

## SETTLEMENT DESERTION AND LANDSCAPE CHANGE IN AN IRISH PARISH: GLENINAGH, COUNTY CLARE 1800–1915

With 12 figures and 2 tables

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*Zusammenfassung:* Siedlungswüstung und Landschaftswandel in einem irischen Kirchspiel: Gleninagh, County Clare 1800–1915

Zwischen 1845 und 1849 litt Irland (damals noch britische Kolonie) unter einer Hungersnot, verursacht durch den Ausfall der Kartoffelernte mehrere Jahre hintereinander. Etwas mehr als eine Million (bei einer Gesamtbevölkerung von 8,2 Millionen) starb an Hunger oder Seuchen, und etwa doppelt so viele Iren wanderten aus. In diesem Artikel werden die Auswirkungen der ‚Großen Hungersnot‘ auf ein abgelegenes Kirchspiel im Burren, einer Karstregion im Westen Irlands, untersucht. Stark klassenspezifische Bevölkerungsabnahmen und Siedlungswüstungen hinterließen sichtbare Spuren in einer ehemals dicht besiedelten Landschaft. Eine Art sehr kleiner Haufendörfer wurde durch weiter auseinanderliegende Einzelhöfe ersetzt. Veränderungen in den Grundbesitz-, den Beschäftigungsstrukturen und im Bildungsstand der Bevölkerung lassen sich weniger leicht von der Landschaft ‚ablesen‘, haben aber weitreichende Folgen für die Entwicklung der ländlichen irischen Gesellschaft gehabt.

*Summary:* From 1845 to 1849 Ireland (then a British colony) suffered under a famine caused by the failure of the potato crop in successive years. Somewhat more than a million (out of a total population of 8.2 million) died of starvation or disease, and as many as twice that number emigrated. This article examines the effects of the Great Famine on an isolated rural parish in the Burren, a karst region in the west of Ireland. Strongly class-specific population depletion and settlement desertion left a visible imprint on a once crowded landscape. A clustered settlement pattern was replaced by one of dispersed farmsteads. Changes in landholding patterns, occupational structures and education are less readily ‘read’ from the landscape, but have had far-reaching implications for the development of rural Irish society.

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 *The Great Famine as a factor for change in rural Ireland*

From 1845 to 1849 Ireland suffered under a famine caused by the failure of the potato crop in successive years due to potato blight. In this time, somewhat more than a million people (out of a population of 8.2 million) died of starvation or disease. The crude death rate more than doubled, from 23.8 in the period 1821–1841 to 52.7 in the years 1846–1851. It is estimated that in the half century before the Famine, emigration had been rising steadily in response to population growth and the absence of industrial development in Ireland, with annual emigration rates of circa 6,000 persons up to 1815 and a possible 45,000 per annum from 1815 to 1845. During the Famine the annual volume of Irish emigration is thought to have been as much as 200,000, in the decade immediately following an annual rate of circa 125,000 was maintained (KENNEDY a. CLARKSON 1993, 171, 177; see also MOKYR 1985).

The traditional view of the Famine, as reflected in such standard texts as EDWARDS a. WILLIAMS (1956) or WOODHAM-SMITH (1962), is that of a terrible natural

disaster, possibly almost inevitable, inadequately dealt with by the British government. The ‘revisionist’ version plays down the immediate, dramatic impact of the Famine and its significance and tries to refrain from utterly condemning the actions (or inaction) of the British government (see for instance DALY 1986). In the most recent comprehensive historical geography of Ireland the Great Famine is not dealt with separately at all – of thirteen chapters, seven deal with the nineteenth century, covering topics such as emigration (two chapters), population change, religious change and social protest, property structures, urban and rural Ireland after 1850 (GRAHAM a. PROUDFOOT 1993).

Nonetheless, the Famine played a major rôle in the development of Irish social and economic geography. Most severely affected were the labouring and cottier class, the poorest Irish, who depended largely on the potato and had little or no monetary resources to find food elsewhere when the crop failed (WHELAN 1986). It was this class which succumbed soonest to hunger and which formed the mass of emigrants, with significant consequences for the overall composition of post-Famine society. It is the purpose of this study to assess the extent to which this is true for a small region in the west of Ireland.

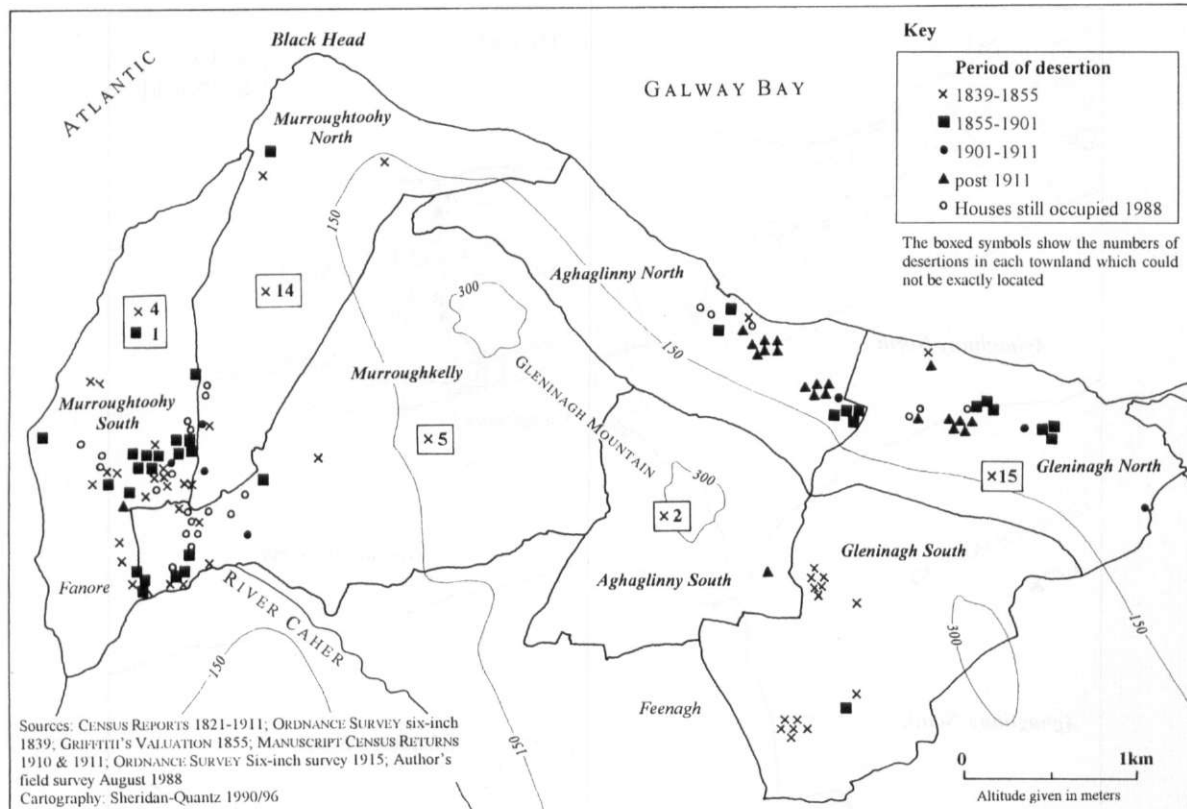


Fig. 1: Settlement desertion in Gleninagh parish  
Siedlungswüstung im Kirchspiel Gleninagh

### 1.2 The study area

Approaching the parish<sup>1)</sup> of Gleninagh on the north-west coast of the Burren, a karst region in County Clare, from the east (Fig. 1), the visitor follows a narrow road perched between Gleninagh Mountain (315 m) and a short stretch of coastal plain. Erosion of the very thick, pure, massively bedded and largely exposed Upper Carboniferous limestones of the Burren has produced a dissected tableland, with a landscape of valleys and steeply terraced, flattish-topped hills. Gleninagh parish is dominated by the three-peaked ridge of Cappanawalla and Gleninagh Mountain. North and west of the terraced mountain-slopes is the narrow coastal plain, barely elevated above sea-level. South of Gleninagh Mountain a green valley opens

towards Feenagh in the southeast, while the valley of the river Caher follows the parish boundary to the southwest. Due to the porous nature of the limestone, the Burren has virtually no surface drainage. The only river which flows overground for the whole of its course is the Caher in a valley filled with glacial drift (WHITTOU 1975).

The climate of this part of Ireland's west coast is moist, with an annual rainfall average of 1,300 mm and mild, winter frost or snow being rare (POCHIN MOULD 1977, 452 and DUTTON 1808, 73). This quite high rainfall in a limestone area with deep valleys can lead to considerable flooding problems, especially in winter. Drought may be a problem on higher ground, because much of the water is absorbed into underground caves and streams, or runs off over the surface into the lowlands (AN FORAS TALÚNTAIS 1971b). Thus the hills provide winter grazing with cattle and sheep generally being moved to the lowlands for the summer months, greatly restricting the already limited potential for arable land-uses on the very poor soils. In Gleninagh parish these consist for the most part of rendzinas, very poorly suited to both tillage and

<sup>1)</sup> Townlands are the smallest territorial unit in Ireland; a group of townlands forms a parish, several parishes form a barony and several baronies constitute a county. The protestant parish divisions (Church of Ireland) were used as a statistical base unit for the nineteenth century Census Reports, hence the choice of unit for this study. Gleninagh parish consisted of seven townlands (Fig. 1).

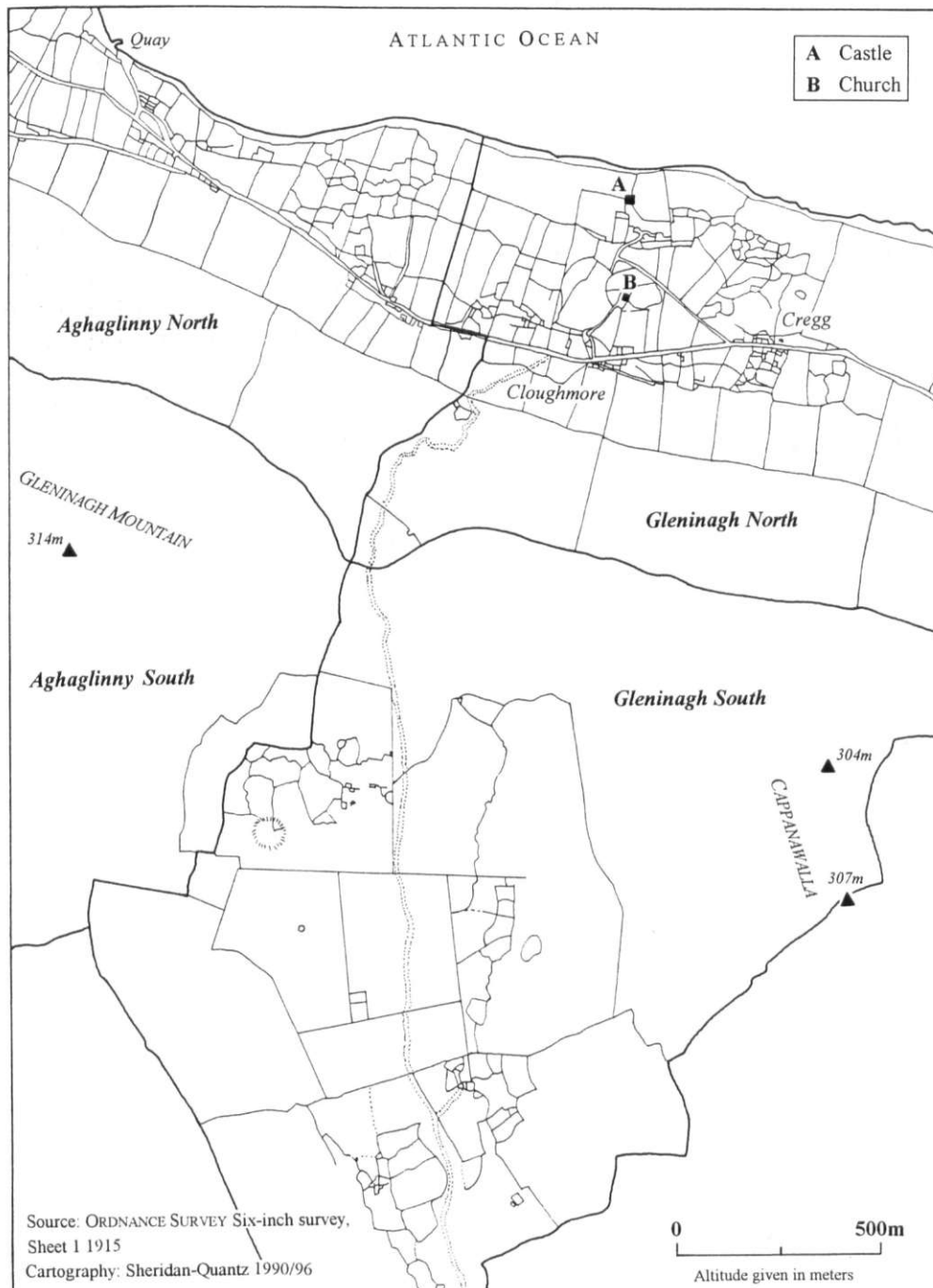


Fig. 2: Field patterns in Gleninagh 'village' and Gleninagh South  
Fluraufteilung in Gleninagh 'village' und Gleninagh-Süd

pasture, and the greater portion of these is over 50% rock. There are pockets of rendzinas with less than 25% rock and small areas of brown earths (both types favourable to tillage and pasture) on the coastal plain.

The fertile valley opening towards Feenagh in the south consists almost entirely of brown earths.

On the south (inland) side of the road the observant can distinguish a disjointed string of deserted, roofless

stone dwellings, now for the most part smothered by a luxuriant growth of ivy and red-flowering fuchsia. This is all that remains of a series of settlement clusters. The settlement area is designated 'Gleninagh village' in the CENSUS REPORT of 1831. Today but six houses are inhabited in the whole eastern half of the parish, whereas in 1831 the 'village' contained thirty-nine families with a total of 220 persons (CENSUS REPORT 1831).

Rounding Black Head with its now fully automated lighthouse the traveller is presented with quite a different landscape. The coastal plain is broader and settlement patterns are quite different. Dispersed farms form a more dense settlement network and desertion is less evident, eighteen houses are still occupied. A caravan park is situated on the sandhills at Fanore where the Caher River enters the sea, and a youth hostel occupies the premises of the former Royal Irish Constabulary barracks on the southern bank of the Caher, just beyond the parish boundary.

The earliest evidence of human settlement in the parish of Gleninagh is afforded by the sites of mesolithic huts and kitchen middens found in the sandhills at Fanore (CUNNINGHAM 1980, 26–7). Further ancient settlement evidence is provided by *fulachta fiadha* (horseshoe-shaped cooking mounds) near the coast and cairns (burial mounds) on the hill slopes, probably dating to the Bronze Age. Widely scattered ring forts (circular fortified settlement sites, with ditches and walls of earth or stone) may date from the Late Bronze Age or the pagan Iron Age, the majority are probably of Early Christian date (MITCHELL 1976, 167 and ROBINSON 1977). The plain medieval parish church in Gleninagh North was already in ruins in 1837 (LEWIS 1837 Vol. I, 654). The other surviving (late) medieval feature is the three-storied, well fortified Gleninagh Castle, a tower-house dating from the 16th century and inhabited until the mid-nineteenth century (CUNNINGHAM 1980, 35; O'DONOVAN 1839, 85).

It is tempting to speculate as to the possible existence of a medieval settlement centre at Gleninagh 'village', in the area close to the castle (Fig. 2). A ringfort in the field next to the castle and traces of irregular earth structures in the field in which the castle stands, evocative of medieval house platforms and the traces left by earthen or wattle pathways, together with castle and church, belong to the important categories of visible indicators for medieval settlement in Ireland (see GRAHAM 1985, 16–7; also GRAHAM 1993). The presence of the tower-house and church in Gleninagh 'village', as well as of prehistoric/early Christian remains and modern dwellings indicates a very strong continuity of settlement. The isolation of this

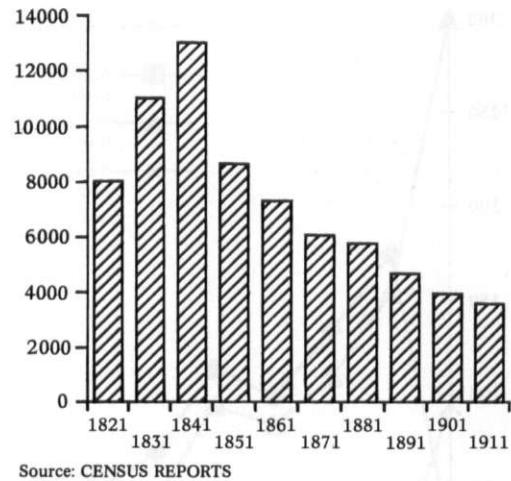


Fig. 3: Population size in the Barony of Burren, 1821–1911  
Bevölkerungsgröße im Barony of Burren 1821–1911

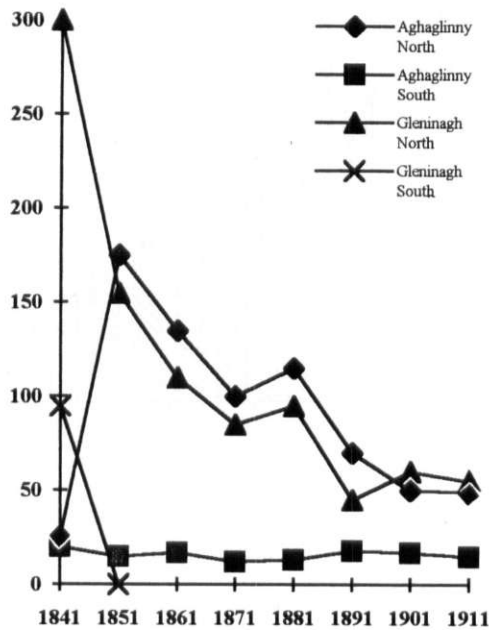
settlement from the primary locations of medieval expansion of nucleated settlements in Ireland makes the possible existence of a village-type medieval settlement here particularly interesting.

## 2 Change and transformation in Gleninagh parish 1821–1911

### 2.1 Population

Although it is apparent from census reports that the rate of population increase in the Burren was already dropping before the Famine, it is only after the Famine that any actual decrease occurs, and when it does occur it is significant. The census reports after 1871 attribute decreases in some areas to emigration (Fig. 3). Population declined rapidly in the parish of Gleninagh after the Famine, but this was expressed in a varied spatial pattern. Although the population as a whole decreased, that of Aghaglinny North actually increased by over 150%, while the population of Gleninagh South was wiped out altogether, that of Gleninagh North and Murroughtoohy South decreased by more than 80%, and the population of Murroughtoohy North, Murroughkelly and Aghaglinny South declined by over 60% (Figs. 4 and 5). Unfortunately no data are available to explain the relative importance of the two probable most important components of population decline, death and emigration, for the parish of Gleninagh.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of a community's 'health', or its 'viability', i.e. its potential for survival, is



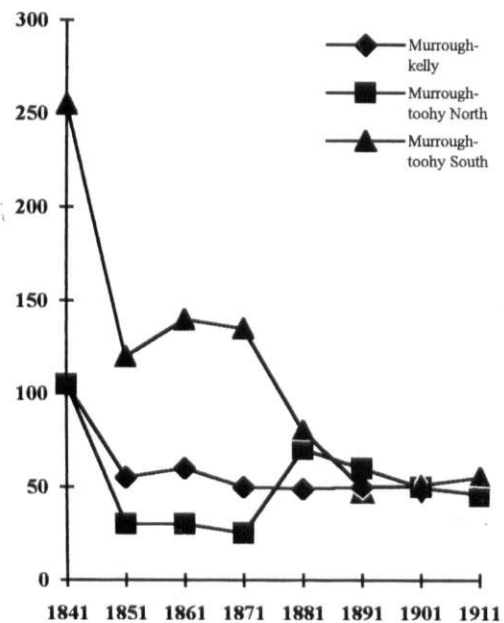
Source: CENSUS REPORTS

Fig. 4: Population change in the east section of Gleninagh parish, 1841-1911

Bevölkerungsentwicklung in der Osthälfte des Kirchspiels Gleninagh 1841-1911

the proportion of its inhabitants under the age of five, as this in turn allows the researcher to estimate the likely percentage of young, reproducing families. The most significant change in the age structure of the population of Gleninagh parish took place during and just after the Famine, with the proportion of those aged less than 5 falling dramatically from 23% in 1841 to only 13% in 1861, only marginally decreasing in the following decades. In 1881 only 10% of the population was aged less than 5. In 1911 some 18 of the total 44 families, i.e. 41%, had children aged less than 5 (37 children, 16% of total population). The parish may therefore have recovered somewhat from the immediate effects of the Famine and of emigration in the 1870s on its demographic structure (CENSUS REPORTS 1841-1911).

There is no direct evidence for the causes of these changes; it is however reasonable to assume that the youngest children succumbed quickest to starvation and disease in the Famine period, and that this led on the one hand to a shortage of adults at child-bearing age in 1861, and on the other hand to a possible subsequent reluctance to have too many children. Permanent celibacy and delayed marriage became features of Irish demographic structure. In 1841 10%



Source: CENSUS REPORTS

Fig. 5: Population change in the west section of Gleninagh parish, 1841-1911

Bevölkerungsentwicklung in der Westhälfte des Kirchspiels Gleninagh 1841-1911

of Irish males aged 45-54 had been unmarried, by 1881 this figure had almost doubled to 17%. In 1841 between 36% and 49% (varying from province to province) of males aged 25 to 34 were still single, in 1881 the figures ranged from 57% to 60%, in 1911 from 62% to a very high 81% (KENNEDY a. CLARKSON 1993, 165, 168). Evidence is not available on the extent to which contraception or abortion were practised in nineteenth century Ireland.

## 2.2 Housing

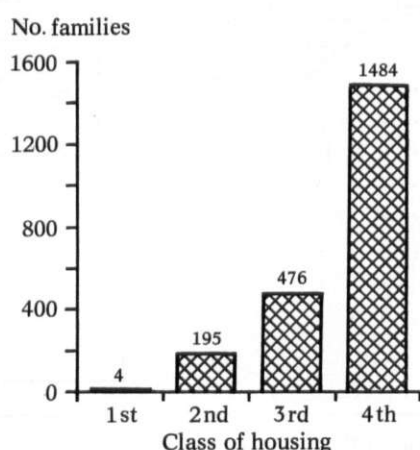
Pre-Famine housing conditions in rural Ireland as a whole were quite wretched, somewhat over half a million families (out of a total of 1.5 million) occupying fourth class housing (CENSUS REPORT 1841). A fourth class house as defined for the nineteenth century censuses consisted of a thatched, mud-walled dwelling with no more than one window in front and only one room (Table 1). A further half a million families occupied third class housing, which would have afforded but slightly better accommodation in many cases (CENSUS REPORT 1841). More extreme figures are to be found in the Burren (Fig. 6), where 68,7% of houses in 1841 were fourth class. Only 22%



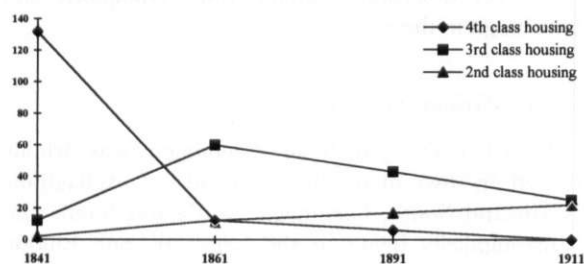
Table 1: Nineteenth century Irish house classification

Klassifikationsschema für irische Häuser im neunzehnten Jahrhundert				
House class	Walls	Roof	Windows in front	Rooms
1st	stone	slate	3 or more	3 or more
2nd	stone	thatch / slate	3 or more	3
3rd	stone	thatch	2 or more	2 to 3
4th	mud	thatch	1	1

Source: CENSUS REPORTS



Source: CENSUS REPORT 1841

Fig. 6: Housing in the Barony of Burren, 1841  
Haustypen im Barony of Burren 1841

Source: CENSUS REPORTS

Fig. 7: Housing quality in Gleninagh, 1821-1911  
Haustypen in Gleninagh 1821-1911

Table 2: House desertions in Gleninagh parish 1842-1988

Anzahl der verlassenen Häuser im Kirchspiel Gleninagh 1842-1988				
1842-1855	1855-1901	1901-1911	1911-1988	Total
81	35	5	21	142
57.1%	24.6%	3.5%	14.8%	100.0%

Sources: CENSUS REPORTS 1821-1911; Ordnance Survey six-inch maps 1842, 1915; GRIFFITH'S VALUATION (with maps) 1855; Author's field survey 1988

were third class, 9% were second class and first class housing accounted for a mere 0,2%.

Large-scale desertion occurred in Gleninagh after the Great Famine, and the type and quality of housing also underwent a transformation. In 1841 there were 146 inhabited houses in the parish as a whole. The greatest concentrations of settlement were in Gleninagh North, with 44 houses, and Murroughtoohy South, with 43 houses. Murroughkelly (21 houses), Murroughtoohy North (17 houses) and Gleninagh South (15 houses) also had sizeable concentrations of settlement. Aghaglinny North and South were the least densely settled townlands, each having only 3 houses in 1841. By 1911 this picture had been radically altered. Of the 146 houses of 1841, but 47 remained and the ruins of deserted dwellings dotted the landscape (CENSUS REPORTS; see Fig. 7, Table 2).

Fourth class housing was most severely affected by desertion. In 1841 90.4% of the housing stock in the parish was fourth class. A mere 8.2% of the dwellings in the parish were third class, and 1.4% were classified as second class houses. There were no first class houses in the parish at all at this time. By 1911 the fourth class houses had disappeared completely, and 53% of the houses in the parish were second class habitations, the remainder being third class (Fig. 7).

The nature of the sources available necessitated the division of the period examined into four phases of unequal duration. The first period of desertion mapped was that of 1842 to 1855. This division was

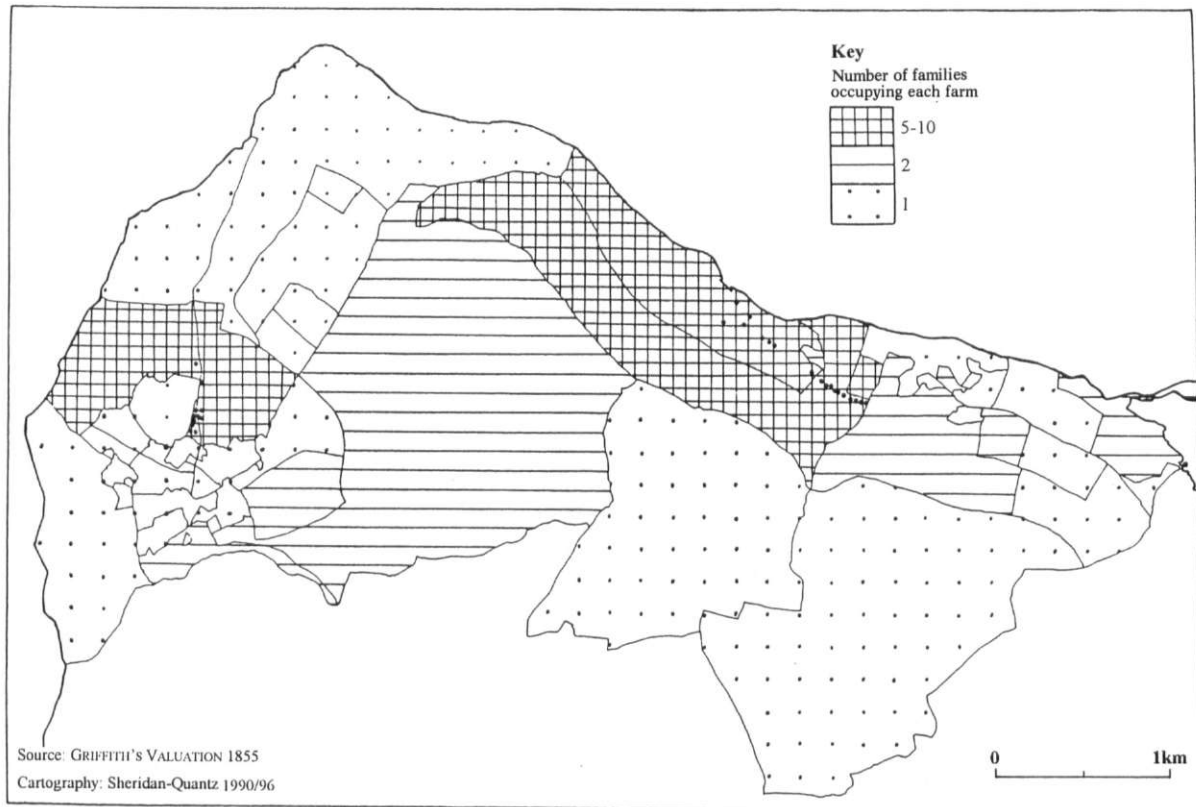


Fig. 8: Subdivision and sharing of farms, 1855

Fluraufteilung und Besitzverhältnisse der Farmen 1855

appropriate to the purposes of this study, enabling the portrayal of the pattern of immediate Famine-related desertions. The second division was longer, from 1855 to 1901. The third time period covered the years between 1901 and 1911. Finally, the evidence of this research and the 1915 six-inch maps were compared with the results of detailed fieldwork to show the distribution pattern of settlement desertion from 1911 to 1988, and also to map the contemporary settlement pattern (Fig. 1).

The most significant change in the landscape was instigated by the large-scale desertion immediately after the Famine. This decline did not take place in a uniform manner throughout the whole parish. The pre-Famine population was concentrated in the 'villages' at Gleninagh and Murrough. Present day settlement is primarily concentrated at Murrough, with only a small scattering at Aghaglinny and Gleninagh. While the overall levels and rates of desertion in each townland are roughly proportional to its share of the total population in 1841, the earliest desertions were most heavily concentrated in the area of Murrough in the west of the parish, with the majority of the

post 1911 desertions coming from Aghaglinny and Gleninagh in the east.

### 2.3 Landholding structures

In 1855 the parish of Gleninagh was wholly owned by two men, the townlands of Aghaglinny North and South, Gleninagh North and South and Murroughkelly being in the hands of one Bindon Blood of Ennis, and Captain Francis McNamara of Ennistymon holding the remaining two townlands, Murroughtoohy North and South. These lands were held in fee. Each of these two landlords had a farm manager to administer one farm (respectively 172 acres and 176 acres) and the rest of the land was sublet in thirty holdings (GRIFFITH'S VALUATION 1855, Field Books).

Although the majority of the farms in the parish were occupied by single families in 1855 (24 out of 32), eight were shared or subdivided (Fig. 8). Of these, five were held jointly by two families, and three were held by 5–10 members of related families. Associated with these three farms were groups or 'clusters' of houses –

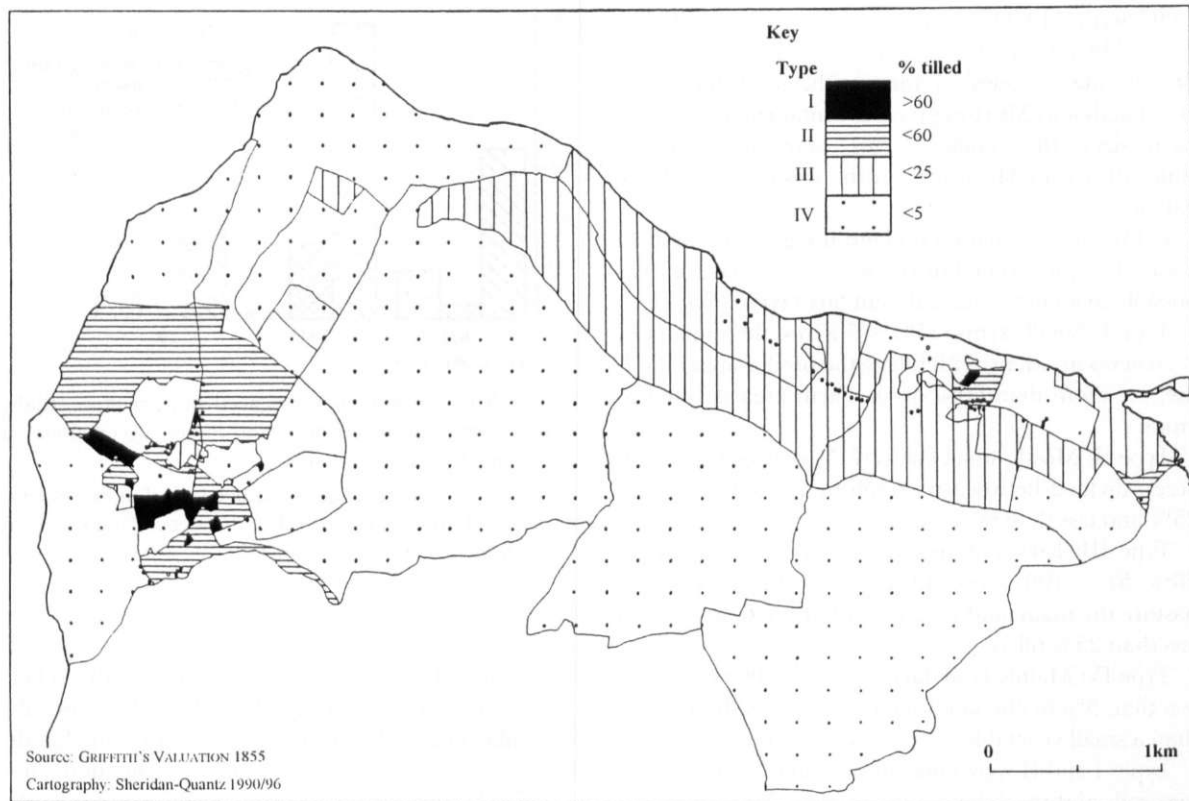


Fig. 9: Farm type, 1855  
Farmtypen 1855

one in Murrough and two in Aghaglinny. Such small clustered rural settlements of related families holding and working land in common have been imprinted on the Irish geographer's consciousness as a supposedly ancient form of Irish settlement by Emyr Estyn Evans, who called them *clachans*. This term is now frequently avoided, as the settlements Evans called *clachans* are now known to be highly varied in origin, function and historical stability (see GRAHAM 1993; TURNER 1993).

Not all of the occupants of these shared farms had equal access to land. Some had but a tiny garden-sized patch of their own and may have been employed as agricultural labourers or may have supplemented their income by fishing. The actual subdivisions and shares to which each person was entitled are given in the field books for GRIFFITH'S VALUATION and relationships were quite complicated. It is evident that there was much subdivision of a father's title among his sons, which indicates that population growth rather than long-established tradition may have been the base for the existence of these shared farms. It is reasonable to assume that by 1855 these farms were relict features of a more crowded pre-Famine landscape.

The 32 farms in the parish of Gleninagh in 1855 ranged in size from less than one acre (0.4 ha) to over a thousand acres (405 ha; GRIFFITH'S VALUATION 1855). Six farms were less than five acres (2 ha) in extent, and five of these were in Murrough 'village', the sixth being in Gleninagh near the castle. Nine farms were between five and twenty acres (8.1 ha) in area and these again were concentrated in the most densely settled parts of the parish, two at Gleninagh 'village' and the remaining seven in Murrough. The one exception to this pattern of clustering of small holdings in the more densely settled areas is a separate parcel of land on the hill-slope above Black Head, belonging to a nineteen acre farm in Murrough. Six farms were of a medium to large extent, greater than 20 acres (8.1 ha) and smaller than 100 acres (40.5 ha). Again these were located at or adjacent to the settlement centres, two in Aghaglinny/Gleninagh and four in Murrough. Nine farms were large, from 100 to 350 acres (40.5–141.6 ha), and extended in a continuous band around the low-lying, rocky coastline and along the lower slopes of the hills. The entire extent of Aghaglinny South and Gleninagh South was occupied by a farm of



1,097 acres (443.9 ha), and most of Murroughkelly was covered by a farm of 852 acres (344.8 ha). Thus while the two main 'nodes' of the parish, i.e. Aghaglinny/Gleninagh and Murrough, each contained a variety of farm sizes, the smaller farms were more heavily concentrated in Murrough, in the western end of the parish.

Using the information on land-use given in the field books for the 1855 GRIFFITH'S VALUATION, it was possible to identify four different farm types (Fig. 9):

Type I: Small farms (75% < 5 acres, the remainder < 20 acres in extent) with tillage the predominant land-use, i.e. more than 60% of the farm area devoted to crops.

Type II: Mostly small farms (71% between 5 and 20 acres) divided between pastoralism and tillage – over 25% and less than 60% tilled.

Type III: Farms of mixed size (28% 5 < 20 acres, 28% 20 < 100 acres, 43% 100 < 350 acres) with pasture the main land use, but with more than 5% and less than 25% tilled.

Type IV: Mainly large farms (70% > 100 acres) with less than 5% of the land tilled – usually with no more than a small vegetable- or potato-garden.

Types I and II were concentrated in the areas of the best soils and most dense settlement in Murrough and Gleninagh, with a higher concentration of tillage in Murrough than in Gleninagh. Much of the coastal strip at Gleninagh was taken up by Type III farms, and Type IV dominated on the slopes of Cappanawalla and Gleninagh Mountain and on the limestone pavement along the coast of Murrough North and South. As could be expected, there was found to be a strong correlation between farm type and the value given to the land in Griffith's Valuation, tillage being associated with the higher land values.

#### 2.4 Occupational structures

Census data indicate increasing dependence on agriculture in Clare in general before the Famine, with declining agricultural involvement after the Famine. This immediate, post-Famine decline does however seem to have stabilised somewhat in the later decades of the nineteenth century in Clare as a whole. A decline in trades and manufacturing had already set in during the decade immediately preceding the Famine, which may be linked to the production of cheap textiles in rapidly industrialising England (Ó GRÁDA 1988).

The most significant changes to occur in non-agricultural pursuits in Gleninagh from 1831 to 1911 were the pre-Famine and post-Famine switches in the numbers of families deriving their chief income from

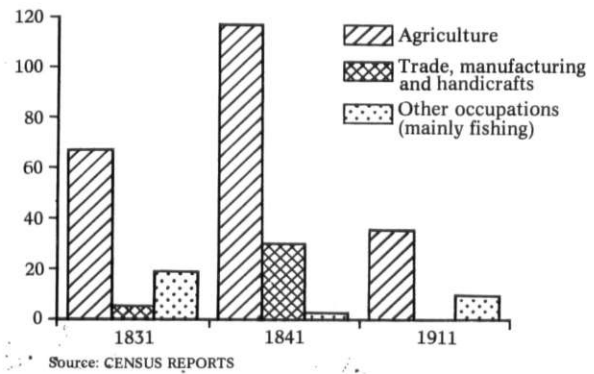


Fig. 10: Number of families engaged in agriculture, trade, manufacturing, handicrafts and other occupations in Gleninagh parish, 1831–1911

Anzahl der beschäftigten Familien in Landwirtschaft, Handel, Industrie, Handwerk und anderen Tätigkeiten im Kirchspiel Gleninagh 1831–1911

trade, manufacturing and handicrafts and 'other' occupations. The 1831 CENSUS REPORT shows 5% of families engaged in trade, manufacturing and handicraft, and 21% of families in other occupations, not specified but likely to have been chiefly represented by fishing (see LEWIS 1837 Vol. I, 334). By 1841 this picture had changed considerably, with 20% of families engaged in trades, manufacturing and handicrafts (the majority of these producing clothing, CENSUS REPORT 1841), and only 1% of families in other unspecified pursuits. In 1911 20% of families depended on non-agricultural pursuits, in this case fishing. As the percentage of families primarily involved in agriculture increased from 1831 to 1841, and the proportion involved in non-agricultural pursuits decreased in this period (Fig. 10), the changing emphasis in non-agricultural pursuits cannot be explained by the growing scarcity of land suitable to agriculture. A possible explanation for the remarkable growth in trade, manufacturing and handicrafts from 1831 to 1841 lies in the increased potential market due to a greater than 50% increase in population in this decade (from 92 to 149 families) or perhaps in outside (landlord) action to encourage this development. The dying-out of local production of textiles after the Famine can be explained by the operation of two factors, namely: population decline through death and emigration (CENSUS REPORTS 1881/91) resulting in the loss of skilled persons as well as in a decrease in market potential, and competition from cheap textiles from England, which grew with the expansion of factory production (Ó GRÁDA 1988).

In 1831 a third or less of adult males were occupied as farmers in the study parish as a whole. By 1911 the proportion of the population farming had gone down slightly in Gleninagh and Murroughtoohey, the actual number almost halving in both areas. In contrast to this, Murroughkelly, which had already had the greatest percentage of farmers in 1831, had considerably increased the share of its population occupied as farmers by 1911, from 34% to 47%, the actual number of farmers in the area decreasing only slightly and not in proportion to the population decline in the area during this period. The fact that the number of labourers and servants in Gleninagh declined by more than half in this same period reflects a change to a greater emphasis on more extensive pastoral agriculture. It is probable that the 1831 category 'other non-agricultural labourers' consisted mainly of fishermen (LEWIS 1837 Vol. I, 334) – if so the proportion engaged in this occupation in Gleninagh/Aghaglinny increased from 29% in 1831 to 41% in 1911, which would be compatible with a decline in employment opportunities in agriculture associated with an increasing emphasis on more extensive pastoralism.

The amount of land available to each farmer increased from 1855 to 1911. GRIFFITH'S VALUATION of 1855 shows 54 farmers sharing 32 farms, the 1911 MANUSCRIPT CENSUS RETURNS show 27 farmers and 27 farms. This change is linked with a change in inheritance practices. The 1855 data give evidence for the sharing of land among fathers and their sons, while the 1911 MANUSCRIPT CENSUS RETURNS clearly show that farms were handed on intact to one son. Evidence for this practice is to be found by correlating age by occupation for 1911. In both Gleninagh/Aghaglinny and Murrough there were no farmers younger than 25, all working males of this age group either subsisting as fishermen or labourers/servants. With increasing age, the proportion of farmers was higher. There were no fishermen in Murrough and a higher proportion of farmers in all age groups here than in Gleninagh/Aghaglinny (Fig. 11).

The labourers of 1911 were generally not truly landless, as had been the case in 1855, but were for the main part farmers' sons waiting to inherit the family farm. This is supported by the correlation between house class and occupation, which shows that almost as high a proportion of labourers as farmers (respectively 59% and 62%) lived in second class housing, while only 47% of fishermen lived in second class houses. The social hierarchy which emerges is not simply related to occupation, as may have been the case in 1855, but can be summarised as follows. At the top level, a class of

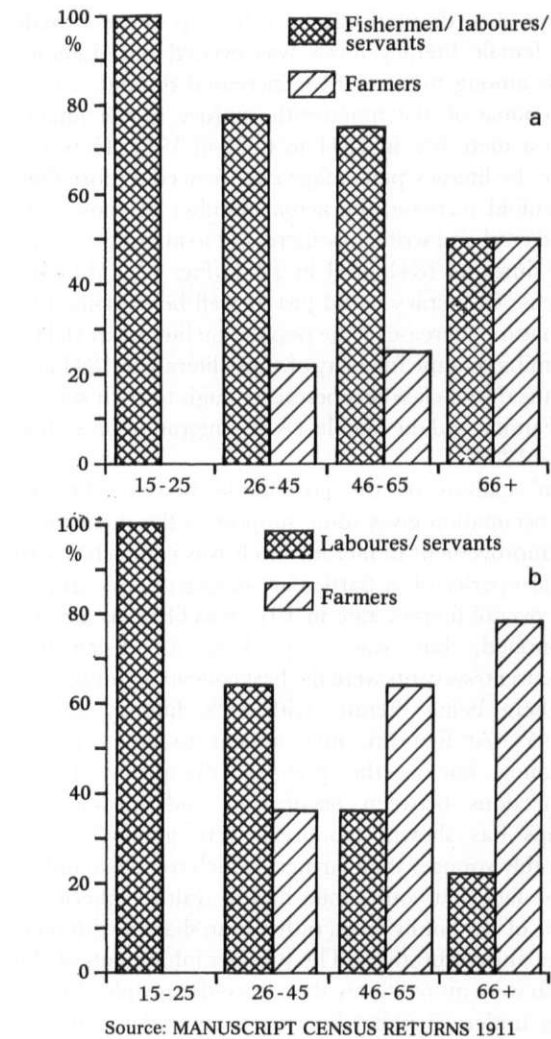


Fig. 11: The relationship between age and occupation among males aged 15 or more in the east (Gleninagh/Aghaglinny – a) and west (Murrough – b) sections of Gleninagh parish, 1911

Das Verhältnis Alter – Beschäftigung von Männern im Alter von 15 Jahren oder mehr in der Osthälfte (Gleninagh/Aghaglinny – a) und Westhälfte (Murrough – b) des Kirchspiels Gleninagh 1911

farmers and their labouring sons can be identified, followed by a class of labourers who are the heads of their households and by the fishermen, who seem for the most part to have been the poorest members of Gleninagh society in 1911, the smallest proportion of this group living in second class accommodation.

### 2.5 Literacy

Literacy is an important indicator of social change. Between 1841 and 1911 overall literacy levels in the

Burren rose dramatically and the gap between male and female literacy levels was evened out. Literacy levels among the over fives increased dramatically in the course of the nineteenth century in Gleninagh, from a mere 6% in 1841 to 68% in 1911. However, while the literacy percentage experienced a more than elevenfold increase, the actual number of those who could read and write only increased to about two and a half times its 1841 level in 1911 (Fig. 12). Thus the increase in literacy could just as well be explained by the natural increase of the population literate in 1841 – assuming that the majority of those literate in 1841 also belonged to a class prosperous enough to both survive the Famine and the high levels of emigration prevailing in the 1880s.

An analysis of the correlation between literacy and occupation gives some support to the theory that the improvement in literacy levels was connected with the prosperity of a particular socio-economic group. The overall literacy rate in 1911 was 68%, as already mentioned, but was only 33% for fishermen. Labourers/servants were the best educated group, 67% of them being literate, with 58% literacy among farmers. At first this may appear to be a strange tendency, but as the previous discussion of the connections between occupation and specific age groups has shown, labourers were generally considerably younger than farmers, which trend was linked to the fact that young men had to wait to inherit the whole of the family farm, rather than share it with their father and/or brothers. The younger inhabitants of the parish were more literate than the older people (73% of those under 25 being literate, compared to 70% of those aged from 26 to 45, and 43% of those over 45). Therefore the higher rate of literacy among labourers is still consistent with the theory that literacy is a function of socio-economic class. The discussion on occupational structure has also demonstrated that most fishermen lived in poorer quality housing than did the farmers and labourers, so the correlation between literacy and social class is clear. Further supporting this theory is the fact that those living in second class dwellings had a literacy rate of 72% in 1911, compared to 61% for those in third class accommodation.

### 3 The socio-geographical significance of the transformation of rural Irish society after the Great Famine

#### 3.1 Changing settlement and social structures

Analysis of pre- and post-Famine changes in landscape, society and economy in the parish of Gleninagh has demonstrated that the most obvious impact of the

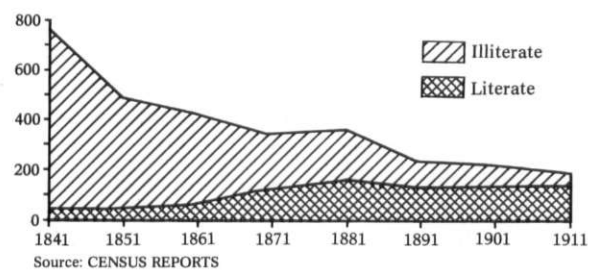


Fig. 12: Literacy in Gleninagh, 1841-1911

Bildungsstand der Bevölkerung in Gleninagh 1841-1911

Famine on the formation of Irish rural society was that of drastically reducing rural population densities in a very short time. This decline was strongly *class-specific*, the census reports showing the greatest decreases in *fourth class* housing after the Famine – the very poorest were most affected by population decline. The *speed* of change was largely dependent on the Famine as catalyst (see BECKETT 1981, 337).

The post-Famine changes in settlement patterns and social structures can be summarised as follows:

- The cultural landscape underwent a twofold transformation. Firstly, *housing density* in many areas was quite drastically reduced. Secondly, the *type of housing* changed, partly due to the desertion of large numbers of fourth class dwellings, miserable hovels. In the decades after the Famine the proportions of second and third class housing rose rapidly. Thus the cultural landscape changed during the nineteenth century from one reflecting general abject poverty to one representing an emerging relatively prosperous, even 'middle class' group of farmers.

- The second major group of post-Famine changes relates to the *transformation of social structures* with the removal by death or emigration of a vast, poor, 'marginal' section of the population. The data on social structure for the pre-Famine period are at best patchy, it is however possible to infer a considerable degree of change. As the large social grouping of the very, very poor was rapidly depleted, 'room' in the landscape and the economy was created for the development of greater disparities and differences among the lower/middle levels of society. Before the 1850s, Irish society had had a well developed relatively polarized class structure, dominated by a very small class of the very wealthy, with a small middle class of 'strong farmers' and a large mass of the miserably poor. By 1911 neither the very rich nor the strong farmers had disappeared, indeed the latter had if anything consolidated their position, but the lower levels had become differentiated to an extent not apparent before, as the analysis of Gleninagh social class structures demonstrates.

– Radical change had also taken place in the *agricultural system*. The information contained in GRIFFITH'S VALUATION of Gleninagh for 1855 has been used to show the survival six years after the end of the Famine of some pre-Famine agricultural structures, in the form of shared and subdivided farm holdings associated with house clusters. By 1911 this situation had altered radically, with all farmers having individual holdings and their sons working as labourers (and to a lesser extent as fishermen) while waiting to inherit the family farm instead of being allocated a subdivision of the farm. It has also been possible to identify changes in the nature of agriculture, with an observed trend towards more extensive types. Although this trend may not necessarily hold for all of Ireland, the Burren being a somewhat unusual area as far as geology, soil types and agricultural conditions are concerned, it is possible that similar changes did take place in the many areas of this country which suffered high population losses in the Famine years and have significant emphasis on pastoralism.

Thus the class-specific depletion of population in the years from 1845 to 1849 can be proved to be important for the emergence of 'modern' Irish society. It is questionable whether this change would otherwise have taken place as quickly as it did, given the links between Famine population decline and subsequent development as demonstrated in this study. Even if the socio-economic effects of the Famine were not so significant, the effect on the cultural landscape is crucial to an understanding of the relatively 'empty' landscapes we now consider so typical of rural Ireland, as these are largely a product of the Famine and the immediate post-Famine period.

### 3.2 *A new relationship to the environment*

Two major post-Famine changes altered the physical/spatial relationships of the rural Irish to their environment, namely the 'emptying' of once crowded landscapes of houses, and increases in farm-size associated with the decline in numbers of people trying to live directly off the land.

The radical changes in the settlement network observed in this study are of course changes which may be observed in any part of the country significantly affected by the Famine. These changes must have effected a corresponding adjustment in patterns of social interaction. With rural settlement increasingly taking on a dispersed pattern, relationships both between the indoor and outdoor worlds and between neighbours, friends and relations must have altered in character and intensity. The increase of farm-size

made possible by the 'emptying' of the land related to post-Famine population decline placed a large number of families on a more secure economic base than they had ever before experienced. This, combined with improvement, mechanisation and extensification within agriculture, placed the farming community in a new relationship to its physical environment.

Many of the features which are frequently accepted as typical and inherent features of the Irish cultural landscape and Irish rural society and economy are in fact products of our more recent past, of the post-Famine period. The neat, comfortable *dispersed* farmsteads, the isolation *within* as well as between rural communities, widespread pastoral farming are not the products of centuries of evolution but rather the results of fairly rapid adaption to drastic change since the middle of the nineteenth century.

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