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**The Next World and the New World:
Relief, Migration, and the Great Irish Famine**

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The Next World and the New World:
Relief, Migration, and the Great Irish Famine¹

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ABSTRACT:

Ireland on the eve of the Great Famine was a poor and backward economy. The Great Irish Famine of the 1840s is accordingly often considered the classic example of Malthusian population economics in action. However, unlike most historical famines, the Great Famine was not the product of a harvest shortfall, but of a major ecological disaster. Because there could be no return to the *status quo ante*, textbook famine relief in the form of public works or food aid was not enough. Fortunately, in an era of open borders mass emigration helped contain excess mortality, subject to the limitation that the very poorest could not afford to leave. In general, the authorities did not countenance publicly assisted migration. This paper discusses the lessons to be learned from two exceptional schemes for assisting destitute emigrants during and in the wake of the Famine.

Keywords: Malthus, famine, population

JEL Classification System: N00, N33, N53, N93, B12

The population of Ireland having been created by the potato, ... without the potato it cannot exist ... A large portion of that population ... will be destroyed by famine and disease if they are not provided with means to emigrate.

William Monsell, Irish landlord, 23 June 1847²

Nothing can effectually and immediately save the country without an extensive emigration. And I have not met in Town, or in Country, a reflecting man who does not entertain more or less the same opinion.

Ulick de Burgh, Earl of Clanricarde, 8 January 1847³

Today famines and their accompanying horrors are at most a faint memory in rich countries and, thanks to economic growth and the globalization of relief, a rarity even in the poorest.⁴ But famines are still worth studying, not least because when they struck, they inflicted enormous suffering on whole communities and led to actions unimaginable in normal times. A second reason for studying famines is that it highlights the difference between famine, hunger, and malnutrition. Non-governmental organizations and popular opinion conflate the three, but they require very different solutions. Coping with famines nowadays should be straightforward, whereas reducing malnutrition is not. Third, studying famines in detail also argues against fatalism and inaction, on the one hand, and against ignoring constraints on economic growth, on the other. Most famines historically were the products of poverty, but two of the greatest famines of the twentieth century were triggered by

² BPP 1847: 197, 216. Several witnesses to this committee stressed the impossibility of producing enough grain to feed a population supported on a potato diet before the blight (p. xiii).

³ Letter to Lord John Russell (cited in MacDonagh 1956: 320).

⁴ The main exceptions are famines caused by wars and civil strife, which still put the lives of millions at risk.

totalitarian regimes in backward economies rejecting the downside risks implicit in Alfred Marshall's epigraph, *natura non facit saltus*: nature does not do leaps (Wheatcroft 2010; Wemheuer 2014).

This paper's main focus is on the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s. In the global history of famines that famine was a bit of an outlier. Whereas most famines last a year or two at most, it lasted four or five. And while the impact of most famines on population was temporary, the Irish Famine marked a demographic tipping point between almost two centuries of rapid population growth and a century or more of sustained population decline or stagnation. Generalizations are therefore potentially problematic. Yet close study of the Irish Famine has lessons for the study of famines more generally, though, its special status in the history of famines must not be forgotten.

In the remote parish of Partry in the west of Ireland, the Famine lasted a long time. In early 1847, just as it was entering a critical phase that was attracting global attention, parish priest Peter Ward wrote an open plea for help to the editor of a local newspaper, stating that five of his parishioners had died of hunger 'in the past six days'. For added impact, he revealed their names. More than a year later, in April 1848, we find Ward writing to Archbishop Murray of Dublin, pleading on behalf of destitutes who had been 'banished from a crowded poor-house, to die on the roads and buried without coffins everywhere as the living are not able to carry their remains to the Grave Yard'.⁵ In May 1849, nearly two years after the authorities in London had in effect declared the famine over, Ward was still begging Murray for help for his parishioners, of whom 'already 1,900 have died in this mountainous area; and more than 700 families wander about, without food, clothing or shelter'.⁶ His plea was rewarded with a donation of £1, which he acknowledged with the news that the meal had run out in Partry, that 'the nettles and watercress ha[d] all been picked' and that 'death awaits many' (Purcell 2000: 108). Ward was not crying wolf. Three months later he reported:

⁵ *Connaught Telegraph*, Letter to the Hon. Frederick Cavendish, 7 Feb 1847; Kerr 1994: 39.

⁶ These numbers are not implausible: the population of Ballyovey civil parish (=Partry) fell from 4,505 in 1841 to 3,073 in 1851.

In the village of Drimcaggy [recte Drumcoggy] four were dead together in a poor hut—brother, two sisters, and daughter. The flesh was pulled off the daughter’s arm and mangled in the mouth of her poor dead mother—her name was Mary Kennedy. William Walsh, of Mount Partree, and his son were dead together, their flesh was torn off their dead bodies by rats, and by each other; flesh was found in their mouths. His wife and child died the week before of hunger... These are true facts.⁷

This is part of what happened in a remote corner of the United Kingdom in the late 1840s. Census data on Drumcoggy Mountain corroborate: its population plummeted by almost two-thirds during the Famine and the number of houses there, mainly one-roomed mud cabins, fell in tandem. Famine is hell.

In what follows, I first address the views of two of the founding fathers of economics on famines generally and their implications for Ireland. Next, I discuss the role of human agency and institutions in mitigating or otherwise the shock of the failure of the potato. Arguing that the policies pursued offered no solution to what was an ecological disaster, I focus on the role of migration as a mode of famine relief. I focus in particular on two small publicly assisted migration schemes. I conclude with some speculations on the broader implications of those schemes.

Smith and Malthus

Although Adam Smith and Robert Malthus seriously underestimated the incidence of famines in early modern Europe, their conflicting perspectives on what caused famines offer a useful introduction to the literature on the Irish Famine. Smith convinced himself that ‘[w]hoever examines, with attention, the history of the dearths and famines which have afflicted any part of Europe, during the course of the present or that of the previous two centuries’—that is, since c. 1500AD—‘... will find that a famine has *never* arisen from any other cause but the violence of government

⁷ Mac Suibhne 2018. The account was widely recycled at the time: see *Dublin Evening Packet*, 21 August 1849; *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 August 1849; *Belfast Newsletter*, 24 August 1849; *Waterford News*, 24 August 1849.

attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniencies of a dearth' (Smith 1776 [1976]: 526, emphasis added). Malthus claimed that, thanks to the preventive check, although '[i]n every state in Europe, since we have first had accounts of it, millions and millions of human existences have been repressed from [want of food] ... perhaps in some of these states an absolute famine has *never* been known' (1798: 139; emphasis added). Both assertions displayed a cavalier disregard of the recent past because, in reality, famine was commonplace in much of Europe well into the eighteenth century. Just a few decades before Smith's birth a famine had robbed Scotland of up to five per cent of its people; and when he was in his late teens Ireland was struck by a catastrophic famine, that of 1740-41 (Alfani and Ó Gráda 2017; Dickson 1997; Wootton 2018).

Smith blamed meddling governments for famines and held that smoothly functioning markets were a panacea for even major crop failures. His advice, extremely influential but not so original, was anticipated by French Enlightenment commentators such as Claude-Jacques Herbert and Jacques Turgot in the 1750s and 1760s and, seven thousand miles away, by the Qianlong emperor in Beijing, in 1742 (Persson 2000: 3-10; Dunstan 1996: 272, as cited in He 2012: 13) who wrote:

Given the vastness of the Empire and the distinctiveness of its component territories, if the harvest is poor in one place, it may be good in another. The whole reliance is on intercourse between want and possession, and aid alike to all in times of crisis. If merchants converge like spokes into a wheel on regions where the harvest has been good, once they have much grain assembled, the price will naturally come down, and it will be easy for the needy masses to acquire food.

Unlike Smith, the emperor—and Turgot too (Persson 2000: 6fn15; Wootton 2018)—supported maintaining entitlements through famine relief. Indeed, Smith's great friend David Hume, whose conviction that 'the rules of equity and justice depend entirely on the particular state and condition in which men are placed'

tempered his faith in free markets during famines.⁸ The empirical evidence—and this holds for Ireland in the 1840s too—supports Smith to the extent that it finds that markets often functioned more or less normally during famines. But that does *not* mean that they did much to alleviate famines (Ó Gráda 1993; 101-116; 2015: 92-129).

By contrast, Malthus and his followers invoked the principle of population to argue that famines were the *natural* if regrettable products of excessive pressure on the land. Moral hazard therefore constrained the efficacy of famine relief or, worse, fatally compromised it.⁹ Yet Malthus, uncharacteristically, did occasionally allow institutions a positive role, conceding in the wake of a threatened famine in England (and an actual famine in Ireland) in 1799-1800 that the ‘system of the poor laws, in general, I certainly do most heartily condemn, ... but I am inclined to think that their operation in the present scarcity has been advantageous to the country’ and that it was owing to them that ‘a much greater number of [the poor] has not been starved’ (Malthus 1800). Malthus would never again have a good word to say about the Old Poor Law, although he did concede two other ways in which institutions mattered in reducing population growth and thereby, ultimately the risk of famine. First, in a little-read review essay on Irish population published in 1808, he argued that legislation granting Irish Catholics full civil rights would lead to ‘the introduction of more prudential habits’ and ‘the retardation of the population’ (Malthus 1808: 49-50). And second, towards the end of his life he would, albeit grudgingly, allow state-funded

⁸ Hume accordingly acknowledged a role for public granaries as a price smoothing device and accepted that in extreme famine situations otherwise law-abiding people might see the violent acquisition of foodstuffs as justifiable. ‘Can we imagine’, he wrote, ‘that men will see any means of preservation before them, and lose their lives, from a scrupulous regard to what, in other situations, would be the rules of equity and justice?’ (Hume 1751: 38-9).

⁹ In the oft-cited words of Sir Evelyn Baring regarding famine relief in India, ‘Every benevolent attempt made to mitigate the effects of famine and defective sanitation, serves but to enhance the evils resulting from overpopulation’ (British Parliamentary Papers 1881 [c. 205], ‘Financial Statement of the Government of India for 1881-82’, p. 17). Lillian Li’s analysis of famine relief in Qing China might be interpreted in this way. She credits it with being effective in the short run but her verdict is ultimately Malthusian: the very success of famine relief promoted population growth and, ultimately, famines which later, less effective Qing administrations were unable to counter (Li 2007).

emigration a role in relieving population pressure. We will return to this topic later on.

Smith and Malthus represent two contrasting, though arguably complementary, views of famine: one highlighting the role of human agency and institutions, and the other that of endowments and population pressure. In the historiography of famine, the former dwells on institutional factors such as poor governance and attendant corruption and on cultural factors such as the role of social capital in fostering philanthropy and, perhaps, preventing crime. The latter discounts agency at the expense of economic factors such as living standards before the crisis and the extent of the harvest shortfall during it. These approaches, in turn, are reflected in alternative ways of writing famine history.

Malthus in Ireland

The Malthusian system is described by two equations. One models income as a function of population; the other, population growth as a function of income (Lee 1973; Mokyr 1985: 42-43). The available statistical evidence for medieval and early modern Europe does indeed suggest that high population pressure on resources was the most common remote cause of a famine occurring, with crop-damaging weather being the trigger. It also suggests that high grain prices led to increased mortality in the short run. But after c. 1630 these Malthusian links between population and grain prices, on the one hand, and excess mortality and famine, on the other, no longer held in England. Malthus-minded economic historians might argue that it was no coincidence that sustained growth in English GDP per capita dates from exactly this time (Alfani and Ó Gráda 2018; Kelly and Ó Gráda 2014).

So far, so Malthusian. But the link between population and the occurrence of famine was sundered in France and Italy from the early eighteenth century on, before the onset of sustained growth in GDP per capita. And even in medieval and early modern Europe, famines were never all about Malthus: between c. 1250 and c. 1800 about one famine in every three was exacerbated, if not caused, by a war that had nothing to do with population pressure (Alfani and Ó Gráda 2018).

Malthus framed his principle of population in a time-series framework—‘population, when unchecked, increase[s] in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio’—and the above discussion reflects this. But the link between land, population, and vulnerability to famine also holds in cross-section, as data produced by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organizations’s Early Warning System show for the present. The FAO lists include thirteen countries suffering since 2009 from either an ‘extensive shortfall in food production/supplies’ or ‘widespread lack of access to food’ in more than one year in two. These vulnerable countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, include six of the seven at the very bottom of the Human Development Index league table in 2013.¹⁰ Remarkably, almost never in these years did an ‘extensive’ shortfall lead to full-blown famine.

From this perspective, the severity of the Great Irish Famine may seem somewhat of an anomaly, since in the mid-1840s GDP per head in the United Kingdom (including Ireland) was nearly three times that of Finland in 1867-8, and over three times that of China in 1958 and Ethiopia in 1985 (Bolt *et al.* 2018). Nor was there a war on. What is missing in such comparisons is a sense of the size and persistence of the ecological shock that was the proximate cause of the Irish famine (Solar 1989; O’Rourke 1991).

Our focus here is the presumed Malthusian link between pre-famine Irish poverty and population which Mokyr (1981, 1985) was the first to test for rigorously. His strategy of exploiting cross-section county rather than (much scarcer) time-series data has been replicated in research on Ireland and elsewhere.¹¹ Fernihough and Ó Gráda (2018), in the same tradition, also relies on data derived mainly from the Irish population censuses of 1841 and 1851. The quality and ambition of those censuses should be noted: in a tribute to the chief architect of the 1841 census, Thomas Larcom,

¹⁰ Two of the remainder, Liberia and Djibouti, were in the bottom twenty, and the others—Mauritania (161th), Zimbabwe (156th), Yemen (154th), and Syria (118th), and North Korea (no data)—have their own tales to tell. Note too that the four economies most severely threatened by what the FAO deemed ‘exceptional shortfalls’ were suffering from either conflict (Iraq and the Central African Republic) or severely dysfunctional governance (North Korea and Zimbabwe) [<http://www.fao.org/giews/country-analysis/external-assistance/en/>].

¹¹ E. g. Mokyr 1981, 1985; McGregor 1989; Ó Gráda 1999; Kelly *et al.* 2012; Fernihough and Ó Gráda 2018. For other work in this mode see Østby *et al.* 2011 (Indonesia); Verpoorten 2012 (Rwanda); Ó Gráda 2015 (Bengal and China).

his renowned English counterpart William Farr described ‘the last census of Ireland... one of the best in Europe’.¹²

Fernihough and I (2018) exploit the data at civil parish rather than at the county level (so $n=2,387$ instead of 32) to estimate the impact of population pressure on poverty. Our results, described in detail elsewhere with the appropriate caveats, support the claim that poverty on the eve of the Famine was highly correlated with pressure on the land as measured by population per quality-adjusted acre. But the size of the effect is modest. This outcome is perhaps too predictable to be very interesting. The more interesting question is why on the eve of the Great Famine so many poor people lived on the worst land. So we allow for the role of potential determinants of population density at the parish level in 1841.

First, we argue a role for remoteness, proxied by longitude and by distance to the nearest town. Remoteness was linked, not just to poor access to markets and the slow spread of new techniques and ideas (compare Redding and Venables 2004; Redding and Sturm 2008; Asher *et al.* 2017), but also to landlord absenteeism and lack of control over subdivision (Dorian 2000: 236-7). Second, we invoke the presence of individuals with ‘vested means’ in a parish—another detail reported in the 1841 census—as a measure of human and social capital and the provision of public goods. Such people mattered because they could have provided employment, sponsored schools and charities, or invested in local infrastructure and new technologies, and so on (compare Lampe and Sharp 2018). Or, as landed proprietors or their agents present in a parish, they could have aided emigration and perhaps controlled the subdivision of farms. Third, in acknowledging that the landed elite may have spurred overpopulation by failing to prevent subdivision or failing to grant those civil rights alluded to by Malthus which might have led to ‘the retardation of the population’¹³, we use the rate of population change between 1821 and 1841—and this, in practice, means population change in rural areas—as a measure of landlords’ failure or inability to

¹² NLI, Larcom Papers, Ms. 7526, Farr to Larcom, 26 October 1844. My thanks to John McHugh for alerting me to this reference.

¹³ Against Nassau Senior’s claim that Providence created landlords in order to prevent overpopulation (Senior 1868: vol. 1, 144, 207, 276). On landlords and subdivision (and their failure to prevent it) before the Famine see Lyne 2001: 3-17; Dorian 2000: 233-5; Solar 2017.

prevent subdivision, early marriage, and overpopulation. Finally, we include a measure of pre-famine emigration to America at the parish level [discussed in more detail below] and, as expected, this variable is linked to higher living standards.

The inclusion of these and other control variables adds to the explanatory power of the model but does not change the coefficients on the population pressure variable much. To get a sense of the importance of that variable we conduct a back-of-the-envelope calculation comparing our estimates against a ‘no 19th century population growth’ benchmark. This suggests that had population remained at the 5 million level reached c. 1800 (instead of the 8.2 million recorded in 1841) (Daultrey et al., 1982), illiteracy would have risen by about 3 per cent of its 1841 level. An equivalent exercise for housing suggests a counterfactual rate of 34.8 per cent living in the lowest quality dwellings against an actual average of 36 per cent. While confirming that population pressure reduced pre-famine living standards, such calculations square with Mokyr’s conclusion that economic historians should look beyond simple Malthusian models to understand Ireland’s pre-famine economy.

Cross-section data on mortality are lacking, but in accounting for cross-parish variation in fertility, we used the number of children aged under five per family as a proxy for fertility in 1841. This fertility measure was subject to significant regional variation, being 20 per cent higher in counties Antrim and Down in the northeast than in counties Waterford and Kilkenny in the southeast. Moreover, we found that fertility was reduced by population pressure and poor housing, but there were important roles also for the size of the agricultural sector, for the lack of education (as captured by illiteracy), and for religion. So Malthus was right, but he was only half-right.

Human Agency and Institutions

Whereas the Malthusian approach to famine is simple and straightforward, the roles of human agency and institutions are more complex and more difficult to test. The claim that fiscal constraints ‘made Britain *feel* unable to borrow to finance relief efforts’ (Read 2017: 3, emphasis added) in Ireland from early 1847 on is ultimately an argument about human agency. But how many lives did that ‘feeling’ cost? Its legislative consequences are clear, but not its impact on mortality. Crucially, it led to

legislation in June 1847 that placed the entire burden of relieving poverty on Irish ratepayers—and disproportionately on those in the most devastated areas—from late summer 1847 on.¹⁴

Famine relief plays only a minor role in the historiography of some well-known famines such as the Soviet famines of the 1930s and China's Great Leap Famine.¹⁵ In the Irish literature it looms large, and issues raised have resonances for modern analyses of famine relief. Before the decision to put an end to public funding was taken, the Treasury had spent about £8 million (nearly 2 per cent of GDP) in Ireland, most of it, admittedly, intended as loans to be repaid by Irish taxpayers. Historians—and many contemporaries—were critical of how that money was spent. For example, food for work schemes tend to score well in the literature (compare Ravallion 1991; Drèze and Sen 1989: 113-18; Devereux 2016) and were effective in Ireland in 1822 and 1831, but as the authorities' first response to distress during the winter of 1846 and spring of 1847, they paid too little, spread disease, weakened the healthy, and failed to reach the most vulnerable. Early in 1847 a public works official in a neighbourhood that was losing people 'with railway speed' pleaded with prime minister Lord John Russell that it would be 'better far to keep [the poor] in their wretched hovels, and pay them for staying there, than ask them to expose themselves during the day on the side of a mountain' (IUP, Vol. 7, 192; compare Dorian 2000; 216-7).

An added problem was that as a result of the harsh weather the typical labour was employed only part-time. Yet so desperate were people for relief that 'in many instances' the dead were left unburied for days on deserted potato plots so that males employed on the works could attend their funerals on a Sunday without the loss of a day's wages (*Irish Examiner*, 27 September 1847; *Kerry Examiner*, 23 March 1847).

As the limitations of food for work became increasingly clear from early 1847 on the authorities switched to the temporary provision of food aid through local relief

¹⁴ 'An Act to make further Provision for the Relief of the destitute Poor in Ireland' (8 June 1847), 10 Vic., c. 31', better known as the Irish Poor Law Extension Act. It also included a provision, known as the Quarter Acre or Gregory Clause, that required smallholders to relinquish all but a quarter acre of their land before receiving relief. Sir William Henry Gregory, the author of the clause, was an Irish landlord. For a defense of Gregory, see Walker 2013.

¹⁵ See, however, Tauger 2001; Davies and Wheatcroft 2004: 113, 422-426.

committees. Nearly two thousand such committees were formed in all but three affluent poor law unions in the northeast, and it was these committees that bought, cooked, and doled out rations. The system as it operated during the summer of 1847 was far from flawless, but it coincided with a drastic reduction in the incidence of starvation and associated diseases. The commissioners in charge of relieving daily nearly three million people, over one-third of the population, at the scheme's height claimed the credit 'for arresting for the present so general a calamity with more complete effect than was probably ever before attempted'.¹⁶ While the hyperbole ignores the role of seasonality in reducing mortality, the scope of the achievement is undeniable and there was a widespread sense at the time that the system worked well. The prospect of a bountiful harvest and fears of moral hazard—the 'demoralization that would follow... large and almost indiscriminate support'—led to the termination of the scheme, other than in a few devastated areas, in mid-August 1847. The closure of the food kitchens meant reliance on one of the 130 workhouses responsible for relief under the Irish Poor Law of 1838.¹⁷

The legislation mentioned above allowed for locally financed outdoor relief where workhouses were overcrowded, but only to occupiers of less than a quarter of an acre of land. The famine persisted. Almost as many people died in Irish workhouses of clearly defined famine-related causes—hunger, but most especially disease—in 1849-50 as in 1847-48 [Figure 1]. In early August 1849, nearly 0.9 million people were still dependent on a combination of indoor (203,199) and outdoor (666,224) poor relief. It is no accident that most of the admittedly few cases of cannibalism identified so far post-date the decision to place the burden of relief entirely on local taxpayers.¹⁸

[Figure 1 about here]

¹⁶ 3rd *Report of the Relief Commissioners*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ó Gráda 1993: 108 (on seasonality); *Freemans Journal*, 17 August 1847; *Freemans Journal*, 24 September 1847 (citing 6th Report of the Relief Commissioners).

¹⁸ Ó Gráda 2015: 30-37; for an earlier case, 'Pestilence in the west of Cork', *Southern Reporter*, 23 March 1847.

Andrés Eiríksson (2018) links the timing of deaths in Parsonstown workhouse in the Irish midlands during the famine to the refusal of its board of guardians to countenance outdoor relief. He claims that the resultant overcrowding, compounded by inadequate clothing, heating, and sanitation, led to many unnecessary deaths. And it is hard to argue with Eiríksson's close reading of the evidence. Other studies critical of workhouse management could be cited but a limitation of such case-studies is their lack of comparative focus.¹⁹ In Figure 2 the y-axis measures workhouse management using three yardsticks, while the x-axis measures the challenge faced by it. As indicated, workhouses in poorer areas (as proxied by land value per capita [*valpop*] and dependence on soup rations at the height of the famine [*max_soup*]) tended to find it more difficult to operate (as measured by the date on which they opened their doors [*date_open*])²⁰, to prevent deaths (as measured by e.g. workhouse deaths per head of population [*dr*] or the proportion of workhouse deaths due to famine-related causes [*famdeaths*]), and to collect the necessary local taxes.

How did Parsonstown rank compared to other similarly challenged workhouses? Table 1 offers a rough indication of relative workhouse performance on the basis of the yardsticks mentioned. The rankings reflect the residuals from regressing each yardstick on *valpop* and *max_soup*. Much depends on the yardstick chosen; *famdeaths* is the perhaps most important, since it measures an outcome. The residuals imply that deaths from famine-related causes in the bottom five workhouses were 27 to 39 percentage points higher than predicted by the regression model. This offers a rough measure of the impact of local decision-making. Interestingly, Parsonstown performed poorly by two criteria out of three.

¹⁹ Compare Guinnane and Ó Gráda 2002a, 2002b; Ó Gráda 2011; McCabe and Ó Gráda 2010; Ó Gráda, Anbinder, and Wegge 2019.

²⁰ Clifden workhouse in County Galway did not open its doors until 8 March 1847, while Cahirciveen in Kerry had yet to open in early October 1846, 'although long since declared fit for the reception of the destitute' (*Kerry Evening Post*, 3 Oct 1846). Bantry workhouse in County Cork, 'certainly the most respectable looking of any building' in the town remained shut for nineteen months after its completion because of a tax strike: 'the farmers stood out and would not pay the taxes' (Nicholson 1847: 277).

[Figure 2 and Table 1 about here]

Assessments of the mechanisms just outlined—public works, soup kitchens, and the workhouse—feature prominently in Irish famine historiography. However, none was fit for purpose, because none addressed the cold reality that the Irish Famine destroyed both an agricultural system and a whole way of life dependent on it. On the eve of the Famine about one-third of the entire population of 8.5 million relied almost exclusively on potatoes, and the majority of the agricultural labour force of over a million was paid essentially in potatoes. The second near-total crop failure in 1846 meant that the ‘Farmers of Ireland [were left with] no Means of replacing the Potato Currency, so to speak, with any other’,²¹ a loud signal that there could be no return to the *status quo ante*. This was widely recognized at the time, but the only form of famine relief to take it on board would have been state-assisted emigration. Unhappily, state funding towards ‘the equalisation of capital and labour in the country’²² was very limited.

Migration as Famine Relief

Migration is an important, if neglected, part of famine demography (Maharatna 2014). Migrants have nearly always been among the first victims of famine, but migration in search of food or work is also an age-old coping mechanism.²³ Such migration is usually internal—often from rural to urban areas—and temporary. In theory, long-distance migration could be a more effective option, either because it reduces the immediate pressure on the affected area in the event of a crisis or, if it precedes a crisis, because it generates emigrant remittances and facilitates crisis migration (Maharatna 2014; Lucas and Stark 1985; Sirkeci et al. 2012).²⁴

²¹ Aubrey de Vere, in evidence to the Lords S.C. on colonization (BPP 1847: 510).

²² Earl of Lincoln on colonization (House of Commons Debates, 1 June 1847, vol. 92, c1383).

²³ In China in 1959-61, although the authorities’ attempts to control migration must have increased mortality, migration was significant nonetheless. Much of it, facilitated by networks forged during earlier movements, was long-distance (Bramall 2011: 1003fn52; Lary 1999: 43-44; Zhou 2013: 141-44, 187-88, 228, 260-63).

²⁴ The available data suggest transfers of macroeconomic significance today: in 28 of the

That option was open to emigrants from Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. Insofar as mass migration over long distances is concerned the Great Famine happened at a unique moment in world history, ushering in an era that would allow over fifty million Europeans to seek their fortune on the other side of the Atlantic (Hatton and Williamson 1998). A limitation of such migration, however, is that the most destitute are more likely to lack the resources to move.²⁵ During the Great Irish Famine, as the parish priest of Kenmare noted in 1849, ‘the better classes of farmers and labourers [were] flying to America as if they were running from a plague’, leaving behind ‘miserable beings... with scarcely a hovel to shelter them, insufficiently provided for by the law.’²⁶

Occasionally, as during the Somali famine of 2011-12 an extensive diaspora, connected through strong clan networks, played an important role in providing relief through remittances. In Somalia even distant relatives in the United States or in Europe were a distinct advantage. But the outcome was a reversal of the Irish pattern: those with kin abroad could remain in their villages or close to their land while others, less fortunate and more marginal, were forced into the age-old coping strategy of taking to the road, in this instance often to refugee camps in neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia (Majid *et al.* 2016: 17, 18, 19, 36; Maxwell and Majid 2016: 83-4; Robinson *et al.* 2014).

In their classic work on Scottish demographic history Michael Flinn *et al.* (1977: 36) argued:

world’s poorest economies in 2015 they added 10 per cent or more to GDP, whereas in over fifty of the poorest they added more than 5 per cent. Such transfers often dwarf foreign aid and inward investment flows combined.

²⁵ This claim is supported by the inverse-U shaped relationship between the ratio of remittances to GDP and GDP per capita today. In 2015 the median ratio was 1.8 per cent when GDP per capita was less than \$500, but 6.7 per cent when GDP per capita was between \$2,000 and \$5,000 (based on World Bank data).

²⁶ O’Sullivan to Cornelius Egan, bishop of Ardfert and Aghadoe, 14 July 1849, as cited in O’Connor 1994: 32-33. More prosaically, the general manager of the Provincial Bank of Ireland remarked in 1847 that ‘the best go, the worst remain’ (Black 1960: 229).

It is likely that the Highlands came very close indeed to the margin that would have produced an Irish-type catastrophe: one estimate put the numbers who might have died in 1836-7 without external relief at 80,000, and it would have been even higher in the 1840s. Had there been more people - had there been no clearances or earlier outmigration - could the situation have been saved?

Flinn *et al.* did not answer their own question directly and, indeed, other factors intervened to ensure that 'the Highlands did not starve' in the 1840s. The challenge was on a smaller scale than in Ireland, the Scottish economy was wealthier and more resilient, dependence on the potato was lower, and landlords were less likely to be burdened with debt (Devine 1995). Scotland's poorest were better positioned to leave of their own volition than Ireland's—and they did so. Be that as it may, the stricter controls on subdivision and early marriage and the Highland Clearances, which involved the forced removal of thousands of marginal smallholders, mainly to the Lowlands of Scotland and to Canada, in intermittent waves between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, were among the reasons for the modest population growth in the Highlands relative to Ireland before the 1840s [Table 2].²⁷ A sinister aspect of pre-Famine Irish demography is that population growth in the pre-famine decades was highest where living standards were lowest. The correlation between population growth and wage levels across Irish counties was -0.41. In early nineteenth-century Scotland, by contrast, it was +0.42.²⁸

[Table 2 about here]

Patterns of population growth reflected contrasting land tenure regimes. In Ireland, landlord indebtedness constrained improvement and landlord-assisted emigration. In pre-famine Scotland the market for financially embarrassed estates was

²⁷ Dyson 1999. Scottish sex ratios were distorted by migration and, consequently, leading to much higher proportions of women who never married in Scotland (Flinn *et al.* 1977: 325-27).

²⁸ For Ireland the correlation refers to 1821-41 (population) and 1829 (wages), for Scotland (1801-1841) and 1795.

much more active²⁹ than in Ireland, where the inability of creditors to foreclose on insolvent landlords led to a constipated land market. The extent of Irish landlord indebtedness cannot be established with precision. A lower bound estimate can be inferred from data on rents due on estates managed by the Courts of Chancery and Exchequer which imply, very roughly, that on the eve of the Famine one owner in twelve and one acre in twenty were chronically insolvent. Those estates represented the extremes of ruinous indebtedness; they do not include heavily indebted properties still under the control of their owners (Donnelly 1975: 68-72; Eiríksson and Ó Gráda 2006: 51; Gray 1999: 83-84). One such encumbered Irish grandee claimed in the House of Lords in January 1847 that that his class owed at least eight years' rental—or about £100 million—in 'judgments, mortgages, and other bond debts', and that the interest on this sum and other charges was costing them nearly £10.5 million annually, leaving only a few million at their disposal. In vain, he pleaded for a stay on the foreclosure of mortgages for three years.³⁰

According to the Irish economist William Neilson Hancock (1850-51: 14) such indebtedness led to a premium of one per cent charged on loans to Irish proprietors as compensation for the 'trouble and insurance against loss arising from the risk of delay and ultimate failure'. A study published in the immediate wake of the Famine buttressed its statistical critique of how the land system penalized creditors with an extreme example 'where the proceedings ha[d] been pending since 1786' and the encumbrancer was 'a pauper inmate of the North Dublin Workhouse' (Hancock 1849-51: 4-6).

In Scotland, the trade-off between evictions before and during the 1840s is highlighted by comparing demographic trends in three of the worst-affected Sutherland parishes and on the island of Barra [Figure 3]. The owners of the

²⁹ Devine 1989; Devine 1994: 63-64; Gaskell 1968: 23-46. Richards (1982: 210-11) has noted the 'fluidity of landownership in this age. Clearances were associated both with changes in tenantry and changes in ownership of the land itself'. Mega-rich Sir Alexander Matheson bought Ardintoul in 1840; John Gordon of Cluny, who bought Barra in 1841, was reputed to be the richest commoner in Scotland when he died in 1858; between 1813 and 1838 'every single property in [the Highland parish of] Morvern changed hands' (Gaskell 1968: xxii-xxiii, 23).

³⁰ *Hansard* 89 [1846] 408 (House of Lords Debates, 25 January 1847); Woodham-Smith 1962: 297. On the travails of the grandee in question see Wilson 1994: 87-91.

Sutherland estate, notorious for large-scale clearances in the 1810s, still faced considerable distress among their tenants in the 1840s. They responded by concentrating on relief, spending £18,000, exclusive of wages and unpaid rent (Flinn *et al.* 1977: 434). By contrast, in the late 1840s Barra, where there had been no clearances beforehand, was the scene of brutal and violent clearances, accompanied by great hardship and even excess mortality.³¹

[Figure 3 about here]

In Ireland one of the institutional by-products of the famine was establishment in 1849 of the Incumbered Estates Court, which facilitated foreclosures on bankrupt landlords. The lands transferred through the Court were not so much casualties of the Famine as the properties of insolvent landlords that a properly functioning land market would have disposed of years or decades earlier (Eiríksson and Ó Gráda 2006). Such transfers from an old-style Castle Rackrent gentry to new more profit-conscious owners reduced the cost of borrowing on the security of land, but half a century too late. What if the Incumbered Estates Court had been established in 1800 rather than in 1849? What if more Irish landlords, like their Scottish counterparts, had helped (or even forced) more people from the most marginal areas to emigrate before the 1840s? The what-ifs about Irish emigration pre-date the Famine.

The Next World or the New World

Most famine migration is internal migration. Ireland's low urbanization rate constrained migration within the island before the Great Famine, limiting its effectiveness as a form of famine relief. In 1841 only five per cent of the population (405,365) lived in counties other than those in which they were born, and most of those lived in counties next to where they were born. For example, in 1841 only 2.5 per cent of Mayo-born Irish residents lived elsewhere in Ireland, and over two-thirds of

³¹ Newby (2000: 139; compare Richards 2008: 265-88) argues that the owner of Barra since 1841, Gordon of Cluny, was 'most culpable' for not using 'his immense wealth to assist emigration from the island' before the Famine. But at least he funded his tenants' passages to Canada, whereas most Irish landlords were wont to show theirs the roadside.

those lived in the three contiguous counties of Galway, Roscommon, and Sligo. In England and Scotland in 1841 the proportions of inhabitants born in counties other than those in which they were born was over three times that in Ireland (BPP 1843b: 14-17; compare Withers 1988).

During the Famine there was a perception that Dublin resembled ‘a gigantic refugee camp’, and the Famine’s first casualties in the city were rural immigrants. But as just noted, internal migration was quite limited and not of the kind that would have alleviated conditions in the worst-affected areas much (Ó Gráda 1999: 173; Kelly *et al.* 2013). The aggregate number of people living in counties other than their birth counties rose to 8.8 per cent of the total (578,158) in 1851, but distance remained a deterrent to migration to the metropolis, with richer counties sending proportionately more migrants to Dublin than the poorer. For example, the number of Mayo-born living elsewhere in Ireland rose by only 1,550 between 1841 and 1851 and those living in Dublin by only 422. Urban Ireland offered no safety-valve for famine refugees in the 1840s.

In this period, Irish migration to Britain was also, technically, internal migration. There were no border walls. A majority of those who crossed during the Famine did so *en route* to North America, but Britain also provided a respite for over 0.3 million Irish immigrants, mostly famine refugees, between 1841 and 1851. Had it not done so, the crisis in Ireland would have been far worse. Given the huge and probably increasing gap between wages in the two islands and their proximity, the wonder is why more had not moved. It would seem that the Irish were welcome in England as seasonal workers, but not as year-round agricultural labourers (Solar and Smith 2009).³² The Famine migrants, who settled mainly in the slums of industrializing towns and cities, were among the poorest who could afford to leave; this was negative selection with a vengeance (Neal 2000; MacRaild 2000, 2006).³³

³² In 1841 the Irish-born in Britain represented just 5 per cent of Ireland’s population and 4.4 per cent of Britain’s.

³³ The county origins of the migrants, which have still not been systematically studied, and the subject of an ongoing study by Alan Fernihough, Peter Solar, and the present author.

One constraint on further migration to Britain was that poor relief there was locally financed and its benefits, except in cases of illness, restricted to locals. Local authorities relieved the Irish sick and limited the spread of disease, but they responded with alacrity when legislation in June 1847 made it easier for them to return paupers without a settlement (i.e. an entitlement to relief) to Ireland.³⁴ How much the fear of removal back to Ireland deterred others from travelling or seeking relief remains moot. A humane solution would have been to relax the settlement laws and spread the burden by making the charge on ratepayers a national, as opposed to a local, one (Neal 1998: 122-76, 222, 243-62, 280-1; Ó Gráda 1999: 111-3). Desperate times call for desperate remedies: had the rest of Britain, controlling for relative size, accommodated half as many Irish as Scotland did in the late 1840s, Ireland would have had 0.2 million fewer paupers to worry about. The constraints on further movements across the Irish Sea were political and institutional, not Malthusian.

Overseas migration reduced the pressure on resources at home and supplemented the incomes of those who remained (Ó Gráda and O'Rourke 1997). Between 1840 and 1850 the number of Irish-born in the US quadrupled to nearly a million, while the number in Canada rose from 122,000 to 227,000 (Commission on Emigration 1956: 126). But a shortcoming of trans-oceanic emigration as relief was that it required capital, or else the assistance of a local landlord: the passage to America would have cost an agricultural labourer more than a half a year's wages. Those without access to such capital were left at the mercy of the grossly inadequate relief regime described earlier. For emigration to be a more effective means of disaster relief public funding was needed, but not forthcoming.

Assisting Migration

The case for assisted migration as a remedy for population pressure in pre-Famine Ireland was not new. It had been an issue in the 1820s when Robert Wilmot Horton, a keen supporter, was colonial undersecretary. In 1823-25 he was behind two schemes to move two thousand smallholders and their families from an epicentre of agrarian

³⁴ 67,513 paupers were returned between 1847 and 1853 (Neal 1998: 222).

unrest of north county Cork to Upper Canada. Those schemes attracted great interest in Ireland (Ó Gráda 1994: 336-7). In their wake, Wilmot Horton prevailed on Malthus to concede before a parliamentary select committee on emigration in 1827 that 'while there was always a natural tendency towards the filling up of a vacuum', resolute action on the part of landlords might prevent that outcome. But opinion in parliament was resolutely opposed to state-assisted migration. The very high cost of the Upper Canada experiment (about £20 per emigrant) deterred pragmatists like Sir Robert Peel, while hard-line Malthusians asserted that any remedy would prove merely temporary anyway, and anti-Malthusians argued for land reclamation instead. In 1830 a frustrated Wilmot Horton conceded that the topic was 'not agreeable to the House'.³⁵

Inevitably, the issue of publicly subsidized migration as means of relieving victims came to the fore again during the Great Famine. The 'plan of colonization for Ireland' proposed by a group of Irish landlords and politicians to Lord John Russell in March 1847 may have been self-serving and impractical in its details, but it cogently posed the choice facing ministers:

Unless the people of England are prepared to say that they will, for many years, support the Irish people with imported food at an immense expense or suffer them to starve by millions, they must turn to the second alternative with a deep and earnest desire... for securing its immediate and extensive application. It is to diminish the redundant numbers of Ireland by means of well-regulated emigration.³⁶

While the plan was opposed by senior Catholic clergy and nationalist leaders, there is ample evidence that the poor themselves were eager to leave. In London, the scheme

³⁵ The Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 gave poor law guardians restricted powers to assist emigration where population pressure warranted it but this clause was not acted on (Poor Law Commissioners *Annual Report 1840*: 33).

³⁶ Reprinted as a supplement to *The Spectator*, 3 April 1847, p. 2. The plan proposed the assisted emigration of 1.5 million to Canada over a three-year period.

yielded a parliamentary inquiry, but no concrete action. Other pleas and petitions from various quarters were given short shrift by government on the grounds that assisted migration would crowd out support from private sources;³⁷ that it would increase the cost of the passage; that the migration of workhouse inmates would entice people into the workhouses in order to qualify; that it would constitute the state assuming the responsibility of landlords; or that it would attract the ‘most infirm’ and the ‘least industrious’ and thus place a burden on receiving areas.³⁸ Supporters of assisted emigration pointed to the trans-Atlantic flow of remittances as proof that the Irish were far from being the ‘worst emigrants’. But the cost of significant emigration was the main constraining factor, with Charles Wood, Whig Chancellor during most of the Famine, adamantly refusing to lend support³⁹ (Black 1960: 226-35; Gray 1999; Moran 2004: 36, 70-90).

By the time the government’s stance on assisted migration mellowed in 1849, it was too late. Article 26 of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of that year, drawing on a suggestion by an Irish Whig M.P., entitled poor law guardians to borrow from the Exchequer Bill Loan Commissioners, subject to Treasury consent, to assist the emigration of workhouse paupers. The immediate results were rather meagre. By March 1851 the unions had assisted 2,592 men, women, and children at a cost of £11,151 (Moran 2004: 89, 136). Given that unions in the neediest areas were already financially stretched, most of those assisted tended not to come from the worst-affected western seaboard counties.

³⁷ In a letter to Wilmot Horton in 1823 Malthus had pointed the ‘superintendence of so powerful an agent has often the effect of weakening the exertions of the settlers themselves’ (as cited in Ghosh 1963: 48).

³⁸ Colonial Secretary Earl Grey’s statement clarifying policy in March 1847 was widely reported (e.g. *Dublin Weekly Register* 13 March 1847).

³⁹ Wood accepted that a reduction in population was necessary ‘before the country could be restored to a state of safety’. In 1849 he described the adjustment as having taken place through a combination of deaths ‘if not from actual starvation, at least from disease brought on by an insufficient supply of food’ and emigration unassisted by the state; see Relief of Distress (Ireland), House of Commons Debates, 7 February 1849, vol. 102, c376 (https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1849/feb/07/relief-of-distress-ireland#S3V0102Po_18490207_HOC_6).

From South Kerry to South Manhattan

In this and the following section I describe two very different assisted migration schemes, one mainly landlord funded, the other publicly funded.⁴⁰ Both refer to highly disadvantaged migrants and offer glimpses of what more assisted migration might have achieved. The Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank (EISB), one of such several savings banks set up in New York in the antebellum decade, was founded in 1850 to help Irish immigrants to save and to remit money home. By 1858 over 15,000 prospective savers had opened accounts in the EISB, most of them immigrants, and most of those Irish famine migrants (Wegge *et al.* 2017). The EISB archive records the date of arrival in the city of thousands of Irish immigrants who became account holders, and the parish they left behind. The striking persistence in spatial emigration patterns during the famine suggests that those who went before paved the way for those who followed. Parishes with a record of pre-Famine emigration sent three times as many post-1845 account holders as those with no pre-Famine account holders.⁴¹ It can be shown that having an account in a savings bank in New York in the 1850s was very common and that the Irish were overrepresented among savings bank depositors (Anbinder *et al.* 2018). Therefore, even if only the most economically successful Famine Irish opened accounts, they were the most successful half or two-thirds, not the most successful one per cent.

Among those who opened accounts in the EISB were 234 migrants from the contiguous civil parishes of Kenmare, Tuosist, and Kilkaskan in Ireland's southwest.⁴² They had arrived in New York either as paupers assisted under the provisions of the 1849 legislation or, much more likely, as emigrants whose passage was financed by the local absentee landlord and prominent Whig grandee, the third Marquess of Lansdowne (White 2009). Most of the latter were 'absolute and entire paupers, and on the very verge of entering the Union house when they left' (Lyne 2001: 41). Lansdowne's agent, William Steuart Trench, was the driving force behind the assisted

⁴⁰ The following account builds on ongoing work with Tyler Anbinder and Simone Wegge (Wegge *et al.* 2017; Ó Gráda *et al.* 2019). They are not responsible for its content, however.

⁴¹ EISB database, available at: <http://beyondragstoriches.org/home-exhibit>.

⁴² 103 from Kenmare, 94 from Tuosist, and 37 from Kilkaskan.

emigration scheme, one of the most ambitious of all Irish landlord-funded emigrations.⁴³ But landlords like Lansdowne were few where needed most, and ‘no landlord in Donegal, Mayo or Connemara had any extensive involvement in the assisted emigration schemes during the Famine because they felt they were too expensive’ (Moran 2004: 36).⁴⁴ What follows focuses on the broader policy lessons to be drawn from the Lansdowne experiment.

Table 3, which gives data on population, housing conditions, literacy, and poor law valuation in the three Lansdowne parishes, in county Kerry as a whole, and in Ireland, highlights the economic backwardness of the three-parish area.⁴⁵ The only town of any size was Kenmare (population 1,339 in 1841), and most of the emigrating tenants would have lived within a ten mile radius of that town. The hardships and horrors endured by the smallholders of this area have been described in some detail elsewhere (Ó Gráda *et al.* 2019). Hard data on famine mortality are lacking but there are indications that it was very high. Local parish registers lack information on burials, but the course and severity of the famine can be captured from the trends in baptisms.⁴⁶ Trends in the neighbouring parishes of Kenmare and Tuosist tally very well.

[Table 3 about here]

Given the area’s narrow tax base and its heavy reliance on the potato, it was inevitable that the workhouse in Kenmare, the main vehicle of relief, would prove disastrously inadequate. At first the local guardians sought to cap total admissions at

⁴³ Historical assessments of his achievement range from outrage at his penny-pinching to an emphasis on the emigrants’ resilience and upward mobility (Lyne 2001: 25-119; Anbinder 2002).

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick (1984: 20) reckons that ‘at least 12,000 emigrants’ were assisted by landlords between 1826 and 1845, ‘22,000 between 1846 and 1850, and perhaps 14,000 thereafter.’

⁴⁵ In 1851 the population of Kenmare was inflated by its workhouse population of 3,353, about half of whom would have come from the three parishes.

⁴⁶ According to a local clergyman, deaths in Tuosist in early 1847 were five or six times the pre-famine norm: ‘The deaths for the last two months are more than they were for the previous twelve months’ (*Kerry Evening Post*, 30 January 1847). At this time the Board of Work’s engineer in Tuosist reported three deaths a day on a road where 300 were employed.

five hundred, the capacity of the workhouse; but by December 1848, they were accommodating over two thousand inmates, many of them in rented buildings in the town and hinterland. The number relieved through the workhouse continued to mount; by April 1851 it still exceeded 3,300.

Many of the Lansdowne migrants either landed in or ended up in New York. Most were penniless on arrival and illiterate; many spoke only Irish. More than four in five of the immigrants, most of whom landed in 1851 and 1852, settled in Lower Manhattan's run-down and heavily Irish Sixth Ward, as compared to two in five of all Kerry account holders and less than one in five of all Irish account holders.⁴⁷ The Lansdowners, who included significant proportions of children and older people, formed a ghetto within the ghetto.

We have occupational data on 143 male and 43 female EISB account holders from the Kenmare area. The men included 91 'laborers', seven waiters or barmen, four shoemakers, and—this being New York—one 'who sets up pins in a bowling alley' and an 'attendant at a shooting gallery'; of the rest, only one claimed a white-collar occupation ('clerk'), while four or five might qualify as small-scale dealers. Among the women, there were seventeen domestics, eleven washerwomen, four seamstresses, and three labourers. The Lansdowners were thus overwhelmingly unskilled labourers. And although there is evidence that the people of Kerry as a whole were eager for schooling and literacy (Ó Gráda 2013), fewer than two in five of Lansdowne males and only one in four of females on whom there is information—proportionately far fewer than in Ireland as a whole—could sign their name on opening their account.

Still, the Lansdowners were keen to join the EISB. On Baxter Street just north of the Five Point intersection, where they dominated, three-fifths of the Lansdowne families had Emigrant Bank savings accounts (Anbinder 2002: 382): an impressive statistic, given that the Lansdowners would have had no familiarity with banks or savings banks beforehand.⁴⁸ Still, the bank's records, which list nearly every transaction made until 1869 for accounts opened from 1850 to 1858, paint a picture of

⁴⁷ For comparability, these numbers refer to arrivals in 1850 and after.

⁴⁸ Indeed, they might have been deterred by news of the sensational collapse of the Killarney Savings Bank, located twenty miles from Kenmare, in April 1848 (Ó Gráda 2003: 50).

resilience and modest achievement. Though the Lansdowners were poorer on arrival and less likely to be literate, the median gap between their arrival and opening an account was shorter than that of Irish-born account-holders in general, and their median opening deposit of \$99 (equivalent to about three months' wages) was higher than that of the Irish as a whole (\$60). Perhaps because they lived closer to the bank, the Lansdowners were more likely to visit it. And like other Irish account holders, the majority of them used the bank to accumulate in the sense that the median gap between closing and opening account balances was positive.

Table 4 describes a preliminary attempt at linking the Lansdowners and Irish account-holders generally to the 1860 U.S. census. Our focus on is male arrivals in the 1850s. Columns 1 and 4 highlight the disadvantage of the Lansdowners relative to other Irish immigrants in the 1850s. Whereas slightly more than half of Irish could be described as laborers on arrival, more than three-quarters on the Lansdowners could be so described. The other columns compare the occupational status of account-holders whose occupations are known both when they opened their account and in 1860. The numbers are small but the outcome nevertheless interesting. While Irish account-holders as a whole registered modest progress by becoming more white-collar, the improvement in the Lansdowners' status is reflected in the increasing importance of trading occupations such as peddling, selling junk, and operating fruit stalls. Not only were the Lansdowners much more likely to live in slum housing, as represented by the Sixth Ward, than the Irish as a whole; they were also less likely to leave it. Thus 88 per cent of the Lansdowners with an address in the Sixth when they opened their account still lived there in 1860, whereas this was true of only 67 per cent of other Irish who arrived in the same years. The Lansdowners may not have struck it rich in the US, but they coped.⁴⁹

[Table 4 about here]

The Earl Grey Scheme

⁴⁹ This did not apply to all: in 1852 the authorities in Boston sent 'a large number' of destitutes from the Lansdowne estate back to New York, where they had landed (Hirota 2017: 79-80).

Virtually the only assisted migration scheme to receive official backing at the height of the Irish Famine was named after its instigator, colonial secretary Henry George Grey, the third Earl Grey (1802-94).⁵⁰ Under this scheme over four thousand female orphans were shipped from Irish workhouses to Australia between October 1848 and July 1850.⁵¹ The plan was to relieve pressure on the workhouses while responding to the demand for domestic servants and for women of marriageable age in a colony where in 1846 males aged 21-45 years outnumbered females of the same age by almost two to one.⁵² Conveyed to Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney in twenty separate consignments, the young women, most aged between 16 and 19, began life there as indentured servants, most with no pre-existing networks of friends and relations.

The orphans were selected by inspectors from among those proposed by the workhouses. There was selection within selection. Despite their background of destitution, the orphans were somewhat more likely to be literate than other young women in the counties they left.⁵³ That makes sense: the authorities would not have selected girls who could not speak English, for example. Those chosen from the workhouse in Oldcastle, County Meath included twelve selected 'for superior merit and good conduct during a residence of more than 2 years in the workhouse'; while nearly all of a group from 'the Cavan, Boyle, Loughrea, and other unions' who sailed from Dublin to Plymouth in December 1848 could read and write, 'some of them very superiorly, both as to style and penmanship'.⁵⁴ Only in one case (Belfast) was there

⁵⁰ The data underpinning the analysis in this section are derived from the Irish Famine Memorial database curated by Perry McIntyre [<http://www.irishfaminememorial.org/orphans/database/>] and Trevor McClaughlin's 'Earl Grey's Irish Famine Orphans' website [<https://earlgreysfamineorphans.wordpress.com/author/trev01/>]. I am much obliged to them both.

⁵¹ Accounts of the scheme include MacDonagh 1956: 352-9; McClaughlin 1991; Reid 1992; Reid and Mongan 1996; McIntyre 2016.

⁵² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2006* [available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012006?OpenDocument>].

⁵³ Based on comparing literacy data in the 1841 census and in the orphans' lists.

⁵⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 15 March 1850; *Kerry Evening Post*, 9 December 1848.

clear evidence of workhouse administrators using the scheme to dispose of their more boisterous inmates.

The orphans seem to have adapted to settler society with relative ease. Most for whom the details have been traced—nearly one-third of the total so far—married within a few years of arrival, when they were still in their teens,⁵⁵ and displayed remarkable procreative power [Figure 5]. The average number of births per woman still married in her 40s exceeded nine. Moreover, the women lived relatively long lives, with an average age at death of 62.6 years.⁵⁶ Unlike Irishwomen who settled in the United States and Britain at that time, most of the orphans married men who were not Irish and/or belonged a different religion, often ex-convicts, and they assimilated quickly. This applied to Catholic and Protestant orphans alike. How representative were those for whom we have information remains moot. Catholic orphans were a little less likely to be traced and those from Ulster more so, and clearly those with no children are less likely to be represented; but at least we can be confident that the data contain relatively few ‘false positive’ matches.

[Figure 5 about here]

As a policy measure the Earl Grey scheme failed in the sense that objections from colonists brought it to an end in 1850. It attracted hostility because the colonists rather than the Treasury bore the cost of the scheme; because public opinion in the colonies conflated convict and assisted immigration; because a minority of the women misbehaved; and because of anti-Catholic prejudice. There were complaints about the orphans’ truculence and lack of appropriate skills, and some were undoubtedly justified, although adverse publicity surrounding a minority overshadowed the efficiency with which most were settled.⁵⁷ And the size of the inflow cannot have

⁵⁵ Given that very little is known about the six hundred orphans who landed in Adelaide (fifteen per cent of the total), this is an impressive proportion. The average age at first marriage was 19.3 years, the modal age 17.5 years.

⁵⁶ The underlying data are available at: <http://www.irishfaminememorial.org/en/orphans/database/>. In mid-century the life expectancy of 20-year old females in the US or in England and Wales was about forty years.

⁵⁷ In Sydney, 254 indentures out of about 2,200 (about 1 in 9) were cancelled. See *Return of Cases of Orphan Female Apprentices whose Indentures Were Cancelled, by the Court of Petty*

counted for much, as the population of Australia grew from 340,000 in 1847 to 405,000 in 1850 and 1,145,000 in 1860.⁵⁸ In sum, this scheme offers a hint of what might have been achieved by a less restrictive scheme of assisted migration to Australia.

Implications

The Great Irish Famine was the product of an ecological disaster that made the vast population previously dependent on the potato and the land-intensive agriculture that it sustained redundant. Only a much lower population could sustain the wage obtaining before the shock, and that required either excess mortality or permanent migration. The challenge posed was unprecedented. For those who could afford it, emigration was an option, which a million or so availed of during the famine and its immediate wake. Although neither the numbers involved nor the trade-off between death (the next world) and migration (the new world) will ever be known precisely, what is certain is that in the absence of this safety-valve, excess mortality in Ireland and in the United Kingdom as a whole would have been much higher (Ó Gráda and O'Rourke 1997). However, a serious limitation of this form of disaster relief was that the most vulnerable lacked the means to leave and local elites in the worst-hit areas were unable or unwilling to support them.

Publicly funded migration was a viable option, much-discussed at the time. Diverting, say, even half of the £4.5 million spent on wasteful public works in 1846-47 to assisting emigration to the New World and to Australia would have financed the emigration of 0.2 million people and significantly reduced the pressure on local relief. The bureaucratic challenges posed by such a desperate measure would certainly have been considerable—but hardly greater than those posed by organizing, in a short

Sessions, at the Water Police Office [in Sydney]; *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Irish Female Immigration*, 1858, pp. 373-450. Available at: <https://earlgreysfamineorphans.wordpress.com/2015/08/20/earl-greys-irish-famine-orphans-22/>

⁵⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics*, 2006 [available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012006?OpenDocument>].

space of time, the public works and the soup kitchens in a country afflicted by hunger and disease.

There would have been other challenges, not least nativist resentment in receiving countries. An increase of about one-fifth in aggregate long-distance migration from Ireland in 1847-49 would have added to the pressure on labor markets and public health and exacerbated anti-Irish sentiment. Such feeling was strong in any case, and would fuel the rapid growth of the Know-Nothing Party in the U.S. in the mid-1850s. In Massachusetts, in particular, there was strong support for excluding paupers who would become a public charge; less so in New York, where the local Irish community was more powerful. Still, in the late 1840s, not even the most rabid nativists argued for a ban on entry: the surge in support for the Know-Nothings came later. Thus, so while an added influx of Irish would not have been welcome, they would have been admitted.⁵⁹

Exporting such numbers during the famine would also have stretched available shipping capacity; but here the record suggests that supply of potential carriers was elastic.⁶⁰ Immigration from the United Kingdom as a whole to the United States more than doubled between 1847 and 1851 (from 129,000 to 273,000) without any rise in steerage fares westwards: indeed, the modal spot fare from Liverpool fell marginally from £4.1 in 1845-47 to £3.9 in 1848-50 (Killick 2014: 191). In other words, shippers found many more (and bigger) ships over these years in order to accommodate quite a large increase in traffic. It seems doubtful that space could not have found for, say, another 0.2 million steerage passengers over a two- or three-year period.

It is impossible to say how many lives such an emigration might have saved. In a somewhat different context two decades earlier, Malthus had remarked that ‘a removal of a small part of the whole labouring population might effect a very

⁵⁹ In the gubernatorial elections of 1854, the Know Nothing candidate in Massachusetts won 63 per cent of the vote, whereas in New York he won 26 per cent. On nativism and the impact of immigration on living standards see Fogel 1989: 356-62; Anbinder 1992: 87-102; Cohn 2009: 206-8; Hirota 2017.

⁶⁰ The Earl of Lincoln, a supporter of assisted migration, pointed out that ‘sufficient number of ships left this country in ballast for Canada to convey thither 300,000 persons per annum’ (*Southern Reporter*, 5 June 1847).

beneficial change in the condition of the remainder'.⁶¹ Surely the same could be said of the assisted migration of, say, 200,000 of those most at risk at the height of the Great Famine?

The micro-histories of the Earl Grey orphans in Australia and the Lansdowne emigrants in New York attest to the ability of even the most wretched to acculturate and adapt in their different ways. The latter clung to the ghetto and were slow to integrate, whereas the former were more likely to leave the cities behind, and far less likely to marry their own kind. In terms of material progress, the orphans probably had the edge. But both groups support Irish historian Oliver MacDonagh's conjecture that had migration been supported out of the public purse during the Famine 'many thousands more might have been given an opportunity to begin life with hope'.⁶² The constraint on this happening was ideological, not budgetary. They make a broader point about the role of migration as a means of relieving poverty and destitution. Famines in peacetime may be a thing of the past, at least for the time being, but their history has plenty resonances for the present.

⁶¹ In evidence before the select committee on emigration (BPP 1827: 315).

⁶² As cited in Moran 2004: 90.

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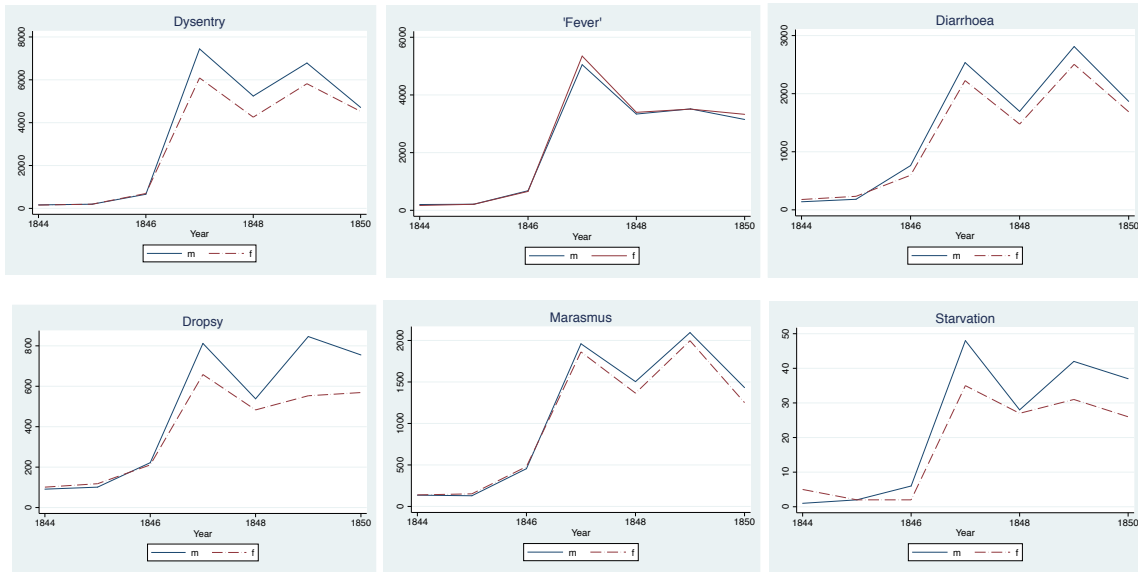


Figure 1. Famine Deaths in Workhouses 1844-1850
Source: BPP 1856

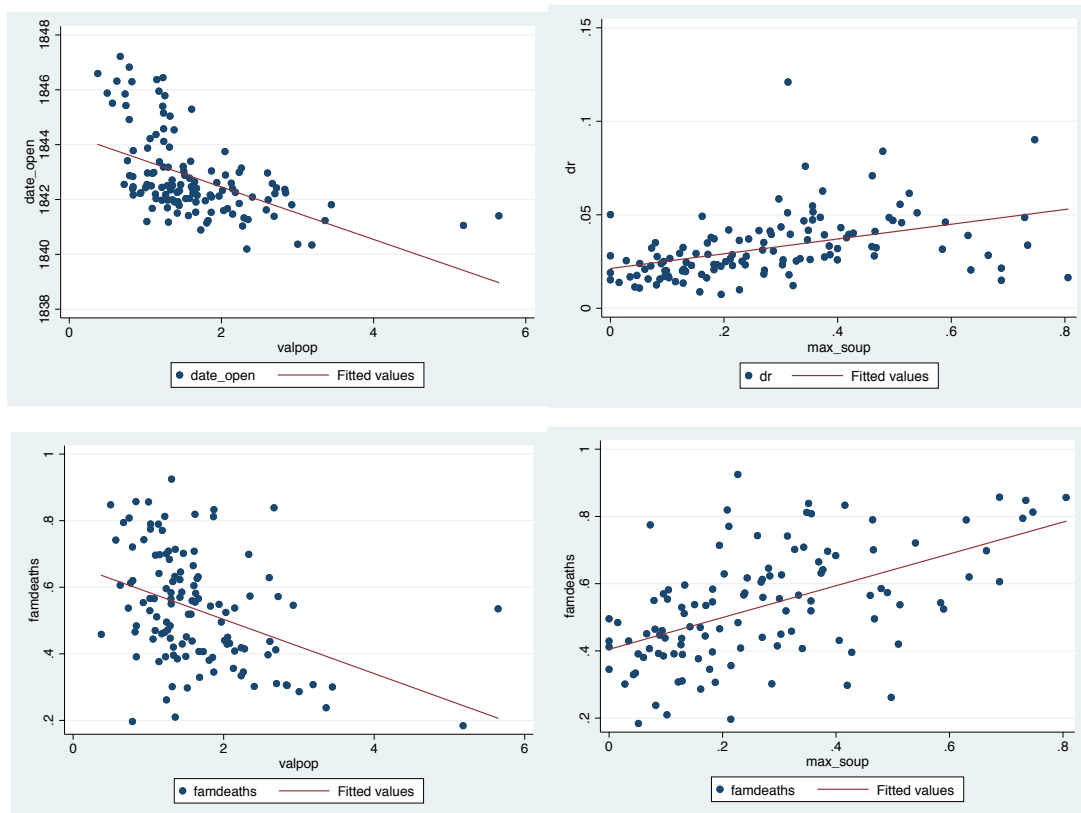


Figure 2. Baseline Poverty and Workhouse Performance
Source: BPP 1856: 82-120

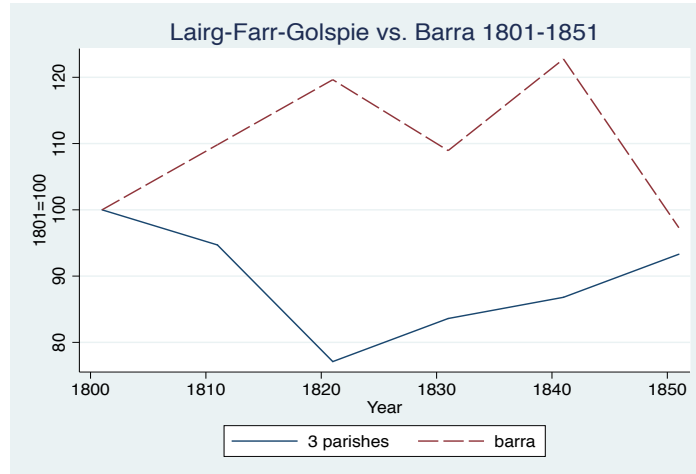


Figure 3. Population Change 1801-1851 in Barra and in Lairg-Farr-Golspie
 Source: derived from Scottish population censuses, 1801 and 1851

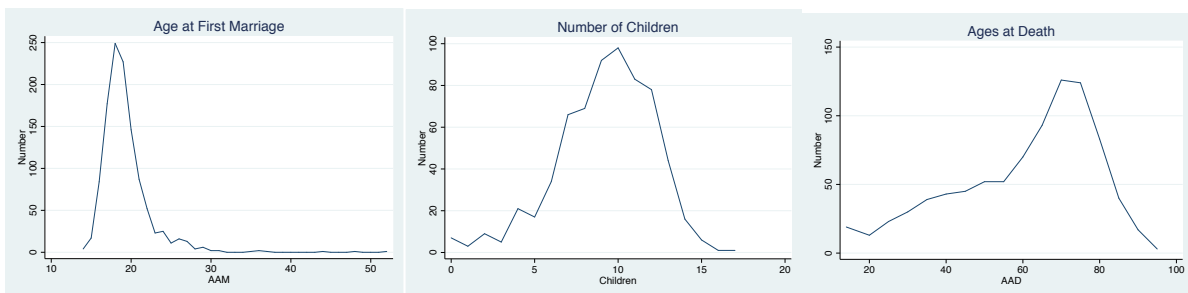


Figure 4. The Earl Grey Orphans: Marriage, Fertility, and Death
 Source: Derived from Australian Irish Famine Memorial database
 [<http://www.irishfaminememorial.org/orphans/database/>]

	<i>Famine deaths</i>	<i>Date open</i>	<i>Rate collection</i>
'Top 5'	Kanturk	Castledearg	Abbeyleix
	Thurles	Lurgan	Dublin North
	Carlow	Lisburn	Limerick
	Newry	Clonmel	Gortin
	Nenagh	Banbridge	Cork
Range	-39 to -23 percentage points	-1.5 to -1.1 years	12.5 to 15.4 [%]
Parsonstown	100	48	102
'Bottom 5'	Tipperary	Glenties	Castlerea
	Manorhamilton	Tuam	Milford
	Abbeyleix	Castlerea	Tuam
	Dunshaughlin	Cahirciveen	Lowtherstown
	Cavan	Clifden	Enniskillen
Range	27 to 39 percentage points	3.6 to 4.5 years	-9 to -11 [%]
Note: 'Famine deaths' are percentage of all deaths due to famine-related causes; 'Rate collection' refers to rates collected to mid-1846 as a proportion of the poor law valuation.			

<i>County</i>	<i>Year</i>			<i>Change [%]</i>	
	<i>c. 1755</i>	<i>1801</i>	<i>1841</i>	<i>1755-1801</i>	<i>1801-41</i>
Argyle	66	81	97	22	20
Inverness	60	73	98	22	34
Ross & Cromarty	48	56	79	17	41
Sutherland	21	23	25	10	9
	<i>1749</i>	<i>1790</i>	<i>1841</i>	<i>1749-1790</i>	<i>1790-1841</i>
Leinster	720	1,180	1,969	64	67
Munster	580	1,200	2,394	107	100
Ulster	570	1,430	2,395	151	68
Connacht	260	610	1,417	135	132
Source: derived from Kyd 1952; Mitchell and Deane 1971; Dickson <i>et al.</i> 1982					

Place	% Illiterate [M1841]	% Illiterate [F1841]	% One-room Housing	Pop. 1841	Pop. 1851	PLV (£) per capita 1841
Kenmare	64.8	71.2	48.6	5,839	7,495	0.62
Kilcaskan	56.7	78.1	69.0	1,379	1,101	0.54
Tuosist	67.9	83.4	72.4	7,495	4,034	0.33
Kerry	52.9	72.4	57.6	295,000	238,254	1.14
Ireland	58.7	69.5	35.1	8.18 m.	6.55 m.	1.60

Sources: Censuses of 1841 and 1851. M1841=Males in 1841; F1841=Females in 1851.

Occupational Category	Irish			Kerry Parishes		
	On arrival	On arrival, matched	1860, matched	On arrival	On arrival, matched	1860, matched
Laborer/ Unskilled	52.6	40.7	38.4	75.2	78.7	70.2
Skilled	26.9	33.7	31.4	9.4	14.9	17.0
Trade	10.2	16.2	17.8	8.1	4.3	12.8
White-collar /Professional	7.2	5.5	7.4	0.7	0.0	0.0
Police/Military	0.3	1.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	2.7	2.8	3.4	1.3	2.1	0.0
Number	3,221	1,250	1,250	149	47	47

Source: EISB database

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