the Irish coast still had benefits to confer. Whereas in the eighteenth century it was as a provisioning stop due to the expertise developed by Irish merchants, by the 1830s the importance of Cork to the trans-Atlantic trade was diminishing. Cork's location on the southern coast, combined with its harbour, were still of some use, especially in the development of postal communication routes to England and to America.

The financing of railways in Ireland was not without criticism. Private capital in Ireland was notoriously difficult to secure for large infrastructure projects. This was demonstrated by the ignoble end of the Cork canal project and it was also true of railway investment. Lord Morpeth sought parliament to advance two and a half million pounds to construct the Dublin to Cork line, but this met with vocal criticism from Peel. He asserted that he was not opposed to the financing per se, but was in favour only if he thought Ireland would derive proportionate benefit from such an outlay. Ireland's comparative poverty was no rationale for financing the project, as Wales was similarly poor. Peel's opposition represented a political opinion on Ireland that would devastate the country in a few short years. He opposed the project because 'it would prevent them [the Irish] from relying on their own efforts, and teach them to lean always on the government'.<sup>149</sup> Peel argued that Ireland's wealthy classes should fund improvements to internal communication themselves, rather than relying on government bonds. It was this reliance that partially led to the failure of the canal four decades earlier, as once public money was withdrawn investment dwindled. Irish opinions were best expressed some years later when the *Cork Examiner* attributed the poor levels of investment into the Cork and Fermoy railway to English ignorance of Irish affairs.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> *The Birmingham Journal*, 9 Mar 1839.

<sup>150</sup> 'Cork and Fermoy Railway', *The Cork Examiner*, 3 Oct 1845.



Committee of Merchants' interest in developing rail communications disproportionately focused on developments in England. In 1845 they lent their support to planned railway lines in Liverpool, Bury, Cornwall, Devon and Lancashire so they could 'supply with Irish produce the importation towns of Wigan, Bolton, Bury, Heywood and Rochdale and their vicinities'.<sup>151</sup> This change reflects the growing importance of the English markets for Cork. Rather than looking across the Atlantic for commercial opportunities, or seeking to open new ventures in foreign countries, they now focused on the internal British markets that the rapidly expanding rail network opened up. These markets were previously outside the purview of the Committee of Merchants. They were too distant from the major port cities of England to be within reach and the effort was hardly worthwhile when there was a more profitable route in selling to port based merchants for transshipment across the ocean. Ironically the advent of the age of mass communications limited the view of Cork's mercantile body rather than expanding it.

## Conclusion

1844 saw the beginning of Cork's entry into what has been termed the second industrial revolution, though for Cork it was the beginning of the decline of the city's commercial and industrial innovations. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1844 Lecky's yard launched the first iron hulled ship in the port.<sup>152</sup> Later that year the provisional committee for the Bandon and Cork railway was established to petition for a new railway connection. Also in 1844 the act to build the Great Southern and Western Railway line was passed, though it would take several more years before the lines reached the city.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> 'Committee of Merchants Minute Book, May 1837-March 1857', 20 May, 14 Aug 1845, Committee of Merchants Papers, U401/1/4, CCCA.

<sup>152</sup> Colman O'Mahony, 'Shipbuilding and Repairing in Nineteenth Century Cork' in *Journals of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xciv (1989), p. 78.

<sup>153</sup> Irish Railway Record Society, 'The Cork, Bandon & South Coast Railway' in *Journal of the Irish Railway Record Society*, xv, no. 94 (1984), p. 209.

As previous chapters have demonstrated, Cork played a peripheral but important role in Western Europe's trans-Atlantic trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While it would be inaccurate to argue that Cork was representative of the experience of Ireland as a whole, it did represent the experience of the more economically developed urban environments in Ireland, such as Dublin and Belfast. Cork leveraged its ideal geographic location, the political niche Ireland held in the British Empire and regional agricultural and production specialities to create a unique commercial identity. However, despite these advantages trade from the city remained based upon a limited range of goods and services and this limited base was not used to develop new economic or industrial specialities. In many respects this is not surprising. The proximity to Britain and prevalence of British shipping took away much of the incentive to further industrialise. As a peripheral location Cork, and indeed Ireland as a whole, could have potentially developed a more sustainable industrial base, but unlike most of the peripheries of the Empire the proximity to the core economy took away at least some of the incentive to do so. Furthermore, as British legislation repeatedly demonstrated from the late seventeenth century onwards, there was a degree of apprehension as well as unwillingness in London to encourage or facilitate industrial development in Ireland. It was potentially both an economic threat and an Achilles' heel in Britain's engagement with Europe.

This is not to place sole responsibility for industrial stagnation on Britain. Within Cork there was a noticeable lack of divestment of finance, with potentially lucrative capital projects such as the canal floundering without private investment. The Committee of Merchant's themselves also suffered from a myopic view of Cork's commercial networks. They relied almost exclusively on legislative interference from Westminster combined with internal regulation to forward their commercial interests. This was a heavy-handed approach that earned the ire of some of Cork's commercial community. The structure of the Committee itself also left them open to charges of nepotism and mismanagement of funds. Within Cork such charges were irritating, but when this local opposition had the power to petition parliament it led to the disruption of bills that could have benefitted the

city. Some of the opposition, as evidenced by Latham's complaints, stemmed not from fundamental disagreements with the legislation itself, but with the Committee of Merchant's involvement. By the 1820s the Committee showed signs of becoming increasingly monolithic and intractable in the face of a rapidly changing commercial reality.

## Conclusion

In 1843 the *Freeman's Journal* printed an article on the state of Ireland's trade in light of the ongoing treaty negotiations between Britain and Portugal. The author directed the readership to consider the views of Cork's Committee of Merchants who had expended considerable energy on the protection of Irish trade. The author argued that 'We [Ireland] have not much trade unfortunately left to us. Whatever remains is day by day departing, strangled by some measure of protection, or some provision for the extension of the commerce of "the empire"'.<sup>1</sup> British interference had devastated Ireland's commercial development and deprived the country of its ability to maintain pre-existing trade relationships. Britain had undermined Irish commerce in favour of developing Imperial markets. If this entailed curtailing Ireland's trade in the pursuit of other markets so be it. While there is a certain degree of truth to the sentiment behind this article, it overlooks the massive structural changes of the preceding fifty years. Of course the Committee of Merchants would have strenuously objected to any agreement with Portugal that they felt undermined their interests and they were correct in doing so, but they were also complicit in allowing Cork's international trade to stagnate and decline during the early decades of the Union. The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented changes in commerce, politics, communications and industry. Cork's mercantile class simply failed to keep pace with these developments. In many respects they still operated as they would have during the eighteenth century and they remained oblivious to the new integrated world that was emerging around them.

From the seventeenth century onwards Cork city metamorphosed into a thriving, internationally focused port city. This growth almost entirely derived from the expansion of Britain's trans-Atlantic colonies and an early integration into the Atlantic economy.<sup>2</sup> However, by the nineteenth century the structure of Europe's

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<sup>1</sup> 'English and Irish Interests' in *Freemans Journal* (Dublin, 2 Feb. 1843), p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Mark McCarthy, 'The Forging of an Atlantic Port City: Socio-Economic and Physical Transformations in Cork, 1660–1700' in *Urban History*, xxviii, no. 01 (2001), p. 25.

trans-Atlantic trade had fundamentally altered due to the disruptions caused to shipping routes by the Napoleonic Wars, the formation of the United States of America and the UK's move towards a free trade environment. Although the full effects of these changes would take several decades to be realised, their foundations were laid by the close of the eighteenth century. Despite some industrialisation in Cork, the city's exports remained predominantly based upon agricultural produce and provisioning. The declining requirements in the Caribbean islands for imported provisions, faster transit times and the growth of the United States all threatened to undermine the lynchpin of Cork's international trade. Furthermore, the generous government provisioning contracts during the Napoleonic Wars combined with increased wartime demand served to hide a declining international provisions trade and hastened the redirection of Cork's mercantile community away from distant colonies and towards an increasing dependence on British markets.

The development of Cork's commercial character in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries derived from the constraints Westminster had put in place to protect the English economy. The restriction on livestock export by the Cattle Acts pushed Cork towards developing an expertise in the packing and preservation of foodstuffs for export. This was, in the words of Crotty, 'the one great industry of Ireland in the eighteenth century'.<sup>3</sup> The restrictions of the Wool Acts preventing the export of woollen cloth led to the increased export of woollen yarn.<sup>4</sup> Cork's mercantile community was resilient and found alternative paths for the development of their commercial intercourse. Such versatility also helped it to circumvent wartime trading embargos through the use of intermediaries, such as using the Dutch to trade with France.<sup>5</sup> However, the success of such adaptations could also be seen as a precursor to later stagnation. Cork's most influential mercantile body, the Committee of Merchants, was founded in the mid-eighteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production, Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 127–130.

<sup>5</sup> R. C. Nash, 'Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii, no. 3 (1985), pp 340–343; Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, p. 57;

century and that era defined the very nature of the organisation. The relaxation of the Navigation Laws in the late eighteenth century opened up direct trade with British colonies. However, this was only the beginning of Britain's gradual relaxation of their protectionist system and the opening of their economy to foreign trade. Irish merchants constantly protested at the relaxation of British protectionism to allow the United States to trade directly with the West Indies. They believed that the Union entitled them to protective rates and tariffs to preserve their trans-Atlantic trade networks. It is likely that this stemmed from a misguided belief that duties and tariffs were the sole manner through which foreign markets could be secured, as such instruments had been used to exclude them for many decades. Right up to the 1840s the Committee of Merchants maintained a solidly mercantilist attitude towards foreign trade and felt that the Union entitled them to such protections. They were either unable or unwilling to learn the lessons of their predecessors and adapt to the changing nature of international trade.

From the late eighteenth century and to the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars Cork occupied a small, but important, position in Britain's transportation network. As a victualling port for the Royal Navy, with an admiral seated in the city and the centre for the assemblage of convoys preparing to cross the Atlantic, Cork could exert a disproportionate amount of influence for a city of its size. However, Ireland was always a peripheral location in the context of Britain's global reach, though the proximity to Britain gave her a unique context within the Empire. Smith classed Ireland's relationship as a dependency, which by his definition was a marginal improvement on a true periphery.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the terminology employed it ultimately meant that Cork's relative importance was precarious. Cork's overreliance on exported foodstuffs was always going to be problematic in the long term. Without a broader array of goods to export or better developed industrial capabilities Cork had little to offer when faster transit times and an increasingly open market changed the nature of international trade. Moreover the improvements in sea transportation had the ironic effect of limiting the focus of

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<sup>6</sup> Ian K. Smith, *Creating a World Economy: Merchant Capital, Colonialism and World Trade, 1400-1825* (Boulder, Colo, 1991), pp 123–124, 151.

Cork's trade on Britain rather than the increasing international trade. The city's merchants instead began to try to exploit the development of Britain's rail network to increase their penetration of a market that they were already overly dependent on, rather than to attempt to rebuild a more balanced trade network.

There was a belief that the Union was the reason Ireland's economic gains in the eighteenth century turned to decline in the nineteenth century, simply because the decline appeared to follow it. Cullen argues that the real cause of the decline in Ireland's fortunes was a poor level of technological development and the growth of the Irish population, which removed part of the rationale for the industrialisation that occurred in Britain.<sup>7</sup> The perception that Ireland's commercial classes had been somehow cheated by the Union pervades the later records of the Committee of Merchants. Constant references appear to the market protections that they believed were due to them by Westminster. The major change for Cork's, and indeed Ireland's, merchants occurred in the mid-1820s. The final clauses of the Union had just come into effect, the prosperity of the Napoleonic Wars had given way to the depression of the early 1820s and the major markets exported to in the eighteenth century were slipping away through a combination of neglect by merchants and changing geo-political relationships. The Caribbean islands were increasingly supplied by the United States and exports of butter to Portugal were soon to suffer a dramatic collapse from a combination of direct British trade with Brazil through the *Rio de Janeiro Treaty* and later the Portuguese Civil War.

The Act of Union had facilitated an increase in Ireland's trade with the Britain, but this was a process that had occurred for several decades by 1800.<sup>8</sup> The Union was a fundamental event in Ireland's political and commercial development, but it simply accentuated a trend that had been in place since the 1780s. Ireland's merchants had long pushed for the relaxation of the Navigation Laws, but by the time the Union was completed and duties were harmonised the world had begun to move away from such protectionist systems. The developing laissez faire system

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<sup>7</sup> Cullen, L. M., 'Irish Economic History: Fact and Myth' in L. M. Cullen (ed.), *Formation of the Irish Economy* (The Thomas Davis lectures, Cork, 1969), pp 113–114.

<sup>8</sup> Dickson, *Old World Colony*, p. 369.

left Cork's merchants in a vulnerable position. Protections against the United States were lost, the limited protections against British manufactures were gone and rapidly decreasing transit times left a small market with limited export items such as Cork open to competition in foreign and home markets. For Cork's merchants there were two major issues by the 1830s and 1840s that they were powerless to address. By 1829 they had lost the ability to regulate their butter trade free from parliamentary interference. The only alternative they had left to control their trade was to impose restrictive self-imposed diktats on the city's butter merchants, buyers and coopers. Although this may have had some success in exercising their control it set a poor precedent for the future. By the later nineteenth century it meant that the city's butter trade was unable to rapidly adjust to changing market requirements. They also lost much of their earlier advantages of being able to petition senior members of parliament and military officials regarding potentially injurious legislation. Cork no longer had the strategic value it held during the Napoleonic Wars. This was demonstrated most acutely during the renegotiation of Anglo-Portuguese treaties in the 1840s when the Committee of Merchants impotently protested the exclusion of Ireland's commercial interests.

Like many contemporary nationalist commentators, it would be easy to lay the roots of Cork's commercial decline on both the Union and a disinterested parliament that happily left Ireland to be the granary of the United Kingdom, providing food and labour to the industrialising regions of England.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Cork this overlooks a simple, unfortunate truth. Cork had always been in the business of supplying food for the Empire; that was the cornerstone of the region's economic and commercial development. Yes, some industrial development had occurred in the region, most notably in linen, but also in glass, iron works and to a lesser extent shipbuilding, but it was all built around the wealth of the provisioning trade. When Cork was derisively referred to as a 'pork and salting provincial', it was because the city had spent quite some time developing expertise in the production

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<sup>9</sup> E. Strauss, *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy* (Westport, Conn, 1975), pp 64–65.



of foodstuffs, but not much else.<sup>10</sup> Of course this was not solely the fault of Cork's mercantile class. There were no mineral resources to speak of in the region and the large labour force removed much of the need to invest in expensive capital infrastructure. This system had functioned reasonably effectively under market protections from the British industrial machine and massive provisioning requirements, but, as was demonstrated in the 1820s, it would collapse under any serious pressure from cheaper British imports. Cork's merchants had capitalised on an eighteenth century problem. Food provision was a constant issue for all European Atlantic economies that depended on slave labour.<sup>11</sup> Cork's merchants became wealthy as a result, but they also became complacent and failed to seek out new ventures and opportunities. When these markets were lost Cork had very little left to replace them with.

In the context of the eighteenth century Ireland was a highly developed and expanding commercial country. However, by the nineteenth century these proto-industrial enterprises were vulnerable to the nearby industrial behemoths in Britain. Ireland simply had not developed sufficiently to compete.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary British writers, such as Wakefield, were under no illusion as to the problems in Irish industrial development. He argued that the Irish character was, 'deficient in energy':

The people of Ireland seem incapable of calling forth their own powers of exertion, unless when stimulated by adventitious assistance. A spinner, to become industrious, must be presented with a wheel; a weaver, before he will work, must be supplied with a loom; and a bleacher cannot carry on business, unless he be furnished with a house in Dublin for the purpose of selling his commodity. Even a gentleman will not plant for his own advantage, or amusement, until he be impelled by some extraordinary inducement.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Maura Murphy, 'Cork Commercial Society 1850-1899: Politics and Problems' in *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development, 1500-1900* (Dublin, 1986), p. 233.

<sup>11</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World' in *History Workshop Journal*, lxiii, no. 1 (2007), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Economy, Trade and Irish Merchants at Home and Abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, Ireland ; Portland, OR, 2012), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 1* (London, 1812), p. 698.

This assessment conveniently overlooks a number of conditions in Irish commerce that were perhaps not immediately obvious. Cork had several relatively well mechanised textile manufacturers in the early nineteenth century, at the time that Wakefield wrote. However, as Bielenberg notes, the loss of sailcloth contracts after the Napoleonic Wars, combined with the relative cheapness of labour through the putting out system, removed some of the necessity for investment in more modern equipment.<sup>14</sup> Cork was barely emerging from a proto-industrial system by 1800. Wartime contracts boosted some industries, such as textiles, but this alone was insufficient to create a strong, competitive industrial base. The loss of wartime contracts was a blow to the region's textile manufacturers and combined with the economic depression of the 1820s and British competition there was little chance of survival. To give Wakefield his due, he did go on to identify several areas through which Ireland's linen industry could be improved and there is a kernel of truth in his arguments. Repeatedly the Committee of Merchants sought what he would term 'adventitious assistance' from Westminster rather than developing their own opportunities. Perhaps the issues he identified in the linen industry would have been more appropriately applied to Ireland's commercial classes.

Wakefield did have some accurate insights into the Irish economy when he argued that 'To promote a single manufacture at the expense of all the other branches of national industry, is inconsistent with every sound principle of political economy'.<sup>15</sup> In this he described the precise issue that Cork's merchants faced by the 1820s. They had encouraged their provisioning trade at the expense of all others, to the extent that a committee intended for butter regulation was able to exert their influence over all branches of trade. In 1812, when Wakefield wrote, business for Cork's mercantile classes had never been so good, but this was more due to the large and generous government contracts available because of the

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<sup>14</sup> Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880 : Development or Decline?* (Cork :, 1991), pp 22–23; David Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 401–403.

<sup>15</sup> Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political Vol 1*, p. 169

Napoleonic Wars than any shrewd business sense.<sup>16</sup> The loss of these contracts in 1815 led Foster to identify that year as the turning point in nineteenth century Irish history.<sup>17</sup> The debate surrounding whether it was 1815, as identified by Foster and Crotty, or 1830, as Solar argues, will never have a satisfactory solution.<sup>18</sup> One way or another the fifteen years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars devastated nascent Irish industrial development. In terms of Cork's, and indeed Ireland's, development events of the mid 1820s — the full implementation of the Union, the opening up of the West Indian colonies to the United States, the negotiation of direct trade between Britain and Brazil and the loss of Cork's exemption from parliamentary legislation for the butter trade — combined to destroy the fortunes of Cork's international trade.

Of course Cork's merchants had not helped themselves. The preference for shipping under British account was less risky than using local shipping. However, reliance on transshipment through Britain and lack of investment in a local mercantile fleet remains baffling for a city that depended so heavily on the sea for its economic growth and that derived all of its advantage from a substantial port. Free trade with the West Indies had been in place since 1778, yet Cork still traded via Britain. The limited amounts of East India goods landed in the city were not of much account, but still represented an advantage conferred on very few ports. During the Napoleonic Wars Cork was the port of departure for British trans-Atlantic convoys, with major British cities such as Liverpool and London deferring to the Committee of Merchants for guidance and advice regarding convoy departures. What benefits could have arisen from a better developed maritime infrastructure will remain unknown. However, they would have been of no small significance. Cork exhibited an ability at times to take the lead in Irish shipbuilding development, as demonstrated by the construction of their own iron clad ships, screw driven ships

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<sup>16</sup> John O'Donovan, *The Economic History of Live Stock in Ireland* (Cork, 1940), p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), pp 318–319.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Solar, 'Growth and Distribution in Irish Agriculture before the Famine' (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1987), pp 12, 38–40; R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), pp 318–319; Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production*, p. 35.

and construction maritime engines within the city. What was lacking was investment. Those with access to such financial resources in Cork were inordinately careful with their financial investment within Ireland, as was seen with indigenous investment in the proposed Cork canal and Irish railways.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it was the same issue to which Cullen attributed the underdeveloped Irish financial sector, the lack of direct colonial trade.<sup>20</sup> This is a likely candidate, though it again raises the point that there was little stopping Cork from conducting a direct colonial trade of its own.

The lack of an indigenous maritime fleet is not simply a modern puzzle, it was one that puzzled contemporaries also. It was noted during the 1780s dispute with Portugal that part of the issue for Ireland was the lack of an indigenous navy to protect her interests.<sup>21</sup> At the same time that Ireland's international trade increased in the eighteenth century, the tonnage of Irish shipping actually decreased by almost twenty-five per cent from 1723 to 1772.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to attribute this to anything other than a myopic, singularly focused mercantile class in Ireland. This lack of an indigenous fleet exacerbated the reliance of Ireland on the British market in the first decades of the nineteenth century and, to a certain degree, prevented Irish merchants from reopening or strengthening the hard won trade routes that they operated in the eighteenth century. It was far simpler, and cheaper, to rely on British shipping and British merchants.

By 1819, soon after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, steam services began their first operations on the Irish Sea.<sup>23</sup> Not only would such rapid connectivity cement the over-reliance on exporting to Britain, it would also lead Ireland to abandon any alternative to becoming more than an agricultural hinterland for British growth. The massive dependence on Britain as an export market for Irish

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<sup>19</sup> J.J. Lee, 'Capital in the Irish Economy' in L.M. Cullen (ed.), *The Formation of the Irish Economy* (The Thomas Davis lectures, Cork, 1969), pp 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> Cullen, 'Merchant Communities, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses', p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> *The Parliamentary Register*, p. 25; Lammey, 'The Irish-Portuguese Trade Dispute, 1770-90', p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland, from the Period of the Restoration* (London, 1903), pp 77–78.

<sup>23</sup> Yrjö Kaukiainen, 'Shrinking the world: Improvements in the Speed of Information Transmission, c. 1820-1870' in *European Review of Economic History*, v, no. 1 (2001), p. 12.

produce was an issue that continued right through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite some early attempts to redress this reliance in the early decades of an independent Ireland it was an issue that only began to slowly change with the gradual integration of Ireland into a wider European, and Atlantic, economy from the 1970s onwards.

The commercial focus of Cork was too narrow and the lack of investment into more sustainable development or exploring new trade routes was detrimental. Further research into Ireland's other urban areas will probably show similar trends. The issue of why Ireland's industry was so underdeveloped when in such proximity to such opportunity will continue to cause much debate, but a partial answer is to look at both regional successes and failures. Exploration of the political representation at Westminster and how Irish MPs engaged with the more mundane legislative issues of importance to Ireland, such as butter and rates regulation, may provide some answers. Ireland had a comparatively large number of MPs, but they lacked cohesiveness beyond issues such as repeal or home rule that was required to push trade and economic issues. Catholic Emancipation and 'monster meetings' could draw crowds and attention, but the more mundane issues such as butter or duties lack such broad ranging appeal.

Yet, within such mundane matters lay the potential for a successful Irish economy. The failure to achieve that was more complex than changing consumption and changing trade movements. It represented a lack of foresight on the part of Ireland's commercial merchants and poor representation by Irish MPs. Suffrage is important, but it does not feed people unless translated to affirmative political support. The failure was due to a recalcitrant political class, an inflexible mercantile community and a disinterested Imperial Parliament. Corkonians may have perceived themselves as living in 'the Capital of the South of Ireland', but in truth Cork was a provincial city on the periphery of the British Empire that for a period, through luck and circumstance, had occupied an enviable role in Europe's trade networks.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

	1811				1823			
	British		Foreign		British		Foreign	
	Ships	Tons	Ships	Tons	Ships	Tons	Ships	Tons
Ballyraine			1	71	1	55	1	122
Baltimore					1	90	3	363
Belfast	11	1570	46	8604	51	5595	42	6634
Coleraine			9	1271	5	434	4	449
Cork	51	6117	49	11364	45	4816	59	8708
Drogheda			5	482	2	179	7	1024
Dublin	45	4876	119	20775	115	11180	68	13223
Dundalk	3	287	3	359	4	439	1	178
Galway			4	728	1	93	5	872
Killibegs			2	208	2	138	1	140
Kinsale			3	798	2	171		
Larne			3	351	1	43	3	452
Limerick	31	4025	20	4092	5	601	5	754
Londonderry	2	282	13	2513	11	1024	19	2070
Newry	2	248	25	4338	20	2058	22	3217
Ross	2	239	1	401				
Sligo			3	251	8	686	9	1413
Strangford	2	244	6	850				
Tralee	1	57	3	598			2	249
Waterford	32	3233	24	4067	14	1310	8	1419
Westport	1	84	2	278			1	156
Wexford	2	197	6	884	2	133	2	276
Youghal	3	175	1	193	1	73	3	311
	188	21614	348	63476	291	29118	265	42030

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<sup>1</sup> An account of the Number of Vessels, with Their tonnage, that Entered the Ports of Ireland, in the Year 1811 and 1823, from the Several Countries on the Continent of Europe, from Norway to the streights of Gibraltar, Including the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas, and Also Including the Islands of Guernsey, Jersey, Aldenay and Sark, The Countries and Islands from which, and the Ports at which they had with the Number of Vessels, and Amount of Tonnage from each such ..Island to each Port Respectively, the each year, and further Distinguishing British from Foreign Vessels, Board of Customs: Statistics: Trade and Shipping, Cust 36/5, TNA.

## Appendix 2 <sup>2</sup>

Year			1801	1802	1803	1819	1820	1821	1822
Port	Rate of Duty per tun (£)	British Ships	38.14.0	38.14.1	40.16.0	90.6.0	90.0.1	90.0.1	90.0.1
		Foreign Ships	40.0.2	40.0.2	42.2.2	93.9.0	92.19.5	92.19.5	92.19.5
	Gallons on which duty paid		1130724	1723190	1318101	278278	256803	298282	250743
French	Rate of Duty per tun (£)	British Ships	59.12.0	59.12.00	63.16.0	135.12	135.12	135.12	135.12
		Foreign Ships	61.12.10	61.12.10	65.16.10	139.13.0	139.13.1	139.13.2	139.13.3
	Gallons on which duty paid		114730	215173	155708	53464	17407	33887	30470
Spanish	Rate of Duty per tun (£)	British Ships	38.14.0	38.14.1	40.16.0	90.6.0	90.0.1	90.0.1	90.0.1
		Foreign Ships	40.0.2	40.0.2	42.2.2	93.9.0	92.19.5	92.19.5	92.19.5
	Gallons on which duty paid		210819	428202	350896	167102	154310	174503	171327
Madeira	Rate of Duty per tun (£)	British Ships	38.14.0	38.14.1	41.17.0	91	91	91	91
		Foreign Ships	40.0.2	40.0.2	43.3.2	94	94	94	94
	Gallons on which duty paid		28742	26704	8162	24979	15559	23783	22489
Total Gallons on which duty paid of all wines			1493016	2398890	1835429	647574	557580	678559	613488

<sup>2</sup> (Ireland.) *Wine. Accounts Relating to the Produce of Revenue Derived from Wine Imported into Ireland; Also, the Quantities of Wine Imported and Exported; &c. 1801-1822.* H.C. 1823 (132) xvi, 587.. From the 5th July 1802 the increases seen in 1803 came into force, and from the 14th July 1803 10% was added on top of former rates.

### Appendix 3

Comparative view of whole duties on wines (there was some confusion by Portugal as to how duties were levied on Irish wines):<sup>3</sup>

Duty	French	Port
Custom	3.3.0	4.10.0
Excise	5.13.5	5.13.5
1 <sup>st</sup> additional duty	11.17.7	10.10.7
2 <sup>nd</sup> additional duty	10.7.0	None
Total	31.1.0	20.14.0

“From hence it appears that with respect to the duties applicable to the uses of government, the treaty of 1703 has been strictly complied with.”

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Lucius O'Brien, 8th April 1781, The Papers of William Pitt the Younger, PRO 30/8/342 ff 11, BL.



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