

Report of the Erris Survey

August 1990 - May 1994



Part II

A Community Response Project.

Sponsored by
Fás and Turasóireacht Iorrais Teo



00073924

CONTENTS

Leabharlann Co. Mhuigheo
Mayo County Library

Landownership/Landlordism	1
Congested Districts Board	37
Family Life in Erris: 1800's	47
Family Life in Erris: 1900's	77
Potato Picking in Scotland	98
Whaling: Aranmore	103
Blacksod	110

Leabharlann Co. Mhuigheo

Mayo County Library

LOCAL COLLECTION

Reference Only



LANDOWNERSHIP/LANDLORDISM

Landownership and Landlordism

Ancient Gaelic Ireland was divided into small tribal areas known as tuatha. Each area had its own tribe. In Iorras (Erris) the two tribes present were the people of Damnonii and the tribe of Belgae (referred to in the ancient Irish histories as Gamanradii). Their king was Oilioll Finn. No records exist to show as to when the Damnonii ceased to rule in Iorras or what Scottish families were established in their place. According to O'Donovan (p. 376) no information exists from the period of the Belgae till it was first noticed in the Annals in 1180 when the Fiachrian O'Caithnaidh was chief. The Annals state that he was Lord of Irrus till at least the latter end of the thirteenth century.

Sir Bhrian, Son of Taichleach O'Dowd put down the O'Caithnias after the year 1274. By 1303 he had taken over the entire principality of the Hy Fiachrach. He was succeeded by his son Donnell. After the death of Donnell in 1380 a number of families moved into the territory. One family, called the Barretts, established themselves in Irrus. The territory remained in their possession from 1386 till the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

North West Mayo was the northern termination of the vast de Burgo grant of land the county was open to the colonisation by outsiders from the 14th century. Because of land type and quality the Mullet Peninsula served to attract farming people. Since the Norman conquest Mayo had been a very restless area and great transfers of land had taken place as a result with fewer Gaelic landowners.

The history of Erris is blank until the close of the 16th century when it is mentioned as the Barony of Invermore and in the possession of Barretts and Bourkes. In the 1500's Sir Edmund Barrett was a renowned landlord from the Munster branch of the Barretts. Also called the "Baron of Erris" he was so called because he had previously been knighted by Queen Elizabeth I for his favours to the crown and later on 10th March 1605 he received lands in Erris as a gift from King James I in appreciation for his sons loyalty to the crown.

In the course of the Norman settlement a Barrett family acquired extensive lands in Tirawley and Erris and they still held most of the Barony of Erris during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558 - 1603). On the 10th of March the Barretts received a confirmation of their estates by James I and sometime before the conclusion of his reign, a large portion of these estates was purchased by a Munster lawyer, Dermot Cormick. By 1641 Michael Cormick, a descendent of Dermot was the owner of Muingnabo a townland in Kilcommon, Erris. Other landholders in this parish then were:-

Erevane Mc Philip who held Lecarrowneglogh and Leccarrow Mc Teige and John Oge Barrett and Edmund Bourke who held Rosduagh. Cormick and other families forfeited the greater part of their land because during the reign of Charles II (1660- 1685) a grant is found of the whole half barony of Erris, consisting of approx. 95,000 acres to James Shane given to him by Sir Thomas Vyner.

In 1640's the Bournes family leased Lecarrowneglogh (Stonefield), Lecarrowmactoeige (Carrowteige), Rosdowagh (Rosspport) and Mungonboy (Muingnabo). They also had leases in Stonefield and Portacloy.

Great historical importance has been placed on the changes in Irish land ownership during the seventeenth century. "To hell or to Connaught" was the cry and was to serve as a major humiliation of the Irish. The coming of Oliver Cromwell (1649 -1658) and his army saw so many Irish people being driven, especially from the North to Connaught. The native Irish of Erris also suffered from this 'invasion' as the lands of Erris were not sufficiently fertile and productive to accommodate the population explosion that occurred.

The Cromwellian Scheme

The Cromwellian scheme provided for the allotment to Irish Catholics of lands in proportion to their original estates and to the degree of guilt imported to them for their share in the confederate war. A survey, called the Strafford Survey was used by the Commonwealth for the assignment of lands to the Irish, soldiers received their share of land based on Petty's Downs Survey. The Strafford inquisition was carried out by a jury of local landowners in Ballinrobe on 31st July 1635. They put together particulars about the estates of the owners of land in each barony together with information about purchases, mortgages and family settlements. This was followed by a survey of the county consisting of maps and a systematic record which showed the owner and area of each townland.

The original intention of the Cromwellian Scheme was to allot particular baronies in Connacht to transplinters coming from countries of other provinces but this did not always happen. It was stated in the orders that transplinters from Ulster not including Down and Antrim would go to Erris and Costello. The final settlements of the Cromwellian transplantation were made in 1656-7. A royalist Earl, Ormond who held the largest Protestant estate shown in the Strafford Survey including, land in southern Erris was recorded in the final settlement even though his estate was declared confiscated.

The Commonwealth regime did not long outlast the making of these allotments and with the restoration of Charles II nothing was secure for the landowners. During the time of the Cromwellian Scheme there was much unrest between Catholics and Cromwellians. In the act of settlement passed by Charles II in 1662 he provided for the immediate restoration of innocents who were to relinquish any lands they had been allotted in Connacht so that other claims could be met. The rest of the land comprised in the Commonwealth Settlement was to be disposed of by the King. He named special deserving Catholics who were to get back their land as soon as their Commonwealth occupiers had been given an equivalent somewhere else. This posed a problem as not enough equivalent lands could be found. The act of Explanation of 1665 took a third of the estates of most Cromwellians and so provided a pool for the partial restoration of Catholics land. The Catholics fared out much better in Connaught than anywhere else but a number of Cromwellians remained. The King also made a number of royal grants. The parish of Kilmore-Erris was given to Sir Robert Viner, a London Goldsmith to whom Charles II owed money. Viner disposed of it to Sir James Shaen, Surveyor General of Ireland. Sir James Shaen was the son of Sir Francis Shaen who had been connected with Mayo from the reign of Queen Elizabeth and before whom the first preserved Elizabethan Inquisition of Co. Mayo was taken in 1587. Sir James Shaen took very little interest in Erris but when he died in 1695 he left his land to his son Sir Arthur Shaen. Arthur took a continuing interest in the estate. He brought a colony of English with a vicar, Reverend John Tootlet to Erris and gave them the best lands in the Mullet Peninsula with grazing lands in Kilcommon Parish. Sir Arthur Shaen offered his new settlers land at very small rents. For example on 1st December 1724 he leased Cloontikilly (1,690 acres) to Francis Nashe of Elly Bay for an annual rent of £20. It does not appear that any such leases were made to the native inhabitants, with the exception of the Cormicks. In fact according to the accounts of the colony the settlers evicted the early inhabitants and built their own homes. This clearing out as it was called provoked a

violent reaction by the displaced people. After several years of discord the English and natives gradually learned to live together and hostility died out. Sir Arthur Shaen a barrister, was high Sheriff of Co. Mayo in 1708. He lived at Shanaghy in the Mullet Peninsula and remained there until he saw the colony settled. When Arthur Shaen died in 1725 he shared his estate between his two daughters Frances and Susannach. In 1738 Frances married John Bingham of Newport Co. Mayo. John was a descendant of Sir Henry Bingham former governor of Connaught. In 1750 Susannach married Henry Boyle Carter of Castlemartin, Co. Kildare. As Arthur Shaen had no sons the name of Shaen disappeared. The Bingham family came to reside on the Mullet peninsula around 1796. They built a castle on the south shore of Elly Bay looking northwards over their lands and their village. The site of the building was said to be that of the Oileach, the fortified seat of the Chiefs of the native Petty Kingdom of the Hy Fiachrach Bingham Castle was the most ambitious of a number of mansions built at this time by local landlords.

Binghamstown

Binghamstown was established on the lands of Ballymacsherron in the final decade of the 18th Century. It was named after its founder Major Bingham and reached its culmination in the final years immediately proceeding the famine. He was the first to commence extensive improvements in Erris. As a 'landlord village' one of its principle functions was to provide a fundamental service for the estate of its founders. Major Bingham was influential in 1817 in the employment of Mr. Bald to project a main road from Bangor. The road was eventually opened in 1824. This created a home market for produce, which did not previously exist nearer than 30 miles by land. Major Bingham also got a patent for holding fairs and markets in both Binghamstown and Bangor. These fairs were held on the first day of every month. Permission to hold markets and fairs was granted by the Crown in the form of a written patent. In return for accepting responsibility for the organisation and supervision of a market or fair as well as for the ensuring the settlement of disputes that might arise there. The owner of the franchise was permitted to charge toals or customs on the days at the place specified in the patent.

In the early part of 1823, the first two-wheeled vehicle passed through Binghamstown to the extremity of the peninsula. It was not until 1824 that Binghamstown was passable generally for carriages of all kinds. Fallmore in the far south was not linked to the rest of the peninsula by road until 1890.

Prior to the Famine Binghamstown consisted of one long street containing seventy private dwellings and other buildings including a

Binghamstown

Binghamstown was established on the lands of Ballymacsherron in the final decade of the 18th Century. It was named after it's founder Major Bingham and reached it's culmination in the final years immediately proceeding the famine. He was the first to commence extensive improvements in Erris. As a 'landlord village' one of it's principle functions was to provide a fundamental service for the estate of it's founders. Major Bingham was influential in 1817 in the employment of Mr. Bald to project a main road from Bangor. The road was eventually opened in 1824. This created a home market for produce, which did not previously exist nearer than 30 miles by land Major Bingham also got a patent for holding fairs and markets in both Binghamstown and Bangor. These fairs were held on the first day of every month. Permission to hold markets and fairs was granted by the Crown in the form of a written patent. In return for accepting responsibility for the organisation and supervision of a market or fair as well as for the ensuring the settlement of disputes that might arise there. The owner of the franchise was permitted to charge toals or customs on the days at the place specified in the patent.



FAIR GREEN
BINGHAMSTOWN.

In the early part of 1823, the first two-wheeled vehicle passed through Binghamstown to the extremity of the peninsula. It was not passable generally form carriages of all kinds. Fallmore in the far south was not linked to the rest of the peninsula by road until 1890.

Prior to the Famine Binghamstown consisted of one long street containing seventy private dwellings and other buildings including a Market House, Court House, Church, Constabulary Barracks, General

INTERVIEW WITH THERESA DALY

Interviewee: Theresa Daly (great great granddaughter of Major Denis Bingham)

Interviewers: Pauline Reilly, Valerie McGoldrick, Trisha Mills.

Date: 25/07/91

Pauline: Who was the first Bingham to encounter Erris?

Theresa: Richard Bingham was the first to encounter Erris territory when he pursued the Spanish Armada, around the coast of Erris, and he didn't put any roots down, so far as I know, because he married and had a daughter, and he didn't have any sons so the line died out at that stage, but he surrounded himself with relatives and he had two brothers in Sligo, who were assisting him and they are the one's who have carried on the family name, and they became ensconced in Mayo at that time, at the time of the Armada, and after this Sir Richard went back to England and his brother carried on the family. They all got titles, one was the Clanmorris branch, and the other one was the Lucan branch, so if we come forward a bit in time to Major Denis Bingham who built the castle.

Trisha: What year did he build the castle in?

Theresa: If you have any information of anything between the time of the Armada and 1580, Sir Richard was around that time. I tried to do some research from Castlebar and I can't find anything, were the records destroyed from the 16th Century, between 1584 and 1795? Major Bingham who actually, I think, built the castle in 1795. There is nothing to tie Sir Richard Bingham with it and so if you could find something on that, I would be very grateful. Because we pick up the story then with Major Denis Bingham, his father was the first Lord of Clanmorris and his mother would you believe was one Letitia Daly, she was very well connected. She reads "Our Irish ancestors can be traced back to Richard Bingham's brother, Sir George Bingham, knighted. We are direct descendants of his not Sir Richard Bingham, and he became Governor of Sligo. His

death took place in 1599 and he's buried in Christ Church, Dublin, and his heir was Henry Bingham who was created Barronet of Novascotia in 1634 and that is the Lucan branch. You've obviously heard of the missing Earl, haven't you? The vanishing Earl of Lucan.

All: Oh yes.

Theresa: Well that's his branch of the family. His younger son, was John Bingham of Foxford, Newbrook. He's the Clanmorris branch, and his second son Charles Bingham of Newbrook, he was an army Major. He was killed at the Battle of Aaghran in 1691, then Charles's son, the right honourable Henry Bingham, Lord Justice of Ireland, and M.P. for Castlebar from 1715 until his death in 1743, he was the one who married Letitia Daly, through the connection with Letitia Daly they derived ascent through the noble houses of Bourke, Shirley, Deberah, Bouchiea and Plantagaret, even from Edward III, King of England, so Letitia Daly was very well connected. Henry Bingham was the father of Major Denis Bingham, who built Bingham's Castle, he died in 1789 and was buried at the chapel, which was attached to the castle.

Trisha: Can you give me dates of the burials which took place at the Castle?

Theresa: In around 1795, circa 1795 and Henry Bingham was buried there in 1789. There was a tablet which is still there somewhere, but of course I can't find it now because it's all completely grown over. I don't know how one would go about finding it now. There was graves from that time up to, I would think about 1929, when the IRA blew up the outhouses and eventually they left. So I think between that sort of time and 1929 people would have been buried there. There is a graveyard where my branch of the family were buried. There used to be a Protestant Church at the top of Binghamstown and the graveyard is still there, but the church was pulled down. But our branch and the Annagh branches have been buried there but there's no traces of the "Castle Bingham's" there, so this has been written, so that is true, so I assume that the date that they started, presumably they started, so he may be the first one to be buried there. He was a Major in the 5th Dragoon guards

from whom our descendants Bingham from Bingham's Castle. He bequeathed all his pictures, prints, books and bookcases, and that Denis should take care of them in memory of his father. Also there were two valuable rings that belonged to his mothers family.

Valerie: How did Denis Bingham get a stronghold in Erris?

Theresa: There was two Shaen sisters, and there were heiresses and this Denis Bingham of the 5th Dragoon guards married one of them and this is how they really got a stronghold in Erris in the first place. One of them married Carter. There were two maybe even three Denis Bingham's. The same Major Denis Bingham who built the castle, built Binghamstown, about 1817 and that would be about my great great grandfather, Gerald Bingham who came to live in Binghamstown House and his father was Denis Bingham. I haven't got the family tree here, which would have been most helpful, if I had that because we could see how the lines go. But it was about 1817 that Binghamstown was built.

Pauline: She was a sister of the girl who married Carter, who owned Belmullet. Belmullet then was built up into a fairly big town, as Belmullet became more important, Binghamstown became less important and I think there were about 40 odd houses there and I think, about the time of the famine they disintegrated.

Trisha: How did Binghamstown get it's Irish name?

Theresa: "An Gheata Mhor" - The Big Gate.
There was supposed to have been a big gate which led into the fair green, I don't know how true this is, there is no substance through the big gate apparently up at the P.O. now that's what I've been told, I wouldn't like to substantiate that. The other name Saleen took it's name from that. The "Big Gate" sounds much more plausible, I think actually, because they used to charge quite a lot, years ago, for people to come in and out, with cattle and things into the fairs.

Trisha: People from Binghamstown going into Belmullet?

Theresa: No, people from all over the place, I think there was a toll, that's one explanation whether that the correct one or not. My grandfather married an English Lady her name was Felverton and she came from a very nice English family and her brother was an admiral and when this was a British protectorate he brought the fleet into Blacksod Bay once. I think that would have been when my father was about seven or eight at the time and he came up to the house and took my father and dressed him in a sailor suit and he took him on board ship, he lined all the ships up so that my grandmother could see them and he took my grandmother and my father on board ship for dinner. But he remembers that, according to my father he thought that Binghamstown was the best place in the world he maintained that Blacksod Harbour was the best harbour in the world and the deepest, its also the deepest natural harbour in Ireland. I think that fairly factual. When my grandmother came here there was no electricity, there was no tarmacadam on the roads.

Trisha: That was your mother?

Theresa: My grandmother, and she must have found it very difficult living here. She liked it here and I think the local people were very fond of her because she was very delicate and I think the family paid for a doctor to come and live her for quite a while.

Pauline: My grandfather was Gerald Bingham. He was born at the castle. He came to live in Binghamstown house after he got married, and his brother continued to live at the castle. I think he got married, and his brother continued to live at the castle. I think he got married around about 1875 or something like that. His brother continued to live there and his nephew was the last person to inhabit the castle, who was also a Denis Bingham and he was married to somebody called Ina Broad, her father was master of the Kings yacht. He was a very important man, and I think she was anxious to get back. She was also an English woman, it must be the late 1920's, it might have been about 1926 maybe, I'm not too sure about the date's and that really was the end, but my grandfather stayed on in Binghamstown, he died in

Binghamstown Castle in 1947. But he was the last of the castle line really, and my father died in 1970, so he was definitely the last of the Bingham.

Pauline: Can you tell me anything about the workhouse down at Saleen?

Theresa: Well as far as I know, it was built by Major Bingham and it was pretty much like any other workhouse and it was very sparsely furnished. The food was very poor they had Indian meal and some soup and that was the main diet. It was terribly overcrowded. I believe, so it really wasn't big enough to cope with all the people who came knocking at the door every day. The date of the workhouse, it was about the mid 1840's, I think, sometime like that. The time of the potato famine, when families either stayed here and famished or emigrated, and some of them made it to Liverpool, a lot of them made it to Liverpool, and they had labels on. Those who didn't perished and the other two popular places for emigration were Australia and America and they were taken off on these ships, awful ships called Coffin Ships. They were run by speculators who charged a lot of money and they weren't at all sea worthy and a lot of them, I think a very small proportion made the trip over to America and then those who did were able to send money back to the ones who were left behind. If have got statistics but you can get that anywhere.

Trisha: What kind of transport was in the area at the time?

Theresa: He was very keen on Horses, and breeding and training horses and Denis Murphy did tell me before he died that the house that he lived in and where the Murphy's still live, belonged to my grandfather and he brought over an English trainer to train the horses and the trainer lived up there, and he had all the horses there and my grandfather used to take them over to England to race and he tried to get a Grand national winner, but he never did. I don't think he was ever really that successful. The Cawleys were Blacksmiths and we think that they came in with major Denis Bingham originally, probably the Nallens too, The Hughes maybe too. They brought in Blacksmiths, Saddlers, Coopers, Gardeners. Some came from Wales, I have a feeling

the Hughes came from Wales. I'm not too sure about that. I do know they brought people in.

Valerie: Were there any other landlords?

Theresa: I think all the landlords, there were the Richards at Barnagh as well you know. They were very famous landlords, they had a lovely house just opposite Barnagh Island. They were landlords, they went about the same time. I think they all went between 1926 and 1929 and then the Land Commission took over and they divided up the land amongst the tenants and all the land back at Elly Bay is now in the hands of the people living there at the time. The Fallons I believe, they were the nearest to the castle. They're probably living now on the site of the castle.

Trisha: Why was the castle never preserved?

Theresa: They used the stones of the castle to build their houses. A lot of the houses were built at the entrance door. My father said it was very beautiful, the castle. It was a shame, it was a shame. I remember back in 1962 and it still had one of the towers up there. Part of it was standing in 1962-63. It was very dangerous, what I'm concerned about since I started delving into the history myself cause my father used to tell me an awful lot and I never really wanted to listen to it. I got really tired of hearing about it. I'd rather leave the room than sit and listen to it. But I didn't realise that the graves were there. It would have been nice to have had to be able to get to see them. Because I think a grave is a grave whatever the religion. It should be treated with respect and looked after. It would be nice to be able to get at them cause I know roughly where they would be. I know where the chapel was beside the old chapel. Dad said "It was very beautiful". It had oak panelling inside it was built in the 18th Century, Georgian Style. This is another reason why I don't think Sir Richard Bingham had anything to do with it, cause it was a Georgian type of building. It had oak panels and beautiful paintings, ceiling paintings, but all Italian artists that they got over to paint the ceilings. We still have some of the paintings the biblical scene down in the house. I don't know what happened to them. But they come from one of the ceilings of the castle, but I don't know

where they are now. It was quiet lovely they used to call them balls in that day. Parties and Hunt Balls and things like that. There was one enormous room apparently which had a folding door that used to open up for the dances and the balls, and they used to sort of visit each other and have tennis parties and coffee parties. A lovely old time but they had to go on horseback of course, that was the only mode of transport. So they either had to ride but all the ladies could ride otherwise they wouldn't get out, they'd be stuck in for the day.

Trisha: What religion was your mother?

Theresa: A lot of them afterwards married catholics here and there but I think she was the first of the Binghamms to marry a catholic. She was a widow, her first husband was a doctor, Dr. Gallagher, he had his practise down in Pullathomas and my stepbrother wasn't born when his father died. She went up to Dublin and trained to be a nurse and her first job, her first district, was in Binghamstown and she came in here as a district nurse. My father fell very much in love and married her. But she was the first catholic to marry a Protestant. But they were all Protestant of course, and there was a Protestant church, you know where Hanleys is, the church was just opposite there, inside a very large wall and the graveyard is still there. The church was knocked down in 1957 and there's one little Protestant church in Belmullet. That's where my father was taken when he died, actually, the day he died there was a big demonstration, the day he was being buried actually.

Trisha: So he never changed religion, he stayed Protestant?

Theresa: He didn't no, he did till he died. He was a Protestant, it was somebody called I think it was Padraic O Conaire demonstrating outside the church, in Gaelic, I couldn't understand it.

Trisha: Why?

Theresa: The villagers went into the church. None of us were allowed to go into a Protestant church in England until the 60's and although my father died in 1970. I don't know what he was

protesting about, I think the landlords, I don't know what it was in Gaelic and I was too upset anyway to listen to what he was saying but he was quickly and forcibly removed by some of the local people, they shut him up very quickly before we got out of the church. He was outside, standing on something we came out and he was quickly whisked away, and then we came out to Binghamstown and Dad was buried in the graveyard. I think he was the last to be buried there, well Henry Bingham and Anna were the last to be buried there in 1975, I think he died. So there hasn't been burials there since the last one.

Valerie: Where were you educated?

Theresa: There was a big room in Binghamstown House which is still there, we still call it the nursery and they had their own governess and then when they were old enough to go away to school the boys went to a boarding school in Kildare and the girls went down well some of them went to England, and others went to Cheltenham College which was a famous school in England. One of my aunts went there, but they didn't go to the local school. My father didn't get home from one summer to the next it was too far because they had to get the mailcar into Ballina, the train was just about coming in then to Ballina so we had to get a coach and they would change at somewhere like Bangor there were changing stations on the way and the coach would change, I think Harry Richards said about 3 times, every 10 or 12 miles I think, they changed the horses so you couldn't do that kind of journey to town so he had to stay in Dublin with relatives at his brothers every Christmas and every Easter he only came home for summer holidays until he was between the age of seven and fifteen, he did that so he was never here for Christmas it was very sad. I'm glad I didn't have to do that.

Bingham was a ruthless landlord and demanded both rackrents and service from his tenants. Each year the half-starved, badly-clothed peasants had to fatten two pigs and bring them to the annual fair at Belmullet or to his residence at An Geata Mór. The local people referred to them as Bainbh an Bhiongamaigh (Binghams Bonhams).

Not satisfied with this, he demanded twelve days cultivating the crops in spring and six days harvesting in autumn. Their reward for their labours was a cart load of boiled potatoes and boiled herrings.

“The Heritage of Mayo”
Aine Ní Cheanamn,
P. 20

Interview with William Fallon,
Elly,
Clogher,
Ballina.

Interviewers: Valerie McGolderick

Valerie: Is it true that you worked for Major Denis Bingham?

William: That's right we go down to the shore picking shells for Mrs. Bingham. She give you half a crown fair play to get a big can of shells. We get the hammereen then and break them there beyond from the polls. She was giving it to you for the shells. But in English or Irish you're getting it?

Valerie: English.

William: Is it. Well, Cuirfidh me bearla maith ort, mar sin Ç.

Valerie: What was it like working for Denis Bingham?

William: You couldn't work for a nicer man, or a decent or a straighter. If he was a penny of your pay short when he'd be paying them Saturday between that Monday I believe until next week, he'd be in the field, he'd be out with his rake or with anything working, with his straight three men he used to have most of the time, maybe five, but no getting away from it, he is what you'd call a gentleman and what I often said all I knew about him.

Valerie: What kind of work did you do?

William: On the farm I used to work, in Spring time setting potatoes and for the summer than there was only a few, them one's would be busy, when the harvest would come, he'd have

four men than with four slashers, four scythes cutting hay for harvest, gather it up then and make a big reek. Oh well, indeed he was what you'd call a farmer to.

Valerie: Was he a nice man? Did he treat his tenants well?

William: He did, I have the scissors yet he brought to my father Christmas Eve. The rivet was in it years ago and yet it never lost edge and the rivet was wore and anyways the thread was broken but I put a rivet in it. I have it abroad in a drawer in the store room abroad. Since the day he left Ireland until the day he died he sent about seven pounds box of tea every Christmas to father, to the old couple, to us. He wouldn't forget. Then he'd send in a letter a ten shilling note an odd time when he was cleared from here we had nothing to do with him then. When he sold the place to the Commission. But he was a genuine man like that was great and herself. She wouldn't know what would she do for you, and she had a sister living with her Miss Broad. And sure she'd keep the whole day going round about talking to old women, getting old seanadhas and cómhra. Ah bo, I tell ya, if there were a few like him around about the place.

Valerie: Why did the Binghamms leave the Castle?

William: Well I'll tell ya, our own country people coming on them in the night battering the stables and battering the houses. "Bolshi", wanting land. I remember they came on me father beyond in Elly, anyone that would work for the Binghamms. They would come in gangs. Thirty or forty of them, marching. I heard them saying, and I knew the man that said the word. I traced up. He got land and if he did he didn't take much out of it. Land we want he said and land we must get. And he died and he had no family. His wife died and left it to a neighbour.

Valerie: What happened to the Castle and how come none of it remains today?

William: The Castle!

Valerie: Yeah!

Leabharlann Co. Mhuilgheo
Mayo County Library

William: Well I'll tell ya. When the Commission took over the farm from Bingham. My father was working all the time for Bingham. For three or four years after. Since he went. He left my father here. Taking care, looking after the stock and doing as he was doing himself. And he'd come twice a year. He'd come, he'd buy cattle in October or November and he'd come in February or March and sell. But then when the place was given up to the Commission. My father asked him this day, "well what about the castle now Mr. Bingham?" he said, "they wouldn't give me a box of matches for the castle". This one went down and said "put it up for auction. We'll do as well on it". Bingham was cleared out of it then and the castle was left there. It was supposed to be coming on our, it was coming on our holding, and the old fella put it up for sale, pieces of slates, that might come lose. I'm sure it's his that's on "Comlaughs" of Blacksod and it was on William neds of Clogher, and Pat Neds. It's on a lot of houses around the area.

Valerie: How many people would have been in the area at the time, was there more or less than there is now?

William: Around about here, there was, there was because our village is half empty now since I was a child. Seven or eight years growing up. Beyond at the cross roads up from our house in Elly. When I was about eight or nine years. On every summers evening you'd see seven or eight fine young men there and sure that wasn't the half of them. Sure there was big families in this village. Cattigans, the Gammons, there was a good few of them and there was a power of Deanes in it. But the Deanes was on the other line that time, they were married. But the Cattidgans, the Barretts. But a lot of them houses are closed down today. No one living in them, only a few come over John Monaghan.

Valerie: Is there anything else you can tell me about any of the Bingham's? Was it just Denis Bingham that was here or was there other Bingham's?

William: Ara, there was other Bingham's back until 1715 they came I think to here. Major Bingham when he came, a Major in the English army, he was a general, a Major. It was a white horse he had and he came into Glencastle. And his general,

the man that was over him told him to look behind him now, to look around and anything he could see, it was his. That's how Major Bingham came out here.

Valerie: Was it Denis Bingham who built the Castle?

William: No, no, this last Denis.

Valerie: Yeah.

William: No it was Major Bingham. There was a Cormac man there before him. A Major Bingham he built a two story, just like Carolyn's behind, the house before the corner. It used to be seen you know from Devlane. The two story gable and it was a bargain. Cormac told him anyhow, that he didn't want him to go but no he said any preparations I'll do you'll see to it. That was the bargain then. Cormac would pay him out for anything he would have done. He came on the Castle, the site and started the same thing. Cormac was far wrong to it then, do you know he said to Cormac what I'll do with you, there was a farm in Cross that time below the Abbey the graveyard and he said Cormac man a tight player. Well one or two Cormac's pulled out of that and threw it over again to me. And the Bingham's they had a place too in Tallaghan. Roy Carter above Roy Bingham they were scattered about they were, the Shaws, Carters. Carter would be married to one of the Bingham's. But Major Bingham, he was there living in the Castle on his own and he had a servant girl and she was from Ballybeg behind and be God he made up with her I think she lived there in the Castle with him, and two daughters they had. They used to be great parties at the big shots, there was a big ball they call it above in Dublin. Must be I think it's in Dublin and the two Major Bingham's the two daughters he had and they were geared out for the party and above at the party men would bring them dancing and they said to this girl she must be a friend of there's well why weren't they bringing themselves out dancing. Well you know they said your father or mother was never married, the two Major women came home bronach (sad) that night when they came they were down and out, and they said to one Major yourself and our mammy never got married. Who told ye that? It was casted up to us at the party. Ah well, it won't be casted up

to ye again. I don't know now what chapel they were brought into she was outside the window and the wife inside in the chapel they were married. Major Bingham and his wife. Well then they had no sons, I think his brothers son then he got married to one that came from him. The last Bingham's. There was three of them after the Major then she got married to her own cousin I believe and there was no Bingham's do you see to come in for the place till he brought him in. But that Major, that Bingham Major I said that Bingham then had, that got married to her to Major's daughter had a son, and that son went on alright in his early days but he was bold and they was going into Minnie Murphy's yard that time there was an arch and he was going over at the graveyard going to town with his coach and two horses and a poor old priest was going the road with a little trap and when he was passing he gave his own horses a sweep and I don't know was it at the second weather horse ah don't mind the priest said to him you'll go home easier than your going out. He went up American St, and you know Minnie Murphy's do ya? Where Hawkins lived well there was an archway there and when he was going in the archway he was sitting up high you know not alot of height over him and then one of the horses bucked he drew the belt on him up goes the two horses and put up the gallop in the archway and left the Major's head the Bingham's head after him. Well there was another Bingham then coming behind him after the priest himself and Carter's men then had a fall out and Carter had a gun with him to shoot the priest and Minnie Murphy's hotel over there at Valkenburgs it's below they'd go in with the cart that time and coming in the priest and all that was in the hotel knew and the staff that he was out that day that he had a double barrel gun with him in his shoe, he had the edge of the gun, the stock and his shoe and him holding it like this I'm glad of that the priest said you'll see who he'll shoot that's all he said walked out to Minnie Murphy's hotel and went up around the town and he said to Carter, ah I suppose he said your wanting me today are ya he wasn't able to speak, he was able to stir the gun left the gun oh your foot he said off yes the shot. Carter went to the moon, settled, that was sure and certain. Well it's a wonder they wouldn't have some seanadhas now, ah but you pole, your father, but I'm thinking older people on the islands, ah they wouldn't have

much trace of this life. Well there was one of the string going all the time. Ah, oh my mother was at his wake, Donacha, he was Denis, I'm thinking he was before Dinny, the last Dinny, he was dead the likes of one of the Ruanes that was dead at the lake and there was a wake at him, bottles of whiskey and everything and they were giving him that whiskey. There was a store room coming up this way from the Castle. And there was a cailín in the Castle, oh an old traveller, she was a foreigner but she was there a long time with them.

Valerie: Was there a lot of bedrooms and parlours in the Castle?

William: There was three rooms in the beyond of it. A dining room, there was a name on each of them. Be jeas I think it was beyond the parlour, it was alright. The dining room and the parlour and the oak room. Well each room of them was twice the size of this big kitchen, when it was a kitchen. And there were three more then, three storey up you know in this near half of it. In the middle then there was two rooms, and then we go out to the hall door, a two storey in the middle, and two more beyond that. That was four and three, seven and three is ten. That's ten big rooms, well then the part of it where Bingham lived that I know, it was coming up this way, like the make of this house now and there was four rooms there, and I don't know ah there was a lot of little rooms there on the ground, because they used to be sailing with me when I was a buck going with the caileachs around the old women, that she'd be out after me. There'd be about thirty-five rooms I'd say. There was thirty-five rooms in it now, but I cannot make out, and there'd be a lot of tourists in it. I cannot make out. The Castle was down like that now we'll say that's the gable and that's the side storey well from that up this side there was a building back along the back here and going up arah it was going up the garden beyond there.

Valerie: Was there a church there as well?

William: It was supposed there was, I didn't see it but there was a church gairín teampull there. There was a church in it and there was a graveyard there with that church but oh I seen the church alright it was me that knocked it, the stone of it

that went in John Toghers house when he was building the new house where he got married he was stuck for stones and he asked me.

Margaret: Which side was the church?

William: You know where I used to have the early potatoes.

Margaret: Down there in that corner?

William: Yes, down in that corner. But then there was a wall going over to the Castle from that. There was a church in it and I know that there was a marble French facing the sea and the church it was as big then as the leaf of a gable. A big marble about that height and what was printed into that if you print there now on paper you'd think and it was there racing the rain and snow. It was on it anyway at the finish to come up here and draw near if you want to hear the word I got. I remember all that and how I remember that story Maisey Reilly used to be making sweets you know he used spill them out, must be on this marble arah he was at it for years but that's where the marble is now like you'd see on a pub or shop. Come up here, ah it was erected by Denis.

Valerie: Was there a signal tower or a Coastguard Station at Elly point any time?

William: There was a Coastguard Station in it well and it was turned I'm sure into a barrack then.

Valerie: Would that be going back years?

William: Well it is, I didn't see it in it, but it was in it I'm nearly sure when my mother was a young girl beyond at the shore it was. There was a Coastguard Station now or an Army Barracks, someone of them said it was over on the shore there that place is it at the tide now till Noon's never in it.

Valerie: There was a Whaling Station in Elly Bay as well what did they do there?

William: Bring fish and whales in from the Atlantic. Manufacturing them, melting them, cutting them, making manure, taking oil

out of them. It was in Inishkea first below Baile Thar there was a small island there you never was in that?

Valerie: Which island is that?

William: The north island this near island to us, the north island of Inishkea, there is two islands in it, Baile Thair and Baile Thoir. Well who was living there now it's the near island to this side Baile Thoir there was a Whaling Station there but the tide to you see and the Atlantic, it was they were facing the Atlantic on the bad weather of winter back there. Bingham was Denis Bingham it's him that got the Whaling Station in there and then they agreed with him to bring it to Elly or else to leave the country and he brought it to Gub Ard Elly it was there then since 1909 they cant out there. They had the first got Christmas Eve in it and I'm thinking it was a nice thing to get that time at Christmas so sort of pay it was there then until about I'm thinking 1922 when it was burned down. The rebelation came out then the "Bailshers" and you would now when they set it a blaze.

Valerie: And would there have been many working there?

William: Ah, there used to be a hundred men. Thee used to be working the night in it and big ships of coal. A big load of coal would come in do you see and they'd have like storage tanks. They'd have two huts and they'd put them alongside the ship and they'd be shovelling coal all night there and ara they used to be a long time in it. Ara I seen men there on the platform cutting the whale and there'd be thirteen or fourteen Norwegians along with them. Headmen you know, every man to his own job.

Margaret: Used they have big dinners and balls and things like that in it?

William: No, no, in late years there wasn't. There wasn't in the late years.

Margaret: But they used to have?

William: They used to one time. Ara they used.

Margaret: Had they their own cooks?

William: Their own cook! Ah well they had cooks galore! And then foreigners coming in, strangers sure, people used to be always stuck in it.

Valerie: What year did they leave the Castle?

William: 1923 or 1924. The day the drowning in Elly Bay, they were in that, me father was working in front of the Castle, cleaning the beach over with French. And Denis was out at him. And I'm sure it's shortly after that, he had the auction. He had an auction you know on the furniture and everything in it before he left. That was 1923.

Valerie: Is there any tale you could tell us about something that happened in the area?

William: The time they caught Fr. Sweeney. Fr. Sweeney was out I don't know what country, in college and he met another lad there from abroad and they were in the same class or school. But a boat load or cargo of something came into Westport and who was walking down the pier but Fr. Sweeney. Newly ordained. He wasn't long ordained now he had the chalice, whatever the priest do get for holding the communion. He had that in his pocket with him, and wasn't it hard, like the I.R.A. is now in the north you know. That they were treating badly the Irish and when Fr. Sweeney was coming down the pier wasn't the captain below and he was looking out the window and he walked out and he went out on the pier. Up the town, making for the town and he met Fr. Sweeney on the pier. And they were there for an hour talking. And it was the Irish people's neighbours that was working there flat out, that how Fr. Sweeney was a traitor, giving information to the foreigners. And the English didn't want that. And there was no more about it for a while, the next thing, the search, the "Ruaile buaille" went out, Fr. Sweeney would have to be caught. Major Bingham had a standing army here that time. Outside that window there, the Barracks was up there along the road and over there above. Then they started searching. They were searching, they searched the counties and they went to Newport. And Fr. Sweeney knew they were on his

look-out and he went a hide and in them days they'd be a bit of a loft in the old country houses. You know sticks across and then like a stairs for putting up straw or bags of oats and there was an old woman sitting at the fire on a little stool and these four men came in and they started asking her and she said no, and these two hypocrites they were from Mullaghroy they were Protestants as well as the Bingham's didn't they come in and the other four men was on him and what did they do but with ram rods prodding up through the loft you know through the straw and the next thing she said they have Fr. Sweeney caught, he was above there, they knew then he was brought on a yacht to here below brought up to the Castle but the yacht came down, what ever two they were from around about the villages here and Fr. Sweeney wanted a drink and him standing on the ditch looking up looking from him. Well this Murphy man from Attycunnane said there is one of his breed in it yet Tom Murphy, but he said I have no cup or no mug or nothing to bring it out but I have a new pair of shoes on me he said and I'll wash the shoe. That will be alright the priest said he went out and one shoe off him and it full of spring water, I know the well it's there below yet and it will be in it go deo as the other man says. He went out and Fr. Sweeney was above and here comes Murphy and was putting the shoe up when this man struck it with a kick. Ah well Murphy went very near to fall. Ah well he said after me trouble. But he said the next time I'll come the one that will need meddle with the drink will suffer. He went in again and a hard cap he wore, he filled the hat and brought the full of the water out again and he said, he said to the man that struck it with a kick now he said it's going up this time and let you don't touch it if you do you'll be where the hat will be don't mind him the priest said don't mind him the day he'll be buried that let will do a bit of travelling the pole of Faulmore will see that leg with the dog across the hill and that came out, he was buried and the children that time there was a little school there in Aughleam they were going out from school, oh they seen the dog coming down the hill and him dragging the leg with him from the knee and they were frightened and when they went home they were telling their fathers and the fathers that smell Fr. Sweeney's talk do you see. Ah they said that true Fr. Sweeney's talk now that's what Fr. Sweeney said

with the men that put the water in the tide and it was that was what he promised, he said don't mind him he said that leg will be seen coming the hill of Faulmore after his death.

Margaret: Was Fr. Sweeney set free then or what?

William: He wasn't, he was not.

Bridgie: Some say that beyond at the Castle he was hung.

Valerie: What did he ever do?

William: He didn't do anything you see.

Margaret: He was seen talking to the foreigners and they thought he was a spy.

Valerie: So he was buried either in Mulranny or Louisberg.

William: He was in some, I could know it from an old man of the Walshes he was from Louisberg he had great seanadhas above in Galway and he knew alot about it.

FAMILY NAME HISTORY

BINGHAM

The arms described below were first awarded to the Bingham of Bingham Castle in County Mayo, where the head of the family bore the title of Earl of Lucan. It was to this part of Ireland that the Bingham first came in the wake of the Anglo-Norman invasion of the twelfth century, and the influence that the family was to have in its new homeland is testified to in the placename of Binghamstown in the same county. The name itself is of local origin, being derived from the name of the place where an original bearer once dwelt or where he once held land, and comes in fact from a combination of the Old english personal name Bynna with the suffix "ham", which signifies "the homestead of Bynna's people". This was the name given to a small township in 1175 when the Pipe Rolls for that county refer to one William de Bingham. The Bingham of Bingham Castle also established a branch in Fermanagh where in 1708 arms were awarded to Henry Bingham, descendant of Charles Bingham, who married Mary, the daughter and heiress of Henry Blennerhasset of that county. The surname is also numerous elsewhere in the northern Irish province of Ulster, but in these latter instances it is more likely to be borne by those of Planter stock, descendants of those English and Scottish settlers who arrived in pursuance of the Plantation policies of Elizabeth I and James II in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Finally, it is interesting to note that the similarity of these arms to those of the Bingham of Bingham-Melcombe in Dorset, "a family of Saxon origin, originally of Sutton Bingham in Somerset", suggests a measure of kinship between the two.

BLAZON OF ARMS: Azure a bend cottised between six crosses pattee ar.

CREST: On a mount vert a falcon rising wings expanded proper, armed, membered and belled ar.

MOTTO: SPES MEA CHRISTUS.

TRANSLATION: Christ is my hope.

Belmullet

On 1st May 1823 William Henry Carter Esq. Sole proprietor of one third of Erris (47,500 Irish Acres) arrived in Erris. He saw the situation of the isthmus of Belmullet for a town and directed that plans should be made for the town. Mr. P. Knight, an engineer from London produced the plans.



As originally designed it was to have a main street about 400m long stretching from West of the head of Broadhaven to the head of Blacksod Bay. This plan was closely followed. Before the end of 1824 one merchant - A Mr. Ivers had built an extensive store and exported two cargo's of grain. When William Henry Carter Esq. visited two years later he noted great developments. By the census of 1831 there were 585 people living in Belmullet. There were 120 houses, 73 of which were two storey, slated buildings. As the two developed additional streets were laid out at right angles to the main one as per Knight's plan. Today the modern town of Belmullet differs little from its original layout and the central area named after the original founder is still referred to as Carter Square.

Belmullet was able to maintain its standing as the only urban centre within a radius of 40 miles. T. Jones Hughes states that in its local setting the building of this settlement must be regarded as a turning point in landlord activity because its coming was followed by a swift transformation of the surrounding rural landscape.

BALLYCROY

In the Strafford Survey of 1635 the royalist Earl (later Marquess and Duke) of Ormond owned large tracts of Southern Erris prior to him owning it, the Butlers held title to Ballycroy Mac Toimin and Barretts were tenants there. Ballycroy was not part of the lands in the grant made of the whole Barony to the trustees for Sir James. It was inhabited by a colony from the North of Ireland called Ulster men of Ultagh. There were thought to have come when they were expelled by James I. Throughout the years it was owned by a Mr. Birch who sublet a portion of it to a Mr. Clive. He built a shooting lodge. Sir Adam Bellinghan also bought land there. These English people were treated quite well by the natives. It was seen as the wildest district and was bought for sport or scenery rather than for investment. Thomas Birch of Claggan was the first landlord to make any real improvement to an estate at Ballycroy. He established a farm at Claggan called "Home Farm" and employed local labour in road making and land reclamation. Edward A. Clive took over.

Other landlords included Matthew Atkinson. He was landlord of a well developed farm of 281 acres along the north western boundary of Glencastle. In 1855 the Atkinsons are said to have been from the Foxford district. They settled in the 1840's and reclaimed much land.

Mathew Atkinson had broad fences made through his estate. His daughter taught in the Protestant School at Bangor. One elderly lady said "if your animals trespassed on Atkinson farm, he would have you shipped and your animals placed in the pound at Muings where a payment had to be made before you could claim them". His agent Edmund Fergus managed his farm.

THE BOURNES FAMILY

It is said that they came to Erris in the latter part of the 1830's. Samuel Bournes, his wife, their six children, Anne Watts, (mother in law of Samuel Bournes) and his mother Mary Bournes and several domestic servants moved into Rossport House in 1847. He had inherited the property in Rossport from his father, George Bournes of Moyne. It was said that Samuel Bournes was a stern and exacting master but he was also a humane and thoughtful landlord.

During the famine the Bournes worked to preserve and save the people from the surge of famine. In minor illnesses or accidents Samuel Bournes himself ministered to the afflicted. When a serious case appeared he sent for his son, Dr. William Henry Bournes, then residing in Belmullet who did not charge for his services.

In addition to supplying stirabout to the people he also brought meal and bread from Westport and supplies from his store in Belmullet.

The tenants had great respect for the wife of Samuel Bournes. She was affectionately called Maistreas Ruadh (Red-haired Mistress). She would often intercede on behalf of any tenant who was in difficulty with her husband the Sean-Mhaistir.

The Bournes moved to London in 1881. In 1926 Georgina Bournes, the inheritor of the Bournes Estate sold a portion of her property to Michael Corduff and John Monaghan, the rest was acquired by the Land Commission and divided among the tenants

Landlords of Erris 1855

Fr. Sean Noone in "Where the Sun Sets" gives the landlords of Erris in 1855.

Ballycroy Parish:-

Annagh Island	-	George Clive
Aughness	-	The Marquis of Sligo
Bellyveeny	-	George Clive
Belygarvaun	-	George Clive
Bunmore East	- -	Representatives of Alick Rickey
Bunmore West	-	Alick Rickey
Castlehill	-	George Clive
Claggan	-	George Clive
Claggan Mountain	-	George Clive
Doona	-	Archer Clive
Dooriel	-	Reverend Archer Clive
Drumgallagh	-	George Clive
Drumslide	-	Archer Clive
Essaun	-	George Clive
Fahy	-	Reverend Archer Clive
Gortbrack	-	George Clive
Greenaun	-	George Clive
Inishbiggle Island	-	Trustees of the Achill missions leased the Island from Sir Richard A O'Donal
Kildune	-	George Clive
Knockmoyleen	-	Alick Rickey
Lettra	-	George Clive and Dennis Godley
Logduff Beg	-	H. J. Grand and William Wilks
Logduff More	-	William Wilks
Lurgandarragh	-	George Clive
Maumaratta	-	George Clive
Owenduf	-	George Clive
Owenglass	-	Representatives of Alick Rickey
Scardaun	-	George Clive
Sheeanmore	-	Representatives of Alick Rickey
Shroduggan	-	George Clive
Shraerderdaowen	-	Representatives of Alick Rickey
Shranamonragh	-	William Wilks
Tallagh	-	George Clive
Tarsaghaun Beg North	-	William Wilks
Tarsaghaun Beg South	-	Representatives of Alick Rickey

Tawnanasheffin	-	George Clive
Belmullet Parish:-		
Alt	-	W. H. Carter, A. Knox, M. Atkinson.
Attycunnane	-	Isabella Short, William H. Carter and others
Barnatra	-	
Belmullet Town	-	
Belmullet	-	William H. Carter, Terence Goodwin, Margaret Davis.
Bunawillan	-	William Henry Carter
Bunnahowen	-	Matthew Atkinson, W. H. Carter, Annesly Knox.
Carrowkeel	-	W. H. Carter, Matthew Atkinson
Carrowmore	-	W. H. Carter
Corclogh East	-	W. H. Carter and others
Crinnish	-	Sir William White
Derreens	-	Henry Bingham, W. H. Carter
Derrycorrib	-	Matthew Atkinson, W. H. Carter
Derrynameel	-	M. Atkinson
Ederglen	-	Blake Knox
Fauleens	-	Henry Bingham
Foxpoint	-	George D'Arcy
Glencastle	-	M. Atkinson
Gortmore	-	W. H. Carter, Arthur Bingham
Lakefield	-	W. H. Carter
Muingmore	-	W. H. Carter, Henry Bingham
Muings	-	Sir William White, Patrick Reilly
Pollagarraun	-	Henry Bingham, Thomas Minaghan
Rathmorgan	-	W. H. Carter, James Gibbons
Shraigh	-	W. H. Carter, Denis Bingham, Margaret Reilly
Srahataggle South	-	Henry Bingham
Toorglass	-	John Crampton, W. H. Carter, Thomas Minaghan, Richard Gibbons, Martin Gaughan, Edward Barrett

Kiltane:-

Altnabrocky	-	Maria & Letitia Bingham
Attawalla	-	Isabella Short
Ballina	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Ballybeg	-	Henry Bingham
Ballymunnelly (Tavnagh)		
Bangor	-	Henry Bingham and Robert Savage
Bellacorick	-	W. Carter, Edward Ovan and Arthur Rose
Bellanumera	-	W. H. Carter
Briska	-	W. H. Carter
Cloontakilla	-	Isabella Short
Croaghaun	-	Charles and Bernard Coyle
Darralough	-	W. H. Carter
Doohoma	-	Anne Bingham
Doolough	-	Arthur Bingham, W. H. Carter, The Minors Cormuck and Michael Cleary
Dooyork	-	The Minors Cormuck
Druminaffrin	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Geesala	-	The Minors Cormuck
Glencullen Lower	-	John Reilly
Glencullen Upper	-	Tobias Kirkwood
Glenturk Beg	-	John Carey and John Bournes
Glenturk More	-	Denis Bingham
Goolamore	-	John Walsh
Kilsallagh	-	W. H. Carter
Kiltane	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Largan Beg	-	W. H. Carter and W. H. Bingham
Largan More	-	W. H. Carter
Lenanadurtaun	-	Robert Savage
Mount Jubilee (Triste)	-	
Muingaghel	-	Maria and Letitia Bingham
Muingnahalloona	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Muingnanarnad	-	William Wilks
Munhin	-	
Rosnagleragh	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Roy	-	W. H. Carter, D. Bingham and Benjamin Bellington
Sheean	-	W. H. Carter
Sheskin	-	Joseph C. Mc Donnell
Shrahanarry	-	Ellen Cosgrove
Shragraddy	-	Captain Blacken

Shramore	-	W. H. Carter
Shranakilla	-	Maria Knox, Helena Mc Cawley, Henrietta Patterson and Matilda Morton
Tarsaghaun More	-	Maria and Letitia Bingham
Tarnagh	-	W. H. Carter
Tavnanasool	-	John C. Walsh
Trista (Mount Jubilee)	-	W. H. Carter, Anthony Lenihan, Henry Bingham
Tullaghanbaun	-	W. H. Carter, Denis Bingham
Tullaghanduff	-	Denis Bingham
Tullaghaunnashammen	-	Charles and Bernard Coyne
Uggool	-	W. H. Carter

Kilcommon:-

Aughoose	-	James O'Donel
Baralty	-	Henry Bingham
Barnacullew	-	Samuel Browne
Barrosky	-	W. H. Carter and Cusack
Bellagelly North (Glenamoy)	-	Reverend Francis Rutledge
Bellagelly South (Glenamoy)	-	Edward Deane
Ballinaboy	-	W.H. Carter
Bunalty	-	R. Hazard
Bunowna	-	
Cornhill	-	Dominic O'Donnell
Carratigue	-	William Bourns (see p. 159)
Cornboy	-	Walter Burke
Cregganmore	-	W. H. Carter
Faulagh	-	W. H. Carter
Garter Hill	-	W. H. Carter
Glenamoy	-	William Carter (6,000 acres), Henry Bingham (1,700), either sold or leased to minor landlords
Glengad	-	Daniel Madden, Church of Ireland, John O'Donnell, Matilda O'Donal
Glinsk	-	W. H. Carter
Goola (Bellagelly North)	-	
Gortbrack	-	Isidore Blake and John Reilly
Gortleatilla	-	W. H. Carter
Gortmelia	-	John Reilly
Graughill	-	Isidore and Peter Blake
Inver	-	Isidore Blake and John Reilly
Kilgalligan	-	Fergus Kelly and George Bourns

Knocknalower	-	John Reilly
Laghtmurragh	-	Henry Bingham
Lenarevagh	-	W. H. Carter and John Thomas Irwin
Milltown (Bellagelly South)	-	
Muingeroon North	-	W. H. Carter
Muingingaun	-	W. H. Carter and Denis Bingham
Muingnabo	-	Fergus Farrell
Owenanirragh	-	W. H. Carter
Poolboy	-	R. Hazard
Pollathomas	-	Dominic O'Donel and Protestant Church Commissioners
Portacloy	-	William Carter
Rossport	-	W. H. Carter, Samuel Bournes and Ecclesiastical Commissioners
Srahataggle	-	William Carter, Reverend Michael Naughton and others
Srahnaplaia	-	William H. Carter
Stonefield	-	William H. Carter and John Bournes

Landlords were blamed for absenteeism, for neglecting their duties, for allowing great portions of their estates to remain in unprofitable waste and for putting forth small effort to assist, guide or elevate their tenants for changing more than Griffiths valuations. Relative to their number it may be fair to say that there were in Ireland as many good and improving landlords as there were good and improving tenants. The relationship between landlords and their tenants often affected the conditions in which the tenants lived.

The Land Act of 1870 did not fulfill all the good expected from it. It tended to paralyse landlords improvement and did not sufficiently encourage or protect tenants improvements. 1870 saw the task of reconstruction falling on the Congested Districts Board and the Land Commission.

The Congested Districts Board:-

In 1891 the Congested Districts Board was formed by Lord Balford. Its functions included the purchase and amalgamation of uneconomic holdings and the improvement of the quality of agriculture in the congested areas. After a detailed survey of the 'Congested Areas' was undertaken, the Board set about their tasks either directly or indirectly through the application of its funds, gifts or loans.

At this time in Belmullet there was little extra land available apart from the 15-16000 acres possessed by the landlords and the large tracts of mountain on which the adjoining tenants enjoyed the rights of free grazing. Most reclaimable land was either in cultivation or had become exhausted and useless because of years of continuous crop growing.

The Congested Districts Board had great difficulty in solving the land problem in Erris. There was little land available for redistribution except in Belmullet. The commonage that was used as grazing land was difficult to divide since each tenant was entitled to a certain share of it. Tenants had very small holdings and this caused great distress. The Congested Districts offered new holdings. This consisted of good, medium and bad land. They often had to give them detached plots in order to distribute the land fairly. While some of the Bingham land was sold to the Congested Districts Board it was done after 1909. The Digby estate was one of the first estates bought in Erris by the C. D. B. He owned 6, 815 acres in Glenamoy and Knocknalower. It was purchased for £2,524. They also purchased the lands of Mr. E. C. Walshe on Inishkea Island in 1907. There were 945 acres and it was purchased for £1,000. They had to spend a further £3,752 to fit the estate for resale to tenants. The Congested Districts Board transformed the conditions of the islands. They removed many of the worst dwellings and erected new houses on approved sites. Those houses which were not knocked were improved substantially. Out-houses were also built in order to prevent animals from living in the dwelling house. Twenty One new houses had been enlarged and substantially improved by tenants with assistance from the board.

The great famine started the financial decline of the Bingham and as the century progressed they sold more of their estates. Their lands were sold to men whose aim was to acquire as much profit as possible out of tenants without putting anything back.

The Congested Districts Board tried to buy as many of the estates as they possibly could. While they were successful in many instances many landlords wanted more than the Board was willing to pay. Some would sell the less profitable part of their estate while refusing to sell the better land. The Congested Districts Board wanted to buy as much untenanted land as possible. They came up against opposition from the landlords. After the land was purchased the C. D. B. had to then divide it carefully giving close consideration to the quality of each plot.

In 1897 the Congested Districts Board set up the Parish Committee System. Their function was to induce tenants to make improvements to their holdings by means of money prizes or small grants in aid. The scheme was administered by local committees made up of poor law guardians, the clergy, the landlord or his agent and six elected members of the parish. Each parish in Erris had one committee with Kilmore and Bangor having two. These grants or prizes provided an opportunity for the tenants to improve the conditions in which they lived and worked.

When the Congested Districts Board was dissolved in 1923 they had spent approximately £9 million in congested areas on purchasing holdings. Over £2 million had been spent on improvements with the help of the board survival in Erris was no longer the greatest struggle in life.

CONGESTED DISTRICTS BOARD

CONGESTED DISTRICTS BOARDS

The Congested Districts Board was founded in 1891 by Lord Balford to help those who were thought to be incapable to help themselves. An area was considered 'Congested' when the total ratable valuation divided by the number of inhabitants amounted to less than 30 shillings per person. As part of Balfords land purchase Act of 1891 he enacted that for twenty years after the passing of the Act a body called the Congested Districts Board should operate in Ireland.

The main functions of the Congested Districts Board were

- (A) The purchase and amalgamation of uneconomic holdings.
- (b) The assistance of migration from impoverished areas to newly amalgamated holdings.
- (c) The promotion of local industries by subsidies and technical instruction.
- (d) The improvement of quality of agriculture in the 'Congested' areas.
- (e) The improvement of communications through the extension of the railways, building of roads, piers and bridges.

The Board was authorised to proceed in the execution of these duties either directly or indirectly and by application of its funds, gifts or loans. All decisions made by the Board were considered final. The Board understood that they could not make decisions without a thorough knowledge of the area in which they were dealing. As a result a survey was undertaken. Each 'Congested' area was further divided into sections.

Erris was divided into four areas -

**Rath hill,
Bangor,
Belmullet
Knockaduff**

The survey showed that an average of 27% of families in Erris were very poor. The majority of the people relied on agriculture for their

livelihood. The conditions of their housing was very bad. Many of the small holders had no security of tenure and as a result had little or no interest in improvement. A good or well kept home could suggest affluence and might result in a rent increase. In 1891 the houses were made of stone and roofed with scraws and straw or rough mountain sedge.

See Congested Districts Board for Ireland, County of Mayo - Union of Belmullet

Report of Major Robert Rutledge - Fair, Inspector of March and April 1892 in the Architectural Report of Erris.

District of Belmullet No. 30
District of Rath Hill No. 31
District of Bangor Erris No. 32
District of Ballycroy No. 33.

Agriculture

Knockaduff was the poorest district . Families considered well off in the area would be considered very poor in almost any other part of Ireland. Rath Hill district was relatively well off and depended mainly on the profits from mountain grazing . In Bangor people relied on profits derived from rearing cattle on the extensive area of mountain available to them. This grazing was also used for rearing sheep. Belmullet was the wealthiest area in the Barony. On the whole one third of the population were estimated to be in a very serious state of poverty.

As mentioned previously, the majority of people in Erris relied on agriculture for their livelihood. Thus its development was one of the most important tasks of the Congested Districts Board. They supplied rams, bulls and stallions of good quality in order to improve the quality of livestock in the area. They introduced Shorthorn, Aberdeen Angus and Galloways into Mayo. Belmullet had on average two bulls each year. The bulls were sold for £12 on condition that they would be maintained properly by the owner at a place approved by the Board. The purchaser had two years to pay for the bull and during that time he was bound to give the service of the bulls to qualifying persons at a fee not exceeding 2s 6d.

Horses were a very important part of farming in Erris. Every second foal was sold and it provided an important source of income. The Board introduced the Yorkshire Hackney Stallions, Hunter and Arab Stallions into Erris. Prizes were given to the best mares and fillies in order that the standard would be maintained. Further inducements that were given included the awarding of certificates of merit and a small premium was promised to owners in order that they would keep foals from the best mares till they were at least three years old . Further to that the Board provided free service by the stallion for five consecutive years from the time the filly was three years old.

They introduced a Scotch Ram which upgraded the breed and improved the wool. They also provided dipping facilities in order to try and eradicate certain diseases.

In order to improve the poultry in the area two expert fowl breeders and fatteners came from Sussex. They set up a breeding depot. Pullets and Cockerels were distributed. Certain areas were provided with instructors to try and make the small holdings more profitable for the farmers. They then began to purchase land in order to give the tenants

the chance of making a decent living. (see chapter on Landlordism and Land ownership). Having bought the land the Congested Districts Board set about making improvements to the holdings including offering money to improve dwelling houses and out-houses. This can be seen in particular on the Inishkea Islands. (see chapter as above).

The rearing of sheep was an important source of income but the sheep were of very poor quality. In Bangor selling and rearing sheep was for many their major source of income due to the large amount of grazing available.

Most families kept at least one pig which they sold each year. While many eggs were sold the ordinary fowl was small and nondescript. Many of the fowl had been inbred for generations and laid small white eggs.

The quality of livestock and farm animals was poor in Erris.

There was a good trade in the selling of eggs. Thousands of eggs were purchased weekly in Belmullet for sixpence per dozen. Many of the eggs were 3 to 6 days old before being sold. In summer the local buyer kept them for a oweek while in winter they were stored for two weeks before sending them to Ballina. On their arrival at their English / Scottish destination, they were usually 2/3 weeks old.

The fairs provided an opportunity for the people to sell their products. It also gave them a chance to obtain supplies. The merchants received their supplies of meal and flour from Westport and Sligo, while sugar, tea, hardware and drapery supplies came directly from Westport and Sligo.

The people lived on credit. When one bill was cleared another was started. In a good year potatoes would last for nine to ten months which saved money. In a bad year they would not be able to save any money.

In Erris as in other areas including Ballycroy the amount of untenanted profitable land was negligible and as a result the improvements of tenants holdings and dwellings did not allow for the same possibility of development and economical results as areas such as East Connacht where good untenanted land was relatively plentiful.

After the passing of the Birrel Act of 1909 the Board felt that the poorest seaboard estates should be purchased and retained in the Boards hands for some time while they applied the surplus revenue of the estates towards assistance to the people to improve their houses and out offices and in making necessary accommodation roads and in consolidation of holdings in scattered plots, while at the same time special efforts would be made to develop fisheries and other local industries.

Industry

Under its industrial functions the Congested Districts Board was given full power to aid the development of industry. In Erris industry was rare but there was a tradition of craft making . Lace and crochet making were seen as the most suitable industry to develop for a number of reasons ...

- (1) There was a lack of transport facilities both to and from Erris.
- (2) The finished item would be small so the carriage and transit costs would be inexpensive as it could be sent by post.
- (3) Little outlay was needed to start up the industry as there was already a strong tradition in that area.

The adviser and inspector appointed for this was W.J.D. Walker. Under his guidance the 'lace schools' were set up. The work produced by these establishments was marketed and sold by the Irish Lace Depot and Irish Industries Association. Under the scheme the Congested Districts Board built or rented suitable classrooms in the districts. They undertook to pay the salary of the instructress and help to pay in the marketing of the lace. The parish of Aghoose in Erris was found to be the poorest in Ireland and a lace school was set up here in 1898. Those who attended classes here were paid at a rate of 3d a day. Those attending the classes became very good , meticulous, clean and tidy at their work. This was evident in both their work and their homes. This was because of the training they received plus the price depended on the cleanliness of the work.

By 1900 knitting classes were set up in Aghoose, Pullathomas and Inver. The Board continued to start classes in Erris until 1910. They

were in general quite successful. The work varied as the workers were encouraged to vary their designs and improve the quality of the work they produced. Instruction was given in drawing to several classes, the ability to draw was useful as they could plan new designs. The Board found it easier to make those who worked in lace to vary their designs. Those who worked in crochet were less willing because they had acquired dexterity in the repetition of the same forms and combinations. New patterns meant loss of time and consequently earnings due to restricted output.

In 1907 the Congested Districts Board entered into an agreement with the Irish Industry development Association for the use of the Irish Trade Mark for genuine Irish lace made at their classes. This was to prevent the sale of machine made imitations.

Lists of Reciepts

1910	-	£23,100
1911	-	£27,752
1912	-	£30,616
1913	-	£29,754
1914	-	£17,565
1915	-	£11,680
1916	-	£16,349
1917	-	£31,697
1918	-	£55,386
1919	-	£80,360
1920	-	£111,802

In 1915 receipts fell to the lowest point reached, namely £11,680 for the year. Mr. Phelan went to England and through research found out that supplies of pearl and ornamental buttons could be made, a brisk demand would be certain. His idea was to cover different sizes and shapes of wood with crocheted artificial courtauld silk. The machines capable of using the wooden articles were being used in munitions work. He therefore decided to make moulds of cotton wool. Large orders were received and this sustained a boom until 1921 until the pre war button machinery was available again. Mr. Phelan realised that these were coming back so he began to work on inventing a knitting machine for making golf coats, jackets and shirts. The introduction of

knitting meant that the slump as occurred in the demand for lace and crochet on the outbreak of war in 1914 was avoided. Mr. Phelan died in 1920 when industrial earnings were at the highest since the introduction of the Congested Districts Board.

Working with lace gave the women of Erris the chance to stay at home and still work. Because of the pressure of work during spring and autumn they were able to leave aside their lace work and pick it up during less busy times in their homes. The earnings allowed the families to live in relative comfort and often helped to stock the farms with animals. In 1906 it was found that the money earned by the girls in seven electoral divisions of North Mayo exceeded the total Poor law valuation of land in these divisions.

The wages of girls and women were spent more wisely than the receipts of the men from fishing or other employment. In Erris the money was used to purchase cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry.

Before the introduction of the Lace Schools emigration was the only outlook for the girls. Working with the Lace Schools meant they were able to stay at home, they learned a skill plus they earned a valuable wage.

Fishery

Under the 1891 Act the Board was "authorised to take such steps as it might think proper to develop fisheries" (W.L. Micks, History of the Congested Districts Board", Dublin, 1925 ch VI.). At this time fishing was not very well developed in the various ' Congested' areas. Most fish was caught for human consumption either by the fisherman, his neighbours or for barter purposes. Facilities did not exist for the export of fish. In Erris the only two places where commercial fishing was possible on a small scale were Broadhaven and Blacksod. The Board intended to create a market for fish. As a result fish curing stations were set up in Porturlin, Portacloy, Inver and On the Inishkea Islands. The intention was to open them for a season but only if the market for fresh fish was not good.

According to the Board there were two distinct kinds of fish trade -

fresh fish and cured. In order to trade in fresh fish an expensive plant was needed which had facilities for packing the fish on ice. A reliable and rapid delivery service was required to ensure that the fish were delivered fresh . For trading in cured fish the facilities needed were, a fish curing shed and stores, fish curers and salt. Once the fish were cured there was not the same necessity for a rapid or regular delivery service to the market. The intention was to charter a steamship or sailing vessel to take the pickled or salted fish to market. Because of the loss of good fish because of the lack of a reliable and strong delivery service the Board felt that the fresh fish trade was unsuitable for the west. As a result the Board proceeded to build many new facilities and repair existing ones. .

Developments undertaken by the Congested Districts Board...

- Landing places were built in Inver, Ballyglass, Inishkea and Rinroe.
These facilities were in addition to the curing stations which had facilities to clean and store fish as well as a place to service and store fishing gear.
- A pier, approach road and sea wall was constructed at Porturlin.
- A Boatslip, breakwater and landing place were built in Portacloy.

Applications were rarely refused for loans for the purchase of suitable boats and fishing gear. The Board purchased the required fishing gear and supplied them directly to the fishermen.

In order to establish the salting and curing stations, the Shetlands islands were visited in order to observe the system of salting and drying. Instructors were engaged to come to Ireland to teach their trade. Experienced curers of cod and ling were engaged. One was assigned to each station and paid at a fixed hourly rate.

In Erris during 1893 a number of fish curing stations were open for salting and drying cod, ling, saithe and haddock. They encountered difficulties, there were no provisions for drying fish in damp or wet weather and not sufficient storage provided to some stations. There were also difficulties in transport as the carriage of dried fish by water to the market was unreliable and expensive.

Other methods of instruction used included sending a dozen men to spend a number of weeks at the Teeling Station in Donegal. This was managed by Arthur Walker. While there the men went out in boats to fish or received instruction in curing.

Between 1894 and 1897 the Board lost money because the market for fresh fish was depressed. In their report of 1898 the Board said that "the amount of labour required, while making the industry valuable in remote districts where employment is scarce, at the same time makes it difficult for curers to show a profit"

The Porturlin, Portacloy and Belderrig stations were still open when the C.D.B. ceased operation. These were the most successful of the Boards stations in Erris.

Porturlin was the most successful station. It had the least number of boats but it had the highest earning.

On 28th March, 1899 a fishing station was open in Blacksod. They also had an ice hulk in readiness. The Board felt that they would have difficulty getting fishermen with properly equipped boats to risk the uncertainty of the untried fishing ground. They decided to enter into agreement with two Arklow crews who undertook to fish for a season in Blacksod with a promise of a forty pound bonus each and a constant price of 14 s per hundred for fish. Because of bad weather no fishing was undertaken until the 17 th of April. Icing of fresh fish ceased on June the 10th. The station was then sublet to fish merchants who cured fish. The station lost £1,015 but the Board saw it as an investment which would add resources to the poor population.

In 1904, twenty four boats manned by 105 fishermen belonging to the Achill, Inishkea and Blacksod Districts fished during the season. The Blacksod fishery earned less than a half of those in Roundstone and in Cleggan. There was a decrease in the number of boats fishing in Blacksod in 1903 and 1904. For this and a number of other reasons the C.D.B. decided to discontinue operations in Blacksod. The majority of fishermen then fished from Cleggan.

The Board did all they could for fishing in Erris, but the problem of transportation proved a continuing stumbling block. While earnings from fishing increased from £50,000 in 1891 to £166,812 in 1913. The last year before the war, Mayo only earned £6,112.

While the C.D.B. put alot of effort and money into Erris, they did not have an effective communications system. This meant that those involved in fishing especially, had to be satisfied with any price they were offered for curing fish.

The lace and Crochet industry was the most successful, as both the raw materials and the finished product could easily be transported by post. The money earned by the girls provided a substantial improvement in the standard of living.

The work done to improve the quality of livestock in the area was worthwhile but the only complaint levelled against them was that the Shorthorn Bull and the Hackney Stallion were too soft and not suited to the boglands of Erris.

With the help of the Board, survival in Erris was no longer the greatest struggle in life. They were committed to improving the lives of those in the "Congested Areas". They offered a chance for training while providing a useful source of income and improving landholdings and infrastructure.

FAMILY LIFE IN ERRIS: 1800's

FAMILY LIFE IN ERRIS: 1800's

Poem describing the cabins though out Ireland
Published in the year 1689
From Otway pg. 47/48

Built without either brick or stone,
Or couples to lay roof upon,
With wattles upon wattles ty'd
Fix's in the ground on either side,
Did like a shaded arbous show
With seats of sods and roof or straw.
The floor beneath with rushes laid - 'stead
Of tapestry, no bed or bedstead,
No posts, nor bolts, nor hinges in door,
No chimney, kitchen, hall, or window.

But narrow doormats stopped with hay
All night, and open in the day.
On either side there was a door,
Extent from roof unto the floor,
Which they like hedgehogs stop with straw,
Or open as the wind does blow:
And though they reach from top to floor,
The man crept in upon all-fours.
Betwixt the doors there was a spot
I'th middle, to hang o'er the pot,
And had an engine in the nick -
for pair of tongs a broken stick.

Where in one end the parted brother
was laid to rest - the cows in t'other.

Under a plad which did extend
'Cross the whole floor from end to end,
On litter laid, like horse at manager,
Which served for family and stranger.

The 1800's were tough years for the people of Erris. Poverty was predominant and they found it difficult to survive, especially in the famine years when many perished due to lack of food and shelter. Though they were self - sufficient in the sense that they made their own bread and butter, housewives struggled to rear their families. Large families were the order of the day, in small primitive houses without the basic commodities such as running water and refrigeration. The men struggled continuously on the seas to earn a living and pay the rent.

By the 1820's the forces of modernisation had begun to enter the Barony. Some roads were constructed, small towns were established at Belmullet and Binghamstown, which provided commercial centres for their vast hinterland. The central social and economic problem in Erris was the pressure of an increasing population on scare and inadequately developed resources. The landholding system was unmodernised though some of the landlords were beginning to develop their estates. The general practice in each village was for three or four men to rent land on behalf of all the inhabitants. The leader of this group was known as the King or Ceann Fine. The groups collected the rent, distributed land and organised labour in the village. They divided out every third year the amount of pasture and tillage each family could hold. They decided the number of cattle which each family could graze and appointed a herdsman on behalf of the landholders. The system was not good for useful farming as no farmer was enthusiastic about improving land he might be deprived of after three years. When John Patrick Lyons became Parish Priest of Kilmore-Erris in 1825 found agricultural methods primitive, they were a hundred years behind the rest of the country. Harrowing by the horses tail was a common practice until he persuaded them to stop it. When John Patrick Lyons came to Kilmore-Erris there was no proper chapels in the parish. Mass houses were still the centre of worship and many people had to worship in the open air. In 1826 there were ten schools in Kilmore-Erris, four sponsored by the London Hibernian Society and six hedge schools, usually held in a cabin. In one case the teacher had no permanent schoolhouse but taught in successions in the cabins of the pupils.

The 1835 Report of the Committee of Public Instruction reveals that less than 30% of the people of the Barony attended Sunday Mass. The poor road system throughout Erris would have meant that many people living in the outlying areas of the vast landscape would have found it difficult to attend regularly, especially in severe weather*. The main reason the people could not attend mass was because they were so poor. They did not have the clothes to wear to mass.

Pre Famine Erris

The Barony of Erris is situated in the northwest of the diocese of Killala and before the Famine was easily the poorest and most inaccessible region.

The dominant configuration (shapes) of the landscape are bog, mountain and moor, somewhat relieved by the harsh beauty of its coastal scenery. In the 18th Century Mayo was the most unique place as well as the poorest.

Mayo was an isolated county with a huge population. There were few towns. In pre-famine times about 1/3 of the land in the Barony of Erris was arable the population of over 20,000 in 1841 was huddled together in these arable, patches. Fishing, farming, spinning and weaving of linen were the main occupations of the people of the area. In 1810 the spinning and weaving of linen turned out to be a big cottage industry. Due to this industry women were now being incorporated into the workforce.

Agricultural methods used in farming were found to be lagging a hundred years behind the rest of the country in Kilmore - Erris in 1825, harrowing by the horses tail was a common practice.

*("Pre-Famine Erris". p.16 Kevin Hegarty.)

SOME ITEMS FROM FAMINE TIMES

The causes of the Famine and its effects on the population are too well known to need elaboration. The almost total dependence on the potato crop had caused minor, of less extensive, famines previous to 1847. In 1739 a severe early frost destroyed the potatoes in the ground before they could be dug; this was followed by fever and dysentery in 1741. In 1822 there was an especially wet harvest and the potatoes rotted in the pits; this again was followed by fever. Violent storms and heavy

rains in 1831 caused failure in the West of Ireland and the result was felt in early 1832. The first blight to appear in Ireland was in Wexford in 1845 and the potatoes were already rotting in Autumn. By 1846 the blight had spread all over the country and caused the total destruction of the crop. In that year the wheat yield was barley average, while the oats and the barley were poor.

In 1846 dealers in food-stuffs were almost unheard of, and an organised and efficient system of distribution was non-existent. Efforts to relieve the famine were made, both by the Government and by charitable organisations. Food, money and clothing were also sent from the U.S.A. by emigrants and other charitable donors, but the unwieldy system of relief, then only evolving, meant that these only often reached their intended destination too late.

In the Autumn of 1847 James Tuke of the Society of Friends pointed that Ballina Union was sixty miles by thirty in extent and much too large. It was supposed to look after 120,000, of whom 2,000 had emigrated to England since the previous year. Six thousand had died of starvation. He recommends that Belmullet should be a separate Union with its own Workhouse. The workhouse was eventually built after the famine was over.

The Government paid the transport costs on supplies of food from America which were landed on the West coast, including Belmullet. There were complaints about the method of distribution, and Richard Webb of the Society of Friends came to Belmullet to investigate. In a letter written from Belmullet on 13/5/1847 he tells a harrowing tale of the distress endured by the people of Erris then. Fever raged everywhere; whole families were wiped out and the neighbours were afraid to bury them for fear of catching the disease; some were buried a few yards from their doors or under the floors, while others had the roofs of their houses knocked in over them instead of a grave.

He says the agents were doing a difficult job well, even if there was some unfairness in the distribution of supplies. They were the only helpers available. He tells of a vessel ten miles offshore from Rosport being plundered of thirty sacks of Indian corn by thirty four men in eleven currachs who overpowered the crew. They were captured later by five coastguards in a forty oared galley and brought to prison in Belmullet. "With two or three exceptions, they were stout, healthy-looking men, apparently well clad and well fed". To me this would bear out the charge that there was something amiss with the distribution

system; these men probably intervened because they considered that the meal was not getting to those who most needed it quickly enough. If they had lawless intentions it is unlikely that thirty four of them would have allowed themselves to be captured by five coastguards.

A similar occurrence also took place some weeks previously in Blacksod Bay.

On a second visit to Erris Richard Webb of Dublin, in a letter of 23/2/1848, tells of a visit to Pullathomas to a middle-man who held "3,000 acres, some excellent, under bishops' lease at a very low rent". There were only 12 tenants left then; the others were too poor to pay the rent and had either emigrated or died, or given up their holdings in order to qualify for relief. (The 1847 Relief Act disqualified anyone holding a rood of land or more from receiving Government relief). He also visited Portacloy, to the East of which is Porturlin "to which the only access by land is over a high and boggy mountain, so wet and swampy that it is difficult to reach it, even in Summer". Within a mile of Porturlin one of the best fishing grounds in Ireland for cod and ling, but he says the fishermen's boats and tackle were too inferior to enable them to use these grounds to advantage.

Very few Erris landlords were said to engage in any significant relief operation which might have helped the people. The 1847 Relief Act disqualified any one holding a rood of land or more from receiving state - sponsored relief.

A Parliamentary Report of 1845 states that most of the people of Ireland at the time were undernourished, poorly clothed and badly paid.

The Famine years saw the Erris region at its bleakest. The suffering of the Irish people as a whole bore little resemblance to the intense hardship felt by those in the Barony. Those dwelling in Erris lived at the lowest level of human misery and degradation.

In comparison to general housing in Ireland at the time, Erris dwellings were dysfunctional and offered very poor living conditions. A typical house consisted of a windowless, chimneyless hut with a roof of straw and sods, that did not even serve to beg the wind and rain out.



The quality of clothing at the time had deteriorated from the Pre-Famine characteristically colourful fabrics to drab, worn garments.

The most prominent effect of the Famine was the population decline, not only because of the loss of life and reduction in births, but because of the numbers that emigrated. "Black 47" saw the onslaught of disaster when the potato crop failed again, resulting in a desperate effort to get away from a dying land. The people took to the roads in their thousands to make their way to a port. An example of one such emigration track was what is now known as "The Bangor trail". This journey brought the intended emigrants through Mulranny to Westport, where they boarded the coffin-ships; so labelled because of the thousands that did not survive the journey.

THE FAMINE - and its effect on the Erris area.

In the spring of 1847 was the time when the suffering of the Irish people was greatest, the place where it was greatest was the Erris Peninsula. Visitors like Asenath Nicholson agreed with the Quaker, James Tuke, who said "Human wretchedness seems concentrated in Erris, the culminating point of mans physical degradation seems to have been reached in the Mullet. People were so wretchedly poor that they literally lived in hovels dug out of the bog. They held land from absentee landlords under the evil conacre system, and with the failure of the potato crop they faced outright starvation. The poorhouse at Ballina was forty miles away, and Erris paupers were not welcome there because their landlords seldom paid rates". In the words of Asenath Nicholson, Erris was the 'fag end of misery' in black forty-seven.

During the actual famine period there was no crisis over soupism in either of the parishes in Erris - Kilmore Erris which was the area formed by the Mullet and Kilcommon Erris, the bleak coastal region of the inland probably this was because of a long tradition of religious amicability in the area. The Parish Priest had been John Patrick Lyons, John MacHales old enemy, and he had lived in a way that was very

similar to the best type of established church parson. He was resident, was an Irish scholar of note, and an enlightened landlord who delighted the Devon Commission with his detailed knowledge of land conditions in the West. He was also so liberal in theology that he saw no danger in accepting money from Protestant sources for educational purposes - much to the disgust of John MacHale. He got along well with the parsons in the two parishes prior to his death in 1844.

We know little about the Protestant clergyman in Kilmore Erris parish. William Paul Dawson, who came from the area, and died in 1849. He solicited aid from the Society of Friends for his people, and appears to have been resident in the spring of 1847. He may be the unfortunate clergyman that Asenath Nicholson says took to drink during the famine and had to be put in an asylum in the Autumn of 1847. Whether this poor soul was Mr. Dawson or not, his breakdown is understandable for no one could have been called upon to administer relief in more wretched circumstances.

The rector of Kilcommon Erris parish was the Protestant counterpart of Dean Lyons - the Rev. Samuel Stock. He had been resident in the Belmullet area since 1816, before the building at either Belmullet or Binghamstown, and he was closely identified with the life of the people.

Stock was the chief organiser of relief administration for the area, and he worked closely with the parish priests: Thomas Walsh at Ballycroy, Michael Kelly at Belmullet, James Moyles and Andrew Hopkins in Kilmore Erris, Michael Conway in Kilcommon and the two catholic curates, James Donaghue and Patrick Reilly who served where they were most needed in the two parishes. Stock used his social influence to write to people like Lord John Russell on behalf of the senior clergymen of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. He also wrote begging letters directly to individuals in England, Dublin and Ulster and interceded with the Commissariat officer in Belmullet who, with the aid of troops guarded a major supply of food while the people starved. Often he assisted his wife and daughters to man a soup kitchen.

The Quakers had complete faith in his goodwill and sense of justice, and they worked directly with him in organising relief throughout the two parishes.

The Tyrawly Herald of 25th February 1847 estimated that by then at least a thousand had died in Erris, and the figure would be doubled within a month. By July 1847, Belmullet was labelled a 'doomed town'

and the quarter sessions had to be held elsewhere. In the midst of this devastation the protestant clergy, Samuel Stock, William Paul Dawson, and Stocks curate, John Greene worked alongside the Catholic clergy in the common cause of easing the misery of the people. Another task of the clergy of both churches was the defence of the dispossessed - the poor people of villages like Tirraun, Mullaghroe, and Clogher in the Muller, who had their houses torn down by the infamous Dublin Lawyer, John Walsh, shortly before Christmas in 1847. They also worked closely together to obtain aid from good landlords like Samuel Bourns of Rosspport, and Dennis Bingham. Again they joined forces to bring social pressure to bear on absentee landlords like the Carter family and the Church Commissioners who owned much Erris land.

The Quakers knew that the key to saving the Erris people lay with the clergy. If they had not been so self sacrificing in their efforts to feed hundreds of fever-ridden and starving men, women, and children day after day, during the spring of 1847 and to bring order to the community, thousands more would have died during the crisis. One of the Quaker visitors, Edmund Richards noted what happened when a clergyman or some other resident gentleman was not available to organise a soup kitchen. The Ship Scourge, on which Mr. Richards came to Erris, put off two boilers at Killybegs in the Mullet - but there was no one available locally to set up a food station, the boilers could not be operated and the people died. In the midst of this crisis there was no charge of souperism made. Stock was above suspicion and neither the Quakers nor Asenath Nicholson had anything but praise for the clergy who laboured so heroically in Erris. The latter wrote to the Tyrawley Herald on 2nd December 1847, to praise the curate of Binghamstown who was so young indefatigable, kindhearted and poor and never engaged in Proselytism. This was probably John Greene who left the area when W. P. Dawson died, Irish sensibilities being what they are, however, this clerical heroism has seldom been noted. In the important work entitled *The Great Famine* edited by R. Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, Mr T. P. O'Neill has written about how local relief administration was organised. In it he says that: "Many landlords acted as local almoners, wrote petitions to benevolent societies, and met daily many persons begging for assistance". There he sees promise of the landlords in this Quaker observation.

I would greatly prefer being a donor to being a distributor of relief. It is much easier for a man to put his hand into his purse, than to labour from morning to night in filling out stirabout to crowds of half clad, hungry people sinking with weakness and fever.... It is difficult for any,

but an eye-witness to form a correct idea of the position of the handful of persons in this miserable country who are properly qualified for the distribution of grants. Placed in the midst of a starving and medicant population... they are liable to continual changes of unfairness, partiality, indifference or want of judgment.

Either Mr. O'Neill was unaware of the state of Erris Society in 1847 when he wrote this or else he choose to suggest that the landlords acted as Erris almoners to avoid the issue of souperism. In all probability the person to whom the Quaker visitor referral was either Stock or another Protestant clergyman, one of those who organised relief for the Barony and manned directly or arranged for their wives or daughters to man, the four soup boilers that operated in the spring of 1847 apart from the help given to their immediate ten.

The remainder of this section on Erris in the 1800's concentrates specifically on the areas of marriage, occupation, education, housing, folklore and clothing of the Erris inhabitants. A final area included investigates the effects of the Famine on the region.

MARRIAGES;

Both sexes usually married young; the matches were arranged by the parents, with romance taking a back seat to the chief concern money. The young people themselves were not consulted. When full agreement had been made by the parents, the young man asked the girl personally.

The intermarriage of relations was very common, not only on the island, but also on the mainland. It was especially common in small fishing hamlets such as Fallmore and Portacloy. While visiting Inishkea inquiries were made as to their marriages and several of the inhabitants said that marriages between the North and South islands were not common, it being a far more usual thing for the islanders to marry from the opposite shore of the Mullet. The South islanders seem to intermarry a good deal with inhabitants of Fallmore, a very primitive village at the extreme end of the peninsula, which was not made accessible by road until 1881. On both islands however, one majority of the marriages appeared to take place between members of the community. While it was unusual for first cousins to marry, matches between relatives of all degrees further out seemed to be a very common occurrence. On the mainland marriages were also arranged, between the parents of the couple and the local matchmakers. The

couple had no say in the matter. When this was arranged the men would bring the father of the girl a bottle of whiskey, so that he would get him drunk and perhaps gain for himself more than a wife, (eg) a cow, sheep or even a pig or horse and a few acres of land.

OCCUPATIONS

Excluding those from Belmullet, where most of the tradesmen resided, the people were either fishermen or farmers or a combination of both occupations. Farming methods were crude and primitive. The principal crops were barley, oats, rye, and potatoes. The work was known as "spade labour", the spade being of modern form as the "gowel" or "gowel -gob " a two-bladed or forked long been extinct. The average farming family had a couple of pigs , a cow or two and some sheep, a large number of fowl, geese and ducks and a donkey or horse.

Fishing employed the men although many of the fish were merely for home use. Typical catches included trout, mackerel, ling, cod, and herring. Most of the fish for home consumption was eaten fresh, but a good deal of it was roughly salted for winter use. The fishermen of Inish Ge often stayed away from their family for weeks on end. Much of their spare time after the fishing season was spend repairing pots for the following year. They fished in currachs and made their own lobster pots. They used the primitive huts of Inishglora for shelter during their fishing excursions. The lobsters were sold in Belmullet for about five shillings per dozen. After that they were transported by carts to Ballina before being shipped to England. The money made on the fishing was used to pay the landlord the rent, and buy supplies in Belmullet.

Excluding the work offered by the resident gentry of Belmullet, there was very little regular employment for labourers. The women attended to the domestic duties of the home while also assisting with field work, carding and spinning the wool, gathering drying and selling carrageen and bringing home the turf.



EDUCATION

This was at it lowest in the 1800's, very few people let alone children could read or write. The poorer of the families were Catholics and which made it more difficult to get an education. However, the Protestants had no problem because their parents were landlords with money so they had their own private tutors. Hedge schools were established to educate the poorer classes. Hedge schools were so called because they were situated along hedges or in old barns. These schools had many teachers who taught in exchange for food and accommodation. As well as children going to school it was quite normal to see people of thirty and forty years also attending. In large families it was unusual for the older children to go to school, as they worked on the farms helping their parents. The younger children would go so that they would teach the older members in time.

Female illiteracy increased between 1841 and 1851. Parents influenced the educational opportunities of their children, with the girls opting to stay in the home allowing their male siblings the chance to become educated. This tendency was particularly evident in poor rural areas.

FOOD

The diet of the locals varied little, with fish being the major component. Flesh or fowl were rarely tasted except on special occasions. On the island (as on the mainland) the women made their own bread and butter. They had their own milk, bacon and an abundance of fish. The islanders were known to feast on sea-birds from time to time. The main diet on the island was stirabout, soda-bread, boxty and fish. Boxty was made from grated raw potatoes and flour, and cooked on a griddle. People on the mainland acquired most of their food from the farms also, but they had the advantage of local shopping facilities.

DWELLING

The dwelling houses of the people varied considerably, some being extremely poor while others were of 'relatively' high class. The 'Parliamentary gazetteer' (1846) describes the majority of dwellings as built partly of stone and partly of turf, and consisting of one or two rooms at most.

The houses on Inishkea were thatched and white washed. An average house had two rooms, the kitchen which was the largest room was also

used as the livingroom. The floor was made of beaten clay. This room also had a window which was seldom opened. At one end of the room there was a large fireplace, built against the wall between the other room which would be the bedroom and storeroom. It consisted of a stone hearth backed by a 'hob' also of stone; its build was in a slant so that the smoke could escape, and so that the fire would draw well. In the early 1800's on Inishkea some houses did not have chimneys, so the only way the smoke could escape was through a hole in the roof just above the hearth. At the other end of the room there were pens for pigs and cows. In the little room there were two beds, a table, chair, or in some houses a large chest. There was also a loft over the room to store fishing tackle, agricultural implements and other articles. Also the domestic utensils which consisted of a three - legged pot, a griddle and sometimes a pot oven were stored there. The light they used at night; the "flare" consisted of rude scone, with a spout like that of a coffee pot, through which the wick was drawn. Rush lights are still used by some. In the poorer houses they had the light of the fire. On the mainland they had the same kind of light. It was easier for the people on the mainland to get oil for the lamps than on the island, with contacts nearer by.

FOLKLORE

Although poor in many other respects, Erris was particularly rich in folklore, and although the tradition was dying out elsewhere, it still flourished in the Barony.

This is one of the many stories that the people on the island of Inishkea told at night around the fire, because they had no television or radio. The story is about one part of the island, where the grass did not grow.

EXPLANATION:

St. Brendan was one day disturbed in his devotions by the devil who appeared to him in the form of a beautiful girl who tempted him. The Saint indignantly refused the temptress, and drove her to the end of the island, blessing the soil as he went, but at the point where the grass ends, Satan changed his form and assumed the shape of

a ram, which astonished the Saint
and in his excitement he ceased
blessing and gave chase to the
evil one who ran to the rocks
and jumped into the sea. The
unblessed land is that on which
the grass does not grow.

Story telling was a great past time along with music and dance, which
took place at the weekends in different houses.

CLOTHING (1895) .

Browne wrote on the "Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea and Portacloy", and noted that the dress of women changed less than that of the men. The younger girls tried, in vain, to copy modern fashions but were said to look better in native costume on the island of Inishkea the people made their own clothes from material they got from Belmullet. The people on the mainland were well dressed not because they had easy access to materials, but because that was where the landlords lived. It was easy to distinguish between the poor and rich. The men on Inishkea worked all the time so they were not dressed up, they wore trousers which were homespun or corduroy. The shirts were of thick white homespun flannel. The boots they wore were heavy and longlasting, and were also purchased from Belmullet. The women wore the same kind of material in white or navy-blue. The reason that they used this material was because it was warm, versatile, hard-wearing, and withstood the sea water well. When the people on the island purchased their clothes it was usually when they could afford them which was on fair days. Second hand clothes were bought from people who were known as "cheap jacks". The women did not wear shoes everyday like the men did. They only wore them on Sundays and on market days. They would walk in their feet until they reached their destination and then put them on. Those on the mainland did the same thing. The elderly women dressed the same as the younger women. Over the shoulders was worn a shawl of tartan. The older women wore heavy blue cloaks with hood on Sunday and holidays. Homespun clothes were worn on the island of Inishkea.

FAMINE:

The Black famine of '47' was to have a detrimental effect on family life in Erris in 1800's. On Inishkea, the wet Spring and humid Summer of 1846 caused the total failure of the potato crop. It was the people's main food, sometimes eating it twice a day, everyday. The mainland was hit just as bad, and Mayo suffered intensely from end to end with the Famine. The poorhouse at Ballina was forty miles away, and Erris paupers were not welcome there because their landlords seldom paid rates. When it became virtually impossible to survive, the people went to the mainland, by currachs and then walked to the nearest port - Cork, to get the emigrant boat to America. These boats were called coffinship, because the majority of immigrants did not survive the journey. After dying they were tossed overboard. Those left on the island struggled to survive to keep themselves alive. It was mainly women who were left, but those who emigrated went to Scotland. They worked at planting, thinning, weeding and picking potatoes. The Famine years took their toll on the landlords in the Barony of Erris. Most of the people could not afford the rent so their (the landlords) income was drastically decreased. This usually led to the eviction of the tenants, leaving them on the side of the road, without shelter or food. Many parents lost their children and indeed their own lives because of these impoverished conditions. One landlord remembered for his generosity and compassion in those days was Mr. Clive M.P. He owned a large estate in Ballycroy and his lands were moderately let, in comparison to those of his neighbouring proprietors. Those who rented land off Mr. Clive were said to have felt perfectly secure as long as they fulfilled the obligations contracted by him.

In 1847 the population figure given was 8,175,124 and in 1851, after the famine, it had dropped to 6,552,385. Census Commissioners calculated that at the normal rate of increase the total should have been 9,018,799. Therefore a loss of least 2.5 million persons had taken place. These statistics are of crude calculation as they do not account for those that had been buried unknown, or those who died on the side of the road and were buried in ditches. Thousands of Erris people perished in these years and did not even gain recognition in the recording of their deaths.



FAIRS:

Fairs were held every month in some parts of Erris. These provided an opportunity for the people to sell their products. They also obtained supplies from the Merchants. They lived on credit. When they managed to pay off one bill they would start another. Bills were paid at the end of the migratory labour in November by some. Depending on the type of product this would effect the length of credit time plus the rate of interest charged. Each area was also different. In Rath Hill there was a twelve month credit period. Meal and flour were not paid for until the end of the migratory labour in November. 15 - 20% interest was charged on clothes. Bangor people paid cash for their supplies during Autumn and early Winter. Six months interest was given on domestic goods but after the six months there was a 10 - 15% increase in the debt. Clothes were given at a higher rate of credit for twelve months. In some of the poorer areas of Erris barter was used as a means of exchange. Eggs, potatoes and corn were exchanged for tobacco, tea and sugar. Depending on whether the year was good or bad it would affect the amount of money saved by the families. In a good year potatoes would last for nine to ten months so the family would be able to save a little as excess potatoes could be used to barter for other provisions.

Extracts from the Letters of Richard D. Webb, of Dublin, whilst on a visit of inspection to Erris, at the request of the Central Relief Committee, in consequence of a statement made to them, that some of their grantees had misappropriated the grants entrusted to them.

Belmullet, County of Mayo,
8th of Fifth-month, 1847.

Shortly after arriving at Ballina I called at Carrowmore, the residence of George Vaughan Jackson, a gentleman who had devoted himself with great energy to the alleviation of the prevalent distress. He travels upwards of 100 miles per week while attending three relief committees in various parts of the country. He describes the amount of destitution the populous district round Ballina as enormous, and the difficulty very great in the way of efforts to lessen it. Owing to the number of absentees, there are but few landlords left to carry forward either public or private measures of relief, and upon these few the claims are greater than can be readily appreciated in more civilised and wealthier communities.

In the workhouse at Ballina, the mortality from fever and dysentery has alarming; but it must be remembered that a large proportion of the suffers only applied for admission in the hope that they should be provided with a coffin when dead, which was more than can be expected if they died outside the workhouse walls. Before the present visitation, the poorer classes in this country were extremely tenacious of the credit and respectability attached to a good, large, well-conducted funeral. Many who saved money for no other purpose, were careful to preserve a hoard to defray their funeral expenses. Few of the popular customs appeared more firmly rooted than this, but it has been swept away like chaff before the wind. In the most distressed districts, funerals are now rarely attended by more than three or four relatives or friends; they excite little attention, and apparently less feeling. Whole families are exterminated by dysentery, fever, and starvation; and this catastrophe has become so common in the West of Connaught, that it excites no more notice than would have been occasioned two years ago by the death of an individual. At Crossmolina, six miles from Ballina, I called upon the rector of the parish. He and his family are indefatigable in their relief of distress. They keep a soup-kitchen in constant operation, and numbers flock to them from all parts of that populous and afflicted district.

From Crossmolina to Belmullet, the road passes through an exceedingly wild country, consisting of bogs and healthy mountains of no great elevation and little picturesque beauty. The quantity of arable land in the district is but small, and the apparent population very limited. However, I was told I must not judge the density of population by the numbers of cabins visible from the road, or by the fewness of the people we met; for in the glens of the mountains, and in the valleys between the hills on either side, there are villages inhabited by hundreds.

Belmullet is the principal, and indeed the only, place deserving the name of a town in the Barony. Binghamstown, three miles farther on, in the peninsula called the Mullet, containing very few tolerable houses, besides several in a ruined condition, and a great number of the most squalid cabins, inhabited by as wretched a class of human beings as could probably be found on the face of the earth.

In the Barony of Erris, living trees are unknown; although the bogs contain abundant remains of timber, which show that this district must once have been profoundly wooded. There are probably many thousands of the present inhabitants who have never seen a living tree

larger than a shrub. R.R. Savage, the intelligent keeper of the hotel at Achill Sound, told me that when his daughter, then a child of eight years old, first visited Westport, she was afraid the trees would fall upon her as they waved over her head across the road.

Such wretchedness, starvation, filth, and degradation I never saw before. Every one I met on my way from Dublin with whom I had any conversation, told me I would find the most extreme misery in this part of Erris, and nowhere else did I see anything so bad as here.

I have heard instances of women wilfully neglecting their young children so that they died. Poor things! I can wonder at nothing I hear, after what I have seen of their fearful wretchedness and destitution. None of us can imagine what change would be wrought in ourselves if we had the same shocking experience. Every one tells me that matters are getting worse, and that there is no ground of hope for the tens of thousands of starving creatures around us.

Belmullet, 13 of Fifth-month, 1847.

On a retrospect of the misery I have witnessed among thousands of our fellow-creatures, who at this time never enjoy a full meal, and cannot tell to-day where to turn for sustenance to-morrow, I am surprised at the absence of outrages amongst them. During my stay of about ten days in the Barony of Erris - although it was not uncommon to hear of sheep, cows, and even horses being stolen, killed, and eaten by the famishing people, I heard of no instances of highway robbery or personal violence upon land. On the sea the case is different; for shortly before my visit, as well as whilst I was there, many vessels laden with provisions were plundered by the people along the sea-side, who surrounded the vessels on pretence of selling them fish, and overpowered the crews by dint of numbers. While I was at Rossport in the northern part of Mayo, a vessel, lying ten miles from shore, was thus plundered of thirty sacks of Indian corn, by thirty-four men in eleven currachs, the fishing boats or canoes of this country. These men, with their boats and plunder, were taken prisoners by five of the Coastguards in a four oared galley, and conducted twenty miles to Belmullet, where I saw them in prison. With two or three exceptions, they were stout healthy-looking young men, apparently well clad and well fed. This robbery took place in Broadhaven. Some weeks before, a similar circumstance occurred in Blacksod Bay, south of the Mullet.

The poor people of the district round Rossport say they would be lost, if it were not for the persons to whom you have given grants. From strict enquiries and close observation, I am satisfied that the lives of hundreds have been saved by the efforts of these men and their families. Unless they are wonderfully crafty and wicked, they deserve the confidence of your Committee for the labour they are undergoing to alleviate this sore distress. If I were merely to consult my personal ease, I would greatly prefer being a donor to being a distributor of relief. It is much easier for a man to put his hand into his purse, than to labour from morning till night in filling out stirabout to crowds of half clad, hungry people stinking with the weakness and fever. between to-day and yesterday, I saw the corpses of a girl, a man, and an old woman who died of hunger. This day I saw a woman sinking into a faint, while I was giving out relief at Pullathomas to some peculiarly wretched families. I saw thousands to-day of the most miserable people I have ever seen. I saw more misery to-day than I have ever seen before.

I may here remark, once for all, that I was much gratified by the zeal and devotedness exhibited by most of those to whom grants for the relief of the poor have been given by your committee and others. I think that at least as much credit is due to the distributors as to the donors; and it is difficult for any but an eye-witness to form a correct idea of the position of the handful of persons in this miserable country, who are properly qualified for the distribution of grants. Placed in the midst of a starving and mendicant population, - whom, with their utmost efforts, aided by all the assistance poured into the country from England and elsewhere, they are unable to supply with enough to even support nature, - they are liable to continual changes of unfairness, partiality, indifference, or want of judgment; charges that are made without stint, and are much more easily made than refuted. Even if the supplies were not distributed with perfect fairness, or in the best possible way, I believe nearly all who act as volunteers on behalf of the suffering poor do the best they can. And if we are to withhold assistance from these, we must either allow the people to perish by thousands; or relieve them by agents appointed by ourselves, who would perhaps meet with no better success, and could not be so well acquainted with the people and the localities. It should be remembered that those who thus labour for the poor do so at a great sacrifice of time and trouble, and are in continual danger of being attacked by the pestilence which rages around them. At the time of my visit to Erris, there was no collection of houses by the road side, no village scattered over the country, in which fever was not prevalent in some families, frequently leaving children fatherless and parents childless. In many

cases many families were swept away by starvation, or fever, or both. In one cabin I saw six children lying heads and points on their miserable beds on each side of the turf fire, while the father and mother, wasted and emaciated, sat crouching over the embers. In another cabin, I saw the father lying near the point of death on one side of the fireplace; over the ashes sat a wretched little boy, wholly naked, - and on the opposite side of the hut, beneath a ragged quilt, lay the body of an old woman who had taken shelter there and died. As she belonged to nobody, there was nobody to bury her; and there have been many instances of bodies lying five or six days unburied, before anyone could be induced by threats or reward to inter them. I saw many graves made within a few yards of the cabin door. In some places bodies have been interred under the floors on which they died; and in others they have been covered by the ruins of the cabins they occupied; this mode of burial being resorted to as the least hazardous, troublesome, and expensive; for a corpse is regarded as an encumbrance to be got rid of as quickly and with as little effort as possible. Although I saw many dead and dying, and witnessed harrowing scenes of disease and want, I observed very few funerals. I was told that they generally occur early in the morning. The relations being ashamed of the necessity of hurrying the departed to their last resting place, with scanty attendance, and sometimes without coffins, make every effort to bury their dead quickly out of their sight.

Of all the arable land in the Barony, probably not more than one acre in one hundred is sown this year. Few of the people have seed; and many who had, ground it and used it for food. Many expected seed from their landlords, others from the government. Of those who have effected any tillage of potatoes or oats, some say they might as well leave the land untouched, since they do not expect to reap what they have sown.

From the same conviction of insecurity, many are killing and eating their miserable cows and sheep. If they don't eat them they will be stolen, or will die of starvation. Cows are sold for 15s. or 20s. which in better times would be worth four times the money. I saw a tolerably good sheep and lamb, which a respectable man told me he had just purchased for four shillings. I was shown extensive districts of mountains, formerly dotted with sheep and black cattle, where now hardly a solitary cow or sheep is to be seen.

Ballycroy, Erris, 16th of Fifth-month, 1847.

This place is about half way from Belmullet to Achill by the sea-coast road. With the exception of _____, my host is the only person to

look after a district of perhaps thirty-six miles in circumference. All he can do, however, is extremely short of the demand for assistance. An immensity of wretchedness prevails all around us. Yesterday I visited a soup kitchen, superintended by the chief boatman of the water-guards at Tullaghan. He attends to it without fee or reward. He told me that it occupies him daily from four o'clock in the morning. I gave him an order for some bags of peas and rice; for the stuff he is supplied with is miserably poor, although he goes beyond his orders in the quantity he puts into his boiled. One does not know which way to turn, nor what to think, at the sight of such a vast amount of intense wretchedness; and the people really seem to be, as they think they are, doomed to extermination. One man says of the poor people, "If they get any strong dose at all, they die off at once." I asked what he meant by a strong dose, and he replied, "If they get a full meal it kills them immediately." Another said, "Anybody's house you come to, the talk is all of misery and starvation! There is no fun at all among them now." This is literally true. Their natural vivacity and lightheartedness have been starved out of them.

Previous to the potato blight of last year, the peasantry of Erris appear to have been a contented race, growing abundance of potatoes for their annual consumption, having plenty of wool for clothing, and butter for milk, the produce of the cattle reared on their mountain farms. Each peasant generally had a small take called "a sum," consisting of two, three, or more acres of arable land, and from twenty to thirty acres of mountain, at a very low rent, sometimes as low as thirty shillings for the whole. With the exception of five or six weeks during which he planted his potatoes, his time was spent in comparative idleness. As there was always a supply of potatoes roasting in the hearth, there was no need for set hours for meals. They ate when hungry, drank when thirsty, and slept when they wished for repose. As almost their only food was the potato, and they made no other provision for the future, the blight has proved the death warrant of thousands.

I was informed that the fish along the coast of Mayo are excellent and abundant, when the people who occupy these shores are far from taking advantage of this great source of wealth and plenty. Their boats are clumsy, or unsuited to deep sea fishing. Their tackle is of the poorest and most inefficient kind. And when they do happen to secure a sufficiency for a week's consumption, they fold their hands, take the world easy, and, like the red Indian, wait until forced by hunger to seek for a fresh supply. Along the west coast of Ireland, the people who live near the sea shore, and depend partly upon fishing for a maintenance,

have suffered most acutely from the present distress.

I have visited a great part of the Barony of Erris, from Portacloy on the north coast, to Achill Sound on the south. The proceeding remarks apply to the whole of the Barony; but the most distressed districts are the Inner Mullet (a peninsula called the Mullet on the maps) and the Invers, a peninsula between Sruwaddacon Bay and Broadhaven. Over these tracts are scattered many thousand people, in miserable villages cut off by the sea or the surrounding bogs from any easy access to relief. I visited many of them, and had an opportunity of inspecting the condition and hearing the complaints and lamentations of multitudes of these poor people of both sexes and all ages. Words cannot describe their rags or their wretchedness.

Dublin, 21st of Fifth-month, 1847.

After about ten days spent in Erris, I visited Achill Island, Newport, Westport, Louisburgh, the Killaries, and entering the county of Galway, proceeded by Salruck on the little Killary through Connemara to Cliffden, whence I returned through Galway to Dublin. Throughout the whole country from Achill to Galway there are doubtless much poverty and scarcity, but a person coming from Erris is hardly qualified to judge impartially of the severity of the pressure in other places, so prominent and transcendent is the wretchedness there. In the southern part of Mayo, and in the county of Galway, a much greater portion of the land was under tillage, and the government measures of relief had pretty generally come into operation. The appearance of the poor was therefore, I was informed, much better than it had been a few weeks before; and instances of starvation and extreme distress were rare in comparison with the north-western parts of Mayo.

It is due to the individuals so actively engaged in the relief of distress, to say that every disposition was shown to forward my enquiries, and to make my stay as agreeable as possible. The exertions of the coast-guard and revenue officers, and of the men under their command, in the distribution of provisions, the oversight of soup-kitchens, and other efforts on behalf of the poor, are truly praiseworthy. This labour is, I believe, entirely uncompensated, and in many instances adds seriously to their official duties, which, in the present disorganised state of the country are much more laborious than usual.

Richard D. Webb

**Extracts from James H. Tuke's Account of his Visit to
Connaught in th autumn of 1847.**

The enormous size of the unions of Connaught is a subject which deserves attention; I have mentioned before that Leinster, which contains nearly the same area and population, has nearly double the number of unions, and, of course, union houses. [...] Look at the parish of Belmullet, in the Barony of Erris, itself as large as the county of Dublin, and conceive for a moment the hardships of those who travel fifty miles of more to the poor-house at Ballina. The Barony of Erris alone is clearly large enough for one union, and ought to have its poor house at Belmullet. (Since the publication of the account of this visit, this union has been divided as mentioned above; the electoral divisions of Binghamstown and Belmullet forming an union, with a temporary poor-house at Binghamstown; and it is intended to build the workhouse at Belmullet. An inspection officer and vice-guardian have also been appointed, whose indefatigable exertions for the relief of this distressed district are and have been instrumental in saving the lives of numbers of its wretched inhabitants.)

I must be allowed to dwell at some length upon the peculiar misery of this Barony of Erris, and parish of Belmullet, which I spent some days in examining. Afflicting as is the general conditions of Mayo - fearful as are the prospects of the province in general, there is here yet a lower depth in misery, a district almost distinct from Mayo, as Mayo is from the eastern parts of Ireland. Human wretchedness seems concentrated in Erris; the culminating point of man's physical degradation seems to have reached in the Mullet. It may seem needless to trouble you with particular descriptions of the distress I have witnessed; for these descriptions are but repetitions of the far too familiar scenes of the last winter and spring; although the present seem aggravated by an earlier commencement. Nevertheless, such a condition as that in Erris, ought, however painful, to be forced on our attention until remedies are found and applied.

This Barony is situated upon the extreme north-west coast of Mayo, bounded on two sides by the Atlantic Ocean. The population last year was computed at 28,000; of that number, it is said, at least 2,000 have emigrated, principally to England, being too poor to proceed to America; and that 6,000 have perished by starvation, dysentery, and fever. There is left a miserable remnant of little more than 20,000; of whom 10,000 at least are, strictly speaking, on the very verge of starvation. Ten thousand people within forty-eight hours journey of the metropolis

of the world, living, or rather starving, upon turnip-tops, sand-eels, and sea-weed, a diet which no one in England would consider fit for the meanest of animal which he keeps. And let it not be supposed that of this famine diet they have enough, or that each of these poor wretches has a little plot of turnips on which he may feed at his pleasure. His scanty meal is, in many cases, taken from a neighbour hardly richer than himself; not indeed at night, but, with the daring of absolute necessity, at noon day.

On entering the houseless and uncultivated region of Erris, the traveller is reminded of the wilds of Canada: for some miles, hardly an acre of cultivated land or the appearance of human residence greets the eye. Yet this district is reported by the Waste Land Commissioners as peculiarly capable of improvement. Advancing further in Erris, the desolation and wretchedness were still more striking. One may indeed at times imagine oneself in a wilderness, abandoned to perpetual barrenness and solitude. But, here and there scattered over this desolate landscape, little green patches appear unexpectedly where no other sign of man presents itself to you; as you walk over the bog, and approach nearer to the spot, a curl of smoke arises from what you suppose to be a slight rise in the surface. To use the graphic language of a late continental visitor, "Let the traveller look where he is going, however, or he may make a false step, the earth may give way under his feet, and he may fall into - what ? into an abyss, a cavern, a bog? No, into a hut, a human dwelling-place, whose existence he has overlooked, because the roof on one side was level with the ground, and nearly of the same consistency. If he draw back his foot in time, and looks around, he will find the place filled with a multitude of similar huts, all swarming with life." *(Kohl) Of what is this human dwelling - place composed? The wall of the bog often forms two or three sides of it, whilst sods taken from the adjoining surface form the remainder, and cover the roof. Window there is none; chimneys are not known; an aperture in front, some three or four feet in height, serves the office of door, window, and chimney; "light, smoke, pigs, and children, all pass in and out by this aperture."

From Bangor to Belmullet, a distance of twelve miles, the same dreary waste of uncultivated and neglected lands extends. In only one place did I observe and sign of improvement or superior cultivation. This was upon an estate of a proprietor named Atkinson; and as this is the only instance in the Barony of any attempt to adopt a perfect system of drainage, it is the more observable, presenting, as the land does, a pleasing contrast to the desolation around it. I never saw what

appeared to me more complete or excellent work. It has been executed under the superintendence of a Scotch steward. The earnings of the labourers, indeed, were low enough, barely 6d. per day, but this employment was a great boon to them. It may safely be said of the landlords of Erris generally, that there appears as much want of willingness as of ability on their part, to do anything for the benefit of their starving tenantry or waste estates. Erris affords one of the most perfect specimens of the mischiefs connected with that vicious system, by which landed property remains in the hands of those who are wholly unable to discharge its duties, or even to open the door to allow others to perform them. (A short time previously to my second visit, the owner (nominally) of a rent-roll of ú500 a - year died of fever, in the capacity of master of the temporary poor-house at Binghamstown. He was formerly a justice of the peace. In another case, the owner of 300 acres of land applied to the board of guardians for out-door relief. The government inspecting officer, under date of the 13th of November, says of this district, in his reports to the poor-Law Commissioners, "There is no proprietor who takes the least interest in the welfare of the unfortunate of this district."

At Belmullet, the capital of the district of Erris, a crowd of almost naked, perished creatures were congregating in the streets, in a state of "perfect destitution, "as the landlord of the inn assured me; they had no homes, no shelter, no land, no food; they slept at night in the streets, and begged for support during the day, from neighbours hardly richer than themselves. He told me also that "six persons had died in the streets in the few previous nights;" and I am sure that several I saw there are now beyond the reach of earthly calamity. The ghastly smile which momentarily played on the countenances of these living skeletons, at the prospect of a little temporary relief, I cannot easily forget. It rendered still more painful the expression of intense anxiety and bitter misery which was exhibited in their livid and death-set features.

Throughout Connaught a large portion of the estates remains in the hands of families who have possessed them for centuries; but their real value has long since been obtained and spent by the predecessors of the present nominal owners. The relation of landlord and tenant is, in truth, lost; in no country in the world are these duties less recognised than in Ireland. The estates are entailed, and they cannot be sold to pay the encumbrances; they are, in general, deeply mortgaged, often in the hands of the mortgages, or in chancery, *(The estates in chancery are notoriously ill-managed and neglected. The only power which

appears to be exercised by this court is that of exacting the uttermost farthing of rent. The tenants in consequence become degraded; and, left to themselves, let and sublet, to their own great injury and that of the estate. When, therefore, a sale takes place, or the estate comes to the heir, and the proprietor wishes to make improvements, he commences by evicting the small tenantry; who, cast out without the means of support, brood over their misfortunes, and in the end sometimes commit murder. Many melancholy instances of this might be stated.) and neither of these parties, though they may collect and retain four-fifths of the profit of the estate, has the slightest sympathy with the tenant, or feels called upon for any other service than the exaction of his legal claim from the miserable tenantry. The embarrassed landlord has, of course, no money to expand upon improvements; his apparent interest is to extort the highest possible rent from the estate. It would be utterly unjust to blame a great portion of the present landlords, for not discharging the duties of ownership, when their circumstances entirely disable them from doing so. I bear a most willing testimony to the kind-hearted and zealous efforts of not a few of this class during the late season of trial. They are fully sensible of the anomalies freed from responsibilities which they cannot discharge; and I found it to be the settled conviction of many, that the steps which affect this object are at the root of all permanent improvement for Ireland.

Extract from an Account of a Second Visit to Erris and some other parts of Connaught, made by Richard D. Webb, of Dublin, at the request of the Central Relief Committee.

Sligo, 18th of Second-month, 1848.

I reached Sligo at night, and on the following day visited the town and vicinity.

Turnips form the chief article of food for the poor, as they are cheapest. Much wretchedness prevails, though I could not learn that any cases of actual starvation have occurred here. I afterwards found that such cases were chiefly confined to those districts, where the number to whom the distribution of relief could be entrusted is small in proportion to the population.

Ballina, county of Mayo,
20th of Second-month, 1848.

There are great complaints throughout the country in consequence of the pressure of demands for the poor-rates and county cess; which must be met, if met at all, by the industry of the few farmers who are still able to keep their heads above water, or from the remaining resources of the few solvent gentry. Many instances have occurred, in which the beds and other furniture of poor farmers, and sometimes the only remaining cow, have been sold for these demands.

Belmullet,

20th of Second-month, 1848.

From Barrack I walked about four miles to Aughleam, a village in the southern part of the Mullet; visiting on my way the ruined villages of Mullaghroe and Clogher, the scene of the recent clearances mentioned by James H. Tuke, Inish "Visit to Connaught in 1847". In these two villages there are probably one hundred cabins demolished, from which fully four hundred individuals must have been thrown without shelter upon the world. I never before saw so great a scene of devastation. Many of the articles of household furniture, such as tables, dressers, and culinary utensils, are left among the ruins. In consequence of the number of persons who have died or emigrated, these articles are so common that nobody values them.

Disease is extremely prevalent in the country, and the fever is of a particular malignant character. Numerous deaths took place among the poor during my stay, and all who mingled much with might be said to carry their lives in their hands. Death had fearfully thinned many families since my last visit. All who depended upon the soil for their maintenance, whether as tenants or landlords, have led a miserable existence in the interval. Previously to the famine, although the mass of the people of Erris lived in miserable cabins, with little attention to cleanliness or refined ideas of decency, they were probably better off than other of the same class in Connaught, as to plenty of food, and freedom from anxiety or excessive toil. Their scrap of tillage supplied them with abundance of potatoes, and on their mountain land they reared cattle which furnished them with milk and butter, and sheep which supplied all the wool they requires for their coarse home-made clothing. The pig paid the rent. I do not believe there is now one pig, sheep, or cow to be found, for fifty that might have been counted in Erris this time three years. The county surveyor of Mayo told me that Erris was formerly the great nursery for cattle for the rest of the country; as the people, being primitive and pastoral in their habits,

found this occupation more congenial than any which required steady application.

Belmullet, 23rd of Second-month, 1848.

Drove to Pullathomas, ten miles from Belmullet, the residence of -----. He is a middleman, and holds about 3,000 acres of land, some of which is excellent, under a bishop's lease, at a very low rent. He had formerly a large number of tenants, of whom not more than a dozen remain, and they are too poor to pay rent; the rest have emigrated or died, or have given up their holdings, in order to become entitled to outdoor relief; for the Poor Law makes it imperative that the pauper shall not hold more than a quarter of an acre. I heard that many clearances were effected by the landlords refusing, as ex officio poor-law guardians, to recommend their starving tenantry to out-door relief, unless they consented to give up their holdings. The people in many instances cling to their little bit of land with energy of drowning men. The land steward of George Vaughan Jackson, near Ballina, told me that he knew of instances in which cottiers, having buried potatoes to preserve them for seed, had allowed members of their own families to perish of want, and had suffered the severest extremities of hunger themselves, sooner than betray their cherished hoard.

On arrival at Rosspport, I rode over with ---- to the fishing station of Portacloy on the north coast. About three miles to the east of this place is another small fishing village, called Porturlin, to which the only access by land is over a high and boggy mountain, so wet and swampy that it is difficult to reach it even in summer. It is probable there is not in Ireland a cluster of human habitations so completely secluded from easy access. Within a mile of Porturlin is the best fishing ground on that coast. It is resorted to by boats from Portacloy, and abounds in fine cod and ling.

During my stay, fishing was impracticable, owing to the severity and uncertainty of the weather. The mornings are frequently fine, and such as an inexperienced person would suppose suitable for the purposes of the fisherman; but towards noon the weather changes, the sky becomes overclouded, the winds blow with violence, and certain danger would await the frail currachs, or small boats that are employed on this tremendous coast, which is lined with cliffs ranging from fifty feet to five hundred feet in height. For about ten miles, the only ports are the small coves of Portacloy and Porturlin, and even these are not easily gained when a heavy swell sets in. As far as I could learn, the fisheries

which the Committee has endeavoured to establish along the coast of Erris, will have great difficulties to contend with, in the rough weather at that season of the year when the more valuable kinds of fish, such as cos and ling, are most abundant.

The general opinion throughout the country is, that the attempt to support the people by the public works last year was a great mistake; and that if the amount of money and labour expended in this way, had been employed in supplying the people with seed, and supporting them while they cultivated their grounds, a vast amount of death and suffering might have been avoided. A large number of the roads then constructed are incomplete, and are likely to continue so. In some parts, the country is so thinly inhabited, that there is scarcely anybody to use them; in others, the roads which would be valuable if completed, are useless for want of even temporary bridges. Many parts of the country might be opened and rendered accessible, if some additional outlay were made for the purpose of completing the roads, on which a great deal has been already expended to no practical purpose.

Belmullet, 26th of Second month, 1848

I walked with _____ through Ballycroy, along a fine road to Croy Lodge, and then crossed an arm of the sea in a currach. I heard that in this part of the country the people were exerting themselves with much energy, and that there was a prospect of a great deal of land being sown. In other parts of Erris the people were alive to the necessity of tillage; but they had not the seed, nor the means of living while the seed lay in the ground.

Ballina, 2nd of Third month, 1848

Met with George Vaughan Jackson, of Carrowmore, who brought me round the experimental farm which the Committee has formed on his lands. Here I was gratified to see, amidst the general misery and want of employment, upwards of two hundred persons at full work, on fair country wages; and in a way which gives them improved notions and habits in connection with the business of their lives. No effort that is being made by the Committee in this part of the country, by way of industrial experiment, appears to me more likely to benefit a large number of the destitute than this; nor do I know of any in which so much good can be done at so small an expense. It must be recollected, however, that the chief difficulty in this part of Ireland, is that of finding trustworthy persons to oversee and conduct operations of this

kind. If the moral tone of the people were higher, it would be much more easy to help them. They would not even require so much assistance. Half the complaints one hears, (and I believe they are frequently well founded, though it is extremely difficult to ascertain their truth) arise from the prevalence of what the people call "favour and faction;" from the tendency to gratify the love of petty patronage; or from the malice arising from old grudges, or the desire to serve one's own friends or one's own tenants. The spirit of "a little brief authority" bristles up in great vigour in most of the small officials. It is difficult to restrain this, and it is greatly in the way of anything effectual being done for the poor. The only remedy, in the necessity of which all my informants, high and low, are agreed, is this, - that if anything effectual is to be done to save the people of Erris from extermination, they should be supplied with seed, and fed while cropping the ground and for a while afterwards. Considering the poverty of most of the Erris landlords, and the want of principle of some of them; considering the low moral condition of the people, and the difficulty of dealing with them in a straightforward way; I am conscious such an effort would be attended with great, but I think no insuperable difficulty. I heard on all sides that whilst the people last year folded their hands in apathy, believing themselves doomed, (and it was not much to be wondered that they thought so) they now evince a disposition to help themselves if they knew how. I fear it will be found that all partial efforts for the establishment of industry will be nearly futile, unless the mass of the people can be kept alive by some such effort as I have hinted at.

Richard D. Webb

CONCLUSION:

"With fingers weary and worn,
With eyes heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread
stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt".

Thomas Hood(1843)
("The song of the shirt")

Out of the impoverished, famine stricken, hungry years of the 1800's came the more prosperous 20th century. The quality of familial life in Erris evolved from the early 1900's onwards. At first those lucky enough to have jobs struggled to survive on their meagre earnings, while others were still forced to emigrate. However, further into the 20th century conditions improved and a higher standard of living served to accommodate not only the rich few, but the mass of Erris inhabitants. The introduction of electricity, improved sanitation and better roads served to make the Barony of Erris a more widely known and accessible region of North Mayo.

FAMILY LIFE IN ERRIS: 1900's

FAMILY LIFE IN ERRIS: 1900's

It's the way of the world; old friends pass away
And fresh faces arrive in their stead
But still midst bustle and strife of the world,
We cherish fond memories of the dead.

- The Old School Clock

Family life in Erris has undergone many changes in the last century. The early 1900s were hard times for the people of Erris. They struggled to survive on meagre wages - if they were lucky enough to have a job. Emigration figured largely in those days leaving no family unaffected. The present generation have better living conditions, better equipment for working the land and a better social life though emigration is still rampant. Along with the life style, attitudes have changed immensely. Gone are the days of 'piseógs', seanachies and school dances; in their place, television, books and discos.

The following is an account of family life in Erris since the beginning of the 1900's using Inis Gé as an example of life on the islands as opposed to the mainland.

Religion

Religion was a very important aspect of the people's lives in the early 1900's, as indeed it is today but to a lesser degree. Every evening without fail, the family assembled together and said the rosary. It was believed that "the family that prayed together, stayed together". The 'rules' followed by these dedicated people were much harsher than they are today. They were required to fast from early Saturday night in order to receive communion on Sunday morning. Everyone dressed in their 'Sunday best' for mass though there was not a lot of fancy dressing in those days. The people were humble and Godfearing and would not miss mass at any cost. Friday was considered a day of fasting and abstinence and meat was forbidden on that day. Confessions were heard at least once weekly and twice yearly the stations were held on a rotary basis in each village. The priest would come to some house, say mass and give absolution and communion to the people. The parish priest always announced at one station whose house they would come to next time round and it was considered unlucky to refuse them. A collection was taken up at the station and the name of each person and how much they contributed was called out. This practise encouraged

people to give more though it was very humiliating for those who were poor and could only afford to give a small sum.

First Communion day and Confirmation day were enjoyable and holy days for all the children. It was preceded at school by much preparation. The children were drilled and cross - examined on catechism. They had to learn the religion books 'off by heart' from cover to cover and were examined and re-examined on it from every angle. An incorrect answer to any question the bishop might ask meant disgrace and a thumping from the teacher or parents - or both.

Bhíodh na paidreacha seo í mbeal na ndaoine o mhaidin go h-oihe;
Coiglím an tine seo mar a choiglionn Críost cach
Bríd ina bhonn is Muire ina bharr
Na trí sheoda breatha í bhflaitheas na nGrasta
Ag cumhtach an ti seo agus a bhfuil ann go la.

A Aine, mathair mhuire,
A Mhuire, mathair De
No ar an fhiabhras o oiche
Mo bhaiste go hoiche mo bhais

Ceithre choirneal ar ma leaba
Ceithre aingeal ortha scaithe
Ma fhaighim bas as seo go maidin
I bhflaitheas De go raibh M'anam.

A Mhuire na ngras
Ar mo leas me.
Go sabhala tu me
ar gach uile olc,
go sabhala tu me
idir anam is chorp.

Garda na n-aingeal
os ma choinn
Dia romham
'agus Dia liom.

Education:

Back in the 1940's access to second - level education was minimal. Thus the onus of equipping people for life fell on the National Schools. It had to develop in its students literacy, numeracy, oracy and self-confidence. It also had to cater for arts and crafts, music and environmental studies. Past pupils of those National Schools, without the benefits of second - level education, were able to fill posts and professions which nowadays would challenge third - level graduates. Most of the schools were single roomed with two teachers; one teacher with classes at one end of the room and another with the senior class at the other end.

The three R's, Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic were basic. There was great emphasis on handwriting. Poems and recitations, no matter how long, were learned 'off by heart'. Corporal punishment was a feature of the educational system and administered freely for failure at lessons to make the pupils learn. The cane was regarded as ' the basic aid to teaching' and a teacher without his cane was regarded as a soldier without his gun. Seán O Ciaráin recalls his first day at Shanaghy school; "One of the first things I noticed was the long wicked-looking cane. I knew well what that was for. I heard about it, and it was not long before I saw it being used, as boys and girls walked ruefully to Mrs. Galligan for their punishment and returned to their places with red faces, squeezing their hands under their armpits and biting their lips, trying not to cry, "I would not please her as much as to let her see me cry", said Anthony McAndrew outside at playtime. Anthony had received four slaps on each hand for not knowing his father's name in Irish. "In Shanaghy school it was nearly always administered with a cane, also called a pointer. I never saw a belt being used, but I saw the cane being used perpetually. Well I remember the noise that slim weapon made as it swished through the air and came down to meet pink young flesh with a sickening thud. And the defiant grins on the victims' faces as they tried not to cry out".

Such were the extremes of those days but perhaps we have reached the other extreme today. Long gone are the days when a student would get caned for misbehaviour or unlearned homework and then get twice as much more from their parents when they went home. Today, a teacher can be sued for hitting a student and parents frowned on for smacking their children. More emphasis is placed on talking to the child and reasoning with them to see sense rather than 'beating sense into them'.

Mary Padden recalls the night, sixty years ago that her father caught her smoking for the first time;

"I was at a dance and the cigarette in my hand when who should walk in but my father. I dropped it but too late! He'd already seen me and over he strolled and ordered me to pick up the cigarette. I did and then he landed me with a wallop across the face. It was more the shame of being slapped in front of everyone than the sting of the slap that hurt me most. And I was twenty-one years old then!".

Most older people would be of the opinion that the youth of today are 'gone to hell' and have no respect for their parents or elders as they did in by gone days when they wouldn't 'back answer' for fear of a dislocated jaw!

In all schools at the beginning of the century, Irish figured largely on the curriculum. The idea was to make Irish the everyday spoken language of the country. Most lessons, 'rithmetic, poetry, history, etc. were conducted through the medium of Irish. In a lot of cases, students were rhyming off all sorts of things in Irish, parrot fashion, without really knowing what they meant in English. Many of them found this particularly frustrating. One man says, "English was our first language, the language we had from the cradle; it was the language we did our thinking in, and it was not fair to be teaching us our school subjects in a language we did not fully understand". However, English had too much of a grip on the people and it was to remain the mother language of Ireland to the present day. Nowadays, learning foreign languages like French and German is as important, if not more important, than having 'an teanga Gaelic'. Students are educated to 'go with the flow' of the European Community with much more emphasis placed on computer studies, sciences and business subjects. Up until 1991, students were awarded a double honour of Irish in the Leaving Certificate Examination. This was deemed unfair and abolished as many regarded Irish as a language of very little practical use. Today for the youth in Erris, going to college is almost a 'must' as there is little else to do other than sign on the dole. Unfortunately, school and college have become more rat races for points than places to learn the basics required to get on as it was in old Ireland. M. Padden says, "Today's children know more about the stock exchange and value of money than they do about the important things - the real values of life!".

A former national school teacher of Shraigh N.S has the following to say," The one sad feature about Shraigh was this: over 90% of its past pupils had to leave to find their living in foreign parts. Their success abroad sadly reminds us of the contribution they might have made at home had the opportunities been available". Emigration and migration have been part and parcel of the way of life for the Irish people particularly in the West of Ireland. In the past in Erris, it was not uncommon to see a family who had all emigrated leaving parents on their own. Harrowing scenes have been witnessed at bus stops when parents had to part with their loved ones. Great joy and excitement was experienced by these people as their families returned for holidays particularly Christmas. Unfortunately, a small minority lost total contact with home and faded into the world never to be seen again by family or old friends. There were many reasons for contact being lost, but none mitigated the pain and suffering it caused to parents and other members of the family.

Emigration

In the early years emigration was a necessity not a choice. Money and payable employment were scarce. The only means of obtaining it was to try and find work in another country. Large families were common, nine or ten the norm, but only one of them could remain on the land. The others had to go. Very few found employment of any worth in Ireland. For most it was the emigrant ship across the Irish sea. Hundreds, both young and old, left Erris every year for the potato fields of Scotland and the beet fields of England. Many of the farmers and their sons emigrated on a seasonal basis, working on farms in the North and midlands of England for the Summer and returning home in Winter. Age was not a great consideration. Anyone willing and able was acceptable. When the emigrants returned at the end of the season wearing their new suits, they were the envy of all who had stayed. No man ever came fro the beet wearing the same suit he went away in. Emigration was accepted as a fact of life. It provided a outlet for the youth in hard times. Seán O Ciarián recalls; " I remember in 1939, just before the outbreak of the war, the priest speaking in Bourhauve chapel advising young men to attend woodwork classes in the new technical school in Belmullet. "A joiner is a good job in England now", he said. Joiner are earning up to seven pounds a week over there now". Wasn't that ironic! The priest on the altar telling people they should go to the school so they cold train for work in England". Up until they were seventeen or eighteen, a lot of the young boys or girls used to steal potatoes from their parents to sell clandestinely for pocket money. Parents did not have the money to give them a weekly allowance.

It was after DeValera came into power that social security otherwise known as the dole, came into being. Every man drawing the dole received a voucher each week, entitling him to free beef; the amount of beef depending on the size of his family. This came as a result of the 'economic war' in Britain, when a tariff was imposed on the export of cattle, causing prices to drop to almost nothing. That period might not have been good for farmers, but it was Godsend to many of the Erris people. In order to qualify for the dole, farmers were means tested as is the practise to this very day.

Between 1926 and 1991, the population of Erris declined by 24%. After a short period of growth in the 1970s when many emigrants returned home, the Erris community has continued to decline. Between 1986 - 1991 the rate of emigration from Erris more than doubled while the birth rate more than halved. This small rural community that survived

the great famine is slowly heading towards the point of no return and will continue to do so until the malaise poisoning the West of Ireland is healed. At present, new figures from the unemployment centres reveal that there are 9,360 on the live register in Mayo. Of that, 1,189 in the small town of Belmullet. These are shocking figures in an area continuously decimated by emigration.

Family Life

As was the case in all rural areas in the past, large families were the order of the day in Erris. Every new arrival was looked upon as a blessing from God. Women's role were difficult as they worked hard not only at home without any of today's conveniences or such basics as running water, but in the fields as well. Men were not very forthcoming in assisting with the rearing of children or with any domestic chores, as in those days sex - roles were very rigidly defined; unlike our present days of equality and the modern man and working mother.

Childbirth has undergone many changes over the century. In the earlier part of the century, the period of confinement was known as the 'faire' and the birth, assisted by the local midwives always took place in the home. If there were complications one of the doctors was called Dr. Kelly Snr. attended many house births. He travelled through the countryside on his bicycle. If the birth was complicated he often stayed in the house for the night, maybe resting for a while in a bed where some of the other children slept. Unlike today, the father did not stay with his wife for the birth. The woman often wore her husband's jacket - so that he could bear half the pain! Society was male dominated and the birth of a son was considered a greater blessing than that of a daughter. Daughters could not carry on the family name and might cost a fortune in dowries. After the birth the mother was not allowed to the well until she was 'churched'. This was a blessing given by the priest in the chapel. She would not be welcome in her neighbour's house either until she was churched, as prior to the blessing she was considered to be a carrier of bad luck. The baby was christened as soon as possible, in case it died without baptism and had to be buried in unconsecrated ground. The place was called a 'lisheen'. There were many superstitions attached to pregnancy and childbirth. It was considered unlucky to throw anything - especially a red cloth - at pregnant woman. It was thought the baby would be marked on the same spot where its mother was hit. A pregnant mother was also required to put her hand to her mouth if she saw a hare - if not, her child might have a hare's lip.

The fairies played an important role in superstition. If a mother had her young child visiting late at night, her neighbour would place a quenched coal (smearod) in the child's palm so that it could not be stolen by the fairies. If a baby was let alone in a house for any length of time, a tongs would be placed on the cradle, again so that the baby would not be taken by the fairies.

Erris has witnessed many changes during the last century. Childbirth has altered from the days of the baby being born in the bedroom, with the assistance of the local midwife; to hospital births and all the modern facilities that go with it. In fact, some of today's modern thinking is beginning to sway towards childbirth taking place at home, with the assistance of trained personnel. However, one thing will never change through the ages; that is the pain, the beauty, the miracle of childbirth. Most of the houses in Erris at the beginning of the century were thatched with straw or rushes or a mixture of both.

Living Quarters

The house building programme did not really get under way until the mid - nineteen thirties and from then on the thatched houses became fewer and fewer, except in the war years, when building was held up for want of materials. "And those thatched houses were so cozy and warm to live in, far more so than some of the slated houses".

Some people kept farm animals in the far end of the long kitchen. It was commonplace to see a woman milking a cow into the end of the house. Some families made a living from selling turf with horses and carts. In the '40s turf fetched four shillings per horse cart in Belmullet. A lot of hard work went into the turf before it was ready for sale. It had to be cut and saved and put out on the road, and weather conditions were not always favourable. Often in wet weather the bogs became so sodden that no donkey could travel them, and then people carried the turf to the road on their backs in bags or in creel.

Creels, ass's pardogs and cishawns (baskets) were made from asiers or sally rods. The baskets were used for carrying turf and potatoes. After the potatoes were boiled the contents of the pot would be emptied into the basket with a bucket underneath it into which the water was strained. Today that craft is dead and has been replaced by modern technology. People were far more self-sufficient in the earlier years of the twentieth century than they are today. Every household produced its own eggs and butter, made in the old dash churns. Most households

sold the eggs and some the butter. Groceries bought by the country people were mainly tea, sugar and tobacco, with fish, usually herring or mackerel. Meat was only bought on special occasions and a loaf of baker's bread was a treat. Flour for home baking came in eight stone bags brought home on the cart or across the ass's back. During the war the people of Erris experienced shortages of many things. Flour for baking was a problem to get and often they had to do with Boxty bread made entirely from potatoes. When they did manage to obtain flour, it was of poor quality, 'black flour' the people called it and it did not make nice bread. Tea was strictly rationed to half an ounce per week per person but could be bought on the 'black market' for an exorbitant price, smuggled in from the North. Paraffin oil was very difficult to get. That is where bog deal came in handy.

In the '30s and '40s Martin McIntyre and Geoffrey Hurst were the two big leading men in Belmullet. Most of the people bought goods on credit from either one or the other from time to time. They, the customers, would settle the score once they had sold turf or a pig. It was said that the shop owners preferred people not to clear the 'books' fully because while you owed them something they had you in their power. A lot of people had no choice but to sell their produce to the shop-owners because they nearly always owed them. Others had the opinion that it was "better to go hungry than borrow" as they could sleep content and independent owing nothing to anyone.

Much has changed since those days. Today, home-made butter is a novelty. Very few people can find the time to bake home-made bread and with such a variety of breads available in the supermarket it is not really worth the effort. Frozen foods and electricity have simplified the life of the 'domestic engineer' immensely.

Life in many ways had to give way to the influence of the modern world and numerous traditional habits and practices once in every day use, are fast disappearing.

Agriculture and the tasks linked with farming have always been man's main work in rural Ireland. Most farmers were self-sufficient. They built their own dwelling houses, grew crops saved turf and herded farm animals. The women not only made the clothes and cooked the meals but assisted with different tasks around the farm.

Various jobs required specific tools - a special spade called a slane was

used for cutting turf, for rope-making a sugan or rope twister, and the flail for threshing were some of the tools commonly used. The bog provided the bogwood which was used for roof-timbers, furniture making, ropes and the carving of ornaments. From earliest times the sickle was used for reaping, then replaced by the scythe which in turn, was replaced by the reaper and binder machine. Seaweed was used for field manure and burned for making kelp.

At the beginning of July lobster in-shore fishing was profitable and for the few communities in Erris, July marked the beginning of a brief season of driftnetting for salmon. By mid-September lobster fishing had usually become too hazardous or too low in yields: pots were stacked and shore nets dried for storage. Work on the land was usually completed before the Winter frosts. Between December and February was the time for odd jobs about the farm. The division of labour between man and woman was; women milked the cows all year round; men dug the turf in the Spring; women saw to the education of the children; men planted the crops and fished the seas. January 25th St. Paul's day was of particular interest to the farmers as it had a reputation for weather predictions. The farmers watched the sky for signs and there was a saying, "If St. Paul's day be clear, there shall come a happy year". If a family cat ate grass, sat with her back to the fire or washed behind her ears, this was a sign of rain.

Perhaps in today's farming world of sophisticated high-tech machinery, production targets, budget controls and administration demands, the farmer could be in danger of forfeiting a life-style which basically concerns itself with Mother Nature and the God-given seasons.

Entertainment

In olden days Erris people made their own entertainment. They had neither radio nor television. A gramophone in a house was rarity but the house was a centre of entertainment. Some houses were noted for the good 'craic' and were know as the 'visiting houses' where neighbours gathered nightly and talked around the fires. The people had a wealth of oral folklore and around the winter turf fires stories were told by people who had never read a book or newspaper. They told stories of the dead people they had met, of battles and giants, buried treasures and fairies. They were never sure whether to give them credence or not, but at the same time they wished to play safe and not offend them. Superstitions and the supernatural played almost as large a part in their lives as the real everyday things of life.

"Piseógs" the old people called them and they were thought to be a legacy from old pagan times.

One thing people did believe was that it was extremely unlucky to build an extension westward out of a dwelling house. Anyone who did that, they said, would not live long. Sean O Ciarián recalls; "One man in Bourhauve built a room westward out of his house. Well-intentioned neighbours warned him against it; he was taking a big risk they told him. But he went ahead with his building and laughed at them. Within a few years both he and his wife were dead, and the house with its new extension lies empty and derelict to this day. Others round about, people of the same age as the man and his wife, died too, but no notice was taken of that".

Many of the older generation had experienced, or thought they had experienced strange unexplainable happenings of some sort at some time of their lives, and if they had never had such an experience themselves, they always knew someone who had. The 'banshees' cried for certain families, mourning the passing of descendants of the old Gaelic race. Many people who claim to have seen her describe her as a tall, dark, willowy woman with long black hair which she continuously stokes as she wails, that lonely and mournful wail.

There was a strong belief in fairies and there are still a few people alive today who claim to have seen them. Many believed that the fairies were fallen angels out to kidnap more souls. One superstition said that one must turn their coat inside out if they got lost in the night. This was supposed to confuse the fairies and put them 'off your scent'. The first cock's crow in the morning was said to be a signal to the fairies to hasten back to their graves. Many stories are told respecting the impudent pranks of these beings. A man, it was thought, could become paralysed or waste away and die from fairy influence. The attentions of these creatures were not expended on human beings alone, for they often attacked animals. Cattle becoming ill suddenly were supposed to be 'shot' by fairies and the owners would often go to a great deal of trouble to find a person who possessed a 'fairy stone' which was the only remedy.

Card playing was very much associated with the devil. One history goes as follows; "Paidraigeen was from Morahan and had the habit of carrying the pack of cards around with him at night. One night on the way home from a card game in Ballyglass he was attacked by the devil himself. First he attacked him in the form of a big, coarse and hairy

man but when Padraigeen saw the cloven hooves he knew what he was up against. Padraigeen made the sign of the cross with his stick and each time he did so the devil retreated a few yards but he always came back again to attack, each time more terrible than the first. Four times in all he changed. From a man in to a black, evil dog as big as a calf with two red, bulging eyes. Next he changed into a black ball that smelled like sulphur and hopped around the place. Finally, into a ram with large twisted horns that tried to butt him. Padraigeen was completely exhausted when he finally got rid of the devil and crawled on hands and knees to a nearby house. It was said that the pack of cards in his pocket had turned black and stuck together as if they were scorched and glued. .

When a few of the 'seanachies' got together that kind of storytelling went on for hours, each endeavouring to go one better than the other - and tell a more flesh-crawling and awesome tale than the other.

Today, the telling of 'Piseógs' is a dead tradition. Television and books have intervened and leave no room for the 'seanachies'. Older people would say that the coming of electricity frightened all the fairies and goblins away from Erris.

In the '30 and '40s, raffles and school dances were the only other source of enjoyment for both the young and old of Erris. They served two purposes in those days. Firstly, it raised money for the person holding the dance and secondly it gave the people of the area a night of enjoyment. A 'school dance' was a chain of dances lasting a whole fortnight, dancing in a different house every night.

A fiddler and maybe an accordeon player provided the music. At the end of the 'school dance' the musicians collected their dues - one shilling per person for all who attended. Raffles were regularly held in people's houses, with dancing and card playing in the room, all for the modest fee of six pence. The raffle prize was anything from an old horse to an alarm clock. Those functions usually ended around midnight. A lot of the young men walked their girls a bit of the road before going home, and maybe loitered along the way, a practise as old as the human race itself.

On Sunday nights, if there were no dances on, the young people congregated at the end of a particular road - the Tip road was a hot spot in Shanaghy - to talk and fool around. Many paired off to 'court' in the haggards or behind turf-stacks. This was a 'great sin' and frowned on

by the priests. 'The intimacy of the embrace' was considered in those days; a very different story years later when many of the priest ran the dances themselves. The ultimate sin was to allow dancing to go on during Lent. If one was held, it would be announced by the priest from the altar the following Sunday and the girls who attended branded 'sluts'. To be read from the altar made you a social outcast and you could not expect to have any luck.

Marriage

By the 1930s matchmaking was a withering tradition in Erris. It was ideal however, for the ageing 'boy' of forty or fifty who had stayed with his parents on the farm and whose only hope was the matchmaker. A good, well-stocked holding of land was an asset in getting any middle aged man a wife. An old father or mother in the house was not, particularly a mother.

When marriages took place the ceremony was always celebrated in the bride's parish church, often in the afternoon or late evening. The custom was for guests to assemble afterwards in the bride's house where festivities went on into the early hours of the next morning. A highlight of the wedding evenings were the 'strawboys'. They were a colourful, mummer-like uninvited group of locals dressed up in queer garments such as petticoats, long Johns, wearing straw hats that came over the head and rested on the shoulders. A chosen 'captain' was responsible for their good behaviour as often there were nearly twenty of them. At the wedding, they danced and played all sorts of tricks and joined in the singing and drinking. Two others accompanied the 'strawboys', the 'Breedoge' (the old biddy) and her old man - two local characters dressed up as an old man and woman. 'Strawboys' comprised mainly of young men but occasionally girls joined in though this was not welcomed by some very superstitious people who thought the presence of female 'strawboys' could cause infertility in the bride. Unfortunately, 'strawboys' are no longer in existence except perhaps when arranged for traditional ceile nights. Honeymoons were unheard of in those days simply because people did not have the money and besides, they usually had either old parents or the farm to look after. That was a far cry from today, where a modest wedding - accommodating one hundred guests, including clothing and flowers - could cost anything from £8,000 upwards.

At the other end of the scale, wakes were a great social occasion then; they were nearly as good as the weddings, and better in one way

because everybody could go, no need to be asked. They lasted about three days and everyone came from far and near and sat around smoking, talking and some even made dates while the corpse who had made it all possible, was laid out on the bed, rosary beads between the fingers. Wakes were also the scene of many practical jokes. Mary Padden recalls; "I was at a wake in Knockshambo once and the crack was going high. Three of the lads got it into their heads to have a bit of fun on everyone else and at the expense of the corpse, though I doubt he minded because the same man was a blackguard when he was alive himself, God rest his soul! They tied a rope around the corpse's chest and brought the rope over the rafters and down to the bottom of the bed. Now, right outside a house with a corpse in it was a considered a bad place to be because that is where all the bad spirits lingered to try and claim the soul of the dead person. When everyone came in to say a prayer over the body, the boys tugged on the rope causing the corpse to sit bolt upright in the bed. Well, what ri ra agus ruaille buaille I never saw in all my life!

Off with everyone, out through windows and doors without any consideration for the bad spirits outside. As far as they were concerned, there was something worse inside!".

Drink hardly featured at all in those days, unlike today; whilst the wakes might be very solemn and silent, it is usually a way to the pub afterwards.

Poteen, the scourge of many backward parts of the West was in abundance in Erris, especially in Inver. Poteen, though illegal was a strong industry and ruined many a man and his home. It was even known to do funny things to the Gardaí! One story goes; "A visiting Chief Superintendent, on paying a visit to the Garda Barracks, found a Sergeant urinating out into the street and two guards inside, lying asleep, drunk after having consumed poteen which they had seized from some illegal distiller. Today, the lights of the fires along the shores where they had the stills going are no longer to be seen though there is still some poteen in circulation!

During the late 1950's Erris was a hive of activity. The 'Light' was coming. Meeting were held, active canvassing, how many would take it? The more taking it the cheaper it would be. Was it worth it? The 'Light' brought more than light; it brought power - power to run equipment in the home, power to run motors, milking machines, water pumps. Power that people had only dreamed of. However, it also

signified the death of so many of the old craft and storytelling tradition.
It brought about a whole new way of life.

THE INIS GE ISLANDS

"Iniskea is an island. Nearly sixty years gone
The human race lived here, the windows shone
With candles over the water, and men
Fished currachs, women wellwards went from ben
There was a king to rule the island then,
Chosen for might, who had his Admiral
Of all the Iniskeas. The Priest's sick call
Was this cold pasture's only festival.
Mass was so far off, with such storms between,
And in the dark nights moved so much unseen
On the wild waters, the Man's beating heart
Still sometimes turned towards the old God's art.
Much magic was made with the dew . The wells
Secretly stirred with strange internal spells
To keep the Agent off, or the Excise,
Fires were lit before the God of Eyes
And dances made around his stone, sunwise
Their old cold Godstone they for comfort dressed
In one new suit each year: his Sunday best.
Then the remorseless sea, the all - beleaguering,
The crafty long - combed sea, the stark and whistling,
The savage, ancient sea, master at waiting,
Struck once.
Two hours later the mainland
Received one man, a saucepan in his hand,
Astride an upturned currach. At the Inn
They gave him clothes without, whisky within
Such as they could: but he nor left nor right
Altered his eyes. Only, with all his might,
This man bailed with his saucepan all the night,
In half one hour of squall, from calm to calm, the Man holding
his ten mates drowned had fallen on sleep again.
Nobody painted the houses after.
The islanders lost all heart for laughter.
Work was a weariness, dances were done,
On the island whose pride of Man was gone."

Inis Ge, sixty years ago, an island of sorrow, in mourning for her lost sons, now since the migration of her people, a forgotten island.

The Inishkea Disaster

Thirty - two man currachs pulled away from the South island at about 6 o'clock to the North island and boarded the nets at the port in the North island. Half a mile out from the North island port they shot their nets.

That night was very calm and there was no indication of the disaster that was to befall them. The storm came like a bolt from the blue, first it blew in short sharp squalls, then in long drawn gusts, and finally bedlam broke loose. The Inis Ge fishermen who were fishing mackerel in their frail currachs saw the squall coming, hastily drew in their nets, and made for home, but, alas, too late. The storm caught them, whirled their currachs about and separated them with monstrous waves. The men shouted, they shrieked and pulled like demons to reach the island shore, but to no avail. Their best efforts were frustrated by the mad frenzy of the angry sea. Some of the more fortunate succeeded in reaching the home shore, others although in sight of the island lights were swept once into that boiling, sizzling cauldron which enveloped them, never to be seen again.

"On the way back to the port we met John and Dominic Reilly. John told us that the night was going to be bad so we started rowing to the port. We were about twenty - two yards from the shore when a squall of wind came at about 9 o'clock and the two Currachs pulled as hard as they could towards the shore. Currachs and men were thrown up on the shore. The rest of the currachs tried to land but ran into difficulty. The man fishing with me that night was Anthony Monaghan and the man with me to Blackrock was Thomas McGinty".

- Pat Reilly

Lights danced on the shores of the Inish Ge islands, women shouted, children cried. Old and infirm men comforted the uneasy women. A dark shape looms up against the background of fourthly waves. A currach! "Buíochas le Dia go bhfuil sibh slán" a voice exclaims. Someone faints and is carried away by willing hands. "A Dhia tabhair slán abhaile iad" and all go on their knees and breath a prayer, but the last currach has reached the shores of the island. Some more are bravely battling against the odds of the sea and storm still, and some are sleeping an ever - lasting sleep at the bottom of the sea.

Over by a little promontory, knee deep in water and holding like grim death to his currach, is a man whose white bairn can be seen fluttering in the breeze. His squat full-bodied, bull-necked figure topped by the blunt, rugged face of the fisherman is clearly discernible in the warning light. By a hare's breath he has escaped the jaws of death, but his features register no fear, only anxiety for his beloved craft. A rope hauls it to safety. Two islandmen, the brothers, John and Anthony Meenaghan are just entering a little island cove when the storm catches them and whirls them once more into the frothy mass. Vainly endeavouring to reach the shore again, they break their oars and their currach is driven before the storm. Hither and thither it goes like a feather in the wind. Each mountain high, white crested waves threaten to engulf them but he who calmed the waters at Galilee is with them and casts them safely on the main shore. On the following morning a tragic sight meets the gaze of mainland men as they search the shore for the bodies of the victims. Entangled in a mackerel net is the body of a young man with a shock of wavy hair. 'Tis the mortal remains of John Reilly, the first of the victims of the drowning.

Names of the ten men lost 28th October, 1927:

John Meenaghan (married); John Monaghan, Michael Monaghan (brothers); John Reilly, Terry Reilly (brothers); John McGinty, Martin Meenaghan, Willie Reilly, John Lavelle, Michael Keane (body not found).

Cupla bliana ina dhiaidh sin baitheadh beirt eile on Oilean o thuaidh, Micheal O Maolabhail agus Sean O Raghallaigh. Fad a bhí an bheirt acu ag iascaireacht ronnaigh is a tharla an tubaiste. Nuair nar fhill an bheirt abhaile chuathas a lorg an mhaidin dar gcionn. Fritheadh an currach folamh, agus nios deanai corp Uí Raghallaigh ach go dtí an lá atá inniú ann níor fritheadh corp Uí Mhaolabhail.

The lonely islands of Inis Ge were the scene of one of the saddest tragedies in the human memory along the Western seaboard, and one that was to have far-reaching effects on their future. These Irish speaking islands were inhabited until after drowning disaster of 1927 and was not finally abandoned until 1934. In 1927 the population consisted of about thirty families. Deserted today, the islands in the past century were quite vibrant.

Island Life

Pat Rua O'Reilly was born on the South Inish Ge Islands some eighty-six years ago in 1907. He attended the local national school until he was twelve years old and then, in common with many of his contemporaries and friends on the island, he became a fisherman. Níl aon dabth in intinn Phadraig ach gur chrua an saol é, bhíodh uaireanta fada acu ar an bhfarraige agus iad i gconaf faor throcaire.

No braver seamen existed than the inhabitants of these islands. Their main occupation was fishing and they devoted more than six months of the year to catching rayfish and lobster, which though lucrative, entailed untold hardships. On leaving school at the tender age of twelve or thirteen years, young boys took to the Atlantic with their fathers and were taught the art of the currach (canvas canoe). Each time they set out they knew they were taking a risk. Wives and mothers went through the same torture each day or night fearing for the lives of these brave seamen but all they could do was wait, hope and pray. Catches of fish were usually brought to Blacksod or Belmullet and sold. When the seas were running they used their nobbies or yawls - undecked, unmasted sailing boats. They often brought their livestock to the fair in these boats. Currachs were also used to ferry islanders to Mass on the mainland in Tirrane.

De reir Phadraig Rua da laidir mar a bhí craifeacht agus naofacht na ndaoine agus bhí creideamh go smior íns na hOileanaigh. The rosary was recited every Sunday by the school - master and all the families assembled. It was also recited each night by the families in their own homes. Ceann de na deacrachtaí ba mho a bhíodh ag na hOileanaigh na nach bhfeicfidis sagart ach cupla uair sa bhlian. When they did come the priests were men to be feared. A former islander says of them, "...the priests were very hard that time, very hard! Don't think you'd see a priest coming into a house unless you were a "big man" or a rich man. There would be four or five of them at a rich man's funeral and there mightn't be one at the poor man's funeral. But, indeed, there weren't many "big men" on the island." The priest was brought by currach twice a year to the island to say mass. Confessions were heard but owing to bad weather the islanders were often months waiting for a priest to come. The currach was the life - support of Inis Ge. Even when the last inhabitants moved to the mainland to Glosh and Surgeview they formed a compact community whose main pursuit continued to be fishing.

They had little land, almost all of which they tilled. Farm holdings on Inis Ge were small where the division of land took place. As was common throughout the Barony of Erris in the last century, lots were cast for tillage land every third year, and each person was entitled to grow potatoes the first year and barley or oats the second year in ridges assigned to them in the lottery. As on the Blasket Islands off the coast of Kerry, a "ri" or king was appointed in each village and one writer gives the following account of his:

"There is a headman or king appointed in each village, who is deputed to cast the lots every third year and to arrange with the community what work has to be done during the year in fencing or probably reclaiming a new piece or for setting the "bin" as it was called; that is the number of heads of cattle of each kind for each man, that is to be put on the farm the ensuing year the king takes care generally to have the rent collected, applots the proportion of taxes with the other elders of the village, for all is done in a patriarchal way"

There was a patriarchal society on the island, not unknown in other islands off the coast of Ireland in former centuries. By the early part of the 1900s one account of the houses says they were tidy, well kept and whitewashed from lime made from sea shells. They were built of stone, thatched loosely, the thatch often tied down with ropes across the house or from eve to eve due to the windy conditions on the islands. The windows were covered with sheepskins in place of glass "producing a dim light from without like brown oil paper, but precluding vision from within." Feather beds were common, the feathers often plucked off wild fowl killed by fishermen.

Food on the island was simple but wholesome, local women, being expert at home cooking including bread, country butter and home made jams. Very often Inish Ge was cut off by bad weather for weeks or months, but they were always prepared for nature's siege and stored up plentiful supplies. Sometimes up to four months advance supplies were brought from Blacksod or Belmullet in case of bad weather; and this was particularly true of Christmas shopping in Belmullet.

Ba shaol suimhneach, sasiul a bhiodh ag na hOileanaigh,"For entertainment", recalled a former islander, "we'd gather in a house, maybe seven or eight of us telling tales and repeating stories of local history. One such story goes like this:

"In Kildun there is a stone, marked with a cross, which is said to cover the resting place of the Giant of Kildun. This giant was shaving one day,

and had the half of his face shaved, when a white hare burst into his dwelling and ran about. It leapt up into his arms, and he clutched it, and surveyed it. Then it ran out the door and made off in the direction of the Fort of Drumgollagh. At this fort there lived another giant. Laying down his razor, determined to follow it, and did so. It lead to Drumgollagh, where the giant of that place, his friend, told him to leave off chasing the hare because he claimed it for himself. At this the two giants had high words. Each said that he was as good a man as the other, and was as much entitled to the hare as he was, and finally they fell of fighting. The giant of Kildun hit the giant of Drumgollagh upon the forehead and killed him. Then he returned to his home in Kildun, a broken man, finished shaving, and committed suicide from the remorse that was in him".

On weekdays it was usually story - telling and card playing and on the weekend, house dances, on the North island one week and the South island the next. They would go from one island to the other in currachs. There was a pub on the island owned by John Crean who got his supplies from Blacksod and Belmullet. The men frequently visited this establishment but if a woman was seen drinking in it they would be shamed and called a 'sean sleapach'. When asked what that meant in English, one man said, "Well, there was never any English put on it but it is probably just as well because it was nothing good'.

Marriage on the Islands

Weddings were a big event on the island. There used to be what the islanders called the 'bainne show' - a wedding party - and the inhabitants spent the day eating, drinking and dancing; the music being supplied by the best local melodeon players. However, by the 1930's, just before the desertion of the island, they became too costly to hold and so the 'bainne show' tradition died. Inhabitants would then go to the mainland for a simple wedding ceremony.

Most marriages were arranged and once the parents had chosen a man for their daughter with the help of the islander matchmakers, the bride-to-be did not have a say in the matter. A former islander recalls; "If you were getting married, you'd have to go to the house..... to the old parents.... with a bottle of whiskey to see if you'd get it - the woman". When quizzed about the purpose of the bottle of whiskey he replied, "Oh, to soften them up. You might get a few cows with her". Saol fada a bhíodh ag muintir na noilean a bhíodh nosanna airithe ag na hoileanaigh nuair a d'fhagheadh duire bas ar an oilean. When a person died,

he/she would be put overboard by the people on a bed surrounded by white sheets. The coffins were made locally. The wake lasted for two days and keening women stood over the bed lamenting the dead and consoling the family. "There would be a box of 43s of white clay pipes and plenty of tobacco. Indeed, there used to be a man cutting the tobacco full time for the two days of the wake". Dar le Pdraig Rua bhiodh an creideamh forleathan go gcaithtina marbh piopa san uaigh agus i ngeall ar sin chuirti na 43s leo ins an uaigh. After the wake the recitation of rosaries over the corpse transferal took place to the North island by currach and a final journey of one and a half miles on foot to the graveside.

Home crafts were common, and island women were happy going to school on the island learning poetry, tales, songs and reading stories and legends. Most of them left school between the ages of twelve and fourteen years and former inhabitant Dominic Reilly remembers,

"When I was about fourteen the teacher said to myself and three others, "you are as well to finish now, because I couldn't teach you all any more. You're as good as myself now".

The islanders knew nothing of radios or television and kept in contact with the people of the outside world - the mainlanders - through newspapers and their frequent shopping expeditions. A former Gaelic League organiser in Co. Mayo, Colm O Gaora, paints a picture of Belmullet as a hive of activity in the 1920's;

Is ar an mbaile sin a bhiodh taraingt mbuintir Iorrais.
Bhiodh margadh ann gach uile sheachtain agus aonach
uair sa mhi, agus ba Gaeilge a chluinti o na daoine
a thagadh chucacht ba a Bhearla a labhraidh muintir na
bhaile leo.

Many of the Irish speakers O'Gaora refers to above, were island people 'in for the day out' and clearly their Irish was not appreciated in what O'Gaora calls the 'baile gallda' or foreign town. The language of Inis Ge gets special mention from Eamonn Mhac an Fhailigh who did a lengthy a study of the Irish in Erris. He says, "Characteristics of Inis Ge was a striking monotone which I did not observe elsewhere in Erris. The final syllable of an utterance unduly drawn out or lengthened". The younger islanders spoke English most grammatically if not very fluently. They had assimilated its intricacies before 'broken English' had time to encroach on their sea-girt fortress, but the tongue of their hearths and

hearts was Irish. Former residents of the islands alive today have said that the Irish being learned nowadays is barely recognisable to them because the Irish dialect has changed so much. However, they insist that they had the 'real Gaeilge'.

Conclusion

The industrious inhabitants of the Inis Ge islands were Irish of the Irish Folk, hospitable and intelligent, strong of limb and fine of feature and beyond everything, fearless seamen. Around the 1930's the islands, being too exhausted by a thousand years of 'sea-manure' or seaweed to grow potatoes any longer and the effect of the "twenty-nine drowning disaster on the islands, saw the demise of traditional life and were abandoned. With those of the North island they were settled in Glesh and Faulmore, others in Glenlara by the land commission. Naturally, the people were lonely leaving their beloved island, especially the old people. They were given four or five acres of land which offered them some occupational opportunity for the start of their new lives on the mainland. There was not much difference between life on island and the mainland in terms of work as people did the same work the islanders had done. Only now, there was not the continuous struggle against the sea to reach a priest, attend mass or go shopping. Aghleam school was extended to accommodate the children and in 1965 a new school was opened.

The little villages of Inis Ge now stand quite silent beside the anchorage, the roofs fallen in, the stones of the walls in the street.

In nearly sixty years it has lost all human origin. Today, the islands are home to countless ravens while the seals frolic in the harbour. The remains of the 'King's' house is now used as a pen where the farmers from the Erris area come in Summer time to dip or dose the sheep now kept on the island.

POTATO PICKING IN SCOTLAND

POTATO PICKING IN SCOTLAND

Between the years 1801 and 1921 8 million men, women and children emigrated from the shores of Ireland. The population stood at 6 million in 1801 and although it increased to 8 million in 1841, it fell to a dramatic 4.2 million by 1920's/'30's. Population statistics increased slightly over the following fifty or sixty years, to 4.9 million. One third of that number however, lived in Northern Ireland.

It was calculated that 57,000 harvest migrants ages between 16 - 35 years left Ireland for Scotland in 1841. Some of those who emigrated from Connaught were from the smallest farms while the majority were landless labourers. In fact one person in every six households in Co. Mayo was said to have travelled across the Irish Sea. Most travelled in search of seasonal work and found that on the potato farms of Scotland. Those who sought such work did not intend to remain permanently and as such this seasonal work was not a definite precursor to permanent emigration.

The decade leading up to 1851 witnessed a combination of deaths and emigration and a population decline of 20%. Emigration fed upon itself and the letters home with news of wages and food and a comfortable life persuaded others to follow them to Scotland. From 1851 to 1911 the population of Ireland decreased again from 6.5 million to 3.2 million.

Between 17% and 25% of the people of the North West especially Mayo, Galway and Sligo left Ireland between 1881 and '91. That was almost double the rate of the previous decade. Before World War I 3,000 emigrated from these counties while previously, in 1880 4,000 emigrated annually. These annual statistics were significant in that they were so large in proportion to the population figures of those counties. The province of Connaught was the chief source of supply to the Scottish potato farms. Emigrants were typically from Achill Island, the Mullet Peninsula and around Westport in Co. Mayo, and parts of Co. Sligo.

Living conditions for the "tattie howkers" were primitive, and official attention was drawn to the housing of the potato diggers in 1897. The inquiry was opened due to an outbreak of enteric fever on a farm in Stirlingshire. There were no sanitary conveniences and the ground near the bothy was used as a dump. The investigation proved fruitful in that a considerable improvement was reported in such areas from 1900

onwards. The contract that had existed between the potato merchant and the farmer had to be improved. The former arrangement obliged the farmer to provide accommodation for the workers while the merchant supplied the blankets, fuel and light. This agreement was being fulfilled but obviously not to a satisfactory level for human habitation.

A steady number of fresh Irish emigrants continued to stream into Scotland from 1901 onwards. Statistical evidence shows us that while there were 205,000 Irish-born in Scotland in 1901, 1951 saw a remarkable resemblance with 207,000 Irish-born residing in the Highlands. Infact 8% of all Irish-born emigrants went to Scotland.

“The Irish Agricultural Statistics Report” of 1905 divided labourers into three categories:-

1) Achill workers both male and female who were employed by potato merchants and farmers in Scotland. They were known as Achill workers but were from the whole Irish West coast, especially Belmullet and some from Aranmore, and the islands off the coast of Donegal. 1,500 - 1,600 Achill workers were reported to be residing in Scotland in 1905.

2) The Donegal men who worked as emergency labourers and harvesters.

3) The Connaught men who went to work in England.

The potato merchants in Scotland applied to the Ministry of Labour in 1918, to issue cards of exemption from military service to “Achill workers” to allow them to come to Scotland for the potato gathering in that year. This saw the introduction of agricultural cards which limited the emigrants to that type of work. The “Right Cards” were seen as those authorising work in the building and civil engineering industry.

As regards the women of Mayo in Scotland, those that emigrated to work in the “tattie” fields, intended to return home in late autumn, and to return the following season. They too travelled from Westport or Ballina to Glasgow at a cost of five shillings. Their tasks included planting potatoes, thinning turnips, weeding, harvesting and potato lifting.

The chores varied very little between the sexes. Women were expected to perform to the same standard as their male compatriots. The work was difficult for female and male alike but hundreds of Connaught folk continued to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers and take that lonely journey to the "tattie" fields of Scotland.

TALES OF A "TATTIE HOWKER" IN SCOTLAND

The trip to Scotland was one taken by thousands of rural Irish people in the 1940's. The only prerequisites for the job were a willing pair of hands and a strong back. Young and old, female and male alike, become members of the "tattie squads".

Much of the information on this section was collected from the memoirs of an emigrant. Sean O 'Ciaráin himself made that fateful journey from Belmullet to Scotland. In his book Farewell to Mayo he gives us a very concise description of his personal experience of the work, the workers, the conditions and the standard of living for an Irish potato gatherer in Scotland during the late 1940's.

Sean O 'Ciaráin's journey began on one of the three full buses leaving from Belmullet Square in June 1947. A few weeks previous to that the tattie gangers had been scouting around the Erris region looking for workers. Promises of a £4 weekly wage, accommodation and food, and the paid journey from Belmullet to Scotland, were all that was needed to entice people to leave a life of drudgery on the pittance of dole paid to them at home. The gangers however knew what lay ahead for those starting out for Scotland. The primitive living conditions and rough treatment was something that they were well used to. One of the perks for them was coming over annually to gather the squad, all expenses paid. Dressed in a navy blue suit and a hat, the gangers cut an impressive figure and this may have helped to allay any fears, and sway the unsure into making the final decision of joining the squad. The intention of the newly signed up "tattie howkers" was almost always to return home in the winter, but few managed to do so.

The journey which began by bus to Dublin was slow and depressing although a few tried to lift others' spirits by playing a tune on an accordian or by singing a song. Arriving in Dublin was something of a culture shock to the squad members as they were met by burly women forcefully trying to entice them to stay in their B. and B.'s. The bewildered Belmullet travellers were by now hungry and tired, and were experiencing the taste of the life yet to come.

The journey by boat to Glasgow was a first for most of the squad, and was a blot in the memory of most, as fatigue and depression were beginning to set in. The initial impression of O 'Ciaráin of Glasgow was not a pleasant one: A dismal, smoke blackened city of terraced houses and dirty, dark streets with young men standing on corners shouting abuse at the "Irish tattie howkers".

The Isle of Whithorn was the first village visited by the new workers although not the final one, as, led by necessity, workers lived an itinerant existence moving from farm to farm, and village to village. Living accommodation was similar on all farms and took the form of a large cow-house. Male and female workers all slept in the shed divided only by choosing opposite ends of the building. Married couples, some with children, had the exclusive use of the loft and cordoned off sections for themselves using potato sacks. Sleeping conditions were rough at first but were willingly accepted later after a long day gathering potatoes.

The work in "the bothy" began at 6 o'clock, and was difficult, drudging and monotonous. The foremen saw to it that the potato picking was done at a constant pace and not sporadically. Ten or twelve people toiled side by side in a row all day long, digging potatoes, two drills at a time with forks known as "tattie graips". The pickers followed the diggers and gathered the potatoes into baskets. These were then lifted and emptied into sacks by "timmers". Full sacks were sewn closed and loaded on to the tractor by two other men, the "loaders".

Cooking in the bothy was done over a charcoal fire in the open air. A homemade hotplate was fashioned out of two low brick walls with a fire between, and a strong mesh wire laid across the top. Each person contributed two shillings towards the purchase expense of essentials such as loaves and jam, tea and sugar.

A coupon method of rationing was in place at the time. Vegetables were impossible to get, apart from the abundance of free potatoes. A weekly allowance of two ounces of bacon was allotted to each man but the butchers would not sell it. They kept the meat for sale to better customers. Butter was also tightly rationed and the weekly two ounces would be eaten quickly, or stolen by others. Confectionery coupons were not as precious as wages tended not to allow such luxuries.

O 'Ciaráin was like hundreds of others who went to Scotland to work on the agricultural cards. These insurance cards allowed the "tattie howkers" to work as agricultural labourers only. The opportunity to acquire the "right cards" arose for Sean O 'Ciaráin, but because it would mean working under another man's name, he felt it illegal and declined the offer. The reality of the situation at the time was that hundreds of Irish labourers were doing the "Two-Card trick". Few were caught but those that were were penalised by fining and some were imprisoned. The "right cards" were those that allowed work in the Building and Civil Engineering sectors. O 'Ciaráin eventually acquired these cards legally, and worked more regular hours with stable pay and improved personal living conditions.

Accommodation remained a problem for this emigrant as he moved from boardhouse to boardhouse. Lodgings were simple with two men to a bed and often six men in one room. As accommodation was scarce in the cities there was no alternative but to remain in such conditions and to obey the landlady's rules.

Sean O 'Ciaráin spent his entire working life in Scotland, working initially as a potato picker but later in different cities in the building/engineering trade. He maintained an itinerant lifestyle before marrying in 1959 and choosing, because of the additional responsibilities, to seek a more settled work and life style. He remained in Scotland but with the Mac Donald Brothers: Nurserymen and Landscape Contractors. His career as an employee of the firm lasted twelve years, before he set up his own garden service.

Although O 'Ciaráin's story only brings us up to the late 1950's, we know that the traditional emigration trail to Scotland which began at the beginning of the 19th Century, still continues to the present day. Industrialisation and the introduction of machinery has suppressed the need for a supply of manual labour, but the impetus to emigrate remains strong.

The era of "tattie howkers" is gone but not forgotten. Emigration remains a fact of life for hundreds of Irish families and although the work may have changed, the negative effect on family life and on the social structure of Erris has not.

WHALING: ARRANMORE
BLACKSOD

WHALING

BACKGROUND: ARRANMORE WHALING COMPANY:

Whaling in the second half of the 19th Century was in decline, as the number of sperm and right whales were at an almost unworkable level.

A system was developed with money and determination, by Captain Svend Foyn, a Norwegian. As early as 1905, a fellow countryman Henrik Bertsen, acting as an agent for some of the Scottish Whaling Companies, came to stay in Co. Donegal and began quietly inquiring about a possible site for a whaling station.

Arthur McLaren, a Scottish Solicitor arrived at Burtonport (west coast of Donegal), in 1907. It became obvious that the Norwegians were determined to set up a whaling station on the neighbouring island of Arranmore. A site was purchased and together with the usual buildings, it was proposed to build a breakwater and a beacon on a submerged rock nearby. On the 16th of January 1908 the Arranmore Whaling Co. was incorporated at Edinburgh with McLaren as secretary.

Normally, clearance would have to be sought from the Board of Trade, who would in turn notify the relevant section of the Irish Civil Service, before any advance could be made on a building on Arranmore.

Concern among fisheries interests centred in Co. Donegal and the adjacent Co. Derry, while others merely opposed the Arranmore project on principle.

The reaction on Arranmore itself was somewhat different. McLaren visited the island in 1907 and pointed out the advantages. The most prevalent of these bring the £12,000 to be spent on the installation of the station, employment for the local people, and the building of a pier or a jetty. It should be noted here that the construction of a pier on Arranmore was something that the islanders had been begging the Government to provide for some time.

Two locals took a pro-whaling station petition and gathered one hundred signatures. Time took its toll and as agitation strengthened on the mainland, many of the islanders began to change sides.

An enquiry was called chaired by the Chief Inspector of Fisheries who opened the proceedings. He made it clear that the theory that whaling adversely affected other fishing had not been proven, and that there was in fact a balance of scientific evidence to the contrary. The pollution resulting from the blood of the slaughtered whales, was minimal. For economic reasons virtually every part of the whale's body and carcass was utilised, and would therefore not pollute the island or surrounding sea to any quantifiable consequence.

However, to be fair, it should be remembered that a large proportion of the local population remained indisputably anti-whaling. The hundred signatures collected by McLaren were in fact written in the same handwriting. Only four persons on the island of Arranmore could write their own names.

It was not until "the steamer" arrived at the island that the natives began to have second thoughts.

Days after the enquiry was closed the result became known: Plans for a station at Arranmore had been abandoned. Less than two weeks later it was revealed that permission had been granted to the Arranmore Whaling Co. for the building of a whaling station on South Inishkea, and island off Co. Mayo.

ARRANMORE WHALING STATION:

In 1907 the Congested Districts Board purchased the islands of Inishkea. Government files relating to the Arranmore Co. up to late 1908 are missing, but the bare facts have been recorded. Rev. Spotswood Green was aware that the negative reaction to a station in Donegal had resulted in the Norwegian retraction. He was however, keen to see the industry established elsewhere and was enticed by the prospect of added employment to relieve the plight of the islanders. All details were conditional on the minimal pollution and careful monitoring of the whaling project.

The Fisheries Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction had no real powers to prohibit whaling, and so they may have had to make their feelings known through the Board of Trade. The Board would in turn have had to have some strong legal reason for refusing a certificate. The Fisheries Branch had the authority to introduce bye-laws to regulate fishing in general and some were enacted in early May. These bye-laws prohibited the shooting of

whales within a three mile radius of the coast, or further north that Downpatrick Head in Co. Mayo

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WHALING STATION:

The station was not actually situated on South Inishkea itself, but on the tidal islet of Rusheen. Rusheen is about four and a half acres in size and the plant lay on the east coast of the islet.

The Arranmore Whaling Co. applied to the Board of Trade for the construction of a flensing plane. Three powerful steamwinches were included, to haul up the carcass for flensing. A wooden pier or jetty was needed, and a large shed to hold the boilers. Two dryers were housed in another shed, steam-powered elevators for oil extraction (from meat and blubber), a mill for crushing bones, a forge, a fire-house with boilers for steam. Also, quarters for the working men had to be taken care of.

Staff were employed to erect more buildings at the close of the season, and some additions to the machinery were made in the following year, complying with the newly introduced legislation.

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL:

Shares were allotted privately, with Christensen and Lund as the Chief Directors of the Arranmore Whaling Station.

12,000 shares were issued at £1 each. Fifty-eight parties had been allotted 11,889 shares by 30th June 1910. The directors together with Petersen and McLaren, had a small majority holding and thus complete control over the whole business. This is an important point in view of subsequent financial manipulation.

In late 1909 Captain Bruun left and set up his own station on the nearby Mullet Peninsula in Blacksod Bay. Perhaps if Cpt. Bruun had had some part in the administration of the Arranmore Co., its history would have been a different and more happy one. It was said by James Fairley that "...the Inishkea outfit suffered from indifferent management". Erling Lund seems to have had little part in the day-to-day running of the station.

The site at Rusheen, though snapped up for £100 was a hasty purchase and far from ideal. It turned out that it was only possible to bring a whale up the slip for two hours on either side of high water, (ie) about eight hours out of twenty-four. The second disadvantage of the site was simply that the station was on a small and remote island, and the Arranmore Co. was thus subject to the whims of the natives, who considered it fair game. This became evident in the subsequent years.

No sperm whales (deep water species) were caught in the first season, though several whales were taken within ten miles of the station. The total catch in the first season was 77 whales.

The annual catches of whales by the Arranmore Whaling Co.
(Sources 1908, 1909, 1910-13)

Year	Blue	Fin	Humpback	Sei	Right	Sperm	Total
1908	19	21	1	31	5	-	77
1909	27	56	-	9	5	5	102
1910	5	32	1	21	4	2	65
1911	4	57	-	-	-	7	68
1912	6	12	-	-	-	8	26
1913	5	40	1	-	-	3	49

(Fairley, Table 2, P. 148)

All of the products from the Irish Stations were said to have been shipped to Bowling in Scotland.

THE WHALE FISHERIES (IRELAND) ACT 1908:

Despite the purchase of Rusheen, objections to whaling were still rife. Members of the local government in Mayo debated the issue and they reproached the Congested Districts Board for their recklessness. Aggravation continued until the end of 1910.

The bill was published late in April and passed in August, despite Horatio Todd's last minute attempt to appear before the Privy council. The Whale Fisheries Act of 1908 did not come into force until 1st January 1909. The Arranmore Co. was not affected in its first season. According to the Act, whaling without a licence was unlawful. Prospective whalers had to notify local newspapers and state their intentions. All objections were to be lodged within a fortnight of the appearance of such advertisement.

The fee for licensing depended on the number of steamers used; £200 for three, £150 for two, and £100 for one catcher.

Bye-laws issued in 27th July, 1910 were purely for the prevention of pollution. Whales had to be dismembered properly, and any solid part of whale could not be returned to pass into the sea. Neither was mooring, temporarily or otherwise, permitted anywhere but close to a station.

The Arranmore Co. advertised its intention to obtain a licence, and applied for one. An enquiry was called for 23rd March 1909 at the Railway Hotel, Mulranny, Co. Mayo. For some reason Todd misunderstood the regulations and failed to lodge a written objection within the stipulated two week period. The Commissioners therefore agreed to hear him, only if the representative of the Arranmore Company did not offer any opposition. This was rather too much to expect. Dublin could not be contacted, and the right to a licence was formally granted. The business closed in a cursory attempt at mollifying Todd with a promise to reconvene sometime, should objections prove admissible.

"... With such able men in the relevant section of the Civil Service and the easy victory over the issue of the first licence, the continuation of whaling off Ireland was never thereafter in doubt".

(Fairley, P. 151)

It is understandable that there was a loss in the first year (1908), considering the initial capital outlay and late start that year. However, one would expect that the directors would be prepared for the 1909 season.

The fee for licensing for two years was paid on 30th April, and McLaren was assured by the authorities that subsequent endorsement for a further vessel would be no problem. Fishing began early in May. A third steamer was chartered by the Arranmore Company and arrived on 2nd July. This seems rather inefficient.

TROUBLES WITH THE ISLANDERS:

In 1909 difficulties with the islanders came to a head. While the figure never fell below twenty-six, thirty locals were employed full-time and forty at peak seasonal times. All the local workmen were from South Inishkea. The Irish hands were paid 15 shillings (75p) per week, at the beginning of the season. They did very little for that wage. However, the company were aware that they were at the mercy of their employees. At the end of August a strike was called for better pay. This withdrawal of labour was successful and the wage was increased to £1 per week. After the initial burst of wholehearted toil, the islanders lapsed into their former lazy ways.

THE DEMISE OF THE ARRANMORE WHALING COMPANY:

In the latter part of 1909 there had been an increase in opposition to whaling off Ireland, largely because Lorentz Bruun's newly formed Blacksod Whaling Company was granted a licence to start fishing in 1910.

Due to the location of this operation, (ie) on the mainland, a storm of objection was raised from various, individuals and bodies, including the Mayo County Council. Counsellors it was said had very little time for whaling, less for foreigners and none at all for Central Government when it "usurped their prerogative". Mayo fisheries had been ruined while the islanders on Inishkea and the people of the nearby mainland found the stench unbearable.

Arnt Olesen, a crew member of the 'Svend Foyn' was very ill. Somehow 'beriberi' was diagnosed although it turned out he died from heart disease. The idea of 'beriberi' wedged itself in Dr. McHale's mind, and the Belmullet Council were informed. Newspaper coverage scandalised

the unknown disease and it was claimed that the Norwegians had brought "a plague among the people".

At this stage; 1910, Captain Bruun had his own business at Blacksod, while the Arranmore Company only had the 'Erling' for use and linked two additional steamers. Lobster and mackerel fishing was reported to have been satisfactory around south Inishkea; but the summer was stormy and the catch of sixty-five whales was well down on that of the previous year.

Although the 1911 season was bad for the Blacksod station, it turned out to be disastrous for the Arranmore Company, which landed only 26 whales. A meeting was held on the 27th of November and it was decided that the company should go into liquidation again. The company was dissolved completely in November 1913, with Christensen as the major shareholder.

A report made by a fisheries inspector gives us a final glimpse of the Rusheen station in September 1913. He found the station dirty, greasy and inefficient in comparison to the Blacksod Bay station.

"... it is still rather dirty compared to Blacksod Bay station. There were three whales on the plane.... one being flensed.... The manager said that it was not their habit to leave a flensed whale on the unguarded part of the plane but that, owing to a wake on the island, all the natives, as is their habit, had knocked off work for three days, and consequently they were short of hands...."

(Fairley, P. 169)

A meeting of shareholders was held on the 23rd of December, and it was decided that the business should fold. The equipment was dismantled before the end of 1914, with the islanders having liberally helped themselves to the moveables, including even the corrugated iron off the roofs. Machinery and boilers were sold off to a company in Spain, although most were not removed until after the war.

On the 4th of January, 1915, the Arranmore Whaling Company officially ceased to exist.

THE BLACKSOD WHALING COMPANY

The main man behind the Blacksod Whaling Company was one Lorentz Bruun and it was he who obtained a site for the station in August 1908. Some may be surprised by that early date but it was felt that Bruun had been considering a business of his own long before the arrival of the Blacksod Company.

The site for the station was carefully chosen and it was decided that it was more time-saving, efficient and economically viable to situate the station on the mainland. The main advantage was the welcome source of employment for the local labour force, but the careful management of the station by Lorentz Bruun resulted in a course of efficiency and cleanliness and a policy of constant improvement, which must have contributed to the overall success of the whaling plant.

Foerinyeo Bay, on the south side of Ardelly Point at Blacksod Bay, and on the eastern side of the Mullet Bay was deemed the most appropriate site for the station. The land had been owned by local landlord Denis Bingham. Buying the site from a local man proved a shrewd move. Bingham became a go-between and acted for both Captain Bruun and the locals. Infact it was of mutual benefit for all concerned. Bingham himself was thankful for the additional income from the station and had 200 shares in the company. Bruun and Bingham were not only business associated but friends, both with much to gain from the friendship of the other.

Lorentz Bruun, while being a shrewd businessman was also a man thought of with great respect and affection, and it was felt that this added to his success in management. His personal charm added to his popularity among the work force, the locals and in time even amongst his most ardent former opponents.

As regards licensing, a similar scenario to that of the Arranmore Whaling Company occurred on Blacksod. A licence was sought from the Fisheries Branch in 1908 and later, permission was sought from the Board of Trade for the construction of a slipway, pier and flensing plane. Letters of objection did not arrive until November and they were the main reason that permission from the Board of Trade was deferred. An enquiry was called for the 9th July at Belmullet Courthouse. Horatio Todd was the main objector and said that neither he nor his clients had seen the application notices in the newspapers. It evolved that Todd was deliberately delaying the process to test the previous inspectors'

ruling at Mulranny (re - the Arranmore Station). To save face and to avoid any further indignation, Todd eventually stepped down from the licence debate.

The granting of a licence was also opposed, chiefly by the nearby fisheries, but also by the directors of the non-existent railway. Lorentz Bruun employed a barrister to represent him and Swaine was merciless in ridiculing the opposition. With regard to opposition by the local fisheries he put forward the case that the loss of fish, or destruction of oyster and mussel beds, was grossly exaggerated. Far less damage was being incurred than was stated by the locals. The second objection was a bizarre one. The building of a hotel had been proposed at Blacksod Point. The representation of the Colony - Blacksod Railway Company believed that prospective customers of the hotel would find the whaling process and products of the work, offensive. This theory was laughed out of the inquiry. Both the railway and hotel were only at the proposal stage, and their hypothetical scenarios were just that: hypothetical.

A licence was issued on 25th August 1909 and a fee of £100 was promptly paid by the company. The Whaling Station was incorporated as a private company on 17th February 1909 and 10,000 shares were issued at £1 each. These "went public" in December and the number of shares was doubled. The cost of the machinery was substantial with the steamers and plant costing in the region of £18,500. When the whaling station began operating in 1910 there were sufficient finances to meet the initial expenses. Accounts of the company showed that by the close of 1910, all 20,000 shares had been sold. The directors of the Blacksod Company were Lorentz Bruun and two Dublin solicitors (Henry Hare and Herbert McClelland). Shares were divided as such:-

Lorentz Bruun:	2,675
Hare/McClelland:	100 each
Jonsberg Private Bank:	1,350
134 other subscribers	≥ 500 each

The Bruun family held 22% of the capital which illustrates the controlling interest of those family members and friends in the whaling company.

On 18th January 1910, the Blacksod Company's licence was endorsed for two steamers and the extra £50 paid in the renowned Bruun prompt fashion. Bruun had sold the "Carsten Bruun", later known as "Fell", after he broke from the Arranmore Company. Tonsberg was the venue for the building of the new "Carsten Bruun", which was delivered in 1910.

Larger and more efficient than her predecessor the "Carsten Bruun" was a perfect example of the company's policy of constant improvement. "Erris" was the second catcher built for the company, but it was not until 1914 that the company commissioned the third vessel; the "Vilma". This catcher was the same one as chartered by the Arranmore Company in earlier in years. Rev. Spotswood Green reported that. "The company seem to be sparing no money in making the station up-to-date in every respect".

(James Fairley, P. 177)

From the viewing angle of the sea, the station appeared as a scatter of timber sheds, with the greasy steam rising out of the boiler-house chimney and guano dryer. Infact, much more was involved than was initially observed. The buildings were centred on the flensing plane and the slip sloped out into the bay, echoed only by the jetty stretching even further out. Finally, there were the coal stores which held the fuel for the three catchers. Coaling the whaling steamers was a long and arduous task assigned to crew and shore-workers alike.

The division of labour for other tasks was much more clear-cut. When a whale was moored the men towed it to the base of the slipway by rowboat. Steel-wire ropes and chains were used to drag the body up the incline of the slipway. After washing down the whale the body had to be cut up into workable sections. Using a blubber knife the flenser made had a dozen cuts through the blubber, each running the length of the body. A concise description of the work carried out and of the products of the whale's body may be found in James Fairley's

Irish Whales and Whaling

Although more Norwegians made up the staff numbers initially, approximately twenty foreigners continued on at Blacksod with the local men, who had by now been trained into the business. From 1911 onwards, depending on the workload and on seasonal changes, there were about thirty Irishmen working on the station. Denis Bingham paid the Irish hands with the rate of pay depending on the nature of work done. A figure quoted was at least half-a-crown (12 1/2p) per day. There was also a bonus system in action from 1920 onwards. A typical day for the station's labourers began at 5.30am with coffee and a roll. Work began at 6am with breakfast from 8 - 8.30am. Dinner hour was at noon and work commenced again until a coffee break at 3 - 3.30pm. Work finished at 6pm with supper at 6.30pm. As can be seen the workers were treated and fed well despite the long working hours. As with the scrupulously hygienic working conditions, the men were well

washed and changed before dining for evening meal. Barring the fresh meat purchased from local butcher "Walsh", all of the food was shipped in from Norway. Meat salted in barrels, flour, bread and pastries, coffee and tinned milk were all imported from Norway. Spare time was spent carving walking sticks from bone and whale jaws and selling them locally. In later years the Norwegians visited the local bar on a Sunday.

Bruun rarely arrived at Blacksod but when he did it was only for a short visit before leaving again on one of the Scottish tramp steamers. Work and general management was running smoothly in his absence so there was little or no reason for Bruun to remain at Blacksod permanently, even if his other business ventures allowed him the luxury to do so.

Inspectors from the Fisheries Branch repeatedly reported the favourable conditions and efficiency of the whaling station. An investigation carried out between September 1909 and September 1911 on the possible pollution by the station reported negligible effects on the surrounding area.

In September 1910 due to an absence of food in the sea until too late, Edward Holt remarked that the first season had been disappointing. The capture of two sperm whales late on in the season, saved the company from severe financial difficulty. 1911 saw a slight improvement in the season's catch but did little to alleviate the financial discrepancies in the company's books.

The following year was a seriously disastrous one, with catches of an all time low, but compensated by the more prosperous 1913. Eighty nine whales were landed in 1914 which was a record attributed to the closure of the Arranmore Whaling Company.

By December 1914 the First World War was raging and it was decided by the Admiralty that all British fishing vessels were to have exclusively British crews. This put a halt to whaling around the British Isles. However, directors of the Blacksod Company agreed that there was no immediate panic as the financial situation was capable of standing up to the unspecified period of inaction. Thus, dividends were withheld from shareholders.

By 1915 it was remarked that the station had not paid a dividend to their shareholders in three years.

When all fishing ceased, the company had to decide either to have its licence cancelled, or to continue to shell out a minimum fee of £100 every year. Management was spared that decision as the Admiralty took over the station as a petrol base, and remained on the site until the end of the war.

During this time, the catchers belonging to Blacksod were quickly disposed of in two stages. They were purchased by Russia for a sum of over £11,000. The liquidation of assets now almost complete meant that shareholders could finally be paid some dividends. This amounted to a sum of 10 shillings per share.

World War I ceased in 1918, but whaling was not resumed until February 6th 1920. The new enterprise was known as the Northern Seas Company (Akties Nordhavet).

Because Nordhavet ran its business from the Blacksod Whaling Company's station, it meant that expenses and profits had to be divided equally. Due to financial difficulties, issue around disposal of waste material, inefficiency, and inconsistencies in management procedure, the company was constantly changing its structure, and catchers were swapped or sold frequently.

On 21st February 1923 a large portion of the station was burned down. Suspicions arose, and many at the time said that arson had been the cause of the fire. Catchers were sold off and by June 21st 1923 the company went into liquidation.

Captain Bruun died on Christmas Day, and with him died the Company. A further complication involved compensation and negotiations continued until 1932, before the company was finally laid to rest.

Only traces of the foundations remain today; traces of the Whaling Station itself, but also a reminder to all of the history and politics that surrounded the contentious issue of whaling off the North Mayo Coast.

