NATIONAL FAMINE
COMMEMORATION 2026

Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna, Co. Galway.
Sunday 17 May 2026

Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

OPW

The IRISH WORKHOUSE CENTRE

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

“History is scrawled in the silence of stone.”

Noelle Lynskey, *Silence of Stone*

Kieran Tuohy, Dark Shadows exhibition.
Photo credit: Kerry Kissane.

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Cover: Kieran Tuohy, Dark Shadows exhibition, photo credit: Kerry Kissane.

Gairdín Comórtha 1916, Swangate, Athenry: plaque commemorating the Diaspóra na Gaillimhe; all our people who left Galway from famine times. Photo credit: Thomas O'Sullivan.

Dormitory in the Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna. Photo credit: Kerry Kissane.

Foreword

I am honoured to welcome you to the 2026 National Famine Commemoration at the Irish Workhouse Centre in Portumna.

Our venue this year is a particularly moving one. The workhouse is a powerful symbol burned in our collective memory. It represents the suffering and perseverance of the living in a land of the dying, and of the inadequacy of the systems that existed to help and protect them.

The Great Famine, *An Gorta Mór*, is our great national tragedy. We continue to live with its consequences in ways we cannot always perceive.

Today, we think of those who died before their time. We think of those future generations who never even had the chance to be. We think of those who did not die. Those who suffered and persisted and survived in a hundred different ways. Those who tried to reweave unravelled communities. Those who left their homelands for overcrowded cities. And those who trusted their lives and their futures to the stormy Atlantic and the lands beyond.

For every life in the Famine there is a story to remember, there is suffering and there are lessons. This is why today we undertake the sacred duty of remembrance. To carry these lives with us and to use their lessons. To build a future rooted in empathy, justice and our duty to each other.

I would like to sincerely thank all of those who contributed to this solemn occasion – Galway County Council, the National Famine Commemoration Committee, the people of Portumna, the volunteer committee of the Irish Workhouse Centre, our readers, musicians and local volunteers, and officials across various Departments. Without any of you, today would not have happened and it is greatly appreciated.

I wish to note and thank as well all those at home and abroad who participate in their own commemorations of *An Gorta Mór* and its victims. Memory belongs to all of us.

And lastly, thank you to everyone here today. I hope this day will offer a moment of repose, reflection and peace for all of you.

Patrick O'Donovan T.D.
Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport.
Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee.

Order of Ceremony

Prelude

- Performance by Army Band
- Guard of Honour march on Parade
- Arrival of the Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway, Councillor David Collins
- Arrival of Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport, Patrick O'Donovan T.D.
- Arrival of the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D.

Ceremony begins

- Welcome by Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport, Patrick O'Donovan T.D.
- Keynote address by Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D.

Community and Cultural Programme

- Introduction by the Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway, Councillor David Collins, to the community and creative performances.
- Jo Vahey, narrator with Áine Sheridan, harp
- **Poem:** *The Famine Year* written by Speranza (Lady Jane Wilde), 1847 - an excerpt read by Noelle Lynskey, Eileen Smith and Stephen Killeen
- **Song:** *The Famine Song*, written by Johnny McEvoy and sung by Cathal Sweeney.
  A song written about the Great Hunger in Ireland (1847-1851) and one man's journey to America after watching his comrades die from hunger.

Music: *The Workhouse Lament* (World Premiere), composed and performed by Ger Fahy (uilleann pipes), written in remembrance of the destitute poor who were driven by hunger and despair to seek refuge in Portumna Workhouse

Poem: *Na Fataí Bána*, written by Peatsaí Ó Callanáin in 1846, and read by Pádraig O'Conghaile

Song: *Crucán na bPáiste*, written by Brendan Graham and sung by Róisín Mannion
This emotional song describes the mass burial grounds of unbaptized babies and children from the Great Famine in Ireland of the 1840s

Music: T*abhar dom do Lámh* from the Edward Bunting Collection (*The Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1840); musicians: Ger Fahy, Roisin Mannion, Cathal Sweeney, Áine Sheridan and Tómas Mannion

Prayers for the victims of the Famine, led by Head Chaplain to the Defence Forces

Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna, Co. Galway.

Commencement of the State Commemoration

- Unveiling of a commemorative plaque by the Taoiseach, assisted by a pupil from St Brendan's National School, Portumna
- Planting of a tree by the Taoiseach, assisted by a pupil from St Brendan's National School, Portumna
- Wreath-laying ceremony by the Taoiseach, the Minister of Culture, Communications and Sport, and the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps
- Minute of silence observed
- Piper's Lament
- Last Post
- National Flag raised to full mast
- Reveille
- National Anthem
- **Ceremony concludes**

Kieran Tuohy,
Dark Shadows exhibition.
Photo credit: Kerry Kissane.

Plaque

This commissioned sculptural work presents a powerful narrative sequence reflecting the lived experience of the Great Famine. Through a series of carefully carved scenes, it traces a gradual descent into hunger, displacement and death endured by communities across Ireland.

Read from left to right, the imagery depicts: Blight; the Selling of Livestock; Taking the Soup; Eviction; the Workhouse and the Coffin Ship, a stark progression that bears witness to the erosion of security, dignity and life during one of the most traumatic periods in Irish history.

Plaque: the artist

Cormac O'Reilly is a traditionally trained stone carver and sculptor in Castleblakeney, County Galway. Working primarily in Irish limestone, he specialises in commemorative and site-specific works that engage deeply with history, memory, and place.

Workhouse Lament *(World Premiere)*

Carried on the haunting tones of the uilleann pipes and shaped by the measured breath and moving fingers of the piper, this commissioned composition gives voice to hardship endured, lives diminished and a humanity that was never extinguished. Within the workhouse walls, the pipes sound as a quiet act of witness, memory and reverence.

Workhouse Lament: the composer

Ger Fahy, virtuoso uilleann piper and multi-instrumentalist from the musical Fahy family from Ballinakill, East Galway, is a founding member of Galway's long-running *Trad on the Prom*. He is widely regarded as one of the leading figures in contemporary Irish traditional music, whose compositions have been performed and recorded internationally.

Community Programme

The National Famine Commemoration 2026 in Portumna was enriched by an extensive Community Programme of academic, educational, cultural and artistic events, most of which were completed in advance of the National Commemoration on 17 May. Delivered at the Irish Workhouse Centre and related community venues, the programme deepened public understanding of *An Gorta Mór* through scholarship, community research, archaeology, storytelling, creative responses and intergenerational learning. It brought together leading historians, archaeologists, educators, artists, students and local heritage groups to explore the human, social and political legacies of the Famine in Galway and beyond, while ensuring strong local participation and national resonance. Collectively, these events embedded the National Famine Commemoration within the lived heritage of Portumna and East Galway, creating a layered, inclusive and meaningful programme that complemented and strengthened the official commemorative ceremony. For more information please visit: https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/category/topics/national-famine-commemoration-portumna-2026

Kieran Tuohy, Dark Shadows exhibition.
Photo credit: Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna.

"The Unflinching Eye." A sketch by Paul Renouard,
exhibited at Ireland's Great Hunger Museum, 8 November 2012.
Illustration Courtesy of Quinnipiac University.

The Great Famine in County Galway

by Christine Kinealy and Gerard Moran

Even before the Great Famine of 1845-52, subsistence crises and local famines were not unknown in County Galway. In 1821-22, the potato crop failed in many parts of Ireland; counties Galway, Clare and Mayo were impacted most and deaths were recorded on Omey Island and in Renvyle and Ballinakill. There was a mass movement of people searching for food and large numbers flocked into Galway City, which already had a problem feeding its own population. A decade later, the potato failure in 1830-31 led to 122,000 people receiving relief in the county.

During the Great Famine, County Galway was one of the most affected regions in Ireland, losing 28 per cent of its population between 1841 and 1851 through starvation, disease and emigration. These years of scarcity were distinguished from earlier ones by the geographical extent and duration of the distress. Government actions in 1845 were similar to those that had been adopted earlier in the century: large quantities of Indian corn were purchased, a relief commission was established to co-ordinate the efforts of local committees and a grant was given to the Board of Works to implement relief work in the affected areas. While the blight of 1845 had been localised, in 1846 it appeared in every part of Ireland and the government response changed. Gratuitous relief was ended and, instead, relief was to be provided in return for labour. Public works were to be extended, although the conditions of employment on the relief works were to be tightly controlled.

Following the 1846 harvest, widespread distress and suffering occurred throughout County Galway. Between October 1846 and June 1847, an average number of 33,325 people were employed each day on the local public works. This number in County Galway was second only to the number of people similarly employed in County Cork. The relief schemes often involved building 'famine roads'. By the end of 1846, all the workhouses in the county were full and, as 'outdoor relief' was not permitted, they were turning away the destitute who sought to be admitted. The relief measures introduced only a few months earlier were inadequate and the government announced the public works would be replaced by the Temporary Relief Act which would provide free soup, financed by local 'poor rates', taxes levied on the landowners.

In July 1847, 56,003 people in Galway City, 49,864 in Tuam and 32,523 in Gort were receiving soup. In August 1847, the Gregory Quarter Acre clause (stipulating that anyone occupying more than a quarter acre of land was not eligible for public relief) was enacted, which resulted in starving farmers having to surrender their holdings to the landlords who then evicted these tenants from their properties. Hence, in December 1847, eleven boatloads of paupers from one estate arrived in the Galway workhouse from Connemara, where they had been evicted, while Marcella Gerrard evicted nearly 300 tenants and demolished over 60 houses in Ballinlass near Mountbellew in County Galway.

The increasing number of people being evicted increased the pressure on the Poor Law Unions in County Galway because the Poor Law Commissioners in Dublin insisted that the Poor Law Boards of Guardians had to keep levying poor rates on the land owners for the maintenance of the local poor. As the number of people dying from disease and starvation increased, the government was told that, unless the poor law was extended, more deaths would follow. In 1849, the Poor Law Commissioners deliberately omitted reports from the Gort Union and some other unions in their published accounts as they feared there would be a public outcry due to the levels of destitution and mortality. In Galway City, food riots took place as locals tried to obstruct the export of food.

While the famine ended when the blight had disappeared from Ireland in 1852, it had had a significant impact on the county: it resulted in a major change in land ownership, the decimation of the landless labourers and a change in agricultural practices. In the longer term, the Famine led to the break-up of communities, a permanently reduced population due to death and mass emigration, a weakened rural economy and the erosion of the Irish language and other cultural traditions. The Great Famine changed everything.

Famine Remembrance Park in Ballinasloe, on the site of 'Bully's Acre'.
Courtesy of Conor Johnston.

Loughrea Workhouse.
Courtesy of Patrick Delaney.

A plaque erected by the Old Tuam Society at Carrowpeter, Dublin Road,
to mark the site of the Famine mass grave, December 1947. Old Tuam Society archives.

Mount St. Joseph's, formerly Moycullen Fever Hospital and Auxiliary Workhouse: 1847-1851.
Courtesy of Moycullen Heritage. Photo taken in 2016.

The workhouses of County Galway

by Gerard Moran

The Poor Law was introduced in Ireland in 1838 and the country was divided into 130 Poor Law unions with a Workhouse in each union. County Galway was divided into six unions: Ballinasloe, Clifden, Galway, Gort, Loughrea and Tuam, and had places for 4,400 paupers (poor people). The largest Workhouses were in Ballinasloe and Galway, each designed to take in 1,000 paupers, and the smallest, which could accommodate 300 people, was in Clifden. The first Workhouse in County Galway was opened in Gort in December 1841 and the last to open, in March 1847, was in Clifden.

Conditions in the Workhouses were worse than people had on the outside. This was to discourage people coming to the Workhouses and ensured that only the most destitute and needy would look to be admitted. Before the potato crop failed in 1845, the numbers of paupers in the Workhouses were small – 217 in Ballinasloe and 177 in Loughrea. During the Great Famine of 1845-52, County Galway was one of the most affected regions in Ireland.

Potatoes were the main food provided in the Workhouses but, by late 1845, this was changed to bread as it was difficult to get a supply of potatoes. By the end of 1846, all the Workhouses in the county were full and there was a problem with collecting enough money to keep the Workhouses open. Gort could only be kept open when some Poor Law Guardians contributed £1,000. In 1847, the situation became worse when the Workhouses and outdoor relief were the only resources on which people could survive so local property owners were now expected to fund local relief of poverty and hunger through property taxes, called rates.

There was a growing demand for places in the Workhouses so they became overcrowded and were often places where diseases spread fast. Some Workhouses in Galway refused to take in people who were in very poor form. In July 1847, there were 30,876 people in the Galway union who received relief in the Workhouse and through outdoor relief, 24,483 in Clifden, 24,625 in Loughrea and 49,864 in Tuam. As the numbers in the Workhouses increased, the guardians could not pay merchants and shopkeepers who provided the goods needed to keep the paupers fed. Many Workhouses would have had to close only for the money

they received from the British Relief Association. At the same time, the numbers coming into the Workhouses also increased because landlords were evicting their tenants.

Extra buildings, auxiliary Workhouses, were rented to care for the surplus numbers of paupers, but these were often of a poor standard and worse than the main Workhouse buildings. Diseases like cholera and typhus were rampant in all the Workhouses and caused many deaths.

To reduce the numbers in the Workhouses, it was decided to send some of the young girls to the colonies; 250 girls left from the Galway Workhouses to Australia between 1848 and 1850, and in the 1850s, large numbers of girls were sent to Canada. Furthermore, a decision was made in 1850 to increase the number of Workhouses in County Galway to ten; Workhouses in Glenamaddy, Mountbellew, Oughterard and Portumna all opened for paupers in 1852. There were now 4,900 Workhouse places for paupers in the county (only 500 more than in 1841, when the first Workhouse was opened).

Irish Workhouse Centre Medical Room.
Courtesy of the Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna.

Poverty, relief and precarious survival in post famine Ireland

by The Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna

Establishment of the workhouse

Portumna Workhouse stands today as one of the most intact Irish workhouses and as a powerful witness to the experience of poverty, relief and precarious survival in nineteenth-century Ireland. Established under the Poor Law Extension Act 1847, Portumna Poor Law Union was formally declared in 1850, and a permanent workhouse building opened its doors to the poor in 1852. Unlike many earlier institutions, it was a post-famine workhouse, designed to accommodate up to 600 inmates at a time.

Before its completion, the destitute of the district were temporarily housed in an auxiliary workhouse at a commercial storehouse, where conditions were overcrowded, unsanitary and deeply feared by those in desperate need.

Life under the Poor Law

Even with the opening of the permanent building, life inside Portumna Workhouse offered little respite. Harsh discipline, family separation, meagre diets and rigid routines shaped daily life. The workhouse reflected an official belief that poverty was a moral failing rather than the result of wider social and economic injustice.

Architecture and control

Architecturally, Portumna followed George Wilkinson's second phase design, with seven main buildings arranged around courtyards, and strict segregation of men, women and children. Built on the edge of the town and enclosed by high walls, it was deliberately placed apart from everyday society. Inside, conditions were austere: large dormitories with straw mattresses, poor ventilation and limited warmth, with constant surveillance and control.

Neglect, suffering and death

Contemporary newspaper accounts and official inquiries revealed recurring allegations of neglect, inadequate medical care and callous administration, particularly during the 1860s. Many of the poorest died within the workhouse infirmary; they were buried without markers and largely forgotten. For some, due to the fear and shame attached to the workhouse, death outside its walls was preferred to seeking admission.

Closure and remembrance

Following Irish independence, the workhouse system was abolished and Portumna Workhouse closed in 1921. Today, as the Irish Workhouse Centre, the building preserves the memory of those who lived, suffered and died there, ensuring their experiences form part of Ireland's collective commemoration of famine, poverty and the Poor Laws.

"The Famine in Ireland – Funeral at Skibbereen." From a sketch by Mr H. Smith, Cork.
Illustration Courtesy of Quinnipiac University.

The Great Famine in County Galway

by Patria McWalter

Tuam

The first reference in the Tuam Town Commissioners minutes (TTC/1) to the famine and distress at that time occurs in their minutes of 5 October 1846, when the Board appealed for a resident magistrate to be stationed in Tuam

> *for the purpose of securing the safe transit of food and of affording protection to property for the want of both which Tuam is at present in a deplorable state and further that Tuam be appointed a Depot for provisions in-as-much as that the Town has been for the last 3 days and still continues without a supply of meal or flour and that in consequence cattle have been taken off the streets and slaughtered by a starving populace*. (TTC/1/1, pp 100-1)

Further reference to the distress of the town and its people occurs in 1848 when the Commissioners passed two further resolutions:

> *That 75 per cent of the applicants for relief understand the Irish language only, and that the Vice Guardians, the Clerk of the Union, and the Tuam Relieving Officer are ignorant of said language and are consequently incompetent to investigate the claims of applicants for relief.* (30 June 1848, TTC/1/1, p. 126)

and

> *That we form a Committee for the purpose of making enquires relative to many cases of distress existing and report to the Board on next day of meeting.* (TTC/1/1, p. 126)

According to some records, several girls received assisted passage from the Tuam workhouse to Australia in 1848 and 1849.[1] The minutes include limited references to arrangements but do indicate, for instance, that in

1 To Melbourne via the *Lady Kennaway* (1848): https://indexes.records.nsw.gov.au/ebook/list.aspx?Page=NRS5316/4_4816/Lady%20Kennaway_6%20Dec%201848/4_481600125.jpg, and to Sydney via the *Inchinnan* (June? 1849): www.irishfaminememorial.org/orphans/database/ Accessed Feb 2015. Assisted Immigration (digital) shipping lists: https://mhnsw.au/guides/assisted-immigrants-digital-shipping-lists/#1840s, Museums of History of New South Wales. Accessed Apr 2023.

August 1848, 25 females were to emigrate to Australia, via Plymouth (England):

> *Resolved: That Mr Morris, Master be directed to proceed to Dublin on Monday 28th in charge of 25 emigrants and that the sum of fifty pounds be advanced to him, for which he will account upon his return to defray the expense incurred in the transport and subsistence of these emigrants*. (GPL5/4B, pp 6-7, 25 Aug 1848)

The Master, subsequently, laid details of his expenses before the Board,

> *attending to the transmission of paupers to Plymouth amounting to £45.13.9 and handed the balance amounting to £4.6.3 to Clerk, who was ordered to lodge it with the Treasurer*. (GPL5/4B, p. 8, 26 Sept 1848)

Loughrea

In November 1847, with 640 inmates in the workhouse, the Master advised that, as the number of admissions *"in all probability may continue to increase same as the last few weeks"* additional materials, such as blankets, calico, shoes and thread would be required (GPL2/4, 27 Nov 1847). By week-ending 15 January 1848, there were 931 inmates in the workhouse and by 19 February 1848, 53 deaths that week. At around this time, temporary hospitals were proposed to be erected in the electoral divisions of Athenry and Clonkeen.

In December 1847, defending a charge of admitting 3 individuals into the workhouse who were not destitute, the Guardians outlined the facts thus:

> *Thomas Fahy, one of the three abandoned a mountain holding which he held at the yearly rent of £4.4.0., of which only one rood was in cultivation, and was provisionally admitted upon the recommendation of the Parochial Clergyman, in a state of starvation, and died the next day of exhaustion.*
>
> *Michael Larkin, the second, held a small mountain farm at the yearly rent of £1.2.0., and was in a state of great destitution, and is now with his family in fever in the House.*
>
> *The third person, James Mannion, held a mountain farm at £2.4.4., which he abandoned and appeared in great destitution, the Guardians regret to say that at the instance of the Poor Law Inspector* [William Burke] *they discharged this family, who are since in Fever and in a state of awful destitution.* (4 Dec 1847, GPL2/4, p. 70)

At its meeting of 22 January 1848, the minutes note that as the

> *present state of the Workhouse is such as not to afford sufficient accommodation for the amount of destitute to which the poor are becoming daily now exposed, he* [Guardian, William Tully]*, will on Saturday next [raise] that outdoor relief be extended to the classes contemplated by the 1st Section of the Poor Law Amendment Act.* (GPL2/4, p. 148)

However, at its meeting of 8 February the Board resolved that it

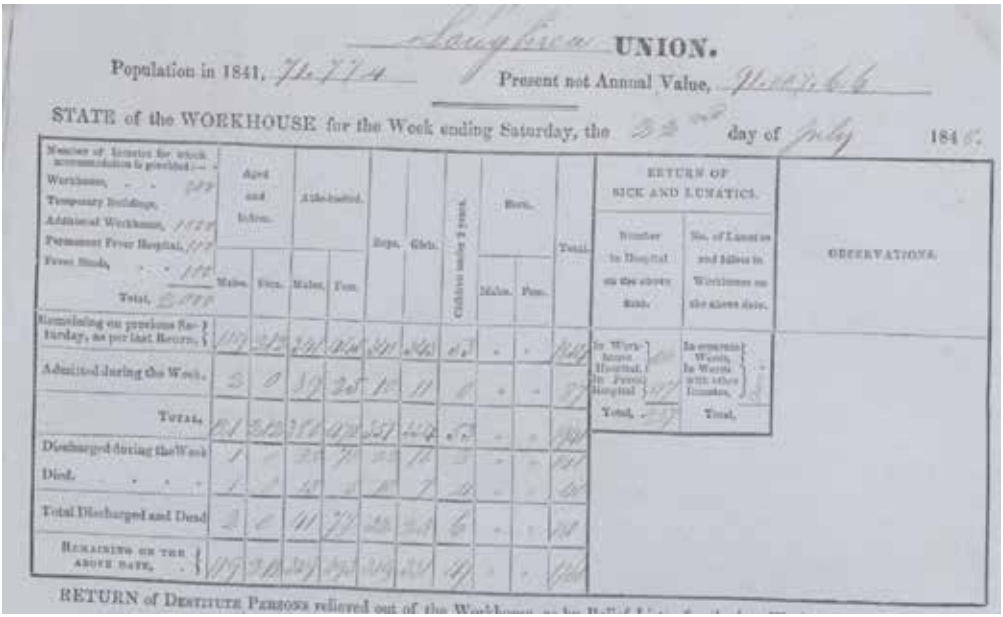
> *could not give outdoor relief till we obtain the Sealed Order of the Commissioners and that, having failed to procure the necessary buildings to enable us to give sufficient indoor relief, owing to the objections made by Doctor Phelan to the one we had taken, we are of the opinion that Mr Conan's house, taken by us on the first January last, should be occupied by the female children now in the workhouse, as originally intended and that the objection made by Doctor Phelan to this building appears to the Guardians not well founded.* (GPL2/4, p. 179)

The Guardians also, at this time, ordered the Master to make lists of all those in the workhouse who might be entitled to outdoor relief.

> For instance, in 1848 they 'despatched' 40 female orphans to Australia (21 Oct 1848, pp 208-09). Girls from Ballinasloe Union also travelled with them, first via canal and then train, prior to taking the boat to Plymouth prior to the journey to South Australia. (GPL2/5, pp 414-415)

The Guardians

> *Resolved: That in accordance with the Commissioners instructions we dispatch 40 of the paupers (so selected by Mr Henry R. N.) per the 'Duke of Cambridge' steam to Plymouth on Saturday the 28th inst., and we direct the Master (Mr Miller) to proceed to Dublin in charge of the party, the remaining 8 to be reserved for a future vessel and their outfit to be placed in the Master's store until required.* (p. 416, 21 Oct 1848)



Loughrea UNION.

Population in 1841, 11,774 Present net Annual Value, £11,266

STATE of the WORKHOUSE for the Week ending Saturday, the 23rd day of July 1848.

	Aged and Infirm. Males.	Aged and Infirm. Females.	Able-bodied. Males.	Able-bodied. Females.	Boys.	Girls.	Children under 2 years.	Born. Males.	Born. Females.	Total.
Remaining on previous Saturday, as per last Return.	117	212	291	416	341	362	53	-	-	1,792
Admitted during the Week.	3	0	32	25	10	11	6	-	-	87
TOTAL.	121	212	323	441	351	373	59	-	-	1,879
Discharged during the Week	1	2	25	7	23	11	3	-	-	72
Died.	1	2	12	2	8	7	10	-	-	40
Total Discharged and Dead	2	4	37	9	31	18	13	-	-	112
REMAINING ON THE ABOVE DATE.	119	208	286	432	320	355	46	-	-	1,767

Number of Inmates for which accommodation is provided:
Workhouse, 1,000
Temporary Buildings,
Additional Workhouse, 1,000
Permanent Fever Hospital, 100
Fever Sheds, 100
Total, 2,200

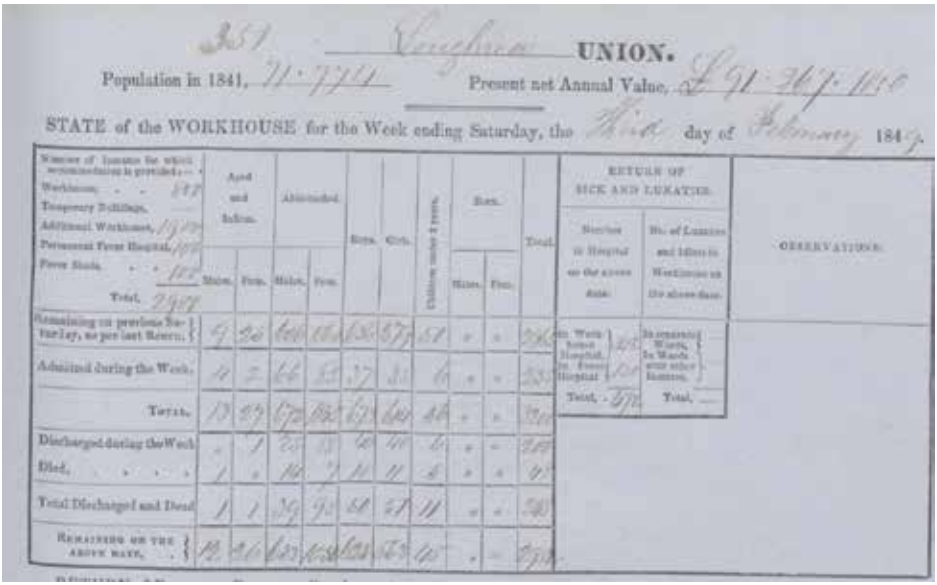
RETURN OF SICK AND LUNATICS.

Number in Hospital on the above date.		No. of Lunatics and Idiots in Workhouse on the above date.	
In Workhouse Hospital,	100	In separate Wards,	-
In Fever Hospital	100	In Wards with other Inmates,	3
Total,	200	Total,	

OBSERVATIONS.

RETURN of DESTITUTE PERSONS relieved out of the Workhouse

Loughrea Board of Guardians minutes, showing state of the workhouse at week-ending 23 July 1848 (GPL2/6), indicating that 40 people died in the workhouse during the week, that 141 had been discharged and that 1,760 remained in the House.
Courtesy of Galway County Council Archives.



351 Loughrea UNION.

Population in 1841, 11,774 Present net Annual Value, £11,267.1.0

STATE of the WORKHOUSE for the Week ending Saturday, the 3rd day of February 1849.

	Aged and Infirm. Males.	Aged and Infirm. Females.	Able-bodied. Males.	Able-bodied. Females.	Boys.	Girls.	Children under 2 years.	Born. Males.	Born. Females.	Total.
Remaining on previous Saturday, as per last Return.	9	20	66	106	65	57	21	-	-	344
Admitted during the Week.	4	2	66	53	37	31	6	-	-	203
TOTAL.	13	22	132	159	102	88	27	-	-	547
Discharged during the Week	-	1	25	13	10	10	6	-	-	65
Died.	1	-	14	7	11	11	5	-	-	49
Total Discharged and Dead	1	1	39	20	21	21	11	-	-	114
REMAINING ON THE ABOVE DATE.	12	21	93	139	81	67	16	-	-	433

Number of Inmates for which accommodation is provided:
Workhouse, 1,000
Temporary Buildings,
Additional Workhouse, 1,000
Permanent Fever Hospital, 100
Fever Sheds, 100
Total, 2,200

RETURN OF SICK AND LUNATICS.

Number in Hospital on the above date.		No. of Lunatics and Idiots in Workhouse on the above date.	
In Workhouse Hospital,	200	In separate Wards,	
In Fever Hospital	100	In Wards with other Inmates,	
Total,	300	Total,	

OBSERVATIONS.

Loughrea Board of Guardians minutes, showing state of the workhouse at week-ending 3 February 1849 (GPL2/6), indicating that 48 people died in the workhouse during the week, that 200 had been discharged and that 2,952 remained in the House.
Courtesy of Galway County Council Archives

Compassion in times of hunger: humanitarian response during and after the Great Famine

by Marie Mannion

During the Great Famine (1845-1852), the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers, emerged as one of the most principled and effective providers of humanitarian relief in Ireland. Although the Quaker population was small and largely absent from Connacht, their work had a notable impact in County Galway through coordinated national and international initiatives.

Organised relief and direct observation

In late 1846, the Quakers established a Central Relief Committee in Dublin, supported by corresponding committees in Britain and North America. Through this network, food, clothing and financial assistance were directed to some of the most distressed districts in the west of Ireland. First-hand inspections by Quaker representatives recorded severe deprivation in Galway City, the Claddagh, Conemara and Oileáin Árann. These detailed reports were central to shaping an informed and targeted relief response.

Beyond emergency aid: Colmanstown Model Farm

Quaker intervention during the Great Famine extended beyond emergency food relief. In 1849, the Society of Friends leased land at Colmanstown in east Galway to establish a model farm. This project aimed to demonstrate improved agricultural practices, promote crop diversification and support long term recovery in communities devastated by repeated harvest failures. The Colmanstown initiative reflected a belief that famine relief should combine immediate assistance with the promotion of self-sufficiency and resilience.

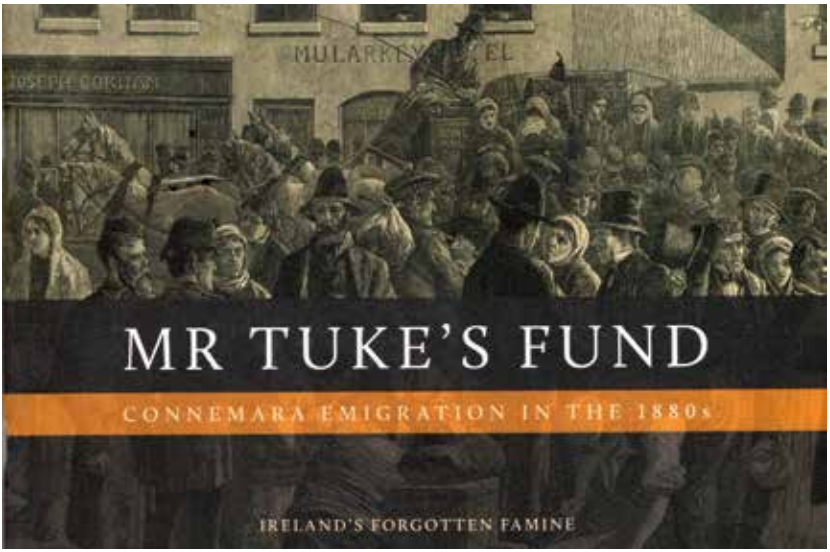
Later famines and renewed intervention

The Quakers' commitment to addressing hunger and poverty in Galway continued beyond the Great Famine. During the later crises of the nineteenth century, particularly the famine of 1879 -1882, often referred to as the 'Forgotten Famine', Quaker philanthropists again played an important role. Individuals such as James Hack Tuke, who had witnessed conditions during the 1840s, returned to the west of Ireland to investigate distress and advocate further assistance. Combined with improved transport networks and international aid, these efforts helped to avert the catastrophic mortality experienced during the earlier famine.

Legacy in County Galway

Across successive periods of crisis, the Quakers were distinguished by their impartiality, administrative efficiency and deep respect for human dignity. In County Galway, their legacy survives not only in the relief they provided, but in a lasting model of humane and practical humanitarian response that continues to resonate in commemorations of famine and social justice today.

James Hack Tuke.



Mr Tuke's Fund: Connemara emigration in the 1880s – Ireland's forgotten famine.
Courtesy of Clifden & Connemara Heritage Society.

Dec. 22, 1849.] THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. 405

VILLAGE OF MOVEEN.

"Village of Moveen", published in the *Illustrated London News* of 22 December 1849.
Illustration Courtesy of Quinnipiac University.

"Village of Moveen", a foilsíodh san *Illustrated London News* an 22 Nollaig 1849.
Pictiúr le caoinchead Ollscoil Quinnipiac.

The Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna, Co. Galway. Photo credit: Kerry Kissane.

Ionad Theach na mBocht, Port Omna, Co na Gaillimhe. Grianghraf: Kerry Kissane.

"The Ejectment", from William Carleton's book *Valentine M'Clutchey, the Irish Agent* (1857) in the Lender Family Special Collection on The Great Hunger. Ireland's Great Hunger Museum. Illustration Courtesy of Quinnipiac University.

"The Ejectment" as leabhar William Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy, the Irish Agent* (1857) i mBailiúchán Speisialta Mhuintir Lender ar an nGorta Mór. Ireland's Great Hunger Museum. Pictiúr le caoinchead Ollscoil Quinnipiac.

The IRISH WORKHOUSE CENTRE

Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

OPW Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland