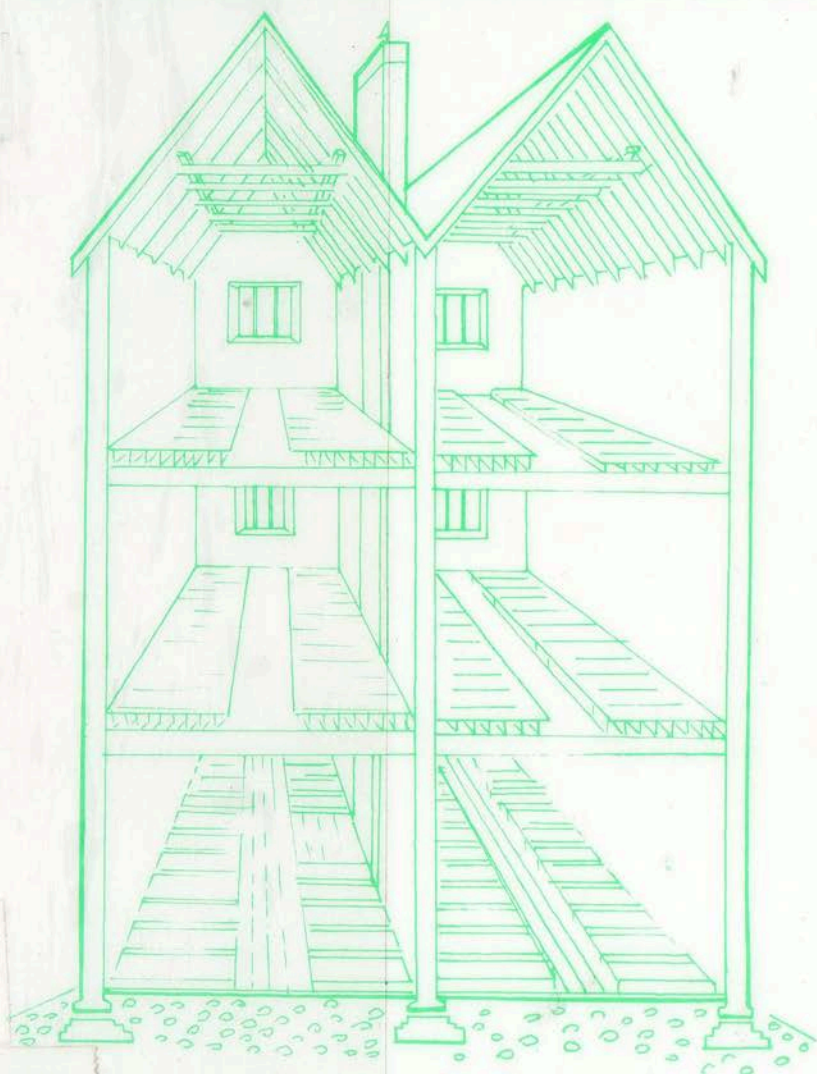


# Roscommon



## The Untold Story

# FOREWORD

*Roscommon — The Untold Story has its origin in a discussion by members of Roscommon Parish Junior Pastoral Council. They reflected on their own social environment and contrasted it with the scene in Roscommon at the time of the famine and the years that followed, stories of eviction, the tragedy of the famine, which saw the population of Roscommon in the twenty year period 1841-1861, fall from 253,591 to 157,272. One hundred thousand died during that time. The story of each person, unknown and unrecorded, is a story of indescribable suffering and hardship.*

*Roscommon's Untold Story focuses in particular on the workhouse in Roscommon, the refuge of so many unfortunate people of the time and on 'Bully's Acre', that unmarked and for the most part, that unknown final resting place of so many of the inhabitants of the workhouse.*

*The members of Roscommon Junior Pastoral Council refused to allow this sad and sacred history of past generations to remain unknown any longer. Through this publication it is their wish to have Bully's Acre properly designated and the story of Roscommon's past documented and recorded. It is their wish also to have a fitting memorial erected on the site.*

*Under the guiding hand of Sister Frances Clarke, Convent of Mercy, Roscommon, the young people researched and compiled this booklet. They deserve our warmest thanks and a special place in our memory.*

*In addition, we wish to thank the Students who prepared the graphic designs, the officials of many Institutions who gave access to resource material, as well as many individuals who by their encouragement and advice have made Roscommon's Untold Story a reality.*

CHARLES J. TRAVERS, P.P.  
ROSCOMMON

25 May, 1994

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE

Books to read first most read by 101 read by 25000

# Roscommon

## The Untold Story

Two girls putting the  
finishing touches to  
"Lazy beds" of seed  
potatoes



Wray Jones

# Pre Famine Ireland

Ireland was far from being the most distressed of European countries in the 18th century. On the contrary, her prospects for a time seemed on the whole rather bright. An independent parliament 1782-1800 encouraged the development of the country, especially the woollen and cotton industries.

The country had been sparsely populated at the beginning of the 18th century but conditions favoured a rise in population. A shift from pasturage to tillage farming created a demand for more labour. Wartime emphasis on tillage — the Napoleonic Wars were being waged in Europe in the early 19th century — completed the triumph of the potato. It enabled the farmer to produce grain purely as a cash crop. Farmers subdivided their holdings to provide for their sons. Landless men reclaimed the mountains and bogs and converted them into farmland. Others, having acquired substantial farms, set up as landlords themselves by creating under-tenancies.

By 1841, over two-thirds of the Irish people were dependent on agriculture for a livelihood, but the condition of the other third was far from enviable. Ireland had no industrial base comparable to that of Great Britain. The growing efficiency and scale of British industry struck hard at the smaller Irish manufacturer. Economic theory declared that state intervention in enterprise, industrial or otherwise, was unacceptable. It was believed that the intricate series of relationships between supply and demand was so delicately poised that any interference with it would have untold and probably disastrous consequences <sup>(N1)</sup>.

To deal with the growing number of destitute people, an Irish Poor Law, based on the English model was proposed. Other proposed schemes for the relief of Irish distress would take time to implement but a Poor Law would have immediate and direct results. Between 1825 and 1832 no fewer than seven bills proposing remedies for the Irish poor were introduced into the House of

Commons by private members. A further bill of 1835 was a comprehensive measure. It proposed to set up elaborate machinery — locally elected authorities and a Central Board — for relieving the destitute and employing able-bodied workers on the construction of roads and other public projects. The scheme was opposed by the Irish landlords who did not want to pay rates which might rise to confiscatory levels and make the rich landlords paupers on their own estates.

Closely related to poverty is the area of public health. In the 18th century, a number of hospitals were founded in Ireland, mainly in cities. Mercer's Hospital, the Rotunda, Dr. Steevan's, the Cork Street Fever Hospital and the Meath Hospital date from this century. The County Infirmaries served rural areas. The Infirmaries were established and supported partly by private subscriptions and partly by treasury grants<sup>(N2)</sup>. Roscommon Infirmary dates from 1783. Over the hall door, on a slab inserted into the outer wall, the following inscription reads: "*This Infirmary was built for the poor of the County at the sole expense of Mrs. Walcott, sister of the late Lord Chief Justice Caulfield, of Donamon, 1783*". The Fever Hospitals also provided medical care for the poor. There were two kinds of fever hospitals in Ireland — County Fever Hospitals and District Fever Hospitals. As their name implies, they catered exclusively for patients suffering from fever.

The population of Ireland increased dramatically in the 1820s and 1830s and it was clear to the Government that direct intervention was necessary in order to assist the poor. As well as encouraging local health services, the Government subsidised public works. Between 1817 and 1830, well over a million pounds was advanced for fisheries, roads, mines and public buildings.

The English poor law based on the workhouse system was not at first seen as suited to Ireland because distress was so widespread that accommodation would have to be provided for well over two million people and because the Irish poor would refuse to resort to the workhouses<sup>(N3)</sup>. But the visit to Ireland of the English civil servant, George Nicholls, ensured that the English system would be extended to Ireland. Nicholls spent nine weeks touring Ireland and surveying its problems from the standpoint of a poor law expert.

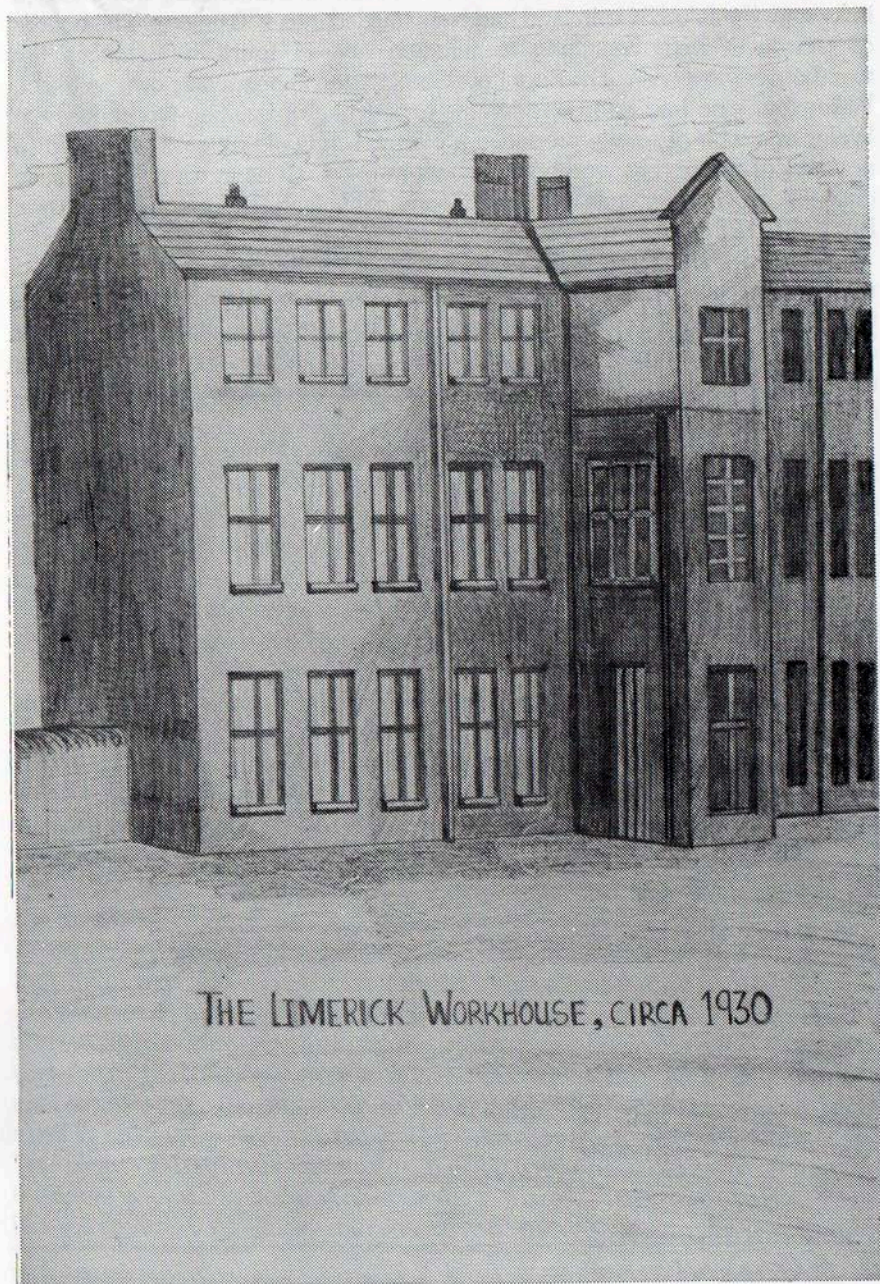
Nicholls, however, emphasised one problem with which the Poor Law could not cope — a general famine. The workhouses could not hold the people who would demand food and the expectation of outdoor relief would lessen their will to economise. In 1837, the Government introduced an Irish poor relief bill which finally received the royal assent in 1838. Ireland was to be divided into a number of unions, each with its workhouse and board of guardians. All relief was to be administered within the workhouse<sup>(N4)</sup>.

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N2 — Sr. Patricia Kelly: From Workhouse to Hospital

N3 — Edwards and Williams: Ireland on the Eve of the Famine

N4 — Edwards and Williams: Ireland on the Eve of the Famine



THE LIMERICK WORKHOUSE, CIRCA 1930

During the next five years, the new administrative machinery was installed in Ireland. By July 1841, Ireland had been divided into 130 unions. The boards of guardians were beginning to function and in fourteen instances the workhouses were open. The Poor Law Commission appointed its own architect, Wilkinson, who had had considerable experience of building workhouses in Wales and who promptly produced a plan which could be easily adjusted to any size of house. His workhouses, built in rough stone in what was usually described as a Tudor style, still form a formidable feature of many Irish towns. By 1842, 122 houses were ready.

The workhouse was intended as a test of destitution. The relief provided there was to be less desirable than that obtainable by independent means. Given the misery of the Irish poor at the time, this was impossible and so workhouse discipline and the breaking up of families added to the irksomeness of the system. Tobacco and alcohol were not allowed and the diet was scant and monotonous<sup>(N5)</sup>

The paid officers of the workhouse were Master, Matron, Medical Officer, Porter and should the Poor Law Commissioners direct, a school master and school mistress. There were three chaplains — one Catholic, one Protestant and one Dissenter.

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N5 → Sr. Patricia Kelly: From Workhouse to Hospital



# Famine Ireland

The immediate cause of the Great Famine was the failure of the potato crop. The blight struck with devastating suddenness in 1845. This phenomenon was new to Ireland and potato-growers, who comprised about two thirds of the country's population, were unable to deal with it. In the first year of crop failure, about one half of the potatoes was destroyed.

As the potato was the chief food of most people, the failure of the crop quickly led to famine. The famine had a major effect on every family throughout the country. Even industrious families who were previously comfortable and quite well off, were now totally destitute. Not only could they not procure potatoes to till their gardens and plots but they were obliged to exist on one meal a day and that one consisting of the worst potatoes and salt.

In Famine Ireland, one could open a pit where not one stone of sound potatoes could be found. In good land, over one half of the crop was lost while in poor land, up to three quarters was lost<sup>(N1)</sup>. The English Government declared that it was no business of their's to sustain the native race, that they were a standing threat and danger to themselves. They also claimed that the ravages of the potato blight were greatly exaggerated and the Corn Laws restricted the amount of grain which could be imported.

The great twelve nights debate took place in the English Parliament on the famine question. It was made known that the greater portion of the only food of four million of the people was destroyed as a result of the failure of the potato crop. However the English still insisted that this situation was being exaggerated. In truth, great numbers were in a starving condition in the southern and western counties, in particular the peasantry. All that was left of their crop was rotten potatoes and people were so desperate, they ate seed potatoes, unable any longer to resist the pangs of hunger. The south and west suffered more in 1845 than the north, but in 1846, the destroyer swept over Ulster also. The blight of 1846 was identical to that of 1845. Potatoes were spotted in the same way; stalks became discoloured in places. These areas broke across like rotten wood. Gradually the Government came to realise the seriousness

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N1 — Mansion House Committee, November 1845



Pre-Famine Ireland

of the situation. The following instructions were issued by the Government to the Lord Lieutenant (1845) and by him to the Poor Law Commissioner:

"The proportion which seed bears to an average crop of potatoes is very large, it has been estimated at not less than one-eighth and when we remember that a considerable portion of this year's crop in Ireland is already destroyed and that the remaining portion, if it be saved, must supply food for nine months as well as seed for next year, it is obvious that no ordinary care is required to husband a sufficient quantity of seed potatoes for planting in the Spring. Unless this be done, the calamity of the present year is but the commencement of a more fatal series"<sup>(N2)</sup>

The effects of the Famine were horrific. It was written:

*"Not a domestic animal to be seen. Pigs and poultry have quite disappeared. Skeletons of dogs are to be found, victims of cruelty and barbarity".* In kitchens, the only rooms of one-roomed hovels, there was not a single stick of furniture. As a result of all the deaths, graveyards were swamped with newly dead people. One priest reported: *"In four of the five churchyards in the parish where he ministered, the yards had to be enlarged by one half to inter the famine-slain people"*. This enlargement of burial grounds took place throughout the south, east, west and north-west<sup>(N3)</sup>.

One woman was so desperate that she threatened to sell her last loaf and then go to America to buy maize. This was obviously foolish as people ought not to sell what they required for themselves, they should only part with surplus food. But this is what the Irish were doing, selling oatmeal and flour with one hand and buying Indian corn with the other.

In Cork, the Rev. Mr. O'Regan observed that the early crop in almost every district was in a very bad condition. Samples of early potatoes were all diseased<sup>(N4)</sup>.

The Roscommon Journal gave constant attention to famine-related matters from July 1845 on:

*"It is our rooted conviction that at least two thirds of the crop is lost and that the people will starve if the Government does not join them in their efforts. The delay of the Government can only be accounted for on one of two principles — either Sir Robert Peel is assured on unquestionable authority that the quantity of grain in this country is sufficient to meet the demand and that alarms respecting the potato crop in Ireland are very much exaggerated and therefore destitute of adequate foundation or there is a serious division of opinion among his colleagues on this question"*.

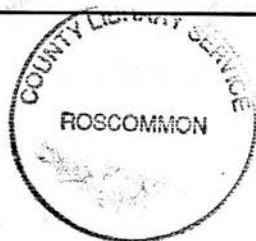
The paper called for the opening of the ports to allow in foreign grain,

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N2 — J. C. Beckett: Studies in Irish History

N3 — J. C. Beckett: Studies in Irish History

N4 — Roscommon Journal 1845



otherwise the effects on society would be disastrous. These effects are listed in the following:

*“The positive privations and sufferings which a scarcity of food inflicts on the masses of the population, the stagnation of trade and commerce which it occasions, the stringest measures which the Executive is compelled to have recourse to, in order to suppress popular violence, the slowly wasting maladies, the attendants upon lack of food — these apprehensions ought to be removed and tranquility and confidence restored to the public feeling”.*

The Mansion House Committee also called for a stop to the exportation of corn.

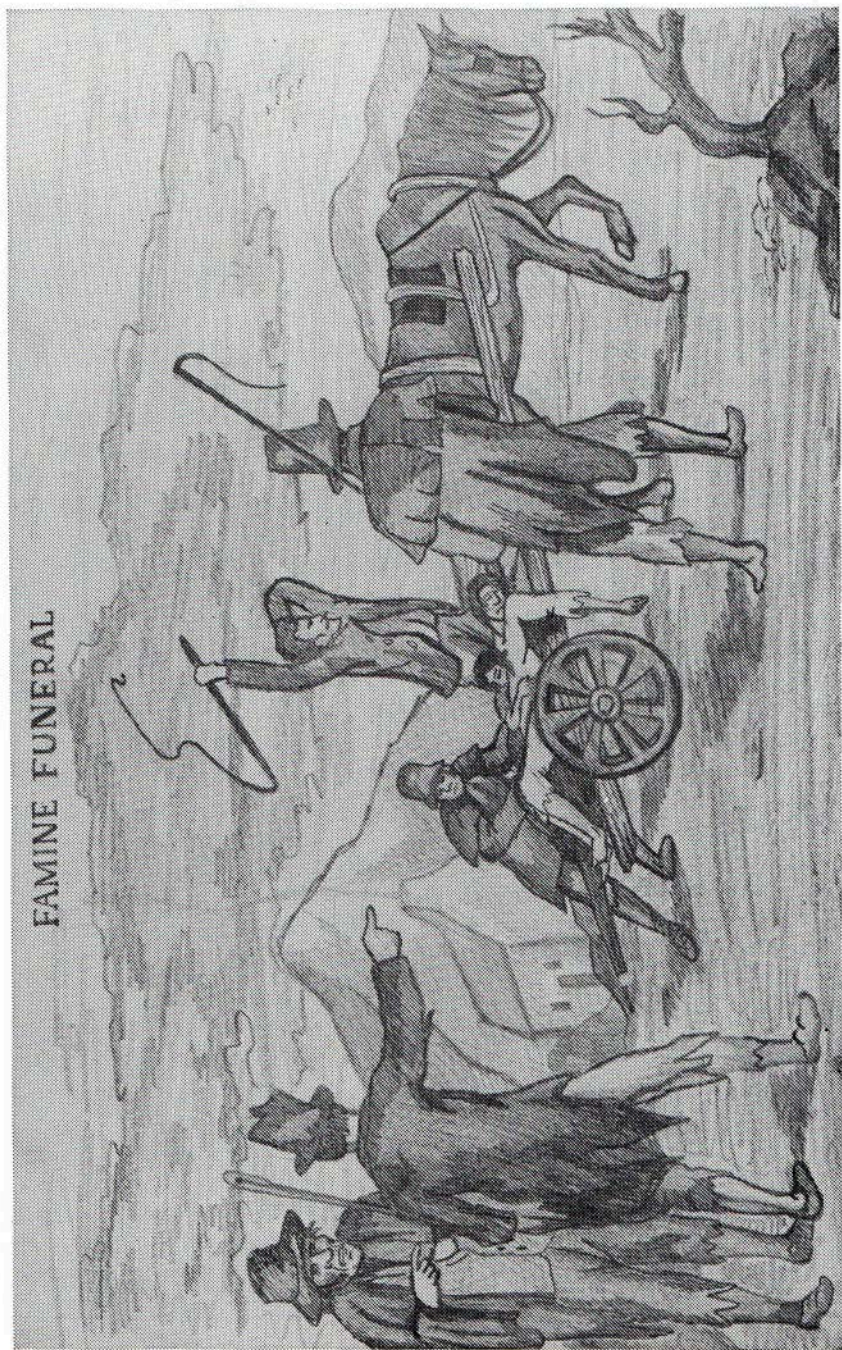
The famine was a time of great poverty and want and disease; a period of unparalleled hardship and misery and death; a period when thousands of Irish died on the roadside and in ditches. Corpses were eaten by dogs because they could not get proper burial as there were over 200 funerals weekly to the cemeteries. People who sought admission to the workhouses were in a most emaciated state, many of them had not tasted food of any kind for 48 hours. Some had been living on turnips and cabbage-leaves for weeks. Children, especially, were ravenous with hunger. Food was now rationed in small amounts.

The early response to the Famine was mainly locally based. The Society of Friends began to establish soup-kitchens. Local relief committees were set up and were more or less successful according to the degree of hunger in the area. The works approved by the Board of Works also commenced. However, these were not always successful. The labourers were dissatisfied at the low rate of wages, being from 8p to 10p per day. Many of them quit the works, the wages being insufficient to support themselves, much less their starving families.

After the failure of the 1846 potato crop, the Government announced the setting up of depots for the sale of Indian corn. It was sold to the poor at the rate of 1p per pound. In the worst affected areas, soup kitchens were set up on the model of the earlier ones of the Society of Friends. The Government had finally come to realise that starving people must be fed and that food must be provided at public expense, when circumstances so dictated. But the psychological scars of the Great Famine were to remain for a very long time.



FAMINE FUNERAL



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# The Famine Road

By Eaven Boland from *Irish Poets 1924-1974*, edited by David Marcus

with kind permission of the Author

'Idle as trout in light, Colonel Jones  
these Irish, give them no coins at all; their bones  
need toil, their characters no less.' Trevelyan's  
seal blooded the deal table. The Relief  
committee deliberated. 'Might it be safe  
Colonel, to give them roads, roads to force  
from nowhere, going nowhere of course?'

'one out of every ten and then  
another third of those again  
women — in a case like yours.'

Sick, directionless they worked; fork, stick  
were iron years away; after all, could  
they not blood their knuckles on rock, suck  
april hailstones for water and for food?  
Why for that, cunning as housewives, each eyed  
as if at a corner butcher, the other's buttock.

'anything may have caused it, spores,  
a childhood accident; one sees  
day after day these mysteries.'

Dusk: they will work tomorrow without him.  
They know it and walk clear; he has become  
a typhoid pariah, his blood tainted, although  
he shares it with some there. No more than snow  
stays with its own flakes where they settle  
and melt, will they pray by his death rattle.

'It has gone better than we expected, Lord  
Trevelyan, sedition, idleness cured  
in one; from parish to parish, field to field  
the wretches work till they are quite worn  
then fester by their work; we march the corn  
to the ships in peace; this Tuesday I saw bones  
out of my carriage window, your servant Jones.'

# Famine in Roscommon

The pattern of events in Roscommon town and county during the Famine years followed closely that of the rest of the country. Events and scenes were as barbaric and horrendous as in many parts of the south and west. Throughout the county magnanimous deeds as well as degrading ones were a feature of everyday living.

Contemporary evidence suggests the people of Roscommon suffered intensely from the Great Famine. At the time, the people of the county, as elsewhere in Ireland, had little say in managing their own affairs. Their Relief Act of 1829 insured that the ordinary man in the country had no vote unless his rent exceeded £10 per annum. The bulk of the people were little more than slaves on their own land and were more or less dependent on landlords, absentee or otherwise. When the blight struck therefore the effects were disastrous for Roscommon.

The "Times" newspaper reporting on famine conditions in Donamon in 1846, stated:

*"We find an absolute dearth here. In a fortnight, not one of the tenants will have a potato".*

The same theme was echoed in a letter to the O'Connor Don, from Elphin House, dated 5th June 1847 <sup>(N1)</sup>. It contained eyewitness accounts of effects of the famine — starving beggars on the road, deaths, fear of fever and pestilence. The writer stated that the framework of society had been completely overturned. A further letter — from Cecelia Strickland to Honoria O'Connor — expressed fears regarding the potato crop:

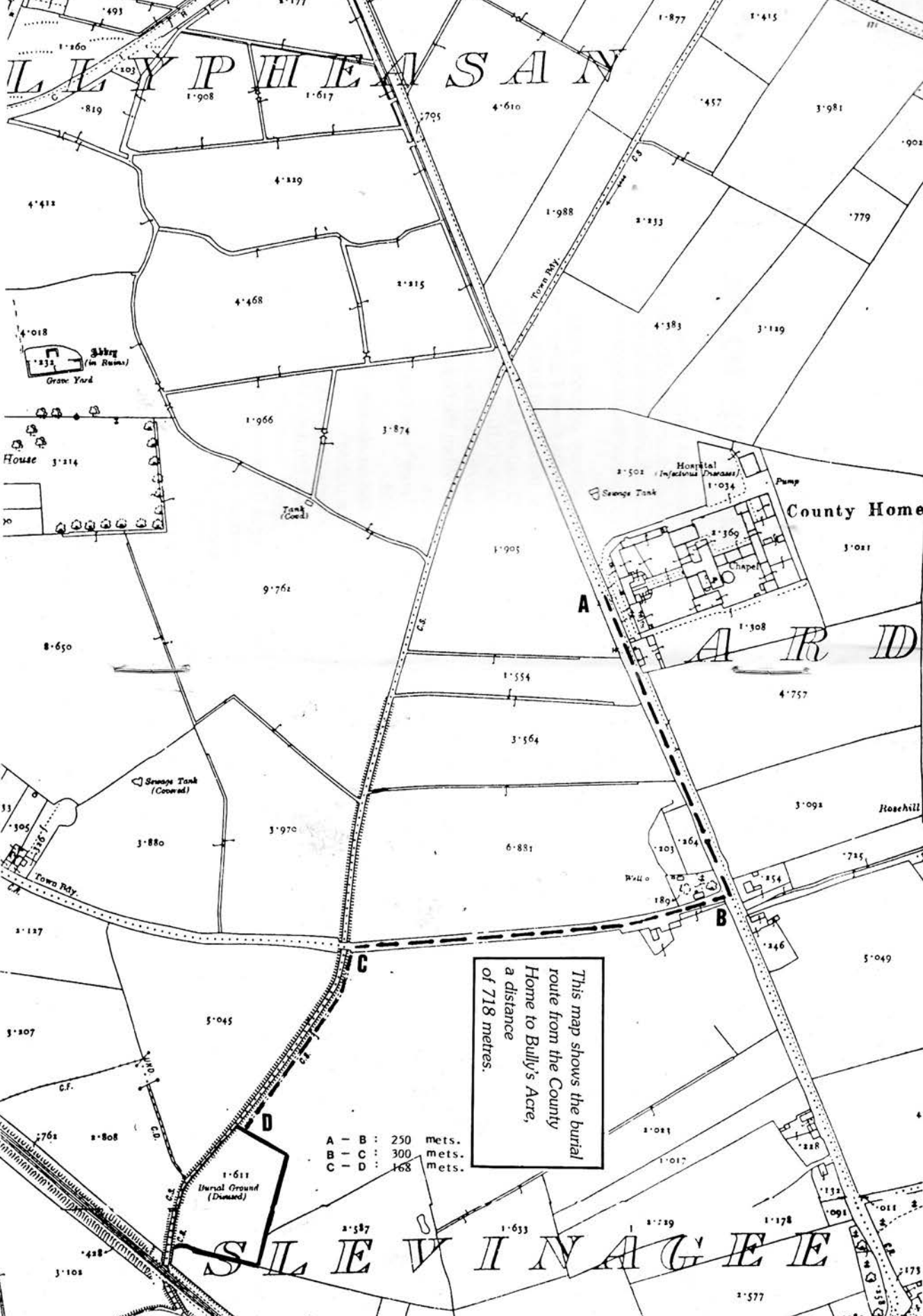
*"What will become of the poor if it should fail again? . . . Day after day the account seems worse and this continuance of wet weather is bad for all the crops".*

Denis O'Connor Don, in a letter to his sister, expressed fear that rot would destroy potatoes; some tenants had not a sound potato.

Hunger and disease ravaged the county in spite of the best efforts of relief committees and local charitable agencies.

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N1 — Clonalis Papers 9.2 HS 058



LLYPHLEASAN

A R R I D

County Home

Rosehill

This map shows the burial route from the County Home to Bully's Acre, a distance of 718 metres.

A - B : 250 mets.  
 B - C : 300 mets.  
 C - D : 168 mets.

SLEVINAGHIE

Shed (in Room)  
 Grass Yard

House

Hospital  
 Infectious Diseases  
 Chapel  
 Pump  
 Sewage Tank

Sewage Tank (Covered)

Burial Ground (Disused)

Town Rd

Town Rd

Town Rd

Town Rd

Town Rd





*After the Eviction — The ejected family takes refuge in a ditch*

A newspaper account of the period reports that:

*“There is not a single hundred weight of potatoes on any farm within ten miles of Roscommon town. The entire crop has been totally destroyed. One man said that he dug 21 yards of ridge and found only two good potatoes”<sup>(N2)</sup>.*

From the Boyle area the following event was recorded:

*"A man named Cunningham, residing near Boyle, died from starvation this week. He had to go three miles every day to his work on the public roads and return again for 8p a day. He had eight in family to support on his slender means"*<sup>(N3)</sup>

Another event in the same area is even more terrifying:

*"A poor man, in the mountainy district of Ballyfarnon, who had been out begging, was found by the police at the side of a ditch, partly devoured by dogs"*<sup>(N4)</sup>

The Boyle Gazette found that death from starvation had become so general in every district around that the newspaper considered it unnecessary to particularise them. Death had become so familiar to all and the people were so miserably poor that they couldn't afford to testify their respect for the dead. Hence, several interments took place where women and children had not only to carry the corpse but actually make the grave<sup>(N5)</sup>. According to some reports, the number of deaths in County Roscommon had exceeded 200 a day.

The scale of the problem was enormous but great efforts were made by private individuals and charitable bodies to alleviate the worst of the distress. One of the unsung heroes of the period was a Scotsman, Mr. Campbell, who was connected with the extensive mills in Athleague. Instead of following the bad example of his neighbours in the same business, he generously opened his stores and himself and his men were daily occupied from morning to night, in retailing at a reduced price and not more than one stone to each family, during the week, the immense quantity of meal in his mills and stores<sup>(N6)</sup>.

The efforts of the Relief Committee were also very praiseworthy. However, it was said in June 1846, that if Providence didn't open other channels to enable them to continue their good work, they would be completely paralysed in a short space of time<sup>(N7)</sup>.

The works approved by the Board of Works also commenced. However, they were not too successful. The labourers were dissatisfied at the lower rate of wages (being from 8p to 10p a day). Many of them quit the works, the wages being insufficient to support themselves, much less their starving families. The lower rate of wages was the cause of a near riot near the town of Roscommon. All the men at Cloverhill struck work in consequence of a reduction of their wages and made their way towards the town. There was a procession of a great number of carts crowded with persons and a mass of men, women and boys, in all about 300. They threatened to plunder town and country, stating they would have beef, mutton and bread before night<sup>(N8)</sup>. Only a promise of

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N3 — Boyle Gazette: Reprinted Roscommon Herald 1947

N4 — Boyle Gazette: Reprinted Roscommon Herald 1947

N5 — Boyle Gazette: Reprinted Roscommon Herald 1947

N6 — Roscommon Journal 1846

N7 — P. Papers

N8 — P. Papers

wages at the rate of 10p per day for that week pacified them. A petition was to be made to the Government regarding wages for the following week.

During the winter of 1847, there were many pauper debtors in the county jails. It was recorded that the assistant barrister, J. Finlay, Esq. LLD, when presiding at Roscommon court, considered the list of pauper debtors in the county jail and paid out of his private purse, their debts. The paper<sup>(N9)</sup> further commented:

*"This was a good deed on his behalf as he restored fathers and husbands to their perishing families".*

Fever and sickness were on the increase in the neighbourhood of Roscommon. The main reason was the lack of clean water, not a drop of which was to be seen within one mile of the town. Dr. Payton, Boyle, was then elected physician to Roscommon Infirmary to try and bring relief to these people.

The threats of the Cloverhill workers were not the only form of violence during the Famine years, indeed they were a minor part of it. Disturbances in Roscommon were not new as is evident from a letter to Dennis O'Connor, 1832. The writer, who is unidentified, analyses the reasons for the disturbances and suggests ways in which the Ribbonmen could be put down<sup>(N10)</sup>. The Great Famine increased the level of agrarian violence, already latent in the Irish countryside. The winter of 1847 saw Roscommon as an unhealthy place for landlords to live in and the murder of two of them hastened the departure of others from the county. Sheep stealing was very common and it continued throughout Roscommon and the district of Boyle with the result that owners were compelled to watch over their stock by night and day.

Numerous murders took place throughout the country. The death of Major Mahon in 1847 (killed at Fourmilehouse, on his way back to Strokestown, after signing Minute Book of Board of Guardians of Roscommon Workhouse) speeded up the departure of the landed gentry throughout Roscommon. Several had already left and others were preparing to do so. Roscommon was a most disturbed county. Rev. John Lloyd, Smith Hill, Elphin (landlord) was shot dead. For the murder, a young man was tried at Roscommon Assizes. A newspaper correspondent observed:

*"Our country continues in a deplorable condition. The resident gentry are daily quitting their residences and shaping their course for Happy England. Lord Crofton's family left the mansion, Moate Park, to join his lordship in London<sup>(N11)</sup>.*

Roscommon was now in a very disturbed state and the Privy Council in Dublin Castle decided to proclaim two of the most disturbed counties, Roscommon and Tipperary. Baron Richards was informed that there were 297 prisoners in the county jail, built to accommodate 240. Fever also committed havoc on the unfortunate inmates of the prison.



## The Workhouse in Roscommon

The Workhouse in Roscommon was one of a number set up under the terms of the Irish Poor Relief Act of 1838. According to the terms of this Act, Ireland was to be divided into a number of unions, each with its workhouse and board of guardians<sup>(N1)</sup>. The Government which passed the 1838 Act believed that the sufferings of the poor were of their own creation and the remedy within their own control. The workhouse was intended as a test of destitution. The relief provided there was to be less desirable than that obtainable by independent means. Such was the misery of the Irish poor at the time that this was impossible and so it was determined that workhouse discipline would be a further deterrent to anybody seeking admission. The separation of the sexes necessitated the breaking up of families.

The paid officers of the workhouse were — Master, Matron, Medical Officer, Porter and should the Poor Law Commissioners direct, a school master and school mistress.

That the workhouse in Roscommon did have a schoolmaster is clear from the following<sup>(N2)</sup> :

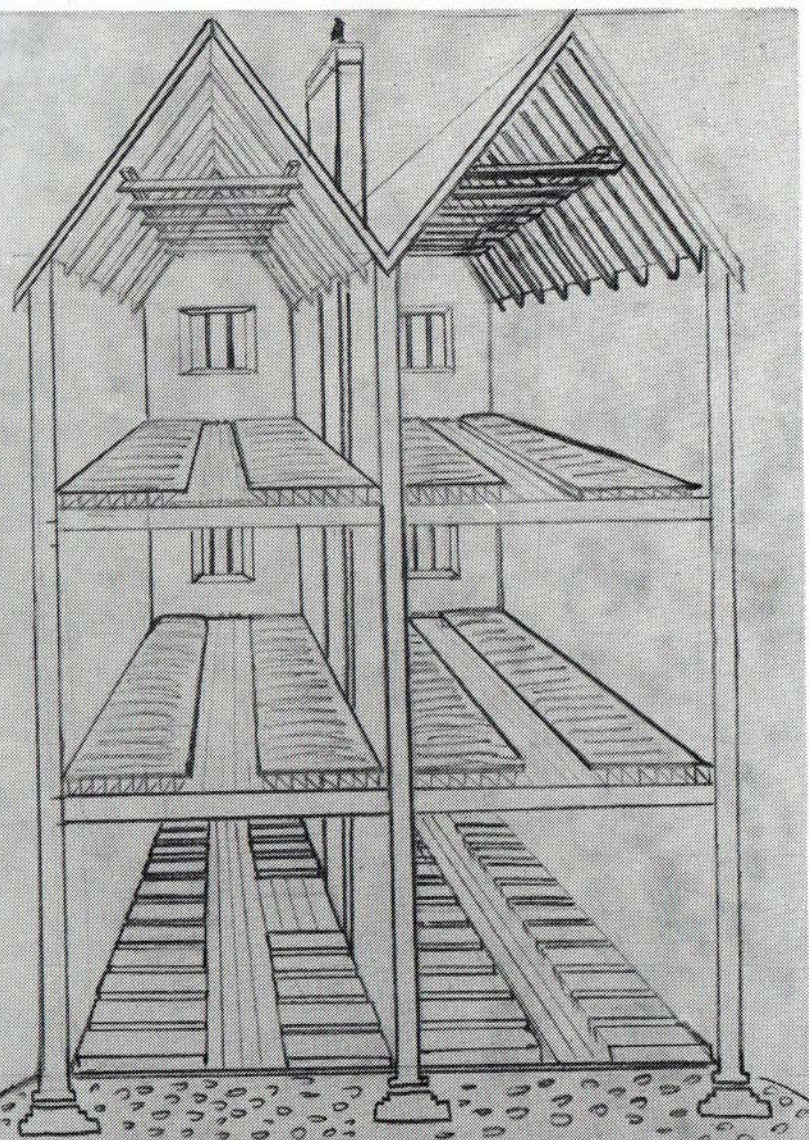
*"The Guardians of the Roscommon Union, will on the 21st November, 1846, elect a Schoolmaster for the Workhouse at a salary to be fixed on that day with a furnished apartment; fuel, candles and rations. Sealed Applications with Testimonials will be received by me up to 12 o'clock on the day of election, when the candidates will require to be in attendance. — P. McGann, Clerk of the Guardians. 31st October, 1846"*

Before the Great Famine, people were reluctant to take refuge in workhouses. Apart from the stigma of pauperism and the penal discipline of life in the workhouse, there was another reason why people were afraid to die in a workhouse. They did not want their bodies used for medical research.

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N1 — Sr. Patricia Kelly: From Workhouse to Hospital

N2 — Roscommon Journal



*Sleeping quarters of a typical workhouse*

The Master of the workhouse was charged with the general management and superintendence of the workhouse. A Visiting Committee, comprising some members of the Board of Guardians, also assumed a supervisory role. Their duty was to examine the workhouse every week. There was a list of seventeen questions which this Committee was required to answer; their reports were kept in the Visitor's Book. In spite of these supervisory measures, it seems certain that abuses were widespread as is evident from the following account in the Roscommon Journal headed 'Roscommon WH - July 4, 1846':

*"It affords a great pleasure to be enabled at length to state that a reform in the internal arrangement of this Establishment has commenced. The Board of Guardians are at last roused to a sense of the duty they owe to the public and their conduct on Tuesday last gives us every reason to hope that they will persevere in similar circumstances to adopt the same course, it is well known that the most glaring abuses have prevailed there".*

The workhouse, as envisaged by the 1838 Poor Law Act, were meant to cater for people in 'real want'. They were open to all who were destitute. It was not foreseen that they would function as hospitals. Each workhouse would have an infirmary attached which would cater for those people who were taken ill while they were in the workhouse. In practice, however, sick people were directly admitted to the infirmary from the beginning of the workhouse system. There was no other hospital accommodation within reach of most rural areas in Ireland <sup>(N3)</sup>.

Such was the overcrowding of workhouse infirmaries during the famine that a medical officer stated that he had to crawl between the bodies trying to distinguish the living from the dead. The famine started a precedent of admitting sick people unquestioningly. This trend was to continue in post famine years. In the 1850s, the number of able-bodied people applying for workhouse relief began to decline, while the number of sick people being admitted was on the increase. The workhouse was changing its role of poorhouse for that of hospital. The new role was given statutory recognition in 1862 when a Bill legalising the admission to workhouses, of sick and injured, though not destitute poor, was passed in 1862.

The year 1847 is popularly known as 'Black '47' and the dearth of detail in official records would point to an almost total collapse of normal administrative work. The 1848 records do, however, provide us with some valuable insights. A certain Captain Evans gave the following information to the Poor Law Commissioners regarding the workhouse in Roscommon:

*"Considering the crowded state of the house, the paupers, generally speaking, are tolerably healthy, but suffering a good deal from the want of clothing, particularly the children who are nearly naked".*

Later, the picture is more sombre:

*"Forty-five cases of fever have been removed out of the body of the house within the last few days, into the new fever hospital; and as soon as the beds are ready, fifteen or twenty more will be removed in the course of the coming week".*

It seems that even as the famine subsided, fever was still rampant. On January 17th, 1848, the Vice-Guardians reported to the Commissioner:

*"There are 1,081 paupers in the house and fever hospitals; 55 of whom are in the new fever hospital, 62 in the temporary fever hospital and 45 in the body of the house, all in fever. We are happy to be able to state that there is a great improvement in the order and cleanliness of the house, much of which is attributable to the exertions of Captain Evans".*

While there may have been some improvement in the conditions of the workhouse as the months passed, the situation in the surrounding area was still serious as the Vice-Guardians report:

*"We regret to state that there are numbers of persons in every part of the Union in a state bordering upon actual starvation; whom, owing to the crowded state of the house, we are unable to relieve by admission into it, in consequence of having no funds and the Union already being so deeply in debt, we cannot obtain the necessary credit to enable us to administer any out-door relief. In reply, the Commissioners advised the Vice-Guardians to raise a further loan by applying to Count Strzelecki".*

A further communication of February, 1848, refers to the improvement of the state of the house but referred to the fact that some of the able-bodied had escaped over the low fence and gone home, because they knew the day the relieving officer gave their families relief. These had been discovered and punished.

## Bully's Acre

Bully's Acre is the name commonly given to the old graveyard situated about two hundred yards from Antogher Road and approximately one quarter of a mile from the Sacred Heart Hospital. It is popularly believed that burials ceased here about 1939.

The use of the term 'Bully' in the context of cemeteries is unclear, but the cemeteries with which it is associated have one thing in common, they would appear to have been cemeteries on common ground and mainly for the burial of the poor. A cemetery known as 'Bully's Acre' is situated near the Royal Hospital of Kilmainham. As a religious site, Kilmainham dates back to the seventh century, when St. Maigneun founded a monastery there. It passed into the hands of the Normans in 1174 when Strongbow established a Priory of Knights Hospitallers on the site. Following the dissolution of the priory during the Reformation in the sixteenth century, its cemetery remained in use, becoming known popularly as 'Bully's Acre' and more officially as the 'Hospital Fields'. The graveyard was considered to be on common ground and was especially popular with the poorer citizens of Dublin and of the Liberties in the south-west of the city in particular, as burials could be performed without payment of fees, or on payment of reduced fees extracted by unofficial caretakers. The religious motivation of desiring burial in holy ground connected with a monastery is also of importance in the Irish context and would explain why the graveyard continued to be used by the relatively well-off as well as the poor. The cemetery was eventually closed in 1832 after the cholera epidemic of that year caused it to become dangerously congested.

Although the origin of the term 'Bully's Acre' is unclear, two explanations have been advanced — one, that the word (Bully) was a corruption of 'bailiff'; the other, that it derived from the cemetery being a place where boxers fought. Another dictionary archaic meaning of 'bully' is 'lover' and this should be added to the list of possible explanations of the name. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word 'acre' (from old English aecer, Latin ager), originally meant 'an enclosed land', later, a field or any piece of land and fields of much larger



extent than one acre are called by this name. This meaning of acre survives in God's Acre — from modern German Gottesecker meaning cemetery/churchyard.

According to local tradition, the Roscommon graveyard, known as 'Bully's Acre', dates from the Famine. At the time of the Great Famine, it was part of a much larger estate, comprising 103 acres, which belonged to Richard Hall. Richard Hall rented his land to the following tenants: Patrick Loftus, Luke Loftus, John Gorrick, John White, Patrick Mailey, James Mangan, Thomas Hickey, Daniel Harrison, George Greene, Thomas Daly, John Maurice, Darby Lennon, Daniel Nerney, Sarah Larkin, Michael Gaffey, John Kelly, Michael Magrath, Patrick McCormick, John Maurice. The average size of holding was 2.3 acres but one tenant had a farm of 12 acres <sup>(N2)</sup>.

The part of the estate known as 'Bully's Acre' remained in the possession of the Hall family until 1959. A member of the family, Mrs. Marion Gray, was owner in fee simple until her death in August, 1920. Her son, Sydney, was seemingly entitled to revenue from the land until 1927, but in that year James Richard Alexander Clark-Hall, a surgeon in the Royal Navy, became beneficial owner and was in sole receipt of the rents and profits. A rent of £4 per year was paid to Captain Clark-Hall by Roscommon County Council. In 1959, Captain Clark-Hall agreed to sell the piece of ground to the County Council for £10. The land in question amounted to 1 acre 2 roods 17 perches. Acting on behalf of Captain Clark-Hall was Miss Lina Black <sup>(N3)</sup>.

According to the accounts of local people, those buried in 'Bully's Acre' were people whose bodies were not claimed by relatives <sup>(N4)</sup>. The coffins were provided by the Health Authority and were often made by local tradesmen. Usually, they were put on a cart, brought along Antogher Road, through the right of way, in through another field, and finally buried in shallow graves. Each grave was marked with a wooden cross and a slab of stone was usually placed on top of the grave to ensure that it would not be re-opened. From the records, it seems that a great number of people, probably hundreds were buried here in the ninety odd years between 1846 and 1939. The names of these people are contained in the records of the Western Health Board.

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N2 — Griffith: Primary Valuation, Roscommon Union

N3 — Documents from Courthouse, Roscommon

N4 — Jim Harlow, Ignatius Gaynor, Anthony King, John Kerrigan



# Emigration

Four million Irish people left their homeland decade by decade and year by year in the half-century after the Famine. They carried with them hatred, bitterness and resentment towards the English Government which had failed both at the levels of administration and of policy to contain the crisis unrolling before the eyes of its horrified and harassed officials. The Famine, however, merely accentuated a trend which had already begun. Between 1780 and 1845, emigration may have taken as many as one and three quarter million out of the country<sup>(N1)</sup> Some of this was already directed towards Canada and the United States — as many as 33,000 a year on average may have gone there between 1815 and 1845, but most followed the easier route to Britain<sup>(N2)</sup>.

The tide of emigration swelled considerably during the Famine years. On the one hand, people fled the pestilence-stricken countryside of their own accord. On the other, they were encouraged to do so by landlords who adopted a policy of clearing as many tenants as possible off the land. Since landlords were liable for all rates on holdings and cottages or cabins of less than four pounds valuation, it made economic sense for them to rid themselves of as many small-holders as possible. It seems likely also that eviction was stimulated by an amendment of the Poor Law itself — the so-called 'Gregory' clause — which excluded from relief all those holding more than a quarter of an acre of land. Whenever hunger bit deep enough, the temptation to the tenant to abandon his farm and seek the relative security of the workhouse often proved irresistible. The displacement of small farmers, especially the cottiers, the smallest of all, went ahead rapidly during the Famine. In 1849, approximately 90,000 people were driven from their homes and in the following year, this number increased to about 104,000. The social upheaval and human suffering that lay behind these figures were on an unprecedented scale.

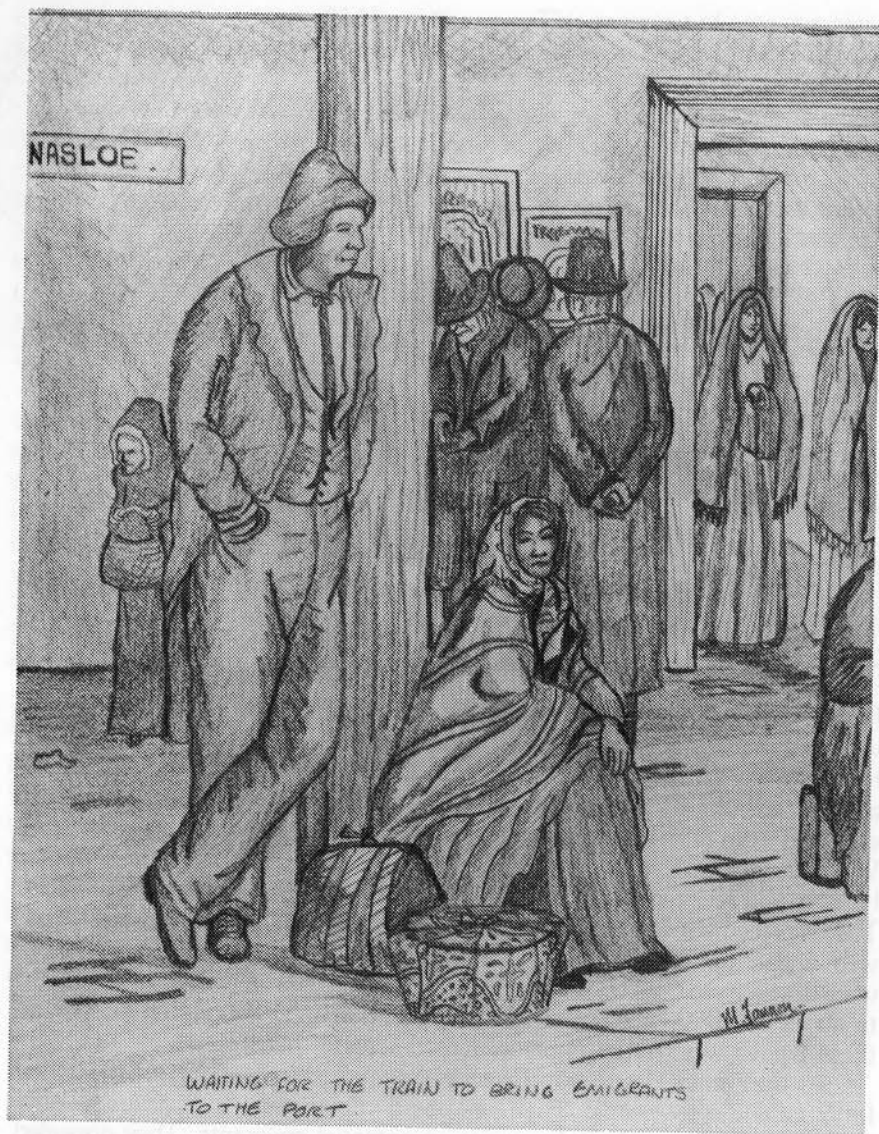
As the Famine deepened, emigration seemed to be the only realistic option for more and more people. The Cork board of guardians, in their first year of office, selected a number of paupers as potential emigrants. They appealed to the Government for aid but were refused. They tried to assist emigration out of the rates but finally had to let the matter drop. Few paupers were assisted to leave before 1846<sup>(N3)</sup>.

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N1—Lyons: Ireland since the Famine

N2—Lyons: Ireland since the Famine

N3—Roscommon Journal



According to records in Clonalis House, it was proposed that an Irish Association be formed for the protection of poor families emigrating to British America and to facilitate voluntary emigration, along the lines of the Canada Company, or the New Brunswick Company. The same topic is mentioned in a letter from Thomas Dillon to O'Connor Don. Dillon was anxious to promote

a Canadian emigration scheme and be asked for the support of O'Conor Don in this venture.

The following population figures, 1841-1861, for the County of Roscommon are in accordance with the countrywide trend:

1841	—	253,591
1851	—	174,492
1861	—	157,272

Death from hunger and disease accounted for part of the decline in the period 1841-1851, but in the following ten years, emigration was the main reason for the decline in population.

Emigration was to form part of the very fabric of Irish society during the succeeding hundred years. The movement outwards continued to be towards the countries from which there was little prospect of return. Between 1841 and 1925, gross overseas' emigration included one million going to the U.S.A., 70,000 to Canada and 370,000 to Australia. These emigrant Irish had their own 'say' in the mother country from Famine times on.

### **'On this cold Pavement' from 'The Exile'**

*A sequence of poems by Frances Gwynn, Dublin University Press Ltd.  
with kind permission of the Author*

On this cold pavement  
Grit  
Stirs to feet

Enslaved in loneliness.  
In your turfy stretches  
Moss yields a living welcome

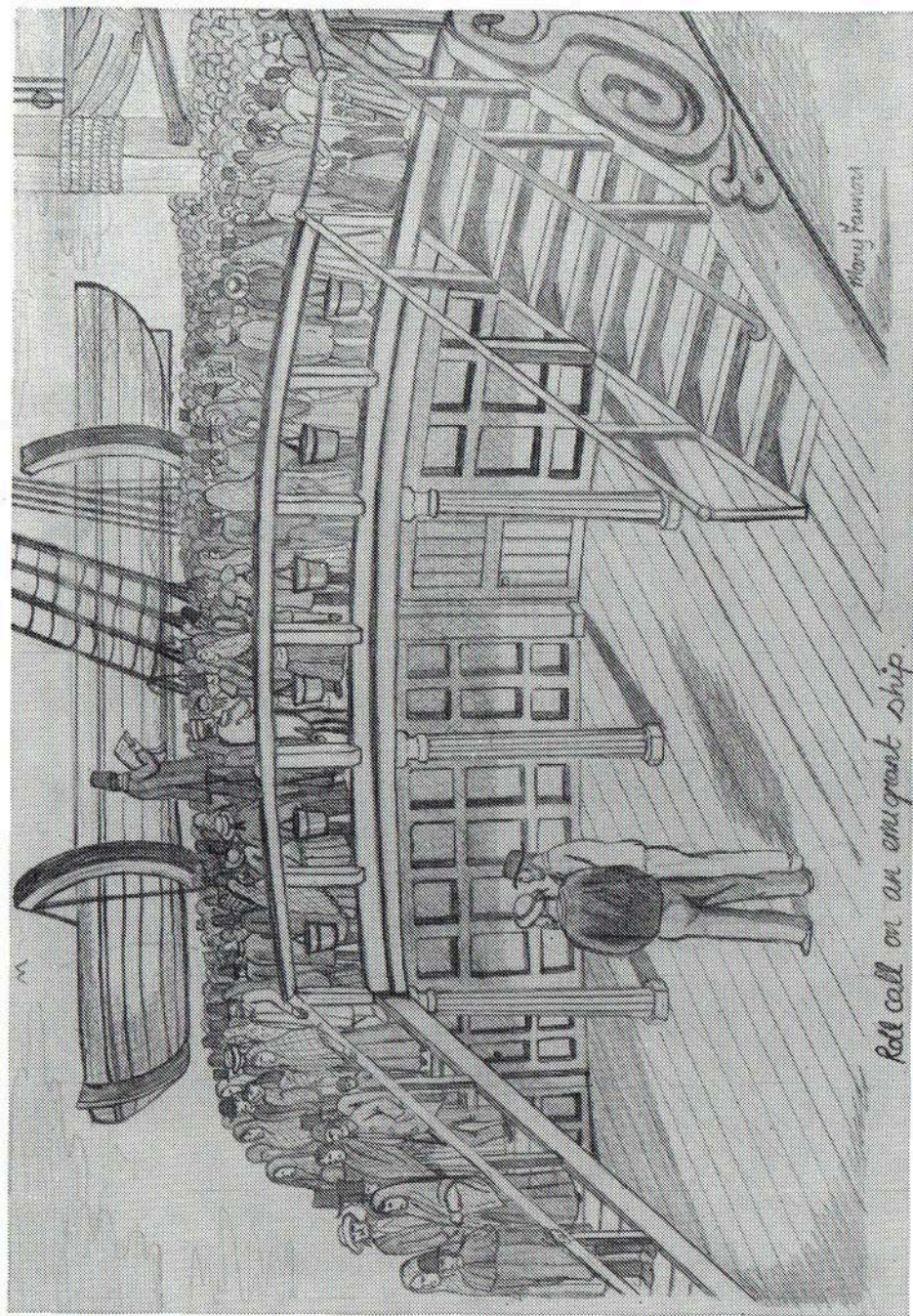
Where the winging air —  
Crosses  
Sweet with the taste of water,

While in the hollows  
Trees  
Spare me green shade.

Drawn back  
To these glaring pavements  
My mind

Follows my feet  
Tracking  
Through a myriad of strangers.





Henry Farnell

Roll call on an emigrant ship.

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