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DECLARATION

A Benevolent Society?

Local Relief Committee Membership in Ireland 1817-52

By

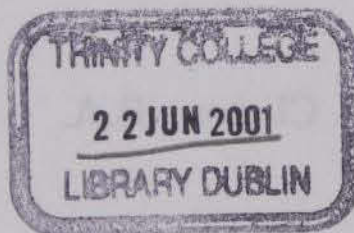
Georgina Clinton, B.A.



A Thesis submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
In the Faculty of Arts  
University of Dublin  
Trinity College

May 1999





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May 1999

## **Acknowledgements**

Dr David Dickson gave his time, wisdom and encouragement to see this project through to completion and for that I am grateful. I am also grateful to the National Archives and National Library in Dublin, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast, Cathy Murphy in the Louth County Library and Mary Guinan-Darmody in Tipperary County Library for their assistance. Noel Ross, Dundalk, proved an invaluable source of local history, and I thank him for taking the time to share his knowledge with me. Many thanks are also due to Dr Marie Coleman and Peter Martin M.A. for their suggestions and Professor Mary Daly, University College Dublin, for the encouragement received. The Clinton family, as always, have been untiring in their support, especially Maria, who double-checked figures. Special thanks are also due to the Third Sector Research Project who part funded this research. Finally, for his love, support and belief in my capabilities, I thank my husband, Owen Larkin, to whom this work is dedicated.



## SUMMARY

In all the various discussions and debates stimulated by poverty and relief in nineteenth-century Ireland, studies rarely go beyond generalisations with respect to relief committee membership. The main aim of this thesis is to go some way towards filling that void by constructing a social profile of the local relief committee member. Using local directories, church records, local newspapers, estate papers and personal diaries, this study reveals the social, religious, and where possible, political backgrounds of relief committees in the four Poor Law Unions of Dundalk, County Louth, Inishowen, County Donegal, Ballina, County Mayo and Thurles, County Tipperary.

The social structures within the four Poor Law Unions were examined, revealing a tiered system of wealth in both rural and urban areas. In terms of possible relief workers, it was the towns of Dundalk, Ballina and Thurles who had larger numbers of clergy, gentry, professionals and traders to help the poor in times of need. Outside of these towns, however, figures of possible relief workers dropped sharply, as the range of potential charity workers revolved around the gentry and clergy.

In terms of charitable associations formed to deal with poverty on a day to day basis, it was the unions of Ballina and Dundalk that had the more active relief volunteer force. These groups were run, for the most part, by local Protestant clergy, gentry and traders. In Thurles there was a more active Catholic participation in the relief of the poor on an ongoing basis, but it was still a small local Protestant population that seized the initiative with respect to local charity and who sustained it when others lost interest.



In terms of *ad hoc* relief committees formed to deal with specific periods of distress, the pre-famine years saw an evolution in the role played by the relief committee member. Yet while the role of the committee member changed, one aspect of relief did not: the charity worker himself. When the blight attacked the potato crop in 1845, the four Poor Law Unions had a volunteer force that had a long experience of working together.

During the famine relief, with a few exceptions, remained a particularly Protestant affair, sustained by lesser gentry and the clergy, Protestant and Catholic. The towns of Ballina and Dundalk did see a more active trader class in terms of relief but in general and despite the fact that these towns did have a growing trader class, they did not form a particularly significant part of relief committees. The famine years saw a concerted relief effort on the part of the clergy, Catholic and Protestant and they proved particularly vital to the relief effort.

Government rules on relief committee membership during the famine placed all women outside of the relief committee structure. The government policy of property paying for poverty automatically placed women outside local systems of relief because few women had the actual ownership and management of landed estates directly in their hands. Yet women did operate their own system of relief during the famine. These women were invariably the wives, daughters and sisters of men who were already active local charity workers. Thus charity during this period was very much a family affair.

And finally, minute books of famine relief committees confirm certain patterns that may be just hinted at in other contemporary sources. They confirm that it was the same group of people who came forward time and time again to help the poor and it was because of that fact that the social, religious and political backgrounds of relief committees rarely changed.



# INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

On 28 April 1846 a relief committee was formed in Dundalk, County Louth, to help the town's poor following the partial failure of the potato crop. Of the 23 members of this committee, there were 3 gentry, 11 clergymen, 1 professional and eight traders.<sup>1</sup> This combination was not quite what the commissioners had in mind when they released instructions on the membership of relief committees in February 1846. The following were the people who were supposed to fulfil a role in relief:

Lieutenant or Deputy-Lieutenant of the County  
Magistrates  
Officer of Board of Works  
Clergymen of all Persuasions  
Chairmen for Poor Law Union of the Locality  
Poor Law Guardians of Electoral district or districts  
Coast Guard Officer, where available  
Resident Magistrate  
and other active and intelligent gentlemen as the lieutenant may select.<sup>2</sup>

The government made it clear that it was the moral and legal responsibility of landowners and ratepayers to give relief to the destitute poor. It was also felt that their local knowledge would ensure proper

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<sup>1</sup> *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 2 May 1846, p.3; *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland* (Dublin, 1846), pp 35-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Instructions to committees of relief districts, extracted from minutes of the proceedings of the commissioners appointed in reference to the apprehended scarcity, 1846*, p. 17. H.C. 1846 (171), xxxvii. (Hereafter referred to as *Instructions, 1846*).



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implementation of relief.<sup>3</sup>

The conviction that the landlord was responsible for the alleviation of poverty was widely held; he was morally obliged to take care of the poor not only in the eyes of the government but in society at large. As a result the landlord had often been blamed for the inadequacy of relief during times of distress.<sup>4</sup> The absentee landlord and the resident landlord who used the crisis to clear his estate of financially inviable tenants are just two examples of the stereotype that has emerged over the years in the general condemnation of relief inadequacy during the great Irish famine.

Yet what do we really know about relief committee members? Who were those members of the Dundalk town relief committee? What was their social standing in the community? What religious and political beliefs did they hold? Did they have a history in charity work?

Poverty, distress and relief in early nineteenth-century Ireland has been the subject of much debate and discussion among historians.<sup>5</sup> They

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The great hunger. Ireland, 1845-49* (London, 1962), p. 69; Canon John O'Rourke, *The great Irish famine* (Abridged edition, Dublin, 1989), p.141.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Robins, *The miasma. Epidemic and panic in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995); Mary E. Daly, *The famine in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1986); R.D. Edwards and T.D. Williams (eds) *The great famine: Studies in Irish history 1845-52* (Dublin, 1956); Peter Gray, *Famine, land and politics. British government and Irish society, 1843-50* (Dublin, 1999); Donal A. Kerr, 'A nation of beggars'? *Priests, people and politics in famine Ireland, 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1994); Christine Kinealy, 'This great calamity': *The Irish famine 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994). This is a small selection of studies covering this period. For a more comprehensive list see Bibliography.



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centred their arguments around government policies, the economic aspects of the tragedy and landlord culpability. The process of relief has generally formed an integral part of many histories of early nineteenth-century subsistence crises and the famine. Yet while relief operations are deftly handled by historians, relief committee membership has been largely ignored. Relief committees are generally referred to in terms of their activities and interaction with officialdom, their membership only mentioned in general sweeping terms. There has been little concentration on the social standing of committee members, their religious and political persuasions, and on whether those people who came forward to volunteer their time, effort and money on local relief committees had a previous history in local volunteer work. Local relief committees have too often been disposed of in a few brief generalisations.

Tim O'Neill's work<sup>6</sup> broke new ground in the study of early nineteenth-century Irish history. O'Neill revealed the extent to which poverty pervaded the country and how a series of subsistence crisis led to the evolution of a formulated state policy towards the relief of distress.<sup>7</sup> When it came to the question of charity, O'Neill revealed that the landed gentry were, in most cases, very reluctant purveyors of relief.

Desmond McCabe's 'Law, conflict and social change: County Mayo 1820-45' concentrated on the changing relationship between

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<sup>6</sup>Timothy O'Neill, 'The state, poverty and distress in Ireland, 1815-45', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, N.U.I. (U.C.D.), 1971).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 299.



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authority and the population at large in that area.<sup>8</sup> McCabe argued that the peasantry in Mayo, at least before 1831, believed it was the 'moral responsibility' of the landed gentry to provide relief for their tenantry in times of economic distress. While this belief did not run in tandem with market theory at the time, McCabe argues that it formed the foundation of 'habits of deference and respect' to the gentry, a situation the gentry themselves wished to see survive.<sup>9</sup> This vision, however, as McCabe's work reveals, had somewhat diminished by the latter part of the 1830s.

The great Irish famine has stimulated debate and discussion on many aspects of that catastrophe. There are those historians who have perpetuated the common assumption that the landlord in Ireland was a selfish uncaring individual whose interest in his land barely extended beyond the collecting of rents. Canon O'Rourke asserted in 1874:

Besides, most of the wealthy proprietors were Englishmen or absentees who, with few exceptions, never saw their tenants; took no friendly interest in them, but left them in the hands of agents, who were prized by their employers in proportion to their punctuality in sending the half-yearly remittances, no questions being asked as to the means by which they were obtained.<sup>10</sup>

In his pioneering work on the organisation and administration of relief during the famine, Thomas P. O'Neill took a systematic look at the mechanics of relief during this period, examining each stage of relief, from the first appearance of the blight and Sir Robert Peel's relief

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<sup>8</sup>Desmond McCabe, 'Law, conflict and social change: County Mayo 1820-45', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, N.U.I.(UCD), 1991), p. 485.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>10</sup>Canon John O'Rourke, *op. cit.*, p. 141.



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scheme, right through to relief provided under the auspices of the poor law.<sup>11</sup> O'Neill recognised the contribution of relief committees to famine relief:

Individual efforts, or even those of associations, made little impression on the economic structure of Ireland, yet the sacrifices made on behalf of the starving people were inspiring...Resident landlords and their families, clergymen of all persuasions, doctors and innumerable others played a noble part.<sup>12</sup>

But although relief committees have on occasion been given attention in the wider analysis of relief operations, their personnel are only mentioned in general terms. Another seminal work on the great famine, Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The great hunger: Ireland 1845-1849*, gave a detailed account of the first four years of the crisis. Woodham-Smith assessed government and international reaction to the crisis; ideologies prevalent at the time; emigration and the human cost of the tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

Again relief committees are referred to in terms of their activities and interaction with officialdom; their personnel are only incidentally mentioned usually in terms of the occupation of particular members.

Woodham-Smith believed that the committee structure was a failure in the first season of crisis because 'unsuitable persons contrived to become members, especially in poor and remote districts.'<sup>14</sup> But she made this judgement without a systematic study of relief committee membership.

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas P. O'Neill, 'The organisation and administration of relief 1845-52', in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds) *The great famine. Studies in Irish history 1845-52* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Dublin, 1994), pp 209-253.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The great hunger. Ireland 1845-49* (London, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 68.



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There is little reference to the cross-section of personalities who made up relief committees and she did not engage in a systematic analysis of their membership in terms of occupation, religion or previous voluntary work. Instead she concentrated on the problems facing these committees and their dealings with government officials; the problems they faced and the challenge of the few trying to cope with the distress of the many.<sup>15</sup>

Mary E. Daly's *The famine in Ireland* is a valuable introduction to the history of the time.<sup>16</sup> Relief of distress during the famine is examined mainly from a government perspective and her work looks at the problems of relief administration. Daly argues that criticism should not be restricted to the British government and its officials with respect to inadequate relief measures during the famine. Deep sectarian and political divisions within Irish society weakened the effectiveness of local relief administration.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Daly argues, responsibility for the famine was a more complicated affair, where people on both sides of the Irish Sea played a part.

In a recent study Christine Kinealy has taken a new look at the famine.<sup>18</sup> In her analysis relief committees are placed in the general scheme of relief without reference to local personnel. While Kinealy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp 110, 124, 132.

<sup>16</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The famine in Ireland* (Dublin, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Kinealy, *A death-dealing. The great hunger in Ireland* (Belfast, 1994).



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does address the issue of voluntary relief, she does so in the context of national and international relief schemes.

An in-depth study of relief committees membership would have been a huge undertaking to have incorporated into the macro-studies of the early nineteenth century mentioned above. Local studies of specific areas during years of crisis should help suggest patterns which may eventually allow us get a bigger picture of nation-wide committee membership. In his recent study of the famine in Lurgan and Portadown, Gerard MacAtasney concentrated mostly on the role of the poor law in the two towns during the famine years.<sup>19</sup> In terms of relief committees he charted their establishment, revealing that:

For the most part, the catalyst for establishing the relief committees was the local clergy, both Catholic and Protestant (jointly), with the local landed gentry either participating at a minor level or solely through subscription.<sup>20</sup>

While he did note the indifference of some local gentry and the 'inability or unwillingness' of certain landlords to help their tenants, MacAtasney did not identify those who formed the backbone of relief, choosing instead to concentrate on public relief as provided by the poor law.<sup>21</sup>

In his west Clare study, *A people starved*, Ignatius Murphy put the spotlight, to a certain extent, on local relief workers and has tried to chart the efforts of certain individuals, especially those of the local clergy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gerard MacAtasney, *'This dreadful visitation.'* *The famine in Lurgan/Portadown* (Belfast, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 31-2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 34, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Ignatius Murphy, *A people starved. Life and death in west Clare 1845-51* (Dublin, 1996), pp 19-21.



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This study looks at committee membership and how they dealt with government officials on the question of relief. Where Murphy did analyse committee membership, the numbers involved turn out to have been extremely small. The Kilkee relief committee contained just six members in the early spring of 1847.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, however, this study concentrates on the human cost of the tragedy.

Sean Kierse, in his study of the east Clare parish of Killaloe, made a real attempt to tackle the issue of relief committee membership.<sup>24</sup> In a work that examines many aspects of life before, during and after the famine, Kierse examines two relief committees in the area: the Killaloe relief committee and the O'Briensbridge relief committee. Yet Kierse restricted this examination to an identification of the more prominent members of Killaloe society who became members of relief committees, and to their activities and commitment to the relief of the poor.<sup>25</sup>

James Grant's study of the great famine in Ulster examines the context and timing for the setting up of relief committees; their methods of relief; public works and the role of the poor law in the process of relief in the province. His analysis of committee membership is confined to chairmen and secretaries of relief committees and he concedes that

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Sean Kierse, *The famine years in the parish of Killaloe 1845-51* (Killaloe, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 21, 32.



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inadequate source material prevented a more in-depth analysis of relief committees.<sup>26</sup>

A more recent doctoral thesis by Kieran Foley has examined the famine years in County Kerry.<sup>27</sup> Foley has paid considerable attention to the issue of relief committees. While concentrating on general themes regarding relief committee membership he has also given us some important new insights - for instance, highlighting the higher profile of Catholic priests in the second season of distress.<sup>28</sup> His research reveals that relief committee membership in County Kerry changed little between early 1846 and the spring of 1847.<sup>29</sup>

Famine and distress in Drogheda, County Louth, during 1847 was the focus of a useful study by Ned McHugh (1986).<sup>30</sup> McHugh gave a complete list of the Drogheda relief committee but he did not probe his material to analyse composition. Instead the study concentrates on the operations of relief and the contribution the Drogheda union workhouse made to that relief.

It is evident from this brief summary of some of the relevant literature that one of the gaps in our knowledge of relief efforts in crisis

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<sup>26</sup> James Grant, 'The great famine in the province of Ulster 1845-49: The mechanisms of relief', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Queen's University Belfast, 1986), p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Kieran Foley, 'Kerry during the great famine, 1845-52', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, N.U.I. (UCD), 1997).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>30</sup> Ned McHugh, 'Famine and distress in Drogheda during 1847', in *County Louth Archaeological and Historical Journal* (Hereafter referred to as *CLAHJ*) ii (Monaghan, 1986), pp 157-178.



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periods from 1817-1852 remains the composition of relief committees. During the initial stages of this thesis, relief committee membership was originally confined to the seven year period of 1845-52. Yet as the study and research progressed it became apparent that to gain a full profile of those members it would be necessary to take the study further back in time.

Therefore the primary aims of this study are: (1) to examine the extent to which charitable societies were part of early nineteenth century Irish life; (2) to identify the members of those relief committees who helped the poor both on a continual basis and in times of extraordinary distress, and in doing so reveal their social standing, religion and, where possible, political affiliation; (3) to establish the experience of relief committee members in other areas of relief in an effort to determine whether different types of charity attracted different types of people; (4) and to identify the women who played a part in the relief committee structure and to assess their contribution to the relief of the poor and the famine-stricken.

The terms 'relief worker', 'charity worker' and 'relief volunteer' are used consistently throughout this work to describe those people who gave their time and commitment to local relief committees and societies. The four poor law unions of Inishowen, County Donegal; Thurles, County Tipperary; Dundalk, County Louth and Ballina, County Mayo, were chosen because they were situated in the north, south, east and west of



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the country respectively. Dundalk and Thurles were chosen because at the beginning of the nineteenth century the towns at the heart of these unions had a strong Catholic trader class (as opposed to the other two unions. See Chapter One, p.53). During a time when famine relief was believed to be the responsibility of the landowner class, an analysis of Catholic trader/middle class contribution to relief will be most valuable. By examining relief committee membership in these four poor law unions, this study will go some way beyond generalisation and local anecdote and will, it is hoped, demonstrate the value of the comparative case-study approach.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE CASE STUDY AREAS**

Before we can examine the structure and behaviour of relief committees, it is necessary to look in broad terms at the communities inside which voluntary action did or did not flourish. The nature of pre-Famine rural society varied considerably across the island, a fact clearly borne out in the four case-studies selected here. But poverty was perceived to be ever-present in all these districts and was a perennial subject of comment in the generation before the Great Famine. However the concept of poverty is always relative, and there was no standard definition as to who did and who did not merit public support. The scale of the problem was quite different in Dundalk, our east-coast case-study, and Ballina in the west. Another variable was the size and social outlook of local elites in these districts: relations between elites and the very poor differed for a number of reasons.

In order to establish a framework for comparison, we shall focus on several specific aspects of the districts under review: the formal make-up of each as a poor-law union; the relative state of agriculture and the role of landowners; the status and condition of agricultural labourers in each district; the urban economies, and the social infrastructure available to cope both with endemic poverty and with real calamity.



### Unions

The introduction of a national system of poor relief in 1838 promised to introduce a novel degree of uniformity in dealing with the everyday problems of the sick, the infirm and the displaced across the country. It was a centralised system with a military emphasis on standardised rules and arrangements: the country was divided into 130 unions with little reference to traditional administrative boundaries, and each union was to contain a workhouse built to standard specifications in a location close to a market town. Every union was to have its board of guardians, comprising both elected representatives of the tax-payers and ex-officio prominent local worthies who between them were to oversee the financing and running of each workhouse.<sup>1</sup> In north-east County Donegal most of the parishes on the Inishowen peninsula were brought together in the union of Inishowen.<sup>2</sup> (A number of wealthier parishes at the southern end of the peninsula were incorporated into Londonderry Union.) The union workhouse was situated on the edge of the small town of Carndonagh. It opened in October 1843 and was run by twenty-

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<sup>1</sup>Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: The Irish famine* (Dublin, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>The union covered an area of 159,322 statute acres, containing 21 electoral divisions.



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three elected and fifteen ex-officio guardians. In 1841 it afforded accommodation to 600 of the union's population of 43,569.<sup>3</sup>

Inishowen union was the smallest union in this study. That of Dundalk, the next largest in size and population, had a strong central focus in the growing port-town that bore its name, but incorporated parts of counties Louth, Monaghan and Armagh.<sup>4</sup> The workhouse was situated just outside Dundalk and was built to accommodate 948 inmates. It opened in March 1842 and was run by thirty elected and eighteen ex-officio guardians representing 19 electoral divisions. It served a population of some 65,509 people.<sup>5</sup>

The union of Thurles was carved out of the very different world of mid-Tipperary, and was the second largest union in this study with an 1841 population of 71,976.<sup>6</sup> The union workhouse was built in the town of Thurles and was opened in November 1842 with enough accommodation to house 960 inmates. It was governed by thirty-one elected and sixteen ex-officio guardians.<sup>7</sup>

With nearly twice the population of Thurles and three times

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<sup>3</sup> *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> It covered an area of 103,226 statute acres and contained nineteen electoral divisions.

<sup>5</sup> *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 610.

<sup>6</sup> It contained 167,236 statute acres and twenty-one electoral divisions.

<sup>7</sup> *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 180.



the acreage, the union of Ballina in north-west Mayo was much the largest union in this study, serving a population of 120,787.<sup>8</sup> The workhouse was in the only substantial town in the huge union, Ballina, where its thirty-three guardians met. The workhouse opened in November 1843 with enough accommodation to house 1,200 people.<sup>9</sup> By any measure it was one of the largest and poorest unions in the country before it was divided at the end of the 1840s.

### Landlords and rural society

The presence of active resident gentry was seen by contemporary commentators as a key ingredient, determining the state of rural society and farming in any area. In the Dundalk union there was, it seems, a great variation in the state of agriculture by 1845 between lowland and more naturally fertile districts, said to be greatly improved, and the poorly endowed areas, said to be in a most wretched state. One witness to the Devon Commission in 1845 from the union was Richard Byrne, landowner, (and chairman of the Haggardstown relief committee in 1847) who attributed the drive for agricultural improvement to resident gentry:

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<sup>8</sup>It covered 498,491 statute acres of land.

<sup>9</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845) p. 180.



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The first is that in the part I have described as comfortable, and as agriculture having improved, there are some resident gentry and a good many large farmers. There are also in operation in those districts two very effective farming societies, the Castlebellingham Farming Society and the Fortescue Farming Society. That portion that I have described as being in a bad state, in regard to agricultural improvement, has no resident gentry and there are no large farmers, and no improved system of agriculture has been either attempted or encouraged.<sup>10</sup>

Byrne noted that there was a correlation between non-residency of a landlord and the degree of farm sub-division on an estate and that on some absentee estates by the 1840s the property had become so subdivided that it resulted in nothing but misery for the tenants.<sup>11</sup> Another Dundalk witness to the Devon Commission, attorney and farmer James O'Hanlon who lived near Carlingford, believed that agriculture was 'improving' but was not as improved as it should be, partly because of the physical isolation of the area but also because of the prevalence there of non-residency.<sup>12</sup> John MacNeill, a successful civil engineer and a landowner near Dundalk town, was by contrast a resident 'improver'; owning extensive limeworks, he gave employment to three hundred men and was seen as directly promoting the economic development in the region.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>*Report from Her Majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practise in respect to the occupation of land, 1845.* p. 344. H.C. 1845 (605) xix. 1. (Hereafter referred to as *Devon Commission*).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.



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Echoes of such views can be found in the very different world of pre-famine Ballina. There, a land-agent George Irwin, when asked by the Devon Commission whether he saw any difference between the estates of the non-resident proprietors and those of residents replied unambiguously that the contrast was great: resident proprietors often gave direct employment to forty or more men but the absentee, if truly inactive, gave nothing.<sup>14</sup> T.C. Foster wrote from Ballina 25 September 1845:

I am much mistaken if the evidence, fairly put, will not prove that wherever the landlords have been resident, and have attended to the duties of their position, there has been improvement; and that the injury which has resulted from leases, has been owing to their total neglect, either of inserting proper covenants in them or of not enforcing them if inserted.<sup>15</sup>

Foster used the activities of some resident gentry in Ballina to illustrate his point on the positive correlation of landlord residency and agricultural improvement. George Vaughan Jackson of Carrowmore, outside Ballina, was a resident landlord. He would drain his land, place a man on a farm of 5 to 10 acres and give him a plan on which to build his house which was to be situated in the centre of the farm. Jackson would supervise the entire exercise and pay the tenants for improvements he approved of. He also employed fifty tenants constantly to carry out improvements on

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Part 2, p. 406.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Campbell Foster, *Letters on the condition of the people of Ireland* (London, 1846), p. 201.



his land.<sup>16</sup> Foster also mentioned other resident landlords, Colonel Knox Gore of Beleek Manor, Edward Howley of Beleek Castle, the Knoxes of Mount Falcon and of Netley, who gave considerable employment to labourers by building and carrying out similar improvements to that of Jackson.<sup>17</sup>

A small Inishowen landowner and witness to the Devon Commission, Thomas Dougherty of Redcastle went so far as to claim that he was the only landowner in County Donegal who directly assisted his tenants in making improvements.<sup>18</sup> When travelling through Inishowen in 1834 one contemporary observer had noted:

I never saw worse husbandry than in the country I passed through between Fahan and Londonderry; or land in a more neglected state. Seaweed and sand are both to be had here in abundance: but I saw none of either in use. The grass land, and even the corn fields, were literally covered with thistles and ragweed, which seemed to be treated with as much consideration as if they had been a profitable produce.<sup>19</sup>

It is not clear here who was thought to blame for the lack of agricultural improvement. One Thurles union witness to the Devon Commission, Nicholas Maher, was in no doubt:

In the county of Tipperary it is difficult to get a tenant to make what I call improvements. Some of them do; but in general they are not an

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp 201-3

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>18</sup>*Devon Commission*, Part 1, p. 713.

<sup>19</sup>Henry D. Inglis, *A journey throughout Ireland during the spring, summer and autumn of 1834* (4th Edition, London, 1836), p. 309.



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improving class of tenantry. I think they are not a good farming class of tenantry.<sup>20</sup>

Such views can be put to a modest test: parishes located in the four unions were examined using Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary* which supplied reports on the state of agriculture and on the prevalence of resident gentry. As Table 1:1 demonstrates – in what is an impressionistic source – there was a direct correlation between agricultural improvement and gentry residence.

**Table 1:1**  
**Residency and Improvement**

Union	No. of Parishes	Agric. Improved	Residency	Agric. Not Improved	Residency
Ballina	22	10	10	12	5
Thurles	21	2	2	19	10
Inishowen	26	-	0	26	10
Dundalk	23	10	9	3	5 <sup>21</sup>

And while the presence of resident gentry was no guarantee of agricultural improvement in an area, it seems fair to assume that there was a markedly better chance of improved agricultural practices if landlords were resident.

### The rural poor

By the 1840s the practice of farm subdivision was thought by some to be over, or at least very much on the wane, having been

<sup>20</sup> *Devon Commission*, Part 1, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1847). 2 Vols.



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actively discouraged by landlords and their agents. In 1835 landlords were said to be using 'every means' within their power to prevent subdivision of farms.<sup>22</sup> However many witnesses to the Devon Commission still assumed that new subdivision was still taking place regularly. Of the fifteen witnesses who had direct knowledge of the four poor law unions in this study, no less than seven held that subdivision and subletting were still prevalent and three others maintained that the practice was in decline. In Dundalk union, this was definitely thought to be the case:

In the last ten or fifteen years, I believe the land has not been so much subdivided as it was previously; it was very common when a young man married that his father either divided the farm with him or he gave him a certain portion of it, as much as would supply him with potatoes, seldom less than an acre; but I have known several families living upon one acre.<sup>23</sup>

Only one witness in the four unions asserted that no subdivision was now taking place. Two witnesses made no comment on the practice, and a further two testified that the only reason that subdivision did not take place was because the farms were so small they could not be divided further. The Rev. Patrick Larkin, from Thurles, testified that 'the farms are too small as they are.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>*First report from the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poor in Ireland. Appendix F, 1836, p. 96. H.C. 1836 (369) xxxiii. (Hereafter referred to as *Poor Inquiry (Ireland)* ).*

<sup>23</sup>*Devon Commission, Part 1, p. 87.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 307.



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Samuel Alexander, from Buncrana, County Donegal, asserted that subdivision 'could not be well accomplished in the district, the farms are so small.'<sup>25</sup>

The witnesses to the Devon Commission in our study areas agreed that 'large' farmers were as a rule gradually improving.<sup>26</sup> Large farmers in these unions were for example reclaiming bogs and reaping the benefits.<sup>27</sup> In 1834 large farmers in the Thurles district were said to be paying high rents that they were well able to pay and they lived well.<sup>28</sup> But the situation with the small farmer was very different. In the Ballina hinterland:

Besides the more considerable farmers, there are many very small landholders located on the larger farms: and these are in a miserable condition. I found a number of these individuals gone to the harvesting. I have scarcely anywhere in Ireland seen more proofs of a pauper population than in Ballina.<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary opinion believed that the smaller farmer was generally struggling. John Burke from Borrisoleigh, County Tipperary, told the Devon Commission that 'they have enough to do to support a family.'

Yet whatever of the difficult position of the smaller stock-owning farmer, it was the vast hordes of agricultural labourers

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 711.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., Part 2, p. 429; Part 3, pp 316, 318.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Part 2, p. 406.

<sup>28</sup>Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup>Inglis, *A journey throughout Ireland, 1834.* p. 267.



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who were believed to be most clearly in a state of gradual, consistent deterioration in their living standards. The Rev Patrick Larkin maintained in 1845 that 'the labourers are in great distress in this country.'<sup>30</sup> John Burke described the condition of labourers around him in Borrisoleigh as very bad, stating that they did not get more than '7d [per day] upon the average of the year.' Martin Fennelly, a large farmer of 130 acres in the parish of Moyne, County Tipperary, described the labouring classes in similar terms: 'their condition is very low. You will get men from 3d to 4d a day and striving to feed 5 or 6 children out of it.'<sup>31</sup> John Perkins, a land agent from Killala, County Mayo, told the Devon Commission that labourers 'have not the courage to emancipate themselves nor means to emancipate themselves, from the misery in which they are in.'<sup>32</sup>

The theme of a deteriorating labouring class is almost constant throughout the various parliamentary inquiries from 1830 carried out to investigate the condition of the Irish poor. Even in the investigations ostensibly into other areas of Irish life, the topic of the poor labourer took centre stage. In a report on the state of Irish fisheries in 1837 it was revealed that the fishermen of

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<sup>30</sup>*Devon Commission*, Part 2, p. 309.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 722.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 429.



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Carlingford, in the north-east of Dundalk union, were often essentially agricultural labourers with a second string:

Mr Moore said that the fishermen in Carlingford are very poor; that they are unable to maintain or equip proper boats...When the herring fishery is over, the fishermen on large boats are employed in carrying potatoes from Carlingford to Dublin and other markets; bringing back manure...The fishermen in the town usually hire potato ground for which they pay £6 an acre.<sup>33</sup>

While the lot of fishermen varied, the poorest of their kind were usually employed in agriculture. T.D. Bateson, an Inishowen land-agent living near Bunrana, was asked by the Devon Commission whether the state of agricultural labourers was improving:

No. it is pretty nearly what it was. A great number of the people about Bunrana have double occupations; they are partially fishermen and partially farmers. I do not see any change in them hardly for the better in any shape.<sup>34</sup>

In an official estimate of the number of fishermen in the coastal unions of Dundalk, Inishowen and Ballina in 1837, there were 160 returned for Inishowen 1,055 for the Dundalk union, 1,576 for Ballina.<sup>35</sup> As a sub-group of the landless poor, they were as dependent on the potato as their more exclusively land-based peers.

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<sup>33</sup>*First report of the commissioners of inquiry into the state of the Irish fisheries; with the minutes of evidence and appendix, 1837.* p. 10. H.C. 1837 (77) xxii.1.

<sup>34</sup>*Devon Commission, Part 1, p. 722.*

<sup>35</sup>*First report of the commissioners of inquiry into the state of the Irish fisheries; with the minutes of evidence and appendix, 1837.* pp 13, 70,91 H.C. 1837 (77) xxii.I.



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The extreme discomforts of the labouring poor were reiterated by witnesses from the four districts to the Poor Inquiry in 1835: Edward G. Brunner, a Dundalk medical doctor, spoke of the complete lack of comforts in the lives of the poor at large:

In general, potatoes are the almost exclusive food of the poor. Generally speaking, the cabins and persons of those applying for relief are without any kind of comfort; many have no other covering at night than the clothes they wear during the day; their cabins are mostly without any furniture, and ventilation is never thought of.<sup>36</sup>

The poor in Moville, County Donegal, were found to be seriously wanting in clothes, bedding and necessary comfort although, it was claimed, they had a good supply of plain food.<sup>37</sup> In inland Borrisoleigh in Tipperary the poor lived on potatoes, with a herring or sour milk sometimes added. Their bedding consisted mainly of straw spread on the ground and furniture was scarce.<sup>38</sup>

But the condition of the poor varied. In the parish of Fahan in Inishowen one witness described living standards as follows:

Those who pay 10£ per annum rent are in comfortable circumstances; the higher the rent the more comfortable the individual. Those who pay 5£ rent have the common necessaries of life as beds, bedding etc., but with those last, ventilation is imperfect, no opening or sliding windows. The last is the cottier, and in five out of six he is miserable; ill-fed, badly clothed, his diet potatoes and salt and herrings; now and again

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<sup>36</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Supplement to Appendix B, 1835. p. 256. H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.2.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 233

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 220.



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buttermilk and in the summer, as potatoes become scarce, oatmeal; this indeed to him is a luxury. If he possesses a cow he is happy.<sup>39</sup>

This highly differentiated pattern of comforts among the poor was not uncommon, especially in the more agriculturally improved parishes in each of the unions. In the barony of Upper Dundalk some of the less densely populated and richer parishes afforded year-round employment to labourers. Higher levels of employment was due to 'the trade, commerce and home manufactures of Dundalk, which furnish employment in whole or in part to many of the country labourers.'<sup>40</sup> However the Poor Inquiry was told that:

In the other inland parishes [in the district] which are more thickly inhabited the able-bodied labourers who have not constant employment, get work during from six to ten months of the year...The labourers think the introduction of the drill system in cultivating potatoes, of threshing-mills, and some other new methods in agriculture, has diminished employment by substituting horse-work for what was formerly done by manual labour.<sup>41</sup>

Agricultural improvement, in other words, could work against the interests of agricultural labourers.

Potatoes were the principal food of labourers everywhere; few even in richer districts were able to afford oatmeal. They never ate meat, eggs or fish. Small farmers may have used some of

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>40</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix D. 1836*, p. 26. H.C. 1836 (369) xxxi.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



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their own eggs and herring, but they were rarely able to afford to eat their own pork.<sup>42</sup> Dietary impoverishment may have gone furthest in a county like Mayo; incomes had been dealt a blow in the two decades before 1845 with the death of the county's linen trade, and by 1841 72.6 per cent of all holdings were returned as being between 1 and 5 acres, making it the most extensively subdivided county in Ireland where potato cultivation was pursued as the single and all important subsistence crop.<sup>43</sup>

As Appendix 1 reveals, a large proportion of the population in the four poor law unions lived on or below 10-acre farms: 59 per cent in the case of Dundalk union, 73 per cent in Thurles union, 77 per cent in Inishowen union, and no less than 85 per cent in Ballina. It is important not to forget that land in all these unions was unevenly distributed, with a large percentage of the land surface remaining in the direct control of a small proportion of farmers and other landholders, and a large percentage of the rural population surviving on a small (and often infertile) fraction of the usable land. Unlike the well-to-do landholders, the majority were without the resources to withstand misfortunes or catastrophe, never mind being in any position to help their neighbours in times of stress.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., Appendix E, 1836. p. 14. H.C. 1836 (37) xxxii.1.

<sup>43</sup> Donald E. Jordan, Jnr, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the plantation to the land war* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 69-70.



### Urban economies

Town development in the four unions reflected the great inequalities of wealth evident in rural areas. In the union of Dundalk its two urban centres, Carlingford and Dundalk, had experienced contrasting patterns of development in the twenty years before the Famine. The primary landlord of Carlingford was the absentee Henry Paget, Marquis of Anglesey; who held property in the neighbourhood with an approximate valuation of £4,278.<sup>44</sup> With large estates in England and near his Anglesey seat, he had at least got to know Ireland when serving as Lord Lieutenant (twice) between 1828 and 1833.<sup>45</sup> Trade in his small town of Carlingford had, it seems, altered little in the early part of the nineteenth century: in 1824 there were 24 listed businesses and in 1846 23, all linked to the provisions trade.<sup>46</sup> The town itself

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<sup>44</sup>Richard Griffith, *General valuation of rateable property in Ireland. Union of Dundalk* (Dundalk, 1854) (Hereafter referred to as Griffith's Valuation). In an effort to plot the annual valuation of landholders in each union, it was felt that the best way to accomplish this task was to add together the acreage and rates under the names of each immediate lessor. This task was completed for the four poor law unions. In the case of the union of Ballina (which was divided into four mid-century), the four poor law unions of Ballina, Belmullet, Dromore West and Killala were consulted.

<sup>45</sup>Sir Bernard Burke, *Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage* (London, 1900), p. 5. (Hereafter referred to as *Burke's Peerage*).

<sup>46</sup>J. Pigott, *The Commercial Directory of Ireland, Scotland and the Four Most Northern Counties of England for 1820-21 and 22. Containing a representation of the professional and mercantile inhabitants* (Manchester, 1824). p. 147. (Hereafter referred to as Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1822*); Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland (Dublin, 1846), p. 20 (Hereafter referred to as *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*).



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had only 10 first-class houses in 1841 out of a total of 230.<sup>47</sup>

By contrast the number of listed businesses in Dundalk had nearly doubled over the same period: 175 in 1824, 343 in 1846. New employment had been created in coach-making, farm implements manufacture, and building supplies; Dundalk had also become a centre for the distribution of coal (there were twelve coal merchants in the town by 1846). Its retail trades were also proliferating: with 10 haberdashery dealers in 1846 compared to 3 in 1824, 53 publicans compared to 33. There were 156 first-class houses in 1841 out of a total of 1,798 (a somewhat higher ratio than in Carlingford).<sup>48</sup> House rent in the town was said to have been extremely high in the early 1830s.<sup>49</sup>

The principal owner in fee of Dundalk was Robert Jocelyn, the Earl of Roden. Roden's property was assigned a rateable valuation of £8,600 in the middle of the century, making him the second highest ratepayer in the union of Dundalk.<sup>50</sup> An occasional resident, he split his time between his seats in Louth,

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<sup>47</sup>*Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, pp 84-5. H.C. 1843 (504) xxiv. (Hereafter referred to as *Census 1841*).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 84-5. See Appendix 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Copy of instructions given by the Chief Secretary for Ireland with reference to the cities and boroughs in Ireland. Sending representatives to parliament; Likewise, copy of any letter of report received by the Chief Secretary in answer to such instructions, 1831-32*, p. 58. H.C. 1832 (519) xliii.

<sup>50</sup>Griffith's Valuation, *Union of Dundalk* (Dundalk, 1854).



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Down and Hertfordshire,<sup>51</sup> but his dominance of the town was on the wane: until the early 1820s he had had a dominant say in the parliamentary representation of County Louth, favouring a strongly conservative line.<sup>52</sup> But in 1826 this had been broken. The Catholic clergy and forty shilling freeholders had supported a retired Protestant barrister, Alexander Dawson, against Leslie Foster and the nominee of the Roden family, Matthew Fortescue. Dawson was returned at the head of the poll.<sup>53</sup> One contemporary said of Roden in 1834 that he

bears a high character among men of all parties: a character which must certainly be merited: since no man has pursued a course so little conciliatory as his lordship. The Conservative agitation of this part of Ireland is not popular with the majority of the educated Conservative population. The Orange lodges are chiefly composed of the farmers - a highly respectable class certainly, but very far inferior in intelligence and information to the shopkeepers and tradesmen of the towns, among whom very few Orangemen are to be found.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed by the 1830s Roden's enemies in the form of the Repeal movement had gathered strength in the town of Dundalk. In 1833 merchants had subscribed £67 to the O'Connell National Annuity Fund,<sup>55</sup> and when O'Connell held a meeting in Dundalk in 1842 as part of the general agitation for the repeal of the Union 60,000

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<sup>51</sup>*Debrett's Peerage, Baronetage, Knightage and Companionage* (London, 1930), pp 808-9.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas Reid, *Travels in Ireland in the year 1822. Exhibiting brief sketches of the moral, physical and political state of the country* (London, 1823), p. 232.

<sup>53</sup>Padraic Ua Dubhthaigh, *The book of Dundalk* (Sligo, 1946), p. 17.

<sup>54</sup>Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>55</sup>*Detailed report of contributions (Parochial and Personal) to the O'Connell National Annuity for the Year 1833* (Dublin, 1834), p. 45.



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people were said to have attended.<sup>56</sup> Despite this the Liberals managed to retain a hold on urban politics.<sup>57</sup>

At the other end of the social scale in Dundalk's 342 fourth-class houses, poverty was rife despite the employment growth in the town. Its coastal position was blamed for the noticeably high incidence of chest infections,<sup>58</sup> and

with respect to their domestic economy, many of the poorer inhabitants are extremely wretched, and a complete want of all regard for cleanliness, both in their houses and persons, is generally but too apparent.<sup>59</sup>

In the poor law union of Ballina there were also only two towns of any note.<sup>60</sup> In the small cathedral town of Killala there were a mere 6 first-class houses out of a total of 244 in 1841 (a worse ratio than in the sleepy backwater of Carlingford).<sup>61</sup> There were 16 businesses in 1824, mainly based on the retail and

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<sup>56</sup>H.G. Tempest, *Descriptive and historical guide to Dundalk and district* (Dundalk, 1917), p. 20.

<sup>57</sup>Padraic Ua Dubhthaigh, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup>John Brown, MD, *Medical report of the Dundalk Destitute Sick Society; together with a sketch of the medical topography and statistics of the town and parish* (1839), p. 413.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>60</sup>The principal owner in fee of Ballina was Philip Gore, fourth earl of Arran, who succeeded his uncle Arthur Saunders in 1837. He had homes at Castle Gore near Ballina and at Windsor. By mid-century his property of some 24,413 acres in the union was given a rateable valuation of £6,307: Griffiths Valuation. *Unions of Ballina* (1856), *Killala* (1856), *Belmullet* (1855) and *Dromore West* (1858); Sir Bernard Burke, *Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage* (London, 1900), p. 66.

<sup>61</sup>*Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841*, pp 400-1. H.C. 1843 (504), xxiv.



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provision trade in the town; by 1846, this had increased to 28. However the increase was due to more of the same rather than new business ventures. Ballina, however, was a 'rising' town, aided by the improved navigation of the river Moy: by 1841 there were 46 first-class houses - out of a total of 962.<sup>62</sup> There was a general agreement that the town was improving:

It has one excellent street, the greater part of which is nearly new, and which contains many good houses, and shops which would be creditable to any town. It is also a town of very considerable trade. For several years previous to 1833, the export - chiefly grain - had reached 10,000 tons. In 1833 it was under 8,000; but this decrease was chiefly owing to the failure of a house in the trade; and it was thought that, for 1834, the export would increase at least 1,000 tons. The retail trade is considerable; but is sadly crippled by absenteeism, and by the embarrassed circumstances of the squires and squireens.<sup>63</sup>

In 1824 Ballina had been home to approximately 109 businesses: 2 breweries, 10 bakers, 2 flour mills and 5 ironmongers plus predictable numbers of grocers, merchants and publicans. By 1846 businesses in Ballina town had grown by about a half and numbered approximately 157.<sup>64</sup> Local trade now included butchers (8), coach makers (2), timber merchants (2), and leather sellers (4). There were also by then twice as many traders. In 1834 a Belfast merchant, J. Brennan, had introduced the provisions

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<sup>62</sup>*Census 1841*, pp 400-1.

<sup>63</sup>Inglis, *op. cit.*, (London, 1834), p. 265.

<sup>64</sup>Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1822*, p. 194; *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 104.



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export trade to the town. Ten thousand pigs were cured annually on his premises by the 1850s.<sup>65</sup> In his evidence to the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland in 1830, a brewer, John Livingstone, reviewed developments over the previous seventeen years:

As to grain, at Ballina, when I settled there, there was only a very small brewery there, and a still smaller mill; there are now two rather respectable establishments in the way of breweries, and two or three mills in which flour and oatmeal to a considerable extent is manufactured and which is not brought to account in the statement I have furnished... I can state that I commenced as a brewer at Ballina on a very small scale, and I have increased my business, probably eight or tenfold; besides the increase in my business another gentleman has since started and he makes a tolerable business also.<sup>66</sup>

Ballina held weekly markets and was the host of five fairs during the year by the 1840s. In all, therefore, although its growth was less pronounced than in an east-coast port like Dundalk, Ballina had by 1845 developed strong coastal links with Ulster and cross-channel ports, one consequence of which was to increase the critical mass of middle-class families in the town. Yet while the town of Ballina was generally said to be improving, there were large numbers of destitute people crowding in. The unimproved

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<sup>65</sup>A. Marmion, *Ancient and modern history of the maritime ports of Ireland* (Holborn, 1855), p. 289.

<sup>66</sup>*Report of the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland; Being a summary of the first, second and third reports of evidence taken before that committee; Together with an appendix of accounts and papers, 1830*, pp130-1. H.C. 1830 (667) vii.



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and filthy state of its streets was reported in 1830 to be of major concern to the wealthier inhabitants.<sup>67</sup> The abundant supply of water provided by the river Moy was rendered unfit for human consumption by sewage pollution. The town relied on some spring wells that dried up frequently in the summer months when they were needed most.<sup>68</sup> Five years later the Poor Inquiry heard ominous stories about the apparently flourishing town:

The proportion of beggars to the population has been greatly increased of late years. That at a low calculation there are at present 300 persons in the town who live by no other means than begging; and that considering the number of labourer's wives and families who are from time to time reduced to beg there must be at least 600 persons that one period or other of the year beg in the town....<sup>69</sup>

There were two strong market centres in the union of Thurles: Templemore and Thurles itself. In the heart of lowland Tipperary the latter dominated the union and was rapidly increasing in wealth and importance:

The town stands on a wide, scantily wooded and uninteresting plain. It contains about eight thousand inhabitants, and is tolerably prosperous town; for having no larger town nearer to it than 40 or 50 miles, it supplies an extensive interior district, and is besides an important market for country produce....Besides the absence of beggars, I saw several other indications of an improving town. I observed no shops to be let, and I saw several houses in course of being built.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 18 Jan., 1830. p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Rev Thomas Armstrong, *My life in Connaught. With sketches of mission work in the west* (London, 1906), p. 160.

<sup>69</sup> *Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix A, 1835*. p. 496.H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.

<sup>70</sup> Inglis., *op. cit.*, pp 60-61.



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By 1841 there were 50 first-class houses out of a total of 1,222.<sup>71</sup> Trade centred on grocers, publicans and hardware in 1824; by 1846 business listings had greatly increased - from 47 to 193. The formal commercial world now extended to include butchers, carpenters, confectioners, corn dealers, leather sellers, tallow chandlers and stone masons, even hat-makers, tailors and clock makers. Grocers had increased from 7 to 19, public houses from 10 to 32.<sup>72</sup> Its industrial life was confined to brewing and tanning but the high-quality agricultural land in the surrounding area coupled with an improving system of agriculture led to an abundance of farm-related business in the town.

Fuel was also plentiful. The Slievardagh coal mines were eight miles away from the town.<sup>73</sup> Yet despite all this apparent wealth, the lifestyle of the urban poor was wretched. The Poor Inquiry was informed that:

clothing [is] very indifferent; food the worst quality of potato, with seldom anything with it but salt, and rarely, sour milk; bedding, straw on the ground floor; furniture, almost none properly so called and total absence in general of all comforts.<sup>74</sup>

Templemore was an even more dynamic and tightly run urban community: in 1824, it had 25 businesses, in 1846, 91; bakers,

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<sup>71</sup>*Census 1841*, p. 214.

<sup>72</sup>Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1822*. p. 311; Slater's *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p. 316.

<sup>73</sup>Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, ii (London, 1847), p. 623.

<sup>74</sup>*First report from the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poor in Ireland, Appendix B, 1836*, p. 223. H.C. 1836 (369) xxxii.



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grocers and publicans were now joined in the commercial listings by blacksmiths, butchers, car and coachmakers. Public houses rose from 3 in 1824 to 26 in 1846.<sup>75</sup> By 1841, there were 47 first-class houses (and a mere 21 fourth-class houses) out of a total of 480.<sup>76</sup> The town had a good supply of water and fuel. It was generally believed to be clean, modern and well-built.<sup>77</sup> The Carden family were the long-established and interventionist landlords of the town.<sup>78</sup> Protestant Liberals, they also played an active part in county politics.<sup>79</sup> Sir John Carden held approximately 4,588 acres in the Templemore area at mid-century with an annual rateable valuation of approximately £ 5,809<sup>80</sup>. But for all this, some saw the town in bleak terms: Edward Kingsley, a surgeon in Templemore, described the poor of the town in 1835 as being in the greatest misery and in need of every comfort.<sup>81</sup>

In the union of Inishowen, there were three small urban centres: Buncrana a small factory town, noted for supplying the surrounding districts with general merchandise; Carndonagh,

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<sup>75</sup>Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1822*. p. 310; Slater's *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 314.

<sup>76</sup>*Census 1841*, pp 306-7.

<sup>77</sup>Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, 1837*. p. 610.

<sup>78</sup>Paul P Walsh, *A history of Templemore and its environs* (Roscrea, 1991), p. 19.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup>Griffiths Valuation, *Union of Thurles* (Dublin, 1850).

<sup>81</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Supplement to Appendix B. 1835*. p. 251. H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.2.



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more exclusively a market town with shops supplying the greater part of northern Inishowen; and the small outport of Moville on Lough Foyle.<sup>82</sup>

By 1841 there were 12 first-class houses in Bunrana out of a total of 176; 5 in Carndonagh out of 118; and 10 in Moville out of 91.<sup>83</sup> Bunrana in 1846 had a total of 50 businesses, mostly centred on the provision trade, Moville half that number, again based on provisions.<sup>84</sup>

On these three towns the union's beggars descended when food stocks ran low or employment was scarce. Beggars swarmed into food-abundant parishes, in some cases to such an extent that a Clonmany clergyman refused all alms to beggars except to the lame, the decrepit and the blind, and to such persons as were resident in the parish.<sup>85</sup> In general though, it was not until the 1830s before the district saw a real increase in mendicancy caused by growing unemployment.<sup>86</sup> In the parish of Moville it was claimed in 1835 that the proportion of 'strange' to local beggars was at least ten to one. And in the parishes of Upper and Lower Fahan [i.e. Bunrana]:

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<sup>82</sup>*The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* (London, 1846), ii, pp 287, 316-7.

<sup>83</sup>*Census 1841*, pp 306-7.

<sup>84</sup>*Slater's Commercial Dictionary of Ireland, 1846*. p. 501.

<sup>85</sup>William Shaw Mason, *A statistical account and parochial survey of Ireland* (1817) pp 183-4.

<sup>86</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix A, 1835*, pp 743, 754.H.C. 1835 (369) Vol.32.



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The period of the year at which begging increases is from the 1<sup>st</sup> of December to August, being at its extreme about July and the beginning of the month of August. The greater number of the beggars here are strangers; those of this parish who are obliged to have recourse to mendicancy generally go into other parishes to beg.<sup>87</sup>

Thus while the four poor law unions had varying degrees of success in both agriculture and trade, there existed in each union a distinct stratum of their population that lived close to subsistence and were habitually dependant on their neighbours and the community. Even in the towns - perhaps especially so in some years - the very poor were a highly visible and growing constituency.

### Social resources

Given the make-up of these unions, who had the responsibility and the capacity to deal with a crisis? When commissioners appointed by the Irish government issued instructions on the formation of relief committees in February 1846, they specified that these committees should be made up of the following:

- Lieutenant or Deputy Lieutenant of the County
- Magistrates of Petty Sessions
- Officer of Board of Works
- Clergymen of all persuasions
- Chairman of Poor Law Union of the locality
- Poor Law Guardians of electoral divisions or districts
- Coast Guard Officer, where available
- Resident Magistrate

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 743.



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'and such other active and intelligent gentlemen as the Lieutenant may select'.<sup>88</sup>

Such a list implies a surfeit of potential committee men. The crisis of 1846-7 was however to reveal many problems in the mobilisation of activists to oversee relief. Any discussion of voluntary workers must begin with a closer analysis of the particular social structures in the four poor law unions.

It is necessary to pinpoint the men who were actually in a position to take responsibility when the crisis broke. The issue of 'responsibility' was of course a major issue for the government.

Even in January 1847 Charles Trevelyan stressed that:

There appears to have been some misunderstanding as to the nature and extent of the responsibility which the government propose to assume under the new plan of relief. It is not intended that the Government should itself undertake the task of feeding the people through its own offices, but that it should organise the upper and middle classes of society for this purpose, by a combination of the relief committees with the Poor Law Guardians, and make such additions to the funds at their disposal as may be required.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, in Trevelyan's eyes at least, those prompted into action were to regard themselves not so much servants of government as that element in the community who had a moral responsibility to be active in the first place, and who were being

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<sup>88</sup>*Instructions to committees of relief districts, extracted from minutes of the proceedings of the commissioners appointed in reference to the apprehended scarcity, 1846*, p. 17. H.C. 1846 (171) xxxvii.

<sup>89</sup>Trevelyan to Routh, *Correspondence from January to March, 1847. Relating to the measures adopted for the relief of the distress in Ireland, 1847*. p. 39. H.C. 1847 (796) Li.



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helped by the government to do what was their inherent duty. Table 1:2 provides some evidence as to 'the upper and middle classes' available in the case-study unions, plotting the total number of landholders in each union and the numbers who held land towards the greater end of the scale. (See also Appendix I). As this table reveals, Thurles had the largest number of big landholders (principally big graziers renting their farms), and

**Table 1:2**  
**Landholders of 100-1000**  
**Acres**

Union	No. of People Holding Land	No. of People Holding 100-1000 Acres
Ballina	29,785	156
Dundalk	6,740	125
Inishowen	12,629	72
Thurles	17,593	259 <sup>90</sup>

Inishowen the fewest. All landholders with one-hundred acre farms were by definition potential leaders of their respective neighbourhoods. In no sense were they at risk from famine, whatever about the famine fevers that did not limit themselves to the poor and hungry.

The commissioners in their instructions of 1846 made it quite clear as to whom they held responsible for the relief of the poor:

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<sup>90</sup> *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor, and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee, 1846, pp 394-7, H.C. 1846 (694), ii, 2.*



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It is evident, and is also in strict accordance with the views and instructions of the government, that the landholders and other ratepayers are the parties both legally and morally answerable for affording due relief to the destitute poor, and that the same parties are, from their local influence, and their knowledge of the situation and wants of the people in their neighbourhoods, best able to furnish such relief without waste or misdirection of the means employed.<sup>91</sup>

None of the four lord lieutenants of the counties of Louth, Tipperary, Mayo or Donegal lived in the four poor law unions.<sup>92</sup> At the beginning of 1846, they were the Marquess of Abercorn for County Donegal; the Marquess of Sligo for County Mayo; Sir Patrick Bellew for County Louth; and the Earl of Donoughmore for County Tipperary.<sup>93</sup> The Marquess of Abercorn (born in 1811 and succeeding to the title in 1818) had no base in the county, although he occasionally resided at one of the family seats not far away at Baronscourt, near Omagh, County Tyrone.<sup>94</sup> The Marquess of Sligo (born in January 1820 and only succeeding to the title in January 1845) lived in the south of County Mayo at Westport House.<sup>95</sup> Patrick Bellew, the lord lieutenant of Louth, was unusual in that he was a Catholic landowner. Born in January 1798, he was raised to the peerage in July 1848. His seat was at

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<sup>91</sup>*Instructions 1846*, p. 18.

<sup>92</sup>*Dublin Almanac and General Register of Ireland for the Year 1846* (Dublin, 1846) pp 249, 251, 263; Sir Bernard Burke, *Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage* (London, 1900) pp 5, 66, 476, 136, 969, 1383.

<sup>93</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845) pp 502, 544, 541, 562.

<sup>94</sup>*Burke's Peerage*, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1383.



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Barmeath, County Louth, not far from the union.<sup>96</sup> John Hely Hutchinson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Donoughmore, resided in the south of County Tipperary at Knocklofty, west of Clonmel.<sup>97</sup> Table 1:3 gives us an indication of the resident deputy lieutenants, justices of the peace and resident magistrates in the four poor law unions in 1846. It was these men to whom the government were hoping to entrust with the direction of poor relief, assuming that they were in good health and in good social and economic standing.

**Table 1:3**

Union	Deputy Lieut.	Resident Magistrates	Magistrates
Inishowen	3	-	13
Ballina	7	1	40
Dundalk	2	1	11
Thurles	4	1	17 <sup>98</sup>

In 1797 the Mayo Bench had comprised 118 justices of the peace. By 1850 this number had only increased to 135, including 3 stipendiary magistrates added during the 1830s. It was generally the same families who held the commissions from the 1790s to the 1830s, and indeed the office of magistrate was generally passed from father to son. For example, in Ballina in 1844 Thomas Jones

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 476.

<sup>98</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845), pp 512-4, 544-6, 541-3, 562-5.



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resigned as magistrate. Two months later his son received the commission.<sup>99</sup> And of the 40 magistrates who resided in the Ballina union in 1845, 28 were related to each other through blood or marriage.<sup>100</sup> The families of Bourke, Gardiner, Knox-Gore, Jackson, Kirkwood, Knox, Orme and Palmer dominated the magistracy in the union.

This tendency can also be seen in the union of Thurles, where 10 of the 17 magistrates were related to each other through blood or marriage. Of the magistrates on the Tipperary bench residing in the Thurles union, the Cardens were perhaps the most prominent; they were related through marriage to the Lloyds and to John Trant of Dovea who were also active. There would seem to have been friendly relations between most of the county's magistrates, even if they were not related.<sup>101</sup>

In the union of Inishowen 7 of the magistrates were related to each other through blood or marriage.<sup>102</sup> This particular knot of

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<sup>99</sup>Desmond Mc Cabe, 'Law, conflict and social change: County Mayo 1820-1845', (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. N.U.I.(UCD),1991), ii, p. 415.

<sup>100</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac, 1845*, pp 544-5. *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1845), pp 679, 680-1, 974, 993.

<sup>101</sup>Diary of John Trant, 18 Oct., 1852 (National Library of Ireland) (Hereafter referred to as NLI), Trant Papers, Ms.2566). *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1871), pp 803, 1207; Church of Ireland Records, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.7)

<sup>102</sup>Church of Ireland Records, Fahan Upper and Lower, Merville Upper and Lower (PRONI, Church of Ireland Records Mic/1/180; Mic/1/181; Mic/1/138; Mic/1/139).



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men were a tight-knit group who guarded their position in society quite jealously. When Lord Leitrim had approved the appointment of a Catholic, Thomas Doherty, to the bench in 1829, the Inishowen magistrates had written a memorial in protest.<sup>103</sup> Their attempts to have Doherty removed from the bench were successful. George Young, an evangelical Tory magistrate from the north end of the peninsula, recorded the event in his diary thus:

Heard that Thomas Doherty of Muff had been *superceded* by the Lord Chancellor, in compliance with the Memorial of the magistrates and that the Lord Chancellor was induced to do so at once, without any further investigation as to the fairness of Thomas Doherty for the office of Magistrate than the evidence of Thomas Doherty's own letter to his Lordship, beginning "Sir, I no I have many inmies (sic)."<sup>104</sup>

This was not to have been the last time Young had a grievance concerning Doherty. In 1842 he recorded his disgust at the fact that Doherty had been elected chairman of the new Inishowen board of guardians. Young and his friends on the board had been outvoted on the issue by a majority of 3, 'the priests having carried the day as usual.'<sup>105</sup> Young and his fellow magistrates had a decidedly hostile relationship with the local Catholic clergy. The correspondence of Edward Maginn, who later became Catholic

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<sup>103</sup>Diary of George Young (Typescript), 24 Nov., 1829 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (Hereafter referred to as PRONI) Young Papers, D/3045/6/4/1).

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 5 Jan., 1830.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 4 April 1842.



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coadjutor Bishop of Derry, reveals that after his appointment as Parish Priest of Fahan (and Buncrana), he wrote numerous appeals to the Castle to check the abuse of power exercised by magistrates in the neighbourhood.<sup>106</sup> Law and order in the union of Inishowen was in the hands of a group of conservatives who were regarded with great hostility by the leaders of a resurgent Catholic community.

In the union of Dundalk family connections among magistrates was not as prevalent as in the other three unions. Of the 11 magistrates it seems that only 5 were related through blood or marriage.<sup>107</sup> The magistracy in Dundalk was however dominated by the families of Roden, Bigger, Fortescue and MacNeill.

Thus the evidence would suggest that magistrates formed part of a network that had been forged either in blood relations, through marriage or by political connection. They could, as in the case of Inishowen, be a formidable, religiously motivated and domineering clique. But more importantly, the magistrates in these four unions had enough experience of working, living and

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<sup>106</sup>Thomas D'Arcy Magee, *A life of the Rt. Rev Edward Maginn. Coadjutor Bishop of Derry with selections from his correspondence* (New York, 1857), p. 49.

<sup>107</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac, 1845*, p. 542; *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1904), p. 198; *Debrett's Peerage, Baronetage, Knightage and Companionage* (London, 1930), pp 808-9.



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socialising together to mobilise themselves quickly in an effort to relieve the poor in times of emergency. This fact alone could bring its own problems as well as advantages. Desmond McCabe has argued that until the 1830s the local gentry in Mayo clung to the idea that they enjoyed an 'unrestricted quasi-feudal autonomy', a belief that was shared and rendered possible by the peasantry. He has suggested that new economic pressures and several subsistence crises after the 1820s led to a series of confrontations with the peasantry, exposing the hollowness of the popular vision of the responsible landowner always acting as the people's friend in times of economic distress.<sup>108</sup> Even if this shift in popular thinking did occur in the 1830s, hostility to the Mayo gentry was rarely expressed before the Famine.

Between the Act of Union and Disestablishment, the Catholic population in Ireland not only increased but the general easing of the penal laws, Emancipation in 1829 and the establishment of a national system of education in 1831 brought with them a steady rise in the social, political and economic expectations of Catholics.<sup>109</sup> It was during this time that Catholics became more actively involved in 'middle-class' occupations in many Irish

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<sup>108</sup> Desmond McCabe, 'Law, conflict and social change: County Mayo 1820-1845', (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, N.U.I.(UCD), 1991. ii, p. 487.

<sup>109</sup> Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-70. A study of Protestant-Catholic relations between the Act of Union and Disestablishment.* (Dublin, 1978), pp134-5, p142.



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towns. In his study of the Catholic church in County Tipperary, Kevin Whelan has suggested that an ‘articulate and mobilised Catholic middle class in County Tipperary began to emerge in the latter part of the eighteenth century’, and that from the 1790s Catholicism there began to take shape as a strong communal force.<sup>110</sup> The growing involvement of Catholic freeholders in contested parliamentary elections over the next thirty years was an apprenticeship for many Catholic families who in the 1840s went a step further in public life by becoming poor law guardians.

The chairmen of the four unions and all the poor law guardians were, it seems, resident. Table 1:4 reveals the number of possible social actors in 1846, men who were in a position in the main towns to help in the moment of crisis.

**Table 1:4**  
**Distribution of Gentry and Middle-Class Urban Residents, 1846**

Union	Town	Clergy	Gentry	Prof.	Traders	Total
Dundalk	Dundalk	10	55	45	292	402
	Carlingford	3	17	2	24	46
Inishowen	Buncrana	6	23	1	50	80
Ballina	Killala	5	22	4	29	60
	Ballina	8	64	30	143	245
Thurles	Templemore	7	25	8	89	129
	Thurles	15	37	26	151	229 <sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Kevin Whelan, ‘The Catholic Church in County Tipperary, 1700-1900’ in William Nolan (ed.) *Tipperary history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1985), pp 219-225.

<sup>111</sup> Slater, pp316-18, 314, 20, 35, 129, 104, 421, 501; Pigott, p311, 310, 137, 147, 209, 194.



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As we can see, the towns of Dundalk, Ballina and Thurles would seem to have had the strongest social base, with the additional advantage of a rising merchant class which could have helped in emergency relief of the poor. (These calculations are based on the assumption that the occupational classifications in Slater's 1846 *Directory* were standardised across all towns and operated consistent rules of inclusion.)

Of all the groups listed by the government commissioners as potential relief workers, it was the clergymen (of all denominations) who were the most important. It was these men who had a broad-based and intimate knowledge of the poor as well as the rich in the community, a knowledge that was crucial in mobilising famine relief. Tables 1:5 and 1:6 chart the distribution of clergy of the various religious denominations in the unions and the denominational pattern in the towns.<sup>112</sup>

**Table 1:5**  
**Distribution of Clergy**

Union	Est. Church	Cath.	Pres.	Other	Total
Thurles	12	29	0	1	42
Dundalk	15	21	2	3	41
Ballina	15	29	2	4	50
Inishowen	17	19	9	5	50

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<sup>112</sup> *First report of the commissioners on public instruction (Ireland) with appendix, 1835*, pp 42c, 44c, 50-2c, 54c, 56-7c, 58c, 60c, 64-5c, 130-3a, 136-7a, 140-7a, 150-1a, 154-5a, 170-3a, 244-6a, 248-9a, 252-3a, 256-7a, 262-3a, 266-7a, 52-5d, 56-7d, H.C. 1835. (46) xxxiii.



**Table 1:6**  
**Distribution of Religions in Towns**

Union	Town	Est. Church	Cath.	Pres.	Other
Dundalk	Carlingford	549	11,481	155	0
	Dundalk	1,447	12,614	252	0
Inishowen	Buncrana	739	4,892	250	0
	Moville	692	4,566	363	0
Ballina	Killala	430	3,699	26	0
	Ballina	904	14,591	5	42
Thurles	Templemore	635	4,590	1	0
	Thurles	270	10,349	0	19

There were over twice the number of Catholic clergy in the union of Thurles than of clergymen of the Established Church. The same was true of the union of Ballina although there is a greater representation of other denominations. Clergy of the main churches were nearer to equilibrium in the union of Dundalk where there were missionary associations for Wesleyan Methodists and Baptists.<sup>113</sup> In the union of Inishowen, however, the total complement of Protestant clergy outnumbered the Catholic priests. It is striking that despite the fact that Inishowen union had far less than half the population of the union of Ballina, there was the same number of clergymen in each. In the union of Inishowen

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<sup>113</sup> Edward B. Cooper, *The Dundalk Almanack and Directory for the Year 1837* (Dundalk, 1837), p. 84.



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there were some 871 people per cleric; in the union of Dundalk, 1,637 per cleric; in the union of Thurles, 1,714 per cleric; and in Ballina, 2,416 people per cleric. And while these figures do not take into consideration the differing mix of denominations we can assume that (at least in theory) clergymen of all religious denominations were equally willing and able to aid the poor in times of want. Therefore these numbers provide a real indication of variations in the supply of appropriate communal leaders in the four areas.

There were indeed stark differences in the human resources available to respond to crisis. Outside the urban areas, the under-supply of a professional class and of 'strong' farming families in Inishowen and Ballina left the business of relief to the various estate authorities – agents, under-agents, and gentry families themselves. Even in Dundalk and Thurles the better-off farming class did not have a history of strong involvement in public life. The towns had such a tradition of broader participation in social action and with the growing numbers and complexity of the trading community, they had a greater capacity than ever to assume



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communal responsibility in the provision of relief. Whether they were prepared to take up this role remains to be seen.



## CHAPTER TWO

### CHARITABLE SOCIETIES 1817-1852

This examination of relief activity in early nineteenth-century Ireland will analyse the relief committee structure, both in the form of ad hoc committees that evolved to deal with extraordinary periods of distress, and those committees which dealt with local poverty on an ongoing basis. The latter group will be the particular subject of this chapter. It has already been established that there was a distinct part of the population in each union district that lived on or below a low subsistence level throughout the period under review. Therefore, questions are raised on whether there was a proliferation of charitable societies established to help the poor, especially in the period before the introduction of the poor law, or did those who were in a position to help take a more individualistic approach to charity.<sup>1</sup> Where charitable societies did exist their personnel will be examined in terms of social standing, religious background, and where possible, political affiliation. By examining these aspects of local

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<sup>1</sup>As has already been noted, Ireland had not been divided into poor law unions before 1838. It is, therefore, necessary to devise an appropriate terminology to describe district boundary lines that did not exist at this time. Therefore, in the following pages, the term "union district" refers to the area that was eventually to be a poor law union. Thus Ballina union district means what was eventually to be the Ballina poor law union.



relief, it is hoped that a social profile can be constructed of the local charity worker in each union.

### **Charity in Dundalk**

An overview of charitable societies in the Dundalk union district during this period reveals a very vigorous history of charitable institutions. The majority of these societies were based in the town of Dundalk. With the exception of a network of dispensaries and the county Infirmary, which was also based in the town, Dundalk charitable societies relied on subscriptions from the town's inhabitants. One charity, the Public Bakery, was established in 1811 in Dundalk under the patronage of the Earl of Roden and other prominent inhabitants. It was credited not only with improving the quality of bread in the town but also lowering its price. Shares in the bakery were sold for £50 each. Rules stipulated that no one person could have more than ten shares. In a very short time the total of £1,000 was subscribed. Accounts were examined by a management committee elected annually. This twelve-person committee was then divided into subcommittees of four. The chairman attended every day and the three remaining members attended every Tuesday. Each member



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present received 3s 9.5d for their attendance. If a member was absent they were fined 2s 6d.<sup>2</sup>

A Friendly Society was also set up early in the century under the direction of a committee of subscribers who met monthly. Financial help was dependent on a member's recommendation and on the potential recipient promising to relinquish mendicancy. By 1816 contributions were said to be quite large.<sup>3</sup> Subscribers to another town charity, the Dorcas fund, contributed the small sum of one penny a week but this amount was believed to be effective in helping the poor. When the Dorcas association was established in Dublin, its main aims were to promote the religious instruction of Protestants and to relieve the Protestant poor by distributing clothes either free or at reduced prices as well as providing loans, donations, food and fuel.<sup>4</sup> During 1815 the fund supplied approximately one hundred and twenty people with blankets and clothing. The success of the fund was attributed to the efforts of local women.<sup>5</sup> However the economic downturn in the area in the second decade of the century meant that this and every institution in the town experienced financial difficulties.

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<sup>2</sup>Rev Elias Thackeray, 'Statistical survey of Dundalk parish in 1816', in *Tempest's Annual, 1907* (Dundalk, 1907), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> *The Dublin Almanac and General Register of Ireland 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p. 325.

<sup>5</sup>Rev Elias Thackeray, 'Statistical survey of Dundalk parish in 1816,' in *Tempest's Annual 1907* (Dundalk, 1907), p. 34.



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Charity in Dundalk at this time had one common denominator, the patronage of Robert Jocelyn, Earl of Roden. Roden was the force behind the establishment of many local charity groups in Dundalk. As we have already seen, Roden was a landlord who split his time between his homes in Ireland and England. Roden was represented in Dundalk by his agent, John Stratton, who was also related to him through marriage. By 1850, Roden held land locally with a rateable value of £8,600, making him the second highest ratepayer in the union of Dundalk.<sup>6</sup> He was patron of the local infirmary, the public bakery and the Dundalk Savings Bank, which was established on 1 August 1820. It opened every Saturday from 12 to 1.30pm. Its membership was exclusively Protestant, a trend that ran through most Roden-backed charities.<sup>7</sup> But it was Roden's patronage of the Destitute Sick Society which proved, in an indirect way, to be the impetus for the establishment of another charitable group, the Dundalk Benevolent Society. In a letter to the *Louth Free Press* on 2 May 1829 a local doctor, Peter Fitzpatrick, accused the Destitute Sick Society of religious bigotry and of being nothing more than a vehicle of proselytism insofar as Catholic clergy and laymen were excluded from taking part in the running of the society.

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<sup>6</sup>Griffith's Valuation, *Union of Dundalk*.

<sup>7</sup>Edward C. Cooper, *The Dundalk Almanack and Directory for the Year 1837* (Dundalk, 1837), p. 84.



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Fitzpatrick excluded the Protestant clerical members of the society in his accusation. However his doubts as to Lord Roden's motives would seem to have been well-founded. Roden was to become a patron of the Association for the Relief of Distressed Protestants (established in October 1836), a national organisation that believed in the evils

that flow from the close admixture of the Protestant and Popish population. The deep moral injury hence arising to poor Protestants can be easily understood by those who are enlightened by the word of God. Nothing tends more to lower moral principle, to lessen Christian practice, and to enslave the soul, than intermarrying with Roman Catholics- it is in innumerable instances the source of adversity and irreligion, and pit of temporal and external misery; and whenever this matrimonial disunion exists, the Committee have found it impossible to improve the social, moral and religious condition of the poor among whom the Association works.<sup>8</sup>

Fitzpatrick's protest prompted the establishment of the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society (also called the Dundalk Benevolent Association) in an effort to redress the balance. This society was presumably based on the Dublin 'Charitable Society for the Relief of Sick and Indigent Room-Keepers of all Religious Persuasions.' The society, founded in 1790, was well supported by voluntary donations, bequests and Protestant and Roman Catholic charity sermons.<sup>9</sup> The Dundalk branch of the society, however, received an unenthusiastic response and was short-lived.

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<sup>8</sup>*Seventh annual report of the Association for the Relief of Distressed Protestants for the year 1843.* p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory, 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 663.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

By the 1830s, other charitable societies had also been established in the town. The Dundalk Education Society was formed in February 1830, its aim being 'to educate without reference to creed or sect, the humbler classes of people.'<sup>10</sup> The Ladies' Benevolent Society sold clothes to the poor at a cheap price. The Dundalk Mendicity Association was established in December 1834. In 1827 Elizabeth Fry and John Gurney had described the functions of the Mendicity Association in general as follows:

The most wretched and destitute part of the population which as formerly without any means of support except begging, are referred, under the care of these societies to some large house in the town, appointed for the purpose, where they are employed in various kinds of work, fed and sometimes, if necessary, lodged; and their poor ragged children disciplined and instructed.<sup>11</sup>

Coming comparatively late to the town, the Dundalk Mendicity Association was a predominantly Protestant society, its only Catholic members being the Rev John Marmion and local merchant Thomas Coleman. It divided the town into nine districts. Two inspectors were appointed to each district and it was through these inspectors that all recommendations for relief were made. The Association was run on voluntary contributions with local inspectors acting as collectors. Relief was given

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<sup>10</sup>*Louth Free Press*, 17 Feb. 1830, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth Fry and John Gurney, *Report addressed to the Marquess Wellesly, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by E.F. and J.J.G. respecting their late visit to that country* (London, 1827), pp 45-6.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

weekly to the needy in proportion to their wants and to the amount of funds in the coffers.

Charitable activity in the union district of Dundalk was, with the exception of a network of dispensaries, confined very largely to the town. It would appear from Edward B. Cooper's *Dundalk Almanac and Directory for the Year 1837*, that the running of the Dundalk Mendicity Association, the Dundalk Savings Bank and the Destitute Sick Society was in the hands of twenty-one men. The social background of these members was clerical (5), gentry(10), mercantile(4), professional (1) and 1 turnpike road surveyor. Using Cooper's *Almanack* (Table 2:1) we can establish the name, social standing, religion and charitable involvement of each member. In an effort to determine committee membership outside of the typically subscription reliant society the table also incorporates those members who were committee members for the county Gaol, Railway and the Dundalk Institution.

Of the 21 members, 12 were involved in more than one local committee, whether those committees were relief organisations or otherwise. The local Protestant clergy were the most active committee men.

The social background of these members was mixed, the religious background overwhelmingly Protestant. Given that the Earl of Roden was the patron of the Dundalk Savings Bank and



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the Destitute Sick Society, the Protestant nature of these groups should perhaps come as no surprise. The vicar of the parish of Dundalk was the Rev Elias Thackeray. Thackeray was a formidable charity worker in the region. He arrived as a young clergyman in Dundalk in 1803 and remained there until his death in April 1854. Educated in Cambridge, Thackeray was a Captain in the 3rd Dragoon Guards before ordination. (It was this regiment that brought Wolfe Tone to Dublin after his arrest.)<sup>12</sup> He worked in many charities both in the town and outside of it and worked with clergymen of every persuasion. He was a member of the Dundalk Mendicity Association and the Dundalk Destitute Sick Society. He sat on committees for the local Erasmus Smith's School and the Charter school.<sup>13</sup> During the Famine he was a member and at times chairman of the Dundalk town relief committee and a member of the management committee of the Dundalk visiting dispensary.

There were two common strands running through the lay membership of local charitable institutions: family and friendship. Alexander Shekleton and George Shekleton were brothers; John Chambers was second cousin to Henry Mc Clintock's father and James Tipping's nephew was married to Mc Clintock's

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<sup>12</sup>Rev J.B. Leslie, *Supplement to Armagh clergy and parishes* (Dundalk, 1948), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup>Edward B. Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp 77-86.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

daughter.<sup>14</sup> These charity workers also socialised together. Henry Mc Clintock was on friendly terms with George Forster, William Purcell, Alexander Shekleton, James Tallon, Rev Elias Thackeray, R.J. Philips and Major Frood.<sup>15</sup>

Dundalk was home to a Wesleyan Missionary Association and a Presbyterian Missionary Association.<sup>16</sup> There was also a number of societies run on a voluntary basis and devoted primarily to the distribution of bibles and educational material on the scriptures. These formed part of a new evangelical crusade in the early part of the nineteenth century to convert the country's Catholics to Protestantism. One part of this new brand of evangelicalism was a doctrine known as pre-millennialism. Briefly, these pre-millennialists believed that divine providence determined human history and that this history could be found in the scriptures in a coded form. Among these conditions were the conversion of Jews and heathens and the destruction of the antichrist of the Book of Revelation, which they believed was the Roman Catholic church. Therefore the main aim of these pre-millennialists was to eradicate Catholicism in Ireland, believing it

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<sup>14</sup>'Minutes of the vestry for the Parish of Dundalk, 1810-1812' in *Tempest's Annual* (Dundalk, 1940), p. 4; Diary of Henry Mc Clintock, 3 Oct. 1832 (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D3580/1/16; *Ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1832).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1817; 23 July 1817.

<sup>16</sup>Edward B. Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 85.



**Table 2:1**  
**Dundalk Charity Activists**

Name	Social Standing	Religion	No. of Char. Soc.	No. of Other Soc.
Rev E. Thackeray	Clergyman	C. of I.*	3	1
Rev J.H. Stubbs	Clergyman	C. of I.	3	1
Rev J. Beatty	Clergyman	Pres.	3	1
Major J. Flood	Gentleman	C. of I.	3	3
Rev A. Molony	Clergyman	C. of I.	3	1
Rev J. Marmion	Clergyman	Cath.	1	0
J. Chambers	Professional	Pres.	1	3
T. Coleman	Trader	Cath.	1	1
A. Shekleton	Trader	C. of I.	3	2
H. McClintock	Gentleman	C. of I.	2	1
J. Eastwood	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	0
R.J. Philips	Gentleman	C. of I.	2	0
G. Shekleton	Trader	C. of I.	1	0
R. McGusty	Gentleman	C. of I.	2	0
G. Forster	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	0
W. Forster	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	0
W. Purcell	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	0
J. Tallan	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	0
J. Tipping	Gentleman	C. of I.	1	1
J. Knowles	Trader	C. of I.	1	0
M. Mallan	Surveyor	?	1	0

\* C. of I. = Church of Ireland

**Sources:** Edward B. Cooper, op. cit., pp 77-86; Church of Ireland Records. Register of Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals, Parish of Dundalk, 1803-21 (PRONI Church of Ireland Registers, Dundalk. MIC/1/204); Catholic Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers, Dundalk Parish, 1790-1901 (Louth County Library; PRONI Roman Catholic Church Records, Dundalk. MIC/1D/46); Rev J.B. Leslie, *The Armagh clergy and parishes* (Dundalk, 1911).



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to be the main cause of the country's problems.<sup>17</sup> Such evangelical groups were to be found in the union district of Dundalk in the shape of the Dundalk Auxiliary to the London Hibernian Society, the Dundalk Auxiliary to the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, the Louth Bible Society, and the Association for Discountenancing Vice. The latter association was founded in 1792 and incorporated by act of parliament in 1800. Its aim was to promote the knowledge and practice of the Christian religion.<sup>18</sup> This was hoped to be achieved by the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures and the Book of Common Prayer. The Dundalk branch represented the Upper Division of the Diocese of Armagh. It sold 3,885 bibles, 3,213 testaments, 5,867 prayer books and 20,425 tracts between 25th October 1821 to 1st March 1836.<sup>19</sup> They raised funds by subscriptions and by charity sermons. They were the beneficiaries of funds raised by charity sermons such as the one given by Caesar Otway in 1832.<sup>20</sup> The Louth Bible Society was established in 1820. Subscriptions to the society amounted to £611 10s

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<sup>17</sup>Irene Whelan, 'The stigma of soupierism' in Cathal Poirteir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 1995), pp 143-4.

<sup>18</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 663.

<sup>19</sup>Edward B. Cooper, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>20</sup>Diary of Henry Mc Clintock, 18 March 1832 (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D/3580/1/16).



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between April 1835 and April 1836.<sup>21</sup> The Bible meetings in Dundalk were by any account, fervent affairs:

A Bible meeting in the Market House of Dundalk...Mr Brown and Mr Daly were most forceful in advocating the circulation of God's word, the Bible- but particularly Mr Daly- who really delighted us all.<sup>22</sup>

The members of these evangelical committees were all active local charity workers. Over fifty per cent of local charity workers who were also evangelical played an active part in local committees. This is not to suggest that their charitable endeavours were purely motivated by aggressive evangelical concerns. However there can be no doubt that local benevolent societies were in the hands of a very motivated Protestant population. However given that the population of Dundalk parish stood at roughly 1,555 Church of Ireland and 268 Presbyterians, as opposed to 12,476 Catholics, there was surprisingly very little Catholic backlash.<sup>23</sup> Catholic clergy, while not heavily engaged in local charitable committees, did act in informal ways, notably as distributors of donations given to them for charitable purposes. In 1844 a merchant from Dundalk, Michael Kelly, left money in his will to parish priest, John Coyne to establish a convent to

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<sup>21</sup>Edward B. Cooper, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>22</sup>Diary of Henry McClintock, 2 Oct., 1832. (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D3580/1/16).

<sup>23</sup>*First report of the commissioners on public instruction (Ireland) with an appendix 1835*, p. 142a. H.C. 1835 (46) xxxiii.



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teach female children and to aid the completion of the new Catholic church in the town. He also ordered:

£500 to be put in the funds in the name of the aforesaid Rev John Coyne, the interest of which is to be drawn by him and his successors in the parish of Dundalk, and applied yearly to the relief of the destitute sick, and to provide coffins for them when dead. I also leave £500 to be funded in the same manner, and the interest to be applied by the parish priest of Dundalk and his curates to procure medical aid for the sick poor in cases of great distress; I order also these charitable bequests and legacies to be paid off as soon as possible.<sup>24</sup>

However the overall response to Dr. Fitzpatrick's Dundalk Benevolent Association was less than enthusiastic. A meeting to form the association was postponed three times.<sup>25</sup> Cooper's failure to list the association would indicate that it had disappeared altogether by 1837. There is no more reference to it in the local newspapers. Another Catholic-backed institution, the Dundalk Education Society would seem to have also failed to pass the test of time. Such evidence suggests that local Catholic dignitaries did not believe such evangelical groups were a serious threat to the souls of their poorer Catholic neighbours. The parish priest of Dundalk from 1800-1817, Dr. Magennis McArdle did clash with Rev Elias Thackeray over the use of Scriptures in the classroom. Thackeray did, in the event, back down on the issue.

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<sup>24</sup>*Charitable donations and bequests (Ireland) Specification of the several sums at present administered by the commissioners of charitable donations and bequests in Ireland, stating by whom left and objects in each case. 1846, p. 28, H.C.1846 (285) XLII.*

<sup>25</sup>*Louth Free Press*, 30 Dec. 1829; 7 Jan. 1830; 15 Jan. 1830.



Mc Ardle's successor, Matthew Mc Cann, parish priest of Dundalk (1817-1836) reacted to local Protestant evangelical activity by launching a series of lectures to rebut their teachings.<sup>26</sup>

With these exceptions, Catholic reaction to Protestant evangelicalism would seem to have been lacklustre. Yet Dundalk's Catholic community were not slow to voice their opinions on the repeal of the union. One particular meeting attracted ninety-three predominantly Catholic inhabitants.<sup>27</sup> Thus in a town with a confident, wealthy Catholic middle-class, it was the Protestant population who established, ran and sustained charitable societies. This is not to suggest that the Catholic community did little to help their poorer neighbours, but in a committee context, they appeared to have valued politics or poverty.

### **Medical Relief: Dundalk**

It was the early part of the nineteenth-century before the government addressed the issue of hospitals to meet the requirements of the Irish poor. In the absence of any real effort to supply the needs of the sick poor, it was philanthropists who sustained the Irish voluntary hospital movement. This movement

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<sup>26</sup>Fr Michael Murtagh, *St. Patrick's, Dundalk. An anniversary account* (Dublin, 1997) p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>*Dundalk Patriot*, 11 March 1848.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

led to the establishment of a network of mainly voluntarily supported infirmaries.<sup>28</sup> The only county infirmary within the four poor law union districts was in Dundalk. The infirmary, which contained twenty-eight beds, doubled up as a dispensary. In its capacity as a dispensary, the establishment was found to be adequately supplying the needs of the district's poor. However as an infirmary, its effectiveness was found to be deficient. Admission refusals were not uncommon.<sup>29</sup> By 1843 the infirmary was being governed by 69 men and women. Three of these governors were installed by act of parliament, eighteen by subscription and forty eight on the basis of donation.<sup>30</sup> They met at quarterly meetings and at times assigned to overview the accounts. A subcommittee also met in the event of complaints or the need to acquire something new for the infirmary. Ordinary quarterly meetings usually attracted only fourteen members but this increased when elections were taking place.<sup>31</sup> Nearly all the landed proprietors in the county were governors, including absentee landlords.<sup>32</sup> The clergymen involved in the infirmary were said to have worked well together. The Rev Elias

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<sup>28</sup>Joseph Robins, *The Miasma. Epidemic and panic in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), p. 36.

<sup>29</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland)*, Appendix B. pp 346-7. H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii.2.

<sup>30</sup>*Report from the select committee on medical charities, Ireland; Together with the minutes of evidence. Appendix and Index, 1843*, p. 77. H.C. 1843 (412), x.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81.



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Thackeray, despite the altercation over scriptures on the school issue, attested:

I have been now thirty-eight years meeting clergymen of the different churches upon business of charity, and I never saw a dispute in my life arise from it, but the very best of understanding.<sup>33</sup>

At one particular meeting on the 10 October 1842, the following men were present.

**Table 2:2**  
**Governors: Louth County Infirmary**

Name	Social Standing	Religion	Other Experience
Thomas Fortescue	Gentleman	C. of I.*	Yes
Lord Ferrard	Gentleman	C. of I.	?
Thomas Lee Norman	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
James W. Mac Neill	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
Rev E. Thackeray	Clergyman	C. of I.	Yes
Richard Bennison	Trader	?	Yes
Edward Healy	Trader	Cath.	Yes
Patrick Wynne	Trader	Cath.	Yes
Rev Dr. Campbell	Clergyman	Cath.	Yes
J.J. Bigger	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
James Eastwood	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
George McGusty	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
Edward Tipping	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
Joseph Booth	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
William Filgate	Gentleman	C. of I.	Yes
Mr Shekleton	Trader	C. of I.	Yes <sup>34</sup>

C. of I. = Church of Ireland

With the exceptions of Lord Ferrard, Joseph Booth and William Filgate, those present came from the Dundalk area. While there

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 125; Catholic Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers. Dundalk Parish 1790-1901 (Louth County Library; PRONI, Roman Catholic Church Records, Dundalk. MIC/1D/46); Register containing list of baptisms, marriages, funerals in the parish of Dundalk, 1803-1821 (PRONI, Church of Ireland



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were Catholics in attendance, again the religious profile was predominantly Church of Ireland. Nine of the sixteen can be identified in terms of political affiliation. Six were Liberals, three were Tory supporters, and there was one Repealer.<sup>35</sup> While the political affiliations may have been varied, these sixteen governors were no strangers to charitable activities. Of the sixteen men, fourteen had a history in local charity. Thus even the infirmary governors reflected the local pattern in benevolence.

### Dispensaries

In 1805 legislation was passed to promote the establishment of dispensaries in areas that were a sizeable distance from the county infirmary. They were to be supported by local subscription, to which was added an equivalent amount from Grand Juries. Dispensaries were to attend to the sick poor and be the core medical establishments in times of epidemic.<sup>36</sup> The dispensary provided a valuable free service, but as Sir George Nicholls pointed out:

In districts abounding in rich resident proprietors, a medical charity is least wanted, but subscriptions are there most easily obtained; while in districts where there are few, or possibly no resident proprietors, the aid

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Registers, Dundalk. MIC/1/204); *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland*. (Dublin, 1856) pp 316-18.

<sup>35</sup>Noel Ross, 'Nineteenth-century election posters' in *JCLAH*. xvi. No.4 (Dundalk, 1968), pp 224-232; Brian Walker (ed.) *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 70.

<sup>36</sup>Joseph Robins, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

is most wanted but there are no subscribers and consequently there is no medical charity.<sup>37</sup>

The twenty year period 1810-1830 was the most active in terms of dispensary establishment. The Thurles union district reveals no obvious pattern in terms of establishment dates, ranging as they do from the year 1810 to 1830. This district did seem to contain dispensaries that catered more to the needs of wider districts than was the case elsewhere.

In the union of Inishowen, establishment dates correspond broadly with years of subsistence crisis but the Ballina union district contained only three dispensaries for an area that ranged forty miles in width.<sup>38</sup> In the union district of Inishowen, the Carndonagh dispensary had started out as the Carndonagh and Clonmany dispensary but by 1835 was confined to the Carndonagh parish because there had been no subscriptions from Clonmany in 1834.<sup>39</sup> The union district of Dundalk had dispensaries in Carlingford, Ballymascanlon, Louth and Dundalk. The Carlingford dispensary was established in 1813 and was supported half by subscription and half by presentment from

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<sup>37</sup>As quoted in Peter Froggatt, 'Response of the medical profession in the Great Famine' in E.M. Crawford (ed.) *Famine: The Irish experience 900-1900* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 136.

<sup>38</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Supplement to Appendix B, 1835* pp 10, 14. H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.2.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.



**Table 2:3**

**Dispensary System**

Union District	Dispensary	Established	No. of Parishes
Thurles	Thurles	1810	Parts of 14
Thurles	Templemore	1815	4
Thurles	Borrisoleigh	1827	Parts of 12
Thurles	Templetouhy	1830	Parts of 6
Inishowen	Culdaff	1817	2
Inishowen	Moville	1818	2
Inishowen	Fahan	1819	3
Inishowen	Carndonagh	1822	0
Ballina	Dromore West	N.A.	0
Ballina	Castleconnor & Kilglass	1828	6
Ballina	Erris	1830	2
Dundalk	Dundalk	N.A.	0
Dundalk	Carlingford	1813	1
Dundalk	Ballymascanlon	1829	1
Dundalk	Louth	1825	1

County Louth.<sup>40</sup> The dispensary catered to a population of 11,927 spread out over eight miles square. The medical attendant lived at the dispensary where he attended to the sick on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from eleven till three o'clock.<sup>41</sup> The dispensary committee was said to be very attentive, attending regularly the fixed quarterly meetings. One witness to the Poor Inquiry stated that:

The amount of subscriptions is about 40l per annum. There is no great subscription, the withdrawal of which would break up the charity; but if

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 61.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

several fall off, the institution must cease to exist. None of the poorer classes subscribe. No subscription is attended with any stipulation in favour of the subscriber.<sup>42</sup>

The Ballymascanlon dispensary was established in January 1829, and catered for a population of eight to nine thousand.<sup>43</sup> The medical officer lived nearly three miles away in Forkhill. He attended the dispensary ( a room in a schoolhouse) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 12 o'clock until all his patients were seen.<sup>44</sup> The Dundalk dispensary was attached to the infirmary and was said to be well run. Table 2:4 (see next page) reveals the membership of the dispensary committee in 1846, indicating that it was more representative of town life, with clergy, gentry, professionals and traders. While the religious composition of the committee was mixed, the political bent of the committee was overwhelmingly liberal.<sup>45</sup> Many of these people feature in relief committees before or during the famine. Experience in organisations like the dispensary was clearly a useful apprenticeship.

The general activities of a dispensary and the means of

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>45</sup>Noel Ross, 'Nineteenth-century election posters' in *JCLAH*. xvi. No.4 (Dundalk, 1968), pp 224-232. Brian Walker (ed.) *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 70.



**Table 2:4**  
**Dundalk Dispensary Committee 1846**

Name	Social Standing	Religion	Politics	Other Charity Experience
Rev E. Thackeray	Clergyman	C. of I.*	Liberal**	Yes
Rev J. Beatty	Clergyman	Pres.	Liberal	Yes
Rev J. Marmion	Clergyman	Cath.	Repeal	Yes
G. Shekleton	Trader	C. of I.	?	Yes
Rev J. Coyne	Clergyman	Cath.	Liberal	Yes
John Stratton	Professional	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
Graham Johnston	Professional	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
Robert Haig	Trader	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
E.G. Bruncker	Professional	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
John Gartlan	Professional	Cath.	Liberal	Yes
John Townley	Trader	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
James Carroll	Trader	Cath.	Liberal	Yes
Peter Russell	Trader	Cath.	Liberal	Yes
J. Shekleton	Trader	C. of I.	Liberal	?
Nicholas Martin	Trader	Cath.	Repeal	Yes
Patrick Denvir	Trader	Cath.	Liberal	Yes
James Knowles	Trader	C. of I.	Liberal	Yes
George Lawson	Trader	?	?	?
P.J. Byrne	Professional	Cath.	Liberal	?
Russell Patteson	Trader	?	Liberal	?
Edward Healy	Trader	Cath.	?	?

\* C. of I. = Church of Ireland

Sources: *Newry Examiner*, 18 Nov. 1846. p.3; Catholic Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers. Dundalk Parish, 1790-1901 (Louth County Library; PRONI. Roman Catholic Church Records, Dundalk. MIC/1D/46); Cholera Papers (Board of Health, County Louth, 2/440/9); Noel Ross, 'Two nineteenth-century election posters' in *JCLAH*. xvi. No.2 (Dundalk, 1968), pp 224-232; Brian Walker (ed.) *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978) p. 76.

\*\* Those members marked 'Liberal' voted for William Torrens McCullagh in the General Election 1847. Walker (1978) has named McCullagh as a Liberal candidate, although the election posters named above brand anyone who voted against the repeal candidate an orange sympathiser.



giving relief to the poor were described by a witness to the Poor

Inquiry:

All sick poor who attend get tickets, are entitled to relief. Some of the servants of subscribers are attended GRATIS. Persons who, from their circumstances, ought not, do sometimes apply for relief. The signature of one subscriber is sufficient and there is no limitation to the number of tickets each subscriber may issue, and as relief is never refused, no poor person can be without advice and medicine. The general management is vested in the subscribers who meet twice a year, three of whom form a quorum; the medical officer not being one of their number, the management has never devolved on the surgeon, as the governors are attentive.<sup>46</sup>

This system of management and relief distribution was quite common, extending itself to other areas of relief and becoming a widespread system of relief during the famine. Where no help was at hand the poor helped each other:

The lower orders of Irish have much feeling for each other. It is a rare thing to hear an angry, or contemptuous expression, addressed to any one who is poor: commiseration of the destitute condition of others, is largely mingled in their complaints of their own poverty; and it is a fact that they are most exemplary in the care which they take of their destitute relatives, and in the sacrifices which they willingly make for them.<sup>47</sup>

### Charitable Societies in Ballina

Ballina, like Dundalk, was home to a number of charitable societies. It also bore striking similarities to Dundalk, in that it was also a centre for mission work by Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists.<sup>48</sup> Ballina was also the seat of the Catholic bishop of Killala. The parish of Kilmoremoy, by which name the parish of

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<sup>46</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix B*, pp 60-1.

<sup>47</sup>Henry D. Inglis, *op. cit.*, pp 61-2.

<sup>48</sup>Edward B. Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 84.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

Ballina was known, comprised 1,159 Protestants, 13,408 Catholics, 5 Presbyterians and 23 other Protestant dissenters in 1835.<sup>49</sup>

Poverty in the Ballina union district was met on an ongoing basis from roughly 1830 by charitable organisations run by women but overseen by local Protestant clergymen. Active local ladies committees in the pre-famine years were the Ballina Ladies Charitable Association who held bazaars in aid of the poor; the Ballina Dorcas Society and the Crossmolina Dorcas Society who provided employment in the manufacture of wool and flax. These predominantly Protestant societies were run primarily by the wives and daughters of clergymen and laymen who were already active in other charities in the area.

The Ballina Benevolent Society was established in 1832 and during its first year of operation helped to relieve over 100 individuals. The society provided clothing for the poor and visited the sick. In 1840 its treasurer was H.M. Short, a local gentleman who was also a member of the Ballina Charitable Loan Society and a member of the Ballina relief committee in 1842. His wife was also on the committee of the Benevolent Society.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>*First report of the commissioners on public instruction (Ireland) With an Appendix, 1835*, p. 53d, H.C. 1835. xxxiii.

<sup>50</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 20 March 1840, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 28 Jan. 1842, p. 3.



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The Crossmolina Dorcas Society was established in 1831 to give employment to the poor in the neighbourhood, sell them clothes cheaply and give small loans of money to be repaid by weekly instalments. By February 1833 they had issued 599 loans amounting to £782 13s. The women in the society offered a pragmatic solution to the problem of poverty. Rather than distribute gratuitous relief they created opportunities for employment among the female poor.<sup>51</sup>

The Ballina Dorcas Society in 1833 comprised six female committee members.<sup>52</sup> Mrs Joseph Verschoyle was wife of the rector of Kilmoremoy and Mrs Allen was the wife of the local Baptist minister, Rev James Allen, who also acted as treasurer of the society. The remaining ladies were all the wives or daughters of local gentlemen. Mrs Joyner was the wife of the manager of the local Provincial Bank, Mr Joseph Joyner; Miss Ormsby was also a member of the Ballina Benevolent Society, as was Miss F. Mally.<sup>53</sup> Finally, Mrs Atkinson was wife of Captain John Atkinson, a local gentleman who was also involved in the Ballina Loan Fund Society.<sup>54</sup>

The charitable societies in Ballina were typical of many early

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<sup>51</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 22 April 1833, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 June 1834, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ballina Advertiser*, 21 Feb. 1840, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 2 June 1834. p. 3.



nineteenth-century relief organisations run by women. The women dispensed the charity and the men took care of the finances, thereby mirroring the gender roles in the home. Early nineteenth-century relief societies also gave annual accounts of their operations either at public meetings or published in newspapers. The societies in Ballina held annual public meetings to give an account of the committee's activities and financial position. In Ballina it was men who took the chair at these meetings. These men were related to the women in the societies.<sup>55</sup> The Rev Francis Kinkead (Ballina Benevolent Society), the Rev James Allen (Ballina Dorcas Society) and the Rev Edwin Stock (Crossmolina Dorcas Society), all took an active role in the financial management of these societies. Charity in Ballina, therefore, was a family affair.

The Ballina Charitable Loan Society was established in 1838.<sup>56</sup> Of the committee of seven men who ran the society six were active charity workers who played a significant part in other local charities. (See table on next page) Rev Joseph Verschoyle, rector of Kilmoremoy, was the second son of Bishop James Verschoyle. Joseph Verschoyle jnr first came to Ballina in 1817

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<sup>55</sup> Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 177; *Ballina Impartial*, 2 June 1834, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 20 March 1840. p. 2.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

and lived there for forty years.<sup>57</sup> Verschoyle was an active member on Ballina relief committees, right through to and including the Great Famine, when he sat on the Ballina baronial relief committee.<sup>58</sup> As has already been noted, his wife was also a member of the Ballina Dorcas Society.<sup>59</sup>

**Table 2:5**  
**Ballina Charitable Loan Society 1840**

Name	Social Standing	Religion*	Other Charitable Activities
Rev J. Verschoyle	Clergyman	Prot.	Yes
Capt. John Atkinson	Gentleman	Prot.	?
G.V. Jackson	Gentleman	Prot.	Yes
J. Knox Gore	Gentleman	Prot.	Yes
John Perkins	Gentleman	Prot.	Yes
Henry M. Short	Gentleman	Prot.	Yes
Rev F. Kinkead	Clergyman	Prot.	Yes <sup>60</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

George Vaughan Jackson, a JP and Deputy Lieutenant, was secretary of the Crossmolina relief committee in 1831, chaired the Crossmolina board of health in 1832, and by 1847 was reported to have travelled up to 100 miles per week to attend three relief committees in various parts of the county.<sup>61</sup> James

<sup>57</sup> Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality?* (Cork, 1970), pp 217-8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4; *Tyrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 2 June 1834, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland* (Dublin, 1846) p. 104; Church of Ireland Parish Records, Kilmoremoy (N.A. Church of Ireland Records. Reel No.32).

<sup>61</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 21 March 1831, p. 3; Cholera Papers 2/440/9, 22 June 1832; Society of Friends, *Transactions of the central relief committee of the Society of Friends during the famine in Ireland in 1846-7* (Dublin, 1852), p. 198.



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Knox Gore, a land agent who sat on a Ballina relief committee in 1842, was the second son of James Knox Gore of Broadlands, County Mayo.<sup>62</sup> John Perkins, a land agent and JP, sat on the Crossmolina relief committee in 1831.<sup>63</sup> Henry M. Short was a member of the Ballina board of health in 1831 and the Ballina relief committee in 1842.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the Rev Francis Kinkead, curate of the parish of Kilmoremoy, was another consistently active clergyman who served on relief committees and was the main force behind the establishment in January 1847 of the Ballina Ladies Institution for the Encouragement of Industry and Relief of the Poor.<sup>65</sup> Kinkead died later that month of fever caught while administering to the poor.<sup>66</sup>

Thus the evidence would again suggest that it was the same group of people who ran charitable committees in Ballina; that these people were Church of Ireland, Baptist or Presbyterian in religion and that charity was a family affair in the town.

### **Medical Relief: Ballina**

Ballina union district contained three dispensaries for an area that ranged forty miles in width. The Castleconnor and Kilglass dispensary catered for the parishes of Castleconnor, Kilglass,

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<sup>62</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 22 July 1842, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 2 March 1831, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 22 July 1842, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 17 Feb. 1848, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Jan. 1847, p. 3.



Kilmoremoy, part of Easkey in the county of Sligo, and Attymass and Kilgarvan in County Mayo.<sup>67</sup> The only complete listing available of a dispensary committee in the 1830s is of the Crossmolina dispensary committee. An analysis of the list reveals that not only was the committee made up almost entirely of Protestant magistrates but the same people formed the backbone of the local relief effort during the subsistence crisis of 1831.

**Crossmolina Dispensary Committee**

James Mc Nair M.D.  
Michael Cormick  
George Jackson  
Annesley Knox  
William Ormsby  
Thomas Paget  
Robert Orme  
George Vaughan Jackson  
Oliver C. Jackson

The eight magistrates and one doctor comprising the Crossmolina dispensary committee were all charity workers, taking part in the local relief committees during the crisis periods of 1830, 1831 and 1832.<sup>68</sup> Five of the nine members were still involved in charity at the time of the great famine. Dr James McNair and magistrate, Oliver Jackson, were still part of the relief effort in 1846. The philanthropic career of Lieutenant-Col. George Vaughan Jackson has already been noted, extending as it did to

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<sup>67</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Supplement to Appendix B. 1835*, pp 10, 14. H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.2.

<sup>68</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 13 June 1831, p. 4.



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the great famine. Annesley Knox, a JP and eventually a poor law guardian, was a member of the Ballina relief committee in 1830 and the Crossmolina relief committee in 1831.<sup>69</sup> By 1847, both he and his wife were operating a soup kitchen and factory out of their home, Rappa Castle.<sup>70</sup> Another JP, Robert Orme, from Gurtnarabbey, Crossmolina was a member of the Crossmolina relief committee in 1831<sup>71</sup> and was still part of the local relief effort in 1846.<sup>72</sup> Of the nine members, the religion of eight was determined and they were Protestant.<sup>73</sup> The dispensary committee was also resolutely anti-repeal in political belief.<sup>74</sup>

Added to this system of charitable groups was another layer of charity. Witnesses who gave evidence to the Poor Inquiry for Ballina and Kilmore-Erris in the Ballina union district stated that for the most part, the burden of relief of mendicants fell mostly on small farmers and local shopkeepers.<sup>75</sup>

The witnesses state, that the burden of relieving beggars falls principally on shopkeepers, and private families in towns, and small farmers in the country, that the relieving of them may cost shopkeepers, on an average, £5 per annum, many less than that, but some £7 or £10...In this opinion the greatest pressure falls on the small farmers and the more liberal of shopkeepers.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 13 June 1831, p. 4; 21 March 1831, p. 3; 29 Aug. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 25 March 1847, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4; 21 March 1831, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup>Parish Records of Crossmolina, Killala and Kilmoremoy (N.A. Church of Ireland Records Parish Records, Reel No. 32).

<sup>74</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 28 Feb. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix A, 1835*, pp 496, 744, 755-6. H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 744.



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When an area was very poor and there were no shopkeepers in a position to help, the poor helped each other.<sup>77</sup> The membership of the public committees bear striking similarities to the Dundalk union district, in that both districts had an active local charitable force that was overwhelmingly Protestant, operating in the shadow of an upsurge in evangelicalism. Dundalk was home to those evangelical groups already mentioned, while Ballina felt the ripples of the Achill experiment from 1834. The main difference in the Ballina instance was that the town would seem to have had a more active female benevolent base in the forms of the Ballina Dorcas Society (established 1830) and the Ballina Benevolent Society (established 1833). There is no evidence to suggest that there was a Catholic response in reaction to the establishment of these societies. No multi-denominational or specifically Catholic organisation was founded to counteract or even complement the work of existing charities. Ballina, like Dundalk, had a Catholic clergy, gentry and trader class that, it would seem, did not share their Protestant counterparts' enthusiasm for committee-based relief societies.

### **Charity in Pre-Famine Thurles and Inishowen**

Charity in pre-famine Thurles had a chequered history with respect to relief organisations. The Thurles Charitable Society



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was established in March 1830 for the relief of the sick and indigent of the parish, only to dissolve over a year later in an air of acrimony.<sup>78</sup> At the beginning, however, it was felt that the society was very much needed:

The want of some permanent body to attend to the wants, and extend relief, to the afflictions of this class of beings had long been felt in Thurles, and it appearing evident in those persons who had assisted in the distribution of nourishment etc. etc. in seasons of scarcity and want, that individual charity (no matter how liberally bestowed) could not reach the numerous and daily increasing objects.<sup>79</sup>

The initial meeting attracted seventeen people, a disappointing turnout compounded by the fact that the Catholic clergy of Thurles refused to take part in the society. The Catholic clergy were convinced that the society would be used as just another means of proselytising. Yet while the society did have a Protestant clergyman as a chairman and a Protestant treasurer, it was made up of men of other religious beliefs.<sup>80</sup> The animosity surrounding the affair led to the dissolution of the society in June 1831. No Catholic charity was formed to rival this particular society. Catholic hostility to the group was all the more surprising, given that a strong Protestant community had never really developed in Thurles town. The full Protestant population only numbered 294 in 1835. Thurles did not even have a strong

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp 506, 755-6.

<sup>78</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 8 June 1831, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 8 June 1831, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 8 June 1831, p. 3.



missionary presence as was the case in both Ballina and Dundalk. The hostility may have been due in part to the presence of Archdeacon Henry Cotton and his use of a tithe-proctor to collect tithes in the area. Cotton was a sub-librarian of the Bodleian library at Oxford when his father-in-law, Richard Lawrence, the Regius professor of Hebrew also at Oxford, was appointed to the Archbishopric of Cashel in 1822. Lawrence brought Cotton with him to Ireland where he was given the Archdeaconry and had two livings worth more than £1000 a year each.<sup>81</sup> Cotton had managed to antagonise the largely Catholic inhabitants of the town by employing a tithe proctor and his chairmanship of the society was most probably the reason for Catholic hostility.

The town of Thurles contained the Presentation and Ursuline convents. The Presentation Sisters operated their own textile workshop for local women and both convents educated poor female children free of charge.<sup>82</sup> St. Paul's Loan Fund Society was run by local parish priest, the Rev William Baron, local baker, Michael Kenny, and publican Martin Clair.<sup>83</sup>

The ledger of the Thurles Savings Bank lists local charities and their trustees. It reveals that charity in Thurles was patchy

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<sup>81</sup> Alan Acheson, *A history of the Church of Ireland, 1691-1996* (Dublin, 1997), p. 147.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Lewis, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 623.

<sup>83</sup> *Thurles Savings Bank Ledger. 1839*, p. 446-7, pp 637-9. (Tipperary County Library, Thurles)(Hereafter referred to as T.C.L.).



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and apart from the Savings Bank itself and the dispensary system, other charitable institutions did not stand the test of time.

### Charitable Institutions in Thurles Union District

<b>Society</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Trustee/s</b>
Agricultural Society	1841	Sir H. Carden; Nicholas Maher
Charitable Association	1833	William Cahill
Charitable Institution	1835	Martin Laffan
Fever Hospital	1836	Rev Thomas Atkinson; Rev W. Baker; T. Hennessy
Poor Fuel Fund	1841	Hugh Mulcahy
Thurles Dispensary	1835	Adam Cooke
Thurles Provident Protestant Fund Society	1842	Rev William Baker

One of the trustees of the Agricultural Society was Sir Henry Carden. Born in 1789, Sir Henry had served under the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo. He chaired the board of health in Templemore in 1832,<sup>84</sup> was ex-officio guardian for the Thurles union and a trustee of the Agricultural Society.<sup>85</sup> He was also chairman of the Templemore relief committee during the great famine.<sup>86</sup> Another trustee of the Agricultural Society, Nicholas Maher, took the seat in parliament held by his uncle,

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<sup>84</sup>Cholera Papers, 30 July 1832 (N.A. Board of Health, County Tipperary, 2/440/9).

<sup>85</sup>Thurles Union Minute Book, 25 May 1839; Thurles Savings Bank Ledger, 1841. P. 228. (Tipperary County Library).

<sup>86</sup>Relief Commission Papers. 3/2/2/27. D.299. (N.A. Relief Commission Papers, County Tipperary, 3/2/2/27). (Hereafter referred to as RLFC).



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Valentine Maher, when he died in 1844. A Catholic, Nicholas Maher took his seat on the Repeal ticket. During the Famine he was elected chairman of the Thurles and Moycarky relief committees.<sup>87</sup> However as will be seen in Chapter Six, Nicholas Maher attended only seven out of 137 meetings.<sup>88</sup> William Cahill, a Christian Brother, was a trustee to a charitable institution in 1833. Before he joined the order in 1815 he was one of a group of laymen who opened a school in Thurles for poor boys. Brother Cahill died on 22 June, 1843 aged 72.<sup>89</sup> Hugh Mulcahy was a trustee to the town's Poor Fuel Fund and a trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank.<sup>90</sup> He died in 1844. Rev Martin Laffan was Catholic curate in Thurles and trustee of a charitable institution in 1835.<sup>91</sup> Politically active, he regularly went to repeal meetings.<sup>92</sup> He became a member of the Thurles relief committee during the great famine.

The Thurles fever hospital in 1836 was principally under the direction of, among others, Rev Thomas Atkinson, Rev William Baker and Thomas Hennessy.<sup>93</sup> Baker, a Protestant clergyman,

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<sup>87</sup>RLFC Papers. Incoming Letters. No.9864. 1 Dec. 1846. (N.A. RLFC3/2 Tipp 2/442/6).

<sup>88</sup>Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee Minute Book. 13 Sept. 1846- Sept. 1847. (T.C.L.).

<sup>89</sup>Daniel O'Gorman, *Historic Thurles* (Limerick, 1984), pp 33-34.

<sup>90</sup>Thurles Savings Bank Ledger, 1841. p. 217. (T.C.L.).

<sup>91</sup>Thurles Savings Bank Ledger, 1835. p. 364. (T.C.L.).

<sup>92</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1844. p. 3.

<sup>93</sup>Thurles Savings Bank Ledger, 1836. p. 56. (T.C.L.).



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was also a trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank<sup>94</sup> and a member of the famine relief committee in Thurles in 1846. Local trader and repealer, Thomas Hennessy, was another active charity worker.<sup>95</sup> He was a member of the Thurles board of health; sat on the managing committee of the Thurles Savings Bank and sat on the Thurles relief committee during the famine.<sup>96</sup>

The town of Thurles also had two charitable loan funds. One of these, the Eliogarty Loan Fund, was established towards the end of 1841 and operated out of a room beside a spirit and general shop owned by John Butler, who established and managed the Fund. However it fell into disrepute within a short time of opening. An inspector reported that:

Rules have been violated by the managers paying a larger amount of expenses than is allowed, and a high rate of interest on the Debentures than they warrant...I have no hesitation, indeed, in expressing it as my opinion, that this Loan Fund was started for the private advantage of Mr Butler and his friends and not for the purposes contemplated by the Legislature.<sup>97</sup>

Thurles, however, still had two loan funds operating in 1845.<sup>98</sup>

The Savings Bank in Thurles was established in 1829. It was a deposit bank which did not offer any credit facilities. Its main aim

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., May 1838.

<sup>95</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept., 1845, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup>Cholera Papers, 12 Oct. 1832 (N.A. Board of Health, County Tipperary, 2/440/9; Minutes of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, 28 April 1846 (T.C.L.).

<sup>97</sup>*Fifth annual report of the commissioners of the Loan Fund Board of Ireland. Appendix B. 1843*, p. 31. H.C. 1843 (224) xvii.

<sup>98</sup>*Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for the Year 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 562.



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was to encourage prudent financial habits among the lower orders. The establishment of the bank was decided upon at a meeting convened by Protestant clergyman, Archdeacon Henry Cotton on 18 October 1829. The bank opened from 1 to 2pm every Monday. It covered Thurles, Drom, Holycross, Loughmore, Moycarky and Templeouhy and to a lesser extent, Clonoulty, Templemore, Upperchurch, Boherahan, Borrisoleigh, Gurtnahoe and Killenaule.

The management of the bank comprised three groups. Its patron was the Earl of Llanduff, the owner of the town. He was succeeded in 1834 by his sister, Lady Elizabeth Matthew. Viscount Chabot took her place in 1843 when he became the new owner of the town. The importance of the patron was minimal, its main value being centred in being a complement to the patron and holding some prestige for the bank. Given that the aforementioned patrons were absentees, their involvement in the actual operation of the bank was more than likely minimal. The second group of the executive were the general overseers of the bank. This body of twenty trustees included Archdeacon Cotton, Robert Laffan, the Catholic Archbishop, and two well-known Catholic landlords, Daniel Ryan of Inch and Valentine Maher of Turtulla. The trustees were unpaid members. The third group of this executive was a managing committee which comprised thirty



members. This final group were more representative of local town life in that they included local traders, gentlemen and professionals. But it was the local clergy that played a central role in the running of the bank. The Rev Dr Thomas O'Connor was president of the seminary in Thurles and a consistent supporter of the Savings Bank. O'Connor was very involved in town life. He was a member of the Thurles board of health in 1832 and a member of the Thurles/Rahealty relief committee during the great famine.<sup>99</sup> However it was the Protestant clergy who formed the backbone of the active executive. Archdeacon Henry Cotton was in fact the driving force behind the bank. He convened the original meeting in 1829 and chaired the trustees final meeting forty years later. He regularly attended the trustees' quarterly meetings. During the famine he was chairman of the Thurles relief committee and a regular correspondent with the Relief Commission.<sup>100</sup> And it was the Protestant clergy who really formed the majority at the bank's quarterly meetings.<sup>101</sup>

**Table 2:6**  
**Trustees Thurles Savings Bank**

Clergy	Gentry	Professional	Traders
4	12	1	3

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<sup>99</sup>Cholera Papers, 12 Oct. 1832. (N.A. Board of Health, Co. Tipperary, 2/440/9).  
Thurles Relief Committee Minute Book (T.C.L.).

<sup>100</sup>RLFC3/2 Inc. Let. No.8686. No.9124. D.264. No.6196 (N.A. RLFC., Co. Tipperary 2/442/6).

<sup>101</sup>J. O'Shea, 'The Thurles Savings Bank' in W. Corbett and W. Nolan (ed.) *Thurles: The cathedral town. Essays in honour of Archbishop Thomas Morris* (Dublin, 1989), p. 98.



**Table 2:7**  
**Managing Committee of Thurles Savings Bank**

Clergy	Gentry	Professional	Traders
4	5	3	18 <sup>102</sup>

Thurles, therefore, is an example of a town with more public and official Catholic involvement in local charity. Yet even in the centre of the Catholic diocese of Cashel it was still local Protestants who took most of the initiative. The only relief society started by a Protestant and chaired by a Protestant failed because of Catholic opposition and no charitable society took its place. Yet when a meeting was called to demand the repeal of the Union, the Catholics of the district appeared in droves to attend a county rally.<sup>103</sup> Such evidence would suggest that it was the Protestant community leaders who considered it their duty to organise provision for the poor, while their Catholic neighbours preferred, for the most part, the business of politics.

### Inishowen

Of the four poor law unions, Inishowen had the least in terms of charitable institutions. The lack of charitable societies can be largely explained by the fact that it was relatively close to the city

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<sup>102</sup> *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p. 316

<sup>103</sup> *Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3.



of Derry, where all types of philanthropic societies were situated. Buncrana and Moville were twelve and nineteen miles respectively from the city. The Poor Inquiry was told that the poor in these towns were generally taken care of by small farmers and local shopkeepers.<sup>104</sup> While the farmer would more often than not give food, the shopkeeper gave money:

The Buncrana relief is indiscriminately given on Mondays to home as well as strange beggars. The relief of beggars falls principally on the small farmers who are more open to solicitation than the higher orders....It is thought that the shopkeeper gives to beggars the value of 1s per week, whilst the farmer, from his being more in the habit of giving food does not estimate his charity at 6d a week. Instances are known where persons have given charity to such an amount as afterwards owing to partial failure or lateness of the crops to leave themselves destitute.<sup>105</sup>

A dispensary for the parishes of Upper Fahan, Lower Fahan and Desertegny operated out of two locations, Buncrana and Upper Fahan. Both were established in 1819 by the Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry. The dispensary covered three parishes. There was no other dispensary, hospital or infirmary within 10 miles. Between them they relieved 6,500 people annually in the mid-1830s.<sup>106</sup> The Culdaff dispensary was established in 1817, catering for the parishes of Culdaff and Cloncha. It relieved between 1,800 and 2,000 annually.<sup>107</sup> The Carndonagh dispensary was established in 1822. It originally catered for the parishes of

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<sup>104</sup>*Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix A, 1835*, p. 744. H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii. 1.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 506, 755-6.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, *Supplement to Appendix B, 1835*. p. 115. H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.



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Carndonagh and Clonmany but in 1834 there were no subscriptions raised from Clonmany. As a result the dispensary just attended to the poor of Carndonagh. There was no other dispensary within ten miles.<sup>108</sup> The Merville dispensary was established in 1818 and catered for the parishes of Upper and Lower Merville. Between 1832 and 1835 it relieved 40,000 persons. The surgeon for the dispensary, John Irvine, stated:

Lord Caledon, Sir Arthur Chicester and the clergy of the different denominations contribute most liberally in supporting this institution by their subscriptions, as do also a few of the landed proprietors; but there are many proprietors of the quarterlands in my district, who do not give a subscription, although their numerous poor tenants receive medical aid.<sup>109</sup>

Thus relief in Inishowen during this period was centred on medical provision for the poor and a more individualistic approach to charity.

### **The Mechanics of Charitable Societies**

This examination of these charitable groups reveals that they all worked in much the same way. The town in question would be divided into districts and a number of inspectors would be appointed for each district through whom all recommendations for relief would be made and to whom subscriptions would be given. The Dundalk Mendicity Association and Dundalk

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 116.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

Destitute Sick Society were run in this way. Alternatively the charity would operate from a specific address, distributing clothes, books and bibles on certain days and at certain times. One such organisation was the Dundalk Ladies' Benevolent Society, which operated from premises in Church Street in the town between 11 and 3 o'clock on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. These methods of relief distribution were continued into the famine era as local charity workers drew on all their experience to cope with the crisis.

It is evident from Tables 2:8 and 2:9 that Ballina and Dundalk had the healthiest history in local charitable societies even though these charities were run by the same small group of people. With the exception of the Thurles Savings Bank, the

**Table 2:8**  
**Membership of Pre-Famine Charitable Societies**

Society	No. of Members	Clergy	Gentry	Trade	Prof.
Dundalk Destitute Sick Society	8	4	3	1	0
Dundalk Mendicity Association	9	5	1	3	0
Dundalk Savings Bank	13	4	6	2	1
Ballina Loan Society	7	2	5	0	0
Ballina Dorcas Society	5	0	5	0	0
Ballina Benevolent Society	8	0	8	0	0
Crossmolina Dispensary	9	0	8	0	0
Thurles Savings Bank	30	4	5	18	3



**Table 2:9**  
**Religious Background of Charitable Societies**

Society	Cath.	Prot*	Other	Unknown
Dundalk Destitute Sick Society	0	7	0	0
Dundalk Mendicity Association	2	5	0	1
Dundalk Savings Bank	0	12	0	1
Ballina Loan Society	0	7	0	0
Ballina Dorcas Society	0	5	0	0
Ballina Benevolent Society	0	6	0	1
Crossmolina Dispensary	0	8	0	1

Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

evidence would suggest that the local volunteer worker was either a clergyman or gentleman, or indeed, the wife or daughter of these men. For the most part, he or she came from a Protestant background and had a history in local charity work.

To determine accurately the number of resident gentry who were active in charity work before the famine, a number of contemporary sources have been examined. The results have to be qualified by a reference to residency: where a landlord, while not resident, may have had a very industrious and benevolent agent, or where a landlord was an occasional resident and may have been, on paper, a member of a local committee, but left the actual running of the group to someone else. There were also situations where resident gentry took care of their own tenants or were philanthropically active on an individual basis. With this in mind,



a useful guide to identify local active benevolent individuals was to take each union district and identify local residents using Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary*. In his work, Samuel Lewis names local resident gentry and their contribution to their parishes in the form of sponsoring schools and local charities. Then, local newspapers, directories, contemporary works, cholera papers and relief commission papers were consulted to identify the most philanthropically active residents, both before the famine and during that period from 1845-52. The results of this exercise are on Table 2:10.

**Table 2:10**  
**Philanthropically Active Gentry**

<b>Union District</b>	<b>No. of Resident Gentry</b>	<b>Active Pre-1845</b>	<b>Active 1845-52</b>	<b>Both</b>
Dundalk	41	8	5	0
Thurles	36	3	12	2
Inishowen	35	1	6	0
Ballina	59	16	3	7

The evidence presented in this table would seem to support Tim O'Neill's assertion that:

The landowners had little knowledge of the poor, most did not understand the Irish language or appreciate the culture of the poor. This failure underlined their differences. Some landowners helped the poor, but the majority only helped when pressures from English sources were exerted.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Tim O'Neill, *The state, poverty and distress in Ireland, 1815-45*. (Ph.D, UCD 1971), p. 304.



## *Charitable Societies 1817-1852*

It is evident that the numbers who gave of their time to establish and take part in local charitable institutions were few.

Charity in the form of local institutional involvement was practically non-existent in the union district of Inishowen. The union districts of Ballina and Dundalk had the strongest history of local charitable organisations but those associations were made up of the same small group of people who formed part of, it would seem, a committee culture. The evidence suggests that the committee member was more often than not a Protestant clergyman or gentleman who took a very active role in the relief of the poor.



## CHAPTER THREE

### PRE-FAMINE RELIEF COMMITTEES, 1817-42

The fact that a large part of the population of pre-famine Ireland lived on or below a minimum subsistence level for one or two months of the year meant that a poor harvest was enough to throw the labouring poor into crisis.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this chapter the crisis periods of 1816-19, 1822, 1830, 1831, 1832 and 1842 will be examined. The most acute emergencies occurred in 1817, 1822 and 1831. Distress extended the length and breadth of the country in 1817. Ten counties in the west and south of the country were affected by the crisis of 1822, while 1831 saw the western part of the island again suffer great distress. These western counties experienced similar privation in 1842. The evolution of the relief committee system will be traced from 1818 in an attempt to identify those aspects of pre-1845 relief that were brought to Ireland during the Famine. In Chapter Two we have seen that local charitable societies were run on an ongoing basis by a predominantly Protestant group that comprised mostly clergymen and resident gentry. In this chapter the social, religious and political backgrounds of relief committee members during extraordinary periods of distress will be examined in an attempt

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<sup>1</sup>O'Neill, *op. cit.*, pp 297-8.



to construct a profile of the local charity worker and see how his collaboration with his peers prepared him for what was to happen after 1845.

### The Birth of a Relief Committee System

The explosion, in 1815, of the volcano of Tomboro on the East Indies island of Sumbawa is thought to have been the main cause of the exceptionally cold weather conditions that swept across Europe in the summer of 1816. Harvest failure and the subsequent scarcity of food was experienced in many parts of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Ireland proved to be no exception. While few people starved before the summer of 1817, typhus had already made its presence felt. The fever, which peaked in the summer of 1818, remained prevalent until 1819.<sup>3</sup>

The cold wet weather conditions that existed in 1816 and 1817 led to poor grain and potato yields. Furthermore, the excessively wet weather meant that the population's main provider of warmth, peat, could not be cut and dried.<sup>4</sup> The distress caused by this lack of food and fuel was compounded by a lack of employment brought on by the economic slump following Waterloo. A population that was already forced below subsistence level could not cope with such shortages and as

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<sup>2</sup>Mary E. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1986), pp 38-9.

<sup>3</sup>Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Robins, *op. cit.*, pp 38-39.



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conditions deteriorated to an extreme level, their resistance to disease diminished. By the spring of 1817 cases of typhus were reaching higher than usual levels.

Typhus thrives in conditions of dirt. It is caused by micro-organisms called *Rickettsia Prowazaki* which are carried usually by lice and fleas which, in turn, enter the human body through scratches and other breaks in the skin. The incubation period of typhus is six to fifteen days. It is a disease that is spread quite easily in overcrowded areas.<sup>5</sup>

By the first four months of 1817 it had begun to spread through the provinces of Ulster, Munster and Connaught. By the autumn of 1817 the disease had spread throughout the province of Leinster, reaching epidemic proportions. It was during this time and during the winter of 1817 that the fever was at its most intense in Ulster.<sup>6</sup> Yet it was 1818 before the first system of relief committees was devised and the Chief Secretary, Robert Peel, fully accepted the responsibility of relief where no local relief was possible.<sup>7</sup>

The government was initially reluctant to spend money on the poor and the sick. The epidemic was already well established

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>*Second report from the select committee on contagious fever in Ireland, 1818*, p. 62. H.C. 1818 (285) vii.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp 15-16.



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before the Lord Lieutenant formed a committee in September 1817 to advise him on relief measures. The committee's main task was to deal with requests for financial aid from areas dealing with the epidemic. The government was still determined not to be the sole provider of relief. Aid would only be given if fever was already in the area and fever accommodation was supplied and supported by the wealthier residents in the district. Thus where local private charity was seen to be trying to deal with the epidemic, small government grants would be given towards fever hospitals and towards setting up the recommended preventative measures. This aid was strictly for fever-related purposes only. The government may have been keen to limit its financial contributions, but it was concerned about the lack of proper local administration to deal with the epidemic. In May 1818 the enactment of new laws saw the establishment of committees in every county and city, empowering them to erect fever hospitals or acquire buildings for that purpose. Not only were grand juries now allowed to raise funds for local hospitals and for dispensaries but the Lord Lieutenant could now form local boards of health when the disease struck an area. This was dependent on a request from a meeting of local residents. Thus the initiative for local relief was kept firmly in the hands of the local inhabitants. The Lord Lieutenant was empowered to advance money to these



boards of health; money that was to be eventually repaid by means of a local grand jury tax. However the effect of these measures on the management of the epidemic was slight. They depended completely on local philanthropic action and their effectiveness varied from place to place. Poorer areas were also hampered by this new legislation because financial aid was for the most part dependent on voluntary subscriptions. Nevertheless, this government policy continued throughout the epidemic. The only exception was where an area was believed to be extremely poor and there was a high incidence of landlord absenteeism. In such an instance, the government might defray the cost of relief.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there are few detailed accounts of how this policy was applied in counties Mayo and Donegal where there was a general lack of dispensaries and hospitals. It was believed, however, that the fever epidemic had been very severe in these areas.<sup>9</sup>

Typhus first made an appearance in County Tipperary in the spring of 1817, spreading throughout the county in the summer and autumn of that year:

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>9</sup>*Report from the select committee on contagious fever in Ireland, 1818*, p. 2. H.C. 1818 (285) vii.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

Its progress and the means adopted for its prevention were similar to those of other counties, and it seemed equally infectious, spreading among the medical and other attendants at hospitals.<sup>10</sup>

In what became the union district of Thurles, however, there was only one fever hospital and that was Templemore. Table 3:1 reveals the numbers who were admitted, cured or died in the hospital from September 1818 to January 1819.

**Table 3:1**

**The Temporary Fever Hospital, Templemore, Co. Tipperary**

Date	Patients Admitted	Discharged/Cured	Died
Sept. 1818	24	23	1
Oct.	22	21	1
Nov.	9	9	0
Dec.	14	14	0
Jan. 1819	7	7	0
Feb.	9	7	2
To March 20	6	0	0
Total	91	81	4 <sup>11</sup>

In the union district of Ballina, typhus was particularly prevalent in Killala, Ballina and the remote mountainous district of Erris. It was felt that Ballina and Killala were particularly vulnerable because of the excessive rainfall all year round.<sup>12</sup> The insanitary conditions in Killala were compounded by the fact that the small town was also exposed to the sea. Ballina's sanitary problems were exacerbated by a large population. However once

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<sup>10</sup>*First report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor in Ireland, 1819*, p. 39. H.C. 1819, (378), viii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.



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the epidemic appeared, a greater effort was made to clean up the streets of the town. In Killala the epidemic was checked by a local dispensary and the Protestant Bishop of Killala. The Bishop of Killala was the Rev James Verschoyle, of Kilberry, County Kildare. Born in 1750, he attended Trinity College, Dublin, became a minor canon of St. Patrick's in 1780, archdeacon of Glendalough in 1788, dean of St. Patrick's in 1794 and bishop of Killala in 1810. He died at the age of 84 in 1834.<sup>13</sup> Patients in Killala were attended in their own homes by the local dispensary medical attendants. The bishop employed a doctor to look after his own tenantry, to whom he also gave money, food and employment. However he received little co-operation from the local gentry and the town remained in a filthy state; fever lingered longer there than elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> In Ballina considerable efforts were made to check the spread of the disease even though the town had neither a fever hospital nor dispensary. The streets were regularly cleaned and houses were whitewashed and fumigated. Large subscriptions were made and food and straw was distributed to the poor. The sick were also attended at home. These efforts led to a decline in fever by the autumn of 1818.<sup>15</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup>Burke, *Landed Gentry of Ireland* (1912), p. 618.

<sup>14</sup>*First report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor in Ireland, 1819*, p. 48. H.C. (378) viii.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.



Killala, 306 people visited the dispensary over the space of two years. A further three hundred were attended by another gentleman not belonging to the dispensary. In Ballina, medical attendants visited from fifty to one hundred people a day.<sup>16</sup>

The epidemic was not so widespread in County Donegal in comparison to the rest of the province. The fever did make an appearance in the summer of 1817, but less people were affected and the death rate was not as high as elsewhere in the province.<sup>17</sup> While the barony of Inishowen did suffer in particular, the fever soon abated. It was believed that one of the reasons that Donegal did not suffer so much was because it did not lie along the main route by which labourers, who were thought to spread the disease from one area to another, travelled to England and Scotland during the summer.<sup>18</sup>

The epidemic appeared in County Louth in May, June and July 1817. It peaked at the end of the year and began to abate by the summer of 1818. The epidemic struck when the poor of the county were already 'labouring under the greatest distress in consequence of the want of employment and the scarcity of fuel and provisions, which were of bad quality.'<sup>19</sup> The reaction to the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 72.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

epidemic in Dundalk was prompt. A board of health was established by clergy, doctors and gentry, and a building for a fever hospital was hired.

It was a time to call forth an active spirit of benevolence; and foremost in the cause of charity was the Rev Elias Thackeray, Vicar of Dundalk....The proprietors of the Dundalk distillery had large quantities of oats and barley in stores for malting but desirous of assisting the poor, generously had this stock ground into meal and sold at a rate within the poor man's reach.<sup>20</sup>

This reference to the proprietors of the local distillery was in all likelihood a reference to Malcolm Brown & Co., Seatown Place, Dundalk.<sup>21</sup> Brown, a Protestant, was a leading resident of the town at the time.<sup>22</sup> The period from October to December 1817 was a particularly harsh time in Dundalk. A friend of Brown, Henry Mc Clintock, estimated in his diary that nearly 100 people were ill in Dundalk in August 1817.<sup>23</sup> During these three months the Rev Elias Thackeray collected £80 2s in subscriptions and gave away £75 12s. This was opposed to usual subscription receipts of between £20 and £30.<sup>24</sup> A soup kitchen was established at the market house. A temporary fever hospital had

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<sup>20</sup>John D'Alton and J.R. Flanagan, *The history of Dundalk* (Dublin, 1864), p. 223.

<sup>21</sup>J. Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1820-21, 22* (Manchester, 1824), p. 147.

<sup>22</sup>H.G. Tempest, *Notes on the parish church of St Nicholas, Dundalk* (Dundalk, 1955), p. 37.

<sup>23</sup>Diary of Henry Mc Clintock, 22 Aug. 1817 (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D/3580/1/4).

<sup>24</sup>St. Nicholas' Church, Register of collections and disposal thereof. Parish of Dundalk Diocese of Armagh, 1815 to 1863. pp 16-7; pp19-29. (St. Nicholas' Church, Dundalk).



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been formed when the epidemic reached the town in August 1817. The hospital was run by a local committee, aided by grants from the grand jury. £60 was raised at a charity sermon preached by the Protestant curate for the benefit of the hospital.<sup>25</sup> It was only capable of housing ninety patients but was exceeding that number by December of that year. The fever extended from the poor to those who were employed to take care of them. A doctor and two apothecaries died of fever caught while working in the town's fever hospital:<sup>26</sup>

All last summer there was nearly a Famine thro' this country in consequence of the failure of the crops in 1816 - In consequence of the great scarcity of provisions, a dreadful typhus fever broke out amongst the poor and has spread over the whole country, and numbers have died and are still dying round about us. There is scarcely a family in this neighbourhood that has not met with some great misfortune, wither by loss of friends or pecuniary losses...Dr Gillichan's death was a most severe loss...he (as a Physician) was not excelled, and he attended to the poor not only *gratis*, but gave them money where he saw it was wanted...The number of people in a middling class that died here is very great, both Priests of this town (McArdle and Dorian) died...In a pecuniary way almost every creature has suffered from failures.<sup>27</sup>

Private subscriptions to the fever hospital from 28 August 1817 to 22 February 1819 amounted to £577 6s 10d. However recovery came when a revival in the linen trade in 1818 resulted in more

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<sup>25</sup>Diary of Henry Mc Clintock, 5 Sept. 1817 (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D/3580/1/4).

<sup>26</sup>*First report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor in Ireland 1819*, p. 78, H.C. 1819 (378) viii.

<sup>27</sup>Diary of Henry Mc Clintock, 31 Dec., 1817 (PRONI, Redhall Papers, D/3580/1/4).



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employment for the town's inhabitants and the waning of the typhus.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 3:2**

**A Monthly Report of the Dundalk Fever Hospital; commencing 22 Aug., 1817**

Date	Admitted	Discharged	Died
Sept. 22, 1817	102	48	4
Oct.	156	122	8
Nov.	101	94	7
Dec.	79	92	2
Jan.-June 1818	Return Deficient		
July 22	52	47	1
Aug.	64	64	0
Sept. 22, 1817	44	57	1
Oct.	43	36	1
Nov.	34	33	0
Dec.	40	39	2 <sup>29</sup>

*The first report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor in Ireland (1819)* revealed the importance of the new boards of health and management committees in providing relief for the sick poor. These committees encouraged subscriptions and the poor were more ready to obey orders for cleaning and ventilating their homes and to admit their sick to hospital when those orders came from their landlords and clergymen, rather than being forced to

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>29</sup>*First report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor in Ireland, 1819*, p. 92. H.C. 1819 (378) viii.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

do so by municipal regulations.<sup>30</sup> The landlords and clergymen involved did not escape the disease:

The mortality has been much greater among the higher ranks of society whom the disease has attacked...and the physicians and other medical attendants, as well as the clergy of different denominations, have felt its destructive force in much more than an ordinary proportion, as the discharge of duty, uniting with the claims of humanity, exposed them peculiarly to its visitation.<sup>31</sup>

The clergy played an important role in the relief effort during the epidemic. The Protestant clergy were members of committees and directors of dispensaries. They also provided the poor with food, straw and provisions. Their Catholic counterparts were particularly zealous in attending the sick. They helped the committees and medical attendants and distributed money, food and medicines throughout the villages.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of relief, it would seem that Dundalk and Ballina towns were the most active in 1817-18 of the case studies under review. Both towns played a proactive role, whether it was by establishing boards of health or fever hospitals, or by taking measures to prevent the spread of the disease and in seeing to the material wants of the poor. Whether as a result or not, the epidemic abated just as quickly as it had begun. The 1819 Report on the state of the poor found that the fever was by then waning

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>31</sup>*Report from the select committee on contagious fever in Ireland 1818*, p. 3. H.C. 1818 (285) vii.

<sup>32</sup>*First report on state of labouring poor, 1819*, p. 53. H.C. 1819 (378) viii.



and that many areas of the country had no cases of fever at all.

### Relief in 1822

Bad weather conditions again brought the prospect of famine in 1822. Ten counties in the west and south of the country were affected by the crisis. Rev George Forster of Thurles gave the following explanation for the prevailing distress:

The great evil of the poor in my parish is the want of employment. An overgrown population of the labouring class, tempted there in former years by cheap food and fuel, and the demand for labour, which eight distilleries (now relinquished) gave rise to, are without employment for above half the time, and are existing in rags, filth and wretchedness.<sup>33</sup>

The crisis, however, was prompted by the bad weather conditions affecting the potato crop.

The organisation of relief committees constructed in 1818 was revived in 1822 and by the autumn of that year their numbers ran into thousands.<sup>34</sup> As the summer progressed, relief committees became more efficiently organised with each of the distressed districts having a county committee. Mayo, however, did not have a committee by June of that year, and the lord lieutenant had to order the high sheriff to establish a county committee.<sup>35</sup> Each county had a central committee with

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<sup>33</sup>*Report of the committee for the relief of the distressed districts in Ireland, Appointed at a general meeting held at the City of London Tavern on the 7th of May, 1822* (London, 1823), p. 87.

<sup>34</sup>Tim O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 252.



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subcommittees set up in each parish. The western part of the country was sectioned into three regional districts, and a civil engineer was appointed to each district to employ the destitute for making new roads, thus marking the beginning of large-scale government intervention by means of public works as a mode of relief.<sup>36</sup> This reflected a growing tendency to emphasise the merits of relief through labour rather than by the free distribution of food or money. The City of London Tavern Committee was formed on 7 May 1822 in response to the alarming accounts of distress emanating from the south and west of Ireland.<sup>37</sup> The committee organised functions to collect money for the Irish poor. This money was then distributed through Protestant and Catholic bishops and other “ecclesiastical dignitaries.”<sup>38</sup> Soup kitchens, where established, were said to be very effective.<sup>39</sup> But the distribution of relief through labour rather than distribution of food free of charge was favoured by the London committee:

The policy of avoiding gratuitous distribution, and of relieving the poor, as much as possible, through the means of their own labour and industry, could not be questioned; and although the direct purpose of the subscription was to relieve a temporary distress, by temporary and instant assistance, the Committee deemed it of the highest importance to consider how far that object could be accomplished without encouraging a spirit of indolent reliance on extraneous relief.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Sir Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish crisis* (London, 1880), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>*Report of the committee for the relief of the distressed districts in Ireland, appointed at a general meeting held at the city of London Tavern on the 7th May, 1822* (London, 1823), p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 4-5.



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Alexander Nimmo, director of public works, had government relief operations under way in Mayo by July 1822. Public works were carried out in Killala, with new roads being built between that town and Castleconnor and Ballina. These works included the improvement of the harbour at Killala and a new road from that town to the quay.<sup>41</sup> Erris also received the benefits of Nimmo's expertise.<sup>42</sup> These public works were supplemented by the importation of potatoes. Sixty tonnes of potatoes arrived in Sligo on 10 June 1822 from Glasgow on the *Albion*, destined for Killala and Ballina. On June 26th, the *Elizabeth* shipped fifty-three tonnes of potatoes to Mayo, where it was consigned to John Frederick Knox for Killala and Edward Harley (sic.) Esq. (Howley?) for Ballina.<sup>43</sup> Edward Howley, a Catholic property owner, was an active relief worker. He sat on the Ballina relief committee in July 1830.<sup>44</sup> In the crisis period that followed in 1831, he gave a rent abatement of 25 per cent to his tenants.<sup>45</sup> Philanthropy was very much a part of the Howley family tradition. Howley's son, Edward, was a JP and deputy lieutenant of the county. He chaired a Ballina relief committee during the

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<sup>41</sup>Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, 1822. Carton No. 880 (N.A. Chief Secretary's Office Papers 1822) (Hereafter referred to as CSORP).

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, Carton No. 663. No.1950.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, Carton No. 660.

<sup>44</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 March 1831, p. 4.



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crisis period of 1842 which also included another family member, Thomas Howley.<sup>46</sup> Edward junior was still very much part of the Ballina relief effort during the great famine.<sup>47</sup> The Killala consignee in 1822, John Frederick Knox from Mount Falcon, had been called to the bar in 1813, was a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant for the counties of Mayo and Sligo, serving as high-sheriff of Mayo in 1823 and Sligo in 1824.<sup>48</sup> In January 1819 he had married Anna Maria, eldest daughter of James Knox Gore of Broadlands Park, another resident landlord who was an active relief worker. A Protestant, it would seem that J.F. Knox took a more individual approach to charity work.<sup>49</sup> During the crisis period of 1830 he gave employment to his own tenantry to see them through that time of want.<sup>50</sup> He was not an active member of local committees but he did go on to be a poor law guardian, a position also held by his father-in-law.

The General Board of Health's Fourth Report indicated that those who were involved in the 1822 relief effort, unlike the period 1816-19, seemed to escape disease, showing no unusual

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<sup>46</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 22 July 1842, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 8 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>John Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1845), p. 681.

<sup>49</sup>*List of remittances made by the London Committee for managing the subscription for the relief in Ireland to this day inclusive*. (London, 1822), p. 3. (NLI, Copy of Papers of James Verschoyle, Bishop of Killala, 1810-1834, Relating to the Famine of 1822).

<sup>50</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 9 Aug. 1830, p. 3; 3 July 1830, p. 4.



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incidence of mortality among them.<sup>51</sup> However relief work did incur some risk. In a letter dated 29 July to the general board of health, a Dr De Burgh Birch in Mullet claimed that the distress experienced previously in the barony was on the wane. However he felt his services were still necessary, despite the fact that the mountains were a refuge for unsavoury characters where distillation and smuggling was quite common. On a more practical level, the doctor reported that the few roads that were then in existence were generally impassable. Birch had sunk into a ditch on the main road leading into the barony on one occasion.<sup>52</sup> It would seem reasonable to assume that Birch was not alone as a relief worker in facing such problems.

There is a letter dated July 6<sup>th</sup> 1822 from the Rev James Burrowes in the same report.<sup>53</sup> In his study, *Souperism: myth or reality?*, Desmond Bowen has characterised Burrowes as 'representative of the best type of resident gentleman parson.'<sup>54</sup> He arrived in the parish of Castleconnor (four miles from Ballina) in 1804 and remained there until 1849 when he died from 'exhaustion'. He had lost his wife and daughter to fever in

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<sup>51</sup>CSORP, General Board of Health. Fourth Report, 5 Aug. 1822. Carton No.659. p. 5. (N.A. CSORP, 1822).

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>54</sup>Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality. A study in souperism* (Cork, 1970), p. 207.



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1847.<sup>55</sup> Burrowes was a member of relief committees in the crisis periods of 1822, 1831 and 1845-8. He also ran the local dispensary, acting as an amateur physician. His relationship with the local Catholic clergy it seems, was amicable.<sup>56</sup> The board of health reported in 1822:

This letter details great distress in this union. Two gentlemen only, of considerable property, reside. Mr Kirkwood and Col. Wingfield, who are doing much good. £187 has been collected in various ways but this is quite insufficient to relieve 2100 individuals in extreme distress. Good roads are making (sic.) and oatmeal has been purchased and is distributing. Reporter applied to some absentee proprietors who refused any relief by subscription to their undertenants.<sup>57</sup>

Fever compounded existing distress in the Ballina union district.

Crossmolina, six and a half miles from Ballina, suffered particularly from fever and dysentery.<sup>58</sup> However by the end of July 1822, even though there were 59 chronic cases of fever in the parish, no deaths had been reported.<sup>59</sup> Contributions from the London Tavern Committee meant that between 10 and 11 hundred families around Crossmolina were given provisions for one week in June and that 200 families were given a moderate portion of seed potatoes.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>56</sup>CSORP, Board of Health. Fourth Report, 5 Aug. 1822. Carton No.659. p. 22 (N.A. CSORP 1822); *Poor Inquiry (Ireland) Appendix B. 1835*, p. 14, H.C. 1835 (369) xxxii.2.

<sup>57</sup>CSORP, Board of Health. Fourth Report, 5 Aug. 1822. Carton No.659. p. 22. (N.A. CSORP, 1822).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>60</sup>*Report of the committee for the relief of the distressed districts in Ireland, appointed at a general meeting held at the City of London Tavern on the 7 May*



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By the beginning of August Erris was also reported to be recovering after a period of extreme distress.<sup>61</sup> Fever had been most prevalent in the month of July.<sup>62</sup> Conditions were improving by August 1822, as this letter from Rev Edwin Stock characterised the situation in late summer:

That with the utmost gratitude for past favours, we feel it quite unnecessary to trespass further on the liberality of the London Tavern Committee on behalf of the distressed poor of this district, because they are at present abundantly supplied with provisions by the Irish government and we have had repeated assurances from the best authority that such supplies will be continued as long as they shall be found necessary.<sup>63</sup>

The year 1822 thus marked a consolidation in relief methods in the west of Ireland. Public works were introduced to supplement the system of relief that was already in operation, as policy on relief moved from distribution of food and money to employment on public works. In Thurles the provision of industrial employment was seen as the only way of permanently relieving the poor:

Amidst such a mass of misery, individual aid or alms can do but little, and it is only through the medium of their own industry that the poor can be permanently relieved. Under this conviction, above a year ago, we endeavoured to establish in the neighbourhood of Thurles, the manufacture of coarse yarn and linen, and at a weekly yarn market which has been regularly held in the town for some months past, we give stated premiums to the persons who sell certain quantities of yarn, the produce of their families industry, and also to the weavers who buy

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1822. (London, 1823), p. 165. (Hereafter referred to as *Report of the committee for the relief of the distressed....1822*).

<sup>61</sup>CSORP, Board of Health. Fourth Report, 5 Aug. 1822. Carton No. 659. p. 5 (N.A. CSORP, 1822).

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>63</sup>*Report of the Committee for the Relief of the Distressed....1822*, p. 169.



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their yarn at our market. Our fund had arisen from subscriptions among ourselves, aided by a donation of fifty pounds from the Irish government. In addition to the premiums, we distributed spinning wheels and flax, some gratis and more for repayment by instalments; and we have reason to hope that by perseverance on our parts, the market will succeed and thereby lay the foundation of industry among the females and children.<sup>64</sup>

As the quest to discourage indolence gathered pace and support, the role of the relief worker now extended from the business of emergency distribution to supervising local public works. He would have to have had a good knowledge of the inhabitants to be in a position to hand out tickets for employment or for food. The distribution of food either had to be carried out or supervised and subscriptions had to be donated, collected and used to provide relief. The role of the relief worker was an ever increasing one, and he faced a new set of challenges in the fourth decade of the century when a crisis with a difference hit most of the poorer classes.

### **Relief in 1830**

The west of Ireland was again the centre of distress in 1830. The local relief effort in the union district of Ballina during this period was at its most intense in the month of July. By the end of June, distress had become widespread:

That poverty not comparative, but absolute, obtains to an alarming extent throughout the barony of Tyrawly...The numerous class of day labourers are to an alarming extent without employment, and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 284.



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themselves and families, in too many instances dependent upon the exertions of charity, which but few are able to bestow.<sup>65</sup>

A public meeting had been held a week earlier by the merchants of Killala. It was resolved at this meeting that further improvement of the quay would be their method of providing employment to the distressed in the area. On July 5 in answer to a public notice, a meeting took place in Ballina to devise a plan to alleviate the distress of the poor there. The local newspaper named eight people in the committee room.

**Table 3:3**  
**Ballina Committee Members**

Name	Social Standing	Religion*	Other Charitable Pursuits
Col. A. Knox Gore	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Rev Dr. McHale	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev J. Verschoyle	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev J. Huston	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev Corcoran	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Edward Howley	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
John Levingston	Trader	Unknown	Yes
Lieut. Short	Coastguard	Prot.	Yes <sup>66</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

All of the above gentlemen were also involved at some stage with other charitable activities. Col. Arthur Knox Gore of Beleek Manor, County Mayo was Lieut-Col of the North Mayo Militia.

<sup>65</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 28 June 1830, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 July 1830, p. 4. Cholera Papers 2/440/9 (N.A. Board of Health, Co. Mayo, 2/440/9); *Tyrrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3; Church of Ireland Records, Kilmoremoy, Crossmolina (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.32).



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He was an older brother of James Knox Gore, another relief worker. A Protestant, Col. Knox Gore was a member of the Mayo central relief committee in 1831, a trustee of the Ballina Charitable Loan Society in 1840, and chair of the Ballina baronial relief committee in 1846.<sup>67</sup> He was also a cousin of another Ballina relief worker, Annesley Knox of Rappa Castle. The charitable career of Edward Howley Snr has already been noted. He not only served on relief committees but also contributed charity on a more individual basis. He was one of the main distributors of money collected to help the children of a deceased clergyman, Rev Claudius Huston.<sup>68</sup> The clergymen present at the meeting had also been involved in other relief committees in the town during other periods of crisis. It is noticeable that the Catholic clergy took a more active role in the *ad hoc* relief committee structure than in local charitable institutions.

John Levingston, a brewer and miller from Ardnaree,<sup>69</sup> was a highly respected townsman who was very active in his response to the Mayo crisis:

Great credit is due to our townsman, John Levingston Esq., for not only supplying extra meal, at reduced prices, in addition to his large subscription, but also for checking the high prices of provisions at this period of distress.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 20 June 1830, p. 3; *Ballina Advertiser*, 20 March 1840, p. 2; *Tyrrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 10 May 1830, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup>*Pigott's Directory of Ireland 1824*, p. 194.

<sup>70</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 12 July 1830, p. 4.



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At the session, a committee was formed and £100 collected on the spot for the poor in the town of Ballina.<sup>71</sup> By the following week the relief effort was well underway. The town was divided into two sections and meal was to be distributed to those people that the committee had supplied with tickets. The task of relief appeared relentless:

On Saturday last the Committee for the management of the funds raised for the support of the starving poor in this town commenced operations; Mr Short, Mr Moore, Mr Higgins and Mr Daly; assisted by the Rev Mr Huston, Rev Mr Corcoran and Rev Mr Costello attended and their united labours did not close until 12 o'clock that night, when upwards of 800 poor creatures were relieved.<sup>72</sup>

Messrs Short and Moore were local resident gentry. Henry Short had a history in local charity and was a member of the Ballina Charitable Loan Society.<sup>73</sup> Messrs Higgins and Daly, local traders, were also active relief workers and very much involved in the relief committees of the day.

The Ballina committee did run into some problems. Since its establishment, a large influx of 'strangers' had descended on the town, draining existing funds. An editorial in the local newspaper complained that the committee was giving meal to everyone who had tickets at half price. Some people were also receiving meal gratuitously, reducing committee funds by up to £40 per week.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 5 July 1830, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 12 July 1830, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 20 March 1840, p. 2.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

The critic felt that the committee time would be better spent organising employment for the poor.<sup>74</sup> The Ballina committee was also experiencing manpower problems. On one particular Saturday the only representative of the committee who could be found to distribute meal in the town was James Higgins.<sup>75</sup> This seems to have been the most common problem of charitable organisations in this union. The diligence and enthusiasm of the few was hampered by the apathy of a majority of the potentially active. The *Ballina Impartial* carried no further reports on this relief effort. Trends in the price of potatoes in the Ballina market would suggest that the crisis was waning by the late Summer. The price of potatoes per cwt went from 3s 9d in July to 2s 6d in August to 1s 8d in October.<sup>76</sup> However this reprieve was short-lived.

### Mayo 1831

The year 1831 was a year of very general distress in County Mayo, punctuated by concerted relief efforts that were in place until September of that year.<sup>77</sup> In early 1831 many local relief committees had been established in the county.<sup>78</sup> When the problem of distress proved too much for local relief activists,

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 19 July 1830, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 19 July 1830, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 19 July 1830, p. 1; 11 Aug. 1830, p. 1; 5 Oct. 1830, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 5 Sept. 1831, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 28 Feb. 1831, p. 4.



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public appeals were made to the government in London and the people of England. The response of the general public was to form the London-based Cornhill relief committee. The establishment of this London committee led to an overhaul of local committees in the Ballina union district. A central committee for County Mayo was formed to co-ordinate the distribution of externally raised relief, and the organisation of the indigenous relief committees. The county committee comprised the Protestant and Catholic bishops, clergy, magistrates, landlords and members of parliament. While the membership of the local relief committees was dependent on those resident in the area, the London committee stipulated that clergymen from every denomination and members of the county committee were to be ex-officio members of local committees.<sup>79</sup> The Mayo central committee lost no time in sending a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant detailing the distress that was so prevalent and pleading for assistance.<sup>80</sup> The committee became more and more frustrated as the government turned a deaf ear to their appeals for help. By May 1831 their funds were dwindling.<sup>81</sup>

The relief committee structure below the central county relief committee was organised on a parochial basis. In terms of relief

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<sup>79</sup>O'Neill, *op cit.*, pp 254-5.

<sup>80</sup>CSORP Carton No.1820. No.1002 (N.A., CSORP, 1831).

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, Carton No. 1823. No.1621.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

committee membership, the parish of Crossmolina received the most publicity. Of the sixteen committee members for the district, twelve were local gentry, three were clergymen, and one was a local trader.<sup>82</sup> Apart from the presence of the local Catholic clergy the committee was entirely Protestant and anti-Repeal in its politics. Twelve of the members were among those who signed an anti-Repeal declaration which was published in the Ballina newspaper.<sup>83</sup> Of the sixteen members, fourteen were involved in other philanthropic activities. Thus the Crossmolina relief committee was a predominantly Protestant, anti-Repeal group who were also proactive relief workers. One important resolution of this committee was that the tenants of the several non-resident landlords were only to be relieved 'on condition of, and in proportion to their individual [landlord's] subscriptions.' While such conditions must have proved disastrous for tenants of non-subscribing landlords, lessons would seem to have been learnt from the previous year. An influx of beggars had then drained the resources of the Ballina relief committee in 1830.

The same article reveals two subscription lists: the first was for supplying the market of Crossmolina with cheap food, and the other was for procuring employment for the poor of the union

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<sup>82</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 21 March 1831, p. 3. *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (1846) p. 104.

<sup>83</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 28 Feb. 1831, p. 3.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

district by public works. There were seventeen people on these subscription lists. Again, the picture is that of a predominantly gentry-based, Protestant and anti-Repeal subscriber network. The list comprised fourteen gentry, three clergymen; fifteen were Protestant, one was a Catholic and one person's religion is unknown. Fifteen of the subscribers were also involved at some stage in other charitable activities.<sup>84</sup>

At the end of June 1831, distress had taken a firm hold of the Mayo poor:

We are informed on the most respectable authority, that a regular census (sic.) has been taken of the destitute poor in the parishes of Ballinahagless and Kilbelfad in the union of Kilmoremoy and that the sufferers are extremely numerous. No relief from any quarters has yet been sent to those parishes except five tons of potatoes, a supply which perhaps would not afford one meal to every tenth in absolute want.<sup>85</sup>

By this stage there were many relief committees operating in the union district but full committee activity was only possible where there was an active resident gentry. There were two hundred men employed in Ballina who were paid out of local subscriptions but there were also three hundred sent away because there was no money to provide them with work. The number of distressed in the parish of Kilmoremoy was eight thousand.<sup>86</sup> While government cargoes of provisions were sent to Killala and Ballina

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 5 July 1830, p.4; 21 March 1831, p.3.

<sup>85</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 20 June 1831, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 3.



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at the end of June, crisis point for the Ballina relief committee came in July when:

It appeared that no assistance had been received from any quarters, during the week....that distress was rapidly on the increase and that there were no adequate means to pay the persons who were employed under the committee.<sup>87</sup>

Thus while the relief committee was willing to dispense relief, their own personal purses remained shut, either because of financial difficulties or a belief that they were already doing their fair share by taking part in committee work.

Lack of money was just one of the problems that beset the Ballina relief committee. Religious tension was beginning to disrupt its activities. The Rev James Allen was the Baptist minister in the parish of Kilmoremoy.<sup>88</sup> As the treasurer of the Ballina Dorcas Society and in his more general role as a clergyman, Allen was well acquainted with the poor in the area. He was a member of the Ballina relief committee in 1831.<sup>89</sup> It was in June of this year that he was instructed by the Baptist Irish Society to relieve those families 'immediately connected with the society's schools in the Ballina district; and also to a moderate extent, such others as he may find in circumstances of destitution.'<sup>90</sup> The clergyman duly complied with these

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 4 July 1831, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 20 June 1831, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 20 June 1831, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 20 June 1831, p. 2.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

instructions. However by the end of June Allen was alleging that local priests were refusing to relieve anyone associated with his schools.<sup>91</sup> These allegations led to a rift within the Ballina relief committee to such an extent that the matter was brought before the central committee, who threatened to dissolve the Ballina branch. However the committee remained largely in the same hands, including the clergymen of each denomination.<sup>92</sup> It would seem as if the tensions that nearly split it were the result of outside and needlessly inflammatory instructions which sparked tensions between the clergymen.

The Crossmolina relief committee brought its business to a close at the end of August 1831. Of a committee of twenty-one, twelve were original members. Fifteen of the members were gentry, two were clerics, and there was one trader. The religious complexion of the committee was, again, overwhelmingly Protestant.

**Table 3:4**  
**Social Composition of Relief Committees 1831**

Committee	No. of Members	Clergy	Gentry	Prof.	Trader	Unknown
Crossmolina (Feb.)	16	3	13	0	0	0
Ballina	20	6	7	3	3	1
Crossmolina (Aug.)	21	2	15	0	1	3 <sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 1 Aug. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p.104.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

In terms of social standing, the Ballina committee reflected local social patterns more than the individual charitable societies in the town. The religious background of the committee was only slightly more varied than Crossmolina relief committee. Of the twenty members in Ballina, the religion of four is unknown. Of the remaining sixteen, eleven were Established Church, two Baptist and three Catholics, two of whom were clergymen. Yet even with a greater representation of Catholics in this committee, the membership was still predominantly Protestant. It would also seem that it was the same people coming forward again and again to organise relief for the poor. 87 per cent of the February Crossmolina relief committee were involved or were soon to be involved in other charity work. 90 per cent of the Ballina relief committee and 71 per cent of the August Crossmolina relief committee were already involved in or were to eventually be involved in other charitable operations.

**Table 3:5**  
**Religious Composition of Relief Committees 1831**

Committee	No. of Members	Prot.*	Cath.	Unknown
Crossmolina (Feb.)	16	14	1	1
Ballina	20	13	3	4
Crossmolina (Aug.)	21	18	1	2

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.



*Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

**Table 3:6**

**Number of Members Involved in Other Charity Work until 1850**

Committee	No. of Members	Involved in Other Charities
Crossmolina (Feb.)	16	14
Ballina	20	18
Crossmolina (Aug.)	21	15 <sup>94</sup>

**Table 3:7**

**The Mayo Central Relief Committee for the Poor, in 1831 in Account for General Funds Received**

Parish	No. of Persons	% Pop.	Amount
	Relieved	1831	£ s d
Attymass	2629	82%	485 15 9
Killala	2220	57%	415 6 6
Ballisakeery	3806	64%	718 5 5
Kilmoremoy	9500	93%	1851 7 3
Adrigoole	3433	51%	677 9 11
Crossmolina	6373	55%	1304 2 1
Moygownagh	2204	111%	415 7 5
Kilfian	2926	52%	928 5 1
Dunfeeny	2527	63%	545 2 0
Kilgarvin	2225	53%	416 5 2
Ballinahaglish & Kilbelfad	4188	47%	658 9 3
Templemary, Lacken & Kilcummin	2500	39%	351 2 6
Castleconnor	2000	43%	295 0 0 <sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 21 March 1831, p. 3; 1 Aug. 1831, p. 3; 29 Aug. 1831, p. 3; Cholera Papers 2/440/9 (N.A. Board of Health, Co. Mayo, 2/440/9); *Ballina Advertiser*, 22 July 1842, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1842, p. 2; *Tyrally Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1847, p. 3; Church of Ireland Records, Kilmoremoy, Crossmolina (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.32).

<sup>95</sup> *Ballina Impartial*, 5 Sept. 1831, p. 1; *Census 1831*, pp 350-370.



The dissolution of the Crossmolina relief committee tallied with the general winding down of relief. Table 3:7 reveals the number of people relieved in each parish, the proportion of the parish population that apparently received aid and the amount of money given to each parish.

### Cholera 1832

Cholera reached Europe towards the latter part of 1830, spreading throughout the continent in the years that followed. Cholera has its origins in the micro-organism, the *Cholera Vibrio*. It usually enters the body through the mouth. Water, food, clothing and blankets belonging to a victim of cholera transfer the *vibrio* to hands and food and then to the mouth etc. Cholera spreads most speedily in insanitary conditions, particularly when sewage carrying the infection seeps into a public water supply.<sup>96</sup>

Ireland did have a general board of health to provide advice on public health issues and on measures dealing with contagious disease. Established in 1820, the Board of Health remained dormant from 1822 to 1831. When cholera appeared in Britain, the board went back into operation. They believed that the existing legislation that dealt with the typhus epidemic, was enough to prevent the spread of cholera. Local boards of health

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<sup>96</sup>Robins, op. cit., p. 62.



could be formed and where an area was too poor, an officer of health would be appointed and their costs would be met by the county to which the area belonged.<sup>97</sup>

Table 3:8 charts the establishment and dissolution of each board of health. The main period of establishment was between April and August 1832. In the case of cholera, as opposed to subsistence crisis, the disease created a terror that spanned from the very poor to the very rich. This terror of the disease had huge implications for relief in all four union districts.

**Table 3:8**  
**Boards of Health 1832**

Union	B.O.H.	Established	Dissolution
Thurles	Thurles	May 1832	Oct. 1832
Thurles	Templemore	July 1832	Dec. 1832
Thurles	Glankeen, Drom & Inch	May 1832	June 1833
Inishowen	Upper Merville	Oct. 1832	N.A.
Inishowen	Donagh	Jan. 1832	N.A.
Inishowen	Lower Fahan	Aug. 1832	N.A.
Ballina	Ardnaree	July 1832	Jan. 1833
Ballina	Ballina	June 1832	Nov. 1832
Ballina	Crossmolina	June 1832	Nov. 1832
Ballina	Killala	July 1832	N.A.
Ballina	Kilmon & Kilcommon	July 1832	N.A.
Ballina	Kilmoremoy	June 1832	N.A.
Dundalk	Ballymascanlon	July 1832	Oct. 1832
Dundalk	Carlingford	April 1832	Dec. 1832
Dundalk	Dundalk	Nov. 1831	Oct. 1832

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 65.



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Of the fifteen boards of health in the four union districts, ten were formed in an effort to prevent the disease from spreading to their area. Local residents, therefore, took a more proactive role during this crisis.

From November 1831 there was constant reporting on the cholera epidemic in England among the Irish newspapers, accompanied by tips on how to avoid the disease.<sup>98</sup> Cholera did not make an appearance in the town of Dundalk until July 1832. A board of health had been in operation since November 1831. Dundalk's position as a port heavily involved in Anglo-Irish trade put it in a vulnerable position with the spread of the disease, prompting the early establishment of a board. The Established Church clergy chaired the three main committees in the union district. Subscriptions proved hard to get. £38 12s 6d was the total sum of subscriptions collected by the Carlingford board of health.<sup>99</sup> The Ballymascanlon board of health managed to collect £30 'together with a quantity of straw for bedding and lime for whitewashing the houses of the poor of the parish.' The Dundalk board of health, applying for a grant of £200, stated that " a subscription list is on foot but its amount will be comparatively small."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 12 Nov. 1831, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup>Cholera Papers, 11 July 1832 (N.A. Board of Health, County Louth 2/440/9).

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 June 1832.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

It would seem that the Dundalk area was experiencing charity fatigue. It already had at least five other charity groups demanding money. Later in the summer the Dundalk board of health was at the centre of allegations regarding political trickery:

We have just heard the Conservatives of corruption in Dundalk have had several private meetings of late which it is believed, were in reference to the future representatives of the borough. Lord Roden, with unusual liberality has given £100 to the Board of Health; and his nominee Mr Gordon, has within those few days sent £50 for the poor of the town.<sup>101</sup>

There is no evidence that the board received this donation. Apart from the board of health in the town, a temporary fever hospital was set up in April. By the end of 1832, it was estimated that 115 people had died out of 194 cases.<sup>102</sup> This extremely high death rate in part explains why many patients would not enter the fever hospital. Dr Fitzpatrick, founder of the Dundalk Benevolent Society, tried to force some of his patients in Dowdalshill to go to the fever hospital. When they refused he consulted the local bailiff on the legality of breaking down doors and forcibly removing patients. When the bailiff could not agree to such procedures, the doctor was forced to back down. Fitzpatrick himself succumbed to cholera, dying that same year.<sup>103</sup> Such a case highlights the problems and dangers involved in helping the

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<sup>101</sup>*Newry Examiner*, 25 Aug. 1832, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup>Harold O'Sullivan, 'The state of the poor in Dundalk, 1800-1850' in *C.B.S. Centenary Celebrations. Irisleabhar Cuimhneachain* (Dundalk, 1969), p. 31.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.



afflicted during periods of distress. However Dundalk escaped the particular harshness and devastation caused by epidemics during this period.

In the union district of Ballina, magistrates chaired five out of six boards of health. Of the six boards of health, Ballina, Crossmolina, Kilmon and Kilcommon had reported that they received no voluntary contributions from the local gentry, while the amount of contributions to the Ardnaree, Killala and Kilmoremoy coffers did not exceed £25.<sup>104</sup> It would seem that those with the financial wherewithal to be generous to the relief effort had called a halt to further donations, a third year of subscriptions possibly proving too much.

In the union district of Inishowen, establishment dates of local boards of health were the latest of all four union districts. Donagh board of health and Upper Fahan board of health were formed in reaction to cholera reaching their district, rather than as proactive preventative bodies. Subscriptions in this district did not exceed £25.<sup>105</sup>

In Tipperary advice on how to avoid cholera first appeared in the *Tipperary Free Press* on November 1831 and the paper continued to monitor the disease in subsequent issues. In the

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<sup>104</sup>Cholera Papers, 1832-34, 2/440/9 (N.A. Board of Health, Co. Mayo, 2/440/9).

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 2/440/7.



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union district of Thurles, the boards of health for Templemore, Glankeen, Drom and Inch were very much preventative groups. But Thurles board of health was not formed until cholera actually reached the area in May 1832.<sup>106</sup> This is in keeping with what we know of charitable action in the town so far. However the arrival of the epidemic did prompt a large subscription of £390, reflecting the terror of the wealthy.<sup>107</sup>

Table 3:9 reveals the social standing and religion of the chairmen of the 1832 boards of health in each union district. It highlights the preponderance of clergy and gentry in the driving seats of these boards. The only exception was the Thurles board of health, where the chairman was a local trader called Charles O'Keefe. The table also confirms earlier evidence that those who came forward in times of crisis were more often than not Protestant in religion. This is not to say that there was no Catholic involvement in local boards of health. Catholics were represented on many boards of health but when the business of chairing a committee or appealing for help to the government took place, it was usually a local Protestant clergyman or magistrate who performed those functions.

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 2/440/9, 5 May 1832.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 5 May 1832.



**Table 3:9**  
**Board of Health Chairmen, 1832**

B.O.H.	Chairman	Social Standing	Religion*
Upper Moville	J.M. Staples	Clergy	Prot.
Donagh	G. Marshall	Clergy	Prot.
Buncrana	H. Stewart	Clergy	Prot.
Ballina	A.F. Gore	Gentry	Prot.
Crossmolina	G. Jackson	Gentry	Prot.
Kilmoremoy	W. Atkinson	Gentry	Prot.
Kilmon & Kilcommon	J.G. Ireland	Gentry	Prot.
Killala	J. Knox	Gentry	Prot.
Ardnaree	A. Knox Gore	Gentry	Prot.
Carlingford	W.B. Forde	Clergy	Prot.
Dundalk	J.H. Stubbs	Clergy	Prot.
Ballymascanlon	O. Ormsby	Clergy	Prot.
Thurles	C. O'Keefe	Trader	Cath.
Templemore	C.J.R. Monck	Gentry	Prot.
Glankeen, Drom & Inch	G. Ryan	Gentry	Cath. <sup>108</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

The chairman of the board of health for Upper Moville, County Donegal, was the Rev John Molesworth Staples. He was the third son of the Right Honourable John Staples MP, of Lissan. Born in September 1776, he attended the Armagh Royal School, entering Trinity College Dublin in 1792 where he obtained a B.A. in 1796.<sup>109</sup> Rev Staples also chaired the relief committee for Upper

<sup>108</sup> *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, pp 501, 421, 104, 129, 35, 20, 316, 314; Church of Ireland Records, Upper Moville, Lower Fahan, Dundalk (PRONI, Church of Ireland, Parish Registers, MIC/1/138, MIC/1/181, MIC/1/204); Church of Ireland Records, Kilmoremoy, Crossmolina, Killala, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No. 32, Reel No.33).

<sup>109</sup> Rev James B. Leslie, *Derry clergy and parishes* (Enniskillen, 1937), p. 62.



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and Lower Moville in the Autumn of 1846.<sup>110</sup> Rev George Marshall was chairman of the Donagh board of health. He was appointed to that parish in 1808. Born in 1768 the son of Rev Josiah Marshall in Donegal, he also attended Trinity College Dublin.<sup>111</sup> During the great famine he sat on the Clonmany and Donagh relief committee.<sup>112</sup> The chairman of the Bunrana board of health was Rev Hamilton Stuart. Born in 1786, Stuart, like the other clergymen, attended Trinity College Dublin. He took up residence in Bunrana in 1821.<sup>113</sup>

Arthur Francis Knox Gore was chairman of the Ballina board of health. His career encompassed that of magistrate, Lieutenant-Colonel of the North Mayo Militia and High Sheriff of County Mayo in 1840.<sup>114</sup> He was a liberal, proposing G.H. Moore in the Mayo election of 1846.<sup>115</sup> In 1830 he chaired the Ballina relief committee,<sup>116</sup> was a trustee of the Ballina Charitable Loan Society,<sup>117</sup> and during the famine he chaired the Ballina baronial relief committee.<sup>118</sup> John Knox of Castlerea was

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<sup>110</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters. Donegal 2/441/41. RLFC3/2/7/23. 5 Nov. 1846.

<sup>111</sup>Leslie, *Derry clergy and parishes*(Enniskillen, 1937), p. 187.

<sup>112</sup>N.A. RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, Donegal 2/441/41. RLFC3/2/7/18 No.7192 (N.A. RLFC. Co. Donegal, 2/441/41).

<sup>113</sup>Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>114</sup>John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1845), p. 681.

<sup>115</sup>*Mayo Constitution*, 10 March 1846, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4.

<sup>117</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 20 March 1840, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 20 March 1840, p. 2.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

chairman of the Killala board of health. Born in May 1783, Knox succeeded his father in 1798. He served as High Sheriff for Wicklow in 1809 and Mayo in 1821. He was a magistrate and a deputy lieutenant of County Mayo.<sup>119</sup> Annesley Gore Knox, a JP and poor law guardian, was chairman of the Ardnaree board of health. He was a member of Ballina relief committee in 1830; the Crossmolina relief committees in 1831<sup>120</sup> and the Crossmolina dispensary committee.<sup>121</sup>

The chairman of the Thurles board of health was local Catholic brewer, Charles O'Keefe. O'Keefe was a trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank.<sup>122</sup> The Templemore board of health was chaired by the Honourable C.J. Monck. George Ryan chaired the board of health for the parishes of Glankeen, Drom and Inch. Ryan, a Catholic, was very much part of the liberal gentry in mid-Tipperary and an active relief worker.

The chairman of the Carlingford board of health was the Rev William Brownlow Forde.<sup>123</sup> Born in 1786, Forde attended Trinity College Dublin, receiving a B.A. in 1807 and M.A. in 1813. He arrived in Carlingford in 1824. John Hamilton Stubbs

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<sup>119</sup>John Burke, op. cit., p. 680.

<sup>120</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 21 March 1831, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 June 1831, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup>*Thurles Savings Bank Ledger* (T.C.L.); *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>123</sup>Leslie, op. cit., p. 160.



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was chairman of the Dundalk board of health. Stubbs was born in Dublin in January 1786. He attended Trinity College Dublin, receiving his B.A. in 1806 and his M.A. in 1814.<sup>124</sup> Stubbs was an active relief worker in the town. Headmaster of the Dundalk Grammar School for many years, he was licensed as curate of Dundalk on 19 March 1824. The Rev Owen Ormsby had been in Carlingford fifteen years when he was elected chairman of the Ballymascanlon board of health. Ormsby also attended Trinity, graduating B.A. in 1801 and M.A. in 1832, became rector of Dunbin in 1832 and held it with Ballymascanlon until he died in 1834.<sup>125</sup>

Table 3:10 lists the social standing of the members of the boards of health. The heading marked 'unknown' refers to names that were indecipherable. What is most striking about this evidence is the small numbers that made up each board of health. Even in areas such as Ballina and Dundalk which had a rich history of charity, their boards are noticeably small. Such evidence would suggest that either the local volunteers were wearying of their responsibilities or that the ferocity of the disease was too great for many to consider taking part in a committee that might put them at heightened risk.

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



**Table 3:10**

**Board of Health Members 1832: Social Background**

B.O.H.	No. of Members	Clergy	Gentry	Trader	Prof.	Unknown
Upper Merville	5	3	1	0	0	1
Donagh	5	2	1	0	0	2
Buncrana	5	3	1	0	0	1
Ballina	13	2	6	3	2	0
Crossmolina	9	1	5	0	1	2
Kilmoremoy	5	1	2	1	1	0
Kilmon & Kilcommon	5	1	2	0	2	0
Killala	8	4	2	1	1	0
Ardnaree	8	2	5	1	0	0
Carlingford	8	2	3	1	1	1
Dundalk	9	4	0	1	3	1
Ballymascanlon	8	3	3	2	0	0
Thurles	6	1	0	4	1	0
Templemore	9	0	3	0	1	5
Glankeen, Drom & Inch	8	2	3	1	1	1 <sup>126</sup>

The cholera epidemic had largely subsided by April 1833. This was the last large-scale epidemic involving the four union districts before the great famine. The fifteen boards of health throughout the four districts, made up of small groups of gentry and clergymen, had accumulated a variety of ‘crisis management skills’ in a short time. Yet committee numbers were down on previous years, notably in Ballina. This was most likely due to the fact that the district was experiencing a third year of distress

<sup>126</sup> J. Pigott, *Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1824*, pp 194, 209, 137, 147, 310, 311.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

and the stamina of the volunteer had been put to the test.

However it was the same core group of men that had sat on the

**Table 3:11**  
**Religious Distribution on Boards of Health**

B.O.H.	No. of Members	Prot.*	Cath.	Unknown
Upper Merville	5	3	1	1
Donagh	5	2	0	3
Buncrana	5	2	1	2
Ballina	13	9	2	2
Crossmolina	9	7	0	2
Kilmoremoy	5	2	1	2
Kilmon & Kilcommon	5	2	1	2
Killala	8	8	0	0
Ardnaree	8	4	1	3
Carlingford	8	5	1	2
Dundalk	9	6	2	1
Ballymascanlon	8	4	2	2
Thurles	6	0	5	1
Templemore	9	5	1	3
Glankeen, Drom & Inch	8	1	5	2 <sup>127</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

committees in 1832. Of the thirteen members of the Ballina board of health, ten had been involved in previous relief efforts. The

<sup>127</sup> Church of Ireland Records, Upper Merville, Lower Fahan, Dundalk (PRONI, Church of Ireland Parish Registers, MIC/1/138, MIC/1/181, MIC/1/204); Church of Ireland Records, Kilmoremoy, Crossmolina, Killala, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel 32,33); Presbyterian Church Records, Buncrana, Fahan, Malin, Merville (PRONI, Presbyterian Church Records, MIC/1p/32, MIC/1p/306, MIC/1p/236, MIC/1p/32); Roman Catholic Church Records, Buncrana, Carlingford, Carndonagh, Culdaff, Dundalk, Louth, Malin, Merville (PRONI, Roman Catholic Church Records, MIC/1D/54, MIC/1D/44 & 45, MIC/1D/54, MIC/1D/55, MIC/1D/55, MIC/1D/44, MIC/1D/54, MIC/1D/55); William J. Hayes, *The old church and graveyard, Templemore* (Templemore, 1995).



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

social and religious background, as in previous years, was mixed. In Crossmolina, the same pattern of relief was extended to 1832, with seven of its nine members being involved in other committees during the previous two years. The social and religious background of the board mirrored previous committees in that it was dominated by Protestant, anti-Repeal gentry and clergymen. In Dundalk, it was also the same core group of volunteers who made up the town's board of health. Of the nine members, seven were involved in other local charitable groups. With the exception of the parish priest and Catholic surgeon, the board was overwhelmingly Protestant.

Thus it was the same core group of people who came forward in times of distress to help the poor, and it was because of this that the social, religious and political background of each committee remained the same.

### **Poor Law 1838**

By the end of this decade the face of poor relief was transformed as the new poor law was introduced. As part of the new system, the boards of guardians, comprising elected and ex-officio local men were to see to the running of each new workhouse. There was a belief that local landlord involvement in this poor-law administration was vital. It was felt that by making the poor rate a local charge, landlords would be forced into



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees 1817-42*

becoming more involved in the management of their estates.<sup>128</sup>

An examination of elected boards of guardians reveals that there were sizeable differences between those who had been active in the voluntary committees, and those came forward after 1838 to operate the poor law. Of the thirty-three guardians in the Ballina union in 1842, only eight had been involved with relief or health committees. Of that eight, four continued to be involved during the famine.<sup>129</sup> In the union of Dundalk, only four of the thirty poor law guardians were previously active in a committee context; one before 1845 and three during the famine.<sup>130</sup> In the union of Thurles, a similar picture emerges.<sup>131</sup> Of the thirty-one elected guardians, five were involved in the relief of the poor outside of the poor law before the great famine. By the famine, this number was reduced to four. Thus it would seem that the two forms of relief attracted, for the most part, totally different people.

### **Ballina 1842**

1842 was the final year before the great famine that emergency relief was needed in the union district of Ballina. Because of the new poor law by then in place, the pace of local

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<sup>128</sup>Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: The Irish famine* (Dublin, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>129</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 1 Aug. 1842, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup>*Newry Examiner*, 27 July 1839.

<sup>131</sup>*Rough Minute Book, Thurles Union*, 25 May 1839. (Tipperary County Library)(Hereafter referred to as T.C.L.).



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

voluntary relief was much slower and took place over a shorter period of time. Judging by newspapers reports, the relief effort was concentrated on July and early August. At one meeting called for the relief of the poor reported in the *Ballina Advertiser* on 22 July 1842, fifteen of the gathering were named. There were eight gentry, two clergymen, four traders and one was an attorney.<sup>132</sup>

Relief efforts were also taking place in Killala and Crossmolina.<sup>133</sup> In Ballina, twelve of the fifteen members had been involved in local relief, some of them since 1830. The social and religious background of the committee was mixed. The committee was forced, however, to dissolve in August due to lack of funds.<sup>134</sup> The same people were willing to give their time but subscriptions proved harder to solicit because everyone now had to pay the poor rates.

The three decades before the famine had seen the establishment of a relief committee system. As the years progressed, the role of relief extended from the distribution of food to the operation of public works. The role of relief worker evolved from distributor to administrator, accountant and public works supervisor. Yet while the work load of the relief worker became heavier and more varied, one aspect of relief did not

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<sup>132</sup>*Ballina Advertiser*, 22 July 1842, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1842, p. 2; 19 Aug. 1842, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Aug. 1842, p. 3.



## *Pre-Famine Relief Committees, 1817-42*

change; the volunteer himself. It was the same group of people who came forward in times of crisis and it was because of this that the social, religious and political background of each committee remained fairly consistent throughout the period. Thus when the potato crop failed for a second time in 1846, the four poor law unions were able to call on a volunteer network that had considerable experience of working together, and who had evolved along with the relief committee system itself.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RELIEF COMMITTEES 1845-1852

The Great Irish Famine tested the skills of the most active and most experienced relief workers. As we have seen, they had built up experience of handling relief during relatively short periods of distress. However the number of relief workers in these four poor law unions was few which, given the severity of the famine and its longevity, raises a number of questions regarding relief committee membership in the mid-nineteenth century. Did the same people come forward to offer their time, money and experience to the relief effort once again, or did this period see the mobilisation of a new breed of relief worker? Did the famine force traders and professionals into the field of relief, or did responsibility remain largely in the same hands? This chapter will also examine public relief in terms of inner committee tensions; special contributions made to the committee system (i.e. by the clergy); the pro-activeness of relief workers; and finally, the identification of those who weathered the famine and could still be found on relief committees when the crisis waned.

During the famine, the government relief measures went through four different stages. It was during the first three that relief committees had an important role to play.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

**Stage One: Nov. 1845-Aug. 1846 Temporary Relief Commission**

**Stage Two: Sept. 1846-April 1847 Relief By Public Works**

**Stage Three: April 1847-Sept. 1847 Temporary Relief Act**

**Stage Four: September Onwards Extended Irish Poor Law**

### Stage One: November 1845-August 1846

#### 'A Tendency to Exaggeration'

The potato blight or *Phytophthora Infestans* was thought to have started in South America.<sup>1</sup> Advanced methods of sea transport assisted the spread of the disease and the blight was eventually to reach Ireland in 1845. The Irish press first remarked on the arrival of the blight in September of that same year.<sup>2</sup> It was believed that the rotten tubers were a result of excess moisture brought on by calm damp weather. The government response was to establish a Scientific Commission to investigate the blight. A temporary relief commission was also established to organise food depots and co-ordinate relief committees. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Henry Goulburn, organised the purchase of £100,000 of Indian corn, to be

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<sup>1</sup>Mary E. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (1986), p.52.

<sup>2</sup>*Tipperary Constitution*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 1; *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 17 Sept. 1845, p. 4.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

distributed for re-sale around Ireland. The Board of Works received an additional financial grant but it was decided that neither the additional works or extra food would be available for disposal until the spring of 1846.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the government went about trying to gauge the extent of the disease and the extent of distress among the Irish poor. Daily contact was established between Peel, Sir James Graham (the Home Secretary) and the Irish Executive at Dublin Castle who were in the process of collecting information from local constabularies, coast guards and local boards of guardians. However there was also a certain reticence on the part of the government:

The accounts of the state of the potato crop in Ireland are becoming very alarming. There is such a tendency to exaggeration and inaccuracy in Irish reports, that delay in acting upon them is always desirable.<sup>4</sup>

In 1831, Sir James Graham, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was in charge of relief in those western districts affected by partial famine. It was during this time that Graham came across what he believed to be a tendency by landlords to exaggerate the condition of their tenantry in order to get more money out of the public purse. Therefore, in 1845 there was a cautious approach to reports emanating from Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: The Irish famine* (Dublin, 1994), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Sir Robert Peel to Sir James Graham. C.S. Parker, *Sir Robert Peel from his private papers* (London, 1891-9), p. 223.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Gray, *Famine, land and politics. British government and Irish society, 1843-50* (Dublin, 1999), p. 126.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

Because it was usually October when the main digging of potatoes took place, the extent to which the blight had affected the Irish crop was not instantly evident. Accurate appraisal of crop loss was also hampered by the unpredictable nature of the blight and the irregular way in which it appeared.

Such difficulties were in ample evidence in the four poor law unions in question. Initial reaction to the blight in the union of Dundalk was staggered and confused. There was a meeting in the parish of Louth in October 1845 to discuss the blight.<sup>6</sup> Potato crop loss was generally thought to be approximately 50 per cent in November.<sup>7</sup> Yet there was no sense of real panic. Mr Malby Crofton R.M. believed in November 1845 that the effects of the disease would not be nearly as bad as was generally being predicted.<sup>8</sup> There was a general reluctance to add fuel to what some saw as exaggerated accounts on the extent of the blight:

For some weeks past there had been a partial cessation of the attempt to keep up the panic, so long sustained by the circulation of grossly exaggerated accounts relative to the effects of the potato disease.<sup>9</sup>

Contradictory reports on the state of the potato crop in Ballina in the autumn of 1845 indicate that the disease was scattered rather than pervasive. The potato crop in the baronies of

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<sup>6</sup>*Newry Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1845, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>RLFC, Administrative Series, No.431 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Louth, 2/442/14).

<sup>8</sup>RLFC2/3. Incoming Letters, No.1081 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Louth, 2/442/6).

<sup>9</sup>*Newry Commercial Telegraph*, 24 Jan. 1846, p. 3.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

Tyrawly, Erris and Gallen was said not to have been affected to any great extent.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, after investigating the state of the potato crop in the union during October 1845, the chairman of the Ballina board of guardians, Edward Howley, believed that the potato rot was not so widespread or as malignant as he had been led to believe.<sup>11</sup> However the local newspaper, the *Tyrawly Herald*, reported in December 1845:

In some cases every precaution has failed and though a few fields may have escaped the infection and the fortunate owners tell us that the state of the crops is not near so bad as people say, we have too many evidences that the disease has extended itself farther than we have yet represented.<sup>12</sup>

In the union of Inishowen, the uncertainty surrounding the potato blight was just as evident. One newspaper, the *Londonderry Journal*, recognised the diversity of opinion with respect to the potato blight but believed that while the disease's effect was extensive in range, there were regional variations in its impact.<sup>13</sup> But it was in the union of Thurles and through the voice of the *Tipperary Vindicator* that the difficulty of gauging the extent of the disease in late 1845 was most ably voiced:

We regret to say, as far as this and the neighbouring districts to many miles extent are involved, the loss is far greater than anticipated. Potatoes that had been pitted a fortnight ago in apparent health have been discovered tainted and in many instances, irretrievably lost; and in the meantime, the disease progresses with irresistible strides.... but we

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<sup>10</sup>RLFC, Administrative Series, 12 Nov. 1845, No.Z15672 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/441/17).

<sup>11</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 23 Oct. 1845, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1845, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 29 Oct. 1835, p. 2.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

find it impossible to give an accurate estimate, the accounts in some cases being very contradictory.<sup>14</sup>

To estimate contemporary consciousness of the blight and distress caused by the potato failure, two local newspapers were examined in terms of column inches given over to the blight and eventual distress. The newspapers, the *Tyrawly Herald* for the Ballina union and the *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, for the union of Dundalk were chosen because they were primarily local papers based in the major towns of the two unions, and they were published consistently throughout the famine period. The extent of the blight and consequent distress among the labouring population did not become a major topic in the *Tyrawly Herald* until 1846. Until 23 October 1845, the potato failure was always referred to as a European phenomenon. References to local distress caused by the potato failure do not make up more than one column in any one edition of the paper until the 27 August 1846, reaching a peak of six columns on 15 April 1847.<sup>15</sup> In the *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, the potato blight was first alluded to in the gardening section on 17 September 1845. This general theme of potato failure continued but specific reporting of any local distress engendered by the failure is piecemeal during the first six months of 1846. Local references to the blight or

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<sup>14</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 29 Oct. 1845, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 27 Aug. 1846, p. 3; 15 April 1847, p. 3.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

distress did not exceed one column during the first six months of 1846.<sup>16</sup> Such examples highlight contemporary consciousness with respect to the need for relief, especially considering that it was those people who read local reports that would in all probability have been in a position to lend some sort of help or voluntary support during times of distress.

### **The Establishment of Relief Committees**

The level of uncertainty or confusion as to the severity of the potato crop loss did have implications for the local relief effort and the timing of local relief committee formation. In April 1846 Dundalk town commissioner, Joseph Cartin, after consulting 'local clergy and dignitaries' decided against calling a meeting believing it to be premature. An application had been made to the board of works for £3,000 for certain works and it was felt that if it was granted there would be employment for the poor of Dundalk. However he did feel that 'extraordinary privation was not very far away.'<sup>17</sup> Yet within a week the commissioners did indeed call a meeting.<sup>18</sup> Potato prices at this time did not show any sign of dramatic increase. Prices at the Dundalk market hovered at 5d per stone of potatoes from January to the end of

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<sup>16</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, January to June, 1846.

<sup>17</sup>RLFC2/3, Incoming Letters, 14 April 1846, No.1467 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Louth, 2/442/6).



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

February 1846. An increase to 6.5d per stone lasted until the end of April, when a stone of potatoes cost 7d.<sup>19</sup> Thus even while the price of potatoes was slowly increasing during this period, there was no such serious escalation in prices such as might prompt the establishment of a relief committee, especially when the town commissioner believed it to be unnecessary. At this stage there was little real sense of crisis. Newspaper reports claimed that attendance was rather thin at meetings in April and May 1846.<sup>20</sup>

Immediate distress in the four poor law unions differed greatly. Evidence suggests that Dundalk did not suffer to the same extent as many parts of the rest of the country. Trade, while affected, continued to operate in the area. In 1855 Anthony Marmion, in his *Ancient and Modern History of the Maritime Ports of Ireland*, estimated that the income of Dundalk Port doubled in the previous fourteen years.<sup>21</sup> The construction of the Roman Catholic St Patrick's Cathedral in the middle of Dundalk town at a cost of £25,000 continued throughout the worst years of the famine, reaching completion in 1848.<sup>22</sup> In 1844, a merchant from Dundalk, Michael Kelly, left £1,000 sterling to the Catholic

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<sup>18</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 22 April 1846, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1846 to 27 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 April 1846, p. 3; 2 May 1846, p. 2; 13 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>A. Marmion, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Maritime Ports of Ireland* (Hilborn, 1855), p. 295.

<sup>22</sup>P Ua Dubhthaigh, *The book of Dundalk* (Dundalk, 1946), p. 89.



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parish priest, John Coyne, to establish a convent to educate the female children of Dundalk. Coyne brought the Mercy Sisters to the town and building on the new convent began in 1847.<sup>23</sup> The Sisters were able to move in by October of that same year.<sup>24</sup> Construction was also taking place of the Dundalk and Enniskillen railway line. The line as far as Castleblaney was opened on 15 February 1849. On the same day, the Belfast Junction Railway was finished from the interim station at Newfoundwell, Drogheda, as far as Dundalk.<sup>25</sup> The only other union in the group of four that had such employment possibilities in terms of railway employment was Thurles. However red tape and lack of money meant those unemployed labourers who expected work on the Cashel Railway line in Templemore and Thurles in early 1846 were to be disappointed.<sup>26</sup> The employment the railway gave proved to be very important in the Dundalk relief effort. By August 1846 it was reported that the works on the Dundalk and Enniskillen railway line were 'in a state of active progress employing 1,200 men.'<sup>27</sup> James Shekleton's foundry and engineering business employed 100 men, while

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<sup>23</sup>*Charitable donations and bequests (Ireland) Specification of the several sums at present administered by the commissioners of charitable donations and bequests in Ireland, 1846.* p. 28, H.C. 1846 (285) XLII.

<sup>24</sup>Ua Dubhthaigh, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>26</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 28 Jan. 1846, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 8 Aug. 1846, p. 2.



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Carroll's tobacco factory employed 50.<sup>28</sup> Major improvements also took place during the famine to the port of Dundalk. Begun in 1840, construction of the navy bank (a solid embankment changing the course of the river from the south to the north channel) was completed in 1848 at a cost of £22,000.<sup>29</sup> Thus while the union of Dundalk did suffer great distress during the famine, the aforementioned projects seem to have played an important part in mitigating the suffering of the poor and averting any great distress on the level to which it existed in other parts of the country.

In the union of Thurles, relief committees were born out of necessity rather than out of any sense of preparation for future distress. The Thurles town relief committee was established on 2 April 1846, to give immediate relief to the poor.<sup>30</sup> There was also a great deal of distress in the rest of the union. In a letter from John Malone, Esq., Sub-Inspector in Borrisoleigh to the Inspector General, he stated that:

the labouring population of this and Templemore district do be most destitute from the mostly total absence of employment - and fears they will take provisions by force if immediate employment be not afforded them.<sup>31</sup>

Of Borrisoleigh's population of 8,000, a quarter was in need of

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<sup>28</sup>Marmion, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>29</sup>Allan B. Swan, "The port of Dundalk" in *CLAHJ.* xvii. 1970. No.2, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>RLFC, Administrative Series, No.1178 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/441/17).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, Z5224, 15 March, 1846.



employment and there was not a single resident landed proprietor in the parish to employ them.<sup>32</sup> One of these landed proprietors, William Beamish, an absentee landlord from Cork, had actually investigated the condition of his tenantry in late 1845.<sup>33</sup> The other main landlord, the Earl of Portarlington, another absentee, took some time to take responsibility for the welfare of his tenants.<sup>34</sup> Distress prompted the establishment of relief committees in Inch (17 April) and Borrisoleigh (22 April), and at Moyne, Drom, Mealiffe, Holycross and Ballycahill, Moycarky, Loughmore and Templeree, Burris and Farneybridge. They were all formed in April in reaction to the total destitution of the labouring poor. There was a general fear that such destitution would eventually lead to violence if the poor did not get employment.<sup>35</sup>

In the union of Inishowen, it appears that Bunrana was the first and only area in this particular season that formed a relief committee to organise public works.<sup>36</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that relief activities were in operation in other parts of the union. Thus, for the most part, relief committees were formed in accordance with government instructions that they should be

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., No.1081. 22 April 1846.

<sup>33</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 10 Sept. 1845, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., June 1846, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>RLFC, Administrative Series, 2/441/17, No.Z5224 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp 2/441/17).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Z3098.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

established, on good and sufficient grounds, that very considerable loss of the potato crop has been sustained and that extreme distress is near at hand.<sup>37</sup>

In the Ballina union a meeting for the barony of Tyrawly for the purpose of forming a relief committee was held in May 1846. Four subcommittees were also formed at this meeting for the areas of Killala, Ballina, Ballycastle and Crossmolina.<sup>38</sup> The relief committee formed in May 1846 for the barony of Tyrawly was thereafter referred to, in contemporary terms, as the 'Ballina relief committee'. Constabulary reports reveal that potato crop loss in the union by November 1846 ranged from one-quarter to two-thirds of the entire potato crop, while employment among labourers ranged from three-quarters employed to nearly full unemployment.<sup>39</sup> Yet despite these figures the committee formed in May was regarded more as a body that was preparing for impending distress.

For those who lived in the barony of Erris, relief in the form of the union workhouse was approximately forty miles away. It was the distressed themselves that forced the establishment of a relief committee in Erris. Seeing that there was corn in store for shipping while they were in danger of starving, the people went

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<sup>37</sup>*Instructions to committees of relief districts, extracted from minutes of proceedings of the commissioners appointed in reference to the apprehended scarcity, 1846.* H.C. 1846 (171) xxxvii.

<sup>38</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>RLFC1, Administrative Series, No.381 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2./441/17).



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

to the stipendiary magistrate, Mr Cruice, for help. When he wrote to the government on the subject he was directed to form a committee consisting of magistrates and poor law guardians.<sup>40</sup>

The newspaper article that reported the situation indicated that the whole process took place over 'a few days' from the time the people approached Cruice to the government direction to form a committee. Relief Commission Papers reveal that a relief committee for Belmullet in Erris was in operation by 11 April 1846.<sup>41</sup> At the other end of the union, a relief committee for Easky was not formed until July 1846, despite the fact that the potato crop was said to have been in a deplorable state of decay from November 1845.<sup>42</sup>

By June 1846, the union of Thurles was proving the most proactive in terms of relief committees, with eleven electoral divisions forming committees. The much larger union of Ballina had a mere six relief committees, Ballina and Ardnaree, Belmullet, Ballycastle, Crossmolina, Easkey and Killala. Inishowen union had one relief committee while the union of Dundalk had four relief committees.

The diversity in terms of relief committee numbers was due

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<sup>40</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 9 April 1846, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>RLFC1, Administrative Series, 2/442/17, D.365 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo 2/442/17).

<sup>42</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 9 July 1846, p. 2.



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to a number of reasons. Thurles union was already experiencing great distress at this stage. Ballina union, with the exception of those areas already mentioned, was preparing itself for impending distress and organising itself accordingly.

For the most part, there were no strict territorial boundaries to the operation of particular relief committees. In Ballina, a relief committee for the barony of Tyrawly was formed and then divided into smaller parochial units to deal with the distress on a more local level. This pattern was repeated in the barony of Lower Dundalk in that union. However Dundalk also had its own town committee. The relief committees in Thurles were formed along electoral divisions and parish lines. The variation in relief committee formation was not unusual. In his study on the great famine in the province of Ulster, James Grant has noted:

As far as the province of Ulster was concerned the lieutenants had formed large central committees with, in some cases, local or 'sub-district' committees under them....Donegal was different. There is no evidence of any central baronial arrangements, but simply the appointment of *ad hoc* committees mostly in single parishes, as distress made itself felt.<sup>43</sup>

The main duties of these relief committees were to purchase and resell Indian corn and to supervise the progress of work on small works of local utility, to be financed by local voluntary subscriptions. A government grant of up to 100 per cent of the

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<sup>43</sup>James Grant, 'The great famine in the province of Ulster, 1845-49: The mechanisms of relief', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Queen's University Belfast, 1986), p. 69.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

sum would be added. To obtain this grant local committees had to comply with printed government instructions issued on 28 February 1846, which advised on the formation of temporary relief committees.<sup>44</sup> May 15 was the date chosen for the opening of food depots. While some depots did open towards the end of March because of local distress, most depots fell into line with government policy and opened in May. Local relief committees were allowed to buy corn in quantities ranging from 5 to 20 tons which, in turn, could only be resold in quantities ranging from 1 to 7 pounds. However it was the small quantities that were in most demand. Depots did not supply traders and it was only when prices in a district were rising that a local committee was permitted to purchase the corn. In places where distress was prevalent but no committee formed or there was insufficient money, the relief commission organised the opening of sub-depots by local police and coast guards. Coast guards thus opened 76 sub-depots along the south and west coasts of the country. The police operated another 29 depots mainly in inland Connaught and Munster. Their actual duties were limited to sales and if there were any difficulties in payments on local employment schemes, they were allowed to use food instead of wages when presented with a certificate from the superintendent of works.

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<sup>44</sup>*Instructions*, 28 Feb. 1846.



**Relief Committee Membership**

When the government commissioners released their instructions on the membership of relief committees, they had made it quite clear that it was the moral and legal responsibility of landowners and ratepayers to give relief to the destitute poor. It was also felt that their local knowledge would ensure proper implementation of relief.<sup>45</sup> This insistence on the responsibilities of property-owners was not just confined to Ireland. Scotland was also experiencing distress at this time and the government in London was just as insistent that Scottish landlords assume the responsibility for relieving the poor.<sup>46</sup>

Relief commission papers and newspaper reports are the best sources for the identification of relief committee members. However there was a distinction between official membership and those actually present at committee meetings, as sometimes reported in local newspapers. Those committees marked with an asterisk denote a committee where only those present were named. These particular figures marked with an asterisk do not represent total committee membership.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>46</sup>T.M. Devine, *The great Highland famine. Hunger, emigration and the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth-century* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 83-4.



## Relief Committees 1845-52

**Table 4:1**  
**Relief Committee Membership: early 1846**

Union	Committee	No. of Members	Gentry	Clergy	Prof.	Trader
Dundalk	Dundalk Town	23	3	11	1	8
	Dundalk Baronial*	18	8	8	1	1
	Carlingford*	7	3	2	1	1
Ballina	Ballina	22	12	6	3	1
Thurles	Borrisoleigh	12	5	4	0	3
	Inch	9	5	4	0	0
	Thurles	18	4	7	3	4 <sup>47</sup>

The evidence here suggests that while local traders made up a significant proportion of the Dundalk town relief committee, the management of relief was still in the hands of the gentry and clergy in Ballina and Thurles, despite the fact that both towns had a healthy population of large traders.

**Table 4:2**  
**Religious Background of First Relief Committees**

Union	Committee	No. of Members	Det.	Prot.	Cath.
Dundalk	Dundalk Town	23	23	9	14
	Dundalk Bar.	18	18	13	5
	Carlingford	7	7	6	1
Ballina	Ballina	22	22	15	7
Thurles	Borrisoleigh	12	12	5	7
	Inch	9	9	5	4
	Thurles	18	14	7	7 <sup>48</sup>

Prot. = From one of the Protestant Denominations.

<sup>47</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), pp 311, 35.

<sup>48</sup>Church of Ireland Parish Records, Dundalk (PRONI, Church of Ireland Parish Registers MIC/1/204); Church of Ireland Parish Register, Kilmoremoy (N.A. Church of Ireland Parish Records, Reel No.32); Catholic Parish Registers, Kilmoremoy (NLI); Catholic Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers, Dundalk Parish, 1790-1901 (LCL).



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

The chairmen of eight relief committees have been identified. Five were resident landlords and three were Protestant clergymen. The only Catholic among the eight was Edward Howley, Chairman of the Ballina Board of Guardians and the Ballina and Ardnaree relief committee.

As for the religious backgrounds of these first committees, the examples of Dundalk and Ballina provide an interesting dimension to lay charitable activity in those areas. Five of the seven Catholics on the Ballina relief committee were clergymen, leaving only two lay Catholics in attendance at one meeting on a particular day, as opposed to fourteen Protestant lay members. Since 86 per cent of these committee members had been involved in previous relief committees, it is no surprise that the religious structure of the Ballina committee mirrors previous relief committees. In the Dundalk instance, the numbers stood at seven Catholic lay members to five lay Protestants. It would seem that local Catholic traders had entered the area of voluntary relief by 1846, taking a more active role in the committee structure than had previously been the case.

While the Dundalk town relief committee was quite mixed in terms of religion with an overwhelming majority of its members either repeal or liberal in politics, the Carlingford and barony of Lower Dundalk relief committees showed more



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

striking differences. Both committees comprised a greater proportion of Established Church members with a greater diversity in terms of political beliefs. Of the seven members of the Carlingford relief committee reported to be in attendance at a meeting in May 1846, six were Protestant, the seventh being a Roman Catholic. The politics of five of the members were established and found to be Conservative.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in the barony of Lower Dundalk, the relief committee members present comprised five Roman Catholics and thirteen Protestants.<sup>50</sup> The committee for the Dundalk town dispensary was examined in an effort to determine whether the Dundalk town relief committee instance was unique in terms of religion and politics. It was found that the dispensary committee almost mirrored the Dundalk town committee in religious and political terms.<sup>51</sup> Of the twenty-one members of the Dundalk dispensary committee, the religion and politics of eighteen was established. The committee comprised eight Roman Catholics, nine Established Church and one Presbyterian. The entire eighteen voted for either Liberal or Repeal candidates. Thus it would seem that those people who

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<sup>49</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 13 May 1846, p2; *An analysis of the parliamentary register of voters for the County of Louth, with the names of the landlords and their tenants on the register of voters, shewing the candidate for whom they voted at the election in April, 1865* (NLI). Walker, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>50</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 22 June 1846, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1846, p. 3.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

came forward in times of need or to help the poor in Dundalk town itself were more likely to be Liberal or Repeal in politics, where as those in the Barony of Lower Dundalk, including Carlingford, were members of the Established Church, with a greater diversity in political beliefs.

The relief commission brought business to a close on 15 August, 1846. Total expenses for the government came to £185,000. However the final cost to the exchequer at this stage was approximately £50,000, since £135,000 had been recovered from sales. The scarcity was met by £365,000 in grants and £368,000 in loans to relief committees.<sup>52</sup>

### Stage Two: September-April 1847

#### Relief Committee Establishment

The reappearance of blight in 1846 and the extent to which it spread through the country necessitated the reorganisation of relief committees. The second year of the blight caused far greater distress and this is reflected in the greater number of relief committees that were formed covering a wider geographic area than had previously been the case. However, in general, the new committees were now responsible for smaller geographical areas.

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<sup>52</sup>*Correspondence explanatory of the measures adopted of Her Majesty's government for the relief of distress arising from the failure of the potato crop in Ireland, 1846, p. 249. H.C. 1846 (735) xxxvii.*



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

Distress in Ballina town was particularly acute by October 1846, and an outbreak of typhus compounded existing scarcity problems.<sup>53</sup> Problems were also arising among local individuals providing relief:

...the efforts of a few benevolent individuals are lost amidst the self-interest, the bickerings, mismanagement, or ignorance of those to whom the care of the poor are intrusted, or who are considered as their natural guardians.<sup>54</sup>

Distress was also now spreading throughout the union of Inishowen:

Great distress, of which we have the most moving accounts exists in some portions of this half-barony. In Clonmany alone, by the report of the clergy of all denominations there are 588 destitute heads of families.<sup>55</sup>

A similar picture was emerging in Thurles, where by mid-August the potato crop was believed to be 'irretrievably lost' in the Holycross and Thurles districts.<sup>56</sup> The second year of distress necessitated a greater distribution of relief committees, as is evident throughout the four poor law unions in question. The union of Ballina was the first to assemble or reassemble relief committees. It was followed by Dundalk, Inishowen and Thurles in that order.

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<sup>53</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 17 Sept. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Oct. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 25 Nov. 1846, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 19 Aug. 1846, p. 2.



**Table 4:3**

**Relief Committee Establishment: Late 1846**

Union	Relief Committee	Date
Dundalk	Louth Baronial	16-Oct
	Darver	16-Oct
	Upper Dundalk Baronial	17-Oct
	Haggardstown	19-Oct
	Barronstown	19-Oct
	Ballymascanlon	19-Oct
Inishowen	Moville	05-Nov
	Buncrana	09-Nov
	Clonmany and Donagh	N.A.
Ballina	Ballina	15-Oct
	Killala	17-Oct
	Crossmolina	17-Oct
	Ballycastle	17-Oct
	Belmullet	17-Oct
	Thurles	01-Dec
Thurles	Farneybridge	01-Dec
	Moycarkey	01-Dec
	Borrisoleigh	02-Dec
	Thurles	20-Dec
	Templemore	09-Dec
	Mealiffe and Templebeg	14 January 1847

The new Relief Act set up to deal with the second year of distress appeared to have great repercussions for relief committees membership,

‘The Lieutenant, or Vice Lieutenant of the County Magistrates deputed by each bench of petty sessions in the barony, or lesser division, for which presentment sessions shall be concerned, nor exceeding 2 from bench  
 The Resident Magistrate  
 The Principal Clergyman of each Church  
 The Chairman of the Poor Law Union  
 The Principal Constabulary Officer  
 The Principal Coast Guard Officer, where available  
 Officers acting under the Commissary-General and Principal officer in the barony acting under the Boards of Works, to be ex-officio members



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In those cases where local circumstances may require that persons not comprehended in this arrangement should be appointed on Committees, it would be desirable to re-appoint so many of the most efficient and respectable members of the Committees of the past season as may be requisite.<sup>57</sup>

At first sight it seemed that there was a danger that many active members of early 1846 relief committees would not be reappointed. Concern over regulations on committee membership reverberated throughout the country. In Thurles Archdeacon Henry Cotton wrote to the Commission to voice his concerns over the new regulations. He complained that if the rules were applied to Thurles, there would be no relief committee. He stressed that

the labour was not and could not have been confined to the principal clergymen of each church, it was shared in and rendered doubly effective by their curates.<sup>58</sup>

Also in Thurles, the Mealiffe relief committee had not been reassembled since August 1846, with no other qualified persons except the local Protestant and Catholic clergymen to distribute relief. The Rev L. Treanor wrote to the Commission on 3 December 1846 complaining of the new relief committee structure as set out by the government.<sup>59</sup>

In the event, and as will be shown, this particular regulation

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<sup>57</sup>*Correspondence relating to the relief of the distress in Ireland, 1847*, p. 104, H.C. 1847 (761) LI.

<sup>58</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.6196 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>59</sup>RLFC, No. 7946 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).



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was ignored in all four unions as relief committees, swamped by distress, called on all the small philanthropic resources open to them. There are full membership lists for eleven relief committees throughout the four poor law unions: Buncrana, Moville, Muff and Upper Fahan, Clonmany and Donagh, Culdaff, in Inishowen; Castleconnor, Killala, Ballina and Ardnaree in Ballina; and Thurles and Drom and Inch, and Templemore in the union of Thurles. These lists reveal that regulations with respect to principal clergymen only sitting on committees were generally ignored. The Clonmany and Donagh relief committee was the only relief committee without a curate as a member. The evidence in Table 4:4 (next page) suggests that professionals and traders were now taking a slightly more active role in relief. However it was still the clergy and gentry who formed the major part of committees. Relief in Buncrana was evenly distributed among the various social groups. However in the Ballina instance there seems to have been a major fall in gentry membership, the brunt of relief committee work being left to the clergy, professionals and traders.

The new Thurles relief committee of October 1846 had seventeen members. Its chairman was Nicholas V. Maher who attended six out of sixty-three meetings, as opposed to the forty-



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**Table 4:4**

**Social Background of Relief Committee Members: Late 1846**

Committee	No. of Members	Clergy	Gentry	Prof.	Traders	Unkn.
Muff	14	7	6	1	0	0
Moville	17	6	8	3	0	0
Clonmany & Donagh Culdaff	13	5	5	2	1	0
Buncrana	19	8	7	2	2	0
Castleconnor	22	6	5	2	5	4
Killala	17	4	8	4	1	0
Ballina & Ardnaree	11	3	5	1	2	0
Drom and Inch	19	8	1	5	5	0
Thurles	14	4	7	0	3	0
Templemore	17	7	3	4	3	0
	26	6	14	3	3	0 <sup>60</sup>

one meetings attended by the Archdeacon Henry Cotton, or the fifty-two meetings attended by the Parish Priest, Rev William Barron. Little had changed in terms of committee membership by the autumn of 1846. The same people remained the backbone of the relief effort - including the local curates.<sup>61</sup> There were those who were listed as committee members because of the position they held in the area, but because of other commitments, distance to travel or plain indifference did not take an active part in the committee to which they were appointed. However there were also those who found the pressure of relief committee

<sup>60</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), pp 501, 421, 104, 129, 314-5.

<sup>61</sup>Minutes of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, 13 Oct. 1846-28 Sept. 1847 (T.C.L).



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membership too much. In the union of Ballina, the Rev Thomas Armstrong, a member of the Ballina and Ardnaree relief committee, wrote in his memoirs:

On one occasion I, in company with a respectable merchant, a member of the well known Dillon family, visited our district. In every house was want and woe....My kind friend distributed his money with a free hand, and on giving up the work for the day, he said "I gave yesterday my subscription of five pounds. Here is a cheque for £25, on condition you never require me to go through such a harrowing work as that of today".<sup>62</sup>

In Inishowen the pattern of membership of the many relief committees was largely repeated, with various personalities taking seats because of their position in local society. Whether they actually managed to attend the various relief committee meetings must remain a mystery. In this union, 44 year-old John Harvey, as Deputy Lieutenant of County Donegal, sat on four different relief committees in the union. A major landholder, Harvey's general valuation was the highest in the union at £3,872.<sup>63</sup> His family had a history of charitable activity in his home parish of Cloncha.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, as a member of the constabulary, Thomas Smith sat on three committees, while his fellow constabulary member James C. Wickham sat on two. Resident magistrate Major John Snow sat on four relief

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<sup>62</sup>Rev Thomas Armstrong, *My life in Connaught* (London, 1906), p. 9.

<sup>63</sup>Richard Griffith, *General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland. Union of Inishowen* (Dublin, 1857) (Hereafter referred to as Griffith's Valuation).

<sup>64</sup>Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1847), i, pp 351-2.



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committees. Fifty-four year old George Young chaired the Culdaff relief committee, in which parish he held most of his property with an annual valuation of £2,868.<sup>65</sup> Young's brother-in-law Brooke Young and his soon to be agent, Capt. Edward Harvey, all sat on the Culdaff relief committee, as did his long-time friend John Harvey. There would seem to have been disagreement at some level between Brooke and George Young. In 1846 Brooke was George's estate agent but left in 1847 due to strained relations with George.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, it would seem that in the Culdaff instance, it was a close knit group that ran the relief committee, a situation that was to cause friction.

Committee members in Ballina, Dundalk and Thurles usually had a history in local philanthropy in that they were the first to come forward to assist in times of crisis; were already involved in established charitable groups in the area, or they came from a family with a history of volunteer work and, as such, had a heightened sense of responsibility. Such was the case with John James Bigger, a magistrate and local landowner in Dundalk. Bigger was an active chairman at one stage of both the Dundalk and Faughart relief committees, as well as being an ex-officio poor law guardian. The son of another relief worker, Lennox

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<sup>65</sup>Griffiths Valuation, *Union of Inishowen*; Amy Isabel Young, *33 years in Inishowen* (Belfast, 1929), p. 201.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.



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Bigger, he was also the agent for landlord John Murphy, taking care of his property in the parish of Castletown.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Fortescue, also in the union of Dundalk, was another landowner who made large contributions to local relief. Of the eight subscription lists in the relief commission papers for Dundalk union, Thomas Fortescue appears as a subscriber on six. Local newspapers testify to his generosity time and time again.

In Ballina, Col. F.A. Knox Gore, a JP and Lord Lieutenant for County Sligo had an annual valuation of £5770 for property mostly held in and around Ballina.<sup>68</sup> Forty-three years old in 1846, he was part of the local relief effort as far back as 1830 when he was on the Ballina relief committee.<sup>69</sup>

In some measure it was inevitable that all the committees in their various forms were invariably peopled by the same characters. Those who sat on the Ballina baronial committee, for example, subdivided into smaller district committees. The same pattern was repeated in the barony of Lower Dundalk. In Thurles and Inishowen a certain group of people because of their positions (i.e. coastguard, R.M.) appear on nearly every committee list. Table 4:5 lists those members of relief committees who had previous experience on relief committees.

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<sup>67</sup>*Dundalk Democrat*, 9 Feb. 1850, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup>Griffith's Valuation, *Union of Ballina*.

<sup>69</sup>*Burke's Landed Gentry*, (1904), p. 681; *Ballina Impartial*, 5 July 1830, p. 4.



**Table 4:5**

**Percentage of Members with Previous Experience on Pre-Famine Committees: Late 1846**

Committee	%
Castleconnor	65%
Tireragh	65%
Ballina and Ardnaree	79%
Buncrana	4%
Upper and Lower Moville	6%
Clonmany and Donagh	17%
Muff and Upper Fahan	0%
Culdaff	5%
Thurles	76%
Drom and Inch	43 %
Templemore	23 % <sup>70</sup>

The chairman of the sub-relief committee of the western district of the barony of Tireragh, Thomas Jones, was a 58 year-old JP, poor law guardian and relief worker. He had an annual valuation of £4,188 for property held in the Ballina union.<sup>71</sup> His father was also part of relief efforts as far back as 1831 when he sat on the Ballina relief committee,<sup>72</sup> and on the Ardnaree board of health in 1832.<sup>73</sup> Jones Jnr was not only the active chairman of the Castleconnor relief committee but also chairman of the Easkey relief committee during the winter of 1846-7.<sup>74</sup> He also

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<sup>70</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 21 March 1831; 29 August 1831; Thurles Savings Bank Ledger 1839, pp 446-7, 637-9 (T.C.L.).

<sup>71</sup>Griffiths Valuation, *Union of Ballina*.

<sup>72</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 1 Aug. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup>Cholera Papers, 5 Dec. 1832 (N.A. Board of Health, Co. Mayo, 2/440/9).

<sup>74</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No.9696 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).



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sat on the Ballina relief committee in the summer of 1847 and was a member of the board of health.<sup>75</sup>

In Ballina there were personalities like Walter J. Bourke who chaired both the district and parochial committees in Killala and Thomas Jones who chaired two committees. George Vaughan Jackson, a local JP and poor law guardian, is another example. He is reported to have travelled up to one hundred miles per week to attend three relief committees in various parts of the country.<sup>76</sup> Finally, William Orme, a thirty-six year old proprietor of land held mostly in and around Killala, sat on the Ballina baronial committee and chaired the Kilfian parochial relief committee.

Local relief workers, in many cases, were pulled in many different directions and as a result attendance at committee meetings could be quite poor. In Crossmolina, one particular relief committee meeting proved a non-starter because most of its members went to another committee meeting for the Crossmolina dispensary.<sup>77</sup>

25 of 26 chairmen of committees during the 1846-7 relief period have been identified in religious terms. Twenty-one were

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<sup>75</sup>*Tyrrawly Herald*, 3 June 1847, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup>Society of Friends, *Transactions of the Central Committee of the Society of Friends During the Famine in Ireland in 1846-47* (Dublin, 1852), p. 198.

<sup>77</sup>Letter 1138. 30 April 1847 (N.A. Society of Friends. Central Relief Committee, Correspondence on distribution of food with the Central Relief Committee, 2/506/19).



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from one of the Protestant denominations while of those four remaining Catholic chairmen there were two lay Catholics, Richard Byrne, a poor law guardian in Dundalk and chairman of the Haggardstown relief committee and Nicholas V. Maher, chairman of the Thurles relief committee. Similarly, 20 of the chairmen were local gentry, the remaining chairs being local clergy. Evidence suggests that at least 22 of the 26 chairmen had previous experience of voluntary relief.

We have seen how charitable societies, pre-famine relief committees and early famine relief committees were, with a few exceptions, run by members of the Protestant population. The religious composition of late-1846 relief committees was examined in an effort to determine if this pattern was repeated.

**Table 4:6**  
**Religious Background of Relief Committee Members: Late 1846**

Union	Committee	No. of Mem.	No. Det.	Prot.*	Cath.
<b>Inishowen</b>	Buncrana	22	14	9	5
	Moville	17	8	5	3
	Clonmany and Donagh	13	6	4	2
	Culdaff	19	14	9	5
<b>Ballina</b>	Castleconnor	17	11	7	4
	Killala	11	11	11	0
	Ballina and Ardnaree	19	17	15	2
<b>Thurles</b>	Drom and Inch	14	12	6	6
	Thurles	17	13	5	8
	Templemore	26	22	19	3

\*Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.



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Sources: Church of Ireland Records, Culdaff, Lower and Upper Fahan, Lower and Upper Moville (PRONI, MIC/1/278; MIC/1/180; MIC/1/181; MIC/1/139); Church of Ireland Records, Killala, Kilmoremoy, Templemore (N.A. Reels No.32 and 33); Presbyterian Church Records, Buncrana, Fahan, Malin, Moville (PRONI, MIC/1P/32; MIC/1P/306; MIC/1P/236; MIC/1P/241); Roman Catholic Church Records, Buncrana, Culdaff, Malin, Moville (PRONI, MIC/1D/57; MIC/1D/55).

The evidence in this table suggests that the same patterns with respect to religious composition of relief committees was repeated in late 1846. With the exception of the Drom and Inch relief committee and the Thurles relief committee, there was a greater preponderance of Protestant lay and clergymen. The Catholic presence on relief committees was mostly in the shape of local clergy, Catholic laymen choosing to remain outside the relief committee structure.

### **The Clergy and Relief Committees**

Where there was little or no gentry activity clergymen, irrespective of religion, were usually the last hope for the starving poor. It was they who formed the vital link between contribution and distribution. A letter dated 17 February 1847 from Protestant clergyman, the Rev James Burrowes of Castleconnor, Ballina union, to the relief commission illustrates the point:

Yesterday we issued Indian Meal to about eighty families....We depend on the order of the Ballina relief committee for getting the supply as no committee could be formed here on account of the small number of



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resident gentry. The whole time and attention of every member of my family are occupied in attending the want of the sufferers.<sup>78</sup>

Burrowes was a veteran of relief committees, having served on committees in 1822 and 1831. A man who got along well with the Catholic clergy in the area and a resident there since 1804, he lost his wife and daughter to famine fever before he himself succumbed to exhaustion and fever and died in 1849.<sup>79</sup> The fact that clergymen were the last hope for the distressed is sharply brought into focus in a letter from Rev L. Treanor of Mealiffe Glebe, Thurles union, to the relief commissioners in December 1846. After complaining about the new relief committee structure as set out by new government legislation, he pointed out that the Mealiffe relief committee had not reassembled since 15 August and that the only people qualified to deal with the crisis were himself and the Roman Catholic priest, the Rev Denis Maher.<sup>80</sup> Also in the Thurles union, another letter to the relief commission from Archdeacon Cotton revealed that not only did clergymen of all denominations work together amicably but their work was essential to the effective operation of relief in the town of Thurles.<sup>81</sup> Not far away in Borrisoleigh, the Catholic and

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<sup>78</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, No. 11529 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).

<sup>79</sup>Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: myth or reality? A study in souperism* (Cork, 1970), pp 202-3.

<sup>80</sup>RLFC4, Incoming Letters, No. 7946 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/13).

<sup>81</sup>RLFC3/2. Incoming Letters, No. 6196 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp 2/442/6).



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Protestant clergymen were also working 'arm in arm in the blessed mission of charity.'<sup>82</sup>

The *Londonderry Journal* noted that in Moville, local Catholic and Protestant clergymen were also working together:

The Rev Mr Galwey and the Rev Mr O'Doherty are most unremitting in using every means in their power to furnish the destitute poor of Lower Moville with food to support life. The relief committee, with the assistance of those active gentlemen have now three soup establishments, each capable of supplying from 60 to 80 gallons of good broth three times a week; and the poor irrespective of creed or party are bountifully supplied.<sup>83</sup>

In the union of Ballina, the Belmullet relief committee was chaired equally by Established Church clergyman, Samuel Stock and a Roman Catholic clergyman, Michael Kelly.<sup>84</sup> The parish priest of Doonfeeny, Martin Hart worked closely with his Established Church counterpart, Francis Little.<sup>85</sup> In a letter to the Society of Friends, Catholic clergyman, Hugh Conway, referred to Francis Kinkead, as his 'worthy and esteemed colleague.'<sup>86</sup> In the parish of Kilmoremoy, again in the union of Ballina, the local Presbyterian minister, Rev Thomas Armstrong, believed that, in the Ballina committee room at least, there was an amicable relationship between clergymen of different religions:

I do not think there was at any time a serious difference among us. If any, it was on mere matters of detail, and caused no bad feeling. The

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<sup>82</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 25 April 1846, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 17 March 1847, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup>*Tyrally Herald*, 27 August 1846, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup>Bowen, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>86</sup>Letter 1871, 2 March 1847 (N.A. Society of Friends Central Relief Committee. Correspondence on distribution of food with the Central Committee, 2/506/19).



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question of religion or politics, though outside, conflicting views on both subjects sometimes caused sharp collision, yet in the committee-room found no place.<sup>87</sup>

However when it came to placing the blame for poverty on society, Armstrong was emphatic that landlords were very much to blame for allowing subdivision of land. He also accused priests in colluding in the practice of subdivision, 'as their revenues were mainly derived from fees for marriages and baptisms, it was their duty to encourage early marriage'.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, both he and the parish priest, Hugh Conway worked together on the Ballina relief committee in 1846 and formed a good relationship. In his memoir, Armstrong spoke fondly of Conway.<sup>89</sup>

In the union of Dundalk the Roman Catholic clergy were members of relief committees but their work on the ground has gone, for the most part, unrecorded. However there is evidence that Catholic clergymen did work alongside Protestant clergymen in some philanthropic societies. This was certainly the case with the local and visiting dispensaries in Dundalk.<sup>90</sup> Clergymen of both religions worked together for the Dundalk Mendicity Association. Catholic clergymen were praised in 1847 in the local newspaper for their efforts during the famine as protectors and

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<sup>87</sup> Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 18 Nov. 1846, p. 3.



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visitors to the poor.<sup>91</sup> The famine relief committee structure, therefore, was not the first time men of both religions joined together for the common good. It would seem that it was not just in these four unions that the clergy played an important role in relief. According to Gerard MacAtasney, the catalyst for establishing relief committees in Lurgan and Portadown was the Catholic and Protestant clergy. The local landed gentry only helped at a minor level or through subscriptions.<sup>92</sup> Each relief committee had at least one cleric as chairman.<sup>93</sup> And in Drogheda, when the town relief committee published its subscription lists in March 1847, more than half of the collectors of these subscriptions were clergymen of different denominations.<sup>94</sup>

The fact that local clergymen worked so closely with the poor also meant that they were on the front-line and were in a position to catch infectious diseases. In the Ballina union, Francis Kinkead and James Burrowes, both Protestant clergymen, died from fever and exhaustion.<sup>95</sup> Relatives of clergymen were also at risk. As we have already noted the Rev James Burrowes lost his wife and daughter to fever, while the wife of Francis Little of

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<sup>91</sup> *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 3 July 1847, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Gerard MacAtasney, *The famine in Lurgan/Portadown*, pp 32-3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>94</sup> Ned McHugh, 'Famine and distress in Drogheda during 1847' in *CLAHJ*, xxi, No.2 (Monaghan, 1988), p. 162.

<sup>95</sup> *Tyrrawly Herald*, Jan. 1847, p3; Bowen, *op. cit.*, p. 202.



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Doonfeeny also died from fever.<sup>96</sup> In the union of Thurles, the Rev Mr Meagher, Catholic curate in Thurles town died from fever caught while carrying out work among the destitute poor in July, 1849.<sup>97</sup> These next tables place the clergy of all religious denominations in the context of relief committees.

**Table 4:7**

**Clergymen in Proportion to Other Members on Relief Committees: Early 1846**

Union	Committee	No. of Members	No. of Clergy
Thurles	Inch	9	4
Thurles	Borrisoleigh	12	4
Thurles	Thurles	18	7
Dundalk	Dundalk	23	1

**Table 4:8**

**Clergymen as Chairmen of Relief Committees: 1846-47**

Union	Committee	Clergyman/men	Religion
Thurles	Borrisoleigh	W. Morris	Cath.
		A. Hoops	C. of I.
	Thurles	H. Cotton	C. of I.
Inishowen	Moville	J. Staples	C. of I.
Ballina	Belmullet	S. Stock	C. of I.
		M. Kelly	Cath.
Dundalk	Barronstown	J. Beresford	C. of I.
	Carlingford	W. Barlow	C. of I. <sup>98</sup>

C. of I. = Church of Ireland

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>97</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 11 July 1849, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No.7905 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6); Ibid., No. 6196; RLFC3/2/7/23, Incoming Letters (N.A. RLFC, Co. Donegal, 2/441/41); *Tyrrawly Herald*, 27 Aug. 1846, p. 3; RLFC2/2, Incoming Letters, No.6424 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Donegal, 2/441/41); Ibid., No.6424.



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**Table 4:9**

**Clergymen in Proportion to other Members of Committees: 1846-47**

Union	Committee	No. of Members	Clergy
<b>Inishowen</b>	Muff & Upper Fahan	14	7
	Buncrana	22	6
	Moville	17	6
	Clonmany	13	5
	Culdaff	19	8
	<b>Ballina</b>	Castleconnor	17
	Killala	11	3
	Ballina & Ardnaree	19	8
<b>Thurles</b>	Drom and Inch	14	4
	Thurles	17	7
	Templemore	26	6

Table 4:8 reveals the prominence of Protestant clergymen in the chairs of relief committees in the 1846-47 relief effort. In the letters to the relief commission, it is these gentlemen who form the majority of the correspondents.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, letters to local newspapers were more often than not written by Protestant clergymen. However the participation of the Catholic clergy was essential, as Asenath Nicholson concluded:

Many favourable opportunities presented to become acquainted with effects of the Famine upon the Roman priests. Some were indefatigable, and died in their labors while others looked more passively on. They had two drawbacks, which the Protestants in general had not. First, a great proportion of them are quite poor, and second, they, in the first season of the Famine, were not entrusted with grants, as the Protestants were....No ministers of religion in the world know as much of their people as do the Catholics, not one of their flock is forgotten, scarcely by name, however poor or degraded; and consequently when the

<sup>99</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, 2/441/41; 2/442/6; 2/442/3 (N.A. RLFC).



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Famine came, they had not to *search out the poor*, they knew the identical cabin in which every starving one was lying, and as far as knowledge was concerned were in a condition to act most effectually.<sup>100</sup>

When one looks at newspapers that report on local relief committee meetings, it is clergymen of both religions that are most regularly present. In Dundalk, at follow on meetings in May 1846 it was the local clergy, Catholic and Protestant, that sustained the momentum of relief.<sup>101</sup> Similarly in Thurles, a letter from the Archdeacon Cotton to the relief commissioners emphasised the fact that the working committee comprised only eleven men, six of which were clergymen.<sup>102</sup> A similar situation prevailed in Inch. Of the six members present at a meeting on the 6 May 1846, three were clergymen; and on the 20th of that same month, two of the five present were clergymen.<sup>103</sup> Because of the nature of their work, it was the parish clergymen who, in most cases, had a more thorough knowledge of the local population, including its poor, and it was in their capacity as guardians of these poor that they proved particularly useful as inspectors. This was certainly the case in the four poor law unions under review in this study. When relief committees

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<sup>100</sup>Asenath Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*, ed. Maureen Murphy (Dublin, 1998), p. 64.

<sup>101</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 2 May 1846, p. 2; 13 May 1846, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup>RLFC3/2, No.6196 (N.A. RLFC. Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>103</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 6 May 1846, p. 2; 20 May, p. 3.



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divided themselves up into inspection teams, the clergyman was the most common inspector.<sup>104</sup>

Relief committees during the famine, given the political and religious climate at this time and the rise of evangelicalism, had the potential to be a hotbed of religious controversy. However in the four poor law unions the general picture is one of clergymen of all denominations leaving all differences outside the relief committee room and coming together to help the poor. While there were always exceptions, this picture of solid working relationships between clergymen of various religions would seem to have been repeated throughout the country. In a letter to Charles Trevelyan in January 1847, Sir Randolph Routh propounded his belief that the Roman Catholic clergy were 'behaving most liberally and most meritoriously, and in close conjunction with the Protestant rectors.'<sup>105</sup>

### **Inner Dissensions**

Some sources merely hint at inner dissensions within relief committees but other sources expose such problems, as was the case with Bernard Egan, P.P. of Kilgarvan, Ballina union, who at

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<sup>104</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 2 May 1846, p. 2; *Tyrrawly Herald*, 5 Nov. 1846, p. 3; Minute Book of Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, 17 October, 1846 (T.C.L.).

<sup>105</sup>Routh to Trevelyan, 27 Jan. 1847. *Correspondence from Jan. to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the relief of the distress in Ireland, 1847*, p. 46. H.C. 1847 (796) LI.



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a meeting of the Ballina relief committee accused local merchants of charging exorbitant prices for meal. Accusation and counteraccusation followed. A local grocer, Thomas Dillon, had offered to buy a cargo of meal, give the use of a store and sell it at first cost. However he withdrew the offer 'fearing that this proposal would be attributed to some selfish motives.'<sup>106</sup> In a public response, Egan claimed his comments were meant for Connaught merchants in general. The same letter described Col Knox Gore, committee chairman, as 'worthless' and a fellow catholic clergyman as a 'gabbler'.<sup>107</sup> At a time when conflict between clergymen was generally thought to be between men of different religions, this example reveals another story.

In the Ballina union, there would also seem to have been some internal disputes regarding Walter J. Bourke's chairmanship of both the district and parochial relief committees. In his letter of resignation from the parochial committee, Bourke assured his opponents that

as the connection of the parochial committee with the government must be through me as chairman of the district committee, I consented in the first instance to act for the purpose of greater expedition in obtaining government assistance.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 8 Oct. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup>*Mayo Constitution*, 5 Nov. 1846, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup>Correspondence of the Killala Relief Committee. Letter from Walter J. Bourke to Dr. Neilson, 2 Feb. 1847 (The Rectory, Ballina. Papers of the Very Rev James Collins, Dean of Killala) (Hereafter referred to as T.R.B. Collins Papers).



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He went on to say that his intentions were purely philanthropic and he only had the interests of the starving poor at heart. He was replaced by Dean James Collins of Killala.<sup>109</sup> Signs of discord would seem to have been, more often than not, between the relief committees and their respective officers than amongst themselves. In Dundalk, political controversy created tension among the committee members. The parish priest, John Coyne, denounced the repeal candidate in the 1847 election in the borough of Dundalk. He described repealers in an open letter as “scabby sheep”. This was bound to cause tension in a relief committee where at least four members were active repealers.<sup>110</sup>

In Buncrana relations were strained between Rev Edward Maginn, coadjutor Bishop of Derry and the members of the magistracy, both on the relief committee and outside of it. Indeed, from his appointment as parish priest of Fahan and Desertegney in 1829, Maginn was a regular correspondent to the Castle complaining about local magistrates abusing their power.<sup>111</sup> In Chapter One, we saw how the landed gentry in Inishowen joined forces to wield a particular type of power over the barony’s political and administrative life. (See Chapter One, p.49) Maginn

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<sup>109</sup>Minute Book of the Killala Parochial Committee, 2 Feb. 1847 (T.R.B., Collins Papers).

<sup>110</sup>Fr Michael Murtagh, *St Patrick’s Dundalk. An anniversary account* (Dundalk, 1997), p. 40.

<sup>111</sup>D’Arcy Mc Gee, *op. cit.*, p. 49.



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was an ardent Repealer.<sup>112</sup> Gentry such as George Young and John Harvey were very Tory in politics.<sup>113</sup> In March 1847, Maginn wrote to the Earl of Bessborough complaining about the membership of the barony's finance committee, which included George Young and John Harvey:

I do not take any exception to their religion, Presbyterian and Protestant, as a man's religion in such cases should not be questioned. Our want of confidence in them is based on altogether different grounds. They have ever been politically opposed to the great majority of the people. Some of them were conspicuously intolerant in religious matters, and in some instances disregarding the rights of conscience, and anything but respectful to the creed of their neighbours.<sup>114</sup>

Maginn went on to wonder how in a county with large Catholic proprietors with real wealth, a Whig government could install a Tory committee. Indeed, Maginn was not exaggerating George Young's intolerance of Catholicism and Roman Catholics. In 1829 he signed 'Three Double Petitions to Parliament against Emancipation.'<sup>115</sup> In 1830 he went to some lengths to ensure a local Catholic's appointment to the magistracy was overturned.<sup>116</sup> The finance committee was also, as Maginn intimated, made up of a little clique. Its members were all part of Young's social circle. They shared the same political opinions, were Protestant

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>113</sup>Diary of George Young, 21 June 1827 (PRONI, Young Papers, D/3045/6/4/1).

<sup>114</sup>Maginn to Bessborough in Mc Gee, op. cit., pp 91-2.

<sup>115</sup>Diary of George Young, 28 Jan. 1829 (PRONI, Young Papers, D/3045/6/4/1).

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 5 Jan. 1830.



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or Presbyterian, and dined regularly with Young.<sup>117</sup> Maginn was not the only clergyman unhappy with George Young. The parish priest of Culdaff, Rev James Mc Davitt, complained of delays in public works. Young recorded:

I had rather an extraordinary sort of letter from Revd Mr Mc Davitt, complaining strongly of delay in giving employment to the poor people, and plainly hinting that the *committee*, if not myself, were to blame in a great measure tho' he himself is a *member*, and never objected to anything he did, or proposed any measure to obviate the difficulty.<sup>118</sup>

Despite the fact that Young seemed surprised by the tone of this letter, he did seem to set himself up in opposition to all things Catholic:

Meeting at Carn. Two applications made for building chapels at Bocan and Malin, both rejected after much wrangling. The Roman Catholic Cesspayers all *for*, the others all *against* so we had a majority of 7.<sup>119</sup>

One sign of blatant discord between government officials and a relief committee came in the form of a letter from Richard Byrne, chairman of the Haggardstown relief committee in Dundalk union, attacking the Board of Works regarding the dismissal of labourers from the public works without making adequate provision for alternative relief and for doing this without any reference to the relief committee.<sup>120</sup> The inspecting officer for Dundalk, Capt. Hart, also had problems with the

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 25 June 1827; 26 Aug. 1841; 4 April 1842.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 25 Dec. 1846.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 1 May 1847.

<sup>120</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 27 March 1847, p. 2.



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Ballymascanlon and Carlingford relief committees. He attributed a strike by labourers in these areas in reaction to task work to

be ascribed to the mischievous tendency of remarks made by that class of persons who attend Relief Committees with the apparent object of obtaining mob popularity by censuring the arrangements made by the Government and by the Board of Works but who spare their own pockets from contributions to relief funds on the plea that the absentee landlords ought first to subscribe.<sup>121</sup>

However it would seem that Capt. Hart finally developed cordial relationships with the various committees, receiving warm thanks from each of the relief committees when they ceased operations.<sup>122</sup> Bureaucratic red-tape hampered relief operations. This was the case in Carlingford with respect to the construction of a pier to give employment to the poor. The works were suspended due to the expense of the whole operation.<sup>123</sup> Expense again was the main reason why the treasury suspended their sanction for works in the Barony of Lower Dundalk to the amount of £2,895 in April 1846.<sup>124</sup>

Internal squabbles in the Muff relief committee in the union of Inishowen would also seem to have hampered relief, so much so that another group of people decided to form a relief committee to provide private relief:

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<sup>121</sup>*Correspondence for relief of distress in Ireland, 1846*, p.164. H.C. 1846 (736) xxxvii.

<sup>122</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 25 Aug. 1847. p. 3.

<sup>123</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, D.86 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Louth, 2/442/6).

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, No.1382.



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No relief, either the local committee, save that a profusion of flowers of rhetoric and tropes of eloquence, have been lavished at their meetings. But this is poor food for a famishing people....A meeting of farmers, it is true, for private relief was held in Muff, on the 28th instant, but I fear, it is likely to be a "Conclusion in which nothing is concluded."<sup>125</sup>

But the most controversial falling out in relief committee terms came in Thurles and led to a radical restructuring of relief committee membership. The main cause of this upheaval were the comments of the government inspector, Capt. Norris, who accused the Catholic clergy on relief committees of putting people on relief lists indiscriminately, 'enabling their flocks to pay their tribute.'<sup>126</sup> The accusation was met with general outrage and it was resolved at a meeting of the Catholic clergymen of the Archdiocese of Cashel that no Catholic clergyman would sit on a committee that was in any way connected with Capt. Norris.<sup>127</sup> This was a huge blow to the Thurles and other relief committees, deprived of the active participation of an essential part of the committee structure. The Norris incident also led to the resignation of Father Morris from the chairmanship of the Borrisoleigh relief committee. The Thurles relief committee not only lost four of its members in the form of the clergy but also its secretary, James B. Kennedy, who resigned in a show of support

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<sup>125</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 6 Jan. 1847, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup>*Correspondence from January to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the relief of distress of Ireland, 1847*, p. 246.

<sup>127</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 10 April 1847, p. 3.



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for the local priests.<sup>128</sup> However within weeks Captain Norris was transferred to Coleraine, and the new inspector, J.M. Labarte, was installed in his place.<sup>129</sup>

### **Relief Committees: Non-Participants**

Those who did not participate in relief committees stayed away for a number of reasons. There were those landlords who may have been non-resident but did relieve their tenants through their agents. Others preferred to help their own tenants rather than get involved in a broader scheme of relief while some landlords with properties mortgaged many times over and faced with tenants unable to pay rents found themselves in dire financial straits. Finally, there were those landlord residents, occasionally resident and non-resident who either ignored the plight of their tenants or contributed the bare minimum towards their relief.

Non-resident landlords did not necessarily renege on their obligations towards their tenants but operated their own form of relief through their agents. In the union of Ballina, forty-four year old Philip Yorke Gore, the Earl of Arran was an occasional resident landlord of property with an annual valuation of £6,308. He operated a benevolent policy through his agent, John

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 14 April 1847, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup>Minutes of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, 13 Oct. 1846-29 Sept. 1847 (T.C.L.).



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Symes.<sup>130</sup> The earl also availed of the Drainage act, employing 500 destitute men by January 1847.<sup>131</sup> John Symes was a very active agent, insisting that tenants whitewash their houses and encouraging them to keep the area surrounding their homes orderly and clean.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in the union of Dundalk, the Earl of Roden, another occasional resident, who spent most of his time at his home in County Down, was represented on the Dundalk relief committee by his agent, John Stratton. Roden was a subscriber to the Dundalk Soup Kitchen and also promised a subscription of £500 at Presentment Sessions for the barony of Upper Dundalk but there is no evidence to suggest he did actually subscribe that amount.<sup>133</sup> He also gave seed to tenants who were unable to purchase it.<sup>134</sup> Also in the union of Dundalk, the Marquis of Anglesey, who held property in and around the Carlingford area with an annual valuation of £4,278 was another absentee landlord who directed relief through his agent A.H. Rutherford.<sup>135</sup> His tenants sent the following appreciation via Robert Strong who had

on behalf of the sick poor on the Estate of the Marquis of Anglesey, thankfully to acknowledge the liberality of A.H. Rutherford, Esq. (his Lordship's Agent) who has placed at my disposal means for their

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<sup>130</sup> *Tyrawly Herald*, 23 July 1846, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> Henry Coulter, *The west of Ireland: Its existing condition and prospects* (Dublin, 1862), p. 242.

<sup>133</sup> *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 7 Oct. 1846, p. 1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 April 1847, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 May 1846, p. 2.



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relief, in the shape of nourishment, and the attendance of a Nurse; and for this boon the Tenantry are truly grateful.<sup>136</sup>

In Inishowen, 48 year old Arthur Chichester, or Lord Templemore, MP for County Wexford, was represented at committee level by his agent Issac Colhoun. He was also a contributor to local subscription lists.<sup>137</sup>

In the union of Thurles, Lord Portarlington, another absentee landlord with land in and around the Borrisoleigh area, was a contributor to local subscription lists but only after much prompting from the relief committee in Borrisoleigh.<sup>138</sup> Another absentee in Thurles, John Maher of Tullemaine Castle, was one of the first landlords in the area to reduce rents by 15 per cent when the potato crop failed. In the summer of 1846 he employed an extra 50 men in addition to the 40 he gave constant employment to. His wife was active in distributing food and clothing to the poor on their estate. Maher also gave £50 to the Thurles relief committee.<sup>139</sup>

There were also those landowners who did not actively participate in relief committees but were regular subscribers and also employed their own tenants to provide their own particular

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<sup>136</sup>Robert S. Strong to the Marquess of Anglesey, 3 April 1846 (PRONI, Anglesey Papers. D619/15/10).

<sup>137</sup>RLFC3/2/7/22, Incoming Letters, No.16.483 (N.A. RLFC. Co. Donegal, 2/441/41).

<sup>138</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 14 Oct. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup>*Tipperary Constitution*, 13 May 1846, p. 1.



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brand of relief. In Thurles, Mrs Otway Cave employed 40 men on her estate while also contributing to local relief funds.<sup>140</sup> In his study on the great famine in Kerry, Kieran Foley also reveals that similar situation existed in that county:

Many of the major proprietors were absentees but there is no evidence that this necessarily impeded the workings of the committee in their areas. Lesser proprietors, agents and Protestant clergymen proved themselves more than capable of providing the necessary leadership.<sup>141</sup>

Another type of non-participant in local committee activity were those who were also feeling the brunt of the famine. Anthony G. Cary, a landowner in the union of Inishowen, wrote to the Donagh relief committee:

When I inform you that out of my holding in the parish of Donagh, I have not received about £10 and have had to pay a half years rent to Lord Donegal, you will, I think, agree with me that I have already contributed to the relief of my tenantry.....<sup>142</sup>

In the union of Dundalk, the reason for non-participation of local landowner James Tipping is perhaps found in an entry in the O'Brien Rentals, his estate being put up for auction in 1851.<sup>143</sup>

Finally, there were those non-participants who were non-resident and made no or little effort to relieve their tenants. In Borrisoleigh, Thurles union, the situation was regarded thus:

Other landed proprietors have also got rid of the duties of property by that gentlemanly expedient of taking no notice of the letters addressed to them; for instance, Mr Justin O'Driscoll, the landlord of a very poor

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 21 Aug. 1847, p. 2.

<sup>141</sup>Kieran Foley, 'Kerry during the great famine 1845-52', (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, N.U.I.(UCD), 1997), p. 70.

<sup>142</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 20 Jan., 1847, p. 2.

<sup>143</sup>O'Brien Rentals, Vol.5, No.20 (N.A. Encumbered Estates Court).



tenantry, being twice applied to had not the courtesy of answering either, whilst he insists on what he calls his rights, his agent, Mr Drought, of Birr being here the day after our last fair, 9th June, insisting on his rents, and has since processed many of his tenants.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, in the Ballina union Sir William Roger Palmer, an absentee landowner, with properties mainly in the Ballina and Killala areas with a land valuation of £8,221 per annum made little contribution to the relief of his tenants.<sup>145</sup> Forty-three years old in 1845, he was a Protestant Tory, renowned for his absenteeism and non-payment of rates. While both Palmer and an MP, a Mr Hudson, purchased 'two splendid mansions at either side of Albert Gate, Hyde Park' in March 1846, Palmer was accused of 'looking with indifference not only upon the misery of the population in general but upon his own tenants in particular.'<sup>146</sup> Apart from a contribution of £20 to the Killala relief committee and £50 to the Crossmolina soup kitchen, there is no other evidence that Palmer or his agent took part in any way in the relief effort.<sup>147</sup>

There were also relief committees who were completely unable to handle the situation. The British Association for the Relief of the Extreme Distress in Ireland and Scotland used the

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<sup>144</sup>*Tipperary Vindictaor*, 4 July 1846, p. 2.

<sup>145</sup>Griffiths Valuation, *Union of Ballina*.

<sup>146</sup>Bowen, op. cit., p. 204; *Tyrally Herald*, 31 March 1846, p. 4; 24 Dec. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>147</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, No.9835 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo 2/442/3).



committee system in Ireland to distribute relief. The association drew up application papers, distributed them to the relief committees who, in turn, would fill them in and give them to the inspecting commissariat officer who would advise the association on the merits of the application.<sup>148</sup> By February 1847 in the barony of Erris, the situation had become critical. An agent for the British relief association, Count de Strzelecki, wrote on 10 February:

In the barony of Erris (Belmullet), where I arrived on the 8<sup>th</sup> instant, I have found the most melancholy and deplorable destitution among its inhabitants, and which in many cases proves fatal.....What aggravates still more the situation of the barony is the inefficiency of the gentlemen composing the relief committee to cope with the difficulties of the situation. And it is in consequence of this inefficiency on one side and the urgent necessity to remedy the evils on the other, that I have lost no time in organising a special committee for the administration of the grant which was needed, selecting for it the two Protestant clergymen, the Catholic priest and the officer commanding the coast guard of the district, all residents of Belmullet.<sup>149</sup>

The situation was no better by 25 March. There was not a magistrate to be found within thirty miles to preside at the presentment sessions. As a result, no county grant could be got to maintain the dispensary.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Report of the British Association for the relief of the extreme distress in Ireland and Scotland; with correspondence of the agents, tables etc. and a list of subscribers* (London, 1849), p. 13. (Hereafter referred to as *Report of the British Relief Association, 1849*).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.



**Stage Three: April 1847-September 1847**

**Soup Kitchens**

The new 'Act for the Temporary Relief of Destitute Persons in Ireland' or the 'Soup Kitchen Act' became law on 26 February 1847. However this new system of supplying relief was not an entirely new concept. Soup kitchens became an integral part of local relief before the government formulated the new act.

In the union of Dundalk, there was a soup kitchen in operation by December 1846.<sup>151</sup> Soup kitchens were not only seen as an end in themselves but as means to help the distressed while they were waiting for the public works to start. Such was the case for the Clonmany relief committee in the union of Inishowen.<sup>152</sup> In that same union, George and Mrs Young established a soup kitchen in the calf house on their property at Culdaff and another one in the local dispensary in January 1847.<sup>153</sup> In the Thurles union, the Templemore relief committee had a soup kitchen in operation by 28 January 1847, while

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<sup>151</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 26 Dec. 1846, p. 2.

<sup>152</sup>RLFC3/2/7/19, Incoming Letters, No.12933 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Donegal, 2/441/41).

<sup>153</sup>Diary of George Young, 16 Jan. 1847; 23 Jan. 1847 (PRONI, Young Papers, D/3045/6/4/1).



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

Thurles already had a kitchen in operation by December 1846.<sup>154</sup>

In the union of Ballina, however, an indication of pervasive distress is found in the fact that there were at least twenty-one soup kitchens in operation by February 1847.<sup>155</sup>

Yet despite the fact that the relief committees established to deal with relief throughout the winter of 1846-7 used soup kitchens as an integral part of their relief policy, the new government regulations of February 1847 stipulated another restructuring of relief committees to conform to poor law districts for relief. This meant that committees had to undergo restructuring for the third time in twelve months. Each poor law union was to have a finance committee made up of two to four people who were to be chosen by the lord lieutenant of the county. Each finance committee was to supervise the expenditure of local relief committees. These new relief committees were to consist of resident justices, poor law guardians and the chairman of the board of guardians, the union's relief inspector, the archbishop and bishops of the Established and Roman Catholic churches resident in the electoral division/s; people appointed by justices of the peace, with approval of the lord lieutenant of the

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<sup>154</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No.9709 (N.A. RLFC. Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>155</sup>Voules to Dobree. *Correspondence from January to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the relief of the distress in Ireland, 1847*, pp 84, 142-3. H.C. 1847 (797) Lii.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

county to act in their place; the principal resident officiating clergymen and the three highest poor-rate payers resident in the electoral division/s.<sup>156</sup> Responsibility for relief as far as the government was concerned, must remain firmly in the hands of landlords. Trevelyan wrote to Routh on the new plan of relief:

It is not intended that the Government itself undertake the task of feeding the people through its own officers but that it should organise the upper and middle classes of society for this purpose, by a combination of the Relief Committees with the Poor Law Guardians, and make such additions to the funds at their disposal as may be required.<sup>157</sup>

The construction of new relief committees was, as in the autumn of 1846, met with alarm.<sup>158</sup> Progress in establishing new relief committees was slow. Public works schemes were suspended and no other means of relief was available. The new act was still not in complete operation by the middle of May 1847.<sup>159</sup>

In the union of Ballina, relief committee membership was causing Count de Strzelecki, the agent for the British Relief Association, some concern:

I fear that some of the electoral divisions of that union, particularly the barony of Erris (Belmullet) will not, and cannot be stimulated to do what is right, for in that unfortunate locality the only persons present, who from their social position and education are entitled to be members

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<sup>156</sup>*First report of the relief commissioners constituted under the Act, 10th Vic., Cap 7, Appendix A, 1847, p. 12. H.C. 1847 (799) xvii.*

<sup>157</sup>*Correspondence from January to March 1847....p. 39. H.C. 1847 (797) LII.*

<sup>158</sup>*First report of the relief commissioners constituted under the Act 10th Vic., Cap 7. Appendix E. 1847.p. 31; Appendix F. p. 37 H.C. 1847 (799) xvii.*

<sup>159</sup>*Second report of the relief commissioner constituted under the Act. 10th Vic. Cap7, with Appendices, 1847, p. 3. H.C. 1847 (819) xvii.*



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of relief committees, are also those who, from habits of negligence, apathy, jobbing and speculation, ought to be excluded from them.<sup>160</sup>

A soup kitchen at Binghamstown was issuing 90 gallons of porridge a day. The kitchen, under the supervision of the Belmullet relief committee and funded by the government and the British relief association, was said to have been badly run for want of a 'respectable person to run it.' The British Relief Association believed that the only people capable of organising relief in Erris were the clergy and coast guard.<sup>161</sup> M.J. Higgins, another agent for the British Relief Association, had become exasperated with the few relief committees in Erris during April. The Belmullet relief committee were trying in vain to re-form themselves according to the new regulations. The Kilmore parish relief committee did not understand government instructions and, according to Higgins, could not be trusted.<sup>162</sup>

The only full relief committee membership list for this period is for the Thurles relief committee. Formed on the 22 March 1847, this new committee was made up of twenty-three members. Nicholas V. Maher was chairman yet again, and again managed to attend only one of the 74 meetings. The same players

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<sup>160</sup> *Report of the British Relief Association, 1849*, pp 103-4.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 April 1847.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 109-10.



## *Relief Committees 1845-52*

kept the momentum of relief going, but with the withdrawal of the Catholic clergy their numbers were seriously diminished.

However for the most part the final season for the relief committees saw the relief of the Thurles distressed in the same hands in which they had been over a year earlier.<sup>163</sup> The finance committee for the union of Inishowen was George Young, John Harvey, Hugh Corbitt and Richard Moore. All four men had experience over the previous six months in famine relief.<sup>164</sup> Table 4:10 (next page) reveals the social and religious distribution among the chairs of relief committees.

It would seem that this table confirms earlier findings that those in control of local committees were, for the most part, gentry and clergy, predominantly Protestant with a history in local charity work. Each of the above chairmen had been involved with the relief effort in their area from early 1846. Thus by the summer of 1847, relief of the starving was in the same hands as it had been eighteen months before.

By September 1847, the poor law administration took on the brunt of relief work. Necessity, however, led to the continuation of local relief committees in Ballina and Inishowen. Thurles may

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<sup>163</sup>Minutes of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, 13 Oct. 1846 to 28 Sept. 1847 (T.C.L).

<sup>164</sup>Mc Gee, *op cit.*, p. 91.



**Table 4:10**  
**Chairmen of Relief Committees, 1847**

Committee	Chairman	Social Standing	Religion*	Previous Experience
Thurles	N.V. Maher	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
Templemore	R. Carden	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Holycross	Major Armstrong			
		Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Inch	G. Ryan	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
Ballymorreen	J. Russell	Gentry	?	?
Moycarkey	Rev G. Stock	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Mealiffe	Rev Treanor	Clergy	Prot.	?
Dundalk	T. Fortescue	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Haggardstown	R. Byrne	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
Inniskeen	W. Steele	Clergy	Prot.	?
Louth	J. Barrey	Gentry	?	?
Culdaff	G. Young	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Donagh	S. Rankin	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Killala	Rev Collins	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Kilfian	W. Orme	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Ballina	Col. Knox Gore	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Lacken	Roger Palmer	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Crossmolina	M. Pratt	Gentry	Prot.	?
Belmullet	M. Kelly	Clergy	Cath.	Yes <sup>165</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

have been in need of extra relief but had to depend on the local poor law.

The union of Dundalk was the only union in which it was generally felt that the famine was over. The winding down of relief operations and the disbandment of the various relief

<sup>165</sup>Minutes of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee, June 1847 (T.C.L.); Relief Commission Papers (N.A.); *Tyrawly Herald*, 27 March 1847, p. 3.



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committees took place in July 1847 on the instructions of the finance committee in Dundalk:

The finance committee are of the opinion that the period has arrived, when, in consequence of the increased means of employment throughout the union, such as hay-making, turf-cutting, and the weeding of the green crops, the able-bodied persons with their families may, in almost every case be removed from the relief lists. They request attention to the fact that, in the course of a few weeks, all temporary out-door relief must cease and they feel it to be highly important duty of relief committees by repeated reductions of the lists, to make the speedy cessation of relief as gradual as possible.<sup>166</sup>

Most committees had disbanded by the end of September 1847.

The Haggardstown relief committee disbanded in August 1847, as did the Louth relief committee.<sup>167</sup> Other relief committees to disband at the end of August were Darver, Jenkinstown and Ravensdale.<sup>168</sup> Their notices in the *Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser* confirm their agreement with the statement that the distress in the union was over and their job was done. Thus it would seem that the first six months of 1847 saw the most concerted philanthropic effort in the union of Dundalk, with charitable endeavours only ceasing when the need for relief seemed to be at an end. Further relief of the poor was taken on by the board of guardians.

In Ballina there was no such feeling that the famine was over. There were still 67,479 people on the relief lists in the

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<sup>166</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 25 Aug. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Aug. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Sept. 1847, p. 3.



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Ballina union when the relief committees disbanded.<sup>169</sup> The Ballina and Ardnaree relief committee would seem to have been the only relief committee to have carried on with their work. The emphasis at this stage was on reproductive long-term employment and, in view of this, the committee met monthly.<sup>170</sup> They purchased a farm in January 1848 in the neighbourhood of the town on which the poor could receive employment.<sup>171</sup> The committee also instituted an industrial scheme to employ the poor.<sup>172</sup> By April 1849 this industrial unit was employing eighty people.<sup>173</sup> The relief committee which ran this industrial venture was Protestant, with the exception of Father Malone, the Roman Catholic curate. What marked this particular committee as different was the presence of some of the Presbyterian congregation. The committee included the Presbyterian minister, Thomas Armstrong, and Presbyterians J.C.O. Urquhart and J.D. Carnegie.<sup>174</sup> In July 1849 another committee was formed in Ballina for the town to help the poor over the following three or four weeks. This committee was made up of clergy and local

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<sup>169</sup>*Second report of the relief commissioners constituted under Act. 10th Vic., Cap7. Supplementary Appendix, 1847, p. 18. H.C. 1847 (819) xvii.*

<sup>170</sup>*Tyrrawly Herald, 21 Sept. 1848, p. 3.*

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid., 6 Jan. 1848, p. 3.*

<sup>172</sup>*Ibid., 17 Feb. 1848, p. 3.*

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid., 5 April 1849, p. 3.*

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid., 14 June 1849, p. 3; Armstrong, op. cit., p. 61.*



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merchants.<sup>175</sup> The Ballina and Ardnaree relief committee lasted until May 1851. At the final meeting of the Ballina and Ardnaree relief committee in May 1851, there were seven members present. Of this seven, five were part of the relief effort from early 1846. They were the Rev J. Verschoyle, Doctors Whittaker and Atkinson, and traders William West and Thomas Dillon. Not only were all these men Protestants but they were also part of the Ballina relief effort before the onslaught of famine. It would seem that by 1851 the local gentry were either not in a position to help or they had washed their hands of the situation.<sup>176</sup> In general, however, the main body of relief was carried on by the board of guardians.

In Inishowen, while normal relief did cease in the form of relief committees, private relief continued in the parish of Donagh. A private relief committee chaired by Samuel Rankin, who had chaired the previous government-sponsored relief committee, sold meal at half price to those who could afford it. The aged and infirm were given gratuitous relief. With this exception, however, the rest of the burden of relief was thrown on the poor law.

The maximum number of people relieved in each union

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<sup>175</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 12 July 1849, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 June 1849, p. 3.



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during the summer of 1847, ranged from 12 per cent of the union population in Dundalk, 25 per cent in Inishowen, 50 per cent in Thurles and 79 per cent in the Ballina union. The numbers still on the relief lists when the local relief committees ceased operations again ranged from 5 per cent of the union population of Dundalk, 16 per cent in Inishowen, 22 per cent in Thurles and 55 per cent of the union population in Ballina.<sup>177</sup> Thus it would seem that, of the four poor law unions, Dundalk not only suffered to a lesser extent than the rest but also experienced localised distress for a shorter period of time than the other three unions. By October 1847, with the exceptions already mentioned, all activity on the part of local committees had ceased and responsibility was handed over to the poor law.

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<sup>177</sup>*Supplementary appendix to the seventh and last report of the relief commissioners, 31 Dec., 1847, pp18-20. H.C. 1847-8 (956) xxix.*



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WOMEN AND FAMINE RELIEF 1845-52

When the government issued the instructions for relief committee membership in February 1846, it was clear that women would take no part on the government sponsored committees. It was envisaged that relief committees would be formed by and include local men of property. Property, as far as the government was concerned, must pay for poverty. In nineteenth-century Ireland this stipulation placed most women outside the committee room door because few had the ownership and management of landed estates directly in their hands. Furthermore, women were unable to sit at this stage as JPs and did not become eligible to serve as poor law guardians until 1896. While women did play an important role in relief during the famine, this relief was always an adjunct and dependent on the sponsorship of the all-male government- sponsored relief committee.

#### **Female Relief Workers: Ballina**

We have already seen how relief of the poor on an ongoing basis in the Ballina area was confined to a small number of female-run societies. These societies were run by the wives, sisters and daughters of local clergy and gentry and their religious



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make-up was exclusively Protestant. The Ballina case would seem to lend credence to Maria Luddy's argument that:

Many philanthropic societies were also exclusivist. Membership was determined by social background but to a greater extent by religious affiliation. Philanthropic effort was organised on distinct religious grounds and this proved to be both a cohesive and divisive force, in regard to those institutions established by women. There is almost no evidence of any interaction between lay Catholic women or female religious with their Protestant sisters.<sup>1</sup>

The methods of relief adopted by philanthropic women during this period revolved around the establishment of soup kitchens and the provision of employment for women. The Ballina Benevolent Society had been in operation for fifteen years by 1845. However the society had run into difficulties, the number of its subscribers dwindling as the years went by.<sup>2</sup> The women of this society that was struggling to survive changed tactics in January 1847:

The lady managers of this valuable society, anxious to do all in their power to assist in extending relief to the deeply distressed poor of Ballina and Ardnaree, have determined for the present year to change the mode of distributing relief through its agency, and intend, if means should be placed at their disposal to employ the poor women in spinning wool and flax....Subscriptions for the furtherance of this project, will be thankfully received and acknowledged in this paper by the Rev Francis Kinkead, Treasurer of the Ballina Benevolent Society.<sup>3</sup>

By February the Benevolent Society was employing approximately two dozen women.<sup>4</sup> Members of the society were

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<sup>1</sup>Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 215.

<sup>2</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 6 Nov. 1845, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1847, p. 3.



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Mrs Read, Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Joyner, Miss Huston and Miss Faussett. Mrs Read was the wife of George Read, Protestant curate of Ballina. Mrs Joyner was an original member of the Society and wife of the manager of the town's Provincial Bank, Mr Joseph Joyner. Joyner was an Englishman and his wife, an Irishwoman, was recognised by Asenath Nicholson as very 'active' in the town.<sup>5</sup> Mrs Whittaker and Miss Faussett were both from medical families in the area.<sup>6</sup> The finances of this society continued to be in the hands of the Protestant clergy, Rev Joseph Verschoyle and Rev George Read, both active relief workers in Ballina.<sup>7</sup> However with other demands on local pockets, the Benevolent Society managed to collect only £25 2s 6d in 1847.

The ladies who made up the Benevolent Society also ran the Ballina Ladies Institution for the Encouragement of Industry and Relief of the Poor. This Institution, established in January 1847, was the brainchild of the Rev Francis Kinkead, who was the treasurer of the Ballina Benevolent Society. Kinkead's wife was secretary of the institution. Asenath Nicholson, on her travels during the famine through Ireland, was very impressed by Mrs Kinkead:

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<sup>5</sup>Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup>Church of Ireland Parish Records, Kilmoremoy (N.A. Church of Ireland Parish Records, Reel 32).

<sup>7</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 27 Jan. 1848, p. 2.



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Mr Kinkead, who was but thirty-five left a widow and son and daughter. The widow is worthy to bear his name. She too like him, is found among the poor, promoting spiritual good in every possible way. In her are united much that makes woman appear in that dignified light, that tells for what she is intended and what she might be if kept from the trammels of a false education, and early brought into the covenant of grace.<sup>8</sup>

The institution's main objective was to encourage and support industrial habits among the poor and to relieve distress through employment, 'the demoralising effect of the system of wholly gratuitous relief becoming daily more apparent.'<sup>9</sup> The committee met once a week to distribute flax and wool to the spinners.<sup>10</sup> The institution gave employment to between 80 and 100 people during the height of distress in 1847 with the aid of donations and collections that amounted to £287 17s. However it was forced to suspend operations in September 1847 because it ran out of funds. It was February 1848 before it was able to resume operations.<sup>11</sup> Asenath Nicholson was very impressed with their work:

The ladies here were much interested for the poor; a society for spinning and knitting was in operation, and the eagerness of the women to procure work was affectingly manifested on the day of meeting, when the crowds would be waiting in the hall, some falling upon their knees, begging for spinning to be given them, when the most that spinners could earn would be eight pence a week. Those who prepared the flax by hackling could earn from 18 pence to two shillings a week.

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<sup>8</sup>Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup>Ballina Ladies Institution to the Society of Friends, Letter 2080, 22 March, 1847 (N.A. Society of Friends, Correspondence on Distribution of Food with the Central Relief Committee, 2/506/19) (Hereafter referred to as SOF, Correspondence).

<sup>10</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 17 Feb. 1848, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 17 Feb. 1848, p. 3.



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So far have manufactures cheapened this work that the ladies who gave it lose at that low price.<sup>12</sup>

The Owenmore Society, also in the Ballina union, was run by the wives of the gentry. The objectives of the society were;

- 1.- to relieve the famishing and sick, especially widows, and orphans, such relief to be given in food, not in money.
- 2.- to redeem bedding and wearing apparel which had been pawned for food and to provide clothing (where health is concerned) in cases of extreme destitution.
- 3.- to support a meal shop at reduced prices, the sales being restricted by tickets, to those whose families are too large to be maintained upon their wages, (at the present high price of provisions) and whose poverty has been ascertained.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the ladies were quite clear on how they intended to provide relief. They adopted the local relief committee system of establishing lists and investigating each applicant for relief. The ladies lived throughout the eastern half of the Ballina union. In January 1847 the Society had 1,178 persons on their relief lists. Each member operated a soup kitchen from their home, supervised the running of the kitchen, and investigated every case before it was permanently placed upon the relief lists. Those people who were on their relief lists were totally dependent on their funds. The society also had hundreds more who received temporary relief. By April numbers receiving relief had trebled to 6,000 persons. The society was relieving the starving at eight soup and meal distribution points,

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<sup>12</sup>Asenath Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup>Miss L'Estrange to the Society of Friends, Letter 548, 14 April 1847 (N.A. SOF, Correspondence).



selling meal cheaply at five points and employing 100 destitute women.<sup>14</sup> This society was, for the most part, very much a family affair, whether it was kin-related or through marriage. The three Mrs Ormes were married to brothers.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Jackson was the mother of Mrs Pratt.<sup>16</sup> Mrs St George Knox was the mother of Mrs John Orme, Belville.<sup>17</sup> Its members included

Mrs Jackson, Carrowmore

Mrs Pratt, Enniscoe

Mrs Orme, Owenmore

Mrs Scott, Glenmore

Mrs St George Knox, Fahy

Mrs R. Orme, Gortner Abbey

Mrs J. Orme, Belville

Mrs Palmer, Summerhill

Secretary: Miss Alice L'Estrange, Owenmore

Treasurer: W.D. La Touch, Esq. Bank of Messrs La Touche and Co., Dublin.<sup>18</sup>

Madeline Eglantine Pratt was the only daughter and heir of Colonel William Jackson, Enniscoe. She married Mervyn Pratt of Cabra Castle in October, 1834. A Cavan landlord, JP and Deputy Lieutenant of County Mayo, Pratt was also High Sheriff of that county in 1843.<sup>19</sup> During the famine he chaired the Crossmolina

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Letter 548, 14 April 1847.

<sup>15</sup>Burke, *op. cit.*, (1904), p. 465.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>18</sup>Miss L'Estrange to Society of Friends, Letter 548, 14 April 1847 (N.A. SOF, Correspondence).

<sup>19</sup>Burke, *op. cit.*, (1904), p. 496.



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relief committee from early 1846 until September 1847.<sup>20</sup> The Pratt family also ran a soup kitchen at their home in Enniscoe, which they funded themselves with the aid of subscriptions from England.<sup>21</sup> Mervyn Pratt held land in the union with a rateable valuation of £2,528 6s.<sup>22</sup> This society also included three sisters, Mrs Orme of Owenmore, Mrs Orme of Belleville and Miss L'Estrange of Gortnerabbey. Sidney Frances Orme of Owenmore was the daughter of Major Christopher Caneton L'Estrange from Market Hill, County Fermanagh. She married Robert Orme, a JP and Deputy Lieutenant of County Sligo in February 1843.<sup>23</sup> Robert Orme was a subscriber to the Crossmolina town soup kitchen and the parochial kitchen of Moygownagh.<sup>24</sup> Janet Orme of Belleville was a sister of Sidney Francis Orme. She married William Orme, a magistrate, in October 1837.<sup>25</sup> He was a member of the Ballina relief committee in 1831.<sup>26</sup> A poor law guardian, Orme was also a member of the Ballina relief committee in 1846<sup>27</sup> and chaired the Kilfian relief committee during the summer of 1847.<sup>28</sup> He gave a 25 per cent abatement in

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<sup>20</sup>*Tyrrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, No.9835 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>22</sup>Griffiths Valuation, *Union of Ballina*.

<sup>23</sup>Burke, op. cit., p. 465.

<sup>24</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, No.9835 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>25</sup>Burke, op. cit., p. 974.

<sup>26</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 29 Aug. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>*Tyrrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 Sept. 1847, p. 3.



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rents to his tenants and also took £2,000 under the Land Improvement Act. With this money and his own he employed 150 people daily on his estate.<sup>29</sup> Emily Palmer of Summerhill was the daughter of Major Perceval of the 18th Royal Irish regiment. She married Thomas Palmer in March 1837. He was a cousin of William Orme of Belleville.<sup>30</sup> Palmer's brother, Roger, was chairman of the Lacken and Kilcummin subcommittee.<sup>31</sup> These women superintended eight distributions of soup or meal, and three sales of meal at reduced prices:

During a month, five members have expended £341 18s exclusive of Parochial Relief, superintended by one of the number, and also exclusive of the wages of 71 poor women employed by the Society in spinning wool and flax.<sup>32</sup>

By May 1847 the Society was totally dependent on subscriptions from outside of the union. Soup was distributed from

...Owenmore, Fahy, Carramore, Belleville, Genmore and Enniscoe. Summerhill having been omitted from the temporary illness of Mrs Palmer...but for the grants of the Friends, and of the College Green Committee, four out of the seven soup kitchens of the Society would have been closed altogether.<sup>33</sup>

Mrs Palmer recovered but the closure of her soup kitchen at the time of her illness illustrates the importance of these women in the general scheme of relief. This initiative represented the very

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<sup>29</sup>*Papers relating to the aid afforded to the distressed unions in the west of Ireland, 1849.* p. 6. H.C. 1849 (1010) XLviii.

<sup>30</sup>Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 993.

<sup>31</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, No.16016 (N.A.RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>32</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 4 March 1847, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Miss L'Estrange to the Society of Friends, Letter 1599, 13 May 1847 (N.A. SOF, Correspondence).



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

pragmatic approach of the many lay female societies as they struggled to deal with proximate poverty.

The Belfast Ladies' Relief Association for Connaught was formed on 22 October 1846. They collected money and within a year had spent £4,000 and £5,000 on the poor in the west. This relief was distributed through Roman Catholics, Church of Ireland and Presbyterians. At the beginning of 1847 the association announced that they were extending their operations from distributing food to establishing schools of industry for women, thereby enabling them to fend for themselves. These schools were to be placed under the supervision of benevolent resident ladies. The schools also had an additional purpose:

That a main object of the whole system be to imbue the minds of the scholars with the truth and spirit of the gospel; and with this view, that those of the pupils unable to read, be taught to read the Bible; and that a portion of time each day be occupied in reading the Holy Scriptures, but that no sectarian exclusive principles, or the catechism of any section of the Christian Church, be taught in the schools.<sup>34</sup>

The association was very Protestant in character, with the majority of the aforementioned superintendents belonging to the Established Church, but their main patron was the Rev John Edgar, a Presbyterian minister. The industrial schools were successful for a time. The produce of the schools were claimed to

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<sup>34</sup> W.D. Killen, *Memoir of John Edgar, D.D. LL.D* (Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, 1867), p. 236.



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

have garnered the poor an annual revenue of £25,000.<sup>35</sup>

There were also individual efforts to relieve the distress of the poor. Mrs Walter J. Bourke made soup and clothes for the poor. She also established a factory for women paying them 6d a day.<sup>36</sup> This particular initiative was first thought of in December 1846. Walter J. Bourke, Chairman of the Killala district relief committee, wrote to the relief commission stating:

That the district is in a dreadful state, thousands are starving...meal should be sent to that part of the country and sold at cost price, by doing so, some oats may be saved to sow the land...In 1822, small factories were established for them, they were paid for their work and fed rice and biscuits.<sup>37</sup>

The commission replied that they were making every effort to forward supplies to County Mayo but that the issue of establishing factories for employing females was a matter for local relief committees. This correspondence took place in December. Mrs Bourke started a factory for the relief and maintenance of destitute widows on 5th January 1847 at Killala and collected £85 1s in subscriptions.<sup>38</sup> Mrs Palmer of Summerhill, distributed food among the destitute poor in her neighbourhood. Mrs Knox of Rappa Castle ran a soup kitchen and factory in her area, both financed by subscriptions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> *Tyrawly Herald*, 28 Jan. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No.8472 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>38</sup> *Tyrawly Herald*, 25 Feb. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 March 1847, p. 3.



**Women and Relief in the Union of Thurles**

In Thurles individual female efforts were also an important part of the process of relief. Ellen Armstrong, the daughter of Capt. William Armstrong, chairman of the Farneybridge relief committee, established a soup kitchen from her house, Farney Castle, in January 1847. Having received £17 10s in local subscriptions, Miss Armstrong distributed soup three times a week to 31 families (160 people altogether) who lived within one mile of the castle. She sold the soup for 5d a measure but sometimes gave it free of charge. Her plea to the relief commission for a grant was turned down because she did not give those subscriptions to her local relief committee. The commission only gave grants of money to those who dealt directly with government recognised relief committees constructed in accordance with government rules.<sup>40</sup>

Before the famine Caroline Elizabeth Carden, wife of Sir John Carden, Bart. of the Priory, Templemore, established and supported a school for girls in Templemore. The school's pupils were taught knitting, dress and shirt making as well as normal subjects. The children were paid for their needlework and the clothes were then distributed amongst the students and poor of the town. This particular scheme proved particularly useful

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<sup>40</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.10062 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

during the famine. Lady Caroline was the daughter of Sir William Mordaunt of Nun, Yorkshire. She died in 1850 from a wound received when a gun accidentally discharged near where she was sitting.<sup>41</sup>

In Thurles town, industrial employment was given to approximately 100 females under the direction of the Thurles/Rahealty relief committee.<sup>42</sup> The Thurles Female Industrial School was still in existence in December 1847.<sup>43</sup>

In the parish of Inch, the wives of the committee members were also involved in relieving the poor:

It was suggested that wool be bought by the Committee and manufactured in flannel, as a means of employment for the women of the parish. The suggestion was at once adopted. The Chairman and George Ryan Esq. said their ladies would buy the flannel of the committee, for the purpose of distributing it to the poor.<sup>44</sup>

The 'lady' of George Ryan was Catherine Margaret, the eldest daughter of Captain Edward Whyte, R.N. of Loughbrickland, County Down. They married in May 1839 and went on to have six children.<sup>45</sup> The lady of John Trant was Sarah Sophia, daughter of Sir Henry Carden, Templemore, whom he married in 1842.<sup>46</sup>

Mrs Ryan was a Catholic and Mrs Trant was a Protestant. If these

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<sup>41</sup>William J. Hayes, *The old churchyard and graveyard, Templemore* (Templemore, 1995), pp114-5; RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.13530 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, No.13530.

<sup>43</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 29 Dec. 1847.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 May 1846, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 529.

<sup>46</sup>S.T. McCarthy, *The Trant Family* (Folkestone), p. 19.



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

ladies actually worked together on this project as a group their situation would have been, in one respect, very unique in that it involved women of the two main denominations working together to relieve the poor.

### Women and Relief in the Union of Inishowen

Outside the boundaries of the union, female philanthropy was directed towards the poor of Inishowen. In January 1847 the Ladies Working Association of Derry was raising money towards relieving the distress of Inishowen's poor.<sup>47</sup> Their operations were well underway by February:

The Ladies Working Association, we rejoice to learn, is continuing its benevolent labours with unremitting industry...At the meeting of the Committee...several communications were read from different localities in Ennishowen....The Ladies' Committee voted a second sum of £30 from their funds to be distributed as follows:- £10 to the Buncrana relief committee, for the parish of Desertegny; £10 to the Moville relief committee to be expended upon the poor from Greencastle along the shore; and £10 to Culdaff if a relief committee be organised, as the ladies have rightly determined not to send their donations to individuals but to local committees.<sup>48</sup>

At the final general meeting of the Ladies Working Association, they resolved to use the remainder of their funds to buy clothing which was then sent to Malin, Clonmany and Desertegny.<sup>49</sup> In the parish of Clonmany Mrs Young employed approximately fifty young females in knitting.<sup>50</sup> Her husband, George Henry Young,

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<sup>47</sup>*Londonderry Journal*, 13 Jan. 1847, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Feb. 1847, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Dec. 1847, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 March 1847, p. 2.



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

was rector of Clonmany parish. Young, the son of a Dublin banker, arrived in Clonmany in 1838.<sup>51</sup>

Mrs George Young of Culdaff supervised the distribution of soup from her home and employed 15-20 women to make clothes in her summer house.<sup>52</sup>

### Women and Relief in the Union of Dundalk

There is no evidence that any ladies society similar to those already mentioned was established in Dundalk. Women do not appear in great numbers on subscription lists. There is a lone reference to Lady Louisa Fortescue helping her husband at their home to relieve the suffering of the distressed. She was the daughter of James Wandesford Butler, Marquis of Ormonde and had married Thomas Fortescue, Ravensdale, in September 1840. She not only supported a soup kitchen in the electoral division of Jenkinstown but helped to establish another in Ravensdale.<sup>53</sup>

There is always the possibility that women such as Lady Fortescue did contribute quietly to the philanthropic efforts, by helping their husbands to relieve the distress of the local poor. An article in the *Dundalk Democrat* stated that:

The Sisters of Mercy beg to return thanks for the sum of £13 4s 4d collected through the charitable exertions of the ladies of Dundalk to purchase warm clothing for the poor children attending their schools.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Leslie, *Derry Clergy*, p. 162.

<sup>52</sup>*Report of the British Relief Association, 1849*, pp 120-1.

<sup>53</sup>*Newry Examiner and Louth Advertiser*, 2 March 1847, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup>*Dundalk Democrat*, 27 Sept. 1849.



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

The late arrival of the Mercy Sisters and the intimation that there was at least some female philanthropic action during this period does not, however, indicate that women in Dundalk were a major philanthropic force in the area. In fact, their efforts seem paltry when compared with the philanthropic efforts of some of the women in Ballina.

### **Women, Religion and Relief Work**

Maria Luddy has argued that Catholic women withdrew from public charitable activities once local convents took over such practices.<sup>55</sup> However this does not explain the inaction in the Ballina union on the part of Catholic women, as Ballina did not have a convent until late 1851 or early in 1852, when the Mercy Sisters set up home in Knoxes Street.

Thurles was the only union in the study to have a functioning female religious presence during the famine. The Ursuline community were founded in Thurles in 1787 with the establishment of a small scale boarding school. The convent went from strength to strength, giving a free education to poor female children. The Presentation Order community of nuns was established there in 1817. During the famine they established a soup kitchen, and took in and tended to victims of cholera. As a

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<sup>55</sup>Luddy, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



result some of the nuns contracted the disease. One nun, Sister Peter Mangan, lost the battle against the disease and died. The Sisters were aided in their work by subscriptions from America, solicited by the Rev Dr Leahy, President of St Patrick's College, Thurles.<sup>56</sup>

As we have already seen, the contribution of clerical wives to famine relief was very significant. In Thurles, the daughters of the Archdeacon of Cashel, Henry Cotton, made soup.<sup>57</sup> In the union of Ballina, the wife of Protestant clergyman, Samuel Stock, joint chairman of the Belmullet relief committee, ran the chief soup kitchen in the town which operated out of the Rectory. Mrs Stock also established a 'clothing manufactory' which continued until fever disrupted operations. In Ballina, Protestant curate George Read and his wife helped their servants to relieve the poor who besieged their house morning and night.<sup>58</sup> The wife of Presbyterian minister, Mr David Rodgers, was praised for denying herself every comfort in an effort to provide for the poor:

Throughout the whole period of the famine she exerted herself with extraordinary activity to relieve the distressed; and as the distributor of funds afterwards placed by the charitable at her disposal, was instrumental in saving multitudes from starvation.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Sister M. Liguori, 'Presentation Convent Thurles 1817-1917' in W. Corbett and W. Nolan (ed.) *Thurles: The cathedral town* (Dublin, 1989), pp 217-8.

<sup>57</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, D.264 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>58</sup>*Tyrrawly Herald*, 30 December 1847, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup>W.D. Killen, op. cit., p. 208.



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

The wife of Francis Little, Church of Ireland parson at Doonfeeny, died of fever caught while doing charity work.<sup>60</sup> In the parish of Castleconnor the Rev James Burrowes told the Relief Commission that 'the whole time and attention of every member of my family are occupied in attending the wants of the sufferers.'<sup>61</sup> By March 1847 the Burrowes family were issuing nearly two tons of meals a week from their house.<sup>62</sup> In the parish of Crossmolina the wife of Henry St George, the Protestant curate of the parish, distributed food. She also acted as an amateur doctor. The Presbyterian school in Ballina taught weaving and sewed muslin work to children. Asenath Nicholson noted the contribution of the Baptist minister in Ballina, William Hamilton and his wife and children to the relief of the poor.<sup>63</sup> In Killala Dr Neilson, secretary of the Killala relief committee lost his sister, Kate, to typhus, caught while helping the starving poor.<sup>64</sup> In the parish of Kilfian the local parson, St George Knox, stated that 'hundreds would already have died if it were not for the relief I was able to afford them.'<sup>65</sup> St George Knox's wife, Fannie, fed

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 20 March 1848.

<sup>61</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.11529 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., No. 14177.

<sup>63</sup>Nicholson, op. cit., pp 125-6.

<sup>64</sup>Patricia Fitzgerald and Olive Kennedy, *The great famine in Killala* (Killala, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>65</sup>Society of Friends. Clothing Application. No.18. 13 January 1847 (N.A. Society of Friends. Correspondence on Distribution of Clothing, 2/506/34).



## *Women and Famine Relief 1845-52*

300 families and another 300 beggars from her Fahy home in the parish of Kilfian out of a monthly sum of £200 which she took from her own pocket. Both she and her mother directed the running of soup boilers, as well the organisation of a weaving and spinning establishment for the poor in their area.

Thus women philanthropists during this period attacked poverty in a number of ways. By soliciting subscriptions and establishing soup kitchens, they ensured that the poor had something to eat. They also took a more pragmatic approach to the problem of poverty by creating opportunities for employment. Where there were convents, nuns did contribute to the relief effort, establishing soup kitchens and tending to the sick. Lay women were more often than not the wives, sisters and daughters of local gentry and clergymen suggesting that philanthropy was rarely a solitary affair, including many members of the same family.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE DILIGENT FEW

Famine relief committee membership lists as published in local newspapers and forwarded to the relief commission tell an important story about the history of relief. Yet in many cases these lists were drawn up in accordance with government regulations, because government grants were reliant on compliance with rules on relief committee membership. However membership lists do not reveal who actually performed the bulk of relief work. To ascertain who were the most diligent relief workers one must turn to surviving minutes of relief committees.

#### Castleconnor Relief Committee

Castleconnor was a parish in the barony of Tireragh, County Sligo. It was four miles from the town of Ballina and contained 4,507 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The relief committee for the Western District of the barony of Tireragh, comprising the parish of Castleconnor and a portion of the parish of Kilmoremoy in County Sligo were

Lieut., Col. F.A. Knox Gore  
Thomas Jones Esq. JP  
Edward Howly Esq. JP  
Thomas Howly Esq. JP  
James Paget Esq. JP  
Arthur Ormsby Esq. JP

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis, *op. cit.*, i, p. 294.



## *The Diligent Few*

Pilsworth Whelan RM  
Rev Joseph Verschoyle  
Rev James Burrows  
Rev Patrick Duffy  
Rev Hugh Conway  
JJ Young Esq.           Constabulary Officer  
J. Wire Esq. Esq.       Coastguard Officer  
Mr Voles                Commissary Officer  
Capt. Gilbert          Officer of the Board of Works<sup>2</sup>

As this list reveals, the Castleconnor relief committee constructed their committee in strict accordance with government instructions for the second season of distress, especially adhering to the rule of principal clergy. The committee's proceedings were forwarded to the relief commission charting a total of eight meetings between 26 October and 9 November 1846. Its main aim seems to have been the organisation of public works. By 9 November 1846 it had secured Board of Works sanction for public works that ensured employment for 870 men. The committee itself, in terms of its residents and exclusive of government officials, is representative of a cross-section of Ballina society, as opposed to Castleconnor society.

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<sup>2</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No.6711 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).



**Table 6:1**  
**Castleconnor Relief Committee**

Name	Status	Religion*	Previous Experience
Lieut. Col. Knox Gore (3)	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Thomas Jones (8)	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Edward Howley (8)	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
Thomas Howley (3)	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
James Paget	Gentry	Prot.	?
Arthur Ormsby	Gentry	Prot.	?
Pilsworth Whelan	RM	Prot.	?
Rev Joseph Verschoyle (3)	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev James Burrows	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev Patrick Duffy (7)	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev Hugh Conway (6)	Clergy	Cath.	Yes <sup>3</sup>

( ) = Attendance Record

- Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

Oliver C. Jackson was voted onto the committee on 14 December 1846.<sup>4</sup> The philanthropic career of Lieutenant F.A. Knox Gore has already been noted, as has that of Thomas Jones. The famine, however, was taking its toll on Colonel Knox Gore:

I employed before the famine of 1846 near 100 men a day paid in money wages every week. I have contrived to do so ever since, having reduced my expenditure to do so....I cannot calculate on more than half my former income and that is required to pay rates, cess, rent, interest of family charges. I look entirely to the improvement on the waste lands to give me enough to feed and clothe my family, for as to carriages, wine and other luxuries, I have long since given them up, and my establishment is now like a mere rent-paying farmer, struggling to pay

<sup>3</sup>Church of Ireland Records, Kilmoremy, Castleconnor (N.A. Church of Ireland Parish Records, Reel No.32); *Ballina Impartial*, 28 Feb. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming letters, No.8255 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).



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by exertion of skill and industry and high-rent which the rates and county-cess are on waste lands.<sup>5</sup>

The charitable endeavours of Edward and Thomas Howley have also been noted. Arthur Ormsby and Pilsworth Whelan did not take part in the meetings of this committee. Rev Joseph Verschoyle was the second son of the Bishop of Killala from 1810-1834. Born in 1797, he attended Trinity College Dublin and performed many charitable functions as rector of the parish of Kilmoremoy.<sup>6</sup> Oliver C. Jackson was a local Protestant magistrate. He was part of the relief effort as far back as 1831 when he was a member of the Crossmolina relief committee.<sup>7</sup> Rev Hugh Conway was also a member of the Ballina Baronial Committee.<sup>8</sup> Both Rev Hugh Conway and Thomas Jones were also members of the Ballina board of health in 1847.<sup>9</sup> The charitable career of Rev James Burrowes has already been discussed. It would seem that by February 1847, both Burrowes and his family were the sole providers of relief in the parish of Castleconnor:

The extent of the parish is about 3 miles by 4 miles, the population is 5,130 of which two-thirds are reduced to destitution...Yesterday we issued Indian meal to about 80 families...We depend on the order of the Ballina committee for getting the supply as no committee could be formed here on account of the small number of resident gentry...The

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<sup>5</sup>*Papers relating to the aid afforded to the distressed unions in the West of Ireland, 1849*, pp 5-6. H.C. 1849 (1049) xIviii.

<sup>6</sup>Burke, op. cit., p. 618.

<sup>7</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 29 Aug. 1831, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 28 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 June 1847, p. 3.



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whole time and attention of every member of my family are occupied in attending the wants of the sufferers.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the Castleconnor relief committee was still in existence by March 1847 and had collected £174 10s in subscriptions, James Burrowes was issuing nearly two tons of meal a week from his house. Burrowes' letters display a sense of isolation, despite the fact that the area did have a relief committee.<sup>11</sup> This is probably explained by the fact that Burrowes was the only member of the committee who actually lived in the parish, the rest living at least four miles away. The committee's location in Ballina town cannot have equipped it to cater for the people's needs. The reason why Burrowes did not attend one of the eight meetings probably lies in the fact that he was too busy attending to the needs of the poor to travel four miles to attend. It is noteworthy that the most active committee members were already relief workers in the town of Ballina. Thus despite the apparently government-regulated relief committee we have on paper, the short minutes reveal a different story. Those who were answering the call of duty were few but very consistent in their efforts. However landholders in this area were, in many cases, in an impossible situation. James H. Tuke reported in

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<sup>10</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.6711 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo 2/442/5).

<sup>11</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.14177 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/5).



December 1846:

I might say with the greatest truth, there are not seven families in the country parts of this parish, who do not require relief to save them from starvation. Our landlords in this part of the country are mostly middlemen, that is landlords who pay rent themselves, to head landlords for the estates which they held. Those landlords, possessing but small incomes from their estates, and many of them being already encumbered with family claims and ancestral mortgages, are unable to consult for the comfort of their tenants. Hence that insensible feeling with which they now view unmoved the starving condition of their tenants. And when they see the enormous burden of taxes to which their already sunk properties are liable to be subjected, instead of endeavouring to provide employment for their people, they endeavour to impede it by every means to in their power.<sup>12</sup>

Hence the few were struggling to provide for the poor in the face of growing apathy.

#### **Killala Parochial Relief Committee**

The town and parish of Killala had 5 clergy, 22 gentry, 4 professionals and 29 traders, as possible relief workers in 1846. The distribution of religions in the town was 430 Established church, 3,699 Catholics and 26 Presbyterians. Between the parish and the town of Killala, there were 10 first class houses, 96 second class, 287 third and 146 fourth class houses. The state of agriculture was believed to be improving 'in the rearing of green crops, and that sort of thing, which has not been heard of till very lately in the country, especially among the poorer classes.'<sup>13</sup> The minutes of the Killala parochial relief committee still exist in the

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<sup>12</sup>Society of Friends, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>13</sup>*Devon Commission*, Part 2, p. 427.



## *The Diligent Few*

form of a small notebook. The first meeting of the committee was held on Friday, 4 December 1846. The committee was completely separate to the Killala district committee which was attending to public works projects in the area. Killala already had active relief workers before the establishment of this relief committee who were members of the district and parochial committees:

In the month of November last a cargo of Indian and oatmeal was imported here by Walter James Bourke, Esq., Major Gardiner and John Kirkwood Esq. and sold to the poor at cost price, which consequently kept down the market during its sale....<sup>14</sup>

At the first meeting of the Killala parochial committee it was resolved that 'each subscriber of one pound and upwards shall be a member of the committee.' The regularity of the meetings were subject to fits and starts. In its initial stages meetings were held regularly but by January 1847 the meetings had drawn to a halt. There was a gap in meetings from 22 December 1846 to 20 January 1847. This gap is explained to some extent in a letter from the committee secretary to the Irish Relief Association:

Some friends in more distant places have given assistance, but our funds are nearly exhausted. The mode in which relief has hitherto been given, is by the sale of meal at a very reduced price, and in some instances by gratuitous distribution.<sup>15</sup>

From 20 January 1847 meetings were held regularly until 24 April 1847 when the minute book finishes its record. Both the

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<sup>14</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 28 Jan. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Letter from Dr Neilson to the Irish Relief Association, 20 January 1847. Minutes of the Killala Parochial Relief Committee (T.R.B.).



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chairman and the secretary of the Killala district relief committee performed the same functions for the parochial committee.

**Table 6:2**  
**Killala Parochial Committee**

Name	Status	Religion*	Previous Experience
Rev Dean Collins	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Walter J. Bourke	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Major Gardiner	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
John Kirkwood	Trader	Prot.	Yes
Robert Kirkwood	Trader	Prot.	?
Joseph Kirkwood	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Palmer Kirkwood	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Dr Charles Neilson	MD	Prot.	Yes
Rev T.G. Lapiere	Clergy	Prot.	?
Rev William Bourke	Clergy	Prot.	?
William Kirkwood	Gentry	Prot.	? <sup>16</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

The very Rev James Collins was the Dean of Killala. He was the overseer of burials during the famine and also acted as director of the local board of health. He directed sewage disposal in the town, the whitewashing of houses and supervised the setting up of feeding stations for the starving people.<sup>17</sup> He was also treasurer of the Kinucun relief committee.<sup>18</sup> Palmer Kirkwood was secretary to the Killala relief committee and

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<sup>16</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p.129; Church of Ireland Records, Killala (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.32).

<sup>17</sup>Bowen, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>18</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.16944 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).



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secretary to the Kinucun relief committee.<sup>19</sup> Walter J. Bourke, a Protestant magistrate, was also a poor law guardian.<sup>20</sup> He chaired the Killala parochial and district committee.<sup>21</sup> His wife started a factory for women and paid them 6d a day. She also made soup and clothes for the poor.<sup>22</sup> This factory for the relief maintenance of destitute widows had collected £85 1s by 25 February 1847.<sup>23</sup> Bourke died in February 1848 after a long bout of illness. His widow married Oliver Jackson in 1849.<sup>24</sup> Major John Gardiner was another Protestant magistrate. An anti-repealer, Gardiner had been a member of the Protestant Brunswick Club. He was part of the relief effort as far back as 1831 when he was a member of the Crossmolina relief committee.<sup>25</sup> He returned to Ireland in October 1846, leaving his family in the Isle of Man. He was

possessed of a large property in the Ballina union the rents upon which were very well paid by comfortable class of tenants previous to the winter of 1846... Since 1846 last nearly seven eight's of his tenants, principally by emigration... Out of 2900l due by his tenants, has only received 800l; cannot reckon upon receiving 500l annually as matters are at present... He applied for money under the Land Improvement Act, and has given as large an amount of employment as his private funds would admit of. During 1847 and 1848, cultivated 275 acres of land which was thrown upon his hands, and lost 200l by the transaction. Has now been obliged to borrow money upon a life insurance for which

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<sup>19</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.1271; No. 16944 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>20</sup>Church of Ireland Records, Killala, 7 Dec. 1815 (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel 32).

<sup>21</sup>RLFC Papers, 2/442/3, No.8472 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Mayo, 2/442/3).

<sup>22</sup>*Tyrawly Herald*, 28 Jan. 1847, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 Feb. 1847.

<sup>24</sup>Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>25</sup>*Ballina Impartial*, 28 Feb. 1831, p. 3; 29 Aug. 1831, p. 3.



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he was paid 1321 annually for 21 years in order to pay his present poor-rate.<sup>26</sup>

At the first meeting of the Killala parish relief committee it was resolved:

That the Parish of Killala be divided into district, namely Killala, Moyne, Rathoma and Ross; and that the following gentlemen be appointed visitors to inquire particularly into the condition of each poor family in their respective districts, and make a careful return of their several inspections, and that from these returns the general committee shall select such persons as may seem proper objects to get meal at a reduced price.

The establishment of a soup kitchen was not considered by the committee until 20 January 1847 and did not actually operate until 6 April 1847. Obstacles to the speedy erection of soup boilers were the problems of acquiring boilers, and of finding a cook and 'provider'. They also had to find a suitable place in town for the soup kitchen, and the adjournment of meetings did nothing to speed up the process. The establishment of provision shops also needed attention.

Table 6:3 (next page) gives us an indication of who actually kept the relief committee in operation. The last four committee names were visitors to the committee room. As this list demonstrates, relief was yet again in the hands of the few with respect to the actual operations of the committee. Walter J. Bourke was very ill at this stage and had to resign his chair

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<sup>26</sup>*Further papers relating to the aid afforded to the distressed unions in the west of Ireland, 1849.* p. 6. H.C. 1849 (1077) XLviii.



because of it. There was also the fact that, as we have seen in Chapter 4 (p.188), his chairmanship of both the district and

**Table 6:3**  
**Attendance**

Rev Dean Collins	10
Walter J. Bourke	4
Major Gardiner	0
John Kirkwood	5
Robert Kirkwood	8
Joseph Kirkwood	0
William Kirkwood	5
Palmer Kirkwood	7
Dr Neilson	4
Rev T.G. Lapiere	3
Rev William Bourke	9
Dr Townley	9
Andrew Kirkwood	1
Mr Nolan	3
Rev A. Corcoran	1

parochial committee caused some problems for other relief committee members. It is also notable that clergy are among those who attended the most meetings. The minutes end on 24 April 1847. It is quite possible that the relief committee established under the new relief act took over the running of the soup kitchens at this stage.

### Thurles Relief Committee

Before famine struck the parish of Thurles it was a place that was increasing in wealth and importance. Thurles town was a market and post-town, 75 miles south-west of Dublin and 25



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miles north of Clonmel.<sup>27</sup> We have already seen that in the town of Thurles there was an increase in local trade with a corresponding rise in merchant numbers. (See Chapter 1, p.40) Yet the lifestyle of the poor was wretched. The population of the town of Thurles was 10,284 in 1841. In the parishes of Thurles/Rahealty there were 294 Protestants, 11,560 Catholics and 19 Baptists who were catered for by 1 Protestant, 5 Catholic and 1 Baptist ministers.<sup>28</sup>

When one looks at who was possibly available in this area to give or help to provide relief, one finds 15 clergy, 37 gentlemen, 26 professional men and 151 traders.<sup>29</sup> When distress took hold of the poor with the failure of the potato crop it was these gentlemen to whom they looked for support.

There were apprehensions with respect to the potato crop as far back as October 1845. Cries for the formation of committees to organise public works began in November 1845.<sup>30</sup> Conditions were worsening by late February 1846:

From Templemore and Thurles, our letters are of the gloomiest description. In those districts many of the labouring population expected work on the Cashel Line of railway- but up to this moment they have not received work- and the result may be better imagined than described.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Lewis, op. cit., ii, p. 662.

<sup>28</sup>*First report of the commissioners on public instruction (Ireland) with appendix, 1835*, p. 58c. H.C. 1835 (46) xxxiii.

<sup>29</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 Nov. 1845, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Feb. 1846, p. 2.



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By March destitution compounded by unemployment led to fear of riots.<sup>32</sup> The social hierarchy in Thurles reacted to the crisis in

April:

At a Preliminary meeting of the Inhabitants of Thurles held at the Court House, Thursday, the 2nd instant for the purpose of devising means, and calling on the Landed Proprietors of the town and parish for subscriptions to procure employment for the labouring classes, and, if possible, to avert the impending famine.<sup>33</sup>

The membership of the first Thurles relief committee as set out in that committee's minutes was as follows:

**Table 6:4**  
**First Thurles Relief Committee**

Name	Status	Religion*	Previous Experience
Archdeacon Cotton	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev William Barron	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
J. Gore Jones	RM	Prot.	?
Martin Quinlan	Trader	?	Yes
Francis O'Brien	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Rev Mr Lanigan	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Joshua Lester	Trader	?	?
Rev Baker	Clerk	Prot.	Yes
Dr R.C. Knaggs	MD	Prot.	Yes
James B. Kennedy	Professional	Cath.	Yes
Dr O'Connor	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Major Armstrong	Gentry	Prot.	?
Thomas Henesy	Trader	Cath.	Yes
Henry Langley	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Mr Crowe	Trader	?	Yes
Rev Martin Laffan	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev Mr Grace	Clergy	Cath	Yes
Dr Bradshaw	Clergy	?	? <sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 28 March 1846, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 4 April 1846, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p. 136; Church of Ireland Records, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No. 7); James Ryan 'St Mary's Church, Thurles' in Noel Reid (ed.) *Irish family history. Journal of the Irish Family History Society.* x (Kildare, 1994), pp 77-119.



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\*Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

Archdeacon Henry Cotton was chairman of the Thurles relief committee. Out of a total of 149 meetings, Archdeacon Cotton attended 87 meetings even though during that period of relief he was absent for two months. He was a trustee and managing committee member of the Thurles Savings Bank. The bank was founded on his initiative and he was rarely absent from the trustee's quarterly meetings. And just as the archdeacon presided over the first meeting for the bank, he presided over its final meeting 40 years later. Cotton, however, was not always a very popular local figure:

Opposition to tithe in Tipperary began in July 1831 when Archdeacon Cotton, rector of Thurles, employed a tithe proctor whom Catholics found "peculiarly obnoxious" because he had been a collector of the O'Connell tribute.<sup>35</sup>

Cotton was a regular correspondent to the relief commission.<sup>36</sup>

The Rev William Barron was parish priest of Thurles. An active repealer, he attended 67 out of the 149 meetings.<sup>37</sup> John Gore Jones was the resident magistrate in Thurles; he was not only a member of the Thurles relief committee but, as resident magistrate, sat on the relief committees in Inch and in

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<sup>35</sup>Thomas G, McGrath, 'Interdenominational relations in pre-famine Tipperary' in William Nolan (ed.) *Tipperary history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1985), p. 268.

<sup>36</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.8686, No.9124. D.264, No.6196 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp 2/442/6).

<sup>37</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3.



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Borrisoleigh.<sup>38</sup> Martin Quinlan was a merchant with a business on main street, Thurles. A poor law guardian, Quinlan was also an active repealer.<sup>39</sup> Francis O'Brien, a landowner and magistrate, was treasurer of the Thurles relief committee and had a history of involvement in local charity. He was appointed trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank in February 1840. However he was not always a popular figure in the town. His support for the Tory candidate, Ponsonby Barker, in the 1841 elections left him victim to jeering crowds when he walked down the streets of Thurles.<sup>40</sup> Rev Lanigan was an active repealer.<sup>41</sup> Joshua Lester was a baker and member of the managing committee of the Thurles Savings Bank. Rev William Baker was another trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank. Dr Robert Charles Knaggs was a local doctor who attended at the Thurles dispensary. He attended 77 out of 149 meetings. Finally, James B. Kennedy was an attorney who had offices on Main Street, Thurles and in Dublin.<sup>42</sup> He attended 22 out of 149 meetings in total. Kennedy was also a trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank. A Catholic repealer, he was also a poor law guardian.<sup>43</sup> The life-span of the Thurles relief

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<sup>38</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 22 April 1846, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 Jan. 1846, p. 2; *Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup>T. McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>41</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3; Thurles Relief Committee Minute Book (Hereafter referred to as Thurles Minutes) (T.C.L.).

<sup>42</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>43</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3.



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committee lasted over 13 meetings. Table 6:5 gives the attendance record of each of the committee members.

**Table 6:5**

### **Attendance Record**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Archdeacon Cotton	9
Rev Barron	9
John Gore Jones	5
Martin Quinlan	1
Francis O'Brien	10
Rev Mr Lanigan	12
Joshua Lester	2
Rev Baker	9
Dr. Knaggs	8
James B. Kennedy	6
Dr O'Connor	4
Major Armstrong	1
Thomas Henesy	1
Henry Langley	1
Dr Bradshaw	1
Mr Crowe	3
Rev Laffan	3
Rev Mr Grace	1

By the end of April the committee had collected £624 4s 6d.

The town had 790 able-bodied men whose families numbered 2625, all of whom were destitute. 400 of the most destitute of these 790 able bodied men were employed at a cost of 8d each per day by the committee.<sup>44</sup> The committee employed four

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<sup>44</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, No. D763, 29 April 1846 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).



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stewards to oversee the public works. The following rules for labourers were,

1. Hours of labour to be from 7 - 7 with 2 hours for meals.
2. Any labourer found to shrink from reasonable and fair work or refusing to follow the directions of his overseer shall forthwith be discharged and not admitted to the work again.
3. That the persons employed shall be paid every evening.
4. That in case a greater number of labour should offer themselves than the funds will allow the committee to pay, a preference shall be given to those who have the largest and most necessary families.

The committee met from 19 April 1846 and nearly every day until 30 April 1846. They then met on the 5th, 6th and 8th May 1846. It is there that the minutes end. Committees minutes revolved around public works and ordering corn through committee member Joshua Lester. However the committee was no sooner in operation than trouble began with the labourers on relief works:

Reported that labourers refused to work for the hire of 8d per day and that none of the works commenced. Question as to varying rate of hire fully discussed and agreed that no more can be given. During discussion Meighan steward announced that several of the labourers had just followed him to say they would work for the 8d and what in his opinion the great cause of the strike was that a sufficient number of labour tickets had not been distributed.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Thurles Minutes, 21 April 1846 (T.C.L.).



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The operation of public works was also open to abuse. In April 1846 it was discovered that some of the labourers were paid three times. After much discussion on how to prevent this happening again, it was decided that a steward should be appointed over each gang of thirty men.<sup>46</sup> By June 1846 the committee had over 300 at work on permanent and useful improvements. However:

In this, as perhaps in other parishes, the farmers have not contributed according to their means, or at all in proportion to the people of the town. The relief committees in the neighbouring rural parishes have been fortunate in getting contributions from their agricultural friends.<sup>47</sup>

In the first subscription list for Thurles there were 147 subscriptions in total. The social standing of 106 was determined. Of this 106, 11 were clergymen, 18 were professionals, 23 were gentlemen and 54 from the merchant classes. However it was from the gentry and professional classes that most of the money was collected. No merchant subscribed more than £20, the usual subscription being £5 and under. By the end of April the relief committee had collected £624 4s 6d in total by means of subscriptions.<sup>48</sup> The last meeting in the minutes of this first committee is dated 6 May 1846. However the committee did continue to meet and operate right through the summer.

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<sup>46</sup>Thurles Minutes, 27 April 1846 (T.C.L.).

<sup>47</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 13 June 1846, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>RLFC3/2, Incoming Letters, D.763 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).



**The Second Season of Distress**

By the end of July 1846, the potato blight had returned with a vengeance. There were less seeds planted that year and the harvest was half than what was usual.<sup>49</sup> But it was the late crop which suffered most, the blight striking before the potatoes matured. Thus by the end of August the poor were subsisting on the earlier crop.<sup>50</sup> By September the potato crop was believed to have been irretrievably lost in the Thurles district.<sup>51</sup> The second Thurles relief committee covered the Thurles/Rahealty areas and started the business of relief on 13 October 1846. This committee met a total of 64 times. As can be seen (next page), thirteen of the seventeen committee members were part of the relief effort during the previous period of distress. The new member, Nicholas V. Maher MP, Turtulla, was elected chairman of the Thurles relief committee but only attended 7 out of 137 meetings. Maher took his uncle's seat in parliament on the repeal ticket. According to Kevin Whelan, the Mahers were representative of a new breed of confident Catholic gentry in the county of

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<sup>49</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 22 July 1846, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>RLFC4 Replies to Circular. Aug. 1846 (N.A.RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/13).

<sup>51</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 19 Aug. 1846, p. 2.



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Tipperary.<sup>52</sup> Maher subscribed £75 in total to the Thurles relief committee.<sup>53</sup> He was also elected chairman of Moycarky relief

**Table 6:6**  
**Attendance Record**

Name	Attendance
N.V. Maher, Chairman	6
Archdeacon Cotton	40
Francis O'Brien	33
Rev W. Barron	51
Rev W. Baker	51
Rev Martin Laffan	45
Rev D.K. Lanigan	28
Rev Thomas O'Connor	43
R.C. Knaggs	47
Rev Patrick Leahy	46
Joshua Lester	10
John Gore Jones	43
James Bracken	37
Alfred Gahan	4
James B. Kennedy	15
Thomas Hennessy	11
Martin Quinlan	7

committee in December.<sup>54</sup> Maher's absence from the Thurles/Rahealty committee meetings may have been because of his chairmanship of this committee. His position as MP for the county could also have kept him away. He was definitely in parliament in April 1846.<sup>55</sup> He does not make another appearance

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<sup>52</sup>Kevin Whelan, 'The Catholic Church in County Tipperary, 1700-1900' in Nolan, op. cit., pp 216-7.

<sup>53</sup>RLFC3/2. Incoming Letters, D.763; RLFC3/2/27/30. No. 15.6898 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6, 3/2/27/30).

<sup>54</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.9864 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>55</sup>Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series 2 April, 1846 (London, 1846) LXXXv. p. 483.



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in *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* until November 1847.<sup>56</sup>

The Rev Patrick Leahy was Professor of Theology and Scriptures at the Catholic College.<sup>57</sup> Leahy was actually born near Thurles in 1807. He was eventually to become Archbishop of Cashel and was consecrated as such in 1857. He regularly attended committee meetings, and was present for 46 of the 64 meetings.

Alfred Gahan was the superintending engineer supervising the

**Table 6:7**  
**Social Background of the Second Thurles Relief Committee**

Name	Status	Religion*	Previous Experience
N.V. Maher	MP	Cath.	Yes
Archdeacon Cotton	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Francis O'Brien	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Rev W. Barron	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev W. Baker	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev Martin Laffan	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev D.K. Lanigan	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Rev Thomas O'Connor	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
R.C. Knaggs	MD	Prot.	Yes
Rev Patrick Leahy	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
Joshua Lester	Baker	?	Yes
J.G. Jones	R.M.	Prot.	?
J.B. Kennedy	Attorney	Cath.	Yes
Thomas Hennessy	Trader	Cath.	Yes
Martin Quinlan	Trader	?	Yes
Alfred Gahan	Government Inspector	?	?
J. Brackan	Government Inspector	?	? <sup>58</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., (London, 1848) XCv, p. 215.

<sup>57</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>58</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846) p316; Church of Ireland Records, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.7); James Ryan 'St Mary's Church, Thurles' in Noel Reid (ed.) *Irish family history. Journal of the Irish Family History Society*. x (Kildare, 1994), pp 77-119.



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public works. It was in that capacity that he attended 4 of the 64 meetings. Of the 17 members, the religion of 4 is unknown. Of the remaining 13, 8 were Roman Catholic, while five were Protestant. Yet if we look at the attendance records, the majority (5) of those Catholic members were clergymen. In terms of attendance, the most frequent committee goers are spread equally between Protestant and Catholic members. Of those who attended over 40 meetings out of the total of 64, 4 were Protestant and 4 were Catholic. The poor attendance of the two traders, Thomas Hennessy and Martin Quinlan, is attributed to the fact that they did not join until 3rd February 1847. Another feature of this committee list is its confirmation that the rule concerning principal clergymen only was ignored. This committee had 2 curates. Concern over new regulations on relief committee membership reverberated throughout the country in the autumn of 1846. In a letter to the Relief Commission, Archdeacon Cotton voiced his concerns over the implications for local relief should the new regulations be implemented. His letter reveals who formed the backbone of relief in practice, rather than what may have been gleaned from names on paper. Cotton complained that the new relief committees were made up of too many public officers and if those same rules were applied to Thurles, there would be no committee:



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From the month of April to the present hour the entire duties of the committee (nominally composed of 21 members) have been performed by five or six of its members resident here, daily witnesses of the prevailing distress...their having given constant employment to about 400 men each day from April to August and supplied them for a great portion of that period with meal at nearly cost price.

The first on the list in the recent instructions is the Lord Lieutenant and Vice Lieutenant of the County- Neither are in Ireland at present.

Two magistrates from each bench in the Barony are next on the list; we have eight magistrates on the list of our present committee, not one of whom ever once attended our meetings or in any way assisted us, but namely our Treasurer, Francis O'Brien, JP.

The Resident Magistrate (John Gore Jones Esq.) assisted with advice...

The principal clergymen of each church...The most zealous and effective members of our present committee are the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen of this district; in fact, without their assistance, the efforts of the most influential of our members would have been totally insufficient to preserve order amongst the poor suffering labourers...but the labour was not and could not have been confined to the principal clergymen of each church, it was shared in and rendered doubly effective by their curates. The next on the list is...The Chairman of the Poor Law Union - The Chairman of our union is Mr John Lanigan who resides in Templemore, eight miles from us and who would most certainly attend the committee. In fact he is, as such, Chairman, a member of our present committee, **but never once attended.**

The working committee here consisted entirely of the following and it is to their exertions solely the amount of relief given is to be attributed.

The Venerable Archdeacon Cotton	Chairman
The Reverend (sic.) William Barron	P.P. Thurles
The Reverend (sic.) Martin Laffan	C.C, Thurles
The Reverend (sic.) Daniel K. Lanigan	C.C. Thurles
The Reverend (sic.) William Baker	Clerk
The Reverend (sic.) Dr. O'Connor	President College
Thurles	
R.C. Knaggs	M.D. Thurles
John G. Jones	R.M.
Joshua Lester, Esq.	
James B. Kennedy, Vice Chairman, Board of Guardians	



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Five or six of the foregoing met each day at 3 o'clock and transacted business brought before them and each evening again several of the members sat in different parts of the town to pay the labourers.<sup>59</sup>

With the possible exceptions of Joshua Lester and James B. Kennedy, control of relief in the second stage of distress remained in the same hands. Thus it would seem that Trevelyan was rather optimistic when he wrote to Lieut.-Col. Jones in December 1846, stating that:

The upper and middle classes are beginning to be trained, through the medium of these local committees to the local administration of their own affairs, and especially the relief of the destitute poor.<sup>60</sup>

The upper and middle classes actually sitting on the Thurles committee were very few and those who were carrying the burden of relief did not need training because they were the same people who came forward time and time again to help the poor. Previous periods of distress had been their training ground. This committee met 7 times in the course of October, 10 times in November, 11 in December, 9 in January 1847, 7 times in February and 4 times in March before the establishment of the new committee under the soup kitchen act. The meetings revolved around relief lists and the purchase of corn.

They sold this meal at cost price. The area was divided into 6 districts. The meal tickets were numbered as follows.

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<sup>59</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No. 6196 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).

<sup>60</sup>*Correspondence from July 1846 to January 1847, relating to the measures adopted for the relief of the distress in Ireland, 1847*, p. 292., H.C. 1847 (764)

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Pike	1 to 100
Quarries	101 to 200
Main Street	201 to 240
Pudding Lane	241 to 400
Garrovocloher	401 to 500
Stradovoher	501 to 600

In November 1846 the committee resolved to distribute warm food on two or three days in the week to the disabled and destitute families in the area because of the severity of the weather.<sup>61</sup> They used a soup kitchen that was already fitted with a soup boiler which had been used in an earlier year of crisis.<sup>62</sup> The committee were already deciding at this stage on how they would employ females during the following spring.<sup>63</sup> Accountability was foremost on the minds of the committee. On 17 November 1846

it was deemed advisable to hold a public meeting for the purpose of auditing the amounts of last year and to ask subscriptions to procure food at a cheap rate for the poor who are on the destitute list - A requisition to that effect was drawn up and ordered to be printed...calling for a meeting on Thursday next, at 12 o'clock. It was determined that the meal should be distributed by weight and not by measure.

By the end of the month, the situation was worsening:

That it appears to the committee extremely desirable to afford to disabled and destitute families a supply of cooked food during the severity of winter, and that we endeavour to establish a distribution of warm food, on two or three days in a week.

Pressure was building on the committee in the winter of 1846-47. They had seven thousand people in their care and were

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<sup>61</sup>Thurles Minutes, 30 Nov. 1846 (T.C.L.).

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 2 Dec. 1846.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 15 Dec. 1846.



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operating out of Dr Knagg's house. There seems to have been an all out relief drive by the relief committee. Henry Cotton wrote to the Relief Commission:

Food is already at a Famine price in all our markets and, unless extraordinary efforts be made, the monopoly enjoyed by a few speculators must cost the sacrifice of many thousand lives. With this conviction, the relief committee of Thurles joined by some of the neighbouring Relief Committees are making arrangements to raise some thousands of pounds on their own security, to purchase a cargo of Indian Corn, in Liverpool, or Cork, and to open a Food-depot in Thurles, for the benefit of the surrounding district.<sup>64</sup>

On the 13 January 1847, the committee

Ordered that application be made to the trustees for Bettering the Condition of the Irish Poor; for a loan of two hundred pounds to be applied in establishing knitting, sewing and other domestic work for females. The Archdeacon Cotton, Francis O'Brien, Rev Pat Leahy, James B. Kennedy, Esq. and Dr Knaggs undertook to be securities for the loan.

By January 1,400 people were employed on the public works out of a population of 14,000; 12,000 of whom were considered to be of the peasantry class. Those employed on the public works received 10d per day. Yet the committee struggled to maintain the momentum of relief. They had the total of £420 to relieve 600 destitute families. The money was subscribed by the 'industrious struggling inhabitants' of the town and by the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy. Of the thirty noblemen holding property in the parish, the committee received liberal subscriptions from

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<sup>64</sup>RLFC3/2 Incoming Letters, No.9124 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 2/442/6).



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only four. These four were Nicholas Maher, John Maher, Tullemaine, Mr Chief Justice Doherty and Francis O'Brien. Viscount Chabot, the owner of the best part of the town, subscribed £10 and his son Count D. Jarmac £5.<sup>65</sup>

When Dr Cotton had to leave Thurles for two months at the end of January 1847, the Rev William Barron was elected to the chair. They resolved that

the committee are of the opinion that relief by distributing bread and soup free of charge is the best and cheapest mode of relief as far is practicable and ought to be preferred to the distribution of Indian Meal at half price.

At this stage there were 2,000 employed in public works in the district. On 6 March 1847 it was resolved that

Mr Brachen, Rev William Baker and Mr Henesy be requested to act as a superintending committee and that they be requested to make arrangements for the distribution of soup and bread with as little as possible for the gratuitous relief of the destitute.

Two days later it was resolved that meat soup be given 3 days in the week and porridge for the other 4 days and that the materials of soup was to be left to the discretion of the subcommittee. But by 10 March distribution of meal was stopped due to lack of funds. Gratuitous relief now took the shape of bread, soup and rice.

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<sup>65</sup>RLFC3/2 Subscription List (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp 2/442/6).



Third Season of Distress

There was no major halt in operations between the lapsing of the old committee and the formation of a new one. There was a meeting on 15 March 1847 to discuss striking off of one-fifth of those on the public works. A week later, on 22 March, a new committee was formed. In the previous week 800 men had been dismissed from the public works. This third and last relief committee met a total of 73 times between 22 March 1847 and 28 September 1847 (See table next page).

While Nicholas Maher was, for all intents and purposes, chairman of the new relief committee, the appointment on paper would seem to have more a case of being seen to keep in line with officialdom. At the first meeting of the new committee, Rev Dr Cotton was appointed chairman and the Rev Barron was appointed vice-chairman. Of the new members John Trant from Dovea, outside of Thurles, was a JP and Deputy Lieutenant.<sup>66</sup> He was chairman of the Inch relief committee in early 1846,<sup>67</sup> and also chairman of the Drom and Inch relief committee, late 1846.<sup>68</sup> Born in 1819, Trant was appointed high sheriff of County Tipperary in 1847. He married Sarah Sophia, daughter of Sir

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<sup>66</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>67</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 22 April 1846, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>RLFC3/2. Incoming Letters, No.7392 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp., 2/442/6).



**Table 6:8**  
**Attendance: Third Thurles Relief Committee**

Member	Attendance Record
N.V. Maher	1
John Trant	1
Henry Langley JP	7
Francis O'Brien	42
John Gore Jones	56
J.B. Kennedy	1
Martin Quinlan	8
Thomas Mullany	1
Captain Norris	8
Thomas Henesy	35
Rev Dr. Slattery	2
Dr Cotton	38
Rev Barron	7
Mr Brachan	14
John Lanigan	1
James P. Ryan	30
Michael Dalton	1
Rev Baker	36
Dr R.C. Knaggs	22
J.M. Labarte	26
Pat Cahill	2
Archibald Cooke	12
John Gorman	1
James B. White	2
W. James Gorman	7

Henry Carden in 1842. He helped many to emigrate during this period.<sup>69</sup> His father-in-law, Sir Henry Carden, was chairman of the Templemore relief committee.<sup>70</sup> Trant attended 1 out of the 73 meetings. However this is not to imply that Trant reneged on his responsibility as a landlord. When he was chairman of the

<sup>69</sup>S.T. McCarthy, *The Trant Family* (Folkestone), p. 19.

<sup>70</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, D.299 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 3/2/27).



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Inch relief committee, he was regularly present at meetings.<sup>71</sup> He vowed that the people on his estate would not need the help of the Inch relief committee because he was providing constant employment. He also was distributing bread and soup to the poor on his estate as early as April 1846.<sup>72</sup> Trant was also regularly at meetings of the Thurles board of guardians.<sup>73</sup> John Lanigan was a gentleman and a repealer who went on to be elected MP, representing Cashel in 1859.<sup>74</sup> He was also a member of the Templemore relief committee in early 1846.<sup>75</sup> He, like Trant, only attended one meeting out of 79. It was a fact that did not go unnoticed. The committee on the 16 April resolved

That the chairman write to members Trant, Maher and H. Langley, requesting that if they will not be able to give regular attendance at this committee, they will nominate gentlemen as their substitutes.

Henry Langley, JP, lived in Brittas Castle in Thurles.<sup>76</sup> He was a trustee of the Thurles Savings Bank but only attended 7 of the Thurles relief committee meetings. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel, the Rev Dr Michael Slattery, was also a member of the committee, and only attended 2 meetings. Dr. Slattery did have a history in local charity, having been involved

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<sup>71</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 6 May 1846, p. 2; 20 May 1846, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 April 1846, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup>Diary of John Trant, 2 Jan. 1851; 6 Jan. 1851; 7 Jan. 1851; 14 Jan. 1851 (N.L.I. Trant Papers).

<sup>74</sup>*Tipperary Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1845, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup>RLFC, Incoming Letters, D.299 (N.A. RLFC, Co. Tipp, 3/2/27).

<sup>76</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 36.



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in such work since 1832 when he was a member of the Glankeen, Drom and Inch board of health. He came from well-to-do farming stock in Tipperary and was the only member of the hierarchy to have obtained a degree from Dublin University. His poor attendance was due to ill-health.<sup>77</sup> He described the situation in Thurles on 25 February 1847:

The distress of the people is everyday increasing and persons who three months ago were able to do without assistance, are now run out and are seeking relief. For some weeks past the deaths in this parish alone average from 15 to 20 every week exclusive of the Poor House where on some days there have been 10 to 12 dead together...It is undeniable that those public works are objectionable and tended much to demoralise our people, but at the same time they were the means of keeping them alive, although barely did the same.<sup>78</sup>

The next committee member, Thomas Mullany, from East Main Street, Thurles was a corn dealer.<sup>79</sup> He was on the Thurles relief committee in his capacity as poor law guardian<sup>80</sup> but only managed to attend one meeting. Archibald Cooke was a grocer who had a shop in Main Street, Thurles.<sup>81</sup> Cooke was also a member of the management committee for the Thurles Savings Bank. He attended 12 of the 73 meetings. Finally, Patrick Cahill was another of the new members but attended meetings rarely.

An auctioneer from New Street in the town, Cahill attended 2 of

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<sup>77</sup>Kerr, *A Nation of Beggars?* p. 21.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>79</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.

<sup>80</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 15 Nov. 1846, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup>*Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846*, p. 316.



the 73 meetings. Table 6:9 reveals the social structure of this new committee.

**Table 6:9**  
**Third Thurles Relief Committee**

Name	Status	Religion*	Previous Experience
N.V. Maher	MP	Cath.	Yes
John Trant	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Henry Langley	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
Francis O'Brien	Gentry	Prot.	Yes
J.G. Jones	RM	Prot.	?
J.B. Kennedy	Attorney	Cath.	Yes
Martin Quinlan	Trader	?	Yes
Thomas Mullany	Trader	Cath.	?
Capt. Norris	Gov. Inspector	?	?
Thomas Henesy	Trader	Cath.	Yes
Rev Dr. Slattery	Bishop	Cath.	Yes
Dr Cotton	Clergy	Prot.	Yes
Rev Barron	Clergy	Cath.	Yes
John Lanigan	Gentry	Cath.	Yes
J.P. Ryan	Gentry	Cath.	?
M. Dalton	?	?	-
Rev Baker	Clerk	Prot.	Yes
Dr Knaggs	MD	Prot.	Yes
P. Cahill	Prof.	?	?
Archibald Cooke	Trader	Prot.	?
John Gorman	Carpenter	?	?
James B. White	?	?	?
W. James Gorman	?	?	? <sup>82</sup>

\* Prot. = From one of the Protestant denominations.

At first glance only 10 of the 22 members were involved in previous relief efforts. But when one takes a closer look at the

<sup>82</sup> *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1846* (Dublin, 1846), p. 316; Church of Ireland Records, Templemore (N.A. Church of Ireland Records, Reel No.7); James Ryan 'St Mary's Church, Thurles' in Noel Reid (ed.) *Irish Family History. Journal of the Irish Family History Society*. Vol.10 (Kildare, 1994), pp 77-119.



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attendance rate (p.256) it becomes clear that it was the same group of people who were distributing relief and contributing to the relief effort.

The most controversial falling out in relief committee terms came in Thurles, leading to a radical restructuring of relief committee membership. The main cause of this upheaval were the comments of the government inspector, Captain Norris, who in a report accused the Catholic clergy on relief committees of putting people on relief lists indiscriminately. They are worth reproducing in full:

I regret to say it is very difficult to keep improper persons off the works, in consequence of some of the Committee not performing their duty. The leading members of many of the Committees are priests, who have no landed property, and consequently no interest in keeping down taxation, but, on the contrary, have an interest in enabling their flocks to pay their tribute. Some of the resident gentry, from disgust at the proceedings, rarely attend the Committees and others who do are afraid to perform their duty; for if they object to improper persons being on the lists, the small farmers who are also often members of the Committees, and only one degree removed from those employed on the Public Works, soon let it be known out of door who are the members of the Committees who prevent their friends being returned.<sup>83</sup>

The accusation was met with general outrage and it was resolved at a meeting of the Catholic clergymen of the Archdiocese of Cashel that no Catholic clergyman would sit on a committee that was in any way connected to Captain Norris.<sup>84</sup> This was a huge blow to the Thurles and other relief committees, depriving them

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<sup>83</sup>*Correspondence from January to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the relief of distress of Ireland, 1847*, p. 246.

<sup>84</sup>*Tipperary Vindicator*, 10 April 1847, p. 3.



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of the active participation of an essential part of the committee structure. The Thurles relief committee not only lost four of its members in the form of the clergy but also its secretary, James B. Kennedy, who resigned in support of the local priests.<sup>85</sup> Captain Norris was eventually transferred to Coleraine and the new inspector, J.M. Labarte, was installed in his place.<sup>86</sup> However when the Catholic clergy resigned in April 1847 it was:

Resolved [that] we have received with much regret the determination of the Rev William Barron to resign his post as a member of this committee. We are sensible that from the commencement of our labours in the arduous task of alleviating the severe distress of our poor parishioners, we have derived from Mr Barron and the other Roman Catholic clergymen most valuable information and assistance, such as from their peculiar acquaintance with the circumstances of the Poor they are enabled to impart, and which they have ever given to us with the greatest readiness and the most unwearied exertion. We are of opinion that absence of all the Roman Catholic clergy from this relief committee will seriously impair its efficiency and usefulness and we hope that the Rev William Barron will soon again rejoin our meetings, and give us the benefit of his experience and advice in administering to the want of the poor; and that the harmony, which has attended all our proceedings from their commencement, will be contained until it shall please God to vouchsafe a successful termination of our present labours.<sup>87</sup>

Those who attended committee meetings most regularly were

Francis O'Brien	42
J.G. Jones	56
Thomas Henesy	35
Dr Cotton	38
J.P. Ryan	30
Rev Baker	36
Dr Knaggs	26

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 14 April 1847, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>Thurles Minutes, 13 Oct. 1846-29 Sept. 1847 (T.C.L.).

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 14 April 1847.



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As we have seen, the contribution of the Catholic laymen in this district remained minimal. When the Catholic clergy withdrew their support over the Norris affair, the fate of the Thurles poor was left almost exclusively in the hands of local Protestants. Throughout the entire period of distress, it was the local Protestant and Catholic clergymen who had proved the most vital in the process of relief. Of the 64 meetings held between 13 October 1846 and 22 March 1847, Protestant and Catholic clergymen made up 50 per cent or more of the committee members on 52 occasions. With the resignation of the Catholic clergy, the prominence and regular attendance of local clergy diminished rapidly and, as such, attendance at committee meetings also dropped sharply. Attendance between October 1846 and March 1847 averaged between 7 and 11 members. Between March and September 1847 these numbers fell to between 2 and 6. The Thurles/Rahealty committee met 7 times from 22-30 March, 12 times in April, 4 times in May, 12 in June, 4 in July, once in August and once in September.

By the end of June 1847 the committee had four places in the town and parish for the distribution of soup. These distribution outlets were run by 14 attendants at a weekly cost of £7 1s 6d. In the same month the local fever hospital was also placed by the central board of health under the control of the



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Thurles relief committee. In their final report to the Relief Commissioners on 28 September 1847 the committee stated:

The loss of the potato crop fell with peculiar severity upon this district for it not only deprived the poor classes of their present food but likewise cut off their chief hope of employment and therefore of subsistence for at least another year. It was also unfortunate for us at such a crisis that the chief proprietors of land within this district are non-resident. It is true that most of these sent us a portion of aid when applied to, but if they had been present with us during the last winter, spring and summer and had personally witnessed the miseries endured by thousands and endured with wondrous patience their Christian sympathies would have been called into more active exercise and might have furthered the Benevolent designs of government by their local influence, and have lightened the labours of our committee by their counsel and co-operation. The committee constituted by the Lieutenant of the county in March last pursuant to the directions of the Act. 10 Vic. Ch. 7 commenced its labours immediately and continued them with a steady perseverance of men who were conscious of the magnitude of the task imposed on them.

In this final season of relief, the Thurles/Rahealty relief committee experienced their busiest time in May and June. In the fortnight between 23 May and 6 June, they relieved 7,270 adults and infants in Thurles and 583 of the same in Rahealty. (See Appendix) By the end of August 1847 this figure had dropped to 1,104 in Thurles and 360 in Rahealty.

### Population Losses

By 1853 the four Poor Law Unions had sustained population losses of 4,907 in Inishowen; 11,778 in Dundalk; 14,275 in Thurles and 44,991 in Ballina. The towns in these unions represented a part of these losses; some actually increased in population because of the establishment of a workhouse.



**Table 6:10**  
**Town Population Losses**

Dundalk	941
Carlingford	223
Ballina	1,202
Crossmolina	447
Killala	2,049
Belmullet	298
Binghamstown	187
Thurles	1,615
Templemore	690
Buncrana	167
Carndonagh	702
Moville	187 <sup>88</sup>

The previous six years had tested the resources, stamina and patience of rich and poor alike. Yet an examination of relief committee minutes reinforces the argument that it was the same people who came forward in times of crisis to relieve the poor. Those who bore the brunt of the relief work, on committees at least, during the famine were no strangers to the distribution of relief.

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<sup>88</sup>*Reports of the commissioners appointed to take the census for Ireland for the year 1851. H.C. 1856 (2087) xxxi, 1856 (2134) xxxi.*



## CONCLUSION

We have seen how a vast majority of landholders in the four poor law unions lived on 10 acres or less, with only a small proportion of farmers holding large acreages of land. Economic decline, small advances in agricultural improvement, and decades of subdivision had created a finely tiered structure of wealth within the rural community. In pre-famine Ireland there would seem to have been a direct correlation between the residency of landed gentry and an improved system of agriculture. A responsible resident landlord was considered to hold the key to a better life for his tenantry. By discouraging such practices as subdivision and providing employment for his tenantry, a resident landlord was believed to be fulfilling the moral obligations that came with land ownership. Yet the presence of a resident improving gentry class was not widespread throughout the four unions. Instead, a system of middlemen and of large and small farmers filled the vacuum with varying degrees of success. But it was the landless labourers who were suffering the most at this stage. We have seen how their condition was gradually but consistently deteriorating during those years before the famine. This tiered structure of wealth was repeated in the unions' urban areas. Where some towns such as Killala, Carlingford and Templemore remained static in terms of wealth, the towns of Dundalk, Ballina and



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Thurles were rapidly increasing in trade, with a rising number of merchants, as their business world expanded. Contemporary testimonies portray these towns in terms of increased trade, improved architecture, local manufactories giving much needed employment to labourers, and the growing success of a rising commercial class. In terms of possible social actors, it was these three towns which also had the larger numbers of clergy, gentry, professionals and traders to deal with potential crisis periods of distress. At the other end of the scale, these urban areas also contained a wretched under-class which existed from day to day. However outside of these towns, the supply of possible relief workers dropped sharply.

The poor received aid from voluntary relief workers on an ongoing basis, not just during periods of distress. We have seen, however, that the numbers who gave of their time to aid the poor from day to day, in terms of charitable societies, were very few. Dundalk and Ballina union districts had the healthiest history of charitable societies. These groups were run, for the most part, by local Protestant clergy, gentry and traders.

In Dundalk, this pattern of Protestantism was broken by the Mendicity Association and the Dundalk dispensary. In Ballina, however, charity was in the hands of a Protestant gentry class. Its all-female charity groups were made up of the wives, daughters



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and sisters of Protestant gentry and clergymen who were also active charity workers. Their finances were organised by Protestant clergymen who acted as treasurers for these societies. In Thurles, there was a more active Catholic participation in the relief of the poor before the famine, but evidence suggests that it was the small local Protestant population which provided or acted on the initiative with respect to local charity and who sustained it when others lost interest.

In terms of ad hoc relief committees formed to deal with specific periods of distress, Ballina revealed a relief committee structure that was sustained, for the most part, by local clergy and gentry. In the Crossmolina instance, relief committee membership was a predominantly anti-Repeal affair. That of Ballina was more mixed. In the cholera crisis of 1832, the relief effort again revolved mostly around gentry and clergy throughout the four poor law union districts. Boards of health throughout the union districts of Inishowen, Dundalk, Thurles and Ballina were populated by men who already had experience in local charity. The social profile of the chairmen of these boards were Protestant, clergy or gentry, with experience in helping the poor. The only exception in this profile occurs in the union district of Thurles where the chairs were held in two instances by Catholics, one a trader and the other a landowner. Thus it was the same core



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group of people who came forward in times of distress to help the poor, and it was because of this that the social, religious and political background of each committee remained the same.

The three decades before the famine also saw the establishment of a relief committee system that evolved over the years, its role extending from initial distribution of food to the operation of public works. As the time passed, the role of the relief worker evolved from distributor to administrator, accountant and public works supervisor. However while the role of the charity worker was subject to change, one aspect of relief did not, the charity worker himself. When the blight struck the potato crop in 1845, the four Poor Law Unions had a volunteer force that had a long experience of working together, evolving along with the relief committee system itself.

What is most striking about the famine years, in terms of relief committee membership, is the small numbers that carried the relief effort in the committee room. The famine years highlighted the contribution of the clergy, Catholic and Protestant, and how vital they were to the relief effort. The evidence suggests that they proved to be the vital link between contribution and distribution. There was also, in many cases, a division of labour among the clergymen, with Protestant ministers acting as correspondents and solicitors of subscription and their



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Catholic counterparts acting as visitors, using their first hand knowledge of the poor to distribute relief. Given the political and religious climate at this time, particularly with the rise of a new wave of evangelicalism, relief committees were a potential hotbed of religious controversy. Yet even though Ballina and Dundalk had a strong evangelical presence, the evidence suggests that throughout the four poor law unions, clergymen of all religions were forced by the depth and extent of the crisis to leave personal differences outside the relief committee room door. While there were some exceptions, the general picture is one of solid working relationships throughout the four unions.

The strong Protestant, sometimes evangelical, presence that marked relief in Dundalk town was tempered somewhat by 1846, as more Catholics joined the relief effort. This pattern was not repeated outside of the town, as relief in the barony of Lower Dundalk and the town of Carlingford was particularly Protestant, with a greater diversity in political beliefs. In the town of Dundalk, a stronger more politically aware Catholic trader class joined the local relief volunteer force. However despite this new rising class of trader in Dundalk, Ballina and Thurles, it is noticeable that they did not form a particularly large part of relief committees, their numbers remaining rather paltry throughout the famine. It is only in the Ballina instance that there is evidence to



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suggest that towards the end of the famine, when local gentry had either tired of their labours or were financially crippled by the crisis, that the small number of local traders that were part of the relief effort sustained interest and carried the relief committee to its conclusion in 1851.

Relief committee membership lists on their own were rarely useful indicators of who actually initiated or sustained the relief effort in any of the four unions. Necessity demanded compliance with government directions on committee membership in order to obtain desperately needed grants. It was not unusual for such people as the chairman of the board of guardians to be placed on a relief committee membership list, even though he may not have stepped inside the committee room throughout the entire crisis. Desperate times called for desperate measures and a committee in need of money had no qualms about the actual truthfulness of the lists they forwarded to the relief commission.

Non-participants on relief committees stayed away for a number of reasons. Those ranged from a landlord being busy relieving his own tenants, distributing food and providing employment; to a landlord acting on a committee through his agent. There were also those landlords with vastly encumbered estates that were pushed into bankruptcy by the crisis. Finally, in



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some rare cases, there were large landlords, who looked on as the crisis happened, and did next to nothing to help.

At first glance, there would seem to have been a healthy preponderance of large landholders on the relief committees of the four poor law unions. However when one takes a closer look, the relief effort, in terms of committees, was sustained by a few lesser gentry and local clergymen.

Government rules on relief committee membership placed all women outside the relief committee door. The government policy of property paying for poverty placed women outside the systems of relief. However there is evidence that women, especially in Ballina, took the initiative and operated their system of relief outside the relief committee room. Women during this period took a pragmatic two-pronged approach to poverty. They established and operated soup kitchens to tackle immediate exigencies of want. To deal with the surrounding poverty in the longer term, they established cottage industries in an effort to help the poor help themselves. As has already been noted, the strongest female philanthropic presence was in Ballina, where societies built on existing charitable structures to extend relief to the poor. The common denominator in this instance was that those women who ran relief efforts were more often than not the wives, daughters and sisters of philanthropically active men.



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While their husbands, fathers and brothers dealt with the surrounding poverty on an individual and committee basis, this small group of women joined together to establish their own particular brand of collective relief.

It is perhaps only through the medium of relief committee minutes that we have been able to get a true picture of who actually carried the relief effort in terms of relief committees. In the three committees examined in this study certain patterns are confirmed that are merely hinted at in other contemporary sources. Firstly, it was the same group of people who were running the relief effort. That means that it was not unusual for active committee members to be sitting on more than one relief committee. Secondly, those active committee members had a long history in local charity. The famine was not the first time these people worked together. They were not new to the business of relief, especially in the union of Ballina, where regular periods of distress had been the main force behind the evolution of the relief system. Thirdly, these men not only sat on more than one relief committee and had a history in local charity but also provided relief on their estates or in their own homes. Gentry established soup kitchens and gave employment to their tenants where clergymen and their families distributed food from their front doors. Lastly, where the political leanings of most



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committees may have been mixed, the presence, in the majority, of lay Protestants is undeniable. We have seen in the Thurles instance how the running of the committee was left in the hands of the few, mostly Protestant lay-men and clergymen. And therein lies the crucial point of the thesis. When the government issued instructions on the formation of relief committees they envisaged a relief effort supported and sustained by a group of people that comprised the wealthier members of society. Social responsibility was placed on the shoulders of the local magistracy, poor law guardians and the highest ratepayers. The government intended, once and for all, to teach Irish property to pay for Irish poverty. In terms of relief committee membership in the four poor law unions of Inishowen, Dundalk, Ballina and Thurles, the government can be said to have failed miserably. They wanted a mass mobilisation of landed authority to bear the responsibility of relief. What they got was something very different. In the event, relief committee members were invariably lesser resident gentry and an overworked but dedicated Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix One

#### Landholders in the Poor Law Unions of Ballina, Dundalk, Inishowen and Thurles

Acres	Ballina	Dundalk	Inishowen	Thurles
0-1	62%	8%	50%	50%
1- 10	23%	51%	27%	23%
10-100	12%	29%	16%	18%
50-100	0.50%	3%	1%	3%
100-500	0.40%	2%	0.50%	1%

**Source:** *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee 1846, H.C. (694) xxii.2.*

### Appendix Two

#### Housing in the towns within the four poor law unions of Ballina, Dundalk, Inishowen and Thurles. Percentage of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class houses

Union	Town	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
<b>Dundalk</b>	Carlingford	4%	40%	37%	19%
	Dundalk	9%	42%	30%	19%
<b>Inishowen</b>	Buncrana	7%	40%	21%	32%
	Moville	11%	42%	33%	14%
	Carndonagh	4%	40%	40%	16%
<b>Ballina</b>	Killala	3%	24%	55%	18%
	Ballina	5%	22%	42%	31%
	Belmullet	8%	55%	27%	10%
	Crossmolina	0.32%	22%	36%	42%
<b>Thurles</b>	Templemore	5%	35%	20%	40%
	Thurles	4%	20%	32%	44%
	Borrisoleigh	3%	24%	37%	36%

**Source:** *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841, H.C. 1843 (504) xxiv.*



Appendix Three

**Final Report of the Thurles/Rahealty Relief Committee Addressed to the Relief Commissioners at their request. 28 September 1847.**

The relief committee of the electoral divisions of Thurles and Rahealty being about to close their general labours under the act of 10 Vic. Chap.

7, beg to send for the satisfaction of the relief commissioners the following summary of their proceedings.

The united parishes and electoral divisions of Thurles and Rahealty contain a population of nearly 14 thousand persons, a very large majority of whom depend upon agriculture for support. The loss of the potato crop fell with peculiar severity upon this district for it not only deprived the poorer classes of their present food but likewise out of their chief hope of employment and therefore of subsistence for at least another year. It was also unfortunate for us at such a crisis that the chief proprietors of land within the district are non-resident, it is true that most of these sent us a portion of aid when applied to, but if they had been present with us during the last winter, spring and summer and had personally witnessed the miseries endured by thousand and endured with wondrous patience, their Christian sympathies would have been called into more active exercise and might have furthered the benevolent designs of government by their local influence, and have lightened the labours of our committee by their counsel and co-operation. The committee constituted by the lieutenant of the county in March last pursuant to the directions of the Act, 10 Vic. Ch.7 commenced its labours immediately and continued them with a steady perseverance of men who were conscious of the magnitude of the task imposed on them. The greatest harmony prevailed among the members. The same spirit animated both Protestant and Roman Catholic, all appeared to remember the poverty and misery know no distinction of sect and that it was the duty of all to unite in alleviating that calamity which providence had thought fit to send upon our land. The good effects of this cordiality were soon evident. The poor felt confidence in us and looked up to us and were guided by us, and although we never were able to do for them all which we desired and often had to cross their wishes and refuse their requests, their patience and forbearance were most exemplary to the last. Nothing in the shape of outbreak of violence has taken place in our district since the opening of the committee, although the population is dense, their privations and sufferings most severe and temptations to



## Appendices

plunder were many and close at hand. We endeavoured to conduct all our business in strict conformity with the instructions of the relief commissioners and Colonel Douglas, one officer departed by the government to inspect local committees expressed his satisfaction with the regularity of our proceedings. In any case where we found ourselves unable to comply with the letter of the commissioners directions, we offered them our reasons, for the deviation and detailed the circumstances which had governed our conduct in that matter. We do not pretend to say that all the applications made to us for relief were strictly agreeable to the truth. Sharp biting poverty will often put moral principal to a very severe trial. But every care was taken to ascertain the real state of applicants, and we are in hope that no very serious errors have been committed on that score. Nor can we admit that the account of relief (though great) was inadequate to the overwhelming mass of destitution which covered the land. But at all events, we have the happiness of feeling assured that innumerable lives were saved by the prompt and benevolent exertions made, and although many of our poor have fallen under the complicated privations of the last twelve months, we of this district have mercifully been spared those heart rending scenes of death from actual starvation, which are said to have occurred in other parts of the county.

With these details of the past we cannot help but cast an anxious glance into the future, for we cannot conceal from ourselves, the conviction that the present is a most critical time. It has pleased providence in its mercy to ? the famine and to grant us an abundant harvest, and the problem now is, in what way that abundance can be most readily and safely made available for the benefit of the labouring classes. It is beyond all doubt that for the coming year they will require not only assistance but the most prudent advice and watchful care. Let us take courage from the success of the past year, as well as warning from its mistakes.

If we feel that the country still contains within it the seeds of a return to a healthy and prosperous activity; let us study how we can best develop all its resources and as the surest prospect of this appears to lie in the general and continued employment of the people by individuals let us hope that the early attention of government and they be directed to the encouragement and promotion of this great object; that property of every kind without exception may be declared liable for its due share of the necessary burthens of that district in which it lies; and that in any mode of relief which may be devised, or any scheme which private benevolence may suggest, we never may lose sight of the principal that it is our duty to elevate the peasantry as well as to feed them; to teach them self-respect and self-reliance; to make them a credit to themselves and useful to the community; to see them become labourers not beggars;



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earning the wages of honest industry, instead of receiving alms in thankless idleness.

While in the awful events of the past year we visibly trace the hand of providence and humbly bless the Almighty for so disposing the hearts both of our rulers and our people that the late severe visitation may be turned into an eventual blessing; our warm thanks are due to the Queen's government for its benevolent intentions towards us, and for the seasonable aid afforded to meet a sudden calamity of almost unexampled and for the seasonable aid afforded to meet a sudden calamity of almost unexampled magnitude.

They are also due to numerous individuals in great Britain, in Ireland, and in foreign countries for the truly Christian sympathy and most munificent desire to recognise the British Association, the Irish Relief Committee in Dublin and the relief committee of the Society of Friends. We offer our last acknowledgements to the relief commissioners for their readiness in attending to our communications and their liberality in forwarding supplies; and to the inspecting officer of her majesty's government, Mr Moore Labarte, a special vote of thanks has been passed by our committee for his prudent and conciliating conduct towards us,

Henry Cotton (Archdeacon of Cashel)  
Chairman



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