

STATISTICAL AND SOCIAL INQUIRY SOCIETY OF IRELAND

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANISATION OF CONNEMARA.

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Introductory.

To begin with I think some apology is due for this paper. The apology is due, not so much on account of the subject, but because of the manner in which it has been treated. When I took the matter in hand, I experienced a good deal of difficulty, mainly in deciding with which, of the great mass of interesting phenomena relating to the area, I should deal. Another difficulty arose owing to the fact that conditions differ so much from place to place; opinions, even of people living in the same townland, differ so widely, that I found it hard to come to any definite conclusions on many points.

I have tried, in such matters as I have selected for the paper, to treat Connemara as a whole, as a unit. Hence, I have had, as a rule, to content myself with averages. You are fully aware of the defects of averages! I mention this matter more by way of warning to those who may be familiar with some small district and who might be inclined to consider such district as typical of the whole area. Perhaps I had better give you an example of what I have in mind. Consider peat. One would ordinarily conclude that there is no difficulty in securing ample supplies, since turbarry is available to every holding. It is estimated there are some 100,000 acres of peat bog in the area, these being fairly well distributed. Prof. T. Dillon, D.Sc., of University College, Galway, has calculated that there are about 240,000,000 tons of peat in this area. In spite of this we know there are populous districts for which the provision of turf is a very pressing problem. In some cases people have to travel six to eight miles to the bog. Besides, the cost of carting the fuel home adds greatly to the difficulty.

Connemara has in recent years assumed a special importance for the Irish people in view of the declared national policy of reviving Irish as the language of the country. This importance is strengthened by the acknowledgment that Connemara is one of the greatest sources of inspiration in the development of a distinctly national literature, art and culture generally. But apart from all this, the area is one of great interest to the student of sociology and economics. Its peculiar problems have so far baffled such attempts as have been made to solve them. In this connection I cannot resist remarking here that for my own part I do not believe the problems of Connemara were ever approached in the right way. I have a feeling that practically every

scheme put forward for the area lacked consideration and confidence ; it was introduced merely to provide some temporary relief. Apart from other considerations the failure of these schemes has had the serious result that many people have been led to form opinions regarding the area and the people which are far from being correct ; opinions which are leading to confusion or despair, according to the particular interest one takes in the people and area. Anyway there is an urgent economic and social problem to be solved and our first duty is to get down to the facts.

Indeed you may suggest that much has been done already ! I am not in the least unmindful of all that was done by the late C.D.B. and by our own Government to ease conditions in the Gaeltacht, but I think the position is well summarised in the following passage, which I quote from the Gaeltacht Commission Report (1925), par. 124, pp. 39-40 :—

“ In respect, however, of those areas which are now indicated as the Irish Speaking and partly Irish Speaking Districts, in Donegal, West Mayo and West Galway, the conditions that the Congested Districts Board was set up to improve still exist, almost untouched in some districts and very little improved in others. It appears to have been a defect in the work of the Congested Districts Board—natural, no doubt, when a limited amount of money was available and a large area required attention—that the really serious areas of congestion were left without any effective measures being taken to improve them, and effort was concentrated on the less needy districts where quicker returns were obtainable. The result is that there is left to be dealt with to-day, in respect of those very congested areas where Irish is still traditionally the language of the home, an economic problem not only very serious in itself, but also very serious in relation to the preservation of the Language. . . . ”

Area and Administrative Divisions.

The name Connemara, as used in this paper, applies to the region known as West County Galway, but excluding the Aran Islands and the island of Inisboffin. Historically, Connemara included only the country in the neighbourhood of Ballinahinch. Having discussed the matter with engineers and other officials who have had a long connection with the area I am satisfied that the term Connemara may now properly be applied to the whole of West County Galway.

The area of Connemara, according to the Census of 1926, is 463,194 acres, or 725·75 square miles, approximately. It is important to remember that from the point of view of area, it is as large as many counties and considerably larger than some.

For administration purposes it is divided, according to the Irish Poor Relief Act, 1838, into three Union Districts, viz., Clifden, Oughterard and Galway (part of). These Union Districts are divided into nine Dispensary Districts as follow :—

Clifden Union District	Oughterard Union District	Galway Union District (part of)
Clifden. Rinvyle. Roundstone.	Clonbur. Lettermore. Oughterard.	Moycullen. Spiddal. Galway (part of).

These Dispensary Districts are, in turn, divided into District Electoral Divisions, of which there are forty-one.

Physical features, soil, etc.

We are not, of course, directly concerned with the geology of the area but in view of the importance of rock formations as factors controlling or influencing climate and soil, which in turn so largely influence economic and social conditions, it may not be quite out of place to give a short account of the principal rock formations to be found in the area and of the principal physical features arising from them.

Along the Western shore of Lough Corrib, from the boundary of Galway city to Oughterard, runs a narrow and practically continuous belt of limestone, somewhat irregular in width, but covering part of the electoral divisions of Moycullen, Wormhole and Oughterard. Again in the Clonbur and Cong divisions limestone is found, these being the only limestone areas in the whole of Connemara. The remainder of the area is divided into two more or less regular regions showing in the south an igneous formation, viz., granite, and in the north, a metamorphic formation in which mica-schists and gneiss predominate. Between these two regions are to be found extensive quartz and quartzite formations. These latter coincide generally with the areas of the Corcogmore and Maamturk mountain ranges and, further west, the Twelve Pins.

By far the greater part of the area lies over 500 feet above sea-level while more than half lies over 800 feet above sea-level. Along the south and west coasts runs a more or less narrow belt which lies, generally, under 250 feet above sea-level. It is along this belt that most of the population of Connemara is concentrated.

The coast all the way round is considerably indented. It is believed that where the numerous bays and inlets occur there were originally masses of limestone. Many of these bays and inlets show quite deep channels and most of them are navigable by steamers of shallow draught.

Over most of the area the rocks protrude while a good deal of the remainder of the area is covered by a heavy, sodden bog. This bog is in many places difficult to drain.

The following figures, compiled from the Tillage and Distribution of Land Returns for 1934, show the distribution of the different classes of land in the area :—

Arable or Tillage Land ..	30,091 acres, approximately.
Pasture	60,813½ ,, ,,
Non-Agricultural Land ..	369,622½ ,, ,,
Woodlands	2,667 ,, ,,

Thus on the basis of this classification, 78.5% of the total area consists of non-agricultural land, viz., grazed and barren mountain, turf, bog, marsh, water, roads, etc.

Soil, as we know, is created as a result of weathering and the general dissolution of rocks, while the soil of a particular region may be the result of weathering of local rocks, or transportation, e.g., by either water, ice or even wind.

Obviously, rocks of a pervious and soluble nature result readily in the production of material for soil while the harder rocks are exceedingly slow in disintegrating. Of the 463,194 acres under review hardly more than 40,000 are of limestone, the distribution of which I have mentioned

above. Ordinarily, we should expect to find a fairly deep soil in these limestone areas but on the whole such is not the case. The reason for this is that the limestone is of a rather pure nature and dissolving readily is carried away by the rain and running water. Besides, the areas are extensively fissured, a feature common to limestone districts and remarkably so in these. The result is a rather light covering of soil in many places while over a good deal of the area the bare rock is to be seen.

The remainder of the area comprises hard, almost insoluble rocks. Consequently weathering and disintegration are very slow, with the result that most of it is mountainous. Where weathering does occur in the igneous and metamorphic areas, the weathered material is liable to be carried away as a result of the frequent heavy rains and floods that occur. Even where deposition does take place the resulting soil is very coarse and lacking in most of the substances essential for transformation into soil capable of vigorous plant growth. Generally, one finds only heather and a coarse grass on this soil. If sufficient lime and fertilisers be applied, this soil may be made to yield very substantial crops. But this involves a capital outlay, which, in the past at any rate, was too often beyond the means of many Connemara farmers, while for many others, and mainly on account of the system of economy that has so far obtained, reclamation and development of this nature would not have meant much advantage.

In both the igneous and metamorphic areas, on which is situated the narrow belt under 250 feet above sea-level, the soil has been reclaimed and made quite productive, but this only as a result of unremitting toil and the application, over a long period, of sea-weed, stable manure, sea-sand and lime. (Most of the lime used has been produced in a peculiar type of kiln (*tornóg*) from stone discharged along the coast by turf boats, the stone having been taken in as ballast on the return journeys from the Aran Islands, North County Clare and Galway, where a considerable market is found for turf. On the whole, though, lime is difficult to obtain in West Connemara.) Originally this belt was glaciated. Later it became covered with peat which in turn was cut away. The "cutaway" bog was gradually worked until at last it was brought to its present state of productiveness which, whether for potatoes, corn or roots, gives, in a fair season, quite astonishing results.

Congestion.

Above I have given an indication of the distribution of the various kinds of land in Connemara. You will have noticed that some 78·5% of the land is in the non-agricultural class. This, clearly, is not sufficient to give an idea of the extent of congestion in the area. Taking the amount of Arable and Pasture land we get a total of approximately 90,904 acres. The population of Connemara, according to the 1926 Census was 36,239. This gives us, roughly, 40 persons per 100 acres. The significance of this is not apparent until we compare it with some outside areas. Taking the counties Carlow, Kildare and Meath and deducting that land classed in each of them under the headings non-agricultural land and taking population statistics (as in 1926) we get the following :—

Carlow ..	17.5	persons	per	100	acres.
Kildare ..	16.0	”	”	”	”
Meath ..	11.4	”	”	”	”

Even now, I need hardly remind you, the comparison is not a fair one for these reasons: (a) there is a vast difference in the fertility and in the general economy of working the land, (b) agricultural population in the “outside” areas is more evenly distributed. In Connemara, the congestion in some Electoral Divisions is as high as 107 persons per 100 acres as in the Roundstone Division and 85 persons per 100 acres in the Lettermore Division. This condition of affairs is aggravated by the fact that a very large percentage of the population is settled in close proximity to the sea.

Another point worthy of notice is this; those Electoral Divisions which show a small density of population in proportion to the amount of tillage and pasture generally have the advantage that a good deal of their non-agricultural land is suitable for sheep-grazing and even for cattle. On the other hand the Divisions of densest population in proportion to tillage and pasture land carry considerably less live stock per 100 persons. Notice the following examples:—

	Cattle	Sheep	Population per 100 acres of Tillage and Pasture Land
Sillerna ..	155	119.6 per 100 persons	75
Cur ..	179.3	488.1 ” ” ”	26.5
Knockboy	143.3	107.6 ” ” ”	22.5
Crumpaun	72	96 ” ” ”	98.2
Kilcummin	84	87.2 ” ” ”	80.8

Farming.

Needless to say, farming and stock-raising are the predominant occupations of the Connemara folk. There are no other productive industries of any account in the area. It may come as a surprise to many to know that the kelp industry is almost at a standstill. In 1934 only £965 worth of the commodity was produced in the whole of Connemara. Carrageen, for the same year, realised £840 10s. 0d. The regular fishing industry, notwithstanding the very commendable efforts of the Sea Fisheries Board, brought in some £3,247 for 1934. I am not in a position to state what proportion of this sum was earned by boats from places outside Connemara, but I understand it was considerable. Cottage industry, either for domestic consumption or exchange, scarcely exists. In 1934, in the small “factories” run by the Gaeltacht Services Department, some 95 girls were finding a certain amount of employment. Apart from our own people who come to study the Irish Language, tourist traffic brings little gain to the mass of Connemara people. Hence the importance of agriculture and stock-raising.

For people, familiar with regular or orthodox farming and stock-raising methods, these terms need some qualification. In view of the decided advantages of the plough and other agricultural machinery, it should be pointed out here, that at present only about 10% of what is described as tillage land in Connemara is capable of being worked by the plough. The fields, commonly referred to as gardens, are of

very irregular shape and are very small, ranging from less than one-sixteenth of an acre to half an acre. The soil on the whole is shallow and unevenly distributed, in places being only three or four inches deep, with no sub-soil. Huge boulders and rocks are found irregularly situated in the fields. The result is that the land must be worked entirely by hand, whether for spring or harvesting operations. An enormous amount of labour has been expended by the people in an effort to clear their tillage land of rocks. The usual method, obviously very primitive, adopted to bring about this clearing, is as follows :—The soil is cleared from around the base of the rock to be removed. Then a large turf fire is lighted on top of the rock, this fire being fed until the rock is heated right through. Water is then thrown over the heated rock causing it to split. The sections are then rolled aside, being used to make loose walls around the land, serving the dual purpose of protecting it from trespass and sheltering the crops against the weather.

Holdings.

Before going further, we should get some idea of the number and size of the holdings in the area.

NUMBER OF HOLDINGS IN CONNEMARA ACCORDING TO SIZE.

Dispensary District	Not over 1 acre	1 to 5 acres	5 to 10 acres	10 to 15 acres	15 to 30 acres	30 to 50 acres	50 to 100 acres	100 to 200 acres	Over 200 acres	Total
Chfden} ...	14	65	212	167	224	98	36	5	16	837
Clonbur... ..	18	42	167	99	211	131	81	20	29	798
Galway (Barna)	8	9	37	19	99	47	26	2	2	249
Lettermore ...	1	222	494	226	214	42	8	3	3	1,213
Moycullen ...	3	28	70	51	101	60	32	12	3	360
Oughterard ...	27	62	87	90	226	129	46	9	26	702
Rinvyle... ..	8	47	173	116	91	48	19	5	25	532
Roundstone ...	9	150	267	225	250	101	55	27	30	1,114
Spiddal	10	51	329	197	173	44	23	14	10	851
TOTAL ...	98	676	1,836	1,190	1,589	700	326	97	144	6,656
Each group of holdings shown as percentage of the total ...	1.5	10	27.5	18.0	24	10.5	5.0	1.5	2	100

From the above table it may be seen that holdings between 5 acres and 50 acres constitute roughly 80% of the total holdings while 11.5% are under 5 acres.

Now the area of a holding, if taken as a whole, will give a very misleading idea of the economic position of the people. To appreciate this point it will now be necessary to get an idea of the amount of land devoted to tillage on the average holding :—

TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF CROPS, WOODS, ETC., IN CONNEMARA ON 1ST JUNE, 1934 (IN ACRES).

Dispensary District	Total Corn Crops	Total Root Crops	Total Area Tilled and under Fruit	Hay	Pasture	Woodlands and Plantations	Remainder of Farm and other non-Agricultural Land
Clifden ...	276	745	1,021	1,453	7,079½	81½	31,159
Clonbur ...	421	603½	1,025	1,365½	7,209½	1,425½	47,756½
Galway (Barna) ...	87½	234½	322	497	5,458	41½	1,287½
Lettermore ...	792½	1,117	1,911	1,647	7,006	8	33,938½
Moycullen ...	263	394½	664½	676	2,110½	156	21,431
Oughterard ...	375	591	997	1,853½	6,162½	564	61,376
Rinville ...	228½	308	540½	1,083½	7,481	191	35,566
Roundstone ...	464½	811	1,280½	1,991	12,128	109½	89,203
Spiddal ...	472	876	1,350½	1,323½	6,107½	90½	54,646
	3,380	5,680½	9,112	11,890	60,802½	2,667	376,363½

From this table it is clear that some 20% of the total area is, at the present time, under production, including timber. If we take the total area given for Tillage and Pasture and the Total Number of Holdings, we get an average of 12 acres per Holding. Again taking the area returned as Tilled and the total number of Holdings, we get an average of just under 1.4 acres per Holding. The distribution of Tillage is well represented by the following table:—

Crop	Averages in acres per Holding.
Potatoes	$\frac{1}{2}$
Roots	$\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$
Corn	$\frac{1}{2}$

Remember that the foregoing are merely averages, but they are, on the whole, fairly representative. In many cases one finds an acre or more each devoted to potatoes, roots and corn. But these exceptions, in most instances, may be accounted for, not, as might be assumed at first sight, by a greater area of definitely suitable tillage land being included in the holding, but by reclamation as a result of there being an extra supply of labour available on the holding. Indeed, whether the acreage mentioned represents the limit of cultivable land in Connemara is a debatable point, but it would seem that there is a fair amount of land under pasture and bog which could, if it were desired, be made to produce crops of good average quality and output for a reasonable outlay of capital and labour.

I think it would be as well now to give you some idea of the more important specific crops grown, and of the use to which they are put.

TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF CERTAIN SPECIFIC CROPS IN CONNEMARA ON THE 1ST JUNE, 1934.

Dispensary District	Pota- toes	Total Corn Crops	Tur- nips	Man- gels	Sugar- beet	Other Crops for ensila- ge	Fruit	Cab- bage
Clifden... ..	490½	276	111½	85	—	10½	½	47½
Clonbur	447	421	40	35	3½	33	½	47
Galway (Barna)	153½	87½	39½	41½	—	—	—	—
Lettermore	930	792½	20	154	—	3	1½	10
Moycullen	264	263	73½	50½	6½	—	2	—
Oughterard	400	375	137½	50	3½	—	1½	—
Rinvyle	252	228½	25	18½	—	—	4	11½
Roundstone	636½	464½	91½	75	—	1	5	7½
Spiddal	600	472	141½	129	—	—	2½	5½
TOTAL	4,172½	3,380	684	638½	13½	47½	17½	129
Each crop as per- centage (approx.) of total crops	46	37.6	7.4	7.0	.1	.5	.1	1.3

It is of interest to note that, as may be inferred from the figures relating to distribution of crops on each holding, that potatoes and corn are the main crops. Taking Corn first, we find that the total area devoted to it is 3,380 acres or 37.6% of the total area tilled. This item is made up mainly of oats and rye. (Rye, incidentally, does not appear in official statistics.) Wheat is scarcely cultivated except in some eastern parts of the area, being found mainly in the Clonbur, Oughterard, and Moycullen districts.

The cultivation of Rye has declined considerably during the past few years, although it is a crop that does very well throughout Connemara. The Oats and Rye are fed to fowl and livestock, while the straw is used for thatching and for fodder. In many cases, though, the corn is not threshed before feeding to stock. The amount of straw available has generally been rather limited, with the result that often the houses had to be thatched with a kind of sedge grass known as "Cib." Practically none of these crops is marketed.

The potato is the crop most extensively grown, covering some 4,174 acres. This crop forms the staple solid food of the people. It is the main item in the mid-day meal and, in many instances, is the main item in the evening meal. Large quantities of this crop are fed to live stock: boiled and mashed potatoes are fed even to horses on occasions. They are also largely fed to poultry. With the exception of very small quantities sent in to Galway, Clifden and Oughterard, one may say that none of this crop is marketed. Of the other crops little can be said. Cabbage, as you can see, occupies only 129 acres . . . even this acreage is doubtful. It is almost invariably grown with potatoes, being dibbled into the sides of the "lazy-beds." Though used as a vegetable by most people, the crop is grown mainly for stock feeding. Fruit occupies 17½ acres. The suitability of the area for fruit growing might be questioned. Indeed, no proper records or statistics are available

on which one might come to a more or less definite conclusion on the matter, but from information I have gathered, and supported by the opinion of the agricultural overseer, who has spent many years in Connemara, I believe that fruits such as apples, gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries, do very well. Considering that a rich soil* is not required and in view of general climatic conditions, there is no reason why this type of culture should not be capable of considerable expansion. As it is, the gardens attached to the different hotels and those on the more extensive holdings, account for most of the fruit area. Hardly more than five acres of the land of smallholders is under fruit.

Farming Methods.

It is as well to give you some idea of farming in Connemara. As I suggested earlier, there is scarcely anything in the nature of agricultural machinery in use over most of the country. I can only repeat that the smallness of the fields, the sparseness of the soil in many places, the amount of rocks on the land as well as the smallness of the areas to be cultivated at any time, generally preclude the use of agricultural machinery.

Scarcely anything in the way of scientific farming is practised, although a good deal is being accomplished of late in this direction, by the agricultural overseers working in the area. The land is usually worked into ridges or "lazy beds" about 3 feet 6 inches wide. The term "Lazy-bed" would seem to be a misnomer, for, in fact, the system calls for a great deal of labour. The system which is always adopted for potatoes and sometimes for corn, unless it is intended to turn over from the latter to grass, is found to serve the dual purpose of airing and draining the land. This is of great importance in view of the heavy, peaty nature of the soil.

No reliable statistics are available as to Crop Yields in the area but the following based on estimates gathered in South Connemara and later checked, as far as possible, with the chief agricultural overseer for the districts in question, may be of interest:—

Corn (oats) .. 10 cwt. grain and 15/18 cwts. of straw per acre.

Potatoes (Aran Chiefs, Epicures and Kerr's Pinks) 5 tons per acre.

Roots .. 10 tons.

On the same land as much as twenty cwts. of grain and twenty-eight cwts. of straw per acre, can be got, the result depending mainly on the intensity of cultivation. Some corn crops yield only four or five cwts. of grain per acre, even less. Such low yields may be accounted for by the fact that the corn may be only a secondary consideration, the main object being to turn the land over to grass. In such cases the land is not properly cultivated; being merely roughed with the spade. The corn when scattered, is sometimes buried too deeply to germinate, while the seed itself on such occasions is usually of a poor quality. On the whole, it may be stated that intensity of cultivation is regulated, not so much by the capacity of the soil or in accordance with any scientific principles, but in accordance with the need of particular produce for a certain more or less maximum of stock and poultry—which in most cases does not represent the amount of stock or poultry which might,

* Annual Report (1934) of the County Galway Committee of Agriculture, pp. 58-9. O'Gorman, Galway.

economically, be carried. It may, in passing, be inferred from this statement that the standard of living could be much improved if efforts were directed towards production of certain live stock and poultry for home consumption as distinct from such numbers as are raised for market.

It may be suggested that production is fairly proportionate to the amount of labour available ! I need not describe the cycle of operations over the year but you may be interested in an estimate of the time necessary for the different operations in the cycle.

However, before I go on I want to qualify this estimate with one or two remarks. I canvassed many opinions as to the length of time necessary for the different tasks and found great divergences between them. Conditions differ widely from district to district. People may live a long way from the land ; some may have good foreshore convenient (seaweed for the land) ; others may have to travel long distances by land or by sea to obtain their supply, while obviously, many people having no foreshore rights must buy the seaweed or go without. The getting of the annual supply of turf may involve much loss of time in travelling to and from the bog ; for others the turbary is conveniently situated. For others again, lack of a suitable road or passage into the bog may be the trouble. Still assuming days are unbroken and that the workers apply themselves to their tasks with normal industry, the following estimates for the $1\frac{1}{4}$ tillage average and for the labour per man, should apply to most holdings :—

Digging and preparing the land for sowing	..	16	days
Manuring and sowing	16	„
Moulding and weeding potatoes	14	„
Weeding, thinning root crops, etc.	14	„
Harvesting Corn	14	„
Harvesting potatoes	14	„
Haymaking and saving	10	„
Threshing	12	„
Cutting and saving turf	20	„
Saving seaweed (for manure)	20	„
Miscellaneous jobs on land, etc.	30	„
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Total	180	days

In other words, the actual work on the farm and bog, excluding attention to live stock, which at most occupies only a few hours a day, keeps the average Connemara farmer employed for about six months of the year. The remainder of the time may be spent fishing, though this by very few and to a very limited extent, in summer and autumn or in performing light tasks at home if relief or general road schemes are not in hand. Remember, too, that, of late, in few instances is the available labour per holding limited to that of one man.

From this statement, it must not be concluded that the Connemara man is lazy ! When there is work to be done, few work harder. If he wastes time, it is because he has nothing to do or does not realise how he might, as a result of spending this spare time, engage more extensively in certain branches of production, with a view, especially, to home consumption ; and thereby considerably raise his standard of living for a very little extra cost. So much for agricultur production.

Live Stock.

Most Connemara farmers engage in the raising of live stock. Some, though not very many, specialise in this industry, particularly in the mountainous districts where sheep-raising is extensively carried on.

It is from the sale of live stock that the Connemara folk normally derive most of their cash income. This being so, it is worth while to get some idea of the distribution and importance of the industry.

The following table for Dispensary Districts gives the numbers of Cattle, Sheep and Pigs in the area on the 1st June in each of the years 1934 and 1927.

Dispensary District	Cattle		Sheep		Pigs	
	1934	1927	1934	1927	1934	1927
Clifden	5,791	4,726	5,945	7,688	461	828
Clonbur	5,122	5,668	32,047	33,509	736	846
Galway (Barna) ...	1,634	1,704	662	1,167	500	428
Lettermore	6,167	5,461	4,827	6,346	989	1,392
Moycullen	2,885	2,814	2,207	1,928	730	918
Oughterard	4,781	4,803	8,315	8,490	725	970
Rinvyle	3,413	4,255	14,978	17,015	44	286
Roundstone	8,209	9,107	14,163	22,085	291	1,628
Spiddal	4,980	4,743	4,397	5,290	836	1,823
TOTALS	42,982	43,281	87,361	103,518	5,312	9,119

The first general feature to be noticed from the table is that there has been a considerable decline in the numbers of sheep and pigs in 1934 as compared with 1927, while the number of cattle has changed very little, notwithstanding that as far as prices are concerned they suffered just as much as sheep or pigs. The decline, in actual figures as percentages, is as follows:—

	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
Reduction in actual figures	299	16,157	3,807
Reduction as a percentage.. ..	0.7	15.6	41.7

Distribution of Cattle.

The number of milch cows and bulls in the area on the 1st June, 1934, was roughly 13,000, or approximately two per head per holding, excluding those holdings under one acre. There were roughly 30,000 cattle, on the same date, primarily intended for market, which gives an average of 4.5 cattle of this kind per holding. Taking the average value of cattle for 1927 (according to the Statistical Abstract) and the number of cattle other than milch cows and bulls, we get a total value of £43 of live stock on the average holding. Assuming that an average of half the live stock was sold in each year, this would result in an income (gross) from this source of, roughly, £21 per holding. Working on the same basis and taking an average of prices for eleven local fairs in 1934, one finds that the average income from this source is approximately £9 (i.e. a fall of approximately 57 per cent). Obviously this has been a very serious matter, especially since there have been no tobacco, beet, wheat, peat, or other productive schemes to help out.

Before leaving this point, I should say a word about the type of cattle in the area. Most of the cattle in Connemara are of Aberdeen Angus

and Shorthorn breeds, which were introduced by the Congested Districts Board. These cattle thrive well there, and develop fairly quickly into good class beef cattle.

Regarding milk production, the only thing I can say is that most of the opinions expressed to me suggest that the old native stock was by far a better milking strain. It is a pity we cannot say more here on this point, especially as lack of a good steady milk supply is one of Connemara's most serious problems.

Sheep.

Sheep are not evenly distributed, the greater number being found in the four Dispensary Districts of Clonbur, Rinvyle, Roundstone and Oughterard. Of the total number of sheep in Connemara on the 1st June, 1934, 69,503 or approximately 79 per cent. were to be found in these four districts. Any attempt to set down an average number of sheep per holding, based on the total number of sheep for the whole area, would be very misleading. Much of the sheep industry is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people who either own extensive tracts of mountain grazing or rent it from other holders, extensive landlords or from the Land Commission.

The average farmer may be said to run a stock of about eight sheep.* This average may be checked in this way: take the total number of holders, apart from those extensive sheep farmers, which may be put at the safe estimate of 150 for the whole area. Multiplying by eight, the average mentioned above, we get $(6656 - 150) \times 8$ or some 52,048. Among the large sheep farmers, individual stock would range from about 40 head to about 1,250 head.

The number of sheep carried by the small farmers differs little from year to year, and this being so, it is possible to gauge any decrease in income which such small holders may have to bear as a result of a fall in price.

In 1927 the average price of sheep was about 40s. per head, after allowing a correction for local prices, which in Connemara show a fairly big difference when compared with prices ruling at outside fairs. If an average of half the stock were sold in the year, this would mean an income (gross) of, say, £8. At the present time, prices, according to local returns, are from 18s. to 25s. per head. If the farmer gets an average of 21s. each for the sheep he sells, he gets about 84s., or a drop of 47·5 per cent. in his income from this source. These differences, reckoned in cash, may not seem to be very important, but when one remembers the smallness of the average income in Connemara, and the urgency of a cash income in the existing economy of the region, their great importance will be appreciated.

Pigs.

The Returns relating to the numbers of pigs in Connemara reveal some extraordinary features. Perhaps one of the most interesting is that a number of Electoral Divisions carry very few pigs. For example, in June, 1934, the Electoral Division of Derrylea returned 4; Doonloughan, 3; Cushkillery, 1; Bencorr, 2. From the summary on page 41, it will be noted that the number of pigs in Connemara has declined by some 41·7 per cent., viz., from 9,119 in 1927 to 5,312 in 1934.

* Many of the smaller holdings have a certain amount of commonage, consisting of rough grazing, which is utilised for both sheep and cattle.

Up to about 1930, there was an average of two pigs on each holding above ten acres and one per holding under ten acres. The average price of pigs about that time was 50s. Allowing that the above average number of pigs per holding was doubled in each year, it would result in a cash income of say £9, less the cost of replacing the stock. This would cost, on an average, say, 21s. per head. Pig-raising, therefore, would bring in about £5 16s. per annum on the larger holdings and £2 18s. on the smaller ones. Apart altogether from the question of price changes, the big decline in the number of pigs being reared has had a very serious effect on many households.

Again, the thing that strikes one in connection with this question of stock-raising, is that the people do not seem to realise the obvious advantage of raising and killing stock for home consumption. This, it would seem, could be done without any sacrifice of the normal amount of stock raised for market and at a very little extra cost. Production of stock for this purpose would clearly reduce their dependence on a cash income—which, as far as this area is concerned, is something very much to be desired.

Conclusion.

I am sorry there is no time to refer to such important matters as Population, Public Health, Housing, Afforestation, Education, etc. I regret very much, too, that there is not time to examine, even briefly, such alternative sources of income (and their incidence) as exist—Road and general relief schemes, the Dole, Housing Grants, Irish Language Grants, Old Age Pensions, etc.

The State has certainly done its share to ease conditions, but on the whole what has been done has been in the nature of relief. I make this comment, not so much by way of complaint against State policy, but rather to point out that no organised or systematically planned effort has as yet been directed towards evolving such an economy as would ensure a reasonable and steady standard of social comfort for the people of Connemara. Efforts have been made, but not intensive and far reaching enough, or sufficiently co-ordinated, with the result that little of permanent value has been effected. For myself, I am convinced that by organisation and education, Connemara can be made to support a substantial population. Education there has been in Connemara, a splendid literary education. But it lacked the seasoning, be it ever so little, of economic bias. Things are changing. Suitable education is at last being made available to this kindly, cultured people, and I think we can say they are becoming aware of its value and possibilities. That alone is a cause of satisfaction to those of us who are interested in the area from the economic and national standpoints.

In conclusion, I desire to thank the officials of the Government Department of Statistics for their courtesy in supplying most of the statistics included in the paper.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. J. V. Bourke, proposing the vote of thanks, said that the subject of Mr. O Buachalla's paper was not a new one, but its problems had so far baffled such attempts as had been made to solve them. The problem of the Gaeltacht was one of a considerable number of people living in a small and infertile area, with much rock and bog. To his mind, the obvious solution was to transfer them to more fertile regions. But the problem also involved the question of the Gaelic language. The obvious solution, therefore, had to be discarded, because the transfer of the people, even in large numbers, would endanger the language. A recent experiment in this line had aroused pessimism as to its effect on the language.

It was unlikely that the agricultural output of the land could be increased. Most of the attempts to assist the farmers in the past had been merely pin-pricks, nothing on a comprehensive scale had been undertaken.

The residents along the coast could be assisted in the fishing industry by means of capital grants for the purchase of boats and gear and the building of proper piers.

Relief schemes devised for the Connemara farmer were only a temporary expedient, and left the main problem untouched. In Cornwall the farmers were able to earn money in the winter by the manufacture of china from clay found in the mountains. Something like that might be discovered for the Connemara people. Or was there any reason why the socks and gloves required for the Army and the Civic Guards should not be made in the Gaeltacht? He believed there were certain industries which could be successfully established in Connemara, e.g., the assembling of telephones, which did not require any great technical skill, and whose location was not a matter of much importance. There was a possibility, too, of such an industry as paper-making, particularly if the schemes for afforestation were put on a proper basis. The setting up of military centres and the transfer of soldiers to barracks in Connemara might be considered. Tourist traffic would be considerably assisted by the provision of second-class hotels.

The importance of the Gaeltacht and of Connemara in particular would be realised when the labours of the Folklore Society revealed the debt the nation owed to them.

Lt.-Col. K. E. Edgeworth, seconding the vote of thanks to the lecturer, said the subject discussed in the paper read was one of considerable importance. It was unfortunate that the development of modern industrial methods involved gradual migration from the country into towns, and with this the gradual merging of local characteristics into the general character of the population as a whole. He could not agree with Mr. O Buachalla's view that by organisation and education Connemara could be made to support a substantial population. A community living under the modern industrial system enjoyed a higher standard of living than under the more primitive system. Land suffered from the disadvantage that increased effort produced diminishing returns. Furthermore, the tendency of the younger and more enterprising people to move from a district with a low standard of living into one where the standard was higher meant that the population in the more primitive area declined in quality as well as quantity.

To check the drift of the population in the Irish countryside into the towns there were three remedies:—

1. Subsidies. Great Britain spent about forty millions per annum in subsidising her agricultural population, but subsidies on that scale were out of the question in this country.

2. Marketing Boards, which would help to increase the bargaining power of the farmer.

3. Increased technical efficiency. The use of machinery had greatly increased technical efficiency in recent years, but too much should not be expected from such a development. Probably the maintenance of

an adequate standard of living would involve a smaller population producing the same volume of output rather than the same population producing a larger output.

He did not think the author of the paper had found the right solution to the problem; the population would drift away from the congested areas whether he liked it or not. His own solution to the problem would be that a modern factory should be built in or near the area in question, and close to it a modern town.

Mr. Ernest Blythe said the paper showed clearly the extreme difficulty of the problem it dealt with. No solution to it could be expected without some agreement as to the real importance of Connemara, and the reason for trying to maintain the population there. Connemara was the most important of the Irish-speaking districts, and for the preservation of the language it was vital that the population there should be maintained at its present numerical level. But their value to the nation and to the language would be increased if their standards of living and economic status were improved.

Because of the fact that the people in these areas could not avail themselves of the wheat and beet schemes, they were entitled to special consideration in other directions, e.g., continuous relief schemes or public works; and the money should be so expended as to increase the resources of the area. He did not think the suggestion of running a modern factory a good one, because of the difficulties of running a large scale factory in such a place as Connemara, and because it would have undesired effects on the language.

He had not much belief in the encouragement of fisheries as a solution. Results could only be expected from that if real fishermen—that was to say, men who would follow the fish to the East Coast, or the Dogger Bank, or Newfoundland, if necessary—were in question.

The problem should be met by doing something for agriculture and small scale industries, and by facing the language side of the problem. Help might be given in the clearance of land from rock by the method the lecturer had described. Road-making, too, could be carried a good deal further, and would not only help to maintain the population of Connemara, but would assist the tourist traffic of the country as a whole.

About afforestation, he was not so optimistic as Mr. Bourke. The kelp and carrageen industries, however, should be permanently subsidised. Then there was the whole question of the homespun industry. If millionaires would not buy homespuns, was there any reason why they should not be used to clothe prisoners in jail?

He agreed that the tourist traffic did not benefit the ordinary people in places like Connemara. The visitors who went to learn Irish, however, did bring money into the small farmer's household.

All these suggestions involved money. But the whole problem was one of bringing more money into Connemara and other areas like it.

Mr. Bulmer Hobson said that while everybody paid lip service to the value of the Gaeltacht, the paper had shown how trivial had been the contribution towards rehabilitating it. As far as evacuation went—the population was being evacuated; it was migrating now as during the past three or four generations.

It was all very well to talk of starting industries, but without an economic basis and markets, such efforts would be a waste of time and money. One essential raw material lacking in this country was timber. Yet there were hundreds of thousands of acres of land capable of growing good timber, and labour was available. The work would provide labour for the months when the Gaeltacht farmer was practically unemployed, and it would provide an essential raw material of which there was a world shortage.

Professor Shields said he wondered if an attempt had been made to compile household budgets which would indicate in a significant way the standards of the people, their real and money incomes, and how they were spent. Such budgets had appeared in the first Report of the

Congested Districts Board many years ago, but they were now out of date, and he would suggest to the lecturer that when he continued his investigations, the compilation of such budgets would help to focus public attention on the peculiar difficulties in which the people of Connemara live.

Some attempt at improving methods of marketing agricultural produce would be valuable. Though much of the produce was consumed in the households of the producers, a balance of livestock, poultry, etc., was sold in the markets—and very inefficiently in Connemara. The farmer sold wholesale and bought retail. He had to bring his produce to market, and the market price was not a competitive one.

The more knowledge collected in a systematic way of the economic and social difficulties of this area, the more readily could its problems be understood and their solution attempted.

The President, conveying the thanks of the Society to Mr. O Buachalla for his paper, said he would like to ask whether Mr. O Buachalla was aware of any change that might have taken place in the influx of money into Connemara from sources like emigrants' earnings or migratory labour? It would be of interest to know whether for some years past there had been any sign of a change in the tendency with regard to these matters.

Mr. O Buachalla, acknowledging the vote of thanks, said there had been one or two points raised which he would like to refer to.

Colonel Edgeworth had referred to the tendency of the people to move into towns from the countryside. The people of Connemara were not a people inclined to move away; the point had been made in a paper some time ago that when they emigrated to America, they were going "home"—it was nearer to them than Scotland or England. Donegal and Mayo people had no hesitation in going to England or Scotland, but Connemara people wanted to stay at home, and in a large number of cases even high wages did not tempt them.

Just as in the rest of Ireland, Connemara people had been led astray and taught to concentrate on a few items—cattle and sheep and pigs—and had thus been at the mercy of the market. They had not been taught that there were other means by which they could get a living even if markets ceased to exist.

He was not sure that the land was as infertile as was suggested. It was not being worked as scientifically as it might be. A great deal of the land under grass or pasture might, if the people knew how to do it, be converted to tillage purposes. Apart from that, it was believed that bog could sometimes be brought into cultivation. It was a well-known fact that strawberries did excellently on bog.

He thought that the extension of technical education would be of great assistance, bringing into production such things as leather and wicker work, net-making, twine-making, etc.—industries that could be carried on indoors and without capital. The Connemara workers could undercut workers outside, or find a market at the expense of outside workers—though he was aware that there were dangerous reactions to this fact.

He agreed with Mr. Blythe that no solution was to be found in encouraging the fishing industry. Only about forty people along these hundreds of miles of coast were doing anything regular in the way of employment at fishing.

As far as the tourist traffic went, while they had excellent hotels, he thought the amount they spent on the produce of the area was very small indeed.

He had compiled a number of household budgets. They showed the people as concentrating on the markets and spending every penny they got in the markets in shops for things they could very well produce themselves.

The question of emigrants' remittances was one that might be gone into in a separate paper. For a good many years past they had practically ceased except at Christmas