

	Rathkeale	Newcastle	Askeaton	Kilfinnane	Ballingarry	Croom	Kilmallock	Bruff	Glin	Adare	Hospital	Dromcolliher	Abbeyfeale	Cappamore
Post Office	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
National School	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Police Barracks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Court House	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Dispensary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓	
Fever Hospital	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓				
Workhouse	✓	✓					✓							

Table 6.3. Service provision in Limerick towns circa 1840.

At this time too the British colonial apparatus in Ireland made one last concerted effort to invest towns with the architecture of authority. In mid Limerick the embattled town of Bruff yields a fine example in the gaunt but massive constabulary barracks which was emplaced towards the head of the Main Street alongside the fair green, the courthouse and the Catholic chapel (plate 6.9.). This type of assemblage framed in space a drive for nodality on the part of Church and State and people. Viewed in another way, it also connoted the powerful undercurrents that bedevilled a polarised society. At Rathkeale the architecture of authority was proclaimed in the courthouse replete with bell tower which stood out boldly in the Market Square (plate 6.10.), and at Adare and Newcastle courthouses of cut limestone came to occupy prominent locations from 1840 and 1842 respectively. However, the greatest effort in provision and in building pertained to the broad area of public health. In particular, the institutions that served to implement the Poor Relief Act of 1838 took on the utmost significance at a time when privation and poverty walked the land, and of all the relevant structures it was the workhouse which counted most and loomed largest at town's edge. Initially, the towns of Rathkeale, Newcastle and Kilmallock were furnished with workhouses in accordance with their status as centres of administrative divisions known as Poor Law Unions. Later in 1850 a repartition of the county resulted in the creation of two further unions in which Glin and Croom served as centres, and workhouses at both locations were completed by 1852. The workhouse ushered in a harrowing epoch for the destitute poor within its sphere, but at the same time it counted significantly in so far as it enhanced nodality and injected capital into the faltering economic life of some towns. All of this is apparent from early records that covered such areas as the procuration of building materials, inmate capacity and intake, the direct employment generated and the day-to-day provision of food, fuel and other materials from a variety of local sources.⁽³⁵⁾ Workhouses usually rimmed the more disreputable flanks of a town, and behind their highly stylised and dour facades, conditions deteriorated as successive layers unfolded. At the rear, kept as far as possible out of sight and out of mind, the paupers' graveyard signalled the ultimate in grim progression and in such places a solitary stone cross may be the only landscape token to stir a memory bank of humiliation (plate 6.11.). To-day these crosses in their forlorn state of abandonment recall a time when government first sought to provide the crudest of welfare services from a network of central places throughout Ireland.

The contributions of Church and State stiffened the functional backbone of towns in rapidly changing times which saw for one thing a considerable refocusing in Irish life on to the larger centres of population. The town became the centre of the local community to an extent that it never had been before as the dual themes of social provision and rural centrality took on a growing significance in the emergent new Ireland from *circa* 1850 onwards.⁽³⁶⁾ However, this did not happen because towns grew in size. On the contrary, as the Limerick experience shows, most towns endured a marked contraction in population (fig. 6.8.) and a continuing decline in manufacturing strength. Considerable reorientation was necessary for survival and the settlements which endured as towns were those which capitalized best on the forward linkages from farming and serviced best the needs of the farming community. Thus there was irony in the fact that the importance of the towns for rural people should become greater at a time when their vitality exhibited major symptoms of decline. Outdistancing everything else loss of population impacted crucially as fig. 6.8. shows in respect of Limerick towns, 1841-1901. All with the exception of the nascent growth centres of Abbeyfeale and Cappamore registered a cumulative loss over the period and the towns to show by far the greatest rates of 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 11 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

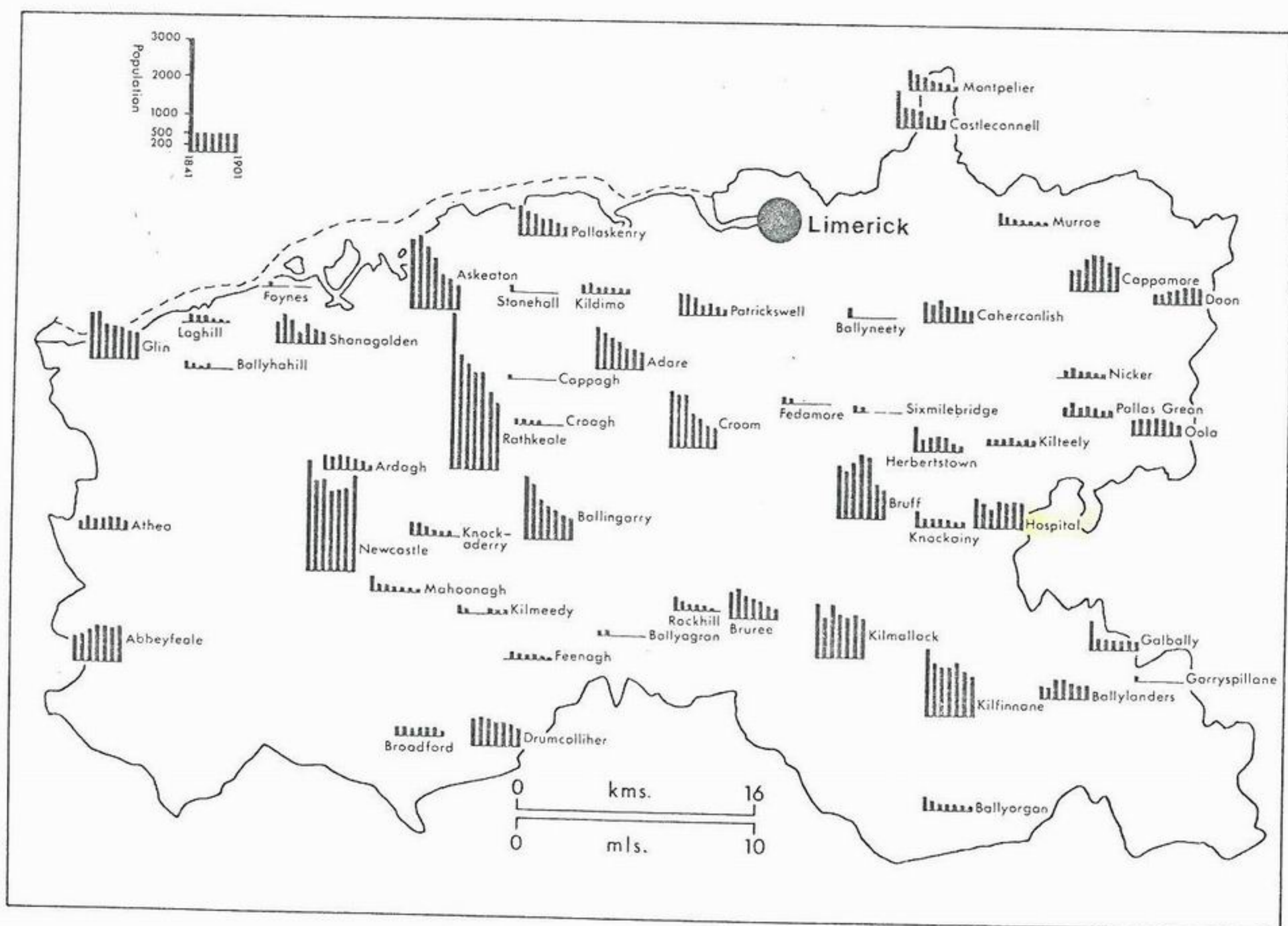


Fig. 6.8. Population trends in towns and villages, 1841-1901.

ery shops had been established,⁽⁵⁵⁾ and while it never amounted to very much subsequently, it has nevertheless helped to ensure that Old Pallas took on a blighted look and shrivelled for want of trade. As early as 1840 the same process had reached an advanced stage on the Limerick-Askeaton road where New Kildimo (Kenry) had already eclipsed its older and by-passed counterpart. At that time the new village contained 32 houses and boasted an occupational range that included police, publicans, shoemakers, carpenters, a baker and a smith. Old Kildimo on the other hand had dwindled to a total of 21 houses, and only its ability to retain the anchors of chapel and school has since kept the threat of extinction at bay. Some 3 miles further to the west the village of Stonehall was not so fortunate even though it contained 36 houses and numbered hucksters, shoemakers, tailors, carpenters and a publican among its household heads in 1840. However, it failed to last at a demesne edging in hard times when patronage died and its chapel deserted to the main Limerick-Askeaton-Glin road in an eager quest for nodality. No new village of Stonehall emerged in this instance, but elsewhere 'New Clarina village' and the youthful port of Foynes (Shanid) had crystallised by 1840, and these along with New Kildimo keenly attest to the village generating ability of the trunk line leading westwards out of the city of Limerick.

It is axiomatic that critical relationships were forged between villages and roads. Indeed sometimes the road acted as a determinant and one good illustration from county Limerick comes by way of the village of Oola (Coonagh) which was straightened, lengthened and re-orientated so as to synchronise with a stretch of the mail coach road from Limerick to Tipperary town in the early nineteenth century. The rectilinear mould then set has endured, and to-day Oola still lacks any depth behind its main street facade. In an utterly different type of situation the same point may be made in relation to Mountcollins (Glenquin) – a curvilinear growth which evolved late at the hilly south-western rim of the county. Here another 'new line' gave an orientation to the settlement structure as it developed, and the centrality of the roadway has remained so deeply etched in the mind of the countryman that he would still in the 1970s proffer the catchphrase 'I am going to the road' rather than say 'I am going to the village'⁽⁵⁶⁾. Sometimes roads were consequential developments which might decisively influence the fortunes of a village. A good example is provided by the western hill village of Athea (Shanid) which shows up on an estate map of 1710 but which only came into its own in the 1830s when patterns of movement along the Listowel-Rathkeale turnpike road gelled with those emanating from the direction of either Glin or Abbeyfeale. Here in the dip of the western hills Athea became a fully-fledged nodal centre and as a result its prospects improved significantly. All was very different on the far side of the county in the old hillside village of Knockainy (Smallcounty). This was a village simply left high and dry in the era of arterial road planning, and it withered in close proximity to the town of Hospital where all the roads that counted, met.

Of all the contributions that shaped village development in nineteenth century Limerick the most resolute undoubtedly came from the Catholic Church. On the side of conservation it is conceivable that villages such as Knockainy might have disappeared altogether were it not for their continuance as parish centres of a re-vamped Church while at the cutting edge the Church and its associated institutions displayed the capacity to make a striking contribution to village fabric, form and function. Many cases might be cited to exemplify the latter point but the best is unquestionably Doon (Coonagh) lying within the diocese of Emly on the borderlands between Limerick and Tipperary. This was a village where Catholic power was put on display and no doubt the muscularity of that display grew out of a counteraction to concerted attempts at proselytism by members of the Protestant community. Earlier on in the century the insidious threat of proselytism had caused endowed schools to be closed due to opposition from the parish priest, but the most spectacular drive came at a time of desperation from 1845-54, when no less than six proselytising societies, English and Irish, formed a

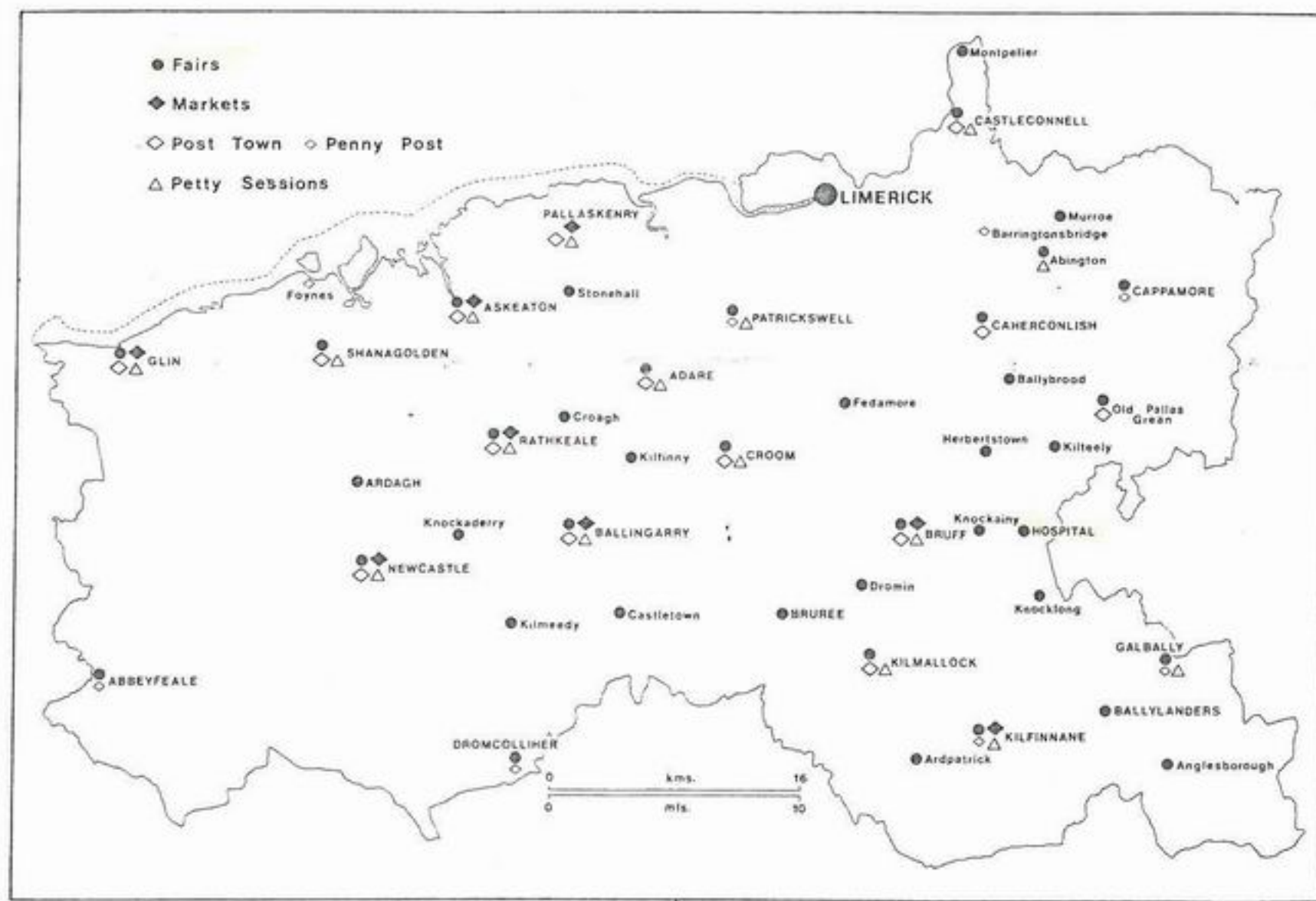


Fig. 7.2. Mechanisms of trade and/or markers of centrality circa 1840.

but by then the tendency for more fairs to be held in fewer centres was well established. All but seven fairs were being conducted at central place venues and all but a trifling amount of trade was being generated in such settings.

Year	No. of locations	Town/village locations	Total no. of fairs	No. in towns/villages	% of total in towns/villages
1787	50	33	147	102	69
1850	63	42	238	175	74
1900	30	25	182	175	96

Table 7.1. The changing thrust of livestock fair venues, 1787-1900.⁽²⁵⁾

Along with fairs other indicators of rural centrality had come to exhibit discernibly modern patterns and to connote a maturing of town and village life during the course of the nineteenth century. In making an evaluation, circa 1840 provides a useful benchmark, partly because of the wealth of evidence which becomes available around that time and partly because by then the State in working out its role among the mass of the population had sought provision from central places. Fig. 7.2. purports to show the towns and villages which possessed either mechanisms of trade, markers of centrality, or both. The virtual ubiquity of the fair is easily the most arresting feature to emerge but it should also be noted that this precocious pattern would not endure for much longer. In contrast, the spate of market patents of an earlier era had failed to stand the test of time, circumstance and competition and by circa 1840 the market as a generator of trading patterns had become unmistakably identified with the

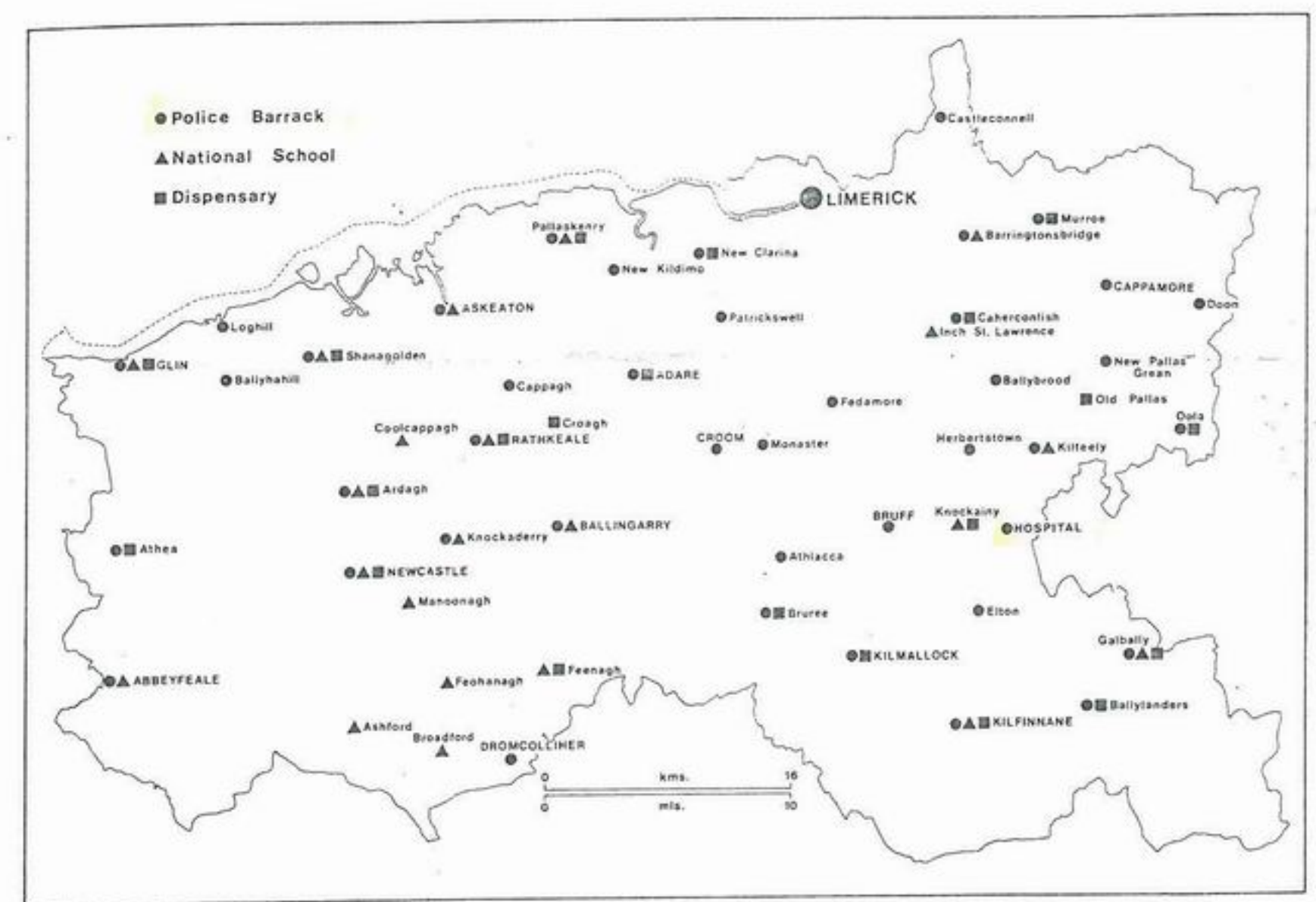


Fig. 7.3. Modernising markers of town and village life circa 1840.

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 registered a strong presence by circa 1840. These were the police barracks, the national school and the dispensary (fig. 7.3.). The near ubiquity of the first mentioned testifies to the comprehensive reconstruction of the police, detailed deployment, and by the 1830s much more concerted attempts than heretofore to preserve public order. Few barracks were located outside of central places while within them it was among the items which tended to cling to the more disreputable or self-consciously native sectors. In Ballingarry, Herbertstown and Elton, for example, the barracks was among a suite of features displaying fair green associations circa 1840 while in Galbally it fell firmly within the precincts of what was known locally as the Low Town. Barracks along with chapel firmed, each in its own way, authoritarian holds over society and although each stemmed from apart culture worlds, some remarkable appositions between the two are encountered in Limerick villages circa 1840. The best examples would include the then terminal village of Stonehall as well as living villages such

as Killeely, Cappamore, Ballylanders, Ballyhahill and Knockaderry. The second of the modernising markers which came in by way of State provision displayed a clear conjunction with the chapel in many instances and also a remarkable rate of diffusion by 1840, considering the controversy that such provision had engendered in the brief period since 1831.⁽²⁷⁾ In county Limerick at any rate it would appear that a reconstituted Church was actively seeking to make its own of State provision in education, so that territorial alliances between chapel and national school spanned all levels of the settlement hierarchy. The conjunction was just as clear in tiny precocious villages such as Inch and Coolcappa as in the chapel villages of Ashford and Feohanagh or in long rooted villages such as Ardagh and Knockainy or in towns such as Rathkeale and Ballingarry. Already by 1840 the new system had taken a firm hold and it went on to modernise by making major inroads into rates of illiteracy. The dispensary was the other marker to have achieved widespread currency in towns and villages where its presence signalled State involvement in the provision of rudimentary health services. In its case no clear locational preferences emerge so that siting ranged from main street in Shanagolden, to side street in Bruree, to Catholic institutional sector in Rathkeale. Health services for the mass of the population had been ushered in and congruent with a drive towards modernisation, each dispensary served its own, carefully defined, territory.

So far the constructive and progressive role of the central place settlements of Limerick has been stressed. It must also be emphasised that the same towns and villages acted as overt battlegrounds in a society which was bedevilled by internal fault lines and divided into pluralist strands. Recent historical research has highlighted the violent nature of Irish life anterior to the Famine, especially among those elements caught up in the painful process of modernisation.⁽²⁸⁾ However, such research has conferred less than the due emphasis on central places as magnets and as targets for conflict. Magnets and targets they most assuredly were and their drawing power for the articulation of violence was such that it may be interpreted as an index of growing centrality in Irish life as well as an obvious ploy on the part of participants to maximise effect. At the heart of much of the violence was a lashing out at the makers of change by the various agrarian collectivities from the 1760s onwards; an inveterate love of feuding and a commitment to clan and territory as epitomized by faction fighting; and a hardening of ethnic/religious cleavage as exemplified by sectarian conflict.

Violence engendered from all of these sources, separately or in concert as sometimes in the cases of agrarian collective action and sectarianism, maintained a high profile in Limerick towns and villages (fig. 7.4.). Effective documentation starts with the Whiteboy movement of the 1760s and in east Limerick at any rate, agrarian grievances were openly aired in urban arenas. The flashpoints then included Kilmallock, Hospital, Caherconlish, Kilfinnane and Bruff. Again in 1786, Bruff saw a visitation of the Whiteboys and in 1793 a new collective known as the Defenders made a simultaneous attack on Bruff and Kilfinnane, only to be driven out in the first instance and repulsed in the second. The next major episode was dominated by the Rockite movement which came to be spawned out of the harsh adjustments to the post 1815 depression and carried a potent mix of millenarian and sectarian as well as agrarian meanings.⁽²⁹⁾ Once again, the part assigned to Limerick town and village in the unfolding drama was significant. Firstly, handbills and broadsides distributed at central place gatherings such as fairs, races etc., served to activate millennial ideas and to stir sectarian feeling. As a result notes of millennial hope sounded in the towns, as instanced in a Limerick ballad of 1821, or in the song of sedition bellowing from a pub at Rathkeale in November 1824 which contained the punchline: 'We will wade knee-deep in Orange blood and fight for liberty'.⁽³⁰⁾ Secondly, a great deal of the anti-Protestant feeling engendered at this time of crisis was targeted in on central places where the sustainers of oppression such as parson, proctor, yeoman, soldier and policeman were concentrated, together with the accompanying totems of Protestantism. Cultures clashed bitterly and the most dramatic events would

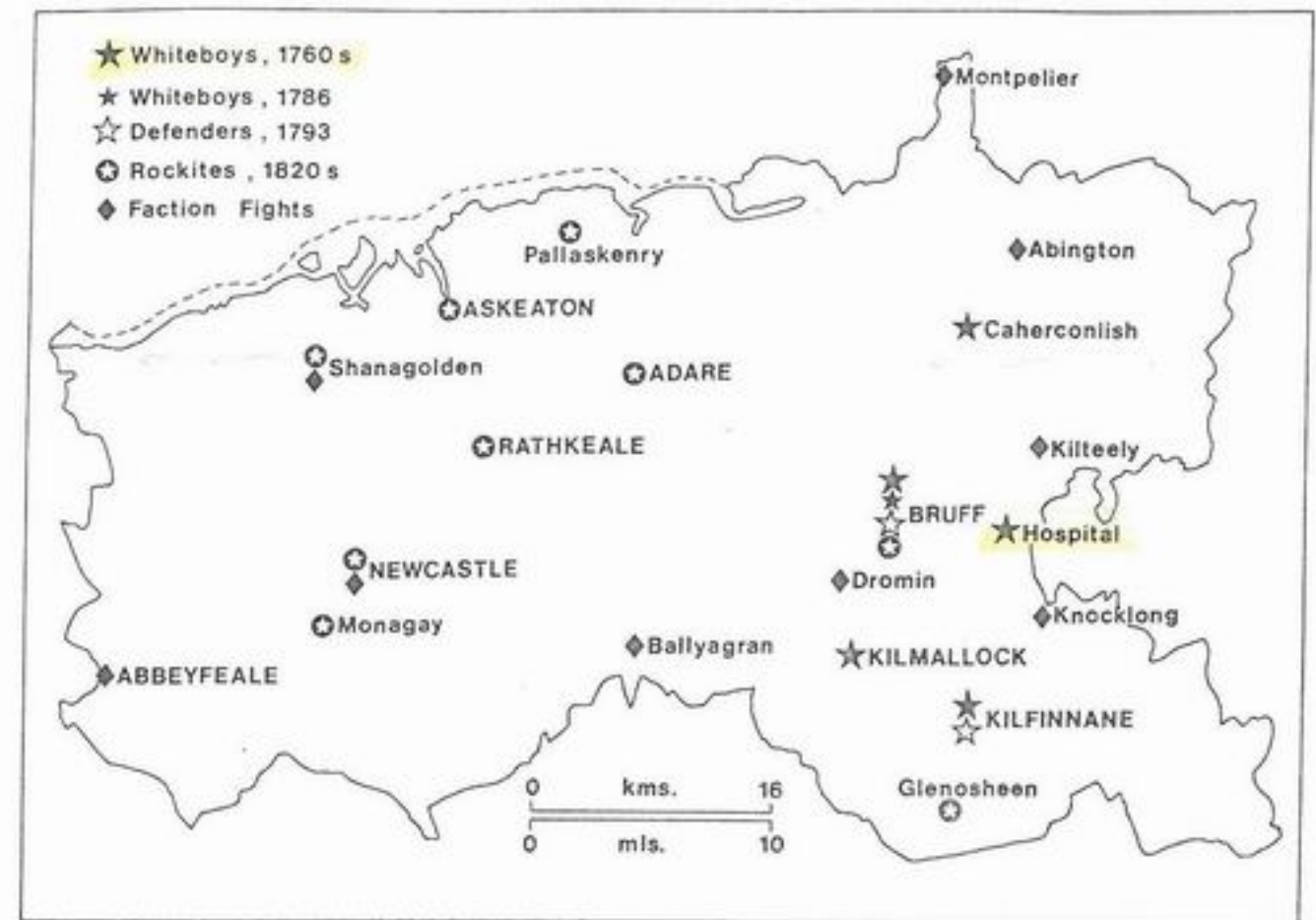


Fig. 7.4. Urban arenas of conflict, circa 1760 – circa 1830.

include a tithe affray at Askeaton and its chilling aftermath at Rathkeale; a faction fight at Abbeyfeale at which stones and Rockite invocations were hurled at intervening constables by members of both factions; and a Rockite onslaught against yeomen at Glenosheen which culminated in the torching of this Palatine hill village. At Pallaskenry a notice left behind for a Protestant resident after burning his out-offices spelt out the Rockite attitude toward soldiers and police:

'This is to show all hereticks the way that we will serve them, and to show them that they are not to put their trust in the Peelers or army, for when they are asleep, we will be awake, and let all the bloody Orangemen of Pallas know that we are preparing for them against the first of July, and let them not boast of the forty thousand, for this is the death they may all expect.'⁽³¹⁾

In the villages of Ballybrood and Athlacca the sectarian tenor of the movement was vented in the burning of their Anglican churches while other settlements to serve as arenas for conflict or resolution included Monagay, Newcastle, Shanagolden, Adare and the ever present Bruff. Indeed the constancy of the last named as an arena for conflict may be taken as evidence of the combative streak that coloured the rich farmland of mid county and although sectarianism had always played a part, societal fissures played the larger role. Here around Bruff class differences were so deeply ingrained into the fabric of society that as late as the 1860s strong farming households on the one side and their retinue of servants on the other, went to separate chapels for Sunday worship.⁽³²⁾ Earlier on in the century when times were charged, such ingrained differences had provided a basis for conflict.

Faction fighters too zoomed in on towns and villages whenever great assemblies were in session, and in Limerick most of the recorded encounters tied in with the peripatetic business of the fair. In this case effective documentation begins in the early nineteenth century when power conflicts between lineages were tending to displace the older, territorially based,

So traumatic was the blow to a shattered world that thereafter it was the people rather than the professional poets who began to sing of dispossession and the scribes came out of cabins rather than castles. Nevertheless, in this way, a vigorous literary tradition was sustained, especially in Munster. Here in the south, studies of counties Cork and Limerick show a close association between the upholding of scribal activity and the maintenance of a literary tradition with central places and their hinterlands.⁽⁵⁵⁾ There was little hidden about this Ireland in its heyday. For example, nothing could have been bolder than the sign over a public house in Croom which at mid eighteenth century proclaimed:

Níl fánaí ná sárfhear d'uaisle Gaoidheal,
Bráthair den dáimh ghlic ná suaircfhear groí,
I gcás a bheadh láithreach gan luach na dí
Ná beadh fáilte ag Séan geal Ó Tuama roimhe.⁽⁵⁶⁾

At best, therefore, pride, defiance and an absence of self-consciousness characterized the literate as opposed to the illiterate Irish Ireland.

Within county Limerick, fig. 7.5. shows the locations of surviving manuscripts in Irish in the period 1700-1900.⁽⁵⁷⁾ In all, 61 locations are plotted and extant material is of the order of 182 manuscripts. Thus county Limerick occupies a transitional role in Munster as between Cork on one side and Clare on the other which rank first and second respectively among the counties of Ireland in terms of their capacity to preserve evidence of scribal activity.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Fig. 7.5. poses a number of interpretative problems. On cursory examination it would appear that urban locations set within rural surrounds were linchpins in the production and the dissemination of materials, while by far the greater output emanated from the east of the county. However, a temporal as distinct from a composite spatial analysis reveals that all decades up to about 1820 produced both 'urban' and 'rural' scribal activity, the city itself being most prominent in the 1760s and 1770s. The persistence of this pattern to the 1820s would appear reasonable considering that the farther back we go the more difficult it must have been to

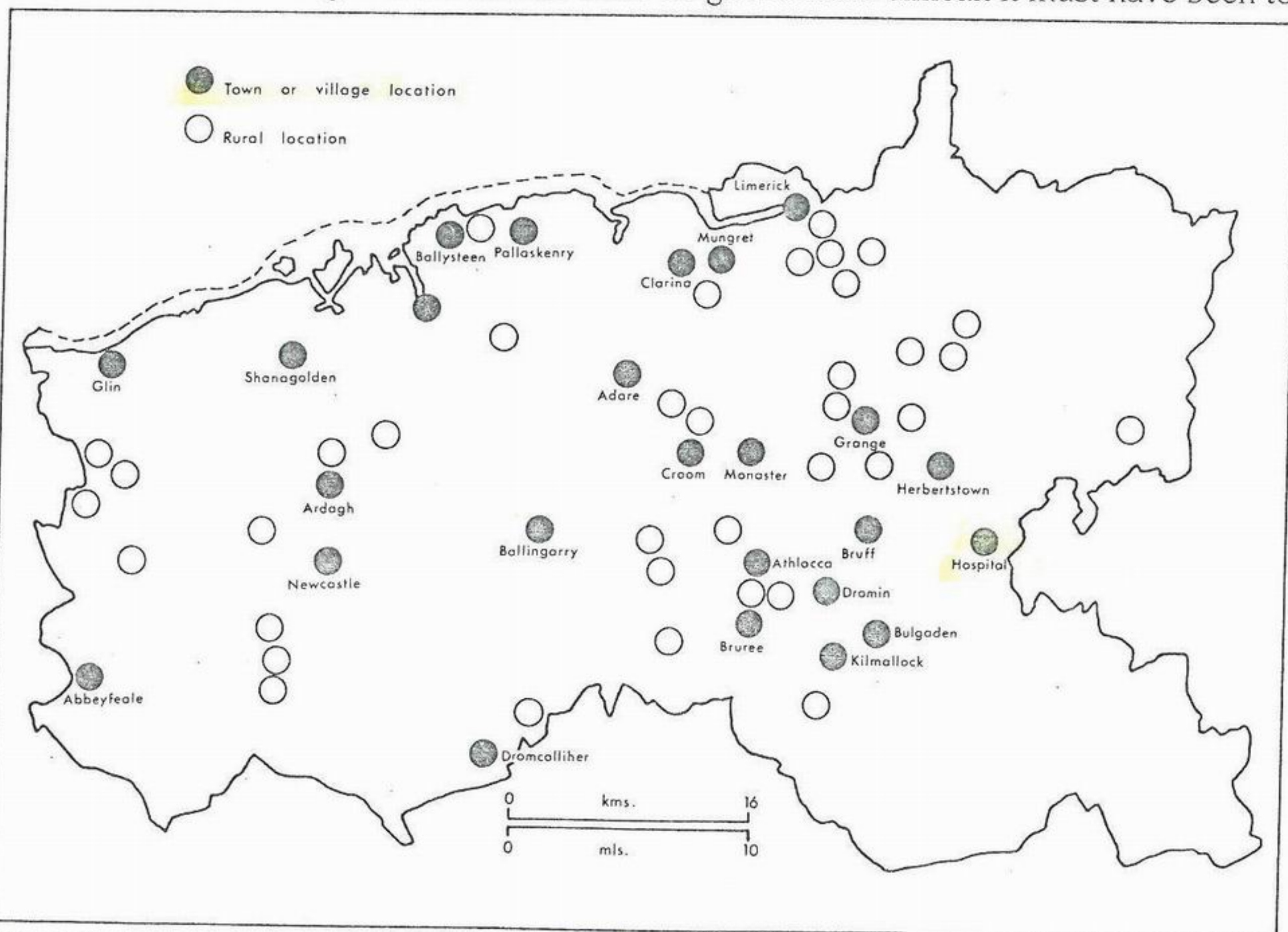


Fig. 7.5. Manuscripts in Irish, 1700-1900.

county Limerick, illegal or unregistered priests were presented at every assizes up to 1726 and sporadic persecution thereafter is signified by the fact that the parish priest of Rathkeale was declared an outlaw in 1758 after having allegedly given offence to a local landowner.⁽⁶¹⁾ Moreover, the Church not only had to contend with a state of political impotence which was imposed by the dictates of a colonial regime from without; it was also assailed from within by a rich vernacular sub-culture where violence, remissness and challenges to authority flourished. And yet in little more than a century, most things had changed utterly.

In seeking to demarcate the enormity of the change it is instructive to focus on two cartographic base-lines, one showing the old administrative framework which had been requisitioned by the State sponsored Anglican Church along with parochial centres, property and revenue; the other showing the structural metamorphosis achieved by the new Catholic Church after it had effectuated the Tridentine ideal of a religion centred upon 'the parish, the parish priest and the parish church.'⁽⁶²⁾ Fig. 7.6. shows the medieval parish net coming through into the early modern period *circa* 1600, and just as it was being adapted by the Anglican 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.

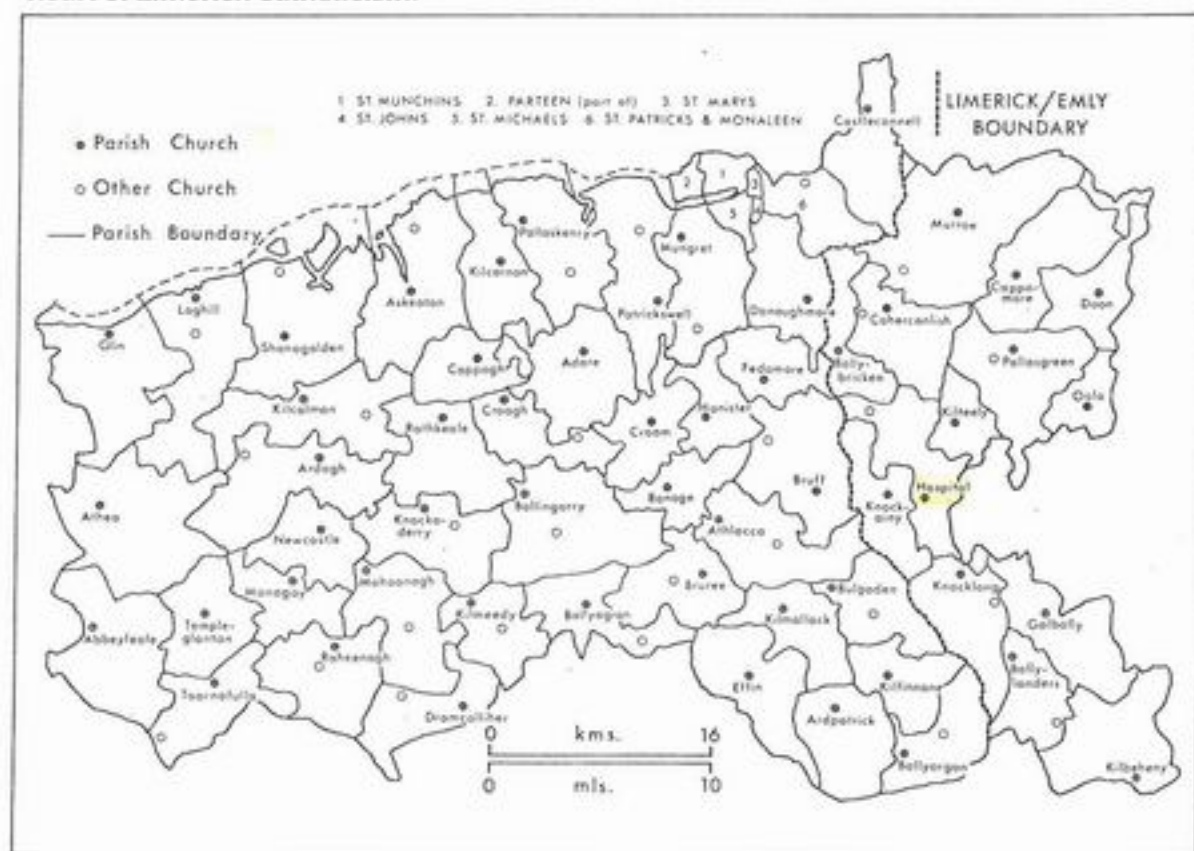


Fig. 7.7. Catholic parishes, parish centres and chapels-of-ease.

Fig. 7.7. shows the thoroughness with which a new Catholic world had come to be fashioned on the ground in county Limerick. Whereas before there had been 131 parishes forming a rather eccentric amalgam, there was now (*circa* 1870) only 65 struck along fastidiously rational lines.⁽⁶³⁾ The building of new and commodious chapels went hand in hand with the creation of new parish structures, and if we look more closely at fig. 7.7., certain conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, some radical changes had been effected in keeping with the modernising thrust of the Catholic Church in Ireland, and because the rising middle classes had provided impulsion traditional culture moulds were abandoned in favour of those best described as bourgeois.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The network was therefore rigidly utilitarian; the great bulk of its components circumscribed urban spheres at easy walking distance. Moreover, it is abundantly clear that Limerick's rich array of towns and villages had provided the cogs for the achievement of parish centrality. The commonest motif saw synchronisation between parish church and town or village within the confines of a single unitary parish. Some of the finest examples derive from the diocese of Emly in east Limerick where Cappamore, Doon, Oola, Killeely, Knockainy, Hospital, Galbally and Ballylanders might be enumerated. Next in line, the motif of dual foci centred upon town/village and village was the most prevalent. Examples are again widespread and in west Limerick alone the following pairings may be noted: Dromcolliher and Broadford; Feenagh and Kilmeedy; Croagh and Kilfinny; Raheenagh and Ashford; Tournafulla and Mount Collins; Ardagh and Carrigkerry; Castlemahon and Feohanagh; Kilcolman and Coolcappa; Knockaderry and Clouncagh; Loughill and Ballyhahill. Among the ten pairings no less than 13 chapel villages feature and this in itself attests to the powerful role of the Church in village germination and growth and in the maturation of village life. Last in line, the motif of chapel at parish centre without the succour of an accompanying village is extraordinarily rare in Limerick. The only clear-cut example is Ballybricken in the diocese of Emly.

Secondly, the new structure in all its facets proved acutely responsive to the changing dynamics of population and settlement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these circumstances there was little synchronisation between new and old parishes, the only replications being Abbeyfeale, Mahoonagh, Ballingarry and Knockainy, and significantly each of these was served from a centre with old urban roots. Everywhere else, novel arrangements were cobbled together, often through compounds of old parishes being given a bishop's imprimatur on the death of a parish priest.⁽⁶⁵⁾ However, in turning from the frame to the heart and hub of the modern Catholic parish in county Limerick, a striking degree of conformity between new and old is encountered. There was, of course, a significant reduction in the number of parish centres due to rationalisation. But notwithstanding this, conformity between the new and the old on the scale it is encountered throughout the Limerick lowland testifies both to the strength of the urban tradition and the depth of traditional sentiment in a part of Ireland where Gaelic and Norman life achieved the best fusion and was the least disrupted by later interjections. The new Church, therefore, avidly sought to re-occupy or to conjoin with old holy sites in towns and villages and among a highly impressive list, the best examples would include Abbeyfeale, Dromcolliher, Kilmeedy, Ardagh and Ballysteen from west county, Adare, Donaghmore, Croom, Athlacca and Colmanswell from mid county, and Inch St. Lawrence, Killeely, Knockainy, Hospital and Galbally from east county. The search for conjunction with, or re-occupation of, the old holy ground proved to be a continuing one. At Croagh, for example, the later nineteenth century chapel forsook the backroad to relocate alongside the old parish centre on the main road and at Mahoonagh the recently built chapel moved back to identify with a site having long-standing Christian associations. Along with sentiment there was a strong streak of pragmatism in the Limerick Church, a point well illustrated in the north-east of the county where the parish net was rationalised at the hands of the Archbishop of Cashel and rising villages such as Murroe and Cappamore replaced older alien-