



# COMÓRADH NAÍSIÚNTA AN GHORTA MHÓIR

BAILE NA nGALLÓGLACH, CONTAE DHÚN NA nGALL  
21 BEALTAINÉ 2023

# NATIONAL FAMINE COMMEMORATION

MILFORD, COUNTY DONEGAL  
21 MAY 2023



## RÉAMHRÁ

Is mór an onóir é Comóradh Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir 2023 a réachtáil i mBaile na nGallóglach, Co. Dhún na nGall, an tríú huair a tharla Comóradh an Stáit i gCúige Uladh.

Is deis uathúil e Comoradh Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir don ghlúin reatha ómós a thabhairt don fhulaingt, don bhás agus don anró a d'fhulaing muintir na hÉireann le linn an tréimhse dhorchá sin dár gcuid staire.

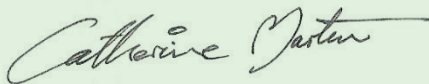
Is cuí go mbeidh an ócáid ar siúl ar shuíomh sheanteach na mbocht i mBaile na nGallóglach, i bhfianaise chora cruá an tsaoil a d'fhulaing muintir Dhún na nGall in aghaidh na bochtaineachta, an ocrais agus na himirce le linn an Ghorta Mhóir agus tar éis.

Chuaigh an imirce a lean an Gorta ar feadh na mblianta i bhfeidhm go háirithe ar mhuintir Dhún na nGall tríd na glúnta. Sa lá atá inniu ann, tugaimid ómós don chaillteanas sin agus muid ag aithint acmhainneacht agus neart an diaspóra seo a d'éirigh go maith lena bpobail nua ar fud na cruinne in ainneoin deacrachtaí suntasacha.

Siombail thar a bheith tochtmhar é reilig theach na mbocht atá fós ar shuíomh an lae inniu den chruatan léanmhar a d'fhulaing muintir Bhaile na nGallóglach agus an cheantair áitiúil. Ba mhínic nach raibh rogha ag go leor daoine i gcrúachás ach dul isteach i dTeach na mBocht, agus cuireann an cuimhneachán atá ar an suíomh seo i gcuimhne dúinn go géar é seo trí thabhairt faoi deara nach n-aithnítear an iliomad corp atá ann. Mar sin féin, léiríú ar dhiongbháilteacht mhuintir Bhaile na nGallóglach agus phobail ar fud na hÉireann é an cuimhneachán seo gan lígean don fhulaingt seo a lígean i ndearmad.

Gabhaim buíochas le gach éinne a chuidigh leis an gcomóradh seo, lena n-áirítear foireann Chomhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall, na ceoltóirí, na léitheoirí, agus na hoibríthe deonacha ar fad a chuir go mór leis an lá seo. Gabhaim buíochas ó chroí freisin le gach duine a bhí i láthair, agus leo siúd go léir a ghlac páirt i gclár imeachtaí pobail áitiúla. Gabhaim buíochas le teaghlach Shéamuis Heaney as úsáid dháin 'At a Potato Digging' a théann go mór i bhfeidhm orainn.

Mar fhocal scoir, ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt d'iarreachtaí iontacha na ndaoine sin a leanann orthu ag obair chun a chinntiú go dtugtar ómós cuí do chuimhne na ndaoine a d'fhulaing mar thoradh ar an nGorta.



**Catherine Martin, T.D.**

An tAire Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Cathaoirleach Choiste Comórtha Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir

*Front Cover image: Milford Workhouse Fever Hospital (Photograph courtesy of Irish Architectural Archive)*

## FOREWORD

It is a great privilege to hold the 2023 National Famine Commemoration in Milford, Co. Donegal, the third time the State Commemoration has taken place in Ulster.

The National Famine Commemoration is a unique opportunity for the current generation to acknowledge the loss, death, and suffering borne by the Irish people during the darkest time of our history.

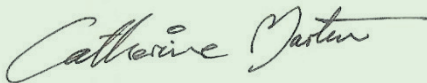
It is appropriate that the event is taking place on the former site of the Milford workhouse, given the adversity endured by the people of Donegal in the face of poverty, hunger and emigration throughout the Great Famine and beyond.

The emigration that followed the famine and continued down the years, has particularly impacted the people of Donegal through the generations. Today, we honour that sense of loss while also acknowledging the resilience and fortitude of this diaspora who thrived in their new communities across the globe despite significant adversity.

The workhouse cemetery that remains on today's site is a particularly poignant symbol of the harrowing misery endured by the people of Milford and the surrounding area. The workhouse was often a last resort for many in unimaginably dire circumstances, and the existing memorial on this site starkly reminds us of this by noting how the many remains contained there are unidentified. However, this marker is itself a testament to the determination of the people of Milford and communities throughout Ireland not to allow this suffering to be forgotten.

I would like to express my appreciation for all those who have contributed to this commemoration, including staff of Donegal County Council, all the musicians, readers, and volunteers who have greatly enriched this day. I also wish to sincerely thank everyone in attendance, and all those who have taken part in the programme of local community events. I would like to particularly thank the family of Seamus Heaney for the use of his evocative poem 'At a Potato Digging'.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of those people who continue to work to ensure that the memory of those who suffered as a result of the Famine are fittingly honoured.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Catherine Martin, T.D.**

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee

Jane Carleton  
 Margt. Lucey  
 Mary M'Gree  
 Mary McGowan  
 Susan Burke  
 Margaret Carbery  
 Biddy Trower  
 Mary McGuire  
 Ellen Feely  
 Jane Carbery  
 Mary Anne Carbery  
 Biddy Smith  
 Sally M'Connell  
 Rose Reil  
 Anne M'Brice  
 Margaret M'Brice  
 Jetty M'Gree  
 Anne Rennie  
 Anne Dolan  
 Mary Dougherty  
 Mary Anne M'Connell  
 Jane McGowan  
 Mary Allingham  
 Sally Lannan  
 Biddy Smith  
 Catherine Birren  
 Anne Muldoon,

The necessary orders having been signed,  
 the Board adjourned.

Wm. M. G. Esq.  
 John Lucey, Secretary, Chairman,  
 John Esq.

List of orphan girls listed for emigration on the Earl Grey scheme, Ballyshannon Board of Guardians Minutes, 29 July 1848 (Donegal County Archives).

## TIONCHAR AN GHORTA MHÓIR I GCONTAE DHÚN NA nGALL

Imeacht tubaisteach a bhí sa Ghorta Mór a tharla idir 1845 agus 1851 a ghoilleann ar Éireannaigh fós sa lá atá inniu ann. I nDún na nGall, maireann an Gorta in intinn an phobail áitiúil, ní féidir lorg an Ghorta ar an gContae a sheachaint, tá an tírdhreach breac le reiligi gorta. Bhí tionchar forleathan ag an nGorta i nDún na nGall, cailleadh daichead míle duine trí bhás agus imirce. Chonacthas na héifeachtaí láithreach bonn. Teaghlaigh feirmeoirí beaga agus oibritheoirí a bhí sa chuid ba mhó de dhaonra an chontae. Mar thionóntaí a mhaireachtáil ar bharr prátaí bliantúla chonaic siad cliseadh a bpobail. Ní raibh an daonra in ann déileáil le teip na mbarr mar gheall ar an mbás agus ar an nganntanas agus ní raibh ach bás den ocra, faoiseamh i dTeach na mBocht nó an imirce i ndán do go leor daoine.

Bhí daonra de bheagnach 300,000 i nDún na nGall ag tús an Ghorta Mhóir, agus bhraith na háiritheoirí go láidir ar a gcuid saothair talmhaíochta féin. Bhí níos mó ban ná fir sa tsochaí seo ina raibh an chuid is mó de na daoine ag cur fúthú faoin tuath, cé go raibh leibhéil litearthachta níos airde ag fir go ginearálta, rud a léiríonn gur minic a coinníodh cailíní sa bhaile. Ar an mórgóir, léiríonn líon na dtithe i ngach ceantar líon na dteaghlach a bhí ina gcónaí sa chontae, cé gur roinn breis agus 2500 teaghlach lena muintir nó fuair siad dídean eile. Ghrádaigh áiritheoirí daonáirimh an réimse tithe in 1841, ó aicme shuibhir a haon go haicme bhocht a ceathair. Sna tithe san aicme bhocht, bhí ballaí láibe, ‘gan ach seomra agus fuinneog amháin iontu’. Bhí an chuid ba mhó de na teaghlaigh sa Chontae ina gcónaí sna tithe beaga dúchasacha seo agus bhí dhá theaghlach, agus fiú trí theaghlach i gceantair áirithe, ina gcónaí sna céadta teachín tríú grád a bhí ní ba mhó. Rinne daoine a thug cuairt ar Dhún na nGall cur síos ar na tithe seo mar “bhotháin gharbha de chlocha scaoilte nó móin” agus de réir mar a chuaigh an Gorta in olcas, cuireadh síos ar na tithe mar “áiteanna cónaithe dorcha, lán le deatach, gan urláir”. Tuairiscíodh go raibh feirmeoirí beaga i Srath an Urláir, a raibh cúpla acra acu, ina gcónaí i “gcróite gránna agus anró orthu...go minic gan fhuinneog ná simléir”. Dúradh go raibh leath de dhaonra Dhún na nGall ag maireachtáil go hiomlán ar a mbarr prátaí sular tháinig an Gorta agus go raibh min choirce mar aon leis ag iad siúd a raibh teacht isteach ní b’fhearr acu. Sular tháinig an Gorta, bhí ganntanas ann cheana féin i míonna an tsamhraidh nuair a idíodh an seanbharr agus bhí an barr nua fós le baint. Mar thoradh air sin nuair a loic ar na prátaí bhí tionchar aige láithreach bonn.

Chomh luath le Nollaig 1846, mhalartaigh agus dhíol feirmeoirí beaga Dhún Fionnachaidh a gcuid muc, éadaí leapa, éanlaithe agus líonta iascaireachta chun bia a cheannach a úsáideadh go tapa. Dúradh gur mhaireachtáil teaghlaigh ar bhéile amháin in aghaidh an lae ina raibh cabáiste nó anraith feamainne agus ní raibh ach brachán lom uisciúil tanáí min choirce in aiste bia daoine eile. Ní raibh tionscadal oibreacha poiblí ar fáil in go leor ceantar mar mhodh chun bia a cheannach. Cuireadh tús le scéimeanna oibreacha poiblí an Rialtais ar bhóithre agus feabhsúcháin in 1846 ach ní raibh na tionscail ar fáil ach anseo agus ansiúd. Bhunaigh carthanais mar Chumann na gCairde agus tiomsaitheoirí airgid Mheiriceá tionscail faoisimh oibre. Cuireadh iasachtaí ar fáil chomh maith, cosúil leo siúd a tugadh do tháirgeoir Ceilpe de chuid an Chlocháin Léith chun fostaíocht a chur ar fáil do na daoine bochta. Theip ar an tionscnamh seo laistigh de bhliain agus in 1847 níor tugadh mórán airgid ar ais. Ní raibh aon seasmhacht ag baint le tacaíocht do thionóntaí ó thiarnaí talún i gcontae Dhún na nGall ar an mórgóir. Ar roinnt eastát de chuid tiarnaí talún a bhí as láthair, in iarthar an Chontae, chonacthas tionóntaí ag fáil bháis den ocra. San Iarthuaisceart, rinne Coiste Faoisimh Chúil Dabhcha gearán sa bhliain 1847 nach raibh mórán uasalaicmí cónaithe ann a bhí in ann “faoiseamh a thabhairt don daonra a bhí ag fáil bháis den ocra agus a bhí ag méadú go laethúil”, fostaíodh 136 duine ar oibreacha poiblí nuair a bhí gá le breis is 2000 post.

Ag tús an Ghorta Mhóir, glacadh le riaráistí cíosa ar eastáit mhóra áirithe, rud nár tharla chomh minic sin faoi 1851-2. Ar eastát Stewart Murray in iardheisceart Dhún na nGall, íocadh cíos 1846 thall is abhus agus bhí céatadán níos airde de na tionóntaí i riaráiste. I bparóistí laistigh de na Cealla Beaga, mar gheall ar an mbrú cíos a íoc agus fiach trom na riaráistí, “theith” roinnt de na tionóntaí agus ‘cailleadh’ na riaráistí. Cailleadh cíosanna freisin nuair a bhí tionóntaí ina “mbochtáin san Aontas” nó trí dhul ar imirce. Bhí teaghlach Kildea, a bhí i riaráiste sa bhliain 1846, fós le feiceáil ar thaifid chíosa 1851-2 agus d’ainneoin fiach, d’éirigh leo a dtionóntacht a choinneáil ar feadh an Ghorta Mhóir. Faoi na 1850idí bhí íocaíochtaí cíosa ní ba sheasta, tá cuntais ar dhíshealbhuithe agus tionóntaí ag leanúint ar aghaidh ag imirce go Meiriceá, ag fágáil na bhfiach ina ndiaidh. Tugann an frása ‘riaráistí a cailleadh’ le tuiscint gur bhreathnaigh an tiarna talún agus an tionónta araon ar an imirce mar rud buan, agus mar éalú ó na cistineacha anraith nó ó thithe na mbocht.

Bhí na tithe oibre mar thoradh ar Acht um Fhóirithint na mBocht 1838 i gceantair ar a tugadh ‘Aontais’. Idir 1843 agus 1846, osclaíodh tithe na mBocht i mBaile Dhún na nGall, sna Gleannta, Srath an Urláir, Dún Fionnachaidh, Inis Eoghain, Leitir Ceanainn, Béal Átha Seanaidh agus Baile na nGallóglach. Le maoiniú ó Ráta na mBocht, thug na hAontais tacaíocht do thithe na mbocht agus de réir mar a chuaigh an Gorta in olcas, fóirithint amuigh faoin aer i bhfoirm cistineacha anraith. Dearadh Tithe na mBocht d’idir 400 agus 600 duine bocht, agus bhí i bhfad ní ba mhó iontu mar gheall ar an easpa bia agus éagumas an daonra béile nó gráin a cheannach. Maidir le hinstitiúidí móra sna Gleannta agus Béal Átha Seanaidh, tuairiscíodh in 1846 go raibh “drochbhail orthu; go deimhin bhí na daoine leathghléasta agus leathmharbh leis an ocraas.”

I dtithe ní ba lú, mar Bhaile na nGallóglach a d’fhéadfadh lóistín a thabhairt do 400 duine bocht, cuireadh brú ar acmhainní freisin agus cuireadh drochbhail ar an áit. Nuair a osclaíodh é sa bhliain 1846 is iad na bianna a ordaíodh do na háititheoirí ná min choirce, arán, prátaí, bainne milis, agus bláthach. Mar sin féin, ní dhearna na daoine bochta aon ghearán ach amháin mar gheall ar an easpa tobac. Faoi 1847 luadh easpa soláthairtí agus gur caitheadh ‘go dona’ le cónaitheoirí i ngearáin ach rinneadh beag is fiú díobh mar “ghearáin gan tábhacht”. De réir mar a chuaigh an Gorta Mór in olcas in 1847, dúradh go raibh Teach na mBocht “míshlachtmhar ar gach bealach” agus go raibh na héadaí a tugadh do na daoine bochta “ag titim as a chéile”. I mí Aibreáin 1847 rinne Bord na gCaomhnóirí machnamh ar dhiúltú do líon níos mó daoine bochta teacht isteach ná mar a tógadh an foirgneamh chun freastsal air. Mar sin féin, faoi mhí Bealtaine thug siad cuntas ar an mbrú a bhí ar Theach na mBocht “ina bhfuil caoga duine níos mó ná an líon a beartaíodh dó ar dtús...”. In dhá ionchoisne básanna i dTeacht na mBocht i mBaile na nGallóglach a reáchtáladh an bhliain sin tugadh fíoras e bás mar gheall ar ghanntanas. Rinne go leor daoine ó cheantar áitiúil Bhaile na nGallóglach iarratas ar fhóirithint lasmuigh mar gheall ar ráigeanna fiabhrais, dinnireachta agus brúitíní, fiú, chomh maith leis an scaradh riachtanach de theaghlach i mbardaí. I mí Aibreáin 1848 bhí líon na ndaoine a ndearnadh fóirithint orthu lasmuigh i mBaile na nGallóglach i bhfad níos airde ná líon na ndaoine a bhí i dTeach na mBocht mar bhí líon na ndaoine ann ní ba lú ná an méid áiteanna a bhí ar fáil ann. D’aithin coimisinéirí Thithe na mBocht an drogall a bhí ar go leor daoine dul isteach i dTeach na mBocht ach rinne siad neamhaird den drochbhail a bhí ar na Tithe, agus dúirt siad gur mhór ‘an náire’ iad na daoine a fuair bás den ocraas seachas dul isteach i dTeach na mBocht. Sa bhliain 1849 rinne Mary Coll iarratas ar phas di féin agus beirt dá ceathrar leanaí chun cuairt a thabhairt ar a teach chun a fháil amach an mbeifí in ann cónaí ann fós. Bhí sí le hathligeran isteach sa chás nach raibh a teach ináitrithe. Bhí tionchar mór ag cailliúint tionóntachta agus tí ar an daonra agus líon na bhfear agus na mban neamhphósta níos sine ná daichead ag méadó ó 1841 go 1851, patrún a leanfadh go maith isteach sa chéad aois eile i gceantair thuaithe agus a mbeadh tionchar aige ar an imirce.

Sular tháinig an Gorta, mheas coimisinéirí Dhlí na mBocht go raibh an imirce inmhianaithe go háirithe do

bhanphríosúnaigh chun dul ar aimsir agus mar mar mhná céile. De réir mar a chuaigh an Gorta in olcas roghnaíodh cailíní dílleachtaí ó Thithe na mBocht do scéimeanna imirce a d'urraigh an Rialtas faoi cheannas Rúnaí Stáit na gCoilíneachtaí, an tIarla Grey. Tháinig Sally Gillon as baile Dhún na nGall go Melbourne ar an Lady Kennaway agus í cúig bliana déag sa bhliain 1848 agus d'oirbh sí mar bhanaltra. Rinne Aontas Dhún na nGall réamhíocaíocht 12 scillinge di as clóca agus bhí siad ag súil go n-aisíocfaí an t-airgead. D'imigh Catherine Baird as Leitir Ceanainn ar an Lady Kennaway freisin agus í ceithre bliana déag agus fostaidh í mar chailín aimsire. Phós sí ina dhiaidh sin maor long i Bendigo sa bhliain 1872 agus tháinig a neacht ó Dhún na nGall chuici sa bhliain 1865. Is minic a chuaigh teaghlaigh iomlána ar imirce, agus bhí rátaí arda báis ar longa imirce mar gheall ar dhrochbhail na n-imirceach agus na long araon. Rinneadh taifead ar imircigh ó Dhún na nGall mar Eliza Farren, Andrew Elliot agus James Johnson a fuair bás in Grosse Ile, Ceanada, agus iad ag fanacht leis an long dul trí choraintín. Chuaigh imircigh eile i longa ar an droch-chaoi chéanna go Meiriceá agus Ceanada cosúil leo siúd ar chuideachta loingseoireachta McCorkell agus J & J Cooke as Doire. Níor éirigh le daoine eile dul níos faide ná an Bhreatain, uaireanta ag malartú teach oibre i nDún na nGall ar cheann i Learpholl agus ag fáil bháis laethanta tar éis dóibh dul isteach ann.

Sa bhliain 1851, de réir mar a thosaigh na barraí prátaí ag téarnamh, chuaigh 4,865 duine ar imirce ó Dhún na nGall. Tugann taití feirmeoirí beaga, cónaitheoirí Thithe na mBocht agus imircigh léargas ar thionchar an Ghorta Mhóir i nDún na nGall. Chuirfeadh cailleadh tí, fiacha cíosa ollmhóra agus ganntanas go leor daoine i dtreo Thithe nuathógtha na mBocht agus leagfaí síos patrún imirce a leanfadh ar aghaidh isteach sa chéad aois eile.

(Aiste leis an Dr Hilary Mc Laughlin-Stonham AFHEA FRHistS)



*Donegal County Museum (formerly part of Letterkenny Workhouse)  
(Photo Credit: Donegal County Museum).*

## THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT FAMINE IN COUNTY DONEGAL

The Great Famine 1845 to 1851 was a catastrophic event that continues to evoke powerful emotions nationally. In Donegal, the famine endures in the local consciousness, its footprint on the county inescapable among the famine graveyards that punctuate the landscape. The impact of the famine was widespread in Donegal with the loss of forty thousand people to death and emigration. The effects were felt immediately. Families of small farmers and labourers comprised the greater portion of the county. As tenants living on yearly potato crops they witnessed the breakdown of their communities. Death and dearth overwhelmed the populations' ability to cope with the crop failure and the stark choice that remained for many was starvation, workhouse relief or emigration.

Donegal entered the famine years with a population of almost 300,000, the inhabitants largely dependent on their own agricultural labour. Women outnumbered men in this predominantly rural society though men tended to have higher literacy levels, an indication that girls were often kept at home. The number of houses in each area, closely reflected the number of families living in the county though over 2500 families either shared with extended family or found alternative shelter. Houses, graded by census enumerators in 1841, ranged from affluent class one to a poor class four, consisting of mud walls, 'having only one room and window. These small vernacular cottages housed the largest portion of families in the county with hundreds of larger, third-class cottages, housing two, and in some areas, three families. Travellers to Donegal described these cottages as "rude huts of loose stone or turf" and as the famine progressed homes were described as "dark, smoky, floorless abodes". It was reported that small farmers in Stranorlar, with a few acres, were living in "miserable hovels in a state of degradation...often without window or chimney". Half of the population of Donegal were described as living entirely off their potato crop prior to the famine with the more comfortable supplementing it with oatmeal. Pre-famine scarcity already existed in the summer months when the old crop was used and the new crop was yet to be harvested. As a result the impact of the potato failure was immediate.

As early as December 1846, small farmers in Dunfanaghy had exchanged or sold their pigs, bedclothes, fowl and fishing nets in order to buy food which was quickly used up. Families were described as living off one meal of cabbage or seaweed soup per day while others substituted their diet with watery thin oatmeal gruel. In many areas no public works projects were available as a means to buy food. Government public works schemes on roads and improvements began in 1846 but were scattered projects. Charities such as the Society of Friends and American fundraisers established work relief projects. Loans were also provided, such as that extended to a Dungloe Kelp manufacturer to provide employment for the destitute. This project failed within the year and in 1847 little of the funds were returned. Throughout Donegal, support for tenants from landlords was inconsistent. On some absentee landlord estates, in the west of the county, tenants were witnessed to be in a state of starvation. In the Northwest, the Culdaff Relief Committee complained in 1847 that there were few resident gentry capable of "affording relief to the numerous, and daily increasing, famishing population", and of the mere 136 people employed on public works when there was need for over 2000.

On some large estates, there was toleration for rent arrears at the beginning of the famine, a concession which would decline by 1851-2. On the Stewart Murray estate in southwest Donegal, the 1846 rental payments were sporadic with a greater proportion of tenants in arrears. In parishes within Killybegs, the pressure to pay rent and the heavy debt of arrears meant that some tenants simply "ran away" with arrears 'lost'. Rents were also 'lost' when tenants became "paupers in the Union" or through emigration. The Kildea family, in arrears in 1846, were still present on the rental records of 1851-2 and despite debt, managed to hold onto their tenancy throughout the famine. By the 1850s rent payments were more constant with noted evictions and tenants continuing to immigrate to America, leaving the debt behind. The phrase 'arrears lost' implies that both



landlord and tenant saw emigration as permanent, and an escape from soup kitchens or the workhouse.

The workhouses were a result of the 1838 Poor Relief Act in districts known as 'Unions'. Between 1843 and 1846, workhouses opened in Donegal Town, Glenties, Stranorlar, Dunfanaghy, Inishowen, Letterkenny, Ballyshannon and Milford. Funded by the poor rate, Unions supported the workhouses and as the famine progressed, outdoor relief in the form of soup kitchens. Designed for between 400 and 600 paupers, they exceeded this as the lack of food and the ability to afford meal or grain overtook the population. In larger institutions at Glenties and Ballyshannon, conditions in 1846 were reported as being in "a dreadful state; the people were in fact half-starved and only half clothed."

Workhouses with less capacity, such as Milford which could house 400 paupers, also saw resources stretched and conditions deteriorate. When it opened in 1846 the only foods ordered for the inmates were oatmeal, bread, potatoes, sweet milk, and buttermilk. However, there were no complaints from paupers except for the lack of tobacco. By 1847 grievances by inmates included a lack of provisions and 'bad' treatment but were dismissed as "trivial complaints". As famine conditions heightened in 1847, the workhouse was described as in "a slovenly condition in every department" with the clothing supplied to paupers "in a dilapidated condition". In April 1847 the Board of Guardians considered refusing admission to more paupers than the building was constructed to accommodate. However, by May they outlined the pressure on the workhouse "which now contains fifty over what it was originally intended for...". Two inquests held that year into deaths at Milford workhouse found a verdict of death from want. Outbreaks of fever, dysentery and even measles alongside the required separation of families in wards, meant that many from the local Milford area applied for outdoor relief. In April 1848 those relieved outdoors in Milford far exceeded those in the workhouse where numbers stayed below capacity. Workhouse commissioners recognised the reluctance of many to enter the workhouse but ignored the conditions of entry, arguing that the actions of those who starved rather than enter the workhouse was to be 'deplored.' In 1849 Mary Coll applied for a pass for herself and two of her four children to visit her house and determine if her home was still viable. She was to be readmitted if her house was uninhabitable. The loss of tenancy and home would have a profound effect on the population with the number of unmarried men and women aged above forty increasing from 1841 to 1851, a pattern that would continue well into the next century in rural areas and influence emigration.

Pre-famine Poor law commissioners saw emigration as desirable especially for female inmates for domestic labour and as wives. As the famine progressed orphaned girls from the workhouses were selected for government sponsored emigration schemes led by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey. Fifteen-year-old Sally Gillon from Donegal town arrived in Melbourne on the Lady Kennaway in 1848 and worked as a nursemaid. The Donegal Union had advanced her 12 shillings for a cloak which they expected to be reimbursed for. Fourteen-year-old Catherine Baird from Letterkenny also sailed on the Lady Kennaway and was employed as a house servant. She later married a ships steward in Bendigo in 1872 and was joined by her niece from Donegal in 1865. Often whole families emigrated, and mortality was high on emigration ships due to the poor condition of both emigrants and the ships. Donegal emigrants Eliza Farren, Andrew Elliot and James Johnson are recorded as dying at Grosse Ile, Canada, while waiting for the ship to pass quarantine. Other emigrants were shipped in similar conditions to America and Canada such as those on the *McCorkell* and *J & J Cooke* shipping lines from Derry. Others did not make it beyond Britain, at times exchanging a Donegal workhouse for one at Liverpool and dying within days of being admitted.

In 1851, as the potato crops began to recover, 4,865 people emigrated from Donegal. The experiences of small farmers, workhouse residents and emigrants provide a synopsis of the impact of the famine in Donegal. The loss of home, overwhelming rental debt and dearth would drive many to the newly constructed workhouses and set a pattern of emigration that would continue into the next century.

(Essay by Dr Hilary Mc Laughlin-Stonham AFHEA FRHistS)

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## AT A POTATO DIGGING, BY SEAMUS HEANEY

*Reprinted by kind permission of Faber & Faber Ltd. and of the Heaney family.*

*From the collection, Death of a Naturalist, by Seamus Heaney. Published by Faber & Faber, 1966.*

I.

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,  
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.  
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill  
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch  
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;  
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch  
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand

Tall for a moment but soon stumble back  
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.  
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black  
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf

Rekurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries  
Of fear and homage to the famine god  
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,  
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II.

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered  
like inflated pebbles. Native  
to the black hutch of clay  
where the halved seed shot and clotted  
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem  
the petrified hearts of drills. Split  
by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.  
The rough bark of humus erupts  
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)  
whose solid feel, whose wet inside  
promises taste of ground and root.  
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III.

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on  
wild higgledy skeletons  
scoured the land in 'forty-five,  
wolfed the blighted root and died.

The new potato, sound as stone,  
putrefied when it had lain  
three days in the long clay pit.  
Millions rotted along with it.

Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,  
faces chilled to a plucked bird.  
In a million wicker huts  
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,  
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,  
were grafted with a great sorrow.  
Hope rotted like a marrow.

Stinking potatoes fouled the land,  
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:  
and where potato diggers are  
you still smell the running sore.

IV.

Under a gay flotilla of gulls  
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.  
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls  
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill  
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;  
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill  
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

## DÚN DO SHÚIL. AIR, TRADITIONAL

*Also known as The Famine Lullaby, the air Dún do Shúil ( lit. 'Close your Eyes' ) is sung by a mother attempting to sooth her hungry child to sleep, by promising her that her father will return in the morning with fish and with wild fowl.*

Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
A chuid den tsaol, 's a ghrá liom  
Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
Agus gheobhair feirín amárach

Tá do dheaid ag teacht gan mhoill ón chnoc  
Agus cearca fraoich ar láimh leis  
Agus codlaidh go ciúin 'do luí sa choid  
Agus gheobhair feirín amárach

Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
A chuid den tsaol, 's a ghrá liom  
Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
Agus gheobhair feirín amárach

Tá an samhradh ag teacht le grian is le teas  
Agus duilliúr ghlas ar phrátaí  
Tá an ghaoth ag teacht go fial aneas  
Agus gheobhaimid iasc amárach

Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
A chuid den tsaol, 's a ghrá liom  
Dún do shúil, a rún mo chroí  
Agus gheobhair feirín amárach

Recorded by Altan on their album Local Ground (2005) and on Altan's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration recording with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra (2009).

## EXTRACTS FROM 1930s NATIONAL SCHOOLS' FOLKLORE COLLECTION

Courtesy of National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin

### **Edward Toland, Doagh Island:**

“The Famine began in 1846 owing to the failure of the potato crop. The blight attacked the potato stalks in July of that year and in one night they were all gone . . . The year ‘46 was called ‘Bliadhain na-Sgeegen’ – the year of small potatoes, for only small potatoes were dug up in that year. The majority of the people had no seed in ‘47. The people tried to live by eating docks, nettles, prasuga and other herbs. . . The folk of this locality, the Isle of Doagh, were fishermen and God sent great numbers of fish in the sea and the men pursued their calling which saved a few from starvation but great numbers died by the mountain sides. As time went on things looked black. People perished by the ditches and were never buried. Coffins were made with false bottoms which dropped the dead in the graves and were then taken back for more dead. During this awful time the powers looked on and did nothing amidst death and desertion. Corn in great quantities was shipped abroad which should have been held up for the people.”

### **Proinnsias Mac an tSaoir, Baile Mhíchíl:**

“Fuair cuid mhór daoine bás ins an cheanntar seo mar gheall ar an aicid a tháinig ar na préataí. Bhíodh siad ag fághail bháis cois an bhealaigh mhóir agus na daoine a bhí beo bhí siad comh lag sin nach dtiocfaidh leo na corpanna a iomchar ‘un na h-uaighe. Ní raibh bia ar bith le n-ithe aca acht turnapaí agus cáil. Na daoine a bhí rud beag airgid dá ba mhian leo rud beag mine a fhághail chaithfeadh siad a dhul fiche míle le múille agus dhíolfadh siad naoi bpighinn ar an punt.”

### **Domhnall Ó Fríghil, Baile Úr, Baile Mhíchíl:**

“Luigh an droch shaoghal go trom ar an ceanntair seo. Fuair cuid mhór bás le ocra. Lá amháin tháinig fear isteach go teach Shéain Uí Congaile agus bhí ocra mhór air, thug bean Sheáin brachán dó agus d’ith sé é agus thug sí tuilleadh dó agus d’ith sé é agus nuair a bhí sé iththe aige fuair sé bás. Fuair eadh bean agus cailín beag ina luighe marbh shuas i n-áit dár ainm Gleann shuas i bPort an t-Salainn.”

### **Grace McDaid, Ballyharry:**

“Many people died on account of the famine and were put in boxes and buried everywhere. In a field in Ballyharry there is a little hill and there is supposed to be many coffins buried there. A lot of sickness followed the famine. The people did not get over it for years. They lost all courage and it is said that they never could tell a story as well afterwards. . . . The people were in a bad state. In order to keep themselves living, the people bled cattle and drank the blood. One beast was bled three times in three months. The blood was mixed with a little meal and cooked. . . . It is said that one coffin did fifty persons. A person was carried on a coffin and thrown into a grave, then the next person was carried in the coffin to the same grave. In this way about fifty persons were buried in one grave.”

**Student in Carricknahorna School, Ballyshannon:**

“In the year 1846 ... the people died and starved on the roadside. The blight came on the potatoes on the night of the 12th July 1846. On that day a man in this district, named James Walsh was weeding his potatoes in a garden and when he would stand up the potato tops were as high as his waist. The next day when this man came out to continue his work the rich tops were lying rotting. When the potatoes all rotted and the corn and all the crops were lost people went out to the roads and sat on the ditches to die of hunger. . . . Some people were not able to pay the rent and the landlords threw them out of their houses and they died on the roadside.”

**Séamus Ó Brógáin, Míin Doire:**

“An Droch Shaoghal Ghoill an droch shaoghal go mór ar mhuintir na h-áite seo. Bhí an chuid is mó aca agus ní rabh a dhách acu le h-íthe. San am sin bhí i bhfad níos mó daoine sa cheantair seo nó mar atá ann anois. Fuair cuid acu bás leis an ocras agus d’imthigh an chuid eile go h-America ar imirce. Fhad agus a mhair an droch-shaoghal mheith bárr na bpréataí. Mo bhrón tháinig an aicid ortha agus mheith siad dó réir cionn agus cionn. An mhéid des na préataí a bhí sadhbháilte lóbhaidh siad ins na poill, agus ní rabh rompa ach an t-anás. . . . Bhí teach fá choinne na boicht i nDún-Feannachaidh agus cuireadh an chuid a ba bhoichte díobh isteach annseo.”

**Nóra T. Nic Amhlaidh, An Lairigean Mór, Fionn Trá:**

“Luigh an droch shaoghal go h-an-trom ar mo cheantar. Fuair cuid de na daoine bás le h-ocras agus cuid eile bás le tinneas agus anródh. Bhí na mná amuigh ag obair ar na bealaigh móra agus ag briseadh na geloch. Bhí fear amháin agus b’éigean do oibriughadh an lá a bhí a mháthair faoi chlár. Bhí i bhfad níos mó daoine ann an uair sin nó mar atá anois. Bhí gach teach lán, ach chuaidh siad ina scórthaí ‘un Oileáin Úir.’”

Classes	House Diet		
	Breakfast	Dinner	Total per day
Men Women & Children above 9 yrs	Meal 8 oz. B. Milk 2 Pint	Indian Meal 8 oz. Buttermilk 2 Pint	Meal 16 oz. Buttermilk 1 Pint
Children under 9 years	Oatmeal 4 oz. Buttermilk 2 Pint	Indian Meal 4 oz. Buttermilk 2 Pint	Meal 8 oz. Buttermilk 1 Pint
Infants under 2 years			Bread 2 lb. Swimilk 2 Pint

Revised diet for Inishowen workhouse residents, Inishowen Board of Guardians Minutes, 1 December 1846 (Donegal County Archives). The diet includes for men, women and children over the age of 9, children under the age of 9 and above 2 years and for infants under two. The main diet for all inmates consists of oatmeal, buttermilk and Indian meal.

COMÓRADH NÁISIÚNTA AN GHORTA MHÓIR  
BAILE NA nGALLÓGLACH, CO. DHÚN NA nGALL  
21 BEALTAINÉ 2023

RÉAMH – IMEACHTAÍ:

- 13:15** Ceol le Banna an 2ú Briogáid
- 13:30** Mórshiúl Gharda Onóra
- 13:50** Teacht i láthair Chathaoirleach Chomhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall, Comhairleoir Liam Blaney
- Teacht i láthair Jack Chambers T.D., An tAire Stáit ag an Roinn Iompair; agus an Roinn Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
- 14:00** Teacht i láthair Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheál D. Ó hUiginn
- Cigireacht ar Gharda Onóra, an 28ú Cathlán Coisithe

TÚS AN tSEARMANAIS:

- 14:05** Aitheasc Fáiltithe Jack Chambers T.D., An tAire Stáit ag an Roinn Iompair; agus an Roinn Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
- Aitheasc Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheál D. Ó hUiginn
- Ceol: *Noreen Bawn* le Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh
- Léamh: Rogha scéalta faoin nGorta Mór ó Bhailiúchán na Scol sna 1930idí á léamh ag Eithne Ní Ghallochbhair
- Amhrán: *Dún Do Shúil* le Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh, le tionlacan ó Steve Cooney, Giotar
- Dán: *At a Potato Digging* le Seamus Heaney.
- Á léamh ag Conaill Byrne agus Aoibheann Shields ó Choláiste na Maoile Rua, Baile na nGallóglach, agus Eilish Russell agus David Kennedy ó Phobalscoil Loreto, Baile na nGallóglach.
- Paidreacha ar son Íospartaigh an Ghorta, faoi cheannas Shéiplíneach Óglaigh na hÉireann, an tAthair Jerry Carroll



15:00

Tús chomóradh foirmiúil an Stáit

Nochtadh chloch comórtha agus plandáil chrann darach ag Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheál D. Ó hUiginn, le cúnaimh ó Alessandra Serra ó Scoil Náisiúnta Ayr Hill agus Nathan King ó Scoil Náisiúnta an Chraoslaigh

Searmanas leagan bláthfhleisce

Nóiméad ciúnais dóibh siúd go léir a fuair bás

Piper's Lament

An Ghairm Dheiridh

Ardú bhrtach na hÉireann

Reveille

An tAmhrán Náisiúnta

15:15

Deireadh an tsearmanais

Ceol: Rogha amhráin sciobóil, sleamhnán agus válsaí a sheinntear go coitianta ag tórraimh Mheiriceánacha agus damhsaí tí i nDún na nGall agus a bhaineann le fídléireacht Jim Doherty, as Lag na hÚraí, Cill Mhic Réanáin (1937 – 2012), *Jim McFadden's Barndance*, *John McGee's Slide*, *Pull Down the Blind (Válsa)*, *The Marine (Port)*, le Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh

### **Seo a leanas ceoltóirí Chomhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh:**

Anne Ferry, Fídl

Kathleen Crerand, Fídl

Martin McGinley, Fídl

Patrick McBride, Bosca Ceoil

Mick Denieffe, Bosca Ceoil

Gráinne Friel, Bosca Ceoil

Kevin Gallagher, Bosca Ceoil

Oisín Sweeney, Bosca Ceoil

John McFadden, Banjo

Geraldine McCluskey, Feadó, Fliút

NATIONAL FAMINE COMMEMORATION  
MILFORD, CO. DONEGAL  
21 MAY 2023

PRELUDE :

- 13:15 Performance by Band 2 Brigade
- 13:30 Guard of Honour march on Parade
- 13:50 Arrival of Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, Councillor Liam Blaney  
Arrival of Jack Chambers T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Transport; and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
- 14:00 Arrival of the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins  
Inspection of the 28th Infantry Battalion Guard of Honour

CEREMONY BEGINS :

- 14:05 Welcome Address by Jack Chambers T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Transport; and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications  
Address by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins  
Music: *Noreen Bawn*, performed by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh  
Reading: A selection of local Famine stories from the 1930s Schools' Folklore Collection, read by Eithne Ní Ghallchobhair  
Song: *Dún Do Shúil*, performed by Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh, accompanied by Steve Cooney, Guitar  
Poem: *At a Potato Digging*, by Seamus Heaney.  
Read by Conaill Byrne and Aoibheann Shields from Mulroy College, Milford, and Eilish Russell and David Kennedy from Loreto Community School, Milford  
Prayers for the Victims of the Famine, led by Chaplain to the Defence Forces, Fr. Jerry Carroll

15:00

Commencement of the formal State commemoration

Unveiling of commemorative stone and planting of Common Oak tree by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, assisted by Alessandra Serra from Ayr Hill NS and Nathan King from Creeslough NS

Wreath laying ceremony

Minute of silence observed for all those who died

Piper's Lament

Last Post

National Flag raised to full mast

Reveille

National Anthem

15:15

Ceremony concludes

Music: A selection of barndances, slides and waltzes commonly played at American wakes and house dances in Donegal and associated with the fiddle playing of Jim Doherty, of Legnahooey, Kilmacrennan (1937 – 2012), *Jim McFadden's Barndance*, *John McGee's Slide*, *Pull Down the Blind (Waltz)*, *The Marine (Jig)*, performed by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh

**Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Maoil Ruaidh musicians are:**

Anne Ferry, Fiddle

Kathleen Crerand, Fiddle

Martin McGinley, Fiddle

Patrick McBride, Button Accordion

Mick Denieffe, Button Accordion

Gráinne Friel, Button Accordion

Kevin Gallagher, Button Accordion

Oisín Sweeney, Button Accordion

John McFadden, Banjo

Geraldine McCluskey, Whistle, Flute

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A letter from the Poor Law Commissioners, was read out dated 9 March, 1847. No. 5753, 547, relative to the erection of temporary Fever wards, together with <sup>plans of the same and</sup> the Architect's reports of the 20 and 22<sup>nd</sup> Decr. 1845.

Ordered, that the consideration of the form of advertisement inviting persons to tender for the erection of temporary Fever wards at the Workhouse, be postponed until next day of meeting.

Ordered - that for the present, no pauper be allowed a temporary leave of absence from the Workhouse as the Guardians apprehend that fever may be introduced in the Workhouse by permitting paupers to visit their relatives, when Fever and other contagious diseases are so prevalent in the country.

Extract from minutes of a meeting of the Milford Board of Guardians held on 15 March 1847. The Guardians decided to refuse to allow inmates of the workhouse to leave the workhouse temporarily due to the presence of fever in the wider community. The minutes include a decision regarding tendering of the construction of temporary fever wards.



**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council



**OPW**

Oifig na  
nOibreacha Poiblí  
Office of Public Works



**An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán**  
Department of Tourism, Culture,  
Arts, Gaelacht, Sport and Media