THE GREAT FAMINE: A LOCAL HISTORY
Front Cover:
Detail from poster advertising the sailing of the Lady Caroline from Warrenpoint to New Brunswick in Canada in June 1847. Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.

Trevor Hill, Newry, 1829
Newry was a commercial and industrial centre on the eve of the Famine, with an educated class ranging from lawyers, clergy, merchants and business people with an interest in politics and welfare. Print by T.M. Baynes, Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.
FOREWORD

This booklet contains articles which look at how the Great Famine (1845 to 1850) and its aftermath, affected the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area. It has been produced to mark the Famine Commemoration taking place in Newry, county Down on Saturday, 26th September 2015.

This is the eighth year in which the Great Famine has been marked with a formal commemoration and the first time that the commemoration has taken place north of the border.

In recognition of the fact that the Great Famine affected all parts of the island, the location of the Annual Commemoration has rotated in sequence between the four provinces since the first Annual Commemoration took place in Dublin in 2008 and now falls to Ulster in 2015.

Over a million people died of starvation and disease because of the famine and around 1,800,000 people emigrated. The failure of the Irish potato crop in successive years was one of the worst European disasters of the 19th century and led to one of the largest population movements of the century.

Councillor Naomi Bailie
Chairperson
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Réamhrá

Pléann ailt an leabhráin seo leis an dóigh a ndeachaigh an Drochshaol agus treimhse ina dhiaidh sin i bhfeidhm ar cheantar Chomhairle an lúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin. Cuireadh an leabhrán le chéile mar meabhrúchán ar Lá Cuimhneacháin an Ghorta Mhóir, a bheas ar siúl Dé Sathairn 26ú Meán Fómhair 2015.

Is í seo an t-ochtú bliain a bhí comóradh oifigiúil ann agus an chéad bliain a bhí an Cuimhneacháin ar súil ó thuaidh.

Toisc go raibh gach cearn den tír buailte go dona ag an Ghorta Mhór eagraitear Cuimhneachán bliantúil ar bhonn uainíochta sna ceithre cúigí i ndiaidh a chéile ón uair a rinneadh an chéad Chuimhneachán riamh i mBaile Átha Cliath sa bhliain 2008. Tá Cuimhneachán 2015 á reáchtáil i gcúige Uladh dá bharr.

Fuair breis is milliún daoine bás leis an ocras agus aicíd mar gheall ar an Drochshaol agus chaugh tuairim is 1,800,000 ar imirce. Tháinig galar dubh ar na prátaí bliain i ndiaidh bliana sna 1840í agus ba é ar cheann de na mórthubaistí is measa a tharla sa 19ú haois san Eoraip agus ar cheann de na hollghluaiseachtaí daonra na haoise sin.

Comhairleoir Naomi Bháille
Cathaoirleach
Comhairle Ceantair an lúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
INTRODUCTION

By 1845 the population of Ireland had risen to around 8.5 million people. This was due to a number of reasons including economic prosperity in response to new overseas markets, sub-division of land, over-reliance on the potato as a foodstuff and a fall in mortality due to better systems of healthcare.

Although there had been famines in Ireland previously, the Great Famine had a severe and lasting impact due to the failure of the potato crop in successive years.

The response to the famine by the British Government has been viewed as inadequate by historians. The reasons for the government’s response are complex, and were not only due to lack of political will, but to the prevailing ideologies of the time. Principal amongst these was the doctrine of laissez-faire, which meant that the government did not intervene with market forces, not least the export of agricultural produce.

For over half the population of Ireland the potato was the main or only source of food.

By the 1840s, sub-division of land was widespread among the poorest people and some farms became so small that potatoes were the only crop that could be grown in sufficient quantities to feed a family.

Potato blight, a fungal infection, was first noticed in Ireland in early September 1845. It had travelled from continental Europe to Ireland, and the damp, sunless summer of that year quickly spread the disease. It rotted the potato crop making approximately a third unfit for human consumption.

By December 1845 county Armagh had lost one fifth of the crop and county Down one quarter. The following year blight destroyed around three-quarters of the Irish potato crop. In 1847 not enough potato seed had survived to plant, and yield was meagre. Failures occurred again in 1848 and 1849.

The Irish Poor Law of 1838 had set up mechanisms for helping poor people including the establishment of workhouses, with 130 initially built in Ireland. However, poor relief legislation was not designed to cope with a prolonged famine. A Relief Commission was formed in November 1845 to oversee relief efforts which included public work schemes and outdoor relief such as soup kitchens.

The famine gave rise to a significant increase in emigration. Emigrants from south Ulster and north Leinster left Warrenpoint for St John, New Brunswick in Canada, New York, or Liverpool. Emigrant ships were often overcrowded, inadequately provided with food or clean water and became synonymous with sickness and disease. Many emigrants died on the voyage.

The famine left Ireland changed socially and economically, with the population never again reaching pre-famine levels. Mass evictions had seen families forced from their holdings: ‘cottier’ and landless labourer classes were decimated and
estates burdened by debt were sold. The famine also accelerated the decline of the Irish language.

No part of Ireland was unscathed. Over a million people died either of starvation or due to the illnesses associated with hunger because of the famine and around 1.8 million people emigrated.

This booklet looks at aspects of how the famine affected this area. The articles and images reflect what life was like in the first half of the 19th century and how the famine impacted on all parts of society and culture. It also briefly examines the lives of John Mitchel and John Martin whose political careers were defined by the famine.

**Regulations for Trevor Corry Charity, 1823**

In the early 19th century private charities were often the only source of help in times of hardship. The Corry Charity arose from a bequest left by Sir Trevor Corry of Newry. 
*Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.*
Kilkeel Workhouse, pictured in the 1970s
Due to the severe distress caused by the total failure of the potato crop, Kilkeel Board of Guardians decided in October 1846 to provide a meal in the workhouse to families from Kilkeel, Mourne Park, Greencastle, Ballykeel and Mullartown. Courtesy of Myrtle Irvine.
THE GREAT FAMINE IN SOUTH ARMAGH
KEVIN MURPHY

Until comparatively recently it was assumed that the northern part of the country remained largely unscathed during the years of the Great Famine in Ireland. This myth has now been exploded and no more so than in the southern part of county Armagh in the two baronies of The Fews and Upper Orior.

Even before the failure of the potato crop in 1845 the evidence of people such as the Rev. Daniel Gunn Brown, Minister of Newtownhamilton Presbyterian Church, Rev. Michael Lennon, Parish Priest of Upper Creggan Parish and Sir John MacNeill, the renowned railway engineer, painted a picture of a people on the edge of starvation and poor relationships between landlords and tenants.

When the potato failure of 1845 began to impact, the Rev. E.O. Disney, Chairman of Newtownhamilton Relief Committee, said on 13th November 1846 that ‘the beasts of the earth are at this moment better fed than hundreds of our fellow creatures around us ... public works may only serve to dig the graves of the people’.

By January 1847 Rev. Michael Lennon, Chairman of the Crossmaglen Relief Committee, noted that relief works had recently stopped and there was no prospect of renewal. He prophesied more deaths and he appealed to the Lord Lieutenant ‘in the name of these ‘starving people’. Also in 1847 Rev. James Campbell, Chairman/Treasurer of Forkill Relief Committee, said that there was ‘lamentable destitution’ in his area and that

Rev. Daniel Gunn Brown (1808 to 1892)
Minister of Newtownhamilton Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Daniel Gunn Brown provided evidence to the Devon Commission in 1844 on the plight of tenants in the area. He became a supporter of the Ulster Tenant Right Association after it was founded in 1847. 

Courtesy of Christine Wright.
Newry Workhouse was ‘closed for the admission of paupers.’

The landlords, many of whom were absentee, contributed virtually nothing to relief. The joint landlords Hamilton, Tipping and Jones promised £1 each but never paid and two landlords, Quinn and O’Callaghan, gave £25 each. A few years later, in 1852, Rev. Gunn Brown said that he could only describe the landlords of south Armagh in this period as ‘exterminators’.

Against this backdrop people starved to death, flocked into the disease-ridden workhouses in Newry, Dundalk and Castleblayney, scraped up the fare and took ‘coffin ships’ to America and Canada or turned to the Ribbon Society to offer some armed resistance to evictions, high rents and hoarding of meal. This latter option became so successful in the south Armagh, north Louth and south Monaghan area that it occasioned a House of Commons Commission into Agrarian Outrages in 1852. While violence in the rest of post-famine Ireland was declining, it rose dramatically in these areas.

This situation set in motion a cycle of rural depopulation which has only recently been reversed. The Parish of Forkill is typical of the whole of south Armagh in that, from 1841 to 1951, it lost 70% of its population.
THE KILMOREY ESTATE RENTAL VOLUMES 1844—1851
SHANE MCGIVERN

Until the early 20th century, Ireland was a country made up of large landed estates. The town of Newry and its surrounding area was no different, with the principal landlord being the Earl of Kilmorey. With these large estates came a significant amount of administration in the form of rental volumes, leases, maps and other miscellaneous items. These documents serve as a reminder of the vast expanse of what were once the landed estates of Ireland.

Included in the Reside Collection at Newry and Mourne Museum is a complete series of Kilmorey Estate rentals dating from 1844 to 1851 which cover the period of the Great Famine. The rentals, comprising 15 volumes in total, offer a glimpse into the hardships that tenants often experienced.

There are numerous references to tenants who emigrated to England, America and Australia. Added to this are cases of former tenants who could no longer pay their arrears being noted as having become ‘paupers’. In one case a calf was seized as a form of payment. Other notations made in the May 1848 rental explain how Lord Kilmorey paid Alexander Montgomery £1 10s for arresting and conveying two individuals to Armagh Gaol. The two men, who were named John Rowland and John Lavell, were imprisoned for debt due for fields in the townlands of Ballinlare and Lisdrumgullion. These men were, however, liberated under the Insolvent Act in 1848.

The rentals also note Lord Kilmorey’s charity to the poor. For example in 1846 a subscription of £50 was paid to Samuel Parsons for supplying the poor of Newry with soup and bread. In May 1847, it was also stated that a total of £30 2s 11d was paid to ‘several poor persons on the Newry estate in small sums during the past winter’. It must be noted that cases of eviction are very few on the Kilmorey Estate between the years 1844 to 1851.

It can be concluded that Newry, and in particular its rural hinterland, felt the pain and suffering that was experienced by so many Irish people during the Great Famine. The primary evidence contained in the Kilmorey rentals demonstrates displacement of populations through migration, poverty and death. Whilst it cannot be forgotten that the poorer classes were badly affected, it should also be stated that the Kilmorey estate did help many of those in trouble by reducing rents, contributing to relief for the poor and the low number of recorded evictions are a testament to this.
Quotations from Kilmorey Estate Rentals

Townland: Lisdrumliska
Date: May 1849
Tenant: Isaac C. Cowan
‘Grazing of this lot let for £9 10s 0d for the season. The tenant, after disposing of his crop, abandoned his wife and four children and fled to America. It was supposed another tenant would have offered for the farm and paid the arrears, £48 having been given by Cowan for it, but owing to the depressed state of the times, no one would do so. Rent and arrears lost.’

Townland: Lisdrumgullion
Date: May 1850
Tenant: Samuel Glenny
‘Arrear due by Samuel Glenny lost £3 1s 8d who in October 1848 went to reside in Liverpool and since became a bankrupt.’

Townland: Ballynacraig
Date: November 1851
Tenant: Arthur Atkinson
‘Arrear lost due by former tenant who has emigrated to Australia.’

Map of Lower Ballyholland, Newry, 1813
Extract from a Kilmorey estate map showing the plots held by ‘cottiers’ in the townland of Ballyholland in 1813. Cottiers were often paid in land rather than cash for labouring on tenant farmers’ land, and used these small plots to grow potatoes. Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.
The widespread failure of the potato crop in 1845 increased the prices of other food resulting in large scale distress among the labourers and weavers in areas around Downpatrick, Newtownards and the east of county Down as well as among workers in Upper and Lower Iveagh and fishermen in Newcastle and Ardglass.

One of the best sources of information on the impact of the Famine in Lecale and east Down is *The Downpatrick Recorder* which provides a valuable local perspective on hardship among the poor and attempts to relieve distress.

Attempts to relieve distress were applauded by the *Recorder* which praised those proprietors and farmers who demonstrated charity while castigating those whom they felt were not doing enough. *The Downpatrick Recorder* dated 30\textsuperscript{th} January 1847 drew readers’ attention to the consequence of ‘patchy’ relief schemes left up to private individuals to implement in Crossgar:

‘There are about 240 persons in this village in an utterly destitute state,... A benevolent gentleman in the neighbourhood made an effort to establish a soup kitchen there, but in vain. He wrote to the proprietor of the town, and also to the several owners of property adjacent, and just two had

*John Waring Maxwell (1788 to 1869)*
John Waring Maxwell of Finnebrogue, Downpatrick contributed to the Ballee Relief Fund. A farmer and landlord, he was chairman of Down Protestant Association and Conservative MP for Downpatrick. The Ballee Relief Fund, established in January 1847, provided relief for about 600 individuals before it closed in August 1847.
*Down County Museum Collection.*
the common civility to reply. Those two gentlemen, although unconnected with the town of Crossgar, inclosed £5 each. The gentleman above alluded to, finding his efforts unavailing, returned the money to the donors. The people, we are assured, are literally starving.’

Government Public Works schemes began in 1846 and labourers were employed on road construction and repair as well as harbour repair schemes. By 1847 soup kitchens had been opened and the soup kitchen in Killough was reported as distributing 240 quarts of soup weekly. Relief committees were also established across east Down.

The Downpatrick diarist, Aynsworth Pilson, a local businessman, who kept a diary from 1799 until the 1860s, is an invaluable source of information on local events and personalities. He was a member of the Board of Guardians of the Downpatrick Union.

The Downpatrick Workhouse opened in 1841 and, during the years before the famine, usually had an annual admission of about 500 inmates. After the disastrous harvest of 1846, admissions began to increase and, by February 1847 the workhouse, the largest in county Down, had its full capacity of 1,000 paupers.

The Guardians worked in the face of sometimes harsh criticism of their methods and public reluctance to fund the workhouse. An editorial which appeared in The Downpatrick Recorder in February 1847 stated that ‘It is monstrous to be arguing while men are dying. Rules and theories must give way before a case of such desperate practical necessity’, a sentiment that could be echoed today in our response to world hunger and poverty.

**Downpatrick Workhouse**
The front of Downpatrick Workhouse as it appears today. By March 1847 the workhouse was already full and trying to cope with epidemics of typhus and fever. The Matron of the Workhouse, Miss McCready, died of fever in March 1847. Down County Museum Collection.
James Harshaw’s diaries date from the 1830s to the 1860s and contain a wealth of information on the Donaghmore area at that time. Daily farming activities, events, the Presbyterian Church, baptisms, marriages and deaths as well as general information on local families and emigration are included.

They cover the period of the famine and give an account of its impact on the local area. The harsh winter of 1846/47 saw a rise in the number of deaths recorded in his diary. The famine was also to have a direct effect on his own family, with his sister, Jane Harshaw Martin succumbing to fever on 16th July 1847 after nearly two weeks of illness.

In an effort to alleviate the poverty and distress of local families, the local Relief committee was formed in December 1846, with the first relief tickets distributed on 1st January 1847. On 8th February 1847, James Harshaw records that he was appointed treasurer of the committee’s medical fund. At the same meeting, Dr. Bryson was appointed and began to visit ‘the poor of this wing of the parish’ a few days later. The committee also purchased and distributed blankets for the poor of Donaghmore and Glen and distributed yarn to make socks.

The following year the medical needs of the locals were met by a doctor employed by the Donaghmore Dispensary, which was established in early 1848 and to which James Harshaw became treasurer on 27th July 1848. The Dispensary meetings were held in the Four Mile House, which was also the venue from which relief in the form of Indian corn meal was administered.
On 7th August 1848 James Harshaw documents the first appearance of blight on his potato crop; ‘Desease first appeared in the potatow tops on the footridge of the briybray’, followed a week later with ‘Desase has sprad over the potatow tops this week’. The presence of blight however, did not cause the ruination of the entire potato crop. Upon digging the potatoes in November he records ‘more than half the potatows sound’. The discovery and spread of potato blight is also recorded in his diary in 1849.

The diaries also chronicle political issues of the time and include information on the political career of his nephew, the Young Irelander John Martin (brother-in-law and colleague of John Mitchel), recording his arrest, trial and eventual transportation to Van Diemen’s Land in 1848.

James Harshaw’s diaries continue until he suffered from ill health in 1866 and were completed by his son Andrew after his death in January 1867. They were taken to America in the late 1800s where they remained until they were discovered in a bank vault and were subsequently donated to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast in 1996.

Relief ticket
Relief ticket issued by James Harshaw to Betty Carr of Ardkeragh on 13th March 1847 for 17lbs of meal for her and her four children, who are listed as destitute. Courtesy of Libraries Northern Ireland.
James Harshaw’s house pictured in the early 20th century
In his diaries, James Harshaw recorded his day to day farming activities and practices: rearing livestock and cultivating crops, weather, local fairs, farm labourers employed and accounts of goods bought and sold. *From An Ancient Irish Parish Past and Present* by J. Davison Cowan (London, 1914).
Born in Dungiven in 1815, John Mitchel was the son of the Reverend John Mitchel, a liberal, Unitarian minister, whose church was in High Street, Newry and whose home was in Dromalane, where the young John was reared.

During his apprenticeship as an attorney in 1837 he met Jenny Verner and fell in love with her. Following an attempt to elope John and Jenny were married in the Church of Ireland, Drumcree, in February 1837. Their story is entwined with the politics of 19th century Ireland and the United States and was to end with John Mitchel dying in Newry in 1875. In between, they were to experience elation, separation, deportation and the loss of three of their children against a backdrop of world events.

It was John Mitchel, more than any other writer, who shaped the nationalist perception of the Great Famine, especially when writing in the *Nation* and his own newspaper *United Irishman*.

His revolutionary zeal deepened as the famine worsened and he encouraged ‘Young Ireland’ to rebel in 1848. The British reacted with the Treason Felony Act and Mitchel was exiled to Van Diemen’s Land. It was Mitchel whom Pearse described as ‘*one of the four evangelists of Irish Nationalism*’. It was he who first declared that the tricolour should be the national banner of Ireland.

*Statue of John Mitchel, St. Colman’s Park, Newry*

The sculptor was Domhnall O Murchadha and the statue was erected by James McAteer and Sons in 1965.

*Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.*
Near death, John Mitchel had a national, but pyrrhic, victory as an abstentionist MP. Mitchel’s politics were republican and extreme, both in Ireland and America, but he is remembered on three continents for his sincerity and the sacrifices made for his ideals. His support of slavery and the Confederacy continue to vex even sympathetic historians, but his vivid writing, especially *Jail Journal*, is widely admired.

In death friends and enemies were generous. The London Times commented, *‘The man who was feared and hated with an intensity which only terror could produce was endeared to those who knew him intimately as an affectionate relative and a sympathetic friend. His public life has been a terrible mistake, unfortunate for his country and still more calamitous to himself.’* Fellow Newry man, Lord Russell of Killowen, described Mitchel as *‘The best of the Young Ireland writers…the most brilliant journalist I have known.’*

The title page of The Life and Times of Aodh O’Neill by John Mitchel which was published in 1845, the year the potato blight first appeared in Ireland.
*Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.*
John Martin, Nationalist journalist and politician, was born on 8th September 1812 at Loughorne, near Newry, county Down.

He studied medicine in Dublin until he inherited the estate at Loughorne, county Down, on the death of his uncle, John Martin. He proved to be a benevolent landlord and during the years of the famine, he took no rent from his tenants and even mortgaged his property to bring help to the needy.

In the 1830s his politics followed those of his close friend John Mitchel in advocating the Repeal of the Act of Union. He joined Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal Association in about June 1844, but with others withdrew from the association to form the Irish Confederation in 1847.

Martin wrote articles for the *Nation*, Young Ireland’s newspaper, and later Mitchel’s *United Irishman*. When Mitchel was arrested and exiled he began his own, the *Irish Felon*, which lasted five issues before he was arrested and charged with treason. He was sentenced to ten years transportation and was sent to Van Diemen’s Land.

He received a conditional pardon in June 1854 and he entered politics again when he set up ‘The Irish National League’, which received little support. He was sympathetic towards the 1868 ‘Manchester Martyrs’ and led the honorary funeral procession to Glasnevin Cemetery.
The Home Government Association (HGA) was formed in 1870. In January 1871 he was the first HGA candidate to be elected in Ireland, becoming MP for county Meath. He acted as secretary to the Home Rule League on half pay and later became ‘Honorary Secretary’ with no pay.

Aside from his political life, John Martin was well travelled. In 1839 he visited his sister in Canada and the following year he toured Europe. After his pardon he went to live in Paris where he also had a sister. He returned to Ireland in 1858, to shoulder the responsibility of guardianship to his orphaned nephews and nieces in Kilbroney, Rostrevor.

He married Henrietta (John Mitchel’s sister) in London in November 1868. From 1869 to 1870, they travelled in Canada and America, where they were warmly received in New York, Boston and New Jersey. In 1875, when he heard that John Mitchel was ill, he returned to Newry from Westminister. After developing pneumonia at John Mitchel’s funeral, he died at Dromalane.

He was laid to rest in the family plot at Donaghmore Church of Ireland, not far from his birthplace.
Over one million left Ireland during the peak years of the famine. The term ‘emigration’, with its connotation of deliberate, calm progress from one country to another, ineffectually describes this movement of people, especially during the panic-stricken flight of 1846 to 1847, when the impulse to leave was so strong the destination was irrelevant.

Newry became the emigration centre for southern Ulster and northern Leinster. Emigration booking agents competed for trade in human cargo with Francis Carvill at the core of this business. The Carvill family acted as emigration agents for those emigrating to North America during the worst years of the famine and their office was at 9, Sugar Island, Newry. Carvill’s brother, William, was a merchant trading from his own depot in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. The brothers traded in timber, Indian corn, rosin and tar from Canada with a return commodity of Irish emigrants bound for Canada.

The famine gave rise to a significant increase in emigration from southern Ulster and northern Leinster. Evidence exists of only one ship departing for a transatlantic voyage from Newry, the ‘Sarah Parker’, all other sailings were from Warrenpoint which was regarded as the deep water port for Newry. Statistics published in recent years have shown that some 5,000 emigrants sailed from Warrenpoint directly to New York in 1846 to 1850. Other emigrants travelled via Warrenpoint to Liverpool on such boats as the ‘Sea Nymph’ and the ‘Hercules’, which sailed three times a week, before securing a passage across
the Atlantic. Destinations for emigrants were Quebec, New York, New Orleans, St. John, New Brunswick, Baltimore and Boston.

In 1846 there were six transatlantic sailings from Warrenpoint, nineteen in 1847, nineteen in 1848 and twenty-nine in 1849 departing from 25th February until 24th November. Thom’s Directory recorded that a total of 1,947 emigrated to the United States and Canada from Newry in 1847.

The increasing demand extended the period of departure to every month of the year instigating increased risk to emigrants. At the height of emigration in 1848, the ‘Ayshire’ chartered by James Ferguson of Merchants Quay in Newry, departed Warrenpoint on 24th November, with approximately six weeks sailing to New York. Arriving around 7th January 1849 in the depths of winter, the emigrants would have had no means to support themselves.

A memorial at Warrenpoint harbour commemorates all emigrants that left via Warrenpoint during the years of the famine.
AN GHAELGE AGUS AN GORTA: TIONCHAR AN OCRAIS MHÓR AR GHAELGE ARD MHACHA THEAS
PÁDRAIG Ó TIARNAIGH

An tOcras Mór nó an Gorta Mór, cibé acu ainm a thugtar ar thréimhse thubaisteach seo na hÉireann nil aon amhras ann ach gur Drochshaol ceart í. Tugann Ó Fiannachta (1974:54) le fios go raibh timpeall ar cheithre mhilliún cainteoirí Gaeilge in Éirinn ag tús an Drochshaoil. Fan am a dtáinig 1851, léirionn na figiúirí nach raibh ach 1,204,684 a raibh an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla ar a dtoil acu, nó níos ísle arís, nach raibh fágtha ach iarsmaí 319,602 de lucht labhartha na Gaeilge amháin, mar chainteoirí aonteanachacha, nó go raibh an Ghaeilge á labhairt ag 23% de mhuintir na tíre (Williams agus Ní Mhuiríosa, 1979:345):

NIL ceist ar bith ann go raibh impleachtaí marfacha, cinniúnacha ag an Ocras Mór ar an Ghaeilge fud fad na tíre. Ag amharc ar Lios Liath, mar eiseamláir de phobal bheag iargúlta i gcroílár Ard Mhacha Theas, maíonn an scoil aíntiúil Aodh Ó Murchú (Murphy, 2005) go raibh an Ghaeilge aitheanta mar theanga phobail ann sna 1830í, agus nuair a osclaiodh an chéad scoil ‘náisiúnta’ ann, go raibh an Ghaeilge á lafháirt ar bhonn laethúil sa scoil féin. Tugtar le fios in Lislea Church And Community (Keane, 2005) go raibh suas le 200 cláraithe leis an tseanscoil in 1831, agus gur tháinig laghdú 50% air seo faoi 1861. D’imigh neart daoine áitiúla ar imirce fosta, agus

LÉIRIÚ AR CHAINTEOIRÍ GAELGE AGUS BÉARLA 1851-91 (WILLIAMS AND NÍ MHUÍRÍOSA, 1979: 345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAONÁIREAMH</th>
<th>LÍON NA NDAOINE SAN IOMLÁN</th>
<th>LUCHT LABHARTHA NA GAEILGE AMHÁIN (AONTEANGACH)</th>
<th>LUCHT LABHARTHA GAEILGE &amp; BÉARLA (DÁTHEANGACH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>6,552,385</td>
<td>319,602</td>
<td>1,204,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>5,798,967</td>
<td>164,275</td>
<td>942,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>5,412,377</td>
<td>103,562</td>
<td>714,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>5,174,836</td>
<td>64,167</td>
<td>885,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>4,704,750</td>
<td>38,192</td>
<td>642,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
bádh cuid de mhuintir Ard Mhacha Theas nuair a cailleadh an bád *The Hannah*, a d’fhág cé an líúir ar aistear go Québec in 1849. Cé gur cailleadh liosta an bháid, glactar leis go raibh suas le 200 ar bord.

Is fiú a chuimhneamh gur cheantar láidir Gaeilge agus cultúir a bhiodh i nDeisceart Ard Mhacha agus i mórchéantar Oirialla agus an Fheadha níos lú ná céad bliain roimhe seo ar fad, áit a raibh clú agus cáil ar a cuid filí agus Gael araon: Peadar Ó Doirdinín, Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta, Pádraig Mac Giolla Fhiondáin, Muiris Ó Gormáin, Art Mac Cumhaigh, chun dornán acu a lua anseo. Le teacht an 20ú chéad, maíonn Murphy (2005) nach raibh ach baicle fhíorbheag de chainteoirí duithe sa cheantar, agus gur éag an duine deireanach acu, Sally Humphreys (Ní Léid), sa bhliain 1918.


Sin ar fad ráite, is fiorbheagán taifid atá againn d’imeachtaí seo an Ocras Mhóir i nDeisceart Ard Mhacha. Shílfi go mbeadh lorg an ama seo le sonrú i mbéaloideas agus i seanchas na ndaoine, mar thaifead béil. Is cosúil, mar sin, go raibh, go bhfuil, agus go bhíonn leisce ar dhaoine sa cheantar bheith ag caint ar mhóorthubaiste den chineál seo agus go maireann stiogma sin an ama sin go fóill, nó mar atá luaitear in Póirtéir (1996: viii):

‘Ní féidir a dhéanamh anois ach pictiúr briste den am uafásach sin a dtugann na seandaoine an Drochshaol air. An méid a mhair tríd an Drochshaol, i nós éicint ní raibh móran fonn orthu iomarca a rá ina thaobh. Is le alltacht agus le huafás do thráchtadh a lán den dream sin ar na rudái do chonáideadar.’

Mar shampla, tá amhráin agus béaloideas eile a bhaineann leis an drochshaol le haimsiú in Ó Gráda (1994).
In the Irish language various terms were coined to express the enormity of this national disaster (1845 to 1851), which today we know as the Great Hunger or the Famine period. When translated these descriptions fail to convey the catastrophic impact of the famine on the national psyche. Ó Fiannachta (1974: 54) demonstrates that there were in the region of 4 million Irish language speakers in Ireland at the beginning of the Great Famine. By 1851, the figures show that only 1,204,648 could speak both Irish and English, and that, worse again, there were only 319,602 monolingual Irish speakers. In total, only 23% of the Irish population could speak Irish (Williams and Ní Mhuiríosa, 1979: 345):

There is no question regarding the fatal implications of the famine period on the Irish language across the county. Taking the small village of Lislea as an example of a remote rural community in the heart of south Armagh, local historian and scholar Hugh Murphy claims that it is acknowledged that Irish was the language of the community in this period, and he evaluates the influence of the famine on the enrolment numbers of the ‘National School’, which had once experienced Irish as a spoken daily language. In *Lislea Church And Community* (Keane, 2005), the author informs readers that there were over 200 registered in the old school in 1831,

### Illustration of Census Figures Relating to Irish Na English Speakers 1851-91 (Williams and Ní Mhuiríosa, 1979: 345)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Total Number of People</th>
<th>Irish Speakers Only (Unilingual)</th>
<th>Irish and English Speakers (Bilingual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>6,552,385</td>
<td>319,602</td>
<td>1,204,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>5,798,967</td>
<td>164,275</td>
<td>942,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>5,412,377</td>
<td>103,562</td>
<td>714,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>5,174,836</td>
<td>64,167</td>
<td>885,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>4,704,750</td>
<td>38,192</td>
<td>642,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a figure which decreased by 50% by 1861. This was put down mainly to the consequences of famine related emigration and death. One case of local emigration, saw the sinking of the Hannah, a ship which set sail from Newry en route to Quebec, with over 200 passengers on board, many of whom were reportedly from Mullaghbawn and surrounding parts of south Armagh.

The cultural and linguistic dominance of this area in previous times must be recalled in this account, especially when discussing the ideas of language shift and decline in the Oriel and Fews districts, which, until less than a century before the famine, played homelands to some of the most celebrated Irish language scribes and poets in Irish history, Peadar Ó Dornáin, Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta, Pádraig Mac Giolla Fhiondáin, Muiris Ó Gormáin, Art Mac Cumhaigh, but to name a few here. Murphy (2005) fully encapsulates the decline of the Gaelic language in south Armagh when he relates this once prominent Gaelic traditions to one that had a mere handful of tradition Irish speakers by the turn of the 20th century, the last of whom, Sally Humphreys (nee McGlade), died in 1918.

Although this paints a devasting picture of famine wrought south Armagh, local songs reveal that the people of the area were not totally reliant on the potato and were able to avail of herring (see Ní Uallacháin 2004). Specific references include ‘Amhrán na Scadán’ (The Herring Song), ‘Margadh an Iúir’ (Newry Market) and ‘Grá mo Chroí An Scadán’ (Herring, the Love of my Life), in Trimble’s collection Glór Gaeilge Oirdheisceart Uladh (2009).

Apart from these occasional references, there is little record of the events of the Great Famine in south Armagh Irish language folk history. One would believe these events would be documented in the folklore or oral literature of the area. It is evident that there is a national lack of folk history of this period, as people preferred not to recall the events of such a distressing time, and that this same stigma is evident in the huge gaps in the oral narrative. Póirtéir (1996: vii) introduces the same idea:

‘We can now only draw a disjointed picture of this terrible time known in Irish as ‘An Drochshaol’. Those who survived the famine, in some way, were reluctant or unable to talk about what had happened. It is with dread and horror that many of that generation would refer to what they had witnessed’.

Examples of songs and folklore relating to this period can also be found in Ó Gráda (1994) and in Póirtéir (1996).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the staff and volunteers of Newry and Mourne Museum and Down County Museum for their assistance in producing this booklet:

Declan Carroll
Joanne Cummins
Peadar Curran
Caroline Hegerty
Conor Keenan
Greag Mac a’ tSaoir
Linda McKenna
Amanda McKinstry
Victoria Millar
Shane McGivern
Anna Savage
Dympna Tumilty
Dr. Robert Whan

We would also like to extend a special thanks to individuals and institutions who contributed articles to the booklet, information and assistance in providing illustrations:

Sean Barden, Armagh County Museum
Olga Fitzpatrick
Dr. Fionntán de Brún, Senior Lecturer in Irish, University of Ulster
Libraries Northern Ireland
Ursula Mhic An tSaoir
Adrian Murdock
Kevin Murphy
Sharon Oddie Brown
Dr. Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh
Public Records Office of Northern Ireland
Anthony Russell
Micí Walsh

Compiled and edited by:
Noreen Cunningham
Dr. Ken Abraham

Every effort has been made to correctly attribute photographs used in this booklet and accompanying exhibition.
Dr. Michael Blake (1775 to 1860)
The Catholic Bishop of Dromore, Dr. Blake helped with famine relief in Newry in the harsh winter of 1846 to 1847. A newspaper account of 5th December 1846 reported that ‘... every morning the benevolent prelate supplies a great number of destitute children with breakfast – their sole support ...’. Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.
John Grubb Richardson’s linen-spinning enterprise was established at Bessbrook, near Newry in 1845. Like most other Irish Quakers, the Richardson family were involved in famine relief. By January 1847, there was ‘lamentable destitution’ in Forkill, and Newry Workhouse was ‘closed for the admission of paupers’.

Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.
In the years following the famine, large landed estates were often burdened with debt and were sold by the Encumbered Estates Commissions. Newry and Mourne Museum Collection.