



A Description of the Irish in Seville Merchants of the Eighteenth Century

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The authors offer a survey of the presence of the Irish on the Atlantic Coast of the south of Spain, focusing on their commercial activities during the eighteenth century, specifically the case of Patricio O'Conry and Juana Keating.

This work is based on a wider study that the authors are carrying out on the role played by foreign merchants in eighteenth-century Spain. The first phase covered a number of the families of Flemish merchants; in this study we seek to deal with some of the defining characteristics of Irish merchants.

Information on the Irish presence in the city of Seville is fairly sketchy compared to that on other colonies formed by British subjects on the Iberian Peninsula, among which Cádiz, Málaga and Bilbao are most prominent. Sources used up till now do not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the volume of trade between Seville and other places; caution is therefore advised when judging the importance of this trade. The gradual silting of the (Gualquivir) river made it navigable only to vessels of shallow draught, usually Dutch or Swedish. Even these vessels in dry years found it difficult to travel beyond Puebla del Río, and for that very reason the moorings there came to be used frequently. Water-borne traffic used the following route: a Spanish vessel - often a kind of sloop known as a 'balandra' - would bring cargo from Seville to either Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Cádiz or Puerto de Santa María. The load would then be transferred at one of these three ports to a ship with greater draught - usually a foreign vessel - destined for a port outside Spain. The entire process was overseen by a merchant based at the port and by the ship's mate.

This practice is what restricts our information about merchandise sent from Seville, or imported through that city, if we only follow vessels' point of origin and destination. For this reason we have turned to the slow and often haphazard study of paperwork and legal documentation. The twenty-four surviving official documents we have traced - promissory notes, reports of losses of ships or damage, demand notes, sales of products, powers of attorney, bankruptcies, wills, inventories of goods, dowries, sales and rentals of furniture, together with other written material, permit us to draw as accurate a profile as possible of the situation of Irish people in the city of Seville. In general, however, this documentation does not permit us to state the volume of trade or the category of merchandise involved. This problem was highlighted in García-Baquero's now classic study, and the difficulty has been recognised in other work (García-Baquero 1988: 479, Lario de Oñate 2000: 123). At any rate, using indirect evidence it is indeed possible to offer a preliminary outline of commercial activity.

From this it is clear that Irishmen, together with their English coreligionists, formed part of Seville's trade with the rest of Europe. This trade was of a lesser extent than the trade with America, but was nevertheless of consequence in supplying those primary materials that were needed for industry and food consumption in the countries to the north. The Irish colony in Seville was of lesser size than the very powerful Flemish community or the extensive French community. Its presence dates at least from the sixteenth century (Martín Murphy 2002: 487-489), although it was during the eighteenth century that it reached its zenith, in spite of Seville's then declining importance as a trading city.

The tradition of commercial interchanges with England in fact can be traced to the Anglo-Castilian treaty of 1254, very shortly after the *reconquista* of Seville from the Moors. We have no information on Irishmen settled in the city until towards the end of the fifteenth century. The nature of the trade was to remain unchanged for centuries: wool, wine, oil, soap, cereals, leathers and furs exchanged for goods such as textiles, wheat and fish. There is evidence of trade with Ireland at this time - wine for fish (Ladero Quesada 1980: 98-99. Childs 1978).

The growth of the volume of English manufactures is closely linked to the corresponding increase in the export of high-quality Castilian wool. As is known, England was able to increase its production of wool, though of inferior quality, by feeding its sheep on the abundant grass yielded by its well-watered pastures. While the production of high-quality wool in England decreased, there was an increase in demand for high quality fabrics. This obliged English manufacturers to look elsewhere for their supply and to come to Spain in search of what was then the finest wool available in Europe. More than half the wool exported by Castile left through the port of Bilbao in the eighteenth century, and wool exports increased even more to satisfy the demand of countries such as Holland and France (Bilbao, Fernández de Pinedo 1986: 343-359).

The great success story of Castilian wool, it appears, is above all something that evolved in the eighteenth century. In 1795 Castilian wool sent to England represented 60% of the total volume exported, a large increase compared to the previous period. More interesting still is England's loss of interest in importing Irish wool. At the beginning of the century this represented 90%, while by the 1740s it amounted to only half the wool imported. Demand in England switched decisively towards raw material of higher quality (Bilbao 1998). This circumstance, together with difficulties occasioned by the heavy tax on the export abroad of articles of Irish wool that was imposed by the Anglo-Irish parliament in 1698, and the further tax the English parliament imposed in the same year on the import of Irish goods to England and Wales, caused many Irish merchant families to emigrate for economic reasons. These joined the Wild Geese, who a generation earlier had gone into exile following the military defeats at the Boyne in 1690 and Aughrim in 1691 and the repression that followed these defeats (O'Beirne Ranelagh 1999: 74-76).

The role of the Irish in Spanish trade with Europe: A survey of the Eighteenth Century

If there is one city in which the Anglo-Irish colony was important it is Cádiz, headquarters of the monopoly trade with the Americas and Spain's main port in the eighteenth century. There they formed one of the most influential commercial colonies of the eighteenth century, after the French and the Spaniards, although with a much larger volume of earnings on an individual basis (García Fernández 2005: 32-34). The Irish were the dominant section of the Anglo-Irish community, probably because they enjoyed preferential treatment as compared to their English coreligionists, even though they too were subjects of His Britannic Majesty. For example, they did not have to participate in the registration of foreigners, such as was carried out in 1791 and 1794. This was because 'the Irish settled in these Kingdoms must be allowed hold and maintain the privileges awarded them which give them parity with natural-born Spaniards... in which regard once settled in these kingdoms they are accepted as Spaniards and do enjoy the same rights according to the decrees that have been issued' (Lario de Oñate, 2000: 100, 124-130, 132-133, 137). The Irish benefited from their situation by being able to avoid restrictions, and the conflicts between the two kingdoms of Spain and England, and to carry on business with fewer impediments than the English.

In the town of Huelva, a small foreign merchant colony also settled. It became the only customs point for the coast of Huelva Province, the county of Niebla and the greater part of the Andévalo region, and thus constituted a distribution centre for the towns in these areas (Lara Ródenas, Peña Guerrero 1991). Foreign trade was dominated by the Irish, who exported cereal, cork and wine (González Cruz 1991), and maintained close relations with Cádiz. The first Irish to settle in Huelva were Thomas and Pablo White or Blanco, brothers of Guillermo Blanco, who had settled in Seville, and also related to other Blancos resident in Cádiz. Coupled with these was the Archdekin or Arcediano family (González Escobar 1991: 271-292), from Waterford, and the Waddings from Carrick. These families engaged primarily in the wholesale and retail trade and in shipping.

In Málaga there was also an Irish colony - among other foreign communities - involved in wholesale trading. This was much more important in the second half of the eighteenth century than in the post-Napoleonic period, when Spaniards - many of them from outside the region - took over the trade. Aurora Gámez and Begoña Villar have studied the careers of these merchants. They were frequently grouped into 'mixed' companies, that is to say formed of foreigners and native Spaniards, even though the same foreigners had lived a long time in the country and had children who could be considered fully Spanish.

One Irishman stands out from the others. Juan Murphy, a native of Waterford, formed part of Málaga's wealthy merchant class from at least 1776. The family established branches of his company in Veracruz (Mexico), Cádiz and London, trading actively with cities both in Europe and in the Americas. He was also a ship-owner, a landowner, and of course an *hidalgo* (nobleman). Juan Galvey, from Carrick-on-Suir in County Tipperary, is an example of those who used marriage to open up paths for advancement in business. His first marriage was to Andrea de Gand y Vittermont, member of a Flemish family settled between Cádiz and Seville. The O'Briens, who married into the French Arboré family that had settled in those cities, continued in the same line of business as the others, while the Quilty family established sporadic relationships with merchants from Seville.

The beginning of commercial relations between the Canary Islands and Great Britain dates from the sixteenth century, with the export of sweet malmsey wine for the English court. The Irish colonies that grew from this maintained close links with those based in the Andalusian ports already mentioned; families such as White, Walsh, Colgan, and Fitzgerald had a long history in the Canaries (Guimerá Ravina 1985: 49-48, 58).

Irish merchants in Seville: An initial sketch

In spite of a slowdown in its commercial activity, it could be said that Seville continued to enjoy significant traffic, as its strategic position some ninety kilometres from the sea provided merchants with the opportunity to trade deep inland and supply the demand both of the former metropolis and of many locations in the interior. In addition, the fertile flatlands of the Guadalquivir River plain and surrounding areas continued to supply abundant oil and citrus fruit; these, together with wool, were exported by river. Spanish trade with England in the eighteenth century had a bipolar character, the two poles being the Cantabrian region and Andalusia. The southern region was prominent in the export of citrus fruit and products derived from grapes. Within this framework, and bearing in mind the freight registries of the different Andalusian ports, Seville had a clear edge in exports, both at regional and national levels.

As regards citrus fruit exports, García Fernández believes that part of the produce of the Guadalquivir river plain region was probably exported from the port of Sanlúcar, or from Cádiz itself, to avail of the superior harbour facilities that these ports offered. Nevertheless, she argues for the growth of the hinterland of Cádiz as a base for the mass export of citrus fruit. This supplanted the traditional export centres - Seville and Málaga - and came to supply 40% of the citrus to be sold (García Fernández 2006: 291-294). However, although we have no comprehensive data, we consider – in line with Álvarez Pantoja (2000: 25) - that a large part of these exports came from the region around Seville, since, as García Fernández herself points out, it is a complicated undertaking to ascertain the initial point of origin of the goods sent out through the ports. This leads us to believe that, if in 1786 Seville reached the highest production figures for the entire century (550,750 units - García Fernández: 294), it could hardly have been secondary to other ports, at least when it came to goods produced.

Around the middle of the eighteenth century the largest group of foreign merchants in Seville were the French, although the Flemish were better represented in the city's trade, where they were more prominent than in other cities such as Cádiz.

The establishment in Seville of these trading colonies that traded from the maritime ports had its rationale in the specific kind of activities they were involved in. They were nearer to the products they exported - citrus, wool, oil - and from Seville it was easy to distribute what was imported - manufactured products, iron, fish - towards the interior of Andalusia and Extremadura. This pattern can be confirmed by studying promissory notes in favour of these merchants, which yield information about advances of merchandise that were being offered in exchange for a delayed payment date. As the market was extremely fragile, since capacity for consumption in rural society depended on good harvests, indebtedness frequently tied the retailer to his supplier. The latter could not demand payment without bringing his debtor to bankruptcy, not just because it would make it even more difficult to recover the full debt owed, but also because in the future he would be left without any customer in the town in question. Their behaviour with suppliers was bound by similar parameters.

We have already mentioned the interest in wool which traditionally impelled relations between Castile and England. 'My father's business was fairly prosperous. It consisted of exporting agricultural produce such as fruit and wool to England,' wrote José Blanco White in his autobiography. The wool was essentially bought in Extremadura, though wool nearer at hand in the province of Seville was not overlooked.

Oil was another product which they dealt in, since it was used in the process of washing raw wool. The Macores (Macorish) family, during the second half of the eighteenth century, is most noteworthy in this respect. By the end of the century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Diego and Patricio Wiseman, relatives of Cardinal Wiseman, were the biggest buyers among the Irish. On 5 January 1803, for example, they ordered the purchase 'from whomever can supply 15,000 arrobas of oil, to be stored in parts of the city or its surroundings or in any other place until such time as we order that by paid carriage and at our expense and with the corresponding documents it be delivered out of town to the warehouses we have in the Carretería or to any other places suitable to us'. Soap is derived from oil, and Seville's soap factories were the most important in Europe. They formed part of the monopoly of the Dukes of Alcalá. As Alonso Morgado wrote in the sixteenth century, 'Seville also supplies many parts of Spain, the Americas, Flanders and England with this white soap'.

Even more than wool and oil, the export of citrus fruit was probably the most typical activity of Irishmen in the region of Seville. The export of bitter oranges to England dates from the thirteenth century, and is better documented from the fifteenth century onwards. These were used both for making marmalade as well as in medicine and perfumes. The trade was so extensive that the fruit became known as the 'Seville orange' or *bigarade*. There were already some attempts to cultivate the fruit in England, anticipating the *orangeries* of the eighteenth century. In 1595 some orange trees were introduced into Surrey by the Carews of Beddington. These were destroyed in the big freezes of 1739-40. There are many references to this trade in the eighteenth century. Although some Flemish and Frenchmen were involved, since the entire trade was orientated towards the North Atlantic and the Baltic, there is no doubt that it was the British - Irish or English - who dominated the market. This covered not just oranges, but also lemons, the juice of both fruits as well as their dried rinds. Sweet oranges, or *chinas*, as they were then known in Seville, had been brought from India by the Portuguese at the start of the sixteenth century. They quickly reached Seville, although it is difficult to establish at what stage they began to be exported. The first references we find are to

those exported in 1757 by Patricio Harper and Company. This advances by some forty years the earliest reports of this that we have had up to now, which referred to Majorca.

This trade left a great effect on the Seville landscape, since citrus cultivation required orchards of trees where previously pomegranates had dominated. At the same time, orange groves were added in places where olive trees were in cultivation, sometimes surpassing the olives in economic value. Citrus plantations were laid out not only in the capital and surrounding district, but also all along the banks of the Guadalquivir, from whence the fruit could be easily marketed. Cultivation spread well out into the countryside (there is documentation available about sales of citrus in Marchena) and the mountains around Cádiz (Villamartín).

There were many variations - not mutually exclusive - on how the trade was undertaken:

a) The merchant purchased one or two crops of oranges and lemons produced by the small farmer. This latter person was usually a tenant farmer who received an advance payment for his crop as a way of guaranteeing the sale. The buyer undertook to pick and box the fruit, the price per box varying according to the variety and the conditions of trade. It is interesting that from the middle of the century, specifically from the time of the Seven Years War, a clause was introduced that the contract was void if a ban on trade with Spain were to be imposed. Families such as Butler, White (Álvarez Pantoja 2000: 31), Macores, Keating, Cahill, Beck, and the English families Rice, Carpinter, Summerhayes and Darwin are good examples. Doña Ana Marsellaque, wife of Don Guillermo Darwin, had at her death in 1735 some 74,577 *reales* 'given to various farmers on account for the oranges and lemons of the coming harvest as costed in the agreement...' (AHPSe, leg. 8.742 f. 218). Darwin himself bought the produce of ten small farms in Alcalá de Guadaíra in the 1770s. But the best example is the company which Don Miguel Coleman formed with Don Diego de Guardo in 1752. The Irishman invested 500 pesos escudos (75,000 *reales*), the equivalent of the capital he had advanced for oranges and sour lemons to several farmers and owners of 18 groves on the outskirts of the city and elsewhere. For his part, De Guardo contributed 3,500 pesos, in which was included the value of 70 kegs of Flanders butter (AHPSe, leg. 3790, f. 610).

b) The merchant offered himself as guarantor for the farmer, both in the rental and in any possible sale, the latter having to undertake to sell to him alone the produce of oranges and lemons; this happened in the case of Don Guillermo Darwin in 1752 in a farm in Sombrerero, in Puebla del Río.

c) Sometimes the merchant himself leased the farm. As well as bestowing on him the role of producer, the farm offered him a place of recreation as well as refuge from harsh weather or frequent epidemics. There was often an agreement with the farmer that he could have the vegetable produce grown on the farm, while the leaseholder would keep the fruit yielded by the trees. Thus Don Guillermo Carpinter declared in his will of 1738 that he held the lease on a farm in Tablada where the farmer had to give him, without Carpinter incurring any costs whatsoever, all fruit produced until he paid off a debt of 16,000 *reales*.

d) The purchase of orchards. In general it has been considered that investment in real estate by the Andalusian bourgeoisie – a class which as we have seen was of differing origins and, it might be supposed, diverse mentalities - was symptomatic of the deflection of capital from more lucrative 'bourgeois' activities. In other words it could be taken as a clear case of 'the betrayal of the bourgeoisie', even though these very Andalusians were of quite recent origins, be they natives, Irish, English, French, Flemish, Italians, Germans and so on. It is advisable to take other factors into account, such as the need to own real estate, precisely because of their origins as foreigners, in order to gain access to trade with America (we will not get further into this aspect here). This was especially relevant since trade with England became financially risky because of the continual wars of the time. In addition to all of these, of course, there was the simple drive to expand businesses.

These investments focused on highly valued products, at a time and in a century when citrus fruits were beginning to be used by the British Navy to combat scurvy. The first attempt was carried out by Lind in 1747, and Cook applied the lesson in his expeditions, but it was not till 1795 that the British navy adopted citrus for general use. The Flemish and the French, who were above all exporters of oil, invested in olive plantations, while the Irish for the same reason turned their attention to the fruit groves, although they did make some minor investments in other crops. They invested much capital in their fruit groves. They planted trees, dug wells, and built houses. In other words the effect of their activities was not only economically beneficial to themselves, but it left a rich legacy to the society where the Irishmen had chosen to live.

A difficult alliance: Patricio O'Conry and Juana Keating

A case in point permits us to illustrate what has been said hitherto. Patricio O'Conry, a well-known member of the British colony in Seville, came from the town of Dungarvan, County Waterford. His businesses included the import of butter and textiles, including silk. He also bought citrus fruit for export, as well as corn to be supplied to the army. Apart from this, we know that he sent large numbers of books to the region around what is now Northern Colombia and Panamá, as well as to Buenos Aires (five and fifteen crates of books respectively, to the value of 8,024

and 52,154 silver *reales*). He invested in the publishing business, ordering the printing of 1,500 copies of Antonio de Nebrija's *Vocabulario* (AHPSe, leg. 5197, f.467).

His strong social position had led him to marry Doña Juana Keating, a native of Waterford and member of an Irish family that was prominent in France (Jahan 2003: 149-163). He was a friend of the Irish merchant Miguel Coleman, also a native of Dungarvan, and was Coleman's executor as well as owing him a significant amount. His daughter Doña Elena O'Conry had married perhaps the most prominent member of the British community in the 1740s and 1750s, a man who was one of the most sought after widowers in Seville society, Don Guillermo Darwin, a native of London. This was in keeping with a strategy practised by merchant families, who employed marriage to their advantage for the development of their businesses and to ensure family stability. These marriages suited both sides - an enterprising son-in-law who had some commercial experience benefited from relationships within his wife's family, while he made his own contribution to expanding and/or consolidating the business. This is the so-called *rule by son-in-law* of which we find examples throughout the century.

This practice offered a certain 'preference for unions between families that were settled in the same territory (...) because as a strategy it permitted the survival of the merchant house as well as social reproduction...' (Fernández Pérez 1997: 166). Darwin was never actually made a business partner, undoubtedly on account of the hard times experienced by O'Conry after the marriage of his daughter Elena. Thanks to these relationships, Elena's brother, Juan, took charge of the finances of the Englishman Guillermo Carpinter, whose executor was the same Guillermo Darwin. A relative of his wife, Diego Keating, was at the same time Darwin's factor or business manager in Lisbon, from whence Darwin exported the larger part of the merchandise he sent to England.

However, in 1743, illness prevented Patricio from continuing with his enterprises and obliged his wife to take charge of them. Until his death in 1745 it appears that things went reasonably well, although he began to experience ever greater shortfalls. O'Conry's main debts consisted of 1,000 pesos escudos for the value of different types of silk that a number of people in the locality of Yecla (Murcia) had failed to pay him, together with various accounts, to the value of 70,334 *reales*, for corn he had sold to the army in the years 1739 and 1740. The payment of this was to be so slow that his son-in-law Don Guillermo Darwin inherited the balance of the debt, 12,374 *reales*. As late as 1772, this had not been fully discharged (AHPSe, leg. 8.807). In 1742, his son Juan O'Conry married Doña Micaela de Tapia, neither of whom brought anything of material value to the marriage. The very fact that Juan was his compatriot's accountant while at the same time being his competitor gives us an idea of the difficult times that the family experienced in the 1740s.

Juana Keating's great success occurred in 1744 when she won a law suit against a man who had acted as guarantor for the people in Yecla. She reached an agreement with him in which she would recover half the 1,000 pesos owed to her, to be paid in yearly instalments of 100 pesos. The debt-ridden couple O'Conry and Keating obtained a mortgage on two farms of pomegranate, orange and lemon trees. He would pay in boxes of oranges which Juana undertook to export. The rest of the money was to be collected directly from a guarantor in Yecla, for which purpose the couple in 1744 issued power of attorney to Don Juan Patricio O'Ronan, a resident of Alzira (Valencia) (AHPSe, leg. 3784 f. 268).

But Juana did not seek to persevere with her husband's businesses, and instead began to liquidate the real estate attached to the household. That same year, 1744, she sold to a neighbour in Triana five *aranzadas* (about two hectares) of Mollar vines for 4,000 *reales*. She also sought to get an extension on the rental of a farm of oranges and lemons that the couple had rented out to the monastery of the Holy Spirit Order (AHPSe, leg. 3784 f. 404 y 411).

One year later, in 1745, Patricio O'Conry died. He left an inheritance of 1,000 pesos escudos, several pieces of jewellery and silver plate, domestic utensils and sundry items of furniture. He also left a vegetable farm in Triana (La Viñuela) and miscellaneous livestock, together with the products of four other vegetable gardens he had rented, two in Puebla del Río, one in Triana and one other very near to the monastery of La Cartuja. The remainder consisted of approximately 206,895 *reales* owed to him but whose payment was less than certain (AHPSe, leg. 5203, f.74).

Faced with such a critical situation, and needing to deal with the bills arising out their commercial activity, his widow quickened the process of selling off the family inheritance by getting rid of an African slave and collecting money owed for grape harvests from previous years. She was in severe straits, hounded by debt and unable to maintain the citrus farms. She reached agreements to cancel rentals and pay damages; in 1746 she paid 1,300 *reales* in damages and penalties to a resident of Coria for a pomegranate and orange fruit farm that she had rented (AHPSe, leg. 3785, f. 174).

The death of her husband in practice represented for Juana Keating the break-up of all his businesses. It appears that the widow's health deteriorated around this time. She made a will in 1747, in which she declared that her eldest son had already received during his father's life everything that he was entitled to. She passed the obligation of educating the younger son Felipe O'Conry to Diego Keating, a relative in Lisbon. She stated that she had had to pay her daughter Elena's dowry at the time of her marriage to Don Guillermo Darwin by using 'money and goods' belonging to Patricio O'Conry, adding at his death 'all the oranges and lemons which have been harvested this year on lands I have rented'. The lack of capital was caused by the non-payment of certain 'capital from America' that never arrived - perhaps payment for the books sent to *Tierra Firme* (coastal Colombia) and Buenos Aires to the value

of 46,538 *reales*. She sold her remaining livestock to pay a debt of 900 *reales* to her compatriot Tomás Macores, and she left 40 pesos to her relatives Mateo and Ana O'Conry and to their two grandchildren. What was left, 127 pesos and 1,638 *reales*, was what was to serve for the upkeep of the house. In spite of her miserable situation, Juana Keating kept for herself whatever bits and pieces remained, leaving to Fr David O'Conry, parish priest at Banestram in Waterford, 'a black velvet skirt and a green gown with a gold floral design for him to divide up to make adornments for the church in that parish' while to Fr. Juan Fogerti, an Augustinian who served as her confessor she left jewellery 'for him to distribute according to the dictates of his conscience.'

A study of legal claims and demands for payment shows that the majority of Patricio O'Conry's customers were from Seville and its surroundings, while the remainder were scattered throughout various places in Spain (Madrid, Cádiz, Málaga, Cartagena) and Europe similar to the case of his fellow Irishmen White and Plunkett, who formed a commercial triangle between Seville, America and the cities of northern Europe (Álvarez Pantoja 2000: 34,38).

Where did Patricio O'Conry's commercial network fail? The setback he suffered was so serious that neither his alliance with an enterprising son-in-law nor the support of his compatriots could help him. This is material for future research, although we believe that the poor health of O'Conry and his wife aggravated a situation which might otherwise have been resolved. There were also the unpaid accounts for wheat provided to the army - which of course constituted a permanent weight on the Spanish economy - as well as other international factors which cannot be ignored. Among these were the constant bans on trade with England during the various wars between that country and Spain. The intermediary role of Portugal, be it legal or illegal, explains the fluctuating relations with that country, but it continued to be an obstacle to the smooth development of some businesses. Forming marriage links with other groups - French, Flemish, people from Rioja in Northern Spain - was a strategy which did not completely work for the O'Conry/Keating couple. In any case, the situation at the end of the century was in general difficult for all merchants based in Seville. A detailed study of this issue remains to be carried out.

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