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To my parents, with love, John

List of Abbreviations

BG/DNGR = Board of Guardians (Dungarvan)

BG/LISM = Board of Guardians (Lismore)

BPP = British Parliamentary Papers

CE = Cork Examiner

CMA = Chronicle and Munster Advertiser

DNB = Dictionary of National Biography

FJ = Freeman's Journal

ILN = Illustrated London News

NA/BG = National Archives, Board of Guardians (Lismore Master's Journal)

NA/RLFC = National Archives, Relief Commission Papers

NLI = National Library of Ireland

PP/CHLY = Chearnley Papers

WC = Waterford Chronicle

WF = Waterford Freeman

WM = Waterford Mail

WMr = Waterford Mirror

WN = Waterford News

Introduction

This thesis proposes to look at the Lismore poor law union, from its establishment in 1839 and the opening of the union workhouse in 1842, to the coming of the potato blight in late 1845, to the onset of famine and beyond. The union will be placed in a regional and political context, and this will necessitate a consideration of the area in the early nineteenth century. As a result, chapter one will address some social and demographic questions. This chapter will argue, basically, that a population growth over the 1821–31 decade in Lismore parish entailed a rise in the numbers of those chiefly employed in agriculture. Cottiers and agricultural labourers dominated this cohort and, as this implied an increase in the practice of tillage farming, subdivision and earlier marriages would have resulted, at least to an extent. Yet the chapter warns against a straightforward linking of subdivision and tillage on the one hand, and earlier marriages and an increased birth rate on the other. While such a link was often present, others factors, such as soil quality and tenant security, were also important. I will also argue that, in the wider Lismore area, the percentages chiefly employed in tillage agriculture were falling in the rural parishes of Tallow and Cappoquin, but continuing to rise in the rural portion of the Lismore and Mocollop parish, by 1841. As West Waterford generally underwent significant rises in its agricultural sector over the 1830s, it would appear that consolidation of holdings was already taking place, and cottiers and labourers were, even at this early stage, being slowly squeezed out.

During the eighteen-twenties, it will be seen that Lismore town experienced a diversification in its employment patterns, with agriculture and trade/manufacture being eclipsed by 'other pursuits'. The chief alternative work in this category was that of 'servants', and, numerically, women dominated this group. The employment

of a considerable number of women as servants could, as much as subdivision, have aided earlier marriages as these women would become more 'eligible', especially where a dowry was required.

The chapter also looks at housing statistics and literacy levels. Startlingly high levels of illiteracy were recorded throughout County Waterford. In addition, the Lismore area experienced greater housing pressures by 1841 than any other area considered. These factors, if considered together with the situation wherein thousands of tenants dwelt on marginal, mountainous lands with no leases, and so no security, would all seem to suggest that the general social conditions of the area immediately prior to the Famine demand revision.

In chapter two, the background to what became the poor law is sketched. Attention is given to the 1833–6 poor inquiry, which rejected the extension of the English and Welsh workhouse system to Ireland. The inquiry recommended, instead, a massive financial commitment on the state's part to alleviating poverty, and the financial, political and social reasons for the government's decision to reject these recommendations are considered. The chapter also seeks to explain the operation of the poor law system at both central and local levels. Having contextualised the poor law system, the workhouse regime is explored. The administrative tasks of the Lismore guardians, and the considerable financial and logistical obstacles they faced even before the Famine also receive attention. These included an inability to maintain what they considered a hopelessly flawed building in any sort of acceptable condition because of financial constraints, and a seemingly endless battle with local suppliers over the quality of food being delivered to the workhouse.

The third chapter considers the coming of *phytophthora infestans* to Ireland, and the misdiagnoses of this disease. Some of the proposed remedies are outlined, as

well as the 1845 Lindley/Playfair/Kane investigation into the nature and extent of the blight. The severe levels of potato losses throughout the Lismore and Dungarvan unions from late 1845, and the consequences to labourers, cottiers and workhouse inmates of such losses are explored. This chapter also compares and contrasts the various responses of local landlords. Again, consideration is given to the difficulties facing the Lismore board of guardians in procuring supplies for the workhouse as the staple food all but disappeared. The refusal of the central authorities to release Indian meal to the union meant that food had to be bought at inflated prices. Yet the union's purchasing power was also severely restricted under the ideology of political economy.

In 1846 administrative pettiness on the part of the central authorities and personal animosities between local officials hampered relief efforts in the Lismore area. Also, central 'donations' were granted only in one of two ways, either as a sum equivalent to local subscriptions or as a loan for the full amount of projected relief expenditure, all of which was repayable. This meant that those areas most in need got least. Initially this favoured an area like Lismore, which was not particularly badly off when compared to areas in the west and south-west of Ireland, or even when compared to the neighbouring Dungarvan union. Yet, as we shall see, funds provided by the government rarely matched what was raised locally. As local funds dwindled, and the public works failed to materialise, the situation deteriorated dramatically. Late 1846 and 1847 saw horrendous levels of destitution and misery in the Lismore union, as people from the town and surrounding country flocked to the workhouse, only to be turned away.

Inside the workhouse, as chapter four shows, overcrowding became a matter of concern for the first time in early 1847. In April of the previous year Indian meal

was substituted for oatmeal in the workhouse diet. The soup had no meat, and the potatoes were, more often than not, inedible. The constantly unhygienic state of the Lismore workhouse privies, the lack of adequate ventilation and cooking facilities, and even the absence of sufficient kiln heat to dry the wheat, all meant that life inside the workhouse, grim at the best of times, had become intolerable. In 1847 typhus broke out among the inmates. Fever also spread to the workhouse staff tending to the sick. The monks of Mount Melleray, who had provided gratuitous relief to the poor during the years 1847 and 1848, were no longer able to bear this financial burden, and their relief efforts collapsed in 1849. Also, the three-month period from early May to late July 1849 witnessed an intense and lethal cholera epidemic afflict the area. This disease had, in the Lismore area, a fifty-eight per cent fatality rate. Overcrowding in the workhouse facilitated the spread of fever, while sub-standard food led to dysentery and diarrhoea. Ultimately, the hasty closing of the Cappoquin, Tallow and Mount Rivers fever hospitals and the concentration of patients in the Lismore fever hospital arrested the decline in fever levels that had been taking place. The strain put on the over-elaborate age and gender segregation system within the workhouse made it more difficult to divide people into 'healthy' and 'ill' categories. The contact between initially healthy inmates and fever convalescents in the probationary wards facilitated the introduction of disease into the main workhouse.

The concluding chapter begins with a short 'inmate population' consideration for the 1843–47 period. The theme is taken up for the 1849–51 years later on. While both of these could have been subsumed into Chapter Four, it seemed more proper to place them where the wider 1841–51 population changes for the Lismore area are dealt with. Such an inclusion also facilitated the attempt to sketch in some details for the years 1847–49 in relation to the area.

Chapter One: The Regional Demographic Landscape

Part I: Population

In order to gain an insight into social conditions in what became the poor law union of Lismore in the late 1830s, it is necessary to consider the County Waterford area demographically over the course of the early- to mid- nineteenth century. In this chapter the attempt will be made, chiefly by means of William Shaw Mason's *Statistical Account, or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, as well as the censal returns of 1821, 1831, and 1841, to uncover and represent, in particular, the Lismore (town and parish) demographic situation before the Famine. The demographic landscape of Lismore and the west Waterford area in general will be viewed from the perspectives of population size, population breakdown by age, gender, occupations, and housing conditions.

According to Mason's work, published in three volumes between 1813 and 1819, there were 1,569 residents in Lismore town. This was much less than the populations recorded for the towns of Cappoquin (1,746), Tallow (2,258), or Dungarvan (4,930).[1] Sadly, this source provides no statistics at a town or parish level for a breakdown of population by gender. In this regard, the first truly 'statistical' account, as far as the west Waterford area is concerned, was the 1821 census. Herein, population was dealt with using the criteria of gender, age, and occupations. In 1821 Lismore town, and by far the greater part of Lismore parish, lay in the barony of

[1] William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account, or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, Vol. III (Dublin, Faulkner-Press, 1819), p. xxxix.

Coshmore, in County Waterford. The town and parish of Cappoquin, along with the parish of Mocollop, completed the barony.

According to the 1821 census, the County Waterford part of Lismore parish contained 7,075 persons, breaking down into 3,474 males and 3,601 females (forty-nine and fifty-one per cent respectively).[2] This parochial gender equilibrium was reflected within the town itself, where out of a population of 2,330, again forty-nine per cent (1,133 persons) were male, with females accounting for fifty-one per cent (1,197 persons). Ten years later the Lismore parish population had risen from 7,075 to 8,807 persons, a rise of roughly twenty-four per cent on the 1821 figure.[3] Such an increase was more or less reflected in terms of gender, with males showing a twenty-three per cent increase and females a twenty-six per cent population growth over the 1821–31 period.

The overall Lismore town population grew by twenty-four per cent, from 2,330 in 1821 to 2,894 a decade later. A similar growth-rate held for the rural parish, within which males and females again experienced similar population increases of roughly twenty-five per cent over the period in question. In the town the number of males increased at a slower rate than did that of females. The 1,363 town-dwelling males recorded in 1831 constituted a twenty per cent increase on the 1821 figure of 1,133 males. By contrast, the recorded number of females rose by twenty-eight per cent, from 1,197 in 1821 to 1,531 ten years later.[4]

How can we explain this trend? The regularity of the overall rises when considered either by gender or in absolute terms would seem to point to a simple

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[2] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns of the Population of Ireland', *Census of Ireland 1821*, British Parliamentary Papers [hereafter BPP] 1824 [577] XXII, 411. p. 218.
[3] Calculated from 'Abstract of Answers and Returns under the Population Acts', *Census of Ireland 1831*, BPP 1833 [442] XXXIX 45. pp. 204–5.
[4] Ibid.

natural growth of population over time. Yet a reading of the censal data for 1821 and 1831 yields another clue. In the rural parish of Lismore, those chiefly employed in agriculture rose from sixty-five to sixty-nine per cent over the decade in question. This meant that, in 1831, out of 1,754 persons employed, 1,211 worked mainly in agriculture, as opposed to 723 out of 1,115 ten years earlier.

Unfortunately, the 1821 returns do not give us any detailed breakdown in terms of agricultural employment. Nevertheless, it is evident that, at least by 1831, agricultural labourers were numerically dominant. Of the 1,211 persons chiefly employed in agriculture in that year, seventy-four persons (or six per cent) were 'occupiers employing labourers', 441 persons (thirty-six per cent) were 'occupiers not employing labourers', while the remaining 696 persons (fifty-eight per cent) were 'labourers employed in agriculture'. Given an increase in the number of those practising agriculture over the 1821–31 period, and the preponderance of agricultural labourers within this group, it could seem that a considerable degree of subdivision and earlier marriages had taken place in rural Lismore during the 1820s. In addition, if, as Mokyrs claims, Waterford was the county most dependent on potatoes before the Famine, and if potato dependency equated even roughly with poverty, as Ó Gráda claims, this reinforces our position.[5] This is, basically, that an expanding agricultural sector in rural Waterford was numerically dominated by labourers. These labourers would have practised tillage farming.

While tillage farming may, in some cases, have encouraged subdivision and smaller holdings, earlier marriages and higher birth rates did not necessarily follow. On Arthur Kiely-Ussher's Ballysaggartmore estate, improving tenants who brought

[5] Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800–1850* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 271, and Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after*

previously marginal land into cultivation were 'rewarded' by being forced off this land and located further up the mountain, and onto even more wasteland.[6] Yet these tillage farmers did not unduly increase in number, and in 1840 the rugged mountainous area of Ballysaggartmore remained by far the least populated of all the union's electoral divisions. On the other hand, the generally more fertile Lismore electoral division, with its larger holdings adjacent to the town, recorded the third greatest population pressures of the nine divisions (after Tallow and Kilcockin).[7]

This is not to attack the claims of either Mokyr or Ó Gráda, and a local exception does not invalidate a general observation.[8] On the contrary, while Lismore and Ballysaggartmore did not fit the paradigm of potato dependency and tillage agriculture leading ultimately to small holdings and higher birth rates, others did. If we look at the 1841 ordnance survey map for the area, we can see that, around Lismore town, allotments tended to be of appreciable size. These areas included Ballymoodranagh to the south-west, Ballyea West on the town's immediate eastern side, and Ballyrafter Flats, which lay north-east of Lismore. Once we move into and even beyond the more mountainous and forested area of Ballyrafter further north, we see much smaller, and even more numerous land divisions. The areas of Sruh West, Glentaun West, and parts of Cooldrishogue provide evidence of this. Looking further

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the Famine: *Explorations in Economic History, 1800–1925*, 2nd edn. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 14–15.

[6] *Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland* [hereafter *Devon Commission*] (Dublin, Alexander Thom, 1845), Part III, witness 810, q. 14, p. 177.

[7] Calculated from *Sixth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners with Appendices A, B, C, D & E* (London, C. Knight and Co., 1840), App. E, No. 8, Tabular Returns – Ireland: Particulars of Unions in Ireland, p. 478.

[8] Indeed both these authors allow for the possibility of a declining rate of population growth before the Famine. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p. 132, and Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after the Famine*, p. 132. See also Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1989), p. 6.

eastward from the town we see that the larger territorial units of Ballyea West gave way to the considerably smaller holdings of Ballyea East and Kilbree East[9].

What can be forwarded for the Lismore Poor Law Union is, basically, a loose version of the Crotty thesis.[10] The presence of relatively larger plots around the immediate Lismore town area in the early 1840s would suggest that consolidation, and probably pastoral farming, were practised on a reasonable scale before the Famine.[11] At the same time, the numerous small, mountainous and marginal plots are evidence that tillage and subdivision were also widely practised, but on a different quality of soil. On Kiely-Ussher's estate, what had traditionally been commonages were eventually cut away and enclosed, with the result that tenants were confined to their holdings and those that had animals were deprived of access to grazing. The placing of an access charge to these grazing areas of 2*s* for a cow, and 4*s* for a sheep certainly would not encourage the consolidation of holdings or development of pastoral farming.[12] Given the sparse population of Ballysaggartmore in particular, subdivision and early marriages were probably already in decline by the early 1840s. Where tenants enjoyed a reasonable degree of security, potato-dependency may have contributed to subdivision, earlier marriages and population-growth, but where tenants enjoyed no security, but were being pushed into a more and more precarious existence, it did not.

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[9] Ordnance Survey of Ireland, sheets 20–22.

[10] Raymond Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production: Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, Cork University Press, 1966), p. 36–41.

[11] Edward Wakefield underlined the point that pastoral farming, fertile soil and low population did not necessarily equal prosperity. In 1812 he noted, while passing through part of the duke of Devonshire's estate between Youghal and Dungarvan, 'a condition disgraceful to a civilized and cultivated country', which was 'grazed by a few half-starved cattle'. Nevertheless, a not exactly over-populated land supported a people that 'exhibited every appearance of wretchedness and misery'. Edward Wakefield's *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (1812), extract reproduced in T. N. Fewer (ed.), *I was a Day in Waterford: an Anthology of Writing about Waterford City and County from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Callaghane, Co. Waterford, Ballylough Books, 2001), p. 71.

[12] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 810, qq. 12, 32, pp. 177, 178.

In terms of Lismore town, however, how do we account for a population rise of roughly one quarter when agriculture as a chief pursuit dropped from thirty per cent at the beginning of the 1820s to nine per cent at the end? Here, the local economy changed from being divided fairly evenly between agriculture, trade/manufacture and 'others', to one where both agriculture and trade/manufacture declined, while those engaged in 'other pursuits' accounted for over two thirds of the town's employed population. Interestingly, just as farm labourers dominated agriculture in the countryside, so servants and non-agricultural labourers dominated the 'others' category in the town. Servants accounted for 190 out of 450 persons (or forty-two per cent) of this category, non-agricultural labourers for 185 persons (forty-one per cent), and bankers and other professional people for fifty-one persons, (eleven per cent). The remaining six per cent or so were male servents twenty years of age or over.[13]

Within the 'servants' category females predominated. Even if we include male servants under twenty years of age, the 136 females still accounted for seventy-two per cent of all the town's servants, while twenty-eight per cent of servants consisted of fifty-four males. The contention here is that a large workforce dominated numerically by (female) servants would draw girls from rural areas to seek employment in the town. There was, it is to be suspected, some common family membership between those rural males who found their chief employment in agriculture and women who found employment as domestic servants in the town. Unfortunately, the complete lack of detailed occupational data within broad categories in 1821 precludes any comparison with the 1831 returns; nevertheless, it seems logical enough to reason that

[13] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns under the Population Acts, Ireland', *Census of Ireland 1831*, p. 205.

a relatively large paid workforce of (predominantly female) domestic servants would have made these women eligible for marriage at an earlier age, especially where a dowry was required.

While one can compare Lismore town in 1821 or 1831 demographically to Lismore town in 1841, a parish-to-parish comparison over time is rendered highly problematic by the amalgamation of the Lismore and Mocollop parishes in the 1841 returns.[14] It is possible to estimate that the 1841 parish of Lismore and Mocollop approximated to the individual parishes of Lismore, Mocollop, and Cappoquin ten years earlier. Proceeding along these lines one arrives at an overall increase in the Lismore and Mocollop rural parish population of nineteen per cent between 1831 and 1841.[15] In gender terms, the male population increased by twenty-two per cent and the female population by eighteen per cent over the course of the 1830s.[16]

Yet caution is required; our calculations assume a straightforward amalgamatiōn in the 1841 census of what were essentially three individual parishes in 1831. While an overall population increase of about nineteen per cent does not seem implausible, it would still be a significant increase on the rate of population growth over the previous decade. From 1821 to 1831 a similarly-amalgamated territory would have recorded a seven per cent population increase. Yet even such an increase in growth-rate may be accepted when we consider that the rural part of Tallow parish

[14] *Census of Ireland 1841*, BPP 1843 [459] LI, 319. pp. 246–7.
[15] While Ballyduff town, with a population of 302 persons was treated distinctly from the rural portion of the Lismore and Mocollop parish in 1841, I have included it as part of the rural population, as was obviously done in the 1831 census.
[16] Calculated from 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 218–9, and 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5.

(which recorded less than one per cent growth between 1821 and 1831) showed a population growth of almost eleven per cent over the subsequent decade.[17]

Within the Dungarvan poor law union, Dungarvan's rural parish would appear to have almost doubled its population over the 1831–41 period. Even the previous decade had recorded a relatively high forty-six per cent population increase. However the enormity of these percentage figures can be misleading. Dungarvan town accounted for most of the parish of Dungarvan. When the rural parish is considered alone, the figures are relatively small. As a result even moderate increases would seem large when expressed as a percentage of a small base population. In addition, it appears that the town of Abbeyside was included in the 1841 Dungarvan parish figures, but was treated separately in the previous censuses. Its inclusion in the 1831 census would, as Table 1.1 below suggests, modify the overall Dungarvan increase significantly. The apparent doubling of the parish's population would now appear as a relatively modest eight per cent increase.

The figures below were arrived at by subtracting the smaller figure from the larger to get a headcount difference, and expressing this difference as a percentage of the earlier figure. For example, in 1821 the total number of persons in the entire Lismore parish (rural and town combined) stood at 7,075 persons. By 1831 this had risen to 8,807. This increase of 1,732 people represents a 24.48 per cent of the 1821 figure. Rounding to the nearest whole number yields twenty-four per cent. Conversely, on the 1831–41 side of the table, there were 2,998 inhabitants of Tallow town in 1831; this fell to 2,969 people by 1841. The deficit of thirty-one persons represents a one per cent decrease over the decade. Apparent anomalies of one per cent arise from the rounding off of figures to the nearest whole number. Also, the

[17] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

'total' figures are based on censal data, and are not crude averages of the male and female totals.

Table 1.1
Population Growth and Decline expressed in percentages (1821-1841)

	1821-31			*1831-41*		
	males	**females**	**total**	**males**	**females**	**total**
Lsm. Town	20	28	24	5	3	4
Lsm. Parish	25	25	25	22	16	19
Lsm. Entire	23	26	24	18	14	16
Capp. Town	25	26	25	4	0.5	2
Capp. Parish[18]	5	9	7			
Capp. Entire	12	15	13			
Tallow Town	28	29	29	0.5	-2	-1
Tallow Parish	2	-1	0	11	10	11
Tallow Entire	17	17	17	4.5	2	3
Dngr. Town	18	37	28	36	29	32
Dngr. Parish	60	34	46	11	6	8
Dngr. Entire	28	36	32	26	20	23
Wat. City	-3	4	0	-19	-20	-19
Wat. County	15	17	16	18	16	17
Wat. Entire	12	14	13	12	10	11

Key: Lsm. = Lismore, Capp. = Cappoquin, Dngr. = Dungarvan, Wat. = Waterford

Note: As in the text, the amalgamated parish of Lismore and Mocollop in 1841 is compared to what would have been a similarly amalgamated territory in 1831. That is, when comparing parishes in 1831 and 1841, the three separate 1831 parishes of Lismore, Cappoquin, and Mocollop are taken together. There is no necessity for such an amalgamation of the three 1831 parishes when comparing them to what were likewise three separate parishes in 1821.

Sources: Calculated from 'Abstract of Answers and Returns of the Population of Ireland', *Census of Ireland 1821*, p. 218; 'Abstracts of Answers and Returns under the Population Acts', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5, and *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

As can be discerned from Table 1.1, the towns of Tallow and Cappoquin, together with the town and parish of Lismore, recorded the greatest growth in population, with readings of between twenty-four and thirty per cent apiece over the 1821–31 period. The rural parish of Tallow, on the other hand, recorded virtually no overall growth, and its female population actually decreased. Given our earlier observations regarding the female-dominated 'servant' population in Lismore town,

[18] It should be kept in mind that, as noted in the text, the parish and town of Cappoquin had been largely subsumed into the parish of Lismore and Mocollop by 1841. While censal statistics were still available for Cappoquin town in the early eighteen-forties, the former 'rural portion' of Cappoquin parish was not distinguished from that of the greater Lismore and Mocollop parish in the census of 1841.

and given that the rural Lismore parish also had in its working population a considerable number of (again predominantly female) servants in 1831, it is tempting to surmise that the Tallow region supplied many of Lismore town's domestic servants.[19] Only Waterford City showed a similarly small growth, less than half of one per cent (rounded down to zero in the table), and here the male population fell. By the early 1840s Waterford City (possibly due to the de-industrialisation which Foster claims occurred in much of Ireland outside of the Belfast and Dublin regions) was to record a population loss of almost twenty per cent.[20]

It is difficult to discern any 'pattern' in the population shifts in the early nineteenth-century decennial returns. Generally, it may be observed that, while the populations of the various towns and parishes continued to grow between 1831 and 1841, that rate of growth had slowed to a remarkable degree when compared to those recorded for the preceding ten years.[21] Yet so many and so varied are the exceptions to this slowing-rate-of-population-growth thesis that general claims regarding west Waterford's demographic landscape must be regarded as provisional at best. For instance, Tallow's rural parish recorded an insignificant 0.2 per cent population growth between 1821 and 1831, but an eleven per cent increase between 1831 and 1841. On the other hand Dungarvan town recorded a twenty-eight per cent increase between 1821 and 1831, and a thirty-two per cent increase on this 1831 figure ten years later. While we have already commented upon Waterford City's minor population gain in 1831 and its huge population losses by 1841, the overall rural

[19] 'Abstract of answers and returns', *Census of Ireland, 1831*, p. 205
[20] Foster, however, includes Lismore in this category. R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, Penguin, 1989), p. 321.
[21] This would accord well with Crotty's thesis, which linked the prevalence of tillage farming with potato dependency, subdivision and earlier ages at marriage. Crotty also located a change from tillage to pasture in response to price movements as early as 1815, thus curbing early marriages and population growth even before the famine. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production*, p. 36–41.

county situation showed a more sustained and consistent rate of growth. The rural county population grew by sixteen per cent between 1821 and 1831, and by seventeen per cent over the following decade.[22]

So, what explanation are we to give for these changes? It is here contented that population growth, stagnation and loss were influenced by the prevalence of tillage agriculture in the region. If we look at the rural parishes, we see that Tallow had, in 1821, sixty-one per cent of its working population employed in agriculture. The figures for Lismore and Dungarvan were sixty-five and seventy-one per cent respectively, while Cappoquin recorded seventy-six per cent of its workforce as being chiefly employed in agriculture. All of these figures were considerably above the overall County Waterford return of fifty-four per cent.[23] Ten years later the Tallow and Cappoquin returns had fallen significantly; meanwhile those for Lismore had shown a rise of four per cent and the percentage of Dungarvan rural workers chiefly employed in agriculture remained virtually unchanged at around the seventy per cent mark. It could therefore be argued that the Lismore parish population rise of roughly one quarter during the years 1821–31 was facilitated by the continuing subdivision of land, leading to earlier and more numerous marriages.

That the continuing subdivision of land was feared even as late as 1848 (when many commentaters claim it was in decline) is strongly implied by rent-book entries relating to the duke of Devonshire's Lismore estate. Here the writer, presumably the duke's agent, Francis Currey, has recorded that where land is to be let, it is strictly on condition that not more than one third of such land is to be under tillage.[24] In his evidence to the Devon Commission in late 1844, the Lismore parish priest, Father

[22] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 218–9 ; 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5, and *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

Patrick Fogarty, observed how consolidation was carried out around the demesne of Arthur Kiely-Ussher's Ballysaggartmore estate. Yet even this, Fogarty testifies, only led to the callous evictions of tenants from relatively good land; such tenants were pushed further up the mountain to cultivate the higher, more marginal and all-but barren regions. To view such evictions as a consolidation of holdings is inaccurate, as it merely (in Kiely-Ussher's eyes) beautified his immediate demesne and sent these tenants to have as many holdings in worse conditions.[25]

As previously observed, it would be perilous to equate the Lismore parish of 1821 and 1831 with the extended Lismore and Mocollop parish of the 1841 returns, which was not just larger, but even more 'rural' in terms of territorial extent than had been its predecessor. While the apparent rise in families practising agriculture from sixty-nine per cent in 1831 to eighty-seven per cent in 1841 may have been inflated by the territorial change, such an increase would not be out of keeping with overall rural parish trends in the area during this ten-year period. The parish of Tallow, for example, which was a neighbour to Lismore and Mocollop, showed an even greater increase in the same period, with its reading of thirty-four per cent of families engaged in agriculture in 1831 rising to eighty-three per cent ten years later. Dungarvan parish witnessed an increase from seventy to eighty per cent in this regard. All of these local readings were considerably above the 1841 national average of sixty-four per cent of families chiefly practising agriculture.[26] Even as late as 1844, Francis Currey testified to the Devon Commission that, while 'a good many' holdings on the duke's Lismore

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[23] *Census of Ireland, 1821*, p. 218.
[24] NLI, Lismore Papers Ms. 6918.
[25] Fogarty's testimony is, however, one-sided. Unfortunately Kiely-Ussher was not on a list of those recommended for interview by the board of guardians, and forwarded to the land commission in September 1844. This list was originally recorded in the Lismore minutes, BG/LISM/2, 10 January 1844.
[26] This national figure of sixty-four per cent is given in Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p.11.

estate extended to fifty or seventy acres, and one in particular covered roughly 360 acres, the majority in the poorer areas were very small, some no more than five acres in total.[27] In addition, Currey conceded that the subdivision of land on the Lismore estate was 'difficult to prevent', and was generally practised by tenants who already held but small plots of land.[28]

With the exception of Dungarvan, all the rural towns considered underwent dramatic declines in their rates of population growth. In fact Tallow town went from experiencing a twenty-nine per cent population growth in 1831 to recording a one per cent population loss ten years later. Lismore town recorded a twenty-four per cent population gain in 1831 and a four per cent growth in 1841. The town of Cappoquin told a similar story; here an 1831 population gain of twenty-five per cent on its 1821 figure dwindled to an 1841 reading of two per cent up on its 1831 figure. It should be noted, however, that the rate of decrease in population growth may be exaggerated. In K. H. Connell's view, for instance, local suspicions regarding the motives of the government in collecting data, together with the inexperience of the enumerators resulted in an underestimation of the overall population in 1821. If, as Connell suggests (and here he follows the 1841 census commissioners' report), the 1821 figures are too low and the 1831 estimates too high, then the rate of increase between 1821 and 1831, and consequently the decline in population growth between 1831 and 1841, are both subject to modification.[29]

Joseph Lee, while accepting that serious underenumeration had indeed occurred in 1821 (he suggests that roughly 400,000 persons were overlooked), does not necessarily accept Connell's assumption of overenumeration in 1831. On the

[27] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 812, p. 183, q. 9.
[28] Ibid., q 52, p. 186.

contrary, 'it seems that whatever tendency to inflation may have marked the 1831 proceedings was more than counterbalanced by other tendencies making for underenumeration'.[30] These 'other tendencies' included, as in 1821, local hostility and suspicion towards government-employed enumerators, as well as the probability of omitting visitors, beggars and seasonal labourers from the returns.[31] Lee's own amendations, however, draw a critique from Joel Mokyr. While Mokyr accepts that Lee's 'corrected' figures for the 1821 and 1841 censuses 'restore the intercensal growth rates to more reasonable orders of magnitude', he also points out that 'they imply an unreasonably high rate of growth for the preceding decades'.[32]

While keeping these objections in mind, it seems reasonable to point out that the figures, as they stand, bear a relational consistency of their own which would suggest that they provide at least a tolerably accurate representation of overall trends, if not always precision in head-count terms. For instance, between 1821 and 1831 female populations in general grew more steadily than did male. During these years all of the towns adhered to this pattern, as did Waterford City and the overall rural County Waterford population. Within the rural population, however, the parishes of Dungarvan and Tallow provided two notable exceptions. While Dungarvan parish's female population-increase was outstripped by that recorded for males, rural Tallow's female numbers fell during these ten years. Yet if we take the entire parishes (that is, towns and 'rural portions' combined) our general rule is almost universally borne out. In three of the four parishes considered, as well as in County Waterford generally, female population growth rates exceeded those recorded for males between 1821 and

[29] K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1750–1845* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950), pp. 1–2.
[30] Joseph Lee, 'On the accuracy of the pre-famine Irish censuses', in J.M. Goldstrom and L.A. Clarkson (eds.), *Irish Population, Economy, and Society: Essays in Honour of the late K.H. Connell* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 53.
[31] Ibid., p. 51.

1831; the parish of Tallow provided the exception with male and female populations each experiencing a seventeen per cent increase.[33]

The succeeding decade was to witness significant demographic shifts in the region. Outside of a general and considerable slowing in the rates of population increase, female population growth no longer exceeded that of males. Between 1831 and 1841 Waterford City saw females record a marginally greater population loss than males, while the rural County Waterford figures reveal that males underwent a greater increase in population over these ten years than females. If we look at the entire parishes (towns and parishes combined) and the entire county (city and rural county combined) our observation is in each case borne out. Here the parishes of Lismore, Cappoquin, Tallow and Dungaravan are shown as having recorded greater male than female population increases. The same held true for County Waterford generally, including Waterford City.[34]

In conclusion, it seems that population growth was slowing through much of west Waterford between 1831 and 1841. Subdivision, as censal returns imply and Devon Commission testimonies confirm, was certainly ongoing during this period. Yet its progress was probably being curbed as well. Again, however, it is too easy to make a simple link between subdivision levels and population growth or decline. Other factors also influenced patterns. As we have seen, the increase of domestic servants in Lismore town would suggest a diversification of employment patterns for

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[32] Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p. 32.
[33] Calculated from 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 218–9, and 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5.
[34] Compare 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204, 212, and *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246, 240.

its immedicate hinterland as well. These servants were mostly women, and many of them probably came either from rural farming backgrounds, or from Tallow town.

Despite the general decline in population growth between 1831 and 1841, the entire west Waterford region seems to have experienced massive increases in those employed in agriculture, and this agricultural sector was increasingly dominated by labourers. This state of affairs would suggest that population growth and decline should be considered within a much wider frame of reference than the extent of tillage agriculture and subdivision. In fact, the extent of subsistence farming and ever-decreasing holdings should themselves be understood in the context of soil quality and security (or insecurity) of tenure in different areas.

Part II: Housing Pressures

Drawing on Mason's *Statistical Account*, we can hazard at least some observations regarding the region's housing conditions at this time. In terms of families per house, the barony of Coshmore and Coshbride (which included Lismore town and parish) recorded a lower average number of families per house than any of the six other baronies.[35] According to Mason's figures, which were based largely on the findings of the 1813 census,[36] there was, on average, one family per house in this barony.[37] This had risen ever so slightly by 1821.[38] However, ten years later Coshmore and Coshbride recorded a figure of 1.21 families per house; this was

[35] Mason, *Statistical Account* (Vol. III), p. xlv.
[36] Ibid, and Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 21.
[37] Mason, *Statistical Account* (Vo.III), Table II, p. xxxix.
[38] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, p. 224.

exceeded only by Middlethird – and that marginally.[39] Yet by 1841 this rate of families per house had fallen back to 1.14, still considerably higher than the figures for 1819 and 1821, but significantly lower than that for 1831.[40]

In addition to recording the lowest family-per-house average of all Waterford baronies in 1814, Coshmore and Coshbride recorded smaller average families than any other barony. This aggravated the demographic differences between Coshmore and Coshbride and the rest of rural County Waterford. As can be seen from Table 1.2 below, in 1814 the other County Waterford baronies recorded average family sizes of six or seven persons, while Coshmore and Coshbride's average worked out at just over five persons per family.

Table 1.2: Housing and Family-Size Averages by Barony (1814-1841)

	fam. per hse.				*pers. per fam.*				*pers. per hse.*			
	1814	**1821**	**1831**	**1841**	**1814**	**1821**	**1831**	**1841**	**1814**	**1821**	**1831**	**1841**
Coshm. & Coshbr.	1	1.09	1.21	1.14	5.3	5.64	5.69	6.11	5.3	6.12	6.91	6.97
Dec. within Dr.	1.01	1.08	1.08	1.06	6.1	6.02	6.56	6.23	6.2	6.5	7.08	6.58
Dec. without Dr.	1.03	1.11	1.14	1.17	6.6	5.65	6.22	6.01	6.8	6.25	7.08	7.01
Gualtier	1.02	1.11	1.07	1.08	6.2	5.85	6.18	5.95	6.4	6.48	6.65	6.4
Glenaheiry	1.02	1.06	1	1.03	6.1	6.37	7	6.31	6.3	6.78	7	6.88
Middlethird	1.01	1.06	1.22	1.08	5.9	5.6	5.94	6	6	6.4	7.28	6.47
Upperthird	1.03	1.14	1.16	1.16	6.1	5.52	5.87	5.99	6.3	6.36	6.83	6.97
Waterford City	1.4	1.79	1.61	1.8	5	4.34	4.95	4.34	7.1	7.81	7.97	7.8

Key: Coshm. & Coshbr. = Coshmore and Coshbride, Dec. within Dr. = Decies within Drum, Dec. without Dr. = Decies without Drum.

Sources: Calculated from data provided in William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account, or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, Vol. III, Table II (Dublin, Faulkner-Press, 1819), p. xxxix. *Census of Ireland 1821*, *Census of Ireland 1831*, and *Census of Ireland 1841*.

From roughly 1814 to 1841 Coshmore and Coshbride witnessed the greatest increase in its families-per-house average. This barony's 1841 figure represented an

[39] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, p. 208.
[40] 'Summary of the General Table', *Census of Ireland 1841*, p. 256.

increase of fourteen per cent compared to its 1814 average. Yet two caveats must be entered which modify this latter claim: firstly, Decies without Drum recorded an increase in this regard of 13.5 per cent, or half of one per cent short of the Coshmore and Coshbride figure and, secondly, if we stray from the purely rural-barony arena briefly and look at Waterford City's increase of twenty-nine per cent, we see that it dwarfs any of the rural increases in this regard.

From the above table it appears that Coshmore and Coshbride continued to record, in general, smaller average family sizes than was the rural County Waterford norm, at least up to the early 1830s. Before 1841, only the baronies of Middlethird and Upperthird (both in 1821) recorded, on average, smaller families than Coshmore and Coshbride.[41] Yet this was to change quite remarkably over the course of the 1830s. By 1841, Coshmore and Coshbride recorded the third largest family sizes on average (after Decies within Drum and Glenaheiry) in County Waterford.[42]

In effect, this meant that the barony witnessed by far the most dramatic rise in its overall family sizes over the thirty or so years under consideration. The 1841 census returns yield a figure representing a fifteen per cent increase on its 1814 figures. Neither barony nor city in County Waterford came near to such an increase; the closest was Decies within Drum, with an increase of roughly six per cent on its 1814 figure. Greater increases in the Coshmore and Coshbride numbers of families per house, and in the sizes of these families, meant that by 1841 the barony went from recording the lowest, to experiencing some of the greatest, pressures upon housing in the rural part of the county. (Its average reading of 6.97 persons per house was just

[41] In the census of 1821 'Coshmore' and 'Coshbride' were recorded as separate baronial entities. This had not been the case in Mason's *Statistical Account* of 1814–9, nor was it to be the case in the censuses of 1831 or 1841. Consequently, Coshmore and Coshbride are here treated as one, the relevant calculations being averages for the two 1821 entities.
[42] 'Summary of the General Table', *Census of Ireland 1841*, p. 256.

below that endured by Decies without Drum and equal to that of Upperthird.) Nevertheless, Waterford City's housing situation was consistently marked by far greater accommodation pressures than even the worst off rural areas.

The increased housing pressures experienced in Coshmore and Coshbride over the 1814–41 period would suggest that neither the rate of house building nor the slowing of population growth were sufficient to avoid a crisis in accommodation. Such pressures saw the barony go from an average of just over five persons per house in 1814 to almost seven persons per house less than thirty years later. This trend would also lend support (albeit of an indirect kind) to the assertion that the greatest population increase took place amongst the labouring and cottier classes. Under the conacre system more people lived on less land, a modest or even 'wretched' cabin housed a family or more, and labourer and cottier families often tended to be larger than better-off families; this was because offspring were seen almost as an investment for the future, and infant mortality was high.

How, then, had Coshmore and Coshbride's family sizes and numbers increased so dramatically? Here, I would broadly agree with Connell's thesis that, from the 1780s to the 1830s, 'the great mass of the Irish people were eager to marry while very young', and that a general shift from pastoral to arable farming, by allowing them to set up on their own earlier in life, facilitated young marriages.[43] Under an agricultural system which fostered subdivision of holdings, a son did not need to wait for his father to bequeath the family holding to him in order to marry. Connell also points to the 'wretchedness' of the living conditions of many people who, despairing of any

[43] Connell, *Population of Ireland*, p. 53.

prospect of betterment through industry, felt no reason to delay marriage.[44] Eric Almquist, however, criticises Connell's 'economically quite negative' case, and maintains that Connell's own logic undercuts his analysis. Yet it is difficult to see why this is so, as Almquist goes on to state that 'it was the "poorest" counties that had the highest percentage of married women'.[45] This, it would appear, reinforces rather than undermines Connell's analysis.

If, then, we accept that an increase in tillage farming up to the 1830s could have promoted earlier marriages and population growth, can we link Coshmore and Coshbride's population growth over the 1814–41 period with any observed prevalence of tillage farming over arable? The ratio of tillage to pastoral farming is difficult to quantify, but a consideration of some of the Devon Commission testimonies for the region might afford a clue. These testimonies were gathered from twelve interviewees around the general Lismore area on 23 September 1844. Half of those interviewed answered on questions specifically related to modes of agriculture and/or subdivision. Of these six people, five answered that the areas they spoke of were mainly tillage or reclaimable mountain areas, with not many large grazing farms and, in general, small tillage farms. Only the somewhat jingoistically-named Nelson Trafalgar Foley (who, significantly, spoke of the immediate Lismore town area) maintained that at least a certain amount of consolidation of holdings had taken place, while the rate of subdivision was being slowly arrested.[46] While generalisation is perilous and certainty elusive, it seems at least plausible, based on censal data and local testimonies, that Lismore and its hinterland were generally characterised by tillage

[44] Ibid., pp. 56–7.
[45] Eric L. Almquist, 'Pre-famine Ireland and the theory of European proto-industrialisation: evidence from the 1841 census', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 39, Issue 3 (Sept. 1979), p. 713.

farming. Although the size of these holdings varied widely (from less than five to just under 100 statute acres), the evidence would seem to support the conclusion of continued, even if declining, subdivision.

So how did Lismore, at town and parish level, fit into the overall County Waterford housing situation? Unfortunately, as far as housing conditions go the census of 1821 is of limited value. True, this census does afford separate figures for numbers of houses, whether inhabited, unhabited, or still in the process of being built; yet no gradation of houses was attempted in either 1821 or 1831, and such an undertaking had to wait for a further ten years. Consequently, judgements based on crude figures must be regarded as tentative. Nevertheless some general observations are possible, and may prove useful for comparative purposes.

Firstly, it appears from the 1821 data that Lismore town was characterised by a families-per-house ratio which was considerably above the average for towns in County Waterford outside of Waterford City itself.[47] Lismore, with its 732 inhabited houses occupied by 766 families, yielded a 1.35 families per house average. Of the other towns, only Dungarvan came close with an average ratio of 1.31 families per house. The average rate for the four towns of Lismore, Dungarvan, Cappoquin and Tallow combined was 1.28 families to a house.[48] This state of affairs was to be severely disrupted ten years later by a very high Cappoquin town figure, which yielded a ratio of over one and two thirds families per house. Nevertheless, the Lismore town figure still outstripped those recorded for the towns of Tallow and Dungarvan.[49] In the cases of Lismore, Tallow and (especially) Cappoquin, the 1831 readings represent

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[46] *Devon Commission*, part III, Francis Currey, witness 812, q. 6, p. 182; William Murray, 819, q. 5, p. 200; Richard Smyth, 814, q. 6, p. 190; Sir Richard Keane, 811, qq. 8, 9, p. 180; Sir Richard Musgrave, 813, qq. 3, 4, p. 188, and N. T. Foley, 816, qq. 20, 27, p. 194.
[47] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 218–9, 230.
[48] Ibid., pp. 218–9.

a marked increase when compared to these towns' respective 1821 families per house figures. Dungarvan town's calculated increase in this regard was much more marginal.

In terms of the ranking of towns according to their respective families-per-house densities, 1841 represented essentially a reversion to the 1821 situation. Cappoquin now recorded a lower ratio than either Lismore or Dungarvan town, but a higher average number of families per house than that recorded for the town of Tallow. Again, as in 1821, Dungarvan town's figure was only marginally below that recorded for Lismore town. In 1841 these figures were 1.56 and 1.58 families per house respectively.[50]

While Munster cities invariably recorded a greater average number of families per house in 1821 than the four County Waterford rural towns under consideration, the towns nevertheless recorded marginally greater average sizes of families than the cities.[51] The city average came to 4.59 persons per family while the towns recorded a figure of just under five persons per family in 1821. Lismore town, in particular, exceeded both the urban and rural-town averages significantly, recording an average of 5.38 persons per family in this year. Twenty years later the overall figures had grown, but the trend remained essentially the same. Now Lismore town's average of just under six persons per family continued to exceed the County Waterford rural town average of five persons per family, as well as the individual figure for any of the other three nearby rural towns (the Waterford City 1841 average of just over four persons per family was also considerably lower).[52]

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[49] 'Abstract of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5.
[50] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.
[51] Calculated from 'Summary of the Province of Munster', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 232–3, and Abstract of answers and returns..., pp. 218–9.
[52] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7, and 'General Table', Ibid., pp. 240–1.

This trend was even more marked at a parish level; while towns recorded marginally greater average family sizes than the cities, the parishes registered considerably larger families than either towns or cities. In 1821 none recorded a number as high as Lismore parish, with its figure of 6.19 persons per family (although the neighbouring parish of Mocollop came close, recording 6.14 persons per family).[53] This parish figure for Lismore remained virtually unchanged ten years later. By contrast all of the other rural parishes under consideration experienced significant increases in average family size over the same period. In fact this was true for rural County Waterford in general, which recorded an average of 5.7 persons per family in 1821, compared to just over six persons per family ten years later. So while Lismore parish still recorded, on average, larger families than the county norm in 1831, its family sizes were, in general, significantly smaller than those in the 'rural portions' of either Tallow or Dungarvan parish.[54] Indeed these latter two increases were remarkable; over the course of the 1820s the parishes of Dungarvan and Tallow recorded average family-size increases of ten and sixteen per cent respectively.

Again, however, a decade was to see a reversal. In 1841 Lismore's rural parish recorded an overall ratio of 6.62 persons per family. This was only marginally behind the 6.65 persons per family which Dungarvan parish had recorded in 1831 (a statistic which now fell to 6.5 persons per family). Tallow's rural parish also had smaller families than before.[55] Yet it must be noted that the parishes of Lismore and Mocollop were now amalgamated; in addition, the new Lismore and Mocollop parish incorporated much of what had previously been the parish of Cappoquin, including

[53] 'Abstracts of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 218–9.
[54] 'Abstracts of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5.
[55] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

Cappoquin town.[56] Nevertheless, while the erstwhile parish of Mocollop had recorded a larger-than-average size of families in 1821, it was still below the Lismore parish figure (albeit marginally) and (unlike Lismore) was to fall significantly by 1831.[57] When one looks at the returns for 1821 and 1831, it becomes apparent that the parish of Cappoquin recorded, on average, smaller families than Lismore parish, as did Cappoquin town in relation to Lismore town. So, while it is obviously impossible to rule out an upward distortion of the figures when comparing the 1821 or 1831 parish of Lismore to that of Lismore and Mocollop in 1841, the inclusion of Cappoquin and Mocollop in the augmented parish would seem, on track record, more likely to lower the overall parochial persons-per-family ratios than raise them. And yet, as observed, the Lismore and Mocollop parish recorded a larger average size of family than did either the parishes of Dungarvan or Tallow, both of whose overall family sizes fell from their 1831 averages.[58]

Obviously, if anything even resembling a correct impression of pressure upon housing over the period is to be formed, then the figures available for family numbers must be considered in conjunction with those available for family sizes. In addition to this, much depends upon presentation of the figures; for instance, if calculations are rounded off to the nearest whole number, the 1821 results are pretty uniform. All rural areas recorded an average of six persons per family, except the parish of Tallow and the overall barony of Coshbride (in which Tallow was situated). Both the Coshbride barony and the parish of Tallow here show an average of five persons per

[56] Indeed by 1841 John O' Donovan was to note that 'The parish of Mocollop is now united to that of Lismore though Dr. Smith speaks of it as a separate parish in his own time, I could meet no one who was able to point out the boundary between them'. *Letters containing information relative to the Antiquities of the County of Waterford collected during the Progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1841* (reproduced under the direction of Rev. Michael O' Flanagan), (Bray, 1929), p. 70.
[57] 'Abstracts of Answers and Returns', *Census of Ireland 1821*, pp. 204–5.
[58] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

family. Yet this is to disguise considerable variations within the figures themselves when rounded more moderately to two decimal points.

As Table 1.3 below suggests, in 1821 Lismore town experienced noticeably greater numbers of families per house, as well as larger family sizes, than any of the other three rural towns. Consequently, the town's persons-per-house average of 7.28 far exceeded each of the other rural-town figures. Indeed the Lismore town persons-per-house density resembled that for Waterford City as much as it did the rural-town densities. Ten years later Cappoquin recorded a considerably greater overall number of families per house than Lismore, while Dungarvan's recorded average size of family was slightly greater than Lismore's. Yet, as Lismore town had larger families on average than Cappoquin, and more families to houses than Dungarvan, it recorded more severe pressure upon accommodation than any of the other towns.

Table 1.3: Town, Parish, and City Housing Statistics (1821-1841)

		fam. per hse.			***pers. per fam.***			***pers. per hse.***		
		1821	**1831**	**1841**	**1821**	**1831**	**1841**	**1821**	**1831**	**1841**
Lism.	town	1.35	1.55	1.58	5.38	5.18	5.59	7.28	8.06	8.82
	parish	1.05	1.13	1.05	6.19	6.17	6.62	6.48	6.97	6.96
	combined.	1.14	1.26	1.17	5.9	5.81	6.19	6.72	7.3	7.21
Capp.	town	1.28	1.69	1.49	4.76	4.48	4.99	6.11	7.58	7.41
	parish	1.04	1.14		6.06	6.14		6.29	6.97	
	combined.	1.12	1.33		5.55	5.39		6.22	7.19	
Tall.	town	1.17	1.33	1.37	4.94	4.99	5.23	5.79	6.65	7.14
	parish	1.05	1.05	1.02	5.37	6.24	6.03	5.66	6.56	6.14
	combined.	1.12	1.23	1.21	5.12	5.38	5.51	5.73	6.61	6.71
Dngr.	town	1.31	1.38	1.56	4.55	5.29	4.69	5.98	7.32	7.32
	parish	1.02	1.05	1.03	6.04	6.65	6.5	6.18	6.99	6.73
	combined.	1.24	1.29	1.36	4.86	5.6	5.2	6.03	7.22	7.1
Wat.	city	1.79	1.61	1.8	4.34	4.95	4.34	7.81	7.97	7.8
	county	1.11	1.15	1.12	5.71	6.08	6.06	6.33	6.98	6.82
	combined.	1.21	1.22	1.2	5.4	5.86	5.79	6.56	7.13	6.92

Sources: Calculated from 'Abstract of Answers and Returns of Ireland', *Census of Ireland 1821*, p. 218; 'Abstracts of Answers and Returns under the Population Acts', *Census of Ireland 1831*, pp. 204–5, and *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7 , 240–1, 250–1.

As observed earlier, the census in 1841 reflected, very broadly speaking, a re-establishment of the 1821 housing pattern, albeit magnified to an extent. Lismore town again recorded a greater ratio of families to houses than the others (although the Dungarvan figure rendered the difference negligible). Also, calculations based on the censuses again yield greater family-size statistics for the town of Lismore than for any of the other three County Waterford towns. As in 1821, these two circumstances resulted in Lismore town showing startlingly high numbers of persons to houses. In 1841, on average, just under nine persons shared each inhabited house in the town. Lismore town, as had also been the case in 1831, recorded even greater pressure upon accommodation than Waterford City.

When one considers the 1821 rural parishes, Lismore again (this time along with Tallow) recorded more families per house than either Cappoquin or Dungarvan parishes. However, here the differences were minute, and hardly deserving of more than a fleeting notice. Nevertheless, the parish's average family size was appreciably greater than those of the other three parishes to the extent that there were, on average, more persons to a house in the 'rural portion' of Lismore parish in 1821 than there were in any of the other three parishes. Interestingly, the year 1831 witnessed the closing of these gaps between Lismore and the other parishes. In this year Cappoquin and Lismore parishes recorded virtually identical families-per-house ratios as well as comparable family sizes. As a result these two parishes had, on average, just under seven persons to a house in 1831. The same was true of Dungarvan parish, which showed a much lower average number of families per house than Lismore or Cappoquin, but also a considerably larger average family size than either of these parishes. Consequently its pressure upon housing was virtually identical to those of

Lismore and Cappoquin. Only Tallow parish, whose families-to-house ratio was comparable to that of Dungarvan but whose family size was smaller, showed an appreciably lower persons-per-house figure than the other three parishes.

In 1841 the amalgamated parish of Lismore and Mocollop was characterised by more (and larger) families to a house than either Dungarvan or Tallow parish. This resulted in a considerably greater overall pressure upon housing. Ultimately, Lismore town displayed a more acute housing shortage than any of the other three towns in any of the three censuses taken during the 1821–41 period. In addition, in 1831 and again in 1841, the town's accommodation shortages were apparently more severe than even those of Waterford City.

While rural persons-to-house ratios were invariably lower than those in the towns or cities, Lismore, Cappoquin, and Dungarvan parishes all recorded well over six persons on average to a house as far back as 1821. In 1831 all three recorded roughly seven people to a house. The early eighteen-forties, however, saw the Dungarvan parish figure slip back slightly but significantly to 6.73 persons per house, while Tallow recorded just over six persons on average to a house. In this year also, the Lismore and Mocollop parish had, at roughly seven persons to a house, greater accommodation pressures than either of the other two parishes or, indeed, the county in general.[59]

Part III: Housing Standards

As already mentioned, the pre-1841 censuses did not provide any information on housing quality (one commentator regards them as 'little more than headcounts').[60] However, a system of gradation was within the purview of the census commissioners charged with the 1841 enumerations.[61] Under this system, housing was considered in terms of four categories, or 'classes'. These classes were described by the census commissioners as follows: fourth class – 'all mud cabins having only one room'; third class – 'a better description of cottage, still built of mud, but varying from two to four rooms and windows'; second class – 'a good farm house, or in the towns, a house in a small street, having from five to nine rooms and windows', and finally, first class houses, which were 'all houses of a better description than the preceding classes'.[62] So does the application of such criteria afford us a glimpse of the state of west Waterford in general, and the Lismore area in particular, in the early 1840s?

Firstly, however, a note of caution must be sounded in relation to the figures given below. When it came to housing matters, the 1841 census dealt in families rather than dividuals. Obviously, as family sizes varied, families-per-house readings provide very little information as to the actual number of persons occupying any

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[59] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.
[60] Thomas P. Linehan, *The Development of Official Irish Statistics* (Cork, Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, 1998), p.2.
[61] Chief among these was Thomas Larcom, who had conducted research into the Old Irish language. He became a census commissioner in 1841. 'It was owing to him that the census in Ireland for the first time included a systematic classification of the occupations and general conditions of the population, as well as its numbers, and that a permanent branch of the registrar-general's department was formed for the collection of agricultural statistics'. Sidney Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *DNB*], Vol. XXXII (London, Smith, Elder, & Co., 1892), pp. 143–5. For Larcom's inaccurate prediction in relation to the 1851 census, see Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848–1918* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1989 [orig. 1973]), pp. 22–3.
[62] 'Commissioners' Report', *Census of Ireland 1841*, p. xiv.

particular type of house. To combat this difficulty, I have proceeded by multiplying the given number of families per grade of house in 1841 by our calculated number of persons-per-family for that year; we may thus arrive at a crude estimate regarding the average number of persons per each class of house in 1841.[63] It is, however, a crude estimate indeed, dealing as it does in calculated averages and so imposing an artificial uniformity of family size upon those occupying the various classes of houses.[64] Yet despite these drawbacks, such an exercise may well reward indulgence if only in terms of gaining a rough and ready impression of the overall housing situation in the wider Lismore area in 1841.

Table 1.4: 1841 Persons per Class of House (%)				
	1st Class	***2nd Class***	***3rd Class***	***4th Class***
Lismore Town	257 (8.5)	1,342 (44.6)	1,297 (43)	112 (3.7)
Lismore and Mocollop Parish	245 (1.6)	2,701 (18)	7,395 (49)	4,660 (31)
Cappoquin Town	105 (4.5)	1,307 (55.8)	808 (34.5)	135 (5.7)
Tallow Town	194 (6.5)	1,020 (34.3)	1,349 (45.4)	408 (13.7)
Tallow Parish	30 (1.6)	1,99 (10.5)	1,206 (63.5)	464 (24.4)
Dungarvan Town	638 (7.4)	4,643 (53.8)	2,556 (29.6)	783 (9)
Dungarvan Parish	65 (1.4)	800 (17)	2,464 (52.5)	1,365 (29)
Waterford City	6,475 (28)	12,629 (54)	3,498 (15)	417 (1.8)
Waterford County	4,339 (2.2)	44,529 (22.7)	75,059 (38.3)	4,8971 (25)

Note: Parish figures refer to rural parishes, exclusive of the towns.
Source: Calculated from statistics in *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246–7.

As can be seen from Table 1.4 above, the rural towns invariably recorded a much greater percentage of people living in 'first class' houses than the rural parishes did. The converse was also true at the other end of the scale, where a much greater percentage of rural dwellers lived in fourth class houses than town or city inhabitants. If we first consider these extremes, it appears from the table that Lismore town fared

[63] Calculated from Ibid., p. 246.
[64] It should be kept in mind that, if the cottiers and labourers generally had larger families than the better off sections of society, our procedure will tend to underestimate the average for persons in third and fourth grade houses, and overestimate those for first and second class houses.

better than its civic or parochial neighbours. With the exception of Waterford City, none of the towns or parishes considered recorded a greater percentage of persons dwelling in first class – nor a smaller percentage dwelling in fourth class – housing.[65]

Thus far we may put faith in *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary* which, in the late 1830s, reported on the 'cheerful and thriving appearance' then sported by Lismore town, several of whose houses were 'neat and well built'.[66] In like vein, six or seven years later the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* observed that Lismore was relatively 'free from the filth and meanness which disfigure portions of so many other towns of Ireland'.[67] To an extent such reports were not inaccurate in themselves, as Lismore town was hardly suffering particularly acute levels of hardship in the late 1830s or early 1840s. Yet such reports can be misleading if taken uncritically, leaving an almost 'rural-idyll' impression upon the unwary reader.

The overall housing conditions in Lismore town that we have so far outlined by means of the 1841 'first-class' and 'fourth-class' statistics contrast sharply with those suggested for the rural parish. Lismore and Mocollop's percentage of persons living in first class houses (1.6) was low compared to the rural towns and, in particular, to Waterford City; yet it was not out of keeping with the other rural parishes of Tallow and Dungarvan, both recording populations roughly one and a half per cent of which dwelt in first class houses. Nevertheless this picture of normalcy

[65] Indeed Kennedy *et al* note the rural-urban divide in relation to fourth-class housing, with the 'extremes of distribution' showing for some West Cork and West Galway areas over eighty per cent in fourth-class housing, while 'the major urban centres of Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Waterford' recorded an average of less than three per cent in fourth-class housing. Conversely, first-class housing was also 'more associated with the towns than the countryside'. Liam Kennedy, Paul S. Ell, E. M. Crawford, L. A. Clarkson, *Mapping the Great Irish Famine: A Survey of the Famine Decades* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 76, 78.
[66] *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary*, Vol. I, (London, S. Lewis and Co., 1837), p. 283.
[67] *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* (Dublin, London, and Edinburgh, A. Fullarton and Co., 1844), p. 656.

alters quite dramatically when one considers rural-dwellers recorded as living in fourth-class housing; here the Lismore and Mocollop reading was particularly high. Out of an enumerated rural population of 15,007 persons, 4,660 (thirty-one per cent) lived in fourth-class houses. This exceeded Dungarvan parish's 1,365 persons (twenty-nine per cent) as well as the 464 persons (twenty-five per cent) recorded for Tallow parish. Indeed, both the Dungarvan and the Lismore and Mocollop rural parishes recorded percentages of population living in fourth-class houses considerably above the overall rural County Waterford average, which (like that of Tallow parish) represented roughly one quarter of the enumerated population.

Even our impressions of Lismore town must, at least to an extent, be modified when one considers the second- and third- class categories of housing. For instance, while Lismore town recorded a lower percentage of persons per fourth-class housing than any of the other towns or parishes considered (outside of Waterford City), it also recorded the highest town percentage of persons per third-class housing (outside of Tallow). The converse is also true for Lismore and Mocollop parish, whose calculations give it a higher rate of fourth-class housing than any other town or parish, but a lower third-class housing percentage than either Tallow or Dungarvan parishes. Significantly though, all three were considerably above the county average of roughly thirty-eight per cent.[68]

In like manner, while Lismore town recorded a greater prevalence of first-class house dwellers than anywhere but Waterford City, it also recorded a much lower level of second-class housing than the towns of Cappoquin, Dungarvan, and Waterford. Only Tallow town recorded a lower percentage of persons living in second-class accommodation. Again, the rural parishes present a contrast; here Lismore and

Mocollop parish, according to our calculations, yielded a greater proportion of population availing of second-class accommodation than the other two parishes or, indeed, the rural county in general.[69] In all cases considered, the towns recorded greater percentages of population residing in first- and second- class housing than the parishes, while, conversely, the rural parishes invariably recorded greater percentages of population per third- and fourth- class housing. On the other hand, the Lismore and Mocollop parish recorded a lower percentage of people living in third-class houses than either the Dungarvan or Tallow parishes, while all were significantly above the county average.

If we refer back to the census commissioners' definitions of the various classes of houses, we may detect the overall significance of these observations. It may be remarked that, in reality, the difference between fourth- and third- class houses was not necessarily great. Indeed, the commissioners themselves related how they, initially, 'intended to have thrown the third and fourth classes together', and hoped 'that hereafter they may be consolidated'. [70] Basically, a mud cabin with two rooms would be classed as a third-class house, as opposed to a fourth-class mud cabin with just one room.[71] One recent study has likewise questioned if the distinction between third- and fourth- class housing 'was observed consistently'; the authors point out that, by 1871, many houses that would previously have been considered third-class, 'were relegated to the fourth-class category'.[72] If this consideration is registered, then nearly half of Lismore town's population lived in distinctly sub-standard housing.

[68] *Census of Ireland 1841*, pp. 246, 250.
[69] Ibid. Yet it must be noted that, as the Lismore and Mocollop figure stood at eighteen per cent, Dungarvan's recorded seventeen per cent renders the one relative difference between the parishes in this respect insignificant.
[70] 'Commissioners' Report', Ibid., p. xiv.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Kennedy *et al*, *Mapping the Great Irish Famine*, p. 76.

Under such an amalgamated criterion, only Tallow town, with fifty-nine per cent, would exceed, or even come close to, the Lismore town reading.

At the other end of the scale the objection to the terms of gradation is different. Here the problem is not that the distinction between classes was too nicely drawn, but that the second category was so broad that it, and not the 'first class' grade, was more representative of the relatively well-to-do in any given geographical area.[73] Basically, first-class housing would have included the great residences of the landed estates, such as John Keily's Strancally Castle and the duke of Devonshire's Lismore Castle (both on the shores of the Blackwater), along with such great houses as that of Villiers Stuart at Dromana, Sir Richard Musgrave at Toureen, and Sir Richard Keane at Cappoquin. If, then, we look at first- and second- class housing individually and then in connection with each other, we see that Lismore had a higher than average percentage of population residing in first class housing compared to Cappoquin, Tallow, and Dungarvan towns. (Yet Waterford City, at twenty-eight per cent in this regard, more than quadrupled the Lismore amount). Notwithstanding, first class houses accounted for no more than 8.5 per cent of any given population, whereas second class housing could account for over fifty-five per cent of those enumerated. As observed, Lismore town scored lower percentages of people in second class houses than the towns of Cappoquin, Dungarvan, and Waterford. Only Tallow town recorded a lower figure with just over thirty-four per cent.

On the face of it, the rural Lismore and Mocollop parish recorded more persons living in fourth-class (and less in first-class) houses than Lismore town. Yet,

[73] Kennedy *et al* also refer to the importance of second-class housing in 'betokening a widespread degree of comfort', which was most evident in towns and cities. Ibid., p. 77.

a more thorough investigation of the 1841 returns would indicate that the relationship between town and rural hinterland was a little more complex than a crude civic prosperity/rural privation dichotomy. If our objections to the censal gradations of housing are accepted, Lismore town's preponderance of third-class houses would suggest a town worse off than first impressions would suggest. Likewise, the rural parish's relatively high percentages of persons living in second-class houses indicates a countryside slightly better off than is commonly appreciated. While it is accepted that the rural portion of the parish was, in general, worse off, with many people forced to practice a precarious form of subsistence farming upon unsuitable soil, I would suggest that the gap between town and country was not quite as great as is often portrayed.

In short, we may say that the barony of Coshmore and Coshbride underwent the greatest increase in family sizes during the 1814–41 period. This meant that, with the third-largest average family size and the greatest increase in families per house over the same thirty years or so, the barony was experiencing some of the greatest housing pressures in the county on the eve of the Famine. Withing the barony, the Lismore town and parish area were labouring under acute accommodation shortages. As the Lismore Poor Law Union was declared, roughly nine people on average shared a house. As labourer and cottier families tended to be smaller than those of the larger farmers, this meant that more than this average number were crowded into the smallest and most unsuitable of houses, while the larger houses had fewer inhabitants than this average figure would suggest. With hindsight, we can see that, on the eve of the Famine, this was a precarious state of affairs indeed.

Part IV: State of the Tenantry

In 1843 the Devon Commission (named after its chairman, William, Earl of Devon) was entrusted with the task of collecting testimonies from around the country and publishing their results in order to find means of improving both Irish agricultural practice and landlord-tenant relations.[74] While the *Devon Commission* is a valuable source, it is also a lopsided one.[75] Despite the commissioners' claim to having 'obtained information from persons of every class and condition of life', the cottiers and agricultural labourers were severely under-represented.[76] In the case of Lismore, consulting with two witnesses who described themselves as 'farmers' was about as far down the socio-economic ladder as the commissioners ventured. Even in these two cases, one farmer – James Morrison of Kilwatermoy, near Tallow – held between eighty and ninety acres while Richard White of Snugborough farmed 113 statute acres.[77] Neither, therefore, could be held as representing the cottier (let alone agricultural labourer) classes.

Although Richard White may not have been of the small-farmer or labouring classes, he certainly did comment on their conditions. According to White, small farmers were not able to better their situation because of the sheer poverty they suffered. The ground had become impoverished and the small farmers simply did not

[74] 'Commission', dated 20th Nov. 1843, in *Devon Commission*, Part IV, p. 3

[75] See, for instance, Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland, 1845–1849* (New York, Anvil Books, 1962), p. 21. For an informative treatment of the Devon Commission and its critics, see Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843–1850* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1999), p. 56–9.

[76] *Devon Commission*, Part IV, pp. 5–6.

[77] James Morrison did not specify as to whether his eighty or ninety acres were Irish or statute acres. Ibid., Part. III, witness 821, p. 203; witness 820, p. 202.

have the capital needed to improve it.[78] The conditions of the labourers were therefore 'wretched'. This led to a vicious cycle that ensnared Irish cottiers and labourers, who did not have the capital to improve the land, and so had to practice a form of subsistence agriculture which ensured that they would continue to have little or no capital in future. The labourers, White observed, rarely received wages above 6*d* a day with diet, and this pittance just about paid the rent on a house and garden, which came to roughly £2 a year. A farmer might charge a labourer in his employ £6 for a 'good manured acre of potato ground', while labourers fattened and sold pigs to pay for clothing.[79]

Can we hazard an opinion as to where, or rather, on what quality of land, these populations were concentrated? Going by the averages calculated from the poor law commissioners' 1840 report, County Waterford had roughly 1.71 statute acres per person.[80] This represented a greater pressure on land in County Waterford than the 'national' average of 2.22 statute acres per person.[81] Yet, as Table 1.5 below shows, when we consider population pressures exclusively on arable land, we witness a reversal. Only counties Kilkenny and Tipperary recorded higher arable acres-to-person ratios than Waterford. These three were also well above the national average in this regard. In other words, on the premise that County Waterford recorded high

[78] As Mary Daly observes, many Irish labour techniques, such as the labour-intensive 'lazy-bed' system of potato-growing, were condemned as barbaric and inefficient as they did not conform to English models, but made perfect sense in a country without the capital to install drainage pipes in fields. Mary Daly, 'Farming and the famine', in Cormac Ó Gráda (ed.), *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series* (Dublin, Teagasc/UCD, 1997), pp. 30–1.
[79] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 820, qq. 30–3, 36–7, p. 202. Both the average rate of wages and the reported lifestyle of the labourers given by Fogarty, Spratt, and White corresponded to the account given in the house of commons by William Smith O' Brien a year earlier, who put agricultural wages at an average 'scanty pittance of 8*d.* for their day's toil', *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. LXX, House of Commons [16 June – 20 July 1843]. p. 670.
[80] *Sixth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, App. E, No. 8, pp. 453–481.
[81] Ibid.

overall population density, and yet quite low pressure on arable land, the conclusion that many people resided on marginal land seems irresistable.

Table 1.5: Population Pressures per Statute Acres of Arable Land, and per Square Mile					
Munster Counties	***Statute Acres of Arable Land per Person***	***Persons per sq. Mile***	***Kilkenny, Provinces, and National***	***Statute Acres of Arable Land per Person***	***Persons per sq. Mile***
Waterford	2.18	293	*Kilkenny*	2.71	236
Tipperary	2.32	276	*Munster*	1.93	332
Limerick	1.92	333	*Leinster*	2.6	247
Kerry	1.53	416	*Ulster*	1.6	406
Cork	1.91	334	*Connacht*	1.66	386
Clare	1.7	377	*Ireland*	1.91	335

Source: *Report of the Census Commissioners for the Year 1841*, British Parliamentary Papers: Population 2 (Shannon: IUP, 1968), p. xiii

In his testimony, the parish priest of Lismore, the Reverend Patrick Fogarty, observed that most land in the parish was let in small farms which practised tillage farming. Fogarty put a typical farm at between forty and sixty acres. This average estimate would accord reasonably well with Francis Currey's observation that, while holdings on the duke of Devonshire's estate varied in size from five to 400 acres, there were precious few farms of the latter size. The majority of holdings were small farms, while 'a good many' ranged from fifty to seventy acres.[82] Sir Richard Musgrave, who resided at Tourin, near Cappoquin, agreed that farms were generally small, ranging between five and fifty acres. Yet Sir Richard Keane, the county vice-lieutenant who likewise resided in the Cappoquin area, claimed that tillage farms usually extended to between sixty and one hundred acres.[83]

While Keane's estimate may be inflated, it nevertheless appears from the 1841 censal returns that County Waterford displayed a greater balance between large and small farms than any other Munster county. From the Table below, it is clear that, in

[82] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 810, qq. 3, 4 & 7, p. 177; witness 812, q. 15, p. 138.
[83] Ibid, witness 813, q. 4, p. 188; witness 811, q. 7, p.180.

Waterford, very small farms, those of fifteen acres and under, constituted a smaller percentage of total farms than they did in the other counties.

Table 1.6: Distribution of Farms and Farm Sizes					
	Farms: Total Numbers & (%)				*Farm*
Region	***1+ to 5***	***5+ to 15***	***15+ to 30***	***30+***	***Totals***
Waterford	3,190 (30)	3,024 (28)	2,179 (20)	2,336 (22)	10,729
Kilkenny	5,131 (31)	5,752 (35)	3,601 (22)	2,006 (12)	16,490
Kerry	8,689 (33)	10,830 (42)	4,068 (16)	2,172 (9)	25,759
Cork	13,683 (30)	15,790 (35)	10,362 (23)	5,691 (12)	45,526
Clare	11,593 (43)	12,049 (45)	2,234 (8)	1,052 (4)	26,928
Limerick	6,841 (35)	6,840 (35)	3,700 (18)	2,346 (12)	19,727
Tipperary	13,032 (39)	12,787 (38)	4,938 (14)	2,960 (9)	33,717
Munster	57,028 (35)	61,320 (38)	27,481 (17)	16,557 (10)	162,386
Ulster	100,817 (43)	98,992 (42)	25,099 (11)	9,591 (4)	234,499
Connacht	99,918 (64)	45,221 (29)	5,790 (4)	4,275 (3)	155,204
Leinster	49,152 (37)	45,595 (34)	20,584 (15)	17,889 (14)	133,320
Ireland	306,915 (44)	251,128 (37)	78,954 (12)	48,312 (7)	685,309

Source: 'Rural Economy Tables', *Census of Ireland for the Year 1841*, BPP: Population 2, pp. 454–5.

While the expectation that smaller farms would predominate in the generally poorer western areas is borne out by these returns, a glance at the Tipperary statistics is instructive. A county boasting fertile soils and also regarded as belonging to the 'prosperous' south-east, its levels of small agricultural holdings of five acres or less would suggest that, perhaps, drawing straight lines from Derry to Cork is not the best method of contextualising poverty.

The figures presented above, it must be noted, should be treated with caution. Bourke, for instance, expressed strong doubts as to whether or not consistency was maintained in the returns upon which these figures are based. The confusion, he pointed out, lay in ascertaining if returns were consistently made in either Irish or statute acres.[84] As an Irish acre was 1.64 times greater in size than a statute acre, then,

[84] Austin Bourke, *The Visitation of God? The Potato and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 77.

as Mokyr observes, 'the possible margins for error were rather large'.[85] These returns also omit holdings of less than one acre. If, as we have argued, a fairly large number of people lived on poorer lands in mountainous regions around Lismore, the numbers of small farms for Waterford could be underestimated. This would, however, apply to other counties as well, and the numbers were probably not so large as to disturb the overall trends suggested above.

Reports conflict when we turn to the subject of the actual conditions of the labouring and cottier classes. Within the parish of Lismore, according to Father Fogarty's testimony, neither the large farmers nor the small tenantry were getting any richer. This echoes the statement of Richard White, who claimed that holders of 100 acres and upward were 'going back in the world', while the small farmers were not progressing in their conditions either.[86] Also, like White, Fogarty painted a particularly dismal picture of the plight of labourers:

> The great mass of the population is in a very deplorable condition. The population upon over 20,000 acres are in a state of great destitution, and I attribute it in a great measure to their having no leases – no tenure.[87]

This account coincided with the overall findings of the 1833–6 poor inquiry, but contrasted with the evidence given by Francis Currey.[88] In his view, the smaller tenants were better in appearance, dress, and 'general habits' than they used to be. While the labouring classes were better off than before, the improvement in their condition was, he conceded, not as extensive as it might have been. Currey credited the 'introduction of temperance' for such improvements as had taken place in the

[85] Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p. 18.
[86] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 820, qq. 29, 30, p. 202.
[87] Ibid., witness 810, q. 12, p. 177.

condition of the tenantry at large.[89] Yet, he allowed that the houses of the smaller tenants were often very poor, so bad in fact that they were 'seldom more than indifferent hovels'. The usual rate of pay for agricultural labourers was *6d* a day with diet and *8d* without.[90] Sir Richard Musgrave related how, for the building of tenants' houses upon his estate, he supplied timber and slates, and undertook to pay the wages of the carpenter, the mason, and the slater, while the tenant quarried stones and provided 'lime and attendance'. Currey and Sir Richard Keane made similar claims.[91] Yet the claims of these landowners and agent are not incompatible with Fogarty's allegations regarding the state of cottiers and labourers. Francis Currey insisted that he spoke only in relation to the duke of Devonshire's property, while Keane and Musgrave both referred exclusively to the tenants on the latter's estate.[92]

As already observed, Fogarty placed a large share of the blame for the condition of the labourers and small tenant farmers on the absence of security. Lismore parish contained a great deal of very rugged and barren mountain land.[93] Tenants could get thirty or forty acres of such land rent-free for seven years, and paid between *5s* and *12s 6d* per acre afterwards. After twenty-one years the landlord could impose any rent. Yet Fogarty insisted that, given the extremely poor quality of such land, tenants could not even extract the 'common necessaries of life' from it during the first seven years, nor pay their rent from it thereafter. Many families were

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[88] *Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, BPP, 1836, Vol. XXX, Sec. 1, p. 3.
[89] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 812, qq. 55–8 incl., p. 185.
[90] Ibid., qq. 57, 36, pp. 187, 185. For estimates of labourers' wages in County Waterford, particularly the barony of Decies without Drum, see *Third Report of Commissionesr for inquiring into the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, Vol. XXX, App. D, Earnings of Labourers, pp. 60–3.
[91] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 813, qq. 17, p. 189; witness 812,question 45, pp. 185–6; witness 811, qq. 23, 24, p. 181.
[92] It is significant that Cecil Woodham-Smith, hardly an apologist for landlords, and certainly not for absentee landlords, commended the duke of Devonshire's Lismore estate as a 'model'. Currey, as land agent, was responsible for the day-to-day running of the estate. Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 21.

removed by Kiely-Ussher 'to rough farms in the mountain' and were, as a result, suffering the most acute levels of destitution.[94] Ultimately, because of this self-defeating policy of removing tenants from fertile land in order to 'beautify' his demesne, Kiely-Ussher had, Fogarty continued, lost between £400 and £500 a year, and had reduced his tenants to mass pauperism.[95] In addition, Fogarty relates how Kiely-Ussher refused to provide even a mountain site for a school to serve the educational needs of his tenants' children. Neither would he facilitate the erection of limekilns, which would have spared his tenants travelling miles in order to draw lime. Fogarty's exasperation comes across as he muses that this landlord opposed the very limekilns that would bring much of his land into cultivation and, in a few years, increase the value of his property immensely.[96]

Arthur Kiely-Ussher was not the only landlord singled out for severe criticism. On the estate of Captain Barry of Mocollop Castle, Fogarty testified, only four tenants had leases even though his rent roll amounted to about £5,000 a year.[97] The Reverend Michael Spratt, parish priest of Knockanore, also complained about the charging of exorbitant rents to tenants on mountain lands. These lands were held by a Mr. Parker under Lord Middleton. The 'considerable number of tenants' who could not pay these rents were served with notice to quit. Even some of those who paid up their rents were encouraged to improve the little plots they held, and were then served with eviction notices. As with Fogarty's account regarding Kiely-Ussher, the Reverend

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[93] Ordnance Survey of Ireland, 1841, sheets 20–22.
[94] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 810, q. 35, p. 178.
[95] Fogarty's testimony was also partly reproduced in *Chronicle and Munster Advertiser*, 19 Dec., 1846.
[96] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 810, q. 22, 35–6, pp. 178–9.
[97] Ibid., q. 31, p. 178; The duke of Devonshire's gross rent income for the Lismore estate, rose from £24,454 to £31,452 between 1821 and 1838, See Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after the Famine*, p. 39.

Spratt's testimony recalled the existence of sizeable villages on land attached to Parker's house, but lamented the fact that these were now no more.[98]

In the district of Ballynatray, not far from Lismore, on the property of a man named Smyth, the rent had been doubled for almost every tenant within the past four or five years. Most of Smyth's 12,000 acres consisted of mountain land and the condition of the people in Glendynes, as well as the quality of land there, was deteriorating rapidly. Spratt laid the blame for the deterioration on Smyth's methods of dealing with his tenants.[99] Spratt and Fogarty both insisted on the necessity of granting leases.

It is possible, although given the minute nature of the sample it is perilous, to sketch a faint pattern regarding leases. Roughly speaking, of the twelve persons from the general Lismore union area who testified to the Devon Commission, seven were landlords or land agents; three were relatively substantial farmers and two were parish priests. Of this twelve, the testimonies of two landlords (Richard Smyth and Edmund Foley) and of two farmers (James Morrison and Nelson Trafalgar Foley) did not address the issue of leases. Of the remaining five landlords and agents, Thomas Foley (agent to Lord Middleton) remarked that Lord Middleton was 'averse to granting leases', and William Murray (agent to Richard Chearnley) bluntly stated that 'we do not give any leases at all'.[100]

Many of the duke of Devonshire's tenants were tenants-at-will. Francis Currey did grant leases, mostly for twenty-one years, but he maintained that tenants were not generally that anxious to obtain them.[101] Mokyr suggests that, in many cases, the landlords may have opted to give leases to improving tenants, while keeping

[98] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 818, q. 6, p. 199.
[99] Ibid., qq. 8, 11, 14 & 15, p. 199.

the others as tenants-at-will, thus retaining the option of removing them.[102] There is a 'chicken-and-egg' problem inherent in this proposition. Basically the question is, did tenants get leases because they were improving tenants, or were they improving tenants because they got leases? The problem is one of causality, which Mokyr acknowledges 'may have worked in both directions'.[103] While Currey was an able, intelligent and honest man, his ability to judge of tenants' wishes on the matter of leases could be questioned. The absence of requests for leases could, after all, reflect pessimism with regard to prospects of success, rather than indifference. Yet, as a land agent, Currey could well interpret such an absence as apathy.

Two other substantial landholders, Sir Richard Musgrave and Sir Richard Keane, believed not only that leases should be granted, but that they should be granted for at least thirty-one years. (Indeed Musgrave maintained that 'the more nearly you can bring the tenant to a perpetuity the better').[104] Each of the three non-landlords who addressed the issue considered exorbitant rents and the lack of leases (and the consequent lack of security) to be the major hindrances to real improvements in the agricultural practices and personal conditions of the cottier and labouring classes.[105] It could be posited that, the further one ventured down the socio-economic ladder (and the Devon Commission didn't venture particularly far) the stronger the feelings of people would naturally be with regard to the obtaining of leases.

An area's state of education also provides at least a rough guide to ascertaining the relative wealth or poverty of its people. According to the 1841 census, sixty-six

[100] Ibid., witness 817, q. 11, p. 196; witness 819, q. 14, p. 200.
[101] Ibid., witness 812, q. 38, 43, p. 185.
[102] Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p. 85.
[103] Ibid.
[104] *Devon Commission*, Part III, witness 813, q. 13, 34, pp. 189–90; witness 811, q. 21, 22, p. 181.

males out of every 100 in County Waterford could neither read nor write. Only Galway and Mayo recorded higher levels of male illiteracy. The case was even worse in relation to females. Eighty per cent of females could not read or write in County Waterford. In this regard, County Kerry joined Galway and Mayo in exceeding the Waterford levels, these three recording female illiteracy rates of between eighty-two and eighty-eight per cent. Taking males and females together, Waterford showed an overall average of seventy-three per cent of people over the age of five having no literacy skills whatsoever.[106] Table 1.7 below illustrates the astounding illiteracy rates that prevailed in what was considered part of the prosperous south-east.

Table 1.7: County, Provincial, and National Illiteracy Rates

	Percentages			*Absolute Numbers*		
Area	*males*	*females*	*both*	*males*	*females*	*both*
Waterford	66	80	73	49,598	65,056	114,654
Kerry	62	83	72	76,701	102,491	179,192
Cork	61	76	68	203,827	264,974	468,801
Clare	56	73	65	67,937	88,610	156,547
Limerick	46	65	56	62,028	91,581	153,609
Tipperary	45	60	52	81,890	112,140	194,030
Kilkenny	44	59	52	34,458	48,006	82,464
Connacht	63	79	71	394,749	490,714	885,463
Munster	56	73	64	541,981	724,852	1,266,833
Leinster	42	53	47	328,467	437,585	766,052
Ulster	37	48	43	358,659	489,058	847,717
Ireland	47	59	53	1,623,856	2,142,210	3,766,066

Note: Counties refer to rural and civic areas combined. Kilkenny, though not part of Munster, is included for the sake of greater regional context, as its inclusion completes the list of counties surrounding Waterford. The others, all being Munster counties, provide a provincial context.
Source: 'Commissioners' Report', Plate 3, & Education tables, *Census of Ireland for the Year 1841*, BPP: Population 2, pp. 166–7, 190–1, 240–1, 250–1 & 256–7,

From this it is evident that Waterford's percentages of people unable to read or write were more in line with those recorded for Connacht or west Munster, than with the

[105] Ibid., witness 820, q. 24, p. 202; witness 810, q. 41, 179; witness 818, q. 18, p. 200.
[106] *Census of Ireland for the Year 1841*, BPP: Population 2 (Shannon, IUP, 1968), 'Commissioners' Report', Plate 3.

south-east. In 1842, a member of a parliamentary commission on the employment of children remarked, after visiting the mining district of Bunmahon, that he had never witnessed such a lack of even the most rudimentary education amongst a people.[107]

Also evident is the fact that, in all cases, females had even less access to education than males. In fact the educational imbalance between the sexes was of a remarkably similar degree in all the regions under consideration. Whether we judge from a county, provincial or national perspective, females never accounted for less than fifty-five per cent of the illiterate population. More usually, as in the case of six of the seven counties studied above, women and girls made up around fifty-eight per cent of those who could neither read nor write. In the remaining county, Limerick, things were even worse, with females making up sixty per cent of the illiterate population. Logan notes a slight improvment since the 1820s and 1830s, when females had often constituted less than half of the already small school-going population.[108] Nevertheless, given our observations above, this improvement is difficult to discern, especially with the stark gender imbalance in school participation being reflected in breathtaking levels of illiteracy, especially in County Waterford, and particularly among females.

So, around the time the Lismore poor law union was established, a situation existed where subdivision and population increase were occurring in some poorer parts of the new union, such as north of Ballyrafter Flats, but not in other areas, such as Ballysaggartmore. Security of tenure, I have argued, played a significant part in determining this trend. Subdivision was practiced, to an extent, on the duke of

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[107] Emmet O' Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford* (Waterford Trades Council, 1989), p. 39.

Devonshire's estate despite Francis Currey's efforts to prevent it. Yet, its progress was being curtailed, and while Kiely-Ussher's drastic attempts to prevent it by displacing improving tenants to more marginal grounds may have succeeded in the short term, it did so only at an immense human cost in terms of misery and destitution, and resulted ultimately in the bankruptcy of the landlord himself, whose property was sold under the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849.

The building of houses was not, as we have noted, sufficient to accommodate a rising town population, even if the rate of population growth was declining. As a result, acute housing pressures bedevilled towns and country by the early 1840s. Extremely high illiteracy rates conspired with a general lack of capital and the absence of security over a pretty wide area to condemn many small cottier farmers and agricultural labourers to a precarious subsistence farming on the eve of the Famine.

[108] John Logan, 'Dimensions of gender in nineteenth-century schooling', in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds.), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1997), p. 36.

Chapter Two: Establishment of the Lismore Poor Law Union

Part I: The Poor Laws

The year 1833 had seen the setting up of an inquiry into the conditions of the Irish poor. This inquiry had been established after Lord Althorp, the leader in the House of Commons, acceded to a request from Sir Robert Peel that such a proceeding be undertaken. Peel had made this request in response to a motion proposing the extension of the Elizabethan poor law to Ireland.[1] The 1833 commission consisted of ten members and was headed by Dr. Richard Whately, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin.[2] Sub-commissioners collected huge quantities of information on such matters as earnings, cost of living, and the management of local charities.

The report, which was published in 1836, observed that, in Ireland, the supply of agricultural labour far outstripped the demand. As a result, labourers received an average wage of just over two shillings per week. These labourers and their families lived in 'wretched hovels' and subsisted mainly on a diet of dry potatoes and milk, with the odd herring and rarely, if ever, meat. In addition, the wives and children of such labourers were often forced to beg and, because of the stigma attached to begging, had to travel away from their own locality in order to do so.[3] However, in a letter dated 14 April 1836, the economist Nassau Senior took issue with the implication that, because most Irish labourers were agricultural labourers, supply

[1] R. B. McDowell, 'Administration and the public services, 1800-70', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland (V): Ireland under the Union, 1, 1801-70* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 555.
[2] John O' Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland: the Fate of Ireland's Poor* (Dublin, Anvil Books, 1995), p. 52. For a breakdown of the commissioners' membership, see Helen Burke, *The People and the Poor Law in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Sussex, The Women's Education Bureau, 1987), p. 17.
[3] *Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland,* BPP 1836 [43] Vol. XXX.1, Sec. I, p. 3.

therefore outstripped demand.[4] Senior pointed to the case of the United States, where most labourers were also agricultural labourers, and yet where supply did not exceed demand.[5] Yet, while this may have been so, it is worth observing that if, as we have tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, tillage agriculture was even slowly yielding to pastoral before the famine, such a structural alteration to the employment market would indeed have placed the agricultural labourer in a perilous position.

In its programme for improvements, the poor inquiry report recommended the establishment of a board of improvement that would oversee the reclamation of wastelands. Where disputes arose, commissioners of partition would decide cases of entitlement to such land. These lands would be surveyed and valued, with leasing arrangements decided upon by the commissioners of partition subject to board of improvement sanction. Objections would be referred to a court of review.[6] The fencing and draining of such territory would be carried out by a board of works, which would sell or let the reclaimed lands under terms approved of by the board of improvement. The latter would also appoint local commissioners to collect the rates, by means of 'entry and distress' if necessary.[7]

In addition the board of improvement would, in the cases of 'nuisance' cabins that obstructed land improvements, arrange for the occupier of such a cabin to be moved and provided with land out of the allotments held by the board of works.

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[4] Nassau William Senior, economist, was appointed to the poor law commission for England and Wales in 1833. The 1834 amendment act was largely based on his report. In 1838, he was appointed master in chancery, a post he retained until the abolition of the office in 1855. Sidney Lee (ed.), *DNB*, Vol. LI, pp. 245–8 (esp. p. 246).

[5] *Letter from Nassau Senior, Esq., to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, on the Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poor in Ireland* (London, W. Clowes and Sons, 1837), p. 4.

[6] While Nassau Senior signalled general support for the establishment of these bodies, he did voice what appears to have been a valid reservation: 'I do not think that the President and Vice-President of the Board of Improvement ought to be members of the Court of Review, on the general principle, that the authority appealed *from* ought never to be the authority appealed *to*'. Ibid., p. 7.

[7] *Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, Vol. XXX.1, ss. V–VI, pp. 18–21.

Nassau Senior expressed a reservation that the board might not have sufficient land for the amount of tenants that could possibly be ejected from such 'nuisance' cabins. While this observation may have been valid in itself, it was hardly overwhelming, as it merely underlined the need for the board of improvement to practice a judicious prioritisation of cases.[8] This relocation was to be paid for from local resources; a rate would be paid to the board of works while the particular landlord who stood to benefit directly from the tenant's removal would also be liable to pay.[9] The bodily infirm would be housed in public institutions, while rates would also be levied for the building and upkeep of penitentiaries to house vagrants, as well as for the support of deserted children, orphans and widows with young children. Local fiscal control would be taken away from the grand juries and entrusted to county boards.[10]

The commission also found in favour of a state-assisted emigration scheme; they were, however, quick to point out that such a scheme should be only a temporary measure, and did not constitute a long-term solution. The assistant commissioners carried out enquiries in twenty-two counties, and found that emigration was, to most labourers, preferable to workhouses.[11] In County Waterford, emigration over the previous five years amounted to just over 300 in the barony of Middlethird, and between 500 and 1,000 in that of Decies without Drum. In both baronies, small farmers and (especially) labourers dominated the cohort emigrating. Also, the testimonies from both baronies asserted that many more would emigrate if they had the means; one of the Middlethird witnesses, a man named Duckett, recalled a local

[8] *Letter from Nassau Senior*, p. 8.
[9] *Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, Vol. XXX, Sec. VIII, p. 22.
[10] Ibid., Sec. XII, XVI, pp. 23–5; given that such boards were to be made up of taxpayers and resident magistrates, they would probably be identical to the already existing boards of guardians who had responsibility for the running and maintenance of public institutions for the relief of the destitute poor, Ibid., XVIII, p. 26.
[11] Ibid., Sec. IV, pp. 9, 17.

landlord offering to pay the emigration expenses of his labourers and small farmers to America, and that 'none refused' this offer.[12]

The report also urged that those convicted of vagrancy should not be confined for seven years in a penitentiary, but should be sent to suitable British colonies as 'free labourers'. Nevertheless, however 'free' these labourers would be in theory, their wages were to be 'attached in the colony until the expenses of their passage be defrayed'.[13] Foundlings were to be moved to a place decided upon by parliament. Then, when old enough, they would also be settled in a British colony, there to be taught a trade or some other occupation.[14] While Nassau Senior envisaged the necessity of a workhouse-style regime of segregation and frugality if the depots themselves were not to become centres of attraction, he approved of 'emigration on a large scale', so long as its benefits were not negated by future Irish improvidence! He, like the poor inquiry commissioners, saw emigration paid for by the public purse 'as a remedy, not a regimen'.[15]

While the poor inquiry of 1833-6 certainly took 'a large view of its allotted task', this would not prove sufficient to rescue its recommendations from the vagaries of the political climate.[16] The commissioners had displayed sufficient sensitivity to recognise that Irish and English circumstances differed widely, and sufficient realism to see that legislation 'should have reference to circumstances as well as to principle'.[17] Consequently, the report came out against a poor law for Ireland along English lines. The poor inquiry commissioners reasoned that, in England, workhouses were a means of forcing the able-bodied unemployed to be more self-

[12] Ibid., Sec. IV, p. 15.
[13] Ibid., Sec. XXIV, p. 27.
[14] Ibid.,Sec. XXIV & XXVI, pp. 27–8.
[15] *Letter from Nassau Senior*, p. 9.
[16] Oliver MacDonagh, 'The economy and society', in Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, p. 226.
[17] *Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, Vol. XXX, Sec. II, p. 4.

reliant and, when unable to obtain work in one locality, to migrate to another. In the Irish case, there was no lack of willingness to work, or to migrate in order to get work, on the part of the able-bodied Irish poor; in fact, the Irish rural proletariat were prepared not only to migrate, but were 'decidedly in favour of emigration' if a reasonably secure livelihood could be thereby obtained. In short, the poor inquiry's analysis was that workhouses in Ireland would be no deterrent to idleness, as idleness in Ireland resulted from lack of opportunity, and not from laziness.[18]

The inquiry's task was both immense and time-consuming, and by 1836 Lord Melbourne's whig government was growing impatient. Indeed the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, threatened to dismantle the commission if a report was not produced soon.[19] On 9 February Richard Musgrave of Tourin, County Waterford, moved to introduce a poor relief bill for Ireland; this was to apply, naturally, only 'in certain cases'.[20] Neither time nor the political climate seemed to favour the poor inquiry commissioners. In 1834 the government had introduced a poor law amendment act into England and Wales. This act, according to Oliver MacDonagh, represented an attempt to steer a middle course between two equally unpalatable extremes. These unattractive extremes consisted of allowing English and Welsh rural labourers to deteriorate into 'an army of paupers, idle and expensive' on the one hand, and provoking severe privation and unrest if relief were withdrawn and market forces allowed completely free rein on the other.[21] Under this act three persons were to be appointed as poor law commissioners, and these would in turn have the power to appoint assistant commissioners. The 1834 act permitted the giving of outdoor relief

[18] Ibid., Sec. II, pp. 4–5.
[19] McDowell, 'Administration and the public services', pp. 555–6.
[20] Sir George Nicholls, *A History of the Irish Poor Law, in connection with the Condition of the People* (New York, Augustus M. Kelly, 1967 [orig. 1856]), p. 154.
[21] MacDonagh, 'The economy and society, 1830-45', p. 225.

to adults who, through old age or infirmity, were deemed unable to work.[22] This was, as Michael Gould points out, a key point of contrast with the subsequent poor law in Ireland, which was enacted four years later.[23] Although, in opposing the poor inquiry's suggestion of outdoor relief as 'a transfer to Ireland of the English poor laws', Nassau Senior added that, far from extending outdoor relief to Ireland, 'we are proposing to gradually abolish out-door relief even in England'.[24]

There was almost universal agreement among British MPs on the issue of extending the poor law to Ireland. Such an extension was not only deemed necessary for Ireland, but was held to be essential to the successful continuation of the new poor law in England and Wales as well. After all, it was pointed out, the 1834 attempt to tackle the problems of English and Welsh poverty via a poor law would be futile if the lack of a similar poor law in Ireland attracted an influx of Irish paupers into Britain.[25] There were already, according to Ó Tuathaigh, 'increasing levels of alarm' throughout British society with regard to the spiralling numbers of Irish paupers who crowded the ghettoes of industrial towns.[26] On the positive side, it was held that an Irish poor law, which laid the burden of taxation on Irish landlords, would stimulate economic development and discourage 'economic inertia'.[27]

Pressure began to grow as a powerful lobby in England became convinced that, now that England had a poor law based on workhouse relief and local union rates, 'Ireland should follow suit, and Irish property should support Irish paupers'.[28]

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[22] 4 & 5 Wm., IV. c. 76, 'An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales'.
[23] Michael Gould, *The Workhouses of Ulster* (Belfast, Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, 1983), p. 3.
[24] *Letter from Nassau Senior*, p. 10.
[25] Burke maintains that, in 1834, when the new English poor law was passed, there were 10,000 adult Irish beggars in Liverpool alone. Burke, *The People and the Poor Law*, p. 23.
[26] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798-1848* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1990), p. 112. See also Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp. 36–7.
[27] McDowell, 'Administration and the public services', p. 554.
[28] Burke, *The People and the Poor Law*, p. 23.

In late August 1836, less than six months after the poor inquiry commissioners had published their report, George Nicholls was sent to Ireland by the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell; Nicholls was to investigate the possibility of extending the new poor laws to Ireland. While, in theory, the 1838 Irish poor law grew out of Nicholls' report, there is merit in the view that the findings of this report were themselves predetermined by the English poor law. There was, after all, something decidedly circular about it all; Nicholls had been one of the chief architects of the 1834 poor law amendment act for England and Wales, and was, only two years later, deciding whether or not the laws which he had been instrumental in formulating were appropriate to Ireland.[29] Unlike the poor inquiry, his report seemed to minimise differences between the prevailing circumstances in England and Ireland. For instance, when countenancing criticisms of the demoralising effects a poor law would probably have on the Irish peasantry, Nicholls claimed that such an objection sprung 'from the example of England under the old law', and that it ignored the manner in which the new poor law was ridding England of previous abuses.[30] In effect, he evaded the objection he claimed to refute, by merely speculating, probably incorrectly, as to its assumptions.

Nicholls' first report did acknowledge that it would be futile, 'even if it were desirable, to seek to make the lodging, the clothing, the diet, of the inmates of an Irish workhouse, inferior to those of the Irish peasantry'. Basically, the Irish rural labourers' standard of living 'is unhappily so low, that the establishment of one still

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[29] This circularity is hinted at in Ó Tuathaigh's work, which points out that, while the poor inquiry commissioners were outraged that their exhaustive work was being passed over, the government had already decided what it wanted from Nicholls' 'hastily prepared report'. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine*, p. 112.

[30] *Report of George Nicholls Esq, to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, on Poor Laws, Ireland*, BPP 1837 [69] LI. 201, p. 7.

lower is difficult, and would, I think, under any circumstances, be inexpedient'.[31] This point coincided with the poor inquiry commissioners' observation that hopelessness, caused by the outstripping of supply over demand in terms of agricultural labour, and not laziness, was the root cause of Irish misery. The willingness of many Irish labourers to travel in order to secure work evidenced this. In fact, the poorest province, Connacht, provided most of the labourers who travelled annually to England for harvest work, despite Connacht being also the farthest Irish province from England.[32] Yet Nicholls, it seems, was able to rationalise the 'less eligibility' principle back into relevance with reference to the apparently 'migratory' nature of the Irish.[33] The fact, if not the conditions, of confinement would, he reasoned, render a stay in the workhouse intolerable to fraudulent Irish claimants on relief.[34]

In addition, economics seemed to be on Nicholls' side. Many objections to the poor inquiry recommendations centred round cost. The application of these proposals would indeed have been extremely expensive. MacDonagh speculates that 'the assisted emigration project alone might have cost £20 million for a merely temporary relief'.[35] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, in like manner, tells of a 'very modest experiment' conducted in 1823-5, whereby roughly 2,000 people were assisted in emigrating to Canada. The government incurred an expense of about £20 per person emigrating, which 'caused misgivings about the prohibitive costs of such schemes'.[36]

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[31] Ibid., p. 14. Nassau Senior conceded this same point in his letter to Russell, *Letter from Nassau Senior*, p. 4.
[32] *Second Report of George Nicholls, to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, on Poor Laws, Ireland*, BPP 1837–8 [104] XXXVIII. 657, p. 41.
[33] The principle of 'less eligibility' meant that, in order to avoid an influx into the workhouses and onto the rates, workhouse conditions were to be worse than those of even the lowest paid workers outside. This principle, combined with the insistence that those claiming must relief surrender their liberty and enter the workhouse, constituted the 'workhouse test'. See Burke, *The People and the Poor Law*, p. 22.
[34] *Report of George Nicholls*, p. 14.
[35] MacDonagh, 'The economy and society', p. 226.
[36] Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine*, p. 114.

George Nicholls, on the other hand, claimed that, even if the eighty projected workhouses were increased to 100 houses and £7,000 were allowed for the erection of each, the resulting £700,000 overall cost of furnishing all of Ireland with such accommodation would be moderate, especially when one considered the nature and dimensions of the project.[37]

In late July 1838, the Irish poor law came into existence. Poor law commissioners were ultimately responsible for the implementation of the terms of the act. These commissioners could unite townlands into unions for the relief of the destitute poor, dissolve such unions and divide them into electoral divisions.[38] They could order that workhouses be built or that suitable pre-existing buildings be converted into workhouses.[39] A workhouse was to be situated in each of the 130 poor law unions. The commissioners were also to ensure that adequate provision was made for the religious needs of the inmates by appointing Catholic, Anglican and Protestant Dissenter chaplains.[40] These workhouses were, however, harsh and pitiless institutions, forbidding in their Gothic appearance, which reflected the severity of the regime within. Inmates were subjected to the humiliation of wearing 'pauper' uniforms, and performing hard labour, while being robbed of a family life by a strict segregation of adults from children, and men from women.[41]

Responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance of the workhouse fell to a board of guardians. Each union was to have such a board, and its members were made up of elected and *ex-officio* guardians. The ratepayers of a union elected the former, while

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[37] *Report of George Nicholls*, p. 15.
[38] 1 & 2 Vic, c. 56, ss. III, XV, XVI, XVIII.
[39] Not that all such pre-existing buildings utilised as workhouses were suitable. In Fermoy, even after £7,000 had been spent on the conversion of a barracks into a workhouse, the Earl of Mountcashel, a local guardian, spoke of their 'doing what they could to get rid of this rotten old barracks as a workhouse', *Waterford Mirror* [hereafter *WMr*], 19 August 1840.
[40] 1 & 2 Vic, c. 56, s. XLVIII.
[41] Joseph Robins, *The Miasma: Epidemic and Disease in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 1995), p. 114.

the latter were to be justices of the peace who were resident in the union for which they sat as guardians, and who were not clergymen of any religious denomination. If, for one reason or another, the election of guardians was delayed, the *ex-officio* members could continue to attend to the union's affairs. They could not, however, account for more than one-third of an entire board.[42] A board meeting, if it was to have any validity, had to be attended by at least three guardians, and the guardians were also charged with surveying and valuing property in a union, as well as levying the poor rates based on such valuations.[43] A key feature of the 1838 legislation was the idea that landlords should be taxed for the relief of the destitute. This had also been a consideration in George Nicholls' original 1836 report, and it was a principle he was to reiterate almost twenty years later, when he wrote that nothing was 'so equitable or so readily effective' for the improvement of the Irish poor, 'as making property liable for the relief of destitution in Ireland'.[44]

The guardians were empowered to employ parish wardens, who were responsible for the conveyance of such destitute poor to the workhouse as the guardians directed. These wardens could also be summoned to board meetings in order to report on the extent of destitution in a union. There was no outdoor relief.[45] Yet, despite this crucial difference, George Nicholls was correct when he candidly observed that the Irish poor law was, essentially, 'no more than a branch or offshoot of the English law'.[46]

[42] 1 & 2 Vic, c. 56, ss. XVII, XXIII, XXIV, LXXXI.
[43] Ibid., ss. XXIX, LXI, LXVI.
[44] Nicholls, *A History of the Irish Poor Law*, p. 153.
[45] One Waterford newspaper related this to its readers in the severity and starkness of the original: 'All relief is to be given in the workhouse, there is no authority for granting extern relief', *WMr*, 1 April 1839, 'Operation of the Poor Law'.
[46] Nicholls. *A History of the Irish Poor Law*, p. v.

Parents were liable by law for the maintenance of their children under the age of 15 years, and adult offspring were likewise liable for the maintenance of their old or sick parents.[47] A husband who deserted his wife and her children could face three months imprisonment and hard labour. Boards of guardians were instructed to give preference to children, the sick and the destitute old, over the able-bodied destitute poor. In addition, the destitute poor of a particular union were to be preferred by its guardians over those not of that union.[48] After all, unlike in England and Wales, there was no legal right to relief in Ireland. Workhouse admission was granted or denied at the discretion of the guardians.[49] Up to one month in jail with hard labour could be incurred by an inmate convicted of insubordination, refusing to work, drunkenness, or attempting to smuggle alcohol into a workhouse. A similar sentence could be imposed on anyone refusing to enter a workhouse in the first place.[50] The threat of imprisonment was not, however, always a deterrent, as many people hated the workhouses even more than they hated the jails.[51]

Part II: The Lismore Union and its Controversies

The Lismore poor law union, which was situated in the western extremity of County Waterford, was declared on 30 March 1839. This union covered an area of 95,478 statute acres and had, in 1831, a population of 34,376 persons.[52] In mid-April 1839 a notice appeared in the *Waterford Mirror* addressed to those persons 'entitled

[47] 1 & 2 Vic, c. 56, ss. L, LIII, LVII.
[48] Ibid., ss. LIX, XLI.
[49] Virginia Crossman, 'The poor laws', in S .J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, OUP, 1998), p. 452.
[50] 1 & 2 Vic, c. 56, s. LVII.
[51] See, for instance, Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine*, p. 113.
[52] *Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with Appendices A, B, &C* (London, C. Knight and Co., 1840), App. E, No. 7, p. 478; Tom Nolan puts this figure at 97,397 acres, 'The Lismore poor law union and the famine', in Des Cowman and Donal Brady (eds.), *Teacht na bPratai Dubha: the Famine in Waterford, 1845-1850* (Dublin, Geography Publications, 1995), p. 101.

to claim a vote as landlords or owners' in the Lismore union, stating that an election of guardians was to take place on 13 May 1839. Another meeting took place on 29 April at Lismore courthouse in order to declare the names of the candidates for the position of guardian in the union's electoral divisions.[53] At this meeting, which was chaired by Rodolphus Mortimer, the Union's returning officer, sixteen guardians were elected for six electoral divisions. These were: Henry Witham, John Bennet, P. Heffernan and James Power for Lismore; William Welstead and John Carroll for Ballysaggartmore; Thomas Smith, John Hely, Matthew Phelan and Thomas Buckley for Cappoquin; Nicholas Walsh and Richard Power for West Modeligo; Joshua Eustace and William Mansfield for Temple Michael and John Kiely and P. Mansfield for Kilcockin. The districts of Mocollop, Castle Richard, and Tallow were still to be contested, and Mortimer declared that an election for them would take place on Monday, 13 May.[54] At this subsequent meeting Michael Flynn and Nelson Trafalgar Foley were elected for Castle Richard, Edmond Barry and Thomas Connery for Macollop, along with R. Hudson, P. Leahy, R. Bartenett and James Parker for Tallow.[55]

On 16 February 1839 the assistant poor law commissioner, Mr. John O' Donoghue, gave notice that he would explain the application of the act to the owners and occupiers of land, as well as to the public in general in the barony of Coshmore and Coshbride at Lismore courthouse on Friday, 22 February.[56] However, the formation of the Lismore and Dungarvan poor law unions was not to be without controversy. In a letter addressed to the editors of both the *Waterford Mirror* and the

[53] *WMr*, 17 April 1839, 'Election of Guardians of the Poor for the several Electoral Divisions in the Lismore Union'.
[54] Ibid., 1 May 1839, 'Union of Lismore'.
[55] Ibid.,15 May 1839, 'Union of Lismore'.
[56] Ibid., 18 Feb., 1839.

Chronicle, Sir Richard Musgrave[57] complained that, according to Mr. O' Donoghue's account of the proposed poor law union boundaries, the Lismore union would be only half the size of the Dungarvan union. Consequently, the cost of building a workhouse, 'estimated at £650, but which will most probably exceed that sum, would result in an annual charge for the Lismore union ratepayers of almost double that which would be imposed on the ratepayers of the much larger Dungarvan Union'.[58] A workhouse for the Lismore union had been contracted for on 11 November 1839, and was finally declared fit for the reception of inmates on 18 May 1842. It had a capacity of 500 persons and occupied four acres of ground at Townspark East.[59]

On the cost of the workhouse at least, Musgrave was in all likelihood correct. According to the 1843 report of the poor law commissioners, £6,500 had been borrowed initially, and this was followed by an additional £1,200.[60] While these borrowings may have been made to meet a variety of union expenses, £650 for the building of a workhouse was still an unduly optimistic estimate, especially when one considers a Dungarvan poor law guardian's opinion that the building and maintenance of a union fever hospital would cost £1,500.[61] Similarly, in August 1840, the Fermoy guardians were ordered by the poor law commissioners to levy £7,800 for the purchase of a barracks, and this sum exceeded by £1,700 the amount the

[57] Musgrave was a poor law guardian and landholder who resided at Toureen, Co. Waterford. The Musgraves were originally of the yeomanry rank in Woortly, in the parish of Leeds, and the county of York. Surviving deeds document how a previous Richard Musgrave, from the parish of Addingham in York, sold his Woortly lands to one Richard Fountain, an embroiderer from the city of London, for £425, and moved to Lismore. See Chearnley Papers, Dungarvan Public Library, PP/CHLY/1–4.
[58] *WMr*, 27 Feb., 1839.
[59] Ordnance Survey of Ireland (1841), sheets 21–2. See also John O' Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland*, pp. 261–2, and Nolan, 'The Lismore poor law union and the famine', p. 101.
[60] *Ninth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with Appendices* (London, W. Clowes and Sons, 1843), App. C. No. 11: 'Abstract of Returns showing the Amount per Pound of every Rate imposed upon each Electoral Division of each Union undermentioned since the declaration of such Union', p. 486.
[61] *Waterford Freeman* [hereafter *WF*], 24 December 1845, 'New oppression – poor law taxes in Dungarvan'. One commentator has put the costs directly relating to the workhouse itself at £6,500, with £5,500 spent on building the house, and a further £1,000 'for fittings and contingencies', Nolan, 'The Lismore poor law union and the famine', p. 101.

commissioners believed would be the total cost of providing 'a very commodious and substantial workhouse'.[62] Even so strict a disciple of economy as George Nicholls was prepared, in theory at least, to allow up to £7,000 on average for the building of a workhouse.[63] While it is conceded that workhouses of different sizes and capacities would vary in cost, the figure of £650 was, as Musgrave pointed out, wildly optimistic.[64]

Musgrave further argued that the proposed boundaries were illogical in addition to being unfair. The western extremity of Dungarvan union, he contended, would lie eight Irish miles from Dungarvan itself, but 'less than four miles from the Lismore workhouse by the nearest road, and less than three miles Irish in a straight line'. Consequently, while the Dungarvan union would stretch to within one Irish mile of Cappoquin, 'in which are great numbers of paupers', it would not 'have to contribute one shilling for the support of the poor of that town'.[65] In this regard it may not be impertinent to observe that, according to the earliest extant minutes for the meetings of the Lismore board of guardians, the Cappoquin electoral division recorded the second largest amount of outstanding poor rates. This is in spite of its being, at least at this meeting, the only electoral division recorded as having paid anything.[66] According to the minutes of this meeting, the ratepayers of the Cappoquin electoral division had paid £20 9*s* 2*d* and yet still owed £101 13*s* 10.5*d*. Only Tallow,

[62] *WMr*, 17 August 1840.
[63] *Report of George Nicholls*, p. 15.
[64] Workhouse capacities varied from 200 persons (in Castlederg and Gortin) to 2,000 persons (in Cork, Dublin North, and Dublin South). John O' Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland*, pp. 260–1.
[65] *WMr*, 27 February 1839.
[66] BG/LISM/1, 7 October 1843. Indeed, in late March of the same year the *Dublin Evening Mail* reported that: 'The people in the Dungarvan union have not paid a single penny poor rates, and are determined not to pay, and the poorhouse has not as yet been opened. The gentlemen and respectable farmers are as much opposed to paying as the poorest cottager', *Waterford Chronicle* [hereafter *WC*], 28 March 1843.

which Sir Richard Musgrave acknowledged as an equally badly off electoral division, was in worse arrears, owing £137 14*s* 3.5*d*.[67]

Without seeking to undermine what was in all probability a perfectly valid grievance, subsequent experience was not to unequivocally endorse Musgrave's implication of Cappoquin's relative deprivation in comparison to Dungarvan. In fact, by 1843 the Dungarvan guardians themselves felt the need to complain about assistant commissioner O' Donoghue. At a meeting of the Dungarvan board of guardians on 26 June 1843, the chairman, Robert Uniacke, was reported as saying that

> as the Assistant Commissioners had nothing to do, and were perfectly useless functionaries, he would suggest that a memorial be sent to government ordering Mr. O' Donohue, Assistant Commissioner, to go out with the collectors to collect the rates, as the board were quite competent to do their business without him.[68]

Obviously, from this report, the matter of the collection of rates was a contentious issue between central and local authorities. The difficulties involved at a local level were illustrated by the beating of a rate-collector in Cork, 'while in the execution of his duty' in September 1840.[69] Indeed, the perilous nature of rate collecting had also been evidenced by a *Waterford Chronicle* report of mid-April 1843. This report told how the poor rate collector for the barony of Gaultier, one Mr. Fitzmaurice, only managed to escape the full wrath of an angry crowd by assuring them that he would cease in his activities as a rate collector.[70] In 1845 a Dungarvan rate payer and guardian observed that the board of guardians deemed it necessary to appoint six collectors instead of two, as 'the great distress and poverty' prevailing in the area had

[67] BG/LISM/1, 11 October 1843.
[68] *WC*, 31 January 1843.
[69] *WMr*, 14 September 1840.
[70] *WC*, 11 April, 1843, 'Latest from Gaultier'.

made the gathering of the previous rate extremely difficult and dangerous.[71] Given the inherent risks to personal safety in collecting the rates, it is perhaps not surprising that Robert Uniacke of the Dungarvan guardians could wish that such an occupation be given by the government to so 'useless' and obviously resented a 'functionary' as a certain assistant poor law commissioner!

Also in 1845 the *Waterford Freeman* carried a story which demonstrated that, far from easing, tensions between the local guardians and the central commissioners had, if anything, become even more aggravated. This report told how *ex-officio* guardians were to be at once dismissed if they disobeyed the instructions of the central commissioners. An even worse fate, that of arrest and imprisonment, was to befall members of 'the other class' of guardians who displayed similar insubordinate tendencies.[72] It must be noted, however, that the *Freeman* article betrays a certain pro-guardian and anti-central authority bias in its sweeping generalisations.[73] For instance, the article was entitled 'Campaign against Poor Law Guardians', and the reason for such a 'campaign' was, the *Freeman* writer posited, that the government had been 'frightened by the Orange magistrates'.[74]

Yet in early 1839 Sir Richard Musgrave's grievances did not end with boundaries *between* poor law unions, but incorporated those *within* unions also. In the same letter of February 1839 he observed that, contrary to the principles for the mapping out of electoral divisions laid down by George Nicholls in his reports, the proposed Cappoquin electoral division would 'consist of a long strip of land', which,

[71] *WF*, 24 December 1845, 'New oppression – poor law taxes in Dungarvan'.
[72] Ibid., 18 October 1845, 'Campaign against poor law guardians'.
[73] Indeed, the *Times* saw fit to characterise the *Freeman's Journal*, a paper with ideological similarities to the *Waterford Freeman*, as 'the organ of the Repeal and Roman Catholic Party', *Times*, 25 August 1845. While the *Freeman* papers may well have held such biases, the pro-state prejudices of the *Times* are also worth keeping in mind. See Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 154.
[74] *WF*, 18 October 1845, 'Campaign against poor law guardians'.

in some places, would be no more than four or five hundred yards in width. While Sir Richard accepted that a perfect circle could not be drawn around towns, he found the proposed boundaries 'wholly unjustifiable'. In effect, the town of Cappoquin would be cut off territorially from its natural hinterland, and so from many ratepayers. As the Balickey river, which runs close to the south-eastern side of the town, was to be a boundary, no land on the other side of the river would be taxed for the relief of Cappoquin's destitute poor. Conversely, as each pauper sent to the workhouse from an electoral district was to be charged to that district, Sir Richard concluded – not without justification – that taxes would be exorbitantly high for small and relatively badly off districts such as Cappoquin and Tallow.[75]

Following from this, a poor law meeting was held at Lismore on Wednesday, 27 February 1839, 'to consider the unequal manner in which the size of that Union had been apportioned'. This meeting was chaired by none other than Sir Richard Musgrave. Musgrave recommended that those gathered should, regardless of party political differences, concert their efforts in pursuit of a more equitable distribution of territory, and of rates, between the Lismore and Dungarvan unions. After much dispute with regard to the particular 'equalizations' to be implemented, the original proposal forwarded by Henry Witham (which had been seconded by Francis Currey) was agreed upon. This proposal entailed the adding of Kilwatermoy parish to the electoral division of Tallow, and of Affane parish to Cappoquin electoral division. It was also agreed that a memorial to this effect be adopted and forwarded to the authorities in Dublin.[76]

Ten days later, Sir Richard received a letter from the poor law commission office in Dublin, which was signed by W. Stanley, the assistant secretary. In essence

[75] *WMr*, 27 February 1839.
[76] Ibid., 2 March 1839.

the memorial from the Lismore ratepayers to the commissioners had consisted of three requests: that the parish of Kilwatermoy be annexed to the Tallow electoral division; that the parish of Affane be added to that of Cappoquin, and that the size discrepancy between the Lismore and Dungarvan unions be redressed. The poor law commissioners felt 'much satisfaction' upon learning that assistant commissioner John O' Donoghue had managed, on grounds acceptable to the commissioners, to accommodate the wishes of the memorialists on two out of their three points of complaint, and they furthermore trusted that the annexation of Kilwatermoy parish to the Tallow electoral division, and the addition, presumably of Affane parish, to that of Cappoquin, would satisfy the Lismore ratepayers. In other words, the 'memorialists' (the Lismore ratepayers) had secured their first two requests. As for the third, the disproportion between the Lismore and Dungarvan unions, the commissioners could see 'no available mode of lessening it materially'.[77] Essentially, it appears that the poor law commissioners were prepared, at least to an extent, to countenance minor alterations to *intra*-union boundaries, but would not allow interference with the *inter*-union boundaries as established. To do so would, from their own viewpoint, allow guardians of one union a say in establishing boundaries between unions, thus interfering with the territory of neighbouring unions, and undermining the authority of the commissioners themselves.

[77] *WMr*, 1 April 1839.

Part III: The Running of the Lismore Workhouse

Under the 1838 Poor Law Act each union was to have a workhouse for the reception of destitute paupers. Although the workhouses were designed to be as forbidding as possible, the system aimed at being severe rather than inhumane. The 'governing principle', in the words of George Nicholls' 1836 report, was to establish a system wherein 'the support which is afforded at the public charge in the workhouse, shall be, on the whole, less desirable than the support to be obtained by independent exertion'. Yet, Nicholls maintained that loss of liberty and strictness of regime would be enough to deter would-be applicants for admission, even if conditions within the walls were materially no worse than those outside.[78] In Lismore, as elsewhere, the boys were to be put working on the workhouse grounds, while the girls were to work 'in the laundry and generally through the house'.[79]

In his account of his Irish travels, which took place roughly ten years after the introduction of the poor laws into Ireland, J. G. Kohl noted of the 'fortress-looking' workhouses that

> they are built of gray, firm stone, are surrounded by lofty walls, and provided with small turrets and other little castellated appendages. They command an extensive prospect over the country, and are the terror of the beggars, who prefer the independence of a mendicant's life to confinement in one of these houses. Some places, in which

[78] *Report of George Nicholls…*, BPP 1837 [69] LI. 201, pt. II, p. 13. See also 'An Act for the more effectual Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland' [31 July 1838], 1&2 Vic., c. 56, paragraph XLI.
[79] BG/LISM/2, 12 June 1844.

workhouses have not yet been erected, are at this moment swarming with beggars, who have there retreated to escape from these dreaded buildings.[80]

Into just such an environment – what one Waterford newspaper referred to as 'one of our Irish Bastilles' – did the first pauper inmates of Lismore workhouse arrive in May 1842, 'to vegetate on bad potatoes, and worse stirabout'.[81] In 1843 an article in the *Illustrated London News* commented on the plight of the Irish destitute:

Not a penny of outdoor relief! And, if they give up their little all, what a fate awaits them within those places of sighs and tears! Two scanty meals of potatoes; milk at one of them, and not a spoonful of broth (meat would set the wretches mad, according to the Poor-Law Commissioners) from the 1st of January to the 31st of December.[82]

The Lismore union workhouse was contracted for on 11 November 1839 with a projected completion date of June 1841. Despite this, the workhouse was only deemed fit to receive inmates in early December 1841, while the first admissions did not actually occur until May of the following year.[83] This workhouse was built to accommodate 500 inmates; it covered four acres and was located south of Lismore town in Townspark East.[84]

Even during its construction, however, the workhouse was to be a site of tragedy. On 3 October 1840, the *Waterford Mirror* carried a story relating the death of one Thomas Lyons. Lyons, a labourer, was working in the limestone quarry when, through a freak accident, he was crushed to death by a large stone that he and his

[80] J. G. Kohl, *Travels in Ireland* (London, J. & D. A. Darling, 1849) , p. 225.
[81] *WF*, 18 February 1845, 'Distress in Dungarvan'.
[82] *Illustrated London News* [hereafter *ILN*], 12 August 1843, 'Ireland and the Irish'.
[83] *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with Appendices* (London, W. Clowes and Sons, 1844), Appendix B, No. 12, p. 521.
[84] 'Financial Return for Lismore Poor Law Union', in *Papers relating to the Proceedings for the Relief of the Distress, and State of the Unions and Workhouses, in Ireland: Fourth Series – 1847* (London, William Clowes and Sons, 1847), p. 239. For details on the site of the workhouse, see also *Ordnance Survey of 1841*, Sheet no. 21.

fellow workers were carrying on a barrow. Apparently, he slipped from a gangway, fell into the quarry and was crushed as the stone 'fell on the unfortunate man's neck and chest'. According to the same report, Thomas Lyons died about an hour later.[85]

The picture that emerges of workhouse life is one not only of austerity, degradation and the fragmentation of families, but also of physical discomfort to a dangerous degree. At the time of the setting up of the Fermoy union the guardians there lamented the 'rotten' state of their workhouse.[86] One of the poor law's chief problems was, paradoxically, the very economy that was hailed as its principal virtue. While a strict adherence to 'economy' led to structurally flawed houses being built or converted for the reception of the destitute, the same economy prevented their proper repair and maintenance.

In Lismore, the state of the workhouse came in for pointed criticism from the guardians themselves who, in early 1845, issued a petition to parliament on the matter. They complained that, during the financial year ending September 1844, the union had been held liable for rates amounting to over £1,600. Repayments due on the workhouse loan constituted much of this burden. According to their own view, the guardians were being held accountable for repaying a loan, and yet had exerted no influence over how this loan had been spent. They had, through no fault of their own, workhouse debts but no proper workhouse:

> A loan for the erection of the Union house exhibits a disheartening prospect to your memorialists who in the discharge of their duties daily and weekly descry the defects and inconveniences of a disjointed structure...but an architect accustomed to build with brick seldom succeeds with stone. Such has been the cause of the glaring defects daily

[85] *WMr*, 3 October 1840.
[86] Ibid., 19 August 1840, 'The Poor Law Commissioners and the Fermoy Union Guardians'. For a consideration of local controversy regarding the Fermoy workhouse, see Edward Garner, *To Die by Inches* (Midleton, Co. Cork, Litho Press, 1986), p. 25.

manifesting themselves in the walls of the Lismore workhouse. Eighteen-inch outer walls in an exposed situation are ill calculated to resist the corroding consequences of the rain and damps of an Irish climate.[87]

While guardians seeking the renegotiation of loan-repayments might be suspected of exaggerating the structural defects of a workhouse, those in Lismore expressed every confidence that the government inspector's imminent report would corroborate their view. The obvious state of decay would, the memorialists hoped, promptly favour the guardians with a little more leeway.

The issue of the workhouse loan resurfaced later in 1845. On 10 September, a new rate was to be struck for the ensuing financial year. W. J. Homan, an *ex-officio* guardian, proposed that an extra 2*d* in the £1 be added to the rate in order to meet the loan repayments.[88] Given that guardians were landowners and landowners were ratepayers, it is not surprising that this proposal was rejected. It is, however, even less surprising that this rejection was swiftly followed by a communication from assistant commissioner Burke, who 'recommended' that the guardians reconsider this resolution. Obviously, the board had merely overlooked the instalments due on the workhouse loan when striking a rate, and the assistant commissioner gladly drew their attention to this oversight by informing them that 'it was the intention of the government to require the instalments to be paid'.[89] The rates were duly amended.[90]

Given the Lismore guardians' condemnation of the state of their own workhouse, most of the repairs recommended by them were pretty superficial. In early 1846, the visiting committee condemned the original structure and stated that

[87] LISM/BG/3, 19 February 1845.
[88] Ibid., 3 September 1845.
[89] Ibid., 10 September 1845.
[90] Ibid., 24 September 1845.

> in consequence of the shameful manner in which the union workhouse has been built the rain has this week penetrated the walls to such an extent as to render the dormitories scarcely fit for the paupers to inhabit and unless some extensive repairs are made the principal timbers in the workhouse must very shortly decay.[91]

Yet 'extensive repairs' were exactly what the workhouse would not get. From late 1843, when the extant minutes begin, up to early 1846, it is fair to say that no substantial repairs were carried out. On 8 November 1843, the guardians ordered that the stoves and flues should be put into proper repair, with grates installed and masonry repaired.[92] A year later, they ordered a report on the conditions of the roofs, towers and sashes of the main building.[93] Also in late 1844, the assistant commissioner insisted on a stove being placed in the workroom, as a fire was necessary there during the winter.[94] Early 1845 saw the visiting committee order that two ground-floor hospital apartments be boarded; while in July of the same year the guardians directed modifications in the windows of both the male and female dormitories so that ventilation could be improved.[95] Yet, ultimately, most of these recommendations addressed only the more cosmetic considerations of workhouse maintenance, and spanned a two-year period from mid-1844 to mid-1846. These were, according to the minutes, the only workhouse repairs authorised by the guardians during this time.

On the other hand, the visiting committee insisted that the men and boys in the Lismore house get a change of linen twice weekly[96], that a half ton of straw be

[91] BG/LISM/4, 4 March 1846.
[92] BG/LISM/2, 8 November 1843.
[93] BG/LISM/3, 6 November 1844.
[94] Ibid., 20 November 1844.
[95] Ibid., 12 February 1845, 23 July 1845.
[96] Ibid., 26 March 1845.

ordered for the use of the inmates,[97] and that more attention be paid to cleanliness and hygiene throughout the house, particularly in the nursery.[98] Yet, even where there were legitimate hygiene grounds for a given policy, the sheer uniformity imposed on the inmates was degrading – sometimes stretching beyond mere clothing to their physical appearances. Along with having to endure the humiliation of wearing pauper uniforms, and adhering to a pitiless workhouse regime, it was ordered that 'all persons on their admission into the hospital shall have their hair trimmed in such manner as the Medical Officer recommends'.[99] While some of the steps taken by the commissioners and guardians could be justified individually, taken together they constituted a singularly harsh regime whose main achievement before the famine was the unnecessary alienation and humiliation of those who finally succumbed to the 'workhouse test'.

While it is of course true that, in many cases, the clothes surrendered were little more than rags, the sheer uniformity and dehumanising nature of the regime made life inside the workhouse all but intolerable.[100] Yet there was, in fairness to the guardians, a serious hygiene factor involved when it came to the issue of clothing. This was illustrated starkly by the workhouse doctor of the Mallow union in early 1847, who pointed to 'the paupers having been permitted to wear their own filthy clothing' as a key contributor to workhouse mortality.[101]

Indeed the policy of keeping the clothes of those admitted for the use of those who were leaving could well have aggravated an already grievous situation. At the height of pressure on accommodation, and when contagion was a real threat, the

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[97] Ibid., 2 April 1845.
[98] BG/LISM/4, 12, 18 December 1845.
[99] BG/LISM/3, 5 February 1845.
[100] This is evidenced by a number of references to the deaths of inmates recorded in the minutes. See, for instance, the cases of John Calahan, William Carey and Anne Farrell. Ibid., 19 February, 16 April 1845.
[101] *Cork Examiner* [hereafter *CE*], 8 January 1847.

Lismore guardians decided against giving the clothing of deceased paupers to the nearest relative in future, and instead agreed with the master that such clothing should be kept 'for orphans who are a long time in the house, and have outgrown their own clothes'. The master, to drive the point home, cited the case of John Mahony, an orphan inmate who had been in the workhouse for about five years. Mahony had found work outside of the workhouse, but had outgrown his own clothes. He therefore received a suit of clothes that had been the property of some now-deceased inmate.[102]

In Lismore, the medical officer complained that 'the rain pours in torrents down the staircases in the infirmary whereon there is much rain accompanied by wind'.[103] A month later the master at Tallow reported that the roof of the spinning shed was still 'in a very bad state'.[104] In Lismore, Dr. Currey also complained that 'the rain penetrates the south wall of the infirmary rendering the ward just opened extremely damp'. He also insisted that, in future, the manure should be placed further away from the house, 'and not at the rear of the infirmary'.[105]

In his report, the medical officer observed that, since the number of infirm patients had 'increased considerably' over the month of January 1850, it was 'necessary to open an additional ward'. He predicted that the current upward trend in numbers occupying the infirmary wards would continue. In particular, he lamented the totally inadequate infirmary accommodation provided for males. So great was the crisis that he was 'frequently obliged to retain in hospital persons labouring under chronic diseases, who might be equally attended to in the infirm wards'.[106] At the same time the master proposed, and the board accepted, that the sheds in the girls'

[102] BG/LISM/8, 31 July 1850. See also, NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 31 July 1850, p. 50.
[103] BG/LISM/8, 12 December 1849.
[104] Ibid., 16 January 1850.
[105] Ibid., 30 January 1850.
[106] Ibid., 23 January 1850.

yards should be 'converted into female infirm wards'.[107] Yet despite the accommodation crisis and the poor law commissioners' indication that further building was permissible, they warned the guardians that, under current legislation, the quantity of land that could be attached to a workhouse was limited to fifteen acres.[108]

Nevertheless, the clerk advertised for tenders 'to increase the accommodation at the Lismore fever hospital, the original workhouse and the auxiliary workhouse at Cliffe's yard'. The master was also ordered to send details of the new building at Tallow to the clerk, 'with a view to its being ascertained what number of inmates it could accommodate'.[109] While the new building's capacity was about 200 people, later minutes indicate that the overall accommodation in Tallow for the destitute poor totalled roughly 1,000 people.[110]

Yet structural problems also bedevilled the Tallow auxiliary house. In 1849 the master related how the foundations of the exterior walls on 'the south and west sides' were 'in a bad state', and stood in urgent need of repair.[111] In early August 1850, the architect reported that the roof of the hospital at the Tallow auxiliary was also in bad repair. Similarly, the spinning-room roof needed slating, as 'the rain comes through the old slates'.[112] The assistant master noted that a recent storm had torn away some of the slates from the auxiliary workhouse roof.[113] Two months later he recorded that a section of the Tallow fever hospital surrounding wall had fallen. It

[107] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 6 February 1850, p. 85.
[108] BG/LISM/8, 23 January 1850. See also 1 & 2 Vic., c. 56, sec. 35; and 10 Vic. c. 31, sec. 20.
[109] Ibid., 6 February 1850.
[110] Ibid., 13 March, 20 February 1850.
[111] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 17 January 1849, p. 30.
[112] BG/LISM/8, 7 August 1850.
[113] BG/LISM/9, 20 November 1850.

was important that repair work be carried out quickly on the wall, as the breach allowed 'access to the hospital without going through the hospital entrance'.[114]

While repair work had been carried out on the roof of the Lismore workhouse, the standard was deemed to be unsatisfactory. The architect opined, and the board agreed, that the slater should remove, 'at his own expense such slating as is placed on defective laths and replace the same using good laths'. The carpenter was also to strip down items of inferior quality, again at his own expense, and 'supply such as are required by the specification'.[115] In matters of maintenance, as in those of food supplies, general shortages and policies of 'economy' probably combined to bring standards down. Here again, the guardians' insistence on cheap workmanship meant shoddy workmanship. Once sub-standard quality was noted, the insistence on free reparations simply meant more sub-standard quality. From the guardians' point of view, the supplier or workman should be held responsible for supplying defective goods or services for which money was being paid. From the supplier's or workman's viewpoint, however, the guardians were more miserly than economic, and were demanding quality for which they were not prepared to pay competitive prices. The inmates suffered the consequences of this crossfire.

While accommodation was being repaired and augmented, it was not keeping pace with the desperate nature of the situation. In April 1849 the master insisted on 'the necessity of erecting sheds in the boys' and girls' yards', in order to provide more accommodation. Yet one month later he received a sealed order from the poor law commissioners 'limiting the number to be accommodated in each of the workhouses'.[116] Despite the acquisition of extra space in Tallow, as well as Cliffe's yard and Rearden's store in Lismore, the guardians resolved that the clerk admit no

[114] Ibid., 15 January 1851.
[115] Ibid., 12 February 1851.
[116] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 4 April 1849, p. 42, 4 July 1849, p. 50.

one for temporary relief; only the 'really destitute' were to find refuge in the house. While in theory only such acute cases of need should ever have been admitted, the fact is that many boards of guardians exercised discretion in this respect. The order to apply poor law theory with such rigidity for the immediate future reflected the dimensions of the catastrophe facing the union. Places were few, and short-term admissions constituted 'a serious item of expenditure'.[117]

Despite the board's order that only the absolutely destitute be admitted, it appears that 'casual' admissions for a night's lodging were continuing. In fact, the guardians only objected to the late hour at which such persons were being admitted. Although the original workhouse and its immediate extensions held 911 persons (137 more than their capacity) the guardians only insisted that relieving officers were not to admit applicants for a night's lodging after nine o' clock, and that tickets should bear the hour at which they were issued.[118] These 'provisional' inmates were given breakfast the following morning, for which they performed workhouse labour for three hours. Yet by April 1850, probably as a result of the difficulties involved in finding work for an inmate population that had grown larger than could possibly have been foreseen, even the three hours of labour were not always exacted from one-night lodgers.[119]

If the Lismore union guardians were in breach of the letter and spirit of the poor laws by permitting overnight lodgers at the workhouse, the Tallow assistant master breached the rules by allowing people out of the workhouse at night. In early June 1850, it was noted that the assistant master issued 'numerous passes' to inmates. Apparently, this resulted in 'some of the inmates not returning for several hours and

[117] BG/LISM/8, 27 February 1850.
[118] Ibid., 8 May 1850.
[119] A proposal from Edmund Foley was adopted that this work should be mandatory in future. Ibid., 17 April 1850.

in some instances remaining out all night'.[120] It is difficult to determine whether or not the guardians had known of these practices. Either way, they ordered that, in future, passes be given only in cases allowed by the commissioners. This, in effect, meant never.[121]

Yet this does not appear to have been the end of the matter. Only one week later, an inspection of the porter's book at Tallow revealed that all the female officers of the house were absent at the one time. In addition, the schoolmistress had stayed out one whole night, not arriving back until 6 p.m. the following day. The guardians demanded that the schoolmistress account for her absence the following week.[122] They also ordered that the master of the Tallow house be informed of the absences of the female officers.

The issue of staff absenteeism from the Tallow house resurfaced within a week. In mid June 1850, the master reported that workhouse officers ignored an order from the guardians that absences should be recorded, as should the times of leaving and returning. Judging by previous applications for leave of absence by officers, it would seem that only serious and verifiable reasons were entertained. The master noted the officers' claim that there was no order of the board to prevent them coming and going 'whenever they please'. He asked the board to order that 'not more than one officer should be absent from the house at any one time'. The guardians facilitated the master in this respect. Indeed, they went further; only they could authorise more than one person's absence from the house at one time and, even in the case of the one-person discretion left to the master, the length of such an absence was

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[120] Ibid., 5 June 1850.
[121] The assistant master at Tallow was not alone in this regard. A couple of years earlier the Dungarvan master had been ordered by the guardians 'to give no leave of absence in future, to paupers, *under any circumstances*' [my emphasis], BG/DUNGN/2, 29 October 1846.
[122] BG/LISM/8, 12 June 1850.

not to exceed one hour.[123] It is not easy to determine how rigorously this order was later implemented. One could speculate, however, that the guardians would have allowed little leeway in this matter once it had been brought to their attention. After all, while they were sometimes prepared to allow discretion to the master in the day-to-day running of the establishment, in this case it was just such relative laxity that had given rise to problems. Paradoxically, once appealed to, the guardians' authority was also challenged. In cracking down on those who played fast and loose with workhouse rules, the guardians confined and 'punished' the workhouse staff almost as much as the impoverished inmates.

While able-bodied males were to farm the workhouse land, as well as work in the blacksmith's forge and the weaver's, tailor's and shoemaker's shops within the establishment, able-bodied females tended to the duties of nursing, cooking, cleaning and laundry work.[124] Yet some locals had other ideas for the employment of workhouse inmates. In early January 1850 the Reverend Archdeacon Power of Lismore proposed that, in order for the paupers to get practice digging the land eighteen inches deep for local farmers (to whom they would be contracted), he would gladly offer 'as a commencement' to get them to dig five acres of his own farm. He recommended a rate of £1 per acre for the work. The guardians promptly informed the Reverend Power that they had no power under the Irish Poor Relief Act to entertain such a proposal.[125] Clearly the poor law authorities were not alone in seeing a source of cheap labour in the unfortunate workhouse inmates.

The working conditions of inmates may be glimpsed from the master's recommendation that 'the schoolboys should get shoes or they will not be able to

[123] Ibid., 19 June 1850.
[124] Nolan, 'The Lismore poor law union and the Famine', pp. 110–1.
[125] BG/LISM/8, 2 January 1850.

work on the farm in the cold weather'. This was already late October 1850.[126] The issue of children's shoes surfaced again early in the following year. The master requested, and the board granted, that a young inmate who assisted in the bakery be provided with a pair of shoes, as this boy had found employment outside of the workhouse. The medical officer, however, insisted on proper shoes being given to the most urgent cases in the house:

> There are a great number of children suffering severely from chilblains, some of whom pass the great part of each winter in the infirmary, as in a very short time after leaving it their feet and legs become so swollen and ulcerated that I am obliged to readmit them, and they thus spend very little time in school – I would thus suggest that shoes and stockings be given to the worst cases, a list of which I could furnish to the master from time to time.[127]

In May 1850, Francis Currey proposed a cost-saving plan that fell just short of getting the inmates to dig their own graves. It would, he posited, be most economical for the board to purchase coarse timbers such as scotch fir, larch and beech for the production of coffins for union use. These timbers would be considerably cheaper than the deal timber currently contracted for, and the necessary work, such as squaring and sawing, 'could be performed by the inmates'.[128] While it is true that some paupers simply struggled to the workhouse in order to be afforded a proper burial, this seemed a somewhat casual and, at the same time, callous reminder of the proximity of death.

In early 1851, the board of guardians informed the poor law commissioners that they would like 'to introduce the manufacture of lace into the auxiliary workhouse at Tallow'. The guardians pointed out that it was not always easy to keep

[126] Ibid., 30 October 1850.
[127] BG/LISM/9, 26 March 1851.
[128] BG/LISM/8, 15 May 1850.

so large a section of the workhouse population as the female inmates working. They were already overstocked with clothing and bedding, so much so that 'the material will suffer by accumulating so far beyond what is required for the present or prospective requirements of the house'. While the guardians conceded that the manufacture of lace was already carried out on a fairly large scale in Tallow generally, they reasoned that the market was so large there was no fear of supply outstripping demand or of local industry being undermined. Besides, in the case of the workhouse produce, the English suppliers of the raw materials would buy the finished lace.[129]

So the workhouse system, it appears, was a pool of cheap labour for the production of not-so-cheap lace goods. It would, after all, take a very cheap source of labour to make it financially feasible to send raw materials from England to Ireland, and then re-import these materials in the form of finished products while still making a profit. The payment the guardians would receive for the use of workhouse labour could, they pointed out to the commissioners, be used to defray rate-in-aid expenses. This meant that the union would have some of its taxes effectively transferred to the inmates themselves. The English parties would realise a profit, while the inmates would learn a trade. Exploitation aside, the project was indeed 'replete with usefulness'.[130] Ultimately, a list of 300 female paupers in the Tallow auxiliary house was submitted for the consideration of the guardians. These were persons deemed 'fit to be instructed in the manufacture of lace'. Some had already acquired lace-making skills and could start at once, while girls from the Tallow convent could be enlisted to

[129] BG/LISM/9, 15 January 1851.
[130] Ibid.

go to the workhouse and give instruction in the manufacture of lace to the inmates there. Such instruction was, of course, to be provided gratuitously.[131]

By 21 May 1851, Arthur Kiely was able to report that twenty-four of the girls engaged in lace-making at the Tallow auxiliary house 'had become so proficient that they would be able to procure a livelihood out of the workhouse'. These girls had been engaged to work at the Tallow convent and were, not surprisingly, 'desirous to leave' the workhouse. The guardians, delighted with the success of the scheme, were equally 'desirous' that these girls quit the workhouse and that a further list be drawn up to fill the vacated places.[132]

A month later the master reported that he had purchased two fly-shuttle looms at 30*s* apiece, even though there was 'not a weaver in the house capable of working them'. At his request, the board ordered that it should be ascertained whether or not a girl could be found in Clogheen who was 'capable of instructing others in the use of the fly-shuttle looms'; if such a competent girl was to be found there, she should be brought to Lismore.[133] It would seem that the workhouse was to remain just that, a *work*house. Sometimes it seems that the poor law authorities conducted business contrary to the accepted norms. Instead of finding out what there was a market for and supplying that, the master and guardians sometimes seem to have decided what was the cheapest thing to produce, and then insisted that that was what the market wanted.

[131] Ibid., 22 January 1851.
[132] Ibid., 21 May 1851.
[133] Ibid., 23 April 1851.

Part IV: Food Prices, Supply and Quality

While *phytophthora infestans*, the potato blight, did not strike until late 1845, the supply of potatoes for the workhouse inmates had been an ongoing problem for the guardians. It appears that, even at a local level, political economy hampered food supplies. The guardians, themselves financially constrained, naturally sought to minimise expenditure. As a result, the prices they offered did not encourage the contractors for potatoes to supply quality food.

In late October 1843, the tender of Edward Keirnan to supply white potatoes at four shillings per barrel was approved.[134] Yet, just one week later, the visiting committee condemned the quality of the potatoes and ordered that the supplier be cautioned on the matter.[135] In an attempt to improve the quality of the workhouse diet, they also directed that crow potatoes be supplied instead of white potatoes for the remainder of Keirnan's contract.[136] Interestingly, while tenders were received in early 1843 from John Morgan for the supply of white potatoes at 4*s* per 21-stone barrel, and from Patrick Heffernan for the supply of *100* barrels, also of white potatoes, at 4*s* 4*d* per 21-stone barrel, the guardians nevertheless opted to approve the cheaper offer of white potatoes at 3*s* 6*d* per 21-stone barrel from none other than Edwared Keirnan. This contract was to last until 6 March 1844. In addition, Morgan had tendered for the supply of crow potatoes at 5*s* per barrel, while the Reverend John Poole had offered to supply sixty barrels of crow potatoes, also at 5*s* per barrel. Again, however, the workhouse guardians chose to accept Keirnan's cheaper tender

[134] BG/LISM/2, 1 November 1843.
[135] Ibid., 8 November 1843.
[136] Ibid., 22 November 1843. Bourke, using contemporary descriptions, documents how the English white potato, also variously known as the 'Horse' or 'Lumper' potato, was 'unanimously condemned' as a food scarcely fit for pigs. Bourke, *Visitation of God?*, pp. 29, 36–39, quotation p. 37.

of crow potatoes at 3*s* 6*d* per 21-stone barrel.[137] While it is possible that Keirnan's cheaper prices may have acted as a siren's song of short-term economy to the guardians, this could unfairly depict them as extremely shortsighted. More likely, the general potato supply was poor, and the guardians may have reasoned that it was better to pay little for unreliable quality than to pay dearly for it.

Subsequent dealings would seem to support this latter interpretation. Upon the expiration of Edward Keirnan's contract in late March 1844, John Morgan's tender of white potatoes at 4*s* per 21-stone barrel for two months, and of crow potatoes at 5*s* per barrel for one month, was accepted.[138] Morgan's contract, however, was not renewed, and Patrick Heffernan was enlisted as potato contractor to the workhouse. In late October 1844, Heffernan was requested by the guardians to attend their next board meeting to account for the poor quality of the potatoes supplied by him.[139] He obviously did not satisfy the board either, as they caused further advertisements for the supply of potatoes to be issued. Only two tenders, however, were received, and one of these came from the unsatisfactory Patrick Heffernan. He offered to supply white potatoes at 4*s* 7*d* per 21-stone barrel. The other tender came from Edward Keirnan, the quality of whose potatoes the visiting committee had also criticised in the past. He tendered crow potatoes at 5*s* 6*d*, pinks at 5*s*, and whites at 4*s* 8*d* per 21-stone barrel. The guardians, possibly wary of these two suppliers, considered all of these prices to be excessive, and ordered the clerk to advertise yet again.[140]

While Heffernan subsequently offered to supply white potatoes, and dropped his price by 4*d* per 21-stone barrel, Keirnan re-submitted his tender for the supply of

[137] BG/LISM/ 2, 3 January 1844.
[138] Ibid., 27 March 1844.
[139] BG/LISM/ 3, 16 October 1844.
[140] Ibid., 30 October 1844.

crows, pinks, and whites, with his already-rejected asking price unchanged. In the event, both tenders were rejected, and James Ferguson's offer to supply white potatoes at 4s per 21-stone barrel was approved.[141] Apparently, Edward Keirnan felt strongly about the second rejection of his tender. Reference was made in the Lismore minutes to a letter written by Keirnan. Unfortunately, this letter is now lost to us. We do, however, know that the Lismore guardians angrily rejected 'the charges and insinuations therein contained' and expressed 'their disapproval of it in the strongest manner'.[142] Ferguson, it appears, was not only cheaper than Heffernan and Keirnan, but seems also to have provided better quality potatoes. At least, there is no record of a complaint regarding the potatoes until 9 April 1845, by which time he was no longer potato contractor to the workhouse.[143]

By mid-March 1845 Patrick Heffernan was again supplying potatoes to the workhouse. In late April or early May 1845, the workhouse inmates complained about the quality of the potatoes. The board of guardians visited the dining hall while the potatoes were being served, and unanimously condemned them as 'very inferior', and not equal to the sample that had originally been approved. They directed that the potato supply be sifted, and any unsatisfactory potatoes be returned to Heffernan. He would then be called on to supply the quantity and quality required for the house. Otherwise, the master would purchase good potatoes elsewhere.[144]

Patrick Heffernan's relationship with the Lismore workhouse came to an end in early July 1845: although it does not appear that his contract was terminated because of previous complaints regarding the quality of his potatoes. Apparently the guardians were prepared to engage Mr. Heffernan again, but it was he who refused to

[141] Ibid., 13 November 1844.
[142] Ibid., 20 November 1844.
[143] Ibid., 9 April 1845.
[144] Ibid., 7 May 1845.

sign the contract. The terms of the renewed contract are not elaborated on in the minutes. Given the overall poor quality of potato supplies, it could be that Heffernan simply could not supply the specified amount at the prices the guardians were prepared to pay. The guardians subsequently accepted the tender of Mr. Richard Neville to supply crow potatoes and white potatoes, each at 4*s* 6*d* per 21-stone barrel. The contract for crow potatoes was to last until the 26 July 1845, and that for whites until 23 August 1845.[145]

Things were not, however, to improve. Less than one month later Neville was ordered to take away the potatoes he had supplied to the workhouse, as they were 'extremely bad'.[146] In fairness to Neville, and indeed to Heffernan before him, it is just possible that his potatoes deteriorated after delivery. The year 1845 was already half over, and Waterford was one of the first, and worst, hit counties during the late 1845 blight.[147] Indeed, by November of that year, the poor law commissioners authorised the Lismore guardians to substitute other articles of food for potatoes in the workhouse dietary.[148] The price of potatoes had also risen sharply in a short time. In fact Nolan goes further, and points out that, by early December 1845, potatoes were virtually unobtainable in the local markets and, for the first time, no mention of them was made in the master's estimate of provisions for the house.[149] As we have seen, the Lismore guardians had been able to acquire white and crow potatoes (albeit of unreliable quality) for roughly 4*s* 7*d* per 21-stone barrel. Now, however, a contractor named Thomas Foulke was demanding six shillings per 21-stone barrel. Foulke

[145] Ibid., 2 July 1845.
[146] Ibid., 30 July 1845.
[147] Helen Litton, *The Famine, an Illustrated History* (Dublin, Wolfhound, 1998), p. 17 and Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p.32.
[148] BG/LISM/ 3, 5 November 1845.
[149] Nolan, 'Lismore Poor Law Union and the Famine', p. 105.

rejected the guardians' offer of five shillings per barrel, a price which, a few months earlier, would have been viewed as almost extortionately high.[150]

Worse was to come; by the end of 1845 David Keniry was demanding 7*s* 6*d* per 21-stone barrel of potatoes, a price rejected by the guardians.[151] Yet just a few weeks later, in mid-January 1846, a contractor named O' Mahony of Tallow demanded eight shillings per 21-stone barrel for two hundred barrels of potatoes. The board was forced to review its attitude to Keniry's tender, and instructed the clerk to inform him that they would accept his offer after all.[152] In fairness to the suppliers, the overall price of potatoes had, predictably enough, risen significantly. According to the board of health, potatoes on the Dublin market cost 2*s* per hundredweight in January 1845; they rose to 2*s* 5*d* in April of that year, and recorded prices of 3*s* 6*d* per hundredweight in January 1846.[153]

Complaints against the quality of potatoes persevered. In December 1845, the visiting committee reported how an inmate named Michael Calahan complained of the quality of potatoes. The committee ordered that some of these should be served to the guardians, who immediately condemned them and ordered that the contractor be cautioned to supply a better quality in future.[154] Again, however, it is possible that infected potatoes could have appeared to be of a sound quality when originally supplied, and could have deteriorated while stored for workhouse consumption. Ignorance of the nature of the blight and, consequently, inappropriate methods of storing potatoes certainly did not help the situation.[155]

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[150] BG/LISM/3, 5 November 1845.
[151] BG/LISM/ 4, 31 December 1845.
[152] Ibid., 14 January 1846.
[153] 'Report of the Commissioners of Health, Ireland, on the Epidemics of 1846 to 1850', in *British Parliamentary Papers: Reports from the Relief Commissioners and Other Papers on Famine Relief in Ireland with Appendices, 1846–53 (Famine Ireland 8)* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970), p. 427.
[154] BG/LISM/ 4, 10 December 1845.
[155] For an example of apparently good potatoes rotting quickly, see W. Steuart Trench's account of 1846, an extract of which is reproduced in Gray, *The Great Irish Famine* 1997), pp. 138 – 9.

By early 1846, the Lismore guardians were requesting copies of the dietaries used in English workhouses, 'in case of their not being able to obtain a continued supply of potatoes'.[156] After receiving these copies, a seven-man committee was formed to formulate a suitable dietary for the Lismore workhouse in the absence of an adequate potato supply. The guardians who made up this committee were: Sir Richard Musgrave; Francis Currey; Henry K. Hemming; John Bennett; Richard Parks; Thomas Stafford, and Nelson Trafalgar Foley. The medical officer was also to attend committee meetings. The clerk was ordered to procure five hundredweight of Indian meal from Cork, as well as one stone of peas, some barley, meal 'and other ingredients for the purpose of trying experiments on soups', as the union had, by this stage, suffered a 'great loss of potatoes'.[157]

Despite the guardians' assessment that the supply of potatoes available to the labouring population was rapidly becoming exhausted, the central authorities were steadfast in their refusal to interfere with the market place.[158] A communication from the secretary of the relief commission at Dublin Castle, dated 19 March 1846, was sent to Sir Richard Musgrave, the chairman of the Lismore guardians. This conveyed the commission's refusal to supply Indian meal for use in the workhouse, and urged the guardians to purchase food supplies 'with the least possible delay' on the open market.[159]

It is here easy to appreciate the crisis faced by the guardians, and faced even more directly by the labouring poor. The potato crop had failed. The central authorities, acting on the ideals of economy, curbed the spending powers of the

[156] BG/LISM/ 4, 25 February 1846.
[157] Ibid., 11 March 1846.
[158] Ibid. This was despite the fact that potatoes were now costing 11*d* per 14lbs in Cork. *ILN*, 4 April 1846, 'Indian Corn in Cork'. As we have seen, the guardians could once have got 21 stone for four or five shillings.
[159] BG/LISM/4, 25 March 1846.

guardians and now refused them Indian meal. Ironically, remedying the food shortage demanded less, and not more, 'economy' as food prices soared.[160] Increased government expenditure on, and distribution of, food products would have helped to maintain a supply-and-demand equilibrium. This in turn would have helped to control prices, at least to an extent. Because of budgetary constraints, the guardians could offer no more than rock-bottom prices for food items, and so could not determine the quality of the food they received. After all, potatoes were not the only article of food supplied whose quality was unsatisfactory to the guardians and visiting committee, as well as to the inmates themselves. Bread was another.

On 1 May 1844, the contractor for bread was warned 'to be more particular with regard to the quality of his bread for the future'.[161] Two months later, the board again warned the contractor in relation to the 'very inferior' quality of the bread supplied, and threatened to 'enforce the penalties of his bond' if he did not live up to his contractual obligations.[162] Obviously not satisfied with the contractor, in September 1844 the guardians advertised for tenders for the supply of bread.[163] John Barron's tender to supply bread of second quality flour at 4.75*d* per 4lb loaf from 28 September 1844 until 25 March 1845 was accepted.[164] Yet, in early January 1845 the guardians also felt the need to warn, and indeed to threaten, Barron because of the poor quality of bread supplied.[165] A similar warning was issued on 23 July 1845.[166] Things had obviously not improved a month later, when the visiting committee

[160] For Asenath Nicholson's support for gratuitous relief, and indeed for Maria Edgeworth's opposition to it, see Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork, Cork University Press, 1997), pp. 98–9.
[161] BG/LISM/ 2, 1 May 1844.
[162] Ibid., 27 July 1844.
[163] Ibid., 28 September 1844.
[164] Ibid.
[165] BG/LISM/ 3, 8 January 1845.
[166] Ibid., 23 July 1845.

ordered that, unless the quality of the bread improved dramatically, the clerk was to purchase good quality bread elsewhere, and charge any price difference to the contractor.[167] In this directive we see the near impossibility of the guardians' task – to buy, in a time of critical food shortages, good quality food cheaply.

Bread prices climbed fairly steadily over the next year. In August 1846, the guardians were prepared to pay James Dwyer 6*d* per 4lb loaf of bread of second quality flour.[168] This was a significant increase on the 4.75*d* per 4lb loaf paid to Barron the previous year. Dwyer agreed to this proposal.[169] Four months later he was commanding prices of 7.75*d* per 4lb loaf. Even so, he informed the guardians that he could no longer afford to supply bread at this new price, and would discontinue the supply in late December 1846 or early January 1847.[170] James Dwyer pointed to the current price of flour as the reason he could no longer act as bread contractor to the Lismore workhouse. A similar situation existed in the neighbouring union of Dungarvan. There the contractor for bread also informed the guardians in late 1846 that, 'in consequence of the great rise in the price of flour', he could not continue to incur such losses as he was at this time. He therefore requested that his contract be 'either increased 1*d* per 4lbs, or else taken off his hands'.[171]

General food shortages arising from potato blight and a consequent rise in food prices are reflected in the master's reports. In mid January 1850 he reported that wheat supplies were running very low in the Lismore workhouse. The master had also been forced to purchase one and a half tons of turnips to provide food for the

[167] Ibid., 27 August 1845.
[168] Ibid., 12 August 1846.
[169] BG/LISM/4, 19 August 1846.
[170] Ibid., 23 December 1846.
[171] BG/DUNGN/2, 24 December 1846.

inmates for two days.[172] Yet, on 27 March 1850, the master reported that peas were being used in the workhouse diet 'for want of turnips'.[173] Also, by order of the guardians, barley meal was to be substituted for Indian meal throughout the establishment.[174]

Dr. Currey also complained that 'some meat received into the hospital for some of the patients was quite unfit for human food'. The board agreed that the meat was 'tainted', and reproved the master for permitting its reception into the house.[175] The guardians ordered the clerk to ascertain from the Dungarvan workhouse authorities whether or not barley meal could be successfully substituted for Indian meal for dinner.[176] The following week such a substitution was ordered. This was to continue so long as the price of barley meal remained 'less than, or equal to, that of Indian meal'.[177]

In early July 1850, the Tallow master asked that a portion of Indian meal 'be used instead of peas with the barley meal in the soup for dinner as the inmates object to soup made from barley meal alone'. The guardians refused on the grounds that the overall dietary had to be 'the same in both houses'.[178] However, a fortnight later the master reported on the 'very bad' quality of the bread made from wholemeal and barley meal. The board ordered the raising of the wholemeal content to two-thirds, and the dropping of the barley meal content to one-third.[179] Whether or not the judgement of the guardians was flawed in refusing to change the soup, it is only fair to point out that they certainly did order alterations when actual food *quality*

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[172] BG/LISM/8, 30 January 1850.
[173] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 27 March 1850, p. 90.
[174] BG/LISM/8, 27 March 1850.
[175] Ibid., 20 February 1850.
[176] Ibid., 3 April 1850.
[177] Ibid., 10 April 1850.
[178] Ibid., 3 July 1850.
[179] Ibid., 17 July 1850. See also NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 17 July 1850, p. 104.

deteriorated, as opposed to what they considered to be the relatively trivial and luxurious matter of food variety. Indeed, to offer any variety that was not dictated by health considerations would be to defeat the workhouse test and undermine the entire ethos of the poor laws themselves. Yet, in a state of affairs that was uncomfortable for the guardians and downright perilous for the inmates, any ill-judged decision in accordance with the harshness of the poor laws could bring further catastrophe down on an already vulnerable and weak workhouse population.

Sometimes, even if the food was not altogether intolerable, the lack of any means of cooking it was. On 30 January 1850, the Lismore master complained that 'there is not a single boiler in the whole establishment'.[180] Also on this date, the master at the Tallow auxiliary workhouse expressed frustration at the virtual impossibility of obtaining a boiler, despite having applied three times for one.[181] On 6 February 1850, he complained that he was 'compelled to get cooking done in the laundry – the boiler of which is so small that I must use it twice for each meal'.[182] The chilling health risks involved in such a state of affairs hardly needed to be spelt out. Overcrowding also contributed to irregularities in dining arrangements. On 20 March 1850 the guardians ordered the barring of windows after complaints that the kitchen assistants were passing cooked food through windows to people in the yard.[183]

In Lismore the cooking of food was hampered by the fact that the pump was in need of repair. The master observed that the drawing of water for the workhouse was 'both expensive and inconvenient'. Even when the pump was working, it was totally

[180] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 30 January 1850, p. 82.
[181] BG/LISM/8, 30 January 1850.
[182] Ibid., 6 February 1850.
[183] Ibid., 6 March 1850.

inadequate for the needs of the increased workhouse and additional-building populations. The board ordered that he contact the Hive Iron Works and acquire a quotation regarding a replacement pump. In the meantime, Mr Dwyer was to 'devise a means of collecting into a cistern the rain water of the main house to be used for the purposes of washing and cooking'.[184]

In October 1850, the master observed that, if the peas on hand were not consumed quickly, they would soon be unfit for consumption. The guardians therefore sanctioned the grinding of these peas into pea-meal, so that they could be substituted for barley meal in the soup.[185] Milk supplies were also deteriorating. In May 1850 the milk was condemned as one-third water.[186] In early November 1850 the master reported that the boiling milk bought from Michael Farrell had curdled, as had the milk supplied by Farrell in conjunction with Thomas Walsh. In addition, thirty tons of coals were ordered from a supplier named Slattery but, on inspection, were of such a poor quality that just over six tons were kept.[187]

In mid December 1850, the Lismore master recommended that the twenty-three acres of land attached to the workhouse should be tilled as follows: turnips – 10 acres; potatoes – 4 acres; flax – 4 acres; parsnips – 2 acres; carrots – 2 acres; and half an acre each for onions and leeks.[188] Such a division of land in favour of turnips for food cultivation reflects the fact that, although potato blight had not been widespread in the yields of 1850 and the acreage under potatoes was slowly beginning to recover,

[184] Ibid., 3 July 1850.
[185] Ibid., 30 October 1850.
[186] Ibid., 15 May 1850.
[187] Ibid., 6 November 1850.
[188] BG/LISM/9, 18 December 1850.

confidence in the crop was still low.[189] Given that the acreage dedicated to the growth of flax equalled that given over to potatoes, it seems the authorities were determined that *work*houses were not to become merely *poor*houses.[190] Also to this end, the poor law commissioners ordered, in early 1851, that 'when peas are used in the workhouse dietary they should be purchased whole and ground on the workhouse premises'.[191]

Yet such aspirations to self-sufficiency carried consequences when it came to quality. In late 1849, in a journal entry that reflected rising bread prices as much as an ethos of self-reliance, the Lismore master maintained that a significant saving could accrue to the establishment if they bought flour instead of bread.[192] Yet even this was a very short-term, and indeed a false, economy. Just over a year later, in March 1851, the medical officer described the bread baked in the workhouse as being 'of very bad quality and quite unfit for the majority of the patients in the infirmary and of those in the infirmary wards'. The fact that Dr. Currey offered these words as 'the best description' of the bread quality would suggest that it was not really fit for consumption by the able-bodied inmates either.[193] A week later he reported that some of the bread had improved in quality, but the improvement was not consistent.[194]

[189] The 1846 blight resulted in 'an untypically low' area of 89,000 hectares under potatoes in 1847. Yet 1848 witnessed something of a recovery, with 258,000 hectares of potatoes being sown. By 1854 potatoes accounted for over 300,000 hectares (Note: 1 hectare = 2.4711 statute acres). *Farming Since the Famine: Irish Farm Statistics, 1847–1966* (Dublin, Central Statistics Publications Office, 1967), p. 18.
[190] BG/LISM/9, 18 December 1850.
[191] Ibid., 15 January 1851.
[192] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 12 December 1849, p. 76.
[193] BG/LISM/9, 19 March 1851.
[194] Ibid., 26 March 1851.

Chapter Three: Affliction and 'Relief'

Part I: The Crops

As early as April 1843 a Waterford newspaper carried an article on the effectiveness of 'earthing-up' potatoes. The writer noted the belief that this withdrew excess moisture from the sod, particularly in well-drained ground. The *Chronicle* urged farmers to try the experiment on well drained land, as 'it would certainly be a great advantage to themselves if they could increase their potato crop a third part more than is usually grown, and with less labour to themselves and horses'.[1] Even in mid July 1845, the *Southern Reporter* found it 'gratifying' to be able to declare that, despite recent heavy rain, the crops generally looked promising and healthy. Wheat and hay harvests promised to exceed expectations. While the same correspondent did concede that the potato crop 'is yet backwards', there seemed to be no reason for apprehension in relation to the harvest.[2] In early August, reports from Nenagh, Limerick, Cork and Kilkenny all carried roughly the same news: recent severe weather with heavy showers had caused more concern in relation to the grain crops than they did in relation to potatoes.[3]

Yet, less than a month later the *Gardener's Chronicle* reported that a 'fatal malady' had afflicted the potato crop. This report blamed cold temperatures and

[1] *WC*, 13 April 1843, 'On the earthing-up of potatoes'.
[2] *WF*, 19 July 1845, 'The harvest – The weather'.
[3] Ibid., 9 August 1845, 'The weather – The crops'; see also the *Times*, 15 July, 1845, 'The harvest in Ireland', and 7 August 1845, 'The weather', for an initially optimistic but eventually gloomy assessment of the weather and crop yield prospects.

continued rain in early August for the condition of the potato crop.[4] The *Waterford Freeman* described the progress of blight as follows:

> The decay consists in a gradual decay of the leaves and stem, which become a putrid mass, and the tubers are affected by degrees in a similar way. The first obvious sign is the appearance on the edge of the leaf of a black spot, which gradually spreads; then gangrene attacks the haulm, and in a few days the latter is decayed, emitting a peculiar and rather offensive odour. When it is severe the tubers also decay; in other cases they are comparatively uninjured.[5]

Just over a month later the *Illustrated London News* noted that accounts received 'from different parts of Ireland show that the disease in the potato crop is extending far and wide, and causing great alarm amongst the peasantry'. Furthermore, the paper had received letters from resident landlords describing the misery of the poor. These letters urged immediate government intervention to 'ascertain the actual extent of the calamity, and provide wholesome food as a substitute for the deficient supply of potatoes'.[6]

Suggested causes for the rot ranged from cold, wet weather, to the blight being transferred to potatoes from cattle, and even to 'meteorological changes', which allegedly allowed fluid to strike into the earth.[7] An article penned by D. Moore, of the Glasnevin Botanic Garden in Dublin, referred to 'the rapid progress this alarming disease is making in this country'.[8] Yet, the true cause of the disease was a fungus called *phytophthora infestans*, 'which fed on even healthy potatoes'.[9] In late 1845,

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[4] *WF*, 6 September 1845, 'The potato blight and its causes'.
[5] Ibid.
[6] *ILN*, 18 October 1845, 'The potato disease'.
[7] *WF*, 6 September 1845, 'The potato blight and its causes', and 17 September 1845, 'Failure of the potato crop'.
[8] Ibid., 20 September 1845, 'On the failure of the potato crop'.
[9] Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845–52* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1994), p. 34.

however, theories of this nature found little support. The *Gardener's Chronicle* adopted a more orthodox idea of how potatoes absorbed a large quantity of water, and needed a moderate-to-warm temperature if excess moisture was to be sent to their leaves, and thereafter sunlight for the leaves to rid themselves of this moisture by perspiration. Under the climatic circumstances of 1845, the reporter concluded, low temperatures, heavy rainfall, and little sunlight had prevented the potatoes from ridding themselves of such excess; consequently they absorbed too much water, which 'stagnated in their interior' and forced the potatoes to rot.[10]

Sir Robert Peel established a scientific commission to ascertain the cause of , and prescribe a remedy for, the blight. This commission included the Scottish chemist, Sir Lyon Playfair, the English botanist, Dr. John Lindley, and the Irish scientist, Sir Robert Kane.[11] According to the November 1845 report of Lindley and Playfair, who had travelled between Dublin and Drogheda, one-half of the entire crop was either destroyed or had been rendered unfit for human food.[12] If, they reasoned, one-eighth of a potato-yield had to be retained as seed for the following year's crop, this left only three-eighths available for consumption. As if this were not enough, Lindley and Playfair reported that the original crop itself was not as large as had been previously believed.[13]

On 21 October 1845, a meeting took place in the boardroom of the Dungarvan workhouse. This meeting, which was attended by the union guardians, magistrates, landowners, and farmers heard the latter relate that the potato blight was not only

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[10] *WF*, 6 September 1845, 'The potato blight and its cause': It is doubtful if many of this reporter's readers could glean much reassurance from his prognosis: 'As to the cure for this distemper – there is none…man has no power to arrest the dispensations of Providence. We are visited by a great calamity, which we must bear'.
[11] Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, pp. 33–4.
[12] As it happened, this turned out to be an overestimation of the progress of the rot, see Litton, *The Famine, an Illustrated History*, p. 24.
[13] *Copy of Report of Dr. Playfair and Mr. Lindley on the present State of the Potato Crop, and on the Prospect of approaching Scarcity* (Dated 15th November 1845), BPP, 1846 (33) XXXVII. 35, p. 28.

affecting the crops, but was spreading at a frightening rate. According to the farmers present, crops were, in the most extreme cases, reduced by one third, and even one half of their normal yield.[14] The local farmers also pointed to the dire probability of an even greater portion of the crop being lost unless something was done, and quickly. At the same meeting it was concluded that

> the potato preserved with a sprinkling of powdered lime was, beyond all doubt, most fit for use; next, those preserved with a mixture of one fourth lime to three fourths of dry mould, while those which were kept apart from each other in the house or pit with clay only, were not so good as either of the former; but worst of all were such potatoes as had been suffered to remain in the ground without being dug to the present time; these in many instances, were wholly unfit for food, and were becoming more and more infected every day they were suffered to remain in the earth.[15]

A letter penned by an English landed proprietor, Christopher Darby Griffith of Padsworth House in Berkshire, who was visiting Lord Stuart de Decies's residence of Dromana House at Affane, made pessimistic reading. Griffith called attention to the appearance of the potato disease in County Waterford. Throughout the county the blight was 'serious and extensive', and affected several different types of potato.[16]

In the following month, Lord Stuart de Decies, the Waterford county lieutenant, contacted the Lismore guardians relative to the lord lieutenant's wish that they form a committee to ascertain the extent of the damage done to the potato crop throughout the union. A committee of twelve elected guardians, together with the *ex-officio* guardians, was duly formed.[17] On 27 November 1845, the poor law

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[14] *Chronicle and Munster Advertiser* [hereafter *CMA*], 25 October 1845.
[15] *WF*, 25 October 1845.
[16] Ibid., 22 October 1845, 'County of Waterford'.
[17] BG/LISM/3, 19 November 1845. The twelve guardians elected to this committee were: Sir Richard Musgrave, Bart.; Richard Parks; Thomas Stafford; John Carrol; Samuel B. Power; Thomas Connery; N. T. Foley; N. Walsh; James Parker; Michael Anthony; William Sullivan and John Kiely.

commissioners authorised the substitution of other food items for potatoes in the Lismore workhouse dietary.[18] While matters had not yet reached disastrous proportions, a sense of urgency is conveyed in the Lismore guardians' desire to provide, as quickly as possible, against the 'scarcity of provisions' fast resulting from the potato blight.[19] In mid-January 1846, the guardians informed the commissioners of a 'considerable deterioration' in the condition of the potatoes. Because of this, the local markets were drained of their supply, and the workhouse inmates were supplied with bread as a substitute for potatoes.[20] Ultimately, the committee reported that the losses incurred in the Lismore Union due to the blight were both severe and general, and that, 'in a few weeks the stock of potatoes of the labouring class will be exhausted'.[21]

In mid October 1845, the *Chronicle and Munster Advertiser* reported that Sir Richard Musgrave had advised his tenantry to keep their corn in case of scarcity, and had forgone his rents. Interestingly, one week later a letter from Musgrave appeared in the paper, pointing out that his tenants' crops had by and large escaped the blight. Neither had he sacrificed his rents. Rather, he had merely advised his tenants to 'hold over their corn, as it was probable that prices would rise'. He had also informed them that he would not press for the immediate payment of his rents.[22]

Addressing himself to the issue of a possible remedy, Lord Stuart de Decies expressed the opinion that pulverised lime, if applied in time, provided the best means of arresting the disease.[23] Yet in their second report to the lord lieutenant of Ireland, the Royal Dublin Society rejected the application of acidic, alkaline, or gaseous

[18] BG/LISM/3, 5 November 1845.
[19] N.A., RLFC2/Z15330.
[20] BG/LISM/4, 14 January 1846.
[21] Ibid., 11 March 1846.
[22] *CMA*, 18, 25 October 1845.
[23] *WF*, 1 November 1845.

remedies. These remedies, observed the Society, might work in laboratory conditions, but were totally impractical in relation to an entire country, while the suggestion of applying chloride of lime (bleaching powder) and salt, either separately or mixed, served rather to accelerate than to arrest the rot. While they dismissed starch extracted from potatoes as a sufficient replacement for the potatoes themselves, they observed that starch, when mixed with oat-meal, bean-meal, or pease-meal, formed an 'excellent and economical article of food'.[24]

Unfortunately for the Lismore union, as far as this recommendation went, bean-crops accounted for virtually zero per cent of the acreage under crops. Indeed, according to agricultural returns for 1847, none of the three County Waterford poor law unions recorded bean-crop acreages of even one per cent of the ground sown. This was largely in line with overall trends in Munster and Leinster, while the returns for Connacht and Ulster showed bean-crop averages of a little over one per cent.[25] Ultimately, however, the Royal Dublin Society's report concluded that where it was possible to execute a more thorough drying of the tubers, this would best preserve the potato from further decay. This entailed the use of limekilns or, where such a facility did not exist, turf fires for the drying of potatoes.[26]

Yet, in a further contradiction, Sir Robert Kane wrote to the poor law commissioner, Sir Thomas Freemantle, and urged against the erecting of limekilns. In a letter dated 25 November 1845, Kane pointed out that the vapour from a limekiln constituted hot gas rather than steam. He therefore concluded, somewhat cryptically, that 'the working up of diseased potatoes into proper food by means of the organisation of the poor law houses and other establishments' would be more

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[24] Ibid., 'Second Report'.
[25] *Returns of Agricultural Produce in Ireland in the Year 1847*, BPP, 1847–48 (19) Vol. LVII, pp. viii, 36, 54, 84.
[26] *WF*, 1 November 1845, 'Second Report'.

effective.[27] Kane did not elaborate on what 'the working up of diseased potatoes into proper food' could mean. It seems reasonable to suggest that the extraction of starch from the potatoes was probably what was intended. Certainly this was what was on the minds of the Lismore guardians when, in mid November 1845, they were considering suggestions 'for converting unsound potatoes into starch', as well as 'directions for the making of a machine' toward that end.[28]

Yet, the extraction of starch for food was itself coming under fire. In early November 1845, a Dublin doctor, D. J. Corrigan of Merrion Square[29], gave it as his opinion that the extraction of the fecula (starch) from the potato would not provide a wholesome food, and that kiln drying constituted the quickest, and cheapest means of preserving the potato.[30] Basically, Dr. Corrigan advised that diseased potatoes be well washed, pared of their skins, cut into slices about one and a quarter inches thick, washed again, drained, dried, ground into meal, mixed with water (no salt) and baked as biscuits.[31] Neither Corrigan nor the Royal Dublin Society advised the direct application of chloride of lime to diseased potatoes. In addition, at the meeting of the Dungarvan guardians on 21 October 1845, Dr Longan expressed grave concern regarding the possibly detrimental effects on people's health if lime was directly applied to potatoes.[32]

Responding to Father Fogarty, on behalf of the lord lieutenant, Richard Pennefather expressed regret that the potato blight continued to infect crops in the

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[27] NA, RLFC3/1/39.
[28] BG/LISM/3, 15 October 1845.
[29] Dominic Corrigan was a physician to the hospitals of the Dublin House of Industry. Hard working, he dominated the central board of health, and advocated that special committees, and not the boards of guardians, should oversee medical matters in local areas, see Robins, *Miasma*, pp. 118–24.
[30] In an age permeated by a strict-economy ethos, cost was always an enormous consideration. Dr. Kane remarked to Freemantle that 'sulphate of lime would form a very excellent drying material for packing potatoes in, but it is too dear'. He predicted, probably correctly, that, at 25*s* a ton plus freight and carriage, it would at once be seen as 'impracticable for the farming classes of Ireland'. NA, RLFC3/1/39.
[31] *WF*, 1 November 1845, 'The state of affairs in general'.
[32] Ibid., 25 October 1845.

Lismore poor law union.[33] According to a constabulary statement of returns concerning the failure of the potato crop, which was originally dated 15 January 1846 and was forwarded from Sir Randolph Routh to Sir Charles Trevelyan in mid February, twenty-five of the forty-nine County Waterford electoral divisions experienced a potato-crop loss of between twenty and fifty per cent. Another twenty-three electoral divisions suffered an even worse fate, with nine of them recording a seventy per cent, and fourteen of them an eighty per cent, failure rate. One electoral division's figures were not yet returned. Indeed, these returns present Waterford as the only Munster county with no electoral division recording a crop loss of less than twenty per cent.[34]

Within a month of the favourable September constabulary reports regarding the potato crop throughout Munster[35], reports of a 'most alarming character' emerged, relating in particular to Tipperary and Waterford.[36] A few days later, with the potato-digging season underway, the *Waterford Freeman* related how people's worst fears, fuelled by rumour, were now confirmed 'with sad and soul-sickening reality', as many areas recorded one-quarter or one-third of their potato yield as 'unfit for human food'. This article dropped the more usual language of restraint and prophesied in apocalyptic manner the possible consequences for the government and the propertied classes if meaningful measures were not taken to alleviate the distress:

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[33] *CMA*, 3 December 1845.

[34] *Correspondence relating to the Measures adopted by Her Majesty's Government for the Relief of Distress arising from the Failure of the Potato Crop in Ireland*, in BPP 1846 [735] Vol. XXXVII. Reproduced in *Famine Ireland 5, Session 1846–47*, (Shannon, IUP, 1970) pp. 53–7.

[35] NA, RLFC2/Z13210, Memoranda, chiefly taken from the Reports of the County Inspectors of Constabulary in regard to the State of the Crop in Ireland. The constabulary returns covered all six Munster counties and reported that, with the exception of partial failures along the Kerry coast, in parts of Cork, and the Tramore district of Waterford, an 'average' or 'above average' crop could be expected. Ironically, the western counties of Clare, Galway and Mayo got the cleanest bill of health.

[36] *WF*, 1 November 1845.

If active and generous legislative interference, and measures be not taken in time – if famine be permitted to stalk through the land – if millions of ghastly, and hunger-infuriated human beings stand and cry out, in a famishing voice, for something to eat, and have nothing to get but stones...Then it will be no longer a peaceful, a patient, and legal agitation for liberty, but an awful and convulsive struggle for life, which may pull down to the dust the very temple of the constitution itself, and bring beneath its mighty ruins the voluptuous and greedy drones.[37]

Less dramatic words were, naturally enough, adopted in the constabulary returns of 7 November 1845. Nevertheless, extensive rot in the potato crop was now reported in the west and south of Kerry, while 'a very extensive failure of the potatoes in the pits' caused some farmers to lose almost half their potato harvest. There is, admittedly, a noticeable inconsistency in the County Waterford constabulary returns. Here, sub-inspector Edward Ashbury recorded that the disease among potatoes had not increased since the September returns. Yet, as already noted, these returns had referred to only a partial failure around the Tramore area. Ashbury is now writing of Kilmacthomas, where 'it is the opinion of several persons that about half the crop is injured'.[38]

A few days later a Mansion House committee meeting adopted a memorial to Sir Robert Peel, calling on the prime minister to close the ports against grain exportation, to open them to the admission of bread, to stop distillation from grain, open granaries in the workhouses, promote public works and even restrict the quantity of oats consumed by the cavalry stationed in Ireland.[39] Yet some reports predicted that the prime minister would procrastinate, 'in the vain hope that the evil

[37] Ibid., 5 November 1845.
[38] NA, RLFC2/Z15382, Potato reports, received this day...8th November 1845.
[39] *CMA*, 8 November 1845, 'The Mansion House Committee of Dublin'.

hour will be removed'. The Irish poor were therefore urged to use what food they had wisely and take the remedy of their own situation upon themselves:

> Meanwhile the people should look to themselves, and not part with the food which it will be impossible for them to replace when the day of dearth arrives. As self-preservation is the first principle of human existence the people of Ireland surely may not be blamed for protecting themselves against a calamity.[40]

Another correspondent, P. A. Brady in London, had welcomed the decision by the *Times* to send a commissioner to Ireland to investigate 'the evils which have so long disturbed and retarded the prosperity of that country'. Brady was now dismayed to relate that, though the commissioner had noted the wretched condition of the great majority of Irish tenants, and had denounced the 'heartless' absentee landlords, his 'national prejudices' had 'so mystified his understanding as to render his opinions, as expressed in some of his later reports, both contradictory and absurd'. Brady went on to criticise the 'extraordinary conclusion' of the *Times* commissioner 'that the ills which affect the agricultural population are of their *own making*', and were the product of 'the indolent, lazy habits' of the peasants and tenantry themselves.[41]

In fairness to the *Times* commissioner, it should be noted that such views were represented even at a local level. A report from Dungarvan in early August 1846 observed that the potato blight had appeared in almost every part of the locality. While the newspaper correspondent did agree that the government should be 'up and stirring', he nevertheless reserved some blame for the fact that potatoes were allowed to become a staple diet in the first place:

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[40] *WF*, 12 November 1845, 'The people's food'.
[41] Ibid., 18 October 1845.

Some people say that the potato disease is a scourge from Heaven to punish the Irish people for violating the "Temperance pledge". This may or may not be the case, but we think that potatoes were never destined by the all bountiful Creator to be the staple food of a nation of industrious and enlightened human beings.

Rather more dramatically, the same reporter remarked that 'we hail the failure of the potato crop as a blessing, and not as an evil'. Yet this piece was not totally devoid of sympathy, and urged the gratuitous giving out of oatmeal to the poorer families as a way of relieving distress and encouraging the diversification of diet simultaneously.[42] A further report confirmed that the potatoes were 'beyond a doubt, destroyed, as the stalks and tubers are in a rapid state of decay'.[43]

Some landlords and land agents did donate money towards relief. Francis Currey, on behalf of the Duke of Devonshire's Lismore estate, donated £100 towards 'relief for the labouring classes' at a meeting held in Tallow in April 1846. At the same meeting another prominent landlord, William Moore, gave fifty pounds.[44] In the following month John Kiely of Strancally Castle also gave fifty pounds towards relief in Tallow, even though he did not own so much as 'a perch of ground' there. In addition to this, twenty-six pounds was collected from among Kiely's tenants, also for the relief of distress in Tallow.[45] While such actions testify to the benevolence of these particular landowners and land agents (and also perhaps to the relatively well off condition of tenants on Mr. Kiely's Kilwatermoy and Knockanore estate), they

[42] Ibid., 1 August 1846. According to the same article, government had stored twenty-one tons of oatmeal at Dungarvan and was selling it at one shilling seven and a half pence per stone.
[43] *Ibid., 8 August 1846*, 'The Crops'.
[44] Ibid., 8 April 1846, 'The Poor'.
[45] Ibid., 13 May 1846, 'A Benefactor to the Poor – A Really Good Landlord'.

also illustrate the very real nature of the distress already affecting the town and district of Tallow.[46]

While the relatively generous dispositions of some landlords or their agents was herein evident, a *Waterford Freeman* report could nevertheless observe in 1846, that

> throughout the wide districts of the South and West, wherein famine prevails, the landlords, with very rare exceptions, have contributed sums disgracefully inadequate to the necessities of the case, and heartless disproportionate [*sic*] to the revenue which they drag from their estates.[47]

Around the same time, a report from Waterford City told how labourers employed on the public works not only rejected the idea of a pay cut, but were in many cases determined 'not to allow any person to work unless at the original wages'. While the reporter admitted that their wages would hardly provide sufficient food for a family, he nevertheless maintained that the labourers should have made 'some little sacrifice'. One wonders how the reporter reconciled in his own mind the idea that a reduced wage was insufficient to feed a family with the idea that accepting such a wage constituted merely a 'little' sacrifice. True, the rural labourer often received even smaller wages than city dwellers, but the rural labourer was not entirely dependent on a cash wage, as the urban worker was.[48] The seriousness of the situation became evident with accounts of groups gathered together throughout the city, showing 'anything but a conciliatory spirit'. The writer even feared that the

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[46] Power notes that the Malcolmsons of Portlaw, in Co. Waterford, made a similar gesture as Kiely's towards Tallow, when they donated £100 towards poor relief in Carrigbeg, even though they owned no land there. P. C. Power, *A History of Waterford, City and County* (Waterford, de Paor Books, 2001), p.
[47] *WF*, 9 May 1846, 'The prevailing distress – those who perform, and who do not perform, their duty'.
[48] See *Devon Commission,* Currey's testimony for rural wages. For a piece on the rural labourer's dependency on pigs and potatoes for much of his income and sustenance, see Mary Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dublin, Dublin Historical Association), pp. 8, 23.

military might have to be called out to assist the civilian power. Subscribers to the relief fund held meetings in order to try to reach a resolution to the crisis.[49]

Part II: Proposed Remedies

In a late 1845 letter to *Saunders's News Letter*, Dr. C. Farran pointed out that the small potato was relatively safe while the large was more susceptible to disease. This, he claimed, was the universal case on several properties in County Waterford. Farran had directed the tenants on these properties to separate the small potatoes from the large, and to place the small ones 'in narrow pits, similar to drills, covering them well with soil to protect them from frost'. In what can be seen with hindsight as a premature tone of reassurance, he rejoiced that the 'threatened calamity has, thank God, been averted by the safety of the small potato, which is well adapted for seed'.[50]

In early 1846 newspaper reports related that the blight was spreading rapidly. By the end of January, William Wall, clerk of the Lismore Union, informed the central commissioners that the condition of the potatoes had deteriorated dramatically. In fact the local markets were bereft of potato supplies, and the workhouse inmates subsisted for three days of the week on bread alone, 'which must continue if potatoes cannot be procured'.[51] In Dungarvan things looked equally dismal. On 26 January 1846, Lord Stuart de Decies contacted Richard Pennefather, under-secretary of the central relief commission in Dublin, and told how reports from some of the Dungarvan union's electoral divisions were becoming more alarming by the week. The Waterford county lieutenant included in his communication a letter he

[49] *WF*, 17 June 1846, 'The relief committee – refusal of the tradesmen and labourers to work'.
[50] Ibid., 6 December 1845, 'The potato crop'.
[51] Ibid.

had received from Robert Longan, deputy vice-chairman, and *pro tempore* chairman, of the Dungarvan board of guardians. Longan's letter referred to intense distress and even famine in the Dungarvan town and rural regions alike. It also imparted that local inhabitants had 'entered into large subscriptions for the relief of the poor', and begged for official aid.[52]

In November 1845 the government ordered £100,000 of Indian meal (or maize) from the United States, which was to be stored in depots around the country. In mid-March 1846, Sir Richard Musgrave wrote to the central relief commissioners to request that quantities of Indian meal be sent for the use of the Lismore workhouse.[53] Sir Richard's letter was probably the result of a communication received by the Lismore guardians in late February 1846 from the poor law commissioners, asking for information 'on the state and quantity' of the remaining potatoes. Along with requesting Indian meal, the clerk also asked the commissioners for English workhouse dietaries. This was done with a view to obtaining an alternative should the potato shortage continue.[54]

Outside of the workhouses, Indian meal often proved as elusive as good potatoes for the needy. In April 1846, the *Illustrated London News* announced that government sales of Indian meal had begun in Cork. Yet, even here, it was a case of those who needed most getting least:

> Among the poor, who were of the humblest description, and needing charitable relief, the sales were but scanty. The occasion had become of necessity; for potatoes have risen to 11*d.* market price for 14lbs.; and some of the leading commercial men in Cork have made a

[52] NA, RLFC2/Z1664, Longan to L. S. de Decies, dated 22 January 1846, and L. S. de Decies to R. Pennefather, dated 26 January 1846.
[53] NA, RLFC/Z4874.
[54] BG/LISM/4, 25 February 1846.

calculation, which shows that the Government can afford to sell the Indian Corn at a much cheaper rate.[55]

At about this time, recipes involving Indian corn began to appear. One such detailed the making of suppawn (porridge), mush (a 'sort of half pudding half porridge') and hasty pudding. All of these ideas were pretty much the same, with Indian meal being boiled in water until thick, then cooled and (sometimes) reheated before eating. The author of this article (describing another but similar recipe – hominy) speculated that, as the weekly allowance to a workman amounted to ten pounds of flint corn or twelve of golden corn, the recipe must have provided a 'nutritious food'.[56] It seems a wonderful logic, which posits that *because* of the meagreness of its distribution, a given food item must have a high nutritional value. Never were government rations known to leave the poor undernourished![57]

By late April and early May 1846 it was reported that, despite the weather having been of a less than perfect nature, corn crops such as oats and barley had already been sown; potato sowing was also progressing apace, and the early crop was showing 'plants sound, healthy, and vigorous as ever we saw'. Nevertheless, hunger was deemed to be inevitable, along with its retinue of social disorder, unless the landlords and the government intervened to provide people with employment and food.[58] Indeed, the case was such that a deputation from the Waterford relief committee met with the lord lieutenant in Dublin. They called his attention to their previous 'promptitude and generosity' in reacting to calls for relief provision, and to their current endeavours 'within the present season of unexampled distress', whereby

[55] *ILN*, 4 April 1846, 'Indian corn in Cork'.
[56] *WF*, 25 March 1846, 'The use of Indian corn as an article of food'.
[57] *The Nation*, adopting a different attitude in terms of Indian meal, urged the poor to take the food rather than starve, but to 'beware of gratitude'. Reproduced in *CMA*, 29 April 1846, 'Indian meal'.
[58] *WF*, 6 May 1846, 'Agricultural report for the month of April: Extending through the Counties of Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny and Tipperary'.

they had raised over £1,800 via local subscriptions to maintain the over-stretched fever hospital and provide employment to artisans and labourers.[59] It seems to have been a common, and probably prudent, preamble to any request for central aid to emphasise previous and present local efforts.

Reports regarding distress illustrate the difficulties facing the central commissioners. In late February 1846, a letter from Tallow addressed to Lord Heytesbury conjured images of 'the rapid progress of the rot', and urged the necessity of acquiring seed potatoes for the following year. As luck would have it, the correspondent, James Leahy, happened to have 2,000 barrels of good quality potatoes on hand, which he was prepared to sell. Leahy insisted that his offer of potatoes was particularly cheap, and would certainly not involve any gain on his part in a region where demand so outstripped supply. In fairness to him, there was a certain 'damned if I do, damned if I don't' element to his offer. As a merchant or contractor, Leahy could be suspected of overstating or exploiting the crisis in order to sell his produce, while he could, conversely, be subjected 'to odium, and perhaps to personal violence' as a calculating speculator if he withheld his goods.[60]

At a relief committee meeting in Ring, the chairman, the Rev. Clancy, insisted to those present that, based on the reports of local inspectors appointed to ascertain the situation in each townland,

> we cannot conceal from ourselves the alarming fact, that we are encompassed on every side by destitution, far beyond even what we had anticipated, and that this state of wretchedness is gradually becoming worse and worse, and that unless prompt measures are speedily adopted, the most serious consequences are to be apprehended.[61]

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[59] *Freeman's Journal* [hereafter *FJ*], 27 April 1846, 'Interview of the Waterford relief deputation with the lord lieutenant and the relief commissioners'.
[60] NA, RLFC2/Z3794, James Leahy to Lord Heytesbury (dated 26 February 1846).
[61] *WF*, 6 May 1846, 'Relief meeting at Ringagoonagh'.

If the poor law commissioners had cause to doubt the veracity of some claims on the public purse from private individuals, landlords or poor law guardians, the constabulary returns for July 1846 added weight to the dire prospect. Out of the returns by then received, spanning eight unions in as many counties, five painted very depressing pictures of potato-crop conditions. The other three also referred to the presence of blight, but in vague general ways that give no indication of its extent or severity. In the Waterford union, sub-inspector Gun suspected, as did those with whom he consulted, that the 1846 potato crop would be an even greater failure that that of the preceding year. The stalks, he lamented, 'which should have continued green for another month longer, are now in many places turning quite black and withering'. From the neighbouring counties of Tipperary and Kilkenny, as well as from Louth and Dublin, returns were similarly pessimistic.[62] The authorities could be forgiven their scepticism towards impressionistic reports rehashed in more or less hostile papers; yet even these accounts were more difficult to ignore when the available constabulary reports tended to reinforce them.[63]

Even the apparently reassuring *Cork Reporter* account of the crops conceded that the blight had been detected in many localities. Nevertheless, in accordance with the prevailing theory that dampness rather than a fungus was responsible for the rot, it suggested that recent fine weather, in contrast to the wet weather of late 1845, would limit, if not eradicate, the disease.[64] Ominously, however, in County Waterford and east County Cork, the disease was reported to be widespread.[65]

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[62] NA, RLFC3/1/4829.
[63] See letter, dated 21 June 1846, from Luke Joseph Shea of Carrigaline, to the *Cork Examiner*, reprinted in *WF*, 27 June 1846, 'Potato crop – progress of the disease'.
[64] *FJ*, 25 June 1846, 'The weather, the crops, &c'.
[65] *CE* article reproduced in the *CMA*, 22 July 1846, 'The potato crop – the disease'.

Part III: Relief Efforts

The consumption of Indian meal, or 'Peel's brimstone', was initially resisted by the very persons for whom it was intended, as it often caused severe bowel complaints among those who availed of it.[66] Yet, after the government distributed instructions on how the corn should be ground, mixed in a 3:1 ratio with oatmeal, and cooked properly, distaste turned to demand. The setting up of stores and depots throughout Ireland by the commissariat branch of the army under Sir Randolph Routh provided a sufficient supply network, even if supply policies were often exceptionally tight-fisted. Nevertheless, all thirteen of these depots and stores, as well as sub-stores in some exceptionally remote areas, were opened by 1 June 1846.[67]

Peel's conservative administration was succeeded by Lord John Russell's whig government in late June 1846. This administration was not, as has often been portrayed, an ideological monolith. It contained, for example, an 'environmentalist' wing (which included Russell himself) that believed large-scale expenditure and the active involvement of government were essential if Ireland was to recover. Nevertheless, the 'moralist' faction was probably larger and, more importantly, included the new whig chancellor of the exchequer, Sir Charles Wood, as well as the permanent secretary to the treasury, Charles Edward Trevelyan. These insisted that 'forcing landlords to assume responsibility for the poor, either by employing them or

[66] See James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (UK, Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2,002), p.51.
[67] T. P. O' Neill, 'The organisation and administrative of relief 1845–52', in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds.) *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845–52* (Dublin, Lilliput Press, 1994, orig. Browne and Nolan, 1956), p. 215.

by paying local rates for their support, was the only solution'.[68] They believed that government expenditure on relief, which would necessarily entail an encroachment onto the market place and a breach of *laissez-faire* ideology, should be kept to a minimum.[69]

Local relief committees had been formed throughout the country in March and April 1846, and by 10 April there were 648 in existence. These committees were to oversee local relief schemes, and were directed by the central relief commission to publish their subscription lists. Such publication, it was hoped, would discourage landlord default, and Dublin Castle was supplied with the names of those who failed to subscribe.[70] Two main statutes were directly concerned with relief administration. Under the terms of one of these, the board of works controlled relief works. This central board provided half the money required by means of a grant, while landholders paid the other half in the form of county cess. Under another arrangement, government gave no grant, but forwarded a loan for the full amount, all of which was repayable.

From November 1845 the Lismore guardians had been lobbying the government to provide the means of increasing employment for the population.[71] In late March 1846 the union's landed proprietors were still inquiring of the government whether or not it would grant an equal or proportionate sum in relation to local subscriptions. Those landlords and land agents also wished to know if the government would sell Indian corn to local committees or individual proprietors and,

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[68] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1790–1930* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 192.
[69] For a study showing that individuals like Trevelyan could be divided between ideologies under changing circumstances, just as parties such as the whigs could be, see the chapter 'Apologia for a dead civil servant', in Bourke, *Visitation of God?*, pp. 170–177.
[70] For instance, see the direction that the Lismore union clerk 'do require the collectors to make a return of the defaulters in their respective districts', BG/LISM/4, 1 April 1846; and O' Neill, 'The organisation and administration of relief', p. 217.
[71] NA, RLFC2/Z15330.

if so, at what price. This corn was to be used to pay the wages of labourers employed in private rather than public works.[72] On 30 March 1846 Richard Pennefather replied that a payment of £75 to the Lismore relief committee had been sanctioned, but reminded them that the commissioners insisted on application procedures being fully complied with in future.[73] On 4 April, a meeting of the landed proprietors, clergy and guardians for the Coshmore and Coshbride barony was held at the Lismore courthouse. The meeting was chaired, initially at least, by Lord Stuart de Decies. The object of the meeting was to appoint local relief committees and determine relief district boundaries for the area. Predictably enough, all eight Lismore union *ex-officio* guardians and as many of the elected guardians sat on the barony's central committee. The local parish priest and the archdeacon, two Catholic curates, the workhouse doctor and a sprinkling of local landowners who were not guardians were also appointed to the committee.[74]

The Coshmore and Coshbride barony was divided into four relief districts: Lismore, Ballyduff, Cappoquin and Tallow. Initially, it was decided that sub-committees would be appointed for the latter three relief districts, while the central committee for the barony would also act for the Lismore district.[75] Eventually, however, a distinct sub-committee was formed for Lismore as well.[76] To suppose that one body could act as both central and sub- committee simultaneously was, perhaps, an indication that the committee had underestimated the bureaucracy involved, as well as the extent of the deterioration that had taken place by April 1846.

This deterioration also manifested itself in less subtle ways than this. At the same meeting of 15 April 1846, it was resolved to again urge on the government the

[72] NA, RLFC3/1/970.
[73] NA, RLFC3/1/1084.
[74] NA, RLFC3/1/1286.
[75] Ibid.
[76] NA, RLFC3/1/1524.

necessity of providing Indian meal at cost price. If, it was added, the government saw fit to refuse, the baronial central committee urged the provision of armed escorts 'for the safe conduct of supplies of provisions purchased by the committees at the different local markets'.[77] The committee seem to have been startled by reports of violent disturbances at Clonmel.[78] The Coshmore and Coshbride committee had obtained supplies from there on previous occasions, and even these were fast running low. The Lismore guardians had also received a communication from Thomas S. Grubb and Co. of Clonmel, urging them not to request further supplies of Indian meal until order was restored in the town.[79] The committee urged the government to treat these considerations with the greatest urgency.[80]

Later in the year, similar disturbances threatened to break out in Dungarvan. Andrew Carbery, a Dungarvan poor law guardian, predicted dreadful consequences if the government did not provide the people with spring and summer employment, 'as there is not a town in Ireland, in proportion to its population, so badly off as this'. The Dungarvan relief fund committee referred to the destitution and distress in the town, where

> A large population, amounting to 5,000 souls, and consisting of tradesmen and labourers unemployed for a long time – a large fishing population in the deepest of distress, as there never was [in] the memory of man so bad a season for fishing as from August last – our Fever Hospital full, and the poor-house also nearly so – sickness and want staring us in the face.[81]

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[77] Ibid.
[78] For instances of food riots in Youghal, Dungarvan and Tallow, see *ILN*, 7 November 1846, 'The late food riots in Ireland'. See also William Fraher, Bernadette Sheridan, Seosaimh O Loinsigh and Willie Whelan, *Desperate Haven: Poor Law, Famine and Aftermath* (Dungarvan, Dungarvan Museum Society, 1996), p.32.
[79] BG/LISM/4, 22 April 1846.
[80] NA, RLFC3/1/1524, William Wall, *pro tempore* secretary of the Coshmore and Coshbride relief committee, to John Pitt Kennedy, secretary to the relief commission, Dublin Castle, 15 April 1846.
[81] *WF*, 14 February 1846.

No relief had, as yet, come from government sources. While government depots of Indian corn were being prepared, it was nevertheless intended to withhold supplies from these depots until the critical summer months, when the demand for farm labour would have waned. In the meantime local relief committees were exhorted to 'exert themselves to meet the existing distress'.[82] In a commentary on this policy (or lack thereof), a *Freeman* writer pointed to the niggardly attitude of a government, which 'does not intend to lose one shilling on all the corn they have imported into Ireland, and consequently, they must add to the first article freight and other charges'. The same article insisted that government should act to relieve the distress immediately.[83] While Sir James Graham, in March 1846, laid before the House of Commons the draft of a bill for the provision of fever hospitals for the destitute poor, William Smith O' Brien pointed out that, as the blight and famine were spreading, it was 'food, instead of physic' that the Irish people needed.[84]

In mid-April 1846, the secretary of the Carrickbeg relief district within the Upperthird barony was writing to the central authorities regarding the 'frightfully urgent' condition of the poor. A local subscription had reached £110, and the marchioness of Waterford had contributed the principal part of a further £100. This money was used to provide food, clothing and coal at half of cost price, and sometimes even gratuitously. The fund, however, was close to exhaustion and the 'dreadful destitution' of the Carrickbeg area cried out for the government to supply its share of donations in aid of food subscriptions.[85] The Dungarvan guardians, in the Decies without Drum barony, also emphasised the desperate need for Indian meal to

[82] Letter of J.P. Kennedy of the Office of Public Works, to 'several relief committees', reproduced in Ibid., 15 April 1846, 'Food for the poor'.
[83] Ibid.
[84] *CMA*, 21 March 1846.
[85] NA, RLFC3/1/1540, Patrick Hayden, secretary of Carrickbeg relief committee to Kennedy, 17 April 1846.

supply the union workhouse, and registered their frustration that things should be delayed because an application for meal from the Waterford depot should have been sent to Dublin.[86]

Like many other things, centrally authorised relief donations are difficult to interpret. A key injustice of the government's policy of supplying proportionate amounts of money to locally subscribed funds was that the poorest areas, which by definition could raise least, got least.[87] In this regard Lismore was comparatively well off. While many people suffered the direst poverty, at least the fact that some estates, such as the duke of Devonshire's Lismore estates, John Kiely's Strancally estate and Sir Richard Musgrave's property at Tourin, meant substantial local subscriptions which would, in theory at least, draw in further substantial government donations. On 31 April 1846 the secretary to the Coshmore and Coshbride central relief committee wrote to the relief commissioners in Dublin to inform them that the £100 subscribed by the duke of Devonshire to the Tallow district 'was a distinct and separate sum' to the £100 he donated to Lismore. In addition, the £469 10*s* 0*d* already returned did not include the £183 subscribed in Cappoquin, nor the seventy-four pounds donated to relief in Ballyduff.[88] Obviously, when it came to what they considered their share of the central funds, the Coshmore and Coshbride committee was determined not to be short-changed.

Yet, short-changed they were, though not by the central authorities. In early May 1846, four of the Lismore union's electoral divisions recorded losses of one-half of their crops. These were: Lismore, Kilcockan, Castlerichard and Tallow. The

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[86] NA, RLFC3/1/1581, M. C. Kennedy to the central commission office, 17 April 1846.

[87] A converse inequality existed in relation to taxation. In mid-October 1845 the electoral division of Tallow, one of the Lismore union's poorest, was taxed higher than any other division. It was rated at 13*d* in the £1 of rateable property, while the next severest was Lismore, at 11*d* in the £1, BG/LISM/3, 15 October 1845.

[88] NA, RLFC3/1/1994, Wall to Stanley, 31 April 1846. Francis Currey, on behalf of the duke, had already donated £100 to the Dungarvan relief fund. *WF*, 14 February 1846.

government grants as quickly as possible. Distress now prevailed among the labouring class from the lack of employment. There were, to compound difficulties, no manufactures or public works in the area, and the loss of one-half of their potatoes spelt extreme hardship for the labouring population of the Tallow region.[99]

Apparently, Wall's communication was not in vain. The Tallow district was, by 11 June 1846, employing 160 persons on public works. Yet the reductions the committee made in the prices of provisions they had for sale were causing 'a considerable diminution in their funds.[100] Things were no better in the Ballyduff district. Here, the relief committee lodged subscriptions totalling £114 10*s* 0*d*, yet declared with certainty that committee funds would 'not be further increased by subscriptions'. The committee pointed out that the Ballyduff district 'is mountainous, and densely inhabited – the people support themselves by agriculture which has now ceased'. In addition, there were no public works in the area, and the committee feared that larger demands would be made on their funds than they could possibly meet.[101] The relief committee were adamant that no further subscriptions could be expected from the Ballyduff district. As a result, and in light of the terrible privations witnessed in the area, they hoped the central commission could see its way to granting a larger amount in aid of local funds than the amount of subscriptions would strictly allow.[102]

While the Cappoquin electoral division's crop losses were less than the other divisions for which returns are available (twenty-five as opposed to fifty or even sixty-six per cent), its relief committee also felt the strain of having 'to reduce the price of provisions to considerably below cost price'. The potato failure had hit a

[99] NA, RLFC3/1/3158.
[100] Ibid.
[101] NA, RLFC3/1/3257.
[102] Ibid., Wall to Stanley, 13/6/46.

community with a 'very large labouring population'. These labourers depended on the sale of their labour to survive, yet now most had 'no fixed employment'. In June 1846, however, there was little demand for such labour, as the potato crop was deficient and there were no public works schemes being carried on in the vicinity.[103] The sum of £203 4*s* 6*d* was raised locally for the relief of the destitute poor of the Cappoquin district.[104]

Even the system of admitting people to the works, which consisted of the issuing of tickets, brought its own problems. On 16 June 1846, the Reverend James Alcock, treasurer to the Ring relief committee, applied to the poor commission office for tickets to be issued to those deemed eligible for a place on the public works. At this stage there were, according to the Ring committee, between 300 and 400 persons employed. Yet, as the committee had but 150 tickets to distribute, a great deal of confusion had resulted, with 'several members of the same family' sometimes gaining employment while other, often poorer, persons were unable to obtain a place on the works. Alcock requested 100 more tickets for the rectification of this abuse.[105] One week later, the *Waterford Freeman* reported that, in Dungarvan, over 400 men who were employed on the roads at Slievegrine were turned away, along with between 300 and 400 others applying for employment because they did not have the relief tickets required. This meant that, in reality, only about 180 persons were employed on the public works in the vicinity of Dungarvan town. [106]

In July 1846, Charles Trevelyan inquired whether or not there was any point in keeping the board of health, which had been established in early 1846 'for providing a remedy for the fever supposed to have broken out in some localities

[103] NA, RLFC3/1/3419.
[104] Ibid.
[105] NA, RLFC3/1/3413.
[106] *WF*, 24 June 1846, 'Dungarvan'.

owing to the scarcity of food'. Trevelyan seemed also concerned that donations from the public purse were still going to what he seemed to consider a superfluous body. Not only this, but the same letter urged the lord lieutenant to fix a day for the closure of the relief commission itself.[107] Yet, in fairness, the task facing both the relief commission and the board of works was colossal.[108] One *Chronicle* correspondent estimated that it would cost just under £4,000 to employ the destitute persons on Arthur Ussher's Ballysaggartmore estate for five months, and that £17,000 would be needed to supply food and employment to the tenants of Captain Barry and other tenants in the Ballyduff district for the same period.[109]

There was considerable local hostility to Trevelyan's analysis. Indeed, the permanent secretary to the treasury was almost certainly the chief target of the *Waterford Freeman* attack on government officials for deciding to suspend the public works, in spite of 'the fearful ravages that the disease has made in every quarter of this country'.[110] In any case, not all critics of this decision came from the ranks of partisan organs such as the *Freeman*.[111] In early September, at a meeting of the Coshmore and Coshbride central relief committee held in Lismore, Father Fogarty spoke of the area 'entering on a period of increased difficulty and distress from the almost total destruction of the potato crop'.[112] Yet, his proposed vote of thanks to Sir Robert Peel probably had more to do with berating the present whig government than

[107] NA, RLFC3/1/4728.
[108] For an excellent consideration of the impossible conditions under which the board of works operated, see O' Neill, 'The organisation and administration of relief', pp. 230–4.
[109] *CMA*, 3 October 1846, 'Cost of the employment of the people'.
[110] *WF*, 29 August 1846, 'Extensive failure of the potato crop in Dungarvan and its vicinity – apprehended destitution'.
[111] For a good overview of newspaper coverage of the Famine years in Waterford, see Eugene Broderick, 'The famine in Waterford as reported in the local newspapers', in Cowman and Brady (eds.), *Teacht na bPratai Dubha*, pp. 153-213.
[112] *WF*, 9 September 1846, 'Relief for the poor'.

with applauding the past conservative one.[113] After all, Peel's efforts had more or less consisted of instituting public works that Trevelyan now wanted discontinued, and allowing moderate amounts of Indian meal onto the food market, a foodstuff that had, in the meantime, risen dramatically in price.[114] As a result of the widespread potato failure, the Lismore guardians were now paying Clear and Sons of Cork £17 10*s* 0*d* per ton of Indian meal.[115] Less than two months earlier, Indian meal had cost £16 per ton in Cork, and this had itself been considered an 'enormous price'.[116]

When specific public works were settled on for the Coshmore and Coshbride barony, they were delayed because of technicalities. The county lieutenant, Lord Stuart de Decies, related how conflict between the board of works in Dublin and the west Waterford barony's relief committee flared when the board refused to grant aid to a project forwarded by the committee. This project would have entailed works being carried out on 1,740 perches of road between Tallow and Ballyporeen. The reason for the refusal was that, in the original proposal, John Keily, the committee chairman, mistakenly referred to the 'widening and repairing', as opposed to the 'widening and forming', of this stretch of road.[117]

In the midst of suffering, such an unrelenting obsession with bureaucratic minutiae seems incredible. This does not constitute anachronistic moralising. Even at the time, Lord Stuart de Decies expressed outrage: 'The consequence is that the...impoverished population of the district of Ballyduff are reduced not only to the greatest distress but...despairing the employment expected, are perambulating the

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[113] Francis Currey's seconding of this proposal is interesting, given the whig politics of the duke of Devonshire.
[114] Trevelyan, ironically enough, had been an important player in the much-lauded relief efforts of late-1845/early 1846 also, see Bourke, *Visitation of God?*, pp. 170–177.
[115] BG/LISM/4, 9 December 1846.
[116] *WF*, 14 October 1846, 'Enormous price of Indian meal'.
[117] NA, RLFC3/1/4400.

country asking relief by other means'.[118] Tactically, the county lieutenant's remarks were well directed, as they painted the board of works as promoting in practice the very vice whose eradication underpinned the entire poor law system – mendicancy.[119] Nevertheless, the relief commissioners, while sympathising with the plight of the local relief committee (whatever about the poor!), posited that the board of works were correct and could not sanction works for which there was no statutory mandate.[120]

Conflict next came with the county surveyor. From the minutes of a meeting of the Coshmore and Coshbride central committee, held on 1 July 1846, it appears that the county surveyor, Mr. Owen, concurred with the resolutions calling for the immediate discharge of labourers who misbehaved in any way, as well as to the limiting of eligibility to those who were resident in the barony for the previous six months and who had no other means of subsistence. Owen, however, would not agree to the fourth resolution, which stated that persons taking labourers off the public works for private employment should be entitled to their choice of workers. The county surveyor's refusal was determined: 'Certainly not, the parties requiring labourers in the county must take them as they run, and not take my best men'.[121]

Another resolution called for an across the board reduction in wages. Men's wages were to be cut to 8*d* per day, and women's to 4*d* per day; boys would be paid between 4*d* and 6*d*, and girls' between 3*d* and 4*d*, per day. Owen considered the present rates fair and refused to countenance a reduction.[122] The Coshmore and Coshbride relief committee, however, insisted that the current rates of pay had given

[118] Ibid.
[119] See, for instance, Francis Currey's proposal, endorsed by the Lismore guardians, that, for the 'protection' of ratepayers, 'some measure should be adopted by the legislature for the suppression of mendicancy'. BG/LISM/4, 25 March 1846.
[120] NA, RLFC3/1/4400.
[121] NA, RLFC3/1/3944.
[122] Ibid.

rise to 'inconvenience' to some farmers, as it tempted agricultural labourers to leave their ordinary employment and go on the public works.[123] Owen's marginal note was terse: 'Let the committee refuse certificates to farming labourers'.[124] Mr. Owen's attention was also drawn to the number of overseers and the salaries they received, together with the fact that some of them had been brought in from other areas. On the Kilnacarriga Road alone, there were five overseers earning between 7*s* and £1 per week. Three stewards on the Tallow road also earned between 7*s* and £1 per week. Another overseer, Richard Hogan, was unable to write. The Coshmore and Coshbride central committee were obviously less than happy with 'the system of superintendence upon the roads under their jurisdiction'. They drew the attention of the board of works to the matter. Nevertheless, Owen refused to recognise the committee's right to 'interfere with my managements, instructions for which I have received from the board of works'.[125]

By the end of 1846 personal animosities and bitter disputes also bedevilled the Cappoquin relief committee. The committee members had met on Monday 7 December 1846, and were accompanied by a 'good sprinkling of half starved, miserable looking men'.[126] Members included local landed proprietors such as Sir Richard Musgrave and Richard Chearnley. Also in attendance was the Reverend J. B. Alcock, who later would attain something akin to hero status among the

[123] O' Neill asserts that: 'The rate of wages was fixed, so as to enable the moderate worker to earn 10*d.* to 1*s.* per day and a good labourer, who exerted himself, from 1*s.* 4*d.* to 1*s.* 6*d.*'. O' Neill, 'The organisation and administration of relief', p. 228. Yet, given the ravages of famine and government obsession with none but the very poorest persons getting such 'relief', it is difficult to imagine many qualifying as 'good' labourers able to exert themselves.

[124] NA, RLFC3/1/3944

[125] Ibid.

[126] *WF*, Saturday 12 December 1846, 'Jobbing on the Public Works – Cappoquin Relief Committee Meeting'

fishermen of Ring because of his efforts on their behalf during the worst of the famine years.[127]

As the meeting got underway, Sir Thomas Ross required that those people beginning to fill the room be 'directed to withdraw'. The Reverend J. Walsh insisted that he would 'have nothing to do with removing the people', and, furthermore, slated the behind-closed-doors meetings which up till then had 'effected no good'. Eventually, at the further insistence of Richard Chearnley and Mr. Slattery, J.P., the room was cleared of those who were not committee members. Basically, Sir Thomas Ross was answering accusations that he had wrongfully dismissed people from the public works, and he challenged 'any gentleman present to particularise any case that he may consider a grievance, that it may be now fairly investigated'. The Reverend Walsh referred to complaints against unfair dismissals and even denounced the concentration of 'such arbitrary power' in any one person's hands. Ross, however, pointed out that he could not employ anybody who held land rated at six pounds or over unless distress was acute. The Reverend Walsh countered that 'such distress is the case in the instances before us'. If, Walsh inquired, tenants on Mr. Chearnley's estate who have had houses built for them and who have been exempt from rent payments are deemed fit objects of employment, 'how can their neighbours who hold worse mountain lots, and are obliged to pay rent, be in a better condition?' Sir Richard Musgrave, who chaired the meeting, opposed the idea of 'farmers holding from 10 to 40 acres of land, and *paying their rents*' being viewed as objects of relief. Richard Chearnley went even further and, in a statement that smacked of the 'arbitrary power' complained of by Reverend

[127] *CE*, 9 October 1846, quoted in Fraher *et al.*, *Desperate Haven*, pp.35–6.

Walsh in relation to the public works, questioned 'how any person can say they have paid their rents. It is only the landlord or his agent can tell that'.[128]

This particular article is worth considering further, as it reveals the actual conditions of many of the small tenant farmers and agricultural labourers. William Hurley, who had been discharged from the public works by Thomas Ross, was brought before the relief committee. Hurley lived in the Mount Melleray area, and had six other people in his family to provide for. He held roughly twelve acres, of which about five or six had been reclaimed. He had paid his rent by selling two sheep and 'going to the priests for charity'. In the previous year he had, according to his own testimony, sown 'an acre of oats and an acre of rye', but 'had not two stone of oats, nor two stone of rye out of them'.[129] Hurley had apparently been dismissed from the public works for striking a steward, but insisted that he had in fact merely intervened to prevent a fight between two stewards. At the insistence of Reverend Walsh, Sir Thomas Ross agreed to 'restore Hurley and his fellow sufferers to their work' until Sir Richard Keane could be consulted on the matter. When Keane did arrive, he was informed by the Chairman, Sir Richard Musgrave, that a list of between thirty-five and sixty farmers who, 'from absolute destitution, were applicants for relief employment' was to be revised. Keane insisted that some of the applicants should not be on the list. These included 'a man named Mulcahy, who had two able-bodied sons having constant employment from the Monks' in Melleray, while 'the father and another son were not worth a penny a day at doing anything'. In addition, Keane contended, there was another man who 'had two or

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[128] *WF*, Saturday 12 December 1846, 'Jobbing on the Public Works – Cappoquin Relief Committee Meeting'. Indeed, as Power points out, landlords who rack-rented their tenants were not actually breaking the law. No matter how much the establishment frowned on such practices, property rights were sacrosanct, Patrick C. Power, *History of Waterford City and County* (Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, de Paor, 1998), p. 151.

[129] *WF*, Saturday 12 December 1846, 'Jobbing on the Public Works – Cappoquin Relief Committee Meeting'.

three sons employed as stewards on the road'. Sir Richard Keane was also confident that 'he could find many more who should be struck off'.[130]

Tensions within the committee itself came to the fore after a letter from John H. Keane was read. This letter stated that Mr. Keane would not be subscribing to the relief fund in future on the grounds that 'improper persons have been relieved by the sale of meal at reduced prices, and thereby kept out of the workhouse'. While one committee member railed against the levelling of unsubstantiated charges in relation to the misuse of funds, Sir Richard Keane thought it 'unfair' that John Keane be criticised in his absence. Mr. A. Hill, however, recalled that Sir Richard himself had made similar allegations in the past, and as *he* happened to be present, he might substantiate them. Hill went so far as to produce a list of those who had received pass-books, and challenged Sir Richard Keane 'to point out the particular cases you have described'. Keane responded that he didn't care for their lists, and made a further allegation regarding the 'inferior quality' of the meal sold by the committee. At this point Mr. Thomas Smith assured Keane that the meal room was open for the inspection of any interested party, and added that 'it would be more becoming and fitter for gentlemen to inspect the meal before they brought forward charges from hear-say'. Smith even offered 'to resign his office to any persons who would wish to undertake it' rather than endure the charges of 'improper use of funds, and selling bad meal' which now faced the members of the Cappoquin relief committee.[131]

In addition to casting doubts upon the trustworthiness of the members and signifying the immediate loss of subscriptions, letters such as that sent by John Keane could have longer-term financial implications for a relief committee. The

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

sizes of 'donations' to relief committees from the central authority tended to depend upon the size of local subscriptions. If we look at the donations issued in aid of subscriptions between late March and late May 1846, it is apparent that, in most cases, central donations lay somewhere between one half and three quarters of the sums raised locally. Of the twenty donations to nineteen relief committees in this two-month period, only that to Carrick-on-Suir (£200) exceeded the local subscriptions (£114) while only Clonmel received a donation (£500) that exactly matched the sum subscribed locally. On 25 March the Lismore relief committee received £75 after having raised £169 via local subscriptions. Again, on 13 May 1847 the Tallow relief committee were in receipt of a £320 donation, as compared with the £480 subscribed locally.[132]

[132] 'A Statement of Sums issued, by order of His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, as Donations in Aid of Subscription raised by the Relief Committees for the Purchase of Food in Ireland', in *British Parliamentary Papers (Famine Ireland 5) 1846 – 1847* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970), pp. 235, 236.

Chapter Four: The Workhouse – 'terror of the beggars'[1]

Part I: Hygiene, Diet and Conditions

In March 1846, Matthew Quinlan, doctor at the Lismore fever hospital, expressed fear that the potato blight in the area was spreading at an alarming rate. Quinlan predicted that, over the coming months, the poor 'will be in a deplorable state for want of food, or [the] means of purchasing it'.[2] Such a gloomy prospect, together with the guardians' decisions to adapt Count Rumford's recipe No. 1, to form a committee to investigate alternatives to the potato in the workhouse diet, and their order that the clerk procure Indian flour from Cork, would all point to a potato-yield crisis leading to a rise in prices.[3] For the workhouse diet, split peas were recommended as part of Count Rumford's recipe No. 1.[4] Yet it was as cheap to buy split peas in London, ship them to Cork and convey to them Lismore, as it was to buy them locally. No doubt the failure of the staple food drove the price of all other foods up as well. The fact that peas were hardly grown in Ireland at all made them even more expensive again.[5] In early April 1846, the workhouse inmates complained of

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[1] Kohl, *Travels in Ireland*, p. 225.
[2] *FJ*, 17 March 1846, 'Disease (Ireland)'.
[3] Benjamin Thompson, 1753–1814, was an American who married the widow of Col. Benjamin Rolfe, the squire of Rumford. Rumford, now called Concord, is in New Hampshire. He travelled to Munich, where, as chief of police, 'he freed the city from the plague of beggars'. In 1796 he arrived in Dublin, and 'introduced improvements into the hospitals and workhouses'. Sidney Lee (ed.), *DNB*, Vol. LVI, (London, Smith, Elder, & Co., 1898), pp. 205–208, quotations p. 207.
[4] Count Rumford's No. 1 recipe for a soup sufficient for sixty-four portions originally read as follows: 5lbs barley meal, 5lbs Indian corn, 4 red herrings, vinegar, salt, pepper and sweet herbs. Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford), *Count Rumford's Essay on Food, and particularly on Feeding the Poor* (Youghal, J.W. Lindsay, 1847 orig. 1795), p. 49.
[5] See, for instance, *Accounts and Papers: Part One – Crops*, BPP 1849 (20) Vol. XLIX, pp. x – xi, and BG/LISM/8, 25 March 1846.

Count Rumford's soup No. 1, which was being served in the house instead of potatoes and milk. It was ordered that the soup only be served on alternate days.[6]

On 22 April 1846, it was ordered that, on alternate days, Indian meal was to be substituted for oatmeal at breakfast. The Indian meal was to be served 'on the same day that the paupers use bread and oatmeal gruel for dinner'. Adults were to get seven ounces of Indian meal, and the others were to get 'the same in proportion'. An adult male's portion of soup was to be raised from twenty to twenty-five ounces, and again other rations were to rise proportionately.[7] The following day it was ordered that Indian meal in stirabout was to be the paupers' breakfast every day.[8] Yet, complaints regarding the quantity of soup persisted.[9] On 3 June 1846, when the visiting committee reported complaints from the inmates regarding diet quantities, the medical officer advised that the adults should get eight ounces of Indian meal at breakfast. On soup days, adults were to get six ounces of bread for dinner.[10] Soup was also, henceforth, to be given for dinner every day.[11] Later in the year, the Lismore guardians refused a request from some of the workhouse inmates to be allowed a small quantity of bread for supper (in addition to the insufficient amount they were allowed at dinner).[12]

By September 1846, the workhouse supply of potatoes was exhausted. The assistant commissioner ordered that workhouse land be divided into plots for the growing of cabbages, turnips and rye, while the guardians gave directions for the

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[6] BG/LISM/4, 8 April 1846.
[7] Ibid., 22 April 1846.
[8] Ibid., 29 April 1846. Famine conditions, including overcrowding, led to a similar deterioration in diet in Dungarvan at this time. Here the inmates were also given 'stirabout for breakfast and bread for dinner', *WF*, 2 May 1846, 'Dungarvan'.
[9] BG/LISM/4, 13 May 1846.
[10] Ibid., 3 June 1846.
[11] Ibid., 8 July 1846.
[12] Ibid., 11 November 1846.

bread and soup diet to be resumed.[13] Indian meal was also an expensive item. In April 1846, the Lismore Union clerk paid Thomas S. Grubb & Co. of Clonmel £55 10*s* 8*d* for five tons and eight new sacks of Indian meal.[14] This obviously hindered the guardians' plan to substitute Indian meal for oatmeal at breakfast time on alternate days.

Outside conditions were also having an impact on the inmates' diet, as civil disturbances cut off access to Indian meal depots. Along with the disturbances affecting Indian meal supplies from Clonmel, food riots in Youghal and Dungarvan bore witness to the acute levels of distress then plaguing the east Cork, south Tipperary and west Waterford region.[15] Despite this, and the fact that Indian meal was difficult to digest, the workhouse inmates were becoming ever more dependent on it.[16] By the end of April 1846 Indian meal in stirabout was being given to the paupers as breakfast every day, as opposed to every alternate day, which had been the original intention.[17]

The guardians were now also finding it difficult to obtain sufficient supplies of milk. On 20 January 1847, J. B. Gumbleton, an *ex-officio* poor law guardian and current contractor for milk, informed the board that, 'despite having made all the exertions in his power', he was unable to supply the full amount of milk. With the blessing of the medical officer, it was decided to use molasses to make up for the

[13] Ibid., 2 September 1846
[14] A ton of Indian meal now cost £11, and a sack 1s 4d, Ibid., 22 April 1846.
[15] For the food riots in Youghal and Dungarvan, see *ILN*, 7 November 1846, 'The Late Food Riots in Ireland'. Although Eríksson posits that the aim of the food riots was not primarily to steal food, 'but rather to regulate the price and distribution of food'. He also points out that North Munster, the midlands and parts of East Connacht suffered most from such social unrest, and not the counties that endured most during the Famine, counties such as Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Cork. Andrés Eríksson, 'Food Supply and Food Riots', in Cormac Ó Gráda (ed.), *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series* (Dublin, Teagasc/UCD, 1997), pp. 68, 71.
[16] Litton, *The Famine: an Illustrated History*, p. 29.
[17] LISM/BG/4, 29 April 1846.

shortage of milk.[18] A similar situation existed in Dungarvan around this time. There also the scarcity of milk supplies led the guardians to order that water and treacle be used as a substitute.[19]

Unfortunately, the extant minutes for the Lismore poor law union cease at early 1847, and do not resume until late 1849. By this time the increases of pressure on the union's resources had become almost unbearable. As a result, conditions within the workhouse, never exactly inviting, had deteriorated to levels unacceptable even to the proponents of the 'less eligibility' test. Notwithstanding this, in May 1849 the privations endured by thousands of people outside the workhouses were even more horrendous. A *Waterford News* correspondent related how he witnessed 'several groups of poor persons, some of whom were carrying children, and most of them barely able to carry themselves', all making their way towards Mount Melleray in the hope of receiving outdoor relief. The same correspondent tells of the even more desperate unfortunates clamouring for admission into the Lismore workhouse:

> In Lismore as in Dungarvan the appearance of the paupers who surround the poor-houses was singularly heart-rending. Some of them were lying on their backs, more on their faces; some against the ditches, more in the ditches, and a few in old cars. I spoke to a little boy who was lying down in at the road-side at Lismore. Near him I saw the skeleton of a man (not more than about 40 years of age) whose face appeared quite black, and whose teeth protruded as if he had been interred for two or three years. I asked the boy was that his father that was lying by his side? and before he had time to answer the father replied in a sepulchral voice – "I am his father!" My heart would not allow me to ask him another question; the ill-fated man sunk his head again, and I proceeded onwards.[20]

[18] Ibid., 20 January 1847.
[19] BG/DUNGN/2, 10 October 1846.
[20] *Waterford News* [hereafter *WN*], 25 May 1849, 'From Our Special Correspondent'.

As for life inside the workhouse confines, some information for the years 1848 and 1849 can be gleaned from the master's journal. As the workhouses and the temporary buildings became overcrowded, ventilation became a concern. On 6 December 1848, the master requested that the windows of the Tallow workhouse be fixed in an open position, as it was 'very difficult to keep up ventilation by night whilst the windows remain in such a way that the inmates can shut them'.[21] A similar request was made in relation to the Lismore workhouse in April of the following year.[22] While ventilation was undoubtedly poor, the fault lay in the design of the workhouses.[23] It seems excessive that inmates who shut windows in the cold night air should be punished, even by a once off stopping of half their milk. Yet such was the punishment meted out to about eighty men for this offence.[24]

In October 1849, the medical officer in Lismore reported that 'the smell coming from the privies attached to the probationary wards is so offensive that I consider it to be very injurious to the health of the patients in these wards'. The report concluded that 'the effluvium was quite pestilential, extending across the high road'.[25] Conditions had deteriorated even further by 1850. In mid January of that year, the visiting committee again complained of the lack of ventilation in both the male and female wards. Many of the boys were filthy in their appearance, while much of the women's clothing was in need of repair and washing.[26] A month later the medical officer also complained of the damp conditions in which medicines were being stored, and suggested that the surgery be moved from Cliffe's yard to the male

[21] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 7 June 1848, p. 25.
[22] Ibid., 4 April 1849, pp. 37–8.
[23] Although it is only fair to acknowledge Kinealy's point that the workhouses had not been originally designed 'to accommodate such a sharp increase in the intake of paupers [after the 1846 potato crop failure], and there were widespread shortages of bedding, clothing and medicine'. Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: the Great Hunger in Ireland* (London and Chicago, Pluto Press, 1997), p. 94.
[24] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 7 June 1848, p. 2.
[25] BG/LISM/8, 3 October 1849.
[26] Ibid., 16 January 1850.

convalescent ward of the workhouse hospital. He also thought that the proposed new accommodation for the male convalescents was too damp, and suggested that a fireplace be installed.[27]

The effects of dampness were also on the mind of the Tallow master. He considered the kiln-heat insufficient to dry wheat properly. As the kiln was in need of repair, he suggested that twenty or thirty barrels of kiln-dried wheat be procured immediately in order to keep the mill at work while repairs were being carried out.[28] The poor law inspector, Joseph Burke, expressed high praise for the Tallow auxiliary workhouse. The establishment was, he claimed, neat, orderly and characterised by an air of industry. Elizabeth Fitzsimon, the schoolmistress, was singled out for particular praise, as the children in the girls' school were making 'fair progress'. Considering this, and the fact that Miss Fitzsimon was also performing the duties of a workhouse matron, Burke felt that she was fully justified in claiming, and the board in granting, a salary increase. Burke's report also commended the special interest taken in the Tallow establishment by John Kiely of Strancally Castle. As a result of these exertions, Burke concluded, the Tallow auxiliary was 'a model worthy of other unions to adopt'.[29]

The case in Lismore could hardly have been more different. There the master stressed the need for windows to admit more light for those at work in the weaver's room.[30] The medical officer reported that, 'owing to the raising of the wall surrounding the mill shed to prevent paupers from getting over it', further ventilation was necessary, particularly in summer, if the health of those working at the mill was

[27] Ibid., 13 February 1850.
[28] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 20 February 1850, p. 86. See also BG/LISM/8, 13 February 1850.
[29] BG/LISM/8, 17 April 1850.
[30] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 20 February 1850, pp. 35–6.

not to be endangered.[31] The visiting committee insisted that steps be taken to remove the 'intolerable stench' emanating from the boys' and girls' privies. A week later the medical officer's report was even more damning on the hygiene issue:

> The effluvium arising from the privies attached to the probationary wards is so great that I consider it necessary for the general health of the inmates of the workhouse that something be done with as little delay as possible to remedy the evil. These privies are now more used than formerly in consequence of the buildings in each yard. The atmosphere in the tailor's and shoemaker's shop is at times quite pestilential. I beg to recommend that a wooden skirting be fixed to the walls of the wards of the infirmary on the east and west sides as the walls are at times very damp, and the dampness is communicated to the bedding.[32]

The following month the medical officer again pointed to the disgracefully unhygienic state of the front-yard privies. He insisted that something be done immediately to remove the 'particularly offensive' and 'most disgusting' smell that came from there.[33] The visiting committee's report also bemoaned the lack of ventilation in the boys' schoolroom, and ordered that 'openings be made in the wall between the workroom and the schoolroom, so as to ventilate the latter'.[34]

As the medical officer had predicted, conditions within the workhouse had become critical, and providing accommodation for the ever-swelling ranks of the destitute was proving all but impossible. The increase in inmate numbers was almost certainly aggravated by the fact that the monks of Mount Mellary, near Cappoquin, had from April 1849 found it financially impossible to continue giving free outdoor

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[31] BG/LISM/8, 20, 27 February 1850.
[32] Ibid., 1 May 1850.
[33] Ibid., 26 June 1850.
[34] Ibid., 8 May 1850.

relief to the poor.[35] Journal and minute entries for early May 1850 record that the main Lismore workhouse had housed 137 persons in excess of its capacity at this time.[36] The medical officer also noted the greater prevalence of cases of dysentery among the workhouse inmates.[37] This, no doubt, had something to do with the fact that the milk, wheat and Indian meal being supplied to the house were of a very poor quality.[38] Things were to get even worse the following month. At the beginning of May 1850, the master explained that he placed an order for twelve barrels of wheat to remedy the food shortages within the house where, at this stage, there was neither wheat nor wholemeal.[39]

As if overcrowding and food supply problems were not acute enough, on 15 May 1850 the assistant master reported that 'the wall of the new building at Tallow appears as if falling out'. Added to this, there was no toilet facility for males at the Tallow auxiliary. This resulted in 'great irregularity' in workhouse norms, as it necessitated permitting the men to go outside the house confines.[40] The guardians considered the tenders received for building the much needed privies in either workhouse to be too high. As a result, further employment was found by the assistant poor law commissioner, who 'suggested' to the board that the works should be carried out under the supervision of the union architect. Also, as tradesmen were difficult to get at acceptable rates, inmates could quarry the stones and prepare the mortar.[41]

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[35] The same report claimed that the monks fed between 100 and 300 persons per day during the dreadful year of 1847. *WN*, 20 April 1849, 'Mount Mellary'.
[36] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 1 May 1850, p. 98, and BG/LISM/8, 8 May 1850.
[37] BG/LISM8, 22 May 1850. Basing his work on the (then available) minutes for April 1847, Tom Nolan notes the 'presence of diarrhoea and dysentery' in the Lismore workhouse. Nolan, 'The Lismore Poor Law Union and the Famine', p. 108.
[38] BG/LISM/8, 24 April 1850, NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 29 May 1850, p. 99.
[39] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 1 May 1850, p. 97.
[40] BG/LISM/8, 15 May 1850.
[41] Ibid., 5 June 1850.

The guardians, in fairness, were battling not only famine conditions and spiralling supply prices, but also the occasional negligence and/or incompetence of those engaged to carry out repair works. For instance, on 22 May 1850, the minutes record a correspondence from William Burke. Burke's tender for skirting the hospital had been accepted at £3 15*s*, which seemed reasonable to the guardians. However, Burke now maintained that he erred in his estimate, 'as he had only measured three rooms at one side of the hospital, and he should have included the same at the other side'. This would double his estimate, from £3 15*s* to £7 10*s*. The guardians ordered that James Dwyer, the union architect, 'prepare a *short* specification with *plain* instructions for the skirting of the hospital' [my emphasis], and that notices inviting tenders be reissued.[42] That a body so concerned with economy as the board later accepted William Burke's doubled estimate says something about the overall rise in prices during these years.[43]

At the end of 1850 the privies had still not been built. In an entry which reflects the unrealistic economic outlook of the guardians amid deteriorating conditions, they bemoaned the fact that the services of tradesmen could not be acquired, while at the same time they rejected the tenders of tradesmen as too high.[44] James Dwyer reported that the open sewers were 'badly constructed' and had not 'sufficient fall to carry off the water'. The guardians therefore deemed it necessary that new sewers be made in the spring. During the intervening winter months, they recommended that the inmates keep the entirely 'defective' sewers clean.[45]

[42] Ibid., 22 May 1850.
[43] Ibid., 29 May 1850. The accommodation situation was not helped by the prevarication of John Slattery who, in the first ten or twelve days after the board hired his store, twice claimed that this store would be ready to receive inmates 'in two or three days'. NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 31 July 1850, p. 106.
[44] BG/LISM/8, 5 June 1850.
[45] BG/LISM/9, 4 December 1850.

A few months later things were, eventually, to improve. On 18 June 1851, the visiting committee's report complained that the Lismore workhouse was dirty, especially the male infirmary ward.[46] Yet an effort was obviously made over the course of the next few weeks. One week later they observed that things had got better in this regard, while in early July they noted a 'satisfactory improvement' throughout the establishment.[47]

Part II: Discipline

Breaches of workhouse regulations were often dealt with in a harsh, indeed sometimes a summary, manner. In a case that illustrates just how cold the board could be in the pursuit of its duties, Joanna Hoare was brought before the guardians on 7 May 1845 on charges of having misled them when she applied for admission only a week earlier. Apparently Hoare admitted the fraudulence of her story to the master subsequent to the admission of herself and her two children. According to the minutes, she had claimed to be a widow whose husband had recently died, and that she belonged to the electoral division of Mocollop in the Lismore Union. However the board ordered her and her children's dismissal on the grounds that 'she was from the vicinity of Killworth in the County of Cork, and that her children were bastards'.[48]

Mary Tobin, an inmate, was reported as being pregnant on 9 January 1850.[49] Her husband had died on 13 March 1849 and, under questioning, she stated that her

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[46] Ibid., 18 June 1851.
[47] Ibid., 25 June, 2 July 1851.
[48] BG/LISM/3, 7 May 1845.
[49] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 9 January 1850, p. 80.

pregnancy resulted from an encounter with a man while she had been carrying out an errand for the master. She also claimed not to know the man in question. The board expressed 'much indignation' towards Mary Tobin who, they observed, already had nine children. Their 'indignation' meant a stopping of her milk ration every second day 'till her lying in, should the medical officer approve of the treatment'.[50] In the case of Mary Tobin, and indeed in that of Joanna Hoare a few years before her, the economic sensitivities of the ratepayer were probably offended as much as the sexual ethics of the puritan.[51]

While the guardians certainly brought a petty moral zeal to their task when dealing with applicants and inmates, they may also have been motivated by more practical considerations. It is just possible that parents who collided with the workhouse authorities were more likely to be dismissed than people without children. This is not to say that there was any conscious policy on the part of the guardians to that effect. Nonetheless, as ratepayers, they, like all other ratepayers, were extremely sensitive to possible abuses of the system, and were determined to detect and check such abuses. Certainly some guardians resented the fact that all members of a family had to enter a workhouse if any were to enter. As the Dungarvan guardians complained:

> When a husband, having a wife and family, is disabled or otherwise afflicted, and cannot labour, he cannot be taken into the house if he does not bring in an able-bodied wife and five to eight children; it is the same with the wife, if she be disabled, she cannot come into the house without bringing in her able-bodied husband and children.[52]

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[50] BG/LISM/8, 9 January 1850.
[51] Such moral and practical qualms had troubled the Dungarvan guardians in November 1846. At this time they informed the poor law commissioners that 'two persons labouring under venereal disease' had been provisionally admitted, and they wished to know 'whether such persons are fit subjects for workhouse relief'. BG/DUNGN/2, 5 November 1846.
[52] *WF*, 11 February 1846, 'Medical Charities – Dungarvan Union'.

Ironically, it seems that, in this regard at least, ratepayers and guardians were also struggling under the workhouse test, though not as much as the inmates were. Still, if families were to be admitted entire, they could also be dismissed entire.[53]

In fairness to the guardians, the evidence for even a subconscious anti-parent bias is far from overwhelming. Also, the cases of Sally Smyth and Catherine Lineen showed that it was not unusual for one parent and their children to enter the workhouse while the other parent remained outside to work or beg.[54] Attempts to deceive the guardians also prompted them to dismiss people. On 20 November 1844, Mr. John Bennett, a guardian, revealed that an inmate named Sally Smyth, who had five children and claimed to be a widow, was in fact married, and her husband was living in Lismore. Smyth claimed that her husband had abandoned her when she was in poor health, and that she subsequently heard he had died; either way, since being admitted she had never seen or heard of him. Yet, the minutes maintain that Smyth's eldest daughter told quite a different story. After George Smyth, Sally's husband, was brought before the guardians, they ordered that he be prosecuted. Sally Smyth and her children were subsequently discharged from the workhouse.[55] Similarly, in late 1846, Catherine Lineen and her four children were dismissed from the house, it

[53] This was the case a few years later when Martin Blicett was admitted to the Tallow workhouse 'in a sickly state'. NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 5 December 1850, p. 74. After recovering from his illness, Blicett was discharged, but re-admitted for a night's lodging on 7 January 1850. Yet, as his wife and three children were already inmates, the guardians ordered that he 'be detained or his family discharged with him'. BG/LISM/8, 5 December 1849, 9 January 1850.
[54] Far from relentlessly pursuing every suspected case of fraud in terms of 'orphaned' children or 'deserted' spouses, union officials sometimes turned a blind eye to such cases, especially during times of temporary but acute hardship. See Dympna McLoughlin, 'Workhouses and Irish Female Paupers', in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds.), *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Dublin, Poolbeg Press Ltd., 1989), p. 141.
[55] BG/LISM/3, 20 November 1844, 1 January 1845.

being discovered that her husband was living in Ballyduff, about four miles from Lismore.[56]

While the desperation and deprivation experienced by the poor and destitute meant that such abuses of the system did occur, it is nevertheless evident from the Lismore minutes that, while mothers such as Julia Sullivan, Ellen Nugent and Joanna Hoare were dismissed for insubordination, deceit and quarrelling, relative leniency was shown to others for similar offences. For instance, on 9 September 1846, the matron complained about three inmates – Joanna Hayes, Mary Roche and Ellen Keefe – who had allegedly refused to work. While this charge was usually considered grounds for dismissal, and would have fed into the prejudices entertained by many poor law officials regarding both the ingratitude and laziness of the poor, the three women were merely 'reprimanded and cautioned not to be guilty of like conduct for the future'.[57]

Petty theft was also condemned, and punished by dismissal. On 16 July 1845, Michael Brohan and his wife were dismissed for attempting to 'dispose of a shirt' that was workhouse property.[58] The discharging of inmates for offences such as this reflected an attitude widely shared by guardians and other property-owners towards poor relief. The poor were an imposition, and as guardians were drawn from the landowning class, they were only too eager to see recipients of relief 'put off the rates'. This practical concern was complemented by a 'moral' distaste exhibited towards even the 'deserving poor'. After all, as already noted, the Lismore workhouse was nowhere near full in 1845, and the pressure on resources was not, as yet, acute.

[56] BG/LISM/4, 2 December 1846.
[57] Ibid., 9 September 1846.
[58] BG/LISM/3, 16 July 1845.

Obviously, if the guardians were intent on punishing dishonesty in 1845 when the workhouse was under-populated and resources, though never abundant, were in relatively good supply, they would be even more determined to do so when shortages reinforced moral conviction in relation to theft. On 7 June 1848 the master reported that two women, Nancy Halfin and Betty English, had absconded with clothing belonging to the house. The guardians ordered that they be prosecuted and imprisoned 'in default of bail'.[59] Around the same time two men, William Dwyer and Thomas Murphy, committed similar offences and were similarly punished.[60] Between 7 June and 11 October 1848, nine cases were recorded of people absconding wearing workhouse clothes. All received prison sentences.[61] While such offences tapered off after mid-October 1848, the case that shows most clearly how desperate people were to evade such 'relief' as the poor laws offered occurred on 17 September 1849. Thomas Burke, a twelve-year-old boy, absconded and, as he left his pauper's uniform after him, the master concluded that 'he must have gone naked'.[62]

The desperation of some inmates to leave the workhouse had its counterpart in the determination of many others to stay outside of it, even when faced with the prospect of death. This extreme reluctance of many people to go into the workhouse was illustrated in the case of Denis Lenane. Lenane was found dead in late April 1851. According to correspondence that passed between the commissioners and the guardians, he had worked for a Mr. M. Anthony of Tallow the day before his death. Anthony gave Lenane money and claimed that he saw Lenane having bread in his possession. He further claimed that he had often urged Lenane to seek relief in the

[59] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 7 June 1848, p. 3.
[60] Ibid., 21 June 1848, p. 3.
[61] Ibid., 7 June – 11 October 1848, pp. 3–16.
[62] Ibid., 19 September 1849, p. 3.

workhouse. Lenane, however, had flatly refused.[63] The workhouse test, by keeping even the 'deserving poor' outside of the house, was in a curious way the victim of its own success.

A month later, in late June 1851, the master recommended that two windows over the pump shed be barred, as 'two boys absconded through them'.[64] The 'test', it seems, was being subverted. It is not without irony that while the state sought to avoid admitting those considered to be undeserving, it should simultaneously seek to imprison the 'deserving' poor, some of whom were obviously trying to escape! Naturally the guardians would want admissions and discharges regulated and conducted through more formal channels than the workhouse windows, yet it also shows that while the authorities guarded against false claimants on rate-funded relief, they equally wanted the destitute to be inside the workhouse. This was preferable to seeing these people begging on the public highways. In short, while bogus claimants were a financial burden inside the workhouse, the genuinely destitute were a nuisance outside of it.

The master brought a woman named Mary Barry before the board on 8 May 1850. She had been employed as a hospital assistant, and was reported by another inmate, Joanna Desmond, for repeatedly 'bringing more soup into the hospital than was required, and exchanging it for bread'. Desmond conceded that she never actually saw Barry selling any of this bread, and Barry produced a letter apparently from her brother in Malta, enclosing £1. She thus explained the money that had been found in her possession. The board, however, suspected that another hospital employee – an inmate named John Harty – had written the letter. Although Harty

[63] BG/LISM/9, 30 April 1851.
[64] Ibid., 25 June 1851.

strongly denied this, a boy named Michael Bartly claimed to know Harty's handwriting and confirmed the board's suspicions. John Harty was confined in the black hole for one hour a day for a week, and the guardians ensured that his confinement did not coincide with working hours! His soup was to be stopped on alternate days. Mary Barry suffered a similar punishment, after which she was discharged.[65] Similarly, when the master reported that 9*s* 5.5*d* was found on the person of an inmate named Ellen Parker, the guardians ordered her discharge from the house.[66]

Insubordination, as well as deceit, was deemed to be grounds for dismissal. On 29 January 1845, an inmate named Ellen Keane was the subject of complaint to the board by both the master and the matron. She admitted their charge that she had wilfully disobeyed their orders, whereupon the board discharged her.[67] Roughly two weeks later (12 February 1845), the master complained of Eliza Duftin, who, he claimed, had also disobeyed both his and the matron's orders. She consequently spent a day in solitary confinement.[68] About two months after this, Duftin, who had just recovered from illness, was discharged from the workhouse, being deemed 'well and able to earn her living'.[69]

Interestingly, there is no mention of whether Eliza Duftin was destitute or not. This is significant because inmates were not automatically disqualified for being 'well and able'. The existence of an 'able-bodied' category of inmates testifies to this. While it is true that the very old, the very young and the infirm were to get priority over able-bodied applicants, nevertheless, the chief concern of the poor laws

[65] BG/LISM/8, 8 May 1850.
[66] Ibid., 17 July 1850.
[67] BG/LISM/3, 29 January 1845.
[68] Ibid., 19 February 1845.
[69] Ibid., 16 April 1845.

was that *destitution* should be the deciding factor in the allocation of relief.[70] Being physically able to earn a living said nothing about one's prospects of making a living, and it was completely irrelevant to the issue of destitution. Duftin had been an inmate before she fell ill, and yet she was immediately dismissed once she recovered. It is tempting to speculate that her discharge had more to do with her previous run-ins with the master and matron, and little or nothing to do with her recent recovery from illness.

The grounds upon which some others were ejected from the workhouse can also be questioned. Consider, for instance, the case of Julia Sullivan. Two inmates – Julia Sullivan and Ellen Ronayne – were complained of for repeated quarrelling. Ronayne was confined to the refractory ward for twelve hours, during which time water was substituted for her milk. However, as Julia Sullivan was married, and it being suspected that her husband lived or worked in the vicinity, she and her children were immediately dismissed.[71] It is interesting that Sullivan was dismissed for being married to a man who, apparently, dwelt in the locality, yet the guardians waited until she was involved in quarrelling to discharge her. Were the guardians' alleged but unsubstantiated 'suspicions' drummed up as a pretext for discharging Julia Sullivan, or were they correct in their charge? If the former, Sullivan was, in effect, being singled out for an unduly harsh punishment even though she had no other means of support. If, as seems more likely, the latter was the case, it provides evidence to support Christine Kinealy's point that, as with most socio-legal systems, the poor law's application at a local level sometimes deviated from its centrally-formulated

[70] *Report of George Nicholls*, p. 14. See also 'An Act for the more Effectual Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland'[31 July 1838], 1 & 2 Vic., c. 56, sec. XLI.
[71] BG/LISM/3, 9 April 1845.

and rigidly-articulated ethos.[72] In this scenario, the guardians had obviously known of Sullivan's marital status, and of her husband's whereabouts, before the quarrelling incident in the workhouse, but had chosen for one reason or another not to eject her. Ellen Nugent, also complained of by the master for quarrelling, got the worst of both worlds; she was confined for six hours and then dismissed from the workhouse with her child.[73]

Problems relating to workhouse discipline were not confined to inmates. In October 1844, the porter, George Egerton, came into conflict with Walter Bible, the workhouse master.[74] After interviewing Egerton and two inmates – James Roche and Bartholomew Griffin – the guardians judged that the charges against Bible were 'frivolous and malicious'. The board felt that, in 'the interests of the establishment', Egerton should be dismissed from his post as porter.[75] A subsequent meeting recorded that the guardians had twice felt the need to reprimand the porter for insubordination towards the master. Having heard no complaints against the master before, they now heard Egerton complain that Bible did not properly oversee the preparation or serving of food, that he was frequently absent from the workhouse and that he 'was getting work done for himself by the paupers'. With regard to the presentation of food, the guardians heard 'no complaint whatever' from the inmates, and so confined themselves to the master's alleged absences from the house. Again, they insisted that all of the charges were 'either satisfactorily explained or totally

[72] It must, however, be acknowledged that Kinealy points to the inconsistencies between central theory and local practice to emphasise the relative liberality of the guardians. Christine Kinealy, 'The Workhouse System in County Waterford', in William Nolan and Thomas P. Power (eds.), *Waterford, History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, Geography Publications, 1995), pp. 579-581.
[73] BG/LISM/3, 16 April 1845.
[74] Walter Bible possibly belonged to the family who owned what was then Bible's Hotel, in the main street of Lismore. See Robert Arthure, *A Priest in His Time: Patrick Fogarty (1791–1866)* (Midleton, Co. Cork, Litho Press, 1998), p. 50.
[75] BG/LISM/3, 16 October 1844.

groundless', and originated in Egerton's 'vindictive feelings' towards Bible. In the end, the board felt justified in vindicating the master, and in dismissing the porter.[76]

Complaints regarding neglect of duty on the part of staff persisted.[77] One week later (20 November 1844) the visiting committee criticised Father Fogarty for neglecting his role as workhouse chaplain.[78] In March 1845 Mary Heale, the schoolmistress, resigned after being criticised by Mr. Quinlan, the superintendent of national schools.[79] In mid June 1845, the guardians again warned Fogarty to perform his duties.[80] While such reprimands were possibly justified, the authorities' obsession with economy even in trivial matters was shown later in the same year when the matron came under fire after the visiting committee found a candle in the female sleeping wards. The guardians condemned the matron's 'want of economy', and threatened 'stronger measures' in future.[81]

In early 1850 the finance committee noticed, on inspecting the account of stock, that the coal account was kept 'in a most neglectful manner'. The keeping of this account had been entrusted to a wardmaster. Not only was the record-keeping shoddy, it was downright fraudulent. The wardmaster, according to the committee, had made 'fictitious entries' in order to show that the amount of coals on hands was equal to the amount stated in the provision check account. The wardmaster, according to the guardians, was 'unfit for his station' and they ordered his dismissal.[82]

[76] Ibid., 6 November 1844.
[77] O' Connor, among others, notes that the 'high dismissal rate of workhouse masters and officers, and the frequent reports of gross neglect and incompentency [sic] of officers, reflect the poor quality and performance of the staff. Quarrelsomeness, drunkenness and immorality were not uncommon'. O'Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland*, p. 97.
[78] BG/LISM/3, 20 November 1844.
[79] Ibid., 12 March 1845.
[80] Ibid., 18 June 1845.
[81] BG/LISM/4, 26 November 1845.
[82] BG/LISM/8, 23 January 1850.

In Tallow, an inmate named Michael Brohan complained that his wife, Catherine, had been beaten by the auxiliary master. The clerk's record of Brohan's testimony before the board reads as follows:

> On Wednesday the 11th June, Mr. Cangley [master of the auxiliary workhouse] put Brohan's wife into the black hole for taking her milk out of the dining hall from breakfast until 4 o' clock and from that day till Monday last (16th inst.) he stopped her milk and halfsoup. On Monday she showed her arm which was black and she stated that it was from being beaten by the master.[83]

According to Catherine Brohan, when the master threatened to punish her for removing her milk from the dining hall she threw it on the ground. Then the master 'beat her with a switch'. Cangley, for his part, claimed that the contempt and insubordination shown towards him by Catherine Brohan infuriated him, leading him to strike her 'three light blows' with a 'small switch'. The guardians, while acknowledging that Cangley had been provoked, judged that he had been 'guilty of an infringement of workhouse regulations by inflicting corporal punishment on a female pauper', and reprimanded him.[84]

[83] BG/LISM/9, 18 June 1851.
[84] Ibid., 25 June 1851.

Part III: 'Contagion'

The prevalence of epidemics such as typhus, relapsing fever and cholera is difficult to quantify. Further imprecision results from the use of the term 'famine fever', which denoted typhus and relapsing fever without discrimination. The minutes refer to specific cases and express fears that fever could spread; yet they do not indicate to what extent fever actually *had* spread. Typhus fever broke out among the Lismore inmates in March 1847. A number of these cases were to prove fatal.[85] Such records as have survived would seem to reinforce the assertion that, although contagious diseases initially afflicted the underfed and weak, those priests, medical people and workhouse staff who came into contact with the poor and sick also ran a grave risk of contracting serious illness.[86] In July 1847, Sister Francis Keating, 'one of the original group [of three nuns] who arrived in Lismore in June 1836', died of fever.[87] We are also told that, on 15 September 1849, the Lismore schoolmaster was removed to the fever hospital.[88] The union clerk fell victim to fever the following month.[89] In November 1849, the master's journal recorded that the workhouse nurse

[85] Nolan, 'The Lismore Poor Law Union and the Famine', p. 107.
[86] For the point that fever initially struck at the hungry and weak, see Canon John O' Rourke, *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, Veritas Publications, 1989, orig. 1874), pp. 241–244. Kerr, among others, points to the spread of fever among those who tended the sick. Donal Kerr, *The Catholic Church and the Famine* (Dublin, The Columba Press, 1996), p. 23.
[87] Arthure, *A Priest in His Time*, p. 65.
[88] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 19 September 1849, p. 60. The Lismore fever hospital was 'located at South Lane adjacent of the workhouse'. Nolan, 'Lismore Poor Law Union and the Famine', p. 108.
[89] BG/LISM/8, 17 October 1849.

in Lismore had been suffering from cholera.[90] A year later a Cappoquin constable named Boylan and a relieving officer named John Hudson both contracted fever.[91]

Lismore was to be hit with considerable ferocity by cholera, a disease 'which affected Ireland pandemically in 1848–49'.[92] According to the report of the health commissioners, ninety-one cases of cholera were recorded for Lismore within a three-month period in 1849. Also in this period, 2 May to 31 July 1849, fifty-three deaths were recorded as having resulted from the disease. In other words, fifty-eight per cent of cholera cases recorded for Lismore proved fatal in this period. This was slightly above the Waterford City figure of fifty-six per cent and well above the forty-seven per cent fatality rate recorded for Dungarvan.[93]

Table 4.1: Incidents of Cholera in the Main Co. Waterford towns, 1849

		Cholera		Mortality	Date	
Town	Population	Cases	Deaths	%	First Case	Last Case
Dungarvan	12,382	723	344	47.4	29/4/'49	11/9/'49
Waterford	29,288	522	294	56.3	15/4/'49	7/9/'49
Lismore	3,007	91	53	58.2	2/5/'49	31/7/'49
Portlaw	3,647	72	13	18	13/5/'49	21/8/'49
Tallow	2,969	35	19	54.2	29/4/'49	27/7/'49
Cappoquin	2,341	17	8	47	25/4/'49	12/9/'49

Source: 'Report of the Commissioners of Health, Ireland, on the Epidemics of 1846 to 1850', in *British Parliamentary Papers: Reports from the Relief Commissioners and Other Papers on Famine Relief in Ireland with Appendices, 1846–53 (Famine Ireland 8)* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970), pp. 399 – 483. See esp. p. 441.

Yet our observations thus far must be qualified, as we must allow for the different durations of regional cholera epidemics. For instance, while Lismore was considered within a time-span of three months between its first and last recorded cases, the records for Waterford City and Dungarvan covered just less than five

[90] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 14 November 1849, p. 60.
[91] BG/LISM/8, 6 November 1850, 27 November 1850.
[92] Geary, Laurence M., 'Famine, Fever, and the "Bloody Flux"', in Cathal Portéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine: the Thomas Davis Lecture Series* (Cork and Dublin, Mercier Press, 1995), p. 81.
[93] 'Report of the Commissioners of Health, Ireland, on the Epidemics of 1846 to 1850', in *British Parliamentary Papers: Famine Ireland 8* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970), pp. 440–441.

months. Therefore, when we take the time factor into account, a slightly different picture emerges. Lismore witnessed, on average, about seventeen deaths per month as a direct result of cholera. This is considerably lower than either the Dungarvan or Waterford City figures. Over roughly five months Waterford City recorded an average of fifty-eight cholera deaths per month while Dungarvan, considered over a comparable time-span, endured an average monthly cholera death rate of sixty-eight persons.

If we consider cholera deaths as a percentage of local populations, we can calculate that Dungarvan, followed by Lismore, suffered the heaviest relative (as well as absolute) losses in Waterford.

Table 4.2: Cholera Deaths Expressed as a Percentage of Population

Area	*%*
Dungarvan	3
Lismore	2
Tallow	1
Cappoquin	0.3
Portlaw	0.3

Source: calculated from Ibid.

In fact, calculations based on the board of health's report may even underestimate the relative prevalence of cholera. After all, the data relating to cholera is based on returns from 1849, while the population figures are gleaned from the 1841 census. As famine, disease and emigration had done much to decimate entire communities since then, the population figures eventually collected for the 1851 census would probably be closer to the reality. The 1849 data for incidents of cholera, if considered against this much-reduced population, would obviously yield higher

percentages. What does emerge in either case, is the impression that the visitation of cholera upon Lismore was lethal and intense, but relatively short-lived.

The dangers posed by overcrowding when it came to containing and minimising the incidence of fever and other health risks were certainly not lost on the medical officer. In early May 1850, he reported that the workhouse was housing 137 persons more than it was designed to hold.[94] By the end of the month there were 215 more persons in the Lismore workhouse than it could with safety accommodate. A newly built shed in the girls yard could, he estimated, accommodate about fifty inmates, thus reducing the superfluity to 165 persons. While the medical officer did not think that overcrowding had, as yet, resulted in a crisis, this he feared would change, especially as days got warmer.[95] The following week, the master confirmed the necessity of increased workhouse accommodation. The clerk drew attention to 'a large store' belonging to a man named John Slattery.[96] As a result, the board again leased Slattery's store and Cliffe's yard.[97]

By July 1850, only the fever hospitals were under-populated. The minutes do not give the combined capacity of the Lismore, Cappoquin, and Tallow fever hospitals, but it was certainly considerably greater than the fifty patients currently residing in them.[98] In relation to this, Arthur Kiely Ussher proposed that the Lismore fever hospital be extended, while those of Cappoquin and Tallow be closed. The

[94] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 1 May 1850, p. 60.
[95] BG/LISM/8, 29 May 1850.
[96] NA/BG111/F1, Master's Journal, 1 May 1850, p. 60. Slattery was a corn merchant who leased a store from the duke of Devonshire. He held this premises on condition that he keep it 'as one store and not convert any part of it into a dwelling house'. See 'Copy of Instructions for Leases', Lismore Papers, 22 April 1848, NLI, Ms. 6198. For reference to Slattery as a pawnbroker, see Arthure, *A Priest in His Time*, p. 47.
[97] BG/LISM/8, 29 May 1850, 5 June 1850.
[98] We do know, from the minutes, that the overall hospital accommodation was for 376 inmates. The Lismore fever hospital itself was to be enlarged to cater for 100 patients. Ibid, 24 July, 8 May 1850.

following week, the commissioners approved of this plan.[99] Yet as late as September 1850 four patients still remained at the Mount Rivers fever hospital near Affane, despite the fact that it should have been closed. These were 'not fit to be removed'.[100] While the fever hospitals were under-populated, it appears that fever had broken out in the main workhouse. In late October 1850 the workhouse doctor, Matthew Quinlan, who seemed to be constantly unavailable due to illness, refused to resign, and the guardians felt that it was imperative for the commissioners to remove him. They stressed the necessity of having a medically qualified person at the workhouse, especially when they could not visit it themselves because of 'the contagion therein'.[101]

The medical officer urged that, as a good supply of water was now available, paupers should be washed when admitted, and that a more regular routine of washing should be observed within the workhouse generally than had previously been the case.[102] He further recommended that 'casual paupers' admitted into the workhouse should not be mixed with those recovering from fever in the probationary wards. Such inmates, he observed, 'sometimes contract fever and introduce it into the main house'. In response to this the guardians ordered that a furniture storeroom at the fever hospital 'be cleared and used as a convalescent ward in place of the probationary wards of the workhouse'.[103]

While the famine itself may have largely run its course by 1851, fever still preyed on the most fragile and vulnerable. In Lismore, Dr Mangan reported that 'the number of patients in the fever hospital had scarcely sufficient accommodation'. To meet this difficulty, he strongly advised against admitting any more fever sufferers

[99] Ibid., 3, 10 July 1850.
[100] NA/BG 111/F1, Master's Journal, 2 October 1850, p. 110.
[101] BG/LISM/8, 23 October 1850.
[102] BG/LISM/9, 26 March 1851.
[103] *Ibid.*, 2 April 1851.

until hospital accommodation could be augmented.[104] A fortnight later, Mangan's tone changed from one of recommendation to one of necessity. There simply was 'no further accommodation' for fever patients at Cliffe's yard. The guardians therefore instructed the relieving officers to send all other fever patients to the Tallow hospital until further notice.[105] Yet the number of fever patients was declining rather than growing. The problem was that union officials were eager to see as many people as possible put off the rates. In their zeal they overestimated the rate of decline, and had, as already noted, ordered the closing of the Tallow and Cappoquin fever hospitals in mid 1850.[106] A few weeks later, the fever-patient population had grown from fifty to fifty-nine.[107] This, admittedly, was hardly a spectacular rise. Yet, given how typhus and relapsing fever spread, the premature closing of these hospitals and the subsequent concentration of all fever patients in Lismore probably arrested the very decline anticipated by the guardians, and led to the accommodation crisis.[108]

The threat to the health of inmates posed by fever was compounded by those posed by poor-quality food. Bad food led to dysentery and diarrhoea. In October 1849 the medical officers of both the Lismore and Tallow workhouses condemned the bread that was to be served to sick inmates. Two months later the Indian meal was denounced as 'not fit for human food'.[109] Yet, despite the guardians' vigilance, or as a result of their rigid 'economy' when ordering supplies, the Lismore medical officer's report in November 1850 condemned food given to paupers as being 'injurious to their health'. Such food, Dr Currey's report concluded, was likely to

[104] Ibid., 7 May 1851.
[105] Ibid., 21 May 1851.
[106] Ibid., 3, 10 May 1850.
[107] BG/LISM/8, 24 July 1850.
[108] For a consideration of typhus and relapsing fever, see Geary, 'Famine, Fever and the "Bloody Flux"', pp. 74–86.
[109] NA/BG 111/F1, Master's Journal, 24 October 1849, pp. 68–9, 26 December 1849, p. 78.

cause an increase in the numbers of dysentery cases in the workhouse. The board, on enquiring into the food quality, shared the report's conclusions.[110]

Sadly, Currey's fears were to prove well-founded. The minutes for the week ending 14 June 1851 expressed alarm that twenty deaths had occurred during the week. Thirteen of these twenty had occurred in Tallow, and ten of these thirteen had been children.[111] A fortnight later the auxiliary workhouse medical officer, Dr Hanan, reported that dysentery and measles had been the main killers.[112] The board ultimately ordered that Currey report weekly on the sanitary conditions within the establishment.[113]

The guardians' plan to accommodate all fever patients in the Lismore hospital encountered a major problem; while the Tallow and Cappoquin fever hospitals were to close, the enlargement of the Lismore hospital was hampered by a conflict between the union architect, James Dwyer, and those contracted to carry out the carpentry and slating. On 30 April 1851, Dwyer reported that the contractors were breaching their contracts by using defective materials. For their part, these contractors complained of him for hindering their work 'by unnecessarily condemning their materials'.[114] The board naturally, if not necessarily fairly, sided with their architect, and warned the contractors to adhere 'strictly' to their contracts, or legal proceedings would be taken against them.[115] On 21 May 1851, while Dwyer and the contract holders squabbled, Dr Mangan again stressed that there was 'no room for fever patients at Cliffe's yard'.

[110] BG/LISM/9, 13 November 1850.
[111] Ibid., 18 June 1851. It is likely that the Tallow auxiliary workhouse held mostly children and female adults. See the marginal note directive to send such inmates there, NA/BG 111/F1, Master's Journal, 7 June 1848.
[112] BG/LISM/9, 2 July 1851.
[113] Ibid., 18 June 1851.
[114] Ibid., 30 April 1851.
[115] Ibid., 30 March 1851.

The guardians ordered that fever patients were to be sent to the Tallow workhouse hospital until suitable accommodation could be procured for them.[116]

The guardians thus found themselves in the paradoxical position of being able to segregate inmates on the grounds of age and gender, but because of this very system, found it difficult to segregate fever-stricken from relatively healthy inmates. While overall numbers were falling, segregation within the workhouse was such that, unless the population was distributed evenly between categories (which it never was) overcrowding in some areas still posed a problem. The workhouse system's myriad of classifications was defeating its own smooth running.[117]

Yet the movement of fever patients to the Tallow and Lismore workhouse hospitals while repairs to the permanent fever hospital were being fought over was a luxury that neither the guardians nor the inmates could afford. Obviously fever patients were to be segregated from others even within these hospitals, but the spread of fever throughout the general inmate population had become that bit more difficult to guard against. The supreme and terrifying prospect of such a spread of disease among previously able-bodied inmates was no longer remote. Also, the bitter irony of freeing ratepayers of able-bodied claimants not by keeping such claimants outside the workhouse, but by rendering them infirm inside it, was unlikely to be lost on the guardians. Undoubtedly, recognising the urgency of the fever hospital situation, and spurred by Dwyer's report that it was still unfinished, the guardians issued an ultimatum:

> ...that the clerk give the fever hospital contractors notice to give up their work finished on this day three weeks, – the 2nd July next – on which day, should any portion of the

[116] Ibid., 21 May 1851.
[117] *Ibid.*

work remain unfinished, the board will provide for its immediate completion out of the balance of their contract remaining on hands.[118]

In other words, finish the work satisfactorily within three weeks, or we will get others to do so, and pay them the money that, by contract, would have been yours. Only on 9 July 1851 could the union clerk, Nicholas Wall, report that a large fever hospital was now open in Lismore. All the fever patients at Cliffe's yard had been transferred to it, and he notified the officers of the Tallow fever hospital that, 'as soon as the patients now in it are convalescent, the guardians propose to close it up'. The relieving officers were directed to send all fever patients in future to Lismore.[119]

While the workhouses were never intended to deal with Famine conditions, and the authorities had many crises to deal with that could not have been foreseen, yet, by continuing an inflexible, unfeeling regime, the central commissioners and the local guardians exacerbated the problems they sought to solve. In the last analysis the workhouses established under the 1838 Act realised one part, at least, of an aspiration articulated in 1775. This was, that a poorhouse should be 'a terror and place of punishment to the sturdy and idle', while providing 'a comfortable asylum for the aged, infirm, and helpless'.[120] Unfortunately, the first part of this duality of intent buried the second. The nineteenth-century workhouses were, thanks largely to the principle of less eligibility, invariably places of terror and punishment to young and old, able-bodied and infirm, women and men alike as the interests of the 'public' condemned all applicants alike to a particularly dubious form of 'comfortable asylum' indeed.

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[118] Ibid., 11 June 1851.

[119] BG/LISM/9, 9 July 1851

[120] *Observations on the State and Condition of the Poor, under the Institution, for their Relief, in the City of Dublin, together with the State of the Fund, &c. Published by Order of the Corporation, Instituted for the Relief of the Poor, and for Punishing Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars, in the County and City of Dublin, March 25th, 1775* (Dublin, William Wilson, 1775), p. 6.

Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks

As we have seen, the populations of the Lismore workhouse, the Tallow auxiliary and the various temporary buildings fluctuated considerably. Yet, from 11 October 1843, when the available statistics begin, to 3 February 1847, when they are interrupted, a steadily increasing number were occupying the Lismore workhouse. The dates in Table 5.1 were selected as highpoints, and between these dates inmate numbers either fluctuated slightly or stagnated.

Table 5.1: Workhouse Population breakdown, 1843 - 47

	Males 15+	Females 15+	Boys -15	Girls -15	Children -2	Total
11 Oct '43	21	26	14	10	6	77
28 Feb '44	30	38	24	18	11	121
29 Jan '45	41	45	30	25	14	155
18 June '45	32	49	40	29	14	164
26 Nov '45	32	45	46	31	15	169
25 Mar '46	34	61	49	40	16	200
6 Jan '46	77	118	113	99	29	436
3 Feb '47	91	151	124	121	34	521

Sources: BG/LISM/2–4.

As can be seen from the above, the inmate population was growing long before late 1845, and the overall difference of four persons between 18 June and 26 November 1845 would suggest that the workhouse really was a last resort for those whose staple food had failed. On the other hand, a more serious leap in inmate numbers took place the following year. As the second consecutive failure removed whatever reserves the poor could call on the first time round, those submitting to the workhouse regime grew from 200 in late March 1846 to 312 by the end of the year. Less than one week into 1847 their number had grown to 436. Early February 1847 witnessed the first episode of overcrowding in the Lismore workhouse.

In the absence of minutes for 1847 and 1848, we can only gain an impression of conditions in and around Lismore for these years. In mid February 1847 the *Waterford Mail* reported the death of a man named Patrick Dunne, who was found in a desperate physical condition by a policeman. Patrick Dunne died while being conveyed to the workhouse. Dr Quinlan's post mortem verdict stated that Dunne's stomach 'was not only empty, but appeared as if it had been washed out with water'. The jury's verdict found that Dunne had died of starvation. They condemned the 'shameful and criminal neglect of the Government, in not adopting proper and timely means of sending food into the country, and their cruel and nonsensical adherence to political economy'. The coroner rejected this verdict and, after discussions with the jury, less condemnatory language was adopted.[1]

It would seem that the case of Patrick Dunne, though extreme, was part of a wider social disintegration around Lismore. Also in early 1847, the *Waterford Freeman* told of the horrific destitution evident in the wider Lismore area. This report claimed that one meal of turnips every two days was all that roughly 3,000 persons had to subsist on. The relief works being carried on were a 'drop in the ocean' in terms of what was needed. The same article urged road works, rather than that 'most wretched description' of employment – drainage works.

> The poor labourers are, from Monday morning until Saturday night, up to their knees in water at this most inclement season. The utmost the ablest bodied man can earn is 7.5d per day, and he is not paid a fraction of this miserable wages until the lapse of three weeks.

[1] *Waterford Mail* [hereafter *WM*], 17 February 1847, 'Death in the Public Street of Lismore from Starvation'.

The writer warned that the people's patience was exhausted, 'and even the influence of the Catholic clergy is beginning to wane'.[2]

Indeed just one month later, a clergyman wrote to the *Freeman*; he lamented that, around the Cappoquin district, people were 'on the verge of starvation'. He also confirmed that most of these skeletal creatures had tasted only one meal of turnips for the preceding forty-eight hours, and even that had been procured with difficulty.[3]

Things became totally intolerable for some of Arthur Kiely-Ussher's tenants in mid 1847. The *Cork Examiner*, on 21 July, reported the trial of John Liddy and John Keefe, both of whom were charged with conspiring to murder Kiely-Ussher. In his testimony, Kiely-Ussher maintained that he refused to allow his tenants to cut turf for sale, but he offered to let them 'cut to any extent for their own consumption'. These tenants-at-will were threatened with eviction if they did not comply. Many refused, and Kiely-Ussher moved to have fifty or sixty of them evicted. John Liddy met with some other tenants at his home, and there the conspiracy developed. Money was paid to John Keefe, who was not a tenant, but who was hired to shoot Kiely-Ussher. The plan was uncovered when two of the conspirators, Pat and Maurice Meyrick, confessed the plot to its intended victim.[4] Liddy and Keefe, along with three others, were convicted of conspiracy to commit murder, and were sentenced to death. On the plea of Kiely-Ussher, these sentences were commuted to transportation for life.[5]

The deterioration of the social fabric is further demonstrated by the fact that, in July 1847, fifty-four prisoners came to trial at the Lismore quarter sessions. This was the largest number of cases the sessions had ever encountered at a sitting. All of the seventeen cases detailed in the *Mail* involved theft. These offences ranged from

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[2] *WF*, 23 January 1847, 'Destitution in Lismore'.
[3] Ibid., 3 February 1847, 'To the Editor of the *Waterford Freeman*'.
[4] *CE*, 21 July 1847, 'County Waterford Assizes: Conspiracy to Murder'.
[5] Arthure, *A Priest of His Time*, pp. 78–9.

'entering a house with intent to steal', to larceny, burglary and robbery. Sentences included transportation for ten years, one-year's imprisonment and six months' hard labour. Two boys who were convicted of 'entering a house with intent to steal' were each sentenced to be whipped.[6]

In October 1847, an *Examiner* correspondent related the tale of Joe Bennett who, along with his wife and seven children, was ill with fever in Curraglass, just outside of Tallow. While Bennett and his family were trying to combat fever, his landlady's agent had Bennett's wheat cut and sold for half its value. Bennett, who later suffered a relapse of fever, returned home to find 'not a potato, nor a grain to feed his family'. The writer concluded that Joe Bennett could have paid his rent 'if his crop was sold in the legitimate course by himself'.[7]

Near the end of 1847 another *Examiner* article lamented the destitution that existed in Lismore.[8] While newspaper reports are hardly reliable in themselves, the impression they give of severe hardship around the Lismore area would seem to be supported by transactions recorded in the Lismore estate papers. The ledger book records that, between the end of March and early December 1848, the duke of Devonshire's estate paid £100 2s 10d to assist twenty-eight people in emigrating to America.[9] Over the same nine-month period the estate also paid £417 15*s* 0*d* to thirty-three tenants for yielding possession of various properties in the area.[10]

It wasn't just tenant farmers and labourers who were giving up holdings. In early 1849 the *Waterford News* reported that as many as forty monks from Mount Melleray themselves wished to emigrate to Pennsylvania, 'in consequence of the

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[6] *WM*, 5 July 1847, 'Lismore Quarter Sessions'.
[7] *CE*, 4 October 1847, 'Tallow'.
[8] Ibid., 17 November 1847, 'Lismore and Liberality'.
[9] Draft Rentals of the Irish Estates of His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, 1848 (with Receipts 1849), Ledger Book, Subscriptions, NLI Lismore Papers, Ms. 6942, p. 41.
[10] Most of these properties were small, and most were around the Lismore area, Ibid., pp. 61–3.

exhausted state of the fund of their charitable institution, in which no less than 400 poor people are daily fed'.[11] Along with this, the monks had to pay 'a very heavy poor rate'. Such, it would seem, was the larger situation into which the Lismore workhouse slotted in 1849.

When the minutes do resume in October 1849, the recorded number of inmates had grown to 1,322. In early January 1850 it had tripled the figure of 500 inmates that the original workhouse had been built to accommodate. Yet the acquisition of the Tallow auxiliary workhouse, together with the amalgamated fever hospital, the fever sheds and additional buildings, meant that the authorities could now accommodate 2,170 persons in all.

Table 5.2 Workhouse Population breakdown, 1849 - 50

	Males 15+	Females 15+	Boys - 15	Girls - 15	Children -2	Totals
3 Oct '49	222	496	296	290	18	1322
2 Jan '50	230	587	347	331	18	1513
24 Apr '50	308	813	421	420	39	2001
19 June '50	367	947	476	464	48	2302
24 July '50	296	825	432	434	49	2036
31 July '50	272	784	426	432	45	1959
14 Aug '50	188	541	337	364	36	1466
30 Oct '50	134	409	275	299	20	1132

Sources: BG/LISM/8–9.

By May 1850, even the extended accommodation was exceeded. Overcrowding meant that the search for even more 'additional buildings' had to be recommenced. The guardians somehow managed to provide accommodation adequate for 2,370 persons, thus avoiding overcrowding among the 2,199 inmates that actually occupied these buildings.[12] Yet pressure on accommodation reached critical

[11] *WN*, 26 January 1849, 'Mount Melleray'.
[12] BG/LISM/8.

proportions in mid June 1850. On 19 June workhouse inmate numbers peaked at 2,302. Over the next four months this figure declined pretty steadily. An upward trend resumed on 20 November 1850, and by late February 1851 it had reached 1,700 people.[13] While this was well over the levels of destitution that could possibly have been envisaged by the poor law commissioners a decade earlier, it still marked a significant easing of pressures when compared to the situation even six months previously.

While the workhouse population was growing to almost unmanageable proportions, the overall population of the union fell considerably over the 1841–51 decade. Lismore town underwent a twenty-three per cent fall in population, while the number of Tallow town residents was cut by one-third. Cappoquin fared better; its town population declined by eight per cent.[14] The former two figures are comparable to the population decline of twenty-seven per cent experienced by Dungarvan town. In all cases the male population decreased more dramatically than the female population.[15]

While the rural parishes underwent decreases comparable to those of the towns, the gender trend was reversed. The Lismore and Mocollop parish lost twenty-three per cent of its people, and the Tallow parish thirty-six per cent.[16] These were higher than the eighteen per cent loss suffered by Dungarvan's rural parish.[17] Yet in all these cases, including Dungarvan, females accounted for marginally greater losses than males. If, as the pre-Famine returns suggested, females often went to find work

[13] BG/LISM/9.
[14] *Census of Ireland 1851*, BPP, Population 12, Session 1852–53 (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970), p. 348.
[15] Ibid., p. 356.
[16] Ibid., p. 348. The number of marriages recorded for Lismore parish increased consistently between 1840 and 1846. In 1847 a sharp decline in the marriage rate is evident. A noticeable upward climb does not begin again until 1858. Unfortunately, Church of Ireland records are unavailable for the period. Parish records of marriages, St. Carthage's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Lismore.
[17] *Census of Ireland 1851*, p. 356.

in the towns, this would underplay the actual losses suffered by the towns. It is difficult to offer an explanation for the greater female losses in the countryside. I suspect that continued migration to the towns is a partial explanation, especially given how greatly women outnumbered men in the workhouse, as Table 5.2 above shows. Yet this cannot be definitively proved. The 1851 figures show Lismore town's working population as being composed of just under one-third engaged in agriculture, just under one-third in 'other pursuits', and over one-third in trade/manufacture. Yet the fact of the trauma caused in terms of population patterns by the Famine renders speculations regarding 1841–51 employment patterns particularly doubtful. After all, the demographic devastation into which the Famine hurled the Irish population meant that the overall population continued to decline long after the 1840s, in Lismore as elsewhere.[18]

[18] See, for instance, the 1861 and 1871 returns for the Lismore Tallow, Cappoquin and Dungarvan areas contained in *Census of Ireland, 1871*, Part I: 'Area, Houses and Population, No. 6, County and City of Waterford' (Dublin, Alexander Thom, 1874), pp.867, 876–7, 887.

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