

SLIGO CORPORATION: ITS CHARTERS AND PATENT HOLDERS

Sligo Corporation was formed by Royal Charter in March, 1613.

It constituted a Provost, 12 free burgesses and a Commonalty. It provided the jurisdiction for local courts of record. The Corporation could enact bye-laws, enjoy a mercatory guild and possess a common seal. The posts created for the better governance of Sligo were two Sergeants-at-Mace, and other interior officers. Importantly, Sligo returned two MPs to Parliament.

King James I in late 1612 issued the King's Letter from his royal residence at Hampton Court to commence the process of Sligo being granted a Charter.

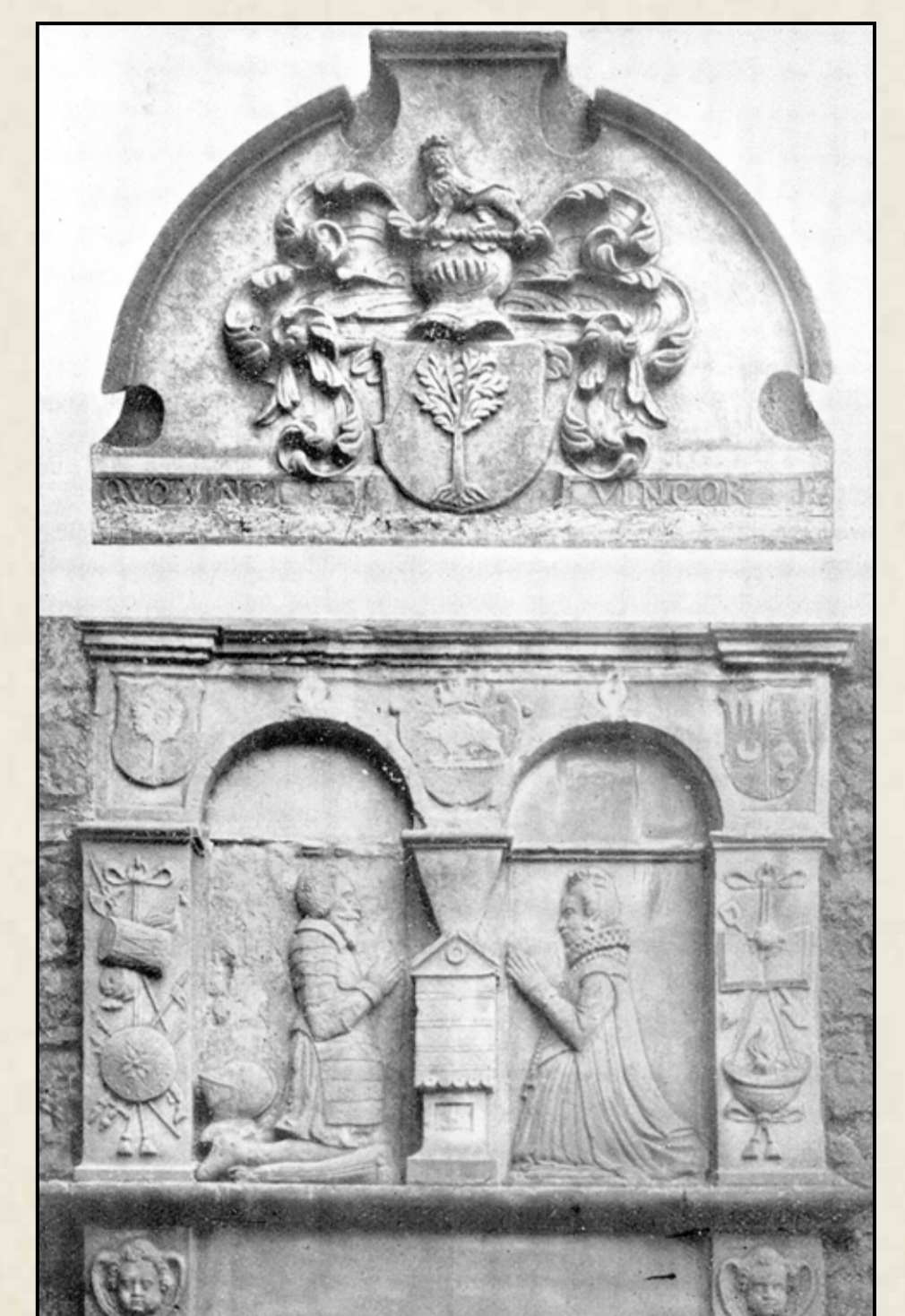
The Lord Deputy, Sir Arthur Chichester of Belfast, received the King's Letter and a fiat with the Corporation members listed and was forwarded to the Solicitor General who prepared the draft Charter. This draft Charter was engrossed by one of the six clerks in Chancery on the Patent Rolls and a copy sent to Sligo Corporation.

However, only when the Charter was signed and sealed did it create the body corporate and politic of the Corporation. Unfortunately, the original Charter of 1613 is still missing although transcribed records, in both Latin and English, exist.

In the early 17th Century, Sligo was heavily depopulated due to the Elizabethan Wars with Lower Connaught at the epicentre of Irish resistance to English rule. The Sligo Charter of 1613 expressly recited it was granted on the petition of the *inhabitants* and for the purpose of *encouraging settlers*.

Sligo's most powerful Gael, Sir Donald O'Connor-Sligo, in his Irish tongue, entered into a Treaty of Peace with Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558–1603) and was re-granted castles, royalties and customs in the Barony of Carbury and later petitioned regarding *de Manerio Castro et Villa de Sligagh alias Slygo (The Manor Castle and town of Sligagh alias Slygo)*.

However, by 1604 Sir James Fullerton, a Scottish Spy and Courtier to King James I (reign 1603–1625), based in Trinity College Dublin, became the Constable of Sligo. King James 1st granted a patent to hold a weekly market and two fairs in Sligo on St John the Baptist's and St Michael's Day, and a court of Pye Powder and the usual toll; he was further granted the foundation of a water-mill, the water-course and two fish weirs upon the River Sligo, with all the tithes etc belonging to the Sligo Priory.



O'Connor-Sligo Memorial, Sligo Abbey.

Sir Donough O'Connor-Sligo (d.1609) protested against Sir Fullerton's grants at Sligo Friary and Ballymote Castle but his objections fell on deaf ears as Fullerton being both Courtier and Knight of the Stool to King James I, was amongst that monarch's most trusted confidantes.

Upon Fullerton's return to Court in England, Roger Jones became the Constable or Keeper of the newly erected Jail of Sligo in 1609. An Elizabethan soldier and wool-merchant, the Derbyshire-native became the first Provost of Sligo in 1613.

Markets, Tolls & Customs

In 1621 Sligo was granted a Staple, the Staple was a medieval method of trade and taxation whereby the King required that trade in certain goods were transacted at specific market towns or ports. The Staple contained the commercial power of urban Sligo, in contrast to the 'adventurers' of 1613, with the town's Gaelic elite, the O'Creans, figuring prominently. The Staple gave full power to trade in all wool, woollen stuffs, yarns and hides, with all Irish ports and cities like Liverpool. In 1627 Sligo was granted an additional fair in Sligo.

Due to the political flux experienced in 17th Century Ireland, the O'Creans and the O'Connor-Sligos would experience reversals to their prestige. The ownership of the right to hold a mart in Sligo was regularised by virtue of a Private Act and a re-grant of Sligo's Tolls and Customs was claimed in 1674.

Importantly by 1722 the Manor of Sligo was for sale. It was owned by Sir Francis Leicester of Tabley near Chester. The Welsh-born General Owen Wynne, who had served at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, wished to buy the Manor of Sligo and Hazlewood.

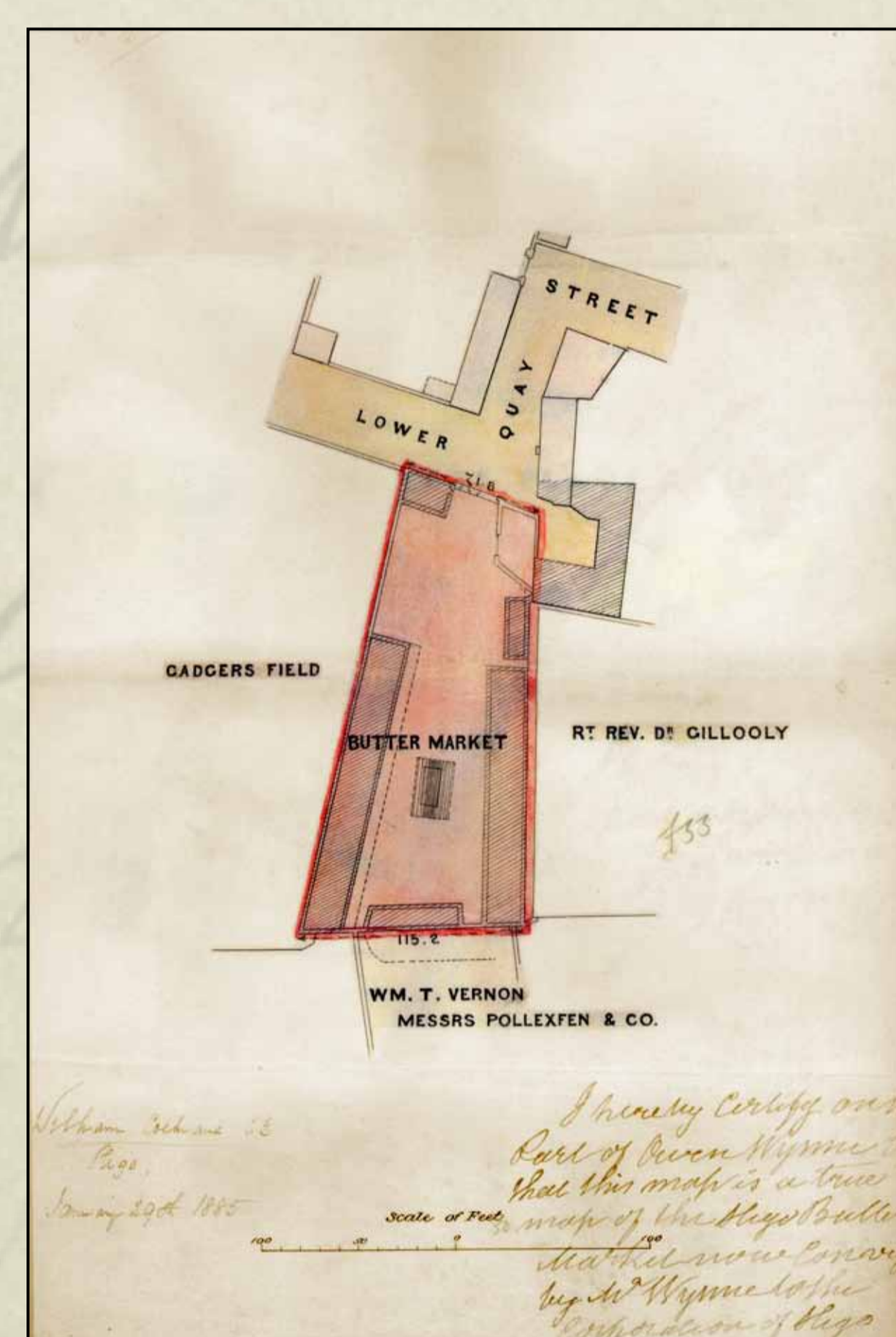
The Charters, though granted to ensure the progress of the Commonalty, had de facto become a private source of revenue for the Patent holder, eg the right to hold the Sligo Butter Market and the position of Butter Taster, were the most heavily litigated Patent rights in Ireland's 19th Century law courts.

Belatedly, in the late 18th Century, the Wynnes had constructed a new Market House at the Corn Market, relocated the Butter Market to the quay, and provided Cattle Pounds at the Northern entrance to the town, but dissatisfaction was brewing regarding the excessive tolls and customs charged, allied with the bribery and fines exacted.

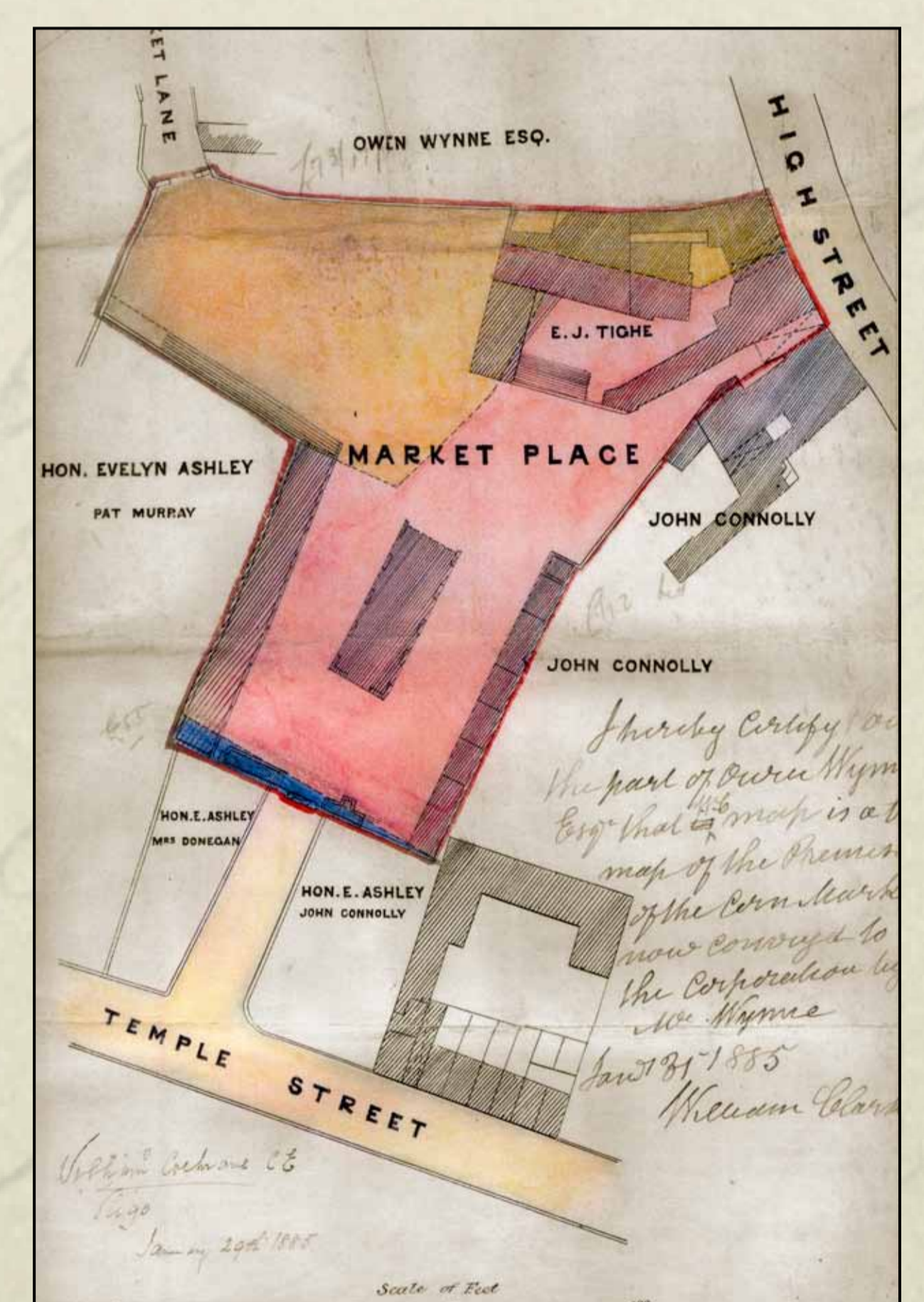
Determined local merchants questioned the autocratic rule of Hazlewood and all vital aspects of Sligo's governing Charter, its auxillary Patents and the new 1803 Act, which controlled the town's trade and politics. Under Wynne domination, Sligo had turned into a political 'Rotten Borough'.

For all practical purposes the two earliest grants of James I were the Charters of the Borough until an Act under George II (reign 1727–1760) saw the Corporation become Conservators of the Port, maintaining a Ballast Office, and under George III (reign 1760-1820), Vestries were empowered to repair the streets.

But the Wynne's right to hold butter, corn and turf markets, and its associated offices, such as Weightmaster, were challenged by powerful merchants, in the main, the Martins and Killeleas.



Butter Market



Market Yard

The right to become a Freeman and Burgess on the Borough was litigated by Abraham Martin.

The control of Charters and the abolition of the ruling order, regarding Sligo Harbour, its costs for pontage and murage, along with the general mismanagement of the town, which saw Sligo described as the worst lit and most ill-paved in Ireland, were all matters petitioned before the House of Lords.

The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell declared the Mr Wynne MP had such control over Sligo Borough "he could nominate his stable-boy" to represent the town in parliament.

The Irish Municipal Reform Act of 1840 provided for a democratically elected Corporation with a restricted franchise electorate and this legislation was designed to dismantle the feudal strangle-hold that existed in Sligo.

Indeed, during the 19th Century Sligo was the only Borough in the West of Ireland and was amongst ten of the principal towns on the Island to hold such civic prestige.

During the 20th Century the last vestiges of Corporate control over Sligo's markets slipped away during the march of modernity and unenforceable bye-laws.



Pig Market and Fair Green

During medieval times certain towns were granted self-governance by the English Crown, being referred to as boroughs. The formal status of a borough was conferred by Royal Charter. Boroughs were generally governed by a self-selecting Corporation.

