

# Markets, Fairs and Towns in Ireland, c.1600–1853

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## Introduction

DESPITE THE CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS MADE in the study of Irish urban history during the last twenty years, it nevertheless remains characterised by perspectives and constrained by problems which combine to create an agenda markedly different from its English counterpart.<sup>1</sup> Prominent within this, for the post-medieval period, are questions concerning the urban places which evolved as part of the intensely pluralistic society created by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' Plantations and Land Confiscations, the cultural production inherent in Dublin's growth as a primate centre in the eighteenth century, and the intricate and contested spaces created both by that city's subsequent relatively slow growth and Belfast's more meteoric expansion during the later nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Arguably, however, the nature of this engagement has been driven by the uneven survival of specifically urban sources prior to the nineteenth century—inevitably, the largest centres such as Dublin or Cork are most extensively documented and have supported the most detailed analysis—and by the relative paucity, particularly in the 'long' eighteenth century, of relevant synoptic urban material generated by the state and other institutions.<sup>3</sup> The seventeenth century is in fact rather better served in this regard. British involvement as the intervening metropolitan power in the formation

<sup>1</sup> M.E. Daley, 'Irish urban history: a survey', *Urban History Yearbook* (1986), 61–72.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: A. Cosgrove, ed., *Dublin Through the Ages* (Dublin, 1988); L.M. Cullen, 'The Dublin merchant community', in P. Butel and L.M. Cullen, eds, *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development, 1500–1900* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 195–210; M.E. Daley, *Dublin, the Deposed Capital: A Social and Economic History, 1860–1914* (Cork, 1984); D. Dickson, 'The place of Dublin in the eighteenth-century Irish economy', in T.M. Devine and D. Dickson, eds, *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 177–92; D. Dickson, ed., *The Gorgeous Mask: Dublin, 1700–1850* (Dublin, 1987); R. Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster: The Settlement of East Ulster, 1600–1641* (Cork, 1985), pp. 167–94; M. MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland, 1583–1641* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 253–60; W. Maguire, *Belfast* (Keele, 1993); P. Robinson, *The Plantation of Ulster* (Dublin, 1984), pp. 150–71.

<sup>3</sup> J. Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 1996); C. Lennon, *The Lords of Dublin in the Age of Reformation* (Dublin, 1989).

of a quasi-colonial state in the country at this time generated a variety of 'censuses', surveys and other material which provide an overview of various aspects of the developing pattern of settlement by the mid-seventeenth century. This material has been used by Gillespie, Robinson and others to offer a convincing account of seventeenth-century urbanism as the regionally diverse instrument for the exercise of state authority, coercive economic transformation and civil society.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, growing concern by successive British governments at the deteriorating social, political and demographic conditions in Ireland during the first half of the nineteenth century ensured that many major aspects of urban life in Ireland came under intense parliamentary scrutiny at this time.<sup>5</sup>

But in attempting an overview of the economic role of early modern Irish towns, the problem resolutely remains: how to support a credible analysis when data are so patchy for any given place or period. One consequence of this uneven coverage is that the regional patterns of economic—and social—production and consumption in Ireland's provincial towns and the urban spaces this created in the eighteenth century are still imperfectly understood, though notable individual case studies such as Barnard's analysis of the urban lives of the Egan and Eves families, merchants at Birr and Edenderry in the 1720s, do exist.<sup>6</sup> Other recent studies of the growth and development of the provincial urban network during this period have envisaged this as a function of collaboration between landlords and tenants in pursuit of shared economic objectives, objectives which ultimately proved to be socially divisive. By investing directly in urban market infrastructures and encouraging the use of tenant capital by the offer of favourable building leases, landlords are argued to have enhanced both their control over the means of agrarian production and the social and political authority which accrued from this. Tenant participation created a bourgeois interest in the towns' prosperity which was aligned with that of the proprietors. However, by providing tenants with such a potentially valuable and relatively autonomous stake in the economic future of these places, landlords are argued to have also created the means whereby tenants were eventually able to capitalise on the processes of economic modernisation and assert their political independence from the landlords during the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

This argument has an appealing symmetry but fails to address the uneven success and high failure rate of landlord marketing initiatives in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, it does not explicitly account for the fact that these formed only

<sup>4</sup> Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster*; MacCarthy-Morrogh, *Munster*; Robinson, *Plantation*.

<sup>5</sup> For the effects of this on one city, Belfast, see C. O'Leary, 'Belfast urban government in the age of reform', in D. Harkness and M. O'Dowd, eds, *The Town in Ireland: Irish Historical Studies XIII* (Belfast, 1981), pp. 187–202.

<sup>6</sup> T.C. Barnard, 'The world of goods and County Offaly in the early eighteenth century', in W. Nolan and T.P. O'Neill, eds, *Offaly History and Society* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 371–92.

<sup>7</sup> L.J. Proudfoot and B.J. Graham, 'The nature and extent of urban and village foundation and improvement in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' Ireland', *Planning Perspectives*, 8 (1993), 259–81; L.J. Proudfoot, *Property Ownership and Urban and Village Improvement in Provincial Ireland, c.1700–1845* (London, 1997).

part of a regionally-varied system of exchange which also included large numbers of urban and rural fair sites. For example, nearly seventy per cent of the market sites known to have been patented in Ireland between *c.*1600 and 1853 were inactive by the latter year. By this date, almost four times as many active fair sites survived as market sites.<sup>8</sup> If the social reproduction of the landowning élite as a class depended on their continuing ability to manipulate the agrarian marketing system, then this high failure rate suggests that as individuals they were not uniformly well placed to carry this out. Equally, the survival of such large numbers of periodic fair sites into the mid-nineteenth century, nearly three-quarters of them rural, suggests that urban markets were not the only instrument of economic control through which landlords apparently tried (with limited success) to ensure their own social reproduction. The assumption here is that although markets and fairs were normally distinguishable by their frequency, degree of specialisation, range of goods and catchment areas, they in fact formed complementary parts of the same trading system—and were perceived as such by their founders. If the reproduction of the landowning class depended on their control of the system of agrarian exchange, this control must have been able to accommodate individual failure as well as have been extended to rural fairs in addition to urban markets.

Ireland's provincial urban economy was, in short, firmly grounded in the countryside, and any consideration of the economic role played by provincial towns must recognise this. The present discussion acknowledges these contexts, and explores various structural aspects of Ireland's provincial urban economy, particularly the provision of formal urban markets and their relationship with rural fairs. These issues are addressed via an interrogation of various early nineteenth-century synoptic sources, which between them cast light on the regional variation in the functional evolution of Ireland's small towns by that period. They provide the basis for a retrospective analysis of the cumulative effects of the growth in urban market provision between *c.*1600 and 1853, and thus go some way to remedy the data deficiencies of the eighteenth century.

Central to this analysis is the question of what exactly constituted a 'small town' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Ireland. Prior to Dublin and (to a lesser extent) Cork's rapid growth in the later eighteenth century, all Irish towns were small by European standards, and the smallest remained resolutely so. Clarkson's analysis of the Irish Hearth Tax returns suggests that by the 1790s, no more than thirty-six of the 780 or so Irish settlements identified as showing evidence of formal planning by *c.*1840 would have exceeded Dyer's suggested population ceiling of 2,500 for small-town status in England in 1700 (above, chapter 3).<sup>9</sup> As Hood suggests (below, chapter 11), many of these Irish settlements consisted of no more than a main street and a *congerie* of lanes

<sup>8</sup> PP 1852–3, XLI, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, pp. 79–231.

<sup>9</sup> L.A. Clarkson, 'An anatomy of an Irish town: the economy of Armagh, 1770', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 5 (1978), 27–45; Proudfoot, *Property Ownership*, *passim*.

and alleys, and had populations estimated in hundreds rather than thousands.<sup>10</sup> Yet by 1853 over sixty per cent either retained or had once possessed a market charter, evidence—according to Dyer—of intended or actual urban status in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. By this token at least, many of Ireland's smaller settlements were intended to play a marketing role that transcended mere agricultural village status, but which in fact failed to generate the sort of population growth experienced by even small market towns in England. But whatever their experience, these places formed part of a pattern of fair and market provision which embraced both the indubitably urban and the avowedly rural, and displayed a chronology and regional dynamic which offers the possibility of aggregate analysis. These aspects of market provision are explored below, but the discussion begins with an evaluation of the primary source used for this appraisal, the 1853 parliamentary *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Fairs and Markets in Ireland*.<sup>11</sup>

### The 1853 Fairs and Markets Report

Despite the omission of a list of inactive patents for County Londonderry, the ambiguity of some its entries and the duplication of others, the 1853 *Report* is the most comprehensive of a series of nineteenth-century government inquiries into the regulation of markets and fairs in Ireland. These were prompted by concern at the allegations of widespread fraud in these markets, particularly in the exaction of tolls and dues, and by the government's desire to obtain accurate information about the volume of trade conducted in them.<sup>12</sup> The *Report* is based on information on existing fairs and markets collected for the commission by the Irish Constabulary, supplemented with data derived from the surviving fair and market patents held by the Paymaster of the Civil Services. Its appendices list 349 towns and villages with an active market in 1853, ninety per cent of which (314) are included in the list of 1,247 urban and rural fair sites active—though by no means all had a patent—in the same year. As this implies, the majority of patents granted the right to hold both a market and a fair, but a significant proportion (about forty per cent) were for fairs only. A third appendix lists 872 urban and rural places where patented markets and/or fairs were inactive by 1853. Of these, just under half (48 per cent) had 'lost' their market but retained their fair, and thus also figure in the active fairs list. Another quarter (about 28 per cent) had lost both fair and

<sup>10</sup> L.J. Proudfoot, 'Urban patronage and estate management on the Duke of Devonshire's Irish estates (1764–1891): A study in landlord–tenant relationships', PhD thesis (Queen's University, Belfast, 1989), 92–5; subsequently published as *Urban Patronage and Social Authority: The Management of the Duke of Devonshire's Towns in Ireland, 1764–1891* (Washington DC, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> PP 1852–3, xli, Report.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.

market functions, while the remainder had only ever received either a fair or a market grant, which had subsequently become inactive.

The entry for each place gives the date of the original patent (if there was one), the name of the patentee, and the original and (if the site was active) current market and/or fair day(s). Larger centres frequently recorded multiple patents, and as elsewhere, these were mainly sought by aristocratic and gentry landowners. Over 94 per cent of the 1,150 or so active and defunct market patents listed in the 1853 *Report* were obtained by landed patrons, confirming the conventional emphasis placed on the role of landlords as a class in market promotion. Corporate or institutional market foundations were rare. Overall, barely 5 per cent of patents were sought by town corporations, though this proportion more than doubled for patents which were still active in 1853 (12.8 per cent), and included a number of larger towns of medieval or earlier origin, such as Carrickfergus (Co. Antrim), Youghal (Co. Cork), and Galway city. Much more typical were individuals such as Sir Richard and Sir John Cox, who obtained market patents for Dunmanway (Co. Cork) in 1693 and 1769, or John Darner and Riggs Falkiner, who likewise equipped Borrisoleigh and Mullinahone (Co. Tipperary) in 1731 and 1759. Thus, generally speaking, the pattern lends credence to Sweet's observation that corporate urban identities were relatively ill developed in eighteenth-century Ireland (below, chapter 10).

Not all of the active fair and market sites returned by the Constabulary were licensed by patent, however, and not all that were adhered to the fair and market days prescribed in the original document. As Crawford demonstrates in this volume, in Ulster the number, location and dates of fairs evolved over time as the trading system initially created during the Plantation gradually adjusted to the realities of the region's pastoral economy. Frequently, these adjustments were made without recourse to law, and by 1853, over one-third of the active market sites and forty per cent of the active fair sites were unpatented.<sup>13</sup> While it is possible that some of these may have originally had patents, since lost, the figures are a reminder that licensing fairs and markets by patent represented a relatively late stage in market regulation. The use of patents for this appears to have begun during the reign of James I, presumably as part of the then-general attempt to extend royal authority in Ireland.<sup>14</sup> How many of the then newly-patented sites already functioned as markets and fairs is hard to determine, as is the number of then-existing sites for which no patent was sought. Some at least of the unpatented active markets listed in 1853 were medieval in origin and presumably operated under the terms of an earlier borough charter.<sup>15</sup> Fairs, on the other hand, appear frequently to have had a more ancient customary origin, often associated with religious

<sup>13</sup> Calculated from Appendices 1–3, *Ibid.*, pp. 122–229.

<sup>14</sup> R. Gillespie, 'Fairs and markets', in S.J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 184–5.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow; Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary; and Drogheda, on the border of counties Louth and Meath.

sites or saints' days. Gillespie suggests that as many as 3,000 fairs existed in the 1770s, concentrated in Leinster.<sup>16</sup> It is easy to envisage how, during the rapid and uneven agrarian expansion of the later eighteenth century, informal trading sites, sanctioned by custom rather than licence, might have flourished (and declined) in response to local changes in trading conditions.

The inactive fair and market patents listed in 1853 pose different questions and permit more limited assumptions. Obtaining a patent was a 'lengthy, awkward and expensive business'. It involved application to the lord lieutenant, appraisal by the attorney general and action by the office of the Great Seal, and it is difficult to believe that applications were frequently made without a serious intention of exploiting the economic opportunities provided by the patent's acquisition.<sup>17</sup> Yet strictly speaking, in the absence of corroborative evidence, we cannot assume that the inactive patents listed in 1853 represent anything more than an intention at some earlier time to found a fair or market. But whether as evidence merely of intent or of a site which subsequently failed, these defunct patents are important. They demonstrate the extent to which patrons' perception of the trading potential in different regions fell short of subsequent reality during the progressive commercialisation of Ireland's economy from the seventeenth century. Previous analyses of the *Report* have concentrated on active sites and specifically excluded the related patterns of failure or non-implementation.<sup>18</sup> These failures are reinstated here, and discussed below as an essential adjunct to our understanding of the way in which the pattern of provincial markets evolved in Ireland.

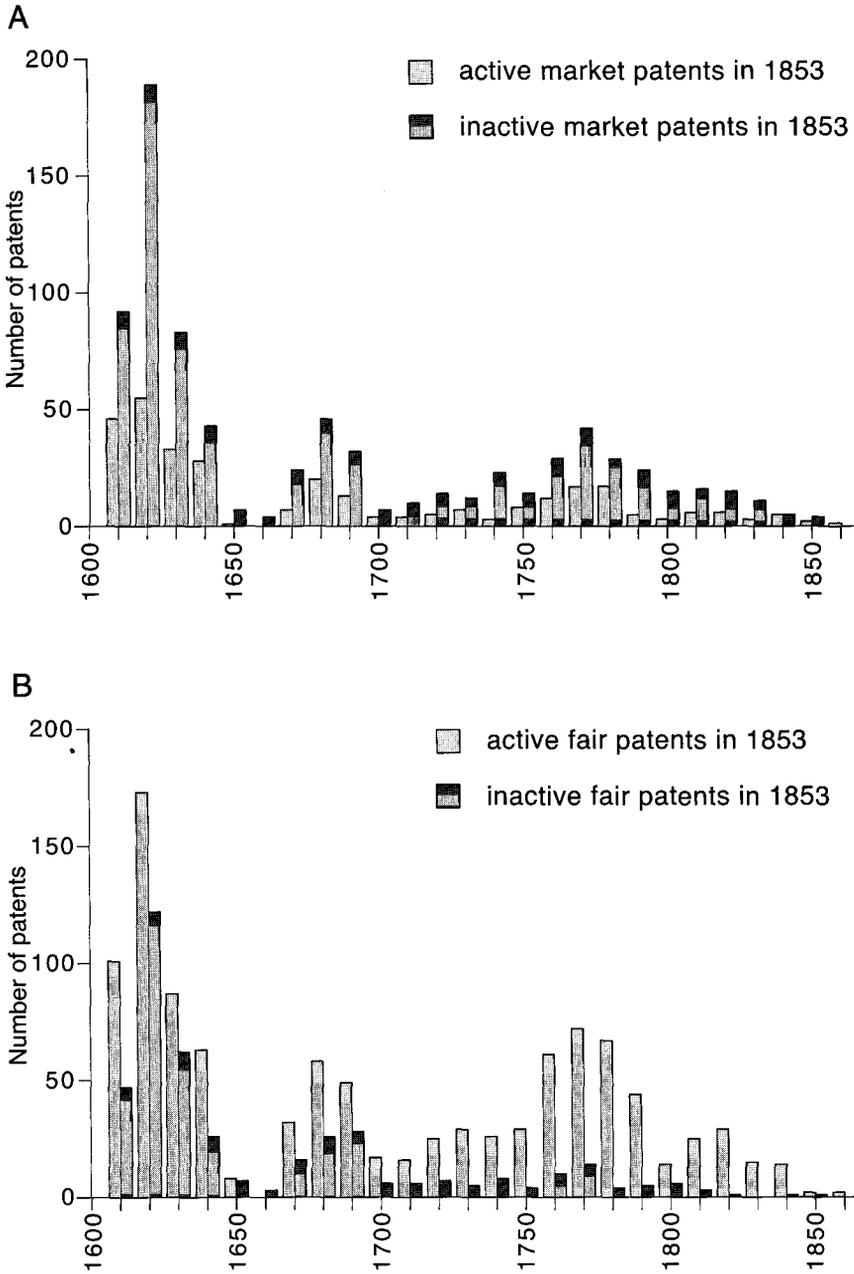
### Patent acquisition, 1600–1853

Figure 4.1 depicts the separate decennial trends in the total number of fair and market patents which were issued between *c.*1600 and 1853, distinguishing in each case between those which were active and inactive by the latter year. Figure 4.2 represents the inactive totals as a percentage of the decennial totals for each category and as a three-year running percentage mean. Two points are worth noting: first, the recognisable congruity between the chronological distribution displayed by the award of these fair and market grants and the major political and economic trends and events of the period; second, the pronounced difference in the numbers of fair and market patents and in the proportion of these which were inactive by 1853. The congruity year-by-year between the distribution of fair and market patents is clearly at least partly a function of the nature of the patents themselves.

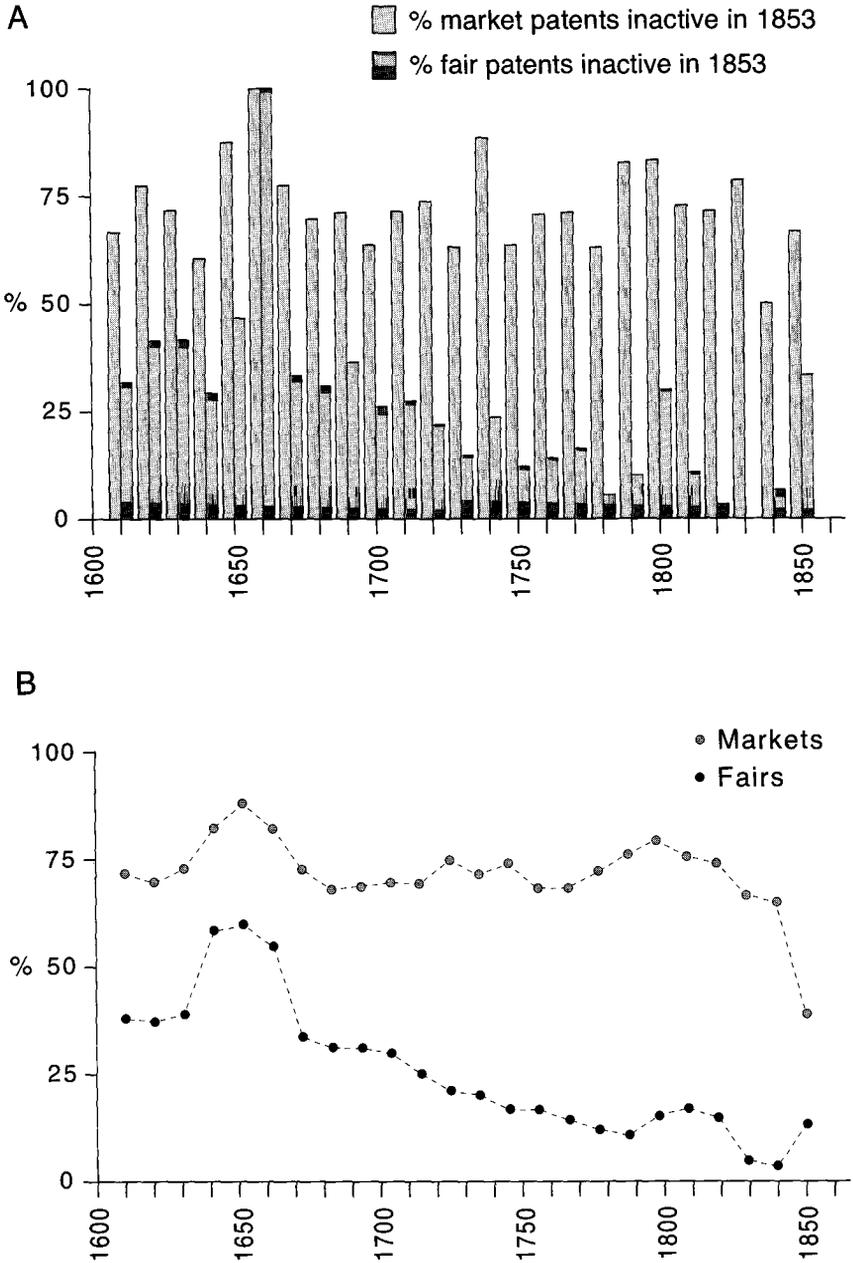
<sup>16</sup> Gillespie, 'Fairs and markets'.

<sup>17</sup> P. O'Flanagan, 'Markets and fairs in Ireland, 1600–1800: index of economic development and regional growth', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11/4 (1985), 364–78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; P. O'Flanagan, 'Settlement development and trading in Ireland, 1600–1800: a preliminary investigation', in Devine and Dickson, eds, *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850*, pp. 146–50.



**Figure 4.1.** Markets and fairs active/inactive in 1853, decennial distribution by date of foundation (A: markets; B: fairs).



**Figure 4.2.** Markets and fairs inactive in 1853 as a percentage of the total, by date of foundation (A: decennial percentage; B: three-year running mean).

The most active period of patent acquisition occurred during the later part of the Plantation period. Between 1600 and 1640 patents for over 680 fairs and 560 markets were issued; subsequently, no other similar period produced anything like this number. This emphasis on market promotion during these years is entirely in accord with the conventional view that the Plantations led to a major transformation in social relations of production over much of Ireland. Existing systems of exchange, partly urban-based and market-led, and partly based on social ties of kinship obligation, are held to have been incorporated within the agrarian capitalism which lay at the heart of Plantation colonialism. Increasingly, land came to be seen as a commodity, with an exchange value quite independent of the kinship ties it once supported.<sup>19</sup> Realising this value to the full required a commensurate extension to the existing marketing network. The widespread patent acquisition which characterised this was followed by a near-total collapse in the number of patents issued in the 1640s and 1650s. These decades witnessed extensive social, economic and political disruption, caused both by the 1641 Rebellion and its suppression, and the unilateral changes in landownership brought about by the ensuing Cromwellian land settlement.<sup>20</sup>

The Restoration of 1660 coincided with signs of a revival in the number of successful patent applications, though to nowhere near the levels experienced during the early years of the Ulster and midlands plantations (1610–30). This revival lasted until the 1690s, and suggests that despite the uncertainties in land title created by the Acts of Settlement (1662) and Explanation (1665), which sought to undo some of the effects of the Cromwellian land confiscations, a significant proportion of the reconstituted—and still largely Protestant—landowning class felt sufficiently confident to continue to invest in their estates in this way.<sup>21</sup> This new-found confidence appears to have been curtailed by the general dislocation of the Williamite wars, however, which ushered in a period of more limited patent acquisition, again particularly for markets, which lasted until the mid-eighteenth century. During the early years of the eighteenth century, this may have reflected uncertainties in the land market created by the continuing threat of Jacobite invasion, together, perhaps, with the general disincentive fostered by the inherited legacy of long leases set at low rents by landlords in the later seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> During the second half of the eighteenth century—a period generally accepted to have been one of sustained export-led growth and regional adjustment in many sectors of Ireland's agrarian economy<sup>23</sup>—the number of patents again rose sharply to a peak in

<sup>19</sup> Gillespie, *Colonial Ulster, passim*; MacCarthy-Morrogh, *Munster, passim*; Robinson, *Plantation, passim*.

<sup>20</sup> P.J. Corish, 'The Cromwellian regime, 1650–1660', in T.W. Moody, F.X. Byrne and F.J. Byrne, eds, *A New History of Ireland, III: Early Modern Ireland, 1534–1691* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 353–86.

<sup>21</sup> J.G. Simms, 'The Restoration, 1660–1685', *Ibid.*, pp. 420–53.

<sup>22</sup> L.M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660*, 2nd edn (London, 1987), pp. 42–9.

<sup>23</sup> L.M. Cullen, 'Economic development, 1750–1800', in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland, IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691–1800* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 159–95; K. Whelan, 'Settlement and society in eighteenth-century Ireland', in T. Barry, ed., *A History of Settlement in Ireland* (London, 2000), pp. 187–205.

the 1760s and 1770s, before falling progressively thereafter to reach a further low during the unsettled years immediately prior to the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798 and a nadir in the Famine decade of the 1840s.

In themselves, of course, these simple temporal congruities prove nothing about the proprietorial *mentalité* which may have encouraged investment in fair and market patent acquisition. We should also note with O'Flanagan that, where a fair or market was active in 1853, the fact that its patent antedated others need not necessarily mean that trading had been going on there for longer—that depended whether the site had been active all that time without a break.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the impressive consistency between the pattern of patent acquisition and, variously, conditions of political uncertainty, agrarian expansion and growing population–resource imbalance—conditions which on *a priori* grounds we might suspect would affect the individual landowner's perception of the likely success of his market—suggests that most patents were sought on the basis of fairly careful proprietorial calculation. The difference in the number of fair and market patents and in the proportion of these which were inactive by 1853, suggests that not only were the opportunities to found new markets perceived to be relatively limited, but that many of those which were founded proved to be more difficult to sustain in the long term than fairs. Figure 4.2 makes it clear that the 'failure' rate among market patents remained consistently high, whereas that for fair patents tended to fall. Overall, nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of the market patents issued after c.1600 were inactive in 1853, compared with just over 28 per cent of all fair patents. Why should this have been so?

One reason may have lain in the differences in the trading patterns at fairs and markets. The vast majority of markets were normally held once a week, but sometimes twice and occasionally more, and consequently relied heavily on the aggregate local trade generated within their immediate hinterland. Much of this trade was agricultural, but in some regions it also included locally-produced textiles, notably linen and woollens, though by the early nineteenth century these were everywhere in decline save in Ulster.<sup>25</sup> The local character of this trade is well described by various entries in the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* of 1846, although by this time it was being increasingly penetrated by the products of British industry. Castlebar in County Mayo, for example, possessed a 'trade, so common to Irish towns, of offering a market for agricultural goods and furnishing supplies of miscellaneous goods'.<sup>26</sup> At Ballinrobe, in the same county, 'the well attended weekly market' commanded 'the ingress of agricultural produce from an extensive adjacent country and the egress of various wares of miscellaneous trade'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> O'Flanagan, 'Markets and fairs', 364–6.

<sup>25</sup> W.J. Smyth, 'Flax cultivation in Ireland: the development and demise of a regional staple', in W.J. Smith and K. Whelan, eds, *Common Ground: Essays on the Historical Geography of Ireland presented to T. Jones Hughes* (Cork, 1988), pp. 234–52.

<sup>26</sup> *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* (London, 1846), vol. 1, p. 350.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 144.

What these wares might have been is suggested by the entry for Ballina, also in County Mayo, where the town's considerable export trade in corn was reciprocal to the sale of imported 'British and Foreign iron, hardware, timber, coffee, sugar, tinned plate, salt, spirits, glass, earthenware and cloth'.<sup>28</sup>

The penetration of the provincial Irish market by British goods in the early nineteenth century occurred at the expense of existing local production, and was made possible by the price advantages which accrued to British industry as a result of its higher output and also, it has been argued, by the abolition of Irish tariff barriers in 1824.<sup>29</sup> This penetration was also facilitated by Ireland's existing canal network and, eventually, the growth of its railways, and for these reasons is likely to have been an uneven process which exacerbated existing competition between local markets. The extent of this competition, and its effects in terms of urban prosperity or decay, form a recurrent theme in the *Parliamentary Gazetteer*. Direct competition between a newly-established and a neighbouring market could spell disaster: in the late 1830s, for example, the Saturday market at Ballinakill, Queen's County (Laois), had 'nearly been destroyed by the attractions of the new market on the same day at Abbeyleix'.<sup>30</sup> In other instances in southern Ireland, the long-term decline in traditional textile staples effected a similar result as linen, in particular, established new geographies of production concentrated in Ulster. At Clonakilty, County Cork, the town had previously prospered on the basis of a linen industry which had been worth £30,000 in the 1790s, but which had gone into substantial decline after 1821, and by 1846 Clonakilty assumed 'every appearance of desertion, decay and coming misery'.<sup>31</sup> In the same county, Skibbereen exhibited 'the usual signs of disgusting penury that exist in small and second-rate towns in Ireland', owing in large measure to the decline in its once-significant yarn and coarse linen manufactures, which had been only partly replaced by the growth in the town's retail trade in 'British manufactures'.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere, improving communications enhanced some towns' market competitiveness and their share of local and regional trade. Boyle (Co. Roscommon), Banagher and Tullamore (both King's County, now Co. Offaly), all benefited from locations on or near the Grand Canal, which by 1803 linked Dublin with the River Shannon in western Ireland, and extended the metropolis' influence across the north midlands. These towns all developed far-reaching corn and provisions trades, which in the case of Tullamore underpinned its role as the 'chief shipping station' of the entire canal.<sup>33</sup> But growth such as this could be achieved only at the expense of rival centres, and underlined the vulnerability of provincial markets to anything which disrupted their trading

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> *Parl. Gaz.*, vol. 1, pp. 131, 325.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 423.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 239.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 207, 272; vol. IX, p. 426.

relationship with their hinterlands, be it civil unrest, sectoral economic decline or differential adjustments to their own or their competitors' accessibility. In short, the very frequency, localism and competitiveness which characterised Ireland's provincial markets, also made them vulnerable to externally-induced failure. Moreover, marketing success implied the presence of a sufficient local population threshold, and this consideration, too, limited the number of opportunities to found successful new markets.

In comparison, although fair sites were more numerous than market sites, the actual fairs were held much less frequently and usually specialised in cattle, horses or other livestock. Consequently, many of the most successful fairs served much larger catchment areas than even relatively large market centres. Held at most perhaps once a month, but frequently no more than four or five times a year, many fairs were held at roadside locations, and eschewed both urban locations and the sort of permanent—and expensive—infrastructures that were becoming increasingly common in urban markets by the early nineteenth century. County Cavan is a case in point. Well over three-quarters (80 per cent) of all fair sites known to have been patented there after 1600 were still active in 1853, the highest proportion in the country. Of these, just over half (55 per cent) were rural, and just over three-quarters (77 per cent) were used less than once a month for livestock fairs, which typically lasted no more than two or three days at most. Arguably, it was the very infrequency of many fairs, together with their limited requirement for capital investment and their regional rather than local economic role, which enabled them to respond to the vicissitudes of trade more effectively than the more inflexible market network. That this may have been so is indicated by the declining trend during the later eighteenth century in the proportion of fair patents that were inactive by 1853 (Figure 4.2). The period saw a massive increase in demand for Irish livestock exports to England following the repeal of the Cattle Acts in 1759, as well as a sustained expansion in the Atlantic provisions trade through ports such as Cork and Waterford. The increase in the number of—increasingly viable—fair sites may be reasonably construed to have represented an infrastructural adjustment in the trading system to accommodate this.

### **Regional patterns**

As this implies, inherent within these trends was a regionalism which reflected the differing opportunities in various parts of Ireland for market foundation and promotion. Population growth (and decline) and agricultural change were fundamental to this, but were regionally uneven and displayed complex changing geographies which reflected their interaction with a variety of other factors. These varied from the material—for example the physical environment and its resource base—to more abstract conditions such as relative location and accessibility, changing patterns of export-led demand for agricultural produce, and social structure and cultural values. Between them, these

interactions helped to create an unstable mosaic of urban and rural 'place', where individual identities were contested and the broader social and economic relations of production worked out.

Figures 4.3 and 4.5 try to capture something of this complexity as it was reflected in the market and fair data contained in the 1853 *Report*. Unlike previous analyses of these data, they are based on the annual aggregate totals of active and inactive fair and market trading days listed for each county in 1853.<sup>34</sup> Each of the four differently-shaded bands covers eight counties, a quarter of the total: hence the apparently arbitrary range of numbers in each quartile. Figures 4.3A and 4.5A express the active market or fair days as a ratio to each county's agricultural area in acres. Figures 4.3B and 4.5B depict the number of inactive market or fair days as a percentage of the total number of market or fair days for each county. The calculation of fair and market trading days—rather than simply the number of fair and market sites—offers a better surrogate measure of the relative extent of trading activity in different regions. This is particularly useful where fairs are concerned, because of the considerable variation in their frequency and duration. As Table 4.1 indicates, calculating this measure also highlights the much greater relative importance of market trading within the periodic exchange system. In turn, this suggests that the recent emphasis on the landlords' control of urban markets as a means of social reproduction may, in fact, have correctly identified where the locus of economic activity lay, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at least. Although active fair sites were more numerous by 1853 (and a quarter of them were urban), the patronage of urban markets allowed landlords the opportunity to regulate and benefit from by far the larger proportion of periodic trading opportunities in the agrarian economy.

The agricultural acreages used to compile Figures 4.3A and 4.5A are derived from the 1846 *Parliamentary Gazetteer*, and indicate the maximum area which had been

**Table 4.1.** Ireland: aggregate fair and market trading days, 1853.

	Markets	Fairs
Active sites	349	1,247
Active trading days	20,892	5,732
Per cent of trading days	78.5	21.5
Average active days per site	60.0	4.6
Inactive sites	750	362
Inactive trading days	44,204	1,337
Per cent of inactive days	97.1	2.9
Average inactive days per site	59.0	3.7

<sup>34</sup> O'Flanagan, 'Markets and fairs', *passim*.

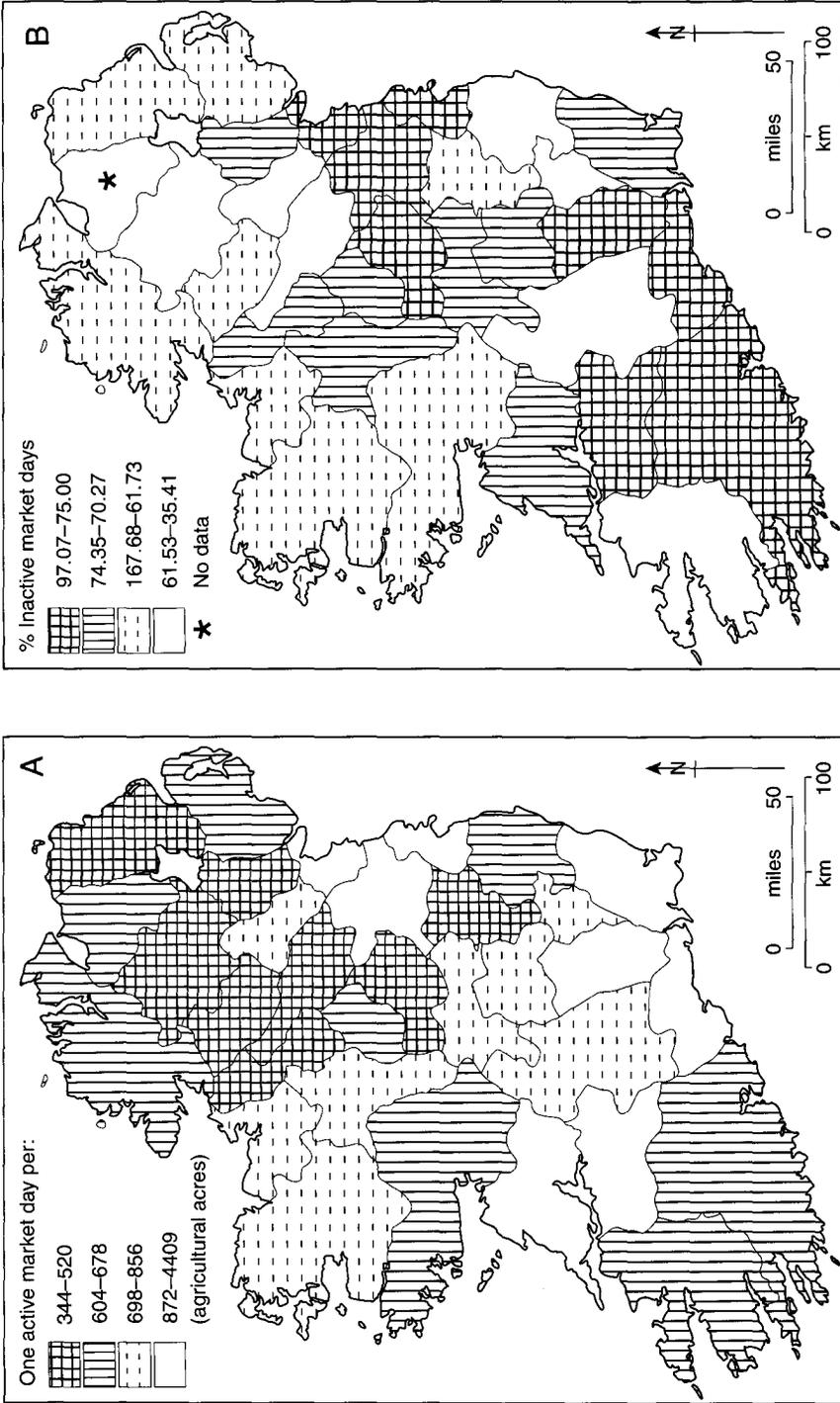


Figure 4.3. A: Ratio of market days active in 1853 to agricultural area, by county; B: Market days inactive in 1853 as a percentage of total market days, by county.

taken into cultivation under the pressure of pre-Famine population growth.<sup>35</sup> In effect, the ratio values measure the relative ability of the agriculture in each county to support fair and market trading by the mid-nineteenth century. The smaller the ratio value the more numerous the trading days through which agrarian value was realised and the economy articulated. Like the fair and market percentage inactivity rates depicted in Figures 4.3B and 4.5B, these ratios offer the basis for synchronic analysis of the cumulative effects of those social and economic trends which were noted above as being likely to determine the opportunities for market and fair foundation. The fair and market distributions both display ratio and percentage patterns which are, broadly, inversely related. Moreover, they also share some recognisably similar distribution characteristics, particularly in Ulster and the north midlands. Generally, however, all four maps depict a degree of regional diversity which lends support to the contention that earlier representations of early modern Ireland's economy, which saw this as divided along Manichaean lines between a 'commercial east' and a 'subsistence west', are no longer tenable.<sup>36</sup>

## Markets

We may draw four tentative conclusions from the patterns of urban market provision depicted in Figures 4.3A and 4.3B. First, by the mid-nineteenth century, the relative distribution of urban market activity, as measured by the number of trading days, still reflected the major structural adjustments made to Irish urbanisation during the Plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Second, and for reasons which may have been related to this, by the 1850s the nine northernmost counties in the historic province of Ulster had experienced a pattern of market provision which differed radically from that elsewhere in Ireland. Third, by this time, proximity to Dublin and major regional ports such as Cork, Limerick or Waterford, had heightened the probability of a decline in the number and/or viability of small market centres in their hinterlands. Fourth, that Connacht had also experienced a regionally-specific market trajectory which, unlike that elsewhere, was characterised by both low levels of market provision and relatively low rates of market inactivity or failure.

The Plantations have already been identified as a period of radical change in the social relations of production in Ireland, and the period of maximum market patent acquisition (Figure 4.1). The quartile distribution in Figure 4.3A reflects this. The two quartiles recording the lowest ratio values (and therefore the densest distribution of market days) demonstrate a remarkable congruity with the distribution of the most

<sup>35</sup> *Parl. Gaz.*, *passim*. Useful surveys of regional variations in pre-Famine population pressure may be found in M.E. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dublin, 1986), and C. Ó Grada, *The Great Famine* (London, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Whelan, 'Settlement and society', *passim*.

extensive and successful of the later plantations. Only County Galway (in confiscated but unplanted Connacht), north County Wexford (planted in the years 1611–16), Queen's and King's counties (Laois and Offaly, where the first attempt at plantation in the 1550s failed), and County Kildare disrupt this pattern. Elsewhere, the Munster Plantation in County Cork and Kerry (begun in 1586 but reinvigorated in the early 1600s), the Ulster Plantation of 1609, the contemporary informal colonisation by the Scots of counties Antrim and Down, and the Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath Plantations of 1618–22, are all mirrored by the highest market densities in 1853.

The consistency of this relationship reminds us once again that the creation of a viable market network was essential to the long-term success of the Plantations. Its longevity prompts two further considerations. First, only those market sites which were sufficiently well located to attract the appurtenances of urban status—a relatively high concentration of population, the provision of high-order goods, a complex social structure and a service role which extended beyond their immediate confines—were likely to survive in the long term. Failure in these terms might help explain the relatively high market inactivity rates by 1853 in some of the midlands Plantations, such as counties Leitrim and Longford, or King's and Queen's counties (Laois and Offaly). Second, the survival into the mid-nineteenth century of a pattern of urban market provision which still betrayed its seventeenth-century origins was made more likely by the absence in Ireland of the sort of extensive, regionally diverse, non-renewable resources which formed the basis of Britain's industrialisation during the same period. While Ireland possessed a wide variety of mineral and fossil fuel reserves—for example, coal at Castlecomer (Co. Kilkenny), Coalisland (Co. Tyrone) and in Connacht, and iron at Arigna (Co. Roscommon) and in County Cork—these reserves tended either to be individually limited or geologically difficult to exploit. The charcoal-smelting iron industry in County Cork had been worked out by the end of the seventeenth century, for example, while the iron mill at Arigna closed in 1838.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the mainstay of the provincial urban economy remained agrarian production—in all its forms—together, as we have seen, with a growing reciprocal trade in the products of British industry. Without the subsequent rapid and uneven development of urban-industrial coalfield agglomerations such as occurred in South Wales and the English west midlands, the regional pattern of agriculturally-led market provision established in the seventeenth century remained stable. Although it experienced periodic adjustment and, particularly during the later eighteenth century, expansion as a result of landlord initiatives, this built upon rather than masked the overall pattern established during the Plantations.

Within this pattern, however, other factors were at work enhancing the regional disparities in market provision. By 1853, the planted counties of west and central Ulster, together with counties Antrim and Down, displayed a distinctive pattern of universally

<sup>37</sup> A. Bielenberg, 'Iron', in S.J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 274–5.

high levels of market provision combined with relatively low levels of market inactivity. Although similar trends occurred in a less pronounced form elsewhere (for example, in counties Galway, Kilkenny and Kerry), only in Ulster did they characterise an entire region. By the mid-nineteenth century, Ulster's provincial economy sustained some of the highest levels of demand for marketing anywhere in Ireland, but, uniquely, had also experienced some of the lowest rates of market failure or non-implementation (though this still meant that between thirty and sixty per cent of all market initiatives did not succeed). This suggests the existence of a relatively thriving or otherwise broadly based regional economy, in which the high demand for market provision was sustained by sectoral expansion and/or high levels of productivity. These distinctive patterns in Ulster evolved in step with the province's growing importance over the previous two hundred years as Ireland's leading linen-producing region. Equally characteristic—and surely a factor in the growing prosperity of the north-east—was the much more entrepreneurial culture of many of its inhabitants.

In Ireland, flax cultivation and linen production was at least of medieval—if not earlier—origin, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and despite attempts by the government-sponsored Linen Board (established in 1711) to encourage production elsewhere, it became increasingly concentrated in Ulster.<sup>38</sup> Conventional explanations have accounted for this in terms of the variation in human resources, region-specific technology transfers to Ulster during the Plantations, and the subsequent promotion by Ulster landlords of efficient marketing systems and other forward linkages. Duty-free access to the British market from 1691 and to British colonies from 1705 also provided a competitive edge over rival Dutch and German products, and encouraged the penetration of overseas markets which provided the Ulster linen industry with its long-term dynamism.<sup>39</sup>

The geographies of production created in Ulster by this growth were complex, and are reflected in the pattern of market provision depicted in Figure 4.3A. The highest quality linens were produced in the so-called 'Linen Triangle', which stretched from Belfast to Dungannon and Newry in the south-east of the province. Other centres of production lay in the counties of Antrim; south Armagh, Monaghan and east Cavan; and—in west Ulster—Tyrone, east Donegal, west Cavan and Fermanagh. Generally speaking, the westernmost of these districts produced inferior-quality linens, and were among the first areas to de-industrialise during the nineteenth century, as linen production concentrated on east Ulster. This area had traditionally provided the industry's core markets and most of its increasingly centralised and mechanised bleaching and finishing facilities. In contrast, spinning and weaving remained domestic operations until the transfer of wet-spinning technologies from Belfast's cotton-spinning industry

<sup>38</sup> H.D. Gribbon, 'The Irish Linen Board, 1711–1828', in L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout, eds, *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 77–87.

<sup>39</sup> W. Crawford, 'The evolution of the linen trade in Ulster before industrialisation', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 5 (1988), 32–53.

in the 1820s, and the mechanisation of weaving in the 1850s, hastened the shift to factory-based linen production in larger towns such as Belfast, Lurgan and Portadown.

Figure 4.3A depicts the pattern of marketing before this process had reached its apotheosis, and all the traditional linen-producing counties are identified as areas with high levels of market provision in 1853. These markets were not merely for linen, however. The growth of the industry and the high rural population densities associated with it, particularly in the Linen Triangle, created a massive demand for agricultural products, but especially cattle, potatoes, oats and turf, and this was supplied from across Ulster and adjacent parts of north Leinster. In County Tyrone, for example, where Plantation urbanism had given rise to a dense network of functionally well-integrated small market towns (Figure 4.4), contemporary accounts repeatedly stress the importance of this broader agricultural trade to these towns' economies. In 1846, linen manufacture remained a staple trade at Ballygawley, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fintona and Omagh, but in these as in other towns in Tyrone, this was supplemented by an equally extensive trade in corn (at Caledon, Cookstown, Dungannon and Omagh, for example) and livestock (frequently at fairs and notably at Castlederg, Newtown Stewart and Strabane).<sup>40</sup> Where these markets were closely proximate, they were rarely held on the same day. Rather, and particularly in the more fertile lowland districts where market density was highest, their periodicity suggests that complex, informal, market circuits had evolved (Figure 4.4). By ensuring that no local markets were held in direct competition with other on a daily basis, these circuits operated to maximise the viability and number of the local market network.

Other factors also helped. At Caledon and Strabane, for example, patronal investment—by, respectively, the second earl of Caledon and the first marquess of Abercorn—was also instrumental in promoting the towns' trade. At Strabane, the marquess funded the construction of a canal which, when it was completed sometime after 1796, linked the town via the River Foyle to Londonderry and the Atlantic trade. In the words of the *Gazetteer*, this 'worked a considerable improvement in the town's fortunes' and established it as 'the grand emporium for all of the central and eastern districts of Donegal, as well as most of east, south-east, central and north Tyrone'.<sup>41</sup> At Caledon, the virtual reconstruction of the entire town, by the earl of Caledon after 1816, involved the provision of an extensive flour-milling complex, which by the 1840s had reputedly captured the corn trade of the entire south-east of the county and the Blackwater valley.<sup>42</sup>

Instances such as these underpin the current emphasis placed by Irish historians on enlightened landlord patronage in accounting for urban improvement in pre-Famine Ireland and exemplified by Hood's account of Birr and Strokestown in this volume. As

<sup>40</sup> *Parl. Gaz.*, vol. I, pp. 169, 495; vol. IV, pp. 148, 216; vol. VII, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 278.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 297.

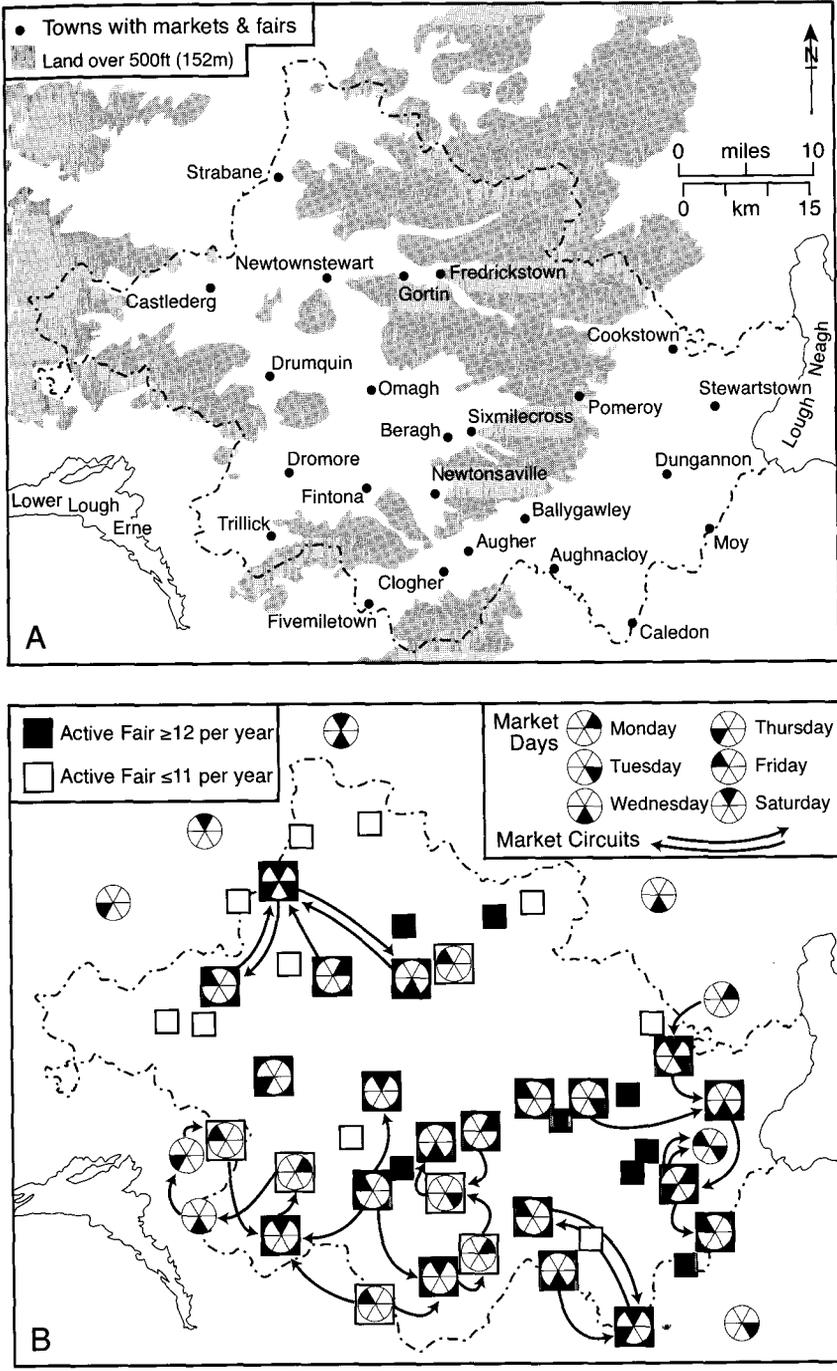


Figure 4.4. County Tyrone markets and fairs: A: Towns; B: Market and fair frequency.

Barnard observes, however, urban vitality also required the active participation of a wider spectrum of a town's inhabitants in its economy, whether as merchants, shopkeepers or purveyors of professional services (below, chapter 9). Various towns in Tyrone, most notably Castlederg, Cookstown, Omagh and Strabane, attracted the attention of the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* as centres of a particularly extensive general retail trade with their hinterlands. But as Table 4.2 demonstrates, by the 1840s even the smallest towns in the county appear to have supplemented their periodic markets with permanent retailing. The figures in the table are derived from the *Parliamentary Gazetteer*, the Ordnance Survey *Memoirs*, and *Pigot's Commercial Directory*, and accordingly have to be treated with considerable caution.<sup>43</sup> They contain some unlikely omissions—specialist transport services at Dungannon and Omagh, for example—and really provide no more than a general indication of the likely relative importance of the major retail sectors in each town. Nevertheless, they also display various consistencies. Food and drink, clothing and textiles, and services (predominantly inns and public houses), constituted the dominant sectors in most towns, while higher-order categories such as non-food retailing and the professions were predictably less numerous overall, and showed a greater concentration in larger towns such as Cookstown, Dungannon and Omagh. In these larger centres, non-food retailing included watchmaking, book-selling and gunsmiths, while the professions were dominated by lawyers, physicians, apothecaries and surgeons.

By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, County Tyrone's relatively numerous network of small country towns continued to provide a generally low level of retailing, supporting (or being supported by) a finely-tuned system of weekly markets (and periodic fairs)—all of this, seemingly, still driven by the demands of the (admittedly contracting) regional staple, linen, and its multiplier effects on the agrarian economy. In these circumstances it is easy to envisage how, in Dyer's phrase, Tyrone's smallest towns such as Augher or Castlederg experienced a very varied sense of the 'urban', which reached a peak with the market-day crowds but was decidedly more moribund at other times (above, chapter 3). Whether these brief periods of trading activity allowed these smallest of small towns to provide the same range of goods and services as larger and more prosperous market towns elsewhere remains unclear. Clarkson's analysis of the economy of the city of Armagh in 1770 and Barnard's exemplary study of merchants in Birr and Edenderry (King's County) in the 1720s offer intriguing insights into the role of wealthy merchants in relatively prosperous towns and their business linkages beyond the towns themselves, but it is uncertain how far their experience was duplicated by petty shopkeepers in smaller and poorer places like Clogher and Trillick.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*; Pigot & Co., *City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory* (Dublin, 1824); A. Day and P. McWilliams et al., eds, *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland*, vols 1–XL (Belfast, 1990–98). For a useful survey of other directories, see A. Horner, 'Newspapers, directories and gazetteers', in W. Nolan and A. Simms, eds, *Irish Towns: Guide to Sources* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 147–62.

<sup>44</sup> Barnard, 'World of goods', 371–92; Clarkson, 'Anatomy', 27–45.

Table 4.2. Retail and service outlets, by sector: County Tyrone towns, 1821-46.

	1841 pop.	Retail outlets and service providers										TOTAL	
		Professional Services	Building	Transport	Food & drink	Clothing & textile	Leather	Other non-food	Misc.				
Aughur	753	0	3	3	14	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	24
Aughnacloy	1,841	2	9	3	40	6	3	0	3	0	0	1	67
Ballygawley	881	0	7	3	22	6	6	0	6	0	0	0	46
Castlederg	476	3	1	1	39	5	2	0	5	0	0	3	55
Clogher	702	2	14	0	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	25
Cookstown	3,006	12	22	1	21	14	5	8	0	0	0	0	87
Dromore	551	1	0	1	32	2	3	3	3	1	1	1	44
Dungannon	3,801	26	34	0	32	28	17	13	2	2	2	2	161
Fintona	1,372	7	18	8	68	23	20	12	0	0	0	0	163
Fivemiletown	693	1	14	8	7	15	5	3	0	0	0	0	62
Omagh	2,947	15	31	0	23	19	9	10	2	2	2	2	109
Stewartstown	1,082	1	13	1	10	7	2	3	1	1	1	1	40
Strabane	1,093	19	31	3	30	19	24	29	5	5	5	5	165
Trillick	434	0	2	4	12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26

Linen drapers, yarn jobbers, chapmen and peddlers presumably all brought intimations of the wider world to even the smallest of Ulster towns on market day, but how did such itinerant and exotic figures interact with the traders and shopkeepers who ran permanent businesses in such places, and where, in turn, did *they* seek their customers?

Elsewhere in Ireland, more radical structural changes appear to have taken place in market provision by 1853. Figures 4.3A and 4.3B indicate that the immediate hinterlands of Dublin, Waterford, Wexford and Limerick, and to a lesser extent Cork, were characterised by some of the highest rates of market inactivity (over 75 per cent) and lowest levels of market provision in Ireland when measured in terms of market days. This was precisely the opposite of Ulster's experience. It suggests that in contrast to the urban vitality of the northern linen districts, by 1853 the hinterland market networks adjacent to most of Ireland's major port cities had either undergone significant contraction since 1600, or else had prompted considerable numbers of speculative market promotions which had never materialised.

Given the regional diversity and sectoral instability of Ireland's agrarian economy, the causes and periodicity of this are hard to determine. Dublin's hinterland experienced a number of sectoral adjustments which might have adversely affected settlement and marketing. At the end of the seventeenth century, for example, it witnessed a substantial transition from tillage to pastoralism, as the English demand for fat cattle eclipsed corn production for the city's consumption in counties Meath and Kildare. Subsequently, however, and in common with much of the relatively fertile south-eastern lowlands, the area reverted to corn in the later eighteenth century under the impetus of the bounties paid for flour sent to Dublin after 1758.<sup>45</sup> With the agricultural price collapse in 1815 following the end of the Napoleonic War and the reopening of the British market to rival overseas sources of food, the balance swung once more in favour of pastoralism. This, in Whelan's phrase, led to attendant 'painful adjustments in settlement' across the entire tillage zone of the south-east.<sup>46</sup>

But painful or not, it is unlikely that these sorts of sectoral adjustment were the only factors affecting market provision in Ireland's city hinterlands. One way or another, the growth of cities—particularly of Dublin as Ireland's primate capital, but also of the other major port cities in the eighteenth century—is itself likely to have led to significant adjustments in the viability of the most closely proximate local market centres. Arguably, the improving efficiency of the transport system was central to these changes. In the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries, the relative inefficiency of Ireland's (nevertheless gradually improving) inland communications may be argued to have ensured the survival of local market centres in the city hinterlands. These places may be envisaged as acting as essential redistribution points in a symbiotic system of exchange which articulated the metropolitan food supply from within a *relatively*

<sup>45</sup> Whelan, 'Settlement and society', *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

restricted regional catchment area. As transport improved in the later eighteenth century and, in Ireland, turnpike networks developed and the Royal and Grand Canals (among others) were built, so the metropolitan and port cities' reliance on their immediate hinterlands diminished. In these circumstances, only the best-located local markets survived the increasing price competition generated by the rapidly expanding and ever more accessible metropolitan and city markets. Changes such as these would account for the relatively high rates of market failure in Ireland's city hinterlands by 1853, and it is worth noting that similar processes have been identified in England. Clark and (in this volume) Dyer argue that the growth of London and other English cities encouraged the development of small-town economies in their hinterlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but subsequently, as communications improved, stifled this as they had earlier stifled the growth of larger regional centres.<sup>47</sup>

The emphasis in this interpretation is on the effects of modernisation: the integration of different regional economies, the rationalisation in systems of exchange and their consequent effect on marketing provision. One region stands out in Figures 4.3A and 4.3B as an area where these effects might reasonably be seen to be limited. Sharing neither the radical, arguably modernising, restructuring of marketing in the city hinterlands, nor the vitality of Ulster's linen economy, counties Sligo, Mayo and, more variously, Galway and Roscommon, recorded both low levels of market provision and relatively low rates of market inactivity in 1853 (though the latter was still everywhere in excess of 61 per cent).

The western parts of this region included some of the most environmentally marginal areas in Ireland. In 1841, the Slieve Gamph, Nephin Beg, Maumturk and Partry Mountains constituted the single largest district effectively recording zero population in an otherwise densely populated region. Moreover, both here and to the east, large areas of both upland bog and lowland (or raised) bog further reduced the region's agricultural potential, and this was only partly compensated for by the important limestone pastures of east County Galway and north-west County Roscommon. In these conditions, the potential for the development of an extensive urban market network was, and remained, limited. Significantly, the area saw some of the most famous landlord attempts at town foundation: Clifden (Co. Galway) by John D'Arcy between 1812 and 1822; Belmullet (Co. Mayo) by W.H. Carter in 1825; and Westport, by the marquis of Sligo a little earlier. Though lauded by contemporaries for their regularity, order and enterprise, none of these was particularly successful in the long term. Like the relatively low levels of market failure, their relative lack of success and late foundation suggests that the regional balance between marketing, urban settlement and agricultural potential had been struck long since.

<sup>47</sup> P. Clark, 'Small towns in England, 1550-1850', in P. Clark, ed., *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 119.

## Fairs

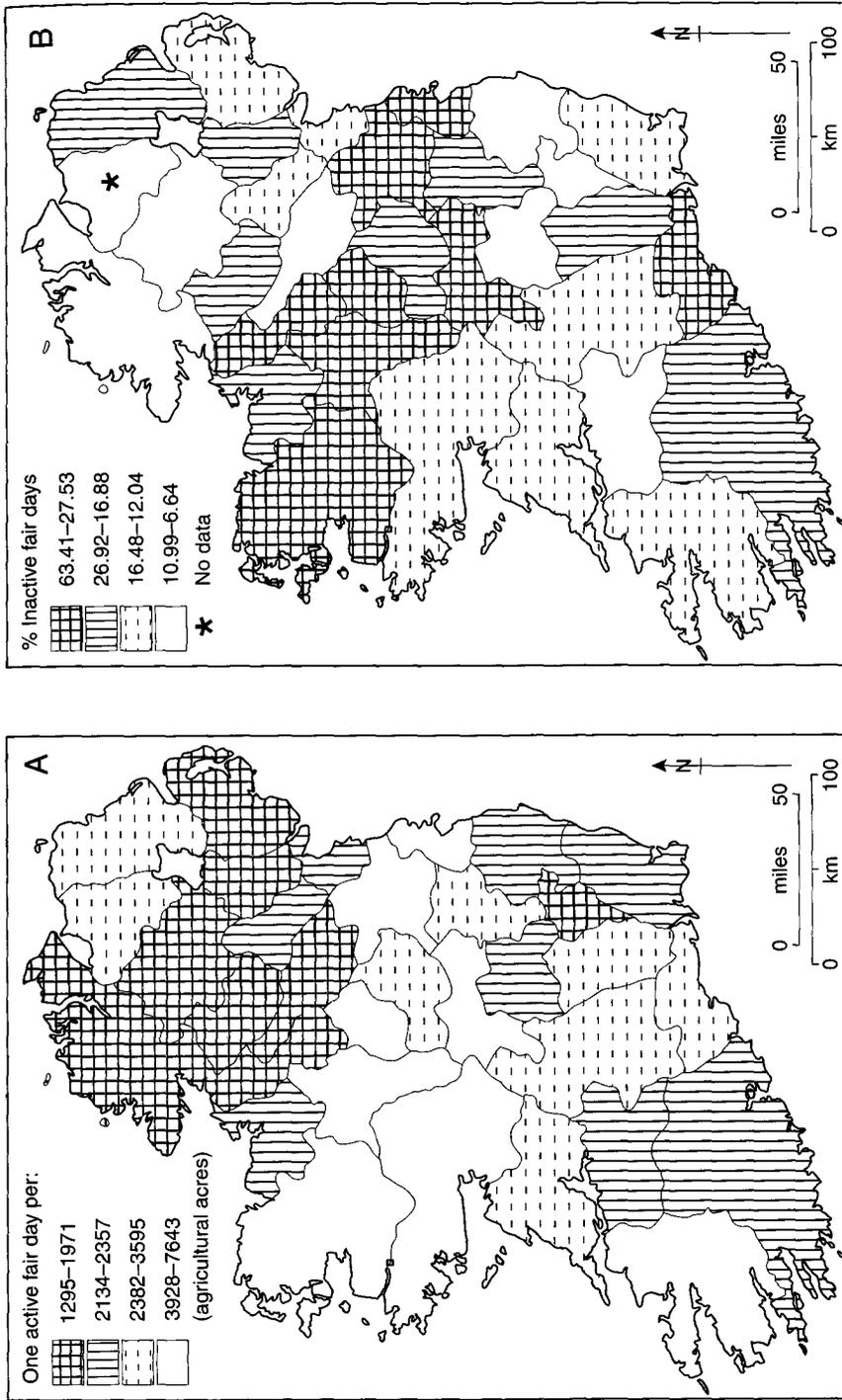
It has earlier been suggested that fairs represented a separate but complementary element within the overall system of exchange, whose relative infrequency responded to the different seasonal rhythms of production which characterised livestock production. Figures 4.5A and 4.5B may be argued to reflect this. Although the levels of fair provision and inactivity display a number of similarities with the analogous market patterns, particularly in Ulster and the east midlands, elsewhere they display more varied regional patterns which only partly echo market provision. The evidence from Tyrone provides some indication as to why the patterns of fair and market provision in the Ulster linen heartlands were so similar. All save one of county's market towns also held a fair—typically monthly, though in some cases less often, in others far more frequently—and these accounted for approximately half the total number (Figure 4.4). Like its market network, the distribution of Tyrone's fairs also mirrored the varying agricultural potential of its environment. The densest distribution lay in the fertile lowlands of the south and east. To the north and west, the infertile uplands of the Sperrin Mountains supported a fair network which was both more rural and less numerous and frequent. Throughout the county, however, fairs were specialist livestock outlets, and in places like Castleterg and Pomeroy, they represented important points of articulation between adjacent upland and lowland economies. At Castleterg, for example, the market dealt primarily in grain, butter, eggs and 'soft goods', and the fairs in cattle, horses, pigs and sheep. At Pomeroy, the fair was primarily for the sale of 'mountain stock', pigs and yarn.<sup>48</sup> In this part of west Ulster at least, the fair network was closely integrated with urban marketing, and like this, it probably relied on the additional value accruing from linen and its multiplier effects for support.

Similarly, the arguments which have been advanced to explain the low levels of market provision in Dublin's hinterland may be applied to the equally low level of fair provision and high fair-inactivity rates there. Although perhaps more resilient than market networks because of their arguably lower fixed costs and larger catchment areas, fairs, too, eventually proved vulnerable to permanently altered patterns of trade. As early as the 1690s, contemporary reports spoke of Dublin merchants venturing as far afield as Mullingar, County Westmeath, or Banagher, King's County, to purchase cattle, sheep and tallow.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, the few fairs that did survive in the immediate vicinity of the city, most famously at Donnybrook, were renowned for their social role as the sites of carnival rather than for their trade, though Donnybrook itself remained a major centre for horse trading for much of the nineteenth century until its suppression in 1868.<sup>50</sup> As

<sup>48</sup> *Parl. Gaz.*, vol. 1, p. 359.

<sup>49</sup> Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin, Dunstan's Letters, Letter 7, cited in S. O Maitu, *The Humours of Donnybrook* (Dublin, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–52.



**Figure 4.5.** A: Ratio of fair days active in 1853 to agricultural area, by county; B: Fair days inactive in 1853 as a percentage of total fair days, by county.

with markets so with fairs. The physical expansion of the city, the growth of its population (reaching perhaps 180,000 by 1800), the burgeoning complexity of its own internal trading mechanisms, and the increased accessibility which accompanied this, rendered existing local fairs increasingly redundant as points of exchange.

These structural similarities in fair and market provision in Ulster and the north-east midlands were unusual, however. Elsewhere, the distribution of active fair days in 1853 appears to represent a cumulative response to the complex patterns of livestock fattening and beef and dairy production, and their continuing adjustment to the fluctuating fortunes of tillage. These created diverse and unstable geographies of production, which are difficult to capture at the county level. Nevertheless, certain consistencies can be discerned. In counties Galway, Roscommon and Mayo, for example, levels of fair provision were notably low and rates of fair failure or non-implementation high, at least in the north and east of the region. In an area already noted for its close intermingling of good and bad land, where the waterlogged acid soils of the bogland margins lay alongside the dry upland limestone pastures, these patterns are likely to have masked considerable local variation. But they are also likely to reflect the fact that counties Mayo, Galway and Roscommon experienced a massive increase in cattle fattening during the early eighteenth century, which in some districts led to widespread settlement destruction and the creation of a depopulated pastoral landscape of large farms and graziers' 'ranches'. In these circumstances, a relatively limited network of fairs would have sufficed to meet the need for local and seasonal exchange, while the environmental marginality of many districts and the downward population adjustments would have precipitated the failure of many initiatives.

In the late eighteenth century these fattening districts were linked to the Atlantic provisions trade—shipped through Cork, Waterford and Limerick—by the trade in excess calves raised by the specialist dairy farmers of the south-west. Major fairs, such as Ballinasloe (Co. Galway) and Athlone (on the Westmeath/Roscommon border) acted as 'hinge points' in this redistribution. Whelan has recently argued that it was the growth of the provisions trade which was responsible for most of the new fairs founded during the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> By 1853, the varied patterns of active fair provision and failure may still have echoed the complex regional dynamics of this earlier trade, as well as, perhaps more certainly, the contemporary primacy of Cork's butter trade. At Ballinasloe, the 'Great autumn fair' still retained something of its traditional importance as late as the 1840s. In 1846, it was described as:

exercising not only a powerful influence over the adjacent and midland counties but [it] affects dealings for cattle even in the metropolis itself. Horses are exposed on the fair green; black or horned cattle are exposed athwart the green's broad expanse; and sheep are exposed in a spacious park within the enclosures of the Garbally demesne. Dealers in various commodities and tradesmen of different callings from the metropolis also bring their goods and productions

<sup>51</sup> Whelan, 'Settlement and society', pp. 191–4.

to the fair; and shops and warehouses in the town are ceded to them for the occasion, the prices being paid usually very high. Lodgings, both in private houses and at inns, are in great demand, and must be generally bespoken in advance, whilst the charges are greatly augmented beyond the ordinary current prices at other periods. The average number of sheep and black cattle brought in for sale is computed to be respectively 90,000 and 12,000.<sup>52</sup>

Here we have encapsulated the essence of the fair's role and its relationship with the town. Periodic in operation, but extensive in their trade and influence, the largest urban fairs connected the localised and sedentary world of the provincial country towns to a wider nexus of social and cultural relations of production, which might extend across Ireland to the nation's capital itself.

## Conclusion

This analysis has sought to explore those aspects of the structural provision of urban marketing and rural fairs in Ireland between c.1600 and 1853 that are recoverable from various nineteenth-century sources which measured the end effects of this process. The temporal and spatial patterns which have emerged have been shown to mirror the fluctuating pulse of Irish history. Secular trends in agrarian production, regional patterns of proto-industrialisation, colonial transformations in settlement and economic space, the uneven pace of city growth, as well as the diversity of the physical environment, have been shown to demonstrate a time-space congruity with the complex geographies of market and fair provision.

Prominently placed among these congruities was Ulster, specifically those parts of the historic province which were central to the geographies of linen production which increasingly differentiated its rural-industrial world from the unstable pastoral and tillage economies to the south. This particular north-south divide highlights the underlying fact that, over large parts of southern Ireland, much of the provincial urban economy for much of the period was driven by agricultural marketing. The implications of this for the stability of Ireland's marketing system have been demonstrated; and these, too, highlight what was surely a fundamental point of divergence from English urban experience.

The results of this analysis have also brought into the foreground other considerations. Although regionally variable in a way consistent with these broader contextual patterns, the level of market 'failure', whether measured by abandonment, non-implementation or replacement, was relatively high throughout Ireland. Generally speaking, more fair and market patents 'failed' in these terms—and a greater proportion of market and fair days was lost—than survived to remain active in 1853. This suggests that the business of market promotion was very uncertain, and was more

<sup>52</sup> *Parl. Gaz.*, vol. 1, p. 138.

susceptible to a wider range of negative externalities than recent class-based narratives of urban improvement have allowed. The point is an important one. If the role of Ireland's urban patrons was more constrained by circumstance than has been suggested, what does this imply about their social agency in general? Ireland's landed class may have played a necessary role in the promotion of urban improvement and market foundation, but the evidence presented here suggests that it was not in itself a sufficient one.

LINDSAY PROUDFOOT

**Markets, Fairs and Towns in Ireland, c.1600–1853**

Synoptic overviews of the economic performance of Irish towns during the early modern period, particularly in the ‘long’ eighteenth century, have been hindered by the relative paucity of adequate comparative data relating to provincial urban marketing and industry during the period. This paper attempts to circumvent this limitation by using the 1853 Parliamentary Report on *Fairs and Markets* to explore the regional and chronological variations in the pattern of urban and rural marketing provision in Ireland between 1600 and 1853. It concludes that the complex geographies of fair and market foundation demonstrated a pronounced space–time congruity with secular trends in agrarian production, regional patterns of proto-industrialisation and colonial transformations in settlement and economic space, as well as variations in the physical environment. Prominent within these was the historic province of Ulster, which emerges as a region of uniquely different patterns and processes of market provision. Finally, the uniformly high rates of fair and market failure are argued to cast doubt on the conventional emphasis placed on the role of landlord patrons as both necessary and sufficient agents of urban improvement.

W.H. CRAWFORD

**The Creation and Evolution of Small Towns in Ulster in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

The character of Ulster’s urban network was determined by its colonial origins in the early seventeenth century. When the Crown abandoned its initial plan to create a network of corporate towns across the province, the task was left to immigrant landlords with small resources. Although the colony suffered in the seventeenth-century wars, further heavy immigration from Britain gave it fresh impetus. Landlords competed to attract tenants by letting tenements at cash rents on three-life renewable leases. By the early eighteenth century a domestic linen industry was transforming both the economy and society of the province. Government insistence on the sale of linens in public markets encouraged investment in the urban and communications networks. Then demand from Britain for Irish livestock boosted markets and fairs. The process of urbanisation in Ulster was getting under way in earnest, led by Belfast with its great commercial and industrial potential. Yet in 1800 only one in fifteen of the total population of Ulster lived in towns with more than two thousand people.

# Abbreviations

BL	British Library
<i>Cal. S. P. Ire</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland</i>
HC	House of Commons
JCHAS	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
JRSAI	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
KTCM	Records of the Corporation of Kells, 1685–1787: NLI MS 25446, 8 vols
LPK	C. McNeill, ed., <i>Liber primus Kilkenniensis</i> (Dublin, 1931)
NA	National Archives [Dublin]
NHist.	<i>Northern History</i>
NLI	National Library Ireland
<i>Parl. Gaz.</i>	<i>The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland</i>
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RO	Record Office
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UH	<i>Urban History</i>
UHY	<i>Urban History Yearbook</i>
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>

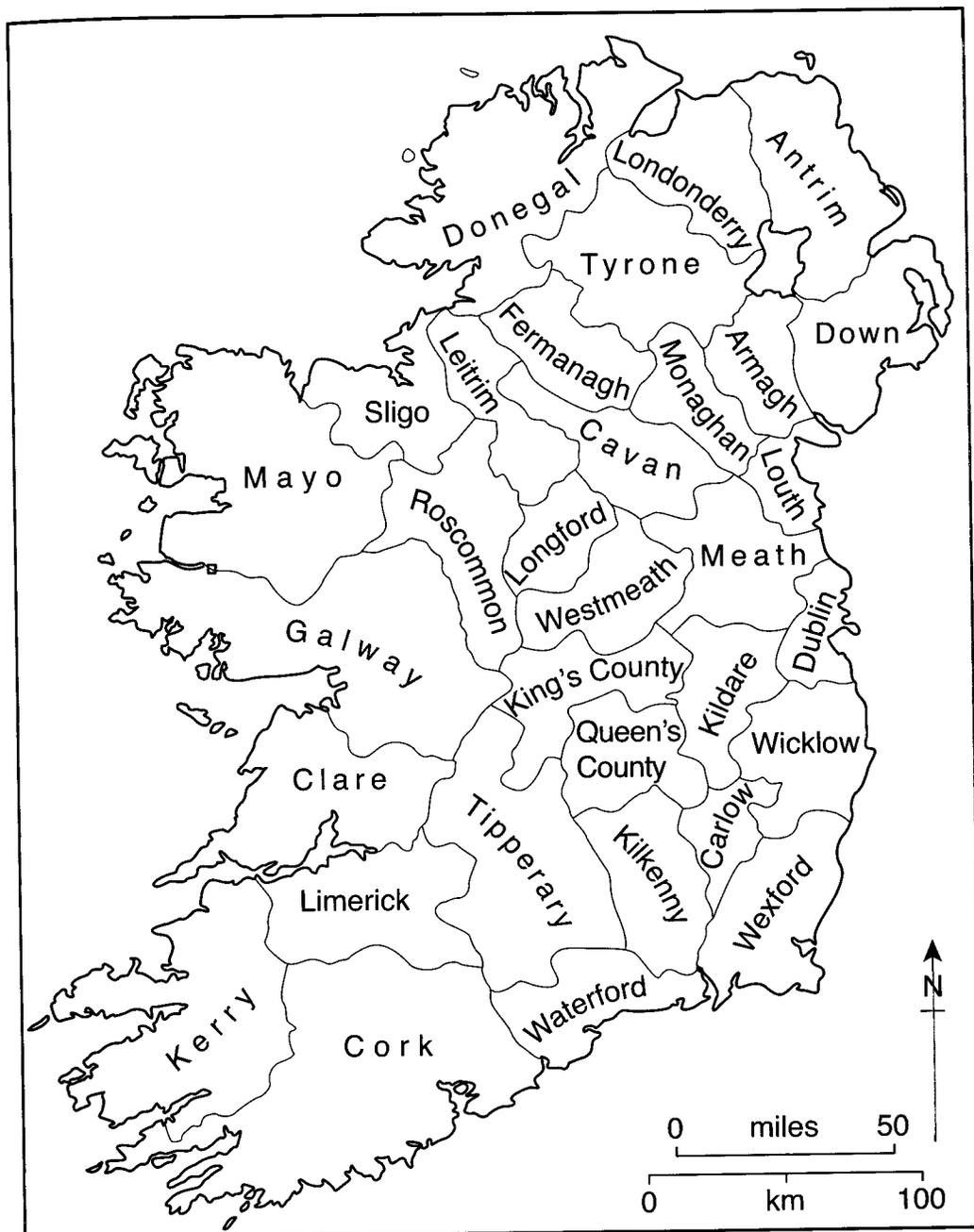


Figure 0.1. Ireland: county map.

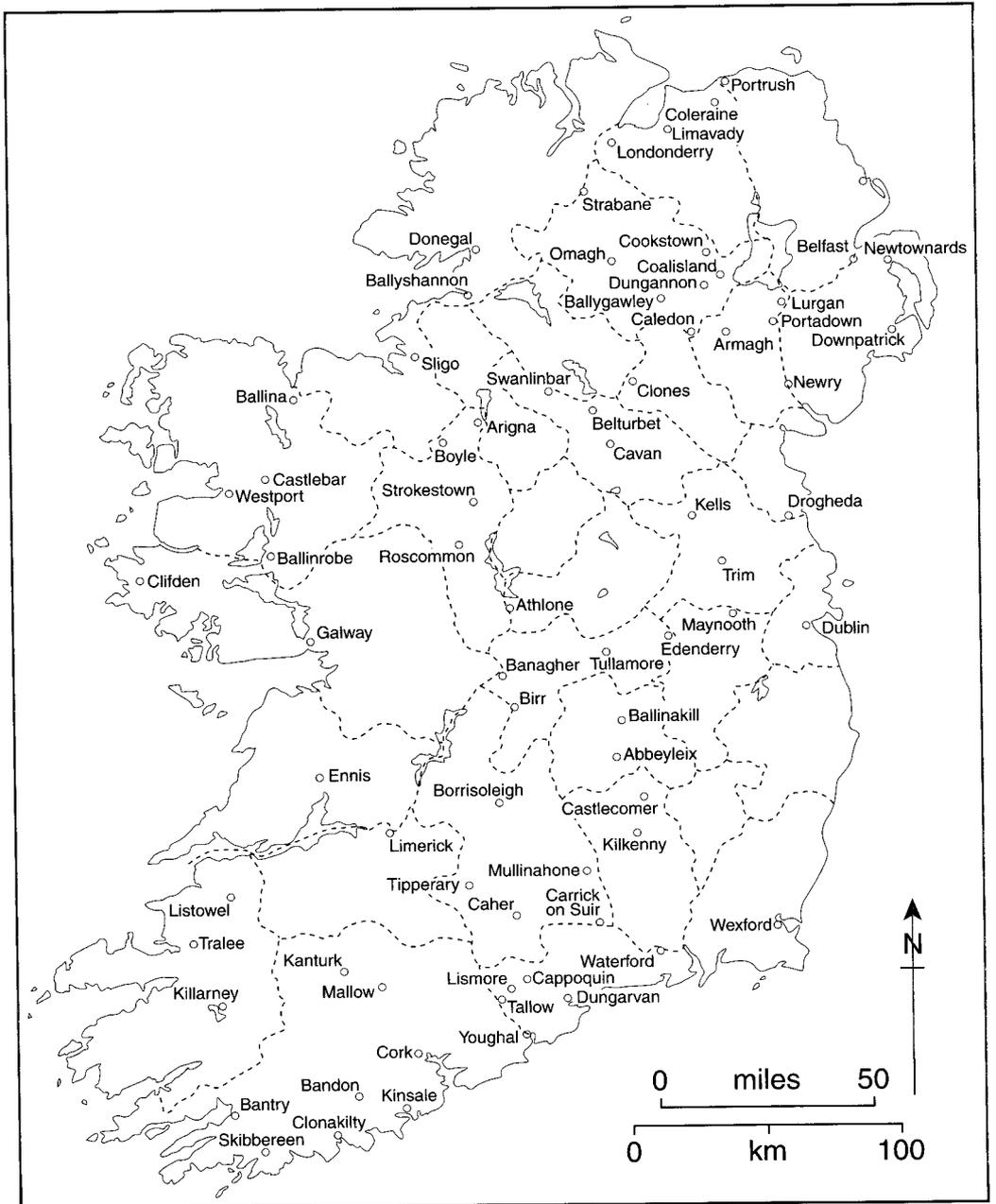


Figure 0.2. Ireland: places mentioned.