

From couper to farmers' cooperative: livestock fairs and markets in north-east Scotland from 1800 to 1900*

by Richard Perren

Abstract

In 1800 local livestock fairs and markets in north-east Scotland were traditional open markets held at fixed times of the year. Their number increased in the first half of the nineteenth century as the region's meat industry developed to supply the growing demand of the Scottish and English markets. After 1850 and the appearance of the railways the number of livestock markets grew further and localities competed with each other, sometimes fiercely, to capture the benefits of a new livestock market. These markets, where deals were made privately between individuals, were dominated by local butchers and livestock dealers. This changed from 1870 as open markets gave way to regular livestock auction markets (or marts) conducted by professional auctioneers. Farmers believed that auctions served their interests better than open markets as sales were conducted quickly and in greater comfort, and they could also judge whether buyers were competing fairly. Farmers from the north east became so enthusiastic about this form of sale that they took advantage of the nineteenth-century Company Acts to float their own joint stock limited auction companies, and also take over some of the existing family-run livestock auction markets. In spite of some opposition from butchers and cattle dealers, the auction markets were all very successful and by 1900 had largely replaced the traditional fairs and markets.

Scotland in 1500 was a poor country with a small population and a backward, underdeveloped economy. Although not entirely stagnant during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the rate of agricultural change was slow. Limitations on transport meant that elements of commercial farming were most in evidence near to the largest towns, or within reach of them by coastal shipping.¹ Subsequent development of Scottish lowland agriculture was a process that accelerated after 1760. The remaining elements of subsistence farming crumbled and had collapsed by 1820.² New methods were generally promoted by progressive landlords

* My thanks to the staff of Aberdeen City Archives and Aberdeen University Library Special Collections for their invaluable help, and also to two anonymous referees, and to Mr R. E. Tyson, for their generous and helpful comments.

¹ Ian Whyte and Kathleen Whyte, *The changing Scottish landscape, 1500–1800* (1991), pp. 1–27; Ian Whyte, *Agriculture and society in seventeenth-century Scotland* (1979); id., *Scotland's society and economy in*

transition, c.1500–c.1760 (1997).

² T. M. Devine, 'The transformation of agriculture: cultivation and clearance', in T. M. Devine, C. H. Lee and G. C. Peden (eds), *The transformation of Scotland:*

and implemented by commercially minded tenants.³ In north-east Scotland this involved the consolidation and enlargement of farms and the use of bone meal to boost the output of root crops to produce more animal feed, a process which permitted the increase and improvement of sheep and cattle to feed the growing urban demand for meat.⁴ Within Scotland as a whole the market for food grew as its population increased from 1.6 million to 4.4 million between 1800 and 1900. But the specialist beef producers of the north east also supplied the larger and more prosperous English market, concentrating particularly upon London.⁵ However, there is little in these studies on how the structure of livestock marketing changed within north-east Scotland in response to the dramatic expansion of the region's meat and livestock industry. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap and link it to the factors behind that growth.

I

The public marketing system for north-eastern farmers selling their livestock passed through three stages between 1800 and 1900. The first was the 'couping' period when butchers and cattle dealers were dominant, doing business either at the farm or at periodic livestock fairs.⁶ The second was after 1800 when livestock markets increased in numbers and became more frequent, especially after the introduction of the railways from around 1850. The third stage was from the 1870s as auction marts became increasingly common. By 1900 this form of livestock marketing had largely replaced the old fairs and new markets.

In the eighteenth century livestock dealers either visited farms to purchase animals directly from farmers, or else they bought animals from farmers and from each other at the various temporary livestock fairs and markets that were held on particular days at fixed times of the year. These were called 'periodic' markets by Ian Whyte.⁷ In the late eighteenth century most of the periodic livestock markets in north-east Scotland were seasonal fairs for the sale of store animals where they were bought and collected into droves by itinerant dealers who walked them on to other fairs further south such as the Falkirk Trysts and the All Hallows markets at Edinburgh. The cattle were then mostly moved to England for fattening.⁸ In 1800 the universal type of sale at these fairs was the local 'open market'.⁹ There, farmers and dealers met on a piece of ground conveniently sited near to towns or villages, and often close to inns. A small custom, or toll, was charged for beasts entering the stance, and as they entered animals were

Note 2 *continued*
the economy since 1700 (2005), pp. 77–84; M. Gray, 'Scottish emigration: the social impact of agrarian change in the rural lowlands, 1775–1815', *Perspectives in American Hist.* 7 (1973), pp. 113–31.

³ T. C. Smout, 'A new look at the Scottish improvers', *Scottish Hist. Rev.* 91 (2012), pp. 125–49.

⁴ Robert Hay, 'Crops and livestock in the improvement era', in A. Fenton and K. Veitch (eds), *Scottish life and society, a compendium of Scottish ethnology*, II, *Farming and the land* (2011), pp. 244–66.

⁵ J. H. Smith, 'The cattle trade of Aberdeenshire in the nineteenth century', *AgHR* 3 (1955), pp. 114–18;

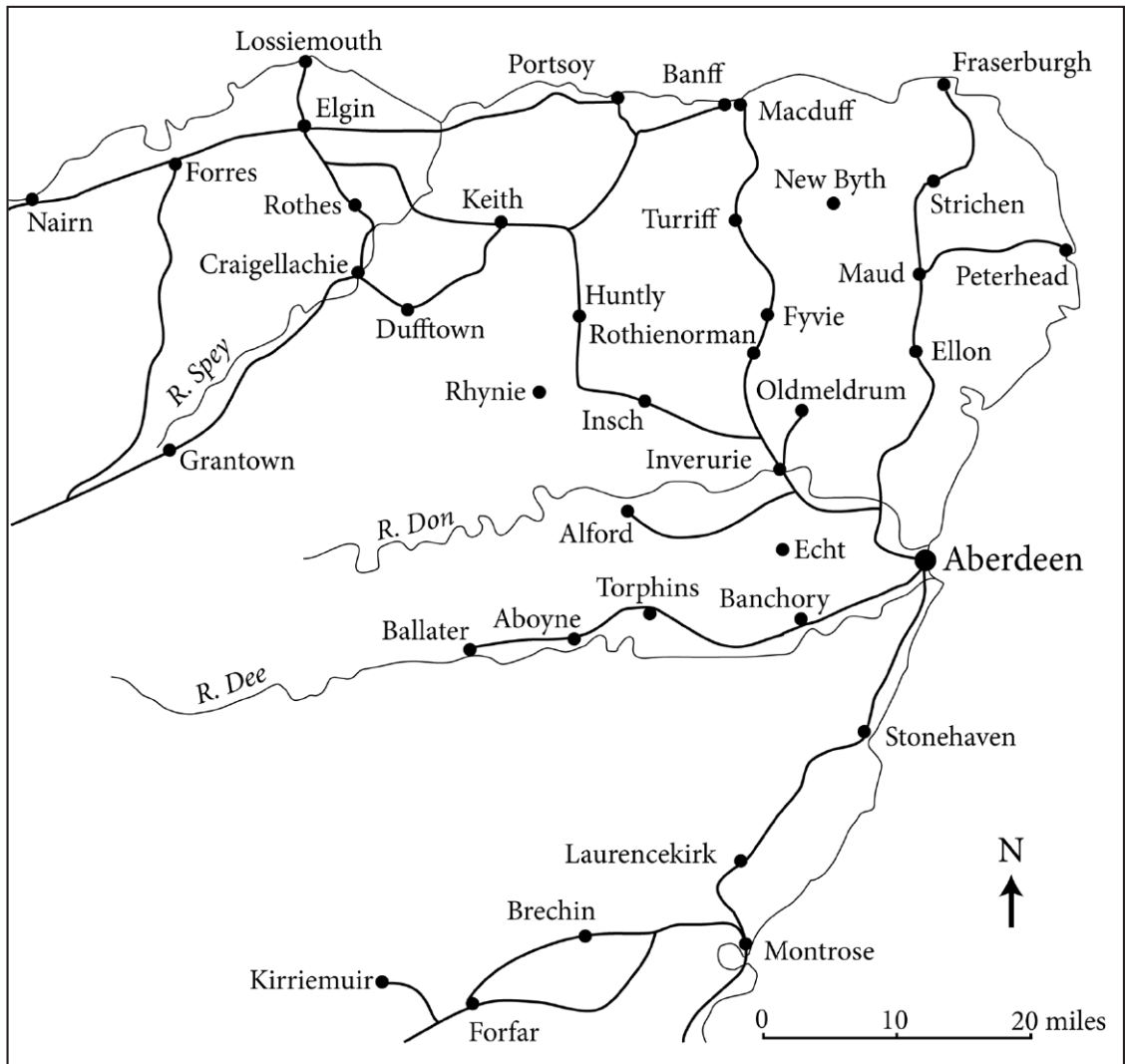
G. Channon, 'The Aberdeen beef trade with London, a study in steamship and railway competition, 1850–69', *Transport Hist.* 2 (1969), pp. 1–24.

⁶ *Scots coup*, vt, buy, trade, ~ er, trader, dealer

⁷ I. D. Whyte, 'The growth of periodic market centres in Scotland, 1600–1707', *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 95 (1979), pp. 13–26.

⁸ A. R. B. Haldane, *The drove roads of Scotland* (1973), pp. 204–22.

⁹ Highland and Agricultural Society, *Report on the present state of the agriculture of Scotland*, Edinburgh (1878), p. 200.



MAP 1: North-east Scotland sites of livestock markets and railways, c.1900

marked with a splash of colour to show it had been paid. Bargains were made individually between buyer and seller. Once a price was agreed the seller often returned a small amount to the buyer as a 'luck penny' to wish him good fortune on the long journey to any further market to which he might take them. Although the traditional fairs were temporary gatherings with no fixed buildings, they could still be quite elaborate with bankers' and refreshment tents as well as a 'judge of the market' to settle disputes.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Aberdeen Journal* (hereafter *AJ*), 2 Oct. 1850, p. 4b; 30 Oct. 1850, p. 4b; *Banffshire Journal* (hereafter *BJ*), 23 Oct. 1858, p. 6e; W. Alexander, *Sketches of Life Among My Ain Folk* (1875), pp. 101–4; I. Carter, *Rural life in Victorian Aberdeenshire* (1992), pp. 147–9.

Sales by public auction were known in Scotland as roups.¹¹ There were four types for livestock, and they were reserved for particular circumstances. The first was when a tenant left a farm and farming, and the whole of his livestock, implements, crops and sometimes even the farmhouse furniture were sold off by a professional licensed auctioneer specially engaged to conduct the sale. This was a dispenishment. The second was when large lots of animals, usually stores and with a high net worth collected together by a dealer were sold. The third was when a particularly valuable lot of good quality animals was sold at a farm, either from the home farm of an estate or a part of the herd from a livestock breeder. Finally, any farm animals seized for debt had to be auctioned. But roups were expensive to organize, and needed to be widely advertised to attract as many buyers as possible to recoup the cost.

The law regarding sale of livestock by auction in Scotland was the same as that in England.¹² In 1777 during the North administration an excise duty was placed on property sold by auction, and it had to be paid by the auctioneer. Although frequently evaded, and complicated by various exemptions, the bureaucracy and expense discouraged auctions of lower-value farm animals. Peel's budget of 1845 abolished the excise and instead all auctioneers paid an annual licence fee of £10. But although this simplification made general livestock auctions easier and cheaper, as the traditional open market sale was well established and still capable of further development, both before and after the railway reached Aberdeen in 1850, there were no serious attempts to replace it until after 1870.

II

In the early years of the nineteenth century the numbers of markets were increased by raising the frequency of existing ones and by the establishment of completely new markets. In some instances markets and livestock fairs were part of the new planned villages founded in the 1750s onwards in the north east of Scotland by progressive landowners to bring about economic development. In the north east there were 98 planned villages between 1750 and 1850, a dozen of which are mentioned in this article as having some form of livestock fair or market.¹³ Farmers, landowners and burghs were all eager to bring more business into their locality and did as much as they could to encourage the cattle and livestock trade by advertising in the local press. In 1805 the Duke of Gordon, who was establishing a planned village at Rhynie 12 miles south of Inverurie, declared a new market would be held four times a year on the Muir of Rhynie.¹⁴ As an inducement for farmers to bring their animals to new markets it was promised they would remain custom-free (i.e. toll-free) for some years to come. As part of the development planned for the village of Ballater on upper Deeside the proprietor, William Farquharson, proudly announced in March 1809 that a weekly market would begin there and that there would also be two new two-day seasonal livestock markets in May and September each year, for sheep on the first day, and cattle and horses the on the second, promising 'No

¹¹ *Scots roup n sale or let by public auction*

¹² Stephen Dowell, *A history of taxation and taxes in England* (3 vols, 1888), III, pp. 19–21, 141–3.

¹³ They are Ballater, Dufftown, Ellon, Grantown,

Huntly, Keith, Laurencekirk, New Byth, Rhynie, Rothes, Strichen, Turriff. Douglas G. Lockhart, *Scottish planned villages* (Scottish Hist. Soc., 16, 2012), pp. 18, 21, 257–59.

¹⁴ *AJ*, 23 Mar. 1803, p. 2a; 22 May 1805, p. 4c.

custom will be taken in the first three years'.¹⁵ But such expansion of markets was by no means confined to planned villages. In 1803 the ancient royal burgh of Inverurie added another two annual markets on its 'Borrowmuir' to the four it already held there. At Oldmeldrum, a burgh of barony since 1672, in 1810 the proprietor, James Urquhart, believed its fortnightly winter and spring markets had been so well attended that there would be a large enough trade in cattle and horses to justify holding monthly summer ones.¹⁶ In 1827 'after requests from a number of respectable farmers and cattle dealers' the proprietor of the Mason Lodge inn, Glenkindie, decided to hold four new trysts annually at that site 'custom-free for some years'.¹⁷

This steady growth in the number of livestock markets in the villages and small towns of the region before 1850 bypassed the city of Aberdeen. It had slaughterhouses but no regular livestock market within the boundaries of the burgh, unlike Glasgow and Edinburgh. As most cattle went out of the county for further feeding, the numbers of fat animals needed to supply the city itself were few, and their sale in Aberdeen did not require much of an infrastructure. The small supply needed to feed the city was provided by a number of markets held on its outskirts.¹⁸ In 1841 Aberdeen had a population of only about 40 thousand and so its demand for fresh meat was limited. In the earlier part of the century the numbers of fat animals sold for local consumption were very few with seldom more than 20 advertised at a sale.¹⁹

More animals were brought into the town from 1829 when the export of cattle from the port of Aberdeen by steamship began. But this was only open to members of the Flesher Incorporation, and the animals were purchased either at farms, or from the growing number of markets in the surrounding villages and small towns of the region. By 1849 the town of Huntly, a burgh of barony but developed as a planned village by the Duke of Gordon after 1769, held 15 markets, and Inverurie had 19.²⁰ The need for a market within Aberdeen itself only became essential after the railway line made it a centre for the buying and selling of livestock. The railway 'reached' Aberdeen in March 1850, but stopped just south of the city centre: the station within Aberdeen itself was not finally opened until August 1854.²¹ But from 1853 onwards the building of the network of branch lines in north-east Scotland promoted further development of the region.²² It allowed local towns and villages to grow in size, some local industries to develop, farming to improve, as well as increasing the number and reinforcing the importance of fixed regular livestock markets held near the local railway station.

But these new rural and urban markets were still dominated by butchers and livestock salesmen, and all transactions conducted there remained personal bargains between seller and buyer. It was only after 1870 that livestock auctioneers opened their own permanent markets

¹⁵ *AJ*, 29 Mar. 1809, p. 1b.

¹⁶ *AJ*, 1 Nov. 1809, p. 4d; 2 May 1810, p. 1c.

¹⁷ *AJ*, 14 Mar. 1827, p. 2e; 28 Mar. 1827, p. 1a.

¹⁸ *AJ*, 11 Aug. 1800, p. 4d; *New Statistical Account of Scotland* [hereafter *NSA*], (15 vols, 1834–1845), XII, p. 102.

¹⁹ *AJ*, 20 Apr. 1803, p. 4c; 18 Apr. 1821, p. 2f; 27 Feb. 1822, p. 2f.

²⁰ *AJ*, 3 Jan. 1849, p. 7e.

²¹ J. J. Waterman, *The coming of the railway to Aberdeen in the 1840s* (1976), pp. 23–6; J. S. Smith, 'The

growth of the city'; in W. H. Fraser and C. H. Lee (eds), *Aberdeen, 1800–2000: a new history* (2000), pp. 38–9.

²² W. M. Acworth, *The railways of Scotland: their present position, with a glance at their past and a forecast of their future* (1890), pp. 116–17, 139–42; S. Wood and J. Patrick, *History in the Grampian landscape* (1982), pp. 28, 64–8; R. H. Campbell and T. M. Devine 'The rural experience', in W. H. Fraser and R. J. Morris (eds), *People and society in Scotland, II, 1830–1914* (1990), pp. 48–9; T. M. Devine, *The Scottish nation, 1700–2000* (1999), pp. 451–2.

TABLE 1: North-eastern livestock fairs and markets between 1797 and 1902

	1797	1829	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1902
January	10	17	45	42	45	50	42	15
February	15	14	41	55	50	58	56	18
March	15	25	47	47	63	59	48	12
April	13	29	49	52	60	64	59	19
May	28	53	68	71	79	66	65	19
June	33	28	49	56	61	55	48	20
July	19	33	54	76	67	64	53	28
August	22	31	65	73	59	62	52	25
September	19	41	44	47	54	51	41	14
October	16	43	66	71	67	64	51	25
November	21	39	53	68	79	54	49	10
December	18	27	36	39	55	54	51	14
Total	229	380	617	697	739	701	615	219

Note: The areas covered are the old Scottish counties of Aberdeen, Banff, Moray and Nairn, Kincardine, and Angus, which was called Forfar up to 1928.

Sources: For 1797, J. Chalmers, *Aberdeen Almanack for the Year 1797* (1796); for 1829, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1902, *Aberdeen Journal*.

TABLE 2: Sheep and cattle in north-east Scotland, 1870–1910

Year	Sheep and lambs	Cows and heifers in milk or in calf	Other cattle two years of age and above	Other cattle under two years of age	Total cattle
1870	457,678	83,670	74,114	139,365	297,149
1880	414,294	80,913	67,306	143,641	291,860
1890	529,989	85,399	84,158	148,389	317,946
1900	592,659	85,580	72,597	162,567	320,744
1910	584,542	81,176	79,541	152,572	313,289

Note: North-east Scotland is defined as the counties of Aberdeen, Banff, Elgin or Moray, Forfar (Angus), Kincardine, Nairn.

Source: Agricultural Returns.

where they took control of all official transactions. There was no sharp chronological division between these methods of sale, and for all of the nineteenth century they coexisted. But by 1900 most livestock left the farm for sale at livestock auctions, and this switch to auctions was a change that began both in Aberdeen and its hinterland. Part of it can be seen in Table 1, which shows a more than threefold increase in the region's advertised fairs and markets between 1797 and 1870, and a decline thereafter. The decline was not accounted for by any reduction in the numbers of livestock in the region (see Table 2) but was a function of the transfer of trade to regular weekly and also special livestock auctions, which were never included in these monthly

lists. By 1902, the last year in which the lists of markets and fairs were regularly recorded in the *Aberdeen Journal*, the numbers were very close to those of 1797. However, this was not necessarily the survival of a hard core of traditional outlets for livestock over the whole century as some of the venues of 1902 did not exist in 1797, and those which still did were reduced in importance.

III

When the Aberdeen Railway Company connected the city with the south in 1850 its first livestock market site was provided by the company on its property south of the river Dee. This was in response to a letter from 188 farmers, butchers and cattle dealers asking it to provide a market.²³ But this arrangement did not cater for farmers and dealers bringing cattle that were intended to be sent south as dead meat into the city from the north, as the city and all its slaughterhouses were north of the river. In addition most livestock were fattened north of the city. A market was therefore needed within Aberdeen, and so in August 1851 a further deputation petitioned the town council to provide one.²⁴

A few weeks later the council acquired a suitable site in King Street, about a mile north of the main business centre. Besides helping the farmers and fleshers to carry on their trade, they believed it had the extra advantage that it might provide the city with a useful source of revenue. It opened on Wednesday 17 December 1851 and the initial arrangement was for a weekly market, free of custom for the time being, to be held on Wednesdays.²⁵ Initially the town provided just a fenced open site of about an acre but as it became more popular the council added a timber building where business could be carried on in greater comfort, and refreshments served.²⁶ After a slow start in the first few weeks, the new market picked up business. In its first two years, shown in Table 3, it averaged some 9000 cattle and with the small stock of sheep, lambs, calves and a few swine, over 17,000 animals passed through the market in each of its first two years.

There was no instant transformation of this market from an open to an auction one. Instead it passed through a long transitional stage lasting from 1860 to 1884 when its regular Wednesday markets were open markets, but at the same time some salesmen held auctions of stock they had either been consigned by farmers, or collected from the rural markets themselves. The first to modernize sales in this way was Alexander Lyon, cattle salesman and hide merchant, who started with an advertisement in April 1860 listing the support of 88 butchers and giving those with sheep and cattle for sale the option of having them 'exposed by private sale or public competition'.²⁷ With the support of so many of the local butchers, Lyon became the market's lead salesman. The speed of sale by public auction was remarked on, and in January 1861 the market reporter noted 'There has been a marked improvement on the market since this mode of selling has been adopted'.²⁸

In 1867 Alex Lyon gave up livestock selling and his place at the Aberdeen market was taken by John Duncan who became its sole lessee in 1869 for an annual rent of £90 and had the

²³ *AJ*, 6 Nov. 1850, p. 4d.

²⁴ Aberdeen Town House, Aberdeen City Council Registers (hereafter CA) /1/1/79, p. 145.

²⁵ CA/1/1/79, p. 152; *AJ*, 8 Oct. 1851, p. 6c; 29 Oct. 1851, p. 1c; 19 Nov. 1851, p. 1b; 3 Dec. 1851, p. 1c.

²⁶ CA/1/1/79, p. 189; *AJ*, 14 Jan. 1852, p. 4d.

²⁷ *AJ*, 18 Apr. 1860, p. 1c; 28 Sept. 1906, p. 10h.

²⁸ *Aberdeen Herald* (hereafter AH), 10 Nov. 1860, p. 7e; *AJ*, 2 Jan. 1861, p. 7f.

TABLE 3: Livestock exposed for sale at the King Street Cattle Market in 1852 and 1853

	<i>Cattle</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Lambs</i>	<i>Calves</i>	<i>Swine</i>	<i>Total</i>
1852	9265	7253	114	21	42	17,695
1853	9054	7321	744	39	90	17,239

Sources: For 1852 *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review*, 24 Dec. 1852, p. 7c; for 1853, *Aberdeen Journal*, 21 Dec. 1853, p. 5b.

exclusive right to sell animals by auction.²⁹ But when in 1871 the Aberdeen butchers complained of insufficient capacity at the Wednesday market to handle all the fat and store animals coming into town, Duncan agreed to open the market from 8 to 12 o'clock on Saturdays for his own increasingly popular auction sales.³⁰ The normal business of the Wednesday markets shrank to small numbers of traditional open sales between farmers, dealers and butchers which amounted to about 100 cattle and a few pigs and sheep a week, while Duncan's public auctions held at other times grew so much that in 1880 he could afford to build his own auction hall on part of the site at King Street.³¹ He was finally able to buy the entire site from Aberdeen council in 1884 for £1850, when the Privy Council Veterinary Department required the town to lay concrete to make it easier to disinfect for disease control. Rather than undertake the expenditure the town sold the entire market stance to Duncan who paid for the work instead, and open sales of livestock at King Street came to an end.³²

In the meantime the rapidly mounting demand for more market capacity in the city allowed another three permanent auction marts to be opened by 1883. These were a couple of miles further north of Duncan's establishment and close to Kittybrewster station. This was the main station of the Great North of Scotland Railway and it was here that most of the cattle coming into the city were unloaded. Two of them were privately owned family firms. The first was Alexander Middleton's Belmont Mart and the second was the Kittybrewster Mart owned by the partnership of Robert Reith and Robert J. Anderson.³³ The third was the Aberdeen Cattle and Farm Produce Association (ACFPA), formed as a farmers' cooperative in June 1882 with a nominal capital of £25,000 in shares of £1 each. Its foundation was a reaction to the fall in livestock prices after 1873.³⁴ According to its prospectus it was to be a direct selling organization which would bypass the middlemen – that is other auctioneers and cattle dealers – whose intermediate profits would be saved and put towards increasing farmers' returns. It was also planned that any surplus profit above 7½ per cent paid to the shareholders would 'be allocated rateably among consigners [sic], according to the value of their respective sales through the Association'.³⁵

²⁹ CA/1/1/87, pp. 22–5; 50–1.

³⁰ CA/1/1/88, pp. 214–15; *AJ*, 4 Oct. 1871, p. 6b.

³¹ *AJ*, 18 Dec. 1880, p. 4c.

³² Aberdeen University Library, (Lf Per Aa H5 Min), City of Aberdeen, Minutes and Proceedings of the Town Council (1883–4), pp. 172–3, 202.

³³ *AJ*, 20 May 1874, p. 4b; 15 July 1874, p. 4c.

³⁴ T. W. Fletcher, 'The Great Depression of English agriculture, 1873–96', *ECHR* 13 (1961), pp. 417–32; R. Perren, *Agriculture in depression, 1870–1940* (1995), pp. 7–16.

³⁵ Prospectus reprinted in *AJ*, 19 July 1882, p. 1c.

IV

If the railway revealed the need for more livestock marketing capacity in Aberdeen, it also contributed to overcapacity among the country markets. The markets that opened in the first half of the century were added to a pre-existing system of fairs inherited from before the eighteenth century. As the local railways were gradually extended throughout the region between 1850 and 1866, the pressure was to add even more markets sited at or very close to local railheads, where dealers and butchers could move quickly from their carriages to the sale rings and not have to search around for transport to take them a further three or four miles to some of the market stances (see Map 1). From the railhead sites it was far easier once they had made their purchases to send them straight on to their destinations by rail rather than searching around for local drovers to take them by road to the nearest station. As not all farmers and traders using the old stances were immediately willing to move nearer the station, the railways caused further duplication of markets, and much argument.

At the end of 1859 the question of fairs and markets came to a head in the Aberdeen press. In some cases pressure was put on proprietors to move their markets nearer to the railway station. In other instances there was concern over markets being held in close proximity on the same day. A leading part of this debate was taken by the Free Church and Liberal *Aberdeen Free Press* which in November 1859 carried a lengthy editorial titled 're-organisation of our cattle markets'. Its editor, William M'Combie, suggested that thoroughgoing rationalization was required, moving the Old Style markets that were fixed according to the Julian calendar to the current calendar, and involving 'the transfer of markets now held at inconvenient points to the vicinity of the nearest railway station'.³⁶

The first response was from the editor's namesake and cousin who was one of the leading cattle breeders of the region, William M'Combie of Tillyfour, near Alford.³⁷ He argued that the Aberdeen butchers, as the main buyers of fat cattle at all the local fairs and markets, were the only group powerful enough to impose any reform. Although he did not use the term, he held that they were the market makers with the power to dictate the shape of the region's livestock marketing network.³⁸ The matter was taken up again in July 1860 by a correspondent to the *Journal* who outlined a reduced calendar of cattle markets and fairs. But not all were in favour of rationalization, and a fortnight later 'A Garioch Farmer' actually argued for the continuance of established fairs on the grounds of 'respect for whatever is ancient'.³⁹ As can be seen from Table 1, there was no overnight rationalization and under the stimulus of the expansion of the railways network, the number of livestock markets continued to increase up to 1870, as did disputes about them.

Where they thought they had a strong enough case the Aberdeen butchers, supported by local dealers and farmers, petitioned landowners to make changes. This practice was particularly strong in the 1860s.⁴⁰ No formal decisions were ever taken by dealers and butchers acting

³⁶ *Aberdeen Free Press* (hereafter *AFP*), 18 Nov. 1859, p. 5a; also substantially reprinted in the *Nairnshire Telegraph*, 23 Nov. 1859, p. 4a–b.

³⁷ T. G. Otte and Paul Readman (eds), *By-elections in British Politics, 1832–1914* (2013), p. 284.

³⁸ *AFP*, 18 Nov. 1859, p. 5a. This letter was also

reprinted in the *AJ*, 30 Nov. 1859, p. 7c–d and the *Monroshire, Arbroath and Brechin Review* (hereafter *MABR*), 2 Dec. 1859, p. 6e.

³⁹ *AJ*, 18 July 1860, p. 8e; 1 Aug. 1860, p. 5d.

⁴⁰ *Elgin Courier* (hereafter *EC*), 20 Dec. 1861, p. 7e; *BJ*, 28 Mar. 1865, p. 1e; 27 June 1865, p. 1f; 15 Dec. 1868, p. 8f.

together to boycott inconvenient sites, but there was strong pressure on proprietors to improve them or change inconvenient market days. At the end of 1859, 60 butchers, 20 cattle dealers and 15 others, with their signatures witnessed as authentic by Aberdeen's Flesher Incorporation, petitioned William Cosmo Gordon of Fyvie to hold the Fyvie markets on the second Monday of every other month throughout the year. As an incentive they promised 'we will attend them if such alteration takes place'. They did not say what they would do if it did not, but the occasion never arose as Gordon immediately agreed to the change as from January 1860. A similar approach was made to the Earl of Fife to alter the days of the Turriff markets to the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month, to which he also agreed. But not all market owners were willing to be pushed around in this way by petitioners. Robert Leslie, proprietor of the Rothienorman market told them he was not inclined to make any changes as the days of his markets suited his tenants and 'a large district of the country'.⁴¹

V

The accelerated decline in the number of rural markets in the 1880s with their collapse after 1890 was caused by auction markets taking the place of both the old livestock fairs and many of the newer markets established after 1800, a transformation that was warmly welcomed by farmers.⁴² It began with auctioneers conducting sales of special lots of animals at the sites of existing markets. As early as 1847 Alex Chisholm, an auctioneer at Turriff was selling 'Short-Horned Bulls and South Down Tups' on the market stance at Turriff on the 'day of Cowan Fair', and again in 1849 he used the Turriff stance on a market day to dispose of a 'Pure-bred Shorthorned Bull Calf' and 'three mules'. In May 1849 auctioneer Thomas Philip sold 40 cattle and 'a few sheep' at the New Byth market, midway between Turriff and Strichen.⁴³ Sometimes this was done rather tentatively, as when 15 Ayrshire cows were promised to be on offer by auction at the 'Lourin' (or Lawrence) Fair of Old Rayne, ten miles northwest of Inverurie, in August 1852, by an auctioneer who did not put his name to the advertisement. Those who were more open were John Thomson, a cattle dealer from Echt 12 miles south of Inverurie, who promised to auction between 40 and 50 Ross-shire stores at Echt in 1853 and James Barrie from Stonehaven with five shorthorn bulls at Huntly in 1854.⁴⁴ Another example in this decade was Laurencekirk cattle dealer James Molyson who between 1852 and 1859 advertised regular October rroups of cattle at the Laurencekirk market stance in Kincardineshire, 30 miles southwest of Aberdeen.⁴⁵

These infrequent examples of 'pop-up auctions' were dealers testing local demand for occasional sales at fresh market situations away from the farm, perhaps hoping to find extra customers at the traditional markets. But they were not attempts to replace them. In all cases above, the times these sales took place were in the afternoon, so as not to interfere with the

⁴¹ *AJ*, 28 Dec. 1859, p. 1e.

⁴² I. Riddell and K. Walker, 'Crops and livestock in the modern era', in Fenton and Veitch (eds), *Farming and the land*, p. 268.

⁴³ *AJ*, 22 Sept. 1847, p. 1d; 13 Oct. 1849, p. 1e; *BJ*, 24 Apr. 1849, p. 1c.

⁴⁴ *AJ*, 11 Aug. 1852, p. 1f; 4 May 1853, p. 6c; 18 Mar. 1854, p. 5b; *BJ*, 2 May 1854, p. 3f.

⁴⁵ *MABR*, 8 Oct. 1852, p. 1c; 21 Oct. 1853, p. 4b; 6 Oct. 1854, p. 4a; 28 Sept. 1855, p. 4b; 10 Oct. 1856, p. 1e; 25 Sept. 1857, p. 4b; 24 Sept. 1858, p. 4a; 30 Sept. 1859, p. 1c.

main business of the markets, which began in the morning. They may even have assisted the markets by keeping dealers at the stance rather than have them drift away after lunch.

By the 1860s the practice of auctioneers using market stances on market days became more common, and though the numbers sold in this way were still low, the quality of the animals offered remained high, mostly coming from named farmers. In March 1860 John Thomson of Echt announced he was instructed to sell on the market stance at Inverurie the surplus stock of pure-bred shorthorn bulls and heifers belonging to William Gibson of Kinmundy, ten miles south-east of Inverurie.⁴⁶ In February 1862 Thomson sold at Echt market three pure shorthorn bulls 'with good pedigree' and in January 1863 four bulls and four calves 'well worth the attention of first-class Breeders', also at the Echt market.⁴⁷ In April 1867 Alex Russell conducted an auction sale of ten 'superior quality' cattle on market day at the Inch market stance, starting 'at Half an Hour after Noon'.⁴⁸ As early as September 1862 there is record of six pedigree bull calves of James Lumsden of Braco being auctioned by James Hendry in a field above the Keith market stance on Keith Summer Eve's Fair at between two and three o'clock, and most of the farmers and buyers in the market attended.⁴⁹ But by 1868 Hendry had become bolder, selling cattle, the property of William Ogilvie, on the market green at Keith on the day of the Keith Market, starting at two o'clock.⁵⁰ But the first regular monthly auctions held on Keith market green were by auctioneer Gordon Robertson, who held eight between November 1870 and June 1871, beginning at noon, again so as not to clash with the start of the market.⁵¹

Most of these examples, with the exception of the last, were still irregular occasional sales like those in the 1850s, and most of the work of these auctioneers was still dispenishment and surplus stock sales conducted at farm premises.

A more sustained attempt to establish auctions on market days was at Laurencekirk. In November 1864 James M'Gregor, an auctioneer in Laurencekirk, advertised that commencing at 12 o'clock he would sell 24 fat cattle, 2 milk cows and 70 store ewes at the village's next fortnightly market and by April 1865 this had become his 'usual fortnightly sale of fat cattle'.⁵² But although his auctions became a fairly regular part of the market for some years, at some he would fall back on private bargains if he was unable to sell all animals by auction.⁵³ He continued selling in this way until 1871 when he announced he would hold his fortnightly sales on market days outside instead of inside the market.⁵⁴ He was not alone in doing this as other auction firms also held rival sales close to the market in the 1870s.⁵⁵ But this form of direct competition did not have a great effect on the fortnightly markets. The Laurencekirk council owned the market

⁴⁶ *AJ*, 7 Mar. 1860, p. 1e; 14 Mar. 1860, p. 1e. Kinmundy was a small estate of 440 acres six miles north-west of Aberdeen with a rental value of £700 per annum. *AJ*, 7 Mar. 1866, p. 2c.

⁴⁷ *AJ*, 5 Feb. 1862, p. 1e; 21 Jan. 1863, p. 1e.

⁴⁸ *BJ*, 16 Apr. 1867, p. 5b.

⁴⁹ *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser*, 19 Sept. 1862, p. 8e-f. James Lumsden was a prominent breeder of shorthorns and farmed at Braco Grange in Banffshire, four miles southeast of Keith. *AJ*, 1 Nov. 1877, p. 4g.

⁵⁰ *BJ*, 19 May 1868, p. 1b; 26 May 1868, p. 1f.

⁵¹ *BJ*, 15 Nov. 1870, p. 4b; 6 June 1871, p. 4b.

⁵² *MABR*, 18 Nov. 1864, *Stonehaven Journal* (hereafter *SJ*), 27 Apr. 1865, p. 3e.

⁵³ *SJ*, 13 Apr. 1865, p. 3e; 11 May 1865, p. 3e; 11 Oct. 1866, p. 3c; *MABR*, 12 Oct. 1866, p. 5a; 26 Oct. 1866, p. 5a; 28 Dec. 1866, p. 1b; *SJ*, 3 Jan. 1867, p. 3d; 25 Feb. 1869, p. 3c; 28 Mar. 1867, p. 3e; *DC*, 13 Dec. 1870, p. 3e.

⁵⁴ *MABR*, 26 Jan. 1871, p. 3d; 27 Jan. 1871, p. 4f.

⁵⁵ *DC*, 5 Mar. 1872, p. 2a; 29 Oct. 1872, p. 2a; 12 May 1875, p. 4a; 14 May 1874, p. 7e; 10 June 1875, p. 3f; 25 Apr. 1876, p. 4b.

stance where they provided licensed refreshment rooms and business booths. The right to run these was sold each year to local firms who provided services for the market, and there was no fall-off in the bidding for them or for the right to collect the market tolls, which was also auctioned annually.⁵⁶ As a strategy for protecting the town's fortnightly market this had some success and the freeloading auctions held at nearby sites remained relatively infrequent.

Unlike Laurencekirk, which had been reached by the railway in 1849, the planned village of Forres in Morayshire was connected to Aberdeen by a branch of the Great North of Scotland Railway as late as 1858, with no direct connection with the north and south until the Inverness and Perth Railway came to the town in 1863.⁵⁷ This explains why it took longer to develop as a livestock market centre and there were no local auctioneers making use of its stance on the market green for occasional sales in the 1850s. In 1850 the town had only eight cattle sales and was somewhat overshadowed by the nearby ancient burgh of Elgin, which had 11.⁵⁸ The extension of the town's livestock markets came about only after an improved railway station was built in 1863, when in November of that year the town council announced it would hold monthly markets as well as look for a new stance nearer the railway station.⁵⁹ Although one was not found, the monthly markets did experience a few years of growth as the railway brought more livestock and dealers into the town, a process helped by the opening of the Station Hotel in July 1865.⁶⁰ But in 1867 some of the wealthier farmers in the county who made up the Forres and Northern Fat Cattle Club, which had been founded two years earlier, formed a joint-stock company to build an Agricultural Hall to hold their December shows sheltered from the blizzards sometimes encountered on the Market Green. It was also sited closer to the railway station than the market green.⁶¹ The hall was an immediate success, and by the mid-1870s was also used for occasional cattle and sheep auctions as well as shows for the cattle club. In addition a separate building was opened as the Morayshire Auction Mart in 1877 by a firm of local auctioneers, Messrs Ross and Macpherson, who used it to run competing sales with those on the market green and those in the Agricultural Hall.⁶² Auction marts in the town were being held weekly by 1879 and when they coincided with the monthly sales it became quite common for owners of any stock unsold at the latter to drive them from the market green to try their luck in either the Agricultural Hall or at the mart.⁶³

By 1884 the Forres monthly markets were in such a sad state that the town council was unable to find anyone willing to pay the annual rent to collect the market tolls. It even took counsel's opinion on whether it could levy custom on the animals being sold at the auction marts, but was advised it could not.⁶⁴ The final record of any activity at the monthly markets was in April 1885, but by then the show of animals was too few for any prices to be quoted, while at the same

⁵⁶ *DC*, 28 Apr. 1866, p. 2h; *SJ*, 7 May 1868, p. 3f; 6 May 1869, p. 3d; 4 May 1871, p. 2f; *DC*, 25 Apr. 1873, p. 4c; 2 May 1874, p. 3c; 25 Apr. 1876, p. 4b; 22 Apr. 1879, p. 5f.

⁵⁷ H. A. Vallance, *The Great North of Scotland Railway* (1989), pp. 31–5.

⁵⁸ *Russel's Morayshire Register and Elgin and Forres Directory 1850*, pp. 187, 218; *EC*, 29 Mar. 1850, p. 4f.

⁵⁹ *BJ*, 10 Nov. 1863, pp. 4b and 6d; *Inverness Courier* (hereafter *IC*), 10 Dec. 1863, p. 6b.

⁶⁰ *IC*, 18 Feb. 1864, p. 7d; 4 Aug. 1864, p. 7e; *EC*, 14 July 1865, p. 8b–c.

⁶¹ *EC*, 2 June 1865, p. 8b–c; 22 Nov. 1867, p. 8b.

⁶² *AJ*, 12 Dec. 1877, p. 2b; 30 Jan. 1878, p. 7g.

⁶³ *AJ*, 29 Oct. 1879, p. 3b; 16 Feb. 1881, p. 3c–d; 19 Apr. 1882, p. 3d; 8 July 1882, p. 7g; *AFP*, 17 Mar. 1880, p. 3f; 20 Feb. 1884, p. 7d

⁶⁴ *AJ*, 14 Apr. 1880, p. 3c; *AFP*, 13 Feb. 1884, p. 3c; *AJ*, 11 Feb. 1885, p. 7f.

time the auction had a good show of all classes of stock and trade was animated.⁶⁵ Thereafter the Morayshire Auction Mart became the town's main livestock market.

VI

When the question of origin and ownership is considered, the livestock auction marts outside Aberdeen in the 1870s were, like Messrs Ross and Macpherson at Forres, begun as private family firms, but in 1896 this mart became a public limited company.⁶⁶ By 1900, many others had either been converted into public limited companies, or started as such like the ACFPA in Aberdeen, taking advantage of the Companies Act of 1856 and subsequent changes in company law. The final outcome of this process is shown in Table 4, which shows that, by 1900, only nine of the region's 34 marts were still run as family firms. This trend in favour of limited liability was in keeping with the same development in the wider British and Scottish business communities.⁶⁷

A good example can be found in the Kincardineshire county town of Stonehaven, some 14 miles south of Aberdeen. From 1875 the auctioneers, John Brown and Alexander Murray, operating under the partnership of Brown and Murray, held monthly cattle auctions in the town's market square. In 1878 they acquired premises within the town and opened their 'new auction cattle mart' in August, increasing their sales to fortnightly.⁶⁸ By 1880 their business had grown to holding weekly livestock sales and they continued in that way for the rest of the 1880s. But at the end of 1890 John Brown retired from the firm and Alexander Murray continued to run it with his brother William under the title of A. and W. Murray.⁶⁹ At the start of 1892 the partnership and premises were taken over by the Stonehaven Auction Company Limited. According to its prospectus the share capital was £4000 in 4000 shares of £1 each. We do not know how much of this was taken up, but as the press reports said 'The directors include most of the farmers in the district', with the Murrays retained as managers, it was certainly a farmer-financed takeover.⁷⁰ Its increased capital allowed further expansion of the firm by opening a branch in the Deeside town of Banchory. As that town did not have an auction mart, the first sales began in the open air in summer 1892 at the old market stance, where the firm subsequently arranged with the council to build a mart which was opened in April 1893.⁷¹ Both marts appear to have been a success and in 1896 shareholders received a tax-free dividend of 6 per cent, a level comfortably maintained for the rest of the century.⁷²

An important feature of the change from open markets to auction marts in the 1890s was the decline of family firms and the rise of new joint stock firms financed by local groups of farmers, businessmen, and landowners, who felt that regular weekly or fortnightly sales under

⁶⁵ *AJ*, 15 Apr. 1885, p. 3c–d; Robert Douglas, *Annals of the Royal Burgh of Forres* (1934), p. 343.

⁶⁶ *AJ*, 4 Nov. 1896, p. 3e; 14 Mar. 1900, p. 2d; 14 May 1914, p. 3f.

⁶⁷ L. Hannah, *The rise of the corporate economy* (1976); P. L. Payne, *The early Scottish limited liability companies 1856–1895* (1980).

⁶⁸ *AJ*, 13 Jan. 1875, p. 7f; 12 Dec. 1877, p. 7g; 6 Aug. 1878, p. 1d; 16 Aug. 1878, p. 2b.

⁶⁹ *AFP*, 29 May 1880, p. 1g; *AJ*, 29 Dec. 1890, p. 7d; *AFP*, 2 Jan. 1891, p. 1a; 9 Jan. 1891, p. 7e.

⁷⁰ *AJ*, 14 Jan 1892, p. 3c.

⁷¹ *AFP*, 3 June 1892, p. 2e; *AJ*, 14 Oct. 1892, p. 2c; 28 Apr. 1893, p. 3f.

⁷² *AJ*, 20 Mar. 1896, p. 3d; *DC*, 12 Mar. 1897, p. 3e; *Dundee Advertiser*, 18 Mar. 1898, p. 4f; *DC*, 17 Mar. 1899, p. 3a; *AJ*, 15 Mar. 1900, p. 6f.

TABLE 4: Livestock auction markets in north-east Scotland, c.1900

<i>Place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>No. of marts</i>
Aberdeen	Belmont Auction Mart	Alec Middleton and Son	Family firm	
	Central Auction Mart Aberdeen	Aberdeen Cattle and Farm Produce Association Limited ^a	Farmer	4
	City Auction Mart	John Duncan	Family firm	
Aboyne	Kittybrewster Auction Market	Messrs Reith and Anderson	Family firm	2
	Aboyne Auction Company Limited	Aboyne Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Banchory	Banchory Auction Mart	Stonehaven Auction Company Limited	Farmer	2
Brechin	The Farmers' Mart	Brechin Farmers' Mart Limited	Farmer	
Craigellachie	Craigellachie Auction Mart	Craigellachie Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Dufftown	The Auction Company	The Dufftown Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Elgin	Elgin Market Green Auction Co. (Ltd.)	Elgin Market Green Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
	Northern Auction Company Limited	Northern Auction Company Limited	Farmer	3
Ellon	Central Auction Mart	Central Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	4
	Ythanside Mart	Ythanside Farmers' Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Forfar	Forfar Auction Market	Messrs Scott and Graham Limited	Farmer	
	Forfar Auction Mart	Strathmore Auction Company Limited	Farmer	2
Forres	Forres Auction Mart	Forres Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Fraserburgh	Fraserburgh Auction Mart	John Bell	Family firm	2
Huntly	Northern Auction Co. Limited	Northern Auction Company Limited	Farmer	3
Insch	Northern Auction Co. Limited	Northern Auction Company Limited	Farmer	3
Kirriemuir	Kirriemuir Auction Mart	Strathmore Auction Company Limited	Farmer	2
Laurencekirk	Kincardineshire Auction Company Limited	Kincardineshire Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Maud	Buchan Central Auction Mart	Messrs Reith and Anderson	Family firm	2
	County Auction Mart	John Bell	Family firm	2
	New Maud Auction Mart	William Findlay	Family firm	2
Montrose	Montrose Auction Company Limited	Montrose Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Nairn	Nairnshire Auction Mart Company Limited	Nairnshire Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	
Oldmeldrum	Oldmeldrum Auction Mart	Oldmeldrum Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	

<i>Place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>No. of marts</i>
Peterhead	Peterhead Auction Mart	William Findlay	Family firm	2
Rothienorman	Rothienorman Auction Mart	Central Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	4
Stonehaven	Stonehaven Auction Company Limited.	Stonehaven Auction Company Limited.	Farmer	2
Strichen	Strichen Auction Co., Limited.	Strichen Auction Company Limited	Farmer	
Torphins	Central Mart, Torphins	Central Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	4
Turriff	Shire Auction Market	John Bell Jnr and William Flett	Family firm	
	Turriff Auction Mart	Turriff Auction Mart Company Limited	Farmer	

^a The marts of this company in Aberdeen, Ellon, Rothienorman and Torphins were all operated under the name of the Central Auction Mart Company Limited.

Sources: *Aberdeen Journal*, *Peterhead Sentinel*, *Dundee Courier*, 1898–1900, *passim*.

cover afforded them more control over the market system. In 1890 at the establishment of the Kincardineshire Auction Company, based in Laurencekirk, the shares were taken up by over 200 local farmers and agricultural businessmen.⁷³ Other examples of farmer-funded limited liability companies taking over or establishing auction marts were at Strichen in February 1894, Dufftown in October 1895, and Turriff in 1898.⁷⁴ In the case of Strichen, its auction mart, founded by Alex Calder in 1882, was taken over and added to by the Strichen Auction Mart Company.⁷⁵ Auction sales, initially in the open air, were also undertaken by John Bell Sen. in the 1880s before the Turriff Cattle and Auction Mart Company Limited was formed in 1898 with a capital of £6000 in £1 shares and took over as a going concern the private rival business there of Alexander Johnston. This meant that by 1900 the town had two auction marts, the farmer-funded Turriff Mart, which was still managed by Alexander Johnstone, and the privately owned Shire Auction Market, now managed by John Bell Jnr and William Flett.⁷⁶

The establishment of multiple branch auction firms was also another feature of the 1890s. In 1896 a group of local farmers and businessmen decided to open an auction mart at Huntly.⁷⁷ But even before the mart was built on a site adjacent to the railway station on land leased from the Duke of Richmond and Gordon (who owned the town), it was decided to amalgamate the concern with the Elgin Auction Mart Company which had been founded in 1888, and rename the new firm the Elgin and Strathbogie Auction Mart Company (ESAMC).⁷⁸ The new company underwent more expansion when the farmers at Inch decided to abandon their monthly markets, form a company and build themselves an auction mart. But even before they appointed

⁷³ *AJ*, 5 Feb. 1890, p. 7f; 19 Mar. 1890, p. 7e, *DA*, 25 Mar. 1890, p. 4g.

⁷⁴ *AJ*, 6 Feb. 1894, p. 1e; 26 Oct. 1895, p. 4b; *DC*, 2 July 1898, p. 6b.

⁷⁵ *AJ*, 14 Oct. 1882, p. 5d; *AFP*, 24 Sept. 1884, p. 1f; *AJ*, 14 Feb. 1894, p. 8e.

⁷⁶ *AJ*, 10 Mar. 1888, p. 5g; *AFP*, 27 Sept. 1889, p. 2e; *AJ*, 2 Apr. 1896, p. 2f; 20 Apr. 1896, p. 7b; 29 Dec. 1897, p. 7g; 16 Aug. 1899, p. 11f; 9 Feb. 1900, p. 2b.

⁷⁷ *AJ*, 20 Feb. 1895, p. 6d.

⁷⁸ *AJ*, 18 Sept. 1888, p. 6e; 23 May 1896, p. 5c; 27 May 1896, p. 2b; 15 Aug. 1896, p. 6d; 4 Feb. 1897, p. 7f.

an architect to draw up plans, the directors of the ESAMC met and suggested an amalgamation with the proposed Inch Auction Company under the new name of the Northern Auction Company Limited (NAC), with branches at Elgin, Huntly and Inch. The proposal was agreed to by all parties and the NAC held its first Christmas sales in all three markets in December 1898.⁷⁹

Firms also moved out from Aberdeen to establish country branches and compete with local auctioneers. As early as November 1876 Alexander Middleton who operated the Belmont mart in Aberdeen, opened a new mart in Keith. He soon had competition from a local firm of Mundell and Hendry.⁸⁰ The auctioneer in this partnership was George Hendry, son of James Hendry, who had been conducting crop, livestock, and property sales in and around the town since 1825, and the irregular livestock auctions on the town's market stance in the 1860s detailed in section V above.⁸¹ Keith was unusual as it was an ancient burgh with a charter dating from 1195, which was later developed as a planned town by two neighbouring landowners, the Earl of Findlater from 1750 and the Earl of Fife from 1817.⁸² As each allowed a mart to be built to assist development in their parts of the town both Middleton and Hendry ran their auctions from separate premises.

In February 1887 the Aberdeen firm of Messrs Reith and Anderson opened their Buchan Central Auction Market at Maud.⁸³ Maud was the railway junction where the lines into Aberdeen from Fraserburgh and Peterhead joined. Because of this position it became an important livestock-marketing centre, and already had an auction mart owned by William Findlay who had been running marts at Maud and Peterhead since 1878.⁸⁴ In the 1890s it also attracted another local auctioneer to open a third market there. This was John Bell, who had established an auction mart at Fraserburgh in 1878. He set up the County Auction Mart at Maud in May 1895, preventing any of the other Aberdeen based firms from establishing a branch there.⁸⁵

In 1896 the ACFPA, the only joint stock Aberdeen-based livestock auctioneers, set up a branch outside of the city when it built and opened a small mart at Torphins on Deeside, a village served by the Deeside railway line. When the mart opened in August 1896 it could accommodate 150 cattle, 250 sheep and 80 pigs, with a sale ring of 30 by 40 feet and sitting and standing room for 200 buyers. Prior to this the village had had monthly cattle fairs, but the new mart held fortnightly sales.⁸⁶ In June 1898 the Association opened another branch in the town of Ellon 16 miles north of Aberdeen. The circumstances of this were unusual as at the same time another Aberdeen firm, Alec Middleton's Belmont Auction Mart Company, also opened a mart in the town. But after nine months of competition Middleton sold the Ellon branch to the Ythanside Farmers' Auction Company for £1150.⁸⁷ This company was formed in March 1899 by a group of local farmers and businessmen with capital of £2000 in one-pound shares specifically to purchase the mart, again stopping the ACFPA from gaining a local monopoly.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ *AJ*, 25 Jan. 1898, p. 6f; 16 May 1898, p. 4g; 2 Dec. 1898, p. 1f.

⁸⁰ *AJ*, 15 Nov. 1876, p. 4c; 13 Dec. 1876, p. 7g; 20 Dec. 1876, p. 7g.

⁸¹ *BJ*, 16 Aug. 1870.

⁸² *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, (21 vols, 1791–99), V, pp. 418, 420; *NSA*, XIII, p. 391.

⁸³ *AJ*, 10 Feb. 1887, p. 3d.

⁸⁴ *AJ*, 20 Aug. 1878, p. 1d; 15 June 1899, p. 7d.

⁸⁵ *AJ*, 2 Mar. 1878, p. 7b; 17 Mar. 1896, p. 1e; 19 Feb. 1902, p. 7a.

⁸⁶ *AJ*, 20 Aug. 1896, p. 7b; 3 Aug. 1899, p. 3d.

⁸⁷ *AJ*, 7 June 1898, p. 7f; 9 June 1898, p. 7h, 14 Apr. 1899, p. 4f.

⁸⁸ *Glasgow Herald* (Hereafter *GH*), 31 Mar. 1899, p. 5c.

VII

This transformation from livestock markets to auction marts was not achieved without opposition. In his study of the region's farming, Ian Carter mentions that the butchers did not like auction markets and formed a cartel to break Aberdeen's first pioneering market.⁸⁹ However this over-simplifies events and fails to acknowledge that on three occasions, and not only in Aberdeen, local butchers attempted to interfere with the transition from markets to auctions. It is not surprising that they did, as in 1800 the active players in the marketing process were butchers and livestock dealers who went from farm to farm and from market to market assembling their herds and flocks. Their relationship with the producer was an individual one and they were the unchallenged mediators of demand because it was upon the information they possessed that prices were decided. This did not alter greatly even with the building of the railways and telegraph.

According to Kieve the telegraph often followed the construction of the railway, and was in place in Aberdeen by 1854.⁹⁰ But its effect was to strengthen the hand of the urban butchers and meat salesmen of north-east Scotland. The weakness of the farmers' position was that their information on markets and prices was always less than current, whereas after 1854 the Aberdeen salesmen and butchers who traded directly with England always had up to date knowledge of cattle and meat sales and prices in London and elsewhere, from their English counterparts. Farmers had no immediate access to the telegraph offices, nor had they anyone to contact for daily market information. The *Aberdeen Journal*, although published since 1747, was an inadequate substitute. It appeared on a Wednesday and was still only a weekly in the 1850s and 1860s. And while its direct competitor the *Aberdeen Free Press* was published daily from 1872, the *Aberdeen Journal* only became a daily paper after May 1876.⁹¹ Even then, the London market reports and prices published in both papers from the 1870s to the 1890s were still only those of the previous couple of days which meant dealers always had access to current price information via the Aberdeen telegraph office, but the prices that farmers received via the newspapers lagged by at least 48 hours.

The auction marts altered this situation by reducing informational asymmetry: seeing butchers and dealers all possessing current price information bidding against each other reassured farmers that the prices they received were the result of fair competition. Inevitably some Aberdeen butchers disliked the change. At the end of March 1871, in an advertisement published in the *Aberdeen Free Press*, 36 Aberdeen butchers called for a general withdrawal of custom from John Duncan's King Street market. They argued that sales of fat cattle by auction at Aberdeen had disrupted the hitherto 'well-arranged local markets'. They said local dealers were visiting farmers and buying up cattle and thus 'taking a position betwixt the Farmer and the Butcher to the disappointment of those regularly attending the various Markets'.⁹² This letter provoked a fierce press debate and it was reprinted in both the *Aberdeen* and the

⁸⁹ Ian Carter, *Farm life in northeast Scotland 1840–1914: the poor man's country* (1979), p. 49.

⁹⁰ J. L. Kieve, *The electric telegraph: a social and economic history* (1973), pp. 44–5, 73–4, 87–9; *AJ*, 27 Dec.

1854, p. 5c.

⁹¹ W. H. Fraser, 'The Press', in Fraser and Lee, *Aberdeen*, p. 456.

⁹² *AFP*, 31 Mar. 1871, p. 1a.

Banffshire Journal along with Duncan's reply, which said that most of the signatories to the letter were not customers at his market and they only comprised a third of the butchers in Aberdeen. He also made the point that although Aberdeen butchers and dealers also purchased direct from farms and then sold in the local markets, at his sales more than three quarters of the cattle still came 'from the grower or feeder'.⁹³

But the 36 butchers' advertisement was largely ignored by the rest of the trade, and it and the debate that followed made no difference to John Duncan's sales at King Street.⁹⁴ In 1881, a decade after his battle with the butchers, he was entertained to a public dinner by 150 of his supporters at Aberdeen's Music Hall chaired by his strongest advocate, landowner and farmer Archer Fortescue, the owner of the Kingcausie Estate eight miles from Aberdeen, on the south bank of the River Dee, who had patronized his sales since they first began. There were even a few butchers among the assembly, and theirs was one of the trades proposed in the toasts at the end of the meal. But the majority attending were farmers, landowners, and businessmen who provided ancillary services for the agricultural industry like bankers, fertilizer merchants, and some of the other Aberdeen auctioneers.⁹⁵

There was a second protest against livestock auctions 12 years later, but this time it was in Keith and not Aberdeen. Being 49 miles northwest of Aberdeen and linked to it by rail in 1857, it had by the 1880s become a processing centre for the dead meat trade in the north, dispatching as many as 250 sides of beef a week for the London market.⁹⁶ Since 1876 it had had the two auction marts described earlier, one run by local auctioneer George Hendry and the other by Alec Middleton, owner of the Belmont Mart in Aberdeen.⁹⁷

At the beginning of 1883 some of Keith's butchers and dealers signed an agreement to refrain from buying cattle at the Inverness, Keith, Forres and Grantown auction marts, saying they preferred to deal directly with the farmers either at their farms or in the cattle markets 'as in olden times' without the agency of cattle salesmen (i.e. auctioneers). They also accused farmers who used the auctions to sell their cattle of bidding up the price, or getting their friends to do so.⁹⁸ There had been an attempt at this at Alex Middleton's mart in 1881 when animals jointly owned by a farmer and a butcher were bid for by the butcher who acted as though he had no business connection with either the farmer or the cattle. This was spotted by Middleton, who ignored the butcher's bids. When the aggrieved joint owners of the animals took their case to the Aberdeen Small Debt Court the Sheriff agreed with Middleton's action and the complainants had to pay all costs of the case.⁹⁹

At a farmers' meeting held in Keith on 20 January 1883 to discuss the butchers' threat, the general mood was one of appeasement. While there was no mention of the auction marts, it was suggested that the town's cattle market be changed from monthly to fortnightly, and to have another meeting in a week's time to make a final decision after a full consultation with farmers who were not present at the meeting.¹⁰⁰ But at their next meeting it was decided

⁹³ *AJ*, 29 Mar. p. 1a–b; *BJ*, 4 Apr. 1871, p. 1b.

⁹⁴ *AJ*, 12 Apr. 1871, p. 8e; *AFP*, 14 Apr. 1871, p. 8c; *AJ*, 19 Apr. 1871, p. 8e; 26 Apr. 1871, p. 8d; 3 May 1871, p. 9a.

⁹⁵ *AJ*, 4 Jan. 1881, p. 6a.

⁹⁶ *BJ*, 16 Mar. 1869, p. 6a; *AJ*, 28 Dec. 1886, p. 7a.

⁹⁷ *AJ*, 28 Apr. 1877, p. 1f.

⁹⁸ *AJ*, 22 Jan. 1883, p. 2h.

⁹⁹ *AEE*, 10 Feb. 1881, p. 2c.

¹⁰⁰ *AJ*, 22 Jan. 1883, p. 2h; reprinted 27 Jan. 1883, p. 8a.

not to have fortnightly markets but to keep to monthly ones.¹⁰¹ The London *Morning Post*, commenting on the Keith dealers and butchers, said they had practically put a stop to the next sale that was going to take place in the Keith auction mart, but did not specify which one.¹⁰²

It is difficult to judge how effective the threat to boycott Keith auctions was, as for the next few months all livestock auctions and markets in the north east were disrupted by the national outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and government restrictions on the movement of cattle.¹⁰³ For the rest of 1883 the traditional Keith markets were held monthly as and when disease regulations allowed, but there is no record of any more auctions that year.¹⁰⁴ Livestock auctions started again in Keith in 1884 but on a much reduced scale and from just one market, which changed hands more than once. Alec Middleton gave up on the town and decided it would be easier to concentrate primarily on his Belmont mart in Aberdeen. According to Keith's local historian, George Hendry's auction mart had to close because it was boycotted by buyers.¹⁰⁵ If that was the case, it was leased to a Mr W. W. Stewart who held his first sales in November and December 1884, and weekly sales in 1885 and 1886.¹⁰⁶ It was then used by various auctioneers until it passed back into the Hendry family's control and George's brother Robert ran weekly sales from 1891 until April 1894.¹⁰⁷ Thereafter Keith had no active livestock auction mart.

Given this frequent change of ownership, it is unlikely that the Keith marts were easily crushed by the butchers' opposition alone: there were other factors which contributed. Keith was surrounded by a number of markets all within easy reach (see Map 1), and it hardly justified having the two auction marts it did since 1876. When we consider the other auction sites its butchers threatened to ignore, Inverness, Grantown and Forres, we find they failed to stop auctions in any of these. Those in Grantown and Forres thrived, and although the Inverness mart is outside the region covered by this article, weekly livestock auctions were held there by 1889 and it had two firms of livestock auctioneers conducting weekly sales by 1891.¹⁰⁸

The third and final attempt by local butchers and meat traders to disrupt the region's livestock auctions was in 1897, and was on a national scale. The dispute began in Glasgow in June 1896 when the Glasgow Fleshers Protection Association (GFPA), a group of wholesale butchers and meat traders, tried to prevent the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) from buying cattle in the city's dead meat market in Moore Street. In the following weeks this was extended to auction marts by threatening to boycott any auctioneer or mart selling livestock to the SCWS.¹⁰⁹ The dispute spread to Aberdeen and the north east in July 1897 with an ultimatum from Aberdeen butchers to have no dealings with anyone in the meat trade who traded with the city's Northern Co-operative Society (NCS). It had been founded in 1861

¹⁰¹ *AJ*, 10 Feb. 1883, p. 8c.

¹⁰² *Morning Post*, 13 Feb. 1883, p. 6b.

¹⁰³ A. Woods, *A manufactured plague? The history of foot-and-mouth disease in Britain* (2004), pp. 1–19; *AJ*, 16 Feb. 1883, p. 7e–f; 10 Apr. 1883, p. 4h; 5 May 1883, p. 2g; 3 Aug. 1883, p. 7e.

¹⁰⁴ *AJ*, 3 Mar. 1883, p. 4g; 7 Apr. 1883, p. 3g; 5 May 1883, p. 3h; 15 June 1883, p. 3e; 21 July 1883, p. 8e.

¹⁰⁵ John W. Cowie, *Recollections of Keith, Fife-Keith and Newmill* (1928), p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ *AJ*, 17 Nov. 1884, p. 3d; *AFP*, 12 Dec. 1884, p. 7b; *AJ*, 13 Dec. 1884, p. 8d; 22 Dec. 1884, p. 3e; 18 May 1885, p. 7j; 9 Dec. 1886, p. 3f.

¹⁰⁷ *AFP*, 27 Mar. 1891, p. 2d; 24 Sept. 1892, p. 2d; 13 Jan. 1894, p. 2a; 20 Apr. 1894, p. 2g.

¹⁰⁸ *Inverness County Directory*, 1889, p. 118; *IC*, 2 Jan. 1891, p. 8e.

¹⁰⁹ J. Kinloch and J. Butt, *History of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited* (1981), pp. 253–4.

and by 1896 operated 10 retail butcher shops in the city, while private traders had 94.¹¹⁰ The ultimatum included not only auctioneers and other butchers who supplied the NCS with beasts or meat, but also farmers who were members of a cooperative society and/or supplied it with any sort of farm produce.¹¹¹ Faced with this threat the Aberdeen auctioneers eventually agreed to the butchers' demands that they sign an agreement which, borrowing from the terminology of the temperance movement, was referred to as the pledge, to restrict their business dealings to those livestock dealers and farmers who agreed to have no dealings with the NCS.¹¹²

Although all four Aberdeen firms were prepared to agree to the butchers' demand, auctioneers in other parts of the region were less accommodating. When the farmers who held most of the shares in the Kincardineshire Auction Company met to consider the pledge, it was described as a selfish attempt to control the meat trade of the whole country and unanimously rejected, and they resolved to continue selling to the highest bidder.¹¹³ In the important markets at the village of Maud, where three separate companies held auctions that handled most of the livestock trade in and out of Buchan and north Aberdeenshire, one of the family firms there, run by John Bell, also refused to have anything to do with the boycott.¹¹⁴ While the other two firms at Maud wavered and said they would wait and see how the situation developed, John Bell was determined in his intentions right from the start, telling the *Aberdeen Journal* reporter: 'I will sell to the highest bidder, cooperative or not. John Bell has all along conducted his own sales and John Bell will continue to do so till the shop is shut'.¹¹⁵ But unlike John Bell and the Kincardineshire Auction Company, many of the other country marts were pragmatic in their approach and decided to wait and see how things developed before taking sides. As the local towns outside Aberdeen did not have cooperative stores operating butchers' shops, the question of local competition from this source never arose.¹¹⁶

After lasting for around 12 weeks the boycott collapsed, not on account of anything that happened in the north east but because livestock auctioneers in Perthshire and central Scotland tired of the Glasgow butchers dictating how they should run their firms, decided to abandon the pledge.¹¹⁷ Once the collapse was underway the auctioneers in Aberdeen, Aboyne, Stonehaven and Maud told the Aberdeen butchers that 'after a fair trial on their part', they would also abandon the boycotting movement, and from 2 December would resume normal practice of selling to the highest solvent bidder.¹¹⁸

There were various reasons why the boycott failed. In the first instance not all auctioneers were willing to fall in with the butchers' demands and exclude all cooperators. Auctioneers faced fierce objections from the farmers, both at a national level and locally, when they signed the butchers' pledge. Farmers argued it was they who employed the auctioneers and salesmen to get the best price for their livestock, and this could not be achieved if any group of solvent bidders were suddenly excluded from their sales. The auctioneers replied that they could not

¹¹⁰ R. Perren, 'Survival and Decline: The Economy 1918-1970', in Fraser and Lee, *Aberdeen*, pp. 115-16; *Aberdeen Directory*, 1896-97, pp. 286, 406-7.

¹¹¹ *AJ*, 24 July 1897, p. 4f; *DC*, 24 July 1897, p. 6c.

¹¹² *The Scotsman*, 10 Aug. 1897, p. 7d; *AJ*, 10 Aug. 1897, p. 4b.

¹¹³ *The Scotsman*, 10 Aug. 1897, p. 7d-e.

¹¹⁴ *AJ*, 19 Aug. 1897, p. 6c-d.

¹¹⁵ *AJ*, 12 Aug. 1897, p. 5h.

¹¹⁶ *AJ*, 21 Aug. 1897, p. 6c.

¹¹⁷ *GH*, 23 Nov. 1897, p. 9b; *The Scotsman*, 23 Nov. 1897, p. 6h; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 Nov. 1897, p. 3a; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 29 Nov. 1897, p. 4g

¹¹⁸ *DC*, 30 Nov. 1897, p. 3e.

obtain any prices for their farmers if the principal group of purchasers – the butchers – refused to attend their sales. But the position of all auctions was not the same. Those most prone to the butchers' pressure were the urban firms of auctioneers who held large regular sales a number of times a week. In Aberdeen three out of the four livestock auctioneers were family-run. These men relied on their businesses for all of their income, and if they were boycotted for any length of time they faced staff lay-offs, and closure of their premises. But rural livestock auctioneers were in a different position. As can be seen from Table 4, here the risks were spread, as many of the country firms were joint stock companies, now owned by local farmers and landowners, who held most of the shares. Rural auction firms, with an employed manager, were not the main source of income for any of these people and it was they who made up the major opposition to those butchers who wanted to exclude all cooperators. Even John Bell, who had stood out against the boycott at Maud had other business enterprises, including a substantial farm.¹¹⁹

The success of the auctions offered advantages to all who used them. These were not always apparent to the dealers and butchers who bought fat stock and many still looked back to the previous system of open markets with some nostalgia during the dispute of 1897. But in 1900 the size of north-east Scotland's livestock farming had expanded so much that the traditional marketing system was no longer adequate to handle the numbers of animals involved. From being mainly an exporter of store cattle and sheep in 1800, north-east Scotland was by 1900 not only exporting large numbers of fat cattle but also importing substantial amounts of store animals, mostly from Ireland. It can be seen in Table 3 that in the 1850s around 9000 cattle a year passed through Aberdeen's single market in King Street, but between 1895 and 1900 the city's four markets were handling an annual average of 58,400 cattle a year, or 14,600 each.¹²⁰ In addition there was an unknown but increased number of small livestock, and it is unlikely the old chaotic system of fairs and markets could have coped efficiently with such increased numbers.

The transformation of the livestock marketing system from pitched markets to auction marts also reflected a growth in the relative strength of the farming community. The main attraction, from the larger and wealthier farmers' point of view, was that being the main group of shareholders in the joint stock livestock marts, they now possessed greater, though not complete, control over the livestock marketing system. Most large farmers of the region were shareholders in their local mart by 1900, and by promoting the formation of a number of small chains of joint stock marts shown in Table 4 they recognized there was community of interest in working together. This was in contrast to the 1850s and 1860s when the increase in the number of traditional markets was accompanied by a fierce rivalry between local communities, each endeavouring to have new livestock markets set up in their locality at the expense of their neighbours. By the 1890s the process of rationalizing away many of the earlier markets set up before and after 1850 was accompanied by cooperation between the auction marts. Instead of holding markets on the same day, the auctioneers staggered dates, and in Aberdeen, Elgin,

¹¹⁹ *AJ*, 1 Sept. 1901, p. 4f.

¹²⁰ Board of Agriculture, Annual Reports of Proceedings Under the Diseases of Animals Act, the Markets

and Fairs (Weighing of Cattle) Acts for 1890, Cd. 535, 1901, pp. 92–3.

Ellon, Forfar, Maud and Turriff when there was more than one market on a single day, care was taken to stagger the starting times so that customers could move smoothly from the finish of one without missing the beginning of the next.

VIII

The attempts of local butchers to undermine the new marts were all failures, with the possible exception of those at Keith. In his reply to the 36 fleshers threatening to boycott his Aberdeen auctions in 1871 John Duncan joked that they were being 'drawn into the cave' by an unrepresentative minority of malcontents.¹²¹ This was a reference to national politics five years earlier when John Bright ridiculed members of the Liberal Party, who formed a short-lived faction opposing Gladstone's parliamentary reform Bill in March 1866.¹²² And at the end of their final futile attempt to disrupt and dictate to the auction marts in 1897 one of the directors of the ACFPA raised an easy laugh from shareholders when he likened the butchers involved to 'the old woman trying to mop the Atlantic with a broom'.¹²³ Although not entirely squeezed out by professional auctioneers, the ability of the cattle dealers and butchers to control the marketing of livestock in north-east Scotland in the 1860s was much reduced by 1900.

In conclusion, more general points about north-eastern farming in the nineteenth century can be drawn from this study. Firstly, the increase in the number of markets was in some instances a further addition in the development of planned villages. Although the early stages of planning such villages and small towns concentrated on the laying out of streets and lotted lands, in some cases livestock markets were added where it was thought they might help further development. But in all cases the success of such markets depended on convenient railway access; and this applied equally to those in planned villages like New Byth and Rhynie whose markets failed because they had no railway access and already established villages like Echt which was similarly bypassed (see Map 1). Secondly, the evolution of livestock markets into predominantly farmer-owned auction marts is a hitherto neglected feature of the commercialization of farming in north-east Scotland, or capitalist farming if one prefers to use Carter's term.¹²⁴ If one does not then it can be explained as the adoption of a more efficient form of marketing, speeding the process of sale and drawing in a larger number of bidders than traditional markets. It can also be seen as a response by farmers to the pressures they were under with the drop in agricultural prices during the 1880s. It was, despite challenges, a successful attempt by farmers to wrest control of a significant sector of livestock marketing from local cattle dealers and butchers. It may also well be worth investigating how far similar changes took place in other regions.

¹²¹ *AFP*, 31 Mar. 1871, p. 1a.

¹²² Bright named them Adullamites, alluding to the cave in the Bible to which David and others fled to hide from an enraged Saul. K. Robbins, *John Bright* (1979),

pp. 180-1; 1 Samuel xxii 2.

¹²³ *AJ*, 20 Aug. 1898, p. 7a.

¹²⁴ Carter, *Farm life*, pp. 176-84