

‘Wholesome regulation and unlimited freedom’: governing market space in southern Ireland before the Famine

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses efforts to reform market activity in pre-Famine Ireland, exploring Karl Polanyi’s assertion that the ‘free market’ required ‘the intervention of the state in order to establish it’. It begins by rooting Ireland’s alleged ‘social ills’ – over-population and subsistence agriculture – in terms of integration into international markets from the mid-eighteenth century. From the crisis of the 1820s, state actors came to see the extension of the cash economy as central to remedying these ‘ills’. Altering the physical fabric of exchange to encourage ‘rational’ market behaviour, I argue reformers aimed to ‘enclose’ commercial spaces economically and physically from non-market forces. Utilizing novel technologies of vision and precision, market space could thus operate according to a logic and ethics of its own, inculcating voluntary compliance through new standards of ‘trust’ and ‘fairness’. I conclude by asking, if indeed the state had come to operate as much through ‘freedom’ as force by 1845, how we might begin to reassess the course and context of the Irish Famine.

Nineteenth-century Ireland has long been regarded as a ‘social laboratory’ of government, a place where, as William Burn first put it ‘the most conventional of Englishmen were willing to experiment...on lines which they were not prepared to contemplate or tolerate at home’.¹ Most studies of Irish state formation under the Union (1801–1922) have thus focused on the precocious development of state capacity in areas such as policing, health provision, national education, land purchase, public housing and rural development, where ‘daring and ambitious experiments’ saw Ireland develop strikingly modern state forms well in advance of Britain.² This

¹ W.L. Burn, ‘Free trade in land: an aspect of the Irish Question’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., 31 (1949), 86.

² *Ibid.*, 68. See respectively: S. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), 36–44; R.D. Cassell, *Medical Charities, Medical Politics: The Irish Dispensary System and the Poor Law, 1836–1872* (Woodbridge, 1997), vii; D. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1971), 17; E.F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906*

article addresses market reform, a largely neglected feature of accelerated state formation in Ireland that has important implications for how we should view the state itself.

The era of the Corn Laws (1815–46) in the United Kingdom has traditionally been regarded as an ‘age of protection’, yet for Ireland, the mid-1820s saw the completion of both a tariff-free UK-wide single market and a currency union between the two kingdoms.³ In this context, the drive toward market reform assumed a special significance; the deep post-war depression in Ireland combined with a series of ‘mini famines’ to produce a period of profound social and economic dislocation.⁴ At the heart of Ireland’s woes, reformers believed, were a ‘super abundant population’, subsistence agriculture and over-reliance on the potato.⁵ Politicians and bureaucrats increasingly saw the extension of market relations as a way of curing these ‘social ills’ and ultimately pacifying the country.⁶ To a great extent, therefore, Ireland also pulled ahead of Britain in this area too; in terms of scale and depth, the 1853 royal commission into the state of markets and fairs in Ireland anticipated the UK-wide Derby Commission by over three decades.⁷

State interference in markets was of course nothing new; eighteenth-century Irish governments passed hundreds of acts regulating the corn, butter, coal and flour trades.⁸ What changed in the first half of the nineteenth century was the ideology and purpose underlying such intervention. The classic mercantile instruments of the premium and bounty, export embargoes and distillation moratoria in times of shortage gave way to new configurations of ‘wholesome regulation and

(Cambridge, 2007), 13; M. Fraser, *John Bull’s Other Homes: State Housing and British Policy in Ireland, 1883–1922* (Liverpool, 1996), 1–6; C. Breathnach, *The Congested Districts Board, 1891–1923: Poverty and Development in the West of Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), ch. 1.

³ B. Holland, *The Fall of Protection, 1840–1850* (London, 1913), 185; L. Kennedy and D.S. Johnson, ‘The Union of Ireland and Britain, 1801–1921’, in D.G. Boyce and A. O’Day (eds.), *The Making of Modern Irish History* (London, 1996), 35.

⁴ L.M. Geary, ‘The whole country was in motion: mendicancy and vagrancy in pre-Famine Ireland’, in J. Hill and C. Lennon (eds.), *Luxury and Austerity*, *Historical Studies XXI* (Dublin, 1999), 121–36.

⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on Tolls and Customs in Ireland, with the Minutes of Evidence*, House of Commons (HC) 1834 (603), xvii, 30; *Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland, and Means of Improving their Condition: Minutes of Evidence*, HC 1830 (665), vii, 483.

⁶ For the link between the potato and unruliness, see D. Lloyd, ‘The political economy of the potato’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 29 (2007), 311–35.

⁷ The drive to build market halls in Britain would peak in the mid-Victorian era. J. Schmiechen and K. Carls, *The British Market Hall: A Social and Architectural History* (London, 1999), xi, 21. For comparison, see D.M. Schreuder, ‘Hercules Robinson, the “Irish Fairs and Markets Commission” (1853), and the making of a Victorian proconsul’, in R. MacLeod (ed.), *Government and Expertise: Specialists, Administrators and Professionals, 1860–1919* (Cambridge, 1988), 145–7. For the ‘Derby Commission’, see *Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls, First Report*, HC 1888 (C. 5550), liii, 1–238.

⁸ E. Magennis, ‘Regulating the market: parliament, corn and bread in eighteenth-century Ireland’, in M. Brown and S.P. Donlon (eds.), *The Law and Other Legalities of Ireland, 1689–1850* (Farnham, 2011), 209–30.

unlimited freedom'.⁹ Much of Ireland's nineteenth-century 'revolution in government' involved the use of newly acquired coercive powers to 'make markets free', upsetting the idea that 'the market system and intervention are mutually exclusive'.¹⁰ 'For as long as that system is not established' Karl Polanyi famously argued, 'economic liberals *must* and *will* unhesitatingly call for the intervention of the state in order to establish it, and once established, in order to maintain it.'¹¹ Ireland's 'semi-colonial' status therefore meant it was subjected to more, rather than less, of liberalism's 'rule of freedom'.¹² The ideological journey from the last ever export embargo in 1800–01 to the mass starvation wrought by 'an overdose of political economy' 46 years later was etched into the physical fabric of market spaces through a process of persistent reform.¹³

This article addresses the reform process with a focus on southern Ireland, especially the agricultural and commercial hinterland of County Cork in the southern province of Munster. The first section roots Ireland's alleged 'social ills' – over-population and subsistence agriculture – in terms of integration into international markets over the second half of the eighteenth century. While historians have sometimes been tempted to see 'two Irelands' distinguished sharply by poverty and prosperity, I stress differences arising through the political economy of a *single* process of uneven capitalist development in Munster.¹⁴ The ways in which market reform became part of the 'answer' to these 'social ills' is addressed in the second section, where we see the emergence of a new attitude to the market as a potential instrument of social transformation following the crisis of the 1820s. The third section develops this analysis by looking at how state support for road construction and the physical enclosure of markets helped both to redefine legitimate market actors and to normalize modes of conduct against the grain of 'popular' market culture. Crucial to this reform was the 'naturalization' of market valorization 'free' from

⁹ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 29.

¹⁰ O. MacDonagh, 'The nineteenth-century revolution in government: a reappraisal', *Historical Journal*, 1 (1958), 52–67; J.I. Domínguez, 'Introduction', in J.I. Domínguez (ed.), *Economic Strategies and Policies in Latin America* (London, 1994), xi; K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origin of our Times* (Boston, MA, 2001), 155.

¹¹ Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 155.

¹² P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), 45–6.

¹³ P. Solar, 'The Famine was no ordinary subsistence crisis', in P. Solar and M. Crawford (eds.), *Famine: The Irish Experience, 900–1900: Subsistence Crises and Famines in Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1989), 126. For a local example of distillation moratorium, see Cork City and County Archives (CCCA), U49, John Anderson to A. Marsden, 19 Oct. 1800. Furthermore, Rev. Horace Townsend used the phrase 'an overdose of political economy' in December 1846, see *Cork Examiner*, 23 Dec. 1846, cited in C. Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), 70.

¹⁴ For an overview of the 'two Irelands' thesis, see J. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800–1850* (London, 1983), 20. The same author offers a view of geographical difference in terms of 'levels of development which corresponded to different stages reached by the "average" economy over time', see J. Mokyr, 'Irish history with the potato', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 8 (1981), 17.

state interference, and the fourth section attempts to make sense of this process in terms of both the spatial and epistemological ‘boundary work’ inherent to enclosure. Under these conditions, the market was seen to operate according to an internal logic of its own, and the last section looks at how technologies of vision and precision helped to induce self-discipline and voluntary compliance through newly objective standards of ‘trust’ and ‘fairness’. I conclude by asking that if indeed ‘the state’ had come to operate as much through ‘freedom’ as force by 1845, how might we begin to reassess the course and context of the Famine (1846–52) in Ireland.

The antinomies of marketization before 1815

As James Vernon has recently argued, the process by which “‘the market’” became seen as an organizing principle for governing the economic domain [is]...a global story as much as an imperial British one’.¹⁵ This is particularly true of the Irish experience, beginning with a process of conquest and settlement in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that saw a ‘precocious and traumatic penetration of market forces into [Irish] agriculture’.¹⁶ Yet it was the expansion of external trade from the 1740s that saw Ireland’s first steps toward integration within a wider ‘Atlantic’ economy, and following the Seven Years War (1756–63), an increasingly British dominated ‘world system’.¹⁷ Many southern Irish towns experienced an ‘urban renaissance’ from the 1760s, centralizing retail around a hierarchy of larger market centres.¹⁸ By 1747, the earl of Shannon estimated that ‘two-thirds of all our imports and all our luxuries, except wine, come from...England and its colonies’, a trade later encompassing ‘an immense quantity of spices, grocery, hardware, potters-ware, cloth, fish,...wines, brandy, oil etc. timber shingles, staves, tar, turpentine, rum and sugar, from the continental states, America and the West Indies’.¹⁹ From the onset of the American Revolutionary War (1775–83) to the end of the Napoleonic era (1799–1815), the Irish economy

¹⁵ J. Vernon, ‘The history of Britain is dead; long live a global history of Britain’, *History Australia*, 13 (2016), 26.

¹⁶ T.M. Devine and David Dickson, ‘In pursuit of comparative aspects of Irish and Scottish development: a review of the symposium’, in D. Dickson and T.M. Devine (eds.), *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983), 265.

¹⁷ D. O’Hearn, *The Atlantic Economy: Britain, the US, and Ireland* (Manchester, 2001), 80.

¹⁸ D. Dickson, *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster, 1630–1830* (Cork, 2005), 411–12; P. Borsay and L.J. Proudfoot, ‘Ireland and England: the urban experience’, in P. Borsay and L.J. Proudfoot (eds.), *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland: Change, Convergence, and Convergence* (Oxford, 2012), 2–3; P. O’Flanagan, ‘Three hundred years of urban life: villages and towns in County Cork, c. 1600 to 1901’, in P. Flanagan and C.G. Buttimer (eds.), *Cork, History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1993), 401–3.

¹⁹ Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D2707/A/1/12/3, H. Boyle, ‘Observations on the Irish economy’, c. 1747; J. Smith, *A System of Modern Geography* (London, 1811), 39.

entered a 'golden age' as provisions emporium of the first British empire, with the volume of exports rising by 40 per cent between 1793 and 1815 and doubling in value.²⁰ This period saw the country develop from a net importer of grain into 'the granary of Great Britain', while trade with the Portuguese empire via Lisbon allowed merchants at Cork – then the 'butter capital of the world' – to exchange firkins for bullion.²¹

The 'marketization' of Irish society, both internally and externally, saw the rise of profit-orientated, 'supply responsive' production transforming town and country alike.²² As land values rose, those cleared from the land when 'landlords inclose[d]...commons' migrated to mud cabin 'shanties' on the outskirts of towns, partly replicating the classic process of proletarianization mapped out by Robert Brenner for late eighteenth-century England.²³ Yet in Ireland, it was larger commercial farms as much as mills and factories that absorbed this labour; smallholding 'cottiers' and landless labourers subsisting on 'conacre' – plots with a mud cabin and potato garden usually paid for in labour – were also shifted to reclaimed wasteland.²⁴ While the 'tillage boom' intensified following Foster's Corn Law of 1784, farm consolidation for grain production continued to hollow the Munster 'gneeever' class (holders of a *gníomh* of 25 acres) and witnessed the emergence of a 'cabin proletariat' by the 1790s.²⁵

Alongside this economic transformation, Ireland experienced a demographic explosion, with the population roughly doubling to 8.2 million between 1780 and 1841. Pre-Famine Ireland has traditionally been regarded as 'the classic "Malthusian country"', where population growth 'outstripped' resources and helped to create two contrasting 'dual economies' – one characterized by capitalism, profit and markets, and a second by subsistence, poverty and the potato.²⁶ Yet aspects of pre-Famine Ireland's apparent 'backwardness' were intimately related to its most

²⁰ L. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), 100.

²¹ For such a transaction, see Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (Lisbon), PT/TT/CLNH/0037/39, [William] Crawford to Marquês do Funchal, 28 Jun. 1813; *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 31 Dec. 1821; J. Fisher, *How Ireland May Be Saved* (London, 1862), 6.

²² Cormac ÓGráda, 'Supply responsiveness in Irish agriculture during the nineteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 28 (1975), 312–17; L.M. Cullen, 'Eighteenth-century flour milling in Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 4 (1977), 9, 14.

²³ J. Mockler, 'A report on the state of the district around Mallow, in 1775', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 21 (1913), 23; C.S. Stewart, *Sketches of Society in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1835), vol. I, 265; R. Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe', *Past and Present*, 70 (1976), 72.

²⁴ K. Whelan, 'The modern landscape: from plantation to present', in F.H.A. Aalen, K. Whelan and M. Stout (eds.), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork, 1997), 74; K.H. Connell, 'The colonization of waste land in Ireland, 1700–1845', *Economic History Review*, 3 (1950), 44–7.

²⁵ M.E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), 8; P. Lenihan, *Consolidating Conquest: Ireland, 1603–1727* (London, 2014), 234; Dickson, *Old World Colony*, 318, 320. For Foster's Corn Law, see 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 19.

²⁶ P. Lynch and J. Vaizey, *Guinness's Brewery in the Irish Economy, 1759–1876* (Cambridge, 2011), 1–8. For Cork in particular, see T. Burke, 'County Cork in the eighteenth century',

modern features; Louis Cullen argues that the demographic explosion after 1780 was not a symptom of the potato as a miracle subsistence crop, but rather the spread of the potato as a by-product of commercial grain production.²⁷ Similarly, rising rents, population and subsistence have been seen as interrelated elements connected to the undermining of patriarchal control in an increasingly profit-driven economy, where 'after 1760, the capital-less young man of twenty able to grow potatoes, and prepared to subsist on them could pay a rent as high as or higher than his father who commanded the family store of capital'.²⁸ As one young labourer described it in 1835, 'I am here under the lash of my father..., so I will take up with some girl, and I will have a house of my own, and we will live for ourselves.'²⁹

Ireland's marketization therefore helped to generate the unusual combination of a wage-labour force simultaneously alienated from the cash economy, 'wages' being potatoes.³⁰ And as Cormac Ó'Gráda has noted, labourers 'paid their conacre rent mostly in labour yet the demand for these workers labour was market derived'.³¹ Rents – although paid for in labour – were also driven by market pressures; on the eve of the Famine, 'farmers set wages as low and conacre rents as high as they dared'.³² Thus, a 'scissor process' of commercially driven upward rents and an expanding labour supply served to isolate the cabin proletariat from the cash economy; by the 1830s, 'only the potato eating-pig remained as the labourer's last contact to the market'.³³ In this sense, as Joel Mokyr argues, there did indeed exist 'two Irelands...living alongside each other, [but] intertwined and mutually dependent'.³⁴ Yet these 'two Irelands' should not be considered discrete stages along a whiggish trajectory of 'progress'; both were products of a *single* development process and the contradictions of a globally situated Irish agrarian capitalism.

Geographical Review, 64 (1974), 61–2. On Malthus and Ireland, see Cormac Ó'Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History, 1800–1925* (Manchester, 1988), 1; Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, ch. 3.

²⁷ L.M. Cullen, 'Irish history without the potato', *Past and Present*, 11 (1968), 72–83; C. Ó'Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Cambridge, 1995), 17; P.R. Razell, 'Population growth and economic change in 18th and early 19th century England and Ireland', in E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay (eds.), *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1980), 260–81.

²⁸ R. Crotty, *Agricultural Production: Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966), 32.

²⁹ *Royal Commission on the Condition of the Poor Classes in Ireland: First Report*, HC 1835 (369), xxxii, 370.

³⁰ Ó'Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine*, 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³² K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), 95.

³³ Dickson, *Old World Colony*, 312.

³⁴ S. Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979), 53. For a critique, see J.J. Lee, 'The dual economy in Ireland, 1800–1850', in T.D. Williams (ed.), *Historical Studies*, 8 (1971), 193.

Free markets for free labourers: post-war crisis and reform

The massive economic shock caused by the collapse in commodity prices following the Battle of Waterloo (1815) exacerbated these contradictions. The European-wide famine of 1817 saw potato prices double and a typhus epidemic affect one and half million in Ireland.³⁵ A financial crisis centred on Munster reduced the country's solvent banks from 19 in 1812 to just 3 by the end 1820, curtailing circulating currency by a third in that year alone.³⁶ Yet it was not until the bad harvest of 1821 when 'wet blighted' wheat and 'a great deficiency in Barley, Oats, and Potatoes' drove up prices and reduced availability that discontent exploded into 'civil war', 'rustic insurrection' and 'revolutionary frenzy'.³⁷ The *nom de guerre* 'Captain Rock' was first used in threatening letters on a west Limerick estate during October 1821, signalling the start of a three-year-long saga of 'Rockite' agrarian outrage unparalleled since the nationwide rebellion of the late 1790s.³⁸ The French consul at Cork characterized 'des insurgés d'Irlande' tersely in January 1822 as 'les Pennyless, les mécontents et les fanatiques', yet as James Donnelly has shown, the coincidence of scarcity and low prices temporarily allied farmers with labourers against rent and tithes.³⁹ Countless letters and notices signed 'Captain Rock' demanded the ploughing up of pasture, suspension of tithes, 'just rents' and 'reasonable prices', combining republican, sectarian and millennialist rhetoric with classic assertions of the 'moral economy'.⁴⁰

Responses to the crisis of the 1820s were profound, as 'Captain Rock's rebellion brought in its train a far-reaching police reform that would transform the policing of the Empire.'⁴¹ With the Irish Constabulary Act of 1822, Lord Lieutenant Richard Wellesley introduced 'a species of *gendarmérie*' to Ireland, intended by Home Secretary Robert Peel to 'habituate the people of Ireland to...an equal, unvarying and impartial administration of justice'.⁴² While Peel balked at the imposition of such

³⁵ C. Ó'Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (Oxford, 2009), 32.

³⁶ G.E. Christianson, 'Population, the potato and depression in Ireland: 1800–1830', *Eire-Ireland*, 7 (1972), 92.

³⁷ *Cork Advertiser*, 5 Sep. 1821; *Cork Constitution*, 5 Mar. 1822; *Cork Advertiser*, 22 Oct. 1822; *Cork Constitution*, 19 Mar. 1823; *Times*, 30 Jan. 1822.

³⁸ *Cork Morning Intelligencer*, 25 Oct. 1821; *Freeman's Journal*, 30 Oct. 1821; National Archives of Ireland (NAI), CSORP/SC/1821/1206, George Purcell to Lord Arden, 29 Oct. 1821.

³⁹ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Paris), Chevalier de MacMahon to Vicomte de Chateaubriand, 30 Jan. 1822, in '63ieme Rapport', *Correspondance Politique 'Angleterre'*, 1822, Cote 615, 35r; James S. Donnelly Jr, *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821–1824* (Madison, 2009), 15.

⁴⁰ See S.R. Gibbons, *Captain Rock, Night Errant: The Threatening Letters of Pre-Famine Ireland, 1801–1845* (Dublin, 2004); James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement of 1821–4', in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly Jr (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780–1914* (Madison, 1983), 104–5.

⁴¹ R. Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London, 2011), 235.

⁴² G. Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812–36* (London, 1970), 131, 145. For the Constabulary Act (Ireland), 1822, see 3 Geo. IV, c. 102.

'odious and repulsive' measures upon 'freeborn Englishmen', the new police would be used in Ireland to 'habituate' citizens to the 'freedom' of markets.⁴³ Thus, while the Munster heartlands of the Rockite rebellion saw an extension of local state power in the form of courthouses and prisons, official responses were far from narrowly coercive.⁴⁴

The 1823 select committee on the employment of the poor, which dwelt largely on the root causes of the rebellion, sought a systematic social and economic prognosis:

The calamity of 1822 may therefore be said to have proceeded less from the want of food itself, than from the want of adequate means of purchasing it...When the produce of the peasant's potato ground fails, they are unaccustomed to have recourse to markets, and indeed they seem rarely to have the means of purchasing.⁴⁵

This conclusion has sometimes been interpreted as articulating a 'food entitlement' approach in stark contrast to the later stringency of mid-Victorian laissez-faire.⁴⁶ I would argue it is more accurately read as diagnosing the sharpening crisis of non-integration with the cash economy. When Arthur Wellesley (duke of Wellington, and brother to Richard) accepted the repeal of the Corn Laws on the eve of the Famine, he did so in terms similarly critical of subsistence agriculture: 'the people, who are producers of the food, which they consume..., have not the pecuniary means, and if they had the pecuniary means, are not in the habit of purchasing their food in the markets'.⁴⁷

Getting labourers into the 'habit' of entering markets was ultimately bound up with the wider project of replacing conacre plots with cash payment and reversing the process of 'potato proletarianization' underway since the 1760s. Lord Naas, later chief secretary for Ireland and leading patron of the 1853 royal commission into the state of markets and fairs in Ireland, articulated this connection as early as 1825:

[T]he supply obtained by the consumer of potatoes, would be better than it now is, if the potatoes were grown upon large farms and sent to market and sold in market...[T]he object would be to have a number of small markets in the interior of the country...[Then,] every measure that frees markets from the difficulties they are now subject to, goes to improve the condition of the people, by facilitating the alteration of small farmers into labourers.⁴⁸

⁴³ Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland*, 240–5, 293.

⁴⁴ For a recent overview of these aspects, see R. Butler, 'Cork's courthouses, the landed elite and the Rockite rebellion: architectural responses to agrarian violence, 1820–27', in K. Hughes and D.M. MacRaild (eds.), *Crime, Violence, and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2017), 87–111.

⁴⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on the Employment of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1823 (561), vi, 5.

⁴⁶ Ó'Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine*, 107.

⁴⁷ Arthur Wellesley to Robert Peel, 30 Nov. 1845, in R. Peel (ed.), *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, pt 3 (London, 1857), 199.

⁴⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland: 1825*, HC 1825 (129), vii, 317.

Lord Carbery, a major landowner in Cork and Limerick, concurred: 'If there was a class of labourers paid in money there would be a better home market for the produce in agriculture than there is now...[A]s long as the potato is the staple food..., they do not think of going to market for provision.'⁴⁹

Accompanying this instrumentalization of the market was a new language of reform, improvement and civility. Just as inherited discourses of 'politeness' had stressed the need to render Catholics 'sociable' through commercial interaction, the contemporary identification of subsistence with ungovernability cast marketization as part of a wider 'civilizing process'.⁵⁰ One southern landlord assured Dublin Castle that a new road was necessary for 'opening and *civilizing* the wild and inaccessible vale of Arglyn [*sic*] as 'for the want of a Road to carry their Corn to Market, the Farmer's Distill the entire of it into Whisky'.⁵¹ The engineer Alexander Nimmo could equally describe a cotton weaver becoming a man who 'purchases his provisions in the open market, lives in a house in a town, and therefore he is gradually rising up [as] an intermediate class between the proprietors and the actual cultivators of the land in Ireland, which is a class we now want, an independent middle class'.⁵²

As 'market forces' assumed social agency, reformers looked to actual spaces of exchange as 'workable' nodes in a vaster system of exchange.⁵³ Yet while markets were likened to an organic entity akin to the human body, individual bodies were increasingly merged into abstract categories of 'population'.⁵⁴ Markets were thus a 'stimulus to production...When the labour of the population is enabled to find a market, it relieves distress in one class, and at the same time enriches another.'⁵⁵ One industrialist similarly explained to a select committee in 1830 how 'sale[s]...could alone take place by an increased capability on the part of the population to become purchasers...[by] bringing their labour to market, without which all stagnates'.⁵⁶ An increasingly utilitarian and assimilationist governing mentality thus drove the conviction that 'Ireland's only salvation lay in embracing...an English-style market economy.'⁵⁷

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 615.

⁵⁰ T.C. Barnard, 'The languages of politeness and sociability in eighteenth-century Ireland', in D.G. Boyce and R. Eccleshall (eds.), *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (London, 2001), 193–221.

⁵¹ NAI, CSORP/1822/2708, William Cook Collis to Henry Goulburn, 20 Nov. 1822.

⁵² *Third Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830 (665), vii, 610.

⁵³ B. Brown and E. Laurier, 'En-spacing technology', in P. Turner and E. Davenport (eds.), *Spaces, Spatiality and Technology* (London, 2005), 28.

⁵⁴ Schmiechen and Carls, *The British Market Hall*, xi.

⁵⁵ J. Beare, *Improvement of Ireland: A Letter to the King on the Practical Improvement of Ireland* (London, 1827), 58.

⁵⁶ *Third Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830 (665), vii, 611.

⁵⁷ K.T. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland, 1800–1921* (Oxford, 2016), 65.

Freeing the market: enclosure and discipline

In the short run, engineering such an 'embrace' required significant state intervention; alongside assisted emigration, investment in economic infrastructure represented the most ambitious aspect of fiscal expansion after 1815. The £2.5 million ploughed into public works between 1823 and 1828 was rationalized explicitly in terms of market access; roads could only be built 'from market town to market town or from market town to the sea'.⁵⁸ Richard Griffith, the engineer of public works in Munster between 1822 and 1830, noted that 'without [roads] no inducement is held out to the industrious man to cultivate more land than is absolutely necessary for his own immediate subsistence, as he possessed no means of bringing his produce to market'.⁵⁹ In the famine conditions of 1822, this want proved stark; one Munster landowner hoped that new roads would provide 'the means to purchase oatmeal to prevent...[peasants] from going into their potato gardens early, which would prolong the calamity to the ensuing year'.⁶⁰ Figure 1 provides a snapshot of both the limited reach of the cash economy in south-west Munster and Griffith's efforts to extend it into areas where the predominant mode of remuneration for labour was still in provisions or conacre. These new arteries also served to integrate local exchanges into a vaster national network; Griffith's colleague Alexander Nimmo hoped the construction of a road linking Limerick to the capital would induce localities to 'give way to the influence of the better stocked, and cheaper markets of the Metropolis'.⁶¹ Indeed, market access was to become a key methodology in Griffith's later and more famous 'General Valuation', which, along with the Ordnance Survey, helped to constitute a supra-local market for the sale of land in Ireland.⁶²

Aside from individual cases of outright settlement – as in the 'experimental improvements' around the Kingwilliamstown 'colony' in north Cork, for example – new roads aimed to draw the poor into existing spaces of exchange rather than creating new ones.⁶³ Patents for new markets and fairs thus continued to decline while a drive toward legislative and physical enclosure around existing structures intensified.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ P. Jupp, *The Governing of Britain, 1688–1848: The Executive, Parliament and the People* (London, 2006), 151. See also *Report from the Select Committee on Grand Jury Presentments, Ireland*, HC 1826–27 (555), iii, 44.

⁵⁹ *Commission of Inquiry into the Nature and Extent of Bogs in Ireland: Fourth Report*, HC 1813–14 (131), vi, 182.

⁶⁰ NAI, CSORP/1822/2708, Daniel Mahony to Alexander Mangin, 4 Jun. 1822.

⁶¹ NAI, CSORP/1821/722, Alexander Nimmo to William Gregory, 6 Dec. 1821; CSORP/1822/344, John Killaly to William Gregory, 23 Aug. 1822.

⁶² *Report from the Select Committee on the Survey and Valuation of Ireland*, HC 1824 (445), viii, 46.

⁶³ Anon., 'The Blackwater in Munster', *Dublin University Magazine*, 26 (1845), 447; *Crown Land Experimental Improvements, and Cork and Kerry New Roads, Ireland*, HC 1834 (173), li, 4.

⁶⁴ Between 1800 and 1853, only eight new patents were granted for the county and city of Cork, out of a total of 202 dating back to the thirteenth century, see *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 66–79.

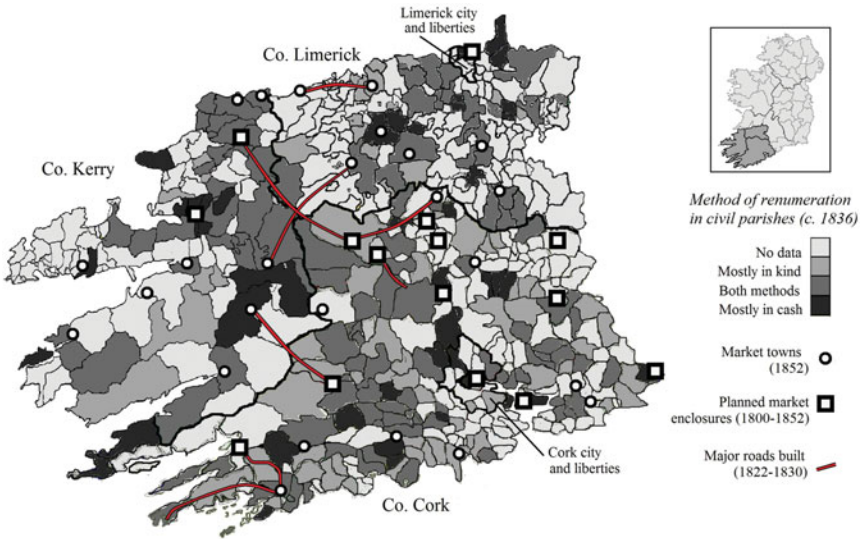


Figure 1: (Colour online) Market infrastructure and the cash economy in south-west Munster, c. 1836

Sources: *Report on Roads Made at Public Expense in Southern District of Ireland*, by R. Griffith, HC 1831 (119), xii, 19; *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland, Appendix*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 1–4; *Royal Commission on Condition of Poorer Classes in Ireland, Appendix D*, HC 1836 (35), xxx, 162–209; NAI, CSORP/1822/413, earl of Bantry to William Gregory, 31 Jul. 1822.

Reformers went as far as to suggest that the Land Clauses Consolidation Act be used to ‘allow for compulsory purchase of plots of land to supply market accommodation facilities’.⁶⁵ And in a desperate attempt to attenuate massive market failure at the highpoint of the Famine, the 1847 Markets and Fairs Clauses Act officially restricted the buying and selling of most agricultural produce to ‘official’ market boundaries in the seven urban jurisdictions where commercial activity was regulated by acts of parliament.⁶⁶ Yet the process of market enclosure was by then long underway; at least 176 market structures were planned across Ireland up to 1900, with the majority constructed in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ A closer look at Cork, a county with 20 markets towns by 1853, reveals plans to extend or construct indoor market facilities in 12 urban

⁶⁵ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 38. For the Land Clauses Consolidation Act, 1845, see 8 & 9 Vict., c. 18.

⁶⁶ For the Markets and Fairs Clauses (Ireland) Act, 1847, see 10 Vict., c. 14, s. 42.

⁶⁷ These figures are based on the combined databases of the *Dictionary of Irish Architects* (www.dia.ie), and the *National Inventory of Architectural Heritage* (www.buildingsofireland.ie/).

centres during the pre-Famine decades (see [Figure 1](#)).⁶⁸ Plans devised in 1834 for a market house in Youghal, though never executed, were typical of these developments; the new structure aimed to regulate access through gates and arches, and planned to carve out a controlled zone from the liminal precincts of the town's dockside market place square ([Figure 2](#)).⁶⁹

Crucial to these physical divisions were new definitions of who constituted a legitimate market actor. The concept of a 'nuisance' was long established in early modern jurisprudence, and early nineteenth-century efforts to 'cleanse' marketplaces bear a superficial resemblance to older trends.⁷⁰ In boroughs like Youghal and Kinsale, municipal ordinances from the late seventeenth century penalized 'pedlars', 'hucksters' and 'peckwomen'.⁷¹ Yet just as the new Poor Law meant '*pauperism* came to be distinguished from *poverty*' – the former a part of an emergent 'social domain' and the latter 'left to the operation of the free market' – so too was that 'free market' made subject to a 'rhetoric of exclusion'.⁷² This was particularly true in terms of reformist language addressing female exclusion, which stressed the need to protect women and children especially vulnerable to abuses in a world associated with male power.⁷³ Another explicitly biopolitical dimension of reform saw the refashioning of commercial space from a site of sexual autonomy from parental and ecclesiastical discipline (via 'runaway matches') into the physical precincts of a tightly controlled 'marriage market'.⁷⁴

Closely associated with concerns about the physical, moral and sexual health of the 'social body' were those related to the well-being of the 'body politic'; elite reactions to the typhus epidemic of 1817–18 saw an emergent sanitarian discourse link disease to disruption, calling for 'the habits...of

⁶⁸ See for example NAI, CSORP/1821/722, John Killaly to Alexander Nimmo, 6 Dec. 1821; CSORP/1822/424, 'Abstract of applications for financial aid on public works', n.d.

⁶⁹ CCCA, YTR/MPD/folder 1, James and George R. Pain, 'Elevation of market and sessions house for the town of Youghal', c. 1834.

⁷⁰ P. Carroll, *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation* (London, 2006), 119, 162.

⁷¹ R. Caulfield (ed.), *The Council Book of the Corporation of Youghal, from 1610 to 1659* (Youghal, 1878), 296, 299; R. Caulfield (ed.), *The Council Book of the Corporation of Kinsale, from 1652 to 1800* (Cork, 1878), lxxviii, 322.

⁷² M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago, 1995), 11; L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998), 41.

⁷³ This logic also operated vis-à-vis quasi-domestic space deemed improper for market activity. When it was suggested to move a fair to Devonshire Square in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, the landlord's agent warned that 'we may be certain to have the ladies of the Square down upon us' – see National Library of Ireland (NLI), Devonshire (Lismore) papers, MS 43493/9, John Berwick to J. Conner, 28 Mar. 1866. For abuses targeting women, see *Tolls and Customs, Ireland*, HC 1830 (264), xxvi, 123.

⁷⁴ Compare the presence of defrocked 'tackem' priests 'for hire' to 'runaway matches' at hay and straw markets in the pre-Famine era with the elaborate ritual of procession through the market as part of arranged marriages in subsequent decades. *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Dec. 1832, 1 Jun. 1833; *Roscommon Journal*, 4 Jul. 1834; *Cork Examiner*, 25 Apr. 1842; University College Dublin (UCD), Irish Folklore Collection, Schools' Collection, vol. 0166, 269.

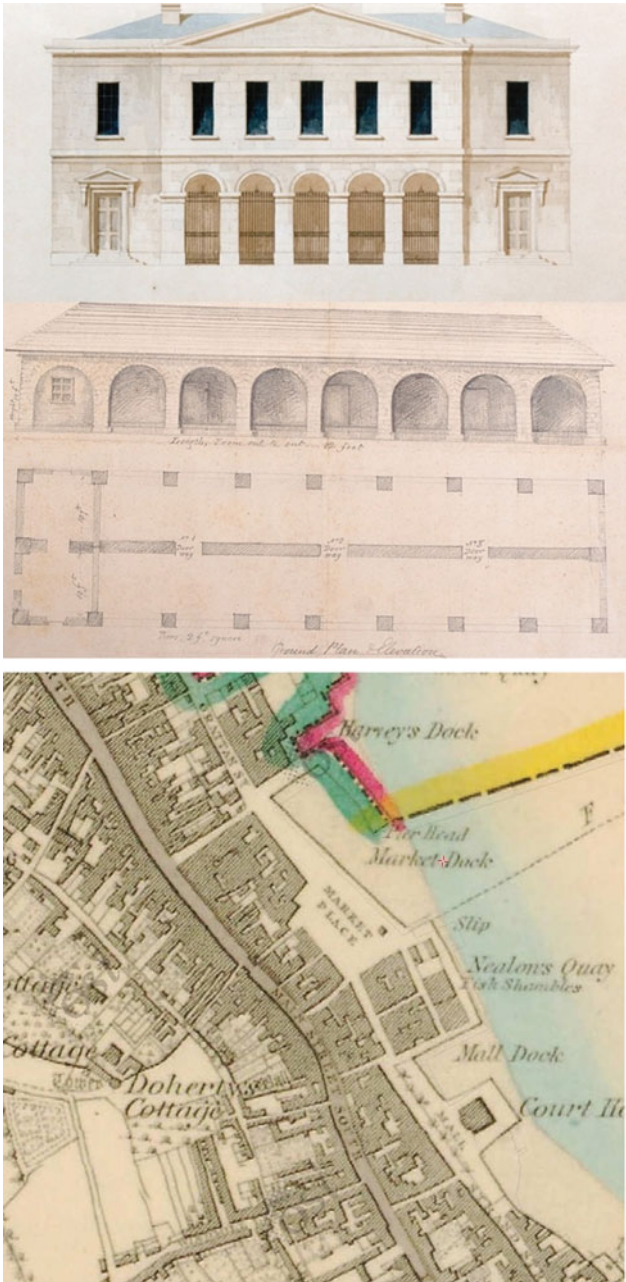


Figure 2: (Colour online) Plans for Youghal market house and proposed site of construction, c. 1834

Sources: CCCA, YTR/MPD/folder1; *Ordnance Survey of Ireland*, 6 inch map, surveyed Jan. 1842.

the lower classes [to] be radically changed'.⁷⁵ In Ireland, the long shadow cast by the political upheaval of 1798 combined with the vast economic dislocation of the post-Napoleonic depression to render markets suspect sites of political 'contagion'.⁷⁶ For some, the country's itinerant 'army of beggars' resembled 'the most active and efficient agents of rebellion and sedition'.⁷⁷ In some cases, this shift involved outright exclusion; the town sergeant of Westport sought to clamp down on 'lame and blind' market beggars by 'kidnapping them into a place of confinement which was called the coop, where he kept them until morning'.⁷⁸ Just as institutions for 'pauper lunatics' were beginning to open in towns across Munster,⁷⁹ one southern landlord advised in 1830 that

Those persons who frequent fairs in Ireland, and different towns on market day, who are frightful objects to look at [should be] provided with an asylum, and compelled to frequent that asylum in case they continued to expose themselves, that would be a great matter of satisfaction to the country to be relieved from their presence.⁸⁰

Yet for most, the market's powers of interpellation focused as much on minds as bodies. Much of the market 'lore' documented by the Irish Folklore Commission in the early twentieth century recounts the liminal journey from farmstead to fair, involving stories of leprechauns, mermaids, fairies and witches symbolizing the risk of venturing beyond a local community.⁸¹ Market reformers were eager to rationalize these risks, and in this sense, enclosure represented a step closer to demarking the idea of 'wronging' the market.⁸² Those who would 'wrong' the market were distinct from vagrants and beggars as a class which contravened standards of ethical market conduct which could now be more rigidly enforced. As early as 1822, the Cork Corn Market Act – which created the largest 'public' market in Ireland under the quasi-private stewardship

⁷⁵ *Select Committee on the State of Disease, and Condition of the Labouring Poor in Ireland: First Report*, HC 1819 (314), viii, 63.

⁷⁶ NAI/RP/ 620/28/248, Anon. to Pelham, 10 Feb. 1797; *Report from the Committee of Secrecy, of the House of Commons in Ireland, as Reported by the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Castlereagh, Aug. 21, 1798* (London, 1798), 10. These perceptions survived into the post-war era – see NAI, CSORP/SC/1821/1662, Thomas Whitney to Gregory, 20 Nov. 1821; *Select Committee on the State of Disease, and Condition of the Labouring Poor in Ireland: First Report*, HC 1819 (314), viii, 41.

⁷⁷ Geary, 'The whole country was in motion', 127; Calvin Colton, *Four Years in Great Britain, 1831–1835* (New York, 1835), 85.

⁷⁸ *Third Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830 (665), vii, 494.

⁷⁹ The first institution set up under the Lunacy (Ireland) Act, 1821, 1 & 2 Geo. IV, c. 33, was in Armagh during 1825, followed by Limerick, Belfast, Derry, Carlow, Maryborough (now Portlaoise), Clonmel and Waterford. See Brendan D. Kelly, 'Mental health law in Ireland, 1821 to 1902: building the asylums', *Medico-Legal Journal*, 76 (2008), 21.

⁸⁰ *Third Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830 (665), vii, 176.

⁸¹ UCD, Irish Folklore Collection, Schools' Collection, vol. 0229, 91, vol. 0190, 219, vol. 0192, 257, vol. 1031, 182, vol. 0191, 116.

⁸² See for example *Tralea Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 1857.

of 'market trustees' – forbade transactions beyond a prescribed area in an explicit effort to prevent arbitrage, forestalling and fraud.⁸³ The 1822 Act in turn spurred the construction of the palatial Cork Corn Exchange, disavowing the 'throgging' or 'earnest sale' of 'sky farmers' and the 'out-for-chance' men.⁸⁴

Boundary work: market and state

If acts of wronging the market required state enforced exclusion, reformers also desired boundaries to be permeable, transparent and synchronized with other commercial spaces. Those such as the countess of Glengall hoped that open exchange would benefit the consumer by 'encouraging public markets [as] the way of bringing down the markets'.⁸⁵ National and local acts made the publication of tolls, customs and daily prices obligatory for public view in the marketplace, and paternalist landlords worried about their tenants being 'at the mercy of the merchant'.⁸⁶ Liberal market reformers focused on the problem of tolls and the distorting effect of seasonal rent collection on the ability of markets to function at all.⁸⁷ And anti-thetical to all was what one Cork landlord described in 1830 as 'bad fairs':

There are what we call bad fairs, where a panic, or any great altercation in the price takes place, the sellers and purchasers cannot meet; they have different views of what the price ought to be; but if such a case as that occurred in a season it is the most [likely] because the next fair regulated the price [of goods].⁸⁸

The state might be mobilized to enforce market boundaries, but in the crucial matter of valuation, the 'free market' depended upon a strict logic of non-interference. The 'purification' of the market from the state – and vice versa – were crucial aspects of this simultaneously spatial and epistemological 'boundary work'.⁸⁹

As in the case of the 'bad fair', the risk of market grammars becoming inverted beyond the 'carnavalesque' were often negotiated along market boundaries. Like markets, fairs were laid out to control entry and exit from a partially enclosed common plain. 'Customs gaps', such as those set up outside Dungarvan in County Waterford (Figure 3), enforced the payment of tolls if transactions occurred. Yet in typically large open air environments, it was extremely difficult to monitor sales between

⁸³ For the Cork Corn Market Act, see 3 Geo. IV, c. 79.

⁸⁴ UCD, Irish Folklore Collection, Schools' Collection, vol. 1031, 353, vol. 1035, 353; *Report from the Select Committee on Tolls and Customs in Ireland*, HC 1834 (603), xvii, 46.

⁸⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on the Employment of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1823 (561), vi, 80.

⁸⁶ *Report from the Select Committee on the Butter Trade of Ireland*, HC 1826 (406), v, 40, 61.

⁸⁷ *Evidence Taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland, Part II*, HC 1845 (616), xx, 617, 851.

⁸⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on Tolls and Customs in Ireland*, HC 1834 (603), xvii, 46.

⁸⁹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, 1993), 11–12; Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago, 1999), 22–3.



Figure 3: (Colour online) Approximate position of ‘customs gaps’ at Dungarvan, County Waterford, c. 1826
 Sources: NLI, MS 43,892/7, ‘Map showing the position of toll boards’;
Ordnance Survey of Ireland, 6 inch map, surveyed Jan. 1841.

individuals effectively; verification depended on a traditional system of oath-giving common at the ‘custom gaps’. Cork landlord Pierce Mahony described in 1830 how ‘oaths are multiple [as] at the custom gap you have the toll collector with his stick in one hand and his book in the other and he collects through the imposition of the oath under the authority of his stick the amount of his toll’.⁹⁰ Swearing on a bible, a wooden crucifix or simply a folded piece of paper, such practices were seen to replicate the oaths of factional and agrarian secret societies.⁹¹ All of this represented a fatal threat to the possibility of fabricating ethical market behaviour; as another respondent described it:

The morals of the lower order of the community, by the frequent use of this practice, and particularly in the hands of such persons as generally administer these oaths, are tainted *considerably* both as regards the person tendering as well as those taking such oaths. I would consider a person treating that obligation such as it is, with levity as a person who would not be very scrupulous as to the truth of what he would swear on other occasions.⁹²

For those interested in creating an environment conducive to ‘free contract’, association and exchange, the fragmentation of authority along an uncertain market boundary threatened the inculcation of obedience ‘from the outside in’.⁹³

⁹⁰ *First Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland, Minutes of Evidence: 24 March–14 May (II)*, HC 1830 (589), vii, 105.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*; UCD, Irish Folklore Collection, Schools’ Collection, vol. 0746, 467.

⁹² *Report from the Select Committee on Tolls and Customs in Ireland*, HC 1834 (603), xvii, 7.

⁹³ M.A. Covaleski, M.W. Dirsmith, J.B. Heian and S. Samuel, ‘The calculated and the avowed: techniques of discipline and struggles over identity in Big Six public accounting firms’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43 (1998), 297–8.

Struggles at the boundaries of market space replicated broader concerns about the delimitation of authority between public and private actors, constituting articulations of 'state' and 'society' respectively. In pursuit of *homo economicus*, market reformers were often willing to undermine radically both property rights and existing iterations of the social contract; most, for example, regarded the 'patent' system governing the right to hold markets and levy tolls as a feudal relic corrupted by fraud and maleficence. Of the 1,646 markets and fairs held in Ireland in the early 1850s, three-fifths either breached their patent or lacked one at all. In eastern Ireland, tolls had gradually been suppressed by 1850 through 'mob force'; in the west, they continued to be extorted 'at the will of vulgar unscrupulous peasants' at the behest of middlemen of the 'underground gentry', blurring the distinction between tax and tribute.⁹⁴ Indeed, most markets so flagrantly violated the law – ignoring rules on toll-free goods, the appointment of weighmasters or the public display of 'toll boards' – that reformers regarded them as an affront to the state itself. The first parliamentary return of local tolls in 1823 convinced investigators that 'the arbitrary schedule thus gives authority, and the apparent sanction of the law, to the very injustice it affects to suppress', a 'contradiction in terms'.⁹⁵

Thus, to say that the market and the state were co-constitutive in pre-Famine Ireland does not imply a seamless, unproblematic division. The under-secretary Thomas Drummond admitted in 1839 that 'every fair and market has latterly been attended by the police in force – whereas in former times the police were either withdrawn from such fairs and markets or did not take any active part'.⁹⁶ Yet, while state intrusion could enforce disciplinary norms 'at the point of a bayonet', the ambition of most reformers was to set the *conditions* for good behaviour. As in the case of the oath, it was to be at a micro level that new technologies of measurement, weight and inspection strove to secure compliance through newly objective standards of 'truth', 'trust' and 'fairness'.

Technologies of vision and precision

The most apparently 'objective' of these forces was time; just as industrial capitalism helped bring into being a regime of 'work-time discipline',

⁹⁴ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 6; K. Whelan, 'An underground gentry? Catholic middlemen in eighteenth-century Ireland', in K. Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760–1830* (Cork, 1996), 3–56. For litigation, see NLI, Devonshire (Lismore) papers, MS 43,892/1, 'Devonshire v. Dominic Ronayne', 15 Jun. 1829.

⁹⁵ *Report of the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830 (667), vii, 47; *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 10; *Market Tolls: Returns... of All Places where Customs, Tolls, or Duties, Are Levied, at Markets, Fairs, and Ports, in Ireland*, HC 1824 (279), xxi, 1–10.

⁹⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Enquire into the State of Ireland in Respect of Crime, Part I*, HC 1839 (486), xi, 1078.

so too did markets generate their own constitutive temporalities.⁹⁷ In larger centres, this involved an elaborate system of ‘market bells’ and ‘warning bells’; elsewhere, it was effected by public or ‘market clocks’ visible to all.⁹⁸ The need for bell or ‘clock time’ discipline was particularly acute in markets given the complex relationship between time, space and valorization. To avoid unethical market ‘abuses’ such as forestalling – withholding produce from sale to realize a future rise in prices – reformers sought to restrict and ‘flatten’ the bounds of market time. The 1853 commission recommended ‘markets commencing by ring of bell, and all sales prohibited before a stated hour under a penalty..., as we believe that such an arrangement would create competition, and...assist in putting an end to forestalling’.⁹⁹ The effective compression of market time and space also aimed to prevent arbitrage, the realization of profit based on re-selling an article at or between individual markets; although an article might be ‘bought in the morning at a certain price, and resold in the evening...[at] a considerable profit’, the careful timetabling of markets and fairs aimed to distance simultaneous sites while tightening the time-frame for potential movement.¹⁰⁰

Just as the spread of time-keeping technology was linked to the standardization of ‘mean time’ after 1792, the drive to standardize weights and measures ultimately aimed at creating ‘technologies of trust’.¹⁰¹ As early as 1705, an Irish act aimed at ‘regulating the weights used in this kingdom’ stipulated the appointment of ‘one honest and discreet person as weighmaster..., who should be sworn justly, truly and indifferently’, one of at least 17 eighteenth-century Irish laws addressing weights and measures directly.¹⁰² Yet, when Victorian market reformers visited Irish towns, they encountered ‘arrangements...quite foreign to the spirit and intention of the Acts’, citing weightmasters beholden to ‘vested interests’, paid through penalties, and ‘subject to no control’ rendering the ‘protection...of independent sworn officer[s]...defeated’.¹⁰³ To Naas, Robinson and their colleagues, abuses surrounding weights and measures trumped even tolls in terms of the damage inflicted upon trade; weighting ‘fees’ such as ‘beamage’, ‘cranage’ or ‘portorage’ not only placed a tax on exchange, but helped to create a distorted ‘fictitious price’ based on

⁹⁷ E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism’, *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 56–97.

⁹⁸ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 31, 69, 184–5, 380.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ See for example NAI, CSORP/1819/953, Henry de La Poer Beresford to William Gregory, 10 May 1819. For a spirited debate on the scheduling of local fairs near Bandon and allied fears of ‘idleness’, see NLI, Devonshire (Lismore) papers, MS 43493/9, J.R.R. Berwick to W. Conner, 24 Jan. 1866.

¹⁰¹ T.M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, 1996), 15.

¹⁰² For the regulation of weights and measures, see 4 Anne, c. 14.

¹⁰³ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 15; NLI, Mayo papers, MS 11,020/25, H. Robinson to Naas, 11 Nov. 1852.

the expectation of fraud.¹⁰⁴ Similarly to 'market oaths', investigators held that 'extortion naturally engenders dishonesty in self-defence'; as one merchant put it succinctly, 'we are always trying to deceive the farmer, and the farmer to deceive us'.¹⁰⁵ One solution to the problem of the 'collusive clerk' was explicit state intervention; an act regulating the butter trade made provision for state appointments of weighmasters in 1812, creating 'three discrete and skilful persons' aided by magistrates and *ex officio* constabulary inspectors from 1851.¹⁰⁶ Yet reformers also aimed at essentially technological fixes to the problems of conduct they couched in moral terms.¹⁰⁷

The pursuit of 'upright dealing' was therefore bound up with the measurement of 'true weight'. Although an act of 1751 required 'one just and true balance or iron beam, with scales, and a competent set of weights made of iron', its rules were later 'evaded' and 'openly violated'.¹⁰⁸ A set of contemporary select committees at Westminster headed by the 'reformist' Irish peer, John Proby, first Baron Carysfort, proved similarly ineffectual, motivated more by 'personal rather than governmental interest'.¹⁰⁹ The inflation of the mid-1790s again led reformist liberals to champion action at Westminster, but it was not until a royal commission, several failed bills and a series of select committees beginning in 1814 that efforts finally culminated in the 1824 Weights and Measures Act.¹¹⁰ The legislation proved a 'decisive break', creating an 'imperial standard' designed to mitigate 'internal free trade' and 'unite the British Isles' ahead of the completion of an Anglo-Irish single market in 1824 and currency union two years later. In the British context, the act represented a reformist compromise distinct from the 'revolutionary' character of the continental metric system, modifying forms of the most common standards already in use.¹¹¹ In Ireland, it anticipated 'radical change'; in line with the 1834 select committee into tolls and customs, reversion to non-standard measures was made illegal in 1835 and the sale of bread by weight obligatory three years later.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 18. Robinson reported to Naas one story of fraud that involved 'robbing the farmer of 6 stone in every 24 stone', see NLI, Mayo Papers, MS 11,020/24, Robinson to Naas, 20 Oct. 1852.

¹⁰⁵ *Waterford News*, 18 Nov. 1853.

¹⁰⁶ For the butter trade, see 52 Geo. III, c. 134, s. 7. For changes regarding the responsibility of the constabulary and magistracy, see the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act, 14–15 Vict., c. 92, s. 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 20–1.

¹⁰⁸ 25 Geo. II, c. 15. See also *Statutes Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland, 1735–1759*, vol. VI (Dublin, 1796), 103.

¹⁰⁹ PRONI, D3167/1/9, Charlemont to Stewart, 27 Nov. 1784; J. Hoppit, 'Reforming Britain's weights and measures, 1660–1824', *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), 94.

¹¹⁰ Hoppit, 'Reforming Britain's weights and measures', 97. For the Weights and Measures Act, 1824, see 16 & 9 Vict., c. 15.

¹¹¹ W. Kula, *Measures and Men* (Princeton, 1986), 267–80.

¹¹² For regulations relating to the sale of bread in Ireland, see 1 & 2 Vict., c. 28, ss. 8–6.

The authors of the 1853 commission report were nonetheless shocked by an 'infinite diversity' of local measures still in use at different stages along the chain of distribution.¹¹³ Like English West Country farmers in the late eighteenth century, resistance to imposed standards of measurement rested on adherence to 'domestic calculations' rooted as much in the practice of everyday life as custom and tradition.¹¹⁴ Like the distinctive linguistic practices relating to commercial exchange in the Irish language, traditional measures were themselves cultural as much as 'social institutions'.¹¹⁵ To market reformers, such practices were at best obscurant and at worst oppositional; above all, universal measurement was required to create the abstract knowledge necessary to govern Irish society *through* its markets. 'From the want of any general system of market returns', the report concluded, 'the state of agricultural affairs in this country...can only at present be supposed by vague calculations or mere guess work'.¹¹⁶ In advocating the 'uniformity of weights and measures' via decimalization, the authors saw in the Famine a unique opportunity to transform market practice in Ireland:

At first, no doubt, some confusion would result from the alteration, and [from] old prejudice, dislike to change, [and] the unreasoning stupidity of the ignorant...[But] the present condition of the agricultural population in this country, appears to us to offer peculiar facilities for the introduction of such a measure. The poorer and smaller class of farmers have rarely scales and weights of their own...[But] as the small holdings are rapidly diminishing in number, we may naturally expect, in a few years, a different state of things.¹¹⁷

Yet even as the 'data state' capitalized on calamity to better 'know' the market, technologies of vision had long rendered commercial spaces sites of mutual and self-surveillance. In terms of temporal, computational and spatial discipline, the Cork Butter Exchange came to represent a regime unto itself; the so-called 'Cork system' depended upon a complex series of 'checks and balances' intended to control quality, fix prices and discipline

¹¹³ P.M. Austin Bourke, 'Notes on some agricultural units of measurement in use in pre-Famine Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 14 (1965), 236, 241; D. Feenan and L. Kennedy, 'Weights and measures of the major food commodities in early nineteenth-century Ireland: a regional perspective', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 102C (2002), 42.

¹¹⁴ S. Drucker-Brown (ed.), *Malinowski in Mexico: The Economics of a Mexican Market System* (London, 1982), 177.

¹¹⁵ R. Sheldon, A. Randall, A. Charlesworth and D. Walsh, 'Popular protest and the persistence of customary corn measures: resistance to the Winchester bushel in the English West', in A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996), 45; N.M. Wolf, *An Irish-speaking Ireland: State, Religion, Community, and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770–1870* (Madison, 2014), 47–9.

¹¹⁶ *Royal Commission to Inquire into the State of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, HC 1852–53 (1674), xli, 35.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

producers.¹¹⁸ From 1770 through to the liberalization of the system in 1829, the market was ‘minutely regulated’ by acts of parliament, yet following formal deregulation, local merchants continued to abide by a voluntary code giving the market’s governing body, the Committee of Merchants, powers of appointment, regulation and expulsion.¹¹⁹ At the heart of the system was a ‘painstaking’ regime of inspection; butter was ‘branded’ one of six ‘grades’ by four professional inspectors through an intricate examination of colour, smell, consistency and taste.¹²⁰ Crucial to the inspection regime was its transparency, guaranteed through processes of inclusion, oversight and appeal; inspectors were appointed by the committee, publicly sworn, highly paid and pensionable, and banned from dealing butter. No farmer had foreknowledge of which inspector would grade his butter, but butter brokers were allowed to ‘stand beside’ the inspector as he made his judgment.¹²¹ An appeals system also operated, and the use of special symbols stamped on butter firkins helped to prevent imitation together with quay-side spot checks. At the height of the Famine, the Exchange was redesigned to accentuate its omnioptical functions; five bays 142 ft long under cast iron columns gave the market a ‘spacious...abundance of air and light’ with a lavish frontage of Tuscan Doric columns aping the independence of a judicial institution (Figures 4 and 5).

Conclusion

Did the nineteenth-century Irish state exist as much at ‘customs gaps’ and in weighing scales as at ‘the point of a bayonet’? This article shows that in order to better understand the triumph of *laissez faire* in pre-Famine Ireland, we must combine a focus on high politics with the material realities of market space. Its limited success involved ‘co-production’, moulding certain types of conduct and complicity which cannot be easily captured through a narrow focus on the decline of the ‘carnavalesque’; pre-Famine markets reveal incipient forms of what anthropologists Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball later described as ‘rituals of inspection’ and ‘bargaining’ in rural Ireland.¹²² And while market reform represented a discourse as much as it did a practice – and a practice which reformers readily admitted left much to be desired – it nonetheless helped to frame a new set of structural realities in Ireland by the middle of nineteenth century. This is partly evident in the pattern of crime which accompanied

¹¹⁸ D. Dickson, ‘“Butter comes to market”: the origins of commercial dairying in County Cork’, in Flanagan and Buttimer (eds.), *Cork, History and Society*, 375.

¹¹⁹ J.S. Donnelly Jr, ‘Cork market: its role in the nineteenth-century Irish butter trade’, *Studia Hibernica*, 11 (1971), 125.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹²¹ C. Rynne, *At the Sign of the Cow: The Cork Butter Market, 1770–1969* (Cork, 1998), 61.

¹²² F. D’Arcy, ‘The decline and fall of Donnybrook Fair: moral reform and social control in nineteenth-century Ireland’, *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 13 (1988), 7–21; C. Arensberg and S. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, MA, 1940), ch. 13.



Figure 4: (Colour online) Interior of the Cork Butter Exchange
Source: Illustrated London News, 2 Apr. 1859.



Figure 5: Exterior of the Cork Butter Exchange
Source: NLI, The Lawrence Photograph Collection, L CAB 05247, c. 1900.

the Famine, with ‘cattle and sheep stealing’ outstripping ‘provision plundering’ by a factor of 20 in Cork between 1846 and 1850.¹²³ Along with the attitude of elites, the physical reality of exchange had also been

¹²³ NAI/CSO/ICR, ‘Reports of outrages, 1848–1869’, n.d.

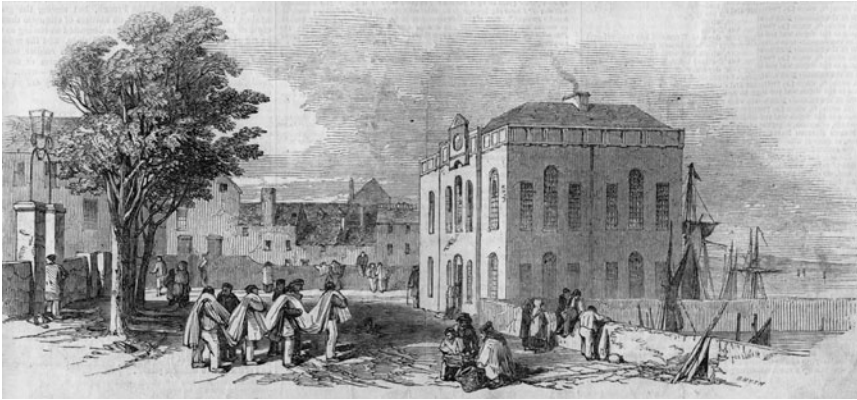


Figure 6: The Mall and Mall House, Youghal, 1846
 Source: *Illustrated London News*, 7 Nov. 1846.

transformed; in late 1846, a ‘mob’ of food rioters at Youghal confronted ‘the Mall-house..., a large, plain, whitewashed building’ (Figure 6), but were ‘obliged to remain in the yard attached to the building’.¹²⁴ While bakers’ shops were ransacked, the crowds proved powerless to ‘prevent the merchants and manufacturers from exporting corn or provisions from the town for which purpose upwards of a dozen ships were lying in the harbour’.¹²⁵ Several decades of alterations to the physical fabric of the local economy ensured it would remain free from interference.

A conception of ‘the state’ as distributed, materialized and ‘co-produced’ may also indicate a way of analysing the Famine distinct from both the economic abstraction of traditional Marxism and nationalist fixations with high political ‘plot’ making.¹²⁶ The tools of environmental history may also represent a way beyond these entrenched paradigms, situating the events of 1846–52 in terms of uncomfortably banal and localized aspects of everyday life, from timetables and taps to herds and hymnals.¹²⁷ It is hoped that the brief history of market reform mapped out in this article will offer one point of departure for such an analysis.

¹²⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 7 Nov. 1846.

¹²⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 23 Sep. 1846.

¹²⁶ Of which the foundational statements can be found in J. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin, 1910), 106–7; J. Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Dublin, 1861), 219. For this conception of the state, see P. Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), 10–11, 30–5, 172–4.

¹²⁷ V. Damodaran, ‘Famine in Bengal: a comparison of the 1770 famine in Bengal and the 1897 famine in Chotanagpur’, in C. Mauch and C. Pfister (eds.), *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History* (Plymouth, 2009), 197–232; J. Grischow and H. Weiss, ‘Colonial famine relief and development policies: towards an environmental history of Northern Ghana’, *Global Environment*, 4 (2011), 50–97.