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THE PUBLIC MARKETS OF SOME NORTH-WEST KENT TOWNS 1700-1850

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Market day is when many small towns come alive. The nature of the market has, of course, changed over the centuries. Retail trading, in both food and a wide range of clothing and household goods, is now more likely to dominate the market place than is livestock or grain. Yet the market place remains the vibrant heart of many urban activities: a place for trading, of course; but also a place for socialising; and a place where civic pride can be made visible.¹

The eighteenth century is frequently seen as an important watershed in the history of public markets. Even if grain was regularly sold in the open market in 1700, it was not by 1800 - sale by sample and sale in inns had become predominant.² On the other hand, in many towns, the public market was becoming increasingly important in retailing, complementing the role of shops.³ There were also changes in the relative importance and role of different market towns linked to population change and changes in urban function.

This article seeks to explore some of these developments by focusing on six market towns in north-west Kent in the period from about 1700 to about 1850. The towns chosen comprise two - Greenwich and Woolwich - that were to become significant suburbs of London in the nineteenth century; one - Dartford - that was traditionally an important

¹ Good recent surveys of developments in agricultural marketing are J.A. Chartres, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce, 1640-1750' in chapters from *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500-1750*, iv, (Ed.) J. Thirsk (Cambridge, 1990) and Richard Perren, 'Markets and Marketing' in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vi, 1750-1850, (Ed.) G.E. Mingay (Cambridge, 1989).

² The role of inns is explored in Alan Everitt, 'The English Urban Inn' in (Ed.) Alan Everitt, *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1973).

³ Roger Scola, *Feeding the Victorian city. The food supply of Manchester 1770-1870* (Manchester, 1992) especially 232-52, discusses the respective roles of markets and shops.

corn market;⁴ and three - Bromley, Sevenoaks and Westerham - that were ordinary small market towns. The other notional market town in the area - St. Mary Cray - has been ignored on the grounds that its market was moribund from the early eighteenth century.⁵

i

In 1700, Kent was one of the more urbanised counties in England with around one-third of its 150,000 people living in its 25 or so towns. The main urban areas by then were the north-west of the county, the Medway towns and those bordering London.⁶ The proximity of London had long been significant to the economic development of Kent influencing agricultural specialisation and the working of the market. The whole of north Kent was an important source of London's grain supplies, and the 1600s saw the growth of market gardening in the north-west, with Greenwich as one of the principal early centres. The area of north-west Kent bordering the Thames was also important for London's wood fuel.⁷ London also influenced the organisation of marketing. Strict lines of demarcation tended to break down during the eighteenth century, with considerable integration of processing and distributive functions in the hands of one man.⁸ Contemporaries also commented on the extent to which changes in London prices tended to have an immediate impact on prices in Kent markets.⁹

Although London was a pervasive influence on the social and economic development of Kent, the county's numerous small market towns were in most respects like those anywhere else in England. Some had their specialist functions - such as Maidstone with a monthly market for hops, cattle and thread from the late seventeenth century onwards - but on the whole buyers and sellers came from a three to five mile radius around the town.¹⁰ The number of market towns in Kent remained fairly constant during our period at just under

⁴ R. Blome, *Britannia* (London, 1673), 124.

⁵ Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, i (Canterbury, 1778), 143.

⁶ C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent* (London, 1965), 32.

⁷ *Ibid.* 89-90, 105-6.

⁸ Dennis Baker, *Agricultural Prices, Production and Marketing, with special reference to the Hop Industry: North-East Kent, 1680-1760* (New York and London, 1985), 343-4.

⁹ John Boyes, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Kent* 2nd ed. (London, 1805), 195.

¹⁰ Chalklin, *op. cit.*, 162.

30, although by the nineteenth century the smaller of these were losing importance.¹¹ The pattern of population was also shifting. By 1801, Deptford was the largest town in Kent with over 17,000 inhabitants and Greenwich was second with over 14,000. Canterbury, which had traditionally been the main centre of population had just under 10,000. Deptford and Greenwich retained their dominant position during the next decades and were joined by Woolwich, with Chatham also growing in numbers.¹² A slightly different perspective on the commercial importance of the towns is given by figures derived from the Shop Tax of the 1780s: those paying the highest amounts of tax were Maidstone, Canterbury, Greenwich and Chatham (all over £75); of the other towns considered in this article, Woolwich paid £50, Dartford £31, Bromley £22, Sevenoaks £14 and Westerham £3.¹³ This implies that all except Westerham had some significance as retail centres.

ii

Turning now to these towns in more detail, Westerham was probably the least important centre. Its population of around 700 in the late seventeenth century had barely doubled by the beginning of the nineteenth century and was only just over 2000 in 1851.¹⁴ Although a market was granted in the fourteenth century, this fell into disuse and a fresh grant was made in the 1620s.¹⁵ Market day was established as Wednesday and contemporary sources in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continue to refer to the Wednesday market, although the implication is that it was not very considerable.¹⁶ As is

¹¹ Chartres, 'Marketing of Agricultural Produce', 161.

¹² *Comparative Account of the Population of Great Britain in the years 1801, 1811, 1821, and 1831...* British Parliamentary Papers 1831 (348), xviii, 1.

¹³ Surviving records of the Shop Tax can be found in the Public Record Office, Exchequer Tax Accounts, Land and Assessed Taxes, Subsidiary Documents (E182). Kent records are at E182/448. The tax was based on the value of the shop and so it is not possible to calculate how many shops there were in any place assessed (unless there were only one or two) but it does give a good indication of the relative importance of different places as shopping centres.

¹⁴ Peter Clark and Jean Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851* (Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester Working Paper no. 5, 1993), 83.

¹⁵ Alan Everitt, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce' in (Ed.) J. Thirsk, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, iv, 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), 477.

¹⁶ See, for example, contemporary mentions in Nathaniel Spencer, *The Complete English Traveller* (London, 1771), 168, E. Hasted, *op. cit.*, 387, and Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England* 7th ed. (London, 1849), iv, 417.

so often the case with markets, primary resources which would reveal details of the volume and type of trade tend not to survive. Records of the manor of Westerham from the 1750s, however, just after it had changed hands, show receipts from the market tolls of around £5 or less,¹⁷ hardly indicative of a flourishing market.

Sevenoaks market is slightly better documented. Like Westerham, Sevenoaks was a town of under 1000 people in the late seventeenth century, growing at a similar pace to just over 2000 in the early nineteenth century.¹⁸ Similarly the market was a medieval foundation, this time from the thirteenth century,¹⁹ although here the market survived right through to modern times. Market day was Saturday and in 1673 the market was described as well served with corn and other provisions.²⁰ It remained a significant corn market during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though probably less important than Dartford. By the mid-nineteenth century there was also a cattle market on the third Tuesday of every month.²¹ As this was held in the High Street, it was increasingly regarded as a nuisance and the 1888 Commission on Market Rights and Tolls was told that sixteen High Street tradesmen had signed a petition calling for its removal. One of these, Mr Clemence, a jeweller, complained that:

'Ladies object to the unpleasantness. I have pigs in front of my shop, which is very objectionable. Most ladies are timid of cattle; they do not like to venture out shopping when there are cattle about'.²²

Tension between different types of traders was nothing new, and complaints by one group that they were being disadvantaged by another were commonplace in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in many market towns. For example, in Sevenoaks in the 1750s, several retail traders in the town complained of outsiders keeping stalls within the market house for the sale of woollen and linen draperies and similar goods. It was claimed that this interfered with the market and reduced the trade of the natives of Sevenoaks.²³

¹⁷ Kent Archives Office, Warde Mss - Manor of Westerham: Rentals and Accounts 1750-59 (U678 M32).

¹⁸ Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 81. Unless otherwise stated subsequent information on town population is derived from Clark and Hosking.

¹⁹ Sir John Dunlop, *The Pleasant Town of Sevenoaks* (Sevenoaks, 1964), 57.

²⁰ Blome, *op. cit.*, 124.

²¹ S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, iv, 50.

²² *Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls*, 3, British Parliamentary Papers 1888 c5550 - II liv, 85.

²³ Kent Archives Office, Sackville of Knowle Mss, Petition of shopkeepers of Sevenoaks c. 1750 (U269 E47).

Nevertheless, the market continued to be a feature of town life: there are records of work to the new market house in 1800-01 costing over £150²⁴ and in 1813 a Sevenoaks man was paying £14 a year for the right to the tolls of the market.²⁵ As late as 1843, a new market house was built with an open space below and room for a court and corn market above,²⁶ but by this time traditional markets were on their last legs in many towns and soon only the monthly cattle market, referred to above, survived.

Bromley market was probably similar in character to those at Westerham and Sevenoaks, although not so important for corn. Again Bromley was a small town of under 500 people in the township and just over 1000 in the parish in the late seventeenth century, growing to 4000 in the parish by 1850. Its market, dating back to the fifteenth century and held on Thursdays, was described by Blome in 1673 as an 'Indifferent good market for provisions'.²⁷ Hasted, around a century later, commented that it was much resorted to for the sale of corn, live cattle and provisions.²⁸ The latter may have been the most important feature: evidence given to a Parliamentary Committee in 1810 described it as a market for butchers, sellers of garden produce and for poultry, butter and eggs with very little corn.²⁹ By the middle of the century the market was struggling, as was said to be trade generally as a result of the railways diverting it away from the town.³⁰ The market house itself was being used as an upholsterer's warehouse, although a room in the White Hart Hotel was still being used by farmers to transact business on a Thursday evening.³¹ There seems to have been some revival of the retail market later in the century, with meat, poultry, provisions, crockery and hardware being sold in the streets around the Town Hall, sometimes to the irritation of local shopkeepers.³²

Westerham, Sevenoaks and Bromley are probably typical of scores if not hundreds of small market towns throughout England. Their markets were a traditional part of town life, attracting local farmers to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Accounts and Bills (U269 A327 A316/6).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Sevenoaks Market House (U269 E115).

²⁶ Dunlop, *op. cit.* 158.

²⁷ Blome, *op. cit.*, 124.

²⁸ Hasted, *op. cit.* i, 92.

²⁹ *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee to whom the Bill for repealing an Act... 'for repairing and maintaining the Road from... Shoreham... to... Farnborough'... was Committed*, British Parliamentary Papers 1810-11 (196) ii, 413, 115.

³⁰ Edward Strong, *A History of Bromley* (Bromley, 1858), 5-6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8, 17.

³² *Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls vol 13*. British Parliamentary Papers 1890-91 c6268 -vi xl pp 248-55; Anon, *Round Bromley and Keston* (London, c. 1870), 9.

sell produce, wholesale and retail, and a range of itinerant retail traders. Gradually the latter came to predominate and the market either decayed or began to seem as much a nuisance as an asset. Nevertheless, many such markets survived through the nineteenth century and beyond, often meeting the needs of the poorer people in the towns. Market days tended also to be fixed. Very often neighbouring towns had their markets on different days, giving traders the opportunity to move from one to another. Thus Westerham market was on Wednesday, Bromley on Thursday and Sevenoaks on Saturday.

The next town to be considered, Dartford, is a little different. Not only was it slightly bigger - just over 1000 people in the late seventeenth century and over 6000 in 1850 - but it was the only one to be of major significance as a corn market. Blome remarked that it was well stored with corn and much frequented by corn chandlers and mealmen, while even in Hasted's day it was still a good market for corn and provisions.³³ The intervening century had, however, seen notable changes in the way in which trade was conducted. The description in *The Kentish Traveller's Companion* of 1776 speaks for itself:

'...the method of selling is by sample. Within thirty years the grain used to be regularly pitched, but not a waggon load of it is now to be seen in the street on a Saturday, which is the market day'.³⁴

Sale by sample, with transactions frequently taking place in an inn adjacent to the market place, was increasingly the norm for wholesale trading in corn and other farm produce.

Although this changed the character of the market, it remained a flourishing one. The old market house, which survived into the eighteenth century, was built in 1576 on the south side of the High Street and at the same time butchers' shambles were erected over the Cranpit stream. The fish market was held at the corner of Lowfield Street.³⁵ It is difficult to gauge how much activity took place, but in 1707 William String of Southwark was willing to pay £60 a year for the right to income from the market, rather more than in the towns considered earlier.³⁶ By the 1760s the traditional site of the market was causing problems, in particular blocking the highway, and a new market house was built in 1769 in the Market Place.³⁷

³³ Blome, *op. cit.*, 124; Hasted, *op. cit.*, 225.

³⁴ *The Kentish Traveller's Companion* (Rochester, 1776), 31.

³⁵ P.M. Beck, *A Study of Dartford Market* (1970 - copy in Dartford Library).

³⁶ Kent Archives Office, Miscellaneous Deeds, etc. Deed re Dartford Market 1710 (U36 T1082).

³⁷ Beck, *op. cit.*, 39.

Trying to move a market was always problematic. Tradition dies hard, and traders soon drifted back to the old site in the High Street. A dispute from the 1840s illustrates the difficulties. The Lord of the Manor at the time, the Revd. A.C. Morgan, had the butchers' shambles repaired in 1841 and tried in the following years to compel butchers who had stalls in the High Street to move to the market. Tolls in the market were higher than those in the street. It was said that there were 30-40 butchers' stalls in total, and a similar number of fishmongers and greengrocers. Some 1000 to 1500 people came into the town on market days. Although it appears that Morgan won his case, enforcing such a victory was never easy.³⁸ Market trading was still taking place in the streets in the 1880s, with a weekly corn market at the Bull Hotel and a monthly cattle market.³⁹

The two remaining towns to be considered, Woolwich and Greenwich, are different again. Both were much closer to London, much bigger by the beginning of the nineteenth century and with less ancient market foundations. In both the importance of the market was primarily retail. Although Woolwich may have had an ancient market, the first formal grant was in 1619 by James I to Sir William Barnes and Hugh Lyddiard,⁴⁰ and in the 1670s Blome described the market, held on Fridays, as very inconsiderable. At that time Woolwich probably had a population of around 1200. The town grew rapidly during the eighteenth century, reaching around 10,000 by 1801, 17,000 by 1811 and 32,000 by 1851. Not only had its numbers increased dramatically, but by the 1840s Woolwich was regarded as the market centre for many west Kent towns and villages.⁴¹

There is virtually no evidence about the nature of the eighteenth-century market which was held in a square on the river side of Market Head in the High Street. The market house was in the centre of the site, which also comprised shambles, ground for stalls and shops.⁴² The Maryon Wilson papers contain copies of leases of the market and its revenues in 1765 and 1807: the former for £70 a year and the latter for £80. This implies a market on a considerably greater scale than in Westerham, Sevenoaks or Bromley. The lessee in 1765 was also required to insure the premises against fire in a sum

³⁸ Dartford Library, Papers on Dartford Market.

³⁹ *Market Rights and Tolls Returns* British Parliamentary Papers 1886 (HC 221) lvi, 65, 50.

⁴⁰ F.C. Elliston-Erwood, 'John Barker's Plan of Woolwich, 1749' in *Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society Annual Report*, 29 (1949), 35.

⁴¹ *Kentish Mercury*, 19 December, 1840.

⁴² W.T. Vincent, *Records of the Woolwich District* 2 vols (London, 1890), i, 42, 48.

of £625, of which £525 covered brick buildings and £100 timber buildings.⁴³

Major improvements were attempted in 1807. According to an Act of Parliament of that year, the market had fallen into disuse because of the want of proper accommodation and thus it would be of great usefulness to the town if a proper market house was erected and the market duly regulated.⁴⁴ A further Act the following year clarified the powers of the Commissioners - who were also assuming responsibility for paving, cleansing, lighting and watching the town - and provided for the new market to be held on Wednesdays and Saturdays.⁴⁵ Rather than redevelop the old market, the Commissioners attempted to create a new one on the site of the present old town hall. As we saw in the case of Dartford, attempts to move a market from a traditional site were fraught with difficulty. The new market was never popular and trading continued around the old market hall in the High Street.

Further improvements were proposed in the 1820s. The Maryon Wilsons, owners of the old market, were complaining of the inconvenience of the site, while at the same time stating that the new market allowed under the 1807 and 1808 Acts had been discontinued some years previously. Regarding the old market, it was said that carts could only gain access via the gate on the west side of the market place and that accommodation consisted of a small timber-built and tiled market house, the lower part of which consisted of shambles. Around the market house was some open ground where people placed baskets and standings, while on the south side of the market place there were eight wooden erections used for stalls. The proposed improvements involved building a new market house and two rows of houses to contain shops for butchers and others; and to open up access from the High Street.⁴⁶

Market improvements cost money and a reasonably secure income was necessary if they were to be financed. Even without the complications created by the 1807 and 1808 Acts regarding just who had rights to which tolls, enforcing market dues was becoming increasingly difficult by the early decades of the nineteenth century, particularly

⁴³ Greater London Record Office, Maryon Wilson Papers - Leases (E/MW/C/573 and 690).

⁴⁴ *An Act for paving, cleaning, lighting, and watching the Town and Parish of Woolwich... and for regulating the Market of the said Town.* 47 Geo III Session 2 cap 111, 13 August, 1807.

⁴⁵ *An Act for...amending so much of an Act of the last Session as relates to the Erection of a Market House in the said Town Woolwich* 48 Geo III cap 146, 30 June, 1808.

⁴⁶ Greater London R O, Maryon Wilson Papers - Charlton General: Papers re Woolwich Market (23/1) Case for the opinion of Mr Sergeant Andrews 1827.

in rapidly growing towns where street traders could find plenty of custom. A case from 1811 illustrates the problem. Joseph Burgis, an itinerant dealer from Greenwich, had come to Woolwich on 8 November with his horse and cart and placed it in the High Street near the entrance to the market place. He was asked to pay 6d. toll, but refused. His horse and cart, with its contents of six fowls, two ducks, two peewits, a whip and two baskets were seized. Although Burgis was not trading in the market place, the lessee of the tolls claimed an ancient right to take toll from all who traded in Woolwich on market day, except those who had shops there. In his support, he cited instances of fruit sellers and others who sold their wares a quarter of a mile from the market having to pay toll in the mid eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Frustratingly, we do not know the formal outcome of this case. Legal opinion, however, seems to have been that seizing Burgis's horse and cart was disproportionate to the offence. What is clear is that in the immediate aftermath at least, collecting tolls became virtually impossible. In 1812, it was claimed that none of the coal carts, milk carts or small beer drays coming into Woolwich on market day would pay toll and neither would bakers or hawkers. Individuals mentioned as refusing to pay included one Lindsey from Greenwich who sold gingerbread, and Johnson, West and Steel, gardeners from Plumstead. Perhaps even more alarming for the owners of the market rights and dues was a report that artillery officers had let out a piece of their land for a toll-free market.⁴⁸

Cases like this provide a tantalising glimpse of the market at a time when it must have had a vital role in meeting the needs of the inhabitants in the rapidly growing town. Indeed one question asked in the associated correspondence was whether there was any chance of a daily open market because the inhabitants were so many. This did not happen as such, but it is clear that economic forces rather than regulation drove the development of the market in the nineteenth century. In particular, the location of the market shifted to Beresford Square not because anyone tried to plant a market there, but because it suited buyers and sellers. Attempts in the 1860s to re-establish the market on its old site failed and in due course the Beresford Square market had to be recognised.⁴⁹ By the 1880s the market was being held on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and was for fish, fruit, vegetables and miscellaneous items.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Brief re toll dispute 1811.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Letters from John Lock 1811-12.

⁴⁹ Greenwich Local History Centre - Woolwich Market Folder.

⁵⁰ *Market Rights and Tolls Returns* 1886, 50.

The history of Greenwich market is similar in a number of ways to that of Woolwich. Greenwich was the largest of the towns being considered in this article; it already had over 4500 inhabitants in the late seventeenth century, had reached 14,000 by 1801, 17,000 by 1811 and 35,000 by 1851. Its market, however, was the last to be formally established. Although market trading had probably taken place earlier, the first grant of a market was in July 1700 to the Earl of Romney. In December of the same year the rights to the market, which was to be held on Wednesdays and Saturdays, were transferred to the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital.⁵¹ The market was held on open land roughly where the west wing of the Seamen's Hospital now stands. Farmers from Kent sold cattle, sheep, horses, fruit and vegetables there while fishermen sold oysters and wet fish. The market house stood near the west gate of the Royal Naval College.⁵²

Not much is known about the eighteenth-century market, but by the early nineteenth century the rapid growth of Greenwich was causing the market to spread out into neighbouring streets with inevitable congestion. In the mid 1820s, the Commissioners began to explore the legal and financial implications of building a new and larger market. They were advised that they were within their rights to move or enlarge the market and to continue to take their customary receipts. If the new market was large enough for all who wished to use it, then they could take action against those who sold outside it, other than in their own shops. They were warned, however, against trying to enforce previously unenforced rights.⁵³ The Commissioners proceeded with their plan and a new market place was opened in 1831. Located on the site of the Powis brewery, it had three main roofed sections for fish, meat and vegetables, with shops around it and space for itinerant sellers of various household goods.⁵⁴

Although clearly an improvement to the town's amenities, the Commissioners were fighting a losing battle, if they thought they could control all market type selling. The usual complaints of people selling outside the market and refusing to pay tolls soon surfaced. For example, in 1837, it was alleged that traders regularly came into Greenwich on Saturdays and sold goods from covered carts in the streets. Others sold fruit and other goods throughout the week in the

⁵¹ *An Act to enable the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital to regulate and manage the Markets held at Greenwich in the County of Kent* 12 & 13 Vict cap 28, 1849.

⁵² Alec Holden, 'Greenwich Market', in *Transactions of the Greenwich and Lewisham Antiquarian Society*, 7 (No 1) 1964, 20.

⁵³ Public Record Office, Greenwich Hospital Papers, Greenwich Market - Case and Opinion 1827 (ADM 76/13).

⁵⁴ Holden, *art. cit.*, 21.

town's streets. One of the latter, George Powell, was to be proceeded against, but many similar traders escaped action, either because their addresses were unknown, or there were just too many of them.⁵⁵ An indication of the difficulty of regulating market and street trading is given by the fall in value of the market receipts; in 1831, these were leased for £160 a year, but in 1845 for only £100.⁵⁶ At the time of the 1845 lease it was said that the meat market was not used and that fishmongers did not use the stalls provided for them. This was not due to lack of trade - indeed it was suggested that a third market day might be beneficial - but rather to unregulated street selling.⁵⁷

In 1848, the Commissioners began a fresh attempt to enforce their market rights. They argued that lack of suitable powers led to difficulties in regulating the market and ensuring its proper cleanliness; and that it was not as valuable as it should have been.⁵⁸ The 1849 Act giving them the powers they wanted was not, however, unopposed. A petition from some Greenwich inhabitants claimed that the:

'Parish of Greenwich is of considerable extent and....many poor and industrious persons have for many years earned an honest livelihood by crying and hawking Fish Poultry Vegetables and other provisions and articles within the said Parish'.

If passed the Act would deprive such people of their livelihood (and lead to an increased burden on the poor rates).⁵⁹ The Act was passed and later in the century a Bill to amend it, again to allow unlicensed street traders to continue to go about their business outside the immediate market place, failed to make progress.⁶⁰

Following the 1849 Greenwich Market Act, new bye-laws were issued. These describe the market as being for all provisions, plants, earthenware and pedlar's goods. The market was to be held on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 5.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. and powers were taken to seize unwholesome goods and to prevent traders from hawking or carrying about in the market items for sale.⁶¹ These changes must have had some positive impact for by 1852 it was possible to let the market tolls for £130 a year.⁶² But by the mid

⁵⁵ PRO ADM 76/13 Writ for Commissioners 1837.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Leases of Market Tolls 1831 and 1845.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1845 Lease.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Advice to Commissioners from Lethbridge and Mackrell 1848.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Petition of Greenwich Inhabitants 1849.

⁶⁰ *A Bill to amend the Greenwich Markets Act 1849* British Parliamentary Papers 1887 Bill 152 ii 449.

⁶¹ *Greenwich Market Bye Laws 1850.*

⁶² PRO ADM 76/13 Leases of Market Tolls 1852.

nineteenth century, the future of any such market lay in finding its own niche between the growing numbers of retail shops and the continuing activity of street traders, often selling to the very poorest of the population. Like many others, Greenwich survived, but the days when the public, regulated market could be the centre of all forms of trading were long gone. Indeed, some activities were positively unwelcome. In 1858, there were complaints of horses being sold in the market and of pens being erected there for sheep and pigs.⁶³ As in the case of Sevenoaks, this was not what a respectable town needed.

iii

Do these accounts of particular towns reveal any common features in the history of public markets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? At first glance, it is perhaps difficult to see significant themes. Not only is the experience of each town unique, but the very patchy nature of the records hinders comparisons. In general, few records survive which reveal much about the normal working of markets. What tend to survive are records about disputes and records about building work. It is possible to deduce from these something of the changes that were occurring in our period, but there are major gaps. The eighteenth century in particular is badly documented, most frustratingly in the two towns - Woolwich and Greenwich - which were experiencing major growth then.

Despite these problems, some common features emerge. Markets were, most importantly, about trading, both retail and wholesale. As is well known, the eighteenth century saw major changes in the way in which much agricultural produce was marketed with the decline of the great wholesale markets and the rapid spread of sale by sample with transactions frequently taking place in inns. Of the towns considered above, the one most affected by this was Dartford. Not only were there no longer sacks of corn in the market place, but many of the smaller items of farm produce were tending to bypass the open market. Edward Jacob writing about Faversham in the 1770s commented on this and claimed that the market and fairs were a mere skeleton of what they once had been. A major cause of this was higglers buying poultry, eggs, butter and similar items at the farms and selling, inside or outside the market, in neighbouring towns.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Complaint from Inspector of Works, 2 November, 1858.

⁶⁴ Edward Jacob, *The History of the Town and Port of Faversham, in the County of Kent* (London, 1774), 63.

Nearly forty years later, a Shoreham farmer giving evidence to a Parliamentary Committee about a local road Bill commented that farmers from his area sold corn by sample in Sevenoaks or Dartford - their choice depending on which was the better market - and took the corn to its purchaser a week after the transaction was agreed.⁶⁵

Thus, by the early nineteenth century the future of the old markets depended mainly on what role they could establish in retail trading. Later in the century, new wholesale and livestock markets might be established, but these were often separate and away from the town centres. If markets were to survive with a retail function, then they were in competition both with fixed shops and itinerant street sellers. We have seen above a number of examples of the uneasy relationship between these different types of trader. In the eighteenth century it was not uncommon for town shopkeepers to feel threatened by traders from outside the town who set up stall on market day - Sevenoaks has a good example of this.⁶⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century the shopkeepers tended to have won in the smaller towns (the decline of Bromley market is an example of this)⁶⁷ but in the larger towns each type of trader could find a place. Thus, the disputes in early nineteenth-century Woolwich and Greenwich do not so much reflect difficulties encountered by individual traders, as the desire of the market owners not to lose out on the profits of increased retail trading activity. But if there was room for fixed shop, market trader and street seller to co-exist, the tendency for market receipts to stay static or decline does imply that the role of markets had clear limits.

This leads on to a second theme. Most markets had an owner, and such owners wanted to maximise their profits on the market. In the smaller towns, market receipts were small and there was probably little that could be done to increase them. This was not the case in Woolwich and Greenwich. Both towns grew rapidly in the 1800s, offering considerable opportunities for those who sold the necessities, and some of the luxuries, of life. The disputes about market tolls described above suggest a mushrooming of street traders, operating outside both the physical confines of the market place and the temporal restrictions of market days. The temptation to try to push all this activity into the regulated public market, and to profit from it, was obvious. But whatever the legal rights and wrongs, market forces tended to prevail. There is little to suggest that, even if individuals

⁶⁵ *Minutes of Evidence... Road from Shoreham to Farnborough* British Parliamentary Papers 1810-11 (196) ii, 413, 22.

⁶⁶ See above, 176.

⁶⁷ See above, 177.

were sometimes successfully prosecuted, the growth of street selling, or in due course of small corner shops, could be restrained. Similarly, markets tended to flourish on sites which suited buyers and sellers; attempts by market owners to move them to suit their convenience rarely worked as is evidenced in both Dartford and Woolwich.⁶⁸

This did not prevent the improvement of existing markets and the building of new market halls. A well-appointed market with good access and plenty of space for stalls was an asset to any town. Dartford acquired a new market hall in the 1760s and work was being done to a 'new' market house at Sevenoaks in 1800. Major building work took place at Greenwich around 1830 and again after the 1849 Market Act. In other cases, some of the more antiquated buildings had to go. The old wooden market house which had occupied the centre of the market place in Bromley was replaced by a new town hall in 1863, even if market trading was still possible in the basement of the new building.⁶⁹ Perhaps by this date there was a growing feeling that markets were all right in their place, but not if they threatened to disturb the activities of the more respectable shoppers. We have already seen how at Sevenoaks shopkeepers began to complain about livestock in the High Street on market days.⁷⁰ Fairs, which had long formed part of the traditional pattern of trading, were very much under threat in the nineteenth century as having a tendency to encourage disruptive behaviour and although markets were never really in the same category, they could sometimes be regarded as a nuisance.

iv

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of markets has been their ability to survive and re-invent themselves to serve changing needs. There has, of course, always been some ebb and flow; by no means every medieval market survived through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some could decline in one period only to revive later. Amongst the town markets considered in this article, Dartford changed from being a great corn market to being one part of the retail facilities of a medium-sized town; Woolwich and Greenwich flourished in the nineteenth century as retail trade spilled out of their confines in the face of growing demand; and while the others struggled, only

⁶⁸ See above, 179.

⁶⁹ E.L.S. Horsburgh, *Bromley Kent* (London, 1929), 52, 385.

⁷⁰ See above, 176.

Westerham seems to have failed completely by the 1880s. Whether as mart for agricultural produce, emporium for the lower and middling classes, or latterly the haunt of collectors with an eye to a bargain, the market has always had its magic. During the period under review in this article, the public market's most important role was probably to widen the range of goods available to the masses and to ensure the supply of essential items. In their humble way, these urban markets were one part of that enterprise culture which, alongside the better known story of industrial innovation, provided the basis for England's growing prosperity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷¹

⁷¹ B.L. Anderson, 'Entrepreneurship, Market Process and the Industrial Revolution in England' in (Ed.) B.L. Anderson and A.J.H. Latham, *The Market in History* (London, 1984), 155-200 discusses some of these broader issues.