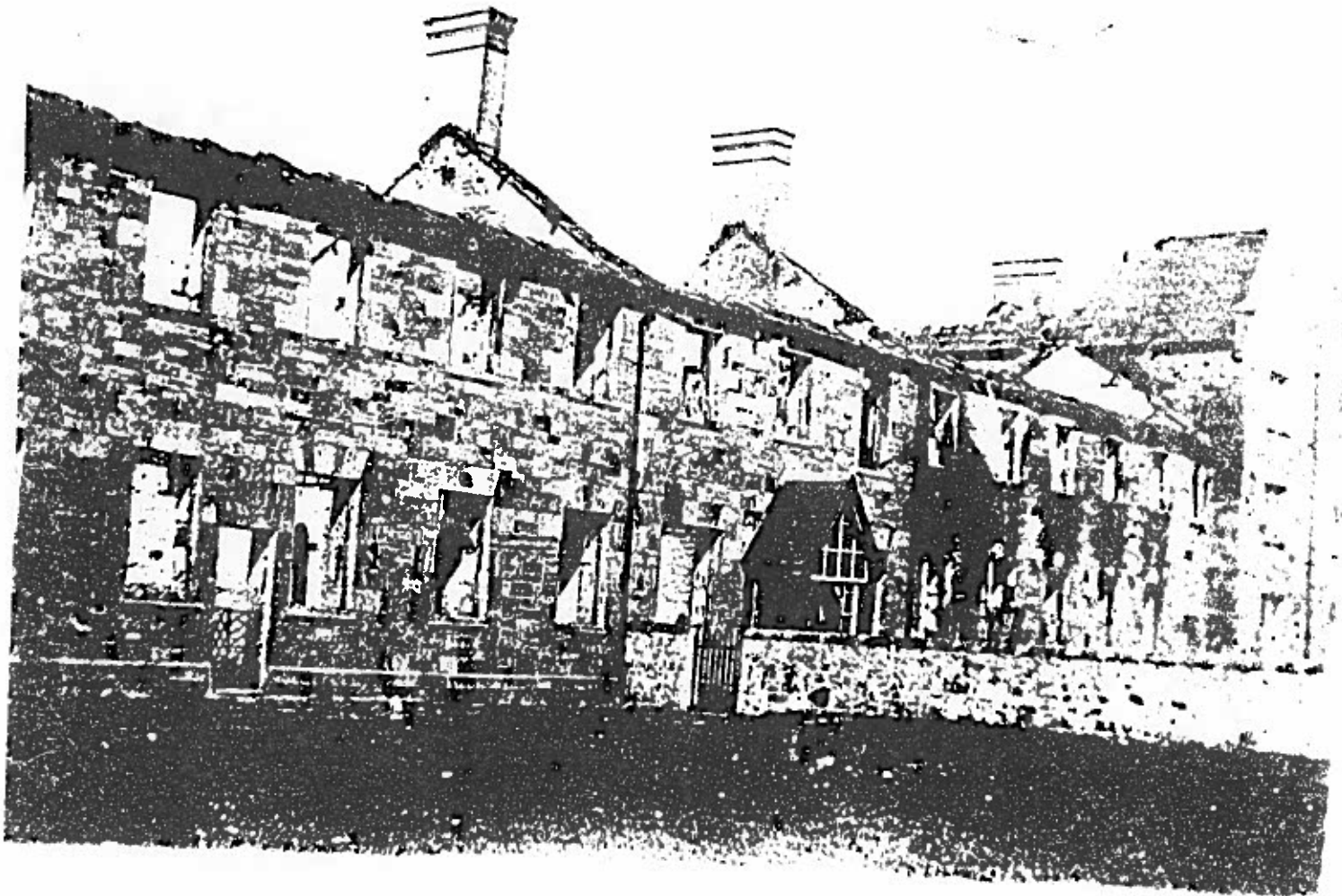


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101

# Listowel Workhouse Union



## Listowel Relief Committee

to the Workhouse was in the course of erection at this time.

Father Eoghan

McCarthy P.P. Causeway, in November 1847 representing the parishes of Ballyheigue, Causeway and Ballyduff wrote to the Board of Guardians about the conditions of the people there, that the people were in great distress and nothing being done to help them. Evictions of one hundred and fifty families were carried out by one landlord and that the local landlords were not providing employment. On numerous occasions he accompanied his people to Saleen Pier near Ballylongford and insisted that they be given their proper ration of grain. He established a grain distribution centre in Killury School as indicated by the school inspectors report on 2nd February 1848. By 1850 Listowel workhouse was housing a population of over 5000 of all ages. Roughly fifty per cent of them were children.

It was reported to the poor law commissioners that Listowel Guardians had ordered that food be issued to those who were refused entry to the workhouse because it was full. Outdoor relief had seized. (Dec. 1847)

Inmates slept on straw mattresses which were placed on timber boards arranged along the walls with a gangway in the centre. The heating was by way of open turf fires. Toilet facilities

provided were pots for urination. With the overcrowding and poor ventilation these conditions led to the rapid spread of disease. The dining hall consisted of long forms and tables, this was not meant to be a comfortable place, meals were eaten in silence. The general order in the workhouses was to subdue the spirit of the inmates. An altar was erected in the dining hall for religious services (The chapel). The general decor of the interior rooms were bare limestone walls painted with whitewash, bare timber ceilings and mud mortar mix made up the ground floors. High limestone walls surrounded the workhouse giving a prison impression to the inmates.

In a letter to the Nation in April 1848, Fr. Mathias McMahan, complained of mass evictions in the Causeway area by four landlords in three parishes. A middleman named Mason was evicting 650 persons. On William Stoughton's estate 120 persons were evicted. Sandes the third middleman denied that he turned out anyone. In reply Fr. McMahan said of his denial:

"not he, good man! He only applied to them the gentle pressure of rackrent, starvation, and threatened imprisonment. From the ruthless extermination now going on everywhere, it is clear that the landlords are determined upon exterminating the peasantry who constitute Ireland's main strength. Unless some stop be put to the murderous proceedings of these thugs, it will soon be in vain to look for material for an Irish nation".

# Auxiliary Workhouses

## Auxiliary Workhouses



**b**y 1850 the Guardians were extending the original building to house 1500 more inmates. Meanwhile a number of auxiliary workhouses were opened by the Listowel Guardians. The locations included Ballylongford, Ballygologue, Clieveragh, Bedford, The Square, Bawnmore, Ballybunion, Gunsboro and Tarbert.

**Stone Breaking** The Guardians ordered that the men in Clieveragh be kept there during the day and employed at stone breaking. That their food would be sent from the main house. The Board went on to complain about the evils of establishing an Auxiliary workhouse as remote as Ballylongford. In justifying overcrowding, they claimed that excessive ventilation was harmful to the inmates

**Good Supply of Turf** "In North Kerry almost every family no matter how poor has an abundant supply of fuel. The fires in the cabins are good and sufficiently large to enable every member of the family to get access to them. The cabins are small in comparison to the numbers who inhabit them so that when shut up for the night the inmates breathe a heated

atmosphere. Those fires and that heated atmosphere are considered by the poor to be the indispensable comfort and the loss of them among the greatest of their privations.

The board is of opinion that ventilation of every part of the workhouse should be regulated to prevent excessive ventilation. The jail at Tralee which during the last four years had for very considerable periods had more than three times the number of persons. It is calculated to hold crowded into it without any increase of rate of sickness and mortality affords abundant proof to what extent crowding may be safely carried among healthy persons with due attention to cleanliness and ventilation".

The following letter from Fr. McMahon to THE NATION tells of the misery around Ballybunion:-

Ballybunion, Listowel, 28 April 1850.  
To Charles Cavan Duffy Esq.

Dear Sir,  
In this miserable and disastrous time the poor man's best protection lies in the advocacy of an able and honest Press. Claims perseveringly and powerfully urged cannot fail in the end to be recognised, and even a cruel and bloodstained Irish landlord cannot be insensible to the scorn and execration to which an exposure



## Auxiliary Workhouses

of his atrocities must surely subject him. This is especially true of absentees. Unsustained by the countenance and support of their brothers in iniquity in Ireland they will be often thrown into the company of the generous and humane in other lands, who will regard wholesale murder in its true light and hold its authors in abhorrence. I shall therefore trespass on a portion of your valuable space while I bring before the notice of the public the conduct of the landlords and condition of the people in this locality. The landlords here may be classed among the worst in Ireland, justice and humanity are alike forgotten by them. The most malignant fiend in hell could not evince more indifference for the sufferings of human-beings. Widespread desolation but too plainly attests their ruinous policy. Energy is paralysed, industry crushed and improvement prevented by their plundering exaction's.

These sharks appear to have no notion of helping their tenantry over the present dreadful crisis. The screw is tightened while anything remains to be squeezed out. According as the poor man's pocket grows empty, the robber's hand is thrust more deeply into it. As soon as a tenant shows the smallest sign of breaking down he is immediately overwhelmed. He has no indulgence to expect.

Arrears which he thought were perhaps forgiven or at least would not be claimed till better times, are required, and because at a time when he has neither money nor means to make it - he cannot work a miracle to meet the monstrous demand - the crops which he toiled to raise are taken away, his cattle are driven off, and at one swoop he is reduced to beggary with a respectable family. This has already befallen many and I shudder to think is but too often to befall many more.

Numbers there are in this doomed district who at no distant period shall be pining in a workhouse, or starving, or wandering over their own land and all owing to the barbarity of the landlords. By a system of detestable injustices an incoming tenant will get abatement which if the former got he might hold on respectably. No matter how much of his labour and capital he may have sunk in the land he is cast out without a farthing compensation. A stranger who can advance a gale's rent has all the benefits of his improvements.

Only two or three landlords have made abatements to the occupying tenants, but these are not up to the requirements of the time. True to their instincts they have given allowances on a scale so grudging and niggardly as to keep their serfs still trembling on the brink of ruin and hopelessly in their

## Auxiliary Workhouses

power. There is a large tract of Trinity College property here which like everything connected with that rotten and pestilent institution is a veritable curse.

A **Mr. St. John Blacker** holds immediately under the college. Middlemen hold under him. A legion of creditors hold under them or have claims on them. The demands of all must be met out of the land. The college to be sure must be paid, Mr. Blacker must be paid, the middlemen must be paid, the creditors must be paid. Between them all the unfortunate tenant is confounded and fleeced. As each finds it his interest to fleece all he can out of him, he has no abatement to get and of course improvement and prosperity are out of the question. The rate collector to whom he at first looked upon as amenable completes his ruin.

This Mr. Blacker is a perfect example of your cold blooded grasping Irish landlord. He requires the old rent without any regard to the altered circumstances of the times. This tenantry must pay the entire or **give up the land.** No struggling man can well exist under him, and the poor are allowed almost no footing in his estate.

His example is followed by a **Mr. Meade Denis** another of our proprietors. No abatement, no encouragement for his tenantry. Extermination and ruin await

them if they fail in their payments. The tenantry on the property of Mr. Raymond which is under the management of a Mr. Hartnett an attorney are similarly treated, and unless the times mend of which there is very little appearance their pauperism is inevitable. Besides these there are several other landlords whose names I shall not now mention as I am not in a position to speak with certainty of them. In a short time though I intend doing so. For the present I shall merely observe of these in general text. I don't think there is within the compass of the four parishes to which I am attached, Gale, Liselton, Killeheny and Kilconly, a single landlord who has done his duty to his tenantry, that is who has given an abatement proportioned to the times, and encouraged their industry by security of tenure and fair compensation for improvements.

As may be expected under such landlords our tenant farmers are on an inclined plane to beggary with nothing to arrest their course. The circle of distress is growing wider and wider and embracing them all. The ratepayer of yesterday is the pauper of today.

The dark shadow of destitution is already at their doors announcing the immediate approach of dismal reality. With expensive support, reduced markets and overwhelming



## Auxiliary Workhouses

taxation they feel it impossible to hold on under their present rents. Despair of maintaining themselves and their destitute families in this unfortunate country has seized them and turned their attention to the free and flourishing shores of America, where away from the extermination and plunderers created and sustained by the infernal policy of England they make sure of having full security for their lives and a certain reward for their industry.

Extermination to an appalling extent has been systematically pursued here for years. Entire villages have disappeared before it. Within the past two years thirty-six families were evicted by Mr. Meade Denis. Ten heads of these he had sent to America. It must however in justice to him be said that he has given very considerable employment, not very liberally paid for I am told yet sufficiently to keep many from starving. If all of his class in this locality did as much things would certainly be in a better state.

Within the past eighteen months or so Mr. Hartnett evicted thirty-two families from the Raymond estate above mentioned with the concurrence if not by the orders of his employer. Last November Mr. Blacker demolished a village of twenty houses and sent the inhabitants adrift. Last February he

dispossessed fifty-eight families on a property from which he ejected a middleman who held under him a Mr. O'Connor a most excellent man. These were readmitted by him into their houses as caretakers at a nominal rent. The property was since redeemed by some of Mr. O'Connor's creditors a Mr. Neligan of Tralee and most of the poor people are still in their homes. Whether or not they will be left so I cannot say.

A month ago in the adjoining townlands of Ballybunion and Killeheny twenty-six families comprising 120 souls were evicted from the one and thirty-five families of 160 souls from the other. The former of these belongs to a Mrs. Harenc, the latter to a Lady Burgeish, both absentees. Their respective agents are a Mr. Collis and a Mr. Coffey who acted in this business it must be supposed with their sanction. When oppressed with the ennui of high life, desolated homesteads, shrieking widows, screaming orphans, groaning invalids, broken-hearted wretches and pale-faced starvelings will form a refreshing picture for their contemplation.

Nor does extermination cease here. It is projected on a more sweeping scale still. Destruction is pending over three large townlands in the neighbourhood. In fact all the

## Auxiliary Workhouses

head landlords embrace with wolfish avidity their opportunity of extirpating the pauper population from their properties. But there is a good God over them whose ears are not closed against the cries of distress - for "the oppression of the poor and the sighing of the needy now will I arise saith the Lord". Even in this world their crimes shall meet a just retribution.

The government is well aware of these murderous proceedings. The police constables of the district took a list of the parties lately evicted. It clearly intends by means of the landlords to **exterminate the masses** whose ominous gatherings in '43 carried terror to their hearts and which if wisely and vigorously directed might have rescued Ireland from their robber grasp. Some 200 years ago our ancestors were legally murdered in "Cromwell's slaughter houses". Posterity will recognise the workhouse boards of these times as "the landlord slaughter houses".

Since the spread of destitution the **workhouse system** has been found to be destructive of human life. But among all the workhouses in Ireland the Listowel one enjoys an inglorious pre-eminence in this respect. Throughout the winter until within the last fortnight the mortality there had been awful and it is still great. A ticket of admission to it is regarded as a passport to

eternity. This mortality is sought to be accounted for by saying that paupers are all but dead when they enter. The defence only aggravates the charges. If certain death awaits them inside why not give them a chance of living by relieving them outside, the more especially as outdoor relief is by half cheaper than indoor. But the commissioners do not allow it where house room is to be had. Again it is said that the **workhouse test** must be applied to avoid imposition.

Yet the tottering gait, emaciated frames and the livid countenances of the poor creatures but too truly evince the direst destitution. The truth is they are crammed into pest houses in order that they may perish and taxation diminish. Every spare house around Listowel that could be at all rendered fit for the purpose is taken as an **"auxiliary"**. Even cowsheds are pressed into the service. In Tarbert an old barrack condemned as unfit for the military was made a house for women. **Females**, ill clad, ill fed, shivering and starving are supposed by our humane guardians to be all right in a place deemed unsafe for the well supported mercenaries who are the vile instruments of our oppression.

In the middle of this desolation proselytism rears its shameless and impious head. An

## Auxiliary Workhouses

organised hypocrisy is set up and a market for the sale of conscience opened. A base advantage is taken of the distress of our people to effect their perversion. It is not enough for them to be crushed in body but they must be damned in soul. Fearful indeed is the trial to which they are subjected. When they are devoured by hunger and their famishing children crying to them for food then the grinning fiend holds out his bribe before their eyes. This is a searching ordeal, a cruel temptation still blessed be God do they in general, true sons of St. Patrick, worthy descendants of those who braved and baffled the fury of the penal laws, nobly reject the foul advances of the tempter. Still do they prefer principle to perfidy and religion to apostasy. It must be said to the honour of the respectable Protestants of the neighbourhood that with the exception of two old maids, they give this disgraceful and abominable system no countenance.

Such then Sir is the state of this locality. It may be compressed in these four words - extermination, emigration, hunger and proselytism. Alas! that we can put no check upon the perpetrators of these calamities save that of public opinion. Yet is some consolation to think that a fearless and powerful Press will scathe and stigmatise them and hold them up to the indignant

reprobation of the virtuous, the principled and the good the wide world over.

I have the honour to remain, with sincerest sentiments of esteem and respect, your obedient servant.

**Mathias McMahon R.C.C.**

**Chaplain Request** The minutes of the Guardians record that on the 29th May 1850 the Guardians considered an application from "Rev M Walsh requiring £40 per annum to act as chaplain at Ballybunion Workhouse: Guardians reply that the Ballybunion Auxiliary workhouse is within a few perches of the RC chapel and the children selected for that place are aged from 5 to 9, the infant Mistress being sent with them for the purpose of affording religious instruction to avoid the necessity of appointing a chaplain. Apparently then as now bureaucracy was tight on the purse.

**Training of Boys** From the very great neglect of the Board in not hitherto providing for the industrial training of the boys within the Workhouse now numbering 1014 between the ages of 5 and 15 and also with a view of lightening taxation by making this establishment to some degree self supporting, it is resolved by a majority of the Guardians that they shall without further delay