

POVERTY, POOR LAW AND FAMINE IN
COUNTY ARMAGH
1838 - 52

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Gerard Mac Atasney.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines provision for the poor in County Armagh in the period from the introduction of the Poor Law to the end of the Famine. It begins by analysing the local reaction to the new measure and its impact on existing charities. It then moves on to the enactment of the law through its most conspicuous elements-the workhouses in Armagh and Newry. These establishments were not long developed when they had to cope with the disaster of the famine and an in-depth analysis of their role throughout this period is offered. In conjunction with such official relief efforts were those of private agencies such as the Society of Friends and the Irish Relief Association. To date, these sources have been little used in famine historiography but their worth is highlighted in this work particularly in evaluating government measures such as the Temporary Relief Act (1847).

The latter part of the study examines the consequences of the famine years and their impact on the county. By looking at mortality rates, depopulation, emigration and crime levels the conclusion is offered that there were a series of famine experiences in the county. It emerges as no surprise that those in the industrialised north-east escaped relatively lightly while there was much suffering in the south. However, the main finding is that the most distressed districts were those in the middle and west of the county, areas which had previously been buoyant due to the linen industry but by the mid-1840s had started to suffer the effects of de-industrialisation and the concentration of manufacturing in the north-east.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BG	Records of Boards of Guardians
BPP	Reprinted British Parliamentary Papers
H. C.	British House Of Commons' Parliamentary Papers
IRA	Papers of the Irish Relief Association
NAD	National Archives, Dublin
PROL	Public Record Office, London
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
RLFC	Relief Commission Papers

INTRODUCTION

What is intriguing about the famine as history is that although the Irish are often accused of being obsessed by history there was extraordinarily little scholarly writing about the famine until roughly a generation ago.¹

This comment from Joseph Lee in the late 1990s accurately reflected how, until then, there had been a dearth of books on the famine. Indeed, prior to Christine Kinealy's *This Great Calamity* in 1994, the subject had merited only two major works in the twentieth century. One was *The Great Famine*, edited in 1956 by R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams and regarded as a classic, value-free revisionist text; the other, Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* (1962), which was stated to have utilised "precisely the type of emotional engagement which earned a degree of disdain from some representatives of the Irish Historical Studies school".²

Kinealy's book was a prelude to a relative deluge of publications marking the sesquicentenary of the famine in 1995. These were presented in a variety of formats such as dissertations published on workhouse/relief efforts, proceedings of seminars addressed by acknowledged experts in various branches of the subject, collaborations of local historians and, finally, pamphlets relating to folklore, poetry and stories of the famine period.³ Indeed, so great was the interest aroused by the commemoration that the National Archives in Dublin deployed an archivist specifically to catalogue the Relief Commission Papers in order to make them more accessible.

Obviously such an eclectic literary mix resulted in works of variable quality - from the scholarly attempts to analyse local conditions to books evidently published to make sure the commemoration was marked regardless of the standard, and in some cases

accuracy, of the work therein. In addition, the 1990s also witnessed a successful move to have the famine incorporated as part of the human rights curriculum in some American state schools. Within this sphere it took its place alongside such topics as the slave trade, the Armenian massacres of the Second World War and the Nazi treatment of the Jews in the same conflict. These efforts and subsequent varying conclusions have, by 2002, resulted in a much-enhanced reservoir of literature on the subject. However, such general works have failed to acknowledge the impact of the famine in Ulster, despite the publication of a series of essays detailing its effects on the region.⁴ It has simply been accepted in overviews of the period that because Ulster was more industrialised than the rest of the country with a significant Protestant population, the famine had little impact. For example, County Armagh does not merit a mention in the work of Woodham-Smith while there are thirty-nine references to Cork, twenty to Galway and forty-four to Mayo, all three areas regarded as amongst the worst affected.⁵ There was an improvement in Kinealy's book which saw Armagh gain six mentions, though Cork (forty), Galway (thirty-nine) and Mayo (twenty-eight), still predominated.⁶ With more in-depth research having been carried out in the recent past one would have expected a greater acknowledgment of the difficulties experienced in Ulster. However, the most recent overview, James S. Donnelly's *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, has actually done a disservice to the subject as it totally ignores Ulster. Thus, Armagh is omitted, while there are sixteen references to Cork, fourteen to Galway and fifteen to Mayo,⁷ thereby reinforcing the contention that, "the famine killed few in the north-east and there it was soon over".⁸

This latter misconception has been emphasised by the comments of those who,

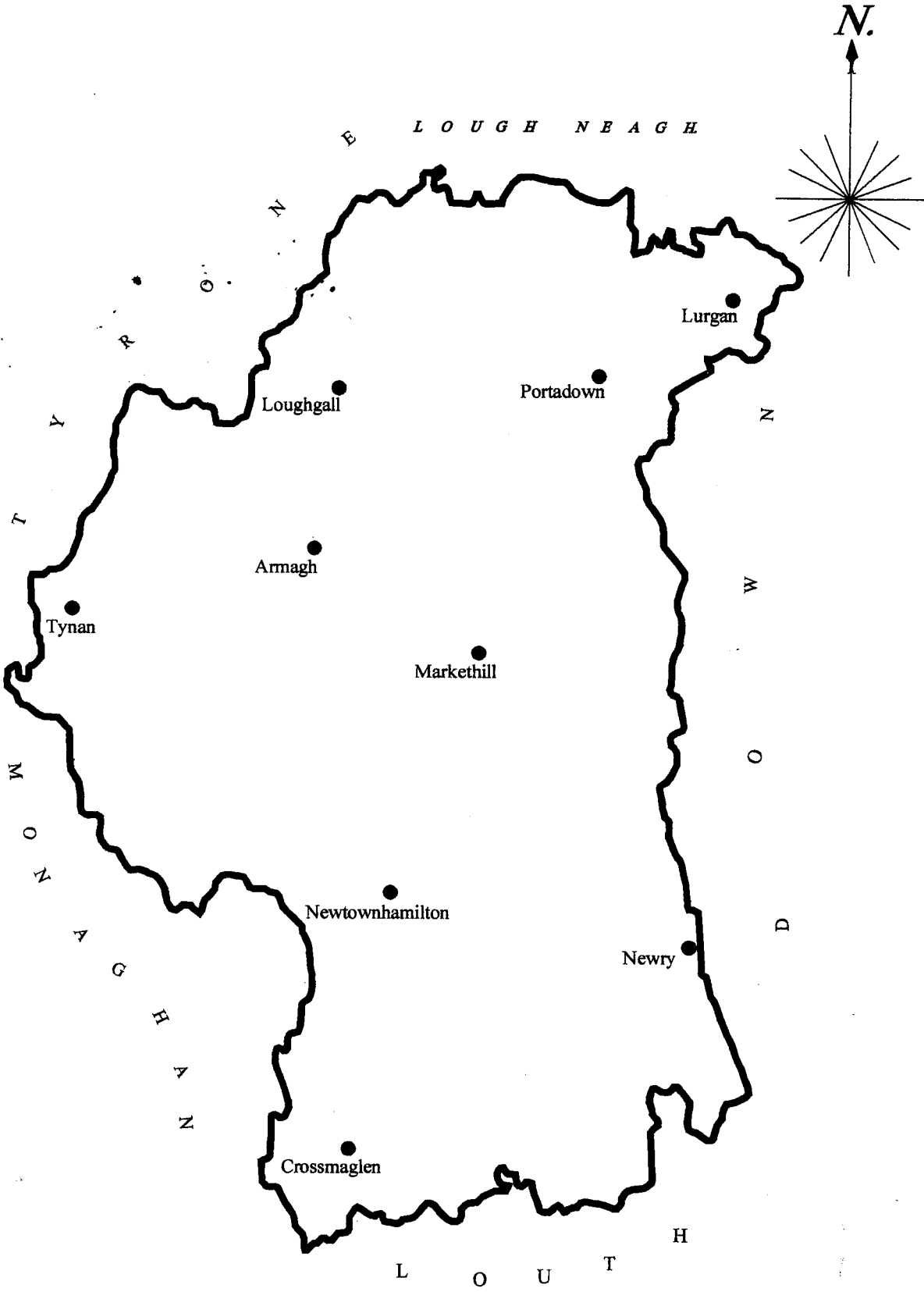
ironically, have been in a position either to partake in, or oversee research of, the topic. For example, Brian Walker has written that, “the great famine with its enormous human toll affected Ulster far less than elsewhere in Ireland thanks to northern industrialisation and the availability of crops other than the potato.”⁹

Similarly, Liam Kennedy remarks how, “Ulster fared better than the average experience of the island...the Protestant people of the province suffered less severely from the famine.”¹⁰ A recent publication offers an interesting variation on this theme by stating:

The Famine knew no boundaries. Even in such relatively prosperous counties as Antrim and Armagh, death was a frequent visitor. This came in the form of famine fever which was carried along the roads by streams of refugees from the west looking for food and work.¹¹

Hence, according to this view, even if there were problems resulting from the famine they were not engendered by indigenous poverty or social dislocation, but resulted from disease visited upon the local inhabitants by a migrant, presumably Catholic, population from Connacht. By ignoring a county like Armagh historians have missed an opportunity to examine an area which in many respects represented a microcosm of Irish society. The county broadly consisted of three areas conterminous with religious affiliation. In the north of the county, a largely Anglican population had established a thriving linen industry, one of the most vibrant in the country. The middle of the county, with areas bordering Tyrone and Down, was Presbyterian and was beginning to suffer due to concentration of industry in the north-east. Finally, the south was overwhelmingly Catholic in composition, largely mountainous and with little industry. This latter district bordered on County Monaghan and its economic prospects had much more in common with this area than with its relatively prosperous countymen in

County Armagh



MAP 1

the northeast.

Despite such nuances one of the difficulties in stimulating interest in the study of the famine in a northern county like Armagh (see map 1) is overcoming the preconception that it was dominated by a thriving linen industry backed by a paternalistic landlord class. The county, in conjunction with east Derry, south Antrim and parts of Down, has been styled as one in which “capitalism was the most fully developed” in the province.¹² At the same time, by the 1820s, the town of Armagh, together with Dungannon and Lisburn, was part of the “linen triangle”, regarded as the “traditional core of the industry”.¹³ In conjunction with this industrial base a number of prominent landed families resided in the county for part or most of the year, amongst whom were Brownlow (Lurgan), Gosford (Markethill) and the Manchester estate (Tandragee). How then could the famine have had a bearing on such an environment? A recent publication has illustrated that, despite such advantages, the poor law union of Lurgan suffered severely from the autumn of 1846 to 1848.¹⁴ This was due to a slump in the linen industry and a greater dependence on the potato crop than had previously been thought. If this area could suffer to such an extent then the prospects for the rest of the county would not have been bright. For example, while most of the industrial infrastructure was based in and around the north east of the county, with pockets of industry in other areas such as Keady, there was little enterprise to be found the further south one travelled. In addition, the linen industry was undergoing rapid mechanisation in the decade prior to the famine, resulting in the almost total decimation of hand spinning and much-reduced wages for weavers, a fact which impacted on areas in the west of the county. Finally, outside the industrial districts of

the north of the county, landlord absenteeism was typical with tenants having to deal with the agents of those who preferred to live in England. In these districts subdivision of land was rife and conacre - the renting of a small patch of land to raise a potato crop - became commonplace. Subsequently, such areas failed to gain any of the benefits offered by those who were prepared to live and invest in the county.

This study serves to illustrate the importance of examining an event like the famine at the micro level. Various analyses are conducted through means of the county unit, the barony, poor law union and townland. While some local studies of the famine have attempted to incorporate an analysis of the pre-famine era they inevitably utilise the standard sources furnished by the details of the Poor Law Commission (1833-36) and the Devon Commission (1844). However, little effort is made to comprehend the extent of opposition to the poor law and its effect on charitable organisations already attempting to aid the poor. An awareness of pre-famine facilities is vital if we are to fully comprehend apparent anomalies in the famine period. For example, in comparison with its counterparts in Armagh and Lurgan, the Newry workhouse suffered a much-reduced level of mortality in the period 1846-48 due to the establishment of a fever hospital in the town in the 1830s. Similarly, it was thanks to a charitable bequest in the same period that the small village of Middletown, with no industrial base and few resident gentry, had a much more sophisticated system of medical provision than Lurgan, the epitome of a northern Protestant linen town.

Due to a study of the effects of the famine in the Lurgan poor law union having already been published, this work focuses on the area covering the remainder of the

county. Only one analysis has previously been made of this region, that by Jim Grant published in *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* in 1977. While this work offered much previously unknown detail it relied almost exclusively on the sources contained amongst the Relief Commission Papers in the National Archives. Such will help form the backbone of any study but these sources are limited for a couple of reasons. Firstly, they focus solely on communication between the government-appointed relief commission and individuals or committees throughout the county; secondly, they terminate in April 1847 when the Temporary Relief Act was introduced. Therefore, while Grant was able to establish the location of twenty-nine relief committees in the county he acknowledged that “undoubtedly numerous other voluntary committees and relief agencies were at work”.¹⁵ However, the sources he used were unable to pinpoint these. Now, previously ignored or under-used resources enable us to ascertain the impact of the catastrophe at both a county and local level. While the papers of the Society of Friends have been drawn upon in a couple of publications they have not been utilised to examine the effectiveness of officially-sanctioned relief efforts.¹⁶ In the same way, the papers of the Irish Relief Association have lain in the Royal Irish Academy having been employed in only one publication relating to the period.¹⁷

Fortunately, the records of Newry and Armagh union workhouses are amongst the best in the country and, in addition to the board of guardians’ minute books, both the admission registers and the outdoor relief register exist for the latter union.¹⁸ Hence, we are able to gain an in-depth analysis of those dependant on the poor law in this period. As in most areas Armagh had a variety of newspapers, each exhibiting their particular political bias. Thus, the *Newry Telegraph* and *Armagh Guardian* reflected

Protestant opinion while the *Newry Examiner* was a supporter of the policies of Daniel O'Connell. However, they remain a vital source for a local study given that they cover a huge variety of subjects, including editorial opinion, verbatim accounts of meetings, advertisements for charity bazaars and rallies as well as the price of foodstuffs.

Reference has often been made to the fact that the winter of 1846-47 was one of the most severe on record but no work has actually been able to demonstrate the extent of this severity. Thus, utilisation of the weather records of Armagh Observatory allows us to reconstruct the conditions which the poor of the county had to endure on the public works during these months. Finally, the use of statistical information garnered from the various census records and church registers facilitates an assessment of the consequence of the famine at all levels, ranging from the total amount of deaths in the county to the losses sustained at townland level. In this way, it will be shown that Armagh contained a number of different regions in which the famine impacted to a greater or lesser extent, thus emphasising how detailed local studies can provide an in-depth analysis of this traumatic period in history.

ENDNOTES

1. J. J. Lee, 'The Famine as History' in C. Ó Gráda (ed), *Famine 150. Commemorative Lecture series*. Teagasc/U. C. D., 1997, p.159.
2. Ibid, p.165.
3. See bibliography for more details but typical publications of the period include A. Kinsella, *County Wexford in the Famine Years 1845-1849*, Duffry Press, 1995; J. Johnston (ed) *Workhouses of the North -West*. Workers' Education Authority, 1996; M. Mac Suibhne, *Famine in Muskerry-An Drocsaol*, Litho Press, 1997.
4. C. Kinealy and T. Parkhill (eds), *The Famine in Ulster*, Ulster Historical Foundation, 1997.
5. C. Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9*, Hamish Hamilton, 1962, pp.502, 504, 506.
6. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity, The Irish Famine 1845-52*, Gill and Macmillan, 1994, pp.433, 436, 439, 442.
7. J. S. Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, Sutton Publishing, 2001, pp.281-2, 284, 287.
8. C. Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine*, Gill and Macmillan, 1989, p.58
9. B. Walker, *Dancing to History's Tune- History, Myth and Politics in Ireland*, Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 1996, p.18.
10. L. Kennedy, 'The Rural Economy' in L. Kennedy and P. Ollerenshaw (eds) *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1939*, Manchester University Press, 1985, p.30.
11. R. Finnegan and E. Mc Carron, *Ireland: Historical Echoes, Contemporary Politics*, Westview, 2000, p.33. See also *The Famine*, (p.24) a pamphlet published by the Aubane Historical Society which gives a verbatim account of a lecture by Brendan Clifford in 1995. In the course of the evening Mr. Clifford was asked why there had not been a famine in the north east, to which he replied: "Because they had a different economic system there. It was a money economy."
12. Kennedy, 'The Rural Economy' p.8.
13. Ibid, p.5.
14. G. Mac Atasney, *This Dreadful Visitation-The Famine in Lurgan/Portadown, Beyond the Pale*, 1997.
15. J. Grant, 'Some Aspects of the Great Famine in County Armagh', in *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, Vol.8 No. 2, 1977, p.351.
16. See R. Goodbody, *A Suitable Channel: Quaker Relief in the Great Famine*, Pale Publishing, 1995; D. Cowman and D. Brady (eds), *Teacht na bpratai dubha - The Famine in Waterford 1845-1850*, Geography Publications, 1995; L. Swords, *In their Own Words: The Famine in North Connacht 1845 - 1849*, Columba Press, 1999.
17. S. O' Brien, *Famine and Community in Mullingar Poor Law Union, 1845-1849: Mud Huts and Fat Bullocks*, Irish Academic Press, 1999.
18. The only other surviving outdoor relief registers which cover the period from the introduction of the Poor Law Extension Act in August 1847 are those for the poor law unions of Clogher, County Tyrone, Lowtherstown, County Fermanagh and Rathdown, County Dublin. Registers dating from 1848 are extant for the unions of Larne, County Antrim (March 1848), Downpatrick, County Down (December 1848), and Enniskillen, County Fermanagh (December 1848).

CHAPTER ONE:

A NEW PROVISION FOR THE POOR

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries there existed no state provision for the poor, the sick and the old in Ireland. The main source of relief for these classes emanated from funds supplied by Anglican church vestries. Between 1720 and 1820 the population of the country more than doubled from three million to six and a half million and as a consequence the number of poor increased substantially. Hence, by the end of the eighteenth century new sources of relief had been established in urban areas throughout the country. Within County Armagh this period saw the emergence of enhanced efforts in Armagh City and Lurgan with the establishment of the Armagh Association for Occasional Relief of Sick Poor (1808) and the Lurgan Publick (sic) Kitchen in the same year.¹ In addition, medical provision was improved in the aftermath of the fever epidemic of 1816-17 so that by 1820 there were nine dispensaries in various parts of the county.²

By the mid 1830s the population of Armagh had increased to more than 220,000 and the needs of the poor were manifested by the establishment of both a mendicity association and fever hospital in Newry in February 1834. While the latter catered for the medical requirements of the poor, the Workhouse and Mendicity supplied food, employment and lodgings for the poor and needy of the district. These endeavours were funded by means of voluntary subscriptions and various charity events and succeeded in raising hundreds of pounds.³ However, by the end of the 1830s donor fatigue had become evident and efforts to aid the poor throughout the county suffered as a consequence. The reasons for such were twofold. Firstly, huge population increases had been accompanied by a simultaneous rise in the number of people seeking relief thereby placing an intolerable strain on those church vestries which

had been at the forefront of poor relief for decades. For example, the numbers receiving aid in the parish of Derrynoose increased from twelve in 1817 to forty five in 1820 while the annual cost to the local Church of Ireland congregation in Clonfeacle of maintaining foundlings was almost £30 in 1825.⁴ The level of costs associated with such relief operations eventually met with opposition from parishioners as acknowledged by Reverend Edward Chichester of Kilmore who commented in 1834 that there had been “much resistance in providing for foundlings by vestry grants”.⁵ Similarly, a local clergyman in Derrynoose reported that it would be impossible to collect cess for foundlings “so bad is the system and so violently opposed to it are the parishioners”.⁶ Secondly, the introduction of a national poor law in 1838 meant that all areas faced a compulsory tax to support the poor of their district. Consequently, those who had previously made voluntary contributions were unwilling to continue, with the result that care for the poor passed to a board of guardians elected by the rate payers of each electoral division in the county with the power to raise a compulsory rate.⁷

INTRODUCTION OF THE POOR LAW

On 25 January 1838, the treasurer of Armagh City Hospital was directed to write to several local landlords asking them to subscribe to the institution, “many of their tenantry being constantly in the habit of receiving relief from the establishment”.⁸ The request encapsulated the difficulty inherent in providing for the poor at this time – there was no compulsion on individuals to contribute to the welfare of the poorer classes. Unlike England, Scotland and Wales, no poor law had been enacted for Ireland apart from, as Denis O’Connor, M. P., commented:

the poor law of sympathy which makes the poor Irish peasant share to the last potato with those scarcely poorer than himself, not knowing what moment he might be thrown himself upon the world.⁹

In an attempt to bring some legal redress to the situation and finally engage “the difficult but pressing question of establishing some legal provision for the poor”,¹⁰ the British government introduced a bill on 17 February 1837 by which it signalled its intention of enacting a poor law for Ireland. In announcing the bill on behalf of the government, Lord John Russell intimated that the measure would be predicated on the amended English poor law of 1834. This legislation itself was largely derived from the Elizabethan poor laws the ethos of which were, as Russell explained:

to place the pauper labourer, the pauper who cannot find work, and the infirm who apply for support, in a situation more irksome than that of its independent, industrious and successful labourer.¹¹

Hence, the new law sought to distinguish between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. The means considered best to meet this need were the establishment of workhouses which, while offering food, clothing and residence, placed all such persons “under a certain degree of confinement” to the extent that:

while they have the necessary clothing, the means of subsistence and often a warmer residence in the winter than the independent labourer possesses, yet the restraint is so irksome to them, that they are not willing to subject themselves to it except when really in a state of destitution. The workhouse (thus) becomes a place that the poor would gladly avoid the necessity of having recourse to.¹²

Consequently, the experience of urban poverty in England was to be combined with the principles of the English poor law to provide a mechanism by which the poor could be relieved in rural Ireland.

As in England, the centrepiece of the new Irish system was to be the workhouse centred in a large town and usually serving a population within a radius of ten miles. This establishment would be overseen by an elected board of guardians responsible for the employment of paid staff. The entire system was to be financed by payment of a poor rate, remitted by occupiers of land or property owners with a rateable value of £5 and over.¹³ Unlike its English counterpart, the Irish poor law would not facilitate a system of outdoor relief, with Russell arguing that “mixing mendicancy and charity with labour” would lead to a “most pernicious system”.¹⁴ Similarly, there was to be no law of settlement, whereby an applicant for relief would have to prove a period of residence in the area concerned. Indeed, Russell contended that such legislation would result in “immense litigation” as a consequence of individuals attempting to prove or disprove a particular claim of residence.¹⁵

News of the government initiative was met with hostility from all the major public organs throughout County Armagh and other parts of the country, particularly Belfast. Whilst it was generally accepted that some form of legal provision for the poor was necessary, it was argued that the bill before parliament contained many flaws. Hence, the opposition which subsequently manifested itself was concerned with a number of areas of contention. For example, Armagh County Grand Jury believed that the introduction of a poor law involving the building and maintenance of a workhouse, payment of officers and so on, would prove an “expensive experiment”.¹⁶ This opinion was concurred with by the church vestries of Portadown and Kilmore, with the latter accurately predicting that opposition to a proposed poor rate assessment would be so universal that collection would prove difficult and, in some places, impossible.¹⁷ As

an alternative, which was published in a local paper, the churches suggested an act by which parish vestries would be empowered to impose and levy a rate for the support of the aged, infirm and impotent poor. In a natural extension of such proposals concern was voiced at the “great extent” of the proposed poor law unions. This was particularly evident in Kilmore on the outskirts of Armagh City where it was feared that inhabitants of such agricultural districts would become liable for the urban poor of towns with which they were unconnected. Hence, they also argued for a law of settlement to limit claims for relief.¹⁸

An alternative to spending a proposed £700,000 on the new system was advocated by William Blacker, agent and agriculturalist to Lord Gosford. Claiming that some thirty million acres lay unproductive throughout the country, Blacker suggested that the British government make grants of land to the poor, as it was presently doing in America. By such means, he opined, the subsequent greater extent of cultivation would allow the pauper population to eventually emerge as independent consumers and increase the home market, thereby restricting poor relief to the helpless and destitute.¹⁹ Blacker was supported in his opinions by various vestries which, while arguing for the development of fisheries, instigation of public works and disbursement of charitable loans to develop agriculture, asserted that the new workhouse system would prove “inefficient as a means of increasing the produce of the soil”.²⁰

Another source of opposition was proffered by local man David Leslie of Armagh City who attacked the proposed measure from a moral viewpoint. He argued that any such initiative “exempts the idle and improvident from the punishment intended by

nature to warn them and others from the pains of destitution". In his opinion "Divine Law" had ordained that want should be attended with pain in order to overcome indolence. Thus, by enacting the present proposal "legislators are removing the punishment and pains attendant on idleness".²¹ A similar moral objection, though one more concerned with the plight of the poor, was raised by the Kilmore vestry which argued that the bill "punishes pauperism as a crime, inflicting on the poor, imprisonment, scanty subsistence, vigorous discipline and hard labour".²² The vestry further castigated the "principle of confinement" inherent in the proposal as being:

totally incompatible with the disposition and habits of the Irish people whose domestic attachments would render such a system inoperative and induce them to consider the endurance of destitution at home preferable to relief on the conditions proposed.²³

For its part, the local Armagh press, together with lambasting the main proposals of the bill, indulged in a personal attack on its main architect, English Poor Law Commissioner, George Nicholls. The *Newry Telegraph* styled the measure an "absurd and ridiculous report" drawn up by an "ignorant theorist" and claimed the government knew "little or nothing of the people for whom they propose to legislate".²⁴ Such sentiments found favour with Daniel O'Connell who, albeit in less vociferous terms, announced in parliament that the legislature "should not rely upon the testimony of Mr Nicholls".²⁵ Russell, however, defended the latter as a man "well known for his worth, abilities and intelligence".²⁶

Opposition to the proposal also manifested itself in various parts of the country by means of meetings and petitions. For example, a gathering in Kilkee, County Clare stated:

That it is the deliberate conviction of this meeting that the newly introduced system of Poor Laws...unaccompanied by employment will, before long, become the fruitful source of increased misery and suffering.²⁷

It further maintained that proprietors would eventually become “the victims of a grinding and almost profitless taxation”²⁸ with similar sentiments being voiced at rallies in Belfast and Holywood, County Down.²⁹

Irrespective of such opposition throughout Armagh and elsewhere, the poor law bill passed through parliament unaltered and received royal assent on 31 July 1838.³⁰ The country was subsequently divided into 130 poor law unions, each one composed of a number of electoral divisions. As the new delineations were not conterminous with county borders Armagh was divided amongst six different unions, namely Armagh, Banbridge, Castleblayney, Dundalk, Lurgan and Newry (see Appendix 1). By mid 1839 the newly-elected boards of guardians were in place and until their workhouses were constructed they held their meetings in temporary premises. For the Armagh board this meant meeting initially in the market house and thereafter at the Tontine Rooms³¹ while the Newry guardians met in Hill Street Sessions House, Ballybot Sessions House and, more frequently, the Police Commissioner’s room in Newry.³² The first task of the respective boards was to appoint committees to locate suitable sites for workhouses and the Newry board eventually selected a site of six acres in Carnagat at a cost of £518/18/1.³³ Their counterparts in Armagh examined nine sites before eventually deciding to accept a six-acre site between St. Mark’s Church and the river; however, the cost was over twice that incurred in Newry, being £1,286/12/2.³⁴ Payment for the sites, together with the construction of the workhouses, was financed

by a loan from the Exchequer Loan Commissioners, payable over twenty years in half yearly instalments. Thus, the Armagh board borrowed £10,000 while that of Newry opted for the slightly smaller sum of £9,800.³⁵

Teething problems became evident in the Armagh union with consistently poor attendances of the guardians resulting in a resolution of 26 May 1840, to convene all future monthly meetings by circular.³⁶ Moreover, some weeks earlier the building committee had reported how the construction of the workhouse was “not proceeding with sufficient expedition” and although the contractor was urged to hasten the work, the delay eventually postponed the opening of the workhouse by some weeks.³⁷

While the building of both establishments was underway, the guardians put the necessary administrative apparatus in place by appointing various officeholders, with those in Newry offering £10 more per annum for each post than their Armagh counterparts.³⁸ The marked differential in terms of pay was reflective of the apparent intention of the Armagh guardians to keep the expenses of the institution to a minimum. This was also evident, though less markedly, in the diets of the officers of each house where the Newry staff received almost two pounds more meat in their weekly diet than those in Armagh.³⁹

The only post which had similar remuneration in Armagh and Newry was that to be occupied by the workhouse medical officer at £50 per annum. However, it was from the medical fraternity that serious opposition was expressed to some of the procedures

adopted by those empowered under the new legislation. The provisions of the poor law meant that guardians now became responsible for the previously independent and locally-supported dispensaries. They therefore undertook to pay doctors for each successful vaccination carried out by them – one shilling for each case up to a total of 200 and sixpence thereafter.⁴⁰ On 5 December 1840, a meeting of the medical practitioners of Armagh, Down, Louth and Monaghan welcomed the “provision legally made for exclusion of vaccination” but regretted that “the power of carrying it into effect” had been entrusted to the Poor Law Commissioners. In particular, they believed that entering into a contract to vaccinate was “derogatory to our character and the respectability of the medical profession” and pledged to “procure an alteration of the obnoxious portions of the Vaccination Act”.⁴¹ Further, they deemed the proposed workhouse remuneration to medical officers as “inadequate” and vowed that each should have the services of an apothecary to compound medicines.⁴² However, when the contracts were sent out to the existing dispensary officers only Dr. Huston of Meigh and Jonesboro refused, the rest apparently acquiescing in the knowledge that there was no viable alternative available to them.⁴³

With their staff selected and the workhouses close to completion, both sets of guardians established the dietary routine for future inmates. This was based on a directive from the commissioners that such should “not be in any case superior to the ordinary mode of subsistence of the labouring poor in the neighbourhood”.⁴⁴ Hence the new diet for both workhouses saw five ounces of meal stirabout for breakfast, three pounds of potatoes for dinner and a supper of four ounces of meal stirabout. In addition, all meals were supplemented with one quart of buttermilk.⁴⁵ Emphasising

the deterrent nature of the new institutions was the fact that the spartan nature of the fare on offer to prospective inmates was akin to that of Armagh gaol. In the latter, breakfast consisted of eight ounces of oatmeal and one pint of buttermilk, while for dinner there was one pound of bread and a pint of sweetmilk.⁴⁶ Thus, the main difference between the diet of workhouse inmates and local prisoners was that the former enjoyed a supper of stirabout and buttermilk.

While the boards were establishing the parameters of daily workhouse life there were signs that the commissioners, perhaps considering the huge number of poor and unemployed in the country (estimated at one third of the population),⁴⁷ were apprehensive of the new system. Indeed, they actually feared that the workhouses would be inundated with paupers requiring relief. Hence, they advised the Newry board to adopt “great caution” when granting admissions, as a “great influx” of paupers, before staff had been properly trained, could cause problems and bring discredit on the new workhouse system.⁴⁸ Such fears proved unfounded, however, with thirty one paupers entering Newry workhouse on 30 December 1841 and thirty eight crossing the threshold of the Armagh house on 4 January 1842. It was thus apparent that the opinions voiced some years earlier by the members of the Kilmore vestry were grounded in a more realistic understanding of the nature of the Irish poor than that available to the Poor Law Commissioners.⁴⁹

DEMISE OF OLD INSTITUTIONS

As a new era dawned for the support of the poor in the county, another ended with the demise of the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity. Opened in the mid-1830s this

institution had provided relief to thousands both within the workhouse and by means of outdoor relief. Such endeavour had been made possible by means of church collections, individual subscriptions, annual charity balls and ladies' bazaars. In this way, the charity was able to supply food, together with fuel and straw, while at the same time procuring work for men cleaning the streets and for women in spinning wool. Approbation of its efforts by the public was evidenced by continued financial support throughout the 1830s and in the period 1834-37 annual subscriptions ranged from £629 to £693.⁵⁰

Significantly, early in 1838 anxiety was being expressed about the possible detrimental impact of the poor law on the charity and on 4 January, the *Newry Telegraph* commented:

We trust that, pending the discussion of the Poor Law Bill, the people of Newry at least will not weary in well-doing...but will still regard the feeding of the hungry and providing for the fatherless and the widows as among the first of Christian duties.⁵¹

Even prior to the announcement of the bill, the institution was experiencing difficulties due to the demands on its limited funds. Consequently, early in 1837 the numbers on first and second-class rations were reduced substantially – from 120 to 90 and 248 to 193 respectively, the change being effected by enacting the workhouse test, with those refusing admission being removed from the poor list.⁵² Despite such efforts, the spectre of a compulsory poor rate exacerbated the situation and at a poorly attended annual general meeting of 1839 the committee decided that “any further attempt to maintain the poor by voluntary subscriptions would be utterly abortive” until the government had clarified the question of the poor law.⁵³ In an attempt to gain

some assurance they invited Assistant Poor Law Commissioner Edward Gulson to a meeting. Gulson insisted that no compulsory rate would be imposed for at least another year while the winter of 1840 was, in his opinion, the earliest possible date for the opening of the workhouses. He thus urged the people of Newry to continue supporting the local charity.⁵⁴

However, even the committee members were reluctant to continue their endeavours as before, with some only agreeing to remain on condition that they no longer had to collect funds.⁵⁵ In comparison to previous years, subscriptions for 1838 had shown a significant fall to £518/2/9 but it was the following year in which public disenchantment really manifested itself, the total contributed being only £338.⁵⁶ Indeed, by this stage the charity was £10 in debt, and with its resources reported as “exhausted” the committee stated that unless immediate aid was forthcoming the establishment would be closed.⁵⁷ Indicative of the general apathy abroad was the fact that even a desperate attempt to solicit funds by means of special charity services in August 1838 failed to procure the requisite amount.⁵⁸ Consequently, although the mendicity workhouse remained open, November witnessed the cessation of outdoor relief to around 300 families.⁵⁹ The problems stemmed from the fact that many who had previously contributed liberally now refused to give anything while others had reduced their subscriptions.⁶⁰ This was evidenced by a total contribution in 1840 of £300, a sum which was inadequate to meet the needs of the charity. Thus, an editorial in the *Newry Telegraph* urged the public to reconsider:

As a community we have done nothing in Newry this year in providing clothing for the poor. The Ladies' Bazaar and other kindred efforts of former seasons have not been repeated. The state of the poor at present, especially during these nights of fearful severity, is most lamentable and loudly demands

some effort to be made for them.⁶¹

The plight of some was highlighted by the fact that women and children had been noted in the “novel employment” of gathering manure with their hands off the streets into tin cans and baskets in the hope of receiving some remuneration from the local authorities.⁶²

However, with the new poor rate now in the process of being assessed and the union workhouse close to completion, appeals to charity fell on deaf ears. The public were not prepared to pay a compulsory poor rate while simultaneously making voluntary contributions to aid the poor and it was only on occasions of extreme difficulty that voluntary aid was still forthcoming. For example, in February 1840 a relief committee was established and £30 subscribed in Tandragee to provide fuel for the poor, either gratuitously or at half price.⁶³ Nevertheless, such action had now become an exception and in August 1841 the committee “reluctantly” closed the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity, their subscriptions for that year totalling a paltry £75.⁶⁴ This was not an isolated occurrence and similar closures of old institutions took place elsewhere. For example, in Belfast, the local House of Industry had been providing food, clothing and work to the poor since 1818, but with the introduction of the poor law it went into decline through lack of funds and was forced to close in June 1841.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, in August of that year the Thomas’ Charity in Naas, County Kildare, announced that due to the opening of the local workhouse, “the usual weekly allowance to the poor from the church will cease”.⁶⁶

Whereas the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity eventually lost public support, those institutions dealing solely with the medical condition of the poor saw their fortunes unaffected by the poor law. Evidently, the local populace was content to differentiate between the sick poor who were incapable of supporting themselves and those who, although living in poverty, had the potential to earn a living. Indeed, in 1838, subscriptions to the Newry Fever Hospital and Dispensary were reported as “far exceeding expectations” with many new subscribers forthcoming, while former contributors had, in many cases, doubled their donations.⁶⁷ Such was the financial condition of the establishment that, in 1839, a new fever hospital was built, complete with dispensary, kitchens, washrooms, boardroom and wards capable of accommodating sixty patients.⁶⁸ So successful was the hospital and dispensary that a local paper noted how, despite the union workhouse being opened, “yet fully the average number of patients were admitted into the hospital and treated at the dispensary”.⁶⁹ Evidence of such buoyancy, and of the increasing poverty amongst a burgeoning population, was the fact that dispensary recommendations increased from 1,036 in 1836 to 2,138 in 1841; while in the same period hospital admissions rose from 136 to 380 per annum.⁷⁰

Similarly, the local hospital in Armagh appeared unaffected by the neighbouring workhouse and from 1836-44 received average annual contributions of £1,272, while over the same period expenditure averaged £1,056.⁷¹ Given such a secure financial basis the Armagh hospital was able to expand its services in these years and in January 1843 the governors approved an extension for the accommodation of scrofulous patients.⁷² This ward, costing more than £980, was largely aided by a

bequest from the late Reverend Dr. Hill and, when completed in May 1844, contained fifteen beds and a staff of two nurses.⁷³

Both the Armagh and Newry hospitals, particularly the latter, sustained support up to and throughout the famine period and played a vital role in counteracting a fever epidemic in 1847. But while they maintained a valuable medical service to the poor of the county responsibility for all other aspects of the relief of poverty passed to the newly empowered boards of guardians in both towns.

A NEW SYSTEM BEGINS

On 6 January 1842, at their final meeting, the committee of the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity expressed the hope that “the destitute poor will find a comfortable refuge and subsistence in the public institutions now provided for them”.⁷⁴ However, these very institutions were not without their own difficulties. Within weeks of opening, the walls of Newry workhouse were found to have been provided with poor waterproofing thereby allowing rain “to penetrate through the walls of each apartment even to the beds on which the inmates were lying”. The guardians successfully negotiated that new cementing should take place at the expense of the contractor.⁷⁵ Another source of annoyance for the board was interference from the central commissioners, a factor which would become commonplace in future years. A typical example of their scrupulous superintendence of each workhouse occurred in a letter to the board on 8 April 1842. Referring to a change in the house diet by which the adult rations had been increased by one ounce of meal for breakfast, the commissioners, while not opposing the change, claimed that it undermined an important part of poor law

philosophy by affording “a more liberal diet than the labouring poor who support themselves out of the workhouse are able to obtain”.⁷⁶ Similarly, when the board paid two shillings and sixpence to a woman for bringing a deserted child to the house, they were reprimanded by the commissioners who regarded such payment as “highly inexpedient” and “unwarranted by any provision of the law”.⁷⁷ However, in recommending that no such payments be made in the future, the central authorities were undoubtedly also reflecting their concern about the financial condition of the union. On 14 October 1842, they noted how a “large balance” was due to the Ulster Banking Company, the union treasurer, and requested that collection of the poor rate be “urged forward with all possible dissipation”.⁷⁸ On 22 November, having noted “a large and increasing balance against the union”, they wrote to the bank for details.⁷⁹ By this stage, it emerged that more than £1,300 was owed to the treasurer while the first instalment of the loan from the Exchequer Loan Commissioners, £490, was now due for payment.⁸⁰

Compounding such difficulties was the fact that poor rate collection was proving problematic. By 19 November, the maximum amount remitted from any area was £4/9 from Poyntzpass⁸¹ and although the union clerk urged the collection forward “with all possible expedition”, the collectors themselves were experiencing serious difficulties.⁸² An indication of such was evidenced by the appearance of posters earlier in the year threatening anybody in Dromintee and Meigh “who pay or collect poor law cess”.⁸³ Meanwhile, in the first weeks of 1843 a meeting took place in Culloville in order to “frame regulations for supporting the poor without the aid of the Poor Law” while threats were also issued against the local poor law guardian, Denis Nugent.⁸⁴

Further indication of the continued hostility to the poor law was the refusal of the Belleek ratepayers to nominate a guardian for the division.⁸⁵ As a result the area remained unrepresented at a board meeting from March to July 1844.⁸⁶ Given such antagonism it was perhaps not surprising that the Killeavy rate collector resigned in the first week of January 1842, an act that would become commonplace in the years ahead.⁸⁷

Epitomising one of the difficulties and anomalies of the poor law was the case of Belleek, “one of the poorest divisions in the union”, where the poor rate was 10d in the pound, double that of any other area in the union.⁸⁸ Thus, such deprived areas were also those most likely to send paupers to the workhouse; yet, by so doing they would be the heaviest taxed. Not surprisingly, therefore, the board were informed that the collector for the division faced “increased difficulty” in carrying out his duties.⁸⁹ No doubt similar “difficulties” explained the resignation of collectors in Killeavy – the second such – Forkhill and Latbirget in 1842.⁹⁰

Despite improved returns from all areas in the early months of 1843, the Ulster Bank refused to hold the union accounts after 1 May and these were transferred instead to the Bank of Ireland.⁹¹ On 6 May, in reply to a demand from the commissioners to pay £490 due the previous December, “without further delay”, the board announced that their financial position precluded them from doing so.⁹² Throughout 1843 it was clear that opposition to the poor rate was both widespread and effective and the Belleek collector sought advice on dealing with cases where he had to distrain for poor rate. He related how a pig had been “forcibly removed” from him and that he had been “so

threatened” he was unable to procure any aid.⁹³ His request for police assistance was refused by the clerk of the petty sessions, possibly fearing that such a move would exacerbate an already tense situation.⁹⁴ Consequently, the collector resigned shortly afterwards, along with those for Mountnorris and Tullyhappy.⁹⁵

The physical intimidation of collectors was compounded by the guardians’ warning of legal action. When threats to prosecute for non-collection were made against the collectors for Ballymoyer, Camlough and Latbirget⁹⁶ the Ballymoyer collector claimed that any outstanding accounts were irrecoverable and resigned his post.⁹⁷ Such pressure from the board emanated from their increasingly difficult and embarrassing financial position. Faced with another demand for £490,⁹⁸ the second instalment of the workhouse loan, and not having paid the first, Newry guardians took the audacious step of petitioning the British House of Commons to request a change in the law to relieve Irish unions from paying loan instalments.⁹⁹ The catalyst for this move was a bill containing “very extravagant charges” for a further £2,067 from the workhouse contractor.¹⁰⁰ In desperation they requested another loan of £2,650 from the Exchequer Loan Commissioners to pay him – a plea which gained the assent of the Poor Law Commissioners.¹⁰¹

As if financial problems were not enough to contend with the board was further criticised for placing the workhouse school under the auspices of the Commissioners of National Education. This initiative, introduced in 1831, hoped to establish a non-sectarian system of elementary education in Ireland but it was soon opposed by all the major churches who railed against the concept of integrating children of various

denominations. Probably the main reason for the adoption of this system by the Newry guardians was the fact that all the necessary books required for schooling were paid for by the commissioners. However, aware of possible opposition on religious grounds they ordained that teachers could daily hear the Anglican and Presbyterian children read from the bible in a room separate from their Catholic counterparts.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the Newry Protestant Orphan Society, styled the national system “a very suspicious mode of instruction, corrupt in principle and ineffectual in operation” which placed all Protestant children “in great peril”.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, as in Newry, the Armagh board of guardians did not have to wait long for their initial problems. Within weeks of opening, the house was described by them as being in an “unsatisfactory state” and to aid the master in his labours, an assistant was appointed for one month.¹⁰⁴ However, the books of the house constantly remained in an unfinished condition and by 1 March 1842 the Finance Committee had been requested to inspect them.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, just over one month later, on 5 April 1842, the master, together with the matron, were given a fortnight’s notice “they having shewn (sic) want of efficiency in the discharge of their duties”.¹⁰⁶ Similarly dismissed was the porter who was deemed “not fit for the efficient discharge of his duties”.¹⁰⁷ His replacement, a former inmate, was appointed on 19 April but removed on 7 July having been apprehended stealing food.¹⁰⁸ Although such staff ineptitude disrupted any chance of cohesive internal management, the major problems for the Armagh board of guardians were concerned with the collection of poor rates. By early May 1842 the collector for Derrynoose was reporting opposition to the rate in various parts of his district and had issued summonses and obtained warrants to deal with

offenders.¹⁰⁹ Later in the same month there was more than a hint of panic in a board resolution, which stated that as they had “liabilities to a large extent to discharge” all collectors were “imperatively required to bring in the collections with all speed”.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, by 11 August a considerable sum was still outstanding and the guardians warned that the “utmost penalties of the law will be inflicted on any defaulting collector”.¹¹¹

One particular area of concern was the division of Keady, where the collection was described as being “very difficient”¹¹² with no money whatsoever having been lodged from the Derrynoose district.¹¹³ In his defence, the collector, Joseph Shields, stated that “personal violence and intimidation” had been resorted to in order to prevent him proceeding in his collection.¹¹⁴ Doubting the competence of Shields to act with “prudence and discretion” the board appointed Leslie Moore, collector for Caledon, to accompany him under the protection of police and to “adopt such measures as may be necessary for effecting the collection”.¹¹⁵ Any extra expense so incurred was to be placed on the ratepayers of the Derrynoose division and, in an attempt to avoid this and the threat of police intervention, the guardians of Crossmore, Keady, Derrynoose and Armaghbreague, printed and circulated an appeal for all rates to be paid forthwith.¹¹⁶

Similar problems were, however, evident in other areas and the guardians found themselves having to constantly extend the deadline for closing the rate. Thus, entries in the minute book on the following lines were typical:

4 October:
One week more for Blackwatertown to be closed;

One month extra for Tynan, Middletown and Brootally.¹¹⁷

The corollary of such problems was that the union was unable to meet its financial liabilities and in early October 1842 application was made to the bank for a three-month loan of £600.¹¹⁸ Not surprisingly, therefore, when pressed for payment of the first instalment of the workhouse loan the guardians asked for a postponement until 1 February 1843 as “the union is not at present in funds to make said payment”.¹¹⁹ As with their counterparts in Newry, the Armagh guardians were not averse to making suggestions to the government on financial matters. In order to facilitate easier collection of the rates they argued for a system, similar to that in the collection of tithes, whereby the rate would initially be collected in its entirety from the landlord. This having been paid to the union, the onus would then fall on the landlord to collect the money from all those beneath him in a scale descending to the occupier. This move, they commented, was necessary due to the “great difficulty and uncertainty of collecting the rate from the occupiers of the soil as well as for the peace of the country”.¹²⁰ Inherent in the latter comment was the acknowledgment that collection of rates could prove a dangerous pursuit for those so employed. Indeed, in April 1843 it appeared the guardians had accepted that some localities in the union were virtual “no-go” districts for rate collectors. Indicative of this was an order that all areas should pay their outstanding rates within one month; exempted, however, were Tynan and Keady, where only one-quarter of the remainder was anticipated.¹²¹

Further pressure on resources resulted from an outbreak of fever in May of that year.

When the medical officer reported the workhouse hospital full with subsequent lack of

accommodation for fever patients a doorway was created to allow access from the male and female sides of the infirmary into the upper lunatic ward thereby increasing capacity.¹²² However, a request from the same source for the assistance of a nurse was refused by the Poor Law Commissioners, who contended that this could only be granted in a situation of absolute necessity which, in their opinion, did not exist. The response of the guardians in support of their doctor was swift and they eventually obtained the acquiescence of the commissioners, arguing that such an appointment was indispensable “on every ground of justice and humanity”.¹²³ The fever outbreak, although limited, highlighted the need for a fever hospital on the workhouse grounds and in May 1844, it was resolved to build a hospital to accommodate forty beds, with capacity for another twenty if required.¹²⁴ To effect this improvement a loan of £4,000 was approved and a tender for £600 from Sinclair Carroll accepted despite the fact that the same contractor had caused “surprise and astonishment” among the guardians in July of the previous year with a bill for other work totalling £4,500.¹²⁵

These financial difficulties were compounded by developments in 1844 which threatened to completely undermine the working of the poor law in Armagh union. In March of that year, it was reported to the board that a homeless fifty-seven year old woman, with no means of supporting her four children, had applied to the local poor law warden, in the townland of Corkley, parish of Armaghbreague, for entry to the workhouse. Instead of issuing her with a ticket he informed her that a meeting at Granemore chapel had agreed that each townland should support its own poor and he advised her to obtain a badge and beg in her native townland, where she had lived for thirty-two years.¹²⁶ Such a move, advocated by a paid member of the union staff, was

totally contrary to the spirit and letter of the poor law, being little more than an attempt to re-establish the ad-hoc parochial relief of the previous decade.

The woman related to the board how she had only survived in the meantime by pawning her clothes, her house having recently been blown down. She intimated that others in the same area would have applied for admission if not dissuaded by similar means or by outright intimidation. Incredibly, she also claimed that every effort had been made by the guardians of Armaghbreague, together with others, to prevent any persons in that area from gaining access to the workhouse and that she herself had been deterred from applying for some time.¹²⁷ Investigating the issue, the guardians ascertained that such pressure had achieved its aim as in the previous six months not one pauper from the Armaghbreague division had been admitted to the workhouse. In recommending the special attention of the Poor Law Commissioners to the matter, they suggested the expediency, in their opinion, of annexing Armaghbreague to the Crossmore division.¹²⁸ Obviously, they were confident that adherence to the stipulations of the poor law was stronger in the latter area. Nevertheless, there was proof that this occurrence was not isolated when some months later it was reported how, in the townland of Mullaghmossagh in Caledon division, a widow had been compelled “with threatening and violence” to remove her grandchild from the workhouse.¹²⁹ Such was the disgust of the local gentry that the news initiated a response from Lord Caledon who offered a £50 reward for the apprehension of those involved.¹³⁰

While in later years, poor law officials claimed that Armagh was one of the best-run

workhouses in the country an analysis of the pre-famine workhouse administration illustrates that both in Armagh and Newry, the poor law faced severe difficulty in gaining acceptance in a largely rural environment. Opposition to compulsory rating had not terminated with the public announcements of 1838 and by 1844 a number of rate collectors in both unions had been forced to resign their positions either as a result of threats from those being asked to pay or from fear of legal action against them on the part of the guardians. This was in spite of the fact that the law had been altered in 1843 to allow those occupying holdings valued at less than £4 an exemption from paying any rate. These difficulties meant that even at a very early stage the unions were unable to repay loans advanced for the building of their workhouses and had to negotiate extra credit to continue in existence. This situation was bad enough in a period when a maximum of one quarter of the workhouses was occupied by the poor. However, given the precarious nature of the lives of so many of the labouring population in the county, it remained to be seen how these institutions would cope when inundated with thousands of starving and diseased people in the latter part of the decade.

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126. *Ibid.*, 19 March 1844, pp.215-6.
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Ibid.*
129. BG 2/A/3, 21 December 1844, pp.29-30.
130. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO:

PRE-FAMINE SOCIETY

As noted earlier, Armagh has been characterised as an affluent county with a thriving linen industry. However, an analysis of the condition of the labouring classes in the decade prior to the famine illustrates that such affluence was largely confined to the north-eastern portion of the county, centring on the town and hinterland of Lurgan. In much of the rest of the county de-industrialisation became evident throughout the 1830s as the increased mechanisation of the linen industry impacted severely on the incomes of those living in rural areas. This was particularly so in the south and west of the county with only a couple of pockets of industrial advancement in places such as Keady and Loughgall. The availability of work obviously dictated the standard of living of this class. Hence, while diet and clothing were varied and of a decent standard in the linen heartlands, other areas reflected both the lack of well-paid and available labour. In the north-east, potatoes formed the mainstay of the labouring classes' diet and they were often supplemented with oats and fish. However, in the rest of the county, as in most other parts of Ireland, the diet was invariably potatoes with salt or milk. Further evidence from this period suggests that many small farmers and weavers in these localities were also labourers as all sought work at whatever became available. Regardless of the poverty of much of the population emigration remained at a trickle as few had the resources to pay passage fares to Britain, the United States or British North America. In the meantime, the rest remained unaware that a blight late in the harvest of 1845 would lead to a traumatic and often harrowing five-year famine.

EMPLOYMENT, DIET AND HOUSING

The diet of the labouring classes was invariably linked to the availability, or

otherwise, of work. Thus, while those in Grange who were employed availed of potatoes, milk, flesh meat and bread, the unemployed subsisted solely on potatoes and milk.¹ From Armagh City local businessman Leonard Dobbin remarked that while the diet of labourers was chiefly potatoes, that of the better-paid labourer, or lower tradesmen, would, in addition, contain meal stirabout and a little milk.² Tellingly, Loughgilly and Mullabrack labourers considered it a treat to be able to add “kitchen”, consisting of cabbage, peas, beans or turnips, to the staple.³

In areas such as Creggan in the south of the county, the consumption of flesh meat was almost unknown, while use of milk in the summer months was regarded as a “luxury”. Thus, a local parish priest affirmed that the people lived “very frequently on potatoes alone without any nourishment whatever”.⁴ Similarly, around Newtownhamilton the standard diet consisted of potatoes thrice daily with a herring or coloured water while “a very few” farmers’ labourers obtained porridge in the morning, bread and bacon in the afternoon and potatoes in the evening.⁵ Indeed, the one aspect constantly remarked upon from throughout the county was the overwhelming dependence on potatoes as the mainstay of the diet. For example, during the cholera epidemic of 1832-33, the *Newry Telegraph* lamented:

The constant use of potatoes, twice, perhaps three times each day, we look upon as a most injurious diet and to those who can afford oatmeal or wheaten meal we would strongly recommend the use of either article...if less of the former and more of the latter were consumed, we should not have so many cases of cholera to report.⁶

Emphasising the monotony of the local diet was an observation from Kilmore noting that, “the best diet generally speaking is potatoes and milk and the third part of them

can not even procure milk”;⁷ while in nearby Mullavilly the poorest labourers lived “almost entirely on potatoes”.⁸ Further analysis reveals a close correlation between such a lack of dietary choice and the clothing of the poor, with one observer remarking how “the condition of those occasionally employed is generally very wretched both as respects diet and clothing.”⁹ Similarly, from Kilcluney:

Both in diet and clothing I regret to say that the generality of labourers could not be worse. Potatoes with salt is the daily food and milk is the highest luxury they know. Their clothing and bedclothes are miserable in the extreme.¹⁰

However, in more industrialised districts, such as Keady and parts of Loughgilly, clothing was “generally pretty comfortable”¹¹ while in Mullavilly, weavers were said to be “much better” clothed than their neighbouring labourers.¹² A comment from H. W. Chambre in Meigh epitomised this difference between the clothing of those in constant employment and those without such prospects. While reporting that labourers within his part of the parish were “fairly and warmly clad” he also acknowledged that this was not so in those parts “where the people are unemployed, where subletting is practised and the landlord non-resident”.¹³

The importance of employment opportunities to facilitate sufficient clothing was also emphasised in reports from throughout the country. As with diet, the general view of middle-class observers was that the standard of clothing was very poor. In Armagh City it was seen as being “little better than rags”,¹⁴ while around parts of Loughgilly and Killeavy “the greater part of them purchase second-hand clothes, not being able to make up new clothing”.¹⁵ This widespread level of poverty was also noted in Clonfeacle thus:

Their clothing, which is of the most wretched description, is totally inadequate

to protect them from the inclemencies of the seasons. Females seldom enjoy the comfort of shoes and stockings and those worn by men scarcely deserve the name.¹⁶

Given such levels of diet and clothing it is perhaps not surprising that the condition of the houses occupied by the labouring class was, in most instances, poor in the extreme. In 1841, as part of the census, the government attempted to estimate the number of people occupying houses according to four categories: for instance, fourth-class consisted of one-roomed mud cabins while those in the third-class were regarded as being a better description of mud cottage but, in addition, having windows and two to four rooms. Those deemed to be second-class constituted either a good farmhouse or, in towns, a house in a small street, having from five to nine rooms and windows. Finally, first-class habitations were houses of a better description than any of the preceding classes. As the following table shows, first-class housing in the county accounted for slightly more than 2% of the total; second-class for just over 22%; third-class for slightly more than 47% and fourth-class for 28%,¹⁷ the numbers being as follows:

HOUSING IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1841

CLASS

Barony	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Armagh	273	1,705	3,571	1,617	7,166
Fews Upper	44	944	1,839	684	3,511
Fews Lower	41	1,014	2,303	1,488	4,846
Oneilland East	120	991	1,553	1,179	3,843
Oneilland West	121	1,727	4,407	2,206	8,461
Orior Lower	80	1,244	2,254	759	4,337
Orior Upper	119	1,035	2,415	2,578	6,147
Tiranny	31	492	1,306	1,157	2,986
Total	829	9,152	19,648	11,668	41,297

Source: H. C., 1843, Volume xxiv, Report of the Commissioners appointed to take the Census of Ireland for the year 1841, County of Armagh, pp.390-3.

The barony of Armagh, which included the Primatial City, accounted for the largest number of first-class houses (3.8%), of which almost 71% (193 out of 273) were based in the city, while O'Neilland East, containing the linen stronghold of Lurgan, was responsible for a figure of 3.1% of its total. At the other end of the spectrum was Upper Fews, where less than 1% of the housing was classified as belonging to the first-class.

In relation to second-class housing, the percentage ranged from 16.5% in Tiranney to 28.7% in Lower Orior, while in three baronies more than half the total number of houses were categorised as third-class – Lower Fews (52.4%); O'Neilland West (52.1%) and Lower Orior (52%). Upper Orior contained the largest number of fourth-class houses (41.9%) while the figures for the other baronies were Upper Fews (19.5%), Tiranney (38.7%) and O'Neilland East (30.7%). However, allowing for regional variations, perhaps the most startling observation to emerge from the statistics is the fact that more than three-quarters of the housing stock of the county (75.8%) was comprised of those belonging to the third and fourth-class. Indeed, comparing baronies throughout Ulster we find that the proportion of fourth-class housing in Upper Orior was amongst the highest in the province being surpassed by only six other baronies, four of which were in County Donegal while the others were in Cavan and Tyrone. The proportion in Tiranney placed it in fourteenth position in an analysis of the worst housing in the province. Indeed, both baronies contained a level of fourth-class housing which surpassed both the provincial average (32.32%) while

that of Upper Orior was greater than the national average (40.53%).¹⁸

The condition of such dwellings, the abodes of the majority of the population, was graphically attested to in the observations of local people. In Clonfeacle, many homes were said to be:

Wretched mud huts, generally consisting of one bay or two at most, without ten shillings' worth of furniture. Bedsteads are seldom to be met with, a small quantity of straw spread on the damp floor, covered with a sheet of the coarsest linen or calico and a single blanket or rag generally being made to serve the purpose of a bed.¹⁹

Similarly, in the parish of Creggan Upper, cabins for the most part were “very miserable” containing one or two pots, a few seats and “some other culinary articles”.²⁰ While a few had bedsteads “of a very inferior description” the overwhelming majority had no beds, as in Clonfeacle, where some straw was thrown on the ground and “the clothes that are worn in the day being very frequently used as a covering for the night”.²¹ Nevertheless, as with diet and clothing, there remained pockets of relative affluence such as Grange, where beds and bedding were comfortable.²² In the same way, those living on the property of bleachers and “respectable” farmers in Keady were also reported to be reasonably well-off.²³ However, for the majority, the best they could aspire to would be a moderately furnished cabin containing “one or two beds, with bedding very bad, a chest, a dresser, a spinning wheel, a small table, two chairs and some stools”.²⁴

Given the condition of their homes, it is no surprise that wages amongst the labouring class were barely enough to keep them alive. In almost all areas the best rate was paid

in the summer when labourers could earn one shilling per day without food, this rate falling to ten pence in winter. On occasions when food was supplied the rate was reduced by a couple of pence so that in summer it was between six and ten pence daily, dropping to four or six pence in the winter. The statistics produced from the Poor Enquiry of 1833-36 suggest little variation between areas, and indeed, this only occurred if labourers were boarded by their employers. Hence, in Loughgilly, the boarded rate was 8d per day for eight months of the year and 6½d for the remaining period.²⁵ By comparison, in Newtownhamilton the much better rate of one shilling per day throughout the year applied. However, it was noted that “few work board wages”.²⁶

In most localities, payment was made in a number of ways. For example, in English, whilst “gentlemen and the better class of farmers” paid in money, the smaller farmers did so in provisions and con-acre.²⁷ Payment via con-acre, provisions (usually potatoes) and money was also evident in Grange, Keady, Loughgilly, Mullabrack, Creggan, Ballymore, Forkhill, Newtownhamilton and Kilcluney.²⁸ On the Chambre estate in Meigh, work was also rewarded in lieu of rent²⁹ while in Kilmore it was noted that when wages were paid by both money and provisions “the money is diminished by half”.³⁰ Although farmers of twenty to forty acres sometimes paid in con-acre or by provisions in Tynan they, together with their contemporaries in Meigh and Loughgilly, generally paid in cash.³¹

In a largely agrarian society the major periods of unemployment occurred prior to, and at the end of, harvests, or as one source commented “about the solstices”.³² Thus, with

very little variation, most labourers were out of work in the periods of December to March and June to August.³³ It was at this point that any additional source of income became vital. However, with the continued mechanisation of flax-spinning many women, who in previous years would have provided a valuable supplement by domestic spinning, were now rendered unemployed. This development was noted by Reverend James Jackson, Dean of Armagh, who observed, “the women are in general discouraged from spinning which was some years back their principal employment, by the smallness of the remuneration”.³⁴ Similarly, Samuel Edgar, a Presbyterian Minister in the city, remarked that “a few women spin at which they make next to nothing”.³⁵ Hence, most women were only able to receive remuneration during periods of harvest when, along with children, they would be required as additional hands to cut turf, prepare flax, weed potatoes, or help in hay-making at wages from 4d to 8d per day with diet.³⁶ Some did, nevertheless, manage to gain full-time employment, with 120 in two spinning factories in Keady³⁷ and a further 200 girls, aged from ten to sixteen years, employed in two “extensive linen-yarn factories” in Killeavy.³⁸

For young boys seasonal work was available in the spring and summer months as herdsmen. Although in Ballymore and Kilcluney they were paid in food and clothing,³⁹ the general pattern appears to have been one of payment in cash and this proved essential in aiding families to survive through lean periods, when there was little alternative employment for males. Indeed, it was at this time of the year that the hire of con-acre land proved invaluable to many families. As Reverend Robert Henry of Loughgilly remarked, “when the throng of agricultural labour is over the greater

part plant potatoes by con-acre and upon these are maintained when out of employment.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Leonard Dobbin of Armagh stated that labourers, having taken one or two roods for potatoes, subsisted on these in lean periods.⁴¹ Such dependence on con-acre was also noted in Creggan, Newtownhamilton and Killeavy.⁴² These references to the widespread use of con-acre in the south of the county were highly important given that this practice was virtually unknown in the linen districts of the north. They highlighted both the huge regional variations within the county with respect to living standards, while emphasising that some districts were not that far removed from those on the fringes of Ulster which shared a border with some of the counties of Connacht. Indeed, the main source of much of the county’s prosperity was, due to technical innovation and the subsequent economies of scale, beginning to fail much of its population. For example, in Kilmore, just outside Portadown, one of the main linen-production centres in the country, it was reported how:

Great numbers of labourers use to weave but the wages for weaving are very low, unless they can make fine cloth, and then they are good; but only the third part can weave fine cloth.⁴³

From the same district, Lord Edward Chichester lamented how the profits of weavers were “now little more than those of day labourers”⁴⁴ while comment was made in the west of the county that the trade was “almost annihilated”.⁴⁵ Such statements were subsequently corroborated by mill owners such as William Orr, who pioneered the operation of 400 looms in Loughgall. Justifying the use of new technologies he stated:

When the manufacturers purchase mill-spun yarn they have it correct and right and know what they are getting and by that means can derive more profit from it than hand-spun yarn.⁴⁶

However, he acknowledged that these developments were “proving detrimental to the

lower class of hand-spinners”, adding:

Mill-spun has superseded the hand-spun to a great extent – at present there is not more than one-fourth hand-spun of the quantity used in all cases – it may in a few years be superseded altogether.⁴⁷

Another manufacturer believed that “a few years will put the hand-spun yarn out of the markets”,⁴⁸ and even for those in employment, it was stated how “it is impossible for any weaver or their family, from the present state of trade, to earn what would support them as they should be.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, if geographic location was favourable some areas were able to diversify and create viable seasonal alternatives. Thus, H. W. Chambre, while stating that small farmers and labourers in Meigh could earn a living by selling turf or cloth, also acknowledged:

A spirit of constant traffic prevails amongst the inhabitants of various kinds. Some are jobbers in cattle, some are dealers in leathers which they take to England and Scotland, principally Liverpool, there being a constant and regular communication by means of steam vessels from Newry and Dundalk.⁵⁰

Only a minority within the county had such access to ports, and for the remainder there were few alternatives in times of hardship. Thus, in Kilcluney, many depended on receiving provisions on trust from farmers “at prices considerably above the market price”.⁵¹ Although some managed to utilise savings made during employment, others, in areas such as Ballymore, simply borrowed from those who would employ them again in a few weeks.⁵² In the worst cases it was not uncommon for unemployed labourers and their families to resort to public charity or begging, with Reverend Henry Disney of Tynan commenting “they are sometimes in great want when sick or

unemployed”⁵³ while Fr. James Byrne, parish priest of Armagh, encapsulated the position of labourers as “labour when they can get it and hunger when in want of employment”.⁵⁴

While most of the comments throughout this section have related to the condition of the labouring class it is evident from the observations of those enquiring into the condition of the poor that there was little difference between labourers, small farmers and weavers – indeed, in many areas these terms seem to have been interchangeable. In Grange, Derrynoose and Tynan small farmers were also employed as labourers⁵⁵ while around Clonfeacle weavers were often engaged in agricultural work at harvest time.⁵⁶ And, as Lord Edward Chichester speaking of Kilmore, stated:

I can't, strictly speaking, assert there are any labourers – those who occasionally till land for hire are weavers and cottiers with a little land attached to their cottages.⁵⁷

Similar reports from throughout the county asserted that “nearly the whole population are labourers of one kind or another – with one third in constant employment”.⁵⁸

For those in such financial hardship the opportunity to escape their third or fourth-class houses and make a better life for themselves and their families in other countries did not exist. This was due to the expense of fares to countries which could have transformed their prospects. Therefore, only those with the necessary finance could afford to avail themselves of the opportunities to emigrate which were often promoted in the local press. Typical of such was that in the *Newry Telegraph* on 27 December 1836, seeking “one hundred respectable mechanics” for the colony of New South

Wales and specifying stonemasons, joiners, stone cutters, bricklayers, carpenters and blacksmiths as the trades most in demand. Guaranteeing a daily wage of at least five shillings, the advertisement further specified that none of the applicants were to exceed thirty years of age and had to be “of sober, industrious, steady habits”.⁵⁹

More popular, however, was the attraction of North America and newspaper adverts, such as that quoted below, painted a tempting picture of the opportunities for a better life across the Atlantic:

Texas, the finest portion of North America, is situated within six week’s sail, or three week’s steam voyage, from England. The English language is spoken there; the English laws are in force, and life and property are secured by them. Every production, either of a tropical or temperate climate is found there in abundance. Labour is amply rewarded – mechanics earning from 10s to 18s per day. Farms sell at 15s per acre – those buying 200 acres or more to get free passage.⁶⁰

The evidence from local sources appears to confirm the belief that emigration at this period was limited to those with money or desirable occupations. This trend was apparent in the parish of Grange, where the figure for emigrants was as little as twenty-five per year, largely consisting of “active young people”, both male and female, and usually Protestants.⁶¹ Reverend Edward Disney confirmed the latter point and stated how those leaving Newtownhamilton were of the “most respectable class”⁶² who occasionally took as much as £50 with them.⁶³ This pattern was also evident in Loughgilly where those leaving were either agriculturists, weavers, tailors, blacksmiths or masons.⁶⁴

Most emigration at this time appears to have been self-financed with little indication

of landlord-assisted movement, although it was remarked that some tradesmen from Ballymore had been given assistance to emigrate to Van Dieman's Land.⁶⁵ However, for those with membership of secret organisations, help was available, as this letter from Tandragee Masonic Lodge illustrates:

Register Moses White as a master mason raised to the second degree as a case of emergency on Friday 29 August. He will leave this country for America on either Tuesday or Wednesday next. You will therefore please, without fail, send his certificate by return of post.⁶⁶

This was by no means an isolated example and the urgency of the request appears to indicate that freemasonry transcended national boundaries. Hence, when a mason with a verifiable source of membership arrived in another country, he would be greeted by those of a similar background who could presumably help him obtain lodgings and employment.

The relative paucity of material for the pre-famine era makes it difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of numbers emigrating but evidence from surviving letters indicates that, in certain areas of North America at least, there were substantial groups of Armagh natives. The following correspondence from John Baird in April 1834, details many names that were obviously familiar to the reader back home:

James and Isaiah Robb are well. Martha Gray is well but John McCracken is dead – he died of dropsy in the month of April. William Tuchan is living near me and requests you to let his father-in-law – Mr McClare – know that he and his family are well. His eldest daughter is married to John McCrum, and his third daughter Nancy to a respectable young man from Loughgall called William Craig.⁶⁷

A regular correspondent in the early 1840s was William Williamson, an emigrant from Richhill. His letters indicated why people such as himself had decided to

emigrate and in the summer of 1843 he wrote:

I pushed on to see my friend Joseph Taylor, and found him in good health. He has fifteen head of cattle died since last Autumn which was a heavy loss to him but he says one of his cows that died in Ireland was more loss to him than the fifteen here. He has fifty acres of as good land as in the state of Illinois – it is what is called prairie. I have not seen much of America but I think if some of my countrymen that is living on potatoes and milk were here they would bless the day before long that they left Ireland. In any house here there is no meal eaten without fresh meat and tea twice a day.⁶⁸

Williamson's comments about his countrymen's dependence on potatoes were ironic given that in a couple of years he would be joined by thousands of them due to the devastating impact of the failure of that root.

From the evidence available it appears by the mid-1840s much of the population of County Armagh was existing on the margins with irregular employment and poor living conditions. While the linen industry and its associated branches had previously proved a bulwark against poverty, technical innovations had impacted severely on rural areas rendering all but the best weavers impotent. Even though it may have been accurate in the past to have spoken of a county divided between an industrial north and poor rural south the evidence reveals that much poverty existed in the middle and west of Armagh. This is affirmed by the proportion of both third and fourth-class housing in the baronies of Lower Fews and Tiranny. While such areas may formerly have been relatively prosperous the small-holdings, so typical of weaving communities, meant that on the eve of the blight of 1845, and in the context of much diminished employment, such communities were susceptible to the effects of a failure of the potato, which for many represented their only source of sustenance.

THE FIRST BLIGHT

In the summer of 1845 reports were received from Europe of the appearance of a mysterious disease, or blight, on the potato crop. It reached England in August and by early September there were isolated reports of blight in Ireland. Within a few weeks the disease had spread to various parts of the country and was found to be particularly virulent in the north of County Antrim.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, due to its late arrival around 60% of potatoes in the country remained blight-free. In October the British government, under Robert Peel, responded to the news of impending food shortages and established a Scientific Commission to ascertain the extent of the damage to the crop. Of more relevance to the majority of people was the fact that a Relief Commission, to oversee and coordinate the work of local relief committees, was also set up.⁷⁰

The impact of the blight on County Armagh has traditionally been seen as negligible given that it was one of only four counties in the country, all of which were in Ulster, which did not establish committees under the Relief Commission.⁷¹ However, as will become evident, the blight impacted to a greater degree in some areas than in others and by the spring of 1846 there was evidence of severe distress in parts of the county. This resulted both from a shortage of food and the advent of a depression in the linen industry upon which so many depended for their survival.

In an attempt to accurately assess the impact of the potato blight of 1845, the government circularised members of local constabularies throughout the country in September. Far from revealing accurate data, the replies presented a picture of

confusion and uncertainty as to the future prospects for the population. For instance, information from the Newry area suggested little or no evidence of any failure in the crop, “nor any complaints made as yet”,⁷² while in Newtownhamilton “a kind of dry rot in some of the potatoes” was noted, but not to any great extent. Indeed, the correspondent commented on never having seen “finer or better potatoes in any previous year”.⁷³ At the same time, illustration of the varying local impact of the disease was contained in a report from Crossmaglen noting “material injury” to the crop from a disease “which first commences in the stalk, afterwards extends to the potato and finally ends in its rottenness”. It was further stated that farmers had remained unaware of the full extent of the damage until the crop had been harvested, and, with disease still apparently progressing, the yield was expected to be an inferior one, both in terms of quantity and quality.⁷⁴

The great contrasts within and between districts were highlighted by two reports dated 23 September. In one instance it was noted how the localities around Middletown, Madden and Tynan had escaped lightly while at the same time in Blackwatertown, Loughgall and the immediate vicinity of Armagh City, disease was much more pronounced. However, both commentators agreed that the disease was of a “strange character”, being found to affect one part of a field while leaving the other uninjured and “in some instances an entire field has been overrun with the rot while an adjoining field has not been troubled”.⁷⁵

The following comments by the *Newry Examiner* typified the sense of uncertainty and puzzlement concerning the blight:

The columns of our contemporaries continue to be filled with the most

alarming accounts of the progress and development of this fearful visitation. No part of the county appears to have wholly escaped; but the estimates of the actual amount of injury differ widely. Hitherto, so far as our own information has enabled us to form a judgment, we are bound to say that the pestilence has not affected the crop in the neighbourhoods of Dundalk and Newry to anything like the extent reported elsewhere. But, on the other hand, from what we have read of the gradual progress and development of the disease, it is too soon to pronounce with anything like certainty that the most healthy-looking roots are out of danger.⁷⁶

The paper further commented that localities which had been pronounced safe had, one week later, witnessed their entire crop tainted and unfit for food. Nevertheless, with market prices retaining their normal level of 2d to 3d per stone, it was argued by some that the blight was “not so serious as represented by the current rumours”.⁷⁷ Indeed, another local paper, asserting that “the alarm relative to the potato disease has now nearly subsided”, claimed “much of the alarm on the Continent as well as in this country appears to have been in a great degree unfounded”.⁷⁸

Such confidence was premature and within days the tone of local reports changed dramatically. The *Newry Telegraph* reported on 11 October how entire fields had become completely tainted within one week, the disease making “fearful and rapid strides”.⁷⁹ These comments were corroborated by a further constabulary report from Armagh City which detected how the blight had increased to “a very alarming extent”, the correspondent noting that serious apprehension existed in relation to the welfare of the crop, both in terms of food provision and availability of seed potatoes. At the same time, anxiety was expressed that prices would increase, thereby placing potatoes beyond the reach of many “who will be obliged to eat what they had hitherto from year to year set aside for seed”.⁸⁰ With the crop in Newry reported as “much injured”,

the local paper acknowledged it had misjudged the situation and admitted that in a large part of counties Armagh and Down up to one-half of the crop was unfit for human consumption.⁸¹ Even on the best land, the disease had gained a hold, as evidenced by the fact that on the estate of the Anglican Primate, Lord John Beresford, in Armagh more than half the crop recently harvested was infected.⁸² As the disease advanced, so did food prices. By mid-October oats in Armagh City had doubled in price from the seasonal norm of seven pence to fourteen pence per stone, while in Markethill and Newtownhamilton oatmeal augmented from twelve to twenty shillings per hundredweight within a fortnight.⁸³ When it emerged that bakers intended increasing the price of bread, commentators noted how, “the poor are consequently in the greatest possible state of alarm and anxiety and nothing is talked of but famine with its attendant evils and miseries.”⁸⁴

Throughout October reports from all areas became increasingly pessimistic with each one remarking on the rapid spread of a disease which reduced the tuber to a water-like substance and resulted in a “most objectionable smell” when broken.⁸⁵ Frustratingly, any attempts to counteract the phenomenon were apparently fruitless because, as one source put it, “The fact is that nothing whatever is known of its nature, or whence it has arisen”.⁸⁶ Such lack of familiarity led to desperate attempts to secure potatoes already harvested. For example, Henry John Porter, agent to the Duke of Manchester, revealed that the greater part of the crop on the demesne had been dug and placed in pits. On being opened a few days later “they were found to be in a state of decomposition - the smell that of decaying vegetable refuse from a garden”.⁸⁷ In and around Armagh City an alternative method saw farmers mix lime and dry turf-mould

through the potatoes “but to little purpose as it did not remedy the evil”.⁸⁸ In the neighbourhood of Keady, people soon gave up digging the crop and opted instead to trench the furrows and shovel soil on the potato ridges thereby leaving the crop in the ground throughout the winter, in the forlorn hope that it would somehow be salvaged.⁸⁹

As a consequence of such developments November saw good quality potatoes retailing at 4d per stone while black cattle and pigs were reported as being in demand at “very high prices” due to farmers purchasing them to be fattened on the damaged portion of the crop.⁹⁰ With prices increasing rapidly and the winter beginning to set in, the prospects for future months looked bleak. One aspect of concern, which was to prove palpable in the following year, was the profiteering engaged in by those capitalising on the crisis. The *Newry Telegraph* commented how “the necessities of life have run up unprecedentedly” and alleged that the situation had been exacerbated by “the practice of forestalling by certain individuals for the purpose of putting money into their own pockets at the expense of their poorer brethren”.⁹¹ In particular, it was noted that farmers were being fully compensated for loss of potatoes by enhanced prices for oats, pork and butter and with a selling price of 2d - 2½d per stone for bad potatoes – the rate previously paid for those of good quality – it was stated that they were “never better off”.⁹² Indeed, a member of the Armagh City constabulary opined:

Many farmers who had hitherto at this time of the year disposed of the greater part of their corn, have it stored in haggards round their dwellings in expectation of obtaining higher prices at a future day, and meal mongerers are largely speculating under like anticipation.⁹³

With “general alarm” developing in Armagh City among the poor it was anticipated

that the “sad consequences” would be an increase in crime and agrarian offences.⁹⁴

The stipendiary magistrate for Markethill and Newtownhamilton, Matthew Singleton, anticipated “great assemblies of the people that may seriously endanger the public peace” if there were a shortage of provisions for a three-month period into the spring.⁹⁵ Although no such rallies occurred at this period his fears were realised towards the end of the year in towns such as Armagh and Markethill.⁹⁶

Observers generally agreed that there was a maximum of two months’ supply available and it was accepted that the chief victims would be the labouring class together with the infirm poor.⁹⁷ Thus, in an attempt to pre-empt any precipitative action by these groups, the county Lord Lieutenant, Lord Gosford, established committees throughout his jurisdiction to gain an accurate assessment of the current situation and by mid-November these had been set up in Keady, Loughgall, Newtownhamilton, Poyntzpass, Tandragee and Tynan.⁹⁸ However, just as with the reports of late September and early October, the apparent extent of potato failure varied widely. In and around Armagh City one-third of the crop was regarded as being unfit for human consumption,⁹⁹ and while between one-third and one-half had been destroyed in Keady, some observers maintained that the area had not “suffered materially”.¹⁰⁰ For its part, the Newtownhamilton committee estimated the loss in their locality as two-thirds of the harvest, a direct contradiction of Singleton’s earlier approximation of one-third.¹⁰¹ Given such local variation, Gosford, in summation, stated that “from the contradictory reports it is impossible to calculate the extent of damage throughout the county”.¹⁰² This conclusion was given added credence by the report of the Mansion House Committee which was then meeting regularly in Dublin.

In an attempt to ascertain a nationwide picture the committee circularised local clergymen, magistrates and poor law boards. They received nine replies from Armagh, four of which were from clergy of the Church of Ireland, two from Catholic priests and one from a Presbyterian minister, while one poor law board also filled out their questionnaire. Their combined observations only added to the confusion as while three replies estimated that the potato crop would be sufficient for the coming season, the rest did not. Similarly, five believed one-third of the crop was unfit for human food; two saw this figure as one-half and the remainder more than one-half.¹⁰³

There was, however, an indication of localised hardship as some of the recently-appointed committees went beyond their original remit and either sent suggestions to the government on ways to circumvent the crisis or adopted the role of relief committees. For example, the Keady and Newtownhamilton committees recommended that the government import seed potatoes “as speedily as possible” to meet the anticipated deficiency of such.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, one of the few similar proposals in the province emanated from Ballymoney, County Antrim, an area which had lost up to two-thirds of its crop. Here, a public meeting suggested that the government supply seed to be distributed through the administration of the poor law guardians.¹⁰⁵

Suggestion of distress for the labouring population in Tynan was evidenced by the local committee’s efforts both to raise a subscription for the purchase of meal for distribution in times of scarcity, and their call for a system of public works to afford employment to the poor,¹⁰⁶ a measure which had the enthusiastic support of William

Kirk, a magistrate from Annvale, near Keady. He believed that such an initiative would be “the only aid which government can consistently give or which would be acceptable to the industrious poor”.¹⁰⁷ In the meantime, the Loughgall committee appointed county cess collectors to examine the situation of families in every townland in order to establish the best means of affording employment and relief.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, in Armagh City a group styling itself the Armagh Provident Committee and consisting of local clergymen and businessmen was formed in late October, in order to provide facilities for extracting starch from diseased potatoes. William Blacker, agent to Lord Gosford, estimated that one bushel of partially-diseased potatoes could produce approximately six pounds of dry starch. The committee believed that the present stock of potatoes would be exhausted by early April 1846, while much of the corn crop would be exported to England where potato disease had augmented the demand for alternative foodstuffs. Thus, they set up an apparatus for extracting starch in a local brewery and initiated a subscription to fund the venture, with the necessary capital required being between £500-600.¹⁰⁹ By 7 November, they had purchased ninety tons of diseased potatoes and elicited a total contribution of almost £1,200 from the area intended to benefit, that of the Armagh petty sessions district.¹¹⁰ Given their success, the committee members suggested that the government provide interest-free loans on security of the poor rates for the purpose of purchasing oatmeal to be distributed by themselves.¹¹¹ However, the suggestion was dismissed by Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, Edward Senior, who commented that any purchase of a large store of meal would inflate the market price. Indeed, Senior, despite the voices of concern raised throughout the county, stated his belief that prospects were far from bleak. He contended that if the remaining portion

of the potato crop were preserved, there would be little distress in the Armagh Poor Law Union. Senior argued that Armagh had several advantages over other areas – the “flourishing state” of handloom weaving; imminent work on the Portadown to Armagh railway, which would provide “considerable employment”; and the “predominance” of resident gentry compared with other districts.¹¹²

Despite such optimistic pronouncements, the reality was that the poor were sinking deeper into distress as a result of huge increases in the price of their staple food. In January 1845 potatoes had been retailing in Crossmaglen, Keady and Tandragee at 2d per stone but by the same month in 1846 they had trebled in price.¹¹³ Therefore, many people were increasingly forced to subsist on indian meal, the cheapest alternative foodstuff available. However, it was a food that had to be properly prepared and required constant boiling before being edible. Indeed, the government-appointed Relief Commission sent circulars throughout the county to explain how to cook the meal while the *Armagh Guardian* of 17 February 1846 devoted an article entirely to this end. Despite William Blacker’s assertion of having found it “perfectly good and palatable”¹¹⁴ for his own breakfast, many people found it difficult to use. In fact, Reverend James Jones of Kilmore reported how this unfamiliar food was widely eaten by the poor of that district without proper understanding of how to cook it – a factor which would seriously endanger the health of thousands in the months to follow.¹¹⁵

In March, in response to increasing food prices, the government established a depot for indian meal at Dundalk, from which areas in south Armagh could be supplied.¹¹⁶ In a letter to Richard Pennefather, Under Secretary to the Relief Commission,

Matthew Singleton expressed the hope that means would be adopted by the authorities to ensure the price of meal was kept to a minimum so as to enable the poor to purchase it. He added that people were declaring how they would not starve while food remained in the country.¹¹⁷ This point was corroborated by R. Harding, reporting for counties Armagh and Tyrone, who remarked, “the people say they will not starve quietly”, adding his belief that imminent scarcity was apprehended amongst cottiers and labourers but not farmers.¹¹⁸

By April, in compliance with a government request, Lord Gosford convened a meeting of the magistrates of the county to ascertain the need for establishment of relief districts. However, this body submitted that no such measure was necessary as in their opinion provisions were abundant and employment ample. Indeed, James Harden stated that, as the previously established Tandragee Committee had never been convened, a new grouping would be of no use.¹¹⁹ In addition, the county Grand Jury decided against holding a special presentment session to give work specifically to the poor maintaining that “the difficulty is not so much a want of employment as a want of men to carry on the works, public and private, at present going on in the county.”¹²⁰ Their conviction was shared by the Grand Jury of County Down which also refused to sanction any relief works on the understanding that the situation there did not merit such a move.¹²¹

Given the continuing inflation of prices, which saw potatoes selling at eight pence per stone in May,¹²² this apparent lack of demand for labour seems incredible. Indeed, Reverend William Maclean from Tynan claimed how, on the contrary, up to half the

labourers in his district were unemployed and warned of the necessity of employment to prevent famine or disease.¹²³ Grasping the importance of the situation, others initiated private sources of relief. In Armagh City, William Paton, agent to Lord John Beresford, provided work for the poor on the palace farm and town mall in order to restrict numbers entering the workhouse.¹²⁴ For his part, William Blacker had negotiated contracts with businessmen in Inverness, Scotland, to supply seed potatoes to tenants on Lord Gosford's estates,¹²⁵ while John Foxall of Forkhill House advanced interest-free loans ranging from £1 to £5 thereby enabling his tenants to purchase seed oats and potatoes together with meal. His efforts met with much gratitude from the local populace:

Upon the present occasion of unparalleled distress, in consequence of the failure of the potato crop, when all hope and expectation of public relief, so long held out to the poor, has ceased to be carried into effect, you have in a benevolent spirit of generosity again lent yourself to our aid and relief.¹²⁶

A similar venture on the Annesley Estate in Castlewellan, County Down meant that a "large sum of money...to relieve those persons who had lost their potatoes" was spent while meal had been sold at a reduced price since September 1845.¹²⁷ The importance of such benevolence was highlighted by the *Newry Examiner*, which suggested difficult times lay ahead for many of the poorer classes:

They are only able to procure one stone of potatoes for every two they could last year and for a stone and a half of meal they can only get a stone. Yet they are obliged to procure a sufficiency of food upon the same wages they have had in previous years. Thus, even with full employment, they must put up with seventy-five percent of the food they had heretofore. What will it be then, when employment becomes casual, instead of continuous, and that food gets scarcer?¹²⁸

IMPACT ON WORKHOUSES

In the years ahead, local workhouses would play a significant role in the relief policies of the British government despite only being in existence for a short period. However, by the winter of 1845 they remained as they had since their opening, anathema to the poor with only one-quarter of their capacity filled, mainly by women, children and the sick.

On 3 November 1845 Armagh and Newry workhouses each received a circular from the Poor Law Commissioners authorising the substitution of meal, rice, bread or other food in lieu of potatoes in paupers' diets.¹²⁹ Even prior to this, both boards had been forced to change their respective dietary as potatoes delivered by contractors had proved to be of an inferior standard.¹³⁰ Thus, in Newry, paupers received an extra two ounces of meal for supper, with the guardians stipulating that dinner would consist of soup for the next six months.¹³¹ Meanwhile, the Armagh board decided to purchase potatoes in the local market "where they can be procured in a sound and usable state".¹³² Increasingly, however, as they became unusable potatoes were replaced by oatmeal, soup and, infrequently, vegetables. Other boards, such as that in Belfast, were obliged to adopt similar measures which saw them increase their soup days from two to four per week while being forced into accepting monthly tenders for potatoes.¹³³

Of course workhouses were as susceptible to price rises as any other sector of the community and in February the Armagh guardians had to purchase ten tons of oatmeal at a total cost of £160.¹³⁴ This prompted a move by some to reduce costs by restricting

meals, the chairman of the board arguing that inmates enjoyed a much superior diet than “many hardworking men outside who are obliged to contribute to the support of the establishment”.¹³⁵ With the board resolving that all inmates, except the sick and children below nine years, were to have two meals instead of three each day, diet for adult males consisted of a breakfast of 8oz of indian or oatmeal made into stirabout with one pint of buttermilk, with dinner as before.¹³⁶ Although such a move was justified by the board on grounds of expense, it was also likely that the increasing strictness of the regime and diet would have deterred those who may have pondered the idea of entering the workhouse, thus keeping the numbers to a reasonable level. However, within one month, this decision was rescinded and the original three-meal diet reinstated, with indian meal, the cheapest variety, replacing oatmeal. The guardians, without elaborating, pointed to the fact that “much dissatisfaction” had been expressed by the inmates while at the same time admitting “little was saved by the alteration”.¹³⁷

Such financial concerns were also to the fore in Newry workhouse. In November 1844 the board received a request from the Public Works Loan Commissioners for repayment of £1,470 being the first, second and third instalments on the workhouse loan.¹³⁸ On hearing they were unable to meet the demand, the commissioners, in a desperate attempt to attain some of the money, agreed to reduce the bill to £861 stipulating that unless the amount was paid immediately, “measures will be taken for enforcing payment”.¹³⁹ In spite of such threats and the significant reduction of a long-standing debt, the Newry board decided to present a memorial to the Treasury requesting that all unions be relieved from the obligation of repaying loans advanced

for the building of workhouses.¹⁴⁰ Predictably, in August 1845, Charles Trevelyan, first secretary to the Treasury, replied that he could not “hold out any expectation of any further remission of sums owing to the public on this account”.¹⁴¹ Undeterred, the guardians wrote to the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, then deliberating, to suggest a number of alterations to the poor law. As well as asking for new powers to suppress begging and to transmit paupers to their “proper” unions, in effect a law of settlement, the prime concern was that unions be relieved of repaying loans advanced for workhouse construction. No doubt to their great disappointment a reply was not forthcoming in response to this appeal.¹⁴²

In spite of such difficulties, the board continued to exhibit compassion for inmates by endeavouring to purchase potatoes for as long as possible, even paying up to 4s per ton for prime cups.¹⁴³ This was in stark contrast to their economy-conscious counterparts in Armagh and it was not until 24 May that potatoes ceased to be used in the Newry workhouse diet.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, as in previous years, paupers received meat for dinner on Easter Sunday, a privilege not allowed in Armagh workhouse.¹⁴⁵

Ominously, however, evidence presented at public meetings in April and May indicated that in the event of another potato failure pressure on the workhouses would increase substantially.

The first such was held in Newry on 18 April with the objective of establishing a relief committee for the town. This had been prompted by a letter received by Catholic Bishop of Dromore, Dr. Michael Blake, which claimed that a person had died of hunger in a house in High Street. The claim was corroborated by a local surgeon who

went further and alleged that “very great distress” existed in other localities in the town.¹⁴⁶ Some weeks later, on 23 May, a similar assembly met in Mullavilly schoolhouse to discuss the fact that:

In consequence of the low wages given to the weavers (they being the principal tradesmen in this district) and the great failure in the potato crop, want of food is felt at present, bordering on actual starvation.¹⁴⁷

The meeting, which was attended by all creeds, decided to apply to the Lord Lieutenant for aid from the Relief Commission while at the same time issuing a request to all local landed proprietors and inhabitants of means to procure funds “to meet the present crisis”.¹⁴⁸ Both the occurrence of these meetings and the manner in which they were reported were highly significant. According to all the available evidence Armagh remained one of the counties least affected by the first potato blight. Principally, this was due to the fact that it was one of only four counties in the country, together with Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone, which had not required aid from the Relief Commission. In contrast to Armagh’s average potato loss of one-third to one-half, the loss in north Antrim was as high as two-thirds while in parts of Cavan it reached three-quarters.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the workhouses in Armagh, in conjunction with those throughout the province, were only marginally affected in that they were forced to change their diets as compensation for the shortfall in potatoes. In light of such, the news of distress from Mullavilly and Newry does not fit the pattern of relatively easy negotiation of the first blight. Significantly, both reports first appeared in the *Belfast Vindicator*, a paper which espoused the principles of Home Rule and continually mocked the notion that the province of Ulster was superior to the rest of the country. Throughout the spring of 1846 it regularly carried reports of distress

which were either ignored or unnoticed by papers such as the *Armagh Guardian* and the *Newry Telegraph*. For its part, the *Vindicator* believed that vested interests in maintaining the pride of Ulster resulted in the burying of information relating to distress occasioned by the potato failure and the gradual slide into economic slump. To enforce its argument it quoted from a meeting held in Coleraine to discuss the need for relief measures where one man stated: "He would not wish it to go abroad that, in his native town, they were in a state even approaching to the condition of the population in other parts of Ireland."¹⁵⁰ Similarly, quoting from the *Northern Whig*, it reported that in Lisburn more than half the total number of looms in the neighbourhood were idle, with the correspondent remarking, "I believe that the wealthy inhabitants of the locality will not admit that distress exists to any great extent"¹⁵¹.

Such sentiments may help to explain the decision of the Armagh Grand Jury to refuse to sanction special works which would have employed the poor. For these men the idea that Armagh, the linen heartland of Ireland, could be seen to be in such distress would have been extremely embarrassing. Hence, it is possible that they preferred to conceal it in the hope that the potato crop of 1846 would restore the condition of those in need. As a consequence of such decisions it is difficult to ascertain the level of distress in the county in the spring of 1846, although the events in Mullavilly and Newry suggest that in certain districts it was quite extensive. It is probable, therefore, that independent relief committees were distributing food in areas which had reported the worst cases of potato loss such as Armagh, Blackwatertown, Loughgall Newtownhamilton and Tynan. In areas which had reported similar losses of two-thirds

of the crop, such as County Cavan, relief started in the first week of May 1846, while by the middle of June the Clones relief committee in County Monaghan had raised £200 by which it was able to offer employment in cleaning and repairing the streets of the town.¹⁵² The difficulty in establishing the existence of such committees in Armagh is enhanced by the fact that, until the winter of 1846, there were no relief agencies acting independently of the Relief Commission. As will become evident, private relief played a much greater role in ameliorating the effects of the blight throughout the period 1846-48 than has previously been thought. By an analysis of correspondence it emerges that many of those wishing to aid the poor in their districts preferred to operate on an individual basis and without the constraints of government regulations. It is likely that their efforts went unreported in the spring of 1846 and thus, either as a consequence of what the *Belfast Vindicator* saw as misplaced Ulster pride on the part of the gentry and business classes, or the lack of independent agencies to provide aid and alternative correspondence, the real extent of the problems which had emerged by the early part of the year have been lost to history.

ENDNOTES

1. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix D. Evidence of Reverend Robert Rusk, p.279.
2. Ibid., Evidence of Leonard Dobbin, p.280.
3. Ibid., Evidence of W. McGouran and R. Atkinson, p.283.
4. Ibid., Evidence of C. Atkinson, p.283 and M. Caraher, p.284.
5. Ibid., Evidence of Wm. McAlister, p.284.
6. *Newry Telegraph*, 25 May 1832.
7. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix D. Evidence of T. Dugall, p.289.
8. Ibid., Evidence of M. Carpendale, p.290.
9. Ibid., Evidence of Edward Disney, p.282.
10. Ibid., Evidence of L. Robinson, p.293.
11. Ibid., Evidence of J. Jenkins, p.282 and A. Henry, p.282.
12. Ibid., Evidence of M. Carpendale, p.290 and Father D. O. Rafferty, p.290.
13. Ibid., Evidence of H. W. Chambre, p.290.
14. Ibid., Evidence of Fr. James Byrne, p.280.
15. Ibid., Evidence of H. Stewart, p.291.
16. Ibid., Evidence of J. Jackson, p.281.
17. H. C., 1843, Volume xxiv, Reports of the Commissioners appointed to take the Census of Ireland for the year 1841 County of Armagh, pp.390-3.
18. Ibid.
19. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxii, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix E. Evidence of John Montague, p.281.
20. Ibid., Evidence of Father M. Lennon, p.283.
21. Ibid., Evidence of John Montague, p.281.
22. Ibid., Evidence of Robert Rusk, p.279.
23. Ibid., Evidence of Reverend Joseph Jenkins, p.282.
24. Ibid., Evidence of James E. Jackson, p.281.
25. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland. Appendix D. Evidence of Reverend William McGowan, p.283.
26. Ibid., Evidence of Wm. McAlister p.284.
27. Ibid., Evidence of Reverend Wm. Barlow, p.280.
28. Ibid., pp.189-90, 280, 282-4, 287-8, 291, 293.
29. Ibid., Evidence of H. W. Chambre, p.290.
30. Ibid., Evidence of Edward Chichester, p.289.
31. Ibid., Evidence of James Stronge and Wm. Mauleverer, p.292; Reverend Richard Verschoyle, p.292; Jonathan Seaver, p.292.
32. Ibid., Evidence of Edward Chichester, p.289.
33. Ibid., pp.279-293.
34. H. C., 1836, Volume xxx, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix C. Evidence of Reverend J. E. Jackson, p.57.
35. Ibid., Evidence of Reverend Samuel Edgar, p.58.
36. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix D. Evidence of various witnesses, pp.279-293.
37. Ibid., Evidence of Reverend James Blacker and Rev. Joseph Jenkins, p.282.
38. Ibid., Evidence of John White, p.291.

39. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Alexander Strain, p.287 and Reverend L. Robinson, p.293.
40. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Wm. McGouran, p.283.
41. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Wm. Barlow, p.280.
42. *Ibid.*, pp.284, 291.
43. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend T. Dugall, p.289.
44. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Edward Chichester, p.289.
45. Trinity College, Dublin, Mun/P/24/241, William Jones Armstrong, Lessee of part of the estate of Trinity, Derryhaw, County Armagh, to the Provost, Sackville Street, Dublin, 10 May 1850, quoting a memorial of 1830.
46. H. C., 1840, Volume xxiii, Reports from Assistant Hand-loom Weavers Commissioners, Part II. Evidence of William Orr, Loughgall, p.767.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Joseph McKee, Keady, p.752.
49. *Ibid.*, Evidence of William Orr, p.768.
50. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland, Appendix D. Evidence of H. W. Chambre, p.290.
51. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Dr. Dillon, p.293.
52. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Alex Strain, p.287.
53. *Ibid.*, Evidence of E. Disney, p.282.
54. H. C., 1836, Volume xxx, Poor Inquiry Ireland. Appendix C. Evidence of Father James Byrne, p.59.
55. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxi, Poor Inquiry Ireland. Appendix D. Evidence of Reverend Thomas Twigg p.280.
56. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Fr. John Montague, p.281.
57. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Edward Chichester, p.289.
58. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Andrew Cleland, p.291.
59. *Newry Telegraph*, 22 December 1836.
60. *Ibid.*, 8 February 1832.
61. H. C., 1836, Volume xxxiii, Poor Inquiry Ireland. Appendix F. Evidence of Reverend Thomas Twigg, p.280.
62. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend E. Disney, p.282.
63. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Andrew Cleland and John White, p.291.
64. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Wm. Irwin, p.293 and Reverend Henry Herbert, p.291.
65. *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Richard Dill, p.288.
66. Archives of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Ireland, Molesworth Street, Dublin, Charity File 82/A, Tandragee, Wellington Lodge No. 82. James Seawright, Secretary to G. Rankin, Masonic Hall, Dublin, 30 August 1831.
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73. *Ibid.*, Newtownhamilton, Thomas Armstrong to County Inspector, 21 September 1845.
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84. *Ibid.*, Constabulary Report, Armagh, William Kelly to Inspector General, 15 October 1845.
85. *Ibid.*, Z14008, M. Singleton, Newtownhamilton to R. Pennefather, 20 November 1845.
86. *Ibid.*
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90. *Ibid.*, William Kelly, Armagh to Inspector General, 1 November 1845.
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94. *Ibid.*, 1 November 1845.
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96. For discussion of assemblies in Armagh and Markethill in December 1846 see chapter three, pp.101-2.
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106. NADRLFC, M. Close to Lord Gosford, 27 November 1845.
107. Ibid., 216430 William Kirk to Lord Gosford, 21 November 1845.
108. Ibid., Lord Gosford, Armagh to Dublin Castle, 24 November 1845.
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113. *Newry Telegraph*, 17 February 1846.
114. PRONI, Gosford Papers, D/1606/5/2, William Blacker to Cotter Kyle, 26 March 1846, p.8.
115. NADRLFC, James Jones, Kilmore to Captain Kennedy, 16 March 1846.
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123. NADRLFC, Reverend W. Maclean, Tynan, to Captain Kennedy, 18 March 1846.
124. *Armagh Guardian*, 7 April 1846.
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126. *Newry Examiner*, 15 April 1846.
127. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.13.
128. *Newry Examiner*, 22 April 1846.
129. PRONI, BG 2/A/3 4 November 1845, p.255; BG24/A/3, 1 November 1845, p.287.
130. BG 2/A/3, 18 October 1849, p.249; BG24/A/3, 11 October 1845, p.261.
131. BG 24/A/4, 18 April 1846, p.425.
132. BG 2/A/3, 4 November 1845, p.256.
133. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.254.
134. BG 2/A/3, 21 February 1846, p.293.
135. Ibid., 24 March 1846, p.307.
136. Ibid.
137. BG 2/A/4, 14 April 1846, p.10.
138. BG 24/A/3, 23 November 1844, p.53.
139. Ibid., 17 May 1845, p.174.
140. Ibid., 19 July 1845, pp.214-5.
141. Ibid., 23 August 1845, p.234.
142. Ibid., 28 February 1846, p.387.
143. Ibid., 14 March 1846, p.398.
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147. *Ibid.*, 30 May 1846.
148. *Ibid.*
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CHAPTER THREE:

COUNTERACTING THE BLIGHT:
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1846

If the impact of the first blight had been limited to a few districts there was little doubt that the second blight of 1846 marked the onset of famine in Ireland with no part of the country remaining untouched. In addition, possible dietary alternatives such as barley, oats and wheat all suffered sub-standard crops while the flax crop, vital for the linen industry, was the worst for years. Moreover, as the winter progressed so too did the economic slump which had emerged some months earlier and hence the requirement for quick and effective government measures to alleviate distress was vital. Whilst there had been consensus regarding the effectiveness of Peel's relief policies, they were regarded as having been unnecessarily expensive and generous by the incoming administration. In June 1846, Peel's administration fell as a result of its decision to repeal the Corn Laws. The new Whig government, led by Lord John Russell, believed that while relief measures were necessary they also had to be more economical than those of their predecessors. It believed in the efficacy of the free market and thus, relief policies were not allowed in any way to upset the equilibrium of market prices. Consequently, in the belief that the poor should work for their own salvation, public works were to be the main method of alleviating distress. In addition, local relief committees which applied for government assistance had first to assure the administrators that their endeavours were not contrary to the interests of local traders. However, as the public works scheme struggled under the huge numbers applying for employment and the government maintained its policy of non-interference in the market, the local press mounted a sustained campaign of criticism of relief policy as the poor sank further and further into distress.

PUBLIC WORKS

The spring of 1846 offered much hope that the previous potato blight had been an aberration. In Armagh, by early June, it was reported that potatoes, together with crops of beans, oats, wheat and flax, were in a luxuriant condition, and an “abundant” harvest was confidently predicted.¹ Within weeks the tone of such reports altered dramatically as severe weather aroused the fear that once again the blight would strike. Symptomatic of such rapid change was the mood adopted by William Blacker in his dealings on behalf of Lord Gosford. On 12 July, he sent a small sample of a cargo of forty tons of oatmeal that he was hoping to sell to merchants in Glasgow stating how “the meal has been bought for the use of the poor, but not having been wanted I am desirous of dispensing of it.”² Ten days later, in a correspondence with a local retailer in Markethill, he showed less urgency to sell his stock:

The appearance of disease in the potato crop and the constant wet weather has made me doubt as to the propriety of selling the oatmeal at so great a loss as I was willing to suffer when I spoke to you last. I hear indian meal and oatmeal have both advanced in consequence of the above circumstances...³

Despite such apprehension the *Armagh Guardian* maintained the hope that what it termed the “visitation” would be slight, remarking, “the appearance of the malady is at present confined to the earlier kinds and even among them it is believed nothing serious will take place.”⁴ Such hopes were soon dashed, with the crop in early September said to be “daily growing worse”.⁵ Nonetheless, some refused to accept the evidence before their eyes and the *Newry Telegraph*, while acknowledging that the disease was now prevalent “to a melancholy and alarming extent,” dismissed talk of a potential crisis as “alarmist”, claiming that the crop was not “wholly lost”.⁶ However, the reality was indeed that the crop was being devastated by blight. In the district of

Newtownhamilton, where, owing to the earlier failure, the total planted had been about one-eighth less than average due to the “scarcity and expense” of seed, the entire yield was affected, “so much so that the stalks have become completely withered and are disappearing fast”.⁷ A correspondent from Ballybot, in stating that half the early and all the late crops were lost, commented, “the market will be supplied with new potatoes, but of a very bad description. From all I can collect I fear the worst results may be anticipated”.⁸ The area around Armagh City fared no better than these isolated rural districts and the total crop was said to be diseased. One report gave an indication of the devastating rapidity of the malady:

It does not progress gradually, as on any given day a crop may be found in a fair state, and upon being re-examined in three or four days after it will appear that it is almost wholly destroyed.⁹

Thus, with predictions that the potato harvest would be “wholly annihilated”,¹⁰ prospects for the ensuing winter were very bleak.

Immediate steps were taken in Armagh City to attempt to counteract the worst of the expected ravages. In September, a meeting was held in the market house to consider the most appropriate means of relieving many labourers in the city and general neighbourhood who were reported as being “in distress for want of employment”.¹¹ William Paton had pre-empted the discussion by employing thirty labourers in St. Mark’s graveyard, while the Toll Committee had apportioned £20 towards the employment of the most necessitous until more permanent provision could be made.¹² Paton estimated that one quarter of the city’s population of 10,000 would require assistance for at least ten months and thus advocated sending a memorial to the Lord

Lieutenant calling for a special presentment session to provide work for the poor. He also believed that a fund to supply meal would be necessary as, even with employment, labourers could not buy food at present prices.¹³ However, others regarded such suggestions as extravagant declaring “it could not be possible that such an amount of destitution could exist in Armagh”, as it was difficult to obtain labourers even at wages of 1/6 per day.¹⁴ In reply, Paton stated that, with no potato digging to be had and few locals employed on the new railway due to contractors using their own men, work was indeed scarce and the situation would degenerate as winter set in.¹⁵ Thus, the meeting agreed to draw up a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant requesting a special presentment session for the barony of Armagh.¹⁶ Their decision was reflective of opinions expressed in a similar memorial by the elders and ministers of the Presbyterian Church which described future prospects as “dark and threatening”.¹⁷

At the same time, a memorial from Newry claimed that work on the Newry to Enniskillen railway had been suspended temporarily due to alleged intimidation of officers on the works by people desperate for work.¹⁸ Hence, it was deemed essential that the road between that town and Camlough be improved by means of public works in order to occupy the unemployed labourers of the area.¹⁹ Consequently, on 21 September T. M. Redington sanctioned an extraordinary presentment session for the barony of Upper Orior²⁰ together with another for Upper Fews.²¹

The Upper Orior session was held at a densely-packed Ballybot courthouse on 2 October and, due to legal restrictions, works proposed were confined to either the improvement of existing roads or construction of new thoroughfares. Any

employment tending to the improvement of lands could not be sanctioned by the assemblage, with Lord Gosford stating, "It is not what we would wish to do but what we can do, that is the thing to be attended to".²² Whilst the meeting had been convened to sanction work for the distressed poor it was evident that, for some, it offered an opportunity to gain presentments which ordinarily would not have been acceded to by the Grand Jury. Thus, local rivalries surfaced, with one person stating his sorrow at seeing "a kind of jealousy existing among gentlemen".²³ This was exemplified by the following extract reported by the *Armagh Guardian*:

Revd Mr Henry: £30 to lower hills etc on the road from Sturgan to the old church of Jonesboro.

Mr White: said he knew the locality alluded to well and had no hesitation in stating that the grant, if made, would be a complete waste of time.

Rev. Henry: It appears, Mr White, that all your presentments are useful, but those proposed by other persons are not.²⁴

Underlying such tension was the fact that some individuals were acting in the interests of their landlords and, while denying an accusation that he was solely proposing works for property with which he was connected, John White admitted "it is Lord Charlemont's battle I have been fighting".²⁵

The following day in Newtownhamilton a similar session took place and, as in Ballybot, the courthouse was "thronged to excess".²⁶ Indeed, so dense was the crowd that a large party of police had been drafted in to guard against any possible violence. Similar scenes were witnessed in Monaghan town where "a vast multitude, amounting to some thousands, assembled in and around the courthouse",²⁷ while at the sessions for Cary barony in Ballycastle, County Antrim the courthouse was "densely crowded."²⁸ The Newtownhamilton assembly was addressed by the two

parish priests of Upper Creggan. One, Fr Lennon, estimated that in the fifty townlands which had been minutely examined, 4,000 people were in a state of starvation, having no resident landlord, agent or magistrate and no representation on the Grand Jury. The other priest, Fr Lamb, stated that 4,050 individuals were in need of immediate relief, being “on the eve of starvation”.²⁹ Marcus Synott junior reminded the meeting that new legislation was anticipated whereby drainage could be sanctioned under the auspices of the Board of Works. Hence, he advised them to present applications which would provide employment for a maximum of three months and no longer.³⁰

The initiative alluded to by Synott was confirmed in a letter to Lord John Beresford on 10 October, from Chief Secretary Henry Labouchere, who, five days earlier, had announced that drainage, together with other elements of land improvement, would now be allowed under the Labour Rate Act.³¹ Money to be levied would be raised in the same way as if the presentment had been made for roads but would be charged exclusively on the lands to be drained. Further, if the proprietors of an electoral division opted to engage in drainage alone, they would be made liable for no other charge; but if drainage constituted only a part of the overall expenditure, they would have to pay their share of the sum raised on the whole division.³² The first session to be held since the introduction of the “Labouchere Letter”, as it was popularly called, was that of 12 October for the barony of Armagh and in commenting that the crisis before them was “most dreadful”, chairman, Lord Charlemont, claimed that the “visitation of Providence” had been inflicted for “just purposes”.³³ However, his knowledge of local conditions appears to have been minimal and when William Paton stated that there was great destitution among the labouring poor of the city, his door

being thronged with persons seeking work, Charlemont openly admitted:

I had been under the idea that there was no such want of employment but that it was difficult to get labourers. I now see that I was misled and am satisfied that we are doing right in holding these sessions.³⁴

The influence of Labouchere's initiative was immense and, unlike the previous sessions, allowed for drainage works to be the sole outlet for relief work. This was endorsed by the huge crowd assembled which roared "no roads – improvement of the land by thorough draining!".³⁵ Charlemont, noting the "insurmountable objection to roads", agreed to adjourn the meeting in order to allow absentee landlords in England to prepare applications for drainage.³⁶ At a subsequent meeting, three days later, it was agreed to sanction only drainage works for the barony, to the value of £10,500.³⁷

A similar course of action was adopted at a session for the barony of Tiranney, held in Tynan on 20 October, where Sir James Stronge deemed it "much more judicious to expend any money that might be presented for, on reproductive works, such as draining the land, than on roads".³⁸ This pronouncement met with "loud and continued cheers from the assemblage"³⁹ and was welcomed by the local press which had condemned the previous "reckless system of presentment-voting for multiferous and useless roads".⁴⁰ Indeed, the *Newry Telegraph* claimed that the works at Newtownhamilton had been sanctioned "under the influence of Priests and a Priest-ridden mob"⁴¹ and thus urged that a new series of reproductive works be substituted for those already passed in Upper Orior and Upper Fews "for useless and mischievous purposes under the compulsive influences of terrorism and apparent necessity".⁴² In doing so, however, the paper was demonstrating its ignorance of the law given that

presentments brought forward for road making could not be jettisoned in favour of drainage projects. Similarly, it was not a “Priest-ridden mob” which convened a meeting in Armagh City on 16 October, to protest against total expenditure on drainage.⁴³ It was felt that the recent sessions had ignored legitimate presentments for roads within the city while the focus on drainage was “doing irremediable injury to the poor of the district”.⁴⁴ Arguing that the lands around the city were already in “a forward state as regards drainage”, the meeting further agreed that as the city share of the baronial cess was one-third they were entitled to have their views recognised.⁴⁵ Having been unsuccessful at the original presentment sessions, they failed in a further one but finally, on 24 October, the sessions agreed to a proposal for creating new roads – one between Scotch Street and the Mall; the other from Dobbin Street to Mill Street.⁴⁶

Such contrasting points of view, often vigorously argued, give credence to the view that presentment sessions represented:

a focus for the anxiety, fear and excitement which characterised Irish society in the late autumn of 1846, generating large crowds, excited statements of conflicting opinions, threats and sometimes, violence.⁴⁷

Excitement soon gave way to frustration as the Board of Works, inundated with presentments from throughout the country, proved incapable of quickly processing applications and when they did so the sums eventually allocated were much smaller than those requested. Thus, while the amount presented for at Newtownhamilton was £9,012⁴⁸ that recommended and sanctioned by the board was £2,960, for the construction of three new roads and the improvement of ten.⁴⁹ Similarly, Upper Orior

estimated an expenditure of £7,348,⁵⁰ but were only granted £2,137, for three road improvements and two new constructions.⁵¹ Such significant shortfalls were exacerbated by an inordinate delay in starting the works. For example, in Upper Orior they had been authorised to commence on 21 October, but by 5 November, “more than a tedious fortnight later” not one person had been employed.⁵² So critical was the situation that the Ballybot Relief Committee, believing the original sum sanctioned to be insufficient, forwarded a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant to commence another extraordinary presentment sessions for the barony.⁵³

The Board of Works attempted to explain the delay by citing a lack of essential implements for the works but their “miserable shuffling” was dismissed by the *Newry Telegraph* which claimed there was no excuse for such and that the board was “trifling with the public”.⁵⁴ Indeed, the government’s own statistics illustrated the inadequacy of the public works as a system to afford immediate relief to those in need. At the beginning of November there were 107 people employed in the county and by the end of that month the figure had gradually increased to 435,⁵⁵ statistics which led the press to once again lambast the inefficiency of the measure:

The unemployed labouring classes in Upper Orior have been...deceived by the Government and trifled with by the Board of Works – weeks have worn away and months and the people are still left upon statistical figures and potential promises. In the name of humanity, we ask what do the government mean by trifling with the destitution in Upper Orior?⁵⁶

The clamour for work eventually resulted in the sanction of £337 for improvements to three roads in Upper Fews and £2,125 for nine improvements and two new roads in Upper Orior.⁵⁷ However, in Armagh City, panic was beginning to set in. On 6

November, with no works started, William Paton wrote to Redington urging an immediate commencement and going so far as to suggest that a partial selection of the total baronial presentment be made with “several of the works requiring no extensive surveys nor involving any engineering difficulties whatsoever”.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it was not until 20 November that works for the barony were sanctioned and even then they were a fraction of the number presented for - the original application totalling £20,083 and the sum recommended being £1,230 for four road improvements and one new construction.⁵⁹ Paton further criticised the works as being of “no benefit whatever” as none were within four miles of the city.⁶⁰

In other parts of the country similar patterns of bureaucratic inefficiency and strict adherence to terms of eligibility were apparent. In Clones union the works were described as being “painfully slow in getting started” and a local relief committee sent a memorial to Dublin Castle appealing for more as only a fraction of those sanctioned had actually begun.⁶¹ Similarly in County Clare, a deputation from Kilkee urged Labouchere to initiate more employment opportunities.⁶² Meanwhile, the local press in Waterford, echoing the sentiments of the Armagh papers, lambasted the Board of Works, complaining, “The Board had its orders; presentments were made...and yet, nearly two months have gone by and what is done for the dying man or the wailing child?”⁶³ Indeed, in his analysis of works throughout Ulster, Grant has noted that delays of ten weeks were frequent, occasionally stretching to eleven or thirteen weeks. However, the longest delay in the province occurred in the application of Tiranney in County Armagh with a lapse of fifteen weeks.⁶⁴

An example of the exasperation felt locally was the decision of Lord John Beresford to withdraw an application which had previously been passed at a presentment session and to proceed privately with work on his demesne “in order to give immediate employment to some of the distressed labourers of the district”.⁶⁵ Further to this, a joint deputation consisting of members of the Crossmaglen and Newtownhamilton relief committees travelled to Dublin on 24 November. They were met by both the chief and under secretaries and received “repeated assurances that directions would be issued...to proceed with the presentments and furnish forthwith the necessary implements”.⁶⁶ Such direct action appeared to succeed as, in December, Upper Fews received £4,474 for one new road and twenty-four improvements, while Armagh obtained £863 for two new roads and ten improvements.⁶⁷ Consequently, the numbers on the public works in Armagh increased from 217 for the week ending 14 November⁶⁸ to 2,303 for the last week in December.⁶⁹

Despite this ten-fold increase the percentage of the population of the county so employed was less than 1% (0.9%) and was only greater than that for Donegal (1,804; 0.6%), Down (429; 0.1%) and Antrim (255; 0.08%).⁷⁰ Indeed, while the county statistic was well below that of the highest figure in Ulster, 20,503 (8.4%) in Cavan, it was also less than half that for the counties of Monaghan (6,650; 3.3%), Fermanagh (5,996; 3.8%) and Derry (4,933; 2.2%).⁷¹ Nationally, Armagh’s figures were closest to those for the eastern counties of Wicklow (2,383; 2.0%), Carlow (2,077; 2.8%) and Dublin (1,961; 1.7%).⁷² Also, the town of Galway with 2,814 had more employed on the works than the county of Armagh while the figures for counties such as Clare (40,771; 15.2%), Cork (32,277; 4.7%), Roscommon (30,548; 12.5%) and Galway

(42,218; 10.5%), give an indication of the severe distress in those districts.⁷³

Nevertheless, regardless of its relatively favourable position in relation to other counties, the amounts sanctioned for employment within the county illustrated the varying levels of distress between baronies.⁷⁴ Of £9,012 applied for, Upper Fews had received £7,971 while Upper Orior had been allocated £4,298 from an application for £7,348. Thus, both baronies were considered to be in such need that they were granted the majority of the amounts for which they had originally applied. Emphasising the extent of distress, both localities were to receive further sums in January but, despite pleas from William Paton, Armagh received only a fraction (£2,093) of the sum presented for (£20,083). This possibly illustrated a belief on the part of the Board of Works that a barony having an association with such a prosperous town as Armagh could do more to engage its local poor on a private basis. However, this supposition appeared based on the concept that a benevolent, resident landlord class existed in the county. But, as the following section illustrates, the attitude of many local landlords to the distress in their midst left a lot to be desired.

THE ROLE OF THE LANDLORD

The magnitude of the distress initiated by blight ensured that the role of the landed class in alleviating it was vital. As one source has commented, it was this class “to whom law and custom had given the leadership of Irish society and to whom the lesser tenantry and labourers traditionally turned in times of crisis.”⁷⁵ In popular memory landlords have been characterised as being either extremely harsh or overtly paternalistic. Thus, the absentee landlord and owner of Macroom Castle in County

Cork, William White Hedges, was referred to as “that demon of destitution”⁷⁶ due to his lack of concern for the poor. On the other hand, the death of Lord Lurgan from typhus fever in the midst of the famine saw him eulogised in the press as the epitome of a benevolent landlord.⁷⁷

In relation to Armagh, much of the evidence of landlord activity comes from newspaper accounts of rent reductions which usually make no reference to the number of tenants concerned, plot sizes and so on. More detailed information is only contained in the papers of the Brownlow, Manchester and Gosford estates.

Nevertheless, it appears that the majority of Armagh landlords, both resident and absentee, were content to offer rent reductions as the full extent of their endeavours. Only a few went further and incorporated such as part of an overall package to alleviate the destitution of their tenants.

The first public notification of a rent reduction occurred in the *Newry Telegraph* of 20 October 1846 which announced how Lord Charlemont had reduced rents on his estate as he was both “willing to bear his share in the general calamity, and anxious to relieve, as far as in him lies, his poorer tenants from an undue share of suffering under the Divine will”.⁷⁸ These reductions were arranged on a sliding scale in the belief that those with the smallest holdings were most in need of relief and they ranged from 25% for those paying an annual rent of less than £5 to 5% for payments under £30.⁷⁹

The small reduction for larger farmers was invoked in the belief that increased agricultural prices in grain and wheat would compensate them for the loss of the potato crop. Regardless of size of land-holding it was stipulated that “such abatements

shall be made only to tenants holding under lease paying the present annual value and tenants at will upon their paying the year's rent now in the course of collection".⁸⁰

Similarly, reductions enacted on the estates belonging to James Stronge in Tynan reinforced the notion that larger farmers would remain exempt from any difficulties amongst the agricultural population in the months ahead; hence, reductions ranged from 50% for holdings of less than five acres to 10% for those under thirty acres.⁸¹ Such a belief was not confined to County Armagh and on the estate of Charles Manners St. George in County Leitrim a similar policy was adopted on the premise that larger farmers would gain "from the very high price the produce of their farms have realised".⁸²

Stronge also used this opportunity to enforce a policy constantly urged by landlords, and ignored by tenants, in refusing to grant reductions to any who had sublet their holdings.⁸³ The general tenor of such paternalistic practices was endorsed by other landlords such as Robert Cope who offered a general reduction of 25% to all those holding under ten acres on his Grange, Loughgall and Mountnorris estates.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, he expressed the hope that, "owing to the heavy obligation on the property and the consideration thereof, it is expected the tenantry will take advantage of the present high prices and pay off the rents."⁸⁵ Similarly, Sir William Verner stipulated that abatements were only to be allowed to those paying a year's rent "within the usual period". In addition, they did not apply to those "holding for ever" or on old leases, where "the rent received is considerably below the annual value of the land".⁸⁶ The *Newry Telegraph*, as the main organ in reporting such local

reductions, obviously felt much displeasure at the continuous conditions attached at a time of increasing distress. When yet another announcement of reductions was made dependant on the recipients being non-leaseholders it commented:

The last clause of this notice does not please us and we take exception to the exception specified. We should prefer the extension of the concession to leaseholders. Why wholly exclude them? They have suffered, we take it for granted, equally with tenants holding at will. Have not they an equitable claim to participate in the bounty. Nay, are not occupying tenants even better entitled to the landowner's favour and attention than mere tenants at will?⁸⁷

Despite such anger at these methods many landlords continued in similar vein and Marcus Synott stated that his Ballymoyer tenants would only benefit if the rent was paid at a time specified by his agent.⁸⁸ Likewise, George Henry, agent to John Simpson of Ballyards, announced abatements ranging from 10% to 50% adding that unless tenants paid the balance of their rent at the beginning of December they would forfeit entitlement to an abatement.⁸⁹

Rent reductions were also often announced without any conditions except that they diminished as the size of holdings increased. The Earl of Caledon, together with Thomas Ball and Walter Bond, all announced the same reductions ranging from 50% to 10%. This possibly suggests that for some it was more a matter of being seen to do something than actually giving serious consideration to the plight of tenants.⁹⁰ Such a suggestion is given added credibility by the contents of private correspondence between William Blacker and Maxwell Close of Drumbanagher. Advising the latter of the necessity of announcing a reduction in rents, Blacker commented:

I am informed through a circular channel, but one on which I place some reliance, that some of the party at tomorrow's dinner will bring on a discussion about the potato crop and you are likely to be called on to say whether you intend to make any and what abatement. I think it best to mention this that you

may not be taken unprepared. You know my sentiments but I do not pretend to urge you to adopt them...and you have still the power of saying you reserved your declaration for the present occasion. I don't like to do anything that might appear like intimidation and would rather anticipate demands then yield to them I most sincerely hope you will decide for the best.⁹¹

In his defence it may be surmised that Close probably believed that such reductions were only one method of aiding the poor and was not interested in solely impressing his peers. Indeed, in the months ahead he was one of the few landlords in the county who attempted to employ large numbers of his tenantry in drainage. Meanwhile, absentee landowner William Armstrong demonstrated a rare understanding of the plight of his tenants and in acknowledging that many of them sold grain to meet the costs of rent he urged them to:

Keep your grain and the other valuable produce of your holdings for the support of your families upon the condition that I shall accept the half-year's rent, due at May 1846, in labour at the rates usually paid in the country.⁹²

Similarly, the agent to the proprietors of the Knockaneigh estate near Killylea stated his belief that, "This is a very critical period with farmers. I know well the value of a respectable, good tenantry and I'll endeavour to keep this so."⁹³ However, the landlord who was to emerge from this period as the one with most understanding of the plight of his tenants was Lord Gosford. Examining his estate records it becomes clear that he, inspired to a large degree by the indefatigable efforts of his agent and agriculturalist William Blacker, realised the importance even of small donations to the lives of his tenants. With many forced to pawn clothes, tools and even bibles, the necessity of being able to regain them by means of a donation or loan could mean the difference between life and death. As the following examples illustrate, Gosford was well aware of the importance of such:

25 November 1846 – 2/- to two poor men looking for work from Forkhill.
26 November 1846 – 1/- to a poor man Doyle to release a spade from pawn.
27 November 1846 – 1/- to a labourer sent by Mr Foster for work, which he did not get.
30 November 1846 – 3/- to widow Newell of Newry Street, Markethill for a score of meal.⁹⁴

This aid was willingly offered despite the deepening crisis which had resulted in a significantly diminished rental income, a point alluded to by Blacker in a letter to creditors in mid-November when he urged them to:

have a little patience, for we have been obliged to give greater license to the tenants this year than formerly and I don't think our rents will come in before Xmas (sic).⁹⁵

However, while the Gosford tenantry appear to have gained the benefit of a benevolent landlord, a variety of sources suggest that his example was imitated by only a handful of others. For instance, Robert Irwin of Keady supplied money to those who wished to emigrate, while also distributing seed oats to tenants.⁹⁶ The latter measure was similarly adopted by John Harris of Ashfort, near Tynan.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, for the majority of their contemporaries rent reductions represented the extent of their efforts on behalf of the poor, the worth of which were derided by Reverend David Donaldson of Armaghbreague thus:

Landed proprietors have refused to do anything to help besides reductions in rents which were, comparatively speaking, of no benefit to the poor while it was the means of rent which they were unable to spare – but were afraid to withhold.⁹⁸

Other evidence of landlord inactivity emerges from the correspondence of individuals throughout the county with various relief associations. Such letters often commented on the role of landlords due to the fact that their input could dramatically affect the

formalisation of relief policy within a particular district. This was very apparent, for example, in Tartartaghan where one of the largest estates in the parish, owned by a Quaker, was styled “one mass of pauperism”.⁹⁹ At the same time, Reverend Norman Foster stated there was not one resident proprietor in the parish of Loughgilly and lamented that “large subscriptions will not be obtained no matter how much needed”. He related how, on writing to one such absentee to alert him of the distress of his tenants who were entirely dependent on the rector, he was informed that, “on no account nor under any circumstances shall I ever recognise the wants of those who have intruded themselves on my property without my approbation.”¹⁰⁰ One clergyman went further and actually travelled to meet an absentee landlord in question. However, Reverend Robert McGhee from Mullavilly reported an unsuccessful attempt to solicit funds from Count de Salis, owner of two-thirds of the parish, relating: “I went to London to see him and to represent the case of his poor tenants – he refused to see me.”¹⁰¹

The consequence of absenteeism was illustrated by many reports of a similar nature. To cite just a couple of examples, Marcus Synott, J.P. informed the Irish Relief Association that, apart from himself, there were no other landlords or gentlemen in the barony of Upper Orior, an area covering 48,000 acres, to sign a form requesting relief.¹⁰² Meanwhile, Thomas Seaver, Chairman of the Jonesboro/Killeavy relief committee, complained that, due to lack of representation on estates within their district, the poor were left to the “care and humanity of a few individuals who compose the relief committee”.¹⁰³ A similar situation pertained in Grange O’Neilland an “ultra parochial part of the parish of Newry”, where there were “no gentry or

anybody above farmer class”, except the local Anglican minister.¹⁰⁴

These complaints were not unique to Armagh, and throughout Ulster many areas complained of the inertia of the landed class. The Urney relief committee in County Tyrone received four replies out of twenty-four sent to landlords asking for assistance, while in Fintona, in the same county, 40% of the relief district was owned by absentees who had contributed £14 out of a total of £214.¹⁰⁵ From Garvagh in County Derry came the complaint that, “the landed proprietors, with few exceptions, have either disdained subscribing to any relief fund or have taken no notice of our applications to them”.¹⁰⁶ Similar reactions were noted by relief committees in Ballinamallard and Maguiresbridge in County Fermanagh, Kingscourt in County Cavan and Aughnacloy in County Tyrone.¹⁰⁷

Within Armagh the lack of resident landlords proved a problem in areas such as Charlemont where the parish was said to be “overwhelmed with cottiers – the property of non-residents” who “hold each a hovel and part of an acre at rack rents”.¹⁰⁸ Similarly in Acton, Kildarton, Forkhill, Lisnadill, Mullaghglass, Fatham, Newtownhamilton and Crossmaglen the absence of resident proprietors, agents or large farmers was lamented.¹⁰⁹ This evidence suggests a lack of concern on the part of local landlords for the plight of their tenants. However, as one source has stated:

The role of the landlords, despite being an easy scapegoat for the ills of Ireland, was diverse, ranging from those who mortgaged their estates to help their poor tenants to those who, insulated by their absenteeism, chose not to set foot in the country during this period.¹¹⁰

This general comment also applies to Armagh and, while there were no recorded

accounts of local landlords mortgaging their estates, some responded to the needs of their tenants in a time of crisis. For example, in the area around Derrynoose, absentee owners were reported as having contributed the great majority of private subscriptions, while some of the resident gentry had also donated “very handsomely”.¹¹¹ Another area that did not correspond to the stereotype of heartless absentees was Forkhill where all the owners of land were absent and yet one local source claimed they were among the best in the country and had not pressed their tenants for rent. Interestingly, and in contrast to the record of other clergymen throughout the county, the rector of the parish, an absentee living fourteen miles away and attaining an annual rent of £1,000, had not made any subscription to the relief fund.¹¹²

If one district in County Armagh epitomised the difference that a benevolent, resident landlord could effect in an area at a time of great distress it was Charlemont. Here, the part of the district regarded as the best in the vicinity was that owned by Sir William Verner. With a population of ninety eight people inhabiting 415 acres Verner had been able, to a certain degree, to prevent subdivision in addition to providing much employment for his tenants on the estate. In comparison to the relatively comfortable position of these tenants, a neighbouring townland of 380 acres was home to 543 persons who paid their rent to absentees. With no prospect of employment their condition was referred to by one observer as “deplorable”.¹¹³ Thus, the reaction of Armagh landlords in the early months of the crisis mirrored that of their contemporaries throughout the country. Some endeavoured to offer employment by drainage in the fashion adopted by the Earl of Roden in County Down,¹¹⁴ while others

supplied seed, a policy also embraced by the Earl of Devonshire on his Lismore Estate in County Waterford.¹¹⁵ As will be shown in later chapters, a number of wives and daughters of resident proprietors laboured tirelessly to feed the poor but in the crucial period of the months before Christmas 1846, apart from reductions of rent, little was done and “landlords were frequently found wanting”.¹¹⁶ In their absence a vital role emerged for relief committees, both official and private, which were generally initiated and maintained by local clergymen.

OFFICIAL RELIEF COMMITTEES

On 20 October 1846, the Central Relief Commissioners received notification from individuals in Forkhill, Poyntzpass and Tandragee that relief committees were to be established and requested all relevant documentation and information pertaining to the organisation of such.¹¹⁷ The commissioners obliged and within days relief committees were up and running in each of the above areas, at this stage comprising their petty sessions districts. By the end of the month further committees had been initiated for the petty sessions of Ballybot and Markethill while, and indicative of increasing distress in the region, sub-committees of the Forkhill group had been deemed essential in Camlough and Jonesborough.¹¹⁸ These groups varied in their preferred response to the crisis at hand. In the Forkhill area, where there were few resident gentry to provide employment, the committee urged the immediate commencement of public works, deeming this to be much more effective and realistic than any appeal for subscriptions.¹¹⁹ On the contrary, in Markethill, where resident gentlemen were much more plentiful, William Blacker disavowed any government-sponsored works initiative. Hence, and doubtless at his behest, a fund to engineer agricultural

improvements within the district was launched, towards which each landlord and large farmer agreed to pay one shilling per acre to facilitate, amongst other things, the levelling of “useless inside ditches,” a cause much championed by Blacker. By these means, it was argued, the landlords and farmers would see their holdings improve, while those in distress would obtain work and wages to buy food.¹²⁰

The venture was proceeding as planned until the committee asked for financial aid from the Relief Commissioners.¹²¹ This was refused on the basis that such undertakings substituted private endeavour for public works.¹²² Further, the Markethill committee had suggested selling food at a reduced price to the poor, a move which contravened government regulations that it be sold only at current market prices. Although the local landed class could contribute a significant amount to the relief fund, government financial assistance was also vital and, when it was refused, the gentry and farmers reacted with apathy to appeals for further subscriptions.¹²³ Consequently, the relief committee was dissolved in early December, much to the disgust of William Blacker, who nevertheless persisted in his attempts to aid those in distress.¹²⁴ To this end, he enquired if the government would assist any attempt to purchase meal from dealers at wholesale prices to be supplied to a specified number of registered poor at a reduced price. To emphasise the need for such a policy he stated:

Lord Gosford is giving employment to anyone who applies but there are many who are unable to earn full wages who are reduced to great distress to whom the plan I mention would afford great relief.¹²⁵

However, in a reply, which was to reflect government procedure in the months ahead,

the commissioners stated that the policy for regulating the price of food to be purchased with government donations was made without reference to the advantage of traders “and only from a consideration for the public good in the present emergency”.¹²⁶ This strategy also created difficulties for groups in other parts of the province. In County Tyrone the Dungannon relief committee wished to know if they would be permitted to dispose of their funds outside the government guidelines. To highlight their predicament they argued that they could procure no subscriptions unless they were allowed a “discretionary power” in the disposal of their funds.¹²⁷ Similarly, in Bryansford, County Down several donations to the relief fund had been withheld while doubt on this question remained.¹²⁸

One committee which did manage to gain the assent of the commissioners was that at Crossmaglen. Here, the members decided the means of relief best suited to the population was that whereby flax was purchased from their funds and distributed to destitute females to be spun at a certain rate per hank. This option, which involved the poor working for their relief, was considered more efficacious than others, such as selling food at reduced prices or distributing it gratuitously. Not surprisingly, the commissioners considered it “very desirable”.¹²⁹ In Armagh City however, the main concern was actually feeding the poor and by mid-November the local committee had a total of 1,200 people on their books. Those so entitled received a ticket which, on presentation to a local dealer, enabled them to receive a quarter stone of oatmeal for three and a halfpence. Each Monday the committee members met individual dealers and allowed them the price differential between the market price of oatmeal and that of the meal sold.¹³⁰ To assist them in their endeavours, the committee applied to the

commissioners for a grant in aid of sums contributed. However, they were informed that the system of distributing meal at a reduced price was contrary to government regulations:

The system for aiding low wages which entailed so much evil on the labouring classes in England under the late Poor Laws and involves gratuitous distribution of the relief fund among able-bodied persons cannot receive a donation – gratuitous relief being only allowed under government regulations to the actually infirm poor.¹³¹

They further added that the committee should attempt to devise alternative means of employment for those in distress to provide “sufficient assistance” for themselves.¹³²

The Armagh committee was not alone in thinking that cheap food was essential at this period. The Urney Parochial Benevolent Fund in County Tyrone sought to aid the families of those employed in the public works, the earnings of whom were deemed insufficient. Thus, as in Armagh, the fund issued tickets which were presented in shops of local provision merchants. The price difference was then agreed between the committee and merchants and paid to the latter.¹³³ However, a similar proposal for the relief district of Rathmelton, County Donegal, was aborted on hearing that government aid would not be forthcoming. Instead, on the advice of Randolph Routh, the committee opted for the establishment of soup shops for which government finance was available.¹³⁴

The varying attempts to counteract local distress was further highlighted in Charlemont. Here, the committee ran a system which simultaneously met with the approval and disapproval of the commissioners. On the one hand, they refused to distribute any relief until the workhouse was full, thereby enforcing a genuine test of

destitution which would have been favoured by the authorities. However, when rations were eventually disbursed, this was done as a means of supporting the able-bodied. This was felt to be essential given that wages for men involved in weaving had slumped to three shillings per week “greatly aggravating distress in this quarter”. Thus each “industrious family” was supplied with one pound of meal per adult and one half pound per child at reduced prices.¹³⁵ When the committee enquired about government financial assistance they were informed that all food receiving such aid “must be sold at market prices”. This stipulation was necessary in order to restrict the commissioners “from becoming administrators of relief in aid of wages, which was one of the most injurious forms of relief under the late English Poor Law”. Demonstrating their strict adherence to the dogma of free-market political economy, they justified their stance as being “designed to prevent interference with trade prices that would necessarily tend to check that competition on which the country must mainly depend”.¹³⁶

The perspective adopted by the commissioners in their correspondence with the fledgling local relief committees was regarded with both anger and incredulity by the press. The *Newry Telegraph*, lambasting the “so-called science these officials appear to be adept in”, commented:

We say that whether the principles of political economy are sound or the reverse, it is not right that people should perish of hunger rather than that there should be any violation of the strict rules of political economy. The people must not be starved in deference to the dogmas of political economy. By the instrumentality now in operation, employment will be abundantly provided everywhere for the season. But what will it avail to the starving that there is work for the whole labouring population and good wages if food cannot be had for money?¹³⁷

Due to the system whereby government grants usually matched the total subscribed locally it was difficult for many areas to forgo this vital aid. Nevertheless, adherence to strict regulations meant that some decided to do so in order to provide assistance as they thought best. By the end of November, with the weather growing increasingly worse, conditions for the poor continued to deteriorate throughout the county. With workhouses now almost filled to capacity relief groups were hastened to even greater endeavours, having little concern for the rights and wrongs of selling at market prices.

Hence, on 5 December, a new committee was established in Markethill, solely for the purpose of feeding approximately 200 people with either free or reduced-price food.¹³⁸

At the same time, evidence of increasing destitution saw the expansion of the work of the Armagh committee. Such were the numbers applying for relief to the latter that more careful scrutiny was deemed necessary in assessing applicants. Thus, the city was divided into six relief districts, each overseen by a committee of three persons who attempted to visit and assess the needs of all those applying. From this group, those whose earnings were deemed insufficient for their support were sold oatmeal at three and a halfpence per quarter stone with each family member receiving one ticket. As in the earlier system, the committee paid the current market price to local dealers.¹³⁹

In rural areas the situation was becoming worse and in the mountainous parts of Upper Fews and Upper Orior the poorer class of farmers together with cottiers were said to be “in a state approaching to starvation”, with one correspondent claiming to have witnessed “scenes of absolute destitution and famine”:

It is my painful duty to again repeat my conviction that numbers are likely to perish of hunger unless immediate and instantaneous relief be provided for them.¹⁴⁰

This sense of urgency was reflected in a petition to John Boyd, the seneschal of Newry, signed by seventy of the town's most prominent individuals who expressed their desire to establish a soup kitchen and reduce food prices for the poor. In doing so they stated their conviction that "there never in our day was a period when the poorer housekeepers were so tried".¹⁴¹ At a subsequent meeting in the local court house on 7 December, Dr. Morrison of the Fever Hospital and Dispensary claimed that at no time in his recollection had disease been so widespread, with dysentery both very prevalent and fatal, and typhus fever "unusually rife", there being forty patients in the local hospital. With food now at famine prices and the inclement season setting in Morrison stated that food must be provided to the poor if pestilence, the corollary of famine, was to be avoided.¹⁴² Thus, the meeting decided to establish a soup kitchen for the town with applicants obtaining tickets from subscribers entitling them to two penny's worth of soup and bread for one penny. Cognisant of the large Catholic population in the area, the committee arranged for the distribution of pea soup, well-seasoned gruel and bread, in lieu of the usual meat, on fast days enforced by the Catholic Church hierarchy. The relief mechanism was overseen by a board of thirteen men who met each day in the Grand Jury room.¹⁴³

The work of such relief committees became more important due to the relative ineffectiveness of the government's local public works schemes. Despite specific works being sanctioned in October few had been initiated by December – a fact which

prompted the following from the *Newry Telegraph*:

We cannot rationally account for the infatuated policy of the Executive. But we tell the Lord Lieutenant that if his Excellency is desirous efficiently to discharge the duty incumbent on him, he will see to it that...the prosecution of public works shall vigorously proceed in the months of December, January and February. If those three months are permitted to pass away as October and November have been, the inevitable results cannot be other than woeful and disastrous.¹⁴⁴

The *Armagh Guardian*, in reporting the arrival of implements for the public works, equally ridiculed the inefficiency of the Board of Works:

The country, as a last extreme, turned to the government, but what have they done? They said "the people ask bread, we will give them stones; we will make public works; we will not interfere with the private dealers (that would affect our object) but we will afford employment"... Yet, months have passed and the Board of Works have shown very little evidence of competency for the task they have undertaken. In some places we find the grossest bungling and neglect and numerous complaints are made of delay in paying the labourers employed.¹⁴⁵

In many districts the main problem appeared to result from underestimating the numbers that would apply for work and a subsequent shortfall in the supply of necessary implements. For example, in County Fermanagh employment was restricted due to a shortage of wheelbarrows, a point also noted in neighbouring Monaghan where the inspecting officer of the Board of Works remarked on the "tardiness with which wheel and handbarrows have been supplied."¹⁴⁶ In County Derry, the Dungiven relief committee complained that hardship for labourers had been occasioned by a similar lack of implements.¹⁴⁷ However, the efforts of the board were certainly not helped by the arrival of harsh weather as the winter of 1846-47 proved to be one of the most severe on record with one source commenting:

The temperature is very low, more so than usual in this part of the country. Yesterday was piercingly cold with a cutting Northerly wind and snowfalls to a considerable depth on roads and fields have put a complete stop to every

kind of outdoor labour.¹⁴⁸

Such conditions exacerbated an already critical position for many in the county and forced them to adopt new means of supporting themselves. This possibility had been alluded to by a government officer who noted, warily:

No acts of depredation have as yet occurred but the people meet in crowds above the door of the relief committee room, they murmur and loudly declare that they must provide food from the stack yards, if not otherwise supplied.¹⁴⁹

The frustration of the poor manifested itself towards the end of 1846 in various parts of the county. On 15 November, a notice was pinned to a gate in Killylea churchyard threatening bailiffs and landlords that, unless they endeavoured to provide relief, the people would have “blood or bread”.¹⁵⁰ Some weeks later, on 9 December, a notice from the Molly Maguires was found posted on Richhill Loan Fund Office. Reported by the local press to have “created much excitement in that village and neighbourhood”, the message was akin to that in Killylea threatening “bread or blood – for we cannot stand no longer (sic)”.¹⁵¹ Groups operating under the same name carried out similar activities in other parts of the country. In Kilkee, County Clare, a Molly Maguire notice was pinned to the door of the local Protestant church; while in Derrykerrib, County Fermanagh, they threatened the overseers of the local public works who, it was alleged, had deducted the wages of labourers.¹⁵²

On 17 December, a very public illustration of the condition of the poor was found in Armagh City. A group of men, who had been forced by bad weather to abandon works initiated by William Paton, marched through the streets of the city, entering the main bakeries and demanding food. Wisely, perhaps, the shopkeepers obliged them in their

wishes and it was reported that “no force or violence was attempted” and the men left the city peacefully.¹⁵³ However, a similar incident in Markethill proved to be rather more fractious when an “alarming assemblage” of men and boys from the neighbouring townlands of Ballymacnab, Cashel and Folio entered the town. They proceeded to the bakeries owned by Cummings and McConnell, allegedly assaulting the wife of the latter, and taking loaves, cakes and biscuits. Despite their numbers, several other shops refused to meet their demands without engendering further violence.¹⁵⁴ To justify their actions the men claimed there was “not one-month’s provisions in the three townlands – no work and no means to earn a penny”. Further, they alleged they had endured much privation and hunger, with local landlords seemingly unwilling to initiate works to aid them. Thus, they chose to highlight their situation by marching to Markethill and had “made up their minds to starve or take them from those who had to spare”.¹⁵⁵ However, some residents replied that Lord Gosford, in addition to his usual number of workers, was employing 200 labourers in shoring and trenching his demesne specifically to aid the poor. They thus argued that tenants belonging to Lord Charlemont’s estate “should not gather to disturb and annoy people so charitable and ready to relieve as those in Markethill”.¹⁵⁶ Having signed a petition requesting help from the local magistrates, the group left, their actions prompting one paper to express the hope that:

The proprietors of lands where such poor tenants live will take prompt measures to relieve them, as such assemblages (sic) of poor, ignorant people may lead to very bad consequences, such as must be met by the strong arm of the law.¹⁵⁷

Such manifestations of distress, while limited to urban areas in Armagh, were also evident in other localities. On 9 September around 1,000 labourers entered

Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh, demanding work as, “the only alternative was to take by force what they could not otherwise obtain”.¹⁵⁸ The following week saw a similar assemblage of “small farmers and labouring classes” in Newbliss, County Monaghan.¹⁵⁹ In light of such protests, one source commented:

The unfortunate sufferers have hitherto remained comparatively tranquil; but, as it is impossible for gripping hunger to continue inactive, a fearful altered state of things may shortly be expected except immediate relief be administered.¹⁶⁰

Highlighting the geographical extent of distress was the fact that similar gatherings took place in areas as diverse as Belfast and Clifden, County Galway.¹⁶¹ These exhibitions of public dissatisfaction with the inept policies being pursued by the government attested to increasing levels of distress, not just amongst the poor but also those tradesmen and farmers who, as winter advanced, were themselves beginning to experience the difficulties occasioned by the expense of food and lack of available remunerative employment opportunities. Some of those with the requisite finance also lamented both the incongruous system of public works and rigid guidelines established for official relief committees and thus set out to establish methods by which they could best aid the poor of their district.

PRIVATE INITIATIVES

In those areas where the public works were either not enacted or limited in extent, employment opportunities were few and indeed, only a couple of districts appear to have been able to offer any work, although even this was barely sufficient to afford support to those in distress. In Madden and Derrynoose, where there were 350 people on the public works, a further 300 men and 500 young people were engaged in

weaving factories and bleach greens.¹⁶² At the same time, the Loughgall weaving firm of Orr and Sons was employing 1,100 directly and many more indirectly “in a trade that is not paying” simply to keep people from starvation.¹⁶³ Apart from domestic weaving and spinning, both of which were in serious decline, the sole work available in the locality was that on the new railway, some three miles away. Yet, able-bodied persons were only getting “irregular employment” there.¹⁶⁴

Reflecting the differences between various localities the Hockley relief committee commented that their area was very prosperous, with many employers in the locality and full employment being provided on the Ulster railway. In addition “large sums” were being expended on private works by landowners such as George Molyneux, the largest proprietor in the division. Consequently, two-thirds of all able-bodied labourers had access to work; nevertheless, wage levels, both on the railway and private demesnes, were insufficient, with one shilling per day being regarded as adequate only for feeding one man. This point was exacerbated by the fact that “since the failure of the linen trade” there was no additional work for women and children.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the inability of this industry to act as a bulwark against destitution was attested to by the observation that in Mullaghglass women received only three pence per day at needlework.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, from the south east of the county Richard Benson commented that although the canal and docks employed the able-bodied of Newry at good wages such work was “frequently interrupted and people thrown idle by casualties.”¹⁶⁷

In areas without such opportunities, however limited, the situation was critical.

Jonathan Darby of Acton Glebe, Hockley, contradicted the assertion of the local relief committee by claiming that the weaving industry was “lamentably declined,” with a large number of the able-bodied being without employment.¹⁶⁸ In Kilmore, Mullavilly and Charlemont the same industry was described as “an utter loss of time.”¹⁶⁹ In an attempt to alleviate the suffering and generate some level of income for his parishioners in the latter area James Disney initiated a number of schemes throughout the winter of 1846-47. Destitute women were employed in knitting socks and coarse articles while local tailors and shoemakers, “who are starving for want of work”, were similarly engaged. While doing his utmost to aid those in need, Disney did not favour doling out meal either gratuitously or at a reduced price, believing that such activities only served to further demoralise the people. Thus, in spite of many being “unfit for spade labour”, he used his own resources to employ men at outdoor work with around forty engaged in breaking stones for drainage and country roads . He also negotiated a system whereby local farmers employed labourers to dig fields in preparation for seeding. To facilitate this, Disney supplied cottiers and farmers with seed beans, carrots, parsnips and turnips while paying half the wages of the labourers employed on the land. The importance of such schemes was emphasised in his following observation:

Last week I paid the wages of sixty-five men employed with small farmers and refused many applications for want of means. Without my means no work would be obtained and without further assistance all men will have to be dismissed.¹⁷⁰

Similar schemes were enacted in other parts of the province. For example, in Ballinamallard, County Fermanagh the local relief committee employed old women in spinning wool, while the same occupation in Castleblayney, County Monaghan

ensured work for almost 300 women at a weekly remuneration of one shilling.¹⁷¹ Such endeavours, albeit on a smaller scale, were in operation in Dromore and Rostrevor in County Down, while in the latter area eighty “poor women” were employed spinning and knitting wool on the Annesley estate.¹⁷²

As has been noted, the level of destitution, high price of provisions and collapse of the linen industry had seen public works sanctioned for the baronies of Upper Fews, Upper Orior and Armagh. However, at the end of December 1846, a proposal for a similar measure in the barony of Lower Fews caused consternation and confusion among landowners in the locality. The proposal was contained in a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant, which asserted that a presentment session had not been sanctioned as a result of “mistaken views”. Whilst acknowledging that a large part of the barony belonged to “indulgent” landlords such as Lords Gosford and Charlemont who had helped their “immediate tenantry”, the memorialists maintained that the labouring poor in many parts of the barony were “bordering on actual starvation” and public works were necessary “to meet the emergency of the case”.¹⁷³

On hearing of the memorial, Lord Gosford stated his disbelief that any part of the barony could have been in such distress without his knowing:

I reside in that barony and am in daily communication with its landed proprietors – not one of them has made any application to me on this subject. In my mind no good result would follow from holding presentment sessions at this moment in the barony.¹⁷⁴

Gosford was also aggravated by the fact that the Lord Lieutenant, in granting a special session, did so without first ascertaining his Lordship’s opinion on the matter.¹⁷⁵

However, there was no obligation on the Lord Lieutenant to inform himself by prior examination of the requirement for such a session, but once it was appointed his authority ended and matters rested exclusively with the ratepayers. The situation was further compounded when the session was listed for 5 February 1847 in Newtownhamilton,¹⁷⁶ the government having mistakenly believed that the barony concerned was Upper Fewes. Thus, while a special presentment was rescheduled for 9 February in Markethill¹⁷⁷ Lord Gosford set about establishing the instigators of the memorial.

It appeared that the government had been influenced in their decision by the fact that the name of Mr. Algeo, agent to Lord Charlemont, was prominent amongst the memorialists.¹⁷⁸ On being asked to justify his involvement, Algeo claimed that the condition of some people in the barony “was, and still is, distressing in the extreme from want of food and work”. He reiterated the statement that while much had been done around the Markethill estate this represented only a small part of the barony and more extensive efforts were required.¹⁷⁹ Gosford was obviously determined to establish the condition of the area in question and wrote a lengthy letter to Redington on 1 February. He noted that the area for which works were felt to be essential had been omitted from the auspices of the Markethill relief committee on the grounds that it would have overstretched the boundaries of the district. On being informed of this decision a local priest had been contacted and agreed that the area could instead be attached to the Keady relief committee “since when there was not a word on the subject.” Further, he expressed surprise that no sub-committee had been established as in other areas “similarly circumstanced” and concluded that the holding of an

extraordinary presentment session would result in “injurious consequences” without benefiting the district.¹⁸⁰

Despite Gosford’s cogent arguments against such a measure, the Lord Lieutenant reiterated that a special session would proceed and justified his decision by citing the fact that the memorial had been signed “amongst others by the agent of the Earl of Charlemont”.¹⁸¹ Gosford’s opposition was not isolated, however, and in a letter to the local press, Charles Seaver from Mullabrack anticipated detrimental effects arising from public works:

We much fear that our resources will be crippled and our usefulness hindered by the extraordinary presentment sessions which are to be held here next week, as some of our subscribers have declared their intention of withholding their subscriptions “till they see the result of such sessions”.¹⁸²

At the sessions on 9 February Gosford, Seaver and the members of the Mullabrack Poor’s Fund requested an adjournment due to the “inexpediency of the measure at this time”. They were opposed by local clergymen Norman Foster of Loughgilly and Robert Henry from Tassagh who had both signed the application arguing that in their areas distress was “exceedingly great” due to the absence of landlords and the impossibility of obtaining employment by any other means. Gosford countered this argument by outlining his own expenditure on relief – approaching an average of £158 for each of the last three months. He also cited the employment given to some 177 labourers on the lands owned by Dr. Blacker in Mullabrack. With such prominent individuals being trenchantly opposed to the proposal, the special presentment session was dissolved and no public works were initiated in Lower Fews.¹⁸³ This was in spite of continuing reports of destitution in the locality, with Foster justifying the demand

for public works by claiming:

A very large number of looms lie idle and the scutching mills have ceased for the season. Farmers do not employ labourers under the present agricultural prospects and a frightful number of women and children have been abandoned by men gone to England and Scotland to look for work.¹⁸⁴

Having failed to see public works instigated Foster, like his counterpart Disney in Charlemont, initiated field work for more than one hundred local labourers on his glebe lands by replacing ploughing with manual labour, thereby planting sixty-six acres of land by hand.¹⁸⁵ He also imported rice, barley, meal and peas which were then cooked in a twenty-gallon boiler and distributed gratuitously.¹⁸⁶ A similar approach was adopted in Kildarton where Henry Disney employed forty men digging the land of small farmers at ten shillings per acre, the local relief committee, in turn, supplying carrot and turnip seed to the farmers.¹⁸⁷ In addition, from mid-November 1846, he sold indian meal and oatmeal to the poor at one penny per pound, allowing a maximum of one pound per day for each family member – the sick and unemployed receiving free rations. He further supplied fifteen children on a daily basis at his home with soup made of oatmeal, rice, cabbage, turnips and celery.¹⁸⁸

Indeed, from October 1846, many individuals, either through a sense of benevolence to local tenantry or exasperation with the inefficiency of official relief committees, undertook to provide relief at their own expense. For example, Richard Benson, from Fatham Park, near Newry, wrote to the Irish Relief Association eliciting funds for 800 people in the townlands of Upper and Lower Fatham and Cloghogue. Those districts had been refused assistance by the Newry relief committee “their own poor fully occupying their means” and so Benson daily distributed free soup and medicines

together with money to the families concerned.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, in Charlemont, John Leech established a soup kitchen unconnected with any official committee in the district, most of the aid from which was distributed gratuitously.¹⁹⁰ An indication of the need for such initiatives was provided by James Disney, a prolific correspondent to various relief associations and the Relief Commissioners. In a letter to the Irish Relief Association on 14 January 1847 he complained that the district assigned to the Charlemont relief committee was “of such unmanageable extent (forty-nine townlands) that the relief it gives to each family applying is necessarily small and altogether inadequate”.¹⁹¹ Thus, he established an independent private fund to provide for the poor of twelve townlands in and around Charlemont village.¹⁹² Similar independent efforts run by the wives and daughters of the gentry were evident in Annaghmore, Creggan, Forkhill, Glenaul, Killeavy, Mullaghglass, Newtownhamilton, Ravensdale, and Tynan.¹⁹³

The overwhelming requirement for food supplies throughout all parts of the county was emphasised by the variety of people who sought to raise funds for those in need. For example, a weekly distribution of meal was made by the Independent congregation in Ebenezer Chapel, Newry, which was supported in its efforts by subscriptions from sister churches in England.¹⁹⁴ While the servants of the Close family set up the “Drumbanagher Household Fund” to give relief to poor families on the demesne,¹⁹⁵ the Duke of Manchester supplied dinners of cooked rice to each of the children attending schools on his estate.¹⁹⁶ In Armagh, the pupils of a local school initiated a subscription for the relief of the poor of the city,¹⁹⁷ and in February 1847, the “Newry Young Men’s Society for the relief of the poor and destitute” began to

solicit contributions towards a relief fund.¹⁹⁸ Their efforts were the catalyst for the formation of the Newry Benevolent Female Working Society, the aim of which was to provide employment for old women in spinning and knitting and for younger females in needlework. It was organised along lines similar to those of a ladies' group in Belfast with a general committee overseeing the work of the following four sub-committees: a Finance Committee – to obtain funds in town; a Visiting Committee – to personally inquire into the condition of those requesting work; an Industrial Committee – to buy raw materials, distribute and collect work, and finally a Bazaar and Sales Committee – to dispose of work when handed over by the Industrial Committee.¹⁹⁹

The Society intended selling articles each Thursday in the Savings Bank while the centrepiece of its activities was a bazaar held at the same venue on 22 April 1847. While most of the merchandise was the work of those employed by the Society, they received various contributions to aid their efforts. The Edinburgh Ladies' group sent a box of needle and fancy work, while an oil painting was donated by John Corbett. One of the main attractions was a quilt loaned by the Belfast Ladies' Society, having been sold at their recent bazaar. With side attractions such as a fortune-teller and the band of the 44th regiment of the British army, the bazaar was deemed a great success and continued into a second day, raising £80 for the poor of Newry.²⁰⁰

The need for private sources of relief demonstrated that, with winter progressing and the linen industry failing to provide a bulwark against distress, the measures adopted by government, principally that of the public works, were proving ineffective in the

face of increased destitution levels. In addition, some preferred to operate independently of official local committees due to the fact that the latter were constrained by the stipulations of an administration which dogmatically adhered to free-market principles. Hence, in order to avail of the considerable advantage of supplementary financial aid official committees had to guarantee a policy of non-interference with the profits of local traders and non-application of their funds to those in employment, regardless of the level of remuneration. However, as distress intensified these stipulations came in for sustained criticism.

CHALLENGING ECONOMIC DOGMA

While the British government's public works initiative was proving totally inadequate to meet the prevailing distress, other aspects of its policy were subjected to scrutiny and, in the columns of the local press, scathing criticism. For example, the allegation that potential food for the poor was being wasted in the use of grain in distilleries was articulated thus by the *Newry Telegraph*:

We look upon the proposition for arresting the expenditure of grain in distillation as one that, in an emergency like the present, ought to commend itself to her Majesty's Government. The impropriety of "wasting oats" at such an emergency in the feeding of horses has been strongly insisted upon. Is it not infinitely more improper, and a more decided and less excusable waste, to consume grain in the manufacture of whiskey?²⁰¹

In urging the temporary suspension of grain in distillation, the paper advocated its substitution with sugar and molasses in distilleries and breweries throughout the country. However, the official government view on the matter was expressed in a report carried by the same journal some days later. In reply to a petition from Glasgow Town Council, advocating a similar initiative, the authorities stated that "it is not the

intention of the Government to prohibit distillation from grain.²⁰² As there were few distilleries in County Armagh,²⁰³ this debate remained largely confined to the pages of the press. However, another aspect of official policy – the refusal to lower food prices – had much more relevance to those living locally.

Despite constant appeals both to reduce prices and facilitate the free distribution of food, the government refused to yield, claiming:

If the attempt were made, it would, by inducing a rapid consumption of the stock of provisions and by checking and suspending the bringing forward of supplies from other sources, render the existing pressure more severe.²⁰⁴

Maintaining that such a course of action was “the only one consistent with the public safety”, they continued:

It is indispensably necessary that the Government depots should not be opened while the markets can be supplied from the produce of the late harvest and that when they are opened, it should be at prices proportionate to the neighbouring market prices.²⁰⁵

Such a philosophy, grounded in the principles of political economy, also saw a refusal to contemplate a prohibition on exports of food. In the same week that fifteen tons of oatmeal, 5,338 bushels of oats and 400 bushels of wheat were shipped from Newry to Liverpool, the *Armagh Guardian* referred to Ireland as a vast “warehouse to let”:

A great warehouse is Ireland – she is advantageously situated for trade – her stores are spacious – her resources are incalculable...The exports are daily increasing, regardless of the demand at home, where hunger, never any great novelty, is now exceedingly plenty; yes, with all our wretchedness and misery, we can export – we can send England butter, bacon, eggs and all kinds of grain, on a scale of more than ordinary extent. We can freight our ships and fill them with provisions, while want casts her wistful glance as they leave the shore, and famine looks ghastly through her victim who has assisted to send off those necessaries of life, a portion of which might be distributed to him who stands in such need. But the warehouse is to let, and the clearance system must go on.²⁰⁶

However, some were prepared to do more than simply “cast wistful glances” and on 18 December 1846, it was revealed by the authorities that, as a result of “private information”:

A very serious attack is intended to be made by a large party of the country people – county of Armagh side – some place about the Fatham Locks, upon one or other of two vessels now loading with oatmeal at Newry and bound for Scotland.²⁰⁷

It was further stated that, in order to prevent any police interference, it was “proposed to have certain number of men armed on both sides of the water to protect the carriers away”.²⁰⁸ This information had been provided by two Newry men and followed reports of Molly Maguire letters having been sent through Newry post office threatening violence against any local merchants exporting meal.²⁰⁹ Thus, it was decided to take preventative action and resident magistrate Matthew Singleton, together with a party of British soldiers, boarded the *Marchioness of Huntley* and ensured its safe passage from Newry to Warrenpoint.²¹⁰ The vessel contained fifty tons of oatmeal bound for Stornaway, Scotland and as it passed, “innumerable hearty maledictions were bestowed on the owners of the cargo and the Military, by the old women and others stationed on the bridges”.²¹¹ Some weeks later a meeting of the deputy lieutenants and magistrates of the county voiced the concern that “a communication for vile purposes exists between Armagh and Down to which confederacy many recent outrages may be traced”.²¹² In an attempt to pre-empt any further attacks they appealed for troops to be stationed at Knockbridge, Madden Bridge and Scarva to “protect the boats laden with provisions on the Newry Canal”.²¹³

Such measures were not confined to Armagh and were resorted to by equally

desperate people in other parts of the country. For example, in Dungarvan, County Waterford crowds gathered on the quay to impede ships leaving the port, necessitating the presence of dragoons, infantry and police.²¹⁴ In the same county, local people blocked Youghal bridge and threw stones at boatmen in order to prevent indian meal being transported to Ardmore along the river Blackwater.²¹⁵ While such exports continued and demand reached an unprecedented level, prices increased rapidly throughout the country. In particular the major sources of food deemed as substitutes for potatoes – indian corn and oaten meal – attained exceptional levels. Within a year oatmeal had risen from £15 to £25 per ton while indian meal had more than doubled in price from £8 to £20 per ton.²¹⁶

Thus, while the *Newry Telegraph* reported “large arrivals of indian meal and barrels of flour” into the local port, it observed further how “large quantities are in the hands of private speculators, many of whom are persons who never did business in the grain and flour trade before”. Noting that around 10,000 barrels of flour were “held on speculation” it commented, “we can hardly be surprised at famine prices, when such hoarding takes place”.²¹⁷ Those concerned with the plight of the poor in various parts of the county concurred with these sentiments and expressed their frustration at such developments. Reverend Edward Disney of Newtownhamilton stated how “the greatest injustice and injury is done to the poor by the retail trade being in the hands of people who are, in general, poor and grasping”.²¹⁸ Urging such to be content with a “moderate profit” he revealed that while indian corn was selling in Belfast at £12 per ton, its price, in the same week in Newry, was £16.²¹⁹ Meanwhile, Marcus Synott junior, commented that while most of the small farmers in Ballymoyer had eaten all

available meal, “some of the better-off retain their grain and oats and store up the meal which they sell frequently on credit to the poor at exorbitant prices.”²²⁰ Aware of such practices, the *Armagh Guardian* castigated government policy alleging that it had allowed “the food of the people” to fall into the hands of speculators:

It is well to tell the people that thousands of bushels of wheat have been shipped from America, that immense arrivals have been reported in Liverpool or London, that there is no inertness in the government, no lack of sympathy in England. What does all the talk avail when the provisions are bought up by speculators as soon as they arrive? To tell a hungry man of abundance yonder is somewhat like binding an animal to a small patch of burned up pasture in the same field with a large crop of wheat or corn – he sees what would satisfy the cravings of appetite but no sooner does he essay a motion towards the place where these cravings could be supplied than the fetter shows him that he is fixed to his spot of misery.²²¹

Such sentiments were not confined to the pages of the *Armagh* press. In October 1845, a meeting of Belfast businessmen and gentry had memorialised the Lord Lieutenant to both close distilleries and stop exports. One proponent of the move argued that the amount of grain used annually in Irish distilleries was equal to 150 shiploads of meal, each containing 500 tons. The Belfast proposal was accompanied by similar initiatives from Dublin Corporation, the Mansion House Committee and various groups in Cork, Derry and Glasgow.²²² The strength of feeling in Belfast on the subject was emphasised by the fact that, in December 1846, a deputation from the town council met the Lord Lieutenant to request, once again, closure of the ports and substitution of grain in distilleries.²²³ At the same time a memorial from the guardians of the Waterford poor law union demanded that “exports should be stopped for six months, distillation suspended and Irish produce purchased by the government to supply extensive public granaries.”²²⁴ This call was supported by the local press which lamented how, “a million men may starve, but the rules which have regulated

commercial enterprise must remain as immutable and fixed as the poles”²²⁵

In light of such manifest and widespread opposition to the prevailing economic doctrine of the administration it is odd that some historians have subsequently ridiculed the argument that an alteration in policy at this stage in the crisis would have eased the pressure on scarce food resources while simultaneously keeping prices at an attainable level. It appears that, to some, it has been more important to counter John Mitchel’s argument that “God sent the blight: the English created the famine”, than to seriously examine the contemporary debates on government policy. For example, Mary Daly has remarked:

There was no strong identifiable call from Ireland for any particular measure to meet the famine. Even the call to prevent food exports was much stronger in retrospect than it was at the time.²²⁶

Similarly, Austin Bourke has claimed that, “little evidence is to be found in the Irish newspapers with the sturdy exception of the *Clare Journal* of any public demand for the closure of the home ports against the export of food”.²²⁷ Such comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with contemporary newspaper accounts, especially reports of local and regional press. In addition, it is highly unlikely that a body such as the Belfast Town Council, containing businessmen and entrepreneurs, would have been unaware of the difficulties associated with closure of the ports in a time when free-market policies were sacrosanct. However, they believed that extraordinary distress demanded extraordinary remedies, a sentiment actually supported by Bourke who argues that:

The grain crop of 1846, if entirely retained in Ireland, could have made an appreciable contribution to bridging the starvation gap between the destruction of the potato crop in August and the arrival of the first maize

cargoes in the following winter.²²⁸

The fact that there was much comment in the local press about the continued export of food revealed the extent to which the palpable distress had impacted on the public consciousness by the end of 1846. Such was the demand for food and work throughout the county that official relief committees had been in existence for almost three months while the public works struggled to make any serious headway in meeting the needs of thousands for work. With local workhouses filled to capacity, a huge burden fell on those with both the finances and sense of duty to aid those in need in their locality. Consequently, the role of some of the minor gentry and clergymen in buying and distributing food, while at the same time attempting to provide various methods of private employment, was vital in filling the significant gaps left by government initiatives. Nevertheless, despite these valiant efforts the malaise worsened as the winter deepened and, as will be shown in the next chapter, the situation in Armagh was exacerbated from February/March 1847 by the destitution of a class of farmers which, the government had hoped, would have been able to weather the worst of the calamity. This group, consisting of those with landholdings of more than fifteen acres, were not as dependent as labourers and cottiers on the potato for food but due to a reduced flax and oats crop, both their income and dietary alternatives suffered. Without any centralised efforts to restrict exports and keep food prices at a manageable level for those on much-reduced wages, they joined the ranks of those who, months before, had sacrificed their self respect in order to receive handouts from relief committees.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

**COUNTERACTING HUNGER, SICKNESS AND DISEASE:
JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 1847**

At the beginning of 1847 the Whig administration decided to alter its policy of relief with the intention of making Irish ratepayers liable for all future expenditure. As an interim measure they introduced the Temporary Relief Act, commonly known as the Soup Kitchen Act, by which those in need would be fed directly in their own electoral divisions. This initiative entailed the closure of the public works just when they were employing thousands as their only source of relief. In the meantime, continued distress led to an important role for private relief efforts, especially those supported by the Irish Relief Association and the Society of Friends. As hunger was followed by disease such groups aided thousands throughout the county and often provided the only source of food and medicine for those individuals and groups deemed ineligible under government legislation.

PUBLIC WORKS

By late December 1846, with the original presentments approaching termination, demands were once more made for further works with Fr. Michael Lennon imploring another presentment session on behalf of the many “starving creatures” in the district of Creggan. Claiming that several deaths from destitution had already occurred, he reported how most people employed on the works were now idle, their condition “frightful and appalling in the last degree”.¹ As evidence of increased distress he noted how those who some months earlier possessed food were now without any means of support having “pawned every article of clothing on which a few pence could be raised”.² In an echo of earlier disagreements at presentment sessions, Lennon’s views were publicly challenged by others from the locality. At an extraordinary presentment session for the barony of Upper Dundalk on 25 January, Lennon lambasted the efforts

of the authorities to support the poor:

The present law is like many others – beneficial enough in its spirit but crude and tedious in its actual working...First there were lists which were made up by the relief committees; these had to give way to tickets; then there was a scrutiny entered into which was not less humiliating to the parties subjected to it, than it was in many cases calculated to shut out those in really destitute circumstances from relief. If a man had a barrel of oats, he was set down, as not being a person requiring relief. What then was he to do? Why, he sold his little saving, all he possessed in the world – and soon he was obliged to apply for relief. Then he was not furnished with the necessary tickets till he had lost day after day in looking for it...it is a poor privilege for a man to claim permission to earn 10d a day, much less to be so often disappointed before he gets employment.³

However, a member of an adjacent relief committee in Philipstown, County Louth, Reverend Frith, disagreed with almost every aspect of Lennon's argument, disputing numbers in need of relief and stating that the level of scrutiny criticised by Lennon had been approved by the local relief committee. Further, when Lennon claimed that a presentment of £2,000 for two months was required for the Derrafalone district, Frith countered that a sum of £1,200 would suffice. Nevertheless, with Lennon alleging "there are this day people in their cold graves from these delays", the meeting agreed to vote a sum in accordance with his evaluation, in spite of further disagreement between Frith and himself.⁴

Thus, numbers employed on the works increased so that by the end of December they stood at 2,302⁵ due largely to the sanctioning of twenty-five works in Upper Fews, with nine being granted for the barony of Armagh. January of the new year saw further works authorised - £1,709 for six improvements and one new road in Armagh and £606/7/6 for drainage in Tiranney.⁶ While the fact that the Armagh works had been presented some two months earlier demonstrated the bureaucratic delays inherent

in the process, an unexpected local obstacle to work in the city emerged when Reverend Dr. Romney Robinson, a leading astronomer, objected to a proposed new road from the courthouse to the railway station. He successfully argued that the route would result in traffic vibration, thereby interfering with the scientific calculations of the local observatory.⁷ The decision not to proceed with a work which would undoubtedly have offered employment to many of the urban poor illustrated the powerful influence of the Anglican clergy in such areas. Meanwhile, hindrances to employment opportunities in other parts of the county were exercising the mind of Lieutenant Griffith, one of the government's inspectors, and on 23 January he commented:

It appears to me that in Upper Orior there is a constant deficiency in the supply of labour as proportional to the extreme wants of the people. Under judicious arrangements numbers might in many instances be greatly and advantageously employed.⁸

However, Griffith's comments simply gave an official stamp of authority to similar reports from the same area. For example, Thomas Seaver, chairman of the Jonesboro/Killeavy relief committee, reported that public works were "so limited in extent as to not afford employment to the one quarter of those seeking employment".⁹ Meanwhile, another source revealed that out of a total of 1,220 able-bodied labourers in the Forkhill area, no more than 120 were employed on the works.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the situation in Armagh only reflected similar happenings in other parts of the province. For example, relief works begun in County Derry in late November were nearly exhausted by the end of January, while in County Cavan a great number of the public works had stopped by late December due to the allocated money being exhausted.¹¹ Given such local distress, Lieutenant Griffith suggested that the scope of public

works be widened to include the quarrying and breaking of stones which could then be sold to contractors.¹² Griffith's feelings were undoubtedly coloured by personal observation of distress which he had witnessed in the area:

I think it my imperative duty again to call the attention of the Board (of Works) to the subject as the people are suffering the pressure of unparalleled destitution and have arrived at the extremity of endeavouring to support themselves on seaweed, bran and turnips, where they can be had, being the general description of diet.¹³

The import of such correspondence from one of their own officers appears to have acted as a catalyst to the members of the Board of Works and another extraordinary presentment session was granted for Upper Fews. Thus, on 22 January at Newtownhamilton, £2,000 was voted for finishing works in progress, while a further £7,000 was passed to allow for employment by stone-breaking.¹⁴ The importance of such additional works was emphasised by estimates of 3,500 people in the Crossmaglen petty sessions district in need of relief and almost 7,500 in Upper Fews reported to be in a state of destitution.¹⁵ At the same time, a further baronial session for Armagh resulted in £2,800 being applied to works already in progress and £500 for breaking stones in the immediate vicinity of the city.¹⁶ Such sums were vitally important especially as the government engineer for the county stated that those without employment opportunities "must be in deep distress".¹⁷ However, while much money was applied to road-making and stone-breaking, those who wished to offer employment by means of drainage were experiencing severe difficulties.

On 4 December 1846, William Blacker informed the chairman of the Board of Works that, in order to offer drainage work on Lord Gosford's demesne, he had made every

attempt to avail of the provisions of the Million Act (1846) but had been defeated in his endeavours. Under this act no money could be advanced for at least three months after an application had been made and even then the whole work, or some specified part of it, had to be complete.¹⁸ Consequently, such stipulations persuaded the Public Works Commissioners to comment: "We cannot...anticipate that much work will be done under the Act in its present shape".¹⁹ After further investigation it transpired that the act only applied to landlords who owned their land and Gosford, as tenant for life under Trinity College, Dublin, on his Armagh estates, was debarred from its benefits. The same problem emerged for Maxwell Close of Drumbanagher in relation to his Brootally estate, which was also owned by Trinity.²⁰ However, even the much-vaunted Labouchere measure caused problems for Blacker, the principal difficulty being that this latest legislation could not be enacted in particular districts until detailed surveys of land were obtained. Given that the Gosford estate contained 1,100 tenants, with many fields extending to less than two acres, Blacker argued that the necessary surveys would involve serious expense and delays and thus "act as a veto upon the whole operation of the Act".²¹ In a letter to William Stanley he maintained that insisting on such requirements would result in the act being "as great a failure as the Million Act".²²

Blacker's obvious desire to avail of the new measure was illustrated in an earlier note to Roger Hall of Mullaghglass, which also demonstrated how presentment sessions were open to manipulation by those in positions of influence. Hence, in relation to the session for Upper Orior in January, he wrote:

I would wish to urge on you, if possible, to have the presentment reduced to such sum as would serve merely for a month, or six weeks at most, as there

might be some better legislation when Parliament meets, from the benefit of which we may perhaps be excluding ourselves by presenting too largely under the present law.²³

Nevertheless, Blacker's resolve to gain work for local tenants cannot be doubted and this attitude was in stark contrast to that of some landlords in the south of the county. In that locality, Hamilton of Newtownhamilton and Fortescue of Ravensdale were described as "resident and paternal landlords who are saving the lives of thousands in this season of death".²⁴ However, the same source lambasted the lack of initiative of Mc Geogh Bond, Ball, Eastwood, Lord Templeton "and others" who, it was claimed, "ought to make themselves useful to their countrymen and imitate Colonel Close and other good landlords in the adjoining barony and thereby relieve the present widespread distress in the parishes of Upper and Lower Creggan".²⁵ He argued that drainage of the Creggan Bogs would provide much needed work if only the landlords were willing to initiate it:

Just take a drive down to the parish of Creggan and you will see lakes and bogs, the reclamation of which would give employment to ten thousand persons and thereby create a vast extent of fine land for the future cultivation of barley, oats and turnips – and you will at the same time learn that the owners of these bogs are gentlemen of considerable wealth who ought to create employment for the people who are the poorest in all the county Armagh.²⁶

In the absence of such proposals many had little option but to avail of the public works so that by the end of January the figure employed in the county had reached 4,042 and continued to grow throughout the following two months attaining a peak of 7,953 on 13 March. Although some women and children were counted amongst this number the majority of those on the works were male. Hence, if assume that most of those on the works were married men with up to four dependants each the above

figures suggest that somewhere between 30-40,000 people were relying on the earnings provided by the public works to purchase food. Given that these labours were carried on in the depth of winter, they must have involved much suffering on the part of men, and to a lesser extent, women and children during what was commonly regarded as one of the most severe on record.²⁷

This was evident as, in the middle of December 1846, the Keady relief committee reported greater distress since “the severe weather...set in”²⁸ while some days later the Tynan and Middletown committee lamented how “destitution is greatly aggravated since the winter set in with such severity”.²⁹ Indeed, from November to April daily temperatures fell below freezing on forty-two occasions, including fifteen days in December 1846 and fourteen in February 1847.³⁰ Further analysis illustrates there were a series of “cold snaps” during which the temperature remained below freezing for a number of days in succession. The first of these was from 27 November to 4 December with another lasting a week from 10 to 17 December. The freezing temperatures returned on 6 February for a period of one week and again from 24 February to 2 March. The final cold snap illustrated the longevity of the harsh winter in that it occurred on 28 March and lasted until 3 April.³¹ While temperatures such as -5°C must have proved excruciating for those put to work on the roads, the difficulty was exacerbated by regular snowfalls throughout this period. Beginning with one day of snow in November, there occurred a further two days’ fall in December, January and March, while in February there were three separate snowfalls.³² In addition, the Armagh Observatory reported “ice all over roof” on 29 January,³³ while, on 1 April,

there were a series of hail showers throughout the day.³⁴ The difficulties resulting from such conditions were acknowledged by one of the government's relief officials who commented, on 9 February, "we have had a heavy fall of snow, which will cause much suffering".³⁵

The winter also witnessed a number of severe gales, which further impinged on those employed on the public works. Thus, from October to March there were thirty-two recorded gales, the largest monthly figure being eleven in November with a further eight in October and January.³⁶ In the midst of such conditions Reverend Edward Disney, whilst remarking that many on such works were "severely injured by cold and want of sufficient food",³⁷ revealed the inevitable consequences for the population of Newtownhamilton:

Many of the labourers and many small farmers have pawned all their clothes, and being obliged to work at the roads in this inclement weather, with scanty covering, their health and strength are failing fast.³⁸

Thus, in addition to hunger, the poor, and those tasked with attempting to ameliorate their situation, were now faced with one of the worst winters in years. Funds to purchase food were difficult enough to attain but these would now have to be augmented in order to supply turf and straw. Moreover, the weather impacted on the health of those already rendered more vulnerable through hunger, thereby further exacerbating problems for persons working in committees or alone to aid the many in need.

EXTENSION OF RELIEF EFFORTS

With distress becoming more widespread, the burden on government-assisted relief committees was unrelenting. This resulted in an extension of work by those already established and the setting up of some new committees in areas previously unaffected. The Armagh City committee, in addition to issuing 1,500 weekly meal tickets, was now forced to distribute turf and straw to the needy, the extra expense being met by Lord John Beresford. Each applicant received a card with the word "turf" on it which was then brought to a shopkeeper who supplied the bearer with a quantity for three or four pence. On each visit, a letter from "turf" was cut off the card which, at the end of four weeks, was renewed. By mid-December three hundred such cards had been issued.³⁹ Meanwhile, due to the increased destitution in Middletown and Tynan, the local relief committee decided to establish soup kitchens in both towns as well as in Killylea, together with circularising absent proprietors in an attempt to gain subscriptions.⁴⁰

The last week of December saw the establishment of a relief committee for the parish of Loughgilly. This was a significant development as the area had previously been under the auspices of the Poyntzpass petty sessions committee.⁴¹ This move emphasised the fact that the original relief districts were now too large to cater for the increased level of demand. Examples from County Derry illustrate that the reshaping of relief boundaries was not restricted to County Armagh. In January a sub-committee was established at Feeny, mid-way between the committees sited at Claudy and Dungiven. With greater numbers in need of aid it was felt that the new committee would be "more convenient for the poor to attend".⁴² Similarly, in Newtownlimavady

a central committee initially served five parishes, but each parish eventually acquired its own sub-committee.⁴³ This need for greater efforts at a local level was highlighted in the following letter from Henry Disney, curate of Kildarton, to Lord Gosford in which he claimed, “I think I should be justly chargeable with very gross neglect of my duty (if not with murder), if I were to let anyone die of starvation within three miles of your Lordship’s house”.⁴⁴ He outlined his continuing relief efforts thus:

They have been refused relief both by the relief committee in Armagh Petty Session District and also by that of Markethill. There are c.450 of the poorest in the district to whom I sell meal, at 1d per lb, allowing ½lb a day for each member to the family and this costs more than £6 at the present high rate of prices. Besides this I give about 20 of the poorest and most destitute children in the neighbourhood their dinner daily in my own kitchen. But for this relief I am persuaded that several would have died of starvation. About 60 of the above individuals reside upon your Lordship’s property, although not under your Lordship, but they have no claims upon anyone who is able to assist them.⁴⁵

Disney’s concerns were mirrored by developments in Richhill where a committee was formed following a meeting in the local Presbyterian Church. The area had suffered heavily from the failure of the flax crop with the consequence that “the portion of the district, which used to be the most independent is now reduced to extensive distress”.⁴⁶ Instead of soliciting a voluntary subscription, the committee decided to ask the ratepayers of the area to contribute five pence per pound on the rateable value of their property or land. This sum was then to be matched by an amount from the Richhill Loan Fund – the total sum then being met with an equal contribution from the proprietors of the division. In this way the fund was enabled to purchase twenty-four hundredweight of meal at £20 per ton on a weekly basis, ensuring a distribution to 550 persons of five pounds of meal each throughout the next seven months. This was to be distributed gratuitously after a strict evaluation of the circumstances of each family

applying for relief. Management of the fund was assigned to a committee of two persons from each townland, along with representatives from the Loan Fund and local proprietors. Townlands which failed to contribute were debarred from any benefits accruing.⁴⁷

This last stipulation was also invoked by the Portrush relief committee in County Antrim where, due to the reluctance of landlords in the vicinity of the village to contribute to their fund, the committee decided to limit relief solely to the village inhabitants.⁴⁸ Likewise, in Ballee, County Down, any landlord not contributing to the local fund was left to meet the needs of those who resided on his land.⁴⁹ The efforts of those in Richhill were also evident in other localities. For example in Claudy, County Derry, the landed proprietors agreed to contribute in proportion to the poor law valuation of their properties.⁵⁰ Similarly, the landlords belonging to the three electoral divisions of Feeny relief district agreed to a voluntary assessment of six pence in the pound on their valuations.⁵¹ An independent committee in Tamlaghtfinlagan agreed to a equivalent assessment in conjunction with a contribution from the local Fishmonger's Company and subscriptions from other occupiers of the land.⁵²

Areas which had sufficient financial independence were thus enabled to establish a relief system which they thought best suited their particular circumstance. However, districts dependent on government financial aid, such as Keady, did not enjoy such benefits. There, the local committee informed the commissioners of their intention to supply food to widows with young families along with infirm persons unable to earn enough to support themselves. They justified their decision in light of "numerous

cases of destitution both of families and individuals who could not be relieved under the usual operations of the relief works".⁵³ However, as before, the commissioners refuted any notion of supplying food in aid of wages "even partially". They therefore notified the committee that if they pursued their original intention, they would be ineligible for financial aid in spite of the fact that in Keady "subscriptions fall far short of meeting the wants of the people".⁵⁴ Thus, after two weeks of deliberating, during which time the Armagh workhouse was inundated with applicants and the weather worsened, the committee capitulated and stated their intention of complying with government regulations. Hence, they announced that gratuitous aid would, in future, only be distributed to the infirm poor.⁵⁵ At the same time they emphasised that, if government aid was not immediately forthcoming, "we know not how to meet the appalling wants of our suffering and hitherto peaceful population".⁵⁶ Keady's dilemma was championed by the *Newry Telegraph* which commented:

The Government regulations must be changed – they are not adapted to the crisis – Sir Randolph Routh will find multitudinous of the working classes speedily converted into actually infirm poor. Insufficiency of food will soon reduce the stoutest. Seeing how the Union workhouses over the country are filled, the government ought not to stand on tribunals or shape their policy with so much consideration for the laws of political economy. Sir Randolph Routh may think his pet principles of political economy vastly more entitled to respect than the cravings of hunger; but still the people must not be stirred – it is possible to test too severely the loyalty and patience of a nation.⁵⁷

Disenchantment with government policy was accompanied by increased anger at the role of the Board of Works. Writing from Charlemont, where weaving was "no longer a resource", James Disney reported how "every member of the relief committee is wearied with applications to be put on the public works which are going forward at Blackwatertown".⁵⁸ Indeed, such demand led to friction between relief committees

and officers of the board. Lieutenant Griffith complained that proper transactions with the former were impeded due to the unwillingness of their secretaries to work without what they regarded as adequate remuneration.⁵⁹ In answer to a charge that a man recommended by the Newtownhamilton committee for a place on the works had been found dead at Drumatee Church, Griffith stated that many men were put on the works by those who had no authority to do so, specifically members of relief committees. He claimed that he had strict orders from the board to engage a limited number of men, yet the committees were intent on obtaining maximum employment for their localities and thus insisted on sending more than could be accommodated.⁶⁰

While officers of the board supported adherence to such regulations the feelings of many of those attempting to alleviate the condition of their tenants were epitomised in a letter from Sir James Stronge to Charles Trevelyan. Stating how “in consequence of the apparent apathy of the Board of Works with regard to giving employment to the people of the district things are beginning to assume a most alarming aspect” he continued:

The gentry in this part of the country are getting very impatient at what appears to them neglect of their representations on the part of the Board of Works, and they are beginning to be alarmed at the increased and increasing excitement of the people. Already symptoms of incipient Jacquerie are beginning to show themselves in this hitherto peaceful county...and outrages, I am sorry to say, are commencing, and God only knows to what a crisis matters will arrive at, unless something is done by the Government.⁶¹

Nevertheless, as was often reported before, even where public works were in operation they were found to be inadequate for the numbers applying. For example, in the area under the auspices of the Forkhill relief committee only 200 labourers, out of

a population of 8,000, were able to gain employment, a figure deemed to be “very limited in extent and value”.⁶² Furthermore, Edward Disney, writing from Newtownhamilton rectory, complained that all those demanding work were once again refused due to an insufficient supply of implements.⁶³

In light of such developments William Blacker gave the Relief Commissioners his assessment of future prospects for the county:

From the best judgment I can form we are in point of destitution, about a month behind that of the south and west and I cannot help apprehending that the lapse of that time will bring us pretty nearly to the same state.⁶⁴

Such a statement, from a man respected for his intimate knowledge of the people and the county, represented a startling revelation of the unprecedented extent of distress in Armagh. Events on the ground, however, indicated that his fears were well-founded as relief efforts struggled to keep pace with the increasing demands made on them. For example, in Tartaraghan a soup kitchen had been daily distributing sixty gallons either at one penny per quart or gratuitously⁶⁵ but this was now proving insufficient and the local Anglican curate appealed to the Irish Relief Association for help in obtaining another boiler of similar size.⁶⁶ In addition, shortage of food was beginning to result in the spread of disease, which was accelerating rapidly throughout the area. Indeed, so delicate were the recipients that they were advised by the relief committee to dilute their soup rations with water as it would otherwise be too strong for their weakened stomachs and cause death 'by violent diarrhoea. By early January, the number of reported deaths from starvation in the locality numbered around a dozen adults, while an unknown quantity of children, the aged and infirm, had been “cut off in great

numbers”.⁶⁷ The all-embracing nature of the crisis was evidenced in every aspect of life. The weekly Anglican congregation had declined from its usual average figure of 480 to between fifty and sixty, due to the fact that people had sold their clothes and, therefore, were unable to attend. School numbers also fell from a daily average of eighty pupils to around ten, the children also having no clothes. One correspondent related having visited homes in the district without a particle of food, clothing or even a stool – all having been previously sold for food.⁶⁸

In nearby Loughgall, soup was distributed twice weekly either at halfpence per quart or gratuitously, but the boiler of fourteen gallons was proving unequal to the demands of the poor, many of whom were reported as “bordering on starvation”.⁶⁹ Thus, the relief committee was forced both to open its soup kitchen for another day each week as well as supplying meal in addition to soup. One member bemoaned the lack of adequate financial resources and believed that they would be forced to witness “the heartrending spectacle of our fellow creatures dying around us in numbers without any possibility of our being able to prevent a calamity so dreadful”.⁷⁰

By mid-January, soup kitchens were opened in the neighbouring villages of Charlemont and Moy (Co. Tyrone) distributing thirty gallons per day at halfpence per quart along with bread. Even at this stage, funds were under threat given that committee expenses were almost £18 per week with demand increasing. In addition, indian corn and oatmeal was distributed to “poor industrious families” at the rate of one penny per pound, the maximum allowed being ten pounds per week to any family. Further indication of increasing hardship was the fact that it was deemed “absolutely

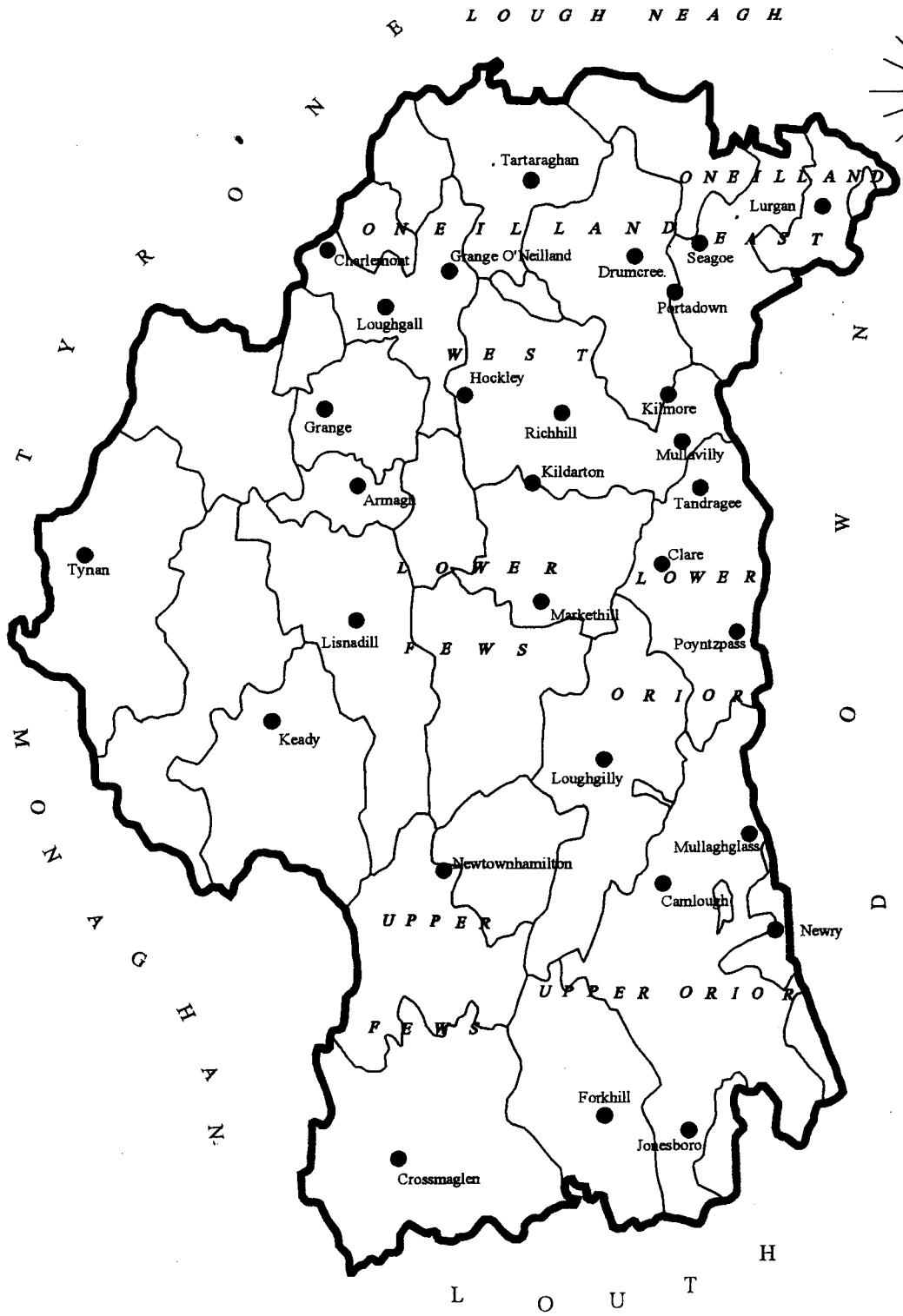
necessary” to allow weekly rations of twenty pounds to families containing nine or more members.⁷¹ Similar necessity saw the Forkhill committee dispense free food to all widows, orphans, aged, afflicted and disabled destitute who applied.⁷² Proof that distress was not confined to rural areas was the establishment of a soup kitchen in Richhill in the last week of January. This was the initiative of James Hogan, perpetual curate of the town, who organised the collection of £30 for the fund which was entirely distinct from the local relief committee. As in other districts, its emergence illustrated the growing desperation of the poor.⁷³ Indeed, by early February further new relief committees had been sanctioned in Grange, Kilmore and Tandragee.⁷⁴

The requirement for such official committees dealing with smaller areas was evidenced by the difficulties encountered by those encompassing large districts. For example, the Keady committee covered a petty sessions district of 34,000 acres containing a population of 17,107 and its members found it impossible to visit families throughout such a “vast district”. In an attempt to organise a more effective relief system, two individuals from each townland were given responsibility for establishing the needs of people in their locality. Only one soup shop had been initiated for the area and it was at full stretch, distributing fifty gallons per day at halfpence per quart. Yet, due to lack of sufficient funds, no bread was given with the soup.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, in Markethill where the committee served four or five parishes it had been found “impossible to get the machinery to work out any system in the relief district”. Thus, the relief effort was reorganised on a parochial basis, with clergy in each parish given responsibility over funds for local needs. This new system was regarded as being much more effective than the one previously in force.⁷⁶

The pattern of smaller relief districts saw the emergence of additional committees throughout February and March in Kildarton, Lisnadill, Grange O' Neilland and Clare (see map 2).⁷⁷ The latter served twelve townlands which were not included in either the Markethill or Tandragee districts and was funded by local landlords and farmers agreeing to an assessment on their land in order to raise a subscription.⁷⁸ A similar scheme was effected in Kildarton where local farmers paid a tax of fourpence per acre which if contributed in its entirety would have yielded a maximum of £80. But, with weekly expenditure averaging £12, such an initiative would only supply the needs of the poor for a matter of weeks.⁷⁹ Around the same time, a soup kitchen was opened in Forkhill specifically for the benefit of inhabitants of the village with 200 families receiving daily relief therefrom.⁸⁰ However, nowhere was the clamour for relief more evident than in the urban centres of Armagh and Newry.

On 14 January, the Armagh Borough Relief Committee dispensed 500 quarts of soup, two-thirds of which was consumed on the premises, as part of a thrice-weekly distribution.⁸¹ Two weeks later, this amount had increased to 2,400 quarts per week⁸² and by mid-February, with "great distress continuing to prevail in the town and district of the committee", it was decided to commence a daily disbursement.⁸³ Thus, with the cooking carried out by two women from the workhouse, aided by two male inmates, the committee expanded its relief mechanism to such an extent that 1,800 rations of soup were distributed gratuitously each day.⁸⁴ In addition, it was decided to offer 1,600 applicants the opportunity to purchase 3½ lbs of oatmeal at one penny per pound, while 500 received fresh straw and turf.⁸⁵ The committee also endeavoured to provide coffins to those unable to purchase such for relatives.⁸⁶

County Armagh: Government - Assisted Relief Committees, October 1846 to April 1847



MAP 2

This extensive mode of relief was made possible by private subscription and a charity concert given by the Armagh Harmonic Society in the Tontine Rooms, although the local population were chided by the press for not supporting the latter in the numbers anticipated.⁸⁷ However, there can be little doubt that the system would not have prevailed without the aid of Lord John Beresford who made good the loss incurred on any purchases by the committee.⁸⁸ Indeed, William Blacker in acknowledging that Armagh City was “highly favoured”, remarked of Beresford that, “his charity and munificence are unbounded even in localities that might be considered as having no claim on him”.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, a similar level of paternalism and benevolence was absent in Newry where the efforts of the relief committee were in stark contrast to those in Armagh. By early February, the Newry Relief Committee had elicited a public subscription of £1,200 but, due to apparent inefficiency among its members, relief lists were not regularly revised.⁹⁰ Thus, in the midst of a deteriorating situation where new applicants were emerging every day, the local press alleged that the relief body was not meeting the needs of the people.⁹¹ Further controversy arose as a result of a decision to refuse any gratuitous distribution of food to 1,200 applicants, some committee members feeling that to do otherwise would simply encourage more of the poor to enter the town.⁹² However, by charging one penny per ration, the committee incurred the wrath of the *Newry Telegraph* which deemed the stipulation “absurd and worse”, lambasting what it called the “political economists of the soup kitchen committee”.⁹³ It further criticised their apparent unwillingness to differentiate between the claims of the local poor and those intruding from outside the town. Specifically, it

noted that large numbers had been moving in from the nearby rural townlands of the Commons, Grinan, Crieve and Killeavy, the latter two owned by landlords with “no benevolent design in contemplation”. Remarking how the town had been “latterly infested with miserable-looking mendicants”, the paper painted a picture of the hopeless condition of those seeking aid:

They daily travel into town, in quest of food, not obtainable in their own localities. The sunken eyes, pale and wasted features, attenuated frames, the limbs as nerveless as if they had been palsy-stricken, are daily witnessed on our streets.⁹⁴

The relief committee was further vilified due to its refusal to distribute free fuel and straw, as had been done in Armagh, but as a result of such public pressure they eventually agreed to drop their “penny tax” and, from the first week of March, all applicants deemed eligible for relief, received gratuitous supplies.⁹⁵

However, by this stage the nature of the crisis was changing. Together with hunger, those responsible for distributing aid now had to contend with the spread of disease resulting either from lack of food or subsistence on vitamin-deficient and under-cooked alternatives. By February, all parts of the county were reporting widespread disease, as the following examples from applications to the Irish Relief Association and the Society of Friends illustrate:

Kilmore: much sickness, especially bowel complaints, from cold and hunger.⁹⁶

Keady/Derrynoose: much sickness especially dysentery.⁹⁷

Newtownhamilton: diarrhoea and dysentery prevail to an alarming extent, together with fever.⁹⁸

Loughgilly: There is more illness than has ever been known – much low fever, with dysentery to a fearful extent; very great numbers, especially aged persons, have died.⁹⁹

Baleek: A great deal of destitution and sickness – both dysentery and fever are daily rapidly increasing.¹⁰⁰

Flurrybridge: Fever not so bad, but dysentery numerous and fatal.¹⁰¹

Charlemont: Dysentery in almost every house and frightfully prevalent; fever also and not a doctor to look after the poor.¹⁰²

Ballymoyer: Fever and dysentery prevail, the latter to an unprecedented degree.¹⁰³

Clare: Destitution is very great and fever and dysentery are rapidly increasing.¹⁰⁴

Kildarton: Have barely kept the people from starvation who are fast sinking by disease brought on by want.¹⁰⁵

Jonesboro: Numbers have died of dysentery and fever.¹⁰⁶

Lisnadill: Very great poverty – many cases of dysentery and poverty.¹⁰⁷

Richhill: Much sickness, especially diarrhoea and fever.¹⁰⁸

Kilcluney: Sickness latterly very much on the increase – fever, dysentery and dropsical swellings.¹⁰⁹

In addition to the destitute and sick, relief committees now found themselves catering for a class which had previously managed to avoid the need for alms. Until the early months of 1847 relief measures had largely been confined to families of labourers and cottiers while farmers owning fifteen acres or more had been able to provide for their own families. However, the continued period of destitution meant that some of the latter were now forced to seek help. The possibility of such a development had been alluded to on 4 December by Henry Disney, curate of Kildarton, who commented that, “some farmers are sending corn to Armagh but several of those even owning fifteen to thirty acres tell me they will not have enough for themselves and their families.”¹¹⁰ By March, this situation of helplessness had indeed been reached, with Reverend James Mauleverer lamenting how “even those who, it might have been hoped, would have been able to weather the storm, are sunk into difficulties and credit is almost gone”.¹¹¹ Likewise, Reverend Henry Archdall noted how many in Grange O’Neilland “who had something” were now utterly destitute, while those able to work were incapacitated by sickness resulting from malnutrition.¹¹²

A similar change in circumstances was recognised by James Disney of Charlemont

who remarked:

People who previously refused food from “a proper feeling” are now forced to ask for it...Distress is every day spreading and deepening and the little stock which the petty farmers had by them is exhausted and a new class of support is about to be thrown on the bounty of the public.¹¹³

Underpinning Disney’s opinions were those of a neighbouring clergyman who, in commenting on the “great and general distress” in and around Moy, stated that his district was “still not as bad as that in the adjoining Charlemont district”.¹¹⁴ Further to the east, Fr. Patrick Quinn, Parish Priest of Kilmore, complained that even with three relief committees in the parish two-thirds of those in want were left unaided:

Destitution has been sorely felt for some months past and it is daily increasing. There are hundreds of families in this locality, with four, six – aye, some, ten acres of land, suffering the severest privations – privations unknown beyond their own threshold except by a confidant. Their actual state of misery they keep a secret – first, from a spirit of decency and secondly, seeing no immediate hopes of relief likely to arise from its being known.¹¹⁵

Reverend Gilbert Percy of Ballymoyer encapsulated the new difficulty by stating how, “persons looked on as comfortable farmers last year are now eagerly seeking employment on public works”.¹¹⁶ The reality of such observations was further reflected in the comments of some of those charged with enacting relief policy such as Captain Glascock who remarked, grimly, “the more I see and think of the existing and fast-increasing destitution, the more I feel persuaded that it is not in the power of any Government to feed a starving, dense population”.¹¹⁷ Thus, in absolute despair, and with no alternative, many thousands turned to the workhouses in unprecedented numbers in the hope of surviving the worst of the winter months.

THE ROLE OF THE WORKHOUSES

NEWRY

While the impact of the first blight on local workhouses had been minimal, involving only a change of diet to replace potatoes, indications by the late summer of 1846 were that this would not be the case after news of the total devastation of the crop. Thus, a strong sense of urgency was reflected in a circular from the Poor Law Commissioners to the Newry guardians warning them to expect a great increase of poverty and distress among the labouring population of the union. It was also suggested that the board review all contracts for provisions together with an inventory of stocks of bedding, clothing and the general state of finances in order to be prepared in due time for any increase in the number of inmates.¹¹⁸

Indicative of future problems was the fact that by late October, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, Edward Senior, was reporting overcrowding in the male day room, male and female infirm wards and the female hospital.¹¹⁹ Anticipating the increased numbers likely to seek relief a door was created in the wall between the upper female idiot ward and the female hospital, thereby enhancing hospital accommodation. Similarly, the straw store was converted into a day ward to allow for greater numbers of infirm male inmates.¹²⁰ Such renovations proved essential as, in the weeks that followed, workhouse admissions exceeded all previous patterns of entry and from 14 November to 26 December there were 532 admissions compared to 150 for the same period in 1845.¹²¹ Indeed, on 12 December, after 105 paupers gained entry, the workhouse was officially declared filled to capacity¹²² as were twenty-one of forty-three workhouses in Ulster at the end of the year. Included in this group were those

which catered for the larger centres of population, such as Belfast, Ballymena, Cavan, Derry, Lisburn, Omagh and Armagh.¹²³

In early December the Newry union medical officer reported twelve cases of fever and indicated his apprehension that an increase of disease was extremely likely due to the shortage of hospital accommodation and subsequent inadequate medical facilities. In an attempt to delay the inevitable, the doctor recommended more clothing for women and children and the substitution of lentil broth for treacle, the latter reported as being responsible for bowel complaints.¹²⁴ Displaying their lack of familiarity with local circumstances, the Poor Law Commissioners advised the guardians to send any future fever patients to Newry Fever Hospital, believing that such an arrangement already existed. They were soon disabused of any such thoughts when the board reminded them that the fever hospital was an independent institution unconnected with the poor law authorities, admission being gained solely by means of a subscriber's ticket.¹²⁵

In the midst of such correspondence, all available space within the workhouse was appropriated. With the female section of the house reported as "very much crowded", the boys' garret was converted into an additional female ward, the boys being placed instead in the schoolroom.¹²⁶ Overcrowding was exacerbated by the spread of disease, with fever on the increase while mortality was "greater than at any similar period since the house was opened".¹²⁷ Indeed, the situation would have been considerably worse were it not for the fact that many cases of whooping cough and other diseases were simply refused admission for want of room.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, and maintaining a policy adopted since the opening of the house, the guardians sanctioned the inclusion

of flesh meat in the inmates' dinner on Christmas Day – in spite of the fact that they had just refused a tender for oatmeal at £20 per ton.¹²⁹

By early January 1847, fever, in particular, together with dysentery and diarrhoea had taken a hold in the house. The master had suffered an attack of bilious fever while the matron resigned through ill-health. The medical officer reported that his services were now required four hours per day due to the fact that the majority of paupers admitted in November and December had entered “in a wretched state of destitution and labouring under disease”.¹³⁰ In an attempt to effect an instant remedy, he recommended alterations to improve the ventilation of the house, together with more clothing for infants, children and delicate adults, and dry straw for bedding.¹³¹ The guardians immediately co-operated with these requests including the most extreme proposal, that no further paupers be admitted to the workhouse until the epidemic was under control.¹³² Thus, for a period of four weeks, entries were strictly limited to cases of dire necessity and from 30 November until 13 December only forty-five people were deemed eligible for access. Given the huge numbers entering in the weeks prior to this period there is little doubt that the effective closure of the workhouse to all but the truly destitute would have heightened the distress of many.¹³³ In other unions a similar policy of restricting admissions resulted in the closure of the Omagh workhouse from February to July while a meeting of the Magherafelt guardians in January decided to reject almost 300 applications, the workhouse containing 200 above its 900 capacity.¹³⁴ In a further attempt to limit the spread of fever, and the increasingly vigorous measles infection, the Newry guardians restricted visitors to the wall of the workhouse, the porter then sending for inmates to meet them at that point.

A subsequent constraint saw all religious services being attended on alternate Sundays by females and males, a policy also adopted by the Belfast board of guardians.¹³⁵

In the midst of a disease-ridden workhouse, financial pressures increased on the board both from within and without and it is clear that due to the increased expenditure on medicines, the cost of providing relief for inmates surged. For example, in comparing the half-yearly accounts for March 1846 and March 1847, the average weekly cost of a pauper increased from 1/11 to 2/2, a small rise, but significant when multiplied by the numbers concerned.¹³⁶ Such financial difficulties were aggravated by renewed demands for payment of long-standing loans. On 7 November a request for £265 had been received from the Public Works Loan Commissioners, to be followed in quick succession by demands for repayment of £980 and a bill for £861, originally solicited on 22 May 1845.¹³⁷ Given the condition of the county, rates were proving extremely difficult to collect and constant references appeared in the minute books to “want of funds”.¹³⁸ Indeed, throughout the period from 2 January to 31 July 1847 – the worst of the famine – there were only five weeks, out of a total of twenty-seven, when the union finances showed a balance in favour of the guardians. It was thus common for the weekly balance against the union to exceed £800, even reaching £944 on 29 May.¹³⁹ In contrast, analysis shows that between 19 October 1844 and 26 December 1846, a total of 103 weeks, there were only four occasions on which the union finances were against the guardians, the maximum amount being £34/01/08 on 14 November 1846.¹⁴⁰

In view of their dire financial situation, the board requested the Poor Law

Commissioners to initiate moves for obtaining a loan of £1000 from the union treasurer, the Belfast Bank, until rates could be collected to repay same.¹⁴¹ However, given that this institution had been refusing to honour union cheques, such a move appears to have been made more in desperation than with any genuine hope of obtaining aid. On 23 January 1847, with the bank having refused a cheque for £198, the board announced that it was “impossible to raise funds sufficient to maintain the house” and urged the commissioners “with as much expedition as possible” to support a request for a twelve-month government loan of £2,000.¹⁴² In a petition they stated the situation of the union as follows:

The workhouse...is filled to suffocation and hundreds of paupers are, each succeeding board day, clamouring for admission, none of whom can be received... The most prompt and energetic measures are required to save the people from starvation – the measures adopted by parliament and the executive government having completely failed to effect that object.¹⁴³

The sense of urgency was heightened by the comments of one guardian, Joshua Magee, who reported that between 24 January and 6 February, 315 paupers “in the most abject state of destitution” claimed admission to the workhouse. Of that number “not more than eight or nine deserted children were received”. He ended by saying that “unless relief be speedily afforded, the doors of the workhouse must be opened and the pauper inmates turned out.”¹⁴⁴

The Poor Law Commissioners, who were themselves subject to the restraints of the Treasury, stated that while they were “deeply concerned at the destitution prevailing in the Newry union”, there was no possibility of obtaining a government loan and suggested as an alternative an application to the bank. They further warned that

utilisation of poor rates to pay interest on money borrowed to defray current union expenses was “undoubtedly illegal” and urged the guardians to consider the possibility of obtaining a private subscription to cover such charges.¹⁴⁵ Given the financial plight of the board, and so many of the union population, such a suggestion at this time seems incredulous and reflected a great deal of insensitivity on the part of the commissioners. The board was £2,000 in debt and contractors had refused to furnish any further provisions. At the same time, additional accommodation was being sought in Monaghan Street, while schoolhouses were being built in the boys’ and girls’ yards – all of which meant that further money was required by the guardians.¹⁴⁶

Increased hardship was occasioned by the necessity of establishing a fever hospital on the workhouse site due to the huge levels of disease. This had been highlighted by the prompt refusal of the town fever hospital to contemplate the admission of forty fever patients from the workhouse, despite the fact that the board was prepared to meet any expenses incurred.¹⁴⁷ However, after initial inquiries the poor law commission architect, Wilkinson, advised there was insufficient space on the grounds to allow for such a building and informed the board that they would have to purchase a one-acre site adjacent to the workhouse.¹⁴⁸ Such an apparently straightforward procedure became complicated when the landowner, despite both the board’s difficulties and urgent need, stipulated that he would sell only a four acre site.¹⁴⁹ Thus, it was not until 17 July, after much discussion, that a site for a new workhouse fever hospital, extending to four acres and costing almost £300, was purchased between the workhouse and a stream at Garr’s Bridge.¹⁵⁰

By mid-February, fever was causing havoc in the workhouse with the master, matron, medical officer, schoolmaster and schoolmistress all being incapacitated.¹⁵¹ Within two weeks the master and schoolmaster were dead and the board was forced to engage a temporary assistant master at a cost of £1 per week, while an assistant clerk was appointed to relieve some of the “onerous duties” bearing on the union clerk.¹⁵² Indeed, the latter tendered his resignation on 20 February and had only remained “against [his] best wishes” after supplication from members of the board.¹⁵³ One month later, on 20 March, there were 362 workhouse inmates under medical treatment, principally for fever, dysentery, measles and whooping cough.¹⁵⁴ The chaotic condition of the house was highlighted by the fact that, due to the illness of some offices, and deaths of others, there was reported to be “little classification at present”.¹⁵⁵ Indicative of the problems faced by the Newry guardians was their decision to virtually prohibit any admissions throughout March, the total for that month being twenty.¹⁵⁶ With the workhouse full, the board received a setback in their attempt to augment accommodation when informed that the stores on Monaghan Street, for which they had been negotiating, had been let to another party.¹⁵⁷ An offer from Reverend Robert Henry to sell them a barracks in Flurrybridge, which, if nothing else, would have considerably aided his relief efforts in that district, was refused, due to it being “at the extreme limits of the union”.¹⁵⁸

There was better news for the guardians when the medical officer reported a considerable reduction in fever cases. Indeed, by 10 April, he noted that the contagion had “deserted the workhouse”, the sanitary condition therein being “very good just now”.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, if the medical condition of the house was improving, albeit

very slowly, the same could not be said of the union finances and by 17 April there was a weekly balance of more than £942 against the guardians.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the board, “despite every exertion” in forlornly attempting to collect poor rates, was once more forced to apply to the commissioners for a loan of £2,000 in advance upon the poor rates – despite the fact that both parties realised any collection of the latter was highly doubtful.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, they felt there was no feasible alternative, given both their standing with the bank and the fact that local contractors were owed £500 for bread, meal and other essentials.¹⁶²

The huge influx of paupers anticipated by the Poor Law Commissioners in August 1846 had thus brought Newry workhouse to breaking point. The house was full by Christmas and the congregation of so many poor, ill-fed people had resulted in huge levels of disease. A similar situation was manifested in the other main workhouse in the county to which the poor, as in Newry, repaired in unprecedented numbers.

ARMAGH

By mid-October 1846, admission to Armagh workhouse was unrelenting. Prior to this period, the highest weekly figure gaining entry had been fifty-three on 7 February, some nine months earlier.¹⁶³ However, this figure was surpassed in the latter part of 1846 when, from 10 October to 26 December, there were a total of 1,256 admissions the lowest weekly figure being fifty-two and the highest 181.¹⁶⁴ For the corresponding period, 11 October to 27 December 1845, the total number admitted was 265, tangible evidence that the blight of 1846 was proving much more devastating than the partial failure one year earlier.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, by 12 December, the workhouse had reached its

limit (1,000 paupers) and three days later, at a specially-convened board meeting, it was decided to increase capacity to 1,200 by admitting paupers to unoccupied dormitories in the attic.¹⁶⁶ Although this move met with the approval of the Poor Law Commissioners, the medical officer, Dr. Leslie, requested a further special meeting as, in his opinion, both the main house and fever hospital were overcrowded.¹⁶⁷

At the meeting, Leslie stated that fever had surfaced in every part of the house resulting in sixty-four patients being treated for the disease. He thus advocated that the attic over the surgical hospital be set apart for fever patients whilst that above the dining hall be reserved for those labouring under non-infectious diseases. In this way it would prove unnecessary to rent extra accommodation, while the sick could be separated from the main body of the house and attended to “with least inconvenience and expense”. Further informing the meeting of many delicate children in the school, nursery, and hospital, resulting in a great number of deaths, Leslie advocated the fumigation of every part of the house, together with cleansing of bedding.¹⁶⁸ All such recommendations were unanimously adopted by the board, together with his plea for a medical assistant given that “the duties of the situation are now so overwhelming”.¹⁶⁹ This request was immediately complied with and a local practitioner, Dr. Wilson, was appointed on a salary of one guinea per week.¹⁷⁰ However, he resigned in a matter of days, citing the board’s unwillingness to specify the time he would be required and a further assistant, Dr. Riggs, was assigned the post at the same rate of remuneration.¹⁷¹

In the meantime, due to increased workloads, both the schoolmaster and mistress received an additional £5 in their annual salary.¹⁷² Significantly, Dr. Leslie “his duties having increased considerably since September last”, requested a salary increase from

£80 to £100, but this was refused.¹⁷³ The decision obviously irked the medical officer who outlined his grievance in a lengthy letter to the board. Claiming that his duties had doubled since September, he revealed how he employed his son as assistant for several weeks, without remuneration from the board – otherwise he would have required an assistant some four months previous to his request for such. To highlight his plight, he noted that the first assistant, Dr. Wilson, had remained at his post for only one day “when he saw the labour and risks of life for so small a sum”.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Leslie also displayed animosity towards Dr. Riggs alleging the latter’s knowledge of pharmacy and compounding medicine was “much too limited to enable him to relieve me” and, more significantly, had actually been responsible for making patients unwell. Indicative of his personal ill-feeling towards his assistant, Leslie threatened to resign unless he was replaced and stated he would not be responsible “for happenings with Riggs”.¹⁷⁵ However, the board, having requested and received satisfactory testimonials as to the ability of the assistant, decided to effectively separate each man in his working conditions. Thus, Leslie was appointed as medical officer over one half of the workhouse, responsible for prescribing for patients and compounding medicines, while Riggs carried out similar tasks in the other half.¹⁷⁶

Putting aside their personal animosity, both doctors agreed that the establishment could exceed the commission-sanctioned maximum of 1,175, without endangering the health of inmates and thus advocated a new limit of 1,300 consisting of 1,000 in the main workhouse and 300 in the hospitals.¹⁷⁷ Less than one week later, however, on 13 February, the new limit had been surpassed, with 1,303 in the house.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, January and February 1847 witnessed a total of 1,343 admissions with the highest

weekly figure being 212 on 30 January and the lowest 104 in the last week of February.¹⁷⁹ To give an idea of the huge problems created by such a vast influx of poor, half-starved and disease-ridden people, the total figure for these two months exceeded the yearly total for 1844, when 946 paupers were admitted and born, and for 1845, when the figure was 836.¹⁸⁰ Such statistics reflected the desperation of many to maintain a grip on life for, as one source commented, they represented “a proof of the destitution, which exists, for the most immeasurable reluctance exists here to taking shelter in the Poor House”.¹⁸¹

Not only were new applicants foregoing a long-standing policy of avoiding the workhouse, they were prepared to enter its confines in the knowledge that disease therein was rife. Indeed, from January to March, “a great mortality prevailed in it”¹⁸² with a total of 360 deaths.¹⁸³ Throughout this period the proportion of inmates dying averaged 2.35%, significantly above both the provincial and national averages of 1.77% and 1.82%. The figure for the Newry workhouse (1.94%) was slightly greater than either of the latter but less than that for Armagh. In ten weeks out of thirteen, Armagh’s mortality rate was greater than either the provincial or national average while Newry achieved this statistic on seven occasions. Indeed, both institutions realised figures well above the average throughout February and March with Armagh peaking at 4.3% in the first week of March and Newry’s highest return being 4.2% in the middle of February. However, as will be discussed later, the mortality rate in Newry workhouse during the famine years was well below that of any other workhouse serving the county due to the proximity of the privately-financed fever hospital. It is also worth pointing out that while both workhouses had relatively high

mortality rates during early 1847, they were still well behind those suffered in Lurgan where the rate peaked at 10.4% in early February.¹⁸⁴

Given both the crowded condition of the Armagh workhouse and the huge level of fatalities, urgent measures were required to arrest the spread of disease. The guardians therefore called a special meeting in the local courthouse, held there as the workhouse was deemed too dangerous, and were informed that both doctors and schoolteachers, along with the workhouse master, had succumbed to fever.¹⁸⁵ The urgency of replacing Leslie and Riggs was exemplified by the board's willingness to allow two new doctors – Lavery and Savage – to specify a “liberal payment” for their services.¹⁸⁶ The meeting also heard that every possible source of alternative accommodation within the workhouse had been exhausted and thus, they opted to utilise a house, previously fitted up as a cholera hospital in the epidemic of 1832-33, for the accommodation of convalescent patients. Having been whitewashed and cleansed, twenty-eight patients were removed to its twenty-two beds under the charge of the workhouse porter.¹⁸⁷ Such numbers represented only a small percentage of the overall total in the workhouse and it was decided to erect temporary dormitories to accommodate one hundred convalescents while two of the wards on the third storey, previously for the accommodation of boys and girls, were adapted for those patients with non-infectious diseases.¹⁸⁸ Further innovation in mid-March saw the replacement of stirabout with rice in the diet, a move regarded as essential in reducing bowel complaints. Thus, the adult dinner consisted of seven ounces of rice or nine ounces of bread and one quart of soup; for children the same ingredients applied but amounts differed according to age.¹⁸⁹

Due to similar overcrowding in other workhouses, measures akin to those in Armagh and Newry were enacted. The Omagh guardians sanctioned both the construction of a dormitory over the dining hall and the fitting up of a straw store as a temporary fever hospital, the latter measure also being utilised by the Clogher board. In addition, the Omagh guardians relinquished their boardroom in order to provide enhanced sleeping capacity.¹⁹⁰ At the same, time temporary wooden sheds to provide more room or to act as fever accommodation had been constructed in Belfast, Banbridge, Derry and Lurgan while the boards in Clones, Enniskillen and Dungannon opted to hire houses in order to cope with demand.¹⁹¹

At this period the crisis in Armagh workhouse deepened and on 20 March it was announced that Dr. Leslie had died of fever while Savage had resigned his post and Lavery was unable to carry out duties due to illness.¹⁹² As a temporary measure, Dr. James Leslie, brother of the deceased medical officer, was appointed, while the board applied to the Central Board of Health in Dublin for a permanent replacement.¹⁹³ In April, in a further attempt to counteract the terrible effects of fever, a new boiler and washhouse, exclusively for washing the clothes of fever patients, were erected.¹⁹⁴ At the same time it was decided that all those being admitted with fever should either go directly to the fever hospital or, if numbering more than fifty, to the recently - constructed fever sheds with capacity for one hundred.¹⁹⁵ However, this order was rescinded shortly afterwards when, with 300 such cases in the house, the guardians took the drastic step of stopping any further admissions of fever sufferers. Furthermore, and citing the sickness and mortality consequent upon overcrowding in other houses, the board were forced to cease all admissions by provisional order,

restricting entry to cases of “extreme urgency only”.¹⁹⁶

Such restrictions also served to ease the burgeoning financial pressure on the guardians resulting largely from the cost of providing extra medical assistance to fever sufferers. Until December 1846 the average weekly cost of each pauper was 1/5; by January 1847, this figure was 1/9 but from 20 March to 17 July it remained at, or above, two shillings, peaking at 2/6 on 19 June.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the guardians appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of adopting a more economical diet in place of the “great expense of the hospital diet”.¹⁹⁸ In the meantime, the union clerk informed the Poor Law Commissioners that, with no funds in the bank, and £1,700 owed to local contractors, they wished to obtain a government loan, in anticipation of a total rate struck of £9,000.¹⁹⁹ However, with rates arrears in early May totalling £8,688 and average weekly lodgements being just over £400, the financial position of the union was dire.²⁰⁰ Further to this, on 8 May, with twenty-five more patients than beds, the medical officer advised against any more admissions of those with contagious diseases.²⁰¹ This was merely the prelude to a critical development one week later when the guardians informed local relief committees that, as the house was now full, such committees would have to deal with all cases of destitution until further notice.²⁰² The Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, Phelan, had recommended limiting admissions to 1,200, but by this stage numbers in the house had surpassed 1,400.²⁰³ Thus, from early May until August, the union minute book reported on each admission day “a considerable number rejected for want of room”.²⁰⁴

Conditions in Armagh and Newry workhouses graphically illustrate the impact of the

1846 blight on a population which had previously displayed abhorrence of both institutions. The fact that such huge numbers chose the confines of workhouse life revealed the extent of destitution amongst much of the population of County Armagh. However, the virtual closure of the workhouses meant that the burden of relieving the sick fell upon either a few privately-financed medical institutions or local relief committees, already inundated with demands for food.

THE FEVER EPIDEMIC

While the poor attempted to feed themselves in the midst of rising prices they were forced to subsist increasingly on a vitamin-deficient diet. Almost inevitably, this resulted in the spread of disease throughout the county. Between September and December 1846, there had been a gradual increase in typhus fever cases in Newry Fever Hospital and Dispensary with the number of monthly admissions rising from fifty-one in September and October, to sixty-one in November and by the end of the year all the hospital beds had been filled with a December intake of seventy-eight patients.²⁰⁵ Alongside fever, there were 400 cases of dysentery which began in September and had gradually eased by December, though the medical officer of the establishment, in making a plea for more beds, stated how, from October, they were “inundated” with demands for recommendatory tickets.²⁰⁶ Indeed, in the early weeks of 1847 medical reports from throughout the county were characterised by mention of bowel disorders and gradual spread of fever. The medical officer of Armagh City Fever Hospital commented that dysentery and diarrhoea were “so very common as to be almost universal” while general dropsy was “very common in all ages and sexes”.²⁰⁷ However, the picture from various rural localities was unclear and although

by February areas such as Forkhill and Kildarton reported severe dysentery they claimed that fever was just in the process of spreading.²⁰⁸ In other districts a variety of diseases were proving equally devastating in their effects. Mullavilly reported fever and dysentery as very prevalent, “affecting all the poor”²⁰⁹ while in Newtownhamilton these contagions, together with diarrhoea, were daily increasing.²¹⁰ The variable nature of such diseases was illustrated by the fact that some areas reported little encroachment; for example, William Blacker on 26 February, was able to state that the area of Mullabrack and Kilcluney was free from fever and dysentery “which are raging around us”.²¹¹ This, he opined, was due to the “timely relief afforded by the almost unlimited employment” given by Lord Gosford and the Reverend Dr. Blacker and the “efficient relief since provided”.²¹² Though no specific reason was advanced there was similarly reported to be no great level of disease or fever in the Charlemont/Moy district.²¹³

As February gave way to March, fever became increasingly virulent with the *Armagh Guardian* commenting how it was “causing alarm among all classes”.²¹⁴ Indicative of such anxiety was the decision of the Armagh relief committee to distribute rice four times per week along with soup on three further days. It was hoped that this initiative would help to stop the spread of diarrhoea and the consequent descent into dysentery and fever among the 1,000 people receiving rations.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, the report of Armagh Fever Hospital for March suggested that such attempts were proving fruitless:

Typhus fever of a most malignant character still increasing, attacking all classes, ages and sexes; dysentery, most prevalent; diarrhoea very frequent, very severe and in many cases fatal. Catarrhal fever increasing and extremely fatal to the very young and very old. General dropsy becoming quite universal. General health very bad.²¹⁶

All rural localities now began to report a significant level of illness and disease even in previously unaffected districts such as Mullabrack. From the latter, William Blacker stated that fever of a “very malignant type” had been brought into the parish by persons leaving the Armagh workhouse and that there was “every probability of it spreading in every direction”.²¹⁷ This reference to the Armagh workhouse was highly relevant. With that institution, together with its Newry counterpart, filled to capacity, many applicants for relief had mingled outside workhouses with those from other districts suffering from fever and hence workhouses and their environs acted as incubators for the spread of disease. As both independent fever hospitals in Armagh and Newry were also inundated, it is likely that many people had to return home unaided and unaware of their infection. Hence, throughout March those seeking aid from voluntary organisations supplied a depressing gazetteer of affliction:

Mullavilly: Destitution and sickness is decidedly on the increase – the longer people exist on a single meal in one or two days, the worse they must become. All the families in the parish have had dysentery; many have died and are dying of it.²¹⁸

Loughgilly/Markethill: The condition of our area is deplorable – dysentery and fever are sweeping off multitudes. There have been no deaths from famine, but insufficiency of food has unquestionably brought on the state to which dysentery puts the finish.²¹⁹

Mullaglass: Sickness is very much more prevalent than before and indicative of lack of sufficient food.²²⁰

In Loughgall fever had chiefly attacked the “lower classes – the majority of those affected having been previously in bad health” and the local medical superintendent noted how the epidemic “materially declined as the poor were better fed”.²²¹ Similarly, from Fatham, Flurrybridge, Newtownhamilton and Tandragee, came news of bowel complaints and fever, while in Kilmore “destitution, and disease consequent on destitution, still prevail to an alarming extent”.²²² One correspondent, from Hockley,

gave a chillingly brief synopsis of his locality thus: "Disease has burnt on us in great force".²²³

Due to reports of fever "creeping among the middle classes",²²⁴ the editor of the *Newry Telegraph* urged that means be pursued to improve the health of that town and thereby reduce the potential for disease:

Let measures be instantly taken for cleansing and purifying the back lanes of the town and the cellars of which Newry boasts such superabundance. They are the ordinary receptacles of resident and strolling beggars, and fever cases, not few in number, have already been detected in these overcrowded and uncleanly abodes of poverty.²²⁵

With no abatement of the spread of disease the government introduced the Fever Act by which relief committees constituted under the Temporary Relief Act of 1847 were empowered to initiate measures to counteract the development of contagion. The provisions of the new act were immediately enacted by the Armagh relief committee, which employed labourers to whitewash the homes of the poor and clean courts and alleys. The committee also undertook to provide free coffins to all who applied for them and to engage men to patrol the streets of the city to prevent the ingress of strolling beggars.²²⁶ The necessity for such measures was emphasised by the death from malignant fever of Joseph Johnston, poor law guardian for Glenaul, whose demise illustrated that no class or sect was immune from the epidemic now sweeping the county.²²⁷ Indeed, statistics from Newry Fever Hospital showed the population to be in the midst of an unprecedented outbreak of disease. In comparing the period January to August 1847 with that for the previous year there was a 350% increase in admissions from 215 to 749. At the same time, deaths more than quadrupled from

eighteen to seventy-six.²²⁸

Such enhanced demand on independently-run institutions was evident throughout the county. For instance, the medical officer of Markethill/Mountnorris dispensary stated that the number of fever cases was “unprecedented in the annals of the institution”, revealing that without the appointment of an assistant he would have been unable to cope.²²⁹ In Middletown, meanwhile, the local fever hospital and infirmary, maintained by the trustees of the charity of Bishop Sterne, was forced to double its number of beds in a desperate attempt to maintain pace with the demands of the population.²³⁰

Such developments resulted in a meeting of local medical practitioners in Armagh market house on 14 May 1847 at which it was decided to recommend further hospital accommodation in order to provide proper facilities for those in need and separate the diseased from the healthy.²³¹ Within days, under the Fever Act, a temporary fever hospital with fifty beds based in Keady was sanctioned for the electoral divisions of Keady, Crossmore and Derrynoose. By the end of May, further temporary hospitals had been established at Loughgall - forty beds for the divisions of Loughgall, Charlemont, Kilmore, Annaghmore, Killeen and Richhill - and Armagh, where one hundred beds were proposed for the divisions of Armagh, Markethill, Killeen, Clady and Hamiltonsbawn.²³² The decision to make Armagh the centre of medical relief for the surrounding districts met with strong local opposition. William Paton stated his belief that the sick of each district should be catered for under the auspices of their own local relief committees, his opinion no doubt the result of a fear that a central hospital would result in a huge influx of disease-ridden poor into Armagh.²³³ Thus,

when the Central Board of Health in Dublin was informed of such concerns, they rescinded the original order, sanctioning instead a fifty-bed hospital in the city for local patients only.²³⁴ Those divisions previously deemed to be under the auspices of the Armagh hospital were catered for at a temporary hospital in Markethill.²³⁵ The necessity for such establishments was illustrated by the spread of disease to areas previously unaffected, a development which had been, in the opinion of correspondents, exacerbated by the closure of public works. Hence, the dependence of an increased number of people on handouts from local soup kitchens and voluntary agencies had resulted in a descent into misery. Reverend Leonard Robinson, writing from Kilcluney, characterised the situation thus:

Early on, deaths were mainly among the aged, but lately they have increased fearfully among those who, six months ago, were the able-bodied. They are now so wasted by insufficiency of food that a short attack of illness is sufficient to carry them off.²³⁶

Demonstrating that this was not an isolated report was an observation from Brootally that dropsy, diarrhoea, dysentery and typhus fever were regarded as the result of “want of food and proper nourishment”,²³⁷ while in Camlough and Forkhill there was said to be a vast amount of fever and dysentery.²³⁸ Some individuals who had previously sought simply to feed the poor now altered their efforts. For example, in Annaghmore, where “dropsical swelling” was added to the list of usual afflictions, Harriet Nicholson distributed a preparation of rhubarb, magnesium and laudanum to counteract the effects of bowel disorder.²³⁹ In Acton village, meanwhile, a temporary fever hospital was erected by means of a private subscription but, as with their faltering attempts to co-ordinate relief policy earlier in the year, the efforts of the Newry relief committee left much to be desired.²⁴⁰

Since March the *Newry Telegraph* had been promoting the cause of cleanliness in the town as a necessary precaution against the spread of disease. However, its promptings appear to have gone unnoticed by those charged with the responsibility for such matters, despite the paper continually making unfavourable comparisons between the Newry relief committee and its Armagh counterpart. By late May none of the preventive means adopted in Armagh had been enacted in Newry and the paper stated that Dr. Morrison of the Fever Hospital and Dispensary had exhorted the “inert officials” to erect sheds in the grounds of his establishment.²⁴¹ In their defence the relief committee commented that they had, on 14 May, applied under the Fever Act for a Board of Health to be established for the town, but their memorial had gone unheeded. They had subsequently pleaded their case to the Central Board of Health but to no avail. The local press, accusing the authorities of “culpable procrastination and remissiveness”, opined that the Central Board was now in the same category as the Poor Law Commissioners due to their “official negligence which is most blameable and inexcusable in the circumstances”.²⁴² Despite such recriminations the appeal of the Newry committee was met and finally on 24 May the health authorities sanctioned the establishment of sheds on the Fever Hospital grounds with accommodation for one hundred patients.²⁴³

With the spread of fever reported as “frightfully rapid”²⁴⁴ other relief committees adopted measures for the improvement of both localities and people. On 26 May, the Armagh committee, which had been distributing food in the market house, moved its operation to a yard at the rear of the court house, many people remarking about the danger of assembling so large a crowd in a room “many of them no doubt from the

abodes of fever”.²⁴⁵ At the same time, the *Armagh Guardian* carried the following report about an area previously relatively unaffected by disease:

Fever of a very malignant type continues to progress in Charlemont and Moy and their vicinities – the chief symptoms being total prostration of thought, great stupor, with coldness of hands and feet, and a black and fetid purging of which the sick are insensible.²⁴⁶

Hence, the Charlemont relief committee decided to adopt strict guidelines for distributing relief and indicated that in future no rations would be given to those whose homes were not either thoroughly purified or whitewashed. To effect this they issued free supplies of lime. In addition, and perhaps offering an illustration both of the extent of the ravages of the epidemic and the fear of the authorities, it was stipulated that applications for relief would only be considered from those who were “clean and respectable”. Broadening their range of responsibilities the committee ordered that all manure heaps, cesspools and such-like be removed a sufficient distance from dwellings and roads. If this was not complied with it would be enforced by the relief committee and its officers, with anybody causing obstruction being fined £5 or sentenced to one month’s imprisonment.²⁴⁷ Similar measures were adopted by the Brootally committee which, in addition, stated it would refuse relief to those who did not conduct themselves “in a quiet and orderly manner”. As in Charlemont, the committee offered free supplies of lime and brushes to aid in whitewashing.²⁴⁸ Despite such exertions, the pestilence continued to prevail and indeed increase, as evidenced by the application of the Middletown Committee for a temporary fever hospital even though the town’s private hospital had previously doubled its patient capacity. Thus, on 17 June, temporary accommodation was sanctioned for thirty patients while two weeks previously a similar establishment for twenty people had been authorised for

Tandragee.²⁴⁹

By June, there appeared the first signs that disease was abating with admissions to Newry Fever Hospital reduced from the May total of 136 to eighty six.²⁵⁰ At the same time, fever and dysentery in Flurrybridge and Jonesboro were reported as “not as bad as previously”.²⁵¹ However, an illustration of the local variation evident in so many aspects of these years was a report from Mullabrack, where fever was still increasing, though both dysentery and dropsy were “much reduced since spring”. In an effort to counteract these ravages the correspondent stated his hope of establishing a privately-funded “Nourishment and Dispensary” for the sick poor, akin to a similar institution in Dublin.²⁵² Meanwhile, a report from Ardaragh, Newry, stated that fever was only “now commencing” after dysentery had “prevailed all winter to a frightful extent”.²⁵³

Newry, however, appears to have been a district where efforts, both to feed the poor and relieve their sickness, were not as concerted as in other areas. Without doubt the voluntary groups had been inundated with numbers seeking relief – the town fever hospital and its additional sheds, together with a recently-acquired house were all filled with fever patients – but unlike Armagh there seems to have been poor co-ordination in engaging the pestilence. For example, on 29 May, Reverend Bagot, one of the leading churchmen in the town, advocated a series of measures to be adopted in and around the town, including the establishment of a health sub-committee with power to summon any who did not whitewash their houses. In an echo of pre-famine days, it was also advocated that able-bodied men be employed to prevent the ingress of strolling beggars.²⁵⁴ Despite such intentions, by 12 June, the local press, referring to

the relief committee as an “inefficient body”, alleged that “beyond distributing food, nothing legally devolving on the committee has been properly done.”²⁵⁵ The *Newry Telegraph*, in urging the committee to prosecute householders who failed to comply with orders to clean their environs, accused it of being remiss in not enforcing the cleansing of houses and lanes and claimed that it had erected “inappropriate” tents for the reception of fever patients.²⁵⁶ Efforts to counteract the influx of poor also appear to have floundered as, in a letter to the press, a local shopkeeper claimed that an “immense shoal of strange beggars” had “thronged into and overrun the town”. According to the correspondent, the residents of Dundalk had employed “bang-beggars” to rid their town of such people, and they had moved instead to “beggar-encouraging, beggar-shielding, beggar-feeding, Newry”.²⁵⁷

The apparent apathy of the Newry committee was in stark contrast to areas such as Brootally where, despite what was termed a “disinclination to adopt the required system of purification”, great numbers of houses had been whitewashed, with manure heaps and cesspits removed.²⁵⁸ Such evidence supports the opinion of one writer who has claimed:

Relief in many cases depended on the existence of a relief committee in the area with committee members sympathetic to the plight of the people or by having an influential or progressive landlord.²⁵⁹

On the information available it appears that this energy was patently lacking in Newry.

Although such measures served to restrict the spread of fever, it still remained virulent in areas where it was already established. In Armagh, the local paper, styling the situation as “very prevalent but not increasing”, bemoaned the lack of adequate

medical accommodation. Commenting on the “niggardliness of hospital provision”, it claimed that patients were forced to lie on the roadside while waiting to gain admission to the temporary fever hospital.²⁶⁰ In Middletown, the medical officer of the temporary hospital, Francis Clarke, revealed that due to “pressing applications to admit serious cases” he was forced to discharge convalescent patients much sooner than would otherwise have been necessary.²⁶¹ Thus, he appealed for, and received, an additional ten beds from the Central Board of Health.²⁶² The authorities also complied with appeals from Keady and Tandragee, supplying the former with thirty beds and the latter with twenty.²⁶³ Indeed, on 5 August, Tandragee was granted another fifty beds,²⁶⁴ a move which both emphasised the continued potency of the disease and demonstrated how an earlier assertion that fever was prevalent “but fast decreasing”²⁶⁵ in the area was incorrect and overly optimistic.

Nevertheless, the epidemic was slowly grinding to a halt and by 11 September the numbers in Armagh workhouse fever hospital had, due to recoveries and deaths, fallen to one hundred, having been 346 on 15 May.²⁶⁶ However, it was perhaps inevitable that as a consequence of constant interaction with the poor some high profile personalities would succumb to the disease. On 7 May, Reverend James Patterson, Presbyterian Minister of Richhill, died, while in September, the death from fever of Reverend James Mauleverer, a man who had been to the forefront of relief efforts in Middletown, was announced. The latter area had already suffered a severe loss through the demise of Dr. Smith, medical attendant of the local infirmary and fever hospital.²⁶⁷ Similarly, in Newry, the pestilence claimed the life of John Bennie, owner of the town’s Phoenix Foundry.²⁶⁸

The epidemic also took a financial toll as Newry Fever Hospital, with its funds almost totally exhausted, had to appeal for an additional subscription from a famine-wearied population.²⁶⁹ For its part, Armagh City Fever Hospital reported that its expenses during the calamity had been four times the cost of any previous period in its twenty-year existence.²⁷⁰ In addition, the cost to the ratepayers of the county for temporary fever hospitals amounted to £2,166/14 the majority being utilised in Armagh (£803) and Newry (£639).²⁷¹ However, in an unexpected and welcome move, the authorities announced that all sums advanced under the Fever Act would be treated as government grants, thereby relieving the populace of a significant financial burden.²⁷² Nevertheless, as one burden was removed, another was imposed through a radical reorganisation of relief policy by the British government.

THE TEMPORARY RELIEF ACT - AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE?

In January 1847 the government decided to amend the 1838 Poor Law Act in order to allow boards of guardians to take full responsibility for famine relief. Realising that the initiative would take some time to implement they introduced the Temporary Relief Act to cover the period up to the harvest of that year. This act, also known as the Soup Kitchen Act, provided for an extensive government-sponsored system of soup kitchens allowing large numbers of people to be fed at a relatively small cost – the expense to be eventually repaid by each poor law union.²⁷³ This new scheme meant that the public works system would be gradually phased out and thus, as a new source of relief was opened, another was closed. The Board of Works announced on 12 March that the numbers employed on public works would be reduced by one-fifth

within a week, those holding ten or more acres of land being discharged first. This was to be followed by a further reduction of ten per cent on 24 April, with total closure on 1 May.²⁷⁴ Prior to such official disengagement, public schemes in Armagh had already witnessed discharge from the works begun some three months earlier with twenty per cent, mostly children and single women, being struck off; consequently numbers had fallen within a week from 7,363 to 5,586 by 27 March.²⁷⁵ Although the relief offered by the works was peripheral to that of the main relief agencies – the local committees – it was still regarded as essential in preserving the lives of many. Thus, with the three-month period for such works now approaching termination, local correspondents pleaded with the authorities to sanction further funds to enable an extension of labours. The Charlemont committee, with 200 men employed at Blackwatertown, requested another extraordinary presentment session either for the barony of Armagh as a whole or for the electoral division of Charlemont where distress was “fearful”. They stated that they would “dread to contemplate the result” if the men were dismissed from the works.²⁷⁶

To pre-empt a similar outcome in their district, the Newtownhamilton committee dispatched a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant informing him that, on 1 March, twelve works in the relief district of that town and Crossmaglen would terminate due to lack of money, leaving 1,261 people without means of employment. In their opinion, far from being reduced, the works needed to be expanded as double the number currently employed were available for work. Hence, they requested another presentment session to at least allow for completion of the works originally initiated in November.²⁷⁷

Indeed, Captain Glascock, while alluding to criticism of the public works, admitted

that they were the only source of sustenance for thousands in the county:

There is an outcry against what is termed the “destructive system”; yet unproductive as it may seem, the popular mode (at least with the poor) of administering ready relief is that afforded by employment on the Public Works. Road-making and mending support thousands and thousands, and whether such employment was conceived in error or not, the starving population now seek it with pressing importunity – mobs of women, as well as men, assail you on the road, imploring relief by such employment.²⁷⁸

However, Glascock confirmed that the discharges anticipated in the south of the county would begin on 20 February with all workers dismissed by 1 March.²⁷⁹ He admitted that the news had “caused much apprehension in the minds of the relief committee men” and related how, on the previous day, the Crossmaglen committee room had been surrounding by men exclaiming their availability for work if it were offered to them.²⁸⁰ The Newtownhamilton memorial also received the support of Lord Gosford who, in a letter to Captain Griffiths, emphasised that those removed from the works “would be left in total destitution”.²⁸¹ This intervention appears to have been decisive as Griffiths immediately endorsed the call for a further presentment session and, in the meantime, instructed his officers to continue the works in anticipation of affirmative authorisation being received.²⁸²

The reaction of relief committees to the government’s proposed new soup kitchens was mixed. In a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant, relief committees for the electoral divisions of Sheerim and Dorsey expressed their “alarm and apprehension” at the move arguing that:

The system of affording scanty and insufficient rations to large numbers of able-bodied men who are thus to be maintained in a state of idleness will lead to the complete demoralisation of the peasantry, will destroy all habits of industry and self-reliance, and cause them to combine for the purpose of securing by plunder, the comforts and necessities which they have no means of

earning by their own labour.²⁸³

They also criticised the taxation consequent on the new measure claiming it would “reduce to utter ruin” the “great body of landholders” of the district.²⁸⁴ However, this opinion was not shared by all and the Forkhill committee welcomed the move given the “alarming and heartrending state of poverty in this district”.²⁸⁵ It felt that the new system would allow for expansion of its efforts and cited how in spite of distributing meal to 450 “utterly impoverished individuals,” it had been forced to refuse as many more.²⁸⁶ Similarly, Reverend J. Hall of Loughgall informed the Relief Commissioners that even with a twice-weekly disbursement of one hundred gallons of soup, demand was increasing and a daily distribution would still not suffice;²⁸⁷ while James Disney related how the Charlemont daily distribution, although totalling 160 quarts of soup, “greatly needs to be enlarged”.²⁸⁸ Nevertheless, there was also a fear that the measure would have a detrimental impact on current voluntary relief efforts due to the fact that existing relief districts were to be reorganised to correspond with local electoral divisions. Thus, while the Markethill committee was affording relief to some 5,000 individuals its efforts were now at risk because, “if the present system, which is becoming pretty well organised now, is altered much under the Temporary Relief Bill, great confusion will be the consequence.”²⁸⁹

The corollary of such fears was evidenced by correspondence from James Disney to the Relief Commissioners informing them that he had intended opening a soup kitchen in a distant part of the parish of Charlemont “where frightful destitution prevails and where I have literally found persons starving to death without anyone to

look after them in cabins, the floor of which was one mass of mud". However, having hired a house and purchased a boiler he was informed that "under the new arrangement" that part of his parish was to be transferred to the relief district of Loughgall. Thus "with the case of the poor to be committed to others", Disney decided to forgo his original idea.²⁹⁰

Apart from the possible detrimental effect on current relief efforts, some committees suggested that the government adopt different means to help the poor. The Mullabrack and Kilcluney committee urged provision of seed in order to give employment to the poor and benefit small farmers,²⁹¹ while their counterparts in Charlemont sent a series of detailed suggestions to the authorities advocating a similar measure. They proposed that all farmers, having no more than ten acres and presently destitute and unable to till the land, should be furnished with a list of the unemployed poor of the district. From this, they could select labourers able to prepare the land for seed with the committee paying half their daily wages, the farmers the other half. The committee further proposed to pay sixpence per day to farmers at present on the public works in order to ensure preparation of land for seeding. Such efforts were necessary due to the fact that "a great number of the above-mentioned farmers who had saved seed oats have been from driven necessity, compelled either to sell them, or get them ground into meal wherewith to feed their families." It was also agreed that unless some means were "speedily taken" to procure seeds, the small farmers would remain without any supply, "the majority...being deprived of the means of purchasing seed of any description".²⁹²

The Loughgall committee advocated similar measures and asked for a small government loan to be placed at their disposal to enable them to employ labourers in preparing the ground of farmers “in consequence of the great scarcity of seed oats and the distressed state of the farmers”.²⁹³ If the government refused to accede, they argued that a large portion of the land would remain in an “unproductive condition”, thereby “perpetuating the present scarcity”.²⁹⁴ Alternatively, if the plan moved forward as proposed:

We think that many of our able-bodied men who are at present unemployed, and a great burden to our relief fund, would find means of supporting themselves, and under Providence, the apprehended scarcity of a second year would be effectively arrested and habits of industry encouraged in our people.²⁹⁵

Despite such detailed suggestions from those with an intimate knowledge of the needs of the poor, the administration forged ahead with its proposal to introduce soup kitchens – the system initially being financed by themselves but requiring repayment over a number of years from the poor law unions, thereby increasing the already weighty burden on local ratepayers. Consequently, in a reaction akin to that when the poor law was introduced, subscribers to relief funds refused to contribute both voluntarily and pay a compulsory tax. For example, in Kildarton, as noted earlier, local farmers had agreed to a voluntary tax of four pence per acre, to support the relief fund but Henry Disney, estimating a total fund of around £120, stated that “owing to apprehension of a compulsory rate under the new act” many who had promised to subscribe had “suspended their payment of the voluntary act”.²⁹⁶

Such problems were compounded by the decision to make 29 March the last date for

the receipt of applications for government grants in aid of subscriptions to local relief funds.²⁹⁷ On 25 March Reverend James Campbell, writing from Forkhill, expressed concern that the commissioners were disputing a subscription from Lord John Beresford as being a private contribution and therefore not eligible for a similar amount of government grant. He felt that the arbitrary date for closure of grants militated against his attempts to communicate on the matter.²⁹⁸ At the same time, Henry Cobbe, incumbent of Grange, wrote to inform the commissioners of having received notification on 27 March, leaving no time to arrange for a fresh subscription.²⁹⁹

With many hundreds of committees throughout the country claiming aid before the deadline, much delay was occasioned locally. On 9 April, Thomas Seaver enquired why no answer had been received in reply to a list of subscriptions from the Jonesboro/Killeavy committee sent on 27 March. He stated that unless such amount was immediately forthcoming he would have to return money to the subscribers. Given that the government soup kitchens were only due to begin operation in May he warned that such an action “would leave the people in those divisions in very great distress”.³⁰⁰ On the same date, William Blacker commented how he had “lost no time” in applying for a grant, but no reply had been forthcoming. He revealed that his committee had sufficient finance to ensure one week’s relief, but after that it would have to be suspended, adding, “we can’t count on any further private subscriptions as money would be so much in escalation of the tax upon the land”.³⁰¹ Equally, by mid-April, the relief committees of Aghavilly and Loughgilly were urgently requesting replies to lists sent in, with funds reported as “waxing low” and expenditure

increasing.³⁰² As late as 27 April, almost one month after the deadline, the Flurrybridge committee still awaited an answer to their request for aid.³⁰³

The introduction of the Temporary Relief Act necessitated the establishment of a new relief commission together with the reconstitution of local relief committees. The poor law union became the unit of relief administration and local committees were based solely on electoral divisions. Each committee had to draw up lists of those entitled to relief, dividing them into the following categories: those deemed to be destitute, helpless or impotent; destitute, able-bodied persons not holding land; destitute, able-bodied holders of small portions of land. The final group consisted of those able-bodied who were employed at wages deemed as being insufficient for their support because of high food prices. The first three classes were entitled to gratuitous relief while the fourth was to be sold food – usually soup – at cost price.³⁰⁴

Due to the administrative difficulties in establishing relief lists the act was introduced at varying dates into the county (see Appendix 2). Hence, the earliest official starting date was on 5 April in Belleek while the latest was on 17 July in Killyman. In addition, several divisions balked at the notion of further increasing the local rate burden and opted out of striking a rate under the act. Thus, Grange, Hockley and Richhill, all in Armagh Union; Mullahead, Banbridge Union and Mullaghglass in Newry Union do not appear on the official relief lists. However, these figures, produced by the Relief Commissioners, do not correspond with reports from various localities communicated to non-government agencies such as the Society of Friends. This was probably due either to their lack of knowledge of private efforts throughout

the county, or a wish to present official relief as being more efficient than it was. For example, relief is stated by the commissioners as beginning in Middletown on 10 May, yet six days later the lists required for distribution were reported by a local source as being incomplete due to “such a vast number of applications”.³⁰⁵ On 4 June, the Creggan committee was still preparing estimates and making preparation for distribution of rations; however, relief was noted as starting officially on the following day.³⁰⁶ Similarly, on 9 June, the Tandragee lists had only been partially made out, yet, officially, relief began over five weeks earlier on 3 May.³⁰⁷ Seven days later disbursement of food was, according to the commissioners, commenced in Loughgall but, by 17 July, over two months later, it was reported that lists for the area had finally been completed – with the names of those aged fifteen and above excluded.³⁰⁸ Finally, Brootally was officially recorded as beginning relief on 10 May but just two days later it was claimed the lists were “made out but necessarily imperfect”.³⁰⁹ Such delays doubtless only served to exacerbate the condition of those dependent on food handouts resulting in greater levels of disease. In addition, the distribution of rations in Lower Creggan was delayed for altogether different reasons when the boiler and various “culinary apparatus” in the soup kitchen were destroyed, presumably by local people, in the middle of May. This was the only reported occurrence of such action in the county and the *Newry Examiner* commented how, “it appears that the people wish for the supply of uncooked food and are more clamorous for the renewal of the public working. Government will not concede either”.³¹⁰

With thousands of people to be visited and assessed it is perhaps not surprising that the new system proved something of a bureaucratic nightmare. A glimpse into the

difficulties of the system was afforded by a letter to the *Newry Telegraph*. The sentiments of the writer, who was obviously a member of a relief committee, served to highlight the frustration felt by those responsible for implementing constantly changing government legislation. Thus, amongst other things, he related how the committee had been forced to pore over:

...letters of explanation, letters of instruction, general circulars, particular circulars, forms lettered nearly through the Roman alphabet, registers of portentous dimensions, intended to record incomprehensible statistics, sales books of imaginary transactions, destitute lists embracing particulars such as the ingenuity of census statistics never before devised, relief documents, finance documents...³¹¹

Understandably, then, the newly reconstituted Newry relief committee, at its initial meeting on 3 April, decided to determine eligibility on only two counts, these being that no person be placed on the relief lists who had not been resident in the electoral division for at least the past four months and that nobody receive gratuitous relief as long as there remained room in the workhouse.³¹² But such restrictions simply served to reinforce the stringent nature of the new measure to the extent that doubt was expressed by many as to its potential effectiveness. In their applications for aid to the Society of Friends concerned persons throughout the county made it clear that alternatives were essential. Thomas Ball, clerk to the Mullabrack committee, believed that “in order to preserve many from hunger and destitution, other measures than the government relief are absolutely necessary.”³¹³ Similarly, James Eastwood of Castletown, on the Armagh/Louth border, argued that “the most necessitous of the poor” would not be entitled to receive outdoor relief under government regulations.³¹⁴

From Kiltybawn, Crossmaglen, James Donaldson warned:

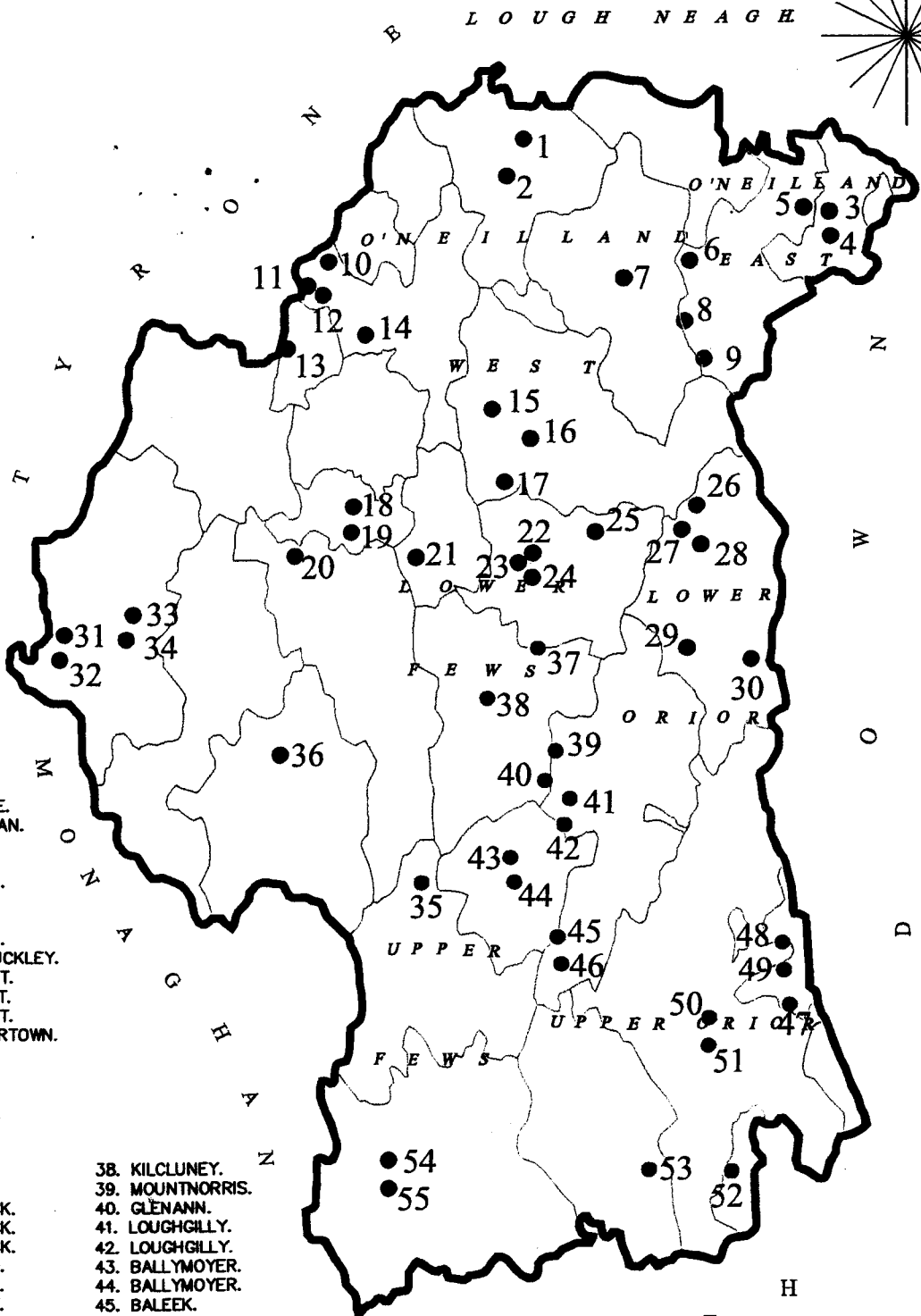
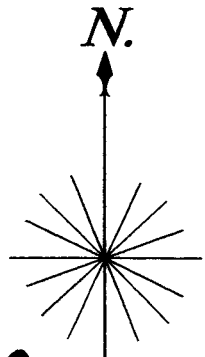
Should other funds than those forwarded by the rate not be placed at the disposal of the committee, or other means adopted not now in operation, it is

feared we must fall far short of meeting the existing destitution.³¹⁵

Similar scepticism about the merits of the new provision were expressed throughout the county and were endorsed by the *Newry Telegraph* which lambasted the government's "pre-occupation with feeding the labouring classes". It alleged that distress was now much more widespread, with tradesmen such as carpenters and stonemasons experiencing a dearth of employment "unparalleled in latter times".³¹⁶ In the absence of sufficient means of relief for these classes the Society of Friends played perhaps their most important role in this period (see map 3).³¹⁷

Unlike the government, they usually had only two pre-requisites for the distribution of relief: firstly, that it be carried out on a non-denominational basis and secondly, that food be distributed, if possible, in a cooked form to avoid impropriety on behalf of those receiving it. Initially, the Society helped relief committees in the hiatus between the introduction of the act and the completion of lists – a period which, as noted, could vary considerably from area to area. The subsequent difficulties encountered by committees were exemplified by the Middletown committee which, by 17 May, was obtaining food on credit, having been forced to organise Sunday church collections to finance its efforts.³¹⁸ In neighbouring Tynan it was only by means of a private subscription that bread could be distributed to the poor towards the end of May.³¹⁹ Similarly, the old committees at Crossmaglen and Newtownhamilton continued their operations in the first couple of weeks in May to afford assistance to those living on the periphery of their areas.³²⁰ However, in Brootally all local efforts had been exhausted and on 12 May the relief committee received, from the Society, one ton of

County Armagh: Private Relief Funds, October 1846 to August 1847



1. CLONMACATE.
2. TARTARAGHAN.
3. LURGAN.
4. LURGAN.
5. SILVERWOOD.
6. SEAGOE.
7. DRUMCREE.
8. PORTADOWN.
9. KNOCKNAMUCKLEY.
10. CHARLEMONT.
11. CHARLEMONT.
12. CHARLEMONT.
13. BLACKWATERTOWN.
14. LOUGHGALL.
15. HOCKLEY.
16. RICHHILL.
17. MULLAVILLY.
18. ARMAGH.
19. ARMAGH.
20. AGHAVILLY.
21. KILDARTON.
22. MULLABRACK.
23. MULLABRACK.
24. MULLABRACK.
25. MULLAHEAD.
26. TANDRAGEE.
27. TANDRAGEE.
28. TANDRAGEE.
29. ACTON.
30. POYNTZPASS.
31. MIDDLETOWN.
32. MIDDLETOWN.
33. MADDEN.
34. MADDEN.
35. ARMAGHBREAGUE
36. KEADY.
37. GOSFORD.

38. KILCLUNEY.
39. MOUNTNORRIS.
40. GLENANN.
41. LOUGHGILLY.
42. LOUGHGILLY.
43. BALLYMOYER.
44. BALLYMOYER.
45. BALEEK.
46. BALEEK.
47. FATHAM.
48. NEWRY.
49. NEWRY.
50. KILLEAVY.
51. KILLEAVY.
52. FLURRYBRIDGE.
53. FORKHILL.
54. CREGGAN.
55. CREGGAN.

MAP 3

rice, half a ton of meal and £20 cash to afford relief “in the interval that must elapse between formation of lists and final arrangements for affording outdoor relief”.³²¹

Crucially, the Society also contributed to those groups which had decided to forgo the new legislation and to continue providing aid on a voluntary basis, thereby avoiding the need for both a compulsory tax and administrative overheads and enabling greater freedom in deciding eligibility for relief. Thus, the Mullavilly committee thought they would be “better able to assist the poor under the old act if funds were available” and with approximately £100 remaining and 1,200 people on the lists, they continued to distribute cooked rice to those in need.³²² Similarly, due to a donation of £100 from Thomas Fortesque, the Flurrybridge committee was enabled to continue without striking a rate and distributed 350 rations daily.³²³ The Society also continued to support those individuals who had been working single-handedly since October 1846 to supplement the work of the old relief committees. Hence, food and money was sent throughout the May to August period to wives and daughters of the local resident gentry such as Harriet Nicholson, Annaghmore; Margaret Bernard, Forkhill; Lizzy Foxall, Killeavy Castle; Jane Atkinson, Creggan Bane and the Synott sisters, Ballymoyer.³²⁴

Having had their doubts about the efficiency of the new act confirmed, these individuals were joined by many more from all parts of the county who decided that additional relief, outside the terms of the act, was essential. To cite just a few examples, Reverend David Donaldson of Armaghbreague felt compelled to provide an alternative as he claimed that half those requiring relief were not admitted to the lists

owing to anxiety amongst rate-payers about the eventual cost, a fear which was also palpable in Creggan. Thus, only those deemed to have been in extreme distress were afforded aid, with Donaldson estimating that just to provide the bare necessities, three times the present distribution of twenty-five hundredweight of meal per week would be necessary.³²⁵ The continued importance of local clergymen at this time was also emphasised by their willingness to initiate relief efforts using their own finances. For example, in Jonesboro, Reverend Robert Henry erected three boilers with regular staff at each issuing approximately 800 rations per day with double on Saturdays,³²⁶ while at Loughgilly, Reverend Norman Foster distributed food from two boilers.³²⁷

The necessity of such independent alternatives was highlighted by the experience of Reverend James Mauleverer in Middletown. In canvassing support for a private soup kitchen he described how some people in the locality had been eating nettles for food and “in one instance a girl, who is probably dying, has been eating shamrocks.”³²⁸ At the same time, a group of Methodist preachers working in the district of Tandragee professed to have met “trying cases of poor families holding from two to six acres getting no assistance from any committee, together with poor tradesmen”. Therefore, they felt that “further measures must be pursued”.³²⁹ Other areas receiving relief supplies from the Society at this time included Acton, Mullavilly, Mullabrack, Keady, Derrynoose, Glenann, Creggan, Loughgall and Kildarton.³³⁰

During 1847 the official figures show that the highest number in receipt of relief on any given day in the county was 35,363 people - 15.2% of the population (see Appendix 3). Within the unions of Armagh and Newry this figure was 16.3% and

15.5% respectively. The greatest requirement in Ulster was in the County Cavan union of Bailieboro where the figure was 39%. Indeed, Cavan, along with Donegal and Monaghan, demonstrated the highest levels of dependency during this period. However, the substantial levels of distress in the Armagh and Newry unions are evidenced by the fact that their figures are similar to those for such rural unions as Castlederg (16.2%), Lisnaskea (17.2%), Lowtherstown (16.1%) and Strabane (18.4%). Moreover, the figures detailing the numbers remaining on the lists when relief had officially terminated in August indicate that the Armagh union (12.9%), and, to a lesser extent, Newry (10%) had a level of distress on a par with that of rural unions in counties Donegal, Monaghan and Tyrone. The Ulster union with the highest numbers remaining was that of Donegal (22%), but out of a total of forty-one unions, Armagh emerged in tenth position in relation to the numbers still requiring relief in August. Thus, it shared a level of dependency with unions such as Ballyshannon (14%), Clogher (14.2%), Omagh (14.3%) and Stranorlar (13.4%). A further indication of the continuing duration of distress in Armagh union was the fact that by August there had only been a slight reduction in the numbers receiving relief. In comparison, other unions saw a substantial fall from their initial figure; for example Bailieboro reduced the numbers from 39% to 7% as did Ballyshannon (28% to 13.9%), Castleblayney (19.6% to 7.4%), Cavan (30.4% to 5.7%), Strabane (18.4% to 8.4%) and Stranorlar (25.1% to 13.4%).³³¹

Within the various unions numbers dependent on relief varied greatly. In the six County Armagh unions fifteen had a maximum dependency in excess of 20% of the population. Of these, six were in the union of Castleblayney - Crossmaglen (32.6%),

Creggan (26.5%), Sheetrim (25.7%), Dorsey (23.9%), Newtownhamilton (22.6%) and Camley (22%); two were in Newry - Mountnorris (36.3%) and Forkhill (22.8%); while a further six were part of Armagh union - Brootally (42.4%), Armagh (25.3%), Keady (23.9%), Middletown (23.3%), Charlemont (23%) and Crossmore (21%). The last area with a dependency level in this group was that of Tartaraghan (30.2%) in Lurgan union. As with the overall statistics in the Armagh and Newry unions even at the end of the summer many divisions revealed significant levels of dependency. For example, while all the divisions in the Castleblayney union fell to single figures, Camley returned a figure of 10.9%. However, in the other unions statistics well beyond this were evident and in Mountnorris it was 25.5% while Forkhill returned 16.5%. Similarly, Tartaraghan (24.6%), Keady (22.6%), Middletown (20.2%), Crossmore (19.9%), Armagh (17.8%) and Charlemont (16.3%), all demonstrated high levels of demand on the eve of the Poor Law Extension Act. In other divisions numbers remained almost constant so that little change was evident between May and August. Hence, Ballymyre (17% to 14.9%), Poyntzpass (11.4% to 10.3%), Armaghbreague (13.6% to 11.1%), Ballyards (no change at 9.11%), Ballymartrim (14.6% to 14.4%), Clady (15.9% to 14.7%), Derrynoose (15.8% to 15.7%), Killeen (11.1% to 9.2%) and Lisnadill (13%) on both occasions demonstrated a level of dependency which was almost as great at the end of the summer as it had been at the beginning.³³²

Despite the fact that such statistics emphasise the continued destitution in the county they exclude those forced to avail of private relief and this latter figure must have numbered many thousands more. Indeed, although more in-depth statistics only

survive for the two officially-designated relief areas of Armagh and Middletown, they indicate that the average figures were close to the highest official numbers recorded in the county, reiterating the fact that distress remained high throughout the period. For example, the Armagh committee disbursed 22,249 rations on 9 May and although they peaked at 33,111 on 20 June, they had only fallen to 24,516 by 15 August.³³³

Similarly, in Middletown there were 13,048 rations issued on 23 June, falling slightly to 12,590 on 14 August, while during this period the highest figure was 15,824.³³⁴

Nevertheless, in accordance with government regulations, the Armagh and Middletown committees, in conjunction with most of the others throughout the county, officially terminated their operations on 15 August. This was in spite of the fact that there were still, according to official figures, more than 23,000 people remaining on the relief lists (see Appendix 4). With such large numbers requiring aid, at least one committee decided to continue issuing rations beyond the official government deadline. Thus, the Forkhill relief committee, with almost £51 still available and five and a half tons of meal in their stores, opted to supply food to the afflicted, aged and infirm up to 29 September.³³⁵

The figures for take up of relief under the Temporary Relief Act have been a source of much discussion in famine studies.³³⁶ The act itself represented the only attempt by the British government to feed the population directly and thus was a complete alteration of previous relief policy in that outdoor relief - the *bête noire* of the administration - received official approval. At the same time, as part of the strategy of making Irish property pay for Irish poverty, the cost of all expenses connected with the

act was to be repaid from local rates under the poor law. All analyses to date have been based on the official figures produced by the Relief Commissioners and, given that three and a half million people were recorded as being fed, have been favourable. Thus, Daly comments how “most accounts of the famine praise the soup kitchens”,³³⁷ while Ó Gráda has stated that, “in some places more meals were provided daily than there were people. The distribution of soup was an impressive feat and historians rate the scheme a success.”³³⁸ Crucially, however, he adds the following coda: “The soup kitchens have not been subjected to close analytical scrutiny.”³³⁹

While this initiative undoubtedly succeeded in feeding thousands in the county its strict parameters meant that many more were unable to avail of the relief on offer. The new measure ignored the fact that a significant proportion of the population, while not destitute, had been severely affected by both the downturn in trade and the unprecedented rise in the price of foodstuffs. It was to this group, together with some of the destitute, that the private aid supplied by the Society of Friends proved vital. The government, as well as disregarding the plight of such groups, also failed to recognise that the famine was far from over, but in the autumn of 1847 it advanced this belief by passing responsibility for all relief to the rate-payers of the country under the auspices of poor law unions.

Thus, while it has been argued that Ulster communities had resource to the linen trade and the dietary alternative of oats this has been shown to be a misconception with regard to County Armagh. The linen industry, already going through a period of transition and resultant rural de-industrialisation, had entered an economic downturn

to the extent that even those thought to be the most resilient had been reduced to seeking relief. At the same time, increased food prices consequent both upon unparalleled demand and poor crops of oats and wheat ensured that even those earning wages were unable to sustain themselves or their families. This combination of factors meant that by the summer of 1847 the famine was still impacting to a great extent on County Armagh, the industrial heartland of Ulster. Nevertheless, the population there, as with the rest of the country, were informed by the British government that the crisis had terminated. This was reflected in their determination to make all further relief the responsibility of the poor law authorities. However, this judgment proved to be one of the government's most ill-informed and, as will be illustrated in the next section, thousands remained dependant both on poor law relief and voluntary aid well into the summer of 1848.

ENDNOTES

1. NAD, Distress Papers, D.562, M. Lennon to Earl Bessboro, 15 January 1847.
2. Ibid., D.334, M. Lennon to Lord Lieutenant, 6 January 1847.
3. *Newry Examiner*, 27 January 1847.
4. Ibid.
5. H. C., 1852 (169), xvii (587), Return Showing the number of persons relieved by labour from 10 October 1846 to 26 June 1847 in each county in Ireland, p.7.
6. BPP, Volume vi, p.590-1; BPP, Volume vii, p.275.
7. *Armagh Guardian*, 26 January 1847.
8. Public Record Office, London (henceforth PROL) Trevelyan Papers, T/64/363/D, report of Lieutenant Griffith, Inspecting Officer for County Armagh, 23 January 1847.
9. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/38, Thomas Seaver, Jonesboro to W. Stanley, 12 February 1847.
10. Ibid., 3/2/2/37, J. W. Campbell, Forkhill to W. Stanley, 28 January 1847.
11. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.172.
12. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T64/363/D, report of Lieutenant Griffith, 23 January 1847.
13. BPP, Volume vii, p.89.
14. *Armagh Guardian*, 26 January 1847.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 23 February 1847.
17. NAD, Distress Papers, D.118, report of Henry Davidson, Engineer County Armagh, 28 January 1847.
18. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', pp.206 and 211. The Million Act (9&10 Vic 101) had a fund limited to £1 million to be repaid over twenty-two years at 6%. It was neither specifically a drainage act nor an Irish one. It enabled proprietors to borrow public money for general estate improvements and applied to the whole of the United Kingdom.
19. Ibid.
20. PRONI, Gosford Papers, D/1606/5/2, William Blacker to Chairman of Board of Works, 4 December 1846, p.52.
21. Ibid., William Blacker to W. Stanley, 6 March 1847, pp.84-5.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., William Blacker to Roger Hall, 10 January 1847, p.57.
24. *Newry Examiner*, 24 February 1847.
25. Ibid., 17 February 1847.
26. Ibid.
27. BPP, Volume vii, p.54. In correspondence with both Randolph Routh (NADRLFC, 3/2/2/10, 16 February 1847) and W. Stanley (NADRLFC, 3/2/2/10, 23 March 1847) Henry Disney stated that in Kildarton each man employed either in private employment or on the public works, had four family members dependent on them. Similarly, Society of Friends distribution of clothing forms illustrate that in Brootally (NAD, form 250), Camlough (form 103), Loughgall, (form 461), Middletown (form 675), Newtownhamilton (form 276), Richhill (form 479), Tandragee (form 62) and Tynan (form B516), those families in receipt of clothes numbered five persons on average.
28. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/9, Keady Relief Committee to Relief Commissioners, 17

December 1846.

29. *Armagh Guardian*, 22 December 1846.
30. Armagh Observatory, Weather Records, Volume 1, January 1833 – December 1852. See also J. Butler, 'A provisional long mean air temperature series for Armagh Observatory' in *Journal of Atmospheric and Terrestrial Physics*, Vol. 58, No. 15, 1996.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T64/363/D, Harry D. Jones, Office of Public Works to C. Trevelyan, 9 December 1847.
36. Armagh Observatory, Weather Records, Volume 1, January 1833 – December 1852.
37. NAD, Quaker Form 403, E. O. Disney, Newtownhamilton, 1 March 1847.
38. RIAIRA, Form 634, E. O. Disney, Newtownhamilton, 10 February 1847.
39. *Newry Telegraph*, 15 December 1846.
40. *Armagh Guardian*, 22 December 1846.
41. NAD, Distress Papers, D.30, J. D. Martin to Chief Secretary, Dublin, 28 December 1846.
42. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.82.
43. *Ibid.*
44. PRONI, Gosford Papers, D/1606/2/31/92, Henry Disney, Kildarton to Lord Gosford, 5 January 1847.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Newry Telegraph*, 5 January 1847; 18 January 1847; RIAIRA, Form 316, Richhill Relief Association, 16 January 1847.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.119.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p.116.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/9, Francis Stringer, Tassagh, Keady to Randolph Routh, 1 December 1846.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/9, Keady Relief Committee to W. Stanley, 17 December 1846.
56. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/9, same to same, 24 December 1846.
57. *Newry Telegraph*, 17 December 1846.
58. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/7, J. Disney to Commissary General, 26 December 1846.
59. PROL, T/64/363/D, extract from journal of Lieutenant Griffith, 2 January 1847.
60. *Newry Telegraph*, 12 January 1847.
61. BPP, Volume vi, p.506, J. Stronge to Trevelyan, 3 January 1847.
62. NAD, Distress Papers II 63, E. O. Disney to Redington, 29 December 1846.
63. RIAIRA, Form 634, E. O. Disney, Newtownhamilton, 10 February 1847.
64. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/14, William Blacker to W. Stanley, 19 January 1847.
65. RIAIRA, Form 233, Francis Clements, Tartaraghan, 11 January 1847.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*

68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., Form 279, Loughgall Relief Committee, 13 January 1847.
70. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/25, Loughgall Relief Committee to R. Routh, 21 January 1847.
71. RIAIRA, Form 285, James Disney, Charlemont, 19 January 1847.
72. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/37, Resolution of Forkhill Relief Committee, 15 January 1847.
73. Ibid., 3/2/2/27, J. Hogan to Relief Commission Office, 27 January 1847; Distress Papers, D.932, same to Lord Lieutenant, 27 January 1847.
74. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/3 Lord Gosford to Henry Cobbe, 2 February 1847; 3/2/2/29, same to R. Routh; 3/2/2/33, James Kinkead to Lord Lieutenant, 4 February 1847.
75. NAD, Quaker Form B155, Crosby Mangan, Derrynoose, 29 January 1847.
76. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/13, William Blacker to R. Routh, 11 January 1847.
77. Ibid, 3/2/2/22, Henry Archdall to Relief Commissioners, 24 February 1847; 3/2/2/10, Lord Gosford to H. Disney, 11 February 1847; 3/2/2/25, John Bell to R. Routh, 5 February 1847; 3/2/2/11, Stephen Radcliffe to Major General Sir John Burgoyne, 19 February 1847.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 3/2/2/10, H. P. Disney to W. Stanley, 10 February 1847.
80. NAD, Unsorted Quaker Papers, William Smith to William Hughes, Assistant Secretary, 20 February 1847; *Newry Telegraph*, 16 January 1847.
81. *Armagh Guardian*, 26 January 1847.
82. Ibid., 23 February 1847.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., 2 February 1847.
87. *Newry Telegraph*, 16 January 1847.
88. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T64/363/D, William Blacker to Colonel Jones, 8 December 1847.
89. Ibid.
90. *Newry Telegraph*, 9 December 1847.
91. Ibid., 27 February 1847.
92. Ibid., 23 February 1847.
93. Ibid., 27 February 1847 and 2 March 1847.
94. Ibid., 28 January 1847.
95. Ibid., 12 March 1847.
96. RIAIRA, Form 409, Kilmore Relief Committee, 3 February 1847.
97. Ibid., Form 501, Keady/Derrynoose Relief Committee, 5 February 1847.
98. Ibid., Form 634, Newtownhamilton Relief Committee, 10 February 1847.
99. NAD, Quaker Form B260, N. A. Foster, Loughgilly/Markethill, 10 February 1847.
100. Ibid., Form 248, A. R. Miller, Baleek, 10 February 1847.
101. Ibid., Form B261, Robert Henry, Jonesboro/Flurrybridge, 12 February 1847.
102. Ibid., Form B247, James Disney, Charlemont, 12 February 1847.
103. RIAIRA, Form 635, Gilbert Percy, Ballymoyer, 13 February 1847.
104. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/28, John Bell, Broomfield, Clare to R. Routh, 16 February 1847.
105. Ibid., 3/2/2/10, H. P. Disney, Kildarton to R. Routh, 16 February 1847.

106. RIAIRA, Form 676, Jonesboro Relief Committee, 20 February 1847.
107. Ibid., Form 675, Lisnadill Relief Committee, 20 February 1847.
108. NAD, Quaker Form B36, James Hogan, Richhill, 22 April 1847.
109. RIAIRA, Form 94, L. H. Robinson, Kilcluney, 22 April 1847.
110. Ibid., Form 7, H. P. Disney, Kildarton, 3 December 1846.
111. NAD, Quaker Form B372, J. Mauleverer, Middletown, 17 May 1847. A similar situation pertained in parts of County Wicklow where “destitution had spread from the cottiers to reach the small farmers of one to six acres and was rapidly overtaking those who held even bigger farms”. See K. Hannigan, “Wicklow before and after the Famine”, in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds) *Wicklow: History and Society*, Geography Publications, 1994, p.804.
112. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/22, Henry Archdall, Grange O’ Neilland to Relief Commissioners, 11 February 1847.
113. NAD, Quaker Form B247, James Disney, Charlemont, 12 February 1847.
114. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.90.
115. *Belfast Vindicator*, 1 March 1847.
116. RIAIRA, Form 635, Gilbert Percy, Ballymoyer, 13 February 1847.
117. BPP, Volume vii, 20/2/1847, p.513.
118. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 5 September 1846.
119. Ibid., 24 October 1846, p.580.
120. Ibid., and 7 November 1846, p.600.
121. PRONI, BG 24/A/3, 15 November 1845, p.299; 22 November 1845, p.303; 29 November 1845, p.309; 6 December 1845, p.312; 13 December 1845, p.321; 20 December 1845, p.330; 27 December 1845, p.335; BG 24/A/4; 14 November 1846, p.602; 21 November 1846, p.608; 28 November 1846, p.616; 5 December 1846, p.626; 12 December 1846, p.635; 19 December 1846, p.643; 26 December 1846, p.647.
122. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 12 December 1846, p.635.
123. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', p.259; BPP, Volume 1, pp.88-91
124. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 5 December 1846, p.630.
125. Ibid., 5 December 1846, p.634; 12 December 1846, p.641.
126. Ibid., 12 December 1846, p.637; 19 December 1846, p.645.
127. Ibid., 12 December 1846, p.637.
128. Ibid.
129. Ibid., 19 December 1846, p.645; 2 January 1847, p.658.
130. Ibid., 9 January 1847, p.669.
131. Ibid., 16 January 1847, p.685.
132. Ibid., 23 January 1847, p.697.
133. Ibid., pp.694,707, 716, 729.
134. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', pp.266-7.
135. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 23 January 1847, p.696.
136. PRONI, BG 24/A/3, pp.341, 353, 358, 363, 367, 379,377, 380; BG 24/A/4, pp.655, 666, 683, 695, 707, 716, 729, 741.
137. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 7 November 1846, p.601; 14 November 1846, p.606.
138. Ibid., 16 January 1847, p.684; 23 January 1847, pp 695 and 698; 30 January 1847, p.708.
139. Ibid., pp.656, 667, 683, 695, 708, 717, 729, 741, 748, 756, 766, 770, 780, 785; BG 24/A/5, pp.1, 6, 19, 24, 28, 36, 49, 53, 56, 61, 66, 70, 76.
140. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 11 April 1846, p.416; 8 August 1846, p.514; 14 November

- 1846, p.603; 12 December 1846, p.636.
141. Ibid., 13 February 1847, p.732.
142. Ibid., 23 January 1847, pp.695 and 698.
143. *Newry Examiner*, 17 February 1847.
144. Ibid.
145. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 23 January 1847, pp.704-5.
146. Ibid., 23 January 1847, p.698; 30 January 1847, p.712, 6 February 1847, p.720.
147. PRONI, BG 24/A/4, 20 March 1847, p.772; 27 March 1847, p.782.
148. Ibid., 27 February 1847, p.750.
149. Ibid., 13 March 1847, p.769.
150. PRONI, BG 24/A/5, 17 July 1847, p.68; 24 July 1847, p.71.
151. Ibid., 6 February 1847, p.719; 20 February 1847, pp.741 and 743.
152. Ibid., 20 February 1847, p.743; 27 February 1847, pp.747 and 754; 6 March 1847, p.755.
153. Ibid., 27 February 1847, p.754.
154. Ibid., 20 March 1847, p.774.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.
157. Ibid., 13 March 1847, p.769.
158. Ibid., 27 February 1847, p.750.
159. Ibid., 10 April 1847, p.4.
160. Ibid., 17 April 1847, p.6.
161. Ibid., 8 May 1847, p.26.
162. Ibid., 8 May 1847, p.26.
163. PRONI, BG 2/A/3, 7 February 1846, p.290.
164. PRONI, BG 2/A/4, pp.71, 74, 76, 80, 82, 84-85, 90, 92, 94, 96.
165. PRONI, BG 2/A/3, pp.247, 249, 251, 253, 258, 259, 261, 263, 267, 269, 273.
166. PRONI, BG 2/A/4, 15 December 1846, p.92.
167. Ibid., 9 January 1847, p.101.
168. Ibid., 12 January 1847, p.103.
169. Ibid.
170. Ibid., 16 January 1847, p.104.
171. Ibid., 23 January 1847, p.106; 2 February 1847, p.110.
172. Ibid., 2 February 1847, p.110.
173. Ibid., 23 January 1847, p.106; 2 February 1847, p.110.
174. Ibid., 13 February 1847, p.115.
175. Ibid., 13 February 1847, pp.115-6; 20 February 1847, p.119.
176. Ibid., 20 February 1847, p.119.
177. Ibid., 6 February 1847, p.112.
178. Ibid., 13 February 1847, p.114.
179. Ibid., pp. 97, 102, 104, 106, 108, 112, 114, 118, 121.
180. Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1845, Appendix B, No. 16, p.234; Twelfth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1846, Appendix B, No. 17, p.222.
181. RIAIRA, Form 285, James Disney, Charlemont, 14 January 1847.
182. Ibid.
183. BPP, Volume i, First Series, p.102; Second Series, pp.22, 28, 42-3; Third Series, pp.4-5, 18-19, 32-3, 46-7, 60-1, 74-5, 96-7, 110-111.
184. Ibid., Second Series, pp.22-3, 40-1, 54-5, 68-9; Third Series, pp.16-17, 30-1, 44-

- 5, 58-9, 72-3, 86-7, 108-9, 122-3, 136-7.
185. PRONI, BG 2/A/4, 3 March 1847, pp.121-2.
186. Ibid., 3 March 1847, p.121.
187. Ibid., 3 March 1847, p.122; 9 March 1847, p.125.
188. Ibid., 13 March 1847, p.128.
189. Ibid., 9 March 1847, p.125.
190. Grant, 'The Famine in Ulster', pp.260; 273-4.
191. Ibid., pp.259-60.
192. PRONI, BG 2/A 4, 23 March 1847, p.130.
193. Ibid.
194. Ibid., 3 April 1847, p.138.
195. Ibid.
196. Ibid.
197. Ibid., 2 January 1847, p.97; 16 January 1847, p.103; 23 January 1847, p.105; 30 January 1847, p.107; 20 March 1847, p.129; 27 March 1847, p.135; 3 April 1847, p.137; 6 April 1847, p.139; 10 April 1847, p.142; 17 April 1847, p.143; 1 May 1847, p.147; 4 May 1847, p.151; 8 May 1847, p.153; 15 May 1847, p.155; 22 May 1847, p.156; 29 May 1847, p.159; 5 June 1847, p.164; 12 June 1847, p.165; 19 June 1847, pp.167 and 169; 26 June 1847, p.169; 3 July 1847, p.172; 10 July 1847, p.176; 17 July 1847, p.178.
198. Ibid., 20 April 1847, p.145.
199. Ibid., 6 April 1847, p.141.
200. Ibid., 4 May 1847, p.150.
201. Ibid., 8 May 1847, p.153.
202. Ibid., 15 May 1847, p.155.
203. Ibid., 29 May 1847, p.159.
204. Ibid., 15 May 1847, p.155; 22 May 1847, pp.157-8; 29 May 1847, p.160; 5 June 1847, p.165; 26 June 1847, p.170; 3 July 1847, p.171; 17 July 1847, p.178.
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206. Ibid.
207. *Armagh Guardian*, 23 February 1847.
208. NAD, Quaker Form B356, James Campbell, Forkhill, 25 February 1847; Form B372, H. P. Disney, Kildarton, 26 February 1847.
209. Ibid., Form B383, R. J. G. McGhee, Mullavilly, 27 February 1847.
210. Ibid., Form 403, E. O. Disney, Newtownhamilton, 1 March 1847.
211. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/14, William Blacker to W. Stanley, 26 February 1847.
212. Ibid.
213. NAD, Quaker Form 357, John Leech, Moy, 1 March 1847.
214. *Armagh Guardian*, 9 March 1847.
215. *Newry Telegraph*, 23 March 1847.
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viii); Appendix to Third Report of Relief Commissioners, Appendix A, p.115.
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1847.
238. RIAIRA, Form 1018, John White, Camlough, 29 April 1847; NAD, Quaker
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239. NAD, Quaker Form B256, H. Nicholson, Annaghmore, 6 May 1847.
240. *Ibid.*, Form B640, J. L. Darby, Acton, 3 May 1847.
241. *Newry Telegraph*, 22 May 1847.
242. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1847.
243. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1847.
244. *Armagh Guardian*, 1 June 1847.
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248. *Ibid.*
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250. *Newry Telegraph*, 13 January 1848.
251. NAD, Quaker Form B592, Robert Henry, Jonesboro, 14 June 1847.
252. *Ibid.*, Form B564, Robert G. Atkinson, Mullabrack, 5 June 1847.
253. *Ibid.*, Form B566, J. W. Dickinson, Ardaragh, 9 June 1847.
254. *Newry Telegraph*, 29 May 1847.
255. *Ibid.*, 12 June 1847.
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257. *Ibid.*, 15 July 1847. Bangbeggars was the term applied to those who were
employed in urban areas to remove itinerant beggars. The term arose due to their
determination to discharge the task with force if necessary.
258. *Armagh Guardian*, 29 June 1847.
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262. *Ibid* and BPP, Volume viii, Appendix to the Fifth Report of the Relief Commissioners, p.199.
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265. NAD, Quaker Form B709, James Harden, Tandragee, 1 July 1847.
266. *Armagh Guardian*, 14 September 1847.
267. *Newry Telegraph*, 6 March 1847 and 30 September 1847; *Banner of Ulster*, 18 May 1847.
268. *Armagh Guardian*, 6 July 1847.
269. *Newry Telegraph*, 12 October 1847.
270. *Armagh Guardian*, 30 September 1847.
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272. *Armagh Guardian*, 5 October 1847.
273. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, pp.120-2.
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276. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/10, H. P. Disney to W. Stanley, 10 February 1847.
277. NAD, Distress Papers, D.1488, Memorial from Newtownhamilton Relief Committee to Lord Lieutenant, 17 February 1847.
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282. *Ibid.*
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284. *Ibid.*
285. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/37, W. Smith to W. Stanley, 29 January 1847.
286. *Ibid.*
287. RIAIRA, Form 279, J. Hall, Loughgall, 19 March 1847.
288. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/7, James Disney to Randolph Routh, 19 March 1847.
289. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/13, W. Blacker to R. Routh, 22 February 1847.
290. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/7, James Disney to Randolph Routh, 19 March 1847.
291. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/13, Charles Seaver to the Relief Commissioners, 22 February 1847.
292. BPP, Volume vii, p.563.
293. *Ibid.*, pp.562-3.
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296. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/10, H. P. Disney to W. Stanley, 10 February 1847.
297. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/8, H. Cobbe to R. Routh, 28 March 1847.
298. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/37, J. W. Campbell to W. Stanley, 25 March 1847.
299. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/8, H. Cobbe to R. Routh, 28 March 1847.
300. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/38, T. Seaver to W. Stanley, 9 April 1847.
301. *Ibid.*, 3/2/2/13, W. Blacker to W. Stanley, 9 April 1847.

302. Ibid., 3/2/2/4, J. Abbot to Randolph Routh, 12 April 1847; 3/2/2/12, N. A. Foster, Loughgilly to same, 16 April 1847.
303. Ibid., 3/2/2/38, R. Henry to Stanley, 27 April 1847.
304. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, p.148.
305. NAD, Quaker Form B372, J. Mauleverer, Middletown Glebe, 17 May 1847.
306. Ibid., B452, Jane L. Atkinson, Creggan Cross, 4 June 1847.
307. Ibid., B563, William Lindsay, Tandragee, 9 June 1847.
308. Ibid., B612, John Leech, Parsonage, Moy, 17 July 1847.
309. Ibid., B373, John Henderson, Portnelligan, Tynan, 12 May 1847.
310. *Newry Examiner*, 19 May 1847.
311. *Newry Telegraph*, 29 April 1847.
312. Ibid., 13 April 1847.
313. NAD, Quaker Form B405, T. Hanley Ball, Mullabrack, 18 May 1847.
314. Ibid., B430, James Eastwood, Castletown, 21 May 1847.
315. Ibid., B245, James Donaldson, Kiltybawn, Crossmaglen, 3 May 1847.
316. *Newry Telegraph*, 4 March 1847.
317. The majority of sources for this map have been extracted from the papers of the Society of Friends. Some were also obtained through announcements in the press of the establishment of private relief initiatives.
318. NAD, Quaker Form B372, J. Mauleverer, Middletown, 17 May 1847.
319. Ibid.
320. Ibid., B245, James Donaldson, Kiltybawn, Crossmaglen, 3 May 1847.
321. Ibid., B373, John Henderson, Port Nelligan, Tynan, 12 May 1847.
322. Ibid., B540, R. J. G. McGhee, Mullavilly, 5 June 1847.
323. *Newry Telegraph*, 24 June 1847.
324. NAD, Quaker Form B256, Annaghmore, 6 May 1847; B369, Forkhill, 16 May 1847; B506, Newtownhamilton, 2 June 1847; B542, Creggan Cross, 4 June 1847; B613, Flurrybridge, 18 June 1847.
325. Ibid., B593, Reverend David Donaldson, Armaghbreague, 14 June 1847.
326. Ibid., B592, Robert Henry, Jonesboro, 14 June 1847.
327. NADRLFC, 3/2/2/12, N. A. Foster, Loughgilly to Commissary General, 16 February 1847.
328. RIAIRA, Form 1170, James Mauleverer, Middletown, 22 June 1847.
329. NAD, Quaker Form B563, William Lindsay, Tandragee, 9 June 1847.
330. Ibid., B371, Poyntzpass, 13 May 1847; B564, Mullabrack, 5 June 1847; B644, Kildarton, 19 June 1847; B649, Keady, 23 June 1847; B878, Derrynoose, 28 August 1847.
331. BPP, Volume viii, Supplementary Appendix to the Seventh and last Report of the Relief Commissioners, pp.290-3.
332. Ibid., pp.295, 301, 302, 305, 307, 317, 337.
333. *Armagh Guardian*, 7 September 1847.
334. Ibid., 12 September 1847.
335. *Newry Telegraph*, 21 September 1847.
336. For various opinions on the contribution of soup kitchens to reducing mortality at this period see Daly, *The Famine in Ireland*, pp.87-9; Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, pp.81-92; Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, pp.153-5.
337. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland*, p.133.
338. Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine*, Gill and Macmillan, 1989, p.45.
339. Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MAKING PROPERTY PAY FOR POVERTY: 1847-48

The 1847 potato crop was the first in three years to remain blight-free but, due to the tiny amount of seed remaining from the devastated crop of the previous year, it was an extremely small harvest. Nationally, the area of potato acreage was 274,134, a fall of just over 87% on that for 1845 (2,186,798). In Ulster there was a similar reduction with the 1847 crop being more than 84% smaller than that of two years' previous, while in Armagh the decrease was almost 80%, resulting in an acreage for 1847 of 9,652 compared to 47,563 for 1845.¹ Nonetheless, the advent of a successful crop led to claims that the famine was over and engendered the hope that things would gradually return to normal. This was given further credence by the termination of local relief efforts and the implementation of the Poor Law Extension Act which became effective from September. By such means all ordinary and extraordinary relief was to be overseen by the poor law guardians and paid for by the ratepayers. The new policy also allowed for the outdoor distribution of food, which had been explicitly prohibited under the original Poor Law of 1838 and hence, while both workhouses remained filled to capacity, the Armagh and Newry guardians had to endeavour to feed thousands of people in various electoral divisions. As with the Temporary Relief Act, eligibility under the new law meant that food distribution was strictly monitored and although local relief committees were supposed to have ceased operating in August and September 1847, some continued to aid people in need. In addition, the help of the Society of Friends remained vital although a change in policy saw them move from the provision of short-term aid by means of food handouts, to long-term help in the shape of the development of farms and fisheries. However, throughout 1848 the major source of relief supplied by them in County Armagh was that of clothing.

Given the fact that a third year of blight had been avoided it is perhaps understandable that some felt the famine years were at an end. Indicative of such thinking was the following comment from the Forkhill relief committee at its last meeting on 2

September 1847:

We are now happy in believing that the approach of an abundant harvest...will very soon restore our locality in common with other districts of Ireland, to a state of plenty, health, comfort and contentment.²

As events were to show, such optimism was based more on hope than on any indication that the calamity effected by the potato blight was about to suddenly abate. Although the harvest of 1847 was unaffected by disease, one of the corollaries of the extensive decay of the previous year was a huge reduction in the numbers of seed potatoes available for planting a new crop. Thus, the successful harvest of 1847 was much too small to bring about any meaningful change in the condition of the people of the county. In such circumstances, many thousands, unable to feed themselves, remained dependent on the authorities for their welfare. Consequently, the latter, faced with the latest government initiative, came under increased pressure as the autumn of that year dawned.

ARMAGH WORKHOUSE

Due to the British government's determination to incorporate any further temporary relief measures into the permanent poor law, the latter was amended to allow, for the first time, Irish boards of guardians to administer both indoor and outdoor relief. Thus, on 16 July the Armagh board received orders from the Poor Law Commissioners to appoint relieving officers in each electoral division within the union – their salaries to

vary between £25 and £50 according to the extent of the district and duties involved.³ Some weeks later the commissioners revised the original estimate stating instead that a total of five officers would suffice⁴ but the guardians determined to press ahead in appointing officers for each division with the exception of one for the joint district of Lisnadill and Ballyards. In this way, twenty-three officers would be appointed at a total annual cost to the union of £685.⁵ However, the commissioners, asking them to reconsider, stated that eight men would suffice⁶ and assistant commissioner Edward Senior stressed that outdoor relief would be confined to those permanently disabled by old age; those temporarily disabled by accident or sickness and those who had been resident in the union for three years. He also advocated a stringent system of labour in the workhouse to extend a test of destitution suggesting the building of corn mills on the site and application of outdoor relief to certain classes of aged and infirm inmates in order to extend the available accommodation for the able-bodied as far as possible. Finally, he contended that any outdoor relief should be distributed either in kind or money and, if feasible, “in such cooked articles of food as may be cheapest and best”, such as soup and brown bread or stirabout composed of oatmeal and indian meal.⁷ Apparently, being confident that such restrictions outlined by Senior would result in minimum demand, the guardians compromised and agreed to sanction nine relieving officers on wages ranging from £30 to £45. In addition to their salary, each officer was to be paid £10 to rent a house for his residence and storage of materials such as boilers and ladles.⁸

With the necessary apparatus in place the guardians convened a special meeting on 22 September to outline a number of stipulations, applicable to all unions, prior to the

commencement of outdoor relief. Initially, the workhouse test was to be applied in all cases where it was felt to be necessary; if outdoor relief was sanctioned it was to be dispensed in food or money according to circumstances. As with the Temporary Relief Act there were strict guidelines governing eligibility for those wishing to avail of such relief and applicants were divided into a number of classes. Destitute persons of the first class, those permanently disabled by old age or infirmity, were generally to receive food except when guardians gave a weekly allowance in money of not more than one shilling for a single person and one shilling and sixpence for two or more persons. Those of the second class, incapacitated due to sickness or accident, were to receive food only and not more than one pound of meal daily. Meanwhile, those of the third class, widows with two or more legitimate children, were to be relieved in the workhouse. Finally, it was stipulated that all outdoor relief was to be dispensed as cooked food with the exception of rations on Saturdays, which were to be distributed as raw meal.⁹

However, these guidelines did not meet with the agreement of all members of the board. At a meeting the following week, nine guardians representing the divisions of Armagh and Ballyards objected to the last provision as being “contrary to the spirit and intention of the Poor Relief Act.” They argued that, under the law, any relief to be administered to the helpless and infirm poor should be made convenient or compatible to the recipients. Further, they believed that in many cases applicants for relief would have to travel several miles “frequently in inclement weather” to receive, at best, “a distasteful meal of cold and unpalatable food unsuited to the necessities of the aged and sickly”. As an example, they stated that a man with a wife and six children would,

for two days, receive a total of 68 lbs. of cooked food which would, they maintained, be impossible to carry any distance. They argued that the guardians, in making outdoor relief rations unpalatable, would in effect be militating against the new system by forcing the helpless to opt for shelter in the workhouse. As a consequence they would be unable to invoke the workhouse test to the able-bodied given the shortage of space which would “inevitably result”.¹⁰ It was further argued that distribution of cooked rations would prove incongruous, expensive and time-consuming. Thus a crowd of 1,500 people requiring daily relief of three quarts each - 4,500 quarts or 1,125 gallons - would necessitate provision of six 200-gallon boilers, together with check clerks and police constables to “ensure order and prevent imposition”.¹¹

Alleging that the proposed system failed to discriminate between urban and rural requirements, the dissenting guardians proposed an alternative whereby relief would be dispensed by means of raw meal and money “to a limited and moderate extent”.¹² A further indication of the lack of unanimity amongst the board was evidenced by a proposal from Lee McKinstry, one of the most prominent guardians, to augment workhouse accommodation by 500 places in order to extensively apply the workhouse test and thereby avert “the expense that must necessarily attend the outdoor relief system”.¹³ To take time to consider these questions the board ordered that no cooking apparatus be established in the Armagh district, while relieving officers were ordered to initially offer workhouse relief to all applicants.¹⁴ The hesitancy of the board to sanction widespread outdoor relief was due to two fears: firstly, that such a system would engender a dependency culture whereby much of the populace would come to rely increasingly on the local authorities for their support; secondly, the belief that, in

a short time, the expense of distribution would spiral out of control – which the financial condition of the union did not allow for. Indeed, so difficult were the circumstances that the board advised a bread contractor they could not “at present make any arrangement as to time of payment.”¹⁵

However, the reasons for such difficulties were not hard to discern given that the number born or admitted into the workhouse in 1847 (4,788) exceeded the combined total of the previous three years (4,247).¹⁶ In addition, due to the fever epidemic and the numbers subsequently requiring aid, the medical expenses of the house increased dramatically. Thus, while the half-year figure for March 1847 (£27/1/1) was actually down on the same period in 1846 (£28/10/9), there was a ten-fold increase in the figure ending September 1847 (£216/1/8) from its corresponding level in 1846 (£21/7/4).¹⁷ At the same time, the average weekly cost of a pauper had remained at or above two shillings from 20 March to 21 August, with just two exceptions¹⁸ and in the period from 19 June to 17 July it ranged from 2/4 to 2/6.¹⁹ A further indication of the continued pressure on the workhouse authorities was the increase in the administration costs of the establishment from the beginning of 1846 to September 1847. In 1846 they averaged £2,000 for each half-year but in 1847 they increased, gradually at first, to £3446 by the end of March and dramatically to £6,417/18/7 for the quarter ending September.²⁰

In the midst of this financial pressure the union now also owed £2,584/15/ for aid advanced under the recent Temporary Relief Act.²¹ Although there had been some respite with the news that all money advanced for temporary fever hospitals under 10

Vic. 22 had been deemed a grant from the government, this was tempered by the stipulation that the future running of such hospitals was to be financed entirely out of the poor rates.²² By mid-October 1847, the weekly cost of hospitals in Armagh, Loughgall, Keady, Markethill and Middletown varied between three and thirteen shillings per week.²³ Indicative of such expense was the fact that while the current bank balance stood against the board on only five weeks in the period from October to December, the maximum amount in their favour was just £431/4/9 and on 28 December it was noted as being just over £7.²⁴ While short-term arrears could gradually be overcome with the eventual collection of poor rate, the spectre of long-term debt occasioned by workhouse construction still hung over the union. Thus, with £7,752/5/1 owed to the paymaster of the Civil Services a demand for repayment of £1,500 was received on 23 November with an order that it be paid by 14 December.²⁵ Any such payment was unlikely given that, as the board itself readily admitted, “rates at present could not be collected anyway”.²⁶

Inevitably, the onset of winter witnessed renewed applications to the workhouse. This was in spite of its association with disease and death, which was exemplified by the death of the master from fever on 21 December.²⁷ Nevertheless, while not as large as the equivalent period in 1846, the admission levels remained substantially higher than for any other similar period since the opening of the house with monthly totals of 413 for October, 583 for November and 156 for December, the latter figure being accounted for by a directive from the guardians to admit only those in dire need. Indeed, in November, apart from one week, numbers constantly exceeded one hundred, being 141 on 16 November and 143 in the following week.²⁸

To a certain extent, local conditions compelled people to seek admission to the house in order to receive medical treatment. On 9 November, the Loughgall temporary fever hospital was closed,²⁹ while on 4 December the patients at the Markethill hospital were discharged, although the establishment was soon afterwards acquired by the committee of the Markethill Dispensary to be operated independently of the authorities.³⁰ The gradual run-down of the temporary fever hospitals saw the transfer of all fever patients in Tynan, Middletown, Derrynoose and Crossmore to the Middletown institution although the board of guardians, faced with a bill of £400, revealed they had no further funds to pay for such hospitals.³¹ In the meantime, the temporary hospital sited at Armagh remained open due to lack of space in the workhouse hospital³² and as the weeks went by it relaxed its policy of restriction to residents of the borough alone, allowing entry to patients from any part of the union.³³

The admission of so many paupers to the workhouse necessitated obtaining further accommodation, especially since the commissioners eventually stated their disapproval of Lee McKinstry's idea to build a substantial extension, advising the guardians to think instead of renting other buildings close to the establishment.³⁴ After discussing the possibility of hiring an old brewery³⁵ the board again opted for the old cholera hospital, which had originally been utilised in the epidemic of 1832-33.³⁶ This afforded additional accommodation for eighty aged and infirm females and was urgently required given that on 23 November the capacity of the workhouse – 1,200 – had been exceeded (1,203) with the medical officer stating there were too many inmates in the body of the house and warning that “the evil of overcrowding should be cautiously guarded against”.³⁷ Further problems arose when Dr. Riggs reported that

the recently constructed sheds were “unfit for habitation” with rain having recently passed through the roof into the wards.³⁸ Hence, a committee was hastily convened to investigate the possibility of renting three houses on Barrack Hill from the Armagh Building Company.³⁹ By 1 February 1848, with negotiations successfully completed, the houses were rented for one month.⁴⁰ Thus, the master was ordered to have beds fitted up “for as many boys as can be conveniently accommodated” to sleep in the houses and return to the workhouse for breakfast.⁴¹ Another alteration saw the clerk’s office converted into a staircase for the admission of paupers, the clerk being relocated to an office at the rear of the boardroom.⁴²

On 28 December 1847, the board received an order from the commissioners restricting numbers in the workhouse to 1,050, together with eighty in the old cholera hospital.⁴³ The authorities were obviously concerned about a recurrence of the overcrowding and subsequent high mortality levels of the previous winter. Hence, in a further rebuke, they felt compelled to remind the board that the workhouse was for the accommodation of able-bodied males and females, and that only those eligible for outdoor relief should be removed from the institution. Stating that the board “must provide sufficient care for the poor” it appears that the commissioners believed the former were stretching the law in a concerted effort to avoid the expense of outdoor relief.⁴⁴ Indicative of such board activity was a resolution on 12 February that the names of all heads of families receiving outdoor relief be posted in chapels and churches throughout the union.⁴⁵ Similar measures were adopted by boards throughout the country and while ostensibly aimed at preventing imposition, the guardians hoped, through shame of having their condition made public, that families would be

dissuaded from applying for outdoor relief and seek admission to the workhouse. Such was the case in Newry where the guardians were experiencing difficulties comparable to those of their Armagh counterparts.

NEWRY WORKHOUSE

In August 1847, the Newry guardians received a number of suggestions from the Poor Law Commissioners as to the method for initiating an efficient system of outdoor relief. They recommended that such aid be given firstly to destitute persons permanently disabled from labour. This they hoped would prevent the majority from begging, now illegal under the Poor Law Extension Act, while relief given to widows with two or more legitimate children would ensure accommodation for the children of able-bodied men.⁴⁶ If the suggestions were to prove unsuccessful in coping with demand for relief the commissioners advocated that all schoolchildren, together with their teachers, be moved to a separate establishment; while, for those suffering from fever and other contagious diseases, they recommended the renting of houses to augment the capacity of the present workhouse hospital.⁴⁷

On 21 August, the board met to appoint relieving officers for the union, with four being allocated to the eleven Armagh divisions at a remuneration of £40 each.⁴⁸ While the outdoor relief system was being set-up, the workhouse administrators, given their experience of the previous winter, were preparing themselves for an influx of paupers. Referring to the “sad experience of the past sacrifice of human life”, the medical officer, Dr. Davis, pointed to the “absolute necessity” of suitable hospital accommodation for the reception of those with infectious diseases. He also urged a

“more wholesome and sufficient diet” than presently available to the inmates, together with supplies of adequate clothing and dry bedding-straw for the coming months.⁴⁹ The board accepted his proposals and sanctioned a new dietary at the end of September consisting of a breakfast of six ounces of indian meal stirabout, with four ounces of the same for supper. In between, each pauper received twelve ounces of brown bread and one quart of buttermilk.⁵⁰ The new adult diet also applied, in half measure, to children, while the commissioners informed the board that adults should receive four ounces of indian meal for breakfast instead of the medical officer’s recommendation of six ounces, an order which they acceded to.⁵¹ In further preparation for the winter, the old straw shed was converted into a sitting room for women, the sitting room now being used as a nursery. At the same time, the girls were sent to the former schoolroom, with the wooden shed presently used as a girls’ school converted into a store for straw.⁵² With such alterations being put into force, the medical officer vouched that a workhouse capacity of 1,000 would suffice for the months ahead.⁵³ However, Assistant Commissioner Barron disagreed and suggested that the board hire houses distinct from the workhouse to be used as schools for girls and boys.⁵⁴ In compliance with his wishes a committee of guardians was established to ascertain the level of accommodation which such buildings could provide.⁵⁵ But, by 1 December, with alternative accommodation proving difficult to procure, the guardians invited tenders for permanent sheds to be erected on the site of the workhouse, thereby increasing accommodation by 600.⁵⁶

The importance of such was emphasised by an order from the commissioners that the limit of the present buildings must not exceed 1,000⁵⁷ but as winter approached and

large numbers again turned to the workhouse this figure appeared unrealistic. As in previous years, admissions began to increase from October onwards with a total of 592 admissions from the beginning of that month until 11 December.⁵⁸ Over the five-week period 14 November to 12 December 1846, the total figure of entries had been 427⁵⁹ and the corresponding figures for 1847 (341) appeared to represent an improvement in the welfare of the people of the union. However, it is more likely that the guardians, operating under the strict orders of the commissioners, were forced to implement a more stringent admission policy. This was evidenced by the fact that in the four-week period, 18 December 1847 to 14 January 1848, paupers were admitted on only one occasion, when forty-nine were allowed to enter on 1 January.⁶⁰ In each of the other three weeks, despite what must have been huge demand, no admissions were allowed, the commissioners stating that none could be facilitated until the present number of 1,036 had been reduced to less than 1,000.⁶¹

As in the Armagh union, by the end of 1847, fever had gradually abated in Newry. However, short outbreaks still caused problems in the workhouse, one of the casualties being the master who, while ill for a number of weeks, failed to fill out the various administrative books essential for the effective running of the house.⁶² Thus, the board appointed an assistant master while the clerk received the help of several colleagues.⁶³ Nevertheless, such staff additions only served to increase the financial burden on the union, although superficially it appeared to be in good shape. Indeed, from October to the end of December the minimum balance in favour of the union was £262/12/10 increasing to a maximum of £1,093/3/5 on 18 December⁶⁴ but the guardians still remained unable to meet some bills. On 13 November they received a

request for £397/10/-, the interest due on a loan of £2,050, while one week later they were notified of a demand for £1,470, being an instalment of the original workhouse loan of £9,800.⁶⁵ At the same time, the board had just arranged a loan of £1,500 to facilitate the purchase of a site and construction of a union fever hospital.⁶⁶ These long-term commitments were exacerbated by the expense consequent on the fever epidemic of the spring, although due to the presence of the local Newry Fever Hospital it was much smaller than that in Armagh. Thus, while the cost of medical provision increased massively in percentage terms from just seven shillings for the half year ending September 1846 to £55/8/8 for the equivalent period in 1847, the latter figure was small in comparison with other workhouses in the country.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, as in Armagh, the total workhouse expenditure increased substantially in the period September 1845 to September 1847 rising from £1,776/7/5 for the quarter ending September 1846 to £2,988/1 in the next quarter and peaking at £4,350/18/2 in September 1847.⁶⁸

In the midst of such financial and administrative difficulties it is perhaps not surprising to find that the guardians sought to bend some of the rules in relation to outdoor relief. In an attempt to further increase available workhouse accommodation, they appointed a committee to select inmates deemed suitable for removal from the house onto the outdoor relief list. They now believed that due both to the commissioners' limit of 1,000 and "in consequence of the great destitution of able-bodied paupers" it was necessary to relieve the latter class outside the workhouse.⁶⁹ However, the commissioners, loathe to allow supplies of free food to those deemed able to work, refused to sanction the proposal. Instead, they argued that the workhouse

should be made available “to as great an extent as possible” for able-bodied men. They also highlighted the fact that out of a total of 998 inmates on 1 January 1848, 573 were less than fifteen years of age, and informed the board that relief of children without their parents who were liable to maintain them was “at variance with the provisions of the Irish Poor Relief Act and liable to generate abuse”. They thus urged the board to establish the number of children who had no known parents and those who had parents outside the house.⁷⁰ They further expressed the hope that:

the adoption of these measures will create so much room at the disposal of the guardians for relief of able-bodied men, that the necessity will not arise for issuing an order authorising outdoor relief to the destitute of that class.⁷¹

Consequently, the commissioners were applied to for plans to build permanent sheds on the workhouse grounds,⁷² but this initiative was once again rebuffed with the reiteration that the authorities wished the board to hire other buildings.⁷³ The guardians responded that no such opportunity within a mile of the workhouse had presented itself and ordered that a wooden shed, originally built as a boys’ schoolroom but latterly used as a store, be “immediately fitted up for the reception of the boys”. In this way, the original schoolroom thus became available for the reception of paupers, increasing accommodation by a further fifty places.⁷⁴

In a highly significant move, directly in contravention of the poor law and the dictate of the commissioners, it was decided to supply all those refused admission on 8 January – there were no admissions – with twelve ounces of “coarse bread”, children receiving nine ounces.⁷⁵ The move was deemed essential as the committee appointed to locate alternative accommodation was being constantly thwarted in its efforts. They

had attempted to negotiate for a building belonging to the Board of Ordinance, but balked at the proposed rent of £190/18/3 per annum.⁷⁶ Once again, the commissioners refused to sanction the construction of new sheds in the male and female wards despite the board's assurance that this would both enhance accommodation for the able-bodied and provide paupers with a source of employment.⁷⁷ In response, the guardians instructed all relieving officers to pay six shillings per week to heads of families with no other means of obtaining lodgings. However, they also reduced rations to seven pounds for adults and half that amount for children.⁷⁸

With both workhouses filled to capacity, many had to avail of the spartan diet offered by the system of outdoor relief particularly in the first three months of the year. In January the total figure amounted to 1,186 including 649 in the first week, with further additions of 621 in February and 182 in March.⁷⁹ In the Armagh divisions of Newry union demand was substantial and, while numbers joining the register declined as the year progressed, the figures below illustrate that in these divisions demand for food actually increased in the same period:

FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN NEWRY UNION, JANUARY-MARCH 1848

DISTRICT	AMOUNT		
	January	February	March
Poyntzpass	29 cwt	26cwt	36cwt
Mountnorris	44 cwt	52cwt	53cwt
Killeavy	30 cwt	42cwt	44cwt
Forkhill	32 cwt	40cwt	44cwt

Source: PRONI., BG 24/A/5, 1 January 1848, p.262; 8 January 1848, p.274; 15 January 1848, p.284; 22 January 1848, p.289; 29 January 1848, p.297; 5 February

1848, p.303; 12 February 1848, p.312; 19 February 1848, p.319; 26 February 1848, p.322; 4 March 1848, p.331; 11 March 1848, p.336; 18 March 1848, p.341; 25 March 1848, p.346.

By March there were almost 6,000 people in the two unions dependent on such relief at a cost of almost £100 per week, the highest figure in Armagh being 2,542 persons in the week of 4 March, while in Newry it was 3,438 three weeks later.⁸⁰

At the same time, both workhouses remained thronged and at the beginning of March, there were 1,223 people in the Armagh house⁸¹ and 1,139 in its Newry counterpart.⁸²

The guardians of the latter had finally managed to increase capacity by negotiating the hire of Hancock's store on Canal Quay at an annual rent of £35.⁸³ Having been "properly ventilated, cleaned, repaired and whitewashed" fifty able-bodied paupers were sent to the building on 12 February.⁸⁴ However, such efforts inevitably entailed much expenditure, further increasing the burden on ratepayers. Indeed, one correspondent declared that:

ruinous taxation in Jonesboro and the adjoining district at once shows the sufferings and privations of the lower classes and the frightful state of even this part of favoured Ulster.⁸⁵

Some rate-payers, such as those in Crossmore and Keady, decided they had endured enough taxation and sent a notice to the Armagh board of guardians alleging "many irregularities committed by the committee under the Temporary Relief Act".⁸⁶

Asserting that they would not be held accountable for expenses incurred as a result of such "mistakes" they announced their intention to oppose any payment by legal means and to this end initiated a collection of one shilling in each townland to aid their objective.⁸⁷ Significantly, this was one of the areas which had manifested the most strident opposition to the poor law by refusing to pay rates in the early years of its

operation. Thus, with the huge increase in rates consequent on the numbers in distress the attitude of local ratepayers had, if anything, become more hostile to the notion of spending more to feed the poor.

Even without such orchestrated withholding of repayment, poor rate collectors were finding it increasingly difficult to attain funds. On 12 February the clerk of the Armagh union had complained of the “deficient manner” in which the collectors were discharging their duties.⁸⁸ He reported that large amounts remained uncollected, leaving the union in considerable debt.⁸⁹ Indeed, at this juncture, with the rate entirely uncollected in some divisions, the total amount still to be repaid was £20,489/15/5.⁹⁰ Believing that more active measures had to be adopted, the board authorised collectors to proceed by civil bill against all defaulters with an unpaid rate of £1 or more and by distraint against those with arrears of less than £1. However, such measures had only limited success due to the fact that increasing numbers were simply unable to bear the weight of enhanced rates.⁹¹

FURTHER OPPOSITION TO THE POOR LAW

In February 1848 another encumbrance was imposed on the ratepayers of the county as a consequence of the disastrous public works scheme which had been in operation during the previous winter. In a report to the Armagh County Grand Jury the county surveyor stated that the works commenced under the acts 9 and 10 vic. Ch. 107 had been abandoned “and in most instances they are in a very unfinished state”. He further commented that the situation was worst in the barony of Upper Fews “where the

majority of the roads are left impassable".⁹² His opinion was corroborated by a report in the local press which commented:

Those who have not seen the cut-up roads can hardly conceive of the amount of public mischief done under the authority of the Labour-Rate Act. A tourist through the Newtownhamilton district would readily find enlightenment on the subject. Substantial highways, along which vehicles could formerly have passed rapidly and safely, it has been ingeniously contrived so to intersect as to render the passage of any wheeled conveyance over them an utter impossibility and to supply active-limbed pedestrians with abundantly numerous opportunities for practicing hop, skip and jump.⁹³

However, this antipathy was not universal, as illustrated by comments on the works noted in County Kerry, where the county surveyor stated how, "with a few trifling exceptions", all roads were reproductive. In addition, the chairman of the Tralee board of guardians regarded money disbursed on road works as "leaving results adequate to the expenditure and beneficial to the public communications on which the expenditure took place."⁹⁴ Such comments illustrate that the public works were not regarded with such disdain in every county. Nevertheless, their legacy in Armagh was described as "ruinous and devastating",⁹⁵ in spite of government assertions in the spring of 1847 that all such works would be completed.⁹⁶ Thus, in order to make good the works, further amounts totalling more than £1,000 had to be advanced under the same acts to be repaid by the ratepayers of the county in twenty half-yearly instalments. The largest proportion of this sum, £686, was levied on the barony of Upper Fews, while the amounts for Upper Orior and Armagh were £187 and £132 respectively.⁹⁷

This extra expenditure, together with the amounts being dispensed weekly on indoor and outdoor relief, prompted the Grand Jury to record their disapprobation with the increasing tax burden on the county. At the 1848 Lent Assizes they stated their alarm

at the large number of able-bodied paupers in the county, the decrease of employment and “the certainty of such a taxation as may endanger both the peace of the country and the solvency of the landed interest”.⁹⁸ Their final reference may be attributed to the fact that the majority of the members were drawn from that class. However, they further castigated the Poor Law Act as “holding out no encouragement, either to the landlord or tenant to give employment as their taxation is not thereby proportionately diminished”.⁹⁹ Believing that such classes were “almost the only employers of labour in this country” they lamented that, even for them, “ruin was now fast approaching”.¹⁰⁰ In consequence, the body pledged to adopt all measures within their power “to obtain such an alteration of the existing law as may”, to reduce the area of taxation and compel “all descriptions of property” to contribute to the alleviation of distress.¹⁰¹

The opinion of the Grand Jury met with the whole-hearted support of the local press, the *Armagh Guardian* lambasting the “indefensible” poor houses as “a national evil – a degradation and disgrace to the country; and their existence at all is unmistakable evidence of a people morally and socially disordered”.¹⁰² Voicing its support of a proposed mass rally against the poor law to be held in Loughgall in April, the paper criticised the statute, which could “never be made suitable to Ireland”:

There is an intolerable extravagance in its machinery and working. It proposes to ameliorate the condition of the poor. Has it done so – have all the millions ever collected from an impoverished middle-class ameliorated the condition of one single beggar? Finding men paupers it knows no provision but that which keeps them always paupers while by its oppressiveness, it is calculated to bring industrious citizens to indolence and mendicancy.¹⁰³

Continuing with an attack on the Poor Law Commissioners “neither chosen by, nor

representing the wishes of the people”, the paper concluded, “the poor laws are a crying evil and sooner or later the voice of the rate-paying population must be heard.”¹⁰⁴

The organisers of the proposed rally appear to have been indifferent to the climate of fear in the country arising from the belief that a rebellion, organised by the Young Ireland movement, was imminent. One consequence was that Loughgall landlord, Robert Cope, whilst admitting “there may be some points in the present poor law which could be advantageously altered”, refused to support the holding of such a meeting for fear of it inciting trouble. He concluded: “I sincerely deprecate any such public assembly which naturally calls together a large number of people and may possibly lead to a breach of the peace.”¹⁰⁵ The reality of such fears was revealed in a communication from the local resident magistrate, W. Millar, to Matthew Singleton who, in advocating the presence of a constabulary force at the rally, admitted that “times like this (are) pregnant with mischief.”¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, even Millar felt that the anger expressed by local people was not without foundation, commenting how “many complain of the intolerable burden of the poor rate and of the expensive establishment connected with it whereby they say they pay for the rich rather than the poor.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, due to the uncertainty of the period and despite the fact that “a very great aversion from the Poor Laws exists among all classes”,¹⁰⁸ the attendance at the Loughgall rally proved much smaller than had been anticipated. Nevertheless, hundreds of people, representing the ratepayers of the electoral divisions of Annaghmore, Charlemont, Hockley, Killyman, Kilmore, Loughgall and Richhill

gathered to voice their opposition to the law.¹⁰⁹ It was agreed that while ratepayers were “nominally taxed for the support of the poor” their money was “to a very great extent lavished on officers”.¹¹⁰ The parish priest of Loughgall, Fr. Keating, believed the present system was “highly injurious” to the interests of farmers “and when that class is shaken, the interest of every other class is shaken”.¹¹¹ Emphasising this point, another speaker related how seed oats had been seized from one farmer in lieu of rates and sold at Portadown market, remarking:

This system has not in the slightest degree relieved the really indigent pauper, whilst it has pulled down the industrious farmer from the position of comfort and happiness, to which his industry had raised him, and placed him on a level with the most vile and abject.¹¹²

A further contributor castigated the role of absentee landlords claiming it was shameful that thousands of pounds “wrung from the hard earnings of the poor industrious farmer” were not invested in the area but were instead “lavished in luxurious expenditure in Italy, Germany and France”.¹¹³ This claim was not without foundation and a cursory glance through the contemporary local newspapers illustrates that many of the Armagh landlords availed of the “grand tour” on the Continent. Even members of the minor gentry such as the Greers and Hancocks travelled to Europe for family vacations in the 1840s.¹¹⁴

Probably the most significant contribution of the meeting emerged from an unlikely source, the poor law guardian for the division of Loughgall, Joseph Orr. Although elected to enforce the poor law, Orr attacked the system as a whole and the institution of the workhouse in particular, as follows:

Whilst we acknowledge the right of the destitute poor to public relief, we cannot but repudiate the workhouse system altogether, for the heavy expenses

of its management and mismanagement as also the dissatisfaction of the unfortunate inmates at the treatment and relief they are subjected to therein – afford in our opinion the strongest reasons for animadversion.¹¹⁵

He further revealed that the system, together with its concurrent expenditure, had never received his approval, and expressed the wish that further meetings throughout the country would accomplish an alteration “whereby the meritorious poor shall be treated as they ought and the indolent sent to seek relief by industry”.¹¹⁶

The subsequent resolutions adopted by the meeting bore a remarkable similarity to those espoused ten years previously when the idea of a national poor law had first been mooted – the difference being that the intervening period had witnessed a huge increase in taxation and overall expense as a consequence of the famine. Therefore, the meeting agreed that, due to a lack of representation of ratepayers on local boards of guardians, “the fundamental rules of taxation are violated” and a “consequent want of confidence in the correctness of the striking of the rate engendered”.¹¹⁷

Similarly, the assembly appealed for a reduction in the size of areas of taxation, claiming that the present system did not differentiate between areas with good and bad landlords thereby “visiting the sins of the guilty on the innocent”. In an extension of this argument it was felt that using the townland, “the general territorial boundary of proprietors”, as the area of taxation would be a better method.¹¹⁸ The thorny question of accountability was also addressed in a resolution which criticised the concentration of power in the hands of the Poor Law Commissioners “obscuring the vision of local residents concerning their own affairs and depriving them of that legitimate control

which they ought to have over funds raised by themselves”.¹¹⁹

Further resolutions called for the reformation of the system of outdoor relief, arguing that too much money was expended on relieving officers; while another sought the establishment of local unpaid boards, consisting of the largest cess payers, together with magistrates and clergy, to meet as often as necessary. It was also advocated that a law of settlement be established, which would make relief a local charge for local people, thereby bringing Ireland into line with English and Scottish laws, and preventing the return of Irish paupers who had moved to Britain.¹²⁰ If all such resolutions were adopted by the state, the meeting believed that the existing workhouses could be put to use as factories and agricultural schools “thus affording reproductive employment to the people”.¹²¹

The sentiments of this gathering would have been well received in a number of areas throughout the country. For example, in Kells, County Meath, the local board of guardians established a poor law amendment committee and convened a meeting of all the Irish boards in Dublin at which various alterations to the poor law were advocated.¹²² However, these were rejected on the basis that in order to counteract the present distress such an enactment was unnecessary and those present were instead content to press for gradual change by means of petitions to the British parliament.¹²³ Hence, as Kinealy has suggested, much of the dissatisfaction, including that in Armagh, was fragmented and, given the added fear of rebellion, was concentrated in a few months during the winter of 1848-49, following which it tended to dissipate.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, such initiatives served to highlight trenchant opposition to the precepts

of the poor law almost a decade after its introduction and highlighted the very real fear that continuous tax increases would eventually cripple the ratepayers of the county.

In the midst of such meetings and debates the business of the workhouses continued and, on 4 April, the Armagh guardians ordered all relieving officers to attend before the board to help facilitate a reduction in the outdoor relief numbers. Revealing that increased accommodation was now available in the house they urged the officers to implement “a more strict application of the workhouse test”.¹²⁵ This intention to gradually phase out the outdoor relief system was emphasised by a resolution that in future only uncooked food be supplied in the districts of Charlemont, Clady, Loughgall and Markethill. Thus, the guardians would be enabled to dispense with the expenditure involved in running boilers and employing assistant relieving officers at one shilling per day.¹²⁶ Further to this, relief was terminated at the end of May in Derrynoose and Middletown on the recommendation of the local guardians¹²⁷ and a few weeks later it was similarly brought to a halt in Grange.¹²⁸ Hence, numbers dependant on outdoor relief in the union fell from 1,951 persons in April to 289 in June while monthly expenditure decreased from just over £28 to £7.¹²⁹ Indeed, from May onwards, with few exceptions, the only division constantly obtaining supplies of meal was the urban centre of Armagh.¹³⁰

However, in Newry union, where aversion to outdoor relief appears to have been less pronounced than in Armagh, substantial numbers remained on the lists. As the following table illustrates, April 1848 saw the largest amount of meal distributed, to date:

FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN NEWRY UNION, APRIL-MAY 1848

DISTRICT	AMOUNT		
	April	May	June
Poyntzpass	58 cwt	38cwt	42cwt
Mountnorris	59 cwt	37cwt	39cwt
Killeavy	36 cwt	14cwt	20cwt
Forkhill	50 cwt	24cwt	26cwt

Source: PRONI, BG 24/A/5, 1 April 1848, p.353; 8 April 1848, p.362; 15 April 1848, p.371; 22 April 1848, p.373; 29 April 1848, p.381; 6 May 1848, p.390; 13 May 1848, p.395; 20 May 1848, p.407; BG 2/A/7, 27 May 1848, p.9; 3 June 1848, p.12; 10 June 1848, p.17; 17 June 1848, p.27; 24 June 1848, p.34.

Nevertheless, there were signs throughout the Armagh divisions that the needs of the poor had begun to abate and by June all areas showed a significant decline in distribution totals. Hence, whilst demand remained at a high level throughout Newry union, numbers gradually decreased to remain at around 2,000.¹³¹ More respite for the guardians came in the form of much diminished applications for admission onto the relief list, the total for April being ninety-five, for May thirty-nine and for June 136.¹³²

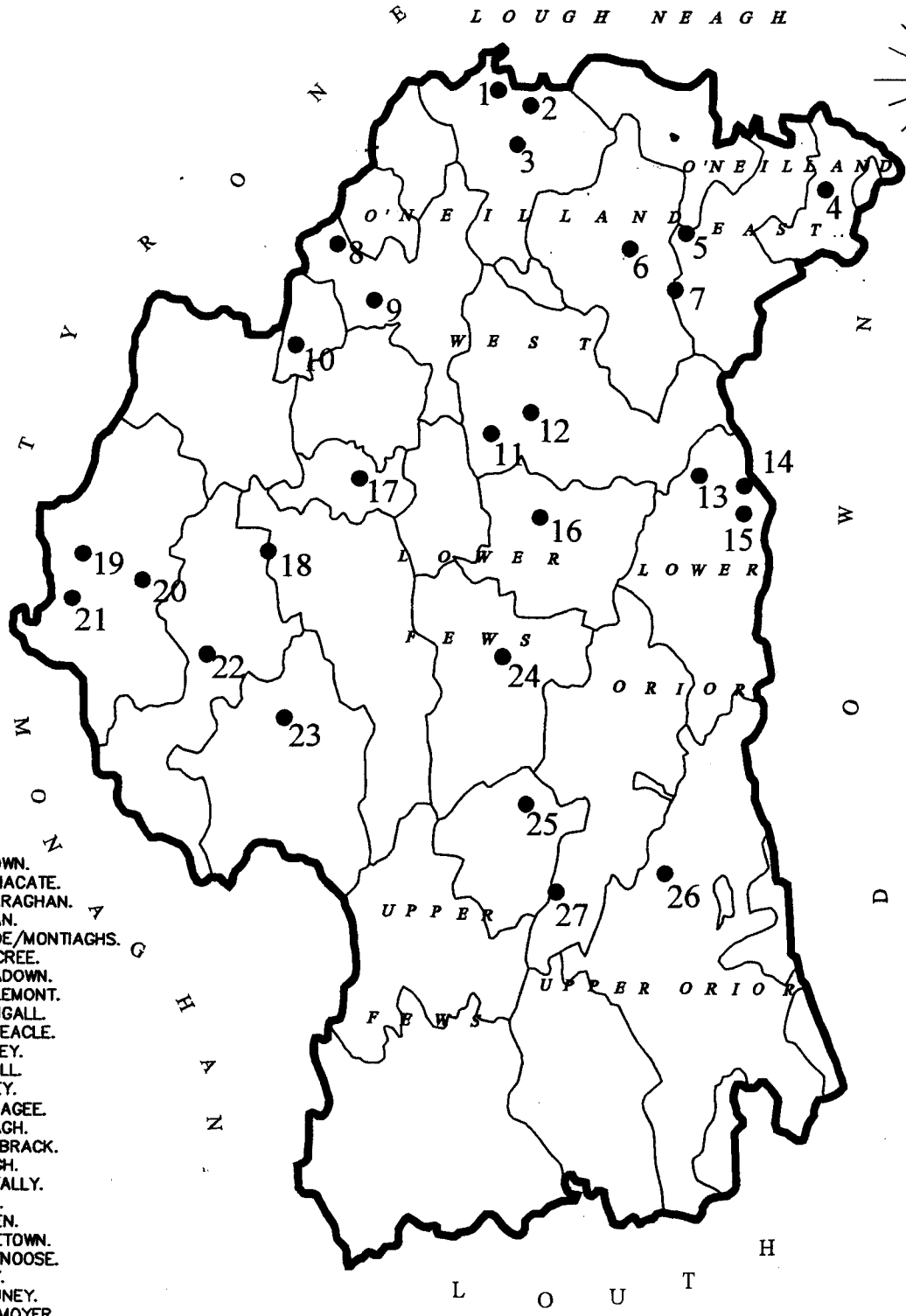
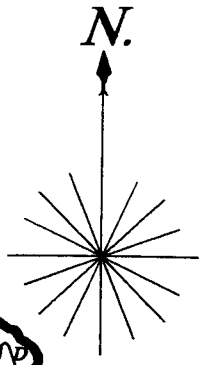
Such improvements were tempered somewhat by the fact that many who were not officially classified as destitute and thus not entitled to relief under the poor law were still dependant on private relief. For example, in the first three months of 1848 Lord John Beresford made donations to relief groups in Camlough, Clare, Forkhill and Mullavilly,¹³³ while a similar contribution to Mullabrack was augmented by £10 from the Earl of Gosford and a weekly subscription of £1 from Reverend Dr. Blacker.¹³⁴ In addition, this latter fund received the benefit of a balance remaining from a grant of meal to the old Mullabrack relief committee, valued at £13/5.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, on the Richhill estate the Richardson family placed a “considerable sum” in the hands of

local poor law guardian Joseph Jackson in order to provide employment for all requiring it.¹³⁶

The need for such benevolence was evidenced by events in Armagh City where sixty labourers gathered at the market house to demand work. Initially, their pleas proved unsuccessful and they only dispersed when given one shilling each by William Paton and Catholic Archbishop William Crolly.¹³⁷ However, on returning the following day Paton was able to provide work for about forty of them.¹³⁸ Throughout the same period in Newry collections were taken up in local churches of all denominations in order to provide fuel, blankets and straw for the poor.¹³⁹

Such localised efforts were supplemented by the continued exertions of the Society of Friends who, in light of the introduction of the Poor Law Extension Act, decided to alter their relief policy to encapsulate a more long-term approach to the needs of the poor. To help effect this aim they established farms and fisheries in various parts of the country but in County Armagh they identified lack of adequate clothing as a problem and therefore dedicated their efforts to clothing those in need (see map 4). In addition, the efforts of the Quakers and independent relief committees also emphasised that a class not eligible for workhouse relief was in distress, a fact highlighted by a published appeal from house-carpenters for a meeting to consider the condition of their trade and “if possible to adopt some means of giving employment”.¹⁴⁰ Hence, to those ineligible for relief under the stringent parameters of the poor law, the aid afforded by the Quakers was essential. The following table illustrates the areas receiving clothes up to July 1848 with the majority being situated

County Armagh: Areas Requesting Clothing From The Society of Friends, February 1847 to July 1848



1. MILLTOWN.
2. CLONMACATE.
3. TARTARAGHAN.
4. LURGAN.
5. SEAGOE/MONTIAGHS.
6. DRUMCREE.
7. PORTADOWN.
8. CHARLEMONT.
9. LOUGHGALL.
10. CLONFEACLE.
11. HOCKLEY.
12. RICHHILL.
13. AHOREY.
14. TANDRAGEE.
15. CABRACH.
16. MULLABRACK.
17. ARMAGH.
18. BROOTALLY.
19. TYNAN.
20. MADDEN.
21. MIDDLETOWN.
22. DERRYNOOSE.
23. KEADY.
24. KILCLUNEY.
25. BALLYMOYER.
26. CAMLOUGH.
27. BALEEK.

MAP 4

in the western barony of Tiranny, an area with almost 40% fourth-class housing:

DISTRIBUTION OF QUAKER CLOTHING IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1848

Area	Date	Heads of Families	No. Dependent
Madden	February	70	245
Camlough	March	35	177
Tynan	March	21	53
Middletown	24 March	50	273
Brootally/M'town	April-June	66	298
Richhill	May-June	63	c.300
Ballymoyer	July	34	170
	Total	339	1,516

Source: NAD, Society of Friends Distribution of Clothing Form 61, C. S. Mangan, Madden, 11 March 1848; Form 103, Wm. T. Harvey, Camlough, 17 March 1848; Form 235, Janet A. Synnot, Newtownhamilton, 22 June 1848; Forms 250 and 276, Margaret Tennison, Portnelligan, Tynan, 22 June 1848; Form 516, Jane B. Maclean, Tynan, 14 November 1848.

The Quakers hoped that those in receipt of clothing would be able to make a contribution towards its cost, dependent on the amount received and the financial position of each family. Thus, some articles were sold either for as little as two pence or as much as nine shillings but in most areas clothing was also disbursed free of cost to those deemed unable to pay.¹⁴¹ In Brootally and Middletown thirty-five families, more than one half of the total, received free clothes, while in Tynan a further eleven families received clothes without charge.¹⁴² Indeed, such was the poverty and distress extant in Madden that local Anglican clergyman, Crosby Mangan commented:

I stated on my application that in consequence of the poverty of the people I feared that I should not be able to dispose of any of the goods humbly entrusted to me from the committee by sale. In fact, I have been obliged to pay for the making-up of the articles, carriage etc.¹⁴³

Remarks such as these demonstrated that many people belonging to the trade class as well as better-off farmers were still enduring much hardship, due to the fact that the longevity of distress rendered them as dependent on handouts from relief agencies as their cottier and labourer neighbours. Their plight was exemplified by the need for clothing, perhaps the ultimate indignity for industrious people. Not only were they unable to feed themselves, they could no longer afford to clothe either themselves or their families. To those who have argued that the effect of the famine in Ulster was short-lived and was soon surmounted this evidence demonstrates that even in one of the richest counties in the country thousands were still suffering from its effects well into 1848. Thus, in Ulster, as in other parts of Ireland, it was essential that the forthcoming harvest followed on from the successful crop of 1847.

ENDNOTES

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6. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1847, p.193.
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10. *Ibid.*, 5 October 1847, p.18.
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14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 26 October 1847, p.26.
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17. Thirteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1847, Appendix B, No. 18, pp.303, 307; First Annual Report of the Irish Poor Law Commissioners, 1848, Appendix B, No. 5, p.221; Appendix B, No. 6, p.227.
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21. PRONI, BG 24/A/5, 23 January 1849, p.197.
22. PRONI, BG 2/A/5, 12 October 1847, p.19.
23. *Ibid.*, 19 October 1847, p.23.
24. *Ibid.*, pp.15, 19, 21, 24, 27, 31, 34, 36, 39, 41, 45, 48, 50.
25. *Ibid.*, 23 November 1847, p.37.
26. *Ibid.*, 26 October 1847, p.26.
27. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1847, p.28; 21 December 1847, p.49.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.19, 21, 24, 27, 30, 34, 36, 38, 40, 45, 46, 50, 52.
29. *Ibid.*, 9 November 1847, p.33.
30. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1847, p.29; 7 December 1847, p.43; 26 October 1847, p.26; 15 February 1848, p.70.
31. *Ibid.*, 18 January 1848, p.60; 25 January 1848, p.62; 11 March 1848, p.79.
32. *Ibid.*, 19 October 1847, p.23.
33. *Ibid.*, 28 December 1847, p.50.
34. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1847, p.29.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 23 November 1847, p.37.
37. *Ibid.*

38. Ibid., 21 December 1847, p.50.
39. Ibid., p.49.
40. Ibid., 1 February 1848, p.65.
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43. Ibid., 28 December 1847, p.50.
44. Ibid., 25 January 1848, p.61.
45. Ibid., 11 March 1848, p.80.
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47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 21 August 1847, p.105.
49. Ibid., 13 September 1847, pp.141-2.
50. Ibid., 27 September 1847, p.149.
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53. Ibid., 20 November 1847, p.213.
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55. Ibid., 27 November 1847, p.219.
56. Ibid., 11 December 1847, p.235.
57. Ibid.
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62. Ibid., 27 November 1847, p.218.
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64. Ibid., pp.153, 161, 170, 180, 194, 210, 217, 230, 243.
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74. Ibid., pp.275 and 278; 15 January 1848, p.284.
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126. Ibid., 18 April 1848, p.98.
127. Ibid., 30 May 1848, p.113.
128. Ibid., 4 July 1848, p.124.
129. BPP, Volume iii, p.1024; Volume iv, p.244.
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134. *Newry Telegraph*, 27 January 1848 and *Armagh Guardian*, 31 January 1848.
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137. *Armagh Guardian*, 24 April 1848.
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CHAPTER SIX:

NEW CHALLENGES: 1849-51

The small crop of 1847 had one significant legacy in that it allowed a greater area of land to be seeded for harvest in 1848. Thus, the total national potato acreage for that year was 805,449, almost three times that of 1847 (274,134) but still a shortfall of 63% on that of the 1845 crop (2,186,798). In Ulster acreage also increased from its 1847 figure of 87,186 acres to recover to 235,211, still almost 60% lower than that of 1845. The statistics for Armagh reflected both the provincial and national trend, thus while the 1848 acreage (28,604) was nearly three times higher than that of 1847 (9,652) it was almost 40% lower than that for 1845 (47,563).¹

By early summer 1848 the prospects for a successful harvest in the county, following on from that of the previous year, appeared promising. On 15 June the *Newry Telegraph* noted how the crops were “generally more forward than what was usual at a similar period in former years”.² Optimism that, after almost three years of distress, the county could return to a semblance of normality, was shared by influential clergymen such as Reverend Richard Verschoyle of Loughgilly who felt hopeful enough to state that “the calamity is in a measure overpast”.³ Similarly, the annual report delivered by the medical officer of the Markethill and Mountnorris Dispensary, exuded confidence:

At present the district is in a healthy state – there is scarcely the usual average of disease and from the plentiful supply of good food and its consequent cheapness, there is every reason to hope that the time of our visitation has passed over.⁴

Indeed, in early August potatoes in the district around Armagh city were reported as healthy, with those at market exhibiting “not the slightest appearance of disease”.⁵ Moreover, in the vicinity of Blackwatertown reference was made to the “luxuriant

appearance of the crops of every description".⁶ However, within days, as had occurred in 1845 and 1846, the tone of the reports changed dramatically and on 7 August, the *Armagh Guardian* stated its regret that "symptoms of potato disease have partially appeared in some parts of the county".⁷ In addition, a reply to a circular from the Poor Law Commissioners by the clerk of the Newry union reported that the potato crop had been "everywhere attacked by the disease" adding, "the precise extent of injury to the tubers cannot yet be ascertained".⁸ Corroborating such statements, the *Newry Telegraph* noted how "the effects of potato disease have now extensively developed itself in this locality" concluding: "The early potatoes have been affected almost universally and the late-planted very generally exhibit the well-known symptoms."⁹ In fact, by the end of August disease of the crop was virulent around Markethill with "cups" being the worst affected,¹⁰ while, in Loughgall, one-third of the harvest was lost. This was akin to the shortfall of 1845 and much more devastating in its impact given the cumulative effects of the previous years of distress.¹¹ Thus, by September 1848, far from celebrating a bumper harvest, local farmers had been reduced to hoping that "the calamity will be only partial".¹²

ARMAGH WORKHOUSE

By the summer of 1848, due to the absence of disease, there appeared to be a return to more mundane matters in Armagh workhouse. For example, in early July the guardians decided to separate prostitutes and "bad females" from the rest of the inmates by moving them to the upper idiot wards to pick three pounds of oakum daily.¹³ Some weeks later they also ordered a remittance to the Paymaster of the Civil

Service of £2,584/1/8 to be followed by an instalment of £2,594/10/1 to the Relief Commissioners “sufficient funds being now available”, though a further £2,573 was still owed.¹⁴ Indeed, in comparison to the same period for the previous year the financial position of the union had been transformed. While in August and September 1847 the largest amount in favour of the guardians had been £213/1/5, for the equivalent months in 1848 the largest figure was £4,440/18 and the smallest £1,372/9/7.¹⁵ Similarly, establishment expenses for the half-year ending September had fallen from £2,255/15/11 in 1847 to £1,222/13/9 in 1848;¹⁶ while, in the same accounts, the cost of medicines was reduced from £216/1/8 to £37/14/10.¹⁷

Despite the onset of winter and also possibly due to a gradual recovery in the local trades, numbers on outdoor relief continued to dwindle and the only division in need of supplies was that of Armagh. Indeed, by the end of August with the termination of the outdoor facility in the divisions of Brootally, Caledon, Crossmore, Keady and Tynan, there remained 115 people in receipt of such relief, compared with 283 at the beginning of that month.¹⁸ This reduction had been achieved by the applicants instead being offered admission to the workhouse.¹⁹ Thus, by 9 September, with the board deeming the “labours of relieving officers very much reduced”,²⁰ it was resolved to decrease their salaries by one quarter from the end of the month.²¹ At the same time, although admissions to the workhouse followed a familiar trend from October onwards, they were less than those for the corresponding period in either 1846 or 1847:

MONTHLY ADMISSIONS TO ARMAGH WORKHOUSE, 1846-48

MONTH	1846	1847	1848
October	200	469	208
November	545	527	374
December	511	156	288
Total	1,256	1,152	870

Source: PRONI., BG 2/A/4 pp.71, 74, 76, 80, 82, 84, 85, 90, 92, 94, 96; BG 2/A/5, pp.19, 21, 24, 27, 30, 34, 36, 38, 40, 45, 46, 50, 52, 159, 160, 163, 165, 167, 170, 173, 176, 177, 179, 183, 185; BG 2/A/6, pp.188.

Nevertheless, the large number entering in late November and early December once again pushed the workhouse total above 1,000 and was indicative of much continuing distress throughout the union with the local press remarking how, “The numbers include many able-bodied who would willingly work if it was available and some who were recently earning a tolerably comfortable subsistence for their families.”²² Further evidence of such privation was the continued requirement for supplies of clothing from the Society of Friends to those in need in Tynan and Loughgall where from May to December more than 1,000 people received a variety of garments.²³ In Tynan, clothes were sold to families at prices from 2d to 1/6, with fourteen receiving free supplies²⁴ while in Loughgall prices ranged from 6d to 2/6, seven families being supplied free of charge. In addition, petticoats were distributed gratis to twelve “aged and destitute” women while thirty-seven children also received free supplies.²⁵ Interestingly, an analysis of the names of those applying illustrates that the vast majority were Protestants thereby bolstering the contention that the famine in County Armagh impacted on all creeds.

Such dependence on outside agencies illustrated the extent to which distress prevailed and by 16 January 1849, with Armagh workhouse once again full, the board ordered the auxiliary workhouse at the old cholera hospital to be reoccupied immediately.²⁶ The situation had not been helped by a severe storm in December, which had rendered two of the three sheds totally uninhabitable²⁷ and an offer to rent four houses on Barrack Hill was gratefully accepted – the period of rent being for three months, at £3 per month.²⁸ The guardians deemed this alternative preferable to that of “limited outdoor relief throughout the union”.²⁹ However, while significant numbers repaired to the workhouse in January (448), a more manageable level was reached in February when the number of admissions was 226.³⁰ In fact, they remained around this figure until the onset of a cholera outbreak in the spring.³¹ Moreover, two aspects of the poor law statistics vouched for better times ahead. Numbers on the outdoor relief register were negligible and in January and February just eight new applicants were registered.³² At the same time, out of a total of 1,151 inmates in the workhouse on 13 February only 123 were men, the remainder consisting of 358 women, 350 boys and 320 girls suggesting that there were now renewed opportunities for male employment outside the workhouse.³³

NEWRY WORKHOUSE

On 12 August 1848, the Newry guardians ordered that the potatoes growing on the workhouse grounds be used for pauper dinners in lieu of bread or stirabout.³⁴ But, given the earlier report of the union clerk in relation to the condition of the crop, these proved to be of little consequence and numbers on outdoor relief dropped only slightly from 1,972 persons on 5 August to 1,571 by the end of that month.³⁵ The authorities

regarded these figures as being too high and, on 19 August, Assistant Commissioner Barron notified all relieving officers that he would examine their books to ascertain if the workhouse test of destitution was being applied “in the proper manner”.³⁶ On 2 September, the board, perhaps over-reacting to the pressure of the commissioners, announced that outdoor relief would cease within days, the workhouse being capable of receiving “a very large number of paupers”.³⁷ Thus, despite the addition of twenty-five people, the numbers on outdoor relief fell from 999 to 296 within the month of September.³⁸

Given this significant reduction the commissioners, feeling that this smaller group could now be accommodated in the workhouse, urged immediate cessation of outdoor relief.³⁹ Notwithstanding their earlier pronouncement, and bolstering suggestions that it had been made under duress, the guardians disagreed and argued that numbers had only decreased due to the workhouse test being more rigorously enforced.⁴⁰ They felt that outdoor relief had to be available due to the likelihood of further admissions to the house in November and December.⁴¹ Indeed, in anticipation of such, they negotiated the rent of the Canal Quay auxiliary workhouse for another year together with other premises on the same site at a rent of £21 until 1 October 1849.⁴² By mid-December therefore, with the workhouse numbers again reaching capacity, and constantly remaining above 1,300, the schoolmistress and 200 girls were removed from the main site to the Quay.⁴³

The instinct of the guardians proved accurate and as winter encroached outdoor relief numbers increased markedly from 279 on 7 October, to 1,675 by 30 December.⁴⁴ On

14 October alone, 264 paupers were admitted to the lists demonstrating both the lack of available space in the workhouse and the continued distress of some people in the union.⁴⁵ As a consequence of the pressure of enhanced numbers both inside and outside the workhouse the guardians insisted, entirely illegally, that no outdoor relief be given to any person not residing in the union for thirty months out of the previous three years except by special order of the board, or “other exceptional circumstances”.⁴⁶ However, in their anxiety to accommodate as many people as possible, they appeared to have overlooked the welfare of paupers and on 20 January 1849, the schoolmistress drew their attention to the “deplorable state of the store on the quay”.⁴⁷ This, she believed, emanated from “want of fire and the damp of the floors and walls” which had resulted in the girls developing swollen hands and feet.⁴⁸ The board reacted immediately and ordered a stove to be placed in the auxiliary workhouse as soon as possible.⁴⁹ Even allowing for the immense difficulty of the times, this complaint appeared difficult to comprehend given that numerous warnings concerning the maintenance of good health had been circulating for months due to the fear of a cholera epidemic.

THE 1849 CHOLERA OUTBREAK

In July 1848, local press reports noted the appearance of cholera “in the most positive form” at St. Petersburg and throughout northern Europe.⁵⁰ Indicative of the general opinion that it would soon arrive in Ireland was a report from Dr. Riggs of the Armagh workhouse who noted that while fever was gradually declining, cases of diarrhoea were on the increase “heralding the march of Asiatic Cholera to our shores”.⁵¹ The *Newry Telegraph*, remarking that the contagion had spread to Hull and

Edinburgh, constantly urged the “inert” town commissioners of Newry to initiate a process of improved sanitation and lambasted them for the delay in removing nuisances liable to exacerbate the spread of disease.⁵² To effect such, the commissioners imposed a system of fines for non-clearance of cesspools, manure heaps and suchlike. Thus, areas such as High Street, Doyle’s Yard and a number of courts were “all well cleaned and whitewashed” having been cleared of manure and filth.⁵³

In September 1848, Armagh and Newry guardians received a communication from the Poor Law Commissioners advising them to take all necessary precautions for the prevention of cholera⁵⁴ but the Armagh board, having received a similar letter espousing the importance of improved ventilation, replied that such was already sufficient in every part of the house.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, they also ordered that any instances of diarrhoea should be reported immediately to the medical officer.⁵⁶ Further to the advice from the commissioners and emphasising the concern of the authorities about the advent of contagion, on 16 January 1849, the Central Board of Health inquired about special measures to be invoked by Armagh guardians in the event of an outbreak of cholera.⁵⁷ Once again, they confidently replied that no special provision was necessary as they could “at any time provide prompt medical relief”.⁵⁸ However, the medical officer of the Newry workhouse advocated a change of diet to counteract the possibility of contagion⁵⁹ with the dinner diet altered from stirabout and buttermilk to rice and oatmeal – the board ordering the purchase of one ton of rice for “immediate use”.⁶⁰ He also ordered that “more attention” be given to the clothing and cleanliness of the inmates.⁶¹ Similarly, it was agreed that the guardians of each

electoral division should enforce measures for the removal of nuisances from various “streets, rows, lanes, courts, alleys or ways”.⁶² With the board seeking information from the Belfast guardians as to the best means for enacting the directions and regulations of the Commissioners of Health, the local board of health ordered that all dispensaries be made available for cholera patients on a twenty-four hour basis.⁶³

Indicative of such concerns amongst the inhabitants was the formation in February of the Armagh Sanitary Committee which aimed to cleanse the city by removing all nuisances.⁶⁴ To effect this the town was divided into a number of districts, with persons appointed to regularly investigate and report to a general committee to meet in the workhouse, while a paid inspector was employed to act under honorary inspectors to locate and remove all nuisances “tending to generate disease”.⁶⁵ At the same time, relieving officers were ordered to tell the board of nuisances remaining within their districts.⁶⁶ As in Newry, the secretaries of local dispensaries were informed that people with bowel complaints were to be attended night and day, while the union clerk was to be alerted immediately if cholera manifested itself in any part of the union.⁶⁷ However, these initiatives were deemed ineffective by the town’s board of health, which ordered them to invoke their own guidelines “without delay”.⁶⁸

The difficulties inherent in attempting to provide for as many paupers as possible and yet secure a healthy environment for them was encapsulated in a report on the Newry union by Poor Law Commission Inspector Captain Dent. On 10 February, he criticised the lack of flax-spinning in the house, and stated that paupers should be regularly and systematically employed. At the same time, he believed the hospital department was

overcrowded while a straw shed converted into a day room was “not sufficiently ventilated”. In addition, he described the enclosed yard of the auxiliary workhouse, presently occupied by 450 inmates, as “very confined” and the stores “very offensive”, both of which required the “particular attention” of the guardians.⁶⁹ In conjunction with Dent’s criticisms, the Catholic chaplain voiced the complaints of his congregation in relation to both the insufficiency of food and thinness of stirabout. Remarking on the fact that there were a large number of children and infants in the house, many of whom were in a very delicate condition, he warned that negligence in relation to food, cleanliness and clothing would result in great mortality.⁷⁰

Given such an environment it was of little surprise when, on 19 February, Dr. Morrison, medical officer to the Newry Fever Hospital and Dispensary, reported the first fatal case of cholera in the town.⁷¹ Having recommended that a special cholera hospital be established for those “who cannot be properly treated at their own homes”, a house was fitted up for that purpose in Dromalaire.⁷² In response to this news the Newry workhouse doctor once more varied the diet, replacing grain vegetables in soup with equal portions of oatmeal and rice, supplemented by an increase in the amount of pepper “to make it more savoury”. In addition, nursery children aged two to five years received half a pint of sweetmilk morning and night, instead of equal parts of sweetmilk and buttermilk.⁷³ Further preventive measures saw the restriction of pauper access to the town, by prohibiting passes, and to the workhouse, by limiting the number of visitors allowed, while Dr. Davis also recommended that all inmates be warmly clothed and “every attention paid to cleanliness and ventilation”.⁷⁴ At the same time, six extra doctors were employed throughout Newry union, to attend all

cases of cholera at a combined cost of twelve shillings per week.⁷⁵

Evidence of the potent threat presented by the epidemic was noted in the *Newry*

Telegraph:

This dreadful scourge is spreading rapidly in the town. Hitherto its ravages have been confined almost exclusively to the poorest ranks but at least one respectable gentleman has been attacked. We earnestly urge on all the necessity for prompt, energetic and judicious measures.⁷⁶

By 9 March, there had been sixteen deaths from fifty-one cases, with eight people remaining under treatment⁷⁷ but on 24 March with only four new cases reported an order was made to discontinue the service of the four doctors employed at two shillings per week.⁷⁸ Hence, by 7 April, the contagion was stated to be “almost entirely gone in the union”.⁷⁹ Despite this improved situation, the medical officer of the Newry workhouse maintained that the continued inefficiency of food and thinness of stirabout would, given the delicacy of many inmates, lead to an increase in mortality.⁸⁰ Therefore, in confirming that earlier orders had been disregarded whilst also establishing impropriety on the part of some staff, the guardians took the drastic measure of locking up the cooks employed to superintend the stirabout “in order to prevent any portion of it being abstracted”.⁸¹

As the contagion eased in Newry, it emerged in Armagh with workhouse medical officer, Dr. Riggs, reporting how on 7 April, a strong wind from Belfast, where the malady was particularly virulent, had blown across the town resulting in an attack of cholera on a twelve year old girl who subsequently died within fourteen hours.⁸² A man walking about a quarter of a mile from the workhouse on the Belfast Road was

similarly infected and died.⁸³ As the wind moved westwards, the virulence subsided, but it left thirty fatal cases in its wake including workhouse master, Mr. Williams.⁸⁴ Riggs noted how the “rapid and almost instantaneous manner in which persons were seized in all parts of the workhouse, entirely separated from each other”, demonstrated how cholera had been carried in the atmosphere and was not contagious.⁸⁵

The guardians reacted immediately by appointing surgeon Leslie as an assistant medical officer but, on 17 April, a further six cases were reported in Keady.⁸⁶ By the end of the month, with the epidemic stated to be “subdued for the minute”, Dr. Riggs reported a total of sixty-one deaths, including that of Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, William Crolly, who had been attacked with cholera on Good Friday, while in Drogheda.⁸⁷ Throughout May local papers rejoiced in the fact that both towns were “wholly exempt from cholera” with public health reported as “excellent”.⁸⁸ In the meantime, the medical officer of the Newry workhouse, concerned about the “impending risk of cholera reappearing”, once again altered the diet, with sweetmilk and buttermilk replacing treacle while, at the same time, bigger fires were set in the main house.⁸⁹ He also recommended that men remain indoors when it was raining while women and children were to be warmly clothed and shoes given to those deemed “delicate”. All of his proposals received the approbation of the board.⁹⁰

The fears of the medical officer were realised when cholera reappeared in early June, this time being “more severe and fatal than before”⁹¹ and between the first and eleventh of the month twenty cases occurred, half of which resulted in death.⁹² Most disconcerting was the news that it had spread to the rural districts of Camlough,

Jonesboro, Killeavy and Mullaghglass.⁹³ So serious was the situation in Killeavy that a committee had been appointed to take steps to procure proper medical attention for those in need.⁹⁴ Similarly, the reappearance of disease resulted in the reforming of Armagh Sanitary Inspection Committee which, to aid its work of whitewashing and cleansing the city, elicited a private subscription, including £10 from Lord John Beresford.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the city was once again visited by the malady, this time claiming the lives of Philip Keenan, owner of the Royal Hotel and J. Lester, principal of the Cathedral School⁹⁶ while in Keady, another prominent victim was James Green, owner of several flax-spinning mills.⁹⁷ By the end of June there had been nine reported deaths in Newry⁹⁸ and the disease had spread throughout both unions with Forkhill, Belleek, Divernagh and Richhill all falling before the scourge, the latter containing “hovels which are spots invitative of epidemic”.⁹⁹

The variable nature of the epidemic was remarked upon by the Commissioners of Health who noted that, unlike fever, cholera exhibited “the singular feature of visiting the dense population of some one town with such severity and passing by almost untouched the population of a neighbouring town, in every respect apparently similarly or worse circumstanced.”¹⁰⁰ Emphasising this belief was the fact that the towns of Armagh, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown had a total of 704 cases with 271 deaths, while those of Banbridge, Castleblayney, Clones and Dungannon reported no cases of cholera in the same period.¹⁰¹

As with the fever epidemic of 1847, the persistence of cholera in Armagh and Newry resulted in extra expense for both unions as, alongside payment for medicines and

additional medical staff, the level of admissions to the workhouses increased from April onwards and thereby reversed the trend of declining applications which had been evident for some months. Thus, in Armagh it increased from 212 in April to 436 in May, falling to 243 in June but rising slightly to 247 in July. Similarly, the figures for Newry workhouse were 293 (April), 394 (May) and 378 (June) before dropping considerably to 177 in July.¹⁰² The figures illustrate that the epidemic impacted on both workhouses from April onwards, reaching a peak in May. However, while cholera appears to have terminated in June in the Newry workhouse, the statistics suggest that in Armagh it continued until the end of July, thereafter dropping dramatically from 274 admissions to ninety-two.¹⁰³

Such numbers obviously had a bearing on the financial condition of both unions, coming at a time when they were experiencing continued problems. Although the Armagh board had been able to repay some of its major long-standing debts, there were still difficulties and on 7 November 1848 they were met with a demand for £800 as part of the repayment of a £4,000 loan.¹⁰⁴ Two weeks later, a letter from the Public Works Loan Office informed them that further instalments on the original workhouse loan of £10,000 were now due – placing an extra burden of £2,000 on the union.¹⁰⁵ The board replied that with insufficient sums available to them, they would only comply with such demands when in a more secure financial position.¹⁰⁶ As always, they had to urge rate collectors to “use all exertions” to have both rates and arrears collected. In early September, the board threatened to proceed against their sureties while at the same time ordering the clerk to make out lists of defaulters in each townland which were then distributed amongst ratepayers and posted in the “most

conspicuous situations in the townland".¹⁰⁷ By 7 November, the same collectors were given one week's deadline while the collector for Middletown was ordered to be proceeded against and fined for failing to close his accounts.¹⁰⁸ Indicative of the difficulties he had encountered was the fact that one hundred and forty summonses had recently been given out at the Middletown petty sessions for failure to pay the rate.¹⁰⁹

Yet, despite their many threats, the board was loath to invoke legal action against their own appointees and in January 1849, they were still threatening a number of collectors.¹¹⁰ However, when the Middletown collector sought to pre-empt any such moves by resigning, the board denied him the opportunity and then proceeded to dismiss him. They immediately appointed a new collector, paying him one shilling in the pound for arrears accumulated under the previous appointee who was to be made liable for any extra expense incurred.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, by 20 March, the Middletown division still owed £1,528/9/2 in poor rates¹¹² and when the board was presented with a bill for more than £2,500 due under the Temporary Relief Act they informed the authorities that due to "other outstanding debts" they would be unable to pay.¹¹³ In addition, they had just paid £45 for the construction of a grinding mill which had been deemed essential by the guardians in providing employment for paupers.¹¹⁴

Similar difficulties were faced in Newry where, on 11 November 1848, the guardians received a request for repayment of £530, part of a £2,650 loan, with a stipulation that the amount be paid within one month.¹¹⁵ A week later they were asked for £1,960 as part of the reimbursement of the original workhouse loan.¹¹⁶ By 6 January 1849, with

neither bill settled, the Poor Law Commissioners sent a terse communication to the board stating: "It is to be distinctly understood that repayments will be required to be made forthwith on account of each electoral division."¹¹⁷ They further expressed the hope that at their next meeting, and each one following, the board would direct repayment be made "to the extent which the balance in the treasurer's hands will admit of, until the entire amount is repaid".¹¹⁸ At this juncture, with the weekly union accounts exhibiting a healthy balance of around £3,000 in favour of the board, it could be argued that they were in a position to expedite some of their debts.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, with outdoor relief costing more than £40 per week, the board remained both cautious and selective as to which bills were paid. Hence, on 27 January, they agreed to repay £500 due on advances made under the Temporary Relief Act.¹²⁰ However, on 17 March, the commissioners again addressed the subject of outstanding debts, making it clear that such should be met "as soon as possible"¹²¹ and instead of the customary practice at weekly board meetings of simply noting such correspondence, the guardians decided that, in order to illuminate the commissioners of their plight, a detailed reply was necessary. Expressing regret that it was not within their power to comply with the request they acknowledged that they had £2,400 in the bank, while a large amount of rate remained uncollected.¹²² Yet, they continued:

In consequence of the distressful state of the agriculturists, the board cannot look with any degree of confidence to the collectors being able to make good their collections till after the next harvest.¹²³

They further stated that with five months' expenses remaining to be met, the sum in the bank would not suffice for three of those. Thus, under such circumstances the board expressed both the hope and expectation that the commissioners would see "the

impracticability of complying with the application for the present”.¹²⁴ Aware of the pressure they were under, the board again threatened rate collectors with court action if accounts were not closed, but the plight of some collectors was highlighted by the case of James Crummy, collector for Killeavy. While in the course of his work he was arrested and placed in prison for debt and, to compound the situation, his father, one of his sureties, was also incarcerated on the same charge.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, such difficulties appeared to make little impact on the commissioners and in reply to the board’s communication they sent a number of questions requiring detailed answers as to the amount of money in the treasurer’s hands, the extent of rate uncollected and the present weekly expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief.¹²⁶ The board reiterated that no amount could be repaid without jeopardising the process of “ordinary expenditure” and commented that when the last rate was struck, they had not allowed for “the great increase in pauperism” which had occurred.¹²⁷ In addition, they had been forced to negotiate a further loan of £1,500 in order to both purchase a new site and build a union fever hospital. They concluded by stating that no further amounts would be repaid until after the next harvest.¹²⁸ However, the board members were far from unanimous on such questions as evidenced by the narrow defeat – eleven votes to ten – of a proposal to pay the second instalment of £500 due for advances under the Temporary Relief Act.¹²⁹

THE RATE-IN-AID DISPUTE

In February 1849 the British government announced the introduction of new legislation which they hoped would finally end the need for Irish Poor Law unions to

seek financial assistance from the British treasury. It was also intended to be the final special relief measure for Ireland and was to mark the end of famine funding for the country. As a result of this new measure a national rate of six pence in the pound, known as the rate-in-aid, was to be levied on all Irish unions for two years. The money would be reallocated to twenty-three unions, which had been officially designated as “distressed”, in the south and west of the country.¹³⁰ Although this number included one Ulster union, that of Glenties in County Donegal, opposition to the new measure was most vociferous in that province. For example, in expressing “deep concern and alarm” at the proposal, the Armagh guardians stated how they were:

morally convinced that such cannot fail to consummate the ruin of a large portion of the ratepayers of the North of Ireland whose utmost energies have been, and continue to be, exerted in maintaining a struggle against circumstances of unparalleled pressure and difficulty.¹³¹

Claiming that such a measure would “inevitably result in the common ruin and degradation of its inhabitants”, they petitioned parliament and requested that the High Sheriff convene a county meeting to oppose the initiative.¹³² Similar sentiments were voiced by the boards of Belfast and Downpatrick where the measure was met with “alarm, indignation and surprise”.¹³³

Local press organs lost no time in leading the charge against what was generally felt to be a new tax imposition. In so doing, they focussed on a number of specific objections, with the *Newry Telegraph* initially observing that while the proposal was an “unjust system of taxation, dangerous to the best interests of Ireland” it was also “inconsistent with the articles of Union”:

The paramount object of Government and Parliament should be to give the people of Ireland to see and know that England, Scotland and Ireland form one

union – to bring them to regard themselves as part of the population of the United Kingdom and to feel that British and Irish concerns and interests are identical.¹³⁴

However, in a statement that would feature strongly in the coming months at rallies and meetings, it argued that “the direct tendency of legislation has been to show...Ireland is practically looked on as a separate country”.¹³⁵ Another aspect of the press articles was the notion that the tax would not be enforced due to the widespread opposition of the Ulster population. Thus, drawing parallels with the events of the 1780s, the *Telegraph* announced how “Ulster, with a promptitude betokening that the indomitable spirit of '82 still animates the province, is on the move already”,¹³⁶ and revealed that the first district to organise a meeting in opposition to the measure was Dungannon where the Volunteers of 1782 had first been organised.¹³⁷ Indeed, the same paper also appeared to insinuate that physical force could be used to oppose the enactment:

There is a dogged determination of purpose to the encountered in “the Black North” we warn...and it might not be so very convenient just now or quite compatible with the doctrines of the Manchester School to maintain an army of occupation in Ulster.¹³⁸

Another tactic of the press was to denigrate those for whom the tax was intended to help and the *Newry Telegraph*, referring to Connacht as “mentally and physically degraded”, commented:

While ‘the faithful’ of Connaught, after the manner of their co-religionists in other parts of the South and West of Ireland were idling their time in making parade of their numbers, at Repeal meetings, and were demonstrating their disloyal feelings and rebellious tendencies by whooping like maniacs in approval of their treasonable purposes aimed at under the guise of Repeal, the Protestants of Ulster were practically realising the adage importing that ‘time is money’ by laboriously following the pursuits of peaceful industry, and steadily eschewed participation in the movements and machinations of those who were seditiously ‘given to change’.¹³⁹

Thus, the new levy was seen as punishing Ulster Protestant loyalty and industry by making it accountable for “the sustenance (sic) of idleness and improvidence in the disloyal Provinces of Ireland.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the *Armagh Guardian* lambasted any proposal to tax “the industry of Ulster for the support for the rack-rented, indolent paupers of Connaught”.¹⁴¹ Such commentaries in the Armagh press support the observation of historian James Grant who stated that they:

vied with one another for the most forceful language of surprise, disbelief, dismay, anger, injury, detestation of injustice, protestation of loyalty and so on, usually with considerable dignity, but not infrequently, as righteous indignation took hold, with unpleasant, menacing and fighting talk, not to mention the occasional bout of sectarianism.¹⁴²

In the midst of such excitement the sentiments of a meeting convened in Armagh City meeting echoed many of the arguments already well-rehearsed in the press with leading Orangemen Colonel Close, Marcus Synnot and William Blacker claiming that the tax would penalise the loyal northern population for “mismanagement and idleness in the South and West”.¹⁴³ Arguing that any such charge should be borne throughout the United Kingdom, Lurgan man George Greer opined that Armagh had a much greater connection with London, Liverpool or Glasgow than with any area in the south or west.¹⁴⁴ Keeping the focus on tax matters was William Kirk who cited the “injustice” of the Labour Rate Act of 1846 and claimed that the populace had agreed to take money from the government in the hope that it would not call for its repayment. Illustrating the burden imposed on the middle classes as a consequence of the famine he related how, having recently paid £4/10/3, he would have to continue paying at every county cess collection for the next ten years. Now, in addition, sixpence in the pound was to be added “to make up for the mismanagement and fraud

practised elsewhere”.¹⁴⁵ Having aired their grievances the meeting concluded with a number of resolutions in opposition to the rate-in-aid which maintained that it would lead to the ruin of many ratepayers while simultaneously “holding out a premium to idleness and imposture...in many of the Southern and Western unions”.¹⁴⁶

A further meeting in opposition to the measure was convened at Newry and, although it regarded the initiative with as much disdain, it was marked by an absence of the sectarian verbiage so prominent in Armagh, probably due to the greater number of Catholic businessmen and guardians in that locality. Indeed, one speaker, in denying that the people of the south and west were “lazy and idle”, pointed to their conduct in America and Australia where they had shown “that under favourable circumstances, they are industrious, frugal and well-conducted”.¹⁴⁷ Again, unlike in Armagh, the assembly tended to focus on the economic argument against rate-in-aid and Rowan McNaghten refuted the government’s opinion that Ulster could well afford any new tax pointing to the fact that due to “so many losses“ farmers were unable to pay the present level of taxation.¹⁴⁸ He urged that, as an alternative, absentee landlords should be made liable for any new charge which in addition, “ought to have been made universal over the whole Empire”.¹⁴⁹

Prominent businessman, Isaac Corry, echoing fears already voiced in Armagh, doubted that the new tax would last, as promised, just two years, commenting, “Lord John Russell wants to get the wedge in. You know what will follow Irishmen – once in; always in”.¹⁵⁰ As in Armagh and similar gatherings in Belfast, Hillsborough, Lisburn, Lurgan and Strabane, a number of resolutions were drafted which focussed

on the perceived economic inequality inherent in the bill, and its failure to apply throughout the United Kingdom, deeming it as representing, “a system vicious in principle, unjust in practice and incompatible with the principles of the legislative union.”¹⁵¹

In the wake of both meetings the *Armagh Guardian* rejoiced in the fact that, “Men of creeds and parties, the highest equally with the lowest, are found to unite together on one common platform...Never during nearly a century was our province in such a ferment.”¹⁵² The paper emphasised the fact that those opposing the measure were the same men who had been to the fore in proclaiming their loyalty during the rebellion of 1848 and how “theirs is no factious move – though England may set them down as rebels – they are as far away from rebellion as it is possible for subjects to be.”¹⁵³

Given their constant lauding of the prosperity and economic endeavour of Ulster it was ironic, therefore, that the same press, saw the new rate as further draining the farmers, and other classes, of Ulster:

The taxation of this province is already more than it can bear, as any individual conversant with the impoverished condition of our unfortunate agricultural class can attest. We do not certainly write beyond truth when we assert that one-tenth of that class are unable to meet the various cesses imposed; and perhaps one-twentieth have not as much lumber, vulgarly called property, as would pay the collectors’ salaries. The working of the Poor Law has reduced them to the lowest extreme and where or how this last sixpence will be got is a question puzzling as vexatious.¹⁵⁴

However, hostility to the proposed tax was not confined to the pages of the local press and in the British parliament former Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, suggested as an alternative that a special commission be appointed to “subject the distressed unions to one concentrated and vigorous supervision”.¹⁵⁵ To alleviate indigence he

proffered the idea of drainage works, fisheries and a congested districts system of emigration “wisely directed”. Echoing the arguments of William Blacker a decade earlier, he also advocated “the release of land and application of new capital and industrial enterprise and skill to the development of the natural resources and capabilities of the soil”.¹⁵⁶ Another Tory Protectionist M.P., and future prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, also objected, seeing the initiative both as inadequate for its stated purpose and “impolitic as well as being illusory and deceptive”.¹⁵⁷ However, in defence of the measure, Lord John Russell claimed that Ireland had always been exempt from “land tax, assessed taxes, income tax and excise duties”.¹⁵⁸

Responding to the latter statement, the *Newry Telegraph* contended that Ireland was as liable as any other area for taxation but that there ought not to be “separate taxation of Ireland for merely Irish purposes”.¹⁵⁹ Further invoking the principle of imperial taxation and liability the *Armagh Guardian*, in an interesting contribution worthy of the *Newry Examiner*, argued for compensation for Irish industries which had been banned in previous years by the Westminster Parliament:

If Connaught is poor and impoverished it is emphatically because the people are neglected by the landlords or debarred the means of earning their bread by the government of England which has contrived to annihilate the manufactures of that province, governing it for their own benefit not ours. Let the sister country pay us half the loss we sustained by the ban having been placed on the woollen manufacture in Connaught and the linen of Ulster. Let her bestow her patronage impartially; let justice be dealt out to us and there shall be no grumbling about sixpence rates nor any necessity for such temporary expedients to atone for a bungling legislation.¹⁶⁰

In spite of such strongly argued opinions the rate-in-aid bill was passed into law by parliament in May¹⁶¹ but the sense of grievance among the local press was further

heightened when it became known that Newry union had been the first in Ulster to receive notification of the amount due under the new rate. Suddenly, the unanimity of Ulster opposition began to fragment, as illustrated by this editorial comment from the *Telegraph*:

Newry has been fixed upon wherein to make the first attempt at spoilation. Why not begin with the capital of the Province? In opposition to the unjustifiable course of the government, Belfast has very properly placed itself in the van. The official representatives of that important town “bearded the lion in his den” – the Mayor of Belfast and its representatives in parliament having bluntly conveyed to the ear of the Prime Minister that to levy the unjust impost... would be impracticable. Wherefore, then, should not the Minister, thus admonished, and virtually challenged, have made experiment of the meeting of his spoilatory enactment in Belfast in the first instance?¹⁶²

By a General Order of 13 June 1849, a rate-in-aid of £7,637/14/5 for 1849 and £2,412/7 for 1850 was placed on the unions covering County Armagh (see Appendix 5) in addition to the poor rate, annual cess, rents and repayments under the various labour and temporary relief acts.¹⁶³

Almost immediately the Duke of Manchester agreed to pay the entire rate due from his tenants.¹⁶⁴ However, this gesture was by no means common and for many the new tax heaped further misery upon them. Declaring that many poor farmers were utterly unable to meet this “new imposition”, the *Newry Telegraph* commented:

So terrible is the depression of the times that even in this favoured county, and in Ulster generally, there are many farmers as yet unable to crop their little fields with turnips etc – the cold-blooded economy of Whiggism is without foresight.¹⁶⁵

For many, the new tax was the final insult to the “loyal” ratepayers of the north, but the opposition to it and the manner in which it was expressed, reflected a confused

sense of disenchantment on the part of those who supported the Act of Union. On the one hand, they were proud to be seen as the standard bearers of the Union in Ireland; nevertheless, they were received a harsh reminder that such unity meant different things to different people. Most importantly, the British government was continuing its policy of ensuring that Irish property paid for Irish poverty, irrespective of how this impacted on perceptions of the Union. The belief was that the famine was certainly over in the northeast and hence, northern ratepayers could easily afford paying a few pence in the pound to help their fellow Irishmen in the south and west. Whether this opinion was grounded in any sense of reality or not, the fact was that in supposedly rich counties like Armagh, destitution, poverty and debt were problems which still needed to be addressed.

GRADUAL RECOVERY

In the midst of the cholera epidemic and heated debate surrounding the rate-in-aid proposal, there occurred some news which promised better times ahead for the people of Armagh. On 1 May 1849, the *Newry Telegraph* noted that, although a recent frost had injured the early-planted potatoes, their appearance was generally promising.¹⁶⁶ Some weeks later it was similarly reported that fields in and around Blackwatertown “smiled with promise of abundance”,¹⁶⁷ while at Middletown the potatoes showed “not the slightest symptoms of famine”.¹⁶⁸ In the first couple of weeks in August, the area from Caledon to Keady was said to present “very fine fields of wheat, oats and potatoes”¹⁶⁹ but, as with the previous harvests, the situation changed dramatically within days. On 21 August the *Armagh Guardian* reported “some reappearance of disease” having blighted leaves, stems and tubers and although its effects varied

between localities, it was agreed by observers that the malady was indeed spreading.¹⁷⁰ Thus, there was stated to be “extreme ravage” in Killylea,¹⁷¹ while in Armagh damage was limited to varieties known as “cups” and “whites”.¹⁷² Remarking how the disease was much worse in the late than in the early-planted crop, the press commented that “it will be nothing like the visitation of 1848, owing to the extent of crop planted and the partial escapes from disease”.¹⁷³

Consequently, by mid-October, it was reported that “digging out goes on briskly” and while “sad ravage” had occurred amongst “cups”, most other varieties had resisted serious damage.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, even a partial failure, following those of 1845, 1846 and 1848, resulted in sustained hardship for much of the population, especially given the added difficulties occasioned by the cholera outbreak and the persistence of long-standing debt. For instance, in June, a local observer referred to Richhill as “a dilapidated and almost fallen village”,¹⁷⁵ while considerable distress had also been noted in Middletown and Tynan, the *Armagh Guardian* commenting that much of the agricultural population was unemployed.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, the long-term effects of penury were noted in Blackwatertown with one commentator stating: “The village itself – once a scene of busy industry – wears now the aspect of desolation.”¹⁷⁷

In an attempt to offset these difficulties some relief work was provided by local landlords such as Sir James Stronge of Tynan and Reverend Waring of Drumsallen and it was agreed that without such “the poor would otherwise feel keenly the pressure of these trying times”.¹⁷⁸ For one man, the lack of employment and continued distress had proved fatal. On 4 June, the *Armagh Guardian* carried a report about an

individual from Derryhaw near Middletown who, though an “industrious man”, had been unable to obtain work. He was subsequently found dead in a ditch, his emaciated condition leading local dispensary officer, Dr. Clarke to certify “death by starvation”.¹⁷⁹

Throughout this period much anger was voiced at the hardship engendered by the level of rates in the county, particularly that of the poor rate. For example, in Killeavy that sum had reached three shillings per pound with the consequence that:

The people are totally unable to bear up under the pressure of these enormous taxes and from the worrying they are getting and the law costs they are put to, they have a greater dread of the poor-rate collector than of the cholera – for both these scourges are now desolating the land.¹⁸⁰

At the same time, the rate collector for the Forkhill area related finding people in the Jonesboro division living on boiled nettles. He stated his belief that many of the people in that neighbourhood were attempting to subsist on such “wretched fare” together with pig nuts “hoked from the ground” adding, “they prefer this to surrendering their independence and coming into the workhouse”.¹⁸¹ Given such widespread destitution together with want of employment and the prevalence of cholera, any collection of rates he felt would prove impossible – an opinion corroborated by the rector of Jonesboro, Reverend Robert Henry:

Mr. Carroll has made every exertion to collect the oppressive poor rates, which are crushing and destroying all classes in the country, but from the poverty of the people, they are totally unable to pay, particularly at this time of the year.¹⁸²

For those unable to meet rate or rent demands, the authorities often resorted to distress – a method whereby goods belonging to the defaulter were confiscated and sold to

meet the rate or rental demand. Thus, it was reported how in the townland of Cashill a “decent” farmer had fallen to such a level of degradation that the authorities had distrained his entire herd of cattle and sold them to obtain the poor rate.¹⁸³ In some areas, the population organised themselves in order to prevent such occurrences. For example, on 12 June, the collector for the Forkhill division informed the Newry guardians of a seizure of cattle for poor rates. However, having been placed in the pound for sale, it was found that nobody would bid for them, fuelling his suspicion that “the people appeared to have come to some understanding with each other”.¹⁸⁴ A striking case of the extent of distress, and perhaps one that was unique in the county, was that of Miss McMaster, owner of the townlands of Cappy and Cloughbeg. Due to her inability to pay the poor rate, itself arising from non-payment of rent by tenants, she had been placed in Dundalk gaol as a debtor.¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, despite such instances of personal hardship there was a general improvement in the condition of the county as exemplified by events within the Armagh and Newry workhouses.

ARMAGH WORKHOUSE

As the remnants of cholera gradually eased, admissions to Armagh workhouse declined rapidly to such an extent that the September (fifty-six) and October (120) figures were the lowest since 1845.¹⁸⁶ The latter development was particularly significant as this month had traditionally heralded the return of many people to the workhouse, peaking at a figure of 413 in 1847.¹⁸⁷ Given such developments, the board felt confident enough to order the auxiliary workhouse on Barrack Hill to be closed from 1 November.¹⁸⁸ Further, due to there being room in the workhouse for all applicants, termination of outdoor relief was ordered on 18 September with effect

from the end of that month¹⁸⁹ while all relieving officers, bar one remaining for the Armagh division, were to be dismissed after this date.¹⁹⁰ The board justified such initiatives on the basis that the capacity specified by the commissioners (1,330) would suffice for all future need. Although the latter voiced their disapproval of such an proposal the board stated that they could have dismissed them all but decided to retain one for Armagh division “not from any necessity, which we find for continuing his services, but from a desire of acting in strict conformity with the law”.¹⁹¹

Nevertheless, the commissioners insisted that the order be rescinded and thus the board ordered the division of the union into four relief districts – Armagh, Keady, Loughgall and Tynan – with each officer being retained until the end of October.¹⁹² Obviously irked by the dictates of the commissioners, the guardians continued to agitate for a reduction in the number of relieving officers and, citing the Banbridge union, claimed that two would prove sufficient.¹⁹³ As a compromise, on 18 December, the commissioners sanctioned a reduction to three relief districts manned by three officers.¹⁹⁴

In the meantime, the gradually improving condition of the union was further illustrated by an order for a supply of potatoes for three months, from the end of August.¹⁹⁵ The guardians also ordered that bread baked in the house be sold to the local gaol for a trial period – an initiative swiftly terminated by the commissioners who stated their objection to the “undertaking of a speculative trade quite unconnected with the relief of the poor and with the wants of the person receiving relief”.¹⁹⁶ They did, nonetheless, give their unqualified support to the purchase of looms to employ those paupers who could weave and train young people in that trade.¹⁹⁷

Whilst there was reason for optimism within the house, the years of crop failure and disease culminated in a legacy of debt in the union. On 2 October, the Public Works Loan Commissioners demanded payment of £2,800, rising to £3,500 by 20 November.¹⁹⁸ However, their weekly balance sheets reveal that the board was experiencing serious difficulties in collecting rates throughout September and much of October.¹⁹⁹ In September they just managed to maintain a credit balance in their favour but by early October this gave way to a balance of £22/1/7 against the union, the first occasion since 25 January 1848 that this situation had arisen.²⁰⁰ Yet, as early as 14 August, they had reported insufficient funds to meet the demands placed on them and, despite prompting from the Poor Law Commissioners to initiate proceedings against rate collectors and threats from themselves to do likewise, they struggled to meet outstanding debts.²⁰¹ Thus, by January 1850, with divisions such as Annaghmore owing half their rate (£226), the total remaining to be collected was £10,263,²⁰² while at the same time the board still owed £1,573 for sums advanced under the Temporary Relief Act of 1847.²⁰³ Hence, while numbers dying from disease and destitution had diminished, there still remained a problem of severe debt throughout Armagh union and this was replicated in the portion of the county under the auspices of the Newry board of guardians.

NEWRY WORKHOUSE

The cholera outbreak meant that demand for outdoor relief remained high in Newry union and was evident in the amount distributed throughout June and July 1849:

FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN NEWRY UNION, 1849

DISTRICT	AMOUNT	
	June	July
Poyntzpass	38 cwt	28 cwt
Mountnorris	42 cwt	32 cwt
Killeavy	32 cwt	26 cwt
Forkhill	24 cwt	20 cwt

Source: PRONI., BG 24/A/8, 2 June 1849, p.17; 9 June 1849, p.25; 16 June 1849, p.33; 23 June 1849, p.40; 30 June 1849, p.50; 7 July 1849, p.61; 14 July 1849, p.71; 21 July 1849, p.79; 28 July 1849, p.87.

At the same time the guardians, having received criticism from Assistant Commissioner Barron about the use of the probationary wards for reception of smallpox and cholera patients, appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of hiring a house.²⁰⁴ After much consultation they rented the upper yard and two under-apartments on Canal Quay until 1 November at a rent of £7/10²⁰⁵ while further accommodation was gained by the conversion of a straw store at the auxiliary workhouse into an extra ward.²⁰⁶ Such difficulties with accommodation were hampered by the continued prevalence of cholera. In the first week of June there were reported to be “many cases” in Jonesboro and Killeavy and the board was subsequently forced to appoint three extra medical men at a combined cost of six shillings per week.²⁰⁷ Despite such efforts, the spread of cholera was being facilitated by the unhygienic condition of many habitations throughout the union. The *Newry Telegraph*, in one of several articles criticising the town commissioners, illustrated the circumstances in which some were forced to live:

Let anyone who entertains any doubt of the necessity for stringent sanitary measures go to Nicholson’s Court off King Street in Ballybot and he will there see a spectacle, which, we have no hesitation in saying, is deeply disgraceful to the authorities of the town. Right before the door of a man ill of cholera there is a large ditch full of the elements of disease and death. It is utterly impossible for the poor people who are compelled to live there to enjoy good health and

we would most earnestly entreat that immediate steps be taken to have this place, as well as others similarly circumstanced, cleansed and purified.²⁰⁸

However, attempts to improve such districts were hindered by antagonism between local groups. Indicative of this was a reply to a letter from the guardians by the town Police Commissioners in which they urged the latter to extend their methods of sanitation.²⁰⁹ In a response which suggested annoyance at the insinuation that they were not exerting themselves the police informed the guardians that they themselves had as much responsibility for such endeavours and, in fact, owed the force £14/4/3 for work already carried out around the town.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, as summer progressed the malady gradually diminished and the numbers dependent on outdoor relief decreased to the extent that Mountnorris received sixteen hundredweight in August while ten hundredweight was disbursed in each of Killeavy and Poyntzpass and eight hundredweight in Forkhill.²¹¹ Thus, demand in each area had diminished by approximately two-thirds from their July returns with the exception of Mountnorris, the figure for which was one-half. In consequence, the board instructed relieving officers to reduce distribution by 20% with those to be removed from the list the “most free from infirmity”.²¹² They also resolved to do away with the need both for external accommodation and outdoor relief by erecting a further storey over the dining hall of the workhouse and two wings in the rear of the probationary wards.²¹³

However, they were rebuked by the Poor Law Commissioners on each count. Primarily, the commissioners objected to the instruction to relieving officers, stating that the power to reduce outdoor relief lay vested in the guardians “who should be satisfied that each individual struck off the outdoor relief list is no longer destitute”.

Further, they pointed out that such a move appeared premature given that on 14 July there had been only fourteen vacancies in the house.²¹⁴ Finally, the commissioners' architect, Wilkinson, objected to the proposed extension over the dining hall as "not a desirable place to raise a second storey upon".²¹⁵ In reply, the board argued that the latter proposal had been seen as representing the "most economical mode" of enlarging the house²¹⁶ while stating that anybody removed from the outdoor relief list would at first be offered admission to the workhouse.²¹⁷

Within the house, the situation appeared to be improving. In the week ending 9 June there had been 1,590 paupers²¹⁸ but by 18 August this figure had fallen to 1,084, with seventy-three discharged at the end of that week and 139 the week before.²¹⁹ In addition, "nearly all the able-bodied men have left the workhouse" with the master having to put some of the "largest of the boys" to work the mill.²²⁰ Towards the end of the month thirty female paupers also left, rather than accept an order to do similar work.²²¹ Their decision appeared to be vindicated when, some weeks later, it was reported that the master had forced women to work at the mill "until some of them actually fainted".²²² Believing him to have been "highly culpable" the commissioners requested that the board reprimand him.²²³ However, they refused to do so, instead recommending that those so employed in future be relieved every quarter-hour instead of every half-hour as at present.²²⁴

Better news for the board saw a reduction to 725 people on the outdoor relief lists and they therefore ordered an end to such relief after one more week. The only exceptions were to be those who were bedridden or labouring under severe illness – all other

cases being offered tickets of admission to the workhouse.²²⁵ At the same time, it was ordered that the men and boys presently in the auxiliary workhouse on Canal Quay be removed to the main building “there being now sufficient room”. In addition, the cellars rented as further extra accommodation were ordered to be relinquished.²²⁶

Despite the reappearance of blight throughout the county, four acres (three tons) of potatoes on the workhouse site were ordered to be served to the males and females for dinner on alternate days “to obviate the difficulty of cooking so large a quantity as would be sufficient for the entire house”.²²⁷ Owing to the subsequent numbers of able-bodied paupers involved in digging out the potatoes, together with females sewing, veining and cleaning, the master was forced to discontinue the mill-working, to the relief, doubtless, of many of the inmates.²²⁸ However, the board once again faced opposition from the commissioners in their efforts to end outdoor relief, the latter refusing to sanction such an initiative while at the same time signalling their willingness to listen to propositions about increasing the size of relief districts.²²⁹ The board moved immediately to further restrict numbers on the lists and from 15 September all relieving officers were required to furnish weekly returns stating name and residence, together with the nature of, and reason for, relief of each applicant.²³⁰ Having been thwarted in their attempts to reduce the number of relieving officers they moved to diminish their salary from £40 to £20.²³¹

Reflecting the board’s indignation at constantly being contradicted by the commissioners, was their engagement of an independent engineer to ascertain the viability of building an extension on the walls of the dining hall.²³² Having been

apprised that such was indeed safe they relayed their opinion to the commissioners²³³ but Wilkinson insisted that any additional accommodation should be raised over the low buildings on each side of the infirmary. He further claimed that the expense would be approximately £300-400, similar to that for the work favoured by the board.²³⁴ The latter thus acquiesced and requested Wilkinson to draw up plans for each proposal.²³⁵ However, regardless of the safety of either idea, the expense to be incurred must also have been a problem for the guardians. The construction of the union fever hospital, which had necessitated a loan of £1,500, had just been completed and by 18 December the first repayment of £150 was due.²³⁶ Additionally, interest amounting to £3,973/10 was owed on loans totalling £12,450 with no instalments having been forthcoming.²³⁷ In mid-August the commissioners had drawn the attention of the board to the “very unsatisfactory” collection of the poor rate in the union. They thus requested them to urge collectors to “an active discharge of their duties”.²³⁸ Indeed, from 13 October to 24 November the weekly balance was constantly against the board and on 17 November it amounted to a deficit of more than £500.²³⁹

Aside from such ubiquitous financial difficulties, there were indicators of improvement in the establishment. With only three cases of fever “and scarcely any infectious disease in the house” the new fever hospital was appropriated for the use of infirm patients, the commissioners recommending that an alternative arrangement be made to separate the fever patients from the rest of the inmates – the board’s original intention to place both in the fever hospital being deemed “very objectionable”.²⁴⁰ Towards the end of February 1850 the schoolgirls were moved from the auxiliary to

the main workhouse, the accommodation being created by sending a number of men and boys to sleep in the auxiliary.²⁴¹ After one month this order had been rescinded “the number of inmates at the workhouse being now so far reduced that they can all be accommodated”.²⁴² Similarly, the numbers on outdoor relief dwindled, with only seventy applicants from 1 September 1849 to 16 March 1850, of whom almost half (thirty-two) were admitted on 20 October.²⁴³ Thus, the amount of meal distributed remained at a low rate throughout this period with all areas receiving two hundredweight of meal per month.²⁴⁴

With demand for relief diminished to such a level, the workhouse officials were able to concentrate on the more routine aspects of running the establishment. In October 1849, twenty-one boys aged twelve to fifteen, many of whom were orphans and had spent “a considerable time in the house”, were placed in the charge of a tailor and shoemaker.²⁴⁵ Between the hours of three and six in the afternoon the schoolboys were to be employed at stonebreaking and the girls at sewing and knitting. Any female adults not engaged in cooking or washing were to be sent to pick oakum.²⁴⁶

Nevertheless, there remained evidence of continued distress outside the confines of the house as illustrated by an order of 10 November that two paupers remain overnight in the porter’s lodge “as some persons opened the (potato) pits and carried away a quantity of them a few nights ago”.²⁴⁷

As the pressure on the workhouse began to ease substantially a note in the minute books highlighted the horrific period of suffering which had been endured by much of the populace of the union in the previous four years. On 6 April 1850, Assistant

Commissioner Baron, after visiting the workhouse, remarked that the inmates looked healthy with “the establishment very much improved”. However, his sole recommendation was that a new burying ground, about half an acre in extent, should be opened at the extreme north-east of the workhouse site. This was necessary given that “the small patch at present occupied for that purpose contains nearly 1,400 bodies”.²⁴⁸ Baron’s comments reflected the fact that the famine had exacted a terrible toll in Newry union while simultaneously demonstrating an improved situation in the county as a whole. The major preoccupation of previous inspectors had involved detailed analyses of attempts to combat disease as well as suggestions on how to best utilise workhouse accommodation. However, with disease abated and numbers much reduced, the need for such scrutiny was gone. Nevertheless, the distress of previously buoyant areas such as Blackwatertown and Richhill illustrated the extent to which the years since the first blight in 1845 had impacted on districts that in light of pre-famine analysis should have withstood the worst excesses of famine. Consequently, while things were slowly improving in local workhouses, there still remained a legacy of debt-encumbered communities into the 1850s.

RESIDUAL POVERTY

By 1850 admissions to both the Armagh and Newry workhouses had fallen dramatically compared to those for the period 1846-48. Thus, since many of the poor relied on these institutions in times of distress, such statistics were regarded by the local press as a barometer of the condition of the poorer classes at this time. Hence, they delighted in reporting how the Armagh workhouse was “besieged each board day by farmers and weavers”.²⁴⁹ Unlike previous years, however, they were not seeking

relief but were “wanting young persons of any class – the farmers seeking servants, the weavers seeking winders”.²⁵⁰ As a consequence, there were stated to be neither able-bodied men nor single women in the establishment, the inmates consisting “mostly of the aged, infirm and children – mainly orphans or deserted children aged less than twelve years”.²⁵¹ In estimating that “at the present rate of progressive diminution” the inmates of Newry workhouse would “soon be exclusively children and a few aged persons”, the *Newry Telegraph* remarked how the number (370) “contrasts gratifyingly with the number at any antecedent period for several years”.²⁵²

While such developments were undoubtedly welcome for the overburdened poor law authorities, events outwith the workhouses suggested both a significant level of residual distress, the consequence of successive crop failures, and an inherent belief that charitable alternatives to the workhouse system were essential. Indicative of the latter was the establishment of a non-denominational school for destitute children on the Mall in Armagh on 29 October 1849. Commonly referred to as the “ragged school” this institution was, within one month, meeting the educational needs of 150 males and females, the majority of them children.²⁵³ In Newry, meanwhile, local subscriptions were elicited, together with charity sermons, in order to finance the erection of a building adjacent to the convent in High Street. It was intended that up to one hundred young females would be employed therein at “needle and other useful works”, while a kitchen would supply 150 children with a daily breakfast and dinner.²⁵⁴

In the midst of these innovations, other groups maintained their long-standing relief

efforts. The Dorcas Committee, based in Armagh City, continued distributing clothes and blankets to the town's poor by means of voluntary subscriptions, charitable bequests and donations of blankets and clothes.²⁵⁵ At the same time, the Portadown Benevolent Association, instituted and maintained by the Duke of Manchester since 1841, had aided sixty-six paupers in 1848²⁵⁶ while the Newry Protestant Orphan Society continued its crusade in "saving the helpless orphan from the social wretchedness and the moral contamination of the workhouse".²⁵⁷ These charitable endeavours also benefited from occasional acts of benevolence such as that made to the Armagh ragged school in Christmas week 1850 when two local clergymen supplied the pupils with a total of 650 lbs of beef for their families.²⁵⁸

Such independent initiatives proved vital given the level of distress still pertaining, as evidenced by rent reductions made by a number of landlords. Indeed, in 1849 several of them, either voluntarily or in response to demands made by tenants, invoked reductions of up to one-quarter. However, as with many earlier abatements, they were often predicated on the promise of payment of rent. Hence, Roger Hall of Mullaghglass agreed to a 25% reduction on the understanding that all rents due by 1 November 1848 were paid in full.²⁵⁹ Similarly, Reverend Dr. Robinson, in acknowledging the "present difficulties", conceded 15% on rent due from the tenants of Derrynaught but this was only to be allowed to those who paid the rent due for May 1849, before January 1850.²⁶⁰ However, no similar clauses were evident in an abatement of 20% offered by Mrs Cope, the proprietor of Drummilly, who, in addition, paid the rate-in-aid amount due from her tenants.²⁶¹

Indicative of the prevailing distress was an event which had echoes of the terrible months of early 1847. On 20 July 1849, a ladies' "fancy bazaar" was held at a house in the Mall in Armagh with the proceeds, eventually totalling more than £86, being donated to "the suffering poor in this locality."²⁶² The prolonged nature of such distress was evidenced by further rent reductions in 1850. For example, William Armstrong lowered rents on his Derryhaw estate²⁶³, while Alex Hamilton, an absentee landlord living in Blackrock, County Dublin, instructed his agent to enforce an abatement of 25% on rents due from his Newtownhamilton estate.²⁶⁴ Similarly, the Duke of Manchester sanctioned reductions ranging from one to two shillings in the pound, depending on the value of the land held.²⁶⁵

However, not all landlords were willing to witness a diminution in their rental income, one such being the Earl of Charlemont. Despite the claims of tenants in Keady and Cladymore that they were unable to meet rent demands due to "the depressed state of agriculture and very low prices of agricultural produce", the Earl refused to accede to requests for any reduction, arguing that his rents were already below the average.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the local press, regarding the tenants' grievances as "well founded", emphasised the difficulties being faced by many throughout the county:

A general depression...is prevalent among all classes of farmers, but more especially among those who hold small patches of land, to whom the want of employment, for a large percentage of the year, is a source of much inconvenience.²⁶⁷

Doubtless, such conditions prompted the Stronge family of Tynan to maintain their employment of some 550 people "of the above description" in addition to enforcing a rent reduction of 15%.²⁶⁸ Thus, while pauperism was reported as having "greatly

diminished”,²⁶⁹ three factors contributed to ongoing hardship. Firstly, 1850 witnessed a partial failure of the potato crop, the fifth in six years;²⁷⁰ secondly, serious debts had accumulated in the same period; finally, an ongoing national economic slump ensured that many weavers were “still experiencing difficulties”.²⁷¹ Recognising such, the Lord Chancellor, acting for the minor Sir Capel Molyneaux, promised in November to reduce rents due to “depressed agricultural prices, successive failures of the potato and a partial failure this year of the wheat crop”.²⁷²

The predicament faced by those whose lives had been devastated by the continuing agricultural slump was epitomised by petitions forwarded to Lord Gosford from tenants on his Belleek and Markethill estates. In the aftermath of yet another failure of the potato crop in 1851, they requested an abatement of two shillings in the pound in addition to the existing abatement of four shillings. The petition of the Belleek tenants reflected the reality of life for so many in the county during the previous six years:

Owing to the constant failure in the potato crop, the ruinous price of livestock and other causes too numerous to detail, added to the fact of our just emerging from a long and protracted famine, the means of living, with the greatest number of petitioners, are almost exhausted... These five years past of distress have exhausted all our little revenues and we feel our utter inability to stand the present demand any longer and almost the whole of your Lordship’s petitioners are on the very verge of being entirely broken down.²⁷³

Similar sentiments were forthcoming from the Markethill tenants who claimed that many of their number who had been in “pretty fair circumstances before the potato crop failed” were “for the most part reduced to the last extremities” and were now “unable to meet the demands of the landlord and the Poor Law and County Cess collectors”.²⁴³ Despite such heartfelt appeals, Gosford refused to sanction any further

reductions, claiming that he had granted a substantial abatement for three successive years.²⁷⁵ His tenants left him in no doubt as to the value of the latter and their attitude illustrated both the relative inadequacy of rent reductions to aid distress and the willingness of local businessmen to exploit such hardship:

Your abatement...has been accompanied with such restrictions and stipulations that little more than one half your Lordship's tenantry can avail themselves of that advantage and...those who have endeavoured to avail themselves of the benefit of it have sometimes to sell their produce at rather a disadvantage for the corn merchants, flax buyers and butter and pork dealers, being aware of the specified times the farmer has to pay his rent in order to get the abatement, take advantage of the markets at that season and lower prices accordingly.²⁷⁶

The plight of the Gosford tenants simply highlighted the extent to which much distress pertained in the county into the early 1850s. By 1851 there had been four successive blights since the successful, but insignificant, crop of 1847 and, as illustrated by the examples above, there were always those who, as in the winter of 1846-47, were willing to capitalise on the misfortune of others in order to obtain greater profits. While disease and death had lessened and the worst of the famine was over, the period had left an indelible imprint on the society of County Armagh. Those who could emigrated in unprecedented numbers due to a combination of factors including evictions and rising crime. As will be shown in the next chapter all strata of society, from those living in fourth-class housing to the resident gentry, suffered to a significant degree while, in some areas, deaths reached levels never before attained. Hence, the consequences of famine were many and varied.

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CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONSEQUENCES

In the previous chapters an attempt has been made to present a chronological overview of the famine years in County Armagh from 1845 onwards. However, while it is necessary to offer a detailed narrative of these years it is also essential to analyse the short and long-term impact of such a catastrophe on all sectors of society. What follows, therefore, is an examination of both the human and social cost of the famine, in terms of evictions, rising crime levels, financial losses and increased mortality levels, together with an assessment of the extent of depopulation arising out of the traumatic events of this period.

EVICCTIONS

One of the most complex areas of famine study is that of evictions. Estimates of the scale of evictions have ranged from one-quarter to one-half a million persons over the period 1846-54.¹ The difficulty in attempting to make accurate assessments is compounded by the fact that reliable constabulary statistics only became available from 1849 onwards. Consequently, attempting to ascertain precise levels of eviction in the years prior to this period is fraught with difficulty for the historian. For example, in order to evict an individual or family landlords had to engage in a lengthy procedure involving several stages and thus it is necessary to extrapolate from complex legal data. At the same time, simply the threat of eviction was often enough to ensure compliance with landlords' wishes and therefore even court decisions which resulted in a decree to evict may not have been enforced by a landlord if tenants complied with his wishes before eviction took place.²

The first stage in the eviction process saw the entering or issuing of a civil bill

process. Between 1842 and 1846 this number averaged 6,444 for County Armagh but in 1847 it jumped to 13,210 before falling to 9,976 in the following year and 6,653 in 1849.³ Given the previous references to financial difficulties for all classes, the 1847 figure suggests that landlords were threatening increased numbers of tenants with eviction for non-payment of rent. Of this number 8,745 were given a decree to evict by the courts while the remainder were either nilled (3,470) or were found in favour of the tenant (995).⁴ The decreement of a civil bill entitled a landlord to evict tenants but, as noted earlier, the threat of such often resulted in compliance with his wishes. Thus, only 551 ejectment orders were actually issued in 1847 and of these 116 were nilled and twenty dismissed. In this way 415 were actually decreed but this represented a marked increase on the average number of 130 for the years 1842-46.⁵ Significantly, whilst the number of civil bill processes entered fell to 9,976 in 1848 the total decrees to evict in this year increased to 703. Similarly, the processes entered for 1849 (6,653) and 1850 (4,830) were much smaller than those for the peak year of 1847, but the actual decrees for eviction were higher, being 684 in 1849 and 522 in 1850. Only in 1851 when the quantity of bills processed was 3,661 did the number of evictions (372) fall below the 1847 figure.⁶ The constabulary figures, extant only from 1849, broadly reflect these figures in that 1,239 persons were evicted in County Armagh in 1849, although 311 of these were later re-admitted after paying arrears of rent.⁷ In 1850 the comparable figures were 1,198 evictions and 365 re-admissions. These numbers then fell significantly in 1851 resulting in 384 evictions and 138 re-admissions.⁸

Nationally, the constabulary figures suggest a peak of 104,163 persons evicted in 1850, the majority of these occurring in Connacht and Munster. As in Armagh, total evictions fell so that by 1851 they stood at 68,023 decreasing to 43,494 in the

following year.⁹

From this evidence there is little doubt that evictions increased as the famine progressed and, indeed, by the late 1840s local papers carried regular reports of families being evicted in contrast to previous years when accounts of such were rare. For example, in late September 1848 around twenty-six families, totalling more than one hundred individuals, were evicted from their land in the townland of Canary, near Loughgall.¹⁰ The *Armagh Guardian*, stating that bailiffs had been resisted in a previous attempt to take possession of houses and land, noted:

The lands are at present in Chancery – the rent being fifty shillings per acre – and with the people unable to pay, heavy arrears had accrued and an order for ejectment was brought for the recovery.¹¹

In addition, a member of the local constabulary illustrated the repercussions for those evicted:

It does not appear that any steps were taken to provide shelter for the many wretches who were suddenly made homeless, although the authorities claimed the families had been offered, and refused, the shelter of the poorhouse.¹²

Similar ejectments and evictions were reported throughout the county, from Milltown on the shores of Lough Neagh to Newtownhamilton in the south, inevitably leading to a reaction from the class most likely to be affected by such measures. Daly has argued that the famine period witnessed an erosion of the strength of agrarian secret societies and thus “permitted widespread eviction free from the threat of retaliatory action”.¹³ In support of this assertion she cites the high levels of evictions in counties Clare, Leitrim, Limerick and Tipperary - areas which had returned the highest levels of pre-famine agrarian crime.¹⁴ However, the available evidence from Armagh suggests that,

as in the pre-famine period, rate collectors, bailiffs and process-servers were equally liable to attack from a variety of groups in the late 1840s and early 1850s. For example, in August 1850, after a report of ejectments in the Drummily area, a Rockite notice was placed in Culloville calling on tenants to refuse to pay rent until November while “keepers” were warned to “stop at a civil distance from crops” in case they dared to distrain such for rent.¹⁵ On other occasions, the houses of those who had been ejected were burnt to prevent occupation by other families¹⁶ and threatening notices sent to prominent local people in the hope that the message therein would be disseminated to members of the community. Hence, when families were moved onto land from which others had been recently evicted in the townland of Carriff near Forkhill, the local priest received a note which advised them to leave immediately. It further warned that “you nor them cannot blame us if we leave their children orphans, and as sure as this pen is in my hand, if I must go see them another time, I will blow the brains out of them.”¹⁷

Such threats were by no means made lightly, as was illustrated by the killing of Thomas Greer, a process-server, near Tandragee in December 1847¹⁸ and the high-profile assassination of Robert Mauleverer in May 1850. The latter had been appointed receiver of rents on an estate in the south of the county and, whilst travelling between Culloville and Crossmaglen, was dragged from his carriage and beaten to death.¹⁹ It later transpired that the estate in question had been divided between three different owners – Tipping, Jones and Hamilton. Initially Mauleverer had been appointed agent by Hamilton to receive his third of the rent but after a short period he had gained responsibility for the entire estate. Thus, he was tasked with

enforcing the rent demands of three landlords and “the result was, the tenantry were dreadfully impoverished, the lands being all rack-rented, and being of a barren, rocky character”.²⁰

Under these circumstances payment of rent became problematic and resulted in the ultimate penalty of eviction for tenants. The local coroner, Joshua Michael Magee, related details of a typical attempt by the authorities to evict people from this estate:

The sheriff accompanied by a number of bailiffs, armed with pickaxes, crowbars etc., and a large number of police came to the lands of Loughcross and one house was levelled. The sheriff proceeded to another but the scene of human misery there presented in the persons of the parents and nine small children, was such as to unman not only the sheriff but the oldest and most unfeeling of his officers.²¹

He claimed that the serving of 200 civil decrees by Mauleverer for ejection of tenants had exacerbated an already tense situation:

It is believed by those best acquainted with the fact that these decrees being executed in the same locality helped to increase the excitement and that the question with those about being served with the ejections was whether one life should be sacrificed, or hundreds should be exposed to slow but certain death by starvation.²²

A similar combination of factors resulted in another assassination in December 1851 when Thomas Bateson, agent for Lord Templeton’s estates in Ulster, was beaten to death on his way from Castleblaney to Keady. The victim, also a poor law guardian of the Castleblaney union, was styled by the *Newry Telegraph* as “the martyr of cowardly ruffianism and bloodthirsty savagery”.²³ As a consequence of his killing those parishes in the vicinity of the killing, Derrynoose and Keady in Armagh and Clontibret and Muckno in Monaghan, were proclaimed under the Crime and Outrage

Act (1847).²⁴ Despite such attempts by the authorities to pacify these areas those tasked with the process of eviction faced continued danger as evidenced by the severe beating of a process server in the southern division of the parish of Killeavy. This continuing trend brought an excited response from the local press which claimed:

We believe that it has been made known to the Government that, on almost every estate in the district, blood-money, the means whereby to defray the wages of hireling assassins, is now being levied – three halfpence the acre being the assessment.²⁵

Regardless of such allegations, there was little doubt that, during the period 1846-50, crime levels increased dramatically, but even those responsible for law enforcement recognised that, in times of such unparalleled distress, desperate people resorted to desperate measures in order to survive. Hence, while stipendiary magistrate Matthew Singleton reported an unusually high number of persons at the Armagh quarterly assizes in July 1847, he admitted:

Many larcenies were committed but in most cases the persons who perpetrated them were driven to do so from actual want. We have nearly passed a year of unprecedented destitution owing to the failure of last year's potato crop.²⁶

Similarly, on 15 July 1848, a local constabulary member in Loughgall remarked that larcenies had substantially increased in urban areas as a result of such destitution in the midst of a dense population.²⁷ Indicative of such acts were the regular reports of food theft in all parts of the county the most high profile being the removal of 250 hundredweight of oatmeal from the premises of the Crossmaglen soup kitchen in January 1847, while local newspapers abounded with similar reports, especially in the early months of that year.²⁸

However, the longevity of the distress resulting from famine, together with continued economic hardship, meant that crime levels for the county only peaked in 1848. In that year the number of crimes committed in Armagh totalled 826, having averaged 392 in the years 1844-46.²⁹ As a corollary, convictions also peaked in the same year (497) having averaged 206 in the three pre-famine years.³⁰ Further corroboration is to be found in the fact that sentences for minor offences of theft, which usually carried the maximum penalty of one year's imprisonment, witnessed huge increases in these years. In 1841 the national number imprisoned for less than six months was 5,624 and this actually declined until 1847 at which point it increased to 9,440. Thereafter, it continued to rise and reached a peak of 13,369 committals in 1849.³¹ For those imprisoned for between six months and one year the pattern was similar, rising from 598 in 1841 to 1,721 in 1849.³² A further indicator of the desperate measures resorted to by many people were the sentences handed down for offences of burglary and larceny. Such crimes carried a maximum punishment of seven years' transportation, the national figures for which increased from a pre-famine average of 543 to total 1,587 in 1847 and 2,075 in 1848 before showing a slight fall to 1,896 in the following year.³³

This unprecedented rise in crime levels was also reflected in the number of committals to Armagh county gaol with a total of 150 in January 1847 alone.³⁴ However, as with the statistics for crime, such committals only peaked two years later, showing an increase of 61% from 855 in 1844 to 1,376 in 1849. Despite a drop of 300 in 1850 they still remained at more than 1,000 thereby emphasising the prolonged extent of destitution in the county.³⁵ The fact that this increase represented part of a

nationwide phenomenon was emphasised by the authorities who commented:

The criminal tables for 1847 present an increase of 12,717 committals, a result which was to have been anticipated from the famine which prevailed for that entire period, and the social disorganisation consequent on a state of universal distress.³⁶

Thus, the figures for Armagh gaol were reflective of a trend of rising crime throughout the country, an example of which was the overcrowding of Galway county gaol which, by January 1848, contained 564 prisoners although it only had capacity for 110.³⁷ In addition, throughout this period reports from County Fermanagh acknowledged “an explosion of larcenies”,³⁸ while in north Roscommon highway robberies, which had been “very rare until the famine”, were reported in these years as becoming “very common”.³⁹ Similarly, Foley has noted how County Kerry’s crime figures also increased substantially as the famine’s impact deepened. The average number convicted and sentenced in the county rose from 417 in the period 1841-45 to 779 in 1847, an increase of 86.5% and, as in Armagh and Galway, the county gaol contained three times its capacity in March 1847.⁴⁰ Over the same period counties Clare and Mayo recorded crime increases of 67.5% and 168.9%.⁴¹ Indicative of much long-term distress was the fact that in early 1849 there were still more than 500 people in Galway gaol⁴² while in February of the same year Castlebar prison in County Mayo, which had capacity for 188 prisoners, contained 584 inmates.⁴³ The reason behind such overcrowding was acknowledged by the ruling administration thus:

The prisons of Ireland have been crowded by a class of persons hitherto of good character who have committed offences, by families, with the view of obtaining within their precincts, the support which they failed to procure, in sufficient quantity or regularity, from the legitimate sources of parochial relief or from charitable contributions.⁴⁴

Hence, the alarming increase in crime figures within County Armagh was not reflective of an outbreak of lawlessness in the area, rather it demonstrated the extent to which law-abiding people were suffering as a result of their inability to purchase food. Instead of allowing themselves or their families to suffer starvation they, like many others throughout the country, were prepared to risk their liberty knowing the penalty to be either transportation or incarceration in a disease-ridden prison.

However, for those with the necessary finance, alternatives, such as emigration, were available.

EMIGRATION

One of the greatest difficulties in discussing emigration is the acute lack of sources. This is largely due to the fact that official statistics were not produced until 1851 and therefore it is somewhat problematic to produce a detailed synopsis of this aspect of the famine experience in County Armagh.

As has been noted, in the pre-famine era emigration was largely confined to artisans or large farmers who had money to finance it and were prepared to leave home to achieve a higher standard of living abroad. This pattern continued in the post-famine years and was in fact hastened by the imposition of higher poor rates and the rate-in-aid. However, the significant change evident in these years was that those from more humble backgrounds began to emigrate, usually to America. In order to do so they were helped by remittances from relatives who had left months or years earlier. As a consequence, between 1851 and 1855, the first period for which emigration statistics are available, almost 15,000⁴⁵ people left County Armagh in the hope of establishing a

better life for themselves and their families, with varying results.

An indication of the financial incentive to emigrate was provided in a letter to the *Newry Telegraph* on 31 August 1848 which decried the fact that the poor rate in Killeavy was much greater than that of any other electoral division in the Newry union:

These unjust and enormous rates will have the effect of destroying all industry and driving out of the country the best portion of its inhabitants, as in many instances the people are totally unable to pay this profligate and ruinous collection.⁴⁶

In a further edition, the paper claimed it had received “numberless inquiries on the subject of emigration”:

The reports from all our maritime towns show that at the present moment, spontaneous emigration is, with the best of the rural population, the order of the day. Overborne by the intolerable pressure of public burthens, latterly so increased by impolitic and inconsiderate legislation, the most painstaking and enterprising farmers...are passing away to other lands.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the *Armagh Guardian*, agreeing that preparations for emigration were on a much greater scale than for many years, commented that “a great proportion of the number will be respectable Protestants, most of whom will have a considerable amount of cash with them”.⁴⁸ Referring to the fact that one person had brought £3,000 with him, the paper opined that such emigration would tend “to impoverish Ireland, while benefiting the land of their adoption”.⁴⁹

For many, further financial hardship was occasioned by the enactment of the rate-in-aid, imposed upon an already impoverished population. The condition of local farmers

was exemplified by a report in the *Newry Telegraph* of 21 June 1849, which claimed that in a yard attached to a pawn shop in Newtownhamilton lay sixty carts, together with a variety of ploughs and other agricultural implements “all in pledges for loans in order to meet the county cess, or poor rate or to labour the land.”⁵⁰ Continuing in similar vein it stated:

Yet it is from a people so impoverished, a community generally living, in reality, from hand to mouth, that, according to the Order of the Poor Law Commissioners, is to be exacted above and beyond rent and taxes, to which they are legally subject, the additional tax, unconstitutionally imposed, of no less than £3,168.⁵¹

The consequence of such burdens was reported in the *Newry Examiner* thus:

The farmer, the labouring man, in fact all of the lower classes who can get away, rush from the country as from a plague. It would be difficult to find a dozen comfortable farmers who have not either made up their minds to emigrate, or who are not convinced that if there be not a great and speedy improvement in the state of the country, they will be unable to remain at home, except as labourers or paupers.⁵²

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that those living in such conditions attempted to alleviate their situation through emigration, the only means open to them. Such an alternative had become more attractive due to improved access to ports in various parts of the county as a consequence of enhanced inland transport systems linking Armagh to previously inaccessible districts. An indication of this was evidenced by a report in April 1849 that nineteen families had travelled by means of the new railroad from Armagh to Belfast and from thence to Liverpool to board a ship to America.⁵³ At the same time, voyages to Australia and America were advertised in every edition of the local press. For example, in February 1849 Francis Carvill, a Newry shipowner, advertised six ships ready to sail in March and April for Quebec

and New York, adding the rejoinder how “in the past two years none of my ships’ passengers have been obliged to be sent to Grosse Isle.”⁵⁴ Obviously, he felt the need to reassure potential customers in the awareness that the latter area in Canada had become notorious for its association with disease and death. Given such varieties of transport it is perhaps not surprising that those leaving the county travelled from ports as distant as Derry and Dublin, although the vast majority, almost 93%, left from ports easily accessible to those from either the north or south of the county. Hence, 6,509 (45.9%), left from Belfast, 3,676 (25.92%) from Newry and 2,967 (20.92%) boarded at Dundalk (see Appendix 6).

Another feature of this period which further facilitated emigration was the fact that family members who had made the initial journey almost immediately sent money home to enable others to undertake the same voyage. Indeed, the *Armagh Guardian* noted that local emigrants were “mostly those whose friends have remitted money or paid their passages on the other side”.⁵⁵ Evidence for this is provided in the columns of a contemporary American newspaper, the *Boston Pilot*, in which recently-arrived emigrants placed advertisements announcing their landing and seeking news of relatives. The following are typical examples:⁵⁶

21 August 1847

Information sought on Ann McGee, daughter of Henry McGee of Creggan Co. Armagh. Aged seven or eight years of age, she arrived in New York on 7 March 1846 in the ship *Roscius* in charge of Robert Bear and family, who emigrated from England and intended to settle in Canada. Information to father, Henry McGee, who now lives in Litchfield, Lower Canada, or her uncle, Peter McGee, Mason, New York.

20 August 1853

Information sought on Patrick Hughes who, together with his sons, William, John, Hugh and Thomas, and daughters, Rosy and Mary Ann, left Tynan, Co. Armagh.

They were last heard of in New York. Information to Edward Hughes, St. Louis, M. O.

3 December 1853

Information sought on Peter Fitzpatrick, Co. Armagh. He emigrated to the United States around six years ago and was last seen in St. Louis. Information to brothers Michael, in North Woodstock, Connecticut, or Edward, 114 Utica Street, Boston, Ms.

In the first example, the child emigrated with another family and was presumably followed by her father and uncle. The latter cases illustrate how entire families emigrated from the county and indeed between 1851 and 1855 the number of emigrants averaged sixty per week. Extrapolating from such information it is possible to reveal how many emigrants from Armagh, as well as elsewhere, were often followed by siblings or other family relations who, in most cases, arrived within a year or two of the original emigrant (see Appendix 7 for Armagh examples). It appears that one family member made the initial voyage and then sent money and information to relatives to follow. As the 1850s progressed this pattern became increasingly evident with the consequence that entire families eventually made it across the Atlantic.

In the midst of the removal of thousands from the county, the *Armagh Guardian* observed:

Whilst the tide of emigration flows from other parts of this island, our heretofore densely populated county is contributing its quota. From every part of it numbers of persons are leaving for America and Australia, principally for the former. From the numerous applications at our office for information we have no hesitation in saying that one-half the population would emigrate if they had the means. The heads of families seem most anxious on the subject, and seeing the difficulties with which they have to contend with at home, it is a pity that free emigration is only partly available by that class.⁵⁷

It is perhaps understandable that the press should have focussed on those leaving for

exotic locations thousands of miles away but, in doing so, they ignored the significant numbers who followed the well-trodden path of movement to Scotland and the industrial districts of the north of England. For decades weavers had opted to leave Ireland to enhance their prospects in these areas. For example, in the pre-famine era there were so many weavers from Armagh, Antrim, Derry and Down living in Stranraer that an area within the town was known as “little Ireland”, while one third of the weavers in the town of Dumfries were Irish-born.⁵⁸ At the same time, the proportion of Irish weavers living in Girvan in Ayrshire was estimated at 90% of the total employed locally.⁵⁹ Given the prevalence of weavers in Armagh it can be surmised that many of these emigrants were from the county. At the same time, emigrants from Armagh were noted in the early 1850s in Newcastle⁶⁰ and Birmingham⁶¹, the regular steam service between Belfast and Whitehaven no doubt facilitating their desire to seek better opportunities outside Ireland.⁶²

Once in their new home emigrants faced a variety of experiences and for some their stay was both short and tragic. Indeed, the local press carried reports throughout the 1840s and 1850s of deaths of recently emigrated Armagh people from dysentery, scarlatina and typhus fever in Canada and North America.⁶³ Even for those who managed to survive, difficulties lay ahead in their attempts to establish a new life for themselves and their families. Indicative of such was a letter from a new arrival in Brooklyn, New York informing his mother in Forkhill of seemingly anti-emigrant or anti-Irish sentiment when noting:

There is many a changing scene here before a person can get permanently and satisfactorily settled. There is many a harsh word and many a dark frown to be borne with to get through life here.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, some Armagh emigrants did succeed in establishing themselves in America. For example, in March 1868, John Gass, writing from Attica, Indiana to his brother in Markethill, related how he had been elected mayor of the city for the second time.⁶⁵ Another Markethill man, Frederick Wann, son of William Wann, J. P. was appointed eastern agent for the Mississippi, Kansas and Texas Railway, the *Armagh Guardian* noting: "Four years ago Mr. Wann was a clerk in the Kansas Pacific Office, Lawrence, and his success as a railway man is quite remarkable."⁶⁶ Given his social standing in his native county and the positions he could have expected to attain, Wann's success further illustrated how those with money had left their home together with the poor in the search for a better life abroad. However, as will be illustrated, the famine years proved to be all-embracing in their devastation, even impacting on those considered to be financially secure.

THE FINANCIAL COST

As noted in the contemporary sources, the catalyst for emigration was to be found in the huge increases in the cost of living occasioned by the famine. For example, between 1844 and 1847 prices of oats and oatmeal increased from six and ten shillings per hundredweight to fourteen and twenty-four shillings respectively.⁶⁷ At the same time the famine imposed a huge financial burden on the middle and large farmer classes with more than £6,000 being raised for local relief groups by means of voluntary subscriptions in the period 1846-47.⁶⁸ In addition, while large numbers in the workhouses resulted in higher rates, the period of feeding the poor under the Temporary Relief Act further increased the burden, as illustrated by the huge rate increases in many parts of the Armagh union. An indication of the demands on local

rate payers was the fact that in spring of 1850 £2,013/10/8 of county cess remained unpaid⁶⁹ from two of the poorest baronies in the county, £1,390/2/6 from Upper Fews and £623/8/2 from Upper Orior.⁷⁰ An added difficulty was the fact that while all taxes increased, rent payments simultaneously fell thereby aiming a double blow at the landed interest within the county. While this often resulted in the ultimate penalty of eviction for tenants, it also had financial implications for the landlords of the county, as evidenced by the workings of the Encumbered Estates Court throughout the 1850s (see map 5). Between July 1851 and October 1859 there were a total of thirty-two sales of property and land throughout the county with five in O'Neilland East, two in O'Neilland West, eleven in Upper Orior, one in Lower Orior, six in Upper Fews and seven in Armagh.⁷¹

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these statistics is the lack of sales in Lower Fews and Tiranny, home to Lord Gosford, Maxwell Close and James Stronge, all of whom had expended large sums in employing the poor at the height of the famine.⁷²

However, each of these was tenant for life on land (a total of 22,860 acres) which was owned by Trinity College, Dublin and even if they had wished to sell land to offset debts they would have been unable to do so.⁷³ Whilst accounting for only six sales, the barony of Upper Fews saw the largest proportion of acreage sold, 38.4% of the total. O'Neilland East had five transactions but these accounted for less than 1% of the total acreage, consisting almost totally of houses and tenements in Lurgan and Portadown. Indeed, the three baronies of Armagh (24.79%), Upper Fews (38.40%) and Upper Orior (34.15%) accounted for all but 2.6% of 18,957 acres sold in the county.⁷⁴

Significantly, the court enabled owners to place their own properties on the market to offset any debts accrued and of thirty-two sales, thirteen (40%), resulted from eight petitions placed by owners themselves and five by family members. It is telling that such petitions accounted for the sale of 10,870 acres, 57% of the total and illustrates that the court possibly offered an exit route for landowners encumbered with debt and unable, by any other means, to repay their creditors. Perhaps the best demonstration of such difficulties was the auctions of Health Hall, residence of Thomas Seaver, and Killeavy Castle, home to the Foxall family.⁷⁵ However, while the wealth and standard of living enjoyed by such families diminished as a result of the famine, for thousands more the final agony was not the encumbered estates court, but death by fever, dysentery, dropsy or any one of a number of diseases.

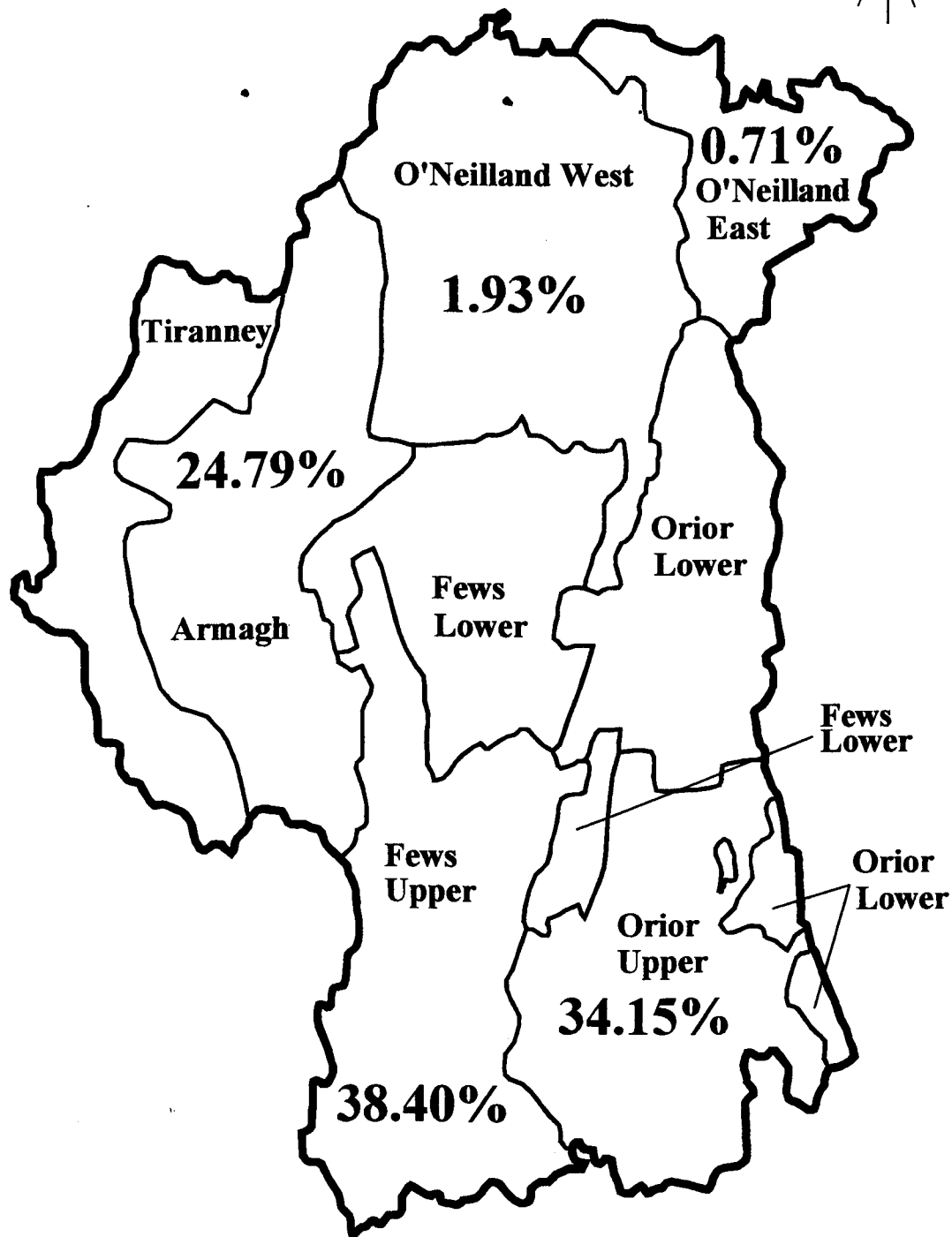
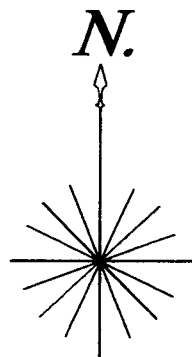
THE HUMAN COST - MORTALITY LEVELS

Estimating the number of deaths resulting from the famine period has always been one of the great difficulties of any such study, not least because compulsory legal registration of marriages and deaths only began in Ireland in 1864. Edward Twistleton, in a letter to Charles Trevelyan, alluded to the difficulty in December 1847:

With respect to the number of deaths from the Famine Fever amongst the upper and middle classes during the last year, Sir Philip Crampton and Mr. Redington are of opinion that it is absolutely impossible to obtain accurate information on this head and that supposed returns would be merely misleading – there is no data for accurate returns.⁷⁶

The concern of the authorities with the fate of the upper and middle classes reflected a not uncommon trait of various classes, groups or denominations to obtain information

The Baronies of County Armagh: Acreage sold under the Encumbered Estate Acts, 1851 - 59



solely relevant to themselves. For example, in September and October 1847, the Catholic Church authorities issued query sheets to parishes throughout the country in an attempt to gain data on levels of destitution, emigration and deaths, together with various other details.⁷⁷ Given the severity of distress in various districts it is not surprising that many areas were unable to either complete or return the forms. Thus, the returns eventually published represented only a portion of the country's parishes.

For Armagh, replies were received from six parishes out of a total of nineteen and although such information is partial and possibly skewed, it nevertheless offers some idea of the suffering in such areas (which unfortunately were not named in the return). Thus, we find that from the onset of the blight in August/September 1846, to the period of enquiry (25 September 1847), the six parishes had seen twenty-four cases of death occasioned by starvation together with a further 1,356 resulting from "want of food".⁷⁸ Presumably the difference in categorising the cause of death was that the former occurred amongst those who had no food while the latter were attributable to diseases brought about as a result of vitamin-deficient foods such as indian meal. Due to the imprecise nature of the information we cannot tell where these parishes were situated or if they represented six of the worst districts. However, in contrast, precise data can be found through the medium of the records of local boards of guardians.

The workhouse records which remain for County Armagh are amongst the best in the country and while the indoor registers for Newry have been lost, those for Armagh and Lurgan are still extant. For the purposes of this study the Armagh indoor register of 1847, the worst year of the blight, was examined, to ascertain the quantity, age and

residence of those who died (see Appendix 8). Analysis reveals that of the total of 919 people who perished, almost two thirds (65.7%) were aged fifteen and under. This corresponds to the pattern of workhouse admissions throughout the period 1841-51. This figure thus emerges as little surprise and simply reinforces the general trend of the workhouse representing a refuge for children in this age group.

During the same period an examination of admissions for the months of January and December from the opening of the workhouse reveals that female admissions consistently surpassed those of males. Taking admissions for each January from 1845 to 1847 the proportion of females was 58%, 63% and 54.5%, while for December in the same years the figures were 61%, 55.5% and 64%⁷⁹ respectively but mortality levels for 1847 fail to correspond to this trend, revealing instead almost identical rates among both sexes. Thus, female deaths represented 50.81% (467), while those for males were 49.18% (452).⁸⁰ These figures bear a close correlation to those of other unions which have been similarly analysed. For the period 1845-47 female admissions to Enniskillen workhouse represented 54.5% of the total, yet in 1846-47 female mortality accounted for 47.9%.⁸¹ Moreover, in North Dublin workhouse female entrants totalled 50.7% in the years 1844-50 while mortality in the period 1845-48 amongst the same sex was 49.6% of that recorded.⁸² The evidence from Armagh therefore supports the contention of some historians that females survived these famine years better than their male counterparts though much more research needs to be done before any definitive opinion can be given on this area of study.⁸³

Another trend which failed to translate into the death statistics was that relating to

admission by religious denomination. From 1841-51 numbers of Catholics entering the workhouse consistently surpassed that of the major combined Protestant denominations – Church of Ireland and Presbyterian. In relation to mortality levels, however, these latter groups accounted for 498 deaths or 54.18%, with Anglicans responsible for all but 4% of this figure.⁸⁴

Finally, the figures revealing the derivation of those who died illustrate that, between them, the divisions of Annaghmore, Armagh and Loughgall accounted for more than one third of workhouse deaths (see Appendix 9). Given the fact that the workhouse was situated in the Armagh division it is no surprise that this area comprised the largest proportion of all deaths, the total being 145 (15.77%). The next highest figure, 118 deaths (12.84%) was for those without any fixed address – labelled as “union at large”.⁸⁵ Other figures reveal a general consistency ranging from seven and eight deaths in Hockley and Derrynoose – situated at the fringes of the union – to sixty one (6.63%) in Annaghmore which was closer to the workhouse and thus supplied greater numbers to the institution.⁸⁶ However, one significant statistic was that for the Loughgall division which, although sharing a proximity to the workhouse, returned a figure of 116 deaths (12.62%), almost twice that of Annaghmore and only twenty-nine less than the Armagh division. These facts, in conjunction with the record of parochial deaths in Loughgall, which are discussed later, suggest that this area suffered particularly severely during the famine.⁸⁷

General statistics gathered by the Poor Law Commissioners offer an overview of workhouse mortality for the period 1841-51. The figures for County Armagh illustrate

that Lurgan suffered the highest level with 2,495 deaths, while that for Armagh was slightly lower at 2,210. Significantly, Newry workhouse suffered a much lower mortality level (1,629) due primarily to the existence of the independent town fever hospital.⁸⁸ Of this combined total of 6,334 deaths, 3,248 or 51.27%, resulted from diseases or contagions which were regularly mentioned in medical officers' reports as being major contributory factors in the deaths of so many paupers in the period 1846-49. The figures for workhouse deaths from these particular causes, therefore, were as follows:

CAUSES OF DEATH IN COUNTY ARMAGH WORKHOUSES, 1846-49

Workhouse	Numbers Dying from Disease/Contagion								
	S'pox	Measles	Whooping Cough	Dysentery	Diarrhoea	Cholera	Fever	Dropsy	Marasmus
Armagh	13	163	9	254	245	84	354	57	133
Lurgan	21	87	17	652	157	28	444	44	68
Newry	17	85	17	139	38	10	43	52	17

Source: H. C., 1856, Volume xxx, Census of Ireland 1851. Table of Deaths, pp.102-3; 106-7.

This table also reveals the extent to which different diseases/contagions ravaged various localities. While measles, diarrhoea and marasmus were prevalent in Armagh workhouse, dysentery, the consequence of poor quality food supplies, was by far the most significant source of mortality in the Lurgan establishment. The figures for Newry illustrate the importance of alternative long-standing medical provision to that offered by the poor law authorities. There, almost 2,000 people, suffering from various diseases, entered the permanent town fever hospital in the years 1846-48.⁸⁹ In this way, the workhouse played a much lesser role in catering for the disease-ridden

poor than its counterparts in Armagh and Lurgan. The significance of this can be seen in the total number of deaths in the Newry workhouse for 1841-51 being almost 600 less than those in Armagh and 900 less than the figures for Lurgan. Indeed, the data for the fever hospital, together with others throughout the county, along with four temporary hospitals established in 1847, further reveals the extent of distress and disease in these years, particularly when compared with those for the period prior to the famine:

ADMISSIONS TO ARMAGH FEVER HOSPITALS, 1842-50

Hospital	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850
Keady	5	7	5	5	6	410	204	5	4
Tandragee	50	94	144	42	64	333	30	N/A	N/A
Armagh	153	145	273	114	151	578	196	123	95
M/Town/Tynan	39	49	49	N/A	N/A	388	261	51	20
Newry	325	363	338	290	536	918	411	458	583
Temporary	--	--	--	--	--	1,867	171	--	--
Total	572	658	809	451	757	4,494	1,368	637	702

Source: H. C., 1856, Volume xxix, Census of Ireland 1851. Table of Deaths, pp.640-1.

The increase in admissions was also reflected in the subsequent numbers of deaths:

DEATHS IN ARMAGH FEVER HOSPITALS, 1842-50

Hospital	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850
Keady	--	--	--	1	1	16	13	--	--
Tandragee	5	5	5	4	10	48	9	--	--
Armagh	12	9	11	11	5	50	14	7	2
M/Town/Tynan	1	--	3	--	--	27	26	10	3
Portadown	--	--	--	--	--	--	8	--	--
Newry	22	17	22	20	26	37	29	34	35
Temporary	--	--	--	--	--	146	16	--	--
Total	40	31	41	36	42	324	115	51	40

Source: H. C., 1856, Volume xxix, Census of Ireland 1851. Table of Deaths, pp.640-1.

A variety of other medical and care facilities also witnessed significant increases both in admissions and fatalities in the period 1846-48. For example, admissions to the Armagh County Infirmary increased from an average of 761 in the period 1842-46 to reach 1,023 in 1847, while over the same period deaths increased from an average of eighteen to stand at thirty-eight in 1846 and forty-three in the following year.

Although admissions to the Armagh Lunatic Asylum remained constant, averaging sixty-three for the period 1842-50, the number of deaths for 1847 (thirty-five) and the following year (twenty) were substantially greater than the pre-famine average of twelve.⁹⁰

The impact of the famine on crime levels and subsequent committals has already been noted but the influx of such numbers into the county gaol in Armagh, often resulting in inmates sleeping four to a bed, simply facilitated the spread of disease and led to unparalleled mortality in the prison hospital.⁹¹ Thus, while admissions to the hospital for 1847 (640) were more than double that for any preceding year, deaths increased tenfold to reach thirty-three in 1847. Although a figure of seventeen for the following year represented a slight improvement it was still almost six times the pre-famine average of three.⁹² Ó Gráda has noted similar statistics nationwide in which prison deaths increased from forty-three in 1845 to 1,140 in 1847 and peaked at 1,293 two years later.⁹³ Such figures further help to place the experience of Armagh in context in that they illustrate how the county shared the dreadful experiences of 1847 with the rest of the country but managed to achieve a recovery, albeit a slow one, while other

areas were still sustaining hardship.

Analysing mortality throughout the county we find that figures for those deaths which were continually referred to as being famine-related were as follows:

ANNUAL DEATHS IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1842-50

	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850
Smallpox	78	53	44	81	93	122	97	75	45
Measles	27	31	42	34	83	244	115	59	17
Scarlatina	25	30	33	20	25	20	18	29	55
Whooping Cough	62	48	52	75	83	80	68	90	36
Dysentery	9	7	13	28	90	1,069	286	100	44
Diarrhoea	34	31	34	44	232	407	189	131	63
Cholera	5	2	1	7	10	19	58	314	20
Fever	175	163	182	192	427	1,667	696	330	230
Consumption	298	317	368	429	532	852	708	706	578
Dropsy	53	53	47	72	85	160	121	96	99
Marasmus	91	105	102	114	196	321	240	256	166
Infirmity									
Debility } Old Age	294	313	318	362	458	781	560	506	458
Starvation	3	2	3	2	13	33	8	21	5
TOTAL	1,940	1,978	2,091	2,425	3,751	7,634	4,536	4,011	3,062

Source: H. C., 1856, Volume xxx, Census of Ireland 1851. Table of Deaths, p.480.

This table provides an accurate indication of the devastating impact of particular diseases in the latter part of the decade, especially when compared with their occurrence in the early 1840s. It also illustrates that 1846 saw the emergence of killer diseases which impacted to a devastating degree in 1847, while also providing a clear indication that distress was not confined to these two years.

It is particularly interesting to note the consequence of contagions in 1846-47 which, prior to then, had a negligible effect on the county. For example, the second largest killer in 1847 was dysentery, with 1,069 deaths. Yet, in the early part of the decade, its victims were counted in single figures. Indeed, it was not until 1850 that this ailment returned to pre-famine levels and in conjunction with the statistics for diarrhoea, which also emerged as a serious killer in the famine, illustrates how insufficient food, together with the almost inedible indian meal, contributed to serious loss of life. Other ailments that increased substantially were measles, which was particularly virulent in the Armagh area, consumption, dropsy, marasmus and death from old age, the old alongside the young being particularly vulnerable. While deaths from smallpox and whooping cough also increased they were not on a par with those already noted. The biggest killer was fever of all varieties, which accounted for 427 people in 1846, more than double that of any previous year and its train of destruction continued from a peak of 1,667 in 1847 to 696 in the following year and by 1850 provided returns which illustrated the longevity of suffering in the county.

In the early part of the decade incidences of cholera were rare but the outbreak of 1849 resulted in the deaths of 314 people. Indeed, evidence for sustained hardship in that year as a consequence of a further failure of the potato crop was illustrated in the returns for death by starvation. In the period 1842-45 there were ten such fatalities but in 1846 this increased to thirteen and peaked with thirty-three cases in the following year. However, despite a fall to eight deaths in 1848 this figure rose substantially to twenty-one in 1849, evidence indeed of the continuation of distress in the heart of Ulster.

While mortality figures are an obvious source of confirmation for the devastation caused by the famine, those statistics available for corresponding births can further illustrate how the blight impacted on all aspects of society. Thus, by analysing church records of births and deaths, it is possible to ascertain impact at a parochial level. Unfortunately, while some Catholic parishes maintained records of births and marriages, it is rare to find one that kept burial records. Thus, data for the latter is derived from Church of Ireland (COI) registers although in some cases, such as Kilmore and Loughgall, these also contained burials of local Catholics. For example, identification of religion by surname in the latter parish suggests that up to fifty-five Catholics were buried in 1847. For the following Church of Ireland parishes with extant burial registers, the statistics were as follows:

ARMAGH PAROCHIAL DEATHS, 1840-50

Parish	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850
Creggan	9	2	5	4	3	5	7	13	8	4	2
Derrynoose	12	5	11	4	9	7	8	8	10	9	10
Drumbanagher	n/a	1	2	1	2	7	8	11	3	5	2
Eglish	9	10	14	10	15	21	23	40	24	31	13
Grange	13	7	7	9	12	16	15	19	14	19	19
Keady	9	6	5	2	12	5	13	10	6	12	12
Killylea	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	2	12	4	9	3
Kilmore	174	130	125	114	125	123	139	347	145	100	98
Loughgilly	6	8	6	6	13	13	13	7	4	7	7
Loughgall	42	55	50	54	46	53	72	143	53	47	41
Mullavilly	35	35	23	37	45	43	39	35	19	34	17
Tynan	37	25	16	15	22	17	28	24	26	12	20

Source: PRONI, Parish Registers, 1840-50.

Mic 1/11; 1/14; 1/1A-B; 1/65; 1/52; 1/8; 1/67; 1/60; 1/70; 1/12.

In comparing the average number of deaths in the period 1840-45 for those with 1846-

47, the following data is obtained:

Parish	1840-45	1846	1847
Creggan	5	7	13
Derrynoose	8	8	8
Drumbanagher	3	8	11
Eglish	13	23	40
Grange	11	15	19
Keady	6	5	13
Killylea	4	2	12
Kilmore	132	139	347
Loughgilly	9	13	7
Loughgall	50	72	143
Tynan	22	28	24
Mullavilly	36	39	35

Source: PRONI, Parish Registers, 1840-50.

Mic 1/11; 1/14; 1/1A-B; 1/65; 1/52; 1/8; 1/67; 1/60; 1/70;1/12.

Compared with the average for 1840-45, significant increases in the numbers of deaths occurred in Creggan, Drumbanagher, Eglish, Keady and Killylea. However, the most noteworthy figures appear to be those for Kilmore and Loughgall with both parishes recording huge mortality levels in 1847. Indeed, the Loughgall statistics, together with those for the local electoral division, reinforce the contention that this area was one of the most severely affected during the famine. To emphasise the regional nature of the calamity, the Derrynoose records show no change throughout these years while those for Loughgilly and Mullavilly, although showing increases between the average and 1846, demonstrate decreases from 1846 to 1847.

An analysis of baptism records for the same period may be used to further demonstrate how the famine affected all aspects of life by resulting in averted births,

that is, the negation of births that would otherwise have occurred in normal circumstances. Given that the effects of hunger and disease would not have manifested themselves in terms of births until late 1847 onwards, we can gain a comparative analysis by establishing the average number for the period 1840-46 and then comparing that figure with those until 1850:

ARMAGH PAROCHIAL BAPTISMS, 1840-50

Parish	1840-6	1847	1848	1849	1850
Creggan	23	23	14	14	17
Derrynoose	33	25	28	23	28
Drumbanagher	8	8	4	2	10
Eglish	41	34	29	29	22
Grange	29	15	16	18	23
Keady	40	24	27	32	23
Killylea	39	24	20	24	22
Kilmore	60	23	32	24	27
Loughgilly	55	32	32	30	22
Loughgall	61	31	40	67	44
Tynan	38	28	24	22	29
Mullavilly	61	14	25	69	69

Source: PRONI, Parish Registers, 1840-50.

Mic 1/11; 1/14; 1/1A-B; 1/65; 1/52; 1/8; 1/67; 1/60; 1/70; 1/12.

This table demonstrates some interesting variations between the parishes. For 1847, all baptisms, except in Creggan and Drumbanagher, fell substantially below the average for 1840-46. In the following year every parish produced far fewer baptisms than that average but some actually increased from their low point of 1847 – Derrynoose, Grange, Keady, Kilmore, Loughgall and Mullavilly. In 1849, the year of the cholera epidemic, the figures were just as varied with Drumbanagher reaching its lowest level – one quarter of the 1840-46 average, while reductions from the 1848

total were also evident in Derrynoose, Kilmore, Loughgilly and Tynan. At the same time, the parishes of Creggan, Grange, Keady, Killylea, Loughgall and Mullavilly all exhibited increased numbers. Indeed, those for the latter two areas attained a greater level than their respective averages over the 1840-46 period. The statistics for 1850 demonstrate similar variations with five of the parishes showing an increase in numbers of baptisms, another five exhibiting a decrease and two showing no change.

Despite such annual variations the critical aspect is that baptism levels throughout all parishes fell well below the average for 1840-46. Nevertheless, and further demonstrating the regional diversity evident at this level, three parishes surpassed the 1840-46 average in at least one of these years – Drumbanagher (1850), Loughgall (1849) and Mullavilly (1849-50). Such variations were symptomatic of significant regional differences highlighted by population changes at all levels from the barony to the townland and support the contention of Ó Gráda that:

During the famine the variation in mortality across the country was significant. Comparing the 1841 and 1851 censuses, which provide data down to the townland level, suggests considerable and sometimes anomalous variation at the local level.⁹⁴

Thus, the trends evident in Armagh appear to have been replicated in other parts of the country and illustrate how the famine years varied in their impact in all districts regardless of previous economic standing. Nevertheless, as the following section will illustrate, “changes in the death rate, the birth rate and the emigration rate were all influenced by the famine”⁹⁵ and had significant consequences for the population of County Armagh.

THE SOCIAL COST - DEPOPULATION

According to official census statistics the population of Ireland fell from a total of 8,175,124 in 1841 to 6,552,385 in 1851.⁹⁶ However, the premise on which these figures is based, that the population did not increase between the years 1841-46, is highly debatable. Indeed, the Census Commissioners themselves recognised that the population was probably in excess of nine million on the eve of the famine. Further difficulty arises from the methodology of those collecting census data due to the fact that civil registration of deaths was not introduced into Ireland until 1864. Thus, estimates of such in the 1851 census were based on a combination of deaths recorded in institutions and the recollections of individuals. Consequently, as one historian has commented:

The statistics provided were flawed and probably underestimated the level of mortality particularly for the earlier years of the famine...as such methods did not take into account whole families who disappeared either as a consequence of emigration or death. In the most distressed areas therefore the data is the most incomplete and the information was sometimes based on indirect evidence.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, in spite of such inconsistencies, the official census returns remain the most reliable and detailed tool for any analysis of the effects of the famine years on a particular district. Hence, as a county, Armagh saw its population fall from 232,393 in 1841 to 196,085 ten years later.⁹⁸ However, this countywide decrease of 15.62% masked much regional variation, as revealed in the statistics for population decrease by barony, poor law union and parish. The figures for change by barony, of which there were eight in the county, were as follows:

ARMAGH POPULATION CHANGE BY BARONY, 1841-51

Barony	Pop. in 1841	Pop. in 1851	% Change
Armagh	41,607	34,330	-17.48
Fews Lower	19,464	15,149	-22.16
Fews Upper	26,896	22,399	-16.71
O'Neilland East	23,391	22,969	- 1.80
O'Neilland West	47,173	40,038	-15.12
Orior Lower	23,765	18,532	-22.01
Orior Upper	33,647	31,664	- 5.89
Tiranny	16,450	11,004	-33.10

Source: H. C., 1852-53, Volume xcii, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, p.65.

This table shows that five of the eight baronies witnessed a population decrease in excess of that for the county as a whole, Tiranny with more than one-third loss being the worst affected (see map 6). However, as subsequent tables will reiterate, those baronies containing the major towns of Newry (Orior Upper) and Lurgan (O'Neilland East) suffered least in respect to loss of population. This pattern is also evident in the figures for change by poor law union which saw Lurgan record the smallest decline:

ARMAGH POPULATION CHANGE BY POOR LAW UNION, 1841- 51

Poor Law Union	Pop. in 1841	Pop. in 1851	% Change
Armagh	106,459	83,853	-21.23
Banbridge	14,936	11,535	-22.77
Catleblaney	18,945	15,773	-16.74
Dundalk	3,075	2,570	-16.42
Lurgan	41,942	40,061	- 4.48
Newry	47,036	42,293	-10.08

Source: H. C., 1852-53, Volume xcii, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, pp.66-7.

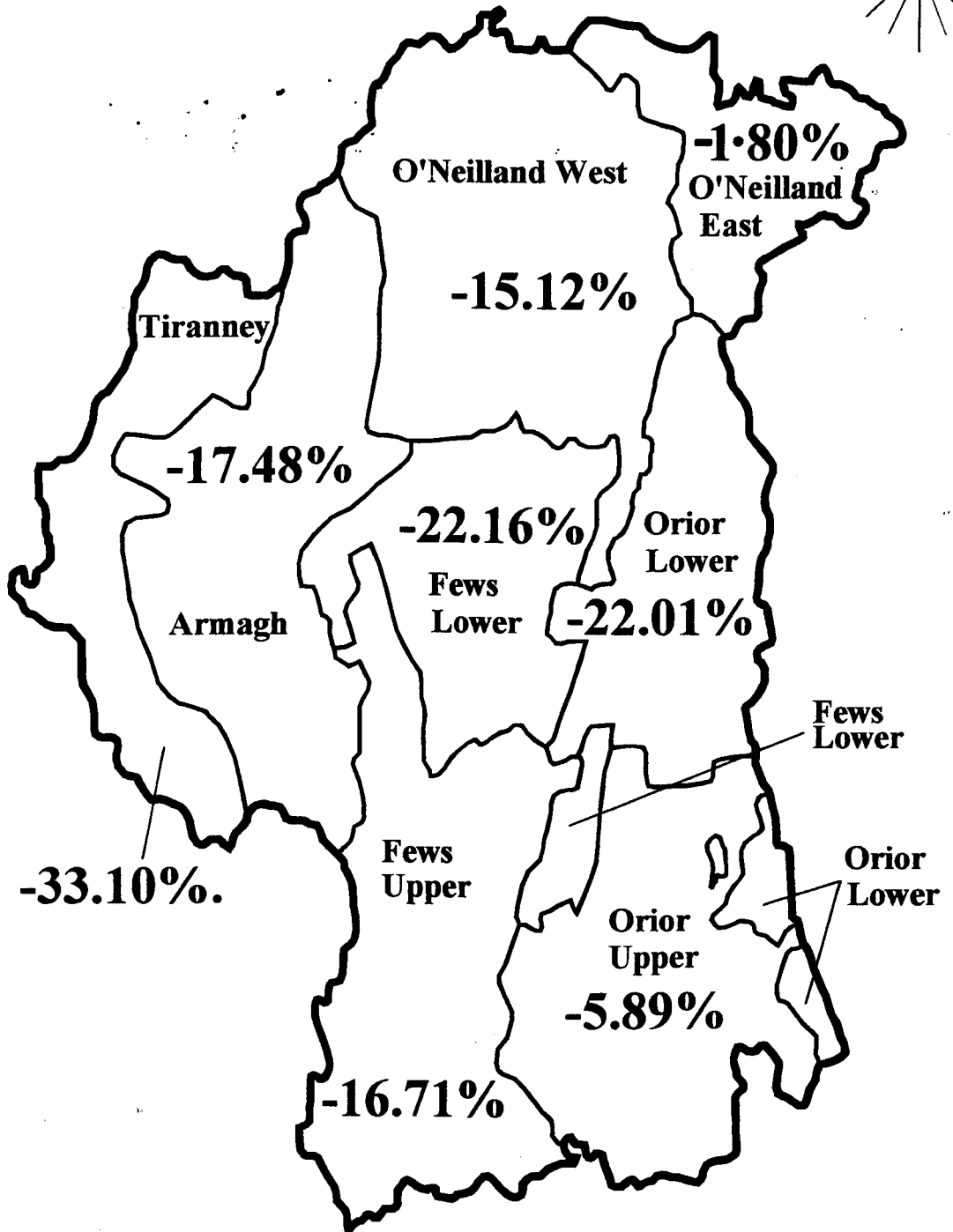
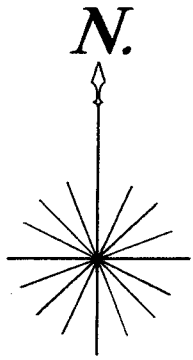
The importance of towns such as Lurgan and Newry to attract, or at least retain, population was alluded to by the 1851 census enumerators who noted:

The movements of a population in times of calamity are governed by a natural law: if plague exists in the towns, the inhabitants, to escape its ravages, fly to the country; if famine visits the country, to supply their wants the rural population flock to the towns – the large rate of increase in 1851 in the cities and large towns may be, thus, in some degree, accounted for.⁹⁹

Significantly, the largest decreases were in those unions which were based in the middle and west of the county on the lands of resident landlords such as Close, Gosford and Stronge. By contrast, the poorer unions in the south in which public works were first deemed necessary sustained losses comparable to that for the county as a whole (see map 7). Thus it would appear that the worst affected areas were not those of Crossmaglen, Killeavy or Newtownhamilton but Tynan, Madden and Derrynoose in the west of the county. This argument is reinforced by the statistics for change by parish which show that the most severe losses occurred in the parishes of Tynan (35.9%), Derrynoose (30.19%) Eglisk (27.92%) and Killyman (26.63%) (see Appendix 10). The other main pattern, that of increases in urban districts, is once again evident as of the four parishes which augmented their population two were in the vicinity of Newry while two were in close proximity to Lurgan. Overall, twenty-four of the twenty-eight parishes suffered a population decline with eight of these recording a loss between twenty and thirty per cent (see map 8).

An examination of the smallest area available, the townland, of which there were almost one thousand in the county, reveals even greater local variation than any of the previous analyses. Of 957 townlands, 825 (86.41%) witnessed a decline in population;

The Baronies of County Armagh: Population Change, 1841 - 51



118 (12.33%) saw their population rise while the remaining twelve (1.26%) saw no change. The following table, therefore, demonstrates both huge regional variety and the extent to which many townlands saw their population decline to a greater level than the 15.62% countywide figure:

ARMAGH POPULATION DECLINE BY TOWNLAND, 1841– 51

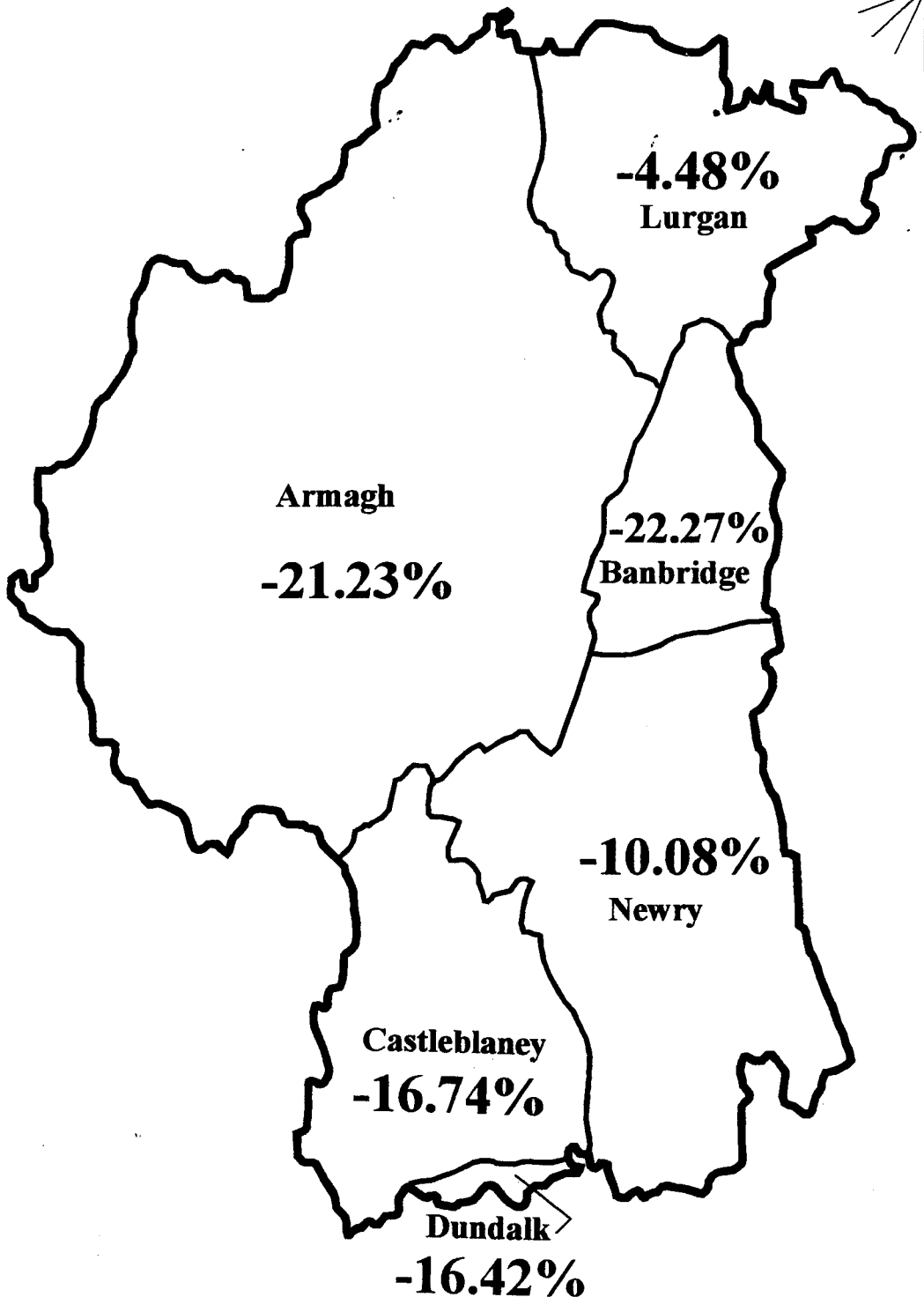
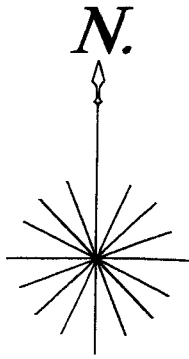
	% Decline							
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40
Townlands	52	75	100	116	102	112	92	64

	% Decline							
	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
Townlands	47	27	18	7	4	2	4	2

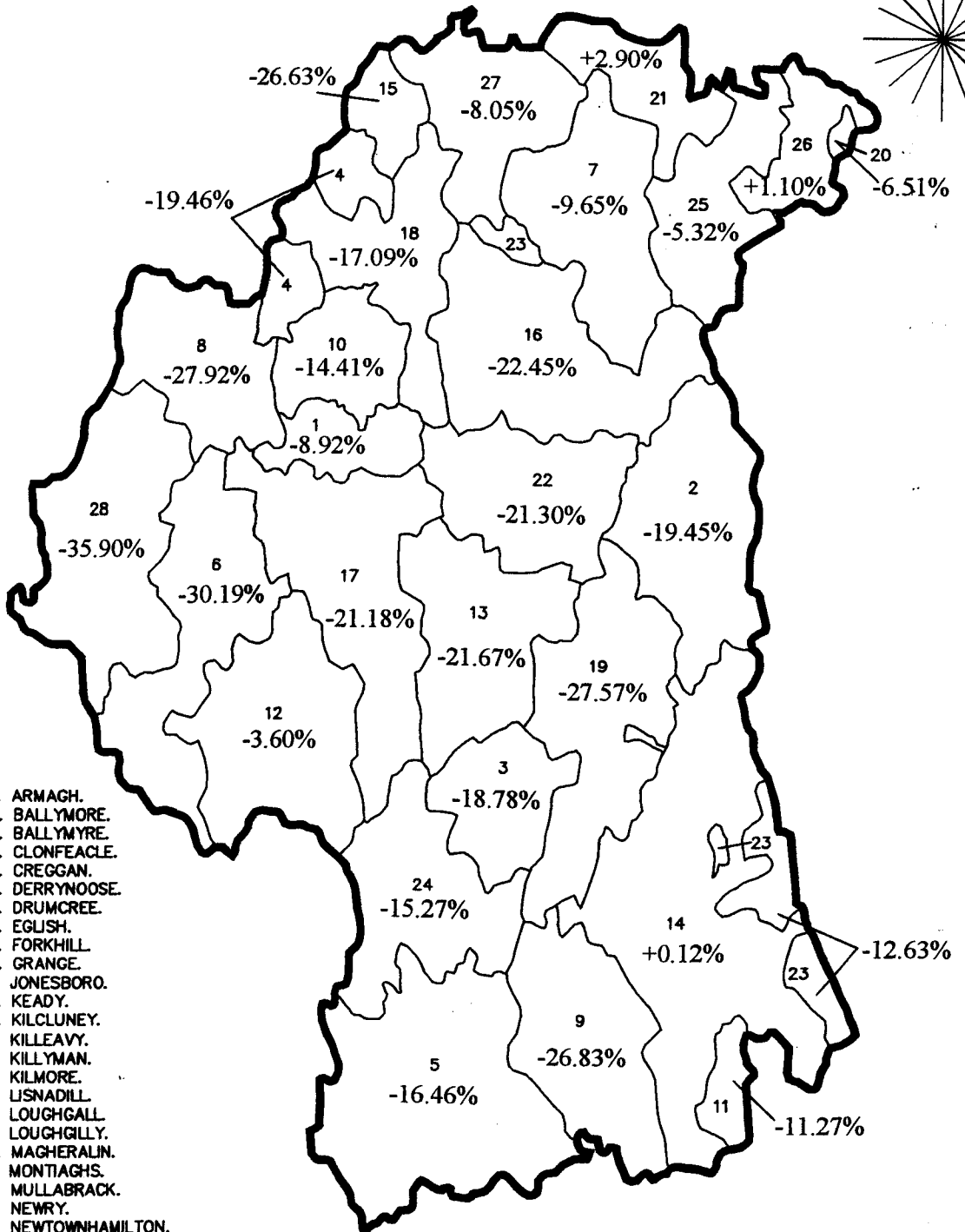
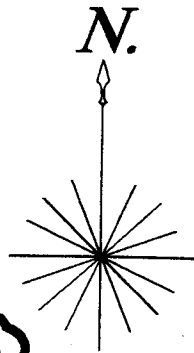
Source: H. C. 1852-53, xcii, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, pp.47-65.

With one further townland experiencing a loss in the region 90-95% this analysis reveals that, of 825 witnessing a decline, 227 (27.5%) either corresponded to the overall county figure or suffered a fall of less than 15%. However, thirty-eight saw their population more than halved while the overwhelming majority, 560 (67.87%) suffered a decline of between 15 and 50%. Demonstrating the local variation of the impact of these years is the fact that a number of townlands actually gained population. This is illustrated by the following table:

**The Poor Law Unions of County Armagh:
Population Change,
1841 - 51**



The Civil Parishes of County Armagh: Population Change, 1841 - 51



1. ARMAGH.
2. BALLYMORE.
3. BALLYMYRE.
4. CLONFEACLE.
5. CREGGAN.
6. DERRYNOOSE.
7. DRUMCREE.
8. EGLISH.
9. FORKHILL.
10. GRANGE.
11. JONESBORO.
12. KEADY.
13. KILCLUNEY.
14. KILLEAVY.
15. KILLYMAN.
16. KILMORE.
17. LISNADILL.
18. LOUGHGALL.
19. LOUGHGILLY.
20. MAGHERALIN.
21. MONTIAGHS.
22. MULLABRACK.
23. NEWRY.
24. NEWTOWNHAMILTON.
25. SEAGOE.
26. SHANKILL.
27. TARTARAGHAN.
28. TYNAN.

MAP 8

ARMAGH POPULATION INCREASE BY TOWNLAND, 1841– 51

	% Increase							
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40
Townlands	39	19	13	10	9	1	3	6

	% Increase							
	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
Townlands	3	2	--	1	2	-	1	--

Source: H. C. 1852-53, xcii, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, pp.47-65.

In addition, a further nine townlands (not included in the table) showed gains varying from 80% to 463%. Six of these were sited in or around Lurgan while the others were in the parishes of Armagh, Grange and Loughgall. The statistic for the latter area, one of the worst affected in the county, reinforces the finding that there was much anomalous variation within districts. At the same time, the figures for Lurgan illustrated increases of two, three and fourfold and emphasise the pattern already identified. Thus, due to its industrial infrastructure, based around various aspects of the linen industry, this area saw much less emigration than other parts of the county, whilst actually attracting people from the surrounding rural hinterland. Indeed, the following table illustrates, that, due to both factors, rural areas bore the brunt of population loss in these years and while the population there declined by 35,842 (16.9%) its urban counterpart saw a loss of only 467 (2.27%):

POPULATION DECLINE IN ARMAGH, 1841-51

	Rural		Urban	
	1841	1851	1841	1851
Males	104,178	86,131	9,714	9,586
Females	107,715	89,920	10,786	10,447
Total	211,893	176,051	20,500	20,033

Source: H. C. 1856, Volume xxxi, The Census of Ireland for 1851, General Report, p.xv.

Alternative analysis also shows that the number of persons per square mile fell from 414 in 1841 to 344 in 1851.¹⁰⁰ With the average fall in Ulster being forty-eight, this figure (seventy) placed Armagh third in the province in terms of decline of population per square mile. The most severe loss occurred in Monaghan (125), followed by Cavan (ninety-one) and then Armagh. The next county was Fermanagh (fifty-seven) while those bordering Armagh suffered much smaller losses, the figure for Tyrone being forty-six with Down one less at forty-five. Nationally, Armagh's loss equalled that of Leitrim and was surpassed only by Cork, Sligo, Longford, Monaghan and Roscommon, the national average being a drop of forty-nine per square mile.¹⁰¹

In terms of population per square mile of arable land, the decrease was even greater from 511 in 1841 to 417 in 1851 – a fall of ninety-four, despite the fact that arable land increased from 414.44 square miles in 1841 to 422.41 ten years later.¹⁰² The corollary of such trends was a fall in the number of those employed in the agricultural sector of the county, from 56.2% in 1841 to 49.6% in 1851.¹⁰³ Simultaneously, the stock of fourth-class housing, which was almost totally inhabited by agricultural

labourers, was devastated and declined from a total of 11,668 in 1841 to 3,172 in 1851.¹⁰⁴ This fall of 73% was on a par with that witnessed in counties Cork, Roscommon, Leitrim and Wexford and was also above the Ulster average of 69%, which represented a fall of 113,926 from 164,113 to 50,187.¹⁰⁵ Armagh's total percentage fall was also in line with the national average of 72.4% where the number of fourth-class houses fell from 491,278 to 135,589.¹⁰⁶

If the census figures for the period 1841-51 reflected the diminution of the county's population through famine and emigration, those for the following ten years illustrated how emigration ensured that the population of the county continued to fall. While the figures for the county showed a decrease of 3.05% from 196,085 in 1851 to 190,086 in 1861,¹⁰⁷ as in the earlier period, they varied widely according to the analysis used. Nevertheless, the pattern of population gain in the north east continued as illustrated by the figures for change by barony:

ARMAGH POPULATION CHANGE BY BARONY, 1851– 61

Barony	Pop. in 1851	Pop. in 1861	% Change
Armagh	34,330	32,005	- 6.77
Fews Lower	15,149	13,635	- 9.99
Fews Upper	22,399	19,947	-10.94
O'Neilland East	22,969	27,766	+20.88
O'Neilland West	40,038	41,668	+ 4.07
Orior Lower	18,532	15,924	-14.07
Orior Upper	31,664	28,947	- 8.58
Tiranny	11,004	10,194	- 7.36

Source: H. C., 1863, Volume Iv, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1861, Part 1, p.67.

While six of the eight baronies suffered population loss, those of O'Neilland East and West, principally the former, saw substantial increases. This was due to the continued development of the linen industry in Lurgan and Portadown which resulted in large numbers removing themselves from neighbouring rural localities in the search for employment. Of the other baronies it is significant that Upper Orior experienced a greater loss in this period, -8.58%, than in the previous ten years, suggesting that proximity to Newry port facilitated the passage of many wishing to emigrate (see map 9). Such trends are also evident in the following table of change by poor law union with Lurgan union experiencing an increase in population while the others all lost people. Both the Dundalk and Newry statistics (-14.35% and -10.77%) are very similar to those for 1841-51 (-16.42% and -10.08%), again supporting the hypothesis that proximity to local ports aided emigration (see map 10):

ARMAGH POPULATION CHANGE BY POOR LAW UNION, 1851- 61

Poor Law Union	Pop. in 1851	Pop. in 1861	% Change
Armagh	83,853	78,328	- 6.58
Banbridge	11,535	10,520	- 8.79
Castleblaney	15,773	14,191	-10.02
Dundalk	2,570	2,201	-14.35
Lurgan	40,001	47,112	+17.60
Newry	42,293	37,734	-10.77

Source: H. C., 1863, Volume Iv, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1861, Part 1, pp. 68-9.

The dichotomy between the baronies of O'Neilland East and West and the rest of the county is further emphasised by the figures for population change by parish (see

Appendix 11). The impact of emigration becomes apparent when we consider that out of a total of twenty-eight parishes only five gained population. Of these, Montiagh (+21.3%), Seagoe (+8.13%) and Shankill (+37.89%) were in O’Neilland East while Drumcree (+11.48%) and Tartaraghan (+11.28%) were in O’Neilland West. However, Newry’s port status saw it record a population decline for the decade (- 2.86%) which must have been due to emigration given that the period 1841–51 saw its population increase by 12.63% (see map 11). While sixteen of the twenty-eight parishes recorded a population loss of 10% or less, the figures for townlands emphasise how local influences ensured a great variety of demographic behaviour. Indeed, of 965 townlands, 643 witnessed population loss as follows:

ARMAGH POPULATION DECLINE BY TOWNLAND, 1851– 61

	% Decline							
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40
Townlands	102	129	120	110	57	40	30	26

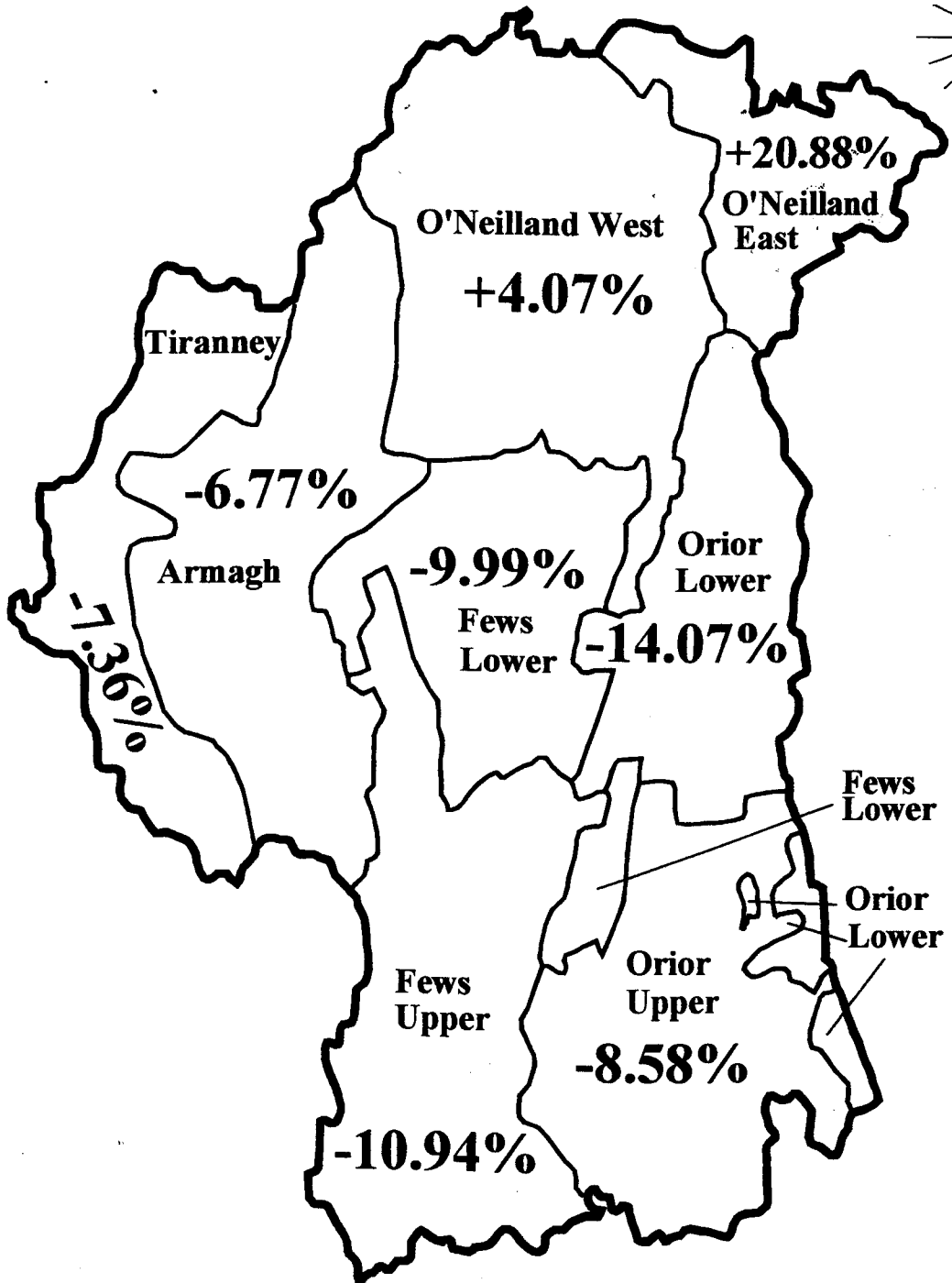
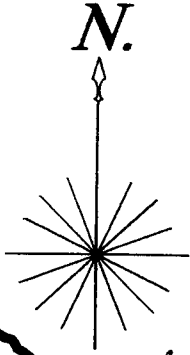
	% Decline							
	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
Townlands	12	8	4	2	2	--	--	1

Source: H. C. 1863, iv, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1861, Part 1, showing the Area, Population and Number of Houses by Townlands and Electoral Divisions, pp.49-67.

In addition, a further six townlands (not included in the table) saw population decline range from 80% to 100% and while the general figures suggest a population loss of well below 10%, these figures illustrate how 173 townlands, 17.94% of the total

The Baronies of County Armagh:

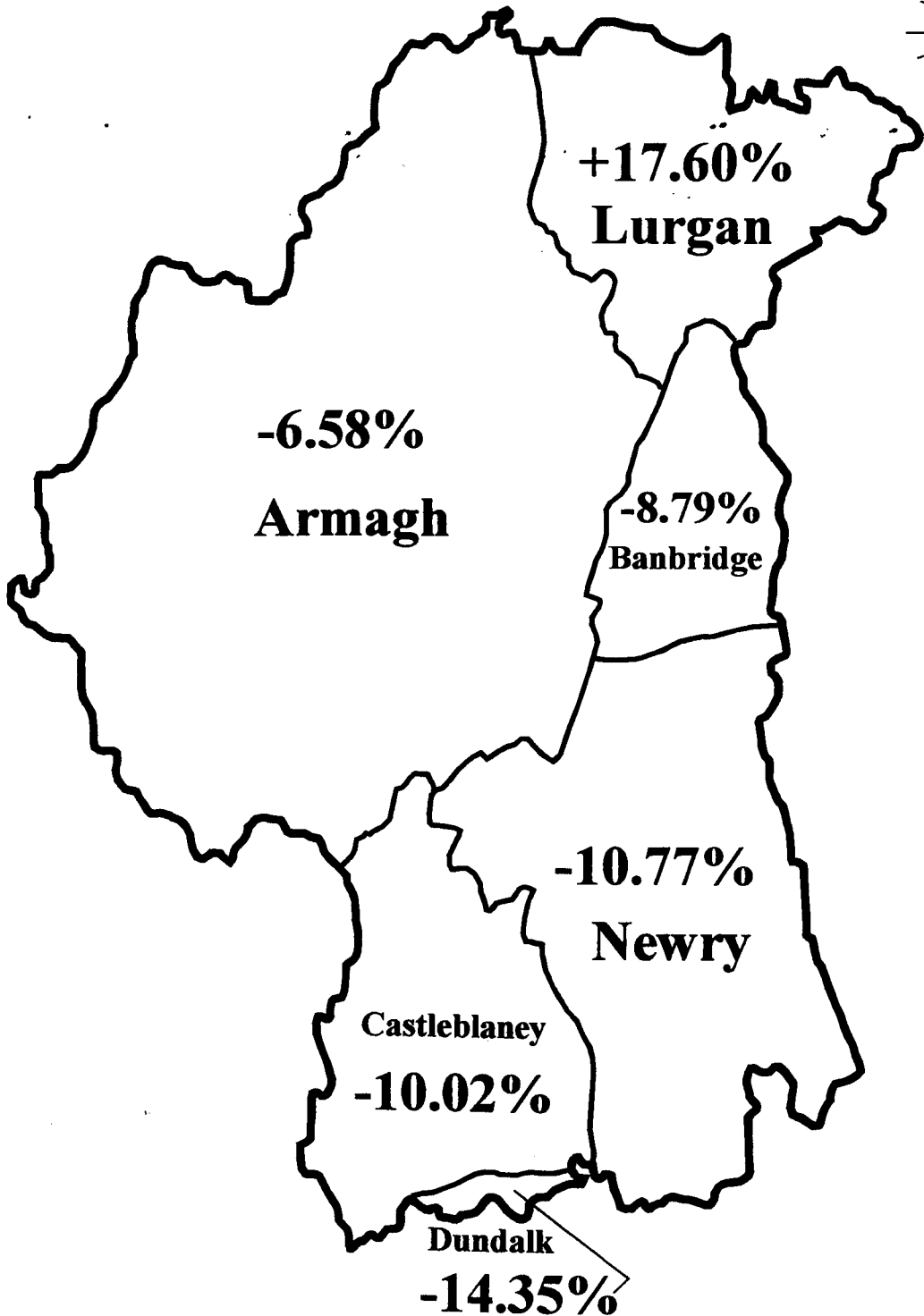
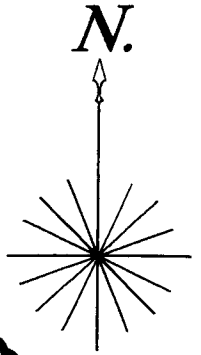
Population Change, 1851 - 61



MAP 9

The Poor Law Unions of County Armagh:

Population Change,
1851 - 61



MAP 10

number, experienced a loss of between 20 and 50%. At the same time, while twenty townlands showed no loss or gain in the decade, 296 did witness population increase including fifteen whose population surged by between 80% and 400% (not included in the table). Of this total, almost one third (28.7%) were in the baronies of O'Neilland East or West:

ARMAGH POPULATION INCREASE BY TOWNLAND, 1851- 61

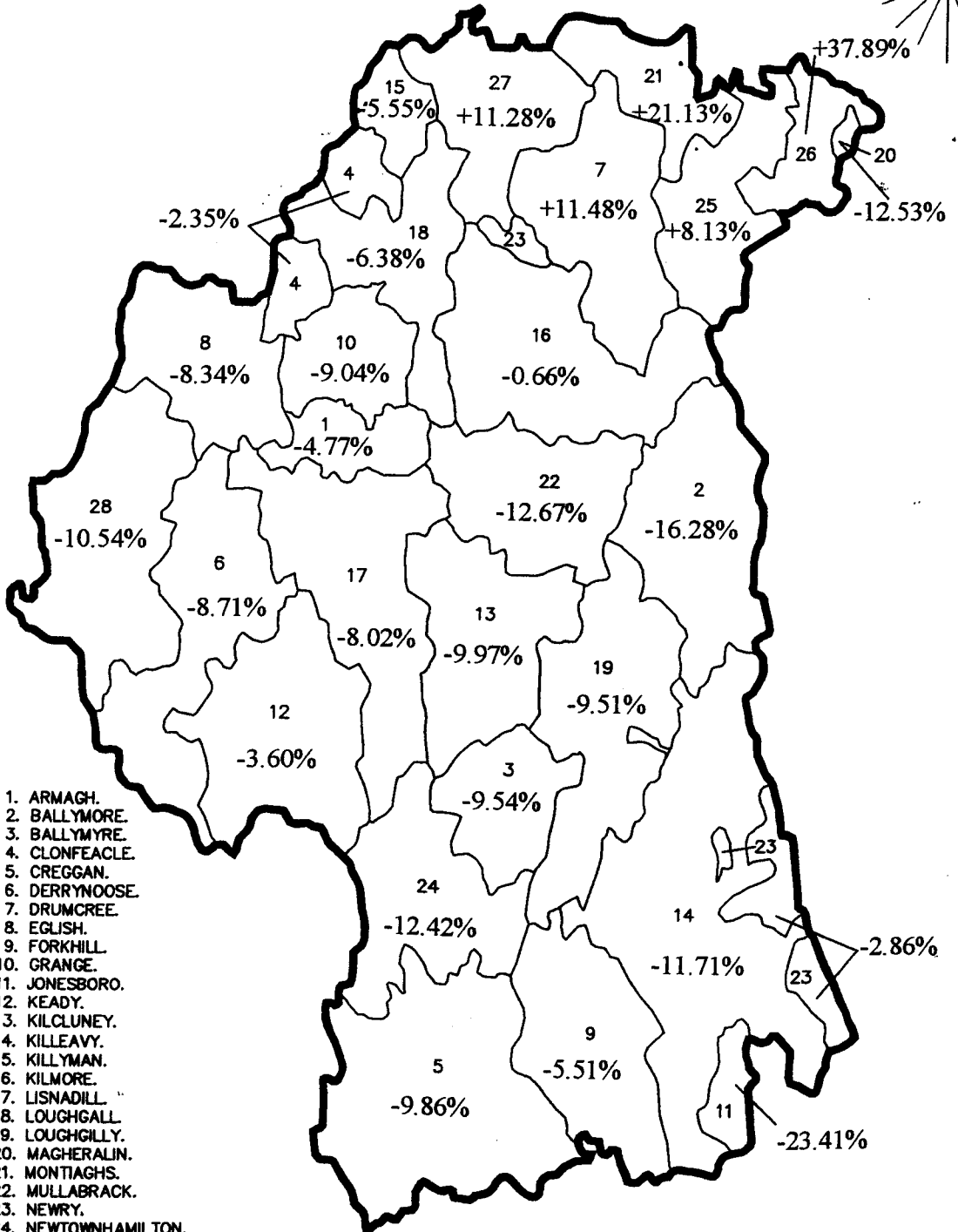
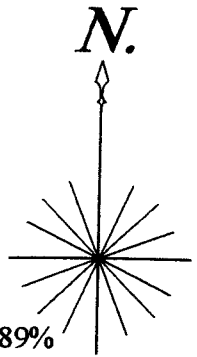
	% Change							
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40
Townlands	72	55	46	32	24	14	8	8

	% Change							
	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
Townlands	2	8	--	4	2	4	--	2

Source: H. C. 1863, iv, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1861, Part 1, showing the Area, Population and Number of Houses by Townlands and Electoral Divisions, pp.49-67.

A final statistic which illustrates the devastating impact on the rural economy concerns the decline of village communities in the decades 1841-61. Under the regulations of the census enumerators a village had to contain a minimum of twenty houses in order to be categorised as such. By 1861, six villages in Armagh which had previously fulfilled this requirement had lost so much of their population that they were classed as part of the nearest townland rather than as villages in their own right. The following table illustrates their demise:

The Civil Parishes of County Armagh: Population Change, 1851 - 61



1. ARMAGH.
2. BALLYMORE.
3. BALLYMYRE.
4. CLONFEACLE.
5. CREGGAN.
6. DERRYNOOSE.
7. DRUMCREE.
8. EGLISH.
9. FORKHILL.
10. GRANGE.
11. JONESBORO.
12. KEADY.
13. KILCLUNEY.
14. KILLEAVY.
15. KILLYMAN.
16. KILMORE.
17. LISNADILL.
18. LOUGHGALL.
19. LOUGHGILLY.
20. MAGHERALIN.
21. MONTIAGHS.
22. MULLABRACK.
23. NEWRY.
24. NEWTOWNHAMILTON.
25. SEAGOE.
26. SHANKILL.
27. TARTARAGHAN.
28. TYNAN.

MAP 11

DECLINE OF VILLAGES IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1841-51

Parish	Village	No. houses 1841	No. houses 1851	No. houses 1861
Creggan	Cullyhanna	37	22	<20
Montiaghs	Charlestown	20	20	<20
Clonfeacle	Derryscollop	59	---	<20
Tartaraghan	Maghery	33	27	<20
Tartaraghan	Milltown	26	23	<20
Loughgilly	Belleek	22	29	<20

Source: H. C., 1863, Volume iv, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1861, pp.55-7; 61; 64.

In addition to population statistics the census returns also reveal interesting trends in relation to education levels throughout the county.

An initial reading of the data would suggest a significant improvement in literacy in the ten-year period from 1841 (see maps 12 and 13). For example, although illiteracy amongst males and females was measured at 35% and 43% respectively, numbers attending school increased from 17% to 20%. In addition, the number of males recorded as being able to read and write increased from 39% to 42% while for females, the percentage improved from eighteen to twenty four.¹⁰⁸ However, these statistics, far from illustrating a sustained improvement in educational standards throughout the county, reveal both the extent of mortality amongst the poorest classes and the continued legacy of emigration, a point concurred with by the census enumerators:

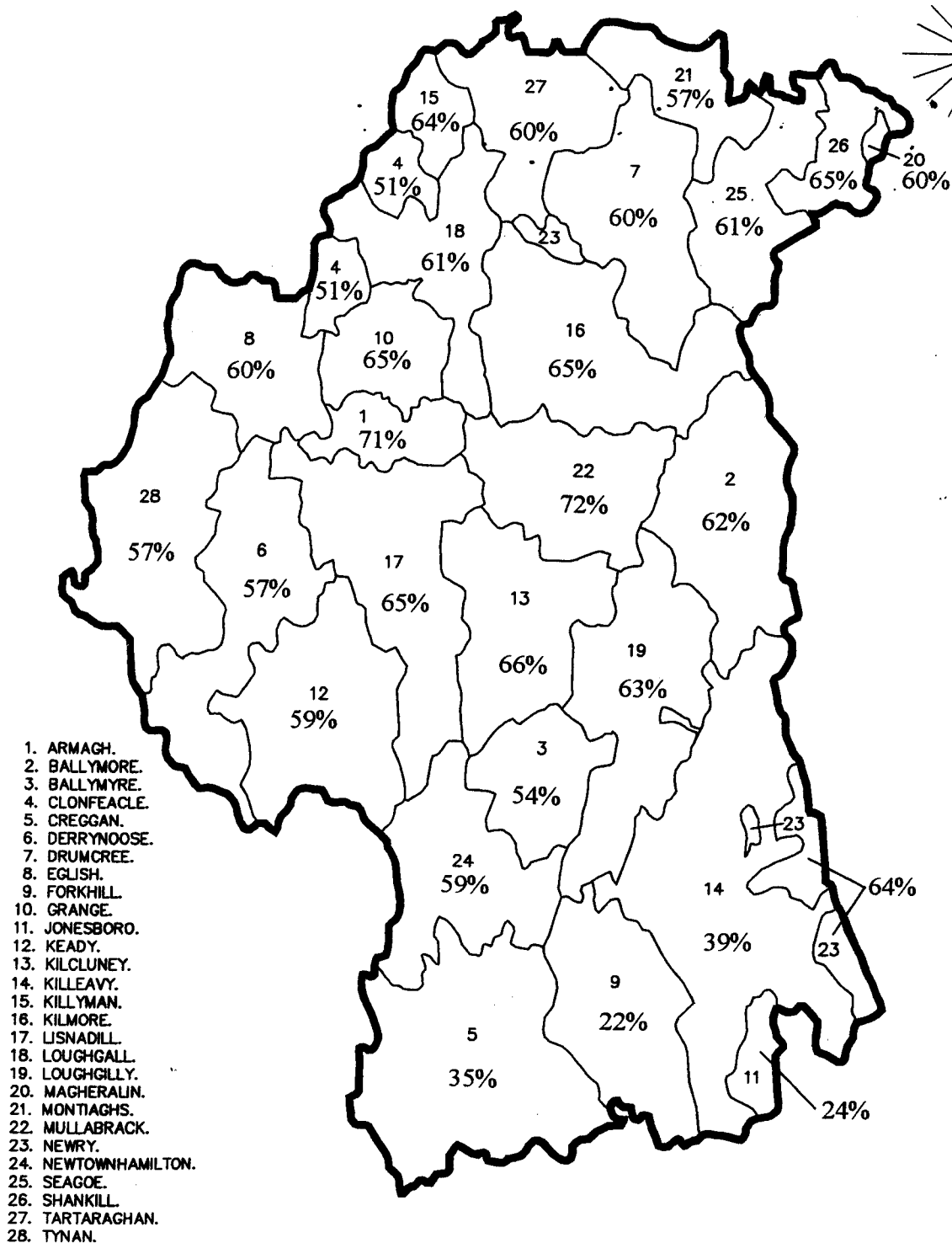
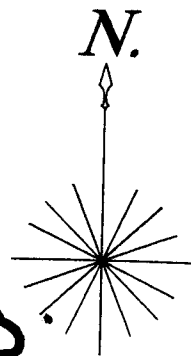
The great mass of the emigrants from Ireland is composed of the poorer classes who, being withdrawn from the population, must diminish the proportions of the illiterate, of persons occupying fourth-class housing accommodation and of those dependent on their own manual labour for support.¹⁰⁹

Linked to such evidence is the fact that many of those emigrating were Irish speakers and thus their departure probably contributed to a diminution of the native language in the county. According to the census of 1851 there were 13,588 Irish speakers in Armagh of whom only 148 were mono-lingual.¹¹⁰ This total, representing 7.01% of the population, compared favourably with most Ulster counties and was similar to that of Cavan (7.48%) and Monaghan (7.72%). Indeed, apart from Donegal (28.71%) these figures far surpassed those for any of the other counties, the lowest being Down (0.36%).¹¹¹ However, it is likely that such statistics significantly underestimated the numbers of Irish speakers, given that more than one-third of the population was illiterate. At the same time, Irish speakers would surely have experienced great difficulty in understanding a census form printed in English. Aside from such difficulties, the census enumerators acknowledged a further problem which would have led to under-representation of Irish speakers:

The information was collected in the space under the heading "Education" and a note at the foot of the form (which may have been overlooked in some cases) required the person filling the return to add the word "Irish" to the name of each person who speaks Irish, but who cannot speak English, and the words "Irish and English" to the names of those who can speak both the Irish and English languages.¹¹²

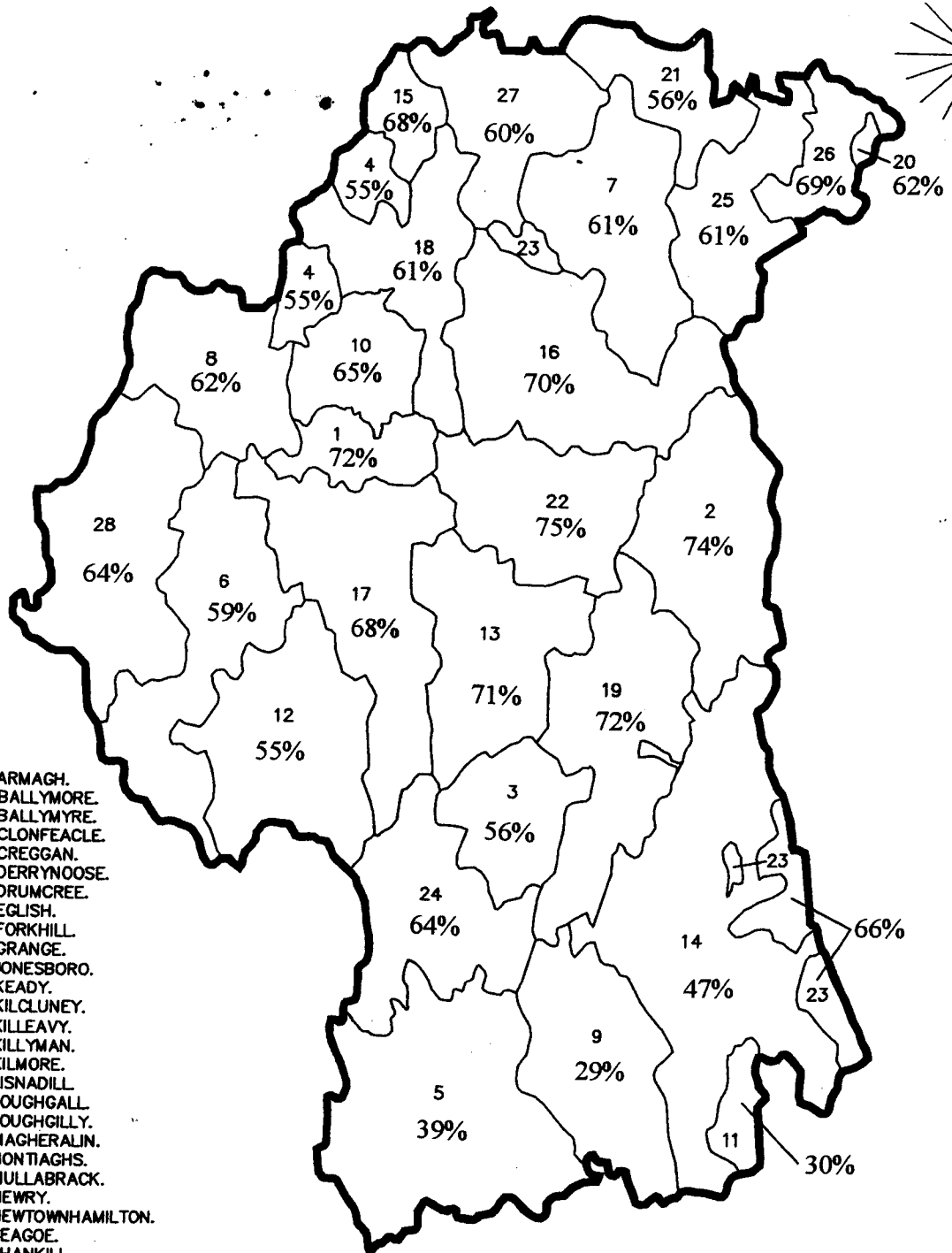
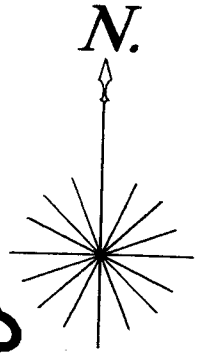
Undoubtedly such requirements led to much confusion and the loss of important data relative to the number of native speakers. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, given its impact on the rural communities throughout the county, the famine signalled the demise of a language which had already been under pressure due to increased urbanisation, the National System of Education, which allowed for education through the means of English only, and the opening up of the rural hinterland by means of the railways.¹¹³ Indeed, the decline of the native language of many of those in the county

The Civil Parishes of County Armagh: Literacy levels in 1841



MAP 12

The Civil Parishes of County Armagh: Literacy levels in 1851



1. ARMAGH.
2. BALLYMORE.
3. BALLYMYRE.
4. CLONFEACLE.
5. CREGGAN.
6. DERRYNOOSE.
7. DRUMCREE.
8. EGLISH.
9. FORKHILL.
10. GRANGE.
11. JONESBORO.
12. KEADY.
13. KILCLUNEY.
14. KILLEAVY.
15. KILLYMAN.
16. KILMORE.
17. LISNADILL.
18. LOUGHGALL.
19. LOUGHGILLY.
20. MAGHERALIN.
21. MONTIAGHS.
22. MULLABRACK.
23. NEWRY.
24. NEWTOWNHAMILTON.
25. SEAGOE.
26. SHANKILL.
27. TARTARAGHAN.
28. TYNAN.

MAP 13

reflected a gradual movement from rural communities to urban centres.

Already in the 1830s domestic spinning and weaving had all but collapsed due to mechanisation of these branches of the linen industry. The famine acted as a catalyst in this process, a fact perhaps best illustrated by the demise of village communities in the 1850s. The population increases in O'Neilland East were accounted for by the ingress of the surrounding rural population into the growing industrial towns of Lurgan and Portadown. As in Belfast, rural attitudes were transferred to the new setting and consequently the sectarian divisions which had been so palpable since the late eighteenth-century made their mark in that entire districts of towns became either Catholic or Protestant in composition. Thus, the famine years brought ancient divisions into sharp focus and ensured that sectarian conflict moved from the hedges and lanes of the countryside to the streets and tenements of bustling market towns.

In many other respects the evidence produced suggests that Armagh's famine experience reflected that of much of the rest of the country. Evictions, crime levels and emigration all showed dramatic increases while deaths in public institutions and in society at large reached unparalleled heights in 1847. At this time previously benign ailments such as measles and dysentery emerged as significant causes of death while fevers of all varieties became epidemic in nature. Indicative of the crisis was the fact that all classes and creeds suffered, a fact perhaps best exemplified by the statistics for Loughgall, the birthplace of the Orange Order in 1795, which showed severe levels of mortality both in 1847 and the following year.

This chapter illustrates the great difficulty in attempting to make generalisations about the effect of the famine in a particular county. Indeed, it is perhaps more correct to talk of a series of “Armaghs” rather than the county as a unit. This is due to the significant local variations which emerge after analysis of church and census records. These have shown that the worst affected areas were not in the barren, mountainous districts of the south of the county where there was little or no industrial infrastructure but in areas of the west and middle of the county which had previously supported a thriving domestic linen industry on heavily subdivided land. As a consequence of mechanisation these districts were actually in the throes of de-industrialisation when the famine struck thereby leaving them helpless against a loss of their basic food. As will be discussed in the final section, a knowledge of such developments in the pre-famine era, both in relation to industry and provision for the poor, is vital if we are to understand the consequences of famine in Armagh.

ENDNOTES

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3. H. C., 1852, Volume xlvii, Civil Bill Ejectment Processes (Ireland), pp.2-4.
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5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.
7. H. C., 1881, Volume lxxvii, Return "by the Provinces and Counties (compiled from Returns made to the Inspector General, Royal Irish Constabulary), of Cases of Evictions which have come to the knowledge of the Constabulary in each of the years from 1849 to 1880, inclusive", p.8.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.
9. *Ibid.*, p.3.
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11. *Ibid.*
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14. *Ibid.*
15. *Newry Telegraph*, 6 August 1850.
16. *Ibid.*, 12 October 1850.
17. *Armagh Guardian*, 21 October 1850.
18. NAD, Outrage Papers, Petition of Agnes Greer to the Lord Lieutenant, 24 December 1847. See also *Newry Telegraph*, 6 January 1848.
19. *Newry Telegraph*, 25 May 1850.
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21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Newry Telegraph*, 27 December 1851.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
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27. *Ibid.*, W. Miller, Loughgall to the Under Secretary, 15 July 1848.
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37. Villiers, *Patient Endurance, The Great Famine in Connemara*, p.122.
38. Mac Donald, 'A Time of Desolation: Clones Poor Law Union 1845-50', in

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 41. *Ibid.*, pp.159-60.
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 43. M. Mullen, *The Darkest Years -A Famine Story*, Cavendish House Publications, 1995, p.162.
 44. H. C., 1847-48, Volume lii, Tables showing the number of criminal offenders committed for trial or bailed for appearance at the assizes and sessions in each county in the year 1847, p.363.
 45. H. C., 1856, Volume xxxi, Census of Ireland 1851. Appendix to General Report, Emigration Tables, pp.ixxviii – xci. An estimate can be made for the volume of emigration in the period 1841-50 by subtracting the total number of deaths for the period (31,428) from the population figure of 1841 (232,393). The number Remaining (200,965) can then be compared with the 1851 Census figure (196,085) to ascertain the approximate number that emigrated in this period. This figure emerges as slightly less than 5,000 (4,880) and illustrates that emigration from the county soared from the 1851 for a number of years.
 46. *Newry Telegraph*, 31 August 1848.
 47. *Ibid.*, 28 November 1848.
 48. *Armagh Guardian*, 17 January 1848.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. *Newry Telegraph*, 21 June 1849.
 51. *Ibid.*
 52. *Newry Examiner*, 12 April 1849.
 53. *Armagh Guardian*, 16 April 1849.
 54. *Newry Telegraph*, 20 February 1849.
 55. *Armagh Guardian*, 16 April 1849.
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 60. MacRaid, *The Great Famine And Beyond. Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Irish Academic Press, 2000, p.77.
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 62. MacRaid, *The Great Famine And Beyond. Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, p.77.
 63. *Armagh Guardian*, 20 August 1849; 8 April 1850; 3 June 1850.
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67. *Newry Telegraph*, 16 February 1850.
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72. Ibid.
73. R. B. MacCarthy, *The Trinity College Estates 1800-1923, Corporate Management in an Age of Reform*, Dundalgan Press, 1992, Appendix Table C, p.241. See also W. J. Lowe, 'Landlord and tenant on the estate of Trinity College Dublin, 1851-1903' in *Hermathena, A Dublin University Review*, No. cxx, Summer 1976.
74. PRONI, D/1201/1; D/1201/2; D/1201/22, Irish Encumbered Estates Rentals, County Armagh, 1851-59.
75. Ibid., D/1201/1
76. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T64/369/53, Edward Twistleton, Dublin to Charles Trevelyan, 9 December 1847.
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78. Ibid.
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81. D. Fitzpatrick, 'Women and the Great Famine' in M. Kelleher and J. H. Murphy (eds) *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland, Public and Private Spheres*, Irish Academic Press, 1997, p.56.
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83. Ibid., pp.50-69.
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88. H. C., 1856, Volume xxx, Census of Ireland 1851. Table of Deaths, pp.102-3;106-7.
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97. *Ibid.*, pp.167-8.
98. H. C., 1852-53, Volume xcii, Population (Ireland), The Census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, pp.66-7.
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101. *Ibid.*, p.xiv.
102. *Ibid.*, p.xii.
103. *Ibid.*, p.xxxiv.
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CONCLUSION

I think that remarkable visitations of God ought to be left to the circumstances of the moment, and provided for according to the wisdom of the legislature.¹

When Edward Chichester made this assertion before the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in 1830, he could not have imagined the extent of the “visitation” which would engulf the country in the middle of the next decade. Doubtless, his faith in the wisdom of the legislature would have been severely dented if he had known that much of the relief mechanism would have been restricted to the parameters of the poor law. In fact, in relation to any contemplation of the latter in 1830, he commented, “there is no country in which poor laws like those of England would be beneficial.”²

From the period of Chichester’s comments until the 1850s much change occurred in relation to provision for the poor, but the only alteration in the thinking on compulsory taxation was an increased opposition from much of the populace. Indeed, the huge rate increases consequent upon the famine years served only to bolster the opinion of those who had argued that any initial compulsory rate would inevitably increase in conjunction with enhanced levels of poverty. However, for those not deemed destitute and therefore not entitled to the relief offered by the workhouse, the situation had not radically changed. Even in the midst of the “remarkable visitation” of 1845-52, their hopes for relief were, as in the pre-famine era, dictated by place, that is, by their proximity to charitable groups and benevolent landlords. In the 1830s the establishment of the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity was forged on the money of the town’s middle and business classes who hoped that such an institution would greatly diminish, if not totally eradicate, the ingress of beggars. Similarly, a highly

successful medical system was only established in Middletown by virtue of a charitable bequest.

The significance of both these institutions lies in the fact that they were supported by those with the finance necessary to maintain such operations. This point was further illustrated by the fact that the only other hospital operating in the county was that in Armagh City established and financed entirely by the Church of Ireland Primate, Lord John Beresford. Thus, the sick poor in these areas benefited solely because they happened to reside there. This fact, together with the collapse of the vestry-supported relief system in the mid 1830s due to massive over-subscription, indicated that a more broad-based system, capable of aiding all those in need was essential.

Nevertheless, it is highly debatable whether a poor law, derivative of that modified in England in 1834, met the requirements of a country where it was estimated that up to three million people were without employment for two-thirds of the year, through no fault of their own. As one recent commentator has noted:

In Ireland, the Whately Commissions' recommendations were set aside. The Irish poor relief measure of 1838 was founded upon the proposals of George Nicholls, an Englishman unacquainted with Ireland, and whose close connections with the origins and practice of the New Poor Law rendered him a less-than-impartial investigator.³

As has been illustrated, opposition to the introduction of the poor law in 1838 was widespread and, instead of mollifying as the years went on, it became more trenchant. From the early attempts to prevent individuals applying for relief, to the outspoken comments of an Armagh guardian in 1848, the debate about the poor law remained

prominent throughout the 1840s. The main grievance of ratepayers was the cost of the relief machinery which simply imposed an increased rate burden on those areas sending most paupers to the workhouse, thereby further penalising districts least able to afford it.

From the point of view of the poor themselves the workhouses were, until 1846, simply a refuge of last resort. This reality was perhaps best illustrated in a letter to the *Newry Examiner* about the Lurgan workhouse, part of which claimed:

The poor of this neighbourhood, particularly the destitute poor that have no alternative but begging or the workhouse, express themselves thus – that they would sooner die of want than allow themselves to become the inmates of the latter, preferring a miserable existence at large to the cold comforts and harsh treatment of the workhouse.⁴

Evidence of such attitudes was to be found in the consistently low admission levels to both the Armagh and Newry workhouses and, from 1842 onwards, the houses were generally the refuge of women, children and the sick or infirm of both sexes. Only after the second blight of 1846 did people repair to such institutions in the hope of obtaining food and shelter; however, the surviving registers illustrate better than any other source the extent to which the calamity impacted equally on all creeds, actually resulting in greater numbers of deaths amongst non-Catholics. Moreover, as has been shown, those empowered with enforcing the poor law faced difficulties themselves. From the first weeks of their operation the Newry and Armagh unions encountered serious opposition to the collection of rates with collectors often being threatened or attacked, a factor which remained constant throughout the 1840s. Furthermore, intervention on the part of the Poor Law Commissioners, often regarded as

interference by the guardians, was a regular occurrence with union minutes frequently containing the commissioners' disapproval of such crucial matters as dietary alterations, workhouse capacity, appointment of staff and alternative accommodation.

Hence, sharp exchanges were a feature of the period with the guardians believing themselves to be the best judges of local conditions while the commissioners demanded strict adherence at all times to the precepts of the law. The Poor Law Extension Act of 1847 only served to further exacerbate such tensions while, at the same time, placing a huge burden on the workhouse administrators who now became responsible for both indoor and outdoor relief. However, from an examination of the minute books in both unions it is evident that this was a burden that was not equally shared. Indeed, it appears that, apart from crucial matters involving financial matters, the running of workhouses was left to a small body of men who regularly attended meetings, a trend that was particularly marked in Armagh union. For example, in a total of fifty eight meetings held in the latter in 1845, fifty were attended by five or less guardians, while six saw ten or more turn up. Of the two meetings at which more than twenty were present, one was a special finance meeting to select a new clerk, which saw thirty six emerge.⁵

This trend continued the following year with there being forty six meetings out of fifty nine at which less than five board members turned up, Once again the largest meeting (twenty eight) arose at a finance meeting in March.⁶ Matters improved somewhat in 1847 when there were sixteen occasions on which more than ten guardians attended, thirteen when the attendance was more than twenty and only twenty four occasions on

which the attendance numbered less than five. However, even in the midst of the calamity the guardians demonstrated where their priorities lay. On 12 January a special general board meeting was called to hear a report from the medical officer on the condition of the workhouse. This elicited a response of seventeen members. In case it may be thought that lack of attendance might have resulted from fear of contracting fever, then rife in the house, it is worth noting that at a meeting held in the local courthouse to obviate such difficulties only fifteen turned up. However, when the controversial question of appointment of relieving officers arose in August the only complete turn out of forty four guardians was noted.⁷ Obviously financial probity and questions of local accountability and control were more important to the majority of guardians than the daily welfare of those paupers who had submitted to their control. Similarly, a meeting called to discuss the rate-in-aid bill in February 1849 elicited the support of thirty eight members.⁸

In Newry, while the majority failed to attend regularly the situation was not nearly as bad as in Armagh. In 1846 there were twenty one occasions on which ten or more members attended. As in Armagh large attendances were usually determined by financial matters and the largest number in that year (thirty three) showed up to oversee the appointment of a rates valuator and supervisor.⁹ Similarly in 1847 the question of a site for a new fever hospital seemed to exercise the minds of guardians with two meetings on this matter witnessing attendances of thirty seven and forty two.¹⁰ Nevertheless, on only one occasion did the number dip as low as five and on thirty six occasions more than ten appeared with more than twenty on another nine. Indeed, the average attendance in Newry was fifteen or sixteen while in Armagh it

rarely rose above five and on many occasions the matters of the union were left in the hands of the two or three people who bothered to turn up.¹¹

Hence, it is a moot point as to whether the poor would have been better served by a parochial system such as that advocated by those who opposed the introduction of the new poor law. From an examination of the period of the Temporary Relief Act there is little doubt that local knowledge saved the lives of many who would otherwise have perished under the dictates of the Relief Commissioners. Nevertheless, the relative inactivity of the landed class illustrated the extent to which an element of compulsory taxation appears to have been necessary given that, except for an honourable few, the county's landlords and their agents did little for their distressed tenants. While the Encumbered Estates Act saw a significant amount of land sold in the baronies of Upper Fews, Upper Orior and Armagh, suggesting debt on the part of the landed class, much of this appears to have arisen as a result of unpaid rents rather than expenses incurred in helping those in need. Indeed, only one landlord seems to have made extensive efforts to aid the poor and the subsequent expense of Lord Gosford's attempts, together with the inevitable shortfall in rental income, resulted in much financial embarrassment in the late 1840s. For example, on 17 June 1846, William Blacker wrote how "giving employment to labourers, purchasing seeds, meal and other assistance to the poor" had resulted in "extraordinary expenses" for Gosford.¹² Sixteen months later, on 20 October 1847, in response to demands for repayment of a loan totalling £600, Blacker replied that "there is not the least chance of funds coming in from the estate to meet the payment."¹³

However, the reaction of Gosford and his agent to the calamity appears, on the evidence available, to have been untypical of the major landlords in the county,

Blacker himself alleging:

In parts of county Armagh, the landlords exhibit an apathy for the sufferings of the destitute. In some localities...there are no resident landlords nor even agents and were it not for the admirable exertions of the clergy, Protestant and Roman Catholic, the poor would be left to starve.¹⁴

Such indifference was perhaps best illustrated, as already noted, by the attitude of Count de Salis in his rejection of a meeting with a clergyman who had travelled to England to appeal on behalf of the Count's starving tenants in Mullavilly.

It is therefore ironic that the government's major source of relief in the period from October 1846 to April 1847 actually accentuated the inequalities between areas which had been so apparent in the pre-famine era. Kinealy has noted that the principle of local chargeability inherent in the poor law meant that "the amount of relief available was restricted financially by what could be raised locally from poor rates."¹⁵ In exactly the same way, the policy of matching local voluntary subscriptions pound for pound with a government grant failed to differentiate between those districts with either resident landlords, and, or, a substantial middle class and isolated rural districts with neither of these benefits. The position of Kilmore in relation to such difficulties was alluded to by the treasurer of the parochial relief fund, Reverend John Lloyd, who noted how his district was held by a number of non-resident landlords, "who, having but small interests in the place, are unable to give much."¹⁶ This situation was in stark contrast to that of a neighbouring district only a couple of miles away:

Richhill district is well provided for. It is altogether much better circumstanced than our district being in the hands of much richer and more

active landlords, and there are, compared with our district, but few poor in it; yet, they have gathered for Richhill district a sum exactly seven times the amount of that which we have been enabled thro (sic) our utmost exertions to collect for Kilmore district.¹⁷

Under the regulations adopted by the Relief Commissioners the Richhill fund also received a government grant seven times greater than that afforded to Kilmore, thereby further accentuating the disparity between the two areas. Perhaps nowhere was the inequity of this system better manifested than in the amounts subscribed in the rural district of Camlough - £27 – and Armagh City - £999/8/5. Indeed, the latter subscription exceeded that for the combined totals of the committees in Clonmacate, Forkhill, Grange O' Neilland, Kilmore, Lisnadill, Loughgall, Loughgilly, Portadown and Richhill in the period from 1 February to 2 March 1847.

The other major scheme to be enacted at this juncture was the public works, which seemed based more on the premise that the poor were somehow responsible for their predicament than in any genuine attempt to counteract the crisis then rapidly developing. Indeed, forcing poor men, women and children to engage in labour in return for food or wages in the worst winter for years, bore all the hallmarks of an administration which had favoured introducing the workhouse as the best remedy for those unable to support themselves. Irrespective of the doctrine behind the policy it soon became apparent that the body tasked with overseeing its implementation, the Board of Works, was incapable of coping with the huge demand for labour, sometimes being in receipt of two thousand letters per week. The following comment from Lieutenant Griffiths on 21 November 1846 seemed to encapsulate its difficulties, which were regarded as incompetence in the areas concerned:

Labourers...are now on the point of being thrown idle from want of barrows; there is also a great loss of labour from want of quarrying tools and gunpowder for blasting; and these observations apply generally, more or less, to all the working now in progress in both Upper Fews and Upper Orior.¹⁸

Even those officers who witnessed at first hand the works in operation doubted the efficacy of the system, remarking how, “the men, although returned as able-bodied, are generally speaking so badly fed as not to be fit for any hard work.”¹⁹

Having acknowledged the inadequacy of the public works the British government introduced the Temporary Relief Act in the spring of 1847 by which it attempted to feed millions of people directly, the cost to be borne by the ratepayers. However, as has been shown, the policy proved much less successful in Armagh than had previously been thought, and only served to highlight the crucial role performed by both voluntary independent relief agencies and charitably-disposed individuals throughout the county. The limits of the Temporary Relief Act and the fact that it placed a new tax burden on the ratepayers of the county were encapsulated in the following analysis of the requirements of his area by Joseph Donaldson of Kiltybawn, Crossmaglen. He estimated that it would cost £2,637 to supply 3,000 people with rations for five months at two pence per head. This sum, which excluded salaries and expenses, would have resulted in a bill to the rate payers of 9s 3d in the pound.²⁰ The fact that the rate did not approach this figure, demonstrates the volume of aid which was disbursed by non-governmental relief agencies in the period October 1846 to May 1848. (See Appendix 12) With at least £4,526 contributed to the relief effort in this period, it can be argued that, both by the method in which it dispensed relief and the period in which it did so, the most important independent relief agency was that

operated by the Society of Friends. This was particularly evident in the period of the Temporary Relief Act when the Society refused to adhere to the restrictions imposed by the British government in relation to eligibility for relief. Thus, it supported those who believed that alternatives were vital in order to preserve the lives of thousands. Consequently, the official estimates of those receiving relief during this period greatly under-recorded the reality of the situation. To take just one example; the electoral division of Loughgall is recorded as having a dependency rate of 15.9% yet this same area witnessed one of the largest increases in parochial death rates in 1847 and was the district with the second highest number of fatalities in the Armagh workhouse in the same year. Thus, it would seem fair to assume that many people were being maintained by private relief at this time, much of it funded by the Society of Friends. Indeed, analysis of application forms returned to both the Society and the Irish Relief Association reveals that between 50,000 to 60,000 people in County Armagh were dependent on their support between February and September 1847.²¹

In terms of food, the Society made a total of fifty-three grants throughout Armagh amounting to more than fifty tons of rice, meal, sugar and ginger. While such undoubtedly enabled the maintenance of life by those who wished to operate independently of the government relief initiatives, it is worth noting that the total distributed still amounted to less than the cargo on one boat leaving Newry laden with exported food for the ports of Liverpool or Stornaway. Although it is often argued that imports increased in this period, it has been illustrated how this proved of little benefit to the people as, in the midst of the calamity, food prices were maintained at an artificially high level by the government's refusal either to prohibit storage of food or,

as often stated in official replies to local committees, to interfere with the free market. Indeed, the administration never contemplated placing a ceiling on prices although it stipulated that public works' wages had to be less than that which could be daily earned by a labourer. Thus, while such imports proved to be of little consequence, the reality for the poor of Armagh was that their meal and corn was being exported to England and Scotland.

Another crucial plank of government policy during the famine was that all expense incurred in either employing or feeding the poor should be borne by ratepayers. The only exception was the granting of money under the Fever Act in the spring of 1847, the Armagh union grant being £1,809 and that of Newry, £1,493. However, the local populace had to bear the cost of the Public Works (£15,940/2/7), Rate-in-Aid (£5,400), and the soup kitchens established under the Temporary Relief Act. The latter amounted to £7,752/5 for the Armagh union and £4,186/13/7 for Newry. By January 1850, Armagh had reduced this to £2,573 but Newry had only made slight inroads, still owing £3,686/13/7.²² Indicative of the financial pressures on unions was the request of the neighbouring Banbridge union, in August 1850, to extend the period for such repayments to forty years instead of the prescribed ten. However, their appeal fell on deaf ears and they were informed that the period for repayment would remain ten years.²³

The government's determination to restrict much famine relief to the parameters of the poor law served both to illustrate the inability of such a system to cope with an extraordinary level of suffering and at the same time highlight the importance of

voluntary alternatives. As William Blacker noted, the role of Catholic and Protestant clerics in such efforts was vital and their determination to aid the poor, regardless of creed or class, was highlighted by Reverend Francis Clements. This gentleman, a Protestant curate in the parish of Tartaraghan, went so far as to travel to the headquarters of the British Relief Association at South Sea House in England to solicit aid for the Clonmacate relief fund. His efforts were awarded by a donation of £20.²⁴ Thus, the clergy together with some of the minor gentry and their families proved indefatigable in their determination to ensure that those in need were not abandoned to the harsh regime of the poor law. Evidence of this was provided in the fact that independent initiatives such as the Dorcas Committee, the Armagh Ragged School and the Newry Protestant Orphan Society survived and indeed prospered in the post-famine era. Further, the Mullabrack vestry book for 1851 contains the names of some old and infirm people who were supported by sums collected and disbursed by the vestry.²⁵ Around the same time a will left by James Eccles specified that £180 should be distributed to the poor of the town of Armagh under the auspices of Cardinal Cullen.²⁶

In the context of its relevance to general famine studies this work illustrates the extent to which pre-famine adjustment impacted on local communities. In the north-east where the linen industry was most advanced significant distress occurred from the winter of 1846 to the middle of 1848 when the industry began to emerge from a slump. At the other end of the county, the baronies of Fews Upper and Orior Upper contained both high levels of fourth-class housing and significant numbers of illiterates (53% in Fews and 62% in Orior).²⁷ However, with little indigenous industry

and a less compacted population living in largely mountainous districts it can be argued that these areas coped better with famine than others simply because they were used to less and could combat hunger and sickness more effectively. In contrast, the baronies of Fews Lower, Tiranny and parts of O' Neilland West had previously been at the forefront of a thriving domestic linen industry. Hence, while a significant proportion of the population in Tiranny both lived in fourth-class housing and was illiterate (46%)²⁸, this area had been enabled to thrive due to the linen industry. In this way small plots of land (usually five acres or less) sufficed for the growing of potatoes for the year. However, many people in such areas lost much of their income as a consequence of mechanisation and in the midst of such hardship they were dealt a mortal blow with the advent of potato blight, particularly in 1846.²⁹ To such communities the extent of the loss must have been devastating. In the pre-famine years the average potato crop per acre in the county was almost 173 hundredweight, the eighth highest in the country; in 1846 this fell dramatically to slightly more than three hundredweight, the eighth lowest in the country.³⁰ In addition, the oats crop declined by more than two hundredweight per acre in the same period.³¹

Consequently, areas within this “de-industrialisation belt”, such as Clonfeacle, Keady, Madden, Mullabrack and Madden, all witnessed significant population loss through death and emigration. In addition, they bore the brunt of extended crop failure and distress into the early 1850s, perhaps best illustrated by the reliance of many on the Society of Friends for clothing. Significantly, many such areas had majority Protestant populations and thus the distress recorded in Kilmore (73% Protestant), Loughgall (59%), Loughgilly (73%), Tartaraghan (66%), Tynan (58%), Charlemont (57%),

Eglis (55%), Killylea (60%), Kilcluney (65%), and Mullavilly (80%)³² demonstrates that suffering occurred amongst all denominations, a point emphasised by examination of the surviving parochial records.

Unfortunately, despite the number of histories recently produced, few have attempted an in-depth countywide analysis for the famine period. However, through a comparison of statistics, an attempt to ascertain the varying impact on counties can be made. It has been noted how there was much variation within County Armagh in relation to population change between 1841 and 1851. Given the position of the county as a centre of the linen industry we might expect these variations to be in line with those experienced in other such industrialised areas in counties Antrim and Down. However, in an analysis of demographic change in the eighty baronies throughout Ulster, it emerges that the percentage loss suffered by Tiranney (-33.10%) was surpassed only by those of Coole (-36.55%) and Clankelly (-34.43%), both in Fermanagh and Dartree (-33.87%) in Monaghan. Of the twenty-eight baronies which witnessed a loss of more than 20%, three of these were in Armagh, while seven were in Cavan, six in Fermanagh, five in Monaghan and one in Tyrone.³³

In relation to poor law unions, of the sixty-eight unions or parts of unions divided between the Ulster counties, there were eighteen which sustained a greater loss than the Armagh portion of the Banbridge union (-22.27%), while twenty-one surpassed the Armagh union decline of -21.23%. Once again, the unions recording greater losses were those situated in counties Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan. Meanwhile, the largest decrease in Tyrone occurred in the part of the county included in the Armagh

union (-27.1%) in an area bordering the barony of Tiranney.³⁴ Illustrating the difference between the north east of the county and other areas is the fact that the former shared statistics more in common with urban areas in neighbouring counties. With a loss of less than 2% the barony of O'Neilland East, which included the town of Lurgan, was the least affected in the county. Indeed, the parish of Shankill, part of the barony, witnessed a population increase of slightly more than 1%. Consequently, its experience was akin to such urban areas as the Barony of North West Liberties of Derry, which, including the town of Derry, saw a population increase of 16.64%. Similarly, the County Antrim barony of Belfast Upper, including the city of its name, increased its population by 29.48%.³⁵

Thus, in conclusion, it can be argued that the famine impacted in parts of Armagh to the same extent as that witnessed in Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan, with the latter's famine experience having been described as "having more in common with the north-west of Ireland than with much of the rest of Ulster."³⁶ While the north-east of the county suffered greatly between 1846-48, the revival of the linen industry ensured that this was relatively short-lived. However, the experience of much of the rest of the county was that of sustained hardship into the 1850s, illustrating the extent to which the famine was a local experience, dependent to a large degree on the status of landlords, industrial infrastructure and what one writer has termed the "benevolent indignation"³⁷ of those in a position to effect relief efforts.

This work has focussed to a large extent on the mechanisms of poor relief before, during and after the famine. However, much still needs to be done in order to properly

understand the impact of famine on the county. The whole question of agriculture in these years requires in-depth analysis as does the role played by tenant right, although in scanning multiferous sources the latter was never mentioned. However, it is hoped that this regional study will both contribute to an understanding of the famine at the micro level in Ulster and, by extension, allow for a greater awareness of the complexities of such a disaster at a national level. Only in this way can the “abundant generalisations” about the famine be “tested and adjusted.”³⁸

ENDNOTES

1. H. C., 1830, Volume vii, Third Report of Evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland, p.526.
2. Ibid., p.522.
3. G. O'Brien, 'Responses to the New Poor Law in Ireland and Scotland' in R. Mitchison and P. Roebuck (eds), *Economy and Society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500-1839*, John Donald Publishers, 1988, p.161.
4. *Newry Examiner*, 9 December 1843.
5. PRONI, BG2/A/3, 5 August 1845, p.196.
6. Ibid., 3 March 1846, p.297.
7. PRONI, BG2/A/5, 3 August 1847, p.186.
8. PRONI, BG2/A/6, 27, February 1849, p.208.
9. PRONI, BG24/A/4, 3 October 1846, p.565.
10. PRONI, BG24/A/5, 14 August 1847, p.92; 21 August 1847, p.101.
11. PRONI, BG2/A/3, 1 July 1845, p.172; 23 August 1845, p.208; 27 February 1846, p.273.
12. PRONI, D/1606/5/2, p.26, William Blacker to the Secretary, Education Office, Marlborough Street, Dublin, 17 June 1846.
13. Ibid., p.114, William Blacker to Leonard Dobbin, Dublin, 20 October 1847.
14. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T/64/363/D, William Blacker to Colonel Jones, 8 December 1847.
15. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, p.29.
16. NAD, Uncatalogued Quaker Papers, John Lloyd, Kilmore to his mother, 29 January 1847.
17. Ibid.
18. BPP, Volume vi, pp.306-7.
19. Ibid, Volume vii, p.228.
20. NAD, Quaker Form B245, James Donaldson, Kiltybawn, Crossmaglen, 3 May 1847.
21. Analysis of letters sent to the Relief Commissioners (October 1846 – April 1847) and of Society of Friends and Irish Relief Association application forms (October 1846 – August 1847).
22. H. C., 1850, Volume li, Statement "of the liabilities of each county and county of a city in Ireland to Her Majesty's Exchequer, on the 20th day of November 1849, in respect of advances from the Consolidated Fund, with the conditions of repayment of each such advance; specifying the Act of Parliament under which each such advance was made", pp.6-7.
23. PROL, Trevelyan Papers, T64/368/B, Appeal of the Banbridge Board of Guardians to the Treasury, 5 August 1850.
24. National Library, Dublin, British Association Minute Book, Mss 2022, 27 February 1847, p.192.
25. PRONI, Mic 1/85, Vestry Book of Mullabrack Church of Ireland, October 1851.
26. O' Fiaich Library, Armagh, D/4/1, Archive of Paul Cardinal Cullen, 1849-52, Will of James Eccles, 1852.
27. H. C., 1843, Volume xxiv, Report of the Commissioners appointed to take the Census of Ireland for the year 1841, County of Armagh, p.281.
28. Ibid.
29. T. P. O'Neill makes a similar claim in relation to parts of County Offaly when

stating that the famine had “proportionately a greater impact than in some of the western counties”. He bases this on the fact that the latter were more familiar with periods of distress and were able to cope better than those parts of Offaly which succumbed in the years 1846-49. See T. P. O’Neill, “The Famine in Offaly”, in William Nolan and Timothy P. O’Neill (eds), *Offaly: History and Society*, Geography Publications, 1998, pp.681 and 684.

30. BPP, Volume v, p.479.

31. Ibid.

32. H. C., 1835, Volume xxxiii, First Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland, pp.148a, 150a, 156a, 158a, 162a, 164a, 168a.

33. H. C., 1852, Volume xcii, The Census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part 1, showing the area, population and number of houses by townlands and electoral divisions, Volume iii, Province of Ulster, pp.103, 228, 289, 330.

34. Ibid., pp.106, 230, 291, 333.

35. Ibid., pp.40, 255.

36. P. Duffy, ‘The Famine in County Monaghan’, in Kinealy and Parkhill (eds), *The Famine in Ulster*, p.195.

37. Brady and Cowman, *The Famine in Waterford*, p.239.

38. Grant, ‘The Famine in Ulster’, p.455.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

POOR LAW UNIONS IN COUNTY ARMAGH

Union	Electoral Division	Area in acres	1841 Population
Armagh	Armagh	3,572	12,120
	Annaghmore	4,994	4,155
	Armaghbreague	9,097	4,107
	Ballyards	4,819	2,612
	Ballymartrim	4,702	2,692
	Brootally	6,097	3,384
	Charlemont	4,764	5,103
	Clady	6,556	3,777
	Crossmore	6,715	4,411
	Derrynoose	7,512	4,373
	Glenaul	7,673	4,040
	Grange	4,348	2,559
	Hamiltonsbawn	6,169	4,561
	Hockley	5,760	3,254
	Keady	7,085	5,479
	Killeen	5,136	2,902
	Killyman	4,790	2,237
	Kilmore	5,236	4,643
	Lisnadill	5,710	3,330
	Loughgall	6,385	5,393
Markethill	7,185	5,566	
Middletown	7,159	5,343	
Richhill	7,830	6,113	
Tynan	7,236	4,258	
Banbridge	Ballyshiel	4,021	2,799
	Mullabrack	3,890	3,008
	Mullahead	4,797	4,019
	Tandragee	5,064	5,110
Castleblaney	Camley	4,440	2,095
	Creggan	4,278	2,403
	Crossmaglen	5,317	4,163
	Dorsey	5,623	3,148
	N'townhamilton	6,040	4,235
	Sheetrim	4,831	2,737
Dundalk	Lower Creggan	5,230	3,075
Lurgan	Lurgan	3,009	6,987
	Brownlowderry	2,787	3,034
	Carrowbrack	2,793	2,747

	Cornakinnegar	3,700	2,747
	Drumcree	4,720	3,865
	Kernan	4,142	5,130
	Montiaghs	5,947	3,840
	Portadown	4,977	7,160
	Tartaraghan	5,589	4,513
Newry	Mullaghglass	3,585	2,317
	Poyntzpass	7,500	4,987
	Mountnorris	4,871	3,146
	Belleek	5,546	3,251
	Tullyhappy	4,835	3,063
	Ballymoyer	7,401	3,071
	Jonesboro	6,011	4,374
	Killeavy	7,831	4,584
	Camlough	7,733	4,649
	Forkhill	5,739	4,183
	Latbirget	5,752	3,277

Source: Twelfth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1846, Appendix B, No. 28, pp. 282, 288, 300, 323.

APPENDIX 2

DISTRIBUTION OF RATIONS UNDER THE TEMPORARY RELIEF ACT, 1847 (OFFICIAL FIGURES)

Union	Electoral Division	Period of Relief	
		From	To
Armagh	Armagh	12/4	15/8
	Annaghmore	7/6	15/8
	Armaghbreague	31/5	15/8
	Ballyards	6/6	15/8
	Ballymartrim	13/5	15/8
	Brootally	10/5	15/8
	Charlemont	19/4	15/8
	Clady	3/5	15/8
	Crossmore	7/6	15/8
	Derrynoose	7/6	15/8
	Glenaul	26/4	15/8
	Middletown	10/5	15/8
	Hamiltownsbawn	1/5	15/8
	Keady	7/6	15/8
	Killeen	19/6	15/8
	Killyman	17/7	15/8
	Kilmore	9/6	15/8
	Lisnadill	13/5	15/8
Loughgall	10/5	15/8	
Markethill	1/5	15/8	
Tynan	26/4	15/8	
Banbridge	Ballyshiel	3/5	15/8
	Mullabrack	3/5	15/8
	Tandragee	3/5	15/8
Castleblaney	Camley	1/5	15/8
	Creggan	5/6	15/8
	Crossmaglen	5/6	15/8
	Dorsey	12/5	15/8
	Newtownhamilton	1/5	15/8
	Sheetrim	15/5	15/8
Dundalk	Lower Creggan	25/5	15/8
Lurgan	Carrowbrack	10/5	15/8
	Kernan	12/4	15/8

	Portadown	7/6	15/8
	Tartaraghan	21/6	15/8
Newry	Ballymoyer	1/5	15/8
	Belleek	5/4	15/8
	Camlough	9/4	15/8
	Forkhill	24/5	15/8
	Jonesboro	20/5	15/8
	Killeavy	12/5	15/8
	Latbirget	24/5	15/8
	Mountnorris	23/5	15/8
	Poyntzpass	6/6	15/8
	Tullyhappy	10/5	15/8

Source: BPP, Volume viii, Appendix to the seventh report of the Relief Commissioners, pp. 295, 301-2, 305, 307, 317, 337.

APPENDIX 3

MAXIMUM NUMBERS RECEIVING RELIEF IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1847 (OFFICIAL FIGURES)

Union	Electoral Division	Maximum Number Supplied On Any One Day
Armagh	Armagh	3,053
	Annaghmore	788
	Armaghbreague	557
	Ballyards	238
	Ballymartrim	392
	Brootally	1,435
	Charlemont	1,175
	Clady	602
	Crossmore	932
	Derrynoose	689
	Glenaul	715
	Hamiltonsbawn	772
	Keady	1,311
	Killeen	322
	Killyman	129
	Kilmore	909
	Lisnadill	432
	Loughgall	858
	Markethill	1,052
Middletown	1,245	
Tynan	433	
Banbridge	Ballyshiel	270
	Mullabrack	374
	Tandragee	925
Castleblaney	Camley	460
	Creggan	637
	Crossmaglen	1,357
	Dorsey	753
	Newtownhamilton	960
	Sheetrim	703
Dundalk	Lower Creggan	674
Lurgan	Carrowbrack	408
	Kernan	601
	Portadown	1,343
	Tartaraghan	1,362

Newry	Ballymoyer	523
	Belleek	495
	Camlough	860
	Forkhill	954
	Jonesboro	571
	Killeavy	495
	Latbirget	623
	Mountnorris	1,143
	Poyntzpass	571
	Tullyhappy	532
	Total	35,363

Source: BPP, Volume viii, Appendix to the seventh report of the Relief Commissioners, pp. 295, 301-2, 345, 307, 317, 337.

APPENDIX 4

NUMBERS REMAINING ON RELIEF LISTS ON 15 AUGUST 1847 IN COUNTY ARMAGH (OFFICIAL FIGURES)

Union	Electoral Division	Number
Armagh	Armagh	2,154
	Annaghmore	463
	Armaghbreague	457
	Ballyards	238
	Ballymartrim	388
	Brootally	331
	Charlemont	834
	Clady	555
	Crossmore	877
	Derrynoose	685
	Glenaul	280
	Hamiltonsbawn	437
	Keady	1,240
	Killeen	268
	Killyman	95
	Kilmore	417
	Lisnadill	432
	Loughgall	112
	Markethill	562
Middletown	1,079	
Tynan	131	
Banbridge	Ballyshiel	25
	Mullabrack	33
	Tandragee	276
Castleblaney	Camley	228
	Creggan	176
	Crossmaglen	367
	Dorsey	180
	Newtownhamilton	228
	Sheetrim	155
Dundalk	Lower Creggan	252
Lurgan	Carrowbrack	129
	Kernan	404
	Portadown	588
	Tartaraghan	1,108

Newry	Ballymoyer	457
	Belleek	343
	Camlough	860
	Forkhill	690
	Jonesboro	400
	Killeavy	365
	Latbirget	427
	Mountnorris	802
	Poyntzpass	514
	Tullyhappy	228
	Total	23,342

Source: BPP, Volume viii, Appendix to the seventh report of the Relief Commissioners, pp. 295, 301-2, 345, 307, 317, 337.

APPENDIX 5

THE RATE-IN-AID ASSESSED ON COUNTY ARMAGH, 1849-50

1. Armagh Union

County Armagh Proportion: £4,096/9/1 (1849) £1,318 (1850)

Electoral Division

Armagh	£591/0/3	£196/6/0
Grange	£135/9/6	£44/11/10
Hockley	£182/15/0	£58/05/02
Richhill	£231/0/9	£70/17/02
Kilmore	£147/19/9	£48/08/0
Annaghmore	£116/16/6	£38/040/2
Killyman	£63/15/0	£20/15/10
Loughgall	£201/10/9	£61/14/04
Charlemont	£150/7/9	£48/14/04
Ballymartrim	£126/9/0	£40/08/10
Glenaul	£182/11/7	£59/05/0
Tynan	£199/4/6	£62/02/08
Middletown	£178/18/3	£54/03/10
Brootally	£151/17/0	£47/07/02
Ballyards	£142/19/7	£46/10/10
Crossmore	£166/0/3	£54/07/02
Keady	£141/1/3	£46/05/02
Derrynoose	£121/5/0	£39/18/08
Armaghbreague	£105/9/7	£34/10/04
Lisnadill	£127/3/4	£41/04/0
Clady	£112/8/3	£36/04/04
Killeen	£122/18/9	£39/14/02
Markethill	£230/8/7	£74/04/06
Hamiltonsbawn	£166/18/9	£54/07/02

2. Banbridge Union

County Armagh Proportion: £533/17/3 (1849) £176/7/9 (1850)

Electoral Division

Mullahead	£134/2/2	£44/6/7
Tandragee	£201/1/6	£66/6/2
Ballyshiel	£102/12/3	£34/6/0
Mullabräck	£96/1/6	£31/8/11

3. Castleblaney Union

County Armagh Proportion: £443/12/1 (1849) £96/9/5 (1850)

Electoral Division

Newtownhamilton	£104/5/1	£27/13/0
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Camley	£51/14/6	£11/13/4
Crossmaglen	£87/16/6	£25/6/4
Creggan	£59/7/7	-
Dorsy	£74/6/1	£19/12/1
Sheetrim	£66/2/4	-
Cullyhanna	-	£12/4/7

4. Dundalk Union

County Armagh Proportion: £58/8/7 (1849) £17/4/8 (1850)

Electoral Division

Lower Creggan	£58/8/7	£17/4/8
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5. Lurgan Union

County Armagh Proportion: £1,336/13/1 (1849) £421/3/2 (1850)

Electoral Division

Lurgan	£253/18/6	£78/9/8
Cornakinnegar	£121/9/6	£35/18/10
Brownlowsderry	£88/14/3	£27/6/8
Carrowbrack	£99/2/4	£31/6/7
Kernan	£123/5/0	£36/8/10
Montiaghs	£90/9/3	£30/3/1
Tartaraghan	£100/5/0	£33/6/10
Drumcree	£97/4/3	£32/5/6
Breagh	£101/17/6	£33/18/2
Portadown	£260/7/6	£81/18/9

6. Newry Union

County Armagh Proportion: £1,168/14/4 (1849) £383/2/0 (1850)

Electoral Division

Mullaghglass	£88/5/6	£29/4/7
Poyntzpass	£203/12/11	£68/6/3
Mountnorris	£131/17/4	£43/19/1
Belleek	£99/8/0	£33/7/3
Tullyhappy	£119/5/1	£38/17/9
Ballymoyer	£98/17/4	£29/6/11
Jonesboro	£71/11/1	£23/3/11
Killeavy	£87/6/6	£28/11/1
Camlough	£124/8/6	£41/0/11
Forkhill	£78/15/0	£25/16/8
Latbirget	£65/7/1	£21/7/6

Total	£7,637/14/5	£2,412/7/-
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Sources: Armagh Guardian, 25 June 1849; Newry Telegraph, 26 June 1849; Second Report of the Irish Poor Law Commissioners, 1849, Appendix A, pp.88, 90; Fourth Report of the Irish Poor Law Commissioners, 1851, Appendix A, pp. 38, 43, 47, 53, 65, 71.

APPENDIX 6

EMIGRATION STATISTICS, 1851-55

1 May - 31 December 1851

Port of Embarkation	Emigrants	
	Male	Female
Belfast	342	352
Derry/Moville	3	-
Drogheda	9	2
Dublin	66	78
Dundalk	230	184
Newry/ W'point	363	400
Total	1,013	1,016
		Total Number: 2,029

1852

Port of Embarkation	Emigrants	
	Male	Female
Belfast	575	575
Cork	1	-
Derry/Moville	15	8
Drogheda	3	2
Dublin	77	114
Dundalk	505	421
Newry/W'point	571	509
Total	1,747	1,629
		Total Number: 3,376

1853

Port of Embarkation	Emigrants	
	Male	Female
Belfast	715	608
Derry/Moville	9	4
Drogheda	4	3
Dublin	92	228
Dundalk	325	330
New Ross	1	1
Newry/W'point	456	415
Waterford	2	1
Total	1,604	1,590
		Total Number: 3,194

1854

Port of Embarkation	Emigrants		
	Male	Female	
Belfast	668	580	
Derry/Moville	16	6	
Drogheda	12	3	
Dublin	130	304	
Dundalk	324	304	
Newry/W'point	341	242	
Total	1,491	1,423	Total Number: 2,194

1855

Port of Embarkation	Emigrants		
	Male	Female	
Belfast	1,117	977	
Derry/Moville	12	5	
Dublin	209	342	
Dundalk	163	181	
Newry/W'point	189	190	
Total	1,690	1,695	Total Number: 3,385

Source: H. C., 1856 Volume xxxi, Census of Ireland 1851. Appendix to General Report, Emigration Tables, pp.ixxviii – xci.

APPENDIX 7

SIBLING EMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Date of First Arrival	Gender	Area of County	Arrival of Siblings	Date
1836	1 Male	Keady	2 Sisters	July 1846
1844	1 Male	Tynan	1 Sister	Aug. 1846
1842	1 Male	Keady	Sister & Brother-in-law	Aug. 1846
1842	1 Male	Newry	1 Brother	Oct. 1846
1836	1 Male	Co. Armagh	1 Brother	Mar. 1847
1844	1 Female	Lislea	1 Brother	June 1847
1840	1 Male	Co. Armagh	Mother	July 1847
1846	1 Female	Co. Armagh	1 Sister	Sept. 1847
1841	1 Male	Cullyhanna	1 Brother	Sept. 1847
1829	1 Male	Co. Armagh	2 Brothers	Oct. 1847
1834	1 Male	Tandragee	1 Brother	Jan. 1848
1847	1 Female	N'hamilton	1 Brother	Dec. 1848
1848	2 Males	Creggan	1 Sister	Mar. 1849
1849	2 Females	Newry	1 Sister	June 1849
1847	2 Males	Tandragee	1 Brother	Feb. 1850
N/S	1 Male	Co. Armagh	1 Sister	April 1850
1848	1 Male	Newry	Father & Cousin	May 1850
1850	1 Male	Tynan	Sister & Brother-in-law	Sept. 1850
1849	2 Males	Co. Armagh	2 Brothers	Oct. 1850
1841	1 Male	Cullyhanna	1 Brother	Dec. 1850
1839/1842	2 Males	Annaghmore	1 Brother-in-law	Feb. 1851
1829	1 Male	Poyntzpass	1 Female	Mar. 1851
1821	1 Male	Ballybay	1 Brother	April 1851
1828	1 Family	Keady	2 Brothers-in-law	May 1851
1849	1 Male	Loughgall	1 Uncle	June 1851
1848	1 Male	Co. Armagh	1 Brother	July 1851
1849	1 Male	Creggan	Father	July 1851
N/S	1 Male	Kilmore	1 Brother	Sept. 1851
N/S	1 Male	Tandragee	1 Brother	Nov. 1851
1847	1 Male	Grangemore	1 Brother	Feb. 1852
N/S	1 Male	Creggan	2 Brothers	Feb. 1852
1848	1 Male	Creggan	1 Male	Mar. 1852
1852	1 Female	Creggan	Father	Sept. 1852
1847	Male & Female	Madden	1 Brother	Sept. 1852
1852	1 Male	Keady	1 Brother	Oct. 1852
1852	1 Male	Tynan	1 Brother	Nov. 1852
1846	1 Female	Madden	2 Brothers	Jan. 1853
N/S	1 Male	Cullyhanna	Father & Mother	Jan. 1853
1846/1847	2 Males	Jonesboro	1 Aunt	Jan. 1853
1848	1 Male	Dromintee	2 Brothers	Feb. 1853
N/S	1 Male	Newry	1 Brother & 1 Sister	June 1853
1833	1 Female	N'hamilton	1 Brother	June 1853
1849	1 Female/1 Male	Foymore	1 Brother	July 1853
N/S	Father/4 Sons/2 Daughters	Tynan	1 Male	Aug. 1853
1835	1 Male	Co. Armagh	1 Sister	Sept. 1853
1849	1 Male	Tynan	1 Sister & Wife	Nov. 1853
1847	1 Male	Co. Armagh	2 Brothers	Dec. 1853

Source: R. A. Harris, D. M. Jacobs and E. B. O' Keefe, *The Search for Missing Friends - Irish Immigrant Advertisements placed in the Boston Pilot*, Volumes 1-11, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1989-91.

APPENDIX 8

DEATHS IN ARMAGH WORKHOUSE IN 1847, BY AGE STRATA

Age	Number of Deaths	%
0-2	199	21.65
3-9	287	31.22
10-15	118	12.84
16-25	43	4.67
26-35	38	4.13
36-45	60	6.52
46-55	60	6.52
56-65	48	5.22
66-75	41	4.46
76-85	23	2.50
86-95	2	0.21
Total	919	100

Source: PRONI, BG 2/EA/1, Armagh Workhouse Indoor Admission Register, 1 January 1842 – 31 December 1847.

APPENDIX 9

DEATHS IN ARMAGH WORKHOUSE 1847, BY ELECTORAL DIVISION

Electoral Division	Number	%
Armagh	145	15.77
Annaghmore	61	6.63
Killyman	25	2.72
Glenaul	29	3.15
Kilmore	27	2.93
Richhill	47	5.11
Charlemont	44	4.78
Markethill	35	3.80
Ballymartrim	18	1.95
Derrynoose	8	0.87
Tynan	25	2.72
Caledon	20	2.17
Killeen	21	2.28
Loughgall	116	12.62
Lisnadill	11	1.19
Keady	19	2.06
Hockley	7	0.76
Crossmore	17	1.84
Grange	15	1.63
Armaghbreague	10	1.08
Brootally	12	1.30
Ballyards	19	2.06
Clady	19	2.06
Hamiltonsbawn	14	1.52
Middletown	37	4.02
Union at Large	118	12.84

Source: PRONI, BG 2/EA/1, Armagh Workhouse Indoor Admission Register, 1 January 1842 – 31 December 1847.

APPENDIX 10

POPULATION CHANGE BY PARISH, 1841 – 51

Parish	Pop. in 1841	Pop. in 1851	% Change
Armagh	12,654	11,525	- 8.92
Clonfeacle	4,172	3,360	-19.46
Derrynoose	9,089	6,345	-30.19
Eglish	5,601	4,037	-27.92
Grange	3,823	3,272	-14.41
Keady	9,865	8,358	-15.27
Lisnadill	9,895	7,799	-21.18
Loughgall	9,615	7,978	-17.02
Creggan	13,603	11,363	-16.46
Tynan	11,392	7,302	-35.90
Kilcluney	8,079	6,328	-21.67
Loughgilly	9,852	7,135	-27.57
Mullabrack	8,570	6,744	-21.30
Ballymyre	3,071	2,494	-18.78
N'Hamilton	7,538	6,285	-16.62
Forkhill	8,128	5,947	-26.83
Killeavy	17,789	17,812	+ 0.12
Jonesboro	1,800	1,597	-11.27
Ballymore	11,505	9,267	-19.45
Tartaraghan	7,313	6,724	- 8.05
Newry	5,882	6,625	+12.63
Kilmore	14,256	11,055	-22.45
Killyman	1,472	1,080	-26.63
Drumcree	14,038	12,683	- 9.65
Shankill	8,433	8,526	+ 1.10
Seagoe	11,094	10,503	- 5.32
Montiaghs	3,480	3,581	+ 2.90
Magheralin	384	359	- 6.51

Source: H. C., 1852-53, Volume xcii, Population (Ireland), The census of Ireland for 1851, Part 1, pp 47-65.

APPENDIX 11

POPULATION CHANGE BY PARISH, 1851 – 61

Parish	Pop. in 1851	Pop. in 1861	% Change
Armagh	11,525	10,975	- 4.77
Clonfeacle	3,360	3,281	- 2.35
Derrynoose	6,345	5,792	- 8.71
Eglish	4,037	3,700	- 8.34
Grange	3,272	2,976	- 9.04
Keady	8,358	8,057	- 3.60
Lisnadill	7,799	7,173	- 8.02
Loughgall	7,978	7,469	- 6.38
Creggan	11,363	10,242	- 9.86
Tynan	7,302	6,532	-10.54
Kilcluney	6,328	5,697	- 9.97
Loughgilly	7,135	6,456	- 9.51
Mullabrack	6,744	5,889	-12.67
Ballymyre	2,494	2,256	- 9.54
Newtownhamilton	6,285	5,504	-12.42
Forkhill	5,947	5,619	- 5.51
Killeavy	17,812	15,725	-11.71
Jonesboro	1,597	1,223	-23.41
Ballymore	9,267	7,758	-16.28
Tartaraghan	6,724	7,483	+11.28
Newry	6,625	6,435	- 2.86
Kilmore	11,055	10,981	- 0.66
Killyman	1,080	1,020	- 5.55
Drumcree	12,683	14,140	+11.48
Shankill	8,526	11,757	+37.89
Seagoe	10,503	11,357	+8.13
Montiaghs	3,581	4,338	+21.13
Magheralin	359	314	-12.53

Source: H. C., 1863, Volume Iv, Population, (Ireland), Census of Ireland 1861, Part 1, pp.49-67.

APPENDIX 12

AID PROVIDED TO COUNTY ARMAGH, 1846-48

AGENCY	RELIEF PROVIDED
Irish Relief Association	£860 and 19 boilers
Lord Primate's Diocesan Relief Fund	£335
British Relief Association	£310
National Club, London	£129
Calcutta Fund	£10
Durham Relief Association	£5
Belfast General Relief Fund	£155
Belfast Temporal Relief Fund	1 grant
Belfast Ladies' Association for Relief of Irish Destitution	£5 (clothing)
Belfast Ladies' Irish Relief Association	£20
Parishes of Little and Great Warley	£23
Aigburth Relief Committee	£30
Ladies' Dublin Association	£20
Central Relief Association for Ireland	£235
General Central Relief Committee for All Ireland	£1,290
Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends	£1,154

Source: Analysis of letters sent to the Relief Commissioners (October 1846 – April 1847) and of Society of Friends and Irish Relief Association application forms (October 1846 – August 1847).

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