

The Workhouses of County Donegal

Locations of the Donegal Workhouses



■ Introduction

Throughout 2022, the Culture Division of Donegal County Council commemorated the events of the Decade of Centenaries. Donegal County Museum in association with the County Archives Service have created this booklet using the Workhouse records held in the Donegal County Archives Service and various other sources.

The Workhouse is synonymous with the purported social care system that existed in Ireland prior to Independence, but its role in society has often been overlooked or misunderstood. In this booklet we explore the early years of the Donegal Workhouses and examine the final years of the Poor Law system. The Donegal Workhouses records are a truly invaluable source for the study of the local, family and academic history of Ireland, from the era of the Great Famine through to the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

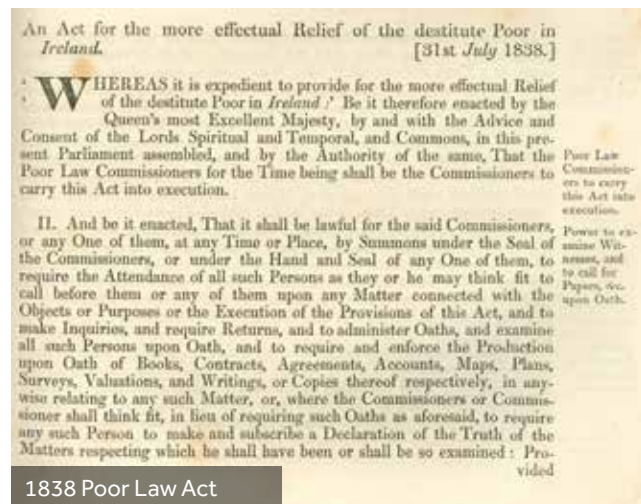
The archives tell the human stories of those families and individuals – our ancestors- who spent time in the workhouse due to desperate poverty or homelessness. The minutes and admission and discharge registers shine a spotlight into the lives of the poorest of the poor and those who were entrusted with assisting them, the masters, matrons, nurses, porters, attendants, teachers etc; the tradespeople who supplied the workhouses; and the rate collectors who were charged with collecting the tax that funded them.

The Workhouses were in Carndonagh, Glenties, Ballyshannon, Donegal, Milford, Letterkenny, Stranorlar and Dunfanaghy. The oldest register is from Inishowen and covers the whole period of the Famine. There are over 900 records in total.

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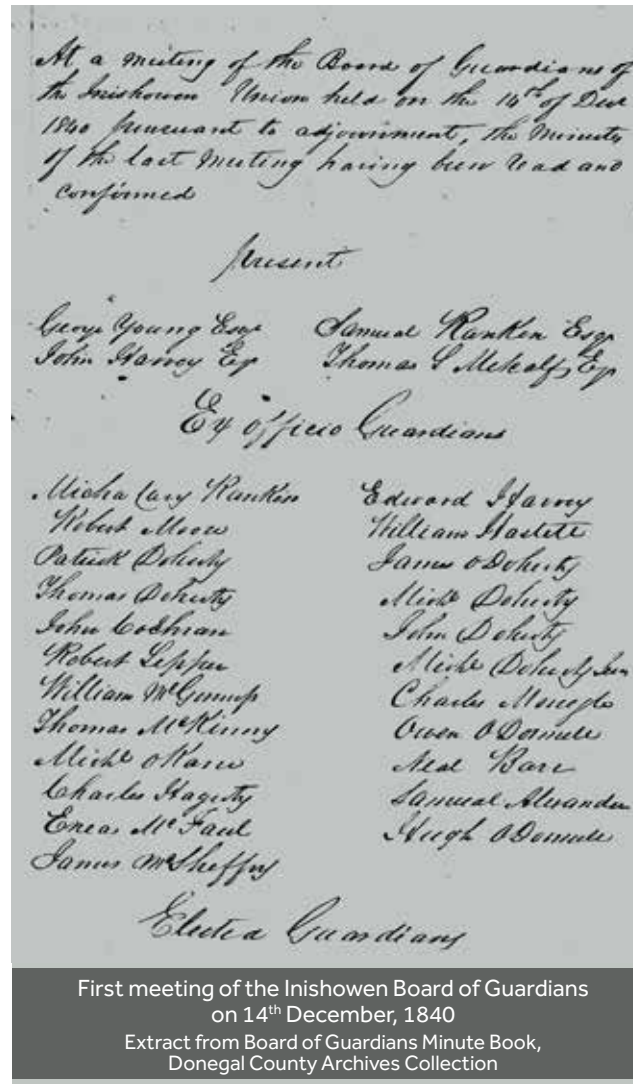
Workhouses of County Donegal

In the 18th and early 19th Century, assistance to the poorest of the poor in Ireland had generally been delivered through charitable institutions and the 'Houses of Industry' under the Grand Juries. In July 1838 the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act, an 'Act for the More Effectual Relief of the Destitute Poor in Ireland' was introduced.



1838 Poor Law Act

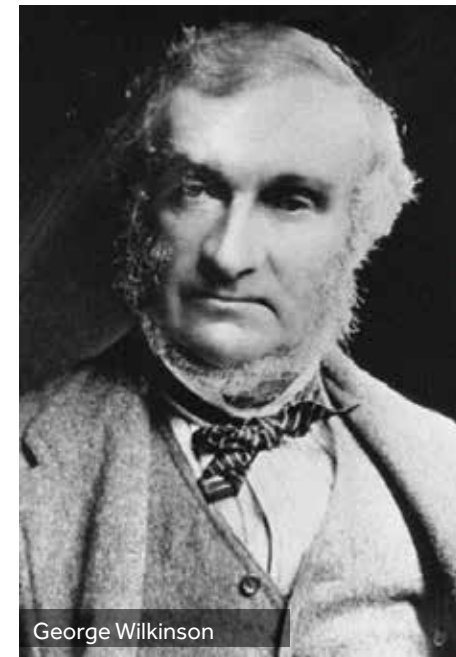
Under this legislation, Ireland was divided into 137 Poor Law Unions. These Unions were controlled centrally from Dublin by the Poor Law Commissioners until 1872 when the Local Government Board was established. Each Union was run by a Board of Guardians whose duty was to oversee the running of each Workhouse. The Local Government Board was formally replaced by the Department of Local Government and Public Health under the Irish Free State in 1924.



First meeting of the Inishowen Board of Guardians on 14th December, 1840

Extract from Board of Guardians Minute Book, Donegal County Archives Collection

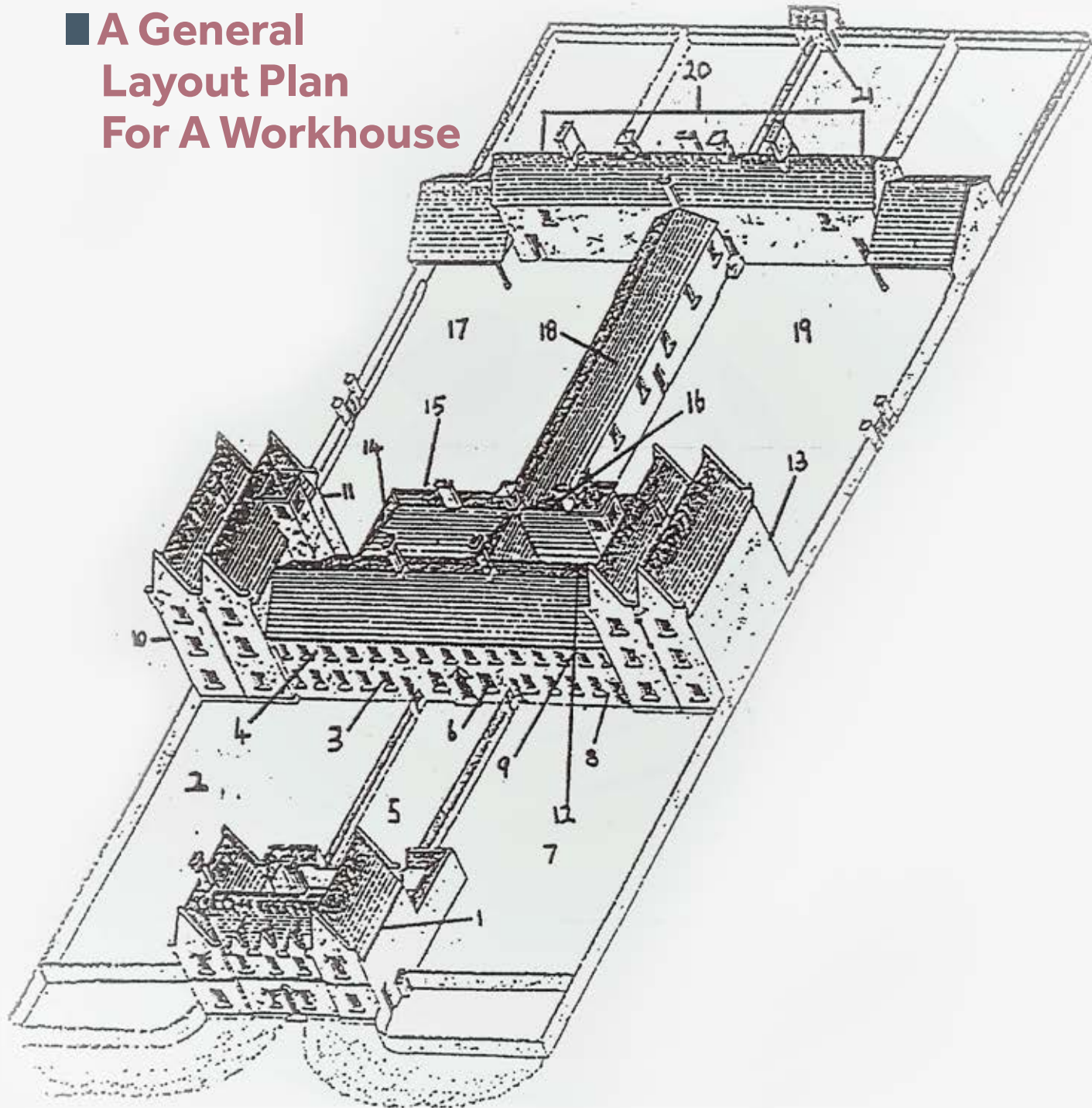
In January 1839, George Wilkinson was appointed the Commissioners' architect in Ireland, responsible for the design and erection of all 130 Irish Workhouses.



George Wilkinson

His brief from the Poor Law Commissioners stated that, 'The style of building is intended to be of the cheapest description compatible with durability; and effect is aimed at by harmony of proportion and simplicity of arrangement, all mere decoration being studiously excluded.' Financing the construction of the workhouses was the responsibility of local Boards of Guardians, so variations in materials used and designs occurred, depending on the available funding. Each workhouse had three blocks – Admissions, Main Building and Back Block. In Donegal there were 8 Unions, and a Workhouse for each - Ballyshannon, Donegal, Dunfanaghy, Glenties, Inishowen (Carndonagh), Letterkenny, Milford and Stranorlar.

■ A General Layout Plan For A Workhouse



1. **Admissions Block**
Any applicants for relief came to be admitted at the front door. The Board of Guardians who ran the Union, held their meetings here in the Boardroom. They met once a week and the Clerk of the Union had his office here. Here were the accommodation quarters for temporary inmates, e.g. beggars who were seeking accommodation for one night only. It was also where the new inmates were kept until they had been examined to ensure that they had no infectious diseases.
2. Girls Yard
3. Girls school room
4. Girls dormitory
5. Master's Garden
6. Master's Quarters
7. Boys yard
8. Boys school yard
9. Boys dormitory
10. These three-storey blocks housed the elderly inmates
11. Women's dormitory
12. Men's dormitory
13. These three-story blocks housed the elderly inmates
14. Able bodied day room
15. Laundry and washroom
16. The kitchen, scullery, work rooms, laundry, drying rooms, and nursery occupied the middle floor to the rear
17. Yard for women
18. The dining hall was originally partitioned to ensure that the segregation of the different groups was maintained. The chapel was in the long narrow row of rooms
19. Yard for men
20. Back block which housed the surgery, infirmary, nurses' room, and the cells, for those described at that time as idiots, epileptics and lunatics.
21. The Mortuary



A rare photograph taken inside a Workhouse in Ireland - location unknown, 1890's
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Under the Poor Law Act it was lawful for the Boards to punish 'refractory' paupers for offences laid down, such as refusing to be lodged and maintained in the workhouse, absconding from a workhouse (and thereby abandoning family being relieved in the workhouse), for drunkenness, insubordination to the Officers of the Union, for disobedience of the rules prescribed or sanctioned by the Commissioners, and for misbehaviour such as 'attempting to introduce spirituous or fermented liquors into any workhouse'. Smoking was also forbidden in the early years but by the 1890's tobacco was purchased for the inmates. Punishments inflicted by the Master and the Board included sending people to the Refractory ward. For more serious offences inmates were summoned to the Petty Sessions and in some cases jailed. Punishments for children included being slapped with a rod.

The upkeep of inmates in the workhouse was paid for by the Poor Rate and covered their food, bedding, clothing and medicine. When the workhouses opened the only foods ordered for the inmates were oatmeal, bread, potatoes, sweetmilk and buttermilk. The average cost of maintaining an inmate in 1846 was 1s 9d. The cost of maintaining a person in the Fever Hospital or the Infirmary was a few shillings more expensive due to the cost of medicines and the nurse's wages.

Article 36.—Any pauper who shall neglect to observe such of the regulations herein contained as are applicable to and binding on him;

Or who shall make any noise when silence is ordered to be kept;

Or who shall use obscene or profane language;

Or shall by word or deed insult or revile any person;

Or shall threaten to strike or to assault any person;

Or shall not duly cleanse his person;

Or shall refuse or neglect to work, after having been required to do so;

Or shall pretend sickness;

Or shall play at cards or other game of chance;

Or shall enter, or attempt to enter, without permission, the ward or yard appropriated to any class of paupers, other than that to which he belongs;

Or shall misbehave at public worship, or at prayers;

Or shall not return after the appointed time of absence, when allowed to quit the workhouse temporarily;

Or shall wilfully disobey any lawful order of any officer of the Workhouse; shall be deemed Disorderly.

Article 37.—Any pauper who shall, within seven days, repeat any one or commit more than one of the offences specified in Article 36, or who shall by word or deed insult or revile the master or matron, or any other officer of the workhouse, or any of the guardians;

Or shall wilfully disobey any lawful order of the master or matron after such order shall have been repeated;

Or shall attempt to introduce any fermented or spirituous liquors or tobacco, without lawful authority;

Or shall unlawfully strike or otherwise unlawfully assault any person;

Or shall wilfully or mischievously damage or soil any property whatsoever belonging to the guardians;

Or shall wilfully waste or spoil any provisions, stock, tools, or materials for work, belonging to the guardians;

Or shall be drunk;

Or shall commit any act of indecency;

Or shall wilfully disturb the other inmates during prayers or divine worship;

Or shall climb over any wall or fence, or attempt to quit the workhouse premises in any irregular mode;

Or shall attempt to convey out of the Workhouse any clothes or other articles belonging to the Board of Guardians;

shall be deemed Refractory.

■ After the Famine

The Boards were given authority over other local matters as the years passed. They ran the medical relief system created under the Medical Charities Act of 1851. This empowered Guardians to divide their Unions into Dispensary Districts, which provided dispensaries in various locations and enabled the ill poor to attend doctors at these locations.

In 1878 they became rural sanitary authorities under the Public Health (Ireland) Act, dealing with such matters as water supply, sewage, and housing. The 1898 Local Government (Ireland) Act set up County Councils as well as Rural District Councils and these took over some of the above functions.

In the last two decades of the 19th century, life in the workhouse did get a little easier. Visiting Committees were set up to oversee the running of the workhouses and to monitor treatment of inmates. One gradual but vital change was that the diet improved and became more varied. By 1899 eggs, tea, rice and meat had been added and in the 1900's butter, fish, jam and sugar were also included. There were also special diets for the sick in the Infirmary. As the variety of rations given increased, so did the cost of maintaining an inmate - this cost rose slowly and by 1899 it was 2s 9d. Between 1899 and 1921 the cost increased dramatically to 11s per person.

As the 19th century progressed, overcrowding ceased as living standards rose very slowly. Life also became a bit easier for children who were allowed some leisure activities. Work was not as hard, and people did not tend to stay as long in the Workhouse.

LETTERKENNY
UNION

THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS of the above Union desire to Contract for a Supply of the following Articles for a period of **TWELVE MONTHS**, from the 29th Inst., reserving to themselves the option of Contracting for any of said Articles for a shorter period, as they may see fit. The Contractor, in each case, to deliver the Articles at the Workhouse, free of all expense, and according to Order:—

Brown Bread (best Wheaten Meal), per lb. in 2 lb. Cakes.	Drugget, per yard.
White Bread (best), in 2lb. and 4 lb. Loaves, per lb.	Portlaw, Blue and Brown, per yard.
Butter (best quality), per lb.	Winceys per yard.
Beef (with bone), best do.	Shrouding, do.
Beef (without bone), best per lb.	Women's Handkerchiefs.
Bones of same per lb.	Bengal Strip, per yard.
Ox Heads (each), weighing on an average 14 lbs	Sheeting, per yard.
Oatmeal, of best quality, per 112 lbs.	Wollen Yarn, per lb.
Indian Meal (Yellow), do.	Bed Tick.
Barley and Peas (Split), do.	Gray Frieze, per yard
Salt, per do.	Flannel, do. Home Manufacture
Eggs, per dozen.	Calico and Shirting, per yard.
Black Pepper, per lb.	Corduroy, per yard.
Tea, at 2s 4d. do.	Linen Unbleached, per yard
Sugar (Brown), do.	Men's Caps, of 3 sizes.
Tobacco, do.	Boys' do
Whiskey, per quart.	Men's Twill Mufflers.
Sherry Wine, per bottle.	Men's Suspenders.
Soap (White) best quality, per 112 lbs.	Boys' do.
Washing Soda, do.	Thread, Black and Brown, per lb.
Candles (dript), best, per dozen.	Cocoa-nut Matting, per yard.
Whitewash Brushes, best do.	Thimbles, per dozen.
Black Lead Brushes, do.	Combs, Fine.
Bass Brooms, No. 5, do.	Coarse
Sweeping Brushes, No. 8, do.	Studs (bone), per gross.
Coffins, with Slip Covers, per	Needles, per gross.
Blankets, per lb.	Tape, wide and narrow, per bolt.
Rugs.	Men's Shoes, per pair.
	Women's Shoes, do.
	Boys' Shoes, do.
	Girls' Shoes, do.

OATEN STRAW, PER TON.

Samples of various Articles, bearing the Seal of the Union, to be seen at the Workhouse, on application to the Master. The Article in each case must be in quality fully equal to the Sample, and bear a NUMBER and PRICE only, otherwise it will be rejected.

Scaled Tenders, giving full particulars and Names of Sureties, will be received by me, up to **TWELVE o'clock, on FRIDAY, the 16th SEPTEMBER, Inst.**, when the Guardians will duly consider same.

JOHN STOREY,
CLERK.

Donegal County Museum Collection

■ Attempts at Reform

By the early 1900s, mounting criticism of the Poor Relief system led to two major reviews of its operation. In 1903, a Vice-Regal Commission was appointed to investigate whether financial savings could be made and whether improvements could be made in the ways that relief was provided in Ireland. In 1906, their report was published which proposed:

- The abolition of the Workhouse system
- Placing various categories of inmates in separate institutions
- The creation of county alms-houses for aged and infirm
- The development of the country's resources

The 1905 Royal Commission, examining the Poor Relief system throughout the British Isles, broadly reached the same conclusions, emphasising the need for classification by institution as well as within institutions. No new legislation directly resulted from the Commission's work and the First World War brought other priorities to the fore. During the war, several Workhouses were partly or entirely put at the disposal of the military authorities including Ballyshannon Workhouse for those soldiers based at Finner Camp.

Ballyshannon Workhouse

was completed on the 1st October 1842 and its first admissions took place on the 6th May 1843. It cost £5850 with fittings costing £1100 and could accommodate 600 people. The staff of the Workhouse included the Master, Matron, Porter and Clerk. Their salaries were Master, £20 pa, Matron £15 pa, Porter £6 pa. Ballyshannon Workhouse had two chaplains - Catholic and Protestant.



Ballyshannon Workhouse
Donegal County Museum Collection

■ The Early Years of The County Donegal Workhouses

Ballyshannon Workhouse

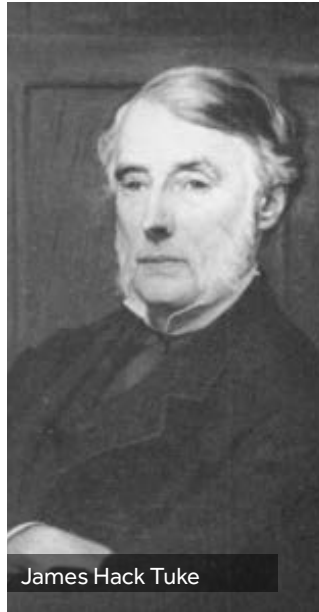
In September 1846 the Poor Law Commissioners warned the Board of Guardians of the Ballyshannon Union to base their estimates for relief on the assumption that “the whole accommodation which the Workhouse affords will be placed in requisition during a considerable period”. At that date there were approximately 135 paupers in the Workhouse. By 27 March 1847 the number had risen to 596. Numbers fell temporarily in the summer of 1847 but by 1 January 1848 there were 769 inmates in the Workhouse.

Up to this point the Guardians refused admission to persons from other Unions. However, on 8 January 1848 the Poor Law Commissioners gave instructions that all paupers from any union were to be admitted to the Workhouse.

Before the failure of the potato crop, workhouse diet was frugal but wholesome, based on oatmeal porridge, potatoes and buttermilk. When potatoes became unobtainable, Indian meal was substituted but its nutritional value was low. Early in 1847 the price of meal rose dramatically from £18 per ton to £27. There was also an increase in the price of oatmeal. While the increase in oatmeal may have been partly due to a general price-rise in Europe, the price increase in Indian meal was principally due to profiteering by those involved in its transport and sale. Merchants tried to prevent government sales of cheap meal as this would have reduced their profits. The Government succumbed to this pressure. Indian meal imported by the British Government late in

1846 for distribution along the west coast was held in storage until all other sources of food failed. This meal was purchased at £13 per ton, but for fear of undercutting the prices charged by local merchants it was sold at the Government depots for £19 per ton at the end of December.

When supplies of meal became unobtainable in Ballyshannon, the Board of Guardians applied to a Mr Hamilton to obtain meal for the Workhouse. Mr John Hamilton of St Ernan’s imported Indian meal and other provisions into Donegal Town for distribution to his own tenants. Philanthropist James Hack Tuke described him as “one who was devoting his whole energies to the service of the poor”.



James Hack Tuke

£600 which was a third of the amount required to the Ballyshannon Poor Relief Committee. He also reduced his Donegal rents by 25%.

Tuke found that in the Ballyshannon area the local landlords were actively involved in relief efforts. Colonel Conolly and his family remained at their summer home, Cliff House, for the winter to provide relief. When the Society of Friends offered “money in proportion to the amount raised in the town for the establishment of a soup-kitchen”, Colonel Conolly subscribed

In April 1847, the Ballyshannon Herald newspaper expressed alarm at the spread of fever in the Workhouse. “We regret to state that the poorhouse of the Union is crowded to excess which has caused fever and dysentery to spread among the inmates to an alarming extent.” In July a temporary fever ward with 50 beds was erected. Deaths from fever continued in 1848, with 13 dying from fever in the last week of January. Doctor Stephens, one of the dispensary doctors, contracted fever from a patient and died. The Workhouse Master caught fever in April but recovered. By December the epidemic was finally contained with 13 deaths that month.

The increasing numbers of burials began to cause difficulties, with the Master reporting on 8th May 1847: “Resistance has been offered to the interment of the dead at several burying grounds in the neighbourhood, the consequence of which is that an accumulation of dead bodies to the number of seven are at present in the deadhouse.” It was decided to locate a pauper’s graveyard at Mullaghnashee in the town.

Water supply and proper sanitation was a problem with the increasing numbers in the Workhouse. In September 1847, it was recorded in the Board of Guardians minutes of an overflowing cess pool outside the women’s yard. By November 1847 the Master reported that the sewerage was backing into the water tank. Water was also in short supply.

At the end of January 1847, the Master reported that bedding and clothing were unwashed for three weeks due to a water shortage. The Board ordered 2 casks with handles for carrying water from the river.

Subsequently a contract was accepted for water to be provided at 5d per puncheon.

By 1847 ratepayers were violently resisting paying a rate. The Inspector, Mr D'Arcy, reported that "all the collectors, without exception, stated that if the assistance of police was not afforded them in the wild districts, and where violence might be apprehended, they would under no circumstances be concerned in it." On 24 October 1847 the Guardians were obliged to make an increase in Union Rates. However, there was considerable difficulty in collecting the rate due to the great distress which prevailed in the Union.

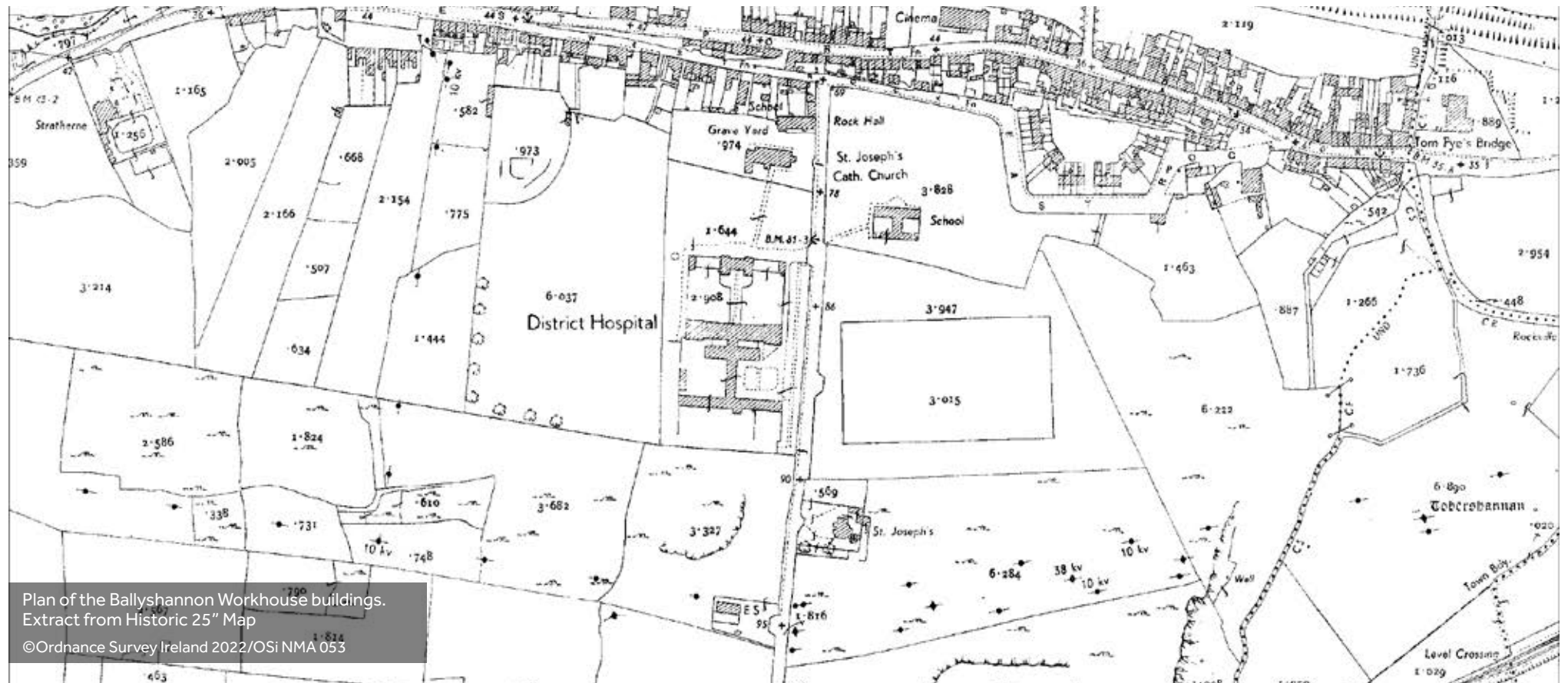
In January 1848 an appeal was made directly to the Lord Lieutenant for some assistance "toward the support of the poor in the Ballyshannon Workhouse, otherwise the House will have to be immediately closed for want of funds".

In Ballyshannon each adult male was expected to break half a ton of stones per day. Women did domestic work, and sprigging and spinning wheels were available in some workhouses.

Ballyshannon employed a schoolmaster and schoolmistress to teach the children. On 16 January 1847, the Superintendent of Workhouse National

Schools reported that "the female teacher is well qualified to teach reading, spelling and sewing and that the male can teach reading, arithmetic and writing and that the moral character of both is good".

Public works were proposed by a Presentment Session held in September 1846, but these were hampered by bureaucratic delays and bad weather. Delays in paying wages caused further hardship, and on arrival in Ballyshannon Tuke reported, "We again heard complaints that the men employed on the public works were irregularly paid, they not having received any pay for ten days or a fortnight, although the money was waiting in the bank."



Plan of the Ballyshannon Workhouse buildings.
Extract from Historic 25" Map
©Ordnance Survey Ireland 2022/OSi NMA 053

Dunfanaghy Poor Law Union

covered an area of 200 square miles. The workhouse was built on a 6-acre site, purchased from Alexander Stewart of Ards House in 1842. It was designed with an unusual split Admissions Block with Boardroom and Porters office on one side and the admissions on the other side. It was built from local stone with the limestone quoins (corner blocks) from the nearby quarry at Ballymore and, unusually, sandstone. The cost of the building was £4,350 along with £855 for fixtures and fittings etc. This was funded by a loan from the Poor Law Commissioners and repaid by the local Poor Rates. On the 15th March 1884, it was declared fit for the admission of paupers. It was officially opened in June 1845 with a capacity of 300, making it one of the smallest in Ireland.

Dunfanaghy Workhouse, Co. Donegal.
1865, taken by Robert French, Lawrence Collection
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Dunfanaghy Workhouse

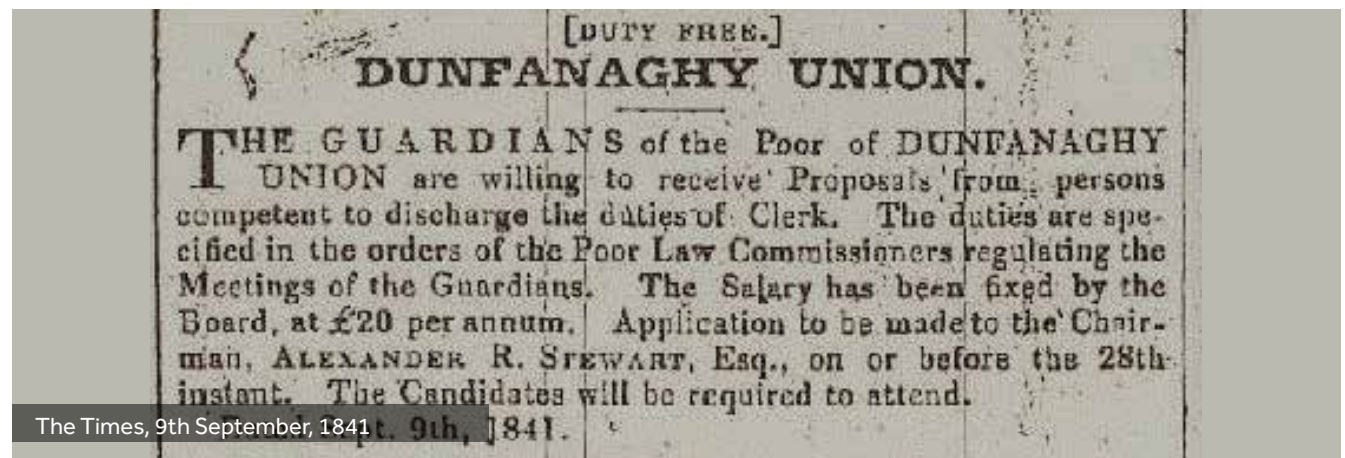
By 1847 the number of inmates grew to almost 500, although this was much lower than that of other areas in Donegal. By 1853, the numbers of those within the workhouse dropped down to 88. Between 1841 to 1901, the population of the Dunfanaghy Union fell from 18,000 to 16,000.

In December 1846 Joseph Crossfield with William Foster came to Dunfanaghy and reported to the London Relief Committee of the Society of Friends:

“Owing to the depth of the snow, and a constant succession of violent snow-storms, we experienced much detention, and did not reach Dunfanaghy until long after dark. A highly respectable merchant in the town called upon us and gave us much information upon the condition of the people in this district, which his business, the corn and flour trade, particularly enabled him to do. He entirely confirmed the previous statements of the widely spread suffering. The small farmers and cottiers had parted with all their pigs and their fowl; and even their bedclothes and fishing-nets had gone for the one object, the supply of food. He stated that he knew many families of five to eight persons, who subsisted on 2 1/2 lbs. of oatmeal per day, made into thin water-gruel and mash -about six ounces

of meal for each. Dunfanaghy is a little fishing town, situated on a bay remarkably adapted for a fishing population...Many of the inhabitants gain a portion of their living by this means; but so rude is their tackle, and so fragile and liable to be upset are their primitive boats or coracles, made of wickerwork over which sailcloth is stretched, that they can only venture to sea in fine weather.... In this district, the “conacre” tenant takes from the small farmer a patch of ground, varying in size from half a rood to half an acre. This land the farmer ploughs and prepares for the “conacre” tenant, who sets his own seed, and draws the manure from the shore. He digs up his crop in autumn but has no further right in the land; and in this neighbourhood he pays no rent for the use of it, the farmer considering

the manure as a sufficient equivalent for its loan. We are told that the produce of half a rood of potatoes, thus easily obtained, would support a family of five to eight persons for at least six months. We were told that there were at least thirty families in this little town, who had nothing whatever to subsist upon, and knew not where to look for a meal for the morrow. A quantity of meal was ordered to be distributed amongst them, and a sum of money was left for their support, and also for a little turf, without which in this severe weather many would be frozen to death. No public works were open in this district, although in this small parish there were, in the opinion of the rate payers, not less than 2,300 persons who were suffering for want of relief.”



General View, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal. 1865, taken by Robert French, Lawrence Collection. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



Evictions

In July 1884, Wybrants Olphert, Ballyconnell House, Falcarragh secured the eviction from his estate of 165 of his tenants for the non-payment of their rents, some of whom had not paid in over two years. "Captain Peel, on his visit, found that 141 persons had slept in the open air. On the same day on which he so reported, the relieving officer visited the place and offered to the tenants individually and collectively relief in the workhouse and suitable conveyance there on that afternoon. The people, however, refused to accept this offer, stating that they were to go on the following Monday, when the Rev. Mr. McFadden would have them all taken together." (**House of Commons Debates, 10 July 1884 vol 290 Hansard.**)

"Sad Scenes in Dunfanaghy" Dublin Weekly Nation Newspaper Saturday 12 July 1884,

"The correspondent of the Freeman, writing from Dunfanaghy on Monday, tells the following sad story of the sequel to the Gweedore evictions:

The saddest sight that eye ever witnessed was the procession today to the Dunfanaghy union workhouse of the poor victims of the Gweedore evictions. They waited, sad, disconsolate, and miserable, for the past week for relief and aid from those whose first duty it was to come to their assistance; but they waited in vain. This evening, in the midst of a dreadful downpour of rain, the evicted assembled at a central spot, where transport had been ordered by the priest to be in waiting to bear the poor creatures to the only shelter left for them, hated and abominated though it is by them all.

The deepest sympathy was manifested by everyone the procession passed along. There were 19 conveyances freighted heavily with old men and women and children, the number of them being about 150.

On arrival at the Workhouse it was found that considerable preparation had been made through the instruction of the Local Government Inspector, who had been in attendance all day, and had convened an informal meeting of the guardians during the day, at which order was made that the master would admit all that presented themselves for admission without examination or inquiry. The poor creatures were taken down from the carts, and then one could see the wretchedness and poverty of those people. They were mainly without shoes, and their clothes were torn and tattered and wretched...."

The Donegal Poor Law Union

was formed on the 7th November 1840 and it covered an area of 245 square miles. The Board of Guardians was made up of 21 elected members, representing 11 electoral divisions Clogher, Donegal, Dunkineely, Gleneeny, Inver, Laghey, Loughderg, Loughesk, Mountcharles, Tawnawully, Templecarn.

The Workhouse was built in 1841-2. It occupied a 6-acre site at the west of Donegal town and could accommodate 500 inmates. The cost of the building was £5,785 plus £910 for fixtures and fittings etc. It was declared fit for the admission of paupers on 15th September 1842 and admitted its first inmates on 21st May 1843.



Donegal Workhouse, Co Donegal. 1865, taken by Robert French, Lawrence Collection.

Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Donegal Workhouse

In 1895, Donegal was visited by a "Commission" from the British Medical Journal investigating conditions in Irish Workhouse infirmaries. Their report listed a number of deficiencies including a lack of nursing supervision at night, and the miserable conditions for those in the lunatic wards whose care was in the hands of a pauper.

Donegal Workhouse Infirmery 1895

Extracts from the Special Commission of 'The British Medical Journal'

'Reports On The Nursing And Administration Of Irish Workhouses And Infirmaries. IX. Donegal Workhouse Infirmery', The British Medical Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1821 (Nov. 23, 1895)

"The (Work) house is a small one, a fourth-class house, and was very empty at the time of our visit; 54 was the number of inmates all told, and of these 30 were on the medical relief book (28 in hospital), not including the lunatics, so that more than half the inmates are disabled paupers. We were not surprised to learn that it is sometimes necessary to obtain labour from outside, the master being empowered to hire when requisite. No ground is cultivated, with the exception of a few flower beds in front of the house.

The poor idiots made such an impression on us that we have spoken of them first, but we must not forget,

The Sick, who are in wards on the two floors of the hospital building. These wards, two on each side of the middle block, hold seven and eight beds respectively: in the lower a wooden screen acts as a draught protector between the beds and the door.

The structure exhibits the usual characteristics of these primitive hospitals & the whitewashed walls, which are so wearying to the eyes; pitched roof with bare rafters, where the dust gathers and forms a soil for the germs of disease; small, ill-fitting windows on one side, faced by slit openings in the opposite wall, admitting the weather but not ventilating the ward; old fireplaces which waste fuel and are niggardly of heat; these are the conditions which surround the patients.

There was one bad case of paralysis: a woman with entire loss of power. She was in a box bed on straw, and we noted that the poor thing was in a most uncomfortable and insanitary condition. A young woman with synovitis was waiting for a leather splint; a man, who appeared to be in an advanced stage of phthisis, was seated by the fire; he had been a soldier, but had not served long enough to earn a pension. The other patients were chronic or old age cases. One case in especial roused our compassion: a respectable-looking woman, who had been in good service in London, was, by the Act of Settlement, returned with her child to face the horrors of an Irish workhouse. The infant was ruptured, and this fact detained her in the sick ward. The look of utter hopelessness in her face will not soon fade from our recollection.

The Beds in the infirmery are almost all wire wove, with hair mattresses; easy chairs do not exist; we saw a wooden chair on which was what appeared to be an old car cushion, and there was of course the usual bench. The bedsteads are too close together, and there was no room for tables in the wards. As there are no day rooms the patients live all day in the wards, as well as sleep in them, and the cubic space was quite insufficient.

There is a trained nurse in the hospital, but no night nurse; in each ward there is the pauper wardman or woman, the only assistants that the nurse has. The nurse is also held responsible for the care of the lunatic class, whose quarters are in her division. She is sorely handicapped by the conditions of her work; she has, no separate linen store, no water laid on, either hot or cold; the only means of heating water is in a kettle. The water comes from the river and is pumped into tanks by the inmates. The fireplace in the infirmery kitchen is a wide-mouthed wasteful grate, which makes almost all cooking extremely difficult.

At Night in the sick wards the vessels are left unemptied, and the patients have no help but such as they can render each other. It is therefore more than probable that the poor paralysed woman is left uncleaned all night. Both Dr. Pope and the nurse said that the atmosphere in these wards is very foul in the night. When we think of the fate of these unhappy sick, left all night without nursing of any kind, in the dark and foetid ward, we cannot but condemn the system which allows so much preventable suffering. This is no sensational picture; its worst features can be verified by any inhabitant of Donegal for himself.

The Infirm Class is a small one in this house: the men's dormitory was empty, the few men being engaged in the house; in the female ward there were thirteen beds, all filled. The harrow beds are used in both wings, with straw ticks and pillows. (We confess to a desire to condemn every Irish Board of Guardians to spend a night or two in the infirm ward of their own workhouse, the door being locked as usual on the outside, at 7 in the evening.) It is always a matter of surprise to us that these straw-

REPORTS ON THE NURSING AND ADMINISTRATION OF IRISH WORKHOUSES AND INFIRMARIES.

SPECIAL COMMISSION OF THE "BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL."

IX.—DONEGAL WORKHOUSE INFIRMARY.

Our visit to the Donegal Workhouse was made in a down-pour of rain, such as is common on the west coast, where the hills condense the rainclouds as the air comes laden with moisture from the Atlantic. The house stands on the line of march between Stranorlar and Ballyshannon. The Board has given discretionary power to the master to refuse relief to the tramps, and the relieving officer simply passes them on to the house for the master to deal with. The result of this plan is, so we were told by the master, that the tramps do not apply at the house. Having an introduction to the medical officer, Dr. Pope, we met him by appointment at the workhouse.

THE HOUSE IS A SMALL ONE, and was very empty at the time of our visit; 54 was the number of inmates all told, and of these 30 were on the medical relief book (28 in hospital), not including the lunatics, so that more than half the inmates are disabled paupers. We were not surprised to learn that it is sometimes necessary to obtain labour from outside, the master being empowered to hire when requisite. No ground is cultivated, with the exception of a few flower beds in front of the house.

THE LUNATIC WARDS on the male side were empty. The cells are used in this sense, two females sleeping in one cell; there were two most ad cases in box beds, semi-idiotic semi-paralysed women, entirely helpless. The three patients who were up, epileptics, were seated on a bench against the wall of the corridor into which the cells opened; at one end is a protected fireplace, and at the other the door that opens on to the airing court. These patients are under the care of a pauper; they had an unwashed, untended appearance. The cells are dark and ill-ventilated, the corridor is merely a dreary passage giving access to the cells, yet this is all the accommodation provided for these unhappy creatures. Only last year the Inspector of Lunacy commented in the severest manner in this disgraceful state of things. We quote from the report:

"We are compelled to reiterate the opinion that the condition of the lunatic inmates is far from satisfactory. The most helpless are frequently found ill attended to, the only persons to look after them being to a large extent pauper inmates; the apartments allocated to their use are often dark, ill-ventilated, and badly furnished, whilst the means of securing personal cleanliness are very inadequate. . . . Unfortunately in nearly all the Irish workhouses the inmates of the lunatic wards are found to be the most hopeless imbeciles and demented, who, quite incapable of caring for themselves, unable to wash, feed, or dress themselves, and requiring the most constant and careful supervision, are left to the mercy of a pauper inmate, or, where a paid attendant is attached to the ward, to the care of an official usually ignorant and untrained, and very often negligent of his duty."

These strong words of an official qualified to speak are not so strong to represent the condition of the unhappy pauper inmates at Donegal. The poor idiots made such an impression on us that we have spoken of them first, but we must not forget

THE SICK.

Extract from the Special Commission of 'The British Medical Journal' on the Nursing and Administration of Irish Workhouses and Infirmaries. IX. Donegal

The British Medical Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1821 (Nov. 23, 1895)

Forty-third Report, July, 1894.

these primitive hospitals—the whitewashed walls, which are so wearying to the eyes; pitched roof with bare rafters, where the dust gathers and forms a soil for the germs of disease; small, ill-fitting windows on one side, faced by silt openings in the opposite wall, admitting the weather but not ventilating the ward; old fireplaces which waste fuel and are niggardly of heat; these are the conditions which surround

THE PATIENTS.

There was one bad case of paralysis—a woman with entire loss of power. She was in a box bed on straw, and we noted that the poor thing was in a most uncomfortable and insanitary condition. A young woman with synovitis was waiting for a leather splint; a man, who appeared to be in an advanced stage of phthisis, was seated by the fire; he had been a soldier, but had not served long enough to earn a pension. The other patients were chronic or old case cases. One case in especial roused our compassion: a respectable-looking woman, who had been in good service in London, was, by the Act of Settlement, returned with her child to face the horrors of an Irish workhouse. The infant was ruptured, and this fact detained her in the sick ward. The look of utter hopelessness in her face will not soon fade from our recollection.

THE BEDS

in the infirmary are almost all wire wove, with hair mattresses; easy chairs do not exist; we saw a wooden chair on which was what appeared to be an old car cushion, and there was of course the usual bench. The bedsteads are too close together, and there was no room for tables in the wards. As there are no day rooms the patients live all day in the wards, as well as sleep in them, and the cubic space was quite insufficient.

THERE IS A TRAINED NURSE

in the hospital, but no night nurse; in each ward there is the pauper wardman or woman, the only assistants that the nurse has. The nurse is also held responsible for the care of the lunatic class, whose quarters are in her division. She is sorely handicapped by the conditions of her work; she has no separate linen store, no water laid on, either hot or cold; the only means of heating water is in a kettle. The water comes from the river, and is pumped into tanks by the inmates. The fireplace in the infirmary kitchen is a wide-mouthed wasteful grate, which makes almost all cooking extremely difficult.

AT NIGHT

in the sick wards the vessels are left unemptied, and the patients have no help but such as they can render each other. It is therefore more than probable that the poor paralysed woman is left uncleansed all night. Both Dr. Pope and the nurse said that the atmosphere in these wards is very foul in the night. When we think of the fate of these unhappy sick, left all night without nursing of any kind, in the dark and fetid ward, we cannot but condemn the system which allows so much preventable suffering. This is no sensational picture; its worst features can be verified by any inhabitant of Donegal for himself.

THE INFIRM CLASS

is a small one in this house: the men's dormitory was empty, the few men being engaged in the house; in the female ward there were thirteen beds, all filled. The narrow beds are used in both wings, with straw ticks and pillows. (We confess to a desire to condemn every Irish Board of Guardians to spend a night or two in the infirm ward of their own workhouse, the door being locked as usual on the outside, at 7 in the evening.) It is always a matter of surprise to us that these straw-filled ticks have found favour for so long with the authorities; they are neither economical nor suitable; the substitution of mattresses would soon be paid for in the lessened amount of the straw bill. The women were all in the dormitory, the dayroom not being in use. The ward was comfortable and dreary; a window at either end gave but a poor light and insufficient ventilation to the long, low-pitched

filled ticks have found favour for so long with the authorities; they are neither economical nor suitable; the substitution of mattresses would soon be paid for in the lessened amount of the straw bill. The women were all in the dormitory, the dayroom not being in use. The ward was comfortable and dreary; a window at either end gave but a poor light and insufficient ventilation to the long, low-pitched room; an old fireplace, for either turf or coal, in the middle of the long wall, was the only means of heating the dormitory. The benches (the only furniture) gave no suggestion of rest or comfort; many of the inmates sat on the foot of the bed. A basin or towel for the whole ward is the sole means of cleanliness provided.

The nursery has been closed for some time; the confinements (about one a year) take place in a small ground-floor room in the infirmary.

The Diets consist of potatoes five days in the week, and soup on the other two days, in the body of the house; in the infirmary, meat, milk, soup, and extras, as ordered by the doctor. Corn flour is the diet of the infants, so that it is as well that the nursery is empty - at all events till a more flesh-forming food is ordered for those under 2 years of age. The food is cooked in a kitchen fitted with three coppers, each having a separate furnace, a plan which is wasteful alike of fuel and labour. These kitchens are relics of famine days,

when porridge or soup was cooked in gallons to feed the starving population. But this is half a century ago, and perhaps it might be well to remove them now to make way for something more suited to the requirements of the house. The laundry is of the same date and has the same old-world aspect; no hot water is laid on; there is no mangle or other labour-saving appliances except a wringer, of which one roller is practically useless.

We would call the attention of the Board to the words which we have quoted from the report of the Inspectors of Lunacy, and urge them to remove this disgrace as far as Donegal is concerned, by making the quarters of the idiots less cruelly unsuitable and providing them with proper attendance. If it is right to retain this class in the workhouse at all, the guardians are bound to do so that all is possible for their treatment. Further we suggest the appointment of a trained night nurse for the wards, to remove the scandal of the present untended condition of the sick through the night. Lastly, it seems to us that a well-devised scheme of amalgamation would solve many of the difficulties which beset the guardians. We trust that this matter will soon receive the attention of the central authority, for the guardians require all the advice and assistance possible in this difficult task of bringing the houses up to date."

Glenties Union

included the extreme western areas of Donegal, such as Ardara, Dungloe, Glenties, Annagary, Fintown, Kilcar, Burtonport and the islands. The first meeting of Glenties Board of Guardians took place on 24 September 1841. Among the 20 new members were James Brown, Andrew Crawford, Robert Russell, George Hamilton, John Crumley (chair) and Francis Foster.



Glenties Workhouse 1967.
Denis Tynan Collection
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Glenties Workhouse

The Board's initial focus was on securing a site and building for a workhouse. Early meetings in Glenties seem to have focused on the dilemma of whether its workhouse should cater for 400 or 600 paupers. It was pointed out that the difference financially only amounted to £200. 500 was the agreed number eventually. Disputes also arose over which town the workhouse should be located in. Eventually Glenties rather than Ardara was chosen.

The building of Glenties Workhouse took a long time and was beset by problems. Finally, in May 1846 the building was ready to take in paupers, just as the first effects of the famine were being felt locally. The Board now had to turn its attention to seeking suitable premises for a fever hospital.

An early duty of the Boards of Guardians was to initiate a programme of vaccination against smallpox, under the Vaccination Act of 1840. A Medical Officer was appointed in March 1843 and centres of vaccination were proposed according to electoral division. Progress in vaccinating was extremely slow. By 1855 all eight Unions were involved in vaccination and Glenties had by then the second highest number of vaccinations in the county, at 582.

In November 1845 Glenties members expressed anxiety that they would be unable to cope with the 'spread of disease in the potato crop', especially given

that the workhouse had still not been opened. The following January, it was decided to go ahead and employ workhouse staff straight away in order 'to meet any cases of destitution that may arise from the general failure of the potato crop'.

The supply of food was a desperately slow process in Donegal during the Famine years. On 7 August 1846 the Board urged the Poor Law Commissioners to tell the Relief Commissioners of 'the urgent necessity of forwarding large quantities of Indian meal to the ports of Teelan, Killybegs and Portnoo for the use of the poor of this union', stating that there was 'general and total failure of the potato crop throughout the union.' The Union was permitted to try to get meal through these ports.

The Glenties Guardians' desperation was evident. Its members deplored 'the melancholy calamity in which seven-eighths of householders are small farmers and occupiers whose existence at all times depended upon this article of food' [potato] in a union where 'grain neither fills nor ripens' ...therefore a famine ...presses...unless people be immediately relieved by the speedy and benevolent intervention of the government in affording them provision at first cost price and giving them some general system of employment'.

Lack of supplies coming in threatened the closure of the Workhouse in 1846. The Guardians tried to deal with profiteers who managed to obtain meal and

were apparently selling it openly in Glenties while the Guardians had no money to purchase any itself. On 6 November 1846, the Guardians complained bitterly that lack of funds was due to those who refused to pay Poor Rates, citing the Marquess of Conyngham as a prime example. He had refused to pay arrears of Poor Rate to the Guardians on the grounds that his tenants had been subdividing the land on his estate for the past eighteen years. The Board solicited the Poor Law Commissioners to issue legal proceedings against him.

In March 1847 the Master was instructed to admit up to 650 people because of the huge numbers of desperate and starving who were gathering at the Workhouse door every day. But this was countermanded by the doctor who refused to admit more than 480 because of the prevalence of fevers and other diseases in and outside of the Workhouse. Fever hospitals established during the Famine years were in Burtonport and Dungloe and later Glenties.

The Glenties Workhouse Register of Admission and Discharge documents the stories of individuals during the last years of the Famine. In April 1851, admission number 305 in the register was Catherine McGill and her family, from Ardara. She was aged 35, a widow, with a son Daniel aged 12 and two daughters, Mary aged four and Kate aged one and a half.

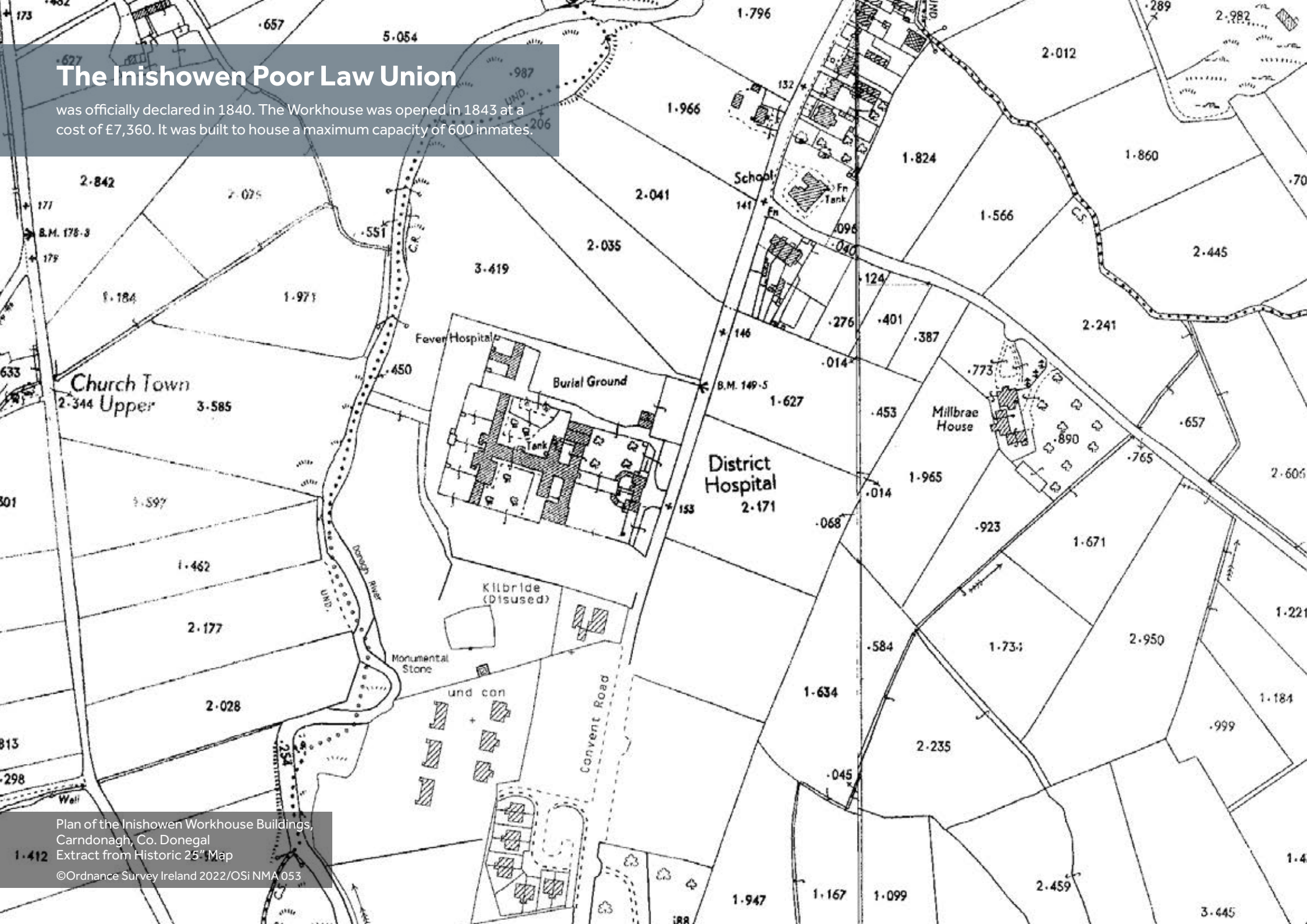
Mary McGill	7	60	16						
Catherine McGill	7	35	Widow	Daughter					27 April 1851
Samuel McGill	16	12	66	66	66	66	66	66	27 April 1851
Mary McGill	7	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	27 April 1851
John McGill	7	32	6	6	6	6	6	6	27 April 1851

Extract from Glenties Workhouse Register of Admissions, showing the admission of Catherine McGill and family in April 1851

Donegal County Archives Collection

The Inishowen Poor Law Union

was officially declared in 1840. The Workhouse was opened in 1843 at a cost of £7,360. It was built to house a maximum capacity of 600 inmates.



Plan of the Inishowen Workhouse Buildings,
Carndonagh, Co. Donegal
Extract from Historic 25" Map
©Ordnance Survey Ireland 2022/OSI NMA 053

Inishowen Workhouse (Carndonagh)

In December 1845, admissions to the workhouse were quite low, on average of 3 to 5 people every week and the cost to the Board per week of one pauper was calculated at £2. Among the issues that occupied the minds of the Guardians was discipline, with one pauper being put into a refractory ward for three hours for 'obstructing the master three days before Christmas'. On 26th January 1846, due to the high price and scarcity of potatoes, the daily diet of potatoes was replaced by oatmeal.

In January 1846, the Clerk became ill and a temporary clerk Edward Doherty caused problems. The roof began to rot and the Poor Law Commissioners blamed the Board for not supervising the architect properly. In August 1846 the Board reported that all potato crops were diseased in all the electoral divisions in the Inishowen peninsula including those planted in the Workhouse grounds. At the end of October 56 people had been admitted since September, a huge jump from average 1845 figures. Among those admitted in October were

the members of the Doherty family - Eleanor 47, a widow from Straid, and her children, Margaret, Anne, Mary, John, Eleanor, aged from 15 to 1, all described as beggars. They are recorded as having been discharged in January 1847.

By 23rd November due to the drastic reduction in supplies and spiralling costs the Guardians made the decision to reduce the diet of healthy paupers over the age of nine to two meals a day. This consisted of 8 ounces of oatmeal with buttermilk for breakfast and 8 oz Indian meal for dinner, again with milk. Bread was added to the diet of those in the hospital wards. 42 admissions were recorded that week.

To take pressure off the workhouses and distribute relief more widely, the Temporary Relief of Destitute Persons Act came into operation in January 1847, allowing people so called outdoor relief. This was mainly in the form of soup kitchens. Public works began to be discontinued (peaking at about 700,000 a week in the early part of the year). However, the new relief scheme was to be wholly financed through the Poor Rate which was practically impossible for many Unions including Inishowen which was in dire straits financially by this time.

41 people were admitted to Carndonagh workhouse in the first week of January 1847. As fever began to spread in the Workhouse in the spring of 1847, the Board sectioned off part of the hospital wards as specific fever wards. To give an idea of the dilemma faced by the guardians, one week in April collections of rates amounted to £46 and uncollected was £1145. Despite this poor collection the Guardians resolved to erect a detached fever ward on the workhouse grounds.

Admissions soared throughout 1847. Some of the 246 people forced to enter the Workhouse in May 1847 included orphans such as five year old Peggy Collins of Glentogher who died on 13 March 1848, Mary Mulloy who stayed there till 1851 and an elderly couple Nancy and Owen McLaughlin from Desertgeney. Owen died on 23 June and Nancy left the following day. In May, the McCann family - Patrick, a tailor, his wife Biddy and their five children aged from 21 to 7 were all admitted. Patrick died there. The rest of the family left the workhouse on different dates.

Don' Bower	M	53	Single	Schouers	Roman Catholic
Peggy Collins	F	5	Orphan		Roman Catholic
Stephen Doherty	M	60	Married	Schouers	Roman Catholic

Extract from Inishowen Workhouse Register of Admissions, showing the admission of Peggy Collins in May, 1847.

Donegal County Archives Collection

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Form 6 - REGISTER of Persons Admitted into, and Discharged from the Workhouse

1. Number	2. Name and Residence of Pauper	3. Sex	4. Age	5. Habit, whether Single, Married, Widowed, or Single, or other, or Pauper, or Pauper, or Pauper	6. Employment or Calling	7. Religious denomination	8. If disabled, the description of disability
1261	Cicely Magee	F	70	Single			
2	Nobles Whapley	M	17		Servant		
3	John Reed	M	9				
4	James Reed	M	6				
5	Robert Reed	M	2				
6	Josannah Thacker	M	6	Married			
7	Anna Barrer	F	11				
8	George Douglas	M	30	Single			
9	Anna Wilson	F	50				
10	Mary Whelan	M	20				
11	Elizabeth Whelan	M	63	Widow			
12	Michael Whelan	M	3	Child 2970			
13	John Barr	M	13				
14	Peggy Barr	F	14				
15	Thomas Barr	M	16	Widow			
16	John Barr	M	15				
17	Margaret Barr	F	11				
18	George Barr	M	9				

of the Workhouse Union - (No 14 and 2nd Part of the Act, Cap. 64, Sec. 16.)

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9. Name of Wife or Husband	10. Number of Children	11. Occupation or number of Pauper when admitted	12. Name of the Workhouse in which received	13. Date when admitted, or when first in the Workhouse	14. Date when last in the Workhouse
			Red Castle	15 th April 1848	1 August 1848
			Montague	15 th April 1848	12 April 1848
			Charlton's Market	5 April 1848	12 July 1848
			do	5 April 1848	27 Oct 1848
			do	5 April 1848	12 Sept 1848
			Marble	30 March 1848	1 August 1848
			Greenacres	2 April 1848	6 July 1848
			Union	11 April 1848	18 April 1848
			Ardenaquin	11 April 1848	18 April 1848
			Red Castle	10 April 1848	26 May 1848
			Red Castle	10 April 1848	16 June 1848
			do	10 April 1848	26 May 1848
			Union	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			do	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			Union	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			Union	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			Union	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			White Castle	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			do	10 April 1848	18 April 1848
			do	10 April 1848	18 April 1848

Extract from Inishowen Workhouse Indoor Relief Register of Admissions & Discharges, 1848 Donegal County Archives Collection

With deaths from fever taking their toll, the Master recommended to the Board that no more fever cases be admitted in June, while the Board ordered spinning wheels to keep the women inmates busy and a shortage of meal led to its replacement by bread three days a week. Another Rate was struck, collections were still meagre with the now added pressure of trying to provide for outdoor relief and fund it.

During the summer of 1847, numbers entering the workhouse decreased markedly, possibly due to the availability of soup kitchens and by now more regulated forms of outdoor relief. The week of 13th September saw 16 admitted and only 12 in November.

A proposal to construct a permanent fever hospital passed in 1848, though the board added that it had not the means to pay for it from the rates owing to the 'impoverished state of the union' (the Commissioners provided £700 towards it). Outdoor relief that first week was provided to 59 with admissions to the Workhouse up to 94 and 104 the following weeks. The biting cold of winter saw numbers soaring, and diseases such as Typhus, Cholera and Dysentery spreading.

While uncollected rates for the week of 18th February amounted to £4818 collected monies came to £137; this was a week that saw 165 admissions. A meeting of 3rd March reported 776 vaccinations (against smallpox) across the Union. 103 were admitted to the Workhouse in May 1848 - this was less than half the

number admitted in the May of 1847 (with outdoor relief being the reason). Admissions in November of 1848 were down to more manageable levels with 35 provisional admissions on 27 November, and 41 admitted in January 1849. That month it was decided to rent space in Carndonagh for school rooms so that they could use the school rooms in the workhouse as spill over dormitories.

As the years went on, conditions improved in the Workhouse. For Easter Sunday 1869, the Guardians treated the inmates to a celebratory Easter lunch consisting of fresh meat, with liberal amounts of ale and a ration of tobacco for those who wanted it. By 1869, numbers had decreased to 165, which included two inmates who were long-stay patients for 22 years.

Letterkenny Workhouse

The first meeting of Letterkenny Board of Guardians was held on 31 July 1841 and Captain Daniel Chambers was elected chairman. Early Board meetings tended to focus on difficulties surrounding securing a suitable site and appointing contractors, building the workhouse, hiring staff, issues with mendacity or begging, the collection of rates, and assisting in emigration. The Workhouse built on the Kilmacrennan road could accommodate 500 paupers. It was staffed and opened in 1844.



Letterkenny Workhouse buildings on the horizon ,1865.
Photograph taken by Robert French, Lawrence Collection
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Letterkenny Workhouse

The Master and Matron operated the rules that applied to all workhouses. On arrival, children were separated from their parents and husbands and wives were also separated. Parents could see their children only for a short time each day. The Board of Guardians' minutes record the frugal meals and the various tasks - stone breaking, washing laundry, knitting, spinning, cleaning. A schoolteacher was appointed to teach children in the workhouse.

In 1845 the Letterkenny Board of Guardians passed a Resolution stating that relief should only be extended to struggling householders and not to mendicants, wandering or homeless poor. However, by 1847 the effects of the Famine could be felt with overcrowding and fever leading to a sharp increase in mortality rates in the workhouses. The Letterkenny minutes of August 1846 record that the ventilation in the Infirmary was defective and that cases of fever had risen as a result.

The Famine resulted in a huge upsurge of emigration from Ireland in the mid-19th century. Assisted Emigration schemes were regarded by the British state as one solution to the disastrous situation prevailing across Ireland. In February 1848, the British Colonial Secretary initiated an emigration scheme to send orphans from Irish workhouses to under-populated South Australia. It was decided that women and girls were needed in the colonies to balance the mainly male population. More schemes quickly developed. By 1849 Letterkenny Board of Guardians listed whole families from its union whose destiny was Quebec and other parts of Canada.

24

The Master Reported as follows;
 That after Schoolhours the Children were employed at cleaning Schoolrooms, working on the Grounds &c.
 The Provisions received for last week were good.
 The undermentioned inmates have reconsidered the Emigration question and have signified their intention of so doing, viz, to Emigrate.

	Names	Age	Occupation	Chargeability
	1 Hugh Sweeney	50	Sailor	Union at Large
	2 John Kennedy	17	Laborer	Letterkenny
	3 Ellen Doherty	40	Servant	Union at Large
Child of Above	4 Ellen Doherty	3½		do
	5 Kitty Harkin	25	Servant	Corroaddy
Child of Above	6 Ann Harkin	3		do
	7 Sarah M ^{rs} Auley	3½	Servant	Keincraigy
Child of Above	8 Mary M ^{rs} Auley	14	do	do
"	9 James M ^{rs} Auley	7		do
"	10 Jane M ^{rs} Auley	3		do
	11 Susan M ^{rs} Daid	26	Servant	Union at Large
Child of Above	12 Patrick M ^{rs} Daid	7		do

Resolved - That the Sanction of the D.G. Board be requested for the Expenditure of £60 for Passage and Outfit in sending the above Persons to Canada. The Proportioned on the Union at Large and the several Divisions to which they are respectively Chargeable.

List of those who are to emigrate to Canada from the Letterkenny Workhouse in May, 1875. Donegal County Archives Collection

The list included the Logue family of six from Gortnavern in 1849.

For decades after the famine, life in Letterkenny Workhouse continued much as it had done since its inception. The surviving Letterkenny Admission and Relief registers of the 19th and early 20th century record the names and townlands of those born in or admitted to the workhouse during each week; whether male or female, aged or infirm, or children; able-bodied or disabled. Included are the dates of admission and discharge or death in the workhouse.

People, old and young, single and married, destitute or unemployed, infirm or sick, the disabled and able bodied, many with little or no family support, spent time in Letterkenny workhouse. In an era with no proper general hospitalisation system, the workhouse often provided a substitute for the ill or vulnerable.

Among those who entered Letterkenny Workhouse in this period were: John McManus, a married schoolmaster from the 'union at large' and described as infirm; he was admitted in November 1864. Unaccompanied children were often admitted. William Wallace is registered several times in the 1860s; first aged 9, later aged 14. Described as an orphan, and 'in want', by age 14 he is listed as a carpenter.

Often the men stayed out of the workhouse seeking work while wives and children were admitted. This was the case for the McGroarty family. Margaret McGroarty, whose calling was 'begging', and her three children aged five, three and one, were admitted to the workhouse for one week in 1866. Her husband James remained at home. Many families were forced

to return again and again. In 1869 the McGroarty's were all admitted again (except the husband James), this time staying for a year and a half.

Frequently single mothers and their children or pregnant women were forced to seek help in the Workhouse. Rachel Killen aged 22, a dressmaker from the 'union at large', was admitted on 19 October 1869 and gave birth on 26 November. Her baby was named Charles. They left the following day.

The elderly were perhaps the most likely to spend time or to end their days in the workhouse. George Wallace from Sallaghgrane was 77, a labourer, and 'in want' when he was admitted in July 1866. He died there the following January. Biddy McCarron was an 80-year-old widow from Gracky, 'begging' was also listed as her calling. She died 16 days after admission in May 1871.

The workhouse records reflect the worst possible consequence of eviction for many people - being

forced into the Workhouse. The infamous wholesale Derryveagh evictions in April 1861 implemented by John Adair and the subsequent homelessness are recorded in the archives of the Workhouse. Letterkenny Workhouse's Indoor Relief register (dating from 1855) lists the names of those admitted there in April and May, all from Gartan and the surrounding area and many more names in the months that followed, including Patrick and Mary Devenney, aged 24 and 26 and their two small children, Hannah and Patrick, five and three.

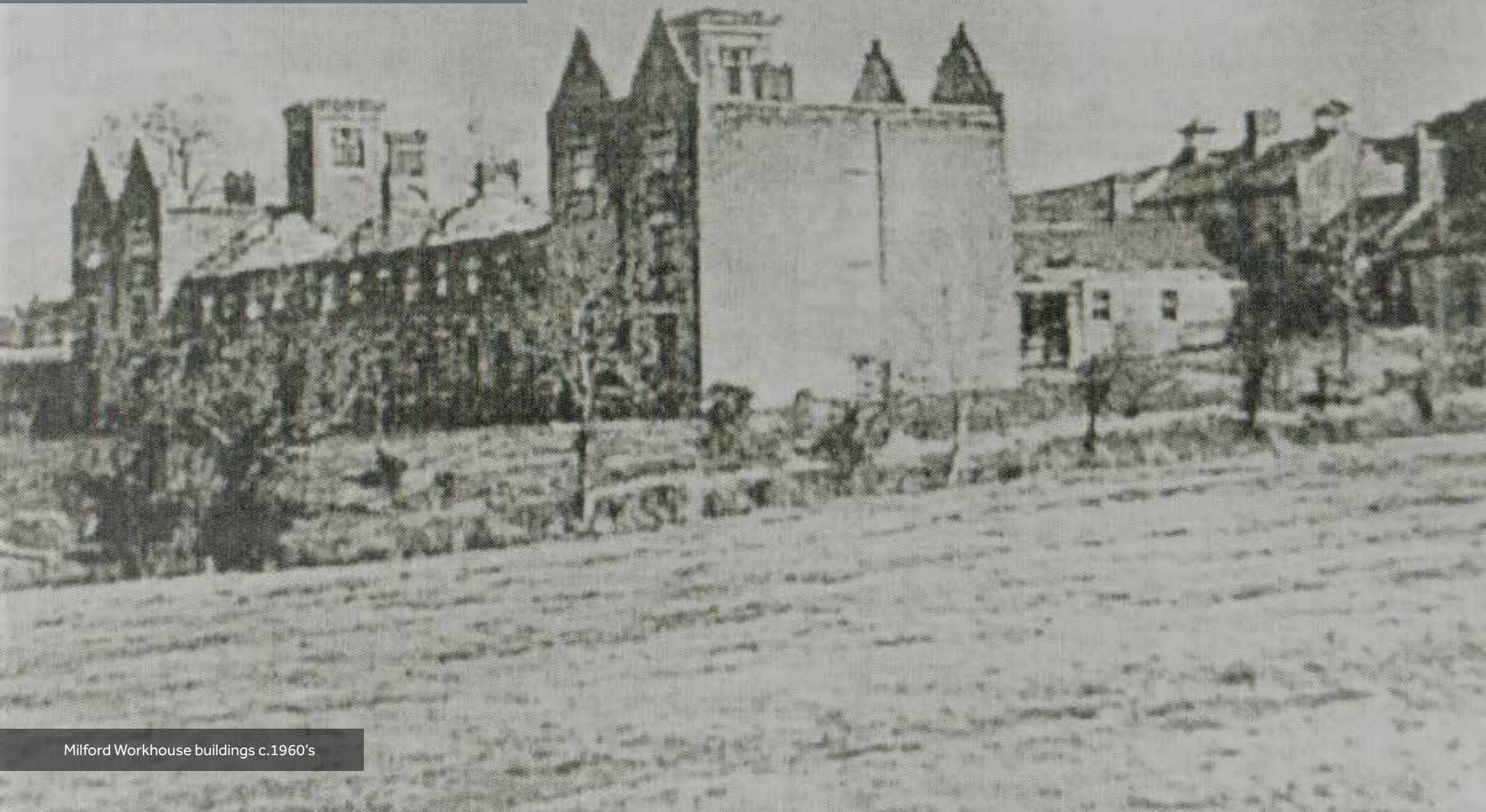
Of those 250 plus people evicted from Derryveagh who did not go to the Workhouse, some may have received outdoor relief though Letterkenny Board of Guardians was at this time reluctant to implement an official policy of Outdoor Relief. Many others were no doubt assisted locally, or by the clergy and many migrated or emigrated over time.

No. when first entered.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Employment at Calling.	Religion.	Married or Single.	Name of Wife or Husband.	No. of Children.	Date of Application for Relief.	Electoral Division in which resident at the time of beginning to receive Relief.	Date when first admitted to the Workhouse.
17.	Mr. Charles Carr	M.	5	none	Roman Catholic	Single			12th June 1861	Gartan Dassel	12th June 1861
18.	Mrs. Hannah Cannon	F.	22	"	Roman Catholic	Single			27th July 1861	Union at Large	27th July 1861
19.	Mrs. Margaret Cannon	F.	1	"	Roman Catholic	Widow			27th July 1861	Union at Large	27th July 1861
20.	Mr. Sally Boyle	M.	40	"	Roman Catholic	Single			12th April 1861	Union at Large	12th April 1861
21.	Mrs. Margaret Boyle	F.	16	"	Roman Catholic	Widow			12th April 1861	Union at Large	12th April 1861
22.	Mr. William O'Brien	M.	24	Servant	Roman Catholic	Single			15th April 1861	Union at Large	15th April 1861
23.	Mrs. Margaret Boyle	F.	16	"	Roman Catholic	Widow			25th April 1861	Edenmoreillybegs	25th April 1861
24.	Mrs. Margaret Boyle	F.	16	"	Roman Catholic	Widow			25th April 1861	Edenmoreillybegs	25th April 1861
25.	Mrs. Margaret Boyle	F.	16	"	Roman Catholic	Widow			25th April 1861	Edenmoreillybegs	25th April 1861

Extract from Letterkenny Indoor Relief Register, April, 1861, showing some of those who received assistance after being evicted in Derryveagh.
Donegal County Archives Collection

The Milford Union

was comprised of almost 113,000 statute acres divided into 12 electoral divisions. The number of Electoral Divisions was later increased to 19. The population of the Union in 1841 was just over 38,100, with 5,320 landholders.



Milford Workhouse buildings c.1960's

Milford Workhouse

The Board of Guardians of Milford Union were elected from the Electoral Divisions of the Union. The twenty-six Guardians consisted of both the tenant farmer class and the landlord class in the form of elected and non-elected or ex-officio Guardians.

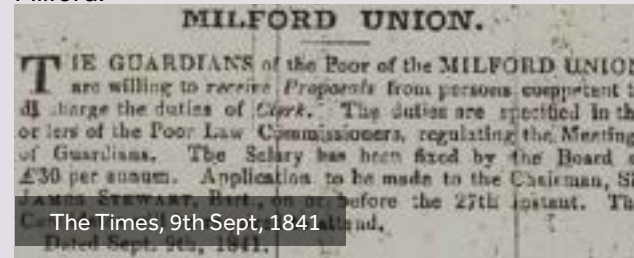
At the first meeting of the Milford Board of Guardians, Sir James Stewart, one of the largest landowners in the area was elected as Chairman. At the onset the Board of Guardians were given only limited responsibilities. The Board were expected to supervise the building of the workhouse, hold interviews for the officers of the Union and the Workhouse, make decisions on tenders for furnishings and food supplies and on a local level smooth the introduction of the Poor Law and make it as acceptable as possible to the local population.

The Poor Law Commissioners had laid down several criteria that each Workhouse site must possess for it to be considered suitable. The most important of these were that it was to be above the reach of common floods, if possible, on a level site, with a clean supply of water. The site was to be at most a mile outside of the town and should not exceed twelve acres, to ensure that the site would be small enough to be tended by the male paupers of the workhouse. The workhouse was built on a site offered by Mr Stewart at the cost of £2 per statute acre and twenty-five years purchase at that rate.

Milford Workhouse was declared fit for the reception of the destitute poor on the 24th December, but it did not open until Monday 6th April 1846. The salaried Officers of the Union included the Union Clerk; Treasurers; Medical Officers; Master and Matron of the Workhouse; Porter; Chaplains; Schoolteachers;

Rate collectors and Relieving officers. John Buchanan and his wife Mary were appointed as Master and Matron.

In 1847 at the height of the famine, 476 people were in receipt of relief in the Workhouse. This had reduced to around 75 in 1899 and before the abolition of the Workhouse there were only 49 inmates remaining in Milford.



The first statistics available for Outdoor Relief are those contained in the Outdoor Relief Register for Milford Union beginning in January 1848. There were 250 cases of outdoor relief granted in January and 1327 between January and July. The numbers receiving relief dropped sharply from the high of 250 in January to only 57 in May of the same year.

The daily work was backed up with strict rules and punishments. Laziness, drinking, gambling and violence against other inmates or staff were strictly forbidden. Other offences included insubordination, using abusive language and going to Milford without permission. Mary Devenny was described as 'a very bad and disobedient, violent worker'. She was imprisoned for six weeks with hard labour because of repeated insubordination and the use of threatening language to the Infirmary Nurse. Catherine Logue took the rod from the Schoolmistress when she was punishing the children, for which she was given three and a half hours in the Refractory Ward. By the early 1900's the punishments had moved away from time

in the Refractory Ward to people being stopped their tobacco or getting smaller rations of milk.

People entering Milford Workhouse came from a wide range of occupations. The Register of Admissions lists everything from acrobats, musicians, artists and ballad singers to the more common labourers, mendicants, beggars, shoemakers, chimney sweeps, farmers, servants, seaweed collectors and smiths. Many people entered for one night only, some travelled huge distances- from Dublin, Cork and one person had just returned from America, while others simply came from the surrounding electoral divisions and from the town itself.

The health of those seeking admission also varied from those with minor ailments like sore eyes and ears to fever and cancer, with some simply described as being infirm due to old age.

Most people are listed as having no residence and as a result are charged on the Union as a whole. In some cases, entire families were admitted to the Workhouse, while single women entered the Workhouse, gave birth and then left later with the children. Cases where the children were left behind seem to be very rare and when it did happen the children were usually boarded out to other families in the neighbourhood and charged on the Union.

No. in Register.	Name of Patient.	Age.	Name of Disease.	Day of Commencement.	Treatment.	Day of Termination.	Event.	OBSERVATIONS.
				1891		1891		
3134	Don McEllane	50	Pain of back	Nov. 5 th	Emp. Caloforians	Nov. 9 th	Cured	x —
3146	Will ^m Moore	50	Ulcer	— 13	Cal. lin. for pill 64	July 1892	Cured	x —
3147	Mary Shults	69	Furunculi	— 15	Sig. Calc. In Luss	March 24 th	Died	x —
3013	Helen Hilday	20	Diarrhoea.	— 16	Lub. Crete.	January 5 th	Cured	
3136	Henry Caruthers	10	Sore Throat.	— 18		Nov. 23 rd	Cured	
3156	James Gibbons	65	Rheumatism	— 28	M. Luss	July 1 st	Cured	x —
3000	Cath Callaghan	65	Ch. Asthma	— 30 th	Pil. 190. Seltz. wine	Dec. 3 rd	Died	
3148	Annier Thomey	65	Debility	— 30 th	Wine. Seltz.	.. 29 th	Died	
3164	Alex. Williams	80	Debility	Nov. 6 th	M. Luss	March 10 th	Cured	x —
3165	Margaret Evans	16	Diphtheria	Dec. 9 th		Dec. 16 th	Cured	x — f
3025	Virginia Dunfee	37	Labour	— 9 th	Delivered	.. 17 th	Cured	
3168	John O'Donnell	35	Epulis Sanguinolent	— 10 th		18 th	Cured	x —
3167	Mary Dunleavy	37	Ulcers.	— 10 th	Iodoform	21 st	Cured	x —
3169	John Magill	16	Cutaneous	— 13 th	Rose oint.	January 25 th	Cured	
3171	Nancy Strickland	70	Debility	.. 17 th	Pil. 49.	January 19 th	Rel. x —	at her own desire
2915	Angela O'Connell	4	Whooping	.. 23 rd		January 7 th	Rel. x —	at his mother's desire
3173	John Gallagher	60	Paralysis	.. 23 rd	Sgt. Galliglas	.. 2 nd	Rel. x —	at her own desire
3174	John Fisher	64	Debility	.. 23 rd	Pil. 119.	Dec. 29 th	Cured	x —
3163	John Caruthers	3	Cutaneous		Long. Hyd. Uyd.	Jan. 12 th	Cured	
3177	Edward O'Donnell	46	Debility	January 1 st		January 16 th	Cured	
3178	James Hogan	80	Suppuration	.. 7 th	Pil. 49.	Feb. 29 th	Rel. x —	at her own desire
3185	Mary Dunleavy	37	Pain of side	.. 12 th		July 8 th	Cured	x —
		61	Constipation	.. 16 th	Pil. 49. Pil. 140.			
		6	Cutaneous	.. 24	Zinc. Oxid. Argent. nit.	July 12 th	Cured	
3036	George Elliott	80	Ch. Bronchitis	.. 24	Brand	Jan. 30 th	Died	
1191		24		.. 24		July 30 th	Cured	

Stranorlar Workhouse

The subject of hiring out young people for employment was an issue in 1845. The Master wished to hire out a girl named Sidney McBride and sought an allowance for her clothing. The Poor Law Commissioners stated she could wear whatever she wore in the Workhouse or clothes from a dead pauper. The Clerk wrote back saying the girl had been in the workhouse since it opened and was anxious to be free from dependency on it. She did not want to wear the clothes she'd worn in the Workhouse and pointed out that there was no deceased woman pauper's clothes lying around.

From March 1845, there were issues over dietary scales. The Medical Officer wanted to increase the dietary scale (breakfast, dinner, supper) to include 8oz oatmeal, 4 lb potatoes: 4 oz buttermilk for able bodied men, (breakfast, dinner, supper) and 7oz, 3.5lb and 4oz for women. This Resolution was passed by the Board but failed to get past the Poor Law Commissioners who wrote in April, to say that the diet in Stranorlar as it stands 'is as good as in any Workhouse in Ireland'.

In July 1846, potatoes were declared to be unfit for use and stirabout was to be given for dinner instead. By then the diet for everyone consisted of Indian meal, oatmeal, buttermilk, bread and sweet milk. The Matron, Master, school mistress and hospital nurse had a better diet with 'fleshmeat' with sugar and tea included. However, the Porter had much the same diet as the paupers.

By early 1847 a proposal was made to only give those aged 7 and over two meals a day. There was stalemate on a vote on this proposal. The average cost of a pauper for a week was between 18d and 20d.

The Medical Officer's report on Stranorlar Workhouse on 1st February 1847 was damning- he stated that 'the health of the inmates has suffered much from overcrowding, the arrangements of the building not admitting of accommodation at all commensurate with the numbers. The consequence has been greatly increased mortality among the aged females and children up to three years.'

The Medical Officer also stated that the hospital accommodation was 'wholly inadequate' even for ordinary requirements. He urged the building of a Fever Hospital. By February 1847 the Workhouse Board room and other rooms were being used to accommodate fever patients. By March the Board refused admission to individuals who had fevers and all patients with fever were to be secured in the front building. By April 1847 plans for the building of a fever hospital in the Workhouse grounds were well underway.

Under the Poor Law Act it was lawful for the Boards to punish 'refractory' paupers for offences laid down. In Stranorlar Workhouse in 1845 Margaret Devenny was charged with several offences including for throwing stirabout at another inmate. She was punished by having her milk withdrawn for two meals. Mary Allison was brought before the Board by the Master for striking Mary McCool. She was discharged forthwith from the Workhouse. A pauper named Mary Anne Martin was sent to solitary confinement for four hours for assaulting Eliza Arnold in September 1845.

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1846 respecting the Annual Appointment of the Officers Guardians
The Medical Officer has before the Board the following returns fully in accordance with the orders given him at the Meeting held on the 7th inst

Class	Breakfast	Dinner	Supper
1st Able-bodied Males Men and Boys above 16 years	5oz Indian Meal 2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk	5oz Indian Meal 2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk 1/2oz Bread & Flour 3/4pt Sweetmilk	5oz Indian Meal 2oz Oatmeal 1oz Melassa
2nd Able-bodied Men, All Women and Boys above 16 years	4oz Indian Meal 2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk	4oz Indian Meal 2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk 1/2oz Bread & Flour 3/4pt Sweetmilk	4oz Indian Meal 1 1/2oz Oatmeal 1oz Melassa
3rd Able-bodied Women and Children from 7 to 16 years	3 1/2oz Indian Meal 1 1/2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk	3 1/2oz Indian Meal 1 1/2oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk 3/4oz Bread & Flour 3/4pt Sweetmilk	3 1/2oz Indian Meal 1 1/2oz Oatmeal 1oz Melassa
4th Children from 3 to 7 years	2oz Indian Meal 1oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk	2oz Indian Meal 1oz Oatmeal 3/4pt Buttermilk 3/4oz Bread & Flour 3/4pt Sweetmilk	2oz Indian Meal 1oz Oatmeal 1oz Melassa

Extract from Stranorlar Board of Guardians Minutes of Meetings, 1846
Donegal County Archives Collection

STRANORLAR UNION.

Population in 1871—18,609.

Present Net Annual Value,—£ 30. 05s. 11 0

STATE of the WORKHOUSE for the Week ending Saturday, the 2nd day of May 1874.

Number of Inmates for which accommodation is provided:	So, that can be accommodated in each building	Total No. in each building on the above date.	Able-bodied.		Aged and Infirm persons, and adult persons, above 15 years of age, but not working.		Boys and Girls above 9 and under 15 years of age.		Children above 5 and under 9 years of age.	Children above 2 and under 5 years of age.	Infants under 2 years of age.	Total.	RETURN OF SICK AND LUNATICS.		OBSERVATIONS.		
			Males.	Fem.	Males.	Fem.	Boys.	Girls.					Number in Hospital on the above date.	No. of Lunatics and Idiots in Workhouse on the above date.			
Workhouse,	592	57															
Temporary Buildings,																	
Additional Workhouse,																	
Permanent Fever Hospital, In Sheds,	66	-															
Total.	658	57															
Remainng on previous Saturday, as per last Return.			4	9	18	14	1	2	8	2	1	57	In Work-house Hospital, } 21	In separate Wards, } In Wards with other Inmates, } 1			
Admitted during the Week.			6	1	1	2						11					
TOTAL.			10	10	20	16	1	2	8	2	2	70	Total, 21	Total, 1			
Discharged during the Week.			7	2	2							12					
Died.						1						1					
Total Discharged and Dead.			7	2	2	1						13					
REMAINING ON THE ABOVE DATE.			3	8	17	15	1	2	8	2	1	57					
													NIGHT LODGERS OR CASUALS.				
													M.	F.	Children under 15.	TOTAL.	
													7	2	1	10	
													1	1		2	
													No. at corresponding period last year,				2

COPY of MINUTES of Proceedings of the Board of Guardians, at a Meeting held on MONDAY, the 1st day of May 1874.

PRESENT: In the Chair, John Gunning

Other Guardians:— Le Boyce, James Holmes, R. Rooney,
A. Magee, J. Sullivan, J. S. Johnston Esq Geo S. Fenton Esq

From the Workhouse to Australia

Between 1848 and 1850, over 4,000 girls emigrated from Irish workhouses to the Australian colonies. This was the result of a British Government sponsored assisted emigration scheme, led by Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Some of the girls were orphans and all were destitute. They were chosen as suitable by the Boards of Guardians who managed the Workhouses. Women were particularly in demand in the under-populated colonies of Australia. On arrival some were greeted with hostility and were exploited or abused. Others however lived relatively prosperous lives.



Rose (Roseanna) McFadden with her Grandchildren.

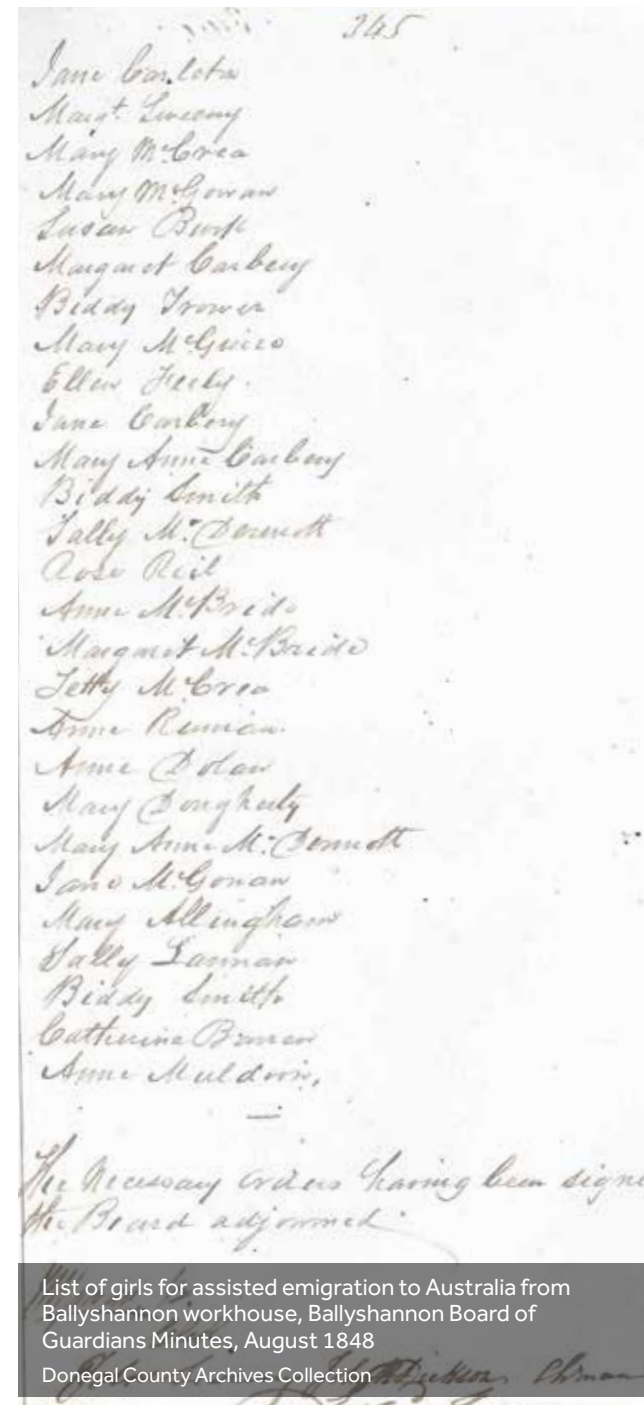
Among those to emigrate under the Earl Grey scheme were the girls who travelled from Ballyshannon Workhouse to Sydney on the sailing ship *The Inchinnan*. The girls had to bring 6 shifts, 2 flannel petticoats, 6 pairs of stockings, 2 pairs of

shoes and 2 gowns. The *Inchinnan* arrived in Sydney on 13th February 1849 after a journey of 106 days. The girls from Ballyshannon, along with others, were housed at the Female Immigrant Depot. An Orphan Committee was responsible for their welfare and acted as a job placement agency.

One of the girls from Ballyshannon Workhouse was a 14-year-old orphan, Jane Carberry. She got work as a nursemaid, and later married Henry Gibson Kemp, had up to 14 children and died in Tumut, New South Wales, in 1917 aged 84.

Mary Ann McDermott from Belleek, Co. Fermanagh, was 16 when she arrived with her sister Sarah (Sally). Mary Ann became a house servant and married Matthew Lester on 10 February 1851. Matthew was frequently before the courts on charges relating to being drunk, causing trouble generally and deserting the family.

Rose (Roseanna) McFadden, aged 16, from Dunfanaghy workhouse, arrived in Melbourne on the *Lady Kennaway* in 1848. She became a housemaid and married Alexander Poynton in 1852. He was involved in the Eureka Rebellion in 1854, which was instigated by gold miners in Ballarat, Victoria. The couple had 14 children (2 died in infancy). Her son Alexander (OBE) was a State and Federal Politician, and her son John Joseph became Lord Mayor of Perth. Her grandson Sir Alexander Wales was Lord Mayor of Melbourne.



List of girls for assisted emigration to Australia from Ballyshannon workhouse, Ballyshannon Board of Guardians Minutes, August 1848

Donegal County Archives Collection

Poor Law Reform and Healthcare Provision in Donegal, 1919-1923

The Democratic Programme, or the declaration of social or economic principles that was issued by the First Dáil on 21 January 1919, emphasised the need to abolish the 'present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law System'. It proposed a 'sympathetic native scheme' that would ensure that the sick and elderly would be 'entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration'.

The services that the workhouses provided were expanded from the 1850s onwards with the creation of the dispensary system. Dispensaries provided medical services within the Unions through a district medical officer. After the opening of workhouse infirmaries to the public in 1862 these institutions gradually transitioned into healthcare facilities. Fever hospitals were also established in the workhouses to combat localised outbreaks. Poor Law Unions also fell under the oversight of the Local Government Board and grew dependent on grants to provide services. After 1898, the public health functions of the Boards of Guardians were taken over by the Urban and Rural District Councils. Therefore, by 1919, workhouses had become multi-purpose institutions that provided essential services to communities.

WORKHOUSE AMALGAMATION IN DONEGAL.

POOR-LAW COMMISSION IN LETTERKENNY.

EVIDENCE FROM LETTERKENNY, MILFORD, GLENTIES, INISHOWEN, &c.

A sitting of the Viceregal Commission, consisting of Mr. W. L. Micks, M.A. (chairman), Dr. E. Coey Bigger, and Mr. George Murnaghan, M.P., with Mr. Mahon as secretary, held a sitting on Tuesday in the Boardroom at the Letterkenny Workhouse.

Mr. Edward M'Fadden, M.P., appeared for the Letterkenny Board of Guardians and Milford Board of Guardians. Mr. John Mackey, solicitor, also represented Milford Guardians. The Urban Council of Letterkenny was represented by Mr. John G. Larkin, Town Clerk; Mr. P. Carroll, and Mr. F. Ward. Mr. Bernard M'Fadden appeared for the Donegal County Council, and Mr. Michael M'Neilis for the Glenties Board of Guardians. Mr. R. S. Watters, Clerk to Letterkenny Board of Guardians, was in attendance.

The first witness called was Mr. J. G. Larkin, Town Clerk of Letterkenny, who said that, in answer to the first query of the Commission as to whether it would be expedient to dissolve any of the unions, it would not be expedient to dissolve any of the unions wholly or partly contained in the County Donegal.

The Chairman: Was that passed unanimously? No, but by a majority.

What was the voting? 3 to 2.

What were the arguments put forward for and against amalgamation? Those in favour argued that the amalgamation would reduce taxation and that many workhouses now were not required for the purposes for which they were originally founded, and on the other hand it was held that amalgamation would be a hardship on the poor owing to the distance of travelling.

In answer to a second query as to whether in the event of any unions being dissolved and the workhouses being no longer required they could with advantage be taken over by the County Council for an auxiliary lunatic asylum or otherwise utilised, Mr. Larkin said that in the event of any union or unions being dissolved and the workhouse or workhouses being no longer required for poor law purposes such could be utilised for the purpose of technical instruction.

The Chairman: Then your Urban Council are apprehensive that some workhouses might be

Donegal News, 1903

As to the classification of inmates, Mr. Larkin

naging body of the centralised workhouse should have power to commit any person refusing to carry out any task allotted to him or her in consideration of the temporary relief afforded them.

Mr. Thomas Hayes, J.P., Chairman of the Milford Rural Council, was in favour of having only one workhouse in the county, and that should be at Stranorlar. He would clear out the body of the other seven workhouses in the county.

To Mr. Murnaghan: There would be a good deal of expense, of course, in making the change. He would move the able-bodied paupers. He endorsed Dr. Warnock's evidence given at Deery.

Mr. Hugh O'Donnell, Chairman of the Board of Guardians at Milford, stated that he was in favour of retaining Milford Workhouse, on the grounds that if it was dissolved, to remove the sick poor to Stranorlar, as suggested by Mr. Hayes, would be too far.

Mr. James A. Diamond would consider it a misfortune to discharge Milford Union, though he would not object to part of Dunfanaghy or Letterkenny being added to it. He would consider it inhuman to move people who were sick to Stranorlar or Dunfanaghy. He was totally against outdoor relief, which was now encouraged, because it was union rating.

The Chairman: Do you think people are getting outdoor relief who are not destitute? I don't think it; but I am sure of it. It is growing, and I will grow as long as union rating exists.

Continuing, Mr. Diamond was surprised to find two respectable professional men like Mr. Massey and Mr. Mallins coming there in favour of the Ramelton hospital. If the chairman would drop into it in its real state, he would see it in its real state.

Mr. Mackey: Were you ever in the hospital? Never, thank God, and I hope I never will. I think it was a great waste of public money, particularly when there is a splendid hospital, with trained nurses, at Milford. He would give the tramps improvement. If the union was dissolved the chaplains would get nothing.

The Chairman: Then you would be in favour of giving them something? (laughter)

Mr. Mackey: Have you got your chaplain here to day? If I must tell you it, I will tell you I pay him a decent salary, and if he neglects his duty, it is his own look out (laughter).

Mr. A. T. Curry, Milford, was in favour of amalgamation. During the past year 188 tramps visited Milford Union. He did not know how they could get them away. They tried to make them work hard at Milford, and they would not. He considered the chaplains were paid rather a big salary.

Mr. Hayes, recalled, stated that the outdoor relief should be electoral divisional rating. He thought the Government should subsidise the rates in the poor electoral divisions, and this could be done by increasing the agricultural grant.

of dietary should be tramps, male and female, in the casual ward at least a week, and that to perform a prescribed in accordance with the dependent upon the vagrant be retained by the (they enter and sent) tution as a county at

Mr. J. E. Boyle, Board of Guardians, the amalgamation of ago the late Mr. J carried a motion in the Glenties Board of communication but the average number houses in the county commutation for about two workhouses would the wants of the whole Letterkenny and Glenties position, would be that these centres were munition with all ception of Milford.

gain would in consequence county without inflict the poor. He would change in the mode present with a heavy tracts. The valuation of the whole county, tracts, was slightly valuation per head of the Union is slight poundage rate for the five years has been 2 houses, while the Union has been 4s 7d property. If the rate instead of a district or 3d to the rate on land to the rate of the who the congested district land and 2s 5d on ho to the county rate w atelle, while the congested districts would seemed to him unfair Londonderry No 2, 1 to the relief of the p by the Glenties Union needed a re-arrangement of taxation. He was rating for the upkeep to be under the cou There was an idea e was a very erroneous- ously bear the cost of

In October 1919 the Local Government Board requested that Letterkenny Board of Guardians enforce the requirements of the Vaccination Acts, which had been passed during the previous century to prevent the spread of smallpox, and insisted that 'prosecutions should be instituted in all cases in which parents persist in failing to have children submitted to vaccination'. From November 1919 the Guardians of Ballyshannon engaged in lengthy negotiations with the St. Johns Ambulance charity in Belfast to procure an ambulance for the Union. This ambulance was subsequently commandeered by Vice-Brigadier Joseph Murray and the Volunteers during the War of Independence, to attack Belleek R.I.C. barracks in September 1920. The Guardians of Ballyshannon received an angry letter from the County Director of St. Johns Ambulance, after the ambulance was impounded in Finner Camp, asking for a guarantee that it not be used 'contrary to the regulations for Restoration of Order in Ireland 1920'.

By 1919, indoor relief, or the provision of relief within the workhouse had declined and Donegal's workhouses contained only a handful of inmates. After nationalists assumed control of the Boards from the 1860s onwards there was a gradual shift to more outdoor relief through direct cash payments, or payments in lieu of work such as road construction. The provision of relief depended on the circumstances of each applicant. Despite Sinn Féin's success in the elections to the Boards of Guardians in Donegal in June 1920, the Guardians of the revolutionary generation maintained an entrenched conservatism on the provision of welfare. Many within Sinn Féin continued to hold Victorian notions about the deserving and undeserving poor. In Donegal the deserving poor were the labourers and seasonal workers who were essential to prosperous

farms to the east of the county. The undeserving poor, by contrast, were those whose poverty resulted from their own personal failings and inability to live up to social ideals.

Despite the desire to reform the Poor Law, the revolutionary government still distinguished between 'poverty' and 'destitution' when determining who qualified for relief. The latter category being the one that guaranteed some form of welfare. In October 1920, Letterkenny's Guardians denied David McAuley temporary lodgings in the workhouse because he had 'an old age pension and is not destitute'. Similarly, in June 1921 the Guardians of Ballyshannon read a letter from Maggie Doherty who questioned why her outdoor relief had been stopped considering that she only earned 5 shillings a week and was 'in very poor circumstances'. The Guardians decided that no action be taken on Doherty's case because her condition was not destitute.

Donegal's Boards of Guardians, like their counterparts in the Rural and Urban District Councils, issued resolutions swearing allegiance to Dáil Éireann from June 1920 onwards. Some Guardians, such as the Guardians of Ballyshannon, undertook a strongly republican outlook from June onwards. James Connolly, the Volunteer Captain of the Kinlough Company in the No. 4 Brigade, was elected as a Guardian for Ballyshannon and was behind a successful resolution that banned forces from Finner Camp from using the hospitals. The Guardians of Ballyshannon also relied on the Volunteers to implement their instructions. In July 1920 they asked the Volunteers to track down John McCurran so he could remove his wife and child from the workhouse. The Guardians also passed a resolution in support of Connolly after his father was killed during an R.I.C. raid in September 1920.

Although the Boards of Guardians in Donegal declared their allegiance to Dáil Éireann they were often, like their counterparts in the Rural and Urban District Councils, reluctant to shed all contact with the Local Government Board. The Guardians of Letterkenny were still sending their minutes to the Board in December 1920 and the Dáil sent a hostile letter, in line with a decree the previous September, threatening to withhold pensions from Guardians who continued to communicate with the Custom House. The Guardians subsequently resolved to sever communication with the Local Government Board but the dangerous financial situation that Union found itself in worried some of the remaining Irish Parliamentary Party members. On 25 February 1921, Edward Lynch, who was a Justice of the Peace in Letterkenny, proposed that the town's Guardians rescind their allegiance to Dáil Éireann and return to the Local Government Board. This motion mirrored similar ones that were proposed to the Rural and Urban District Councils and it also came to nothing. However, the fact that it was proposed further demonstrates both the divisions within the nationalist movements and those that were caused by the practicalities of local government.

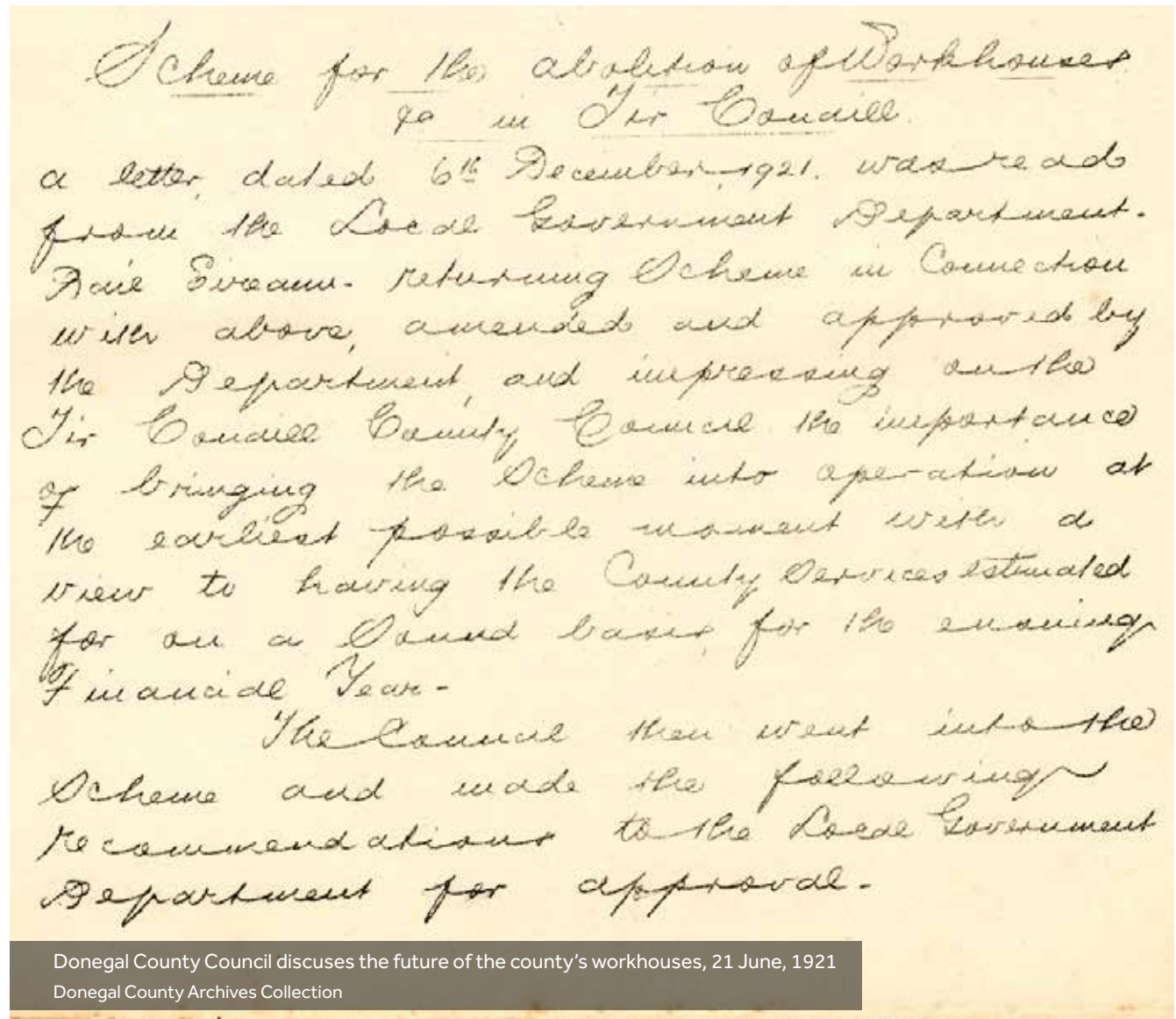
These divisions were made more apparent when it came to the future of the Workhouses. The Democratic Programme pledged the Irish Republic to improve the country's health but, as with its other pledges, it proved to be a vague aspiration rather than a certainty. The lack of money and the campaign against Crown forces ensured that there was no clear plan on how the Poor Law should be reformed. In July 1920 representatives from Donegal's Boards of Guardians convened at Lifford Courthouse to discuss the Workhouses. The attendees decided to abolish the county's Workhouses and transfer all the

remaining inmates into Letterkenny. In late 1920 the Dáil's Commission of Inquiry into Local Government recommended that the Workhouses be abolished and amalgamated. Boards of Guardians in each county were required to implement these schemes and amalgamation, along with the need to save money, became the main policy that was pursued on health. By December Donegal County Council had taken over the amalgamation scheme. The Council decided to retain Letterkenny Workhouse, abolish the others, and transfer the cost of these institutions to a 'County at Large' charge. The Guardians of Letterkenny noted that the Council lacked the power to abolish the Workhouses and argued that 'half of the Boards of Guardians of Unions situated wholly or partly in the County are opposed to the scheme'.

These amalgamation schemes often provoked fierce local resistance from various Boards of Guardians who, despite their opposition to the idea of the 'Workhouse', were reluctant to see their area deprived of welfare and medical services. This was the case for Ballyshannon's Guardians in November 1920 when they emphasised the 'peculiar situation of the Ballyshannon Workhouse' considering the area that it served extended into three counties. The Guardians rejected the proposed amalgamation because 'the time is not ripe for such a drastic change'. Similar grievances were raised by the other Unions and many, such as Glenties and Letterkenny, deferred discussions on amalgamation for several months.

On 21 June 1921, Donegal County Council debated the future of the Workhouses. It was decided that all the inmates in the County's Workhouses, except for Ballyshannon, would be transferred to Letterkenny which would henceforth be known as the 'County Home'. Owing to Ballyshannon's objections, the

County Council decided to temporarily maintain the town's Workhouse. The Fever Hospitals, considering the recent Spanish Flu Pandemic, would also be maintained for the time being. Any Board of Guardians that refused to comply with the scheme would receive no money from the County fund.



Donegal County Council discusses the future of the county's workhouses, 21 June, 1921
Donegal County Archives Collection

The Council's plan provoked a hostile reaction from the Inishowen Union that also touched on grievances that dated back to the splitting of the peninsula into Inishowen and Londonderry No. 2 under the Local Government Act (1898). Claiming a truer allegiance to Dáil Éireann than the County Council, the Inishowen Guardians refused to be 'compelled to amalgamate with a Union which has gone over to our enemy for the sake of a dole'. By this the Guardians meant the portion of Londonderry No. 2 that was now part of Northern Ireland. The objections of Inishowen came to nothing, but they reflect the intense negotiations between Lifford, the wider county, and the revolutionary government in Dublin, on the future direction of healthcare provision in Donegal.

The County Council's plan was referred to the Dáil's Department of Local Government for consideration and it was estimated that it could save around £14,000 to £20,000 per year. The Local Government inspectors, who were appointed by the Department to visit run-down and remote workhouses, challenged the Council's plans for healthcare reform across Ireland. The inspector recommended that Letterkenny was unfit to be the County Hospital and that it should go to Lifford Hospital. Furthermore, the Inspector recommended that a County Home should be established at Stranorlar and that district hospitals should be maintained at Letterkenny, Donegal, Glenties, and Carndonagh. By the time the Civil War broke out in June 1922 the situation had developed further. Between July and October,

the Department of Local Government ordered that Ballyshannon Workhouse be closed and that the town's healthcare services should be transferred to the nearby Sheil Hospital, which was deemed to be a higher quality institution. This situation remained unchanged until the 1960s when the district hospitals were closed, and the Letterkenny General Hospital became the County Hospital.

The abolition of the Workhouses was the first major attempt to reform the Poor Law in Ireland and Britain and was innovative for its time considering that the structure remained in Northern Ireland until 1948.



Ballyshannon Workhouse Hospital
c. 1890
Copyright Glenfinnann Station Museum

Ballyshannon Workhouse after Closure

By the twentieth century the numbers in Ballyshannon workhouse continued to decline, assisted by the introduction of the old age pension and outdoor relief. The Board of Guardian minutes for 1917 show that some children were boarded out at a cost of £4 per annum, and that there were ninety-five inmates. This compares with over 900 inmates at the height of the Great Famine.

The Workhouse school had only seven children present when inspected in August 1917. The cost of keeping an inmate was eight shillings and four pence halfpenny. Facilities had improved – hot water was laid on in the Maternity ward and a tender by John Myles for electric lighting of the Workhouse and Fever Hospital, at a cost of £50 per annum was being considered. In the Infirmary local doctors were often called upon to perform operations on patients. The Workhouse hospital was used by the military during the First World War and approximately 940 military patients were treated there. This reflected the numbers who were based at Finner Camp, a local training camp for soldiers during World War I. It was reported that in 1921 Ballyshannon Workhouse was

occupied by the IRA and provided “an armed sentry at the gate” (Irish Examiner 1921).

There were only 21 inmates left by March 1922 when notices were served on Workhouse officials (with the exception of the dispensary doctor, midwives, caretakers and relieving officers) terminating their appointments from 1st March 1922. The last inmates were transferred to Stranorlar, Irvinestown or Carrick-on-Shannon depending on their place of origin. The workhouse buildings still survive in Ballyshannon, but most are in a precarious state. The Council uses part of the old site as a depot while the Ballyshannon Community Nursing Unit is based in what was once the infirmary block and dining hall/chapel.

FORM 18. (Article 40.)

SEPARATE REGISTER for the Half-year ended the 30th day of September 1916, of Persons admitted liable by law to maintain them, have claimed to pay the cost of (To be kept by the Master of the Workhouse and

(c) A separate form of this Register shall be opened at the beginning of each half-year. The names and other particulars of Persons remaining at the close of the preceding half-year are to be transferred, in red ink, below

REGISTER NO.		Name and Surname	Residence	Sex	Age	Whether Single, Married, Widower, or Widow	Employment or Calling	If dependent, in what capacity, whether as Wife, Child, Servant, or Apprentice, and of whom	Religious Denomination	Date of discharge or death
If re-entered from last half-year, original Number (a)	If admitted during half-year, consecutive Number									
<i>Bank Regns Bath. Company</i>										
<i>819</i>		<i>J. Donnan</i>	<i>Arrears due for military patients</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Soldier Private</i>	<i>27299. 12th B. Div. Ind. D.</i>	<i>Presbyterian</i>	
<i>820</i>		<i>F. Morwood</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>27420</i>	<i>"</i>	
<i>821</i>		<i>G. H. Kirkpatrick</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>28028</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>B Wesleyan</i>
<i>822</i>		<i>John M. Lytles</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>25706</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>B of I</i>
<i>823</i>		<i>Robert M. Keon</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>25705</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>
<i>824</i>		<i>Tom Humphrey</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>27774</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>
<i>825</i>		<i>John M. Lytles</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>26693</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Presbyterian</i>
<i>826</i>		<i>John M. Lytles</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Co. 1</i>	<i>27388</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>B of I</i>
<i>827</i>		<i>John M. Lytles</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>28284</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>B of I</i>

Extract showing some of the Finner Camp soldiers who were treated in Ballyshannon Workhouse in 1916
Donegal County Archives Collection

Donegal Town Workhouse after Closure

In August 1921, the Guardians decided to close the main body of the Workhouse, abolish the offices of Master and Porter, and request that the nun in charge of the hospital inform the Board what salary she would accept to perform the master's duties and her own. In November, 200 soldiers of the Irish Republican Army commandeered the

main workhouse building. In early June 1922, in the aftermath of the Battle of Pettigo, those who fought free of the encirclement by the British at Pettigo were rescued by local residents or Irish National Army units in cars and horse-traps, and were brought to safety in Donegal Town. There up to fifty wounded men were temporarily sheltered in the workhouse, attended to by doctors and nurses. The Admissions Block is now part of a Community Hospital. The Workhouse graveyard is located nearby.

33340	5	-	1922	Michael Donnelly	3779	- Family Pettigo	M.	25	-	Soldier I.R.A.	R.G.	
1	5	-	1922	Felix Mc Gule	4272	- - -	M.	29	-	Soldier I.R.A.	R.G.	
2	6	-	1922	Patrick Mc Glinchy	4779	-	M.	19	-	I.R. Police	R.G.	From Hospital
3	7	-	1922	Francis Ross	3879	Pettigo	M.	24	-	Motor Driver	R.G.	
4	8	-	1922	Willie Reid	3779	-	M.	19	-		R.G.	
5	8	-	1922	Michael Harley	4279	Minicohan	M.	28	-	Farmer Son	R.G.	
6	9	-	1922	Joseph Ross	4779	Dongal. Family Pettigo	M.	24	-		R.G.	
7	10	-	1922	William J. Byrne	2779	Rosclair	M.	43	-	Farmer	R.G.	
8	13	-	1922	Joseph Mc Hugh	4179	Dongal Family Pettigo	M.	39	Married	Soldier I.R.A.	R.G.	
9	16	-	1922	3281 Patrick Kelly		-	M.	51	Single	Labourer	R.G.	
33350	17	-	1922	Afford Gallagher	1179	-	M.	17	-	Soldier I.R.A.	R.G.	
1	19	-	1922	3329 Sarah Doberty		Dongal	F.	41	-	Servant	R.G.	
2	20	-	1922	Patrick Barron	3479	Pullnacorney	M.	50	Married	Farmer	R.G.	
3	22	-	1922	Alice Mc Grea	3779	Dongal Family Pettigo	F.	23	-	Antitoxin wife	R.G.	Patrick Mc Grea
4	22	-	1922	Mary Teresa Diver		Kninaghman	F.	Birth	Child of N. 3208	Servants Child	R.G.	
5	22	-	1922	Alice Bridget Mc Grea		"	F.	Birth	Child of N. 3252	Antitoxin Child	R.G.	
6	22	-	1922	William Douglas	5379	Dunne	M.	70	Single	Land Surveyor	S.G.	
7	24	-	1922	James Gowen	1279	Dongal	M.	25	-	Soldier I.R.A.	R.G.	
8	27	-	1922	3316 John Hammond		-	M.	49	-	Labourer	R.G.	From Hospital
				Patrick Carrington		Donnaltraute	F.	43	Married	Delicatessen wife	R.G.	Thomas Diver
						Trummon	M.	22	Single	Servant	R.G.	

Soldiers wounded during the Battle of Pettigo, 1922 were treated in the Donegal Workhouse.
Donegal County Archives Collection

Dunfanaghy Workhouse after Closure

With ever declining numbers a decision was made in 1915 to close the Workhouse. In 1917, Glenties Board of Guardians declined to take any inmates from Dunfanaghy Workhouse. The Workhouse closed on 31st March 1917, with remaining inmates sent to Milford Workhouse. The last Master was Andrew McIntyre, who then became Master in Milford until 1918. He later became the County Librarian. A public auction was held on 18th March 1919 to sell off 4 out of the 6 acres and part of the Workhouse buildings. The Admission block is now The Workhouse: Donegal Famine Heritage Centre. The Fever Hospital is in use as an Art Gallery.

D. COLL & CO.'S SALES.

DUNFANAGHY UNION.
WORKHOUSE PREMISES AND LAND
FOR SALE.

WE have received Instructions from the Board of Guardians of the Dunfanaghy Union to offer **FOR SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION**, subject to the approval of the Local Government Board for Ireland, at Dunfanaghy, on the 18th MARCH, 1919, at **TWELVE** o'clock Noon, portion of the Dunfanaghy Workhouse Premises, with the Land (comprising about Four Acres) thereto attached.

Terms—Cash for Deposit and Fees at time of Sale as per Conditions of Sale, and balance if and when the said Sale shall have been approved by the said Local Government Board.

Full Particulars as to Conditions and Terms of Sale can be obtained from the undersigned.

WILLIAM KELLY,
Solicitor, Letterkenny; or
DANIEL COLL & CO.,
Auctioneers, Magheracloghor,
Bunbeg.

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Donegal News, March, 1919

Glenties Workhouse after Closure

From 1921, Glenties Board of Guardians had accepted that closure was inevitable and necessary. In April 1923, the Workhouse closed. With the closure of the Workhouses, the officers and officials sought compensation which led to long disputes with the local Board of Guardians and the Dáil Eireann Local Government Board. In 1925, the former Master and Clerk were still occupying Glenties Workhouse building and the Council had to seek an order on behalf of the Local Government Board to request them to vacate the premises. It was then modified for use as St Patrick's District Hospital and remained in use until 1958. In the 1950's, part of this hospital was in use as a Sanatorium under Dr Noel Browne's TB scheme. The Workhouse and associated buildings were demolished, and Glenties Comprehensive School built on the site in 1968.

GLENTIES WORKHOUSE AFFAIRS.

ALLEGED "SQUATTING" BY EX- OFFICIALS.

ACTION BY COUNTY COUNCIL.

The position of affairs at the Glenties Workhouse was referred to at the meeting of the Tuconall County Council on Tuesday, when notice of motion by Mr. James Clarke, D.L., appeared on the agenda as follows:—"That Mr. P. J. Ward, solicitor, Letterkenny, be authorised to demand on behalf of the County Council possession of the workhouse premises at Glenties from Messrs. James Breslin, ex-master, and Patrick Kennedy, ex-porter."

It appeared that since the abolition of Glenties Workhouse in April, 1923, the then workhouse master and porter remained in possession of the apartments occupied by them, and full occupation of the buildings being desired notice to quit was given to the occupants, but a difficulty arose as to which Government department now controlled the buildings. The Local Government Board having failed to secure possession asked the County Council to take action, hence the notice of motion.

Mr. Clarke proposed his motion, which was seconded by Mr. Gallen, who said these people were a nuisance and impediment to those carrying out their work

Donegal Democrat, 1925

The resolution was carried unanimously



Demolition of Glenties Workhouse in 1967 to make way for the construction of the Glenties Comprehensive School
Denis Tynan Collection

Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Inishowen Workhouse, Carndonagh after Closure

In 1903, the Board stated that they were in favour of the amalgamation of their Workhouse with Derry. At that time there were 96 inmates in the workhouse. In 1906 after an enquiry by the Local Government Board, the Master, Matron, Porter and a female attendant were asked to resign due to lack of discipline and irregularities.

In November 1921, the IRA occupied the front block of the workhouse. After its closure it became a district hospital. All the buildings were demolished in 1958. The Fever Hospital is now the James Connolly Memorial Hospital.



Inishowen Workhouse Staff
Courtesy of Irish Architectural Archive



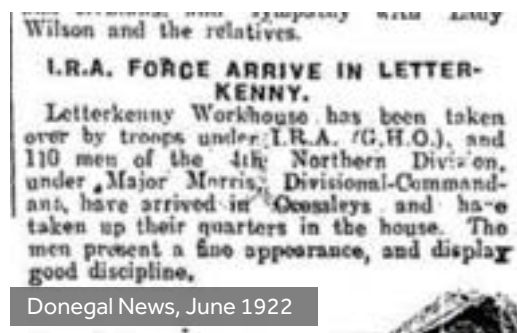
IRA at Inishowen Workhouse, 1922



Letterkenny Workhouse Buildings
Taken by Alexander Campbell Morgan. Letterkenny, Co. Donegal 1954
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Letterkenny Workhouse after Closure

In early June 1922, Rockhill House and Ballymacool House were taken over by Anti Treaty forces. In response to this in late June, over 100 Pro Treaty troops from Beggars Bush Barracks in Dublin were sent to Letterkenny, where they took over the main Letterkenny Workhouse building.



A day after the Civil War began, on 29 June, these Pro Treaty forces were ordered to recapture Ballymacool House and Rockhill House from the Anti Treaty forces. The raids began at 5am and all prisoners arrested were taken to Letterkenny Workhouse.

During the Civil War, the former Master of the Workhouse was threatened which resulted in him and his family moving to Derry to live.

Letterkenny Workhouse was administered by the Board of Guardians until their last meeting on 27th October 1922. From

August 1923, at the rear of the Reception Block, the Watt and Co Ltd, Wholesale Bottlers and Aerated Mineral Water Manufacturers, leased a large part of the complex including a garage. In 1948, Mr Watt from Derry who had begun the company handed it over to his manager Mr Lyttle, who went into partnership with Mr Mc Auley and renamed the operation as LYMAC.

A Fever Hospital opened in the Reception Block of the workhouse on 28th December 1928 and this remained in operation until 1954, when it became St Anne's Maternity Hospital. This operated until 1960, when it moved to the new County Hospital. After this, Letterkenny Urban District Council Offices, a branch of the County Library and the Assistant County Engineer were housed in the Reception Block, along with an office used by the Births Deaths and Marriages Registry. A portion of the end block was used as a Dispensary by Dr Mc Ginley and Dr Scally. Letterkenny Boxing Club was based in the workhouse until the mid-1950's. The site was also the headquarters for the local Civil Defence for several years. The one and half acre site on which the old Workhouse stood later became the yard for Donegal County Council and Letterkenny Urban District Council. In 1987 the Reception block was converted into Donegal County Museum. On the 14th January 1988, the Workhouse building (the main accommodation block) was demolished to provide a site

for a new Garda Station and Divisional Headquarters at New Line Road.

Milford Workhouse after Closure

In the early 1900's the avenue leading to Milford Workhouse was planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. At a meeting of Milford Board of Guardians on 14 August 1920 a letter was read from the Local Government department of Dáil Eireann in which they approved of the Resolution passed by the various Donegal Boards of Guardians as a step forward and toward their goal of the complete abolition of the Workhouses. In 1921, Kathleen Mackey, Nurse in the Fever Hospital, asked the Board to grant her permission to accept a trained nurse's commission in the Irish Republican Army. On the 14th July 1923, the Board of Guardians of Milford was officially abolished along with the other County Donegal Unions. In May 1996, the remaining workhouse buildings were demolished. The Milford Co-Op Livestock Mart is now located on this site. The Workhouse graveyard is located nearby.



Milford Workhouse Demolished

A community organisation in Milford has protested about the demolition of the old workhouse and fever hospital outside the town last month. The group, Integrated Resource Development-Milford stated that although the demolition of the derelict structure was entirely legal, they had no prior knowledge that the building was to be removed.

An I.R.D spokesman said the workhouse was established in 1846 and the fever hospital was opened as part of the development in 1851. It had historic and architectural significance because of the magnificent square cut cornerstones used in the construction and there was an old graveyard site adjacent to these buildings.

The spokesman added that when they contacted the owners the day the demolition began, they were told the action was being taken for safety and for insurance liability reasons. The I.R.D. group were also told that the property had been on the market for nearly a year but no interest had been shown in it by the people of Milford.

The group stated that the demolition had distressed people in the town but as it was not a listed building and since it was unoccupied, it could be demolished without planning permission being required, there was nothing that could be done. They added that they

Donegal News, May, 1996
Donegal County Archives Collection

The County Home St Joseph's Hospital, Stranorlar

From 1899, the Sisters of Mercy provided the nursing staff in the Workhouse Infirmary. Following the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1923 Stranorlar Workhouse became St Joseph's County Home. In May 1924, the Matron reported that Stranorlar home was 'very congested', and that there was 'little available room for children'. In March 1925, an inspector from the Department visited Stranorlar and recommended the immediate removal of children from the institution because 'the contact with other inmates will have a very bad effect on their health, both bodily and mentally'. The Minister suggested, as a temporary expedient, the removal of all infants and mothers to the Ballyshannon premises. However, the Board of Health rejected the proposal and subsequently decided that the illegitimate children should be boarded out but only in cases 'where this course is not objectionable to the mothers'. The Department also directed that boarded-out children whose mothers were alive and not resident in the County Home should be boarded out as far as possible from the district in which the mother resided, except in cases where they contributed to the support of the child. Otherwise, it was suggested, the mother would give constant trouble to the foster parents. In 1925, continued overcrowding in the County Home led to renewed consideration by the Board of Health of the removal of unmarried mothers and their children to other accommodation. However, it was realised that unmarried mothers undertook most of the work in the Home and if they were removed many staff would

have to be employed to replace them. One member of the Board calculated that the transfer of women and children would cost up to £1,000 and another argued that the transfer would in effect create two County Homes. Little action appears to have been taken to reduce the overcrowding.

In January 1925, 29 single mothers and 51 children were living there. By December, numbers had increased to 36 women and 56 children. Overall occupancy in the home had increased from 275 to 292.





Donegal County Archives

Donegal Workhouse Collection in the Donegal County Archives

Donegal County Archives holds almost 1,000 items relating to the eight Workhouses of County Donegal, dating from 1840 to 1923. The archive, known as the Poor Law Union Collection, consists mainly of minutes of the meetings of the Board of Guardians in each Union and Admission and Discharge Registers. There are also statistics, dietary records, correspondence, posters and notices, registers of deaths, a punishment book, dispensary records, a visiting committee register, photographs and accounts.

The archives can be viewed by appointment at Donegal County Archives,
3 Rivers Centre, Lifford, Co. Donegal
T 074 9153900

E archivist@donegalcoco.ie

or are available online at www.findmypast.ie

The archives of Strabane Workhouse (whose jurisdiction included much of east Donegal) and Derry/Londonderry Workhouse (whose jurisdiction included some of south Inishowen) are held in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in Belfast.

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The Workhouses of County Donegal

Throughout 2022, the Culture Division of Donegal County Council commemorated the events of the Decade of Centenaries. Donegal County Museum in association with the County Archives Service created this booklet on the history of the Workhouses of County Donegal using the Workhouse records held in the Donegal Archives and various other sources.

Workhouses were synonymous with the purported social care system that existed in Ireland prior to Independence, but their role in society has often been overlooked or misunderstood. In this booklet we explore the early years of the Donegal Workhouses and examine the final years of the Poor Law system.

The records of the Donegal Workhouses are a truly invaluable source for the study of the local, family and academic history of Ireland, from the era of the Great Famine through to the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

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



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