

**Staying Alive:
Crime, Agency, and Trauma during the Great
Irish Famine of 1845-1852**

HELEN MARY YATES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the University of
Staffordshire for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2025

Copyright Page

© 2025

Helen Mary Yates

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

This thesis argues that Famine-era criminality should be understood not simply as deviance but as a form of agency, revealing how the crisis of 1845/52 reshaped patterns of offending and turned law-breaking into a calculated response to hunger, displacement, and systemic neglect. Drawing on Irish prison registers from the agricultural year preceding the Famine (1844/5) and its worst year (1847/8), the study traces a marked shift in crime typologies across both rural Nenagh and urban Dublin, while the more limited records from Sligo also point to increased activity. For many of the destitute, crime became a survival strategy, whether through theft, imprisonment to secure food, or transportation as a route to a new life. Emigration offered another escape, though often at the cost of leaving families behind, some of whom resorted to crime out of necessity. By treating criminality as adaptive behaviour, the thesis challenges narratives of passive victimhood and highlights the resilience of individuals confronting catastrophe. It situates the Famine within wider debates in historical criminology, imperial governance, penal history, and the social consequences of mass crisis, while also engaging with current concerns over humanitarian response, systemic injustice, and inherited trauma. Tracing the lives of individual convicts across geographical and institutional contexts further uncovers the continuities linking British imperial control, carceral systems, and recurring patterns of hardship. Taken together, these findings offer fresh insight into how trauma, agency, and state power intersect in moments of crisis, and why the Famine remains deeply embedded in Irish historical identity today.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my journey from undergraduate degree to PhD. I have been helped by some fabulous people, and I would like to take a moment to thank them. Firstly, my old friends and colleagues at the Claims Management Regulation Unit who gave me the confidence to fulfil my life-long dream of university, especially Val, Bob, Pat, John M, Verley, and Cherry, who all saw something in me that I could not see myself. My fabulous lecturers at the University of Staffordshire, Martin Brown, Dr Alun Thomas, Dr Simon Smith, and Dr Tony Craig who have turned me into a scholar and academic and took time to encourage and guide me. I cannot thank them enough. My university friends, especially Aida Salkic Haughton MBE, who helped me to believe in myself and made the stressful times and deadlines almost fun.

I am grateful for the many foresighted people who have digitised records which have allowed me to undertake research which would have been impossible 30 years ago. To the staff at Gladstone's residential library who enabled me to feel like a real academic during my stay, and the staff at the British Library at Boston Spa who gave me a lift back to my accommodation when I was unable to obtain a taxi, thank you. To the staff of the National Archives of Ireland who remembered that I was missing a page from the misplaced Nenagh Prison Registers and who surprised me one day with a scanned copy, I really appreciate your assistance even though it meant having to revisit my dreaded results chapter! Professor Brian Griffin, who kindly sent me a copy of a chapter from his book that I was unable to obtain elsewhere, thank you for your generosity. Dr Hannah Bennett, my university *PhD buddy* provided moral support and practical advice whilst completing her own thesis, and Emma Brodzinski of *The PhD Life Raft* provided me with a new perspective on my PhD journey and introduced me to a new support network. You are all amazing!

A special thank you must go to my proofreaders; Hannah, Sheila, Jackie, Helen, Kathryn, Mark, Elle, Martin, Val, Amanda, and Geoff. Friends and family members who actually volunteered to read over 80,000 words for me! I cannot thank you enough for doing this, and for the thoughtful advice and suggestions which have given me extra confidence in my thesis.

To my friends I apologise for my lack of participation over the last few years, thank you for sticking by me. I would like to thank my brothers, parents, and stepson Jake for their support, and I am especially grateful for the unwavering validation provided by my daughter, Estra, and my partner, Geoff. Estra's belief that I could do whatever I set my mind to, and pride that I have 'followed my heart's desire' (to an end that no-one expected), is something that I hope can reflect back to give her the same confidence in herself. Geoff has supported me in every way, has read almost everything I have written over the last seven years, and has provided a calm and reasoned response when I have felt overwhelmed. He is a rock!

Finally, my supervisor Dr Tony Craig has my deepest gratitude. Tony has been superb from my first tentative enquiry. His unruffled manner, sound advice, and genuineness have made the whole experience a pleasure. Tony, I could not have done this without you.

A final word should go to my Irish ancestors, Anna Maria (Annie) Reilly and her parents James Reilly and Anne (née) Flynn, the latter two of whom lived through the Famine. Annie was my 2 x Great Grandmother, who died 53 years before I was born, but who nevertheless sparked my interest in both family history and Irish history.

Without you all, this thesis would not exist.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. S. S. S.', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Signed

Table of Contents

Copyright Page.....	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Author's Declaration	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Arguments and Aims	4
1.2 Topics.....	7
1.2.1 Crime.....	7
1.2.2 Agency and Anomie	11
1.2.3 Trauma	13
1.3 Research Methodology	16
1.4 Summary of Chapters	26
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Historiography.....	28
2.1 Introduction	28
2.2 Crime, Class, and the Limits of Interpretation	29
2.3 Revisionism in Irish Famine History.....	40
2.4 Sources for Transportation	42
2.5 Research Material	43
2.6 Conclusion	52
Chapter 3: Background to the Famine	54
3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 The Colonisation of Ireland.....	55
3.3 The Irish Tour	59
3.4 Nenagh and Agrarian Outrages	65
3.5 Sligo and Illicit Distillation	72
3.6 Policing and Criminal Justice.....	79
3.7 The Prison System	82
3.8 British Government Attitude and Intervention.....	84
Chapter 4: Data and Results.....	87

4.1 Introduction	87
4.2 Legal and Policy Context.....	91
4.3 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Nenagh	94
4.4 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Sligo	114
4.5 Comparative Analysis: Rural Ireland.....	119
4.6 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Kilmainham	121
4.7 Comparative Analysis: Urban vs Rural	135
4.8 Kilmainham – Additional Information	139
Chapter 5: The Convict Experience	152
5.1 Introduction	152
5.2 The Prison Registers	157
5.3 The Conviction Process in Ireland	162
5.4 Onboard Ship	165
5.5 Van Diemen’s Land	165
5.6 Conduct Records	170
5.6.1 The <i>Samuel Boddington</i>	171
5.6.2 The <i>Pestonjee Bomanjee</i>	173
5.7 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Van Diemen’s Land	177
5.8 Convict Life in Van Diemen’s Land	183
5.9 Conclusion	191
Chapter 6: The Irish Experience	194
6.1 Introduction	194
6.2 Bermuda: Transportation, Labour, and Survival.....	195
6.3 Spike Island: A Domestic ‘Penal’ Colony.....	202
6.4 City Survival: Prison, Workhouse, and Street Crime	207
6.5 Rural Survival Crime and Agrarian Tension	214
6.6 Wealth, Leisure, and Inequality during the Famine	219
6.7 Administering Crisis.....	222
6.8 Conclusion	230
Chapter 7: Impact of the Famine.....	233
7.1 Introduction	233
7.2 Eviction and Assisted Migration	234
7.3 Death and Burial	239
7.4 Police	245
7.5 The Migrant Reality	250

7.6 Trauma and the Famine Experience.....	254
7.7 The Rise of Nationalism	260
7.8 Conclusion	265
Chapter 8: Conclusion	268
8.1 Introduction	268
8.2 Demographics and Offence Typologies	269
8.3 The Prisoners.....	272
8.4 The Wider Population.....	273
8.5 Aims	274
8.6 Future Research	276
8.7 Summary.....	277
Bibliography.....	279
Printed Primary Sources	279
Books	279
Chapter in Edited Book.....	281
Journal Articles	281
Newspapers	282
Official Publications.....	283
Parliamentary Papers	283
Royal Commissions and Official Reports	284
Statutes.....	284
Manuscript and Archival Sources	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Online Primary Sources.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Secondary Sources.....	284
Appendices.....	305
Appendix 1 – Map of Ireland, showing Provinces and Counties.....	305
Appendix 2 – Percentage of Population Change in North-West	306
Tipperary between 1841 and 1851	306
Appendix 3 – The Freeman’s Journal 21 st December 1847.....	307

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 - Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods	23
Figure 3.1 - Townland Fines for Illicit Distillation	76
Figure 3.2 - Criminal Justice System Schema	82
Figure 3.3 - Prison Regimes, Incarceration Rate and Homicide Rate, 1840-1920	84
Figure 4.1 - Nenagh Arrests by Gender	96
Figure 4.2 - Nenagh Age Range	98
Figure 4.3 - Nenagh Age Range by Gender	100
Figure 4.4 - Nenagh 1844/5 Crime Typology	102
Figure 4.5 - Nenagh 1844/5 Crime Typology by Gender	104
Figure 4.6 - Nenagh 1847/8 Crime Typology	106
Figure 4.7 - Nenagh Crime Typology by Gender, April-August	108
Figure 4.8 - Nenagh Vagrancy & Begging Arrests by Gender	109
Figure 4.9 - Nenagh 1848 Arrests Relating to Vagrancy Offences, by Gender	110
Figure 4.10 - Nenagh 1847/8 Age Groups in Relation to Vagrancy & Begging Offences	111
Figure 4.11 - Irish Revenue Police, Employment Numbers	115
Figure 4.12 - Sligo Arrests by Gender	116
Figure 4.13 - Sligo Age Range	117
Figure 4.14 - Sligo Age Range by Gender	118
Figure 4.15 - Kilmainham Arrests by Gender	123
Figure 4.16 - Kilmainham Age Range	124
Figure 4.17 - Kilmainham Age Range by Gender	125
Figure 4.18 - Kilmainham 1844/5 Crime Typology	126
Figure 4.19 - Kilmainham 1844/5 Crime Typology by Gender	127
Figure 4.20 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Crime Typology	128
Figure 4.21 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Crime Typology by Gender	130
Figure 4.22 - Kilmainham Vagrancy and Begging Arrests by Gender ...	131

Figure 4.23 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Arrests Relating to Vagrancy Offences by Gender	132
Figure 4.24 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Age Groups, in Relation to Vagrancy & Begging Offences	132
Figure 4.25 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Recorded Place of Birth	140
Figure 4.26 - Migrant Arrests in Kilmainham 1847/8 by County	141
Figure 4.27 - Kilmainham Marital Status	142
Figure 4.28 - Kilmainham Marital Status by Gender	143
Figure 4.29 - Kilmainham Skilled Occupations	146
Figure 4.30 - Kilmainham Unskilled Occupations	146
Figure 4.31 - Kilmainham Occupations with Vagrancy Offences Removed	147
Figure 5.1 - Nenagh & Kilmainham 1844/5 Offences Resulting in Transportation	158
Figure 5.2 - Nenagh & Kilmainham 1847/8 Offences Resulting in Transportation	160
Figure 5.3 - Kilmainham Transportation Offences	161
Figure 5.4 - Nenagh Transportation Offences	161
Figure 5.5 - Simplified Crime Typology Comparison by Percentage Aboard	178
Figure 5.6 - Previous Convictions by Percentage Onboard	179
Figure 5.7 - Age Range Comparison by Percentage Onboard	180
Figure 5.8 - Marital Status Comparison by Percentage Onboard	181
Figure 5.9 - Reoffending Frequency Comparison by Percentage Onboard	183
Figure 6.1 - A View of Ireland Island, Bermuda, June 1848	199
Figure 6.2 - Spike Island Conviction Offences 1850	203
Figure 7.1 - Prisoner Committals to Kilmainham Gaol, 1844-60	250

List of Tables

Table 4.1 - Simplified Categorisation of Offences	88
Table 4.2 - Crime Typology Categories	89
Table 4.3 - Occupation Categorisation	144
Table 4.4 - Occupation Typology	145

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AoH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
ASD	Acute Stress Disorder
DMP	Dublin Military Police
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

Chapter 1: Introduction

By 1845, Ireland had a long history, not only of colonisation and suppression by the British, but also of resistance. After the Irish had supported Catholic James II in his fight for the British crown against Protestants William and Mary, from 1695¹ they faced a restrictive body of Penal Laws, unevenly enforced, but nonetheless designed to curtail Catholic political influence, property accumulation, and access to power. These laws disenfranchised the Catholic majority from holding political or economic power and, through restrictions on property rights and inheritance, encouraged patterns of subdivision and insecurity, unless an heir converted to Protestantism, in which case the oldest Protestant male would inherit the estate.² While historians have shown that enforcement and local impact varied, these measures contributed to longer-term patterns of insecurity, land fragmentation, and limited opportunity for many Catholic families. Although the Penal Laws had fallen out of use by 1845, the consequences remained, resulting in a largely impoverished population who had few employment opportunities and tiny plots of land. The potato was the only crop that would grow in sufficient quantities on such patches of ground and provide sufficient nutrition for a family. Reliance on this crop grew as the land was increasingly divided, the only alternative being to force the next generation off the land to face complete destitution and starvation.³

This dependence meant that the arrival of the blight, *Phytophthora infestans*, in Ireland in 1845,⁴ would result in the loss of some million lives when the potato crop subsequently failed, as it did repeatedly between 1845-49.⁵ While the blight caused real distress on the European continent and in Russia, it did not cause famine on the same scale as in Ireland, for the simple reason that the potato had not been adopted in these countries as a single source of food for much of the population.⁶ The resulting devastation of Ireland would become known as the Great Hunger, *An Gorta Mór*, the Irish Potato Famine, or The Great Famine.

¹ Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger* (Evanston, IL, 1962), p. 27.

² J. O. Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland* (2nd edn, Cambridge [England]; New York, 1994), pp 69–70.

³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 32–5.

⁴ Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London: Chicago, 1997), p. 52.

⁵ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London, 1988), pp 318–9, 324.

⁶ J. C. Zadoks, 'The Potato Murrain on the European Continent and the Revolutions of 1848' in *Potato Research; Journal of the European Association for Potato Research*, li (2008), pp 6, 38; Kinealy, *A Death-*

Although food continued to circulate through Irish markets during the crisis,⁷ many cottiers and labourers, living with little cash income, could not reliably purchase substitutes when the potato failed. In that sense, famine was driven not only by shortage but by limited access to food, shaped by wages, prices, and local relief provision.⁸ John Mitchel, an Irish nationalist activist and leading figure in the Young Irelander movement, used this ‘theme of starvation amidst plenty’ as a powerful rhetorical device⁹ that challenged the common belief in Whitehall that the Irish were largely to blame for their own distress.¹⁰ While Mitchel’s framing was shaped by his political objectives, his central point, that food exports could continue while large sections of the population lacked the means to access food, aligns with later scholarship that emphasises market access, purchasing power, and entitlements.

The 1841 Irish census recorded a population of 8,175,124 people, or 1,472,739 families, of which 491,809 rural families (one in three) lived in one room mud cabins. A family was estimated to consist of 5.55 people, and a further 475,950 rural families occupied third-class accommodation. Together, these figures indicate that well over half of the rural population were living in the bottom tier of housing.¹¹ Of the total population, 68% ‘of the rural element had no means of support other than their own manual labour’ and 66% were chiefly engaged in agriculture.¹² Figures indicate a population growth of around 172% between 1779 and 1841, compared with a growth figure throughout England and Wales of about 88%.¹³ However, outside of the Belfast area, this increase was not supported by meaningful industrial growth, therefore the populace remained largely rural, with

Dealing Famine, p. 67; Marten Seppel, ‘The Spread of the Potato Blight in the Russian Empire, 1846 to 1852’ in *The Agricultural History Review*, lxxv, no. 1 (2017), pp 95–6.

⁷ Graham Davis, ‘Making History: John Mitchel and the Great Famine’ in Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (eds), *Irish Writing: Exile and Subversion* (New York, 1991), pp 109–10.

⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 82.

⁹ Davis, ‘Making History’, p. 109.

¹⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 146.

¹¹ T. A. Larcom, ‘Observations on the Census of the Population of Ireland in 1841’ in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vi, no. 4 (1843), pp 324, 337, 330, 339; W. A. Dunning, ‘Irish Land Legislation since 1845’ in *Political Science Quarterly*, vii, no. 1 (1892), p. 58.

¹² Dunning, ‘Irish Land Legislation’, pp 58–9.

¹³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 29; K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* (Westport, CT, 1975), p. 1.

growth occurring mostly at the bottom of the economic ladder.¹⁴ Colonial suppression had removed most Irish land from Irish Catholic hands,¹⁵ forcing subdivision and high demand, which enabled *rack rent* as landlords rented to the highest bidder, often exceeding market value. Those who could not afford to pay rent were forced onto diminishing patches of ground, under *conacre*, a system of land hire which ‘was not a lease but a licence to occupy’.¹⁶ Others farmed under *rundale*, a system of communal landholding¹⁷ which would have been recognisable to the medieval agricultural European labourer.¹⁸ By 1827, the situation was described by Reverend Caesar Otway, an Anglican clergyman and social commentator, travelling through Ireland, as ‘one wide expanse of populous pauperism’,¹⁹ a situation consistent with William J Smyth’s opinion that ‘the greater the proportion of a population engaged in agriculture, the higher their exposure to harvest failure’.²⁰

Although nineteenth-century Ireland remained overwhelmingly agrarian in its economy and population distribution, it nonetheless possessed a substantial and varied urban network. The census criterion defined a town as having twenty or more occupied houses, and by this measure there were 1,257 towns in 1841. Larger urban centres were concentrated along the east and south coasts and became increasingly sparse toward the west. Ten towns, including Sligo, had populations between 10,000 and 24,000, while Dublin, by far the largest settlement in southern Ireland, recorded almost 233,000 inhabitants in 1841.²¹ Thus, while much of the countryside was rural and sparsely populated, Ireland also supported a small but well-developed layer of cities as well as provincial towns that played important commercial, administrative, and institutional roles.

¹⁴ W. H. A. Williams, ‘The Irish Tour, 1800-50’ in Benjamin Colbert (ed.), *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp 103–4.

¹⁵ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, p. 69.

¹⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 33–4.

¹⁷ The Devon Commission, *Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty’s Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 2* (Dublin, 1848), p. 735.

¹⁸ Tom Yager, ‘What was Rundale and Where Did It Come From?’ in *Béaloides*, lxx (2002), pp 181–2, 184.

¹⁹ Caesar Otway, *Sketches in Ireland: descriptive of districts in the North and South* (Dublin, 1827), p. 268.

²⁰ W. J. Smyth, ‘“Variations in Vulnerability”: understanding where and why the people died’ in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), p. 184.

²¹ K Hourihan, ‘The Cities and Towns of Ireland 1841-1851’ in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 228–9.

The significant lack of employment opportunities in rural Ireland meant that those who could afford to do so, emigrated to England or further afield, whilst the landless were forced into vagrancy and begging.²² The potato could be grown for little cost or effort but could not be stored for more than nine months. Even after a good harvest, there was a period of scarcity each summer before the next harvest was ready,²³ 'often a season of great distress'.²⁴

The potato blight was a natural disaster which caused hardship throughout Europe. However, the conditions of deep poverty in which much of the Irish lived, along with their total reliance on a single crop for food, was an environment created by man rather than by nature. These pre-existing conditions created the anomic pressures within which crime could become a survival strategy, and within which agency was exercised under constraint.

1.1 Arguments and Aims

At the onset of the Famine in 1845, much of the Irish population was already living at or below subsistence level, leaving them highly vulnerable to the failure of the potato crop in 1845. In such conditions, it is unsurprising that many individuals resorted to whatever means necessary to ensure survival for themselves and their families. Yet, general histories of the Famine often overlook the role of crime as a survival strategy, contributing to a misleading narrative of individual passivity. Convict chaplain and self-declared moral reformer Reverend Charles Bernard Gibson claimed that 'the people did not possess sufficient courage to commit a crime, and therefore lay down and died',²⁵ a judgement likely shaped by his role within the penal system. Similarly, Cecil Woodham-Smith described the population as 'helpless and inert'²⁶ and John O'Beirne Ranelagh asserted that the Famine victims 'simply accepted death passively as their inevitable fate'.²⁷ The most damning assessment, however, came from Michael Davitt, a Fenian activist, former political prisoner, and later agrarian campaigner, whose experiences of poverty, imprisonment, and nationalist activism shaped his

²² Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 206.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp 35–6.

²⁴ Jonathan Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland* (London, 1837), p. 50.

²⁵ C. B. Gibson, *The History of the County and City of Cork* (London, 1861), p. 365.

²⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 329.

²⁷ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, p. 116.

interpretation of popular behaviour during the famine. Writing with the hindsight of later agrarian struggle, Davitt condemned what he perceived as collective passivity:

... a million of people - including, presumably, two hundred thousand adult men - lying down to die ... and making no effort, combined or otherwise, to assert even the animal's right of existence – the right to live by the necessities of its nature. It stands unparalleled in human history.²⁸

Davitt's language is striking not only for its scale but for its moral force. His emphasis on 'two hundred thousand adult men' frames the catastrophe in explicitly gendered terms, casting survival as a masculine duty and famine mortality as a failure of collective assertion. The comparison to 'the animal's right of existence' intensifies this moral indictment, suggesting that the absence of organised resistance represented a fall beneath even the most basic natural instinct. Such phrasing reflects less a neutral observation of famine behaviour than a retrospective judgement shaped by later nationalist and agrarian mobilisation. Davitt was not simply describing the Famine; he was interpreting it as a lesson about political inaction and the necessity of organised mobilisation. This is important because it shows how later narratives could moralise survival and obscure the restricted forms of agency visible in famine-era records.

Breandán Mac Suibhne argues that Davitt harnessed this narrative 'to stir people to activism',²⁹ positioning famine memory as a call to mobilisation rather than as detached historical reflection. In this sense, Davitt's account reveals how interpretations of famine agency were refracted through subsequent political struggles. Yet the broader works of Gibson, Woodham-Smith, and Ranelagh reflect the lack of sustained attention to the subject of agency during the Famine, a term explained in section 1.2.2. Davitt's intervention therefore exposes both the moral charge embedded in retrospective nationalist memory and the need for more focused examination of how agency operated, or was restricted, during the Famine. It is precisely this question of how agency operated in practice, rather

²⁸ Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland or the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London: New York, 1904), p. 47.

²⁹ Breandán Mac Suibhne, *Subjects lacking Words? The Gray Zone of the Great Famine* (Hamden, CT, 2017), p. 30.

than in retrospective moral memory, that this thesis interrogates through an examination of famine-era criminality.

Accordingly, the central argument advanced here is that many people actively sought to survive the Great Famine through the limited means available to them, including criminal acts that should be interpreted as strategies of resilience, rather than mere deviance. To support this claim, prison register data has been analysed from three different regions of Ireland: Kilmainham, in Dublin, (east), Nenagh, in County Tipperary, (south-west), and Sligo, in County Sligo, (north-west) (Appendix 1). The data reveals a clear shift in the typology of offences from social-order to survival-related crimes over the periods examined, demonstrating that crime often functioned as a rational response to worsening conditions.

The Famine inflicted deep and enduring psychological harm on individuals and communities, creating both collective and intergenerational trauma. This legacy shaped political consciousness and nationalist sentiment, while also shaping a Famine narrative that continues to influence Anglo-Irish relations. Drawing on primary sources and interdisciplinary scholarship, this study links the experience of the Famine in terms of agency and trauma, showing that much criminality during the Famine period was symptomatic of wider psychological and social wounds.

Analysis of the Kilmainham registers highlights a decline in arrests among merchants, tradesmen, artisans, and skilled workers, suggesting substantial emigration in the early years of the crisis, alongside a marked increase in arrests among women, children, and unskilled labourers. This points to an interlinked causal sequence of events: as the potato crop failed and recession followed, those with resources left Ireland, often intending to send for dependants later. Those left behind were pushed into poverty and begging, and in some cases, crime, while urban centres with greater access to food and institutions became focal points for displacement.

The evidence presented here contextualises the changing nature of crime during the Famine, reframing it as a form of agency through which individuals attempted to endure extreme hardship. In doing so, it challenges narratives of passive victimhood and reasserts the resourcefulness of Famine-era Irish society, while

also helping to explain the Famine's enduring centrality to Irish national identity and memory.

This study adopts a bottom-up approach to Irish Famine history, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of ordinary people, and seeking to humanise those too often reduced to statistics, revealing the complexity of individual responses to one of the most devastating events in Irish history.

1.2 Topics

1.2.1 Crime

A number of sociologists have defined crime as 'behaviour that is prohibited by criminal law. In other words, no act can be considered a crime, irrespective of how immoral or damaging it may be, unless it has been made criminal by state legislation'.³⁰ Paddy Hillyard and Steve Tombs explain that 'in reality there is nothing intrinsic to any particular event or incident which makes it a crime',³¹ agreeing that crime is defined by those in positions of power and authority, who naturally fail to include crimes committed by that state, whether war crime, environmental damage, poverty, or inequality.³² Additionally, it is unarguable that crime is a social construct and, as such, is therefore heavily reliant on the context in which it is set.³³ Even across the world today, diverse social environments, themselves often caused by differing political or religious ideologies, can result in different interpretations of what constitutes a crime, crime itself being varyingly deemed harmful to individual, group, community, society, institution or state.³⁴ Grant Lamond succinctly explains that 'what makes wrongs deserving of punishment is that they are seriously blameworthy, inasmuch as they evince a disrespect for the values violated'.³⁵

³⁰ Eamonn Carrabine, Paul Iganski, Maggy Lee, Ken Plummer and Nigel South (eds), *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction* (London, 2004), p. 113.

³¹ Paddy Hillyard and Steve Tombs, 'Beyond Criminology' in Danny Dorling, Dave Gordon, Paddy Hillyard, Christina Pantazis, Simon Pemberton and Steve Tombs (eds), *Criminal Obsessions: Why harm matters more than crime* (2nd edn, London, 2008), p. 7.

³² University of Glasgow, The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, 'What is Crime?', n.d., p. 3 (<http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SCCJR-What-is-crime.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).

³³ Hillyard & Tombs, 'Beyond Criminology', p. 8.

³⁴ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 114–5, 125; C. J. M. Drake, 'The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection' in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, x, no. 2 (1998), p. 53.

³⁵ Grant Lamond, 'What is a Crime?' in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, xxvii, no. 4 (2007), p. 609.

While such sociological definitions are valuable in highlighting the constructed nature of crime, historians have long cautioned against treating legal categories as transparent reflections of social reality. As historians such as E P Thompson, George Rudé, V A C Gatrell and Clive Emsley have demonstrated, criminal law must instead be understood as a historically contingent framework through which particular behaviours were problematised, recorded, and punished. Thompson's work on the 'moral economy' illustrates how actions criminalised by the state, such as food rioting, were often regarded by participants as legitimate responses to subsistence crisis, revealing a disjuncture between legal definitions of crime and popular notions of justice.³⁶ Similarly, Rudé's reconstruction of offender profiles indicates that those labelled as criminals were frequently ordinary working people acting under acute economic and social pressures, rather than members of a distinct or professional criminal class.³⁷ Gatrell and Emsley further emphasise that recorded crime reflects patterns of enforcement and prosecution as much as levels of offending itself, cautioning against reading criminal statistics as straightforward evidence of criminality.³⁸ As crime is a social construct, so is the criminal.³⁹ Motivation for committing crime can be loosely categorised as stemming from 'greed, naivety, desire, jealousy, a propensity to flout the rules, revenge, misunderstanding, hardship, desperation, or chaotic and troubled lives'; categories which have remained largely constant over the centuries.⁴⁰ Eighteenth-century criminal law reformers⁴¹ characterised 'the offender as a rational, free-willed actor who engages in crime in a calculated way and is responsive to the deterrent penalties' advocated by these reformers, an attitude not seriously challenged until the late nineteenth century.⁴² Historical studies of

³⁶ E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' in *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971), pp 78–9.

³⁷ G. F. E. Rudé, *Criminal and Victim: Crime and Society in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1985), pp 123–6.

³⁸ V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker, 'Introduction' in V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker (eds), *Crime & The Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), pp 4–8; Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (3rd edn, Harlow, 2005), pp 15, 26, 41, 56.

³⁹ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Alison Eatwell, *Crime, Clemency & Consequence in Britain 1821-39: a slice of criminal life* (South Yorkshire, 2017), p. 148.

⁴¹ Reformers such as Cesare Beccaria, Jeremy Bentham, and John Howard, in Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 29.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

crime, however, have demonstrated that such assumptions of rational choice sit uneasily with contexts of structural poverty and economic crisis. In poverty-stricken Ireland, it is difficult to see how much free choice there was when for many the only options were starving or stealing.

Punishment can be defined as ‘a legally approved method designed to facilitate the task of crime control’,⁴³ and the prison ‘became the dominant response to crime across Europe and North America from the end of the eighteenth century’.⁴⁴

Michael Ignatieff argues that:

incarceration was a response to the crisis in class relations wrought by the industrial revolution as it served to establish the legitimacy of the law and was understood as an element of a larger vision of securing popular consent in an increasingly unequal class-divided society,⁴⁵

whilst Michel Foucault contended that the prison was not intended as a humanitarian punishment, but rather a more efficient and extensive attempt to create a ‘disciplined society’.⁴⁶ Overcrowding was rife, conditions were squalid and disorderly, and lashes or solitary confinement were common punishments.⁴⁷

Reform, in this context, was more likely to refer to a prison regime which attempted to educate the offender through hard work and religious teaching than to an attempt to improve living conditions for the incarcerated.⁴⁸ As Gatrell and Emsley have shown, such regimes reveal more about contemporary anxieties surrounding order, discipline and authority than about any consistent concern for rehabilitation.

Even if more concerted efforts at rehabilitation had been attempted, they would likely have failed. Claudia Sturt, at the time Executive Director for Security, Order and Counter Terrorism in HM Prison and Probation Service, identified that ‘you won’t get much meaningful rehabilitation within prisons that are chaotic and

⁴³ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: a study in social theory* (Oxford, 1990), p. 18.

⁴⁴ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 294.

⁴⁵ Michael Ignatieff, cited in *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cal McCarthy and Barra O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves and Pickpockets: A History of the Victorian Convict Prison on Spike Island* (Cork, 2016), pp 9, 17; Anne McMahon, *Floating Prisons: Irish Convict Hulks and Voyages to New South Wales 1823-1837* (Canberra, 2007), p. 18.

⁴⁸ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 233.

dangerous, because people in there are just too busy surviving',⁴⁹ a statement which is equally accurate in relation to nineteenth-century prisons, whether in Ireland or elsewhere.

In 1839, the social reformer, Edwin Chadwick, 'destroyed the belief in a crude association between poverty and crime',⁵⁰ stating that 'the notion that any considerable proportion of the crimes against property are caused by blameless poverty or destitution we find disproved at every step'.⁵¹ Such assertions reflect a broader nineteenth-century tendency to moralise criminality and detach it from structural inequality, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Today we recognise that 'reactions to crime differ according to the fundamental values of a society: [and] how much worth it places upon an offence and an offender', a situation which undoubtedly proves problematic when the fundamental values of one society are superimposed with the laws of another, ensuring that 'there is nothing inevitable about how citizens or legal systems respond to crime'.⁵² Conflict analysis of crime establishes that crime is the result of social inequality; economic systems benefit one segment of society whilst oppressing the rest.⁵³ Prison does not reduce crime, although the transformation of social inequality undoubtedly would. However, this has still not happened today and was certainly not about to happen in nineteenth-century Ireland. This study therefore approaches crime not as a fixed or self-evident category, but as a historically contingent construct shaped by law, enforcement practices, and popular norms, drawing on the insights of social historians of crime to interpret Irish prison data within its broader socio-economic context. This divergence between legal definitions of crime and popular understandings of legitimacy has been identified in the Irish context by James Kelly, who applies Thompson's 'moral economy' framework to examine whether food rioting in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland was governed by widely shared norms of subsistence and fairness rather

⁴⁹ Claudia Sturt, in Kate Gooch and Claudia Sturt, 'Leading Prison Security: Interview with Claudia Sturt, Executive Director for Security, Order and Counter Terrorism' in *Prison Service Journal*, no. 252 (2021), p. 9.

⁵⁰ J. J. Tobias, *Nineteenth-Century Crime: Prevention and Punishment* (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 7.

⁵¹ Edwin Chadwick, cited in *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵² Shane Kilcommins, Ian O'Donnell, Eoin O'Sullivan and Barry Vaughan, *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order in Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 1.

⁵³ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 76–7, 79–80.

than by criminal intent. While Kelly acknowledges that such moral norms could influence behaviour, he ultimately argues that these were traditions and expectations inherited from English incomers, and concludes that 'in Ireland, food rioting was less about the defence of a traditional paternalist economy in the face of an emerging capitalist economy than it was about securing access to food'.⁵⁴

Throughout, the two main crime typology categories discussed will be those of social-order and survival crime. This study initially intended to use the terminology of public-order crime, rather than social-order crime. Larry Siegel explains public-order crime to mean a victimless crime, and one which includes prostitution and drug use.⁵⁵ However, it is necessary to ensure that the terminology used in this thesis is not confused with the legal usage of the term *public-order* which has arisen from the Public Order Act 1986. For that reason, when discussing crimes jeopardising public-order, the term *social-order* will be used instead, as defined by this author in the context of nineteenth-century Ireland and the Irish prison registers. These definitions will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.2.2 Agency and Anomie

The term *agency* refers to the actions, decisions, and strategies adopted by individuals seeking to control their own lives; it is associated with 'being active rather than passive, and of reacting effectively to immediate situations and planning effectively' for the future.⁵⁶ Whilst the term is modern, people in the past undoubtedly exercised agency, even if it was not labelled or understood as such. As Paul Napper and Anthony Rao observe, 'human history itself can, in many ways, be seen as a quest for agency',⁵⁷ and for many living through the Great Famine it was undoubtedly a steep and often painful learning curve.

The terms *anomie* or *anomic* will also be used. These concepts, drawn from the disciplines of sociology and criminology, describe a society in which 'rules of behaviour ... have broken down or become inoperative during periods of rapid social change or social crisis such as war or famine ... suggesting that social

⁵⁴ James Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd* (Dublin, 2017), pp 212, 241.

⁵⁵ L. J. Siegel, *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies* (12th edn, Boston, MA, 2016), p. 482.

⁵⁶ Paul Napper and Anthony Rao, *The Power of Agency* (New York, 2019), p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

conditions, not individual personalities, produce crime'.⁵⁸ Although such terminology was not used during the Famine, it serves here as a concise way to capture these dynamics.

This approach aligns with a wider methodological shift in Irish historiography, in which agency is becoming a crucial analytical tool. Georgina Laragy notes that 'the agency of the poor is an important issue in recent historiographical scholarship'⁵⁹ and, in her study of 'letters written to the Mansion House Relief Committee' in 1881, indicates that the poor adopted varied strategies to avoid or delay workhouse admission. She finds that some applicants appear to have deliberately sought entry to the North Dublin Union, which lacked work facilities, as a way to minimise the hardships of institutionalisation. As she concludes, 'The poor emerge from the records not as a downtrodden and oppressed social category ... but as active participants in the ongoing negotiation between administrators of relief and its recipients, and between the state and its citizens'.⁶⁰

Virginia Crossman likewise shows that Victorian social attitudes often denied crediting the poor with any meaningful agency, for example by classifying prostitutes as 'feeble-minded',⁶¹ yet her work also reveals how inmates nonetheless exercised agency within restricted environments such as the workhouse. When female inmates and prostitutes were not segregated, the prostitutes (when identifiable as such) were 'generally avoided by other female inmates' and left to associate with each other.⁶²

Lindsey Earner-Byrne further argues that recent scholarship has deepened our understanding of the character, execution, and limits of poor people's agency by analysing sources created by the poor themselves. While their scope for negotiation was frequently narrow, such material shows how limited agency was '*created, mediated, and controlled*', revealing both the possibilities and the boundaries of power available to marginalised groups.⁶³ Whether people

⁵⁸ Siegel, *Criminology*, pp 196–7, 199.

⁵⁹ Georgina Laragy, 'Poor Relief in the South of Ireland: 1850-1921' in Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray (eds), *Poverty and Welfare in Ireland, 1838-1948* (Dublin: Portland, OR, 2011), p. 65n.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 60–1, 62–3.

⁶¹ Virginia Crossman, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland, 1850-1914* (Liverpool, 2013), p. 169.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶³ Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 14.

remained in their cabins, migrated, or turned to crime, their actions reflect forms of agency shaped by anomic conditions. Inevitably these responses sometimes helped preserve life and sometimes contributed to early death. This thesis examines individuals who engaged in criminal acts as a means of survival, situating their decisions within a broader social context and assessing their impact on families and communities. Despite severely restricted options, such individuals acted to shape their own life trajectories in one of the few ways that remained available to them during the crisis, demonstrating resilience, intention, and agency amidst catastrophe. The chapters that follow trace how this limited agency becomes visible in the archive through recorded offences that increased as famine conditions became more anomic.

1.2.3 Trauma

Trauma is another term which is in common usage today but which was not used or recognised in Famine Ireland, even though a post-Famine increase in asylum inmates from Ireland was documented.⁶⁴ Today, however, trauma is recognised as ‘the scar that a tragic event leaves on an individual victim or on a witness’, and also as ‘the collective imprint on a group of a historical experience that may have occurred decades, generations, or even centuries ago’.⁶⁵ Recent research, such as Gilad Hirschberger’s work on collective trauma,⁶⁶ Ron Eyerman’s work on social theory and trauma,⁶⁷ Zihan Zhang and Jun Hyung Kim’s work on intergenerational trauma,⁶⁸ and Juan José López-Ibor’s work on disasters and mental health,⁶⁹ all recognise that trauma is a frequent psychological reaction to disaster, whether of personal or national magnitude. Consequently, *trauma* has been considered an acceptable term to use within this thesis. This approach is consistent with the way trauma has been employed as an analytical tool in recent

⁶⁴ Catherine Cox, Hilary Marland and Sarah York, ‘Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited: The Bodies and Minds of the Irish in Late Nineteenth-Century Lancashire Asylums’ in *Journal of Social History*, xlvii, no. 2 (2012), p. 501.

⁶⁵ Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford, 2007), p. xi.

⁶⁶ Gilad Hirschberger, ‘Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning’ in *Frontiers in Psychology*, ix (2018), p. 1.

⁶⁷ Ron Eyerman, ‘Social Theory and Trauma’ in *Acta Sociologica*, lvi, no. 1 (2013), p. 42.

⁶⁸ Zihan Zhang and J. H. Kim, ‘The Inheritance of Historical Trauma: Intergenerational Effects of Early-Life Exposure to Famine on Mental Health’ in *IZA - Institute of Labor Economics* (2023), p. 1.

⁶⁹ J. J. López-Ibor, ‘What is a Disaster?’ in Juan José López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), p. 3.

Irish historiography: for example, Guy Beiner has used trauma as a tool to illuminate the fragmented, often suppressed layers of collective memory surrounding politically charged events, demonstrating how narratives of trauma interact with narratives of triumph in the shaping of modern Irish identity.⁷⁰ Siobhra Aiken's *Spiritual Wounds* similarly applies the concept of trauma to 'veteran testimony from the Irish Civil War', to illuminate the mental and emotional realities of their experiences, dimensions that have been largely 'overlooked in historical enquiry to date',⁷¹ thereby giving voice to a narrative previously absent from the historical record. More broadly, Joanna Bourke has emphasised the methodological value of trauma for historians, arguing that engaging with pain, suffering, and emotional experience allows historians to access dimensions of the past that are not always visible through institutional or administrative records alone. Her work highlights both the possibilities and challenges of writing histories of trauma, particularly the need to balance empathic interpretation with critical distance when reconstructing past experiences of distress.⁷²

The Great Famine did not only produce crime in the immediate struggle for survival but also left deep psychological wounds that shaped how survivors, their descendants, and Irish society as a whole understood and responded to trauma, guilt, and agency in its aftermath. This dimension has received little dedicated attention. One of the few historian-led discussions that explicitly frames the Great Famine through trauma to date is Cormac Ó Gráda's chapter 'Famine, trauma and memory' in his book *Ireland's Great Famine*. Ó Gráda observes that 'not only are famines uneven: they are also, always and everywhere, deeply divisive tragedies': charity and solidarity binding communities together for a while but with hospitality declining, and crime and cruelty increasing, along with child abandonment and infanticide, as the crisis continues.⁷³ The cumulative exposure to starvation, disease, eviction, workhouse confinement, and imprisonment generated not only physical suffering but emotional environments marked by fear,

⁷⁰ Guy Beiner, 'Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlvii, no. 2 (2007), pp 278, 382, 384.

⁷¹ Siobhra Aiken, *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* (Newbridge, Co. Kildare, 2022), p. 1.

⁷² Joanna Bourke, 'Why History Hurts' in Peter Leese and Jason Crouthamel (eds), *Traumatic Memories of the Second World War and After* (Switzerland, 2016), pp 269–70, 273–5, 281, 283–6.

⁷³ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin, 2006), p. 223.

grief, shame, and moral injury. Many faced a combination of these ‘horrors’.⁷⁴ These psychological ruptures shaped how individuals navigated questions of morality, survival, and agency, factors which frequently intersected with criminal behaviour during and after the crisis.

Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman describe trauma as being not just ‘the traces left in the psyche’ but also ‘an open wound in the collective memory’ following devastating experiences and events.⁷⁵ Eyerman adds that individual and collective traumas both ‘issue from shock’, creating wounds that are also ‘collective and social’, intensifying the trauma whilst destroying both collective and individual identity.⁷⁶

The medical and psychiatric definition of trauma is a wound inflicted on the mind ‘by an emotional shock so powerful that it breaches ‘the mind’s experience of time, self and the world’’,⁷⁷ while ‘the psychological definition of trauma includes the encounter with death, or extreme death anxiety, as a central component of this psychological phenomenon’.⁷⁸ Trauma ‘can also be ongoing and structurally induced’,⁷⁹ and has a ‘lingering, long-term impact’,⁸⁰ while ‘the spirals of rage emanating outwards from a heinous crime’ are ‘traumatising rather than healing’.⁸¹ It is evident that emotional shock, encounters with death, and extreme death anxiety would aptly describe the experiences of the majority of Irish Famine survivors to a greater or lesser degree, depending on length of exposure, personal experience and individual resilience.

However, Ó Gráda’s observation that ‘collective memory’ is ‘in large part ‘artefact or myth’⁸² highlights the extent to which shared recollections of the Famine are constructed rather than simply inherited. Ó Gráda believes that collective

⁷⁴ L. P. Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction in Ireland 1845-1910* (Dublin, 2011), p. 29.

⁷⁵ Fassin & Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Eyerman, ‘Social Theory and Trauma’, p. 43.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Hirschberger, ‘Collective Trauma’, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Kate Schick, ‘Acting out and working through: trauma and (in)security’ in *Review of International Studies*, xxxvii, no. 4 (2011), p. 1840.

⁸⁰ Björn Krondorfer, ‘Unsettling Empathy: Intercultural Dialogue in the Aftermath of Historical and Cultural Trauma’ in Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (ed.), *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition* (Opladen: Berlin: Toronto, 2016), p. 91.

⁸¹ Claire Vallier, cited in Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 240.

⁸² Ó Gráda, *Ireland’s Great Famine*, p. 218.

memory does not function as a neutral repository of the past but is actively produced through state narratives, media representation, national myth-making, and ritualised forms of commemoration.⁸³ Such processes privilege certain events, silence others, and refashion traumatic or ambiguous episodes to suit contemporary identities and political projects. As a result, what communities remember together often tells us more about present-day concerns and power dynamics than about historical experience itself. As such, adopting trauma as an analytical lens situates this thesis within a growing body of Irish historiography that seeks to recover the emotional and psychological traces of historical crisis, extending this approach into the context of Famine-era criminality. This thesis therefore treats trauma not as separate from crime but as entangled with survival strategies, institutionalisation, and the moral injuries produced by famine conditions.

1.3 Research Methodology

In order to make best use of the Irish prison registers, it was important to establish a sound methodology at the start of the research process. Initially, the intent was to compare the prison register for Kilmainham prison with that for Galway, but the Galway registers only appeared to contain a register of convicts sentenced to transportation from 1847 onwards. These records are undoubtedly fascinating but were not suitable for inclusion because they could not be used to establish a pre-Famine benchmark of general crimes over the 1844/5 period. It was subsequently discovered that later pages in the run of scanned documents provided the required material; however, by this time, the Sligo registers had been selected instead due to their wider date coverage (although these also proved problematic as they are specific to the crime of illicit distillation rather than covering a broad range of crimes).

It quickly became apparent that it would be necessary to extract the data in agricultural years (September to August), following the harvest pattern, better reflecting the lived experiences of the ordinary population. Ultimately, as James Anthony Lawson (founder member of the Dublin Statistical Society) stated,

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp 217–8, 228.

statistics supply 'the facts which are the basis and subject matter of Political Economy; secondly, by means of facts it supplies a test to determine the correctness [sic] of the abstract conclusions of Political Economy'.⁸⁴ To that end, the entries for the agricultural year of 1844/5 were extracted to set a pre-Famine rural and urban benchmark, before 1847/8 was similarly examined; the agricultural year of 1847/8 being known as *Black '47*, the worst year of the Famine.⁸⁵ This element of research involved quantitative methodology and the information was extracted into *Excel*, before being carefully examined in order to establish any patterns of change and a working hypothesis.

The data sample was not entirely random, having been drawn from 'the least successful in Irish society', who entered the criminal justice system by being caught.⁸⁶ There is some personal information in the registers, such as religion, age, and physical description, but there is, of course, no information about why the alleged crime had been committed. Indeed, as David Fitzpatrick observed, 'the issue of motivation is notoriously resistant to historical analysis'; the perpetrators themselves may not have been aware of their motives, but even if they were, the reasons might be too complicated to vocalise, or the perpetrator too embarrassed to explain.⁸⁷ Thus, to attempt to add meaning to these results, and better understand the lived experience, it has been necessary to add qualitative information, obtained through the first-hand accounts of witnesses to the Famine, official papers, government records, books from the period, and newspapers. This wide utilisation of resources has hopefully enabled the creation of a narrative interpretation greater than the sum of its individual parts.

To interpret this qualitative material, the thesis draws on insights from sociology and criminology. In this context, the 'general patterns of social life' shape a person's life experience, 'attitudes, beliefs, behaviour' and identity. History is

⁸⁴ J. A. Lawson, 'On the Connexion between Statistics and Political Economy: A Paper read before the Dublin Statistical Society' in *Transactions of the Dublin Statistical Society*, i (1848), p. 5.

⁸⁵ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (The Princeton economic history of the Western world, Princeton, NJ, 1999).

⁸⁶ Matthias Blum, C. L. Colvin and Eoin McLaughlin, 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection in the Great Irish Famine' (2017), p. 10.

⁸⁷ David Fitzpatrick, 'Protestant Depopulation and the Irish Revolution' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxviii, no. 152 (2013), p. 643.

today combined with disciplines such as sociology.⁸⁸ Philip Abrams writes that ‘in my understanding of history and sociology there can be no relationship *between* them because, in terms of their fundamental preoccupations, history and sociology are and always have been the same thing. Both seek to understand the puzzle of human agency, and both seek to do so in terms of the process of social structuring’.⁸⁹ Applying this combined perspective allows the thesis to interpret criminal acts not simply as legal infractions but as decisions taken within environments shaped by poverty, coercion, and the breakdown of normal social regulation. For the historian, this means attempting to step outside of our own society, and into that of the period under examination, applying the ‘sociological imagination’.⁹⁰ Without combining these disciplines, it becomes difficult to fully comprehend the past; the reasons for social differences and differing social behaviours needing to be examined before today’s societal influences can be removed, thus allowing the lived experience of the past to be identified and better understood.

Criminology is also a necessary discipline for this thesis, with *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction*⁹¹ providing a useful background to the discipline whilst enabling the research subject to be approached from an alternative perspective. A more recent release (*Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies* by Larry J Siegel) complements this publication with an updated edition which includes a particularly useful ‘framework for studying criminology’ in a self-professed ‘unbiased and even-handed fashion’.⁹² Criminological researchers use the disciplines of ‘sociology, psychology, political science and history’ in the same way that historians do, allowing for a better understanding of the changes in society’s understanding of crime, the minds of both victim and criminal, and the problems and pitfalls faced in analysis.⁹³ However, because this thesis is crime-focused, with the Famine providing context, the primary discipline used throughout is that of historical criminology, which offers a valuable framework for understanding how crime, punishment, and societal responses have evolved over

⁸⁸ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 4–5.

⁸⁹ Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), p. x.

⁹⁰ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 4–5.

⁹¹ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*.

⁹² Siegel, *Criminology*, p. xxi.

⁹³ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 9, 18–19.

time, shaped by broader social, political, and economic contexts, especially when combined with other disciplines.⁹⁴ By applying this perspective to the Famine, it becomes possible to explore not only patterns of criminal behaviour during a time of profound disruption, but also how concepts of agency, justice, and deviance were constructed and interpreted within that historical moment. This approach situates the actions of individuals within the structures and pressures of their time, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of both criminality and victimhood.

The eminent sociologist Robert E Park believed that ‘people should be studied in their natural environments’ in an anthropological approach, whilst Jeff Ferrell reasons that, to appreciate the lived experience of the criminal, ‘researchers must be prepared to participate in the immediacy of crime, to share the lived experience themselves’.⁹⁵ This is not possible when researching an event that has passed out of living memory, but the closer the researcher can come to understanding the context of the past and the minds and lives of the people within it, the closer they can get to this approach. This can be achieved by observing the actions of the Famine victims through studying crime during the Famine period, a study which naturally includes the disciplines of sociology, psychology, criminology, and history. Despite two Irish universities now offering degrees in criminology,⁹⁶ it is still something of a missing discipline in Irish historiography, particularly when compared to other aspects of Irish history. However, it is still crucial, as ‘a detailed understanding of local conditions’ is an essential ‘prerequisite for rational debate’,⁹⁷ and an exercise which leads to a better understanding of agency amongst the inhabitants of Ireland during the Famine.

This combination of sources, therefore, reflects a mixed-methods approach; Sarah J Tracy writes that ‘some of the strongest research programs are built upon multiple methods of data collection’⁹⁸ enabling a ‘comprehensive understanding of

⁹⁴ David Churchill, Henry Yeomans and Iain Channing, *Historical Criminology* (Abingdon, Oxon: New York, 2022), p. 7.

⁹⁵ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 18–19.

⁹⁶ Maynooth University, ‘Bachelor of Arts Criminology’ in *Maynooth University*, n.d. (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/study-maynooth/undergraduate-studies/courses/bachelor-arts-criminology>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁹⁷ Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order*, p. vii.

⁹⁸ S. J. Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (Chichester, 2012), p. 25.

the topic' with each method supporting the findings of the other, and providing different perspectives,⁹⁹ ultimately neutralising the 'weaknesses of each form of data'.¹⁰⁰ Within the discipline of history, this is particularly important when the researcher is so far removed from the event. Quantitative research provides information about what did occur, whilst qualitative information adds context to help with understanding why it happened, who it affected, and the wider impact. Thus, the two methods build a narrative which is not directly available to us, due to the lack of auto-ethnographical evidence left by the Famine victims. This challenge is further compounded by the nature of the sources available. Due to decades of violent conflict and fluctuating political stability, the Famine narrative has changed over time, and wide reading of authoritative research remains the best way of obtaining an empirical understanding of the causes, reality, and impact of the Famine. At times of heightened political tension, scholars may face pressures that encourage greater caution in how the Famine is framed. It has thus been established that over the years many eminent historians have developed a comprehensive and empirical history of Ireland and the Great Famine. However, it is difficult to get 'into the mind of the past',¹⁰¹ especially when those most severely affected by the potato crop failure were often unable to leave a written record, either because they were illiterate or because they had no means by which to do so. Consequently, there is an absence of auto-ethnographical evidence written from the perspective of the ordinary people. There is oral evidence contained within the National Folklore Collection, recounted by the children and grandchildren of those who lived through the Famine, and collected within the following century. Cathal Póirtéir has extracted references to the Famine from this material, collating it together in his book *Famine Echoes*, but he admits that there is 'an incredible gap in the documentary knowledge of the Famine period' from the 'perspective of the ordinary people'.¹⁰² Trauma affects the memory, so while some survivors were unwilling or unable to remember, others remembered a more nuanced version of events, one based on

⁹⁹ Judith Bell and Stephen Waters, *Doing Your Research Project* (7th edn, London, 2016), pp 24–5.

¹⁰⁰ J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th edn, California, 2014), loc. 13%.

¹⁰¹ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (5th edn, Harlow, 2010), p. 76.

¹⁰² Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin, 1995), pp 13, 3.

a 'chosen trauma dynamic',¹⁰³ that is, an interpretation of events proving more lasting to history than the reality, regardless of accuracy. The National Folklore Collection is therefore valuable but must be used with caution.

Otherwise, the voices of the poor can only be heard obliquely through government records, newspapers, or witnesses such as Asenath Nicholson,¹⁰⁴ or the Quakers (who also supplied humanitarian aid, as well as providing 'calm and sober evidence' of the condition of Ireland).¹⁰⁵ Whilst 'written sources' and 'archival holdings' can be inaccurate, muddled, 'based on hearsay or intended to mislead', ultimately, for mid-nineteenth century research, they are both rewarding and a 'most plentiful' source, although the caveat must be added that 'it is a vital part of the historian's work to scrutinise the source' for misrepresentation.¹⁰⁶

Archives may also contain an occasional series of invaluable letters sent home by Irish emigrants¹⁰⁷ but, on the whole, as Ciarán McCabe observes, 'any historian dealing with the poor must tackle the fact that his subjects were, almost invariably, not the creators of the primary sources in which they appear', whilst their appearance in the records constitutes 'more than disobedience against the prevailing system of law and order'.¹⁰⁸ Rachel Fuchs clarifies that 'the poor often become visible to historians only when they meet the literate middle classes in the workplace or public arenas. As a result, historians have largely observed the lives of the underprivileged through middle-class eyes that viewed them, in turn, from a safe distance through lenses distorted by [the] fear, distrust, and disgust'¹⁰⁹ of a Catholic underclass.

An example of the lack of auto-ethnographical evidence from the Famine period is provided by *The Great Irish Famine: A History in Four Lives* by Enda Delaney. It might be supposed that the four lives are representative of those at the bottom of the social pyramid, and therefore those most affected by the Famine, however this is not the case. Whilst the book is interesting and well written, the four lives

¹⁰³ Hirschberger, 'Collective Trauma', pp 1–2.

¹⁰⁴ Asenath Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland, in 1847, 1848, and 1849* (New York, 1851).

¹⁰⁵ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 157–8.

¹⁰⁶ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 90–2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ Ciarán McCabe, 'Begging and Alms-Giving in Urban Ireland, 1815-1850' (PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2014), p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ R. G. Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in nineteenth century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 154.

comprise John MacHale, the Catholic archbishop of Tuam; Sir Charles E Trevelyan, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury during the Famine; John Mitchel, an attorney and Nationalist; and Elizabeth Smith, a baronet's daughter and the wife of an East India Company Colonel and estate owner in County Wicklow.¹¹⁰ There is much useful and interesting information in the book, but it does not represent the experiences of those most adversely affected by the Famine.

This also underlines the need for careful interpretation of the evidence. As stated by Howard S Becker, it is not possible to approach research without being contaminated by our own 'personal and political sympathies'¹¹¹ however hard we might try. In the case of research into Ireland during the Famine it is impossible not to feel empathy towards the victims, a fundamental aspect of human connection. Nonetheless, the chosen mixed-method structure, combined with an open-minded and empirical approach, aims to reduce personal bias to a minimum; with the caveat that statistics, as well as the sources themselves, be they prison registers or personal accounts, can contain inaccuracies and have also been subjected to some level of censorship dependent either upon the requirement for which the document was produced, or upon the social structure of the period, as well as how and why that particular document came to be preserved in the archives whilst others were not.¹¹²

The official Irish prison registers incorporate the quantitative element of this research. The approach used here will primarily be that of historical methodology, described by John Tosh as 'common sense applied very much more systematically and sceptically than is usually the case in everyday life, supported by a secure grasp of historical context and, in many instances, a high degree of technical knowledge'.¹¹³ Practically, the systematic approach adopted is that of explanatory sequential mixed methods as illustrated in John Creswell's diagram below (Figure 1.1):

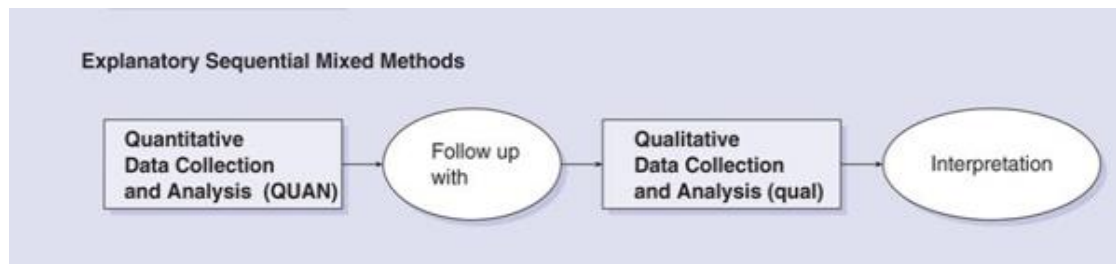
¹¹⁰ Enda Delaney, *The Great Irish Famine: A History in Four Lives* (Dublin, 2012).

¹¹¹ H. S. Becker, 'Whose Side are we on?' in *Social Problems*, xiv, no. 3 (1967), p. 239.

¹¹² Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 90.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Figure 1.1 – Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods¹¹⁴



This methodology will be underpinned by a constructivist approach, particularly social constructivism, recognising that knowledge is shaped by its historical and social context. Paired with a critically informed perspective, this will allow for a questioning of dominant narratives and power structures. The aim is to develop understanding of how crime during the Irish Famine was socially constructed, influenced by poverty, imperialism, and inequality, while also recovering the voices and experiences of those historically silenced.

Although 'the recording of crime involves a complex process of interpretation and interaction' and 'is certainly not a straightforward process',¹¹⁵ the biggest disadvantage to researching records from a period which has passed out of living memory is that the researcher does not know how the information contained within the records was obtained or recorded, or why certain information was deemed worthy of inclusion or exclusion. Additionally, the agenda of the alleged criminal, or the arresting officer, is largely unknown. Something that can also be the case regarding the author of both primary and secondary literature, despite any stated author intent.

In addition, the prison registers only record those crimes for which an arrest has been made and, undoubtedly, many more crimes occurred than are represented within. This might be for several reasons; the crime may not have been reported, the perpetrator may not have been identified, or the police may have decided not to record the event, either because the victim was not believed, the incident was considered trivial, or the occurrence was not considered a crime at all. Indeed, a number of 'relatively minor laws dealing with public order'¹¹⁶ 'were vague and

¹¹⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, loc. 85%.

¹¹⁵ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Ciarán McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2018), p. 27.

generic, allowing considerable discretion in their interpretation',¹¹⁷ and making it difficult for today's historian to establish exactly what act had been committed that resulted in an arrest. Alternatively, it is possible that the officer may have simply wished to 'avoid work' or had accepted a bribe to keep quiet. It is also true that 'conflict analyses of crime, for instance, have drawn attention to how the crimes that poor people commit are subject to disproportionate attention by criminal justice systems', therefore some crimes may have been overlooked due to the social status of the offender.¹¹⁸

The literature and source base were identified through systematic searching across academic databases, library catalogues, and reference-tracking within key texts, prioritising peer-reviewed scholarship, and archival/official material. This strategy ensured breadth while keeping the focus on sources directly relevant to crime, punishment, survival strategies, and the social consequences of the Famine.

Throughout, the working title of the thesis provided focus and functioned as an 'orienting device', whilst proving easy to modify as ideas changed, developed, and reformed.¹¹⁹ However, the direction of the thesis was allowed to develop organically, shaped by the analysis and, ultimately, by the subjects themselves. The aim of the thesis is to produce an empirical understanding of the social history of crime in Ireland during the Great Famine, engaging with what G M Trevelyan described as 'the history of a people with the politics left out',¹²⁰ while recognising that such a separation between social experience and political structures is no longer tenable in contemporary historical scholarship.

As Michael Crotty observes, 'we are all born into a world of meaning ... bestowed upon us by our culture',¹²¹ while Creswell similarly argues that to learn anything from history it is necessary to 'focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the

¹¹⁷ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain' in *The Economic History Review*, xxxiv, no. 2 (1981), p. 197.

¹¹⁸ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, pp 12, 5.

¹¹⁹ Creswell, *Research Design*, loc. 17%.

¹²⁰ G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: New York: Toronto, 1941), p. vii.

¹²¹ Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process* (London, 1998), loc. 23%.

participants', whether willing or not. He describes the social constructivist as someone who seeks 'understanding of the world in which they live and work', the goal being to 'rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied'. He states that this 'worldview' or 'broadly conceived' research methodology is particularly useful for 'social and historical construction', or in this case reconstruction, and is therefore especially suitable for this study where the intent is to construct, as far as is possible, a lived experience of the Famine. In this instance, where the participants' views have been largely lost to time, the researcher must listen 'carefully to what people say or do in their life settings',¹²² and for the purposes of this thesis, this means researching the written record, whether this be the Irish prison register, eye-witness narratives, or newspaper articles. The end result will be to better understand the experience of the Famine for those who were most affected by it.

Read collectively, these sources reveal the role of the British government in creating an anomic environment within Ireland, where systematic marginalisation, poverty, and dependence on the potato crop left the population profoundly vulnerable to crisis. This thesis argues that within the resulting breakdown of order: crime, trauma, and agency became deeply intertwined: crime emerged as both a symptom of desperation and a means of survival; trauma followed from hunger, loss, and dislocation; and agency was exercised in limited but significant ways, from committing survival crimes to migrating, resisting, or even deliberately engaging with state institutions as a strategy of endurance. The failure of the British government to respond adequately to catastrophe reinforced both the reality and perception of abandonment, embedding long-term patterns of dislocation and grievance that resurfaced in the post-Famine period, not least in the revival of agrarian unrest and later nationalist violence. The chapters that follow examine how these dynamics appear in the archive, beginning with prison register evidence and extending to transportation and institutional confinement.

Within this broader context, this thesis sits at the intersection of several dynamic strands of recent scholarship, contributing not only to Irish Famine studies but also to broader discussions in historical criminology, penal history, imperial

¹²² Creswell, *Research Design*, locs 11-12%.

governance, and the social impacts of mass crisis. While grounded in the biographical analysis of individuals and their experiences, the research speaks to a much wider academic audience, including those interested in the operation of penal regimes, the construction of national narratives, and the lived effects of colonial rule. The thesis also engages with issues that remain highly topical today: how states respond to humanitarian crises, how marginalised communities experience and resist systemic injustice, and how historical trauma is inherited and remembered. By tracing the movement of individuals across different geographical and institutional contexts, the project reveals underlying continuities that link these settings, such as British imperial control, penal institutions, and recurring patterns of hardship. In so doing, it offers original insights into how trauma, agency, and state power intersect in moments of crisis, and how these intersections continue to shape public memory, identity, and political discourse. The use of prison records for the thesis, alongside its biographical method, adds empirical depth, while also reinforcing the contemporary relevance of this research in contemporary discussions of social justice, migration, and inequality.

1.4 Summary of Chapters

This introduction has outlined the central aims and arguments of the thesis, clarified key terminology, and explained the research methodology underpinning this study. The following chapter outlines the historiographical context and provides a critical review of the relevant literature, situating this study within existing scholarship and highlighting its contribution to a deeper understanding of crime, agency, and trauma during the Great Famine. It also identifies key gaps in the literature and introduces the primary sources on which this research will be based.

Chapter three examines how British colonial policies contributed to systemic poverty and overcrowding in Ireland, conditions that proved catastrophic following the outbreak of potato blight, *Phytophthora infestans*. Offences such as agrarian outrages and illicit distillation were common offences in Ireland at the time and will be explained in this chapter, within the context of Nenagh and Tipperary. Finally, the legal definitions of crime and the functioning of law enforcement in pre-Famine Ireland will be explored, establishing a baseline for assessing later

social and legal developments within their historical context, and concluding with an explanation of the British Government's attitudes towards Ireland and intervention in the Famine.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the prison registers, identifying patterns in criminal behaviour and offering insights that support the broader arguments of the thesis. Chapters 5 and 6 extend the analysis with the aim of understanding what these results meant for the ordinary Irish person living through the Famine period. Chapter 5 explains the conviction process before investigating the experiences of convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land (which became Tasmania in 1856), drawing on conduct records from convict ships the *Samuel Boddington* and the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* to complement the prison register data. Chapter 6 examines the experiences of those sent to Bermuda and Spike Island before taking a wider societal view, which explores the wider effects of the Famine, and criminality on Irish society, in both rural and urban settings, considering both the offender and the broader population.

Chapter 7 studies the psychological and societal impact of the Famine, focusing on lived experience and the long-term effects of trauma on survivors both in Ireland and further afield. The closing chapter presents key findings, reflects on the thesis's central aims, and offers directions for future research.

This study adheres to the referencing conventions of *Irish Historical Studies*, where this does not conflict with University of Staffordshire thesis submission guidelines.

This chapter has established the thesis's central claim that famine-era criminality should be read not simply as deviance but as survival strategy and restricted agency, while also outlining the conceptual lenses of trauma, anomie, and colonial governance that structure the analysis. The chapters that follow therefore move from historiographical debate to empirical investigation, using prison registers and related sources to show how the state's definitions of crime intersected with ordinary people's attempts to endure crisis, and how those experiences shaped memory and politics long after the famine itself.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Historiography

2.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to analyse selected data from the Irish prison registers in order to gain a wider understanding of the changing nature and frequency of crime during the Famine period. The objective is to better understand the lived experience of the Famine and to establish whether crime was turned to as a means of survival, thus enabling us to get 'into the mind of the past'.¹²³ This chapter situates that analysis within existing scholarship on Irish crime, poverty, and famine society, while also clarifying how the concepts of crime, agency, anomie, and trauma structure the interpretation of the prison register evidence used later in the thesis. This research will be supported by first-hand accounts, newspapers, and government reports, and will draw upon academic texts where appropriate.

Throughout, the thesis treats the language of class and criminality as historically contingent and politically charged. It also recognises that prison registers reflect enforcement practices and administrative priorities, rather than being simple and neutral accounts of crime.

While there is some excellent literature available about the Great Famine, much of it concentrates on the politics of the time, either providing a broad overview of a large subject, or focusing narrowly on one particular aspect of the tragedy.

Similarly, there are publications relating to crime during this period, some of which provide wide coverage, while others focus on one smaller element of crime.

There have also been several interesting publications which have used the Irish prison registers,¹²⁴ but which focus on quite specific aspects within the prison registers, rather than the wider approach of this thesis.

¹²³ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 76.

¹²⁴ Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Heights in Tipperary in the 1840s: evidence from prison registers' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xviii (1991), pp 24–33; R. S. Lawlor, 'Crime in nineteenth-century Ireland: Grangegorman female penitentiary and Richmond male penitentiary, with reference to juveniles and women, 1836-60' (master's thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2012).

2.2 Crime, Class, and the Limits of Interpretation

The impetus for this thesis came from a single sentence in *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847*, in which James Hack Tuke, a Quaker philanthropist and prominent relief organiser, observed first-hand that ‘in almost every field of turnips or potatoes worth protecting, a hut is erected for the accommodation of a watcher’,¹²⁵ implying that this was an unusual sight prior to the Famine, but common during it. 150 years after Tuke, Roger Swift wrote in 1997 that ‘knowledge of Irish criminality is limited and patchy in both time and place’,¹²⁶ and in 2004, Shane Kilcommins et al. wrote that criminology was still Ireland’s ‘absentee discipline’, reasoning that although ‘research in the area has appeared intermittently over the years, and while there have been some excellent individual efforts, it could not be said that a tradition of scholarship has emerged’. They believed that this was due to the ‘lack of an infrastructure to sustain and promote empirical research’ (such as the Institute of Criminology in Ireland, which had only been created in 2000), coupled with a lack of available information, making ‘the production of a textbook on the Irish criminal process’ impossible.¹²⁷ Nicholas Woodward, whilst determining that crime figures had doubled during the Famine, also stated that, whilst ‘a good deal has been written about Irish crime, surprisingly little of it is about how crime changed during the Famine’. He concluded that it was assumed, but not confirmed, that courts became more lenient at this time, whilst ‘hunger-related crimes’ increased, and the gender and age demographics of the criminal changed,¹²⁸ as will be discussed in Chapter 4. More recently, in 2013, Richard McMahon wrote that ‘there has, with a few notable exceptions, been little detailed examination of the incidence and nature of particular violent offences ... in pre-Famine and Famine Ireland’, although ‘the last thirty years or so have seen a burgeoning interest in the historiography of

¹²⁵ J. H. Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847* (2nd edn, London, 1848), p. 7.

¹²⁶ Roger Swift, ‘Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England’ in *Albion*, xxix, no. 3 (1997), p. 400.

¹²⁷ Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order*, p. vii.

¹²⁸ Nicholas Woodward, ‘Transportation Convictions during the Great Irish Famine’ in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2006), p. 59.

crime and criminal justice in the extent and nature of homicide in early modern and modern Europe'.¹²⁹

Kyle Hughes and Donald M MacRaild have also concluded that there was 'much confusion over the extent of crime and violence in nineteenth-century Ireland' which had caused historians to be 'split on the fundamental question of whether Ireland was an inordinately violent place in comparison with other societies in the British Isles or in Europe'.¹³⁰ Whilst 'it has been calculated that, relative to the population, Ireland was twice as crime-ridden as England',¹³¹ in 1984, K T Hoppen wrote that pre-Famine violence in Ireland was both 'less constant and less universal than has often been supposed',¹³² and this opinion was supported by Charles Townshend, who believed that 'violence in pre-Famine Ireland was only 'remarkable by the standards of an imaginary rural idyll. By those of an urban industrial society it was almost trifling".¹³³

Even contemporary accounts are not necessarily of assistance. In 1831, Sir Richard Hussey Vivian, Lieutenant-General and later Commander of the Forces in Ireland, remarked that the lower classes had an 'extraordinary carelessness of human life' and 'would have no sort of hesitation in taking up a stone and committing murder',¹³⁴ a belief echoed at the end of the Famine in 1852 by Maxwell Hamilton (Crown Solicitor), who responded to a Select Committee question on the 'great recklessness of human life' which he believed to be the result of desensitisation from witnessing murder,¹³⁵ while seemingly disregarding the effects of witnessing so much death during the previous seven years of Famine. Travellers to Ireland in the 1830s such as Henry David Inglis, John Barrow, Caesar Otway, and Gustave de Beaumont, all wrote about the violence

¹²⁹ Richard McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2013), pp 5–6.

¹³⁰ Kyle Hughes and D. M. MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century; Themes and Perspectives' in Kyle Hughes and D. M. MacRaild (eds), *Crime, Violence and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century* (The Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, Liverpool, 2021), p. 1.

¹³¹ Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order*, p. 13.

¹³² K. T. Hoppen, cited in Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', pp 1–2; K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 342.

¹³³ Charles Townshend, cited in Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', pp 1–2.

¹³⁴ Sir Richard Hussey Vivian in Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland* (session 1831-2, HC 1831-2, vol. xvi, London, 1832), p. 93.

¹³⁵ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Outrages (Ireland)* (session 1852, HC 1852, vol. xiv, London, 1852), p. 160.

they had seen, interspersed with anecdotal detail.¹³⁶ Tosh writes that ‘it would be a mistake to think of the published memoir as an upper-class preserve. In Britain by the mid-nineteenth century, it had become a recognized means of expression for the literate artisan as well’,¹³⁷ although the majority of the Irish population were neither literate, nor skilled.

This problem of representation extended beyond questions of literacy into the very social categories through which the Irish poor were understood, as attempts to categorise them in the nineteenth century frequently relied on social languages developed in industrial Britain and continental Europe. However, these urban and industrial frameworks map imperfectly onto a largely rural, subsistence-based society. Geoffrey Joel Crossick’s analysis of Victorian social description in England indicates that ‘the political language of class’ was historically contingent and politically charged, particularly in relation to the lower or working classes.¹³⁸ More broadly, Virginia Crossman’s work *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland, 1850-1914*¹³⁹ demonstrates that Irish society and culture differed markedly from those of England, with a predominantly rural population, widespread poverty, and limited employment opportunities outside agriculture, especially in the south and east.

As Ó Gráda has noted, farmers who neither hired labour nor hired themselves out were relatively few in pre-Famine Ireland.¹⁴⁰ Some rural households therefore occupied fluid positions within local labour markets, combining small-scale cultivation with seasonal or casual labour. This blurring of categories between farmer and labourer complicates rigid social distinctions and underscores the interdependence of rural society. Such fluidity is critical to understanding how famine pressures later reshaped behaviour and criminalisation, as households already operating near subsistence were pushed rapidly beyond lawful means of survival.

¹³⁶ McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland*, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 95.

¹³⁸ Geoffrey Crossick, ‘From gentlemen to the residuum: languages of social description in Victorian Britain’ in P. J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp 150–1, 155–6.

¹³⁹ Crossman, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland*.

¹⁴⁰ Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘Poverty, Population, and Agriculture, 1801-1845’ in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: Ireland Under the Union* (Oxford, 1989), pp 114–5.

This helps to explain why poverty was often understood as temporary and relational rather than morally deviant, shaping local attitudes towards begging and informal relief. Consequently, alms-giving was commonplace, and beggars were often regarded as acceptable members of society.¹⁴¹ In this context, labels derived from English industrial society were frequently applied to populations whose social and economic conditions differed fundamentally from those of the English urban poor. This thesis therefore treats such terminology not as analytical truth but as evidence of the perceptions of those in authority, shaping policy, policing, and punishment.

Understanding how the Irish poor were conceptualised by policymakers and administrators is essential to interpreting prison records, which reflect these assumptions. The criminalisation of survival strategies must be understood within this framework of misrecognition and social distance.

This disjuncture is particularly evident when British class categories are applied to nineteenth-century Ireland. This class of poor does not fit into the British class system, which had the working class or industrial proletariat at the base, with only beggars sitting lower. In post-feudal England, even rural dwellers worked for a wage, the working class literally being the class that worked for a living.

Thompson described the English working class as tying 'loosely together a bundle of discrete phenomena', and included tailors and weavers within his description although he later described these artisans as preferring 'to build bridges towards the middle class [rather than trying to] bridge the gulf between themselves and the tumultuous poor'.¹⁴² 120 years earlier, Friedrich Engels had explained that 'the first proletarians were connected with manufacture', these 'children of the industrial revolution' forming 'the nucleus of the Labour movement',¹⁴³ although Thompson referred to them as 'late arrivals', following on from the earlier 'domestic' woollen and 'small-ware' weavers. Thompson repeatedly referred to urban workers as the working class; the industrial proletariat on which the 'industrial bourgeoisie' relied; and dependent upon their

¹⁴¹ Crossman, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland*, pp 13, 34, 200–1.

¹⁴² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964), pp 9, 139.

¹⁴³ Friedrich Engels, cited in *ibid.*, p. 191.

own labour, vulnerable to economic exploitation and political oppression.¹⁴⁴ However, in Ireland, elements of feudalism remained,¹⁴⁵ and, in the south especially, there was little industry, domestic or otherwise.¹⁴⁶ The majority of the population were not the industrial working class, or 'factory proletariat' of England,¹⁴⁷ rather they were viewed as the 'swinish multitude', a term used by Edmund Burke¹⁴⁸ to 'denote the unthinking, uncultivated masses, the irresponsible elements of society whose lack of involvement in sustaining the cultural heritage would lead them to destroy it'.¹⁴⁹ By default this also included the largely illiterate, unindustrialised, rural workers living at subsistence level, in a cashless society,¹⁵⁰ who did not engage with the global capitalist system at all, not even to be exploited by it.

This notion of the 'swinish multitude' appears to reflect how the Irish were viewed by their British rulers. The term functions as a language of contempt rather than an objective description, revealing how social categories forged in industrial Britain were imposed on rural, subsistence-based Irish society. This attempt to apply a capitalist social hierarchy to a pre-industrial, largely cashless society, illustrates the hegemonic soft power of colonialism, as well as a failure to fully understand the Irish culture and ways of life which contributed to the inability of the British government to manage the potato crop failure and the tragedy which followed. Marx dismissed this alleged underclass, arguing instead that real power lay with the industrial working class, from whom he believed revolution would ultimately emerge,¹⁵¹ whilst unwittingly illustrating that his own beliefs were tainted by the western capitalist system in which he lived. However, as argued by Frantz Fanon, power did exist at the very bottom of the social structure and this

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp 193, 177, 198–9.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Gray, 'Irish Social Thought and the Relief of Poverty, 1847–1880' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xx (2010), p. 144.

¹⁴⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 31–2, 36.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 759.

¹⁴⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*. (London, 1790), p. 117.

¹⁴⁹ J. T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London, 1963), p. 259.

¹⁵⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 82.

¹⁵¹ F. B. Randall, 'Introduction: Marx the Romantic' in *The Communist Manifesto* (Washington Square Press, 1964), pp 26, 33; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963), pp 60, 129.

thesis will illustrate that *the wretched of the earth* did have agency,¹⁵² especially when survival depended upon it. For many, it was their only option; indeed, many thousands had already demonstrated agency when they organised themselves during Daniel Ó Connell's monster meetings in the years prior to the Famine. Such meetings were seen as criminal activities by the authorities, although in truth they could more accurately be described as an attempt at self-help. Many others had already shown agency by emigrating from Ireland to take their chances elsewhere.¹⁵³

Today, it seems unreasonable to attach such a label to the nineteenth century rural Irish; they had no opportunity to work for a wage, and no opportunity to change or improve their situation except through emigration, which was not an option for the penniless. They comprised the majority of the Irish population, and to dismiss them would, at best, distort history. The story of the Great Famine is their story, one which can occasionally be glimpsed through chronicles and memoirs. Whilst many of these were published with 'little thought for posterity', and few, if any, were written by the rural poor, a small minority were undoubtedly written with the future reader in mind, providing a 'ready-made chronology, a coherent selection of events, and a keen sense of period atmosphere. Their drawback [being] that they recount only what people found worthy of note about their own age – which may not be what interests us today'.¹⁵⁴ It might be said that 'books, like the people who write them, are products of their own times', bringing 'particular ideas and ideologies to bear on the past',¹⁵⁵ but it should be remembered that these were not the ideas, opinions, and ideologies of the Irish rural majority, but those of their British colonisers. However, whilst the thoughts of the Irish rural majority can rarely be glimpsed, their actions do appear more often. Henry David Inglis, a Scottish travel writer whose accounts combined social observation with literary description, witnessed *faction fighting*; described by Hughes and MacRaild as 'an Irish form of recreational violence'.¹⁵⁶ Recounting

¹⁵² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 129.

¹⁵³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 17–18, 209.

¹⁵⁴ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 96, 93.

¹⁵⁵ R. J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), pp 1–2.

¹⁵⁶ Henry D. (Henry David) Inglis, *Ireland in 1834. A Journey throughout Ireland, during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834* (London, 1835), p. 280; Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', p. 5.

such fights, which were deliberate and planned, helped to stereotype the Irish as violent, and ‘thus in need of coercion’, justifying the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the near-continuous use of coercion acts in Ireland ‘for all but 16 years of the nineteenth century’.¹⁵⁷ Such sensationalised accounts might also be recorded with an eye to scandal and increased sales, simply with the aim of portraying the Irish Catholic as violent and culturally backward, in ways that could be used to legitimise coercive governance. Swift believes that crime in Ireland was often exaggerated to appear worse than it really was,¹⁵⁸ and these debates illustrate how interpretations of Irish violence have often depended on selective evidence and official narratives. By contrast, the prison registers analysed in this thesis provide an opportunity to examine a wider spectrum of everyday offences and to assess how famine conditions reshaped patterns of criminal behaviour.

Such accounts might have influenced Poor Law Commissioner and political economist George Cornwall Lewis, who wrote in 1836 that ‘for the last seventy years Ireland has been the scene of constantly recurring disturbances’, consisting of murder, arson, or general insurrection, whilst ‘successive governments have apparently exhausted every means in their power to suppress the evil, but without success’. He referred to the Irish as ‘inferior’ and with ‘inherent barbarism’, believing that large parts of the country had ‘still less security of person and property’ than almost any other part of Europe,¹⁵⁹ a stark contrast to the opinion of Asenath Nicholson, an American social reformer and relief worker, who travelled extensively through Ireland in 1845, and again during the height of the Famine in 1847, and who wrote that ‘seldom do they murder for money, and in no country where oppression has ruled have the oppressed plundered and robbed so little as in Ireland’. However, she added that such behaviour was not entirely unknown, and ‘crimes are multiplying’.¹⁶⁰

Sean Connolly concluded that from the eighteenth century until the 1930s homicide was consistently higher in Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom, although this assessment may have been influenced by his inclusion of

¹⁵⁷ Hughes & MacRaild, ‘Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish’, pp 5–6.

¹⁵⁸ Roger Swift (ed.), *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815-1914: a Documentary History* (Cork, 2002), pp 78–9.

¹⁵⁹ G. C. Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland; and on the Irish Church Question* (London, 1836), p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, p. 17.

infanticide figures. Once infanticide is removed from the analysis, homicide rates appear only 'marginally higher than in England and Wales'.¹⁶¹ More recently, Richard McMahon has argued that homicide was one of the better recorded crimes in Ireland, due to its prominence, and 'perhaps the only violent offence for which it is possible to offer a viable statistical analysis' to help establish how violent Ireland was at the time. He suggests that studying this one crime across different regions allows for the inclusion of 'personal and family disputes' and enables a more nuanced picture than approaches focused solely on agrarian, political, or sectarian violence.¹⁶² In what is described elsewhere as 'important recent research',¹⁶³ McMahon concludes that Ireland in the nineteenth century was not significantly more violent than elsewhere by either the standards of the time or of today.¹⁶⁴ It is clear that extrapolating accurate statistics for comparison is difficult. There is a 'distinct lack of sources' from which to establish 'long-term Irish patterns in violent crime', alongside differences in record keeping and category definitions across institutions and jurisdictions, and differing intentions behind the collection of criminal statistics.¹⁶⁵ This difficulty reinforces the importance of examining other categories of offence recorded in the criminal justice system.

While this debate has produced important insights into the prevalence of violence, its emphasis on homicide reflects both the availability of sources and the priorities of the nineteenth-century state.¹⁶⁶ As Brian Griffin has argued, violent crime, including homicide, is among the most visible and consistently recorded offences in Irish criminal sources,¹⁶⁷ but it represents only a narrow spectrum of criminal behaviour. An emphasis on lethal violence risks obscuring more routine and pervasive offences, such as petty theft, vagrancy, and subsistence-related crimes, which were more likely to bring the poor into contact with the criminal justice system, particularly during periods of acute economic distress such as the Famine.

¹⁶¹ Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', pp 2–3.

¹⁶² McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland*, pp 5–6.

¹⁶³ Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁵ Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', pp 2–3.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 2–3.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Griffin, *Sources For The Study of Crime in Ireland, 1801-1921* (Dublin, 2005), pp 11–18, 42, 84–5.

Much of the existing historiography has focused on specific categories of crime. Studies such as W E Vaughan's work on murder trials¹⁶⁸ illuminate legal process and official responses to violence, emphasising how serious crimes were interpreted, prosecuted, and punished by the courts, rather than how violence was experienced or understood by perpetrators or victims. In contrast, Jennifer Kelly's research on agrarian crime highlights collective protest and rural resistance.¹⁶⁹ Terry Dooley's analysis of the Wildgoose Lodge murders bridges these approaches by demonstrating the importance of local social and cultural contexts in shaping criminal acts and their interpretation, revealing how extreme violence could emerge from, and intersect with, agrarian conflict and community tensions.¹⁷⁰ While these studies provide rich insights into particular forms of violence, they are less concerned with the everyday criminalisation of poverty that characterised the Famine years.

Limited research has been undertaken on various elements of crime in Ireland during, or around, the Famine period. One such piece of research is *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36* by Galen Broeker, which is described as a 'methodical study',¹⁷¹ but focuses on agrarian violence.¹⁷² While valuable for understanding pre-Famine rural disorder and the development of policing, its chronological focus means it offers limited insight into how famine conditions altered everyday criminal behaviour.

Gemma Clark's chapter *Arson in Modern Ireland: Fire and Protest before the Famine* researches this offence in considerable detail and collates much information in one place, allowing for a better sense of the crime, and adding necessary context to an offence which is mentioned in the Kilmainham prison register.¹⁷³ Clark's work is particularly useful in demonstrating how criminal acts

¹⁶⁸ W. E. Vaughan, *Murder Trials in Ireland, 1836-1914* (Dublin, 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Kelly, *'The Downfall of Hagan': Sligo Ribbonism in 1842* (Dublin, 2008).

¹⁷⁰ Terence Dooley, *The Murders at Wildgoose Lodge: Agrarian Crime and Punishment in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Dublin, 2008).

¹⁷¹ Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', p. 9.

¹⁷² Galen Broeker, *Studies in Irish History, Second Series: Volume VIII, Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-1836*, eds T. W. Moody, J. C. Beckett and T. D. Williams (London: Toronto, 1970).

¹⁷³ Gemma Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland: Fire and Protest Before the Great Famine' in Kyle Hughes and D. M. MacRaild (eds), *Crime, Violence, and the Irish, in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2021), pp 211–226.

could function as protest, but its emphasis on political meaning contrasts with the more survival-driven offences that dominate the Famine years.

Mary McConnon has researched convicts from County Louth who appear in the registers of Kilmainham from 1798-1823,¹⁷⁴ and Rebecca Lawlor's MLitt thesis focuses on juveniles and women prisoners,¹⁷⁵ while Ó Gráda has published a journal article which concentrates on prisoners' heights and dietary implications.¹⁷⁶ These are all studies which illustrate the potential of prison registers to recover marginal lives, but they tend to extract specific variables, such as age, gender, or physical stature, rather than examining crime as a lived response to crisis.

Economic historians such as Ó Gráda have noted changes in crime during the Famine, but discussion of criminality remains brief and often subordinate to wider demographic and economic concerns.¹⁷⁷ As a result, crime appears more as an indicator of economic stress than as a social experience shaped by hunger, coercion, and survival. Patrick Carroll-Burke's *Colonial Discipline* examines how the nineteenth-century Irish convict system was shaped by political, cultural, and administrative forces, highlighting the colonial dimensions of punishment and the ways in which disciplinary practices and record-keeping reinforced social hierarchies, without focusing primarily on the experiences of individual prisoners.¹⁷⁸

Cal McCarthy and Barra O'Donnabhain have written about Spike Island Convict Prison, but mention the Famine era only briefly, focusing more upon the prison itself rather than the convict or the crime.¹⁷⁹ Their work contributes to an understanding of penal space and regime, yet offers limited insight into how famine-era prisoners experienced incarceration. Likewise, Richard Butler's *Building the Irish Courthouse and Prison* provides a political history of Irish penal institutions, examining their development, administration, and reform,¹⁸⁰ while

¹⁷⁴ M. P. McConnon, 'The Kilmainham Gaol Registers 1798 to 1823: List of Convicts from County Louth' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxiii, no. 4 (1996), pp 413–437.

¹⁷⁵ Lawlor, 'Crime in nineteenth-century Ireland'.

¹⁷⁶ Ó Gráda, 'Heights in Tipperary'.

¹⁷⁷ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994), pp 173–209.

¹⁷⁸ Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: The Making of the Irish Convict System* (Dublin, 2000).

¹⁷⁹ McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*.

¹⁸⁰ R. J. Butler, *Building the Irish Courthouse and Prison: A Political History, 1750-1850* (Cork, 2020).

Catherine Cox's research, which includes her book *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900*¹⁸¹ as well as several studies on medicine and the treatment of patients in asylums,¹⁸² illuminates the management of mentally ill prisoners in nineteenth-century Ireland and Britain. Both authors offer valuable context for institutional frameworks, though neither focuses directly on the lived experiences of ordinary prisoners during moments of crisis such as the Great Famine.

Similarly, Peter Duffy's *The Killing of Major Denis Mahon*¹⁸³ has a narrow focus, whilst Michael Huggins' *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland* covers broad criminality before the Famine.¹⁸⁴ These are all excellent works which provide useful analysis and valuable context, some offering useful additional angles through which criminality can be understood. While existing scholarship has greatly enhanced understanding of crime, punishment, and institutions in nineteenth-century Ireland, it has tended to privilege structures, categories, and exceptional cases over the everyday experience of criminalisation during the Famine, an imbalance this thesis seeks to redress through a bottom-up analysis of prison registers to examine the relationship between crime, punishment, and survival at the lowest levels of society. Examining these offences allows the thesis to move beyond debates about violence alone and instead explore how criminal behaviour functioned as a practical response to hunger, displacement, and the increasingly anomic conditions produced by the famine.

There are many books and articles written about the Famine, and a flurry of new publications generally emerge around important commemorative dates; these publications will be used where appropriate. Crime also has a substantial public readership, and Famine history continues to attract wide interest well beyond academic audiences. Generally, it would be fair to say that there is significant

¹⁸¹ Catherine Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester, 2012).

¹⁸² for examples see: Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited'; Catherine Cox, 'Managing Insanity: Carlow Lunatic Asylum, 1832-1922' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xxxi (2004), pp 78–79; Cox, *Negotiating Insanity*; Catherine Cox, 'Discursive Essay: A better known territory? Medical history and Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 113C (2013), pp 341–362; Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland, "'Unfit for reform or punishment": mental disorder and discipline in Liverpool Borough Prison in the late nineteenth century' in *Social History*, xlv, no. 2 (2019), pp 173–201.

¹⁸³ Peter Duffy, *The Killing of Major Denis Mahon: a mystery of old Ireland* (New York, 2007).

¹⁸⁴ Michael Huggins, *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: The Case of County Roscommon* (Dublin, 2012).

ongoing interest in Irish history throughout the English-speaking world, thanks to the many descendants of Irish migrants and convicts, making this research of interest to a broad reading base.

A nuanced understanding of Irish history requires an examination of the attitudes and ideologies of the policymakers who imposed their own values on a colonised and subjugated population. These prevailing Victorian values can be discerned through sources such as Whig historiography, contemporary newspapers, and parliamentary papers, as well as from first-hand accounts such as those of the *Irish Tour*. The revisionist approach has subsequently challenged these narratives and allowed for a more accurate understanding of history, resulting in many publications on Irish history which have not been mentioned in this chapter, but which are nevertheless just as valuable as those that have. The following chapters build on this substantial body of scholarship while shifting the focus towards everyday criminalisation and survival during the crisis years.

Taken together, this scholarship leaves two linked gaps. First, while famine-era crime is often invoked as an index of distress, there is still limited sustained work tracing *how* the mix of recorded offences changes across the crisis years, and how far those shifts can be read as strategies of survival rather than simple disorder. Second, studies of Irish crime have frequently privileged either exceptional violence (especially homicide) or highly politicised offences (agrarian outrages), leaving the routine criminalisation of poverty, petty theft, vagrancy, minor disorder, and subsistence-related offences, less fully integrated into famine history. By analysing prison register evidence across regions and contrasting pre-famine and famine-year patterns, this thesis addresses these gaps and connects recorded criminality to hunger, enforcement practices, and circumscribed forms of agency. In doing so, it becomes possible to trace how famine conditions generated increasingly anomic environments in which criminalised behaviour could operate as a restricted form of agency.

2.3 Revisionism in Irish Famine History

The historiographical gaps identified above must also be understood in relation to wider debates within Irish Famine history. Irish Famine historiography has been shaped not only by new evidence and methods, but also by the political and

cultural contexts in which historians have written. Early narratives often prioritised policy and administration or were part of wider national arguments about blame and responsibility. From the mid-twentieth century, revisionism encouraged a more explicitly professional, archive-driven approach and a scepticism towards inherited national stories, while later scholarship has complicated any simple nationalist/revisionist divide by integrating social history, cultural history, and the history of memory.¹⁸⁵

These historiographical shifts matter directly for this thesis because they influence how poverty and criminality are interpreted. Accounts focused on high politics and relief administration can obscure the everyday practices through which the poor navigated scarcity, and they may take official categories, vagrancy, theft, disorder, as transparent descriptions rather than as labels produced through enforcement, prosecution, and the perspectives of those in positions of authority.¹⁸⁶ Conversely, social and cultural approaches have made it easier to recover experience, stigma, and agency, while also reminding us that crime in the archive often records the priorities of the state as much as the behaviour of the poor. In the Irish context, those priorities were shaped by a system of governance that operated within the wider framework of British imperial rule. These perspectives provide an important foundation for this thesis, which similarly seeks to recover agency among the poor, not through autobiographical testimony but through the indirect evidence preserved in prison registers and related institutional records.

While the primary focus of this thesis is the lived experience of famine-era offenders as recorded in prison registers, these developments unfolded within Ireland's position inside the British imperial system. As discussed more fully in Chapter 3, colonial governance shaped many of the administrative and legal institutions through which poverty, crime, and disorder were managed in nineteenth-century Ireland. Institutions such as the constabulary, the workhouse system, and the prison network functioned not only as mechanisms of welfare or criminal justice but also as instruments through which the state sought to regulate poverty, mobility, and public order. References to colonial assumptions, imperial

¹⁸⁵ For an example, see Chapter 11 in Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine*.

¹⁸⁶ For an example, see Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland*.

authority, and coercive administration that appear throughout the following chapters should therefore be understood as applications of this broader framework rather than as attempts to develop a separate analysis of colonial rule.

This thesis therefore reads prison registers as administratively shaped evidence: valuable for tracing patterns and change over time, but always to be interpreted in relation to policing practices, local conditions, and the wider languages used to govern poverty.

2.4 Sources for Transportation

Alongside the Irish prison registers examined elsewhere in this thesis, this study draws on a mixed body of primary and secondary sources to reconstruct the experiences of convicts sent to Van Diemen's Land, Bermuda, and Spike Island. This section is positioned alongside the wider primary source analysis and historiographical review, allowing the chapters that follow to proceed directly to interpretation without repeating source overviews.

For Van Diemen's Land in particular, the study makes extensive use of digitised archival material held by *Libraries Tasmania*,¹⁸⁷ especially convict conduct records and associated administrative documentation, supplemented by contemporary newspapers accessed via *Trove*.¹⁸⁸ These sources allow for the reconstruction of individual trajectories following transportation, including behaviour, punishment, labour allocation, and conditional release. While the source base for Bermuda and Spike Island is more fragmentary, official correspondence, institutional records, and contemporary commentary nonetheless allow for comparative analysis of penal regimes and lived experience across different imperial contexts.

Record-based sources are read alongside a small number of contemporary narrative sources to add texture and context. In particular, the observations of James Syme, a government officer working within the probation system in Van

¹⁸⁷ Libraries Tasmania, '*Convicts in Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania*' (<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/family-history/convicts-in-van-diemens-land-now-tasmania/>) (3 Aug. 2025).

¹⁸⁸ National Library of Australia, '*Trove*' (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/landing/research>) (4 Aug. 2025).

Diemen's Land,¹⁸⁹ and Louisa Meredith,¹⁹⁰ writing as a free settler and colonial observer in Van Diemen's Land, provide insight into daily life, discipline, and social relations that are not always fully captured in administrative records. These accounts are treated as situated and partial perspectives rather than as representative voices, and are used cautiously to complement, rather than substitute, archival evidence.

2.5 Research Material

The sources used in this thesis are examined not as neutral records of criminal behaviour, but as historically contingent artefacts shaped by administrative priorities, legal definitions, and contemporary assumptions about poverty and deviance, and therefore require careful contextual interpretation. This applies both to the prison registers that form the core of the thesis and to the transportation material outlined in the previous section. The Irish prison registers fall under the description of a 'manuscript source',¹⁹¹ although they are now available online through www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk. The originals are available at the National Archives of Ireland (NAI).

Ancestry explains that the Irish prison registers include 'records detailed in prison registers from across Ireland for the years 1790-1924'.¹⁹² *Findmypast* estimates that 3,127,598 prisoners were recorded in the registers during this period,¹⁹³ a figure which undoubtedly includes a substantial number of recidivists. Matthias Blum et al. write that once uniform prison administration was introduced, the data collected became 'consistent and comparable' across prisons, making today's research considerably easier.¹⁹⁴ However, it is unlikely that these prison registers were written with any thought to posterity; they were simply a tool to assist with the day-to-day management of crime and the criminal. Such material carries the 'most weight' according to Tosh, arising 'directly from everyday business or social

¹⁸⁹ James Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land* (Perth, Australia, 1848), pp 2, 272.

¹⁹⁰ Louisa Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* (New York, 1853).

¹⁹¹ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 93.

¹⁹² *Ireland, Prison Registers, 1790-1924* (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61943/>).

¹⁹³ findmypast.co.uk, 'Find your Ancestors in Irish Prison Registers 1790-1924' (<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/world-records/full-list-of-the-irish-family-history-records/institutions-and-organisations/irish-prison-registers-1790-1924>) (25 Feb. 2026).

¹⁹⁴ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 39.

intercourse, leaving open the task of interpretation'.¹⁹⁵ Marc Bloch called this type of record 'the evidence of witnesses in spite of themselves',¹⁹⁶ whilst Tosh elaborates that 'historians wish to be as nearly as possible observers of the events in question; they do not want to deliver themselves into the hands of a narrator or commentator. The most revealing source is that which was written with no thought for posterity' and which therefore has 'all the fascination of eavesdropping'.¹⁹⁷ In the case of the prison registers, this means that the data is available in its raw form, without being distorted by previous attempts at analysis or manipulation, and it is reasonable to suggest that the contents are as truthful as possible, taking into account human error and that those arrested may not have always given honest answers. As some prisoners were found not guilty, others were discharged, and those charged with lunacy might be given into the care of a family member or sent to the lunatic asylum rather than gaol, the decision has been made to use the word *arrest* rather than *committal* throughout this thesis. Those who found themselves discharged were in an unfortunate position 'turned loose, without Credit or Character, without - money - & almost naked, & probably at a Distance from their Friends and their Homes ... They are thus forced to become Vagrants or Thieves'.¹⁹⁸

Of course, although the prison registers have been described as 'unique and rich historical documents',¹⁹⁹ this does not, however, mean that their use is problem free. Initial concerns surrounding the transcribing of such old handwriting largely proved unfounded; as the writing and terminology used became more familiar, it became easier to read. Generally, the only issues encountered during transcribing related to annotations, which were added in a light hand, and often crammed into a small area, and whilst *Ancestry* does supply a transcript, this does not include annotations. Fortunately, these occurrences were few. A bigger potential problem was where several whole pages were missing from the

¹⁹⁵ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁶ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), p. 61.

¹⁹⁷ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁸ An unknown judge, cited in Alan Brooke and David Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay: British Convicts Voyages to Australia* (Richmond, 2005), p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 5.

scanned registers; however, this proved to be the result of an error on the part of the scanning operative, and the missing pages were supplied by the NAI.

This problem is not unique to the Irish prison registers. Missing documents make research in Ireland generally more difficult than that in England, a situation exacerbated by the frequent occurrence of common names. On the afternoon of 30th June 1922, 'over 700 years of records were destroyed' during the Irish Civil War, when the Four Courts buildings were seriously damaged. There is now an ongoing project, called *Beyond 2022*, to digitally reconstruct the missing records through the use of 'clerical copies, facsimiles, printed editions, published calendars summarising the contents, as well as original holdings from across the world', and a further 200 boxes of surviving material.²⁰⁰

To add to this loss, Gerard MacAtasney states that out of 130 Poor Law Unions operating in 1845, only 17 of the admission registers survive, 12 of which are for Ulster.²⁰¹ In part, this is due to administrative collapse within many of the workhouses, but others were lost through deliberate action, largely due to the stigma and shame attached to workhouse admission. MacAtasney recounts a conversation which he had in the late 1990s with a witness in County Monaghan who recalled, as a child in the 1940s, cycling behind carts full of huge books with gold clasps which were being taken from the old workhouse buildings (which were being converted into hospitals) to be burnt.²⁰² It is possible that a number of people mentioned in the prison registers spent time, or ended their lives, in the local workhouse, but the loss of these registers means that the researcher is unlikely to be successful in establishing this, although some Board of Guardians Minute Books survive and may provide some useful context and occasionally

²⁰⁰ Neil Johnston, 'Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury' in *National Archives Ireland*, 2018 (<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/beyond-2022-irelands-virtual-record-treasury/>) (3 Aug. 2025).

²⁰¹ Gerard MacAtasney, 'The Province of Ulster and the Great Famine in Armagh City'. Webinar presented at the Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council online lecture series Rippling Effects of the Great Irish Famine, online, 19 Jan. 2023, 54.20-55.10 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=133SfrW0Fq0&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFtZwXGVBRIjygj5E8boXJG&index=3>) (25 Feb. 2026).

²⁰² Gerard MacAtasney, 'The Workhouse: Creation of the workhouse system during the famine with case study, Lurgan Workhouse, Co. Armagh'. Webinar presented at the Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council online lecture series Rippling Effects of the Great Irish Famine, online, 26 Jan. 2023, 57.03-57.25, 52.00-53.00 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSQ6QTfzFkY&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFtZwXGVBRIjygj5E8boXJG&index=4>) (25 Feb. 2026).

refer to an inmate by name. However, the truth is that much material is undoubtedly lost forever, making it impossible to track specific people through a series of registers to reconstruct their lives.

Tosh writes that ‘most publications ... are intended to inform, influence, mislead or entertain contemporaries’,²⁰³ and this is as true in nineteenth-century Ireland as it is today. Consequently, other primary sources have been used to support the prison registers. These have included official papers such as parliamentary proceedings, which provide a useful insight into political discourse, providing background to official decision-making and offering some understanding of the reasoning behind such decisions. First-hand accounts from the period, such as narratives from the *Irish Tour*, and newspapers, are also used and will be elaborated on elsewhere.

Prison registers, books, official records, and newspapers, have all been created with an agenda. In the case of the prison registers, this was to assist with the application of the criminal justice system. For example, in the prison registers being analysed, eye and hair colour, skin complexion and height have all been recorded to identify the prisoner, although the information is not necessarily sufficient for us to identify repeat offenders in the registers with any degree of confidence. This information was logged by prison administrators and new inmates were supposed to submit to a medical examination by the prison doctor, although this does not always appear to have taken place.²⁰⁴

Robert Shoemaker and Richard Ward have identified that the amount of personal information relating to the criminal vastly increased in the century prior to 1860, and believe that ‘these developments in record-keeping and statistics were mostly the result of local initiatives and imperatives, revealing a grass-roots information-gathering culture, with limited central government direction’; they claim that this was due to ‘a strong and widely held desire to understand the criminal’.²⁰⁵ They are writing about England, however, and this does not seem to be the case to any great degree in the Irish prison registers that have been

²⁰³ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 96.

²⁰⁴ Blum et al., ‘Working Paper: Scarring and Selection’, p. 15.

²⁰⁵ Robert Shoemaker and Richard Ward, ‘Understanding the Criminal: Record-Keeping, Statistics and the Early History of Criminology in England’ in *The British Journal of Criminology*, lvii, no. 6 (2017), p. 1442.

examined for this thesis. In the Kilmainham register, for example, the only information added which is not an official column in the register first makes an appearance on 8th June 1846, with a handwritten heading of *native place*.²⁰⁶ This information does not appear in either the Nenagh or Sligo registers for the period under examination, but it does appear in registers for other prisons in Dublin. The occasional mention of a lying-in-hospital suggests that place of birth had been requested, rather than address at the time of arrest. It is impossible to know whether the addition of such information was a central directive, or a reactive local decision during a period of mass migration into the city, to identify those who were travelling between different Poor Law Unions in order to obtain relief.²⁰⁷ However, in Ireland there was ‘no ‘right’ to relief’ through the Law of Settlement; despite this being the case in England and Wales.²⁰⁸

Blum et al., consider the prison registers to contain a ‘targeted sample’ of ‘the lowest orders of society’,²⁰⁹ although they question the ‘representativeness’ of these prisoners in relation to the general population, and whether such categories changed over time, ‘representativeness’ having become a ‘key concern in the anthropometrics literature’ at their time of writing.²¹⁰ This thesis supports the argument of Ó Gráda that the majority were first time offenders, while the nature of the crimes committed, as well as the occupations of the offenders, would suggest that not just the lowest social groups were represented in the registers, but also the tradesmen, merchant, and artisan classes,²¹¹ and occasionally men of higher standing.

However, those who appear in these prison registers only do so because an activity in which they were allegedly involved was determined by state legislation to be a crime,²¹² and not all were convicted. Overall, they represent only a small portion of the population as a whole and include only those caught for alleged

²⁰⁶ *National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Prison Registers, Kilmainham Prison, 1835-1850* (Dublin, digitised copy consulted), p. 553.

²⁰⁷ McCabe, ‘Begging and Alms-Giving’, pp 55–6.

²⁰⁸ Christine Kinealy, ‘The Irish Poor Law, 1838-1862: A Study of the Relationship between the Local and Central Administrators’ (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1984), pp 13–14.

²⁰⁹ Blum et al., ‘Working Paper: Scarring and Selection’, p. 5.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹¹ Ó Gráda, ‘Heights in Tipperary’, p. 26.

²¹² Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 113.

criminal activity, whether because they were unlucky, or because they wanted to be caught. There was undoubtedly much criminal activity which went unpunished because those involved were not apprehended, and there is also an element of survival bias, the criminals recorded in 1847/8 having survived the Famine until this point. Additionally, the prison registers reflect the changing concerns of the criminal justice system, along with wider political and societal concerns. This might be indicated by harder sentences, intended as a deterrent, whilst it is also possible that more lenient sentences were awarded by sympathetic courts during the Famine who recognised that many penniless Irish chose criminality over death.

Contemporary sources also support the information found in the prison registers. One of these is the newspaper, described by Tosh as 'the most important published primary source for the historian', and one offering 'the best entry into the current state of establishment opinion – provided due allowance is made for the editorial bias of the paper in question'.²¹³ For example, *The Tipperary Vindicator*, launched in 1844, has been described as both nationalist and Catholic,²¹⁴ and *The Freeman's Journal* 'cultivated a Catholic middle-class urban readership',²¹⁵ whilst *The Times* is described by Christine Kinealy as the 'most politically authoritative paper' of the period, one which was 'opposed to state expenditure in Ireland' and which espoused 'that Ireland had to be forced to rely on her own resources', despite claiming to be 'non-partisan'.²¹⁶

As well as aiming to spread partisan or political bias, newspapers are also invested in selling copy and can therefore be guilty of sensationalism. This can be illustrated by an event which occurred in November 1848 when there was a serious riot in Nenagh workhouse, which caused Mary Costelloe to be discharged, although she could not physically leave 'for want of clothes'.²¹⁷ Although Mary was alternatively reported as 'an amazon with a patch on her eye',²¹⁸ and a 'tall healthy-looking young woman whose appearance betokened

²¹³ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 96–7.

²¹⁴ Daniel Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh Poor Law Union, Co. Tipperary* (Nenagh, Co Tipperary, 2000), p. 18.

²¹⁵ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 30.

²¹⁶ Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, p. 133.

²¹⁷ *Tipperary Vindicator*, 'Another Row Against the Soup!', 13 Jan. 1849.

²¹⁸ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 'Mutiny in the Workhouses', 18 Nov. 1848.

the possession of no small portion of bodily strength',²¹⁹ she is described in the Nenagh prison registers as aged 30, five foot 4 inches, with grey eyes, brown hair, and a fresh complexion.²²⁰ If it is supposed that the prison register was an accurate recording, then this is a useful illustration of the poetic licence used by the newspapers, and an indication that such descriptions must be treated with care. Nevertheless, as long as such agendas are understood, newspapers are still an invaluable resource for a 'day-to-day record of events', especially when used in combination with other sources,²²¹ and crucially, on occasion, they may report an event which includes a quotation from a key player, whether a witness, a judge, or even a prisoner. This is as close as we are likely to get to establishing a motive for a criminal act, and thus better understanding the lived experience of the past. Overall, newspapers are a valuable and potentially dangerous resource for the historian who, if they delve deep, might never re-emerge. Despite this danger, newspapers will be used throughout the thesis when relevant to the research findings.

Parliamentary papers 'include all those which form part of the necessary machinery of parliamentary government', such as journals, 'papers arising in or presented to parliament' in relation to policy, and debates.²²² 'Few other sources convey so well the public face of political discourse', although 'government records are more concerned with decisions and their implementation than with the motives of the people who made them'.²²³ The select committees and committees of enquiry reports make for particularly interesting reading, often including the opinions of 'experts on the subjects in hand, persons prominent in public affairs or representative of some body of opinion, experience or interest' and containing a verbatim record of the spoken word.²²⁴ Although the words of ordinary people have likely been interpreted and paraphrased before being recounted by the expert witness, they nevertheless provide insights into life and

²¹⁹ Tipperary Vindicator, 'Nenagh Union - Thursday', 30 Dec. 1848.

²²⁰ *National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Prison Registers, Nenagh Prison, 1842–1880* (Dublin, digitised copy consulted), p. 421.

²²¹ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 96–7.

²²² P. & G. Ford, 'Introduction to Parliamentary Papers' in W. R. Cornish, Jenifer Hart, A. H. Manchester and John Stevenson (eds), *Crime and Law in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Dublin, 1978), p. 1.

²²³ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp 96, 105.

²²⁴ Ford, 'Introduction to Parliamentary Papers', pp 1–3.

attitudes during the period, which make for fascinating reading. However, just because a number of these witnesses agree with each other does not necessarily mean that their viewpoint is accurate.²²⁵

The *Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online* provide useful information which helps to support that found in the Irish prison registers. Described as ‘the largest body of texts detailing the lives of non-elite people ever published’,²²⁶ these records relate to London’s central criminal court but are useful to Irish research too, as the Irish criminal justice system operated within a broadly comparable common-law framework, even if local policing, prosecution, and enforcement practices differed. The website explains various elements of the trial procedures and verdicts and includes thorough definitions of various crimes. For example, the explanation of the offence of ‘damage to property’ explains that:

this category of offence includes types of malicious damage to private property that were considered crimes against the public (as opposed to personal wrongs, which were civil offences). Some of these offences became capital offences under the Black Act (1723, repealed in 1823) ... so called because it was passed in response to an outbreak of poaching committed by men who disguised themselves by "blacking" their faces.²²⁷

There are ‘over 100 known famine-period graveyards’ in Ireland,²²⁸ and a number of roads, which were the result of public work schemes aimed to provide work in return for a wage during the early Famine period.²²⁹ However, other than the written word, there is an absence of artefacts as the majority of the Irish owned practically nothing before the Famine, and anything they did have was pawned or sold when the potato crop failed.²³⁰ Nevertheless, some art survives from the Famine period, such as Robert Richard Scanlan’s 1852 drawings, *The Famine*, and *Emigrants Waiting in Embarkation*,²³¹ and James Mahony’s better known

²²⁵ David Philips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England: The Black Country 1835-1860* (London, 1977), p. 18.

²²⁶ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, ‘The Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674-1913’ in *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online*, 2023 (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version, 9.0) (25 Feb. 2026).

²²⁷ The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, ‘Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey’ in *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online*, 2023 (<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/about/crimes>, version 9.0) (25 Feb. 2026).

²²⁸ Jonny Geber, *Victims of Ireland’s Great Famine: The Bioarchaeology of Mass Burials at Kilkenny Union Workhouse* (Florida, 2015), p. 9.

²²⁹ Colm Donnelly, Eileen Murphy, Gillian Allmond, Brian Sloan and Alistair Ruffell, ‘On the Line’ in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxxv, no. 4 (2021), p. 24.

²³⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 30, 92.

²³¹ W. J. Smyth, ‘Exodus from Ireland - Patterns of Emigration’ in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), p. 503; Patrick Hickey, ‘Mortality

illustrations, which were published in the Illustrated London News, using wood-block engravings and accompanied by a text report of his observations.²³²

Mahony was a travelling correspondent for the Illustrated London News. The owner was an Englishman named Herbert Ingram who had observed that when illustrations were included in a newspaper, especially of a catastrophe, more copies were sold. It was most likely for this reason that the newspaper published a 'shocking two-part eyewitness account of the Great Hunger in Ireland' on 13th and 20th February 1847,²³³ rather than to make any moral or political statement, although Kinealy believes the newspaper to have been sympathetic and sensitive to the suffering of the Irish.²³⁴ On 13th February 1847, the Illustrated London News informed its readers of the accounts of Irish suffering which were to follow, introducing Mahony as a native of Cork and assuring its readers that he was familiar with the suffering and 'cannot be supposed to have taken an extreme view of the greater misery at Skibbereen'.²³⁵ The drawing of attention to Mahony as a commissioned artist and a Cork man validates the information provided in the article, but today reminds the reader that Mahony was being paid for his art and therefore needed to satisfy the requirements of the newspaper and, by association, the readership.

Mahony's illustrations are invaluable for study of the Famine era, even though his subjects appear healthier than other contemporary accounts suggest. Although Niamh Kelly suggests that Mahony 'eschewed Victorian models of presenting palatable accounts of poverty through sentimentalizing aesthetics or moralising observation',²³⁶ it has also been proposed that an image becomes 'acceptable to the reader, or makes sense as a valid representation', when its truth adequately aligns 'with the reader's own assumptions about the 'way things are''.²³⁷ It is therefore possible that Mahony instinctively tempered his imagery, or that the

and Emigration in Six Parishes in the Union of Skibbereen, West Cork, 1846-7' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), p. 379.

²³² *The Illustrated London News*, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland - By Mr James Mahony', 13 Feb. 1847; *The Illustrated London News*, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland - By Mr James Mahony', 20 Feb. 1847.

²³³ N. A. Kelly, 'James Mahony (c1816-1859): The Illustrated London News' in Christine Kinealy, Jason King and Gerard Moran (eds), *Heroes of Ireland's Great Hunger* (Hamden, CT, 2021), pp 239-40.

²³⁴ Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, p. 133.

²³⁵ *The Illustrated London News*, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland, 13 Feb 1847'.

²³⁶ Kelly, 'James Mahony', p. 251.

²³⁷ Peter W Sinnema, cited in *ibid.*, p. 240.

images were altered during preparation for publication when ‘each sketch was worked up by house draftsmen for transfer to woodblocks’, with the drawings ‘finished’ in a harmonised house style, which makes it impossible to know how closely the published sketch matched the artwork originally sent to the newspaper by Mahony. Nevertheless, Mahony’s work for the Illustrated London News has been described as his ‘key visual legacy’ and, despite some concerns, his ‘iconic images of suffering produced amid the Great Hunger have transcended that era’.²³⁸ We are certainly richer for having access to his sketches and first-hand accounts of the Famine era.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature discussed in this chapter indicates that interpretations of the Great Famine and its associated criminality have been shaped by a wide range of historiographical approaches, each reflecting the priorities, assumptions, and contexts in which they were produced. Early interpretations were often framed by political, moral, or national concerns and tended to privilege the perspectives of policymakers, administrators, and commentators, leaving limited space for the lived realities of ordinary people or for close consideration of crime as a response to material deprivation and survival.

Later scholarship has expanded the analytical framework, incorporating socio-economic, cultural, and biographical perspectives that allow for a more nuanced understanding of the Famine’s impact. Nevertheless, much of this work continues to focus on institutions, categories of crime, or exceptional cases, rather than on the everyday experiences of those drawn into the criminal justice system during the crisis itself. As a result, the language of class and criminality often appears as a descriptive category rather than as a historically contingent discourse through which those in authority interpreted and governed poverty. The prison registers, in particular, offer a rare opportunity to move beyond state-led narratives and engage, albeit imperfectly, with individual lives and experiences. They allow for the identification of patterns of behaviour and agency that complicate portrayals of the poor as passive victims, instead revealing the difficult and pragmatic

²³⁸ Ibid., pp 241–2, 245, 247.

choices made under conditions of extreme deprivation. The empirical chapters therefore use prison register data to trace how these patterns evolved during the crisis years, linking recorded offences to broader processes of social disruption, survival strategies, and institutional responses.

By situating this research at the intersection of Irish Famine studies, historical criminology, penal history, and the history of state power, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates about how marginalised communities experienced and responded to crisis. In treating prison registers not simply as administrative sources but as institutionally shaped accounts influenced by contemporary official perspectives, it reflects critically on the construction of historical narratives and the ideologies that underpin them. In doing so, it establishes the methodological and conceptual foundation for the chapters that follow, which draw on the empirical evidence of the prison registers to reassess the relationship between crime, survival, and agency during one of the most devastating periods in modern Irish history.

Taken together, the scholarship reviewed here indicates that crime, survival strategies, and social responses to the Great Famine must be understood within the wider structures of nineteenth-century British colonial governance in Ireland, which shaped both the conditions in which famine unfolded and the ways in which behaviour was interpreted and recorded by the state. Establishing this context is necessary in order to understand how famine conditions later produced the anomic environment within which survival crime, institutional punishment, and traumatic experience became intertwined. The following chapter therefore turns to the historical and institutional context of pre-Famine Ireland, examining colonial governance, agrarian conflict, and legal enforcement in order to establish the conditions within which famine-era criminality emerged.

Chapter 3: Background to the Famine

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to provide context for the Great Famine, as understanding societal conditions in Ireland is necessary in order to interpret the meaning of the changes illustrated by the Irish prison registers. The chapter opens with an examination of British colonisation and its socio-political consequences, followed by a discussion of the Irish Tour, which offers insight into the lived realities of the pre-Famine environment.

It moves on to consider the imposition of English law upon Ireland, and the ways in which it operated in practice. Forms of criminal activity such as agrarian violence and illicit distillation will be examined, providing necessary context for their historical relevance, especially in regions such as County Tipperary and County Sligo, where such offences were prevalent. These activities, unfamiliar to modern audiences, will be explored in detail to highlight their socio-economic underpinnings and to illustrate how, in a context of severe poverty, insecurity, and limited avenues for relief, they became both acts of resistance and strategies of survival. In contrast, criminal activity in urban centres such as Dublin during the 1840s often resembled more contemporary offences and thus will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Finally, this chapter outlines the structure and function of the colonial criminal justice system, including key aspects of law enforcement and an explanation of the attitude of the British Government towards Ireland, whose limited attempts at intervention during the Famine often proved inadequate and contributed to the conditions in which insecurity, hunger, displacement, and policing pressures made it more likely that survival strategies would be treated as offences.

While a crime is defined by law,²³⁹ it is also shaped by the interests and assumptions of those who make and enforce that law. In Ireland, that means taking account of the colonial context in which crime was defined, policed, and recorded. Understanding this relationship between law, power, and social

²³⁹ University of Glasgow, The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, 'What is Crime?', p. 1.

conditions is essential for interpreting the prison register evidence examined later in the thesis. In particular, the chapter provides the structural context in which criminalised behaviour could emerge as a confined form of agency within increasingly anomic conditions.

3.2 The Colonisation of Ireland

Ireland is widely treated as Britain's earliest and most sustained colonial project, marking the beginning of what would later become a global empire.²⁴⁰ Although Henry II and his army invaded Ireland in 1171, large-scale colonisation only began in the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In part, this occurred in order to protect England from backdoor invasion from Spain or France, and to eliminate Ireland as a haven for domestic malcontents. However, crucially, it also allowed for the implementation of English law and the confiscation and redistribution of land away from Irish possession, destroying 'the economic foundations of the old Gaelic order' in the process.²⁴¹ Colonisation in Ireland was therefore not simply territorial but legal and economic, shaping patterns of landholding, authority, and social order.

David Veevers believes that one of the main reasons for the colonisation of Ireland was to entrench 'Anglicanism at home' and to strike a blow against Catholicism.²⁴² Jane H Ohlmeyer takes a wider view and observes that 'English imperialism in Ireland was driven by military, political, and, increasingly, religious and economic concerns, and by the determination to colonize the island with English, Welsh, and Scottish settlers'.²⁴³ It was also part of an ongoing attempt to 'exploit Ireland's wealth', whilst at the same time attempting to quell ongoing rebellion in the name of Irish independence.²⁴⁴ Taken together, these interpretations highlight colonisation as a process that sought to impose authority through law, religion, and economic control, rather than through consent.

²⁴⁰ David Veevers, *The Great Defiance: How the World Took on the British Empire* (London, 2023), p. 3.

²⁴¹ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, pp 37, 49–55; Kevin Kenny, 'Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 6; J. H. Ohlmeyer, 'A Laboratory for Empire?: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 51.

²⁴² Veevers, *The Great Defiance*, p. 2.

²⁴³ Ohlmeyer, 'A Laboratory for Empire?', p. 27.

²⁴⁴ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, pp 47, 54.

Ireland had not been lawless before the introduction of English law. Brehon Law had been the native legal system of Ireland, covering civil, military, and criminal law from before the ninth century until the early seventeenth century. Later historians, such as P W Joyce, writing in 1906 from a cultural-nationalist perspective, argued that the subsequent Penal Laws ‘turned the Irish natural love of justice into hatred and distrust of law’.²⁴⁵ While Joyce’s assertion captures a powerful nationalist interpretation that emphasised the moral and psychological legacy of these laws, it reflects a retrospective reading of a complex and uneven body of legislation that has since been subjected to extensive historiographical debate.

By the eighteenth century, Ireland’s constitutional status was that of a formal kingdom with its own nominal Parliament; nominal because Poyning’s Law of 1494 meant that this Parliament could only meet with the permission of the English monarch, and all laws had to be approved by both the monarch and the English Council.²⁴⁶ Within this restricted constitutional framework, English law functioned not merely as a system of governance but as a mechanism of colonial authority, regulating land, behaviour, and allegiance. The stated aim was to civilise the unruly Irish through anglicisation achieved through the application of English law and order, customs, and culture. In short, as observed by Ohlmeyer, such ‘strategies, though often couched in the rhetoric of civility, effectively amounted to a form of imperialism that sought to exploit Ireland for England’s political and economic advantage and to Anglicize the native population’.²⁴⁷

‘Pre-modern sanctions were often geared towards securing obedience to a monarch, with the result that punishments were brutal, if infrequent, [whilst] the state ignored a great deal of harmful behaviour that did not directly threaten the monarch’.²⁴⁸ Crime considered damaging to the community was often dealt with internally, rather than being seen as a transgression of law, consequences depending on the person committing the crime and their relationship to the victim and community. The extension of English legal authority disrupted these local

²⁴⁵ P. W. Joyce, *A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland* (Dublin, 1906), pp 71–2, 76.

²⁴⁶ Kenny, ‘Ireland and the British Empire’, pp 6, 8.

²⁴⁷ Ohlmeyer, ‘A Laboratory for Empire?’, pp 27–9.

²⁴⁸ Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order*, p. 1.

practices, recasting crime as an offence against the state rather than against community norms. Now crime was viewed by the authorities as a 'minute act of civil rebellion that had to be suppressed', and so punishment could involve removal or execution: public punishment intended 'to remind subjects of their place within the overall scheme of things',²⁴⁹ emphasising 'the sovereignty of the political power to which it owes judicial authority'.²⁵⁰ Irish prisons in this period were institutions which removed 'offenders from society ... to hold them without oppression or unnecessary coercion', and with no 'official aim to impose secondary punishment or to improve morals'.²⁵¹

The 1801 Act of Union resulted in considerable Irish capital moving to London along with the Parliament, 'weakening the financial and commercial infrastructure' of Ireland, exacerbated by the removal in 1824 of tariffs that had protected Irish industry from British competition, and resulting in increasing poverty for the growing masses of penniless cottiers and landless labourers.²⁵² Colonial power after the Union therefore further centralised authority while limiting Ireland's capacity to respond to economic crisis. As recorded by James Fraser, a Dublin-based writer offering a contemporaneous account of Ireland's political and administrative position, Ireland was now represented at Westminster by twenty-eight Irish representative peers, chosen for life by the full Irish peerage, and by four bishops who took their seats in rotation; in the House of Commons, following the Reform Act, Ireland returned 105 MPs.²⁵³

At the time, the British government operated on several principles, including that of free trade, 'financial prudence', and the 'Malthusian doctrine', which believed that unsustainable population growth would lead to death and ultimately restore the population to a sustainable level. Despite famine being a common feature of Irish life, Hoppen wrote that during such times 'most of those who did the helping were themselves cottiers and labourers, who thus supported each other as well as the many 'beggars' and 'vagrants', and, who before the Famine had formed a

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁵⁰ Carrabine et al. (eds), *Criminology*, p. 232.

²⁵¹ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, p. 18.

²⁵² Kenny, 'Ireland and the British Empire', p. 13.

²⁵³ J. A. Fraser, *A Handbook for Travellers in Ireland* (Dublin, 1844), p. 7.

distinct group at the very bottom of the social pyramid'.²⁵⁴ These ideological commitments shaped colonial response, framing poverty and hunger as economic inevitabilities rather than political responsibilities and allowing the British government to follow an overall economic tenet of non-intervention,²⁵⁵ seeing Ireland primarily as a food basket to support the industrial areas of England and the north of Ireland, with imperial governance acting as the structure through which this relationship was maintained.

Comparative work on imperial governance is useful here, not as a claim that Irish and Indian experiences were identical, but because it highlights a shared administrative logic within empire. Bernard Cohn has shown how colonial rule often relied on reducing 'vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms',²⁵⁶ translating local practices into categories legible to the state and enforceable through law. Shashi Tharoor similarly observes that imperial legal systems were 'created by a foreign race and imposed upon a conquered people who had never been consulted in [their] creation',²⁵⁷ functioning as instruments of control rather than expressions of local norms.

In nineteenth-century Ireland, the application of United Kingdom law often worked in similar ways, translating local practices into categories that could be regulated and punished. Following the Union, Ireland was incorporated into a British constitutional framework designed to integrate the island into the metropolitan core of the Empire.²⁵⁸ Within this system, legal authority prioritised property, revenue, and public order, a distinction that would become increasingly significant during periods of crisis.²⁵⁹ The effect was not simply to punish crime, but to redefine customary behaviour and survival practices as offences against the state. This colonial legal framework therefore shaped how poverty, disorder, and resistance were interpreted and recorded, providing an essential context for understanding the patterns of criminalisation that emerge in the prison registers. Practices that might previously have been regulated informally within

²⁵⁴ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, pp 97–8.

²⁵⁵ Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India* (Harlow, 2018), p. 151.

²⁵⁶ Bernard Cohn, cited in *ibid.*, p. 103; *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, p. 93.

²⁵⁸ Kenny, 'Ireland and the British Empire', pp 9–10; Alvin Jackson, 'Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800-1960' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 124.

²⁵⁹ Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', p. 225.

communities could therefore appear in official records as criminal acts, revealing the gap between local survival strategies and the legal categories through which the state understood social order.

3.3 The Irish Tour

During the pre-Famine period, there were several travel narratives published by visitors to Ireland; described by William H A Williams as *The Irish Tour*. Many were undoubtedly written from an interest in Ireland's political and economic future and therefore many focus primarily on these aspects, but they also provide valuable insights into the living conditions of the rural majority, if read critically. Williams notes that visitors often compared the worst of Ireland with the best of Britain, rather than with the conditions of the English industrial slums, whose inhabitants suffered shorter lifespans and poorer diets than the Irish cottier. As Ó Gráda has cautioned, however, the material condition of pre-Famine Ireland was often more complex, and in some respects less uniformly bleak, than such external observations suggest. Visitors frequently imposed their own standards of comfort and respectability when assessing poverty, overlooking the ways in which many households, though materially poor, were nevertheless adequately fed, well supplied with fuel, and embedded within functioning subsistence systems during normal conditions. Poverty, in this context, did not equate automatically to destitution, nor was it experienced evenly across regions, households, or social groups. Recognising this complexity is important, because the catastrophe of the Famine lay not only in hunger itself, but in the sudden collapse of a fragile yet functioning society, one characterised by layered social relations in both rural and urban settings.²⁶⁰ Additionally, some visitors ignored or misunderstood cultural differences, for example by underestimating the southern Irish middle class, who invested in livestock, education, emigration,²⁶¹ or dowries, rather than in outward displays of wealth.²⁶² Ó Gráda observes that in some cases, this understatement masked considerable prosperity. A stratum of the Irish middle class, particularly substantial farmers, merchants, and professionals, accumulated significant capital and lived at high levels of comfort, although this

²⁶⁰ Ó Gráda, 'Poverty, Population, and Agriculture', pp 110–111.

²⁶¹ Williams, 'The Irish Tour', pp 97, 105.

²⁶² Inglis, *Ireland in 1834*, pp 45–6.

did not always result in conspicuous consumption.²⁶³ Glenn Hooper aptly summarises that ‘each travel narrative was a response to, or attempt to understand, quite specific political or economic circumstances, rather than [being] a mere record of wanderings’.²⁶⁴ Read in this way, travellers’ accounts should not be treated as neutral descriptions of Irish society, but as interpretations shaped by the position, assumptions, and expectations of the observer. Consequently, they often measured Irish conditions against British norms of order, comfort, and improvement, and therefore reflect external judgements as much as local realities. Nevertheless, as C J Woods has argued, such narratives remain valuable because they record aspects of everyday life that rarely appear in official sources.²⁶⁵ They offer descriptive insight into housing, labour, diet, movement, and social interaction, allowing the material and social environment of pre-Famine Ireland to be visualised in ways that administrative records cannot provide. By supplying descriptive detail largely absent from administrative sources, these accounts help to contextualise the conditions that heightened vulnerability during the crisis and clarify how practices rooted in subsistence and necessity could later be interpreted, by the state, as criminal behaviour.

Observations of rural housing and overcrowding were common in such accounts. Caesar Otway described the moors ‘studded over with cabins, and these cabins crowded with children, pigs, goats, cocks and hens’, observing men, women, and children toiling across the land, reclaiming patches of ground to cultivate their only food, the potato.²⁶⁶ Leitch Ritchie, a journalist and novelist who visited Ireland in 1837, remarked that in the fields ‘we see but a group of ill-clad men, boys and women – all of the same rank, living on the same fare, and, very often, inhabiting the same description of houses’.²⁶⁷ Similarly, Henry David Inglis, along with Jonathan Binns, a British Quaker traveller with humanitarian interests, described homes that were commonly roughly assembled using stones and mud, approximately 15-18 feet long and 10-12 feet wide, consisting of one storey, and usually one room, with clay floors, and thatched roofs. Any windows were small

²⁶³ Ó Gráda, ‘Poverty, Population, and Agriculture’, p. 113.

²⁶⁴ Glenn Hooper, *Travel Writing and Ireland, 1760-1860: Culture, History, Politics* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 3.

²⁶⁵ C. J. Woods, *Travellers’ Accounts as Source-Material for Irish Historians* (Dublin, 2009), p. 11.

²⁶⁶ Otway, *Sketches in Ireland*, pp 262–3.

²⁶⁷ Leitch Ritchie, *Ireland Picturesque and Romantic* (London, 1837), p. 75.

and often filled with old rags, doors might consist of a piece of wood secured with stones, or a straw mat hung from wooden pegs and the buildings were shared with livestock. The smoke from the turf fire seeped out through any gaps, and most houses had a dung heap outside the door. Such homes reflected the severe overcrowding and precarious living conditions experienced by large sections of the rural Irish population.²⁶⁸

However, despite obvious poverty, travellers often reported feeling safe. Sir John Carr, an English travel writer whose accounts combined anecdotal observation with personal impression, noted that although travelling alone and armed with 'no other weapon than a toothpick', he 'never met with the slightest molestation',²⁶⁹ while Inglis felt confident travelling even 'in a country where half the people are starving'.²⁷⁰ This was echoed by Binns, who wrote that 'though the country was then in a disturbed state [he was] met with every civility.' He felt confident that he could have 'gone anywhere in the neighbourhood, day or night, without interruption, and with even less risk than would be incurred, at the same time, in most parts of England'.²⁷¹

Ritchie was advised to take weapons into 'disturbed districts' when he left Dublin for County Wicklow yet recorded that he met with no violence even when travelling alone at night,²⁷² a contrast that underscores the gap between metropolitan anxieties about Irish lawlessness and the reality of local conditions. His experience, however, also reflects the vantage point of a socially protected observer whose mobility was shaped by class and connection, reminding us that perceptions of order were conditioned by position. Meanwhile Carr believed that much of the violence reported to take place in Ireland had 'been manufactured by the editors of English newspapers, to fill up a vacancy in their prints',²⁷³ with the unfortunate consequence that such reports 'perpetuated negative stereotypes of

²⁶⁸ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, pp 50–2, 339; Inglis, *Ireland in 1834*, p. 94.

²⁶⁹ John Carr, *The Stranger in Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1806), p. 32.

²⁷⁰ Inglis, *Ireland in 1834*, p. 102.

²⁷¹ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, pp 35–6.

²⁷² Ritchie, *Ireland Picturesque and Romantic*, pp 51–2.

²⁷³ Carr, *The Stranger in Ireland*, pp 32–3.

the ‘wild’ Irish character’ rooted in assumptions of ‘primitive brutality’.²⁷⁴

Representations of disorder were therefore not merely descriptive but politically mediated, circulating within wider imperial narratives about Irish incapacity for self-governance. Inglis similarly characterised robbery as a crime of ‘infrequent occurrence’.²⁷⁵ Yet Ritchie simultaneously observed pervasive hunger and recorded encounters with

feuds of names and families, such as cannot by possibility exist in any country where the laws are good and well executed. I met with agrarian disturbances, with bloody revenges, with petty pilferings of food, though few robberies of money.²⁷⁶

The distinction drawn between subsistence theft and monetary robbery suggests not the absence of disorder, but a differentiated landscape of transgression in which survival-driven acts coexisted with targeted forms of agrarian violence.

In 1837, Binns characterised Dublin as a city marked by stark social contrast: outwardly impressive yet deeply scarred by poverty.²⁷⁷ Areas such as the *Liberties*, which had supported a thriving population of artisans and manufacturers in the eighteenth century, had deteriorated markedly following the Act of Union,²⁷⁸ signalling not simply urban decay but structural economic dislocation. Binns described streets of decaying housing, many dwellings lacking basic features such as doors or windows, in which multiple families were crowded together, producing conditions of extreme overcrowding, illness, and deprivation.²⁷⁹ The coexistence of wealth and destitution was particularly striking; scenes of urban gaiety, he observed, existed alongside visible suffering, with impoverished individuals sleeping on steps and pavements, their appeals for assistance forming an unavoidable backdrop to the comforts enjoyed by the city’s more affluent inhabitants. This juxtaposition points not to a uniformly impoverished urban society, but to a sharply stratified one, in which material security and extreme vulnerability existed in close proximity. Such proximity

²⁷⁴ William Jenkins, ‘“Strange and Belligerent Factions”: Irish Immigrants and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Ontario’ in Paul Huddle and Arlene Crampsie (eds), *New Perspectives on Conflict and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2025), p. 21.

²⁷⁵ Inglis, *Ireland in 1834*, p. 102.

²⁷⁶ Ritchie, *Ireland Picturesque and Romantic*, p. 5.

²⁷⁷ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, p. 3.

²⁷⁸ David Dickson, *Dublin: The Making of a Capital City* (Cambridge, MA: London, 2014), pp 174, 163, 281.

²⁷⁹ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, pp 3–4.

heightened both visibility and tension, embedding deprivation within the everyday landscape of the city rather than at its margins.

Leitch Ritchie similarly recalled an initial impression of Dublin as ‘splendid and imposing’,²⁸⁰ but this was quickly undermined by encounters with acute poverty. He recounted seeing two young children lying unclothed on the pavement, visibly distressed by cold and hunger, while passers-by continued on without acknowledgement, suggesting not simply individual indifference but the normalisation of extreme hardship within the urban environment.²⁸¹ The episode illustrates how deprivation could become routinised, absorbed into the visual fabric of city life.

These externally observed accounts can be productively read alongside the work of Asenath Nicholson, who travelled extensively in Ireland during the twelve months immediately preceding the Famine. Unlike many short-term visitors, Nicholson sought sustained contact with the poor and produced a ‘highly descriptive’ account of the lives of the ‘common people’.²⁸² Her writing offers a vivid portrayal of the lower classes on the eve of the crisis, capturing not only material deprivation but also the everyday strategies through which the poor attempted to endure it. Read together, these sources reveal a society already structured by precarious survival practices before the onset of mass famine, complicating any assumption that crisis responses emerged only after 1845. The traces of such survival strategies become more systematically visible in the prison registers examined in this study, where everyday acts of transgression emerge as measurable responses to mounting precarity. These sources therefore allow the thesis to move from descriptive accounts of poverty to a closer examination of how individuals navigated hardship in practice, including the forms of agency that became visible when survival strategies intersected with the criminal law.

Nicholson returned to Ireland for 28 months during the Famine and Hooper identifies her as one of a number of ‘outspoken critics of government policy’, noting that her ‘feelings of wearied disgust are evoked all too clearly during her

²⁸⁰ Ritchie, *Ireland Picturesque and Romantic*, pp 10–11.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp 11–12.

²⁸² Woods, *Travellers’ Accounts as Source-Material*, pp 39–40.

Famine journey'.²⁸³ Hooper argues more broadly that 'the nineteenth century was stamped by the rhetoric of empire, and many of its travellers mirrored, and in some cases passionately articulated, empire politics'.²⁸⁴ Nicholson's position as an American traveller, outside the formal structures of British imperial authority, may help to explain both the relative directness of her critique and her sustained moral engagement with Irish suffering. While not free from the conventions of nineteenth-century travel writing, her accounts are less obviously aligned with the justificatory language of empire that shaped many British narratives.

Williams, Woods, and Hooper each emphasise that travel narratives should be approached as historically situated texts, shaped by the political, cultural, and intellectual concerns of their moment. Williams situates the Irish Tour within contemporary debates about reform and improvement, showing how many travellers wrote with an implicit concern for how Ireland was governed and how social conditions might be reshaped, rather than with the aim of providing neutral description.²⁸⁵ Woods, by contrast, highlights the value of such accounts precisely because they record aspects of everyday life that rarely appear in administrative sources, particularly where poverty and overcrowding were normalised rather than exceptional.²⁸⁶ Hooper draws attention to the ways in which travel writing intersected with the language and assumptions of empire, reminding us that observation was often entangled with moral judgement, comparison, and, at times, romanticisation.²⁸⁷

Collectively, their work supports an approach that treats these narratives neither as transparent evidence nor as simple prejudice, but as interpretive sources that reveal how Irish society was observed, categorised, and represented on the eve of the Famine. Used in that way, they help to reconstruct the material setting of poverty and insecurity, and they clarify how everyday subsistence practices could later be redefined, by those in authority, as criminal behaviour.

²⁸³ Glenn Hooper, *The Tourist's Gaze* (Cork, 2001), pp 102, xxii.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

²⁸⁵ Williams, 'The Irish Tour'.

²⁸⁶ Woods, *Travellers' Accounts as Source-Material*.

²⁸⁷ Hooper, *The Tourist's Gaze*.

Today, the countryside of Ireland reveals little of the crowded landscape described by these nineteenth-century travellers. Landscape archaeology shows outlines of plots and the ridges of lazy beds (a raised ridge cultivation method for potatoes), but the plentiful ruins of churches and houses left by the better-off are not representative of how the majority lived. Those who 'existed in caves, sod huts and under tree roots' did not leave stone walls to stand in their memory.²⁸⁸ Their survival in the landscape nonetheless points to the presence of a materially secure minority whose experience of pre-Famine Ireland differed sharply from that of the labouring poor. The narratives left by visitors therefore play a crucial role in allowing readers to visualise the pre-Famine landscape: arable land and pasture, hills, mountains, and bogs, alongside land covered in cabins and lazy beds for potatoes, 'swarming with men and children'²⁸⁹ who were dressed in 'rags and tatters' and lived in 'mud and filth'.²⁹⁰ A varied landscape that was both crowded and highly vulnerable to a sudden collapse of the fragile subsistence system on which the population depended.

3.4 Nenagh and Agrarian Outrages

In 1815, Nenagh was described as 'a town of some eminence in the county of Tipperary', whilst the countryside around it 'abounds with gentlemen's seats'.²⁹¹ In 1833, the Dublin Penny Journal described Nenagh as being situated 'in the centre of a populous and well-cultivated district, which enjoys perhaps a larger portion of resident gentry than any other of the same extent in Ireland', but with 'little trade and no manufacture'.²⁹² In 1838, Nenagh had been selected as the administrative capital of the north riding of Tipperary, the new gaol was built the same year, and an adjoining courthouse followed in 1843. However, whilst there were some attempts at improvement, there was also ongoing destitution and distress, as evidenced by the presence of several banks, balanced by a similar number of

²⁸⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 31.

²⁸⁹ T. C. Foster, *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland* (London, 1846), p. 543.

²⁹⁰ Asenath Nicholson, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger: or, Excursions through Ireland, in 1844 & 1845* (London, 1847), pp 259, 109.

²⁹¹ A. Atkinson, *The Irish Tourist: in a series of picturesque views, travelling incidents, and observations, statistical, political and moral on the character and aspect of the Irish nation* (Dublin, 1815), p. 170.

²⁹² The Dublin Penny Journal, 'Nenagh Castle, County of Tipperary' in *The Dublin Penny Journal*, xxxviii, no. 1 (1833), p. 298.

pawn shops.²⁹³ By 1844, Fraser recorded that there was also a church, a chapel, meeting houses for Nonconformists, and two inns 'where post-horses and carriages can be obtained', as well as a large infantry barracks. The town was undoubtedly a reasonable size by Irish standards as he described it as 'the second town in the county of Tipperary, the capital of the north riding of that county, and the largest town between Dublin and Limerick'. In addition, Fraser mentioned passing through the 'suburbs', indicating that Nenagh was a town with a moderate sprawl.²⁹⁴

County Tipperary had a population of 435,553 in 1841.²⁹⁵ The rural Nenagh Poor Law Union contained 89,874 inhabitants at this time, being the largest in Tipperary and the 17th largest in Ireland, with a workhouse located half a mile south of the town at Tyone, occupying a seven-acre site. Nenagh was estimated to contain 1,420 houses and a population of 8,618 at the time of the 1841 census,²⁹⁶ while land close to Nenagh was 'very expensive'.²⁹⁷

Within this local context, protest crime is driven by ideological motives, rooted in either religious or political beliefs,²⁹⁸ but in rural Ireland such violence was also deeply entangled with material grievances and customary notions of justice. This includes agrarian violence which had become commonplace in parts of Ireland in the decades prior to the Famine, including in County Tipperary, which Thomas Campbell Foster, a Quaker social investigator reporting on Ireland during a five-month tour for *The Times* in 1845-46, described as having 'long possessed the notoriety of being a focus of outrage and disorder'.²⁹⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel William Miller, Deputy-Inspector-General of the Constabulary in Ireland, confessed that he was 'unable to assign a reason for the prevalence of crime in Tipperary ... but it would appear that in all history Tipperary has been remarkable for the lawless

²⁹³ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, pp 17–18.

²⁹⁴ Fraser, *A Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 267.

²⁹⁵ W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 10.

²⁹⁶ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, pp 19, 25, 21.

²⁹⁷ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland* (session 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi, n.p., 1846), p. 634.

²⁹⁸ Drake, 'The Role of Ideology', pp 53, 55.

²⁹⁹ Foster, *Letters on the Condition of Ireland*, pp v, 330.

character of its peasantry'.³⁰⁰ While analysis of the 1844/5 prison registers for Nenagh confirms a concentration of agrarian offences in the region, such data complicates rather than endorses contemporary claims that disorder stemmed from the innate character of the peasantry. Such assessments, produced by state officials and commentators, reflected colonial assumptions about Irish disorder and frequently framed rural violence as evidence of inherent lawlessness rather than as a response to structural conditions. Within the context of nineteenth-century British rule in Ireland, such interpretations were not merely descriptive but served to legitimise continued administrative and coercive intervention by the colonial state. However, such behaviour undoubtedly influenced the attitude of the British government towards the Irish. Within a colonial context, persistent agrarian unrest was interpreted not simply as criminality but as a challenge to authority, reinforcing the perception of Ireland as requiring firm legal and coercive control through institutions such as the constabulary, and the justice and expanding prison systems.

Secret societies emerged in Ireland in the eighteenth century, and have often been interpreted by later writers as a response to exclusion from formal legal redress, 'since the law did not give him justice, he set up his own law'.³⁰¹ This interpretation, drawn from Woodham-Smith's narrative, captures a contemporaneous sense of legal exclusion, but it functions as a moral explanation rather than a full account of the formation, operation, or local variation of such groups. It therefore sits alongside a wider scholarship that traces secret societies to disputes over land, labour, and customary rights (see Vaughan on rural violence; Kelly on agrarian crime; Dooley on local social context).³⁰²

Bruce Elliott similarly argues that agrarian outrages were 'the result of the people's attempt to defend a man's right to the land and employment he already had'.³⁰³ Seen within a colonial legal framework that privileged property rights and

³⁰⁰ The Devon Commission, *Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 1* (Dublin, 1848), pp 322, 331.

³⁰¹ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 28.

³⁰² Vaughan, *Murder Trials in Ireland, 1836-1914*; Kelly, 'The Downfall of Hagan'; Dooley, *The Murders at Wildgoose Lodge*.

³⁰³ B. S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (2nd edn, Montreal & Kingston: London, 2004), p. 58.

landlord authority, such actions can be understood as efforts to assert customary practices and local norms that were increasingly marginalised by the state, rather than outright rejection of the legal system. Nevertheless, these actions were performed without legal authority in the manner of a vigilante, and largely aimed to intimidate, although this is not to say that all communities condoned such acts, and some acts were undoubtedly performed for revenge.³⁰⁴

As the 1821 crop failed, prices rose, rents increased, and land was in increasingly short supply, more secret societies such as the Rockites and the Ribbonmen were formed.³⁰⁵ Such developments suggest continuity rather than sudden emergence, linking agrarian violence to long-standing disputes over land, labour, and access to resources under colonial rule, rather than to any single legislative cause alone. In this context, agrarian protest can be understood not simply as criminal behaviour but as a form of collective response to the economic and legal pressures produced by colonial landholding structures. These groups can be understood as addressing wrongs as they were defined and experienced within local communities, rather than offences such as illicit distillation, which were constructed as crimes through state definitions concerned with revenue and order rather than local harm. The contrast illustrates the tension between customary rural norms and a legal system increasingly aligned with the interests of property, revenue collection, and administrative stability under British governance. This distinction highlights the disjuncture between local conceptions of justice and a colonial legal system that criminalised customary survival strategies while prioritising order and property. Consequently, prisons became a key instrument of colonial governance, converting local disputes and survival strategies into offences against the state that could be punished and controlled through a bureaucratic system designed to extend imperial authority into everyday rural life.

Agrarian violence reflects what can occur when poverty, land insecurity, and limited access to formal justice leave communities with few workable alternatives. In sociological terms, such conditions resemble what later theorists would describe as anomic environments, where established norms of regulation weaken

³⁰⁴ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, p. 80; Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', pp 213, 217.

³⁰⁵ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 24–5.

and individuals or communities develop alternative mechanisms for defending livelihoods. In such circumstances, violence functioned less as random disorder than as an improvised means of regulation and resistance, through which communities sought to defend livelihoods and assert some measure of control in the absence of effective legal protection. Although these actions were criminalised by the state, they can also be understood as responses shaped by desperation and structural neglect, rather than evidence of inherent lawlessness. When military forces failed to control the unrest, the government introduced the 1822 Insurrection Act, which stayed in place until 1825. Those deemed 'idle and disorderly' now faced a potential sentence of seven years transportation, with no right to appeal. Being categorised as idle and disorderly included such behaviours as 'having arms', 'persons found unduly in Public Houses between 9pm and 6am', 'tumultuous assembly', 'taking oaths for seditious purposes', 'circulating notices to excite riots or demanding money, arms or weapons' and being 'out of abode between sunset and sunrise', an event which could be ascertained by Justices of the Peace, who were allowed to enter houses to check for 'absent persons'. Trial was by magistrate rather than jury but, despite the high numbers arrested, it would seem that relatively few people were transported, Anne McMahon concluding that the criminal court process itself was 'intended to deter disorder'.³⁰⁶ However, in 1829, Robert Peel, then British Home Secretary with responsibility for policing and criminal justice, observed that overall, it 'had not produced any lasting improvement in the habits or the morals of the people' and came to the conclusion that 'scarcely one year during the period that elapsed since the Union had Ireland been governed by the ordinary course of the law'.³⁰⁷

The situation was aggravated by the Tithe War which escalated during the 1830s. The tithe was 'essentially a legally binding, ecclesiastical tax on land' which was payable to the Church of Ireland regardless of the religion of the land-owner,³⁰⁸ and consequently, these societies became more sectarian than their predecessors, raiding houses for arms and ammunition.³⁰⁹ With the 'deliberate

³⁰⁶ Ibid., pp 27–9.

³⁰⁷ Virginia Crossman, 'Emergency Legislation and Agrarian Disorder in Ireland, 1821-41' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvii, no. 108 (1991), p. 313; Robert Peel, cited in *ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁰⁸ M. J. Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question 1800-1922* (London; New York, 1984), p. 25.

³⁰⁹ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 24–5, 74.

and carefully orchestrated'³¹⁰ aim to intimidate, they gradually spread across Ireland, murdering, mutilating, and raping in protest against high rents, tithes, evictions, and the employment of strangers. Arson, a capital crime until 1837, could involve crops, hay ricks, sheds, or houses and was a favoured high-profile tactic, as fires could generally be seen at a distance.³¹¹ Protestant clergy were especially targeted,³¹² but overall, agrarian disturbance can be viewed as less a form of sectarian violence per se, and more as a response to perceived unfairness, aimed towards those who 'administered or benefited from what were perceived as the unfair economic practices',³¹³ which in nineteenth-century Ireland often meant, by default, that the person targeted was Protestant. In short, 'secret societies were activated as the means of imposing the people's justice whenever it appeared to be threatened', although the innocent often suffered in the process,³¹⁴ and on occasion crimes were undoubtedly committed less for ideological reasons and more out of resentment.³¹⁵

George Cornwall Lewis, then a Poor Law Commissioner and political economist, elaborated in 1836 that these disturbances sprang 'from the peculiar state of the peasantry which makes the possession of land a necessary of life',³¹⁶ arguing that coercive measures were unlikely to succeed while underlying conditions remained unchanged. Successive attempts to impose stricter legal penalties, within the limits of a constitutional and civilised state, had already proved futile, as those with little prospect of improvement in their present circumstances had little to lose from engaging in crime, rendering 'the ordinary engines of government' ineffective.³¹⁷

The main effect of the Act was to 'induce a state of aggravated insubordination by secret societies against police, military landlords, middlemen and tithe proctors' and anti-tithe unrest continued well into the 1830s, although there is evidence of some acceptance of the authority of the courts to prosecute serious crimes

³¹⁰ J. S Donnelly (Jr), *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824* (Madison WI, 2009), p. 18.

³¹¹ Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', pp 211-2. 214-5.

³¹² McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 22-3.

³¹³ Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', p. 218.

³¹⁴ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, p. 20.

³¹⁵ Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', p. 219.

³¹⁶ Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*, p. 308.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

through the Assizes and the Quarter Sessions, and to use the Petty Sessions to resolve family matters that could otherwise result in violence.³¹⁸ A report made to the government by the land commissioners stated that for an extended period in Tipperary, and more recently in certain other counties, 'there has prevailed a system of lawless violence', resulting in repeated cases of deliberate and calculated killings. Such incidents were typically framed as reprisals for perceived wrongs suffered by those who conducted, or encouraged, the attacks,³¹⁹ pointing to a discernible pattern in these reprisals, rather than to indiscriminate violence.

Foster devoted a whole chapter to *Tipperary and its Outrages*, recounting his own experience of a visit to Roscrea, Tipperary:

the walls of this town are covered with placards offering rewards for the apprehension of criminals charged with shooting into houses, waylaying, beating and murdering ... Men are seen walking about the town followed by a couple of armed policemen to protect them as they transact their business. Threatening notices, which are not mere idle threats, are sent by every post; crime escapes with comparative impunity....³²⁰

and observed that following a recent murder, farmers had taken to 'driving home with their cars in clusters, for mutual protection, having upon each car a short gun'.³²¹ Although agrarian violence was common in Tipperary at this time, it was not unique to that county, the Marquis of Headfort (Lieutenant of County Cavan) stating 'we deeply deplore the extensive system of lawless violence which has for some months past prevailed in this county'.³²² Foster's visit to Ireland took place 'between August 1845 and January 1846'.³²³ He was writing about Tipperary in October 1845 at the very beginning of the Famine when the first partial crop failures occurred, and his observations are supported by the crimes logged in the Nenagh prison registers during this period, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. The persistence and patterned character of these agrarian outrages suggests that the process described by Norbert Elias (the state monopolisation thesis), in which control over violence gradually shifted from local communities to the state through

³¹⁸ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 29, 38–9; Clark, 'Arson in Modern Ireland', p. 217.

³¹⁹ The Devon Commission, *Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 2*, p. 1163.

³²⁰ Foster, *Letters on the Condition of Ireland*, p. 346.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³²² The Marquis of Headfort, cited in *ibid.*, p. 5.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. v.

institutions such as the police, was only partially achieved in Ireland. This supports Lucia Zedner's view that the idea of a complete police monopoly on crime control during this period was more illusion than reality.³²⁴

3.5 Sligo and Illicit Distillation

By 1837, the town of Sligo was described as having 'but few good streets or shops for a town whose population is already upwards of 15,000' and with 'disgraceful accumulations of filth in some of the streets'.³²⁵ In 1841, the population of the town was recorded as 12,272, with a county population of 180,886. The 1841 figure is likely to be more accurate, being based on census returns.³²⁶

Foster wrote that there was 'a very considerable export trade' from Sligo quay, which formed the main departure point 'for the produce of five of the adjoining interior counties'.³²⁷ The quay was a 'place of great activity', admitting vessels as large as 200 tons, and '60 or 70 vessels may be seen here at once'.³²⁸ This commercial vitality suggests that Sligo functioned as a regional centre of exchange, linking agrarian production to wider markets while simultaneously exposing local livelihoods to fluctuations in trade and harvest. Sligo also possessed a constabulary barracks, housed in a disused military building,³²⁹ signalling the growing institutional presence of the state within a commercially active yet socially fragile region. When Nicholson visited in 1845, she described the town and surrounding bay in favourable terms.³³⁰ Her impression of a relatively prosperous and attractive area was echoed by Foster, who described the county as 'beautiful' and added that the majority of landlords near the town were improving, resident landlords. He did not comment directly on housing conditions in Sligo; however, when he travelled into County Mayo, he did

³²⁴ D. C. Churchill, 'Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis: the historiography of policing and criminal justice in nineteenth-century England' in *Crime, History & Societies*, xviii, no. 1 (2014), pp 132, 135.

³²⁵ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, p. 328.

³²⁶ Vaughan & Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics*, pp 40, 15, xviii–xix.

³²⁷ Foster, *Letters on the Condition of Ireland*, pp 160, 157.

³²⁸ Binns, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland*, p. 329.

³²⁹ Brian Griffin, 'The Irish Police, 1836-1914: a social history' (PhD thesis, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, 1991), p. 39.

³³⁰ Nicholson, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*, p. 433.

comment on the 'wretched and filthy cottages of the peasantry',³³¹ implying that housing conditions there were inferior. Nevertheless, Sligo was in the province of Connacht, 'the poorest of the provinces'.³³² The coexistence of commercial activity, improving estates, and provincial poverty underscores the uneven distribution of security within the region, where visible development did not eliminate underlying dependence on a fragile subsistence economy. Throughout the county the main food consumed was the potato, although fish were more commonly available to the population than to those in the landlocked counties.³³³ Such dietary dependence, even when supplemented by coastal resources, left much of the population structurally exposed to crop failure.

The prison registers for rural Sligo indicate that one of the main problems for the authorities at this time was that of illegal distillation of poitín (poteen), an illegal whiskey usually made of oats or barley, but which could also be made from potatoes.³³⁴ Applying a tax to spirits had been attempted as early as 1661 with little success, but in 1760, distillation became illegal unless officially licensed, meaning that 'overnight a large proportion of the Irish population became 'criminals''.³³⁵ The aim was clearly not to protect either the poitín maker or the public, rather poitín making was seen as a threat to the economy,³³⁶ and the intent was to protect excise revenue. A further incentive to control alcohol, and therefore alcohol consumption, was that intoxication undoubtedly led to an increase in crime, and that the resulting income 'attracted several agrarian and political groups'.³³⁷

The 1779 Revenue Act, also known as the Pot-still Act of 1779,³³⁸ championed 'the move towards large stills in order to reduce the costs incurred by the excise towards assessing and collecting revenue from the indefinite number of small

³³¹ Foster, *Letters on the Condition of Ireland*, pp 174, 199.

³³² T. E. Jordan, *Ireland and the Quality of Life: The Famine Era* (Lampeter, 1997), p. 66.

³³³ Connell, *The Population of Ireland*, p. 141.

³³⁴ Larry Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxv, no. 3 (2003), pp 338, 336n; Aidan Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History* (Letterkenny, 2003), p. 8.

³³⁵ John McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen* (Belfast, 1978), p. 9.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³⁷ Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', pp 337–40.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

craft-based distillers' spread over Ireland.³³⁹ No pot-stills that were under a 200-gallon capacity would now be licensed, forcing 'literally hundreds of relatively law abiding distillers into illicit distillation'.³⁴⁰ Legal distilleries were increasingly forced to work faster to satisfy this quota, as it was now the pot-still being taxed rather than the actual output of poitín. This caused the quality of the legal spirit to deteriorate and resulted in illegal poitín becoming the superior product. Legal distilleries also had to contend with a tax on malted corn, and the indirect effect was to increase the number of illicit stills, who undercut the legal distilleries in an increasingly lucrative business.³⁴¹ As a consequence of this Act, 1,228 distilleries were licensed in Ireland in 1779, although by 1791 the Irish MP Henry Grattan, speaking in the Irish House of Commons, claimed that there were 90,000 houses selling spirits, but only 8,000 licences issued.³⁴² Thus, the Act indirectly encouraged the purchase and consumption of illegal spirits.

In 1785, as the excise revenue from distillation declined, the government imposed a heavy fine 'on all the inhabitants of a parish where a conviction was secured for illicit distilling' or where distilling equipment was found.³⁴³ In reality, this meant that equipment was often hidden on a neighbour's land, sometimes just to avoid a fine but sometimes to settle an old score. Hiding parts of a still separately, and then reporting each to the revenue men to gain a number of financial rewards, was an easy way of making a living, but overall, the 1779 Revenue Act failed to encourage neighbours to report on illegal stills, and after 1815, the collection of the fine was taken over by the Board of Excise, assisted by bounty hunters who had been involved in finding illegal stills since 1787. The excise men received half of the fine, but corruption was rife, and they often took bribes or made token seizures in order to keep this income flowing. Indeed, in 1808, Owen McMahon from Magheracloone, County Monaghan, was convicted for three months for illicit distillation. His appeal against the sentence was based on having bribed the excise officer to be left alone; a 'guinea a quarter' being commonly accepted as an adequate bribe. Given that revenue officers were sometimes beaten,

³³⁹ J. P. Murphy, 'Poitín, A Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration' (Dublin, 2016), p. 4.

³⁴⁰ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, p. 11.

³⁴¹ Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', p. 340; McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, p. 11.

³⁴² Great Britain. House of Commons, *The Parliamentary Register or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland* (session 2, vol xi, Dublin, 1791), pp 73, 68.

³⁴³ Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', p. 338.

murdered, or kidnapped and 'forced to work the stills',³⁴⁴ it is hardly surprising that many chose to accept payment for looking the other way instead.

After 1817, a small armed force, the Revenue Police, was created in order to assist the Board of Excise and was provided with two permanent stations: one at Ballina, County Mayo, and another at Sligo. The Revenue Police cost the Board of Excise £20,000 in 1820, rising to some £35,000 by 1833. Initially, they had to be accompanied by excise officers but, after 1823, powers of entry, search, and seizure were granted to the Revenue Police who were now immune from prosecution if civilians were killed or wounded during the raids. Illicit distillation was clandestine and dangerous, involving violence on both sides. Local law and order forces did not wish to assist for fear of retaliation and, overall, effectiveness was limited.³⁴⁵ Consequently, *poitín* continued to be distributed by 'cadgers' who travelled throughout Ireland, taking many risks in exchange for a share of the profit.³⁴⁶

County Sligo was a remote area with a limited road network and poor-quality land.³⁴⁷ However, remoteness was a key factor in *poitín* making and 'the poor peasant in the west and north was economically almost forced into illegality' due to the lack of other opportunities. From this perspective, illicit distillation illustrates how activities criminalised by the state could function simultaneously as economic survival strategies within marginal rural economies. John McGuffin identifies Sligo as one of the ten Irish counties most heavily fined for illicit distillation in 1816, from a total of thirty-two counties. Sligo was also one of the poorest, and the resulting fines caused significant hardship.³⁴⁸ The following chart (Figure 3.1) illustrates the 'number of townland fines imposed upon each barony in the counties by the courts' in 1816, giving a total of 1,323 fines:

³⁴⁴ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, pp 22, 25; Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', p. 345.

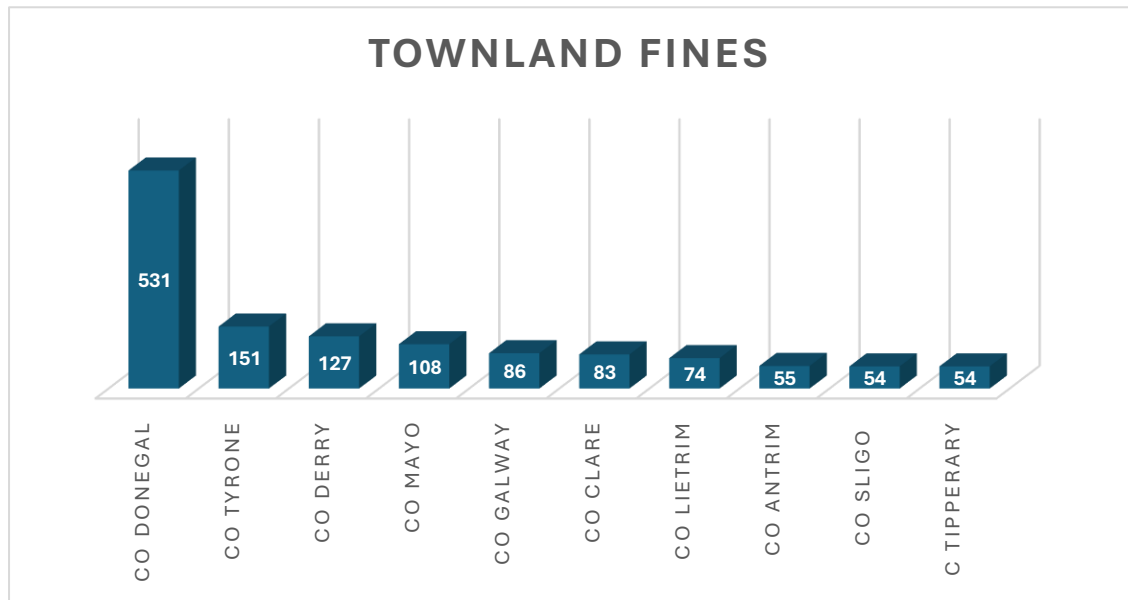
³⁴⁵ N. M. Dawson, 'Illicit Distillation and the Revenue Police in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in *Irish Jurist*, xii, no. 2 (1997), p. 288; McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, pp 25–6; Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', p. 336.

³⁴⁶ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, pp 13–14.

³⁴⁷ James McParlan, *Statistical Survey of the County of Sligo* (Dublin, 1802), pp 3–4, 86–7.

³⁴⁸ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, pp 18, 22, 25.

Figure 3.1 – Townland Fines for Illicit Distillation³⁴⁹



While a number of factors, such as easily corruptible revenue men or incompetent law enforcement personnel, might influence these results to a degree, McGuffin states that the records for ‘nearly a century shows roughly the same order’, indicating that the list is reasonably accurate, although McGuffin notes as an anomaly the limited prominence of West Cork and Kerry in poitín production, for which no entirely satisfactory explanation has been offered.³⁵⁰

Donegal’s prominence in the above chart requires some discussion. In 1806, an excise collector named Verney Darby had attested that every other house in northern Inishowen, County Donegal (the most northern peninsula on the island of Ireland) was home to a malt house or private distillery, and some 1,300 stills were estimated to exist in the barony. Historically, the county had a high rate of absentee landlords who would therefore have found it difficult to suppress poitín manufacturing, leaving their tenants and middlemen free rein to partake in an industry which could be mutually beneficial.³⁵¹ Even when a resident landlord did attempt to prevent illicit distillation on their land, they faced violence and retaliation. In 1782, Young of Culdaff (Inishowen) seized upwards of 100 stills, resulting in an attack on his dwelling and his windows being broken, in what

³⁴⁹ compiled by the author from *ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp 15, 18.

³⁵¹ Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, pp 12, 21.

seems to have been a fairly common means of reprisal.³⁵² Over 60 years later, in 1844, Lord George Hill of Gweedore was accused of having a 'lax attitude' to poitín being made by one of his bailiffs, resulting in a feud with the revenue police. Whether he did not care, was unaware, or was frightened of retaliation, is unrecorded,³⁵³ although it is recorded that he built a grain store at Gweedore, in part to discourage illicit distillation,³⁵⁴ and Aidan Manning believes that Hill was 'unsympathetic to poitín makers'.³⁵⁵ Overall, this situation, along with poor roads and a remote landscape, helped to instil a tradition of poitín making, which was assisted by substantial barley growing in the area and which would prove extremely difficult to stamp out.³⁵⁶

In 1822, in Scotland, the duty on Scottish whisky was reduced from 6/2d to 2/4³/₄d, and within 10 years, poitín making 'had virtually died out in the highlands and lowlands'.³⁵⁷ In Ireland, however, this route was not followed. Although the 1823 Distillation Act did make it easier to gain a licence for legal distillation, by this time manufacture of good quality poitín in County Donegal was again on the increase.³⁵⁸ Whilst legislation was clearly put in place in an attempt to protect government revenue, James Peter Murphy believes that further legislation created in 1831 was also aimed at raising awareness that improperly distilled poitín could be lethal.³⁵⁹

Partly due to the influence of temperance societies in the 1830s, 'government revenue from spirits fell from £1,435,000 in 1838 to £832,000 in 1844 and licensed taverns from 21,500 to 13,500'.³⁶⁰ Although not conclusive, prison registers for Lifford, County Donegal, follow the same trend, showing 41 offenders confined for illicit distillation in April 1838, but only 13 in April 1842, before rising to 69 in 1843 and 54 in 1844.³⁶¹ While consumption of alcohol was naturally

³⁵² Brian Bonner, 'Illicit Distillation in Inishowen' in Jim Mac Laughlin (ed.), *Donegal: the making of a northern county* (Dublin: Portland, OR, 2007), p. 185.

³⁵³ Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, p. 257.

³⁵⁴ G. A. Hill, *Facts from Gweedore* (5th edn, London, 1887), p. 36.

³⁵⁵ Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, p. 175.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 25, 29–30.

³⁵⁷ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, p. 15.

³⁵⁸ Murphy, 'Poitín, A Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration', p. 6; Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, p. 13.

³⁵⁹ Conlon, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808', p. 336; Murphy, 'Poitín, A Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration', p. 6.

³⁶⁰ Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, p. 95.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

restricted by the circumstances of the Famine, some level of poitín making clearly did continue. In 1847, there were fourteen revenue police detachments, consisting of some 197 men, operating in Donegal,³⁶² and the prison registers for Sligo also indicate that poitín making continued. Whether the above figures show a genuine increase in illicit distillation or a concentrated effort on the part of the revenue police to eradicate the trade is unclear. Possibly a more realistic interpretation is that the local population were becoming more inclined to report their neighbours' activities in the hope that the financial reward would keep starvation from their doors. Unfortunately, without further information, this must remain conjecture.

It is difficult to understand Ireland in this period without recognising the wider structures of colonial governance within which political authority operated. It is clear from the above that the values and criminal justice system operating in Ireland on the eve of the Famine were essentially those which operated throughout the rest of the United Kingdom,³⁶³ although they were applied 'within a socio-political context that varied considerably from England'.³⁶⁴ This apparent administrative uniformity masked a deeper asymmetry of power, in which laws developed in Britain were applied to a society shaped by different economic conditions, landholding structures, and political relationships.

It is widely recognised that 'Empire was always a language of power',³⁶⁵ and Tharoor argues that the proliferation of administrative regulations often concealed the fragility of imperial authority, producing rule books that attempted to impose order on societies that colonial administrators only partially understood.³⁶⁶ Veevers similarly observes that imperial governance frequently relied on legal and bureaucratic frameworks designed to extend authority rather than to reflect local realities.³⁶⁷ In Ireland, this dynamic can be seen in the government's largely ineffective attempts to control illegal distillation, where policies framed in London struggled to address local economic practices.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 257.

³⁶³ McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, p. 6.

³⁶⁴ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 38.

³⁶⁵ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 29.

³⁶⁶ Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, p. 55.

³⁶⁷ Veevers, *The Great Defiance*, pp 3–4.

The recurring tendency to treat Ireland as administratively equivalent to England³⁶⁸ therefore reflected a broader feature of colonial governance: the assumption that the same legal and administrative frameworks could simply be applied across very different societies. Such assumptions contributed to the persistent failure of British authorities to recognise the structural roots of Irish grievances, particularly those connected to land, poverty, and subsistence practices.³⁶⁹ The result was a legal and administrative system that frequently interpreted structural distress as criminal behaviour, a dynamic that becomes visible in the prison register evidence analysed in the following chapters.

3.6 Policing and Criminal Justice

By 1830, the County Constabulary had 1,143 police stations across the countryside, each containing approximately half-a-dozen men in each.³⁷⁰ However, from 1836, most of Ireland (with the exception of Belfast and Derry city) were placed under the jurisdiction of the Irish Constabulary (later the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)), and the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) followed in 1838.³⁷¹ The new Irish Constabulary were armed with carbines, revolvers, and shotguns, as opposed to the unarmed smaller force of the DMP,³⁷² and were ‘the first uniform, national police force to exist in Ireland’ with standardised rules and regulations, replacing a more ad hoc system of admission. Brian Griffin believes that these changes made little difference in the countryside, writing that ‘the backbone of the Irish Constabulary was composed of experienced men and officers of the County Constabulary’. Overall, ‘some 94% of the rank and file were accepted into the new force’ due to tightening up of discipline earlier in the decade.³⁷³ Stanley H Palmer situates the Irish Constabulary within a wider institutional context, emphasising that from its inception it was a barracked force, with small detachments housed in rented buildings that the government regarded as essential to prevent the men from ‘promiscuously mixing with the country

³⁶⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 410.

³⁶⁹ Elizabeth Malcolm, “‘On Fire’: The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–1849” in *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, xii, no. 4 (2008), p. 145.

³⁷⁰ S. H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 267.

³⁷¹ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, p. 3.

³⁷² Lar Joye, ‘Weapons of the Royal Irish Constabulary (1822-1922)’ in *History Ireland*, xxviii, no. 2 (2020), p. 45.

³⁷³ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, pp 24–6.

people'. Inspector General Powell recalled the renting of barracks as 'an object of the greatest anxiety to the government', underscoring the importance attached to maintaining separation between police and population. Such arrangements were not merely logistical but ideological: the police were armed, housed apart, and understood by 'the disaffected' as custodians of arms that were perceived as rightfully their own.³⁷⁴ The constabulary thus operated less as a civic presence embedded within local society than as an institutional instrument of state authority.

In Dublin, the new system drew heavily on that of the London Metropolitan Police, which itself had roots in earlier policing experiments conducted in Dublin in 1786 and 1808.³⁷⁵ However, the requirements for joining the DMP were more stringent; 'a candidate for admission must be under 26 years of age, must be able to read and write, and, moreover, must be in height 5 feet 9 inches, without his shoes'.³⁷⁶ Training was formalised and discipline tightly regulated,³⁷⁷ reflecting an emerging model of professionalised urban policing. As in London, the structure was hierarchical and closely supervised, with 'the constable responsible for his beat', while sergeants checked the activities of constables and inspectors exercised supervision over both constables and sergeants.³⁷⁸ Both the Dublin and London Metropolitan Police systems ostensibly operated according to the Peelian principle that the 'police are the public and the public are the police', a formulation that implied a reciprocal relationship between authority and community.

In practice, however, this ideal translated unevenly across the Irish context. Whereas the DMP was conceived as a civic police force for the capital, the Irish Constabulary functioned more overtly as an 'imposer of force on the people', a visible reminder that governance in much of Ireland rested upon coercive authority. Its priorities frequently centred on offences against the state and the maintenance of order, rather than on consensual community policing. This structural orientation complicated later attempts to reimagine the force as a public

³⁷⁴ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, p. 252.

³⁷⁵ Griffin, 'The Irish Police', pp 10, 6.

³⁷⁶ F B Head, *A Fortnight in Ireland* (London, 1852), p. 100.

³⁷⁷ Anastasia Dukova, *A History of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and its Colonial Legacy* (London, 2016), pp 51–3.

³⁷⁸ Griffin, 'The Irish Police', pp 10–11.

service,³⁷⁹ and is reflected in the prison registers by recurrent attacks on policemen and police property.

The criminal justice system in Ireland was also formally modelled on that of Britain. As Frantz Fanon observed of colonial contexts more broadly, 'the colonial world is a world cut in two' where barracks and police stations demarcate authority and where 'the policeman and the soldier' function as visible agents of rule.³⁸⁰ Although Fanon wrote about twentieth-century colonial societies, his observation captures an important feature of nineteenth-century Irish governance: the close association between legal authority and the institutions through which imperial power was enforced.

Within Ireland, this structure was replicated institutionally. Writing in 1844, Fraser described a judicial hierarchy mirroring that of Great Britain, with a Lord Chancellor, superior courts divided into Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, and Exchequer, and circuit judges travelling the country twice yearly to hear criminal and civil cases. The extension of this judicial model formed part of a wider process through which British legal and administrative institutions were established across Ireland, presenting imperial governance as the ordinary operation of British law while embedding authority within a colonial context. Beneath this level operated Quarter Sessions and Petty Sessions, presided over by barristers and local magistrates, while the conservation of the peace rested with crown-appointed officials, including the Lord Lieutenant, deputy lieutenants, sheriffs, and magistrates. The concentration of authority in crown-appointed positions ensured that the enforcement of law remained closely tied to the structures of British administration rather than to locally representative institutions. A centrally organised police force of approximately nine thousand men supported this framework, alongside an extensive prison network of county gaols, penitentiaries, and bridewells.³⁸¹ Together, these institutions created a system through which crime, poverty, and disorder could be monitored, categorised, and punished within the broader framework of colonial governance.

³⁷⁹ Georgina Sinclair, 'The "Irish" policeman and the Empire: influencing the policing of the British Empire-Commonwealth' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxvi, no. 142 (2008), pp 174–5.

³⁸⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 38.

³⁸¹ Fraser, *A Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 7.

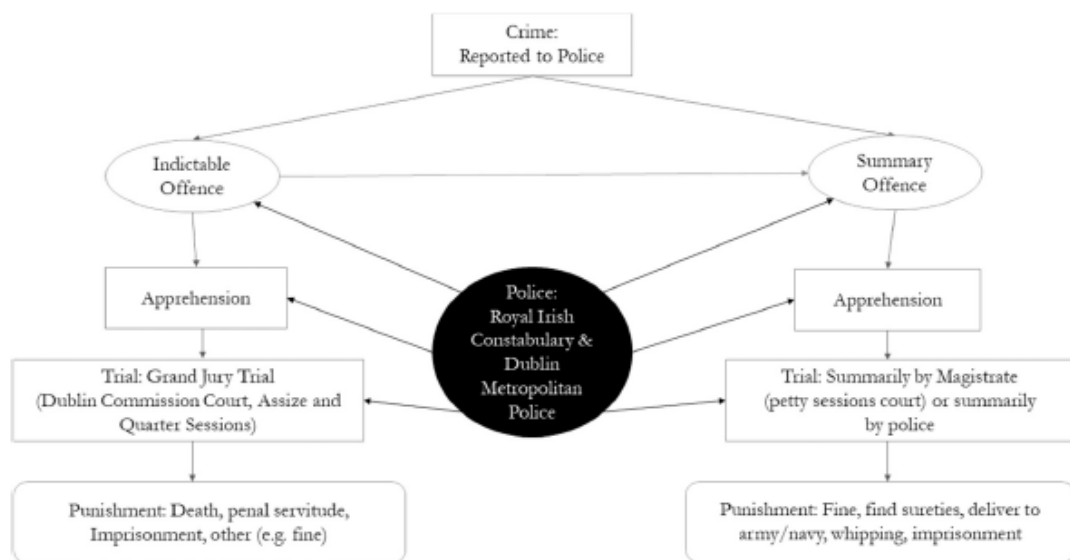
The prison registers examined later in this thesis were produced within this institutional framework, meaning that the offences they record reflect both patterns of behaviour and the priorities of the policing and judicial systems that identified and prosecuted them.

Although the institutional architecture closely resembled that of Britain, its operation in Ireland was shaped by social and political imbalance. As Niamh Howlin notes, the Irish system ‘fell somewhat short of ideal’, particularly because juries were drawn disproportionately from a Protestant ruling minority, while the majority of the population were Catholic and often poor. This often resulted in linguistic barriers, especially in the west, and narrowed the pool of ‘qualified’ jurors, qualification being determined by property and status rather than education.³⁸² The result was a judicial system formally British in structure but socially unrepresentative in practice, reinforcing perceptions of law as an instrument of governance rather than an expression of communal consent.

3.7 The Prison System

In order to understand the prison registers and their contents, it is necessary to understand the criminal justice system of the period. It cannot be expressed better than in the following diagram provided by Blum et al. (Figure 3.2):

Figure 3.2 – Criminal Justice System Schema³⁸³



³⁸² Niamh Howlin, ‘The Terror of Their Lives: Irish Jurors Experiences’ in *Law and History Review*, xxix, no. 3 (2011), pp 704, 707, 717, 761, 709–11.

³⁸³ Blum et al., ‘Working Paper: Scarring and Selection’, p. 30.

In 1826, a more uniform system of prison administration was introduced, and this naturally included a standard set of rules on prisoner administration, making the data collected from different prisons more consistent and easier to compare, although still not completely consistent. Serious crimes such as murder, rape, and grand larceny were classed as indictable offences, whereas summary offences included petty crimes such as vagrancy, common assault, and revenue laws, comprising the 'majority of crimes prosecuted in Ireland over the entire nineteenth century'.³⁸⁴ Both types of crime are represented in the data sample, and both could be punished by custodial or non-custodial sentences. Fines in particular were used extensively, which may in part reflect the financial interest of petty sessions in the resulting revenue.³⁸⁵ Examining how these offences were distributed across the prison registers allows the thesis to assess whether famine conditions altered the balance between social-order offences and survival-related crimes.

'Criminal prosecutions and civil disputes were generally dealt with at a local level', with county assizes, led by judges from the Dublin superior courts, being held several times a year to hear important criminal and civil cases.³⁸⁶ In addition, quarter sessions were held four times a year, and local Justices of the Peace dealt with less serious criminal offenders. Juries consisted of men of respectable standing, with grand juries deciding whether there was enough proof to take the case to trial (instances in the Nenagh and Kilmainham registers record *no bill* against them, indicating that the juries considered that there was insufficient evidence to proceed). A petty jury of 12 men would then sit on the case.³⁸⁷

Blum et al. have performed significant research into incarceration rates in the decades after 1840, stemming from investigation into the impact of famine on health, through use of the Irish prison registers. Their calculations are presented below (Figure 3.3):

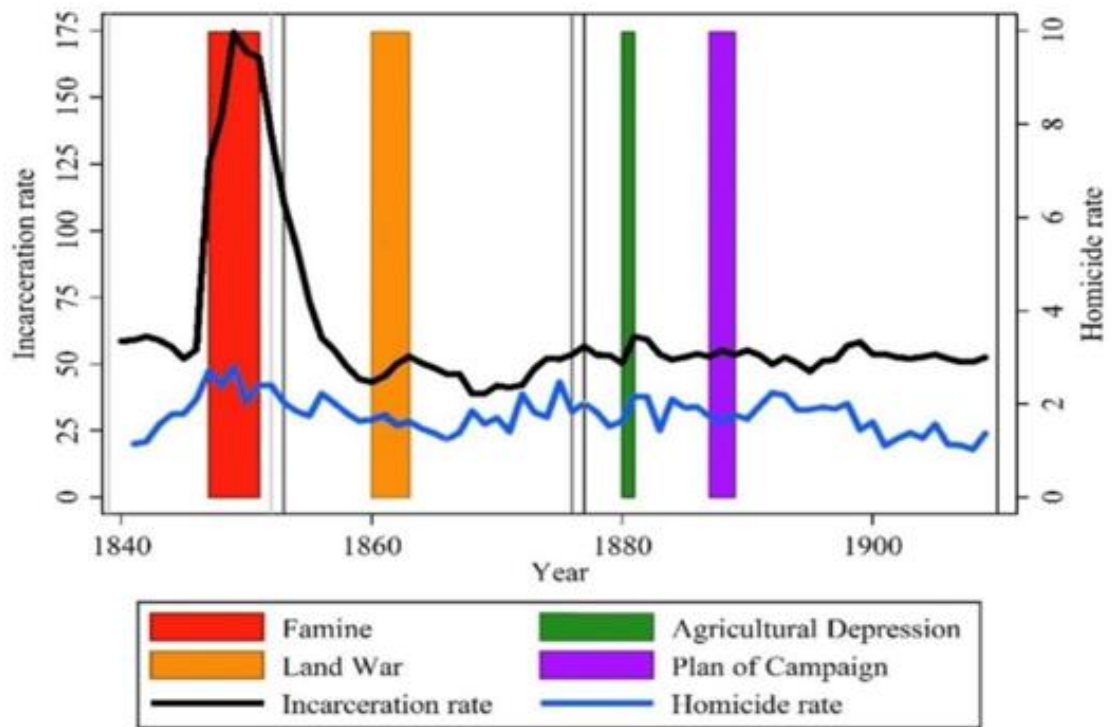
³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp 38–9, 29.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁸⁶ Howlin, 'The Terror of Their Lives', p. 708.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pp 709–10.

Figure 3.3 – Prison Regimes, Incarceration Rate and Homicide Rate, 1840-1920³⁸⁸



The average daily imprisonment rate between 1839 and 1909 has been calculated at 62 per 100,000 people. While this figure spans a long period, it is significantly elevated by a surge in the incarceration rate during the Famine years. This is partly due to the dire situation in which people found themselves after the failure of the potato crop, in part because of evictions, but also because of the introduction of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847, which will be discussed in the next chapter (section 4.2).³⁸⁹

3.8 British Government Attitude and Intervention

The Great Famine elicited a range of responses from the British government, shaped by contemporary economic ideologies and administrative restrictions. While much more could be said about these efforts, to summarise, the government initially attempted to provide relief through the importation of Indian corn, the establishment of public works, and the operation of soup kitchens. However, these measures proved inadequate, and, in 1847, the government

³⁸⁸ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 36.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

shifted responsibility from centralised relief to the Irish Poor Law system, effectively withdrawing direct involvement. By transferring relief to a system funded by local rates, the British government placed the burden on largely insolvent Irish landlords, who were ill-equipped to cope with the scale of the crisis.³⁹⁰ This decision illustrates how imperial governance could redistribute responsibility within a colonial territory while maintaining central political authority. By requiring local ratepayers to finance relief, the British administration effectively shifted the economic burden of famine management onto Irish society itself, despite the limited fiscal capacity of many communities. In this sense, the structure of relief policy reflected the asymmetrical power relationship characteristic of colonial rule, in which decisions taken in London determined both the form of assistance provided and the distribution of its financial costs.

This retreat reflected a combination of prevailing beliefs in providentialism, laissez-faire economics, and a commitment to private enterprise, alongside deeply entrenched prejudices and anxieties about encouraging dependency.³⁹¹ The views of figures such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Wood, reflected prevailing assumptions about dependency and improvidence, warning against providing a 'safe and comfortable existence'³⁹² through state support, and exemplify how detached government thinking had become from reality. The resulting situation left the penniless reliant on limited resources and informal support, circumstances that could later intersect with prosecution for vagrancy and other poverty-related offences. In this way, relief policy and criminal justice became indirectly connected, as the erosion of subsistence security increased the likelihood that poverty itself would become visible in the criminal record. The broader failure of the British government to adequately understand Ireland's condition or to provide meaningful aid, even as food continued to be exported from the country, contributed to a lasting narrative of neglect, and, in some later writing, claims of deliberate intent. This perception was later mobilised in nationalist discourse and continues to shape Anglo-Irish relations today.

³⁹⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 62–3, 157–8, 227.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp 410–11.

³⁹² Charles Wood, cited in *ibid.*, p. 306.

This chapter has provided a concise overview of the key contextual factors surrounding the Great Famine, alongside an outline of the criminal landscape and two common forms of criminal activity in pre-Famine Ireland, namely agrarian violence and illicit distillation. The Irish criminal justice system, largely modelled on British institutions, failed to account for the socio-economic conditions of pre-industrial Ireland. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that, as the crisis produced increasingly anomic conditions, everyday practices of survival came into contact with the criminal law within a colonial system that prioritised property protection and public order.

The prison registers analysed in the next chapter provide an empirical lens through which these dynamics can be observed, revealing how individuals navigated famine conditions through limited forms of agency that were often recorded by the state as criminal behaviour.

Chapter 4: Data and Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes crime trends from the Irish prison registers for Nenagh, Sligo, and Kilmainham, during the agricultural years 1st September 1844 to 31st August 1845 (before the Famine), and 1st September 1847 to 31st August 1848, a year without blight but with only about 10% of the usual crop sown. The low planting reflected both the uncertainty of the previous harvests and the high price and scarcity of seed,³⁹³ a situation which led to widespread starvation throughout Ireland.

The two main crime typology categories which will be referred to throughout this thesis are those of social-order and survival crimes, defined in the context of nineteenth-century Ireland, and based on the information within the prison registers. Social-order crimes involve acts that interfere with the functioning of society, either by causing harm or conflicting with prevailing norms. For this study, protest crimes, domestic disputes, and agrarian disputes are also included since motives cannot be reliably determined. Such offences encompassed 'moral crusaders' who sought to impose their views through the law, and agrarian violence that might today be described as vigilantism.³⁹⁴ These categories also provide a framework through which the thesis's broader conceptual themes can be examined. Social-order offences illuminate patterns of authority and social regulation, while survival crimes reveal how individuals exercised limited forms of agency within increasingly anomic conditions produced by famine.

The prison registers recorded similar offences under varied headings; these have been simplified into categories devised for this thesis (Table 4.1). Some offences, such as abduction, attempted suicide, cruelty to animals, dangerous driving, debt, habitual drunkenness, lunacy, prostitution, treason, and trespass, are omitted from the table as they require no further clarification. The offence of assault appears in several categories depending upon the relationship with the victim (domestic assault or assault on employer), occupation of the victim (assault on

³⁹³ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 46.

³⁹⁴ Siegel, *Criminology*, pp 482, 485–6.

police), or where the assault took place (such as robbery and assault, or assault in the workhouse). This simplification provides a workable framework for analysis, allowing broad trends in criminal behaviour to be identified while avoiding the distortions that arise from overly granular distinctions.

Table 4.1 – Simplified Categorisation of Offences

Crime Description	Includes
Armed/Armed Assault	carrying arms, theft of arms, firing at a person, armed attack, armed violence
Attack of a House	illegal entry, forced entry, forced possession
Breach of the Peace	disturbing the peace, obscene language, fighting, disorderly
Burglary (non-violent)	entering with intent to steal, theft from property, house breaking
Court	refusal to give evidence, witness for the crown/examination, perjury, escape from prison
Damage	wilful, malicious, threat of damage, arson
Domestic	assault, threat of violence, abandonment, bigamy, concealed birth
Employment Issues	absent from service, absconding, assault on employer, disorderly servant
Food Theft	attempted theft, in possession, cutting cows' tails
Fraud & Forgery	Embezzlement, passing forged money, in possession, uttering base coin
Gambling	on the sabbath, with intent to cheat, in public
Livestock Theft	attempted theft, in possession
Military	losing regimental necessaries, absent, deserter, disobedient, drunk, theft
Miscellaneous	obstruction of footpath, manure, or pig, on highway
Murder	manslaughter, poisoning, aiding & assisting, domestic murder
Police & Property	Assault of police, threat, obstruction, damage, disorderly at station, offences committed by policemen
Post	acting as a packet porter without licence, embezzling a letter
Rescue	of livestock, a prisoner, a body
Riot	without assault on police
Robbery (violent)	robbery, and assault combined with robbery
Sedition	administering unlawful oaths, writing a rockite notice, seditious public speech
Sexual Offences	buggery, sexual assault, rape, indecent exposure, found with a prostitute
Smuggling	selling spirits without a licence, excise warrants, tobacco, illicit distillation
Suspicion	behaviour, character, about to commit a felony, found concealed
Theft & Handling	money under false pretences, in possession, pickpocketing, attempted theft
Vagrancy & Begging	vagrant, vagabond, begging, asking for alms
Violence to Person	assault, threatening, threatening letters, throwing stones
Workhouse	damage to property, theft, assault within, absconding from

Each crime description has then been carefully considered within the context of the Famine period and allocated to a typology category (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 – Crime Typology Categories

Crime Typology Category		
Social-Order Crime		Survival Crime
Abduction	Habitual Drunkenness	Attempted Suicide
Armed Crime	Lunacy	Food Theft
Attack against a House	Military	Illicit Distillation
Breach of the Peace	Miscellaneous	Livestock Theft
Burglary (non-violent)	Murder	Prostitution
Court Related Issues	Police & Property	Smuggling
Cruelty to Animals	Post	Suspicious
Damage	Rescue	Theft & Handling
Dangerous Driving	Riot	Trespass
Domestic	Robbery (violent)	Vagrancy
Employment Issues	Sedition	Workhouse Offences
Debtors	Sexual Offences	
Fraud and Forgery	Treason	
Gambling	Violence to the Person	

Without any record of intent, it is impossible to know for certain why some crimes were committed. Not all livestock theft may have been for survival purposes, gambling might have been an attempt to improve dire financial circumstances, and while many arrests for faction-fighting and ‘riotous behaviour’³⁹⁵ were often fuelled by alcohol, they may not all have been.³⁹⁶ These categories have thus been loosely informed by Hoppen’s observation that by 1845 the ‘authorities had officially begun to distinguish between those peculiarly Irish categories of crime called ‘outrages’ and ‘agrarian outrages’, causing 673 offences occurring in Roscommon during this period to be ‘pigeon-holed under no less than twenty-two headings, of which homicide, firing at the person, appearing armed, attacking

³⁹⁵ Conlon, ‘A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808’, pp 337–8.

³⁹⁶ V. A. C. Gatrell and T. B. Hadden, ‘Criminal Statistics and Their Interpretation’ in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society; essays in the use of quantitative methods for the study of social data* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 371.

houses, turning up land, maiming cattle, and sending threatening notices were only the most visible'.³⁹⁷ The following figures and accompanying analysis are therefore based on the most likely crime typology, established from extensive reading of primary and secondary sources, including Hoppen.

Historically, prostitution is a crime linked to poverty, and many women resorted to it only occasionally when they fell on particularly hard times or needed to supplement their income.³⁹⁸ This situation is potentially evidenced in the Kilmainham registers for 1844/5, which list a number of prostitutes with occupations such as dressmaker, fresh fruit woman, tailor, and clerk, and for 1847/8, which list some prostitutes under occupations such as hat trimmer, needleworker, servant, washerwoman and so forth.³⁹⁹ For this reason, and given the context of the period, prostitution has been categorised below as a survival crime. It is considered that most women would be involved for survival purposes rather than out of choice. Additionally, whereas arrests for appearing suspicious could be categorised under social-order crime, the individual arrests which fall into this category relate to survival crime, such as loitering with intent to steal either items of food, or an item which could then be sold or bartered for food. Whether this intent was given to the police by the arrestee, or whether it was assumed from previous knowledge of the offender, is unknown.

Burglary was defined as 'breaking into a dwelling house at night with intent to commit a felony (normally theft) or actually doing so'. Burglary during the day was considered 'housebreaking'. Both burglary and housebreaking included 'attached buildings, shops and warehouses' and were considered serious crimes as there were likely to be people inside.⁴⁰⁰ When more than one crime was specified against an offender's name, categorisation has been based on primary intent as far as can be interpreted by the registers. For example, in the case of *assault and rescue*, the crime has been categorised as *rescue*, the intent to rescue being considered likely to have led to the assault. A rescue being 'whereby a detainee's associates or even anonymous onlookers attempted to retrieve them from police

³⁹⁷ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, p. 341.

³⁹⁸ Claire Richardson, *Exploring the Lives of Victorian Prostitutes* (Yorkshire: Philadelphia, 2024), p. 11.

³⁹⁹ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁴⁰⁰ The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey'.

custody',⁴⁰¹ and assault being defined as either a physical attack or where 'the victim was terrified by gestures or shouting'. Similarly, threatening behaviour, of which there were nine cases recorded during this period, could be either physical or verbal, and could include sending threatening letters.⁴⁰²

It should again be emphasised that the word *arrest* has been used rather than *committal* because not all prisoners recorded in the registers were committed. Some were found not guilty or discharged, while a number of those charged with lunacy were passed into the care of a family member. All quantitative figures in this chapter are derived from the author's analysis of Irish prison registers held by the NAI and consulted in digitised form via *Ancestry.co.uk*. Arrest counts refer to recorded entries rather than individual offenders, as names frequently recur due to recidivism or multiple charges. Where registers are incomplete calculations are based on the surviving data only. Percentages and comparative figures reflect the available sample and should be read as indicative of broader trends rather than precise population measures.

4.2 Legal and Policy Context

The Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 requires some explanation, as arrest figures would naturally be influenced by changes in the legal system. There is no doubt that there was a certain amount of vagrancy occurring before the Famine, as it was commonplace for women to take to the road when they were out of place as domestic servants or when the male breadwinner was away helping with the harvest in the east or in Britain during Ireland's hungry months.⁴⁰³ It was also common for the cottier tenantry, to plant their potato crop, and then leave their cabin, sometimes in the charge of the aged or infirm, while the able bodied sought seasonal sustenance elsewhere, leading what contemporaries characterised as an idle and vagrant life during the summer,⁴⁰⁴ supported in part by charity from labourers and fellow cottiers.⁴⁰⁵ Consequently, begging in Ireland

⁴⁰¹ David Churchill, *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police and the Public* (Oxford, 2017), p. 223.

⁴⁰² The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey'.

⁴⁰³ McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, p. 27.

⁴⁰⁴ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Papers relating to Aid to Distressed Unions in the West of Ireland* (session 1849, HL 1849, vol. xlviii, London, 1849), p. 31.

⁴⁰⁵ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, pp 97–8.

had traditionally been regarded by many as a socially embedded and often respectable occupation,⁴⁰⁶ woven into seasonal labour patterns and local economies of mutual support, although critics continued to depict it as a threat to social order.⁴⁰⁷

After 1843 landlords had become responsible for the poor rates on holdings valued at £4 or less.⁴⁰⁸ Once tenants failed to pay their rent after the second failure of the potato crop in 1846, eviction was increasingly used by landlords as a means of reducing Poor Law rates while simultaneously providing an opportunity to 'modernise Irish agriculture'.⁴⁰⁹ The displaced population added to arrest figures for 'wandering abroad' or gathering alms,⁴¹⁰ illustrating the convergence of agrarian restructuring, welfare policy, and criminal justice.

The Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 affected crime rates by now criminalising public begging and by making it an offence to encourage 'a child to engage in begging' or to wander 'from one Poor Law Union to another for the sake of obtaining relief', offences punishable by up to one month's imprisonment with hard labour.⁴¹¹ As Ciarán McCabe has demonstrated, the Act significantly widened the discretionary powers of the police to apprehend and confine vagrants, marking a decisive shift from informal tolerance of mendicancy to its formal criminalisation.⁴¹²

In 1846, the Select Committee responsible for reporting on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland had recognised that an 'efficient law for the suppression of vagrancy' would result in a massive influx into the workhouse of those 'previously addicted to habits of idleness and vice'.⁴¹³ Nevertheless, George Cornewall Lewis, then serving as a Poor Law Commissioner, reported receiving 'numerous applications from Boards

⁴⁰⁶ Nicholson, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*, p. 238.

⁴⁰⁷ McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994), p. 23.

⁴⁰⁹ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, pp 181–2.

⁴¹⁰ 'Vagrancy (Ireland) Act (1847) 10 & 11 Vict., c. 84, accessed via Irish Statute Book' (<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1847/act/84/enacted/en/print.html>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁴¹¹ McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, p. 30.

⁴¹² Ciarán McCabe, 'The Impact of the Great Famine on Voluntary Charitable Societies in Dublin City' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), p. 60.

⁴¹³ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland, sess 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi*, p. xxi.

of Guardians' upon the subject of Vagrancy', reflecting anxiety about disorder and mobility rather than a commitment to expanding relief provision.⁴¹⁴

While the 1847 Act may have been intended, in part, to alleviate pressure on the workhouses, recent scholarship suggests that it instead redirected that pressure onto the prison system. Brian Crowley argues that the Act 'allowed the authorities to access and utilise the prison infrastructure', with prisons increasingly compensating for deficiencies in the welfare system.⁴¹⁵ Indeed, the Inspectors-General of Prisons themselves regarded the legislation as 'a retrograde attempt by the government to use the prison system as a form of poor relief'.⁴¹⁶ Tim Carey similarly believed that the Act represented an instance of disastrous mistiming, as 'magistrates were obliged to flood prisons with shoals of beggars', many of whom came to view imprisonment as a form of temporary subsistence.⁴¹⁷ In this context, incarceration could function less as deterrence than as an improvised survival strategy when there were few alternative options.

The vagrancy situation was further exacerbated by land clearances and eviction. Between 1846 and 1853, an estimated 45,357 people were evicted in County Tipperary, with multiple families facing eviction at any one time, rather than through earlier patterns of single-family evictions. It has been estimated that more than half of these evictions occurred between 1849 and 1850,⁴¹⁸ although Jim Donnelly believes that 'evictions soared in 1847' and continued to increase annually until 1850, impacting increasingly on a rural population already depleted by migration, emigration, and death.⁴¹⁹ Tim O'Neill similarly points to an 'extraordinary high number of ejections and threats of ejection' in Counties Cork and Tipperary, suggesting that as many as 188,346 families may have been evicted in 1846-48 alone, with the 'peak in evictions' happening in 1847 and 1848 rather than in later years.⁴²⁰ These mass displacements intensified patterns of

⁴¹⁴ G. C. Lewis, in *ibid.*, pp 65–6.

⁴¹⁵ Brian Crowley, "'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison": Kilmainham Gaol and the Great Famine' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), p. 104.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴¹⁷ Tim Carey, *Mountjoy: the story of a prison* (Cork, 2000), p. 40.

⁴¹⁸ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 181.

⁴¹⁹ Jim Donnelly, cited in T. P. O'Neill, 'Famine Evictions' in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 47.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 47, 40–1.

mobility that the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 sought to suppress, ensuring that eviction, vagrancy, and imprisonment became structurally linked during the famine years.

4.3 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Nenagh

Each page of the Nenagh prison registers contains space for 39 entries, and although one page of this prison register was missing from the online records for the period of 1844/5, the original was available at the NAI. Consequently, the registers for the 1844/5 agricultural year are complete. The registers record arrests and include a brief description of the crime, any fine, or whether the case has been referred for a future hearing. Sometimes, this later sentencing is recorded against the original arrest record; however, they are often recorded as separate entries, causing risk of duplication. The Nenagh register contains 934 entries, of which 112 relate to sentencing (nine concern arrests occurring before the period used in the data sample and 103 pieces of duplicate information mentioned elsewhere), leaving 822 relevant entries.⁴²¹

Unfortunately, the NAI confirmed that the entire register for Nenagh from September 1847 until 31st March 1848 is missing; consequently only a five-month comparison is available. Some of the sentencing entries undoubtedly refer to arrests recorded on these missing pages, but whilst strenuous attempts have been made to eliminate as much duplication as possible, it was decided to retain the remainder as, otherwise, a substantial number of arrests would remain uncounted. Given the shortage of complete prison registers, it was felt that this method still provided the most accurate data. The increase in crime is easy to see, with 822 cases recorded in 1844/5, compared with 1,317 cases recorded over the last five months of the 1847/8 agricultural year.⁴²² The first entry that appears for 1848 is that of Patrick Mara, who has been given entry number 768. Because each prisoner is logged in the prison register with a sequential number, this would imply that there were a previous 767 entries recorded between 1st January and 31st March 1848. However, because the details of these missing arrests are impossible to establish, this information is of limited use. Within the

⁴²¹ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

available pages, there are 1,320 entries; three relate to sentencing, as above, and have been excluded from the count, leaving 1,317 relevant entries. Despite the incomplete register, there were more arrests in 1847/8 compared with the 1844/5 arrest data, indicating that Nenagh experienced an increase in the arrest rate of at least 60% compared to 1844/5. If the estimated 767 missing entries (prior to Patrick Mara) are also added to the equation, then a potential 154% increase is indicated, although this cannot be proven.⁴²³ The prison registers record no deaths in 1844/5, but nine in 1847/8.⁴²⁴ This increase could be because of overcrowding in the gaols, or because of the poor state of health of the inmates prior to incarceration; in either case, death can likely be attributed to deteriorating conditions due to the Famine. Combined, these results support the argument that crime increased during the Famine, indicating that individuals continued to make strategic choices within severe constraint.

In the Nenagh prison registers for 1844/5, there were 5.4 times as many arrests of men as of women. However, the available records for 1847/8 indicate that the gender gap had narrowed, with approximately twice as many arrests of men as of women (Figure 4.1). While the number of male arrests increased by 26%, the number of female arrests rose by 244%, suggesting a significant shift in gendered patterns of criminalisation during the Famine years.⁴²⁵ Clive Emsley believes that recidivism was higher for women than for men during the general Victorian era, a pattern which may have contributed to this increase and a subject which is worthy of further research in itself.⁴²⁶

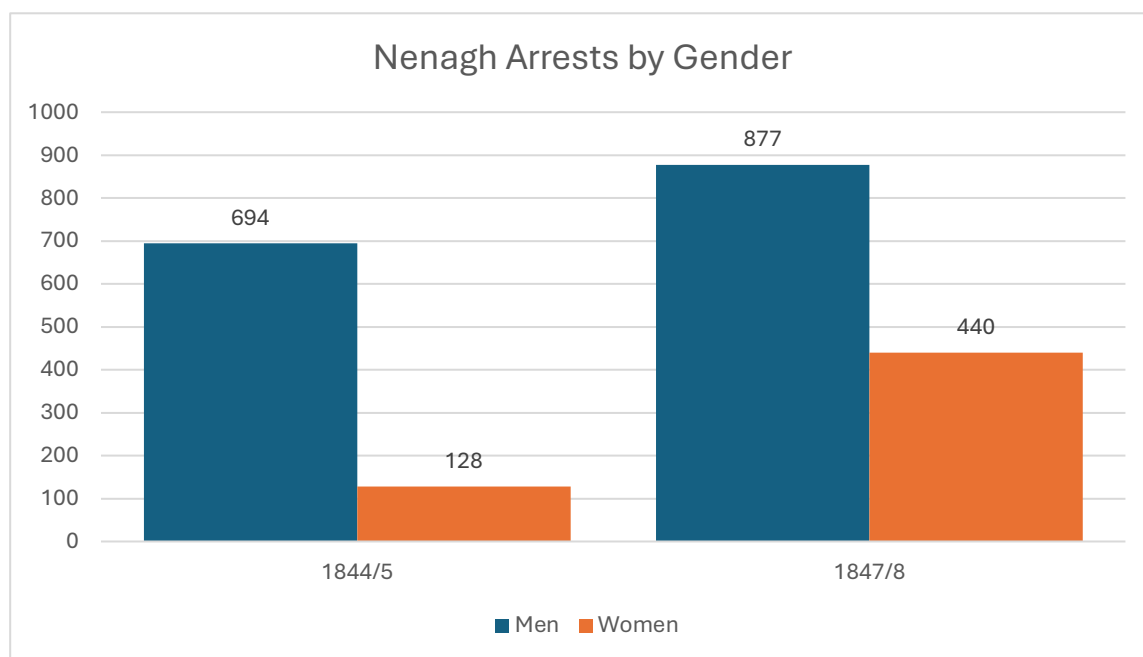
⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Emsley, *Crime and Society in England*, pp 93–5.

Figure 4.1 – Nenagh Arrests by Gender⁴²⁷



These figures suggest that whilst both genders were naturally affected by the loss of their primary food source, the worsening situation caused significantly more women to turn to crime. This was most likely because husbands and fathers had left the family in search of work elsewhere, before sending for their families, or had already died from starvation and disease, whilst the usual family and community support networks were no longer available. It is also possible that, as food became scarce, the skilled, and those with sufficient money to do so, left Ireland. This exacerbated the inevitable recession by removing money from the economy, whilst increasing the number of women who were left with no resources and no choice but to turn to crime for survival. Other shifts in household survival strategies may also have contributed, particularly as traditional means such as begging became less viable under famine conditions.

In 1844/5 the most active criminal group was aged between 20-29 years of age with 441 arrests.⁴²⁸ This trend is supported by research undertaken by Anna Bindler and Randi Hjalmarsson into the ages of male convicts, using data from the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court, which dealt with the most serious crimes of

⁴²⁷ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 77–112.

the period.⁴²⁹ Within the Nenagh prison registers, this age group was arrested 159% more frequently than the next largest age group, those aged 10-19. In each age group, men were represented more frequently than women; in the 20-29 age group, men appeared 574% more often than women, compared with the 10-19 age group where males appeared 236% more often. Five arrests did not include an age.⁴³⁰

By 1847/8, the under-10s, and over 70s are now also represented, and arrests had increased across all age groups with the exception of those aged between 20-29 which had fallen from 441 arrests to 346, a 22% decrease, possibly indicating emigration within one of the fittest, working aged groups. The 30-39 age group had seen an increase of only 68%, compared with the 10-19, 40-49, and 50-59 year olds, who had seen increases of well over 100%. The 10-19 age group was now the most active, having increased from 170 to 474 arrests (179%), and with 165% more males than females being arrested, which might be evidence of a willingness to take risks in an age group with no employment or caring responsibilities. The 40-49 and 50-59 also showed an increase in arrests of over 100%. Six arrests did not provide an age.⁴³¹ The decrease in the 20-29 age group could be, in part at least, due to the missing seven months of registers, or the result of 'age heaping'.⁴³² More broadly, these patterns may also reflect shifting household strategies under famine conditions, although the registers do not allow these to be reconstructed in detail.

A comparison between the two years (Figure 4.2) immediately highlights that the very young and very old are barely represented in 1844/5, indicating that these age groups were largely cared for within their family or community. In 1847/8, the presence of both groups indicates that while the junior and senior generations had not all succumbed to starvation or disease during the previous years of potato blight, they were no longer able to rely on family or community for survival.⁴³³ However, the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 caused many people to be

⁴²⁹ Anna Bindler and Randi Hjalmarsson, 'Prisons, Recidivism and the Age-Crime Profile' in *Economics Letters*, no. 152 (2017), pp 46–7.

⁴³⁰ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

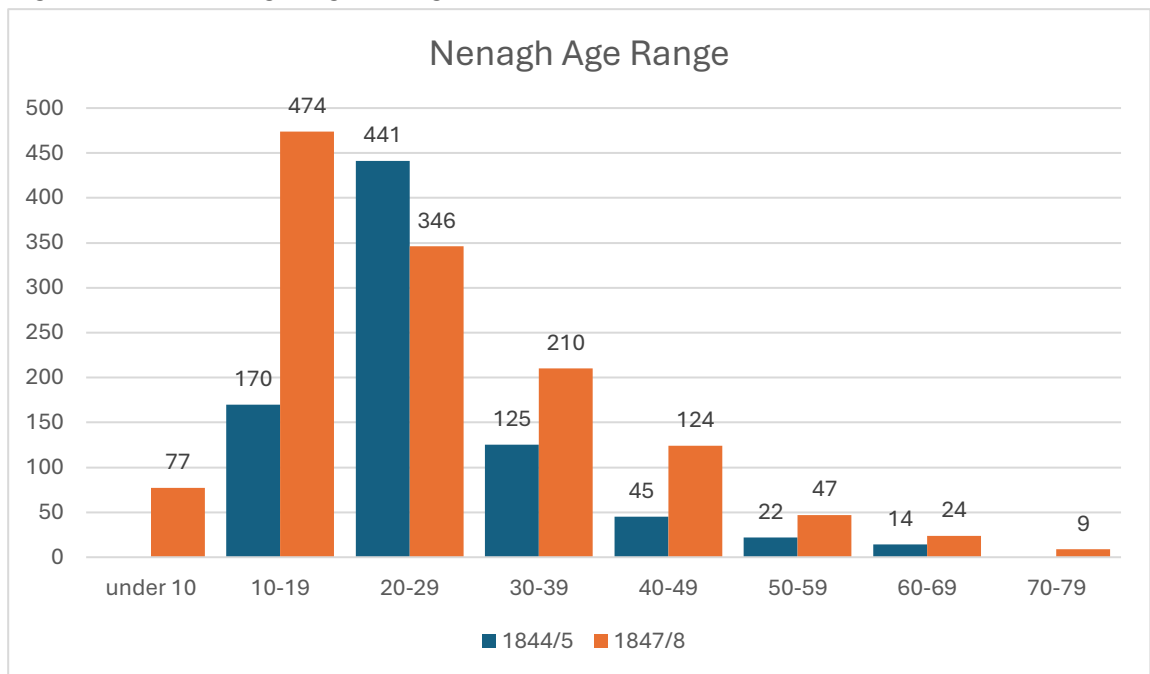
⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, pp 348–404.

⁴³² Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 47.

⁴³³ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

labelled as criminals whose only offence was migration for survival purposes. It was largely this criminalisation of vagrancy, combined with increased evictions and the loss of the potato crop, rather than previous leniency or later harsher sentencing, which caused an increase in the arrest figures for the very young and very old.

Figure 4.2 – Nenagh Age Range⁴³⁴



In nineteenth-century England, children under seven could not be prosecuted, and it was unusual for a child under 14 to be prosecuted unless the judge and jury could be convinced that the child knew they were committing a crime.⁴³⁵ In Ireland, however, children were ‘regarded as little adults’ by the criminal justice system and were consequently ‘granted no exceptions’.⁴³⁶ Although relationships are not stated, the young children in the 1847/8 registers often appear with an implied family member, indicating that attempts were still being made by those arrested to keep their families together, and that whole families were being drawn into offending, even if the crime was simple vagrancy. Indeed, with two exceptions, all of the children aged under 10 were arrested for vagrancy or begging. The exceptions were James Burke, aged seven, who was arrested with

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Emma Watkins and Barry Godrey, *Criminal Children, Researching Juvenile Offenders 1820-1920* (Yorkshire: Philadelphia, 2018), loc. 4%.

⁴³⁶ Niamh O’Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour: a history of Kilmainham Jail* (Dublin, 2007), p. 18.

two probable older sisters for ‘pulling grass, property of John Bennett Esq’, and who all received a fine or 14 days imprisonment with hard labour, and Patrick Malloney, aged eight who was arrested along with his probable older sister for pulling and injuring potatoes ‘with intent to steal, property of Mary Quigly’, both receiving sentences of one month with hard labour. There were five children without an obvious family group, although they may have been with a married female relative. There is also evidence that sentencing was not necessarily becoming significantly more lenient, with Thomas Walsh, aged nine, being arrested in July and August 1848 for vagrancy, the first time receiving 14 days, the second time being imprisoned for one month with hard labour. Indeed, in the 1847/8 dataset, six children under 10 years of age received sentences including hard labour.⁴³⁷ It is likely that a ‘great number of mendicants’ had migrated into the town from the surrounding countryside, either voluntarily or through eviction, as evidenced by Richard Uniacke Bayly, elected Guardian and Chairman of the Nenagh Poor Law Union, who believed that a ‘great proportion’ of [the] paupers who had ‘flocked’ into Nenagh in 1846 were local.⁴³⁸

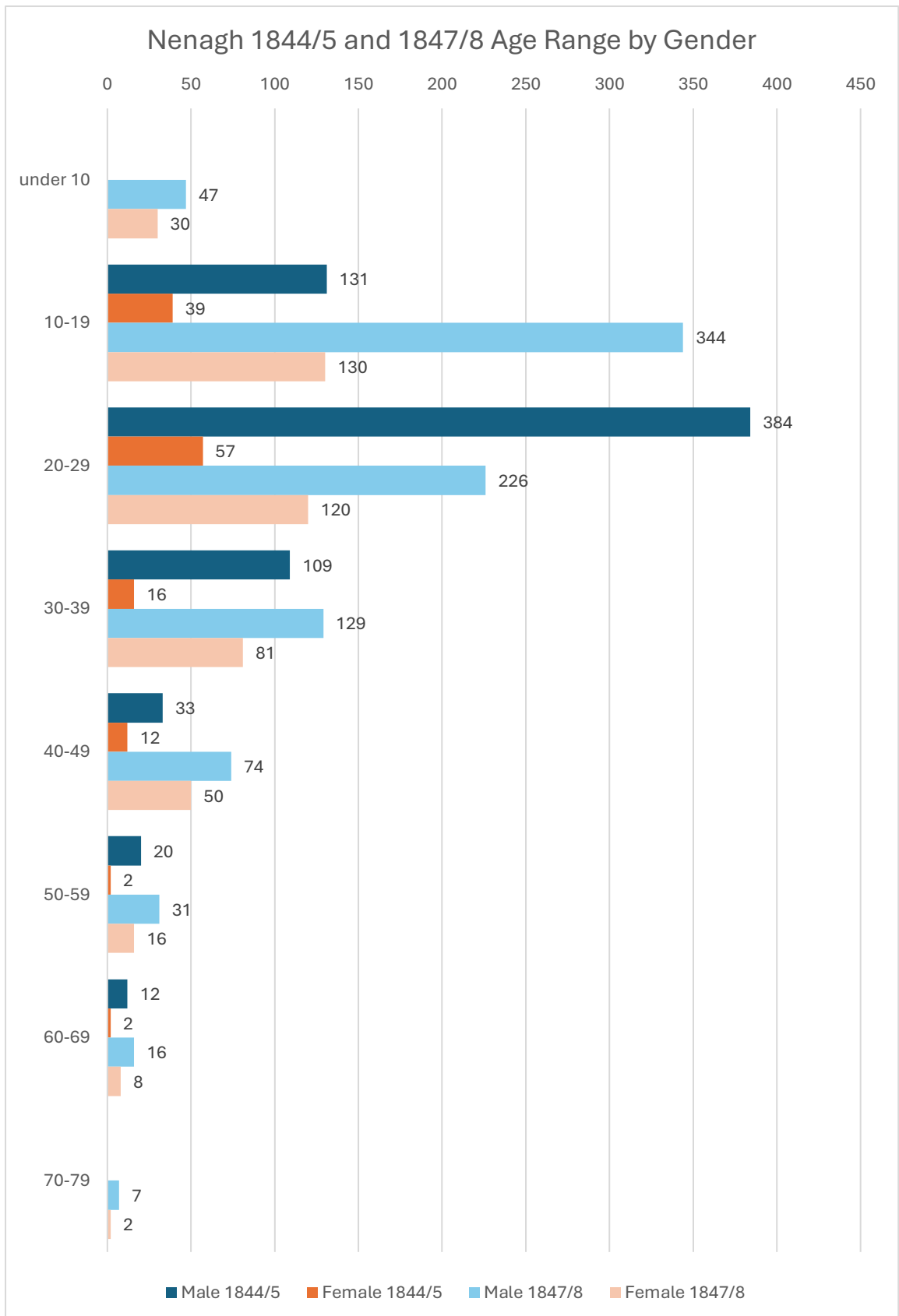
The decrease from 441 to 346 arrests in the 20–29 age group may reflect the incomplete registers, or it could indicate that many in this cohort migrated for work, leaving dependents behind, or entered the workhouse to try to protect their young families, as employment opportunities for young adults were limited. Given the structure of Irish society at this time, it is unlikely they would have found work. The increase of arrests in the other age groups suggests that people were doing whatever they could to help themselves and their families to survive, and this might include vagrancy and begging, or turning to other crime.⁴³⁹ Figure 4.3 combines age and gender data, clearly showing the change in age and gender demographics between the two dates.

⁴³⁷ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404, 382, 403, 392, 398.

⁴³⁸ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland, sess 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi*, pp 638, 636.

⁴³⁹ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

Figure 4.3 – Nenagh Age Range by Gender⁴⁴⁰



⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Nenagh registers do not indicate occupations, marital status, or place of origin, making it harder to establish a definitive conclusion to these trends. However, the results do support the argument that, despite having few options, many Irish, including women, children, and the elderly, actively adapted their behaviour as conditions deteriorated, in order to secure subsistence. Even though vagrancy and crime both carried risks, it would seem many people weighed up their options and decided that action carried less risk than doing nothing. Because prison registers record administrative encounters rather than interior motivations, it is rarely possible to determine whether individuals consciously framed their actions as acts of resistance or empowerment. Nevertheless, patterns of behaviour suggest that many people made pragmatic decisions within severely restricted circumstances in order to maximise their chances of survival. Such choices were often made within a legal environment shaped by measures such as the 1847 Vagrancy Act,⁴⁴¹ which could be used to disperse mobile populations rather than imprison them, further illustrating how individuals navigated shifting institutional constraints in pursuit of survival.

Two arrests had no crime recorded against them. However, the largest category of offences for 1844/5 was that of physical violence with 132% more arrests than for the second largest category of armed crime, (usually armed with guns).⁴⁴² These categories, along with abduction, armed crime, attack of a house, murder, and riot, support written accounts of Tipperary at this time⁴⁴³ of a lawless and dangerous place, where 'violence developed a self-generating tradition', and where a large amount of social-order crime, as well as protest (or ideological) crimes, centred around land issues and resulted in attacks against property or person.⁴⁴⁴

From 820 total arrests, 631 have been categorised as social-order crime (77%) and 189 have been categorised as survival crime (23%),⁴⁴⁵ indicating that in 1844/5, survival was not the main reason for offending (Figure 4.4). Despite the

⁴⁴¹ Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-50* (Dublin: Portland, OR, 1999); Crowley, 'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison'; McCabe, 'The Impact of the Great Famine'.

⁴⁴² *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

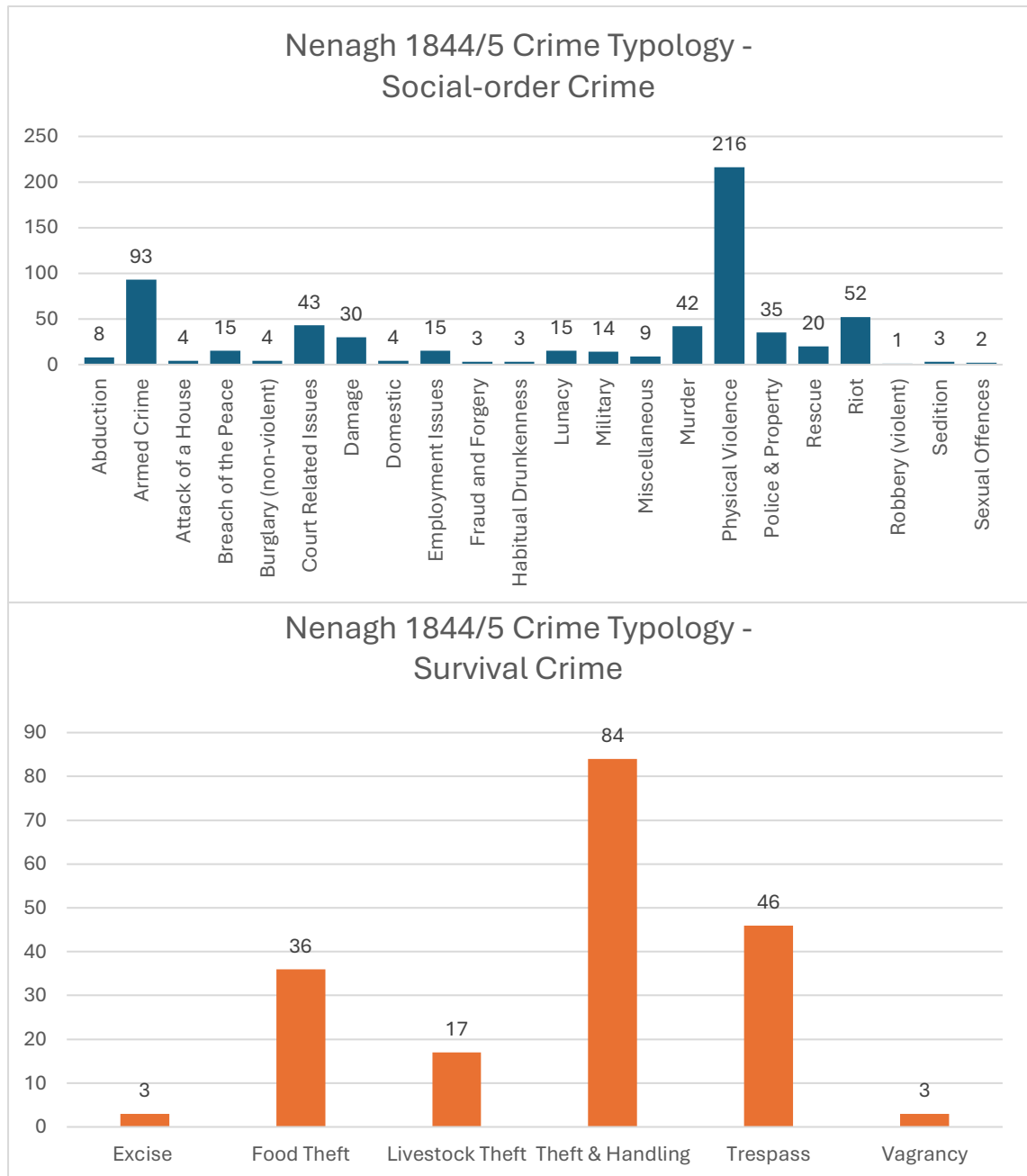
⁴⁴³ For example see Foster, *Letters on the Condition of Ireland*, pp xxi, 6n, 330, 345.

⁴⁴⁴ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, p. 341.

⁴⁴⁵ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

missing registers, it is clear that, compared with the data from 1844/5, there was a vast change in the type of crime being perpetrated by 1847/8 (Figure 4.6) with survival crime now occurring 178% more frequently than social-order crime, and with vagrancy and begging showing the biggest increase.⁴⁴⁶ In other words, prior to the famine, survival crime was three times less prevalent than social-order crime, after the famine, it was three times more prevalent.⁴⁴⁷

Figure 4.4 – Nenagh 1844/5 Crime Typology⁴⁴⁸



⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., pp 348–404.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., pp 77–112.

Figure 4.5 splits the results into crime typology categories and gender, indicating that there were only three criminal categories where women offended more frequently than men: (a), breach of the peace with eight arrests of women compared to seven of men; (b), domestic crime where three women were arrested (all for crimes relating to either child desertion, or concealing a birth), but only one man was arrested (for bigamy); and (c) vagrancy with three women arrested, and no men.⁴⁴⁹ The small margins make it difficult to establish whether these are genuine trends or a normal fluctuation. The results could even be the result of bias from the arresting officers, or the men being more experienced at avoiding arrest, or because domestic crimes perpetrated against women were considered acceptable during this period and largely went unreported.

Breaching the peace could include throwing firecrackers, trespass 'on the property of another (where this was a criminal and not a civil offence)', or 'appearing in armed groups with blackened faces' to disguise identity, although in the case of the prison registers, it most likely refers to affrays, where two or more people were fighting in a public place.⁴⁵⁰ The reference to 'blackened faces' relates directly to the 1723 Black Act, which was described by E P Thompson as important 'in eighteenth-century legal history' and which created some fifty 'new capital offences'. Thompson writes that 'the first category of offenders within the Act is of persons 'armed with swords, firearms, or other offensive weapons, and having his or their faces blacked' in relation to poaching but was soon enlarged to encompass being armed or 'blacked' as separate crimes, both becoming capital offences. Also punishable by death was damage caused to fishponds, cattle, trees, setting fire to barns, houses, or haystacks, and malicious shooting.⁴⁵¹

The other two categories where there is a substantial number of female arrests are food theft, and general theft, neither being violent crimes and most likely being crimes of opportunity undertaken to either provide food directly, or to provide the means of obtaining it through sale, barter, or pawning the stolen item.⁴⁵²

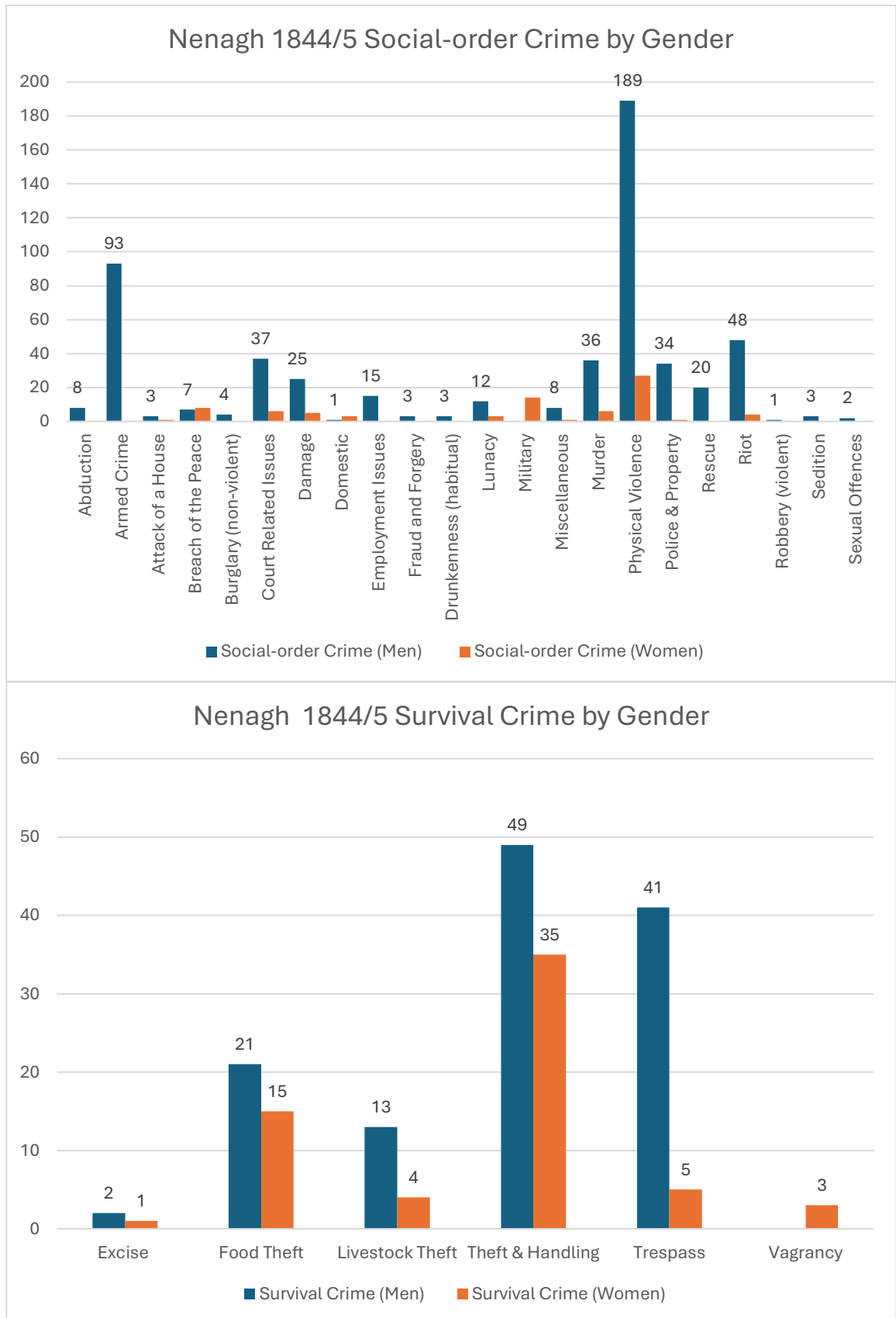
⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey'.

⁴⁵¹ E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp 15, 21–2.

⁴⁵² *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

Figure 4.5 – Nenagh 1844/5 Crime Typology by Gender⁴⁵³



⁴⁵³ Ibid.

By 1848, there were four categories of crime in which women offended more frequently than men, suggesting a modest but noticeable shift in the gendered pattern of offending, even though the raw numbers remain small. Regarding social-order offences, four women were arrested for offences against police and police property, compared with two men. Five women were arrested on suspicion of attacking homes, compared with four men. Six women were arrested for breach of the peace, compared with three men, and whereas three men were arrested for lunacy, four women were arrested for the same crime. Two men and two women were arrested for sexual offences, the men for rape, and the women for exposing their person.⁴⁵⁴ Such charges were shaped by expansive and often gendered understandings of indecency: as Claire Richardson observes, 'indecency covered a much larger range of crimes than exposing intimate flesh' and could include bathing naked in a river, urinating in the street, 'public displays of affection', a lady exposing her thigh, or being caught in a sexual act whether consensual or not.⁴⁵⁵

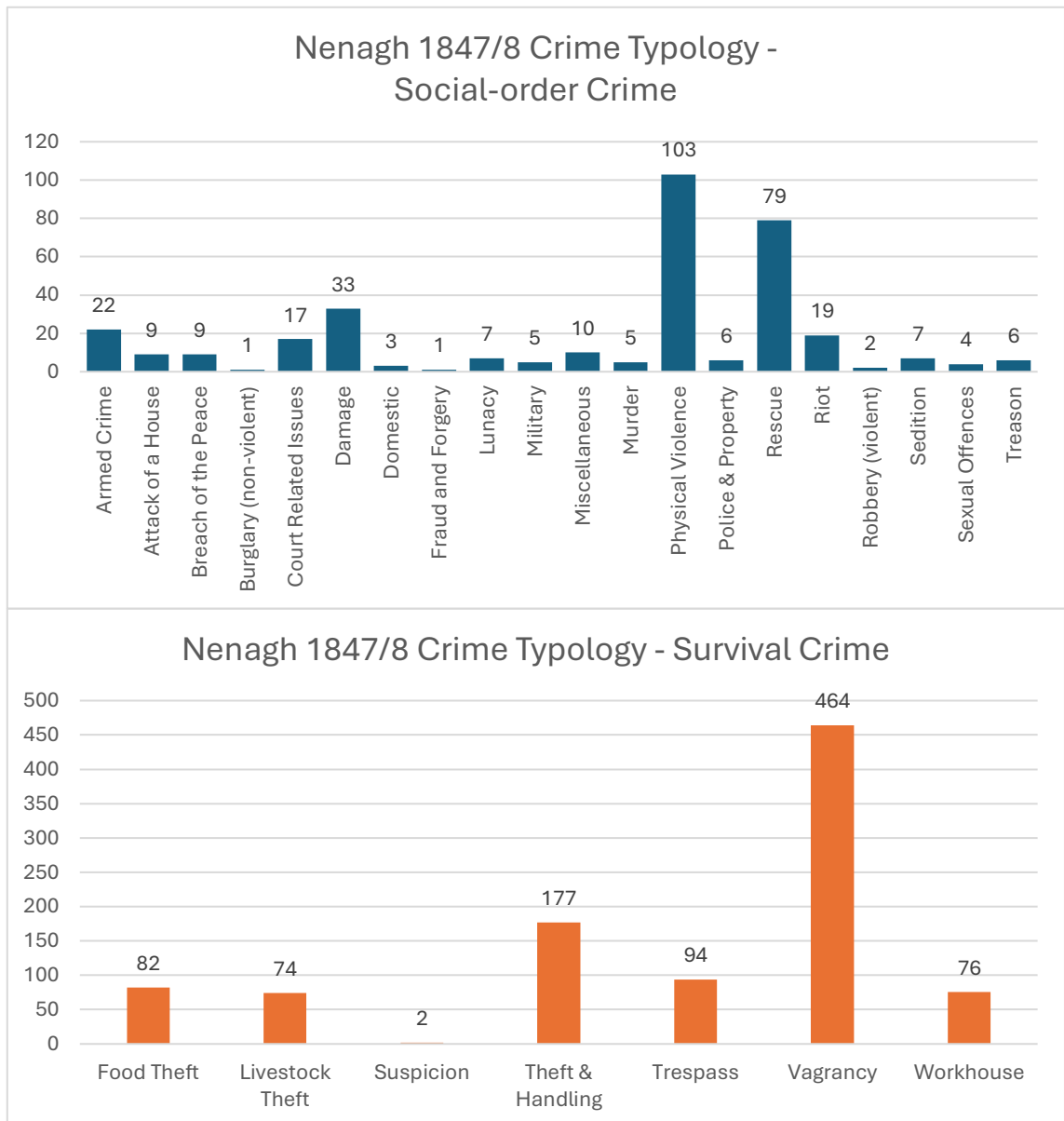
Within the category of survival crime, food theft and livestock theft saw a significant increase with 28 women and 54 men arrested for food theft, and 23 women and 51 men arrested for livestock theft. For the first time in the sample data, there were arrests for being 'suspicious characters' (two men), while six men were charged with treason (in relation to the Young Irelanders rebellion), and there were 76 workhouse related arrests involving absconding, theft, or leaving a family chargeable to the workhouse. 60 of these arrests were of men, and 16 were women (Figure 4.6).⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., pp 348–404.

⁴⁵⁵ Richardson, *Exploring the lives of Victorian Prostitutes*, p. 79.

⁴⁵⁶ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404.

Figure 4.6 - Nenagh 1847/8 Crime Typology⁴⁵⁷



A comparison between 1844/5 arrests and the available information for 1847/8 illustrates the changes over the five months of April to August (Figure 4.7), where both sets of records are available, indicating that social-order crimes have increased slightly from 232 in 1845 to 245 in 1848. Survival crimes have increased significantly over the same period, from 72 in 1845 to 1,072 in 1848 (an increase of 1389%), supporting the premise of this thesis that individuals

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

demonstrated forms of limited agency, adapting their behaviour in response to rapidly deteriorating conditions.⁴⁵⁸

Here, the term *agency* should not be understood as autonomy exercised under conditions of choice, but rather as strategic decision-making within extreme material constraint. The dramatic rise in survival-related offences suggests not a collapse into indiscriminate criminality, but a patterned and adaptive response to worsening conditions, in which individuals engaged in acts such as food theft or livestock theft, to maximise the possibility of survival.

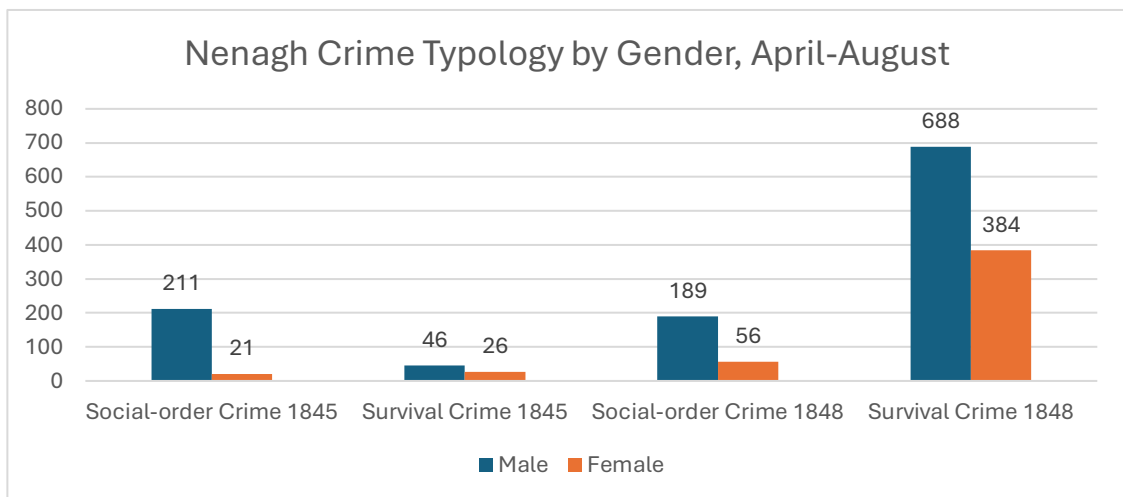
Although the prison registers cannot reveal subjective intention, the concentration of arrests around specific categories of survival crime, and their rapid escalation over a short period, indicate a practical awareness of how food systems, relief structures, and legal enforcement operated. While the registers cannot reveal whether individuals consciously understood their actions as *agency*, the patterned nature of survival offences suggests an awareness of how to navigate the limited options available to them. Agency therefore becomes visible not through explicit self-expression but through behaviour: repeated decisions to steal food, livestock, or other necessities demonstrate calculated attempts to secure survival within a coercive legal and economic system. Imprisonment itself may also have been understood instrumentally, not solely as punishment but as an outcome negotiated within a limited range of options. This reframes prisoners not simply as passive victims of criminalisation, but as individuals responding rationally to famine conditions within a legal system that prioritised property protection and public order under British administration. Recognising such behaviour as agency is significant because it challenges earlier portrayals of famine victims as passive or paralysed by suffering, instead revealing how ordinary people actively negotiated the constraints imposed by hunger, law, and colonial governance. The prison system thus formed part of a wider colonial structure in which behaviours associated with subsistence and survival were increasingly interpreted and processed as criminal offences.

The figures indicate a 10% decrease in the number of men arrested for social-order crimes, whilst the number of women arrested rose by 167%. The number of

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., pp 77–112, 348–404.

men arrested for survival crimes increased by 1396%, whilst the number of women arrested increased by 1377%. Overall, there was a 241% increase in the number of men arrested in 1848 compared with 1845, but an 836% increase in the number of women arrested. In 1844/5, men were arrested approximately 5.5 times more often than women; by 1848, this ratio had dropped to just over 2:1.⁴⁵⁹

Figure 4.7 - Nenagh Crime Typology by Gender, April-August⁴⁶⁰



Whether the available 1847/8 figures are compared with a full year of data from 1844/5 or restricted to a like-for-like comparison between April and August for both periods, the results suggest that both men and women altered their behaviour in response to the drastically changing environment around them, in a shift which appears to have affected women proportionally more than men.⁴⁶¹ While some were repeat offenders, it is probable that a number of former law-abiding citizens were also now committing crimes that they would likely have never contemplated before the Famine, whilst a number of those who had previously committed social-order crimes were likely now committing crime for the purposes of survival.

However, it is possible that the political and judicial responses to behavioural changes caused by the Famine, including criminalisation of that behaviour, may also have driven change during the Famine period, contributing to the increased number of arrests. By 1847/8, Ireland had become a quite different country to the

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

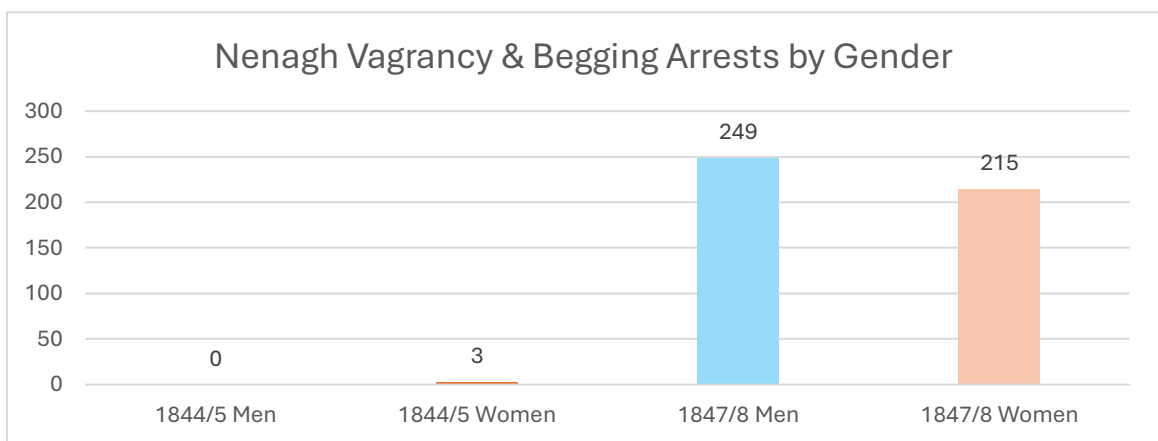
⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

one that had preceded it, and consideration is necessary of whether these results support the hypothesis that many people adapted their behaviour in response to deteriorating conditions.

In Tipperary, between 1832 and 1835, there were between six and eleven people imprisoned for vagrancy annually.⁴⁶² In 1844 the number remained similar, with no arrests recorded for men in 1844/5 and only three for women, compared to a significant growth of 464 arrests listed in the available Nenagh prison registers for 1847/8 (Figure 4.8).⁴⁶³

*Figure 4.8 – Nenagh Vagrancy & Begging Arrests by Gender*⁴⁶⁴



In 1846, Bayly reported there to be ‘a great number’ of mendicants within the town, many arriving in order to obtain admission into the workhouse but then remaining in the town if refused.⁴⁶⁵ This opinion was supported by the Poor Law Commissioner, Edward Twisleton, who remarked that he had ‘heard it generally stated in Dublin, that the number of mendicants is greater than it was before the distress’.⁴⁶⁶ This information indicates that vagrancy was increasing by 1846 and was being experienced in rural towns and in Dublin alike. Vagrancy is an example of behavioural changes leading to a change in the criminal justice system, and the consequences of the resulting Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847, in turn, being reflected in the prison registers. This Act is significant legislation for any study of

⁴⁶² Great Britain. House of Commons, *Tipperary Committals. Return of Number of Persons committed to Prison in County of Tipperary, 1832-35* (session 1836, HC 1836, vol. xlii, n.p., 1836), p. 2.

⁴⁶³ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

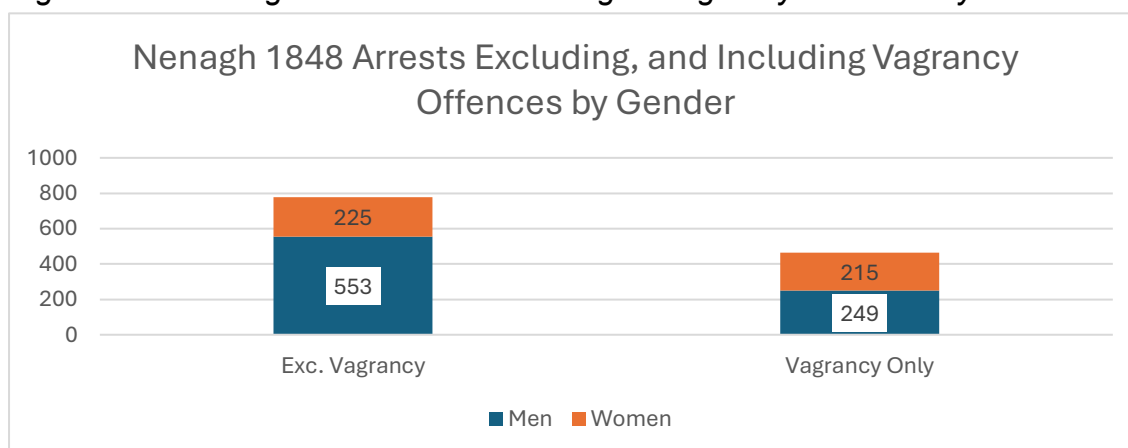
⁴⁶⁵ Richard Uniacke Bayly, in Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland, sess 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi*, pp 637–8.

⁴⁶⁶ Edward Twisleton, cited in *ibid.*, p. 782.

Ireland during the Famine period, and one ‘overlooked by most historians of the Famine’ according to McCabe.⁴⁶⁷ It would therefore be remiss not to investigate the impact that this Act might have had on arrest figures, therefore the data is repeated below, first with vagrancy and begging offences removed, in order to provide a fair comparison with the prison registers for 1844/5, and then showing the arrest figures for vagrancy and begging only (Figure 4.9). The Nenagh prison registers for 1848 show that overall arrests were 99% higher for men than women (Figure 4.1), however, when vagrancy and begging are excluded this disparity rises to 146%, while the figures for vagrancy alone reveal only 16% more men than women (Figure 4.9).⁴⁶⁸

Comparing this with 1844/5, when 442% more men than women were arrested (Figure 4.1), the 1848 data suggests that women increasingly turned to survival strategies that brought them into conflict with the law, particularly through vagrancy and begging.⁴⁶⁹ This pattern underscores the agency of women, who sought to sustain themselves and their families under conditions of extreme deprivation, but it may also indicate that women were facing harsher scrutiny within the criminal justice system by the late 1840s.

*Figure 4.9 – Nenagh 1848 Arrests Relating to Vagrancy Offences by Gender*⁴⁷⁰



An investigation of the age range in the same way (Figure 4.10) shows that isolating vagrancy and begging arrests makes the 20–29 group appear to have a higher arrest rate than the 10–19 group. However, given that these results are

⁴⁶⁷ McCabe, ‘Begging and Alms-Giving’, p. 18.

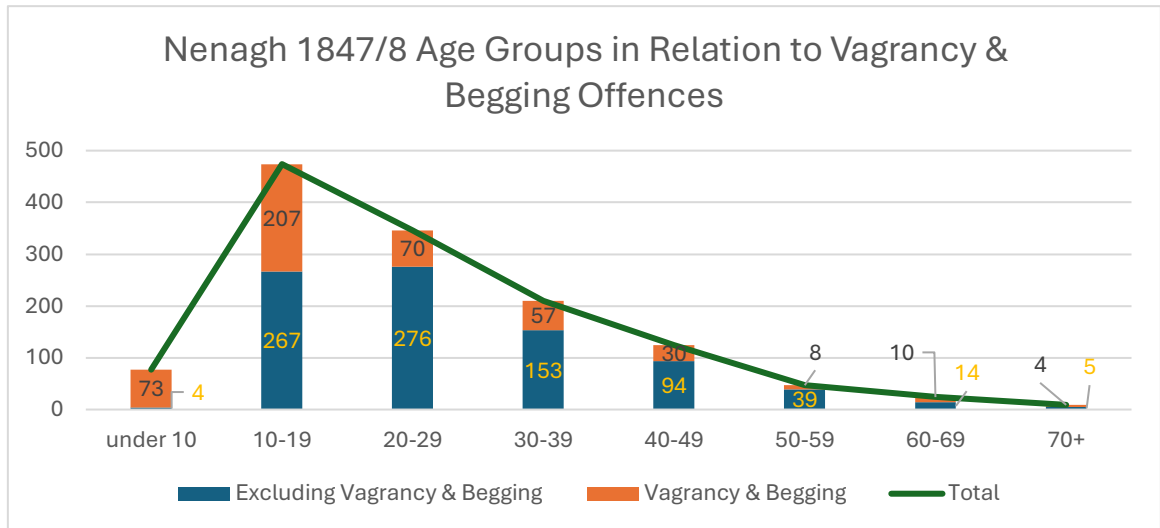
⁴⁶⁸ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 348–404.

based on only five months of data, the difference is slight, just nine arrests tipping the balance in favour of the 20–29 cohort.⁴⁷¹

*Figure 4.10 – Nenagh 1847/8 Age Groups in Relation to Vagrancy & Begging Offences*⁴⁷²



To summarise, by 1847/8, the high rates of arrests for armed crime and violence in Nenagh had been replaced by arrests for survival crime. Women, children, and the elderly were appearing in the registers with increasing frequency and were most likely to be arrested for non-violent survival crime, especially begging and vagrancy.⁴⁷³ This would tend to indicate that many people were prepared, although not necessarily eager, to do whatever was necessary to stay alive.

As there are no places of origin or occupations recorded in the Nenagh prison registers at this time, it is difficult to establish migration patterns. However, 464 arrests for vagrancy and begging suggests that migration into the town had been most likely occurring from the surrounding countryside of County Tipperary.⁴⁷⁴ This is certainly supported by the figures (Appendix 2) provided by David Grace, which give a 'percentage of population change in each civil parish of north-west Tipperary between 1841 and 1851'.⁴⁷⁵ Out of 41 parishes, 39 saw a decrease in population of between -4% in Abington to -55% in Kilkeary, although Nenagh saw a population growth of 22% over the same period, and Borrisokane a growth of

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., pp 348–404.

⁴⁷⁵ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 180.

9%. The growth in Borrisokane was undoubtedly a consequence of the new workhouse, built when the new Poor Law Union was established there in 1850, resulting in 1,142 inmates by the 1851 census. Nenagh had 3,607 workhouse inmates by 1851, and 531 prisoners in the county gaol; however, according to Grace, if these inmates are removed from the figures, 'the resident population of both towns' had also actually declined, Borrisokane's by 28% and Nenagh's by 21%.⁴⁷⁶ These figures support the argument that many ordinary people demonstrated agency, attempting to improve their circumstances through action.

It can be concluded from the above exercise that, in 1844/5 Nenagh, offenders were likely to be male and involved in social-order crime; for example 600% more men than women were being arrested on suspicion of violence against the person (inter-personal violence). Offenders were most likely to fall within the 20–29 age group, with no children under 10 represented. Indeed, of the 170 aged 10-19, only 32 were under 16, indicating that under 16s were likely taken care of within the family group or community.⁴⁷⁷ This conclusion is reinforced by Hoppen's analysis of pre-Famine social organisation, which suggests that welfare and informal regulation operated largely within the lowest strata of society itself. Rather than reliance on external authority, cottiers and labourers sustained reciprocal networks of support that extended to marginal figures such as beggars and vagrants.⁴⁷⁸ This pattern indicates that social stability and care for vulnerable groups were managed internally within impoverished communities, situating these actors collectively at the base of the social hierarchy prior to the Famine.

The highest crime figures were for social-order offences such as armed crime and violence against the person, reflective of rural Tipperary at the time. Again, mostly perpetrated by men, rioting, murder, and other violent or aggressive crimes were also common, although survival crime was still represented in the registers. Trespassing was reasonably frequent, although it is unclear whether this was to facilitate other potential crimes or for some other purpose. In 1844/5, this crime was generally described as wilful and malicious trespass, although sometimes, the property where the trespass was taking place was also mentioned. In 1847/8,

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 179–81, 19.

⁴⁷⁷ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

⁴⁷⁸ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, pp 97–8.

all of the arrests for trespassing were malicious. It seems unlikely that such descriptions referred to poaching, as no mention was made of such an action.⁴⁷⁹

Despite seven months of the prison registers for 1847/8 being missing, significant changes are still visible. Arrests now covered a broader age range, reaching into the over 70s, and there were 77 arrests of children aged between 6 months and 9 years, although children under seven years of age could not be prosecuted.⁴⁸⁰

The most represented age group was now 10-19 years of age, with 236 of these aged between 10 and 15. Men were still more likely to be arrested than women, although women are now appearing in the registers much more frequently than in 1844/5. Men were also still more likely to be involved in social-order crime, although arrests for this type of crime had barely increased, and the number of men involved had fallen slightly. Survival crime such as livestock and food theft had increased, as had theft and handling. Trespass had increased and could have been opportunistic, either seeking shelter or looking for items to sell or pawn, or for food to eat. The biggest increase was for vagrancy and begging, in part due to the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847, but still indicating a substantial increase in survival crime, as well as in the number of female arrests. However, the age category most frequently represented if the vagrancy arrests are removed, is the 20-29 age group, although only by nine arrests. The remaining statistics indicate a significant growth in arrests between 1844/5 and 1847/8.⁴⁸¹

Despite Elliott's belief that the effects of the Famine were not as severe in North Tipperary as elsewhere,⁴⁸² arrests in Nenagh had nevertheless increased significantly by 1847/8 compared with arrest figures for 1844/5, and arrests for offences related to survival increased as conditions deteriorated. Whilst arrests for social-order and protest crimes also increased, growth was smaller, and this category of arrest became secondary to arrests for survival offences.⁴⁸³ These results support the argument that the ordinary people were not passive recipients of social, cultural, or economic forces, but were active participants in shaping their experiences and outcomes. As communities were destroyed by eviction and the

⁴⁷⁹ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁸⁰ Watkins & Godrey, *Criminal Children*, loc. 4%.

⁴⁸¹ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁴⁸² Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas*, p. 106.

⁴⁸³ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

impact of the Famine, previous networks of support were lost, and choices were limited, leaving crime as one of the few remaining options for those who were trying not to resort to the workhouse, or who may have been refused admission due to overcrowding within.⁴⁸⁴

4.4 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Sligo

Sligo prison registers were complete for the agricultural years of interest, each page containing space for 15 entries, and unlike the Kilmainham and Nenagh prison registers, all of the offenders listed in this register served a sentence for their crime. There were 33 prison committals in 1844/5, and 27 of these were sentenced for either being involved in the illicit distillation of poitín or for possession of it. The remaining six were in ‘breach of the excise laws’, likely also relating to illicit distillation. Overall, 30 were sentenced to three calendar months imprisonment or a £6 fine, with Charles Kerins, who was sentenced for ‘harbouring 1 noggin of illicit spirits’, receiving the same sentence as James Connawn, who was caught ‘having 2 gallons of illicit spirits in possession’. Joseph Gregg and Thomas O’Connor both received £5 fines for breach of the excise laws, whilst James Tucker received a fine of £12.10 shillings for the same offence.⁴⁸⁵

There were 164 prison committals for 1847/8, all relating to illicit distillation.⁴⁸⁶ This figure is difficult to reconcile with the wider context of the Famine. It seems unlikely that the majority of poitín makers would have been able to afford the malt or barley necessary for poitín manufacture during a period of acute scarcity, and therefore equally unlikely that poitín making would have increased to the levels suggested by the arrest data. Indeed, McGuffin argues that the Famine ‘contributed, in a devastating way, to a decrease in the amount of poitín being

⁴⁸⁴ Frank Corrigan, ‘Dublin Workhouses during the Great Famine’ in *Dublin Historical Record*, xxix, no. 2 (1976), p. 62.

⁴⁸⁵ *National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Prison Registers, Sligo Prison, 1836-1879* (Dublin, digitised copy consulted), pp 21–3.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 26–35.

made',⁴⁸⁷ a view supported by James Peter Murphy, although Manning notes that 'despite the scarcity, people continued to make poitín'.⁴⁸⁸

Several explanations may account for this apparent contradiction. There may have been a more focused effort by the Revenue Police to tackle poitín making, although no direct evidence has been identified to support a change in enforcement strategy, and employment figures suggest that staffing levels remained broadly stable during this period (Figure 4.11). Alternatively, the increase in arrests may reflect changes in local behaviour rather than production levels. It is possible that, in conditions of extreme hardship, individuals were more willing to report illicit activity in the hope of financial reward, while excise officers may likewise have been incentivised by the prospect of fines.⁴⁸⁹ Changing social attitudes under conditions of scarcity may also have influenced reporting behaviour, although this cannot be demonstrated directly from the available evidence, it represents one possible explanation for the divergence between declining production and rising arrest figures.

Figure 4.11 – Irish Revenue Police, Employment Numbers⁴⁹⁰



Having initially thought to exclude the Sligo prison registers from the data sample because they only recorded arrests in relation to the excise laws, it was subsequently decided that this data nevertheless complements and strengthens the data from Nenagh, providing a nuanced and more rounded picture of prison

⁴⁸⁷ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, p. 28.

⁴⁸⁸ Murphy, 'Poitín, A Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration', p. 7; Manning, *Donegal Poitín, A History*, p. 257.

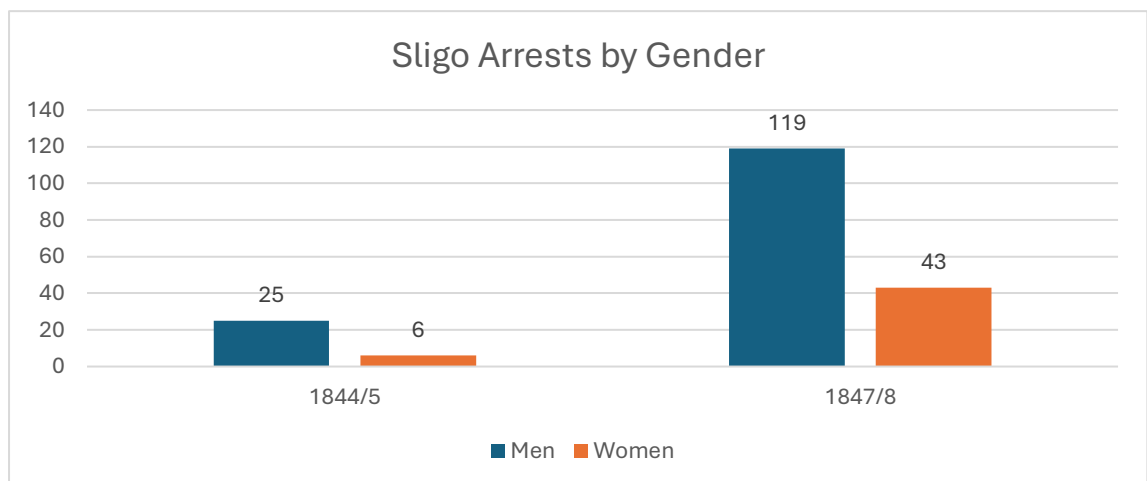
⁴⁸⁹ McGuffin, *In Praise of Poteen*, pp 22, 25.

⁴⁹⁰ Jim Herlihy, *The Irish Revenue Police: a short history and genealogical guide to the 'poteen hussars'* (Dublin, 2018), p. 219.

committals at this time, especially in rural Ireland. The Sligo excise arrest registers for both agricultural years are complete, and the offences range from being in breach of the excise laws, being found in a malt house, carrying illicit spirits, or being in possession of poitín-making equipment. There appear to be no duplicated entries, and no deaths were recorded in prison during either period, possibly because the sentences were limited to three calendar months, considerably shorter than many recorded in the Nenagh and Kilmainham registers. Because the records for Sligo are complete, the scale of change between 1844/5 and 1847/8 can be clearly established, with arrests rising markedly across the period.⁴⁹¹

There were two arrests in 1844/5, and again in 1847/8 where gender could not be established by the offender’s name. However, the 1844/5 arrest figures indicate a gender bias in the arrest record, with 317% more arrests of men than of women, although this had reduced to 177% by 1847/8, as can be seen in Figure 4.12. Additionally, whereas by 1847/8 male arrests had increased by 376%, female arrests had increased by 617%.⁴⁹² To some extent, this may be the result of a changing focus by the police, however there were fewer employment options for women, especially in rural areas, and widowed women in particular may have had no male relative to support them. As families and communities were torn apart, and any limited resources were now exhausted, women increasingly appeared in the registers for survival-related offences.

*Figure 4.12 – Sligo Arrests by Gender*⁴⁹³



⁴⁹¹ *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–3, 26–35.

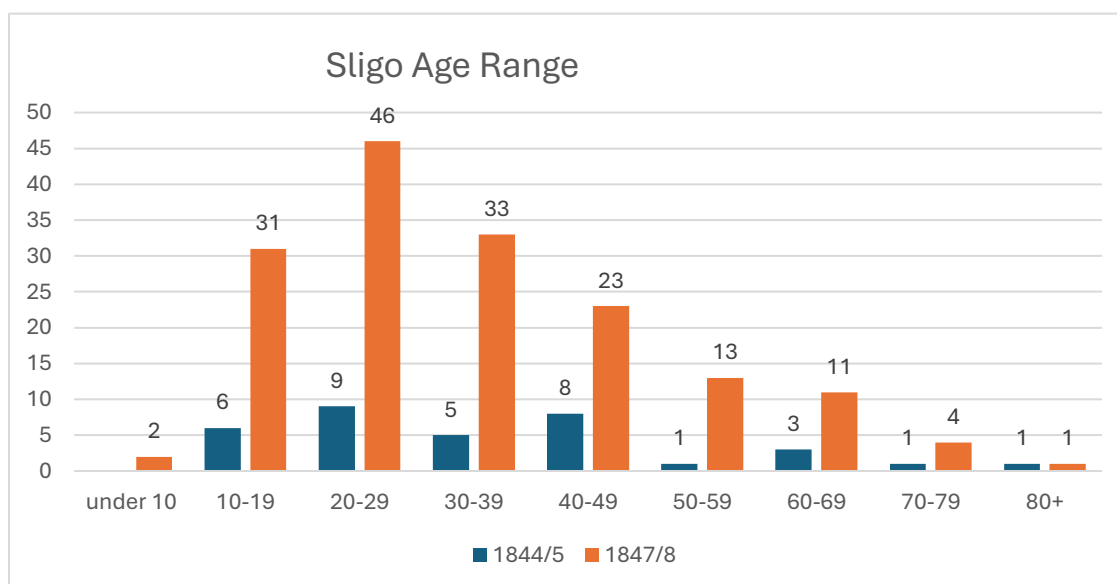
⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

In 1844/5, the most represented age was that of 20-29, there are no arrests of children aged under 10 (indeed there were no arrests for anyone under the age of 15), and only one arrest each in the 70-79 and over 80 age groups (Figure 4.13).⁴⁹⁴ These results suggest that the very young and very old were generally supported within the household, particularly by parents in the case of young children, and therefore not driven into crime for survival purposes.

The 1847/8 data shows increases in arrests across all age groups up to the age of 80. The 20–29 cohort remained the most represented, while arrests among those aged between 70-79 rose from one to four, and two children under ten now appeared in the register. Only the over-80 group remained unchanged.⁴⁹⁵ However, given the sharp reduction in Ireland’s population during this period, the per capita rate of arrests was likely even higher in each age group than these figures alone suggest.

Figure 4.13 – Sligo Age Range⁴⁹⁶



Whilst there are still considerably more arrests of men than women in both periods, the number of women increased markedly between the two dates, with an increase of 358% for arrests of men, compared with a 616% increase of arrests for women (Figure 4.14).⁴⁹⁷ It would seem likely that when illicit distillation

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

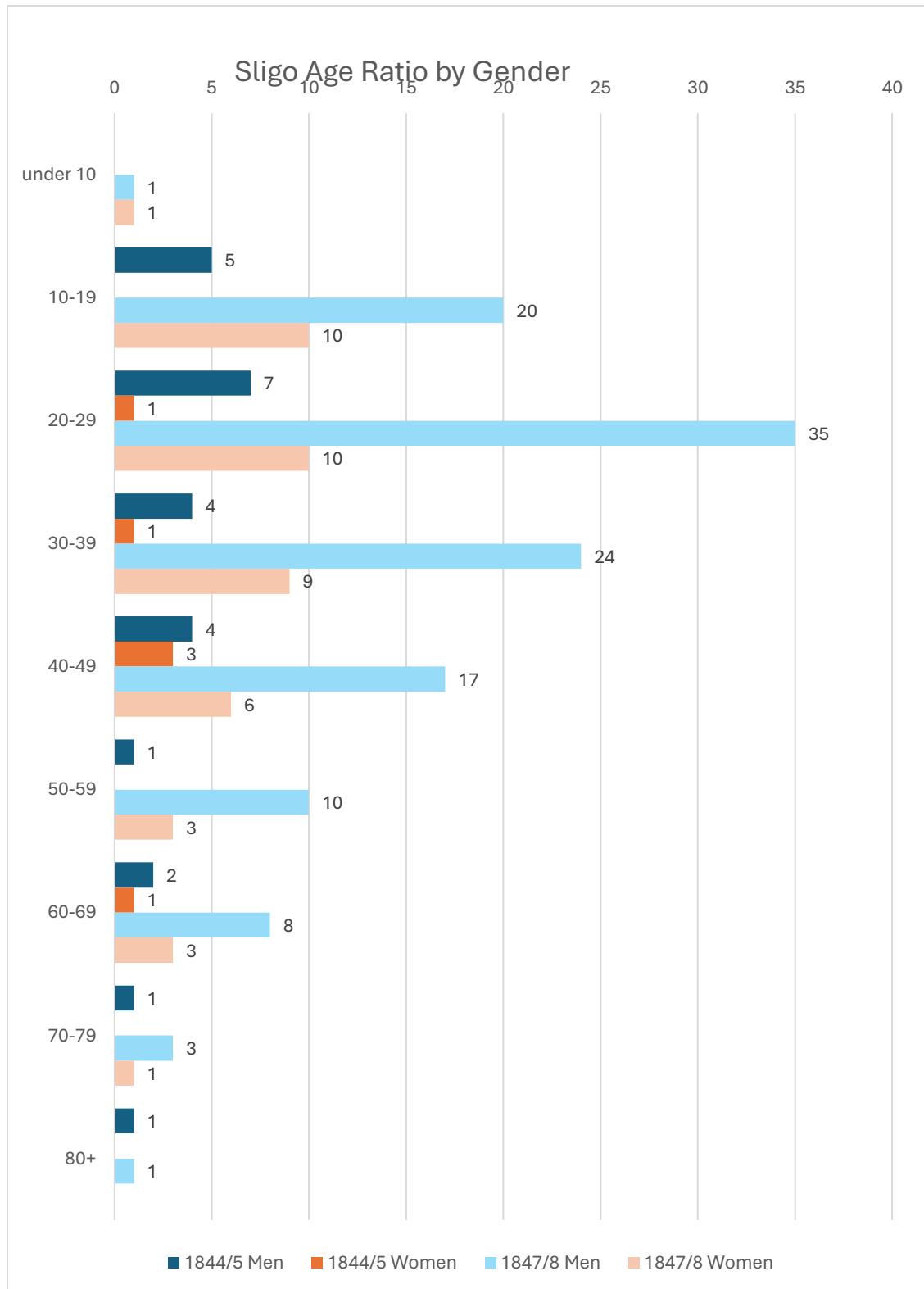
⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

was practiced, all family members were doing whatever they could to help their family to avoid starvation.

Figure 4.14 – Sligo Age Range by Gender⁴⁹⁸



⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

To summarise, between 1844/5 and 1847/8, the crime rate for excise offences in Sligo increased by 397%. Whilst there were 317% more men than women in 1844/5, this had decreased to 177% by 1847/8, the number of female arrests in the prison registers increasing by 617%, compared to an increase of 376% for the men. 20-29 was the most represented age group in the prison registers for both periods.⁴⁹⁹ Together, these patterns suggest that illicit distillation during the Famine drew in a broader cross-section of the population, including women and older individuals, reflecting the increasing pressures of survival.

4.5 Comparative Analysis: Rural Ireland

Because illicit distillation was so prevalent in Ireland before the Famine, it was decided that the Sligo registers, which related purely to excise offences, would complement the more general Nenagh registers to provide a wider rural perspective than either source could alone. Although the samples remain small and the Nenagh data for 1847/8 is incomplete, the comparison nevertheless reveals significant insights into how the Famine altered crime and arrest patterns, especially when combined with first-hand accounts to offer a holistic account of the changes at this time.

Overall arrest rates rose in both Nenagh and Sligo between 1844/5 and 1847/8. The most notable shift was in gender. In Nenagh, men still outnumbered women among the arrested, but the gap narrowed dramatically: from 442% more men than women in 1844/5 to just 99% more by 1847/8. Sligo displayed a similar pattern, falling from 317% to 177%. This points to a marked increase in female involvement in crime, or at least in being arrested, during the most severe years of the Famine. By 1847/8, women in Nenagh were arrested overwhelmingly for survival crimes, rising from 63 arrests in 1844/5 to 364 three years later, with vagrancy and food theft dominant.⁵⁰⁰ This suggests that many women were forced to assume the role of providers as men either died, emigrated, were imprisoned, or sought seasonal labour elsewhere.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

Age profiles also shifted. In Nenagh, the largest group of arrests moved from those aged 20–29 in 1844/5 to those aged 10–19 by 1847/8, with almost half of this latter group aged only 10–15. The registers also recorded rising numbers of both the very young and very old, showing that people at the margins of dependency were increasingly drawn into the criminal justice system. Meanwhile, arrests of men aged 20–29 declined, which may reflect their emigration in search of work, leaving behind more vulnerable family members. In Sligo, the predominant age group remained 20–29, but the broader trend of more extreme age groups appearing in the registers was mirrored there too.⁵⁰¹ Although by 1847/8 the age groups most represented in the two registers differ, they are adjacent. These results could be influenced by the incomplete 1847/8 data for Nenagh but could also mean that the 20–29 demographic may have been the most likely to move to England or further afield in the search for work, demonstrating personal decision-making, goal-setting, and problem-solving on the part of the ordinary Irishman.

The typology of crime also underwent a clear transformation. In Nenagh, the 1844/5 records show a strong presence of social-order, agrarian, and protest crimes, often centred on disputes over land.⁵⁰² As Hoppen notes, ‘the occupation of land seems to have overwhelmed all other concerns in the minds of those embarking on acts of agrarian violence’.⁵⁰³ By 1847/8, such offences had been significantly displaced by crimes of survival,⁵⁰⁴ whilst an increased crime rate in Sligo would also indicate a population that was becoming increasingly desperate.⁵⁰⁵ These results indicate that famine conditions reordered priorities: grievances over land giving way to the more immediate imperative of securing food or relief. In sociological terms, this shift reflects the emergence of increasingly anomic conditions in which established norms governing property, work, and subsistence were destabilised by the collapse of the potato economy.

Taken together, the Nenagh and Sligo data demonstrate how profoundly the Famine altered patterns of criminality. Arrests rose overall, with women, children,

⁵⁰¹ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁰² *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

⁵⁰³ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, p. 345.

⁵⁰⁴ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

and the elderly more visible in the registers, and survival crimes eclipsing protest crimes.⁵⁰⁶ These trends underline the extent to which the collapse of family and community support networks forced individuals into new, often desperate strategies. Entering prison could itself be seen as an act of survival, offering food and shelter otherwise unavailable. In this way, the registers reflect both the trauma of famine and the agency of ordinary people, who adapted their behaviour to endure unprecedented hardship, and in turn altered the focus of the criminal justice system.

4.6 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Kilmainham

Plans for building a new Kilmainham Gaol had been approved in 1786, and the building was completed in 1796.⁵⁰⁷ Kilmainham was Dublin's county gaol for housing debtors,⁵⁰⁸ and initially half of the prison population were there for that reason, although it also held convicts awaiting transportation, and the 'insane'.⁵⁰⁹

The 1841 census records a population of 232,726 in Dublin city (and a further 140,047 in County Dublin).⁵¹⁰ It would be expected that in this crowded urban environment, where poitín making was difficult to conduct discreetly, and where affluence and destitution rubbed shoulders, a wider variety of crime would be recorded than in rural areas with fewer opportunities.

The Kilmainham prison registers from 1st September 1844 to 31st August 1845 are complete. There were 1,331 entries made during this period, of which 17 relate to sentencing and, as with Nenagh, will be excluded from the count so as to avoid the duplication of figures. This leaves 1,314 relevant entries, of which two resulted in death, both classified as dangerous lunatics.⁵¹¹

The records from 1st September 1847 to 31st August 1848 are also complete, containing 2,226 entries. Thirteen of these can be excluded from the count, in

⁵⁰⁶ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; NAI, *Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁰⁷ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 58–9.

⁵⁰⁸ McConnon, 'The Kilmainham Gaol Registers', p. 413.

⁵⁰⁹ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 58–9.

⁵¹⁰ Vaughan & Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics*, p. 5.

⁵¹¹ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507.

nine cases to avoid duplication of figures, and in four cases because significant information is missing from the entry, leaving a total of 2,213 relevant entries. Twelve deaths were recorded during this period.⁵¹² The 'years of the Great Famine, saw the largest number of people ever held at one time in the [Kilmainham] prison', a situation fuelled by the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act. 1847.⁵¹³ Where famine occurred, disease inevitably followed,⁵¹⁴ aggravated by overcrowding and causing Dr Kirwin, the coroner for Dublin, to air his opinion about the dangers of having 'convicts sent there [Kilmainham] from the country, as it not only entailed expense, but there was a great danger of disease'.⁵¹⁵ Of the 12 deaths recorded in the 1847/8 Kilmainham registers,⁵¹⁶ a proportion can likely be attributed to deteriorating conditions caused by the Famine, exacerbated by the reduction of 'the prison diet to the smallest amount possible' as rations were cut in order to address the increasing prison population, some of whom had offended with the intent of being imprisoned, and therefore fed.⁵¹⁷

These figures are not necessarily the number of individual offenders as some names appear several times. Additionally, some were arrested for several offences, with each offence listed separately. The increase in numbers of arrests in these statistics nevertheless indicates a growth rate in crime of 68% between 1844/5 and 1847/8,⁵¹⁸ although this figure will have been affected by the introduction of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847. At the same time, the population of Ireland was decreasing rapidly due to death and migration and so the real increase was most likely proportionally higher than is indicated by these figures. This increase supports the argument that as the Famine deepened, the last resource for many increasingly became crime and the criminal justice system.

As with the rural registers, it can immediately be seen that there is a heavy gender bias towards males, with 130% more men than women being arrested in 1844/5, reducing to 77% by 1847/8, despite an increase in both male and female

⁵¹² Ibid., pp 635–736.

⁵¹³ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, p. 22.

⁵¹⁴ McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, p. 5.

⁵¹⁵ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Coroner's Inquests', 20 June 1848.

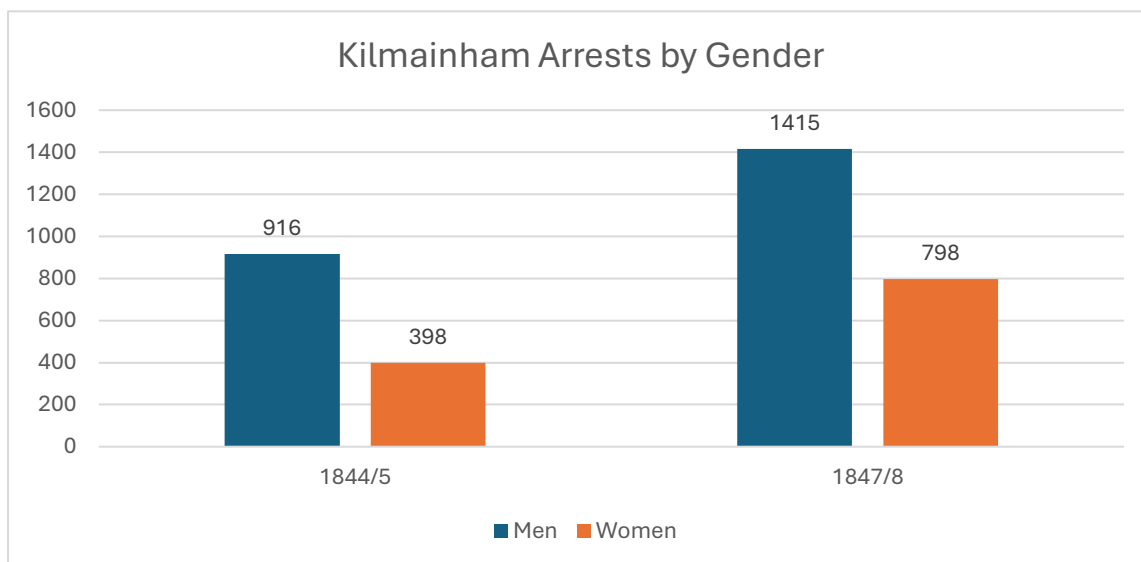
⁵¹⁶ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507.

⁵¹⁷ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, p. 55.

⁵¹⁸ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

arrests over this period (101% for women and 54% for men) (Figure 4.15).⁵¹⁹ Although arrests for both genders increased between the two dates, these results support the hypothesis that more women were forced to change their usual behaviour during the Famine in order to survive, most likely due to the loss of provider either through death or migration in search of work, although harsher treatment by the criminal justice system could be a contributing factor.

*Figure 4.15 – Kilmainham Arrests by Gender*⁵²⁰



In the 1844/5 registers, 14 arrests do not state age, but from the remainder it can be established that the most active age group, regardless of gender, was aged 20-29, this group appearing 60% more often than the next largest group, those aged 10-19. The very young and over 60s are barely represented in comparison to the other groups. There are fewer women than men in all age groups, the 20-29 age group being the closest with 36% more men than women.⁵²¹

In 1847/8, 71 arrests did not include an age. The under 10 and over 60s categories have grown in size but are still small overall, and those aged 20-29 remain the most commonly arrested age group. Out of the six children aged under 10, two did not appear in the registers with any obvious family relative, and only three were sentenced for vagrancy; the other three were for food theft, fraud

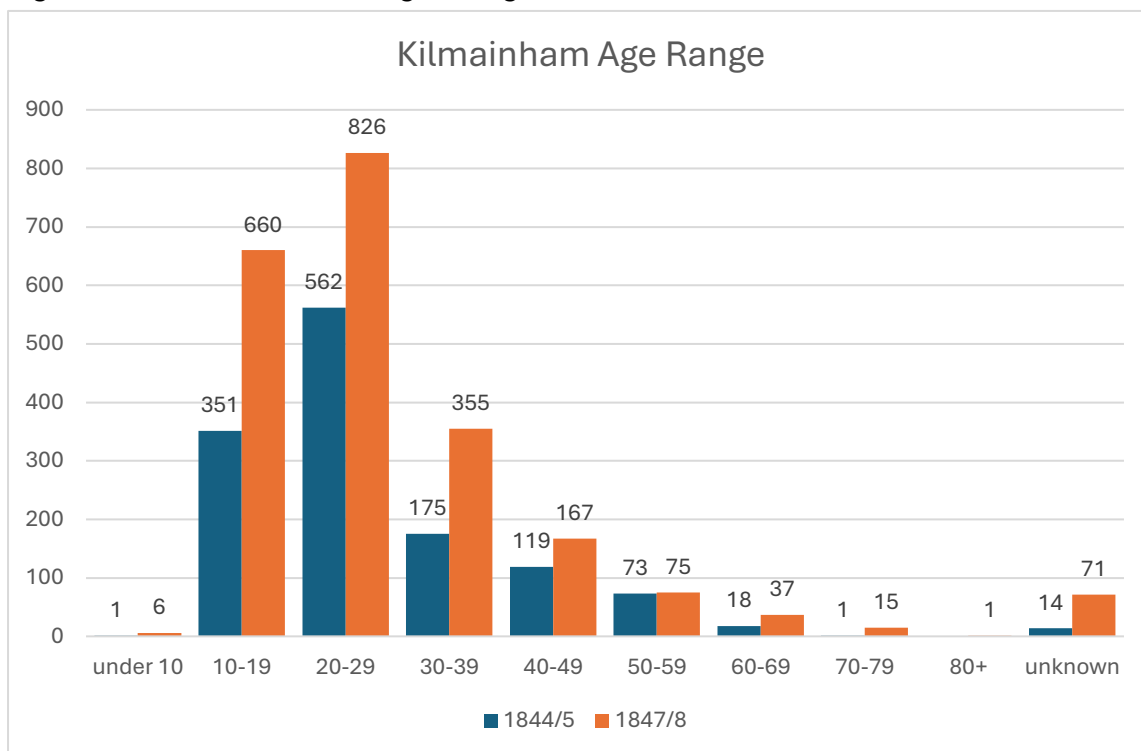
⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid., pp 455–507.

involving the GHW railway company, and loitering (Figure 4.16).⁵²² Such children undoubtedly experienced Kilmainham’s children’s exercise yard, ‘as inhospitable and grey as the rest of the gaol’.⁵²³

Figure 4.16 – Kilmainham Age Range⁵²⁴



Despite a significant increase in the number of female arrests in 1847/8, in all age groups between 10 and 49, the only cohort where there were more arrests of women than of men was the 30-39 age group, which was the age group most likely to be supporting young children and elderly parents. In this group there were 5.2% more women represented than men, strengthening the argument that increasingly women were turning to crime as living conditions deteriorated. This was most likely because of the loss of their spouse or family support group through death or migration. It is also possible that women were now being treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than previously, although this would be difficult, if not impossible to prove (Figure 4.17).⁵²⁵

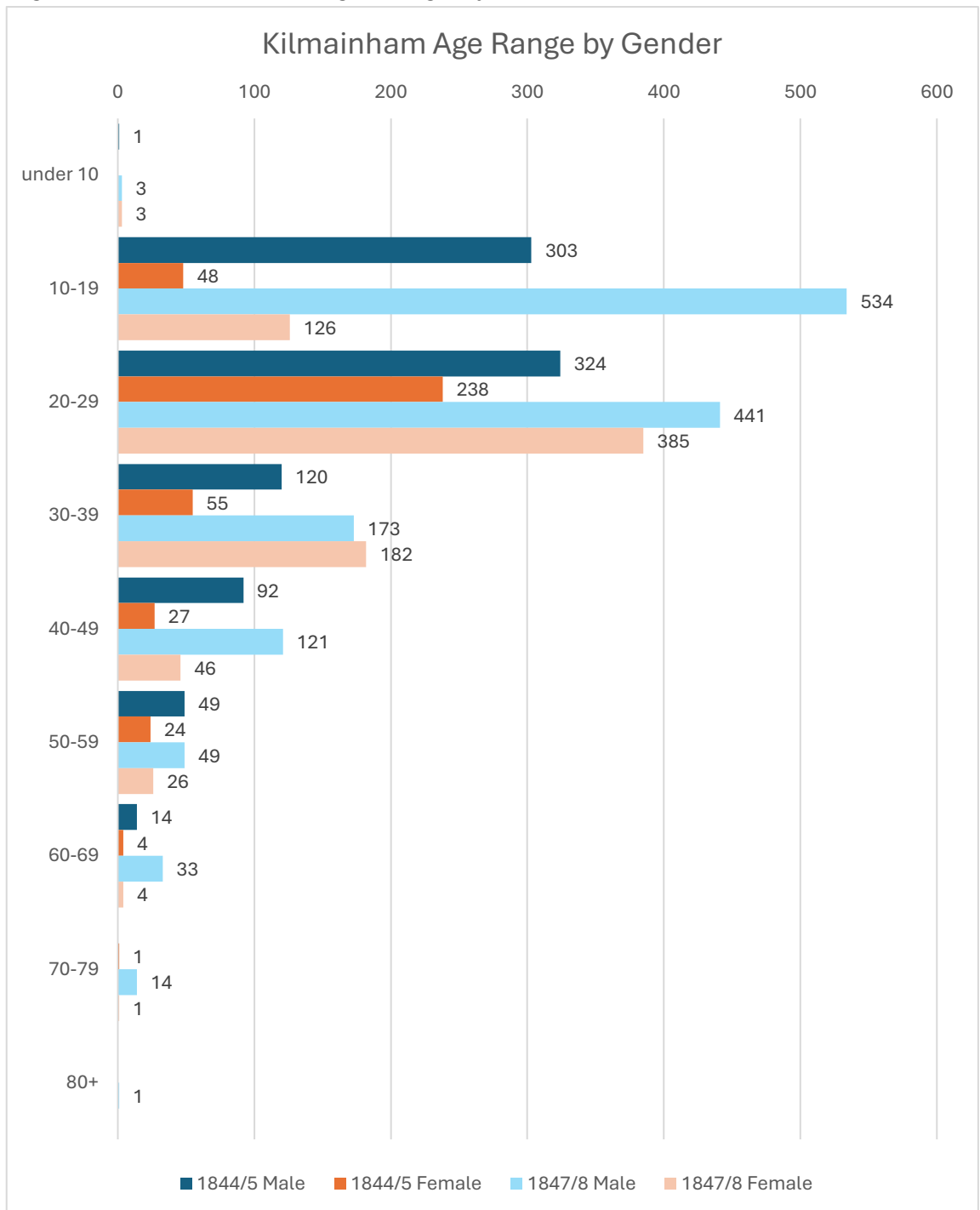
⁵²² Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵²³ O’Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, p. 18.

⁵²⁴ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

Figure 4.17 - Kilmainham Age Range by Gender⁵²⁶

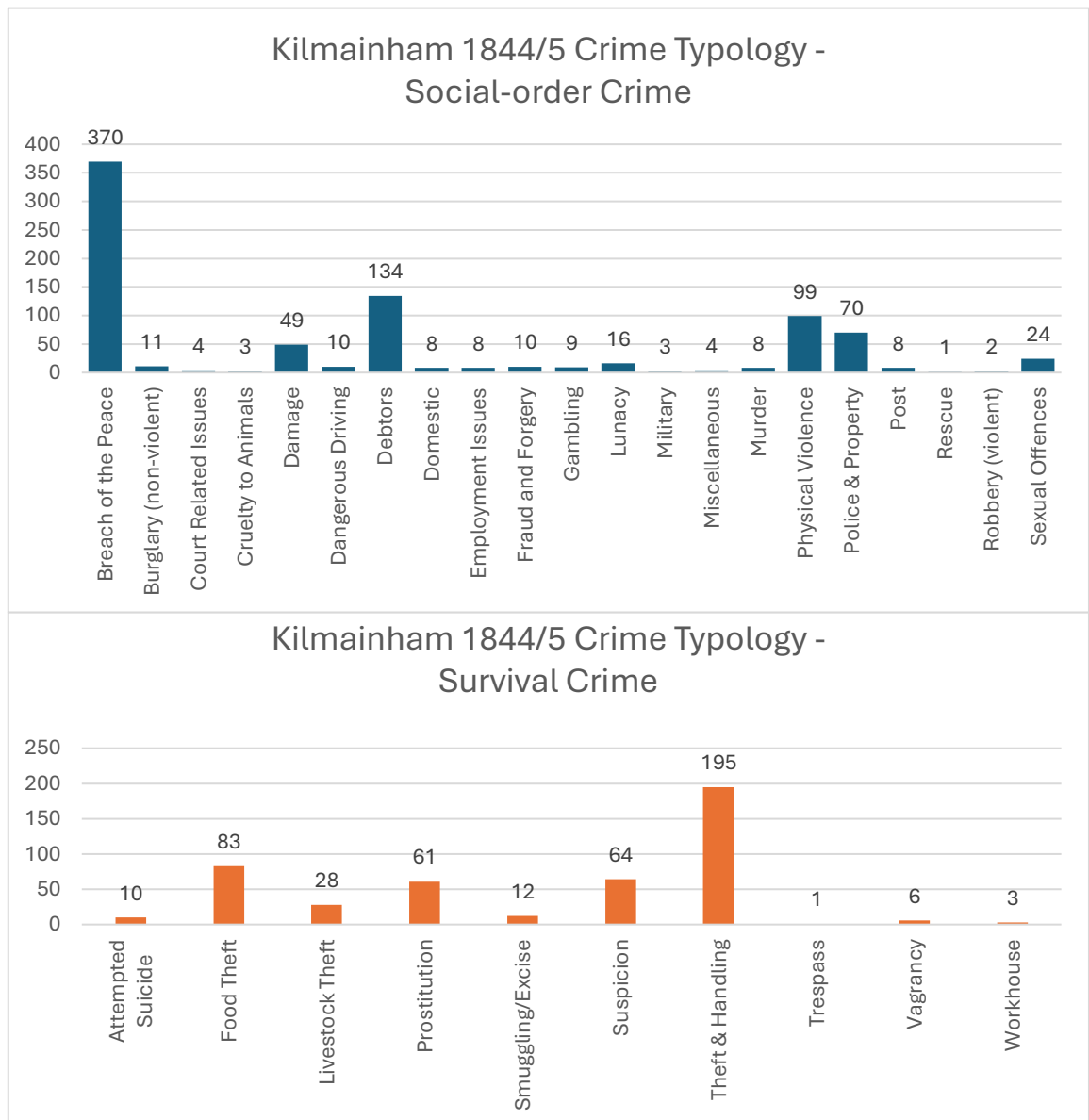


There are ten offences in the Kilmainham register which are absent from the rural registers; attempted suicide, cruelty to animals, dangerous driving, debtors, gambling, prostitution, smuggling, suspicion, and offences occurring within the workhouse, or regarding the postal service. These offences largely reflect the

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

different urban environment of Dublin, and likewise there is a reduction in agrarian crime in the Kilmainham registers. The highest arrests in the Kilmainham prison registers in 1844/5 were for breach of the peace (including faction-fighting), resulting in 84% more social-order crime than survival crime (851 cases of social-order crime, compared to 463 cases of survival crime) (Figure 4.18).⁵²⁷

Figure 4.18 – Kilmainham 1844/5 Crime Typology⁵²⁸



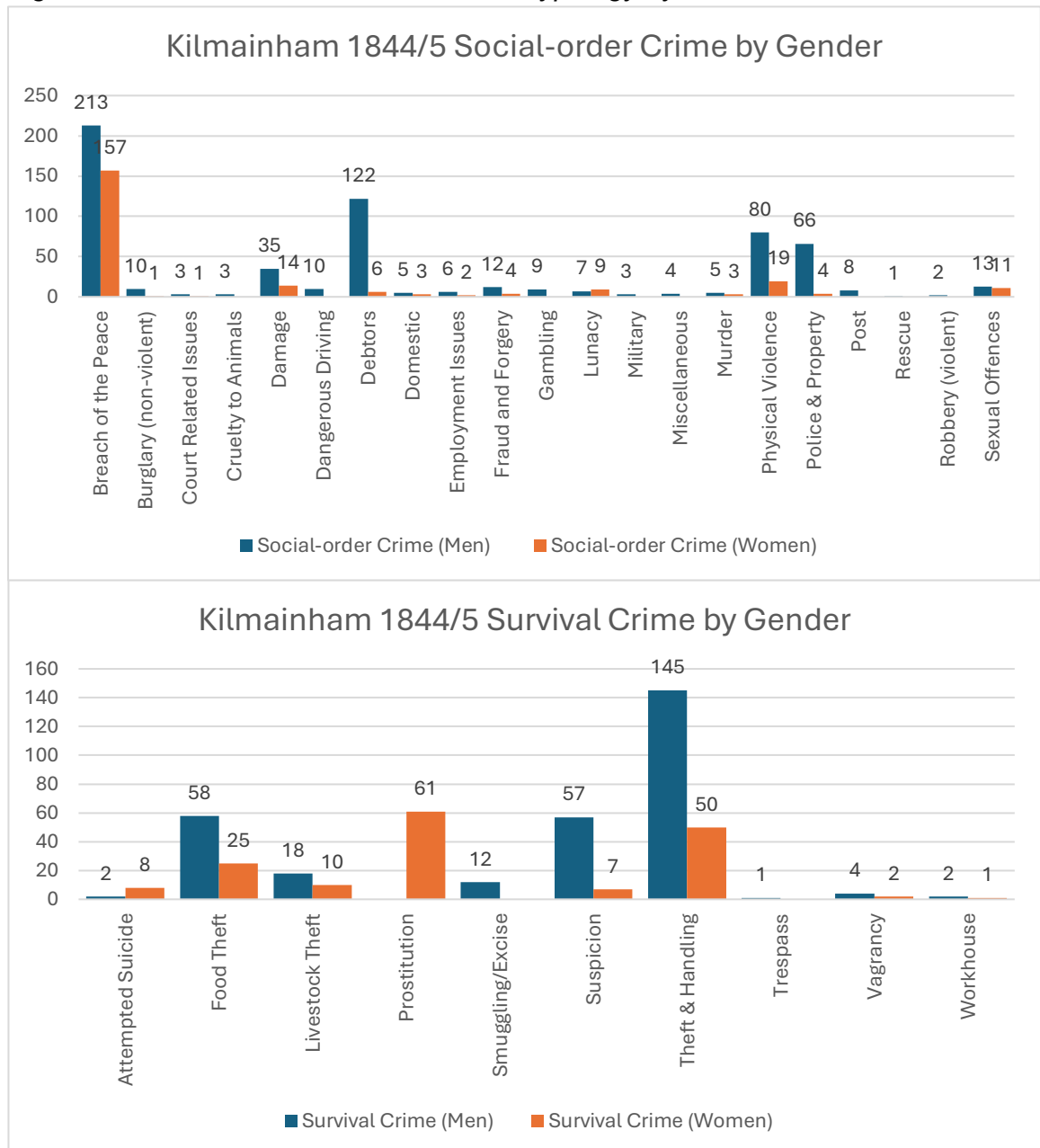
In 1844/5, the only crimes in which there were more female arrests than male arrests were attempted suicide, lunacy, fraud and forgery, and prostitution (Figure 4.19), the first two of which would not be classed as a crime today. There were

⁵²⁷ Ibid., pp 455–507.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

three arrests for fraud and forgery, William Reilly being arrested on suspicion of ‘uttering 3 shillings base coin’, while Catherine Watkins was arrested for ‘passing a bad note (value £1.0.0)’, and Mary Jenkinson for being ‘in possession of bad notes and sending Catherine Watkins to pass same’.⁵²⁹

Figure 4.19 – Kilmainham 1844/5 Crime Typology by Gender⁵³⁰



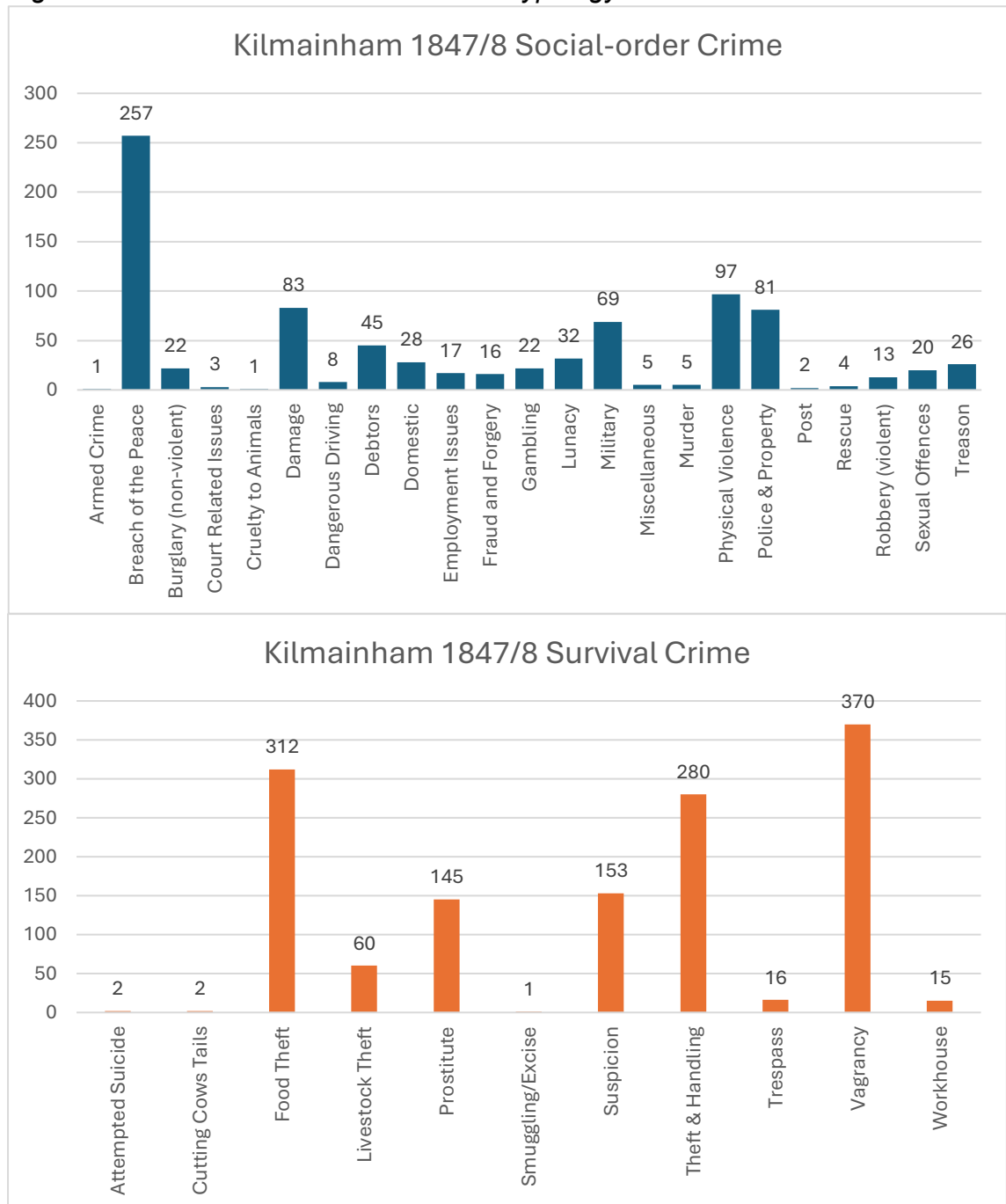
However, by 1847/8, the biggest cause of arrest was for theft and handling. Social-order arrests had increased very slightly from 851 to 857 (an increase of 0.71%), whilst arrests for survival crime had increased from 463 to 1,356, an

⁵²⁹ Ibid., pp 455–507, 466, 475.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., pp 455–507.

increase of 193% (1,356 cases of survival crime compared to 463 cases of social-order crime). Vagrancy and begging which had six offences in 1844/5, now had 370. Food theft increased by 276%, and theft and handling increased by 43%, all categorised in this thesis as survival crime. Prostitution, another survival crime and one which is possibly easier to commit in a city where anonymity was commonplace, had increased by 139% since 1844/5 (Figure 4.20).⁵³¹

Figure 4.20 - Kilmainham 1847/8 Crime Typology⁵³²



⁵³¹ Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵³² Ibid., pp 635–736.

By 1847/8, there are seven crime categories where there are more arrests of women than of men; breach of the peace, domestic crimes, lunacy, and murder within the category of social-order crimes, and attempted suicide, prostitution, and smuggling crimes within the category of survival crime. The arrests for men involved in social-order crime decreased from 617 in 1844/5 to 581 in 1847/8 (a decrease of 6.2%), whilst arrests for survival crime increased from 299 to 834 (an increase of 179%). Arrests for women involved in social-order crime increased from 234 to 275 (an increase of 17.5%), whilst arrests for survival crime increased from 164 to 523 (an increase of 219%). Figure 4.21 simplifies this information, indicating a significant increase in arrests for survival crime by 1847/8 for both men and women.⁵³³

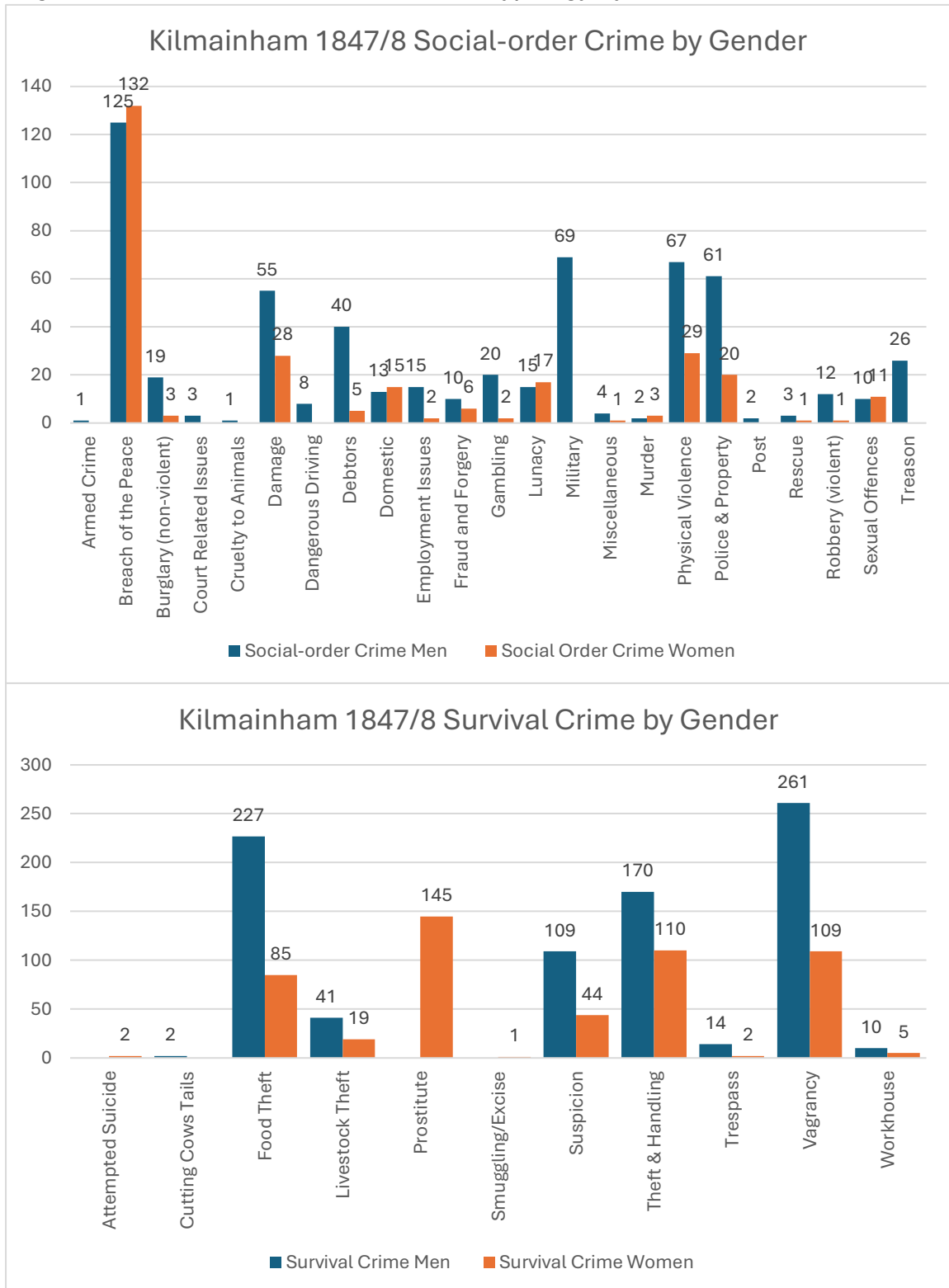
Although talking about a longer period, Carolyn Conley believes most occurrences of 'violent activity' during the nineteenth century in Ireland were either recreational or stemmed from 'petty disputes fuelled by alcohol'.⁵³⁴ There is no specific mention of drunkenness in the Kilmainham prison registers. Blum et al. state that drunkenness 'was punished with greater intensity following the 1872 Licensing Act', and so it is entirely possible that arrests for crimes such as window breaking, breach of the peace and so forth were also fuelled by alcohol, but this was simply not mentioned at the time of the Famine, possibly being of secondary importance to the main crime. By 1881, drunkenness had been closely linked to common assault,⁵³⁵ and it would be realistic to suppose that the effect of alcohol on human behaviour had not changed radically in the intervening years.

⁵³³ Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵³⁴ Carolyn Conley, cited in Hughes & MacRaild, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish', p. 3.

⁵³⁵ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 31.

Figure 4.21 – Kilmainham 1847/8 Crime Typology by Gender⁵³⁶

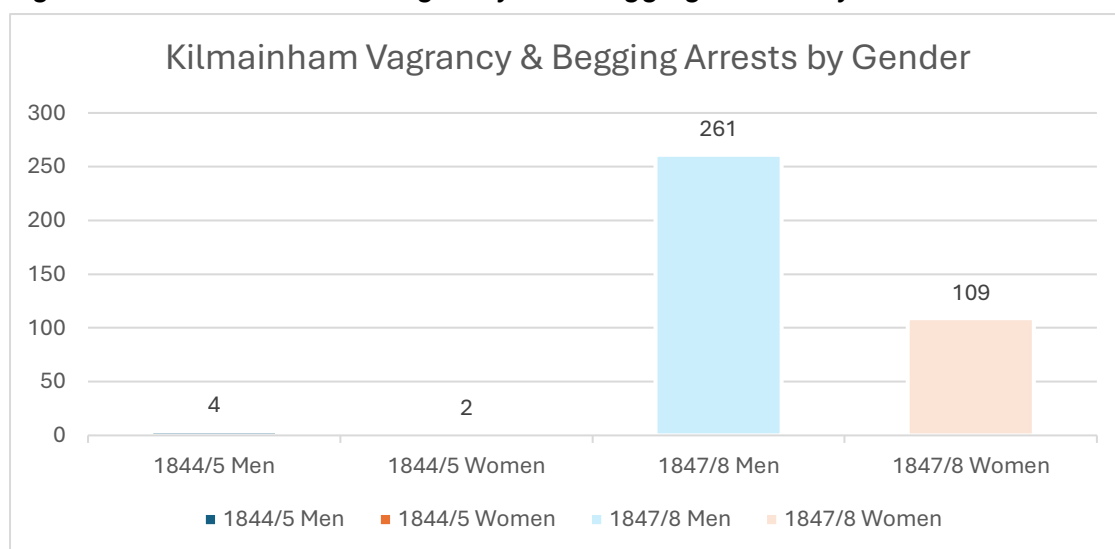


Whilst the arrest rate for men in 1844/5 for vagrancy and begging was double that of women, there were just six arrests in total. However, by 1847/8 arrests for

⁵³⁶ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

vagrancy and begging had increased to 370, a massive increase of 6,067%.⁵³⁷ This was an activity which Ciara Boylan describes as ‘social dislocation ... the movement of countless thousands across the countryside and into towns, cities, and ports in search of sustenance or escape’.⁵³⁸ Because of the introduction of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 it is important to ensure that a fair comparison is made with the pre-Famine prison registers for Kilmainham, and so the data will be looked at again with the vagrancy figures excluded (Figure 4.22).⁵³⁹

*Figure 4.22 – Kilmainham Vagrancy and Begging Arrests by Gender*⁵⁴⁰



Because the figures are so small, excluding the six vagrancy and begging arrests from the 1844/5 figures makes little difference to the overall results.

When this exercise is completed for the 1847/8 data for survival crimes, the results reveal 60% more men appeared in the prison registers than women, decreasing to 39% when vagrancy is excluded (Figure 4.23). This indicates that the introduction of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 altered the overall gender distribution of recorded survival crimes in the 1847/8 Kilmainham prison registers.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

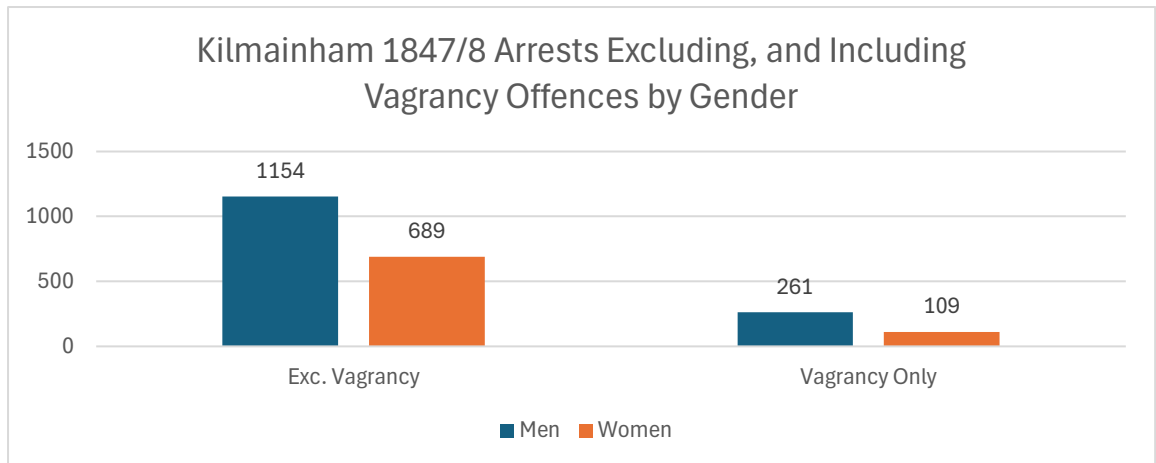
⁵³⁸ Ciara Boylan, ‘Famine’ in Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (eds), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford, 2016), p. 408.

⁵³⁹ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

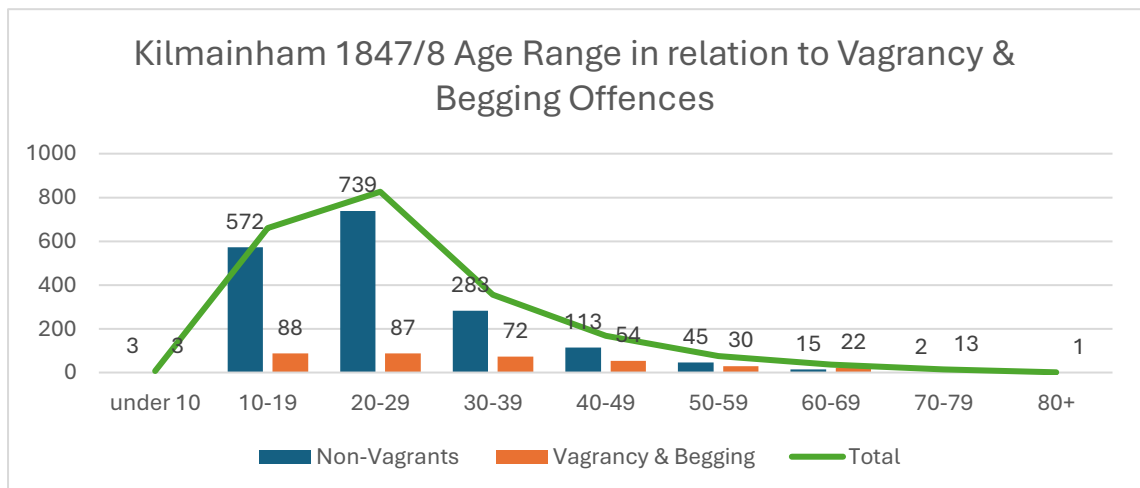
⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

Figure 4.23 – Kilmainham 1847/8 Arrests Relating to Vagrancy Offences by Gender⁵⁴²



The 20-29 age group remains the group most responsible for crimes in the 1847/8 Kilmainham register whether vagrancy and begging data is included or removed (Figure 4.24). It is only in the 60+ age group that there are more arrests for vagrancy and begging than for other crimes and where excluding this data would provide a different outcome.⁵⁴³ That more of the elderly are represented in the begging and vagrancy figures is not a surprising result, given their poorer health and mobility, and the possible loss of the family on which they had previously relied.

Figure 4.24 – Kilmainham 1847/8 Age Groups: Vagrancy & Begging Offences⁵⁴⁴



To summarise, the Kilmainham prison registers show that there are more men than women being arrested for crimes in both 1844/5 and 1847/8. However,

⁵⁴² Ibid., pp 635–736.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

although there is an increase in arrests of men between 1844/5 and 1847/8, there is a larger increase in arrests of women over the same period, reducing the gender gap. In 1844/5, the Kilmainham registers indicate a similar number of men committing crimes in both the 10-19 and 20-29 age categories, but with significantly more women being arrested between the ages of 20-29. By 1847/8, the numbers of men and women being arrested between the ages of 10-19 through to 40-49 have all increased significantly, and there are also more arrests of the very young and very old, mostly for vagrancy.⁵⁴⁵

Monthly arrest data for 1847/8 reveals a sudden decrease, to next-to-nothing, for vagrancy and begging arrests from January 1848 onwards.⁵⁴⁶ Recent scholarship suggests that this apparent decline in recorded vagrancy arrests does not necessarily indicate a reduction in vagrancy itself, but rather a shift in how the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 was enforced. As Peter Gray notes, the Act formed part of a broader legislative package introduced during the crisis, alongside measures such as the Poor Law Amendment Act and the Land Improvement Bill, through which Russell's government sought to strengthen administrative control while addressing the visible problems of mendicancy and distress.⁵⁴⁷ McCabe adds that, while the Act substantially expanded police powers, its enforcement was uneven and did not always translate into formal committal.⁵⁴⁸ Crowley similarly observes that the Act widened the range of responses available to authorities, allowing them to draw selectively on prison infrastructure alongside other informal or non-custodial responses, when managing visible destitution.⁵⁴⁹ It is therefore unlikely that vagrancy itself declined so abruptly. Rather, the pattern more plausibly reflects changes in enforcement and administrative practice, particularly given the documented overcrowding of workhouses and the continued presence of vagrancy offences later in 1848.⁵⁵⁰

Combined, these discretionary and selective enforcement practices help to explain the apparent contradiction identified by McCabe, whereby the Dublin

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 678–736.

⁵⁴⁷ Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, pp 276–7.

⁵⁴⁸ McCabe, 'The Impact of the Great Famine', p. 61.

⁵⁴⁹ Crowley, 'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison', p. 104.

⁵⁵⁰ Corrigan, 'Dublin Workhouses', p. 62.

County Grand Jury attributed the substantial rise in committals to Kilmainham Gaol in 1848 to the implementation of the Vagrancy Act,⁵⁵¹ even as the registers show a sharp decline in recorded vagrancy and begging offences from January onwards.⁵⁵² The reason cannot be because of the availability of Indian corn, as the poor had no money with which to pay for it. Public works had proved ineffective and had been closed down in favour of the Soup Kitchen Act 1847, which itself had ended between August and October 1847, depending on the location.⁵⁵³ The Irish Poor Law Amendment Act 1847 had legalised outdoor relief on 8th June, and the aged, the infirm, widows and children could now be provided with food outside of the workhouse, whilst the able bodied had to enter it to obtain relief,⁵⁵⁴ although this would not explain why the arrest rates dropped to almost nothing at the beginning of 1848.

It therefore seems likely that the sharp decline in recorded vagrancy arrests reflects a combination of overwhelmed enforcement capacity and the increasingly discretionary use of the Act, including the non-custodial removal of vagrants from the locality rather than their committal to prison. McCabe records that, following complaints from the Mendicity Association regarding inadequate enforcement, a 'vigorous enforcement' of the Act during 1848–49 resulted in the removal of approximately 3,000 vagrants, many of whom were non-locals, without this necessarily being reflected in prison registers.⁵⁵⁵ This interpretation aligns with wider historiographical characteristics of the 'ordinary constable as [a] discretionary law-enforcer', whose 'beat-level compromises' frequently moderated the 'intentions of legislators and police chiefs'.⁵⁵⁶ In Famine Ireland, such discretion was likely intensified by overwork, institutional overload, and humanitarian unease, factors that shaped enforcement practices even where legislation formally criminalised vagrancy. This issue will be returned to in Chapter 7. Accordingly, the decline in recorded vagrancy arrests does not weaken the argument that survival-related offending intensified during the Famine; rather, it highlights the uneven and adaptive operation of colonial law

⁵⁵¹ McCabe, 'The Impact of the Great Famine', p. 61.

⁵⁵² *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 678–736.

⁵⁵³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 293, 171–2, 287, 302–3.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 296–7, 308.

⁵⁵⁵ McCabe, 'The Impact of the Great Famine', pp 60–1.

⁵⁵⁶ Churchill, 'Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis', p. 138.

enforcement within a legal system that prioritised property protection and public order under British administration in conditions of systemic crisis.

Together, these enforcement dynamics contextualise the broader shift in crime patterns after 1844/5. Although there is only a small decrease in the number of arrests of men for social-order crime by 1847, and a slightly larger increase in the number of women being arrested for these crimes, there is a significant increase in the number of arrests of both men and women for crimes related to survival.

4.7 Comparative Analysis: Urban vs Rural

The increase in arrest figures in the Kilmainham prison registers from 1314 in 1844/5 to 2213 in 1847/8 indicates that arrests had increased by 68% over this period, closely correlating with the 60% increase in the arrest rate experienced by Nenagh (as far as can be established). Sligo saw a much larger increase in arrests for offences relating to excise offences of 397%, but as this figure relates to a specific offence, rather than the collection of offences represented in the Nenagh and Kilmainham registers, a fair comparison is difficult to make.⁵⁵⁷

However, the arrest rate certainly increased in Nenagh, Sligo, and Kilmainham between 1844/5 and 1847/8, indicating a wider trend in the arrest rate in both the rural and urban areas under analysis, and supporting the argument that many people were actively fighting to survive the Famine, causing an increase in crime. It seems likely that more people migrated to their local towns and cities, with fewer travelling as far as Dublin, than has previously been understood, filling the towns of Ireland with the destitute desperately seeking a means of survival.

Both the rural and urban prison registers show a marked increase in number of women being arrested for crimes in 1847/8, even excluding arrests for vagrancy.⁵⁵⁸ It is possible that labouring on the public works, of which there were a number in Tipperary and Sligo,⁵⁵⁹ caused some male deaths to occur sooner than would otherwise have happened, although large numbers of women also

⁵⁵⁷ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁵⁸ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁵⁹ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 75; A. R. G. Griffiths, 'The Irish Board of Works in the Famine Years' in *The History Journal*, xiii, no. 4 (1970), p. 637.

ended up on the public works.⁵⁶⁰ However, there is no reason to suppose that starvation and associated diseases resulting from the failure of the potato crop targeted men more than women, although Sidney Godolphin Osborne, an English aristocrat, Anglican cleric, philanthropist, and writer, (who visited eleven workhouses during a month-long visit to Ireland in 1850) wrote that ‘no one has yet I believe been able to explain, why it is, that men and boys, sink sooner under famine, than the other sex; still, so it is; go where you will, every officer will tell you, it is so’.⁵⁶¹ McCabe, however, believes that ‘women were more vulnerable than men to economic distress and destitution’, especially when the main family provider might be seeking work abroad.⁵⁶²

It is also recognised that some labourers deliberately aimed for a prison sentence, whilst their families stole, begged, or prostituted themselves outside of prison.⁵⁶³ The increase in the number of female arrests supports the argument that the support network which had previously enabled these women to scrape by in normal times no longer existed, forcing women to take ownership of the situation and turn to crime for the purposes of survival, either through food theft, theft of items to sell or exchange for food, or through the use of gaol as an alternative to the workhouse. In many cases the impetus for the crime was likely an attempt to keep their children and other dependents from death.

The prison registers for Nenagh and Sligo in 1844/5 show no arrests for the under 10 age group, and only 14 and five respectively in the over 60 age group. Kilmainham similarly reports one arrest within the under 10 age group, and 18 in the over 60 age group. These figures suggest a general trend throughout Ireland of care within the wider community if family support were unavailable. By 1847/8, this was no longer the case. Nenagh prison registers returned 77 arrests for under 10 years of age, and 33 for the 60 and over age group, while Sligo returned two under 10, and 16 over 60. Kilmainham registers indicate six arrests for the under 10-year age group, and 53 in the over 60 age group.⁵⁶⁴ This increase

⁵⁶⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 141, 143, 145.

⁵⁶¹ S. G. Osborne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland* (London, 1850), pp 2–3, 19.

⁵⁶² McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, pp 26–7.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁶⁴ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

throughout both rural and urban Ireland suggests that these age groups, the least self-sufficient, were now more vulnerable than previously and had been forced into criminal activity in an effort to survive, although the majority of arrests were within the 10-19 and 20-29 age groups.

In the Nenagh prison registers, there is a clear change from social-order and protest crime to crimes which could have been committed for survival. In Sligo, this is less obvious given that the only crimes recorded relate to illicit distillation, classed here as a survival crime.⁵⁶⁵ Contemporary observers also recognised this dynamic. Writing of Kilmactige in County Sligo in 1816, the Reverend James Neligan observed that private distillation was the only feasible means the poor people here have of paying their rents and supporting their families and that 'if it were made a felony they would not desist, as they might as well hang as starve'.⁵⁶⁶ Neligan's observation suggests that illicit distillation functioned not simply as criminal activity but as a recognised economic strategy within impoverished rural communities. The evidence would suggest that Sligo residents were endeavouring to survive by using familiar means; for some, this meant illicit distillation. It is possible, though not demonstrable from the available evidence, that some individuals may also have reported illicit activity in the hope of financial reward. Overall, the results from both Nenagh and Sligo indicate a significant increase in survival crime by 1847/8.⁵⁶⁷

In the Kilmainham registers, there is much less indication of protest crime in particular, as the land ownership issues of rural Ireland were not so relevant in an urban area, resulting in a natural lack of agrarian crime. However, by 1847/8, arrests for food theft had increased significantly from 83 to 312, whilst arrests for theft and handling had increased from 195 to 279. Vagrancy had also increased substantially,⁵⁶⁸ as might be expected, in part due to the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847, but also undoubtedly due to migration into the area by a desperate rural population.

⁵⁶⁵ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁶⁶ James Neligan, 'Parish of Kilmactige' in W. S. Mason (ed.), *A Statistical Account, or parochial survey of Ireland* (Dublin, 1816), p. 394.

⁵⁶⁷ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁵⁶⁸ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

Vagrancy offences had increased significantly in the Nenagh and Kilmainham registers by 1847/8, in Nenagh increasing from three in 1844/5 to 464 in 1847/8, and in Kilmainham increasing from six to 370. Although Nenagh registers are incomplete, and Kilmainham registers indicate a sudden drop in vagrancy and begging offences after December 1847, both datasets show a large influx of vagrants and beggars into urban areas as conditions continued to deteriorate, and the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 was enforced.⁵⁶⁹ The available data does not seem to support McCabe's conclusion that 'criminal records for Ireland reveal that by far the majority of people tried under the vagrancy laws were women'.⁵⁷⁰ In Nenagh, the data confirms there were 0.2% more men than women being arrested for vagrancy, but in Kilmainham this figure was 0.8%. The margins are small however, and the Nenagh records incomplete.⁵⁷¹ In 1850, an eyewitness account mentions Galway thronging with 'masses of nearly naked women and children',⁵⁷² and it is possible that further research into other prison registers would support this account, as well as McCabe's conclusion.

To summarise, it would appear that rural and urban Ireland were following the same general pattern of decreasing social-order and protest crime and increasing rates of survival crime. Whether the rural occupants were moving into their local towns or travelling to Dublin, there is no question that the population in such areas rose significantly due to eviction and blight. At the time, it was recognised that in the towns 'great inconvenience is felt from the prevalence of mendicancy', especially when 'the shops of the middle classes are very frequently beset by mendicants'. However, Lewis nevertheless reported to the Select Committee that there was also 'feeling in favour of asking and giving alms',⁵⁷³ an opinion supported by William Smith O'Brien, an Irish MP, and nationalist figure, who added that 'as long as the inclination of people is to give alms to persons whom they believe to be in a state of distress, you cannot repress that disposition'

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁵⁷⁰ McCabe, *Begging, Charity and Religion*, p. 26.

⁵⁷¹ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁵⁷² Osborne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*, pp 49–50.

⁵⁷³ G. C. Lewis, in Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland, sess 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi, p. 66.*

[mendicancy].⁵⁷⁴ Such statements indicate that providing charity was a long ingrained trait in Irish society, and therefore begging was also a long ingrained trait.

However, charity alone was not sufficient to make up for the loss of a major subsistence crop. With some variations due to the differing environment, it would seem that whether in rural Nenagh or Sligo, or urban Dublin, the changes in the crime pattern were similar, indicating that rural crime trends were also taking place in the urban environment of Dublin.

4.8 Kilmainham – Additional Information

The 1847/8 Kilmainham registers include additional information which is not available in either the Nenagh or Sligo registers. Although a rural/urban comparison is therefore not possible, the data is still worth investigating to establish what it can reveal about Irish society at the time of the Famine.

A *native place* column was manually added to the Kilmainham registers in 1846. The recording officer appears to have been asking for place of birth, providing an interesting insight into internal migration patterns at this time (Figure 4.25).⁵⁷⁵ Unlike England, there was no Law of Settlement in Ireland, meaning that relief could be supplied by any Poor Law Union, provided that the applicant was destitute, although it also meant that the Irish population could never gain a right to relief.⁵⁷⁶ This, therefore, was not the reason for this information being collected.

The records for 196 of the arrests did not indicate a place of birth, while 103 either did not specify a county, or gave a location outside of Ireland; 11 stated Ireland, 73 stated England, and 13 stated Scotland. Wales, Canada, America, and 'born at sea' were represented once each, and the Channel Islands were recorded twice. Of the 92 who stated places of birth outside of Ireland, 43 were arrested on suspicion of offences related to the military. However, those born in Canada, America, or the Channel Islands were all arrested on suspicion of food theft, whilst Jane McDermott, who was born at sea, was arrested for being an *idle*

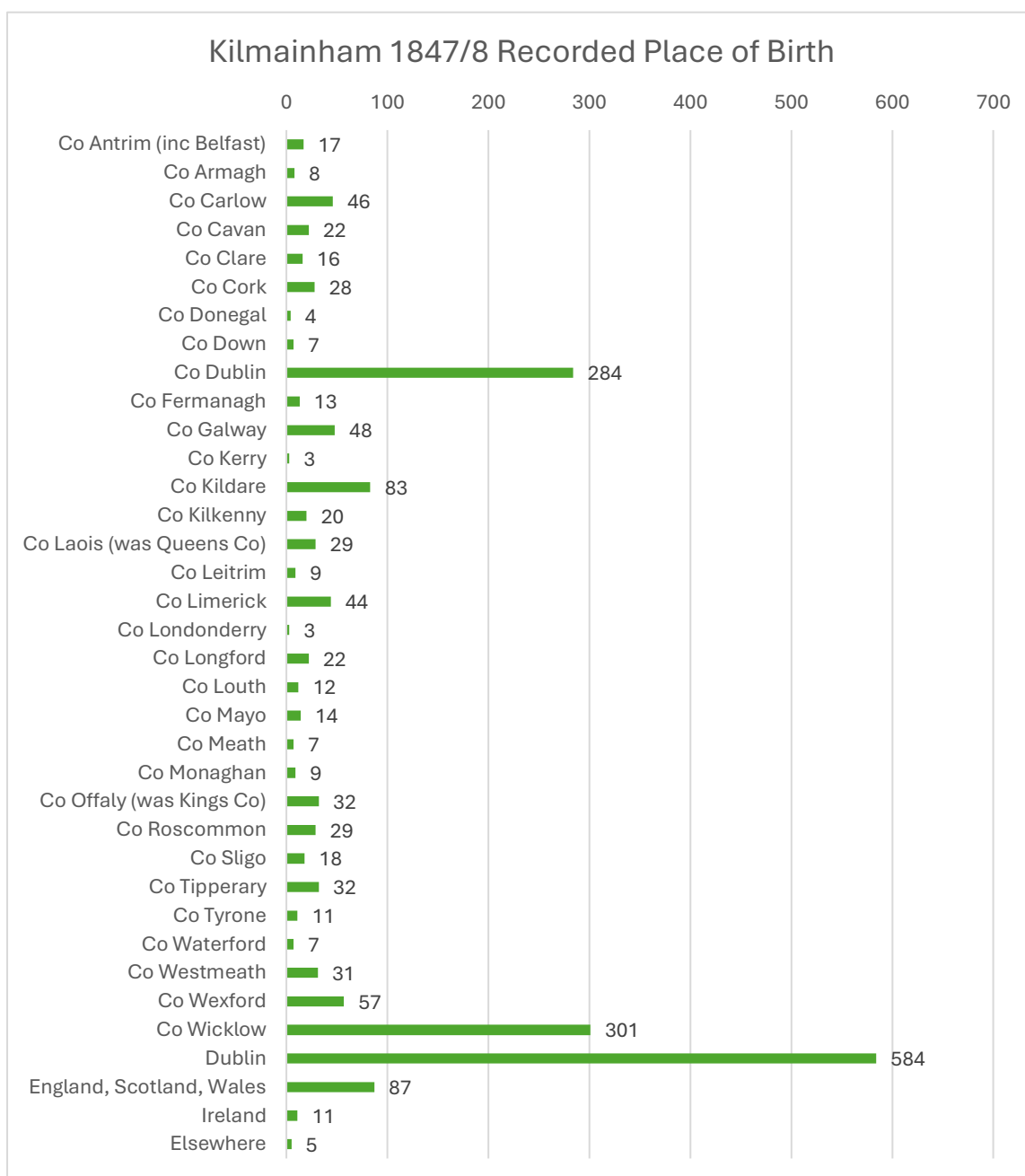
⁵⁷⁴ W. S. O'Brien, in *ibid.*, p. 866.

⁵⁷⁵ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, p. 553.

⁵⁷⁶ Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law', pp 44, 13–14.

*strolling beggar demanding alms.*⁵⁷⁷ Although the Irish could be removed from England back to Ireland under the English Laws of Settlement,⁵⁷⁸ the opposite did not apply to the 73 English who were recorded in the Kilmainham prison registers. 1914 arrests provided a county of birth within Ireland, and these results can be seen in figure 4.25 below:⁵⁷⁹

Figure 4.25 – Kilmainham 1847/8 Recorded Place of Birth⁵⁸⁰



⁵⁷⁷ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736, 642.

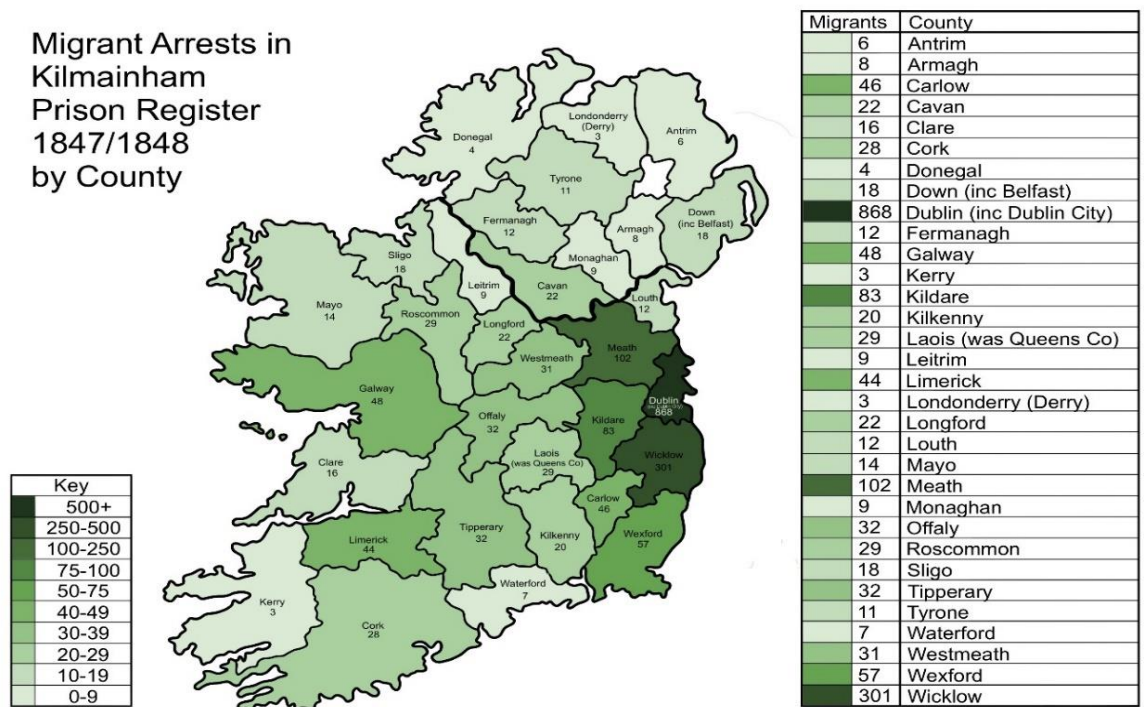
⁵⁷⁸ Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law', p. 44.

⁵⁷⁹ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

The majority of those arrested, and who supplied information, were born either in Dublin, County Dublin, or the adjacent county of Wicklow.⁵⁸¹ Although the north of the island is represented, figures from here are low, as might be expected when there was a significant gravitational pull from Belfast and its relatively vibrant economy, which could more easily absorb any excess rural population than could Dublin.⁵⁸² Overall, the migration figures into Dublin reduce in direct relation to the distance the county of origin was from Dublin (Figure 4.26),⁵⁸³ meaning that Connacht is much less represented than might have been expected, given its status as ‘the most distressed province in Ireland’.⁵⁸⁴ By 1847, many had already died, and many others emigrated; for those remaining, it would be logical to make way to their nearest town rather than an unfamiliar city which could be several hundred miles away. This migration undoubtedly also affected the crime rate in their home counties and towns, for example, the 18 people arrested who were from County Sligo, and the 32 who were from County Tipperary, were committing crimes in Dublin rather than their local area.⁵⁸⁵

Figure 4.26 – Migrant Arrests in Kilmainham 1847/8 by County⁵⁸⁶



⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 19–20.

⁵⁸³ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁵⁸⁴ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 157.

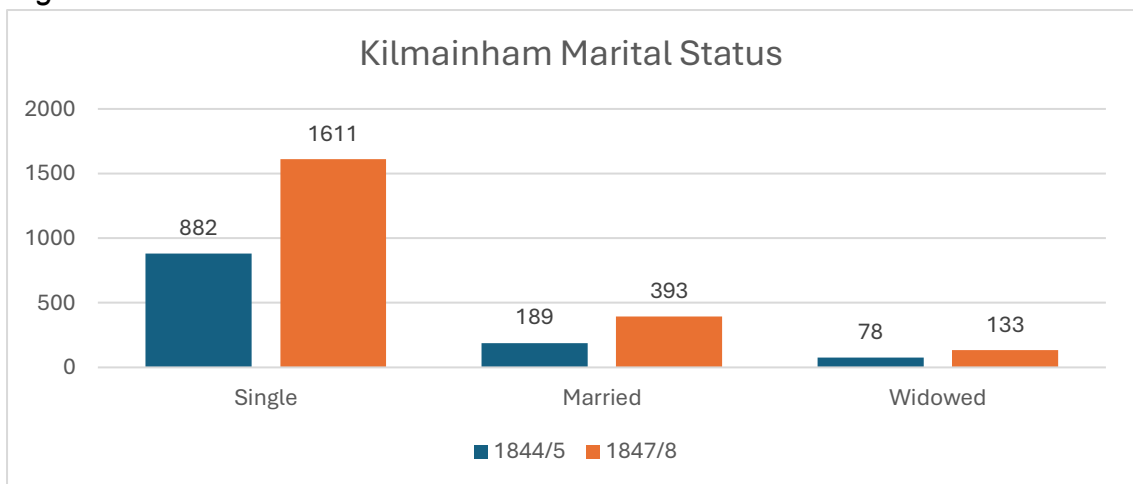
⁵⁸⁵ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

Whilst it is impossible to know how many of these people had already been living in Dublin prior to the Famine, these results nevertheless support the argument that people attempted to control the situation in which they found themselves by migrating to the towns and cities, turning to crime when they discovered that urban living was not the answer to their prayers, or that the workhouse refused entry because they were already full.

In 1844/5 marital status was not recorded in 165 out of 1314 arrests, but in 1847/8, out of 2213 arrests, only 76 have no marital status recorded. Each marital state shows a growth between 1844/5 and 1847/8, with an 83% increase for single people, 108% for married people, and 71% for widowed (Figure 4.27).⁵⁸⁷

*Figure 4.27 – Kilmainham Marital Status*⁵⁸⁸



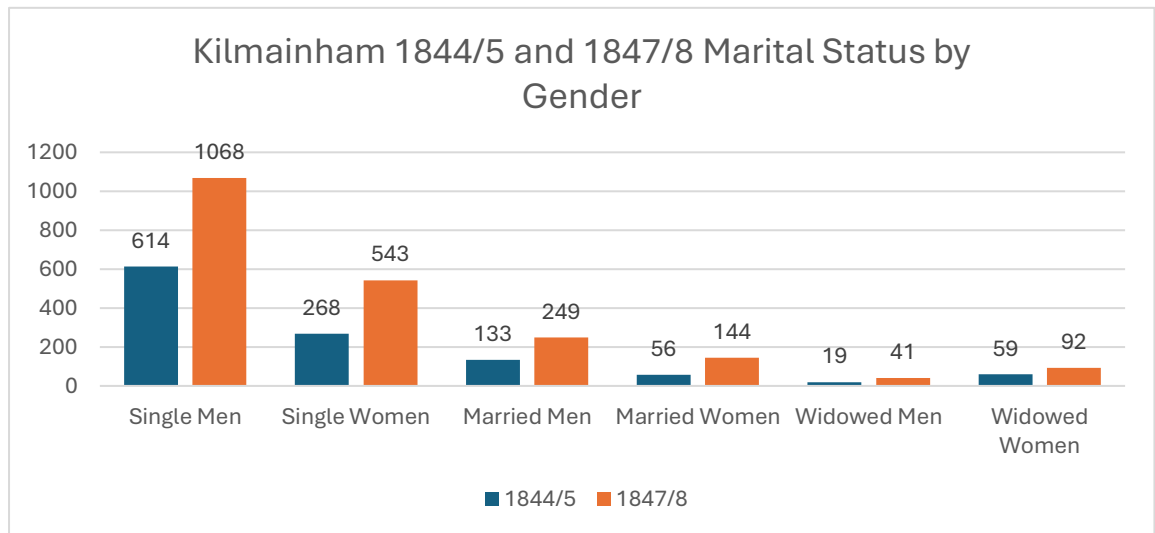
Both single and married categories for 1844/5 and 1847/8 show more arrests of men than of women, but it is the percentage increase that is the most interesting, with a growth of 74% for single men compared with a growth of 103% for single women, and a growth of 87% for married men, compared with a growth of 157% for married women. The widowed category for both years includes more women than men, although with a growth of 116% for men compared to a smaller growth of 56% for women. There are no widows or widowers listed in either year for the under-19 age group. The proportion of single men compared to women dropped from 129% more men than women to 97%, while the proportion of the widowed fell from 211% to 124% more women than men. However, the most significant growth occurs in the number of married women being represented in the arrest

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

figures, compared to the number of men; 137.5% more men than women in 1844/5, which is reduced to 73% in 1847/8 (see Figure 4.28).⁵⁸⁹

Figure 4.28 – Kilmainham Marital Status by Gender⁵⁹⁰



Out of a total of 393 married entries in 1847/8, only 14 appear to relate to couples being arrested together. In total, 274 married entries originated from outside of Dublin and County Dublin. This, combined with the increased number of married women included in the registers for 1847/8 (a growth of 157%),⁵⁹¹ would support the hypothesis that many family groups of married women and children were forced into vagrancy, an activity which appears to have been more likely when the male head of the household was absent for whatever reason. Given that a majority of married prisoners originated from outside the capital, this pattern likely reflects displacement affecting both rural and urban households, rather than being an exclusively urban phenomenon.

There were a wide range of occupations recorded in the prison registers for Kilmainham, and so, similarly to the *reason for arrest* data, these occupations have been simplified into categories. Table 4.3 provides a sample of this categorisation. In the few cases where multiple occupations were provided, the first one is used. Where soldiers stated their occupation, they have nevertheless been categorised as *military* as this is considered their primary role. There were

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., pp 635–736.

484 arrests without a listed occupation in 1844/5 and 129 in 1847/8.⁵⁹² This categorisation necessarily reflects the imprecision of the source material, as the registers record official categories rather than clear or consistent occupational identities.

Table 4.3 – Occupation Categorisation

Description	Includes
Artisan	painter, blacksmith, apothecary, nailor [sic]
Building	carpenter, plasterer, road contractor, stone mason
Clerical/Admin	clerk, civil engineer, teacher, school master
Clothing	tailor, dressmaker, stocking knitter, cloak maker
Coast & Waterways	sailor, fisherman, boatman, sailor boy
Dealer	Hardware, software, plain worker, rags
Driver	carboy, float driver, drayman, car man
Food Production	dairy boy, cow boy, farmer
Food Retail	butcher, vintner, confectioner, tavern keeper
Footwear	shoemaker, boot boy
Gentleman/Pensioner	
Hair and Hats	bonnet maker, hatter, curled hair manufacturer
Industry	factory boy, coal porter, moulder, fireman to steam engine
Military	soldier, deserter, military pensioner, discharged soldier
Miscellaneous	singer, wife of, beggar boy, gambler
None	stated as such on arrest record
Other Servant	cook, gardener, groom, stable boy
Prostitute	stated as such on arrest record
Servant	no further detail provided on arrest record
Textile	fancy worker, comber/spinner, calico printer, weaver, dyer
Unskilled	sweep, washer woman, porter, straw platter

In particular, the frequently used category *labourer* presents interpretive challenges. The prison registers do not distinguish between agricultural labourers and urban casual workers (such as dock labourers, porters, or carters), meaning that this group cannot be reliably disaggregated by sector or location. Compound labels such as *dealer/labourer*, *gardener/labourer*, and *jobber/labourer* suggest

⁵⁹² Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

patterns of insecure, hybrid, or seasonal employment, reinforcing the likelihood that the description of labourer functioned as a flexible catch-all term for precarious work rather than a precise occupational classification. As a result, the occupational data should not be read as reflecting an exclusively urban labour profile.

To give an example of the wide range of occupations appearing in the registers and how necessary it was to provide some form of categorisation, the following occupations have all been categorised as tradesmen, artisan, or skilled worker, as can be seen below (Table 4.4). These groupings should be understood as a pragmatic analytical framework rather than a definitive reconstruction of prisoners' economic identities, particularly for lower-status and casual forms of work.

Table 4.4 – Occupation Typology

Skilled Worker	Unskilled Worker
Artisan	Coast & Waterways
Building	Dealer
Clerical/Admin	Driver
Clothing	Food Production
Food Retail	Industry
Footwear	Labourer
Gentleman/Pensioner	Military
Hair and Hats	Miscellaneous
Other Servant	None
Textile	Servant
	Prostitute

These tables illustrate how certain occupations have been classed as unskilled or skilled for the purposes of this thesis. While many named occupations reflect recognisably urban trades, the large and undifferentiated category of labourer, combined with prisoners' frequent origins outside Dublin, suggests that a substantial proportion of those recorded may have had agricultural or mixed rural–urban employment backgrounds. Any inference about the spatial character of work must therefore remain cautious. This information can be simplified further

(Figures 4.29-4.31 below), indicating that in 1844/5 there were 316% more unskilled workers represented in the Kilmainham prison registers than skilled workers. This had increased to 519% by 1847/8. In 1844/5, prostitution was not stated as an occupation in the registers, and consequently, these arrests are not included in the following figures.⁵⁹³

Figure 4.29 – Kilmainham Skilled Occupations⁵⁹⁴

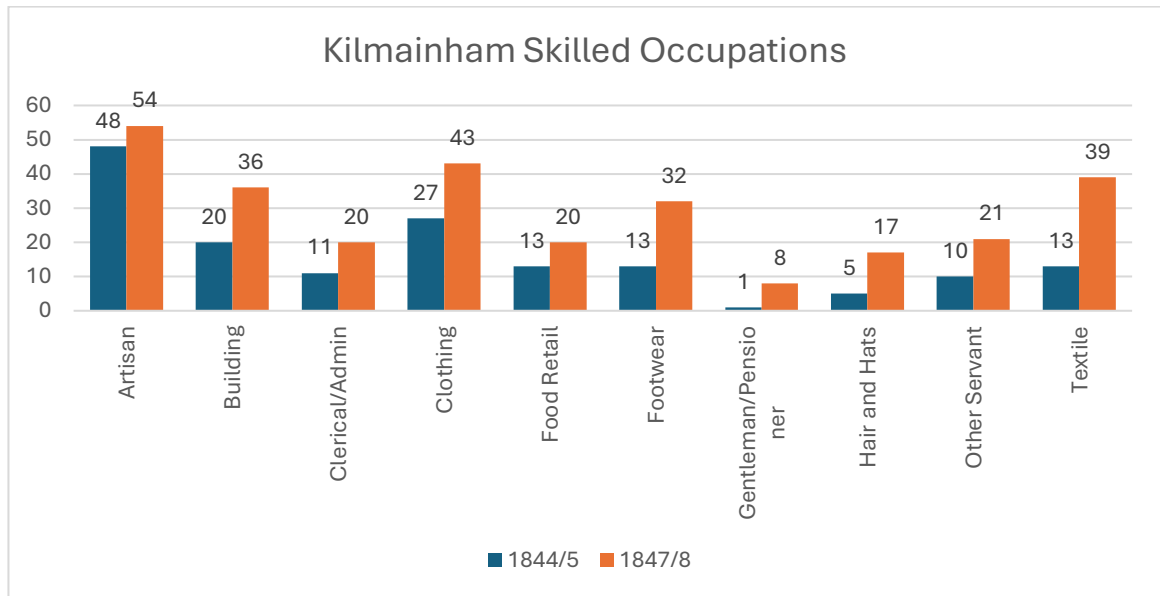
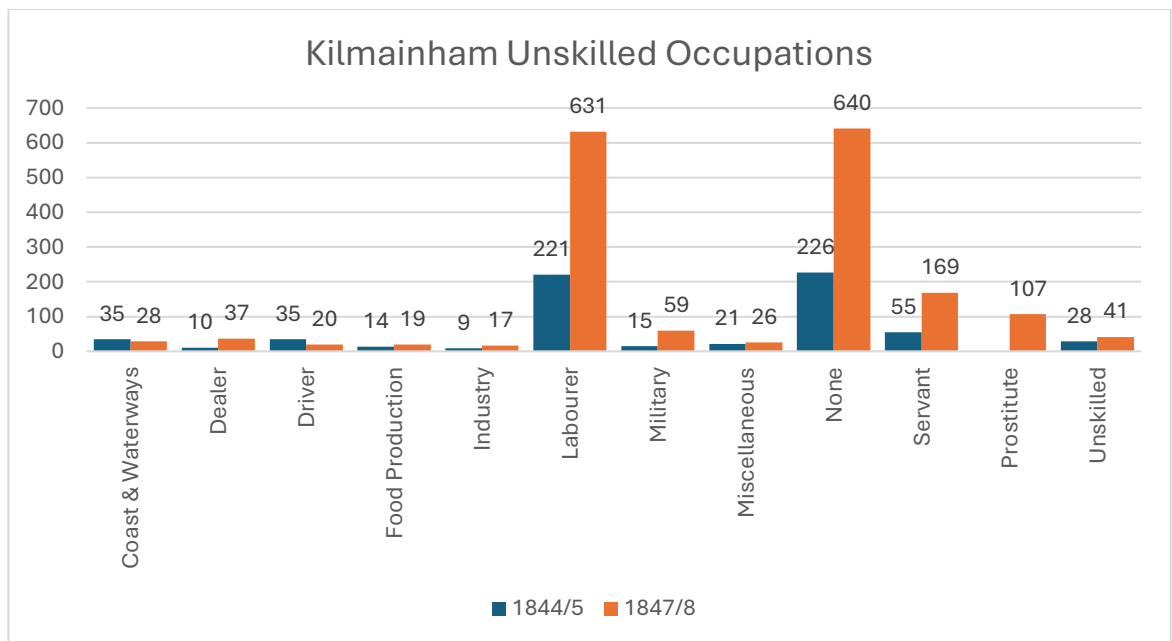


Figure 4.30 – Kilmainham Unskilled Occupations⁵⁹⁵



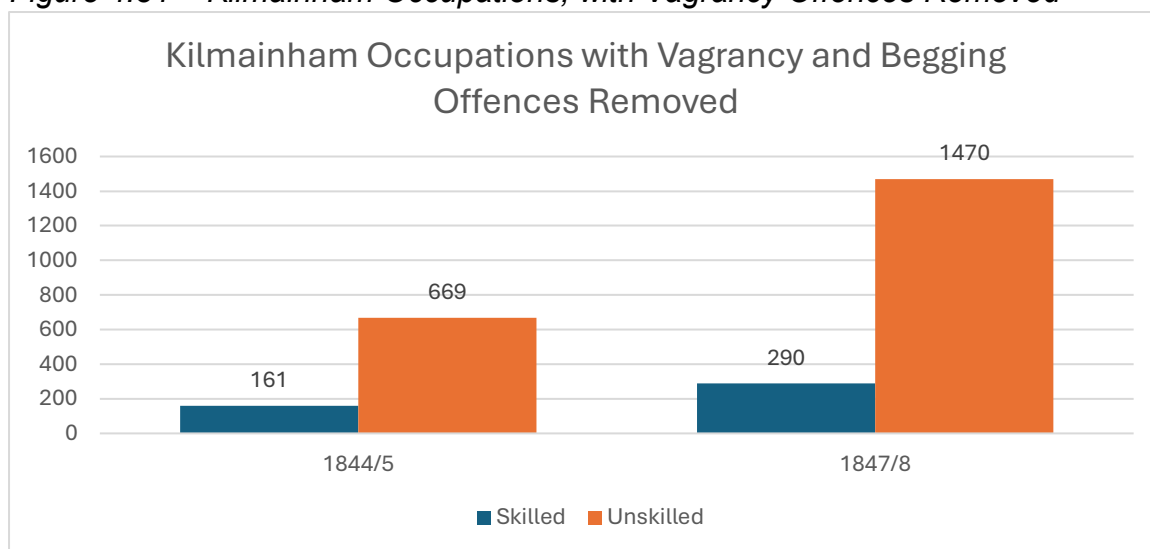
⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

Of the 1,794 arrests of unskilled people in 1847/8, 324 (18%) relate to vagrancy and begging, however, even when those arrests are removed from the figures, there are still 407% more arrests of unskilled offenders compared to skilled⁵⁹⁶ (Figure 4.31).

*Figure 4.31 – Kilmainham Occupations, with Vagrancy Offences Removed*⁵⁹⁷



By 1847/8, the excess of unskilled workers represented in the Kilmainham prison registers had increased from 316% to 519%.⁵⁹⁸ The increased presence of some skilled occupations would suggest that it was not solely the lowest social groups who were committing crimes by 1847/8; skilled workers increasingly turned to crime, as the recession brought on by the Famine caused them to lose either their employment, their customer base, or most likely both.

It is unclear whether an unemployed skilled worker would be recorded in the 1847/8 register by previous occupation or by current unemployed status. However, the results indicate that the Famine did not just impact those at the very bottom of the social ladder but also affected those who might generally be considered solid working class or middle class, and not part of Burke's 'swinish multitude'.⁵⁹⁹ Many of these people, who were usually in regular employment and better-off than rural cottiers prior to the Famine, had already used their funds to

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., pp 635–736.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., pp 635–736.

⁵⁹⁹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 117.

flee the country, along with a large number of 'formerly 'comfortable' farmers' as the 'threat of bankruptcy and eviction' hung over them.⁶⁰⁰

Vic Gatrell and Tom Hadden state that, 'as in the case of any average, however, national and county crime rates may mask important and perhaps contradictory movements in the incidence of criminal activity, often of a very localised character'.⁶⁰¹ The very localised characters of County Tipperary, County Sligo, and Dublin can be seen in the results above. Nevertheless, the data also reveals that the Famine caused a change in the crime typology from an emphasis on social-order and protest crimes in rural areas, to survival crime, an equally consistent result whether Nenagh or Kilmainham prison registers are being examined, supporting the conclusion of Gatrell and Hadden that offences such as assault fall, whilst theft rises during times of depression.⁶⁰² A clear rise in the theft of food, personal or household items that could then be sold to purchase food, can be seen. However, an unexpected undercurrent of social-order offences continued. Some may have been driven by other forces; a number were undoubtedly due to protests against the situation and may have potentially included actions aimed at obtaining food.

Men remained the main offenders, although the gender gap reduced significantly as many women became involved in crime, particularly in rural areas and to a lesser degree within the Kilmainham registers. In both the rural and urban locations examined, 1847/8 saw increased representation in the prisoner registers of the under-10 and over-60 age groups, indicating that those dependent on others for survival were either arrested along with them, or were forced to turn to crime when their usual support network failed them. In part, this may have been due to loss of family, friends, and neighbours through death, eviction, or migration, and would have included families where the breadwinner had left the country to find work before sending for their dependents because the family only initially had enough money for one fare. The majority of arrests in both periods of interest were of those in the 10-29 age group, with 1847/8 Nenagh being the only prison register examined which differed from this, with more

⁶⁰⁰ K. A. Miller, 'Emigration to North America in the Era of the Great Famine' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 214–5.

⁶⁰¹ Gatrell & Hadden, 'Criminal Statistics and Their Interpretation', p. 362.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 371.

arrests being made from the 10-19 age group - a result which may be influenced by the lack of a complete register for this period.

Kilmainham prison registers also contained some additional information. *Native place* data indicates that migration into Dublin was most likely to take place from the surrounding counties and decreased the further away from Dublin the migrant lived. There were exceptions, but this result suggests that those who lived a significant distance from Dublin were most likely to migrate to their local towns, a conclusion supported by the explosion of vagrancy arrests in 1847/8 in Nenagh, despite incomplete prison registers.⁶⁰³

Arrests of single, married, and widowed offenders all increased significantly between the two dates, but the category of women offenders who are married increases the most significantly.⁶⁰⁴ Whilst their spouses could be nearby, this result nevertheless supports the argument that families were left behind whilst their provider searched for work abroad before sending for them, having to find their own means of survival in the meantime. This understanding is supported by the arrival of many spouses, children, elderly parents, and siblings, to the United States of America in the early 1850s,⁶⁰⁵ but somewhat contradicts Woodward, who writes that 'the anticipated increase in female crime only partially materialized. In fact, during the Famine years, the male-female crime gap widened, although females tended more toward protest crime'.⁶⁰⁶ Woodward's conclusion may be based on a wider array of records. However, the three sets of prison registers examined for this thesis all indicate a marked increase in arrests of women, significantly closing the male-female crime gap, who appear to have been committing crimes to survive, rather than in protest.⁶⁰⁷

Although many arrests did not include occupation details, the information that is available indicates a substantial increase in arrests of skilled workers between 1844/5 and 1847/8 but an even bigger increase in the unskilled workers

⁶⁰³ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 77–112, 348–404; NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; NAI, *Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁶⁰⁵ Miller, 'Emigration to North America', p. 215.

⁶⁰⁶ Woodward, 'Transportation Convictions', pp 86–7.

⁶⁰⁷ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; NAI, *Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35; NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

category.⁶⁰⁸ This result supports the argument that by the summer of 1848, those with the funds to do so had already left Ireland to look for a new life abroad, while the financially vulnerable were hit the hardest by deteriorating conditions.

The true number of offences being committed was undoubtedly higher than the number of arrests represented in the prison registers. However, despite J J Tobias' assertion that due to a number of changing variables 'criminal statistics have little to tell us about crime and criminals in the nineteenth century', whether 'produced at the time or assembled later by investigation of court records',⁶⁰⁹ the above results nevertheless support the argument that the failure of the potato crop caused an interlinking sequence of criminal events. Due to the loss of the potato crop any spare money was used to purchase food. Consequently, there was less demand for other goods and services, causing a cost-of-living crisis for practically everyone. Only those with money, including tradesmen, skilled workers, and the artisan class, could afford to leave Ireland, and for some this would have meant leaving their dependents behind until work had been found and fares could be sent back home. As conditions continued to deteriorate, these dependents, alongside the broader financially vulnerable population, were increasingly confronted with the necessity of choosing whether to engage in criminal activity as a means of survival. At the same time, many other desperate people moved into the towns and cities, in the hope of a better chance of survival than they could obtain in the countryside. Overall, the patterns of crime discovered from analysis of the prison registers would demonstrate that the change in crime typology from social-order to survival crime was similar in both rural and urban environments.

The prison registers also demonstrate that there was not total societal breakdown; the legal justice system continued to operate, even under severe strain. In this sense, the prison system functioned as an instrument of colonial governance, processing behaviours associated with subsistence through legal frameworks designed primarily to protect property and maintain public order. An almost complete lack of vagrancy arrests in the Kilmainham registers after

⁶⁰⁸ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

⁶⁰⁹ J. J. Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century* (London, 1967), pp 21, 10.

December 1847 suggests that the system was becoming strained and that the 1847 Vagrancy Act was being used to disperse mobile populations rather than to imprison them, meaning that the absence of arrests does not necessarily indicate a reduction in vagrancy itself. This conclusion is supported by Woodward who observes that, with regard to the NAI Transportation Register, record keeping quality deteriorated after 1845, most likely as a result of the Famine. He adds that 'overloading of the courts also created a lag between committal and trial',⁶¹⁰ whilst the overloading of the prisons was another issue. This is also referred to by R J Scally, who believes that 'the dramatic rise in the number and severity of criminal sentences while the famine lasted gives a harrowing testimony to their intentions in policing Ireland in the midst of famine'.⁶¹¹

The results discussed in this chapter confirm that survival crime increased during the Great Famine, indicating that people demonstrated individual agency, despite the immense structural constraints imposed on them by colonial governance, including a legal and administrative system that prioritised property protection and public order under British rule, alongside poverty, and starvation. While traditional historical narratives have often portrayed victims of the Famine as passive, these results highlight the resilience and adaptability that many ordinary people demonstrated in their active efforts to survive. Viewed through the conceptual framework developed earlier in the thesis, these patterns reveal how famine conditions generated anomic social environments, within which individuals exercised restricted agency while confronting profound social and psychological disruption. The following chapter builds on these findings by examining the processes of conviction and transportation, exploring what these patterns of survival crime meant for those drawn into the penal system during the Famine.

⁶¹⁰ Woodward, 'Transportation Convictions', p. 65.

⁶¹¹ R. J. Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland* (Oxford: New York, 1995), pp 103–4.

Chapter 5: The Convict Experience

5.1 Introduction

Various punishments were imposed on those recorded in the Kilmainham and Nenagh prison registers, one of which was transportation to destinations such as Australia, Bermuda, and Spike Island (off the coast of County Cork). For the purposes of this thesis, transportation to Van Diemen's Land is of particular importance, since the extensive records generated by the process, especially the conduct registers, offer rare insight into convicts' behaviour after sentencing. Such evidence is not available for the wider Irish population, nor for those sent to Bermuda, Spike Island, or retained in Irish prisons.

Consequently, this chapter focuses specifically on transportation to Van Diemen's Land, exploring both the practical realities of the penal system and the ways in which convicts exercised personal agency within it. Once in Van Diemen's Land, most convicts ceased to be part of the Irish story and instead became part of the emerging Australian one. Attention will be given to the psychological impact of transportation, its effects of dislocation, stigma, and trauma, alongside the strategies convicts employed to assert control over their lives. By tracing their actions and experiences, from initial offence to receiving certificates of freedom, it will be shown that, even under conditions of coercion, many convicts demonstrated resilience and agency, reconstructed their identities, and forged new paths in an unfamiliar land. Rather than treating transportation as an endpoint to Irish criminal justice, the chapter approaches it as a further stage of confinement, one that relocated punishment across imperial space and reshaped the possibilities for survival, compliance, and resistance. Conceptually, the chapter links the thesis's earlier discussion of anomie and limited agency to the penal realm. It treats transportation as a mechanism through which famine-driven behaviours were reclassified as criminal, then managed through institutions designed to protect property and maintain order. The conduct registers are used not simply to narrate convict lives, but to evaluate whether the patterns identified in Chapter 4 persist after displacement, including whether survival-driven offenders continued to offend once basic subsistence was secured.

By contrast, convicts sent to Bermuda could not remain there on release; they were either returned to Ireland or re-routed to Western Australia.⁶¹² Those confined on Spike Island remained within Ireland's borders and, like prisoners serving shorter sentences in Irish gaols, their experiences and eventual outcomes will be examined in the following chapter. Accordingly, Bermuda and Spike Island are treated here only as brief points of comparison, to clarify what was distinctive about the Van Diemen's Land system and what the surviving evidence can and cannot show. The experience of prisoners sent to Bermuda and Spike Island will be covered more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

The transportation system, which sent thousands of convicts to Australia, was a direct product of colonial expansion, forming part of a wider imperial strategy that used penal labour to support the development and maintenance of settler colonies. While rooted in coercion and displacement, it created the foundations of settler societies where some individuals could eventually find opportunities, whether as a pardoned convict or a free settler arriving in Australia, Canada, or the United States of America. Yet such opportunities were uneven and contingent, and for many convicts they were inseparable from ongoing surveillance, stigma, and labour discipline. These movements were made possible by imperial transport and administrative networks that redistributed labour across the British Empire, opening new, though often precarious, prospects for those fleeing famine or poverty.

Crime in Ireland increased during the Famine, and although transportation affected only a minority of offenders, it provides particularly rich evidence for analysing displacement, punishment, and limited decision-making. This chapter situates Famine-era transportees within the longer history of Irish convict transportation, which sent around 26,500 convicts from Ireland to Australia between 1791 and 1853.⁶¹³ Between 1840 and 1853, some 7,248 Irish men and 4,068 Irish women were sent to Van Diemen's Land, accounting for approximately

⁶¹² Anna McKay, 'Empire-builders: Interactions between Convicts and Enslaved, Free, and Military Workers in Bermuda's Dockyards, 1824-1838' in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, lii, no. 4-5 (2024), p. 789.

⁶¹³ Kilcommins et al., *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order*, p. 17.

20% of all convicts arriving in the colony during that period.⁶¹⁴ The analysis here draws on two cohorts, the transportees of the *Samuel Boddington* (arrived 18th January 1846) and the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (arrived 2nd January 1849),⁶¹⁵ enabling comparison across time while retaining a defined sample.

Ireland's criminal justice system has been described by Blum et al. as 'highly sophisticated', in the sense that it possessed a clearly differentiated legal and procedural structure, with offences systematically classified into indictable and summary categories, each subject to distinct forms of adjudication,⁶¹⁶ despite some aspects remaining unchanged since medieval times. This structured legal framework underpinned the operation of transportation as a formal extension of punishment rather than an ad hoc response to crime. After the 1717 Transportation Act, the death sentence could be commuted to transportation to the British colonies, without 'the consent of the convicted person'.⁶¹⁷ Following American independence in 1776, which ended the use of the American colonies for penal transportation, a new penal settlement was established at Botany Bay, Australia, in 1788.⁶¹⁸ Convicts from throughout Ireland were sent to Cork and Dublin to await transportation, eventually leading to the use of HMS *Surprize* at Cork, and HMS *Essex* at Kingstown as prison hulks designed to house male convicts pending removal, both remaining in use until 1837.⁶¹⁹ Generally, public executions had become increasingly unpopular during the early decades of the nineteenth century, with crowds exhibiting sympathy to the condemned and hostility towards the authorities. Consequently, the authorities turned increasingly towards transportation as a punishment with greater perceived deterrent effect, believing that for many, enforced separation from family, community, and homeland, was more dreaded than the death penalty itself.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁴ Richard Davis, 'Companion to Tasmanian History: Irish Community' in *University of Tasmania* (<https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmanian-companion/biogs/E000516b.htm>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁶¹⁵ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Conduct Registers of Male Convicts, *Samuel Boddington*' (digitised copy consulted via Libraries Tasmania Digital Collections); Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Conduct Registers of Male Convicts, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)' (digitised copy consulted via Libraries Tasmania Digital Collections).

⁶¹⁶ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 29.

⁶¹⁷ McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 6–7.

⁶¹⁸ Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, pp 26, 46.

⁶¹⁹ McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 8–9.

⁶²⁰ McMahon, *Floating Prisons*, pp 34, 30, 36, 41.

After 1837, the system was overhauled again. Male convicts would now be housed at Kilmainham prison, with a male convict depot being opened at Smithfield in 1844, whilst female convicts were housed at Grangegorman (all Dublin),⁶²¹ a system which would remain in place until 1868 when transportation officially ended. This reorganisation reflected both administrative reform and growing pressure on the penal system as committals increased. Limited employment opportunities in Ireland meant that much crime was undoubtedly committed out of desperation, but moral reform, particularly through hard work and religious instruction, was believed necessary for inmates to feel remorseful for their crimes. This penal philosophy frequently underestimated, or ignored, the structural destitution and crisis that drove many offences, especially as the famine intensified.⁶²²

As the gaols filled, and as Australia became increasingly reluctant to accept further convicts, many of those sentenced to transportation were forced to remain in regional gaols which, by 1846, were often filled to more than four times their original capacity, with a mix of vulnerable prisoners, as well as hardened offenders.⁶²³ This overcrowding blurred distinctions between habitual criminals and famine-driven offenders, complicating both classification and punishment. Local prison registers at this time are therefore likely to reflect national trends in crime, whereas those in Dublin would likely reflect an urban trend, albeit one that was the exception in predominantly rural Ireland.

The majority of convicts were transported for what would be classed as petty offences today, and although some may have been recidivists, the nature of the offences and either the lack of previous convictions or their limited occurrence suggests that by 1847/8, most of these offenders were not incorrigible but were committing crime as a result of the anomic environment in which they found themselves. Today, social ecologists have recognised the ‘association between crime rates and community deterioration: disorder, poverty, alienation, [and] disassociation’,⁶²⁴ and these would all have been felt by the Irish, whose world

⁶²¹ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, p. 9.

⁶²² Laylor, ‘Crime in nineteenth-century Ireland’, pp 2–3.

⁶²³ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 9–10, 110.

⁶²⁴ Siegel, *Criminology*, p. 191.

was being torn apart by the Famine to a degree rarely experienced, the previous comparable Irish Famine having taken place a century earlier in 1740/1.⁶²⁵

In the nineteenth century, the term 'convict' referred to someone who had received either a sentence of death, transportation, or penal servitude, the transportation period only beginning once the ship sailed. This distinction is important, as many individuals were labelled as convicts in Irish records despite not having entered the transportation system, but while they were still being held in an intermediate penal status. The records of the Old Bailey indicate that horse theft was considered the most serious animal theft, followed by sheep and cattle; all non-capital offences by 1844, which often resulted in transportation.⁶²⁶ Of the convicts sent to Australia, L L Robson calculates that 14% were convicted for animal theft, largely from rural areas, and with a significant number from Tipperary.⁶²⁷ This rural profile reinforces the argument that transportation disproportionately affected individuals whose livelihoods were tied to agrarian economies destabilised by the famine.

A newspaper report in March 1847 stated that, out of 340-350 cases waiting to be tried, over one hundred were charged with cattle and sheep stealing,⁶²⁸ concluding the following day that 'the people are in a dreadful state, and it will be impossible to put a check to this species of offence as long as they are left without food'.⁶²⁹ The report explicitly linked rising livestock theft to subsistence crisis, suggesting that such offences were driven less by criminal intent than by hunger. Indeed, Gibson wrote that 'thousands *qualified* themselves, by sheep and cattle stealing, for a convict prison, in preference to a poor-house or county jail, where the people were dying like rotten sheep'.⁶³⁰ Gibson's phrasing, though dramatic, underscores the extent to which transportation could be perceived as materially preferable to local relief institutions, reframing livestock theft as a calculated, if desperate, survival strategy.

⁶²⁵ Christine Kinealy and Gerard Moran, *The History of the Irish Famine 'Fallen Leaves of Humanity': Famines in Ireland Before and After the Great Famine* (London; New York, 2019), p. 4.

⁶²⁶ The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey'.

⁶²⁷ L. L. Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia; an enquiry into the origin and character of the convicts transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1787-1852* (Melbourne, 1965), p. 47.

⁶²⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Assizes Intelligence', 23 Mar. 1847.

⁶²⁹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Assizes Intelligence', 24 Mar. 1847.

⁶³⁰ C. B. Gibson, *Life among Convicts* (London, 1863), p. 6.

An overview of the primary sources and secondary literature used to reconstruct convict experiences in Van Diemen's Land, Bermuda, and Spike Island is provided in Chapter 2, alongside the wider discussion of sources and historiography. The present chapter therefore moves directly to analysis of the convict trajectories and institutional settings evidenced in those records.

5.2 The Prison Registers

During 1844/5, the Kilmainham prison registers indicate that from a total of 1314 entries in the prison registers, 12 men and three women were sentenced to transportation. Three women and nine men received sentences of between seven and ten years for theft of goods or livestock, the women being sent to Grangegorman convict prison to await transportation. Of the remaining three men, Robert Lesley was sentenced to seven years' transportation for robbery of a dwelling house, and being in possession of stolen property, whilst Thomas McCabe was arrested for 'burglary, robbery and assault on Louisa Francis Webber' and received 20 years transportation. William Mahon received fifteen years transportation for 'forcibly entering a house and stealing several articles of wearing apparel'.⁶³¹

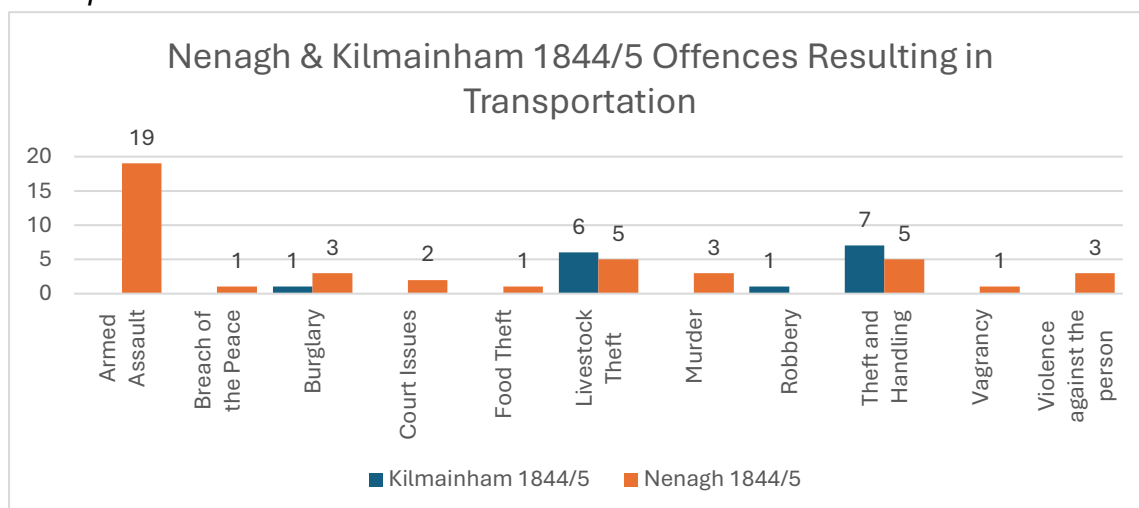
Six of the sentences were for animal theft, with the remainder involving burglary, robbery, and theft. This disparity likely reflects the contrasting realities of rural and urban life. While the rural poor often lived in a largely cashless economy and faced significant hardship, they typically had access to small plots of land that allowed them to grow their own food. In contrast, the urban poor, particularly in a densely populated city like Dublin, had no such opportunities. With limited or no access to land and few options for subsistence, those unable to secure paid work faced a more immediate and acute form of poverty. In this context, the pressures that led to criminal behaviour were often more urgent and desperate.

From a total of 822 arrests in the Nenagh prison registers for 1844/5, there were 43 people sentenced to transportation, 19 of whom were sentenced for crimes involving arms, categorised for the purposes of this thesis as social-order crime, and discussed in relation to Nenagh and agrarian outrages in section 3.4. Of the

⁶³¹ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507.

43 convicts, one was bailed, two were discharged, and two were returned to Nenagh gaol. The remaining 38 were all sent to Van Diemen's Land. Of the transportation sentences issued in Nenagh during this period, 31 were for social-order offences, while only 12 related to crimes of survival.⁶³² This suggests that survival was not the dominant driver of transportable offending in Nenagh at this time, in a county associated with agrarian violence and where, before the Famine, many households were able to grow their own food. This aligns with the Chapter 4 finding that pre-Famine offending in Nenagh was dominated by social-order concerns. It also suggests that transportation at this stage functioned primarily as a tool for managing disorder rather than for absorbing subsistence-driven offending. The transportation records examined here originate in the same penal processes visible in the Irish prison registers analysed earlier in the thesis, allowing offenders recorded at the point of arrest and committal to be traced into the wider imperial system of punishment. Comparisons between the two sets of data can be seen in Figure 5.1 below.

*Figure 5.1 – Nenagh & Kilmainham 1844/5 Offences Resulting in Transportation*⁶³³



Although there were 2,213 entries in the 1847/8 Kilmainham prison registers, there was almost no increase in convictions for transportation, four females and 12 males receiving such sentences. Two women were convicted for burglary and robbery, and two for theft, all receiving seven years transportation to Van

⁶³² *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507.

Diemen's Land. Of the men, nine were transported for offences relating to house breaking, burglary, robbery, and livestock theft, sentences varying from seven to 15 years. Three avoided being transported, one being pardoned by the Lord Lieutenant, one being discharged and one finding bail.⁶³⁴ To relieve pressure on Van Diemen's Land, alternative destinations were utilised after 1846,⁶³⁵ and so three of the men were sent to Spike Island, and three men were sent to Bermuda.⁶³⁶ These different destinations do not appear to bear any relation to the severity of the alleged crimes, nor to the convict being a repeat offender.

The Kilmainham prison registers show an increase from 1,314 to 2,213 arrests between 1844/5 and 1847/8, but an increase in transportation offences from only 15 to 16.⁶³⁷ This suggests that sentences were becoming more lenient, at least in relation to transportation, possibly because changes in British penal transportation policies were being reviewed at this time. It is also possible that the focus of those engaged in criminal activity had changed in view of the desperate environment in which they now found themselves, with fewer becoming involved in crimes which carried a transportation sentence, either due to need or opportunity. This divergence between rising arrests and flat transportation rates suggests that punishment was shaped as much by shifting imperial capacity and policy as by offending patterns, highlighting how colonial governance mediated the relationship between need, crime, and sanction.

The partial prison registers available for Nenagh show an increase from 822 to 1,317 arrests between 1844/5 and 1847/8, but with an increase in transportation offences from only 43 to 49, 40 men and nine women receiving such convictions. Eighteen of these (14 men and four women) were convicted for livestock theft, with 10 convictions being between seven and 14 years. The remaining crimes included theft and handling (15), armed assault (8), food theft (2), assault (2), damage (1), and murder (2), with sentences of between seven years and life. Of the men, three died before being transported, 27 were sent to Spike Island, three were transported to Van Diemen's Land, and two remained in Ireland⁶³⁸ as

⁶³⁴ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁶³⁵ Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London, 1987), pp 551–4.

⁶³⁶ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

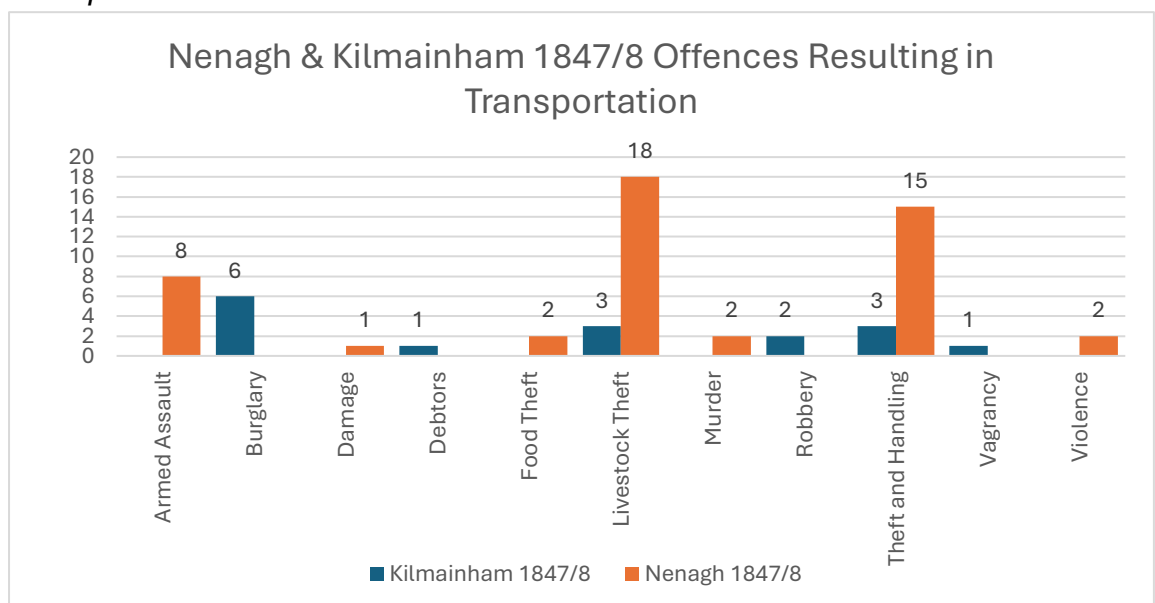
⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁶³⁸ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

transportation was replaced with penal servitude, being sent to the first ‘state prison’, Mountjoy, in 1850.⁶³⁹ The fate of the other five is unknown, a lack of information which suggests either that some records have been lost over time or that the administrative system started to break down. With the change in British penal transportation policies after 1846, those men who had deliberately committed crimes in order to be transported to Australia must have been disappointed to find themselves on Spike Island instead. The point is analytically useful because it separates intention from outcome: even where individuals attempted to exercise agency through strategic offending, the state’s changing penal geography could redirect that agency into different institutional experiences, a dynamic taken up again in Chapter 6.

There was less change for the female convicts; out of the nine women sentenced to transportation, six were transported to Van Diemen’s Land, while three had their sentences commuted to gaol within Ireland.⁶⁴⁰ Comparisons between the two sets of data can be seen in Figure 5.2 below. A comparison with Kilmainham is difficult because of the missing prison registers, nevertheless the data reveals a similar pattern where arrests have increased, but transportation sentencing has not followed the same trajectory, most likely for the same reasons.

*Figure 5.2 – Nenagh & Kilmainham 1847/8 Offences Resulting in Transportation*⁶⁴¹



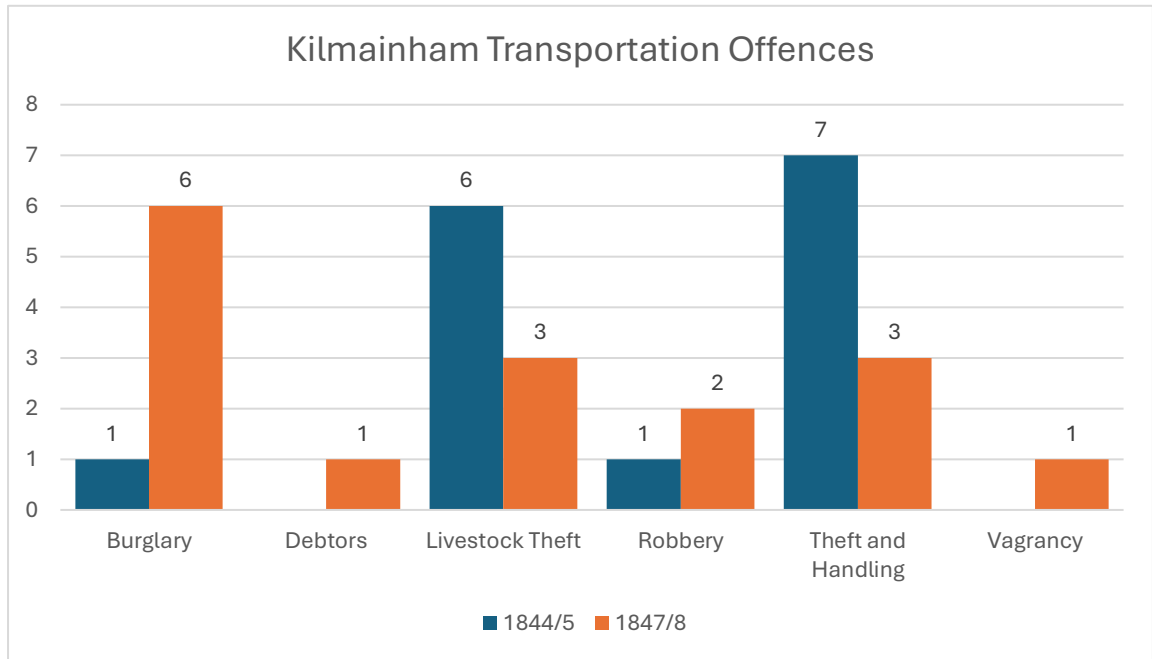
⁶³⁹ Blum et al., ‘Working Paper: Scarring and Selection’, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁰ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404.

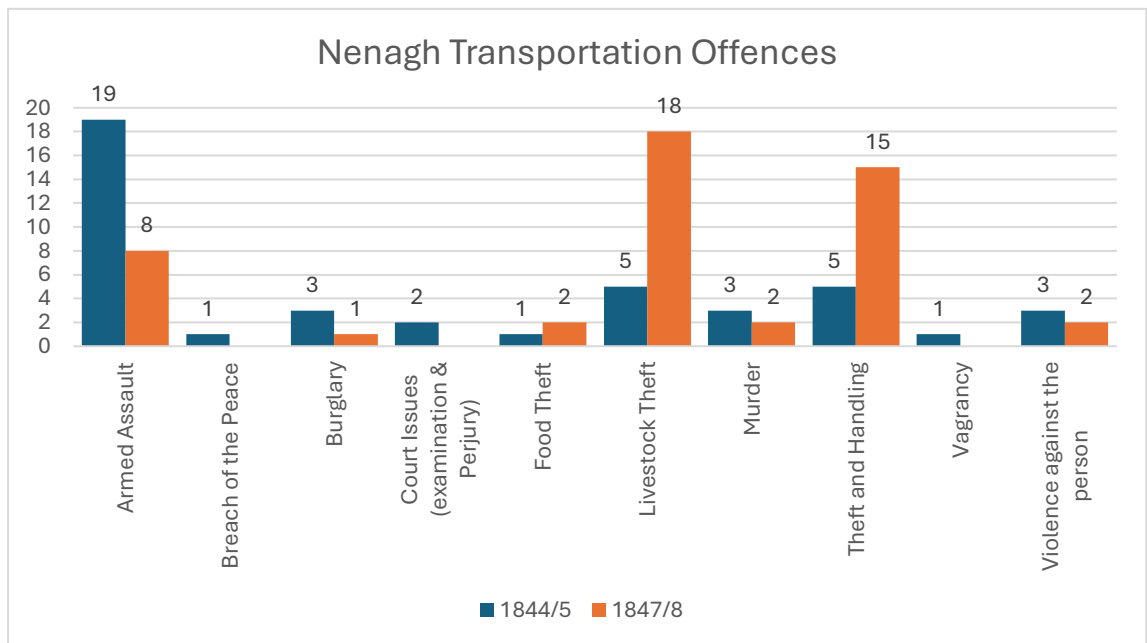
⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

In 1844/5, the Kilmainham and Nenagh sample combined amounted to 58 transportation sentences, increasing to 64 in the 1847/8 sample.⁶⁴² Figures 5.3 and 5.4 will help to illustrate the changes in each location more clearly:

*Figure 5.3 – Kilmainham Transportation Offences*⁶⁴³



*Figure 5.4 – Nenagh Transportation Offences*⁶⁴⁴



⁶⁴² NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁶⁴³ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁶⁴⁴ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

To some degree, changes in the crime typology categories are restricted by what were considered transportable offences and the difficulty of establishing motives, which means that the above figures may not be telling the whole story. For example, *The Freeman's Journal* reported the sentencing of a young girl who broke three windowpanes and then a lamp. While this would be categorised as a social-order crime, the newspaper report makes it clear that the crime was committed in the hope of imprisonment, making it a crime of survival.⁶⁴⁵

Additionally, burglary has been categorised for the purposes of this thesis as a social-order crime, and during 1847/8, six people were transported for burglary compared to one in 1844/5. This might indicate that by 1847/8, more people were committing burglary in the hope of obtaining items to sell for food, but the Kilmainham prison registers reveal 11 arrests for 1844/5 and 22 for 1847/8, which shows that while transportation sentences for burglary had increased sixfold, arrests for burglary had only doubled.⁶⁴⁶ This suggests that the authorities had instigated stricter sentencing for this offence, rather than there being an increase in the crime rate.

In comparison, at Nenagh, armed offences reduced from 93 to 22, while transportation for this offence had reduced from 19 to 8, indicating that the proportion of people being transported for this offence in 1847/8 had increased when compared against 1844/5 figures.⁶⁴⁷ This would suggest that the authorities may have instigated stricter sentencing for these offences too, although not to the degree indicated by the burglary figures.

5.3 The Conviction Process in Ireland

Once a suspect was apprehended, they were lodged in cells until they could be brought before magistrates at petty sessions, where the case would be determined on the basis of sworn evidence, formal charges, and defence statements.⁶⁴⁸ The accused might then be remanded for further examination, committed for trial at quarter sessions or assizes, or sentenced immediately.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Dublin Police - Yesterday', 29 Oct. 1847.

⁶⁴⁶ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

⁶⁴⁷ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

⁶⁴⁸ E. F. Du Cane, *An Account of the manner in which sentences of penal servitude are carried out in England* (London, 1882), p. 12.

While this procedure was well documented in England after the Famine period, the prison registers examined here indicate that a comparable process operated in 1840s Ireland. Once sentenced to transportation, prisoners were transferred to one of the convict depots. In practice, subsistence behaviours were recast as prosecutable offences, so hunger-driven theft and mobility could be managed through a legal process geared towards property and public order.

Nicholson recorded encountering two such prisoners in 1844, describing them as 'chained together', and guarded by three policemen on the back of a public coach, one 'singing merrily' while the younger appeared on the verge of tears.⁶⁴⁹ Her account captures both the visibility of convict transmission and its emotional ambiguity: transportation was at once routine, guarded, and publicly enacted within ordinary travel networks.

When Nicholson's carriage arrived at Barrack Street in Dublin, the convicts were to change carriages for their onward journey. Although she provided no personal details, the episode indicates that at least some prisoners were conveyed via what amounted to public transport. Whether this method was reserved for particular categories of offender cannot be determined from this account alone.

A few pages earlier, Nicholson noted that she had visited Tullamore gaol, where 'seventeen had been that morning sent to Dublin for transportation'.⁶⁵⁰

Unfortunately, there are no prison registers surviving for Tullamore for this period, and although these individuals may have been dispatched from there, this cannot be established. The absence of such records underscores the fragmentary nature of the archival trail, limiting the reconstruction of individual trajectories. An 1848 newspaper report concerning an unrelated Limerick case further suggests that public conveyance formed part of the transfer process, describing prisoners as handcuffed and placed on cars under police and military escort before being forwarded by railway to Dublin.⁶⁵¹ Such accounts point to the bureaucratic regularity of transportation, embedded within expanding transport infrastructures and sustained by coordinated policing and military oversight, and suggest that these processes were often conducted in public view, with potential implications

⁶⁴⁹ Nicholson, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*, pp 32–3.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 33, 27.

⁶⁵¹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Special Commission', 11 Jan. 1848.

for stigma deterrence, and the experience of trauma among those subjected to them.

Despite Sir George Arthur, Governor of Van Diemen's Land having stated in the 1830s that men did not generally commit offences in order to be transported,⁶⁵² transportation was certainly considered by some as a means of escape during the Famine. *The Freeman's Journal* reported that two Galway men had stolen and killed a sheep, their intent being transportation, as demonstrated by their placing of the sheep's ears in their pockets as evidence and exclaiming 'hurrah for Botany Bay' upon their conviction.⁶⁵³ Whether apocryphal or not, the anecdote reflects contemporary recognition that transportation could be reimagined as opportunity rather than solely punishment. Even children as young as twelve attempted to escape conditions through transportation, and Woodham-Smith wrote that 'the authorities in London and in the penal settlements were embarrassed by the deluge of youthful convicts'.⁶⁵⁴ The situation was even acknowledged by the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, who believed that although transportation had been traditionally viewed with terror by the Irish, the immediacy of starvation could outweigh the terror of exile.⁶⁵⁵

Graham Davis writes that, during the Famine, transportation from Ireland increased from 600 to 2,000 per annum.⁶⁵⁶ Throughout the two-year period when transportation was temporarily suspended,⁶⁵⁷ the situation naturally caused already congested prisons to become even more overcrowded, particularly in Ireland, where accommodation designed for 50-60 people now housed hundreds.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵² Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 156.

⁶⁵³ James Maher, PP, cited in *The Freeman's Journal*, 'To the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland', 22 Apr. 1848.

⁶⁵⁴ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 377.

⁶⁵⁵ Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 156.

⁶⁵⁶ Graham Davis, 'The Historiography of the Irish Famine' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Meaning of the Famine* (London: New York, 1997), p. 29.

⁶⁵⁷ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, p. 552.

⁶⁵⁸ T. A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia* (London, 1918), p. 356; McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 9–10.

5.4 Onboard Ship

By the 1840s, convict ships were under naval control, operating under strict regulations for 'rations, accommodation, exercise and medical supervision under a Surgeon-Superintendent'.⁶⁵⁹ However, overcrowding was inevitable, the air was foetid, and rats, lice and other parasites were inescapable. Catarrh, diarrhoea, and typhus were easily passed on in the close confines of the ships, cholera and dysentery were often present, and food and water were hard to keep fresh, despite restocking during the journey.⁶⁶⁰ By 1848, the journey to Van Diemen's Land took between three and five months, and each ship carried approximately 250 convicts. If a death occurred, the body was wrapped in a blanket, weighed down with stones and thrown overboard.⁶⁶¹ Attempts were made to ensure that the convicts arrived safely, and death rates were relatively low, decreasing from one in 85 during the early days of transportation to around one in 180 by the end of the transportation period.⁶⁶² However, the voyage also functioned as a liminal stage between Irish crisis and colonial discipline, intensifying trauma through confinement while beginning the institutional reshaping of identity that the conduct registers later record.

5.5 Van Diemen's Land

In 1803, the first European settlers arrived in Van Diemen's Land, an event that rapidly transformed the island through colonisation, violence, and the displacement of First Nations people.⁶⁶³ By 1838, the colony had expanded to 46,000 inhabitants, including a substantial convict population,⁶⁶⁴ reflecting its growing role within Britain's imperial penal system. The expansion of settlement therefore relied not only on migration but also on the forced relocation and labour of transported convicts, whose presence formed an integral part of Britain's wider

⁶⁵⁹ Frank Clune, *Martin Cash: The Last of the Tasmanian Bush Rangers* (Sydney: London, 1956), p. 6.

⁶⁶⁰ Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, pp 172–3, 178, 182–6, 108.

⁶⁶¹ Anna McKay, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred: Convict Transportation from Ireland during the Famine Period'. Webinar presented at the Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council online lecture series Rippling Effects of the Great Irish Famine, online, 15 Feb. 2024, 17.58-18.12, 20.35-20.42 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxyHvSy9gTY&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFewaYXY7XuSEZMwJvxNp33&index=2>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁶⁶² Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, pp 174–5, 177–8, 168.

⁶⁶³ Alison Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts: How Felons Built a Free Society* (Crow's Nest, NSW, 2010), p. 4.

⁶⁶⁴ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, pp 47, 350.

colonial strategy. Alongside the physical occupation of land, British legal institutions, social hierarchies, and cultural values were progressively imposed upon the colony, reshaping governance, and everyday life according to imperial ideals of order, property, and civilisation. For this thesis, the significance of Van Diemen's Land is that it makes visible the relationship between authoritarian governance and limited agency. The penal regime aimed to discipline and extract labour, but it also created structured incentives that could reduce survival pressures and, in turn, reshape patterns of offending.

By the 1820s, Van Diemen's Land had become economically viable through pastoral and agricultural production,⁶⁶⁵ and by the 1840s it had developed into a relatively stable settler colony. Louisa Meredith described Hobart as surrounded by 'green meadows, gardens, and cultivated land', with 'neat and substantial' buildings,⁶⁶⁶ indicating the consolidation of colonial order after earlier periods of instability.⁶⁶⁷ Such descriptions of cultivated landscapes and orderly towns reflected the visible outcomes of settler expansion, which had been made possible through both the displacement of Indigenous communities and the labour of transported prisoners.

An estimated 72,500 convicts would land at Hobart between 1803 and 1853,⁶⁶⁸ making transportation a defining feature of the colony's social and economic structure. After 1824, prisoners were assigned to private employers upon arrival, a system that exposed convicts to highly uneven treatment,⁶⁶⁹ ranging from brutality to leniency.⁶⁷⁰ Meredith noted that when a 'master was a useful tool of the governor', the prisoner could not expect justice even for minor offences.⁶⁷¹ While Alison Alexander argues that assignment could be 'relatively benign' and socially reintegrative,⁶⁷² its fairness depended heavily on individual masters rather than institutional safeguards. The assignment system therefore functioned as a

⁶⁶⁵ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, pp 17, 47.

⁶⁶⁶ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, pp 25–6.

⁶⁶⁷ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, p. 16.

⁶⁶⁸ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁹ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 495, 587.

⁶⁷⁰ E. D. Watkins, *Life Courses of Young Convicts Transported to Van Diemen's Land* (London: New York, 2020), p. 26; A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts & the Colonies; a Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain & Ireland to Australia & other parts of the British Empire* (London, 1966), p. 294.

⁶⁷¹ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 40.

⁶⁷² Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 1.

mechanism through which convict labour was integrated into the developing settler economy, reinforcing the close relationship between transportation, colonial expansion, and labour exploitation.

By the late 1830s, the assignment system faced criticism for its 'connotations of slave labour' and its perceived failure to deter crime.⁶⁷³ In response, it was replaced in 1843 by the probation model, intended to impose greater discipline and state oversight. Under this system, the worst offenders would be detained on Norfolk Island, while the remainder were sent to Hobart and placed in 'government gangs'⁶⁷⁴ consisting of some 250-400 men performing labour such as logging, road-building, and land clearing.⁶⁷⁵ After completing an initial probation period, the convict could receive a probation pass, allowing them to work for wages,⁶⁷⁶ though misconduct risked demotion or return to gang labour.⁶⁷⁷ Progression was therefore conditional, reinforcing discipline while offering limited incentives for compliance.

In practice, the probation system destabilised Van Diemen's Land's labour economy, removing the free labour on which settlers had relied. Following a surge in convict arrivals, and declining settler demand, immigration collapsed and unemployment rose sharply. By 1844, approximately 16,000 prisoners and ex-convicts were unemployed, and Van Diemen's Land was described as 'saturated with convicts'.⁶⁷⁸ Settlers resisted acting as 'private gaolers' without the incentive of cheap labour,⁶⁷⁹ leading to the temporary suspension of transportation from Britain in 1846,⁶⁸⁰ developments that reflected the complex relationship between imperial penal policy and the economic needs of a settler colony dependent on convict labour. This crisis underscores the tension between imperial punishment and colonial economic sustainability, revealing how transportation served not only as a mechanism of punishment but also as a means of regulating labour within the wider structures of British colonial expansion.

⁶⁷³ Watkins, *Life Courses of Young Convicts*, p. 26.

⁶⁷⁴ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 522–3.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 523; Shaw, *Convicts & the Colonies*, p. 297.

⁶⁷⁶ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 523–4, 528.

⁶⁷⁷ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, pp 323–4.

⁶⁷⁸ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 521–2, 527, 551.

⁶⁷⁹ Shaw, *Convicts & the Colonies*, p. 18.

⁶⁸⁰ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 552–4.

By this stage there were 16 probation stations,⁶⁸¹ while prisoners deemed most dangerous were sent to Port Arthur, a penal settlement described as ‘the hell of Van Diemen’s Land’, and where convict labour centred on timber cutting and coal mining.⁶⁸² Agricultural labour was widespread,⁶⁸³ although Irish convicts were regarded as ‘very good spade labourers’, but less skilled in technical farming.⁶⁸⁴ Alexander concludes that large gang labour offered little training or reformation,⁶⁸⁵ despite official rhetoric or reform.

Female convicts followed a distinct trajectory, being sent to Anson female probation station before entering domestic service.⁶⁸⁶ After probation, many were hired into private households,⁶⁸⁷ reinforcing official beliefs that domestic work and rural placement could encourage moral reform.⁶⁸⁸ Marriage was regulated by authorities and often functioned as a pathway to stability,⁶⁸⁹ though remarriage rules were easily circumvented.⁶⁹⁰ Meredith observed that female convicts were cheaper and often more efficient than free servants, and that courtship and marriage were common, often disrupting employers’ labour arrangements.⁶⁹¹

Meredith recorded that male convicts undertook a wide range of agricultural, trade,⁶⁹² and their wives had the opportunities to add to the household income through sewing or laundry work.⁶⁹³ She added that meat, bread, tea and sugar were widely consumed,⁶⁹⁴ all a marked improvement of the diet of many Irish prior to the famine, rural or urban. These conditions suggest that for some Irish transportees, Van Diemen’s Land offered greater material security than Ireland,

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p. 528.

⁶⁸² Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen’s Land*, pp 42–3.

⁶⁸³ Australian Convict Sites World Heritage Property, ‘Port Arthur Historic Site’ in *Australian Convict Sites* (<https://www.australianconvictsites.org.au/portarthurhistoricsite>) (4 Aug. 2025).

⁶⁸⁴ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Transportation, Crime and Punishment, Transportation 2* (session 1837, HC 1837, vol. xix, Shannon, 1837), p. 169.

⁶⁸⁵ Alexander, *Tasmania’s Convicts*, p. 2.

⁶⁸⁶ Watkins, *Life Courses of Young Convicts*, pp 75–6.

⁶⁸⁷ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, p. 325; Lucy Williams, *Convicts in the Colonies: Transportation Tales from Britain to Australia* (Havertown, 2018), p. 129.

⁶⁸⁸ Lucy Frost, ‘Eliza Churchill Tells ...’ in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters, Narrating Convict Lives* (Carlton South, Victoria, 2001), p. 80.

⁶⁸⁹ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, pp 318–9, 330.

⁶⁹⁰ Alexander, *Tasmania’s Convicts*, pp 66–7.

⁶⁹¹ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 330.

⁶⁹² Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 41.

⁶⁹³ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, p. 205.

⁶⁹⁴ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 283.

despite the coercive context of exile. Hoppen and Robson both note that many transported Irish were rural labourers,⁶⁹⁵ and a Select Committee report concluded that they were 'probably be much better off than they were in Ireland'.⁶⁹⁶

Upon arrival, male convicts were recorded, searched, and dispatched to probation stations under close surveillance.⁶⁹⁷ Life was highly regimented, involving communal housing and strict discipline. Education, religious instruction, and task-based labour were incorporated into daily routines, although Syme believed taskwork fostered laziness.⁶⁹⁸ For Irish convicts accustomed to seasonal underemployment and subsistence living, the labour regime was likely unfamiliar and, at times, materially more secure.⁶⁹⁹ Syme described chained convicts performing manual labour, noting both the harshness of restraint and the sympathy their condition inspired.⁷⁰⁰ These observations highlight the enduring brutality of the system, even as some convicts gradually progressed towards conditional freedom.

The evolution of penal practice in Van Diemen's Land during the early- to mid-nineteenth century reveals a complex interplay between imperial discipline, colonial labour needs, settler demands and the lived realities of transported convicts, many of whom were impoverished Irish caught in the throes of famine, poverty, and systemic neglect. Their arrival in Van Diemen's Land marked the beginning of a journey structured by institutional surveillance, regimentation, and exile, as they entered a world governed by oversight, routine, and enforced labour. For Irish prisoners, many displaced by famine, social collapse, and economic dislocation, transportation represented both profound trauma and one of the few remaining avenues for survival.

For those who came from rural poverty or slum hardship, this system was both alien and deeply confronting; the absence of all that was familiar, combined with

⁶⁹⁵ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, p. 343; Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 25.

⁶⁹⁶ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Transportation, Crime and punishment, sess. 1837, HC 1837, vol. XIX*, p. 163.

⁶⁹⁷ Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, pp 183, 362, 367.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 184, 278–80, 231–3.

⁶⁹⁹ Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, pp 223, 227–9, 271.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 12–13.

the abrupt imposition of colonial authority through regimented labour, surveillance, and disciplinary control, would have intensified feelings of disorientation, and loss. Life in the probation stations, with its cramped huts, supervised silence, and unfamiliar labour, stood in stark contrast to the informal rhythms of Irish peasant life. Yet within this rigid order lay an unexpected irony: for those who had endured starvation, instability, and social abandonment in Ireland, the colony's enforced structure could also offer a measure of stability in the form of regular food, clothing, employment, and the possibility of social reintegration within the hierarchies of a developing settler society.

The probation system therefore embodied a fundamental contradiction of imperial punishment: a regime that had imposed control, discipline, and dehumanisation, while simultaneously enabling survival and the reshaping of identity within its institutional framework. Particularly for rural Irish convicts, who had rarely handled currency, eaten meat regularly, or accessed formal education, the system held the potential for adaptation and transformation, even as it perpetuated deep psychological trauma and enduring dislocation. The Irish convict's early experience in Van Diemen's Land thus reflects not only the brutality of imperial punishment, but also its paradoxical capacity to stabilise lives fractured by the economic deprivation and administrative failures associated with British colonial governance in Ireland. In this sense, transportation emerges not simply as a tool of discipline, but as a crucible of trauma, adaptation, agency, and severely limited opportunity within the wider structures of the British imperial system.

5.6 Conduct Records

To deepen our understanding of the lived experiences of Irish convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land, this section undertakes a focused comparative analysis of two cohorts, drawing on the conduct registers that accompanied each transport ship. The register from the *Samuel Boddington* offers a representative sample of pre-Famine Irish convicts,⁷⁰¹ whereas the register from the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* provides a sample of Irish convicts who sailed from Ireland during the Famine period, the majority having been sentenced in 1847.⁷⁰² The same

⁷⁰¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'.

⁷⁰² Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

methodology that was applied to the Irish prison registers will be used to explore patterns of criminal activity, expressions of agency, and evidence of trauma within the convict experience, offering valuable insight into those who departed Ireland just as the potato blight began to take hold, and allowing for some broad conclusions to be made in relation to their actions and experiences. In practice, this means treating recorded misconduct, compliance, and requests for family reunion as behavioural traces through which restricted agency can be inferred, while also reading silences and uneven documentation as part of the institutional production of the archive.

5.6.1 The *Samuel Boddington*

On 23rd September 1845, 141 convicts were boarded onto the transport ship *Samuel Boddington*, arriving in Van Diemen's Land on 18th January 1846.⁷⁰³ It is impossible to know how complete the conduct records are for the *Samuel Boddington*, although they certainly seem more complete than those of the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*. In these earlier records, there is no mention of the convicts having to reimburse the government for their passage before conditional pardons could be issued, little mention of wives and family members having their passage paid, and very few convicts appear to have joined the constabulary in Van Diemen's Land.

The *Samuel Boddington* was commanded by Captain Richard O'Connell and with guards from the 1st and 65th regiments supervising the convicts.⁷⁰⁴ The superintendent-surgeon, James Carmichael, recorded that the majority 'enjoyed most excellent health' during the journey, in part due to a pre-emptive stop at Cape of Good Hope for fresh supplies before early signs of scurvy could turn into something more serious. Cleanliness was encouraged and the reading of religious material was promoted, while those who could not read were urged to learn. There were no deaths during the voyage, and the main causes of illness were diarrhoea and catarrh. Only seven convicts were placed on the sick list; two for phthisis (tuberculosis), and one each for diarrhoea, catarrh, rheumatism, ascites (a fluid build-up in the stomach commonly due to cirrhosis), and

⁷⁰³ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'.

⁷⁰⁴ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'The Army', 10 Sept. 1845.

erysipelas (a bacterial infection of the skin). John Guinane, who was suffering from phthisis, had also been injured by a musket ball through the upper part of the left side of his thorax which he had received 'during an affray with the military near Limerick'. He was discharged into Hobart hospital upon arrival in Van Diemen's Land 'very much emaciated and depressed', the only convict to be described thus.⁷⁰⁵

Although all of the convicts on board were tried in Ireland, three will be omitted from the analysis which follows because they were not Irish by birth, and it is not known how long they had been in Ireland before conviction. Of the remaining 138, sentences ranged from seven years to life, and all had been sentenced between 4th March 1845 and 16th September 1845. Ten convicts were recorded as being 'stout made', but only one was recorded as also having a double chin.⁷⁰⁶ A double chin could be a sign of ageing or a family trait, while significant weight loss could leave loose skin and thus is not conclusive of a person's build. However, 'stout made' cannot be interpreted as anything other than that the person was not starving. John Walsh was the youngest at 11 years old, transported for stealing scissors, his third conviction.⁷⁰⁷ He, and all of the under 16 year olds, were sent to Point Puer, a 'reformatory for boy convicts'⁷⁰⁸ at Port Arthur, where 'every hardship and degradation awaits him, and where his sufferings will be severe'.⁷⁰⁹

Stephen Bray, the oldest at 72, was transported for sheep stealing. He had previously received a life sentence of transportation due to his involvement in the 1798 rebellion (as Stephen Broa), but had subsequently been pardoned. He was sent to Wedge Bay,⁷¹⁰ which housed male convicts who were 'unfit for standard probation gang labour' but could 'perform light labour' such as gardening.⁷¹¹ However, Edward Feeny, also aged 72, was sent to Rocky Hills probationary

⁷⁰⁵ The National Archives (TNA), 'ADM 101/66/4, Royal Navy Medical Journal of the *Samuel Boddington*, 1845–6', pp 17–18, 16, 8–10 (accessed via Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>).

⁷⁰⁶ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷⁰⁸ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 27.

⁷⁰⁹ Sir James Graham, cited in Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, p. 524.

⁷¹⁰ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*', p. 11.

⁷¹¹ Andrew Piper, 'The dregs of a criminal population: Impression Bay and the origins of Tasmania's residential charitable system, c. 1839-1857' in *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, xxii (2020), p. 217.

station, along with the other 130 convicts,⁷¹² suggesting that age alone did not guarantee an easier sentence.

5.6.2 The *Pestonjee Bomanjee*

Between 21 September 1846 (*John Calvin*) and 18 February 1848 (*Mount Stewart Elphinstone*), no convict ships were sent to Van Diemen's Land from either England or Ireland due to a two-year suspension of transportation.⁷¹³ Consequently, once transportation resumed, there was no shortage of convicts waiting to fill the transport ships.

On 5th September 1848, the *Birkenhead* war steamer arrived in Kingstown harbour with 179 convicts from Spike Island. These men were guarded by 'a body of constabulary' and were soon transferred to the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, which had been lying 'at anchor off the east pier' since 22nd August.⁷¹⁴ Four convicts were disembarked, but on 11th September, the remainder were joined by 125 men from prisons and depots in Dublin, bringing the total to 300.⁷¹⁵ The *Morning Chronicle* recorded that the prisoners had been gathered from different parts of the country and had been 'taken from the prisons to the North-wall in covered cars, guarded by dragoons', before being conveyed by river steamer to the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, before sailing for New South Wales.⁷¹⁶ The account reveals the carefully staged and militarised choreography of transportation, in which convicts were moved through multiple guarded stages before embarkation, reinforcing the visible authority of the state at each point of transfer. The ship's superintendent-surgeon, John Tarn, recorded that the new arrivals were 'young or middle aged men chiefly from the agricultural districts of Ireland, and with some exceptions were healthy and robust'.⁷¹⁷ His assessment underscores the predominance of working-age rural men among the transported, reinforcing the agrarian profile evident in the prison data and highlighting the removal of economically productive bodies from famine-affected districts. The captain was

⁷¹² Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'.

⁷¹³ Libraries Tasmania, CON33, 'Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Probation System' (v) (4 Aug. 2025); Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, p. 552.

⁷¹⁴ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Arrival of Convicts at Kingstown', 6 Sept. 1848.

⁷¹⁵ The National Archives (TNA), 'ADM 101/59/3, Royal Navy Medical Journal of the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, 1848-9', p. 26 (accessed via Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>).

⁷¹⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 'Ireland', 13 Sept. 1848.

⁷¹⁷ The National Archives (TNA), 'TNA, ADM 101/59/3', p. 26.

John Baker (from London), and the guard detachments were drawn from the 11th, 58th, and 96th Regiments, amounting to fifty rank and file with two officers.⁷¹⁸ The scale of military supervision further emphasised that transportation was not merely penal relocation, but an operation sustained by coordinated policing and armed force.

The *Pestonjee Bomanjee* finally set sail on 20th September, arriving in Van Diemen's Land on 2nd January 1849,⁷¹⁹ without stopping at any intermediate port during the journey.⁷²⁰ All of the men had received seven-year sentences.⁷²¹ Two, John McConnan and Thomas Molloy, died on board and limited information is available about them.⁷²² Even within what was officially recorded as an orderly and uninterrupted passage, these deaths serve as a reminder of the human cost embedded within the administrative efficiency of transportation.

Although all of the convicts were tried in Ireland, seven will also be omitted from the following analysis because they were not Irish-born, six being military and one being a seaman. Cornelius Caulfield had no native place recorded but had a family and a previous occupation of revenue officer, implying that he was, at least, settled in Ireland; consequently, he has not been excluded. This leaves a sample size of 291.⁷²³

Luke Golden, one of the excluded military personnel, was the only convict sentenced in 1848; however, the ship also transported eight convicts who had been sentenced as early as 1846. Those who had been waiting the longest were brothers John, Michael, and Denis Conlan who had been sentenced in Clare on 24th February 1846 for 'ordering a man to quit' from their house.⁷²⁴ 'Compelling to quit' was an offence linked to 'appearing armed', 'assaulting habitations', and the writing of threatening letters or notices, all of which aimed to intimidate the tenant

⁷¹⁸ *The Morning Post*, 'Ireland', 26 Aug. 1848.

⁷¹⁹ The University of Melbourne, 'FAS Convict Ship 368.39 *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3) arrived 1849 at VDL Prosopography Index' in *Research Data Australia* (<https://researchdata.edu.au/fas-convict-ship-prosopography-index/395364>) (3 Aug. 2025).

⁷²⁰ The National Archives (TNA), 'TNA, ADM 101/59/3', p. 26.

⁷²¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷²² *Ibid.*, pp 211, 234.

⁷²³ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 24–6.

to leave their land or property.⁷²⁵ In Van Diemen's Land, Michael and Denis were later found guilty of the 'wilful murder' of Francis Burt, being described, along with two others, as 'the worst specimens of the Irish character'.⁷²⁶ Michael was executed. Denis was sentenced to execution and dissection, but this was commuted to transportation for life - ten years on Norfolk Island. There is no record of Denis committing any offence whilst on Norfolk Island and he received a colonial conditional pardon on 15th April 1862, and a free pardon on 15th October 1867.⁷²⁷ Motive for the murder appeared to have been 'deadly animosity against Burt, on account of the apprehension of an absconder', and that they 'were mad with liquor, and like wild men!'.⁷²⁸ Additionally, it is also possible that three years' incarceration while awaiting transportation had taken a psychological toll.

Nine conduct records were annotated with what appears to be a motivation for the crime for which they were convicted, five stating 'poverty', one 'very poor', and three 'starvation'. Four of these are provided in speech marks, indicating that they may be the actual words of the convicts. Most were sentenced for livestock theft, but one was arrested for housebreaking and stealing a watch. Five were married with children, which might have provided additional motivation for the offences. However, the physical descriptions of 29 convicts indicate that not all of the convicts were starving, although a number had been on a prison diet for some time. There was no crossover between this group and the nine who provided motivation for their crime. Sixteen were described as 'stout made', nine were described as having a 'double chin', and four were described with both characteristics. These convicts ranged from 23 to 46 years of age. Four were sentenced for social-order crimes, (perjury, embezzlement, and two for burglary) and of the remainder, five were convicted for food theft, 15 for livestock theft, and five for theft and handling. 242 convicts were described as either labourers or farm labourers, indicating that the majority were from rural areas, the remainder had occupations ranging from shepherd, groom, or ploughman to gentleman's servant, miller, shoemaker, and engine smith.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁵ Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, pp 180–1.

⁷²⁶ *Colonial Times*, 'The Huon Murder', 15 Aug. 1851.

⁷²⁷ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)', pp 24–26.

⁷²⁸ *Tasmanian Colonist*, 'Supreme Court.', 8 Dec. 1851.

⁷²⁹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

The medical journal for the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* indicates that during the journey convicts were treated for bronchitis, ophthalmia, diarrhoea, dyspepsia, scrofula, ascites, and haemoptysis (which can be caused by bronchitis). The journal allows some insight into the condition of the men. John McConnan (burglary) was described as ‘a man of weak constitution who has worked hard and led an intemperate life ... previous to conviction he was in a state of great poverty and wretchedness ... is a good deal emaciated’. Thomas Molloy was suffering from ascites, surgeon-superintendent Tarn describing the two men as ‘advanced in years and with constitutions impaired by previous abject misery and destitution’. As both died before arriving in Van Diemen’s Land, their ages were not recorded in the conduct registers. However, Tarn’s medical journal notes Molloy’s age as 50 and McConnan’s as only 36,⁷³⁰ highlighting the severe toll that poor living conditions had taken on their health. Molloy’s offence, stealing calves’ flesh,⁷³¹ further underscores desperation and extreme poverty, while the description provided for McConnan, in particular, suggests that the convicts’ physical condition was quickly compromised once they became ill.

The convicts, along with part of the guard, were disembarked between 6th and 10th January 1849,⁷³² and Tarn recorded that the prison was ‘well ventilated’, that ‘personal cleanliness was rigidly enforced’, and that through the regular use of chloride of lime no ‘unpleasant odour’ could be detected.⁷³³ Such observations reflect contemporary mid-nineteenth-century sanitary concerns and also reveal the importance placed by shipboard officials on documenting voyages as orderly, disciplined, and hygienically managed. By emphasising ventilation, cleanliness, and the absence of foul smells, Tarn’s account presented the convict transport not simply as a penal journey but as an institutionally regulated environment designed to demonstrate proper administrative control.

The conduct records for the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* have not been completed with the same level of detail as for the *Samuel Boddington*. Some contain copious notes of new offences, while others do not even contain basic information such as

⁷³⁰ The National Archives (TNA), ‘TNA, ADM 101/59/3’, pp 11–12, 9–10.

⁷³¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)’, p. 234.

⁷³² The National Archives (TNA), ‘TNA, ADM 101/59/3’, p. 29.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, pp 28–9.

ticket-of-leave or conditional pardon information. This unevenness highlights the inconsistent bureaucratic recording practices within the convict system, and none record probation station, convict class, or period of labour. The absence of such information complicates attempts to reconstruct the full trajectory of individual prisoners after arrival in Van Diemen's Land. Nevertheless, the majority note that the convict must reimburse the government for the cost of their passage before receiving a conditional pardon, and several mention applications for family members to have their passage paid to VD,⁷³⁴ suggesting that transportation could gradually transform from penal exile into a pathway for familial migration.

Although approximately 20 convicts were almost immediately employed as constables, the real figure may be somewhat higher because this information was often only revealed on the conduct record when a convict was dismissed from the police or recommended for dismissal. Only one of the constables (Michael Grimes) appears to have been granted a ticket-of-leave on arrival, and only two appear to have served without incident (Elisha Lilly and Simon Murphy).⁷³⁵ Robson wrote that they were 'usually dismissed for misdemeanours',⁷³⁶ an opinion supported by the conduct records, which indicate that the majority were reported or dismissed for alcohol-related offences, causing them to perform their duties unsatisfactorily.⁷³⁷

5.7 Demographics and Offence Typologies in Van Diemen's Land

Figure 5.5 below indicates that the crime typology demographic on the *Samuel Boddington* in 1845 was almost evenly split between survival-related crimes and those reflecting defiance or disorder. This suggests that while poverty was significant, resistance, unrest, and socially disruptive behaviour played a major role in criminalisation. In comparison, crime typology onboard the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* suggests that, by 1849, criminal behaviour among Irish convicts was

⁷³⁴ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 103.

⁷³⁷ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷³⁸ Ibid.

primarily a response to acute deprivation rather than social defiance.⁷³⁸ This change reflects how the Famine reshaped the context of crime, with survival becoming the principal motivation for criminal acts. This suggests a shift from protest and disorder towards subsistence offending, because the famine cohort is disproportionately concentrated in survival crimes, linking the crime typology directly to anomie and limited opportunities for agency.

Figure 5.5 – Simplified Crime Typology Comparison by Percentage Onboard⁷³⁹

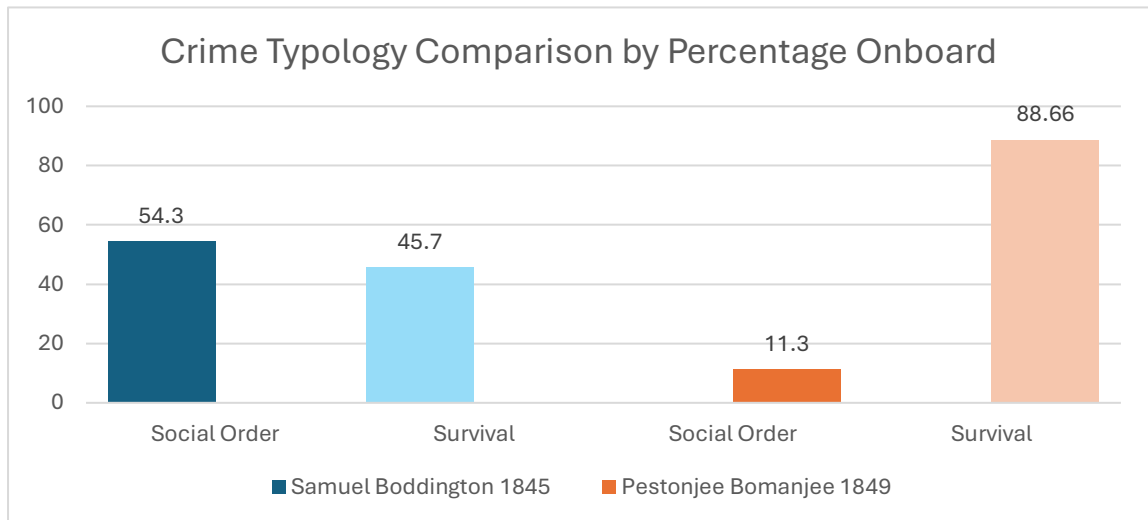
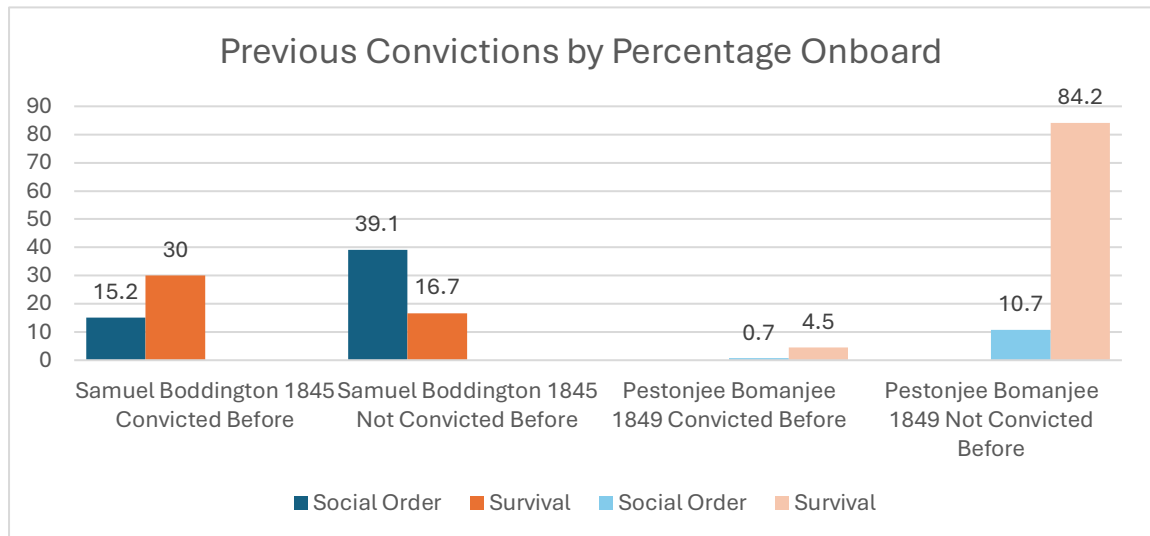


Figure 5.6 below, strongly reinforces this conclusion. On the *Samuel Boddington* (1845), there was a fairly balanced spread between those convicts with prior convictions and those without, and between both crime typology categories. However, on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (1849), the vast majority of convicts, especially those convicted for survival crimes, had no previous criminal record. Additionally, there is a dramatic increase in the number of first-time offenders convicted for survival crimes of 965% (from 23 to 245 individuals), suggesting that many of these men had entered the criminal justice system as a result of famine-related pressures rather than longstanding criminal involvement.⁷⁴⁰ This shift is consistent with the anomic conditions created by the Famine, in which the collapse of normal economic and social structures pushed otherwise law-abiding individuals towards acts of subsistence offending. This suggests that famine-era

⁷³⁸ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷³⁹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷⁴⁰ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

survival offending was largely situational rather than habitual, because the surge is concentrated among first-time offenders, supporting the claim that famine conditions generated restricted agency rather than being a simple expansion of criminal propensity

Figure 5.6 – Previous Convictions by Percentage Onboard⁷⁴¹

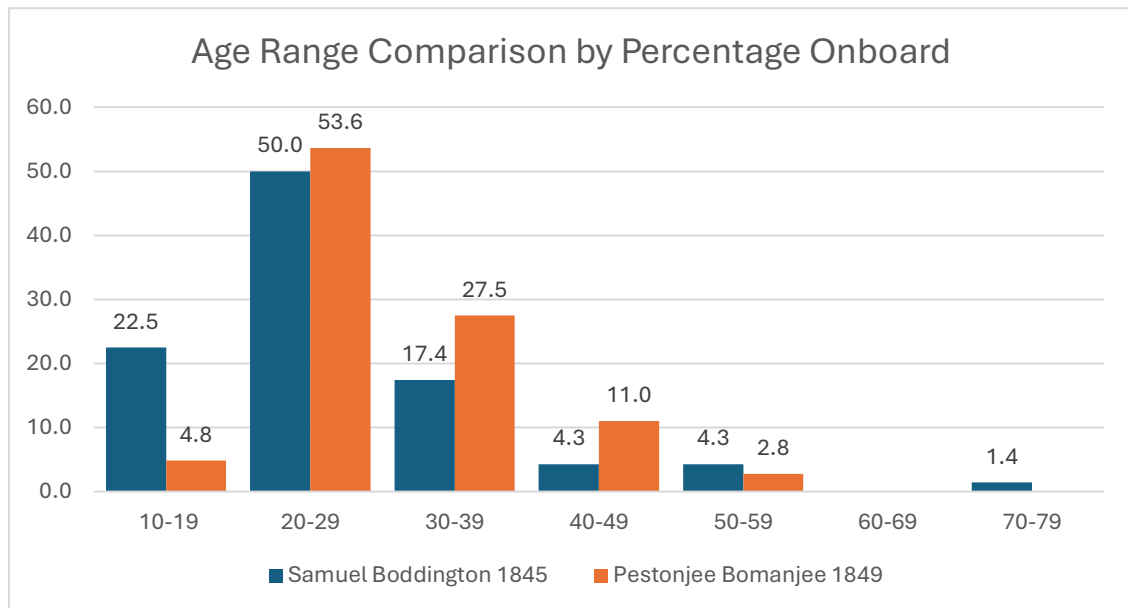


The 138 convicts on the *Samuel Boddington* ranged in age from 11 to 72, whereas the 291 on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* cover a narrower range, from 16 to 57. Figure 5.7 below indicates that on both ships, the 20-29 age group was most frequently represented,⁷⁴² as was also the case with the Sligo and Kilmainham prison registers for both periods. The Sligo prison registers are a particularly useful comparison here as they do not contain any convicts and therefore suggest a possible nationwide trend.⁷⁴³ Overall, the comparison between ships reveals a marked demographic shift in convict populations before and during the Famine, with the 1849 cohort showing a pronounced increase in mature male convicts between the ages of 20-39. The *Samuel Boddington* carried a more diverse and marginalised population, including children and elderly individuals, whereas, in contrast, the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* was dominated by adults in their prime working years.⁷⁴⁴ This suggests that famine pressures fell most heavily on

⁷⁴¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷⁴² Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷⁴³ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; NAI, *Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.
⁷⁴⁴ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

the core working-age population, because the 1849 cohort clusters in ages 20–39, connecting subsistence crime to household responsibility and crisis-driven decision-making.

Figure 5.7 – Age Range Comparison by Percentage Onboard⁷⁴⁵

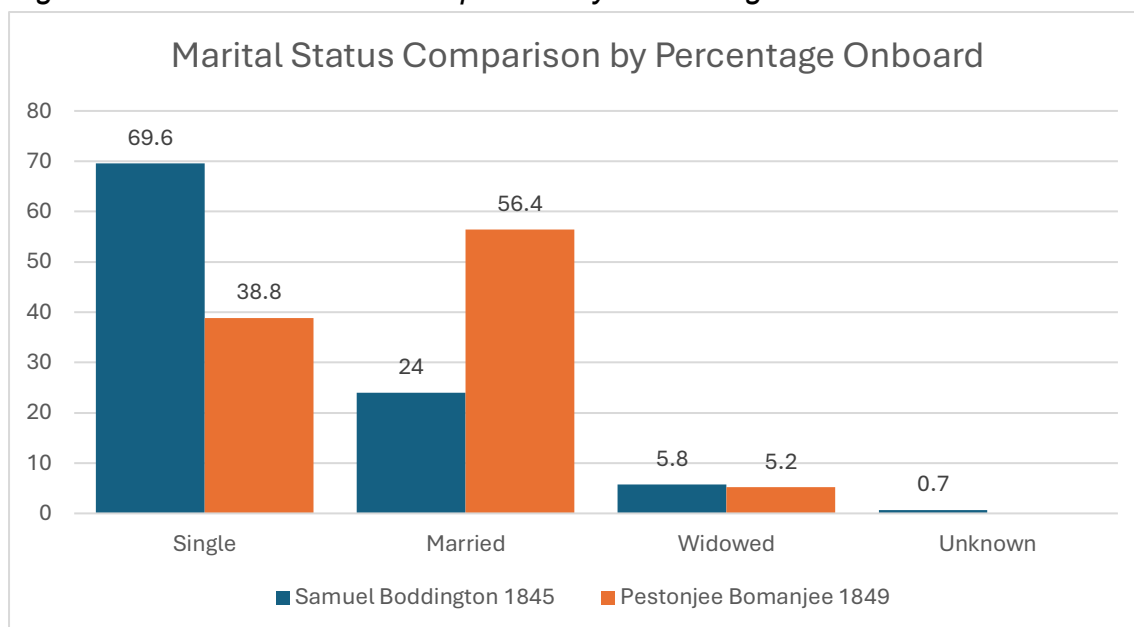


The situation becomes clearer when marital status is examined (Figure 5.8). The *Samuel Boddington* carried a more diverse and marginalised population, including children, elderly individuals, and a high proportion of single convicts. In contrast, the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* was dominated by adults in their prime working years (20–39) and included a disproportionately high number of married individuals. This points towards agency exercised by the convicts. The *Samuel Boddington*'s cohort included a number of convicts involved in social-order crimes such as agrarian unrest, as well as reflecting a population swept up in a broad, indiscriminate penal system which included the socially and economically vulnerable who may have had little control over their circumstances, such as juveniles or the elderly. Their presence aboard the ship indicates a more severe approach to criminal justice, where social marginality translated more directly into transportation. Conversely, the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*'s demographic suggests a more self-targeted selection, containing significantly more convicts who were adults with familial ties, and in their prime working years. These men may have engaged in criminal activity not out of deviance but as a rational, survival-driven

⁷⁴⁵ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

response to famine and displacement.⁷⁴⁶ This suggests that survival offending was often oriented towards household survival rather than individual deviance, because the famine cohort includes a much higher proportion of married men. Agency was therefore relational, shaped by the demands of household survival.

*Figure 5.8 – Marital Status Comparison by Percentage Onboard*⁷⁴⁷



To help test this argument, the rate of reoffending once in Van Diemen’s Land was also examined. Among the Irish convicts transported on the *Samuel Boddington* in 1845, only 14.5% did not reoffend, compared with 27.5% of those on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* in 1849. This means that the proportion of non-reoffenders from the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* was almost double that of the earlier cohort. This notable change suggests a shift in convict character and behaviour during the Famine period, likely reflecting the fact that many convicts in 1849 were first-time offenders driven by survival rather than habitual criminality.⁷⁴⁸ As such, they may have been less inclined to reoffend once their immediate needs were met in Van Diemen’s Land. This outcome is significant because it suggests that once the conditions of extreme deprivation were removed, many famine-era offenders no longer engaged in serious criminal activity, supporting the argument

⁷⁴⁶ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*’; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)’.

⁷⁴⁷ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*’; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)’.

⁷⁴⁸ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*’; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)’.

that their earlier offences were driven primarily by necessity rather than persistent criminal behaviour.

For the purposes of this thesis, offences have been classified into three categories. The 'minor' category includes acts such as drunkenness, tippling, being out after hours, petty theft, and so forth; offences that primarily challenged authority and mainly affected the convicts themselves, usually involving alcohol, and behaviour which largely would not have been considered an offence had the perpetrator not been in the probationary system.

The 'severe' category has been reserved for individuals who had committed serious crimes against others or whose conduct had led to further transportation to either Norfolk Island or Port Arthur. More severe punishment was not unheard of; Michael Walsh, originally transported for sheep stealing, was hanged in Launceston in 1860 for rape.⁷⁴⁹

The 'middling' category covers other offences, typically those which were not especially harmful to others but were frequent or persistent, including larceny. Common punishments included fines, hard labour, flogging, the revocation of a ticket-of-leave, solitary confinement, and the use of the treadmill.

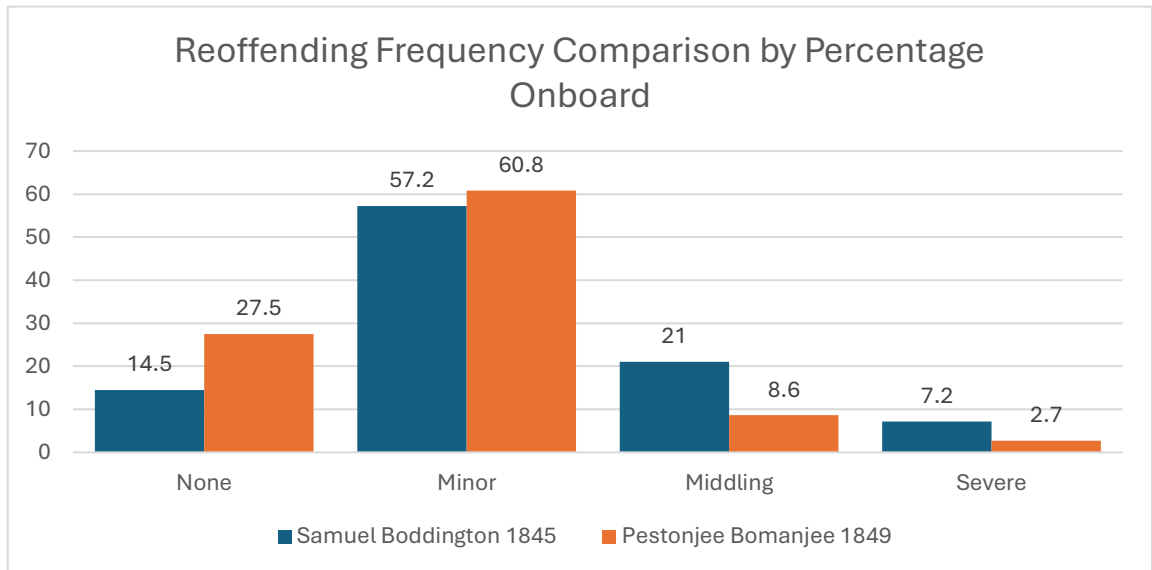
Figure 5.9 indicates a significant change in the reoffending pattern between the 1845 sample and that from 1849. In both periods, most reoffending was frequent but minor. Whilst the number of convicts involved in middling and severe offences was similar in both periods, they reduced in real terms with regard to percentages.⁷⁵⁰ The difference in the number of convicts who were not arrested for reoffending suggests that the majority were not criminal by nature and aimed to get through their probationary period as quickly as possible, supporting the argument that these men may have engaged in criminal activity in Ireland as a rational, survival-driven response to starvation and displacement, and had no need to continue such behaviour in Van Diemen's Land. This suggests that once subsistence conditions stabilised, many famine-era offenders de-escalated, because serious reoffending is lower in the 1849 cohort. This strengthens the

⁷⁴⁹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*', p. 132.

⁷⁵⁰ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee (3)*'.

argument that famine crime was driven by scarcity rather than enduring criminality.

Figure 5.9 – Reoffending Frequency Comparison by Percentage Onboard⁷⁵¹



The high number of married convicts aboard the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, for instance, may reflect those who acted in defence of family survival, engaging in criminal activity as a means of sustaining kinship networks, and lives. Rather than being passive recipients of state punishment, these convicts can be seen as actors navigating systemic hardship whose actions, though criminalised, were often rational and socially embedded. The contrast between the two voyages thus allows us to better understand the social logic and narrow choices that shaped convict lives.

5.8 Convict Life in Van Diemen’s Land

Upon arrival, the convicts of the *Samuel Boddington* were largely assigned to Rocky Hills probationary station for anything from 12 months to three years labour.⁷⁵² Rocky Hills housed around 400 men,⁷⁵³ and had been established some years earlier with the aim of using forced labour to construct and maintain bridges and roads in the area.⁷⁵⁴ Meredith had passed by the Rocky Hills road

⁷⁵¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*’; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)’.

⁷⁵² Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, ‘Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*’.

⁷⁵³ Libraries Tasmania, ‘Libraries Tasmania, *Convicts in Van Diemen’s Land*’.

⁷⁵⁴ Tasmanian Heritage Council, ‘Development Guidelines: Rocky Hills Probation Station and Road Station’, 2014, p. 1

gang in the early 1840s and had been unimpressed, writing that the convicts created 'greater obstacles than they removed', and that their idleness was 'notorious'.⁷⁵⁵ She described their accommodation as a 'large assemblage of huts and other buildings, almost like a village' erected specifically to accommodate such road gangs,⁷⁵⁶ and which indicated a permanent or semi-permanent status.

Syme had been allocated to the Rocky Hills probationary gang as an officer in 1841 and was still there when the convicts from the *Samuel Boddington* arrived. He confirmed Meredith's opinion, describing the station as a 'hot-bed of idleness', with 'some outbreak or depraved action' 'in continuous occurrence'. Such activities included escaping to become bushrangers, highway robbery, or stealing from habitations, sometimes forcing the household servants to assist.⁷⁵⁷ The men were not always safe from each other either, with violence towards another prisoner and theft of rations, clothing, or possessions sometimes being recorded in the conduct records.⁷⁵⁸ Punishment could include extension of the transportation or probation periods, hard labour, sometimes in chains, the lash, solitary confinement of up to 30 days, and being downgraded in class. Syme believed solitary confinement to be the most effective, and lashes and hard labour in chains to be the least effective, feeling that such punishments dehumanised and hardened the convicts who experienced them.⁷⁵⁹ In 1865, social reformer Henry Mayhew, known for his work on documenting poverty and crime in Britain, interviewed an ex-convict returned from Van Diemen's Land who had been flogged many times, and whose statement supported the opinions provided above. The nameless convict stated that 'I could have taken the flogger's life at the time, I felt such revenge. Flogging always gives me that feeling; I know it does, from what I've heard others say who had been flogged like myself'.⁷⁶⁰ Over 100 years later, Robson agreed that men who were flogged became 'hardened to, and careless of, punishment', and it is fortunate for our sample that after 1840,

(<https://heritage.tas.gov.au/Documents/Rocky%20Hills%20Probation%20Station%20and%20Road%20Station.pdf>) (3 Aug. 2025).

⁷⁵⁵ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, pp 66–7.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁷⁵⁷ Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, pp 191–3.

⁷⁵⁸ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'.

⁷⁵⁹ Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, pp 283–5.

⁷⁶⁰ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1861), pp 387–8.

flogging became increasingly rare; during the probation period only 4% of prisoners were flogged, compared with 38% of prisoners during the earlier assignment period.⁷⁶¹

For those who received secondary sentences of further transportation and were sent to Norfolk Island, conditions were much worse. The cultural and moral reform aimed for by penal reformer and one time governor of Norfolk Island, Alexander Maconochie, had amounted to a three-year blip (1840-1843) in a history otherwise filled with shocking tales of sadism and abuse.⁷⁶² The Island was described by Robert Hughes as 'a machine for extinguishing hope',⁷⁶³ and six convicts from the *Samuel Boddington* were sent there, as were five from the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*.⁷⁶⁴

The case of Michael Brennan provides just one example of how a convict's behavioural trajectory can reflect both psychological strain and resistance within the disciplinary environment of the penal system. Brennan, aged 19, had been sentenced for seven years on 16th October 1845 for stealing clothes, his first offence. He had reportedly behaved well in gaol prior to his departure; however, his behaviour quickly deteriorated in Van Diemen's Land. In September 1850, he escaped from a constable after being arrested for attempting to pass a forged note with intent to defraud Ann Walsh. This offence resulted in a 15-year transportation sentence, beginning with three and a half years of probation at Norfolk Island, where he arrived on 9th December. The conduct record, though partially illegible, indicates that Brennan was in immediate trouble for disobedience and idleness, receiving multiple sentences of hard labour. In the years that followed, his punishments escalated: he was given 50 lashes in April 1851 and another 36 in June. Further infractions included such minor offences as having a dirty face, quarrelling, and 'talking in the rank'. In September 1856, he was sentenced to four months' hard labour for neglect of duty, followed later that same month by nine months for possessing a gold pencil case, perhaps an attempt to assert autonomy or self-worth. Although he was granted a ticket-of-

⁷⁶¹ Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, pp 93, 111, 102.

⁷⁶² Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 503, 515, 533–6, 511–12.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁷⁶⁴ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.

leave on 2nd November 1858, it was revoked on 15th March 1859 for being absent from muster. Eventually, he received a colonial conditional pardon on 24th December 1861, after serving a sentence of almost 13 years (his original sentence had been for seven years of which he would only have been expected to serve half).⁷⁶⁵ Brennan's record suggests a deterioration in behaviour, reflected in the escalating frequency of punishments, repeated minor infractions, and cycles of conditional progress followed by further disciplinary action.

Many of the crimes for which the convicts were transported during the Famine can be understood as survival offences, involving the theft of food or of items which could be sold or bartered for food. This conclusion is supported by Robson, who wrote that Irish convicts included a 'very high' proportion of men with no previous convictions who had received the minimum sentence,⁷⁶⁶ suggesting that many offenders were not habitual criminals but individuals drawn into crime under exceptional circumstances.

A similar perception was expressed by Alexander Marjoribanks, a Scottish traveller and writer who visited New South Wales in 1840. Quoting a contributor to the *European Review*, he repeated the observation 'that a man is banished from Scotland for a great crime, from England for a small one, and from Ireland, morally speaking, for no crime at all', making many Irish convicts essentially good men.⁷⁶⁷ By reproducing the remark without criticism, Marjoribanks reinforced the view that many Irish convicts were essentially ordinary men whose offences arose from necessity rather than entrenched criminal behaviour.

The contrast between English and Irish convicts was raised again in 1850 by the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland who drew Earl Grey's attention 'to the fact that the general character of the Irish convicts differs widely from that of the English ... the offences of the Irish convicts are usually thefts to which they are often driven by distress'.⁷⁶⁸ This assessment framed Irish transportation not as the removal of

⁷⁶⁵ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee (3)*', pp 17, 338.

⁷⁶⁶ Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 25.

⁷⁶⁷ Alexander Marjoribanks, *Travels in New South Wales*, p. 154.

⁷⁶⁸ The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Cited in Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 50.

hardened offenders but as the displacement of men pushed into petty theft by economic desperation.

Although individual motivation can rarely be ascertained with certainty today, those who were not actively seeking transportation as an escape from dire famine conditions were either aiming for imprisonment or had accepted that potential gain from the crime outweighed potential risk of the punishment if caught. Such behaviour suggests a form of restricted decision making, in which crime functioned as a calculated response to extreme deprivation rather than as evidence of ingrained criminality. When transportation itself was the intended outcome, the argument for agency becomes even clearer, as offenders deliberately used the penal system as a means of escaping famine conditions.

Robson's research suggests that a relatively high proportion of those who did not reoffend were Irish convicts, who had been transported after 1840 for the seven-year minimum period. This description particularly fits the 1849 convict sample from the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*.⁷⁶⁹ Robson added that the Irish convict was 'not inured to crime to the extent of the London pickpocket', and Williams similarly argues that the majority were unlikely to have 'repeated the serious crimes for which they were transported'.⁷⁷⁰ Indeed, many convicts later became established tradesmen or farmers, while others undoubtedly became involved in the gold rush of the 1850s.⁷⁷¹ These conclusions support the observations of Meredith who wrote that although some convicts remained 'wholly incorrigible', far more became 'good, willing men', who, grateful for the opportunity to begin anew, lived as 'quiet, orderly, industrious' members of colonial society.⁷⁷² Meredith's remarks formed part of a broader colonial defence of the transportation system, which sought to justify the continued use of convict labour within expanding settler colonies by emphasising the possibility of reform and productive citizenship among transported prisoners.

Alexander similarly notes that Britain often imagined its convict colonies as dangerous and disorderly places, echoing Meredith's view that Van Diemen's

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 93; Williams, *Convicts in the Colonies*, p. 180.

⁷⁷¹ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, pp 2–3.

⁷⁷² Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 248.

Land had become a 'shamefully slandered colony'. Meredith elaborated that 'not even in an English country village can a lady walk alone with less fear of harm or insult than in this capital of Van Diemen's Land'.⁷⁷³ Such comments highlight the contrast between civic anxieties about criminality and colonial claims that transported convicts could become disciplined and productive members of society. Such narratives also served an important ideological function within the British Empire, presenting transportation as both a mechanism of punishment and a means of populating and stabilising settler colonies. This negative reputation was likely shaped by British perceptions of convicts as inherently dangerous, even though many were transported for relatively minor offences such as theft and posed little physical threat, while the most serious offenders were often confined to places like Norfolk Island until their spirits were largely broken.⁷⁷⁴

The reoffending comparison exercise, above, further undermines the notion of an irredeemably criminal convict population, suggesting instead that the environment in Van Diemen's Land was not socially disorganised or anomic. Rather, the increase in non-reoffenders among the 1849 cohort supports the argument that many Irish convicts were not habitual criminals, but famine sufferers driven to theft by desperation. This dual identity, as both convicts and victims of systemic failure, complicates simple classifications and challenges the moral binaries imposed by British penal ideology. Understanding this intersectionality is crucial. These individuals occupied a liminal social space, punished as criminals yet often pitied or even sympathised with due to their famine-related suffering. This dual status may help explain why, as Syme noted, those who were 'well conducted' and 'steady' could be integrated into free society.⁷⁷⁵ The shared trauma of the Famine, coupled with their perceived low threat level, may have enabled a smoother path to acceptance for many Irish ex-convicts, highlighting that their criminality was viewed as circumstantial rather than innate. In this context, Van Diemen's Land society may have been more receptive to the reintegration of Famine convicts, precisely because they were understood to be victims of broader forces, not merely moral failings.

⁷⁷³ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 2; Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 35.

⁷⁷⁴ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, p. 549.

⁷⁷⁵ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 2; Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, p. 107.

However, 'transportation was a physical, psychological, and social trauma from which some never recovered', exacerbated by punishments such as 'flogging, a reduction of diet, or confinement alone in the dark for days on end'.⁷⁷⁶ Alexander touches on this when she writes that about 20% of the Van Diemen's Land convicts suffered a traumatic response to the convict system, largely men who had reoffended and consequently suffered harsh physical punishment at one of the penal stations of Port Arthur or Norfolk Island.⁷⁷⁷ Some of these undoubtedly became the 'marginal group of criminals, tramps and casual labourers' who were unable or unwilling to form relationships and beget families, however Alexander's definition of trauma is based on those who were unable to function in wider society. If allowance is made for those who could function in society, but who drank too much, or who had difficulty maintaining employment or relationships, then the figure of the traumatised would undoubtedly be much higher. Neither does Alexander make allowance for those who entered the justice system already carrying trauma with them, especially those who had left Ireland during the Famine and who had likely witnessed much death and loss of community before being torn away from everything familiar.⁷⁷⁸ A reasonable exclusion given the difficulty in establishing any meaningful measurement to such distress. Alan Brooke and David Brandon also recognise the validity of the trauma of transportation but exclude the trauma that many Irish convicts undoubtedly carried with them before entering the justice system. However, they devote a whole chapter of their book *Bound for Botany Bay* to the trauma of exile, believing that 'the experience of being torn from all that was familiar to be forcibly transported across the world by sea could never be other than traumatic'.⁷⁷⁹ It was an experience likely reinforced multiple times during the various stages of the convict experience; from original arrest, and sentencing, during the move from the local prison to the transportation depot; from there to the ship; and again upon reaching their destination. On arrival, the authorities still had control over the convict's life, and so for some, this trauma undoubtedly continued throughout their probationary period, while their behaviour was 'watched carefully and noted

⁷⁷⁶ Williams, *Convicts in the Colonies*, p. xv.

⁷⁷⁷ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 2; Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp 547–9.

⁷⁷⁸ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁹ Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, p. 12.

systematically, in order that it might be considered when their subsequent treatment came to be decided on' and with the intention that 'all may be brought within the reach of moral and religious influences'.⁷⁸⁰ The result was the creation of an artificial social world in which the convicts were 'compelled to live',⁷⁸¹ a situation which must have been considerably harder for some to survive than for others. It would be difficult to argue with Robson, who believed that reoffending could be 'the result of the blind hitting out of desperate men driven to near madness by an inflexible system of discipline in the penal settlements', whilst simultaneously prolonging the very situation they wanted to escape.⁷⁸²

Those who successfully applied for their families to join them in Van Diemen's Land,⁷⁸³ or who replaced their previous spouse, friends, or community with new, undoubtedly found themselves better placed to deal with their new lives than those who could not, but because there were far more men convicted than women, many men never found a wife.⁷⁸⁴ Alcohol has always been turned to for its numbing propensities and undoubtedly, in many cases, loneliness or 'the system of convict discipline drove them [the convict] to seek solace in the bottle when they could'.⁷⁸⁵ Meredith observed that 'an addiction to drink is the chief temptation to be feared; if they resist that all goes well', and Robson understood that 'sobriety was not a characteristic of the convicts', and that the Irish were 'especially prone to intoxication'.⁷⁸⁶ These beliefs support the evidence provided by the conduct registers, as where the convict did reoffend, alcohol was often involved, a pairing recognised by pioneering sociologist L A J (Adolphe) Quetelet in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸⁷

Re-offences classed as 'minor' for the purposes of this thesis would generally not have been considered an issue if the perpetrator had not already been in the convict system. Therefore, if these are excluded from the reoffending data, 28.2%

⁷⁸⁰ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, pp 323, 325.

⁷⁸¹ Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'Introduction' in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters, Narrating Convict Lives* (Carlton South, Victoria, 2001), p. 2.

⁷⁸² Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 110.

⁷⁸³ Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, p. 8.

⁷⁸⁴ Williams, *Convicts in the Colonies*, p. 87; Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, pp 8, 62.

⁷⁸⁵ Alexander, *Tasmania's Convicts*, p. 67; Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 111.

⁷⁸⁶ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 330; Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, pp 111, 12.

⁷⁸⁷ Siegel, *Criminology*, p. 181.

of the convicts onboard the *Samuel Boddington* (1845), and 11.3% of those on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (1849), reoffended in Van Diemen's Land.⁷⁸⁸ That the majority of the sample from the *Samuel Boddington* did not continue criminal activity in Van Diemen's Land suggests that the convicts recognised, albeit subconsciously, a society that allowed for progression and rewarded hard work, eliminating the need for protest crime, whilst for the sample from the *Pestonjee Bomanjee*, the results suggest the same, and that their previous criminal activity in Ireland was largely related to poverty and the Famine. Once arrested, they could easily have been influenced by the criminals around them, and indeed, Syme could not 'conceive a better school for the propagation of criminal knowledge and habits than a probation gang'.⁷⁸⁹ Much of the re-offending that did occur could be seen as frustration against a situation over which the convict had little control, rather than an indication of criminal tendencies, and it would seem that most chose to work within the system, serve their sentences, and emerge from the system as soon as possible in order to restart their lives. Certainly, the decision to marry, whilst not conclusive, would imply acceptance of their new life, and a further example of agency. It is even possible that this sense of control succeeded in somewhat mitigating the trauma of the Famine and transportation experiences.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the presence of agency enacted by the convicts either in their criminal activity or their attempts for survival through transportation, and this is also indicated through their decisions to accept their sentences, and to avoid significant reoffending, thus generating the best outcome that they could in order to live the rest of their lives in a new world.

Transportation was widely regarded as 'a harsh and difficult punishment',⁷⁹⁰ and colonial Australia was certainly 'no more a working-man's paradise than Victorian Britain'.⁷⁹¹ For many English convicts this assessment was accurate. The

⁷⁸⁸ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/75, *Samuel Boddington*'; Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee* (3)'.
⁷⁸⁹ Syme, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land*, p. 276.

⁷⁹⁰ Michael Martin, *Spike Island: Saints, Felons and Famine* (Dublin, 2007), p. 76.

⁷⁹¹ David Kent and Norma Townsend, cited in Brooke & Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, p. 88.

experience of Irish prisoners, however, could be somewhat different. The Irish were the 'poorest group of immigrants to leave from anywhere in Europe in the nineteenth century',⁷⁹² and many of those transported during the Famine were escaping conditions of extreme deprivation. Within that context, the economic prospects available in Van Diemen's Land could appear comparatively favourable, as employment opportunities were often more plentiful than in famine-stricken Ireland and offered the possibility of subsistence without the immediate threat of starvation.

Even two decades before the Great Famine, a convict ship surgeon-superintendent, Peter Miller Cunningham recorded Irish convicts telling him that 'they had never been half so well off in their lives before', despite being reluctant to leave their homeland.⁷⁹³ Cunningham attributed this not only to material improvement but also to the character he believed Irish prisoners displaced on board ship, observing that they showed 'an anxiety to oblige' and a ready willingness to assist officers, in contrast to English convicts who, in his view, were less responsive.⁷⁹⁴ Such remarks, though shaped by contemporary stereotypes, nonetheless reveal how many transported Irish prisoners were perceived as rural labourers and 'poor simple peasantry' convicted of comparatively minor offences.⁷⁹⁵

By the time of the Famine, it appears that this perception persisted. As Carey observed 'at a time when merely living in Ireland was a death sentence for multitudes, to be sentenced to transportation was often a high award'.⁷⁹⁶ Although rhetorical, this statement captures a broader contemporary recognition that exile could, under famine conditions, be interpreted less as punishment than as a desperate opportunity for survival.

The evidence examined in this chapter therefore suggests that transportation functioned not solely as a disciplinary measure but also as part of a wider repertoire of famine survival strategies. For some individuals, conviction offered a

⁷⁹² James Boyce, 'Return to Eden: Van Diemen's Land and the Early British Settlement of Australia' in *Environment and History*, xiv, no. 2 (2008), p. 300.

⁷⁹³ P. M. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales* (London, 1827), p. 241.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 243–4.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷⁹⁶ Carey, *Mountjoy*, p. 40.

means of escape from immediate scarcity and social collapse. These findings reinforce the argument that criminality during the Famine must be understood not simply as deviance, but as agency exercised within conditions of extreme deprivation. This theme reappears within Ireland itself, where prisons, workhouses, and street-level survival likewise formed interconnected systems of containment and subsistence. When read alongside Chapter 4, the Van Diemen's Land material helps distinguish survival-driven offending from entrenched criminality. The famine cohort's high proportion of first-time offenders and its lower rate of serious reoffending support the central claim of this thesis that much Famine-era crime reflected restricted agency within anomic collapse, rather than a simple rise in deviance. At the same time, this chapter shows how colonial governance operated across space, converting hunger-related behaviours into punishable categories, then reorganising lives through discipline, labour extraction, and stigma. The following chapter therefore returns to Ireland to examine how these dynamics unfolded within domestic institutions such as prisons, workhouses, and sites of public order enforcement.

Chapter 6: The Irish Experience

6.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the examination of transportation by shifting attention from Van Diemen's Land to those convicts sent instead to Bermuda or confined on Spike Island. The destinies of these groups diverged from those transported to Van Diemen's Land: while the latter forged new lives as part of Australia's emerging colonial story, the experiences of Bermuda and Spike Island convicts remained bound to Ireland and its social upheavals. By examining these destinations first, the chapter establishes how differing penal outcomes shaped survival, identity, and agency within imperial systems that did not always result in permanent exile. In doing so, it also extends the themes of trauma and agency explored in the previous chapter, but relocates them within environments that keep convicts socially or geographically connected to Ireland. In this chapter, agency is used to mean restricted choices and forms of institutional navigation under conditions of scarcity and institutional control, rather than autonomy or empowerment.

Having established these penal contexts, the chapter then turns to conditions within Ireland itself, moving from institutional settings to wider social environments. An exploration of the broader realities of crime during the famine will follow, along with a consideration of its effects not only on prisoners but also on their children. Offences such as vagrancy, begging, and prostitution will be discussed as urban survival strategies rather than merely criminal acts, situating these experiences within the wider social and historical framework. The individuals committing these offences, often positioned at the lowest levels of society, form a key focus of this chapter, as groups likely to have been among those most acutely affected by the devastating consequences of the crisis.

The focus then shifts from urban to rural Ireland, examining agrarian tensions, property protection, and survival crime in the countryside. This section considers how food insecurity, the breakdown of ordinary means of subsistence, and fear of theft affected farming communities across multiple social layers, thereby

complicating any simplistic division between rich and poor and demonstrating the fluid gradations of material security that existed during the period.

Finally, the chapter turns to those who witnessed, administered, or governed the crisis, including magistrates, Poor Law Guardians, and middle-class professionals. Although not typically subject to starvation, they were nonetheless affected by the wider social crisis and the psychological burden of managing public responses to the catastrophe. This final section considers the impact of the Famine not only on direct victims, but also on those who witnessed or managed the crisis, linking the idea of witnessed trauma to the wider analysis.

Individual cases are included where the prison registers can be supplemented by contemporary newspaper reports, which provide fuller accounts than the registers alone. While each case is unique, some are more representative than others, and this additional detail allows for broader insights into the lived experience of the Famine. Such accounts reveal not only suffering but also survival strategies, reminding the reader that even those at the margins of society demonstrated agency in the face of extreme hardship. Viewed collectively, these perspectives show how the prison registers record not only deprivation and breakdown, but also the adaptive strategies through which individuals navigated famine conditions.

6.2 Bermuda: Transportation, Labour, and Survival

There are some prison hulk registers available on *Findmypast.com* for Bermuda, but none for the three convicts destined to be transported there from the 1847 Kilmainham prison registers.⁷⁹⁷ Two first-hand narratives from the 1840s and 1850s provide a more generalised account of the experience. These accounts allow individual prison register entries to be contextualised within a broader material and institutional framework, compensating for archival gaps.

John Mitchel was transported to Bermuda in 1848, although being a political prisoner, he was not housed with the rest of the convicts.⁷⁹⁸ He nevertheless

⁷⁹⁷ 'Search Prison Ship (hulk) Registers, Prison Registers' in *Findmypast* (<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/discover/institutions-and-organisations/prison-registers/prison-ship-hulk-registers>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁷⁹⁸ John Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (Dublin, 1913), pp 39–41.

described aspects of the convicts' lives which help to provide a picture of their experiences, and his account is supported by that of Ferdinand Whittingham, who arrived in Bermuda in 1855.⁷⁹⁹ Mitchel was an Irish Nationalist, whilst Whittingham was an officer employed by the British military; consequently, the two accounts provide a well-rounded observation of the convict system. When read alongside Royal Navy Medical Journals and recent academic research, these sources enable triangulation between official record, observer testimony, and prisoner experience.

Bermuda's selection as a penal destination was driven less by settlement ambitions than by labour demand, there being no indigenous inhabitants living on Bermuda when it was first colonised in 1612 by English settlers.⁸⁰⁰ After the American War of Independence, the British needed to find a new North Atlantic naval base, and construction began in 1809.⁸⁰¹ In 1822, the island was chosen as a convict destination, its isolated position being ideal, whilst the dockyards required labour after a yellow fever epidemic had decimated the workforce in 1818/9.⁸⁰² Settlers argued that the island could not support an increased population, but the *Antelope* nevertheless arrived in Bermuda in 1824 with 300 convicts on board, a practice which would continue for 40 years. Between 1824 and 1863 approximately 9,000 convicts were sent to Bermuda, of whom nearly 22% died before sentence completion,⁸⁰³ their names and nationalities largely unknown.⁸⁰⁴ This mortality rate underscores the physical risk inherent in what was often presented administratively as an alternative to execution.

From the 1847 Kilmainham sample, three convicts were transported on the *Medway* to Bermuda,⁸⁰⁵ where they were forced to work on modernising the Naval dockyards, work which involved restructuring the dockyards, quarrying

⁷⁹⁹ Ferdinand Whittingham, *Bermuda, A Colony, A Fortress, and a Prison* (London, 1857), p. 2.

⁸⁰⁰ Terrance McGovern and Edward Harris, *Defenses of Bermuda 1612-1995* (New York, 2018), p. 10.

⁸⁰¹ Anna McKay, '2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of 300 convicts on board the "Antelope"' in *National Museum of Bermuda, 2024* (<https://nmb.bm/history/britains-convict-legacy-in-bermuda/>) (25 Feb. 2026); McGovern & Harris, *Defenses of Bermuda 1612-1995*, p. 18.

⁸⁰² McKay, '2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of 300 convicts on board the "Antelope"'.

⁸⁰³ McKay, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred', 39.02-39-10.

⁸⁰⁴ McKay, '2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of 300 convicts on board the "Antelope"'.

⁸⁰⁵ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

limestone, working underwater in diving bells,⁸⁰⁶ or repairing roads.⁸⁰⁷ ‘Records suggest that many of Bermuda’s male convicts were selected as they were fit, young, and strong workers’⁸⁰⁸ and this was likely the case for Kelly and Gibney, but unlikely for Patrick Farrell, who was 57. Farrell had received seven years’ transportation ‘beyond the seas’ for horse stealing, likely a directive to ensure that he was not sent to Spike Island. John Kelly (alias Cross) was 34 and received seven years for burglary and felony; neither had been convicted before.⁸⁰⁹ Andrew Gibney was 20 and received 10 years for stealing a mare. His escalating arrests over seven months⁸¹⁰ illustrate a trajectory of survival-driven criminality rather than entrenched recidivism. All were boarded onto the *Medway* on 26th November 1847,⁸¹¹ arriving in Bermuda on 24th February 1848.⁸¹² The *Medway* would remain in Bermuda to serve as a prison and provide accommodation.⁸¹³

Records for the Bermuda Royal Naval Hospital indicate that Farrell, Gibney, and Kelly all received medical treatment either on board or shortly after their arrival in Bermuda. Gibney was treated at sea for an ulcer of the tibia, Farrell for scurvy, and Kelly for bronchitis. Other convicts were treated for enteritis, peritonitis, pneumonia, dysentery, fever, rheumatism, wounds, conjunctivitis, and syphilis.⁸¹⁴ The care provided was most likely driven by a practical concern to maintain prisoners’ physical capacity, rather than humanitarian motives, since prisoners represented labour capital whose preservation supported imperial infrastructure. Even so, out of the 704 convicts referred to by Charles Elliott below, 44 died soon

⁸⁰⁶ Anna McKay, ‘Britain’s forgotten prison island: remembering the thousands of convicts who died working in Bermuda’s dockyards’ in *The Conversation*, 2024 (<https://theconversation.com/britains-forgotten-prison-island-remembering-the-thousands-of-convicts-who-died-working-in-bermudas-dockyards-226044>) (25 Feb. 2026); McKay, ‘Separated from their Country and their Kindred’, 28.32-28.43.

⁸⁰⁷ Anna McKay, ‘The Story of Irish Convicts sent 3,000 miles from home to Bermuda’ in *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE)*, 2021 (<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0608/1226956-bermuda-irish-convicts-great-famine>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁸⁰⁸ McKay, ‘2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of 300 convicts on board the “Antelope”’.

⁸⁰⁹ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 653, 656.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 635, 595, 591.

⁸¹¹ *National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Prison Registers, Smithfield Prison, 1844-1849* (Dublin, digitised copy consulted), p. 99.

⁸¹² *Morning Chronicle*, ‘The Navy’, 28 Feb. 1848.

⁸¹³ Whittingham, *Bermuda, A Colony*, p. 188.

⁸¹⁴ The National Archives (TNA), ‘ADM 101/11/1, Royal Navy Medical Journal of the Bermuda Royal Naval Hospital, Midsummer quarter (1 April-30 June) 1848’, pp 3–5, 1–18 (accessed via Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>).

after arrival, their deaths likely reflecting the physical debilitation many prisoners carried with them from famine-stricken Ireland.⁸¹⁵

Four months after the arrival of the *Medway*, Elliott, writing in his capacity as colonial governor, informed Earl Grey, the British Secretary of State in the colonies, that a striking number of the 704 prisoners transported on the *Medway* and *Bangalore* had been convicted for stealing food, or for agrarian offences. He attributed the first category largely to the 'dreadful calamities which befell the poorer classes' during the previous two years, while suggesting that the latter were connected to agitation that had arisen during a period of acute distress.⁸¹⁶ By framing these crimes as the product of extraordinary hardship rather than inherent criminality, Elliott implicitly distinguished famine-driven offending from habitual crime.

Elliott further described the convicts as 'for the most part friendless men in humble stations of life', and recommended that many be granted early tickets-of-leave.⁸¹⁷ His appeal to imperial authorities combined humanitarian concern with administrative pragmatism, proposing conditional leniency for men whom he regarded as products of social crisis rather than persistent offenders. This distinction between necessity-driven offenders and habitual criminals mirrors contemporary Irish prison discourse,⁸¹⁸ reinforcing the argument that famine criminality was structurally produced rather than inherently deviant.

Mitchel recorded seeing 'many hundreds of poor convicts marched in gangs, some of them in chains, and hearing the 'shrieks of the mangled wretches' during flogging. He described the *Medway* as the largest of the hulks,⁸¹⁹ including an illustration in his memoir (Figure 6.1):

⁸¹⁵ McKay, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred', 20.55-21.16, 38.46-38.51.

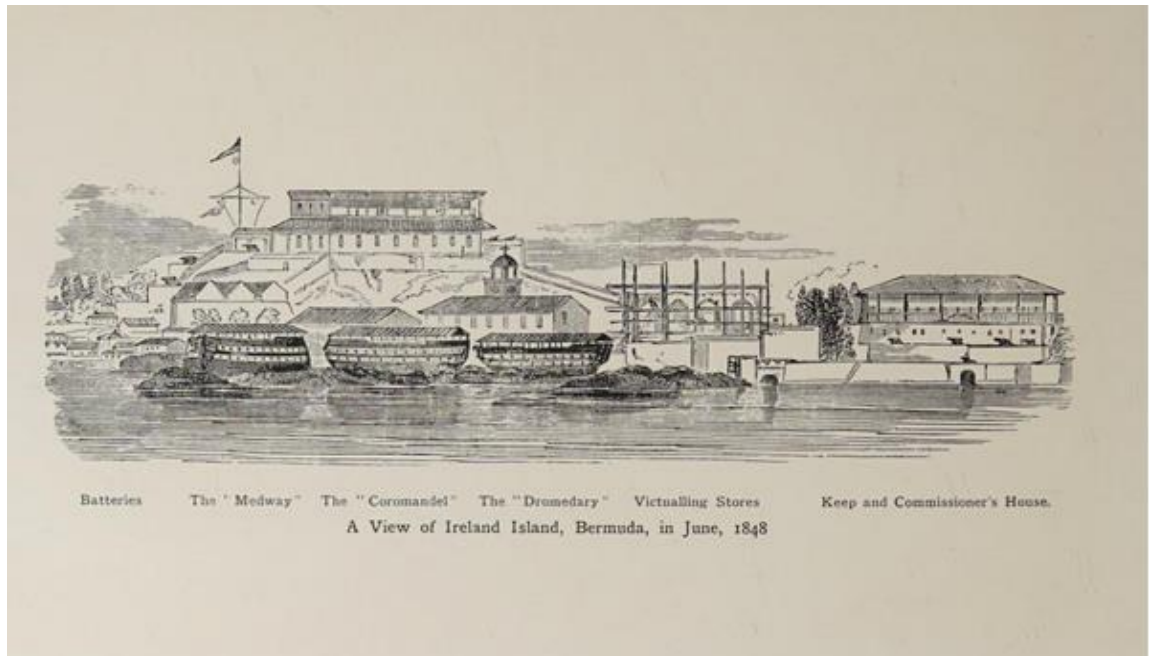
⁸¹⁶ Charles Elliott, cited in *ibid.*, 34.10-35.17.

⁸¹⁷ Charles Elliott, cited in *ibid.*, 35.18-35.31.

⁸¹⁸ For an example see Clement Johnson, cited in Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847* (HC 1847-48 (952), vol. xxxiv, Dublin, 1848), pp 14-15.

⁸¹⁹ Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, pp 53, 46.

Figure 6.1 – A View of Ireland Island, Bermuda, June 1848⁸²⁰



Yet his observations also reveal that life on the hulks was not defined solely by punishment and suffering. He described an entrenched sub-culture of petty theft, gambling, and informal trade, in which prisoners obtained small sums of money through a combination of theft and illicit exchange. Those employed in quarries or construction were permitted to retain a small fraction of their wages, while others manufactured items such as shoes or small crafts which were then sold, creating what Mitchel and Whittingham both regarded as a significant informal exchange between convicts and civilians.⁸²¹

Archaeological investigations at the site of the *Dromedary* hulk have since provided material confirmation of these activities with the recovery of counterfeit coin dies, gaming counters, dominoes, and dice.⁸²² Such finds substantiate Mitchel's claims that gambling was widespread and that convicts developed micro-economies within confinement. These practices demonstrate restricted but deliberate forms of agency, revealing that prisoners were not merely passive recipients of punishment but active participants in informal social and economic networks, even under strict surveillance.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., p. 48 facing.

⁸²¹ Ibid., pp 122–3; Whittingham, *Bermuda, A Colony*, p. 210; Christopher Addams, 'Counterfeiting on the Bermuda Convict Hulk *Dromedary*' in *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia*, xviii (2007), p. 3.

⁸²² Addams, 'Counterfeiting on the Bermuda Convict Hulk *Dromedary*', pp 5, 12, 3.

Mitchel's characterisations of the prisoners themselves must, however, be treated cautiously. He described many long-term convicts as possessing 'evil countenances' and 'amorphous skulls', language reflecting the contemporary influence of pseudo-scientific physiognomy and criminal anthropology rather than objective observation. In marked contrast, he portrayed the recently arrived Irish prisoners very differently, emphasising their emaciation and exhaustion rather than innate criminality.⁸²³ Writing as an Irish nationalist and former political prisoner, Mitchel's representations were shaped as much by rhetorical purpose as by lived experience, his depictions serving to distinguish famine-driven offenders from what he regarded as habitual criminals.

Nevertheless, Mitchel's testimony remains valuable in illustrating the material shock experienced by Irish arrivals. He reported that these men were 'astonished, at first, by the luxuries provided for them – fresh beef three days in the week, and pork the other days, pea-soup, tea, excellent loaf-bread – things they had never seen before, except in shops'.⁸²⁴ Whittingham provided an additional account of daily rations, recording that convicts each received a daily allowance of 'one pound and eleven ounces of bread, and one pound and a quarter of meat, and half a gill of rum', along with 'sweetened cocoa for breakfast', comparing the diet favourably to that of the soldiers stationed on the island.⁸²⁵ It was certainly vastly superior to what the Irish convicts were used to in Ireland even during a period of plenty, suggesting that the Irish experience of transportation to Bermuda resulted in a heightened standard of living. However, the coexistence of corporal punishment with comparatively generous nutrition encapsulates the central paradox of Bermuda's penal regime: a system simultaneously brutal in discipline yet materially more sustaining than the conditions many Irish prisoners had endured prior to transportation.

Indeed, punishments were severe. Mitchel described escaped convicts receiving 60 lashings each, recounting hearing 'the horrid screams of one man plainly'.⁸²⁶ Other offences, such as 'drunkenness, refusing to work or gambling', were

⁸²³ Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, pp 67, 123.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁵ Whittingham, *Bermuda, A Colony*, pp 190–1.

⁸²⁶ Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, pp 95–6.

punished by reduced rations, solitary confinement, or 'losing a pardon for release'.⁸²⁷ These disciplinary practices reinforced hierarchy and deterrence, yet they also underline how bodily suffering remained integral to imperial penal ideology.

By the 1850s, Bermuda's convict labour was declining. The '*James*, convict-ship, with emancipated convicts' on its return voyage from Britain, left Portsmouth for Cork in December 1853,⁸²⁸ with 79 convicts arriving at Spike Island to be discharged during 1854 on tickets-of-leave.⁸²⁹ Andrew Gibney was among them.⁸³⁰ For these men, transportation functioned less as permanent exile than as a cyclical displacement that ultimately returned them to the socio-economic conditions from which they had originally fled.

Given the substantial number of convicts sent to Bermuda, the experiences of Farrell, Kelly, and Gibney would appear broadly typical. Their crimes, horse stealing, burglary, and livestock theft align with register patterns of survival and opportunism. Gibney's gradual escalation from geese to cattle theft within a seven-month period⁸³¹ illustrates how famine pressure could intensify criminal behaviour without necessarily indicating criminal identity. Although labour was harsh and punishment brutal, transportation undoubtedly contributed to his survival, and that of the 78 other convicts who returned to Ireland with him at the end of their sentences. Bermuda therefore represents a penal environment in which coercion, subsistence, and limited agency coexisted, complicating any straightforward categorisation of transportation as either purely disciplinary or inadvertently benevolent. In this respect, Bermuda illustrates how famine-era criminality operated within conditions of anomie, where institutional punishment, subsistence needs, and restricted agency became intertwined within the wider structures of British imperial governance.

⁸²⁷ McKay, 'The Story of Irish Convicts'.

⁸²⁸ *The Standard*, 'The Navy', 14 Jan. 1854.

⁸²⁹ Great Britain. House of Commons, *First Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland, for the year ended 31st December 1854* (session 1854–55, HC 1854–55, vol. xxvi, Dublin, 1855), p. 45.

⁸³⁰ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), 'Ireland–Australia Transportation Database, entry for Andrew Gibney' (<https://findingaids.nationalarchives.ie>) (3 Aug. 2025).

⁸³¹ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 653, 656, 635, 595, 591.

6.3 Spike Island: A Domestic ‘Penal’ Colony

Before being transported to Bermuda, Mitchel had been incarcerated on Spike Island for a brief period, but he was kept away from the other prisoners, and his account contains little useful information. There do not appear to be any other first-hand accounts of Spike Island from a convict perspective, and the prison registers for Spike Island are meagre for the early years.⁸³² The earliest surviving registers available at the NLI start later than the sample periods,⁸³³ and none of the transportees sent to Spike Island from the dataset can be positively identified within them. Nevertheless, an oblique picture of conditions can be reconstructed through the observations of Gibson,⁸³⁴ supplemented by parliamentary papers,⁸³⁵ and secondary studies such as *Too Beautiful for Thieves and Pickpockets*, and *Spike Island: Saints, Felons and Famine*.⁸³⁶ Together, these sources allow institutional conditions to be inferred despite archival gaps.

In the autumn of 1846, it became obvious that measures were required to address ‘the *four-fold* increase of the numbers sentenced to transportation’, while transportation to Van Diemen’s Land had been suspended.⁸³⁷ Spike Island, a 104-acre island in Cork harbour (Appendix 1) already housed a fort considered suitable for conversion into a convict depot. Initially intended as a temporary relief measure for overcrowded prisons,⁸³⁸ the island was to hold those sentenced to seven years or less, whilst those receiving longer sentences were to remain in Dublin pending overseas transportation.⁸³⁹ That this plan did not materialise can be seen from the cases of Patrick Farrell and John Kelly, who both received seven-year sentences but were nevertheless transported to Bermuda.⁸⁴⁰ The

⁸³² McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 34, 37–9.

⁸³³ National Library of Ireland, ‘Convict register of [Spike Island Government Prison] giving detailed particulars of prisoners, including many transported to Bermuda, Van Diemen’s Land and Gibraltar 1849–50’ (<https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtIs000866560>) (4 Aug. 2025).

⁸³⁴ Gibson, *Life among Convicts*.

⁸³⁵ For examples see Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847, HC 1847–48 (952)*, vol. xxxiv, p. 11; Great Britain. House of Commons, *First Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland, sess. 1854–55, HC 1854–55*, vol. xxvi, p. 23.

⁸³⁶ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*; Martin, *Spike Island*.

⁸³⁷ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847, HC 1847–48 (952)*, vol. xxxiv, p. 11.

⁸³⁸ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 9–12, 19.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 19, 23–4.

⁸⁴⁰ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 653, 656.

divergence between intention and practice illustrates how administrative expediency frequently overrode sentencing logic during the Famine years.

Register evidence further indicates this inconsistency. In the 1847/8 Kilmainham registers, 12 men received transportation sentences, three being sent to Spike Island for seven years. Of 39 men who received sentences of transportation in the 1847/8 Nenagh prison registers, 26 were sent there, with only seven receiving seven-year terms and the remainder ranging from ten years to life.⁸⁴¹ These figures broadly confirm an 1854 report, indicating that transportation sentences to Spike Island could vary widely in duration,⁸⁴² and reinforcing its function as a flexible holding space rather than a strictly defined penal category.

Figure 6.2 below indicates that in 1850, prisoners on Spike Island were convicted for a wide range of offences, with livestock theft, larceny, and burglary predominating. Livestock theft was particularly common due to the high value of cattle and sheep, even though 'stock prices did not increase much during the Famine'.⁸⁴³ The predominance of such offences supports the conclusion of the previous chapter that many prisoners were criminalised through necessity rather than by nature.

Figure 6.2 – Spike Island Conviction Offences 1850⁸⁴⁴

PRISONERS CONVICTED OF			
Murder,	6	Sending Threatening Letters,	2
Manslaughter,	9	Coining,	12
Shooting at, with intent to Murder,	3	Forged Notes,	6
Attempting to Poison,	1	Bigamy,	1
Rape,	16	Horse-stealing,	41
Assault, 19—Malicious Assault, 13,	32	Cattle-stealing,	489
Burglary,	241	Sheep-stealing,	433
Attack on Dwelling,	27	Pig stealing,	26
Arson,	33	Embezzlement,	7
Highway Robbery,	27	Receiving Stolen Goods,	60
Robbery of Arms,	2	Post-office Fraud,	2
Robbery,	74	Sacrilege,	18
Appearing Armed,	8	Escaping from Prison,	2
Attacking Police Barracks,	6	Felonies not specified,	89
Perjury,	7	Larcenies,	376
Administering Unlawful Oaths,	2	Misdemeanor,	1
Unlawful Assembly,	5	Vagrancy,	7
		Fraud,	8
		Total,	2,079

⁸⁴¹ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404; NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁸⁴² Great Britain. House of Commons, *First Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland*, sess. 1854–55, HC 1854–55, vol. xxvi, p. 2.

⁸⁴³ Woodward, 'Transportation Convictions', pp 68–9.

⁸⁴⁴ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850* (session 1852, HC 1852, vol. xxv, Dublin, 1851), p. 21.

When Spike Island was opened as a convict depot on 9th October 1847, accommodation existed for 600 convicts, with plans to extend capacity by a further 200.⁸⁴⁵ Compared with 627 convicts in Irish gaols in 1845, this expansion reveals anticipation of a massive influx. By the end of 1848, numbers had risen to 1,200,⁸⁴⁶ increasing to 1,455 by January 1850, 2,070 by the end of that year,⁸⁴⁷ and standing at 2,300 by 1852.⁸⁴⁸ Overcrowding therefore became structural rather than temporary, mirroring pressures seen in civilian institutions such as workhouses and urban prisons.

Asenath Nicholson's 1848 visit provides one of the few descriptive contemporary accounts. She observed convicts digging rocks, levelling ground, weaving coconut bark mats, or being marched in circles for exercise or punishment. At that time, Spike Island was the only Irish gaol employing inmates in outdoor labour, undertaken less for its practical importance than to provide work for the convicts.⁸⁴⁹ By 1854, additional occupations included tailoring; shoemaking; knitting; tinwork; weaving; carpentry; coopering; blacksmithing; nail making; painting and glazing; stonecutting; and baking,⁸⁵⁰ indicating an expansion of labour functions beyond purely penal work.

Nicholson described the convict accommodation as large and ventilated, although the solitary cells were 'reeking with wet', a condition she dismissed as avoidable with good behaviour.⁸⁵¹ In 1850, the average solitary confinement period on bread and water was 54 hours, which 509 inmates had received for offences including 'injury to clothing, furniture, prison' etc, refusing to work, disorderly conduct, theft, and escape attempts. A further 25 prisoners had been put in irons, and 'many stoppages of bread for light offences' were recorded for minor offences.⁸⁵² Such

⁸⁴⁵ Martin, *Spike Island*, pp 68–9.

⁸⁴⁶ Gibson, *Life among Convicts*, p. 4; McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, p. 41.

⁸⁴⁷ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852, vol. xxv*, p. 20.

⁸⁴⁸ Gibson, *Life among Convicts*, p. 7.

⁸⁴⁹ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852, vol. xxv*, p. 8.

⁸⁵⁰ Great Britain. House of Commons, *First Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland, sess. 1854–55, HC 1854–55, vol. xxvi*, pp 62–3.

⁸⁵¹ Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, p. 250.

⁸⁵² Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852, vol. xxv*, p. 21.

statistics reveal a regime grounded in behavioural discipline rather than corporal punishment, contrasting with overseas flogging practices.

Dietary provision appears comparatively substantial. Nicholson believed the bread to be of good quality and reported cocoa was provided every sabbath with meat for dinner, concluding that conditions were superior to those of the workhouse.⁸⁵³ Two decades later, Gibson similarly observed that ‘the sentence says nothing about meagre or poor food’, arguing that it was ‘bad economy to starve the men engaged on public works’.⁸⁵⁴ During the Famine, Spike Island’s rations were therefore likely more consistent, and substantial, than those available to much of the civilian population, reinforcing the paradox whereby incarceration could provide a measure of basic security during external deprivation.

Juvenile prisoners received four hours schooling per day, and adults received two, yet the overall regime remained ‘unforgiving and sometimes brutal’.⁸⁵⁵ The aim was ‘supervision, strict discipline, and constant employment’, whether through weaving, operating hand-mills for grinding corn, or general work designed to improve the fort.⁸⁵⁶ Correspondence was ‘allowed as sparingly as possible’, forced labour was severe and continuous,⁸⁵⁷ and verbal communication during the working day was discouraged.⁸⁵⁸ Hair was cropped,⁸⁵⁹ dormitories each housed 30 men,⁸⁶⁰ and turnkeys maintained constant surveillance.⁸⁶¹ Leisure activities were rare, and books were not introduced until the end of 1860.⁸⁶² The environment therefore prioritised order and fatigue over any sustained concern with rehabilitation.

⁸⁵³ Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, pp 250–1.

⁸⁵⁴ Gibson, *Life among Convicts*, pp 177–8.

⁸⁵⁵ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 214, 92–3.

⁸⁵⁶ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847, HC 1847–48 (952), vol. xxxiv*, pp 12, 14–15.

⁸⁵⁷ Clement Johnson, cited in *ibid.*, pp 15–16; McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, p. 49.

⁸⁵⁸ McCarthy & O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, pp 47–8, 54.

⁸⁵⁹ Gibson, *Life among Convicts*, p. 167.

⁸⁶⁰ Martin, *Spike Island*, p. 71.

⁸⁶¹ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852, vol. xxv*, p. 36.

⁸⁶² Gibson, *Life among Convicts*, pp 11–12, 217, 283.

Writing in his capacity as Inspector-general of prisons, Clement Johnson, observed ‘the peculiar description of convict[s] at present found in the Irish depots’, noting that of 608 convicts, 227 had been sentenced for sheep, cattle, or food theft during the famine year. Echoing the Lord-Lieutenant’s assessment of Van Diemen’s Land prisoners,⁸⁶³ Johnson recognised necessity-driven criminality and expressed hope for reform, while also acknowledging that some had committed crimes ‘in the hope that their particular offence might escape notice in the fast increase of delinquency brought about by the disorganized state of society’.⁸⁶⁴ Others had undoubtedly found themselves in the convict system intentionally, having committed crime in the hope of transportation. For these men, release back into Ireland at the end of their sentences often meant a return to the same limited life choices, although the possibility of family reunification may have softened any disappointment. However, some prisoners were later transported overseas, such as the 287 sent to Van Diemen’s Land on the *Hyderabad* in 1850, whilst others received commuted sentences, were sent to county gaols, or were discharged.⁸⁶⁵

By 1851, Spike Island still housed many prisoners sentenced during the height of the Famine. However, prison inspector, H Hitchens, reported that there had been ‘comparatively few’ incidents which had required punishment, a fact he considered significant given that the depot traditionally received those convicted of serious offences. He attributed this relative orderliness to restraint by the inmates despite the availability of ‘facilities for evil communication and consequent insubordination’,⁸⁶⁶ an opinion which supports that of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in respect of the Van Diemen’s Land convicts.⁸⁶⁷ Register evidence from Kilmainham and Nenagh indicates that many inmates had committed survival crimes rather than habitual violence, reinforcing these

⁸⁶³ The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Cited in Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 50.

⁸⁶⁴ Clement Johnson, cited in Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847, HC 1847–48 (952)*, vol. xxxiv, pp 14–15.

⁸⁶⁵ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852*, vol. xxv, p. 20.

⁸⁶⁶ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850, sess 1852, HC 1852*, vol. xxv, p. 12.

⁸⁶⁷ The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, cited in Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, p. 50.

observations that the majority of these convicts were criminal by need, rather than by nature.

Unlike Bermuda, Spike Island did not remove prisoners from Irish society but temporarily contained them within it. Imprisonment functioned less as exile than as interruption, offering subsistence and discipline without permanent social rupture. For many famine-era convicts, Spike Island therefore operated as a domestic form of transportation in which punishment, survival, and eventual reintegration existed simultaneously. This reinforces the wider argument of the thesis that famine-era crime cannot be understood solely as deviance, but as limited agency operating within institutions that blurred the boundaries between relief, discipline, and social control.

6.4 City Survival: Prison, Workhouse, and Street Crime

The previous sections have shown how transportation could function as a life-sustaining but disciplinary coercive system at the edge of empire (Bermuda) or within Ireland itself (Spike Island). This section brings the analysis back to the urban streets and institutions that shaped day-to-day survival for those who were not transported but were nevertheless drawn into the interconnected systems of prison and welfare. It shows how prisons and workhouses formed overlapping mechanisms of containment and relief, and how offences such as vagrancy, begging, and prostitution can be read as situational strategies for survival rather than simply as moral failure or disorder.

Few individuals living in Ireland during the Great Famine remained untouched by its effects, regardless of financial status. This section focuses on urban Ireland, examining how mass deprivation shaped daily life and contributed to rising levels of survival crime. It considers the impact of these conditions not only on those who were arrested, but also on those recorded in the prison registers as their victims, showing how scarcity and institutional responses affected both groups.

As destitution deepened and food prices soared beyond the means of those already reduced to selling or pawning their last possessions, options narrowed drastically for the penniless, who lacked the funds or opportunity to emigrate. Some faced a stark choice between the overcrowded and under-resourced

workhouses⁸⁶⁸ and a spectrum of informal survival strategies, including petty theft and public order offences. Gibson claimed that many lacked the 'courage' to commit a crime and instead 'died by the side of a ditch' or 'within the walls of a poor-house'.⁸⁶⁹ Rising incarceration rates during the Famine years suggest, however, that many did make deliberate, if heavily circumscribed, choices between different institutional forms of relief and containment.⁸⁷⁰ For some, prison offered the prospect of regular rations and temporary shelter, and both contemporary observers and modern historians have noted that those prosecuted for petty offences were often as much casualties of the crisis as they were offenders.⁸⁷¹

The *Tipperary Vindicator* described the condition of offenders entering Nenagh gaol in 1849, 18 months after the worst year of the Famine, noting that many arrived in 'destitute condition', 'poor wretches whom hunger and sickness have made fit inmates for a hospital', who committed 'petty crimes for the sole purpose of gaining the shelter and food of a prison'.⁸⁷² This depiction framed offending not as habitual criminality but as a strategy of survival adopted by individuals already weakened by starvation and disease. The report added that some prisoners were 'scarcely able to crawl' upon arrival,⁸⁷³ a detail that emphasised the physical exhaustion and desperation underlying such offences.

Once admitted, prisoners would at least receive food and shelter. Yet this limited refuge came at the cost of severe overcrowding, as the prison population expanded rapidly during the crisis. In 1849 Nenagh prison housed 758 inmates in 192 prison cells originally built to accommodate only 370 prisoners,⁸⁷⁴ illustrating how famine-driven incarceration strained the capacity of local penal institutions even as they functioned as emergency spaces of subsistence. Kilmainham gaol recorded fewer than 2,500 prisoners in 1847, rising to 4,655 in 1848 and 6,888 in 1849. By 1850 the registers documented 9,052 prisoners, the steepest increase

⁸⁶⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 315.

⁸⁶⁹ Gibson, *The History of the County and City of Cork*, p. 365.

⁸⁷⁰ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, pp 55–6.

⁸⁷¹ McKay, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred', 34.10-35.20; McCarthy & O'Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves*, p. 200; Woodward, 'Transportation Convictions', p. 86.

⁸⁷² *Tipperary Vindicator*, 'Nenagh Gaol', 28 Apr. 1849.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁴ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 186.

in the institution's history.⁸⁷⁵ Although these prisoners would not all have been incarcerated simultaneously, these figures indicate severe pressure on a prison with less than 200 cells. These figures should therefore not be interpreted as a simple rise in criminality, but as evidence of crisis-driven committals that strained institutional capacity and made contagion harder to contain. The Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 had exacerbated conditions, and dirt and overcrowding became a significant issue. Prisoners could no longer be separated by classification, and dysentery and fever spread rapidly.⁸⁷⁶ Conditions were undoubtedly similar throughout Ireland as over 1,300 prisoners died in 1849 alone.⁸⁷⁷ One advantage that Irish gaols had over English gaols, and transportation to Van Diemen's Land and Bermuda, was that flogging was not allowed as a punishment.⁸⁷⁸ However, poor clothing, illness, and inadequate diet, combined in many cases with hard labour, did little to help the prisoner to withstand 'the fierce, bone-piercing cold which seeps into every corner, corridor and cell of the prison [Kilmainham] for six or seven months of each year'.⁸⁷⁹ Time in prison could potentially trigger or exacerbate 'existing mental disorders',⁸⁸⁰ undoubtedly adding to the overall traumatic experience of the Famine. However, Kilmainham (and most likely other prisons too) 'reluctantly became a place of shelter and a source of meagre relief for the poor and destitute who crowded into the city and its hinterland at that time'.⁸⁸¹

Although the vast majority of arrests in the dataset are for adults, it is important to acknowledge that many children were also affected by the loss of the potato crop and left to fend for themselves after the loss of their parents and other family members, especially if they could not obtain admittance to the workhouse.⁸⁸² The majority were arrested for survival crimes such as vagrancy and theft, although the motive for committing social-order offences such as damage, trespass, or loitering, could have been to gain admittance to gaol. The under 16 age group

⁸⁷⁵ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, p. 55.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 55–6.

⁸⁷⁷ Carey, *Mountjoy*, p. 40.

⁸⁷⁸ Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847, HC 1847–48 (952)*, vol. xxxiv, pp 15–16.

⁸⁷⁹ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, p. 197.

⁸⁸⁰ Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited', p. 506.

⁸⁸¹ Crowley, 'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison', p. 98.

⁸⁸² Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 181.

were largely arrested for petty crime, the main exception being an attempt to 'violate a child 6 years of age',⁸⁸³ many making deliberate survival choices with very limited options available to them (see Chapter 4). While some children were arrested alongside family members, particularly in cases involving vagrancy, others appeared in the Kilmainham registers as part of small groups of similarly aged but seemingly unrelated peers. The fact that these children often came from different localities suggests that they had formed ad hoc groups for mutual support and protection in the absence of parental care. Such behaviour reflects a clear form of agency, as these children actively sought safety in numbers as a strategy for survival.

Until 1859, when children were convicted of a crime they could be 'received' into gaol, where they were dealt with in the same manner as adult prisoners.⁸⁸⁴ However, there is no mention in the prison registers regarding the fate of those children whose caregivers were committed to prison, but who had not been committed themselves. When this happened, it was likely that the children would be sent to the workhouse, with low chances of survival.⁸⁸⁵ Because so many of the workhouse records have been destroyed, the most helpful information comes from excavations at Kilkenny workhouse, which took place in 2005.⁸⁸⁶

In total, 970 bodies were found in 63 pits, a 'substantial proportion' of those bodies being infants and children.⁸⁸⁷ '33% of the skeletal remains were aged under five and [in total] 48% of the remains were under 12'.⁸⁸⁸ The children were small for their age, especially the newborns and infants, indicating that they had suffered from intrauterine growth retardation, the health of the mothers affecting the growth of the foetus. Collagen in their bones indicated that many were suffering from chronic starvation and their bodies had started to consume protein reserves to obtain energy. There was a peak in the age of death at around three years of age, when the children would have been separated from their mothers. This might indicate that psychosocial and emotional stress associated with

⁸⁸³ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404; NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736, 714.

⁸⁸⁴ O'Sullivan, *Every Dark Hour*, pp 201, 18.

⁸⁸⁵ Corrigan, 'Dublin Workhouses', p. 62.

⁸⁸⁶ MacAtasney, 'The Province of Ulster', 54.20-55.10; Geber, *Victims of Ireland's Great Famine*, pp 1–2.

⁸⁸⁷ Geber, *Victims of Ireland's Great Famine*, pp 60, xvi, 158.

⁸⁸⁸ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 14n.

maternal deprivation contributed to these deaths,⁸⁸⁹ although it may simply mean that they were not cared for as well by the workhouse staff as they had been by their mothers. The archaeology team had not expected to find any burials as the ground was not hallowed, the pits were not recorded on any maps, and there was no local awareness of any such burials.⁸⁹⁰ It is possible that the scale and informality of these burials contributed to later silence or absence of local memory, although the destruction of workhouse records and the loss of family members may be sufficient explanation. How many parents left prison to find that a child sent to the workhouse had died in the interim cannot be quantified from surviving records, but the statistics above suggest it was not uncommon and would have compounded the trauma of the Famine experience.

When the potato crop first failed, people sold 'every stitch that would fetch the fraction of a penny', including their bedding and clothing. For those who turned to vagrancy and begging, once on the road they had no facilities for washing, and during the winter they huddled together for warmth, spreading typhus through the transfer of lice. If they were then arrested, or managed to gain entry to a workhouse, they took the disease with them, 'a brush in passing' being 'enough to transfer the fever-transmitting louse or its dust-like excrement to a new victim', 'one fever-stricken person' potentially passing infection onto 'a hundred others in the course of a day'.⁸⁹¹

Dublin city's population was approximately 232,726 in 1841, increasing to 246,679 by 1851, due to migration of the poor rural population into the city rather than 'a reflection of increasing prosperity'.⁸⁹² This trend is indicated by 'the number of Dubliners born elsewhere in Ireland [which] rose by three-fifths over the decade',⁸⁹³ and caused Famine Dublin to be described as 'a gigantic refugee

⁸⁸⁹ Jonny Geber, 'Forgotten Victims: the children found in a Kilkenny Workhouse mass grave' in *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE)*, 2021 (<https://www.rte.ie/history/famine-ireland/2021/0113/1189442-forgotten-victims-the-children-found-in-kilkenny-workhouse-grave/>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁸⁹⁰ Geber, *Victims of Ireland's Great Famine*, pp 1–2, 45; Geber, 'Forgotten Victims'.

⁸⁹¹ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 191–2.

⁸⁹² Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly, 'When the Famine made Dublin's Streets a 'gigantic refugee camp'' in *Independent.ie*, 2022, p. 2 ([https://www.ucdpress.ie/resources/pdfs/2023%20PDFs/Famine%20Independent_ie\(1\).pdf](https://www.ucdpress.ie/resources/pdfs/2023%20PDFs/Famine%20Independent_ie(1).pdf)) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*

camp',⁸⁹⁴ although the city had been 'relatively free of the true impact of the catastrophe until the bitter winter of 1846-7', with conditions deteriorating further after government relief works began to close in March 1847.⁸⁹⁵ Dublin city naturally had a much less agrarian character than other towns and cities in Ireland, but all of them faced a decline in trade as 'shops were boarded up, artisan workshops [were] deserted' and their owners 'sought out the emigrant ship', unless the shop in question was a pawnshop or had a contract with a public institution such as a workhouse, the police, or an army barracks.⁸⁹⁶

Another business that continued to operate throughout the Famine, was the brothel. There were 1,287 in Dublin in 1842, a figure which decreased to between 330 and 419 during the Famine years, with over 1,300 women working from them.⁸⁹⁷ This may indicate a decline in brothel-based prostitution, but it does not necessarily imply a decline in prostitution overall. This conclusion is supported by the data from the Kilmainham prison registers, which show an increase from 61 arrests in 1844/5 to 145 in 1847/8 for this offence.⁸⁹⁸ In part, this increase may have occurred because prostitutes were discouraged from entering the workhouse,⁸⁹⁹ and so if they needed medical attention, a respite,⁹⁰⁰ or food, prison became their only option, but as prostitution was 'often the resort of the desperate',⁹⁰¹ it is likely that more women were engaged in prostitution, but on the streets rather than in a brothel. The existence of prostitution during the Famine also indicates that some had spare resources with which to pay the women.

Adding to the increase in prostitution, towns near workhouses or ports became perceived 'battlegrounds', being described as being 'swarmed' by the 'near starving' who were reported to threaten the plundering of shops, to obstruct the

⁸⁹⁴ M. J. Craig, *Dublin, 1660-1860* (New York, 1952), p. 309.

⁸⁹⁵ Georgina Laragy, 'Items in the Sum of that Great Calamity': Suicide in Dublin During the Great Famine' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), p. 93.

⁸⁹⁶ W. J. Smyth, 'Born Astride a Grave' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 116-7.

⁸⁹⁷ Maria Luddy, 'Women of the Pave' in *History Ireland*, xvi, no. 3 (2008), p. 17.

⁸⁹⁸ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455-507, 635-736.

⁸⁹⁹ Geber, *Victims of Ireland's Great Famine*, p. 99.

⁹⁰⁰ Luddy, 'Women of the Pave', p. 19.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

transportation of grain, and to protest about conditions.⁹⁰² There had, of course, been begging, and even skilled mendicants, prior to the Famine. By March 1847, however, conditions had deteriorated sufficiently for *The Nation* to describe people ‘obviously unskilled in the hard lessons of mendicancy’ emerging from ‘alleys and lanes’ to stretch out their hands in hesitant appeal to passers-by. The paper claimed that ‘hundreds – thousands – bred to industry’, were now forced into fellowship with ‘hardened vagrants’, presenting Dublin as ‘the beggared capital of a starving nation’.⁹⁰³ This language emphasised the perceived transformation of begging from a marginal occupation into a widespread survival practice affecting those previously accustomed to regular labour.

As a nationalist newspaper with a clear political agenda, *The Nation* was not simply reporting urban conditions but actively shaping public interpretation of them. Its highly emotive language and rhetorical flourishes can therefore be read as part of a deliberate strategy to dramatise social collapse, mobilise public sympathy, and attribute responsibility to British governance. By presenting famine poverty as a collective national tragedy rather than the product of individual moral failing, the newspaper sought to reframe destitution within a broader political narrative of injustice and neglect. Although such accounts may have exaggerated scale or sentiment, they remain valuable as evidence of contemporary nationalist discourse and of the ways famine conditions were represented in order to influence political consciousness.

Nevertheless, there were undoubtedly many individuals for whom begging was a new and deeply unwelcome necessity, one that carried significant social stigma and psychological cost. As those with the resources to emigrate left the country, towns increasingly filled with displaced beggars and vagrants, contributing to overcrowding, the spread of disease, and the depletion of charitable resources, thereby further intensifying the struggle for survival. These urban survival strategies illustrate how famine conditions produced forms of limited agency within an anomic environment, where individuals navigated between prison, workhouse, and street economies in order to secure subsistence.

⁹⁰² Smyth, ‘Born Astride a Grave’, pp 116–7.

⁹⁰³ *The Nation*, ‘Distress in the City’, 27 Mar. 1847.

However, Blum et al. believe that ‘direct famine-related mortality in Dublin’ appears to have been lower than in many rural areas, although with the caveat that mortality in Dublin did increase during the peak years of the Famine largely because of the rural migrants who moved into the area only to die of Famine-related illness, rather than starvation.⁹⁰⁴ Although food prices increased, allowing less purchasing power for those with money, ‘the inhabitants of Dublin were less likely to be affected by absolute decline in food availability’, as their diet relied as much on bread as on potatoes. It seems that Dublin residents were also less likely to be victims of violence than those living in rural areas. During the 1840s, Tipperary recorded a homicide rate of 5.92 per 100,000 population, compared to 1.44 in Dublin; by the end of the century, Dublin had increased to 4.13, while Tipperary had decreased to 2.51.⁹⁰⁵

6.5 Rural Survival Crime and Agrarian Tension

If section 6.4 considered survival crime in the city as a response to crowding, policing, and institutional scarcity; rural Ireland reveals a different but related set of pressures. Here, theft and conflict often arose from the fragility of subsistence itself and the need to protect crops, animals, and seed in a collapsing economy. By tracing these rural dynamics, the chapter also complicates any simple division between victims and perpetrators, showing that the threat of loss could cut across multiple layers of farming society during the famine years.

In the farming hierarchy, small farmers stood below landlords, middlemen, and strong farmers, and above cottiers (often paid through access to small plots for potato cultivation), and landless labourers.⁹⁰⁶ During times of plenty, the small farmers likely maintained a modest but sustainable existence but almost certainly had insufficient resources to draw on during an extended period of hardship, especially once their tenants were in rent arrears. Consequently, during the Famine, the loss of any part of their crop to theft could make the difference

⁹⁰⁴ Blum et al., ‘Working Paper: Scarring and Selection’, pp 2, 8.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp 8, 32n.

⁹⁰⁶ Ciarán Reilly, “‘Black Sheep disgrace any Flock’: The Irish Land Agent & The Great Famine”. Webinar presented at the Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council online lecture series Rippling Effects of the Great Irish Famine, online, 15 Feb. 2024, 7.20-7.33 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy0QTslqqh0&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFewaYXY7XuSEZMwJvxNp33&index=2>) (25 Feb. 2026).

between their own survival or death. Indeed, Tuke confirmed that the desperate might take food from the fields 'from a neighbour hardly richer than himself', and that this was not even 'at night, but, with the daring of absolute necessity, at noon-day'.⁹⁰⁷ Thomas Gallagher somewhat contradicts Tuke, writing that sheep stealing was initially 'shunned' before gradually spreading 'to every county as the supply of food dwindled', though he may have been describing a slightly later period of the Famine. Gallagher further observed that even the desperate were reluctant to steal from neighbouring families whose few animals represented their only means of survival. Instead, offenders often travelled to unfamiliar districts and targeted larger flocks belonging to more prosperous farmers, waiting at night in mountain caves before carrying out swift and silent thefts while farmers guarded their herds with rifles and sheep bells.⁹⁰⁸ Gallagher's description suggests that such crimes followed a recognisable logic of selection and restraint rather than indiscriminate plunder, with offenders attempting to minimise harm within their own communities while still securing food.

The occupation of *watcher*, previously referred to in Tuke's observation that 'in almost every field of turnips or potatoes worth protecting, a hut is erected for the accommodation of a watcher'⁹⁰⁹ (section 2.2), was therefore not simply a famine innovation but part of a longer tradition of protecting scarce agricultural resources in rural Ireland, indeed land agents had employed watchers prior to the Famine to ensure that tenants did not remove crops and animals which might otherwise be taken in lieu of rent.⁹¹⁰ However, Tuke's observation suggests that the use of *watchers* became much more common during the Famine period, an observation supported by material from the National Folklore Collection, which recorded that during the Famine, a turnip field had to be guarded both day and night.⁹¹¹ This indicates that 'farmers had to adopt all sorts of stratagems to protect their turnip fields and their poultry and animals from theft'.⁹¹² Some theft may have been planned, while other theft was opportunistic as the poor passed by fields, possibly on their way to the workhouse, (which in the case of Westport Union was a trek of

⁹⁰⁷ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 19.

⁹⁰⁸ T. M. Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament: Ireland 1846-1847 prelude to hatred* (New York: London, 1982), p. 33.

⁹⁰⁹ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 7.

⁹¹⁰ Reilly, 'Black Sheep disgrace any Flock', 9.40-9.57.

⁹¹¹ Ned Buckley, in Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 69.

⁹¹² Michael O'Donnell, *Fethard County Tipperary 1200-2000* (Dublin, 2010), p. 247.

up to 40 miles), a journey which many did not survive.⁹¹³ Although this example is from County Mayo, it illustrates pressures that could recur elsewhere, including in County Tipperary, where register evidence likewise records thefts from fields, gardens, and orchards. At Kilmainham, arrests include instances of rooting or stealing potatoes or turnips from fields or gardens, alongside fruit theft, particularly apples.⁹¹⁴ The Nenagh registers likewise record apple theft and potato pulling, although quantities and contexts are not always specified,⁹¹⁵ making it difficult to distinguish theft in situ, from shops, or opportunist theft from elsewhere.

Gallagher writes that some victimised farmers were lenient and might shoot 'over the head of a thief' caught either killing or stealing a sheep, whilst others might witness such acts but refuse to identify the thieves, accepting that the thief had little other choice. However, most farmers regarded theft as a serious threat and often responded by beating offenders, having them arrested, or publicly restraining them on structures such as fence posts or cartwheels to serve as a warning to others. When these measures failed to deter further theft they resorted to more extreme methods, constructing 'mantraps, deep pits eight to ten feet deep laid with spikes and concealed with brambles, grass, and weeds'.⁹¹⁶ Folklore testimony recorded by the National Folklore Collection includes accounts of mantraps and extreme violence against thieves.⁹¹⁷ Such accounts are difficult to verify and may capture exceptional incidents, but they nonetheless convey the intensity of fear surrounding theft in some localities.

Such actions would likely amount to manslaughter or murder, but there is no record of any offences of this nature in the sample prison registers, and they seem too extreme to be typical. Some of the strategies used to prevent theft also made it easier for the culprit to ensure arrest, should the intent be imprisonment or transportation, and, of course, no matter how surreptitiously the theft was conducted, any smell of cooking meat would be 'an immediate giveaway, meat being a once- or twice-a-year luxury even in the best of times'.⁹¹⁸

⁹¹³ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 11.

⁹¹⁴ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁹¹⁵ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 348–404.

⁹¹⁶ Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament*, p. 34.

⁹¹⁷ Felix Kernan, Thomas O'Flynn, John Melody, Mrs Brigid Butler, in Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, pp 70, 77, 79.

⁹¹⁸ Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament*, pp 33–4.

There were 60 cases of livestock theft in the 1847/8 Kilmainham registers, and David Timmons and William Shaw, aged 17 and 18 respectively, both received three months confinement with hard labour on 23rd June 1848 for cutting the tails off several cows.⁹¹⁹ Such behaviour was a well-known act of agrarian outrage but even if this was the motivation for Timmons and Shaw, it is likely that similar acts were being committed for survival purposes, such as seen in the arrest of 18-year-old Bessy Thompson for stealing the flesh of a bull,⁹²⁰ and the transportation of Thomas Molloy on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* for stealing calves' flesh.⁹²¹ The drawing of blood is mentioned in the Irish Folklore Commission collection,⁹²² even being attempted in public although the horse being bled was pulling a cart full of meal which was guarded at the time.⁹²³ Kinealy discusses the bleeding of cattle and the theft of tails for food during the Famine⁹²⁴ which might then be skinned and roasted,⁹²⁵ and Gallagher adds that if a farmer wanted to avoid killing their cattle for food, they too were forced to extract blood or take the animal to a reputed 'bleeder of animals' who would do it for them.⁹²⁶

The Famine was, in material terms, a *potato famine*; but access to alternative food was largely beyond those without purchasing power. Throughout the Famine, wheat, barley, oats, livestock, butter, and eggs, continued to be exported while cheaper Indian meal was imported, although both Woodham-Smith and Roy Foster concur that more grain was imported than was exported. However, had the exported food remained in the country, distribution would have caused sizeable logistical problems, and a significant number of mills would have had to be built in order to grind the grain.⁹²⁷ As early as October 1846, the risk of theft during transportation had caused the British Government to send soldiers to protect this food 'because the people were cutting the traces of the horses which drew carts and wagons to prevent grain being taken away'.⁹²⁸ There had also been several

⁹¹⁹ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736, 716.

⁹²⁰ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, p. 381.

⁹²¹ Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, 'Libraries Tasmania, CON33/1/92, *Pestonjee Bomanjee (3)*', p. 234.

⁹²² Hugh Byrne, in Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 61.

⁹²³ J Toole, in *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹²⁴ Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, p. 81.

⁹²⁵ Mrs Fitzsimons, in Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 84.

⁹²⁶ Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament*, p. 12.

⁹²⁷ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 75–6; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 325.

⁹²⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 125–6.

robberies from barges during this period, and a number of mills had also been placed under police protection.⁹²⁹ In County Tipperary, two carts which were taking flour to Cashel from Clonmel, a distance of approximately 14 miles, were held up by ‘a party of desperate men’ in February 1847, and in May, convoys of Indian meal were successfully attacked.⁹³⁰ However, regular mention of local fairs in newspapers would suggest some degree of normality, and clearly some supplies of produce and livestock were moved successfully.⁹³¹ Farmers worried that any crop they sowed would either be stolen or taken by the landlord for rent, and they attempted to protect any seed potatoes by hiding them under the floor of their homes.⁹³² Food riots largely ceased after 1847, to be replaced by ‘apathy and despair’.⁹³³ As James Kelly has shown, food rioting had long functioned as a recognised form of popular protest and negotiation, grounded in customary expectations of provision and moral economy in Ireland, and elsewhere. Its decline in the late 1840s marked not merely a response to famine conditions but a broader erosion of these practices under the combined pressures of repression, exhaustion, and the imposition of administrative rules.⁹³⁴ These rural dynamics demonstrate that survival crime during the famine operated within a fragile moral economy, where desperation, customary expectations, and the collapse of subsistence structures interacted within the wider framework of colonial governance.

While not all rural landlords were philanthropic, some, such as the Leslies of Castle Leslie (County Monaghan), Lord Sligo of Westport House (County Mayo), and Sir Robert Gore-Booth of Lissadell House (County Sligo), made efforts to provide food for their tenants,⁹³⁵ whilst others, such as Lord Clonbrock of Clonbrock Estate (County Galway), facilitated assisted emigration, albeit not necessarily for wholly altruistic reasons.⁹³⁶ Nevertheless, as the Famine

⁹²⁹ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 186.

⁹³⁰ O’Donnell, *Fethard County Tipperary*, p. 247.

⁹³¹ *The Freeman’s Journal*, ‘Fairs’, 1 Nov. 1847.

⁹³² Gallagher, *Paddy’s Lament*, p. 34.

⁹³³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 359.

⁹³⁴ Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland*, pp 25, 19–20.

⁹³⁵ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 299; John Percival, *The Great Famine: Ireland’s Potato Famine, 1845-51* (New York, 1995), p. 76.

⁹³⁶ John O’Sullivan, ‘Landlord-Tenant Relations on the Clonbrock Estate in Galway, 1849-93’ (M. A. Thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1997), pp 10–12, 24.

progressed, many of the rural poor either perished, emigrated, or sought refuge in the workhouses.⁹³⁷

These rural dynamics reinforce the wider pattern emerging across the chapter, in which crime during the Famine is best understood not as deviance but as a response to severely limited circumstances. In the countryside, this took the form of theft from fields and stores, of animals and produce, actions shaped by the fragile subsistence economy and the immediate threat of starvation. As in other chapters, the distinction between victim and offender became increasingly blurred, with individuals acting within narrow and deteriorating margins of survival.

At the same time, these patterns highlight the broader structures within which such behaviour occurred. The persistence of agricultural production alongside widespread hunger, the need to defend crops and livestock, and the movement of people through prisons, workhouses, and other institutions point to a system in which survival strategies were constrained by inequality, governance, and access to resources. Rural survival crime therefore reflects not only individual desperation but also the structural tensions of a system in which subsistence, property, and governance were increasingly in conflict.

6.6 Wealth, Leisure, and Inequality during the Famine

The evidence of urban and rural survival strategies sits alongside another, more uncomfortable reality: famine conditions did not eliminate consumption, leisure, or sociability for everyone. This section uses contemporary reporting and the prison registers to show how relative plenty and acute deprivation could coexist in the same places and even on the same newspaper page. The point is not to present Irish society as a simple binary of rich and poor, but to show how uneven access to food, space, and protection shaped vulnerability, policing, and the options available to different social groups.

In Dublin, this unevenness was especially apparent in public space, where vagrancy, begging, and prostitution became increasingly evident and subject to regulation. As wealthier residents left, a phenomenon of 'poverty concentration' emerged, the 'most disadvantaged population' increasingly clustered in the 'most

⁹³⁷ Osborne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*, p. 23.

disorganized urban neighbourhoods'.⁹³⁸ This anonymity and compressed poverty contributed to a decline in privately funded charitable relief and intensified reliance on policing and institutions to manage visible destitution.

In *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine*, Ciarán Reilly devotes a chapter to exploring how, for some individuals, elements of daily life continued with a measure of normality during the famine.⁹³⁹ This opinion is echoed in contemporary evidence of leisure and consumption, including activity in and around the Phoenix Park, during the late 1840s. In the 1847/8 Kilmainham prison registers, 68 arrests were recorded for prostitutes accused of 'annoying the passengers in the park',⁹⁴⁰ indicating that even spaces associated with respectable leisure were closely policed and could become sites where survival strategies such as prostitution brought the urban poor into conflict with authorities. A newspaper notice from 1846, similarly suggests that the park remained an active social space, reporting that Lord Chief Justice Doherty had injured his arm 'while driving in the Phoenix Park'.⁹⁴¹ Although incidental, this brief report illustrates the continued presence of elite recreational activity within the park during the years immediately preceding the worst phase of the famine.

Despite the Famine, both architectural and landscape work continued in the park until 1849,⁹⁴² and organised recreational events also persisted, as evidenced by the Phoenix Park garrison races, which took place on 20th and 21st July 1847.⁹⁴³ Similarly, a report in *The Freeman's Journal* on 3rd May 1849 recorded 64,328 admissions to the Phoenix Park zoo during the previous year, with entrance fees reaching 6d. Annual receipts amounted to £738.14s.8d, leaving a modest surplus of £8.9s.3½d after expenses.⁹⁴⁴ Taken together, these details point to the persistence of discretionary spending among sections of the urban population

⁹³⁸ Siegel, *Criminology*, p. xxii.

⁹³⁹ Ciarán Reilly, "'A Little London, All Alive": Some Experiences of the World of Goods and Commodities in Famine Dublin' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), p. 11.

⁹⁴⁰ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁹⁴¹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Fashionable Intelligence', 28 Sept. 1846.

⁹⁴² The Hearsom Collection, 'Parks Our Shared Heritage: The Phoenix Park, Dublin & The Royal Parks, London', 2017 (<http://hearsomcollection.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Our-shared-Heritage-catalogue.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁹⁴³ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Phoenix Park Garrison Races', 20 July 1847.

⁹⁴⁴ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Royal Zoological Society of Ireland', 3 May 1849.

even as famine-driven migration intensified pressure elsewhere in the city. Policing in these spaces also intersected with wider efforts to manage visible poverty, including vagrancy and begging, which increasingly became questions of public order as well as need.

Indeed, the apparent contrast between the Famine experiences of those experiencing acute deprivation and those with continued purchasing power becomes particularly evident through an examination of contemporary newspaper accounts, such as that of *The Freeman's Journal* on Wednesday 16th May 1849. Four news items related to relieving the distress of Ireland were followed by an article about the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and his wife hosting 'a numerous party at dinner' at the Viceregal Lodge within the Phoenix Park to honour the Queen's birthday.⁹⁴⁵ This was not unique to Dublin; on 18th October 1847, *The Freeman's Journal* had reported a public dinner where 'the inhabitants of Sligo entertained their excellent representative, John P Somers esq, at a public banquet, at the county grand jury rooms'. The dinner had 'included all the delicacies of the season' for over 300 people, however, given that those invited consisted of the clergy and legal profession, it seems unlikely that the public banquet fed any of the actual starving public of Sligo.⁹⁴⁶ The comparison is striking: reports of distress relief sit alongside accounts of affluent dining and public banquets. Whether or not participants perceived this as improper, the layout of the newspaper page captures a city in which crisis and sociability co-existed, and where access to food and leisure remained sharply uneven.

While such juxtapositions reveal stark inequalities, they should not be read as evidence of a simple binary division, as Irish society at mid-century contained multiple intermediate strata such as artisans, small traders, minor officials, and middling farmers whose experiences varied and could shift rapidly under famine pressures. Indeed, Amartya Sen clarifies that 'starvation is a matter of some people not *having* enough food to eat, and not a matter of there *being* not enough

⁹⁴⁵ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Something Unexpected', 16 May 1849.

⁹⁴⁶ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Public Dinner at Sligo to John P Somers Esq, MP', 18 Oct. 1847.

food to eat'.⁹⁴⁷ This helps explain why visible starvation could coexist with continued consumption in the same urban space.

This dichotomy is further illuminated by a single newspaper page dated 21st December 1847, which highlights the goods, services, and entertainment available to the affluent classes during the height of the Famine. There were advertisements for performances, lectures, exhibitions, and seasonal shopping, alongside notices for luxury groceries and confectionery (Appendix 3). The establishment advertising tea had only 'opened this day', indicating that there were exceptions to the general conditions of recession, or at least that some entrepreneur was prepared to take a leap of faith when most were doing the opposite. Amidst all of these adverts was a plea from the Sisters of Mercy for donations to 'assist the sick and starving',⁹⁴⁸ a stark illustration of the distance between those with purchasing power and those dependent on charity.

These traces of leisure and consumption do not negate famine conditions; rather, they show how urban survival strategies unfolded in a city where scarcity and relative plenty existed side by side, shaping policing priorities, public space, and the lived experience of vagrancy and prostitution. The coexistence of leisure and starvation within the same urban environment highlights how famine-era criminalisation was shaped not simply by poverty itself, but by the visibility of poverty within spaces governed by property, order, and social hierarchy.

6.7 Administering Crisis

The chapter has so far focused on the survival choices of those most exposed to hunger and criminalisation, and on the uneven social landscape in which those choices were made. It is also necessary to consider the individuals who witnessed, administered, and enforced responses to famine distress, including magistrates, Poor Law officials, and local professionals. Examining this cohort helps to extend the analysis of trauma beyond direct deprivation, showing how fear, responsibility, and repeated exposure to suffering could produce psychological strain and shape decision-making within local governance.

⁹⁴⁷ Amartya Sen, 'Ingredients of Famine Analysis: Availability and Entitlements' in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, xcvi, no. 3 (1981), p. 434.

⁹⁴⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Advertisements & Notices', 21 Dec. 1847.

This group included prominent local figures, including those who may have sought to assist their tenants or the destitute in their communities, alongside individuals involved in administering justice or serving on Boards of Guardians. Their experiences and perspectives, shaped by both social privilege and close proximity to the unfolding catastrophe, as well as by an anomic environment, provide a valuable counterpoint to those of the offenders they judged.

The case of Richard Uniacke Bayly illustrates how authority figures could become both agents of policy and vulnerable witnesses to violence, fear, and mass distress. He was a magistrate, landowner, land agent, and Poor Law Guardian, whose name appeared regularly in the Nenagh prison registers. Guardians were elected by ratepayers, so the Boards of Guardians were often dominated by propertied local interests.

Bayly was 'minor gentry' from Ballinaclough⁹⁴⁹ and, in April 1846, was called as a witness for the Select Committee, who were appointed to inquire into the relief of the destitute poor, and the operation of the medical charities, in Ireland. He was questioned by Viscount Clancarty and confirmed that he was an elected Guardian of the Nenagh Poor Law Union, having been chairman for the previous four years. He stated that the Union covered 180,000 acres and contained a workhouse which was built to accommodate 1,000, but which was currently 69% full of the able bodied who were suffering from lack of employment and 'scarcity of food'. Bayly stated that providing food for the inmates only accounted for about 17% of the overall cost of running the workhouse,⁹⁵⁰ neither him nor Clancarty commenting on the inefficiency of a system which prevented the majority of funds being used to feed the poor, who had largely entered for that purpose. Bayly believed that the workhouse was the reason so many now 'flocked into the town' of Nenagh, and who remained in the town if admittance to the workhouse was refused, resulting in 'a great number of mendicants' within the town. Bayly considered that this migration tended to be within the Union rather than from further afield,⁹⁵¹ a pattern largely confirmed by the internal migration results

⁹⁴⁹ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 22.

⁹⁵⁰ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland, sess 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi*, pp 633–4.

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp 636–8.

discussed in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.25), which revealed that only 32 entries in the Kilmainham prison register for 1847/8 were originally from County Tipperary.⁹⁵² At the beginning of the Famine, the workhouse was the only practical alternative to gaol or starvation for Ireland's poor, but as Famine conditions worsened and workhouses became overcrowded, they increasingly became less of an option.⁹⁵³ By 4th December 1847 Nenagh Union Workhouse contained 1,246 inmates in accommodation built to house 1,000,⁹⁵⁴ indicating that as living conditions deteriorated, people were actively seeking help. What had once seemed an untenable solution was quickly becoming necessary, yet increasingly unattainable.

Two weeks after the more widely known assassination of Denis Mahon, Richard Uniacke Bayly was the target of a similarly violent shooting while returning home from Nenagh on 13th November 1847. He was severely wounded but survived.⁹⁵⁵ Those charged were John Daly, Edward Rowan, John Ryan, William Carty (also reported as Carthy), and William Dwyer; by the time of the trial, Carty was ill in prison with fever, and Dwyer had become a witness for the prosecution. Contemporary accounts suggest that the attack was shaped less by a specific personal grievance against Bayly than by a wider climate of agrarian tension and drink-fuelled aggression.⁹⁵⁶

This crime occurred during the period where the Nenagh prison registers are missing, and it is fortunate that more information can be gleaned from other sources. The Nenagh Poor Law Union Minutes record the feelings of the Poor Law Guardians of the 'outrage committed on our respected chairman', and their offer of a reward to help with the capture of the attackers.⁹⁵⁷ This reward is likely the reason why 40 witnesses 'left the police barrack at Nenagh, under the superintendence of P Carroll, Esq, county inspector for the special commission at

⁹⁵² *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

⁹⁵³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 158.

⁹⁵⁴ Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service, 'Nenagh Poor Law Union Minute Book 1847-1848, parts 1-4', p. 14 (<https://www.tippstudiesdigital.ie/items/show/1989>) (25 Feb. 2026) Part 4.

⁹⁵⁵ *The Tipperary Vindicator*, cited in *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Attempt at Murder Near Nenagh', 15 Nov. 1847; *The Morning Post*, 'Ireland', 17 Nov. 1847.

⁹⁵⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 'The Irish Special Commission', 31 Jan. 1848.

⁹⁵⁷ Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service, 'Nenagh PLU Minute Book 1847-1848, parts 1-4', pp 114, 133–5, part 3.

Clonmel',⁹⁵⁸ although Bayly was not called to the stand as he was 'still in a delicate state'.⁹⁵⁹ Rowan was acquitted,⁹⁶⁰ whilst Daly was found guilty of malicious assault with intent to murder,⁹⁶¹ and sentenced to be executed.⁹⁶² Both were somewhat disbelieving of the result, looking 'round with a vacant stare – the one as if astonished that he was considered innocent by the jury, and the other upon reflecting that the last hope of escape had departed'.⁹⁶³ Daly was executed at 12 noon on 4th March 1848 at Clonmel, advancing 'to the front of the drop with trembling steps', and appearing to be 'exceedingly weak'.⁹⁶⁴ Carty and Ryan were later also sentenced to be executed,⁹⁶⁵ despite Bayly having 'begged the lives of these conspirators'.⁹⁶⁶

These accounts have provided some interesting information regarding the wider conditions of the period. Daly was described as being 'in the vigour of manhood',⁹⁶⁷ not emaciated by Famine conditions. Dwyer mentioned the Nenagh fair, which would signify some degree of normality, although reports of other fairs at this time indicate a deterioration in livestock quality,⁹⁶⁸ while the possession of a firearm suggests disposable wealth. Reports of Carty's execution and wake are also interesting. Carty had attempted to exonerate Ryan and, despite admitting responsibility, claimed that the statements of all witnesses except for Dwyer were false.⁹⁶⁹ Given the significant reward offered by the Poor Law Guardians, it is possible that Carty was correct, Dwyer himself stating that he was aware of the reward before giving himself up.⁹⁷⁰ Contemporary newspaper accounts of Carty's funeral emphasised the scale of attendance, claiming that thousands were present. While such figures are likely exaggerated, their inclusion is revealing. Reports that many 'comfortable looking farmers' attended suggest that social

⁹⁵⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'State of the Country', 24 Jan. 1848.

⁹⁵⁹ *The Standard*, 'Irish Special Commission', 1 Feb. 1848.

⁹⁶⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 'The Special Commission', 1 Feb. 1848.

⁹⁶¹ *Morning Chronicle*, 'The Irish Special Commission', 3 Feb. 1848.

⁹⁶² *Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*, 'Ireland', 5 Feb. 1848.

⁹⁶³ *The Standard*, 'Irish Special Commission, 1 Feb 1848'.

⁹⁶⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 'Ireland', 10 Mar. 1848.

⁹⁶⁵ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Assizes Intelligence', 7 Aug. 1848.

⁹⁶⁶ *The Morning Post*, 'Ireland', 28 Aug. 1848.

⁹⁶⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 'The Irish Special Commission, 3 Feb 1848'.

⁹⁶⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Fairs, 1 Nov 1847'.

⁹⁶⁹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'The Late Execution at Nenagh', 21 Sept. 1848.

⁹⁷⁰ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Special Commission', 29 Jan. 1848.

gatherings could still draw substantial crowds, even during the height of the famine. The language of scale and spectacle reflects both the persistence of elements of public life and the tendency of the press to dramatise events within an atmosphere of fear and unrest.⁹⁷¹

Bayly returned to chair the Poor Law Guardians meetings on 16th March 1848,⁹⁷² and became a Poor Law Inspector later that year,⁹⁷³ living until 1888.⁹⁷⁴ During his convalescence, the Poor Law Guardians had started to provide outdoor relief, an action for which they were 'strongly reprimanded'.⁹⁷⁵ However, as they had been determined to avoid granting outdoor relief to the able-bodied except as a 'last resort', it might be supposed that the 'last resort' had now arrived, and they were certainly not the only Guardians to make such a decision.⁹⁷⁶ They also had concerns regarding an instruction to employ the recipients of outdoor relief in stone breaking. Their main point was concern 'in compelling a people worn out by famine and sickness in the depth of winter, broken hearted, and very nearly in a state of nudity to sit down in the open air for eight hours per day breaking stones'. Whilst it would seem that the cost and practicality of purchasing stones at 'great expense' were also important parts of the guardians' argument, the above quotation indicates sympathy, even empathy, towards those who had been forced to apply for relief as the result of a wider calamity affecting the countryside rather than their own malfeasance.⁹⁷⁷ As Bayly had been chairman for the previous four years, it is plausible that he shared some of this outlook, a belief supported by his subscription of £5 to the Ballinaclough Poor Relief Fund in 1846, as well as in his role as treasurer.⁹⁷⁸ Bayly was deeply embedded in local governance and civic

⁹⁷¹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'The Late Execution at Nenagh, 21 Sep 1848'.

⁹⁷² Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service, 'Nenagh Poor Law Union Minute Book 1847-1848', p. 107 (<https://www.tippstudiesdigital.ie/files/original/42/1990/Nenagh%20PLU%20MB%201848%20Part%201.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁹⁷³ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 137.

⁹⁷⁴ *National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Calendars of Wills and Administrations, 1858-1922, entry for Richard Uniacke Bayly* (<https://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/search/cwa/details.jsp?id=1639456602>) (25 Feb. 2026).

⁹⁷⁵ Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service, 'Nenagh PLU Minute Book, 1847-1848'; Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 118.

⁹⁷⁶ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 109; Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law', pp 91-2.

⁹⁷⁷ Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service, 'Nenagh PLU Minute Book 1847-1848, parts 1-4', p. 85, part 4.

⁹⁷⁸ Tipperary Vindicator, 'List of Subscriptions to the Ballinaclough Poor Relief Fund', 24 June 1846.

improvement, chairing Poor Law meetings while also serving on multiple committees and promoting projects such as the introduction of gas lighting in Nenagh,⁹⁷⁹ responsibilities which he himself acknowledged were becoming increasingly burdensome.⁹⁸⁰ For Bayly to have returned to work at all, let alone so quickly, is testament to the importance with which he viewed his role. Whether this commitment was rooted in paternalism, duty, or sympathy is difficult to establish, but for those seeking relief or justice the practical effect was that local authority remained present and visible, albeit strained.

While Bayly appeared in the prison registers as a magistrate, he would also have appeared as a victim if the missing registers were extant. By using him as a case study, this account of his experiences allows the roles of magistrate and Poor Law Guardian to be placed into the context of the Famine-era. A special Commission of Judges sent to investigate such cases concluded that ‘circumstances connected with the possession of land’ were the primary cause of such crimes;⁹⁸¹ and indeed, the whole tale indicates that an undercurrent of crime continued during the Famine, (at least amongst those who could afford to expend their energy on pursuits other than staying alive), which was sustained by land grievances, and exacerbated by the anomic environment of the Famine.⁹⁸² It also emphasises the wider atmosphere of fear which compelled other potential targets of assassination, whether real or imagined, to attempt to protect themselves by resigning from their official duties.⁹⁸³ Howlin writes that ‘political and social pressures prevailing in Ireland meant that jury service was indeed perilous at times, and many were reluctant to participate’.⁹⁸⁴ Indeed, a number of such assassinations did occur, and fear was considerably heightened amongst both upper, and middle classes, resulting in a number of landlords leaving the country.⁹⁸⁵ The peak time for assassination was during ‘the bleak winter months of 1847-8’ when ‘some sixteen landlords, agents, and middlemen suffered violent deaths while the landgrabber remained the chief target of those seeking revenge’,

⁹⁷⁹ *The Freeman’s Journal*, ‘The Attempted Assassination of Mr Bayly’, 16 Nov. 1847, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁰ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 24.

⁹⁸¹ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 329.

⁹⁸² *Morning Chronicle*, ‘The Irish Special Commission, 31 Jan 1848’.

⁹⁸³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 325–7.

⁹⁸⁴ Howlin, ‘The Terror of Their Lives’, p. 723.

⁹⁸⁵ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 325, 327.

although overall, 'despite all the hostility remarkably few landowners and agents were shot during the famine'.⁹⁸⁶

Individuals deeply embedded in the communities in which they lived, such as Bayly, were 'bound intellectually, geographically and socially to his fellow man', and could experience 'the rupture of the social bonds' that was inevitably the outcome of the potato Famine.⁹⁸⁷ They were also likely to have experienced psychological strain caused by seeing the dead along the roadside, hearing of the death of their tenants, and fearing for their own, and their families', safety from either assassination or disease. Additionally, many of the landowners were adversely affected due to loss of rent, increased rates to support the Poor Law and, in some cases, their own attempts to provide food for the starving. 3rd Baron Clonbrock of Clonbrock House (County Galway) had 300 of his deer slaughtered and distributed as food to the needy in 1846,⁹⁸⁸ while others, such as Thomas Martin of Ballinahinch Castle (also of County Galway), died of fever caught when visiting their ill tenants.⁹⁸⁹ Woodham-Smith reported that, as the Famine continued, 'landlords who owned thousands of derelict acres were shut up in their mansions, existing on rabbits shot in their overgrown parks',⁹⁹⁰ a depiction that complicates Ó Gráda's argument that farmers of 50 or more acres survived the famine 'largely unscathed',⁹⁹¹ and suggests that formal landholding did not necessarily equate to economic security or insulation from crisis.

This distinction becomes clearer when read alongside Hoppen's observation that 'farmers with more than thirty acres - and many above twenty - survived the Famine remarkably well'.⁹⁹² While larger tenant farmers and substantial owner-occupiers often retained access to food and markets, sections of the landed class were more exposed to collapsing rental income, debt, and estate mismanagement. By contrast, middle class professionals with little or no land, such as medical practitioners or administrators, frequently fared better

⁹⁸⁶ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 45.

⁹⁸⁷ Laragy, 'Items in the Sum of that Great Calamity', p. 96.

⁹⁸⁸ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'London Correspondence', 7 Dec. 1893.

⁹⁸⁹ Kathleen Villiers-Tuthill, *Patient Endurance: The Great Famine in Connemara* (Rev. ed, Dublin, 2008), p. 60.

⁹⁹⁰ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 378.

⁹⁹¹ Ó Gráda, 'Poverty, Population, and Agriculture', p. 114.

⁹⁹² Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society*, p. 98.

economically because their livelihoods did not depend on rent or on the potato crop, and they were more likely to retain capital or the option of emigration. This relative security, however, did not equate to immunity from the crisis. Medical personnel, clergymen, and workhouse officials faced sustained exposure to disease, particularly typhoid fever, often contracted during attempts to relieve suffering, demonstrating that vulnerability operated across social layers, even where material deprivation was less immediate.⁹⁹³

In some cases, exposure to famine distress produced severe emotional strain even among those not themselves starved or imprisoned. The suicide of public official Patrick Bardin, a week after spending just one day in the role of 'secretary and visiting officer to the relief committee of St Nicholas Without', provides a stark illustration of the psychological impact of *witnessing* famine distress.

Contemporary newspaper reports noted that he had never exhibited any 'despondency of mind ... until he came into contact with the scenes of misery which he encountered in the parish', despite having previously taken 'an active part in the relief of the poor' and even offering 'a boiler in his own concern to make soup for them'. Having been appointed as a 'visitor of the poor', a 'painful duty' which he reportedly expressed 'an unwillingness to undertake', he 'acted for one day' before resigning, confiding to a friend that he had not thought that 'such scenes of misery could be witnessed in any part of the world'. The jury concluded that he had died by suicide whilst labouring under a 'temporary aberration of intellect', caused 'solely and entirely from the painful impression made on a sensitive and humane person, by his witnessing such melancholy scenes of starvation, destitution, and extreme distress'.⁹⁹⁴

Although the case was atypical, it indicates that the Famine's psychological toll extended beyond those suffering direct deprivation to include those charged with observing, assessing, and administering relief. Bardin's experience suggests that exposure to concentrated urban distress could itself become a form of trauma, particularly for individuals whose official duties required sustained engagement with extreme poverty. In this respect, his death provides a useful entry point to the

⁹⁹³ Laragy, 'Items in the Sum of that Great Calamity', p. 94.

⁹⁹⁴ The Freeman's Journal, 'Melancholy Suicide of Mr Patrick Barden, One of the Water Bailiffs of Dublin', 18 Jan. 1847.

concept of *witnessed trauma*, reinforcing Laragy's observation that the emotional consequences of the Famine were borne not only by its immediate victims but also by those who encountered its effects at close quarters through roles of authority or civic responsibility.⁹⁹⁵ In this way, the Famine's psychological impact extended beyond direct victims to encompass those responsible for administering relief and maintaining order, illustrating how trauma circulated through the wider social structures of governance during the crisis.

6.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to develop an understanding of the impact of the Famine through the lenses of punishment, survival strategies, and the experiences of both offenders and authority figures. In 1849, Osborne visited Ireland and recorded his exposure to 'lengthened scenes of destitution, death, and misery, in every aggravated form', describing his daily encounters with the visible consequences of 'famine, fever, and oftentimes cholera'.⁹⁹⁶ Similarly, Rev. John O'Rourke, a Catholic priest writing from direct pastoral experience of famine distress in Ireland, recorded that 'many of the deaths which happened are too revolting and too horrible to relate' and that Famine victims were sometimes found dead by the roadside,⁹⁹⁷ in some instances partially consumed by rats.⁹⁹⁸ The psychological toll of witnessing such scenes, especially when they involved relatives or friends, was likely devastating, regardless of social standing. These experiences were often compounded by forced evictions or ejections, which drove already vulnerable families into vagrancy, increased exposure to disease, and deepened the trauma of displacement and loss.⁹⁹⁹ The majority of the population who were living outside of gaol or workhouse were typically living in this environment, too poor to leave the country,¹⁰⁰⁰ and even some of the better-off who stayed were eventually forced to enter the workhouse. Michael O'Donnell writes that 'artisans such as weavers, cobblers, tailors, blacksmiths and masons',

⁹⁹⁵ Laragy, 'Items in the Sum of that Great Calamity', p. 94.

⁹⁹⁶ Osborne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁷ John O'Rourke, *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847, with notices of earlier Irish Famines* (Dublin, 1902), p. 270.

⁹⁹⁸ W. J. Smyth, 'The Long Durée: Imperial Britain and Colonial Ireland' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), p. 62.

⁹⁹⁹ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 364.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Essex Standard*, 'Ireland', 4 May 1849.

and even a 'starving and destitute' schoolmaster and his family had been forced to such recourse.¹⁰⁰¹ Such cases illustrate that recourse to the workhouse was not confined to the chronically poor but increasingly affected skilled workers' families which had previously supported themselves.

It is therefore unsurprising that the penniless and starving population, effectively trapped within Ireland, were becoming increasingly demoralised, and both Kinealy and Woodham-Smith believe that attempts at self-help diminished as the Famine continued, and malnutrition and exhaustion increased.¹⁰⁰² However, as crime escalated, the authorities recognised that some individuals were committing offences deliberately in order to be incarcerated, prompting a reduction in prison rations to bring them more in line with the workhouse diet.¹⁰⁰³ Reports of rioting within workhouses, motivated by the desire to be transferred to the prison system, where conditions were still perceived as comparatively better,¹⁰⁰⁴ also demonstrate that even under extreme duress, individuals continued to exercise a form of agency. These acts reflect conscious attempts to influence their circumstances and make choices, however limited, in pursuit of survival within a system that increasingly blurred the boundaries between relief, punishment, and containment.

The experiences examined in this chapter, and the one preceding it, suggest that the people in Ireland endured far more than the Famine alone. They survived profound bereavement, physical illness, and immense psychological strain. Many lost not only their homes, but also family members and entire communities, while being exposed to harrowing scenes of suffering and death. The evidence examined throughout this chapter indicates that crime, punishment, authority, and relief were not discrete phenomena but overlapping responses to a society experiencing profound anomie under extreme strain. In these conditions of social dislocation and uncertainty, individuals were often forced to navigate institutions such as prisons, transportation, and relief systems as part of wider strategies of survival, illustrating forms of limited agency within extremely difficult

¹⁰⁰¹ O'Donnell, *Fethard County Tipperary*, pp 259–60.

¹⁰⁰² Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, p. 74; Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 359.

¹⁰⁰³ McKay, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred', 12.37-12.57.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Blum et al., 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection', p. 33n.

circumstances. Together, these findings reinforce the argument that survival during the Famine involved navigating a complex web of institutional pressures and limited choices within a colonial system of governance. Few individuals could have emerged from such conditions without enduring lasting psychological and emotional consequences. These psychological and emotional dimensions of survival form the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Impact of the Famine

7.1 Introduction

By examining several dimensions of the famine experience not addressed elsewhere in this thesis, this chapter argues that collective trauma was not only experienced but remembered, interpreted, and politicised. It became embedded in Irish memory and identity, shaping political consciousness in ways that contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiment in the decades that followed. Rather than offering a comprehensive survey, the chapter traces a set of connected experiences through which displacement, witnessed suffering, and crisis administration shaped survival choices and their psychological after-effects. Building on the prison register evidence examined earlier in this study, this chapter shifts from explaining who entered institutions and why, to examining what these experiences meant psychologically and how they were later interpreted, remembered, and politicised. Like prisons and workhouses, transportation formed part of a wider institutional landscape through which famine survival was negotiated. The discussion situates the experiences of those represented in the prison registers within a wider social landscape of collapse, coercion, and adaptation. The aim is to show how the limited agency visible in the registers, often expressed through institutional navigation, survival offending, and coerced mobility, sits within a wider environment of breakdown and uncertainty that shaped both behaviour and later memory.

Eviction and assisted migration illustrate the coercive forces that uprooted families and reshaped communities, while also revealing the trauma that such upheavals inflicted and the strategies people employed to endure it. Death and burial practices show how the loss of entire families and communities could produce lasting psychological strain, including guilt. This strain was compounded by the relentless presence of mortality and the disruption of familiar religious rituals. The experiences of the police demonstrate that even those charged with enforcing the law and administering order were not insulated from the crisis, and that some exercised agency through resignation, emigration, or discretionary acts of relief. Migration extends this picture beyond Ireland, showing how

displacement extended and carried trauma across borders, while also reshaping diasporic identities, social position, and political consciousness.

The chapter then considers how these experiences of suffering, survival, and perceived injustice were remembered, transmitted, and reworked over time, providing a framework through which trauma was transformed into nationalist meaning and political mobilisation. Rather than treating nationalism as an inevitable outcome, the chapter shows how it emerged through the selective interpretation of lived experience, memory, and loss.

Together, these themes show how Famine-era life both restricted and enabled survivors, leaving a durable imprint on individual lives and contributing to the formation of a collective memory that could be mobilised as a political resource within later nationalist movements. Because the registers capture moments of official contact rather than personal experience, this chapter uses them as an entry point into trauma and memory, triangulating institutional traces with contemporary observation, burial evidence, and later testimony.

7.2 Eviction and Assisted Migration

Eviction and assisted migration during the Great Famine represented not only a physical dispossession but also a profound rupture in the social fabric. They produced trauma, provoked resistance, and shaped patterns of survival that intersected directly with crime and expressions of agency. In the prison registers, this structural pressure is legible indirectly, through the clustering of vagrancy, petty theft, and public order committals among people whose options narrowed sharply once housing, land access, and local support networks were disrupted. Far from being isolated events, these processes reshaped everyday life, community bonds, and political perceptions in ways that would endure long after the immediate crisis had passed. The 1841 Irish census had recorded that around one-third of the population¹⁰⁰⁵ lived in the lowest class of housing, one-room mud cabins.¹⁰⁰⁶ However, by 1851, nearly 360,000 of these cabins had disappeared, due to eviction, migration, and death; a decrease of 74% in Connacht (which

¹⁰⁰⁵ Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: a quantitative and analytical history of the Irish economy, 1800-1850* (London: Boston: Sydney, 1983), pp 17–18.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 20.

includes County Sligo), 69% in Munster (which includes Nenagh), and 62% in Leinster (which includes Dublin) (See Appendix 1 for a map of provinces and counties). Overall, Connacht lost 28.6% of its population, Munster 23.5%, and Leinster 15.5%,¹⁰⁰⁷ the highest eviction rates occurring to the west of the line between Youghal (County Cork) and Malin Head (County Donegal). For those evicted from their cabin, this also meant eviction from their holding and any future means of growing food.

Eviction and land clearance were not unique to the Famine period, and had escalated during the 1830s after livestock and grain prices had dropped following the cessation of the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁰⁰⁸ They escalated again after the Poor Law Amendment Act (1843) made landlords and tenants responsible for rates on holdings valued at £4 or less,¹⁰⁰⁹ and also after the Poor Law Amendment Act (1847) effectively made these Irish landlords responsible for the full cost of relief through the Poor Law system.¹⁰¹⁰ During the Famine, the burden of the poor rates increased while rental income ceased. This created strong economic incentives for clearance and forced many landlords to consider eviction as their only viable option. The eviction of more than 40 families at once was classified as a land clearance, and while some landlords were notorious for this practice,¹⁰¹¹ others were driven to similar action by structural pressures rather than individual cruelty.¹⁰¹² Lord Palmerston spent around £8,000 assisting his tenants to emigrate,¹⁰¹³ after being informed by his agent, J Kincaid, that three times the amount of land would be needed to feed a family with oats than was needed to feed a family with potatoes.¹⁰¹⁴ This episode illustrates how structural pressures within the rural economy could produce displacement even in cases where landlords attempted to soften its impact through assisted emigration.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question*, pp 8–9.

¹⁰⁰⁹ B. M. Walker, 'Villain, Victim or Prophet?: William Gregory and the Great Famine' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxviii, no. 152 (2013), p. 587.

¹⁰¹⁰ Paul Bew, *The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (Oxford; New York, 2007), pp 190–1.

¹⁰¹¹ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, pp 35–6.

¹⁰¹² Ibid., pp 32, 36.

¹⁰¹³ Tyler Anbinder, 'Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration' in *The Historical Journal*, xlv, no. 2 (2001), p. 463.

¹⁰¹⁴ Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonization from Ireland* (session 1847, HL 1847, vol. vi, n. p., 1847), pp 145–6.

There are some eyewitness accounts of evictions, and the eviction of 270 tenants (61 families) from the Gerrard Estate in County Galway is arguably the most notorious case.¹⁰¹⁵ However, first-hand narratives from the evicted are rare,¹⁰¹⁶ although John Francis Maguire, an Irish writer and politician, reported the account of one Irish family who had settled in America. Twenty-five years after being evicted, they remembered being ‘turned out like dogs – worse than dogs – on the roadside’ after having ‘barely time to snatch their children from the crashing ruin of what had been their home’. There was no account of how the family had survived after eviction, but by the time of the interview, they owned 400 acres of ‘fine land’.¹⁰¹⁷ Such retrospective success, however, should not obscure the trauma of the original experience or the many who did not recover. Maguire also recounted another eviction narrative, second-hand but revealing. The man had been expelled from land, occupied by his family for generations. One morning, the sheriff arrived ‘with the crowbar men, and a power of peelers, and the army too’. The man recalled that it was as if ‘twas going to war they were, instead of coming to drive an honest man and his family from house and home’. His father was near death, and his wife heavily pregnant, yet the agent allowed no delay. His father died that night in a ditch and his wife in childbirth the next day. Both men blamed the English government and ensured that they passed this sentiment onto their children.¹⁰¹⁸ These accounts illustrate how eviction functioned not simply as economic displacement but as an experience of violence, humiliation, and lasting moral injury, remembered long after material circumstances changed.

Those evicted were left with fewer options than usual, and such experiences understandably produced bitterness, resentment, and trauma, not only among the dispossessed but also among eyewitnesses. A M Sullivan, editor of the nationalist newspaper, *The Nation*,¹⁰¹⁹ described eviction as an ordeal ‘to try the sternest nature’, recalling sheriffs and sub-sheriffs who insisted that carrying out evictions was more distressing than participating in executions on the public scaffold.¹⁰²⁰

Historian L Perry Curtis Jr. describes the levelling of cabins as ‘one of the

¹⁰¹⁵ *The Freeman’s Journal*, ‘Landlordism in Ireland: Case of the Gerrard Tenantry’, 27 Mar. 1846.

¹⁰¹⁶ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 6.

¹⁰¹⁷ J. F. Maguire, *The Irish in America* (New York; Montreal, 1873), pp 603–4.

¹⁰¹⁸ Maguire, *The Irish in America*, pp 604–6.

¹⁰¹⁹ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, pp 6, 28.

¹⁰²⁰ A. M. Sullivan, *New Ireland* (3rd edn, New York, 1878), p. 161.

cruellest and most common features of the famine evictions’, noting that the destruction of homes ‘scarred not only the landscape but also the minds of the victims’.¹⁰²¹ The *Illustrated London News* went as far as to state that ‘being expelled from a home, suffices to destroy life’,¹⁰²² and Curtis adds that ‘no amount of description or analysis, moreover, can possibly convey the extent of suffering’.¹⁰²³ Indeed, in a largely cashless society, the loss of home, land, and sometimes livestock was widely understood as a ‘sentence of death’.¹⁰²⁴

Observers repeatedly commented on the transformed landscape. In 1849, George Poulett Scrope, a British political economist and MP with a sustained interest in Ireland, observed that parts of the countryside resembled ‘an enormous graveyard’, the gables of unroofed dwellings appearing as ‘gigantic tombstones’.¹⁰²⁵ Travelling through Galway, Sir Francis Bond Head, former Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, similarly described ‘jagged triangular gables’ marking where ‘the hand of the destroyer had been at work’,¹⁰²⁶ scenes that ‘haunted’ him through the remainder of his tour.¹⁰²⁷ Curtis argues that the suffering caused by eviction cannot be quantified, particularly for the ‘myriad eyewitnesses’ who watched cabins being emptied and razed.¹⁰²⁸ The Bishop of Meath recalled witnessing the eviction of 700 people, stating ‘I must remember all my life long’, and noted that policemen attending the clearance cried ‘like children’.¹⁰²⁹ Some officers and men even gave their own money to assist evicted tenants.¹⁰³⁰ Póirtéir confirms that ‘the pathetic attempts of families and individuals to stay alive left a strong impression on the minds of those who survived the horrors of the Famine’.¹⁰³¹ Sir Arthur Kennedy, a Poor Law Inspector, later recalled returning from evictions so disturbed by what he had seen that he felt

¹⁰²¹ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 43.

¹⁰²² *The Illustrated London News*, ‘Condition of Ireland. Illustrations of the New Poor-Law’, 15 Dec. 1849.

¹⁰²³ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 28.

¹⁰²⁴ *The Times* 14 Sept. 1854, cited in Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 24.

¹⁰²⁵ George Poulett Scrope, cited in Jordan, *Ireland and the quality of life*, p. 57.

¹⁰²⁶ Head, *A Fortnight in Ireland*, p. 214.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁰²⁸ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 6.

¹⁰²⁹ The Bishop of Meath, cited in Sullivan, *New Ireland*, pp 161–2.

¹⁰³⁰ *The Freeman’s Journal*, ‘Gerrardising’, 9 Apr. 1846.

¹⁰³¹ Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 6.

‘disposed to take the gun from behind my door and shoot the first landlord I met’.¹⁰³²

If such reactions were common among observers, the trauma experienced by the evicted themselves must have been far greater. ‘Eviction not only severed the taproot of ‘home’ but also broke up extended families and deprived the occupiers of their only means of existence’.¹⁰³³ Curtis notes that ‘even the poorest peasants ... were profoundly attached to their hovels’, and eviction destroyed both emotional bonds and material security.¹⁰³⁴ The cumulative effect was not simply homelessness but the disintegration of social worlds. Viewed through the thesis framework of anomie, eviction accelerated the erosion of predictable norms and reciprocal obligations, producing conditions in which both survival crime and institutional containment expanded as alternative forms of social regulation. Loss of community contributed to what has been described as “a primordial breakdown’ in the social order’,¹⁰³⁵ a disruption that could be more damaging than physical deprivation alone.¹⁰³⁶ After the Famine, life could not return to what it had been; homes were destroyed, family dispersed, neighbours lost, leaving emotional trauma, instability, and detachment in their wake. Many who migrated into Irish towns during the Famine undoubtedly remained as beggars, while others became habitual wanderers.¹⁰³⁷ These outcomes reflected the longer-term social dislocation produced by the collapse of familiar community structures.

For those expelled from their homes, eviction represented not just the loss of shelter but the collapse of community, identity, and security. Its consequences were carried forward in memory, bitterness towards the state, and a readiness to attribute responsibility and blame, shaping how survivors understood both their suffering and its causes. The aftershocks of eviction were visible in patterns of migration, protest, and survival crime, revealing how trauma and agency were intertwined. In this way, eviction became a formative experience through which suffering was remembered, injustice interpreted, and political consciousness

¹⁰³² W. F. Butler, *Sir William Butler: an autobiography* (London, 1911), p. 12.

¹⁰³³ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 11.

¹⁰³⁴ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, pp 5, 11.

¹⁰³⁵ Margaret Kelleher, cited in *ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰³⁶ López-Ibor, ‘What is a Disaster?’, p. 4.

¹⁰³⁷ Cox et al., ‘Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited’, p. 515.

sharpened, forming a foundation for later nationalist narratives rooted in dispossession and grievance. Similar dynamics appear elsewhere in this study, where punishment could operate as coerced subsistence and where agency often consisted of choosing between bad institutional options.

7.3 Death and Burial

The Great Famine exposed the Irish population not only to starvation but to the persistent and unavoidable presence of death. Mortality became a daily reality that shaped behaviour, perception, and psychological response. Many of those evicted were forced to travel as far as forty miles to the nearest workhouse,¹⁰³⁸ placing further strain on an already overwhelmed relief system. By Christmas 1846, over half of the workhouses were full,¹⁰³⁹ and by Spring 1847 this figure had risen to 75%.¹⁰⁴⁰ Workhouses struggled to cope with the influx both financially and with terms of space,¹⁰⁴¹ and Kinealy notes that relief increasingly became more 'ad hoc' as the situation deteriorated. Ratepayers were already struggling to meet Poor Law demands,¹⁰⁴² and by August, only eight Poor Law Unions were solvent, possessing £3,600 between them, whilst the other 122 collectively owed some £250,000.¹⁰⁴³

For some, admittance to the workhouse was sought not as a route to recovery but as a means of securing burial, rather than being thrown coffinless into a pit.¹⁰⁴⁴ This logic parallels patterns discussed earlier in the thesis where imprisonment could be pursued as a last-resort survival strategy, not because of criminal identity, but because institutions offered minimal guarantees of food, shelter, or dignified handling of the body. Many others died en route to the workhouse. Tuke was told by drivers that they 'rarely drove anywhere without seeing dead bodies strewn along the roadside, and that in the dark they had even gone over them'.¹⁰⁴⁵ In Clifden (where the workhouse had been closed in early 1847 due to

¹⁰³⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 310.

¹⁰³⁹ Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law', p. 89.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Boylan, 'Famine', p. 408.

¹⁰⁴¹ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 173, 175–7.

¹⁰⁴² Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law', pp 92, 89–90.

¹⁰⁴³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 8.

lack of funds, and the inmates expelled),¹⁰⁴⁶ ‘one inspector of roads’ buried 140 bodies ‘which he had found scattered along the highway’.¹⁰⁴⁷

Nicholson described seeing dogs looking ‘fat and shining’ from feeding on corpses,¹⁰⁴⁸ while Tuke reported that it was well known that the last survivor of a family might earth up ‘the door of his miserable cabin, to prevent the ingress of pigs and dogs, and then laid himself down to die in this fearful family vault’.¹⁰⁴⁹ By 1849, in the countryside surrounding Nenagh, ‘profound tranquillity’ had fallen,¹⁰⁵⁰ a stillness that reflected not peace but depopulation and death. In such conditions, people increasingly turned to whatever food sources were available. Wild animals were undoubtedly killed for food, although Home Gordon, editor and compiler of *The Reminiscences of an Irish Land Agent* (being those of S M Hussey) reported that superstition had prevented some children from eating the autumn blackberries.¹⁰⁵¹ However, this claim is complicated by evidence from the Irish Folklore Commission, suggesting that necessity often overrode belief.¹⁰⁵²

Cannibalism was extremely rare, but several incidents were recorded in Cork, Galway, and Mayo between 1847-9. Where it occurred, it seems so have done so in the final moments before the death of the guilty party.¹⁰⁵³ In 1848 John Connolly (County Galway) had his sentence for sheep stealing remitted once it was realised that he had committed the crime only after his wife ‘had eaten part of the legs and feet of her own child’ who had just died.¹⁰⁵⁴ The fate of the family is unknown, but survival after such an act would almost certainly have carried profound psychological consequences. Rather than sensational exceptions, such cases illustrate the outer limits of desperation and the moral injury that famine conditions could impose, contributing to blame, guilt, and enduring trauma that would shape how the catastrophe was remembered.¹⁰⁵⁵ These episodes mark the

¹⁰⁴⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 176–7.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, pp 101–2.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁵¹ Home Gordon (ed.), *The Reminiscences of an Irish Land Agent; being those of S M Hussey* (London, 1904), p. 52.

¹⁰⁵² John Doyle, in Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵³ Mac Suibhne, *Subjects Lacking Words?*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Freeman’s Journal*, (1848), ‘To the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland’, *Newspaper*, 22 Apr 1848

¹⁰⁵⁵ López-Ibor, ‘What is a Disaster?’, pp 7–8.

extreme end of the same continuum of constraint visible in the registers, where famine conditions forced choices that could produce later moral injury, guilt, and silence.

Ó Gráda's discussion of famine cannibalism helps to situate such cases within a wider historical and comparative framework, while reinforcing their exceptional nature. In *Eating People Is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future*, he notes that while corpse consumption recurs in accounts of extreme famine, not all famines produce it, and many reported instances have been exaggerated or are demonstrably spurious.¹⁰⁵⁶ In regard to the Great Famine, Ó Gráda records only a tiny number of plausible incidents during the 1840s, including cases such as John Connelly (above), emphasising both the striking paucity of firm evidence given the scale of the catastrophe and the evidential difficulties inherent in documenting such acts. This relative silence, however, cannot be read as proof of absence. The profound taboo surrounding cannibalism meant that, if it occurred, it was likely to have been furtive, with traces deliberately concealed, while the same taboo inhibited witnesses and later commentators from recalling or recording it. The absence of cannibalism from famine folklore may therefore reflect later sensibilities rather than nineteenth-century realities. In this context, empirical history inevitably gives way to cautious inference. What is most revealing is not the prevalence of cannibalism, but the extreme conditions required for it to occur, and the lasting moral injury and silence such acts imposed on survivors and on collective memory.¹⁰⁵⁷ Read alongside the pervasive experience of illness, bereavement, and the constant proximity of death, these rare instances mark not an aberration but the furthest point on a continuum of famine trauma. At this extreme, survival, memory, and moral injury became inextricably entangled.

Illness, disease, and death, which formed the everyday context within which such extreme acts occurred, permeated every aspect of Irish life during the Famine, becoming grimly familiar across all social groups. Survivors, whether mourning the loss of loved ones, or living in constant anticipation of death, were likely left

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Eating People is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford, 2015), pp 22–3, 29.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 30–37.

with deep emotional scars. Prolonged stress, unresolved grief, and survivor's guilt would have significantly affected mental well-being. By this stage, many had already sold or pawned their remaining possessions, including clothing. When what remained deteriorated beyond wear, some people became effectively confined to their homes,¹⁰⁵⁸ while others were forced onto the roads in search of aid or opportunity. For some, theft, vagrancy, or deliberate imprisonment offered not moral release, but the possibility of food, shelter, or survival, underscoring how death and deprivation reshaped choices.

Recent local studies reinforce the extent to which guilt, silence, and selective memory shaped how famine survival was later recalled. In *Strokestown and the Great Irish Famine*, Ciarán Reilly argues that the events of the 1840s were so overwhelming that they came to dominate subsequent remembrance, with later incidents remembered less clearly or forgotten altogether. He emphasises that social memory was inherently selective, and that, if left unexamined, it can obscure the complex ways in which the Famine unfolded at a local level. Such selectivity was often shaped by guilt and discomfort, particularly where survival involved actions that conflicted with prevailing moral expectations.¹⁰⁵⁹

Reilly further documents how, in the period immediately after the Famine, many people were reluctant to speak openly about what had occurred, and that contemporary observers were already aware of this. In the early 1850s, George Petrie, an Irish antiquarian and cultural scholar, remarked upon an 'awful, unwonted silence' surrounding the famine years,¹⁰⁶⁰ while a later contribution to the Irish Folklore Commission observed that 'several people would be glad if the famine times were altogether forgotten so that the cruel doings of their forebears would not again be renewed and talked about by their neighbours'.¹⁰⁶¹ At *Strokestown*, Reilly shows that practices surrounding relief distribution, land acquisition, and the treatment of women, children, and the elderly frequently challenged simplified narratives of blameless tenants and villainous landlords. Actions such as land grabbing, assisting bailiffs in clearing cabins, providing false

¹⁰⁵⁸ Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospects of Ireland* (Dublin, 1848), p. 110.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ciarán Reilly, *Strokestown and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2014), pp 164–5, 171.

¹⁰⁶⁰ George Petrie, cited in *ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

information to the police to settle scores, or reporting neighbours to agents in order to demonstrate rent-paying capacity generated lasting shame and resentment. Such behaviour proved deeply painful for subsequent generations and was often repressed, just as famine survivors were reluctant to acknowledge receipt of relief or the acquisition of land. The abandonment of women, children, and elderly dependants, along with the failure of many emigrants to return or send remittances, further contributed to repressed memories and an enduring reluctance to speak openly about the Famine.¹⁰⁶² These accounts suggest that survivor's guilt during and after the Famine was not merely emotional but social and moral, rooted in the compromises, betrayals, and silences that survival itself could require.

At the same time, the notion of a uniformly trauma-induced silence has been challenged. In his article *Was there 'silence' about the Great Famine?*, Niall Ó Ciosáin cautions against treating the apparent absence of testimony as evidence of repression, arguing instead that famine memory was often expressed selectively and contextually rather than suppressed outright. What appears as silence, he suggests, may reflect the forms through which memory was communicated and the contexts in which it could be expressed.¹⁰⁶³

This insight is developed further in Ó Ciosáin's later study, *Approaching a Folklore Archive*, in which he demonstrates that remembrance was frequently embedded in local narratives, moral commentary, and the everyday practices of popular memory, even if explicit discussion of the Famine was limited. He shows that what survives in this folklore archive reflects the priorities, assumptions, and questioning strategies of the collectors as much as the memories of informants themselves. Collection questionnaires unavoidably shape the responses obtained, but in this case leeway was often allowed for extended narrative. Apparent silences must therefore be understood not simply as evidence of forgetting or repression, but as products of the structured and selective conditions under which famine memory was recorded.¹⁰⁶⁴ Read together with Reilly's

¹⁰⁶² Ibid., pp 172, 175–7.

¹⁰⁶³ Niall O Ciosáin, 'Was there "silence" about the famine?' in *Irish Studies Review*, iv, no. 13 (1995), pp 8–10.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Niall O Ciosáin, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine' in *Folklore*, cxv, no. 2 (2004), pp 223–5.

findings, this suggests not an absence of memory, but a complex landscape of remembering and not remembering, shaped by guilt, social tension, and the forms through which the past could be safely articulated. Selective remembering and selective forgetting shaped which experiences became publicly narratable as injustice, and which remained privately lived as shame.

In this context, Jonny Geber highlights the importance of death and burial rituals in nineteenth-century Ireland,¹⁰⁶⁵ when even a ‘thinly attended’ funeral was considered disrespectful,¹⁰⁶⁶ and burial without a coffin prior to the famine would have been considered ‘a sacrilegious abomination’.¹⁰⁶⁷ As the Famine deepened, however, ‘wakes and other rites of passage disappeared’,¹⁰⁶⁸ and coffins became scarce. Nicholson wrote that ‘in the mountainous regions and islands’ bodies were placed between two boards and wound with straw rope;¹⁰⁶⁹ straw mats,¹⁰⁷⁰ or reusable coffins with a sliding bottom were also employed. Over time, coffins were often abandoned entirely. Many lay where they fell,¹⁰⁷¹ while others were buried beneath the ruins of their own cabins, which were pulled down over them.¹⁰⁷² In some cases, burial consisted of little more than a pile of stones covering the body, and overcrowded graveyards left bodies shallowly interred and accessible to animals.¹⁰⁷³ Aoife Bhreatnach notes that, in Cork city, in late May 1847, although 112 coffins were distributed in one parish, only 25 burials were publicly funded, indicating the persistence, albeit under strain, of family and community responsibility. As the Famine progressed, however, the dead were increasingly left to be ‘coffined by the city’s relief committee’.¹⁰⁷⁴ Sullivan described burial as ‘a sacred duty’,¹⁰⁷⁵ and survivors unable to fulfil this obligation were likely to carry deep feelings of guilt, despite their lack of options.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Geber, *Victims of Ireland’s Great Famine*, pp 42–3.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Sullivan, *New Ireland*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Philip O’Regan, ‘Dr Daniel Donovan – heroic figure of the Famine in Skibbereen’, n.d. (<https://skibbheritage.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Dr-Donovan-Hero-of-the-Famine-in-Skibbereen-.pdf>) (3 Aug. 2025).

¹⁰⁶⁸ Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Lady Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book* (London, 1926), p. 84.

¹⁰⁷¹ Sullivan, *New Ireland*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁷² Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Aoife Bhreatnach, ‘Without a Friend? Burial of the Destitute Poor in Cork, 1830–1900’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, I, no. 1 (2023), p. 48.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Sullivan, *New Ireland*, p. 90.

Combined, these accounts show how the Famine subjected individuals to sustained exposure to death. In doing so, it eroded religious, familial, and communal frameworks that had previously structured meaning and dignity. In this context, acts otherwise condemned, such as stealing for survival or failing to bury the dead, can be understood as responses shaped by necessity rather than moral collapse. Survival itself became a source of emotional burden, leaving enduring psychological scars that shaped both individual behaviour and collective memory, and revealing how agency during the Famine often operated within narrow and painful limits. When ordinary rites collapsed, grief became harder to process and harder to speak about, helping to explain both the emotional residue of famine survival and the later political potency of simplified narratives of loss and blame.

Póirtéir argues that ‘the burial of the one million who died during the Famine has left its mark on the landscape as well as on the minds of the people of Ireland’. Graveyards, famine pits, fields, ditches, and the ruins of homes continue to hold the remains of the dead,¹⁰⁷⁶ embedding loss into the physical environment. In some areas, remnants of cabins, churches, and lazy beds remain visible, while elsewhere the land has been levelled or repurposed.¹⁰⁷⁷ These absences are themselves a form of presence, ensuring that the Famine endures not only in memory but in the altered Irish landscape, reinforcing a collective awareness of loss that would later be drawn upon in political and nationalist narratives.

7.4 Police

Considering the role of the police during the Great Famine offers insight into the pressures of public service under extreme duress. It also complicates simple distinctions between victims and agents of authority. The famine environment forced law enforcement into new and harrowing responsibilities, exposing constables to scenes of mass suffering, death, and disorder. Rather than standing outside the crisis, the police were deeply embedded within it, and their experiences reveal how trauma and survival shaped the choices available, even among salaried state officials. Their accounts and outcomes extend the thesis argument about witnessed trauma, showing that exposure to death, eviction, and

¹⁰⁷⁶ Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 3; Head, *A Fortnight in Ireland*, p. 130.

institutional triage affected not only victims but also those tasked with enforcing order. This perspective draws attention to a rarely considered aspect of the prison registers: how the trauma of the Famine shaped the work and experiences of those charged with enforcing the law. It also situates the police within a broader, socially layered famine society, as a cohort whose position complicates binary readings of authority versus victimhood. Where the registers name constables, magistrates, and complainants, they allow the crisis to be seen as relational, with law enforcement simultaneously producing committals and absorbing the strain generated by mass deprivation. In this sense, the prison registers examined throughout this thesis record not only the actions of offenders but also the institutional presence of the police themselves, whose expanding role during the Famine shaped how survival behaviours were detected, interpreted, and processed through the criminal justice system.

Even before the Famine, the police were used as an ‘information-collecting agency’,¹⁰⁷⁸ which included data collecting for the census. During the Famine, however, they were also expected to gather weekly reports on crops conditions, assist with food distribution, guard supply stores, oversee ‘the loading of emigrant ships’ and protect convoys of food.¹⁰⁷⁹ In September 1846, in Sligo, the police had been employed to ‘protect bread being taken to the poorhouse after a mob plundered its supply’.¹⁰⁸⁰ A month later at Templemore, the five policemen stationed there, later aided by the military, ‘battled for two hours with a crowd of 300 to 500 hungry people from the nearby public works’.¹⁰⁸¹ These incidents were not exceptional, in Drogheda a newspaper report in 1847 claimed that the police were ‘almost fatigued to death’ from escorting food wagons.¹⁰⁸² Such responsibilities placed policemen in constant, embodied contact with hunger and disorder, reinforcing their position as reluctant intermediaries between state policy and everyday survival rather than distant agents of control.

Additionally, police were stationed at public works, soup kitchens, workhouse doors to keep the peace and to restrict access, and also responded to property

¹⁰⁷⁸ Elizabeth Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life* (Dublin, 2005), p. 201.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, p. 352.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp 352–3.

¹⁰⁸² *The Nation*, 16 Jan 1847, cited in *ibid.*, p. 355.

owners seeking protection.¹⁰⁸³ Their responsibilities extended further still: reporting 'cases of destitution to the Poor Law Officials', recovering bodies, recording deaths, arranging inquests and burials,¹⁰⁸⁴ and attending burials where paupers were interred without coffin or shroud.¹⁰⁸⁵ In 1848, magistrate Mr Gore Jones confessed to committing 'some hundreds' of 'famishing creatures' to prison in order to provide them with shelter and food,¹⁰⁸⁶ and there is evidence that policemen provided charity to the starving.¹⁰⁸⁷ These actions reveal how enforcement and compassion coexisted uneasily, often within the same individuals. Eventually, the scale of mortality overwhelmed administrative procedures, and the Sligo constabulary stopped holding inquests for local famine deaths, conducting them only for strangers found on the road, or in ditches.¹⁰⁸⁸

Elizabeth Malcolm suggests that these duties contributed directly to rising resignation rates, calculating that 1,124 policemen resigned between 1847 and 1849, a rate of 375 per annum, compared with 163 per annum between 1841/4. Dissatisfaction with the service conditions may have played a role, but in a 10% sample of resignations received during 1846/51, 75% were intending to emigrate.¹⁰⁸⁹ Resignation and emigration can therefore be understood not merely as occupational turnover but as deliberate strategies for escape from trauma and insecurity, aligning police behaviour with broader patterns of survival during the Famine. In this respect, policemen's responses mirror those of other vulnerable groups, even as their authority positioned them differently within the social hierarchy. In the terms used throughout the thesis, these were forms of restricted agency, institutional exit strategies taken when continued service meant sustained exposure to danger, disease, and moral conflict.

Before the Famine, clashes 'between small, armed police parties and large, angry, unarmed crowds were not unusual', particularly during prolonged events characterised by heavy drinking and fighting. Between 1847 and 1849, however, almost 600 policemen died while on duty, compared with only 133 between 1843

¹⁰⁸³ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'State of the Country, 24 Jan 1848'.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *The Freeman's Journal*, 'Gerrardising, 9 Apr 1846'.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Griffin, 'The Irish Police', pp 357–8.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life*, p. 204.

and 1845.¹⁰⁹⁰ This was ‘the highest ever death toll in the history of the force’,¹⁰⁹¹ and none of the deaths were due to the 1848 Young Irelander’s rebellion.¹⁰⁹² Although police barracks were occasionally attacked, and officers threatened, injured or killed,¹⁰⁹³ these deaths were unlikely to have resulted from starvation, given that policemen received wages and could purchase food. Famine-related diseases such as typhus and typhoid were far more probable causes, highlighting the occupational exposure of police to infection through their daily contact with destitution and death.¹⁰⁹⁴

Recruitment into the RIC ‘was generally boosted during times of social and political unrest’ such as the Famine,¹⁰⁹⁵ and the promise of regular wages undoubtedly attracted labourers and members of the farming classes.¹⁰⁹⁶ The expansion of the force during a period of mass impoverishment is significant, because it underscores the growth of an intermediate social cohort whose experiences do not fit neatly into categories of rich and poor. For some individuals, joining the constabulary represented a strategy of economic survival within the state apparatus itself, demonstrating how agency during the Famine could involve entry into institutions of authority rather than resistance to them. The recruitment of labourers and small farmers into salaried state employment during crisis reveals how survival could depend on incorporation into, rather than exclusion from, structures of authority. However, after the Famine, rising prices eroded the value of police wages, and by 1854 recruitment and retention had become increasingly difficult, with emigration remaining a common explanation for resignation.¹⁰⁹⁷

Although the RIC increased from 9,100 in 1844 to 12,400 by 1848,¹⁰⁹⁸ the force was clearly ‘under considerable strain during the Famine’.¹⁰⁹⁹ This expansion is significant because it illustrates how famine conditions did not simply produce

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁰⁹¹ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, p. 350.

¹⁰⁹² Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁹³ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, pp 353–5.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, pp 105, 88.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid., pp 107–9.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, p. 480.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life*, p. 94.

destitution but also generated new forms of employment within the machinery of the state, drawing labourers and small farmers into salaried institutional roles. Numerical growth did not translate into security or insulation from crisis, instead, it intensified exposure to disease, exhaustion, and moral injury, particularly among lower-ranking constables. Increased workload, combined with losses through illness, death, and emigration, stretched already limited resources, while the psychological burden of sustained exposure to suffering compounded these pressures. Palmer argues that the Famine took ‘a heavy toll on the morale of the constabulary, men and officers’, who ‘day after day for six years ... recorded the unspeakable horrors’. He extends this assessment to the military, and the Famine relief officers, describing the latter as being ‘among the heroes in this national tragedy’.¹¹⁰⁰

The experiences of the police illustrate the interconnectedness of crime, survival, and social disorder during the Famine. Officers were repeatedly required to mediate between desperate populations and the demands of the state, performing duties that exposed them to disease, violence, and profound moral tension. Many exercised agency through resignation, emigration, or acts of informal charity, even as they remained implicated in coercive practices such as eviction enforcement or exclusion from relief. Their position demonstrates how trauma severely limited options across multiple social layers, extending beyond the destitute poor to affect those tasked with maintaining order. In this respect, the police emerge not simply as instruments of authority but as participants in the wider crisis, subject to the same forces of fear, exhaustion, and moral compromise that shaped Irish society during the Famine.

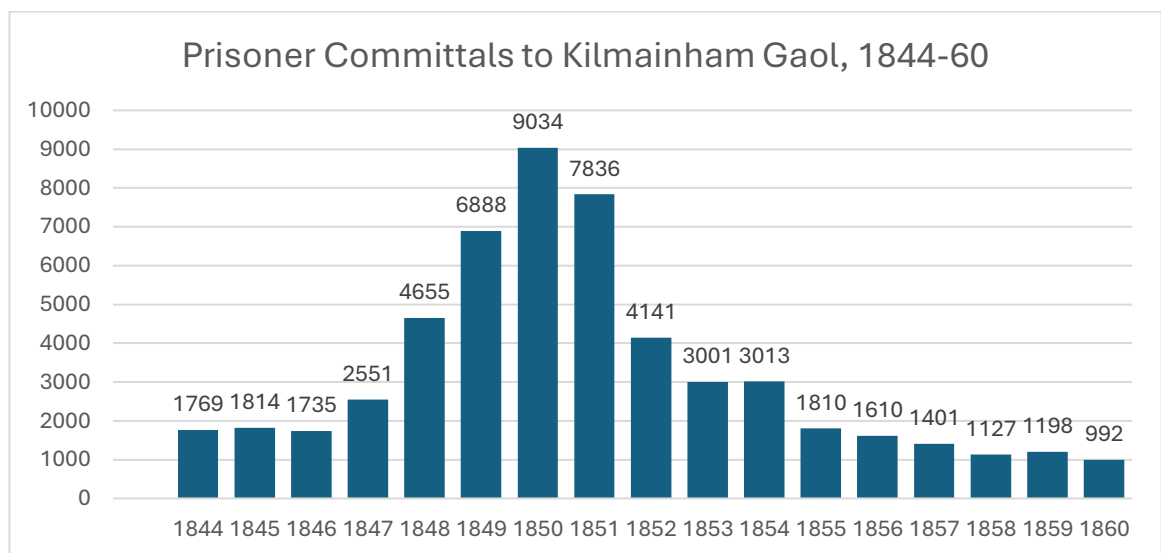
After the Famine, recorded crime declined sharply, particularly in relation to cattle and sheep stealing, which fell from 10,047 incidents in 1847 to 697 in 1856, and plundering provisions, which declined from 1,191 incidents in 1847 to none over the same period.¹¹⁰¹ Since both population size and enforcement capacity changed dramatically, the significance lies less in raw totals than in how crime rates and institutional pressures recalibrated once famine conditions eased. Griffin attributes this reduction to the decimation of the rural poor, among whom

¹¹⁰⁰ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp 480–1.

¹¹⁰¹ Griffin, ‘The Irish Police’, pp 444–5.

much pre-Famine agrarian crime had originated. Yet when arrest levels are considered alongside population loss, a more nuanced picture emerges. By 1859, arrests were roughly one third lower than in 1847, but the population itself had also fallen by approximately a third. Per capita, crime levels therefore stabilised rather than collapsed outright, returning closer to pre-Famine norms. Even during the Irish Land War of the 1880s, absolute crime figures never again reached the extraordinary heights witnessed during the worst years of the crisis.¹¹⁰² This shift, in relation to Kilmainham gaol, can be seen in Figure 7.1:

*Figure 7.1 – Prisoner Committals to Kilmainham Gaol, 1844-60*¹¹⁰³



7.5 The Migrant Reality

While less directly linked to the prisoners recorded in the registers, consideration of migration is nonetheless crucial because it illuminates the broader social context. It intersects with the experiences of the police, many of whom resigned or emigrated during this period, as well as with the wider population who either financed their own passage or participated in assisted migration. Migration therefore emerges not simply as movement, but as a response to trauma and a limited exercise of agency in the search for survival amid crisis. Like prison, workhouse, or transportation, migration functioned as a survival pathway

¹¹⁰² Ibid., pp 446–7.

¹¹⁰³ Crowley, 'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison', p. 103.

structured by unequal access to resources, meaning that mobility itself became a form of stratified, restricted agency.

For those who could afford to do so, migration from Ireland had been taking place prior to the famine, and it has been estimated that between 1815-1845, some 1,500,000 migrants permanently left Ireland.¹¹⁰⁴ Such emigration was undertaken by the better-off Irish in order to improve future prospects, rather than to escape immediate hunger or poverty,¹¹⁰⁵ while by the mid-1840s, some 60,000 Irish men annually sought seasonal work in England and Scotland at harvest time.¹¹⁰⁶ In 1844 Nicholson met such a group who informed her that while the men were abroad, the women and children go begging. They fasten the cabin-door and agree to return at a certain date, bringing home the fruits of their labour, and going 'in together at the unfastening of the cabin'.¹¹⁰⁷

This pattern of temporary and strategic migration would be transformed by famine conditions, as the Famine exodus began in the spring of 1846, when 'many respectable persons' decided to leave Ireland with capital and skills, having had the winter months to sell their property and make plans.¹¹⁰⁸ By the spring of 1847, 'the headlong flight from Ireland' began in earnest. Due to cheaper tickets and fewer immigration rules than the United States of America, Canada became the preferred destination for those who were destitute after paying for their tickets, and for landlord-assisted migrants, whose sponsors clearly preferred to pay as little as possible.¹¹⁰⁹ Conditions on board the emigrant ships were dire; water was often scarce or contaminated, while many emigrants boarded with no provisions for the journey, and the 7lb of ship-issued food allocated to each emigrant weekly was insufficient to sustain an adult through their journey by itself.

During 1847, over 100,000 'emigrants left the United Kingdom for British North America', and a minimum of 58,126 deaths have been estimated (17,000 during the voyage and the remainder after arrival).¹¹¹⁰ Boats ferried the sick from the

¹¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp 216, 345.

¹¹⁰⁵ Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke: New York, 2008), p. 149.

¹¹⁰⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 80.

¹¹⁰⁷ Nicholson, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*, p. 32.

¹¹⁰⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 214.

¹¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 210, 212–3, 215.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

ships to the land where ‘hundreds were literally flung on the beach, left amid the mud and stones to crawl on the dry land as they could’.¹¹¹¹ Eyewitness Father Bernard McGauran reported seeing people ‘lying on the beach, crawling in the mud and dying like fish out of water’.¹¹¹² Some 30,000-40,000 Canadian arrivals travelled onwards to the United States of America,¹¹¹³ while others travelled directly from Ireland to America.¹¹¹⁴

Fear of disease meant the Irish migrant received a hostile reception regardless of destination,¹¹¹⁵ and even the healthy emigrants looked ‘cadaverous’ and emaciated.¹¹¹⁶ The majority of Irish emigrants settled in the cities despite the difficulty in finding unskilled work in overcrowded urban environments, often because they lacked the resources to travel further, which restricted their ability to travel freely. Additionally, many were too ill, exhausted, or traumatised to continue onward. Being forced into ‘the horrors of an emigrant slum was in itself a profound psychological shock’, reinforced by the loss of hope by a ‘terrible reality’. Yet, within these environments, many attempted to recreate the communities they had lost, demonstrating resilience even amid extreme marginalisation.¹¹¹⁷

In Canada, despite sectarian violence and discrimination contributing to the concentration of Irish populations in overcrowded urban areas,¹¹¹⁸ many ‘labourers, artisans and merchants’, were nevertheless able to establish new lives. In cities such as Montreal, Irish labour played a significant role in industrial development and urban growth, while opportunities there enabled the emergence of Irish shopkeepers, tailors, shoemakers, ships chandlers, and other artisans. Others entered policing or became community leaders. It has been suggested that Irish migrants were often better received in Canada than in the United States,

¹¹¹¹ Maguire, *The Irish in America*, p. 136.

¹¹¹² Michael Quigley, ‘Grosse Ile: Canada’s Irish Famine Memorial’ in *History Ireland*, v, no. 2 (1997), p. 23.

¹¹¹³ K. A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford, 1985), p. 292.

¹¹¹⁴ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 247.

¹¹¹⁵ Gordon M. Winder, ‘Trouble in the North End: The Geography of Social Violence in Saint John, 1840-1860’ in *Acadiensis*, xxix, no. 2 (2000), p. 27.

¹¹¹⁶ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 235.

¹¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 248–9, 207, 251.

¹¹¹⁸ Winder, ‘Trouble in the North End’, pp 27–8.

because labour was more readily framed as honourable work, reducing the need to cling to older social identities carried from Ireland.¹¹¹⁹

By contrast, in the United States, nativism was more pronounced. Stephen Puleo argues that while cities such as Philadelphia and New York were relatively cosmopolitan, in Boston 'the Irish confronted a homogeneous and solid social class that dominated the city's political and civic life'.¹¹²⁰ Anti-Irish sentiment, inflamed by the Orange Order, and anti-Catholic legislation, contributed to violence, marginalisation and social exclusion and, almost defiantly, Catholicism became 'the primary expression of Irish American identity', serving as both refuge and restriction.¹¹²¹ Despite these constraints, migrants continued to exercise agency, as evidenced by figures such as Bernard 'Barney' McGinniskin, who became Boston's first Irish-born police officer in 1851,¹¹²² and by the gradual emergence of an 'Irish-stock-middle class'.¹¹²³

For those unable to travel beyond Britain, conditions were often catastrophic. In Liverpool, Irish paupers receiving relief rose from 888 in December 1845 to 13,471 in December 1846, and to 130,795 by January 1847. Condemned cellars were overcrowded, with up to 80 people in each, fever spread rapidly, and hostility towards the Irish intensified. Similar dynamics unfolded across English cities, where Irish migrants were disproportionately associated with disorder, criminality, and the spread of fever, with fear of disease playing a central role in anti-Irish sentiment.¹¹²⁴

Events such as the 1867 Murphy riots in Birmingham further entrenched Irish marginalisation, reinforcing fear, mistrust of authority, and communal defensiveness. Yet even here, longer-term trajectories reveal adaptation and reconfiguration: by the late nineteenth century, Irish-born individuals were

¹¹¹⁹ Donald MacKay, *Flight from Famine: The Coming of the Irish to Canada* (Toronto, 2009), pp 324–5, 327–328, 339, 320.

¹¹²⁰ Stephen Puleo, *A City so Grand: the rise of an American metropolis, Boston 1850-1900* (Boston, MA, 2010), pp 70–1.

¹¹²¹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, pp 323, 332–3.

¹¹²² Puleo, *A City so Grand*, pp 53, 57.

¹¹²³ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 495.

¹¹²⁴ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp 274–5, 277, 171, 281–3.

increasingly represented within policing, culminating in Charles Haughton Rafter's appointment as Chief Constable of Birmingham in 1899.¹¹²⁵

The migrant experience therefore illustrates how displacement both constrained and created opportunities for agency. Trauma travelled with the migrants, shaping identity, behaviour, and political engagement, yet migration also enabled survival, adaptation, and over time, influence. In this way, the Famine diaspora demonstrates how trauma, marginalisation, and agency intersected beyond Ireland's borders, contributing to new forms of community political mobilisation and enduring national consciousness. In diasporic settings, this trauma could be reorganised into identity work, producing communities where memory of loss, eviction, and perceived injustice became politically available in ways that were sometimes harder to articulate within Ireland itself.

7.6 Trauma and the Famine Experience

Life could not go back to normal after the Famine, even for those who had remained in Ireland. Countless had died; families and communities were decimated and dispersed, and homes destroyed. The population had been forced to contend with disease, starvation, eviction, the workhouse, and prison.¹¹²⁶ This section examines how these experiences generated psychological trauma, shaped survival behaviour, and restricted the capacity for agency during and after the crisis. While trauma cannot be read directly from the registers, the behaviours they record, including repeated committals, survival offences, institutional cycling, and family disruption, are consistent with a crisis environment that produced chronic stress and limited choice, as reflected in the prison register evidence analysed earlier.

For the majority of the population, the traumatic experience of the Famine began with the shock of the catastrophic potato crop failure of 1846. Many had already endured the partial failure of 1845, but the collapse of 1846 was far more devastating and immediate in its consequences. Sullivan described how a 'blank

¹¹²⁵ Patsy Davis, 'Green Ribbons: The Irish in Birmingham in the 1860s: a study of housing, work and policing' (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2003), pp 153, 194–5, 140; James Moran, *Irish Birmingham: A History* (Liverpool, 2010), p. 83.

¹¹²⁶ Curtis, *Depiction of Eviction*, p. 29.

stolid dismay' appeared to fall upon rural communities, noting that it 'was no uncommon sight to see the cottier and his little family seated on the garden-fence gazing all day long in moody silence at the blighted plot that had been their last hope', unable to respond even to attempts at encouragement.¹¹²⁷ His account emphasises the psychological shock that accompanied the sudden destruction of the subsistence crop on which so many households depended.

Although Sullivan's description is highly dramatic, it captures a widely reported sense of disbelief and paralysis among those whose livelihoods had been abruptly undermined. This sense of shock marked the psychological beginning of the Famine, and with years of uncertainty and suffering to follow, the experience inevitably took a severe toll on both mental and physical health. Dr Douglas at Grosse Île in Canada, similarly observed the social consequences of epidemic fear among the famine migrants, reporting that fear of fever was so intense that 'the nearest relatives abandon each other, whenever they can'.¹¹²⁸ Such testimony suggests the extent to which famine conditions strained familial and communal bonds under the pressure of disease and desperation.

Within Ireland itself, the crisis also exposed the uneven social responses to scarcity. Some merchants, shopkeepers, and usurers profited from shortages, eviction became increasingly common, and in Cork city the Catholic mayor reportedly expelled rural refugees from the town in an effort to control the growing influx of destitute migrants, and accompanying fever.¹¹²⁹ These developments reveal how famine conditions simultaneously generated humanitarian suffering, social fragmentation, and opportunistic economic behaviour.

Jonathan Pim, an Irish Quaker MP, and social reformer closely involved in famine relief debates, claimed that extreme deprivation could fracture family bonds, reporting cases in which parents neglected their children, elderly relatives were 'turned out', and family members were abandoned in attempts to survive.¹¹³⁰

Richard Webb, another Quaker observer of relief conditions, likewise described instances in which cottiers hid potatoes intended for seed while enduring extreme

¹¹²⁷ Sullivan, *New Ireland*, p. 83.

¹¹²⁸ Dr Douglas, cited in Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 221.

¹¹²⁹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 288.

¹¹³⁰ Pim, *Condition and Prospects of Ireland*, p. 72.

hunger, even allowing members of their households to perish rather than reveal their supply.¹¹³¹ Webb's account highlights the brutal calculations imposed by scarcity, where preserving seed for future survival could come into direct conflict with the immediate needs of starving family members.

Such actions illustrate the profound moral dilemmas imposed by famine conditions, and for those who survived, these choices were likely accompanied by guilt, shame, or long-lasting psychological distress. Survival itself could carry a heavy emotional burden, particularly when it placed other considerations above the immediate welfare of relatives. Others may have felt guilt for crimes committed in order to stay alive, or survivor's guilt when so many others had died.

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, a leading Fenian figure writing from the perspective of later imprisonment and political struggle, reflected on the psychological effects of deprivation, recalling that 'the degradation into which want and hunger will reduce human nature' could weigh more heavily than the hunger itself.¹¹³²

Although he referred to a personal episode, the observation captures the sense of moral injury that famine conditions could inflict on those forced to make extreme choices.

As Kate Schick observes, individuals who endure such circumstances may become 'haunted by their experience and trapped in the past that wounded them'.¹¹³³ While not referring specifically to the Irish Famine, her description resonates with the emotional aftermath reported by many survivors, suggesting that famine trauma could persist long after the immediate crisis had passed.

It is likely that many migrants remained near where they had disembarked either because they lacked funds to travel further, did not know where else to go, or sought safety and familiarity among other Irish migrants. Exhaustion was undoubtedly a factor too. In 1854, 29% of admissions to Liverpool's Rainhill Asylum were Irish, and 'over half of all patients were described as reduced and exhausted' a diagnosis associated with ill-health, lack of food, poverty, tramping, or 'intemperance', and produced or exacerbated 'by long-term mental disorder,

¹¹³¹ Richard Webb, cited in Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 303.

¹¹³² Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, *Rossa's Recollections, 1838-1898* (Shannon, 1972), p. 122.

¹¹³³ Schick, 'Acting out', p. 1842.

particularly mania'. Other long-term consequences included tremors, convulsions, and general paralysis.¹¹³⁴ The asylum noted that mental breakdown could result from migration itself, particularly the disappointment at not being able to migrate further than England, and the physical and mental 'stress of urban life'. Patients entered with melancholia which deteriorated to 'dull listlessness, dementia and slow physical deterioration'. The Famine is not explicitly referred to in these records. Even so, the cumulative impact of famine-related displacement, deprivation, and loss is difficult to ignore.¹¹³⁵ Catherine Cox et al. note that 'high rates of mental breakdown were observed in both the Irish who remained at home and those who migrated over seas',¹¹³⁶ while Kerby Miller states that 'in 1855 an official Massachusetts report on insanity blamed the high proportion of Irish-born in the state's lunatic asylums on the unsettling nature of the emigrants' experiences'.¹¹³⁷

The transition from a rural environment where pre-Famine conditions had included a largely reliable potato-based diet, fresh air, water, fuel, and strong communal ties, to overcrowded urban environments lacking these necessities, deepened the traumatic impact of the Famine. Nutritional decline compounded physical weakness, as migrants were forced to adopt the bread and tea diet of the English urban poor, making recovery difficult.¹¹³⁸ Arguably, more significant still was the unpredictability of post-famine life for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Employment was uncertain yet essential, whereas in pre-Famine Ireland subsistence had been more secure for those with access to land. Unpredictability has been identified as the 'most traumatic factor for human beings'¹¹³⁹ and this applied equally to those who remained in Ireland. Nothing had been done to prevent renewed crop failure, and famine did return between 1861 and 1863, reinforcing insecurity and fear.¹¹⁴⁰ This returns to the subject of

¹¹³⁴ Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited', p. 509.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 510.

¹¹³⁶ Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited', p. 500.

¹¹³⁷ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 320.

¹¹³⁸ Davis, 'Green Ribbons', p. 131.

¹¹³⁹ E. E Sarraj and Samir Qouta, 'The Palestinian Experience' in J. J. López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), p. 231.

¹¹⁴⁰ Kinealy & Moran, *The History of the Irish Famine 'Fallen Leaves of Humanity': Famines in Ireland Before and After the Great Famine*, pp 107–8.

anomie, where the collapse of reliable expectations, whether about food, work, relief, or protection, created conditions in which both offending and institutional reliance could expand.

It might appear natural for Famine survivors to seek out other Irish to restore a sense of identity and belonging. However, Schick cautions that trauma can produce forms of communality that are 'corrosive' rather than therapeutic, leaving individuals isolated despite proximity to others.¹¹⁴¹ Attempts at mutual support could therefore coexist with prolonged grief and psychological damage, particularly in hostile host societies.

In the immediate aftermath of the Famine, many survivors were unable to exercise meaningful agency. For migrants, this may explain why so many remained in the port towns where they had disembarked. Some fared better than others, as indicated by remittances sent back to Ireland, including Lord Palmerston's assisted emigrants sending almost £2,000 home within a year.¹¹⁴² However, it is generally accepted that sustained socio-economic improvement did not occur for the Irish migrants until the second generation.¹¹⁴³

Cox et al. observe that there was a 'high incidence of mental breakdown and confinement in asylums amongst Irish migrants to Britain and elsewhere after the Famine, a situation described both as 'a global phenomenon',¹¹⁴⁴ and as 'one of the 'most traumatic aspects' of Irish migration'.¹¹⁴⁵ Carol Fullerton and Robert Ursano add that psychiatric illness, in relation to disasters, could include 'psychological responses to physical disease', 'acute stress disorder (ASD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trauma-related depression'.¹¹⁴⁶ In England during the 1850s and 1860s, Irish patients sometimes exceeded those of the English population, while institutionalisation rates within Ireland itself were

¹¹⁴¹ Schick, 'Acting out', p. 1840.

¹¹⁴² Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 303.

¹¹⁴³ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 207; David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801-1921* (Dublin, 1984), p. 35.

¹¹⁴⁴ Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited', p. 501.

¹¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Malcom, cited in *ibid.*, pp 500–1.

¹¹⁴⁶ C. S. Fullerton and R. J. Ursano, 'Psychological and Psychopathological Consequences of Disasters' in J. López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), p. 13.

exceptionally high too.¹¹⁴⁷ For many, alcohol became a means of temporary forgetfulness, alleviating pain, disappointment, and grief, with whiskey.¹¹⁴⁸

Recent scholarship has strengthened understanding of trauma's long-term and intergenerational effects. A 2023 study by Zihan Zhang and Jun Hyung Kim, examining the Chinese Great Famine, demonstrates that early-life trauma can 'persist across generations', shaping parenting behaviour and long-term mental health outcomes'.¹¹⁴⁹ Earlier research by Petra Persson and Maya Rossin-Slater similarly identifies a 'causal link between foetal stress exposure' and adult mental health.¹¹⁵⁰ While contexts differ, the scale of loss and psychological strain during the Great Irish Famine makes comparable effects plausible. The claim here is not equivalence across cases, but that the famine environment described in earlier chapters plausibly generated the kinds of stress exposures that other studies associate with long-run psychological and social effects.

Additionally, Schick argues that 'trans-generational transmission of trauma can occur' even when subsequent generations lack detailed knowledge of the original events.¹¹⁵¹ According to Björn Krondorfer, 'such continuities can be traced *intergenerationally* (traumatic patterns and memories transmitted *within* a family system) as well as *transgenerationally* (traumatic patterns and memories transmitted *across* unified social identities, independent of personal family histories)'.¹¹⁵² Gilad Hirschberger indicates that, rather than weakening over time, the emotional consequences of trauma can remain pronounced in second and third generations, manifesting as heightened distress, fear, and injured collective identity, a psychological inheritance that was intensified by the apportioning of blame. While the blight itself was a natural disaster, Ireland's extreme dependence on a single crop had been shaped by human intervention and economic considerations, leaving the population exceptionally vulnerable to crop failure. The result was the emergence of 'a national narrative', rooted in

¹¹⁴⁷ Cox et al., 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited', pp 505, 501.

¹¹⁴⁸ Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 268.

¹¹⁴⁹ Zhang & Kim, 'The Inheritance of Historical Trauma', pp 1–2.

¹¹⁵⁰ Petra Persson and Maya Rossin-Slater, 'Family Ruptures, Stress, and the Mental Health of the Next Generation' in *The American Economic Review*, cviii, no. 4–5 (2018), pp 1214–7.

¹¹⁵¹ Schick, 'Acting out', p. 1841.

¹¹⁵² Krondorfer, 'Unsettling Empathy', p. 92.

trauma,¹¹⁵³ polarising experience into moral binaries, and fostering resentment.¹¹⁵⁴ Although Judith Kestenberg's reflections on Holocaust descendants relate to a different historical context, her observations regarding inherited missions of restitution and redemption resonate with the Irish experience.¹¹⁵⁵ While the historical contexts differ, the comparison highlights how collective trauma can be carried forward through memory, shaping later interpretations of the past and informing political identities.

A similar inherited sense of victimhood also shaped collective memory of the Famine, often filtered through a 'distorted lens'.¹¹⁵⁶ This contributed to the rise of nationalist sentiment and, ultimately, the justification of violent resistance to British colonial rule. Within a political system in which authority, land ownership, and legal power were closely associated with British governance, memories of famine suffering were frequently interpreted as evidence of systemic injustice rather than isolated misfortune. In this way, trauma helps explain acts of desperation during the Famine years and also illuminates how agency was reshaped and transmitted across generations, producing enduring patterns of grievance, resistance, and identity that nationalist movements would later harness.

7.7 The Rise of Nationalism

The social disruption and trauma described in the preceding sections did not disappear with the end of the Famine, or with the generations that experienced it. Instead, these experiences contributed to longer-term political and cultural developments that would shape the rise of nationalism in the later nineteenth century. The experiences of Irish migrants during the Murphy riots in Birmingham can also be linked to the formation of 'territorial youth gangs' drawn from the working classes, a phenomenon that spread across England's major cities in the later nineteenth century. Described by Andrew Davies as the 'first modern youth cult', they were 'fighting gangs' rather than criminal gangs, and they were largely

¹¹⁵³ Hirschberger, 'Collective Trauma', p. 3.

¹¹⁵⁴ Schick, 'Acting out', pp 1843, 1845.

¹¹⁵⁵ Judith Kestenberg, cited in Victoria Aarons and A. L Berger, 'The Intergenerational Transmission of Memory and Trauma: From Survivor Writing to Post-Holocaust Representation' in *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (Evanston, IL, 2017), pp 58–9.

¹¹⁵⁶ Hirschberger, 'Collective Trauma', p. 11.

interested in 'defending their territory'.¹¹⁵⁷ Rather than simple criminality, it would appear that these formations reflected a breakdown of trust in legal authority, shaped both by the Famine experiences of their parents and by the more recent violence of the Murphy riots. Law, which had failed to protect Irish communities, came to be viewed as hostile or illegitimate, generating a wide disrespect for authority. In this sense, law and institutions were often experienced not as neutral arbiters but as uneven systems of containment and exclusion, shaping later mistrust of authority.

Whether famine or riot, large-scale crisis produces social disruption, collective trauma, and collective memory which may not be an accurate rendition of events but nevertheless become politically potent. Such memories can be mobilised into what Hirschberger conceptualises as a '*chosen trauma* dynamic', a narrative emphasising 'that 'walking through blood' is necessary on the path to freedom, independence and group security'.¹¹⁵⁸ Vamik Volkan similarly argues that 'adopting a chosen trauma can enhance ethnic pride, reinforce a sense of victimization, and even spur a group to avenge its ancestors' hurts'.¹¹⁵⁹ Within the Irish context, the Great Famine provided a particularly powerful reservoir of such memory, contributing to the creation of fertile ground on which revolutionary politics could take root. That the famine had become central to nationalist mobilisation is suggested by later revisionist efforts to challenge what were seen as mythologised famine narratives within nationalist discourse. The earlier sections of this chapter show the kinds of experiences that could supply the content for such a narrative: eviction, institutional triage, mass death, and coerced migration, while Chapters 5 and 6 show how survival was negotiated through punishment and restricted choice.

Transforming grievance into political change required organisation, coordination, and leadership. This role was filled by a range of nationalist organisations that translated trauma and resentment into collective action. The largest of these was the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AoH), which by the late nineteenth century had

¹¹⁵⁷ Andrew Davies in 'BBC2, The Real Peaky Blinders' (18 Aug. 2023), 9.22-9.33, 32.28-32.35, 12.48-13.02 mins (<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/3BF1099E?bcast=139575041>) (4 Aug. 2025).

¹¹⁵⁸ Hirschberger, 'Collective Trauma', pp 1–2.

¹¹⁵⁹ Vamik Volkan, *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (Boulder, CO, 1997), p. 78.

around 6,000 lodges throughout the United States of America, alongside ‘a large organization in Great Britain’ and Ireland. Membership was initially restricted to first- or second-generation Irish Catholics.¹¹⁶⁰ The AoH acted as something of a counterweight to the Orange Order and helped to facilitate Irish employment and ‘upward mobility for their members’, while also offering community support alongside the Catholic Church. At the same time, its exclusivity often reinforced perceptions of Irish separateness, limiting wider integration and offered little support to upwardly mobile Irish-Americans, many of whom ‘never overcame deep-seated feelings of inferiority and insecurity’.¹¹⁶¹ These organisations also functioned as memory infrastructures, sustaining shared stories, rituals, and interpretive frames that converted personal loss into collective meaning.

More explicitly nationalist were the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the Fenian Brotherhood, secret, pledge-bound organisations (collectively referred to as Fenians). These Brotherhoods emerged from the Young Irelanders movement in 1858, their unsuccessful rebellion in 1848 having already ‘politicized the Famine experience’.¹¹⁶² As early as 1850, William Stevens Balch, an American writer and social observer visiting Ireland in the immediate aftermath of the Famine, observed that ‘an inveterate hostility’ was already ‘cherished towards that nation, and all their misfortunes and misery are set to the account of English interference – high rents, heavy taxes, potato rot, and all’.¹¹⁶³ Fenianism drew strength from this interpretive framework, particularly as many members were demobilised soldiers from the American Civil War¹¹⁶⁴ who brought military training and experience with them. The movement’s rapid growth suggests that large sections of the Irish population were already receptive to the idea of ending British rule in Ireland through armed rebellion,¹¹⁶⁵ demonstrating agency rooted in both grievance and strategic calculation.

¹¹⁶⁰ F. P. Dewees, *The Molly Maguires: the origin, growth, and character of the organization* (Philadelphia, 1877), pp 97–8.

¹¹⁶¹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, pp 500, 423, 498.

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp 280–1.

¹¹⁶³ William Stevens Balch, *Ireland, as I saw it: the character, condition, and prospects of the people* (New York, 1850), p. 214.

¹¹⁶⁴ MacKay, *Flight from Famine*, p. 325.

¹¹⁶⁵ William Casey, *The Cradle of Fenianism: Skibbereen and the Early Fenian Movement, 1850-1867* (np, 2018), p. vii.

Support for the Fenians increased during renewed food shortages in the early 1860s and again during the agricultural depression of the late 1870s when starvation once more became a reality.¹¹⁶⁶ These crises reinforced perceptions that structural change was necessary. While ideological commitment varied, Owen McGee notes that for some rural members, the exchange of a subscription fee for arms was more compelling than Fenian doctrine.¹¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless Roy Foster argues that Fenianism 'provided a social outlet as well as a political identity',¹¹⁶⁸ partially replacing communities fractured by famine, migration, and eviction. Political participation thus offered a sense of purpose and agency, as well as community, in the aftermath of prolonged dislocation.

'Catholic Irish-Americans were rarely hostile to Irish nationalism, but many were indifferent'. Nevertheless, by 1906, the AoH openly supported 'Sinn Féin, physical-force nationalism, and total Irish independence', with membership rising to 200,000 by 1908.¹¹⁶⁹ Ideology played a crucial role in this transition, providing a framework through which identity, grievance and political aims could be aligned.¹¹⁷⁰ Unlike the AoH, the IRB had been founded explicitly for this purpose. As McGee notes, it was a 'revolutionary fraternal organisation determined to instill into the Irish masses the ability to think and act'.¹¹⁷¹ The IRB sought to prepare 'Ireland for the task of recovering her independence by force of arms', although revolution was to be postponed until sufficient public support existed and Britain appeared vulnerable and disadvantaged, a moment that arrived in 1916.¹¹⁷² It 'is important that ideology provides a motive and framework for action',¹¹⁷³ and this was supplied by the IRB, along with an administrative framework.

The motivation for seeking an independent Ireland was not purely emotional; the Act of Union (1800) represented an unequal political relationship, and the Famine

¹¹⁶⁶ Kinealy & Moran, *The History of the Irish Famine 'Fallen Leaves of Humanity': Famines in Ireland Before and After the Great Famine*, p. 108; F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (2nd edn, London, 1973), pp 164–5.

¹¹⁶⁷ Owen McGee, *The IRB, The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005), p. 38.

¹¹⁶⁸ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 394.

¹¹⁶⁹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, pp 535–6, 533.

¹¹⁷⁰ Drake, 'The Role of Ideology', pp 54–5.

¹¹⁷¹ McGee, *The IRB*, p. 15.

¹¹⁷² León Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924* (New Jersey, 1976), pp 7, 2, 167.

¹¹⁷³ Drake, 'The Role of Ideology', p. 55.

had starkly exposed its failures. ‘Nationalist rhetoric’ increasingly fused memory with land clearance, emigration, and genocide, rendering Famine and Fenianism inseparable in popular discourse.¹¹⁷⁴ Over time, the IRB infiltrated cultural and political organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, and the Irish Volunteer Force, using them as vehicles for nationalist mobilisation.¹¹⁷⁵ Financed largely by Irish-America through the Fenian Brotherhood (which later became Clan na Gael), the IRB embedded itself within civil society.¹¹⁷⁶

Although IRB membership declined from around 40,000 in the early 1870s to only a few hundred by 1900, its influence endured.¹¹⁷⁷ Intergenerational transmission proved crucial, as can be seen in the family backgrounds of figures such as Harry Boland and Michael Collins, both raised within IRB households.¹¹⁷⁸ They were both involved in the Easter Rising and were key players in the Irish fight for independence, as well as in the Civil War which followed; (both of them losing their lives in 1922). This recruitment of second and subsequent generations was one of the strengths of the IRB and undoubtedly one of the reasons that the Brotherhood was still in existence by 1916. Katherina Dodou argues that ‘the perception that the Great Famine resulted from English economic, agricultural, and landholding policy’ became an unchanged and integrated interpretation in the nationalist version of Irish History, ensuring its ‘cementation in a collective Irish memory’.¹¹⁷⁹ Within this narrative, famine suffering was increasingly interpreted as evidence of the structural injustices associated with British colonial governance in Ireland. This meant sidelining other Irish famines, particularly that of 1741/2, despite proportionately higher mortality.¹¹⁸⁰ Even today, the Great Famine ‘has come to stand as an emblem of Irish suffering under English colonial

¹¹⁷⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, p. 16.

¹¹⁷⁵ Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, pp 168–9, 122, 132, 150, 152.

¹¹⁷⁶ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, pp 119, 122.

¹¹⁷⁷ T. D. Hoyt, ‘The Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858–1924: A Case Study of Terrorism and Irregular Warfare’ in Paul Huddie, Cathal Billings and Arlene Crampsie (eds), *New Perspectives on Conflict and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2025), p. 226.

¹¹⁷⁸ David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2003), pp 18–20; Margery Forester, *Michael Collins, The Lost Leader* (London, 1971), pp 4–5.

¹¹⁷⁹ Katherina Dodou, ‘Jim Sheridan’s “The Field” and the Memory of Dispossessed Irishness’ in *Nordic Irish Studies*, xiii, no. 1 (2014), pp 114–5.

¹¹⁸⁰ Kinealy & Moran, *The History of the Irish Famine ‘Fallen Leaves of Humanity’: Famines in Ireland Before and After the Great Famine*, p. 44.

rule',¹¹⁸¹ demonstrating how historical trauma could be incorporated into nationalist political narratives and mobilised as a powerful symbol of colonial oppression.

In this context, the legacy of famine, migration, and urban violence both restricted and motivated individual and collective agency. Trauma and marginalisation contributed to social unrest and distrust of authority, while also providing the emotional and ideological foundations for nationalist organisation. Nationalist movements harnessed these experiences, transforming memory and grievance into coordinated political action, and linking patterns of crime, survival, and resistance to a broader project of national self-determination.

7.8 Conclusion

The aftermath of the Famine, alongside episodes such as the Murphy riots, created enduring social, psychological, and political conditions that fostered the rise of Irish nationalist movements. This chapter has shown how collective trauma was not only endured but actively interpreted and mobilised, illustrating how suffering, memory, and resentment could be channelled into organised political action.

In 1916, the Military Council of the IRB decided that the time was right for revolution, judging that British attention was sufficiently diverted by the Great War. León Ó Broin believed that up to this point, the IRB 'had achieved no practical result whatsoever', although he conceded that the "Organisation" had consistently promoted the separatist ideal and kept alive the expectation that, under the right circumstances, 'Ireland might secure its freedom by the exercise of physical force'.¹¹⁸² Despite estimates that the median lifespan of armed clandestine organisations is between five and nine years, the IRB survived for 65 years. T D Hoyt attributes this longevity to the organisation's ability to 'recover from defeat and adapt to changing political circumstances', as well as to a 'broader interaction between the movement and Irish society' that surpassed the role of a simple military organisation.¹¹⁸³ This adaptability allowed the IRB to absorb periods of

¹¹⁸¹ Dodou, 'The Field', pp 114–5.

¹¹⁸² Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, pp 167–9, 141.

¹¹⁸³ Hoyt, 'The Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924', pp 215–7.

failure while maintaining relevance, supported by its 'quasi-democratic' structure, which incorporated elections to a supreme council, and by 'a tradition of episodic violent resistance', that enabled ordinary members of society to participate in a cause they believed could effect change.¹¹⁸⁴ Throughout its existence, the IRB acted as a 'radicalising agent',¹¹⁸⁵ successfully translating the anguish and memory of the Famine into political meaning, through a '*chosen trauma* dynamic'.¹¹⁸⁶ This process helps to explain how initial opposition to the Easter Rising rapidly converted into support for independence following the harsh sentencing of participants and the execution of the Rising's leaders.¹¹⁸⁷ British reprisals transformed defeat into moral legitimacy, provoking outbreaks of violence in America as well as Ireland. When Sir Roger Casement was hanged in England, on 3rd August 1916, there was widespread outcry, including within Britain itself. F S L Lyons observed that British actions added 'a new bitterness to the hatred that was fast coming to be the chief legacy of the Easter Rising'.¹¹⁸⁸ In this way, repression reinforced the narrative of collective grievance, transforming earlier memories of famine suffering into a powerful framework through which later political conflict could be understood.

These developments culminated in the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, marking a decisive reassertion of Irish agency after decades of political subordination. The original Irish Republican Army (IRA) formed as the army of the Irish Republic, and declared during the Easter Rising,¹¹⁸⁹ provided an organisational and ideological template that would later shape the Provisional IRA (PIRA) in the latter half of the twentieth century. The PIRA explicitly claimed to be "true heirs' of the original Irish Republican Army',¹¹⁹⁰ using terrorist tactics developed and utilised by Michael

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

¹¹⁸⁶ Hirschberger, 'Collective Trauma', p. 1.

¹¹⁸⁷ Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, p. 174.

¹¹⁸⁸ Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, p. 377.

¹¹⁸⁹ J. O. Ranelagh, 'The I.R.B. from the treaty to 1924' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xx, no. 77 (1976), p. 26.

¹¹⁹⁰ W. H. Van Voris, 'The Provisional IRA and the Limits of Terrorism' in *The Massachusetts Review*, xvi, no. 3 (1975), p. 413.

Collins after the Rising.¹¹⁹¹ In this way, the legacy of Famine-era trauma and resistance extended beyond independence into later cycles of political violence.

The resentment towards Britain that originated in the Famine years and was cultivated by nationalist organisations had political consequences. In Ireland, the perceived threat of a Fenian uprising contributed to British reluctance to introduce conscription to Ireland during the Great War, a policy ultimately abandoned on the grounds that enforcement would require more troops than it would yield. During the Second World War, lingering resentment, reinforced by the Irish War of Independence, Irish Civil War, and partition, helped shape Ireland's decision to remain neutral. Abroad, Irish-Americans supported American isolationism during both world wars, and provided substantial financial and ideological support for 'every Irish national movement from the nineteenth-century Home Rule Party to the IRA' in the latter part of the twentieth century.¹¹⁹²

Across the thesis, evidence from the prison registers has shown how famine pressures channelled people into institutions through survival offending and restricted choices. This chapter has extended that analysis by showing how the same conditions produced lasting psychological effects and politically potent memories.

This chapter has explored the long-term impact of the Famine on political identity, memory, and Anglo-Irish relationships. It has demonstrated that trauma did not produce political passivity, but informed evolving forms of agency. It shaped nationalist sentiment, influenced Ireland's domestic and foreign policy choices, and sustained diasporic engagement with Irish politics. In doing so, it reinforces the broader argument of this thesis that the experiences of famine survival, including crime, punishment, and displacement, left enduring psychological and political legacies. Together, these legacies reveal how the trauma of the Famine extended far beyond the immediate crisis, embedding itself in political consciousness and identity in ways that continued to shape Ireland's national and international position well into the twentieth century and beyond.

¹¹⁹¹ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, pp 193–4, 315.

¹¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp 186, 233, 119.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has demonstrated that crime during the Great Famine functioned primarily as a contextually rational, although often desperate, response to conditions of acute deprivation. Siegel observes that ‘if a society becomes anomic, it can no longer establish and maintain control over its population’s wants and desires’, and that ‘under these circumstances, obedience to legal codes may be strained, and alternative behavior choices, such as crimes, may be inevitable’.¹¹⁹³ The prison registers confirm that, as customary expectations and practical constraints collapsed, many turned to illicit acts not as evidence of passivity or moral failure but as strategies of survival undertaken within a narrowing field of viable options. In doing so, individuals exercised forms of agency that were neither uniform nor freely exercised. This agency operated unevenly across gender, age, occupational status, and locality, and was often accompanied by fear, moral tension, and lasting psychological strain. Combined, the prison registers analysed throughout this study reveal how famine conditions produced a convergence of anomie, limited agency, and trauma, reshaping patterns of crime and survival in ways that reflected both the collapse of customary social structures and the coercive framework of colonial governance.

At the same time, the records testify to the profound trauma of the period: the disintegration of social bonds, the erosion of customary behaviour, and the enduring psychological scars carried by those who endured the catastrophe, across a society that remained socially differentiated rather than uniformly impoverished. Importantly, this thesis has also shown that the famine experience cannot be reduced to a binary social world of landlords and tenants, or rich and poor. The registers, alongside supplementary evidence, illuminate a socially layered society in crisis, in which the destitute, the displaced, state officials, and local intermediaries were entangled within the same catastrophe, albeit from very different positions. The history of Famine-era crime is therefore not marginal to

¹¹⁹³ Siegel, *Criminology*, p. 197.

our understanding of the crisis, but central to grasping its lived realities and its long shadow in Irish society.

In this light, crime functions as a crucial lens through which to apprehend the interplay of survival, agency, trauma, and governance. The remainder of this chapter consolidates the thesis's core findings, showing how Famine-era offences emerged from deprivation and institutional strain, how individuals negotiated limited choices, and how these experiences fed into longer-term patterns of memory, grievance, and political meaning. It will then briefly outline possible avenues for future research.

8.2 Demographics and Offence Typologies

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the Famine precipitated a substantial increase in arrests across both rural and urban registers, reflecting profound social disruption and widespread deprivation. While the Sligo registers (section 4.4) cover only excise offences, categorised here as survival crime, the dramatic 397% increase in arrests between the two dates indicates how even narrowly defined criminal behaviour was extremely sensitive to famine-induced pressures. This trend is mirrored in the Nenagh and Kilmainham registers (sections 4.3 and 4.6), where a clear shift from predominantly social-order crime to survival-driven crime occurred between 1844/5 and 1847/8.¹¹⁹⁴

The Nenagh prison registers indicate that in 1844/5 there were 234% more arrests for social-order crime than for survival crime, whereas by 1847/8 there were 178% more arrests for survival crime than for social-order crime. Similarly, the Kilmainham prison registers reveal that in 1844/5 there were 84% more arrests for social-order crime, but by 1847/8 there were 58% more arrests for survival crime.¹¹⁹⁵ These patterns indicate a systemic shift in both the function and motivation for criminal behaviour, demonstrating that survival imperatives increasingly overtook pre-existing social tensions in shaping illegal activity, while also registering the wider strains of hunger, displacement, and an overwhelmed

¹¹⁹⁴ NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; NAI, *Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

¹¹⁹⁵ NAI, *Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; NAI, *Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

relief and penal system. Combined, these shifts correspond closely with the thesis's theoretical framework. As subsistence systems collapsed and relief mechanisms faltered, conditions of social breakdown and anomie emerged in which customary expectations regarding work, food access, and social obligation could no longer be reliably maintained. Within this environment, survival crime functioned less as deviance than as a practical adaptation to institutional and economic disruption.

Yet, despite this overwhelming trend toward survival crimes, the registers also reveal an undercurrent of social-order offences that continued even as conditions deteriorated. This persistence indicates that political, structural, and interpersonal tensions continued to drive some criminality independently of famine necessity. Moreover, the true scale of famine-related offending was almost certainly greater than the registers record, given under-reporting, selective enforcement, and local variations in policing and prosecution. This reflects decision-making shaped by immediate survival needs, social norms, fear of punishment, and family responsibilities within severely limited circumstances.

Gendered patterns of arrests (sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.6) further illuminate these dynamics. Across all registers, women's arrests increased at a faster rate than men's, narrowing the male-female gap. In Kilmainham, this is particularly evident among married women, supporting the argument that many households were left with women as primary providers due to male migration, death, or incapacity. The marked increase in women's involvement in survival crimes, rather than social-order offences, underscores that women were active agents negotiating strategies to sustain themselves and their dependants amid extreme hardship, often under acute stress and responsibility.¹¹⁹⁶ Migration patterns discussed in sections 4.8 and 7.5 reinforce this point, showing how households were fragmented by seasonal movement and long-distance migration, leaving those remaining to improvise survival within tightening constraints.¹¹⁹⁷

Age patterns also reveal adaptive responses. In the 1844/5 registers, the 20–29 age group was most frequently arrested, followed by the 10–19 cohort (sections

¹¹⁹⁶ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404.

¹¹⁹⁷ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 635–736.

4.3, 4.4, and 4.6). By 1847/8, the Nenagh registers indicate a shift, with 10-19-year-olds becoming the dominant age group.¹¹⁹⁸ While missing data and local differences may account for some variation, the overall pattern suggests that survival strategies engaged multiple generations within households, including children and young adults, reflecting both desperation and the redistribution of household responsibilities under crisis.

Occupational data from Kilmainham (section 4.8) further illustrates how social position intersected with famine criminality. The number of skilled workers in the register increased by 80% between the two dates, while unskilled workers increased by 120% over the same period. Although this reflects the vulnerability of lower occupational classes, the rise in skilled-worker arrests indicates that even those with previously greater pre-famine resources were drawn into survival offending as economic security collapsed. Marital status data add a further layer: arrests of married women increased sharply by 1847/8 (157%), with only a small fraction arrested alongside spouses,¹¹⁹⁹ highlighting the gendered distribution of survival responsibility and exposure to criminalisation.

Finally, the reduction in recorded crime after the famine, particularly in relation to agrarian offences such as cattle and sheep theft (falling from 10,047 incidents in 1847 to 697 in 1856),¹²⁰⁰ underscores the situational nature of Famine-era criminality (section 7.4). Griffin's observation that much pre-Famine crime was agrarian and committed by the rural poor highlights that the extraordinary rise in crime was temporary and context-driven. It reinforces the thesis's central point that much Famine-era offending was an adaptive response to scarcity and institutional collapse rather than evidence of inherent criminality.

Together, these patterns show that the Famine reshaped Irish criminality across frequency, typology, gender, age, and class. The registers reveal ordinary people adapting to unprecedented hardship, making difficult choices under conditions of deprivation, fear, and loss.

¹¹⁹⁸ *NAI, Nenagh Prison Registers*, pp 77–112, 348–404; *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736; *NAI, Sligo Prison Registers*, pp 21–23, 26–35.

¹¹⁹⁹ *NAI, Kilmainham Prison Registers*, pp 455–507, 635–736.

¹²⁰⁰ Griffin, 'The Irish Police', pp 444–5.

8.3 The Prisoners

The prison registers provide the empirical basis for demonstrating that incarceration increased significantly during the Famine, while the presence of frequent re-offenders indicates that for some, survival crime already formed part of a precarious pre-famine economy. To understand what these patterns meant in lived terms, the thesis combined register analysis with eye-witness testimony, newspapers, official documentation, and scholarly literature, allowing offenders to be situated within the social and institutional environment that had shaped their choices.

In Van Diemen's Land, the conduct records enabled a small cohort of famine-era convicts to be traced in detail. Most exhibited relatively good behaviour in prison and after transportation, with recorded misconduct more often linked to alcohol or resistance to institutional constraint than to any consistent pattern of violence or bad character. These findings support the thesis's central argument that a large proportion of offences resulting in sentencing were survival-driven, committed by individuals with limited alternatives, who nonetheless attempted to influence the direction of their lives despite circumstances largely outside of their control. This pattern reinforces the thesis's interpretation of famine-era offending as an expression of restricted agency, in which individuals navigated limited and often morally troubling options in order to secure survival within a coercive institutional framework.

For those sent to Bermuda or who remained within the Irish prison system, contemporary sources supplement the limits of official records and enable a clearer picture of conditions endured. The petty nature of most offences, combined with the increased crime rate, reinforces the conclusion that a substantial proportion of committals during the worst years of the Famine, related to survival crime. At the same time, Chapter 7's discussion of guilt, moral injury, and selective memory cautions against treating such adaptations as cost-free. Survival strategies could preserve life while also generating shame, resentment, or psychological burden, and could reshape how individuals and communities later understood what had occurred.

Ultimately, the evidence indicates that Famine-era criminality cannot be reduced to deviance or disorder. It must be understood as a complex intersection of deprivation, enforcement, limited choice, and agency, enacted within a crisis that simultaneously intensified vulnerability and narrowed the range of lawful options.

8.4 The Wider Population

Although those arrested in the prison registers can be understood as victims of the Famine, they were not the only people affected by famine criminality or by the crisis conditions that produced it. Victims of crime appear in the registers, as do those who worked within the criminal justice system, including magistrates and police, and members of the Boards of Guardians. Landowners and members of the public who undertook charitable work were also affected, sometimes financially and sometimes through exposure to suffering, disease, or moral conflict. These groups have therefore been included throughout the thesis to support a comprehensive and socially layered analysis of Ireland during the Famine. At the same time, the Famine years did not eliminate wealth or social differentiation altogether, and a residual middle class remained present alongside widespread destitution, shaping how suffering was encountered and experienced. Whether an agricultural labourer living precariously before 1845, a member of the police force, a middle-class ratepayer, or a landowner, few could avoid the wider effects of mass death, displacement, and disorder. Some encountered famine suffering episodically; others confronted it daily through relief administration or enforcement. As Chapter 7 demonstrates, even salaried state officials were not insulated from the crisis. Many faced sustained exposure to disease, exhaustion, and moral tension, and some exercised agency through resignation, emigration, or discretionary acts of relief. The Famine thus imposed pressures across multiple social layers, producing diverse forms of vulnerability and trauma. Recognising this wider social field is important for interpreting the prison registers themselves, because it demonstrates that criminalisation during the Famine cannot be understood in isolation from the broader crisis of governance, relief, and social order in which those arrests occurred.

8.5 Aims

The primary objective of this study has been to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the lived experience of the Great Famine, using Irish prison registers as a critical lens for reconstructing the circumstances of those arrested, imprisoned, or transported, and the strategies they adopted in order to survive. Newspapers, eyewitness testimony, official reports, and wider historical research were consulted to situate the registers within the wider social, institutional, and emotional landscape of crisis.

The results demonstrate that, in the face of extreme deprivation, many individuals attempted to shape their own survival, even when choices were limited and often desperate. Some embraced criminal activity; others rejected it; but decisions were shaped by necessity, risk, household responsibility, and fear. While nineteenth-century commentators noted that only a fraction of offences were formally reported,¹²⁰¹ the increase in recorded arrests nonetheless indicates that people weighed options and acted under pressure. Such decision-making reflects what has been described as ‘the essence of instrumental rationality’,¹²⁰² demonstrating that even under famine conditions individuals continued to assess risks and opportunities within the limited structures available to them.

This thesis has also shown that agency during the Famine was not a fixed attribute but a dynamic, uneven process. Individuals exercised limited choices, negotiated meaning, and attempted to reshape outcomes within an environment largely beyond their control. The registers reveal a surge in survival crimes, such as theft of food, livestock, or saleable goods, demonstrating that criminal acts could function as tactical adaptations and attempts at self-preservation rather than as expressions of inherent criminality.

Such agency generated a paradoxical relationship between state and subject. While the state deployed prisons, police, and the military to preserve order, mechanisms of discipline were at times appropriated by the poor as tools of survival. Offenders who reoffended immediately upon release, effectively using

¹²⁰¹ Churchill, *Crime Control*, p. 193.

¹²⁰² Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: London, 2014), p. 14.

prison as a means of subsistence, and convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land who generally displayed good conduct, underscore that many were not criminal in disposition but were driven into crime by circumstance. Prisons and penal colonies, intended as deterrents, could therefore become spaces of refuge for those living at the edge of survival within a legal system structured by British colonial governance.

Equally, this thesis has traced the longer-term psychological and social consequences of these experiences. Exposure to hunger, disease, death, eviction, and disrupted burial practices had profound implications for mental health, with trauma emerging both individually and collectively. Evidence concerning guilt associated with survival strategies, the stresses borne by the police force, and the hardships encountered by migrants illustrates the breadth of this impact. However, Chapter 7's engagement with debates over post-famine silence also demonstrates that memory was not simply absent or repressed. It was selective, contextual, and shaped by the forms through which the past could be narrated, recorded, or safely articulated within a society still structured by the political and institutional legacies of colonial rule.

The unavoidable conclusion is that many survivors lived with lasting trauma that could be transmitted across generations and entwined with national identity and collective memory. This was compounded by political framing: the potato blight was a natural phenomenon, but the structures of colonial governance, economic inequality, and inadequate relief policies fostered perceptions of abandonment and injustice. In this way, the trauma of the Great Famine became politicised, mobilised within later nationalist narratives and movements, contributing to Ireland's long struggle for independence and shaping diasporic engagement with Irish politics.

In tracing these dynamics, this thesis shows that the Great Famine must be understood not only as a humanitarian disaster but also as a crisis in which crime, governance, trauma, and agency intersected. These dynamics unfolded within the wider structures of nineteenth-century British colonial governance in Ireland, where institutions such as prisons, policing, and the Poor Law

simultaneously enforced order and shaped the limited choices available to those struggling to survive the crisis.

8.6 Future Research

The Irish prison registers are extensive, if incomplete, and contain much information worthy of further research. In the first instance, it would be valuable to expand the temporal scope to analyse the period from September 1845 to August 1847, establishing how criminality escalated between the dates analysed in this study. This could incorporate the three registers already examined and potentially additional prison registers where extant.

Further work could investigate particular localities or themes, such as Cormac Ó Gráda's *Heights in Tipperary in the 1840s*.¹²⁰³ This might include finer-grained analysis on marital status or age demographics, or the expansion of women's histories in a manner analogous to the *Bad Bridget Project*.¹²⁰⁴ Future scholarship might also examine individual offences in greater depth, following approaches such as Gemma Clark on Arson, or Richard McMahon on homicide. Another avenue might be to explore whether patterns of offending and prosecution correlated with landlord residence, relief policy, or local enforcement cultures. Research into sentencing practices before, during, and after the Famine could clarify whether judicial approaches shifted under crisis pressure. The principal limitation remains the incompleteness of the surviving registers, although targeted studies drawing on multiple prisons and wider sets of conduct records could still yield significant insights.

Another promising direction lies in further investigating generational trauma and its transgenerational impact within the Irish diaspora. This could encompass not only crime and marginalisation but also later participation in policing and civic authority, extending the thesis's emphasis on socially layered outcomes and the long afterlife of famine experience.

¹²⁰³ Ó Gráda, 'Heights in Tipperary'.

¹²⁰⁴ The Bad Bridget Project, 'The Project' in *Bad Bridget® : Criminal and deviant Irish women in North America, 1838-1918* (<https://badbridget.wordpress.com/>) (3 Aug. 2025).

8.7 Summary

Before the Famine, much of the Irish population lived precariously at subsistence level, exposed to structural vulnerability, and often blamed for poverty as if it were a personal failing. The analysis of prison registers and convict conduct records undertaken in this thesis reveals that, despite limited options, many attempted to keep themselves and their dependants alive during the crisis. For some, survival crime provided a temporary lifeline; for others, it risked punishment, separation, and additional trauma. For those transported to Van Diemen's Land, sentencing sometimes bought new opportunities, but it also carried dislocation and loss. Across these trajectories, survival was frequently accompanied by fear, shame, guilt, or lasting psychological strain, with personal experience and resilience shaping how such burdens were carried forward. At the same time, this thesis has shown that nineteenth-century Ireland was not a binary society of landlords and poor, but a complex social landscape in which relative security, intermediate status, and acute vulnerability coexisted, shaping how individuals experienced crisis and exercised agency. These findings therefore reinforce the central analytical claim of this thesis: that famine-era crime emerged from the intersection of structural deprivation, colonial governance, and restricted human agency, producing behaviours that were both adaptive responses to immediate crisis and sources of enduring psychological and political consequence.

This thesis has therefore sought to recover the experiences of those whose lives were most exposed to famine deprivation and criminalisation, while also situating them within the wider social world of Famine Ireland. Because many left no written records, the registers have been read alongside newspapers, charitable organisations, eyewitness testimony, and official documentation, with oral traditions preserved by the Irish Folklore Commission providing further insight into remembrance and its limits. As David Churchill notes, studying the ordinary person 'negotiating authority' underscores that crime and responses to it 'were core constituents of everyday life' and 'contribute substantially' to understanding human experience otherwise lost to time.¹²⁰⁵ This study has aimed to do precisely this, contributing both to Irish Famine scholarship and to wider conversations in

¹²⁰⁵ Churchill, 'Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis', p. 146.

historical criminology, penal history, and the social consequences of mass crisis. In doing so, it has shown how trauma, agency, and state power intersected during and after the Famine within the framework of colonial governance and penal institutions.

Today, famine memory, shaped by survival, trauma, and hard-won human agency, remains deeply woven into Irish identity at home and abroad. That memory's political potency also makes it vulnerable to simplification or misinterpretation, reinforcing the importance of historically grounded analysis attentive to complexity, social layering, and the limited choices people made to survive. As Lady Augusta Gregory, Irish playwright and folklorist, wrote, 'The Hunger, there's a long telling in that, it is a thing that will be remembered always'.¹²⁰⁶

¹²⁰⁶ Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book*, p. 78.

Bibliography

Manuscript and Archival Sources

Libraries Tasmania

CON33, *Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Probation System* (25 Feb. 2026).

CON33/1/75, *Conduct Registers of Male Convicts, Samuel Boddington*.

CON33/1/92, *Conduct Registers of Male Convicts, Pestonjee Bomanjee (3)*.

National Archives of Ireland (NAI)

Calendars of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1922 (25 Feb. 2026).

Ireland–Australia Transportation Database (25 Feb. 2026).

Prison Registers, Kilmainham Prison, 1835-1850 (digitised copy consulted).

Prison Registers, Nenagh Prison, 1842–1880 (digitised copy consulted).

Prison Registers, Sligo Prison, 1836-1879 (digitised copy consulted).

Prison Registers, Smithfield Prison, 1844-1849 (digitised copy consulted).

National Library of Ireland (NLI)

Convict Register of Spike Island Government Prison giving detailed particulars of prisoners, including many transported to Bermuda, Van Diemen's Land and Gibraltar, 1849–50.

The National Archives (TNA), Kew

ADM 101/11/1, *Royal Navy Medical Journal, Bermuda Royal Naval Hospital, Midsummer quarter (1 April-30 June) 1848*.

ADM 101/59/3, *Royal Navy Medical Journal, Pestonjee Bomanjee (3), 1848-9*.

ADM 101/66/4, *Royal Navy Medical Journal, Samuel Boddington, 1845–6*.

Tipperary Studies Digital Archive, Tipperary County Council Library Service

Nenagh Poor Law Union Minute Book 1847-1848 (digitised minute books).

Printed Primary Sources

Books

Atkinson, A., *The Irish Tourist: in a series of picturesque views, travelling incidents, and observations, statistical, political and moral on the character and aspect of the Irish nation* (Dublin, 1815).

Balch, William Stevens, *Ireland, as I saw it: the character, condition, and prospects of the people* (New York, 1850).

Binns, Jonathan, *The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland* (London, 1837).

Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris.* (London, 1790).

Butler, W. F., *Sir William Butler: an autobiography* (London, 1911).

Carr, John, *The Stranger in Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1806).

Coghlan, T. A., *Labour and Industry in Australia* (London, 1918).

Cunningham, P. M., *Two Years in New South Wales* (London, 1827).

Davitt, Michael, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland or the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London: New York, 1904).

Deweese, F. P., *The Molly Maguires: the origin, growth, and character of the organization* (Philadelphia, 1877).

Du Cane, E. F., *An Account of the manner in which sentences of penal servitude are carried out in England* (London, 1882).

Foster, T. C., *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland* (London, 1846).

Fraser, J. A., *A Handbook for Travellers in Ireland, Descriptive of Its Scenery, Towns, Seats, Antiquities etc* (Dublin, 1844).

Gibson, C. B., *The History of the County and City of Cork* (London, 1861).

Gibson, C. B., *Life among Convicts* (London, 1863).

Gordon, Home (ed.), *The Reminiscences of an Irish Land Agent; being those of S M Hussey* (London, 1904).

Head, F. B., *A Fortnight in Ireland* (London, 1852).

Inglis, H. D., *Ireland in 1834. A Journey throughout Ireland, during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834* (London, 1835).

Joyce, P. W., *A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland* (Dublin, 1906).

Lewis, G. C., *On Local Disturbances in Ireland; and on the Irish Church Question* (London, 1836).

Macaulay, T. B., *History of Ireland* (London, 1848).

Maguire, J. F., *The Irish in America* (New York; Montreal, 1873).

Marjoribanks, Alexander, *Travels in New South Wales* (London: Edinburgh, 1847).

Mayhew, Henry, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1861).

McParlan, James, *Statistical Survey of the County of Sligo* (Dublin, 1802).

Meredith, Louisa, *My Home in Tasmania* (New York, 1853).

Mitchel, John, *Jail Journal* (Dublin, 1913).

- Nicholson, Asenath, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland, in 1847, 1848, and 1849* (New York, 1851).
- Nicholson, Asenath, *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger: or Excursions through Ireland, in 1844 & 1845* (London, 1847).
- O'Brien, George, *The Economic History of Ireland in The Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: London, 1918).
- O'Donovan Rossa, Jeremiah, *Rossa's Recollections, 1838-1898* (Shannon, 1972 [1898]).
- O'Rourke, John, *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847, with notices of earlier Irish Famines* (Dublin, 1902).
- Osborne, S. G., *Gleanings in the West of Ireland* (London, 1850).
- Otway, Caesar, *Sketches in Ireland: descriptive of districts in the North and South* (Dublin, 1827).
- Pim, Jonathan, *Condition and Prospects of Ireland* (Dublin, 1848).
- Reid, Thomas, *Travels in Ireland in the Year 1822* (London, 1823).
- Ritchie, Leitch, *Ireland Picturesque and Romantic* (London, 1837).
- Sullivan, A. M., *New Ireland* (3rd ed., New York, 1878).
- Syme, James, *Nine Years in Van Diemen's Land* (Perth, Australia, 1848).
- Trevelyan, C. E., *The Irish Crisis* (London, 1848).
- Tuke, J. H., *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847* (2nd ed., London, 1848).
- Whittingham, Ferdinand, *Bermuda, A Colony, A Fortress, and a Prison* (London, 1857).
- Whyte, Robert, *The Ocean Plague* (Boston, MA, 1848).

Chapter in Edited Book

- Neligan, James, 'Parish of Kilmactige' in W. S. Mason (ed.), *A Statistical Account, or parochial survey of Ireland* (Dublin, 1816), ii, 349–398.

Journal Articles

- Larcom, T. A., 'Observations on the Census of the Population of Ireland in 1841' in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vi, no. 4 (1843), pp 323–351.
- Lawson, J. A., 'On the Connexion between Statistics and Political Economy: A Paper read before the Dublin Statistical Society' in *Transactions of the Dublin Statistical Society*, i, (1848), pp 3–9.
- 'Nenagh Castle, County of Tipperary' in *The Dublin Penny Journal*, xxxviii, no. 1 (1833), pp 297–298.

Newspapers

Colonial Times, 'The Huon Murder', 15 Aug. 1851.

Essex Standard, 'Ireland', 4 May 1849.

Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph, 'Ireland', 5 Feb. 1848.

Londonderry Sentinel, 'Mutiny in the Workhouses', 18 Nov 1848.

Montreal Transcript and Commercial Advertiser, 'Distress at St John', 4 Jan. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'The Special Commission', 1 Feb. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'The Irish Special Commission', 31 Jan. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'The Irish Special Commission', 3 Feb. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'The Navy', 28 Feb. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'Ireland', 10 Mar. 1848.

Morning Chronicle, 'Ireland', 13 Sept. 1848.

Tasmanian Colonist, 'Supreme Court.', 8 Dec. 1851.

The Freeman's Journal, 'The Army', 10 Sept. 1845.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Landlordism in Ireland: Case of the Gerrard Tenantry', 27 Mar. 1846.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Gerrardising', 9 Apr. 1846.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Fashionable Intelligence', 28 Sept. 1846.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Melancholy Suicide of Mr Patrick Barden, One of the Water Bailiffs of Dublin', 18 Jan. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Assizes Intelligence', 23 Mar. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Assizes Intelligence', 24 Mar. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Phoenix Park Garrison Races', 20 July 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Public Dinner at Sligo to John P Somers Esq, MP', 18 Oct. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Dublin Police - Yesterday', 29 Oct. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Fairs', 1 Nov. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Attempt at Murder Near Nenagh', 15 Nov. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'The Attempted Assassination of Mr Bayly', 16 Nov. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Advertisements & Notices', 21 Dec. 1847.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Special Commission', 11 Jan. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'State of the Country', 24 Jan. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Special Commission', 29 Jan. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'To the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland', 22 Apr. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Coroner's Inquests', 20 June 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Assizes Intelligence', 7 Aug. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Arrival of Convicts at Kingstown', 6 Sept. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'The Late Execution at Nenagh', 21 Sept. 1848.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Royal Zoological Society of Ireland', 3 May 1849.

The Freeman's Journal, 'Something Unexpected', 16 May 1849.

The Freeman's Journal, 'London Correspondence', 7 Dec. 1893.

The Illustrated London News, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland - By Mr James Mahony', 13 Feb. 1847.
The Illustrated London News, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland - By Mr James Mahony', 20 Feb. 1847.
The Illustrated London News, 'Condition of Ireland. Illustrations of the New Poor-Law', 15 Dec. 1849.

The Morning Post, 'Ireland', 17 Nov. 1847.
The Morning Post, 'Ireland', 26 Aug. 1848.
The Morning Post, 'Ireland', 28 Aug. 1848.

The Nation, 'Distress in the City', 27 Mar. 1847.

The Standard, 'Irish Special Commission', 1 Feb. 1848.
The Standard, 'The Navy', 14 Jan. 1854.

The Tipperary Vindicator, 'List of Subscriptions to the Ballinaclough Poor Relief Fund', 24 June 1846.
The Tipperary Vindicator, 'Nenagh Union - Thursday', 30 Dec. 1848.
The Tipperary Vindicator, 'Another Row Against the Soup!', 13 Jan. 1849.
The Tipperary Vindicator, 'Nenagh Gaol', 28 Apr. 1849.

Official Publications

Parliamentary Papers

Great Britain. House of Commons, *The Parliamentary Register or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland*, session 2, vol. xi (Dublin, 1791).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland*, Session 1831–32, HC 1831–32, vol. xvi (London, 1832).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Tipperary Committals. Return of Number of Persons committed to Prison in County of Tipperary, 1832-35*, session 1836, HC 1836, vol. xlii (1836).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Transportation, Crime and Punishment, Transportation 2*, session 1837, HC 1837, vol. xix (Shannon, 1837).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Outrages (Ireland)*, session 1852, HC 1852, vol. xiv, p. 1 (London, 1852).

Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland*, session 1846, HL 1846, vol. xi (1846).

Great Britain. House of Lords, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonization from Ireland*, session 1847, HL 1847, vol. vi (1847).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Twenty-Sixth Report on General State of The Prisons of Ireland: 1847*, HC 1847–48 (952), vol. xxxiv (Dublin, 1848).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Government Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31st December 1850*, session HC 1852, vol. xxv, (Dublin, 1851).

Great Britain. House of Commons, *First Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland, for the year ended 31st December, 1854*, session 1854–55, HC 1854–55, vol. xxvi (Dublin, 1855).

Great Britain. House of Lords, *Papers relating to Aid to Distressed Unions in the West of Ireland*, session 1849, HL 1849, vol. xlvi (London, 1849).

Royal Commissions and Official Reports

Great Britain. *Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland (Devon Commission)*. Part I, comp. John Pitt Kennedy (Dublin, 1848).

Great Britain. *Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland (Devon Commission)*. Part II, comp. John Pitt Kennedy (Dublin, 1848).

Statutes

Vagrancy (Ireland) Act (1847) 10 & 11 Vict., c. 84. (Accessed via Irish Statute Book, <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/> 25 Feb. 2026).

Secondary Sources

Aalen, F. H. A., Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (2nd Ed., Cork, 2011).

Aarons, Victoria and A. L Berger, 'The Intergenerational Transmission of Memory and Trauma: From Survivor Writing to Post-Holocaust Representation' in *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (Evanston, IL, 2017), pp 41–66.

Abrams, Philip, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, NY, 1982).

Addams, Christopher, 'Counterfeiting on the Bermuda Convict Hulk Dromedary' in *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia*, xviii (2007), pp 2–18.

Aiken, Siobhra, *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* (Newbridge, Co. Kildare, 2022).

Alexander, Alison, *Tasmania's Convicts: How Felons Built a Free Society* (Crows Nest, NSW, 2010).

Anbinder, Tyler, 'Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration' in *The Historical Journal*, xlv, no. 2 (2001), pp 441–469.

- Ancestry.co.uk, *Ireland, Prison Registers, 1790-1924* (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61943/>).
- Armitage, David, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).
- Arnstein, W. L., 'The Murphy Riots: A Victorian Dilemma' in *Victorian Studies*, xix, no. 1 (1975), pp 51–71.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2nd ed., London: New York, 2002).
- Australian Convict Sites World Heritage Property 'Port Arthur Historic Site' in *Australian Convict Sites* (<https://www.australianconvictsites.org.au/portarthurhistoricsite>) (04 Aug 2025).
- Bastable, C. F., 'Review of The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century by G O'Brien' in *The Economic Journal*, xxxi, no. 121 (1921), pp 109–114.
- BBC2, 'The Real Peaky Blinders', 18 Aug. 2023 (<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/3BF1099E?bcast=139575041>) (04 Aug 2025).
- BBC4, 'The Wars of the Roses' in *British History's Biggest Fibs* (26 Jan. 2017) (04 Aug 2025).
- BBC News, 'Belfast leaders condemn sectarian attacks on homes' in *BBC News*, 2025 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62n0135pyjo>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Becker, H. S., 'Whose Side are we on?' in *Social Problems*, xiv, no. 3 (1967), pp 239–247.
- Beiner, Guy, 'Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlvi, no. 2 (2007), pp 366–389.
- Bell, Judith and Stephen Waters, *Doing Your Research Project* (7th ed., London, 2016)..
- Bew, Paul, *The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (Oxford; New York, 2007).
- Bexar, Gunilla, *The Great Irish Famine in History-Writing and Prose Fiction: "the mutual interplay of two narrative genres"* (Åbo, 2016).
- Bhreatnach, Aoife, 'Without a Friend? Burial of the Destitute Poor in Cork, 1830–1900' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, I, no. 1 (2023), pp 40–56.
- Bindler, Anna and Randi Hjalmarsson, 'Prisons, Recidivism and the Age-Crime Profile' in *Economics Letters*, no. 152 (2017), pp 46–9.
- Black, Jeremy and D. M. MacRaid, *Studying History* (Palgrave Study Skills, 4th ed., London, 2017).
- Blackburn, Simon, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2006).

- Bloch, Marc, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953).
- Blum, Matthias, C. L. Colvin and Eoin McLaughlin, 'Working Paper: Scarring and Selection in the Great Irish Famine' (2017).
- Bonner, Brian, 'Illicit Distillation in Inishowen' in Jim Mac Laughlin (ed.), *Donegal: the making of a northern county* (Dublin: Portland, OR, 2007), pp 182–187.
- Boulton, J. T., *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London, 1963).
- Bourke, Joanna, 'Why History Hurts' in Peter Leese and Jason Crouthamel (eds), *Traumatic Memories of the Second World War and After* (Switzerland, 2016), pp. 269-289
- Bowe, Aileen, 'The Ever-Complicated Relationship Between Ireland and the UK - What Can We Expect Next?' in *History Ireland*, xxix, no. 4 (2021), pp 16–17.
- Boyce, D. G. and Alan O'Day, 'Introduction: "Revisionism" and the "revisionist" controversy' in *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London: New York, 1996), pp 1–14.
- Boyce, James, 'Return to Eden: Van Diemen's Land and the Early British Settlement of Australia' in *Environment and History*, xiv, no. 2 (2008), pp 289–307.
- Boylan, Ciara, 'Famine' in Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (eds), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford, 2016), pp 403–424.
- Broeker, Galen, *Studies in Irish History, Second Series: Volume VIII, Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-1836*, eds T. W. Moody, J. C. Beckett and T. D. Williams (London: Toronto, 1970)
- Brooke, Alan and David Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay: British Convicts Voyages to Australia* (Richmond, 2005).
- Butterfield, Herbert, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York, 1965).
- Butler, R. J., *Building the Irish Courthouse and Prison: A Political History, 1750-1850* (Cork, 2020).
- Cannadine, David, *G M Trevelyan: A Life in History* (New York: London, 1992).
- Carey, Tim, *Mountjoy: the story of a prison* (Cork, 2000).
- Carr, E. H., *What is History?* (2nd ed., London, 1987).
- Carrabine, Eamonn, Paul Iganski, Maggy Lee, Ken Plummer and Nigel South (eds), *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction* (London, 2004).
- Carroll-Burke, Patrick, *Colonial Discipline: The Making of the Irish Convict System* (Dublin, 2000).
- Casey, William, *The Cradle of Fenianism: Skibbereen and the Early Fenian Movement, 1850-1867* (Self, 2018).

Churchill, D. C., 'Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis: the historiography of policing and criminal justice in nineteenth-century England' in *Crime, History & Societies*, xviii, no. 1 (2014), pp 131–152.

Churchill, David, *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police and the Public* (Oxford, 2017).

Churchill, David, Henry Yeomans and Iain Channing, *Historical Criminology* (Abington, Oxon: New York, 2022).

Clark, Gemma, 'Arson in Modern Ireland: Fire and Protest Before the Great Famine' in Kyle Hughes and D. M. Macraird (eds), *Crime, Violence, and the Irish, in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2021), pp 211–226.

Clarke, Aidan, 'Dictionary of Irish Biography: Edwards, Robert ("Robin") Walter Dudley', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2011 (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/edwards-robert-robin-walter-dudley-a2888>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Clifford, Naomi, 'Convicts in the Colonies: Transportation Tales from Britain to Australia by Lucy Williams' in *Naomi Clifford*, 2019 (<https://www.naomiclifford.com/convicts-in-the-colonies-transportation-tales-from-britain-to-australia-by-lucy-williams/>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Clune, Frank, *Martin Cash: The Last of the Tasmanian Bush Rangers* (Sydney: London, 1956).

Conlon, Larry, 'A Poteen Affray at Ardee in 1808' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxv, no. 3 (2003), pp 336–350.

Connell, K. H., *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* (Westport, CT, 1975).

Coogan, T. P., *The Famine Plot, England's Role in Ireland's Greatest Tragedy* (New York, 2012).

Corrigan, Frank, 'Dublin Workhouses during the Great Famine' in *Dublin Historical Record*, xxix, no. 2 (1976), pp 59–65.

Cox, Catherine, 'Managing Insanity: Carlow Lunatic Asylum, 1832-1922' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xxxi (2004), pp 78–79.

Cox, Catherine, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester, 2012).

Cox, Catherine, 'Discursive Essay: A better known territory? Medical history and Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 113C (2013), pp 341–362.

Cox, Catherine and Hilary Marland, "'Unfit for reform or punishment": mental disorder and discipline in Liverpool Borough Prison in the late nineteenth century' in *Social History*, xlv, no. 2, pp 173–201.

Cox, Catherine, Hilary Marland and Sarah York, 'Emaciated, Exhausted, and Excited: The Bodies and Minds of the Irish in Late Nineteenth-Century Lancashire Asylums' in *Journal of Social History*, xlvii, no. 2 (2012), pp 500–524.

Craig, M. J., *Dublin, 1660-1860* (New York, 1952).

Creswell, J. W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed., California, 2014).

Cronon, William, 'Two cheers for the Whig Interpretation of History', in *American Historical Association*, 2012 (<https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/two-cheers-for-the-whig-interpretation-of-history-september-2012/>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Crossick, Geoffrey, 'From gentlemen to the residuum: languages of social description in Victorian Britain' in P. J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp 150–178.

Crossman, Virginia, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland, 1850-1914* (Liverpool, 2013).

Crossman, Virginia, 'Emergency Legislation and Agrarian Disorder in Ireland, 1821-41' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvii, no. 108 (1991), pp 309–23.

Crossman, Virginia, *Politics, Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Dublin, 1996).

Crotty, Michael, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process* (London, 1998).

Crowley, Brian, "'That They Might Obtain the Shelter of a Prison": Kilmainham Gaol and the Great Famine' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), pp 98–117.

Cullen, L. M., 'Problems in the Interpretation and Revision of Eighteenth-Century Irish Economic History' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xvii (1967), pp 1–22.

Curtin, Nancy J., "'Varieties of Irishness": Historical Revisionism, Irish Style' in *Journal of British Studies*, xxxv, no. 2 (1996), pp 195–219.

Curtis (Jr), L. P., *Depiction of Eviction in Ireland 1845-1910* (Dublin, 2011).

Daly, M. E., 'Historians and the Famine: a beleaguered species?' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxx, no. 120 (1997), pp 591–601.

Daly, M. E., 'Revisionism and Irish History: The Great Famine' in D. G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London: New York, 1996), pp 71-89.

Davis, Graham, 'Making History: John Mitchel and the Great Famine' in Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (eds), *Irish Writing: Exile and Subversion* (New York, 1991), pp 98-115.

- Davis, Graham, 'The Historiography of the Irish Famine' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Meaning of the Famine* (London: New York, 1997), pp 15-39.
- Davis, Patsy, 'Birmingham's Irish Community and the Murphy Riots of 1847' in *Midland History*, xxxi, no. 1 (2013), pp 37-66.
- Davis, Patsy, 'Green Ribbons: The Irish in Birmingham in the 1860s: a study of housing, work and policing' (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2003).
- Davis, Richard, 'Companion to Tasmanian History: Irish Community' in *University of Tasmania* (<https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmanian-companion/biogs/E000516b.htm>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Dawson, N. M., 'Illicit Distillation and the Revenue Police in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in *Irish Jurist*, xii, no. 2 (1997), pp 282-294.
- Delaney, Enda, *The Great Irish Famine: A History in Four Lives* (Dublin, 2012).
- Dickson, David, *Dublin: The Making of a Capital City* (Cambridge, MA: London, 2014).
- Dodou, Katherina, 'Jim Sheridan's "The Field" and the Memory of Dispossessed Irishness' in *Nordic Irish Studies*, xiii, no. 1 (2014), pp 111–128.
- Donnelly, Colm, Eileen Murphy, Gillian Allmond, Brian Sloan and Alistair Ruffell, 'On the Line' in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxxv, no. 4 (2021), pp 24–29.
- Donnelly (Jr), J. S., *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824* (Madison WI, 2009).
- Dooley, Terence, *The Murders at Wildgoose Lodge: Agrarian Crime and Punishment in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Dublin, 2008).
- Drake, C. J. M., 'The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection' in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, x, no. 2 (1998), pp 53–85.
- Dublin City Council, 'History of The Liberties: As Old as Dublin Itself' in *The Liberties, Dublin*, n.d. (<https://libertiesdublin.ie/visit-the-liberties/history-of-the-liberties/>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Dudley Edwards, Robert, 'Reviewed Work(s): A History of Ireland under the Union ... by P S O'Hegarty' in *Irish Historical Studies*, viii, no. 31 (1953), pp 280–284.
- Duffy, Peter, *The Killing of Major Denis Mahon: a mystery of old Ireland* (New York, 2007).
- Dukova, Anastasia, *A History of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and its Colonial Legacy* (London, 2016).
- Dunning, W. A., 'Irish Land Legislation since 1845' in *Political Science Quarterly*, vii, no. 1 (1892), pp 57–79.
- Dyster, Barrie, 'Convicts' in *Labour History*, no. 67 (1994), pp 74–83.

- Earner-Byrne, Lindsey, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920-1940*, (Cambridge, 2017).
- Eatwell, Alison, *Crime, Clemency & Consequence in Britain 1821-39: a slice of criminal life* (South Yorkshire, 2017).
- Elliott, B. S., *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (2nd ed. , Montreal & Kingston: London, 2004).
- Ellis, S. G., 'Historiographical Debate: Representations of the Past in Ireland: Whose Past and Whose Present?' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxvii, no. 108 (1991), pp 289–308.
- Elton, G. R., *Return to Essentials: some reflections on the present state of historical study* (Cambridge, 1991).
- Emsley, Clive, *Policing and its Context 1750-1870* (London: Basingstoke, 1983).
- Emsley, Clive, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (3rd ed., Harlow, 2005).
- Evans, R. J., *In Defence of History* (London, 1997).
- Eyerman, Ron, 'Social Theory and Trauma' in *Acta Sociologica*, lvi, no. 1 (2013), pp 41–53.
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963).
- Fassin, Didier and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the condition of Victimhood* (Princeton NJ: Oxford, 2007).
- Findmypast.co.uk, 'Find your Ancestors in Irish Prison Registers 1790-1924', (<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/world-records/full-list-of-the-irish-family-history-records/institutions-and-organisations/irish-prison-registers-1790-1924>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Fitzgerald, Patrick and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke: New York, 2008).
- Fitzpatrick, David, *Irish emigration 1801-1921* (Dublin, 1984).
- Fitzpatrick, David, *Harry Boland's Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2003).
- Fitzpatrick, David, 'Protestant Depopulation and the Irish Revolution' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxviii, no. 152 (2013), pp 643–670.
- Ford, P. & G., 'Introduction to Parliamentary Papers' in W. R. Cornish, Jenifer Hart, A. H. Manchester and John Stevenson (eds), *Crime and Law in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Dublin, 1978), pp 1–4.
- Forester, Margery, *Michael Collins, The Lost Leader* (London, 1971).
- Foster, R. F., 'We Are All Revisionists Now' in *The Irish Review*, no. 1 (1986), pp 1–5.
- Foster, R. F., *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London, 1988).

- Frost, Lucy, 'Eliza Churchill Tells ...' in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters, Narrating Convict Lives* (Carlton South, Victoria, 2001), pp 79–90.
- Frost, Lucy and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'Introduction' in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters, Narrating Convict Lives* (Carlton South, Victoria, 2001), pp 1–5.
- Fuchs, R. G., *Gender and Poverty in nineteenth century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005).
- Fullerton, C. S. and R. J. Ursano, 'Psychological and Psychopathological Consequences of Disasters' in J. J. López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), pp 13–36.
- Gallagher, T. M., *Paddy's Lament: Ireland 1846-1847 prelude to hatred* (New York: London, 1982).
- Garland, David, *Punishment and Modern Society: a study in social theory* (Oxford, 1990).
- Garvin, J. L., *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1932).
- Garvin, Tom, 'Dictionary of Irish Biography: O'Hegarty, Patrick Sarsfield ("P. S.")', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2009 (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/ohegarty-patrick-sarsfield-p-s-a6801>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Gatrell, V. A. C. and T. B. Hadden, 'Criminal Statistics and Their Interpretation' in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society; essays in the use of quantitative methods for the study of social data* (Cambridge, 1972), pp 336–396.
- Gatrell, V. A. C, Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker, 'Introduction' in V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker (eds), *Crime & The Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), pp 1–10.
- Geber, Jonny, *Victims of Ireland's Great Famine: The Bioarchaeology of Mass Burials at Kilkenny Union Workhouse* (Florida, 2015).
- Geber, Jonny, 'Forgotten Victims: the children found in a Kilkenny Workhouse mass grave' in *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE)*, 2021 (<https://www.rte.ie/history/famine-ireland/2021/0113/1189442-forgotten-victims-the-children-found-in-kilkenny-workhouse-grave/>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Gooch, Kate and Claudia Sturt, 'Leading Prison Security: Interview with Claudia Sturt, Executive Director for Security, Order and Counter Terrorism' in *Prison Service Journal*, no. 252 (2021), pp 9–14.
- Grace, Daniel, *The Great Famine in Nenagh Poor Law Union, Co. Tipperary* (Nenagh, Co Tipperary, 2000).
- Gray, Peter, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-50* (Dublin: Portland, OR, 1999)

Gray, Peter, 'Irish Social Thought and the Relief of Poverty, 1847–1880' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xx (2010), pp 141–156.

Gray, Peter, 'Polemic without plausibility' in *The Irish Times* (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/polemic-without-plausibility-1.963743>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Gregory, Lady, *The Kiltartan History Book* (London, 1926).

Griffin, Brian, *Sources For The Study of Crime in Ireland, 1801-1921* (Dublin, 2005)

Griffin, Brian, 'The Irish Police, 1836-1914: a social history' (PhD thesis, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, 1991).

Griffiths, A. R. G., 'The Irish Board of Works in the Famine Years' in *The History Journal*, xiii, no. 4 (1970), pp 634–652.

Harris, Mary and Maria Luddy, 'Interview: Whose History?' in *History Ireland*, viii, no. 4 (2000), pp 16–19.

Herlihy, Jim, *The Irish Revenue Police: a short history and genealogical guide to the 'poteen hussars'* (Dublin, 2018).

Hickey, Patrick, 'Mortality and Emigration in Six Parishes in the Union of Skibbereen, West Cork, 1846-7' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 371–379.

Hill, G. A., *Facts from Gweedore*, (5th ed, London, 1887) .

Hill, Jacqueline, 'Dictionary of Irish Biography: McDowell, Robert Brendan (R.B.)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2017 (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/mcdowell-robert-brendan-r-b-a9927>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Hillyard, Paddy and Steve Tombs, 'Beyond Criminology' in Danny Dorling, Dave Gordon, Paddy Hillyard, Christina Pantazis, Simon Pemberton and Steve Tombs (eds), *Criminal Obsessions: Why harm matters more than crime* (2nd ed., London, 2008), pp 6–23.

Hirschberger, Gilad, 'Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning' in *Frontiers in Psychology*, ix (2018), pp 1–14.

Hirst, Michael, 'What is behind the violence in Northern Ireland?', in *BBC News*, 2021 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664378>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Hooper, Glenn, *The Tourist's Gaze* (Cork, 2001).

Hooper, Glenn, *Travel Writing and Ireland, 1760-1860: Culture, History, Politics* (Basingstoke, 2005).

Hoppen, K. T., *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984).

- Hourihan, K, 'The Cities and Towns of Ireland 1841-1851' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 228–239.
- Howlin, Niamh, 'The Terror of Their Lives: Irish Jurors Experiences' in *Law and History Review*, xxix, no. 3 (2011), pp 703–761.
- Hoyt, T. D., 'The Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924: A Case Study of Terrorism and Irregular Warfare' in Paul Huddie, Cathal Billings and Arlene Crampsie (eds), *New Perspectives on Conflict and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2025), pp 215-233.
- Huggins, Michael, *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: The Case of County Roscommon* (Dublin, 2012).
- Hughes, Kyle and D. M. MacRaid, 'Introduction: Crime, Violence, and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century; Themes and Perspectives' in Kyle Hughes and D. M. MacRaid (eds), *Crime, Violence and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century* (The Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, Liverpool, 2021), pp 1–18.
- Hughes, Robert, *The Fatal Shore* (London, 1987).
- Hughes-Warrington, Marnie, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History* (3rd ed., London: New York, 2015).
- Jackson, Alvin, 'Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800-1960' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp 123–153.
- Jenkins, Roy, *Portraits and Miniatures* (London, 1993).
- Jenkins, William, "'Strange and Belligerent Factions": Irish Immigrants and Social conflict in Nineteenth-Century Ontario' in Paul Huddie and Arlene Crampsie (eds), *New Perspectives on conflict and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 2025), pp 20-39.
- Johnston, Neil, 'Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury' in *National Archives Ireland*, 2018 (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20250613143359/https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/beyond-2022-irelands-virtual-record-treasury/>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Jordan, T. E., *Ireland and the Quality of Life: The Famine Era* (Lampeter, 1997).
- Joye, Lar, 'Weapons of the Royal Irish Constabulary (1822-1922)' in *History Ireland*, xxviii, no. 2 (2020), p. 45.
- Kelly, James, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd* (Dublin, 2017).
- Kelly, Jennifer, *'The Downfall of Hagan': Sligo Ribbonism in 1842* (Dublin, 2008).

Kelly, N. A., 'James Mahony (c1816-1859): The Illustrated London News' in Christine Kinealy, Jason King and Gerard Moran (eds), *Heroes of Ireland's Great Hunger* (Hamden, CT, 2021), pp 239–260.

Kennedy, Liam, D. M. MacRaild, Lewis Darwen and Brian Gurrin, *The Death Census of Black '47: Eyewitness Accounts of Ireland's Great Famine* (London: New York, 2023).

Kenny, Kevin, 'Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp 1–25.

Kilcommins, Shane, Ian O'Donnell, Eoin O'Sullivan and Barry Vaughan, *Crime, Punishment, and the Search for Order in Ireland* (Dublin, 2004).

Kinealy, Christine, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London: Chicago, 1997).

Kinealy, Christine, 'Beyond Revisionism: Reassessing the Great Irish Famine' in *History Ireland*, xii, no. 4 (1995), pp 28–34.

Kinealy, Christine, 'Private Responses to the Great Famine' in Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Tomás O'Riordan (eds), *Ireland, 1815–1870: Emancipation, Famine and Religion* (Portland: OR, 2011), pp 85–94.

Kinealy, Christine, "'The Historian is a Haunted Man": Cecil Woodham-Smith and The Great Hunger' in *New Hibernia Review*, xii, no. 4 (2008), pp 134–143.

Kinealy, Christine, 'The Irish Poor Law, 1838-1862: A Study of the Relationship between the Local and Central Administrators' (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1984).

Kinealy, Christine, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52*, (Dublin, 1994).

Kinealy, Christine and Gerard Moran, *The History of the Irish Famine 'Fallen Leaves of Humanity': Famines in Ireland Before and After the Great Famine* (London; New York, 2019).

Krondorfer, Björn, 'Unsettling Empathy: Intercultural Dialogue in the Aftermath of Historical and Cultural Trauma' in Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (ed.), *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition* (Opladen: Berlin: Toronto, 2016), pp 90–112.

Laffan, Michael, 'Williams, (Thomas) Desmond' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2012 (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/williams-thomas-desmond-a9055>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Lamond, Grant, 'What is a Crime?' in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, xxvii, no. 4 (2007), pp 609–632.

Laragy, Georgina, 'Items in the Sum of that Great Calamity': Suicide in Dublin During the Great Famine' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), pp 87–97.

Laragy, Georgina, 'Poor Relief in the South of Ireland: 1850-1921', in Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray (eds), *Poverty and Welfare in Ireland, 1835-1948* (Dublin 2011), pp 53-66.

Lawlor, R. S., 'Crime in nineteenth-century Ireland: Grangegorman female penitentiary and Richmond male penitentiary, with reference to juveniles and women, 1836-60' (master's thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2012).

Leddy, Chuck, "'The Famine Plot' by Tim Pat Coogan", in *The Boston Globe*, 2012 (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2012/12/03/book-review-the-famine-plot-england-role-ireland-greatest-tragedy-tim-pat-coogan/6eP6yaKm16wlw8qx3xEDkK/story.html>) (25 Feb 2026).

Lee, J. J., *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989).

Libraries Tasmania, *Convicts in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania)*.
<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/family-history/convicts-in-van-diemens-land-now-tasmania/> (25 Feb. 2026).

López-Ibor, J. J., 'What is a Disaster?' in Juan José López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), pp 1–11.

Luddy, Maria, 'Women of the Pave' in *History Ireland*, xvi, no. 3 (2008), pp 16–19.

Luddy, Maria, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: a documentary history* (Reprinted, Cork, 2006).

Lyons, F. S. L., *Ireland Since the Famine* (2nd ed., London, 1973).

Mac Bhloscaidh, Fearghal, 'Revisionists? They Haven't Gone Away, You Know' in *History Ireland*, xxviii, no. 4 (2020), pp 14–17.

Mac Suibhne, Breandán, *Subjects lacking Words? the Gray Zone of the Great Famine* (Hamden, CT, 2017).

MacAtasney, Gerard, 'The Province of Ulster and the Great Famine in Armagh City' (online, 19. Jan. 2023)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=133SfrW0Fq0&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFtZwXGVBRljyqj5E8boXJG&index=3>) (25 Feb. 2026).

MacAtasney, Gerard, 'The Workhouse: Creation of the workhouse system during the famine with case study, Lurgan Workhouse, Co. Armagh' (online, 26 Jan. 2023)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSQ6QTfzFkY&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFtZwXGVBRljyqj5E8boXJG&index=4> (25 Feb. 2026).

MacKay, Donald, *Flight from Famine: The Coming of the Irish to Canada* (Toronto, 2009).

Malcolm, Elizabeth, *The Irish Policeman 1822-1922: A Life* (Dublin, 2005).

- Malcolm, Elizabeth, “‘On Fire’: The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–1849’ in *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, xii, no. 4 (2008), pp 143–149.
- Manning, Aidan, *Donegal Poitín, A History* (Letterkenny, 2003).
- Mark-Fitzgerald, Emily, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly, ‘When the Famine made Dublin’s Streets a ‘gigantic refugee camp’’, in *Independent.ie*, 2022 ([https://www.ucdpress.ie/resources/pdfs/2023%20PDFs/Famine%20Independent_ie\(1\).pdf](https://www.ucdpress.ie/resources/pdfs/2023%20PDFs/Famine%20Independent_ie(1).pdf)) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Martin, Michael, *Spike Island: Saints, Felons and Famine* (Dublin, 2007).
- Maynooth University, ‘Bachelor of Arts Criminology’, n.d. (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/study-maynooth/undergraduate-studies/courses/bachelor-arts-criminology>) (25 Feb. 2026) .
- McCabe, Ciarán, ‘Begging and Alms-Giving in Urban Ireland, 1815-1850’ (PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2014).
- McCabe, Ciarán, *Begging, Charity and Religion in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2018).
- McCabe, Ciarán, ‘The Impact of the Great Famine on Voluntary Charitable Societies in Dublin City’ in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), pp 98–117.
- McCarthy, Cal and Barra O’Donnabhain, *Too Beautiful for Thieves and Pickpockets: A History of the Victorian Convict Prison on Spike Island* (Cork, 2016).
- McConnon, M. P., ‘The Kilmainham Gaol Registers 1798 to 1823: List of Convicts from County Louth’ in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, xxiii, no. 4 (1996), pp 413–437.
- McCullagh, Ciaran, *Crime in Ireland: a Sociological introduction* (Cork, 1996)
- McDowell, R. B., *The Irish Administration, 1801-1914* (Westport, CT, 1964).
- McGarry, Fearghal, *The Rising. Ireland: Easter 1916* (Centenary Edition, Oxford, 2016).
- McGee, Owen, *The IRB, The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005).
- McGovern, Terrance and Edward Harris, *Defenses of Bermuda 1612-1995* (New York, 2018).
- McGowan, M. G., ‘The Famine Plot Revisited: A Reassessment of the Great Irish Famine as Genocide’ in *Genocide Studies International*, xi, no. 1 (2017), pp 87–104.
- McGuffin, John, *In Praise of Poteen* (Belfast, 1978).

- McKay, Anna, 'The Story of Irish Convicts sent 3,000 miles from home to Bermuda' in *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE)*, 2021 (<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0608/1226956-bermuda-irish-convicts-great-famine>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- McKay, Anna, '2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of 300 convicts on board the "Antelope"' in *National Museum of Bermuda*, 2024 (<https://nmb.bm/history/britains-convict-legacy-in-bermuda/>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- McKay, Anna, 'Britain's forgotten prison island: remembering the thousands of convicts who died working in Bermuda's dockyards' in *The Conversation*, 2024 (<https://theconversation.com/britains-forgotten-prison-island-remembering-the-thousands-of-convicts-who-died-working-in-bermudas-dockyards-226044>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- McKay, Anna, 'Empire-builders: Interactions between Convicts and Enslaved, Free, and Military Workers in Bermuda's Dockyards, 1824-1838' in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, lii, no. 4–5 (2024), pp 779–807.
- McKay, Anna, 'Separated from their Country and their Kindred: Convict Transportation from Ireland during the Famine Period' (online, 15 Feb. 2024) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxyHvSy9gTY&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFewaYXY7XuSEZMwJvxNp33&index=2>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- McMahon, Anne, *Floating Prisons: Irish Convict Hulks and Voyages to New South Wales 1823-1837* (Canberra, 2007).
- McMahon, Richard, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2013).
- Miller, K. A., *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford, 1985).
- Miller, K. A., 'Emigration to North America in the Era of the Great Famine' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 214–227.
- Mokyr, Joel, *Why Ireland Starved: a quantitative and analytical history of the Irish economy, 1800-1850* (London: Boston: Sydney, 1983).
- Moody, T. W., 'The First Forty Years' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xx, no. 80 (1977), pp 377–383.
- Moran, James, *Irish Birmingham: A History* (Liverpool, 2010).
- Mullin, Katherine, 'Unmasking: The Confessional Unmasked' in *ELH*, lxxxv, no. 2 (2018), pp 471–499.
- Murphy, J. P., 'Poitín, A Spirit of Rebellion and Inspiration' (Dublin, 2016).
- Napper, Paul and Anthony Rao, *The Power of Agency* (New York, 2019).

National Library of Australia, 'Trove' (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/landing/research>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Norman, E. R., *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (Oxford: New York, 1968).

Ó Broin, León, *Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924* (New Jersey, 1976).

O Ciosáin, Niall, 'Was there "silence" about the Famine?' in *Irish Studies Review*, iv, no.13 (1995), pp 7-10.

O Ciosáin, Niall, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine' in *Folklore*, cxv, no. 2 (2004), pp 222-232.

O'Donnell, Michael, *Fethard County Tipperary 1200-2000* (Dublin, 2010).

Ó Gráda, Cormac, 'Poverty, Population, and Agriculture, 1801-1845' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: Ireland Under the Union* (Oxford, 1989), V, 108-136.

Ó Gráda, Cormac, 'Heights in Tipperary in the 1840s: evidence from prison registers' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xviii (1991), pp 24–33.

Ó Gráda, Cormac, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994).

Ó Gráda, Cormac, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (The Princeton economic history of the Western world, Princeton, NJ, 1999).

Ó Gráda, Cormac, *Eating People is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and its Future* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford, 2015).

Ó Gráda, Cormac, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin 2006).

Ohlmeyer, J. H., 'A Laboratory for Empire?: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp 26–61.

Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 'The Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674-1913' in *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online*, 2023 (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version, 9.0) (25 Feb. 2026).

O'Neill, T. P., 'Famine Evictions in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), pp 29–70.

O'Regan, Philip, 'Dr Daniel Donovan – heroic figure of the Famine in Skibbereen', n.d. (<https://skibbheritage.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Dr-Donovan-Hero-of-the-Famine-in-Skibbereen-.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).

O'Sullivan, John, 'Landlord-Tenant Relations on the Clonbrock Estate in Galway, 1849-93' (M. A. Thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1997).

- O'Sullivan, Niamh, *Every Dark Hour: a history of Kilmainham Jail* (Dublin, 2007).
- Palmer, S. H., *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 1988).
- Paz, G. D., 'Popular Anti-Catholicism in England, 1850-1851' in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, xi, no. 4 (1979), pp 331–359.
- Percival, John, *The Great Famine: Ireland's Potato Famine, 1845-51* (New York, 1995).
- Persson, Petra and Maya Rossin-Slater, 'Family Ruptures, Stress, and the Mental Health of the Next Generation' in *The American Economic Review*, cviii, no. 4–5 (2018), pp 1214–1252.
- Phillips, David, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England: The Black Country 1835-1860* (London, 1977).
- Piper, Andrew, 'The dregs of a criminal population: Impression Bay and the origins of Tasmania's residential charitable system, c. 1839-1857' in *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, xxii (2020), pp 211–236.
- Póirtéir, Cathal, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin, 1995).
- Prunty, Jacinta, *Dublin Slums 1800-1925: a Study in Urban Geography* (Dublin, 2011).
- Puleo, Stephen, *A City so Grand: the rise of an American metropolis, Boston 1850-1900* (Boston, MA, 2010).
- Quigley, Michael, 'Grosse Ile: Canada's Irish Famine Memorial' in *History Ireland*, v, no. 2 (1997), pp 22-6.
- Randall, F. B., 'Introduction: Marx the Romantic' in *The Communist Manifesto* (Washington Square Press, 1964), pp 7–40.
- Ranelagh, J. O., 'The I.R.B. from the treaty to 1924' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xx, no. 77 (1976), pp 26–39.
- Ranelagh, J. O., *A Short History of Ireland* (2nd ed, Cambridge [England]; New York, 1994).
- Reilly, Ciarán, '“A Little London, All Alive”: Some Experiences of the World of Goods and Commodities in Famine Dublin' in Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly (eds), *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2022), pp 3–11.
- Reilly, Ciarán, '“Black Sheep disgrace any Flock”: The Irish Land Agent & The Great Famine' (online, 15 Feb. 2024) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy0QTslqqh0&list=PLNOzO4OVJQgFewaYX Y7XuSEZMwJvxNp33&index=2>) (25 Feb. 2026)
- Reilly, Ciarán, *Strokestown and the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2014).

- Richardson, Claire, *Exploring the Lives of Victorian Prostitutes* (Yorkshire: Philadelphia, 2024).
- Richter, D. C., *Riotous Victorians* (Athens; London, 1981).
- Robson, L. L., *The Convict Settlers of Australia; an enquiry into the origin and character of the convicts transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1787-1852* (Melbourne, 1965).
- Rudé, G. F. E., *Criminal and Victim: Crime and Society in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1985).
- Sarraj, E. E. and Samir Qouta, 'The Palestinian Experience' in J. J. López-Ibor, George Christodoulou, Mario Maj, Norman Sartorius and Ahmed Okasha (eds), *Disasters and Mental Health* (Chichester, 2005), pp 229–237.
- Saunders, Janet, 'Magistrates and Madmen: Segregating the Criminally Insane in late-nineteenth-century Warwickshire' in Victor Bailey (ed.), *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New Brunswick, 1981), pp 217–241.
- Scally, R. J., *The End of Hidden Ireland* (Oxford: New York, 1995).
- Schick, Kate, 'Acting out and working through: trauma and (in)security' in *Review of International Studies*, xxxvii, no. 4 (2011), pp 1837–1855.
- Selinger, William, 'Parliamentary Government, Whig History, and the Cambridge School' (<https://intellectualhistory.web.ox.ac.uk/article/parliamentary-government-whig-history-and-the-cambridge-school>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Sen, Amartya, 'Ingredients of Famine Analysis: Availability and Entitlements' in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, xcvi, no. 3 (1981), pp 433–464.
- Seppel, Marten, 'The Spread of the Potato Blight in the Russian Empire, 1846 to 1852' in *The Agricultural History Review*, lxxv, no. 1 (2017), pp 94–107.
- Sewell, K. C., *Herbert Butterfield and the Interpretation of History* (Basingstoke: New York, 2005).
- Shaw, A. G. L., *Convicts & the Colonies; a Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain & Ireland to Australia & other parts of the British Empire* (London, 1966).
- Shoemaker, Robert and Richard Ward, 'Understanding the Criminal: Record-Keeping, Statistics and the Early History of Criminology in England' in *The British Journal of Criminology*, lvii, no. 6 (2017), pp 1442–1461.
- Siegel, L. J., *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies* (12th ed., Boston, MA, 2016).
- Sinclair, Georgina, 'The "Irish" policeman and the Empire: influencing the policing of the British Empire-Commonwealth' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxvi, no. 142 (2008), pp 173–187.

Smith, N. C., 'Dorothy Macardle (1889-1958): Republican and Internationalist' in *History Ireland*, xv, no. 3 (2007), pp 14–15.

Smyth, W. J., 'Born Astride a Grave' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 108–117.

Smyth, W. J., 'Exodus from Ireland - Patterns of Emigration' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 494–503.

Smyth, W. J., 'The Long Durée: Imperial Britain and Colonial Ireland' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 46–63.

Smyth, W. J., "'Variations in Vulnerability": understanding where and why the people died' in John Crowley, W. J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (New York, 2012), pp 180–198.

Soyer, Michaela, *The Price of Freedom: Criminalization and The Management of Outsiders in Germany and the United States* (California, 2023).

Stanford Reid, W (William), 'Reviewed Work(s): A History of Ireland under the Union, 1801 to 1922, with an Epilogue Carrying the Story down to the Acceptance in 1927 by de Valera of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 by P S O'Hegarty' in *The American Historical Review*, lviii, no. 3 (1953), pp 609–611.

Sutton, Malcolm, 'Ulster University, CAIN Archive – Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland', n.d. (<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Status.html>) (25 Feb. 2026)

Swift, Roger, 'Heroes or Villains? The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England' in *Albion*, xxix, no. 3 (1997), pp 399–421.

Swift, Roger (ed.), *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815-1914: a Documentary History* (Cork, 2002).

Tasmanian Heritage Council, 'Development Guidelines: Rocky Hills Probation Station and Road Station', 2014 (<https://heritage.tas.gov.au/Documents/Rocky%20Hills%20Probation%20Station%20and%20Road%20Station.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).

Tharoor, Shashi, *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India* (Harlow, 2018).

The Bad Bridget Project, 'The Project' in *Bad Bridget®: Criminal and deviant Irish women in North America, 1838-1918* (<https://badbridget.wordpress.com/>) (25 Feb. 2026).

The Digital Panopticon, 'Tracing London Convicts in Britain & Australia, 1780-1925' in *The Digital Panopticon*, 2020 (<https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>) (25 Feb. 2026).

- The Hearsam Collection, 'Parks Our Shared Heritage: The Phoenix Park, Dublin & The Royal Parks, London', 2017 (<http://hearsamcollection.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Our-shared-Heritage-catalogue.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online, 'Crimes Tried at the Old Bailey' in *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey Online*, 2023 (<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/about/crimes>, version 9.0) (25 Feb. 2026).
- The University of Melbourne, 'FAS Convict Ship 368.39 Pestonjee Bomanjee (3) arrived 1849 at VDL Prosopography Index' in *Research Data Australia* (<https://researchdata.edu.au/fas-convict-ship-prosopography-index/395364>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964).
- Thompson, E. P., 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' in *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971), pp 76–136.
- Thompson, E. P., *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth, 1977).
- Thompson, F. M. L., 'Social Control in Victorian Britain' in *The Economic History Review*, xxxiv, no. 2 (1981), pp 189–208.
- Tobias, J. J., *Crime and Industrial Society in the 19th Century* (London, 1967).
- Tobias, J. J., *Nineteenth-Century Crime: Prevention and Punishment* (Newton Abbot, 1972).
- Tomasello, Michael, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: London, 2014).
- Torr, Christopher, 'The Whig Interpretation of History' in *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, iii, no. 1 (2000), pp 52–58.
- Tosh, John, *Why History Matters* (London, 2008).
- Tosh, John, *The Pursuit of History* (5th ed., Harlow, 2010).
- Tracy, S. J., *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (Chichester, 2012).
- Trevelyan, G. M., *English Social History* (London: New York: Toronto, 1941).
- University of Glasgow, The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, 'What is Crime?', n.d. (<http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SCCJR-What-is-crime.pdf>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- University of London, 'Making History: History from Below', 2008 (https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/themes/history_from_below.html) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Van Voris, W. H., 'The Provisional IRA and the Limits of Terrorism' in *The Massachusetts Review*, xvi, no. 3, (1975), pp 413–428 .

- Vaughan, W.E., *Murder Trials in Ireland, 1836-1914* (Dublin, 2009).
- Vaughan, W. E. and A. J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics: Population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978).
- Veevers, David, *The Great Defiance: How the World Took on the British Empire* (London, 2023).
- Villiers-Tuthill, Kathleen, *Patient Endurance: The Great Famine in Connemara* (Rev. ed, Dublin, 2008).
- Volkan, Vamik, *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (Boulder, CO, 1997).
- Walker, B. M., 'Villain, Victim or Prophet? William Gregory and the Great Famine' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxviii, no. 152 (2013), pp 579–599 .
- Watkins, E. D., *Life Courses of Young Convicts Transported to Van Diemen's Land* (London: New York, 2020).
- Watkins, Emma and Barry Godrey, *Criminal Children, Researching Juvenile Offenders 1820-1920* (Yorkshire: Philadelphia, 2018).
- Whyte, J. H., 'The Age of Daniel O'Connell: 1800-47' in T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin (eds), *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD, 1967), pp 204–215.
- Williams, Lucy, *Convicts in the Colonies: Transportation Tales from Britain to Australia* (Havertown, 2018).
- Williams, W. H. A., 'The Irish Tour, 1800-50' in Benjamin Colbert (ed.), *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp 97–113.
- Wilson, Adrian and T. G. Ashplant, 'Whig History and Present-centred History' in *The Historical Journal*, xxxi, no. 1 (1988), pp 1–16.
- Windelspecht, Devlin, 'As racially-motivated violence replaces sectarianism, Northern Ireland erupts into riots' in *Human Rights Research Center*, 2025 (<https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/as-racially-motivated-violence-replaces-sectarianism-northern-ireland-erupts-into-riots>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Winder, Gordon M., 'Trouble in the North End: The Geography of Social Violence in Saint John, 1840-1860' in *Acadiensis*, xxix, no. 2 (2000), pp 27–57.
- Winstanley, M. J., *Ireland and the Land Question 1800-1922* (London; New York, 1984).
- Woodham-Smith, Cecil, *The Great Hunger* (Evanston, IL, 1962).
- Woods, C. J., 'Connell, Kenneth Hugh' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2009 (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/connell-kenneth-hugh-a1942>) (25 Feb. 2026).
- Woods, C. J., *Travellers' Accounts as Source-Material for Irish Historians* (Dublin, 2009).

Woodward, Nicholas, 'Transportation Convictions during the Great Irish Famine' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2006), pp 59–87.

Yager, Tom, 'What was Rundale and Where Did It Come From?' in *Béaloides*, lxx (2002), pp 153–186.

Zadoks, J. C., 'The Potato Murrain on the European Continent and the Revolutions of 1848' in *Potato Research; Journal of the European Association for Potato Research*, li (2008), pp 5–45.

Zhang, Zihan and J. H. Kim, *The Inheritance of Historical Trauma: Intergenerational Effects of Early-Life Exposure to Famine on Mental Health*, in *IZA – Institute of Labor Economics* (2023), pp 1-39.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Map of Ireland, showing Provinces and Counties¹²⁰⁷



Key to Map Locations (location highlights added)

- Kilmainham (Dublin)
- Nenagh
- Sligo
- Spike Island (Cork)

¹²⁰⁷ F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Second, Cork, 2011), p. 1.

Appendix 2 – Percentage of Population Change in North-West Tipperary between 1841 and 1851¹²⁰⁸



¹²⁰⁸ Grace, *The Great Famine in Nenagh*, p. 180.

Appendix 3 – The Freeman’s Journal 21st December 1847¹²⁰⁹

Advertisements of luxury items available in Ireland during the Famine.

THE ITALIAN WAREHOUSE,
20, DAME-STREET,
FOR FAMILY ORDERS AND WINE DEPARTMENT.

PORTS, fresh Bottled, 24s to 26s; Crusted Port, recommended, 30s; fine Old Crusted, 36s; very Old Crusted, 48s. Sherrys—Good Dinner Sherry, 24s to 26s; Excellent Sherry, recommended, 30s; very superior Pale, Brown, or Golden Sherry, 36s; Claret, l’Ordinaire, a pure St. Julien Claret, 28s; Chateau Margaux, very old, 72s. Champagnes—Good, 55s; fine, 60s; the finest, 72s.

SPIRITS.

BRANDIES—22s; good Old Cognac, 24s; very fine, 28s; choice Old Liqueur Cognac, 25s years old, 6s per Flask.

RUM—Finest Old Pine Apple Jamaica Rum, 12s 6d; excellent Jamaica Rum, 10s; fine Demerara ditto, 9s; good ditto, 8s.

WHISKEYS—Andrews’s No. 1, Pine Apple Whiskey, 10s 6d; No. 2, fine Old Whiskey, recommended, 9s; No. 3, excellent Whiskey, 8s; No. 4, good Whiskey, 7s. Guinness’s XX Porter, 3s 6d; Drogheda Ale, 3s 6d; Bass’s East India Pale Ale, 5s.

NEW FRUITS.

Finest Patras and Zante Currants; Bunch and Layer Muscatel Raisins for dessert; Valencia Raisins for Puddings; Turkey and fine Eleme Figs; Jordan and Valencia Almonds; French Plums, Grapes, Candied Orange, Lemon and Citron Peel; Preserved West India Ginger, &c.

J. R. ANDREWS AND CO.

HAMS, CHEESE, AND BACON
WAREHOUSE,
No. 19, DAME-STREET.

HAMS.		
American Hams	5d
Wicklow do	6d to 6½d
Belfast do	8d
Limerick do	8½d
BACON.		
New Limerick Bacon	8d to 8½d
Belfast do	7½d to 8d
Wicklow do	7d to 8d
CHEESE.		
American Cheese	6d to 7d
Cheddar and Gloucester do	8d to 10d
Stilton do	1s 3d
Dutch do	7d
North Wilts do	10d
BUTTER.		
Finest Fresh Butter...	1s 1d
Finest County Wicklow do, in Crocks } of 2lb to 6lb each	1s 0d
Carlow, Cork, and Waterford do, 9l, 10l, and 11d	
OX TONGUES.		
Russian Ox Tongues each	2s 6d
Ox Tongues, our own curing	3s 0d
Do do extra size	4s 6d

ANDREWS AND CO.

CHRISTMAS, 1847.

S. MITCHELL,
CONFECTIONER TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE
EARL OF CLARENDON;

BEGETY respectfully to inform the Nobility and Gentry that, having made large purchases from some of the first houses in London and Paris, she is enabled to vie with every other establishment in Dublin. Her immense stock consists of every Novelty suitable for Presents and the Festivities of the Season.

EVERY KIND OF CRYSTALLIZED FRUITS.

BON BONS and **CANDIES** of endless variety and design.

CHRISTMAS PIES of the very best quality and kind. **MINCE PIES, PLUM CAKES,** and every other article in the **CONFECTIONERY** department, of the first quality, and suited to the most fastidious tastes.

10, GRAFTON-STREET.

FACTS ARE STUBBORN THINGS.

We have a Lot of prime Ready-made Goods, which we are now offering at unusually low prices. Comparison will at once show (and is daily showing) that the Cheapest House for first-rate Clothing is

30, DAME-STREET.

	£	s.	d.
Stout Pilot Over Coat, Velvet Collar	9	0	18 0
Fine Beaver Chesterfield do	...	1	0 0
“ “ Albert	...	1	5 0
West of England Fancy Doe Trowsers	...	1	2 6
Fancy Tweed	...	0	9 6
“ Doe	...	0	13 0
Vests, in great variety, at every price.			
Russia Paletots, lined through with Fur	...	3	10 0
Hets, Caps, and Hosiery.			

Every article is marked in plain figures, from which no abatement can be made.

Observe the Number,
30, DAME-STREET.
MOSES AND CO.,
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL CLOTHIERS,
DRAPERS, AND TAILORS;
And at Belfast, Liverpool, Manchester, LONDON.

¹²⁰⁹ The Freeman’s Journal, ‘Advertisements & Notices, 21 Dec 1847’.

NEW MALAGA AND VALENCIA FRUIT, COCOA SHELL, RICE, &c., BY AUCTION. ISAAC ENGLISH

WILL SELL BY AUCTION, at WILLIAM HONE and SONS OFFICE, COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS, on THIS DAY (Tuesday), 21st of Dec., at Two o'Clock precisely, to close sundry Sales.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 80 Boxes | } | Muscatal Raisins, in layers. |
| 200 Half Boxes | | |
| 100 Half Boxes | | |
| 60 Quarter Boxes | } | Valencia Raisins. |
| LAST YEAR'S IMPORTATION | | |
| 70 Boxes | } | New Batch Muscatels. |
| 150 Quarter Boxes | | |
| 150 Boxes | } | do. do. in layers. |
| 50 Boxes | | |
| 150 Half Boxes | } | Valencia Raisins. |
| 20 Boxes | | |
| Jordan Almonds. | | |
| 2 Barrels | | do. |
| 5 Barrels, 5 Boxes Valencia Almonds. | | |
| 90 Bags Rice, various qualities. | | |
| 30 Bales Spanish, &c., Cocoshell. | | |
| 10 Cases Sicilian Liquorice Juice. | | |

Office and Stores, 21, Bachelor's-walk.

AUCTION OF GRAPES AND FIGS.

FOR SALE BY AUCTION, THIS DAY, 21st December, at WILLIAM HONE and SON'S OFFICE, COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS,

- 150 Barrels Grapes, and
50 Baskets Figs.

Apply to James Foxall, and Co., of
WILLIAM HONE AND SON, Brokers.

TEAS.

Black and Green Teas in all their varieties, from 3s. to 5s. per pound.

A really good Black Tea, 3s. 6d. per pound.

These Teas have been selected with the greatest care.

COFFEES.

Fresh roasted Coffees, viz., Ceylon, Jamaica, and Mocha, from 1s. to 2s. per pound.

To the selection of this article they pay particular attention.

SUGARS.

Refined, from 6d. to 8d. per pound.

Moist, from 3½d. to 6d per pound.

None but cash purchasers can sell Sugar on good terms.

GUINNESS'S XX PORTER.

They wish to draw particular attention to this article; its nutritive qualities are increased materially by being aged; it is therefore necessary that it should be bottled some time before being made use of. Customers may rely on not receiving any but such as will be fit for their consumption.

SUPERIOR ALES, &c.,

receive the same attention.

WINES.

They will hold a large stock to which the will refer in a future circular.

MUSTARD.

It may appear superfluous to direct attention to this article; but as it is one frequently most difficult to procure good, and of every day consumption, they have taken especial care to have a supply of it genuine.

Wholesale buyers will find it their advantage to make a trial of this Establishment.

12th Month, 21st, 1847.