lican Church to serve the needs of a small, vulnerable and scattered community. The picture that emerges upholds all the hallmarks of medieval territorial organisation with its combination of far-flung and miniscule parishes, enclaves and detached portions, oddments and fragments. As stressed in Chapter 1, there was a strong element of village centrality in terms of the locational attributes of parish churches but equally it must be emphasised that many churches were placed incongruously relative to the territories they served. All this came to represent the lost world of medieval Christianity and early modern Catholicism, and while the loss of the parochial net did not mean a great deal since it was progressively less well adapted to contemporary needs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the simultaneous loss of so many old churches – rich in ritual, functional and associational meaning – struck right at the heart of Limerick Catholicism.
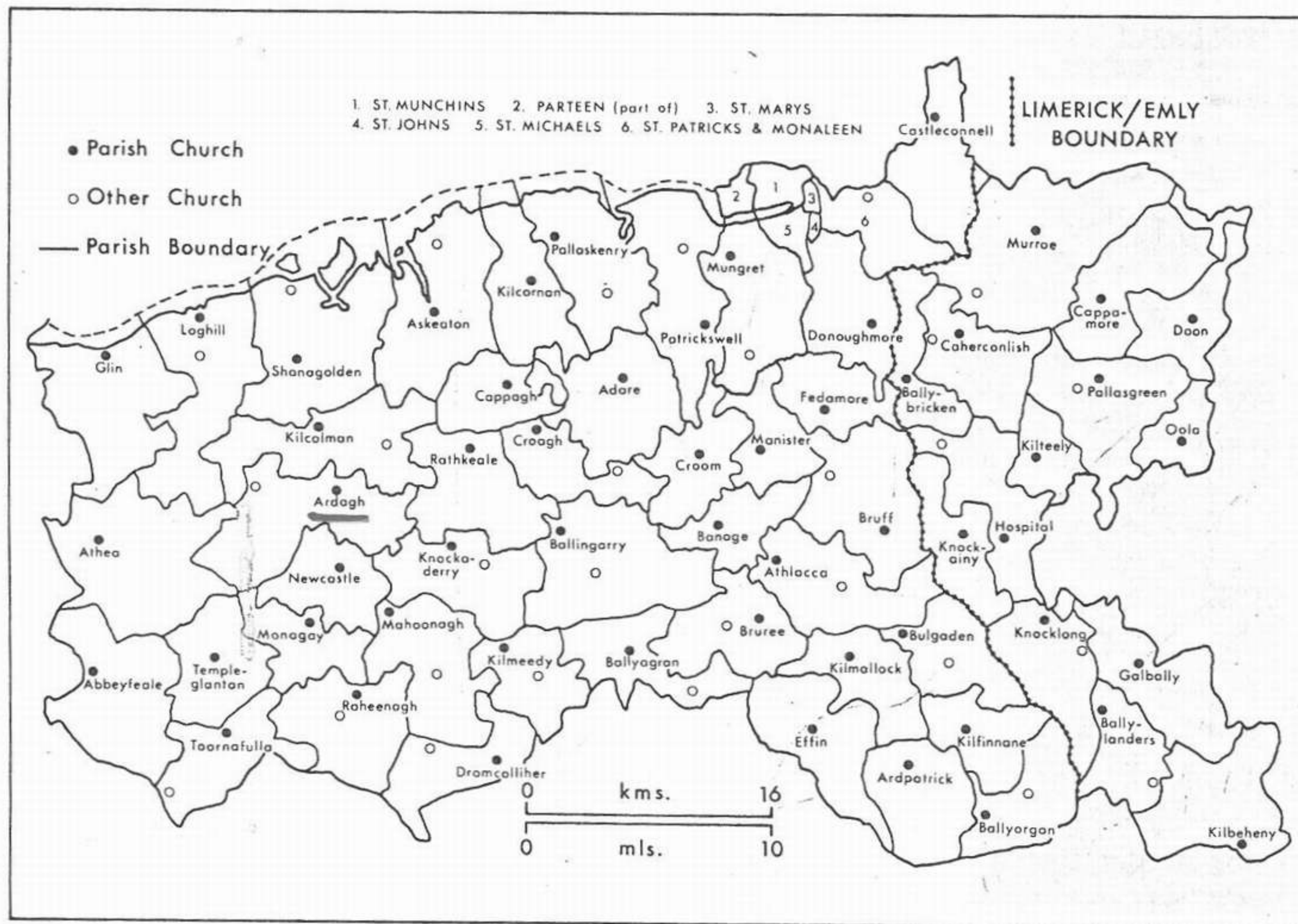

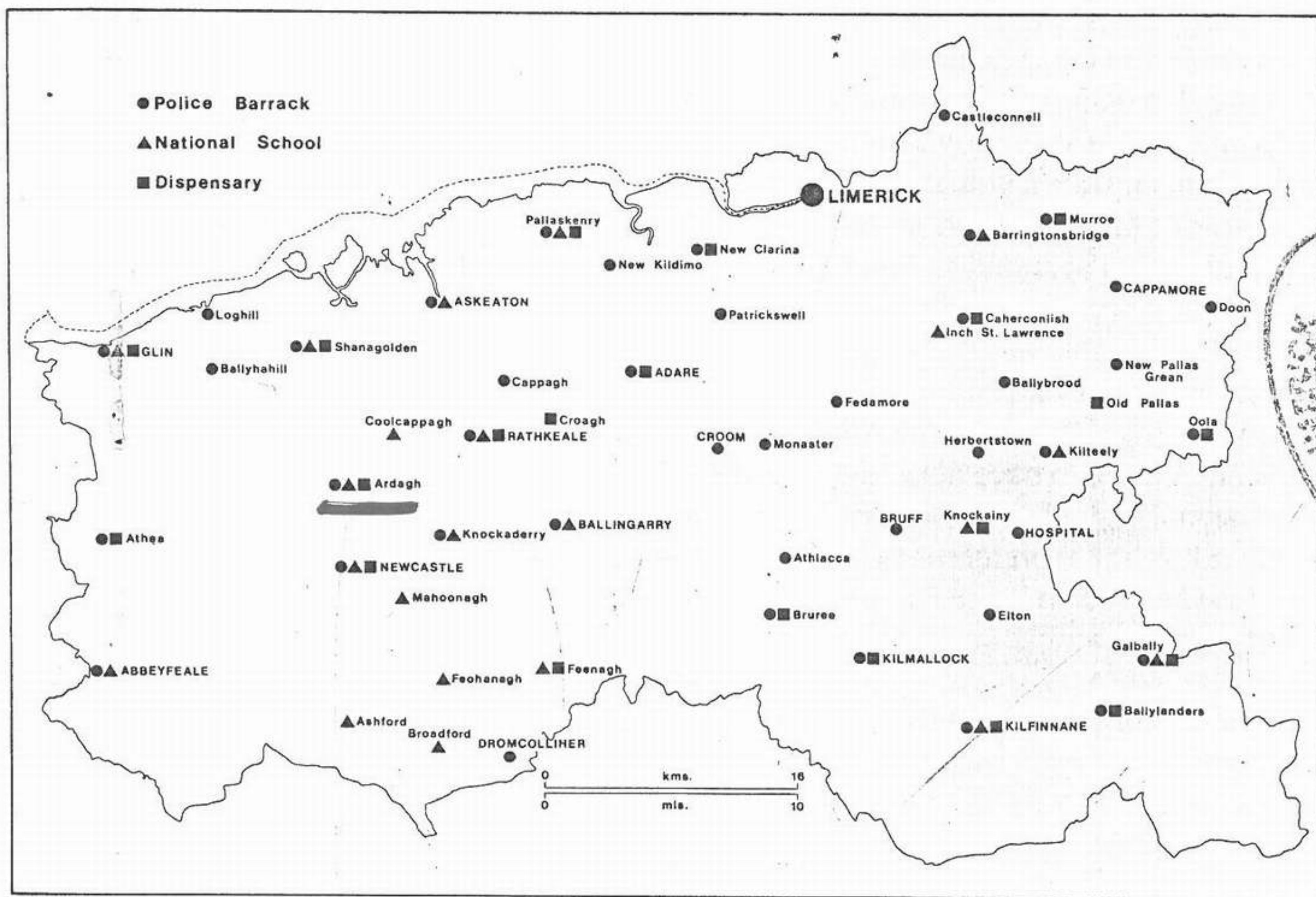Fig. 7.7. Catholic parishes, parish centres and chapels-of-ease.

Fig. 7.3. Modernising markers of town and village life circa 1840.

more vigorous higher order centres. Foremost among the casualties was Kilmallock which, as we have seen in Chapter 4, had proved to be a loser on many major counts. In eight other places, however, the designation of market town was deeply value laden, not only in social and economic terms but also as a symbol of status. Similar values, material and immaterial, attached to the designation of post town, of which there were 16 *circa* 1840, along with connections by way of the penny post to seven satellite settlements. The post stood for medium and message as literacy levels rose and outside connections were forged. In all of this the role of the maturing central place was pivotal. One other marker of centrality which concerned the local implementation of the law had become thoroughly rationalised by *circa* 1840. In this case petty sessions on a weekly or fortnightly basis acted as the medium whereby courts were convened at 16 centres throughout the county. Court day together with fair day, market day and post day magnified the role of central places and served to buttress modernising bonds between settlements and their hinterlands.

Turning to the area of provision on the part of the State, three modernising markers had

decline – Rathkeale (–58·5%), Askeaton (–64·6%), Ballingarry (–67·6%), Croom (–65·7%) and Adare (–56·4%) – were those which serviced the increasingly grassy but much less populous plain of mid Limerick, where dairying took an unprecedented hold and emigration continued in uneven spurts. In part some of these towns along with others were saved by the fact that while they declined, villages and clusters declined even more.

Fig. 6.8. shows this latter feature clearly, and at worst it caused the virtual demise of no less than 1 I of the 50 settlement nucleations which appeared in the 1841 census of population but which failed to do so in the enumeration of 1901, when a cluster of at least 20 inhabited
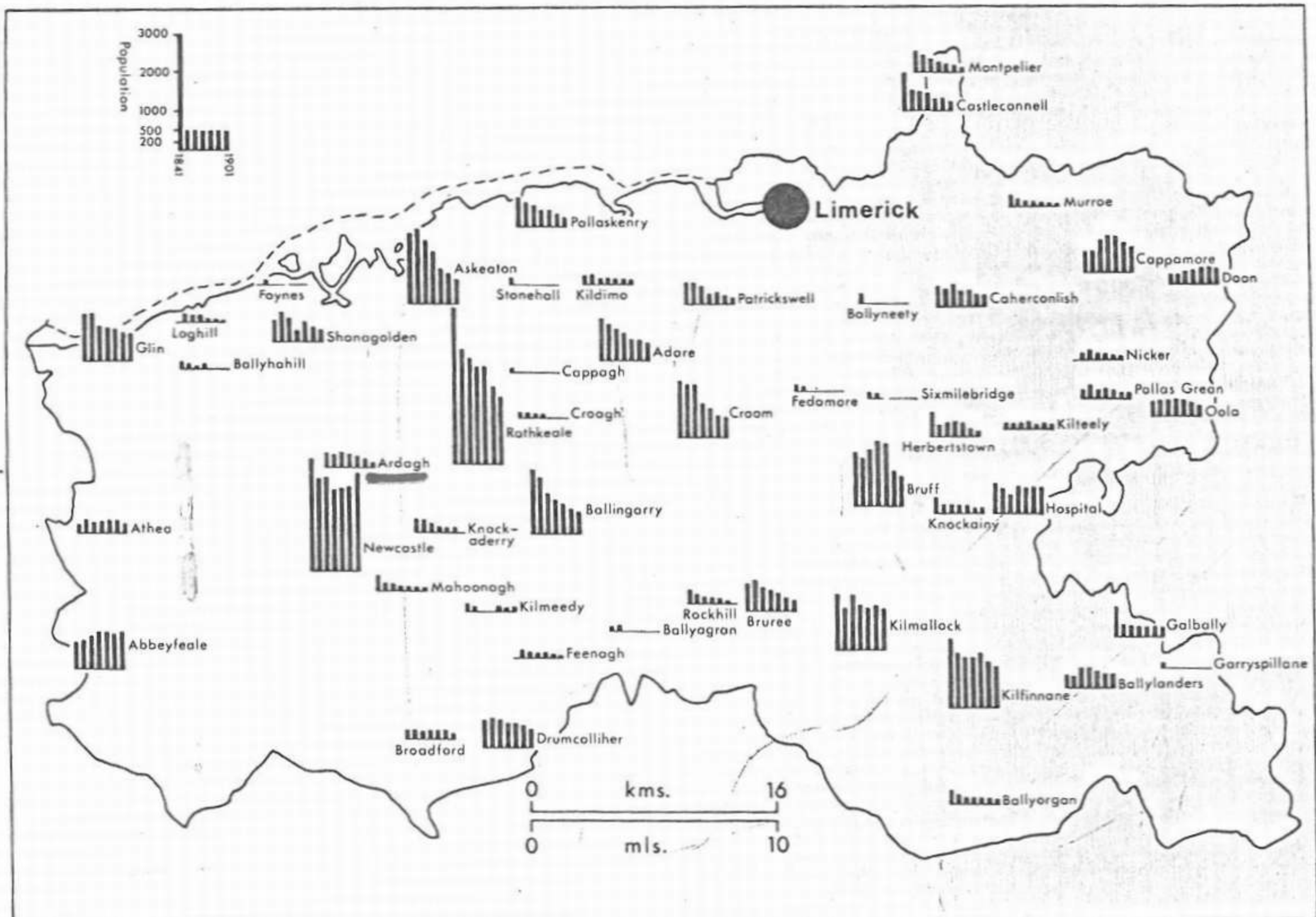

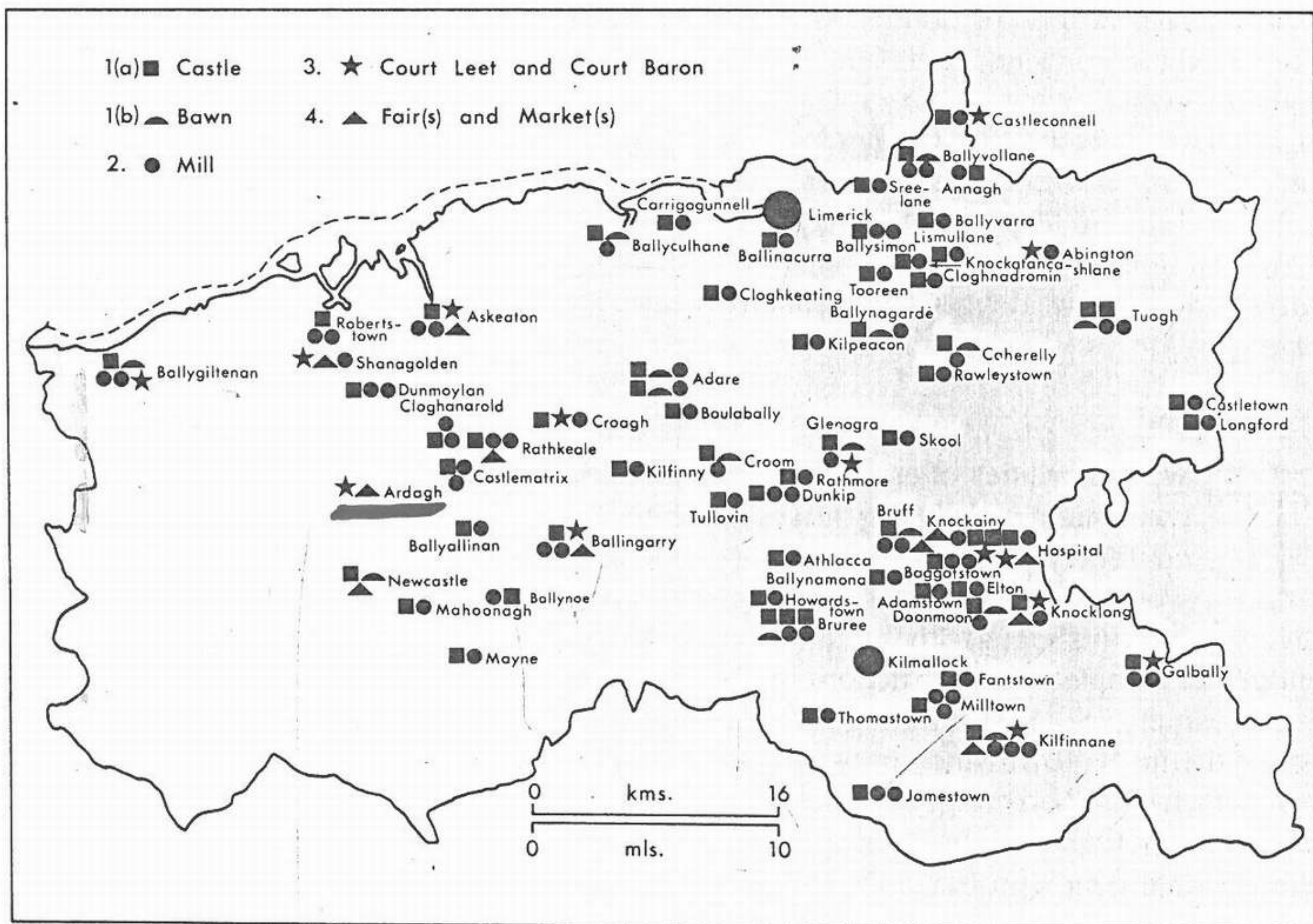Fig. 6.8. Population trends in towns and villages, 1841-1901.

Legend:
- 1(a) ■ Castle
- 1(b) ▲ Bawn
- 2. ● Mill
- 3. ★ Court Leet and Court Baron
- 4. ▲ Fair(s) and Market(s)

Fig. 2.1. The villages of county Limerick 1654-6.

meedy, even though both had already struck roots and had acquired central place functions. A third problem posed by the Civil Survey relates to the difficulty in discerning the phenomenon of nucleation. From an examination of the Tipperary survey it has been noted that 'there is hardly a single case of the word village being applied specifically to a group of buildings'.(2) This observation similarly relates to the Limerick scene. As in Tipperary, what the survey does is to record the number of buildings to be found in a certain townland or townlands without any mention of the space relations between one building and another.

Despite the problems adumbrated above, fig.2.1. represents a tentative bid to plot the distribution of Limerick villages using the Civil Survey as source. The survey was studied with a view to selecting criteria which might be taken as pointers to the presence of settlement nucleations. Altogether, four such criteria could be identified with consistency from the Limerick volume. These emerged as follows: i) castle with or without an accompanying bawn, ii) mill, iii) fair/market and iv) privilege of court leet and court baron. No single criterion