

Fig. 7.8. Town and village based places of worship of the leading Churches circa 1840.

cans similarly embarked on an ambitious church building programme in the early nineteenth century but while Catholic activity was imbued with a sense of destiny that of the Anglicans counted for nothing more than a hollow symbolic gesture. Indeed the hollowness of the gesture is nowhere better illustrated than at Bruree where the Anglican church, upon occupying the old parish centre in 1812, displayed what can only be called the 'architecture of retrenchment' by presenting a blank external wall to its own parishioners. The world of Catholicism on the other hand was in a buoyant mood; the only significant blotch being a patchy attendance pattern at Sunday Mass.⁽⁷⁰⁾ But this in no sense meant that the people were not devout as attendance at Sunday Mass had yet to become established as the criterion of the practising Catholic.⁽⁷¹⁾ In the end it was the Famine which smoothed the way to universal Mass attendance on Sundays, firstly through removing the most dedicated adherents to vernacular religious practices and secondly through providing an energetic, Rome-oriented clergy with much more malleable material on which to work.

From the 1850s on the Catholic Church in county Limerick and in the country generally adopted a much higher profile than heretofore and succeeded in penetrating deeply into the fibre of town and village life. Moreover, in a rapidly modernising society, the Church of the great majority pivoted around a largely urban based world. It was thus in a position to powerfully influence the maturing qualities of town and village life and it did so in congruity with the tone of the new bourgeois Ireland.⁽⁷²⁾ At the top end of the urban spectrum in county Limerick, Newcastle West of the 1860s serves as an exhibit of how deep and pervasive the Church's influence had become in the life of a town.⁽⁷³⁾ Straightaway the picture forms of a heavily institutionalised Church well on its way to consummating the devotional revolution. A plethora of Church linked organisations had taken hold in the town including the guilds of St. David, St. Bridget, St. Laurence O'Toole, St. Columkille, St. Patrick and St. Coleman; the Young Men's Society, the St. Aloysius Society; the Children of Mary; the Temperance Guild

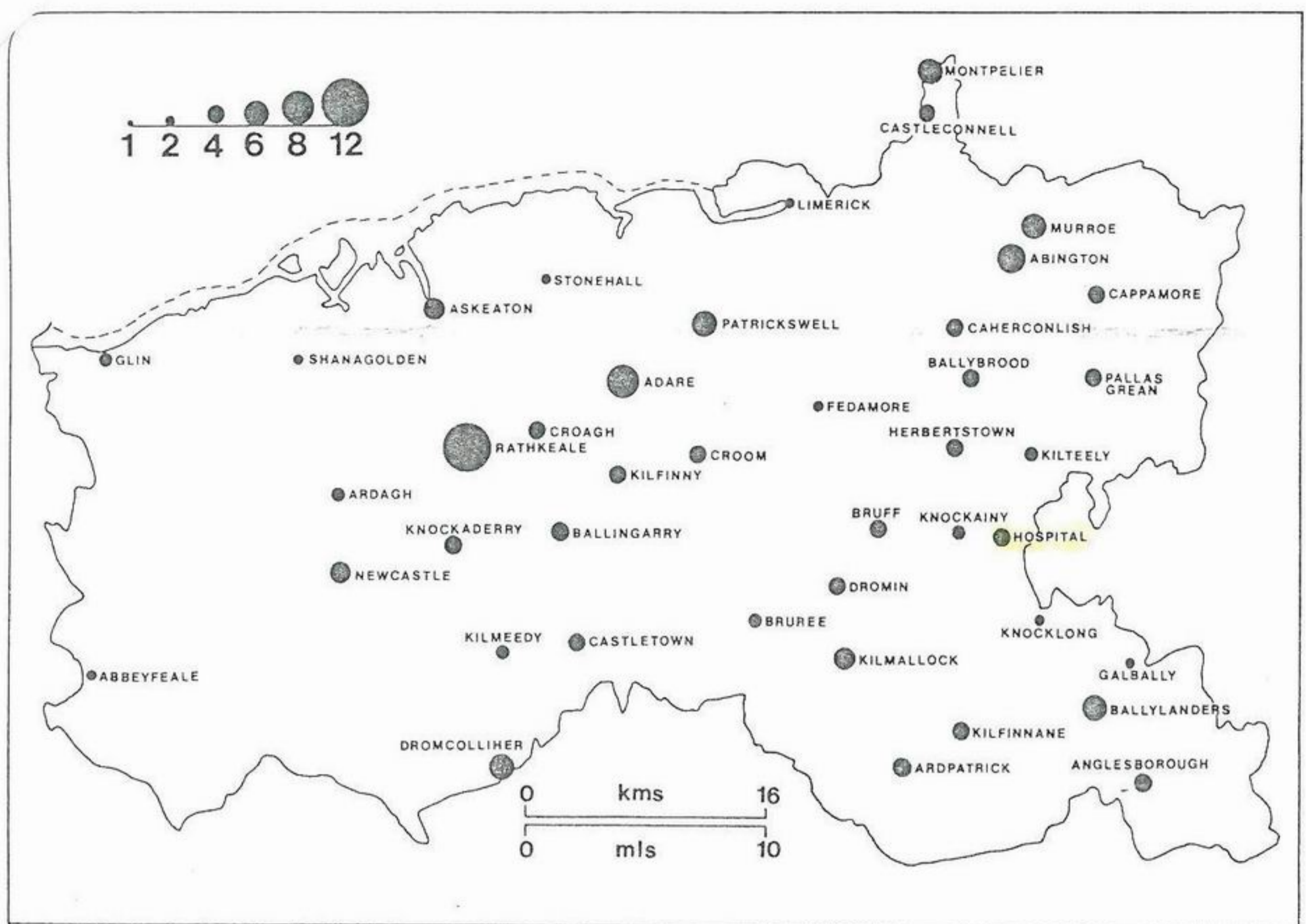


Fig. 7.9. Fairs in 1850.

last two days at a time.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The benefits were proportionately all the greater for the larger centres, among which Rathkeale, Newcastle, Adare and Dromcolliher boasted the highest frequency and the best attendances.

Second, it is instructive to undertake a reconstruction of the pattern of post town designation together with a record of revenue remittances made when such towns had established their credentials.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Earliest impressions suggest a quickening in the pulse of communications, a keen appraisal of improving arterial lines and an unmistakable modernising thrust (fig. 7.10). Infill along the major lines of communication is evident in conjunction with hierarchical diffusion through penny posts during the latest phase. Consonant with these favourable indicators there is a marked increase in revenue as between returns for the years 1821-3 and those for 1830-1. All of the designated towns and villages shared in the benefits of an expanded postal business and this might perhaps be taken as a crude surrogate of rising levels of commercial activity. Rathkeale, the leading town, fared spectacularly well with a marked take-off as between the first and second set of returns; Newcastle, Bruff and even Kilmallock all gave substantial underpinning to the designation of post town; and villages such as Pallaskenry, Caherconlish and Pallasgrean all stepped up on their modest performances. Aside from Rathkeale, the most striking set of returns issued from Castleconnell, a village which in the late eighteenth century only merited the pejorative term of 'inconsiderable', but which by the 1830s had been transformed into a 'village of neat, clean country houses, situated close to the Shannon and backed and flanked by noble domains, and fine spreading woods'.⁽⁸¹⁾ Castleconnell had capitalized on its spa, on its proximity to the Shannon and to the city, and it took on the maturing qualities of a dormitory/resort village while generating a trade congruent with such qualities and maintaining a well graduated profile of postal revenues.

And yet for all the propitious signs that might be adduced from trade and from Church and

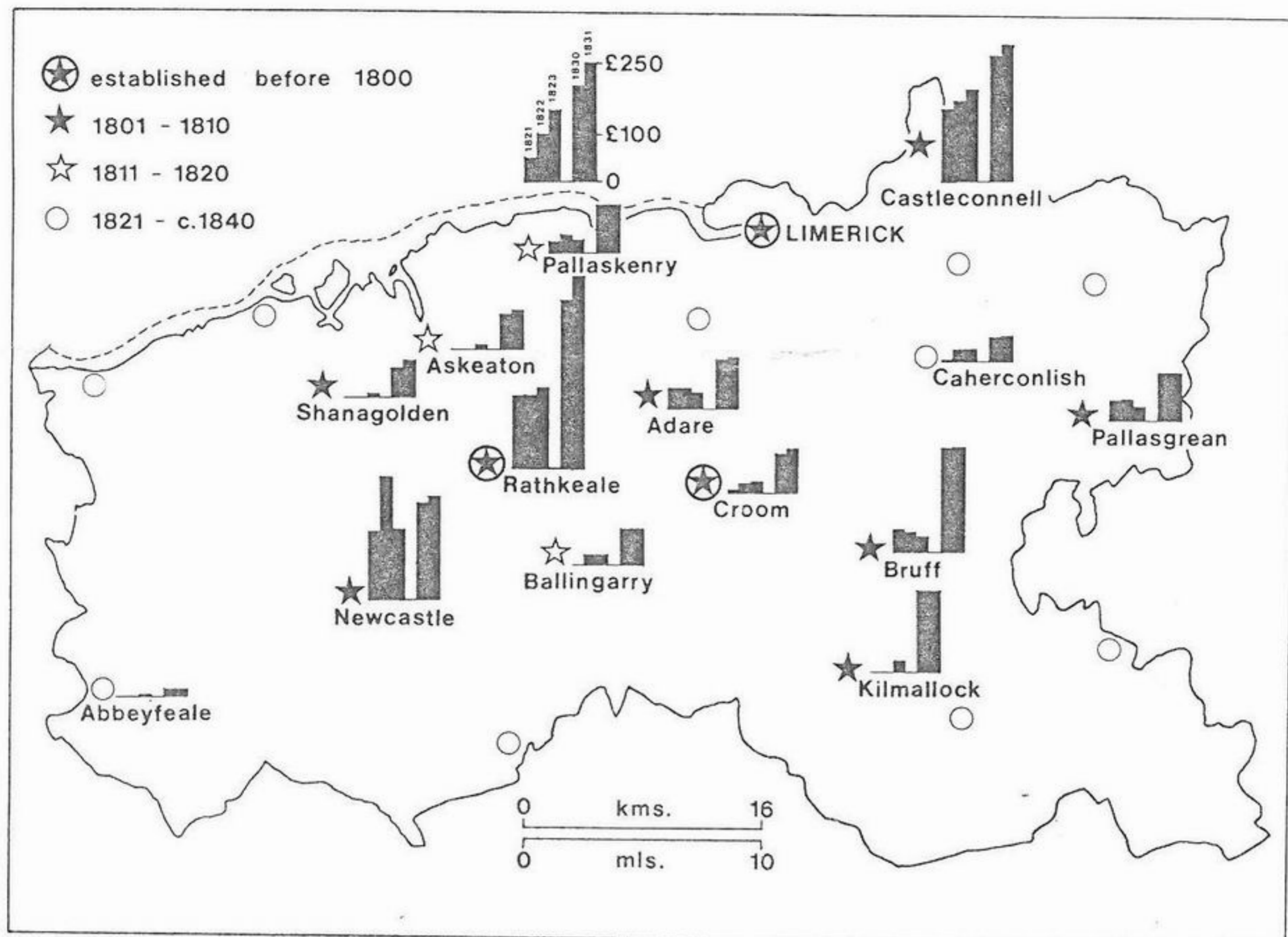


Fig. 7.10. Post towns, penny posts and postal revenue 1821-3 and 1830-1.

State provision, one corrosive trend cut deep into the fibre of life in Limerick towns and villages. This was the scourge of marginalisation at a time approaching peak population numbers and just as external influences and competition began to make inroads into the economic activity of the smaller urban settlements. The plight of the poor was already desperate by the 1830s with hordes of unemployed or only occasionally employed labourers gravitating towards the towns from a stricken countryside. In Abbeyfeale parish, for example, only about 30 out of 800 labourers could find constant employment; in Ballygarry parish, 884 labourers and 400 tradesmen (chiefly weavers) could find but a trickle of full-time work; in the town of Rathkeale the best that 800 labourers could aspire to was occasional employment; and in the town of Bruff only 50 out of a total of 300 labourers could find constant and remunerative work.⁽⁸²⁾ Within the towns themselves, work chances had been savaged through the impact of superior external competition. Thus Rathkeale had all but lost its considerable industrial structure; Bruff's domestic linen industry had been devastated by the availability of English machine-made cotton goods; Ballygarry's 1500 looms which used to supply the province of Connaught with 40 horse loads of coarse linens three times yearly had been whittled down to 60; and at Askeaton almost as many families were employed directly in agriculture as were engaged in trade, handicraft and manufacturing. Everywhere, prospects for the masses of the people of no property were grim, and so great were the pressures created by them that in some towns landlords or their agents felt obliged to move in ruthlessly to prevent what they perceived as ruinous sub-division. Such action caused up to one fifth of the housing stock of Newcastle to be levelled while one side of the Kenmare town of Hospital was similarly demolished and walled-in, and for those who went off quietly, 30^s to £2 was made available to aid passage to America.⁽⁸³⁾

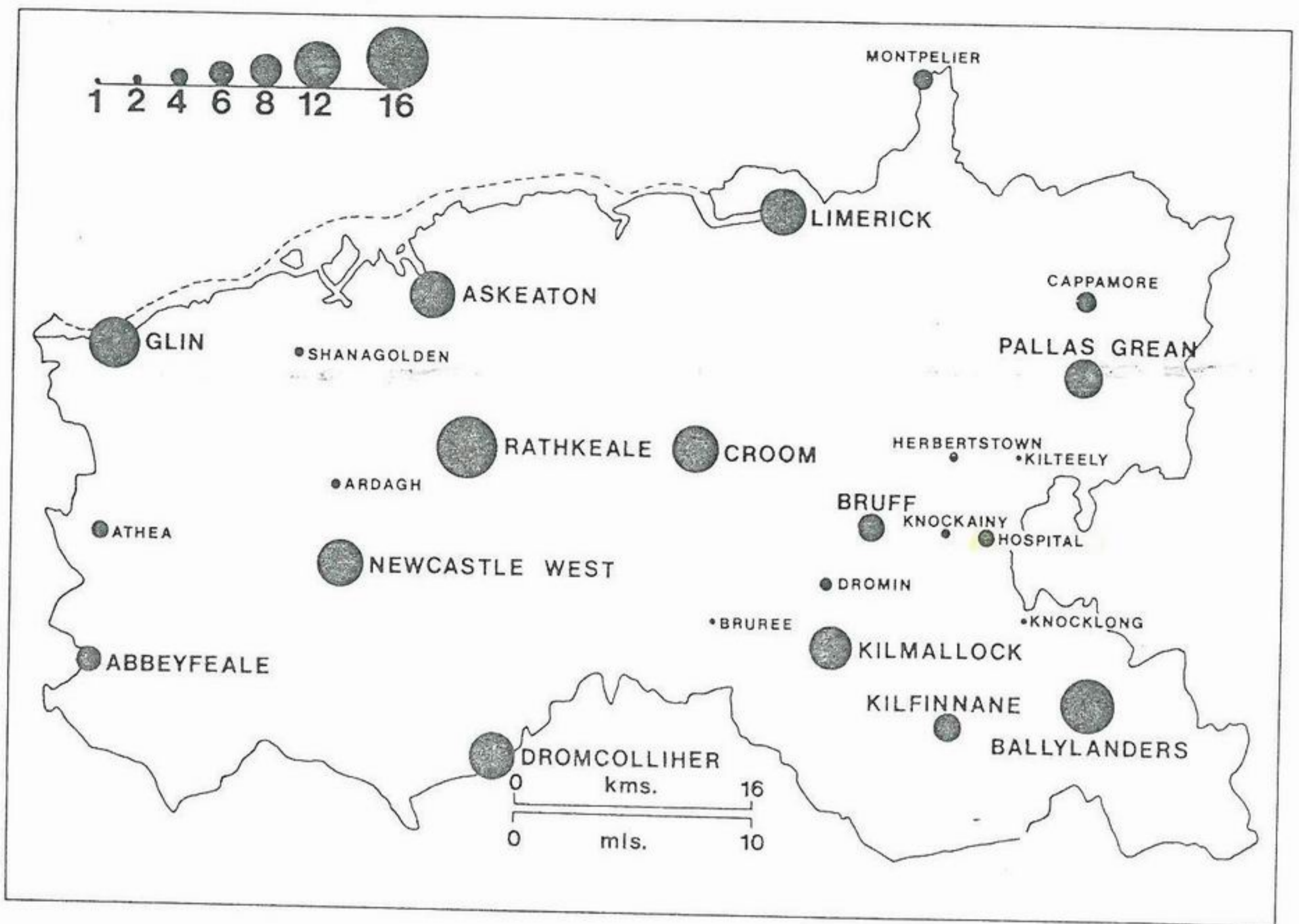


Fig. 7.11. Fairs in 1900.

played both breadth and depth in the occupations which underpinned trade and sustained commerce. Most of all, Pallaskenry impresses. It displays the best balanced occupational profile, including the higher order category of draper, and it serves to show that even in the hardest of times, a village could marry function to form and in the process project a maturing modernising image.

Following upon the Famine, the cruelest of adjustments needed to be made in the rapidly modernising town and village life of county Limerick and two distribution maps, in particular, serve to convey the tenor of such adjustments. First, fig. 6.8. shows how severely the demographic content of towns and villages was pared down to size in the newer, leaner, bourgeois led world of mid Munster during the period 1841-1901. Second, fig. 7.11. suggests a considerable refocusing of life generally on to middle and higher order centres in keeping with the ruthless thrust of modernisation (see also fig. 7.9.). Still, the urban structures and the network held, often with an attenuated occupational core but with town/village – country links cultivated with perhaps greater assiduity than ever before. The symbiotic links of town and country are well illustrated from the ageing Devon/Courtenay estate where upon the prevention of sub-division, several farmers in the 1850s and 1860s opted to settle their sons in shops in the town of Newcastle.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Capital accumulation in the new west brought the hillsman to town where amid a changing commercial world embracing the banker, the insurance agent, the architect and the surveyor, familiar western names of our own time such as Ahern, O'Connor and Murphy began to adorn the shopfronts. Following then upon the intimacies of kin, the trade links between town and country interlocked. More than ever before, Newcastle became an agrarian service centre and the rhythms of its trade and commerce responded sensitively to the rising fortunes of the dairy farmer.⁽⁸⁶⁾ In the villages too, an agrarian thrust was firmed and deepened as the strong farmer or the farmer cum shopkeeper/publican strengthened his hold over land, passed it on to a single heir and cultivated the links of kinship and of trade.

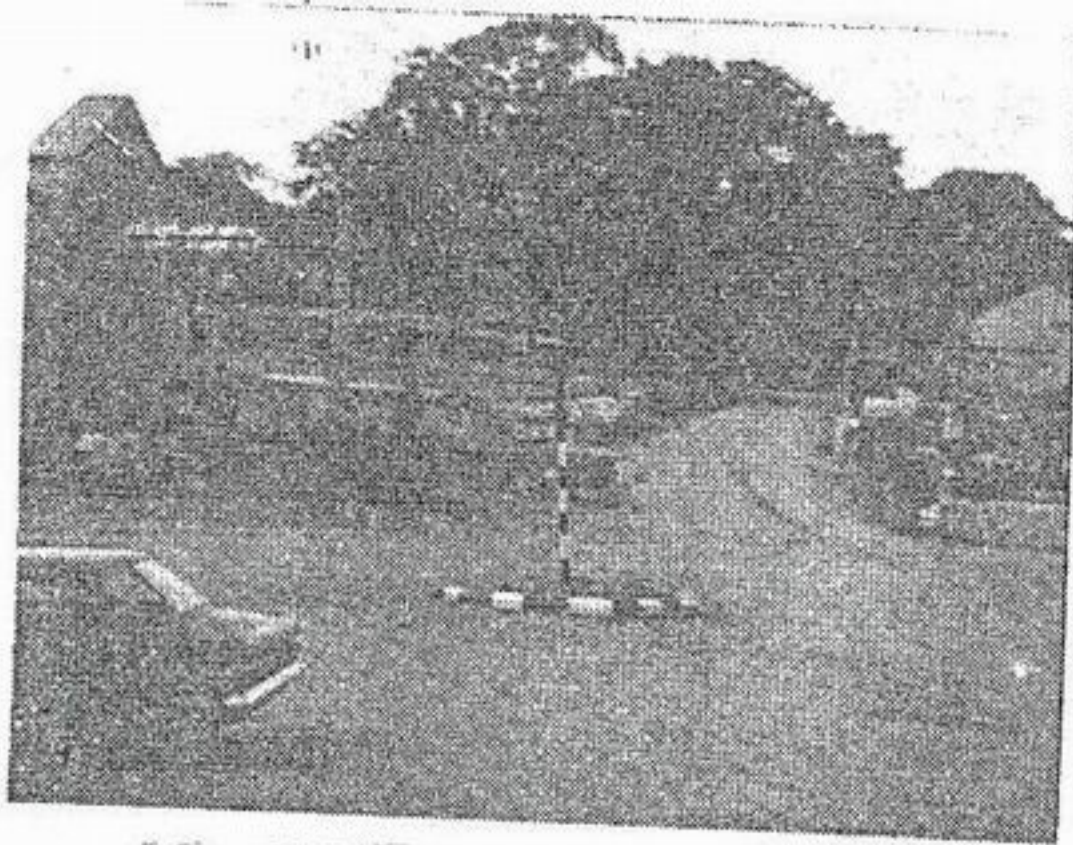


Plate 8.1. Open space, Shanagolden



Plate 8.2. Main Street, Glin

The ground evidence for county Limerick, however, is not nearly so unequivocal as Cullen would have us believe. In a general way surrogate data relating to patent provision for markets and fairs suggests that an important sprinkle of villages and prospective towns may have crystallised in the 1600-41 period when the stimuli provided by intrusive colonisation were at their most active. Villages and towns which must then have been emerging in a recognisably modern form would include Kilfinnane, Bruff, Hospital, Rathkeale, Askeaton, Ardagh, Galbally, Shanagolden, Ballingarry, Fedamore, Newcastle, Kilmeedy, Dromcolliher and Knockainy, and among this selection open space provision counted to a varying extent in village formats. Only in a minority of cases was it excluded altogether as at Hospital (where the characteristic linear shape is discernible in what is now a very tatty estate map⁽¹¹⁾), Ardagh, Ballingarry and Kilmeedy. Elsewhere, village formats latched on to open spaces which evinced a variety of morphologies. Among the forms, triangularity is certainly in evidence and is nowhere as clear-cut as in Dromcolliher. This is a settlement which exhibits all of the hallmarks of a plantation town or village with its finely made triangular green and curvilinear streets focusing on to it, all of which betokens a sense of huddled insecurity in early colonising days. The colonial veneer appears to have soon melted away but the form remains to grace and to green the town of Dromcolliher of our own time. At Kilfinnane too the broadening main street culminates in a triangular green and at Shanagolden and Fedamore the spaces between pivotal road junctions might be adjudged as presumptively triangular in form (plate 8.1.). At Newcastle and Rathkeale on the other hand a rectangular open space lies at the heart and hub of the town while in Galbally a diamond-shaped green – reminiscent of that in Old Pallas – commands at a juncture of roads. Askeaton and Bruff are morphologically more complex and each has dual foci around which they appear to have developed in the early modern period. Askeaton features an irregular and a triangular open space to the east and west respectively of a connecting bridge over the River Deel while Bruff too boasts irregular and triangular open spaces opening off either end of the main street and these *circa* 1840 encapsulated the immediate spheres of church and chapel respectively. Only at Knockainy did the green recorded as early as *circa* 1656 ultimately disappear (fig. 2.4.b). Here it was closed down at a cross roads at a time when church and castle had ceased to count and when trade had largely deserted the old hillside village.

At least one other town may have been rooted morphologically in the plantation era. This is Abbeyfeale which was granted a patent for markets and fairs in 1705 and which exhibited its characteristic lineaments broadening on to a rectangular open space in an estate map of 1710. At this stage also it may be noted that youthful towns such as Rathkeale, Newcastle, Dromcolliher and Ballingarry had come to exhibit maturity of form and villages such as Kilmeedy, Ardagh, Mahoonagh and Athea had well and truly crystallised (fig. 8.3.). By comparison therefore with much of the rest of the island urban forms set early in Limerick. The land-

uch empty spaces abounded after the Famine. Ultimately, a large section of
ered an ecology of invasion and succession as the tinkers came in numbers and
ided what, in effect, has become a colony of travellers. To-day the Catholic institutional
ctor retains its solidity and nearby there is the new, prosperous looking but strange world
a people who still pursue a peripatetic lifestyle from their home bases in the Fair Hill of
athkeale (plate. 8.37.).

Newcastle's Catholic sector also dates from *circa* 1850 when a Convent of Mercy, dedicated
St. Catherine of Sienna, opened and so furnished a dual pole along with the church, in the
edge of ground that lies between Knockane and Chapel Road (also known as Boherbuie).
imilar to Rathkeale, consolidation in situ has proven to be the keynote here as the nuns com-
enced a national school, a technical school and an orphanage along with facilities for board-
ers and while some of these functions lapsed subsequently more than adequate compensa-
on came by way of a secondary school, established in 1951, and the subsequent spate of
uilding associated both with it and with the burgeoning primary school. Consolidation too
as occurred by the church side with the acquisition in recent years of presbyteries and a
arochial office, and the most pertinent of the nearby site associations is the parish hall which
ates from 1926. Elsewhere, some of the best integrated of the Catholic sectors evolved in this
entury in the towns of Kilfinnane, Kilmallock and Cappamore. That at Kilfinnane takes on
ne wonted wedged appearance as an impressive suite of features – presbytery, church, con-
ent dating from 1905, and schools – stand in alignment on ground between Castle Lane and
hapel Lane. Directly opposite there is the cemetery and nearby the local G.A.A. pitch com-
letes a pattern of site association that is familiar in Irish townscapes. At Kilmallock the
plendid neo Gothic church, built 1879-89, acted as a magnet but only somewhat belatedly
ecause it was well into this century before the Sisters of St. Paul colonised from Kilfinnane.
Once they did, however, the distinctive qualities of the Catholic sector began to emerge with
he church, girls national school dating from 1929, convent, secondary school, boys national
chool and presbytery, all in integral association while a library and a County Council housing
estate complete the broader set of linkages. At Cappamore the symbiotic links between
church and convent tell in their close proximity, while the schools give communal meaning
o an institutional/congregational sector. At Bruff, the Catholic sector bulks impressively to
he south of the Morningstar River although it is minus the parish church which stands at the
head of the Main Street. Everywhere else among Limerick's towns familiar landscape
alliances fasten on to the Catholic church, but perhaps nowhere is the pattern so evocative as
in the town of Hospital. There the modern Catholic church juxtaposes with the old Hospital
church founded in 1215 by Geoffrey de Marisco, while on the other side St. John's Park, the
local G.A.A. pitch, abuts. Across the road there is the former big house and demesne of a
Catholic landlord family. Resuming directly to the north of the Mahore River we encounter the
parochial house and opposite it the Presentation Convent together with its complex of prim-
ary and secondary schools, some of which are run jointly with the De La Salle Brothers. By any
standards, the apposition of items at Hospital is remarkable. It provides a striking illustration
of deep rooted stability on the Limerick scene since altogether some 800 years of landscape
making are recalled, and all of the formative phases from medieval to modern find represen-
tation in a town sector.

In the villages it is rare to encounter really telling site associations other than those which
cohere round the Catholic church, and some of the finest examples derive from the deepest
rooted villages such as Ardagh, Kilmeedy, Croagh, Kildeely, Fedamore and Ballylanders.
Ardagh's church environs are among the most venerable of all, with continuity of site as well
as of status harking back to the Early Christian era. The modern church is the direct lineal
descendant of an ancient prototype and the dedication to St. Molua has stood the test of time
and taste. It is not surprising therefore that rich and rare associations should link in with the

of Glin (d. 1854) gave tangible form to ideas by presiding over an extensive range of improvements and in these the town featured prominently. The long heralded manufacture of textiles became a reality *circa* 1816, when stimulated by the Knight's resolve, the making of linen and cotton cheques was introduced to the town of Glin.⁽¹¹⁾ Economic development went hand in hand with enhancement of the estate core. Under the Knight's supervision Glin House was transformed into Glin Castle through the addition of battlements and turrets, demesne and plantation were elaborated upon, and at intervals between 1812 and 1836 ornate gates together with accompanying lodges came to punctuate the rim of an insulated setting.

In this kind of situation, the conventions as to what belonged and what did not, are well illustrated in the relative locations of Anglican church and Catholic chapel. The former, built in 1816, was assigned a commanding hill site just inside the demesne, while in its shadow and just outside, the newly slated chapel rose from beneath street level. Such sectoral arrangements typified the world of landlordism as two Christian churches gathered, to each its own, close to the abrupt termination of a street. This street along with Main Street and Hamilton Terrace gave an ordered layout to the town of Glin which grew appreciably under the controlling influence of its landlord. The 25th Knight was a notable advocate of building leases in forwarding planned, if piecemeal growth, and development was still actively under way *circa* 1840 when rents ranged from 1^s to 2^s (5p. – 10p.) per foot of street frontage on plots that extended backwards for about 120 feet.⁽¹²⁾ At this stage a neat, planned town had taken shape. It had as nucleus a wide but converging main street, tree-lined on one side and flanked by some well-built houses. The same street, giving way to what is known as the Lower Mall as it gradually narrows, still remains faithful to its nineteenth century form (fig. 6.4.). Along with the town in general, its layout evinces the footprints of landlordism.

The towns of Hospital, Kilfinnane and Bruff along with Croom and Ballingarry have all in their time seen the landlord's patronage or his improving thrust. In the eighteenth century, for example, Hospital was accorded the positive discrimination of its landlord when it came to

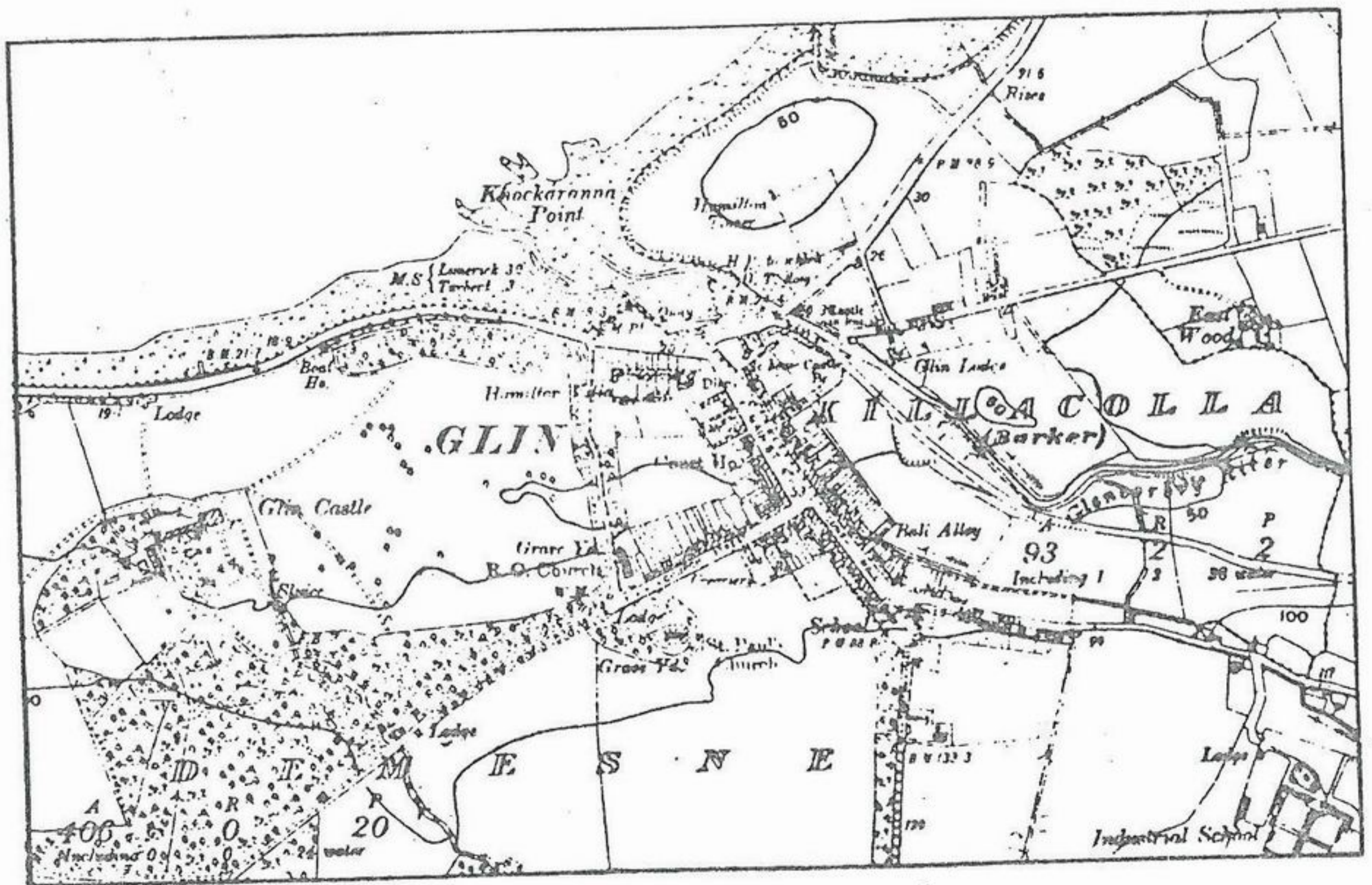


Fig. 6.4. Glin (based on the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Government, Permit No. 4741).

reletting property in and around the town. The following extract from a private notebook of Thomas, 4th Viscount Kenmare, refers to the Castle Farm of Hospital in 1755-7, and it serves to illustrate the point well:

'These lands are looked on as the cream of this estate and some of the best in Ireland, were on my coming of age in the tenure of the inhabitants of the little town of Hospital, and though upon advertising them I received numberless proposals I intended to have continued them to them purely to try to keep up said town.'⁽¹³⁾

Continuing patronage on the part of these Catholic landlords through into the nineteenth century is suggested firstly by the coherence of the Kenmare east Limerick estate *circa* 1840 (fig. 6.1.) and secondly by Hospital's neat, linear format in which chapel faced demesne entrance and market house opposed school house.

At Kilfinnane and Bruff overt landlord influence was a feature of the eighteenth century. Both were to the fore among county Limerick towns which, through landlord assistance and investment, saw the setting up of a successful linen industry and they both derived sustenance from a big house cum proprietorial presence in their vicinity. Indeed, Kilfinnane in its urban layout came to feature the characteristic trappings of landlordism such as a court-house, a market house, a church, an assembly and a charter school. In both cases, however, the formative influences of the eighteenth century gave way to absentee proprietorship in the nineteenth, and at a time of retrenchment generally, grim adjustments had to be made. These are well exemplified in the case of Bruff *circa* 1840. Here, the linen industry which supported 600-700 weavers was devastated over the previous 20 years by English machine-made cotton goods,⁽¹⁴⁾ and the effects may have been transmitted to the townscape in the extraordinary fringe settlement stretching for more than a ½ mile beyond the chapel. But it is a measure of the resilience of towns such as Bruff and Kilfinnane that, having left a phase of landlord paternalism behind them, they should in straightened circumstances continue to hold their status among the primary central places of county Limerick. Croom and Ballingarry came through too. Framed in demesne surrounds at an edge of the Dunraven estate, the former displayed an orderly and planned appearance *circa* 1840. The latter, consisting mainly of one long irregular street marked by steep gradients, may have owed nothing to landlord influence for its format, but in the eighteenth century and for part of the nineteenth it drew on the patronage of the Odell lineage and on the entrepreneurship of the Graves's.

Befitting its standing as first town of the county, a complexity of forces from inside the estate system shaped the development of Rathkeale during the eighteenth century. From the top echelon of the structure there was landlord involvement, from the middle ranks there was constructive role play and at base a new immigrant influx helped to generate and to boost trade. It was Sir Thomas Southwell, a local landlord, who provided much of the impetus when, in 1712, he took the bulk of 200 families from the German Palatinate on to his estate. From an early date the Palatines ringed Rathkeale in their settlements at Courtmatrix, Killiheen and Ballingarrane, and from these places they contributed powerfully to a developing town through industry, enterprise and commitment to tillage. In some respects Rathkeale in its heyday may have been to the Palatines what Elmira (population 7,034 in 1981) in Waterloo county, Ontario, is to the Mennonite farmers of the Grand and Conestoga River valleys.⁽¹⁵⁾ Certainly, the land surveyor, Joshua Wight, was impressed by what he saw. Writing in 1752 he stated:

"As I have gone to and fro several times by Rathkeale I have took notice of it as a pleasant town, the situation of it sweet, the land extraordinary good."⁽¹⁶⁾

Consistent with this kind of description, a thriving linen industry was set up and sustained soon afterwards which embraced the growers of flax, among whom the Palatines performed with distinction, the bundle-cloth weavers, the spinners and the shopkeepers. Again, it was a member of the Southwell family who provided the initiative, while in addition other land-

post office was intended. Quarterly fairs had been set up, using the fringing fair green as venue, and 4 others were then contemplated. All this betokens a measure of youthful exuberance in a town which for the most part had come to consist of two irregularly-built streets. The early momentum was maintained for much of the remaining part of the nineteenth century as Cappamore, through its shopkeepers and traders, avidly exploited lacunae in the central place network of north-east Limerick and mediated to advantage between the rural economies of hill country and lowland. To-day shop names reveal the same familiar mix as in 1840. In their own way they proclaim a type of town that has passed without notice in geographical literature.

Towns and the new Church

In county Limerick as in much of Ireland a reconstituted and reinvigorated Catholic Church eyed growing towns with vision and in time crowned them with its achievements. Coming through from the late eighteenth century a greater self-confidence and vitality in Church organisation intensified in the nineteenth to restore dignity to a people and in the process forge some of the most intimate links between town and country. From an early date this re-emergent Church sought to synchronise its own institutional development with gradations in the settlement pattern and it was acutely responsive to the dynamics of settlement change in a modernising urbanising Ireland. Moreover, contrary to the image it propagated of itself, this Church in re-entry left the trappings of poverty behind to eat deeply into the thrifty, utilitarian and commercialised world of Irish Ireland.⁽²⁶⁾ Stiffened in this way the new Church was able to act as an efficient tool of decolonisation, and in the making of its own imperial designs, towns were used as the most significant levers and gatherers of Catholic power.

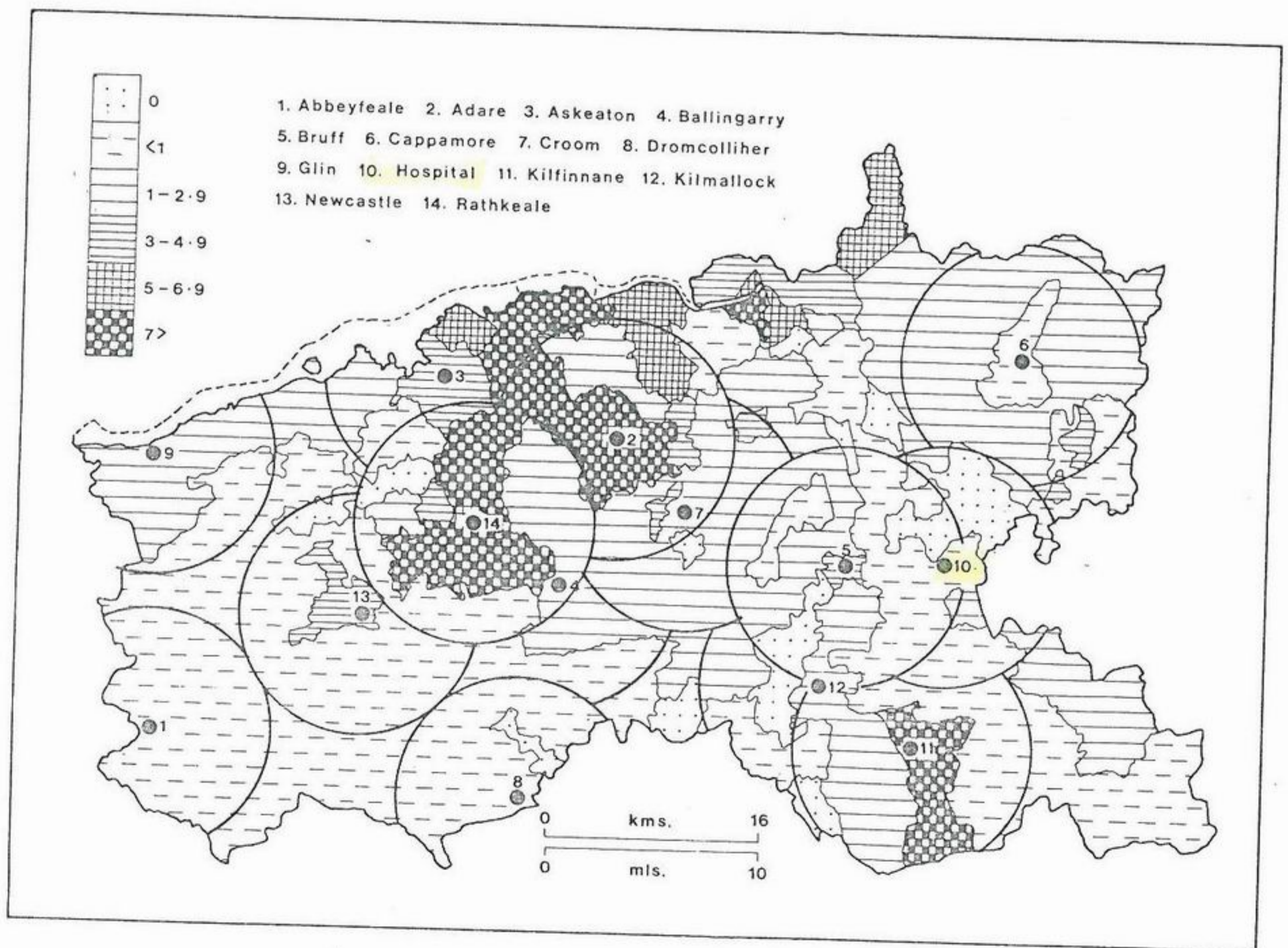


Fig. 6.6. Protestants as a percentage of total population, 1834.

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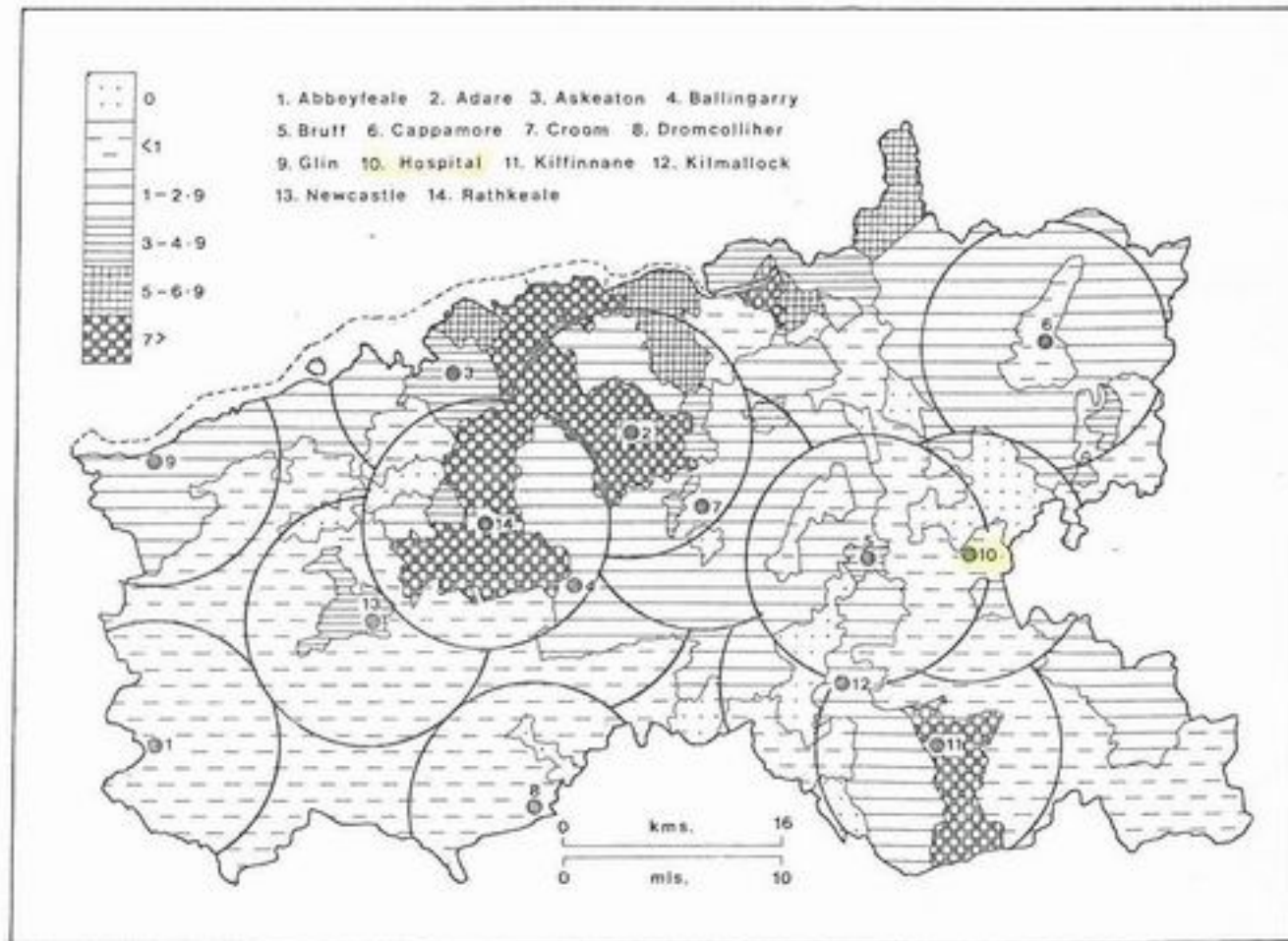


Fig. 6.6. Protestants as a percentage of total population, 1834.

In viewing the growing assertiveness of the Catholic Church from its town bases within county Limerick, it is instructive first of all to examine the relative strength of the Catholic community vis-a-vis the relative weakness of the Protestant community. Fig. 6.6. suggests that Limerick ranked among the most Catholic of Irish counties during the colonial period and this thoroughgoing numerical supremacy, so apparent in general terms, carried over strongly into the towns and their immediate precincts. Three broad gradations may be discerned. Firstly, in and around the towns of Abbeyfeale, Dromcolliher, Cappamore and Hospital the Protestant element counted for less than 1 per cent of the total population while within a 5 mile radius of them the Catholic proportion nowhere dropped below a minimum of 95 per cent. Secondly, in and near the towns of Ballingarry, Kilmallock, Glin, Croom, Bruff, Newcastle and Askeaton the Protestant component ranged from 2 to 5 per cent of the total while in the spaces enclosed by 5 mile radii the Catholic proportion only dipped below a minimum of 93 per cent in sporadic, localized pockets. Thirdly, a stronger Protestant representation had gravitated towards the towns of Rathkeale, Kilfinnane and Adare but even in these cases the respective proportions of 8, 9 and 13 per cent were modest in the context of colonial Ireland. Through all three gradations the surge of Catholic dominance pulsated in the nineteenth century, and in creatively harnessing this energy, a reinvigorated Church vied with the British colonial apparatus as the most dynamic provider of new buildings in Limerick towns. That same numerical pre-eminence on the part of Catholics together with the strong traditional sentiments which they espoused must have also contributed to the ability of their Church to form firmer associations than anywhere else in the island with the old holy sites that harked back to medieval and early Christianity.

Through into the nineteenth century the chapels at Askeaton, Abbeyfeale and Hospital maintained close site associations with the medieval parish centres which had preceded them; at Croom and Kilmallock the chapels clung as tenaciously as was feasible to the old sites; and at Newcastle, Rathkeale, Ballingarry and Dromcolliher the chapels continued to retain the same locations which they had held at least as early as 1710.⁽²⁷⁾ This same tendency to either re-occupy the old sites or to cling closely to them persisted in the spate of building and reconstruction that followed in the first half of the nineteenth century. This phase which prevailed throughout the country got under way early and resolutely among the towns of

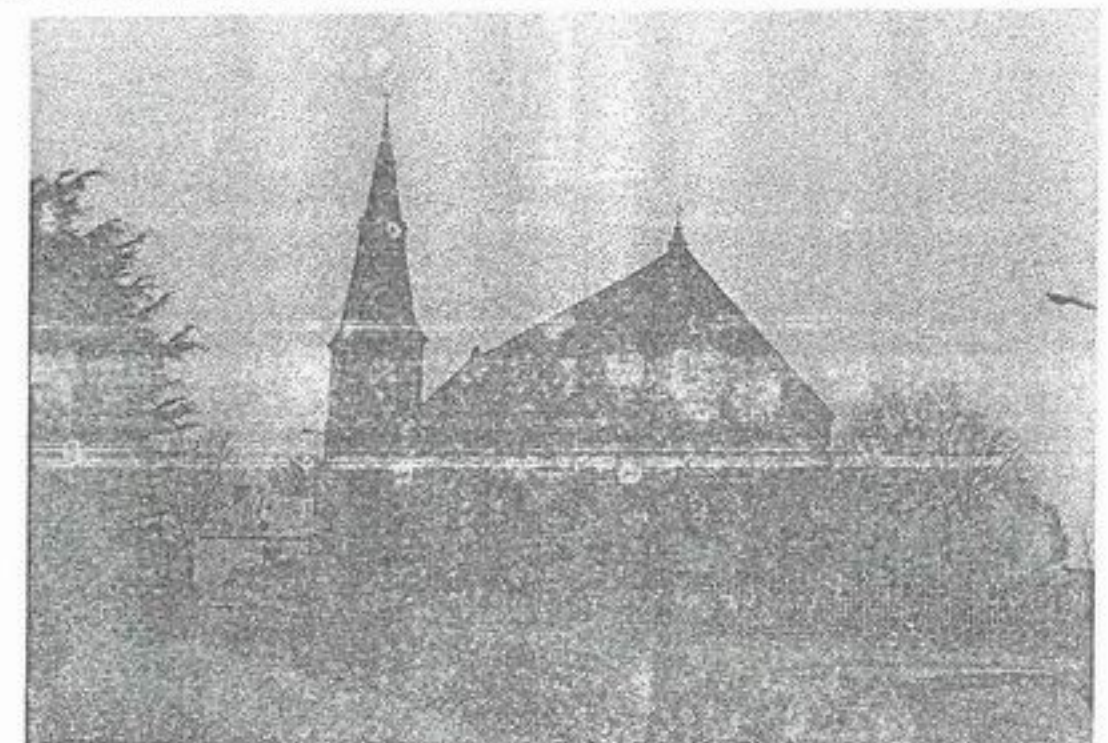


Plate 6.4. Catholic church, Bruff

Limerick. In 1808 the new chapel at Croom adhered to old ground as it confronted the State supported interloper across the road. In 1811 the re-edified Trinitarian Priory at Adare which dated from *circa* 1260 was handed back to the Catholic community to serve henceforth as parish church. In 1813 an unadorned but commodious chapel at Rathkeale maintained site continuity with an older structure. In 1814 Kilmallock's new chapel at laneway's end juxtaposed the site of the old parish church of SS. Peter and Paul. At about the same time Glin's newly slated chapel rose to stand reanimated below the hoisted church of the Anglican minority. Maintaining the early impetus, the 1820s saw the construction of modern chapels at Dromcolliher, Newcastle and Bruff. That at Dromcolliher was completed in 1824 on a landlord approved site opposite the old and ruined parish church of St. Bartholomew. Similarly at Newcastle, proximate site continuity came to be upheld in the chapel of hewn stone which was erected in 1828 to succeed an earlier building. At Bruff, a town which had seen culture clash as mirrored in the visitations of Whiteboys (1762 and 1786), Defenders (1793) and Rockites (1822), the new chapel of 1828-9 stood at the head of the Main Street – assertive, defiant and imitative of the Anglican church in its finely honed Gothic detail (plate 6.4.). In locational as well as architectural terms this chapel served as a marker of the massing power of the Catholic Church in town life. The 1830s saw the erection of a new chapel in Kilfinnane at a cost of £1000, one in Cappamore at a projected cost of £1050 and reconstruction of the existing chapel in Hospital. All this effervescence in building and re-edification signified a tightening hold of the Catholic Church over its community; it also connoted a broadening and a deepening of the town's role as gathering focus for country people. Table 6.2. illustrates these points succinctly as well as serving to show the exiguous role which the Anglican Church played by comparison. Additionally, it might be noted that whereas the chapel's tributary area was tight and parochial, that of the church was loosely strung out.

Town	Catholic Chapel	Av. no. attending divine service, Sundays/holidays	Whether increasing, decreasing, stationery.	Anglican Church	Av. no. attending divine service, Sundays/holidays	Whether increasing, decreasing, stationery.
Rathkeale	✓	3000-4000	incr.	✓	c. 200	incr.
Newcastle	✓	c. 3000	stat.	✓	c. 120	incr.
Askeaton	✓	1000-1500	incr.	✓	c. 120	stat.
Kilfinnane	✓	1300	incr.	✓	250	incr.
Ballingarry	✓	c. 2400	incr.	✓	60-70	stat.
Croom	✓	c. 1600	incr.	✓	20-50	stat.
Kilmallock	✓	800	incr.	✓	35	stat.
Bruff	✓	1000	incr.	✓	80	incr.
Glin	✓	c. 2000	incr.	✓	Summer 80-90 Winter c. 30	incr. in Summer
Adare	✓	c. 2000	stat.	✓	c. 180	stat.
Hospital	✓	1500	incr.		-	-
Dromcolliher	✓	c. 1200	incr.		-	-
Abbeyfeale	✓	c. 900	incr.	✓	c. 15	incr.
Cappamore	✓	c. 1800	incr.		-	-

Table 6.2. Chapel and church as foci in Limerick towns circa 1835.⁽²⁸⁾

ideal made concrete in the land (plate 6.6.). It stands a world apart from its predecessor, and epitomises the marked transformation within the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century.

An impression of Catholic power massing itself in the towns is strengthened by the concurrent burst of building associated with the nuns and the Christian Brothers. In the second half of the nineteenth century a considerable capital investment went into the making of the various establishments as religious orders sought to exert a tightening grip on all levels of education. The Mercy Sisters made the most telling impact in the branches that stemmed from a city-based Mother House, and within the diocese of Limerick their convents sprung up in Rathkeale, Newcastle, Adare, Glin, Ballingarry and Abbeyfeale.⁽³⁰⁾ Other towns to witness the spate of convent and associated school building were Cappamore (Mercy), Bruff (Faithful Companions of Jesus), Hospital (Presentation), Kilfinnane (Sisters of St. Paul) and Kilmallock (Sisters of St. Paul). The Christian Brothers made a lasting impact in Adare and maintained an ephemeral presence in towns such as Bruff and Newcastle, while the De La Salle Brothers became established in Hospital. Everywhere, the resultant reinforcement of Catholic Church interests bulked in the townscapes and in the minds of the local communities.

The drive started at mid century. In 1850 the Mercy Sisters were established in Rathkeale when the parish priest gave them his house as a convent and bequeathed £1,200 to build schools. Thus was instituted a distinctive Catholic sector and it grew *circa* 1880 when the new church was built and the old one converted into schools. By century's end an impressive suite of features – church, convent, presbytery, schools, orphanage, cemetery – had all become enmeshed between Thomas Street and the New Road. Consciously put together these gripped the life of the faithful from cradle through to grave. At Newcastle too a branch of the Mercy Sisters was established in 1850. Here they colonised ground alongside the chapel which had been vacated in their favour by the Protestant rector. As usual a powerful alliance of interests provided the funding for a convent and a school for girls. Under the aegis of the parish priest £700 was raised, while the bishop, another priest and some parishioners contributed substantially. The nuns with characteristic zeal did the rest. They commenced a national school, a technical school and an orphanage, and were able to draw on the entire young female population by ranging in their intake from boarders to day pupils to orphans. Extending their provision for, and hold over the poor, the Mercy Sisters also took charge of Newcastle workhouse. In a sense the local influence of the nuns was pervasive or nearly so as convent educated mothers soon began to mould religious belief and practice within their families. Similarly, alliances etched in the landscape related a potent story of the interplay of nun and priest, convent and church, in a sector set apart and well endowed by the end of the century.

Elsewhere the colonisation process among religious orders was proceeding apace. The Faithful Companions of Jesus, a French Order of limited provenance, came to Bruff soon after their introduction into Ireland in 1852. Starting in Crawford's Lane they shortly afterwards translated to more spacious surroundings south of the Morningstar River where their buildings massed impressively in the landscape (plate 6.7.). The interiors massed no less dauntingly in the mind. This much is clear from the sense of culture shock that one of the earlier pupils had encountered on her arrival as a boarder:

'Everything was different: the vast size of the rooms, the endless stairs, the long uncurtained windows from which no one might look out, the cold bright light reflected from painted walls, the black clothes of nuns and pupils.'⁽³¹⁾

Circa 1853, Adare saw an *entrée* of the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers, with the Sisters ensconced in a convent and school alongside the chapel and the Brothers consolidating at the site of the old fever hospital. At Glin the Mercy Sisters ran the workhouse school and they performed a similar function at Kilmallock. Active colonisation continued throughout the second half of the century and beyond, with the Mercy Sisters, as always, to the fore. Sectoral development within towns was augmented and firmed as, for example, at Cappamore

In viewing the growing assertiveness of the Catholic Church from its town bases within county Limerick, it is instructive first of all to examine the relative strength of the Catholic community vis-a-vis the relative weakness of the Protestant community. Fig. 6.6. suggests that Limerick ranked among the most Catholic of Irish counties during the colonial period and this thoroughgoing numerical supremacy, so apparent in general terms, carried over strongly into the towns and their immediate precincts. Three broad gradations may be discerned. Firstly, in and around the towns of Abbeyfeale, Dromcolliher, Cappamore and Hospital the Protestant element counted for less than 1 per cent of the total population while within a 5 mile radius of them the Catholic proportion nowhere dropped below a minimum of 95 per cent. Secondly, in and near the towns of Ballingarry, Kilmallock, Glin, Croom, Bruff, Newcastle and Askeaton the Protestant component ranged from 2 to 5 per cent of the total while in the spaces enclosed by 5 mile radii the Catholic proportion only dipped below a minimum of 93 per cent in sporadic, localized pockets. Thirdly, a stronger Protestant representation had gravitated towards the towns of Rathkeale, Kilfinnane and Adare but even in these cases the respective proportions of 8, 9 and 13 per cent were modest in the context of colonial Ireland. Through all three gradations the surge of Catholic dominance pulsated in the nineteenth century, and in creatively harnessing this energy, a reinvigorated Church vied with the British colonial apparatus as the most dynamic provider of new buildings in Limerick towns. That same numerical pre-eminence on the part of Catholics together with the strong traditional sentiments which they espoused must have also contributed to the ability of their Church to form firmer associations than anywhere else in the island with the old holy sites that harked back to medieval and early Christianity.

Through into the nineteenth century the chapels at Askeaton, Abbeyfeale and Hospital maintained close site associations with the medieval parish centres which had preceded them; at Croom and Kilmallock the chapels clung as tenaciously as was feasible to the old sites; and at Newcastle, Rathkeale, Ballingarry and Dromcolliher the chapels continued to retain the same locations which they had held at least as early as 1710.⁽²⁷⁾ This same tendency to either re-occupy the old sites or to cling closely to them persisted in the spate of building and reconstruction that followed in the first half of the nineteenth century. This phase which prevailed throughout the country got under way early and resolutely among the towns of

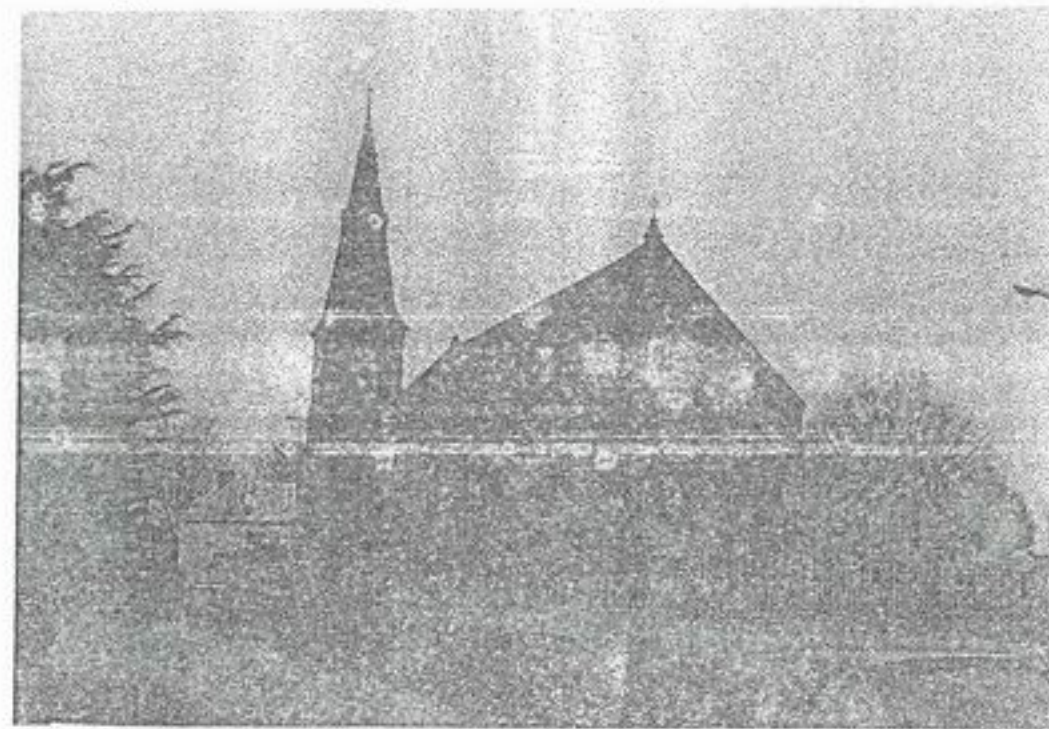


Plate 6.4. Catholic church, Bruff