

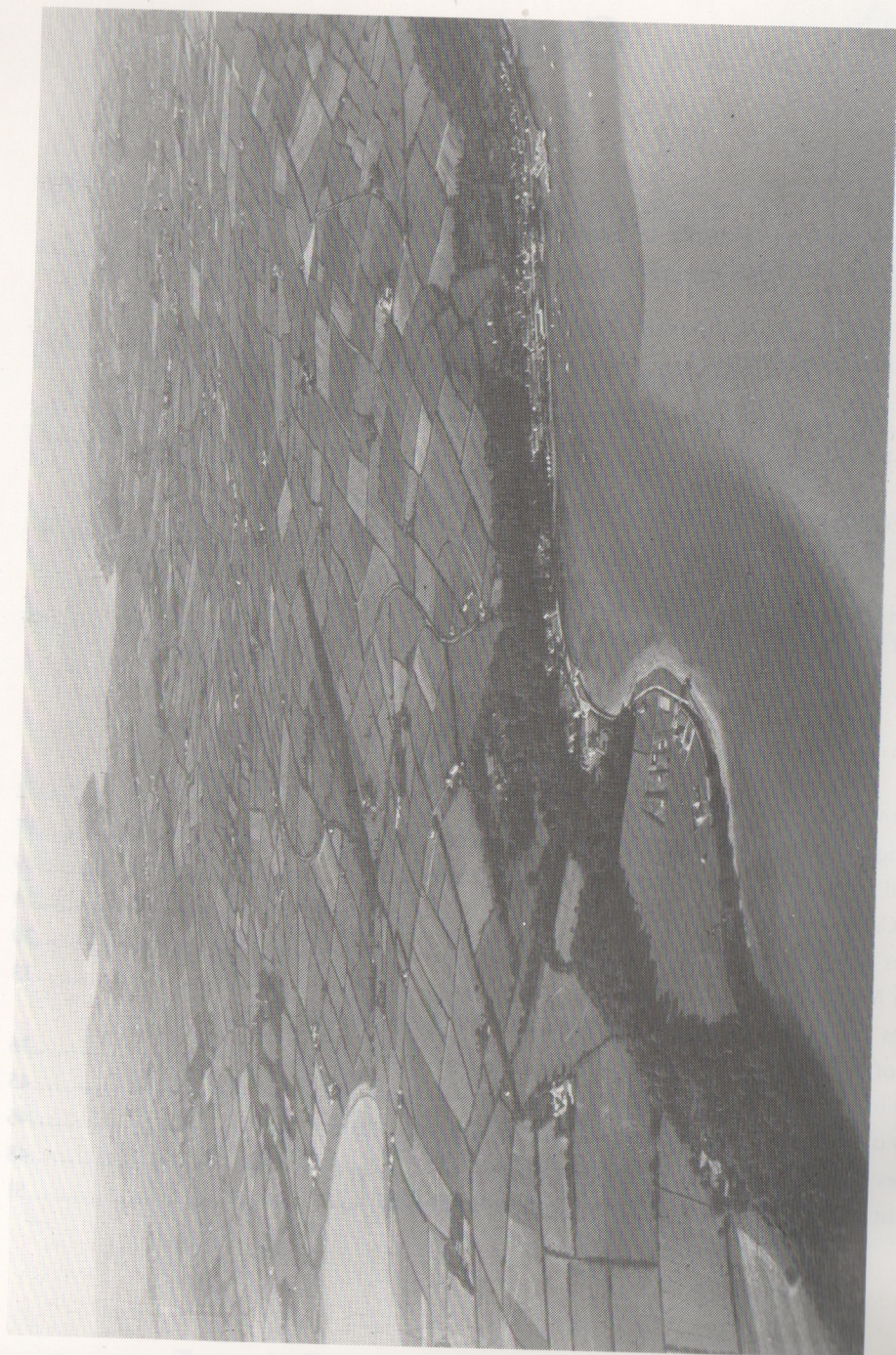
SEANCHAS CHAIRBRE



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Foreground: Courtmacsherry. Background: Barryroe — 'abounding in potatoes' 1750
(Photo by D.D. Pochin Mould)

The Sea Trade in Potatoes in South West Cork (1730-1850)

by JAMES COOMBES

In the early decades of the 17th century the Lady Montgomery induced workmen to her estates in Greyabbey and Comber, Co Down by providing them with plots of land to grow flax and potatoes. This is the first reference which is both contemporary and explicit, to potatoes in Ireland.¹ It stands on its own in the first half of the century. Nevertheless it is certain that the potato had been well established in many parts of the country for at least a generation to before the wars of the 1640s and provided relief for the hungry during the course of these wars. We first read of potatoes in south west Cork in 1658. About 17 March of that year the *Constant Warwick* put into Castlehaven. It had on-board an eleven-year old apprentice-surgeon, James Yonge by name.

We cruised about 10 days more, and met some of our own frigates but no enemies, and being near the coast of Ireland our captains resolved to take the first port for watering, the many prisoners shortening our stores very much. We fell in with Cape Clear, the wind at west, and bore away for Castle Haven. It's an excellent harbour within but it's a somewhat bad entrance. Here there is no town, but on the left hand as we came in there is a cove and an old small Castle with no guns, nor garrison. In it lives Col. Townsend, one that was formerly fellow servant with my father, but grown great in the late rebellious war. Here we bought hakes of great bigness for 3 farthings, hens for as much, a sheep for 16 or 18 pence, a bag of potatoes, another of eggs, and 3 or 4 hens for a small piece of tobacco. The people are mostly Irish and live in cabins and go very poor in clothes. All provisions are monstrosly cheap, and money scarce. From hence we sailed for England, but it proving bad weather, lost company of the *Adventure* and the prize, and put into Kinsale.

An entertainment of two travellers in Coolfin, Co Waterford, c. 1654 is thus described in verse:³

*And now for supper, the round board being spread;
The van a dish of coddled onions led;
I' th' body was a salted tail of salmon
And in the rear some rank potatoes came on.*

The first pamphlet dealing exclusively with potatoes was published in 1664. It contains the first-known reference to 'Irish potatoes'. The northern poet, Dáibhí Ó Bruadair, mentions potatoes in a poem in the Irish language in 1674. By 1699 the workman's cabin, with its adjoining potato patch, had become an integral part of the Irish landscape.

By the early years of the 18th century potatoes were a commercial commodity in the towns. On 5 March 1710 the corporation of Cork discussed the need to relocate the potato market.⁴ Potatoes were among several commodities subject to new by-laws promulgated in Kinsale on 6 September 1714.⁵ By 1730 potatoes were being exported to 'our garrisons in Gibraltar and Portmahon and to some other Parts'. In 1729, during a period of severe scarcity, county Cork supplied Dublin and the north of Ireland with barley, oats and potatoes.⁶ These are the earliest extant references, outside of South America, to the export of potatoes. By 1752 Dungarvan was famous for the export of potatoes to many parts of Ireland.⁷ 'The two large Barronies of East and West Carbery yearly supply the City of Cork with most of the potatoes that are consumed therein'.^{7a} For over a century the coastal areas of Cork and Waterford preserved their dominance of the potato export trade. Several factors helped to bring this about, suitability of soil, climate and the proximity of seaweed and sand. In those days the only practical way to transport such a bulky commodity over long distances was by sea.

The trade made a significant contribution to the economy of these regions, a fact not immediately obvious to the student of even regional history. Many local studies such as William O'Sullivan's *Economic History of Cork* make no mention of it and it is rarely noticed in the various topographical dictionaries. It did not, of its very nature lend itself to being recorded or assessed. Most of the trade was conducted by lowly sloops and hookers from obscure inlets. The less the landlord's agent and the tithe proctor of the Church of Ireland clergy knew, the better those engaged in the trade liked it.⁸ During the first half of the 19th century a well-known local merchant, James O'Sullivan, lived on Roaring Water bay in a house later to become presbytery of Kilcoe, south west of Skibbereen. Near to his house he had a large store where he kept potatoes until they were ready for export.⁹ The long vanished village of Scilly, in the townland of Ringcolisky, was a hive of activity, between shipbuilding and the export of potatoes.¹⁰ Trá Mhaoilín on the western side of Blind Harbour in Myross parish was another centre for the loading of potatoes.¹¹ After Sunday mass in the old mass-house of Tralong Father John Power, parish priest of Kilmacabea (1800-1831) visited a Mrs Hayes.¹² She was grieving over the cot death of a baby. 'Dry your tears, woman', said the priest, 'you have been saved from a greater loss. Your husband narrowly escaped death last night'. He had gone to Cork on a sloop loaded with potatoes. When he returned home a few days later he told his wife that on Saturday night he had fallen between the quay and the sloop and had been pulled out in the nick of time. The noted seanchaí, Seán Ó hAo (Hamit) 1861-1946 was born and lived his life in the nearby townland of Cregg. He has this to say about the sea trade in potatoes.¹³

Do bhí húcaeirí anso fadó agus do bheiridís chúig bharraille prátaí leo o áit go háit, sará dtáinig a' Gorta i nÉirinn. Do bhi ceann acu ag fear anso thoir san Inior go nglaoidis Seán Ó Donabháin air. Bhi leasainm air go nglaoidis 'Sean Gallda' air. An *Hibernia* a b'ainm don húcaeir s bhí aige.....

Do bhí fear eile ann agus do chona se i n-áit go dtugaid siad Baile no Cloiche air, lastoir do Thrá Lúng. Do bhí sloop aige sin. Bheireadh sí fiche tonna nú deich tonna fíchead léi. Partholán Ó hAo a b'ainm don fhear san, agus do bhíodh se a' trádáil

ins geach aon saghas cúinne ó Phortlairge anios, agus go Ciarrai.

Donnchadh Mór Ó Donabháin (Donnchadh Coitéineach) exported potatoes from Faill a'tSrutháin, Brownstown (Gleann Ui Mheadhráin) in Ardfield parish.¹⁴ There are steps cut into the rock which are believed to date back to the smugglers of the 18th century. Pigs were also exported from here.

On the whole results from our national folklore archives have been disappointing — just one small item from Gaibhlín na mBarrach at the mouth of Cork harbour. It included a few fragments of a ballad in Irish concerning the loss of a sloop and its cargo of potatoes.

By 1750 the tiny barony of Ibane and Barryroe 'abounded in potatoes'.¹⁵ The Reverend Horace Townsend was an accomplished agriculturalist and spent many years farming in Courtmacsherry. When, in 1810, he described in great detail, the cultivation and disposal of the potato crop, he wrote from first hand experience. Assuming that each household consumed an average of eight tons of potatoes per year, he estimated that over 25,000 tons were consumed annually in the barony.¹⁶

Notwithstanding the great consumption of potatoes within the district, it is enabled to afford very large quantities for use of other places. Dublin is the great market, but Cork, Bandon, and Cloghnikilty partake largely of its produce. The mode of sending potatoes to Dublin is thus managed. Two, three, or more farmers jointly freight a vessel, and, if their own stock of potatoes be sufficient, collect from their neighbours enough to make up the loading. One of the party, or some person in whom they confide, goes as supercargo, sells the potatoes, and on his return divides the profits among the several contributors, being allowed a certain commission for his trouble. It is supposed, and I believe, not without cause, that the supercargo does not always make fair returns. As there is no check upon his accounts, their only security is his honesty, which it may be easily conceived, is not always proof against so tempting an opportunity of enriching himself at the expense of his employers. Trusts of greater importance, though in the hands of his betters, are not always managed more faithfully.

Sometimes a rich farmer hires a vessel on his own account, and either superintends the sale himself, or deputes one of his sons. The freight varies according to circumstances, generally from thirty to forty guineas for a sloop of fifty or sixty tons. larger vessels are procured on cheaper terms, but the delay, that frequently attends the sale of a large cargo, seems to render the smaller conveyance more eligible. The master's profit in these voyages is so considerable, that farmers are never at a loss to procure a vessel. The demand for the commodity in Dublin is, however, very fluctuating and uncertain. As the supply, in consequence of the variable weather in this climate, must necessarily be irregular, the market frequently experiences the extremes of want and abundance. The profits of the farmer, therefore are always precarious. Sometimes he is fortunate enough to return with full pockets, and sometimes he has been known to desert the vessel, and leave the cargo to pay the freight. This uncertainty, however, is not found to destroy his hopes or diminish his ardour. It is a sort of lottery, in which, like other adventurers, each man hopes to be the favourite of fortune, never calculates the chances against his success. Four shillings per hundred weight, in Dublin, affords a fair profit; his good or bad fortune depends upon their exceeding or falling short of this standard.

There is no way of estimating what proportion of potato exports was catered for in this way. Local merchants also exported potatoes to Cork, Dublin and even farther

afield. Foreign ships also arrived to pick up cargoes along the coast. The port of Cork had a large export trade to diverse destinations. Since most of the potatoes would have originated in south west Cork this particular part of the trade would seem to be not out of place in this essay. The *Corke Journal* for 1754 refers to the export of potatoes to, among other places, Philadelphia, Nova Scotia, and Portsmouth. The following selection of destinations from the *Cork Gazette* of 1792 shows an even greater diversity but even then probably tells but part of the story.

30 May 1792	<i>Friends Adventure</i> for Demerara	200 hampers of potatoes
4 July	<i>Jenny</i> for Lisbon (A. White & Co.)	110 hampers
11 August	<i>Joanna</i> for Antigua	3 tons
25 August	<i>Chance</i> for Jamaica (John Anderson)	3 tons
1 September	<i>William & James</i> for Jamaica (id)	3 tons.
15 September	<i>Best</i> for Barbados,	3 tons
26 September	<i>Pitt</i> for Dominica (D. Waters & Sons)	80 hampers
3 October	<i>Susanna</i> for Antigua (James French)	2 tons
	<i>Three Sisters</i> for Dominica (Piersy & Waggets)	100 hampers
	<i>Nancy</i> for Barbados (Leycester & McCalls)	2 tons
10 October	<i>Ann & Mary</i> for Philadelphia (J.J. Carrolls)	10 tons
17 October	<i>Fanny</i> for Honduras (Leycester & McCalls)	4 tons
	<i>Penelope</i> for Malaga (Sam Williams)	1 ton

The French consul, Coquebert de Montbret, visited county Cork in 1790.¹⁷ He found that each year seven or eight ships sailed from Kinsale for Portugal laden with butter, grain and textiles from Bandon and potatoes. Garretstown, the seat of a well-known agriculturalist, was of special interest to him.¹⁸ Potatoes from that area were being sold as far afield as the north, the average price being 2/- a hundredweight, falling sometimes to 7d or 1/-. 'Apart from their ordinary use, starch is extracted from potatoes and some are dried for export to America. These latter are first boiled and then left in the sun to dry, after which they fetch from eighteen to twenty-four pence a hundredweight. It is forbidden to sell potatoes by bulk rather than weight.' The *Cork Gazette* of 5 August 1795 reported that several sloops loaded with potatoes had sailed from the western ports for England.

The rebellion of 1798 brought its own problems for the trade. The rebels occupied Wexford town during the month of June. They commandeered four oyster boats, manned them with twenty-five men for each boat and sent them to patrol outside the harbour. These intercepted vessels on the way to Dublin with oats, potatoes and other provisions and confiscated them to feed the people of Wexford.¹⁹ Twenty claims for compensation from Cork county were pressed for damages sustained during the rebellion.²⁰ Eight of these claims were for the loss of potatoes off the coast of Wexford. Five, probably six, claims were from Ibane and Barryroe.

Barry, William	Farmer	Abbeynhon(sic)	£20 claimed
Buckley, Daniel	Farmer	Mycross (sic) 50 tons	£72

Carthy, Denis & Leary,		Kilkeran	£240
Cornelius		Durrow	£180
Cullinan & Donovan	Farmers	Dundeady	£58-4-0
Fichane, Mary Donovan	Widow	Youghal	£150
Flairn, William	Mariner	Dundeady	£105-12-0
Keohane, Michael	Farmer	Rocksavage	£68-13-4
O'Hea, William	Gent.		

If the rebellion brought problems it also brought opportunities. Daniel O'Connell was a young barrister in Dublin at the time. In June he left Dublin for Kerry.²¹

Communication by land with the interior was cut off; so eighteen of us sailed for Cork in a potato-boat, bound for Courtmacsherry. We each gave the pilot half a guinea to put us ashore at the Cove of Cork, where we landed, after a capital passage of thirty six hours. I then went to Iveragh, and remained some months at Carhen.

By this stage the district had ousted Dungarvan from the first place in the Dublin market.^{21a} Kinsale and Baltimore were sending to Dublin in excess of 7,000 tons of potatoes per annum (more than three quarters of the national total of all potatoes coasted at that time to the capital).

In 1798 Dr William O'Brien became pastor of Clonakilty. A few years later he wrote of expanding population and an expanding economy.²² The soil was not naturally good anywhere in the area. It owed everything to the unremitting industry of the people. 'Within a few miles of the shore cultivation has already reached that point of perfection which appears to set improvement at defiance'. Surplus population either emigrated to England or moved inland to the vast tracts of reclaimable land still uncultivated. Clonakilty was the centre of the flax and linen industry. 'Immense quantities of potatoes are cultivated along the coast and sent for sale to the Dublin market'. In 1816 Shaw Mason mentioned corn and potatoes as the principal exports of Clonakilty.²³

A far more detailed report on the potato trade in the 18th and 19th century would emerge if one had the time to extract the laconic reports of arrivals and sailings from the newspapers. On 20 July 1822 the *St Patrick*, coaster of Baltimore, arrived in Cork with potatoes. On 5 December the *Robert*, of and from Kinsale (Green) sailed for Gibraltar with potatoes. On 9 January 1826 the *St. Anne* (Saldanha) sailed for Gibraltar with potatoes. On 13 April the coaster *Lislee* from Courtmacsherry arrived with potatoes and flaxseed.

According to Fr Michael Collins, pastor of Skibbereen, later Bishop of Cloyne and Ross, Skibbereen had been exporting potatoes for years previous to 1824 to Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Limerick.²⁴ The Drummond Report of 1837-8²⁵ listed the main potato exporting ports in order of importance: Strangford, Ardglass-Killough, Donaghadee, Belfast, Waterford and Baltimore.

Alexander Nimmo, a public works engineer, wrote in the early 1820s: ²⁶ 'Clonakilty struck me as being a very remarkable place; the whole peninsula around there all the way from Clonakilty to Courtmacsherry is cultivated as close as the bed of a garden: there is not a single piece of waste land'. Robert Owen, the socialist,

1792. The *Cork Gazette* of 17 November reported that on the previous Sunday a mob had assembled at the Cove of Cork and visited the outward-bound vessels, out of which they landed some potatoes, said to have been only for ship's use.

The *New Cork Evening Post* of 3 December 1792 deals with the situation in the city. The fund-raising committee headed by the Mayor announced in an advertisement that fund raising had had to stop owing to 'tumultuous Meetings'. The people had now been convinced of their error and 'have returned to their duty'. Therefore fund-raising to relieve the poor could begin again.

POTATOES

The MAYOR and SHERIFFS of Cork, as Trustees of the Public Contribution, for alleviating the Distresses of the Poor, hereby offer a Bounty on every Boat, loaded with Potatoes, that shall arrive from any place, without the Harbour of 2s per ton, to be paid to the Owner of the Boat, and of one halfpenny per wt. to the Owners of the Potatoes.

Cork, Nov. 26, 1792

Whereas a most false and malicious report has been industriously propagated, (with intent to injure me in the minds of the people) that I have bought, or engaged a large parcel of Potatoes; to the injury of the poor and industrious; now, in order to justify myself in the opinion of my fellow Citizens from such false and villainous insinuations, I have voluntarily made Oath before the Right Worshipful the Mayor, that I never bought, engaged, or intended to buy or ship, either Wheat, Oats, or Potatoes, and that all my Stores are, and shall be opened for any person that wishes to inspect them. And I do now hereby offer a Reward of Fifty Guineas to any person or persons, who shall within one month from this date, give information of the Author or Authors of such false and malicious Reports, so that he or they may thereof be convicted. Bandon Road, Nov. 21, 1792.

ANDREW DRINAN.

Sworn before me. JOHN SHAW, Mayor.

Thomas Newenham was very aware of the need to regulate the interaction of marketing trends. When he wrote in 1805 much surplus pork was being produced.³³

Perhaps this surplus produce would have been still further augmented, but for the increasing exportation of potatoes to the West-Indies; and the consequent enhancement of their value. When the country people can get sixpence a stone for their potatoes, they will seldom feed pigs with them. We find, by the accounts laid before Parliament, that there were 1,661 tons of potatoes exported last year; but I have been informed by persons, who had good opportunities of attaining a competent knowledge of the fact, that the average quantity really exported, of late years, was infinitely greater than appears. Whether it would be prudent to encourage, by bounty, the exportation of potatoes, when, under a certain price, and to prohibit their exportation when above it, is a question perhaps not unworthy of the consideration of the legislature. The price of potatoes, in and near Limerick, last July, was 2½d. the stone: their price in and near Cork was 8d. The cause of the former was, I understand, a discontinuance of exportation, occasioned by popular tumults: the cause of the latter was a free and uninterrupted exportation. In the latter case, the people were distressed: in the former, the cultivation of the potatoe was discouraged. Had there been a bounty on the exportation of potatoes when under 4d. and prohibition when above it, the unaccommodated poor of Cork would not have felt distress, nor would the poor of Limerick have proceeded to acts of outrage.

(London 1805)

1812. On 23 April between 11 a.m. and 12 noon Thomas Marmion of Inane met two magistrates, the Reverend Richard Townsend and Thomas Baldwin in Skibbereen and informed them that his sloop, the *Gertrude* had been seized the previous night and had been carried downstream.³⁴ Baldwin and another magistrate, Timothy O Driscoll went off with Marmion to look for the sloop. They found her three miles from the town anchored well away from the shore. All the boats in the neighbourhood had been taken over by the mob, who included some Yeomen, members of the West Carbery Infantry. The potatoes were being unloaded and taken back to town. The three reached the vicinity of the *Gertrude* and the magistrates tried to prevail upon the looters to be patient until the magistrates and gentry of the area could meet. They warned the mob of the possible consequences — to which the reply came: 'We would rather be hanged than starved.' They offered to buy the potatoes at Market price from Marmion. He refused. The magistrates tried to prevail upon the mob to return the sloop to Marmion but to no avail.

Marmion emerged from this episode in a poor light. His attempts at self justification were very feeble, consisting of a mixture of self pity, special pleading and an insistence on blaming everybody but himself for his misfortunes. He made every effort to play on the heartstrings of the Lord Lieutenant, portraying himself as the son of an Englishman, orphaned at the age of two. He had but one brother and three nephews and therefore deprived of family support in his predicament. He had lost over £400 by the looting of the potatoes (30 tons) which had been bound for the Dublin market. He accused the magistrates of connivance, if not outright complicity in the affair. Alexander O Driscoll held the rental of half the town of Skibbereen. The potatoes were held in his market house. He was related to and was a bosom friend of Timothy

O Driscoll. About the time of this incident two sloops belonging to the son-in-law of Timothy O Driscoll were being loaded in the area — without hindrance. One of these had returned to port and was again being loaded, thus creating a monopoly of what should be free for all. Marmion, as a gesture of goodwill had promised publicly to concentrate on buying provisions for sale locally. In another place he said that the barony had a thousand tons of potatoes over and above normal requirements. Again he complained that his stores were full of potatoes and his sloop idle — for fear of reprisals.

There may be some truth in what Marmion alleged. One suspects that the other magistrates were but marginally less obnoxious than him. Whether or not they connived at the looting or encouraged the looters they were perfectly right not to risk their own lives and the lives of others in an attempt to get Marmion out of his predicament. No small military force could have recaptured the sloop without boats and without artillery. To withdraw military from the town would have been foolhardy in the extreme. As a result of this incident the magistrates were ordered to intervene promptly in similar situations; military support could be called out when necessary. According to Collector Troy of the Revenue the check on shipment of potatoes had been shortlived and now once again there were very large quantities shipped in adjacent harbours for Dublin and were awaiting for favourable winds.

1817. A little before 2 o'clock in the morning of 17 February 1817, Thomas Robinson, a Skibbereen magistrate, was roused from slumber by the news that an enormous mob had collected and was marching to Baltimore.³⁵ Their purpose was to plunder a large vessel, partly loaded with potatoes for France or Antwerp. He rose immediately, went to the local barrack where he got the services of a subaltern, two sergeants and sixteen men. He then set off with the military party in quest of the mob. Two men were sent on ahead to inform the leaders that he wished to speak to them. They met the mob as it was changing direction towards Whitehall, where apparently the vessel was now anchored. They agreed to return to meet him. He warned them of the folly of taking the law into their own hands and begged them to return to their homes. This they did by about 4 a.m. On the same Sunday at about 1 p.m. the mob assembled again. Once again he dissuaded them from impulsive action.

The *Southern Reporter* (Cork) of 28 August 1827 described the proceedings of the County Record Court on Saturday, 25 August. It contained accounts of two cases which concerned the export of potatoes.

1819. In that year there was a great scarcity of potatoes. A Mr O'Sullivan, who lived in 'the West', sent a boat-load of potatoes to Cove. The inhabitants plundered the cargo, insisting that it be sold for public benefit. Defence alleged that a number of gentlemen about Cove paid 1s 8d out of their own pockets for the potatoes. They further alleged that O'Sullivan was not satisfied and availed of an Act of Parliament to bring a case against 'any of the inhabitants of the place where the outrage occurred. He selected the late Sir David Perrier, then an Alderman, against whom he obtained a judgement for £191. The matter was transacted through Mr Pope, allegedly sub-sheriff, who paid the plaintiff a considerable sum. A balance of £73 still remained

due. Despite the fact that the defence vehemently denied that Pope had ever been sub-sheriff, the verdict was for the plaintiff — Damages £73. 5s Irish.

1827. O'Driscoll v Sullivan. Plaintiff had sent a sloop of potatoes from Skibbereen to Kinsale. He sold most of the cargo to the defendant at £4 per barrel. The defendant paid earnest and later £20. 'The question at issue was, whether the barrel should be calculated at the Castletownsend measure, which includes 193 weights, at 23 lbs each, or at the Kinsale measure, which includes but 78 weights of 21 lbs each. Verdict for the plaintiff, £46 6s 6d plus 6d costs.

1838. In January 1838 Scott & Co, shipping agents of Cove chartered the Liverpool brig *Westmoreland* to carry a load of potatoes to Baltimore, Maryland.³⁶ In the early hours of Monday 21 January the people were awakened by the loud and shrill sounding of horns. This was a signal that the brig had been seized. The mob remained in possession until 23 January when they were persuaded to hand her back. In March 1839 thirteen of the ringleaders were arraigned before the Cork assizes on two charges, riot and preventing the export of potatoes. The defending lawyer directed them to plead guilty to the charge of riot. The other charge was quietly dropped. The judge, in a severe lecture, told them that if they had been found guilty of preventing the export of potatoes he would have had no option but to condemn them to death. In view of the time they had spent in jail he would give them the minimum sentence of two months. The brig *Westmoreland* became part of local folklore and a commemorative ballad has come down to our own times.

1840. The 1840s opened on a familiar note. On Saturday, 27 June the *Cork Constitution* reported great excitement in the western ports on account of the high price of potatoes and the large quantities being exported. This had come to a head at Rosscarbery pier the previous Wednesday when a ship was being loaded with potatoes for export to Dingle. A large mob boarded the vessel, unloaded the potatoes and took them to the market house in the nearby town. One constable had been killed and the life of another was despaired of. Two of the ringleaders were under arrest. On 4 July the *Southern Reporter* published a letter from *Veritas* of Rosscarbery which poured scorn on the *Constitution* report. *Veritas* claimed that no life had been lost and that the constables had suffered only minor injuries.

At the beginning of the decade J.P. Lawson recorded that small sloops of thirty tons could occasionally reach the quay in Clonakilty and that corn and potatoes were shipped for Dublin.^{36a} However, at this time, Ring in Clonakilty outer harbour was exporting 1,000 tons of potatoes annually.^{36b} Courtmacsherry had its own tiny fleet of coasters including seven colliers trading with Newport, and eight hookers conveying corn, potatoes, &c to Cork and bringing back timber, iron and other merchandise.^{36c}

One of the casualties of the Great Famine was the sea trade in potatoes from south-west Cork. A sense of foreboding brought together a disparate grouping of landlords, farmers, labourers, Catholic and Protestant clergymen at a public meeting in Skibbereen courthouse early in December 1845. The galleries were so thronged that they were in danger of collapse. All the speakers were positive and forthright in their

approach to the looming tragedy. The well-known lawyer McCarthy Downing urged that anybody who attempted to export potatoes should be shunned and proposed that a petition expressing the feelings of the meeting should be sent to Peel. Something which for over a century had been part of a way of life was on the way out. On 25 June 1847 Fr Theobald Mathew spelt out what this meant.³⁷ 'The poor population depended very much upon potatoes brought round by the boats into Cork from the districts of Skibbereen, Bantry, Skull and neighbouring districts'. At a meeting in Skibbereen in late November 1847 Mr J.H. Marmion attributed the large potatoe crops to the superabundance of sea manure.³⁸ 'The markets of Cork and Waterford were principally supplied with potatoes from this district and he himself had exported 2,000 tons of them in one season. This crop induced a superabundance of population, contrary to the wishes of the proprietors. But when the crop failed the labourers went hungry'. The sea trade continued though not as briskly as heretofore. Curiously a fair proportion of the export of potatoes went to Kerry. As far back as 1775 it had been recorded that the county produced 'not near enough' of potatoes.³⁹ 'Numbers of the inhabitants would be yearly starved had it not been for the supplies they get from the adjoining parts of the County of Corke'. The *Kerry Evening Post* for 16 May 1846 announced the arrival in Dingle from Baltimore of a large hooker, freighted with potatoes. In the previous March potatoes brought on small hookers from Kinsale were sold on the quay to speculators for 7d. per weight of twenty one pounds and then resold in the city markets for 9½d. to 11d. The *Constitution* for 9 April 1850 announced the arrival in Cork of four vessels with food, the *Herald* and *Catherine* with thirty tons of potatoes, the *William* with 374 barrels of barley and the *Shamrock* with 300 barrels of wheat 'remarkable in view of the fact that only two weeks previously thirty tons of potatoes had arrived'.

Signs of the decline in the trade were all too obvious. The *Southern Reporter* for 19 January 1847 carried depressing accounts of areas in south west Cork. That for Myross mentioned that Myross, with Schull and Baltimore had for years supplied the Cork market with potatoes, shipped on large hookers now lying useless. One which had been valued at £90 had been sold for £25. Archibald Stark toured Leinster and Munster in 1850. He has some shrewd comments of the building of the first stage of the railway westwards, to Bandon. The railroads would also reduce considerably the sea traffic of the area. Stark has this to say of the potato trade in Clonakilty:

Small sloops which found access here were formerly employed by the traders in conveying potatoes to Cork and Dublin; but since the decay of the national esculent, the vessels have been turned to a different purpose, for the humane landlords and poor-law guardians of this union have chartered them to carry their paupers to Wales and England.

Cork and Waterford had for well over a century dominated the sea trade in potatoes. In 1845 they came first and second in density of the potato crop. Between 1845 and 1859 the production of potatoes dropped by 75% in Cork and by 74% in Waterford.⁴¹ They had ceded their first and second places to Armagh and Down respectively. Never again would Cork and Waterford figure among the top potato producing counties of Ireland.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS

Caulfield, *Cork* = Caulfield, R., *Council Book of the Corporation of the City of Cork* (Guildford 1876)
 Caulfield, *Kinsale* = Caulfield, R., *Council Book of the Corporation of Kinsale* (Guildford 1879).
 J.C.H.A.S. = *Journal of the Cork Historical and Historical Society*.

1. Montgomery MSS. cited by Davidson, 'The Potato and its Progress in Ireland'. *Dept. of Agric. Jour.* Vol. xxxiv, 2, 290. There are many references to 'roots' which probably mean potatoes.
2. Poynter, F.N.L.(ed.), *Journal of James Yonge* (1647-1721). Longmans, p. 30. Yonge became a distinguished surgeon later in life.
3. T.W. (Thomas Weaver 'Songs and Poems of Love and Drollery', 1654) cited by Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 292. Davidson cites many other literary references.
4. Caulfield, *Cork*, p. 345.
5. MSS of Kinsale Corporation. *Anal. Hib.* 15 (1944), p. 181.
6. Rye, George, *Considerations on Agriculture* (Dublin 1830) cited by Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
7. *Tour in Ireland* (1891), p. 141.
- 7a. Mallow in 1775. *J.C.H.A.S.* Vol. xxvii (1921), p. 83.
8. 6 Feb. 1766. A man employed by archdeacon Browne at upper Glanmire to watch tithe potatoes, was abused in a most inhuman manner, the following night his house was set on fire. Tuckey, F.H., *Cork Remembrancer* (Cork 1837), p. 144.
9. See Cadogan, 'James O Sullivan of Roaring Water' in this issue, p. 17
10. Informant, Mr Bernard O Regan of Aughadown.
11. Informant, Mr Patrick O Sullivan of Reen.
12. Informant, the late Mrs John Emmet O'Donovan of Union Hall, a lineal descendant of the Hayes family.
13. Ó Cróinín, D. (eag), *Seanachas ó Chairbre* (Áth Cliath 1985), pp. 199-200.
14. Informant, Mr Charles McCarthy, Mountain Common.
15. Smith, *County and City of Cork* (Cork 1750; 1893 ed.), p. 222.
16. Townsend, H., *Stat. Survey of the County of Cork* (Cork 1810) II, pp. 235-7.
17. Ní Chinnéide, S., 'A Frenchman's impressions of Cork in 1790', in *J.C.H.A.S.*, lxxviii (1973), p. 123.
18. *ibid.*, lxxxix (1974), p.17.
19. Hay, E., *Irish Rebellion* (Dublin 1848), p. 114.
20. *Jour. Ir. H. Commons* (1800) Appendix clxxxii. Durrow is probably Dunmore.
21. O'Neill Daunt, Wm., *Personal Recollections of O'Connell* (London 1848), p. 117.
- 21a. Account of potatoes shipped coastways to Dublin 1798-9. Cited by Dickson, *Economic History of Cork Region in 18th Century*, unpublished thesis in Cork archives.
22. Newenham, Thomas, *View of Ireland* (London 1809) Appendix XXII.
23. *Parochial Survey of Ireland*, p. 319.
24. Evidence before Sel. Comm. on Disturbances, 14 June 1824, p. 362.
25. Cited by Bourke, 'Potato Crop in Pre-Famine Ireland', p. 978.
26. Evidence before Sel. Comm. (Lords) on State of Ireland (1825), p. 125.
27. Caulfield, *Cork*, p.671
28. *Cork Chronicle*, 21 October, 1765.
29. Caulfield, *Kinsale*, pp. 280-1.
30. Tuckey, F.H., *Cork Remembrancer* (1837), p. 150.
31. O'Shea, J.J., Index to Old Cork Council Books, Vol. 6, p. 833.
32. Kelly, 'Scarcity and poor relief', *Ir. Hist. Studies*, May 1992, p. 59.
33. Newenham, Thomas, *Inquiry into Progress of Population of Ireland* (London 1805), pp. 104-5.
34. National Archives, SOC 1404/6. This is a composite account based on the depositions of Thomas Marmion, J.J. Troy, revenue collector for Baltimore port, two magistrates, i.e. Thomas Baldwin and Timothy O'Driscoll, and C. Auriol, Brigade Major of Yeomanry, Bandon.
35. National Archives, SOC 1835/5. Depositions of Thomas Robinson.