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Towns & Town Life in Mid-17th Century Co. Tipperary

by William J. Smyth

In seventeenth-century County Tipperary, it is very difficult to distinguish between the largest nucleated settlements, with still predominantly agriculturally-oriented functions, and those settlements geared primarily to trading activities. The picture is further complicated by the drive to establish new centres for fairs and markets in the boom years of the first four decades of the seventeenth century.

Apart from old established corporations like Clonmel, Fethard, Cashel, (and, one assumes, Carrick-on-Suir) and the manorial towns of Roscrea, Cahir and Tipperary, which were all renewing their fair and marketing rights at this time, one also sees a vigorous drive by other enterprising landowners to establish fairs and markets on their estates. The new developments seem to have been taking place in the expanding commercialised pastoral regions, particularly in the rich cattle country of Clanwilliam, in Upper Ormond and in a transitional zone on the edge of Fethard.

Old landowners were particularly active in this entrepreneurial drive — the Cantwells at Moycarkey, the O'Dwyers of Clonyharp at Kilsenane, the Everards of Fethard, with new fair grants for Knockkelly (parish of Peppardstown), Kilknockane (Rathcoole) and Killerk (Donaghmore), the Derby Ryans at both Solloghmore and at Tipperary town, and the Ryan Creggs at Ballycottan. Likewise merchant-landowner alliances show up in new fair/market developments at Templemore, Kilfeakle and Knockordan/Lattin.

A new breed of landowners such as the O'Mearas at Lissinsky, the Graces at Tyone and the Everards at Ballyboy/Clogheen emerge as major fair developers in newly modernising areas of the county. The list of entrepreneurial landed interests is completed by men like Gamaliel Waters at Cullen and a James Craig at Toomevara.

The above is simply the official list of fairs and markets confirmed in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹ The Civil Survey also notes the existence of fairs at Ballyclerihan, Holycross, Clonoulty, Abbyinnislounaght and Pallas (Youghalarra), and it is likely that a small number of other old centres have retained such functions.² For example, the ancient town of Nenagh — *Aonach Urmumhan* — whose very name epitomises this function is not designated as a fair centre either in the Civil Survey or in the official list of fairs and markets.

Likewise, it is not at all clear how many of the old burghage settlements at Ardfinnan, Ardmayle, Borrisoleigh, Buolick, Dromineer, Emly, Fithmone, Killenaule, Kilsheelan, Kiltinan, Knockgraffon, Latteragh, Lisronagh, Loughmoe, Lorrha, Modeshill, Modreeny, Moyaliff, Newcastle, Newtownlennon and Terryglass still did (or did not) retain some rudimentary market functions, whether officially recognised or otherwise.

In addition, if the wider range of functions (including the presence of 'bakeries' and a substantial proportion of women householders) is any guide, it is likely that places like Rathmacarthy (later Rosegreen), Lower Dovea, Golden/Religmurry, Drangan, Boytonrath, Kilcooly, Lismalin, Graystown and Dundrum may have occupied an important local hinge function in gathering some rural surpluses for transmission to the major market towns.

We must remember too that some important landowners and middlemen also sought to control,



channel and profit from local commercial transactions from their own home residences. Moreover, we are in the dark about the role of the travelling hucksters and “gray” merchants, who must have been active on the roads in these days.

There is little ambiguity, however, at the top of the central-place hierarchy, with the county town of Clonmel returning 345 hearth taxpayers in 1665-6; Cashel 216 for 1666-7; Carrick-on-Suir 188; Thurles 177; Fethard 101; Nenagh c.100; and Roscrea c.90; and Tipperary 66 hearths. Excluding Clonmel, whose returns - except for the west suburbs of Irishtown - are absent for 1666-7, the 1665-6 returns for the other towns are defective by the order of c.50 per cent.³

Other available evidence also suggests that the Fethard household returns in 1666-7 are defective by, at the very minimum, a further 6 per cent.⁴In the light of these admittedly limited but geographically adjacent examples, a total of at least 600 households is highly probable for the county town of Clonmel in 1667.

At the time of the Survey of the Corporation in 1655, there were already at least 144 houses or cabins in the western, eastern and northern suburbs of the town, and Burke notes that that poll-tax returns for 1661 amounted to c.830 adults, suggesting a total town population close to 3,000.⁵By 1667, this figure is likely to have been in excess of 3,600.

Excluding for obvious reasons the smaller (and often ephemeral) fair centres, it would still appear that c.15 per cent of County Tipperary’s mid-seventeenth century total population was living in settlements which were characterised by a wide range of non-agricultural functions. At the bottom of this “urban” hierarchy were five settlements — Holycross, Ballyclerihan, Solloghmore, Clogheen and Cullen — each with rather different characteristics.

Holycross, like most of the old burgage towns, was by 1667 only a shadow of its pre-Reformation eminence. Yet, if its Cistercian Abbey was already dissolved, it was still a relatively vibrant centre in 1667. It was a manor with all the privileges flowing from this function and was administered for its manorial lord, then the Duke of Ormond, by George Comerford.

It had two fairs, a number of stone houses, four functioning mills (including one tucking mill), its old Abbey church, its four eel fisheries. It also performed an important bridging function on the Suir, and it is likely that part of the older settlement lay to the south of that bridge and across the river. Its relative complexity as a settlement nucleation is also suggested by the naming of two weavers in the hearth money.

It also included at least six women householders in its total hearth-tax paying population of 34. The inclusion of females as hearth-payers suggests women of independent means, including some widows, some hucksters and other women providing services to the wider community. The total mid-17th century population of Holycross probably exceeded 300.

Ballyclerihan had also its patrons in the form of the Boyton family. It was likewise the centre of a major estate, had all the classic manorial village functions, and in addition the privilege of one fair a year. In 1659 its adult population total of 129 suggests a population of c.325. The absence of hearth money record details leaves a gap in the evidence for 1667. Its deserted street pattern, near the old parish centre, still survives a mile west of the modern chapel-village of the same name.

Clogheen, on the other hand, was a new urban foundation expanding westwards from the old bridge and inn at the crossing of the River Tar. It was patronised and developed by the entrepreneurial Everard family, who transferred the fairs and markets, (originally granted to Ballyboy) to this nodal point, with its small triangular market ‘square’ facing the bridge.

By 1667 one-fifth of its occupiers were New English in origin, and these accounted for three-fifths of the wealthier two-hearth tax payers. It was then also characterised by its mill, forges, ovens, and kilns, and under the later O’Callaghan administration was to grow into a still small but thriving estate town.



The old parish centre of Cullen was to benefit from both its garrison role in the first half of the seventeenth century and from the new enterprise brought into the settlement by the developer Gamaliel Warter, who was also active in purchasing and leasing land in this region of Clanwilliam. He had built up under the Earl of Thomond's patronage a thriving small town at Cullen, with its Saturday market and two annual fairs.

The 1667 hearth taxes record that it was then characterised by two forges, four ovens, two kilns and one mill. The long celebrated parish centre of Solloghmore, the seat of the Mulryans, had also been developed into a thriving small centre with a Thursday market and an annual fair. It had in addition its mill, forges artisans and hucksters in 1667.

Significantly perhaps, the Ryans and Waters were involved in the revitalisation of Tipperary town after its late medieval decline. As this old town (which gave its name to the county) began to gain a greater command of its rich hinterland, it is likely that the Ryans and Waters shifted their interests away from both Cullen and Solloghmore.

Whatever the processes, Tipperary town was soon to outstrip all its rivals in the rich Clanwilliam core with its many fairs, mills, and artisans. The poll-tax returns for 1660 suggest a total population for Tipperary town of c.250. This was to grow rapidly in the 1660s, and the hearth-money records suggest a total population closer to 500.

Cahir, and Roscrea and Nenagh too, were being revitalised at this time under the careful patronage of the baron of Cahir and the Earl/Duke of Ormond, respectively. If one includes the "suburban" communities at Cahir Abbey and elsewhere, Cahir was equal in size to Roscrea, with c.90 hearths in 1667. Here the great Butler castle was the fulcrum with its manifold administrative and legal functions, the centre of one of the largest estates in the county.

Likewise its morphology illustrates the classic symbiosis as between castle, bridge and corn mills. It also had a tucking mill, had its fairs, a Thursday market, its forges, weavers, ovens, kilns and other artisan activities, as well as its labourers and garrison population.

Roscrea's growth was also clearly related to its garrison functions in a difficult borderland location epitomised by its castle complex and by its utilisation first by the Butlers and later by the Cromwellian soldiers to command this territory. It too had its fairs and markets, and the property boundaries of its ruined Franciscan Abbey (founded in the era of the Gaelic resurgence by the O'Carrolls) outlined some of the older streets to the south of the castle core.

It was also a manorial centre and a milling centre, and again the limited evidence points to a significant agglomeration of craftsmen as well. Only 15 per cent of its houses were taxed for two or more hearths, and 40 per cent of these were of new English origin. It was therefore a still rudimentary frontier town in 1667.

Nenagh by comparison was more developed, with 33 per cent of its houses of a substantial character, two-thirds of them occupied by families bearing old Ormond names. Like Roscrea it was an Earl of Ormond manor, and likewise grew out of its garrison function. However, its more elaborate structure is also indicated in the Civil Survey by the references to its walls and gates (including Thomond Gate) and by its larger and more diversified population. It was also the centre of a deanery, and was already clearly emerging as the major administrative and market town of the north-west of the county.

The new urban frontiers in Co. Tipperary were, therefore, in the west and north at Clogheen, Tipperary, Roscrea and Nenagh. Most of the smaller fair foundations were also in these regions, marking the growing penetration of the formerly autonomous Gaelic heartlands by expanding commercial influences. In contrast, in the Old English core of the south and east of the county were located the older, more continuous and more durable urban worlds of Thurles, Fethard, Cashel, Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. These old towns exhibited both more complex physical



morphologies and social structures than the still rudimentary, if now thriving, fair towns of the north and west.

Under Ormond patronage, these southern towns had also played a critical and long-established marketing function in their regions. This in turn had also helped to sustain more elaborate rural settlement hierarchies in their hinterlands right throughout the later Middle Ages and down to the mid-seventeenth century.

The old inhabitants of the walled town of Fethard (originally part of the County of the Cross) had benefited greatly from the conditions of its surrender to Cromwell. Its population composition, therefore, reveals the least disruption by New English influences. Its urban landscape in the mid-seventeenth century was dominated by its two castles and walls, a magnificent parish church, at least three stone houses and 48 thatched houses, some lofts, three kill houses/butchers, a corn mill and a tucking mill.

With its old Augustinian priory and deanery functions, it was partially ecclesiastical in character. The Everards were the dominant landowners in the surrounding region and were the leading landlords in the town. Three Everards each in turn leased ten, nine and seven thatched houses within the town, and another Everard was a miller.

Again a strong artisan population is suggested by the surviving evidence for carpenters, weavers, gardeners and bakers. The town also boasts of at least two medical doctors and some merchants - all members of an urban sub-culture whose daily and yearly rhythms and lifestyles increasingly diverged from those of the countryside, giving even a small settlement such as Fethard a distinctive urban flavour.⁶

Carrick and Thurles were the two most important Butler towns in the south and east of the county - each commanding an important stretch of rich riverine lowlands of the Suir valley. Carrick occupied a funnel point on the lower Suir, strategically commanding access along the great Waterford-Limerick corridor. This walled town with its quays, barges and boatmen functioned in part, at least, as a hinge between the port of Waterford and its extensive overseas connections and the large inland county town of Clonmel.

Its whole aspect was dominated by the then Earl of Ormond's thirty-hearth Tudor mansion house to the east of the town - the symbol of both the administrative power of the Earl and the wealth which flowed into this house and town from his Tipperary and Kilkenny manors. To the west of the town was his deerpark, and the evidence suggests that after the Restoration much of this well-planned and well-managed town was actually owned by the now Duke of Ormond.

Previously, it had seen its Franciscan friary and Augustinian priory dissolved and a castellated garrison built on the site of the latter. Its intimate corporate life was centred on trade along the river, on its crucial bridging functions and on its fairs and markets.⁷The hearth money records not only provide details of its smiths, brogmakers and weavers (in what was by now a growing woollen town) but also includes such characters as the hatter and the potter.

It also emerges that there is a striking balance between Irish and Old English merchants families in a town which lived under the shadow of the hills of south-east Tipperary, South Kilkenny and West-Waterford. The Neales - relatives of the landed branches of the family - were a leading family here, as were representatives of the Ward, Reilly, Breen and Headen families, all of which occupied substantial houses. The Waddings - with a long history of churchmen in the family - were the leading Old English representatives.

Thurles was equally a Butler town and even more emphatically an Old English one, as only three of its twenty leading families bore Irish names - Ryan (five hearths), Cormack and Corkeran with two hearths each. The hearth money records suggest a division of the urban area into three parts. The core area of the medieval town commanded the large market square, which in turn was



dominated by the turreted castle, bawn and house of fifteen hearths owned by Lady Thurles, by Mr. James Butler's castle with ten hearths and with other houses (some of tower-house character) with three or more hearths dominated by the leading Old English merchants families of Purcell (two), Power, Fitzgerald, Coogan, Walsh, Hackett (two), Marnell and Brown.

Indeed, in this core area of the town, over half of the total number of houses were taxed for more than one fireplace. A second more extensive but less prosperous section is described as "Over the Bridge" to the east. This area appears to be the main artisan quarter within the walls, with its kilns, forges, ovens, as well as the house of miller John Headen. The western suburbs, described as "Without the Gates" of the walled town, also contained a large number of houses, all but three of which were taxed for a single hearth. This was, therefore, the poorer part of the town.

Like all these Butler towns, it has also seen its Carmelite monastery dissolved and its lands transferred to the secular lord. This ancient Butler manor thus commanded a rich parish hinterland - the names of its townsmen reflecting the easy intermingling between town and countryside. The town benefited from the profits emanating from two fairs and a market every Saturday. It had two eel weirs and commanded a strategic crossing point for the upper Suir region.

The two most dominant urban centres of mid-seventeenth County Tipperary were quite clearly the episcopal city of Cashel and the county town of Clonmel - symbolising the twin pillars of power in the late medieval/early modern transitional period. One was the powerhouse of the Church in the region and the capital of the County of the Cross, and the other the centre piece of the County Palatinate, and the administrative and legal core of the county.

A vast literature testifies to the wealth of the walled city of Cashel with its many gates - including that of St. Nicholas, our Lady's and Canafoys (a corruption of *Ceann na faiche*) - symbolising its great centrality, not just in Tipperary but also in a Munster and, indeed, Irish context.⁸ Its Rock had been a focal point for tribute and rents for a thousand years.

The surrounding parish of St. Patrick's Rock contained twelve castle/towerhouses and important settlements at Ballydoyle, Leinstown, St. Patrick's Rock, Camus, St. Dominick's Abbey and Brittas - a wealthy "suburban" zone dominated by Cashel merchants. The hearth money records do not distinguish between the sections of the town; but quite clearly there were a number of important streets in this city whose parish was called after St. John.

Of the 22 old wealthy families in the city, 12 were of old English and 10 of Irish extraction. Of the latter, the prestigious ecclesiastical family of the Kearneys - collectors for the Cathedral of Cashel of St. Patrick's dues in Munster - were most conspicuous. Their cultural position in this mid-seventeenth century town is suggested by their use of the prefix "Fitz" in the family name.

The Archbishop was, of course, also a powerful landowner, commanding a rich hinterland. Even apart from Cashel's powerful administrative functions at the diocesan/archdiocesan and "County of the Cross" levels, Cashel also had its Wednesday and Saturday markets, and a two-day fair held twice a year on "The great Green of the City". The hearth money records also testify to the greater sophistication of its citizenry - which included important churchmen, county officials and legal men, as well as its merchants, millers, joiners, tailors, smiths (four), bakers (seven ovens) and kilns - the latter used in the many malt houses and brew-houses.

The most dominant figure was the new Archbishop of the Established Church, Thomas Perch, who lived in his eleven-hearth mansion. The 1641 depositions highlight the significant influx of New English settlers into this episcopal town long before the Cromwellian settlement.

At the apex of the whole settlement system was the county town of Clonmel. Its 1655 Court of Survey still testifies - despite the traumas of the previous 15 years - to the richness and complexity of the county capital just as it passed into Cromwellian control:



The sd. Towne of Clonmell is situated on the north side of the River Sewir, in the County of Tipperary And is walled about with a stone wall of Lyme and stone, with several Turrets, & hath the Accommodation of a stone bridge together with two Greist mills on the same; and had the conveniency of three suburbs Vizt. The East Suburbs extending to the lane called Bohir Mullinne parky, containeing fifty & cabbins or thereabouts with Garden plots & three Weires likewise three houses & Gardens wch. leadeth from the sd. East Suburbs unto the North Suburbs The sd. North Suburbs consisting of fowerteen houses or thereabouts with gardens & from the sayd North Suburbs, there was a lane inclosed all along with Gardens & oarchards leading unto. the west suburbs, wch suburbs consisted of eighty houses or thereabouts. Whereof six were good slate houses & one Mill, And ye sayd suburbs did extend from the west gate to a lane called BoRinenenardchysy comonly called Cheiferentlane. The sd. Towne had the priviledges of followinge Vizt. By Charter granted them in the yeare 1608 They weare to make choyce of twenty men for their councill, and out of the twenty they were to elect a Mayor & two Bayliffes about Mid-Summer & sweare them at Michellmas together with a Recorder There was likewise a Court of Record once a fforthnight or Accordinge as occasion served to determine any difference betwixth party and party for any sume or sumes or other causes or actions; There were alsoe ffower Deere hundred Courts every yeare, A Court Leete twice a yeare, A Court Barron once a yeare, A Pye powder Court as often as occasion served, & the Mayor of the Towne for the time being was alwayse Coroner Sealemar & Justice of the Peace & quorum for the County of Tipperary, & had three Sarieants to attend him with Mases, a sword, & a swoord bearer. A common seale of office & a Capp of Maintenance. There was a Clarke of the Market belonging to the sd. towne & ye Maior for the time being did receive custome from every stranger that passed over the Bridge with Carriage or Cattle, & there was likewise a common sellar keyage and boateage to receive strangers goods as they came from or went to Waterford, & a markett twice a weeke vizt upon Tuesdays & saturdayes.⁹

In 1640 its burgage property owners included the lord of the Palatine County, the Earl of Ormond, 20 Clonmel merchants of Anglo-Norman descent, including seven leading members of the White family and three Walls, and also seven merchants with Irish surnames. Its strategic regional importance is suggested by the presence in this list of burgesses of three landowners from other areas in South Tipperary and three merchants from the City of Waterford.

Other institutions which highlight its regional role and its much higher status functions included a free school, a hospital, "County Gaole and Town Hall built over the same situated neere the middle of the Towne now in good repayre",¹⁰ Guild Hall, Courthouse, a house of Correction, and the Butchers' Shambles. Likewise "the good and lawfull men formerly inhabitants of the sd. Towne" who gave evidence to the Court of Survey indicated the range of functions carried out by the old merchant class which included James Brenock, Apothecary and John Dwyer, Glover.

The material wealth of the core of the town is suggested by the fact that close on a quarter of the houses were taxed for more than two hearths. On the other hand, by 1665-6 two-thirds of these wealthy merchants were New Cromwellians. James Brenock, Apothecary now lived in "The Thatcht house in the West suburbs". Similarly, "a small parcel of land neare the Gibbett hill without the North gate of the sd. towne belonged to the Corporation afforesd. time out of minde one part whereof [the displaced] Victor White, Daniel Molloghan, MLaghlin Skehane, Micheall Kott & Edward Purcell have lately built cabbins".¹¹

The repercussions of the Cromwellian conquest were therefore reverberating with great force throughout the old county capital of Clonmel, sorting out the populations into their new social and



territorial positions. From this conquered capital, *via* Dublin and London, flowed a whole series of changes which in the end left no townland in County Tipperary untouched or no persons unchanged.

FOOTNOTES

1. 'Fairs and Markets 1338-1773': *Record of the Rolls*, 14, 139, National Archives, Dublin.
2. R.C. Simington (ed.): *The Civil Survey A.D. 1684-1656 County of Tipperary*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1931-4).
3. T. Laffan (ed.): *Tipperary families: being the hearth money records for 1665-6-7*, (Dublin, 1911). The comparative perspective in this paper for mid-seventeenth century Tipperary as a whole is based mainly on the detailed returns of the hearth money records and those of the Civil Survey. For a general analysis of County Tipperary at this time see W.J. Smyth: "Property, patronage and population - reconstructing the human geography of mid-seventeenth century Tipperary", in W. Nolan (ed.), *Tipperary: History and Society* (Dublin, 1985), pp. 104-138.
4. A.D. Gallwey: 'Proprietors of Fethard Co. Tipperary 1651-63', *The Irish Genealogist*, 6(1), 1980, pp.5-8.
5. W.P. Burke: *History of Clonmel* (Waterford, 1907), pp. 247-255.
6. Gallwey, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-8.
7. P.C. Power: *Carrick-on-Suir and its people* (Dún Laoghaire, 1976), pp. 45-63.
8. See especially the Ordnance Survey Letters for County Tipperary in manuscript form in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.
9. R.C. Simington: *The Civil Survey*, Vol. 1, pp. 385-6. (Burke's *History of Clonmel* (see note 5 above) is the classical study of this great county town. See especially pp. 60-111, and pp. 214-262, for detailed material and insights on the complex history of seventeenth-century Clonmel).
10. *Ibid.* p. 387.
11. *Ibid.* p. 388.

