

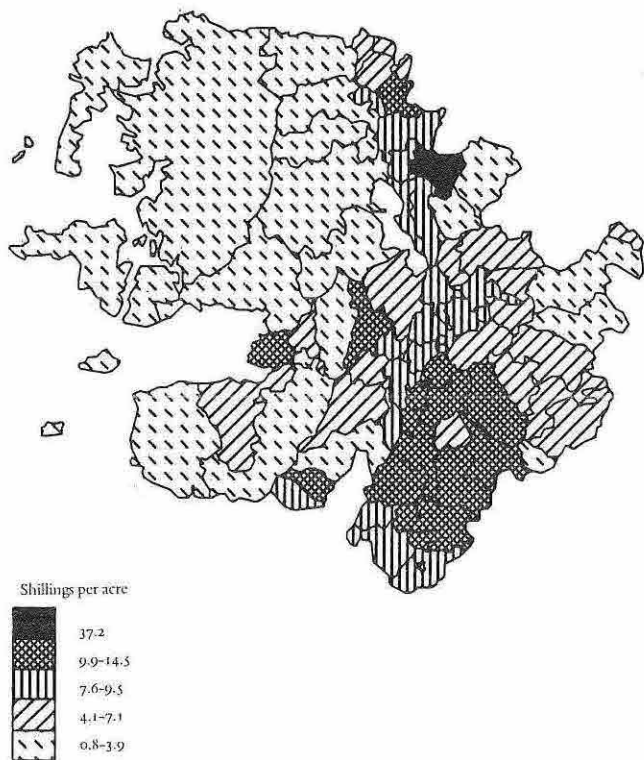
The Famine and Its Aftermath in County Mayo¹

DONALD JORDAN

The Famine of 1846-50 marks a major turning point in the economic and social development of modern Ireland. Famine depopulation and post-Famine land clearances and emigration accelerated a trend, established before the Famine, of consolidation of holdings into larger, more profitable ones. The reduction in the number of subsistence producers that the Famine brought about allowed for a larger market surplus for those who survived the blight with their land holdings intact or enlarged, and cleared the way for the fuller commercialisation of Irish agriculture. A rise in livestock prices, stimulated by a growing British beef market, further encouraged the consolidation of holdings and a switch from tillage to livestock farming. These demographic and economic changes brought new wealth and prominence to those with sizable holdings of good pasture land. Within the agrarian community the balance between the various classes of farmers shifted markedly to the advantage of the larger farmers, whose agricultural, inheritance and marriage practices became the norm for Irish society.

These structural changes occurred more slowly in Mayo than they did in the more prosperous counties of Ireland. There were proportionally fewer large farm families in Mayo to lead the way by taking full advantage of the dynamic post-Famine economy. The county, and especially its eastern and western peripheries, remained peopled with small farmers who married early and worked tillage farms that were regularly subdivided to meet the land hunger of the next generation. Nonetheless, the process of the consolidation of holdings and the shift from labour-intensive tillage farming to labour-extensive grazing did occur, bringing with it conflicts over land and tensions within the farming community. While the lines of division between larger and more prosperous farmers, concentrated in central Mayo, and the smaller, impoverished farmers increasingly relegated to the peripheral regions cannot be precisely drawn, following the Famine, and largely as a consequence of it, Mayo developed more fully than previously into a county that contained two economies and two social systems:

1 This article is extracted to a large degree from my *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), which contains a fuller treatment of the Famine in County Mayo. Preparing this article has given me a welcome opportunity to revise and update the argument as well as to recalculate the data. I wish to thank William Davies of Cambridge University Press for his permission to publish this article



Map 1 Valuation of land, 1881, by parish, County Mayo (shillings per acre).
 Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1881, pt. 1: area, houses and population, vol. iii, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 285-353, H. C. 1882 [c. 3268-III], lxxix, 273.

one concentrated in but not confined to the central lowlands and one concentrated in but not confined to the periphery.² Map 1³ illustrates the valuation of the land by parish, clearly revealing that the best land was concentrated in a central corridor that begins at Killala Bay in north Mayo, widens out in mid-Mayo to include the land between Castlebar and Westport, and then continues south and east to the Galway and Roscommon borders.

As was the case throughout Ireland, the Famine inaugurated a period of population decline in County Mayo that saw the population drop 51 per cent between 1841 and 1911.

² The core-periphery thesis is developed in *ibid.*, pp. 5-7, 13-17.

³ Maps 1-3 were prepared by David Miller of Carnegie Mellon University for *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*. Again, I wish to express my gratitude to him.

Table 1: Population of County Mayo 1841-1911

Year	Males	Females	Total	Percentage Change
1841	194,198	194,689	388,887	
1851	133,264	141,235	274,499	-29.41
1861	125,636	129,160	254,796	-7.18
1871	120,877	125,153	246,030	-3.44
1881	119,421	125,791	245,212	-0.33
1891	107,498	111,536	219,034	-10.68
1901	97,564	101,602	199,166	-9.07
1911	96,345	95,832	192,177	-3.51

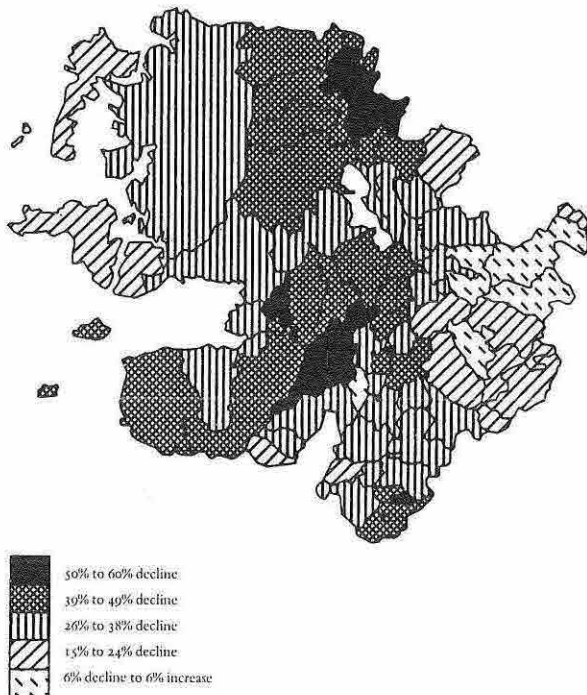
Source: W.E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 14.

This population loss was not distributed evenly throughout the county. The massive population loss during the Famine was heavier in central Mayo than in the peripheral regions, especially the eastern periphery, where one parish, Kilmovee, actually experienced a six per cent increase in population between 1841 and 1851. In a pattern that was to continue until the 1880s, the poorest regions of the county suffered less depopulation than did the more prosperous central lowlands, as can be seen from a comparison of Maps 2 and 3.

Between 1851 and 1881 many parishes that experienced the least population loss between 1841 and 1851 gained in population, despite a ten per cent drop for the county as a whole. All of the five parishes that lost fifteen per cent or less of their population between 1841 and 1851 gained population during the subsequent thirty years. Of the ten parishes that lost fifteen to twenty-five per cent of their population between 1841 and 1851, eight experienced a population gain by 1881. At the other extreme, all the parishes that experienced a depopulation in excess of forty per cent between 1841 and 1851 continued afterwards to decline in population, often at very high rates.

The salient components of Famine depopulation – death and emigration – were present throughout the county.⁴ It is impossible to isolate statistically one or the other of these factors on a parish basis, but it seems safe to assume that Famine mortality was the least likely of the two to contribute significantly to the regional variation in depopulation within the county. At the time of the Famine all regions of Mayo contained a considerable number of people who

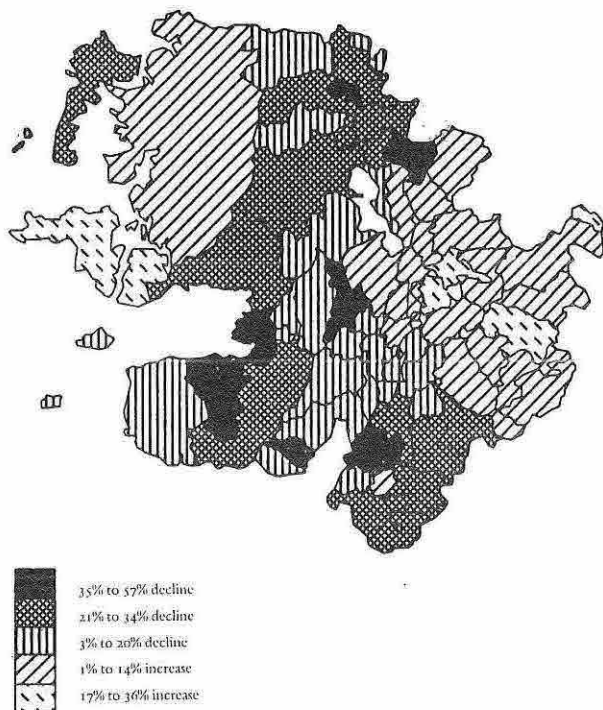
⁴ Estimates of the total Famine-driven depopulation in County Mayo range from 114,000 (S.H. Cousens) to 170,000 (J. Mokyr), with excess mortality being credited with forty-four to sixty-six per cent of the total, respectively. See Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, pp. 107-9.



Map 2 Rural Population change, 1841-51, by parish, County Mayo.

Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1851, pt. i: showing the area, population and the number of houses, by townlands, and electoral divisions*, vol. iv, pp. 455-514, H. C. 1852-3 (1542), xcii, 453. Populations of the towns of Ballina, Killala, Westport, Hollymount, Cong, Castlebar and Ballinrobe excluded.

were heavily dependent on the potato and who suffered severely when it failed. On the other hand, emigration, at least that forced by eviction, may have accounted for the heavy depopulation from the fertile lowlands. This was the area where there was the greatest incentive for landlords to clear the land of tenants and amalgamate holdings into large grazing farms. Although none of the poor law unions for which statistics on farm sizes were compiled in 1847 consisted entirely of good quality lowland, Ballinrobe had a larger share than any other union in Mayo. During the Famine the union was ravaged by death and evictions, especially in 1848, compelling *The Telegraph or Connaught Ranger* to compare its fate to that of Skibereen in County Cork.⁵ The effect of Famine evictions in the union is evident when comparing farm size in 1847 and in 1851. Between



Map 3 Rural Population change, 1851-81, by parish, County Mayo.

Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1881, area, houses and population, vol. iii, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 285-353, H. C. 1882 [C.3268-III], lxxix, 273. Note: Populations of the towns of Ballina, Killala, Westport, Hollymount, Cong, Castlebar and Ballinrobe excluded.

those years the number of farms of fifteen acres or less fell from seventy-five to sixty-one per cent, while the median size of farms rose from seventeen to twenty-six acres.⁶ This was the pattern in all poor law unions whose territory included portions of the central lowlands. It appears that many of the families displaced by the evictions that made the amalgamation of holdings possible took to the emigrant ships or migrated elsewhere in Ireland.

⁶ Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, pp. 136-7. In order to create four new unions for County Mayo, the poor law unions were reorganized in 1850. The eastern portion of the Ballinrobe union was separated off to form the Claremorris union. For purposes of comparison, the figures for 1851 include both the Ballinrobe and Claremorris unions. The 1851 figure for the Ballinrobe union as it was constituted in 1851 show holdings of fifteen acres or less to represent sixty-four per cent of the total and the median size of holdings to be thirty acres.

Famine depopulation was lowest in the eastern periphery, especially in the Swinford union, which comprised much of the eastern portion of the county. S.H. Cousens has argued that regions such as that comprising the Swinford union were spared excessive Famine depopulation and experienced population growth after 1851 due in large part to the availability of wasteland that could be reclaimed and converted into small holdings for people who would otherwise be compelled to emigrate.⁷ According to the commissioners of the 1851 census, Mayo had the largest area of unclaimed wasteland of any county in Ireland. The commissioners estimated that between 1841 and 1851, 10.9 per cent of that wasteland had been reclaimed, lowering the proportion of such land in the county from 58.8 per cent to 47.68 per cent.⁸ In 1845 Richard Griffith, the General Valuation Commissioner for Ireland, estimated for the Devon Commission that 58.7 per cent of the land of Mayo was unclaimed. Comparing Griffith's estimate with that contained in the 1841 census would indicate that little reclamation had gone on between 1841 and 1845, when the population of the county was rising.⁹ Rather, the bulk of the decennial reclamation appears to have occurred during the Famine, when it would seem improbable that a starving population would have much time or energy for clearing and draining new lands. This was the assumption of K.H. Connell in his study of the reclamation of waste land in Ireland:

When starvation was almost universal, it can hardly be supposed that the peasants had either the resources or the incentive to drain mountain and bog as never before. And, moreover, when death and emigration caused neighbours to vacate their holdings it is unlikely that the need to clear fresh land seemed as urgent as in former years.¹⁰

Yet, in eastern Mayo land was reclaimed during the Famine and it seems reasonable to suggest that the people doing the reclamation had been evicted from land in the more fertile lowlands. In eastern Mayo they found land of marginal quality that held little incentive for landlord-initiated consolidation. The result was low Famine depopulation and rapid repopulation during the following decades.¹¹

7 S.H. Cousens, 'Emigration and Demographic Change in Ireland, 1851-1861' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, xiv, 2 (Dec. 1961), pp. 278-88.

8 *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1851*, part vi: general report, pp. x-xii, H. C. 1856 (2134). xxxi, I.

9 *Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland*, p. 51, H. C. 1845 (605), xix, I.

10 K.H. Connell, 'The Colonization of Waste Land in Ireland, 1780-1845' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, ii, 1 (1950), p. 48.

11 Cousens, 'Emigration and Demographic Change', p. 280.

The regional variations in levels of population growth and decline in post-Famine Mayo were further reinforced by differing levels of natural increase (i.e., excess births over deaths) within the county. Between 1861 and 1871 the rate of natural increase in Mayo, when calculated by poor law union, varied from twelve to fifteen per cent in the central and northwestern sections of the county to sixteen to nineteen per cent in the east and in the parishes of Achill and Burrishoole in the west. Between 1871 and 1881 all of eastern and western Mayo had rates of twelve to fifteen per cent, while the rate in the central strip fell to between eight and eleven per cent.¹² By 1901 the division was even sharper. Between 1891 and 1901 the poor law unions that included portions of central Mayo had levels of natural increase ranging from 5.1 per cent in the Ballinrobe union to 7.5 per cent in the Ballina union, while the Belmullet and Westport unions had rates of 11.3 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively. In the unions of east Mayo, Swinford had a rate of 9.3 per cent and Claremorris a rate of 9 per cent.¹³

The decline in the number of births that characterised post-Famine Ireland is generally attributed to a rise in the age of marriage, an increase in the number of people not marrying, and the high rate of emigration of potential parents.¹⁴ Prior to the Famine, marriage patterns tended to be conditioned by the ease with which land on many estates could be subdivided among all heirs and by the potato, which enabled a large family to be fed on a small parcel of land. In impoverished counties such as Mayo, where land was easily subdivided and where the practice of impartible inheritance of land had not yet found acceptance, there were few restraints to early marriages since the new couple would have little difficulty obtaining a potato patch. Stemming from the work of K.H. Connell, it has long been accepted by Irish historians that the practice of early and frequent marriages was the norm throughout pre-Famine Ireland.¹⁵ How-

12 S.H. Cousens, 'The Regional Variations in Population Changes in Ireland, 1861-1881' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, xvii, 2 (Dec. 1964), pp. 306, 314.

13 *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1901*, part I: area, houses and population: also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion and education of the people, vol. iv, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo, p. 104, H. C. 1902 [Cd. 1059-II], cxviii, 365.

14 For discussions of Irish demographic history during the nineteenth century, see B.M. Walsh, 'A Perspective on Irish Population Patterns' in *Éire-Ireland*, iv, 3 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 3-21; K.H. Connell, 'Land and Population in Ireland, 1780-1845', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, ii, 3 (1950), pp. 278-89; K.H. Connell, 'Peasant Marriage in Ireland: Its Structure and Development since the Famine', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, xiv, 3 (April 1962), pp. 502-23; J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society* (Dublin 1973), pp. 1-9. For a brief discussion of regional differences in depopulation in Mayo, see: E. Almquist, 'Mayo and Beyond: Land, Domestic Industry and Rural Transformation in the Irish West' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis: Boston University 1977), pp. 239-42.

15 *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* (Oxford, 1950).

ever, recent research has demonstrated that O'Connell's analysis of pre-Famine marriages failed to account for the complexity of a rapidly changing set of practices. It now seems certain that many farmers, especially the more substantial ones who tended to be clustered in the wealthier eastern and central regions of Ireland, were engaged in complex and carefully calculated marriage and inheritance practices prior to the Famine that established stringent terms over the possibility and the timing of marriage. S.J. Connolly suggests that future research on pre-Famine marriage in Ireland might:

reveal the existence of two groups within the farming community: a minority of larger occupiers, among whom marriage was postponed almost or entirely as long as it was to be in post-Famine Ireland, and a larger group of small farmers, deeply concerned with the implications of marriage for the orderly transfer of property from one generation to the next, but nevertheless willing to subdivide the family holding in order to allow their sons to marry while still in their twenties.¹⁶

Such a division of marriage practices was noted in pre-Famine Mayo in 1825 by the Catholic archbishop of Tuam. In testimony before a parliamentary committee examining the state of Ireland, Archbishop Oliver Kelly reported that among the more prosperous farmer/weavers in the vicinity of Westport and Newport there was 'an indisposition ... to contract improvident marriages'. He continued:

I did observe that in those prosperous districts the marriages were not so frequent as I found them in the more impoverished districts ... I have perfectly on my recollection that the circumstance [in the prosperous districts] struck me at the time, and that I did inquire amongst the people how it happened; and the reply I received was that they had no idea of entering into the matrimonial state until they could acquire a competency for their own support, and the support of a family. In other parts of the country, where I observed very considerable poverty, I found a greater indifference about their future comforts than among persons in a more prosperous situation in life.¹⁷

For the majority of Mayo's small farmers the lack of hope for an improved future combined with few restraints on the subdivision of holdings and the survival of the rundale system, meant there was little incentive to limit marriage

¹⁶ S.J. Connolly, 'Marriage in Pre-Famine Ireland' in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), pp. 117-20.

¹⁷ *Second Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland*, p. 247, H. C. 1825 (129 continued), viii, 173.

or to impose lofty financial expectations on it. A Catholic curate, speaking in 1836 before the royal commission appointed to inquire into the condition of Ireland's poor, summed up the beliefs of many of the county's small holders when he reported that they were 'induced to marry by feeling that their condition cannot be made much worse, or, rather, they know they can lose nothing, and they promise themselves some pleasure in the society of a wife'.¹⁸

The near elimination of rundale and the gradual increase in the median size of holdings following the Famine brought a slow transformation of marriage practices in rural Mayo, although as David Fitzpatrick has recently noted, farmers in the west tended to marry younger and in larger numbers than their counterparts in the east until the last third of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ One consequence of the Famine, in Mayo as elsewhere, was that there was a greater proportion of larger farmers who were more likely to practice restrictive marriage practices. As Lee has noted, 'a disproportionate number of Famine survivors belonged to classes with above average age at marriage ... Even had age at marriage remained unchanged within social groups, the reduction in the proportion of earlier marrying strata would have raised average age at marriage'.²⁰

In this new environment it became increasingly the norm for the timing of marriage and the choice of a partner to be controlled by parents who were concerned above all with the commercial advantages of the marriage. Encouraged by the unwillingness of many post-Famine landlords to countenance the further subdivision of the land and by their own heightened expectations, the prime concern of many parents was to preserve the farm intact by leaving it in its entirety to one heir and to provide a dowry to allow at least one daughter to marry well. To the male heir, not necessarily the eldest son, fell the privilege of marrying. The landless sons were left either to emigrate or to remain celibate since, without land, marriage was improbable. Even the inheriting son was often prevented from marrying until he came into the land on or near the death of his parents. The pattern was similar for daughters, with the one chosen or willing to marry into a neighbouring farm family being provided with a suitable dowry while her sisters were left to emigrate or remain unmarried. Marriage negotiations were protracted, parents of potential brides being concerned primarily with assurances of when and under what circumstances their prospective son-in-law would come into the land. Parents of potential grooms were equally concerned with the amount of cash, stock and/or land that their prospective

18 *Poor Inquiry (Ireland): Appendix (F) Containing Baronial Examinations Relative to Con-acre, Quarter or Score Ground, Small Tenantry, Consolidation of Farms and Dislodged Tenantry, Emigration, Landlord and Tenant, Nature and State of Agriculture, Taxation, Roads, Observations on the Nature and State of Agriculture: and Supplement*, p. 43, H. C. 1836 (38), xxxiii, I.

19 Connolly, 'Marriage in Post-Famine Ireland' in Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland*, pp. 117-20.

20 Lee, *Modernisation of Irish Society*, p. 4.

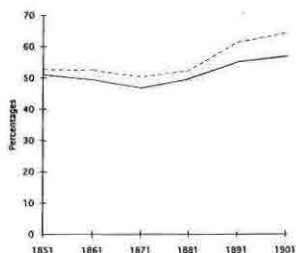
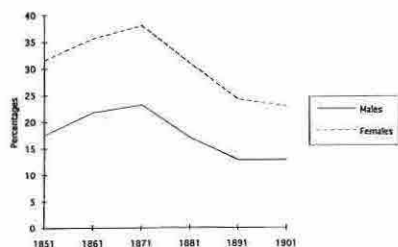


Figure 1 (left) Proportion of those between 15 and 34 years of age who were married or widowed. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1851, pt. i: showing the area, population and the number of houses, by townlands, and electoral divisions*, vol. iv, pp. 577, H. C. 1852-3 (1542), xcii, 453.

Figure 2 (right) Proportion of men between 15 and 64 and women between 15 and 64 who never married. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1861, pt. v: general report*, p. 419, H. C. 1863 (3204-IV), lxi, I.

daughter-in-law's dowry contained. Frequently, the couple had little or no say in these matters.²¹

One consequence of these restrictive marriage practices was an increase in celibacy, especially after 1881, although its spread was slower in the west than in the east.²² Two frequently employed indices of late and infrequent marriage are the proportion of young men and women who are married and the proportion of fertile adults who never marry.²³ As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, the proportion of married young men and women fell in Mayo from 1871, while the percentage of fertile adults who never married rose steadily.

The figures indicate that the restrictive marriage practices associated with the post-Famine period began to have a significant impact in Mayo after 1871. Brendan Walsh has calculated that the marriage rate per 1000 single women fell more rapidly in Mayo after 1871 than in any county in Ireland. At the same time, according to Walsh's figures the fertility rate (children under one year of age per 1000 women aged fifteen to forty-five) in the west remained high despite a national downward trend. Walsh charts a demographic transition between 1871 and 1911 in which the west of Ireland was transformed from a

²¹ D. Fitzpatrick, 'Marriage in Post-Famine Ireland', pp. 116-29; also see C. O'Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History, 1800-1925* (rev. ed., Manchester, 1993), pp. 180-94.

²² Fitzpatrick, 'Marriage in Post-Famine Ireland', pp. 117-18.

²³ S.H. Cousins, 'The Regional Variations in Population ...', pp. 315-8; B.M. Walsh, 'Marriage Rates and Population Pressure: Ireland, 1871 and 1911' in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, second series, xxiii, 1 (April 1970), pp. 148, 151.

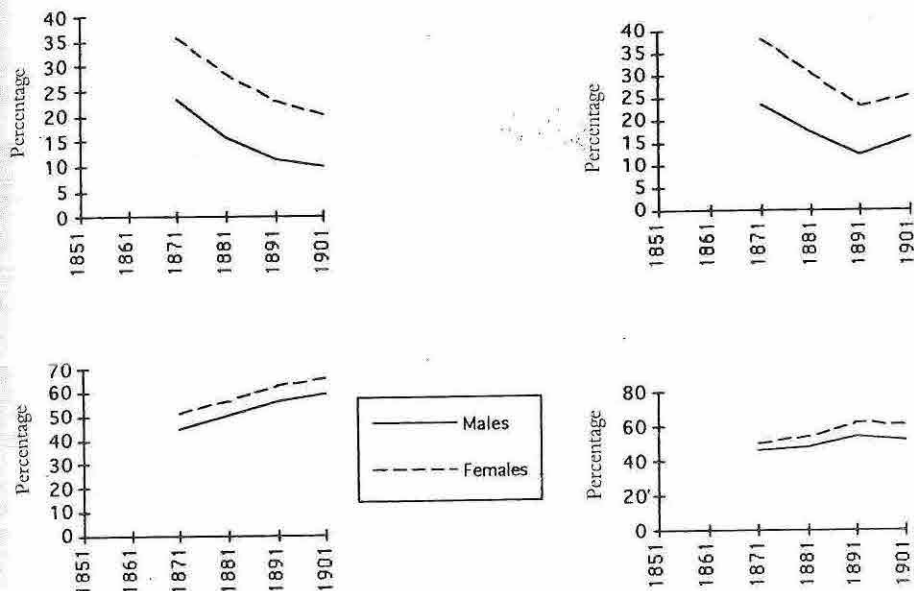


Figure 3a (top left) Proportion of those between 15 and 34 years of age who were married or widowed, Ballinrobe Poor Law Union. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1871, pt. i: area, houses and population, vol. iv, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 361-2.

Figure 3b (top right) Proportion of those between 15 and 34 years of age who were married or widowed, Swinford Poor Law Union. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1881, pt. i: area, houses and population, vol. iii, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 261-2, H. C. 1882 [C.3268-III], lxxix, 273.

Figure 4a (bottom left) Proportion of men between 15 and 64 and women between 15 and 44 who never married, Ballinrobe Poor Law Union. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1891, pt. i: area, houses and population, vol. iv, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 361-2, H. C. 1892 [C 6685-II], xciii, 277.

Figure 4b (bottom right) Proportion of men between 15 and 64 and women between 15 and 44 who never married, Swinford Poor Law Union. Source: *The census of Ireland for the year 1901, pt. i: area, houses and population, vol. iv, province of Connaught, no. 3, county of Mayo*, pp. 108-9, H. C. 1902 [Cd 1059-ii], cxxciii, 365.

region with high marriage and fertility rates to one with a low marriage level but continued high fertility. He argues that a primary cause of this transformation was the desire on the part of Mayo's farmers to secure higher living stand-

ards by reducing the population pressure on the land. With fertility within marriage remaining high, Walsh argues that restraining from marriage was an accepted means of controlling the population.²⁴

Surprisingly, the indices of age and frequency of marriage do not show a wide diversity between central Mayo and the peripheral areas of the county. As indicated in Figures 3 and 4, in 1871, when the census first contains breakdowns of age and conjugal status by poor law union, the Ballinrobe and Swinford unions were roughly equivalent in both the proportion of young men and women who were married and the proportion of fertile adults who were not married. Until 1891 both unions followed similar paths in the decline in the number of young adults who were married and the rise in the number of celibates. Yet, by 1901 the two unions were experiencing different marriage patterns as the Swinford union reversed course with an increased proportion of its population being married and a levelling off of the number of celibates.

From these indices it would appear that there was very little difference between the marriage patterns in the centre and the periphery during the last third of the nineteenth century. However, when the marriage rate (marriages per 1000 population) of the two unions is compared a wide divergence appears. In 1864, at the time of the first registration of marriages, births and deaths, the Swinford union had a marriage rate of 6.3 while the Ballinrobe union had one of 3.0. These were respectively the highest and lowest rates in the county with the county average being 4.6. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century the marriage rate in the two unions had converged. In 1901 the rates were 4.5 for the Swinford union, 3.5 for the Ballinrobe union, and 3.9 for the county of Mayo.²⁵

The explanation for the seeming disparity between the two indices is most probably found in differences in the rate of emigration between the core and the periphery within County Mayo. While the emigration statistics do not reveal the districts within the county from which emigrants departed, it seems probable that by the 1870s, if not earlier, Mayo's high number of emigrants came to a large degree from the poorest regions of the county, in contrast to the situation during the Famine. Walsh theorises that by the 1870s population growth had resulted in a scarcity of land in those regions that experienced growth during the thirty years following the Famine.²⁶ As a consequence of this new land shortage, subdivision of holdings was slowed and many people who would have stayed in Mayo had land been available, opted to emigrate.

24 Walsh, 'Marriage Rates and Population Pressure', pp. 148-62.

25 *First Annual Report of the Registrar General of Marriages, Births, and Deaths in Ireland, 1864*, pp. 40, 46, H. C. 1868-9 (4137), xvi, 665; *Thirty-eighth Detailed Annual Report of the Registrar General (Ireland), Containing a General Abstract of the Number of Marriages, Births and Deaths Registered in Ireland during the year 1901*, pp. 40, 46, H. C. 1902 [Cd. 1225], xviii, 501.

26 Walsh, 'Marriage Rates and Population Pressure', pp. 158-9.

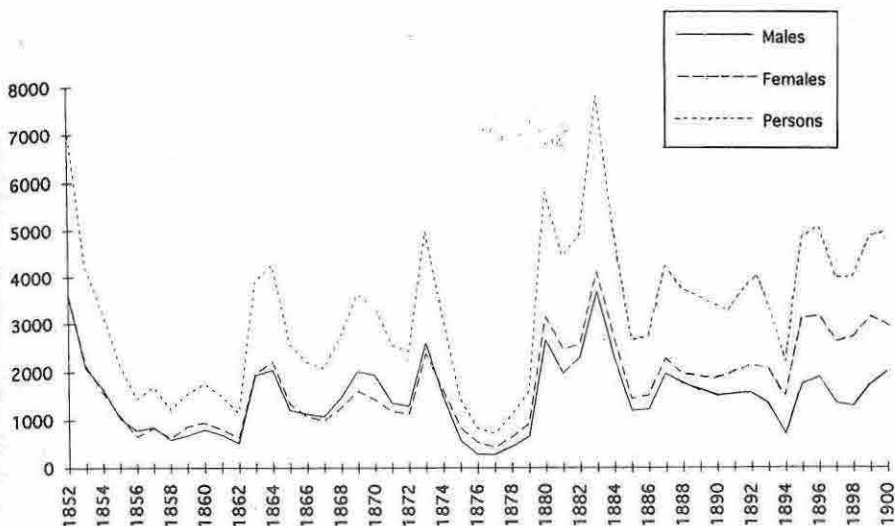


Figure 5 Emigration, County Mayo, 1852-1900. Source: W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 337-9.

In the Swinford union the number of men aged between fifteen and thirty-four, which had risen steadily from 1851 to 1881, fell from 6909 in 1881 to 6562 in 1901. Over the same period the number of women in this age bracket fell more sharply from 8893 to 7823 due to the substantially higher rate of emigration among women.²⁷ The growing divergence in the emigration rate of men and women after 1888, illustrated in Figure 5, no doubt contributed to the sharp upswing in the percentage of women aged between fifteen and thirty-four in 1901 who were married, as fewer young women were available to marry. Similarly, the slight rise in the proportion of married men can also be attributed to emigration, since with the departure of the landless young men the proportion of men with access to land and thus to marriage would increase.

In the Ballinrobe union the gradual decline in the proportion of young men and women who were married and the gradual rise in the number of celibates continued unabated from 1871 to 1901. This occurred less from a scarcity of land due to overpopulation, as was the case in the Swinford union, than from the slow but steady consolidation of holdings in the Ballinrobe union. These consolidations limited the amount of land available for new families as market-

²⁷ *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1881, Part I: Area, Houses, and Population, vol. iii, Province of Connaught, No. 3, County of Mayo*, p. 362, H. C. 1882 [C 3268-III], lxxix, 273; *Census of Ireland, 1901, part i, vol. iv, no. 3*, p. 109.

oriented and aggressive farmers took up the farms of their less fortunate or less resolute neighbours.

Although by the end of the century marriage patterns in the two unions, representing Mayo's core and periphery, had coalesced to a large degree and conformed to the national pattern of late and infrequent marriages with many left celibate, the reasons for this change were significantly different in the two regions. Among small farmers, concentrated in but not exclusive to the periphery, the demographic transformation began during the 1870s as a result of population pressure on the small holdings that limited land available to new families and compelled many to emigrate. It is significant that small farmers were driven to abandon their marriage traditions in order to preserve a share of the small farm economy for the fortunate few who could secure land. In contrast, the more prosperous farmers clustered on the good land of central Mayo adopted prudent marriage practices that were calculated to increase the size of their holdings and to capitalize better on the dynamic post-Famine livestock economy. In both instances, the stage was set by the Famine, which had left large portions of the county densely populated, while initiating a dramatic depopulation in the county's more fertile centre.