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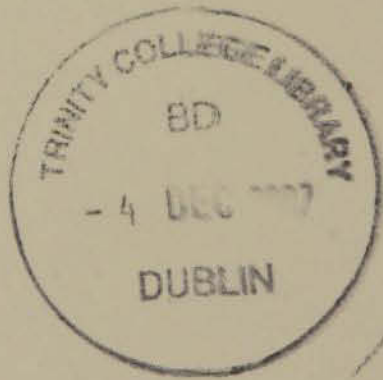
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THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

AND TRADE OF BELFAST

1767-1800

SUMMARY

During the last third of the eighteenth century, Belfast experienced a growth unparalleled by any other major trading centre in Ireland. This was in part due to the dominance of trade and industry: its role as a service centre for the surrounding area was relatively small although by 1800 it dominated the economy of east Ulster and provided many services which had been fulfilled by Dublin at the beginning of the period.

The strong sense of identity which existed among the Belfast business community was a major reason for its success. It was tightly bound together by ties of kinship and apprenticeship which resulted in an exceptionally stable and cohesive business life in the town. The sense of communal identity was reinforced by the failure or absence of established authorities to undertake such tasks as poor relief, and the maintenance and development of the town. As a result the business community had to undertake these functions themselves: by 1800 the linen trade, poor relief, the harbour and the day to day administration of the town were in the hands of the town's businessmen. The sense of corporate identity also expressed itself in the town's foreign trade which was to a considerable extent channelled through centres where Belfast men resided. This was especially true of the French, American and Caribbean trades.

Belfast's industrial expansion was the most rapid of any centre in Ireland. It was dominated in scale by the cotton industry which began in 1777. However, the merchants played little part in its growth and instead invested in a wide range of industrial projects, many of which, such as the canvas, glass and sugar industries, were intended to aid the town's trade. By 1800 the basis of much of the 19th century industrial activity of the town had come into existence, and the town was the leading industrial centre in Ireland. However, it is suggested that it should be regarded as forming part of the economy of west Great Britain and that its industrial performance in this context was not unique.

Norman E. Gamble

Divinity Hostel,

Dublin.

January 1978,

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND TRADE OF BELFAST

1767 - 1800

by

NORMAN E. GAMBLE

Ph. D.

University of Dublin, 1978

I declare that what follows is my own unaided work,
and that it has not been submitted for a degree of any
other university.

Norman E. Gamble

22.2.78.

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January 1978.

List of Abbreviations used in this Work

As far as possible, abbreviations used in the footnotes of this work conform to the list contained in Supplement No. 7 of Irish Historical Studies (1968), pp.81-124. However, references to MSS in the British Library are abbreviated to BL instead of BM. Some works which are not included in the above list, but to which frequent reference has been made, have been given abbreviated titles and these are listed below.

- Beckett & Glasscock, Belfast J.C.Beckett, R.E.Glasscock (eds), Belfast: the Origin and Growth of an Industrial City (London, 1967).
- Belfast Politics (W.Bruce, H.Joy) Belfast Politics (Belfast, 1794).
- Benn, History G.Benn, A History of the Town of Belfast from the Earliest Times to the Close of the Eighteenth Century (2 vols., London, 1877, 1880).
- BEP Belfast Evening Post
- Bigger, Griffith F.J.Bigger, Amyas Griffiths, Surveyor of Belfast, 1780 - 1785 (Belfast, 1916).
- Bigger, Land War F.J.Bigger, The Ulster Land War of 1770 (Dublin, 1910).
- Bigger, Maqees F.J.Bigger, The Maqees of Belfast and Dublin, Printers (Belfast, 1916).
- Bigger, Mitchell F.J.Bigger, Alexander Mitchell, the Famous Blind Engineer of Belfast, Belfast Natur. Hist. Soc. Proc. (1907), pp.19-29.
- BM Belfast Mercury.
- BNL Belfast News-letter.
- Burke, Gentry (1858) J.B.Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1858).
- Business Hist. Business History.

- Charlemont MSS HMC, The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont (2 vols, London, 1891, 1894).
- CUST 1 Minutes of the Irish Customs Board.
- DEP Dublin Evening Post
- DG Dublin Gazette
- Dubourdieu, Antrim J.Dubourdieu, Statistical Survey of the County of Antrim (Dublin, 1812).
- Dubourdieu, Down J.Dubourdieu, Statistical Survey of the County of Down (Dublin, 1802).
- Econ. & Soc. Rev. Economic & Social Review
- f. folio
- Geogr. Journ. Geographical Journal
- Green, Early Belfast E.R.R.Green, Early Industrial Belfast, in Beckett & Glasscock, Belfast, pp.78-87.
- Green, Ind.Arch.Down E.R.P.Green, The Industrial Archaeology of County Down (Belfast, 1963).
- Green, Weavers E.R.R.Green, The Cotton Hand-Loom Weavers in the North-East of Ireland, UJA 3rd ser., VII (1944), pp.30-41.
- Griffith, Tracts Amyas Griffith, Miscellaneous Tracts (Dublin, 1788).
- Hist. Collections (H.Joy) Historical Collections Relative to the Town of Belfast from the Earliest Period to the Union with Great Britain (Belfast, 1817).
- Ir. Econ. & Soc. Hist. Irish Economic & Social History
- Journ.Amer-Irish.Hist.Soc. Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society
- LHL Linenhall Library, Belfast.
- Longfield, Textile Printing A.K.Longfield, History of the Irish Linen and Cotton Printing Industry in the Eighteenth Century, RSAL Jn. (1937), pp.26-56.
- Longfield, Notes N.I. A.K.Longfield, Notes on the Linen and Cotton Printing Industry in Northern Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, Belfast Natur. Hist. Soc. Proc., 2nd ser, IV (1955), pp.53-68.

- McSkimin, Annals
- McSkimin, Carrickferqus
- meml.
- Millin, Add. Sidelights
- Millin, Sidelights
- Mins. Linen Trustees
- Monaghan, History
- NS
- Owen, History
- Owen, Port
- Pares, War & Trade
- Pares, W. I. Fortune
- Pares, Yankees
- Proc. Dub. Soc.
- R.D.
- Rep. Comm. Secrecy
- Riddell, Andrews
- Riddell, Black
- Scand. Econ. Hist. Rev.
- S.McSkimin, Annals of Ulster; or, Ireland Fifty Years Ago (Belfast, 1849).
- S.McSkimin, The History and Antiquities of the County of the Town of Carrickferqus (ed. E.J.McCrum, Belfast, 1909).
- memorial
- S.S.Millin, Additional Sidelights on Belfast History (Belfast, 1938).
- S.S.Millin, Sidelights on Belfast History (Belfast, 1932).
- Minutes of the Trustees of the Linen Manufacture.
- J.J.Monaghan, A Social and Economic History of Belfast, 1790 - 1800 (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Queen's Univ. Belfast, 1939).
- Northern Star
- D.J.Owen, History of Belfast (Belfast, 1921).
- D.J.Owen, A Short History of the Port of Belfast (Belfast, 1917).
- R.Pares, War and Trade in the West Indies 1739 - 1763 (Oxford, 1936).
- R.Pares, A West India Fortune (London, 1950).
- R.Pares, Yankees and Creoles (London, 1956).
- Proceedings of the Dublin Society
- Registry of Deeds, Dublin
- Report of the Committee of Secrecy.
- H.Riddell, Dr Thomas Andrews, the Great Chemist and Physicist, Belfast Natur. Hist. Soc. Proc., 1920, pp.49-88.
- H.Riddell, The Great Chemist, Joseph Black, his Belfast Friends and Family Connections. Belfast Natur. Hist. Soc. Proc., 1921, pp.107-38.
- Scandinavian Economic History Review.

- SNL
- Westropp, Glass M.S.D. Westropp, Irish Glass, Belfast Natur. Hist. Soc. Proc., 1915, pp.12-56.
- Westropp, Pottery M.S.D. Westropp, Notes on the Pottery Manufacture in Ireland, R.I.A. Proc., XXXII (1913), Sect. C, pp.1-27.
- Young, China R.M. Young, The Old Belfast 'China Manufactory' at Ballymacarrett, U.J.A., 2nd ser., II (1896), pp.188-89.
- Young, Hist. Notices R.M. Young, Historical Notices of Old Belfast and its Vicinity (Belfast, 1896).
- Young, Tour A. Young, A Tour in Ireland with General Observations on the Present State of That Kingdom made in the Years 1776, 1777 and 1778, and brought down to the End of 1779 (2 vols., Dublin, 1780).
- Young, Town Book R.M. Young (ed), The Town Book of the Corporation of Belfast 1613 - 1816 (Belfast, 1892).
- Young, Ulster in '98 R.M. Young, Ulster in '98, Episodes and Anecdotes (Belfast, 1893).

A short note is necessary in order to explain certain practices regarding footnotes as used in this volume.

- A. No references have been included for statistics of imports and exports cited where the source is the statistics preserved in collection CUST 15 in P.R.O. A copy of these records from 1771, but omitting statistics of value, is to be found in NLI.
- B. Dates underlined in text or references, e.g. 1777, refer to the year ending March 25. It will be seen that data given for such periods in fact refers to a considerable extent to the previous calendar year.
- C. References to the memorials of deeds in the Registry of Deeds, Dublin are cited in the following form: R.D. v.503, f.541, the first number referring to the volume in which the memorial is to be found, the second to the page on which it is entered.

D. References to the Correspondence of the Irish Commissioners of Customs (P.R.O. Deposit CUST 1) are cited thus: P.R.O. CUST 1/174, f.103 (12 March 1785), meaning volume 174, page 103, meeting of 12 March 1785.

E. Many footnotes refer to material in PRONI. They are cited as follows: PRONI, followed by the title of the deposit, the reference number of the item and, in most cases, a short description: e.g. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/174, Dr Drennan to Mrs McTier, n.d.

F. For some years the Belfast Newsletter headed each issue with two dates. The first was the date of publication of the PREVIOUS issue and the second that of the issue itself. To avoid confusion and standardise newspaper references, only the latter has been cited throughout: e.g. BNL headed 24 February to 28 February 1786 becomes BNL 28 February 1786.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking economic developments in nineteenth-century Ireland was the rapid expansion of Belfast. From a town of 20,000 inhabitants in 1801,¹ it had become by 1901 a city whose population was calculated at 349,180,² a figure larger than that of Dublin by some 50,000,³ and its charter of 1892, granting its Mayor the title of Lord Mayor, described it as 'the capital of the Province of Ulster and . . . in commercial and manufacturing importance . . . the first town in Ireland'.⁴ It was the economic hub of the only area of the country which had undergone the experience of intensive industrialisation, and its prosperity rested upon the twin pillars of linen manufacturing and shipbuilding, reinforced by a wide range of other industries including mechanical engineering, ropemaking and tobacco manufacturing.

This work examines the origins of this remarkable growth so far removed from the Irish experience as a whole, and shows how during the last three decades of the eighteenth century many changes occurred in the town which laid the foundation for its expansion in the following century. One of these developments was the establishment of a wide industrial base in which were to be found the origins of most of those activities which underlay

1. Owen, History, p.243.

2. ibid, p.337.

3. The population of Dublin City in 1901 was 290,638 (1901 Census, Parl. Pprs, 1902, Vol. CXXII, p.237). However, this figure did not include the various townships which formed part of the built up area of the city but were administratively part of the county. The population of these areas (Rathmines/Rathgar, Pembroke, Blackrock, Dalkey and Kingstown) was 88,110 (ibid, p.99).

4. Owen, History, p.395.

its nineteenth century prosperity. This change from a small if flourishing commercial centre into a town whose prosperity depended primarily upon its industrial activity was the product of the activity of men whose fortunes were determined by their readiness or their failure to seize opportunities which presented themselves in their everyday business lives, and many of the reasons for the town's growth will be found in their social and family activities as well as in the more formal sphere of the factory and counting-house.

Unfortunately many of the town's business records have vanished during the ensuing two centuries. Some types of record have gone almost in their entirety, only a handful of account⁵ and letter books surviving. Two of the few letter books, while the product of Belfast businessmen, were written in New York⁶ and one of them covers a period predating that under consideration and the type of material widely available and used by Fitzgerald in his study of the business community of Drogheda between 1780 and 1820⁷ is thus largely unavailable to the student of Belfast. As a result the emphasis in this study is on the community's organisation and relationships rather than on the extent of its financial dealings. Personal correspondence is surprisingly abundant although much of it comes from one family grouping occupying at most a middling position in the town's social pyramid. This was the Young-Drennan-McTier connection, the principal

-
5. Account Books: Isaac Andrews & Co. of Comber, Millers; PRONI D468 (account book of a linen merchant, believed to be one of the Ferguson family); D1721/1 (account book of a Belfast wine merchant, possibly T. & M. Atkinson.)
 6. New York Historical Soc., Letter Book of Greg & Cunningham, May 1756 to January 1757 (NLI Microfilm P4069); PRONI Drennan-Duffin Papers D729/22 (Letterbook of Hamilton Young, April 1787 to February 1790).
 7. J. Fitzgerald, The Organisation of the Drogheda Economy 1780-1820 (unpublished M.A. thesis, University College, Dublin, 1972).

collections involved being the Drennan-Bruce correspondence, the Drennan-Duffin papers and the Drennan letters, all deposits in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.⁸ However much material survives elsewhere, and some surviving collections, not primarily concerned with the town's affairs contain many items which shed light on the multifarious activities of its businessmen. Among collections of family papers, the Charlemont, Foster, Macartney, Downshire and Ker collections are particularly rich,⁹ while much material also survives in the records of the Customs Commissioners and, thanks to the involvement in the political troubles of the 1790s of so many of the town's inhabitants, in the Rebellion Papers in the State Paper Office, Dublin. Legal records, unlike correspondence and business papers, survive in plenty, principally in the Registry of Deeds in Dublin, and in numerous deposits in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

The use made of these records will become evident from the footnotes and the bibliography but the present work would not have been possible without one source of extraordinary richness. This is the particularly complete coverage afforded to the town's affairs by the newspapers, files of which have survived virtually complete to the present day. Pride of place must of course be accorded to the Newsletter, which survived the entire period and which, of course, still exists today, but the contribution in fields other than that of political controversy of its rivals, the

8. PRONI D553, D729, T765/2 respectively. In 1931 Dr D.A. Charle edited a selection from the latter collection (The Drennan Letters (Belfast, 1931)). However it is far from complete and use has been made instead in the present work of the sets of typescripts in PRONI. All references are to these.

9. The Charlemont MSS have been published by the Hist. MSS Comm. (2 vols. ed. J.T. Gilbert, London 1891, 1894 resp.). The others are PRONI deposits D562, D572, D607, D2651 respectively.

Mercury and the Northern Star has perhaps been neglected. They frequently report events which went unrecorded in their elder contemporary, and contain advertisements not included in the Newsletter. The present writer's debt to all three newspapers will soon become evident to the reader.

No student of Belfast and its business life can ignore the work of such writers as Benn, Owen or Millin, which provides a useful base from which to make further investigations.¹⁰ The later writings of George Benn, for example, represent a remarkable achievement for a local historian working in the mid nineteenth century in relatively isolated circumstances. While it contains what may now be seen as a number of factual errors, it is still of great value in providing clues for further investigation. However his work, and that of later writers, including the extremely accurate writings of Owen and Millin, are somewhat spoiled as historical studies by subjectivity stemming from the not unjustifiable pride which all these writers had in the town and which led them to emphasise its achievements and neglect its many shortcomings. Much has been written in recent years on the business life of other towns in Britain and Ireland¹¹ and there has for some time been a need for a study of Belfast which will set the town's achievements and failings in the wider context of British business life revealed in these studies.

The purpose of this study has been the portrayal of a society in a period of change when new patterns were emerging which were to influence and shape the town's affairs from that period until the present day. In doing this it has been necessary to portray the town not just as the centre

10. See Bibliography.

11. The most relevant studies have been those concerned with Drogheda, Glasgow, Leeds and Hull (see Bibliography under Fitzgerald (thesis), Devine, Wilson and Jackson respectively).

of its region but to place it in a wider sphere. Perhaps the most serious failure of previous histories of its affairs at this time has been a failure to see that external influences on the town were far more wide-reaching than the political effects of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Belfast was part of what might be termed the Atlantic economy, an economic system affected not just by political upheavals but by economic depressions and even by bad weather in any part. It is only by placing the town in the perspective of the Atlantic economy that one can see properly how its businessmen gradually adapted themselves to the increasing complexity of industrial and commercial affairs, evolving new patterns and structures which enabled them to take advantage of the opportunities available to them during the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

THE SITE AND EARLY HISTORY OF BELFAST TO 1767

The growth of Belfast's trade from its earliest days owed little to any advantages of its site for in common with many other towns founded in Ulster during the early seventeenth century, this was chosen for reasons which were as much strategic as economic and commercial. It was situated at the lowest crossing point on the River Lagan where it was partially blocked by a sand-bar produced by the confluence of the Lagan with the Farset, a small stream which flowed from the hills to the west along the centre of what is now High Street.¹

The first person to consider the building of a town on the site was the Earl of Essex who in November 1573 considered it as 'a place meet for a corporate town, armed with all commodities, as a principal haven, wood and good ground . . .'.² He was thinking in terms of military strategy and in another letter two years later visualised it as a base for troops who 'shall command the plains of Clandeboye, and with footemen may kepe the passage open between that and the Newrie, and kepe those of Kilulto, Killmarlin and the Dufferin in obedience, and may be victualled at pleasure by sea'.³ However no attempt was made to build a town until November 1603, when James I granted Belfast and Lower Clandeboye to Sir Arthur Chichester, who had begun to build a town by the end of 1607.⁴ In many respects the site was unsuitable for urban development. It was low-lying and vulnerable to

1. E.E.Evans, Belfast, the Site and the City, UJA 3rd ser., V pp.10-11.

2. J.S.Brewer, W.Bullen, Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts preserved in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth, 1571-1574 (London, 1867) p.448.

3. Quoted in Owen, History, p.15.

4. ibid. pp.19-23.

flooding, while the area available for building was limited by slobland to the north and south, and by the River Lagan to the east. While the Farset provided a safe anchorage for vessels, it was extremely difficult of access, being approached by a winding channel from the Garmoyle Pool, the nearest place where ships could ride safely at anchor at all stages of the tide. Building materials, too, presented a problem as the soft sandstones of the district were unsuited for building purposes⁵ and it was necessary to make bricks of the estuarine clay on which the town was built. Brickfields were opened, apparently near where the 'Boyne Bridge' in Durham Street is today,⁶ and by 1611, when the Plantation Commissioners visited the town, 1,200,000 bricks had been made. These were primarily used in building a new castle to the south of what is now Castle Junction on a site occupied by the remains of a Norman fortification, and in the construction of a residence for Chichester, but it was said that '. . . after finishinge of the said Castle, house and Bawne, there wilbe a good proportion left for the buyldinge of other tenem^{tes} within the said Towne'.⁷

Chichester was created Baron of Belfast in 1612, and in the following year the town was incorporated by charter. It must be stressed that this act was in no way due to its prosperity or rapid growth. The motives were purely political, Belfast being one of forty places incorporated at the time to provide the government with a Protestant majority in the 1613 Parliament. The charter provided for a Sovereign, twelve free Burgesses and commonalty. While they were given considerable powers of local government in such matters the administration of markets and the maintenance of

5. E.E.Evans, loc cit, pp.5-7.

6. Millin, Additional Sidelights, pp.5-7.

7. Quoted in ibid, p.3.

peace, in political matters they were effectually bound to the decisions of the Lord of the Manor.⁸

In the pre-Restoration period, Belfast developed slowly, partly because of the disturbed state of the country. The earliest extant map of the town, supposedly of 1660 but probably dating from about 1685, shows it still well within the ramparts built by Chichester in 1607.⁹ These, with the river to the east, enclosed an area of some 86 statute acres, of which 16 comprised the castle and its grounds.¹⁰ The built up area was about a quarter-mile square, and comprised the present High, Ann and Waring Streets running from east to west and North and Bridge Streets from north-west to south-east, together with a number of interconnecting lanes (Map 1). The growth of population was not rapid; in 1657 Petty estimated it at 589, although this was probably an underestimate as 204 houses were liable for hearth tax in 1666.¹¹

The second half of the reign of Charles II was a period of prosperity and expansion. When the French traveller, Torevin de Rocheford visited the town in 1672 he found only 'a very fine castle and two or three large and straight streets'.¹² Subsequent accounts, however, portray a large and rapidly expanding town. Story, writing of the town as it was during the

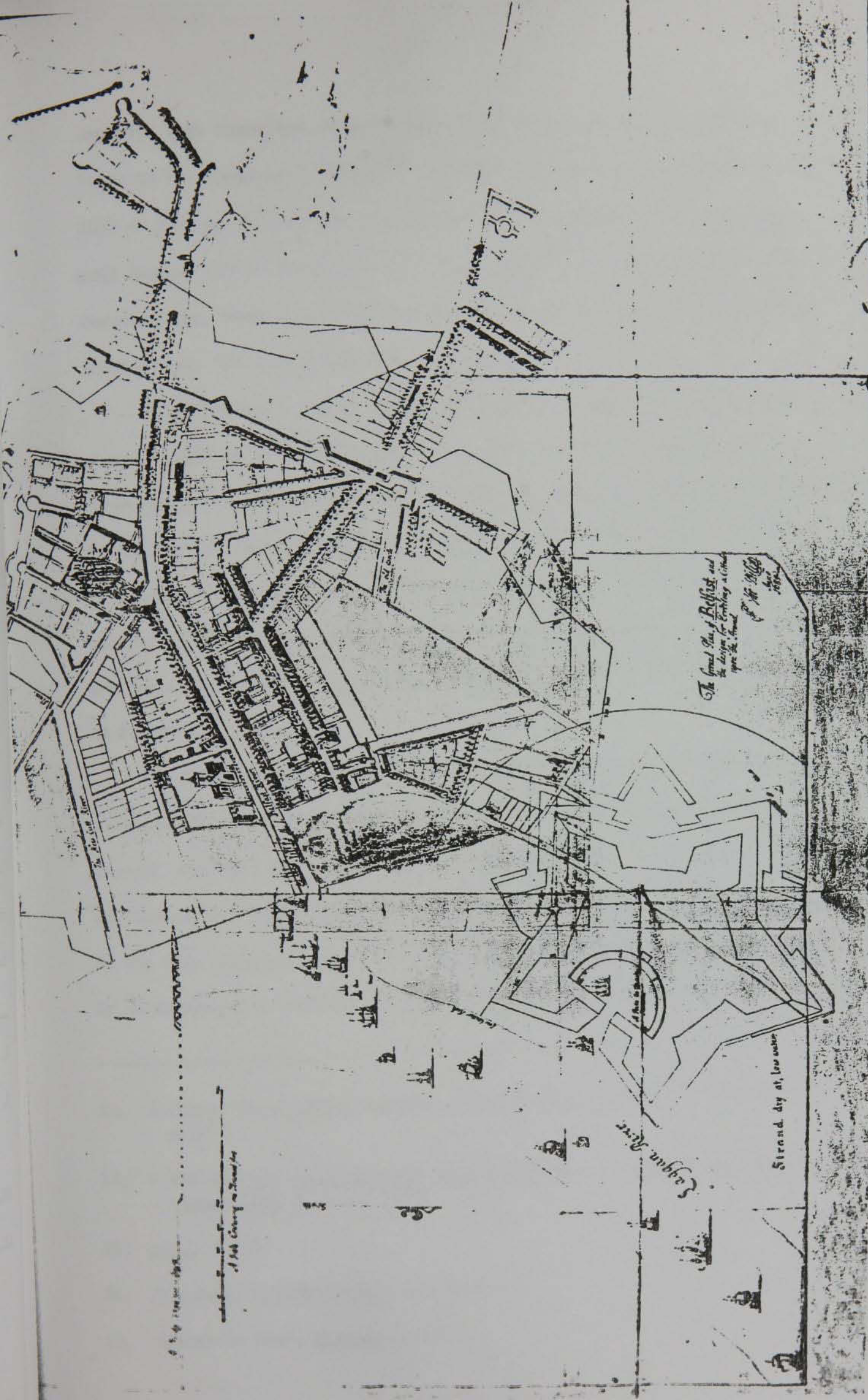
8. Owen, History, pp.24-26.

9. Map in M.Tindal, The History of England, by Mr Rapin de Thoyras, continued from the Revolution to the Accession of King George II, III (London, 1744) p.76 . For its later dating see Owen, History, p.57.

10. Benn, History I, p.276.

11. Quoted in Owen, History, p.58. L.M.Cullen (Population Trends in Seventeenth Century Ireland, Econ.& Soc.Review VI (1975) pp.149-65) and K.H.Connell (The Population of Ireland 1750-1845 (Oxford, 1950) p.260) see Petty's figure as underestimated. Using Connell's adjustments for the Irish population as a guide, Belfast in 1657 had a population of about 1,000.

12. Quoted in Owen, History, p.58.



SOURCE: G. CAMBLIN, THE TOWN IN ULSTER (BELFAST, 1951)
PLATE 17, FACING P. 33

FIG 1 BELFAST IN 1685

Jacobite War, described it as 'a very large Town, and the greatest for Trade in the North of Ireland',¹³ while William Sacheverell visited it in 1698 on his way to Iona and described it as 'the second Town in Ireland, well built, full of People and of great Trade',¹⁴ a strong contrast with Carrickfergus which though 'very Antient, and the Capital of the County of Antrim', was 'of little Trade and ruinous'.¹⁵

While Belfast's growth before the 1680s was slow, one factor which played a role in stimulating commercial activity in the town was the purchase by the government in 1637 of the commercial privileges of Carrickfergus and the transfer of the customs offices from that town to Belfast. It was an unfortunate transaction for Carrickfergus, and McSkimin, in his history of that port, claimed that its trade soon declined, the stones of the quay were used for ballasting ships and a number of its merchants moved to Belfast.¹⁶

By the immediate post-Restoration period the town had developed a trade of considerable geographical extent. De Rocheford mentioned that several merchants who lived in the town were involved in trade with England and Scotland,¹⁷ while John Black, a Belfast man who moved to Bordeaux early in the 18th century, wrote that his father, who was 'educated as a merchant by Mr Pottinger (a Belfast merchant) had been often super-cargo to the West

13. G.Story 'An impartial History of the Wars of Ireland' (Dublin 1693) p.38.

14. W.Sacheverell 'An Account of the Isle of Man . . . with a voyage to I-Columb-Kill (London, 1702) p.125

15. ibid, p.124.

16. McSkimin, 'Carrickfergus, pp.158-160.

17. Quoted in Owen, 'History', p.58.

Indies, at Cadiz, Bourdeaux, Danzick, Holland, England, Rouen, etc.¹⁸ As the writer was born in 1681, it would seem that these journeys were made not later than the early 1670s, and that the trade of Belfast extended to these places then.

Growth in the period between the Restoration and the Revolution of 1688 may be gauged from an increase in the tonnage of shipping owned at the port from 1,102 in 1663 to 1,527 twenty years later. If we can judge from statistics of imports and exports for the latter year, the trading activity of the town would appear to have centred around the provisions trade, which comprised the vast bulk of exports, while in return the town's merchants imported a wide range of general goods.

The rapid growth of the latter part of the reign of Charles II resumed after the interruption of the Jacobite war, and was marked in a number of ways. One of them was an increase in population from about 2,000 in 1685 when Thomas Philip's map (Fig. 1) was drawn, to an estimated 8,549 in 1757.¹⁹

By the middle of the 18th century, Belfast had become a place of considerable commercial importance. It benefited greatly from the growth of the linen industry in the Lagan Valley, and to a lesser extent, from the development in north Armagh for, although Lisburn and Lurgan became the principal centres of weaving activity in the Lagan Valley, the raw materials required for the trade were to a large extent imported through Belfast because of its strategic site at the head of navigation on Belfast Lough. Already, during the late 17th century, there had been bitter rivalry between the merchants of Lisburn and those of Belfast for control of the provisions

18. PRONI Black MSS D1401/4. Letter of Attorney John Black to sons Robert, George and Samuel, July 1761.

19. Owen, History, p.90.

trade in the Lagan basin.²⁰ From this rivalry the merchants of Belfast had emerged victorious, and during the first half of the eighteenth century, they strengthened their control of the linen trade until by 1752 one visitor to the town was able to write in his journal that Belfast was 'a considerable town of trade, especially in the linnen manufacture, in which they are all concern'd, buying the yarn and giving it to be wove'.²¹ The activity of the Belfast merchants was not confined to their activity as drapers, however, and they were acting both as importers of raw materials and exporters of bleached linen to Great Britain, although the bulk of linen exports were despatched through Dublin.

During the first half of the eighteenth century the town's prosperity could not be said to have been reflected in the style of its buildings although as early as 1685 it had begun to expand beyond the limits of its original ramparts and the 'Long Bridge' over the Lagan was begun in 1682, and completed six years later. It was 2,562 ft long, and had twenty-one arches with a considerable length of causeway at its eastern end. It stretched from the end of Ann Street to what is now the junction of Short Strand and Mountpottinger Road and for over a century and a half it was one of the sights of the town.²² Its construction was at least partly a result of the town's increased importance, and it also acted as a stimulus to trade by easing access to the North Down area. The Lagan was bridged again at about the turn of the century by the building of Shaw's Bridge, some four

20. W.H.Crawford, 'The Origins of the Linen Industry in North Armagh and the Lagan Valley' in Ulster Folklife, xvii (1971), pp.43-44.

21. G.T.Stokes (ed), Pococke's Tour in Ireland in 1752, (Dublin 1891), p.20.

22. Dubourdiew, Antrim, p.364.

as 1746-47: apparently the business transacted there had outgrown the old hall.²⁸ The new street was known as Linenhall Street, although it was renamed Donegall Street about 1783 when the White Linen Hall was begun to the south of the town. However, it does not seem to have been very successful, as only a few buildings appear on the map of the town dating from 1757,²⁹ and building leases for the street were being issued as late as 1767.³⁰ Indeed, some of those buildings which were erected do not appear to have been substantial, despite the high hopes held out at the commencement of the scheme for its development as a high-class area of uniform, three story buildings.³¹

Nevertheless, despite the uncertainties of its leaseholds, Belfast was a prosperous commercial centre by the middle of the eighteenth century, and a number of industries supplemented the traditional activities of the small country town. Whereas these had depended upon the produce of the surrounding countryside, such as a supply of skins for tanneries and tallow for soapboiling and chandling, the new industries relied on imported goods acquired by the trading activities of the town's merchants. The most important of these developments was the establishment by 1691 of a sugar refining industry, its existence being an indication that trade with the West Indies had begun by this date. By the 1750s the industry had undergone

28. Benn, History, I, pp.345-47.

29. Anderson, op cit, pp.104-5.

30. eg. PRONI Donegall Leases D509/219, 297, 336, 372.

31. Benn, History, I, p.547.

considerable expansion, and there were two refineries in the town, one in Rosemary Street and the other in Waring Street.³² There was also a small iron-foundry in Hill Street, behind Linenhall Street, apparently founded in or about 1741, which relied upon imported iron,³³ and a ropeworks at Fore Plantation, now Corporation Street. This concern was founded in 1758,³⁴ and would have required the importation of considerable quantities of hemp from the Baltic; its foundation serves to show the extent to which the trade of the port had expanded by this date. The town's development is also indicated by the formation in 1751 by three of its leading merchants of the banking house of Mussenden, Adair & Bateson.³⁵ It survived until 1757 when its closure was prompted by a clause in the 'Act for Promoting Public Credit' of 1756,³⁶ which forbade bankers from being involved in any other activity. While no other bank was formed in the town until the 1780s, the very fact that a banking house could operate safely for more than five years is an indication that the business community of Belfast had by the early 1750s attained a considerable strength and sophistication.

When the fifth Earl of Donegall came of age in 1760 and gained control of his property, the way was open for a resolution of the doubts which sur-

32. See pp.^{342ff} below.

33. B.N.L. 25 December 1787; H.D.Gribbon, The History of Water Power in Ulster (Newton Abbot, 1969), p.76.

34. Benn, History, I, p.365; M.McNeill, The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken 1770-1866, A Belfast Panorama. (Dublin, 1960), p.41.

35. They appear to have opened for business in late February 1752 (B.N.L. 19 June 1752). This would indicate that the idea was formulated at the end of 1751.

36. 29 Geo II (Ire) c.16, § 2.

rounded the town's leaseholds. Plans were soon put in hands for a general releasing of the property, although this was not achieved until July 1767. As far as the Earl was concerned, the principal reason for renewing the leases was the need to increase his income and so meet his own, and his inherited debts. In the short term this would appear to have been achieved, for the rents laid down in the new leases were substantially higher than their predecessors. John Caldwell, for example, a merchant who had a tenement in Hercules Lane, now found himself paying £5 instead of £3, as specified in his lease of 1756,³⁷ and a lease granted in 1754 to a widow Katherine Rainey, for a tenement in High Street for a rent of £8.17.0. was renewed to her son, John, for £12.17.6.³⁸

Clearly, however, concessions were required if the old leases were to be surrendered for renewal at an increased rent before they had expired, and this was achieved by increasing their duration to ninety years and three lives. With such a lease a man might feel assured that his children would enjoy a considerable measure of security. The concession, however, also had the effect of considerably weakening the power which the Donegall family had over the town and its development, and was itself a sign that the position of the inhabitants in the negotiations with the estate was not one of weakness.

The new leases were of four kinds. Some merely renewed the leases on existing property, which would seem to indicate that the premises concerned were in good condition. A second category laid down strict standards for repairing buildings. Thatch was forbidden, doubtless because it was a fire hazard: walls had to be fourteen inches thick, and of brick or stone, while

37. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509/135,196.

38. PRONI D509/67, 329.

the type of timber to be used in the roof was also specified. In some cases the lessee was given a certain period (usually thirty years) to bring his property up to the required standard. Other leases required the demolition and replacement of existing buildings by new structures: for example, Henry Ellis, who held a tenement in Castle Street and Cornmarket, was given 'thirty years to replace the existing buildings'.³⁹ A last group of leases make no mention of existing buildings, and may be presumed to involve new sites.

Taken together, the 1767 leases show that Lord Donegall's intention was that within a few years the town of Belfast would have been brought up to a high standard insofar as its buildings were concerned. The distributions of the types of lease within the town are also of considerable interest, and will be found in Fig. 3, which is based on the principal deposit of these leases in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.⁴⁰ From these statistics we can obtain some idea of the physical state and extent of the town at this period, although it must be realised that some leases are missing and that the size of individual tenements differed considerably.

One of the most noticeable features was the large number of 're-building' leases in the 'suburbs' to the west and north, which may be indicative of the redevelopment of cabin suburbs in these areas, and similar conditions requiring redevelopment may be seen in Church Lane and Skippers' Lane, two streets which may be traced back in origin to the mid-

39. PRONI D509/208.

40. PRONI D509/156-375. Some other leases, not included in this deposit, are in other PRONI deposits, or are memorialised in the ledgers of the Registry of Deeds. They do not affect the finds of this survey. A number of leases cover two pieces of property and are considered here as two leases. Others concern small areas of ground outside the town and these have been excluded.

STREET	TYPES OF LEASE				TOTAL	
	ORDINARY	REPAIRING	BUILDING	REBUILDING		
HIGH STREET	9	4	0	11	24	E-W AXIS
WARING STREET	0	0	0	0	0	
ANN STREET	2	2	0	0	4	
CASTLE STREET } CORNMARKET	3	6	1	12	22	
BRIDGE STREET	4	7	1	0	12	N-S AXIS
NORTH STREET	5	1	0	6	12	
LINENHALL STREET	3	2	5	1	11	
OLD QUAY } CUSTOMHOUSE LANE } CHURCH LANE } HANOVER QUAY }	3	1	1	10	15	MINOR STREETS S. OF FARSET
SKIPPERS LANE	0	0	0	6	6	SECONDARY STREETS IN TOWN
ROSEMARY LANE	3	0	0	0	3	
HERCULES LANE	2	2	1	3	8	
LEATHES LANE	0	0	1	0	1	
SHAMBLES	0	1	0	0	1	
BULLER'S ROW PLANTATIONS	1	0	0	10	11	
PATRICK STREET	0	2	1	4	7	W. SUBURBS
GOOSE LANE	7	3	0	5	15	
CARRICKFERGUS ST. } PETER'S HILL }	2	5	1	7	15	
MILLFIELD STREET	0	0	1	9	10	
MILL STREET	1	2	3	4	10	
POUND STREET	0	0	0	1	1	
BARRACK STREET	0	0	0	4	4	

FIG. 3 . THE NEW LEASES OF 1767 IN BELFAST (Source: PRONI D 509/--.)

17th century, but which never became major thoroughfares. However, even High Street/Castle Street has a large number of rebuilding leases, which would indicate that it was in a state which needed considerable improvement. Interestingly, the number of building leases is few, which would indicate that the town was undergoing a period during which expansion was being consolidated. They only occur in any numbers in two places, Linenhall Street and Mill Street. They suggest that the development of Linenhall Street, laid out in 1754, was not yet complete, while the Mill Street leases would seem to indicate continued development along this thoroughfare which formed the initial part of the road to Lisburn and Dublin.

One area of the town is not included in this brief survey. This is the Macartney lease which comprised all the land to the east of Church Lane. This had been developed by 1715, as it appears on MacLanachan's map of that year.⁴¹ Presumably because it was the subject of a complicated mortgage by the Macartney family to outside interests,⁴² negotiations for renewal of the lease were not completed until later in 1767 when Henry Meredyth, a Dublin man who then held a mortgage on the property, was granted a redevelopment lease of the site.⁴³

The population at this period was probably about 10,000 and, as can be seen from Fig. 2, the town had expanded considerably in area since the 1680s. Its trade had greatly expanded and the customs revenue had risen from about £8,000 p.a. in the 1700s⁴⁴ to almost £33,000 in 1762-63.⁴⁵

41. Millin, Sidelights, p.99; G.Camblin, The Town in Ulster(Belfast, 1951) p.79.

42. PRONI T956/37.

43. PRONI D509/376.

44. Owen, History, p.154.

45. Owen, Port, p.23.

Nevertheless, little had been done to improve the port since Isaac Macartney had constructed Hanover Quay, and the lack of adequate harbour facilities was to be one of the major obstacles in the way of the town's expansion during the rest of the century. With the notable exception of the Brown Linen Hall, little was done to provide substantial public buildings in the town during the period and there were only two other public buildings. These were the church and market house in High Street, both of which were portrayed on Philip's map of 1685. The other great 17th century building, the castle of 1607, was burned down in 1708, and was never rebuilt, parts of its grounds being leased out for grazing by the 4th Earl after he attained his majority in 1716,⁴⁶ and not used for building until the 1780s. The town, then, while prosperous and expanding economically, suffered from serious neglect by its landlord during the first half of the eighteenth century. Part of its problems stemmed from the disorder surrounding the complicated financial affairs of the Chichesters. When these were resolved to some extent during the period of the 5th Earl, a policy of close supervision of its affairs was instituted, in which considerable sums were spent by the Earl on the improvement of the town and the conditions under which leases were held were changed for the benefit of the inhabitants. It was a policy which in its generosity contrasts with his treatment of the remainder of his Co. Antrim estate which was exploited for the contribution it could make to alleviating his chronic indebtedness, and shows how powerful the town had become by the mid 18th century.

By 1800 Belfast was a thriving and well-built town, the third most important port in Ireland with a population of about 20,000, a prosperous and progressive industrial sector and a widespread trade. In subsequent

46. Millin, Add. Sidelights. pp.43-48.

chapters this development will be examined in an attempt to discover the factors which stimulated its rapid growth in size and prosperity and it will emerge that the patronage of the Donegall Estate was by no means of negligible importance, although overshadowed by many other reasons.

CHAPTER 3
THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

(i) The Elements of the Community

The prosperity and growth of Belfast centred primarily not around any overwhelming natural advantages of its site, nor upon the patronage of the Chichester family, but upon the talents and skills of its businessmen. They came from many different origins, geographical and social, and engaged in many and varied activities. However, despite their differences they formed when required a cohesive, if hierarchical, community which could act as a powerful pressure group. Its leaders were the general merchants who controlled the town's foreign trade. They dealt in a wide range of goods, and had connections in many parts of the world, and they were in many cases very wealthy men. The richest was probably Waddell Cunningham, the son of a prosperous farmer from Ballymacilhoyle, near Killead. He made his initial fortune in New York, and was involved in many activities including legitimate trading, the financing of privateers, glassmaking and banking. On his death in 1797 he left a fortune in excess of £60,000 as well as lands in Dominica and possibly in New York.¹ His was not an isolated case: in 1799 seven businessmen owned over £30,000 worth of property in the town, the largest holding being that of Hugh Montgomery, which was valued at £60,000.

Without its large and active merchant class, progress in such matters as industrial development would have been much more limited, if not non-existent, during the period. Indeed the very success of the families of

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1. A calculation based on figures included in PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/685A (Mrs McTier to Dr William Drennan, December 1797). They are corroborated by the 1799 valuation of the property in the town owned by his nephew, James Douglas, who had inherited his estate; this was valued at £40,000 (LHL, Joy MSS 10/13 f.54-55).
 2. LHL Joy MSS 10/13, f.54-55.

general merchants who dominated the town's economic and social life during the 1760s and 1770s became a threat to the survival of their type of business, for the growth of the town enabled new figures to rise to prominence whose wealth and influence rivalled that of the longer-established families. Merchant dynasties such as the Blacks or Greys were 'jacks of all trades', turning their hand with equal success to a wide variety of activities. The rising merchants and businessmen, on the other hand, were frequently specialists in one field or another - industrialists, ship-brokers or importers of specific commodities. Industry needed managers with technical knowledge of new processes, and those who had this knowledge rarely came from the merchant families, although these often funded the new enterprises. Nicholas Grimshaw, for example, the man who pioneered the factory-based cotton industry in the town, was the son of a Lancashire textile printer, and on his first coming to the town relied on the finances of Nathaniel Wilson, a wealthy wine merchant. Despite Wilson's death and failure in 1788, Grimshaw became one of the leading figures in the business community by the end of the century and his firm had an office in Dublin as well as Belfast.³ A new ropeworks was established at Mountpottinger in 1790, financed by some of the town's leading merchants. When their manager, James Mason, left early in 1796 and they were unable to find a successor, the firm was threatened with extinction, although Mason held only a small share in the concern.⁴ A third example of the manner in which managers were able to exert an influence considerably in excess of their monetary contribution to a concern occurs in late 1797 when Israel Milliken, the manager of the muslin manufacturers, Milliken, Sayers and Clarke, was arrested along with other United Irishmen. The other partners, who held

3. See pp. 373ff below.

4. See pp. 351ff below.

a majority of the capital tried in vain to petition for his release: when this failed, the firm ceased trading.⁵

The increasing trade of the town enabled specialisation to develop in a number of activities which had formerly formed part of the business of the general merchant. Among these were shipbroking and the importation of wines and spirits, both of which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. It should be noted, however, at this juncture that those who were involved in them frequently came from backgrounds of considerably lower social standing than the long established merchant families. The effect of the process of specialisation, therefore, was to increase the upward social mobility of the business community. Expansion provided opportunities for individuals who would otherwise never have risen to prominence. Henry Haslett, for example, was one of the most successful shipbrokers in the town during the 1790s. He had previously owned a drapery shop in Rosemary Lane,⁶ while another prominent shipbroker, Robert Hunter, had been a publican and woollen draper before that.⁷

The same comment can be made about the new managerial class which has been mentioned as a product of industrialisation. Many of the members came from the ranks of the numerous small businessmen and master tradesmen who must be regarded as forming the base of the business community's social pyramid. The cotton industry, especially, owed much of its growth to finance and skill supplied by such groups as grocers, woollen drapers and master craftsmen, and surprisingly little to the general merchants.⁸

5. SPO Rebellion Papers 620/35/69.

6. BNL 8 April 1788.

7. BNL 11 August 1778, NS 28 July 1792.

8. See Chapter 10.

These groups are frequently neglected by the historians of urban economies at this period: Wilson, for example, in his study of Leeds is concerned primarily with its wealthy woollen merchants, while Jackson and Fitzgerald, in their studies of Hull and Drogheda respectively, also concentrate their attention on the wealthy merchants and financiers.⁹ The extant records for the merchants are usually considerably more complete than those of groups at the lower level on the social and economic scale. However, should one concentrate a study upon them it is easy to miss what is one of the most important factors in Belfast's transformation from a trading centre into a primarily industrial town. This was the gradual eclipse of the general merchants as the dominant element in the business community by groups who would have been considered as their social inferiors at the beginning of the period. The merchants were, to a considerable extent, a self-perpetuating body. Fathers passed on their businesses to their sons and apprentices were recruited mainly from the families of other merchants, or from the more prosperous elements of society such as the clergy or well-off farmers. Apprenticeship fees, together with the expense of becoming established in business, could be a formidable obstacle to prevent those without financial resources from becoming merchants.

Nevertheless the town's prosperity rested, not only on the merchants, but on the large numbers of small industrial and commercial firms in the town. The small retailers, for example, provided markets for the goods imported by the merchants: the small craft industries processed raw materials both for domestic sale and export. Their owners and their employees provided employment and markets, and as skills became increasingly more valuable,

9. R.G. Wilson, Gentlemen Merchants: the Merchant Community in Leeds 1700-1830 (Manchester, 1971); G. Jackson, Hull in the Eighteenth Century: a Study in Economic and Social History (London, 1972); J. Fitzgerald, The Organisation of the Drogheda Economy 1780-1820 (unpublished M.A. thesis, Univ. Coll. Dublin, 1972).

they were not slow to invest what they had as opportunity offered. It was from this background - that of the lower middle classes - that the economic leaders of Belfast in the nineteenth century were, in large part, to emerge.

However, it must be stressed that the conflict between the general merchants and the lower socio-economic groups in the town is one which was not visible at the time to any appreciable extent. There was not, for example, a great gulf fixed between the two groups, and a common front in the business community was frequent during political crises which threatened the town's economy, such as those of 1785 and 1798-1800 when all elements subscribed to petitions drawn up by town meetings. Projects, such as the Poorhouse, which benefited the population as a whole, also received the general support of the inhabitants. However, the merchants rarely joined with other businessmen in the formation of companies. This was not because the other businessmen lacked resources of capital as many firms formed by non-merchants were of considerable size; rather, one must acknowledge the importance of the relative exclusiveness of the merchants who were bound together by ties of interest, family and apprenticeship, in determining the form of the town's economic evolution.

(ii) Personal Relationships within the Community

One of the most noticeable features of the Belfast business community was its cohesion as a unit, and the continuity of many of the businesses which comprised it. Firms changed with considerable rapidity but the business continued from one firm to its successor, and in many cases the majority of the partners also remained.

One of the most important binding mechanisms in the complicated network of connections which gave strength to the Belfast business world was the intricate network of family relationships which permeated it at all levels, and which on occasion brought together the most diverse elements. In its most simple form, the family provided continuity from father to son: continuity of the family business was best guaranteed if there was a son or sons who could be trained in the family business and who would, with time, inherit it. But this is the obvious, visible, continuity and on examination it proves to be but the most visible of many linkages originating in family relationships. A number of partnerships among brothers existed, possibly the most important being that of the Browns of Linenhall Street. William and John Brown were in partnership by 1770; in October 1777 they admitted their half-brother, Thomas, to partnership, and this firm was in business for ten years until John left in early 1787 to enter banking, William doing likewise in the following year, leaving Thomas as the trustee of their property.¹⁰ All three were apprenticed to their Uncle, John Campbell, another Belfast merchant, and were incidentally partners with him in the Waring Street sugar refinery from 1782¹² as well as in the glassworks of

10. BNL, 27 February 1770, 28 October 1777, 10 April 1787, 9 September 1788; J. Schoales, T. Lefroy, Reports of Cases argued and Determined in the High Court of Chancery in Ireland, during the Time of Lord Redesdale (Dublin, 1806), I, p.328.

11. Benn, History ii, p.223.

12. BNL, 1 January 1782.

John Smylie & Co., which was founded in 1785,¹³ while both Campbell and William Brown were partners in the same bank, that of Cunningham, Campbell & Co., which lasted from 1788 to 1793.¹⁴

Other examples occur of young men being sent for training to relatives who had successfully established themselves in business in the town. Mention has already been made in another context of the woollen draper, John Neilson, and it will suffice here to note that after going into business on his own, his father sent his two younger brothers, Samuel and Thomas, to Belfast to serve their time under him.¹⁵ In similar fashion, the merchant, Thomas Greg sent his son Samuel to his uncle Robert Hyde, a Manchester cotton mill owner. Hyde adopted him and on his death in 1783 he, with his cousin, Nathaniel Hyde, inherited his business at Ardwick.¹⁶

While in most of these cases we are assisted by a common surname, this is not of course the only criterion in seeking out family relationships and it is only when we look beyond it that we can appreciate the extent of the ramifications and buttresses with which the marriage tie strengthened the Belfast commercial and industrial world. In the firm of Holmes and Davis the partners, James Holmes and Robert Davis were brothers-in-law, Holmes having married his sister, Jane, in 1782.¹⁷ Similarly, the partners of James Robinson & Co., which was formed in 1791 to build starchworks in Rosemary Lane, were related to each other, the other two partners, George

13. Millin, Sidelights, p.77.

14. BNL 30 December 1788.

15. Madden, United Irishmen, 1st ser. ii, p.51; BNL 20 July 1787.

16. R.V.Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England (2nd ed., London, 1952), p.52.

17. R.D. Vol. 344, f.147 (Marriage Settlement); BNL 17 March 1789; R.D. Anonymous Partnership Register I, memorial 112.

Langtry and Charles Peyton, being married to Robinson's sisters.¹⁸ A third example emerges from an examination of the Magee and Callwell families. In 1784 William Magee married Jane Callwell; in the following year Magee helped her brother Robert to open a spirit and cheese shop next door to the Magee's printing and bookselling business in Bridge Street.¹⁹

Some of these family connections embraced extremely wide areas of the town's commercial and industrial life. The most influential family group in the town was that of the Hyde family, or rather those businessmen who had married daughters of Samuel Hyde, a Lancashire man who came to Belfast at some date prior to 1750 and established himself as a linen-draper and merchant. An examination of their activity, and that of their descendants, will show how marriage not only influenced decisions on the taking of partners and the making of investment decisions, but how it could also be used to reinforce business interests.

In 1747 Elizabeth Hyde married Thomas Greg, a young merchant who was rapidly rising to prominence in the town.²⁰ In 1756 he entered into a partnership with Waddel Cunningham, then resident in New York where he had made a considerable fortune by the early age of twenty-eight. There were two other partners in the firm. They were Hamilton Young, a Belfast man, and Robert Ross Waddell, a relative (probably a cousin) of Cunningham, his mother being one of the Waddells of Springvale, Co. Down.²¹

In 1765 Cunningham returned to Belfast, and the same year married Margaret Hyde, another of Samuel's daughters. In the same year, a third

18. R.D. Vol. 471, f.245; PRONI St Anne's Marriage Register D1759/1C/2.

19. Bigger, Magees, p.13; BNL 1 July 1785.

20. Benn, History, ii, p.176.

21. PRONI Duffin Papers D270/6; New York Historical Society - Greg & Cunningham Letterbook (N.L.I. Microfilm P4069) Letters from W. Cunningham, May 1756.

daughter, Hannah, married Robert Batt, who was described in the Newsletter as 'late Captain 18th Regiment of Foot'.²² The Batts had considerable property interests in south-west Wexford, incidentally near the small Donegall estate at Dunbrody. These were inherited by Robert in 1779, when his brother, Thomas, was killed fighting in the British forces in the American War of Independence.²³ Finally we must consider a fourth line of descent from Samuel Hyde, for in 1764 his son, Samuel jnr, married Peggy Hamilton, the daughter of a Manchester cotton merchant with whom he was in partnership during the 1750s.²⁴

This last connection, including a link between Belfast and a branch of the Hydes who retained their connection with their native Lancashire, is of considerable interest. In 1783 Robert, one of the Manchester Hydes, died and left £400 to Samuel's son, Nathaniel as well as £10,000 to Thomas Greg's son, Samuel, with the proviso that if Nathaniel died without an heir, he would have the reversion of his fortune on adopting the name of Hyde.²⁵ Both Hyde and Greg went to Manchester, and Hyde died there in 1797, when Samuel Greg came into full control of what was one of the largest and most advanced cotton mills in England.²⁶

The terms of Robert Hyde's will show a very close bond existing between the Greys and the Hydes. However, this investigation has so far revealed only part of the intimate and complicate network of family relationships

22. St Anne's Church marriage register, PRONI D1759/1C/2

23. Burke, Gentry (1858), p.61.

24. Benn, History ii, p.177

25. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/65. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, mid-1783.

26. BNL 13 January 1797; M.Sanderson, Education and the Factory in Industrial Lancashire, Econ.Hist.Rev., 2nd ser., xx (1967), pp.269-73.

which expressed itself in the business life of the Gregs, Hydes, Batts and the other families involved. Captain Batt died in Waterford in 1783, having gone there four years earlier to look after the family lands.²⁷ On his death the family returned to Belfast where three of his five sons, Narcissus, Robert and Thomas, became merchants. Another son, Samuel, became a linen draper while William became an Anglican clergyman and apparently spent much of his time looking after the family estate. In 1793 Narcissus further reinforced the links between the Gregs and the Batts by marrying Margaret, Thomas Greg's daughter,²⁸ while Samuel married Anne Hyde.²⁹ Narcissus was in partnership with Robert: Thomas went into business on his own account by 1796, although by 1800 he was working closely with another Belfast merchant, John Turnley, whose sister had married William Batt in 1794.³⁰

So far, little has been said about Waddell Cunningham. However, in our examination of his family connections, we may extend our net even further. Certainly, his activities leave us in no doubt of his zeal in promoting the activities of his family. As early as 1756 his brother, Charles, was the manager of the New Sugar House in Waring Street in which Waddell had a financial interest,³¹ and another brother, Daniel, was the captain of one of his ships.³² By 1768 he employed as his personal clerk

27. BNL 14 September 1779, 28 October 1783.

28. BNL 25 January 1793.

29. H.J.St J.Clarke, Thirty Centuries in South-East Antrim (Belfast, 1938), p.215.

30. BNL 11 August 1794, 18 July 1797, 23 May 1800.

31. NLI Pos. Mic. P4069. Waddell Cunningham to Charles Cunningham, 12 September 1756. Charles was apparently engaged in the linen trade at this time.

32. ibid. W. Cunningham to Haliday & Dunbar, Liverpool, 10 May 1756; the same to Thomas Greg, 8 June 1756.

one Robert Douglas, who married Cunningham's sister, Jane.³³ When Cunningham 'retired' from business in 1788 to enter banking, his general merchants' business became the firm of John Boyle & Co., the partners being John Boyle and Jane Douglas, who was presumably keeping a motherly eye on Cunningham's interests, which she did until 1798, shortly after his death.³⁴ Another of Cunningham's employees was Campbell Sweeney, who was the brother-in-law of James Douglas, Cunningham's nephew and heir. Sweeney was Cunningham's manager when he recommenced business in 1793. To complicate the historian's task, this business was carried on separately from that of John Boyle & Co. On Cunningham's death in 1797 the firm became that of Douglas and Sweeney, the partners being Sweeney and Robert Douglas.³⁵

Meanwhile, Cunningham had died in December 1797, leaving a very considerable fortune.³⁶ The account of Mrs McTier in the Drennan correspondence indicates that in the last months of his life the Batts had shown a moving regard for their 'cunning dark-souled Uncle', as she called him, and it would appear that in this way they were encouraged by Mrs Cunningham, who had no children and who wanted to keep his fortune in her side of the family. However, the old merchant was more than a match for them, and asked them to take his nephew, James Douglas, into partnership, for which he would give them £5,000. They refused, their mother giving as a reason the fact that 'her sons had never been connected but with people of good character', a statement which would seem to indicate a considerable reservoir of ill feeling between the Batts and Cunningham's blood relations. Needless to say this refusal, and the manner in which it was made, annoyed Cunningham who

33. R.D. Vol.265, f.117

34. BNL 30 December 1788; 12 November 1798.

35. BNL 9 February 1798; 17 May 1799.

36. R.S.J.Clark, op. cit. ii, p.60.

told a friend soon afterwards that 'he wd make a Man of Douglas before a Batt', and made a new will. In it he left his nephew, Cunningham Greg, who had inherited the business interests of Cunningham's former partner, Thomas Greg, £2,000, and after making a number of smaller bequests left his wife nothing but the house she lived in, and demanded that £500 borrowed by one of the Batts should be repaid. The vast bulk of his estate went to his nephew, James Douglas.

So runs Mrs McTier's account³⁷ and while it is in many ways the product of a vitriolic pen, its factual detail is borne out by the surviving summary of the will.³⁸ From it, it is clear that disruptive pressures could build up within such a widespread and wealthy family group. Douglas seems not to have been suited for his sudden wealth: he had little interest in business and had been educated as a lawyer, not a merchant. By the end of 1799 he had sold his interest in the sugar, ropemaking and muslin industries to Boyle.³⁹

Nevertheless, elsewhere in the family cooperation continued throughout the period. Narcissus and Robert Batt were frequently found cooperating in the West Indian trade during the 1790s, although they never seem to have entered into a formal partnership. They also invested in a number of the industrial ventures which developed during the 1790s, including the Old Sugar House, the Mountpottinger Ropewalk and the 'New Traders'.⁴⁰

37. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/685A, Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, December 1787.

38. Stewart Kennedy Papers, T.C.D. MS.2108, f.85.

39. PRONI Millin Papers T811/1, f.73. The interests were a 3/10 share in the Sugar House, a 1/4 share in cotton firm of Robert Wilson & Co. and a 1/7 share in the Ropeworks. These, with the ship Itala were valued at £9,500.

40. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memls.57,58; BNC 26 January 1790; 15, 21 March, 5 April 1791; 30 June, 4 July, 11 August 1794.

This particular admixture of family ties was more complicated than most, although its complexity was perhaps rivalled by that of a group of businessmen, all of whom were related by marriage to the Joy family. The Joys had made a modest fortune from a combination of activities including printing, newspaper publishing and papermaking. They had entered the business world in the 1730s under Francis Joy and by 1767 their affairs were in the hands of sons, Robert and Henry, who were joined in 1785 by Robert's son, Henry junior. He was known familiarly as 'Harry' Joy, and we shall retain this title to avoid confusion with his uncle, and a cousin of the same name. By 1789 the death of his father and uncle left Harry in control of the business, and he maintained most of it to the end of the century although he sold the Newsletter in 1795.

However, printing and paper¹manufacturing were only part of the family's activities. They were, for example, partners in the pioneer cotton¹manufac-
turers, Joy, McCabe and McCracken. One of the other two partners in this venture, founded in 1778, was John McCracken, a sea-captain who was married to a sister of the Joy brothers. Mary McNeill, in her work on McCracken's daughter, Mary Ann, has shown us how the two families grew up in close contact with each other, sharing many common experiences.⁴¹ In 1788 the fourth partner, Thomas McCabe, sold his share in the firm, by then managed by Robert's son,
Francis, under whose name it traded.⁴² Another partner in the business was Robert Holmes, who was married to Henry's daughter, Anne. He was also one of the partners in the firm of Jones, Tomb, Joy & Co.⁴³ a merchant house

41. M. McNeill, op cit., Chaps. I - IV, pp.13-58.

42. BNL 16 December 1788.

43. BNL 24 September 1790; RD Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 58; PRONI T732/43 (Hill MSS, will of Henry Joy).

whose evolution is discussed later in this chapter.⁴⁴ Two other partners in this concern were David Tomb and George Joy, who was Henry's son.⁴⁵ Tomb had married his sister, Elinor in 1770.⁴⁶ He had also been a partner in the firm of Thomas Hardin & Co. and on Hardin's death in 1785 his share in their property had been purchased by Joy. Finally, David Tomb was a member of the Old Ropewalk Company during the 1790s when it was trading as McCracken's & Co. This firm had been founded as early as 1708, the prime mover behind its establishment being none other than John McCracken. By the 1790s it was being managed by his son, Francis,⁴⁷ who had worked for Thomas Hardin & Co. during the mid-1780s.⁴⁸

A third set of family connections which helps us to understand a number of prominent business ventures is that between the Stewarts of Ballydrain, the Leggs of the Malone and the Thomsons of Carnmoney, three families which played an important part in the life of the town during the early 1770s. The Stewarts were bleachers and linendrapers, owning greens at Ballydrain and Wilmont. There were four brothers: John, Alexander and Robert of Ballydrain and William of Wilmont. They were the children of Jane Legg, whose brother, Benjamin, was a West India merchant and a part-owner of the Old Sugar House in Rosemary Lane. He died in 1760, after which the business was managed by Robert Thomson, who married his daughter, Jane in the following year.⁴⁹ In

44. See pp. 46-7 below.

45. RD Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 58.

46. PRONI D1759/1C/2, St Anne's Church Marriage Register.

47. BNE 23 June 1794.

48. BNL 15 April 1783.

49. Benn, History i, p.344, ii, p.166: J.S.Crone, F.G.Bigger, In Remembrance: Articles & Sketches Biographical: Historical: Topographical by Francis Joseph Bigger, MA MRIA FRSAI, p.54 (Dublin, 1927); Burke, op.cit. P.1200.

1777 the Stewart brothers purchased the shares of Thomson's partners, Robert Legg, who was Benjamin's son, and John Hyde, a son of Samuel Hyde. The firm's name was altered from Legg Hyde & Co. to Stewart and Thomson, but it was still, in a very real way, the same business.⁵⁰

The inter-family connections were complicated even further by Alexander Legg, another of Benjamin's sons. He and Thomson were both partners in the general merchants, Galen Thomson & Co.,⁵¹ and this firm opened another sugar refinery in 1773. This was managed by Bartholemew de la Maziere, a Dublin Huguenot who was the brother-in-law of Peter Galen, the acting partner in Galen Thomson & Co.⁵² When de la Maziere returned to Dublin in 1775 he sold his share in the business to Thomson who found himself managing two refineries, which he continued to do until the closure of one of them in 1781.⁵³

Another connection involving the Legg family was that with their neighbours in Malone, the Templetons. James Templeton was married to Eleanor, another of Benjamin Legg's daughters,⁵⁴ and it may be more than coincidental that during the 1760s one Oliver Templeton and a Mr Stewart, both Ulstermen, were auctioneers in New York, while James Templeton and John Stewart were co-owners of the emigrant vessel, Liberty, which was owned in America and which sailed to New York in October 1774.⁵⁵

50. BNL 4 March 1777.

51. PRONI Millin MSS T811/1, f.180.

52. BNL 26 March 1773.

53. BNL 10 October 1775. The sugar industry is dealt with in Chap.9.

54. Benn, History, ii, p.166.

55. BNL 15 April 1774; V.D.Harrington, The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution (New York, 1935), p.93; R.C.Murphy, L.J.Mannion, The History of the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick in the City of New York, 1784 to 1955 (New York, 1962), p.26.

Having shown that family connections frequently underlay business partnerships, certain questions arise which must be answered as far as the available evidence allows. Among them is the question of whether or not marriage as an institution was subordinated to business interests. The evidence for this is extremely meagre. Some cases do occur of marriages within a particular occupational group which were later to form the basis of business arrangements and partnerships. A well-documented case is that of Thomas Black and his sisters. For a number of years before his death in 1773 he had been the master of a vessel engaged in the London trade.⁵⁶ In 1756 one of his sisters, Ann, married Robert Moore, another sea-captain in the London trade, and in the following year another sister, Elizabeth, married Hugh Henderson, who was captain of various vessels owned by Greg & Cunningham. A third sister, Margaret, married James McTier, who carried on a malting business in the town.⁵⁷

The various members of these families carried on a wide range of activities in common. In 1764 McTier, Henderson, Moore and Black took a lease in the Plantation, an area to the north of the town, and built a number of houses there.⁵⁸ McTier died in 1769 and his wife took over the business.⁵⁹

56. In 1765 it was the Pilt (A. Monaghan, *An Eighteenth Century Linen Business: The Faulkners of Wellbrook, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, Ulster Folklife ix* (1963) p.34. He appears as captain of the Pilt (to 1772) and Draper (1773) in PRONI D468 (account book of a Belfast linen merchant). See also BNL, passim.

57. PRONI D1759/1C/1 (Marriage Register of 1st Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast).

58. PRONI McTier MSS D199/3 (Lease).

59. In 1773 she was mentioned in the Donegall Estate correspondence as the owner of a maltmill (PRONI T 1893, Donegall Estate Letter-Book, George Portis to Charles Talbot, 4 April 1773).

Her son, David, became a tallowchandler and in 1786 entered into partnership with Hugh Henderson's son, Hugh jnr., the business lasting until at least 1793 when Henderson went into business on his own account.⁶⁰ Some years later, David McTear entered into a partnership with his sister, Ann and a linendraper, Robert Henderson of Rea, Co. Monaghan, to establish a bleach-green there. It seems likely that Henderson was in some way related to Hugh Henderson, the Belfast sea captain.⁶¹

The most likely reason for this group of marriage connections, however, was not that they were deliberately arranged, but that the sister of a mariner was the most likely person to be able to cope with the strains of a life which involved considerable risks and long absences from home. In addition (and this is probably the most important reason) the common activities and experiences of ships' officers were likely to reflect themselves in their choice of acquaintances, and thus a considerable number of contacts in the form of family friends would probably be seamen. Thus the likelihood of Black's sisters choosing a seaman as their life-partner was higher than that of girls whose family background had nothing to do with the seafaring life. Similarly, merchants' daughters tended to marry merchants and others, such as linendrapers, who engaged in similar activities and acquired similar levels of wealth.

The financial status of the bride was an important consideration in the marriage settlement under which the girl contributed a substantial dowry to her husband's stock and assets but retained it as her own on his death.

60. BNL 8 September 1786. The partnership was still in existence in 1793 (BNL 7 May 1793) but by March 1794 Henderson was working on his own account (BNL 28 March 1794).

61. PRONI McTier MSS D199/21 (Lease).

What evidence exists for arranged marriages within the merchant community is principally that of the existence of matches whose effect could only have been the advancement of the social status of one of the families involved. One such was that of John Alexander and Ann Portis in 1760.⁶²

John Alexander first comes to prominence in the town in 1758, as the junior partner in Bradshaw & Alexander, a merchant house which took over the business of Daniel Mussenden on his retirement in that year, and which specialised in the north European trade.⁶³ Ann Portis was the daughter of George Portis, who was Lord Donegall's agent in Belfast. By 1770 Alexander was his assistant,⁶⁴ and in 1788 he acquired a lease of the manorial mill, which had been converted and enlarged as a flour mill some years earlier by Waddel Cunningham.⁶⁵ The Alexanders remained in control of the mill for over ninety years until it was purchased by Isaac Andrews & Co. in 1882.⁶⁶ Of course, in this case we cannot say directly that Alexander's marriage was arranged with the idea of his advancement in the world, but only that it seems likely that his career benefited by his choice of marital partner. There were a number of such marriages where up and coming young merchants married into the family of their senior partner. Alexander, for example, was a partner in the project to establish a porter brewery in the town in 1787, and seven years later his daughter married its manager, John Cranston.⁶⁷

62. PRONI D1759/1C/2, St Anne's Church Marriage Register.

63. BNL 19 May 1758.

64. PRONI T1893, Donegall Estate Letter Book.

65. See Chapter 9

66. S. Andrews, Nine Generations: A History of the Andrews Family, Millers of Comber (Belfast, 1958), pp.159-60.

67. BNL 9 June 1794.

Similarly, Waddel Cunningham's marriage to Margaret Hyde may be seen as strengthening his commercial interests. However, in all the known cases it is virtually impossible to gauge the motives for the marriage, largely because of the lack of surviving correspondence. There are also just as many cases where marriage preceded inclusion in the family business, often by a considerable period, and so it is hard to come to a hard-and-fast conclusion on the subject.

One reason, however, for the very considerable amount of family involvement in the establishment of entrepreneurial ventures in the town was the lack of protection afforded by the law to unsuccessful enterprises. Until 1782 it was non-existent, but in that year the Anonymous Partnerships Act enabled any number of persons to join in partnership by deed for fourteen years or less where the capital involved was not less than £1,000 or more than £50,000. An acting partner was to be chosen and nominated by the company, and all other members were Anonymous Partners with a strict limitation of liability as to debts incurred to the amount of their contribution and profits, and freedom from subjection to the bankruptcy laws.⁶⁸

As has been mentioned above, quite a number of Belfast firms were registered under the act. It did not apply to ventures whose activities encompassed banking or discounting and most of those who took advantage of it were engaged in industrial projects, the commercial sector continuing to rely upon more traditional methods of forming partnerships.⁶⁹ These centred around the financial resources and the reliability of the prospective partners. Little need be said of the first, and the second explains much of the importance of the family link. It may be presumed that a relative was often invited into a partnership simply because he was a known quantity

68. 21/22 Geo iii (Ir) c146.

69. This may have been due, in part to the traditional function of many merchants as bankers.

insofar as both his resources and his abilities were concerned.

Of course, such knowledge about a prospective partner could be acquired in a number of other ways. In some cases, a number of the partners can be shown to come from the same place, as in the firm of Haslett Strong & Co., which was formed in 1789 as wholesale woollendrapers and haberdashers. One of the two acting partners was Christopher Strong, a native of Ballymoney, and three Ballymoney men were to be found among the sleeping partners.⁷⁰ Similarly, the cotton spinners, Carleton & Sterling, who were in business from at least 1792 to 1794, had as partners two Lisburn men, Cornelius Carleton (who had been a tallowchandler in Belfast since 1778) and Robert Sterling. It is of interest to note that in 1783 both men had been in partnership as tobacco spinners in Lisburn.⁷¹ Similarly, both the partners in the grocery firm of James Davison and Bristow Miniss, which was formed in 1782, came from Antrim.⁷²

One problem which arises in considering the number of firms in which the partners shared a common origin is that in many cases one does not know where the businessmen involved came from. It is impossible to ascertain just how many were natives of Belfast, and how many were immigrants. Of the immigrants one cannot tell, except in a few cases, at what stage in their careers they first came to Belfast. Many may have come as apprentices and have entered a partnership with people from their home town or district. However, the fact that some partnerships between people from the same localities did exist, added to the undoubted importance of family relationships, does effectively demonstrate that more was taken into consideration

70. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.31; BNL 21 April 1789.

71. BNL 8 August 1783, 15 June 1792, 15 August 1794.

72. BNL 2 July 1782.

when forming a partnership than the fact that the prospective partner, or partners, had sufficient capital to invest in the firm.

This conclusion is further reinforced by a number of other facts. Some junior partners are known to have been formerly employed in the businesses to which they were admitted as partners, or to have been related to others who were involved in business with their senior partners. When John Holmes retired from banking in 1794, he reentered business as a general merchant in partnership with one Allen Barklie.⁷³ Seven years earlier, in 1787, his brother, James, had become a partner in the Larne firm of Barklie Black & Co.,⁷⁴ who owned a mill at Inver, near that town, and the partnership was still in existence when John Holmes entered into his partnership with Allen Barklie. It is reasonable to presume that Allen Barklie was related to the Thomas Barklie who was James Holmes' partner in Barklie Black & Co., especially as John Holmes and Allen Barklie witnessed a deed of 1795 between two of its partners, Thomas Barklie and Robert Black.⁷⁵

William Tennant is known to have been employed by the New Sugar House by 1782, and served his time there, or to John Campbell, one of the partners: he was admitted to partnership in 1788, and was the acting partner in the concern for the remainder of the period which we are considering,⁷⁶ while James Kilbee was employed at the Old Sugar House for a number of years before he was appointed as its acting partner.⁷⁷

73. R.D. Vol.500, f.125; BNL 1 May 1797.

74. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.20.

75. R.D. Vol.500, f.125.

76. PRONI Tennant Corr. D1748, Hugh Thompson of Muckamore to William Tennant, 29 September 1782; Benn, History ii, p.223.

77. See pp. 345ff below.

These two examples are drawn from the industrial sector but others can be found in the commercial sector. Alexander Sutherland, for example, managed a merchant business for Mary McWaters after the death of her husband, James, in 1771. He purchased the concern in 1778 and went into business on his own account.⁷⁸ Another possible case was that of John Graham, who in 1788 took over the retail wines and spirits department of John Campbell & Co. when that firm was dissolved. By the end of the century he was in partnership with his son, Campbell. His name would indicate that Graham was previously an employee of Campbell.⁷⁹

Thus the Belfast business community was held together by a complex series of interrelationships which made it into a stable entity and cushioned it as well as was possible against the domino effect of bankruptcy. This was achieved, not by guarantees or arrangements between the different interests to support each other in times of crisis but rather by great care in the selection of those who invested, especially at the upper levels of the economic scale.

By and large the system worked. There were no calamitous failures of merchant houses and in the one serious example of industrial bankruptcy, that of Nathaniel Wilson in 1788, the business community rallied to the firm's aid, and further failures were prevented.⁸⁰ While one cannot say that major economic crises left the town unscathed, the framework of its economy survived, and the credit for this must be attributed to the virtue of economic prudence, a prudence which, as we have seen, extended beyond that of careful making of money.

78. BNL 16 August 1771, 16 July 1776, 1 May 1778

79. BNL 26 September 1788; PRONI, D2167, Box 4, Lease, William Irwin to John and Campbell Graham of premises in Ann Street.

80. See pp. 375-77 below.

(iii) The Development of Partnership Organisation

The period saw considerable advances in the sphere of company formation in Belfast. This was largely a response to the demands of industrialisation for substantial amounts of capital for projects which might not be profitable for many years, if at all. The vitriol works at Lisburn, for example, which was founded by Waddell Cunningham and Thomas Greg in 1767 at a cost of £3,500 had not succeeded in making a profit by 1783.⁸¹ Equally unsuccessful was the porter brewery of 1787: by 1796 George Black, one of the partners in the concern, described it as a 'total failure'. The capital involved was originally £6,000, a sum increased to £7,000 in 1790.⁸² The investment of such substantial sums in activities which were often not the primary concern of the investors called for safeguards to minimise losses in the event of the failure of a venture, and Belfast businessmen were, for example, partners in 23 of the 113 partnerships registered before 1800 under the Anonymous Partnerships Act of 1782, a measure which first introduced the idea of limited liability into Irish company law.⁸³

However, that act did not introduce the idea of partnership into the economic life of Belfast; rather, it added the benefit of limited liability to a mode of organisation already commonplace in the economic life of the town. Joint ventures were virtually, although not quite universal among the merchant houses and the few substantial industries, such as the ropeworks and sugar refineries, as early as the beginning of the period under review. Indeed, partnerships were not uncommon in the smaller retail establishments

81. PRONI Foster MSS D562/6846. Greg to Yelverton, 20 Nov. 1783; Green, Lagan Valley, p.69. For a history of the firm see Chap.10.

82. PRONI Macartney MSS D572/11/19. Black to Macartney, 25 December 1796; R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memls.25, 42.

83. 21-22 Geo III (Ire) c.146.

and even in certain craft industries.

In commerce, the primary motive for entering into partnership was the need for capital. The partner was expected to contribute to the firm's capital so that the activity and range of the business could be maintained or increased. There was, of course, always a danger that the other partner might fail, bringing down the entire concern, but in practice, bankruptcies were rare among the general merchants, who were the group with the largest capital requirements. Only six failures are known to have occurred,⁸⁴ and of these, only two involved major merchant houses. In both cases the bankruptcy occurred on the cessation of a partnership, as the accounts were being drawn up. In both cases, too, the proceedings were restricted to the individual's personal affairs, debts concerning the firms being presumably absorbed by the other partners. The first case occurred at the end of 1774, when the accounts of the merchant house of Galen, Thomson were being drawn up, one of its partners, Peter Galen, having withdrawn to enter the sugar refining business in Dublin. It was discovered that his assets did not cover his liabilities, and bankruptcy proceedings were begun against him without affecting the operation of his partners, who were trading from January 1775 as Legg Sinclaire & Co.⁸⁵ Galen's bankruptcy occurred at a time when cash was in extremely short supply, as was the case in late 1798 when Thomas Brown, another eminent merchant, failed, his partner, John Oakman, continuing in business.⁸⁶ Indeed, the credit

84. The six are (i) Alexander Sutherland 1785 (BNL 26 July 1785); (ii) the same in 1789 (BNL 22 May 1789); (iii) Thomas Brown 1798 (J.Schoales, T.Lefroy. Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the High Court of Chancery in Ireland, during the Time of Lord Redesdale, I (Dublin 1806), p.331); (iv) Peter Galen 1775 (BNL 10 February 1775); (v) Francis Graham 1779 (BNL 1 October 1779); (vi) Fortescue Whittle 1800 (BNL 21 February 1800).

85. BNL 24 January, 10 February 1775; R.D. Vol. 310, f.472.

86. Schoales, Lefroy, op.cit. I, pp.329-331.

of the Belfast businessmen was something of which they were justly proud.

In 1785, the Committee in charge of the White Linen Hall declared that they were establishing a Discount Office because they were 'anxious to preserve the good character our Town has justly obtained for integrity and exactness'.⁸⁷

In similar vein, Dr Alexander Haliday, the eminent physician, wrote to his friend, Lord Charlemont, in 1789 bemoaning the fact that 'the spirit of commerce . . . monopolises the human mind, and most of our merchants are infinitely more anxious about their own credit than that of parliament or the nation',⁸⁸ while five years later, Harry Joy and Rev. William Bruce in the preface to their book Belfast Politics wrote proudly that the town's credit had held firm while it tottered 'in almost every corner of Europe'.⁸⁹

While partnership was primarily a means of concentrating capital in a firm, it also helped to provide continuity within a business. Unless the owner of a one-man business had an heir-apparent,⁹⁰ either the business was likely to be brought to a halt on his death or his wife was left to carry on as best she could, generally having to rely upon her husband's manager. For example, on the death of James McWaters in 1771, his business was carried on by his wife Mary, who eventually sold it in 1778 to her manager, Alexander Sutherland. He was none too successful as a businessman and, once on his own, managed to achieve the dubious distinction of going bankrupt twice, in 1785 and 1789.⁹¹ Somewhat similar was the case of Alexander Blackwell, who

87. BNL 20 May 1785.

88. Charlemont MSS ii, p.96 (Haliday to Charlemont, 11 April 1789).

89. Belfast Politics, p.xv.

90. For example, when one prominent merchant, John Bradshaw, died in the Spring of 1782, his son Robert carried on the family business (BNL 2 April 1782). Likewise the brothers Robert and William Simms inherited their father's tanning and milling interests on his death in 1780 (BNL 11 April 1780).

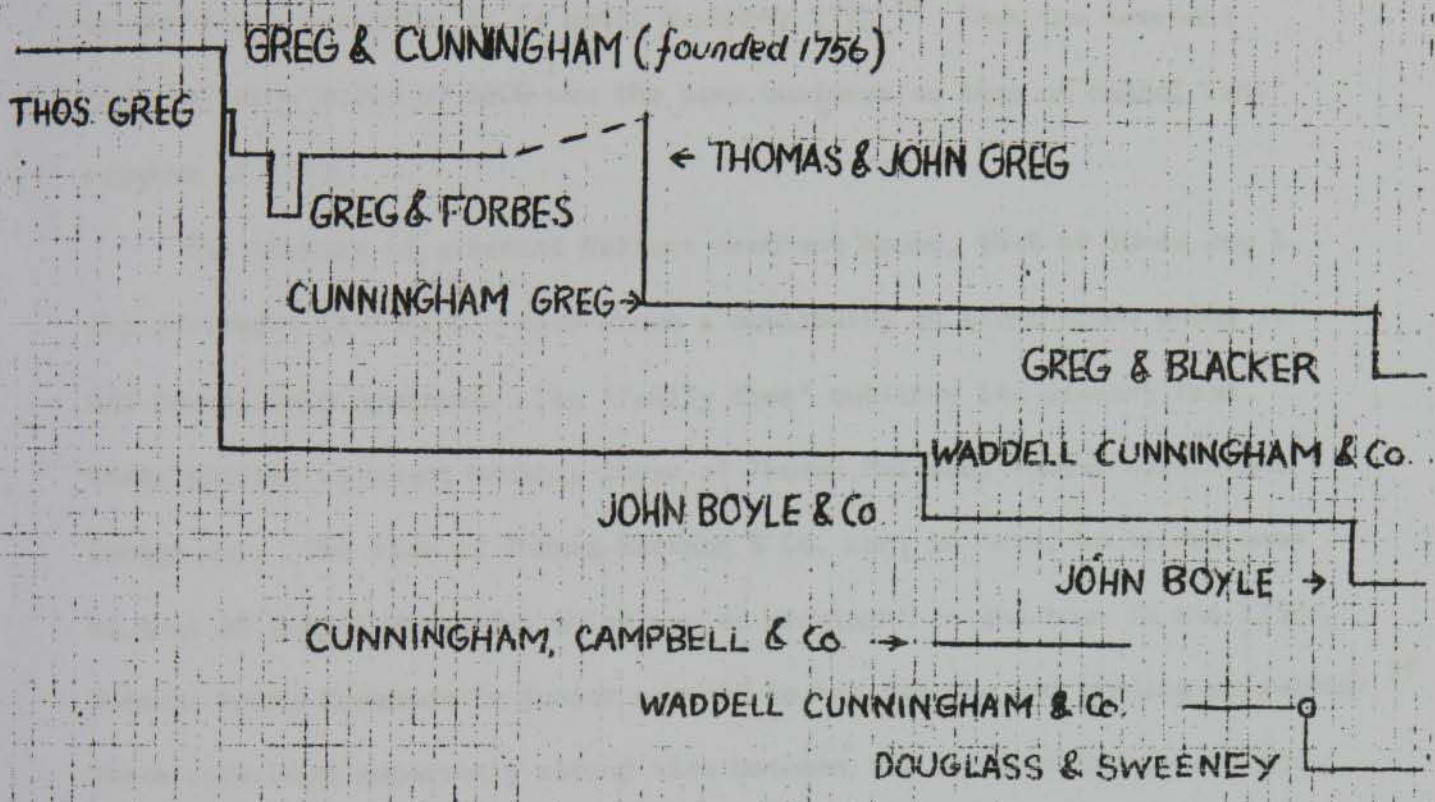
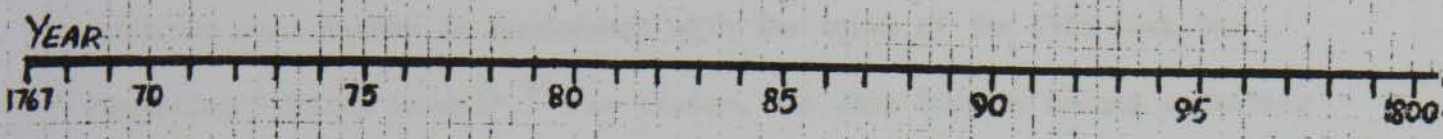
91. BNL 16 August 1771; 16 July 1776; 1 May 1778; 26 July 1785; 17 October 1788; 22 May 1789.

was a master shoemaker on an extremely large scale. He died in November 1785, leaving a wife and son, Alexander Jnr. The latter was in business as a linen wholesaler and does not appear to have been interested in the family business. Mrs Blackwell attempted to carry on the business but no further mention of the firm can be found and it must be presumed that her efforts in this regard were unsuccessful, although she was still living in her house in High Street in 1795.⁹²

Death, then, could have a traumatic and even fatal effect upon the firm which was owned by a single individual. The effect upon the partnership was much less drastic, however. While it meant that new books would have to be opened and the firm's outstanding accounts settled, business was able to continue normally inasmuch as the customers were concerned. Indeed, the remodelling of partnerships was a frequent occurrence in the town's commercial life. Most partnerships were of limited duration. The firm of Greg & Cunningham, for example, made a five year agreement in 1756, a seven year one in 1761 and another of the same duration in 1768, although this latter did not run its course and the firm was dissolved at the end of 1772, possibly because of financial pressures caused by the economic crisis of the early 1770s.⁹³ The history of this firm and its successors, which will be found in graphical form in Fig.4, is an excellent example of the manner in which partnerships changed but the business continued in existence. The original partnership divided in two at the end of 1772, one firm representing the Greg holding and the other that of Cunningham. The continuity of the former firm is evident as it continued to use the Greg

92. BNL 25 November 1785, 24 January 1786; NS 6 July 1795.

93. NLI Mic.P4069. Greg & Cunningham Letter-Book: Cunningham to Hyde & Hamilton, Manchester, 10 May 1756; PRONI Duffin MSS D270/6, 8; BNL 5 January 1773.



--- PRECISE DETAILS NOT KNOWN

○ DEATH OF PARTNER

FIG. 4 . THE FIRM OF GREG & CUNNINGHAM AND ITS DESCENDANTS

name but that of Cunningham's interest in the other partnership is not quite so evident from the style of the firm. Unlike Thomas Greg, he had no son to inherit the business. However, John Boyle (who may have been apprenticed to him) was in partnership with him as Waddell Cunningham & Co. by August 1785,⁹⁴ and when Cunningham retired in 1788 to commence business as a banker in accordance with the terms of the 1755 'Act for Promoting Publick Credit',⁹⁵ his sister, Mrs Jane Douglas became a partner in the firm, remaining in it until November 1798.⁹⁶ Thus the merchant house of John Boyle of 1800 was the same business as that of Waddel Cunningham of 1773.

The history of a second Belfast merchant house, that of Jones Joy & Co. portrayed in Fig. 5 also shows a continuity on examination which is not immediately apparent. Its 'family tree' outlines its descent from three earlier merchant houses, those of Thomas Bateson, Thomas Hardin and George Joy. The firm of Thomas Bateson & Co. can, in turn, be traced back to that of Daniel Mussenden which was so prominent in the town in the 1750s, Bateson being Mussenden's junior partner in his banking and trading activities.⁹⁷ There were also apparently strong ties between the firms of George Joy and Thomas Hardin by May 1784, when both were acting as agents for the Hope, a vessel engaged in the emigrant trade between Newry and Pennsylvania,⁹⁸ and on Hardin's death in October of that year, Joy purchased part of their premises from his surviving partners, Valentine Jones jnr, and David Tomb.⁹⁹

94. BNL 12 August 1785.

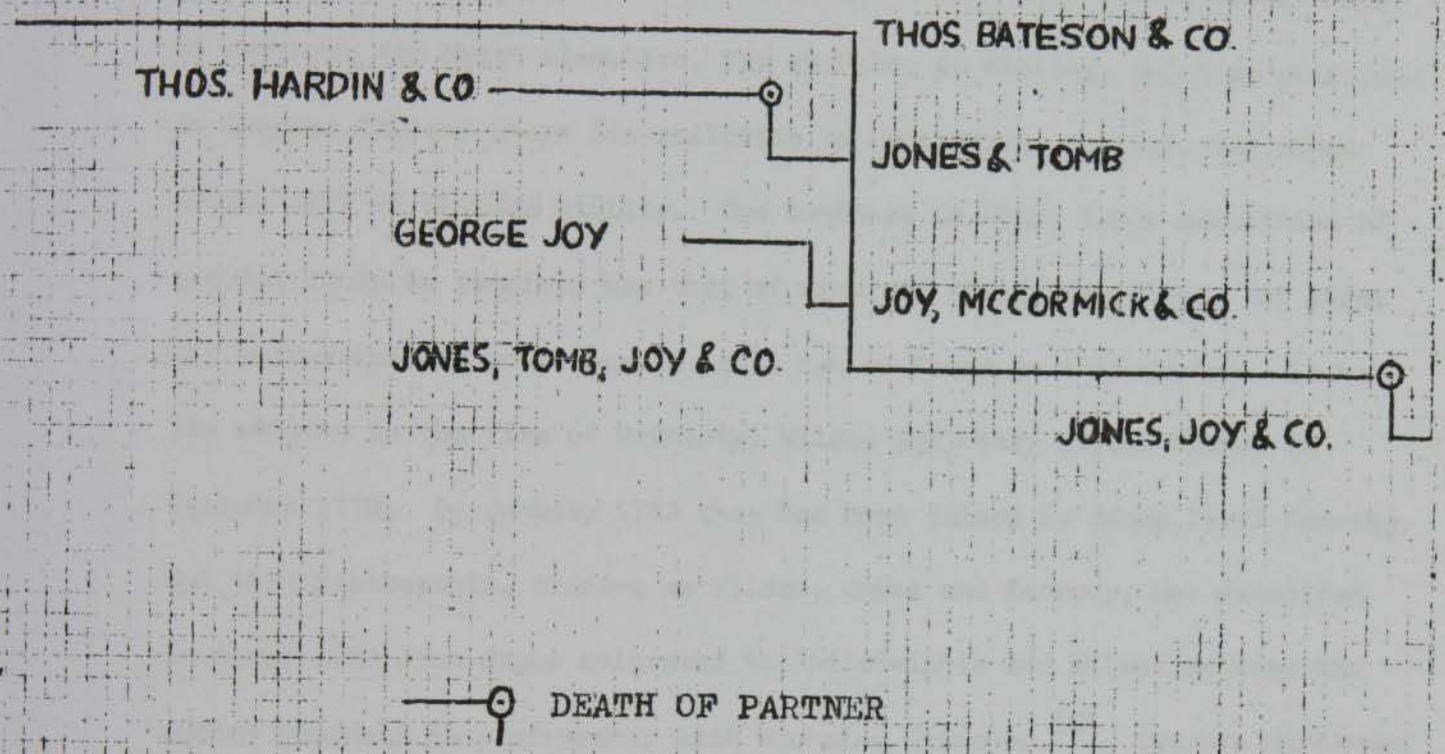
95. 29 Geo ii (Ir) c.16, §.2. This act forbade those engaged in banking to be in business in any other capacity.

96. BNL 2 November 1798.

97. BNL 5 July 1757.

98. BNL 4 May 1784.

99. R.D. Vol.360, f.487.



—○— DEATH OF PARTNER

FIG. 5 . THE EVOLUTION OF THE FIRM OF JONES, JOY & CO.

In the following years the two firms appear to have participated in a number of joint ventures although they did not actually join forces until the beginning of 1787.¹⁰⁰ As in the case of John Boyle & Co., the firm of Jones, Joy & Co. as it was in 1800 bore no resemblance to its parent firm, but continuity had been preserved and business had been transacted without interruption.

The two examples which have so far been used have been drawn from the sphere of the general merchants, and it was here that the largest partnerships in the commercial sector were to be found. However, large partnerships, embodying considerable capital sums and a considerable number of partners did exist elsewhere, for example, in banking, which is discussed in Chapter 4(i), and where its abilities to concentrate capital, and reputation were of obvious utility. One business in which large quantities of capital could be required was that of wine and spirit importing. At least one partnership of considerable scale can be found in this sector. It had its origins in the firm of Nathaniel Wilson and Henry Joyce, formed in December 1778. By January 1782 they had been joined by James Trail Kennedy, but this partnership, trading as Wilson, Joyce and Kennedy, was dissolved in April 1783 when Joyce emigrated to Philadelphia and Wilson entered the cotton business in partnership with Nicholas Grimshaw.¹⁰¹ Kennedy continued in business on his own account until about 1790, when he once again entered into partnership, this time combining the business of wine and spirit importer with that of grocer. His partners were George Black, a merchant with whom he was a part-owner of a brewery in the town, Alexander Cranston whose brother, John, managed the brewery, and Black's son, George. The

100. BNL 19 April, 13 May 1785; 2 January 1787.

101. BNL 11 December 1778; 1 January 1782; 11 April 1783.

firm continued until 1797 when it was abandoned, having proved unprofitable.¹⁰² Most partnerships in the retail sector, however, were small, usually consisting of two individuals. They were often short-lived, one or both partners soon establishing themselves in business on their own account. The firm of Moore & Emerson provides an example of this process. John Moore was apparently its senior partner. By 1779 he was in business as a grocer and retailer of flaxseed and timber, and in November 1780 he was joined by William Emerson. They opened a grocery business in Bridge Street, and in 1784 Emerson left to work on his own account. By 1795 he had transferred his interest to cotton spinning, his grocery business being in the hands of his brother, John. In the following year, the latter went into partnership with Henry Boyle and this firm lasted until January 1798 when Boyle, too, went into business for himself.¹⁰³(Fig. 6)

The formation of partnerships proved to be of use in a most unusual way in the wholesale woollendrapery trade where it enabled families to participate in the two sectors of the trade, the sale of Irish goods and the wholesaling of cloth imported from abroad, and yet gain the benefits which would accrue from concentrating activity in one sector alone. This was done by the formation of two partnerships, each specialising in one branch of the trade. One example of this process was the activity of the Johnson brothers, William and Hugh. Hugh Johnson first entered business on his own account in 1781 at a shop in Bridge Street. In the meanwhile, his younger brother, William, had become a partner in Samuel Clark & Co. who owned the 'Belfast New Irish Woollen Warehouse' in Bridge Street, moving to Rosemary

102. PRONI Macartney Corr. D572/11/17. Black Snr. to Earl Macartney, 25 December 1796; BNL 18 February 1791; 2 June 1797.

103. BNL 20 April 1779; 17 November 1780; 20 January 1784; 21 September 1795; 27 July 1796; 26 January 1798.

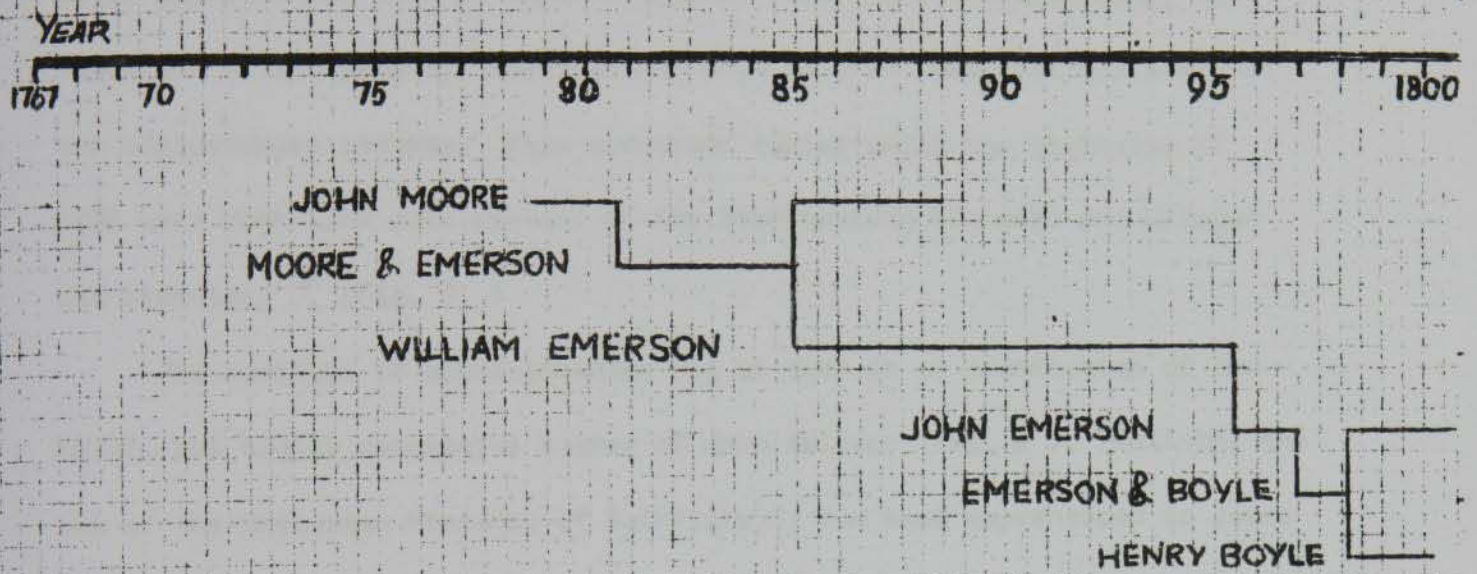


FIG. 6 . THE FIRM OF MOORE & EMERSON

Lane in 1793. On Clark's death in March of that year, they became Johnson and Beck, in which William was an active and Hugh a sleeping partner. By this time William had become a sleeping partner in Hugh Johnson & Co. When Samuel Beck left the partnership in July 1794, the two firms became Hugh Johnson & Co. of Rosemary Lane and William Johnson & Co. of Bridge Street. In both cases the partners were the two Johnson brothers, William specialising in Irish woollens and Hugh in imported goods, although, interestingly, the functions of the premises involved had been swapped around at one stage in the evolutionary process. This situation lasted until the beginning of 1798 when Hugh took sole control of the firm bearing his name and William did likewise.¹⁰⁴ (Fig. 7)

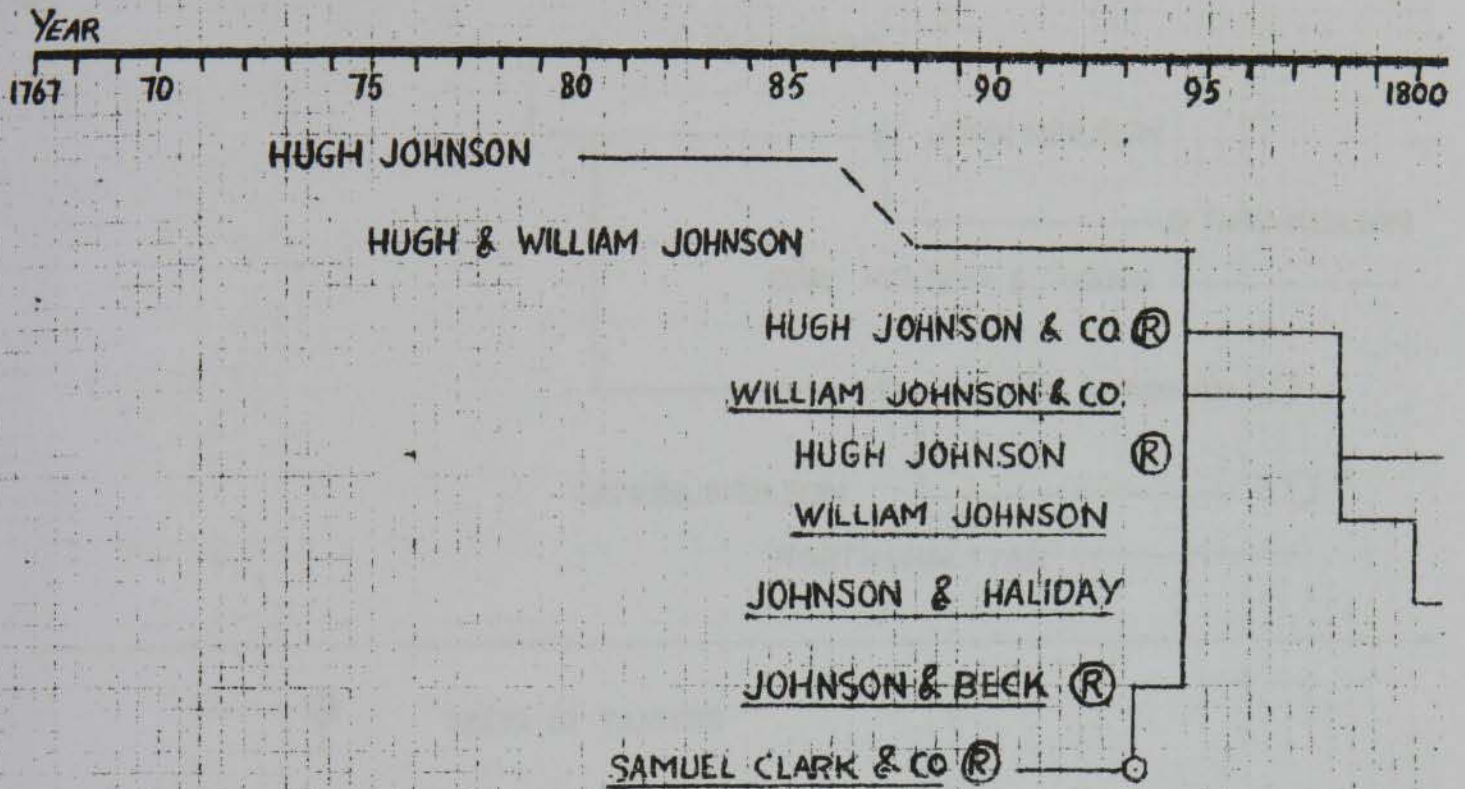
The same type of specialisation may be seen in an examination of the brief, but highly successful career of John Neilson (Fig. 8). Neilson, the son of the Unitarian Minister of Rathfriland, had been apprenticed to James Crawford, a Belfast woollendrapery. Between 1780 and his death in 1787 Neilson was a partner in the firm of Neilson, Hyndman & Co., the other principal partner being James Hyndman, who, like Neilson, had served his apprenticeship under Crawford. This firm specialised in the sale of Irish woollens.¹⁰⁵

Neilson and Hyndman were also partners, with two Belfast merchant families, the Browns of Waring Street and the Gaws, in the firm of Brown, Gaw, Neilson & Co., who were wholesalers of English woollens, and it is of note that both Neilson and Hyndman also kept their own separate retail outlets.¹⁰⁶ On Neilson's death in 1787, his Irish woollen interests were

104. BNL 3 April 1781; 1 February 1791; 15 February 1793, 22 March 1793; 25 April 1794, 7 July 1794, 12 March 1798.

105. BNL 12 June 1778, 1 October 1779, 29 December 1780; R.S.J. Clarke (ed.) Gravestone Inscriptions (Belfast, 1968) ii, p.88.

106. BNL 2 February 1781, 5 July 1782, 13 May 1785.



--- DETAILS NOT KNOWN

—○— DEATH OF A PARTNER

(R) ROSEMARY LANE (OTHER FIRMS OPERATED FROM BRIDGE STREET)

FIG. 7 . THE WOOLLENDRAPERY ACTIVITIES OF THE JOHNSON FAMILY.

carried on by his brother, Samuel, who in the following year separated from Hyndman and carried on the business on his own account. Meanwhile the retail side of John's business was carried on by another brother, Thomas, in partnership with John's widow.¹⁰⁷ James Hyndman, meanwhile, remained involved with the English, or importing, side of the concern.¹⁰⁸

The division of the various partnerships in which John Neilson was involved would seem the manner in which the firms were managed, with Samuel in effective control of one firm and Hyndman of another. The third firm, dealing with the retail sector, may have been that to which John Neilson had given his personal attention, which would explain why his widow was a partner in its successor, but not in the Irish wholesale business. Such specialisation made sound business sense. It enabled each firm to concentrate on one particular aspect of the trade on which it could focus all its financial and managerial skills and its emergence in Belfast in the years after 1780 must be seen as a response to the expansion of the demand for cloth in the town and its hinterland.

There were, of course, a number of retail and wholesale activities in which partnerships were virtually unknown. These were generally to be found, as might be expected, at the lower end of the scale among such groups as milliners and publicans. The former was generally the preserve of the daughters and wives of merchant families who presumably used it as a means of supplementing their income and of providing for such needs as a dowry or the exigencies of widowhood. Yet, even here, some partnerships existed, usually within the family framework. In 1774, for example, Elizabeth Caine and her mother opened a millinery shop in High Street.

107. BNL 20 July 1787, 22 February 1788.

108. BNL 11 July 1788.

When she married Robert Wilson, a wholesale haberdasher, in 1777, she kept on the shop. Her mother retired in 1786 and Elizabeth continued on her own until 1794 when she handed over the business to her sister, Ann, whose husband John Taggart, a woollendraper, had just died.¹⁰⁹ Another example was the business started by Elizabeth Hamilton in 1767. Two years later she was in partnership with her sister Margaret and the business was continued until 1778, by which time Elizabeth had been married.¹¹⁰ Incidentally the premises were then occupied by a Mrs McCormick and her daughter, Eleanor, and she remained in business until her death in 1784.¹¹¹

In millinery retailing, therefore, partnership was inextricably linked with family interest. These explain its incidence in circumstances of low capital requirements. Similarly, the publicans' overheads and capital requirements were generally not large unless he was the keeper of one of the few respectable inns in the town, and the only partnership which existed was that of James McKane and James Sheridan, at the Donegall Arms. McKane had become the owner of these premises in 1773 by which time it had already earned a considerable reputation as the best inn in the town under the management of Adrian von Brackeley.¹¹² The building was rebuilt and enlarged by McKane in 1786-87, by which time he had entered into partnership with Sheridan, and it would appear from this that the reason for entering into

109. BNL 14 June 1774, 21 March 1786, 2 June 1794, 17 October 1794; PRONI D1759/10/2, Marriage Register of St Anne's Church, Belfast.

110. BNL 21 April 1767, 30 June 1769, 1 May 1778.

111. BNL 4 May 1779, 11 June 1782, 7 December 1784.

112. BNL 29 June 1773. The actor, John O'Keefe, stayed there in December 1768 and described the oysters there as being each 'like a little boiled chicken' (J.O'Keefe, Recollections of the Life of John O'Keefe (London, 1826), p.200). No doubt he was exaggerating, but he was certainly impressed by the establishment.

partnership was the scale of the rebuilding operation.¹¹³ Sheridan's entry into the partnership may also have been connected with the beginning of regular coach services to Newry and Dublin, for which they obtained the Belfast agency.¹¹⁴ They conducted their establishment on a lavish scale: by 1791 they were even renting the Copeland Islands, off Donaghadee, for raising rabbits and deer, although they may have overstretched themselves financially as they had sold the 'Donegall Arms' by May 1794, and had gone bankrupt by the end of the year.¹¹⁵

The vast majority of partners in commercial concerns were active, and few cases of sleeping partners have come to light, although it must be presumed that Mrs Douglas did not take a particularly active part in John Boyle & Co.,¹¹⁶ while in the years before 1787 the merchants, William, John and Thomas Brown were sleeping partners in the Sligo merchant house of William Manoe & Co. However, as Manoe was in Belfast in 1780 it is likely that he was then connected with the Browns in some capacity and had been given a loan by them to commence in business.¹¹⁷ They certainly assisted one of their former apprentices, Robert Getly, to establish himself in business in 1781 and in 1787 he announced that his partnership with them was now dissolved.¹¹⁸ Another business in which a sleeping partner may have

113. BNL 9 May 1786; Millin, Additional Sidelights, pp.129-131.

114. BNL 24 May 1785: See also pp.119-20 below.

115. PRONI, Ker MSS D2651/2/57. David Ker to Richard Gervaise Ker, 6 November 1791. Subsequent correspondence in the same letter book reveals that Ker had great difficulty in getting them to pay their rent. In 1794 Terence McGuckian announced that he was moving to the 'Donegall Arms' (BNL 2 May 1794). A note of McKane and Sheridan's bankruptcy appeared in BNL 12 December 1794.

116. See p.30 above.

117. PRONI, Foster MSS D562/8419B (Petition of Belfast merchants re the Sugar Duties, 1780); BNL 6 February 1787.

118. BNL 5 January 1781, 23 February 1787.

been involved was the short-lived house of Greys & Forbes, which lasted for ten months in 1773. Its partners were Thomas and John Greg and a Mr Forbes of whom virtually nothing can be ascertained. However, at the time Thomas Greg was in considerable financial straits, partly because of the depression and partly because of the need to pay heavy fines to renew leases on lands which he held in the Donegall Estate, and it is possible, indeed likely, that he had received a loan from a Mr Forbes in return for adding his name to the partnership while it was being repaid.¹¹⁹

However, in the industrial sector, both in the traditional craft industries and the larger factory-based^{dr} businesses, a different type of partnership developed in which the sleeping partner became the rule rather than the exception. The craft industries, such as tallow^{dr} handling or tanning, frequently formed only part of the activity of their owners. The chandler, William Gregg and his nephew and heir William Irvin were primarily concerned with the provision of meat for the British and West Indian markets:¹²⁰ another chandler, David M'Tier, was also a maltster and later became a brewer and distiller. In tanning, one tanyard owner, Charles Mackenzie, was a sea captain, while the Simms family had a controlling interest in Crumlin flour mills by 1765. In these circumstances cases arose where the owner did not have a direct control over his investment and left it in the hands of a manager who might well be admitted to partnership. Mackenzie's tanyard was managed by his partner, William McCleary. When he left the firm, Mackenzie tried to carry on but had to give up soon afterwards,¹²¹ and it must be presumed that McCleary's knowledge of the processes involved played a vital role in the prosperity of the concern. Some partnerships

119. BNL 2 February, 3 December 1773.

120. They are generally, although not invariably, described as 'butchers' or 'merchants', rather than chandlers.

121. BNL 16 July 1790, 16 October 1792, 3 January 1794.

were obviously in return for loans given at the commencement of business; until 1786, for example, the merchants John Campbell & Co. were sleeping partners in the chandlers Robert Herdman & Co., Herdman later continuing in business on his own account.¹²² This example is similar to that of William Manoe & Co. which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In both cases 'sleeping' partners existed who lacked the technical knowledge which was needed even for such a relatively simple process as chandling or tanning, and they coexisted with partners who possessed technical knowledge but not necessarily the capital required for the successful management of their plants. Of course, such partnerships were not very common in these traditional small scale industries. However, what was merely a tendency in the traditional crafts and industries became the accepted rule in the factory-based industries which developed in the town during the second half of the century. One reason was the very considerable capital requirements of these concerns. The capital needed for the glasshouse of John Smylie & Co. had reached £3,600 by 1791, and in the following year the cotton manufacturers, Robert Wilson & Co. were established with a capital of £4,000. Larger still was that of the Old Sugar House, in Rosemary Lane (the oldest factory based industry in the town), which amounted to £9,800 by 1799.¹²³

Had the partnerships in these establishments been simply formed with the aim of accumulating a sufficiently large amount of capital, there would be no need to deal further with them here. However, in the merchant partnerships each partner possessed sufficient expertise to be able to take control if an emergency arose. In the new industries, expertise in the techniques involved in the production processes was invaluable to the

122. BNL 14 March 1786.

123. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, Memorials 51, 65, 113.

success of the enterprise, and was generally only possessed by the active partner who could acquire power and influence far beyond that warranted by his financial contribution to the concern. Many of the new generation of factory managers who rose to prominence in the town at this period came from relatively lowly origins. James Kilbee, for example, who managed the Rosemary Lane sugar refinery, had begun his career as a grocer in Donegall Street, in partnership with Robert Hunter, in February 1785. In November of that year he went into business on his own account, and kept a grocery shop for some years. After 1788, however, he ceased advertising in the public press and by 1792 he was the bookkeeper in the Old Sugar House, then trading as Francis Jordan & Co. When Jordan emigrated to Liverpool in 1799, Kilbee became acting partner in his stead.¹²⁴

The cotton industry, which required much specialist knowledge of technical processes, saw the rise to prominence of a number of figures whose descendants were to play an important part in the town's development during the next century. Mention has already been briefly made of Nicholas Grimshaw and his patronage by Nathaniel Wilson: their considerable achievement was a combination of Grimshaw's expertise and Wilson's finances. Other cotton firms whose partners and financial contributions are known show a similar pattern. George McCance, a wholesale mercer and haberdasher, formed George McCance & Co. in 1792, financed by the prominent Dunmurry linen bleachers, William and David McCance, while his erstwhile partner, Robert Wilson, formed a company with three Belfast merchants for the same purpose. McCance contributed one-third and Wilson one-quarter of the capital for their respective firms, and Wilson, at any rate, received a commission of 5% on sales in return for his services as a manager.¹²⁵ In

124. BNL 11 February 1785, 3 October 1786, 17 November 1786, 3 June 1788, 11 May 1792, 16 August 1799.

125. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorials 61, 65.

other cases a salary was paid: William Napier was paid £56.17.6 per annum for managing the whiskey distillery bearing his name in 1791:¹²⁶ Francis Jordan, the sugar refiner did better, receiving 'a Dwelling-house to be erected for him at the expense of said parties adjoining the Sugar-house, and allowed out of the Funds the yearly salary of £50, and also an allowance of £5 per cent upon the annual nett Profits together with the Dwelling-house aforesaid and a sufficient allowance of Coals and Candles for the same'.¹²⁷ What may have been just as important was the responsibility which devolved upon the Acting Partner. The business was conducted by him alone. In 1799, for example, William Moffett, the acting partner of a saltworks, secured a clause in the agreement establishing the concern which stated that he 'should be the only Acting Partner'.¹²⁸

The development of partnerships in Belfast may thus be seen as evolving into two separate directions, one primarily commercial and the other industrial, and rarely did they overlap. The industrial partnerships tended to be different because they consisted of an acting partner who was responsible for the management of the concern together with other partners whose role was the contribution of finance but whose control over the firm's affairs were limited by their lack of knowledge of the technical processes involved in the concern. While they no doubt made decisions on major matters, they would have been guided in this by the advice of the acting partner. Technical knowledge was thus becoming a marketable commodity: it was also something which it was being increasingly realised needed to be invested in a concern as well as money. It began to attain a value of its own and this helped the social advancement

126. ibid, memorial 52.

127. ibid, memorial 58.

128. ibid, memorial 112.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BELFAST ECONOMY

(i) The Emergence of Financial Institutions

In the previous chapter, the physical structure of the business community as a whole was examined and found to be a complex organism bound together by a number of forces including strong ties of consanguinity and apprenticeship and dominated by the general merchants who ultimately determined the town's prosperity, for all its industrial and commercial activity was related to their success.

They also controlled its financial affairs and were thus to the fore in the development of financial institutions in the town in the years after 1767. Like most other Irish provincial towns, Belfast had no concerns dealing solely with such banking functions as the borrowing and lending of money and the discounting of bills and these activities were instead imperfectly and informally conducted by the town's businessmen. Throughout the period the dominant need was for specie, and this was especially critical in the hinterland of Belfast as the linen weavers declined to give credit for their webs and demanded cash.¹ Consequently, the economy of the linen-weaving districts, in which the Belfast business community played an important role by exporting cloth and providing raw materials such as flaxseed and potash, was much more cash-orientated than other parts of the country. This situation lasted into the early years of the next century: in 1804 the 'Committee on Circulating Paper' of the House of Commons noted in their report that 'in Belfast, the Bills of Exchange are purchased by Guineas, in Dublin by Bank of Ireland and other Bankers' Notes,' and went

1. C.Gill. The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry (Oxford, 1925), p.172.

on to observe that Bank notes bore a higher discount in Belfast than elsewhere,² and Carr, in his tour of Ireland in 1806, noted that English guineas were seldom seen out of the North of Ireland.³

This dependence on cash was a constant source of worry to the Belfast business community and was said to be a factor restricting the town's growth as a linen exporting centre as factors preferred to use the Dublin market where credit facilities and banking were better developed. Consequently, the drapers found themselves caught between two opposing forces: on the one hand there were long delays in obtaining settlement of their accounts with the factors and on the other the weavers required prompt payment in specie for the webs.⁴ The drapers were not the only people affected by the situation. The peasantry relied on the linen industry to provide them with purchasing power and so its prosperity was a barometer of that of the Lagan basin as a whole.

The dependence of the local economy upon an adequate supply of specie was but part of a general credit problem springing from its dependence on foreign trade and the close integration of the rural population into the processes of the dominant industry. A cash shortage could quickly paralyse the region's economic activity, and this is well illustrated by the events of the early 1770s, when the failure of the London market in Irish linens plunged the industry into crisis. The causes need not concern us here - suffice it to say that a probable cause was either underpricing by continental linens or overpricing of the Irish webs, the effect of this being the

2. Report, Minutes of Evidence and Appendice from the Committee on the Circulating Paper, the Specie and the Current Coin of Ireland; and also on the Exchange between that Part of the United Kingdom and Great Britain (H.C. 1803-4, (86) IV. p.153).

3. Quoted in M.Dillon, The History and Development of Banking in Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (London, 1889), p.11.

4. Gill, op. cit. p.170.

same. While some major failures occurred in late 1770, linens continued to be produced in large quantities during that year and well into 1771. This led to the accumulation of large numbers of webs in the hands of both drapers and weavers. Both groups found themselves unable to obtain payment: the drapers because they were unable to sell the bleached linen and the weavers because the drapers could not find coin with which to pay them.

By the end of 1773 the situation had become desperate. Yarn and linen prices collapsed because of the lack of demand. Robert Stevenson estimated that a third of the industry's employees were idle and that trade was at a standstill as stocks piled up.⁵ One London merchant, Samuel Dyson, claimed that his stock of unsold linens had increased from his usual £10,000 to £44,000.⁶ Emigration rose to unprecedented proportions. In the two years from October 1771, 3,541 people were said to have emigrated from Belfast while the number of looms in the area had shrunk from 441 in 1771 to 160 in March 1773.⁷ The situation about Belfast was made worse by the withdrawal of cash occasioned by the payment of renewal fines on many leases in the rural areas of the Donegall Estate. The situation was briefly summed up by one contemporary pamphleteer. Even without the new leases, he wrote 'cash no longer circulated, paper credit began to multiply; necessaries to grow dearer and the means of providing a subsistence grew extremely difficult. In this unhappy interval, Lord Donegall had a great part of his estate to reset; his conditions could not be complied with by his late tenants, and he set their dwellings to richer undertakers; and they, in their turn, wanted

5. Report from the Committee appointed to Enquire into the Present State of the Linen Trade in Great Britain and Ireland (H.C. 1773 (30), iii, p.107).

6. ibid, p.110.

7. Commons Journ. Ire. IX, p.ccxviii (Letter from the linendrapers of Belfast to the Commons Committee enquiring into the linen industry, 11 November 1773).

to swell their fortunes . . . by demanding an exorbitant price for what they themselves had - paid too much already'.⁸

In many ways the writer was wrong. Paper credit, for example, did not expand and the reasons for the violence and distress of the areas surrounding Belfast during the early 1770s were far more deep rooted than he dreamed of. They are dealt with elsewhere, but it should be noted here that he did at least see the trouble which was caused by the large fines which were levied on the middlemen on the estate, and which exacerbated their already pressing economic problems by forcing them to divert valuable funds to non-economic use. By November 1772 John Alexander, Lord Donegall's assistant estate agent, reported to his London office that 'money is scarcely to be obtained here on any Terms, and those few who have any are much more cautious, as to the Security than they were some years ago', while in another letter of the same period, this time to a friend in Dublin, he remarked that Bills were similarly in short supply. He placed the main blame for the situation on the depression⁹ rather than on the middlemen who have in later years been blamed by such writers as Benn and Bigger,¹⁰ and in this he was probably correct. Negotiations for the new leases were conducted during 1770, before the slump, and it is quite likely that the estate would have been able to weather the rent increases and fines had there been no depression. However, the activities of a number of merchants who rackrented their holdings to obtain money with which to pay their fines did not ease the situation.¹¹ Even the resident agent, George Portis, who

8. An Attempt to Shew the Cause of the Present Risings in the North and South in which the State of the Nation is Briefly Considered. (Dublin, 1772), p.10.

9. PRONI Donegall Estate Letterbook T1893. Alexander to Charles Tablot, London, 23 November 1772; the same to Hamilton McClure, Dublin, 10 November 1772.

10. Benn, History i, pp.611-20; F.J.Bigger, Land War, pp.63 ff.

11. See Chapter 6 (iii).

tended to see the payment of rents and fines as more important than human suffering, had come to see the evil of the fines by the end of 1773, and was within a hair's breadth of perceiving the connection between the depression, the fines and the resulting agrarian unrest when he wrote that 'the Rising of the Steel Boys soon followed the Drain made by the Fines, whereby immense sums were dissipated'.¹²

The town's businessmen survived the crisis with only two failures, John Gregg, a provisions merchant¹³ and the brewer, William Wallace jnr.¹⁴ However, disaster may not have been far from many of their fellow townspeople, and the many failures elsewhere in the country received widespread coverage in the Newsletter. Many businessmen restricted credit and demanded payment of their debts. When the coal merchant, James Henderson, declared in an advertisement in October 1772 that 'none need come without paying for what they want as I have been kept too long out of my Money by some people',¹⁵ he was only putting bluntly what others phrased more discreetly, that payment in specie was the only trustworthy means of settling debts. However, such action as his only helped to worsen the situation still further by contracting the supply of credit. The distress also led to heavy emigration to the colonies which further depressed credit as the emigrants converted their belongings into specie, taking it with them to help start a new life in America.¹⁶

During the crisis it seems evident that the town's economy was in a perilous state, and that another failure of a major firm with strong con-

12. PRONI Donegall Estate Letterbook T1893: Portis to Charles Talbot, 30 December 1773.

13. BNL 26 November 1773.

14. BNL 19 March 1773.

15. BNL 20 October 1772.

16. R.J.Dickson, Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775 (London, 1966), p.97.

nections in the town might have had catastrophic results. A similar situation emerged a decade later when the linen industry went through another period of crisis and the failure of the eminent London linen house of Marler Stewart & Boyd put fear into the heart of many Belfast merchants who traded with them, or who were connected with them in other ways. Thomas Greg, for example, had paid his rents and fines in 1773 by mortgaging his property to the firm.¹⁷ A contemporary witness, John Moore of Clough, the agent on the Annesley estate, wrote that 'a vast number of merchants and linnen drapers were connected with Marler. The people in Belfast are I already know taken in for many thousands'.¹⁸ However, the overall economic situation was not nearly as bad as it had been in the crisis of 1770-73, and the firm were eventually able to meet most of their debts. Consequently, no Belfast firms became bankrupt as a result of its failure. However, the problems experienced ^d may be illustrated by the case of John Moore who discovered that the Belfast merchant house which normally remitted his bills to London had ceased to do so until they had obtained more details of Marler Stewart & Boyd's failure,¹⁹ and the same was doubtless true of many other dealings, the consequences being a sudden dislocation of the established credit facilities, and thus of trade.

The condition of the currency in circulation was a long-standing problem. In the 17th century, and during the second quarter of the 18th century, a shortage of small change had been met by Belfast merchants and shopkeepers with the issue of trade tokens,²⁰ and as late as 1823 Benn could write that 'many old persons yet recollect them passing, though with

17. RD Vol.380, f.93; PRONI Millin Papers T811/2 f.182.

18. PRONI Annesley Papers D2309/4/4, John Moore to Annesley, 28 July 1781.

19. PRONI Annesley Estate Papers D2309/4/4, John Moore to Annesley, 28 July 1781.

20. Benn, History i, pp.455-65.

most people the remembrance is only preserved in that common phrase "not worth a two penny token".²¹ This would indicate that they survived in use until at least the mid 1750s when Mussenden's Bank came into existence. The available money supply suffered from the attention of clippers and forgers. The cash shortage of the early 1770s, for example, led to the circulation of large quantities of underweight coin which had to be checked and weighed rather than circulated at face value. An attempt to reform the English coinage in 1773 made matters worse by causing uneasiness and confusion,²² and at least one Belfast merchant, Archibald Hyndman, refused to take light gold even at the usual discounts.²³ People thus refused to take the old gold coin while clinging to any silver coin which came their way, and the Newsletter caustically remarked in an 1774 editorial that 'few silver shillings are intrinsically worth ten pence a-piece, most of them having been counterfeited at Birmingham'.²⁴ Attempts at reform of the quality of the coinage met with little success: in 1777, for example, there were large numbers of counterfeit guineas in circulation and investigations by the Sovereign led to the uncovering in the following January of a gang of coiners at work in the town.²⁵ Good coin was a rarity: in 1781 the town was said to be overflowing with rap halfpence made in Birmingham,²⁶ and good coin was offered as an incentive by many firms in the town in times of

21. (G.Benn), The History of the Town of Belfast (Belfast, 1823), p.83.

22. L.S.Pressnell, The Rate of Interest in the Eighteenth Century, in L.S.Pressnell (ed.), Studies in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1960), p.182n; T.S.Ashton, Economic Fluctuations in England 1700-1800 (Oxford, 1959), p.129.

23. BNL 3 August 1773.

24. BNL 19 July 1774.

25. BNL 14 March, 17 October 1777, 20 January 1778.

26. Benn, History i, p.464.

shortage. In 1782, for example, the millers, Cunningham Harrison & Co. boasted that they paid for grain with good gold,²⁷ and a similar offer was made by John Galt Smith when they were buying flax in 1786.²⁸ Advertisements appeared in the press from time to time from merchant houses which had obtained supplies of 'heavy guineas', and who exchanged them for light at a suitable discount. This however did not improve the state of the small change and in 1785 the Newsletter urged its readers to accept good English halfpence 'without question'.²⁹

The principal financial task undertaken by the town's merchants was the discounting and remission of bills, for which purpose it was a centre of considerable importance. The handling of bills was an integral part of the activity of most of the town's merchant houses. As we have seen, the Annesley estate, for example, transferred its rents to London through Belfast merchants. The merchants were thus serving as financial clearing houses for the surrounding area. In 1799 the firm of Youngs of Ballymena transmitted their bills to Hugh Crawford, a Belfast merchant, in return for cash or goods. Such an arrangement was often based on trust: one entry in Young's account book tells us that 'I have Stopped Keeping any accumps With Mr Crawford as he keeps them all himselfe'.³⁰ It may be more than a coincidence that Crawford came from Ballymena.³¹ Similarly, James and Elizabeth Shipboy, a Coleraine family who transferred their wholesale mercery business to

27. BNL 15 February 1782.

28. BNL 23 June 1786.

29. BNL 10 June 1785.

30. PRONI Account Book of Youngs of Ballymena D1364/G/1.

31. He was the son of William Crawford of Ballymena. PRONI Young Papers D1364/A25

Belfast in 1793 discounted bills from a number of Coleraine merchants, remitting cash or goods in return.³²

A small charge was, of course, levied for the service. In December 1790, for example, the merchant, Robert Getty charged $\frac{1}{2}\%$.³³ The merchant houses, and indeed most firms, also accepted money on deposit. In 1788, for example, the glasshouse of John Smylie & Co. was regarded as 'very good security',³⁴ and advertisements frequently appeared in the Newsletter from merchants who had money and were looking for opportunities to invest it.

The first attempt to put order into the rather anarchic financial arrangements in Belfast had been made in 1751 by three prominent merchants, Daniel Musuerden, James Adair and Thomas Bateson. Early in the following year, they opened the town's first bank. Its function was the discounting of bills and the issue of banknotes. The latter were apparently of fixed denomination, the initial issue having a face value of £1, and they had come to an agreement with the other merchants in the town, and with local land-owners, to have them accepted for the settlement of accounts and the payment of rents.³⁵

The opening of the bank would seem to have met with considerable local opposition. At least two pamphlets exist, one supporting and one opposing its foundation, while another one which opposed it is known to have existed but no surviving copy can be traced. Unlike many of its contemporaries, the firm did not collapse. It survived until 1757 when its closure was prompted by a clause in the 'Act for Promoting Publick Credit' of 1756 which forbade

32. PRONI Shipboy Papers D530/14; Deane MSS D544/3-37.

33. BNL 10 December 1790.

34. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/254. Mrs M. McTier to Dr Wm Drennan, February 1788.

35. BNL 19 June 1752 (advertisement dated 24 February 1752). An opening date in February 1752 indicates that the scheme was conceived late in 1751.

bankers from being engaged in other business activities. On its dissolution the partners continued in business as merchants and, no doubt, continued to discount bills.³⁶

For many years after 1757 nothing was done to provide specialist banking facilities in the town, and this provides an indication of its relative unimportance at this period although the formation of banking houses would also be hindered by the reliance on cash which has already been mentioned. The early date of Mussenden's Bank must also be considered: it was a relatively early Irish provincial bank and in Britain neither Liverpool nor Manchester had banks until after 1770.³⁷ However, in 1782 establishment of a discount office was envisaged as part of the facilities offered by the White Linen Hall, which was opened at the end of 1784.³⁸ This project was carried through in strong competition with the existing hall in Dublin, and a projected one in Newry, and its promoters were well aware that the discounting facilities which it offered would play a vital part in determining its success or failure.

However, despite the inclusion of the office in the original prospectus, it was not in operation for the early sales. As a result, the rapid increase in business placed too great a strain on the traditional, haphazard

36. A Letter from Abraham Protestmaker, Runner to a Bank in Belfast, in Vindication to Himself and the Bank, in Answer to the Twelve Queries, signed A.B., lately published against the said Bank (Belfast, 1751); Remarks of a Pamphlet lately Published, entitled 'Reasons against the Establishing of a Bank in the Town of Belfast' (Belfast, 1752); BNL 5 July 1757; Benn, History, i, pp.465-67; J.Salmon, Early Irish Bankers and Banking, New Ireland Review XII (1899), pp.70-71; Millin, Sidelights, pp.15-16.

37. A.P.Wadsworth, J.de L.Mann, The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780 (Manchester, 1931), p.248.

38. BNL 3 December 1782

existing discount facilities in the town. A serious shortage of bills resulted, and complaints were made to the Linenhall Committee about two merchants who had 'charged exorbitant and usurious interest' when discounting, and in April 1785 the Committee met to consider the matter. They issued a stern warning about the malpractices, which they considered as a threat to the success of the entire Linenhall project, and within a month eleven members of the Committee, led by Robert Bradshaw, had formed a Discount Company at Bradshaw's office in High Street, their activity being backed by a declaration, signed by the principal members of the business community that they would in future protest all unpaid Bills on Belfast as 'punctuality in paying Bills of Exchange is for the General Benefit of the Community'.³⁹

The venture was an immediate success, and within a year a move had been made to the more commodious offices of John Galt Smith & Co., and in January 1787 a further move was made to the Old Sugar House in Rosemary Lane.⁴⁰ By the end of that year, despite competition, the Company was discounting over £25,000⁴¹ worth of bills each month while its capital was said to be some £200,000,⁴² although this figure must have been the total assets of its partners. The office would seem, from its advertisements, to have discounted bills on both Belfast and Dublin. Despite the port's heavy and developing trade with Great Britain, no mention was made in advertisements of a trade in bills on English centres.⁴³

The success of the Discount Office, coupled with the rapid increase in trade in the mid 1780s, led naturally to the development of a bank, and in

39. BNL 29 April, 20 May 1785.

40. BNL 19 May 1786, 1 June 1787. It is, of course, possible that these frequent moves were to the premises of members of the Company who were acting as managers.

41. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/249A. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, January 1788.

42.

43. BNL 20 May 1785.

1787 three of the partners in the Discount Company, John Brown, John Ewing and John Holmes, withdrew to form the firm of Ewing, Holmes & Co. in partnership with another merchant, John Hamilton.⁴⁴ Their decision to do so was probably made in August 1786, as the Newsletter of September 8 carried an editorial which said that the proposed bank was to be formed by four gentlemen of 'ample fortune', and that the capital was to be £50,000 'which (project) must be attended with infinite advantage to the trading part of the community in this part of the kingdom'.⁴⁵

The early months of 1787 were passed in making preparations for the opening of the bank. The various partners were engaged in many activities which the Act of 17~~86~~ held to be incompatible with banking. John Brown evaded its requirements by handing over his business interests in trust to his brother, William, while John Holmes likewise gave his interests to his younger brother, James.⁴⁶ Ewing and Hamilton seem to have genuinely given up their businesses.

The bank met with considerable opposition from those who feared the release of a flood of paper money which would lead in time to an undermining of credit. The matter was raised in the House of Commons by Mr Annesley, who, it may be assumed, was speaking not merely on his own behalf when he referred to the bank as a 'contagion . . . by which there was every reason to fear that in a short time there would not be found a guinea in specie in the North of Ireland'.⁴⁷

One of the first acts of the new bank was to announce that they would accept light guineas and deface the old coin in the seller's presence, a

44. BNL 8 June 1787. Business commenced on 1 June.

45. BNL 8 September 1786.

46. J.Schoales, T.Lefroy, op.cit. i, p.325; BNL 9 March, 10 April 1787.

47. Parl. Req. VIII, p.10 (17 January 1788).

move designed to engender trust in the firm by reassuring its customers that the coin would not be recirculated.⁴⁸ In November the firm obtained a supply of twenty thousand half-guineas from Dublin and placed them in circulation.⁴⁹ They also issued notes of varying denominations. Annesley claimed that they issued guinea notes, and a note of this value, dated 1794, was reproduced by Millin,⁵⁰ while in 1791-92 they were issuing notes of ten, twenty and fifty pounds denomination. At a later date they circulated pound notes.⁵¹ According to Wakefield, their total circulation of notes was small, varying between £40,000 and £50,000 'but neither of these sums could be considered permanent, because a scarcity of gold always brought in a considerable number of the notes'.⁵² The bank also engaged in deposit banking, giving an interest rate of 4% to depositors, and presumably lending at the maximum legal rate of 6%.⁵³

The success of Ewing Holmes & Co. soon attracted competition from another group of businessmen led by Waddell Cunningham who decided in late 1787 to form another bank. Cunningham's partners were John Campbell, John Brown's brother, William, and Charles Rankin. The first two, with Cunningham, had been partners in the Discount Office and in June 1787, at the same time as Ewing Holmes opened their bank, the three had issued, illegally, small

48. BNL 21 August 1787.

49. BNL 16 November 1787.

50. Parl. Reg. VIII, p.10 (17 January 1788); Millin, Sidelights, p.18.

51. BNL 7 January 1791 refers to lost notes of £10 and £20, BNL 28 February 1792 has a reference to lost £50 notes. For £1 notes see Millin, Sidelights, p.18.

52. E. Wakefield. An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political ii (London, 1812), p.169n.

53. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/255. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, c. February 1788.

notes of $\frac{1}{2}$ guinea, 7s and 3s denomination, claiming that there was a shortage of change in circulation.⁵⁴ Rankin was a retired colonel in the East India Company who had retired to Ireland in 1783 and had acquired Richmond Lodge, near Tullycarnet, in 1787.⁵⁵ The initial motivation behind the second bank was that of Cunningham and Campbell. Their identity was known in January 1788 but the town was rife with rumours as to the other partners and among the names mentioned were those of Alexander Stewart of Mountstewart and David Ker of Portavoe.⁵⁶ There was a considerable interval between its first mention and its actual opening on January 2, 1789. Part of the reason was that, as with Ewing Holmes & Co., the partners had to disengage themselves from their existing business interests. Another reason may have been the uncertainty caused by the failure in July 1788 of the cotton firm of Grimshaw and Wilson which shook the fabric of the town's economy.⁵⁷ The new bank, trading as Cunningham, Campbell & Co., was in many respects the successor of the Discount Office which had continued in business after the opening of Ewing Holmes & Co. and apparently competed with it by offering a rate of five per cent on deposits against the bank's rate of four per cent.⁵⁸ It had been intended that it would continue to trade until the end of 1788 but it was forced to close prematurely by the ill health of Robert Thomson, the sugar refiner, who appears to have been acting as its manager at this

54. Bigger, Magees, p.29.

55. PRONI T765/2/238. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, 10 August 1787; Monaghan, History, p.173.

56. PRONI T765/2/249A. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, January 1788.

57. See Chapter 10.

58. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/239. Mrs McTier to Dr W.Drennan, 13 August 1787.

time. Its discounting activities were taken over by the partners of the new bank who, however, did not engage in note issue until the new year.⁵⁹

There would appear to have been considerable bitterness between the partners of the two banks. In January 1788 John Brown suffered a slight stroke which necessitated his removal to Bristol (and, presumably, Bath) to recuperate, and the irascible Mrs McTier hoped for his death as it 'might unite the Bankers, & all that is said may be with that design',⁶⁰ while Hamilton Young, a Belfast merchant resident in New York, on hearing the news which was sent to him by his sister Martha, wrote to her that it confirmed his view that 'when the Bank was establish, y it would creat Jealousy'.⁶¹ However, this initial bitterness seems to have subsided and by July 1789 the two concerns were cooperating sufficiently to issue a joint statement concerning opening hours,⁶² while in 1793 Ewing Holmes & Co. moved into the new building erected by Cunningham Campbell & Co. on that firm's closure.⁶³

Little is known about the activities of Cunningham Campbell & Co. However in 1791 the two banks had a joint note issue of ~~£85,000~~^{£85,000}, while in the following year Cunningham claimed to be discounting bills to the value of £80,000 each month.⁶⁴ It is quite possible that Cunningham Campbell & Co. concentrated on discounting while Ewing Holmes & Co. had a much larger

59. PRONI T765/2/249A, 254, 272. Mrs McTier to Dr W.Drennan, January 1788, February 1788, late 1788.

60. PRONI T765/2/247. Above to above, January 1788.

61. PRONI Drennan/Duffin Papers T729/22. Hamilton Young to Miss Martha Young, 7 May 1788.

62. BNL 10 July 1789,

63. Millin, Sidelights, p.21.

64. LHL Joy MSS 10/14.

note issue, but the truth will never be known for certain. Tenison, however, may well have been recording an old memory when he wrote that the former concern had scarcely any notes in circulation.⁶⁵

In the early 1790s, however, there were a number of failures, not only in Belfast but elsewhere. At least one prominent Belfast family, the Fergusons, were reputed to be on the brink of failure and the crisis, according to one writer, 'occupies the whole thoughts of many'.⁶⁶ To assist manufacturers and others over their difficulties, the Bank of Ireland deposited £200,000 in cash with provincial merchants and bankers at the government's request, and £30,000 of this was deposited with Cunningham Campbell & Co. in the spring of 1793.⁶⁷

Despite this massive cash injection, however, they decided to wind up the business in the following September. Ewing Holmes & Co. continued to trade and negotiations started between them and Rankin concerning the latter's admission to the firm. This would appear to have been effected by June 1794, although the legal documents in the matter were not signed until the following January.⁶⁸ This partnership, however, did not last long for in November 1795 Ewing, Holmes and Brown retired.⁶⁹

65. C.N.Tenison 'The Old Belfast Bankers', U.J.A. 2nd sec. II (1896), p.162. It must however be realised that Tenison's article is highly inaccurate in a number of regards.

66. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/415. Samuel McTier to Mrs M.McTier, 28 April 1793. The difficulties were not, of course, restricted to the town's businessmen. As in most of the financial crises of the period, the poor suffered severely. In June 1792 there were 150 carpenters alone out of work in Belfast and by May 1793 about 5,000 artisans were unemployed in the town and its hinterland (BNL NS 18 May 1793, Monaghan History, p.153)

67. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/426. William Drennan to Samuel McTier, - May 1793; F.G.Hall The Bank of Ireland 1783-1946 (Dublin, 1949), p.70.

68. R.D. Vol 509, f.175; BNL 6 June 1794.

69. Millin, Sidelights, p.21.

Hamilton and Rankin continued the bank until March 1797 when the Bank of Ireland was authorised to suspend the convertabilityⁱ of its notes into gold, and the private banks found that they had to follow suit. Ewing Holmes & Co. protested vigorously to the Treasury through the intermediarcy of David Ker and Bartholemew de la Maziere, a Dublin sugar refiner who had once been manager of a Belfast sugar house. They claimed that they had never refused to honour their notes with gold and that their credit was now at risk as the Bank of Ireland no longer converted paper into gold and gold was consequently harder to acquire. They pointed out that banknotes were little used in the area and that they would be forced to honour their own notes with those of the Bank of Ireland.⁷⁰ There certainly seems to have been a suspicion of paper money in the area and Dublin paper was especially unfamiliar. Mrs McTier tells a story, which should probably be taken with a grain of salt, about a farmer who refused to take £14 in Bank of Ireland notes for a bullock which he then sold for seven guineas.⁷¹ While the Belfast bank could still honour the notes in gold, the general drain of gold in the early months of 1797 led both the Bank's proprietors and customers to doubt its ability to follow this course, and advertisements inserted in the press by a number of prominent merchants stating that they would accept the notes indicates that others were refusing them. In the face of this loss of confidence, the partnership was dissolved on 24 March.⁷²

However, one financial institution remained in the town, for a new Discount Company had commenced business in March 1793. As it did not issue

70. S.P.O. Official Papers 22/28; PROI Customs and Excise Administration Papers IA 34/5/73 (John Beresford to Edward Cooke, 7 March 1797)

71. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/652. Mrs McTier to Dr William Drennan, 17 March 1797.

72. Millin, Sidelights, pp.22-23; BNL 24 March 1797.

notes payable to the bearer, it did not presumably face as critical a situation as the Bank in the crisis of early 1797. It had a capital of £60,000, and its partners were fifteen prominent businessmen, mostly involved in the linen trade.⁷³ Its opening was no doubt connected with the difficulties of Cunningham Campbell & Co. As with the earlier Discount Office, Robert Thomson played an important role, and its business was transacted from the Rosemary Lane sugar refinery until his death in March 1800. His son, John, and the former banker, John Hamilton, were admitted to the partnership in his stead, and the firm moved to Bridge Street, where it traded as Gilbert McUreen & Co.⁷⁴

Its principal purpose was the discounting of notes and bills, although money was also accepted on deposit. There is evidence that at first the company aimed too high in its attempts to attract deposits: initially a minimum deposit of £50 was specified, but by January 1794 this had been reduced to £20.⁷⁵ An advertisement of early 1798 is of considerable interest. It stated that in future they would no longer accept underweight guineas and half-guineas, which would indicate that this practice had been engaged in until this time.⁷⁶

The creation of banking facilities in Belfast during the eighteenth century was linked directly to periods of economic growth. The first bank was founded in the 1750s at a time when the Brown Linen Hall was being rebuilt on a larger scale.⁷⁷ The other banks were opened during the late 1780s when the White Linen Hall and its associated activities led to a

73. BNL 5 March 1793; Wakefield, op.cit. ii, p.169.

74. BNL 4 March 1800.

75. BNL 7 January 1794.

76. BNL 12 February 1798.

77. See Chapter 2.

massive increase in the scale of the cash-hungry linen trade. Their subsequent demise came in periods of depression during which their notes, tolerated by the suspicious customers in the optimism engendered by prosperity, came under scrutiny. There is no evidence that banknotes were welcomed with open arms in Ulster: indeed, as we have seen, the economy of the North of Ireland continued to rely on specie long after Bank of Ireland notes had been accepted in the rest of the country. These circumstances may have helped to restrict the quantity of notes in circulation and to limit the possibility of a creation of excess paper not unknown elsewhere. Wakefield's assessment of the note issue of Ewing Holmes & Co. was remarkably similar to their original capital.⁷⁸ The good reputation of those involved is borne out in Annesley's comments in his speech to the House of Commons when he stressed that they were 'men of character and property', and that what he feared was the establishment of banking institutions in other towns, in the control of less scrupulous individuals.⁷⁹

So far in this chapter, emphasis has been laid on the mainstream of development in the history of Belfast's early financial institutions, the discount houses and banks which evolved to meet the needs of the merchants and traders for increased credit, and more efficient means of discounting and remitting bills of exchange. However, they were not the only financial institutions in the town, and a brief mention should be made of the Annuity Companies, and their role in the town's economic development. These personal life insurance societies were formed in the early 1770s, presumably as a response to the economic crisis of those years. They were part of a movement which found considerable favour in the North of Ireland at

78. Wakefield, op.cit. ii, p.169n; BNL 8 September 1786.

79. Parl. Reg. VIII, p.10 (17 January 1788).

the period, and Companies were formed in Londonderry, Enniskillen and Newry, as well as Dublin and Belfast. They were composed of a limited number of members and provided the widows of members with annuities on their death.⁸⁰

By the end of 1771 two companies had been formed in Belfast. Their formation is an indication that despite the economic troubles, funds were available in the town for investment 'for a rainy day'. Within a short period they controlled substantial quantities of capital and it is likely that their success would not have been as great had there been a proper bank in the town. The two companies were the Belfast Annuity Company and the Belfast Bachelors' Annuity Company. The members of the latter had to be under forty years of age and unmarried at the time of admission.⁸¹ The members of both Societies were among the town's wealthier businessmen and residents, although an attempt was made at the end of the year to form the 'Traders' Annuity Company' with a lower subscription and correspondingly lower benefits. However, nothing came of this venture which had been proposed by John Carlile, a grocer in the town.⁸² The two established companies enjoyed lives of considerable duration. The Belfast Annuity Company lasted until the early years of the next century,⁸³ while the Bachelors' Annuity Company was in existence until the end of the economically troubled year of 1793. One of the causes for its demise would seem to have been the failure of a number of members to keep their subscriptions up to date.⁸⁴

The Annuity companies frequently sought investment opportunities for

80. BNL 17 September 1771.

81. BNL 5 November, 6 December 1771

82. BNL 20 December 1771.

83. PRONI Johns Elliott & Johns Papers T889/12. The Will of William Stewart of Willmount (April 1804) mentions his share in the concern.

84. NS 25 November 1793.

their funds in the newspapers, which would indicate that little or none of it was investment in government funds, but was rather put out to earn money in the town or its hinterland. For example, in March 1785 the Bachelors' Company had £1,000 to lend,⁸⁵ while in November 1786 the Belfast Annuity Company announced that they had £6,000 to invest.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, no record survives of how these sums were actually invested, and much of it may have been put into land, but some almost certainly was reinvested in the commerce and industry of the town.

Another development by the town's merchants during the period was the formation of a Belfast based insurance company which operated during the 1790s. Its creation was another indication of the rapid growth of the town during the 1780s, and of its increasing economic sophistication. Before its formation the insurance business in the town had been handled by merchants and brokers working on commission for firms based in Dublin, London and other financial centres. In 1783, for example, the Dublin Insurance Company had three agencies in the town, the firms of William and John Brown, John Ewing and John Henderson.⁸⁷ In 1785 a serious fire in the Waring Street sugar refinery led to advertisements of their agency by Browns, couched in terms which indicated that property insurance was far from universal, and the same conclusion may be drawn from advertisements of the General Insurance Company, the actual insurers of the premises who stressed the speed with which they had assessed the damages and paid the claim.⁸⁸ Another company which was very active in the town was the 'Irish Insurance Company for Ships Merchandize and Lives', of 1786 which numbered sixteen of the town's merchants among its shareholders.⁸⁹

85. BNL 25 March 1785.

86. BNL 24 November 1786.

87. BNL 28 January 1783.

88. BNL 18, 22 November 1785, 24 February 1786.

89. Charter Party of the Irish Insurance Company for Ships, Merchandize and Lives (Dublin 1786), p.5.

Early in 1789 moves were made by two merchants, Robert Bradshaw and Robert Ewing, to form an insurance company in Belfast.⁹⁰ However, they seem to have been unsuccessful as nothing more is known of the venture. However, in 1791 the Belfast General Insurance Company was formed. Neither Ewing, who had died in 1790,⁹¹ nor Bradshaw was apparently involved in its promotion, and its initial committee was dominated by a number of the younger businessmen in the town. All but one of them were shortly to become prominent as members of the United Irishmen.⁹² The secretary was Henry Haslett, a prominent shipbroker, and it appears that, despite the very considerable value of the cargoes involved in the linen trade,⁹³ the company engaged in marine insurance, as well as that against fire. The evidence for this is to be found in two cases. The first is a letter from Rev. John Tennant to his son John in 1792. Another son, William, was one of the principals of the Insurance Company. A ship of his had just been lost and in the letter his father, somewhat suspicious of the Insurance business, hoped that the loss 'will be a profit in the end to engage him (William) henceforward to ensure himself and all he has in the Insurance Office of Heaven, and also desist from the dangerous station of insuring to others'.⁹⁴ It would thus seem probable that William had insured the

90. BNL 13 February 1789.

91. BNL 9 July 1790.

92. BNL 2 December 1791. The Committee were Alexander Orr (Chairman), Henry Haslett (Secretary), William Tennant, John Campbell White and Robert Getty. All except Orr were members of the United Irishmen.

93. When, for example, the Friendship sailed to London in September 1784, her cargo was valued at £75,000 (BM 28 September 1784).

94. PRONI Tennant Corr. D1748/1/28, Rev. John Tennant to John Tennant, 5 November 1792.

vessel. The second example dates from March 1794, when the Hibernia, a Belfast vessel bound for Jamaica, was seized by privateers and later recaptured by the British. She was said to have been insured in Belfast.⁹⁵

The firm seems to have enjoyed a measure of success despite competition from other insurance companies in Dublin and London. However, its success may also have been contributed to by a lack of serious fires in the town between the Sugar House fire of 1785, and a fire in the Donegall Arms Hotel in February 1797,⁹⁶ and in March 1796 the committee claimed to have paid the shareholders a dividend of 100%⁹⁷ which may not have been as large as it appears at first sight, as there is no evidence that any dividend had been paid previously. However, the end came in February 1797, some weeks after the fire in the Donegall Arms Hotel.⁹⁸ This may have been a cause of its demise, but a more likely reason was Haslett's arrest in the previous September, and the generally disturbed political and economic condition of the country.

95. NS 27 March 1794.

96. BNL 12 February 1797.

97. BNL 18 March 1796.

98. BNL 27 February 1797.

(ii) The Linen Trade and the Town Economy

One of the outstanding achievements of the merchants of Belfast was the expansion of the trade in bleached linens passing through the port en route to overseas markets, principally in Great Britain in the years after the economic crisis of the early 1780s. Even before this, however, the quantity of linen exported from the port was considerable, averaging about 4,000,000 yards annually during the 1770s and comprising just over a fifth of the total Irish export. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons there was considerable dissatisfaction with the trade. The principal grievance was the dominant role played in the trade by the Dublin market, and for many years most cloth was sent to the Dublin factors to find a market, despite the considerable inconvenience of its distance from the weaving and bleaching districts. Direct shipment of linens to the British market could only take place where the individual bleacher's business was conducted on a substantial scale, and could command credit from either Dublin or London sources. As the volume of direct exports rose, scope was created for Belfast merchants to enter into the trade as middlemen between the bleachers and London merchants.

Both these processes had taken place to some extent in both Belfast and Newry by the late 1760s, and in the London trade at any rate, bleachers were regularly dispatching webs directly to London. The Faulkners of Wellbrook, near Cookstown, were sending goods there through Belfast in 1765,⁹⁹ while a surviving account book of the next decade, believed to be that of the Ferguson family, shows the despatch of large numbers of webs to London, although they also sent considerable quantities to Dublin by

99. A. Monahan, 'An Eighteenth Century Linen Business: The Faulkners of Wellbrook, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone', Ulster Folklife IX (1963), p.34.

carrier.¹⁰⁰ The evidence of the surviving letter-book of the New York house of Greg and Cunningham for the 1750s shows that linens were also being shipped to the mainland colonies on the account of the larger Belfast houses such as James Henderson and, of course, Greg and Cunningham themselves.¹⁰¹

The 1770s were not particularly prosperous years for the linen trade which failed to regain the level of the years immediately before the trade's collapse in late 1770, although it succeeded in holding the level of the early 1770s and, unlike that of Newry, was scarcely affected by the depression of the early 1780s. During the decade there was a steady increase in the hostility felt by the Ulster linendrapers towards the still predominant position of Dublin in the linen trade. There was a general belief among them that the power of the factors in the Dublin linenhall was inhibiting the trade and that the working of the hall was in the hands of a 'set of underling officers . . . who under various pretences duped their employers and fleeced the fair dealer'.¹⁰²

The latent discontent was brought to the surface by the disastrous years of 1781 and 1782 which saw, among other things, the failure of the important London firm of Marler Stewart & Boyd, and by early November 1782, the Ulster drapers, led by those of Newry, had coordinated their activities sufficiently so as to organise a meeting in Armagh on 2 December, aimed at promoting the erection of a linenhall in the North of Ireland.¹⁰³ Newry was the port favoured by the meeting's organisers. There were sound geographical reasons for their choice. It was nearer to Liverpool and London than was

100. PRONI D468.

101. Greg and Cunningham Letter Book 1756-57 (NLI Microfilm P4069).

102. BNL 21 January 1783.

103. BNL 10, 13 December 1782.

Belfast, and in 1769 it had become connected to the sea by the Newry Ship Canal which could accommodate vessels of up to 120 tons, and at the same time a new pier for larger vessels had been built at Warrenpoint.¹⁰⁴ Newry was also connected by canal with the Bann, and thus with Lough Neagh and the Blackwater valley, the heartland of the linen industry.

However, the scheme was forestalled by the united action of the Belfast merchants and the linendrapers and bleachers of the lower Lagan valley who organised a town meeting in Belfast on 15 November (before the Armagh meeting) and took up a subscription towards the building of a hall in Belfast. By early December, over £17,500 had been collected towards the project.¹⁰⁵

The Armagh meeting must have been somewhat disappointing for the promoters. The four Ulster counties of Londonderry, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan were completely unrepresented, while only a handful of Antrim drapers attended. Of those present, some left in protest at what they claimed to be the unrepresentative nature of the gathering. Nevertheless, the rump passed resolutions in favour of the Newry site and plans went ahead for the construction of a hall in that town.¹⁰⁶

The reaction of the Belfast merchants and drapers had been swift and drastic. While they no doubt agreed with the idea of breaking the influence of the Dublin market, they realised that the erection of a hall in Newry would have been an even more serious threat to the trade of their town. In the second half of the 1770s, Newry had begun to move ahead of Belfast

104. W.A.McCutcheon, The Newry Navigation: the Earliest Inland Canal in the British Isles, in Geogr. Journ. CXXIX (1963), p.469.

105. BNL 19, 29 November 1782; ^{Hisc.} Collections pp.223-27.

106. BNL 13 December 1782.

in the quantity of linen which passed through it (Fig. 9), and the rising importance of its southern rival (which had been temporarily stemmed by the depression of 1781-82) was viewed with considerable trepidation in Belfast. The year 1783 saw a considerable quantity of often vehement correspondence on the subject published in the press. One writer, 'Reason and Commonsense', who favoured the Newry hall, did so on the grounds of its proximity to Dublin and Drogheda and to the manufacturing areas,¹⁰⁷ while in January, John Nevill, a prominent Newry draper, claimed that five ships had sailed each year from Newry to the great linen fair at Chester: in contrast, none had sailed there from Belfast for at least seven years.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the supporters of the Belfast scheme, writing under such pseudonyms as 'Co. of Down Draper', 'A Mariner' and 'A Northern Draper', pointed out the dangers of navigation in Carlingford Lough and claimed that £300,000 worth of linen was finished each year within six miles of Belfast.¹⁰⁹ A number of pamphlets were also published on the subject, the most important of which was probably Nevill's Seasonable Remarks on the Linen Trade of Ireland.¹¹⁰ There is, indeed, some evidence that the dispute was carried somewhat beyond the bounds of public debate as in mid January 1783 the Belfast Committee found it necessary to issue a public statement denying rumours which were being 'industriously reported' that the Subscribers 'actuated by mercenary motives and a thirst of gain' intended to charge unlimited rents 'to those drapers who had not subscribed to the project.

107. BNL 24 January 1783.

108. BNL 31 January 1783.

109. BNL 24 January 1783. The danger of navigation in Carlingford Lough had been brought forcibly to the public mind by the loss of the Three Friends on a voyage from Liverpool to Newry. It was alleged that the cause was the refusal of the pilot, 'allowed to be one of the best pilots in Newry', to go instead to Belfast, asserting that he could safely make Newry (SNL 29 November 1782).

110. J. Nevill, Seasonable Remarks on the Linen Trade of Ireland with some Observations on the Present State of that Country (Dublin, 1783).

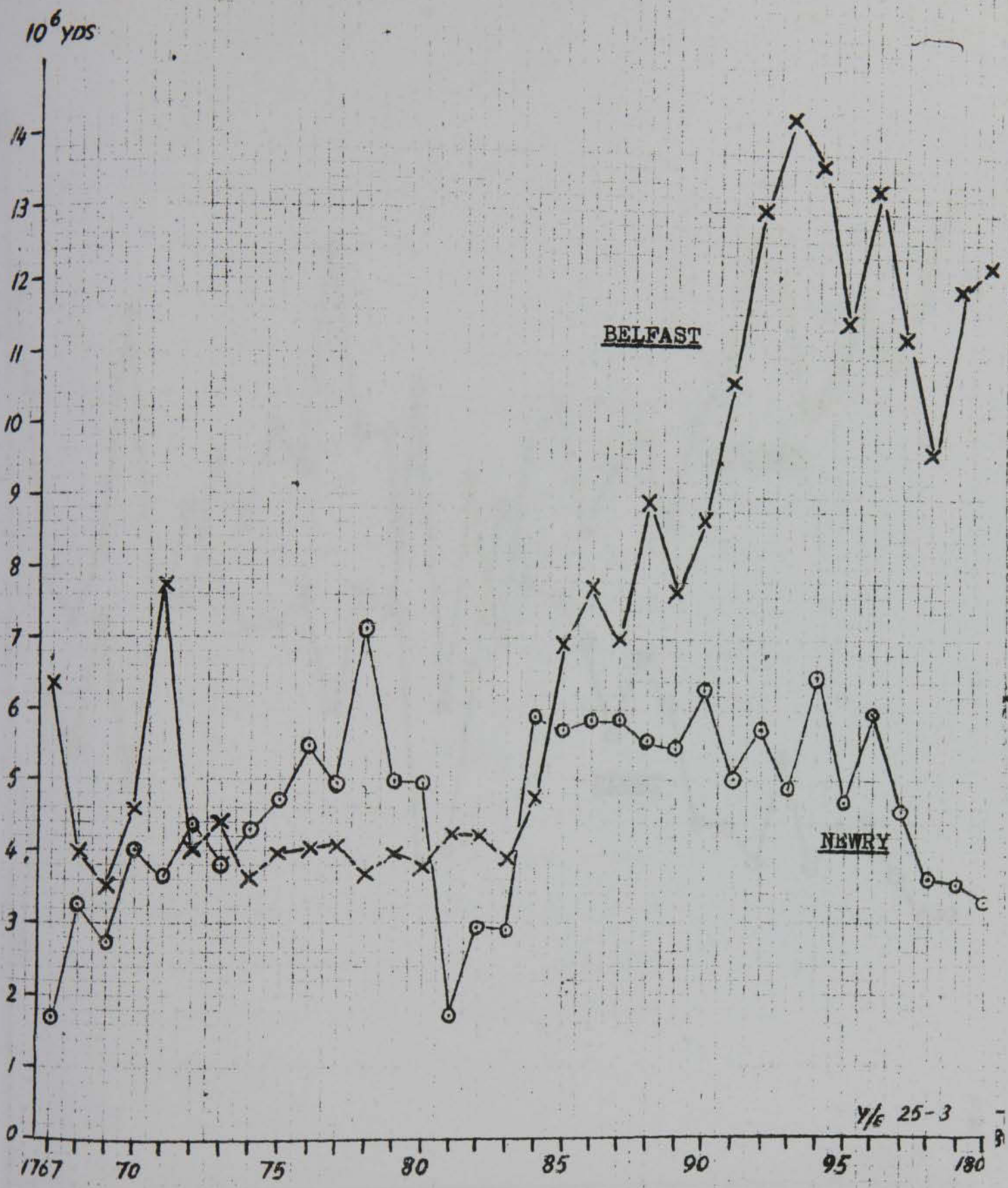


FIG. 9a . EXPORTS OF LINEN FROM BELFAST AND NEWRY, 1767 - 1800

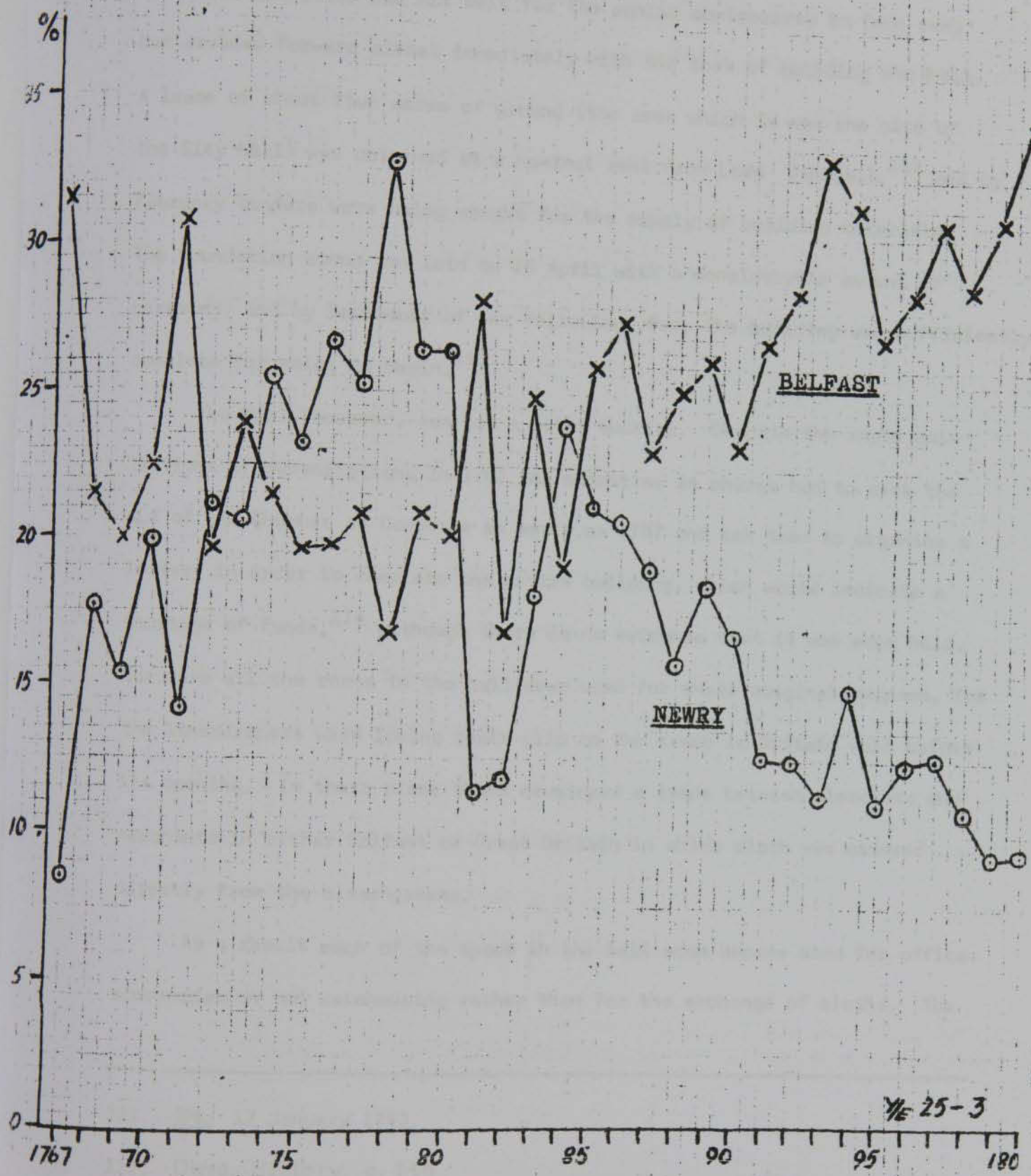


FIG. 98 . EXPORTS OF LINEN FROM BELFAST AND NEWRY EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE IRISH TOTAL, 1767 - 1800

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Indeed, they announced, the reverse was true and no rents were to be charged for rooms.¹¹¹

The committee did not wait for the public controversy to fade away but pressed forward almost immediately with the task of building the hall. A lease of about five acres of ground (the area which is now the site of the City Hall) was obtained at a nominal rent from Lord Donegall,¹¹² and by February tenders were being sought for the supply of building materials. The foundation stone was laid on 28 April with a considerable amount of ceremony, and by September of the following year, the building was sufficiently complete for sales to begin.¹¹³

The Hall, however, was not a total success. Despite the rapid collections of subscriptions in 1782 the committee in charge had to seek the aid of the Chamber of Commerce as early as 1787 and ask them to organise a lottery in order to complete the centre building, which would indicate a shortage of funds,¹¹⁴ although there is no evidence that it was ever held. Nor were all the rooms in the hall ever used for their original purpose, for the linendrapers were losing their grip on the trade to Britain well before its opening. In their place there developed a trade between bleachers and merchants in either Belfast or Great Britain in which cloth was ordered directly from the bleachgreens.

As a result much of the space in the hall soon became used for office accommodation and warehousing rather than for the exchange of cloths. The

111. BNL 17 January 1783.

112. Owen, History, p. 144.

113. BNL 4 February, 20 May 1783; 17 September 1784; Hist. Collections, pp.232-33. By this latter date, 130 rooms had been allocated to factors; Millin, Sidelights, pp.169-70.

114. PRONI D1857/1/1, 8 March, 3 May 1787. Chamber of Commerce Minutes.

principal success of the trade was in the transatlantic sector, cargoes for the United States and West Indies being made up in Ireland as speculative ventures rather than to order and, as a result, the merchants engaged in this trade continued to find it convenient to have before them in one place a wide range of cloths brought to the hall by many different bleachers and drapers.¹¹⁵ Parts of the hall, indeed, were used for other purposes: in 1792 the Society for Promoting Knowledge tried unsuccessfully to obtain the large room over the main entrance,¹¹⁶ but in 1794 it was being used as an Exchange by the Chamber of Commerce¹¹⁷ and in the following year it was the scene of town meetings although a town assembly rooms had been built in High Street as recently as 1776.¹¹⁸ Later, it was found possible to use a wing as a military barracks without causing undue disturbance to the hall's business.¹¹⁹

This indicates that its facilities were underutilised. It was, nevertheless, considerably more successful than its rival, the Ulster Linen Hall in Newry which, deserted and derelict, was sold to the army in 1799 for conversion into military barracks,¹²⁰ for the Belfast hall remained in use until well into the next century. The fact that it was used for transatlantic trade rather than that with Great Britain helps to explain the differing

115. W.Charley, Flax and its Products in Ireland (London, 1862), p.6; Gill, op.cit. pp.190-91.

116. NS 8 December 1792; J.Anderson, History of the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge, Commonly Known as the Linenhall Library (Belfast, 1888), p.12.

117. NS 8 May 1794.

118. NS 9 February 1795; Millin, Sidelights, pp.30-33.

119. LHL Joy MSS iv, f.328.

120. 40 Geo III (Ire) c.6.

fortunes of the two halls, for the Newry merchants never succeeded in developing their colonial trade to the same volume or diversity of markets as their Belfast counterparts. The Belfast hall fulfilled a function as a place where cargoes could be brought together in the transatlantic trade, and much of the surplus space was used for office accommodation which, had it not been available in the hall, would have been obtained elsewhere without much inconvenience to the trade. The Newry hall did not have the same nucleus of transatlantic trade on which to build. As a result the town's linen merchants continued to use their own premises rather than hire rooms and office space in the Hall.

The linen statistics for the two ports at first glimpse demonstrate the relative effectiveness of the two halls. In 1785, the first year in which linen was sold in the Belfast hall, the town's exports rose from 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ million yards to 6.9 million yards while its share of the Irish trade rose from 19 to 25.1 per cent, while exports through Newry, where the hall was opened at about the same time, actually dropped very slightly, having recovered in the previous year from the depressed level of the early 1780s (. Fig 9). However, the 1785 figures only include a half year's use of the Belfast hall, and one would expect to discover a similar increase in the following year, representing a full year's use of the hall. Between 1785 and 1786 Irish exports as a whole rose by 1.5 million yards compared with 1.7 million yards in the previous year. However, the corresponding figures for Belfast are 835,000 and over 2 million. This suggests that the effect of the Belfast hall was not as great as that of the improved shipping facilities which came into operation in mid 1784, and were thus in force for three-quarters of 1785. Nevertheless, accounts of the early sales in the Belfast Hall describe the vast quantities of linen brought there and offered for sale. The Newsletter, for example, wrote of the January 1785 sales that

they 'have far exceeded the expectations of the most sanguine friends of a Belfast Hall in so much as to convince all concerned of the probability of its speedy establishment on a very permanent and extensive basis'.¹²¹ It cannot be denied that the sales brought much linen to the hall: the question which should be asked, and which can never be answered in quantitative terms is this: how much would have passed through the town anyway?

Much more important in its effect on the linen trade than the direct success of the Hall was its indirect effect. It has already been shown to have had strong links with the first Discount Company and that this institution was in its turn connected with the development of the town's two banks. Dr Green's conclusion that 'the growth of banking in Belfast was really of more help than the Linenhall to the northern bleachers in building up a direct export trade to their customers',¹²² is the most pertinent observation possible, and it is interesting to note from Fig. 10, that bleacher control of the Linen Hall had by 1785 been largely transferred to Belfast merchants, indeed to the same group of merchants who dominated the town's other commercial institutions. A brief allusion has also been made to improved shipping arrangements which came into force in 1784, and which resulted from the concern of the Linenhall committee to arrange suitable shipping and to determine sailing dates of vessels so that they would be available for loading when required. Unlike the discount office, this part of the project was in operation before the opening of the Hall, as in May 1784 a committee was appointed to supervise the London trade, and three new vessels were ordered. Of the seven original members of the Committee, five were on the Linenhall Committee in 1785, and a sixth, James Stevenson, was

121. BNL 4 February 1785.

122. E.R.R.Green, Economic History, in British Assocn. for the Advancement of Science, Belfast in its Regional Setting, a Scientific Survey (Belfast, 1952), p.121.

MEMBERS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WADDELL CUNNINGHAM	X	X	X	X	X	Y	X
JOHN BOYLE					X		
HENRY BELL (LISBURN)	X						
WILLIAM LEGG (MALONE)	X						
ROBERT STEWART (BALLYDRAIN)	X						
ROBERT THOMSON	X	X	X	X	X		
THOMAS LYONS (OLDPARK)	X						
ROBERT BRADSHAW (MILECROSS)	X						
ROBERT BRADSHAW (BELFAST)							
JOHN BARCLAY (LISBURN)	X				X		X
JACOB HANCOCK (LISBURN)	X			X			
JOHN HOLMES	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
JAMES FERGUSON	X	X			X		
JOHN or WILLIAM BROWN	X	X	X	X	X	XY	
JOHN SCOTT (FALLS)	X						
WILLIAM SINCLAIRE	X	X	X	X	X		X
JOHN RUSSELL (EDENDERRY)	X						
JOHN HAMILTON	X						
JOHN EWING		X				X	
JOHN CAMPBELL		X			X	X	
HUGH MONTGOMERY		X			X	Y	
ROBERT KNOX		X					
VALENTINE JOYCE		X					
ALEXANDER SUTHERLAND		X					
THOMAS GREG		X					
JOHN LUKE		X					X
JOHN ROBINSON		X					
JOHN ALEXANDER		X					
SAMUEL HYDE			X	X			
JAMES STEVENSON			X	X			X
CHARLES RANKIN						Y	
NATHANIEL WILSON							X
HENRY JOY							X
DAVID TOMB							X
ROBERT GETTY							X

FIG. 10 . CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE LINENHALL, OLD ESTABLISHED TRADERS, DISCOUNT COMPANIES AND BANKS.

col 1, Linenhall, 1783; 2, do., 1785; 3, London Traders, 1784; 4, do., 1786; 5, Discount Co., 1785; 6, X = Bank, 1786, Y = 1788; 7, Chamber of Commerce Committee, 1783.

a ship broker who acted as the Committee's agent.¹²³ The seventh member was Samuel Hyde, a brother-in-law of Waddell Cunningham. This group would seem to have been elected by the owners of the various vessels engaged in the London trade and the new committee was really a partnership in which the subscribers held shares which were occasionally auctioned as property.¹²⁴ It would thus appear that shares were held in the Company rather than in its ships.

There had already been considerable cooperation between shipowners but it was of an informal nature and possibly owed much to the relationship between the captains of a number of the vessels, which has already been described.¹²⁵ Broking arrangements were virtually non-existent. Those, for example, intending to ship goods to Liverpool by the Peggy in April 1779 were advised to 'apply to said Master on board, at the Kay':¹²⁶ more often, no mention was made even of this simple arrangement.

Shipbroking, as a profession, was combined at this stage with the business of general merchant and was restricted to trade other than that to Great Britain. This was connected directly with the speculative nature of the port's long distance trade, and the high proportion of commission carrying involved. This will be discussed more fully when we come to examine the geographical breakdown of the trade of Belfast: what must be realised at this juncture is that the sudden expansion of the Linen trade in the mid 1780s made necessary an extension of formal handling techniques to the home trade.

123. BNL 28 May 1785.

124. e.g. NS 3 April 1794.

125. pp. 35-36 above.

126. BNL 30 April 1779.

Initially, the increased coordination provided by the Committee proved to be of great advantage to the linen trade and this, as much as the building of the White Linen Hall, may have attracted the large quantities of linen already mentioned to the town in 1784. In this regard, a brief comment in an August 1784 edition of the Newsletter is of importance. It was to the effect that 'The exceeding punctuality of the Linen Shippers here, occasions a greater quantity of cloth to be brought into town than we ever before recollect to have observed in the same time'.¹²⁷ As the effect of improved communications would have taken place some months earlier than the first sale in the White Linen Hall, this would help to explain the sudden increase in exports in 1785, as they would have been operative for nine months of 1785.

During the first few months of the Committee's existence new vessels were ordered and placed in service, and a regular order of sailing arranged so as to prevent gluts and shortages of shipping space as much as possible. Special efforts were, of course, made to provide sufficient vessels for the end of the regular sales and within a short time the committee's interests had expanded beyond their original task of conducting the London trade. As early as the June sales of 1785, for example, sailings were also advertised for Chester, Liverpool, Bristol, Whitehaven and the Clyde.¹²⁸ The vessels involved were all regular traders, and this indicates that they were controlling vessels which were not owned by the company although they may, of course, have been owned by its subscribers. As a result their functions were seen as the organisation of shipping just as much as the operation of their own vessels in conjunction with the trade.

127. BNL 24 August 1785.

128. BNL 7 June 1785.

Such an approach, with its monopolistic tendencies, soon bred dissatisfaction. Some merchants, for example, were unable to gain entry to the original consortium on whom they found themselves dependent for shipping space. There may also have been dissatisfaction within the Company. At any rate, a new Company was formed in January 1790.¹²⁹ Two of its members, John Boyle and James Holmes, had been members of the former committee. Unlike it, the new grouping was a trading partnership in which the subscribers held shares,¹³⁰ and it would thus seem that the vessels involved were owned by the Company. At first they employed two agents, Henry Haslett and Valentine Smith. The former had been a wholesale woollendrapery while the latter was the son of James Galt Smith, a prominent merchant. Within a short time, however, Smith had joined the old committee and was acting as their agent in conjunction with Stevenson, and by the following year he had left the business to become the Chamberlain of the White Linen Hall.¹³¹ This left Haslett as the effective manager of the 'New Traders', and in many respects the Company seems to have borne the stamp of his influence. He was, for example, deeply involved in the United Irishmen, and one noticeable feature of the 'New Traders' was the manner in which they patronised Ritchie's shipyard and gave their vessels such patriotic names as Shamrock, Hibernia and St Patrick.¹³² Like the 'Old Traders', the new committee soon developed beyond their original intention of participating in the London trade, and was soon competing in most of the routes on which their rivals had organised

129. BNL 22, 26 January 1790.

130. These were occasionally advertised for sale in the public press (e.g. NS 10 February, 21 April 1794, BNL 12 July 1799). It is interesting to note, however, that Tone described one of their vessels, Hibernia, as 'McCracken's new ship' in 1792. (W.T.W. Tone, Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone (Washington, 1826) i, p.172. Tone, however, was not the most observant of the many people to visit Belfast at this time.

131. BNL 12 February, 26 July 1790; 4 January 1791.

132. See Chapter 10.

sailings. In 1792, for example, Haslett secured an agreement with six importers of Irish linens in Bristol for the use, where possible, of the 'New Traders' vessels,¹³³ while in 1795 a number of subscribers commissioned a vessel for the Oporto wine trade.¹³⁴ The firm's existence can be confirmed from advertisements until early 1798 when it would appear that they succumbed to the political and economic troubles of that year, although a share was advertised for sale in July 1799.¹³⁵

By then, the function of broker had come into existence in the town. The earliest brokers, men such as James Stevenson, had also been involved in trading activity although to a lesser extent than had formerly been the case. In September 1788 John Tisdall was in business as a ship and commission broker, and he later developed this business into the semi-legal sphere of the notary public, as well as becoming an auctioneer.¹³⁶ In 1795 Fortescue Whittle, who had served his time to Haslett, was also describing himself as a ship and linen commission broker: by the following year he was also selling insurance policies.¹³⁷ Most of these brokers came from a less exalted social background than that of the general merchants. John Tisdall had been a printer, Haslett and another shipbroker, Robert Hunter, had been woollendrapers and Haslett had been bankrupt.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, the emergence of brokers as a distinct group, separate from the merchants, was a sign of the increasing volume of trade, and much

133. NS 2 June 1792.

134. See pp. 262 ff below. Strictly speaking, this vessel, the William, was not part of the 'New Traders' fleet but the shareholders were apparently members of the Company and Haslett acted as broker.

135. BNL 12 July 1799.

136. BNL 26 September 1788, 31 December 1790.

137. BNL 11 September 1795, 8 July 1786.

138. BNL 7 April 1789.

of this expansion was due directly to the linen trade. In the growth of broking, the White Linen Hall played a vital role as a stimulus by bringing together in one committee the various shipping interests involved in it, thus forming a centralised unit which could provide fulltime employment for one man. Competition produced a similar unit, and the general growth of trade provided the conditions in which other specialised shipping managers could make a living.

CHAPTER 5

BELFAST AND IRELAND : THE TOWN AS A REGIONAL CENTRE

The hinterland of Belfast varied somewhat according to the function under consideration. However, for virtually every purpose it consisted of Antrim and North Down, bounded on the south by the River Bann, and it also extended south-westwards from Lough Neagh into County Monaghan, and westwards into the east of County Londonderry. Beyond this zone lay the hinterlands of Newry and Londonderry, although these areas were dominated increasingly by Belfast for a number of functions. Belfast also had, of course, widespread contacts with other areas of the country and these will also be examined in this chapter. The town did not develop in isolation from the rest of the country. Its rapid growth in terms of population, for example, was not achieved by the natural increase of its own inhabitants. Throughout the period there was a constant flow of immigrants into the town from many parts of Ireland, and many of them attained positions of prominence in its business life. There was also a lesser movement in the other direction of men leaving the town, either to establish themselves in business in the smaller towns round about, or to exercise their talents in the wider spheres of Dublin life.

There was, too, a constant movement of commodities into and out of the town. Its inhabitants had to be fed, while its principal exports of linen and provisions were drawn from the surrounding countryside. In the opposite direction goods imported through the port of Belfast were distributed in the districts round about. The town also performed functions unprovided for elsewhere in the locality, such as the printing of newspapers, the provision of legal services in the form of solicitors and notarys, in addition to its major role as a trading and manufacturing centre.

One must also consider the means by which the town's businessmen invested money elsewhere in the area. This has already been commented on in relation to the textile and flour-milling industries where circumstances dictated their dispersion into the surrounding areas, but it is also necessary to examine such questions as the role played by the business community in such matters as the development of the Co. Donegal herring fisheries during the 1770s and 1780s.

During the period with which this study is concerned, it is possible to divide the various Irish ports into groups based on the range of functions which they fulfilled. Dublin and Cork may be seen as comprising the most important group, handling virtually every item mentioned in the statistics of imports and exports, and having a near monopoly of the more esoteric goods, which were redistributed from them to the smaller ports and the interior. There were also a number of ports of lesser size and a more restricted function. These exported the basic products of their hinterland and directly imported bulky and low cost necessities as well as those luxury (i.e. non-essential) items in large-scale demand, such as fruit of various kinds, woodenware and haberdashery. In the 1760s six ports can be included in this category: Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Londonderry, Newry and Belfast. All except Galway had a substantial transatlantic trade, and all enjoyed some form of regular commercial intercourse with the European continent.

One point of some interest and importance was the relatively small population of both Newry and Belfast in relation to the quantity of trade emanating from them, although by the turn of the century, the growth of Belfast brought its population close to that of Waterford. This high level of activity would seem to be an indication of the prosperity of the hinterlands of both Newry and Belfast. The dominant role of the linen industry in the area was also of importance for it necessitated the importation of

large quantities of flaxseed and potash and, as has been seen, despite the dominant position of Dublin as a marketing centre in the linen trade, the quantity of linen exported from Newry and Belfast was considerable.

The rivalry between Newry and Belfast in the linen trade has already been discussed in connection with the building of the Belfast White Linen Hall. The scheme was proposed at a period when Newry was exporting larger quantities of linen than Belfast, a fact which helps to explain the zeal with which the Belfast drapers and their supporters carried out the scheme. Its success relative to the total failure of the Newry hall can be explained by a number of factors. Largely because of its location, Newry lacked a Scottish trade, and Belfast was far more favourably situated for access to the principal commercial and industrial centres in Scotland. Newry's provisions trade was also considerably smaller than that of Belfast, and this may have contributed to its poorer performance. Its butter trade was generally between a half and two-thirds that of Belfast, and its beef trade during the 1770s about one-tenth, although it rose to about 40% by the mid 1790s (Fig. 11). However, the town appears to have received more benefit than Belfast from the Revolutionary War, and its butter trade in the late 1790s was actually greater than that of Belfast.

One reason for Newry's weakness was the failure of its merchants to develop the wide range of overseas trading contacts which were so important in the trade of Belfast. By the late 1780s the ports' transatlantic exports consisted of little more than a small quantity of linen which was sent to the northern states of America, probably in returning flaxseed ships, and the town never developed a regular Caribbean trade. As most of the vessels used for voyages to the West Indies were locally owned, the effect was to considerably reduce the shipping owned in Newry. Most of the town's shipping

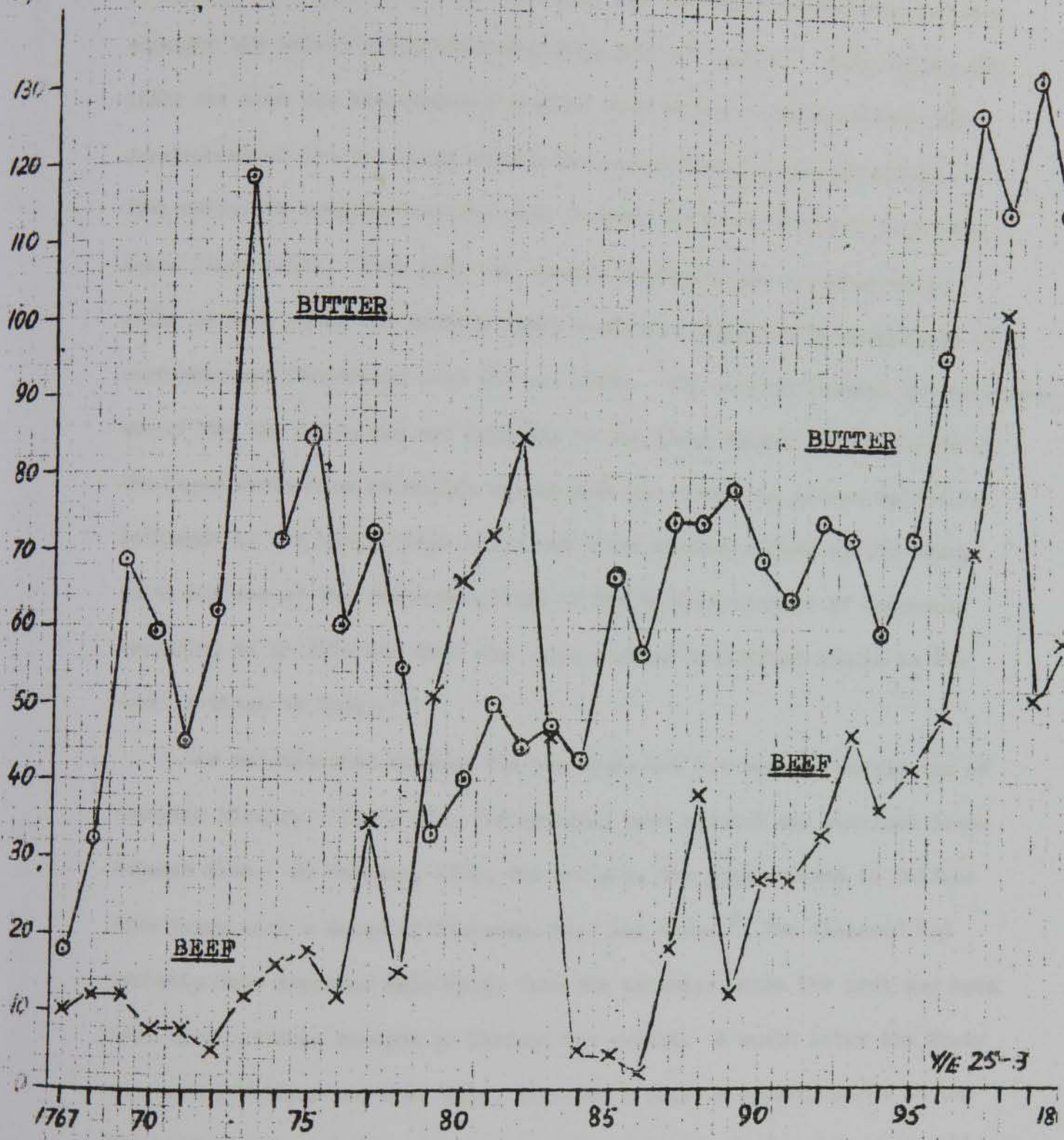


FIG. 11 . EXPORTS OF BUTTER AND BEEF FROM NEWRY EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THOSE FROM BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

V/E 25-3

was engaged in the British trade where a large tonnage could be handled by a small number of vessels. The town's smaller provisions trade was also ultimately a reflection of the fact that its immediate hinterland was less populous and economically developed than that of Belfast. Even during the 1760s the town was considerably smaller than Belfast. Nevertheless the development of the two towns during the period reveals many parallels. Both contained wealthy families with transatlantic connections, both promoted linen halls. Both also had annuity companies and ironfoundries, while in both cases the British linen trade was regulated by committees of merchants and shipowners from the mid 1780s. The rivalry between the businessmen of the two towns was not confined to the linen trade: the promotion of the Lagan Navigation extension was in part an attempt to extend Belfast's influence in the Lough Neagh basin which was already served by the Newry Canal and one of the recommendations of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce regarding it in 1793 was that the tolls charged to Belfast should be the same as those to Newry.¹

The relationship between the two towns was not however merely one of economic rivalry. There was, for example, much coastal and overland trade between them. In February 1769, for example, the John arrived in Belfast from Newry with a cargo of flaxseed, beef and hides.² The flaxseed had probably been imported into Newry from the colonies while the rest may have been local produce brought to Belfast for export. A month later the Newry merchants, William and John Ogle, inserted a curious advertisement in the Newsletter concerning the cargo of the Pennsylvania Farmer which had just arrived in Newry. It stated that the shippers had wanted it landed in Belfast 'as more convenient to that Part of the Country where the Owners

1. PRONI Chamber of Commerce Minutes D1857/1/1, 24 December 1793.

2. BNL 28 February 1769.

live; but as it is probable that most of the Owners would rather accept it at Newry¹, it had been brought there and the owners of the cargo were to send instructions for its onward carriage.³ Among other things, this shows how Newry merchants were involved in the flaxseed trade with the Belfast hinterland, possibly on a considerable scale. In February 1773 a cargo of potash was brought from Newry to Belfast,⁴ and two more in 1779, while in 1785 one sailing with kelp and ashes was recorded in the opposite direction.⁵ These coastal sailings presumably served to distribute surpluses and alleviate local shortages, and were probably paralleled in other years, as well as in other commodities. Overland carriage was not unknown either, especially as roads improved towards the end of the century. In 1796, for example, Robert Getty, a Belfast merchant, was landing Dutch clover seed in Newry (presumably as part of a cargo shipped on board a Newry-bound vessel in Rotterdam), and bringing it by road to Belfast.⁶

The emigration boom of the early 1770s provides much positive evidence for assuming that there was much cooperation between the two business communities. As Dickson has shown, Newry's American trade expanded extremely rapidly in these years in response to the emigrant traffic: indeed in 1771 and 1774-75 more vessels were advertised to sail from Newry than Belfast. The reasons for this are not particularly clear, for Newry's linen industry was apparently relatively unaffected by the recession if its export statistics are a reliable guide.⁷ The most likely explanation is that the emigrants came from areas in mid- and west-Ulster which were seriously

3. BNL 3 March 1769.

4. BNL 2 March 1773

5. BNL 28 September 1779, 4 April 1780, 22 April 1785

6. NS 24 March 1796.

7. Dickson, op.cit. pp.229-30. See also Fig.9

affected by the economic and agrarian troubles of the time, and which normally sent their linen to the Dublin market.

In 1771 Greg and Cunningham's Venus sailed from Newry to Baltimore and Charleston.⁸ In November of the following year, the Britannia left Belfast for Charleston. It was managed by two merchants from Newry, as well as Matthew Rea, the Drumbo emigration agent.⁹ In 1773 Joseph McClure, a Newry merchant and shipbroker, was an agent for the Lord Chatham, another vessel which sailed from Belfast to South Carolina,¹⁰ and these examples may indicate the heavy volume of the Newry emigration traffic, which was straining the port's resources to the full. Indeed, in the same year the Betsy sailed from Newry to Philadelphia. Among the agents was Hugh Kyle, a Belfast shipbroker, although he may have been related to its captain, Samuel Kyle.¹¹ In 1774, the last year of the traffic, further examples occur. The Belfast watchmaker, Thomas McCabe, was listed as an agent for the Baltimore Packet along with David Gausson, a Newry merchant and shipbroker, and a Portadown man, J. Woolly. McCabe and Woolly were probably no more than Gausson's agents, but it is interesting to note that McCabe was a native of Lisburn and that another watchmaker, William McCabe (possibly a younger brother) moved from Lisburn to Newry in 1772.¹² Another Belfast businessman, John Hyndman, was listed as an agent for the voyage of the Renown, destined for Philadelphia from Newry in the same year. The other promoters of this venture had addresses in Armagh and Cookstown, while

8. BNL 4 June 1771

9. BNL 6 November 1772; Dickson, op.cit. p.247.

10. BNL 10 August 1773; Dickson, op.cit. p.257.

11. ibid. p.263.

12. BNL 4 March 1774.

13. BNL 3 November 1772.

Dublin agents were listed in Faulkner's Dublin Journal.¹⁴ Another venture, the Betsy from Newry to Philadelphia was, like that of the Baltimore Packet, organised by David Gausman, who claimed in his advertisements that he had an agent, John Patterson 'touring the North of Ireland, his places of call including Belfast'.¹⁵

There are signs that this 'crossed promotion' of transatlantic voyages was not restricted to the 1770s. In 1784, for example, the Belfast merchants Thomas Hardin and George Joy helped to promote the voyage of the Hope from Newry to Newcastle in Delaware,¹⁶ and in the same year, Zachariah Maxwell, a Dundalk merchant, was having sugar sent coastwise from Belfast to Newry, and this would seem to have been a regular occurrence.¹⁷ There is also evidence that some ships called at Newry en route from the Continent or London to Belfast. In 1793, for example, the William of Belfast was captured in the Garonne when war broke out with France. She had been advertised to sail from Bordeaux to Belfast via Newry.¹⁸ Three years later the Resolution was seized by pirates in the Mediterranean and taken to Algiers. The announcement of her capture stated that she was on a voyage from Sicily to Belfast and Newry.¹⁹

Evidence of industrial links between Newry and Belfast is much thinner. The Belfast cotton manufacturer, Nicholas Mercer, apparently worked in Newry before going to Belfast and Ballyclare²⁰ and the Belfast merchants, Robert

14. Dickson, op.cit. pp.271-72.

15. ibid. p.273.

16. BNL 4 May 1784.

17. BRONI Foster MSS, D562/252. Maxwell to John Foster, 16 January 1784.

18. BNL 26 February 1793.

19. BNL 10 June 1796.

20. Mins. Linen Trustees, 10 February 1786, p.10.

and Hugh Hyndman, acted as agents for Benson's Newry foundry in 1783.²¹ In the other direction, so to speak, Benjamin Edwards had a warehouse in Newry in 1800 for the sale of his glass and ironware.²² However, the reason for the scarcity of evidence for this aspect of the relationship between the two towns may simply be the relative lack of industrial development in Newry.

What other evidence survives concerning the links between Belfast and Newry tends to concentrate on the movement of people between the two towns. There were some family links: the marriage of the Belfast merchant, James Holmes, to Jane Davis of Newry²³ has already been mentioned. One other marriage relationship of importance was that of Jane Sinclaire, a daughter of Thomas Sinclaire, a prominent Belfast linendraper, who married James Pollock, a Newry merchant.²⁴ Such references, however, are surprisingly few, and that this may reflect the situation is a view supported by the correspondence of Dr William Brennan who was a Belfast man practising medicine in Newry from 1783 to 1789.²⁵ His letters display little indication that he had fellow townsmen in Newry, although he writes familiarly of many people whom he met after he moved to Dublin in 1789.

The relationship between Belfast and Newry has been treated at some length for Newry alone, of all the Irish ports, constituted a threat to the development of Belfast. However, it is also necessary to consider the

21. BNL 6 May 1783.

22. BNL 28 October 1800.

23. R.D. Vol. 344, f.147.

24. St. C.L. Daub, A History of Descendants of a Scottish Family, by the Name of Sinclaire, who emigrated to Ireland, from Caithness, Scotland, in the Seventeenth Century (unpub. typescript. PRONI T1666). Pollock later went to America where he acted as an agent for his father-in-law.

25. PRONI T765/2.

links which existed between Belfast and other towns and cities in Ireland. While most of its contacts were with its immediate hinterland, some were with areas considerably further afield. Dublin, for example, was the social and political centre of the country, and its industrial and commercial dominance was considerable. It was the largest exporter of Irish linen, and its market was by far the most important in the country. Many Belfast men found their way to the capital where they established themselves in business. David Hay, a Dublin bookseller who died in Aachen in 1772,²⁶ was one of a family engaged in the same business in Belfast, and his son, David jr. who succeeded him in business, owned a tavern in Sugarhouse Entry in Belfast in 1800.²⁷ John Magee, who achieved a dubious renown as the editor of the Dublin Evening Post through his literary and judicial battles with the notorious Francis Higgins and with Lord Clonmell, was also from Belfast, being the son of the bookseller and stationer, James Magee.²⁸ It is interesting to note that when his brother, William, acquired the Belfast Mercury in 1786, he quickly renamed it the Belfast Evening Post. A somewhat less direct connection was that of the Blow family, also booksellers and stationers in Belfast with George Grierson, Daniel Blow's brother-in-law, who was the Irish King's Printer.²⁹

These links resulted from Dublin's role as the centre of Irish political cultural and social life, as did the examples of lawyers and doctors from Belfast who went to Dublin to establish a reputation and fortune for

26. BNL 5 January 1773.

27. BNL 10 January 1800.

28. BNL 1 July 1785; B.Inglis, op.cit. pp.75-79.

29. J.R.H.Greeves, Two Irish Printing Families, in Proc. Belfast Nat. Hist. & Phil. Soc., 2nd ser IV (1955), pp.38-44.

themselves. Among them was William Drennan, who moved from Newry, the scene of his first medical practise, to the capital in 1789.³⁰ The law courts, too, proved to have a magnetic attraction for young and ambitious provincial lawyers, such as Henry Joy's son, Henry who enjoyed a career which reached its peak with his appointment in 1831 as Chief Baron of the Irish Court of Exchequer.³¹

A few merchants and other businessmen from Belfast also established themselves in business in Dublin. The firm of Blacks Murray, for example, moved from Belfast to Dublin in 1769.³² Another Belfast man who emigrated to Dublin was William Russell, a grocer and shipbroker. He had special reasons for making the move, as he had been fined and jailed for three months for mixing barley and oatmeal and selling it as oatmeal, some being exported and the rest sold to the town's poor.³³ Another businessman, Robert McCormick, who moved to Dublin in 1795 was a gunsmith. He first intended to move in 1793 but would appear to have postponed the decision on a number of occasions.³⁴ These were years when the political situation in the town was becoming increasingly disturbed, and he may have felt himself to be at risk, living in premises containing a large quantity of arms. Apart from the special case of the professions and the bookselling trade, most of the few businessmen who transferred their activity to Dublin had special, personal motives which probably influenced their decision.

30. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/287. Dr Drennan to Samuel McTier, 22 December 1789.

31. F.E. Ball, The Judges in Ireland 1221 - 1921 (London, 1926), ii, pp.269-71; M. McNeill, op.cit. p.35.

32. BNL 20 June 1769.

33. BNL 29 June 1787, 2 March 1792; DEP 14 July 1787.

34. BNL 29 September 1793, 13 October 1794; NS 26 March 1795.

The number of Dubliners known to have come to Belfast was likewise small. Among them was Peter Galen of the firm of Galen Thomson & Co., he later brought his brother-in-law, Bartholemew de la Maziere.³⁵ Most of the mobility was in the craft sector, in those activities which either required special skills, as in watchmaking, or a knowledge of the world of fashion. It was in these spheres, too, that people tended to receive their training in Dublin before returning home to Belfast to work. Many of the town's milliners, for example, learnt their trade in Dublin. There were also a few known cases of merchant apprenticeships being served in Dublin by youths from Belfast. The orientalist, Charles Hamilton, who was a native of Belfast, was apparently apprenticed for some time to a merchant in Dublin³⁶ and the Rev. William Laird, the minister of the Third Belfast Congregation, had a brother, Francis, who was a wholesale woollendrapery in Dublin. He sent his son, John, to Dublin to learn the trade under him. After serving his time, John returned home and opened a shop in Bridge Street in 1781. However, he seems to have met with limited success and in 1783 emigrated to the West Indies, where he died two years later.³⁷

The quantities of goods imported into Belfast through Dublin were usually small and would probably not have justified the expense of direct importation. In 1778 Waddell Cunningham and John Robinson were purchasing brandy in Dublin,³⁸ and in the following year Samuel Robinson was importing

35. See Chapter 9.

36. DNB VIII, p.1,024.

37. BNL 6 February 1781, 22 April 1783, 3 February 1786.

38. PRO CUST 1/149, f.103 (2 July 1779).

garden seeds through Dublin, although he had another consignment coming directly to Belfast.³⁹ In 1793 Robert Getty was bringing tea overland from Dublin to Belfast.⁴⁰ It is important to note that all three cases are drawn from wartime when there was a danger of capture by privateers, and similar considerations may have been behind the importation by the merchant, Samuel Carson, of gunpowder through Dublin in 1795,⁴¹ for it was normally imported directly into Belfast. Other commodities also featured in the coastal trade from Dublin to Belfast. For example, it was alleged in 1787 that Belfast millers were purchasing wheat in Dublin where the price was reduced by bounties, because even after they had paid the costs of purchase, shipment and insurance, it was still cheaper than purchases made locally.⁴²

References to the sending of imports from Belfast to Dublin are, as might be expected, less common, and it is likely that much of the overland trade in this direction consisted of linens for the Dublin market. The Ferguson family, for example, sent considerable quantities of linen to Dublin, especially during the American war.⁴³ The only other evidence for this period is of some coffee sent from Belfast to Dublin in 1772,⁴⁴ and of a trade in tobacco.⁴⁵ Both these items were plantation produce and, as has been shown elsewhere, Belfast's share of the transatlantic trade was substantial. It would seem relatively easy for surpluses of colonial goods to accrue in the town and for these to be redistributed over a wide area.

39. BNL 23 February 1779.

40. PRO CUST 1/232 ff.63-64 (20 March 1793).

41. PROI Customs and Excise Administration Papers IA/43/5/32 (Petition of Samuel Carson to Lord Camden, 23 May 1795).

42. BNL 2 February 1787.

43. PRONI D468 (Ferguson Account Book).

44. PRO CUST 1/120 f.122 (18 March 1772).

45. PRO CUST 1/120 f.51 (22 January 1772). Among the merchants noted as being involved in the trade were John Holmes, William Holmes, John Henderson and Samuel Robinson.

Towards the end of the period, there grew up a trade in locally produced items between the two centres. Considerable quantities of Dublin porter were sent to Belfast,⁴⁶ and these grew rapidly as the capital's brewing industry expanded. Belfast cotton goods found their way onto the Dublin market, where Grimshaw's had a warehouse from at least 1793,⁴⁷ and the trade employed a considerable number of carriers as well as an unknown and unquantifiable amount of coastal shipping which must have been more substantial than appears from the Newsletter shipping news, where only occasional arrivals (sometimes of vessels from London which appear to have called at Dublin en route) are recorded. In 1777, for example, Sanders's News-Letter mentions three sailings from Dublin to Belfast between July 10 and August 18,⁴⁸ in addition to that of the Neptune, a Belfast-owned West India trader which put into Dublin on July 9, but sailed next day for Belfast.⁴⁹ During 1780 at least two vessels engaged in the trade were lost at Donaghadee alone,⁵⁰ and in 1791 the Belfast general merchants, John Boyle & Co. were sufficiently engaged in the trade to own one of the vessels employed on the route.⁵¹ A suggestion of relatively frequent sailings is also to be found in a letter from Chichester Skeffington, the Port Collector of Belfast in the same year. Writing to his wife, who was in Dublin, he asked her to forward him some items by the next boat,⁵² and in 1799 Dr

46. See Chapter 9.

47. H.C.Lawlor, The Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century, Ir and International Fibres and Fabrics Journ. VIII (1942) pp.1-16.

48. SNL 16 July, 4, 18 August 1777.

49. SNL 10, 11 July 1777.

50. SNL 2 March, 24 November 1780.

51. BNL 14 January 1791.

52. PRONI D1108/C/5B, Skeffington to Lady Harriett Skeffington, 23 September 1791.

Drennan was astonished that a vessel would have to wait six weeks before a cargo offered.⁵³ It is thus likely that in normal conditions, sailings between the two ports occurred at least every couple of weeks.

Evidence also survives of regular commercial contacts between Belfast and other parts of Ireland apart from Dublin, Newry and its immediate hinterland. During the 1760s and 1770s, for example, there was a regular trade in anthracite which was brought from the Castlecomer coalfield in Co. Kilkenny to Belfast through the port of New Ross. Some of it was used in the brewing, milling and ironfounding industries as it did not contain arsenic or sulphur.⁵⁴ Those who sold it in Belfast were generally engaged in these industries and this would indicate that they were responsible for conducting the trade. In March 1770, for example, William Wallace junior was selling 'Kilkenny Coals' at his brewery at the Long Bridge,⁵⁵ and the trade was continued by his successor, Francis Turnly,⁵⁶ when Wallace failed in 1773. After the 1770s, however, references to the trade decline although in 1786 a cargo arrived on board the Belfast⁵⁷ and in 1791 William Seed & Co., the owners of the Beersbridge Mills, were advertising some for sale.⁵⁸ However, during these years it is likely that supplies were being increasingly obtained from Scotland, and at least one reference to 'Glasgow Blind Coal' is known,⁵⁹ while the

53. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/751. Dr Drennan to Mrs McTier, January 1799.

54. S. Andrews, op.cit. p.43.

55. BNL 20th March 1770.

56. BNL 30 April 1776.

57. BM 25 May 1786.

58. BNL 16 August 1791.

59. BNL 31 July 1781.

shipbroker, Henry Haslett, was advertising 'Riscarton Malting Coals' in 1794.⁶⁰ The inland location of the Kilkenny collieries and consequent relatively high costs, was probably a problem: certainly, Belfast merchants showed interest when two Larne merchants, John Montgomery and Malcolm McNeill, tried to develop an anthracite colliery at Fair Head in 1785, and a cargo of coal was brought to Belfast during that summer.⁶¹ However, the concern never got off the ground, partly because of the bad state of the harbour at Ballycastle which could only be used in good weather.⁶²

Another area with which the Belfast business community had strong contacts was that about Drogheda and Balbriggan. In the winter of 1767-68 the merchants, Galea Thomson & Co., acting on behalf of their Ayr correspondents, Alexander Oliphant & Co., were purchasing barley in Drogheda for shipment to Scotland,⁶³ and in the latter year the Prince George, a ship belonging to the Belfast merchant, Andrew Orr, was engaged as an emigrant vessel from Drogheda to America.⁶⁴ A later contact, and one which the Belfast businessmen cannot have relished, was provided by the Balbriggan cotton spinners, Comerford, O'Brien & Smith, who opened a Belfast agency in 1788.⁶⁵ While this would seem to have been a case of 'carrying coals to Newcastle', they must have met with some success, as it remained open

60. NS 28 July 1794.

61. BNL 27 May, 17 June 1785; DEP 10 May 1785.

62. SNL 3 September 1783; G.L.Davies, The Town and Coalfield of Ballycastle, Ir. Geogr. III (1957), p.210; C.Dallat, Ballycastle's 18th Century Industries, The Glynn III (1975), p.13.

63. NLI P3988. Oliphant to Galea Thomson & Co., 15 December 1767, ff.

64. DG 20 September 1768.

65. BNL 22 April 1788.

until 1794 when its manager, William Martin, went into business on his own account.⁶⁶ Martin apparently had contacts with Drogheda as well as Balbriggan as after 1794 he sold Drogheda Ale as well as Balbriggan cotts.⁶⁷ Belfast's contacts with Dundalk were also strong, principally consisting of the supply of imported goods in exchange for grain. In June 1767, for example, the Nightingale was lost on the North Rock while on a voyage from Dundalk to Belfast with a cargo of oatmeal,⁶⁸ while in the early 1780s Robert Thomson was regularly importing sugar on behalf of Zachariah Maxwell, a Dundalk merchant.⁶⁹

On the other side of the country, references occur frequently to contacts between Belfast and the West of Ireland, these relating principally to a trade in kelp and oats. Much of this trade may have been organised from Sligo, to which port flaxseed was being sent in 1769,⁷⁰ for reference has already been made to the investment of William and John Brown & Co. in the Sligo merchant house of William Manoe & Co.⁷¹ Their business may have included the purchase of commodities for the Belfast market. Much of the interest of the Belfast merchants in the west of Ireland, however, was in County Donegal where a number of those merchants engaged in the Caribbean trade were involved in the north-west fisheries. One of them, Greg and Cunningham, had held leases in Dunerris and its vicinity since 1753, and

66. BNI 6 June 1794.

67. BNI 3 January 1794; MS 16 February 1795.

68. BNI 5 June 1767.

69. PRONI Foster MSS D562/252, Maxwell to Foster, 16 January 1784.

70. BNI 28 February 1769.

71. See p. 52 above.

only sold them in 1782, at about the period that the fishery began to decline.⁷²

When the Co. Donegal herring fisheries were revived about 1771, they began to export considerable quantities of Irish herring, principally to the Caribbean,⁷³ and at least one businessman, James Suffern, was regularly selling them for local consumption. He sent at least one vessel to the fisheries each year from 1777 to 1780,⁷⁴ and does not seem to have been involved in the West Indies unless he sold part of his catch in Belfast for this purpose. In 1778, five Belfast boats were awarded bounties.⁷⁵ With the end of the war, however, the trade declined although in 1783 the Chamber of Commerce tried to raise £4,000 to equip six vessels, each with a crew of ten⁷⁶ and in the following year the brig Belfast was built for the trade⁷⁷ and the need to maintain contact with the fisheries was one reason put forward by the Chamber when it attempted to have a cross-post from Belfast to Londonderry established by the government.⁷⁸

Most immigrants into the town came from its immediate hinterland, although as has been seen, some came from Dublin and other areas a considerable distance from Belfast, and from Great Britain. However, they were

72. See D. Dickson, The Barony of Inishowen in the Century before the Famine (unpublished BA (Mod) Dissertation, T.C.D. 1969) This thesis is unfortunately unpaginated but see Note 80 to Chap. II; R.D. Vol. 330, f.267, Vol. 347, f.142; PRONI Donegal Leases D509/538-541. (Leases dated 14 November 1770 to Thomas Greg of lands area 3,480 Irish acres in vicinity of Buncrana).

73. Many references may be found in Proc. Dub. Soc. The references are to vol. and page number, followed by date: - XIII, p.12 (14 November 1776), XIV, p.146 (25 June 1778), XV, p.11 (12 November 1778) XVII, p.183 (19 July 1781), XVIII, p.95 (28 March 1782), XXI, p.159 (14 July 1785), XXII, p.198 (13 July 1786).

74. Commons Journ. Ire. IX, p. dxvii, X pp. cxciv, ccii, cccl; BML 7 March 1777.

75. Commons Journ. Ire. X, pp. cxciv-cxiv.

76. PRONI Chamber of Commerce Minutes D1857/1/1, 6 November 1783.

77. BM 19 October 1784.

78. PRONI D1857/1/1, 10 April 1784.

usually involved with businesses which required special skills or a knowledge of the latest fashions. Grocers and merchants, those involved in more traditional occupations, usually came from the town's immediate hinterland. The Coleraine area, for example, provided many members of the business community. Among them was Elizabeth Shipboy, who moved to Belfast in 1793 with her children, James and Jane, and purchased Robert Wilson's haberdashery business.⁷⁹ The woollendrapers and shipbroker, Henry Haslett, was born near Limavady, and served his time there before coming to Belfast about 1780 or 1781,⁸⁰ and the Tennant brothers, who have been mentioned frequently in this work, were the sons of Rev. John Tennant, a Presbyterian minister from Roseyards, near Der^cvoak. John, at least, was apprenticed to a Coleraine merchant before coming to Belfast.⁸¹ The woollendrapers, Christopher Strong, had been in business in Ballymoney before coming to Belfast in 1789,⁸² and at least two innkeepers in the town had previous associations with Ballycastle. Terence McGuckian of Coagh opened an inn there in 1771: by 1785 he was landlord of the 'Antrim Arms' in Ballymoney and in 1791 he was owner of the 'George' in North Street, Belfast. In 1794 he purchased the 'Donegall Arms' in High Street, the most prestigious inn in the town.⁸³ The other innkeeper was Daniel Murphy, who moved from Ballycastle to the White 'Hart' in North Street at the end of 1777.⁸⁴

Further south, Ballymena and its vicinity also contributed a considerable number of its inhabitants to the Belfast business world. The most

79. BNL 15 January, 28 May 1793.

80. PRONI T777, f.79. (Will of William Haslett of Clooney, Henry's father. See also PRONI Lorton Wilson MSS T1021/31.

81. PRONI Tennant Papers D1748 Box 28 (Memorandum Book of John Tennant); Madden, Lives 3rd ser., II, pp.51 ff.

82. RD Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 31; BNL 24 October 1777, 21 April 1789.

83. BNL 12 July 1771, 28 June 1785, 8 April 1791, 2 May 1794.

84. BNL 19 December 1777.

prominent of these were Hugh Crawford, the son of William Crawford of Ballymena,⁸⁵ John Campbell and his nephews, William, Thomas and John Brown who were the sons of a local Presbyterian clergyman.⁸⁶ Another merchant who may have come from Ballymena was Henry McKedy whose brother, Robert, was a tanner there until his death in 1776.⁸⁷ Other, less prominent businessmen came from the same area. Robert Stevenson came to Belfast from Stewartstown in 1768 as a partner in an apothecary's firm and by 1775 was engaged in practice as a surgeon.⁸⁸ In 1784 Hugh Dick, who had been a grocer in Magherafelt, moved to Belfast and opened a business there in partnership with a local man, John Rea⁸⁹ and Samuel Boyd, a draper from Portglenone, moved his business to Belfast at the end of 1796.⁹⁰ There may have been others: the McAdams family, for example, one of whom married Jane Shipboy, came originally from the neighbourhood of Ahoghill.⁹¹

A similar pattern may be seen in the area to the south of Belfast. Ballyroney near Rathfriland, for example, was the home of the Neilson family who, as has already been described in Chapter 3 (ii), became deeply involved in the woollendrapery business in Belfast,⁹² and George Langtry, a prominent merchant of the 1790s and early nineteenth century, came from Kilmore, near Lurgan, a fact possibly of some importance as a reason for his purchase of Benogue Flour Mill, near Lurgan, which he owned by 1799.⁹³ Another Belfast

85. PRONI D1364/A25 (Young MSS).

86. Bena, History ii, p.223.

87. BNL 20 September 1776.

88. BNL 14 June 1768, 14 November 1775.

89. BNL 9 January 1784.

90. BNL 22 August 1796.

91. PRONI Deane MSS D544/1; BNL 9 October 1798.

92. Madden, Lives, 2nd ser., I, p.75.

93. R.D.Vol.310, f.201; Green Ind Arch.Down p.24.

merchant, Thomas Hardin, came from Portadown.⁹⁴ To the west of there however the number of immigrants rapidly declined. The only one whose origins are known for certain was James Boyd, who claimed to be a tobacco and snuff manufacturer and who came from Fivemiletown. He came to Belfast in 1785, but no further traces of his career can be discovered.⁹⁵ This is not, of course, to state that nobody else came from the area west of the Bann, and we have already examined evidence which indicates that Robert Henderson, a linenbleacher from Rea, in Co. Monaghan, was related to Hugh Henderson, a Belfast master mariner.⁹⁶

As was to be expected in view of the rapid expansion of Belfast, migration in the area overwhelmingly consisted of immigration into the town and few examples of outward migration from Belfast can be found, with the exception of that to Dublin, and to various centres overseas. The most important businessman who left Belfast was Joseph McClure, who went to Newry and became a merchant there in 1769. He had been apprenticed to John Henderson, of Belfast, but may well have originally come from Newry.⁹⁷ Ballymena attracted a small number of Belfast men, probably because it was emerging as a prosperous linen and market centre within the hinterland of Belfast. William Gregg, one of the Belfast chandling family, moved there in 1774, and he was followed in 1786 by Samuel McMaster, a watchmaker who had served his time under Thomas McCabe, and in the following year by James Gordon, who had formerly been a partner of the tanner, James Martin.⁹⁸ None was particularly important, and Gordon was presumably improving his

94. R.D. Vol.360, f.487; PRONI D1252/17/9.

95. BNL 3 June 1785.

96. See pp. 35-36 above.

97. BNL 5 September 1769.

98. BNL 11 January 1774, 14 April 1786, 9 November 1787.

status by working on his own in a small town rather than being a junior partner in a more important centre. Migrants to other centres were few in number. A grocer, James Montgomery, opened a business in Ballynahinch in 1767. Like McMaster, it was his first venture into business on his own, while James Bellamy, a publican, who went to Downpatrick in 1770, apparently left Belfast because of his debts and gave up business, becoming a school-teacher instead.⁹⁹

The area for which Belfast acted as an entrepot and commercial centre was approximately similar to that from which it recruited its businessmen, extending into west Londonderry and as far south as Monaghan. In 1793 one merchant, Hugh Montgomery, was sending tobacco overland to Limavady,¹⁰⁰ and by the late 1790s there was a traffic in dead pigs from County Londonderry into Belfast to cater for the needs of the provisions trade,¹⁰¹ and in 1796, John Bennett, a Coleraine merchant, was bringing flaxseed overland from Belfast.¹⁰² Another traffic was that in salmon from the River Bann fisheries, a product regularly exported to European and colonial markets.¹⁰³ In 1768, for example, over 30 tuns were sent to Spain, and a small amount to the colonies, while in 1792 over seven tuns were shipped to the Caribbean, as well as a small quantity to Gibraltar. Salmon, indeed, was occasionally mentioned as forming one of the principal items in vessels bound for these destinations.¹⁰⁴

99. BNL 13 October 1767, 25 May, 6 June 1770. In 1775 the merchant, Valentine Jones, foreclosed on his debts (RD Vol.312, f.537).

100. PRO CUST 1/235, f.3 (15 October 1793).

101. W.S.Smith, loc.cit., p.213

102. BNL 9 May 1796.

103. PRONI T925/1. Diary of J.Macky, Bann Waterkeeper, f.80.

104. e.g. BNL 23 December 1768, 14 October 1785

Belfast's influence is also seen in the vigorous coastal trade between it and Coleraine, Londonderry and the lesser ports in their vicinity, through which not only were goods imported into Belfast distributed into the area, but also the products of the various industries in the town were sent by sea to the smaller ports. During the 1770s, for example, there was a trade in flour between Belfast and Londonderry, and in 1776 this amounted to 660 cwt.¹⁰⁵ By the 1790s the coastal trade had grown to such an extent that at least one shipbroker, Robert Hunter, was able to specialise in the coastal trade, and in 1795 was describing himself as a 'coastbroker'.¹⁰⁶ In February 1792 he was the agent for the Mary, bound for Coleraine and the May for Newry, and in July he advertised sailings for Dublin, Londonderry and Coleraine. A year later he announced that he was seeking cargoes for ships sailing to Londonderry and Coleraine.¹⁰⁷ The coastal trade often involved much shorter voyages than those to Coleraine or Londonderry. In May 1768, for example, two vessels arrived in Belfast with slates, one from Ballywalter and the other from Donaghadee, while in the following February and March four arrivals were recorded from Larne. The items involved were herrings, cod, wheat, tar and staves and all were bulky commodities which would have been difficult to transport by road.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, despite the bad condition of many roads in the area, goods were sent overland considerable distances from Belfast. In the spring of 1781, for example, a cartier named Michael McGaughan was arrested after running off with £75 worth of goods which were being sent to Monaghan by

105. Commons Journ. Ire. IX, p.dlxxxiv.

106. MS 12 January 1795.

107. NS 29 February, 28 July 1792, 6 July 1793.

108. BNL 10 May 1768; 10 February, 31 March 1769.

the Belfast woollendrapers, Lukes Murphy and Haslett.¹⁰⁹

The town's newspapers were also distributed over a wide area, although this was a task undertaken on horseback rather than by cart. By 1785 the town's principal paper, the Newsletter was being distributed as far south as Dundalk and Monaghan, as well as throughout the present six counties of Northern Ireland,¹¹⁰ and a surviving subscription list for the years 1795-97 has made it possible to reconstruct the various delivery routes and the numbers of papers despatched to the different towns. A very considerable number of papers was also sent by post, usually to outlying areas.¹¹¹ The Belfast Mercury, which flourished between 1783 and 1787, representing the views of the radical Volunteer party, was also purchased throughout Ulster, having subscription agents in most centres in the province.¹¹² These were presumably backed up by a distribution system similar to that of the Newsletter, while the Northern Star, the famous journal of the Belfast United Irishmen, which was published between 1792 and 1797 enjoyed an extremely widespread zone of circulation,¹¹³ largely on account of its political content. Indeed, the raw material for the paper from which the newspapers themselves were manufactured was drawn from a wide area. In 1793 the Joy family, publishers of the Newsletters and owners of a paper mill at Cromac, advertised that they would purchase and collect linen rags from anywhere in the counties of Antrim, Down or Armagh.¹¹⁴

Another Belfast product which found a wide market was linen marking

109. BNL 6 April 1781.

110. BNL 8 April 1785.

111. PRONI T2771/4.

112. BM 1 February 1785.

113. NS 24 December 1795.

114. BML 2 April 1793.

fluid. It was sold by most of the town's printers and by some merchants and, like newspapers, was light and easily transportable. One manufacturer, James Magee, for example, was advertising agencies as far distant from Belfast as Londonderry and Strabane to the west and Newry to the south.¹¹⁵

There is also evidence of a trade in grain of various kinds into Belfast over a considerable area after 1780. This traffic was greatly facilitated by access to water transport. By the turn of the century, buyers were employed by the Belfast millers in such small ports as Bangor and Killyleagh,¹¹⁶ and with the opening in 1794 of the Lagan Navigation, a similar trade developed with inland areas, although Lisburn remained an important centre for the trade in oats until well into the nineteenth century. Stores were built at strategic points along the canal where the grain could be held before being taken by lighter to Belfast - one was built, for example, by John Alexander & Co. at Aghalee in 1795.¹¹⁷

While Belfast expanded rapidly during the 1780s, its actual hinterland changed little in extent. However, the communications facilities within that area underwent a process of rapid change and improvement, not only through the development of new modes of transport such as the canal, but also in the existing forms of road transport. At the beginning of the period, overland carriage of goods had been in the hands of a number of carriers, some of whom were men of considerable substance. The largest firm was that of Isaac Ramadge. On his death in 1785, the Newsletter afforded him an obituary of considerable length which included a detailed description of his

115. BNL 3 May 1776.

116. Dubourdieu, Down, p.225.

117. Dubourdieu, Antrim pp.181-82; PRONI COM 1/1/1 (Lagan Navigation Minutes) 13 April 1795.

funeral.¹¹⁸ The scale of his business can be seen from a request from John Alexander to a friend in Dublin in 1773 to forward 30,000 'Quicks' (young hawthorn plants) for ditching work on the Donegall Estate by means of Ramadge's carts.¹¹⁹ It is likely that a considerable amount of the south-bound traffic carried by men such as Ramadge was linen for the Dublin market, which would have been sent directly from the manufacturing areas. Certainly, no carrier found that the Belfast to Dublin trade justified the establishment of a service operating to a fixed schedule until the end of 1793 when a waggon owned by a Newry firm, which had been operating between Dublin and that town, began to serve Belfast as well.¹²⁰ Within a few months, this vehicle was joined by those of a Belfast carrier, John Cunningham. He instituted a service of cars rather than the more cumbersome waggons, and this may be an indication that the traffic expected was not particularly heavy. He may have had other reasons as well, for a month later the waggon had to be temporarily withdrawn as its wheels were not in accordance with legal requirements.¹²¹ For some years these two services sufficed for the traffic offering. However, in 1797, the Newry firm of Anderson & Grier, owners of the waggon, increased their frequency from fortnightly to weekly by the use of a second vehicle.¹²²

These regular waggon services were not the first scheduled services on the Dublin - Belfast road, for by the time of their introduction stage-coaches had become a regular, if expensive, mode of passenger transport

118. BNL 3 June 1785.

119. PRONI T1893 (Donegall Estate Letter Book). John Alexander to Hamilton McClure, 9 January 1773.

120. N6 13 December 1793.

121. NS 17 February, 6 March 1794.

122. BNL 13 March 1797.

between the two places. However, regular coach services on an all-the-year round basis were only established about forty-five years after the initial attempt was made in 1740 or 1741. The journey then took three days in winter and required six horses. Travel was possibly only during daylight hours and nights were passed in Drogheda and Newry.¹²³ However, this initial attempt to found a service failed, as did a second one in 1752 which also enjoyed only a short life.¹²⁴ In the following year regular hackney cars began to operate in the Belfast area, and fixed hire charges were laid down. However, their utility must have been limited. The rate of hire was an English shilling per mile, and no charges were quoted for journeys further afield than Carrickfergus, indicating that little or no demand was envisaged for longer journeys.¹²⁵ A further extension of public transport facilities was probably restricted by the generally unsatisfactory condition of the roads. As late as 1783, when John Bernard travelled from Dublin to Belfast 'in a verminous buggy with a worn-out horse', the road conditions which he described were truly appalling.¹²⁶ Indeed, it seems that one of the worst sections was the road between Belfast and Lisburn which had a slaty surface which choked travellers with dust in summer and covered them in mud during the winter.¹²⁷ By the mid 1780s there was a considerable demand for a service and this was met in part by Messrs Hayes who operated a regular coach between Newry and Dublin and who provided a connecting service to

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123. Details of this service can be found in A.Riddall, *The Dublin-Belfast Coach*, UJA 3 ser X (1947), pp.26-29.
124. This second attempt to operate a coach between Dublin and Belfast has been described in Benn, History i, pp.497-98. One cause of its demise c.1755/56 was the bad roads: it was unable to operate during the winter of 1754-55.
125. ibid i, pp.498-99.
126. J.Bernard, Recollections of the Stage (London, 1830) i, pp.306-7.
127. Dubourdieu, Antrim p.360; I.J.Herring, *Ulster Roads on the Eve of the Railway Age*, IMS ii (1940), p.165.

Belfast in May 1785. This may have been in response to pressure from the Linenhall committee: certainly, a letter from an English draper who experienced considerable difficulty in getting to Belfast from Dublin for the fair was published in the Mercury in March. He had been obliged, for want of a stagecoach, to hire a chaise at ls. 3d per mile.¹²⁸

Unfortunately this service soon fell a victim to rivalry for the Dublin to Newry traffic, being run off the road and wrecked by its rival, Roche's coach, but it was restored by the autumn and would seem to have run on a year round basis as its departure times were altered in November to minimise the amount of night travel involved.¹²⁹ However, it did not satisfy local demands and there was considerable agitation for the establishment of a mail coach.¹³⁰ Not only was this a more prestigious and reliable form of transport than a privately owned coach, but it would facilitate the post as well as passengers. However, when the government advertised for contractors for mail coach services in the autumn of 1786, no tenders were received for the Belfast route,¹³¹ and in the following year the government stated that the bad state of the roads rendered the regular operation of a coach impossible,¹³² although Mayne's coach was apparently still operating, ignorant of this conclusion.

In April 1788 another attempt, this time successful, was made to find a contractor, and a year later a coach began to run three times a week while the details of the mail arrangements were decided. This took some time, and it was not until August of the following year that the mail was carried and

128. BNL 24 May 1785; BM 15 March 1785.

129. BNL 13 June, 4 November 1785.

130. DEP 7 May 1785; BNL 20 September 1785.

131. DEP 18 November 1786.

132. BNL 27 November 1787. The reason was probably just as much the lack of a contractor

the service became a daily one. At the same time it was extended to Donaghadee to connect with the packet service to Portpatrick. This does not seem to have been very successful and in April 1798 it was replaced by a postboy on horseback.¹³³

The prominent role played by the mail contract in establishing coach services is a reminder of the fact that the postal services formed, as they do today, an integral part of the communications network and were of special importance to a commercial centre such as Belfast which depended upon them for the remittance of bills and orders. Until the mid 1790s the town's postal arrangements could only be described as inadequate, leading to widespread use of acquaintances for the carriage of letters. In 1795, however, the post office was reorganised and the staff increased to six.¹³⁴ One reason for this move may have been increasing trade, but the need to supervise the activity of the United Irishmen may also have loomed large in the authorities' minds as the postmaster appointed, Thomas Whinney (who had formerly been a wine and spirit retailer in Newry) was in frequent contact with Dublin Castle and earned a reputation among the town's radicals for interfering with the mails.¹³⁵ During this period the post office made many improvements to the system in the Belfast area. By June 1797, for example,

133. DEP 12 April 1788; BNL 10 April 1789, 31 August 1790, 6 April 1798. The contractor was probably James McKane, the proprietor of the Donegall Arms Hotel who put forward a tender for the Newry-Belfast stage in 1788 (DEP 29 April 1788). The Donegall Arms was the Belfast terminus of the service

134. J.H. Smith, Belfast's First Post Office, Northern Light, November 1949, pp.3-4.

135. PRONI McCracken Corr. T1210/17 (H.J. McCracken to Mary McCracken, 9 June 1797); BL Pelham Corr. v (Add. MSS 33104), f.344 (Gen. Lake to Pelham 3 July 1797); PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/688 (Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, 6 January 1798) also various references in the Rebellion Papers in SPO: 620/25/197 (Whinney to Lees, 29 October 1796); 620/26/153A (same to same, 24 December 1796); 620/30/194 (same to same, 25 May 1797); 620/46/101 (same to same, 29 March 1799); see also McNeill, op.cit. pp.142-43.

a regular post operated to Comber.¹³⁶ However, a constant complaint of the business community was that Donaghadee remained the place where the English mails were sorted and that this added a day's delay to Belfast-bound letters, and despite efforts to change this situation, the sorting office remained at Donaghadee.¹³⁷

Despite this, Belfast had become by 1800 the principal centre of communications in the north-east of Ireland, and the problems of making contact with the interior of the country had been greatly eased by the provision of regular coach, car and waggon services, as well as the facilities provided for the movement of bulky goods by the opening of the Lagan Navigation in 1794.¹³⁸

The effect of these developments was to increase the economic control which Belfast already exercised over the area by the 1760s, rather than to extend the size of the town's hinterland, and by the end of the century Belfast had become the unrivalled economic capital of the north-east of Ireland. This increase of economic strength was not the result of a natural and inevitable process, but depended upon the ability of the town's businessmen to work successfully together on boards, and as members of companies, and to come together as a unit which, by means of town-meetings, subscriptions and petitions could present a powerful, and united front to the central authorities.

136. BNL 5-June 1797.

137. SPO Official Papers 68/3 (Petition of Belfast merchants, 9 October 1799).

138. See Chapter 6 (ii).

The growth of Belfast in prosperity and size provided scope for a considerable amount of specialisation in its businessmen's activities, and led to a broadening of its function as a retail and service centre for its inhabitants and those living in its vicinity. It increasingly acquired businesses which had formerly only existed in Dublin and, in doing so, strengthened its position as a regional capital, a role reinforced by its emergence as both a commercial and industrial centre, and also as a focus of social activity. One of the most noticeable developments was that of the wine and spirit trade as a distinct sector. At the beginning of the period this had been the preserve of the general merchants, but by 1800 a number of merchants specialised in the business and dealt directly with continental suppliers. The first of them was Charles Brett who opened a wholesale and retail spirit stores in Hercules Lane in 1773. The business seems to have prospered: in the following year he moved to more central premises on Hanover Quay¹³⁹ and by the mid 1780s he had become an important figure in the business community. He invested the substantial sum of £100 in the White Linen Hall project in 1782,¹⁴⁰ and was a partner in the glass-house of John Smylie & Co.¹⁴¹ He was also a founder member of the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁴² By the mid 1790s he was living at Charleyville, a comfortable villa in Ballymafeigh¹⁴³ and his extensive business involved not only the importing of wines and spirits, but also an export trade in whiskey,

139. BNL 6 July 1773, 1 November 1774.

140. BNL 19 November 1782.

141. Millin, Sidelights, p.72.

142. PRONI D1856/1/1 (Chamber of Commerce Minutes).

143. LHL Joy MSS 8/15/6 (a political poem of 1786 entitled 'The Down Convention').

and his contacts and customers extended at least as far south as Portaferry.¹⁴⁴

By 1799 Brett's property in the town was valued at £4,000. Even larger was that of the firm of Robert and Alexander Gordon, which first came into prominence in the mid 1780s, although Robert Gordon may have been in business for a number of years previously as a man of that name was admitted to the roll of freemen of the town in 1772, and subscribed £180 to the White Linen Hall in 1782.¹⁴⁵ By 1791 they were prominent enough to be admitted to membership of the exclusive Northern Whig Club¹⁴⁶ and by 1799 their property was valued at £6,000¹⁴⁷ and they had built up a wide range of contacts on the continent as far afield as Madeira.¹⁴⁸ They may have been related to William Gordon, a cooper who worked in the town for many years;¹⁴⁹ another wine importer, Thomas Cruse, began his business in 1783 by taking over the business of William Atkinson, a deceased winecooper.¹⁵⁰

The emergence of specialist wine merchants was undoubtedly a result of the expansion of trade which occurred in the years after the end of the American War in 1783. As will be shown in Chapter 8 (ii), the trade would seem to have expanded to such an extent as to make direct importation through Belfast an increasingly feasible operation and the port's share of wine imports rose sharply. The specialist wine merchants supplemented rather than replaced the general merchants in the trade. One must also be careful

144. PRO CUST 1/237, f.99 (24 March 1794), CUST 1/246, f.17 (31 August 1795).

145. BNL 19 November 1782; Young, Town Book, p.298.

146. SPQ Westmorland Corr. 32 (Membership List of the Northern Whig Club).

147. LHL Joyr MSS 10/13.

148. PRO CUST 1/268, f.153 (2 March 1800), CUST 1/269, f.11 (28 March 1800).

149. He became a freeman in 1760 (Young, Town Book, p.297), and was mentioned as still at work in NS 27 October 1794.

150. BNL 18 February 1783.

not to overstress the extent of their specialisation. Mention has already been made, for example, of Brett's investment in the glass industry: he was trading in flaxseed in 1780, and seven years later was advertising anthracite among his wares.¹⁵¹ Thomas Cruse was trading in flaxseed in 1791,¹⁵² and in the following year, a surviving account book of the firm of Thomas and Miles Atkinson shows them not only distributing wines and spirits over a wide area, but also purchasing boots and shoes for sale in the West Indies.¹⁵³

A similar diversity is also to be found in the business of other merchants whose principal activity related to particular commodities. The firm of Henderson and Crawford, for example, which passed into the sole ownership of Walter Crawford in 1791, concentrated on the iron trade from its foundation in 1783.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Crawford was also dealing in whiskey in 1794 and in starch in 1800.¹⁵⁵ However, the business of such men was concentrated on one or two closely defined commodities, and this was a phenomenon unknown in the town at the beginning of the period. Their emergence was thus a product of the growth of the town which made it feasible for them to successfully conduct their business in an increasingly narrow range of goods.

The period also saw many changes in the retail sector of the business community. At the beginning of the period, the retail grocers who sold a wide range of goods directly to the public were perhaps the most numerous group of businessmen in the town. Some of the wares were purchased from the

151. BNL 14 April 1780, 13 November 1787.

152. BNL 12 April 1791.

153. PRONI D1721.

154. BNL 3 June 1791.

155. BNL 17 October 1794, 20 May 1800.

general merchants who imported them in bulk quantities, although by the 1760s the grocers had become directly engaged in many aspects of the British trade where it was feasible to order goods in relatively small quantities, and where the time taken for delivery was short. Most of the town's general merchants were also grocers and sold goods retail as well as wholesale, thus supplementing the activity of the grocers. However, the grocers rarely, if ever, became general merchants engaged in the European and continental trade simply because of the substantial resources which such a move required. The grocers usually operated on a relatively modest scale, and partnership and business organisation was generally simple. There were rarely more than two partners, although some firms enjoyed a long and stable existence. That of James Davison and Bristow Miniss, who came from Antrim to Belfast in 1782, was still in business at the end of the century, selling more or less the same goods from the same shop.¹⁵⁶ James Hamill had an even longer career, for he was in business at the 'Indian Boy and Canister'¹⁵⁷ from at least 1773 to 1800 and would seem to have been at least comfortably off financially; his wife was the widow of an army captain.¹⁵⁸ One firm which was of considerable interest was Black Cranstons & Co., which was in many ways the exception which proves the rule, for in its scale and partnership structure it bore many resemblances to the large merchant establishments. Its partners were Alexander Cranston, a brother of John Cranston the brewer, George Black and James Trail Kennedy,¹⁵⁹ and it is important to note that the latter two were also partners in the brewery of John Cranston & Co.¹⁶⁰ One reason for the establishment of the firm may have been to act as a

156. BNL 2 July 1782, 11 February 1800.
157. BNL 13 April 1773, 19 September 1800.
158. BNL 16 December 1774.
159. BNL 18 February 1791.
160. See Chapter 9.

marketing medium for its porter. Like the various general merchant firms with multiple partners, the partnership changed a number of times without, however, expanding. Indeed, both brewery and grocery business failed to make a profit and Black and Kennedy both lost heavily by them.¹⁶¹ Only one firm, that of McKedy & Stevenson, appears to have developed a distinct general merchant's business. Henry McKedy had been in the grocery business at 'The Orange Tree' in High Street from at least 1767.¹⁶² In January 1782, he entered into partnership with James Stevenson, a linen merchant. However, McKedy died two months later and Stevenson continued the business in partnership with his widow until 1797.¹⁶³ During this time, they became increasingly involved in shipbroking, and in the importation of flaxseed, potash and other commodities normally dealt in by the general merchants. Stevenson rapidly rose to prominence in the business community. In 1783 he was one of the founders of the Chamber of Commerce, and was a member of its council,¹⁶⁴ and in the following year he became the manager of the Old Traders, and in 1785 was appointed a member of the Belfast Board.¹⁶⁵ However, the transition of McKedy & Stevenson from grocers to importers was illusory. There was only a very short interval between the formation of the partnership and McKedy's death: Stevenson may have been made a partner as a family friend or relative as McKedy's death became imminent, and it is important to note that the two businesses were conducted separately, the

161. PRONI Macartney MSS D572/11/19. George Black to Earl Macartney, 25 December 1796.

162. BNL 13 February 1767.

163. BNL 29 January, 12, 19 March 1782, 17 April 1797.

164. Millin, Sidelights, pp.81-83.

165. 25 Geo III (1x) c lxiv, §.2; Owen, Port, p.17

retail business from 'The Orange Tree' and the wholesale from Stevenson's premises at Chichester Quay.¹⁶⁶

Any attempt to estimate the number of grocers in the town at any given time faces great difficulties created by the fact that few firms were of any size. Some were no doubt like those described by Twiss on his visit to Dublin in 1775, whose stock in trade he described as 'half a dozen of eggs, a platter of salt, a few pipes, a roll of tobacco, a yard of tape, a ball of twine, a paper of pins, etc. etc.'¹⁶⁷ One grocer, James Kilbee, who opened a shop in the town in 1786, was working by 1792 as bookkeeper in the sugar refinery of Francis Jordan & Co.¹⁶⁸ Others enjoyed even shorter careers. Archibald Kirkpatrick is mentioned only once in the Newsletter in March 1785, as were the brothers Samuel and James Mulligan, who started business in North Street in July 1788.¹⁶⁹ Such men may have quietly failed, or have continued in business in a small way, concerned only with a local custom which was unable to read the advertisement columns of the Newsletter. This makes it virtually impossible to establish the number of grocers in the town, and unfortunately, Robert Hyndman's surveys of 1782 and 1791 were not concerned with merchants or shopkeepers. However, in 1767 there were at least ten grocer's shops in Belfast, in addition to those operated as part of a general merchants business, and this number had increased to at least 32 by 1800. Some of this rise may have been due to more use being made of the media. However, the population had also doubled, while the various

166. See e.g. BNL 29 January 1782, 1 March 1785.

167. R. Twiss, A Tour in Ireland in 1775 (London, 1776), p. 31.

168. BNL 17 November 1786, 11 May 1792.

169. BNL 18 March 1785, 11 July 1788.

industrial developments which took place greatly increased employment and individual spending power.

As has been stated already, many general merchants were engaged in the retail as well as the wholesale trade. However, there was a tendency for these functions to become separated, usually on the dissolution of a partnership. In July 1770, for example, when the general merchant partnership of Campbell and Donaldson was dissolved, its grocery sector became Hall & Boyd, while the wholesale business became John Campbell & Co.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, in 1788 the grocery interests of William and Thomas Brown passed to a partnership of Hamilton Thompson and William Oakman, while the wholesale business was taken over by Thomas Brown and John Oakman.¹⁷¹ In both cases the division occurred under boom conditions; in the first case just before the collapse of the linen trade in the following winter, and in the second during the period of expansion of the cotton industry. Another, if somewhat variant example, is provided by the retirement of John Campbell in 1788. While most of his interests were continued by his partner, Hugh Montgomery, his retail wines and spirits business was continued by John Graham, who had apparently been its manager.¹⁷² The financial details of all these transactions is somewhat unclear and it is not possible to determine whether they were handed on cheaply as a reward for service or were purchased at their full market value. However, it does show that the various firms involved had developed to a scale where they could have an independent existence.

The growth of the wine trade led to the evolution of specialist retailers as well as wholesalers. Thomas Milliken, for example, opened for

170. BNL 17 August 1770.

171. BNL 9 September 1788.

172. BNL 26 September 1788.

business in 1782, retailing just about every conceivable kind of alcoholic beverage. In 1786 he sold the business to the brothers Samuel and Andrew McClean, who maintained it until at least 1800.¹⁷³ The late Isaac Ward has referred to them as keeping a tavern.¹⁷⁴ However, they were not licensed as such in 1791, and this would indicate that they were purely retailers.¹⁷⁵ Another establishment of note was that of Magee & Callwell in Bridge Street, which was opened in 1785 to trade in porter and cider, as well as hams and cheeses. All these items could be readily obtained through Bristol where Callwell's uncle, Robert, was a merchant. The firm were primarily retailers: indeed in one advertisement they stated that they would only accept payment in cash.¹⁷⁶

Another trade in which specialist retailers emerged was that in garden seeds. In the earlier part of the period some grocers, notably Henry McKedy and Thomas Elder, specialised in this commodity and stocked a wide variety, but seeds never formed more than a small part of their trade.¹⁷⁷ However, in 1783 William King opened a seed shop near what is now Castle Junction (perhaps fleetingly, as no mention of it can be found after 1785).¹⁷⁸

173. BNL 15 March 1782, 7 July 1786; PRO CUST 1/270, f.20 (21 May 1800). This last reference is to wine imported on their behalf by the general merchants, Douglass & Sweeney.

174. I.W.Ward, Old Belfast Signboards, in U.J.A. 2nd ser, XII (1906) p.188.

175. BNL 4 November 1791.

176. BNL 1 July 1785.

177. e.g. BNL 9 February, 2 March 1773. Some idea of their range may be gained from the fact that in BNL 2 March 1773, Elder listed his varieties in stock as 22 root crops, 82 'sallad seeds', 18 'pot and sweet herbs', 16 types of grass and clover seed, 20 varieties of beans and 21 of peas, 141 types of flower seed and 9 varieties of roots as well as 28 different kinds of tree, a grand total of 357. It occupied a column of the newspaper.

178. BNL 23 December 1783, 22 February 1785.

However, in 1791 John Bullen opened a seedshop which was still in business in 1800,¹⁷⁹ and by early 1796 he was joined by Edward Lindsay whose shop was one of the features of the town mentioned by Dubourdieu in 1812.¹⁸⁰ The success of these two men was no doubt due to the increase of the town's population and the consequent growth of its need for food.

So far this discussion has centred on the general merchants and retail grocers, and on those specialist businesses which evolved from their activity. However, similar developments occurred elsewhere, most notably in the drapery trade. At the beginning of the period this was in the hands of firms which performed both wholesale and retail functions, but during the 1780s three distinct categories of business tended to develop; the wholesaling of imported cloths, the wholesaling of Irish cloth and the retail trade, which have already been discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to two of the families involved, the Johnsons and the Neileons. Haberdashery, too, tended to emerge as a distinct economic activity. Until the mid 1780s it had normally been combined at the wholesale level with woollendrapery, and the emergence of specialists in the business is yet another sign both of the growth of the Belfast market and the lessening of the town's dependence on importers in Dublin. Some idea of the growth of the direct trade may be gained from comparing the trade statistics for 1780 and 1792. In the former year imports of haberdashery into Belfast from Great Britain comprised 152,000 needles, 432 thimbles, 719½ lbs outnal thread, 14 lbs sisters thread and £330.3s.9d worth of assorted parcels. The equivalent figures for 1792 are 408,000 needles, 9,648 thimbles and £1,402.4s.8d worth of parcels from England and 36,000 pins and 156 lbs of thread from Scotland.

179. BNL 1 November 1791, 16 December 1800.

180. BNL 14 February 1796; Dubourdieu, Antrim, p.216.

The development of specialised wholesale haberdashers in the town can be traced back to the death of the merchant, Robert Wilson, in 1773. His widow, Brigid, went into business as a woollendrapery and haberdasher, and in 1785 she brought her son, Robert, into partnership with her. When she retired four years later, he brought one George McCammon into the partnership.¹⁸¹ They still stocked woollen cloths but, with the exception of carpets, such items played a very small role in the firm's advertisements and the business is best described as that of 'wholesale mercer and haberdasher'. In 1790, McCammon went into business on his own account.¹⁸² Another firm which engaged in similar activity began in 1788, when Isaac Patton, formerly a linendrapery, transferred his attentions to haberdashery.¹⁸³ There were a number of connections between the three men. All eventually turned their attention to the cotton industry, and in 1793 Patton transferred his business to McCammon's former premises in High Street, from where he was acting as his Belfast agent some three years later.¹⁸⁴ One must be careful not to see these moves into cotton manufacturing from haberdashery as an indicator of the unviability of the latter: all that it shows is that the hoped for rewards of the cotton industry were greater than those being obtained from haberdashery and these losses were more than compensated for by the opening of other businesses. Indeed, one may perceive a continuing trend towards specialisation in the business in the activities of such men as William Tucker. Tucker opened a 'Wholesale Button and Trimming Warehouse' in 1796. By 1799 he had expanded into wholesale woollendrapery selling goods on commission from English

181. BNL 13 July 1773, 20 October 1782, 2 January, 16 June 1789.

182. BNL 28 May 1790.

183. See BNL 2 December 1788.

184. BNL 19 February 1793, 1 April 1796.

manufacturers,¹⁸⁵ and his 1796 venture may have been his first business activity: that he was able to commence on such a limited base is in itself evidence of the expansion of the market provided by the town.

To this point, specialisation in the Belfast business world has been seen in terms of the subdivision of existing activities made possible by the growth of the town in size and prosperity. A number of new, narrowly-based occupations emerged within the town's economy. One of the most noticeable was that of auctioneer and valuer. The sale of goods by auction had long been practised by importers, but while references to auctions are common in the early years of the period, references to auctioneers are non-existent. It may therefore be presumed that they were carried out by the merchant or his employees. However, early in 1785 Joseph Bailie, an upholsterer and cabinet maker, started to describe himself as an auctioneer. Bailie was from London¹⁸⁶ and it is likely that he saw the need for an auctioneer who would undertake general business. Bailie was apparently successful and within a few years there were at least two other auctioneers at work in the town. One of them was John Parrock who was in business by 1788. Like Bailie, he was an upholsterer by trade, and was also the owner of the 'Brown Bear', a tavern in High Street where he conducted his auctioneering business.¹⁸⁷ The other was John Tisdall, a printer who owned and printed the Belfast Mercury and who, on that paper's closure in 1786, went into business as a 'ship and commission broker'.¹⁸⁸ There are few subsequent references to the former aspect of the business, and none after 1788. However, his interests

185. BNL 14 November 1796, 15 March 1799, 4 April 1800.

186. BNL 26 April 1785.

187. BNL 13 June 1788. By 1797 he had moved to Ballymacarrett (BNL 1 December 1797).

188. BNL 10 November 1786.

would seem to have gravitated towards the legal side of the business: he became a notary public at the end of 1790, and by 1797 (despite a flirtation with the Northern Star in 1792) he was the Secretary of the County Antrim Grand Jury,¹⁸⁹ and was also in business as a general auctioneer.¹⁹⁰

Many of these specialised businesses catered for the needs of the town's middle and upper classes, which with the rapid growth of industrial and commercial activity, expanded considerably from the mid 1780s. There was a demand, for example, for a wider range of foodstuffs, and in 1792 the News-letter announced the arrival in the town of Charles Frederick Schuller, 'late cook to the Rt. Hon. John Foster, Speaker of the House of Commons', who opened a shop in Hercules Lane, 'where all sorts of cakes, Jellies, Pies & Comfits may be had'.¹⁹¹ His success is unknown as no further advertisements or traces of his activity have been discovered, but two years later one John Murdock arrived from Dublin and opened a confectioner's shop in Greg's Entry. His business would seem to have prospered as by the end of the century he was occupying premises in Ann Street, one of the more prestigious thoroughfares in the town.¹⁹² Another occupation, and one in which considerable fortunes were apparently made, was hairdressing. Before the arrival of Nicholas Bourdot in 1769, there was apparently no hairdresser in the town, the task being no doubt left in the hands of domestic servants. Little is known of Bourdot's activity, although he worked in the town for 47 years.¹⁹³ However, there was evidently a market for his

189. BNL 31 December 1790; Monaghan History, p.391; Madden, United Irishmen, 1st ser. vol. 1 (1842), p.311; BNL 10 March 1797; Tisdall printed the first seven issues of the Star.

190. See e.g. BNL 1 July 1800.

191. BNL 25 September 1792.

192. BNL 31 October 1794, 11 July 1800.

193. BNL 17 December 1816 (quoted in A.McClelland, The Ulster Press in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, in Ulster Folklife XX (1974), p.91).

skills, and in subsequent years other hairdressers established businesses in the town. Among them was Victor Coats who, in 1782, began his rise to fortune, becoming by the early 1800s one of the town's foremost entrepreneurs.¹⁹⁴ Another enterprising hairdresser was James Lawrence who arrived in Belfast from London in 1786 in partnership with James McPherson. He went into business on his own three years later, and by 1792 he was giving regular classes in hairdressing techniques, probably for the benefit of domestic servants.¹⁹⁵ In the same year he opened the Ulster Registry Office, which was the first employment agency in the province, and which was based on London models.¹⁹⁶ Its creation was yet another indication of the town's growth and prosperity

A third occupation which emerged in the town as a response to the needs of the growing middle and upper classes was that of coachbuilding. It was a relatively late growth. There are no references to coaches being built in the town before the mid 1790s, and the repairs to those owned in the town were probably carried out by carpenters and cabinet makers. However, in 1794, two Dublin men, James Galvin and George Trueman, arrived in the town and established a coachbuilding and repairing workshop in Greg's Entry.¹⁹⁷ No further trace of this enterprise survives, but in the following year, James Atkin, a painter and decorator, claimed in an advertisement that he painted coaches as well as houses and shop signs¹⁹⁸ and another coachmaker, John Wright, was working in Princess Street in 1799.¹⁹⁹ It thus

194. BNL 15 January 1782, see also Chapter 9, 10

195. BNL 17 October 1786, 1 May 1789, 6 January 1792.

196. NS 29 September 1792; Monaghan, History p.151.

197. BNL 16 May 1794.

198. BNL 27 March 1795.

199. BNL 23 August 1799.

seems that during the 1790s the number of coaches in the town increased to the point where it tempted those engaged in the business of building and repairing them to establish themselves in the town.

CHAPTER 6

BELFAST AND THE DONEGALL ESTATE

(i) The Growth of the Town

During the period, the population of Belfast grew rapidly: in 1757 it was estimated at 8,549.¹ Twenty-five years later Robert Hyndman calculated it to be 13,105, and in 1791, using similar methods, he arrived at a figure of 18,320,² indicating a compound growth rate in the intervening years of almost 4%. This period included the late 1780s which, as has already been seen, was a time of great prosperity in the town and the rate of growth probably slackened somewhat in the economically and politically troubled 1790s. However, even a rate of 1% during this period would have brought the population to over 20,000 by 1800, assuming that Hyndman's calculation of 1791 is correct. His figures are, of course, unsatisfactory by modern standards but they give the impression of being honestly and carefully compiled and can be faulted principally for their use of a standard household size. Their principal advantage is that both surveys were compiled using the same techniques thus in all probability preserving the correct ratio between the two sets of figures. All the other contemporary estimates which have survived are mere guesses: in September 1791, for example, the Newsletter reported that the town's population was now reputed to exceed 20,000,³ while five years later, Joshua Gilpin made a guess of about 24,000, or about ten persons to a house.⁴

The increasing population had to be accommodated. This was partly accomplished by more intensive use of the existing built-up area during

1. Owen, History, p.90.

2. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

3. BNL 27 September 1791.

4. Hancock & Wilkinson, loc.cit. p.133.

rebuilding. Many of the leases granted in 1767 contained rebuilding clauses, or obligations to build houses, and there are indications that in High Street and probably in other major thoroughfares the new houses were placed further forward on their sites than their predecessors. Benn, for example, had known people who could remember front gardens in the street; by the end of the century it had become almost entirely a commercial street, with buildings comprising a ground floor shop or office, above which was two floors and a garret containing residential accommodation, some indeed were even larger. That, for example, which Peter Galen occupied in 1769 had four storeys and an attic.⁵ These houses and those on the town's other thoroughfares had restricted frontages with long gardens or yards at their rear, and these provided many opportunities for development. In some cases the main buildings were extended backwards for a considerable distance, in others smaller houses and other premises were built until by the 1770s whole areas behind the principal streets were drawn together into a complicated network of interconnecting offices, open yards and dwellinghouses. The sole approach to these was through the entries formed by the juxtaposition of one building alongside another and as McNally has justly remarked in The Narrow Streets a photographic record of these thoroughfares, from 'the deviation apparent in these passageways, it is clear that they were the consequence of, rather than the reason for the conglomerate development within'.⁶ However, their role in absorbing the great increase in population during the 1780s and 1790s may easily be overestimated, and most of the entries were already in existence by 1767,⁷ known either by the name of the merchant who owned the tenements

5. BNL 16 May 1769.

6. K.McNally, The Narrow Streets (Belfast, 1972), p.8.

7. G.Camblin, The Town in Ulster (Belfast, 1951), pp.79-80.

or, in the case of some such as Winecellar or Sugarhouse Entries, by the activities carried on in their midsts.

The entries were claustrophobic, crowded and in many cases disease ridden. One story, undoubtedly apocryphal, was told of a man who fainted from the effects of unaccustomed fresh air on going from them into the countryside!⁸ The lower orders were also to be found living in cabin suburbs which were already evident on maps of the late 17th century and which were extended during the eighteenth century, doing little to enhance the appearance of the town. One traveller wrote that on his entry into the town in 1780, he 'was vastly surprised and hurt to see a long string of falling cabbins and tapered houses, all tumbling down, with a horrid aspect, and the seeming prelude to a pitiful village, which was my idea of Belfast, until I got pretty far into the town'.⁹

The infilling of the area between the principal streets and the ribbon development of cottages and cabins outside the town were alike piecemeal in nature. However, from the 1780s there were a number of planned developments, mostly of working-class housing but also including the prestigious Linsenhall Street development. The three main areas of working-class housing were associated with separate individuals. One of these was Roger Mulholland who was born in Co. Londonderry in 1740, and who was living in Belfast by 1770. A master carpenter, he was being described as 'architect' by 1786, a more fitting description as he had by then been responsible for the design of the First Presbyterian Meeting House in Rosemary Street (then Lane) in

8. McNally, op.cit., p.16.

9. BNL 19 February 1780.

10. These can be seen on Fig. 12, which is an extract from Williamsons Map of 1790, and which can be compared with the earlier maps in Chapter 2.

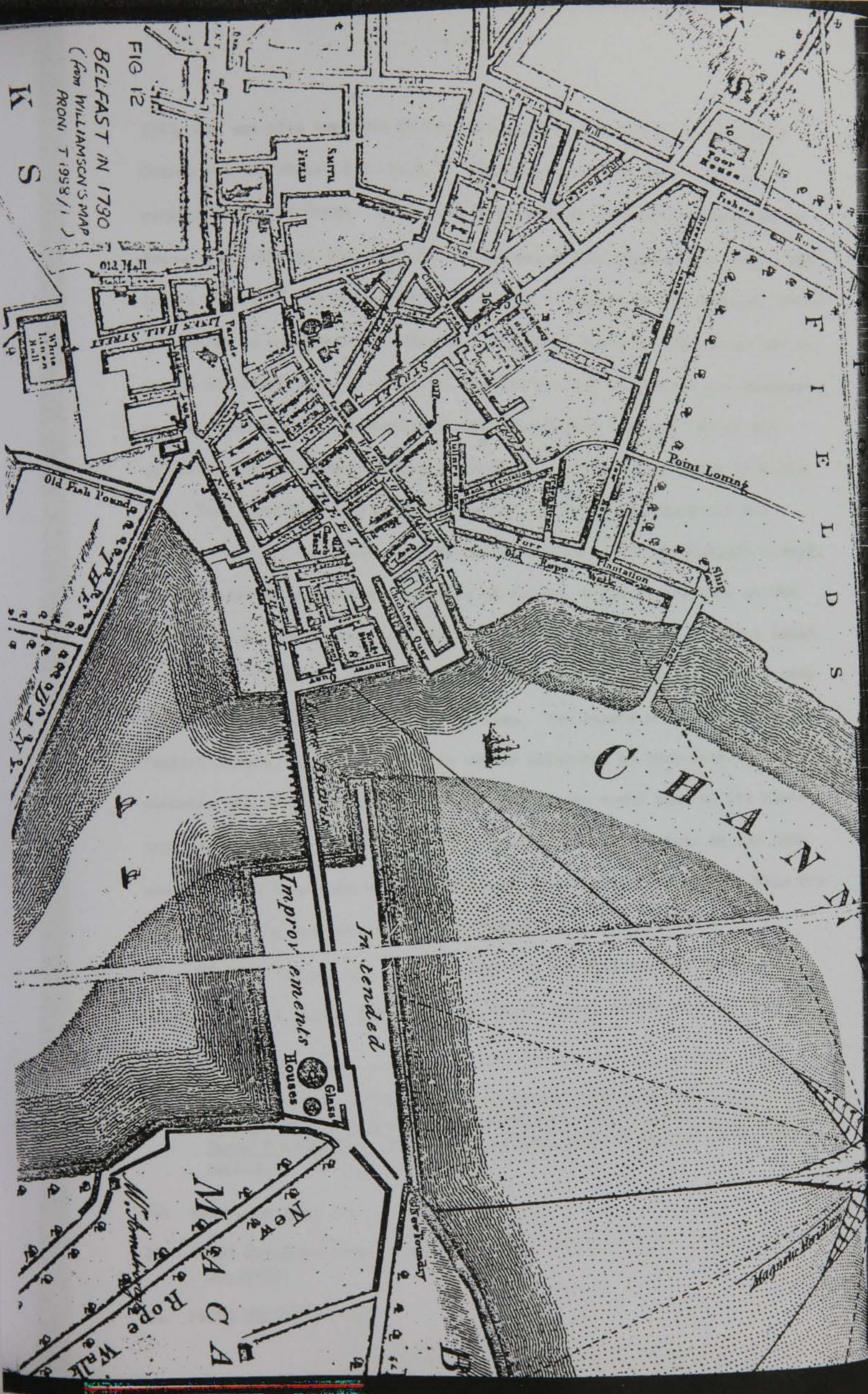


FIG 12
BELFAST IN 1730
(From WILLIAMSON'S MAP
ARDNI, T. 1958/1)

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Improv
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Houses
Glass

M
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C
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R
O
P
E
W
A
L
K

White
Linen
Hall

White
Linen
Hall

Old Fish Pounds

Point Loring

Fishers
Row

Four
Houses

Slip

Plantation
Walk

Old
Lago

Intended

Old
Lago

Magazine
Road

B

1783, and was also employed in the construction and design of St Anne's Church and the White Linen Hall.¹¹ Mulholland was not only a skilled carpenter and architect. From 1783 until 1795 he rented a timber-yard in Rosemary Street and from 1789 to 1792 owned another between Ann Street and Castle Street.¹² He also obtained a number of leases in the Donegall Street area which he developed for housing. His first lease in 1783 consisted of strips on either side of St Anne's Church: on one he built a new vicarage, on the other he built seventeen houses, two facing Donegall Street and seventeen facing Academy Street although only bound by his lease to build one. This intensive use of ground marked his activity throughout his career. In 1787 he obtained other leases on both sides of Donegall Street. On one opposite the church, he built 41 houses, while in the area on the other side of the street, then known as Buller's Fields, he built at least 109 houses.¹³ Before he obtained his leases there had already been a very limited amount of development in the area. Two leases of 1767 exist for Patrick Street, suggesting that it was in existence by that date.¹⁴ It probably got its name from the Patrick family who owned land at its river end. However, the network of little streets which now exists in the area would seem to date from Mulholland's work in the 1780s and to have been his contribution to the geography of the district.

The 1767 leases also include some for Millfield Street which runs northwards from Castle Street to meet North Street at the foot of Peter's

11. Benn, History i, p.391; A.Gordon, Historic Memorials of the First Presbyterian Church of Belfast (Belfast, 1887), p.18; C.E.B.Brett, Roger Mulholland, Architect. of Belfast, 1740-1818 (Belfast, 1976), pp.2-5.

12. Bratt, op.cit. pp.5, 8.

13. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509/638, 684; D562/370; Brett, op.cit. pp.12-13.

14. PRONI D509/202, 280.

Hill.¹⁵ However, the area between Hercules Lane and Millfield Street was undeveloped until 1788 when a lease was granted to Hugh Dunlap¹⁶ who, like Mulholland, was a master carpenter and timber merchant. He developed the site over the next few years in conjunction with Robert Steele, a master mariner who may have provided capital for the project. They divided the area into small plots and released them between 1788 and the mid 1790s, principally to artisans such as carpenters or gluemakers and, as some leases were of more than one house, there was obviously a sizeable amount of further subletting (Fig. 13), and this was probably paralleled on other similar developments elsewhere in the town for which documentary evidence is thin.¹⁷

More planned development occurred on the far side of Millfield Street during the 1770s and 1780s. It was undertaken by the merchant John Brown, who lived at Peter's Mill where he held a number of leases. There had already been some development there before 1770: at the beginning of that year when land belonging to James Ross, a recently deceased merchant, was advertised there were said to be fifteen brick cabins with slate roofs and three others with thatch on the 2½ acres.¹⁸ Brown's own development began about 1776 when he built new houses in Goose Lane and Peter's Hill.¹⁹ Another seven houses fronting onto Millfield Street were advertised in June 1785, and the published description of them shows that Brown was catering for the cotton industry whose growth was just then gathering momentum, for each house had

15. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509/182-83-87, 201, 300-34-55-60-61.

16. PRONI Wallace MSS D556/20.

17. According to their initial advertisement, the availability of sand on the site and a rock foundation only six inches beneath the surface meant that houses could be built more cheaply there than at any other site in the town (BNL 5 September 1794).

18. BNL 30 March 1770.

19. BNL 30 April 1776.

DATE	NO	HOLDER	OCCUPATION	FRONTAGE (ft)	UNITS	RENT (£)
10/89	24	DAVID MITCHELL	GLUEMAKER	80	4	6.00.00
do	25	THOMAS BROWN	MERCHANT	MUSTARD WORKS		13.00.00
3/91	29	STEWART LOWRY	BAKER	40	2	2.13.09
5/91	30	ROBERT HILDITCH	COTTON MANUFACTURER	40	2	2.13.09
7/91	31	BERNARD CLOSE	?	14	2	1.00.00
9/91	33	JOSEPH NEILSON	?	30	2	3.10.00
3/92	35	WILLIAM FLETCHER	?	15	1	4.05.08
do	36	HUGH DONALDSON	?	15	1	2.00.07
5/92	37	JOHN MURLAND	CARPENTER	25	1	2.07.01
do	38	JOHN RONEY	TURNER	15	1	1.16.03
7/92	40	DANIEL MCCLARNAN	CARPENTER	30	2	2.06.00
do	41	RCHD. TITTERINGTON	CARPENTER	69	2+	6.14.04
9/92	42	NIALL GILLAN	LABOURER	32	2	2.08.00
10/92	43	NATHANIEL MAINE	PUBLICAN	38	2	2.17.00
12/92	46	THOMAS MULLHOLM	TAILOR	45	2	4.10.00
4/93	49	WILLIAM TENNANT	MERCHANT	15	1	1.17.06
6/94	51	DAVID MAXWELL	PUBLICAN	41	2	2.17.00
10/96	55	WALTER CRAWFORD	MERCHANT	15	1	0.18.09
9/97	58	JAMES BLACK	DEALER	31	2	2.04.00

FIG. 13 . DUNLAP LEASES IN WALLACE PAPERS (PRONI D556/-)

three looms and four jennies.²⁰ Further evidence of the cotton industry's importance to the development may be seen in a statement in the Belfast Evening Post in the following year that the many new houses being built in the town were 'intended for manufacturers in the Cotton line',²¹ and in the fact that five of Brown's houses were included among the property being leased by Nathaniel Wilson at the time of his death in 1788.²² Another man to hold leases in the area was James Douglas of Englishtown in the Falls, who held three of them in 1793,²³ and it would thus appear that many of them were sublet by manufacturers to their workers, possibly weavers to whom they put out work. In 1786 Brown further extended his building activity by offering building sites on a new street running from Peter's hill to Millfield Street, which became the present Brown Square. Most of his development occurred in the 1780s, but even as late as 1796 it seems that building space was still available there.²⁴

The final scheme of planned expansion to be considered was very different in character from that already described, in that it catered for the wealthier residents of the town. This was Linenhall Street, the present Donegall Place, which was originally built as a residential avenue leading to the White Linen Hall. Before 1783 the area directly south of the town had been relatively undeveloped, partly because it did not lie along an existing route into the town, and partly because of the marshy nature of the ground where the River Blackstaff flowed into the Lagan. It was known as Castle

20. BNL 10 June 1785.

21. BEP 26 June 1786.

22. BNL 8 July 1788.

23. R.D. Vol. 480, f.561.

24. BNL 18 April 1786; 15 April 1796.

Meadows after the ruined Donegall residence nearby, and was used as part of the 'town parks' or grazing lands. When the White Linen Hall was proposed in late 1782, Lord Donegall gave a site there to the Hall Committee and plans were drawn up for an elaborate residential development in the area. A new street, lined with houses built to a standard frontage, was to run from the side of the old Castle to the front of the Linen Hall. Another long straight street was to be driven at right angles to it across the front of the Hall, with an ornamental canal along the centre.²⁵ Unfortunately, the scheme was never completed, all that was ever built being Donegall Place and the Hall itself, although some buildings were erected in Chichester Street. The first leases in Linenhall Street date from 1784, and despite high rents up to £180 per annum, there was a considerable demand for houses there.²⁶ Within a few years many of the more prominent merchants had moved there as well as a number of independent gentlemen. Among the residents were John Brown of Peter's Hill, who was reputed to be the richest man in the town, and Lords Donegall and Massarene.

While the scheme in its original form was over-ambitious, it opened up the Castle Meadows for piecemeal development, including some light industrial purposes such as the linen callendar installed by Charles McAlister in 1794.²⁷ Among them was a new Shambles, which was first proposed by the estate officials

25. PRONI T765/2/74 (Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, June 1783). Mrs McTier wrote that 'our linen hall and new street is all marked out and goes back as far as the stone table in the castle garden, and quite across the Mall into the exercising field' (one of the fields in Castle Meadows used for exercising troops). See also C.E.B. Brett, *The Georgian Town: Belfast about 1800* in Bckett & Glasscock, *Belfast*, p.72.

26. PRONI T765/2/249A (Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, Jan, 1788). This figure referred to house rents, not site rents which were about £10 p.a. for a 40' frontage (PRONI T811/2, ff.239, 240, 242). William Stewart built two houses and sold one with a 30' frontage to David Gordon, a lawyer, for £1,300 and a rent of £7.12.0., which was his share of the rent (T811/2, f.240).

27. See pp. 386-87 below.

in 1787, and opened at the end of 1792.²⁸ It certainly could not be said to enhance the area and would indicate that by the late 1780s Lord Donegall and his agents had given up hope of completing the original Linenhall project.

While the influence of the Donegall Estate was most in evidence in the Linenhall Street scheme where the frontages of the houses were made uniform to preserve the unity of the project, it was present in virtually every development in the town through the insertion of clauses in leases regulating the materials to be used in buildings and the dimensions of new houses. Some of the premises built at this period survive in Waring Street and are of a plain, three story type with a high roof undisguised by coping.

The influence of the estate could be enforced in other ways. Hugh Dunlap's lease of 1788, for example, stipulated that neither he, nor his tenants, were to engage in offensive pursuits such as tanning or chandling,²⁹ although it is doubtful whether or not the influence of the estate as a planning authority was sufficient to ensure that restrictive clauses in leases were fully obeyed. In October 1785, for example, Mrs McTier's next door neighbour was trying to use the site as a brewery despite warnings.³⁰

The greatest influence of the estate was probably in the sphere of public buildings. In some cases, such as the Poorhouse, the White Linenhall and the new theatre of 1792, land was provided at a reduced rate, or for nothing. Other buildings, notably the Exchange which was built between 1769 and 1773 and had an Assembly Rooms added in 1777-79 at a cost of £7,000,³¹ St Anne's Church, built between 1774 and 1776³² and the New Shambles of 1792,

28. BNL 9 March 1787; NS 12 May 1792.

29. PRONI D509/737.

30. PRONI T765/2/586. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, October 1785.

31. Camblin, op cit, p.86; BNL 22 January 1779.

32. BNL 6, 13 May 1774

were built at his expense, and when one adds to the cost of these his substantial investment in the Lagan Navigation of almost £60,000 in 1782,³³ it will be seen that Lord Donegall's investment in Belfast can scarcely have been an economic investment. It was little wonder that the Linenhall Street project ran out of impetus by the end of the 1780s.

It was not until 1800 that the townspeople managed to acquire a voice in the planning of their town. The Police Committee, established in that year largely as a result of pressure from the business community, was given strict powers as a planning authority and its permission had to be obtained not only for the erection of buildings but of such items as bay windows and signs, while special regulations covered slaughter houses and traffic controls,³⁴ matters formerly coming under the jurisdiction of the corporation. Their inclusion in the Act was an admission that these authorities had been unable to control the rapid expansion of the town.

Nevertheless one can see the evolution of zoning occurring in the town in an elementary form prior to 1800. The principal streets, High Street, Castle Street, Waring Street and Ann Street were dominated by retail and wholesale businesses, the latter tending to be sited at the eastern end, this being nearest to the docks. There were exceptions, of course. Waddell Cunningham, for example, had premises in Hercules Lane although he also owned premises in Ann Street. The concentration of tanyards in North Street may not have been accidental, for this situation was one in which their noxious odours were blown away from the town by the prevailing wind, which in Belfast blows from the south west, channelled up the Lagan Valley. There were of course exceptions: one yard was in Smithfield and more in Mill Street and Millfield, and these situations could

33. See pp. 168-69 above.

34. 40 Geo III (1x) c.37.

not have enhanced the desirability of Dunlap's development at Union Street.

However, as we have seen, this area was primarily a working-class one and it may be presumed that its residents had little choice in the matter. The building of such areas as Union Street and Peter's Hill no doubt aided the location of the cotton industry in this part of the town during the late 1780s and early 1790s. The links between John Brown's development at Peter's Hill and the domestic cotton industry have already been discussed. One of Dunlap's customers, Robert Milditch, was also involved in the industry and probably relet the houses he leased to his workers. Housing, indeed, rather than the need for power, may have been the governing factor in the siting of mills in the Smithfield area, as horses rather than water were a probable source of power before the introduction of steam power in the late 1790s.³⁵

The early 1780s, a period marked by depression, probably saw little activity in the building industry. However, the initial growth of the cotton industry led to a building boom in the middle of the decade: it was certainly under way by October 1786 when the Dublin Evening Post informed its readers that 'such is the demand for houses (in Belfast) for the use of manufacturers that they cannot be supplied, and they are now engaged in building several new streets, and upwards of 300 new houses erecting in that town',³⁶ while almost a year later the Newsletter remarked that 225 houses had been built or were building in Belfast during the previous twelve months.³⁷ Between 1782 and 1791 it would appear that 1181 units were added to the town's housing stock. This may have been more than ample to meet the demand created not only by the 1780s, but also by the growth of the cotton industry during the 1790s,

35. See Gribbon, op.cit., pp.111-12.

36. DEP 12 October 1786.

37. BNL 11 September 1787.

for between 1791 and 1802 new houses were only built at a rate which did little more than maintain the 'status quo', the number of houses increasing by only 90 in the eleven years.³⁸

By the early 1790s it is possible to divide Belfast into a number of well-defined districts. To the south of the commercial heart of the town was upper-class Donegall Street, to the east was an industrial zone containing such industries as a ropewalk, shipyard and saltworks, all of which required access to the sea, and to the north and west were districts in which working-class housing was interspersed with industrial activity.

These areas were not, of course, as clearcut as may seem to be the case from this brief description but they did exist. Interestingly, they reflect the present day land use pattern of the central city, with the exception of the takeover of Donegall Place by the commercial district in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the 'banishment' of its wealthy inhabitants to the Malone ridge and the Antrim Road, areas where many of them had removed themselves before 1800.³⁹ What has occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the extension of the late 18th century land use zones into the surrounding countryside as the town expanded. The dockside industrial area has extended northwards along the Lagan, but west and north Belfast have retained their working-class characteristics and are still dotted with industrial plants situated conveniently close to their work-force. The western boundary of the commercial area has remained Smithfield, and its northern boundary is still Donegall Street, while south Belfast has retained its exclusive and wealthy air. The basic land use characteristics of present-day Belfast may thus be seen as having their roots in the last quarter of the

38. Monaghan, History, p.105.

39. Gilbert Camblin (op.cit. p.91) has already noted that 'the slums of 1757 continue to be the black spots of the city at the present day' (1951). Little has altered in the 25 years since then.

eighteenth century.

So far, we have been concerned here with the area to the west of the Lagan. However no examination of the town at this period can neglect the development of the area in County Down contiguous with the Long Bridge. Ballymacarrett in 1767 was an insignificant place, a cluster of houses at the end of the bridge where the road from Belfast divided, one branch running west to Donaghadee and the other southwards to Saintfield. Its importance lay in the fact that it was not part of the Donegall Estate, but belonged to the Pottinger family. They sold it to Barry Yelverton in 1779, together with the neighbouring townland of Owenacorke.⁴⁰ Yelverton, a prominent figure in patriot politics, had been returned three years earlier as Member of Parliament for Carrickfergus, and must be presumed to have been trying to establish a power base in the area.⁴¹

He proceeded to develop the area, possibly guided by the knowledge that the leases available on the Donegall Estate were of limited duration, and that his tenants were under frequent pressure to renew their leases and so ease Lord Donegall's chronic financial difficulties by the payment of fines. Yelverton's activity was not limited to the granting of leases in perpetuity, and he made strenuous efforts to develop the area around the village of Ballymacarrett, which in 1782 had a population of only about 400,⁴² and to build a town there which might, in time, rival Belfast in trade and prosperity.

One of his projects was the establishment of a number of industries there. Among them were two glassworks and an ironfoundry, as well as a flour-

40. R.D. Vol.330, f.546. Owenacorke is also known as Beer's Bridge.

41. D.N.B. XXI, p.1229.

42. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

mill at Beersbridge.⁴³ The growth of traffic made it necessary to widen the causeway at the east end of the Long Bridge during the winter of 1786-87.⁴⁴ Yelverton also attempted to reclaim land from the mudbanks north of the bridge and work on this project began in May 1785, over a hundred men being employed on the site from then until November 1786.⁴⁵ The success and scale of these developments aroused the opposition of Lord Donegall, who started legal proceedings against Yelverton, claiming that James I had appointed the Chichesters as Admirals of the Coast, and that he thus had a veto on any reclamation schemes. However, Yelverton continued with the work and in November 1786 some workmen engaged on the Lagan Navigation were marched to the site where they began, under cover of darkness and directed by Richard Owen, the Navigation's engineer, to destroy the works. The men were apparently plied liberally with spirits and by ten o'clock next morning a riot seemed likely as the drunken workmen confronted a group of armed and indignant citizens, many of whom were probably hoping to benefit from Yelverton's improvements.⁴⁶ Peace was only restored with some difficulty but it was too late to halt serious damage to the works and the embankment lay in ruins exposed to storm and tide.⁴⁷ What is of interest is that the order for the demolition had not come from Lord Donegall's agents in Belfast, for George Portis, the resident agent, also looked after Yelverton's interests

43. See Chapters 9, 10.

44. BNL 9 January 1787. Further widening was carried out in 1789-90 (F.J. Bigger, Old County of Down Presentments, U.J.A. 2nd ser, XIII (1907), p.112.

45. DEP 23 November 1786.

46. DEP 23, 25, 30 November, 21, 23 December 1786; Parl. Reg. VII, p.207 (20 February 1787).

47. DEP 12 December 1786.

and, indeed, held land under him.⁴⁸ It would thus appear that the attack on the reclamation works originated in London. It was an unsavoury affair which did Donegall's reputation little good: it was, indeed, raised during the debate on the Riot Bill in the Irish House of Commons in the following February as an example of the widespread unrest still prevalent in Ulster,⁴⁹ and eventually the Earl was forced to purchase Ballymacarrett and Owenacorko to bring the affair to a close.⁵⁰

Under Donegall's ownership, the development of Ballymacarrett continued as before. However, no attempt was made to reclaim the once disputed area north of the Long Bridge although Narcissus Bath and John Holmes, two prominent merchants, reclaimed a substantial area to the south of the bridge in the years after 1793. However, this was not accessible to shipping and hence could not affect the development of Belfast port.⁵¹ From 1787 the ownership of Ballymacarrett by the Donegall estate ensured that it would develop as part of Belfast rather than as a possible rival. By 1791 its population was said to be 1,208,⁵² and this would seem to have increased considerably by 1800, if only to provide accommodation for those employed in the various industries established there during the decade. Much of the development in the area was piecemeal in character, involving the development of the various small holdings which were already in existence. Thus in 1787 Victor Coats let land on the Newtownards Road to Thomas Shaw,⁵³ while in 1791

48. PRONI Drennan Letters, T765/2/172, Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, October 1785; RD Vol.368, f.243; DEP 21 December 1786.

49. Parl. Reg. VII, p.207 (20 February 1787).

50. RD Vol.392, f.476; BNL 3 April 1787. The price was £25,000, £7,000 more than Yelverton had originally paid for it (D.Kennedy, The Early Eighteenth Century in Beckett & Glassecock, Belfast, p.49).

51. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases T956/43; NS 7 May 1795.

52. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

53. RD Vol. 392, f.360.

Benjamin Edwards was setting surplus land for building sites near his glass-house.⁵⁴ Planning would seem to have been virtually non-existent: writing about the area half-a-century later, Pilson noted that 'though its houses are disposed over the whole area . . ., they are but partially segregated in street alignment and, in numerous instances, seem as if they had been sown, powdered or clustered, rather than methodically arranged'.⁵⁵ Many of the inhabitants were cotton weavers who were presumably employed by Belfast firms, and they remained a characteristic feature of the district until the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶

The part played by the general merchants and other prominent businessmen in the physical growth of Belfast and Ballymacarrett was a very limited one, and largely consisted of infilling on their own plots. This was only to be expected as they took little part in the extension of the cotton industry whose growth took up most of the additional accommodation in the town. What is more surprising is the minor part played by those who were involved in the cotton industry. Eighteenth century Belfast lacked the factory cottages which characterised many British developments of the time, and the provision of housing was in the hands of men such as Dunlap and Mulholland, forerunners of present-day speculative builders. The only large scale development which was apparently undertaken by a wealthy merchant was John Brown's scheme at Peter's Hill, and there is no evidence to show that he was in any way directly concerned with the cotton industry. The lack of involvement in housing by the owners of cotton firms could reflect

54. BNL 8 March 1791.

55. J.A.Pilson, History of the Rise and Progress of Belfast, and Annals of the County Antrim (Belfast, 1846), p.27.

56. J.J.Monaghan, The Rise and Fall of the Belfast Cotton Industry, IHS, iii (1942), pp.15-16 describes the appalling conditions which existed by the 1830s.

either a shortage of capital among mill-owners or, more likely, that sufficient housing was readily available, as between 1782 and 1791 the number of houses in the town rose from 2,026 to 3,107, and of this latter figure, 198 were unoccupied.⁵⁷

The building industry was a source of considerable employment in the town. In 1782 Robert Hyndman estimated that there were 68 carpenters and 48 stonemasons in the town, and in 1791 the equivalent figures were 169 and 68, most of the carpenters and all the masons, it may be presumed, ^{being} in the building trade.⁵⁷ In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2, local stone was unsuitable for building purposes and any building stone used had to be imported, as had the town's timber requirements, and so the needs of the town's building industry influenced a wide area of the town's trade, and its significance in this regard was well expressed by David Boyd in his poem The Belfast Poor House when he wrote

'The flinty rock for stone, they cleave with pride,
Freestones, in brigs, from British ports doth ride
That for foundation and more polish'd this
T'adorn the front, and raise the pyramis.
In Norway's groves, and round the Baltic seas,
The woodsman's hatchet echoes felling trees;
Which in large ships, before the northern blast,
Bound o'er the waves and land at fam'd Belfast;
And, last of all, from Bangor in North Wales,
Slates come in sloops with large outspreading sails.'⁵⁸

With the exception of the use of stone, which was only used sparingly in Belfast, Boyd's words apply as much to the town's building industry in general as to the building of Clifton House. Brick, not stone, was the normal medium of construction. By the middle of the century the original brickfield, on the town side of the Blackstaff near Durham Street, was largely exhausted.⁵⁹

57. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

58. D.Boyd, The Belfast Poor House, An Historical and Descriptive Poem (Belfast, 1806), ll.77-86.

59. G.Camblin, op.cit., p.89.

However, in 1767, James Young, a cabinetmaker, had opened a new brickfield on the other side of the river, probably to meet the demand caused by the granting of new leases in that year.⁶⁰ He produced about a million bricks a year,⁶¹ and in 1769 supplied 100 thousand bricks to the Charitable Society for use in Clifton House, and this was followed by a contract for between 180 and 250 thousand.⁶² In 1781 Young sold the business to Henry McAuley, who in his turn sold it to Robert McCrea in 1791.⁶³ McCrea had formerly been a grocer, but had gone bankrupt in 1785.⁶⁴ The site remained in the hands of the McCrea family for the remainder of the century, and by 1797 was being worked by Robert's son, John Alexander, who was a cotton merchant in Donegall Street.⁶⁵

The deposit of brick clay extended north-westwards as far as Cullingtree where it was being worked by the firm of Mitchell & Simpson in 1783. The site had earlier been in the possession of a Mrs Wilson, although there is no evidence to show that she worked the site.⁶⁶ George Mitchell was a master shoemaker, while Richard Simpson was possibly the manager of the works, which were of considerable size in 1793, for example their first firing consisted of 100 thousand bricks.⁶⁷ By 1790 Simpson was the sole owner of the concern and in 1798 received a lease of the site.⁶⁸ However, it is likely that the

60. BNL 29 September 1767.

61. BNL 21 March 1769.

62. R.W.M.Strain, op.cit. p.39

63. BNL 15 May 1781, 20 May 1791.

64. BNL 22 February 1785.

65. BNL 13 June 1800; NS 6 March 1797.

66. BNL 9 May 1783.

67. BNL 31 May 1793.

68. BNL 13 April 1790; BRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509-1131. The probable date of Simpson's takeover was November 1788, when Mitchell died (BNL 11 November 1788).

two families were in some way related, as early in the 19th century the site was being worked by Alexander Mitchell, who was to achieve fame as the inventor of the screw pile.⁶⁹ Bricks were also being manufactured at Stranmillis in 1797 by Charles Lennon, a local farmer,⁷⁰ and in 1791 James Hunter, a Belfast builder, advertised for brick makers.⁷¹ He owned land at Ballynafeigh, just across the Lagan from Stranmillis,⁷² and was probably using the brick clays there: the remains of brick pits, now long worked out, may still be discerned on both sides of the river at this point. A reference also exists concerning a brickfield at the end of the Short Strand in 1785 but no further details of it survive.⁷³ There is also some evidence to indicate that for large projects, bricklay was brought to the building site and processed there. In 1769, for example, the Charitable Society contracted with Hugh Agnew for the manufacture of 200,000 bricks in this manner.⁷⁴

The brick industry of Belfast was not concerned only with the local market, for the estuarine clays used were not to be found at inland locations. By 1792 Simpson was employing regular carriers on fixed twelve month contracts to distribute bricks in the surrounding district,⁷⁵ and in 1797 Lennon was using the Lagan Navigation, which passed beside his workings, to carry bricks as far as the shores of Lough Neagh.⁷⁶ Belfast was also the port through which such building materials as slates and timber passed for distribution in the surrounding districts. However, the growth and expansion of the

69. Bigger, Mitchell, p.22.

70. BNL 28 July 1797.

71. BNL 7 July 1791.

72. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D652/387.

73. BNL 17 May 1785.

74. R.W.M.Strain, op.cit. p.39.

75. NS 18 February 1792.

76. BNL 28 July 1787.

brick industry, were primarily based on local demand: it is, for example, surely more than a coincidence that Young opened his workings in 1767, the year of releasing, or that Mitchell & Simpson began business at Callington in 1783, as trade began to pick up with the end of the war.

(ii) The Development of Representative Institutions

The White Linen Hall, with the financial and shipbroking activities which developed from it,⁷⁷ was not the only achievement of the Belfast merchants during the period under review. Considerable advances were also being made in such matters as the development of the port, and the extension of the Lagan Navigation, and the most substantial developments in these spheres were achieved largely as the result of pressure arising from the activity of the Chamber of Commerce.

By the time of its formation in 1783, it had already become customary for the merchants and other principal inhabitants of the town to discuss important matters affecting their interests. This was done at town meetings which were called by the sovereign at the request of a number of individuals of suitable influence and standing. The precise date at which this custom arose is far from clear, but they had become a regular occurrence by the beginning of 1771, when one was held to discuss the widespread distress among the town's poor. At this gathering it was decided to collect funds for the purchase and distribution of food, a move which it was hoped would reduce begging in the streets.⁷⁸

This particular meeting was concerned with social problems but the scope of these meetings was much wider than this: a meeting at the end of 1775, for example, passed resolutions condemning the government's colonial policy,⁷⁹ while municipal matters also came under consideration, a meeting in June 1781 discussing the subjects of sewage disposal and street paving.⁸⁰ The constitutional basis of these meetings is rather vague. Those concerned

77. See Chapter 4.

78. BNI 25, 29 January 1771.

79. Hist. Collections, pp.118-19.

80. BNI 1 June 1781.

with town improvements were vestries, comprised of those inhabitants who paid cess, and this title was used for such gatherings. The same people usually attended town meetings and they probably grew from an extension of the vestry into the realms of commerce and politics.

The record of the vestry and the town meeting in the running of the town was by no means one of efficiency, and by May 1783 there was a considerable awareness of the need for a permanent body concerned with the promotion of the town's industrial and commercial interests. A sub-committee was appointed at a meeting of the merchants and traders to investigate the possibility of forming a Chamber of Commerce in the town, and a committee was elected at a subsequent meeting.⁸¹ The Chamber may have been founded as a result of the revival of trade which followed the end of the American War of Independence and the depression of 1781-82. Much hard work and co-operation was going to be required if Belfast was to regain her former role in the colonial trade in the much altered conditions of the post-war years. The Chamber may also have been linked to the White Linen Hall: all of the first three office holders were members of the Linen Hall committee and two of them were involved with the 'Old Traders' (Fig. 10). However, the most important influence, and the models on which the Belfast Chamber was based, were the Chambers which had been formed in Dublin and Glasgow a short while beforehand. Hamilton has shown how that in Glasgow, the first in the United Kingdom, was a formalisation of the habit prevalent among the Glasgow merchants of gathering as a group for the purpose of discussing common problems,⁸² and, as we have seen, a similar pattern existed in Belfast.

The aim of the Chamber, membership of which was open to all the traders

81. BNL 20, 30 June 1783; Millin, Sidelights, pp.81-83.

82. H.Hamilton, The Founding of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce in 1783, in Scottish Journ. of Political Economy I (1954), pp.33-35.

in the town, was 'to attend to the Interests of Commerce: to have a watchful attention to the proceedings of Parliament respecting trade in both Kingdoms; to inspect into the method of transacting business in Belfast; and to contrive and recommend improvements therein, when such shall be thought expedient; to correspond with the Council of the Chamber of Commerce in Dublin, and with any others that may be established in this Kingdom, as well as, when necessary, with those that are, or may be, established in Great Britain'.⁸³

This was a varied and comprehensive programme, but during its existence the Chamber undertook most of the tasks which it had set itself. One of its first acts was to correspond with the government on the subject of tobacco duties, which it believed to be having a crippling effect on the industry. It was also active in the agitation against Pitt's 'Commercial Propositions' in 1785,⁸⁴ and in January 1787 raised the question of competition from foreign linens being imported into Ireland.⁸⁵ In the same year, it organised a lottery to help the finances of the White Linen Hall,⁸⁶ and during the crisis of 1793, through the personal securities of its members, it obtained a deposit of £30,000 of government credits with Cunningham, Campbell & Co., and also paid the expenses of those who travelled to Dublin to negotiate the deal.⁸⁷

The Chamber was also involved in 1784 with the establishment of a benevolent fund for the port's seamen and their dependents. This was organised in conjunction with the Belfast Marine Society, which comprised the masters of the various vessels belonging to the port, and was known as the Belfast Marine Charity. It appears to have been a reactivation of a similar fund of many

83. BNL 30 May 1783; Millin, Sidelights, pp.80-81.

84. PRONI D1857/1/1. Minutes of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, 25 May 15 June 1785.

85. ibid., 25 January, 1, 15 February 1787.

86. ibid., 8 March, 3 May 1787.

87. ibid., 18 May 1793; PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/426. William Drennan to Mrs McTier, May 1793; pp. 72-73 above.

years earlier, and may have been started to increase the attractiveness of the sea at a period when trade was increasing and more sailors were needed. It had to be reformed in 1792, a sure indication that it had failed.⁸⁸

By far the most important task undertaken by the Chamber, however, was the campaign which it initiated for the improvement of the harbour. The harbour was supposedly under the jurisdiction of the Corporation under an Act of 1729 entitled 'An Act for cleansing the Ports, Harbours and Rivers of the City of Cork, and of the Towns of Gallway, Sligoe, Drogheda and Belfast, and for erecting a Ballast-Office in the said City and each of the said Towns'. Unfortunately, the measure was a failure as it contained no provision for the construction of quays or docks and the Corporation did little beyond maintaining a minimal depth of water in the tortuous channel leading from Garmoyls Pool to the town quay in the middle of High Street. Not only was specific mention not made of the need to increase berthing facilities, but the Corporation had, under the Act, to apply any surplus which might arise from the sale of ballast 'to the erecting and supporting a workhouse or workhouses to promote the linen manufactory'.⁸⁹

Despite the rapid increase in business of the port,⁹⁰ the authority charged with its care and improvement was thus precluded by statute from extending it, and all efforts to improve its facilities to keep pace with increasing traffic had to be undertaken by private individuals. The only addition, indeed, to the town's docks in the half century after the passing of the 1729 act was made by Thomas Greg in 1769-70 after he had obtained a

88. PRONI D1857/1/1 10 November 1784, 30 April 1792.

89. 3 Geo II (Ire) c 21 ; Owen, Port, pp.8-10.

90. In 1772 it was claimed that revenue had risen from £30,000 to £64,000 per annum since 1758 (PRONI Macartney Correspondence) D572/2/54. George Portis to Sir George Macartney, 30 January 1772.

lease on a large parcel of land to the east of the existing quay. Here he built a new quay, naming it Chichester Quay after Lord Donegall's infant son. It was 320 ft long and formed a useful addition to the port's facilities.⁹¹ Greg was permitted to recoup part of the expenses by charging quayage of two-pence per ton landed there, although there is evidence that despite this income the new quay was being but poorly maintained. In 1792, for example, the Chamber of Commerce felt obliged to remind his son, Cunningham (who was then the owner) that 'he is obliged to sweep both Quays twice a week under a Penalty, and also to remove all nuisances lying upon any of the Quays under a penalty', and to threaten to order its members to stop paying quayage until their demands were met.⁹²

The provision of Chichester Quay did nothing to improve access to the port for ships and no increase in the depth of the channel leading up to the quay had apparently taken place since the 1730s. At low tide the water receded and left only a narrow, winding stream between two and four feet deep at the town: two and a half miles downstream the depth had increased to about eight feet and at Garmoyle roadstead there was available a minimum depth of sixteen feet. Ships had to remain there until they were floated upstream by the tide. Vessels drawing more than ten feet were unable to approach the quay at a neap tide, and even at spring tides there was no more than fourteen feet of water available. Consequently, many ships had to anchor at Garmoyle and unload their cargoes into lighters, a time-consuming and

91. BNL 25 August 1769, 15 May 1770; Barr, History i, p.546; Owen, Port, p.16; PRONI Millin Papers T811/2, p.176; Donegall Estate Papers D509/222.

92. PRONI D1857/1/1 (20 February, 3 March 1792).

expensive process.⁹³ In 1778, for example, a passenger on the Belfast Packet, one of the regular vessels in the Liverpool trade, recorded 'yt she had to be Disloaded of 70 Boxes and Bales of Linnen before she could get to Garmoyle'. Once there, the linnen was reloaded and the ship proceeded to Liverpool.⁹⁴

As already noticed,⁹⁵ 1784 saw the beginning of a period of rapid growth in the town's linen trade, which was expressed in the trade statistics for 1785. The end of the war saw a resumption of the North American trade, and a surge of growth in exports to the Caribbean. Peace, too, enabled normal trade to resume in many other areas. Imports of iron, for example, rose from 4,089 cwt in 1784 to 11,460 cwt in 1785, partly due to the opening of a second foundry in the town, but also to the fact that trade generally was recovering from the effects of the war. The revival of trade created new pressures upon the already inadequate port facilities and in April 1784 the Chamber organised and paid for a survey of the harbour and its approaches. This was completed by the end of the year, and a town meeting was held to discuss the matter. At this it was decided to petition Parliament for a grant of £2,000 towards the construction costs of 'a Straight cut from the Quay to Garmoyle, which would be for ever kept open by the waters of the River Lagan running therein'. No grant resulted from the appeal; instead an act was passed establishing the 'Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port and Harbour of Belfast', a body which soon became known locally as the 'Ballast Board'.⁹⁶

93. Owen, History, p.220.

94. PRONI T1763/3 (Diary of a Ballylesson linen merchant, entry 20 November 1778).

95. See p. 87 above.

96. PRONI D1857/1/1; 15 April, 8 December 1784, 4 February 1785; BNL 4 February 1785; 25 Geo III (ix) c.lxiv

The composition of the first committee of the Board was specified in the Act, and showed that it was, in many respects, strongly linked to the Chamber of Commerce. It comprised Lord Donegall, Hon. John Beresford and the Rt. Hon. John Foster, as well as twelve prominent members of the Chamber of Commerce. The role of the first three mentioned was purely nominal. Lord Donegall was included as landlord of the town, while Beresford and Foster were members because of their government positions, and none of them was likely to be a regular attender of the Board's meetings.⁹⁷

Like the act of 1729, that of 1785 contained the provision that surplus funds should be used for other purposes, in this case the activities of the Belfast Charitable Society, which ran the poxhouse at Clifton House. However, unlike the earlier act, the Board's permitted activities allowed them to build wharves and dry docks, and to carry out any other necessary improvements to the harbour. The Board also differed from its predecessor, the Corporation, by employing full time officials in the form of a Ballast Master and a Haven Master, as well as clerical staff.⁹⁸

The Ballast Board finally provided the port with a dynamic which matched the physical and economic expansion of the town. Its income was obtained from three principal sources, tonnage dues, the sale of ballast and charges for pilotage. It was thus provided with regular income which was partly used for the day to day administration of its duties, but mostly in improving the port and its approaches. One of the first tasks undertaken was the perching of the estuary from the Long Bridge to Garmoyle, which was carried out in 1785, while in the following year the South Channel, one of the two approaches to the quayside, was provided with buoys and the last vestiges of

97. 25 Geo III (Ire) c. lxiv; Owen, Port, pp.17-18.

98. 25 Geo III (Ire) c. lxiv; Owen, History, pp.217-18; R.W.M.Strain, Belfast and its Charitable Society (Oxford, 1961), p.88.

the old ford of Belfast were removed as they were considered a hazard to shipping.⁹⁹ In 1788, another hazard to the safety of vessels was rendered less dangerous when a white buoy was placed on 'the Briggs', a treacherous reef off Groomsport where in the previous December the collier Bridekirk, bound from Maryport to Belfast, had been lost with all her crew.¹⁰⁰ While nothing was done before 1800 on the new channel which had been proposed in 1785, much work was undertaken on the deepening of the existing channels, and by February 1786 the 600 ton ship, Three Brothers, owned by William, John and Thomas Brown, was able to come up to the quay. It was by far the largest vessel to do so up to that time, and was followed the next month by the Belfast of the same tonnage, owned by Browns and the merchant houses of Waddell Cunningham & Co. and John Cunningham & Co.¹⁰¹ By 1800 sales of ballast had produced revenue of over £7,777. The rate charged was 2/-d per ton to British and Irish vessels, and a third more to other ships. If one assumes an arbitrary figure of eight tons per £ revenue, this would mean that over 62,000 tons of ballast were sold to ships leaving the port in this period. Nor does this represent all the clearance work undertaken by the Ballast Board: between 1789 and 1794, 60,419 tons of sludge were also removed from the channels and dumped on the river banks.¹⁰² They were also responsible for charting the Lough in 1799, this task being undertaken by the Haven Master, James Lawson.¹⁰³ However, by far the most important and expensive

99. Tabular Statements of the Accounts of Belfast Harbour from the Year 1786 to 1845 . . . (Belfast, 1847), p.2; (E. Getty), History of the Harbours of the United Kingdom: Belfast (London, 1852), p.4; A. Marmion, The Ancient and Modern History of the Maritime Ports of Ireland (London, 1855), p.341; Owen, Port, pp.18-19.

100. BNL 18 December 1787, 27 June 1788.

101. BM 6 February, 16 March 1786.

102. Tabular Statements . . ., *passim*; (Getty), *op.cit.*, p.5.

103. A copy is preserved in PRONI (D671/P10/2).

work to result from their activity was the provision of a graving dock.

This was preceded by a graving platform which was built in 1791, and which provided the town with its first proper shiprepairing facilities.¹⁰⁴ The new dock was built under the supervision of William Ritchie, whose arrival in the town in 1791 to found a shipyard is discussed elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ The scheme was made possible only by dint of careful management by the Board of its resources, and as can be seen from Fig. 14, expenditure was ruthlessly pruned from 1792 to 1795 and the profits of those years were used for building the dock. Construction began in 1796 and despite a number of difficulties, it was eventually finished in 1800, at a cost of just over £6,000. It was capable of accommodating three vessels of 200 tons burthen, and was a most useful addition to the port's facilities.¹⁰⁶

The activity and interests of the Chamber of Commerce in the field of shipping were not restricted to the port and harbour. One of their first acts was to revive a scheme for building a lighthouse on the South Rock, near Dundrum.¹⁰⁷ This treacherous reef, submerged at high tide, had been the scene of many wrecks over the years and as early as 1683, William Montgomery, in his account of the Ards, had suggested that a lighthouse should be built there.¹⁰⁸ In 1767 the inhabitants of Belfast had petitioned Parliament on the subject and, as a result, a grant of £5,173 was made for the erection of

104. (Getly) op.cit., p.4; Owen, History, p.219.

105. Chapter 10.

106. BNL 7 November 1800; (Getly), op.cit., pp.4-5; D.Rebbeek, The History of Iron Shipbuilding on the Queen's Island up to July 1874 (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Queen's Univ., Belfast, 1950), pp.11, 44. The dock was damaged by high tides at least twice during its construction (BNL 4 April, 26 November 1798); Owen (History, p.219) gives the cost as £7,684 but £6,000 is given in BNL 7 November 1800 and supported by the Board's accounts.

107. PRONI D1857/1/1 (Chamber of Commerce minutes), 6 November 1783.

108. Young, Hist. Notices, p.104; Green, Ind Arch Down, p.78.

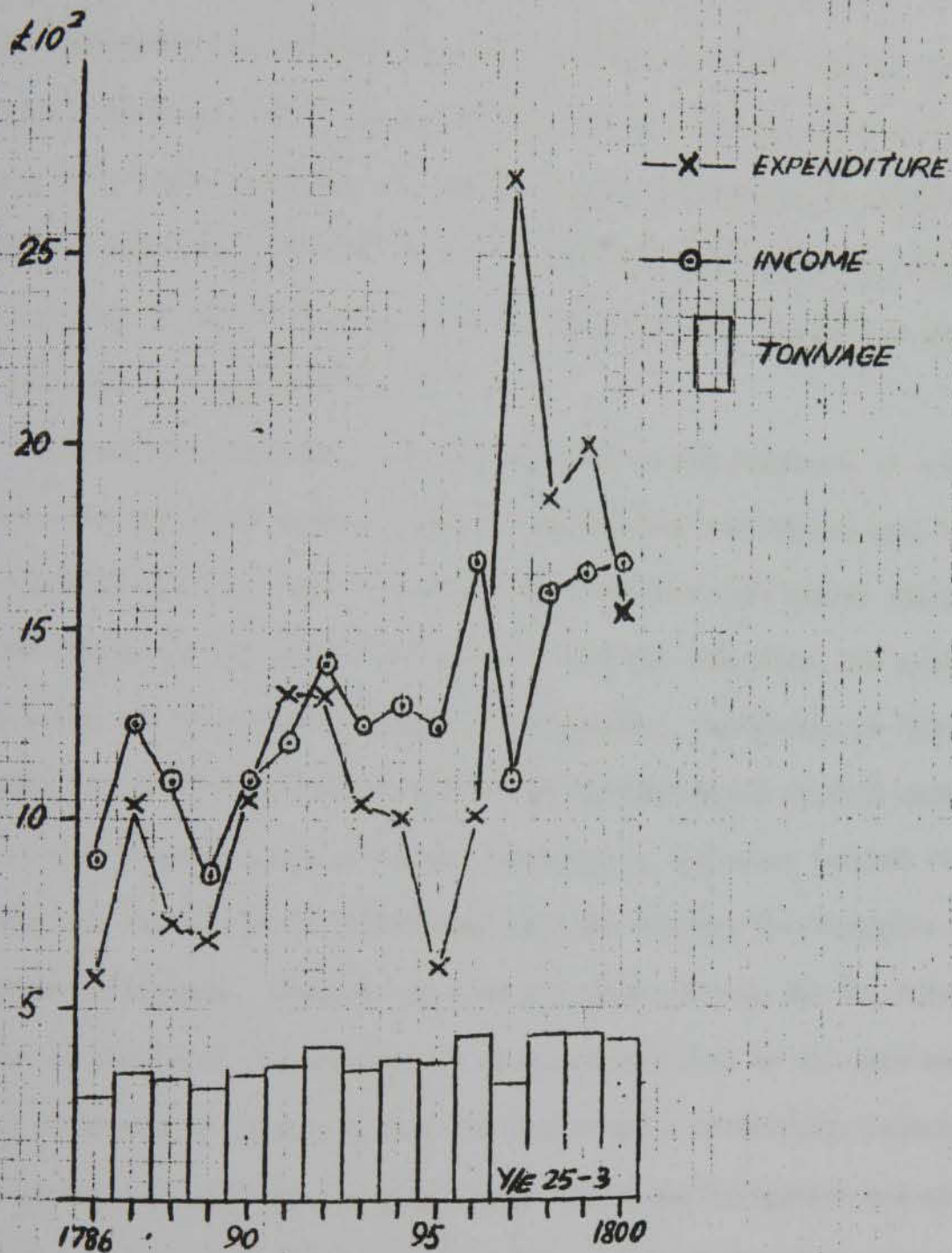


FIG. 14 . BELFAST 'BALLAST BOARD': Receipts and Expenditure, 1786 to 1800

a lighthouse which would, it was hoped, be completed by the end of 1769.¹⁰⁹ However, as with so many projects, the scheme fell into limbo and the rocks continued to take their toll of passing ships until, as a result of the Chamber's agitation, a new grant was made in 1783 which raised the total allocation to almost £7,000, although the work was not finished until 1797, and was apparently only completed by dint of the efforts of the Marquess of Downshire. It proved to be an enormously difficult task as the rock was under water at high tides and was also difficult of access, and these considerations increased the cost far beyond what had been originally intended. The final cost of the 60 ft high tower was some £17,000, almost two and a half times the original estimate.¹¹⁰

The Chamber's interests were not confined to the promotion of the town's foreign trade and those matters, such as the harbour and lighthouses, which were connected with it. By the early 1790s they had also become involved with the Company of the Lagan Navigation. From its inception, the history of this concern had been neither happy nor prosperous. Authorised in 1753, construction of the section between Belfast and Lisburn began in 1756 under the aegis of the 'Commissioners of Inland Navigation', and plans existed for extending the navigation to Lough Neagh and thus tapping the resources of the Tyrone collieries. However, despite government grants and the financial stimulus of receiving the proceeds of an additional duty on all ales and spirits manufactured or sold within the excise walks of Belfast, Lisburn, Moira and Hillsborough, it was seven years before the Navigation was opened as far as Lisburn. The work entailed the deepening of the river along its natural course with the construction of locks and by-pass cuts at sites

109. Commons Journ. Ire. VIII, p.clxxv; Lib. Munerum. Pub. Hib. II, pt.6, p.78; Green, Inld Arch. Down, p.18; T.G.Wilson, The Irish Lighthouse Service (Dublin, 1968), pp.17-19.

110. Lib. Munerum II, pt.6, p.78; T.G.Wilson, op.cit., pp.17-19.

cb

where there were rapids, or other constructions to navigation. No attempt was made for many years to build the proposed canal linking Lough Neagh to the Lagan, although by 1765 the river had been made navigable for an additional mile, as far as Sprucefield. The success or otherwise of the Navigation was naturally a matter of considerable importance to the businessmen of Belfast and it is not without significance that the first vessel to sail up the Lagan was the Lord Hertford, a lighter of 60 tons burthen belonging to the Belfast merchant, Thomas Greg, which carried a cargo of coal and timber.¹¹¹ By 1767 Greg owned a timber yard in Lisburn and in that year, in conjunction with Waddell Cunningham, he built a factory there for the manufacture of sulphuric acid for use in the bleaching industry, its raw materials of coal and sulphur being conveyed by the navigation.¹¹²

However, the scheme was extremely unsatisfactory in many respects. It was incomplete and no funds were available to enable the extension to Lough Neagh to be built. Indeed, while over £40,000 had been expended from public funds, even those works which had been constructed were most unsatisfactory. One reason for this was a clause in the 1753 Lagan Navigation Act which entitled linenbleachers to 'divert the water of the said river Lagan from the said Navigation in order to supply with water such bleachyards as are now watered by the river in dry seasons where there would otherwise not be a sufficient supply of water to ensure the purposes of bleaching and also

111. Libri Munerum Publicorum Hib. II, pt.6, pp.58-65; Commons Journ.Ire. VII, p.xei; 27 Geo II (Ire) c.3; 3 Geo III⁽¹⁷⁶²⁾ c.6; W.A.McCutcheon, The Canals of the North of Ireland (Dawlish, 1965), pp.40-42; Green, Lagan Valley, pp.33-35, Green, Ind. Arch Down, pp.70-72. The importance of the Belfast merchants to the scheme's success may be seen in the fact that of 2,066 tons carried from Belfast to Lisburn from 29 Sept. 1766 to 21 Sept. 1767, 1,117 tons (54%) was on account of the Belfast firms Galen Thomson & Co., Greg & Cunningham and Bradshaw & Alexander. In addition, Greg & Cunningham carried 1,025 tons of building material from Lambeg to Lisburn for their vitriol factory (Commons Journ.Ire. VIII, pp.clxiv-clxv).

112. PRONI Foster MSS D562/6846. Greg to Yelverton, 20 November 1783.
See also pp. 387ff below.

of carrying on the same Navigation'.¹¹³ Coupled with the tendency of the lower Lagan to produce flash floods after heavy rain, and with seasonal changes of water flow, this resulted in a most unsatisfactory state of affairs. On many occasions navigation became impossible, and the only solution to the difficulties was the construction of a new canal entirely separate from the river.¹¹⁴ The cost of this was estimated at some £20,000, but it proved impossible to raise this sum despite the attempts of legislation passed in 1772 and 1774 which established local commissioners to oversee the undertaking. They were mainly local landowners, but also included some Belfast merchants, presumably those who regularly used the Navigation. The 1774 Act also included a clause allowing anybody who subscribed £100 or more to the concern to become a commissioner: there appear to have been no takers. The commissioners were empowered to borrow up to £10,000 on the security of the existing traffic, and the ale and spirit tax already mentioned.¹¹⁵ In 1779 they were replaced by the 'Company of Undertakers of the Lagan Navigation', a body under the control of the Marquess

113. 27 Geo II (Ire) c. 3 § 9.

114. Commons Journ. Ire. VIII, pp. clxxv, ccxlvii; W.A. McCutcheon, op. cit., p. 42. Five years after the opening to Lisburn, the engineer Robert Wintworth surveyed the Lough Neagh extension and wrote that 'To make a permanent and uninterrupted Navigation in the bed of the River Lagan has been found by many years experience to be impracticable; as it has always been . . . exposed to many and great Inconveniences by the great and rapid floods' (A Plan and Estimates of the Intended Navigation from Lough Neagh to Belfast (Belfast, 1773) p. 3). As late as 1802 Dubourdieu was critical of the Navigation. His remarks could have been written forty years earlier. 'The original defect', he wrote, 'seems to have been in the idea of making the River Lagan navigable, which, having a fall of so many feet and being a mountain river subject to many floods, is the most unfit that can be imagined for the purposes of navigation, being a great part of the year rendered so by the bursting of its banks, whose breaches cannot be repaired without draining a level and interrupting the passage of boats'. (Down, p. 26).

115. 11-12 Geo III (Ire) s. 26; 13-14 Geo III (Ire) c. 12; BNL 6 January 1775.

of Donegall.¹¹⁶ McCutcheon comments that 'significantly, whereas the local commissioners had included many small landowners and merchants, the new company consisted almost entirely of landed gentry and nobility, from whom substantial financial patronage might be expected.'¹¹⁷ This was indeed so, but by 1793, when Board minutes become available, three of the six active members were Belfast merchants and the other three were the Vicar, Rev. William Bristow, the Surveyor of Excise, Edward Kingsmill and Stewart Banks.¹¹⁸ The latter was a wealthy resident who served as Sovereign on four occasions and while in office displayed a considerable interest in the town's welfare. Effective control of the Navigation was thus in the hands of Belfast residents.

The Company commenced its activity with high hopes of bringing the project to an early completion. In March 1782 Lord Donegall stated that it was his intention to complete the works within four years, and a town meeting publicly acknowledged his 'generous attention to the prosperity of the town and neighbourhood'.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless work, now concentrated on the canal between Lough Neagh and the Union Locks at Sprucefield, was not complete by 1788 when Lord Donegall visited the works,¹²⁰ and it was hoped that the task would be completed by November 1790. Even this forecast was too ambitious. Progress was painfully slow: in January 1792 the Northern Star commented ruefully that 'at one end the mouldering hand of time destroys almost as

116. The Board's financial dependence on him was virtually complete. Continually starved for funds, all decisions requiring expenditure had to be sanctioned by him or his London agents. In 1795, faced with increasing criticism from the users of the Navigation, they complained that they were but 'Proxies of the Marquis of Donegall (PRONI COM 1/1/1 (Lagan Navigation Records), Board to Sir Charles Talbot, 17 November 1795.

117. 19-20 Geo III (Ire) c.32; McCutcheon, op.cit., p.44.

118. PRONI COM 1/1/1.

119. Hist. Collections, pp.195-97.

120. BNL 20 June 1788.

rapidly as the labours of the engineer compleat the other'.¹²¹ However, the canal was eventually opened on New Year's Day, 1794. The cost had been some £62,000, most of it borne by His Lordship's rather shaky finances.¹²²

Even then, the Belfast merchants were far from satisfied. The river section of the Navigation was as unsatisfactory as ever. It was no wonder that the lightermen were notorious for cheating and overcharging¹²³ as their efforts to make a living were continually thwarted by the taking of water from the Navigation by the bleachers, and in 1790 they were driven to the desperate expedient of writing to Lord Hillsborough. In their letter they claimed that they were taking up to two or three weeks for the round trip to Lisburn. Nor were the bleachers solely to blame: part of the lightermen's complaint was that 'the People that owns the Locks takes no care of them for wee do not see one of them from wee leave home untill wee go home again but John Johnston an then it is to receive the lockage'.¹²⁴

The forthcoming opening of the Lough Neagh extension meant that the Navigation assumed a much greater importance for the town's commercial life than formerly, and in late 1793 the Chamber of Commerce decided to campaign for the improvement of the river section. William Ritchie was commissioned to carry out a survey. The Chamber also complained about the proposed charges which were to be made and demanded that they be the same

121. BNL 19 August 1790, NS 7 January 1792.

122. BNL 3 January 1794. Even at this stage, the canal was incomplete and work was still in hands at the Union Locks (McCutcheon, op. cit., p.45).

123. For complaints see BNL 26 February 1773, 23 February 1787.

124. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/367E. Dubourdieu tells a story of a ship which sailed from Belfast to the West Indies and back during the time occupied by a lighter on the Lough ^{Neagh} ~~Neagh~~ voyage! (Antrim, p.366)

as those of the Newry Navigation. They also requested that coal should be let pass for half the regular rate 'as every degree of care should be taken to bring this article so necessary to the comfort and relief of the poor'. It would thus seem that they still had hopes of using the Tyrone collieries as a major source of fuel for the Belfast area.¹²⁵ Ritchie's report revealed that the Navigation had fallen into a 'ruinous state'. Low bridges prevented the passage of lighters capable of making the passage across Lough Neagh, and he commented acidly on the inability of the Navigation to maintain four feet of water, the minimum desirable depth. This was largely due to bleachers drawing off water from the river section for their greens. There were also problems caused by landowners who levelled the banks and removed the towpath, while it appears that on occasion manpower, rather than horses or mules, had to be used to haul the lighters.¹²⁶

Ritchie's report was made in January 1794, but despite talks between the Chamber and the Company and the fact that Waddell Cunningham was a prominent member of both bodies, no steps were taken to improve matters until 1795 when there was a particularly glaring example of interference by John Younghusband, a bleacher at Newgrove, who completely blocked the river to obtain water for his bleachgreen. The local lockkeeper would seem to have been involved: at any rate, it was decided that in future lockkeepers should not be connected with linendrapers.¹²⁷

125. PRONI D1857/1/1, 24 December 1793, 14, 21 January 1794. Some Tyrone coal was used in Belfast as it was being used in John Smylie & Co's glasshouse in 1794 (BNL 11 February 1794), but the quantity involved cannot have been large and Smylie's coal may have been a trial assignment.

126. PRONI D1857/1/1, 23 January 1794; PRONI COM 1/1/1, Board to Sir Charles Talbot, 17 November 1795, also minutes of meeting of 16 November 1795.

127. PRONI COM 1/1/1, 16 November 1795.

By and large, however, the Company refused to risk a head-on confrontation with the bleaching interests of the Lagan Valley. They were also seriously hampered by their subordination to the will of Lord Donegall whose last years were marked by a worsening of his always chronic indebtedness. By 1800 attempts were being made by a number of Belfast merchants to purchase the undertaking.¹²⁸ They were possibly taking advantage of the examination of the Donegall finances which followed the death of the first Marquis in the previous year. However, like so many other aspects of the history of the Lagan Navigation, the negotiations were spread over many years and were not concluded until 1810.¹²⁹ Not until then did it prove possible to make the much-needed improvements which turned the concern into one of the more successful Irish inland navigations during the nineteenth century.

The eighteenth century history of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce was one of initiation and stimulation. It created the Ballast Board, for example, and thus, by dominating the Board's composition, ensured that the harbour and port would be improved in accordance with the requirements of the business community. In doing so, it also removed the matters under the Ballast Board's responsibility from the arena of its own debate. It was concerned not with operating such things as the Harbour and the Lagan Navigation, but with seeing that those involved with them did their duty properly.

The Chamber was thus concerned with specific events, and for long periods it remained dormant and inactive, only to be resuscitated for a particular purpose or purposes. It would appear, indeed, that it had originally intended that its framework would remain in constant existence, and its constitution allowed for annual elections, but by July 1786 there was no

128. BNL 2 May 1800.

129. McCutcheon, op.cit., p. 44-46

quorum at the Annual General Meeting,¹³⁰ and no business was undertaken until January 1787 when it was decided to investigate the duties being charged on foreign linens which were imported into Ireland.¹³¹ The next entry in the minute book of the Committee was made in 1791, when it was decided to investigate whether or not the port's customs authorities were overcharging duty,¹³² and from the beginning of 1792 until January 1794 the Chamber remained in sporadic activity before once more lapsing into inactivity. Its members took no part in the great debate on the Union in 1799 and 1800, although it was reformed towards the end of the latter year.¹³³

It would thus seem that in its early years the Chamber of Commerce depended for an active existence on an immediate cause providing a goal towards which it would direct its activities. Its members had not as yet managed to diversify its activities so that it would remain in constant being. A long hiatus could lead to extinction of the spark of life: this seems to have occurred at the time of the Union debate. Nevertheless its achievements were considerable, although they were nearly all attained as a result of 'ginger group' activities, and the town's businessmen failed to make it a truly representative voice of their common interests.

The Linen Hall and the Chamber of Commerce were primarily involved with commercial affairs. However, circumstances in the town dictated the involvement of the town's businessmen and industrialists in many activities which lay outside commerce or industry. One of these activities was that of local government, for while the town had been ostensibly governed by a corporation since 1613, by the middle of the eighteenth century it had proved

130. PRONI D1857/1/1, 1 July 1786.

131. ibid 20 January 1787.

132. ibid 5 May 1791.

133. Belfast Almanack 1803 (Belfast, 1803), p.57; Millin, Sidelights, pp.86-87.

itself incapable of conducting the day to day running of the town's affairs, and its function had become primarily a political one. The main reason for the town's incorporation had been the establishment of a Protestant majority in the 1613 Parliament and it had therefore been necessary to enshrine conditions in its charter to ensure that the borough would not return members who could be regarded as unsuitable at some future date. This was achieved by making the sovereign and burgesses, whose responsibility it was to return the town's two Members, into a self-perpetuating body who filled vacancies arising in their ranks. Further safeguards were incorporated in the procedure for the election of a sovereign, the burgesses submitting the names of three of their number to Lord Donegall, who indicated his approval of one of the persons included in the list. That this system operated as might be expected is shown by the following quotation from the corporation's records concerning the nomination of candidates for the post of Collector, the right of nomination to which had been given to the patron. 'The names of three collectors (we read) will be like the naming of three to be sovereign; the lord of the castle puts a mark upon the one he would have chosen sovereign and whoever votes for any other is ill looked upon by the castle'.¹³⁴

By the middle of the 18th century, the corporation had become a body whose exclusiveness had been considerably increased by the exclusion of Presbyterians under the Test Act of 1704.¹³⁵ This prohibition, which of course applied to the entire country, was especially harmful in Belfast where the Presbyterians were the most dynamic element in the community. The corporation was also seriously affected by a high incidence of non-

134. Young, Town Book, p.208.

135. 2 Anne (Ir) c.vi: For a discussion of the Test Act and its affect, see J.C.Beckett, Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780 (London, 1948).

residence among its members. However, it must be said here that its powers and independence were so limited by its charter that neither residence in the town nor the admission of Presbyterians would have made all that much difference.¹³⁶ Only one person, the Sovereign (or Mayor), whose duty it was to regulate the markets and trade of the town, and to ensure that the various by-laws were observed, retained any effective power, and this came as much from his role as the town's principal magistrate entitled to hold a court for trying minor offences, as from his association with the Corporation.¹³⁷

The Sovereign was generally a respected member of the community. Some were more active than others. Stewart Banks, for example, who held the post on six occasions between 1755 and 1778,¹³⁸ earned a reputation as an energetic sovereign. Within a few days of taking office for the last time at Michaelmas 1777, he seized 21 false weights and 24 misreading meal scales during an inspection of the markets. At the end of October, he seized a large quantity of underweight bread and another check of the markets in mid-December resulted in the seizure of fifty-one more weights. His reform of the markets was not finished until the middle of January when a gang of forgers and pickpockets operating in the town were put to rout.¹³⁹ That such a devastating campaign upon the town's criminal elements was necessary would seem to be a sure indication that Banks's predecessor had been less than diligent in his work and that the effectiveness of the Sovereign's jurisdiction was a matter of personality rather than law. Indeed, in 1773, Banks had to take action to

136. The Repeal of the Test Act in 1780 had little practical effect on its affairs. One Presbyterian, Henry Joy, was elected Burgess in 1781 (Young, Town Book, p.238).

137. Dubourdieu, Antrim, p.525.

138. 1755, 1758, 1762, 1766, 1771, 1778. In each case, the term of office ran from Michaelmas of the previous year. Banks was a gentleman of independent means who lived in the town. His father, Thomas, had been Lord Donegall's agent in the town.

139. BNL 17, 31 October, 4 November, 19 December 1777, 20 January 1778.

regulate the butter market, although he was not sovereign at the time, and for his exertions he earned the public thanks of the town's butter merchants.¹⁴⁰ Matters, however, improved after 1774 when George Black, a prosperous merchant, became Sovereign. He and his brother Samuel held the post on eleven occasions between then and 1789, while in 1786 the visar, Rev. William Bristow, was appointed, holding the post on eleven occasions between then and 1798.¹⁴¹ They were efficient administrators, and Bristow's position as visar gave him a considerable amount of control over the vestry, which apportioned a cess for such matters as street lighting and cleaning. However, their effectiveness was still dependent on their personality, and the fact that for almost a quarter of a century the post was monopolised by two families indicates how little it was affected by popular choice.

In the previous section of this chapter, mention has already been made of the vestry, in relation to the evolution of the town meeting as the representative body of the inhabitants.¹⁴² Vestries proper were meetings of the male property owners in a parish and among their duties was the levying of cesses for the maintenance of municipal services.¹⁴³ Unfortunately the efforts of the vestry in this direction were just as ineffective as those of the corporation, and the same problems plagued the inhabitants of Belfast at the end of the century as were present in the 1760s. In many ways the

140. BNL 26 November 1773.

141. George Black was sovereign in 1774, 1775, 1776, 1782, 1783 and 1785, Samuel in 1779, 1780, 1781, 1784 and 1789. Bristow served in every year from 1786 to 1798, except 1789 and 1797.

142. See pp. 156 ff above.

143. The act 5 Geo III (IX) laid down that parochial vestries were empowered to raise taxes for the purpose of repairing their streets as well as being able to appoint their own surveyors and overseers. Many other matters such as paving and cleaning the streets also came under the vestries' jurisdiction (see K. Milne, *The Irish Municipal Corporations in the Eighteenth Century* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, T.C.D. 1962), pp. 258 ff.).

situation was worse as the town grew during the intervening years without the evolution of municipal machinery to cope with the expansion in population and area.

By the 1760s the corporation's influence was confined principally to that of market regulation, and other activities centring about the physical maintenance of the town's fabric were the responsibility of the vestry, which while it represented the business community lacked the legal powers to enforce its decision. Its handling of the problem of lighting the streets is a good illustration of its problems.

In 1761 a street lighting act was passed and in October a lamp-lighter was advertised for, but there were no funds with which to purchase lamps. By September 1765 there was as yet neither watchman nor lamps and it was not until the following September that a vestry made a presentment for the purchase of 130 lamps.¹⁴⁴ By 1780 it would appear that the responsibility of looking after the lamps rested with a committee of fourteen merchants.¹⁴⁵ However by 1785 the duty was being neglected or, more likely, that what lights there were were, in reality, totally inadequate for their purpose as a by-law was passed in that year requiring the inhabitants to illuminate their windows in the case of a fire occurring at night to assist those going to extinguish the blaze.¹⁴⁶ This latter conclusion of inadequacy would seem to be reinforced by the calling of a vestry meeting in January 1787 in order to improve the lighting, while the inadequacies of the system were also dealt with at the vestry of September 1791.¹⁴⁷

The problem of fire prevention also came under the auspices of the vestry and was dealt with in a similarly inefficient manner. By 1780 it

144. Benn, History i, p.501.

145. BNL 14 November 1780.

146. BNL 23 August 1785; Benn, History i, p.502.

147. BNL 23 January 1787; 16 September 1791.

appears that some form of firefighting machinery existed in the town,¹⁴⁸ but it also seems that it was quite inadequate for its purpose. Luckily serious fires were rare. However in November 1785 a serious fire at the Waring Street sugar refinery, followed by a chimney fire in Caddell's Entry, raised the issue to prominence and holes were ordered to be made in the arches covering the Farset River which flowed down the centre of High Street, so as to enable a supply of water to be drawn up to extinguish fires and a number of men were appointed to supervise them, being paid 30s per annum with a supplement of five shillings for attendance at an actual fire. A town fire engine and six mobile pumps were also to be purchased.¹⁴⁹ Some, at least, of this equipment was acquired, as a fire at John Smylie & Co's glasshouse at Ballymacarrett in July 1786 was extinguished with the help of the town fire engine.¹⁵⁰ However, these arrangements soon apparently became neglected. In January 1787, after a fire at the house of James Suffern, a merchant and tobacco manufacturer, had been prevented from spreading to a nearby gunpowder store only by the efforts of the army, the Newsletter condemned the lack of practice of the town brigade, and when there was a fire in the White Linen Hall in September 1798 it was only put out by the joint efforts of the army (who were using part of it as barracks) and the fire engine from Grimshaw's cotton works at Whitehouse, some four miles away.¹⁵¹

Another branch of municipal activity in which the traditional methods of maintenance by cess proved inadequate was in keeping the streets in repair.

148. A fire in a timber yard at Chichester Quay was extinguished with the aid of the town's fire engines (BNL 11 August 1780).

149. BNL 11 November, 2, 20 December 1786; J.H.Smyth, A Short History of Old Time Fire Fighting, Belfast Nat.Hist.Soc.Proc., 2nd ser. VI (1962), p.23.

150. BEP 6 July 1786.

151. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.328; BNL 2, 23 January 1787; Monaghan, History, p.50
In fairness it must be recorded that a fire in the shipyard in May 1798 was brought under control by the town fire brigade (BNL 17 May 1798).

Indeed, the clause in all the town's leases requiring householders to be responsible for paving half the street opposite their property seems to have been ignored by many of the inhabitants. Nor were the streets kept clean. One visitor in 1780 was surprised to discover dunghills in the streets and was informed that 'twas always the case on Sundays; for that Friday being the market-day the town was constantly swept on Saturdays, and that dunghills built up . . . in the manner before represented as sweet savoured nosegays to regale the inhabitants on every Sabbath.¹⁵² The cleaning of the streets devolved upon the householders who, as with paving, were inclined to neglect the task as much as possible, and in 1776 the Sovereign had to distrain a number of residents who had not swept their portion of the street, and in 1782 it was found necessary to publish a list of defaulting householders and to arrange for twice-weekly inspections by the Sovereign.¹⁵³ This seems to have done little good, for in 1785 the Newsletter once more complained of 'the present unparalleled filthy state of the streets and lanes', and in October 1788 fifty inhabitants were fined for not cleaning the street in front of their property.¹⁵⁴ In 1790 the then Sovereign, William Bristow, had to threaten to seize and sell piles of building materials which were blocking the streets, and in 1798 the system of householder maintenance had to be virtually abandoned and tenders sought for street cleaning.¹⁵⁵

The principal reason for the failure of the town to provide itself with services was the lack of adequate executive machinery to enforce the by-laws and vestry decisions. The main source of municipal power was the Sovereign,

152. BNL 19 December 1780.

153. BNL 9 February 1776, 15 October 1782.

154. BNL 23 September 1785, 3 October 1788.

155. BNL 12 November 1790, 14 August 1798.

and he was unable to undertake all the rapidly increasing duties which fell to him as a result of the town's growth. The need for a centralised and effective local authority had become acute by the end of the century, and in 1800 one of the last measures enacted by the Irish Parliament was 'an Act for paving, cleansing and lighting, and improving the several streets, squares, lanes and passages within the town of Belfast in the County of ^W Atrim'.¹⁵⁶ Under it, a Commission was appointed consisting of the Corporation and twelve residents, mostly prominent businessmen. While the first twelve names were nominated by the Act, their successors were to be elected by the ratepayers and all the elected commissioners had to be residents of the town. The effect of the measure was to transfer the making of all municipal decisions to a small but representative body of inhabitants, thus removing the problems of the unwieldiness of the vestry and the unrepresentative nature of the Corporation which, however, remained in existence to return the town's Member of Parliament to Westminster. The new commission was given wide powers in municipal matters such as paving, sewage disposal, fire protection and the regulation of hackney cars and it was not slow to exercise its powers. By September tenders were being sought for street repairs and for the provision of four hundred lights. Street names were fitted to corners and houses were numbered.¹⁵⁷ The result was a dramatic improvement in municipal standards and one gentleman, who lived some miles from the town and who had not been there for six months, was so impressed with the changes he found that he wrote in glowing terms to the Newsletter in December 1800, remarking 'with much satisfaction how forcibly he was struck

156. 40 Geo III (Ire) c.37.

157. BNL 2 September 1800.

with the appearance it now exhibits, contrasted with that which it formerly presented when so many hanging signs, pent-houses and street obstructions were allowed to remain',¹⁵⁸ and Dubourdieu's description of the town as it was about 1811 shows few signs of the shortcomings of the past. The town, he wrote, 'is remarkably cheerful, the streets being most spacious, straight, carefully paved and clean, and at night well lighted, and the houses almost all well built and of brick; though some of the lanes and entries are narrow, they are not numerous, and attention is paid to the cleanliness'.¹⁵⁹

While the Commission was of course representative of the inhabitants (or, rather, those whose houses were valued for rates at over one pound), the vast majority of this group were members of the business community: indeed, of the twelve original non-burgess commissioners, eleven were businessmen and the other was a lawyer. The Act of 1800 may thus be seen as the means whereby the town's businessmen were able to overcome the various forces which had formerly hindered the efficient running and expansion of the town.

One aspect of the town's social and municipal life, however, was not covered by the Act, simply because it had already come under the control of the community as a whole. This was the relief of the poor and needy. The principal instrument in this matter was the Belfast Charitable Society which was formed as early as 1752 with the object of building a Poorhouse and Hospital. Like the later Town Commission, the Society was dominated by the business community: of the nineteen members of its original committee, all but two were businessmen. Its history has been the subject of a monograph,¹⁶⁰ and so we need not concern ourselves with it here beyond seeing it as an

158. BNL 9 December 1800.

159. Dubourdieu, Antrim, p.555.

160. R.W.M.Strain, The Belfast Charitable Society (Oxford, 1961).

excellent example of the way in which the town's inhabitants were forced by the weakness of the existing institutions to take upon themselves burdens which are nowadays considered as the prerogative of central or local government, and which often differed radically from their original goals. By the end of the century the Charitable Society was undertaking a wide range of functions. Among them were its original roles of provider of an old people's home and a poorhouse, but it also ran an orphanage and provided the town with water, while in 1802 it opened its burial ground for public burials.

The Charitable Society may be considered as providing for the everyday needs of the town's underprivileged, but the century was also subject to harvest failures and economic disturbances which made the hard life of the poor virtually unbearable. These times of acute distress saw reaction by the business community in the form of additional schemes to supplement the efforts of the Society. These became more comprehensive towards the turn of the century as the town and its problems expanded. The year 1792 was one of great distress, and a dispensary was opened and funded by general subscription. It had become moribund by 1796, but was revived in the following year as a fever hospital. While this soon fell into neglect, it was once more revived in 1800 and formed the nucleus of what was to become the Royal Victoria Hospital.¹⁶¹ Another charitable body which had its origins in the economic depression of 1792-93 was the 'Lying-in Hospital', conceived in 1793 but not opened until 1794 when a house was rented in Donegall Street. Like the Charitable Society and the Dispensary, it still exists today, being the ancestor of the present Royal Maternity Hospital.¹⁶²

161. A.G.Malcolm, The History of the General Hospital, Belfast, and the other Medical Institutions of the Town (Belfast, 1851), pp.34-54; R.Marshall, The Book of Belfast Compiled for the 105th Annual Meeting, in 1937, of the British Medical Association (Belfast, 1937), pp.13-15; Strain, op.cit. pp.149-57.

162. Malcolm, op.cit. pp.43-44; Strain, op.cit. pp.161-65.

Periods of economic depression brought hunger and misery as well as disease to the poor and, as the years passed, the town's middle classes became increasingly active in their efforts to alleviate distress. Conditions were particularly difficult in the years following the 1798 Rebellion and a brief examination of the methods of relief adopted at the time will demonstrate the way in which the business community became involved. The summer of 1799 was wet and cold, and resulted in widespread crop failures. By January 1800 food prices were rising rapidly and for three days no meal or potatoes were brought to the market.¹⁶³ In November 1799 a soup kitchen was established and remained open until the following October, by which time it had cost £1,547.15.10,¹⁶⁴ and in January 1800 a 'Cheap Repository' was opened to provide cheap clothing and coal.¹⁶⁵ Both these institutions were financed by public subscriptions, and in August 1800 their efforts were supplemented by those of a public flour milling company which tried to provide the poor with cheap flour by cutting out middlemen's profits.¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately the summer of 1800 did little to ease the situation, for it was extremely dry, and this affected both the yield of crops and the capacity of the various mills in the town,¹⁶⁷ and in November the coalyard had to reopen, followed in December by the soup kitchen.¹⁶⁸

It will thus be seen that the entire system of poor relief was being maintained by the voluntary subscriptions of the populace, and that the role

163. LHL Joy MSS 4, ff.334-42; Strain, op.cit., p.169. Matters would have been even worse had late November and early December not been fine enabling the potato crop to be saved and winter wheat sown (Joy MSS 9/13, Alexander Haliday to Harry Joy, 4 December 1799).

164. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.335; Benn, History ii, pp.16-17.

165. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.337.

166. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.340; BNL 14, 28 October 1800; Strain, op.cit. p.169.

167. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.342.

168. LHL Joy MSS 4, f.342; BNL 11 November 1800.

of the traditional municipal institutions of parish and corporation was virtually non-existent. Their role had come to be a purely political one. One must, however, avoid concluding, with Dr Strain, that such bodies as the Ballast Board and the Charitable Society owed their form and existence to a 'revolt from that undemocratic piece of machinery, the Belfast Corporation of former days.¹⁶⁹ This implies that the Corporation's roles had been deliberately undermined by the townspeople because it was undemocratic. Efficiency and necessity, not democracy, were the forces behind the emergence of the town's middle classes to a position of control over their own municipal affairs. They were filling a gap created by the failure of the Corporation to carry out its functions of running the town's affairs. Had the Corporation been efficient in carrying out its duties under the charter, its lack of democracy might have been little heeded.

169. Strain, op.cit. p.148.

(iii) The Merchants and Land

Belfast's business community had ties with the way of life of the surrounding countryside. As has been seen in Chapter 1, its growth was recent, for the most part a phenomenon of the 18th century: with the possible exception of the Blacks, none of the families prominent in the town's early development during the late 17th and early 18th centuries were still in business in 1800. The Macartneys had moved to Lissanoure in the 1730s, and their business interests in the town by 1767 consisted merely of a number of leaseholds; they were followed about 1758 by the Mussendens, when Daniel Mussenden retired to his estate at Larchfield, near Hillsborough.¹⁷⁰ The third important family, the Leggs, retained many business connections into the 1760s but by 1777, when Alexander Legg died, they too had abandoned the business life of the town for the pleasures of the family lands in Malone and the Bush Valley.

They were, in a way, returning to the land from whence they came for in many respects, Belfast was and remained a village, a community drawing its human strength from the surrounding districts, from the ranks of the farmers' sons and the gentry, from the rural craftsmen and the small town businessmen. Lacking a closed commercial hierarchy, its growing trade and prosperity provided opportunities unavailable to those who remained at home. Waddell Cunningham, for example, was the son of a prosperous farmer:¹⁷¹ the lack of a mercantile tradition did not prevent him becoming one of the wealthiest businessmen in Belfast. The gentry contributed their share: among those who came from landed backgrounds were the Batt brothers, Narcissus, Robert and Thomas¹⁷² and the linen merchant and banker, John Hamilton, who was related

170. An announcement of his retirement may be found in BNL 19 May 1758.

171. Benn, History ii, p.179.

172. See pp. 29 ff above.

to the Hamiltons of Killyleagh.¹⁷³ The Dissenting Ministry, too, provided many of the town's businessmen. Robert Thomson's family, for example, had been ministers at Carnmoney since the early 17th century,¹⁷⁴ and at least three other prominent families, the Neilsons, Tennants and Browns, came from this background. It was a calling which had its roots deep in the soil, for lacking the privileges of his Anglican counterpart and the temptations offered to the latter to neglect his duty, the dissenting minister became identified with his people. He shared their background and their problems as he moved among them, catering for their spiritual needs. Like them, he had to cultivate his land and negotiate with his landlord for the renewal of his lease. The rural shopkeeper, too, was forced by his circumstances to keep in close touch with the life of the countryside, for he was dependent upon its prosperity for his livelihood.

Even those businessmen whose fathers had been in business before them could rarely extend their urban lineage back for more than one or two generations. Thomas Greg, for example, was a son of John Greg of Ochiltree, near Coupar Angus, whose family were small landowners. John had to leave Scotland because he had been involved in the 1715 Rebellion. He came to Belfast where he established himself in business, specialising in the linen trade, a trade which was itself closely tied to rural life both because of the role played in it as weavers by the tenantry, and because bleaching had to be carried out in rural areas because of its need of land and water.¹⁷⁵

Migration to towns and involvement in the business world did not necessarily break the ties which bound men to rural life, and land played an important part in the activity of the business community. One role with

173. S.Andrews, op.cit. p.79.

174. J.B.Burke, op.cit. p.1,200.

175. J.B.Burke, op.cit. p.483.

an attraction for the commercial mind was that of land agent, and the many absentee landowners in the vicinity of the town provided scope for businessmen willing to undertake the supervision of estates. The largest of these, the Donegall Estate, employed a full-time agent, but an assistant was employed on a part-time basis and to act as deputy when the resident agent was out of town, and the position of assistant agent was held for much of the period by John Alexander, a prominent merchant. George Black, another prominent businessman, acted as agent for the Macartney family at their Lissanowre estate, near Ballymoney,¹⁷⁶ while during the 1790s, the linen-draper, William Sinclair, was the agent on David Ker's estates in County Down, a connection possibly having its roots in the foundation of the Ker family fortune in the linen trade.¹⁷⁷ These were both large estates, but there were also smaller estates in the area which employed other members of the business community such as the Bateson estate at Kilrea whose agency was offered to Samuel McTier about 1784 when his fortunes were at a low ebb. McTier saw the agency as a stepping-stone towards the eventual recovery of his prosperity, and the duties involved were light, consisting merely of two or three visits a year which he was able to do without difficulty, even after he became Ballast-Master in 1785. On his death in 1795 the agency was taken up by a local physician, Alexander Haliday, and was then valued at £60 a year, half of which he gave to William McTier, a relative of Samuel, who acted as his deputy.¹⁷⁸

176. See PRONI Macartney Corr. D572.

177. PRONI Ker MSS D2651/2/85. Letterbook of David Ker 1791-97.

178. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/170, 174, 596 resp. Mac McTier to Dr Drennan, October 1785, Dr Drennan to Mrs McTier, n.d., Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, 4 January 1796.

As has been stressed earlier, the links between the businessmen of Belfast and the land were strong and to many of them the ownership or occupation of land was a natural consequence of success. They were products of a society where landlords and middlemen were part of the natural order, even if disliked by the peasantry. Few Belfast men became landlords in fee and followed in the footsteps of the Macartneys, Mussendens and Leggs.¹⁷⁹ The Donegall Estate was set in terminable leases, generally of 41 years or three years duration, and similar leases were the rule on the other large estates in the area, such as the Upton estate at Templepatrick, the Dunganon estates at Islandmagee and Belvoir, and the Hertford estate in Lisburn. Few estates came on the market and only one local family, the Kers, made extensive purchases in fee. Originally from Ballymena, they became linen merchants in London and by 1765 had amassed sufficient capital to be able to purchase Portavo, near Donaghadee. When David Ker, son of the David Ker who had founded the family fortunes, retired from business in 1785, he was able to concentrate his attention upon his estates, which now included, in addition to Portavo, the Copeland Islands, and holdings at Clough and Magheranock.¹⁸⁰ In 1791 he acquired another estate at Killinchy from the debt-ridden vicar of Saintfield, the Rev. James Clewlow. Macartney was also interested in the land, but the news that Ker intended to purchase it led his agent, George Black, to advise him of the futility of any attempt, an indication of the considerable scale of Ker's resources. As it was, he

179. A similar phenomena has been noted in Drogheda, although there, unlike Belfast, the years after 1785 showed greatly increased landed involvement by the town's merchants (J.Fitzgerald, *The Organisation of the Drogheda Economy 1780-1820* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Univ. Coll. Dublin, 1972), pp.94-95).

180. H.C.Lawlor, *Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century*, in *Irish and International Fibres and Fabrics Journal* VIII (1942), p.45; PRONI Ker MSS (re Copeland Is) D2651/2/17; Alexander Arthur, Belfast to Ker, 31 December 1779.

spent about £10,000 on the deal, a sum amounting to over 40 times the profit rent, although by increasing rents as leases expired, he hoped to be able to increase them almost threefold.¹⁸¹ Nor did Ker's investment in land cease with the purchase of Killinchy for in the same year he purchased the townlands of Ballyfoster, Ballymazer and Ballymackerris (Strandtown) from Cunningham, with an eye towards using them for housing development because of their proximity to Belfast,¹⁸² while in 1800 he acquired Montalto, near Ballynahinch and developed it as a family seat.¹⁸³ David Ker was not the only member of the family to purchase land in the area. In 1779 his brother, Richard, bought Red Hall, Kilroot, from Sir Archibald Edmonstone of Duntreath, a heavily encumbered Scottish laird, and extended it northwards two years later with the purchase of land at Ballycarry.¹⁸⁴

The Ker purchases were in fact one of only two significant purchases in fee in the vicinity of Belfast at this time. The other was Ballymacarrett, which was purchased by Barry Yelverton from the Pottinger family in 1779,¹⁸⁵ a time when the American War of Independence had considerably curtailed the amount of surplus capital in the town. The sale would seem to have been by private treaty and there were a number of good political reasons for the purchase. Yelverton having been elected as M.P. for Carrickfergus in 1776, was probably trying to reinforce his position by acquiring land in the

181. PRONI Macartney MSS D527/11/14. Black to Macartney, 25 March 1790; Ker MSS D2651/2/85. Letterbook of David, Ker to Sinclair, 12 February 1791.

182. Correspondence in above letter book, 1791.

183. Lawlor, loc.cit. p.45.

184. PRONI D233 (Deed relating to sale of Red Hall); RD v.340, f.491 (Conveyance of land, John Marshall of Ballyduff, Carnmoney to Richard Ker, Red Hall of lands at Old Freema and Ballycarry).

185. RD v.330, f.546.

locality, and as he was closely associated with the popular cause espoused at this period by most of the town's businessmen, any such attempt was unlikely to be opposed by them.¹⁸⁶

However, if the opportunity for the merchants of Belfast to purchase lands in fee was limited, this did not usually apply to the purchase of leasehold interests. Only one case is known of a merchant failing to secure a leasehold. This was in 1769 when the Clothworkers' Company of London invited tenders for their lands in County Londonderry. They offered a terminable lease of 61 years duration, or three lives at a rent of £600 a year, plus a negotiable fine for an area of 6,702 Irish acres producing a profit rent of about £2,200 annually. The highest tender received for the fine was that of the Belfast merchant, Waddell Cunningham, who offered £23,000, but the Clothworkers' Company then held an auction and the lease was eventually given to the existing holder, Robert Jackson whose bid was increased from its original £20,000 to £28,900. It is, indeed, likely that the Clothworkers had intended throughout to extract the highest possible rent from Jackson who had, of course, vested interests in the estate as the tenant in possession.¹⁸⁷

Most of the land held by Belfast businessmen was on the Donegall Estate. Many of the holdings were of considerable extent and were subdivided into farms, the businessmen playing the part of middlemen. It was a role which was well established by the beginning of the period. The most prominent of the middlemen was John Greg who was granted leases of three

186. For the subsequent history of the Ballymacarrett Estate, see pp. 148-51 above.

187. PRONI T656/73. Merchant Taylor's MSS; Also MIC 146/9 (Minutes of Committee of Clothworkers' Company concerning their Irish estates).

townlands with a total area in excess of 400 acres in the Carrmoney area in 1757.¹⁸⁸

Greg acquired his holding by outbidding the actual occupiers of the land. It was a perfectly legal act, and was far from extraordinary at the period, but it created very considerable resentment at the time among the tenantry and shortly afterwards his house was wrecked by a number of men who disappeared without causing any other damage in the town.¹⁸⁹ The tendency to act as middlemen was a strong one and it was reinforced by the physical and, one might almost say, spiritual links between Belfast and rural life. When large tracts of land became available for releasing in 1770, the town's businessmen obtained leases of about 3,000 Irish acres in the Donegall Estate,¹⁹⁰ as well as lands elsewhere in the Dungannon and Upton estates which fell in at about the same time. On the Donegall Estate, there would seem to have been an expectation current among the tenants that they would be offered direct leases, thus abolishing middlemen. Instead, they found that the problem had become worse rather than better. The middlemen had managed to increase their holdings largely because they were able to pay fines, or down payments on their new leases. The levying of fines was a short term policy which resulted in Lord Donegall receiving a large sum of money immediately at the cost of lower rents for the duration of the lease. While unwise in the long term, it did provide a temporary easing of his indebtedness and give him some of the money required for his elaborate

188. Bigger, Land War, p.28.

189. ibid, p.29.

190. PRONI Donegall Leases D509/423-556.

mansion at Fisherwick in Staffordshire, which was being built between 1770 and 1774.¹⁹¹ It was an offer which the tenants could not meet, although some counter-offer was apparently made and Froude tells us that 'the tenants . . . offered the interest of the money in addition to the rent',¹⁹² a statement rendered all the more intriguing by its lack of clarity, but which probably meant that they offered the interest on the fines.

The leases were the immediate cause of an outburst of agrarian discontent which lasted from 1770 until the American Revolution and which found its energy not only in a hatred of middlemen but in longstanding grievances relating to the payment of tithes and abuses of the county cess in undertaking projects which were of no public utility. The discontent was fuelled by clearances as the middlemen cleared their holdings of tenants who could not or would not pay increased rents and replaced them with others, and the discontent and violence were multiplied at the end of 1770 when the linen trade, which had been undergoing a period of unparalleled growth, suddenly collapsed, thus depriving many tenants of the means of paying their rents.

The amount of the fines has probably been exaggerated by many writers who were only mirroring contemporary if uninformed opinion at the time. Many people felt considerable sympathy for the tenantry, including no less an onlooker than Elizabeth, Countess of Moira, who was of the opinion that 'Lord Donegal has given just cause for an insurrection in the County of Antrim', and who believed that the fines amounted to about £150,000.¹⁹³

191. D.Kennedy, *The Early Eighteenth Century*, in Beckett & Glasscock, Belfast, p.50.

192. J.A.Froude, The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1881) II, p.130.

193. Hist. MSS Comm, Hastings MSS (ed. F.Bickley), III, pp.152-53. Elizabeth, Countess of Moira to Francis, Earl of Huntingdon, 4 February 1771.

Echoing this Froude claimed in 1872 that it was £100,000¹⁹⁴ (no doubt believing himself on the safe side, this sum being mentioned by the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Townshend).¹⁹⁵ However, in 1877 George Benn showed that it was about £20,000¹⁹⁶ and his calculations are given support by the fact that in September 1771 unpaid fines totalled £7,990,¹⁹⁷ a very substantial portion of £20,000 but a surely unrealistically miniscule part of the larger totals mentioned when the distressed state of the economy at the time is considered. Froude's figure was seized on by Bigger, who dismissed Benn's account as 'mildly written',¹⁹⁸ and it was used by him in his work, The Ulster Land War of 1770. Nor, at a cursory inspection, do the fines seem to have been particularly heavy. The largest known were of £1,000 each on Shem Thompson and Waddell Cunningham, a rate of little more than £1 per acre.¹⁹⁷ William Greg, a provisions merchant, had to pay a fine of £400 for a lease of 253 acres in the Falls, the rent of which was £57.10s¹⁹⁹ and Robert Wallace, another merchant, who was renewing a lease of 340 acres at Ballymurphy and Ballynafeigh in the Falls, had to pay £170 as well as having his rent increased from £80 to £100.²⁰⁰

194. J.A.Froude, op.cit. ii, p.130.

195. Townshend to Rochford, 15 April 1772, in R.A.Roberts (ed) Calendar of Home Office Papers 1770-1772 (London 1881), p.485.

196. Benn, History i, pp.613-14. Lecky made the same error as Froude, no doubt preferring the word of a Lord Lieutenant to that of a local historian! (W.E.Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892) 11, p.47).

197. PRONI Donegall Estate Letterbook T1893, Alexander to Talbot, 30 September 1771.

198. Bigger, Land War, pp.53, 72.

199. PRONI D509/468.

200. PRONI D509/71 (the previous lease of 1754); Benn, History i, p.613.

The payment of the fines was a successful use by the businessmen involved of their superior resources of capital and influence. However the new leases were granted at a most unfortunate time, just before the onset of the depression which affected them just as much as the occupiers and very considerable difficulty was experienced by them in paying their fines. By August 1771 John Alexander advised Charles Talbot, Lord Donegall's London agent, that they were likely to remain unpaid for a considerable time to come, and that there would also be considerable difficulty in having rents paid.²⁰¹ Eventually some had to come to special arrangements with the estate. Thomas Greg and Waddell Cunningham had to travel to London to negotiate terms²⁰² and it seems likely that Greg mortgaged his lands to the linen merchants, Marler Stuart and Boyd, as a result of this visit.²⁰³ Another merchant, Francis Turnly, paid his debts in kind by repairing the wall of his Lordship's deerpark and a sluice-gate on the Lagan Navigation.²⁰⁴

The violence which accompanied the depression was principally directed at the middlemen and at those whom they had settled on their lands, and many of them were the victims of houghings and burnings carried out at night by disaffected tenants, who banded together in secret agrarian societies known as 'the Hearts of Steel'. On the night of August 17/18, 1770, for example, twenty-three cattle belonging to Thomas Greg were houghed at Lisnalinchy,²⁰⁵ and when Waddell Cunningham arrested David Douglas, a Templepatrick farmer and lodged him in the barracks at Belfast the following December, a mob invaded the town and forced his release, burning Cunningham's house in the

201. PRONI Donegall Estate Letter-Book T1893. Alexander to Talbot, 7 August 1771.

202. PRONI T1893. Portis To Talbot, 27 June, 7 August 1772.

203. PRONI Millin Papers T011/2, f.182.

204. PRONI T1893. Alexander to Portis, 16 May 1772.

205. BNL 4 September 1770.

process.²⁰⁶ Many more incidents occurred over the next three years. Most were similar to that at Lisnalinehy. In September 1771, for example, two of Robert Wallace's cattle were killed at Ballymurphy, three others and two young horses being houghed, and on the same night two cattle belonging to John Greg, a brother of Thomas's who was a provision merchant in the town, were killed.²⁰⁷ That December he suffered again when four of his bullocks were stolen, a crime for which three men were later executed.²⁰⁸ There were also burnings: on 13 June 1772, for example, 'three houses situate on the farm of land of Ballygomartin, in the parish of Belfast, in the possession of Shem Thompson, were feloniously set on fire and burnt by some person or persons unknown'.²⁰⁹

By the spring of 1772 the troubles had extended to much of the northern part of Ulster and the army had had to be reinforced.²¹⁰ However, firm action by landowners and middlemen coupled with heavy emigration from the region had brought a peace through exhaustion by the end of 1774. Portis considered that by 1773 many people had given up all hope of an improvement in the situation and had left but that they were only the less useful members of society. There were, he believed, 'still a sufficient Number of Manufacturers left and People in number also left to prevent any lands lying waste'.²¹¹ By the autumn emigration had eased²¹² and by December the linen

206. Hist. Collections, pp.111-13; Benn, History i, pp 614-19.

207. PRONI T1893 Donegall Estate Letter-Book. Alexander to Talbot, 30 September 1771.

208. BNL 11 September 1772.

209. BNL 9 July 1772, ; It is interesting to note that Thompson had been forced to offer a reward for the arrest of people damaging his property in May 1770, a month before his lease was renewed (BNL 25 May 1770).

210. BNL 20 March 1772.

211. PRONI T1893, Portis to Talbot, 22 April 1773.

212. The same, Alexander to George Hamilton, Dublin, 29 November 1773.

industry was showing signs of recovery,²¹³ although burnings and houghings continued for some time.²¹⁴

After the 1770s, land played a far less important part in the affairs of the Belfast business community. Before 1770 their investment in it had been considerable and some families had been able to give up their business interests and become accepted in landed society. While grants and leases held at this period were generally retained, they were rarely added to although a few cases are known of businessmen from the town purchasing considerable holdings: in 1783, for example, the merchant Thomas Andrews bought Carneyshure, Co. Antrim with £10,000 which he had won in the State Lottery.²¹⁵ One reason for the failure to add to landed holdings may have been the smaller size of holdings coming on the market, but the importance of the development of trade after 1775, and the consequent rise of the businessman on the social scale were no less decisive.

Some of the land held by Belfast businessmen in the vicinity of the town was used for industrial purposes, principally for linenbleaching. William Wallace, for example, leased a 54 acre holding at Whiteabbey, of which 22 acres were occupied by a bleachgreen: on his bankruptcy in 1773 it was leased by the Bateson family. There was another bleachgreen on a holding of Wallace's at Greencastle: it was subsequently leased by another bleacher, John Orr. Similarly, Waddell Cunningham had a bleachgreen on his holding at Springfield.²¹⁶ These greens covered very substantial areas

213. PRONI T1893, Portis to Talbot, 30 December 1773.

214. The same, Portis to Donegall, 4 January 1774.

215. Andrews, op.cit. p.64.

216. PRONI D835/3/1. Donegall Estate Rentals 1775 to 1778.

for not only was land occupied by buildings and mill races, but space was needed for the laying out of the cloth while, if the example of the Wolfendens of Lambeg in 1754 can be relied upon, land was needed for the grazing of cattle for buttermilk which was used as a bleaching agent,²¹⁷ although this practice probably died out with the advent of potash and vitriol. As there were some 40 bleachgreens in the Belfast area,²¹⁸ it will be realised that a very substantial area of land was occupied for this purpose. Land was needed for other industrial uses as well: Arthur Buntin, for example, leased 50 acres at Ballysillan, some of which was used to supply his limekiln with limestone, and the rest let out to market gardeners who supplied the Belfast market with potatoes.²¹⁹

There was no general movement away from the owning and leasing of land although some sales of land by the larger merchant landholders have been recorded. In 1783, for example, Waddell Cunningham sold his holding at Ballypalady to two of his tenants; it appears that there was considerable subletting and also a substantial amount of arrears of rent as his last act as owner was to forgive arrears which had accumulated. Cunningham can have made little from the deal, as the arrears came to several hundred pounds, and the land was sold for £1,100.²²⁰ Some years later, in 1791, he further reduced his holding by selling three townlands near Belfast, on the Co. Down side of the Lagan, to David Ker who decided to use them for building development, clearing them of their existing tenants as their leases expired, and

217. PRONI T555. John Wolfenden to Donegall Estate, 15 July 1754.

218. H. McCall, Ireland and her Staple Manufactures (3rd ed., Belfast 1870) p 91.

219. Young, Tour i, p.229; BNL 7 June 1776.

220. PRONI D1587/7/1 (Conveyance of lease); BNL 6 February 1784.

declaring that he would only change his mind 'if handsome proposals are made'.²²¹

When David Ker made his decision to develop Ballymazer, or Strandtown, he was intending to cater for a market which was rapidly emerging among the Belfast business community. Ballymazer was 'the nearest freehold Ground to Belfast except the Earl of Donegall's'²²² and he intended to divide it into small plots and lease them, in perpetuity, to the businessmen of Belfast for the building of villas.²²³ Some years earlier, in 1788, George Black recommended to Lord Macartney that Macartney's lease at Clowney near Springfield should be similarly divided up into small lots, presumably with the same intentions.²²⁴ By the 1790s these large residences were already a feature of the town's environs, many of them being built on the small holdings which the merchants owned and originally used as market gardens. Possibly the first of these houses was Orangefield, which Thomas Bateson purchased in the 1750s, and these villas figured prominently on Williamson's map of 1791:²²⁵ in 1794 Tyner devoted much space to listing the occupants of the houses which graced his readers' routes into the town.²²⁶

These houses were mini-estates, tended with loving care and holding the same place in their owners' affection as the demesne did in the country gentleman's. In the mid 1780s, for example, when the McTiers were developing Cabin Hill, a cottage style property at Knock, Mrs McTier vehemently rejected

221. PRONI Ker MSS D2651/2/85. Out letter book of David Ker. David Ker, Portavo to Messrs Arthur & Young, solicitors in Dublin, 24 July 1791; the same from Lausanne to Richard Gervais Ker, Red Hall, 20 October 1794.

222. The same, Ker to William Sinclair, 12 February 1791.

223. The same to the same, 20 October 1793.

224. PRONI Macartney MSS D572/11/6. Black to Macartney, 5 October 1788.

225. PRONI T1800.

226. G. Tyner The Traveller's Guide through Ireland (Dublin 1794), pp.6-9.

the idea of a tiled roof as this would make it look as though it had once been on fire,²²⁷ and was disgusted when her husband whitewashed the walls, turning it into 'a great glaring bare white place like those about bleach greens' and contrasted it to Mrs O'Neill's cottage at Lough Neagh which was of 'mud, studded with pebbles from Lough Neagh, and in front supported by four rustic pillars of ivy'.²²⁸ In 1791, John Holmes, on holiday in Harrogate, worried about the gravelled drive being built to his house at Cliftonville and hoped that it would be completed before the hay harvest,²²⁹ and at Cranmore, in Malone, the Templeton family developed a rare and valuable collection of shrubs and trees.²³⁰

The movement of many businessmen out of the town to live in villas in the surrounding countryside was a development of considerable importance. The traditional distinction between merchant and country gentleman was no longer relevant, a man could be both, commuting to his office each morning and returning home in the evening to the comfort and isolation of a rural residence. The businessman could be both an urban dweller and countryman. No longer did the town's businessman have to live, like Waddell Cunningham, among the narrow streets, above his business: he could escape from the town into the countryside from which he or his ancestors had come. That they were able to do so, to erect their fine houses in imitation of the gentry, was an indication too of the growth of the town, not just in size but in the scale of its businesses for the villa was an investment on which there was no return in financial terms.

Not all welcomed the new order: in a letter of 1787 Mrs McTier, for

227. PRONI T765/2/156. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, c.1784 or 1785.

228. PRONI T765/2/237. Above to above. c.1787.

229. LHL Joy MSS 13/17. John Holmes to Harry Joy, 22 June 1791.

230. S.T.Carleton, The Growth of South Belfast (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Queen's Univ. Belfast, 1967), p.17

one, caustically referred to 'rich upstarts who skipping from the Counter to their Carriage run one down with force of wealth, which sanctions ignorance',²³¹ but they had discovered a solution for the subconscious problem posed by the development of the town - that of how to reconcile the wealth and prosperity of urban life with the spaciousness and ease of the life of the country gentleman. The business community had achieved maturity and the ability to stand on its own feet.

In this, of course, the Belfast businessmen were not unique. The same phenomenon was occurring elsewhere; in London, Dublin and other growing centres throughout these islands, those who could afford to do so moved out of the towns to more congenial areas, away from the filth and overcrowding, only to be followed by lesser mortals until they were forced to move further, aided in their flight as the nineteenth century progressed by the omnibus, the railway and the tramway. In this study of land in Belfast we can see the first steps in the process of suburbanisation occurring in the years after the American War, the years of the town's greatest development in the eighteenth century.

231. PRONI T765/2/238. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, 10 August 1787.

CHAPTER 7

THE BRITISH AND EUROPEAN TRADE OF BELFAST

(i) Great Britain

The examination of Belfast's trade in this and the following chapter is structured along broadly geographical lines, beginning with the short-distance but vitally important trade with Great Britain before proceeding to examine the activity of the town's businessmen in the more distant regions to which they traded. In volume, the British trade was by far the most important one in the town, although its short distance meant that it did not employ a proportionate tonnage of shipping. Geographically, it was a diverse trade which was conducted with about a dozen centres, mostly situated along the west coast between the Clyde and Bristol although the London trade was of particular importance.

In many respects, less is known about the British trade than about that with other, more distant ports. There is, for example, an almost total lack of surviving correspondence, while the customs statistics only differentiate between Scotland and England, and then only for 1783 and subsequent years. The principal surviving sources of information are the 'Port-News' columns of the Newsletter, and even these are fragmentary and depend very much upon the whims of the paper's editor. Indeed, for considerable periods, especially during the 1790s, they do not appear at all and the researcher is left at the mercy of occasional advertisements.

Despite the shortcomings of the sources, various patterns of trade can be discussed. Some ports were naturally of greater importance than others, trade with London, Liverpool and the ports of the Upper Clyde being of a particularly intensive and varied nature. Less important than these was another group of ports, such as Bristol and those along the Ayrshire coast

where trade, although less in volume, was regular and contacts frequent. There was also a third group of ports with which trade was conducted principally for the purpose of obtaining one particular product such as slates or coal. A fourth type of trade was one in various commodities which had, by law, to be imported into Ireland from the colonies through a British port until the granting of Free Trade in 1780. The principal items involved were sugar, rum and tobacco. In the case of rum and to a lesser extent, sugar, this trade was only nominally conducted at a British port convenient to Belfast, such as Rothesay or Campbelltown at which the ships involved called en route from the Caribbean to have their papers checked.

The two principal ports with which the Belfast merchants traded were London and Liverpool, the commodities exported being mainly linen and provisions, with linen playing a much greater proportionate part in the London trade than in that to Liverpool. Indeed, Belfast's contribution to the Irish linen trade with London would seem to have been considerably greater than its proportion of the Irish linen trade as a whole. In 1772, for example, when the town's share of the Irish linen trade was 19.6%, almost 40% of the Irish linen imported into London came from Belfast 'from whence the finest linens are shipped'.¹

The importance of linen in the London trade can also be gauged from the descriptions of the cargoes which are to be found in the 'Port-News' column of the Newsletter. In 1769, for example, seven sailings are recorded, and linen was mentioned as a component in all cases, while in 1786 eleven sailings are noted, and once again linen is mentioned in all cases. Indeed, in eight cases as compared with three in 1769, no other commodity is

1. D. MacPherson, Annals of Commerce, Manufactures, Fisheries and Navigation (London, 1805) iii, p.528.

mentioned,² and this could indicate that linen was coming to form an increasing proportion of the exports to London. In this context, it has already been mentioned that the shipping committee of the White Linen Hall was formed in May 1784;³ its first task was to make shipping arrangements for the London trade although it very soon widened its sphere of interest. This shows that the London market was the primary concern of the Belfast linen merchants and that it experienced a very considerable expansion at least in line with the increase of the trade as a whole. In 1792, indeed, we know of at least twenty sailings, of which thirteen were described as carrying linen only.

From the scanty existing records it appears that most of the linen was sent by Ulster bleachers to specialist linen merchants in London by ships in which neither party had shares. The one surviving account book, belonging to the Ferguson family, shows them sending linen to three London firms between 1771 and 1779, those of Schumaker and Heymann, Bell and Boetefeur Dorrien Lewis & Co. and their successors,⁴ while the records of John Andrews, a Comber bleacher, who sent his webs to London through Belfast, reveal that he was trading with Schumaker & Heymen, Heiper Pearson & Sammon and also with the firm of Ker, Pope and Dyson, whose senior partner, David Ker, was a native of Ballymena and had substantial landed interests in north Down.⁵ It would seem from these two cases that each bleacher had a small number of London correspondents with whom he dealt on a considerable scale. The substantial financial involvement with a relatively small number

2. This does not mean that no other cargo was carried as the Newsletter only mentioned the principal items.

3. See Chapter 4 (ii) above; BNL 28 May 1784. By September sailings were being organised not only to London but also to Liverpool, Chester and the Clyde (BNL 7 September 1784).

4. PRONI D468.

5. Out-letter book of John Andrews, 7 February 1787 to 29 October 1792.

of firms which this could entail could only hinder the trade's stability in a time of crisis, as when Marler Stewart & Boyd, another firm with considerable Ulster connections, failed in 1781, although it probably led to substantial savings in shipping and invoice costs.

Linen exports were supplemented by agricultural produce, principally beef, pork and butter. Unfortunately, it is impossible to calculate the precise quantities involved but in 1769 butter is mentioned as a component of two cargoes, beef of one and hides of one. In 1786 pork had emerged as a regular export and was mentioned once, beef also being mentioned once and butter twice, and in 1792 beef and pork are mentioned once and butter five times. This would indicate that butter played a more important part in the London trade than other provisions.

In return a wide range of goods were imported into Belfast from London, the most important of these being tea, hops and porter. Tea imports especially showed a rapid growth: indeed, in the late 1760s they were virtually negligible indicating that Belfast's needs were then being met partly by tea imported through Dublin and partly by smuggling, for tea figured prominently in a number of years such as 1771-72 and 1774 among the items concerned in the prosperous smuggling trade in the vicinity of the town despite a lowering of duties in 1767 on importation and reexport. This smuggling may have been due to price differentials between supplies from British and Continental sources. It was not until 1774 that legal imports began to increase, and this growth was soon cut short by the war. The peaks of 1784-85 may have been speculative in nature, but there then began a period of steady growth aided by the British Commutation Act of 1784 which reduced British tea duties and thus lowered the price of tea on the London market (Fig. 15).⁶

TF
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6. Hoh Cheung, L.H.Mui, The Commutation Act and the Tea Trade in Britain 1784-1793, Econ. Hist. Rev. 2nd ser., xvi (1963) pp.234-37.

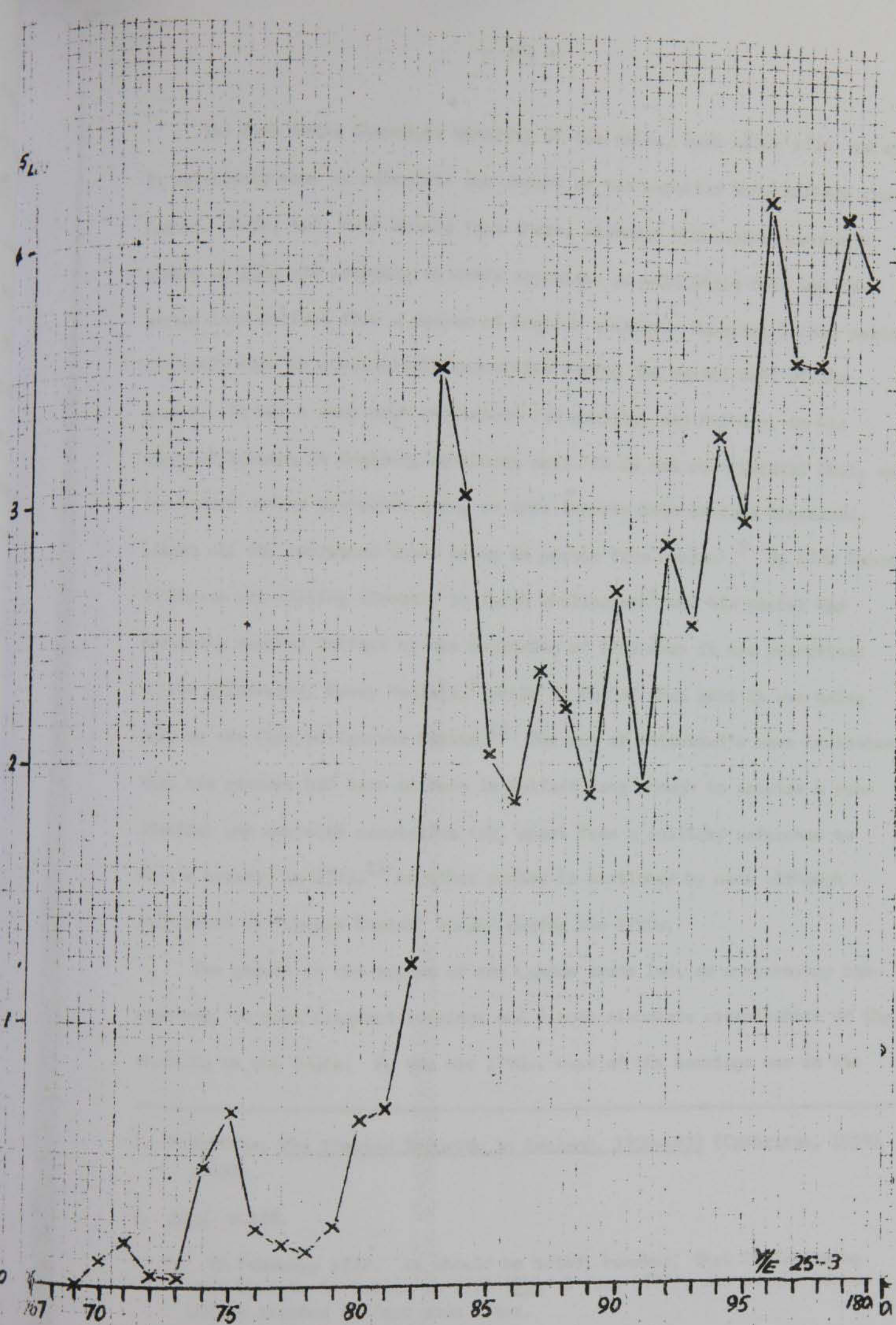


FIG. 15 . IMPORTS OF TEA INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

The East India Company's monopoly of tea sales, even after 1784, makes it relatively easy to calculate the amount of tea exported into Belfast from London. Hops, too, came mainly from there, although Worcestershire was a source in 1780 and probably on other occasions as well while beer was imported into Belfast from a number of English sources. However, London porter certainly came in considerable quantities during the second half of the period. It had a very high reputation for quality, and Mathias, in his study of brewing in England, concludes that 'it is not coincidental that, as the London porter breweries grew, so beer imports into Ireland increased, almost all the increased trade being in porter from London'.⁷ By 1790 Samuel Whitbread was selling directly to Irish wholesalers⁸ and his porter had certainly reached Belfast by the beginning of 1792 when it was advertised by the shipbroker, Henry Haslett,⁹ while in May of that year it was being sold by the firm of Tennant Martin.¹⁰ The use of Whitbread's name indicates that his product had been on sale in Belfast long enough to acquire a substantial and enviable reputation for, apart from a solitary reference to Meux's brewery in 1793,¹¹ no other porter is mentioned by name although references to 'London Porter' abound during the 1790s.

The growth in the volume of the London trade led, as a necessary consequence, to more frequent sailings and a more elaborate organisation of the shipping on the route. By the mid 1790s, most of the carriage was in the

7. P.Mathias, The Brewing Industry in England, 1700-1830 (Cambridge, 1959) p.153.

8. ibid. p.156.

9. NS 29 February 1792. It should be noted, however, that it was being sold by name in Dublin in 1776 (SNL 5 July 1776), and in all probability reached Belfast soon after.

10. NS 12 May 1792.

11. NS 9 February 1793.

hands of the two shipping companies known locally as the Old and the New Trades.¹² The gradual increase in the number of sailings over the years made it more attractive for merchants to import directly into Belfast goods which had formerly been imported through Dublin, and full freights outwards from Belfast probably ensured low freight rates on the return journey. As most of the vessels engaged in the trade were owned in Belfast, the benefit of this was likely to be realised to the full.

The principal weakness of the trade route to London was its vulnerability to disruption in wartime. The most usual defence was the adoption of the convoy system, but this caused its own disruption and delay. For example, during the summer of 1777, there were rumours of privateers off the Dublin coast which proved to be all too true,¹³ and representations were quickly made to the Admiralty for the provision of escorts. These were promised within a few days, but it was mid-September before the warships (a 20-gun frigate and a sloop) reached Dublin, and 11 October before the convoy left Belfast.¹⁴ The resulting three months' delay disrupted trade severely, each vessel involved in the trade losing at least one round voyage and the great linen fair at Chester having to be cancelled.¹⁵

By the beginning of the Revolutionary War little had been achieved in the way of reducing delays. Early in August 1793, for example, the Alarm arrived in Belfast Lough with orders to escort the linenships from there to Dublin where they would join the London-bound convoy. However, due to

12. See pp. 88 ff above.

13. BNL 1 July 1777 and subsequent issues.

14. Letter Allen Marler & Co. to Waddell Cunningham, 14 July 1777, reprinted in BNL 18 July 1777 (This London firm of linen merchants made representations to the Admiralty on behalf of the Belfast Shippers); BNL 19 September, 14 October 1777.

15. D. Macpherson, op.cit. iii, p.611.

various delays, it was mid-September before the fleet reached The Downs.¹⁶

Delays were compounded by the enforced infrequency of sailings: as early as May 1793 Henry Haslett wrote in an advertisement of the voyage of the Doris from London to Belfast that 'those who wish to order Heavy Goods by long Sea will do well to forward their orders in time, as the present will probably be the only opportunity for many months'.¹⁷ Even the convoy system did not

dispel apprehensions. In January 1794, for example, rumours swept the town to the effect that a complete linen fleet of seven vessels had fallen into French hands, although these were later proved to be unfounded.¹⁸ In such an

atmosphere, it is not surprising that even during 1793 and 1794, when French privateers were active in the Channel, some shipbrokers became impatient and threatened to sail without the protection of a convoy. However, such threats

were not always carried out. In January 1794, for example, the Susanna was advertised to sail 'with or without convoy'. However, she sailed with a convoy later in the month.¹⁹ More interesting is the case of the Friendship

which in September 1793 was advertised to sail from London without convoy, at an insurance rate of 4%, but which was later noted as being in convoy.²⁰

Indeed, no vessel which advertised that it might run the gauntlet of enemy privateers on its own can be definitely shown to have done so. Two casualties did occur. In July 1796 the Doris was captured off the Isle of Wight and

16. SPO Official Papers 14/11. Letters of Capt. Lewis Robertson (HMS Alarm) to Lord Hobart dated 2 August 1793 (from Carrickfergus), 4 September 1793 (from Dublin), 16 September 1793 (from The Downs).

17. NS 1 May 1793.

18. BNL 24, 28 January 1794.

19. NS 2, 31 January 1794.

20. NS 25 September, 7 November 1793.

brought to Cherbourg, while early in the following year the Adventure also fell victim to an enemy privateer.²¹ However, both vessels were sailing at a time when the risk of capture was thought to be relatively slight, and not in the tense days of 1793-94.

One alternative to the risks of the London voyage during wartime was the consignment of freight through Liverpool, and during both wars there is evidence that many merchants were sending goods overland between London and Liverpool because of uncertainty and the increased costs of transport and insurance on the London voyage. During the American war, for example, James Ferguson, the Belfast linen draper, was using the overland route. In 1778 and 1779 his Liverpool agents were the merchants, Haliday & Bamber, while in 1781 he was sending goods through the firm of Cazneau & Marlin.²² Both firms, incidentally, had strong links with Belfast. William Haliday and Richard Bamber were natives of Belfast,²³ while Hugh Pringle, who was a partner in Cazneau & Marlin, may have been a relation of Margaret Pringle, a widow who held a lease in Ann Street in 1767, as in 1777 he subscribed to the Belfast Charitable Society.²⁴ When war with France broke out in 1793, the Liverpool factors, Hamilton, Graham & Co. almost immediately inserted advertisements in the Newsletter offering to handle trade sent overland between Belfast and London.²⁵ In the other direction, goods normally purchased in London were sent to Liverpool and shipped to Belfast from there. The best indicator in

21. BNL 29 July 1796, 13 February 1797.

22. PRONI D468. Account-Book of James Ferguson, 1771-1784.

23. SPQ Westmorland Co. List of Members of the Northern Whig Club, describes Bamber as 'an Irishman, formerly a Merchant at Liverpool'. He was from Castlehill, near Belfast, as was William Haliday who died in Liverpool in 1796 (BNL 17 October 1796).

24. PRONI Millin Papers T811/2, f.157; BNL 4 August 1778, 22 June 1779.

25. BNL 19 March 1793.

this respect was tea, which had to be sold in London because of the monopoly of the East India Company, and which appears among cargoes arriving at Belfast from Liverpool in both wars. In December 1779, for example, the merchant, Hugh Crawford, was advertising teas purchased at 'the India Sales, and imported through Liverpool, while tea was also among the cargo of the Frances Ann which arrived at Belfast from Liverpool in September 1797.²⁶ The increased importance of Liverpool and the decline of London in wartime may also be seen in the number of sailings to both ports. Normally, voyages to London were about a quarter to a third of those to Liverpool but in wartime the proportion changed drastically; in 1780, for example, there were 36 arrivals from Liverpool recorded in the Newsletter and 22 clearances for thence, and the equivalent London figures are 4 and 2.

Liverpool would seem to have handled a considerably greater quantity of goods than London. In 1769, for example, the Newsletter recorded 31 arrivals and 22 departures in the Liverpool trade compared with 8 and 7 in the London trade, while in 1792, at the end of the growth period of the later 1780s, the equivalent figures are 37 and 33 against 12 and 20. These latter figures show that the London trade grew in importance insofar as the Belfast merchants were concerned at this period, a conclusion which supports the view that the White Linen Hall was primarily concerned with the London trade. However, the vessels used in the Liverpool trade were considerably smaller than those on the London route. In 1785 the three ships regularly engaged in the London trade totalled 550 tons, an average of just over 180 tons each, while the five on the Liverpool run totalled 465 tons, or 93 tons each.²⁷ A few years later, when William Ritchie came to Belfast in 1791, he found that 'the

26. BNL 7 December 1779, 4 September 1797.

27. Dubourdieu, Antrim, pp.520-21.

Liverpool traders consisted of four sloops, each about 80 tons burthen, and the London traders of four brigs of 160 tons'.²⁸

As has been mentioned above, provisions played a much more important role in the Liverpool trade than they did in that with London. In 1769, for example, linen was mentioned in connection with only eight of twenty-two vessels clearing for Liverpool, while butter was mentioned in 15 cases, hides or skins seven times and beef four times. In 1786 the proportion of butter to cloth was similar, being nine against five.

The return trade was also somewhat different from its London counterpart. One of its characteristics was the wide range of products: in 1769, for example, nine inward cargoes from Liverpool were described as 'merchant goods', a term denoting a wide variety of small quantities of commodities. There were also substantial amounts of colonial produce and of the products of the local hinterland, principally salt which came from Cheshire and was used in Belfast for, among other purposes, the preparation of salted meat for the provisions trade. In 1769 it was the sole component of eight cargoes mentioned in the Newsletter, and also formed part of two others: in subsequent years the quantity involved fluctuated broadly in accordance with the fortunes of the provisions trade.²⁹ Other items in the trade were bark and earthenware. The situation was similar in 1792: despite the many changes of the intervening years, rum, sugar and tobacco were still being imported in substantial quantities. It thus appears that Liverpool was one of the principal centres where the Belfast business community supplemented its direct imports of colonial produce.

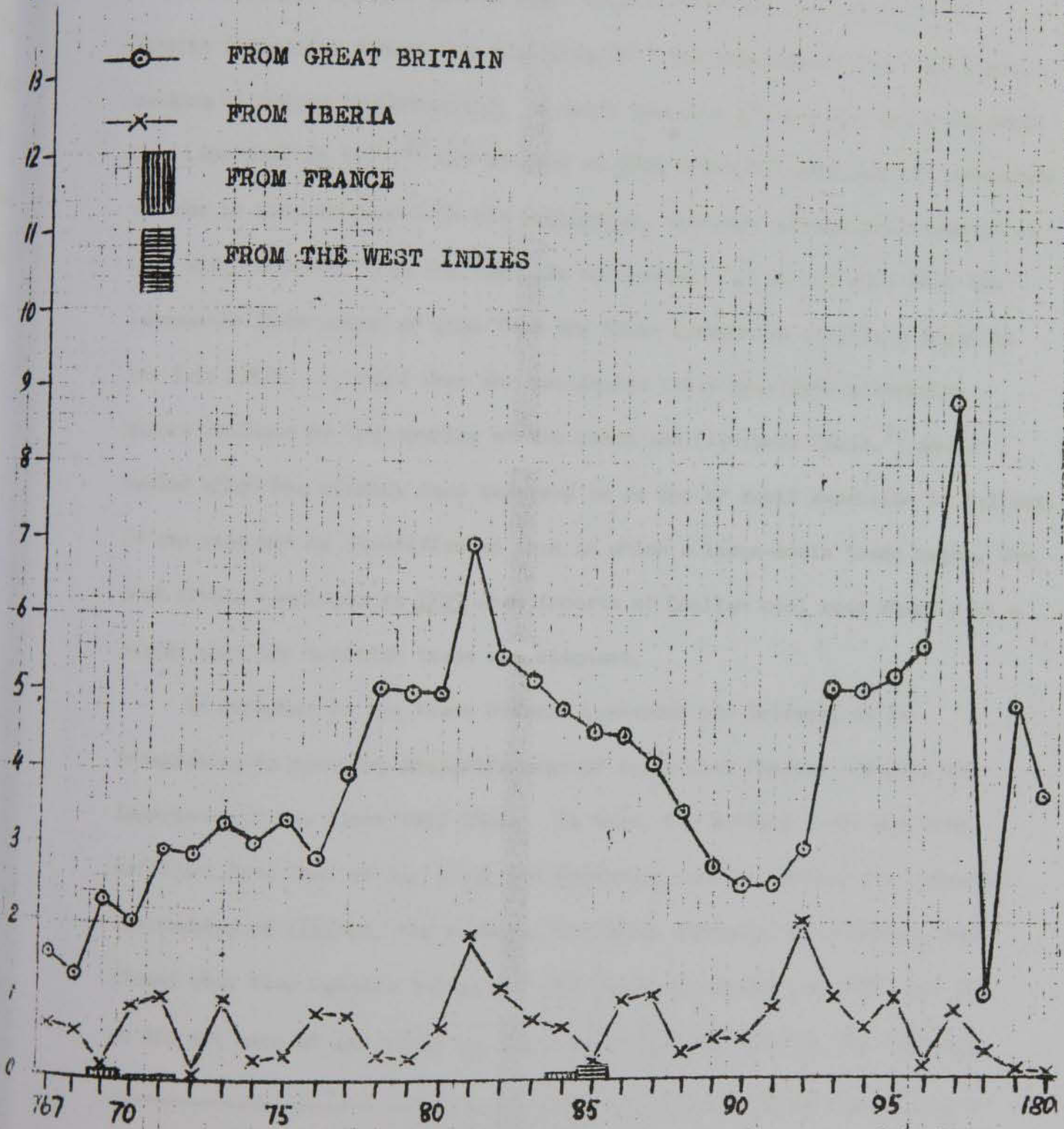
Two items of increasing importance in the Liverpool trade at this period were textiles and coal, both being mentioned in 1792 but not in 1769.

28. Ritchie to Rev. John Dubourdieu, 31 July 1811, in ibid., pp.521-24.

29. See Fig. 16

10⁴ BUSHELS

- — FROM GREAT BRITAIN
- × — FROM IBERIA
- ▨ — FROM FRANCE
- ▨ — FROM THE WEST INDIES



V/E 25-3

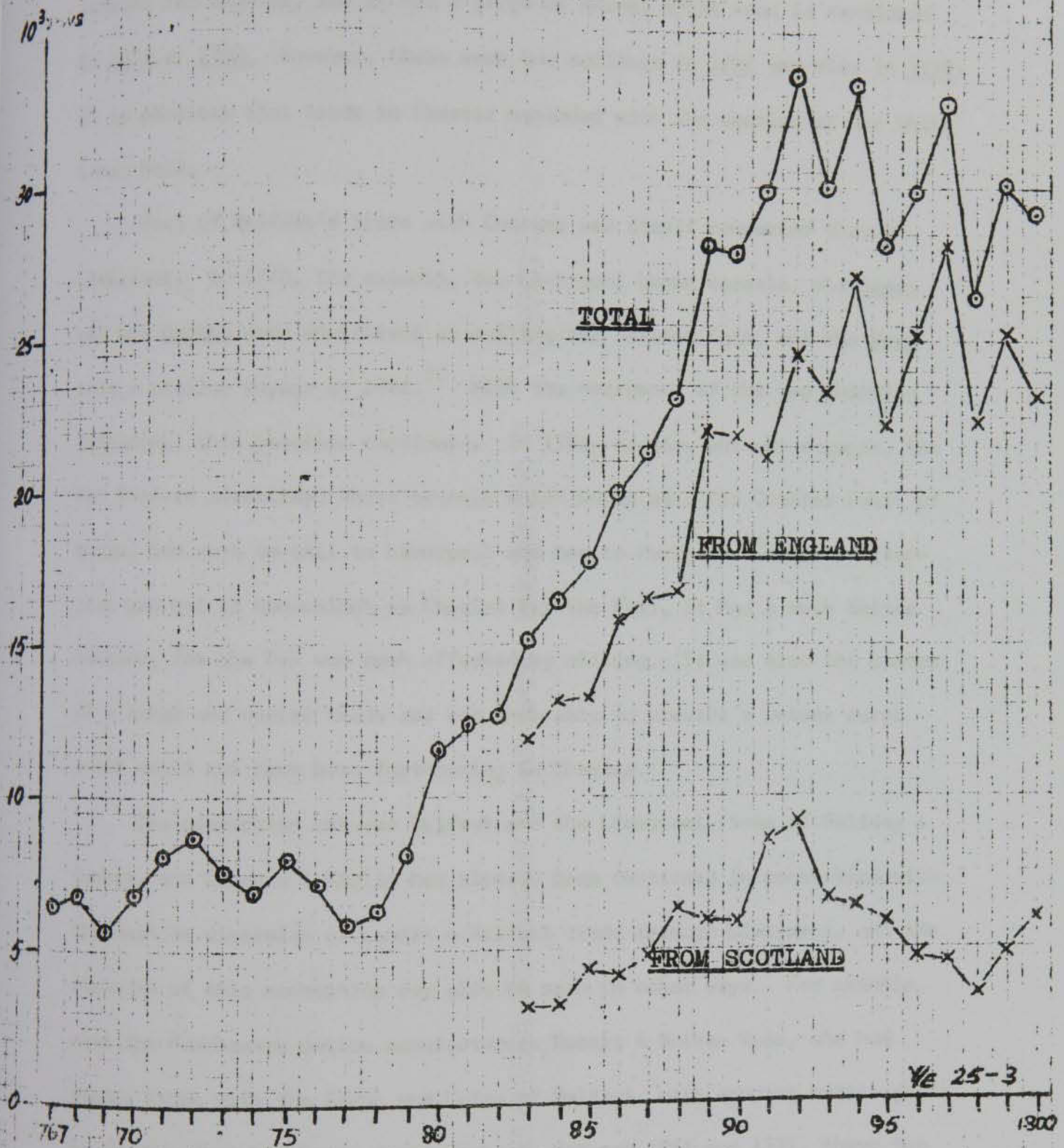
FIG. 16 . IMPORTS OF REFINED SALT INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

Eight cargoes of balegoods, or woollens, are listed during 1792, while they formed a part of eleven others. It seems likely that in earlier years they were classed by the Newsletter in the miscellaneous category of 'merchant goods'. As balegoods were not mentioned elsewhere, it would appear that Liverpool was Belfast's main source for them. The coal trade is also of some interest and its growth would seem to indicate that the town's rapidly increasing demand for coal (Fig. 17) had outstripped its traditional sources of supply in Cumberland. A small quantity of coal was being imported from Liverpool in 1775,³⁰ but as late as 1786 Liverpool coal was not mentioned by name in advertisements in the Newsletter, although considerable quantities were being obtained from the Ayrshire collieries. It is probable that the largescale importation of coal from the South Lancashire coalfield began in the late 1780s, a period when the collieries there developed a thriving export business by the opening of the Leeds and Liverpool canal,³¹ and a period which has already been referred to as one of rapid expansion in Belfast. If one year can be identified as that in which a large-scale trade began, the most likely candidate is 1789 when imports of English coal rose sharply at a period when the Scottish trade was stagnant.

In contrast to the trade between Liverpool and Belfast, it is interesting to note the insignificance of trade with Chester, despite the importance of the linen fair there. In this, the Belfast trade was very different from that of its rival and neighbour, Newry. During the Linenhall controversy of 1782-83, for example, the Newry merchant, John Nevill, mentioned that five vessels had sailed from there to Chester in 1782, but that he did not know of any which had gone there from Belfast for the previous

30. PRO CUST 1/130, f.122, 6 March 1775.

31. F.E.Hyde, Liverpool and the Mersey: an Economic History of a Port, 1700-1970 (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp.29-31; L.M.Cullen, op.cit. pp.84-85.



VE 25-3

FIG. 17 . IMPORTS OF COAL INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

seven years.³² These remarks are borne out by an examination of the Newsletter's shipping lists. During 1769, only one vessel was recorded as leaving for Chester, and it had a cargo of skins, while none is mentioned in 1774 or 1780. However, there were two sailings in 1786 and five in 1792: it is possible that trade to Chester expanded with the opening of the White Linen Hall.

Most of Belfast's trade with Chester was itself conducted through Liverpool. In 1770, for example, two Liverpool bound vessels, the Nancy and the Martha were advertised as sailing for Chester Fair, and the Mary made a similar voyage in 1782.³³ With the emergence of the two shipping companies, this practice continued. In 1795, to give but one example, the New Traders advertised three vessels which would sail for Chester Fair: of these, two were to sail to Liverpool and one to Parkgate.³⁴ While Liverpool was not as convenient as Chester for the Fair, it had a much better harbour, for the Dee was much affected by silting. It was also the centre of a large and varied trade and was thus able to provide a return cargo which would not have been forthcoming in Chester.

The connection between Belfast and the Liverpool firms of Haliday & Bamber, and Cazneau & Marlin has already been mentioned in connection with the wartime diversion of London - Belfast trade through Liverpool, and the strength of this connection may also be seen in other ways. For example, when the Manchester cotton manufacturers Robert & Nathan Hyde, who had strong links with the Gregs and Hydes of Belfast, were sending cotton goods to the New York merchant, James Beckman, between 1767 and 1771, these two

32. BNL 31 January 1783.

33. BNL, 12, 29 June 1770, 21 June 1782.

34. NS 28 September 1775.

firms were the only ones mentioned as Liverpool agents and shippers.³⁵

Liverpool's connections with the colonies were exceptionally strong, and one activity of such firms as Haliday and Bamber may have been the purchase of the large quantities of colonial produce (principally sugar but also rum and tobacco) which were sent from Liverpool to Belfast, even after the trade relaxations of 1780, and which supplemented the direct trade between the colonies and Belfast.

Much of the activity of Liverpool merchants in the Belfast trade, however, was brokerage. By the late 1770s Belfast businessmen were ordering many goods directly from English suppliers whom they frequently visited to make personal purchases. This direct trade received a tremendous boost with the growth of the cotton industry, for much of its supply of yarn came from the Manchester area. By 1800, the Liverpool trade was largely one with the hinterland of the town, although much of the provisions sent there may have found their way into the colonial trade, either as reexports or victuals.

Belfast also had strong trading links with the Upper Clyde. Unlike the London and Liverpool trades, this trade was not centred on a single port, but on a group of ports of which the most important was Greenock, but which also included Glasgow and Port Glasgow. This was because of the difficult navigational problems involved in making the passage to Glasgow with a large vessel, and most of the items sent to the Clyde were probably destined for Glasgow or its hinterland, but had to be transhipped at a port

35. P.L.White (ed) The Beckman Mercantile Papers 1746-1799 (New York, 1956) ii, pp.835-43 (Robert and Nathan Hyde to James Beckman, 8 July 1767, Hugh Pringle to James Beckman, 27 July 1767, William Haliday & Co. to James Beckman, 20 April 1771).

lower down the Clyde.³⁶

In 1769 the Newsletter recorded two departures for Glasgow, nine for Greenock and two for Port Glasgow, the products involved being principally provisions. Linen was mentioned only once which would seem to indicate that it played an insignificant role in the trade, and it must be realised that the Scottish linen industry was large and well organised at this period.³⁷ In the other direction, the same year saw twelve arrivals at Belfast from Greenock, four from Port Glasgow and two from Glasgow, the commodities involved being principally colonial produce, principally tobacco, for Glasgow was the principal supplier of tobacco to Belfast. By the 1770s some Glasgow tobacco merchants, not content to supply Belfast with leaf tobacco, were specialising as manufacturers and exporters of roll tobacco, and prominent among them was the house of Wilson Brown & Co., who had a substantial trade not only with Belfast, but also with Dublin and Newry.³⁸ Even when direct imports of tobacco were permitted after 1780, Glasgow merchants remained substantial suppliers of Belfast's tobacco needs for despite initial hopes, the United States never succeeded in supplying all the tobacco used in the town.

36. In 1755 the depth of water in Glasgow at low tide was only 15 in, and during the 1770s, under 10 Geo III c.104, an Act for deepening the Upper Clyde from Port Glasgow to Glasgow, considerable improvements were made which enabled an increasing number of ships to reach Glasgow (H.Hamilton, An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford 1963) pp.218-20). Before the improvements were made goods were mainly landed at Greenock on account of Glasgow merchants. Devine, in examining the Glasgow tobacco trade, used as evidence the import figures for Greenock and Port Glasgow (T.M.Devine, Glasgow Merchants and the Collapse of the Tobacco Trade 1775-1783 in Sc. Hist.Rev. LII (1973) p.50). It is interesting to note that Robert Reid ('Senex') was not able to find a sailing from Glasgow to Ireland advertised in the press before 1784 ('Senex', Glasgow Past and Present (Glasgow 1884) iii, p.430).

37. See A.Slaven, The Development of the West of Scotland 1750-1960 (London 1975) pp.80-81; H.Hamilton, op.cit. pp.141-153.

38. T.M.Devine, loc.cit. p.64

By 1780 the scale of the trade was virtually unchanged, twelve clearances for Greenock being recorded in the Newsletter, and one to Glasgow, this latter being a vessel in ballast. The twelve Greenock sailings carried cargoes of provisions, cloth being mentioned as forming part of one cargo. In the opposite direction, there were thirteen arrivals in Belfast from Greenock, two from Port Glasgow and one from Glasgow. This last carried a cargo of bottles, the glassworks in the Clyde supplying much of Belfast's needs even when the town's own glass industry developed during the 1780s.³⁹ Of the other sailings, tobacco comprised ten cargoes, sugar two and rum one.

Linen played a small part in the trade during the 1770s. In 1777, for example, John Andrews of Comber sent at least two shipments to Glasgow on vessels bound for Greenock. His experience seems to demonstrate that the trade became increasingly less profitable⁴⁰ for he eventually gave it up in 1784, claiming that he had lost money by it for the previous four years. These years were, of course depressed ones in the trade, but there is no evidence that he ever returned to it although he promised one of his Glasgow correspondents, George Miller & Co., that he would resume business with them when the market recovered.⁴¹ However, when trade picked up again shortly afterwards he continued to concentrate his efforts in the Dublin and London markets. Nevertheless, it would appear that more entered the trade than left it, and exports to Scotland rose rapidly during the 1780s and early 1790s, in contrast to the apparently low level of consignments in

39. In 1791, for example, 12,249 lbs of bottle glass was exported to Belfast through Port Glasgow (A.Fleming, Scottish and Jacobite Glass (Glasgow, 1938) p.165).

40. Possibly because of the American War. Hamilton has shown (op.cit. p.263) that most of the linen exported from Ireland to Scotland was reexported to America before the Revolution.

41. Outward Letter-Book of John Andrews, 23 December 1776 to 22 December 1786. Andrews to Robert Rainey, Glasgow, 28 July 1777, the same to Miller, 10 September 1777, 26 April 1784.

the 1760s and 1770s. The Upper Clyde was one of the areas to which the 'Old Traders' organised vessels.⁴² The relatively short voyage meant that the one or two ships regularly employed could make seven or eight round journeys each year, although they did not concentrate on linen, taking any traffic which might offer. Besides linen, oatmeal was another commodity which was sent to the Upper Clyde. The trade was purely speculative and depended upon the coincidence of a surplus in Ireland with a shortfall in Scottish production. In May 1768, for example, the Ayr firm of Oliphant & Co. were selling oatmeal in Greenock on behalf of the Belfast merchants, Galen Thomson & Co.⁴³ and in 1785 a firm of Greenock merchants were regularly employing a vessel in the trade between there and Belfast although it was firmly believed by the Irish customs authorities that it was in fact a cloak for smuggling.⁴⁴

By 1792 there had been a very considerable increase in the scale of the Clyde trade. In that year at least twelve vessels cleared Belfast for Greenock. Details of seven of the cargoes are known, and significantly, linen features in three of them. However, it is the cargoes arriving at Belfast which are of most significance. Eleven of these were from Greenock, and no less than nine from Glasgow, a dramatic increase reflecting the improvements in the condition of the Upper Clyde. The trade had also apparently diversified as two of the Glasgow vessels and one from Greenock carried coal. Some of this may have been anthracite as early as 1781, John Mitchell, a Belfast coal merchant, was advertising 'Glasgow Blind Coal'

42. e.g. BNL, 25 January 1785.

43. NLI Letterbook of A.Oliphant & Co. (Mic.P3988), Oliphant to Galen Thomson & Co., 5 May 1768.

44. PRO CUST 1/180 f.38 (19 November 1785).

for sale,⁴⁵ while the opening of the Monkland Canal in 1790 greatly eased the transport problems of the coalmining districts west of Glasgow by providing them with direct access to the sea.⁴⁶ The failure of the Belfast glassworks to satisfy the local demand for bottles⁴⁷ is evident in 1792 by the arrival of at least four shiploads of them from Glasgow. There was also a small traffic in linens from Scotland into Ireland, principally in lawns and kentings. It rarely exceeded 30,000 yds annually, and came from Ayrshire as well as the Upper Clyde ports. However, during the 1780s there may have been hopes of extending it, as in 1783 William Wilson, a Belfast coal and tobacco merchant, was appointed agent to an unnamed 'extensive Glasgow manufactory'.⁴⁸ It was not his usual line of business and nothing more is known of the venture, but his agency probably reflects his contacts with Glasgow merchants through the tobacco trade.

The Clyde, Liverpool and London were the principal places with which the Belfast business community traded. However, Bristol, Whitehaven and the Ayrshire ports of Irvine, Ayr and Saltcoats may be seen as forming a second order of centres distinguished from the first group principally by having a considerably smaller number of sailings. In 1769, six ships were recorded as arriving at Belfast from Bristol, and four as leaving for that port. The products exported were linen and provisions, those imported being apparently assorted in nature as four cargoes were described as 'goods'. In both the others, glass was mentioned and considerable amounts

45. BNL 31 July 1781.

46. H. Hamilton, The Industrial Revolution in Scotland (Oxford, 1932) p.234.

47. See pp. 396-97 below.

48. BM 5 August 1783.

of Bristol glassware were imported into Belfast, a fact which becomes all the more interesting when the link in style between the products of the Bristol industry and the Belfast glasshouses is considered.⁴⁹ Some West Indian produce was also imported as sugar was mentioned as forming part of one cargo. The details given of the arrivals at Belfast from Bristol in 1780 reveal more clearly the more miscellaneous nature of the goods imported from Bristol and it would seem that they were largely the products of the Severn Valley, such as hops, iron and cider. In 1786 cider is mentioned in three of the four arrivals and lead shot is mentioned once, and in all three known arrivals in 1792.

For many years much of the Bristol trade was in the hands of the Callwell family. As early as 1756, Richard Callwell was in business as a merchant in Bristol, while his brother, Robert, traded from Belfast,⁵⁰ and in 1785 Robert's son, Robert, in partnership with his cousin, William Magee, opened a retail business in Bridge Street, Belfast, which specialised in cider, cheeses and Bristol porter.⁵¹ It would seem to have been formed because of the family's strong links with Bristol as they owned a ship, the Margaret which was employed on the Bristol route until it was lost in a storm off Dundrum, Co. Down, in March 1786.⁵² However, in 1792 the 'New Traders' announced that they were opening a new route to Bristol with the agreement of six major importers of linens there,⁵³ and the 'Old Traders' had been sending vessels there since the opening of the Linen Hall. It

49. See pp. 393-94 below.

50. NLI P4069 (Greg & Cunningham Letter Book, Cunningham to Richard Callwell, 22 June 1756).

51. BNL 1 July 1785.

52. Bigger, Magees, p.24.

53. NS 2 June 1792.

would thus seem that the linen trade between Belfast and Bristol had grown to a considerable size by the end of the 1780s.

The trade with the various ports along the coast of Cumberland was very different in nature to that with Bristol, and there is no evidence of any Belfast man settling there as merchant, although one Whitehaven family, the Martins, were related by marriage to the Joy and Ellis families in Belfast,⁵⁴ and in 1773, when the American emigration from Ulster was at its height, they attempted to establish a linen manufactory at Whitehaven, and hoped to staff it with Ulster weavers.⁵⁵ Among their Belfast agents at least one, Samuel Ashmore, was importing rum from Whitehaven in 1776,⁵⁶ and would thus seem to have had close ties with the town.

The principal items in the trade with Cumberland, however, were coal and tobacco. Tobacco was the most important constituent of the Whitehaven trade which, at the beginning of the period, was the most uni-directional of all the trades which have been examined so far. In 1769, for example, only two sailings were recorded in the Newsletter from Belfast to Whitehaven, while twelve were recorded in the other direction. Tobacco was involved in each case, while coal was a component of the cargo on seven voyages and presumably came from the Lowther collieries near the town. As was the case in the trade to the Clyde, only a small tonnage of shipping was required to handle the trade as each vessel could make a large number of round trips. In 1768, for example, at least seven return voyages were made by one ship, the Mary Ann, which remained on the route for many years.⁵⁷

54. LHL Joy MSS 10/11.

55. BNL 29 June, 9 July 1773. The Martins' other agents were Archibald Hyndman and Alexander Orr.

56. PRO CUST 1/152 f.136 (8 January 1780).

57. The apparent contradiction between the statement that the two voyages were recorded from Belfast to Whitehaven, and the seven round voyages of the Mary Ann may be explained if we see some of these voyages as being made in ballast. In most cases, the Newsletter did not mention clearances in ballast.

However, by the beginning of the period Whitehaven's tobacco trade was already in decline, and this is reflected by a decline in shipping activity on the route, the trade failing to recover from the disruption caused by the American War of Independence.⁵⁸ However the trade also became more balanced as the provisions trade from Belfast grew during the 1770s, and in 1780 six ships cleared Belfast for Whitehaven with cargoes. Four carried provisions and two linens although the cargoes were in reality probably an admixture of both. In the other direction, only five arrivals are mentioned, four being described in the Newsletter as carrying tobacco and one tobacco and coals. By 1786 still further decline was evident, only one arrival and two clearances being recorded, and no appreciable quantity being apparently imported.

The decline of the tobacco trade meant that Whitehaven had little or nothing else to offer the Belfast merchants except coal, and Belfast's needs were principally met from the nearby Curwen collieries at Workington. The principal evidence for this assertion is to be found in the January 1779 issues of the Newsletter. Normally the arrival and departures of colliers were recorded at the foot of the 'Port-News' section as so many colliers arrived and cleared, no origin or destination being stated. However, during that month, Workington was mentioned as the port of origin of all arriving colliers, and this evidence is supported by the many references over the years to vessels from Workington in the trade.

Most of the colliers returned in ballast, although some would manage to find cargoes of various kinds. In 1777, John Andrews of Comber wrote that 'there are Vessels almost daily leaving Belfast for Whitehaven, Workington etc.' and that these greatly eased the problems of shipping

58. See J.E. Williams, Whitehaven in the Eighteenth Century, in Econ. Hist. Rev., 2nd ser. VIII (1956) pp.400-402.

linen to the North of England,⁵⁹ No doubt their masters were only too glad to accept any freight which might come their way on what was normally an unprofitable voyage.⁶⁰ In that year Andrews himself was sending cloth through Workington to Newcastle-upon-Tyne,⁶¹ while in December 1779 the Agnes & Betty is mentioned in the Newsletter as sailing for Workington with a cargo of hides.⁶² Another Workington vessel to receive mention in the press was the Delight which was lost at Grey Point on its return journey in February 1795.⁶³

The trade in coal from Workington and Whitehaven was supplemented by that with other towns in Cumberland, although the evidence suggests that it was on a much smaller scale. One of these ports was Maryport through which John Andrews was conducting his Newcastle trade in 1779, while three years later he was using it for linen destined for Dumfries.⁶⁴ More evidence for a trade with Maryport comes from the wreck of the collier, Bridekirk, on the Briggs, a treacherous reef at Donaghadee, in December 1787 with the loss of all her crew as she was on a voyage from Maryport to Belfast.⁶⁵ Some trade may also have existed between Belfast and Harrington as the coal merchants, Clarke & McDowell, announced in April 1791 that they had a stock of Harrington coal,⁶⁶ and in the following January the Friends was listed

59. Letter-book of John Andrews, 23 December 1776 to 22 December 1786.
Andrews to Christopher Smyth, Stockton-on-Tees, 19 February 1777.

60. The scale of the trade can be seen in the fact that the Newsletter mentions 232 arrivals of colliers in Belfast during 1792.

61. Letter-book of John Andrews, 23 December 1776 to 22 December 1786.
Andrews to Stephens & Lambert, Newcastle, 10 September 1777.

62. BNL 14 December 1779.

63. NS 9 February 1795.

64. Letter-book of John Andrews, 23 December 1776 to 22 December 1786.
Andrews to Isaac Woodville, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 30 September 1779,
to Robert Donald, Dumfries, 26 January 1782.

65. BNL 18 December 1787.

66. BNL 26 April 1791.

in the Newsletter as sailing for that port.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, no details of her cargo are known, but any westbound cargo almost certainly consisted of coal.

As has been mentioned above, Belfast's rapidly increasing need for coal resulted in the development of a trade between the town and the Lancashire coalfield. However, even before this trade developed, the various collieries along the Ayrshire coast were being resorted to in order to supplement the town's principal source of coal in the Cumberland coalfield, and there was a regular trade throughout the period with that region of Scotland. This was conducted principally with the ports of Ayr, Irvine and Saltcoats. During the late 1760s Irvine was the most important of the three ports, four or five sailings being recorded annually. In 1769 there were seven sailings from Belfast to Irvine as compared with only one to and from Ayr and none from Saltcoats. By 1774, however, there had been a change in the relative importance of the two ports and six vessels were recorded in the Newsletter as arriving from Ayr and none from Irvine, although four cleared for there and only two for Ayr. In 1780 there were three sailings to Irvine, but no recorded arrivals from either port, while in 1786 one vessel cleared to each port, while two arrived from Irvine.

The goods exported to Scotland were principally linen and skins: in 1769, for example, linen was mentioned as forming part of the cargo of five of the seven sailings to Irvine, and skins and hides in four: some oats and flaxseed were also exported. In 1774 the products mentioned were skins, tallow, oatmeal and butter. No mention is made of linen; in 1780 and in

67. BNL 24 January 1792. The Friends was not listed as arriving at Belfast during the previous month. However 'colliers' were not usually listed individually in the Newsletter.

1786 the items mentioned were hides and cloth. In the early part of the period the bulk of the trade was an export one: one of the four arrivals from Irvine in 1769, for example, was in ballast, although some coal was imported. In 1770, for example, at least one collier was lost when engaged in the trade,⁶⁸ and in 1774 coal was mentioned in the Newsletter, as well as some timber and rum. The coal trade continued throughout the decade: in 1779, for example, Thoburn and Munfoad were selling Kilmarnock coal (the type exported through Irvine) at their limekiln and saltworks in Waring Street.⁶⁹ By 1786 the trade seems to have evolved into one in kentings and linens, as well as coal.

While Ayr was apparently overshadowed in importance by Irvine during the late 1760s, a surviving letter-book of Oliphants, a firm of Ayr merchants, shows that between 1706 and 1768 they had close links with the Belfast house of Galen Thomson & Co.⁷⁰ Oliphants specialised in the wine trade and in 1766 their vessel the Brittain was used to bring a cargo of wine from Bordeaux to Belfast,⁷¹ where it was stored and later forwarded in small quantities to Ayr. The wine had incidentally been purchased from John Black, a Belfast merchant resident in Bordeaux. Other letters in Oliphant's correspondence show that some Belfast merchants, such as Thomas Bateson, were supplementing their direct imports of rum with purchases in the Clyde ports, and were financing their purchases with sales of oatmeal.⁷² In 1767-68, for example, Oliphants were acting as agents in this trade on behalf of Galen Thomson. The trade was purely speculative in nature: on one occasion in

68. BNL 13 November 1770.

69. BNL 10 December 1779; B.F. Duckham. A History of the Scottish Coal Industry, Vol.1 (1700-1815), (Newton Abbot 1970), p.205.

70. NLI Microfilm P3988.

71. Above: Oliphant to Captain of Brittain, 18 October 1766.

72. Above: the same to Thomas Bateson, 14 November 1767.

1767 they had to send it to Whitehaven,⁷³ and in May 1768 it had to be shipped to Greenock to find a market.⁷⁴ They were also engaged in purchasing grain and butter in Ireland. In 1767 they sent an agent, Mungo Brown, to purchase barley and in 1770 he was once again in Ireland, this time to purchase butter. In both cases his financial needs were met by Galen Thomson.⁷⁵ Oliphants also had trading contacts with the Belfast firm of Blacks Murray & Co., the Blacks of which were brothers of John Black of Bordeaux, and these contacts continued after Blacks Murray & Co. transferred their operations to Dublin in 1769.

The coal trade between Ayrshire and Belfast was for many years overshadowed in scale by that from the Cumberland coalfields. However, as Belfast's appetite for coal increased during the 1780s, imports of Scottish coal steadily increased and evidence suggests that much of this came from the Ayrshire field. The Statistical Account of Scotland, in its memoir of Newton-upon-Ayr, which was written in 1792, records that the coal industry there was revived in 1786 and that over 300 vessels loaded at Ayr each year for Ireland, the principal destinations being Dublin, Larne and Belfast.⁷⁶ In 1794 William Ritchie was promoting the sale in Belfast of coal from Robert Cunningham's colliery at Saltcoats, although it is likely that trade with that port was then very small indeed as the advertisement in the News-letter was at pains to point out the advantages of the port, comparisons being made with Ayr and Irvine,⁷⁷ although Saltcoats had had a coal trade with Ireland since the beginning of the century.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, by this

73. Above: the same to Galen Thomson & Co., 19 June 1767.

74. Above: the same to the same, 5 May 1768.

75. Above: the same to the same, 15 December 1767, 19 September 1770.

76. J. Sinclair (ed). The Statistical Account of Scotland drawn up from the Communications of the Ministers of the Different Parishes (Edinburgh, 1792) ii, pp.270-272.

77. BNL 7 July 1794.

78. Sinclair, op.cit., vii, p.19 (Memoir of Stevenston Parish).

time imports of Scottish coal had entered a steady decline which continued until 1798 (Fig. 17), and it is thus likely that it was of lower quality or more expensive than its English counterpart.

In addition with the trade with the ports mentioned above, many vessels arrived in Belfast from the numerous small ports along the west coast of the British Isles. Herrings were imported in large quantities from a number of ports on the Scottish west coast: at least nine boats arrived from this area in 1769 as well as one from the Isle of Man and this was not a particularly prosperous year in the trade (Fig. 18). These vessels were probably very small. The average cargo contained less than eighty barrels, and in 1776 the trade reached approximately five times its volume of 1769. The subsequent decline was caused by the growth of the Rosses fishery in which Belfast merchants were involved to a considerable extent. However, from about 1784, it declined as quickly as it arose⁷⁹ and imports of Scottish herrings resumed in the late 1780s. As can be seen from Fig. 19 about a tenth of Scottish herring exports after 1788 went to Belfast, although the percentage declined somewhat as exports rose rapidly at the end of the century. Nevertheless by 1800 Scottish herrings dominated the Belfast market, largely because of the effect of the Revolutionary Wars which cut off the town's supply of Swedish herrings.

Herrings formed the mainstay of trade with the Scottish highlands and the Western Isles, supplemented by a traffic in other commodities such as kelp, bark and timber. In 1769, for example, two cargoes of kelp were imported from Islay and one from Barra, as well as two from Campbletown on the Mull of Kintyre. The kelp would have been used in the making of soap and tallow as well as in the linen bleaching industry where it was seen by

79. See pp. 109-10 below, also J. McParlan Statistical Survey of the County of Donegal (Dublin 1802), p. 72; D. MacPherson, op. cit., III, p. 725.

10³ BARRELS

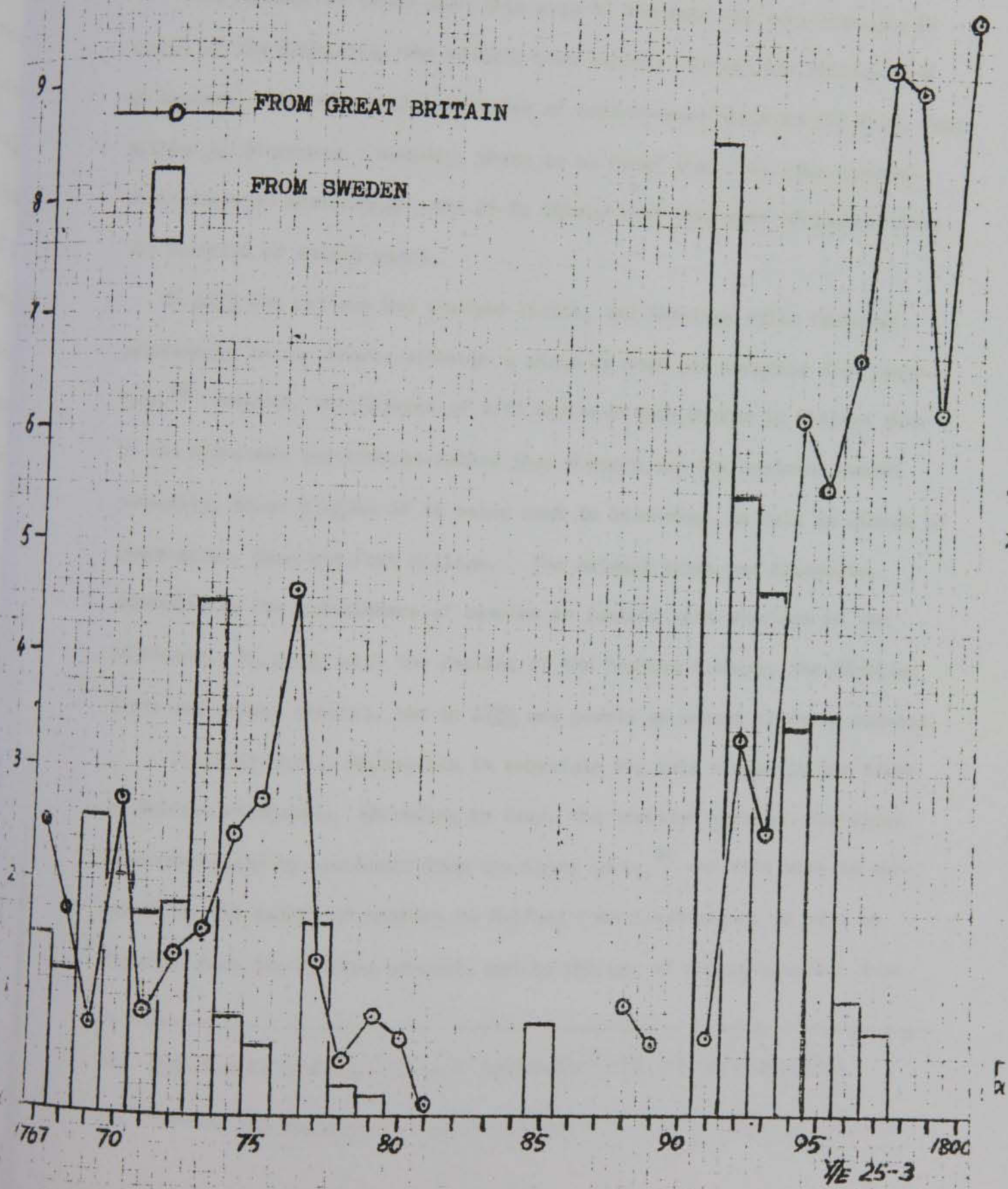


FIG. 18 . IMPORTS OF HERRINGS INTO BELFAST FROM SWEDEN AND GREAT BRITAIN, 1767 - 1800

1/E 25-3

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many bleachers as an efficient and locally available bleaching agent. Some timber was also brought to Belfast from the forests of Western Scotland, one vessel arriving from Lough Fyne, while another arrived from Fort William with a cargo of slates, and oak bark was imported from Moidant and Islay.

The balance of trade with this area of Scotland was very strongly in favour of the Highlands, the vessels used normally making the journey home in ballast, although small quantities of tobacco were declared for Skye, Fort William or Stornoway. However, there is no proof that they ever reached their supposed destination, and it is likely that they were offloaded along the Scottish or Antrim coast.

In 1774 the pattern had changed little, and herrings still featured prominently in the trade, although a cargo of bark was imported from Lough-fyne.⁸⁰ However, the harvest of 1773 had been much better in Ireland than in the Highlands and oatmeal rather than tobacco was the dominant export commodity, three cargoes of it being sent to Stornoway, as well as others to Campbletown, Oban and Fort William. The oatmeal trade was spasmodic, depending on the coincidence of surplus in Ireland with shortage in the Highlands. By 1780, with the decline of the herring fishery, the Highland trade was almost extinct, and in 1786 was purely an export trade in oatmeal.

It is virtually impossible to ascertain the role played in the trade by Belfast merchants. According to Gray, the Scottish herring fisheries were controlled by merchants from the Clyde ports,⁸¹ and this view is supported by the export of herring to Belfast from Campbletown, as well as directly from the fishing grounds, and by the use of Scottish rather than

80. BNL 5 June, 26 August, 9, 16, 23 September 1769, 24 February 1769.

81. M. Gray, The Highland Economy 1750-1850 (Edinburgh, 1957), pp. 109-24.

Irish ships in the trade. Another indication would be the participation of Belfast merchants in the Donegal fisheries which might suggest that they had not invested in the Scottish fisheries, although, as Gray has shown, there were Irishmen among those who took leases on the Scottish kelp shores.⁸² Evidence also exists for a regular trade in raw hides from Belfast to Newtondouglas in Dumfrieshire during the 1790s⁸³ At the Belfast end this was in the hands of Hugh McElwaine, a merchant who specialised in the trade. His Scottish correspondents were the firm of Anthony McCaa of Newtondouglas, and it is of course probable that McElwaine was also dealing with other centres. He had been engaged in the hide and skin business since at least 1776,⁸⁴ and it is likely that the trade had been in existence since then. There is, however, no evidence of its continuance after McElwaine's death in 1796. Indeed, one of the last letters in the surviving correspondence hints that the trade was in some difficulty because cattle were being increasingly exported live.⁸⁵

Belfast also had a regular Welsh trade, and this bore many similarities to the Scottish trade. It largely involved the import of low value, bulky essentials such as tanners' bark and slates which were the products of the hinterlands of the ports involved. There was little which the Belfast merchants could supply in exchange, and many of the vessels involved returned in ballast. The principal commodities, bark and slates, came from different areas. The bark came principally from a number of small ports in the southern half of Wales, of which Chepstow was the most important, and was conducted

82. *ibid*, p.130.

83. PRONI L'Estrange & Brett MSS D1905/2/31, McElwaine to McCaa correspondence 1794 to 1796.

84. *BNL* 23 April 1776.

85. PRONI D1905/2/31. McElwaine to McCaa, 13 November 1796.

by factors in the ports who acted on behalf of the bark producers, although in the 1790s some Newry merchants had formed a company with the aim of sending their own agents to Britain to purchase supplies and so hopefully obtain a higher quality of bark, as well as a greater regularity in delivery.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, no evidence exists as to whether or not similar moves were made or contemplated by their Belfast counterparts. In 1769 six vessels arrived at Belfast from Chepstow, two in September 1768 and two more in January and also in March 1769, indicating that shipments were being made in substantial quantities.⁸⁷ Ten ships arrived during 1774, and these were supplemented by arrivals from North Wales and Liverpool. Although the demand for bark increased rapidly over the years, Chepstow's role in the bark trade declined as supplies of bark in its vicinity became exhausted. In 1780 and 1786 only two ships arrived from there and the area from which supplies were drawn expanded to include such ports as Llanelli, Gloucester and Aberystwyth in the south and Beaumaris and Chester in the north, as well as more distant ports such as Liverpool and the Scottish Highlands.⁸⁸ Finally, imports of foreign bark were permitted in 1788 but imports were not made in substantial quantities until 1791 (Fig. 20).

While the principal source of bark was to be found in South Wales, slates came from the west and north of Wales. In 1769, for example, eight vessels arrived from Fishguard and one from Cardigan. The trade was thus

86. T.Wallace, An Essay on the Manufactures of Ireland (Dublin 1798), p.272.

87. BNL 6, 27 September 1768, 24 January, 14 March 1769.

88. A petition of the tanners of Co.Fermanagh to the House of Commons mentions a serious shortage of bark in 1785 and claims that the tanners were only saved from ruin by exceptionally cold weather which prevented hides from rotting (Parl.Reg.VI, p.259, 10 March 1786). The previous month Belfast tanners had been among those who had petitioned Parliament seeking permission to import foreign bark and asking for a bounty on the planting of oak trees in Ireland (ibid pp.179-80), 15 February 1786).

10³ BARRELS

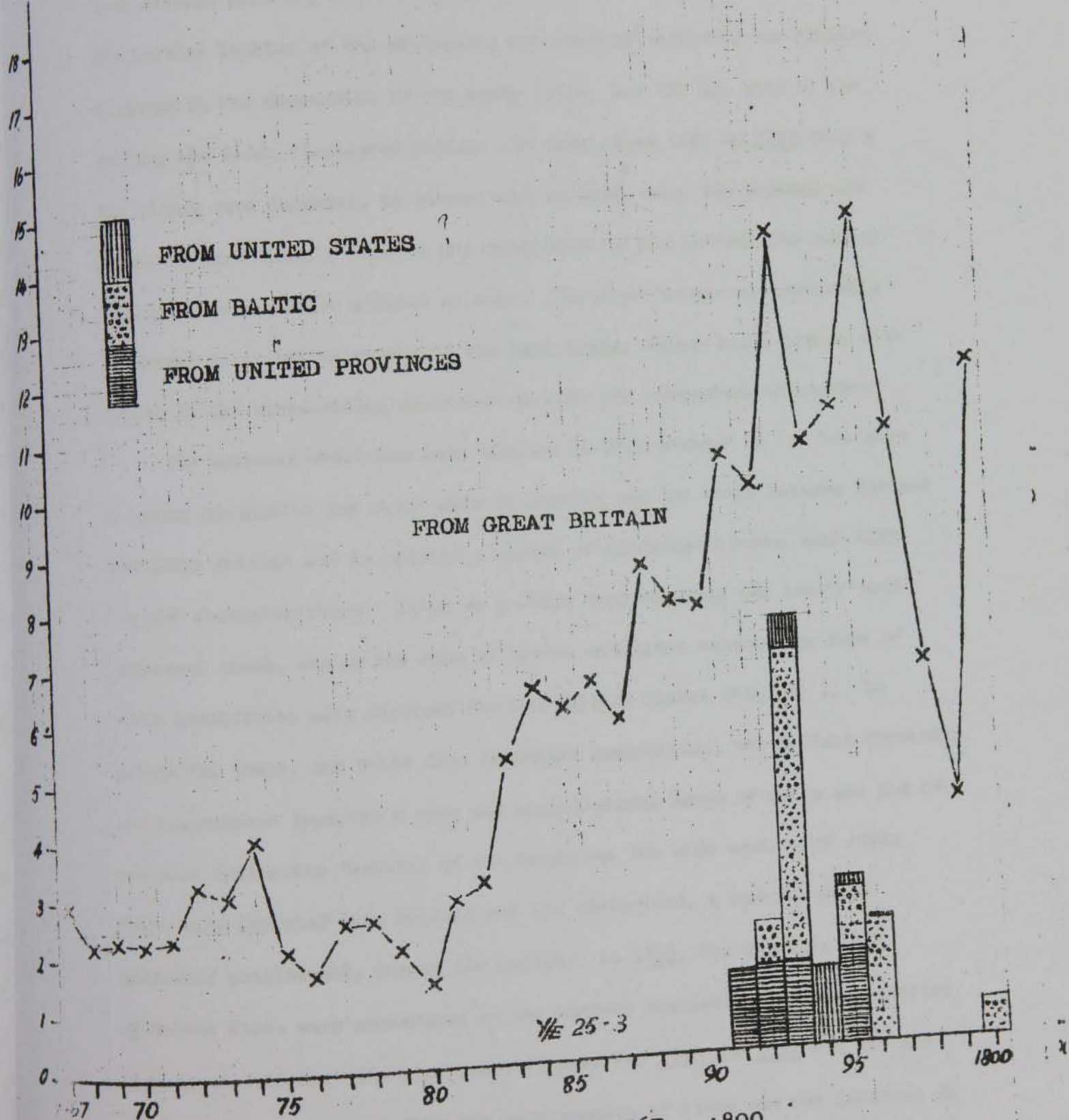


FIG. 20 . IMPORTS OF BARK INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

being conducted on a substantial scale at this period. It was however dependent directly on the prosperity of the building industry, and there was much new housing construction in progress at this time in the aftermath of the re-leasing of 1767. In 1774 the figure was substantially lower, only five vessels arriving from Fishguard and one from Cardigan. By this time the initial impetus of the re-leasing was over and building was further hindered by the depression of the early 1770s, and for the rest of the century the trade fluctuated wildly. In some years such as 1780 only a few slates were imported, in others such as 1786, when the economy was expanding more rapidly than at any other time in the period, the number increased to a quarter million or more. The slate trade was presumably organised in a similar manner to the bark trade, orders being placed with agents in the slate-mining districts or with the mineowners themselves.

The approach which has been adopted in this chapter so far has been a rather disjointed one which aims at showing how the trade between Belfast and Great Britain was in reality a number of different trades, each with its own characteristics. Taken as a whole they comprise the town's most important trade, and in the case of butter and linen exports the bulk of these commodities were destined for the British market (Fig. 21). In return for these, and other less important commodities, the Belfast merchants and businessmen imported a wide and miscellaneous range of goods and one of the most noticeable features of the trade was the wide variety of items which were imported into Belfast and its hinterland, a variety which increased considerably during the period. In 1768, for example, 139 different items were enumerated in the customs statistics as being imported from Great Britain. The equivalent figures for 1780 and 1786 are 160 and 169. Far more important than the mere numbers of items was the increase in such non-essential imports as drugs and haberdashery, the increase in the

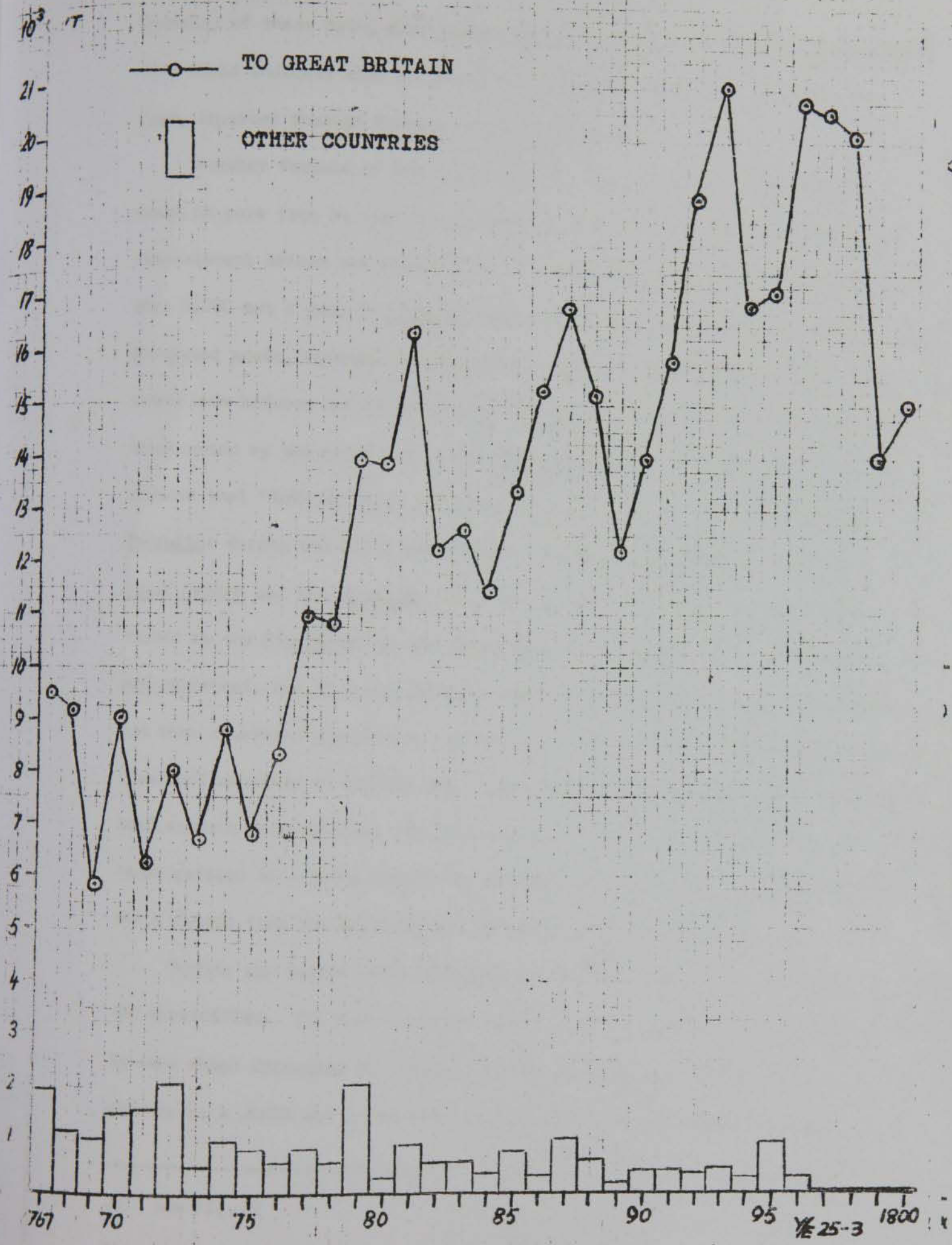


FIG. 21 . EXPORTS OF BUTTER FROM BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

quantity of these being much greater than the rise in the town's population.⁸⁹ This would indicate that an increasing volume of miscellaneous trade was being imported through Belfast rather than Dublin.

Another feature of the trade was the development of a substantial trade in pork from Belfast to the British market. This had been virtually non-existent before the American War of Independence and after averaging over 5,000 cwt a year in 1781-83, reverted to its former state but soon increased again, expanding dramatically during the Revolutionary War. The connection between the prosperity of the pork trade and the war is well illustrated by the editorial in the Northern Star of 27 February 1797 which claimed that 'Nothing bears so good a price at present as Pork and Stout Recruits: during the whole War indeed, the Swinish Multitude have been in Great demand and the Slaughter of them so great, that much fear is entertained by the Pig Herds for the extinction of the breed'.⁹⁰ The message was political, but it could not have been written had the trade's prosperity not been a wartime phenomenon. By the late 1780s, most years saw more pork than beef exported to Britain and a much smaller proportion of pork than beef exports were destined for other markets. If thus seems that the pork trade catered to a large extent for the British market while the beef trade met a demand from the colonies and the naval stores markets.⁹¹

During the period under consideration Belfast's British trade grew and diversified. The town's growth was not a steady one: it was affected by wars which increased the exports of beef and pork but dislocated the economy as a whole and by economic depressions which suppressed growing

89. See Fig. 22

90. NS 27 February 1797.

91. See Figs. 23, 24

	FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING MARCH 25		
	1768	1786	1792
Books (bound)	£24.07.06	£34.15.11	£5.00.00
do (unbound)	3cwt.	26cwt., 7lbs.	49cwt. 2qrs 9lbs
Earthenware	£431.07.04	£1,045.19.06	£1,609.06.05½
Toys	£9.04.00	£218.19.01	£505.06.01
Haberdashery (assorted)	£63.16.10	£529.07.02	£1,410.08.09
Upholstery	£173.00.02	£637.03.06	£1,576.16.08
Garden seeds	5,290lbs.	5,676lbs.	7,644lbs.

FIG. 22 . A SELECTION OF MISCELLANEOUS IMPORTS
INTO BELFAST FOR THE YEARS 1768, 1786
AND 1792.

10³ B. WELS

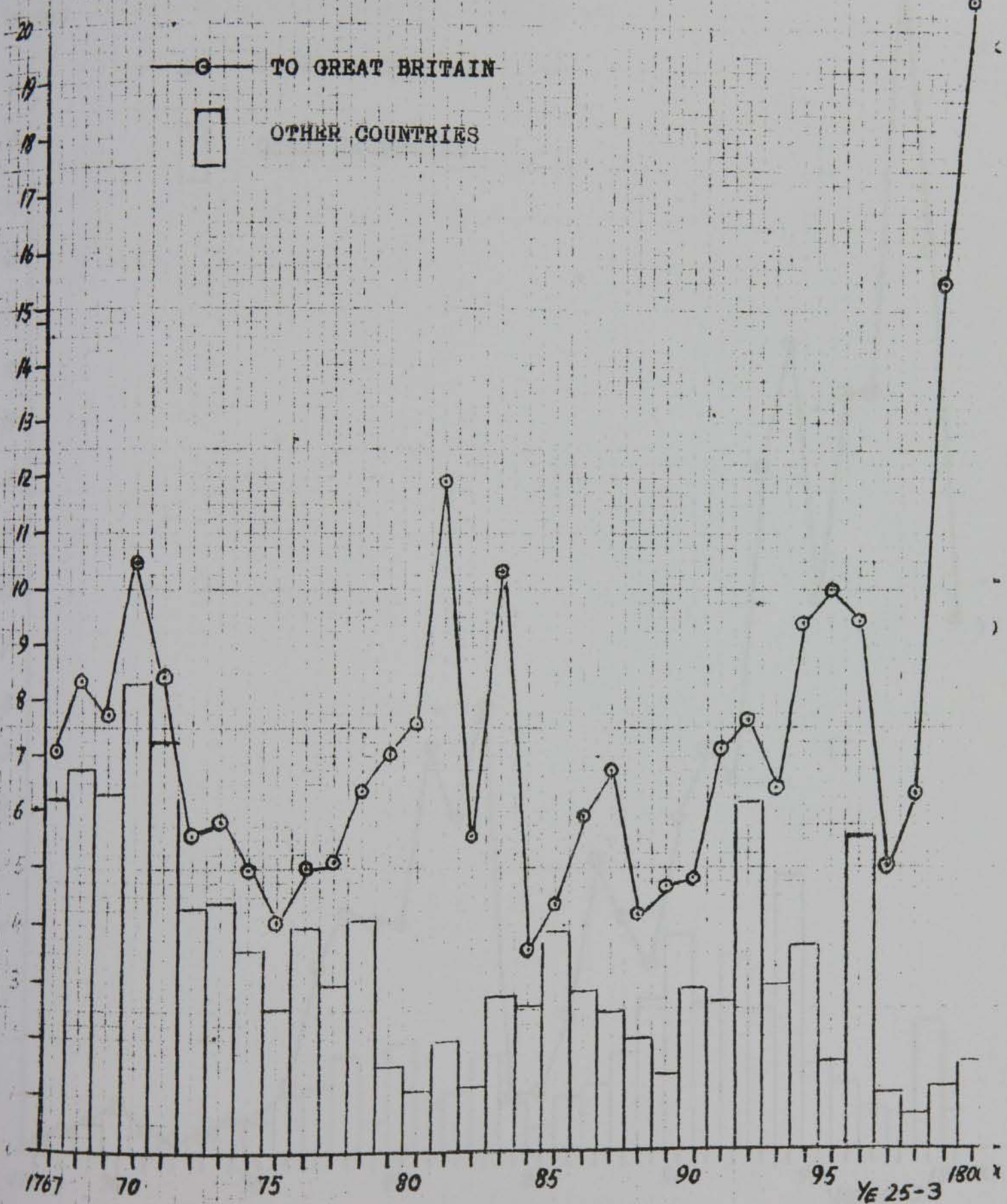


FIG. 23. EXPORTS OF BEEF FROM BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

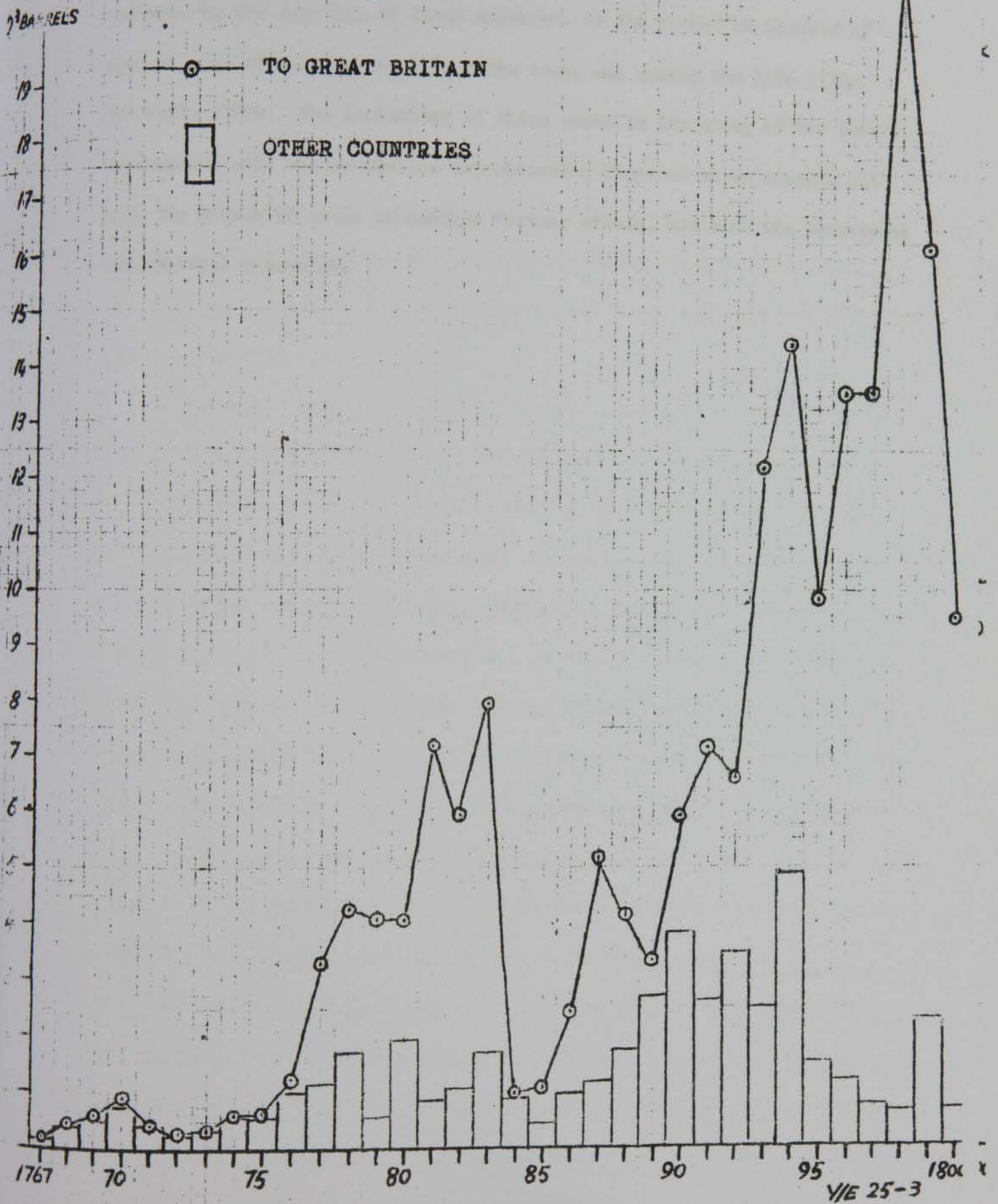


FIG. 24 . EXPORTS OF PORK FROM BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

markets. One constant pattern emerges and will be seen in many of the graphs included in this chapter: the greatest period of growth, whether measured by the quantity of linen exported, or the number of barrels of bark or tons of coal imported into the town, was during the late 1780s and early 1790s. The importance of these years in the story of the town's development will become obvious in succeeding chapters as we examine not only the growth of trade to centres further afield, but also its industrial and physical expansion.

(ii) Continental Europe

Belfast's trade with continental Europe was extensive and widespread, ranging from the White Sea in the north to Sicily in the south. In many respects, more is known about the European than the British trade as, with some exceptions, it was in the hands of the large general merchants who also acted as shipbrokers and frequently as shipowners, whereas the British trade by the 1770s had seen a division between the trader and the shipbroker, with the latter arranging carriage for importers whose business was conducted on a much smaller scale than that of the general merchant engaged in the European or colonial trades.

The European trade can be divided broadly into two geographical areas, north and south of the Netherlands. To the north the commodities involved were principally goods of low value in relation to their bulk such as tar, timber, fish and flaxseed. To the south luxury goods such as wine, brandy and fruit played a more marked role, although large quantities of such bulky essential goods as potash and brimstone were also involved in the trade. In the northern sector, too, there was a marked seasonality in trade on account of the dangers of winter operation in northern waters, and the freezing over of the Baltic. Shipping, too, was largely owned in ports other than Belfast. In the southern trade, the seasonal element was much less marked and a greater proportion of the shipping used was Belfast owned, although the port's vessels never dominated the trade as they did that to the Caribbean.

These two basic zones can be further sub-divided into regions which differed from each other in their exports to the Belfast market. In each region one can distinguish one or two principal ports with which trade was conducted, although voyages were often made to or from other centres.

The most northerly region with which Belfast merchants traded regularly was Norway and Arctic Russia, where trade centred on the port of Trondheim.

It appears from the 'Port-News' column of the Newsletter that about five voyages were made annually during the 1760s and 1770s, a number which increased rapidly after the middle of the 1780s. In 1787 at least sixteen ships arrived at Belfast from that port, and while the figures for subsequent years are not quite as high, they still exceed the levels of the 1760s and 1770s.

The principal commodity obtained from Trondheim was timber in the form of deals, and 'Dronthon Deals' were by far the most commonly advertised form of timber. The Trondheim timber-trade was strongly linked with that between Norway and the Clyde. The mechanics of this trade have already been described by Dr Kent, who has shown that it was essentially a barter trade.⁹² In this the Belfast merchants were at a considerable disadvantage, for they had little to offer in exchange for their supplies of timber apart from a small amount of provisions and linen, although before the British and Irish rum duties were equalised in 1772, a number of vessels were recorded as sailing for Bergen with rum and/or tobacco. There were seven during 1767, while the Newsletter also mentions two in 1769 and three in the following year. However, only one of the dozen is recorded as returning from a Norwegian port with a cargo of timber. This was the Brothers, which sailed with a cargo of rum for Bergen in June 1767, and returned from Christiansund with timber at the end of July,⁹³ and it would seem from this evidence that most of the vessels in the trade were involved in smuggling rather than in the timber trade. After 1772 the trade contracted sharply: in 1786, for example, only one ship is known to have carried a cargo from Belfast to a Norwegian port. This was the Industry which sailed to Christiansund in June 1785 with

92. H.S.K.Kent, War and Trade in Northern Seas (Cambridge, 1973), p.15.

93. BNL 5 June, 28 July 1767.

provisions,⁹⁴ and the customs records reveal that the quantity involved was trifling, consisting of a small quantity of oats, beef and sea-bread, as well as some hides and linen. During the same period, at least twelve ships arrived from Trondheim and most presumably left in ballast, either to a Scottish port to take in a return cargo, or to Norway to reload with timber. Unfortunately, however, the Newsletter's tables of arrivals and clearances rarely mention departures in ballast, so it is impossible to find out which of these two alternatives was most common.

While Trondheim was the centre of the timber trade, vessels occasionally arrived in Belfast from other Norwegian ports, probably in response to exceptionally high demands which outpaced the ability of the timber industry in Trondheim itself. In 1767, for example, three came from nearby Cristian-sund⁹⁵ and in 1787 four from Bergen. Both were years of considerable activity in the building industry. In the former year the various leases in the town had been renewed and the security afforded by longer leases coupled with the clauses in each lease setting time limits on the completion of rebuilding or building should have stimulated the demand for timber, while the latter year was in a period of rapid economic expansion which saw the construction of many new houses and a number of factories.

Trade with Cristian-sund and Bergen, however, never became established on a regular basis, and their contributions of timber can best be described as spasmodic. This adjective could also be used to describe the trade in tar and tallow from the White Sea ports of Archangel and Omega which occurred only in occasional years, and apparently supplemented that with the Russian Baltic although little is known of it. At least one major firm of merchants,

94. BNL 14 June 1785.

95. BNL 23 June, 28 July, 6 October 1767.

John and James Holmes engaged in it, and in October 1782 they offered tar from Archangel for sale, shortly after the arrival of the Chatham, a vessel for which they acted as brokers.⁹⁶ In 1794 a Belfast tallow chandler, Matthew Steele, was offering 'Archangel Yellow Tallow' for sale,⁹⁷ but it is unlikely that he was importing it directly. Indeed as no arrival from Archangel can be traced at this time, it is very possible that Steele was importing it from a British port. If this is the case the importation of goods from the White Sea area may have been occurring even in those years in which no direct voyages can be traced, and may have been conducted through a Scottish or English port.

Most of the vessels engaged in the Norwegian trade were owned at a port other than Belfast and chartered for a voyage or for a season, a pattern which fits in well with Kent's conclusions. Most of the vessels bore English names in the Newsletter lists, as did their masters, and it is reasonable to suppose that they were registered at a British port. The masters' names are frequently Scottish in origin. In 1776 they included McLeod, McKeller, Thompson and McDonald⁹⁸ although by itself this cannot be taken as proof of Scottish ownership of their vessels. However, the conclusion that the ships were largely from Scotland is reinforced by an occasional ship's name, such as the Clyde of 1787.⁹⁹ A few vessels which are mentioned as leaving for a Scottish port, for example in 1776, would also point towards a Scottish origin. The Grizey sailed for Greenock,¹⁰⁰

96. PRO CUST 1/165, p.132 (18 December 1782); BNL 20 September, 11 October 1782.

97. BNL 20 June 1794.

98. BNL 2 April, 20, 23 August, 12 November 1776.

99. BNL 1 June 1787.

100. BNL 27 August 1776.

and five years later the Providence cleared from Belfast for Stormoway¹⁰¹ while in 1787 the Wood Carrier left in ballast for Peterhead.¹⁰² However, a departure for Scotland is not in itself a proof of Scottish origins.

Vessels of continental and of known English origin also appeared in the trade from time to time. Vessels with continental names and with masters whose names are definitely of continental origin tend to appear in prosperous years which indicates that they were hired when other sources of shipping were fully utilised. In 1767 they included the Juliana Maria and the Emmanuel, their masters' names being Hesselburgh and Abelsnes respectively,¹⁰³ as well as the Young George commanded by Pieter Albrecht, a regular trader between Belfast and the Baltic in these years.¹⁰⁴ In 1773 the Confidentia arrived, but the next vessel with a continental name did not appear until the arrival of the Christian und Karon in 1779, followed in 1787 by the Fridenshat¹⁰⁷ and in 1789 by the St Johannes and Zufrenheit.¹⁰⁸ While some continental names may have been anglicised by the Newsletter, the indications are that the share of the trade enjoyed by continental vessels was very small. English vessels are harder to distinguish because of the absence of linguistic differences. However one of the most regular vessels in the trade, the Molly which made voyages in 1767, 1770-72 and 1776 is known to have been owned in Whitehaven.¹⁰⁹

101. BNL 6 July 1781.

102. BNL 6, 20 July 1787.

103. BNL 2 June, 22 September 1767.

104. BNL 14 July 1767.

105. BNL 14 September 1773.

106. BNL 7 May 1779.

107. BNL 4 September 1787.

108. BNL 28 July, 4 August 1789.

109. BNL 5 May 1767, 6 July 1770, 21 May, 9 July 1771, 24 July 1772, 7 May 1776.

Some vessels known to have been owned by Belfast merchants were also found in the trade, one vessel at least being generally engaged each season. Most prominent were vessels owned by Waddell Cunningham and his associates. In 1767 they owned at least two vessels, the Elizabeth and the Earl of Donegall which made voyages to Norway.¹¹⁰ The master of the Elizabeth, Charles Mackenzie, made voyages there in 1769 and 1770 as the master of the Two Peggys and in 1774 and 1776 another of their vessels, the Waddell was involved in the trade, as was the Recovery in 1782.¹¹²

However, other merchants beside Cunningham were involved in providing ships for the trade. The Hopewell, for example, which made voyages in 1771, 1772 and 1774, was also used for the emigrant trade by the Belfast broker, William Beatty.¹¹³ In 1774 it carried a cargo for a firm of Belfast timber merchants, John Alexander & Co.¹¹⁴ Another merchant who was involved in direct trade with Norway was John Bradshaw, who had been Alexander's partner before 1773. In 1776 he owned the cargo of the Molly, and regular charters by him possibly explain the involvement of this Whitehaven owned vessel in the trade.¹¹⁵ He is known to have been a regular hirer of the Young George in the Baltic trade, and its 1767 voyage from Norway¹¹⁶ may have been on his account. His name is also linked with the 1773 voyage of the Confidentia¹¹⁷ and his use of continental vessels may stem from his considerable involvement

110. BNL 16 June, 4 September 1767.

111. BNL 16 May 1769, 25 September 1770.

112. BNL 11 October 1774, 23 August 1776, 7 June 1782.

113. R.J.Dickson, Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775 (London 1966), pp.170-71, 239, 248.

114. BNL 20 September 1774.

115. BNL 7 May 1776.

116. BNL 14 July 1767.

117. BNL 14 September 1773.

in the Baltic trade, where the use of continental vessels was more common.

As the timber trade was a seasonal one, vessels were not exclusively restricted to it, but were diverted to other routes for most of the year. The Earl of Donegall, for example, sailed to Charleston after its voyage from Trondheim in 1767;¹¹⁸ while the Two Peggys followed its voyage in 1769 with voyages to St. Ubes and Charleston¹¹⁹ and in 1774 the Waddell sailed to St. Eustatia.¹²⁰ The town's merchants thus did not restrict their ships to a single trade route but rather sought to use them as intensively as possible, and so employ tonnage which would otherwise have lain idle while awaiting its next voyage to the colonies.

Before 1783 it is difficult, if not impossible, to calculate the quantity of timber imported into Belfast each year from Norway as until that date it was included with Baltic imports under the heading of 'East Country'. However, in that year Denmark and Norway were included as a separate category in the customs returns and almost 400 hundred of deals and just over 2,000 gallons of train (whale) oil were imported. As at least three arrivals are recorded, the vessels involved must have been small, a conclusion which accords well with Kent's calculation of 100 tons burthen for the closely related Scottish trade.¹²¹ The import figures for the 1780s show a rapid increase until 1788, followed by a decline in 1789, and this pattern is followed by the known number of voyages during these years. An average cargo would appear to have consisted of between 80 and 120 hundred of timber. By 1788 almost 1,500 hundred was being imported each summer but in 1790 this

118. BNL 6 October 1767.

119. BNL 11 August, 8 December 1769.

120. BNL 8 November 1774.

121. Kent, op.cit., p.56

had declined to just over 800 hundred. Imports would thus seem to have been related to the prosperity of the building industry which reached a peak of prosperity in Belfast during the late 1780s¹²² However, 1791 saw the arrival of at least 14 ships from Trondheim and one from Bergen and in 1792 imports revived to almost 1,400 hundred, but the revival was short-lived. In 1793 imports were down to less than 800 hundred and in the ensuing years the figure fluctuated between 1,000 and 1,500 hundred showing that as in so many aspects of Belfast's trade, the peak of prosperity in the period lay in the second half of the 1780s. By then the importation of train oil had also increased considerably to over 9,000 gals. and a considerable quantity of timber was being imported in other than deal form, although deals still played a dominant role in the trade.

The Norwegian trade has been dealt with at some length to provide a basis of comparison for the trade between Belfast and other areas in Northern Europe, including Sweden where ^{h h}Goteburg_{^ ^} was the most important centre. From there large quantities of iron and herrings were sent to Belfast, and these were supplemented by imports from other Swedish ports. In 1770, and in at least each year from 1773 to 1776, in 1780 and in 1789 to 1791, at least one ship arrived with a cargo of iron from Stockholm, while two vessels arrived in Belfast from Trosa, an iron-exporting port to the south of Stockholm, in 1776.¹²³ In 1791 a cargo of herrings was imported from the small west coast port of Masstrand.¹²⁴

122. See Chapter 6 (i).

123. BNL 2 April 1776.

124. BNL 2 September 1791.

While there appears to have been some regularity in the sailings from Stockholm, which were probably made to obtain iron of a higher quality than that available in Goteborg,¹²⁵ the voyages from the other centres were purely supplementary to the regular trade, and speculative in nature, the importing of herrings from Marstrand, for example, occurring at a period of high demand in the provisions trade.

The Swedish trade was conducted on a smaller scale than the Norwegian. The largest known number of vessels to arrive at Belfast in a single calendar year was the ten which arrived in 1791, a year of high iron and herring imports. In most years not more than three vessels arrived, especially after the expansion of the Rosses fishery at the end of the 1770s.

As in the Norwegian trade, the Belfast merchant faced the problem of either providing a suitable return cargo or of returning vessels in ballast, and no solution was forthcoming although small quantities of provisions and linen were exported. However, such barter dealings could only have accounted for a miniscule proportion of the transactions and in most cases payment was made in cash or in bills of exchange drawn by the exporter.

Throughout the period bar-iron was one of the two most important commodities in the Swedish trade. Before 1783 it is difficult to distinguish between Swedish and Russian imports, both sources being combined under the blanket designation of 'East Country'. However when separate statistics become available, the Russian share of the trade was small and it is probably correct to state that at least two-thirds of the iron imported into Belfast during the 1770s came from Sweden, despite competition from British and Russian production and, as Kent has pointed out, some 'Russian' iron may, in

125. It is interesting, in view of the close ties between Belfast and Liverpool, to note that there was 'an opinion held in Liverpool, but not in Eastern England, that Gothenburg iron was superior to Stockholm iron . . .' This was not in fact the case (K.G.Hildebrand, *Foreign Markets for Swedish Iron in the 18th Century in Scand. Econ. Hist. Rev.* VI (1958), pp.31-32).

fact, have been of Swedish origin.¹²⁶ However, unlike the situation which Kent has described as prevailing on the east coast of England,¹²⁷ there is no evidence or tradition of iron smuggling in Ulster, and it would appear that the total amount imported was substantially accurate, revealing a trade in which growth was gradual. During the 1770s iron imports from the East Country were about 6,000 cwt annually and by the late 1780s, despite rapidly increasing imports of British iron, they had risen to between 8,000 and 9,000 cwt per annum.

The other principal item in the trade was salted herring. The export of herring from the Swedish west coast to the British Isles had commenced about 1752. In 1775 over 25,000 barrels were exported to Ireland alone, and in the following year the quantity was in excess of 56,000 barrels, although with the development of the Irish fisheries in the late 1770s it declined rapidly¹²⁸ and had ceased by 1781. In the late 1760s Belfast merchants imported over a thousand barrels a year. By 1773 this figure had risen to almost 4,500 barrels although in succeeding years it became increasingly erratic. In 1775, for example, it was less than 600 barrels, and none was imported in 1776 although over 16,000 were imported in 1777. These fluctuations, with the parallel decline in Scottish imports, would appear to have been directly linked with the involvement about this time of a number of Belfast merchants in the Rosses fishery.¹²⁹ From 1777 to 1791 no substantial quantities of herrings were imported into Belfast, but in the latter year almost 9,000 barrels were imported and imports in the ensuing year years, while not reaching this level again, were maintained at a level

126. Kent, op.cit. p.67.

127. ibid, pp.64-66.

128. See D.MacPherson, op.cit.iii, p.725.

129. See pp. 109-10

substantially in excess of those prevailing before 1775. However, imports declined again after 1796, presumably as a result of the trading difficulties brought on by the Revolutionary Wars.

No Belfast men are known to have settled as merchants in Sweden and it is likely that trade was conducted by correspondence with the Scottish merchant community in Goteborg and Stockholm. However, the owners of at least two vessels in the trade during the first decade of our period are known. The Camden, which went to Sweden in September 1768 and returned the following January, was owned by Thomas Bateson & Co. and was normally employed in the West Indian trade,¹³⁰ and in 1770 the Prince of Wales, which belonged to Waddell Cunningham and Thomas Greg, made a voyage from Goteborg.¹³¹ In the same year they chartered the Catherina Margareta of Lulea to take a cargo of iron from Stockholm to Belfast.¹³² This voyage is of interest on a number of points. It would appear that they were trying to import iron of a higher grade than that normally imported into Belfast as east coast ores were generally more highly regarded than those from the more accessible western provinces. Indeed in each year from 1773 to 1776 and in 1780 one voyage from Stockholm to Belfast has been recorded, and that in 1773 was on account of Gregs & Forbes,¹³³ who were the successors of Gregs and Cunningham. Greg was also responsible for the one voyage in 1774,¹³⁴ and also for those in 1775 and 1776.¹³⁵ While it is impossible to trace the destination of the iron in 1780, the circumstances are similar to the earlier voyages,

130. BNL 7 September 1768, 10 January 1769.

131. BNL 24 December 1770.

132. BNL 10 August 1770.

133. The Margerita (BNL 16 July 1773.)

134. BNL 16 August 1774. The ship was the Lucia

135. BNL 10 October 1775, 30 August 1776. The vessels were the Magdalena and the Jungfrau.

a continental bottom being used and the voyage being made in the autumn.¹³⁶ It is thus likely that Greg ordered a cargo of higher grade iron each year and was able to monopolise the local demand for this product by the scale of his operations.

Iron was to be found in the stock of most Belfast merchants and individual orders were probably for relatively small quantities, although Greg's involvement was evidently on a considerably larger scale. However, as can be seen from Fig. 25, imports of iron as a whole increased rapidly and by the 1790s one merchant, Walter Crawford, had become a specialist iron-merchant. From 1783 he had been a partner in the firm of Henderson and Crawford who imported iron and timber, and on its dissolution in 1791¹³⁷ the timber side of the business was apparently discontinued. The emergence of Crawford is an indication of the growth of the iron trade which would seem to be underestimated by the mentions of shipping arrivals in the Newsletter, which mention the arrival of two or three cargoes annually, reaching a peak in 1789-90 when there were six and ten sailings respectively. While this conclusion fits in well with the import statistics which show 1790 to have been a year of largescale imports, there are possibly omissions, as in 1782 when no vessels are mentioned in the Newsletter although 4,000 cwt of iron were imported.

Belfast vessels were more deeply involved in the herring trade than in that in iron. In 1768 three vessels were engaged in this trade. They were the Camden,¹³⁸ which has been mentioned already, the Matty and the Ann.¹³⁹

136. BNL 26 September 1780. The vessel involved was the Catherina Dorothea.

137. BNL 3 June 1791.

138. BNL 7 September 1768.

139. BNL 5 January, 10 June 1768.

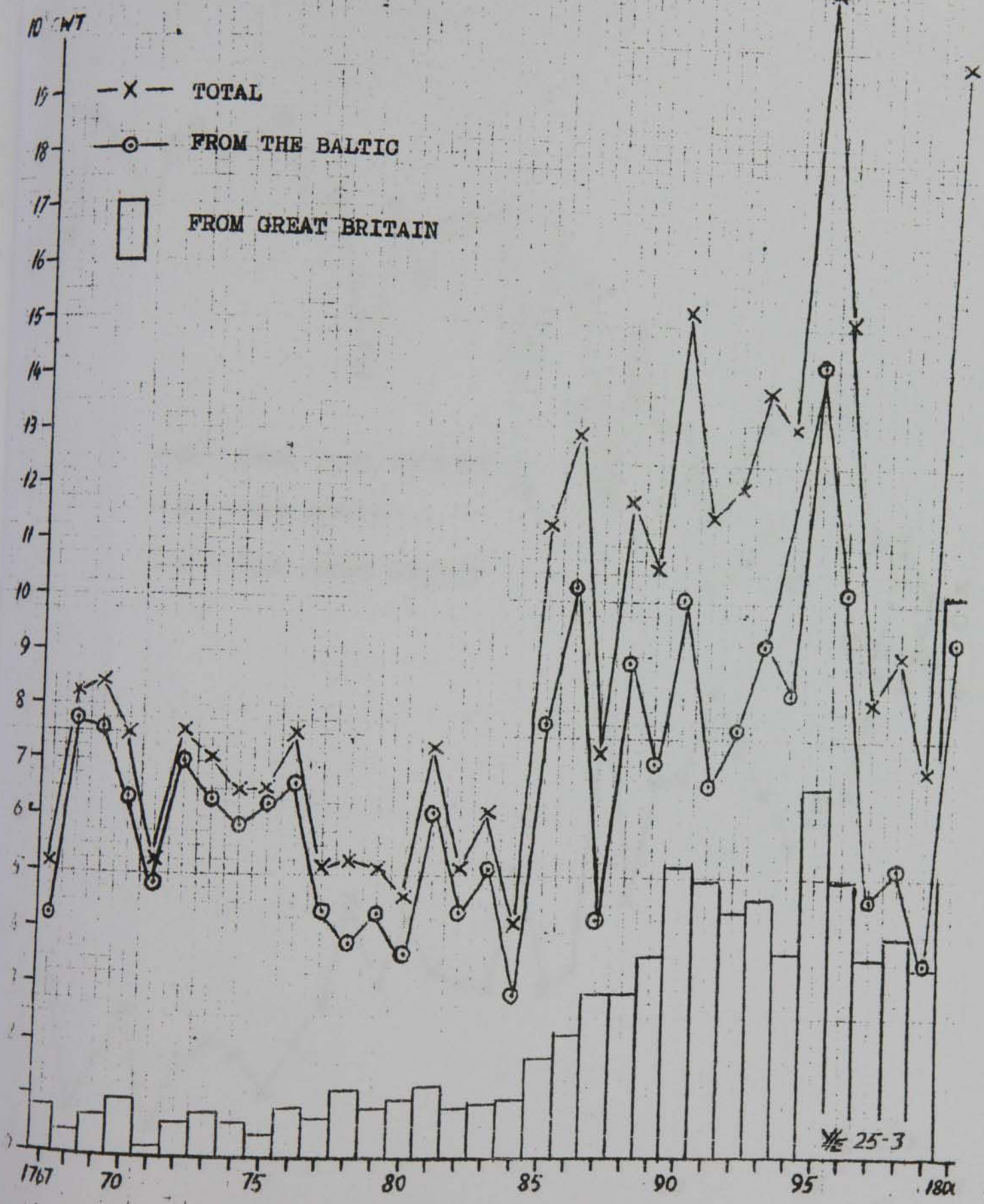


FIG. 25^a. IMPORTS OF IRON INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

25-3

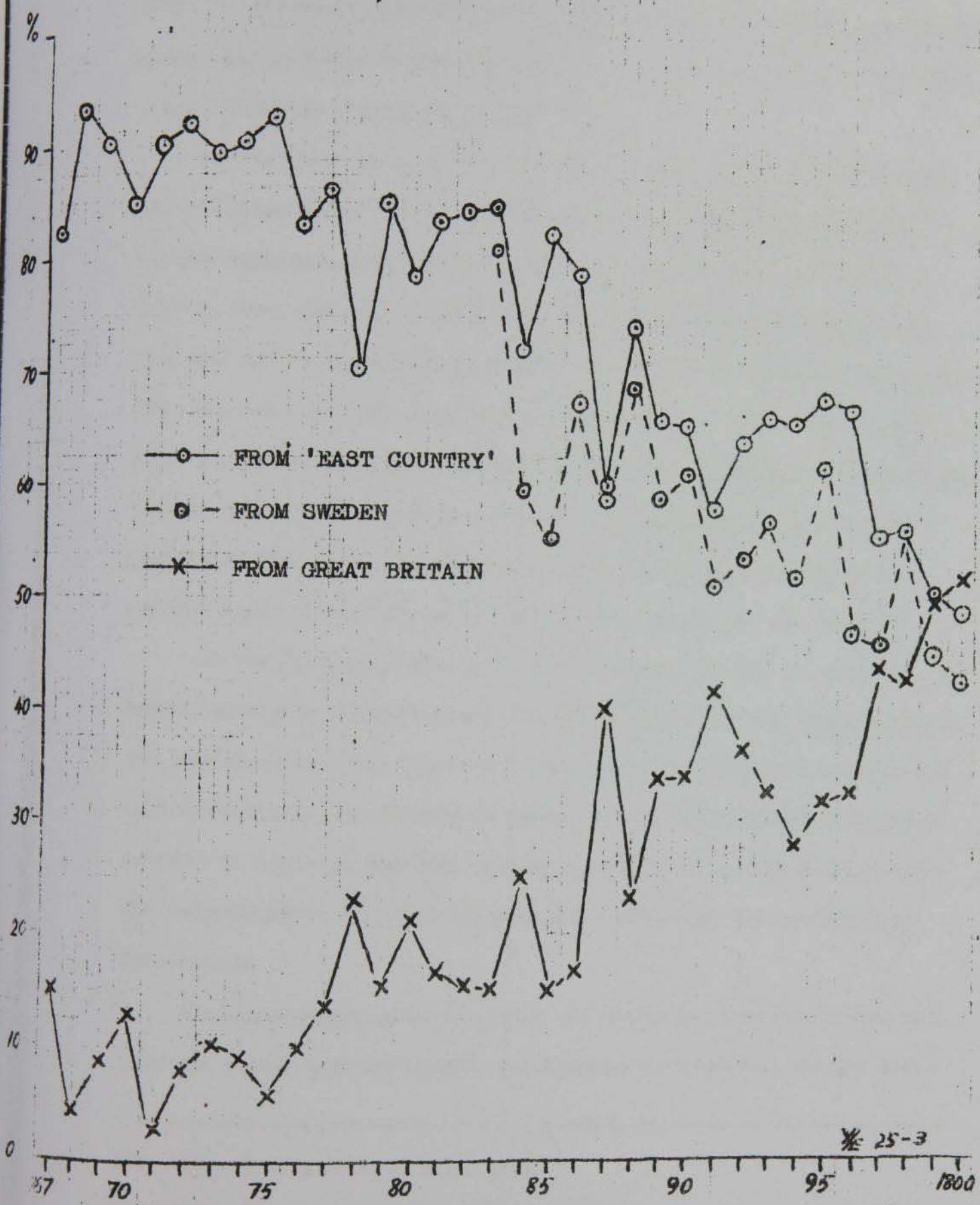


Fig. 25b. IMPORTS OF IRON INTO BELFAST EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL QUANTITY IMPORTED, 1767 - 1800

25-3

In 1772 the only non-continental ship was the James and Mary which had previously been a regular trader to France and which sailed to America in 1773.¹⁴⁰ It was not until 1791 that another Belfast owned vessel, the Belfast appears and it should be noted that this was the period in which the herring trade experienced a temporary revival.¹⁴¹

Most of the vessels used in the Swedish trade were apparently Swedish, but only occasionally, as in the example of the Catharina Margareta which has been mentioned above, is the vessel's home port stated. In 1776, for example, among the ships involved were the Christiana and the Sophia from Goteborg, and the Young Frau (no doubt a misspelling of 'Jungfrau') from Stockholm, the masters of the three being surnamed Ryberg, Peterson and Sinman, while in 1786 the only known sailing was that of the Gustava.¹⁴² On occasion, however, British vessels were involved: the Saint Andrew of 1774 and the Hamilton of 1791 were probably Scottish, and the Maryport of 1790 is a possible indication of the use of some Cumbrian vessels in the trade.¹⁴³

The Swedish trade, then, like that to Norway, was one in which the Belfast merchants' involvement was limited to their need for Swedish herrings and, insofar as the iron trade was concerned, they were content to leave the work of purchasing and shipping to Swedes, or possibly to Scottish merchants resident in Sweden because they were best equipped to conduct business with the 'Jernkontoret', the state monopoly which controlled the production of Swedish iron.

The Scandinavian ports with which the merchants of Belfast traded had large and active Scottish business communities which had been settled there

140. BNL 14 July 1772, 26 March 1773.

141. BNL 26 August 1791.

142. BNL 30 August, 3 September, 12 November 1776, 27 October 1786.

143. BNL 17 June 1774, 29 June 1790, 2 September 1791.

for many years before the beginning of the period,¹⁴⁴ and the same can be said of Danzig in Poland, the principal centre of Belfast's Baltic trade, although one cannot tell whether or not trade there was conducted through the Scottish merchant houses in the town. The trade with Danzig bore many similarities to that with Sweden, principally involving the importation of a large quantity of non-perishable commodities of low value in relation to their weight. Like the Scandinavian trade, too, it was conducted principally in cash or bills of exchange as there were few commodities which could be supplied by the merchants of Belfast which would find a ready market in the Baltic. As a result, east-bound trade was virtually non-existent, consisting in 1786, for example, of a small quantity of soap and provisions and in 1792 of 325 yds of cloth, although occasional attempts were made to increase the range and quantity of goods and in 1782, for example, John Holmes tried to reexport 24 hogsheads of wine to Konigsberg but gave up the idea when the vessel was unable to proceed on the voyage.¹⁴⁵

The principal commodities obtained from Danzig were potash and timber, while during the 1770s a regular timber trade was developed with the Lithuanian port of Memel. The first sailing recorded was in 1772 and an increasing demand for timber coupled with the disruptions caused by the American War of Independence led to a rapid expansion in the trade.¹⁴⁷ By the end of the war two or three voyages were being made there annually, as

144. T.A.Fischer, The Scots in Sweden (Edinburgh 1907), pp.10 ff; J.Berg, B.Lagercrantz, Scots in Sweden (Stockholm 1962), pp.50 ff.

145. PRO CUST 1/165, p.132, 18 December 1782. Konigsberg is the present Kalinengrad.

146. Now Klaipéda.

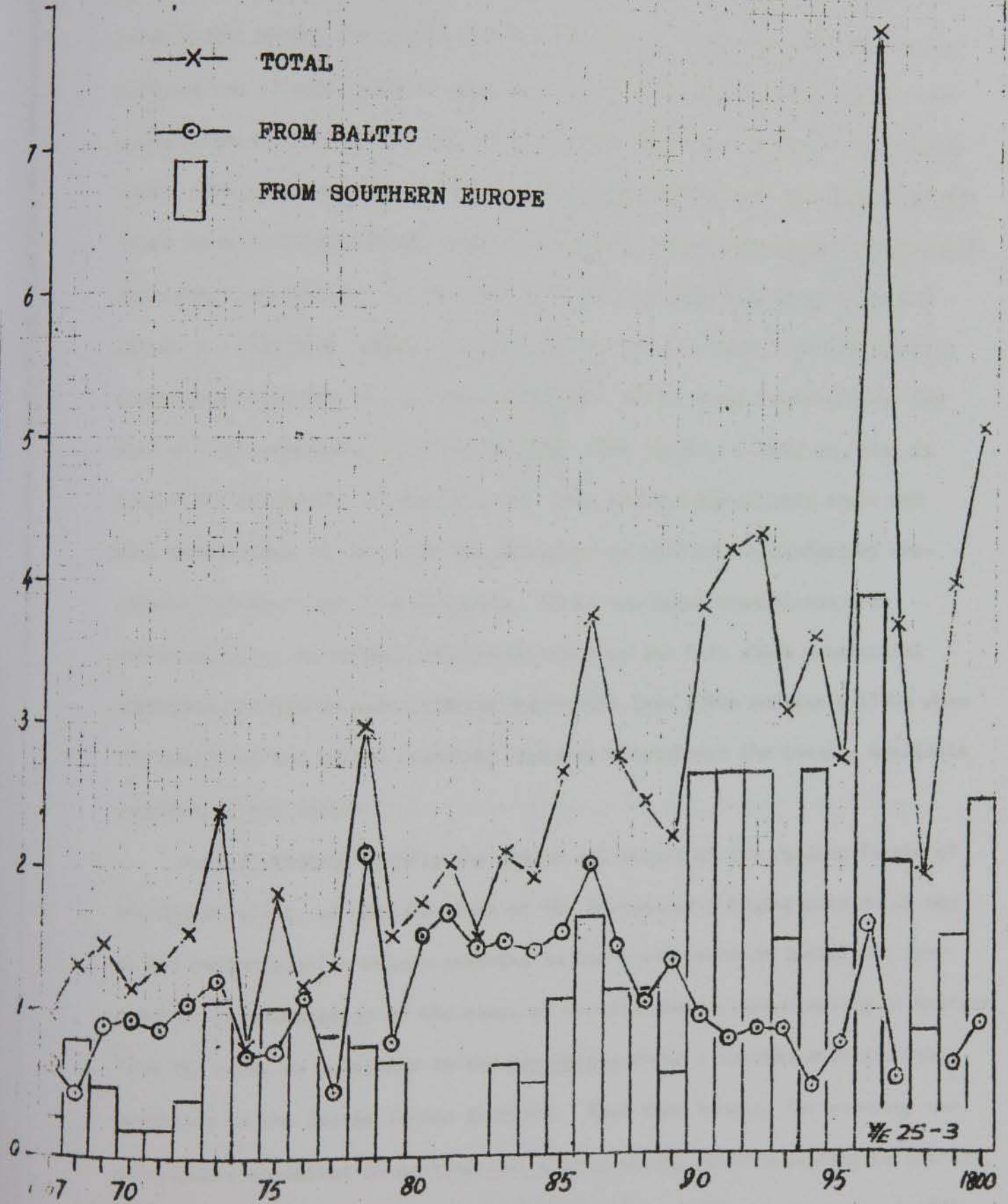
147. The growth of the Memel trade during the war and after is described in S-E.Astrom, English Timber Imports from Northern Europe in the 18th Century, Scand. Econ.Hist.Rev. XVIII (1970), pp.20-32. He attributes the relative decline of the Norwegian trade at this period as being caused by overcutting (p.30). Memel came by the mid 1780s to occupy a dominant role in the Baltic trade, more British vessels calling there than at any other Baltic city (p.21).

well as some with flaxseed from Riga in Livonia. When the war ended, this latter trade ceased, but the timber trade with Memel continued to flourish and by the early 1790s the number of vessels noted in the Newsletter as arriving from there was at least equal to that from Danzig, while the increasing demand for timber also led to the reestablishment of trade with Riga by 1790, at least one voyage being made annually from this date.

The volume of goods in the Baltic trade was very substantial. The amount of potash, for example, varied between 8,000 and 15,000 cwt each year. It was however a relatively stagnant trade which failed to expand in parallel with the bleaching industry in the town and during the period the share of the market taken by imports from the Baltic (principally from Danzig) declined from about two-thirds to a fifth (Fig. 26). It is difficult to make similar calculations of the share taken by the Baltic ports in the timber trade, however, as imports from Norway, Belfast's other principal source of timber, were mainly in deals while those from the Baltic consisted principally of staves, plank, timber and prepared woodenware. In 1786, for example, 1,480 hundred deals were imported from Norway as well as 342 hundred of staves, £194 value of planks and almost £65 worth of woodenware from the Baltic from whence came also 1,644 tons of what was described as 'timber', and the volume of the Baltic trade can be seen in the fact that Belfast imported more planks and timber from the region than any other Irish port. The Baltic trade reached its peak during the mid 1780s. The statistics for 1792, a year of great prosperity in many aspects of the town's trade, reveal a considerable decline in volume, especially in potash and a rise in the volume of plank timber which barely compensated for the virtual disappearance of the trade in oak-staves which were now being imported from the plantations as a direct consequence of the rapid expansion of the provisions trade.

10⁴ WT

- X— TOTAL
- FROM BALTIC
- FROM SOUTHERN EUROPE



1/2 25-3

FIG. 26 . IMPORTS OF POT-ASHES INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

This account of Belfast's Baltic trade has so far ignored its trade with St Petersburg which differed from what might be termed the Baltic trade proper in a number of respects. It was not conducted on a particularly large scale; during the 1770s and 1780s one or, at most, two sailings a year sufficed and in some years no sailings were recorded in the Newsletter. The commodities involved in it also differed from those in the rest of the Baltic trade. The principal item was hemp and by 1792 Belfast was the second largest Irish importer of hemp after Dublin as a result of the development of the rope and canvas industries. By the late 1780s the quantity was about 3,000 cwt annually. Iron also played an important part in the trade, although Russian iron rarely amounted to more than one-eighth of the total imported into the town and only exceeded 3,000 cwt in 1796. One reason for this was that it lacked the reputation of Swedish iron. Its quality was usually lower and less consistent, and it could not therefore be used as a satisfactory substitute for it in all circumstances. These two basic commodities were supplemented by occasional imports of raw flax and tar, while substantial quantities of tallow were imported during the late 1780s and early 1790s when the growth of the tallow chandling industry outstripped the locally available supplies of raw tallow.

Having examined briefly the nature and extent of the various facets of the Baltic trade, we will now look at the sources of shipping used in it and at the evidence which exists relating to the involvement of individual merchants. An examination of the names of vessels and masters arriving in Belfast from the area, as published in the Newsletter shows a considerable diversity according to the Baltic region involved. That from Danzig, for example, was principally conducted in continental vessels which, after unloading in Belfast, left in Ballast for a Baltic or an English port. In the three years of 1778,

1787 and 1790, for example, five out of eight, five out of seven and four out of five ships respectively bore foreign names, thus revealing a domination of the trade by continental shipping similar to that existing in the Swedish trade, and it is interesting to realise that the trade with Memel differed considerably in this respect. In the three years mentioned above, three out of five vessels in 1778 bore continental names, but none did in the other two years. This reveals a pattern which is basically similar to that existing in the Norwegian trade, which was also dominated by timber and may result from the relative isolation of the ports concerned from the principal centres of Baltic shipping, one of which was Danzig.

As in other respect^s, such as the commodities involved, the St Petersburg trade differed from the rest of the Baltic trade. In some years Belfast owned vessels sailed there, often owned by Greg and Cunningham, which would indicate that this firm had developed a virtual monopoly over the trade similar to that already identified for the Stockholm trade. Of the vessels which were used in the years from 1767 to 1770, for example, the Earl of Hillsborough¹⁴⁸, Betty Greig¹⁴⁹ and Chichester¹⁵⁰ belonged to them, as did the Success of 1780¹⁵¹ and the Lord Donegall¹⁵² of 1783. On other occasions continental vessels were used, such as the Maria Jorgen Jorgensa of 1784,¹⁵³ while a Liverpool vessel, the Charming Sally was used in 1772.¹⁵⁴ It thus appears that any convenient vessel was used but that, unlike the situation in Danzig, shipping was not always available in St Petersburg and the Belfast

148. BNL 10 November 1767.

149. BNL 9 October 1769.

150. BNL 28 September 1770.

151. BNK 25 August 1780.

152. BNL 14 November 1783.

153. PRO CUST 1/178 unpaginated vol., 20 August 1785.

154. BNL 6 November 1772.

merchants had frequently to send their own vessels to fetch the goods which they required.

The principal merchant engaged in the trade was Waddell Cunningham, who was involved both as an importer on his own account and as a shipbroker providing shipping for others. In 1780, for example, his Success carried a cargo destined for the Ropewalk Company.¹⁵⁵ His Baltic operations were not, however, restricted to the Russian trade and he was responsible for at least two vessels which made voyages to the Baltic. In 1774 his ship, Lord Bangor, made a voyage to Danzig¹⁵⁶ and in 1779 and 1780 the Eleanor undertook a number of voyages to Memel.¹⁵⁷ Other Belfast merchants were also engaged in the Baltic, among them the firm of Bradshaw & Alexander who frequently appear as hirers of vessels. In 1773 and 1774 they were owners of the cargo of the Salmon and it would seem likely that they were responsible for its visits in 1768 and 1785.¹⁵⁸ They also chartered the Palm Tree which visited Belfast in 1768 and the Young George which made two voyages in the following year.¹⁵⁹

The Baltic and Scandinavian trades were dominated by a small number of basic commodities such as timber, fish and iron. In this they differed from the very substantial trade between Belfast and the United Provinces. This was centred on Rotterdam: voyages to Amsterdam were few and far between. Only six are known to have occurred between 1767 and 1793. Rotterdam was, of course, the principal commercial centre in the United Provinces, although this did not mean that the Belfast merchants would necessarily establish links there for, as has been shown earlier, most of the town's timber

155. BNL 25 August 1780.

156. BNL 27 September 1774

157. BNL 14 December 1779, 28 March, 11 July, 28 November 1780.

158. BNL 23 September 1768, 5 January 1773, 30 September 1774, 8 July 1785.

159. BNL 3 June 1768, 6 June, 17 October 1769.

requirements came from Trondheim rather than Bergen, and its iron from Goteborg rather than Stockholm. Rotterdam, however, was the centre of the trade in the items sought by the Belfast merchants, such as flaxseed and paper, Amsterdam tending to concentrate on the colonial and other long-distance trades.

Whereas the trade between Belfast and the Baltic and Scandinavian ports showed a close affinity to the Scottish trade with those regions, examination of the Dutch trade reveals strong links with the trade between Belfast and London. In 1768, for example, both the vessels engaged in the trade, the Industry and the Edward,¹⁶⁰ were normally employed in the London and Liverpool kinen trades, while in 1770, the Pitt, a regular London trader, extended one of her voyages to Rotterdam.¹⁶¹ The links between the London and Rotterdam trades were not merely a pre-war phenomenon. While the American war caused a temporary diversion of the trade into neutral shipping, Belfast-owned vessels were involved in the years from 1783 to 1785, and in some subsequent years, while the William, which traded to Rotterdam in 1791 and 1792, as well as twice in 1793, was described in the latter year as a regular London trader,¹⁶² and in 1794 the Hope, another regular London trader, was arranged to sail from London to Rotterdam, and thence to Belfast.¹⁶³ However, not all the Belfast vessels employed in the trade were normally used on the London route. Another William, which was used for two voyages in 1792,¹⁶⁴ was normally employed in the French and Iberian trades, while the Jenny of

160. BNL 5, 26 January 1768.

161. BNL 13 February, 29 May 1770.

162. BNL 12 February 1793.

163. BNL 28 January 1794.

164. BNL 20 January, 1 May, 20 July 1792

1778¹⁶⁵ and the Neptune, which was used in 1786 and 1787,¹⁶⁶ were normally used in the Caribbean trade.

While the home port of many of the ships used in the trade is unknown, it is evident that not all were Belfast-owned. For example, the Friendship of Saltcoats called at Belfast in 1776 en route from Greenock to Rotterdam,¹⁶⁷ while the Ruby, which was used in 1773 and 1774, was registered at Whitehaven, and in the former year sailed from there to Rotterdam before returning to Belfast early in 1774.¹⁶⁸ Both vessels were normally employed in the trade between Belfast and their home areas.

On the outbreak of war with France in 1778, the trade passed into continental bottoms, presumably registered in the United Provinces or another neutral country, although some of them may have been Belfast-owned ships re-registered and sailing under a neutral flag. The Industry, which made a voyage to Bordeaux in 1779, for example, was registered as Dutch,¹⁶⁹ and the Emelia, which was engaged in the London trade in early 1783, was reregistered in Ostend as the De Stad Weenan.¹⁷⁰ However, when peace came the trade was once again dominated by Belfast ships, although the Frau Cornelia which was involved in 1791, was obviously a continental vessel.¹⁷¹

The few voyages from Amsterdam contained a much larger proportion of continental vessels. This may have been due to the small scale of the trade which meant that no vessels were regularly employed on the route, and to the fact that voyages were only made from Amsterdam when there were no regular

165. BNL 9 January 1778.

166. BNL 27 October 1786, 19 January 1787.

167. BNL 1 October 1776.

168. BNL 22 October 1773.

169. BNL 14 September 1779.

170. BNL 3 January 1783.

171. BNL 7 October 1791.

ships at Rotterdam, nor could suitable vessels be chartered there. As late as 1793, Narcissus Batt, when attempting to organise a sailing from Amsterdam to Belfast, had to inform his potential customers that 'the expense of conveying goods from Rotterdam to Amsterdam is very trifling',¹⁷² which would indicate that he was catering for the Rotterdam rather than the Amsterdam trade. Indeed, all the known contacts between Belfast and Dutch merchants involved Rotterdam houses. Waddell Cunningham had contacts with at least two firms there when he was in business in New York in the mid 1750s. They were Isaac & Zechariah Hope, a Scottish firm and Herman Van Vzendoorn.¹⁷³ In 1788 the latter were among the creditors of Nathaniel Wilson, the Belfast cotton manufacturer.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, Cornelius Van der Hoovin, another Rotterdam merchant, was a creditor of the Belfast merchant John Moore.¹⁷⁵ Van Vzendoorn's Belfast agent was Waddell Cunningham and it thus seems certain that both these firms had been trading with each other over the intervening thirty years. Some years later, in 1794, Robert Twiss, another Rotterdam merchant, was the broker for the Diligence, which arrived in Belfast in the following January and was the last vessel to make the voyage before the Revolution of 1795.¹⁷⁶

Like Belfast's trade with other parts of northern Europe, the Dutch trade consisted principally of a westward flow of goods, and little was exported from Belfast although shipments of provisions were occasionally sent to Holland in the years prior to 1775, probably for reexport to the Dutch or French West Indies. In 1770, for example, beef, pork, candles and

172. BNL 12 March 1793.

173. NLI Mic. P4069 (Greg & Cunningham Letter-book, 4 June 1756: 2 letters, one to each firm).

174. BNL 11 July 1788.

175. BNL 1 August 1788.

176. BNL 3 November 1794, 2 January 1795.

butter were sent and in 1771 the customs records disclose the export of 85 cwt of candles and 660 lbs of boots and shoes. However, this trade ceased with the outbreak of war and the embargo on provisions. In 1780 the principal item exported was 12 tons 3 tierces of salmon and in the post-war period the trade consisted mainly of a small quantity of linen. ~~However the customs figures may underestimate the quantity of goods involved as re-exports were not included, and a petition of 1790 exists from some Belfast merchants who wanted to export tobacco to Rotterdam on the grounds that it was unfit for the Belfast market¹⁷⁷ and there may well have been other similar cases.~~

Like the trade from London to Belfast, that from the United Provinces consisted of a large number of different commodities. Among them were gin, paper, linseed oil, smalt and garden seeds. Another item which was of great importance for many years was flaxseed. It had only been imported from the Netherlands in small and irregular quantities before 1775. When the colonial supply was cut off by the American Revolution, recourse was first had to the Baltic and it was not until 1778 that flaxseed was imported from the Netherlands in large quantities. Most of the seed came from Rotterdam although at least one cargo was imported from Ostend in the Austrian Netherlands in 1782.¹⁷⁸ The trade grew rapidly and by 1781 over 2,000 cwt was being imported annually, although the quantity declined after the war and imports ceased altogether with the disruption caused by the Batavian Revolution of 1795.

Flaxseed imports were probably the principal reason for the expansion of the Rotterdam trade. In the late 1760s traffic consisted of about one

~~177. PRO CUST 1/211 p.20. 1 February 1790. The firms concerned were Hugh Montgomery & Co., Brown & Bakker and John Boyle & Co. The quantity involved was 17 hogsheads. Permission was refused as the ship was only 129 tons burthen and by law tobacco could not be exported in a vessel of less than 150 tons burthen.~~

178. BNL 23 April 1782.

vessel each year: by the end of the 1780s it had increased to about three sailings a year. Flaxseed is a bulky commodity but the other items imported from the United Provinces tended to be of high value in relation to their size and weight. In 1771, for example, imports included over 200 reams of paper, a ton of sugared fruit and 7 tons of smalt, a blue dye used in the textile industry, as well as almost 10,000 gals. of gin. All these items, together with 945 hogsheads of flaxseed and numerous sundry items, would easily fit into a single ship of 200 tons, such as were then being used in the London trade. By 1786, however, the quantity of goods involved in the trade had roughly doubled. Imports that year consisted of about 2,400 hogsheads of flaxseed, about 16,000 gals of gin and 21 tons of smalt, with a large number of smaller items, and the statistics for 1792 are similar in volume, with a significant addition of almost 1,400 bls of bark, a new trade made possible by the relaxation of import duties in the tanning industry and the consequent breaking of the former monopoly of English suppliers. During this period we know of four arrivals of vessels from the Netherlands, and in the following year five vessels arrived.

The expansion of the Dutch trade which occurred during the American War of Independence would thus seem to have continued during the general recovery in trade after the end of the war although the resumption of the American trade must have somewhat restricted its growth by reopening the traditional source of flaxseed. However, the trade came to an end in 1795, when the Revolution forced William V into exile in England and remodelled the government of the country along French revolutionary lines, altering its external policies to bring them into line with those of France. Already trade had been feeling the pressure of the French war: it now came to an abrupt halt. This is demonstrated best, perhaps, by the statistics for the

importation of gin into Belfast. These show that during the 1780s and early 1790s the quantity gradually increased to about ^{20,000}~~200,000~~ gals annually, remaining relatively impervious to such factors as increased taxation. However, in 1796 the quantity dropped to an insignificant level, and gin remained in short supply until the end of the war (Fig. 27).

In some respects, the Dutch trade was transitional between that with northern Europe and that with southern Europe. The commodities involved in it were principally those needed for the everyday operation of the local economy, such as paper, dyes and linseed, although a considerable quantity of luxury, non-essential items such as gin and toilet soap were also included. Further to the south the emphasis on luxury goods becomes increasingly marked. The trade with France, the next one to be considered here, was dominated by three items, all classifiable as luxury goods. They were wine, brandy and fruit. As was the case of the town's trade with other European centres, it was dominated by one port, Bordeaux, situated in the heart of the Gironde wine-making district and at the end of the trade route from the French West Indies.

Not only was the trade centred on one port, but it was dominated by one family in Bordeaux, the Blacks. The first of them to come to Bordeaux was John, who emigrated there in 1699 from Dublin where he had been apprenticed to a merchant.¹⁷⁹ By the mid 1720s he had become a prominent figure in the Bordeaux merchant community. He had acquired a large house in the merchant suburb of Les Chartrons, and a vineyard and country residence at Larmont, a hill which overlooked Bordeaux from the other side of the Garonne. He was also a man of considerable culture and was a close friend of the philosopher, Montesquieu.¹⁸⁰

179. PRONI Black MSS D1401/4. John Black to Robert, George and Samuel Black, July 1761; H.Riddell, Black, pp.61-62.

180. W.Ramsay, The Life and Letters of Joseph Black M.D. (London 1918), p.5.

10 GALS

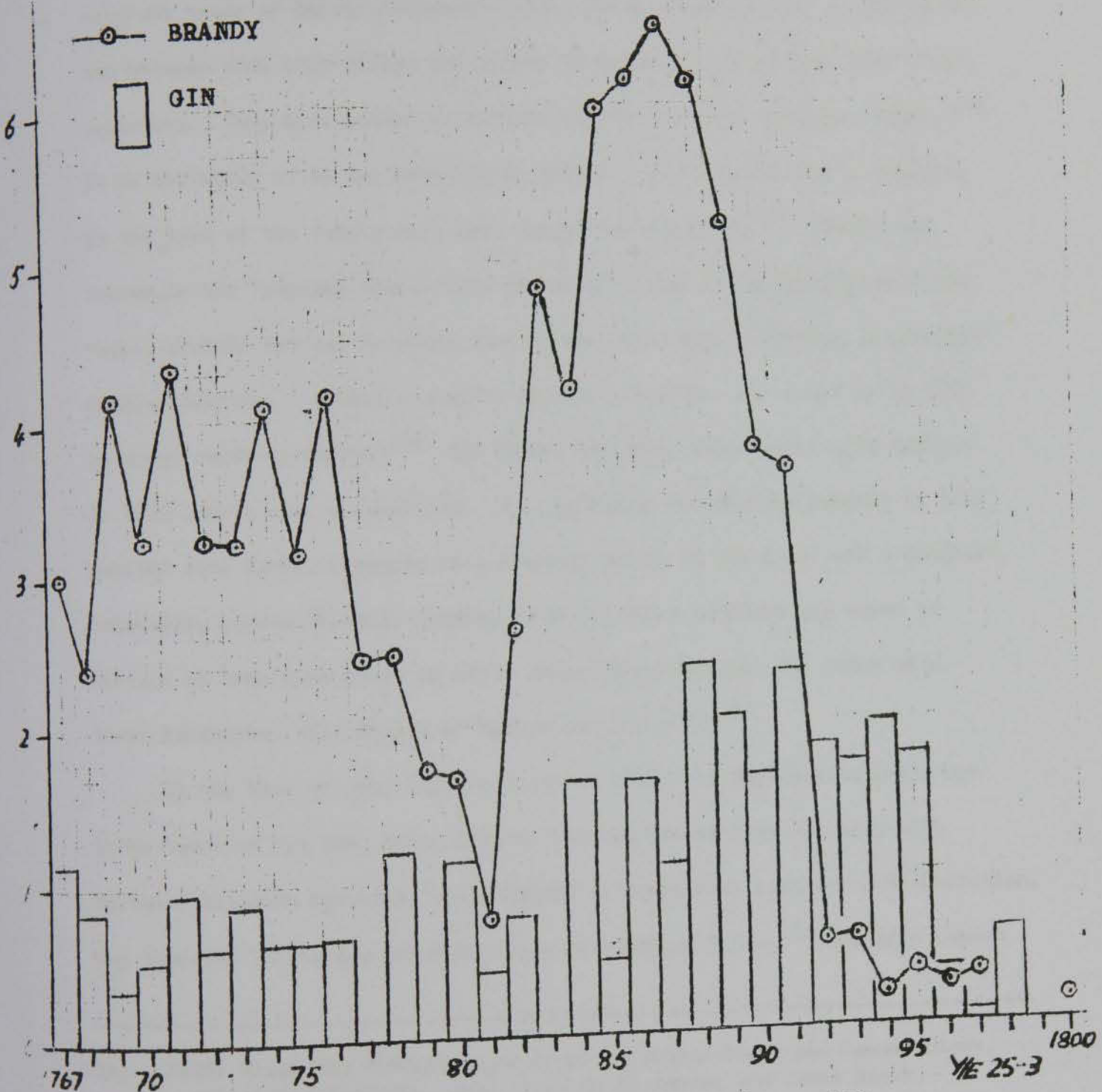


FIG. 27 . BELFAST: BRANDY & GIN IMPORTS, 1767 - 1800.

Black and his descendants always retained close links with Belfast. He sent his children there to receive their education, and at least two of his sons became prominent in the town's business life. George joined the merchant house of Daniel Mussenden & Co., while Samuel became a linendraper and between them they filled the office of Sovereign on no less than eleven occasions. They were joined in Belfast in 1767 by their brother, Robert.¹⁸¹ It is not known if he was educated in Belfast, but this is highly probable as the rest of the family were sent there for schooling.¹⁸² Robert had become [^]in the 'running trade' from the Isle of Man in partnership with the Parks, another Belfast merchant family, and with John Christian, a prominent Douglas merchant. Robert's stay in Belfast, however, was short as in 1769 he moved south to Dublin.¹⁸³ The Blacks had many other links with Belfast. In 1750 John's son, another John (who succeeded him when he retired in 1757) married Jane Banks, a member of a leading family in the town, and a daughter, Katherine, married Francis Turnley, a Newtownards merchant who moved to Belfast at some date prior to 1773, while George married the niece of a local landowner, Hill Wilson of Purdysburn, in 1753.¹⁸⁴

By the time of John Black's death in 1767, the Bordeaux business was in the hands of his son, John, who had trading connections not only with Belfast, but with Ayrshire, where Robert's former Manx partner, John Christian, had invested in the Ayr merchant house of Oliphant & Co.,¹⁸⁵ and with London

181. PRONI Black MSS D1401/4, John Black to George Black and Samuel Black, July 1761; T1073/19, John Black to Alexander and James Black, November 1766.

182. W.Ramsay, op.cit., p.4.

183. BNL 20 June 1769; L.M.Cullen, op.cit. pp.148-49; the same 'The Smuggling Trade in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, Proc.RIA lxviii (1969) Sect.C, pp.153-54

184. Riddell, Black, pp.62-64.

185. Cullen, Smuggling Trade, p.154.

where his brothers Alexander and James had established themselves in business.¹⁸⁶ He also had interests in the Caribbean. His son, John, had gone there as a supercargo in 1771, and by 1779 was a factor in Grenada.¹⁸⁷ According to a surviving letterbook of Alexander Oliphant & Co.,¹⁸⁸ he kept an agent, Thomas Barry, in Guernsey in the late 1760s to take advantage of the lower customs duties in force there, and throughout the period under consideration there was a small but regular trade between Belfast and that island.¹⁸⁹

Thomas Bateson was not only a wine-merchant but also a major shipowner and broker in Belfast, and it is possible to trace many of the vessels which he controlled. It is thus possible to identify the bulk of the shipping used in the Bordeaux trade as belonging to him or to his successors in trade. Both before and after the American War of Independence, he kept at least one vessel on the route, while another vessel, the Belfast Trader was owned by Galen Thomson & Co., who were associated with Black and with the Ayr wine-merchants, Alexander Oliphant & Co. and who were, with Bateson's firm, later to form the firm of Jones Tomb Joy & Co. Galen Thomson also owned the Industry which was used between 1779 and 1781, reregistered in the United Provinces as a Dutch vessel, and with a Dutch crew.¹⁹¹

Voyages from other ports on the French west coast were irregular, none, for example, being known between 1770 and 1783. With the exception of some voyages from Calais, those known originated from the Atlantic sea-

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186. PRONI Black MSS T1073/19. John Black Snr to Alexander and James Black, November 1766.
187. PRONI Macartney Corr. D572/3/147. George Black to Lord Macartney, 17 July 1771; BNL 1 October 1779.
188. NLI Mic. P3988.
189. e.g. BNL 20 September 1768.
190. BNL 24 December 1770; NLI Letterbook of Alexander Oliphant & Co. Mic P3988.
191. BNL 14 September 1779.

board, principally from the ports of St Malo, Rouen and Rochefort, and involved the same commodities as were imported from Bordeaux, wine, brandy and fruit.

Overall, the goods imported from France were of considerable value. In 1786 for example, imports included over 31 tuns of wine, 60,901 gallons of brandy and over 28 tuns of vinegar, as well as 20 tons of prunes, about the same quantity of resin, some salt, canes and hoops. In that year three voyages can be traced, two from Bordeaux and one from Rochefort. While Belfast was only the fifth largest importer of French wine,¹⁹² only Dublin imported more brandy, prunes and canes and only Cork, with its vast provisions trade, imported more barrel hoops, and in the vinegar trade, Belfast was only exceeded by Dublin and Cork. Belfast's French trade was therefore very considerable and the position in 1792 was similar although excise duties had by this time reduced the trade in brandy to negligible proportions (Fig. 27). An interesting feature of the statistics for that year are those which show that over 32 tons of prunes were imported, for the total amount imported into Ireland was only 85 tons, slightly more being imported into Dublin than Belfast.

During the late 1780s the expansion of the French trade was only slight if the figures of imports contained in the customs records are a reliable guide, and this is borne out by the lack of information concerning new individuals and firms becoming involved in the trade, and by a lack of growth in the numbers of sailings mentioned in the Newsletter. Indeed, they are remarkably similar for 1786 and 1792, two voyages being recorded in the latter year from Bordeaux and one from 'Charante', probably Rochefort. However, the outbreak of war in 1793 put an end to the trade, a situation

192. Behind Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Limerick.

far removed from that of 1778 when trade had continued under flags of convenience. One Belfast vessel, the William, was seized by French forces as she tried to flee Bordeaux¹⁹³ and the realisation among French policy-makers of the strategic role of trade in wartime ensured that there was no resumption apart from occasional contacts through neutral vessels such as the Hope of Baltimore which called at Belfast in 1793 en route from Le Havre to her home port.¹⁹⁴

By the 1790s, however, the French wine trade, while still valuable, had been far outstripped by that with Iberia and the Mediterranean, an area the trade with which is best examined as one unit. In 1792, for example, while only 38 tuns of wine were imported from France, over 194 came from Portugal and 79 from Spain. The brandy trade had suffered a considerable eclipse, only 1,586 gallons being imported from France compared with 4,145 from Spain. Wine thus played a very important part in the Iberian trade but it did not hold as dominant a position as it did in the French trade, being at least equalled in importance by commodities which played a much more vital role in the Belfast economy, namely potashes and brimstone. Potashes manufactured from barilla in the region about Alicante enjoyed an extremely high reputation among the Ulster linen bleachers and were imported in considerable quantities. Before 1775 about three sailings were made annually from either Alicante or the neighbouring port of Carthageno to Belfast, and in the decade from 1768 to 1777 annual imports were in excess of 4,000 cwt. Spain's entry into the war in 1778 caused considerable disruption to the trade although alternative sources of supply were available in the Baltic for these were not reckoned to be as good a bleaching agent. The end of

193. BNL 8 March 1793.

194. BNL 26 July 1793.

the war, therefore, saw an immediate resumption of the Spanish potash trade although the growth of both the linen and cotton industries maintained the demand for Baltic ash. By 1786 imports of barilla ash had exceeded their immediate pre-war level of about 7,000 cwt per year, and by 1790 had increased to a level in excess of 20,000 cwt, an increase which was, of course, reflected in a very considerable increase in shipping activity, the Newsletter, for example, recording eleven arrivals during 1790. By the early 1790s, Spanish ash accounted for more than half the total imported into Belfast.

However, the Alicante barilla potash industry never appears to have been able to supply more than 25,000 cwt a year. Indeed, in some years such as 1796, when the crop failed, the quantity was far less. The fluctuations of the supply and the rapid increase in demand led Belfast merchants to seek alternative sources of supply. Even before 1778, occasional recourse had been made to Sicilian potash imported through the Italian free port of Leghorn,¹⁹⁵ where there was a prosperous English merchant community and which served as a trading centre for Italy and the eastern Mediterranean. Sailings from there have been recorded in 1768, 1771, 1775 and 1778, all years of below average imports of Spanish potash. Unfortunately, the proportion of Sicilian ash involved cannot be estimated as it appears in the customs figures as being of Spanish origin before 1783.

With the end of the war, the Italian trade became a regular one, handling not merely potash but also a considerable quantity of brimstone, or raw sulphur which soon came to play a more important role than potash in the trade. It was used for the manufacture of sulphuric acid, then finding increasing acceptance as a bleaching agent. Originally, it was apparently imported through Dublin and reshipped to Belfast:¹⁹⁶ the growth of the

195. Now Livorno.

196. In 1779 this was the method employed by the firm of Thomas and John Greg (PRO CUST 1/148, p.99 (11 May 1779)) to supply Thomas Greg's vitriol works at Lisburn.

industry, and the increase of the Italian trade made direct importation an economic proposition, and by the mid 1780s annual imports amounted to about 1,800 cwt. These basic commodities were supplemented by other items generally in the 'luxury' category, such as olive oil and orange juice, which were imported in such small quantities as would not otherwise have justified the expense of direct shipment to Belfast.

The Belfast merchant family most deeply involved in the Italian trade were the Holmes. Like nearly every other Belfast general merchant of any substance, John Holmes had been involved in trade with Alicante in the early 1770s,¹⁹⁷ and as early as 1782 he was importing barilla potash from Leghorn.¹⁹⁸ By 1794 his brother, James, was linked with the merchant house of Webb and Holmes in that port although it is not clear whether or not a member of the Holmes family emigrated there, or whether the link was merely a financial one with an already existing house of Webb.¹⁹⁹ What is clear is that James Holmes was the principal broker engaged in the trade, although the vessels used seem to have belonged to ports other than Belfast.

During the 1790s Holmes, together with a number of other potash importers, also began to supplement his imports with ashes purchased in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. This trade started in a small way in 1791, when 200 cwt were imported. It then languished until 1794 when 1,000 cwt were brought in. Large scale importation, however, really began in 1796 when 19,500 cwt were entered. At least five vessels arrived in Belfast that year, and the total would have been greater had one ship not been driven off course and forced to put into Londonderry in considerable distress so that it was unable to proceed

197. In 1772 he was part owner of the cargo of the Jane and Mary in conjunction with Hugh Montgomery (PRO CUST 1/121, p.37 (3 March 1772)).

198. BNL 17 May 1782.

199. PRONI Ker MSS D2651/2/88. David Ker to William Sinclaire, 1794. This letter includes the request that Sinclaire, who was Ker's Belfast agent, should 'Pay James Holmes & Co. £12 English money on account of Webb & Holmes at Leghorn'.

and its cargo had to be sold there.²⁰⁰ The shipment in 1794 had been organised by the firm of Brown & Oakman,²⁰¹ and at least two of the vessels in 1796 were to the order of another large firm, that of Hugh and Alexander Montgomery.²⁰² Imports from the Baltic that year were also high and the importation of Canary ash would appear to have been an attempt to counteract a shortfall in Spanish and Sicilian supplies at a period when Mediterranean trade was hazardous because of French naval activity. In an advertisement in the Newsletter announcing the arrival of the initial shipment, Brown & Oakman claimed that 'the quality . . . will be found superior to Sicily for Chandlers' use, and nearly equal to Alicante Barilla for Bleachers'.²⁰³ However, Tenerife ash never became popular in Belfast and only in 1799, when the war and crop failure combined to drastically depress imports from Spain, did the quantity entered at Belfast exceed 3,000 cwt and the emergency nature of the trade is shown by the statistics for the following year which show the arrival of large quantities of Spanish ash and a sharp decline once again in the quantity imported from the Canaries (Fig. 28).

One reason for the failure of the Canaries potash trade to establish itself may have been the lack of any other regular trade between there and Belfast, although in 1795 the firm of Jones Tomb Joy & Co. attempted to import wine in a vessel from Tenerife, being refused because the vessel they were using was American, not British.²⁰⁴ Spain itself, on the other hand, was a source of wine and fruit. Most of the fruit came from the ports of Cadiz and Malaga, and on occasion cargoes of potash were supplemented by

200. BNL 16 March 1795.

201. BNL 28 February 1794.

202. BNL 3 April 1795, 1 January 1796.

203. BNL 28 February 1794.

204. PRO CUST 1/246, f.42 (11 September 1795).

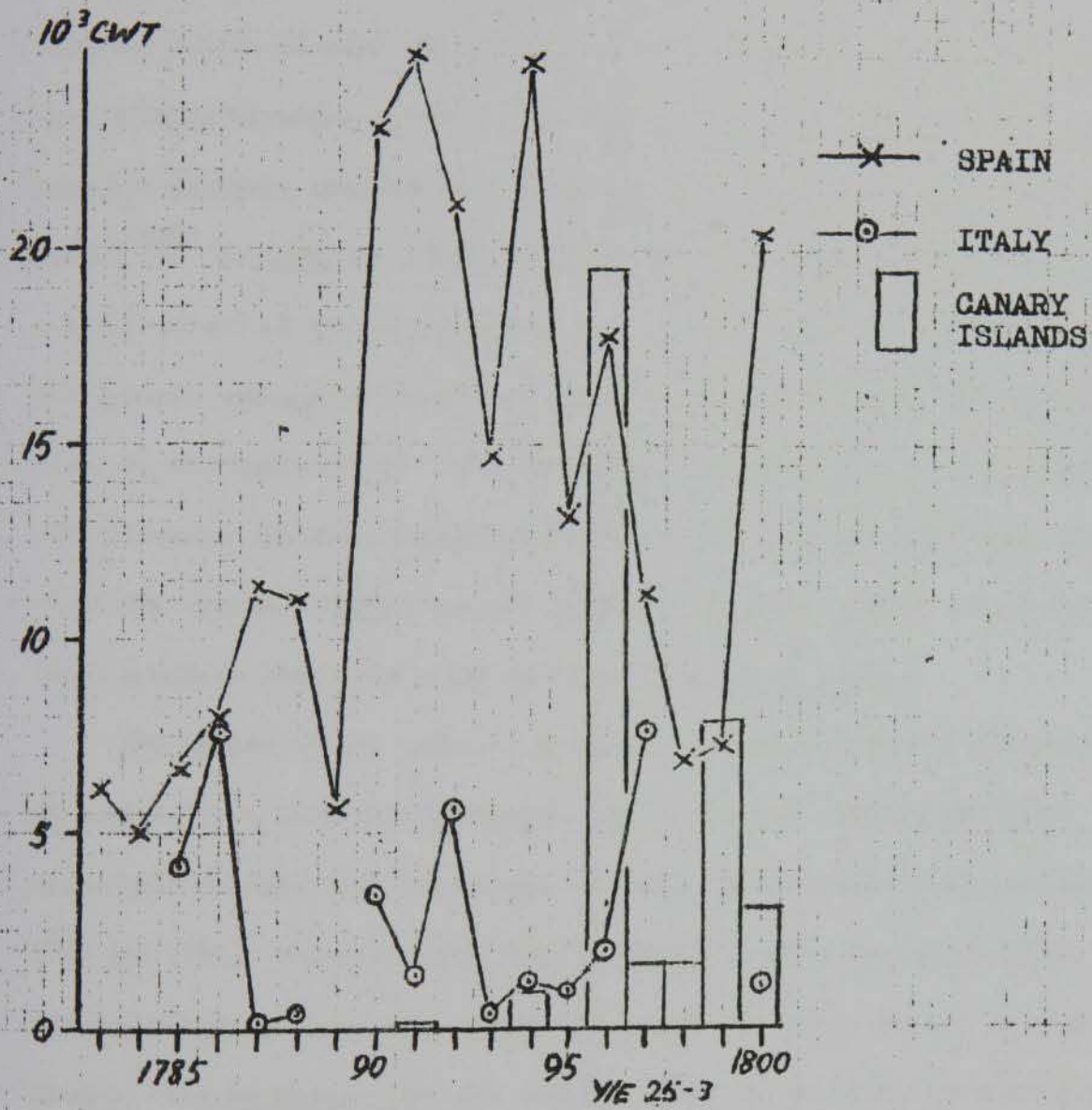


FIG. 28. IMPORTS OF POTASH INTO BELFAST FROM SOUTHERN EUROPE, 1783 - 1800

fruit loaded at Cadiz, as was the case with the Jane & Mary in 1772.²⁰⁵

The Malaga trade expanded considerably during the late 1780s, and large quantities of figs and raisins as well as citrus fruits were sent from there to Belfast. By 1792 the trade in figs alone amounted to about 700 cwt per annum and that in raisins to about 700 cwt. The fruit trade was supplemented by one in wine and brandy. Before the 1780s this had not been a particularly vigorous traffic. In 1786, for example, only 13 tuns were imported directly although this quantity was supplemented by imports through London:²⁰⁶ in 1792 the amount directly imported had risen to 80 tons. The overall growth of the trade after the coming of peace in 1783 was impressive, the pre-war average of one vessel per year rising to three, four or even five, by the early 1790s. This may have been due to direct importation of wine formerly imported through Dublin, the town's share rising from 2% to 9% of the national figure between 1786 and 1792 with a rise from fifth to third position among the Irish ports engaged in the trade.

The growth in the Spanish wine trade was paralleled by the development of a wine trade with the Portuguese town of Oporto. During the 1760s occasional vessels made the voyage but there is no trace of voyages between 1770 and 1781. However, after 1785 a regular traffic was established. At first the vessels used were normally employed on other routes, or were tramps. The Neptune, which was used in 1787, for example, was normally employed on voyages to Rotterdam and Bordeaux. However, in 1795 William Ritchie built a vessel especially for the trade. This was the William, a brig of 170 tons burthen owned by a syndicate of merchants in the town.²⁰⁷

205. PRO CUST 1/121, f.37 (5 June 1772).

206. In 1786 the firm of John Robinson was ordering wine and fruit through Ker Pope & Dyson in London (PRONI Ker MSS D2651/2/198. Griveynee & Co., Malaga to Ker Pope & Dyson, London, 3 October 1786).

207. NS 4 June 1795.

The growth of the trade in port wine was quite dramatic. In 1786 just over two hogsheads were imported legally directly into Belfast, this quantity being less than $\frac{1}{4}\%$ of the total imported into Ireland. By 1792, despite a more than sixfold increase in the amount of port imported into Ireland, largely as the result of alterations of duties in favour of Portuguese wines, over 6% was imported directly into Belfast, the quantity involved being just over 194 tuns, which would seem to indicate that whereas formerly the trade had been handled through Dublin, it had now grown sufficiently for it to be handled directly through Belfast.

The development of the port trade was not the first regular contact which Belfast merchants had had with Portugal, for in the early years of the period salt from St Ubes, near Lisbon, enjoyed a high reputation in the provisions industry for its curative qualities which were held to be much superior to those of Cheshire salt. During the 1760s and 1770s about three sailings were required each year for this trade and an associated one in citrus fruits and small quantities of a number of other products such as cork. The salt trade, however, was a very variable one (Fig. 29) and after reaching a peak in the early 1780s with the development of the Rosses fisheries, declined sharply in the middle of the decade, although over 14,000 bushels were imported in 1792, probably because of the boom which occurred that year in the West Indies provisions trade. By 1796, however, less than 1,000 bushels were being imported each year and trade was in the hands of one firm, Hugh Montgomery & Co. In August 1795, using the Industry, an American ship, they imported 80 tons, a figure which roughly equates with the customs statistics of 800 bushels.²⁰⁸ ~~That December the Industry brought another cargo which was, however, exported from Belfast without being entered in the port~~

208. PRO CUST 1/245, f.148 (19 August 1795).

10 BUSHELS

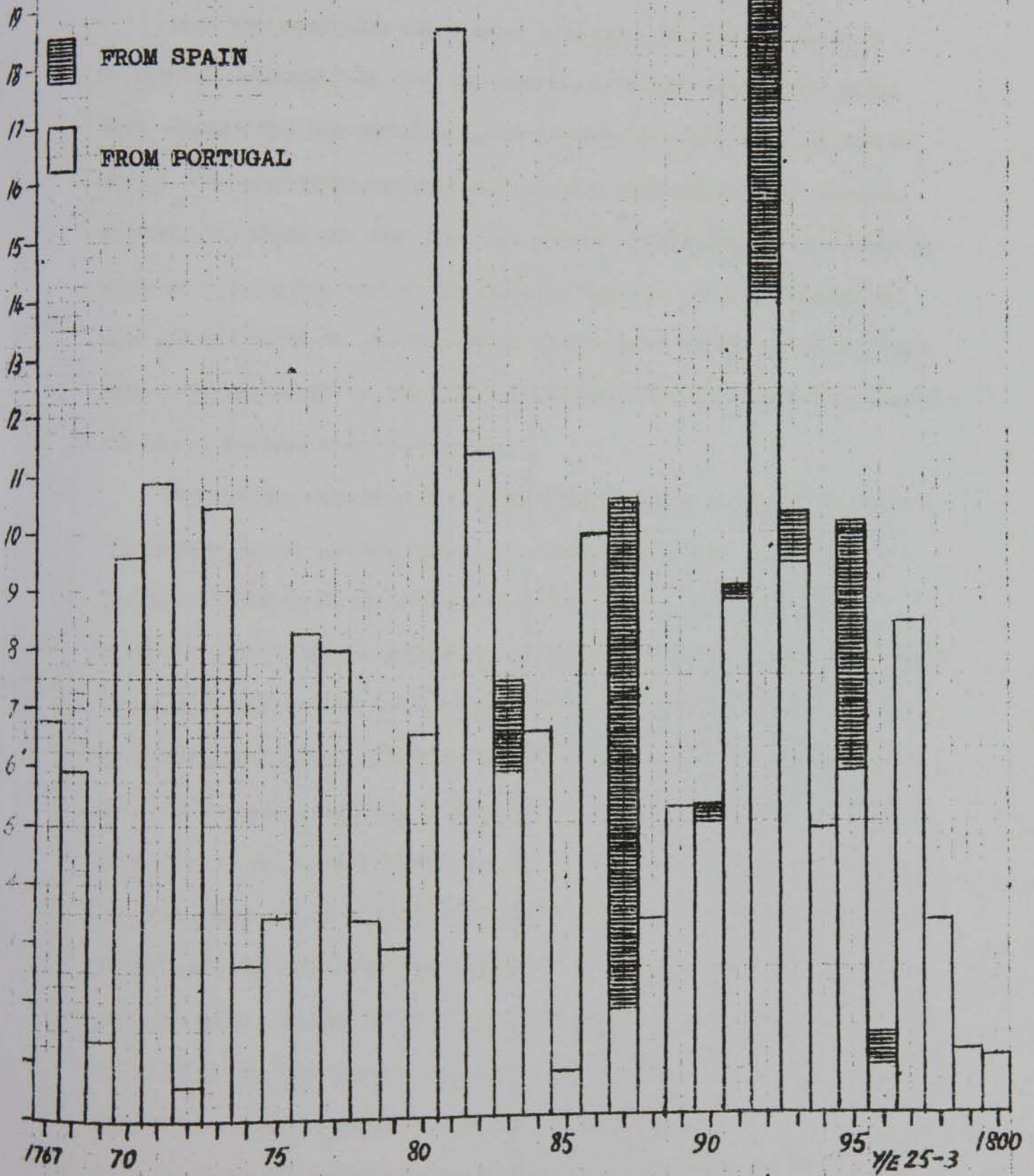


FIG. 29 . IMPORTS OF IBERIAN SALT INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

~~Records²⁰⁹ and this would indicate that these seriously underestimate in certain circumstances the quantities of goods which passed through the ports because of the amounts which were stored in bond awaiting re-export.~~

Like the trade with other parts of Europe, that to the south of Europe was unbalanced in that the quantity of export traffic was small. Most transactions had therefore to be financed by remittances of cash or bills. The only items exported were a small quantity of linen and provisions, for which the most important market was Madeira, but the trade to there was not really part of the European trade as the vessels involved were usually bound for the Caribbean. They called at Madeira to purchase wine which was resold in the plantations where they would also find a market for any provisions unsold in Madeira.

The largest component of cargoes sent to Southern Europe was butter, yet exports rarely exceeded 200 cwt. However there was a realisation in the linen industry of the potential of the market, and in 1783, at the height of the linen/hall controversy, the Newry merchant, John Nevill, wrote of the potential of the Spanish market, with its colonial as well as domestic possibilities, and of how the spare space of ships to Spain could be used for the cheap carriage of linen.²¹⁰ Towards the close of the 1780s, indeed, it began to appear that Belfast merchants were following his advice and that their linens might find a market in Spain. In 1789 and 1790 over 40,000 yards were exported each year, and in 1792 the quantity was over 100,000 yards. However the next year saw a fall to less than 35,000 yards and in 1794 the quantity was less than 10,000 yards. The only substantial attempt to create a return trade to Europe had failed.

~~209. PRO CUST 1/247, f.143 (14 December 1795).~~

210. J.Nevill, Seasonable Remarks on the Linen Trade of Ireland, with some Observations on the Present State of that Country (Dublin 1783), pp.19-20.

The European trade of Belfast never achieved the dominance of either that to Britain or the Americas. The former far exceeded it in volume, while the transatlantic trade was an employer of shipping and hence seamen. As we have seen, with the exception of the Dutch and French trades, Belfast-owned vessels played a relatively minor role in the European trade. Nevertheless, it was just as important to the everyday life of the town, supplying it with everyday necessities such as timber and iron which were essential to the economic activity of Belfast.

CHAPTER 8

BELFAST AND THE NEW WORLD

(i) The Caribbean

The Caribbean was by far the most distant region with which the port of Belfast had a regular trade. By the 1770s it had already been established for a considerable time, for the merchant, John Black, who was born in 1681, wrote of his father (who had been apprenticed to a Mr Pottinger, a merchant in the town) that he had visited many places as a supercargo on his master's ships during his apprenticeship, among them the West Indies.¹ These visits could not have taken place later than the early 1670s, and were probably of an earlier date.

The Caribbean trade was primarily one in provisions. However, as specie was a chronically short commodity in the islands, the settlers paid for the provisions in the produce of the islands, principally in rum, but also to a far lesser extent, with such items as sugar, indigo and staves for which the Belfast merchants had to find markets, and a small sugar refining industry had become established in Belfast by the beginning of the 18th century.² By the 1780s this was refining a considerable quantity of sugar which was imported directly from the West Indies although sugar was still regarded by the Belfast merchants primarily as a return freight. In 1780, for example, Waddell Cunningham stated that the importation of rum and sugar should be increased only if the result of the increase was a rise in the price paid for provisions, and at the same time John Foster was viewing the maintenance of

1. PRONI Black MSS D1401/4. John Black to Robert, Samuel and George Black, Letter of Attorney, July 1761.

2. See pp. 342 ff

the sugar refining industry in terms of the prosperity of the provisions trade.³

Rum dominated the eastbound trade from the Caribbean during the 1760s it having been discovered that due to anomalies in the various duties levied on that article, considerable profits could be made from importing it through Scotland for eventual reexport. Until 1772, when the duties were equalised, many Belfast merchants and vessels were involved in this trade whose speculative nature may be easily demonstrated by the subsequent decline in the quantity of rum imported into Belfast.⁴ Under the Navigation Acts, ^{Rum} ~~all~~ was one of the Caribbean commodities which did not first have to be ~~Caribbean cargoes had first to be landed at a United Kingdom port but the~~ landed at a United Kingdom port. ~~Strict requirements of the Acts were easily circumvented.~~ Vessels arriving with rum were normally routed before 1772 to from the Caribbean ~~were normally routed along the Donegal coast and the North Channel to Belfast, a diversion being made to touch at~~ Campbletown or Rothesay where the ~~necessary papers were signed and the cargo checked. In some cases~~ cargo was entered to gain drawback of duties, and reloaded in a matter of days ~~at least the call at a British port was a formality.~~ In 1768, for example, the Newsletter announced that the Pitt had 'arrived from Antigua . . . with near 400 Puncheons of Rum for Greys and Cunningham, and is sailed for Campbelltown to enter, from whence she is expected in six or eight days'.⁵ ~~Most of this time would have been occupied at sea, and there certainly would not have been sufficient time to load and unload the cargo.~~

By this time the West Indian trade had expanded considerably: in 1769, for example, at least 19 ships arrived at Belfast with cargoes of West Indian produce from the Clyde ports and while some may have been coasters, most were West Indian traders such as the Matty which arrived from Rothesay with rum and sugar in mid-January 1770 and cleared for St Eustatia in early

3. Cunningham to Foster, 8 September 1784, Foster to John Holmes, 7 February 1780. PRONI Foster MSS D562/8444, D562/8402.

4. See L.M.Cullen, Anglo-Irish Trade, pp.76-77.

5. BNL 5 July 1768.

March⁶ with a cargo of provisions on the Eagle which arrived from Campbeltown in February with a cargo of rum and left for Barbados in April, laden with beef and herrings.⁷

Not all the West Indian ships made the northward passage around the Donegal coast and occasionally calls were made at Welsh or English ports. In March 1768, for example, the Hawke, a vessel owned by the wine and spirit importers, Thomas Bateson & Co., arrived with a cargo of rum from Milford Haven, and sailed for Barbados with provisions on 18 May. She arrived back in Belfast on All Saints' Day, again with a cargo of rum, but on this occasion called at Rothesay.⁸ In 1770, the Hawke's voyages fell into the more usual pattern, arriving from Barbados via Rothesay in the middle of May and sailing to Antigua early in June⁹ Arrivals from the south may indeed have been casualties of the weather as the currents and prevailing winds normally favoured the more northerly route.

The equalisation of rum duties in 1772, by practically annihilating the reexport trade in rum, led to a serious decline in the level of activity of the Caribbean trade, and other depressing factors affecting the trade were the difficulties in the linen industry during the early 1770s, and the dislocation resulting from the American Revolution. However the granting of 'Free Trade' in 1780 aroused great hopes for its revival among those involved in it, one commentator writing that 'it is obvious, that as soon as a perfect intercourse shall be established, which, considering the importance to the colonies of our provisions trade, cannot be very remote, this circuitous importation of sugar through England, both raw and refined, must altogether

6. BNL 15 January, 9 March 1770.

7. BNL 23 February, 1 May 1770.

8. BNL 25 March, 20 May, 4 November 1768.

9. BNL 18 May, 8 June 1770.

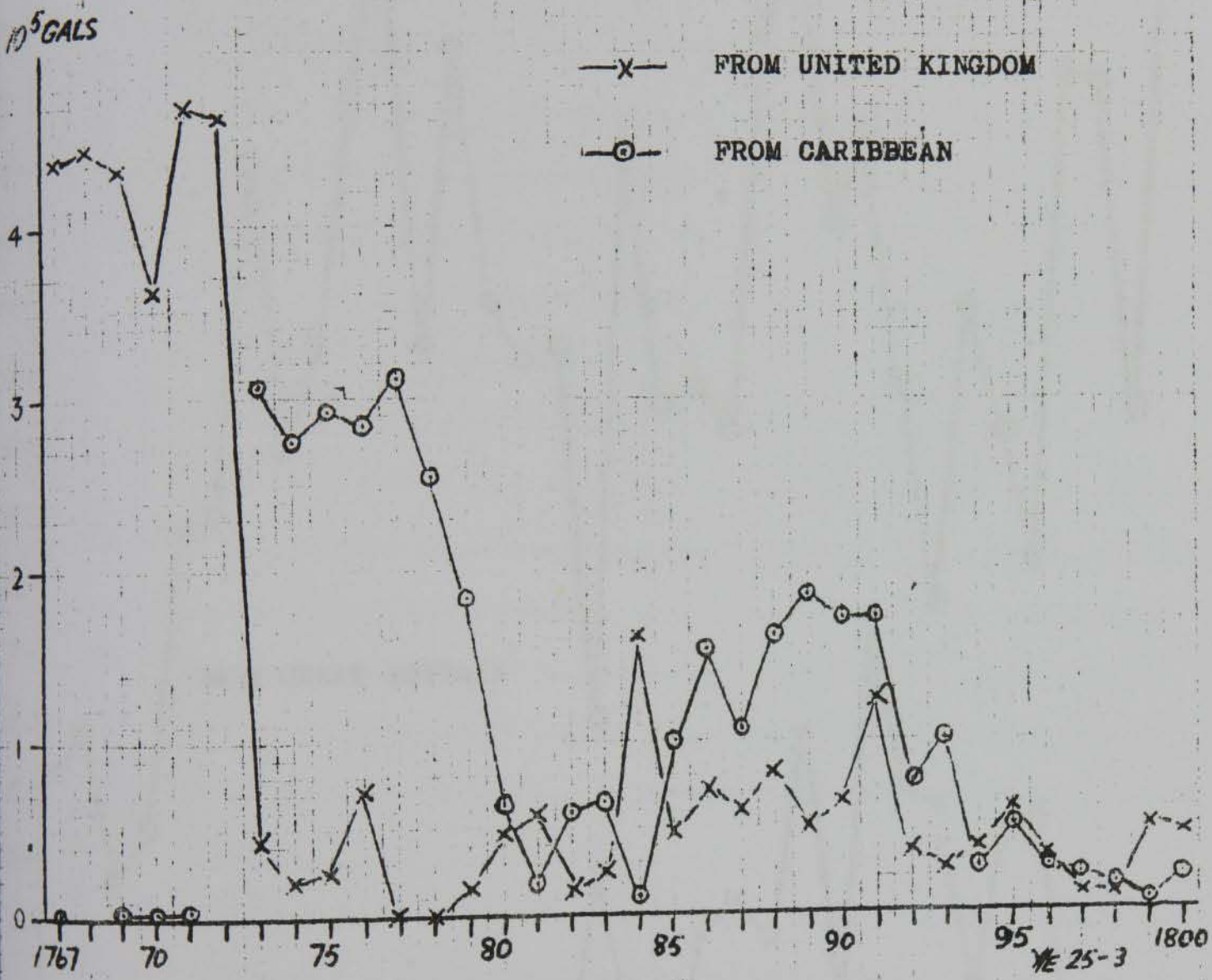


FIG. 30 . IMPORTS OF RUM INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

25-3

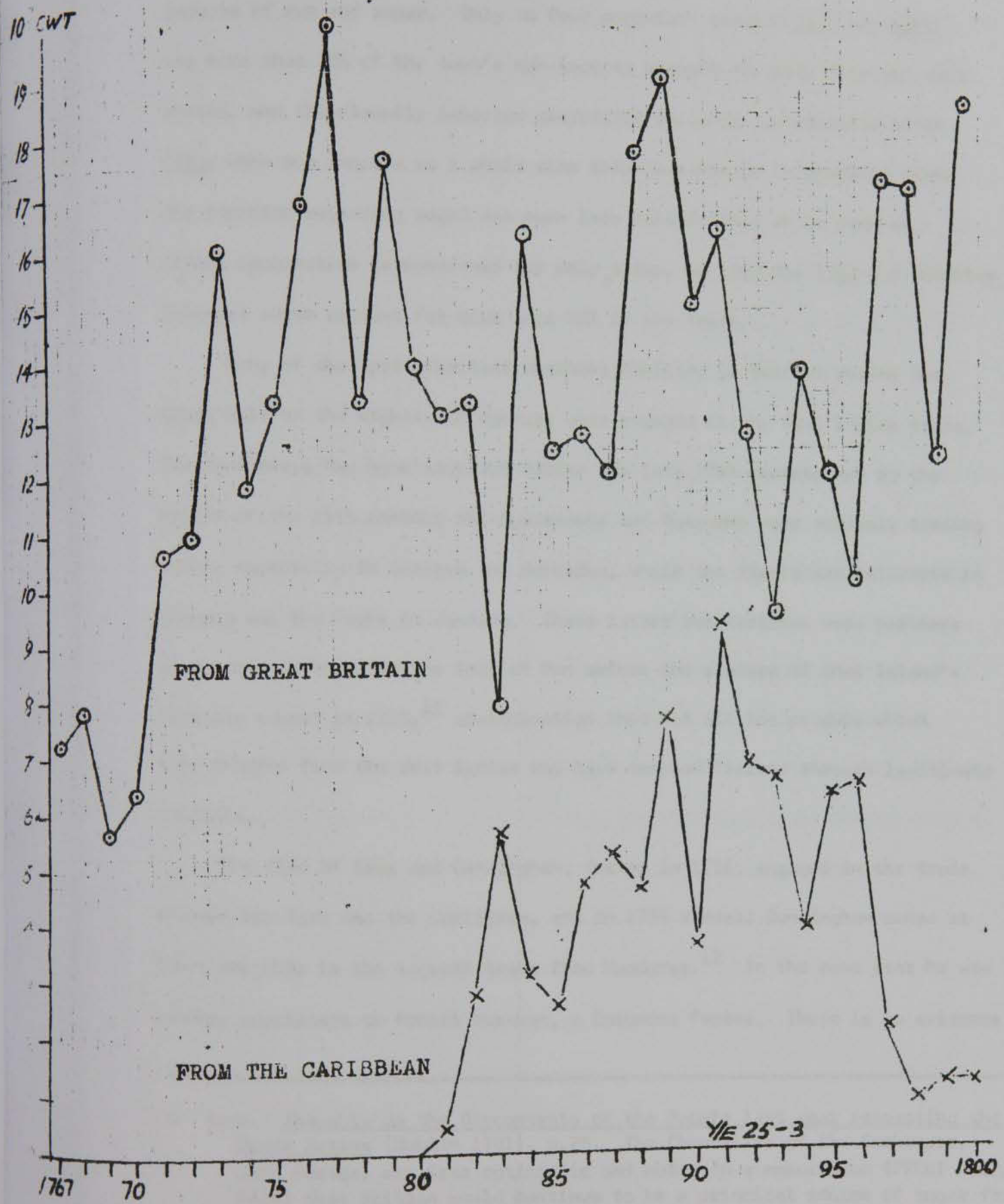


FIG. 31 . IMPORTS OF MUSCAVADO SUGAR THROUGH THE PORT OF BELFAST, 1767 - 1800.

cease'.¹⁰ This however was not what occurred, and as can be seen from Figs. 30 and 31, there was a persistent shortfall in Belfast's direct imports of rum and sugar. Only on four occasions between 1781 and 1800 was more than 70% of the town's rum imports brought directly from the West Indies, and the directly imported proportion declined dramatically after 1793, when rum imports as a whole also fell drastically in absolute terms. The position regarding sugar was even less satisfactory in as much as direct importation is concerned for only twice, in 1783 and 1793 did directly imported sugar account for more than 40% of the total.

Many of the most important merchant families in Belfast during the first half of the eighteenth century were engaged in the West Indian trade. The Macartneys had been involved during the late 17th century and by the middle of the 18th century the M_ussendens and Batesons were actively trading there, especially to Antigua and Barbados, while the Blacks had interests in Grenada and the Parks in Jamaica. These latter two families were partners in a merchant house in the Isle of Man before the closure of that island's 'running trade' in 1765,¹¹ an indication that not all the produce which they shipped from the West Indies may have reached Ireland through legitimate channels.

The firm of Greg and Cunningham, formed in 1756, engaged in the trade between New York and the Caribbean, and in 1756 Waddell Cunningham owned at least one ship in the logwood trade from Honduras.¹² In the same year he was sending provisions to Robert Workman, a Barbados factor. There is no evidence

10. Anon. Thoughts on the Discontents of the People last year respecting the Sugar Duties (Dublin 1781), p.25. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Foster, was less optimistic and noted in a memorandum (PRONI D562/8418) that Britain would continue to be a principal source of sugar for many years.

11. Cullen, Smuggling Trade, pp.153-54.

12. NLI Greg & Cunningham Letter Book M₁c P4069. Waddell Cunningham to Thomas Greg, 29 May 1756.

that he was at this time in the direct trade between Belfast and the West Indies. However, among the masters of the vessels which he was using between New York and the Caribbean were two Belfast men. One was his brother, Daniel. The other was Hugh Hawthorne, whose ship, Greg, arrived in New York in July 1756 with a cargo of provisions from Thomas Greg and a number of other Belfast merchants. However, the New York provisions market was depressed because of the outbreak of the Seven Years War, and the vessel was sent on to Barbados with orders to return to New York with a cargo of rum and sugar, and to load with flaxseed for the return voyage to Belfast.¹³ Early in the following year he was supplying indigo to the sugar refiners, Legg Hyde & Co.¹⁴

During the Seven Years' War Cunningham obtained substantial experience in privateering, and in the rather dubious trade with the Spanish entrepot of Monte Christo,¹⁵ and all of this was to stand him in good stead for the prominent part which he was to play in the trade between Belfast and the Caribbean on his return to Belfast in 1765. He purchased land (which he called the 'Belfast' estate) in Dominica, probably when it was ceded to Britain by France in 1763.¹⁶ By 1767 he was a partner in the sugar house of Bateson Cunningham & Co. His principal partner in this firm, Thomas Bateson, had been in the Caribbean trade for a number of years and his interests centred on the islands of Antigua and Barbados, if one can judge by the declared destinations of the vessels which he is known to have controlled.

13. Same colln. Cunningham to Robert Workman, 11 July 1756. The next day he wrote to another Barbados firm, Walker and Woodbridge trying to obtain a return cargo.

14. Same colln. Cunningham to Legg Hyde & Co., 13 January 1757.

15. Pares, War and Trade, pp.442-59.

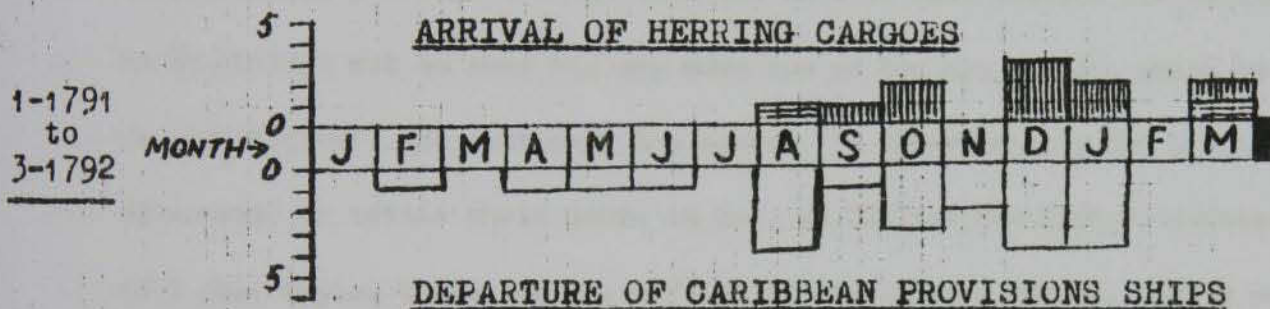
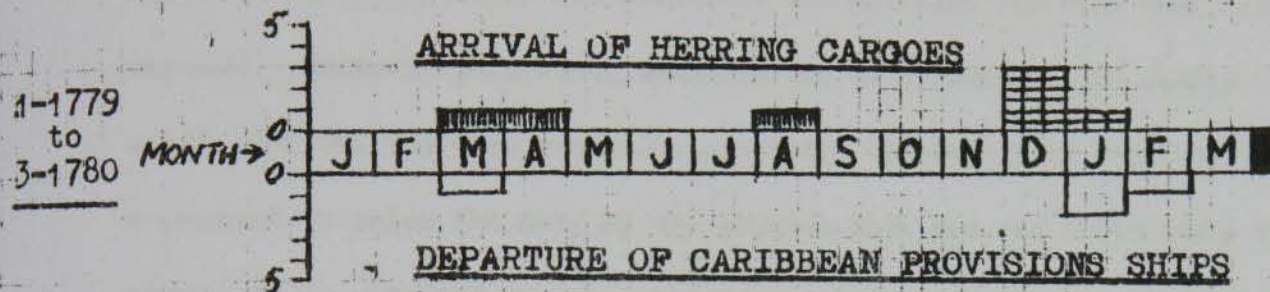
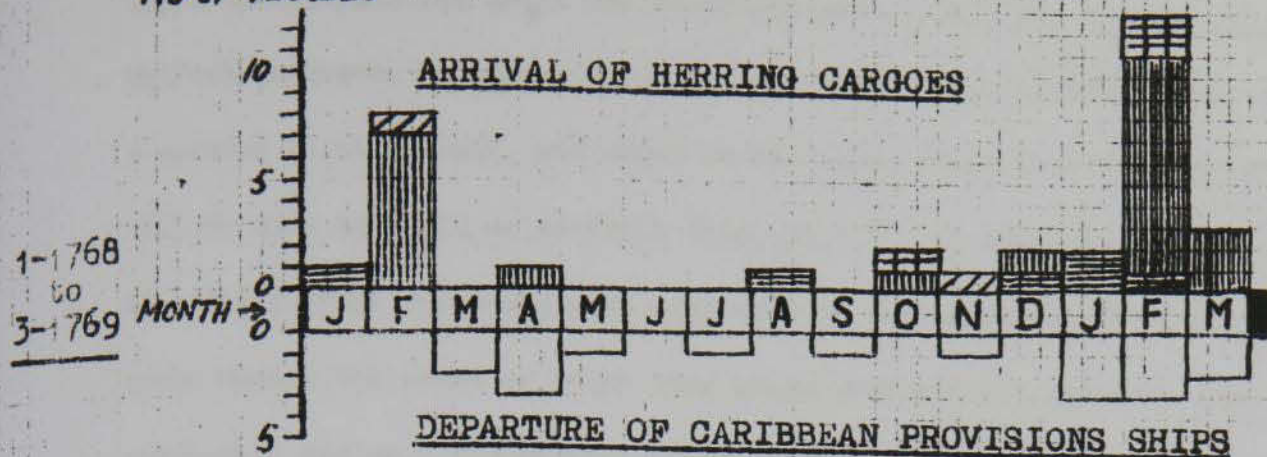
16. For the auction of Dominica in 1764, see B.E.Cracknell, Dominica, (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp.60-62.

The West Indian trade was highly seasonal. For one thing, the hurricane season in the Caribbean began in mid-August and lasted to the end of the year. During this period, no captain wished to risk his ship in the area if he could possibly avoid doing so.¹⁷ Seasonal factors were also operative in Ireland because of the nature of the outward cargoes, for provisions were most freely available in autumn when stock was killed after being fattened on summer pastures and the production of the bleach greens reached its peak. Another seasonal influence for many years was the arrival of herrings from the Scottish and Swedish fisheries. In 1769, for example, there was a direct correlation between the arrival of herrings and the departure of ships to the West Indies. The arrival of a herring fleet in February 1768 was followed by the departure of six provisions ships to the Caribbean in the months from March to May, while the normal autumnal departures in fact occurred in January 1769, rather than late in 1768 as would have been the case had the availability of pork, beef and linen, the other components of the trade, been the sole factors determining sailing dates. A similar pattern may be discerned in 1780, boats arriving from Killybegs in December 1779 and January 1780, and sailings to the West Indies occurring in January and February 1780. However, by the early 1790s the role played by herrings in the trade had declined in relation to the other commodities involved and in 1792 the relationship between the stated arrivals of cargoes of herrings, and the departure of vessels for the Caribbean is much less marked than heretofore (Fig. 32).

On arrival in the islands, the provisions were consigned to a merchant who sold the cargo and provided a return freight. It was a difficult and thankless task. The chronic indebtedness of the planters meant that a cargo

17. Insurers officially regarded August 1 as the start of the hurricane season. Caribbean insurance rates generally doubled on that date. (Pares, Yankees, p.18; T.S.Ashton, Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800 (Oxford, 1959), p.11).

NO OF VESSELS



FROM SWEDEN FROM ISLE OF MAN
 FROM SCOTLAND FROM IRELAND

FIG. 32 . BELFAST HERRING IMPORTS AND THE WEST INDIAN PROVISIONS TRADE.

might not be paid for until the following year. In 1794, for example, the Belfast merchant, Narcissus Batt, was apparently owed £4,000 by James Adams, a planter in St Vincent, and wrote to his agent there that he expected 'he will be able to remit me entirely this crop'.¹⁸ It would appear, indeed, that the Belfast merchants were very much at the mercy of the planters, who could decide the means by which they could settle their accounts when they eventually did so. The choice was essentially one between sugar and rum, and until the early 1790s the merchants did not mind too much which product was used. However, increasing taxation led to a slump in the demand for rum, and in 1791 the business community protested vigorously to Parliament against a proposal to raise the duty on the grounds that rum was 'frequently the only article to be obtained in payment for our exports to the West Indies'.¹⁹ However their protests were in vain and in 1794 Batt ordered his correspondents in St Vincent not to send him any more rum as the new duties, which he termed 'a prohibition', had destroyed the market.²⁰ Unfortunately the planters were determined to settle their debts in rum, as William Cunningham discovered in 1797 when trying to settle the affairs of his brother Samuel. There was little he could do except bemoan his fate, especially when he discovered that not only was there no overseas market for the rum, but that nobody in the islands was prepared to accept it either.²¹

One solution to this problem was the purchase of estates in the islands which would provide a regular supply of sugar as well as a market for provisions. In 1763, for example, Waddell Cunningham purchased an estate in

18. PRONI Mic 45/3/8. Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers. Narcissus Batt, Belfast to Gordon & Cunningham, St Vincent, 20 February 1794.

19. Parl. Reg. XI, p.255 (1 March 1791).

20. PRONI Mic 45/3/8. Narcissus Batt to Gordon & Cunningham, 14 February 1794.

21. PRONI Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers D1108/A/21. William Cunningham, St Vincent to John Cunningham, Crookedstone, Co. Antrim, 2 May 1797.

Dominica on the capture of that island by British forces,²² and for the rest of the century it was a regular destination for Belfast vessels. The Blacks were another Belfast family who owned land in the Caribbean. By the end of the century they owned an estate in Trinidad with an annual turnover of about £60,000. This was managed by John Black, a grandson of John Black of Bordeaux who had settled in Grenada by 1779.²³ Another family with strong connections in the area were the Tennants. Robert Tennant, whose brothers William and John were partners in the New Sugar House, went to Dry Harbour, Jamaica in 1785 as manager of a plantation,²⁴ his departure coinciding with a rapid expansion of Belfast's Jamaican trade which began in the late 1780s. Another link between the Tennants and Jamaica was through Thomas Martin, who was William's partner in a wine and spirit business and who visited the island in 1792-93. He died in St Vincent leaving no will, but surviving correspondence of the Tennant family reveals that his brother, Archibald, lived in Jamaica.²⁵ Other Belfast men also found their way to the West Indies. Waddell Cunningham's brother-in-law, John Greg, became a planter in the islands during the 1760s.²⁶ Others may have gone as overseers: Cunningham, for example, was looking for men ~~as~~ Belfast to act as overseers on his Dominica estate in 1785.²⁷ The business of many of these emigrants is not known: Francis Hamilton, for example, died in 1788 or 1799. Of him we only know that he 'must have been very old and was long a resident in the island of

22. B.E.Cracknell, op.cit. pp.44-63.

23. BNL 1 October 1779; PRONI Black MSS D1401/9. John Black to George Black, 1 March 1799.

24. PRONI Tennant Corr. D1748/1/11. Rev. John Tennant, Roseyards to Robert Tennant, 17 March 1785.

25. BNL 8 November 1793; PRONI D1748 (uncatalogued) legal document dated May 1795.

26. Benn, History ii, p.181.

27. BM 19 July 1785.

Jamaica,²⁸ while Charles McComb of Johnstown in Antigua, who died in 1810, was the uncle of Thomas McComb, a Belfast timber-merchant.²⁹

Other Belfast men can be identified in the business communities of the islands, among the many gradations which lay between the ship's master or supercargo and the merchant who traded on his own account. There is no positive evidence that the masters of Belfast's West India ships transacted business on behalf of those who consigned goods in their vessels, but they did a small amount of business on their own account. John McCracken, for example, the captain of the Hawke, frequently advertised in the Newsletter that he was selling West India produce.³⁰ While this was one of the benefits of their position, it could be abused and on one occasion in 1756 Waddell Cunningham complained bitterly that Hugh Hawthorne, the captain of the Greg, had too much business to do on his own account and was delaying the voyage.³¹

There is no evidence that specialist supercargoes were employed on Belfast vessels although John Black was on board a vessel which made a round trip to the Caribbean in 1771.³² This, however, was probably for the purpose of gaining experience of the islands. The agent or factor was a much more common personality. In the Seven Years War, for example, Waddell Cunningham employed one Richard Mercer as his agent at Monte Christo, although there is

28. PRONI Drennan-Duffin MSS D729/22. Letterbook of Hamilton Young, New York. Hamilton Young to Martha Young, 8 April 1789.

29. Will of Charles McComb, quoted in V.L.Oliver, The History of the Island of Antigua II (London 1896), p.94.

30. e.g. BNL 22 November 1768, 6 August 1776.

31. NLI Mic P4069. Greg & Cunningham Letter-book. Waddell Cunningham, New York to Thomas Greg, Belfast, 13 July 1756.

32. PRONI Macartney Corr. D572/3/147. George Black to George Macartney, 17 July 1771.

no evidence that he was from Belfast or even Irish.³³ However most firms of factors dealt with a number of firms in Britain, Ireland or North America, and can be termed 'independent'. Cunningham, for example, was sending goods to at least two firms in Barbados in 1756, Walker & Woodbridge, and Robert Workman,³⁴ and a number of Belfast men were engaged in this business. Among them was Robert Ewing who returned to Belfast in 1787 after twenty-five years in the colonies, of which at least the last five had been spent as a factor in Barbados.³⁵ The Grenada firm of Park and Smith also had strong links with Belfast, one of the partners being James Park jnr, the nephew of a Belfast merchant of the same name who had himself been in the West Indies at an earlier date, and who went to Grenada in late 1785 as a factor for Waddell Cunningham³⁶ but shortly afterwards joined with Smith. The firm remained in business until Park was forced to leave after a slave revolt in 1796.³⁷

Another firm of factors with Belfast connections was that of Gordon & Cunningham of St Vincent in which one of the partners was Samuel Cunningham of Crookedstone. They corresponded with a number of Belfast houses, including those of Narcissus Batt, Thomas Batt and Cunningham & Greg.

-
33. R.Pares, War and Trade, pp.442-43. The temporary nature of the Monte Christo trade, which owed its prosperity solely to the War, makes it a special case.
34. NLI Mic P4069. Greg & Cunningham Letterbook, 1756-57.
35. BNL 9 July 1790. In 1782 he made a subscription to the Belfast Charitable Society, his address then being Barbados (BNL 26 November 1782).
36. BNL 9 December 1785. A year later, Cunningham was offering a reduced shipment rate to those who were consigning goods to Park and Smith on the ship Free Trader.
37. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/1396A. James Park to Lord Hillsborough, 18 January 1798. Park was the only Irish merchant on the island. For a brief history of the troubles in Grenada, see A.Burns, History of the British West Indies (London, 2nd ed.1965), pp.567-572.

Samuel Cunningham had originally arrived in the West Indies in 1792 and the partnership lasted until 1795 when he moved to St Pierre in Martinique where he established himself in business on his own account. Unfortunately, he was killed early in 1796 in a skirmish between a French warship and a British vessel he was on, as he was about to make a visit home. His brother, William, went out to the West Indies to sort out his affairs and remained there until his own death in 1801.³⁸

A third firm which should be mentioned is that of Cuming and Burke, which was active in Jamaica in the early 1790s, and which may have played an important role in the opening up of the trade to Jamaica from Belfast in the mid 1780s. We know little of their activity, however, apart from a court case in 1794 when they sued a Belfast merchant, Richard Seeds, for refusing to accept a shipment of cotton wool which he claimed was sub-standard. Seeds won the case, much to the delight of the Northern Star, which declared that 'This verdict will tend to induce Factors in the West Indies to pay a more minute attention to their orders than has hitherto been customary'. Cuming and Burke appealed, and the verdict was set aside.³⁹ Thomas Cuming of this firm was apparently related to a number of businessmen of the same surname in the town, and in 1793 he purchased some seventy acres of land at Ballymisca, being then described as late of Jamaica, now of Summerfield, Co. Down.⁴⁰

There were many changes in the markets to which the merchants of Belfast sent their goods. Unfortunately, before 1783 the customs records do not differentiate between the different islands, and the principal source before that date is the Newsletter which notes intermittently the arrival and departure

38. PRONI Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers. These are in two collections, D1108/A and Mic 45/3.

39. BNL 5 September, 28 November 1794; NS 4 September 1794.

40. PRONI L'Estrange & Brett papers D1905/2/284. Deed, John Hamilton to Thomas Cuming. The cost was £6,000.

of ships. Four islands, Antigua, Barbados, Dominica and Grenada are regularly mentioned, while occasional voyages were made to a number of other islands, among them Jamaica, St Kitts and the Dutch island of St Eustatia. Among the merchants involved in trade with Barbados and Antigua were the houses of Greg & Cunningham, and Thomas Bateson & Co. They were also involved in trade with Grenada and Dominica. In 1776, for example, two vessels belonging to the former firm, the Lord Chatham and the Waddell sailed to Dominica⁴¹ where, as we have seen, Waddell Cunningham owned an estate, while Bateson's Hawke arrived from Grenada,⁴² an island where the Black family, who were closely associated with Bateson in business,⁴³ had interests. It would thus seem likely that the regular trade which these firms engaged in with these relatively unimportant islands was based on their interests there, although in the case of Dominica, advantage may also have been taken of the 'free port' status enjoyed by it between 1766 and 1780.⁴⁴

These were the islands to which voyages were made regularly, but as has been mentioned, other islands were also involved from time to time. At least six ships cleared for St Eustatia between 1769 and 1775⁴⁵ and three for Jamaica in 1769, but trade there was spasmodic.⁴⁶ In 1773 one Belfast merchant, Henry McKedy was importing Jamaican rum through London; another,

41. BNL 5 March, 20 September 1776.

42. BNL 2 July 1776.

43. John Black was in Grenada in 1779 (BNL 1 October 1779). His uncle George, a Belfast merchant had been a partner, along with Thomas Bateson, in the merchant firm of Daniel M_ussenden & Co. during the 1750s.

44. D. MacPherson, op.cit. III, pp. 626-27.

45. BNL 14 March 1769, 6 February, 9 March 1770, 20 March 1772, 8 November 1774, 29 September 1775.

46. BNL 10 March, 7 April, 13 June 1769.

John Cunningham, was sending herrings there in 1782.⁴⁷ Voyages are known to have been made to a number of other islands including St Kitts,⁴⁸ Tortola⁴⁹ and Montserrat.⁵⁰ However, these were mainly in wartime when trade was depressed and traditional markets had been lost through capture.⁵¹ They may thus show that at such times, Belfast's merchants were willing to try any available markets but normally relied on a few trusted centres with which they had regular contacts.

When detailed trade statistics concerned with individual islands become available from 1783, Antigua was the destination of just over a third of Belfast's exports of provisions to the Caribbean, and in exchange supplied a third of her West Indian sugar and over two thirds of her rum. The island constantly supplied a much higher proportion of rum to sugar than others and this, with its lack of growth as a provisions market and the economic difficulties which beset it in the years after 1783, explains why trade there virtually ceased during the 1790s when duties on spirits were raised sharply. The small size of Antigua and Barbados, which suffered from similar problems,⁵² meant that they had an extremely limited capacity both for absorbing goods and supplying plantation produce and that they could very easily be over-supplied. A mistimed arrival could easily collapse a previously profitable market as well as causing a sharp rise in rum and sugar prices or delays in

47. BNL 23 July 1773; Proc. Dub. Soc. xviii, p.95 (28 March 1782).

48. e.g. BNL 9 January, 5 October, 21 December 1781.

49. e.g. BNL 30 July 1776, 3 May 1782, 24 January 1783.

50. BNL 13 June 1783.

51. L.J.Ragatz 'Upon Every Principle of True Policy' the West Indies in the Second Empire, in C.W.Toth (ed), The American Revolution and the West Indies (Port Washington, N.Y., 1975), p.192.

52. ibid., p.143.

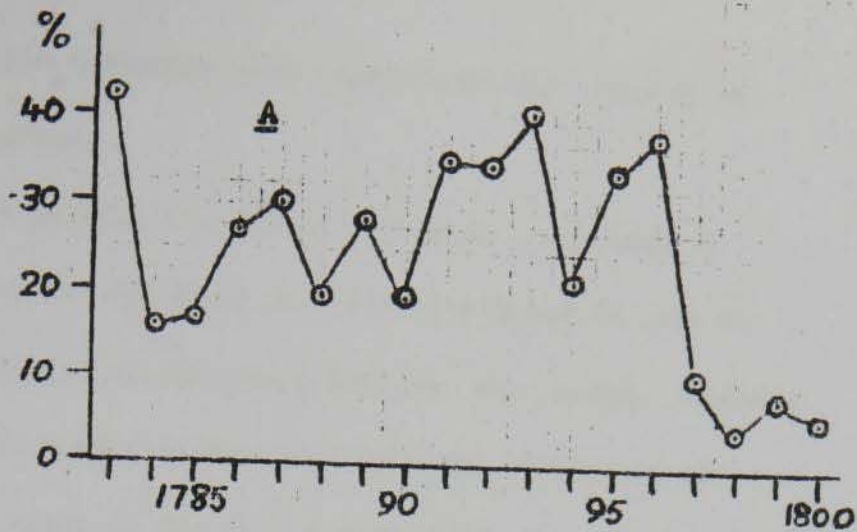
obtaining cargoes. The breakthrough into the Jamaican market which occurred during the second half of the 1780s was thus of great importance as it was by far the largest market in the British Caribbean and the one most able to absorb fluctuations in trade. The success of the Belfast merchants there must be seen as a product of their increasing prosperity and contacts⁵³ although it may have been assisted by the devastation of food crops which occurred in each of the years from 1784 to 1786, and which caused conditions of acute distress during which 15,000 slaves were reported to have starved to death.⁵⁴ The result of the opening of a reliable Jamaican market may be seen in Fig. 33, which shows how it had come to dominate the Caribbean sugar trade by 1790. A similar pattern can be perceived in the provisions trade in beef, pork and herrings. In the years immediately following the end of the American War of Independence, the West Indies consumed between 10% and 15% of the town's exports of beef and pork. It was a proportion which rose steadily in the years before 1795 despite a rapid expansion in the provisions trade as a whole. Between 1786 and 1794, between 25% and 40% of Belfast's exports of beef and pork were destined for the Caribbean, a peak being reached in 1792, when 25 ships were said to have left Belfast.⁵⁵ As most of these were destined for Jamaica, this may have been a response to the market created by the devastation of the 'Maroon Wars'

53. The need for a large amount of capital and reliable contacts before embarking in the Jamaica trade may be seen from a letter from John Mills to Francis Mills (two members of a London family of sugar merchants) in 1770. He wrote that trade 'cannot be extended to Jamaica without having a Large Advance and as I have not any Acquaintance in your Island We never made any attempts to procure any Consignments from thence as it would require an Immense Sum to make our Concerns so general'. (quoted in D.W.Thoms, *The Mills Family: London Sugar Merchants of the Eighteenth Century*, Business Hist. xi (1969), p.5.

54. J.H.Parry, P.M.Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies, 3rd ed. (London, 1971), p.140.

55. J.R.Fisher, J.H.Robb. Royal Belfast Academical Institution, Centenary Volume 1810-1910 (Belfast, 1913), p.11.

**FIG 33 . IMPORTS
OF MUSCOVADO SUGAR
FROM THE WEST
INDIES INTO BELFAST
1783 - 1800**

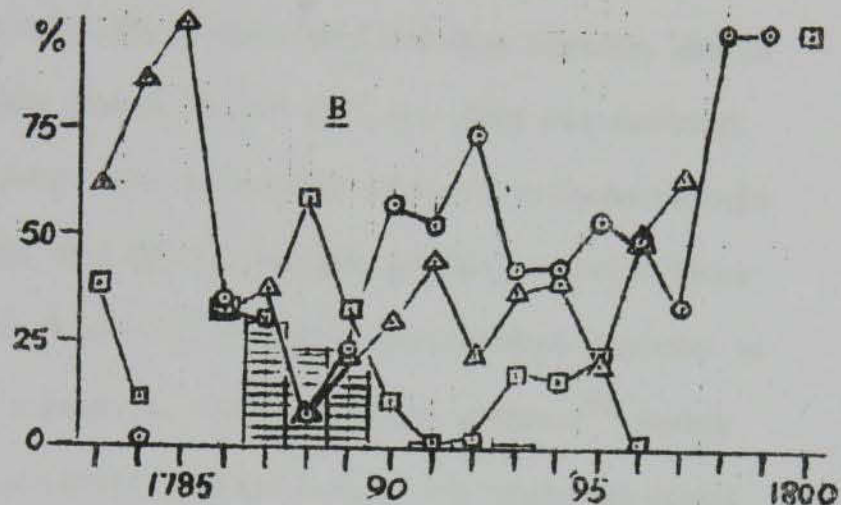


A

Imports from the West Indies expressed as a percentage of the total imports into Belfast.

B

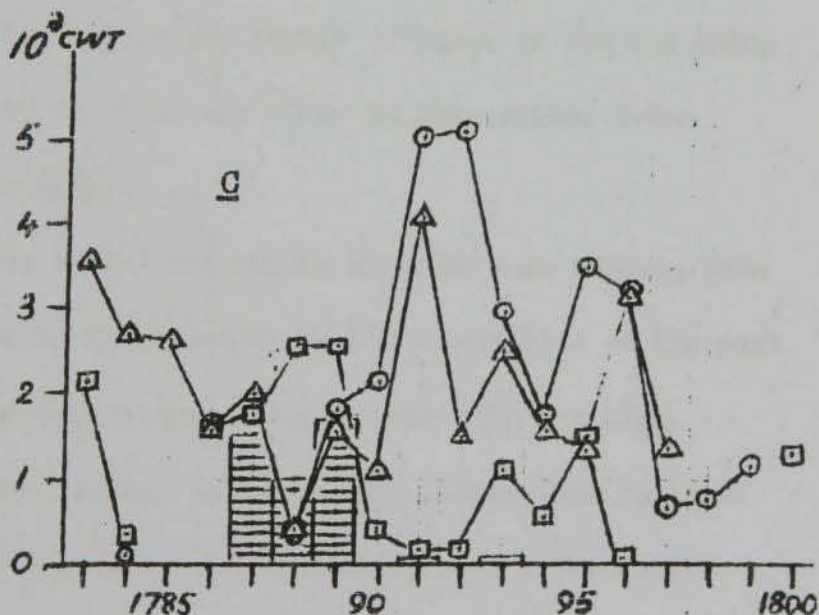
Individual islands as a percentage of the total import from the Caribbean



C

Imports from individual islands

- ANTIGUA
- JAMAICA
- ▨ BARBADOES
- △— OTHER ISLANDS



in Jamaica at this period which destroyed many slave provision grounds and threatened an acute food shortage.

The performance of pork exports bears little overall similarity to those of beef, largely because of the rapid growth of the trade in pork to Great Britain, which was virtually non-existent early in the period. Perhaps more significant is the relationship between beef and pork exports to the various islands expressed in terms of the West Indies trade as a whole. In 1783 roughly a third went to Antigua and the remainder to the smaller islands. By 1790 Jamaica was absorbing over 70% of both beef and pork exports, and in some years a considerably higher proportion of pork than beef was exported. Only in 1787 did exports of either meat to Antigua exceed a thousand barrels and during the decade from 1783 to 1792 the average quantity exported there was just over 550 barrels of beef and 210 of pork. The quantity exported to the area known in the customs records as 'West Indies in general'⁵⁶ during the same period was 667 and 330 barrels respectively. The trade was static, the best years being 1783-84 in the latter case, and 1787 in the Antigua trade. Indeed, the Barbados market, the third major sector of trade in the mid 1780s declined rapidly thereafter, and no ships are known to have sailed there between 1789 and 1791, or after 1795.

The growth of the Jamaican trade, the causes of which have already been discussed, was rapid.⁵⁷ Virtually non-existent in 1784, over half of the pork exported from Belfast to the Caribbean went there between 1788 and 1796. While the proportion of beef was somewhat less, by 1789 Jamaica had replaced Antigua as Belfast's major West Indian market, absorbing over a thousand barrels each year between 1790 and 1795. However the expansion of the Jamaican market did not free the Caribbean trade from the effects of fluctuations in

56. Principally Grenada and Dominica.

57. See pp. 276 to 279

demand and prices. There were boom years such as 1792: there were also periods of depression, especially when war broke out with France in 1793. The year 1795 was disastrous: 1796 differed from it only in seeing a recovery in the beef trade, and overall the West Indian trade declined rapidly in wartime conditions.

This pattern of rapid growth, followed from the mid 1790s by a rapid slump, cannot be readily deduced for the trade in salted herrings, the third of the major commodities which comprised the provisions trade. Herrings formed an important part of the trade as they were a major item in slave diets and virtually all the herrings exported from Belfast went to the Caribbean market. Apart from a period during the 1770s and 1780s⁵⁸ the bulk of the herrings exported from Belfast to the West Indies had to be imported, principally from Scotland and Sweden. The best herrings were Swedish: they had a higher fat content and although it was illegal to export foreign herrings to the Caribbean, Scottish fishermen and merchants frequently complained that Irish merchants were repacking them in Irish barrels, which were smaller than Swedish barrels⁵⁹ (and, it was said, often made from them). As duties and drawbacks were levied on each barrel, the transaction could prove highly profitable to the exporter, especially as it was virtually impossible to determine the nationality of the fish. The practice was notorious in Cork: it is hard to estimate just how prevalent it was in Belfast as in all years before 1777, the number of barrels exported was less than that imported from Scotland. However, the fact that exports increased significantly in 1777 and declined after 1789, this being the period of the Rosses fishery, would seem to indicate a relative honesty on the part of the

58. This was during the hey-day of the Rosses fishery, for which see pp. 109 ff

59. 20 Swedish barrels = 25 Irish (Young, Tour I, pp. 249-50).

Belfast merchants.⁶⁰

During the period, linen formed an increasingly important component of cargoes to the Caribbean, mainly in the years after the end of the American War of Independence. During the early 1780s about 1½% of the linen exported from Belfast went to the Caribbean: by the 1790s the proportion was usually just less than 10%, and, indeed, reached 11½% in 1791. The pattern of dispersion among the various islands was similar to that found in the provisions trade. During the mid 1780s about one third was sent to Antigua. However, from 1787 there was a rapid expansion of the Jamaica market: in 1788 a quarter of the bleached linen exported to the West Indies was sent there and by 1790 more was being sent there than to Antigua: indeed, from 1793 Antigua only received linen every second year while trade with Barbados ceased after 1794.

The growth of the linen trade was much more rapid than that of the provisions trade. The increased share of the trade which went to the West Indian market would have been remarkable even had the trade as a whole remained static, but as has been seen, it too was rising dramatically. If one takes 1783 as a base year, the exports of provisions to the West Indies in that year were only exceeded in 1785, 1792 and 1796, and in 1797 were but a quarter of what they had been in the base year. Exports of linen, on the other hand, were only less than in 1783 in 1784-6 and in 1798 (Fig. 34) the

60. Reports from Committees on the State of the British Herring Fisheries 1798, 1799, 1800. (Sessional Papers H.C. X, 1803) pp.207-9; Reports from Committees on the State of the British Fisheries 1785, 1786. (Sessional Papers H.C. X, 1803), p.78. The same complaint to a lesser extent was made re repacking of 32 gal. Scotch barrels into 28 gal. Irish barrels. This latter trade was perfectly legal. In 1776 Young (Tour I, pp.292) complained bitterly about how the practice affected the Rosses fishery and was compounded because drawbacks were paid on reexport but the bounty offered to exporters of Irish herrings was not paid until the ship returned to Ireland.

YEAR	BEEF	PORK	HERRINGS	PROVISIONS ¹	LINEN
1781	74.4	61.5	16.1	47.4	21.6
1782	39.9	73.7	12.3	36.1	33.3
1783	B A S E Y E A R (1 0 0)				
1784	89.6	53.0	37.5	59.8	60.3
1785	116.4	13.7	186.9	123.8	85.7
1786	69.2	51.5	64.9	63.4	78.8
1787	85.5	51.0	51.4	63.7	137.0
1788	64.9	92.0	110.9	90.0	353.0
1789	60.3	103.5	66.0	72.4	496.1
1790	109.4	178.9	7.5	83.0	486.9
1791	109.2	151.3	4.2	75.4	881.6
1792	263.5	260.7	153.9	217.7	878.5
1793	113.8	145.3	--	74.0	598.2
1794	128.9	198.6	--	91.4	297.2
1795	56.2	105.8	--	44.1	575.8
1796	234.6	79.7	4.7	100.5	769.9
1797	39.1	53.2	7.2	26.2	197.8
1798	21.2	47.3	--	18.3	95.7
1799	46.3	166.0	26.7	65.1	362.8
1800	66.5	48.8	--	35.1	211.9

¹Provisions comprises the total number of barrels of the three commodities, beef, pork and herrings, exported.

FIG. 34 . THE GROWTH OF EXPORTS OF PROVISIONS AND LINEN FROM BELFAST TO THE WEST INDIES, 1783 - 1800

latter being an acutely depressed period because of domestic recession and political unrest as well as wartime disruption of trade.

The growth of the linen trade to the West Indies was in some measure due to the activities of the White Linen Hall committee. In 1785, for example, they advertised that they had arranged for a ship to sail for Grenada in connection with the January sales,⁶¹ and four vessels sailed for the West Indies after the July sales of 1791,⁶² and during that year at least three vessels, two bound for Antigua and one for Grenada, were advertised in the Newsletter as clearing with linen rather than with the more usual description of linen and provisions.⁶³ By this time the trade had indeed attained considerable dimensions: seventeen Belfast merchants involved in the exporting of linen to the Caribbean⁶⁴ have been identified for the year ending June 1792.

While the vast bulk of this linen was exported in a bleached state, the trade in white linen was supplemented during the second half of the 1790s by one in coloured and printed linens which resulted from the rapid expansion of cloth-printing in Belfast because of the growth of the cotton industry. They were first mentioned in connection with the West Indies trade in 1783, but the quantities involved were insignificant until 1795 when 116,233 yds were exported. While a quarter of this amount went to Antigua, Jamaica was once again the principal destination and the evidence indicates that Belfast merchants were able to sell about 100,000 yards annually in Jamaica. The quantity sold elsewhere was generally minimal, although over 10,000 yards were sent to the Danish colony of St Thomas in 1796.

61. BNL 25 January 1785. The vessel was the Prosperity.

62. BNL 12, 26 August, 2 September 1791.

63. BNL 8, 26 August, 2 September 1791.

64. Mins. Linen Trustees (1792) pp.101-6 (A list of linens examined by Arthur Buntin, port inspector of linens at Belfast).

This probably found its way to the French islands.

The provisions and linen which formed the bulk of exports to the West Indies from Belfast were supplemented by smaller quantities of other commodities including beer, cordage and shoes. Exports of the latter item apparently commenced during the 1770s,⁶⁵ being first mentioned in the trade statistics for 1776, a date which seems to show that initial shipments were substitutions for goods normally obtained from the mainland colonies. Initially, shipments were to Holland, and from there they no doubt were sent to the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean which were busy at this period exploiting the benefits of their neutral situation. Direct shipments were recorded in 1778 and 1780: the quantities involved were small and it was not until the late 1780s that they expanded considerably. In October 1792 one Belfast spirit merchant engaged in a venture to the West Indies, part of the cargo exported including over £100 worth of shoes,⁶⁶ and in 1794 Narcissus Batt described a typical cargo bound for the Caribbean as being 'say, linens, herrings, a good many Boots and Shoes, Pork, Soap, Tongues'.⁶⁷ By 1797 over 10,000 lbs of boots and shoes were being exported annually to the West Indies: in each year from 1789 to 1799 over three-quarters of the boots and shoes exported from Belfast were destined for the Caribbean market.

Another item of some interest which was supplied to the West Indies was horses and mules. The West Indian climate was extremely hard on these animals and regular imports were required to provide for the planters' needs.

65. Shoes were listed in the imports and exports statistics for 1683 quoted in Owen, History, pp.366-68. However the trade was apparently extinct by the 1760s.

66. PRONI D1721/1 (Account Book of a Belfast wine and spirit merchant, probably T. & M. Atkinson).

67. PRONI Mic 45/3/8 (Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers), Narcissus Batt to Gordon & Cunningham, St Vincent, 14 February 1794.

Supplies were always inadequate and in 1784 Waddell Cunningham remarked that they were one item which West Indian governors would allow to be imported from any source despite the Navigation Acts.⁶⁸ They were, he wrote a year later, a suitable business for the poor, for they were easily reared and found a ready market.⁶⁹ Others besides Cunningham were engaged in the trade, John Campbell & Co. were purchasing them as early as 1784⁷⁰ while the merchants Cunningham Greg and Narcissus Batt regularly advertised for them in the columns of the Newsletter.⁷¹ However their success was limited: even in 1792 the total number exported was only 225.

While the provisions trade was the original 'raison d'etre' of the Caribbean trade, it came to be equalled in importance as we have seen by linen, and also by the two commodities which were the staple components of cargoes from the West Indies, rum and sugar. As has been mentioned earlier, these had acquired virtually the status of currency in the islands. The trade in them was also severely restricted by legislation in the years before 1780: it was said, for example, in 1770 that not only did the requirement that they had to be imported through a British port add £100 to the cost of a venture but that it stood in the way of a vessel making a double journey each year. It should be noted, however, that this claim turned out to be false as after the liberalisation of trade in 1780 Belfast vessels consistently failed to make double voyages. Indeed, the week or two spent diverting to a British port was insignificant compared with the far less predictable delays accruing in the islands as vessels tried to sell or purchase cargoes, or sheltered from the weather. Throughout the period no substantial reduction

68. PRONI D562/8444 (Foster Papers) Waddell Cunningham to John Foster, 8 September 1784.

69. PRONI D562/9543, the same to the same, 21 July 1785.

70. BNL 16 January 1784.

71. See for example BNL 6 August 1791, 4 July 1794.

was made in the round time taken for a voyage. It occupied between five and eight months, and the achievement of more than one and a half round trips in a year was a rare event indeed, as time was required for the reequipment and repair of vessels.⁷²

The Caribbean trade also suffered from the fact that each island did not produce the same proportion of rum to sugar. Antigua, for example, was primarily a supplier of rum, while Jamaica was a source of sugar: indeed, this is yet another reason which may have contributed to the decline of trade with Antigua during the 1790s. The trade was also influenced by the quality of sugar, which differed from island to island. Barbados, for example, was noted for its high quality clayed sugars while St Kitts was a source of excellent muscovado, or raw, sugar. Demerara sugar was much favoured by grocers who based their judgement on colour whereas refiners favoured strong sugars: Jamaica sugar, while available in large quantities, was little regarded as it ranked lowly in each criterion, as did sugar from Neirs.

While rum and sugar were the dominant imports from the Caribbean, the trade was increasingly diversified after 1783. In 1780 (admittedly a year when trade was subject to serious disruption) only six commodities were imported. They were rum, sugar, indigo, flaxseed, timber and barrel staves. The rum and sugar were mostly imported through Great Britain while the flaxseed and timber were not local products but had probably come from the mainland colonies. Thus only four items were actually from the West Indies. By 1786 logwood, ginger, sugared fruits and cotton wool had been added to the list, the first three being luxury goods imported in relatively small quantities. Later years saw piamento and coffee being added to the list, and their importation was probably a result of the extension of trade to Jamaica. This was

72. Pares, examining the West Indian trade of Bristol, has come to the same conclusion that double voyages, while always aimed at, were rarely achieved (R.Pares, A West India Fortune (London, 1950), pp 227-28).

the nearest of the West Indian islands to Central America, and the colony with the most diversified agriculture.

Piamento, or Cayenne pepper, for example, was first imported into Belfast in 1784.⁷³ Initial imports came from England: in 1788 over a thousand pounds were imported. In 1789 365 lbs were imported from Jamaica, and the following years saw a considerable growth in the trade. Logwood, which also featured among the trade statistics from the mid 1780s was a product of British Honduras. It was used as a dyestuff in the textile industry and before the development of trade with Jamaica, had been imported from either England or Spain, the quantity involved being about five tons annually. It was first imported directly from the colonies in 1790, when one ton was imported, followed in the next year by an importation of 50 cwt. Growth then became extremely rapid. In 1792 1040 cwt were imported, and 808 cwt in the following year, these figures reflecting the development of textile industries in the Belfast area. Considerable quantities of another dyestuff, indigo, were also imported from the West Indies. However Jamaican indigo never attained the reputation of that made in Spanish Guatemala, largely because indigo is a very difficult plant to grow and requires great skill in the preparation of the resultant dyestuff.⁷⁴

Barrel staves also figured prominently among the commodities imported from the West Indies. They were generally included in the return cargoes from all the islands to which provisions were sent, and it is likely that most of those imported were, in fact, dismantled components of provisions barrels for it is otherwise hard to explain how Antigua managed to supply 276 cwt in 1792, or even more how treeless Barbados shipped 30 cwt to Belfast

73. It is to be presumed that earlier supplies had been imported through Dublin.

74. For the indigo trade, see R.Pares, Merchants and Planters (Cambridge, 1960), p.22.

in 1788. The dismantling and reconstruction of barrels was practiced in Ireland in the herring trade, as we have seen, and it is thus all the more likely that similar practices were engaged in in the West Indies, where the raw materials involved were in even shorter supply.

The rise of the cotton industry in Belfast also led to the importation of considerable quantities of cotton wool from the Caribbean during the late 1780s and the 1790s, although the amounts involved were never sufficient to meet the needs of the Belfast spinning mills. Most of the cotton initially came from the Windward and Leeward Islands: Park and Smith would appear to have been purchasing in Trinidad, from their base in Grenada,⁷⁵ while cotton from Grenada, Tobago and Dominica was also frequently advertised in the press.⁷⁶ By 1791 Jamaica had become the dominant source of supply, probably as a result of the large amount of trade undertaken with that island, and it would seem likely that cotton was purchased there from many different sources. The West Indian cotton trade, however, was a short-lived one and by the mid 1790s its position was already severely threatened by imports from the United States.

From what has been written so far in this chapter it might appear that the West Indian trade consisted of direct voyages to the Caribbean and back. This was true for the most part: vessels leaving Belfast for the Caribbean arriving back from there some months later. However, on occasion they were also employed on another route, and made a round trip via the mainland colonies or (more rarely) a European port. An example of the latter was a voyage of the Lord Camden which returned to Belfast from Antigua via

75. BNL 2 October 1789.

76. In 1792 John Boyle & Co. advertised cotton from Grenada, Tobago and Trinidad for sale (NS 6 June 1792), while in 1794 Jones Tomb Joy & Co. were advertising Demerara and St Domingo wool (BNL 12 December 1794).

Lisbon in 1781. Another was the return voyage of the Success in 1787: it sailed to Grenada in May and returned from Rotterdam in December.⁷⁷ More frequently the return trip was made by way of the mainland colonies: the Lord Dungannon, for example, sailed to Barbados and returned to Belfast from Baltimore in 1768-69, as did the Chatham and the Mary in 1770-71.⁷⁸ Such voyages, however, were few, as were those which after 1780 visited a British port on their return, although in 1791 both the Beresford and the Richard returned to Belfast via Liverpool.⁷⁹

The most frequent 'triangular' voyage in which Belfast ships were to be found was that involving an outward voyage calling at Madeira. This trade involved the export of linen and provisions to that island where wine was purchased for sale in the West Indies. The wine trade from the Azores and Madeira to the British Caribbean was a valuable one, estimated to be worth £30,000 annually,⁸⁰ and among the Belfast firms engaged in it was Thomas Bateson & Co., who played a prominent part in the town's wine trade, their contacts in which were no doubt a major factor determining their involvement in the Madeira - West Indies traffic. In July 1767, for example, their vessel, Camden sailed for Madeira, returning laden with rum and sugar from Rothesay on Christmas Eve.⁸¹ In 1769 two of their vessels, the Camden and the Hawke were engaged in the trade,⁸² as was the John and the Diana.⁸³

77. BNL 17 April 1781

78. BNL 6 September 1768, 10 March 1769, 24, 27 July 1770, 5 February, 5 March 1771.

79. BNL 7 June, 4 November 1791.

80. B. Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies (London 1819), II, p.463.

81. BNL 3 August, 24 December 1767.

82. BNL, 3, 7 February 1769.

83. BNL 24 October, 5 December 1769

The latter was probably owned by Greg & Cunningham,⁸⁴ whose Betty Greg sailed to Madeira in the following year.⁸⁵

The Madeira trade was an irregular one. As has been seen, four vessels were involved in 1769, but no voyages can be traced in 1771 or 1774, or during the American War of Independence. After 1783, when exports to Madeira were entered separately in the customs records, trade only occurred in a few years.⁸⁶ Nevertheless the trade had a number of advantages for those engaged in it. It did not add appreciably to the duration of the voyage, while not only was there a ready market for wine in the Caribbean islands, but any provisions which might remain unsold in Madeira could be brought on and sold in the West Indies.

There was, of course, another triangular trade of greater extent and fame than that to Madeira. This was the slave trade from West Africa to the plantations, and in the late 1920s the question of whether or not Belfast merchants participated in it led to a heated controversy between the town's two most prominent local historians of the time, R. M. Young and S. Shannon Millin, the latter denying the story of an attempt to promote a slaving partnership in 1786 on the grounds that no Belfast merchant would stoop so low.⁸⁷

For this assumption there is unfortunately no evidence. Waddell Cunningham and the Black family, for example, owned plantations in the West Indies, while James Park, in a letter to Lord Hillsborough in 1798, mentioned

84. She operated on their behalf in the following year (BNL 31 July 1770).

85. BNL 3 July 1770.

86. The years ending 25 March 1783-84-86-87, -91-92-93-95.

87. See S.S. Millin, Was Waddell Cunningham, Belfast Merchant, a 'Slave-Ship' Projector? (Belfast, 1926).

the slaves which he had had to sell when he left the Caribbean.⁸⁸ Another merchant, John Wallace, had a negro slave in Belfast in 1769, the unfortunate man's plight being brought forcibly to public notice when he ran away⁸⁹ and a similar incident occurred in November 1780.⁹⁰ However, there is no contemporary evidence for the alleged meeting of 1786: indeed, only two years later the Newsletter congratulated Irish merchants for never being involved in the slave trade.⁹¹

A clue to the factual basis for the slavery controversy is probably to be found in a letter from Mrs McTier to Dr William Drennan which refers to a meeting called by the Sovereign for the purpose of forming a fund to raise men for the Royal Navy, at which there was vehement opposition from the town radicals, who are referred to in the letter as 'McCabe & Co.'⁹² The first mention of the slavery meeting is in a memoir written by William McCabe for Dr Madden's Lives of the United Irishmen,⁹³ and it would seem that either his mind had become confused on the matter or else that he deliberately told the story to glorify his father's memory, Madden, a keen abolitionist, eagerly seizing on the story.⁹⁴

The importance of the West Indian trade in its various branches to the economy of Belfast cannot be underestimated. For one thing, it was to a large extent, conducted in ships belonging to the town: the sheer length of the voyage meant that the number of vessels involved was high in proportion

88. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/1396A. Letter dated 18 January 1798.

89. BNL 16 June 1769.

90. Hist.Collections, pp.163-64.

91. BNL 1 January 1788.

92. PRONI T765/2/219.

93. R.R.Madden, Lives, 3rd ser. Vol.1 (London 1846), pp.306-8.

94. For Madden's career as an abolitionist, see D.R.Murray 'Richard Robert Madden: His Career as a Slavery Abolitionist', Studies LXI (1972), pp.41-53.

to the quantity of goods carried. In 1767, for example, when the rum trade was at its height, at least ten vessels were regularly employed on the route and it may be presumed that they were, for the most part, registered in Belfast. This meant that the Caribbean trade employed a very considerable number of sailors: it also provided employment in a number of the town's industries, such as sugar-refining and shoemaking, as well as in such trades as coopering which were directly connected with the provisions trade.

Nevertheless it was very easily disrupted. Its very length exposed it to wartime disruption. Both wars in the period saw the imposition of a convoy system which however, as in the London trade, led to delays as sailings could no longer be spread throughout the year as heretofore although the danger of capture was much reduced. However it was not always possible to ensure the safety of vessels, especially within the Caribbean and in both conflicts Belfast vessels fell victim to attacks by privateers.⁹⁵ Late in 1776 or early in 1777, the Fanny was taken by a privateer and brought to St Lucia,⁹⁶ and some months later the Waddell was similarly captured and taken to Martinique.⁹⁷ At about the same time another Belfast ship, the Loyalty, was taken, but her crew managed to overpower their captors and brought the vessel to safety in Dominica.⁹⁸ Another casualty was the Elinor which was seized in 1781 with a cargo of Donegal herrings belonging

95. There is of course no evidence that Belfast vessels suffered more than those from other ports. In 1776, for example, 130 vessels fell victim to privateers (R.B.Sheridan, *Planters and Merchants: the Oliver Family of Antigua and London 1716-1784*, in Business Hist. xiii (1971), p.107).

96. SNL 8 May 1777.

97. BNL 19 May 1778.

98. BNL 7 July 1778.

to Thomas Greg.⁹⁹ The Revolutionary War, too, produced a number of casualties despite such precautions as the provision of convoys. In March 1794, for example, the Hibernia was captured en route to Jamaica by a French privateer, but was later recaptured,¹⁰⁰ and shortly afterwards the Minerva, bound for St Vincent, had the same experience.¹⁰¹ Less fortunate was another Belfast ship, the Hope, which was captured and taken to St Domingo in December 1795.¹⁰² Two more vessels, the Cadiz Packet and the Hanna were taken in the Caribbean in the following year,¹⁰³ while the Jane was seized off the Newfoundland coast and taken to Brest,¹⁰⁴ and yet another Belfast ship, the Betsy, was taken in 1797.¹⁰⁵

In both wars, those captured represented a significant share of the port's tonnage, and in the American War of Independence this loss of shipping was coupled to a loss of markets through capture by the enemy. When France entered the War in 1778, for example, many of the islands to which the Belfast merchants regularly traded in peace-time were taken. Dominica, where Waddell Cunningham had an estate, was taken during the year, and was soon followed by St Lucia. The next year saw the loss of Grenada and St Vincent, and in 1782 French success continued with the taking of St Kitts, Montserrat and Nevis. Further disasters were only averted by Rodney's victory at the Battle of the Saints which reestablished British naval

99. PRO CUST 1/163, f.146 (13 June 1782) Proc.Dub.Soc. XVIII, 29 November 1781, p.33.

100. NS 27 March 1794.

101. NS 19 May 1794.

102. BNL 29 February 1796.

103. BNL 23 September, 3 October 1796.

104. BNL 30 January 1797.

105. BNL 9 June 1797.

superiority in the area.¹⁰⁶ However the risks from war were but part of those faced by merchants engaged in the Caribbean trade. The herring fisheries on which much of the provisions trade depended were notoriously unreliable: good fisheries could suddenly and inexplicably be abandoned by the herring. Above all hung the threat of bad weather. Occurring in Ireland, it could destroy crops and so attack the very basis of the provisions trade: occurring in the West Indies, as in the hurricane of 1780, it could cause immense damage throughout the area. Where hurricane damage to crops was severe, the availability and price of sugar cane, and thus of rum and sugar naturally rose. To the risks from weather in the Caribbean one had to add the not inconsiderable risks from the weather around the Irish coast, which was a risk common to vessels employed on all the trade routes radiating from Belfast. In 1775, for example, the Friendship returning from Tobago, was stranded at Killough, and was later sold where she lay,¹⁰⁸ and in the following year another vessel, the Eagle came to grief on the Arklow bank on her return from Barbados.¹⁰⁹ In October 1781 the Peace and Plenty was lost off the Western Isles in a storm en route to the Caribbean and all her crew save one were drowned.¹¹⁰ That December two vessels, the Reprisal and the Lord Bangor sailed for Antigua. The Reprisal made Valentia after a month at sea, while the Lord Bangor ran aground at Bangor¹¹¹ and

106. L.J.Ragatz, *The Sugar Colonies during the Revolution*, in C.W.Toth (ed), op.cit. pp.82-83.

107. A.Burns, op.cit. pp.507-9, 759. A hurricane in 1772 caused £½ million worth of damage in St Kitts alone (ibid, p.509); the loss to Barbados of the great hurricane of 1780 was estimated at £1,320,564 (Ronald Tree, A History of Barbados (London 1972), pp.57-9.

108. PRO CUST 1/133, f.115, 23 November 1775; BNL 5 April 1776.

109. BNL 13 December 1776.

110. BNL 15 January 1782.

111. SNL 4 January 1782.

although both eventually continued their voyages, damage and delay were considerable. Other risks also existed in the trade from the economic effect of slave and 'maroon' revolts such as occurred in Jamaica and Dominica in the 1790s, destroying plantations and property.¹¹²

When coupled to markets which were easily and frequently saturated with goods and vessels, and to the difficulty of communications between Ireland and the Caribbean, it was no wonder that the West Indian trade displayed such an unstable nature; nor was it surprising that attempts were made to open up new markets which would possess greater stability by reason of their size. What is surprising is that Belfast, whose share of the provisions trade was small compared to that of Cork or Waterford, should be so active in the Caribbean trade before the great expansion of the linen trade during the 1780s. Participation in it had almost become the mark of the rich general merchant, a fact which ably illustrates that its many disadvantages could be handsomely outweighed by the profits made in it.

112. A. Burns, op.cit. pp.553-55; B.E. Cracknell, op.cit. pp.66-68.

(ii) The North American Mainland

The trade between Belfast and the British colonies in North America differed from that with the West Indies, most noticeably in its lack of homogeneity and continuity. The products of one West Indian colony were broadly similar to those of the others. However, obvious climatic and other geographical factors ensured that this was not the case in the North American trade which encompassed a wide variety of different products ranging from the timber, flaxseed and grain of the more northerly colonies to the semi-tropical produce of the south. Time too was another decisive factor helping to divide up the trade into a number of different traffics and the post-war resumption of trade in 1783 showed that the Revolution had resulted in many changes in traditional patterns.

Indeed, there were so many changes that it becomes necessary to examine the post-war situation separately from that prevailing in the years before 1775; although it is difficult to make a precise comparison between the two periods because of the nature of the surviving evidence. It is, for example, impossible to compare the physical volume of trade in the pre-war years with that of 1783 and subsequent years, as the statistics for the former period do not differentiate between the different states; indeed, before 1781 the 'Plantations', both in America and the Caribbean, are grouped together under one heading. On the other hand, the few accounts and letters relating to the trade refer principally to the pre-war years and for information on this period one has to rely mainly on these and on such sources as the 'Port-News' column of the Newsletter.

During the years preceding the outbreak of the American Revolution, Belfast had regular direct links with four North American ports. These were New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Charleston, the first two being in many

ways the most important. Both had merchant houses comprised of Belfast men much of whose business was concerned with trade to and from their home town, and Philadelphia was the only North American port from which a vessel was employed constantly in trade with Belfast. Indeed, the largest merchant house in New York during the 1760s, that of Greg and Cunningham, was comprised of Belfast men, and, while Waddell Cunningham returned home in 1765, his two partners, Robert Ross Waddell and Hamilton Young remained in the town. The partnership was dissolved in 1772, but they remained in business, Waddell staying in New York until his death in 1812 and Young retiring to Belfast in 1793 where he lived until his death five years later.¹¹³ By the mid 1760s, the firm was the largest owner of shipping in the port of New York.¹¹⁴ While their trading interests were spread over an extremely wide geographical area, they would seem to have dominated the trade between Belfast and New York. It was, nevertheless, only sufficient to load about two vessels each year.

During the 1750s the trade consisted principally in the despatch of grain and flaxseed to the order of Belfast merchants who sent provisions and linen to New York in return. The flaxseed trade, especially, was open to many risks. The price of seed was subject to large and sudden fluctuations, the price in New York often differing greatly from that in Philadelphia, the other principal centre of the trade. In addition, the casualty rate among the vessels involved was exceptionally high, largely because shipments had to be made when the weather was at its worst so that the seed might be in Ireland in time for planting in the spring.¹¹⁵ However the fact that the trade was

113. In 1778 Thomas Greg referred to Young as 'his agent' (PRONI Downshire MSS D607/167, Greg to Hillsborough, 28 November 1778). See also PRONI Drennan-Duffin Corr. D729/1, -/22 (Letterbook of Hamilton Young 1787-1793); PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/449 (Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, 16 November 1793 in which she refers to 'Hammy Young' dozing his life away in retirement; R.C.Murphy, L.J.Mannion, op.cit. pp.60, 524.

114. V.D.Harrington, op.cit. pp.52, 188-89.

115. For a discussion of the flaxseed trade see P.L.White, The Beckmans of New York in Politics and Commerce 1647-1877 (New York, 1956), pp.232-64.

conducted on a commission basis reduced the risk to the New York partners to a considerable extent. Greg and Cunningham were also engaged in the trade between New York and the Caribbean on their own account and found it to be a far riskier business than the commission trade with Ireland. A report of the New York partners in 1766 on the state of the firm's affairs, while recommending that the Caribbean trade be continued on a somewhat reduced scale, advocated the expansion of the commission side of the business as having the greatest potential value.¹¹⁶

During the late 1760s and early 1770s the firm's vessels dominated voyages between Belfast and New York. In 1769, for example, the two ships used on the route, the Hibernia and the Earl of Hillsborough were owned by them, the latter sailing from Belfast to Madeira in May, presumably to load a cargo of wine for the colonies.¹¹⁷ In the following year, they owned the Countess of Donegall¹¹⁸ and were agents for the Diana¹¹⁹ while in 1771 they owned the Prince of Wales, the only ship to sail that year from Belfast to New York.¹²⁰ Indeed, in the three years mentioned, the only vessel with which they do not appear to have been involved was the Oswego, which arrived in Belfast in April 1771. The only merchant whose name appears in connection with it is John Ewing, who advertised it for sale at the beginning of May.¹²¹

Greg & Cunningham may not have been the only merchant house of Belfast origins in pre-Independence New York. The 'vendue merchant' or auctioneers, Templeton & Stewart, may have been connected with Belfast and in this context

116. NLI Mic P4069 (Greg & Cunningham Letterbook 1756-57); PRONI Duffin Papers D270/7.

117. BNL 24 March, 11 April, 16, 23 May 1769, 2 January 1770.

118. Benn, History ii, p.11.

119. BNL 8 May 1770.

120. Dickson, op.cit., p.239; Harrington, op.cit., p.52.

121. BNL 26 April, 3 May 1771.

it is interesting to note that their best customers were none other than Greg & Cunningham: for example between September and December 1769 they received almost £1,200 from them, a sum far in excess of anything they got from any other firm.¹²² The house of Henderson & Ewing, which was active in 1762, may also have had personal ties with Belfast. They were trading there early in that year¹²³ and both names were prominent in the Belfast business world. Most importantly, Robert Ewing, a brother of the Belfast merchant, John Ewing, emigrated to the colonies at about this period.¹²⁴ Another Belfast man who lived and traded in New York at this period was Hugh Gaine who was born in Belfast in 1726 or 1727 and who served his apprenticeship under James Magee, a prominent printer in the town. In 1745 he emigrated to New York and seven years later started the New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, which soon became the leading newspaper in the colony. He also engaged in bookselling and printing and was an importer of cosmetics and patent medicines. By 1768 he had been appointed as the colony's official printer.¹²⁵ As a merchant, his importance to this present study is minimal. However, he was a close friend of Young and Waddell, and it appears from Young's correspondence after the war that, like so many other Belfast men living abroad, he kept in close contact with his native town.¹²⁶

Similarly, in Philadelphia there seems to have been at least one firm whose partners came from Belfast. This was the house of Campbell and

122. Harrington, op.cit., p.93.

123. New York Mercury, 25 January, 1 February 1762 (quoted in T.M.Truxes, Connecticut in the Irish-American Trade, 1750-1775 (unpub. M.A. Thesis, Trinity College, Hertford, Conn., 1975), p.40).

124. BNL 9 July 1790.

125. O.T.Black, New York City during the War of Independence (New York, 1931), pp.137, 145-46; R.J.Purcell, Irish Contribution to Colonial New York, Studies XXIX (1940), p.602; R.C.Murphy, L.J.Mannion, op.cit., pp.27-33.

126. PRONI D729/22. Hamilton Young to Martha Young, 2 May, 5 September 1787.

Donnaldson. There was a firm of this name in Belfast until 1770, its partners being John Campbell and Hugh Donnaldson. The latter emigrated from Belfast early in 1771, Campbell continuing the business. In 1772 one Hugh Donnaldson, whose son, John, was a partner in the Philadelphia firm, died while on a visit to Belfast, and it is extremely probable that the two Hugh Donnaldsons were one and the same person. The other partner in the Philadelphia firm was John's brother-in-law, George Campbell.¹²⁷

Even before the great emigration rush of the 1770s, which benefited commerce between Belfast and Philadelphia to a far greater extent than that between Belfast and New York, trade with Philadelphia was conducted on a much larger scale than that with New York. In 1767, for example, five vessels arrived in Belfast from Philadelphia and two from New York, and in 1770 the equivalent figures are four and two respectively.

New York and Philadelphia were not the only ports in the Northern colonies with which Belfast had regular trading links. In at least three years between 1767 and 1771 vessels arrived there from Boston while in the immediate pre-war years ships also came to Belfast from Newburyport and Rhode Island, in both cases conveying flaxseed. Unfortunately we know little or nothing about the home port of these vessels, nor of their destination.

Further to the south, however, there was a regular trade with the port of Baltimore as well as occasional vessels from Alexandria. The Navigation Laws in force at the time prevented the direct importation of tobacco into Ireland, and as a result it played no part in the trade, which

127. BNL 17 August 1770; PRONI Millin MSS T811/2, f.159 (Conveyance, Donaldson to Campbell, 3 August 1771); J.H.Campbell, History of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick and of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland (Philadelphia, 1892), pp.44-47, 77, 108.

was principally one in flour and flaxseed. Instead small, locally owned vessels conveyed the tobacco to Belfast from British ports, most notably Greenock and Whitehaven, and it would thus appear that the Belfast merchants merely purchased their requirements of tobacco from merchants in these ports.

The Baltimore trade before the war bore strong resemblances to that with the northern colonies insofar as the commodities involved in it are concerned. These were mainly flaxseed, wheat, flour and wheatenmeal. The North American trade in these goods played an all important part in the town's pre-war economy. In 1769, for example, all imports of these commodities came from the colonies, and they dominated the eastbound trade. The only other items imported in any substantial volume were iron, potashes, staves and whale oil, and in each case the proportion they formed of the town's total imports was tiny. The situation in 1774 was similar, although no ashes or iron were imported. Once again, however, the plantations supplied the vast bulk of Belfast's requirements of flaxseed and wheat products, and the importance and scale of the latter trade, as well as its speculative nature, may also be seen in early 1775, when considerably more flour was imported into the town than the market could absorb and at least two merchants, Waddell Cunningham and John Bashford, were reexporting it to British ports.¹²⁸

In exchange for these imports, Belfast's merchants had little to offer the mainland colonies, although some linen and provisions were sent there, and, as Dr Dickson has shown, this aspect of the trade was much more diversified than that of its rivals, Newry and Londonderry, whose colonial exports were dominated by linen alone. In 1769 one of the two sailings to Philadelphia

128. PRO CUST 1/130, f.130 (11 March 1775), 1/131, f.23 (14 April 1775).

129. R.J.Dickson, op.cit., p.10.

was described as carrying 'beef and cloth',¹³⁰ and the other as 'beef etc.'¹³¹ while a sailing to Charleston was described as carrying a cargo of salmon and cloth.¹³² The colonies, however, were capable of providing for much of their needs of provisions, while the quantity of linen was far from substantial. In 1769, for example, the quantity exported to all the colonies, both in North America and the Caribbean, was only 86,641 yards.

The imbalance in trade is shown by the fact that the Newsletter mentions more arrivals from America than departures thence in these years. Some sailed on to another port where a return cargo was more readily available. In 1767, for example, the Lydia from New York and the Carlisle, from Baltimore, both sailed for Liverpool,¹³³ and the Carlisle did the same in the following year.¹³⁴ She was a Baltimore-owned vessel which traded frequently to Belfast until 1769, the only year in which she carried a cargo from there to North America.¹³⁵

Another means by which a vessel could be employed on her return journey was to sail for the Caribbean, thence for the mainland colonies and possibly back to Belfast. The Lord Dungannon, for example, sailed for Barbados in September 1768, arriving back in Belfast from Baltimore in the following March with a cargo of flaxseed.¹³⁶ A variation to this pattern was provided by the Diana in October 1769. She sailed to Madeira and arrived from New York in the following May. Unfortunately there is no indication as to whether or not she visited the Caribbean, or sailed directly to New York from Madeira.¹³⁷

130. The Philadelphia (BNL 27 May 1768).

131. The same (BNL 30 May 1769).

132. BNL 22 November 1768.

133. BNL 13 March, 14 July 1767. The Lydia had a cargo of butter, the Carlisle sailed in ballast.

134. BNL 9 August 1768.

135. BNL 21 July, 8 September 1767. Her cargo was described as 'cloth'.

136. BNL 6 September 1768, 10 March, 1769.

137. BNL 24 October 1769, 8 May 1770.

Other ships returned to the colonies in ballast, including at least one of the two vessels which left Belfast for Charleston late in 1769,¹³⁸ However, such sailings are difficult to identify as the Newsletter did not usually list them.

This shortage of a return freight can only have served to increase shipping costs and hence the cost to the economy of its essential supplies of flaxseed and, to a lesser extent, flour. However the great depression of the early 1770s provided the North American trade with a much needed boost by making available a return cargo in the form of emigrants. Of course, as Dr Dickson has pointed out, emigration had been endemic in Ulster for many years. However, apart from exceptional years, the volume was small. During the 1750s, for example, he claims that the number of persons involved was probably less than 500 annually.¹³⁹

Dr Dickson's study has described the conditions under which the prospective emigrants sailed and the pressures which led people to emigrate to a new life in the American colonies. The emigration of the 1770s was on a scale which was totally outside the experience of previous years, and transformed what had previously been a means whereby shipowners and brokers could fill otherwise empty shipping space into a business by itself, and one which for a few years dominated the structure and organisation of the North American trade.

Two destinations principally attracted the emigrant from Belfast before 1770. One of these was Philadelphia, from where he could make his way into the undeveloped areas beyond, not just in Pennsylvania but in Kentucky and Ohio. Emigration through Pennsylvania became especially heavy in 1769 with the

138. BNL 22 November 1768. This was the Lady Stawell which did not advertise for emigrants. The Betty Greg, owned by Greys & Cunningham, left a few days later with a cargo of salmon and cloth, and some passengers (BNL 25 November 1768).

139. Dickson, op.cit., p.59.

opening of a land office selling land acquired by the colony through the 'New Purchase' of the previous year.¹⁴⁰ The second region was South Carolina where bounties had been given to immigrants since 1760.¹⁴¹ While this scheme ended in 1767, by this time a group of specialised emigration agents were beginning to emerge among the Belfast business community.

The first of these men was William Beatty who, after some years spent as an orthodox broker, became an active encourager of emigration. His first venture was in 1765 when with Robert Wills, another merchant, he promoted the voyage to Charleston of the aptly named ship, New Hope. To further the enterprise, he visited a number of towns in the Lagan Valley and north Down.¹⁴² In January 1766 he himself left for South Carolina on board the Prince of Wales so that he might survey the territory¹⁴³ and that autumn he chartered a vessel of his own for Charleston¹⁴⁴ and remained in the trade until the bounty emigration ended in 1768. He then became involved with Matthew Rea, a gentleman from Drumbo who was attempting to find tenants for land which his brother, John, had taken in Georgia, and in the remaining years before the outbreak of the war, they sent at least four vessels there. Unlike the majority of emigrant vessels at this period, these ships were not making a return voyage to an American home port. In 1769 the ship involved was the Hopewell commanded by a Belfast man and presumably owned in the town as it made a number of voyages from the port to various destinations. In 1771 it was the Britannia which was owned in Newry and in the following year the Elizabeth, which arrived at Belfast from Londonderry and was the only American vessel involved.¹⁴⁵

140. W.F.Dunaway, The Scotch-Irish of Colonial Pennsylvania (Chapel Hill, 1944), p.74.

141. Dickson, op.cit., p.56; Dunaway, op.cit., pp.74-78.

142. BNL 19 February, 15 March 1765.

143. BNL 29 October 1765.

144. BNL 7 October 1766.

145. Dickson, op.cit., pp.164-72.

During the 1770s most of the merchants engaged in the North American trade became actively involved in the emigration trade, and prominent among them were Waddell Cunningham and John Campbell, both of whom had contacts in the colonies. Cunningham had been engaged in the emigrant trade by at least 1768, his ship, the Donegall having 250 passengers on board when it sailed to South Carolina in that year.¹⁴⁶ During these years the volume of trade far exceeded the capacity of returning vessels and new and larger vessels were obtained. Advertisements in the press speak of some of these ships as being specially built and equipped for the trade,¹⁴⁷ which would show that the emigrant traffic had now become the most important component in the town's North Atlantic trade. The Friendship, for example, a 300 ton ship which regularly voyaged from Philadelphia to Belfast was replaced in 1773 by the aptly-named Prosperity with a burthen of 400 tons,¹⁴⁸ while in the same year Cunningham purchased the Waddell of the same reputed size and replaced the 200 ton Peggy with the twice as large Peace and Plenty.¹⁴⁹

Unlike the emigration of the previous decade, the bulk of that of the 1770s went to Pennsylvania, a destination which admirably suited those involved in arranging shipping as it was an area from which cargoes of flour and flaxseed could easily be obtained. Four ships sailed there in 1771, and at least five in the following year and six during 1773, these figures representing a considerable increase on the two or three which made the voyage in earlier years. Nevertheless Philadelphia was not the only destination to which emigrants went from Belfast. In 1774, for example, two Belfast men,

146. M.J.O'Brien, Historical Items Obtainable from Newspapers, Journ. Amer. Irish Hist. Soc., XXVII (1928), p.193.

147. Gazette and Country Journal (Rhode Island) (quoted in ibid, p.193.

148. BNL 7 December 1773.

149. BNL 10 December 1773, 4 March 1774. The purchase was made in New York.

James Templeton and John Stewart of Ballydrain were involved in the promotion of the voyage of the Liberty to New York,¹⁵⁰ and mention has also been made of Burgess & Rea's ventures to Georgia. Nor did the Charleston trade cease completely after the cessation of the emigration bounty and one or two vessels continued to sail there annually until the Revolution.

The emigration continued apace almost to the outbreak of war, most of the pressure falling on Belfast. In one week in the spring of 1773, 14 ships were advertised to take passengers from Belfast to North America, compared with 8 from Newry, 3 from Londonderry and 4 from other Irish ports.¹⁵¹ However, by the end of that year there was evidence of a slackening in volume which expressed itself in a reduction in the number of sailings, especially to the remoter colonies such as Georgia. That November, for example, the Waddell sailed for Savanna on what was the last of Burgess and Rea's ventures to that colony. She had only 130 passengers aboard, and 94 of them were the victims of largescale clearances taking place at the time on the Upton estate near Castleblaney.¹⁵²

The events of 1775, however, brought trade with the American colonies virtually to a halt. Emigration ceased and the main supplies of flour and flaxseed fell into the hands of the colonists. Only New York remained in British control for most of the war and what goods it produced were required for its own needs and those of the government. However, occasional voyages were made there during the war. The Eleanor arrived from there in December 1778.¹⁵³ She was owned by Thomas Greg, and in the following year was used

150. BNL 15 April 1774.

151. New York Gazette, 12 July 1773 (Quoted in A.Lockhart, Some Aspects of Emigration from Ireland to the North American Colonies 1660-1775, unpub. M.Litt. thesis, T.C.D. 1971).

152. PRONI Donegall Estate Letter-book T1893. John Alexander to George Hamilton, 29 November 1773.

153. BNL 8 December 1778.

in the European trade. In October 1779 another vessel, the Elizabeth sailed for New York with a cargo of provisions,¹⁵⁴ and in July 1781 the Success, which was owned by Waddell Cunningham, arrived in Belfast from New York.¹⁵⁵ Until 1777 she had been engaged in the Caribbean trade, and her use may indicate that Cunningham and Thomas Greg were maintaining tenuous links with their former colleagues who were still in New York, although they seem to have been reduced to a state of dismay as in 1778 Hamilton Young, who had continued to represent them there, had suffered a nervous breakdown under the strains imposed by the Revolution and Greg had had to send his son, John, there in an attempt to untangle his affairs.¹⁵⁶

The fragile links retained with New York during the war years were reinforced by the emergence of a small amount of trade with Canada, from which goods could readily be smuggled southwards. With the exception of a small number of voyages to Newfoundland with salt for the fisheries, and the tragic emigrant voyage of the John & James to St John's in 1772,¹⁵⁷ Belfast had not had any previous contacts with Canada. The only voyage which has been traced was that of the Wilmington which arrived from New Brunswick with a cargo of flour in October 1773, and sailed for Bristol in November with deerskins, which had presumably come on it from America.¹⁵⁸

However, in 1776 two vessels left Belfast for Halifax, in Nova Scotia, and there was at least one sailing there in the following year.¹⁵⁹ In the opposite direction, two ships, one in 1777 and one in 1778, declared themselves as coming from Quebec. However, no evidence exists concerning the

154. BNL 5 October 1779.

155. BNL 27 July 1781.

156. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/167. Greg to Lord Hillsborough, 28 November 1778.

157. Described in Dickson, op.cit., pp.160-64.

158. BNL 22 October, 16 November 1773.

159. BNL 16 April, 25 October 1776, 26 August 1777.

nature of the Belfast merchants' involvement in these ventures. Flaxseed was one of the commodities involved: it formed most of the cargo of the Escape which arrived in Belfast in January 1777, and the arrival almost exactly a year later of the Lord North would indicate that her cargo was similar. The Escape was not a Belfast-owned vessel: she was probably owned either in Canada or Bristol for which she sailed immediately after unloading.¹⁶⁰ The only venture in which Belfast merchants are known to have been involved as shipowners in this trade was in 1779, when Waddell Cunningham's Betty Greg sailed to New Providence, returning with a cargo of flaxseed and timber.¹⁶¹

Canada was not the only place through which a tenuous trade with North America could be maintained, and the import and export statistics reveal that some trade was conducted by way of the West Indies. The direct importation of tobacco into Ireland, for example, was first permitted in 1780, and considerable quantities were imported from the Caribbean in 1782 and 1783, but ceased with the coming of peace. Once again Waddell Cunningham emerges as the principal identifiable individual involved. The bulk of the tobacco imported from the West Indies in 1783 came from Tortola, an island which was not usually the destination of vessels bound from Belfast to the Caribbean. However, in April 1782 Cunningham's Success sailed there via Madeira with a cargo of provisions and linen and no doubt returned later in the year as she was back in Belfast early in the following spring.¹⁶²

The war undoubtedly led to severe losses on the part of those engaged in the transatlantic trade. One way in which these could be to some degree recouped was by the fitting out of privateers. However it was some four years after the beginning of the Revolution before the port's first privateer was

160. BNL 21 January 1777, 12 January 1778.

161. BNL 4 May, 9 November 1779.

162. BNL 3 May 1782, 14 March 1783.

equipped and put to sea. One reason for this delay may have been the strong pro-American feeling in the town: certainly, when the Glasgow privateers, Katie and Ulysses arrived in the summer of 1777 they met with a stormy reception from the populace,¹⁶³ despite the considerable havoc being caused to the town's trade at the time by American vessels.¹⁶⁴ However, during that summer the Peace and Plenty, belonging to Waddell Cunningham, was granted letters of marque and equipped with twelve light guns and a crew of forty.¹⁶⁵ She may be regarded as representing a half way stage between the peacetime merchant vessel and the privateer, and still carried a cargo but was prepared to defend herself, or to seize enemy vessels should the opportunity arise. Her first voyage was to New York in June 1777,¹⁶⁶ and it is probable that her armament was originally intended for self-defence in this extremely dangerous trade. In the following year, by which time France and Spain had entered the war, she made voyages to Russia and Minorca,¹⁶⁷ but she also made a short cruise in May during which she captured a brig bound from Boston for Bilbao,¹⁶⁸ and in 1779, on a voyage to Italy, she captured a French vessel sailing from Marseilles to Smyrna.¹⁶⁹ On her return voyage, however, she was attacked by an enemy privateer, and although she escaped capture five of her crew were killed.¹⁷⁰ Once back in Belfast she appears to have been confined to ordinary

163. Edinburgh Evening Courant 26 July 1777 (quoted in T.M.Devine, The Tobacco Lords (Edinburgh 1975), p.142.

164. See p.205 above; D.MacPherson, op.cit., iii, p.611.

165. BNL 22 April 1777.

166. BNL 13 June 1777.

167. BNL 9 June, 20 November 1778.

168. BNL 15, 22 May 1778.

169. BNL 11 May 1779.

170. BNL 5 November 1779.

trade. However her short and successful cruise in May 1778 was apparently intended as a trial to test the feasibility of fitting out a proper privateer from the port, and in October a crew was sought for the Amazon, a vessel which was to be equipped with fourteen light guns, and a crew of eighty. Her first voyage, begun in January 1779, was a mixed success. She took a ship off the Scottish coast, and a boarding party was put aboard. They tried to bring it to the Clyde but were impressed by the Royal Navy off Ailsa Craig. Three weeks later the Amazon managed to recapture the Friendship which had been seized by privateers while on a voyage from Cork to Gibraltar, but for the next ten weeks she sailed off the French and Spanish coasts without any success and eventually put into St Male for water before sailing back to Belfast.¹⁷¹ At a meeting of those who had invested in the project, it was decided to reequip the vessel for a second voyage and she sailed in August, calling on the way at Strangford to take on crewmen.¹⁷² However this venture met with no success and ended in tragedy when the Amazon was wrecked at Ballyholme in a storm with the loss of all aboard. Luckily most of the crew had previously been put ashore at Donaghadee.¹⁷³

Unsuccessful as the career of the Amazon was, it was far more successful than the other ventures in the field made in the town at the period. One of these involved the Ocean, which had formerly been a wherry owned by a Mr Ainsworth of Strangford and which was purchased by some Belfast men and fitted out with fourteen six-pounder guns. She left Belfast towards the end of May 1779 and called at Strangford and Waterford but was then taken by a French frigate and brought to L'Orient, her mast having collapsed when the crew put

171. BNL 20 October 1778, 5 January, 2, 23 February, 1 June, 4 July 1779.

172. BNL 4, 9 July, 6, 10, 24 August 1779.

173. BNL 29 February 1780.

on too much sail.¹⁷⁴ A third scheme which was mooted was the Royal Rock Harrier which was projected by Waddell Cunningham and William Johnston of Downpatrick in December 1779. This fourteen-gun brig was to undertake a three-month cruise in the West Indies but nothing more seems to have come of the project.¹⁷⁵ The same fate seems to have befallen the Rattlesnake, formerly a Philadelphia privateer, which was to have been equipped by a number of merchants and sent to sea as the Harlequin.¹⁷⁶ When the fate of those privateering ventures which actually got under way is considered, this is not surprising for nobody can have made anything from them: certainly not the crews involved, and in all probability not the merchants who equipped the vessels.

With the coming of peace, trade with America was resumed but on a very different pattern to that which had prevailed in the pre-war period. The principal agent of change was the change in the Navigation Laws which permitted the direct importation of tobacco from the now independent colonies into Irish ports. This had taken place in 1780,¹⁷⁷ but the war had prevented its immediate implementation. When the war ended, Belfast businessmen quickly became involved in the tobacco trade. The war had broken the hold which the merchants of Glasgow and, to a lesser extent, Whitehaven, had enjoyed over the trade.¹⁷⁸ The first vessel to leave Belfast for the United States was the Success, which sailed for Virginia on 12 March, returning in

174. BNL 19 March, 27 April, 18 June, 13 July 1779.

175. BNL 31 December 1779.

176. BNL 29 December 1780.

177. 20 Geo III c.10.

178. See T.M.Devine, Glasgow Merchants and the Collapse of the Tobacco Trade in Scot.Hist.Rev. LII (1973), pp.50-74.

August with a cargo of tobacco.¹⁷⁹ By the end of the year at least three other vessels had left Belfast for Virginia or Maryland.¹⁸⁰ Nor was the town's involvement in the trade merely a matter of sending vessels there for during the immediate post-war years a number of Belfast businessmen are known to have emigrated to Maryland where they set up in business as commission agents, specialising in the tobacco trade. Among them were Samuel Liggat and James Hyndman, who left for Baltimore in January 1785. They intended to ship goods there, bringing any which they could not sell on to Richmond, where one of them would take up permanent residence. Any goods remaining unsold there would be shipped back to Ireland along with their first shipment of tobacco.¹⁸¹ They were followed two months later by Hugh Thompson, who also entered the commission business in Baltimore.¹⁸² They were only three of many young Irishmen who went there at the period hoping to make a quick fortune and who aroused the ire of the Maryland State Legislature by their unwillingness to settle down long enough to contribute to the state taxes.¹⁸³ Thompson, for example, returned home during the summer of 1788 and became manager of the family's flour mill at Muckamore:¹⁸⁴ by this time the tobacco 'boom' had ended, as can be seen from Fig. 35.

The emigration and the sudden growth of the tobacco trade were not motivated by purely legitimate reasons. The initial shipments, according to the intelligence received by the authorities, were to be smuggled into

179. BNL 14 March 1783.

180. The Friendship (BNL 25 March 1783); Jameson (SNL 12 September 1783), and the Lord Donegall (BNL 10 December 1783).

181. BM 7 January 1785; BNL 11 January 1785.

182. BNL 18 February 1785.

183. DEP 14 July 1785.

184. BNL 16 November 1788. He was still in Baltimore in April 1788 (R.D. Vol.395, ff.320-21).

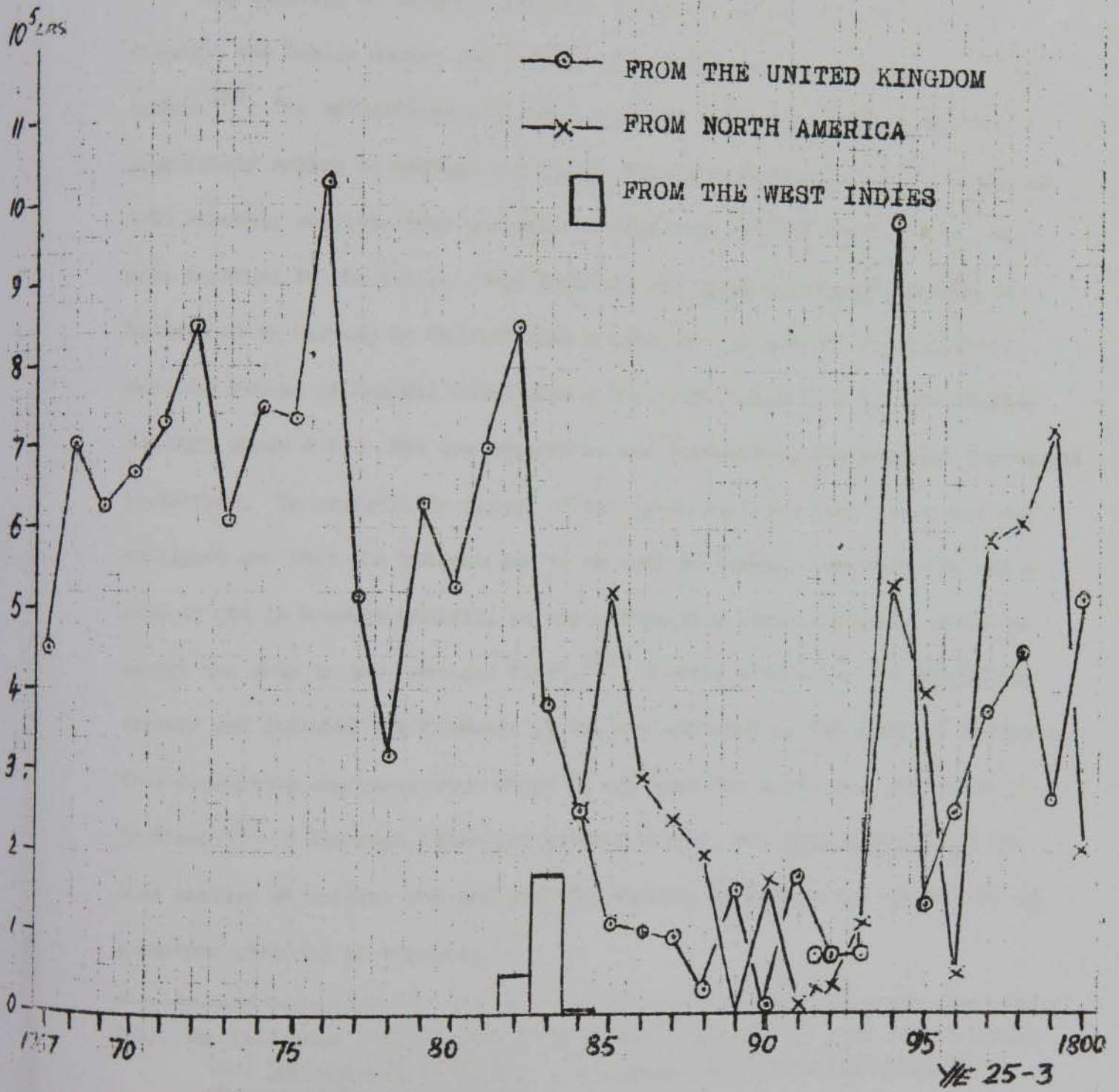


FIG. 35 . IMPORTS OF TOBACCO INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

Ireland and England.¹⁸⁵ However, by 1785 'rather than go all the way to Virginia for tobacco to smuggle, it was found cheaper to ship duty-paid tobacco . . . ostensibly for some destination qualifying for drawback of duty, Norway for instance, and then after attracting no Customs attention en route unship the goods somewhere on the coast of Scotland or Ireland'.¹⁸⁶

The quantity of tobacco involved was considerable, and it was soon flooding the Dublin market and driving the legally-imported tobacco from the market.¹⁸⁷ The authorities were well aware of what was happening and took appropriate action to control the abuse. Their activity during the spring of 1785 strongly suggests that a number of prominent Belfast merchants had become involved in the trade. That February the Irish Volunteer arriv^{ed}~~ing~~ at Strangford on her way to Belfast with a cargo of tobacco for the prominent merchant houses of Waddell Cunningham & Co., John Campbell & Co. and William and John Brown & Co. She was boarded by two landwaiters who escorted the vessel to Belfast. On arrival the owners of the cargo declared that the market had collapsed and that the tobacco was to be sent to Norway. Whether this was a ruse or not is however unclear, as the authorities were suspicious enough to escort the ship to the Pentland Firth.¹⁸⁸ Shortly afterwards the Resolution arrived and declared for Hamburg: it too was escorted to the North of Scotland, thus disrupting any rendezvous which it may have had along the west coast of Scotland.¹⁸⁹ A few days later yet another vessel, the Jenny and Sally likewise arrived at Belfast and set sail for Hamburg as soon as it was boarded by a customs official at Holywood.¹⁹⁰

185. See Collector of Liverpool to Customs Board, 30 July 1783 in R.C.Jarvis (ed) Customs Letter-Books of the Port of Liverpool 1711-1813 (Manchester 1954), pp.114-15.

186. ibid - Introduction p.xvii. Jarvis's remarks, while concerned with Liverpool, may be applied with equal force to the situation in the vicinity of Belfast.

187. DEP 10 December 1785.

188. PRO CUST 1/175, 176 passim

189. PRO CUST 1/177 ff.72, 80 (7, 9 July 1785).

190. PRO CUST 1/178, unpaginated volume, 14 September 1785.

Despite the close customs supervision, however, tobacco smuggling continued, largely because of the high rate of duties and in 1787 the town's tobacco manufacturers petitioned the House of Commons, 'setting forth that the smuggling of leaf tobacco has arisen to such an alarming height as to threaten not only to decrease his Majesty's revenue in this branch, but utterly to destroy the petitioners' business, to the great injury of them and their families'.¹⁹¹ During the 1780s the industry in the town declined almost to the point of extinction, the numbers employed in tobacco spinning declining from 190 to 25 between 1782 and 1791¹⁹² and imports fell dramatically after 1786. ~~Indeed, the fall was even greater than was revealed by the statistics of imports and exports as these did not include tobacco which was re-exported on arrival in Belfast. No tobacco was directly imported into Belfast from the~~ United States in 1789, and the subsequent revival of the trade during the 1790s was the result of tax concessions which were eventually made in 1793. The recovery which followed was accompanied by a tendency for imports to Belfast from the more northerly states to increase at the expense of the more traditional sources in Virginia and Maryland. In 1793, for example, the total amount imported from the United States came from New England where large quantities were also obtained in 1797, while in 1799 and 1800 substantial quantities were entered from New York. This seems to indicate that the network of Belfast men who were to be found in the tobacco-colonies in the 1780s had now ceased business and that the trade was now being handled by northern merchants.

While the tobacco trade grew rapidly after 1783 there was no resumption of the once large trade in wheat and flour owing to the imposition of duties on imports from countries other than Great Britain when the Irish price

191. Parl. Reg. VII, p.235 (22 February 1787). See also Commons Journ. Ire. XII, pp.206-07.

192. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

fell below 53s. 4d (English) per English quarter. Not only did this encourage home production but it also introduced an air of uncertainty which discouraged speculative importation. As Lord Temple wrote to Lord Northington in 1783, 'the stake is too great for merchants to hazard importation upon speculation, and . . . by the time the price of corn shall rise so high as to exonerate the importation from the duty before mentioned, the cost will be too far advanced, and the relief arrive too late'.¹⁹³

However imports of flaxseed, the other staple of the pre-war trade recommenced after the war although some still continued to be imported from the United Provinces on a much smaller scale than during the war. About four fifths of the seed imported into Belfast after 1782 came from America, and of this, roughly half was from New York, its share of the trade remaining remarkably constant throughout the 1790s, while just under one-third came from Pennsylvania. Until about 1790 about a fifth of the seed is entered as coming from the middle colonies. These imports were abruptly replaced at that time by imports from New England, and this decline is probably associated with the similar transfer in the tobacco trade which has already been remarked upon.¹⁹⁴

Another commodity which featured in the eastbound North Atlantic trade was potash. Before the war it had been imported in small quantities. However bleachers preferred barilla and weed ash obtained from the South of Europe and the Baltic respectively. From the late 1780s imports of American ash nevertheless grew rapidly as the expansion of the textile industries placed a heavy pressure on traditional sources of supply. While American ash never accounted for a very high proportion of the total, it had neverthe-

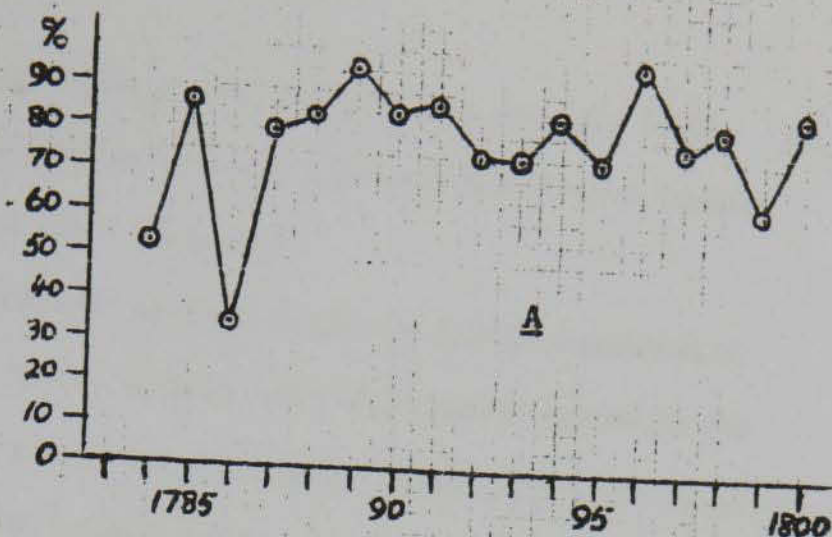
193. NLI Home Office Papers (Ireland) Customs Correspondence Mic. P4082, Temple to Northington, 23 May 1783; 23/24 Geo III (Ir) c.19, ff. 9.10.

194. See Fig. 36.

G. 36. IMPORTS
FLAXSEED FROM
THE UNITED STATES
INTO BELFAST
1784 - 1800

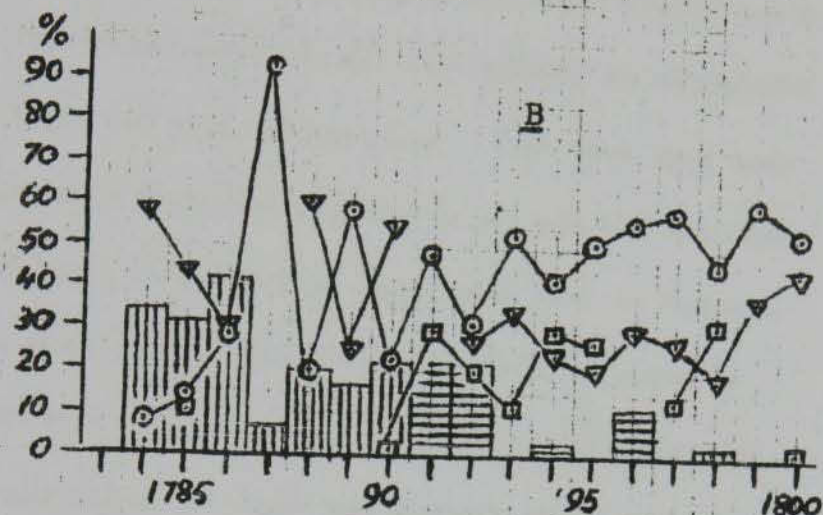
A

Imports from the United States expressed as a percentage of the total imports into Belfast.



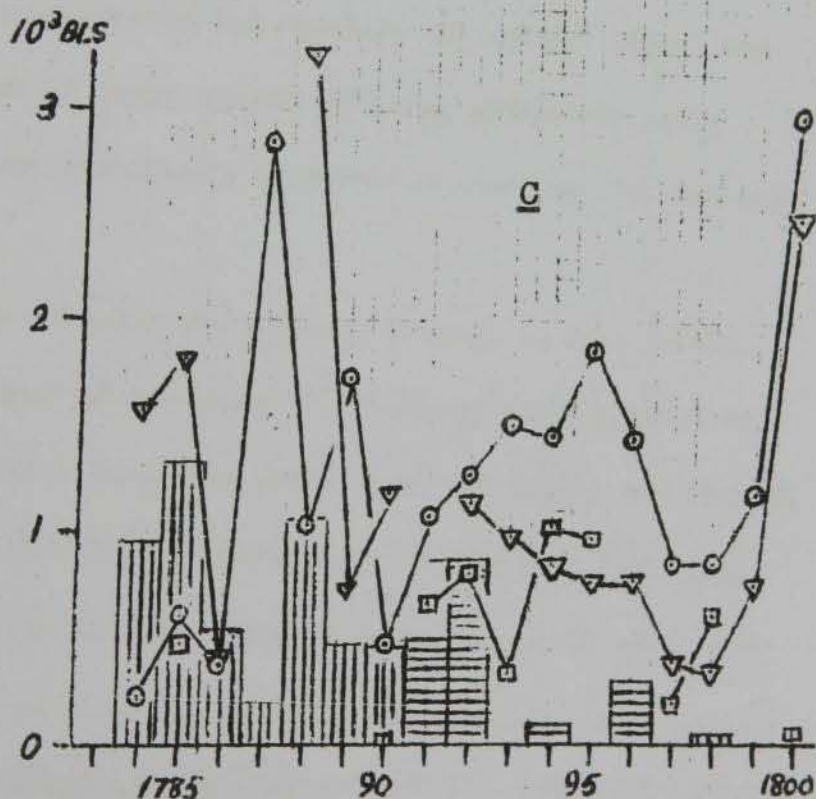
B

Individual states as a percentage of the total American seed imported



C

Imports from individual states



- NEW YORK
- ▽ PENNSYLVANIA
- NEW ENGLAND
- ▨ VIRGINIA & MARYLAND
- ▧ CAROLINA

less reached an annual importation of about 250 tons by the late 1790s. The most important source of supply was New York although New England emerged during the early 1790s as a major supplier.

In the westbound direction, exports of linen expanded dramatically after the end of the war. Linen, indeed, was the principal export to the United States and was used to pay for the various commodities which were imported into Belfast. Initial exports were exploratory in nature. For example, in 1784 almost 200,000 yards were sent to Philadelphia and over 170,000 yards to Virginia and Maryland. The former quantity was much reduced in subsequent years: no doubt the market there had been oversupplied. That same year over 16,500 lbs of shoes were also sent there, an exercise which was not repeated. No doubt the reason why such large quantities of goods were sent to Pennsylvania was the dominant role which it had occupied in the trade in pre-war days.¹⁹⁵ However the pattern soon changed. Until the early 1790s Virginia and Maryland absorbed large quantities of linen but exports there declined thereafter parallel with the decline in the flaxseed and tobacco trade, New England being the destination of large amounts of linen during the early 1790s, although the trade came principally to centre on New York and Pennsylvania (Fig. 37).

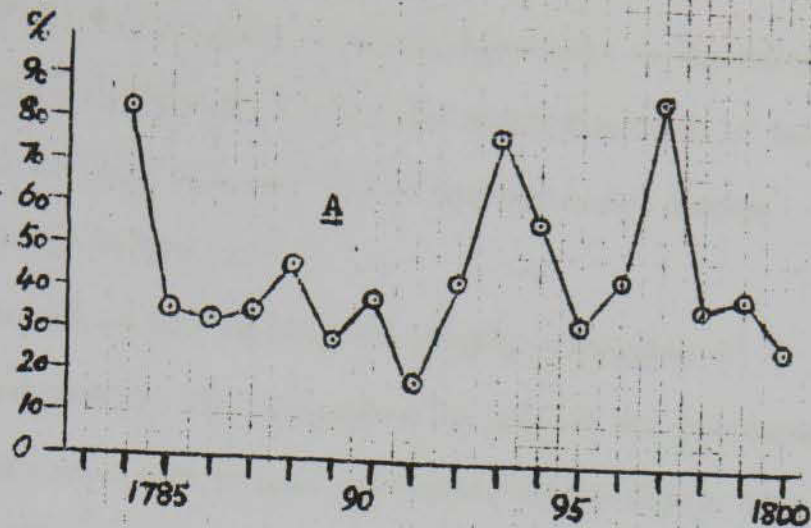
The linen trade to North America was never as buoyant as that to the Caribbean when regarded in terms of its share of the total linen exports of Belfast. In the 1780s it usually comprised about 3% of the total, and only in 1793 and 1797 did it rise to more than 7%. Likewise, in only one year, 1793 did the total yardage exceed one million. Nevertheless, as can be seen from

195. On 30 September 1783 Saunders's Newsletter published a number of letters from Philadelphia, one concluding 'I hope no vessels will come here from Belfast, as very little they can bring will fetch first cost.' These letters, brought on a ship leaving on August 3, represent the economic conditions as the first shipments from Belfast and other ports were arriving. The Belfast Mercury of 15 March 1785 described Philadelphia as choked with British merchandise.

FIG 37 . EXPORTS OF LINEN FROM BELFAST TO THE UNITED STATES 1784-1800

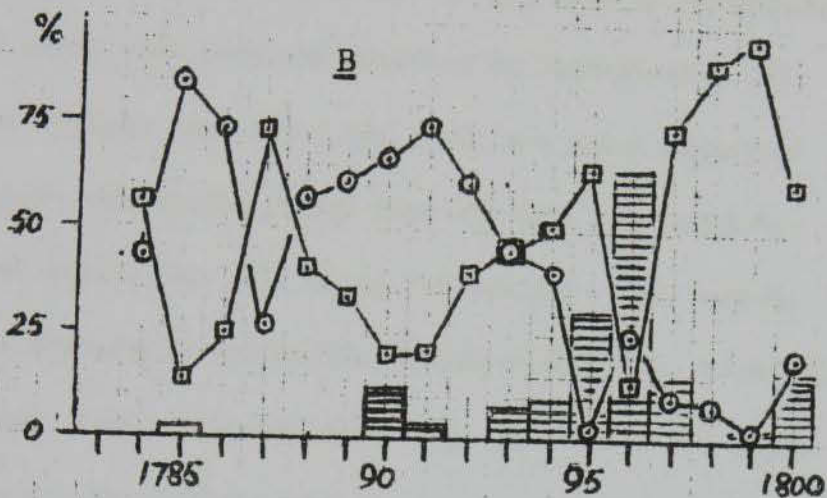
A

Exports to the United States expressed as a percentage of the total linen exports from Belfast.



B

Exports to individual states expressed as a percentage of the total exports of linen from Belfast to the United States



C

Exports to individual states

- NEW YORK & PENNSYLVANIA
- VIRGINIA, MARYLAND & THE CAROLINAS
- ▨ NEW ENGLAND

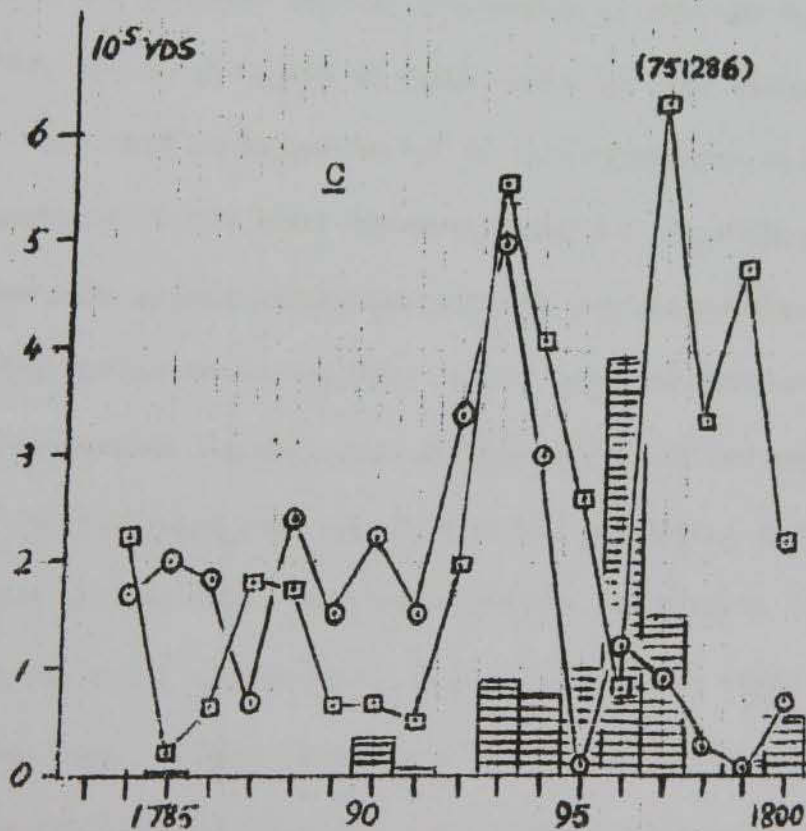


Fig. 37, the proportion of the export trade in linen which went to the United States increased slowly during the period, despite the rapid expansion of the linen trade as a whole, and was less affected by war and depression during the 1790s than the trade to the Caribbean.

While linen exports to the United States were roughly comparable in volume with those to the West Indies, the same cannot be said of the provisions trade, although some attempts were made to sell provisions in the Middle Colonies in the immediate post-war years. These do not, however, seem to have been particularly successful and exports of beef and pork to the area in subsequent years were small. In most years some beef was exported to Pennsylvania but once again the quantity was minimal and during the 1790s the total amount of beef sent to the United States was normally less than 250 lbs, the quantity of other commodities such as butter and beer being far smaller. The reason, of course, was obvious: the Americans, unlike the Caribbean planters, were able to satisfy most of their needs from their own resources and even in the plantation economies of the middle and southern states, the supply of land was not a restricting factor and there was an abundance of small farms and free farmers.

The commodities which have been mentioned so far in this discussion were merely the principal ones involved in the North American trade and, especially during the 1790s, other items make regular appearances in the customs records. At this time, for example, the cotton of the southern states began to form an important part of Belfast's raw cotton imports, and in 1796 over 1,500 cwt was imported from New England. The following year saw substantial quantities being imported from both New England and New York. Although none was imported in 1798, a year of great economic and political disturbances, imports resumed in 1799 and 1798, principally from New York. Timber of varying types was also imported in substantial quantities, much of it in the form of barrel staves, a product of which the mainland afforded much greater supplies than the West Indies. Another commodity imported was iron although the quantities were rarely substantial

and the town continued to draw the bulk of its supply from British and European sources.¹⁹⁶

In the other direction, the variety of goods exported to the United States also widened considerably. Indeed the American market was a major cause of the establishment of some of the new industries in the town during the early 1790s. Two firms especially come to mind in this context. They are the glassworks of John Smylie & Co. and the New Ropewalk Co. Both were established by groups of merchants who were engaged in, among other activities, the North American trade. In 1792 over 20,000 drinking glasses were sent from Belfast to the United States, as well as £500 worth of other glassware, while during the 1790s considerable quantities of canvas and cordage were exported not only by the New Ropewalk, but also by the longer established firm of John Galt Smith & Co.¹⁹⁷ While their principal markets were to be found in the Caribbean, a considerable quantity of cordage was sent to the United States, as well as some canvas. In January 1796, for example, the Old Ropewalk sent 200 pieces of canvas to Virginia,¹⁹⁸ while three tons of ropes were sent to Carolina during 1792.

So far little mention has been made of the emigration trade which formed such a prominent part of the pre-war trade. However the post-war emigration trade has received excellent attention from historians and especially in Maldwyn Jones' article in Essays in Scotch Irish History.¹⁹⁹ He has shown

196. Hildebrand's comment that American supplies 'were always more important in discussion than in practice' (loc cit, p.11) was just as true of the Belfast trade as it was the trade between Britain and America.

197. Minutes Linen Trustees (1792), pp.101-6; PRO CUST 1/237, f.72 (12 March 1794), -/245, f.8 (9 June 1795).

198. PRO CUST 1/248, f.84 (19 January 1796).

199. M.A.Jones 'Ulster Emigration, 1783-1815', in E.R.R.Green (ed) Essays in Scotch-Irish History (London 1969), pp.46-68.

how the post-war emigrants were of a higher social standing and more self-sufficient than their pre-war predecessors and included a considerable number of professional and business men.²⁰⁰ Such men did not lend themselves to the promotion of organised emigration, such as the Georgian schemes of Matthew Rea in the early 1770s which have been mentioned above. Instead the traditional pattern re-emerged whereby emigrants filled the available space on westbound merchant vessels, and plenty of scope for emigration was provided by the lively trade which emerged from the wartime disruptions. By the end of 1783, 1470 emigrants were said to have left Belfast,²⁰¹ a greater number than from any other Irish port with the exception of Londonderry.²⁰² The scale of emigration helps to explain the initial concentration of trade on Philadelphia, for it was the principal immigrant port in the United States.

The trade showed every sign of approaching, if not exceeding, that of the pre-war years. However, the government feared that the emigration of skilled workers would have a detrimental effect on the economy and forbade the emigration of skilled craftsmen and their tools,²⁰³ although it is hard to know the extent to which the ban was enforced. From time to time, however, evidence survives which shows at least token enforcement. In 1791, for example, the Collector of Belfast was warned by the authorities in Dublin Castle that several vessels 'are preparing to proceed to America with Emigrants among whom are several Manufacturers intending to take with them the Implements of their Trade, contrary to Law', and was told to help stop them.²⁰⁴ However, as

200. ibid, p.49.

201. BNL 4 June 1784.

202. M.A.Jones, loc.cit, p.50.

203. 23 Geo III (Ire) c.14.

204. PROI Customs and Excise Administration Papers, IA/43/5/1 ('R.H.' Dublin Castle, circular letter to the Collectors of Newry, Belfast and Londonderry, 27 April 1791.

Jones has pointed out, there were many difficulties in enforcing such regulations, even when they were supplemented in 1795 by a Proclamation requiring ships' captains to hand sworn lists of the names and occupations of their passengers before sailing.²⁰⁵

Despite these controls, emigration continued throughout the period and provided a useful source of revenue for vessels westbound from Belfast to the United States. Indeed, emigration received a considerable boost from the political troubles of the late 1790s, as many people, including some Belfast businessmen, sought a new life in a land more hospitable to their political opinions. Wolfe Tone left from Belfast when he sailed for America in 1795: his diary reveals that many were doing likewise for there were 300 passengers on board his 200 ton vessel, the Cincinnati of Wilmington.²⁰⁶

The local evidence relating to Belfast amply bears out Jones' conclusion that the post-war emigrants contained 'a considerable leavening of professional men and of the moderately well to do'.²⁰⁷ Mention has already been made of those who went to the Middle Colonies in the mid 1780s, and even if those who left Belfast for political reasons are not considered, one can discover traces of a considerable number of businessmen who emigrated to America. Hugh Thompson of Muckamore, for example, had returned to Belfast in 1788 but emigrated again in 1797.²⁰⁸ John Cunningham, a brother of Samuel Cunningham of St Vincent, went to Baltimore in 1795, having been offered a junior partnership by Arthur Kennedy, a merchant who was a nephew of another John Kennedy, a Belfast merchant who was a distant relative of the Cunninghams of Crookedstone.

205. BNL 20 April 1795; M.A.Jones, loc.cit., pp.54-55.

206. W.T.W.Tone, Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone (Washington, 1826) i, pp.128-29.

207. M.A.Jones, loc.cit., p. 49.

208. BNL 24 July 1797.

However, he had to return home when Kennedy reneged upon his promise.²⁰⁹

It is possible that what might be termed a 'business' traffic of a kind also developed. In April 1783, for example, the firm of Thomas Hardin & Co. sent two employees to Philadelphia at least partly with the intention of re-establishing contacts there.²¹⁰

Little is known of the organisation of trade in the post-war era.

However, what evidence survives suggests that it resembled the pre-war trade in being largely conducted on a commission basis on behalf of Belfast merchants. Certainly the tobacco trade was conducted on this basis as were shipments of linen to the United States,²¹¹ and there is no reason to suppose that the other commodities involved were handled differently.

209. PRONI Mic 45/3/14 (Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers). Typescript account of his travels, also D1108/A/14, Cunningham to Thomas Brown, 16 May 1796.

210. BNL 15 April 1783.

211. W.Charley, op.cit., pp.6-7.

CHAPTER 9

THE INDUSTRIAL GROWTH OF THE TOWN.(1):

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING INDUSTRIES.

In the closing decades of the century, Belfast was in the process of becoming a very considerable industrial centre. Even before 1767, there were many industrial activities carried on within its boundaries. Some, such as tallowchandling and tanning, were organised in small workshops, while others, such as shoemaking and linenweaving, were conducted on a domestic basis. In all of these, overheads were low, and the need for advanced types of business organisation such as the limited liability company, was virtually non-existent. These traditional industries were supplemented by others which were the precursors of later technical advances. These were large scale industries involving extensive buildings and machinery, and the employment of substantial capital and managerial skill. There were also some other industries, such as brewing and milling, which gradually changed from a traditional form to increasingly advanced technological and financial methods by 1800.

The industrialisation of Belfast during the late 18th century was not just the development of those industries already existing in 1767: new industries evolved during the period. By far the largest of these was the cotton industry which by 1800 had become the largest employer in the lower Lagan Valley. More than any other industry, it laid the foundations for rapid industrial expansion in the following century. However, its scale of operation must not be allowed to hide the considerable contribution which was made to the town's development by other industries, both old and new and in this and the following chapter it is intended to outline the various industrial activities in the town so as to give some idea of their range and scope. One aspect which will come to the fore in this regard is the role of the provisions trade,

especially as a provider of employment within the town itself. The preparation and packing of such commodities as salted beef and pork was in itself a major source of employment, as were industries which dealt with by-products of the provisions trade, such as tallowchandling and tanning.

Tallowchandling and soapboiling were two of the most important of the traditional industries, and were normally carried on in conjunction with each other. In 1782 Robert Hyndman calculated that they employed 27 men: by 1791 this figure had only risen to 29.¹ Newspaper advertisements and other sources indicate that between six and eight firms were engaged in the business in 1782, these two figures taken together giving an average number of employees per firm of about three or four. By 1791, however, the known number of firms had risen considerably without a corresponding increase in the number of employees, indicating that a number of firms have been omitted in the 1782 calculation. This view is reinforced by the fact that the 1791 list includes a number of firms whose existence is only known by the publication of a list of active soap and tallow-chandlers in an advertisement announcing the industry's adoption of the 112 lb hundred weight instead of that of 120 lbs.²

Like other traditional trades, it required little capital. Most premises were leased and equipment was inexpensive: that of Conway Carleton & Co. was valued at about £19 in 1789.³ Despite the generally small scale of operations, however, candles and soap were exported in considerable quantities to the colonies as well as being used by the linen finishing industries, although soap was also being imported from the continent and Great Britain. Between 1791 and 1798, however, exports exceeded imports in all years except 1793 and 1798,

1. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

2. BNL 20 January 1792.

3. PRONI D1252/17/9 (Carleton Papers).

while imports of raw tallow were a characteristic feature of the customs statistics after the end of the American War of Independence. The exports of soap and candles broadly reflect the patterns of the colonial provisions trade, and would seem to have been one of the items regularly added to provisions cargoes, being mentioned as such by Narcissus Batt in 1794.⁴ The rise in soap and candle exports is not as sharp as at first appears as it was to some extent a substitute for the export of raw tallow which declined from the early 1780s. It is thus evident that to some extent tallow was being processed in Belfast rather than exported in its raw state and the only year between 1782 and 1796 when tallow was exported in substantial quantities was 1789, when soap exports showed a considerable reduction on the previous year. By the 1790s the regular importation of tallow shows that the industry was expanding much more rapidly than its supply of raw material.

Firms were frequently owned by persons engaged in other walks of life. Mention has already been made of the chandler David McTier, who was also a maltster.⁵ The merchant house of John Campbell & Co. were partners in the firm of Robert Herdman & Co. until its dissolution in 1785.⁶ As has been seen in Chapter 7 (i), they were involved in the trade to the Caribbean, the principal export market for tallow products. Conway Carleton, who came to Belfast in 1778 from Lisburn where his father, Cornelius, was a grocer and chandler, was a tobacconist as well as a chandler,⁷ although in the late 1790s he abandoned both pursuits for cotton spinning. Another partnership which combined chandling with tobacco was Hugh Kearns and

4. PRONI Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers Mic 45/3/8. Narcissus Batt to Gordon & Cunningham, 14 February 1794.

5. See pp.35-36 above.

6. BNL 14 March 1786.

7. BNL 16 November 1770, 27 October 1778, 1 March 1791; PRONI D1252/17 (Carleton Papers).

Gavin Davison, who began their business in Ann Street in 1798.⁸

Nevertheless, some chandlers did confine themselves exclusively to the trade, including Hugh Henderson, who took over David McTier's business in 1794,⁹ and the brothers Rowley and William Osborne, who began business at Church Lane in 1782. As their partnership was dissolved exactly five years later, it is likely that they had drawn up a formal partnership agreement,¹⁰ and their business was on a sufficiently large scale for William Osborne (then sole owner) to indicate that a knowledge of bookkeeping would be required when he advertised for an apprentice in 1791.¹¹

Little is known of the origins of many of the town's chandlers, which could indicate that many of them came from relatively lowly social origins. Certainly, it was an unpleasant occupation, and the capital required to establish oneself was small. Nevertheless, some of those engaged in the business came from fairly prosperous backgrounds. Henderson's father, for example, was a ship's captain,¹² while both Carleton and McTier came from respectable commercial families. On the other hand, Rowley Osborne senior, the father of the Osborne brothers, was illiterate, although this does not mean that he was not a wealthy man.¹³ The Linn family, for example, were chandling in Belfast at least as early as 1777:¹⁴ by 1799 their property in the town was valued at £7,000.¹⁵ There is no evidence that they were engaged

8. BNL 17 October 1798.

9. BNL 28 March 1794.

10. BNL 20 August 1782, 28 August 1787.

11. BNL 19 August 1791.

12. See p. 35 above.

13. PRONI L'Estrange & Brett Papers D1905/2/63A/1 (Will of Rowley Osborne smr. 28 February 1793).

14. BNL 29 April 1777. Robert & Michael Linn were looking for an apprentice which indicates that they had been in Belfast for some time.

15. LHL Joy MSS 10/13.

in any other activity, although most firms in the business, as has been shown, were operated as adjuncts to other activities.

Another industry which played a prominent part in the town's economy by utilising the by-products of the provisions industry was tanning, which used the skins of cattle slaughtered by the victuallers. Like tallowchandling, it was organised in small, workshop type units employing only a small number of journeymen and apprentices. It too underwent a period of growth during the 1780s, measured both in increasing imports of bark, and in the meagre evidence available regarding the numbers of firms and people employed in the trade. The latter may well be underestimated, as they are based upon chance references in newspapers and other contemporary sources. However, the error is probably significantly less for tanners than for the chandlers estimated from similar evidence as tanners required more elaborate premises than the tallowchandlers who could rapidly equip any shop or workshop for their trade. These estimates show that a peak in the number of firms in the trade was reached in the early 1790s, and that by the Rebellion of 1798 the number of firms involved may have contracted to the levels of the 1770s.

One of the principal differences between tanning and tallowchandling was the scale of the firms involved, for tanning required spacious premises with sheds and stores, and equipment such as vats and presses. Tanning was a slow process and so a considerable amount of capital had to be tied up in raw materials, such as hides and barks, and also in fuel. When Charles Mackenzie went bankrupt in 1793, a year's supply of hides was listed among his assets.¹⁶ Tanyards were thus fixed entities, although they not infrequently changed hands. That of Samuel McTier in North Street, for example, was sold after his death in 1773 and passed through a number of hands, coming

16. BNL 10 September 1793.

by 1792 into the ownership of Charles Mackenzie who sold it in 1798 to James Douglas, a prominent merchant.¹⁷ Another yard in North Street, that belonging to the Simms family, was sold in 1794 to a partnership of John Bell, jnr and Samuel Alexander. Alexander left in 1799, and moved to another yard, which had been vacated by another tanner, Thomas Major.¹⁸ The size of tanyards in the town varied considerably. While it is possible to identify some major concerns which were owned by individuals who played a major part in the town's commercial life, there were also a number of smaller establishments. At the upper end of the scale were concerns such as those of Samuel McTier or Christopher Hudson. Before the former's death in 1773, he was a prosperous and respected member of the business community and the poor state of his affairs at the time of his death probably reflected the financial situation of many firms in that year. Family correspondence shows that they were on intimate terms with the prominent merchant families of the town,¹⁹ and his son, Samuel junior, was respectable enough to be appointed as Captain of the Belfast Volunteer Company.²⁰ When Charles Mackenzie announced in 1793 that his North Street yard was for sale, it was said to have a capacity of 2,000 hides.²¹ Similarly, Hudson, whose only source of income was his tanyard in Smithfield, owned property worth £8,000 in the town by the end of the century.²²

Until 1782, there were about half a dozen tanyards in the town, and these employed an estimated 33 men. Some new yards were established in the

17. BNL 18 May 1773; RD Vol.509, f.460.

18. BNL 29 September 1794, 1 November 1799.

19. Principally The Drennan Letters (PRONI T765/2/-).

20. T.MacNevin, The History of the Volunteers of 1782 (5th ed, Dublin 1846), p.224.

21. BNL 10 September 1793.

22. LHL Joy MSS 10/13.

1780s, and by 1791 the industry employed 45 workers.²³ Many of the new yards were small, like that operated by James Martin. He had arrived in Belfast from London in 1774, and had set himself up in business as a saddler. By the end of the century he was in partnership as Martin and Moreland with a family of prominent victuallers in the town.²⁴ Another leather worker who engaged in tanning was George Munro, a shoemaker. He was a partner in the tannery belonging to the Smith family in Mill Street from 1793 until 1799 when he took over sole command of the yard, as well as retaining his shoe manufacturing business in High Street.²⁵ Other newcomers to the industry included Samuel Law, who was also engaged in metal casting by 1795 although tanning remained his principal occupation.²⁶ In 1781 he was described as a 'dealer', under which description he was admitted to the freedom of the town²⁷ but had begun tanning at a yard in North Street by 1789.²⁸ In 1786 he married Elizabeth McIlwaine,²⁹ the daughter of Hugh McIlwaine, a Belfast merchant who was involved in selling hides and skins and, although he was never described as a tanner, there may well be a link between Law's entry into the industry and his father-in-law's business.

The period before 1791 was one of expansion in the tanning industry in Belfast despite many difficulties such as the rising price of oak bark which led to the Belfast tanners petitioning Parliament in 1786.³⁰ However the

23. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

24. BNL 15 July 1774, 26 August 1800 (The latter reference announces the dissolution of Martin and Moreland).

25. BNL 8 February 1793, 3 May 1799.

26. PRONI Shipboy Mss D530/22/14. R.Patterson to James McAdam, 17 November 1795.

27. R.M.Young, Town Book, p.300.

28. BNL 27 February 1789.

29. PRONI St Anne's Marriage Register D1759/lc/2.

30. Parl. Reg. VI, pp.179-80 (15 February 1786).

rapid expansion of the provisions industry at a time when the provisions trade in Ireland as a whole was stagnant provided the Belfast tanners with a plentiful supply of raw hides at a period when they were in chronically short supply elsewhere in Ireland.³¹ The Belfast industry showed few signs of contraction until the early 1790s. During that decade the number of yards decreased until in 1800 there were only between eight and ten in operation compared with about six during the 1770s. Some came into the hands of property speculators. David Dunn, for example, died in 1797 and his yard was sold to a Mrs Moor who was accumulating property in the town,³² and Charles Mackenzie sold out in the following year. The history of his yard illustrates well the decline of the industry. In 1789 it was owned by William McCleery who entered into partnership with Mackenzie. Mackenzie had been a seacaptain and may have known little^{of the trade}, the arrangement being a financial one. McCleery left Belfast in 1792 and Mackenzie, left with the yard, soon found himself in trouble, becoming bankrupt in 1793. At the end of the year he resumed business having evidently made a settlement with his creditors but in 1795 offered the premises for sale.³³ However he was unable to sell it until 1798 when it was bought by his ground landlord, James Douglas.³⁴ Mackenzie was not the only casualty and a number of other yards also faded from public mention at this period and may be presumed to have closed down.

Very few tanned hides were ever exported from Belfast, most being exported raw, mainly to Great Britain. The only statistical indicator which

31. T.Wallace, op.cit., pp.283-84.

32. BNL 19 May 1797; PRONI McTear MSS D199/21. According to this deed, made a few months before Dunn's death, Mrs Moor bought the yard in return for extinguishing a mortgage which Dunn had made on the premises with her brother-in-law, David McTier. This would possibly show that Dunn was in some financial straits.

33. BNL 27 February 1789, 6 November 1792, 10 September 1793, 21 September 1795; NS 7 September, 12 December 1793.

34. RD Vol.509, f.460.

can be used as a gauge of the prosperity of the industry is that of the importation of tanners' bark through Belfast, for most of the bark used by the tanning industry had to be imported, principally from Britain. The statistics, while they include the bark imported for the town's hinterland as well as for the town's tanners, bear out the conclusions of Fig. 38 which show the 1770s as a period of stagnation, followed by a period of growth which lasted until the early 1790s and a rapid fall to a level but slightly in excess of that prevailing during the 1770s.

As already said, few hides were exported from Belfast in a tanned state. The one product of the tanning industry which formed a significant part of the town's export trade was shoes which were exported in considerable quantities to the West Indies. Shoemaking, indeed, was one of the principal sources of employment in the town, employing 224 men in 1782 and 312 nine years later³⁵ and, according to these estimates of Robert Hyndman, only linen weaving employed more workers in the town. It was a highly labour-intensive industry where skill was more important than the price of raw materials or machinery and catered principally for the local market, the rather sporadic export trade being a bonus rather than a mainstay of the industry.

The small amount of equipment needed by the craftsman was reflected in the fact that much of the industry was conducted on a domestic basis, the raw material being 'put out' to journeymen who worked in their own homes by masters who often employed large numbers of workmen. The number of workers per master shoemaker was large. In 1783 there were about twenty people in the town who may have been master shoemakers and some of these may have been retailers unconnected with the manufacturing side of the industry. The number of employees in each firm varied greatly. The largest firm was that of Alexander Blackwell,

35. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

10³ BARRELS

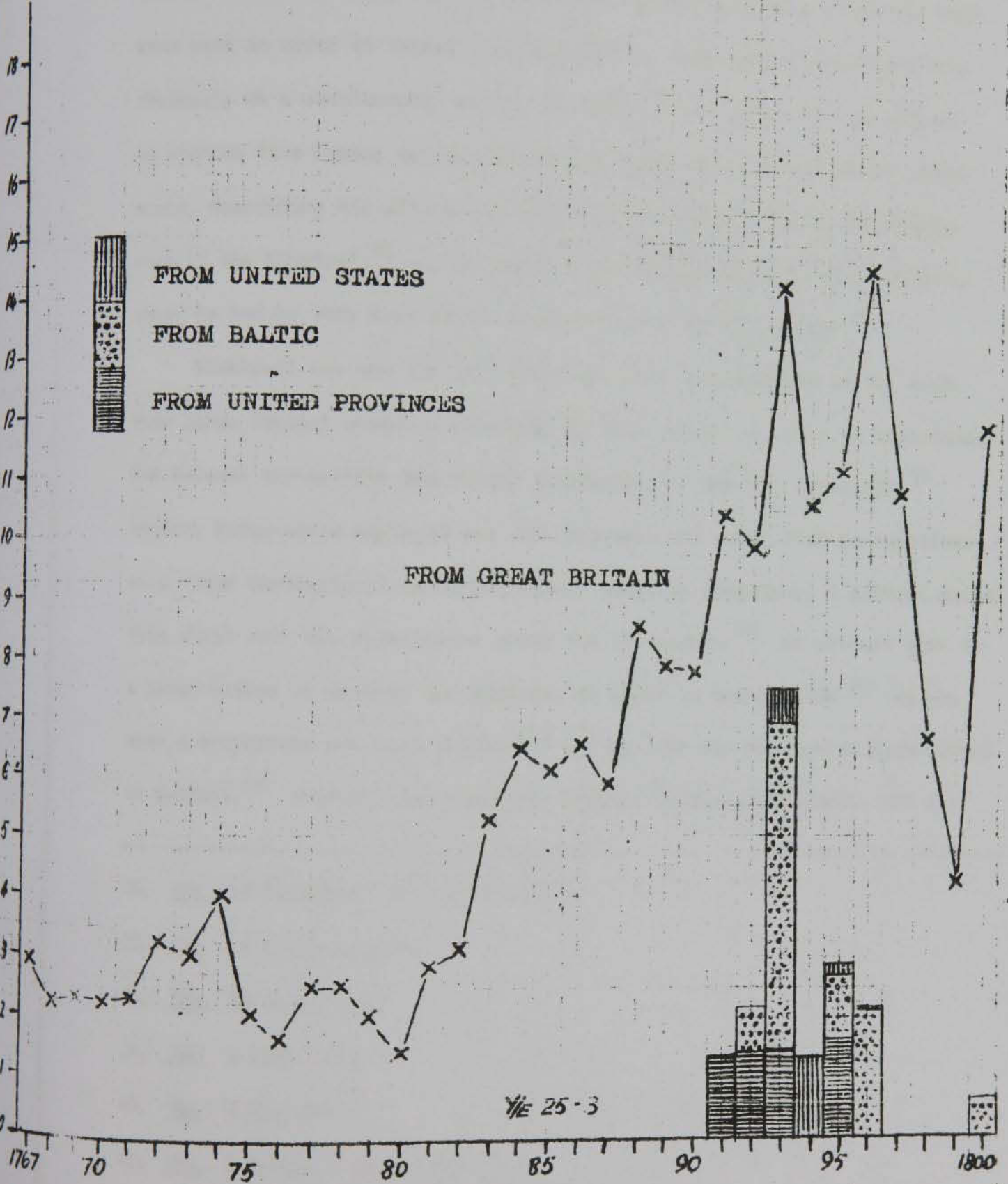


FIG. 33 . IMPORTS OF BARK INTO BELFAST, 1767 - 1800

who advertised in February 1779 for thirty or forty journeymen who had a good knowledge of ladies' shoes, while in the following December he was seeking journeymen who specialised in the making of gentlemen's boots and shoes.³⁶ Even allowing for the fact that these recruiting drives may have been made in order to fulfil specific orders, Blackwell's operations were obviously on a considerable scale. In 1770, for example, he had brought in workers from London and Dublin and had begun the manufacture of ladies' shoes, describing his efforts as 'the first attempt of this sort in this part of the Kingdom',³⁷ and to judge by an advertisement in the following year, he had by this time built up an extensive country trade.³⁸

Blackwell was not the only important shoe manufacturer in the town. When James Stewart opened a warehouse in High Street in 1787, he advertised for between twenty-five and thirty journeymen to form his workforce.³⁹ Another large-scale employer was John Mitchell who owned what he described as a 'Shoe Manufactory' on Hanover Quay: this was presumably a central depot from which work was distributed among the journeymen.⁴⁰ He offered work to a large number of workers and employed an agent in Newtownards.⁴¹ He was also a shipbroker and coal merchant⁴² and in 1794 was the Danish vice-consul in Belfast.⁴³ Mitchell may have been related to George Mitchell, who was

36. BNL 16 February, 31 December 1779.

37. BNL 16 February 1770

38. BNL 30 April 1771.

39. BNL 5 June 1787.

40. BNL 3 May 1776.

41. BNL 7 March, 9 May 1775.

42. BNL 12 October 1773, 22 October 1779, 31 July 1781, 13 May 1788.

43. NS 2 August 1794.

also in business as a master shoemaker in the town at this time.⁴⁴ Like John, he had other interests as well as shoemaking, being a partner in a brickfield,⁴⁵ and in the years after 1767 built a number of new houses on a tenement at Old Quay.⁴⁶ He dies in 1788 and the business passed into the hands of his manager, George Munro, who later became involved in the tanners, Smith & Munro mentioned earlier in this chapter.⁴⁷ By 1799 he owned a tannery at Chapel Lane off Mill Street as well as a shoeshop in High Street.⁴⁸

These firms were evidently of considerable size, but others must have been considerably smaller, employing but a couple of men. Many remain shrouded in mystery, among them the firm of Thomas and Abraham Harman who moved from Hillsborough to Skipper's Lane in 1776.⁴⁹ Of their subsequent fate we know nothing. It is important to realise just how little capital was required for the establishment of a journeyman in the business, just his tools and the rent of a room. From this humble beginning the good workman could, with luck, work himself up until he too employed his own journeymen and became a master.

This independence, and the domestic organisation of the trade, led at times of depression in the trade to combinations and strikes. In 1790, for example, there was a strike over wages during which the journeymen replied to newspaper advertisements inserted by the masters seeking replacement labour, by themselves placing an advertisement in the Newaletter for 'twelve master

44. BNL 14 March 1793.

45. BNL 9 May 1783.

46. RD Vol.265, f.42; BNL 19 April 1768.

47. BNL 11 November, 12 December 1788.

48. BNL 3 May 1799.

49. BNL 23 July 1776.

shoemakers devoid of meanness', a statement which may be of some use in calculating the number of master shoemakers in business at the time.⁵⁰ The men eventually gave in but dissent continued and in 1794 pressure by the journeymen on the masters became intense once again. This time the master shoemakers found support from the Caribbean merchants in the town who inserted a statement in the newspapers stating that they would refuse to purchase shoes from any master who surrendered to the journeymen's demands.⁵¹

That the merchants should make such a demand is an ample illustration of the strength which the export trade had attained at this period. Its post-war growth has already been mentioned in Chapter ⁸ ~~4~~. Exports commenced on a small scale during the war, and when peace came in 1783 the merchants and master shoemakers made a determined effort to establish themselves in the Caribbean market. Standards and an inspection procedure were laid down, and a set combination of the different sizes of shoe in a shipment was decided upon. It appears that exports were intended for the slave market rather than the colonists themselves as it was decided that all shoes exported were to be made wider than those for the home markets.⁵² This market penetration was successful, and the trade grew steadily until in 1792 over 13,500 lbs of shoes were exported. This high level was maintained until 1797, by which time the market for Belfast shoes had been extended to cover the Carolinas. These export orders were a considerable boost to the industry, especially as they continued throughout the crisis years of the 1790s, and they probably also prevented the tanning industry from an even greater decline than it endured in this period. One venture in which George Munro was involved in

50. BNL 1 October 1790.

51. BNL 17 October 1794.

52. BNL 14 March 1783.

1792 involved over £100 worth of shoes,⁵³ and some master shoemakers were men of considerable property. William Bryson was letting property in Pottinger's Entry and Ballymacarrett in 1768⁵⁴ while Alexander Blackwell owned property in High Street which provided his widow with a substantial income after his death in 1785.⁵⁵ James Stewart helped to found the rather exclusive Masonic Lodge 272 in 1780. Its membership consisted of prominent businessmen in the town.⁵⁶ In 1793 he owned property in Holywood, as well as in High Street and on the Malone Road⁵⁷ and sent his son to Trinity College for some years prior to 1796.⁵⁸

Some of the town's master shoemakers belonged to what might be termed shoemaking families. Blackwell, for example, was related to Jonathan Blackwell, who was a master shoemaker in Newry in the mid 1770s.⁵⁹ William Dawson inherited his father's business at Hanover Quay in 1776 and may have been related to Moses Dawson, who was in the trade for a while during the early 1790s.⁶⁰ Mention has also been made of two Mitchells. We know that others had either served their time to or had been employed by Belfast firms. George Munro, for example, had worked for George Mitchell, and two others, Charles Hyland and a Mr Thomson both worked for Alexander Blackwell.⁶¹

53. PRONI D1721/1. Atkinson Papers: A/c book of a Belfast wine merchant. The merchant (probably T. & M. Atkinson) were also involved in the venture.

54. BNL 11 October 1768.

55. See for example BNL 11 March 1791, NS 6 March 1793.

56. Griffith, Tracts, p.10.

57. PRONI Donegall Estate Papers D509/886; BNL 3 May 1793.

58. PRONI Downshire Mss D607/920. Stewart to Lord Hillsborough, 7 December 1796.

59. BNL 5 July 1776.

60. BNL 23 August 1776, 5 April 1793.

61. BNL 1 February 1774, 2 December 1785.

Other master shoemakers, however, were not shoemakers, but were trained in what could be termed 'related trades'. When James Martin came to Belfast in 1774, it was as a saddler and currier: by 1778 he owned a shoeshop in Castle Street, and later concentrated on tanning.⁶² Others had backgrounds which had little to do with leather. William Spenceer, for example, was described as a 'master shoemaker' in 1783, and was the proprietor of the 'Golden Boot' in High Street during the 1790s.⁶³ He was described in a legal document of 1770 as the 'menial servant' of Robert Batt, an army officer living in the town.⁶⁴ Another master shoemaker, James Burnside, was evidently a man of many parts, being variously described as a bricklayer and a cambric weaver.⁶⁵ Such men were obviously master shoemakers only in so far as they contracted with journeymen whom they supplied with raw materials, and from whom they purchased finished boots and shoes.

The footwear industry is important in the wider context of the town's economic activity not only as a provider of employment, and as a means of utilising readily available raw materials, but also as a component of the town's West Indian trade during its rapid expansion after 1783. Activity in the Belfast tanning industry increased considerably at this period while the Irish industry as a whole was contracting, and, as bark imports showed a similar pattern of expansion to the export of shoes, a positive link

62. BNL 15 July 1775, 3 November 1778. In 1785 he described himself as a tanner and currier (BNL 16 September 1785). He was principally a retailer of shoes and also sold leather and saddlery goods at his Castle Street shop (BNL 8 December 1789).

63. BNL 14 March 1783, 4 October 1791; NS 2 March 1793.

64. RD Vol.280, f.652.

65. Ann McCracken to Thomas McCabe, 1 May 1780 (quoted in R.M.Young, Historical Notices of Old Belfast and its Vicinity (Belfast 1896) p. 270) describes him as a cambric weaver. Elsewhere he is described as a master shoemaker (BNL 14 March 1783), bricklayer (RD v.50, f.96 of 1795 and v.503, f.532 of 1781) and a mason (PRONI L'Estrange & Brett MSS, lease to Burnside of a house in Man's Entry, 15 July 1796 D1905/2/31).

between the two is likely, and the continued prosperity of the town's tanneries may be seen as stemming to a large extent from the growing exports of boots and shoes.

Tanning, chandling and footwear were not of course the only industries in the town which were engendered by the provisions trade. In 1782, for example, there were 87 butchers and 163 coopers in the town⁶⁶ and these would to a considerable extent have been employed in preparing provisions for export. However, little material survives concerning their activity and it is likely that they were employed by the exporting merchants concerned. Only one large firm can be traced in the business, that of Greg, Hyde and Gregg, the Gregs involved belonging to the same family as Thomas Greg of Greg and Cunningham. It was dissolved in August 1773,⁶⁷ shortly after its merchant counterpart. By 1780 it had become Greg and Irwin, the partners being William Greg and his nephew, William Irwin who took control in the following year.⁶⁸ They were chandlers, coopers and butchers and obviously worked on a considerable scale as Irwin was said to own property worth £10,000 in the town in 1799.⁶⁹ Other firms were generally conducted on a much smaller scale, and were possibly one or two man businesses catering for local needs. Interestingly, the number of both coopers and butchers in the town declined during the 1780s,⁷⁰ and one reason may have been an increased trend towards bringing meat to the town rather than walking animals to the port and slaughtering them there. In a story preserved by W.S. Smith in his article

66. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

67. BNL 31 August 1773.

68. PRONI Foster Mss D562/8419B. Petition of the merchants of Belfast concerning the sugar trade, 1780; BNL 23 October 1781.

69. LHL Joy Mss 10/13.

70. The number of butchers declined from 87 to 39, and coopers from 163 to 115 between 1782 and 1791 (Belfast Politics, pp.94-97).

'Memories of '98' as told to him by Mrs Graham Shannon, a granddaughter of a United Irishman, after the Battle of Antrim, a man named Ezekiel Vance 'was standing not far from the Market House, and seeing what appeared to be car-loads of dead pigs passing on their way from County Derry to Belfast (as was then customary) . . .' he discovered as they came closer that they were 'no other than the naked bodies of dead peasants on their way to burial'.⁷¹ This indicates that dead meat was, by this time, being brought to the town from considerable distances.

Watchmaking differed greatly in terms of scale and employment from the industries already considered. It was traditional, in that its skills and techniques were rooted deep in the past. It was conducted on a relatively small scale. Only 14 workmen were employed in 1782 and 22 in 1791.⁷² Nevertheless, as an industry it played an important part in industrial development in the town, largely because of the skills in metalworking and precision engineering which it involved. The new machinery which came into use in industry, particularly in the field of textile production, required higher standards of precision and knowledge if it were to operate effectively and the watchmaker, in possession of these as few of his fellow craftsmen were, was to play a prominent part in the process of industrialisation, his skills providing a link between traditional crafts and the new mechanical age which was just dawning.

Even during the late 1790s there were probably more than seven or eight firms in the business in Belfast and many may have been literally one-man businesses although advertisements for apprentices and journeymen were common. As befits a trade where skill was a necessity and which was also to some degree linked with fashions and culture, a very large number of the

71. W.S.Smith, *Memories of '98*, UJA, 2nd ser. I (1895). p.213.

72. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

town's watchmakers came to Belfast from outside centres. Thomas McCabe, for example, moved from Lisburn to Belfast in 1762.⁷³ Others came from further afield. John Grace, who was in Belfast between 1767 and 1770 came from London.⁷⁴ William Auld was a native of Belfast who had served his time in Dublin before returning to Belfast in 1772.⁷⁵ John Gelston had worked in Newry and Dublin before coming to Belfast in 1779: three years earlier Hugh Gelston (who was probably a relative) came to Belfast from Lurgan.⁷⁶ Another immigrant was Job Ryder, who came from Lisburn in 1791. He had been the works superintendant at James Wallace's pioneer steam-powered cotton mill in that town, and had previously worked in Hillsborough and had also experienced in both London and Dublin.⁷⁷ Some at least of the Belfast watchmakers catered for a wide area. Robert Montgomery came from Lisburn to Belfast in 1781, but returned to Lisburn each week,⁷⁸ while John Knox, who came to Belfast from Larne in 1783, maintained agencies in Larne, Carrickfergus and Templepatrick. He was apparently a native of Belfast where he had served his apprenticeship, but had begun his business career in Larne in 1770.⁷⁹

Many of those involved in the trade combined their watchmaking and repairing activities with retailing, and with such related activities as

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73. I.W.Ward, Old Belfast Signboards in UJA 2nd ser. XII (1906), p.189.
74. BNL 14 April 1767, 1 May 1770.
75. BNL 6 March 1772.
76. BNL 9 February 1776, 3 December 1779.
77. BNL 1 April 1791; H.McCall, Ireland and her Staple Manufactures (3rd ed, Belfast 1870), p.482; W.E.Coe, The Engineering Industry of the North of Ireland (Newton Abbot, 1969), p.40.
78. BNL 25 May 1781.
79. BNL 27 May 1783; J.J.Marshall, Ulster Clocks and Clockmakers, Ulster Countrywoman IV No. 4 (July 1940).

jewelling and silverworking. Knox sold hardware, flour and groceries⁸⁰ while silverware apparently played a prominent part in Thomas McCabe's business, at least in the 1790s. A prominent radical, after his shop was wrecked in a military riot in 1793 he placed a placard in his shattered window describing himself as 'an Irish slave, licensed to sell gold and silver'.⁸¹ Another indication of the importance of the jewellery side of the business was the fact that the town was usually able to give a living at least one full time jeweller. Joshua Hutton worked in the town from 1767 until his death in late 1774.⁸² There was then an apparent hiatus: economic conditions at the time were impropitious. However, in 1783 Hghh McCullough came to the town and in the following year described himself as the only working jeweller in Belfast. He was active in 1788 but after that year no mention of his activity can be traced. In 1797, however, he appears in a list of United Irish prisoners on a tender in Belfast Lough.⁸³ Presumably, he continued his business activity in the intervening years. In 1788 he was joined by Matthew Bellew, who described himself as a goldsmith and jeweller.⁸⁴ In 1795 he was stated to be 'of Belfast, Dublin and London',⁸⁵ this presumably meaning that he visited the latter two places regularly and kept in touch with the latest developments and fashions.

As has been said earlier, the watchmaker was a highly skilled craftsman, and some of those in Belfast demonstrated their skills in unusual ways.

80. BNL 14 January, 23 August 1791.

81. R.R.Madden, Lives, 3rd ser. Vol.1 (London 1846), pp.306-8.

82. BNL 9 January 1767, 29 November 1774.

83. BNL 24 October 1783, 5 November 1784, 18 March 1788; B.M. Add.Mss. 33119 (Pelham Mss relating to Ireland, vol.II) f.132 'Return of Prisoners Transmitted and in Custody at the Artillery Barracks, Belfast', 2 July 1797.

84. BNL 14 March 1783.

85. NS 23 February 1795.

James Wilson, who usually described himself as a clockmaker rather than a watchmaker, spent much of his energies on the manufacture of highly complicated novelty clocks, of which he made at least three during the period, and another in 1764. That of 1768 was typical of his productions. Its hands showed the hours, minutes and seconds: it also showed the 'Moon's age, increase and decrease; the Day of the Month and Time of full Sea, made to answer any Port, and over all, in the Arch, a Ship of War delineated, moving as on the Waves'. Musically, it was equipped with 12 bells and 25 hammers and played tunes on specially provided 'music barrels'. It struck the hour every three hours and as a concession to Calvinist consciences was so arranged as not to strike on Sundays. These clocks were not sold directly to the public, but were raffled.⁸⁶

Normally however the skill of the Belfast watchmakers was devoted towards more serious ends. Thomas McCabe became a partner in Joyce McCabe and McCracken, the pioneer cotton manufacturers in the town and in 1791, along with William Pearce, another resident in the town, he developed an improved cotton loom 'by which double work can be done by one Man at the same Time'. They petitioned Parliament for a premium, but a Coleraine weaver named Hugh Blackwood countered it with a claim that he had invented such a loom in 1789 but, in ignorance, had said nothing about it. He went on to accuse the two Belfast men of industrial espionage, saying 'that the said Thomas McCabe, or some Person on his Behalf, must have taken the Model of his loom from that on which the Petitioner (i.e. Blackwood) has constantly wrought'. However, it is more likely that a case of parallel development had occurred. The matter was referred to the Linen Board but they managed to sidestep the issue by a technicality.⁸⁷

86. BNL 18 March 1768, 25 August 1775, 26 April 1782.

87. BNL 25 February 1791; Minutes Linen Trustees 1791, pp.46, 50-51 (8, 15 March 1791); PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/299. William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 5 February 1791.

McCabe's son, Thomas jun was also involved in the cotton industry and in 1791 he entered into partnership with Clotworthy Birnie, who was probably the son of William Birnie, a Templepatrick watchmaker.⁸⁸ Mention has already been made of the involvement of Job Ryder with James Wallace's Lisburn cotton mill. Ryder went on to demonstrate his skills in other directions, inventing a machine for making 'aerated waters' in 1800, and this led to the development of a thriving mineral water industry in the town during the 19th century.⁸⁹ During the early 1800s he made further use of his undoubted mechanical abilities and turned his attention to the development and manufacture of steam engines.⁹⁰

Steam came early to Belfast as a source of motive power, for from about 1790 a pumping engine was used at Springfield cotton mill to drive a water wheel which powered the mill's machinery and in the same year James Wallace installed the more advanced rotative drive engine in his Lisburn mill.⁹¹ Others followed these examples and by the end of the century factory chimneys were already emerging as features of the Belfast skyline.

Already by 1767 industrial activity in Belfast was, however, no longer restricted to craftsmen working either in their own homes or in workshops. Industries were already in existence in the town based in factory-style units, some using large quantities of water for power, and others burning a considerable amount of coal as part of their manufacturing process. Many of these establishments made use of expensive and technologically advanced machinery. In no case were they large by nineteenth century standards but they were by no means to be considered in the same breath as the craft industries which have formed the subject of the first part of this chapter, and were just as

88. BNL 30 December 1791.

89. BNL 28 March 1800; W.E.Coe, op.cit. p.117.

90. ibid. p.40.

91. See Coe, op.cit. pp.38-39.

much part of the 'Industrial Revolution' as the skills of the watchmaker or the new large scale industries introduced into the town during the period. The most important of them was the sugar-refining industry which had been founded in the 1680s by a number of merchants involved in the town's Caribbean trade.⁹² At the beginning of the period, it was small but well organised. At its peak, in the late 1770s, there were three refineries in the town, although the numbers employed never seem to have exceeded three dozen and were probably less.⁹³ The Belfast refiners were in the van of all efforts to strengthen and protect the industry's position and one of them, Robert Thomson, was the most vocal spokesman for the Irish refiners during the crisis of 1780⁹⁴ when the industry was threatened by government measures for the equalisation of duties on sugar between Ireland and the United Kingdom.

This crisis exposed the industry's weakness at the time. It had been fostered in an atmosphere of legislative protection, and was incapable of facing its English competitors on equal terms as they were both better organised and operated on a larger scale than their Irish counterparts. Thomson claimed that even with protection the English refiners 'compell us to lower our prices' so that Irish refiners could not operate profitably and stated that 'all who made fortunes so called did it by other articles - no man to my knowledge or belief ever made a fortune in this kingdom merely as a refiner',⁹⁵ although the writer of a manuscript criticism of Thomson's standpoint which also made its way into Foster's collection pointed out that coal was dearer

92. Bawn, History, i, p.332; Owen, History, p.150.

93. Anon, Thoughts on the Discontents of the People Last Year Respecting the Sugar Duties (Dublin 1781), p.93. It was stated that there were 32 refineries in the country, employing, at most 300 people.

94. ibid, pp.55 ff; PRONI Foster Mss D562/8407, 8409, 8412-5.

95. R.Thomson, R.Thomson's Remarks on and Reply to the Evidences produced in support of the Petition from Importers of Refined Sugars (a printed broadsheet in Foster MSS, PRONI (D562/8409) n.d.

in London and the average throughput of each refinery was approximately the same, yet the English refiners were able to undersell their Irish counterparts who were either inefficient or making a very substantial profit.⁹⁶ The truth is probably halfway between the two views, the opinions of the Irish refiners being strongly influenced by a desire to protect their position. Unfortunately their ability to survive under Free Trade conditions at the time cannot be discovered as their agitation was successful, the sugar duties being fixed at a higher level than had been originally intended.⁹⁷ During the remainder of the century the industry continued to exist in Belfast although, as can be seen from Fig.39, its rate of growth as measured by the quantity of muscovado sugar imported, was very low and certainly did not expand with the rest of the town's economic activity during the years after 1783.

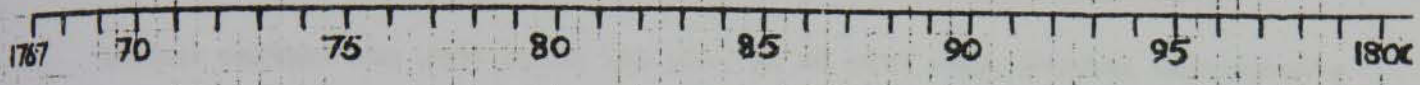
In 1800 there were two refineries in the town, the 'Old Sugar House' in Rosemary Lane and the 'New Sugar House' in Waring Street. The use of the terms 'Old' and 'New' was relative as both had had a long history, the former tracing its history back to at least 1683 and the latter to 1704.⁹⁸ The Old Sugar House was owned in 1767 by the firm of Legg Hyde & Co. and the other by Bateson Cunningham & Co. Both firms comprised a group of merchants who owned the business but who left its day to day management in the hands of specialist managers, and both probably employed ten or twelve people, and processed about 400 hogsheads of raw sugar annually.⁹⁹

96. Ms Observations on the Belfast Letter and Calculations as Supported by the Evidence of Mr Thompson (PRONI D562/8412).

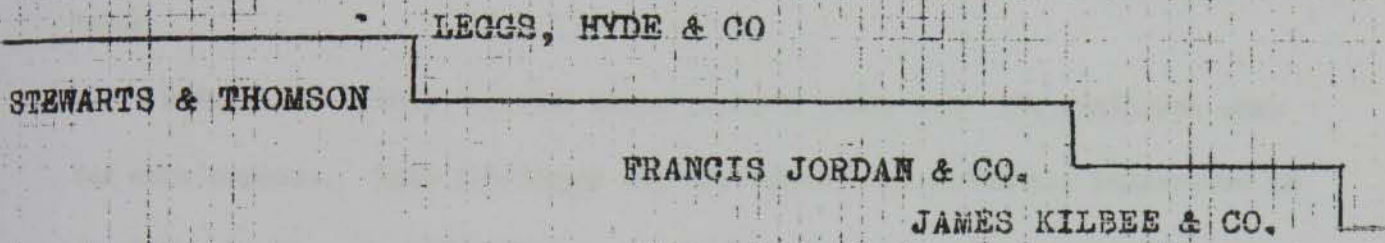
97. The political aspects of the controversy have been ably dealt with in M.R.O'Connell, Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution (Philadelphia, 1965), pp.216-23.

98. Owen, History, p.150.

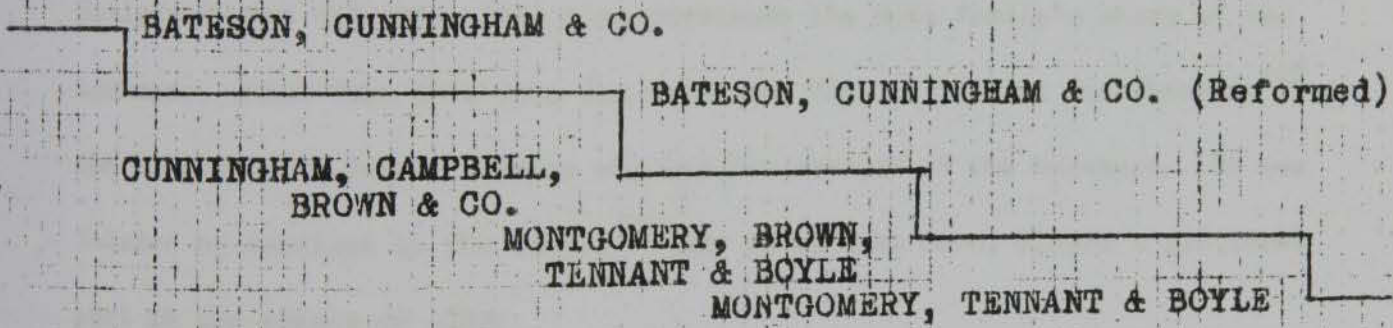
99. Thoughts on the Discontents . . . pp.55, 93.



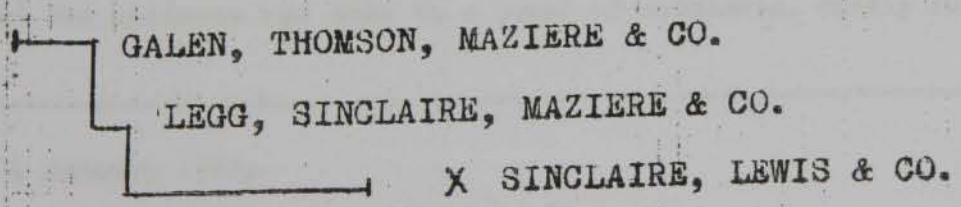
OLD SUGAR HOUSE, ROSEMARY LANE



NEW SUGAR HOUSE, WARING STREET



NEW SUGAR HOUSE, ROSEMARY LANE



X = Premises in use as cotton mill.

IG. 39 . BELFAST SUGAR REFINERIES, 1767 TO 1800.

There were important differences between the two establishments, principally in the links between their partners and the West Indian trade. These were to the forefront in Bateson Cunningham & Co., two of whose partners, Thomas Bateson and Waddell Cunningham, have both already received frequent mention in the chapter dealing with the Caribbean trade. When Bateson retired in 1782, shares in the concern were taken by two other merchants with interests in the trade. John Campbell and Hugh Montgomery,¹⁰⁰ while another partner, William Tennant, who managed the business during the 1790s, had a brother, Robert, who managed a Jamaican sugar plantation.¹⁰¹ Another partner was John Boyle who was, as we have seen, Waddell Cunningham's successor in trade, and continued Cunningham's interest in the West Indian trade.

Before the 1790s, the Old Sugar House's links with the Caribbean were far more tenuous. Both the Leggs and the Hydes were primarily interested in the linen trade. In 1777 the Leggs withdrew from the partnership, selling their share to their neighbours and fellow linen-draper, the Stewarts of Ballydrain and Wilmont. They also purchased the Hyde family's share of the business, which from this date was under the firm of Stewart and Thomson,¹⁰² the latter being Robert Thomson who was the manager of the business. He was related by marriage to the Leggs,¹⁰³ and as we have seen, played a prominent part in the crisis of 1780.

Thomson retired in 1793,¹⁰⁴ probably to manage the Second Discount Company, and the business was sold to a group of merchants, mostly in the

100. BNL 1 January 1782.

101. See p. 273 above.

102. BNL 4 March 1777.

103. He had married Jane, daughter of Benjamin Legg in 1761 (Benne, History, ii, p.166).

104. BNL 5 February 1793.

West Indian trade, and who were no doubt seeking a means of processing the sugar which they purchased there. They included the prominent houses of Jones Tomb Joy & Co., John Cunningham & Co. and Narcissus Batt, these being virtually all the firms trading to the Caribbean who did not hold shares in the New Sugar House. Their manager was Francis Jordan of whose origins little is known.¹⁰⁵ He was, however, in Belfast in 1782,¹⁰⁶ and may have been previously employed by Thomson. He remained with the firm until 1798, when he fled to England for fear of being implicated in the Rebellion of 1798,¹⁰⁷ and was succeeded by James Kilbee.¹⁰⁸ He had served an apprenticeship to a grocer in Dublin and by 1785 had become a partner in the Belfast spirit merchants, Hunter and Kilbee of Donegall Street. He went into business on his own in the following year:¹⁰⁹ however, by 1792 he was working as Jordan's bookkeeper, having apparently found it as profitable an activity as shopkeeping.¹¹⁰

The third sugar house in the town, compared with the others, was a relatively short lived concern which was situated in Rosemary Lane, beside the Old Sugar House, and was opened in 1773 by the firm of Galen Thomson Maziere & Co., which was composed of the merchant house of Galen Thomson & Co. and its manager, Bartholemew de la Maziere, Galen's brother-in-law and, like him, a Dublin Huguenot.¹¹¹ Galen became bankrupt in 1775 and the firm

105. RD. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 58.

106. He chaired a meeting of the Belfast troop of light dragoon Volunteers on July 28, 1782 (Historical Collections, p.215).

107. S.P.O. Rebellion Papers 620/46/101. Thomas Whinnay^r, Belfast to John Lees, Dublin, 29 March 1799.

108. RD. Anonymous Partnerships Act I, memorial 113; BNL 16 August 1799.

109. BNL 11 February 1785, 17 November 1786.

110. BNL 11 May 1792.

111. BNL 26 March 1773; PROI T1276 (Will of Andrew de la Maziere 1788).

was taken over by the Leggs and Simclaires.¹¹² Like the Leggs and Stewarts, the Simclaires were linen drapers rather than general merchants and there is no evidence that they were actively engaged in the Caribbean trade apart from being sleeping partners in Galen Thomson & Co., in which Peter Galen was the acting partner. Thomson's involvement in the firm is of considerable interest in view of his involvement in the Old Sugar House, and this increased at the end of 1775, shortly after Galen's bankruptcy, when Maziere left and returned to Dublin where he established a refinery at St Mary's Abbey.¹¹³

On his departure effective control passed into Thomson's hands and he managed the firm until 1781 when the concern was sold for conversion into a cotton mill.¹¹⁴ The closure had virtually no effect upon the quantity of sugar imported into Belfast and it is thus evident that its capacity was by this time surplus to requirements as a result of depression and the effect of the war on sugar supplies. The evident surplus of refining capacity in the town could also be a major reason for the prominence of Thomson's involvement in the agitation of 1780, and for the lack of profit of which he complained so bitterly.

For the rest of the period the industry made little progress within the town. Production remained confined to the two long-established firms and the quantity of sugar imported into the town only increased very slowly, as did the amount of capital involved. In 1792, for example, Francis Jordan & Co.

112. BNL 24 January 1775.

113. BNL 10 October 1775, R.D. Vol.310, f.472 (deed of purchase of land in Mary's Abbey); see also BNL 24 January 1792 relating to the destruction of his refinery by fire.

114. BNL 10 July 1781; 12 March 1784. The premises apparently lay vacant for about two and a half years, the second reference being to its occupation by the firm of Joys McCabe and McCracken, see p. 374 below.

had a capital of £5,600, seven years later James Kilbee & Co. had a capital of £9,800,¹¹⁵ but much of this increase was accounted for by war-time inflation. Part of the reason for the relative lack of growth in the industry was increasing competition from grocers who were importing refined sugar from Great Britain. Most of this sugar may have been imported through Dublin for direct imports were small. In 1786 the customs figures do not mention refined sugar, while in 1792 the quantity was only 56 cwt of loaf sugar and almost 2 cwt of sandy sugar, which does not seem sufficient to explain the lively competition between grocers and refiners at this period. No holds were barred: in May 1792 the refiners accused the town's grocers of starting a rumour that a man had been boiled to death in a vat in the Old Sugar House in order to increase the sale of imported sugar.¹¹⁶ The refiners may, of course, have been perceiving a gradual increase in imports and have been trying to stem a future rather than a current threat to the industry and in this way were justified as the Belfast sugar industry became extinct under English competition early in the following century.

Another industrial activity in the town was the refining of salt, mainly for use in the provisions trade. It was carried on at at least one site in the town virtually throughout the period. This was at New Quay, to the north of High Street, at which boats could be tied up to unload cargoes of rock salt, most of which had to be imported. This site was owned in 1767 by James Mardock who died early in 1777 although refining was carried on until the end of 1776.¹¹⁷ However, in December 1779 it was reopened by the

115. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Reg. I, memorials 58, 113.

116. BNL 11 May 1792.

117. PRONI Donegall Estate Papers D509/316; BNL 6 January 1775, 11 October 1776, 1 January 1777.

firm of Thorburn & Munford.¹¹⁸ James Munford had been Murdoch's manager¹¹⁹ while David Thorburn was a maltster and anthracite dealer.¹²⁰ The partnership also dealt in lime and coal and built a limekiln on the premises. For over twenty years they were the only refiners of salt in the town. However, a second firm opened in March 1800. This was William Maffit & Co., which was financed by the merchant houses of Narcissus Batt and James Holmes & Co., both of which were deeply involved in the provisions trade.¹²¹ Maffit's output was intended partly for the provisions trade and partly for export to America. Its manager, William Maffit, had formerly been a tidewaiter in the port. Its capital was not particularly large, being only £1,500, but it differed from Thorburn & Munford by specialising in the salt business to which it was expressly limited by its articles of agreement.¹²²

Thus, despite the rapid growth of the provisions trade, the salt industry in Belfast remained on a small scale virtually throughout the period and it was not until the last year of the century that a firm existed which was solely concerned with its manufacture. One reason for the industry's weakness was severe competition from imported salt (principally from Cheshire). At least one merchant family, the Seeds, specialised in the salt trade and maintained special premises for its sale,¹²³ and in the early 1790s the firm of Thomas Parker & Co. were in business as salt merchants.¹²⁴

118. BNL 10 December 1779.

119. BNL 4 May 1773, 6 January 1775.

120. PRONI Donegall Estate Letter-Book T1893 (George Portis to Charles Talbot, 31 July 1773); BNL 11 June 1771.

121. PRO CUST 1/268, f.113 (6 March 1800).

122. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 113.

123. BNL 23 February 1779, 27 September 1782.

124. NS 27 October 1792, 5 June 1793.

This competition from imported salt was increased by competition from saltworks outside Belfast and in particular that at Glynn, near Larne, which came to dominate the local salt-refining industry. In 1780, for example, only 167 tons of salt were imported into Belfast, while 1,280 tons were landed at Larne, and in 1792 the equivalent statistics were 314 and 2,311 tons. The Glynn works were well organised and highly successful: during the 1790s it even built up a small but regular export trade to Scotland. Most of the capital involved in it was apparently local, although one Belfast merchant, James Stevenson, had been a partner in 1782.¹²⁵ By the 1790s, however, its owners, Duncan Sweeny & Co., were all Larne businessmen.¹²⁶

The salt and sugar industries provide excellent examples of the difficulties involved in establishing and maintaining industrial activity in the town. Far more successful in this regard was the establishment of a rope and canvas industry (Fig. 40) which was first brought to the town in 1758 by a group of businessmen associated with the merchant house of Daniel Mussenden. They included Thomas Bateson and John McCracken, the latter being a sea captain in the Caribbean trade.¹²⁷ This, as has been explained, was the longest of the town's trade routes. It was also one in which ship repairing facilities at the far end were minimal, and the only trade which was dominated by Belfast owned shipping.

By 1767 the firm was trading as Lyle McWaters & Co., and owned a ropewalk at the Fore Plantation, the lane alongside it being known as the Rope Walk. Its manager was Mussenden Lyle and it would appear to have given

125. BNL 16 August 1782. The investment was actually in the name of the firm of McKedy & Stevenson, in which he was the dominant partner (see pp. 127-28 below).

126.

127. Benn, History, i, p.365; McNeill, op.cit. p.41.

1767 70 75 80 85 90 95 1800

OLD ROPE WALK

JOHN GALT SMITH & CO.

LYLE MCWATERS & CO.

MCCRACKENS & CO.

NEW ROPE WALK (BALLYMACARRETT)

THOMAS ASH & CO.

NEW ROPEWALK CO.

JAMES MASON & CO.

WARING STREET ROPEWORKS

MUSSENDEN LYLE

FIG. 40 . THE BELFAST ROPE AND CANVAS INDUSTRY.

employment to between fifteen and twenty people.¹²⁸ In 1778 Lyle left and attempted to form his own business. He died at some date between May 1779 and 1786 when his widow announced that she was retiring from business. His premises were in Waring Street and must have been on a small scale as no mention of a ropewalk can be found in the area. It is thus likely that much of his business involved the sale of imported ropes.¹²⁹

From the time of Lyle's departure the Ropewalk traded under the firm of John Galt Smith & Co. and building up a substantial export trade, principally to the colonies. Much of the product exported was canvas, which the firm apparently began to manufacture in 1784, shortly after the end of the war.¹³⁰ It also developed strong links with the Baltic which was a source of flax and hemp as well as of certain types of canvas, such as ravenstuck, which they were unable to make.¹³¹ These links also led them into the iron trade, probably with Russia, which was their main source of hemp.

The Ropewalk proprietors seem to have been interested in developing their works and incorporating new developments. In 1791, for example, they were awarded a premium of £60 by the Linen Board for erecting and successfully operating a machine for the longshed spinning of hemp.¹³² Smith retired in 1794 and management passed to John McCracken's son, Francis, the concern trading as McCrackens & Co. By this time the proprietors included a number of leading merchants such as Hugh Montgomery and John Holmes. The

128. BNL ; 14 April 1778. The figure for employment is for 1782, and is taken from Robert Hyndman's survey of the town (Belfast Politics, pp.94-7).

129. BNL 14 April 1778, 7 November 1786.

130. (G.Benn), The History of the Town of Belfast (Belfast, 1823), p.103.

131. PRO CUST 1/174, f.46 (20 December 1784); CUST 1/178 (unpaginated vol.) 20 August 1785.

132. Min, Linen Trustees (1791), p.37 (1 March 1791).

actual amount of the firm's capital is not known, but one of the partners, John Boyle, subscribed £1,200.¹³³ Details of the business in these years are scarce but it seems that they remained at work until at least 1800.

Another Rope Walk was opened in August 1790. It was in Mountpottinger, on the far side of the Lagan. The acting partner of this concern, in whose name the business was conducted, was Thomas Ash who, like McCracken, was a former sea captain. The other partners were all Belfast merchants, at least three of whom were engaged in the transatlantic trade, and so had a vested interest in obtaining their own supplies of ropes and sailcloth.¹³⁴ Indeed, with its opening, virtually every prominent merchant in the town was a partner in one or other concern, a phenomenon similar to one already noticed in the sugar industry.

In 1792 Ash left the firm and returned to the sea,¹³⁵ and after a short period of trading as the 'New Ropewalk Company', a new manager was found in the person of James Mason. Little is known of his former career and he may have been a newcomer to the town. At this time the firm's capital was considerably increased. Whereas each share in the former partnership had been of £400, this was now increased to £700, although Mason's contribution was only £350. The new partnership lasted for almost four years, but was dissolved in February 1796.¹³⁷ For a short while, the firm continued to trade as the 'New Ropewalk Company', probably while attempts were being made to

133. PRONI Millin MSS T811/1, f.90.

134. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 41.

135. In 1795, for example, he was master of the Linenhall, a Liverpool trader (NS 6 July 1795).

136. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 57.

137. BNL 1 February 1796.

find a new manager, but in March the premises were offered for sale.¹³⁸ However, the sale was later cancelled, and new managers found in Robert and Hamilton Steele.¹³⁹ Like Ash and McCracken, Steele had been a sailor.¹⁴⁰ Hamilton may have been a brother or son, and they managed the concern until at least the end of the year.¹⁴¹ By 1802, however, Mason was once again the manager,¹⁴² and the firm developed into the Mountpottinger Ropeworks which, by the early 1900s, was the largest in the world.

By the early 1790s the industry had become strongly export orientated, exporting principally to the United States and the West Indies. Some of this trade was undertaken by the ropewalks themselves and part was in the hands of industrial partners. In 1794, for example, John Galt Smith & Co. were exporting canvas to Philadelphia¹⁴³ and in the next year Masons exported 10,750 yards to Boston¹⁴⁴ and the following January sent a consignment of 20,529 yards of canvas and ten tons of cordage to Jamaica.¹⁴⁵ In 1791, for example, Narcissus Batt, a partner in the New Ropewalk, sent canvas to Leghorn, Cadiz and the West Indies while his colleague, Hugh Crawford, was exporting to North America and the Caribbean, and in that and the following year Francis McCracken was sending canvas and ropes to the same market.¹⁴⁶

138. BNL 14 March 1796.

139. BNL 1 April 1796; NS 13 May 1796.

140. See PRONI Wallace MSS D556/31. Robert Steele, mariner, Hugh Dunlap: lease to Bernard Close of site in Little Donegall Street, 21 July 1791.

141. NS 23 December 1796.

142. Millin, Sidelights, p.78.

143. PRO CUST 1/236, f.72 (12 March 1794).

144. PRO CUST 1/244, f.24 (26 March 1795).

145. PRO CUST 1/248, f.84 (19 January 1796).

146. Mins. Lines Trustees, 1792, pp.101-6.

As a result of the development of the ropewalks, Belfast became a net exporting centre for both sailcloth and cordage. During the 1770s imports of canvas were usually just under 20,000 yards per annum, and exports were non-existent. By 1790, however, 140 cwt of cordage was exported to Antigua and Newfoundland and by 1795 the quantity exported had increased to 560 cwt, and this further increased in the following year to 702 cwt. The figures for 1797, however, a year when there is no trace of any activity on the part of the New Ropewalk, show a considerable decrease although there was some recovery in succeeding years.

The rope and canvas industry is an example of an industry which responded positively to the pressures of the age, and was able to meet and conquer competition, although it must be admitted that its success was in part due to government encouragement by bounties and protection. The same cannot be said for the paper manufacture which developed to meet a specific need within the town itself, and the emergence of which was a response not so much to the commercial importance of the town as to its intellectual and social role in East Ulster.

The first paper mill in the town was opened in 1767 at Cromac, near the mouth of the Blackstaff. It was owned by the Joy family, the proprietors of a prosperous printing business in the town, and also the publishers of the Newsletter. Their mill was a prominent feature of the town, for in order to obtain a sufficient fall of water, a large dam had to be constructed and the resulting lake proved to be an effective stop line to the southward expansion of the town.¹⁴⁷ The Cromac mill was not the first in which the family were involved as in 1745 Francis Joy had built one at Randalstown and within a few years had gone to live there leaving his

147. Benn, History i, p.358; Gibbon, op.cit. p.129.

interests in Belfast in the hands of his sons, Henry and Robert. However, after the opening of the new mill, that at Randelstown was run down and was sold in 1772.¹⁴⁸ The Cromac mill was evidently successful financially as it continued in the family even after Harry Joy had sold off his other business interests in 1795.¹⁴⁹ The Joys were not the only Belfast family to become involved in papermaking, but a shortage of water in the vicinity of the town dictated that the other ventures should be sited elsewhere. As early as 1747, Daniel Blow, another printer, had a mill at Dunadry and this was still at work in 1798. He installed a steam engine at some date prior to his retirement in 1794, and his plant must there have been substantial.¹⁵⁰ A third mill was that of Arthur Darley & Co. at Ballyclare which dates from the early 1790s. Darley was a witness to Henry Joy's will in 1789 and was a notary public.¹⁵¹ He may have been employed by Joy which would explain his knowledge of the industry. In 1791, with James Kenley (a Belfast grocer) and James Jackson (a surgeon from Newtownards) he leased a disused flour mill at Ballyclare. By 1793 machinery was installed and manufacture was begun.¹⁵² During this period Darley was an employee of the Northern Star, and in later years the paper for this was supplied by the Ballyclare mills¹⁵³ which were purchased in 1798 by Robert and William Simms.¹⁵⁴ They had been closely involved with

148. BNL 1 May 1772; R.R.Madden, The History of Irish Periodical Literature (London, 1867) ii, p.209; M.McNeill, op.cit., p.16; R.Munster, The History of the Irish Newspaper, 1685-1760 (Cambridge, 1967), p.42.

149. BNL 8 May 1795.

150. Dubourdieu, Antrim, pp.413-14; Young, Ulster in '98, p.43; Gribbon, op.cit., p.129.

151. PROI T9965; BNL 26 May 1789.

152. RD Vol.441, f.254; Anonymous Partnerships Register i, meml.71.

153. SPO Rebellion Papers 620/15/8/1.

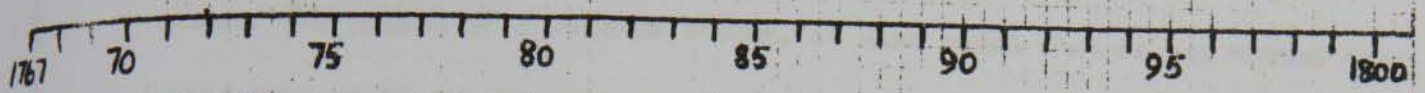
154. BNL 16 March 1798 (the firm was Simms & Smith).

the Star for most of its short and stormy career, and it may be conjectured that the Ballyclare project was closely connected with the newspaper at all stages.

Unlike the ropeworks, Belfast's paper mills never made the town self-sufficient. Imports continued and, indeed, grew. These, however, were generally higher grade papers for which there would have been too small a demand to make local production economically viable, the mills tending to produce coarser paper such as newsprint and lapping paper which could be made from local supplies of linen rags on which the mills relied.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, these were limited and Joys, for one, had frequently to insert reminders in the press of the valuable employment they gave to poor people who they employed as rag sorters.

The paper industry involved many characteristics of the Industrial Revolution such as a heavy investment of capital, and an advanced technology. However, its overall role in the town's development was never large, unlike that of the next industry to be considered in this section. This was flour-milling which, like the paper industry, tended to develop in the vicinity of the town rather than within it because of its requirement of adequate water power (Fig. 41). Another feature of the industry also increased its tendency to dispersion: the availability of corn supplies and especially an adequate supply of wheat. Until 1765 milling had been a small scale activity in the area. What mills there were were small meal mills which could be used for grinding oats or rye, as well as wheat, at will, and were generally incapable of producing flour which was either brought into the town from elsewhere or produced in small quantities (and probably of indifferent quality) by indivi-

155. Vide BNL 20 June 1769, 24 June 1774, 2 April 1793. Joshua Gilpin, a paper manufacturer from Delaware, visited Joys' mill in 1796 and found the quality of its paper 'indifferent' (H.B.Hancock, N.B. Wilkinson, An American Manufacturer in Ireland, 1796, Journ.RSAI xiii, p.137.)



BELFAST MILLS

JOHN ALEXANDER ———— CUNNINGHAM,
 HARRISON & CO.
 ?
 ROWLEY OSBORNE ————

ANTRIM

MONTGOMERY, FERGUSONS & LEDLIE ————

BALLYDUGAN

JOHN MCCONNELL X

BALLYNAHINCH

THOMAS BAMBER X

BANOGUE (Opened 1765)

GEORGE LANGTRY ————

BEER'S BRIDGE

WILLIAM SEED & CO. ————

⊙ ROBERT SIMMS & CO.

CRUMLIN

THOMAS ASH & CO.

ROBERT & WILLIAM SIMMS & CO.

CRAWFORD MACAULAY & CO.

EVER MILLS, LARNE

BARKLIE, BLACK & CO. ————

HOLMES & BLACK

BLACKMORE

HUGH & SAMUEL
 THOMPSON

THOMPSON & LYLE

HUGH THOMPSON

FIG. 41 . BELFAST INVESTMENT IN FLOUR MILLING, 1767 TO 1800.

dual bakers. Many of the mills, including that in Belfast itself, were manorial mills to which the local inhabitants were compelled by their leases to bring their corn for grinding¹⁵⁶ and while this practice, if observed, ensured the miller of a regular income, it also meant that he was forced to grind corn as it was brought to him, usually in small batches of varying quality. Consequently, it was virtually impossible for a manorial mill to engage in the specialised, large-scale business of flour production.

When flour milling was introduced, the initiative came, not from the manorial millers, but from independent businessmen. The first three mills were opened in 1765, only three years after the first large-scale mills in Ireland were built at The Naul and at Abbeyvale in Co. Kilkenny.¹⁵⁷ One of these was a Banogue, Co. Down, a townland not far from Lurgan. It was owned by Robert Patterson, a local merchant, and was the first to be planned, although not the first to go into production, that distinction belonging to a mill owned by Robert Simms, a Belfast merchant and tanner. His venture, at Crumlin, received a government subsidy of £200.¹⁵⁸ There was also a third mill at Crosshill, near Glenavy which was built by Rowley Heyland, a middleman on the Rowley estate.¹⁵⁹ The initial three mills were soon followed by others, including one at Comber, opened by the Andrews family in 1768 and rebuilt on a larger scale in 1771,¹⁶⁰ and within a short while they had destroyed the business of the manorial mills. By 1773 Lord Donegall's mills at Belfast were virtually at a standstill and the flour

156. These conditions were repeated in the new leases granted in the Donegall Estate in 1767.

157. L.M.Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland since 1660 (London, 1972), pp.92-93.

158. Commons Journ.Ire. VIII p. 36 (14 November 1765); E.R.R.Green, Ind.Arch.Down, p.46; H.D.Gribbon, op.cit., p.42.

159. S.Andrews, op.cit., p.40.

160. H.D.Gribbon, op.cit., p.42.

millers were even purchasing wheat in the Belfast market, and selling the flour in the town, much to the chagrin of his Lordship's agents. When the lease of the mill fell in during that year, it proved impossible to find a suitable tenant, even when the site was offered as a building lease.¹⁶¹

The flour mills which developed in the Belfast area tended to concentrate in those districts where wheat could be grown intensively. There were three such areas where the soil was suitable, and where rainfall was relatively low. They were the Lagan Valley, the barony of Lecale, and the eastern shore of Lough Neagh. Banogue was in the first area, while Lecale was catered for by mills at Ballydugan, Ballynahinch and Comber. There was another group of mills along the shore of Lough Neagh at Glenavy, Crosshill, Antrim and Muckamore. However, mills did not have to be sited in wheat-growing areas. Wheat and flour do not differ drastically in weight and bulk and in the case of the mills which developed in the Belfast area, the savings in transport costs of transporting flour rather than grain were countered by the advantages of a site close to a large urban market, and similar considerations probably account for the success of the mills at Larne. The one known unsuccessful venture was at Ballyclare, in an exposed upland area where it was impossible to grow wheat successfully, and which was relatively thinly populated. As has already been seen, the mills there were adapted for paper manufacture in the early 1790s.

The growth of the flour milling industry was aided by a number of factors, including improvements in communications, the most important of these being the opening of the Lagan Navigation, whose importance to the industry can be seen in the erection of a store at Aghalee in 1795 by the

161. PRONI Donegall Estate Letter-book T1893. James Lewis to Talbot, 4 April 1773, Portis to Talbot, 31 July 1773.

Belfast millers, John Alexander & Co.,¹⁶² and in Dubourdieu's statement in the early years of the 19th century that 'buyers from Belfast are employed in many parts of the county (of Antrim) for the purchase of grain, especially where it can be stored within reach of water carriage'.¹⁶³ Milling would seem to have been a profitable activity: some Dublin partners in the mills at Larne invested apparently for purely speculative reasons and were simultaneously involved in a mill at Ballyconnell, in Co. Cavan,¹⁶⁴ and the number of mills erected between 1785 and 1795 is another testimony of the industry's profitability, despite the considerable amount of capital needed. In 1797 James Ferguson sold a one-eighth share in the mills at Antrim for £1,035,¹⁶⁵ while John Alexander's property at Belfast was valued at £16,000 by 1799.¹⁶⁶

The American Revolution was another factor which provided a stimulus to the industry. Before 1775 grain could be imported in years of shortage, and much of that imported into the Belfast area came from the colonies. In 1767, for example, over 5,000 cwt of flour was imported from America, and 1,240 cwt from Great Britain, while in 1770 over 9,500 cwt of flour were imported as well as 2,900 barrels of wheatenmeal and 886 quarters of wheat. Much of the grain imported can thus be seen to have arrived already processed by American mills. However, the Revolution cut off this source of supply and led to the placing of an increased emphasis on the growing of grain with consequent benefit to the milling industry. In 1779 the Donegall Estate finally found a lessee for the old manor mill in Waddell Cunningham, who in

162. PRONI Lagan Navigation Records COM 1/1 /1 (Board Minutes) 13 April 1795.

163. Dubourdieu, Antrim, p.181.

164. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memls 20, 38.

165. -do- meml.55; R.D. vol.509, f.333.

166. L&L Joy MSS 10/13.

partnership with William Harrison, a clerk in Lord Donegall's office, converted it into a flour mill,¹⁶⁷ although as late as November 1782 they issued a notice reminding the inhabitants of the Belfast area of their manorial obligations to have their corn ground at the town mill.¹⁶⁸ Initially they only sold their flour at the mill,¹⁶⁹ but by the end of 1782 they had appointed retail agencies in the town.¹⁷⁰ They also operated a bakery but in 1787 they sold this side of the business to Maurice Spottiswood, who may have been its manager.¹⁷¹ In the following year Cunningham gave up his business interests to enter banking, and the mill was sold to John Alexander,¹⁷² who had been Lord Donegall's deputy agent in the early 1770s. His involvement with both the estate and the mill is of some interest as Harrison had also been an estate employee, and it would seem that the mill was rebuilt at about this time a short distance downstream from its former site.

When the war ended in 1782, the flour trade did not resume and the industry continued to expand. The rebuilding of the mill was but one of a number of developments in the Belfast area, which occurred despite an acute shortage of suitable sites. In 1789, for example, Rowley Osborne, a tallowchandler, had a mill which was capable of producing a ton of flour a day:¹⁷³ it may, in fact, have been the old town mill as it was on its site

167. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509/600; BNL 19 October 1779, 2 June 1780.

168. BNL 15 November 1782.

169. BNL 12 December 1780.

170. BNL 24 December 1782.

171. BNL 4 September 1787.

172. Alexander was owner of the mills by the end of 1789 (BNL 20 November 1789).

173. BNL 3 April 1789.

if we can use Williamson's map of 1791 as a guide.¹⁷⁴ The venture may not have been particularly successful, as in the following year he advertised his interests for sale,¹⁷⁵ and no further mention of milling on the site can be found, although both mills appear on Williamson's map.

Another development of more lasting importance took place on the far side of the Lagan, at Beersbridge on the Connswater where there was an old corn mill. By 1783 it had come into the possession of William Seed, a Belfast merchant who had converted it for flour-milling, although apparently not on a considerable scale. However, in 1787, in conjunction with Robert Thomson, the sugar refiner, a new lease of the site was obtained, and the premises rebuilt on a much larger scale, the firm using Seed's warehouse in Weighhouse Lane as their Belfast agency.¹⁷⁶

The Beersbridge mill was not the only one in which Belfast merchants had an interest. The Simms, for example, retained their mill at Crumlin until 1798, when it passed into the control of the firm of Crawford Maccauley & Co., in which the partners were Hugh Crawford (who had been a partner in the firm since at least 1790), John Cunningham and James Maccauley.¹⁷⁷ The first two were prominent merchants in Belfast, the latter was the son of Henry Maccauley, who owned a brickworks in the town in the 1780s.¹⁷⁸ He was of a much lower social standing than the other partners, which suggests that he was the managing partner.

Another Belfast man who became deeply involved in milling was James Holmes, a partner in a mill at Inver in 1787. The other partners included

174. PRONI D971/ML/14A.

175. BNL 29 January 1790.

176. R.D. Vol.382, f.59; BNL 30 September 1783, 1 January 1788.

177. BNL 6 August 1790, 31 August 1798.

178. BNL 11 March 1783.

some linen drapers from Larne and, as mentioned earlier, two Dublin investors. Holmes' share of the original capital was small, amounting to only £150 out of a total of £1,430, but by 1799 he and Robert Black, one of the Larne partners, had bought out the other investors and the firm was trading as Holmes and Black.¹⁷⁹ Belfast capital was also invested in other centres. In 1790, for example, Thomas Bamber built a mill at Ballymahinch¹⁸⁰ and in the following year John and James Ferguson, two prominent linen merchants, and the merchant, Hugh Montgomery, were the principal partners in the firm of Montgomery, Fergusons and Ledlie, who leased the former corn mill at Antrim and converted it into a flour mill. The manager was Alexander Ledlie, an Antrim man whose family were deeply involved in the linen business.¹⁸¹ In the same year Alexander Orr owned a mill at Ballyclare but it must have been out of use as it was sold to Arthur Darley who converted it into a paper mill.¹⁸² Five years later, another Belfast merchant, John McConnell, is mentioned as the owner of a mill at Ballydugan, near Downpatrick.¹⁸³ The next year John Cunningham, who was already a shareholder in the mill at Crumlin, purchased Muckamore Mill from Hugh Thompson, when the latter decided to emigrate to the United States. The Thompsons came from Carrmoney and had strong links with the town: they had been milling flour since at least 1788.¹⁸⁴ As well as these, Robert Patterson's original mill at Banogue had passed into the hands of George Langtry, a Belfast merchant, by 1799.¹⁸⁵

179. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorials 20, 38; BNL 12 January 1787, 14 April 1792, 24 September 1799; RD Vol.500, f.105, Vol.503, f.90.

180. BNL 23 November 1790.

181. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 55; BNL 3 January 1792; R.D. Vol.509, f.333.

182. R.D. Vol.441, f.254.

183. BNL 1 January 1796.

184. BNL 16 November 1788, 6 April 1790, 6 October 1797.

185. E.R.R. Green, Ind. Arch. Down, p.24.

By the 1790s Belfast had become an exporting rather than an importing centre for flour and wheat. In 1790, for example, a year of plenty, over 11,800 quarters of flour were exported from Belfast and 1,500 from Larne, and to this can be added over 1,000 swt of sea-bread, the export of which was about five times the quantity of the 1770s. Even in the bad years of the late 1790s grain rather than flour was imported, showing that milling capacity was now sufficient for local demands, although from time to time flour was brought from considerable distances to the town as in early 1792 when John Gregg and the Simms brothers were selling Dublin flour.¹⁸⁶

The development of the brewing industry was similar to that of milling, with the erection of purpose-built and highly-capitalised ^{the} concerns, especially during the late 1780s. However it remained an urban industry, the new plants coexisting alongside the older.

At the beginning of the period many publicans brewed their own ale. What evidence there is about the industry relates to the common brewers who wholesaled their products to the publicans and retailers. There were three of these in the town in 1767 and this number doubled by the end of the century, while the scale of operation also increased (Fig. 42).

One distinction which must be made in 1767 is that between 'maltsters' and 'brewers'. While all three breweries had malt houses attached, they were supplemented by maltsters who sold their products to publicans engaged in their own brewing, for malting was the one part of the brewing process requiring space and investment. The town's leases contained clauses obliging the tenants to use a malt kiln attached to the manorial mill but this was universally ignored. By April 1773 there were at least eight malkilns in the town 'by which there is not now ground at Lord Donegall's Mill one Boll

186. BNL 28 February 1792; NS 10 March 1792.

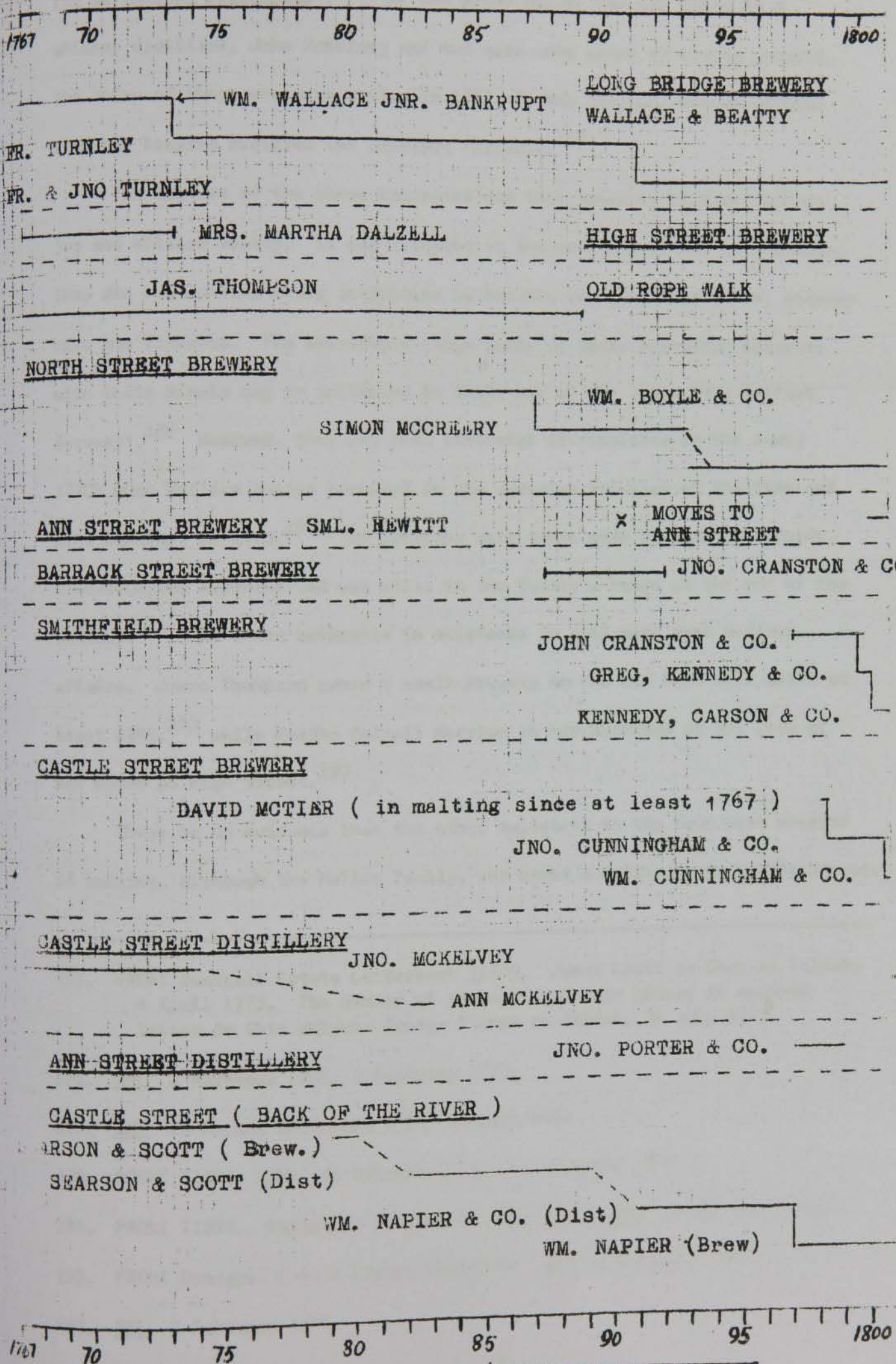


FIG. 42 . BREWING AND DISTILLING IN BELFAST, 1767 TO 1800.

for an Hundred previously'.¹⁸⁷ Of the eight mills, one was owned by a whiskey distiller, John McKelvey and two more were owned by common brewers, the third of these who were active in 1767, Martha Dalzell, having retired from the brewing business the previous February.¹⁸⁸

The largest of the three breweries was that owned by William Wallace jnr and William Beatty. It was situated at the town end of the Long Bridge. They did not confine their activities to brewing but also sold grain, anthracite and flaxseed. The relatively large scale of their operation compared with their rivals may be reflected in their use of the title 'The Belfast Brewery'.¹⁸⁹ However, they got into financial difficulties in the early 1770s when Wallace became involved in the agrarian troubles of the time and went bankrupt in 1773.¹⁹⁰ The premises were taken over by Francis Turnley, a Newtownards merchant and was still in the family's hands at the end of the century.¹⁹¹ The other breweries in existence in 1767 were much smaller affairs. James Thompson owned a small brewery on the Old Rope Walk until at least 1788,¹⁹² while Martha Dalzell carried on her business at the rear of her house in High Street.¹⁹³

There is no evidence that the other maltsters in the town were engaged in brewing, although the McTier family, who owned a malthouse in Castle Street,

187. PRONI Donegall Estate Letterbook T1893. James Lewis to Charles Talbot, 4 April 1773. The owners of the malkilns are listed in another letter in this volume: George Portis to Talbot, 31 July 1773.

188. BNL 8 November 1771, 2 February 1773.

189. BNL 20 March, 10 August 1770, 9 April 1771.

190. PRONI T1893, BNL 16 October 1772, 28 September 1773.

191. PRONI T1893. Portis to Talbot, 31 July 1773; BNL 5 November 1799.

192. PRONI Donegall Estate Papers D509/740; BNL 6 February 1789.

193. BNL 2 February 1773.

were involved in brewing during the late 1790s.¹⁹⁴ Another kiln, in North Street, was owned by Samuel Scott who may have been a relation of Thomas Scott, a publican who owned the 'Antrim Arms' in North Street during the 1770s and the 'King's Arms' in the same street in the 1790s.¹⁹⁵ The other two malthouses were owned by James Henderson, a spirit merchant and anthracite dealer, and James Patrick, whose other interests involved the sale of lime and flour.

In the 1780s, the period of greatest growth and change in the industry, a number of new breweries were opened. The first was in Castle Street, opened by Henry Se arson and Robert Scott in 1799.¹⁹⁶ However, it cannot have been a great success as they soon afterwards turned their attention to distilling for which purpose the site was used until 1796 when William Napier, the managing partner of the firm which owned it at the time, bought out the other partners and reconverted the premises for brewing.¹⁹⁷

Another brewery was that in North Street owned by William Boyle, a merchant with interests in the Caribbean and flaxseed trades, who purchased the premises in 1769 but is not mentioned as a brewer until 1784. His partners in the venture at this time were a merchant, Robert Knox, and Arthur Grainger, a brewer who presumably managed the business. The partnership was dissolved in 1787¹⁹⁸ and the business came into the hands of Simon McCreavy, a spirit merchant who ran it until 1793, when he had to sell it to pay a backlog of

194. BNL 26 October 1773.

195. BNL 20 September 1776, 14 October 1791. The lease on the premises was in Samuel Scott's name in 1767 (PRONI D509/337). The two taverns may well be the same building, having undergone a change of name.

196. BNL 3 December 1779.

197. BNL 2 January 1797.

198. R.D. Vol.277, f.275. Crawford to Boyle; BNL 23 March 1774, 6 March 1787.

excise duties.¹⁹⁹ It was purchased by another merchant, Samuel Gibson, who remained in ownership until at least the end of the century.²⁰⁰

These concerns were all conducted on a relatively modest scale. However, the brewery of John Cranston & Co. in Barrack Street, also known as the 'Belfast Porter Brewery', was on a far more ambitious scale. Formed in 1787 by a group of prominent merchants who intended to produce porter on a scale similar to London or Dublin breweries, the original capital of the firm was £6,000, an impressive sum for the time and place. The partners were Waddell Cunningham, John Galt Smith, John Alexander and John Campbell, who were all general merchants, James Trail Kennedy, a wine and spirit merchant, and John Cranston, who was the manager of the concern.²⁰¹ Buildings were erected on or beside the site of an old army barracks, and are a prominent feature of Williamson's Map of 1791 which shows them grouped around a square, central courtyard.²⁰² From other accounts we know that they covered an area of 180 feet by 160 feet, and were four stories high.²⁰³ In 1790 the partnership was reformed and the capital increased to £7,000: the new partnership agreement recorded that the dissolution of the firm had been decided upon by a majority decision rather than 'by mutual consent', and the members of the old and new partnerships were not identical. Waddell Cunningham was replaced by George Black: this change may however have taken place in 1788 when Cunningham gave up his other business interests. There was also another partner, Charles Page, a brewer later associated with the Anchor Brewery in Cork. His address was given as Belfast, but no other trace of his presence

199. BNL 16 April 1793.

200. BNL 29 August 1794, 5 November 1799.

201. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml. 25; DEP 27 March 1787.

202. PRONI D971/M1/14A.

203. DEP 27 March 1787.

in the town can be found. The new partnership was short lived and was dissolved early in 1792.²⁰⁴ According to George Black, the venture was 'a total failure', in which he lost most of his savings.²⁰⁵ One reason was probably overoptimism, both as regards the size of the market and the ability of the Belfast product to overcome the competition of English and Dublin competitors of a known and trusted quality. Porter to be brewed successfully must be produced on a large scale, and Belfast, while a prosperous and expanding place, was not large enough to support the firm. It was also perhaps ahead of its time, for the prosperity of the Irish provincial porter breweries began in the following decade and in promoting the brewery, the Belfast merchants were ahead of even the city of Cork, whose breweries, including the Anchor Brewery which has already been mentioned, were founded from 1792 onwards.²⁰⁶

When the brewery failed, John Cranston went into business as a general merchant for some years in partnership with his brother, Alexander. However, by 1797 he was once again in charge of a brewery, this time in Smithfield.²⁰⁷ In late 1799 he left the business which became Greg & Kennedy, the partners being Cunningham Greg and James Trail Kennedy who were joined in 1800 by the merchants, William Seed & Co.²⁰⁸ This would indicate that the firm was conducted on a substantial scale, although it is unclear as to whether or not it was as large as the porter brewery. Two other

204. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, memorial 42, BNL 27 April 1792; P. Mathias, op.cit., p.165.

205. PRONI Macartney Corr. D572/11/19. Black to Macartney, 25 December 1796.

206. See T.Newenham. A Statistical and Historical Inquiry into the Progress and Magnitude of the Population of Ireland (London, 1805) pp.198-99.

207. BNL 24 April 1797.

208. BNL 5 November 1799, 26 August 1800.

breweries also existed in the town. One of them was certainly on a small scale, and belonged to Samuel Hewitt, an Ann Street wine merchant, who advertised for a brewer in 1800. This is the only indication that he was involved in brewing although he had been in business since 1789 and in his Ann Street premises since 1790.²⁰⁹ The other brewer was David McTier who sold his brewery to John Cunningham and his sons, William and Thomas, in 1798.²¹⁰ McTier is known to have been a maltster and was a partner in the distillers, William Napier & Co., but the date when he started brewing is not known. This indicates that he, like Hewitt, was involved only on a modest scale.

While brewing prospered, there seems to have been no parallel development in distilling, later to become an important industry in the town. This was partly due to the ready availability of other spirits in the town, especially before 1775. In later years legislation favoured the larger distiller who kept a still constantly employed. There was only one attempt made in the town at forming a large scale distillery. This was William Napier & Co., which was formed in 1791 and took over the disused distillery of Searson & Scott in Castle Street.²¹¹ It was unsuccessful and in 1796 Napier, as already related, bought out the other partners and converted it into a brewery. His move may have been made because of changes in the law which repealed the beer duty and replaced it with one on malt, raising the tax on whiskey to the same as that on rum or brandy. Certainly, at a later date, he again became involved in distilling, and was one of the founders of what later became

209. BNL 13 February 1789, 11 May 1790, 3 June 1800.

210. BNL 10 August 1798.

211. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.52; BNL 1 November 1791.

'Dunville's Royal Irish Distillery'.²¹² There is little evidence of other distilleries operating in the town although one John McKelvie was distilling in Castle Street from at least 1769 to 1773, and his widow, Jane, was distilling in the same premises in 1782, which would seem to indicate continuous distilling by the family during the period²¹³ and the firm of John Porter & Co. were distilling in Ann Street in 1797-98.²¹⁴ Like brewing, distilling was probably, however, carried on to some extent on a domestic scale and illegal stills are not a peculiar feature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The final industry to be considered had few links with those so far described. This was ironfounding, which had been established in the town since at least 1747, while there was a tradition ^of iron in the area which stretched back in time to the Restoration period, although smelting became extinct early in the eighteenth century when supplies of local iron became exhausted. The foundry which was opened in Hill Street in 1741 made use of imported pig iron. It was owned by Stewart Hadskis, the son of a Belfast hardware merchant, and for over forty years, until the opening in 1783 of Benson's Foundry in Newry, Belfast was the only town in the north of Ireland to have its own ironfoundry.²¹⁵ As Hadskis imported some of his wares, it is difficult to say exactly what he actually made in Belfast.²¹⁶ However, he was undoubtedly able to undertake complex commissions. In 1773, for example, he made some decorative work in iron for the sanctuary in Hillsborough

212. 36 Geo III (1x) c.2, §.12; E.B.McGuire, Irish Whiskey (Dublin, 1973), pp.144-45, 345.

213. R.D. Vol.312, f.159; PRONI T1893; BNL 22 March, 29 November 1782.

214. NS 20 March 1797; BNL 2 October 1798.

215. BNL 6 May 1783, 25 December 1787; W.E.Coe, op.cit., p.24; H.D.Gibbon, op.cit., p.76. Hill Street was also known as Pot House Lane (Benn, History, p.355).

216. In 1770, for example, he was importing bleaching furnaces from England (BNL 27 February 1770).

Church,²¹⁷ and in 1775 he made a 700 gallon yarn boiler which he cast in one piece, a feat regarded with some awe at the time.²¹⁸ Ten years later, he cast a furnace pan of 21 ft 9 in diameter and 1,625 gals capacity for John Russell, a bleacher from Dunmurry.²¹⁹ On his death in 1788, the concern passed to his widow and Abel, his son, who continued in business until the middle of 1796, when the site was sold and used for housing.²²⁰

In 1783, another firm was opened by the firm of Edwards and Shaw at Benjamin Edwards glasshouse at the junction of Newtownards Road and Foundry Street.²²¹ It may well have been started because Edwards had difficulty in obtaining machinery for his glassworks: in advertisements announcing its opening the firm offered glass-grinding machinery as well as more typical products.²²² By the end of the following year, however, bleaching furnaces were the most prominent feature of its advertisements, the firm claiming that it now employed the best craftsmen from Great Britain as well as Ireland.²²³ While occupying a rather isolated position in Ballymacarrett, the firm had the advantages of being able to use the marketing facilities belonging to the glasshouse, including from 1788 a showroom at Hanover Quay. It continued in the Edwards family until its closure in 1816 although Shaw, who was probably the manager, retired from the business in 1789,²²⁴ by

217. PRONI Donegall Estate Letter-Book T1893, Portis to Talbot, 17 September 1783.

218. Benn, History i, p.355.

219. BNL 25 February 1785.

220. BNL 1 January 1785, 15 August 1796; 8 January 1798; Coe, op.cit. p.23

221. SNL 18 November 1783

222. M.S.D.Westropp, Irish Glass, in Proc.Belfast Nat.Hist & Phil.Soc. (1915) p.32.

223. BM 17 December 1784.

224. BNL 2 September 1788; M.S.D.Westropp, loc.cit., p.3433; Coe, op.cit. p.23.

1800 had expanded its facilities to include a warehouse in Newry.²²⁵

In 1799, Edward's foundry was joined by another, situated on the Short Strand. This establishment, owned by the firm of McClenaghan Stainton & Co., was in the long term to exercise a very considerable influence upon the development of the engineering industry in the town, being far larger and incorporating a steam engine which provided a blast for a cupola furnace, a far more advanced type than the traditional air furnace. The cupola furnace gave the foundryman stricter control over the composition of the metal and enabled larger castings to be made. The proprietors of this concern included John McClenaghan, a cotton yarn merchant who had strong links with Manchester, and Victor Coats, previously the owner of a pottery and starchworks on the site. Coats' shop in Castle Street served as town agency. Their initial advertisements show them as catering for the textiles industry. From 1801 the firm traded as the 'Lagan Foundry' and on Edward Stainton's death in the following year it became Victor Coats & Co. It subsequently became one of the best known in the town until its closure in 1905.²²⁶

The development of the ironfounding industry cannot be separated from the on-going process of industrialisation in the town. Hadskis catered for the dominant industrial needs of his day - those of the linen industry, while he also provided the town with its domestic requirements in the way of pots and pans, nails and suchlike items. Edward's venture was somewhat more advanced but at the time of its foundation the cotton industry had not emerged from its tenuous infancy. Not until the opening of the Lagan Foundry was it adequately catered for. The reason for the timelag is obvious: ironfounding and engineering are large scale ventures which require substantial

225. BNL 28 October 1800; W.A.Thorpe, A History of English and Irish Glass i (London, 1929), p.281.

226. BNL 18 June 1799; PRONI Williamson's Map of 1791, D971/M1/14A; Coe, op.cit., pp.23-24; see pp.399-400 below for Victor Coats activity in the starch and pottery industries.

markets.

The actual output of the ironfounding industry in Belfast cannot be calculated. The only statistical guide which exists is that of the quantity of iron imported into Belfast. As there were no ironfoundries outside the port, the import figures are a good proxy for production data. Imports, static during the early years of the period, rise dramatically in 1785, thereafter increasing slowly until the mid 1790s, after which time is a rapid decline, reflecting the closure of the Hill Street foundry and the general economic depression. However, in 1800 they attained a level only exceeded previously in 1795, reflecting both the recovery of the economy and the opening of the Lagan Foundry.

This study of the development of industrial activities in the town reveals the considerable progress made. The one small foundry which had existed in 1767, for example, had gone, but in its place were two larger establishments. The three breweries, only one substantial, of the beginning of the period, had increased to six, flour milling had increased out of all proportion to the local population. There was one exception to this expansionary trend. This was sugar refining, which became extinct early in the following century. It was the only industry financed principally by the town's established commercial interests and its decline was a sign that industry was fast replacing commerce as the guiding force behind the development of Belfast.

CHAPTER 10

THE INDUSTRIAL GROWTH OF THE TOWN (2):
THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES

The industrialisation of Belfast during the late eighteenth century was not merely a matter of expanding and developing the various industries which existed in the town during the 1760s. Far more important were the new activities introduced into the town during the period. Of these the cotton industry was by far the most important. From humble beginnings, it had become by the late 1790s the largest employer in the town. As early as 1787, only a decade after its inception, there were 1,000 cotton looms employed in the lower Lagan valley. Within another decade it had replaced linen as the dominant industry in the area.¹ A contemporary estimate of 1790 was that it employed 8,000 people within a fifteen mile radius of Belfast.² A year later, Robert Hyndman estimated that there were 522 cotton looms and but 129 linen and cambric looms in the town.³ By 1800, it was said that 13,500 people were directly employed in the industry. The spinning-mills alone had an annual wage bill of £85,000 and over £750,000 worth of cotton goods were produced annually, mainly for domestic consumption although small quantities were exported and the price of cotton had fallen well below that of linen.⁴

The importation and spinning of cotton wool was not quite unknown in Belfast before 1777. In 1767, for example, over 47 cwt of cotton wool was

1. Hist. Collections, pp.326-27.

2. Owen, History, p.150.

3. Belfast Politics, pp.94-97.

4. BNL 7, 18 June 1799; Evidence taken before the Committee of the Irish House of Commons on the Subject of the Legislative Union, H.C., 1835, xxxv, p.552 (Evidence of Nicholas Grimshaw).

entered in the customs books. Some of this may have been used for medicinal purposes, or hand-spun on a small scale in the town or its hinterland. Similarly, in July 1773 the firm of William & John Brown announced that they had imported 'a few bales of Turkey cotton wool'.⁵ However, no trace of an organised cotton industry in the town can be discovered until 1776 when cotton spinning by hand was introduced into the Poor-house by the Charitable Society as a means of providing employment for some of the able-bodied residents: by early in the following year at least seven people, one an adult and the rest children, were engaged in the work.⁶

This minute beginning into the cotton industry of the 1790s can be credited in the main to two men. One of them was Nicholas Grimshaw jnr who arrived in Belfast in 1776. Born in Blackburn about 1747, he served an apprenticeship in the Lancashire cotton industry, and by 1772 was the manager of a cotton and linen printing works at Port-y-Shee, near Douglas in the Isle of Man. However, after a dispute with the owners he went to Belfast where he opened a printworks at Greencastle, to the north of the town.⁷ The other person was Robert Joy, the joint proprietor of the Newsletter and the architect of Clifton House. He was one of the leading members of the Charitable Society and in 1777, while on a visit to Lanarkshire, conceived the idea of introducing the cotton industry to Ireland as a means of providing employment for the poor. With Thomas McCabe, a watchmaker, he financed the construction of a spinning jenny and a carding machine by

5. BNL 30 July 1773.

6. Strain, op.cit., 133-34.

7. ibid, p.134; BNL 2 August 1776; PRONI L'Estrange & Brett Mss D1905/2/18/5 (Deed, Orr to Grimshaw), also see Journal of the Manx Museum III (1935) pp.61-62, also note entitled 'Nicholas Grimshaw of Port-y-Shee Cotton Factory, ibid IV, (1939), p.156. Port-y-Shee is also dealt with in L.S. Garrad et al, The Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man (Newton Abbot, 1972), p.169.

8. PRONI Beck MSS D1286/2/6 (Notebooks of J.A.Beck)

Grimshaw who then formally approached the Charitable Society with a request that they be tried in the poorhouse. The Society appointed a sub-committee consisting of Joy, McCabe, Nathaniel Wilson, a wine and spirit merchant and two other members, Samuel McTier and John Callwell: the first three mentioned were to become, with Grimshaw, the pioneers of the industry in the town. They recommended that machinery should be installed in a spare room in the poorhouse, but as the Society was unwilling to take the financial risks involved in the venture, the equipment was purchased by a partnership composed of Joy and his brother, Henry, their brother-in-law, John McCracken, and McCabe.⁹

After a number of experiments and trials, the business prospered. In the years after 1779 the firm received aid from the Linen Board and the Dublin Society (see Fig. 43)¹⁰ and by 1783 they had outgrown their rented accommodation in the poorhouse, employing 150 hands and owning 100 looms.¹¹ In that year they converted the disused sugar refinery of Sinclaire Lewis & Co. in Rosemary Lane into a cotton factory, moving their workforce there in March 1784, and three years later opening bleaching and printing facilities in the Falls.¹²

Meanwhile, they had been joined in the industry by other firms, the most important of which was that of Nicholas Grimshaw and Nathaniel Wilson at Greencastle. It was probably formed in April 1783,¹³ and in a short time had become the largest producer of cotton goods in the region. Like Joys

9. Strain, op.cit., pp.134-37.

10. Proc.Dub.Soc. XVI, pp.18, 21 (25 November, 2 December 1779), XVII pp.171, 178 (28 June, 12 July 1781), XVIII pp.158-59 (20 June 1782), XIX p.135 (19 June 1783), XX p.46 (29 January 1784), XXI, p.22 (25 November 1784); Mins.Linen Trustees 29 March 1785, 4 April 1786; Commons Journ.Ire. XII pp.cclvi-cclvii.

11. PRONI D562/8842 (Petition of Joys McCabe & McCracken, 30 October 1783).

12. BNL 12 March 1784, 19 January 1787; Strain, op.cit., pp.140-42.

13. The firm of Wilson, Joyce & Kennedy (wine merchants) was dissolved in April 1783 (BNL 11 April 1783). That November Wilson sent samples of his products to John Foster (PRONI D562/8842, Wilson to Foster, 17 November 1783).

DATE	SOURCE	AMOUNT (£)	DETAILS
12/1779	DS	£12.00.00	Carding of cotton
6/1781	DS	£36.00.00 ¹	Four premiums, two each for Marseilles quilting and White Corded Dimity
6/1782	DS	£18.00.00	Two premiums, one each for Marseilles quilting and White Corded Dimity
6/1783	DS	£20.00.00	White Cotton
1/1784	DS	£12.08.09	5% on sale of fustians
1/1784	DS	£52.17.10	Bounty on sale of £1,268.9.5 value cotton warp
11/1784	DS	£21.19.09	<u>do</u> value £1,253.18.5½
12/1784	Govt.	£28.19.09	5% bounty on mixed goods
3/1785	LB	?	Utensils
4/1786	LB	?	<u>do</u>

DS = Dublin Society

LB = Linen Board

¹. Grant disallowed as yarn used not spun in Ireland

FIG. 43 . BOUNTIES RECEIVED BY JOYS MCCABE & MCCRACKEN TO 1786

McCabe and McCracken they received grants from both the Linen Board and the Dublin Society (Fig. 44)¹⁴ There were also other entrepreneurs in the business by the mid 1780s. One of them was Michael Twigg who was producing mixed (i.e. linen and cotton) goods by 1783. He had come to the town as a linen draper some three years earlier. Two other drapers, the brothers James and John Stephenson Ferguson were also awarded bounties for the production of similar products between 1783 and 1785.¹⁵ There is, however, no evidence to show that either of these two firms was engaged in the spinning of yarn.

In 1785, however, the industry's growth was threatened by Pitt's 'Commercial Propositions' which included the abolition of the various bounties offered by the Linen Board to the manufacturers of mixed cloths during the early 1780s. Nathaniel Wilson was particularly worried, as he had begun to produce all mixed goods and believed that at this delicate stage, he was in particular need of the bounty to counter competition from the more formidable English industry. Without the bounties, he claimed, he would be unable to maintain his investment in the industry. Failure to do so would mean disaster, and it appears that his rapid expansion had been financed not only by his own resources, but by extremely heavy borrowing. 'I have struggled as well as I could with these great matters and both stretched my fortune and my credit to the last string', he wrote to Foster, and from other sources it appears that he had put all his savings into the industry. His spinning mill

14. Proc. Dub. Soc. XX, p.194 (12 August 1784), XXI, pp.23, 35 (25 November, 2 December 1784; Min. Linen Trustees, 1 March 1785; Commons Journ Ire. XI, pp.cclxxii-cclxxxi, XII, pp.cclvi-cclvii.

15. PRONI D562/8858 (Petition of Mixed goods Manufacturers); Commons Journ Ire. XI, p.cclxxii, XII, p.cclvi; BNL 12 June 1786. It may be more than coincidental that these firms were all in existence about 1783 and that Arkwright's patents had first been successfully challenged in the courts in 1781, as this legal decision led to the establishment of large numbers of 'pirate' firms elsewhere (e.g. for the situation in the English mid-lands see S.D.Chapman, The Early Factory Masters (Newton Abbot, 1967), pp.72-76.)

DATE	SOURCE	AMOUNT (£)	DETAILS
10/1783	Gov.	180.13.11	5% bounty on mixed goods
06/1784	<u>do</u>	209.00.08	<u>do</u>
07/1784	<u>do</u>	126.12.06	<u>do</u>
08/1784	DS	20.00.00	Premium for bleached callico for printing.
11/1784	<u>do</u>	38.03.05	Bounty on £2,176.12.10 worth of cotton warp.
11/1784	<u>do</u>	80.05.08	Bounty on £3,336.13.8 worth of velvets, etc.
12/1784	<u>do</u>	384.17.02	Purchase of finished goods.
01/1785	Gov.	118.19.08	5% bounty on mixed goods
01/1785	<u>do</u>	8.01.00	<u>do</u>
03/1785	LB	830.00.00	machinery

DS = Dublin Society Gov. = Government LB = Linen Board.

FIG. 44 . BOUNTIES AND GRANTS RECEIVED BY THE FIRM OF GRIMSHAW & WILSON TO 1786.

alone had cost him £3,000 to which must be added investment in weaving and printing plant, and materials as well as bad debts of £5,000 which he had accumulated.¹⁶ He was lavish in other regards as well: he was said, for example, to have advanced £3,000 to a man who had invented a watermill for spinning warp cotton similar in quality to that spun by Arkwright's spinning jennies.¹⁷ Indeed, even his initial expenditure of 1782-83 had outreached his resources, and he had been unable to purchase all the machinery which he had intended.¹⁸

With the ill-fated Captain Brooke of Prosperous, Wilson went to London early in 1785 on behalf of the Irish cotton industry. Although their journey was not very satisfactory,¹⁹ the 'Propositions' came to naught for other reasons, after casting a shadow of uncertainty over the industry's future for many months. Indeed, in August 1785 matters were so grave that the manufacturers in the Belfast area refused to distribute work to their weavers for a number of weeks.²⁰ The crisis passed but the failure which Wilson had feared so much came three years later when he died, largely, it was said, as a result of overwork. By this time he employed over 3,000 people in various capacities and was the largest employer in the town.²¹ Although his assets were valued at £39,000 they were insufficient to meet his debts and his passing thus boded disaster not merely for the cotton

16. PRONI Foster Mss D562/8865, Wilson to Foster, 23 February 1785; D562/8875, Petition of Sovereign, Burgesses and Principal Inhabitants of Belfast on behalf of Wilson, 1788.

17. W.E.Coe, op.cit., p.47.

18. PRONI D562/8865. Wilson to Foster, 23 February 1785.

19. PRONI D562/8866. Above to above, 5 May 1785.

20. BM 9 August 1785; BNL, 12, 16 August 1785.

21. BNL 24 June 1788; DEP 24, 26 June 1788.

industry but also for the local economy as a whole. An added complication was the fact that his land at Ballygoland and Drumnagroagh was in fact a joint tenancy with Grimshaw, which increased the chance of the latter falling in his wake.²² The situation was however saved by the action of the merchant community, as a result of which Waddell Cunningham and James Holmes took over the retail side of the firm and sold off the stock in hands and their holdings were sold while Grimshaw continued to work the mills.²³

The collapse of Wilson & Grimshaw marks a break in the history of cotton manufacturing in Belfast. After a short period of unease it once again began to expand, but upon a much sounder financial and operational base. Until 1788 the different aspects of the industry, spinning, weaving and finishing had been carried on together. After that date, however, they increasingly tended to separate. Of the three sectors, spinning was by far the most capital intensive. It was highly mechanised and required premises which were either purpose-built or, as was the case at Joy's factory in Rosemary Lane, adapted at considerable expense. Power, too, was needed: some of the early mills used horsepower although Wilson & Grimshaw used water at their Whitehouse mill in 1783. However, waterpower was scarce and the final answer to the problem of providing power for what was, because of its intensive labour requirements, an urban industry, was only found with the introduction of steam, first used in 1789 by James Wallace at his mill in Lisburn. By 1800 steam engines were in use at at least two other mills, Stevenson & Houston's at Springfield and Sterling & Whitla's at Derriaghy.²⁴

22. R.D. Vol.369, f.538; PRONI D562/8875 (Petition of the Sovereign, Burgesses etc. of Belfast seeking aid for Wilsons); BNL 27 June 1788.

23. BNL 1 July 1788; R.D. Vol.500, ff.540, 542. A town meeting was held to support Grimshaw (BNL 12 August 1788). By June 1789 he was selling his wares through the wholesale drapers Haslett Strong & Co. (BNL 16 June 1789).

24. Gribbon, op.cit., p.112.

The capital for the establishment of a spinning mill was considerable: to give but two examples, Grimshaw's mill at Whitehouse cost at least £3,800²⁵ and probably considerably more, while that of Robert Wilson & Co. of 1792 had a capital of £4,000.²⁶ For many years the machinery had to be imported from either Lancashire or the Clyde, and in many cases the expertise and management skills involved had also to be imported.²⁷ Nicholas Grimshaw came from Lancashire, while James Wallace was from Yorkshire.²⁸ Others were local. The contribution of watchmakers to the industry has already been mentioned while some mill-owners came from other branches of the textile trades. The brothers, William and John Milford, had formerly been woollendrapers,²⁹ while the managing partners in Robert Wilson & Co., George McCarnon and Robert Wilson, had been wholesale haberdashers.³⁰ While men such as these may have lacked mechanical knowledge, their training gave them a direct knowledge of textiles.

By 1800 there were, according to the Newsletter, ten spinning mills at work in the town and its vicinity,³¹ a dramatic increase on the number extant in 1788, and there were also mills in more distant centres such as Bangor and Lisburn. Relatively little of the capital which financed the

25. By 1783 he had spent £3,000, and in 1785 received £800 worth of machinery from the Linen Board.

26. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.65.

27. In 1797 George Hannay, setting up a mill in Bangor, sought a quotation from M'Connel Kennedy of Manchester (C.H.Lee, A Cotton Enterprise 1795-1840: A History of M'Connel & Kennedy, Fine Cotton Spinners (Manchester, 1972), pp.20-21. The first manufacturer of machinery in Belfast did not begin operation until 1799 (Chap.6 (ii)).

28. H.McCall, Ireland and her Staple Manufactures (2nd ed., Belfast, 1870), pp.482-83; J.J.Monaghan, The Rise and Fall of the Belfast Cotton Industry, I.H.S. III, (1942), p.11.

29. BNL 13 October 1794.

30. BNL 28 May, 4 June 1790.

31. BNL 4 February 1800.

mills came from the general merchants who were so prominent in other aspects of the town's industrialisation. Apart from John Boyle and Narcissus Batt's interest in Robert Wilson & Co.,³² no general merchant is known to have been a partner in a Belfast cotton mill. Nathaniel Wilson was a wine merchant rather than a general merchant: much of his money was apparently his mother's,³³ a prominent wholesale haberdasher in the town. The Joys were newspaper proprietors and industrialists: wealthy businessmen but not merchants. The Gaw and Carleton families were tobacco manufacturers, another mill proprietor, Sampson Clarke, was a hat manufacturer.³⁴ There was also some investment from the linen industry: the Stevensons of Springfield, Thomas Lyons of Oldpark and the McCance family from Dunmurry were all prominent drapers who invested in the industry.³⁵

However, despite the rapid growth of the spinning sector, the supply of locally produced yarn fell short of demand, partly because of the large amount of capital which spinning required, and partly because of serious competition from cheaper, British yarn which had taken much of the market by the end of the century.³⁶ In 1783 only 49 lbs were imported, and only 197 lbs in the following year, but by 1787 this figure had reached 5,908 lbs and by the end of the century almost 200,000 lbs of cotton yarn was being imported annually (Fig. 45). This yarn trade was originally in the hands of

32. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.65.

33. PRONI D562/8875. Petition of Sovereign etc. in his favour, 1788.

34. BNL 15 November 1785, 9 June 1797 (he was a partner in Milliken, Sayers & Clarke).

35. The firms of Stevenson & Houston, Springfield (R.D. Vol.503, f.104), Robert Wilson & Co. (see note 33 above), George McCamon & Co. (same source, meml.61).

36. Evidence taken before the Committee of the Irish House of Commons on the Subject of the Legislative Union (H.C. Sessional Papers 1835, xxxv, p.551, evidence of Nicholas Grimshaw).

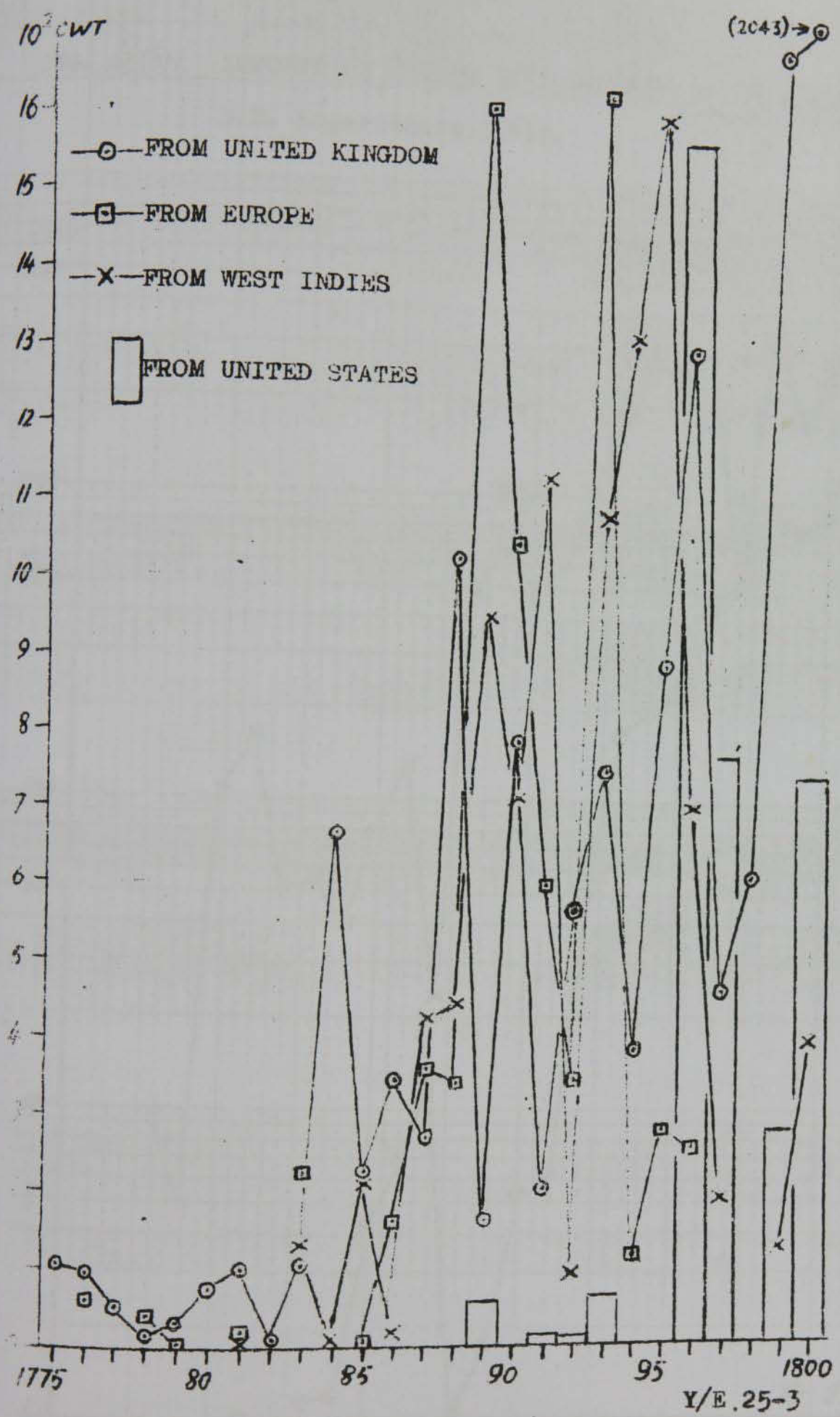
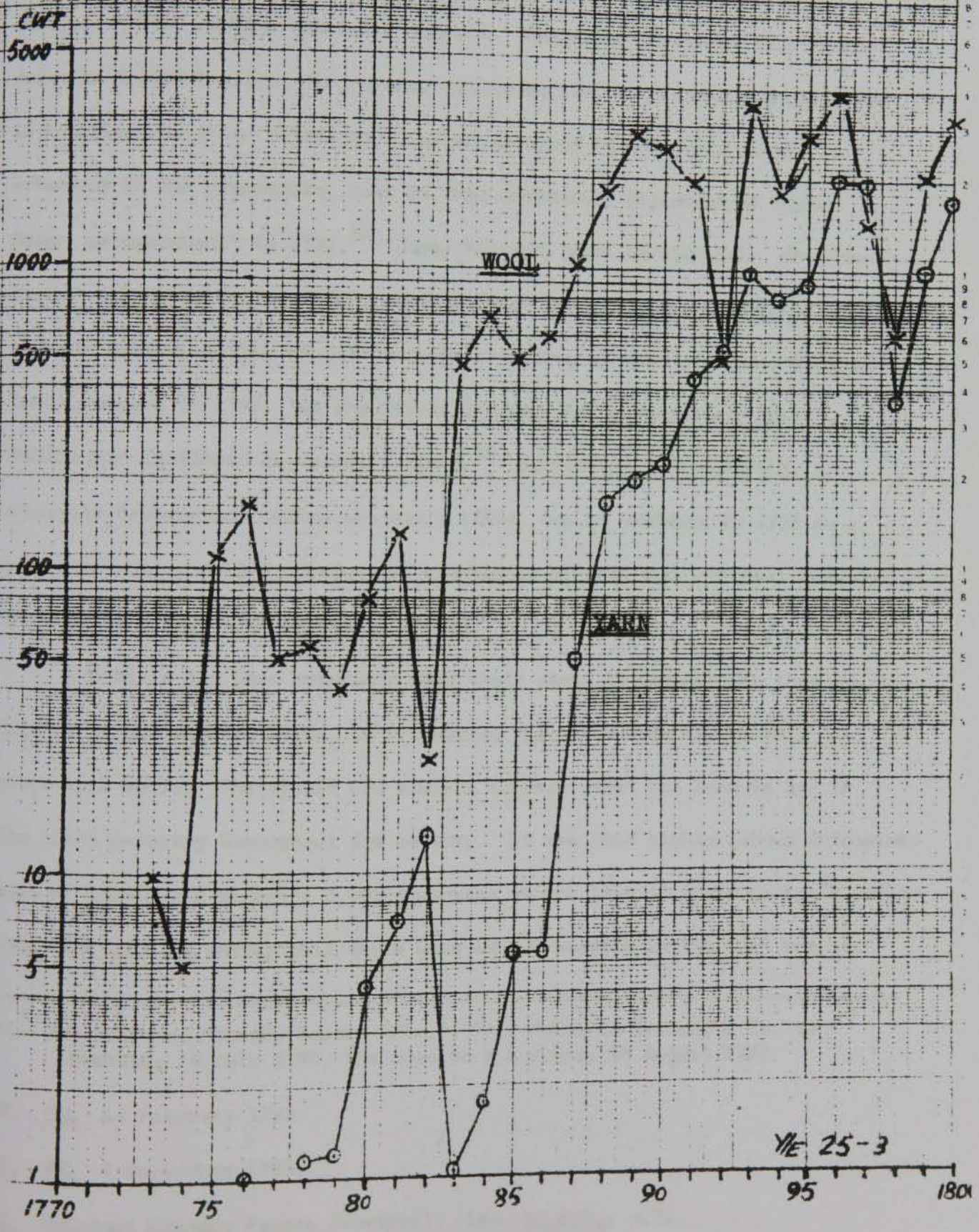


FIG. 45^(a) SOURCES OF COTTON WOOL IMPORTED INTO BELFAST, 1775 - 1800

FIG. 45(b). IMPORTS OF COTTON INTO BELFAST, 1775 - 1800

N.B. Logarithmic scale.



Y/E 25-3

the general merchants, while there is also some evidence that the spinning mills on occasion supplemented their output with imported yarn as in 1796 when William Emerson was purchasing yarn from the Manchester spinners McConnel Kennedy & Co., who were also supplying yarn in 1798 to William & John Orr.³⁷ However, during the 1790s a group of specialised yarn dealers emerged. Their origins are often obscure. Operating on credit from Lancashire or Scottish mills, they needed little capital to establish themselves in business and their existence is often attested to only by a single reference in the newspapers, such as that announcing the death of 'John Baker, yarnmerchant' in 1792.³⁸ Some, however, were substantial. The Manchester spinners, Hallam & Co., owned a share in McClenaghan Leathem & Co. of North Street, a firm of yarn merchants trading as the Manchester Cotton Yarn Warehouse in 1795. On the firm's dissolution in that year, John McClenaghan continued as Hallam's agent.³⁹ Similarly, Hill Hamilton, a wholesale haberdasher during the early 1790s, was in business in 1798 as a yarn merchant, ordering substantial quantities of yarn from McConnel Kennedy and supplying them with specie in return.⁴⁰

The mills and yarn merchants sold their yarns to weavers who then re-sold it to the manufacturers, or who worked for the manufacturers on a piece-work basis. The system was similar to that which had been in use in the linen industry throughout the century. It was thus highly labour intensive: most of Grimshaw & Wilson's 3,000 employees at the time of their demise⁴¹ would have been weavers and by 1811 there were 16,500 weavers in the town and its

37. NLI McConnel Kennedy Papers (Mic.P4074). McConnel Kennedy & Co. to Emerson, 14 July 1796, the same to W.& J.Orr, 18 August 1798.

38. BNL 14 February 1792.

39. BNL 4 September 1795.

40. McConnel Kennedy Papers (various); Lee, op.cit., p.71.

41. BNL 24 June 1788.

environs, mostly working on a casual piece-work basis on looms in their own houses.⁴² As early as 1785 John Brown was building houses with built-in looms in Peter's Hill,⁴³ probably similar to those still inhabited by weavers in Ballymacarrett as late as the 1860s, with a workshop downstairs and living accommodation upstairs.⁴⁴ Compared with linen weaving, earnings were high and by 1806, there were only four linen looms left in the town. According to Madden, in the 1780s the cotton weaver could earn £1 for a four day week while his linen-weaving counterpart could earn but five shillings.⁴⁵ A more reliable figure is that given by McCall for the period about 1800 of about 16 shillings a week for weavers of fine cloths with much lower levels for those who wove the coarser grades.⁴⁶ This was higher than the prevailing rates for linenweaving although the benefits to the urban weaver cannot have been substantial as he lacked a patch of land on which to grow part of his food supply, and cotton weaving was much more of an urban activity than linen weaving had been. The industry's prosperity was at any rate shortlived and real wages fell rapidly thereafter until by the late 1830s the surviving weavers in the town were existing in conditions of abject poverty.⁴⁷

The 'putting-out' of yarn to weavers was not a particularly capital intensive occupation and was engaged in by many of the town's lesser businessmen. Typical of these men were George Forcade, a High Street grocer, who was selling cotton goods in 1793, or Thomas Potts, another grocer, who advertised

42. Dubourdieu, Antrim, pp.404-407.

43. BNL 10 June 1785.

44. Their sad plight at that time is graphically described by Prof.E.R.R. Green in Weavers, pp.39 ff.

45. Madden, Lives, 2 ser. Vol.1 (London 1843), p.xcii.

46. McCall, op.cit., pp.498-99.

47. Green, op.cit., pp.39 ff.

for salico weavers in 1799.⁴⁸ Other 'manufacturers' included William Atkinson, the town clerk, and his brother Miles, who was a wine merchant.⁴⁹ Such small operators supplemented the activity of the various spinning mills in this field. Not all mills engaged in manufacturing: in 1809, for example, only five mills were directly involved in the weaving sector which would indicate that much of the yarn produced in the town was sold to manufacturers who were responsible for distributing it among the weavers.⁵⁰

After weaving, the cloth was sent for finishing, a stage entailing bleaching and, frequently, printing, the latter process being usually carried on at the bleachgreens. The bleaching processes used were similar to those in the linen industry and many former linen bleachgreens switched to cotton bleaching although a few continued to cater for the linen trade alone. There is, for example, no evidence that the various greens on the Lagan ever handled cotton, while in 1787 John Montgomery built a new green at Knock which was apparently confined to linens.⁵¹

Cotton did not need to be beetled and those greens which bleached only cotton could dispense with their beetling mills.⁵² Some, however, continued to handle both fabrics throughout the period, including that of the Luke family at Islandreagh and the green belonging to the Fergusons at Hyde Park. However, both these greens were on the fringe of the cotton manufacturing area. Nicholas Grimshaw gradually gave up finishing linen at Whitehouse, as

48. BNL 30 August 1793; 26 July 1799.

49. SPD. Rebellion Papers 620/25/165. George Murdoch, Belfast to Lord Downshire, 12 October 1796; BNL 30 October 1792; R.M.Young, Town Book, p.369.

50. Monaghan, *loc.cit.*, p.6.

51. PRONI Longfield Kelly & Armstrong Papers T877/168 (Lease Knox to Montgomery). Montgomery was obliged to spend £12 per acre on buildings connected with the linen industry. In 1793 it was being leased by Walter Brown of Knock who described himself as a linen manufacturer and bleacher (BNL 12 July 1793).

52. This happened at Fergusons green at Craigarogan in 1795 (NS 14 December 1795).

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did Olivia Tomb at her neighbouring Whiteabby green in 1789,⁵³ and they were followed by John How at Greencastle during the mid 1790s.⁵⁴ By 1797 he was describing himself as a cotton bleacher. At about the same time, William Radcliffe ceased linen bleaching at his green on the Glen river at Dunmurry. In 1798 he was said to be a manufacturer of worsteds and linens, but in 1799 Dunmurry bleachgreen was described as a muslin green.⁵⁵ In other cases, cotton firms took over bleachgreens and converted them for finishing cottons, among them Joys who took over a green in the Falls, and the Gaws who acquired one at Stoneyford.

While linen was traditionally sold in its bleached state, cottons were generally printed, and in some cases, the printworks was housed in the former beetling mill. The first printfield in the Belfast area was that of Nicholas Grimshaw, which he opened in 1776 for the printing of both linen and cotton.⁵⁶ In the following year, Richard Williamson of Gilford sold cotton goods through Stewart Hadskis but had abandoned this agency in the following year.⁵⁷ Until the mid 1780s the market for printed goods was not particularly large and it was not until the export of printed linens was permitted in 1780 that the number of printfields in the Belfast area began to increase, partly to meet export demands for linen, and partly because of the growth of other sectors of the cotton industry. All, with one exception, were part of bleaching concerns. The exception was that built by Henry Joy McCracken and David Thoburn at Knockcairn in 1795, but even this short lived venture was on the site of a former bleachgreen.⁵⁸

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53. Benn, History i, p.350.
54. He changed to cotton only between 1795 and 1797 (BNL 5 January 1795, 23 January 1797).
55. BNL 6 July 1798, 29 March 1799.
56. BNL 13 August 1776.
57. Longfield, Notes NI, p.61.
58. PRONI John Elliott & Johns Papers D491/66. John Gregg, lease to McCracken & Thoburn, 3 October 1795; NS 9 May 1796.

Thus, by 1800 three distinct sectors of the cotton industry had emerged, as well as the associated commercial activity of the merchants who imported its raw materials of cotton wool and yarn. There was firstly the highly capitalised and urbanised spinning sector, secondly the traditional, domestically based and labour intensive weaving sector with its base in both rural and urban areas and finally, the finishing sector which was highly capitalised, but which required large quantities of water and space, and which tended to be sited in rural areas.

The progress of the cotton industry in Belfast after 1788 must not be seen as a continual increase in strength. During the economic crisis of 1793, the Balbriggan firm of Comerford O'Brien and Clarke 'failed for exactly £67,000, and might have done so for £200,000 as their credit was great the day before'.⁵⁹ This led to problems in Belfast, as they had opened a warehouse in the town, and it appears that Grimshaw was in considerable difficulties, although he managed to survive the crisis.⁶⁰ Other Belfast firms were not nearly as lucky. Thomas McCabe junior resigned from a mill at Randlestown in which he was a partner in April,⁶¹ Nicholas Mercer, who owned a mill and bleachgreen at Ballyclare, failed in the same month. He was back in business in December 1794, but failed again in the following May.⁶² Robert Hilditch, who had been Wilson and Grimshaw's manager, and who had begun his own business in 1791, was another casualty, failing about June 1793.⁶³ Others probably failed or gave up the business at about this time as a number of other firms faded from public view.

59. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/370. Dr Drennan to Samuel McTier, Spring 1793, also T765/2/369, same to same, end 1792.

60. PRONI T765/2/370; Longfield, Notes NI, p.59.

61. BNL 3 May 1793.

62. BNL 23 April 1793, 19 December 1794; NS 7 May 1795.

63. PRO CUST 1/233, unpaginated volume, 17 May 1793; BNL 11 February 1791.

The profitability of the industry, and its ability to stand on its own feet was always doubtful. In 1785 Nathaniel Wilson stated that only the various bounties enabled him to sell goods profitably as his English competitors were able to obtain their raw materials more cheaply and also benefited from a store of tradition and expertise. Indeed, even with the bounties, they were able to undersell him in a number of lines.⁶⁴ In like vein, Nicholas Grimshaw, in giving evidence before a committee of the Irish House of Commons which was investigating the effect of the proposed union in 1799, declared that his costs in virtually every sector were higher than those of his English counterparts and that the removal of protection would be disastrous.⁶⁵ Indeed, within a few months he had filed for bankruptcy although he withdrew the proceedings early in the following year.

Nevertheless, despite the uncertainties which characterised it, the cotton industry brought many benefits to the town. As has been seen, it provided employment on a scale formerly unknown in the town and introduced the large-scale factory to Belfast for the first time, a development which brought to the town the advantages and disadvantages of machinery and, above all, the steam engine. More than any other industry it transformed the town from a port and service centre into a town whose primary activity was industrial production.

There were, of course, disadvantages as well as advantages, for the industry brought to the town the rigours, discipline and unhealthiness of factory life and in its labour demands stimulated the development of such areas as Brown's Square and Ballymacarrett which formed the nucleus of the vast housing schemes which were to form such a distinctive feature of the

64. PRONI Foster MSS D562/8857. Wilson to Foster, 13 January 1785.

65. H.C. Sessional Papers 1833, XXXV, pp.551-52.

66. Longfield, Notes NI, p.59.

late nineteenth century city and which have exercised such a baleful influence upon it ever since. Indeed, despite these developments the population increased so rapidly that they were being described as 'slums' in 1800, well before the word was in common use.

The cotton industry reacted upon the linen industry in ways other than forcing its range of operation back from the mouth of the Lagan. It introduced textile printing into the region: Grimshaw, originally printed both cottons and linens and only specialised in cottons some years later when the industry had grown sufficiently. During the 1790s printed linens were exported to the United States and the Caribbean in considerable quantities. Virtually non-existent at the beginning of the decade, the quantity was in excess of 165,000 yards by 1795. This was over 12% of the total linen exports to transatlantic markets. A year later the amount was almost 450,000 yards, a dramatic expansion when it is considered that total linen exports rose by about 20%

The increased mechanisation of the textile industry which began with the cotton industry may also have stimulated the introduction of more mechanised finishing processes in the linen industry. When Tone visited Belfast in 1791 he was brought to see William Sinclair's bleachgreen and was told that 'almost all the work now done by machinery was done thirty years ago by hand'. The Sinclairs were apparently innovators. Tone tells us that William was told by neighbouring bleachers that he was mad and that his father met with considerable opposition, having to bring in the army to protect his machinery.⁶⁷ One important development was that of the callendar, a set of rollers through which the cloth was passed so as to give it a smoother finish. The first of these was erected in 1784 at Greencastle by John Ledlie,

67. W.T.W.Tone, Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone (Washington, 1826), i, p.148.

a linenbleacher.⁶⁸ No more are known to have been built for another decade although when Thompson's bleachgreen on the Antrim Road was offered for sale in 1793, it was suggested that one could be erected on the site.⁶⁹ The next year Charles McAlester constructed one in Belfast.⁷⁰ Its title 'The Belfast Callendar', and the fact that it gave its name to the street in which it was situated (Callendar Street) suggests that it was the first in the town, although at least two more were in operation by the end of 1795.⁷¹ It may not be coincidental that at least two of the four persons involved were also engaged in the cotton industry.⁷²

The scale of the cotton manufacture in Belfast must not be allowed to cloak the fact that a considerable number of other industries were introduced into the town or its neighbourhood by members of the town's business community. Some of these were strongly influenced by developments in the textile industry, and none more so than the vitriol industry which produced sulphuric acid for use as a bleaching agent.

The circumstances in which John Roebuck and Samuel Garbett first manufactured vitriol commercially and how, despite their attempts to prevent their methods being used elsewhere, they lost their original monopoly, have been described elsewhere.⁷³ In 1749 they established a works at Prestonpans, on the Firth of Forth, and during the 1760s and early 1770s one or two vessels a year sailed from there to Belfast,⁷⁴ showing that sulphuric acid was already

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68. BNL 15 October 1784.
69. BNL 29 October 1793.
70. BNL 7 March, 1 December 1795.
71. These belonged to Thomas Milliken in Waring Street and Ranson & Foster in Millfield.
72. Milliken in Birnie McCabe, cotton spinners (NS 30 June 1794); McAlester as a yarn merchant (BNL 1 May 1785).
73. A. and N.L. Clow. Vitriol in the Industrial Revolution, Econ. Hist. Rev. 1st ser. XV (1945), pp.44-48.
74. e.g. BNL 7 April, 22 August 1789. It was being sold by John Campbell & Co. in October 1779 (BNL 5 October 1779).

in use by bleachers as a substitute for buttermilk and potashes. In 1766 two prominent Belfast merchants, Thomas Greg and Waddell Cunningham leased a site at Lisburn⁷⁵ and built a vitriol works there. It is not clear how they managed to acquire the necessary knowledge: they may, as others did, have employed former employees of Roebuck and Garbett, or have used industrial espionage, which was legal as Roebuck and Garbett, for some inexplicable reason, did not seek a patent for their process until 1771, some twenty-five years after it was invented. Greg and Cunningham did not make this error. They quickly obtained an Irish patent valid for fourteen years allowing them the sole rights of manufacture in Ireland, on the grounds that their venture entailed them in considerable financial risks. They also applied in vain for a patent allowing them the sole right of sale.⁷⁶ They began production in 1767,⁷⁷ but encountered many setbacks. Among their minor problems was probably that of finding and keeping in circulation sufficient bottles for their needs for the Newsletter frequently carried advertisements requesting their customers to return their bottles.⁷⁸ Another problem may have been the quality of their product at the beginning: a newspaper advertisement of 1774 claimed that its quality was now superior to that of imported vitriol,⁷⁹ thus suggesting that this had not formerly been the case. Their principal problem, however, was one of costs. Those who imported vitriol had only to pay the transport costs of the highly concentrated liquid, but Greg and Cunningham had to pay transport costs on all their raw materials. Coal, for example, cost them eleven shillings per ton more at Belfast than on the

75. PRONI D409/1.

76. PRONI Foster MSS D562/6847. Patent, 14 August 1767.

77. BNL 26 February 1768.

78. BNL 27 July 1770, 10 December 1771, 21 July 1772.

79. BNL 18 March 1774.

coal field in 1783, and its carriage up the Lagan Navigation cost another threepence per ton in lighterage charges, while they also had to bear the costs of building and maintaining the lighters. They also claimed that their British competitors, who supplied a number of markets, were selling at an uneconomic price on the Ulster market.⁸⁰

While their patent expired in 1781, only at the end of 1783 did the partners apply for government assistance. This suggests that competition increased noticeably at this period, most likely as a result of the reopening of traditional sources of potash in Spain and America which had been disrupted during the war. The subsequent history of the firm is shrouded in doubt and it may have been closed down although the site was known as Vitriol Island until the twentieth century.⁸¹ It had not been given by Greg to his son Cunningham on the former's retirement in 1781, which would indicate that Greg regarded it as a special interest, as he did his interest in the pottery industry. By 1798, however, the site was owned by Cunningham Greg and Alexander Crawford, a Lisburn doctor.⁸² In 1791 Greg had been importing saltpetre for vitriol manufacture.⁸³ However there is no indication that this was for Lisburn as Dubourdieu described him as owning a works in Belfast early in the 19th century⁸⁴ and there was at least one other works in the area, at Moyallen on the upper Lagan. This concern was owned by the Christy family, who were cambric manufacturers in the area, and was opened by them in 1786 with a capital of £10,000, remaining in operation until at least

80. PRONI D562/6846. Greg to Yelverton, 20 November 1783.

81. See Green, Ind. Arch. Down, p.74.

82. R.D. Vol.509, f.429.

83. PROI Customs and Excise Administration Papers IA/43/4/8 (A List of Repayments Received in the Examiner of Customs Office, in the Quarter Ending the 24th June last . . . (1791)).

84. Dubourdieu, Antrim, p.417.

1830.⁸⁵ At least two Belfast merchants, James Holmes and Henry Haslett, were importing saltpetre for vitriol manufacture in 1796 although no evidence of their involvement in the industry has come to light.⁸⁶

Vitriol was only one of many methods by which bleachers sought to augment and improve upon the use of buttermilk and imported potash as bleaching agents, and Belfast businessmen played a prominent part in these experiments. James Ferguson, a doctor with interests in the linen industry, was experimenting with lime in 1764, and was awarded £300 by the Linen Board in 1770 to carry out further experiments, although its use remained unlawful because of fears that it would damage the cloth. The regulations concerning the use of lime in bleaching were however widely ignored.⁸⁷ Efforts were also made to substitute home-produced ashes for imported. Prominent in this field was Richard Cunningham who was making potash at Bryansford in 1767, selling it through Charles Cunningham, the manager of the New Sugar House. He was a brother of Waddell Cunningham, to whom Richard had transferred his agency by 1780,⁸⁸ Charles having died in 1769. It is likely that the three were related to each other, and the possible link becomes all the more interesting when Waddell's role in the vitriol industry is considered.

Richard Cunningham would appear to have enjoyed more than an ephemeral success. In 1772 he published a book on the various experiments which he had

85. Green, Ind. Arch. Down, pp.22-23. Moyallen vitriol was being sold in Belfast in 1794 by John Caldwell (BNL 7 July 1794).

86. PROI Customs & Excise Administration Papers IA/34/5/51, 58. Chichester Skeffington to Revenue Commissioners, 27 August 1796, Haslett to same, 15 September 1796.

87. Benn, History i, pp.342-43; Gill, op.cit., 208-10; H.C.Lawlor, Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century, in Ir. & Internat. Fibres & Fabrics Journ. VII, no.11 (1941), p.9.

88. BNL 13 November 1767, 31 May 1768, 20 June 1780.

made using kelp and various weeds⁸⁹ and as has been seen, was still in business in 1780, while in 1785 he sought a bounty from the Linen Board for ashes made from Irish kelp.⁹⁰

While the attempts to improve the techniques used in the bleaching industry were directly linked with the linen industry, that industry's requirements were indirectly the cause of the development of another industry, that of shipbuilding, which from small beginnings in the last fifteen years of the century developed rapidly during the following century to become, with the linen and engineering industries, the town's major employers. Ships had been built intermittently in the town since 1636 when the Eagle's Wing, a small vessel of between 115 and 150 tons, was built in the town.⁹¹ In March 1784 an attempt was made by two men, Hugh Hutchinson and William McClymon, to establish a shipyard at the Foxt Plantation,⁹² and by June work had begun on a ship, one newspaper account stating that 'a new vessel of about one hundred tons burden, is at present on the stocks at the Point Fields . . . which will be ready for launching about the middle of August'.⁹³ This was the Belfast, a 115 ton brig which was employed in the herring trade to the north-west fisheries until 1787 when it was offered for sale.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, despite a statement by the Dublin Evening Post's Belfast correspondent that 'several others (vessels) are expected to be built in the

89. R. Cunningham, Experiments with Lime, United with Weed-Ash and Kelp in Different Proportions, together with a Process for making Pot-Ash (Dublin 1772).

90. Mins. Linen Trustees 1785, pp.81, 84.

91. Owen, History, pp.30, 363.

92. BNL 16 March 1784.

93. DEP 5 June 1784.

94. BNL 9 March 1787.

course of next summer',⁹⁵ there is no other evidence of this early venture, and it would appear that by 1791 repair and maintenance work alone continued in the town, possibly involving the building of small boats and major renovation work on larger vessels, such as that undertaken by Isaac Martin in 1789 when he converted the lighter John into a sloop for the Irish Sea trade.⁹⁶ By 1791 there were only six ships' carpenters working in the town.⁹⁷

In that year, William Ritchie and his brother Hugh gave up their shipbuilding business at Saltcoats in Ayrshire, and moved to Belfast where they established a shipyard on the site used by Hutchinson and McClymon in 1784.⁹⁸ The move was successful, largely because of orders from the Company of New Established London and Liverpool Traders, as can be seen from Fig. 46, which gives details of the yard's known output in the period; about one large vessel per year was launched, in addition to the construction of smaller boats and, presumably, repair work. The Ritchie brothers may have been invited to Belfast by the New Traders, or their manager, Henry Haslett. This would explain why they abandoned a prosperous business in Saltcoats and moved their staff and equipment to Belfast, with all the uncertainties which a move entailed. They never built vessels for the 'Old Traders', or for individual merchants unconnected with the 'New Traders'. By 1800 the town had two shipyards, Hugh Ritchie having established himself in business on his own account in 1798 at Pilot Street,⁹⁹ although little is known of his

95. DEP 5 June 1784.

96. PRO CUST 1/214, f.131 (27 August 1790).

97. Dubourdieu, Antrim, pp 521-22

98. PRONI Donegall Estate Leases D509/917; Dubourdieu, Antrim, pp.521-24; Owen, Port, pp.25-27; D.Rebbeck, The History of Iron Shipbuilding on the Queen's Island (unpub. Ph.D.thesis, Queen's Uni. Belfast, 1950), pp.36-42.

99. BNL 20 July 1798: for the subsequent history of these firms see Rebbeck, op.cit.

NAME	OWNER	TONS	RIG	DETAILS
HIBERNIA	NT	193 ¹	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 10/7/92 Launched. 1st vessel. <u>BNL</u> 29/5/95 For sale
	J. Boyle ²	?	CUTTER	<u>NS</u> 18/5/93 For Caribbean island work.
COURIER	NT	?	?	<u>NS</u> 9/1/94 Greenock trade
SHAMROCK	NT	?	BRIG	<u>NS</u> 28,31/7/94 Liverpool trade.
ST PATRICK	McNeill of Larne	60	GALLIOT	<u>BNL</u> 29/5/95. Coasting and inland work.
WILLIAM	3	170	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 5/6/95; <u>NS</u> 4/6/95: Oporto Trade.
---	Revenue Commrs.	---	BOAT	PRO CUST 1/247 f 119: For <u>Naas</u> cruiser.
HIBERNIA	NT	230	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 10/6/96. London trade.
ST PATRICK	NT	230	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 19/12/96. London trade.
?	?	?	?	<u>BNL</u> 18/5/98. Fire at yard. New vessel on stocks undamaged.
---	Revenue Commrs.	---	BARGE	<u>BNL</u> 13/9/99. For Whitehouse.
BELFAST ⁴	NT	150	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 24/9/99. Liverpool trade.
DRAPER	NT	180	BRIG	<u>BNL</u> 24/10/00. Seventh vessel for NT built at yard.
PRINCE OF WALES	?	?	LIGHTER	<u>BNL</u> 29/12/00. For sale at yard.

1. 300t (BNL 10/7/92). Capacity: registered tonnage 193t.
2. Boyle was a partner in NT
3. Owned by a group of merchants engaged in the trade.
4. BNL 22/10/99

NT COMPANY OF NEW ESTABLISHED LONDON & LIVERPOOL TRADERS

PL 46. VESSELS BUILT BY WILLIAM RITCHIE, BELFAST 1792 - 1800

shipbuilding activity. Both firms' advertisements show that they did not restrict themselves to shipbuilding and repairing, but also engaged in the timber and coal trades, in the latter capacity acting as agents for the Saltcoats collieries.¹⁰⁰

The glass industry was introduced to the town in the 1780s and within a decade there were three plants in operation. Much of its output was decorative in nature or was connected with the daily needs of the town's inhabitants for bottles and window panes. Its success in the town during the period was in part due to the availability of suitable sand in the Lagan estuary. The man who was responsible for introducing the industry to Belfast was Benjamin Edwards. He was said to have received his training in Bristol, and his surviving decorative work displays strong traces of Bristol influence.¹⁰¹ He may have been the 'Benjamin Edwards, glassblower, who leased a house in Abbey Street in Dublin in 1768.¹⁰² Three years later he was the manager of a glassworks at Drumreagh, near Coalisland, owned by the proprietors of the Tyrone collieries. This concern was not a commercial success and in 1773 was advertised to let.¹⁰³ Three years later Edwards was in Belfast and by 1781 he had erected a glasshouse at the County Down end of the Long Bridge at which he was producing flint glass.¹⁰⁴ There was apparently a windmill on the site as his son, John, was making clay pipes there as a subsidiary activity.¹⁰⁵

As already mentioned, Edward's work displays Bristol influences, and

100. BNL 10 October 1796, 4 April, 27 June 1800; NS 7 July 1794.

101. C.MacLeod, *Irish Volunteer Glass*, Ix. Sword VII (1966), p.248; W.A. Thorpe, A History of English and Irish Glass I (London 1929), pp.263-64.

102. R.D. Vol.270, f.382.

103. M.S.D.Westropp, *Glass*; C.MacLeod, op.cit., p.248; W.A.Thorpe, op.cit. p.264.
pp 31-32

104. BNL 9 January 1781.

105. BNL 10 March 1789, 2 March 1790, 17 March 1797.

he is known to have imported a cutter from England.¹⁰⁶ It is possible that he came from Bristol. Among other wares, he made enamel glass, a white opaque glass 'which was certainly a speciality, though not a monopoly of Bristol'.¹⁰⁷ He also widened his activity, as has been described earlier in this chapter, to include ironfounding, presumably as a result of difficulties which he may have experienced in obtaining machinery.¹⁰⁸ Edwards's sales were about £1,000 annually (Fig. 47). The business would appear to have been successful from the outset: indeed by 1800 a warehouse had been opened in Newry for the sale of their products,¹⁰⁹ and the firm's success had by 1784 attracted competition from a group of twelve businessmen in the town, who formed the firm of John Smylie & Co. in the following year with a capital of £1,300.¹¹⁰ The manager was John Smylie, and it is interesting to note that all but three of the other partners were engaged in the transatlantic trade. Their glasshouse, like that of Edwards, was situated in Dallymacarrett,¹¹¹ and would seem to have been larger than Edwards, judging by the size of its premises which included a glasshouse 60 ft in diameter and 120 ft in height, which was as large as any in Britain at the time.¹¹² Their turnover figures as submitted when they were applying for premiums each year from the Dublin

106. BNL 9 January 1781. In 1785 three-quarters of the workmen in Irish glasshouses were immigrants, principally from England (Westropp, Glass, p.52).

107. W.A.Thorpe, op.cit. II, p.264.

108. See pp. 369 ff above.

109. BNL 28 October 1800.

110. BNL 8 June 1784; Millin, Sidelights, p.77.

111. R.D. Vol.402, f.381; Benn, History i, p.357.

112. DEP 25 August 1785.

Year	BENJAMIN EDWARDS		J. SMYLIE & CO.	
	Premium (£)	Turnover (£)	Premium (£)	Turnover (£)
1787	75.14.11	1,238.0.0.	84.05.01	1,377.0.0.
1788	16.17.00½	1,306.0.0.	33.02.11½	2,569.0.0.
1789	11.03.02	1,780.0.0.	38.16.10	6,148.0.0.
1790	--	--	50.00.00	9,512.0.0.
1791	--	--	50.00.00	7,460.0.0.
1792	--	--	50.00.00	8,030.0.0.
1793	--	--	50.00.00	6,948.0.0. ^x
1794	--	--	50.00.00	4,190.0.0. ^x

^x Turnover for these years refers to window glass only.

FIG. 47 . PREMIUMS AWARDED TO BELFAST GLASS MANUFACTURERS BY THE DUBLIN SOCIETY.

(Source: Dublin Soc. Proc., xxiii, p.103; xxv, p.18; xxvi, p.14; xxvii, p.38; xxviii p.14; xxix, p.13; xxx, p.18; xxxi, p.18)

Society are another indicator of its size (Fig. 47). Production began in April 1786¹¹³ and expanded with great rapidity. By 1790 it had reached a peak of over £9,000 worth of glass annually. In 1788 Smylie's concern was recommended by Mrs McTier as a 'good security' at a time when one bank was in business in the town, and another was about to open.¹¹⁴ Another indication of the firm's success was the reconstitution of the partnership in 1791 when its capital was increased to £3,600, the additional sum financing the opening of a second glasshouse on the site in 1792.¹¹⁵ From this time, the older house was used for the manufacture of flint glass and the new house concentrated on making bottle glass. One feature of Smylie's production which differed from Edwards's was his high proportion of everyday products such as bottles and window glass,¹¹⁶ whereas Edwards would seem to have concentrated on high value engraved products such as goblets and decanters: all the surviving known products of the 18th century Belfast glass industry are of Edwards's manufacture.¹¹⁷

By 1800 Belfast glass had earned itself a high reputation. In 1789 Smylie's crown glass was reckoned to be of higher quality than the comparable Bristol product, although it was fourteen per cent cheaper.¹¹⁸ Seven years later, when Joshua Gilpin, an American paper manufacturer, visited Edwards's glasshouse, he recorded that 'the window glass is made here better than any-

113. DEP 20 April 1786.

114. PRONI Drennan Letters T765/2/265. Mrs McTier to Dr Drennan, February 1788.

115. R.D. Anonymous Partnerships Register I, meml.51; BNL 29 January 1794; M.S.D. Westropp, loc.cit., p.36.

116. See his advertisements, e.g. BNL 29 February 1788, 28 April 1797; NS 2 March 1795.

117. W.A. Seaby, Irish Williamite Glass (Belfast n.d.(1966)), p.12; C. MacLeod loc.cit. p. 255

118. M.S.D. Westropp, Glass, p.35.

where else in Ireland - but the white glass not so well as in Waterford',¹¹⁹ and by 1800 Edwards was producing decanters decorated by wheel engraving at a time when most glass of this kind was moulded or cut.¹²⁰

From the beginning, the Belfast glass industry was export orientated. Edwards's works was built in 1780-81, shortly after the lifting of the prohibition which had been laid on the export of Irish glass, and coinciding with a doubling of the English glass excise. This encouraged the Irish industry, especially as it induced many English workers to emigrate and settle in places where circumstances were more favourable to their craft.¹²¹ The considerable level of glass exports to the United States has already been mentioned: it was commented on by Joshua Gilpin in 1796 and described by him as one of the principal items in the port's trade,¹²² while Edwards stressed his dependence on the export market in a letter to Lord Hillsborough in 1797.¹²³ The concentration on exports was apparently carried on to the extent of neglecting the home market, especially by Smylies. This is perhaps not surprising as most of the firm's partners were involved in the transatlantic trade. Imports of glass from the various glassworks on the west coast of Britain continued and indeed increased. This conclusion is supported by a statement of Thomas Wallace in 1798 that much of the glass consumed in Ireland was imported while Irish glass was largely exported to America.¹²⁴ The Belfast glass industry was relatively successful although, like the cotton industry

119. Hancock & Wilkinson, *loc.cit.*, p.133.

120. W.A.Seaby, *op.cit.*, p.12.

121. Thorpe, *op.cit.*, pp.261-63.

122. Hancock & Wilkinson, *loc.cit.* p.134. See also Westropp, *Glass*, pp.48-50.

123. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/1125, Edwards to Hillsbrough, 1 March 1797.

124. T.Wallace, An Essay on the Manufactures of Ireland (Dublin, 1798), pp.238-39.

much of its prosperity was due to protection, and it survived in various forms until about 1870, having thus survived for about ninety years.¹²⁵

In this it was far more successful than another industry which was briefly established in Ballymacarrett during the mid 1790s. This was the pottery industry, promoted by a group of three businessmen, Thomas Greg, John Ashmore and Samuel Stephenson, the first two merchants and the latter a doctor and Presbyterian minister.¹²⁶ Their aim was the manufacture of Queen's Ware, using local deposits of clay which were already being used by the earthenware industry in the Mersey, the clay being shipped regularly to Liverpool from Carrickfergus.¹²⁷ The site which they used was at the end of the Ravenhill Road, on part of the land which later became McConnell's distillery.¹²⁸ Production started in 1791, although it is likely that the firm was founded some four years earlier as in May 1787 the Dublin Evening Post reported that some gentlemen in the Belfast area had formed an Irish pottery company which they hoped to get under way by bringing over some English workmen.¹²⁹

The firm met with a number of initial difficulties. One of these was presumably that of obtaining labour: in February 1793, for example, when they needed a skilled painter, the only person available was a private in the 70th Regiment whose commanding officer refused to release him; Greg had to appeal to Lord Hillsborough for his assistance in the matter.¹³⁰ There was also the problem of a duty which was levied on ground flint imported into Ireland,

125. Westropp, Glass, pp.35-39.

126. Benn, History i, p.357; Millin, Sidelights, pp.64-67.

127. DEP 22 November 1785.

128. R.M.Young, China, p.188.

129. DEP 19 May 1787.

130. PRONI Downshire MSS D607/438, Greg to Hillsborough, 2 February 1793.

especially as there was not a flint mill in the country, and requests for relief from this duty on the grounds that the flint was for use in Irish industry were politely but firmly rejected.¹³¹ Another problem was that of producing a ware of similar quality to the original Queen's Ware. However, by the end of 1792 these had been largely overcome and the firm announced that they 'have brought the manufacture of Cream-coloured, or Queen's Ware, to a degree of perfection much superior to what it was', a statement which obviously conceals an admission that their early production left much to be desired in this regard. At the same time, they advertised 'blue-printed' ware for sale: this may have been either a willow-pattern or true 'Wedgewood' type of pottery.¹³²

When their initial production difficulties had been overcome, the firm applied for Parliamentary assistance. While no direct aid was forthcoming, they received a number of premiums from the Dublin Society during the firm's existence,¹³³ and it may have been these which enabled them to advertise that their prices were lower than those charged for imported goods.¹³⁴ In 1795 they also managed to solve their problems concerning the supply of ground flint when Thomas Greg erected a flint-mill at the Forth River, just north of the town. For this he was awarded a Dublin Society premium which had been offered to the person who was first to erect such a mill in Ireland.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, he died early in the following year.¹³⁶ He had been the dynamic

131. PRO CUST 1/236, f.137 (7 April 1794).

132. BNL 13 November 1792.

133. Proc. Dub. Soc. XXIX, p.129 (20 June 1793), XXX, p.133 (19 June 1794), XXXII, p.106 (28 April 1796). The premiums were £90 on a production of £1,045.4.3., £110.14.0 on £1,007.14.0. and £100.2.0 on £1,001.6.11. respectively for the years ending 31 May 1793, 1794 and the period 1 June 1794 to 31 March 1796. See also Millin, Sidelights, pp.65-67.

134. BNL 29 November 1793.

135. Proc. Dub. Soc. XXXII, pp.33, 105-6 (17 December 1795, 28 April 1796).

136. BNL 11 January 1796.

force behind the industry and it apparently died with him. The flint mill was sold to the cotton firm of Stevenson & Houston,¹³⁷ and when the partnership was dissolved in 1799, it was stated that it 'has been dissolved for some time'.¹³⁸ As in the glass industry, there seems to have been relatively little local demand for the firm's products and no example of their work survives apart from fragments found during building operations on the site in 1895-96.¹³⁹ However, they were not the only pottery manufacturers in the town as Victor Coats (who later became involved in the Lagan Foundry) opened a pottery in Ballymacarrett in 1792, in premises which he used principally for starch-making.¹⁴⁰ Until 1795 he frequently advertised his wares in the press, and his products would seem to have been of a more utilitarian nature and presumably were a coarse earthenware. However during 1795 and 1796 he was advertising his wares cheaply and production had probably ceased by this time.¹⁴¹

Coats' interests in pottery manufacture were but a minor part of his industrial and commercial activity at the time. His major business at this time was starchmaking, and his Ballymacarrett works was apparently of considerable size as he introduced waterpower in 1795.¹⁴² The starchmaking was a part of his original activity as a hairdresser and wigmaker, in which business he was engaged in 1782.¹⁴³ Coats' starchworks was only one of a number in

137. R.D. Vol.506, f.110.

138. BNL 29 October 1799 'Dissolved' in the announcement presumably meant moribund.

139. Young, China, pp.188-89.

140. BNL 1 May 1792.

141. NS 18 May 1895; BNL 8 April 1796; Westropp, Pottery, Proc.R.I.A. XXXII (1913) Sect.C, p.5.

142. NS 18 May 1895.

143. BNL 15 January 1782.

the town during the years preceding the taxing of hairpowder in 1797. Another hairdresser, James Lawrence, was making hairpowder in his premises in Cornmarket in that year although this work was on a small scale and concentrated on the cosmetic market.¹⁴⁴ On a larger scale was the 'New Starch, Stone-Blue and Hair-Powder Manufactory' of James Robinson and his two brothers-in-law, Charles Peyton and George Langtry, in Rosemary Lane. It opened in 1791 but closed shortly after Robinson's emigration to the United States in 1794.¹⁴⁵ There was also a fourth starchworks, that of James Beggs in Castle Street, which may have been the first in the town, apparently being in operation in 1784.¹⁴⁶ Beggs claimed to use the latest Dutch production methods and to have sent one of his staff there for training. However, in 1795, the year after this claim was made, he died and the business ceased.¹⁴⁷

Beggs was also a partner in what must be regarded as one of the more exotic industrial developments of the period, the Belfast Mustard Works of 1790.¹⁴⁸ The other partners were Thomas Brown, a leading merchant, and Richard Callwell, a merchant who had spent many years in Bristol but who had returned to his native Belfast at some date prior to 1789. Beggs and Callwell both died in 1795 and their place was taken by Richard Callwell jnr. He may have been the elder Callwell's son and is known to have worked for Beggs from 1784 to 1792 when he left to begin his own hair powder manufactory.¹⁴⁹ This may not have been a success as no further mention of it has been traced. The mustard works continued in business until Thomas Brown went bankrupt in 1798

144. BNL 22 September 1797.

145. BNL 7 October 1791, 4 March 1794.

146. BNL 23 January 1784.

147. BNL 16 May 1794, 27 March 1795.

148. BNL 29 January 1790.

149. BNL 28 August 1792.

when the site was sold to the merchants, Robert and Hugh Hyndman.¹⁵⁰ During its existence its products were said to have been exported to America and the Caribbean and to have been much appreciated there although details of its activity on the local market are virtually non-existent.¹⁵¹

The mustard works was presumably only a small concern and was far from being technologically advanced. It was nevertheless typical of the new industries of the 1780s and 1790s in two respects: the involvement in it by prominent general merchants and its export orientation, and all the other industrial developments in the town, save one, resembled it in at least one of these aspects. The exception was the cotton industry which was financed by the town's general merchants only to a very limited degree, and which was almost exclusively concerned with the domestic market.

The period from the end of the American War of Independence in 1783 to 1800 was one of great importance in the town in that the seeds of all the industrial activity of the nineteenth century had been sown. Not only was there a thriving and technologically advanced textile industry, but there was also a well established ropemaking industry and a substantial investment in flour milling and brewing. On a smaller scale, the shipbuilding and engineering industries were in existence although their growth was yet to come.

The period also saw the beginning of a shift of economic power and wealth from the general merchants to what might be termed the 'lesser businessmen', the shopkeepers and craftsmen, who by the end of the century played an all-important role in the town's economy as much by their managerial and technological skills as by their wealth. They were most in evidence in the cotton industry where the general merchants concentrated on importing raw materials and for the most part were not directly involved in financing the

150. PRONI L'Estrange & Brett Papers D1905/2/31 (papers relating to the firm).

151. BNL 11 March 1791.

industry. Even in the role of raw material importers, indeed, they found themselves threatened by the rise of the yarn merchants. Similarly in the linen trade, although they owned much of the shipping involved in it, they had lost their former control of its day-to-day activity to the specialised shipbrokers in charge of the shipping companies which had been formed to handle the British trade and were left with only the longer distance trades in their direct control. It is significant in this respect that those industries which were heavily financed by the merchants at this period involved long distance trade in one-way or another. The vitriol industry, for example, was supplied with brimstone from Sicily, while the mustard, sailcloth and glass industries were, as we have seen, export orientated. One might consider that flour milling was an exception: however those who were involved in it, such as Waddell Cunningham, William Seed and James Holmes, had been involved in the pre-war flour trade with America, while sea-biscuit formed a substantial item in the colonial trade, both as a tradable commodity and as food for the ships involved in it.

These were the principal industries in which the general merchants were involved. Any Belfast money which went into the shipbuilding industry came from the New Traders as a company and was devoted to their own business. The involvement of the merchants in brewing was relatively small, although far from insignificant, and it must not be forgotten that, like sea-bread, beer was exported to the United States and the Caribbean. Likewise, as we have seen, merchant funding of the more traditional industries in the town tended to be in those which serviced the town's exports. If we are to look for investment by the town's general merchants divorced from foreign trade or a relationship with it, we are left with the sole example of the china industry, and had this been blessed with greater success, it might well have developed an export market in time.

The general merchants of the town thus lost their dominance over its economy in proportion to the emergence of an industrial base in the town which concentrated upon production for the home market. What industrial diversification there was, was due to their efforts but the scale of these new activities was insignificant when considered against that of the cotton industry. With its rise there came a new economic order, men of skill, entrepreneurs rather than merchants. They were typified, perhaps by Victor Coats, who started his career as a humble wigmaker and hairdresser, and who made a modest fortune which he used for the development of starch and cheap pottery industries, before moving into ironfounding. All his industrial activity was connected with mass demand rather than with the craft concept of quality. It is perhaps symbolic that while he was making everyday items at his pottery, a few yards down the Ravenhill Road, Thomas Greg and his friends were trying to produce wares of a quality most of the town's inhabitants would be unable to afford.

By 1800 Belfast was an industrial rather than a commercial centre in that the dynamic force behind its development was now industry rather than trade. While the role which the merchants still played must not be underestimated, the stage had been reached when they no longer dominated the town's development in the almost exclusive fashion of a quarter of a century before. They were still wealthy and active: they had not been submerged but rather outnumbered by a rising middle class which owed them little or nothing and which had its roots and strength in the future rather than the past, in Belfast and its hinterland rather than in lands beyond the sea.

CONCLUSIONS

Having examined the structural evolution of the Belfast business community during the period, not only in its commercial and industrial activity but also in the fields of municipal affairs and national politics, it is now necessary to draw together these varied strands and in this final chapter to examine as a whole the reasons for the town's rapid growth and pioneering role which it played in Irish industrialisation. Some of these reasons have already been described in individual chapters. In Chapter 2, for example, it has been shown how the business community was composed of a closely-knit group of families, linked by ties of kinship and apprenticeship, and it has been seen that common geographical origins were also of importance, for the rapid growth of the town relied upon immigration to feed and sustain its momentum.

It has also been shown that the town's businessmen had relatively little interest in land as an alternative to commerce during the period. They did not become landlords although many made substantial fortunes from their business activities, and most owned little more land than was necessary for a country house and their family needs for vegetables and dairy produce. In this they were similar to the Roman Catholic middle classes which Mrs. Wall has described as emerging elsewhere in the country during the century, and who were prevented from gravitating upwards to the more socially respectable milieu of the landed gentry by the various restrictions of the Penal Laws.¹ These constraints did not operate upon the Belfast businessmen, and yet they showed little sign of renouncing the counting-house for the landed estate.

1. M. Wall, The rise of a catholic middle class in eighteenth-century Ireland, in IHS XI, pp.91-115, esp. 102-03.

In his Tour of Ireland, Arthur Young castigated the trend for Protestant businessmen to quit trade and industry 'when they have made from five to ten thousand pounds, to become gentlemen'.² He could not have been writing of the merchants of Belfast where even Waddell Cunningham, whose fortune was at least ten times greater than those of whom Young wrote so acidly, and the Batt brothers with their substantial land holdings in Co. Wexford, remained firmly entrenched in their business affairs.

In a previous chapter³ the lack of available land has been mentioned as a reason for the lack of progression of the town's businessmen into landed society. It was only one of many reasons: another was the lack of political opportunity afforded by the Test Act although this was probably of minimal importance as the First and Second Congregations in the town, to which most of the wealthier merchants belonged, were Unitarian and would not have cavilled at the observance of occasional conformity. In addition, The Test Act was repealed in 1780 and so was only effective during the first part of the period. A far more important reason why the Belfast businessman tended to remain in business long after he had amassed sufficient wealth to retire may well have been that the making of money was more respectable in the town and its vicinity than elsewhere in Ireland, because the linen industry had taken the values of commercial and industrial life and propagated them in a rural environment. The draper was a man of commerce, but he was also a figure of the rural community, bringing the Ulster rural population firmly within the cash nexus. The prosperity of the countryside, and the rent rolls of the landed gentry, were increased by the existence of the linen trade in a manner virtually unknown in other rural areas in the Irish countryside, and

2. Young, Tour ii, p. 191

3. Chap. 6 (iii)

so the gentry could hardly ignore or despise the urban businessman. Another factor which increased the importance of the merchant was the weakness of the landed society in the area. There were only a small number of landowners in the vicinity of the town, and most of these were absentees. Edward Cooke, the Chief Secretary in the late 1790s, indeed stated in a letter to Auckland in 1796 that there were 'no resident Gentry', and that for all the boasts of Lord Hertford about the prosperity of his estate, 'last year he set his Demesne, . . . he has no Representative of his Family upon it . . . he cannot command the Votes of his Tenants & he has no influence whatever as Landlord . . .'. He went on to state that Hertford was not an isolated case but that a similar situation existed throughout the province and that consequently the urban communities, while 'very flourishing, wealthy, industrious and independent, . . . being unopposed by resident Nobility or Gentry, they are actually upon Equality & feel & think & act from that sentiment'.⁴ The town's political independence was probably reinforced to a considerable extent by the Presbyterian background of most of its businessmen, which stressed the virtues of honesty and hard work and allowed a larger role to the individual in society than was the case with the Establishment, and this individuality was sharpened by the religious tensions of the eighteenth century.

The dominant landowners about the town - Donegall, Hertford, Upton, Dungannon and Yelverton - were all absentees and the Belfast businessman, lacking a local landed society with which to relate, was thus able to acquire social respectability while continuing to be involved in industry and commerce. In this context it is important to note that when Waddell Cunningham stood as a candidate in the Carrickfergus by-election of 1784, he canvassed both as a gentleman of means and as a businessman. Many businessmen remained solely interested in extending their fortune and many visitors and others commented

4. BL Add. MSS 34454, f.57 (Auckland MSS, Cooke to Auckland, 3 September 1796).

on the prominent place which business played in the townspeople's lives. Some, no doubt, carried the matter to extremes. Hugh Montgomery, for example, was known irreverently to his fellow townspeople as 'Split-fig'. His contemporary, John Smyth, wrote of him many years later that he 'was a mighty stickler for honest weights and measures, and was so scrupulous on the point that he thought it as sinful to defraud himself as his neighbour. Hence, for the ease of his conscience and the satisfaction of his principles, he would even split a fig to secure a standing beam'.⁵

While such assiduity in business matters was perhaps unusual, many found the town's businessmen distinctly boring. In 1787, for example, Dr Haliday confided in a letter to Lord Charlemont that he was dreading a forthcoming dinner at Waddell Cunninghams' where 'after being bored with gardens and hot-houses, and the linen market, and ships, and regaled with the productions of the four quarters of the globe, I shall have the pleasure of drinking your lordship's health',⁶ while two years later he bitterly complained about the difficulties of retaining political interest in a town where 'the spirit of commerce . . . monopolizes the human mind, and most of our merchants are infinitely more anxious about their own credit than that of parliament or the nation'.⁷ The forebodings of Chichester Skeffington, the newly-appointed Port Collector in 1791 were remarkably similar to those of Haliday in 1787: that September he wrote to his wife (who was still in Dublin) to tell her that 'I have to undergo the unpleasant operation of partaking of an entertainment which the merchants of the Town are to give me this day week. I was waited upon by a Deputation for that purpose and it was impossible for me to avoid accepting the invitation',⁸ and some six years later, when the French emigré, de Latocnaye,

5. 'An Octogenarian', Belfast Sixty Years Ago (reprinted in Belfast Telegraph 7 November 1934). The author was John, son of John Galt Smith.

6. Charlemont MSS ii, p.55. Haliday to Charlemont, 22 June 1787.

7. ibid. ii, p.96. Same to same, 11 April 1789.

8. PRONI D1108/C/5A. Skeffington to Lady Harriet Skeffington, 3 September 1791.

passed through the town on his tour of Ireland, he remarked that 'if you start a conversation with them about the Emperor or General Clairfaire, they will possibly talk about the prices of sugar or linen according as they are trading in one or other, or may remark that if peace is not made promptly they do not know how they are going to get rid of their muslin or how they are to buy wine'.⁹

There are indications that religion as well as politics was subordinated to the interests of trade. John Wesley, for example, was a frequent visitor to the town during the period, but the Methodist community remained small, and poor. In 1762 he chose as his text 'Gallio cared for none of these things': as Gallio was a Roman proconsul, one suspects that the attitude of the town's businessmen lay behind the text,¹⁰ while in 1771 he remarked in his journal about the 'self-sufficiency' of the townspeople in spiritual matters,¹¹ and in 1778 once again preached on the Gallio text, and doubted if many in his congregation understood its implications.¹²

These were the views, of course, of outsiders, and the members of the business community saw their enthusiasm for business in a very different light. They were naturally proud of their prosperity and their achievements: in their introduction to Belfast Politics, for example, Harry Joy and Rev. William Bruce boasted of how in the town industry was fostered and credit held good 'while it tottered in almost every corner of Europe'¹³ and the same

9. de Latocnaye, A Frenchmans Walk Through Ireland 1796-7 (trans. J. Stevenson), (Belfast, 1917), p.222.

10. Acts, Ch.XVII, v.17; N.Curnock (ed) The Journal of Rev. John Wesley A.M. (London 1909-16) IV, p.449.

11. ibid. V, p.421.

12. ibid. VI, p.197.

13. Belfast Politics, p.xv.

pride is evident in the young George Benn's early work of 1823 when he wrote that ' . . . there is not undoubtedly a town in the kingdom which has advanced to eminence with equal rapidity, or which has been so little distinguished in the ancient history of Ireland, and so much in the modern'.¹⁴ While Benn was correct in making this statement, for no other Irish town did expand at the rate of Belfast during the period, Belfast's experience was not unique in Britain. Dr Jackson's study of Hull, for example, reveals an even greater rate of growth, its population rising from about 13,000 in 1770 (about the same as Belfast) to almost 30,000 by the end of the century, most of the increase occurring after 1780,¹⁵ while Manchester's population rose from about 17,000 in 1758 to over 70,000 by 1800.¹⁶ A rapid growth also occurred in the urban centres of western Scotland where between 1755 and 1801, while the population of Belfast increased from 8,500 to 20,000, that of Glasgow rose from 31,700 to 83,700, Paisley from 6,800 to 31,200 and Greenock from 3,800 to 17,400.¹⁷ If the growth and development of Belfast are seen, not as part of the Irish economic experience, but as part of the British economic situation, the uniqueness of the town's expansion quickly evaporates. Its connections with those parts of Ireland other than its immediate hinterland were comparatively weak compared with the strong ties between it and the major commercial centres of the west coast of Great Britain, and with London. Dublin's most important function in relation to Belfast was as an entrepot, and there are few traces of Belfast men engaged in business in the capital,

14. (G.Benn) The History of the Town of Belfast (Belfast, 1823), pp.3-4.

15. G.Jackson, Hull in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1972), p.2.

16. W.H.Chaloner, The Birth of Modern Manchester, in C.F.Carter (ed) Manchester and its Region (Manchester, 1962), p.134.

17. T.C.Smout, A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830 (2nd ed., London, 1970), p.261.

a stark contrast with the situation in Great Britain, or even in the Colonies.¹⁸ Most of the personal connections with Dublin concerned minor businesses such as haberdashery, millinery, bookselling and, to some extent, watchmaking, in which a knowledge of the latest trends and fashions played an important part, and the links with Dublin probably owed much to that city's dominant social and cultural position in Irish affairs, rather than to its economic position.

The importance of examining Belfast within the context of the British economy as a whole rather than solely within that of Ireland will become clearer if it is compared with that of the Upper Clyde. Before 1775 both areas were economically dominated by their merchants, and had extremely well developed transatlantic trades, that of Belfast concentrating on the Caribbean and that of the Clyde on the tobacco trade. By 1800 the cotton industry had emerged as the predominant economic force in both areas, and in Scotland its rise has been traditionally attributed to investment in it by former tobacco merchants.¹⁹ However over the last twenty years this view has been convincingly challenged, first by Robertson who demonstrated that 'the men behind the development of the cotton manufacture were for the most part the master weavers of Glasgow and the surrounding district', although he allowed that it was possible 'though there is little evidence to support the assumption that there may have been some financial connexion between the one-time tobacco merchants and the new industrial developments'.²⁰ However cotton played a very lowly part in these industrial developments, for merchant involvement was concentrated in the many activities which sprang up on Clydeside at the period, such as leather, ropes, glass and sugar. More recently, his conclusions

18. See Chap. 5.

19. See, for example, H. Hamilton, The Industrial Revolution in Scotland (Oxford, 1932), p.121.

20. M.L. Robertson, Scottish Commerce and the American War of Independence, in Econ. Hist. Rev., 2nd ser. IX, p.130.

have been reexamined and restated by Devine who has shown how 'the colonial merchants represented a minority financial interest in the (cotton) industry and even in those firms in which they had a share they never supplied more than half of the total capital',²¹ and how what industrial development they did invest in was in other areas of the economy such as sugar, ropes, glass and coal, the latter by means of an accident through their ownership of lands on which it was discovered.²² He goes on to show how these industries were linked to the merchants' trading activities, and pointing out that 'many of the ventures established perhaps might not have evolved if they had not answered specific needs in colonial markets or within the regime of individual traders.'²³

Both writers might just as well have been writing of Belfast as of Scotland, for the situation in each case was remarkably similar and there was equally a lack of merchant investment in the Belfast cotton industry.²⁴ As in Glasgow, merchant investment in industry was concentrated on the other activities carried on in the town, notably in ropes and glass. Nevertheless, the part played by the town's merchants in the development of the cotton industry must not be underrated, for Belfast owed its initial economic strength to its trade and its strong commercial sector was a powerful factor in its subsequent economic expansion. Trade, by expanding the available markets, facilitated economic specialisation and diversification and promoted the development of an institutional framework of banking, insurance, marketing and other services. It provided finance for a wide range of industrial activities and, in the case of the cotton industry, supplied a means of access to the sources of raw material and machinery.

21. T.M.Devine, *The Colonial Trades and Industrial Investment in Scotland, c.1700 - 1815*, in Econ.Hist.Rev., 2nd ser. XXIX (1976), p.11.

22. ibid, pp.4-7.

23. ibid, p.13.

24. See Chap 9. . . .

The relationship between the merchants and the cotton industry was not the only similarity between Belfast and the Upper Clyde towns. Another parallel was the remarkable number of long lasting mercantile partnerships which were a characteristic feature of the commercial and industrial activity of the two areas.²⁵ In both cases the principal businessmen were simultaneously engaged in a wide range of activities. Their individual contributions were often quite small, but put together in a partnership, could often amount to a considerable sum, while a wide spread of interests served to safeguard the investor against failure of any particular sector. The importance of the Scottish example in Belfast may be gauged from the fact that such a structure was commonplace despite the absence of the Scottish law of partnerships which safeguarded investors' interests by treating partnerships as separate legal entities. No legislation containing the idea of limited liability existed in Ireland until the Anonymous Partnerships Act of 1782,²⁶ and this had little effect on the situation in Belfast.

These links between Belfast and the Upper Clyde become all the more interesting when the relatively small amount of actual known contacts between the two areas is taken into consideration. There is, for example, no evidence that Belfast men worked in Glasgow, while the known sources of skilled labour for the town's industrialisation all point to England. However the Scottish Lowlands was the area from which most Ulster Presbyterians originally hailed, and the two areas were united by strong ties of kinship and religion which, while less obvious because of the nature of surviving sources, were probably just as influential as the more commercial links which existed with England and America. It must also be realised that, because of

25. T.M.Devine, The Tobacco Lords (Edinburgh, 1975), Ch.5(a).

26. 21-22 Geo III (Ire) c.146.

the surviving sources, the absence of names is only a negative evidence: there was certainly a brisk trade between Belfast and the Clyde ports which involved numerous individuals in both centres.

Unfortunately the surviving source material provides us with little material which can be used statistically to provide information on such items as capital formation. However, since Belfast's economy behaved similarly to that of the industrialising regions of Great Britain, the forces at work there may reasonably be presumed to be operating in the town in the absence of evidence to the contrary. The 1780s, for example, were years of extremely rapid commercial and industrial growth during which many of the conditions laid down by Rostow for his 'take-off' stage of economic development were to be found in the town.²⁷ There was a rapid expansion of the entrepreneurial class, many of the new members having no previous business experience or family background based in the town's business life. The scope of commercial activity widened with the opening up of new markets and the intensification of trade to those already in existence. New Industries, involving new technological advances, expanded rapidly and new opportunities were provided for the diversion of capital into the industrial sector.

Whether or not one envisages Belfast as part of the British or the Irish economy, however, it cannot be denied that the achievement of its business community in the period was considerable. Even during the 1760s, this small town was the centre of a trade which covered two continents: between then and the end of the century it developed an industrial base whose size and extent in relation to the size of the town was unparalleled elsewhere in Ireland, and it managed to employ and accommodate a population which doubled during the period by developing new municipal, social and commercial institutions which directed and controlled the town's expansion.

27. See W.W.Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1971), pp.7-9.

Much of the success which attended this period of expansion was due to a combination of exceptionally favourable circumstances. The linen industry had created a cash-based economy in its hinterland and had produced a commodity which formed the basis of the town's widespread trading links. The contacts which it engendered were strengthened by family and other social connections with the most economically advanced areas of Great Britain. But the town's development would not have taken place without the readiness of the town's businessmen to use every opportunity which presented itself to advance their interests. This readiness to take advantage of opportunities can be seen many times during the period, for example, in the way in which they managed to forestall the campaign for an Ulster Linen Hall, originally proposed by Newry merchants, by establishing a more attractive hall in Belfast. It can be seen, too, in the virtual takeover of the Lagan Navigation by the town's merchants and in the various activities of the Chamber of Commerce. It can also be seen in trade, for example in the speed with which business was resumed with America in 1782, and in industry, where developments in flour milling, glass and, above all, cotton manufacturing, as well as in other sectors, were well abreast of those in England or Scotland.

The peak period of development would seem to have been the years immediately after the end of the American War of Independence, until about 1791. The crisis of the early 1770s was exceptionally severe, harvest failure combining with depression in the linen trade and local agrarian bitterness to create conditions of misery and unrest. The subsequent crises of 1778-79 and the early 1780s did not have nearly as devastating an effect upon the local economy, partly, it is likely, because sales of linen were maintained, although at the expense of prices.²⁸ That this occurred was a tribute to the ability of the town's businessmen, for elsewhere the quantity as well as the price

28. See Fig. 9

declined rapidly. The coming of peace in 1783 however saw an end to the relative stagnation which had marked the town's economic life for the previous decade and it is from the following eight years that nearly all the economic and industrial developments of note in the period can be traced. Trade increased rapidly, not only with Great Britain, but with North America and the Caribbean. From 1783 the cotton industry began to expand, and its most technologically advanced sector, that of spinning, had almost reached its fullest development by the end of the decade, expansion being subsequently most marked in the weaving end thanks to heavy imports of yarn. Nearly every other industry in the town owed its expansion to the 1780s: subsequently the trend was one of consolidation and even contraction, and this pattern can also be seen in the amount of traffic using the port, the tonnage of shipping on which harbour dues were payable to the Ballast Board expanding until 1792, subsequently stagnating, then declining until the troubled years leading up to the Rebellion but rapidly increasing thereafter (Fig. 48). The 1790s, indeed, were not happy years in the town. The population of 18,000 in 1791 was but 20,000 a decade later and the only industry which was expanding significantly was cotton-weaving and trade signally failed to expand, with the exception of the British provisions trade which grew to meet wartime demands. Unemployment and discontent were rife: in May 1793 5,000 artisans were said to be out of work in the town and its hinterland,²⁹ and discontent among the business community expressed itself in the formation of the Society of United Irishmen in October 1791.³⁰ Its subsequent expansion and its transformation into a secret revolutionary society as a result of government persecution did little to enhance the town's prosperity, for it involved in its ranks many of the town's leading businessmen. While only one, Henry Joy McCracken, was

29. NS 18 May 1793.

30. Hist. Collections, pp.358-59; F.MacDermott, Theobald Wolfe Tone: a Biographical Study (London, 1939), pp.83-5.

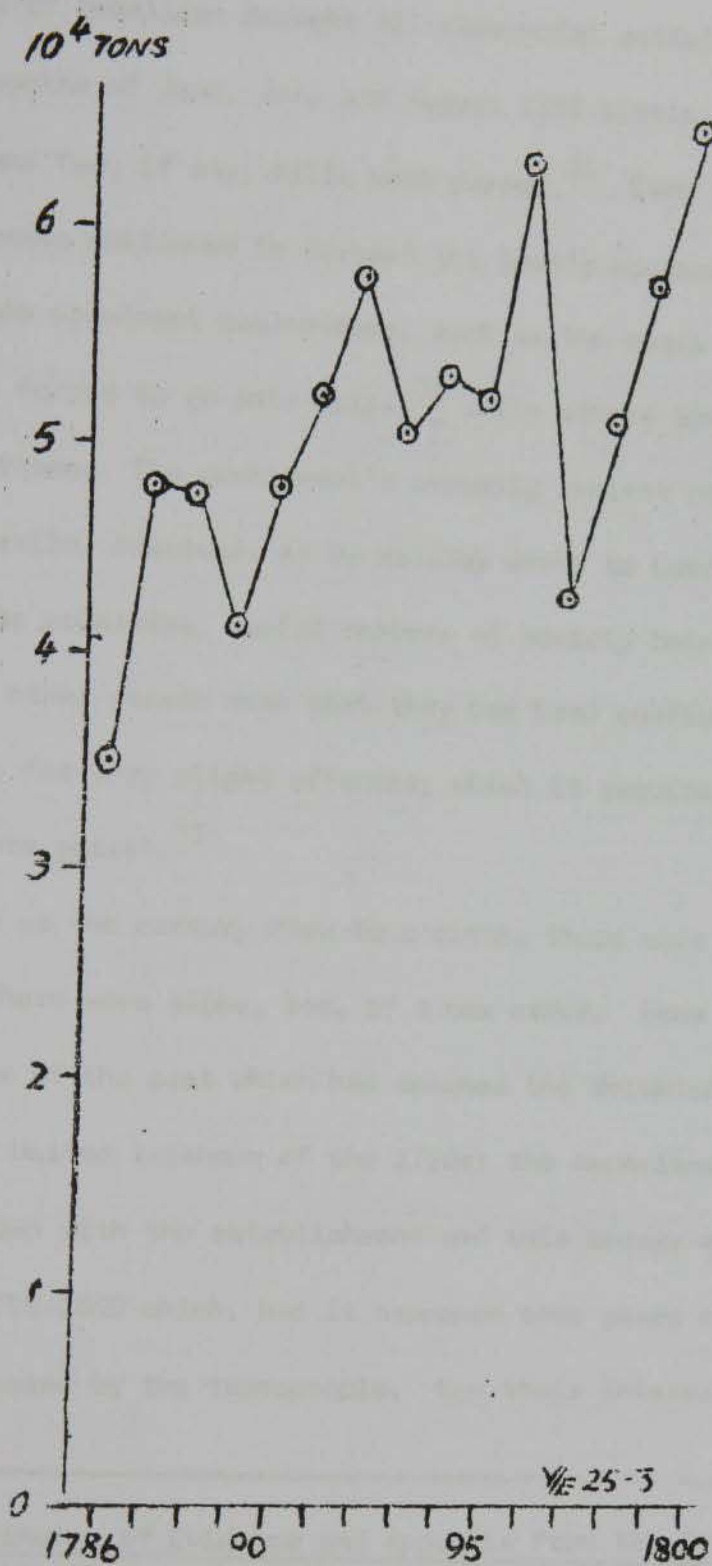


FIG. 48. TONNAGE USING BELFAST PORT, 1786 TO 1800

actually executed, many others including Samuel Neilson, Henry Haslett and Robert Simms were arrested along with many other townspeople of lesser importance, and the fear of rebellion caused many others to leave the town. The outbreak of rebellion brought all commercial activity to a standstill: during the months of June, July and August 1798 little or no business was transacted and few, if any, bills were passed.³¹ Even after the Rebellion, political events continued to disrupt the town's economic life, for in its aftermath some prominent businessmen, such as the sugar refiner, Francis Jordan, were forced to go into exile,³² while others spent considerable periods in prison. The government's avowedly lenient policy, with its emphasis on exile, involved, as Dr Haliday wrote to Lord Charlemont, 'in many instances cruelties, useful members of society being banished, some for ever, for no other reason than that they had been confined on groundless suspicions or for very slight offences, which it required a microscopic eye to magnify into guilt'.³³

However as the century drew to a close, there were once more signs of expansion. There were signs, too, of a new order. Gone was the Presbyterian egalitarianism of the past which had spawned the Volunteers of the 1770s and 1780s and the United Irishmen of the 1790s: the experience of the 1790s had aligned the town with the establishment and this became clear in the Union campaign of 1799-1800 which, had it happened some years earlier, would have been hotly opposed by the townspeople. Now their interests lay in admission

31. Report, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix from the Committee on the Circulating Paper, the Specie and the Current Coin of Ireland and also, on the Exchange between that Part of the United Kingdom and Great Britain (H.C. 1803-4(86) IV, p.153).

32. SPD Rebellion Papers 620/46/101. Thomas Whinnery, Belfast to John Lees, Dublin, March 1767.

33. H.M.C. Charlemont MSS II, p.331, Haliday to Charlemont, 8 August 1798.

to commercial equality with Great Britain, and while no pro-Union petition was received from the town,³⁴ there was no widespread hostility and the town's Orange Lodge was the only one to declare in favour of the measure.³⁵ What opposition there was came from the cotton industry which was in an especially vulnerable position, and its fears were soon shown by history to be well justified!³⁶ The majority of the town's businessmen, however, had come to believe that the town's future prosperity would depend upon the strength of its links with Great Britain.

34. G.C.Bolton, The Passing of the Irish Act of Union (Oxford, 1966), p.128.

35. BNL 4 March 1800.

36. See J.J.Monaghan, The Rise and Fall of the Belfast Cotton Industry, IHS III (1942), pp.1-17.

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D 50.	Reports of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.
D 162	Dobbs MSS.
D 199	McTear MSS
D 207	Masserene MSS.
D 233	Edmonstone Papers.
D 270, 516	Duffin Papers.
D 272	McCance Papers
D 322, 1108/A) MIC 32, 45/3) T 617)	Cunningham of Crookedstone Papers.
D 332, 537	Worsley Papers.
D 342	Cleaver & Fulton Papers.
D 354	Mussenden MSS
D 453	Maps (includes plan of Belfast water supply, 1795).
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D 1044	Greer MSS.
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