



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**THE LETTERKENNY & BURTONPORT
EXTENSION RAILWAY 1903-47:
ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT AND
ENVIRONMENT**

by

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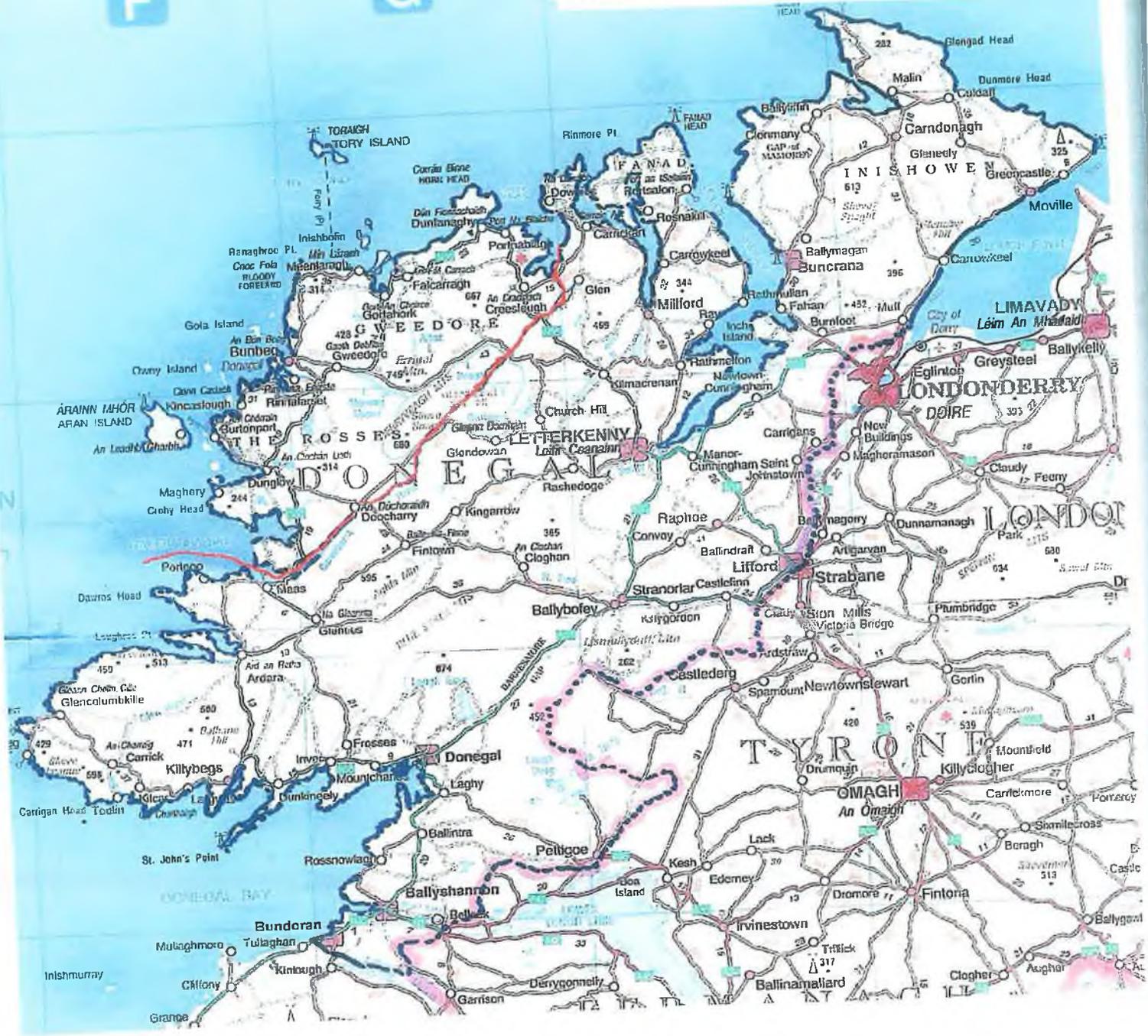
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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AOH | Ancient Order of Hibernians |
| BMH | Bureau of Military History |
| CDB | Congested Districts Board |
| Cd/Cdm | Command Papers |
| CDRJC | County Donegal Railways Joint Committee |
| CICMR | County inspector's confidential monthly report |
| <i>DD</i> | <i>Donegal Democrat</i> |
| <i>DI</i> | <i>Donegal Independent</i> |
| <i>DJ</i> | <i>Derry Journal</i> |
| <i>DP</i> | Derry People |
| <i>DS</i> | <i>Derry Standard</i> |
| GAA | Gaelic Athletic Association |
| HC | House of Commons |
| IPP | Irish Parliamentary Party |
| IRA | Irish Republican Army |
| L&BER | Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway |
| L&LSR | Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway |
| <i>LS</i> | <i>Londonderry Sentinel</i> |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NA | National Archives of England (formerly Public Record Office) |
| NAI | National Archives of Ireland |
| NLI | National Library of Ireland |
| PLV | Poor Law Valuation |
| PRONI | Public Record Office of Northern Ireland |
| RIC | Royal Irish Constabulary |
| TD | Teachta Dála (Member of Dáil Eireann) |
| UCD | University College Dublin |
| UIL | United Irish League |

Fig. 1 County Donegal



SCALE 1: 600,000

Source: Adapted by Frank Sweeney from Ordnance Survey road map of Ireland 1997

Northwest Donegal is edged —

INTRODUCTION

I was born in 1941 in the townland of Bunaman, in the parish of Annagry in northwest Donegal. My birth came one year after the closure of the Gweedore to Burtonport section of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway which was visible from my home, so that I never had the joy of seeing a train passing by. During the years of my primary schooling, I passed over the railway twice daily and often joined with other schoolchildren in searching for little lumps of coal along the permanent way. In later years, the same track bed became one of my favourite walks and set me wondering about the story behind so large a development at a time when few monuments of progress left much impression on our local landscape. My interest in the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway was aroused.

Most studies of railways tend to concentrate heavily on the locomotives, rolling stock, technical details and the accepted railway enthusiast's cherished minutiae of locomotives, timetables, horsepower, manuals, specifications, signalling, gradients and memorabilia. Little reference to any of the above will be found in this study for the simple reason that this author is not a railway enthusiast, has little knowledge of such detailed items and has set out a different analysis of the chosen subject.

The objectives set out in this study are as follows:

1. An analysis of the state of northwest Donegal before the construction of this railway which will reflect the way of life of its population in regard to demographics, economic situation, land holding and structure, migration, social conditions, educational standards, conflict, religious practice and influences, political development and general way of life. The interaction between shopkeeper and client will be analysed as well as the practice of gombeenism which was

very prevalent in northwest Donegal. Seasonal migration, emigration, and child labour are three of the topics that will receive special attention.

2. To study the effect of government philosophy and changing policies in regard to one of the most peripheral regions in Ireland towards the end of the nineteenth century. The phrase 'killing home rule with kindness' is often quoted but it is hoped that this study will shed some light on the development that such government initiatives had on the population of isolated northwest Donegal which was at the end of the economic, educational, social and cultural line of Irish progress and development.
3. To analyse the different intentions and reactions of the various parties in the construction of a railway. The government, especially in the era of Arthur Balfour's reign as Chief Secretary of Ireland (1887-91), saw railway development as a weapon in breaking the repetitive cycles of poverty, distress and destitution that diminished life in the congested areas of the west. Railway construction was also an objective of the Congested Districts Board (CDB) which was set up as a result of the 1891 land act to develop the western regions of Ireland and improve the economic situation to relieve recurring cycles of distress and poverty. The development of fishing was one of the major policy decisions made by the CDB for this economic resurrection but, as nearly all of the fishing ports were far removed from the main markets of the east coast and of Britain, it was impossible to make adequate progress without railways which were necessary to get the fish to market. But railways would bring in soldiers and control to such areas as well as bring out the people to labour in Britain and the colonies where they could be civilized into respectable and docile citizens. Those left behind would become law-abiding tenant farmers of respectability and conformity. At

local level, however, railways were seen for their ability to bring employment, develop natural resources and create wealth which would eliminate the need for emigration and relief programmes entirely. The success and failure of these schemes will be examined throughout the study.

4. Many different categories of people held views, interests and involvement in railway development in those years. This list included government, civil service, gentry, landowners, the churches and their clergy, the politicians, the business community, fishermen, and ordinary citizens. The interests, aspirations and conduct of these groups will be analysed throughout the study.
5. The logistics involved in the construction of a fifty-mile long railway are examined. This involved the legal processes for the purchase of land, planning of the route, the employment of men, difficulties of construction in unfriendly terrain, accidents, disagreements and many other facets of railway construction. Not all elements involved behaved in exemplary manner and it is often difficult to understand the undercurrents which drove much performance.
6. The Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway (L&BER) was one of the major agents of change and modernisation of society in northwest Donegal during the first years of the twentieth century. A broad alliance of clergy, medical profession, local government and Congested Districts Board teamed together to rid the northwest of the proliferation of one-room houses in which large families lived along with their animals in pathetic conditions. Different standards of respectability were demanded. Bedrooms were built, animals were put into byres, external and internal walls were whitewashed and large windows were installed for fresh air. This modernisation process was made possible and was accelerated with the coming of the railway. The railway's function as an agent of change and

development in the northwest community is analysed. How much did it respond to the objectives of the various interests and to what extent did it realize their ambitions? What did it bring to the people? How did it change their lifestyles? What were the benefits of railway development or what were its weaknesses and how much impact did it have on the development of society within the region?

7. After years of progress, modernisation and increased living standards, World War I began in 1914. Its impact on northwest Donegal was immense. The fishing industry came to a standstill. The normal valve of seasonal emigration came to a halt because of fear of conscription in Scotland. Women could not go to the gutting in Scotland. Child labour increased enormously in an effort to maintain the home and pay the shopkeepers. Idle young men had neither employment nor money. The progress of former years had been halted abruptly. Sinn Fein replaced the United Irish League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians as the major forces and influences in the northwest. By 1918, society had been transformed in many ways. On the railways, unionisation, massive pay rises, government control, the eight-hour-day, increased expenses and many other changes meant that railway companies could never recapture the control and profits enjoyed before the war.
8. The War of Independence and the Civil War both impacted severely on Irish society and the railways of Ireland were used as weapons by all sides. The Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway was a major instrument in the initial control of the northwest by the British government but, later, it became the principal weapon for the dislodgement of the same forces and the creation of an independent 'republic' in the region. Both sides in the civil war used the railway to further their own ambitions.

9. In the independent Ireland after 1922, the L&BER experienced difficult times, not least being a 'victim of partition' but also finding itself struggling in a quickly changing world, competing with road transport and motor vehicles, new political philosophies and changing economic conditions. An examination of the years between 1922 and 1947 will provide an insight into the changing face of Irish society and northwest Donegal, in particular.

10. Comparisons will be made between progress and change in northwest Donegal and other parts of Ireland.

These then are some of the issues which will be analysed in this study which will, primarily, concentrate on people and change, on the construction, growth, decline and extinction of a railway and of its various involved elements, on the stages of development of a community from 1875 approximately to 1950 in northwest Donegal. This is not just about a railway. It is using the railway as a vehicle for the study of the communities it touched in some way and its part in the development and maturation of those communities during forty-four years of its existence. The social context and environment of the railway will be integral factors throughout this thesis.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Northwest Donegal suffered from lack of newspaper coverage during the nineteenth century because of its isolation. There were no local papers published within the region and we have to rely on the newspapers based in Derry City for coverage of Donegal in the early years. The *Londonderry Sentinel*, established on 19 September 1829, was a solid establishment paper and although it was not attached to any one religious denomination, it did advocate the cause of Protestantism generally and was the medium through which the Church of Ireland clergy brought their announcements before the public. Nearly all its coverage and editorials aired the

Conservative/Unionist establishment viewpoint without apology. It enjoyed a decided superiority particularly as an advertising medium because its readers generally belonged to the most wealthy and influential classes in the community. Its bias is very evident throughout but, for all that, it provides good information about many aspects of life in northwest Donegal and deals especially well with railway development in the county, principally because of its importance to the business and economy of the city of Derry. The fact that John McFarland, chairman of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company (L&LSR), was one of the city's most prominent businessmen and was also active in Derry's political affairs, serving as mayor on a number of occasions, helped to create much interest in railway matters. The *Sentinel* provided good coverage of meetings in the area and dealt with the issues from an establishment viewpoint but it is the best source of coverage we have. The fact that it was published three days per week increases the amount of information that it provides. When one allows for its viewpoint, then it is a valuable source.

The *Derry Standard*, sometimes called the *Londonderry Standard*, founded in the middle of the nineteenth century, was also an establishment newspaper based in Derry with it leaning very much towards the Presbyterian congregation. While it contains many good articles together with concise items of fact and intelligent comment and is generally more objective and less vehement than the *Sentinel*, its spread of news is more limited and less detailed because of its once-weekly issue. However, it provides balance to many articles in the *Sentinel* for each paper was quick to find fault with the other's articles, reports, comments or editorials.

Another Derry newspaper was the *Derry Journal* which began life as an establishment organ with Church of Ireland leanings in 1772 but closed down, reinvented itself and became a nationalist/Catholic newspaper in the nineteenth century. During the last years of that century, its focus was rather scattered though it was said that it enjoyed the patronage of the

clergy, gentry, merchants and traders. It covered Donegal, Tyrone and Derry and, like the two above papers, devoted much space to British and colonial affairs which left little enough space for the mundanities of life in the northwest. It is only in the early twentieth century that it narrowed its political focus to become purely nationalist and it later adopted northwest Donegal as its cherished locality. Its local notes and news items continued to improve and it is the main fount of knowledge about local life in the northwest during the twentieth century. It provided total counter-balance to the Protestant/establishment newspapers with its allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church and to nationalist ideals.

From 1903 another nationalist newspaper appeared. This was the *Derry People* (later incorporating the title *Donegal News*). It was unashamedly nationalist and Catholic, devoted to the revival of the Irish language, opposed to Unionist and 'foreign' rule, and insular in many of its editorials. From 1912 onwards its tone was decidedly republican. Because it confined its focus to northwest Donegal, however, its local news items provide much background information that is valuable to a study such as this. The heavy adherence of both the *Derry Journal* and *Derry People* to the Catholic viewpoint must be treated with care throughout for both newspapers were used by the clergy of the Catholic church to advance their own positions and that of the church without critical analysis. The *Derry Journal* and the *Londonderry Sentinel* berated each other through their columns on many occasions and were never slow to find fault with each other.

The *Donegal Independent* was based in Ballyshannon which was even more remote from the northwest than Derry and it covered few items within the northwest region. After 1897, it tended to focus its items on south Donegal, north Leitrim and north Sligo. However, up until then, it was a very well-balanced paper with a moderate attitude to most developments. It could be described as a liberal organ which was willing to

give generous amounts of space to both Catholic and Protestant viewpoints while not being reluctant to criticize both when necessary. Many good items relating to life in the northwest are found between 1880 and 1897 and I have used some of these in developing the background of the thesis. After 1912 it became decidedly Republican and often came under the watchful eye of the RIC and the County Inspector.¹

Therefore, with the information provided by five very different newspapers, there is a reasonably balanced viewpoint to be found in averaging the material provided by all of them. The range of letter correspondence available in the press gives a fine insight to the thoughts of many ordinary people in the northwest.

A very rich source of information was provided by the Congested Districts Board 'Baseline reports' for the Rosses, Gweedore, Cloughaneely, Dunfanaghy, Aranmore, Tory Island, Glenties and Gartan areas which were produced between 1892 and 1898. The Congested District Board was set up as a result of the 1891 land act² and was composed of the Chief Secretary, two land commissioners and five experts appointed by the government. Its objectives were to develop local industries with the help of subsidies and technical instruction, amalgamate uneconomic holdings, purchase land, assist migration to improved holdings, and improve agricultural methods. The congested, overcrowded, poorer areas which generally lay west of a line drawn from Derry to Bantry Bay were each examined by an inspector according to a set formula.³ The amount of information collected was extensive, ranging from statistics on population, farm size, valuations, housing, diet, annual income and expenditure, clothing, farming practice, standards of poultry and cattle, fishing, emigration and migration, fairs and markets, pastimes, knitting and

¹ Monthly Report of the County Inspector for County Donegal, Mar. 1917 (CO 904/102). (hereafter CI Monthly Report, County Donegal.

² 54 & 55 Vict., c. 48 (5 Aug. 1891).

³ A congested district was defined as one in which the total rateable value divided by the number of inhabitants amounted to less than 30s. per person.

household crafts, alcohol consumption, games, dancing and pastimes, and much more. The reports are normally recorded on a civil parish basis or on cohesive areas resembling the parish, often combining a number of D.E.D.s encompassing a definable geographical area. The reports provide excellent material for comparison between various regions because the format used in each report was the same and the information contained in the reports can be compared with the 1891 and 1901 census returns, with agricultural statistics, poor law records and newspaper items. These reports are generally free from the type of bias that one often finds in commission reports or official investigations because, in the case of the Congested Districts Board, its agenda was a very open one without the necessity of providing a viewpoint favourable to the government or any of its branches. These reports furnished the basis for intervention by government to ameliorate distress, hunger, deprivation and social conditions in the poorer areas for which grants were made available and schemes devised. However, one must be careful when collective character is presented as being typical of a particular area or when the general impressions of pastimes, work ability, neighbourly interaction, drinking and personal habits apparent to the author are stated to be representative of all the people in that area. These are no more than impressions of the people represented. However, the CDB published annual reports of its income, expenditure and schemes until its abolition on 24 July 1923. These provide good analyses of the schemes in the areas being developed through the country and the investments made. I have used much of the information contained in these reports to construct the 'condition of the northwest' during the last quarter of the nineteenth century which is contained in the first chapter.

The census returns taken decennially from 1841 until 1911, and again every ten years from 1926 onwards, provide statistical records throughout where demographic changes, religious affiliation, profession or trade, housing, education, family structure, marriage status, language of the

home and housing types are presented to us. One must be aware when comparing census with census that there are subtle differences from one to the other – see Joseph Lee’s concerns about the 1841 census, and the change in house types.⁴ The recording of religious affiliation was only introduced in 1861 but, all in all, they provide a very objective record of the people in any given area and the pattern of demographics up to 1946 which covers the period of this study. Each census return evokes more queries and problems than answers. However, the patterns of declining population and permanent emigration were different in west Donegal to almost all other parts of the country. Consequently, census analysis is very important in delineating trends and defining change.

The Irish language revival movement during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century helped to create many writers in the Donegal Gaeltacht which resulted in the production of many books in the Gaelic language dealing with life in the area. Séamus Ó Grianna and his brother, Seosamh, were prolific writers about the locality during these years and produced autobiographies which convey to the reader a live and spiritual insight to their world. Tadhg Ó Rabhartaigh, Niall Ó Domhnaill, Seán Bán Mac Meanmain, Fionn Mac Cumhaill, Míic Mac Gabhann, Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsi, Hiúdai Ó Domhnaill, Seán ‘ac Fhionnghaile and Cití Nic Giolla Bhríde are but some of the writers from this region that provide a broad range of material for our understanding of life in the northwest because they wrote about the localities where they grew up. They present vivid pictures of people, living conditions and everyday life and reflect the moral and social issues of the inhabitants over long periods of time. Most of these writers produced their work during the years of the Burtonport railway’s existence. The uniformity in many of the descriptions of life and its events provides us

⁴ Joseph Lee, ‘On the accuracy of the pre-Famine Irish censuses’ in Goldstrom & Clarkson, *Irish population, economy and society* (Oxford, 1981), pp 37-56.

with a realistic picture of society in those years described. While most of the work produced deals with the lives of the people in the lower strata of society, the peasant, seasonal migrant, the labourer and cottier, we do get many glimpses of the world of the shopkeeper, the gombeenmen as well as the priest, the church, the police and the agencies of control within this world. Yet, we must be conscious that there were many aspects of such times that these writers ignored or failed to deal with because of social restrictions, church domination or the suffocation of the close interactive society in which they resided.

Supporting these writers are the collections from northwest Donegal in the Irish Folklore Commission in University College, Dublin located in the UCD Folklore Archives at Belfield, Dublin 4. These were collected from school children from 1937 onwards but many further collections were made by the enthusiastic Seán Ó hEochaidh throughout the Donegal Gaeltacht for many years thereafter. He collected from a great variety of the older generation and there are few aspects of life that remained untouched. Perhaps the value of the collections can be found in the insights, beliefs, attitudes, fears and aberrant behaviour that these records present to us and which are difficult to find in any other source. The reader must be aware though that the presentations are not totally factual, that time is a variable and that interpretations of the great world are, generally, the simple analyses of peasant narrators. Controversial or unpleasant topics were generally avoided and many presentations were severely censored by the seanchaí. With these reservations they provide us with many useful and interesting insights to the human behaviour of our ancestors in northwest Donegal.

A further valuable source is that of the local oral evidence still available to us to this day. The period under review is from 1875 to 1950. Many of the older generation in northwest Donegal are only one generation removed from the beginning of that era, e.g. Rory Delap of Letterkenny

was born in 1900, Grace Sweeney of Bunaman was born in 1909, Susan Ward and Michael Ward of Keadue were born in 1916 and 1915 respectively, Maggie Roarty of Knockastolar was born in 1916, District Justice Sean Delap of Gweedore was born about 1930, Gerry McGrenra from Churchill was born in 1913, and I spoke to many more. Some of these, such as the Delap family had close connections with the railway from its very inception but all of them had grown up listening to parents telling many stories of the railway era. I collected much information from Rory Delap who worked on the Burtonport railway from the age of seven years until it closed in 1947. He died in 1999, aged almost one hundred years. I found that their recollections consisted mainly of days out to the Letterkenny Feis, to Doon Well, with the AOH on the 15 August, going to and returning from the Derry boat or travelling to football matches or other events. The older generation had many stories to tell about the Black and Tans and 'the troubles' or about the men who worked on the railway. But the oral information was limited and sometimes unreliable especially when information was given which had originated from newspaper articles rather than from personal experience, such as the Owencarrow Viaduct disaster in 1925, or other events, deaths or accidents on the line. I found that facts were sometimes interchanged between different events. I also discovered that women were more reliable than men because they told their stories as they knew them, whereas men often presented their own personal opinions as facts to explain or elaborate on particular instances. However, because of the large number of people that I spoke to, I was able to cross check many of the stories with newspaper articles or official documents or with other oral sources. But people were often reluctant to add their name to information that might be used as a criticism of the railway or of the people who worked on it.

The Public Records Office, Northern Ireland [PRONI], has the records of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway which also includes

the Burtonport Extension records. Sadly, this collection is not nearly as extensive now as that which was available to historians such as E. M. Patterson when he wrote *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*.⁵ This is because of fire damage during the 'troubles' in the late 1960s when many documents were destroyed at the L&LSR headquarters in Derry. However, the surviving material provides much insight together with detailed information about the day-to-day running of the railway with files on many of the employees, accident reports, dismissal of staff and general correspondence. The inspection tour conducted by James F. O'Donnell in 1902 gives valuable information about many aspects of the construction of the railway.

Government investigations and commissions provide one of the richest sources for the construction of this narrative. The Evicted Tenants Commission⁶ dealt extensively with the northwest Donegal estates of Olphert, Stewart, Hill and Swiney in the Cloughaneely and Gweedore parishes during the 1880s and early 1890s because of the scale of evictions taking place there. This is one of the better commissions as many priests gave evidence and they were insistent on having their points of view presented irrespective of the wishes of the officials. Consequently, there is an extensive amount of factual material which provides rich understanding to the background, tensions and troubles of life in the region during the early years of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Any distortions or bias in the accounts are generally balanced by counter claims from opposing viewpoints. The reports of the Allport Commission of 1884⁷ which investigated the northwest Donegal area recommended railway extension to the northwest area. While this commission tended to interview the most important people in the northwest this invariably tended

⁵ E. M. Patterson. *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway* (David & Charles. London. 1964).

⁶ *Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the estates of evicted tenants in Ireland*, HC 1893-94 (C. 6935), xxxi.

⁷ Royal Commission on Irish Public Works, *First Report* HC 1887 (C. 5638), xxv; *Second Report*, HC, 1888, (C. 5624), xlii.

to concentrate on the landlords and their supporters so that we do not get as reasonable a balance as in later inquiries. The Board of Works instituted many enquiries before they built railways and we have two very detailed investigations from northwest Donegal which provide very extensive information on the area covering a very wide spectrum of life there. The Railway Commissioners' investigation in 1897 on behalf of the Board of Works involved public enquiries at three locations in northwest Donegal and contains much excellent material about many aspects of life there.⁸ While many private agendas were at work during the course of the commissions, representing business, land, church, fishing and more, these documents provide much factual information about the area after allowance is made for the tendency to exaggerate conditions in order to gain from government. Joseph Tatlow who was chairman of the 1897 commission again returned to investigate the Burtonport railway in 1905 (his report was not published but much information from it was given orally to the Irish Railway Commission in 1907) and he returned again in 1917 when he produced a very detailed analysis of the Burtonport Extension Railway and its many problems (this report was not published but all of it is included with the Board of Works documents).⁹ The Irish Railway Commission¹⁰ of 1907 provides the greatest amount of detail about the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway from the initial steps to build a railway, through the construction phase and the first years of its operation. This was because the chairman, Sir Charles Scotter, took a personal and very special interest in the long-standing disagreements between the directors of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway and the Board of Works and he applied himself in 1909 to the resolution of the problems that existed between them. Consequently, an extraordinary amount of time was

⁸ 'Proposed railway from Letterkenny to Burtonport. Public enquiries at Letterkenny, Falcarragh and Burtonport', 1897 (NAI, Privy Council Papers, Letterkenny - Burtonport Railway, viB - 3 - 16, no. 30). This collection of unsorted documents contains the full report of the commissioners.

⁹ 'Reports of working the line, 1917-19' including Tatlow's report, (NAI, OPW 'Railways', Burtonport Extension Railway, 13749-19).

¹⁰ Irish Railways Commission, 1907, Cd 3632.3633, xxxvii, 45.

devoted to the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway during the commission's hearings. Exchanges were very heated especially between the Board of Works' personnel and the L&LSR management and witnesses tended to be firmly on one side or the other. This is probably the most informative document of all the material sources because a great amount of detail is provided that is not now to be found elsewhere. Many original documents were also presented and they appear in the appendices.

Hansard, the record of debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords provides another good source. From the first plans to build a railway into the northwest of Donegal until the partition of the country, there are continuous questions and statements on nearly all aspects of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway. Because it was built with government money, with the exception of £5,000, there was a strong sense among Donegal M.P.s that such a public entity should be the subject of close scrutiny. The railway's failure to perform adequately and the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company's refusal to introduce efficiency into its running or take heed of the outpourings or condemnations of the public representatives led to increased controversy and many questions in parliament because many M.P.s believed that government had direct and ultimate responsibility for the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway because of the amount of public funds invested in it. Consequently, we get information about train breakdowns, overcrowding on trains, passengers travelling in cattle wagons, poor timekeeping, inefficiency and much more which give a rich insight to the workings of the railway.

Sadly, the Dáil Eireann record is not nearly so valuable and is much smaller with regard to the Burtonport railway than that of *Hansard*. There was reluctance by the Dublin government to get too involved with a northwest Donegal railway straddling the border with its headquarters in Derry city. The Donegal Dáil deputies made scathing speeches about the

performance of the Burtonport railway and about the L&LSR directors and those responsible for the mess from time to time but there were few statements from ministers or cabinet that add much to our knowledge or insight of the railway.

The Gaeltacht Commission 1925¹¹ was instituted to provide the Cumann na nGaedheal government with a basis for action in Gaeltacht areas. It provides particular information on northwest Donegal because most of the area had Gaeltacht recognition. Most of the evidence was given by experts in the Irish language although many of these were not resident in the Gaeltacht. Much of the evidence presented included the aspirations and hopes of these Gaelic enthusiasts. The findings of the commission were very far reaching and ambitious with plans for industry, secondary education, development of resources and much more but, it was obvious from the beginning that the cost of implementation would prohibit the government from taking action. This, indeed, was the outcome and it led to six years of agitation throughout Donegal until De Valera's government assumed power in 1932. The best result of this agitation was that it provided extensive newspaper coverage over these years and gives us a great amount of information about life in Donegal during the latter 1920s and early 1930s.

*The Report of the Donegal Transport Commission, 1935*¹² which was set up to analyse the transport needs of the county, especially the demand for deep sea ports and the retention of the railways, gives much information about the economy of the county, the state of the roads and harbours, and the quality of rail and road transport available. Witnesses were called from many parts of the northwest but the quality of evidence was often poor with most individuals presenting exaggerated cases for development in their local areas and decrying the possible schemes for other regions. Many

¹¹ Gaeltacht Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Preservation of the Gaeltacht, 1926*, R23/1 - 27.

¹² *Report of County Donegal Transport Committee, 1935*, R 53/1.

pleas were made for the building of deep-sea ports but there was no unanimity as to where they should be located. Similar pleas were made for the retention of the Burtonport Railway. The commission disregarded most of the evidence and stated that there was no need for a deep-sea port and they added that most of those who advocated the retention of the railway were not using it. It recommended that the railway should be closed and that road transport should replace it.

The National Archives of Ireland, Dublin has a large collection of documents relating to the Burtonport Extension Railway. These include the Board of Trade's 'Green Series' which contains maps, drawings and documentation on the first attempts to bring railways into northwest Donegal and contains information on five attempts at railway extension into the area before those described in this thesis. The Office of Public Works (OPW) (Railways) files hold many documents concerning all four railways run by the L&LSR. The correspondence between the Board of Works and the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company is very rich for the years between 1903 and 1921. The L&LSR chairman, John McFarland, and his partner, Basil McCrea held the contract for the construction of the Stranorlar to Glenties railway (opened 1895) but they were sacked by the Board of Works for poor workmanship. This led to a prolonged court case with claims and counter claims dominating. As a consequence, relations were always poor between both parties and there is a fine edge to many of their communications. The reports from the Board of Works' inspector in Letterkenny, Mr Allely, provide much interesting information and many funny incidents. These add many facets to the story of the railway that are not apparent elsewhere, regarding overcrowding on trains, poor timekeeping, disciplining of staff, timetables, complaints from the public, relations with the Board of Works and much more. However, much of the documentation makes for tedious reading, consisting as it often does, of lengthy correspondence over long periods, about some minor

complaint or problem such as the price of coal, the speed of a train on a particular journey, overcrowding on a fair day or other minutiae concerning the railway. These documents are to be found in the National Archives of Ireland in brown parcels, unsorted and uncategorized. There are many documents dealing primarily with legal matters. Sadly, after partition, the new 'Free State' took little interest in the railway and there is a dearth of documentation from then onwards.

The National Archives of Ireland also contain the Bureau of Military History 1913-1921. These are the written statements from participants who were engaged in the struggle for independence during these years. There are thirty-one entries connected with County Donegal. A number of these are very relevant to this thesis because they are from people such as Eithne Coyle who was involved in holding up trains and burning Belfast goods and papers and from Denis Houston who was involved in an ambush on the train. Patrick Breslin's account provides the reader with the background to the growth of the Volunteers and the Sinn Fein movement in the Rosses, the operation of the Republican courts in the area and provides much insight into the mentality of those who were involved in bringing about the revolution. Many of the other accounts deal with important issues throughout the county. One must remember though that these accounts are selective and only contain what the contributor chose to make public.

In the Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Rathmines, Dublin, I found one extensive document dealing with the War of Independence and its effect on the Burtonport Extension Railway. It detailed the number of raids and incidents on the railway for a period of months in 1921. There were letters from the manager, Henry Hunt, about the impossibility of running a railway during the War of Independence.

Some excellent material regarding the Letterkenny and Burtonport Extension Railway is located in the National Archives in Kew, London.¹³

¹³ 'Burtonport Extension Railway' (NA, MT 6/2595 – 59374 and WO/22395/10).

These documents are listed in the bibliography. They include the County Inspector's monthly reports to the Chief Inspector of the RIC [CICMR] for the years from 1892 to 1921 which give details of boycotts, burnings, attacks on the railways, derailments, the evacuation of the army and RIC from the northwest, overcharging, accidents, weather, crops, secret organisations, potential dangers, and much more.¹⁴ Another file contains all the signed memorials from the various parishes of the northwest with the complaints from the areas and their demands for new management which led to the L&BER being taken out of the hands of Sir John McFarland in 1917. Also contained is Joseph Tatlow's report, 1917¹⁵ and details of the parliamentary questions and answers with the notation in the margins from various officials. The original contract for the operation of the railway is included in this file also. Various letters are included as well. These documents provide much important material that gives insight and understanding to a study of the railway.

The Donegal County Council Archives in Lifford contain the registration records of all motor vehicles registered in the county from 1903 onwards. As the Burtonport railway also opened in 1903, we can compare the developing competition that the railway received from road transport whether by hackney, taxi, van, lorry or bus over the years. After 1918 and the end of World War 1 motor vehicles became plentiful. This signalled the beginning of railway decline.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Nothing has been published to date that deals exclusively with the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway (L&BER) although it was an independent railway in its own right. Because it was operated by the

¹⁴ These are now on microfilm in the library, NUI Maynooth under title British in Ireland Series – CO 904 - and include the County Inspector's Crime Monthly Reports [CICMR] 1892-1921.

¹⁵ Joseph Tatlow, 'Report on Burtonport Railway 1917' (NA, The Burtonport Railway, MT 6/2595 – 59374).

Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company (L&LSR) it was always included with that company's lines in publications or articles.

Edward M. Patterson's wrote *The Lough Swilly Railway* (London, 1964). While this book deals with the whole of the Londonderry and Lough Swilly railway, of which the Burtonport Extension was only one of four lines, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, it devotes only twenty pages approximately out of 189 directly to the Burtonport railway. Patterson records the history of railway development in north Donegal briefly but accurately, especially during the fifty years before the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension came into being. He devotes one third of the book to the locomotives, carriages and working system of the railway and practically ignores any political, economic or social aspect of the railway. Some good tables give information on stations, fares, timetables, etc.

David Bell and Steve Flanders wrote *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway* (County Donegal Railway Restoration Society, undated). This is 'a visitors' guide to the old railway and all the bits that can still be seen'. It contains ninety-six pages which divides the total L&LSR into four tours. The photographs of trains, locomotives, stations, gatehouses and bridges are excellent as are the drawings of station layouts and routes. Good maps of the line are valuable inclusions also. Being a visitors' guide it is concerned mainly with directions for the enthusiast who wishes to tour the line and re-live some of the memories of olden days.

Steve Flanders' *Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway – an Irish railway pictorial* (Leicester, England, 1997) is a sixty-four page pictorial record of the whole of the L&LSR network including its buses and road transport as well as the trains and railways. The collection of photographs is very good and interesting but they concentrate on the machinery and rolling stock, stations and houses. There are simple notes accompanying each photograph giving a cursory account and general information only.

Michael H. C. Baker's, *The Irish narrow gauge railways* (Surrey, 1999) deals with the Irish narrow gauge railways and devotes ten pages to the entire L&LSR network. These pages are dominated by photographs of the stock and locomotives with only brief facts and some important dates on the opening and closing of the various lines of the system.

Tom Ferris's, *The Irish narrow gauge, a pictorial history* (Leicester, 1993) contains twenty-seven pages on the L&LSR network with many photographs and general information on the locomotives, rolling stock and history covering a period of more than 100 years. The inclusion of the Ordnance Survey maps for the areas between Burtonport and Derry is less than successful because they are reduced too much to present the reader with detail of the landscape.

Thomas Middlemass, *An encyclopaedia of narrow gauge railways of Great Britain and Ireland* (Somerset, 1991) devotes eight pages to the entire L&LSR network with two photographs of stock on each page. He gives some interesting but brief facts on railway development but clearly his work is for the railway enthusiast and not for the historian.

The *Railway Magazine* and Irish Railway Record Society have contained articles about travel on the Burtonport railway or about some aspect of its working. These interesting items are too many to mention here but where referred to in the narrative, they will be documented in the footnotes. However, many of the items may only contain brief reference to the Burtonport railway or some aspect of it.

LOCAL HISTORY IN DONEGAL

Most articles about Donegal local history, especially those about the northwest and Gaeltacht regions, were written in the Irish language during the first half of the twentieth century. There was a tendency to follow the storytelling tradition in the fashion of the Gaelic writers such as the Mac

Grianna brothers from Ranafast, in documenting the lifestyle and times of the people. Most of these works had a proliferation of details regarding religion, superstition, poverty, emigration, matchmaking, work on the land, fighting and struggle while upholding the traits of decency, honesty, and conformity to the mores of the community. They provide valuable insights to many aspects of life but they lacked analysis and were rather confined in the breadth of their treatment of life. But the latter half of the twentieth century experienced a great increase in the scope and variety of topics which were written about Donegal and most of these were in the English language although the Irish language material still continued to be produced but with more analysis. The use of a wide variety of sources normally used for scholarly discourse became a feature of this new writing. In other words the footnote entered Donegal local history. The *Donegal Annual* played a major role in this development presenting a selection of well-researched articles each year since its foundation in 1946 until the present day.¹⁶ The articles moved forward from the biographies, in both Irish and English, of former years to analytical studies such as those of Niall O Dónaill's *Na glúnta Rosannacha* (1974), Niall Mac Fhionnlaoich's *Dr McGinley and his times* (1985), Desmond Murphy's *Derry, Donegal and modern Ulster* (1981), Nolan, Ronayne & Dunlevy (eds) *Donegal History & Society* (1995), Ben O'Donnell's *The story of the Rosses* (1999), Gerry McLaughlin's *Cloughaneely* (2002), and many more. Many parish histories and local studies, such as *Glór Ghaoth Dobhair, Scáthlán, Footprints through the Rosses, Stairsheanchas Ghaoth Dobhair* and *A short history of Gweedore* are but a few examples of this new trend.

Each year brings forth further research and the publication of new material which unveils deeper layers of Donegal society over the centuries.

¹⁶ The publications of 1947 and 1948 were titled *The Journal of the County Donegal Historical Society*. From 1950 onwards the name was *Donegal Annual*.

As the secondary sources in the bibliography indicate there is a fine reserve of material for the historian to utilize.

LAYOUT OF THESIS

The thesis is set out in an introduction, eleven chapters and a short conclusion.

The first chapter sets out the condition of northwest Donegal during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It attempts to set the scene for the reader by detailing the type of society prevailing there during those years. The economic, cultural, social, educational and linguistic aspects of its prevailing world are dealt with together with the stresses and failings which created great turbulence among a predominantly peasant population which led to demands for railway extension in order to relieve destitution and improve society.

The second chapter deals with the development of railways in Donegal up to 1895 and the attempts during the years 1880 to 1891 to secure railway extension for northwest Donegal. Although these attempts ended in failure, they are worth analysing because of the insight we obtain about the percolating effects of government policy and how it effected the people at the most remote and lowest strata in Irish society. Donegal society is analysed in this chapter from the point of view of influence, religion, landholding, and wealth, all elements that played a part in railway development.

The third chapter deals with the changes made by government in order to improve the lot of the peasantry in such areas as northwest Donegal and the effects on local society that eventually led to the railway being granted in 1897. The reports of commissions of investigation are dealt with and these provide much knowledge on the working of society in this remote region during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The fourth chapter deals with the planning of the railway, legal procedures and purchases of land, and then the construction of the actual line which took place between 1899 and 1903. This provides a tremendous insight into the operations of the Board of Works in Ireland and its dealings with various bodies. The method of construction of the railway is dealt with as well as accidents, problems, disagreements, appointment of staff, and much more until the railway to Burtonport opened on 9 March 1903. The changes which had taken place in the northwest during the short spell of years between 1890 and 1903 gives an indication of the influences operating in Donegal society and the advancement taking place in the county at that time.

The fifth chapter deals with the first years of operation from 1903 to 1910, approximately, when the performance of the new railway is analysed and the changes which resulted from its arrival are documented and commented upon. This was a period in northwest Donegal when great progress was made in housing standards, the development of fishing, the establishment of the Templecrone Cooperative Society,¹⁷ the work of the Gaelic League and the Irish Ireland pursuit. It was also a time when the clergy dominated almost every aspect of life in the area. The new railway had a part to play in each of these developments and its contribution, especially in the modernisation of society, is measured together with its failings, which were many.

The sixth chapter deals with the years before the First World War. The Burtonport railway was doing very well and had been producing much better returns than had been forecast for it. Northwest Donegal society was peaceful and was making steady progress and the railway was playing an important part in bringing change and outside influences into those

¹⁷ The Templecrone Agricultural and Co-operative Society was known locally as the Cope. It is said that local people found it difficult to pronounce co-operative or even co-op so a compromise was reached with Cope. This name is extant and in normal usage at present.

communities. But there were many complaints about the performance of the railway and its poor timekeeping.

Chapter 7 deals with the period of the First World War. The government took control of all Irish railways which action was to change utterly the direction of railway business for many years to come. However, there were many further changes in nationalist, political, economic and social spheres also and the Burtonport railway was subject to change and pressure from all of these fronts, leading eventually to a public enquiry and the humiliation of losing its chairman and being put under independent management.

Chapter 8 covers the period of the most intense change in Irish history with the War of Independence. Railways became important weapons for all sides in these hostilities and the Burtonport Railway seemed to suffer more than most because it became the principal weapon used by the Volunteers to break the power of law, order and authority in the northwest. Normal business was impossible due to derailments, blockages, attacks and robberies. The Government of Ireland Act 1920¹⁸ which separated Donegal from Derry and split the L&LSR railway system in two left the whole L&LSR system with a very indefinite future.

The ninth chapter deals with the Civil War. Just when the management might have hoped for calm and the restoration of normal business, the actions of the Irregulars, in particular, almost brought the railway to closure. From being a profitable railway before the First World War there was now no money and business had fallen away. There was talk of closure even though the railway had only been open for twenty years.

Chapter 10 deals with the aftermath of the Civil War and the period of native government up to 1930. Great hopes had been put in the Dublin government to rescue the railway and restore it to greatness again.

¹⁸ The Government of Ireland Act 1920, 10 & 11 Geo. V., c. 67.

However, the many demands on that administration left little money for the poverty stricken northwest Donegal region or the railway although subsidies were made available, year after year. The economy of the county was stagnant, industries closed, and fishing was only a shadow of former days. The proliferation of lorries and motor traffic during the twenties left all railways fighting a losing battle and the Burtonport Railway was no different except that the lack of roads in the remote regions of the county deferred its closure for a number of years.

The final chapter deals with the 1930s and 1940s. De Valera came to power with a Fianna Fail government in 1932 but tariffs and controls did little to help the railway. In 1935 the Carndonagh Railway closed down and the Burtonport line might have been closed also except that motorised transport could not be run into the Rosses because of the appalling condition of the roads. It was 1939 before the buses and lorries came to that region and a decision was then made to close down the railway. However, the Second World War was soon raging and coal and oil were in short supply so the turf that covered most of Donegal became a valuable asset. As a consequence, the railway received a reprieve but, by that time, the rails had been lifted between Burtonport and Gweedore. The railway ran between Letterkenny and Gweedore until its closure in 1947.

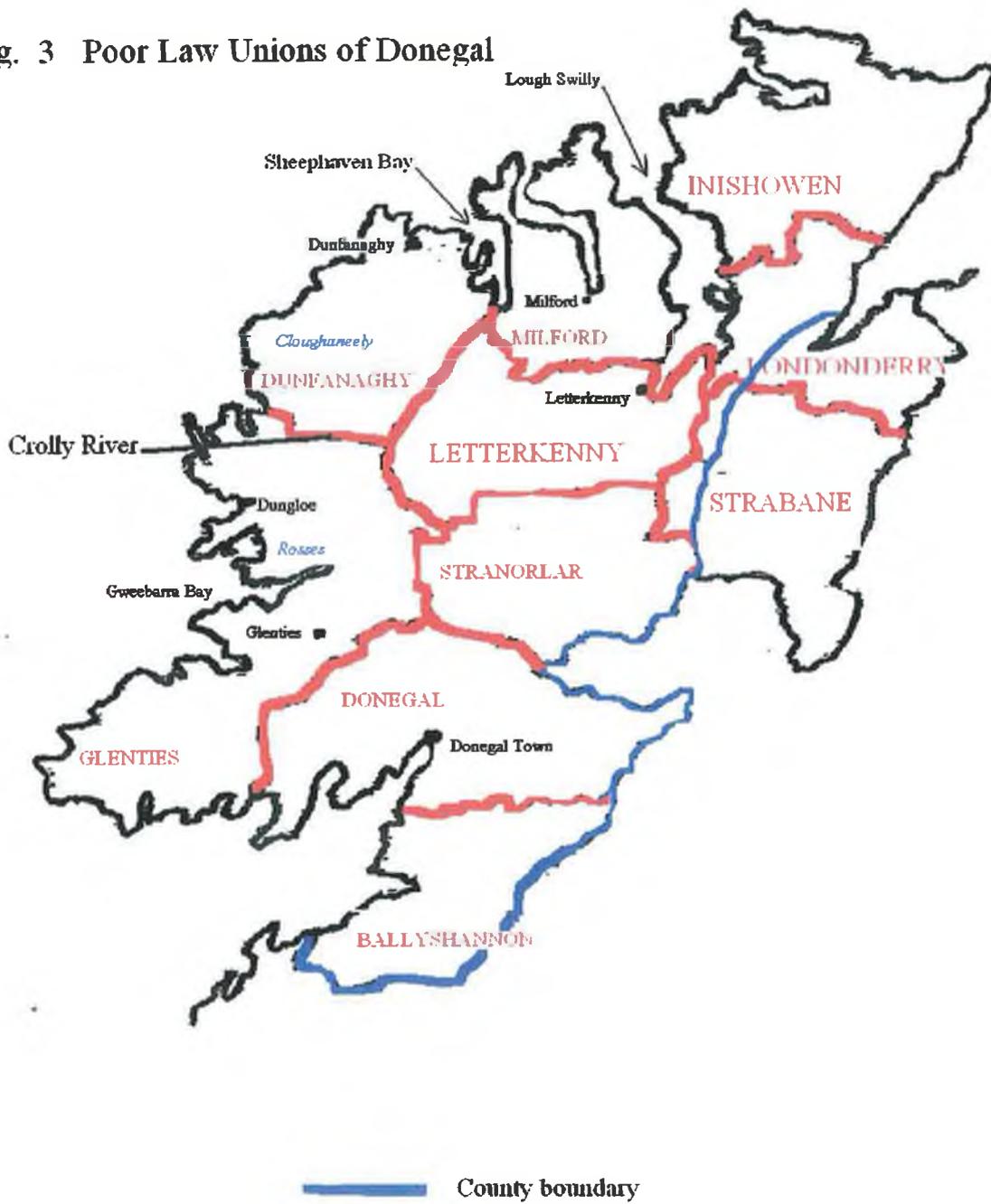
But all of these chapters are not confined solely to the railway and its workings. The railway was there to serve communities of people and it is important that some analysis should be presented of their way of life and the conditions under which they lived. An effort will be made throughout each chapter to give some insight into the world of those people especially their lifestyle, economy, migratory practices, religion, education, housing, health, population trends, and general way of life. It is intended that the modernisation of society in the northwest and the growth of stages of respectability will become apparent during the narrative. Because of constraints of space these analyses must be limited. However, I believe that

Fig. 2 Northwest Donegal



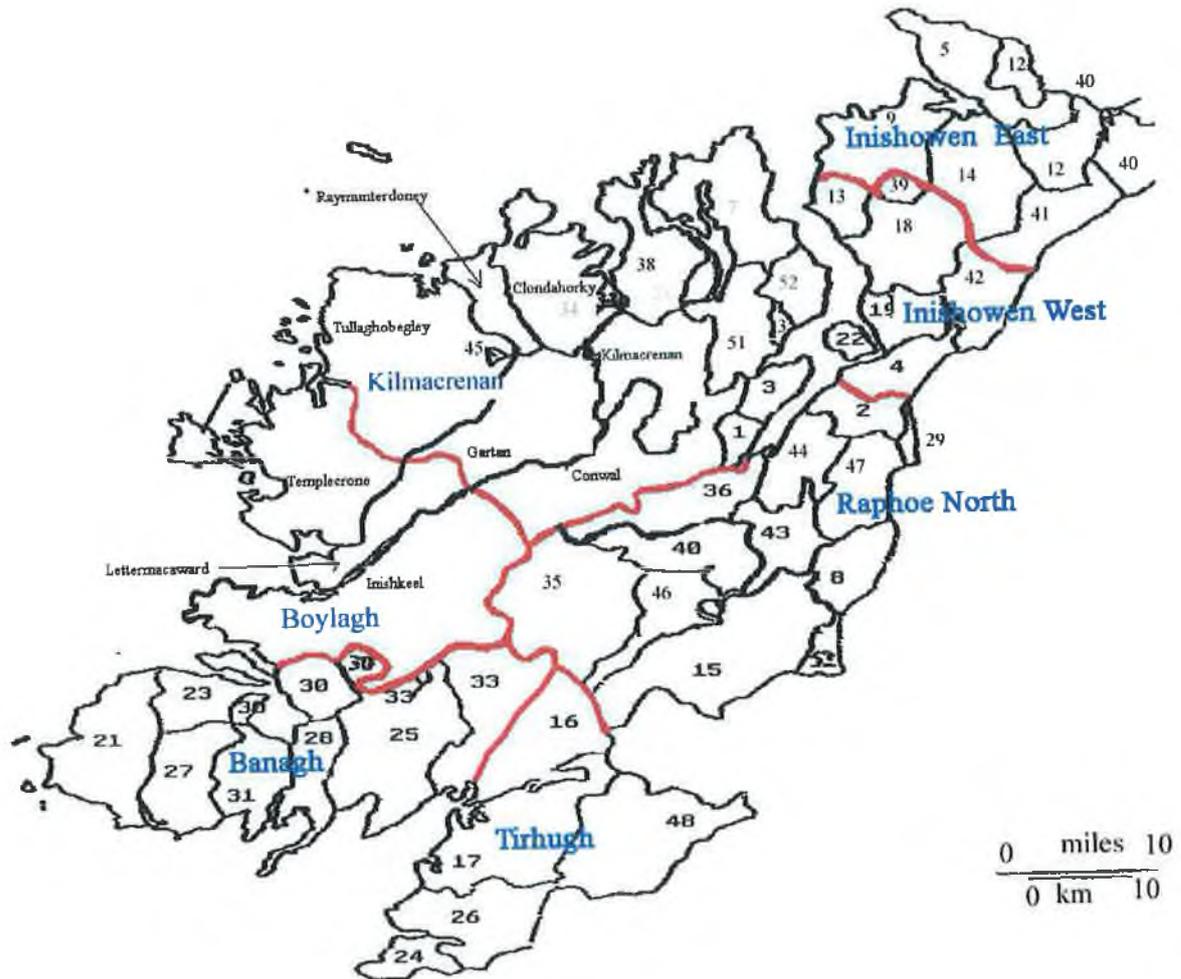
Source: Drawn by Frank Sweeney

Fig. 3 Poor Law Unions of Donegal



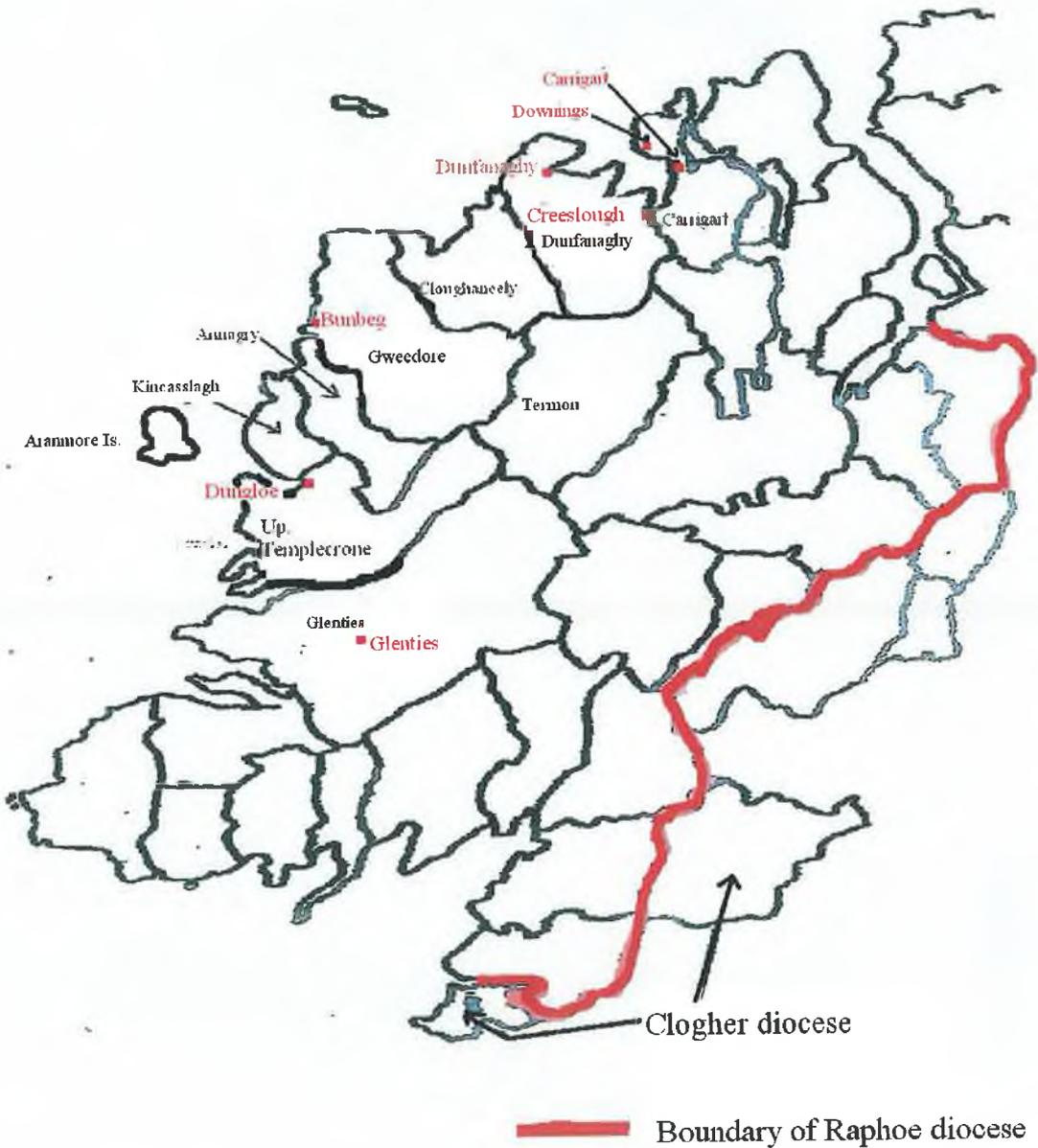
Source: Drawn by Frank Sweeney.

Fig. 4. Baronies and civil parishes of County Donegal



Source: Donegal history and society, p. 356

Fig. 5 Northwest Catholic parishes



Source: Donegal History & Society, p. 470

such information enriches and enlarges our picture of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway and especially, its social context and the environment in which it operated.

THE REGION OF NORTHWEST DONEGAL - A DEFINITION

The rift valley that stretches from Gweebarra Bay on the west coast of Donegal, in a north-easterly direction as far as Sheephaven Bay, on the north coast, creates the most natural division between northwest Donegal and the rest of the county (fig. 1). From the long fjord of the Gweebarra inlet which reaches inland as far as Doochary, this rift valley runs deeply along the Owenwee River into Lough Barra, situated between the Glendowan Mountains to the east and the long range of the Derryveagh Mountains to the west. It continues its north easterly path through the elongated Lough Beagh where Glenveigh Castle is situated, before continuing its journey along the Owencarrow River which flows into Glen Lough, south of the village of Glen, five kilometres east of the town of Creeslough. From Glen Lough, the Lackagh River runs into Sheephaven Bay near Doe Castle (Fig. 1 and 2).

Because of its location behind the Derryveagh Mountains the northwest was traditionally referred to by the residents of east Donegal as 'the back country' and indeed this term can still be heard today.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF THE NORTHWEST REGION

The northwest was covered by two baronies. South of the Crolla River, the civil parishes of Templecrone and Lettermacaward, (these two combined were commonly called the Rosses) are situated in the barony of Boylagh (fig. 4). North of the Crolla River the civil parishes of Tullaghobegley, Raymunterdoney, Clondahorky, Gartan, Kilmacrenan and Meevagh are situated in the barony of Kilmacrenan (fig. 4). The Crolla

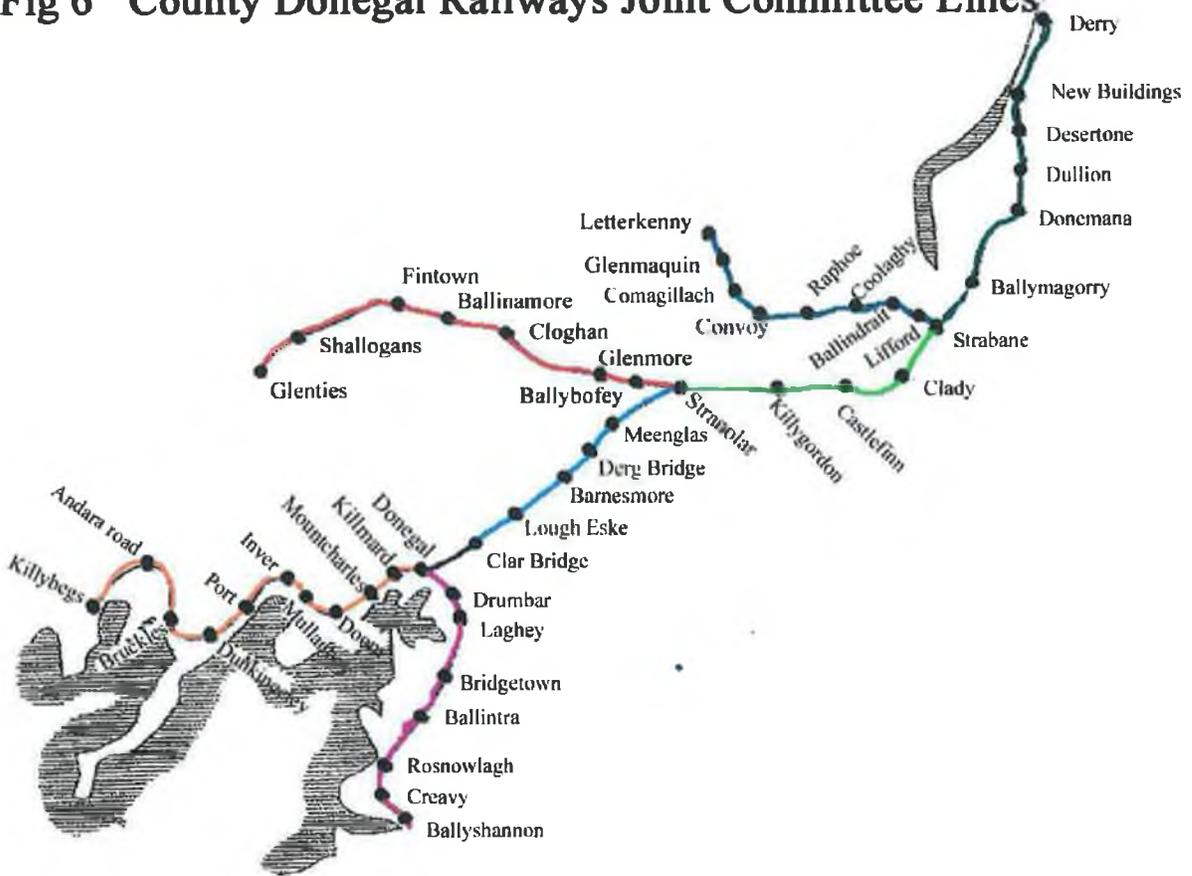
River also formed the boundary between two poor law unions. The civil parishes of Templecrone and Lettermacaward were situated in the Glenties Poor Law Union which had its headquarters and workhouse in the town of Glenties (fig. 3). The civil parishes of Tullaghobegley, Raymunterdoney and Clondahorkey were situated in the Dunfanaghy Poor Law Union which had its headquarters and workhouse in that town also.

While the civil parishes have remained static the Catholic parishes have been subject to change over the years, especially as more priests became available during the latter years of the nineteenth century. Originally, the civil parish of Templecrone was the same as the Catholic parish of Templecrone. In 1836 the Catholic parish was divided into Upper Templecrone which covered the area between the town of Dungloe and Gweebarra, with its parish church in Dungloe and Lower Templecrone which stretched from Dungloe Town to the Crolly River and included the island of Aranmore and had its parish church in Kincasslagh. (The parish is often referred to as Kincasslagh). In 1945 this latter parish was again divided when the area between Kincasslagh and the Crolly River was created as the parish of Annagry (fig.4).

The Catholic parish of Tullaghobegley, coterminous with the civil parish of the same name, was split in 1834 into the parishes of Gweedore with its parish church in Derrybeg and Cloughaneely with its parish church in Gortahork. In 1998 the parish of Falcarragh was created around the town of Falcarragh (fig. 5).

The Catholic parish of Dunfanaghy embraced almost all of the civil parish of Clondahorky and its parish church is situated in the town of Dunfanaghy. (Fig 4) The Catholic parish of Termon is almost identical to the civil parish of Gartan and both cover much of the inland and mountain area of the northwest (fig. 4 and 5).

Fig 6 County Donegal Railways Joint Committee Lines



County Donegal Railways Joint Committee lines.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Strabane to Stranolar |  | Opened 7 September 1863 |
| Stranolar to Drumminin (Clar Bridge) |  | Opened 25 April 1882 |
| Drumminin to Donegal Town |  | Opened 16 September 1889 |
| Donegal Town to Killybegs |  | Opened 18 August 1889 |
| Stranolar to Glenties |  | Opened 3 June 1895 |
| Strabane to Derry |  | Opened 1 August 1900 |
| Donegal to Ballyshannon |  | Opened 21 September 1903 |
| Strabane to Letterkenny |  | Opened 1 January 1909 |

Source: Thomas Middlemass, *Narrow gauge railways of Great Britain and Ireland*, p 141

THE VARIOUS RAILWAYS OF COUNTY DONEGAL

THE RAILWAYS IN THE SOUTH AND EAST OF DONEGAL (Fig. 6)

On 7 September 1863 the Finn Valley Railway Company opened a line from Strabane to Stranorlar. On 25 April 1882, the West Donegal Railway Company opened a line from Stranorlar to Druminin outside Donegal Town. The section from Druminin to Donegal Town was opened on 16 September 1889.

In 1892 The Finn Valley Railway Company and the West Donegal Companies merged under the name Donegal Railway Company which was more commonly called the County Donegal Railways. On 18 August 1893 this company operating under the title 'The West Donegal Light Railway (Killybegs)' opened a railway from Donegal Town to Killybegs and later opened the Stranorlar to Glenties railway on 3 June 1895. On 21 September 1903 the Donegal to Ballyshannon railway opened under the control of the County Donegal Railways.

In 1903, the Midland Railway of England acquired the Belfast & Northern Counties Railway and they operated beside the Donegal Railway Company at Derry which entity they offered to purchase. Eventually, on 1 May 1906 the Midland Railway and the Great Northern Railway jointly purchased the County Donegal Railways and ran it under the new name of County Donegal Railway Joint Committee (CDRJC). On 1 January 1909 the CDRJC opened the Strabane to Letterkenny railway thereby bringing its total mileage up to 124 ½ miles.

THE RAILWAYS OF NORTH AND NORTHWEST DONEGAL (Fig. 7)

The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company began operations out of Derry city in 1852 with its focus firmly fixed on County Donegal. They opened their railway from Derry City to Bunrana on 31 December 1863 and operated it themselves.

The Letterkenny Railway Company opened a railway from the town of Letterkenny to Tooban Junction where it joined up with the Buncrana Railway on 30 June 1883. This section was soon in serious financial trouble and in 1887 the Board of Works took ownership of it and signed a thirty-year contract with the L&LSR to operate it.

The Buncrana to Carndonagh railway was opened on 1 July 1901. It was built with a free grant from the government and the L&LSR were the operators of the line.

The last railway to be built was the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway. It was opened on 9 March 1903. It was built with a free grant from government with the exception of £5,000 which was guaranteed locally. The L&LSR operated the railway.

It is this last railway that is the subject of this thesis. While the L&LSR liked to claim all four railways as their own and treated them all under the one title of the 'Lough Swilly Railways', in truth only the Derry to Buncrana Railway belonged to the L&LSR.

THE BOARD OF WORKS

In the early years of the nineteenth century sporadic attempts had been made with the aid of public money to improve inland navigation, to encourage coastal fisheries and to explore the economic potentialities of the vast bogs that covered so much of the country. In addition the government were often obliged to grapple with unemployment by making grants or loans for public works, notably the building of roads or bridges. To deal with these diverse problems the old eighteenth century institution – known as the Barrack Board or Board of Works – was reconstituted in 1831. It speedily began to gather other matters besides relief works into its hands and to assume responsibility for the upkeep of public buildings, drainage,

canals and waterways and fisheries. It performed vigorously in the organising of public works and, on the whole, competently during the famine period, or at least so long as relief works remained the principal panacea for the crisis.

In the second half of the nineteenth century it had become so indispensable to the government as to attract more duties, many of them arising out of the trend towards 'constructive' legislation. Thus it was empowered to lend money for land improvement, for farm buildings, for labourers' cottages and for working class dwellings in the towns; it arbitrated between railway companies and landowners over the acquisition of lands needed for track; it investigated promotional schemes for railroads and tramways; it constructed piers and harbours and in general it watched over the whole public building programme of the government.¹⁹

COMPARATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY

A review of railway publications would lead the reader to the conclusion that a book has probably been written about every railway or branch railway in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The growth in local historical studies has contributed greatly to this proliferation of material as have the railway societies and special interest groups with the result that short popular histories or enthusiasts' manuals tend to proliferate. Most publications deal with the initial negotiations for a railway to a particular place, the construction of the line, the locomotives and rolling stock, technical data, accidents and incidents and eventual decline. The larger railways normally receive much better treatment and in-depth analyses than minor lines because they inter-connect the major towns, have greater impact on farming, manufacture, development of resources, the

¹⁹ The above is taken from F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (Fontana, London, 1963) p. 81. Lyons quoted as his source: R. B. McDowell, *The Irish administration* (London, 1964) pp 203 – 214.

ports, and population movement. Little analysis is presented regarding the impact and influence which the smaller, more remote railways had on particular communities or their function as agents of change or development in those areas.

Specialist publishers such as David and Charles of Newton Abbot and London have adopted particular formulae in dealing with railway analysis in their many publications. This has led to books about 150 pages in length with one half giving a cursory history of the lifetime of the railroad and the second half devoted to the working of the system and the motive power and rolling stock. Edward M. Patterson's books on the Donegal railways and a number of northern railways are typical samples. Again little attention is paid to the economic or social impact made by railways or their place as agents of change or progress in the various communities in which they operated.

One of the best publications for in-depth analysis of railway influence is David Turnock's *An historical geography of the railways in Great Britain and Ireland* (Aldershot, Hants, 1998). Half of this book of 366 pages deals with the railway networks but the second part deals with 'the railway impact' and provides many insights for comparison between the various regions as well as dealing with the impact on city, town and country.

Kevin O'Connor's *Ironing the land* (Dublin, 1999) is a valuable publication dealing exclusively with Ireland. It provides many insights and gives a good account of railway development. However, its weakness is that it deals with all of the railway development in Ireland over nearly two centuries within the confines of 146 pages and is therefore limited in its depth of analysis.

On old publication and yet one of the best is J.C. Conroy's *A history of railways in Ireland* (London, 1928), 386 pages. It deals with the various acts, state intervention, rates and charges, railway theories and

philosophies, political developments and the various railway commissions throughout the nineteenth century and also deals with the years after partition in a simple and clear manner which makes it valuable reading for any student of railway development. It is well laced with critical analysis and comment throughout.

Two essays by Joseph Lee and Miriam Daly in *Travel and transport in Ireland*²⁰ provide excellent analysis on the performance of the railways in Ireland and the eventual demise of many of them as a result of the pressures of World War 1 and road transport during the 1920s.

Many references and good information can often be found in parish histories or local publications regarding the impact of railways. These would have particular local significance not always applicable to other regions and are often more interesting than the overall analysis applied in many publications.

All in all there is no shortage of material for the interested reader.

²⁰ Joseph Lee, 'The golden age of Irish railways', and Miriam Daly, 'The return to the roads' in Kevin B. Nowlan (ed.) *Travel and transport in Ireland* (reprint, Dublin, 1993).

CHAPTER 1

THE CONDITION OF NORTHWEST DONEGAL

1875 - 1900

Northwest Donegal was 'a dreary wilderness of rugged mountain wastes and heaths broken in the west into abrupt rocky heights ... unsuitable for either grazing or tillage' when Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary* was published in 1837.¹ By 1845, the patriotism of John Mitchel was sorely tested during his travels in the same region by 'rain, rain, rain, country utterly barren and desolate. I have seen wild tracts enough I have travelled through these two or three days past about sixty miles of unrelieved desolation, extending on all sides as far as the eye could reach'.²

The Quaker philanthropist, James Hack Tuke, was 'heartily glad' to see the lights of the Gweedore Hotel in 1880 after having travelled from Glenties through Dungloe and Annagry where

the little farms, laying among the granite rocks, look as if they have been pelted with enormous stones, the huge masses or boulders of granite being scattered over them in all directions. The labour being exerted by the people in reclaiming their little patches must have been enormous.³

This then is the selected theatre for our study of the land, life and society which, in general, can be regarded as the area west of the town of Letterkenny but more particularly for the purposes of this thesis, will concentrate on the region stretching from Sheephaven Bay with the town of

¹ S. Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837), ii, p. 603.

² Maureen Wall, 'County Donegal in 1845, an excerpt from the journal of John O'Hagan', in *Donegal Annual*, 1970, vol. ix, no. 2, p. 170. O'Hagan accompanied Mitchel on his travels.

³ James Hack Tuke, *Irish distress and its remedies* (London, 1880), p. 22.

Creeslough at its southernmost inlet, around Bloody Foreland headland to Gweebarra Bay in the west (see fig. 2)

North and west of this region was the inhospitable, indented coastline of the Atlantic and to its east was the dominating, dividing spine of the Derryveagh and Blue Stack mountain ranges, shielding the northwest from economic, social, cultural and political activity and advancement in the rest of Ireland. The 'strange, wild, roadless place'⁴ named the Rosses which consisted of the District Electoral Divisions of Annagry, Rutland, Dungloe, Maghery, Crovehy, Lettermacaward and Doochary consisted of 66,634 acres; 'bleak' Gweedore which consisted of the District Electoral Divisions of Meenaclady (part of), Dunlewy (part of) and Magheraclogher had 41,314 acres (this area would equate with the present Catholic parish of Gweedore); Cloughaneely which contained the District Electoral Divisions of Cross Roads, Dunlewy (part of) and Gortahork had 51,363 acres and Dunfanaghy which contained the District Electoral Divisions of Ards, Creenasmear, Creeslough, Doecastle and Dunfanaghy had 32,215 acres. The waters of the northwest coast contained 6,382 acres of islands which included Aranmore, Gola, Owey, Innismaan, Innisrerr, Innisboffin and Tory, making, in all, a total of 197,908 acres. The poor law valuation per acre of the Rosses was 13½*d.*, of Gweedore 9½*d.* and of Cloughaneely 18*d.* making it one of the poorest regions in the country.⁵ In this area the agricultural source base was very limited because of the dearth of arable land. In all of the Glenties Union, 58 per cent of the land was unproductive and only 11 per cent was cropped in 1898.⁶ In 1910, the poet AE (George William Russell) marvelled at the survival of a community in the Rosses of Donegal 'where the bare bones protrude through the starved skin of the

⁴ *DI*, 8 Jan. 1892, p. 2, letter from Mrs Sinclair, a philanthropist helping the poor.

⁵ Congested Districts Board, 'Baseline reports' for the Rosses, Gweedore, Cloughaneely, Dunfanaghy, Aranmore and Tory. (Hereafter CDB).

⁶ *Agricultural statistics 1898*, Co. Donegal, Glenties Union, p. 35.

earth'.⁷ Gweedore, to the north of the Rosses, was little better with its shallow bog having to be broken and fertilised to make enough soil for household crop production. However, in Cloughaneely and around Dunfanaghy, there were some stretches of fertile land, especially along the shore and in the river valleys although the surrounding hills limited agricultural expansion. An English visitor in 1890 was surprised to find that 'in the neighbourhood of Falcarragh the land is rich'⁸ but the northwestern region of the Donegal seaboard was 'still as Carlyle called it "a continent of crags" with immense tracts of rock and bog to which they [local people] cling with a strange tenacity'.⁹

Remote though the region was, it drew the interest of adventure speculators from an early age. Sir Albert Conyngham purchased large tracts of Donegal, including the Rosses, from his cousin, Richard Murray, in the 1660s and it was to remain in that family's name until it was transferred to the ownership of small holders at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century the Conynghams were absentee landlords who entrusted the running and management of their estates to agents. The Olphert family, of Dutch-Protestant stock, had come to Cloughaneely in the seventeenth century and were still resident there as the nineteenth century closed. Lord George Hill acquired 23,000 acres in Gweedore for £6,000 in 1838 and added to it subsequently until he owned 24,189 acres in 1862.¹⁰

The speculative atmosphere in the 1840s, especially after the Famine, enabled a number of investors to acquire land in the northwest. John Austen purchased in the 1840s and James Russell, Revd A. B. Nixon and James Obins Woodhouse, a successful Dublin solicitor, were just some who bought their estates in 1845. This latter type of landlord differed

⁷ Pat Bolger, 'The Congested Districts Board and co-ops' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy (eds), *Donegal history and society* (Dublin, 1995), pp 649-650.

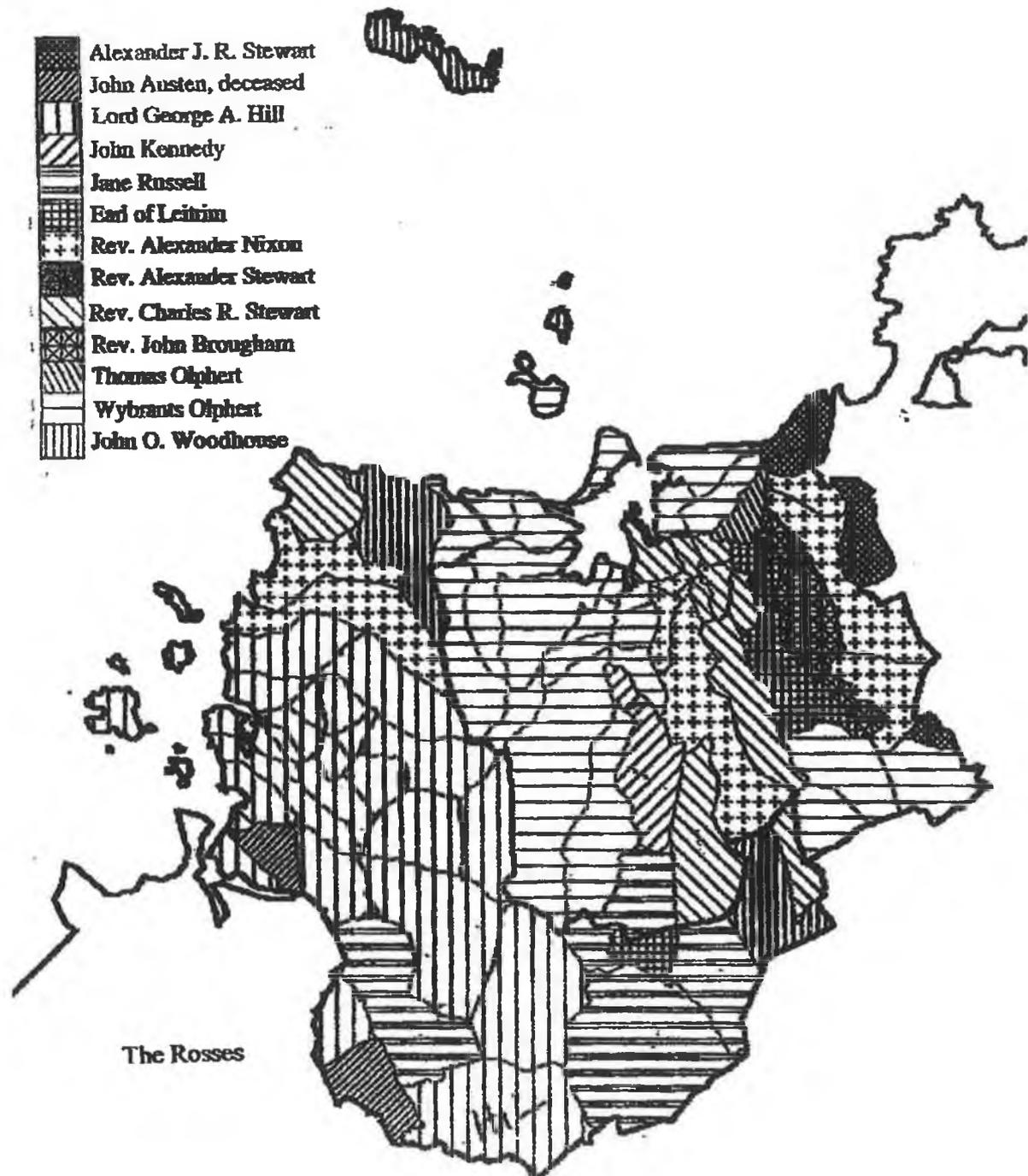
⁸ *LS*, 7 Oct. 1890, p. 3.

⁹ *DI*, 27 Mar. 1891, p. 1. Letter from Dorothy Roberts, London.

¹⁰ Noel Ó Gallchóir, 'Faoi scáth na hEargala' in *Donegal Annual*, 1996, p.54.

Fig. 8 Estate owners in Gweedore & Cloughaneely

in 1857



Source: Donegal History and society, p. 559

somewhat from the older types in that their investments were made with the intention of deriving immediate substantial profits from the lands acquired but their initiatives soon led to conflict with the native population who insisted on maintaining their traditional practices and lifestyle.¹¹

The 1840s and 1850s were years of developing sheep walks in the Scottish fashion and the mountains of Donegal were seen as suitable for the development of the sheep industry. Revd Nixon soon ran into trouble with his tenantry in Gweedore when he banned the use of their mountain grazing which severely affected the common practice of transhumance or boolying and he was lucky to escape when an attempt was made on his life in 1858.¹² Hill made strenuous efforts to reform the traditional rundale system of land cultivation, by which a person might own a number of small, disparate plots of ground scattered over a large area. He tried to arrange the land in much larger self-contained cuts and strips which were fenced and had the house situated on the farm.¹³ As a further measure he attempted to limit the shoreline, traditionally utilized by the people for the collection of seaweed to be used as manure, and the mountain commonages which were used for grazing especially during the summer when booleying was a common practice.¹⁴

In Cloughaneely, the landlord, Olphert, brought in Scottish herdsman to establish sheep-runs on the mountains thereby forbidding the use of this grazing to the ordinary tenants. On the margins of Cloughaneely, John George Adair and Lord Leitrim were enforcing change at a similar pace and many of the lesser landlords were copying the actions of their betters. Naturally, there was resistance from the tenantry. There was a 'marked increase in agrarian crime between the Famine and the outbreak of the

¹¹ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Agrarian improvement and social unrest: Lord George Hill and the Gaoth Dobhair sheep war' in *Donegal history and society* (Dublin, 1995), pp 552-573. Also Proinnsias Ó Gallchobhair, *History of landlordism in Donegal* (Ballyshannon, 1962), chapter 2.

¹² Mac Suibhne, 'The Gaoth Dobhair sheep war', p. 573.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp 558-563.

¹⁴ Ó Gallchobhair, *History of landlordism in Donegal*, p. 23.

sheep-war in the winter of 1856-7' in Gweedore.¹⁵ The sheep-war itself lasted from 1856 to 1861 and was to leave a residual bitterness that became the focus of land agitation and rent campaigns in Gweedore during the years of the Irish land war. The Derryveagh evictions in 1861 saw 143 young men and women being forced to depart for Australia from the estate of John George Adair while their parents were thrown on the roadsides as their cabins were destroyed.¹⁶ Lord Leitrim was murdered in 1878. The 1880s and early '90s saw the land war and the Plan of Campaign in force on the Hill, Swiney, Stewart and Olphert estates, bringing the century to a close after more than fifty years of agitation, evictions, rent rises, murder, rent campaigns, boycotting and general turmoil.¹⁷

The absenteeism of the marquis of Conyngham from his Rosses' estates did not have the same negative effect on the tenantry in that region as did the presence of the resident landlords of Gweedore and Cloughaneely. Mr Hammond, Conyngham's agent, departed from that post in 1893 to a fine eulogy from Fr Walker, the parish priest of Lower Templecrone, in the Rosses. 'He (Mr Hammond) will be able to look back on Conyngham's estate and say he had not left behind him any evicted farms, any ruined roof-trees, any tear of the widow or cry of the orphan. I verily believe that in all Ireland there is not a better agent than Mr Hammond' and the cheers of the people rang out, 'we will have no other agent but Mr Hammond'.¹⁸ A few months later Fr Walker was 'taking the initiative in the matter of ... organising a presentation and testimonial to the agent from ... the inhabitants of the Upper and Lower Rosses'.¹⁹ Hammond's genial stewardship had given the Rosses a calmed and quiet

¹⁵ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'The Gaoth Dobhair sheep war' in *Donegal history and society*, p. 558.

¹⁶ See W. E. Vaughan, *Sin, sheep and Scotsmen; John George Adair and the Glenveigh evictions* (Belfast, 1861) for the story of the evictions.

¹⁷ Breandán Mac Suibhne in *Donegal history and society*, pp 547-582; Proinsias Ó Gallchobhair, *History of landlordism in Donegal*, pp 22-41; Seán 'ac Fhionnlaoidh, *Scéal Ghaoth Dobhair* (Dublin, 1983), pp 60-83.

¹⁸ *DI*, 14 July 1893, p. 2.

¹⁹ *DI*, 22 Sept. 1893, p. 3.

Fig. 9 Population trends in northwest Donegal 1841-1911

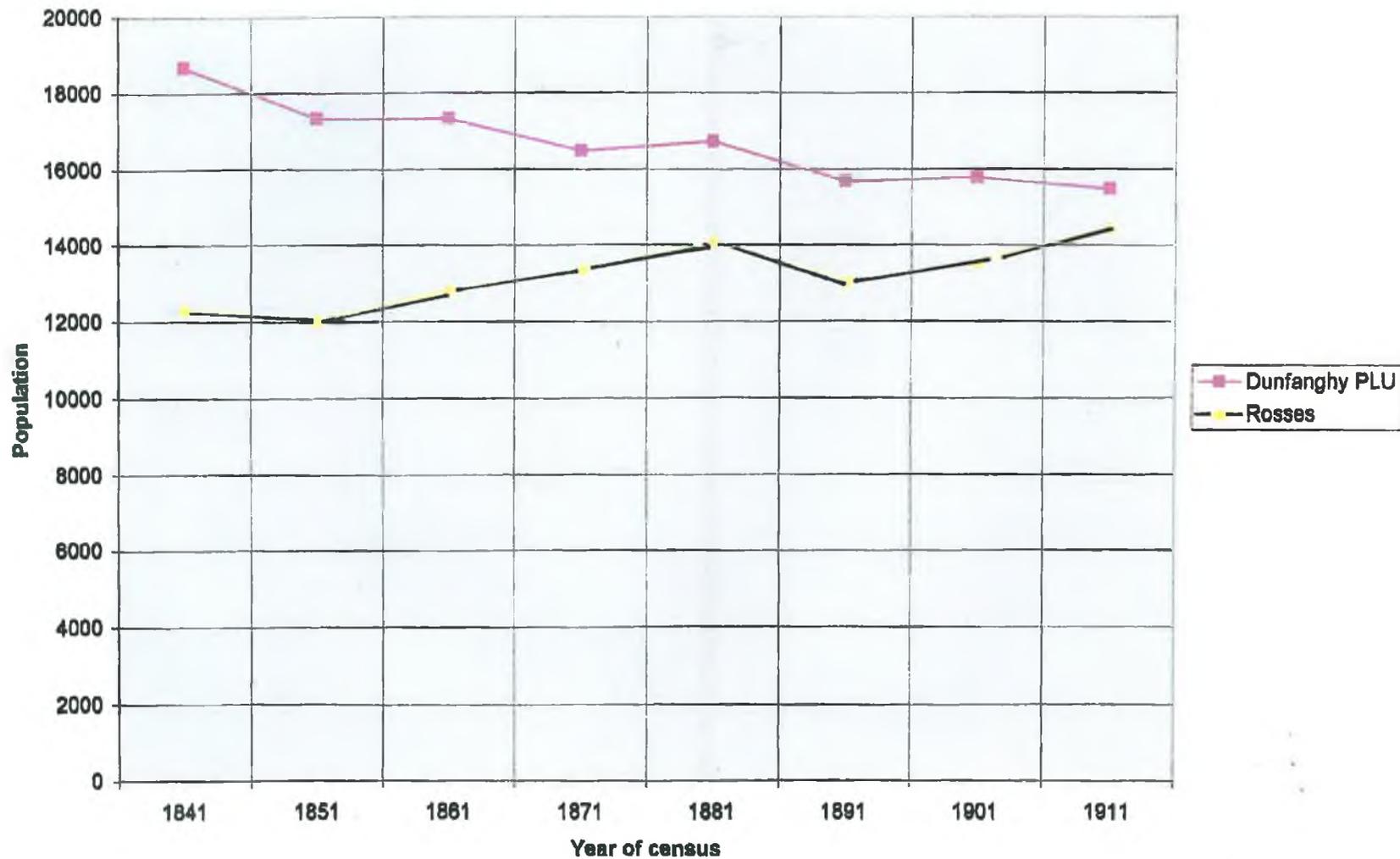
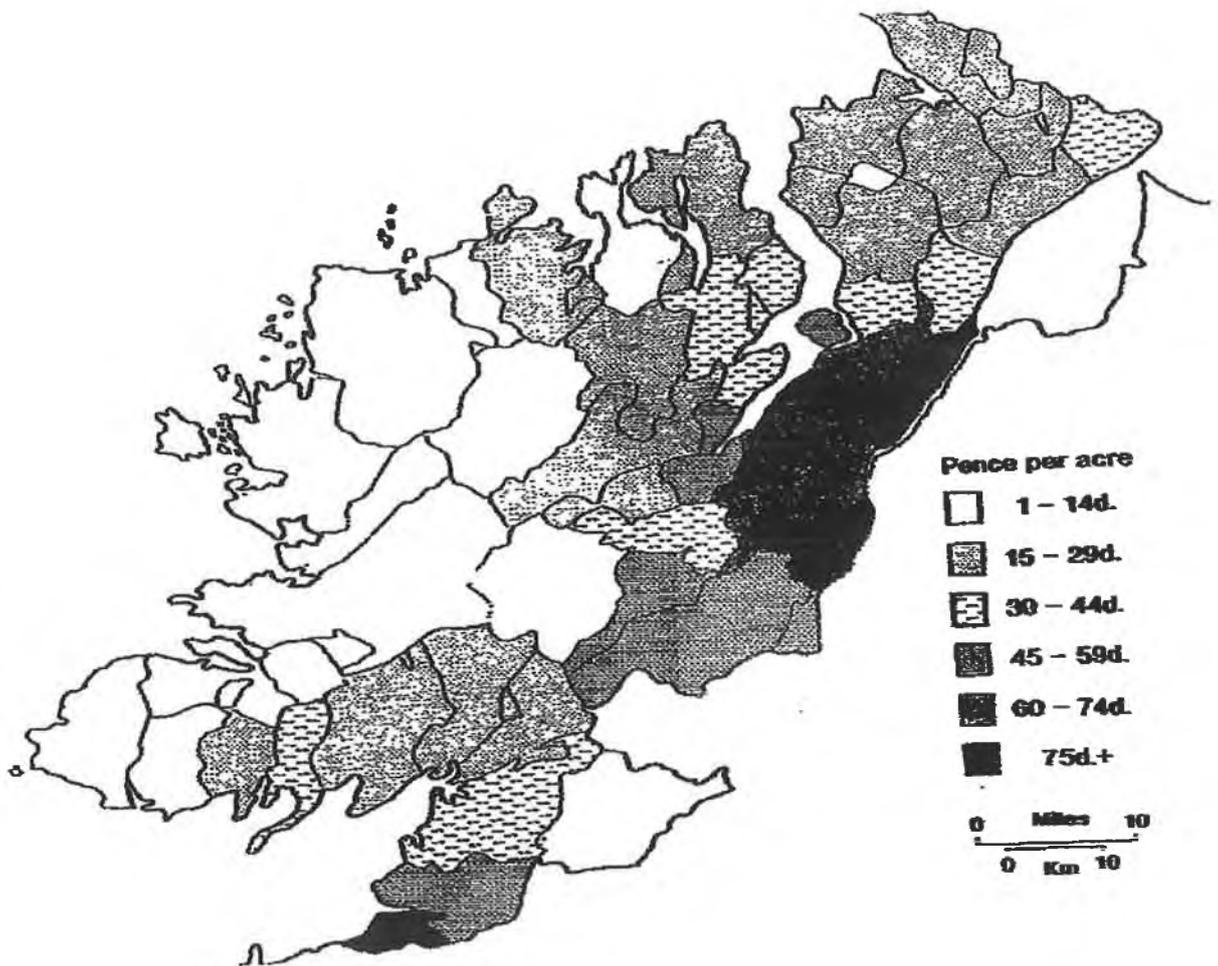


Fig. 10

Land valuations in County Donegal c. 1850.



Source: Donegal history and society, p. 511

Fig. 11 Congested Districts Board district analysis of Northwest Donegal.

| CDB district | Area in statute acres | Poor law Valuation | No. of ratings at or under £10 and above £4 valuation | No. of ratings at or under £4 valuation | Population in 1901 | No. of families in 1891 | No. of families on holdings exceeding £2 and under £4. | Number of families on holdings under £2. | Number of families in very poor circumstances. | No. of families which have no cattle. |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Rosses | 66,634 | £2,796 | 58 | 2,532 | 11,377 | 2,226 | 279 | 1,863 | 94 | 84 |
| Cartan | 58,044 | £5,155 | 317 | 474 | 4,225 | 819 | 334 | 140 | 194 | 48 |
| Dunfanaghy | 32,215 | £5,804 | 279 | 459 | 4,739 | 858 | 245 | 214 | 27 | 53 |
| Cloughaneely | 51,363 | £3,869 | 96 | 853 | 5,471 | 994 | 331 | 522 | 190 | 130 |
| Gweedore | 41,314 | £1,668 | 11 | 994 | 5,116 | 928 | 87 | 807 | 230 | 20 |
| Tory Island | 785 | £128 | 0 | 56 | 348 | 66 | 19 | 37 | 35 | 6 |
| Aranmore Island | 5,597 | £633 | 11 | 301 | 1,659 | 322 | 65 | 236 | 112 | 0 |
| Totals | 255,952 | £21,053 | 772 | 5,669 | 32,935 | 6,213 | 1,360 | 3,819 | 882 | 341 |

Source: CDB baseline reports for areas mentioned

existence in comparison to its neighbours in turmoil along its northern border.

Despite its isolation, poor land quality and agrarian turmoil, northwest Donegal contrasted severely with most other regions of Ireland where the population had fallen by almost 40 per cent between Famine times and 1901. The population of the civil parish of Tullaghobegley (Cloughaneely and Gweedore Catholic parishes combined) had grown from 9,049 in 1841 to 9,636 in 1881 and the Rosses had increased from 9,842 to 11,525 or by more than 17 per cent in the same period.²⁰ The Rosses mainland had 2,226 families containing 11,377 people in 1891. 1,863 of these families were on holdings of less than £2 valuation and ninety-four were in a state of poverty, making the region one of the poorest in Ireland. Gweedore had 928 families containing 5,116 people. 807 of these families were on holdings of less than £2 valuation and 230 families were living in poverty. Cloughaneely had a population of 5,471 people in 994 families of which 522 were on holdings of less than £2 valuation and 190 families were said to be 'in very poor circumstances' which really meant the edge of starvation. Dunfanaghy contained 4,739 people in 858 families of which 214 were on holdings of less than £2 valuation and 27 were in poverty.²¹ The most overcrowded townlands were Annagry and Cloughlass in the Rosses, and Brinalack, Glasserchoo and Meenclady in Gweedore.²²

The population was overwhelmingly rural in its dispersal. The only concentrated developments were Dungloe which had seventy-seven houses inhabited by 431 people in 1901, Crossroads (commonly called Falcarragh) had thirty-eight houses inhabited by 229 people and Dunfanaghy had ninety-three houses with 525 population. The rest of the northwest

²⁰ James Hack Tuke, *The condition of Donegal* (London, 1889), letter no. 3, p. 14.

²¹ CDB, 'Baseline reports' for the Rosses (1892), Gweedore (1896), Cloughaneely (1896) and Dunfanaghy (1892), with statistical table in each report on p. 1.

²² Tuke, *The condition of Donegal*, p. 14.

population was scattered on five acre little farms (on average) throughout the area.²³

On these 'farms' an ordinary tenant in the Rosses grew about an acre of potatoes, half an acre to an acre of oats, a rood of green crops and about a rood of meadow, making a total of 2½ acres in all.²⁴ Gweedore fared somewhat better for the typical tenant set, on average, 1½ to 1¾ acres of oats, 1 to 1¼ acres of potatoes, a rood of green crops and a rood of meadow, a total of three acres.²⁵ The comparative wealth of Cloughaneely is apparent in that the ordinary tenant cultivated between five and eight acres, divided into 1 ½ acres of oats, one acre potatoes, ½ acre turnips, one rood cabbage, 2¾ acres grazing even though the land was 'for the most part poor and cold, badly drained and wet'.²⁶ Dunfanaghy tenants cultivated between six to eight acres but there was great divergence between the mountainous areas and lowlands.²⁷ There was not one plough in the Rosses in 1892 because the rocky land or deep bog were unsuited and the harrowing of the corn land was done nearly altogether with large wooden rakes.²⁸ Gweedore was similarly deprived so that all fieldwork had to be carried out by hand labour. Gortahork, in the Cloughaneely parish, had several ploughs which helped to work the larger areas of cultivation. The CDB 'Baseline report' of 1896 for Gweedore stated that the cultivation was, on the whole, good with more care being taken with the cleaning and weeding than in other districts. The manures used were mainly seaweed which was one reason for the large population residing along the coastline.²⁹ Cow manure was always in short supply in the northwest because only one cow was kept by most households and that animal was

²³ Census of population, 1901, County Donegal.

²⁴ CDB, Rosses, p. 1.

²⁵ CDB, Gweedore, p. 1.

²⁶ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 1.

²⁷ CDB, 'Baseline report', Rosses, Gweedore, Cloughaneely and Dunfanaghy, question 2.

²⁸ CDB, Rosses, p. 2.

²⁹ CDB, Gweedore, p. 2.

sent to the mountain or seaside pastures during the boolying season which meant that the manure could not be collected³⁰

Tenants paid very little attention to the proper rotation of crops which, together with the tardiness in weeding, largely accounted for the small size of the potatoes generally seen throughout the whole area.³¹ The local population had little grasp of the advances in agriculture. They burned the bog and tried to manure it with seaweed but they were totally unaware of the benefits to be derived from draining, fencing, weeding or rotation of crops.³² The Cloughaneely Baseline report stated: 'Potatoes, in a good year, lasted from August until April or May; in a bad year only till the beginning of February and, in some cases, only till the end of the year'.³³ This situation led to frequent famines and starvation. In 1890 the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported that along the entire seaboard from Falcarragh to Killybegs not one farmer in every forty had an acre of corn, the produce of which he devoted to food for his family. The grain crops never exceeded and seldom equalled an average of one acre per family in this region and the produce, even when allowed to ripen properly, was usually given to the cattle, generally in an 'unthreshed' state.³⁴

Even if the crops had been threshed there was little that a household could do with the grain because there was so little of it. These crops were normally set to maintain the cow and calf of the household which was the normal holding of stock. The cow was kept to provide milk for the family, though better-off households kept two milk cows to maintain a year round supply, and the calf was usually sold in the late autumn to save on winter feeding.³⁵ All of the CDB baseline reports mention the poor quality of the

³⁰ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 2.

³¹ CDB Dunfanaghy, p. 2.

³² *DI*, 27 Mar. 1891, p. 1.

³³ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 6.

³⁴ *LS*, 11 Oct. 1890, p. 2, report investigating potato blight and farming prospects in Donegal.

³⁵ *Agricultural statistics 1898*, HC 1899, cvi, p. 62. There were 12,414 milch cows in the union of Glenties in 1898 representing 1.8 cows per household.

cattle with the Rosses report stating: 'horned cattle in the Rosses are of a very poor, small, worn-out breed'.³⁶

Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore, told the Evicted Tenants Commission³⁷ which took evidence from a wide spectrum of Donegal people in 1893-94 that if a year turned out badly it was distressful and if the earnings fell away at the same time, it meant a very sad state of things. Generally the condition of the people was that of living from hand to mouth. In 1879, there was severe crop failure in northwest Donegal and the traditional earnings of Donegal migratory labourers in seasonal employment in Lowland Scotland were not as good as they used to be and in the following year, 1880, there was further distress in the district.³⁸

An editorial in the *Donegal Independent* in 1892 summed up the problems of agriculture in many areas of Donegal.

In the Rosses and Glencolumbcille those who call themselves farmers decline to believe that a change of seed potatoes is necessary and then, in ignorant apathy, wonder why it is that the crop is so miserable. They also let the cattle run over the ground till May, instead of planting in March or April thereby adding another factor to render the produce late and small. Meadow and corn ground is also regarded as unsuited to potatoes with the result that in a few years the constituents necessary for the formation of either crop is used up in the different patches whereby, if the rotation of crops were understood, we might hear less of poverty and more of better crops.³⁹

With such uncertainty about the crops it might be expected that the Atlantic Ocean would provide adequate sustenance for the region whose population was mainly located along the coastal edge. However, the fishing situation mirrored the land problems to a large extent. Fishing was done by

³⁶ CDB, Baseline report, Rosses, p. 3.

³⁷ Evicted Tenants Commission, 1893-4, C. 6935, xxvi.

³⁸ Evicted Tenants Commission, evidence of Fr James McFadden, P.P., Gweedore, p. 367 in relation to the Olphert estate in Cloughaneely and Gweedore.

³⁹ *DI*, 1 April 1892, p. 2.

long lines and hand lines with some netting but, until the Congested Districts Board set up classes to teach the fishermen in the years after 1891, there was little ability in the fishing industry. Herring were seen in large shoals off Aranmore Island and Owey Island on the Rosses coast from June to September 1891 but there were no adequate means of capturing them. The want of proper boats and gear was badly felt as well as a means of getting the fish to market.⁴⁰ The fishermen of the northwest watched the Scottish trawlers scoop up vast amounts of fish from the deep sea and sometimes inshore while the local fishermen only had the capability to fish when mackerel, herrings or fry came close to the shore, when they then 'engaged vigorously in fishing for the time'.⁴¹

When, however, fish were sometimes caught in large quantities, there was a problem as to their disposal. On Aranmore Island, on the Rosses coast, within three days in 1890, fifty tons of fish were caught and landed on the island and thirty tons were brought ashore on the Port Quay in Burtonport. These eighty tons of fish worth hundreds of pounds were practically valueless owing to there being no buyers and no means of curing.⁴²

With the agricultural output so limited and uncertain and the fishing in much the same position, there was little else in the northwest that might sustain such a teeming population. As a result of the reports of distress, evictions and destitution in the British press in the 1880s, Mrs Alice Hart of London came to Donegal to try and alleviate the suffering. She established a factory in Gweedore where she trained and employed local girls in spinning, weaving, lace making, embroidery, sewing and fancy goods. Mrs E. Sinclair, a large landholder's wife from Bonnyglen in south Donegal, established a similar operation in the Rosses where the object was to instruct the women in cottage industries, conferring certificates according

⁴⁰ *DI*, 14 Aug. 1891, p. 1.

⁴¹ CDB, Baseline report, The Rosses, p. 6.

⁴² *LS*, 22 Mar. 1890, p. 2, editorial.

to progress and getting work from firms for them when these certificates registered a sufficient number of good workers to secure speed and skill in executing large orders. At one stage they had eleven classes in all with accommodation for eighty pupils in each. The teachers who attended each of these classes, once a week, taught four different cottage industries.⁴³ Another English philanthropist, Miss Dorothy Roberts, established a knitting agency in the Rosses and paid the money directly to the knitters.⁴⁴

However, such enthusiastic progress was soon halted by an unexpected external factor, namely the McKinley tariff in America which was introduced to protect American industry from the dumping of cheap clothing imports from Europe, especially cottage industries. This was a terrible blow to the embroidery industry for the closing of the American market soon led to the total annihilation of cottage needlework in County Donegal and caused the emigration of large numbers of girls who earned their living by it. In the Rosses where the population was poor, this want of employment told heavily upon the poor people who relied on the few shillings to tide them over the winter.⁴⁵

The importance of the knitting industry was illustrated when Arthur Balfour, Chief Secretary for Ireland, visited the Rosses in 1890. Fr Walker, parish priest of Lower Templecrone, informed him of the advantages that could be reaped if the army would only send some contracts for knitted socks to the Rosses. The result of the conversation was that Fr Walker received an order for 20,000 dozen pairs to be paid for at the rate of 2s. 6d. a dozen, almost double the price that was paid by local agents, shopkeepers or gombeen merchants who were in total control of the knitting industry as shall be discussed later. The order was the means of keeping hunger from the doors of many of Fr Walker's parishioners.⁴⁶ Since Famine times northwest women had been knitting for the British army. Lord George Hill

⁴³ *DI*, 24 Apr. 1891, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *DI*, 24 Feb. 1893, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *DI*, 29 May 1891, p. 2. The tariff was imposed on many goods entering the American market.

⁴⁶ *DI*, 27 July 1891, p. 2.

had been the initiator of this industry in Gweedore and despite his many detractors among subsequent historians, he maintained the reputation of paying his knitters in cash.⁴⁷ But the oral tradition is strong in the Rosses that the native businessmen such as John Sweeney of Dungloe and many Glenties merchants, whose businesses employed the majority of the Rosses women knitters, insisted on payment in goods only at values decided upon by the merchants. The McDevitt brothers of Glenties were reputed to be one of the richest families in Ireland although they had the reputation of paying their knitters in cash.⁴⁸ In her autobiography *Róise rua*, Róise Nic Grianna⁴⁹ from Aranmore Island wrote that ‘there was nothing in this world that they did not have – big houses, shops, plenty of land, a horse and coach’.⁵⁰

The system of paying in kind for the knitting was of great loss to the workers as they never got their money’s value, there being always the dealers profit to come off it.⁵¹ Many families were working for two or three merchants at the same time but the rate of pay for the knitwear was always very uniform.⁵² In her study of Donegal Eugenia Shanklin described how the expected benefits from knitting were quickly usurped by the gombeenmen for

no sooner did the Congested Districts Board devise a scheme by which a tenant farmer’s wife might earn money than the gombeenman devised a scheme by which he turned profit several ways on the innovation. The well-known ‘Aran’ sweaters, knitted in Donegal, were developed by the CDB as a cottage industry but their manufacture came rapidly under the supervision of the gombeenman,

⁴⁷ *DI*, 23 Sept. 1898, p. 6.

⁴⁸ CDB, Glenties, Baseline report, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsi, *Róise rua*, (Dublin, 1988).

⁵⁰ Ua Cnáimhsi, *Róise rua*, p. 50.

⁵¹ There is a contradiction between the CDB, Baseline report for Glenties and the oral history regarding the McDevitt Brothers’ policy of payment in cash or in kind. CDB Baseline, Glenties, p. 8, states that the McDevitts always paid in cash for knitted goods. However, oral tradition in the Lower Rosses says that the McDevitt Brothers engaged in payment in kind just like the other firms and this viewpoint seems to be confirmed in Patrick McGill’s books.

⁵² CDB, Baseline report, Glenties, p. 9.

who imported the wool, supplied it to the farmers' wives for knitting, and in return for their labour, paid in shop goods.⁵³

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century in northwest Donegal the two biggest commodities were knitwear which was exclusively produced in the homes, and the provision of meal which became the staple food when poor potato crops, food shortage or distress appeared which was quite often. However, the knitting and meal trade were totally under the control of the merchants and facilitated the growth of the gombeenman and gombeen merchant. In October 1890, the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported on the two types of gombeen⁵⁴ operators in northwest Donegal. The gombeen moneylender differed from the gombeen meal dealer in that the moneylender exacted interest, not at the termination of the lending term but at the point when the loan was made, and for every succeeding period thereafter, usually three months at a time, the interest had always to be paid on the remaining balance, in advance. In other words, interest was paid on money which was never in the possession of the borrower at all, as well as on the money which he got to use. The gombeen meal-dealer, who in the latter years of the nineteenth century, dealt in groceries also, added the interest to be charged to the selling price of a bag of flour or meal and, at the beginning of every three or four month period, added the usual sum to the account for interest. This system continued until the account was cleared. Even if the account was paid off before any of the terms expired there was no rebatement. It was calculated that the interest added for letting a bag of Indian meal on credit for three months was 4s. or sometimes more, and a like sum was charged for every succeeding period entered upon or equal to 16s. in profit for every two hundredweight of Indian meal over a period of twelve months.⁵⁵

⁵³ Eugenia Shanklin, *Donegal's changing traditions* (New York, 1985), p. 72.

⁵⁴ Gombeen: from the Gaelic *gaimbin*, a usurer or a trader selling goods at interest-bearing credit.

⁵⁵ *LS*, 11 Oct. 1890, p. 3.

By the year 1890 the gombeenman and the village or country shopkeeper were normally one and the same person. They still exercised great control over the lives of the people through the exercise of credit control.⁵⁶ The *Sentinel* report continued that, as a rule, all debts were paid when the men returned from Scotland after their seasonal labour there, as is detailed below. If a dealer chose to be dishonest, he had every opportunity for being so, there being absolutely no check or written receipt, beyond the memory of the purchaser, on his financial transactions. The interest charged varied from 6*d.* to 1*s.* per bag for six months equal to between 10 per cent to 15 per cent. The length of credit depended on the dealer's knowledge of his customer's circumstances. If it was a strong wage earning family, ample credit was given; if, on the contrary, the wage earning powers were small, the length of credit was proportionately diminished.⁵⁷ Eggs were nearly always exchanged at market prices for tea, sugar and tobacco and, as shopkeepers made much larger profit on tea than they did on other commodities, they naturally preferred to give tea rather than other goods in exchange for eggs. Shopkeepers paid only 1*s.* to 1*s.* 3*d.* per pound for the tea that they retailed at 2*s.* 4*d.* or 2*s.* 6*d.* It was questionable whether people would have consumed as much tea as they did if they had to pay cash for it, but the shopkeepers knew that the customers had little choice because they had to have stocks of meal, flour and the necessities of life.⁵⁸

The shopkeepers' books had to be settled at defined intervals in order to maintain credit lines for the coming season. While knitting, eggs, butter, days of service, turf, seaweed or other contributions might make some reduction in the shopkeepers' accounts, the bulk of the settlement was demanded in hard cash.⁵⁹ To facilitate this demand for cash in an area which generated very little cash internally because of lack of industry and

⁵⁶ *LS*, 11 Oct. 1890, p. 3.

⁵⁷ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 4.

⁵⁸ CDB, Rosses, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Ledgers from Duffy's shop, Annagry, for the 1880s. (In author's custody).

the poor agricultural and fishing returns, and where there were few other sources of income, the people of northwest Donegal sent child labourers to the rich lands of east Donegal, Derry and Tyrone (in northwest Donegal this region has always been called the Laggan) and seasonal migrants to the farms of lowland Scotland as the solution to their problems in their efforts to accumulate the necessary cash to pay the shopkeepers and gombeenmen in order to maintain the household.⁶⁰

There were four stages of migration being practised in northwest Donegal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The first stage was the hire of children from the age of seven or eight years upwards to families in the immediate locality. There had been a custom in northwest Donegal that childless couples took the children of relatives to work as herds, help with housework, carry turf or do messages. Sometimes these children stayed with the adopted family for a few years until they could go to more profitable employment when they were replaced at regular intervals by younger siblings.⁶¹ These elder children then went to work locally for shopkeepers, doctors, RIC, the better-off landholders, fish merchants and others in the community who could afford to pay for labour. The contract was set for a fixed period of months each year at an agreed price.⁶² This local hiring was not always successful because when the local economy went into periodical recession many employers tended to renege on payment which led to disagreements among neighbours with many resultant court cases.⁶³

This local employment was the preparatory stage for the migration of northwest Donegal children to join with the men and older girls, to travel to the hiring fairs, called 'rabblies', in Letterkenny and Strabane for employment on half-yearly contracts at fixed sums of money, in the

⁶⁰ Mici Mac Gabhann, *Rotha mór an tsaoil*, pp 31-58.

⁶¹ Patrick Shéimí Ó Dochartaigh, aged 89 years, Radio na Gaeltachta, 15 July 2004, interview with Aine Ní Churráin.

⁶² Ua Cnámhshi, *Róise rua*, pp 23-32.

⁶³ Anne O'Dowd, *Spailpeens and tattie hokers* (Dublin, 1990), appendix, Bunbeg Petty Sessions, cases no. 5, 9, 12 and 77 and Falcarragh Petty Sessions, cases no. 9, 25 and 59.

Laggan, the stretch of fertile farmland between the Donegal mountains and the Sperrin Mountains in Derry. The practice of seasonal migration to the Laggan and Scotland had its origin in the Napoleonic wars when the price of farm produce, especially grain, rose dramatically and, in the momentum of the Industrial Revolution, when iron, steel, cotton, linen and woollen industries flourished. Cheap, efficient labour was recruited from west Donegal into the fertile lands of east Donegal, Derry and Tyrone, for the spring and harvest seasons to replace the flow of workers into the industrial centres. The Scottish farmers in the Lowlands soon became aware of this source of cheap labour for they had been experiencing worker shortages from the counties and shires of the north of Scotland, where Highland clearances, army recruitment, and competition from the mills and shipyards decimated the traditional workforce employed on Lowland farms. Each year, on the Thursday after 12 May, great numbers of boys and girls, from third class upwards left their classrooms to walk to Letterkenny or Strabane for the 'rabble' or hiring fair where they hoped to be hired for a six-month term in the Laggan. The CDB report from Cloughaneely stated that children of eight or nine years often went as herds.⁶⁴

The *Donegal Independent* wrote about the Letterkenny hiring fair of 1892 stating that the number of persons offered for service was the largest for many years past. Gweedore as usual supplied the majority. Early in the day, higher wages than usual were asked but engagements were declined in consequence and not until evening was business done. Ploughmen and men-of-all-work were engaged at from £7 10s. to £8 10s. for the half year; farm labourers £6-£7; boys £4-£5; women for general work including dairying £5 10s. - £6 10s.; girls for outdoor and indoor work £4 -£5 5s. A considerable number of intending employers declined engaging servants

⁶⁴ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 4.

believing they might get them at lower wages when the first rush passed over.⁶⁵

The parish priest of Ardara, Fr Peter Kelly, decried the institutionalised cruelty attached to the hiring system when he gave evidence to the Evicted Tenants Commission⁶⁶ in December 1892 about his experience while serving in the parishes of Dunfanaghy and Cloughaneely.

They [parents] hire out their children when they can walk. They bring them to hiring fairs in Letterkenny, Strabane and elsewhere. These hiring fairs are like slave markets. Fathers and mothers bring their children by the hand and walk them distances of 10, 15 and 20 miles to these places and stand over them in the open streets in Letterkenny or Strabane, or wherever it may be, and barter them away for whatever they may get, so that those children are deprived of schooling, of course, and of Catholic instruction. They are all Catholics and this place where they are hired is called the Laggan, which is a prosperous district. They are under Presbyterian masters and mistresses for the most part They are thrown out as little waifs among strangers. It has a terrible effect on the people themselves, for I know these people to be watching these children and talking of when they will be fit for hire just as they would talk of a pig that was being fed for the fair.... This is one of the ways in which rents are being paid in this place.⁶⁷

However, for some families there was no alternative to child labour. In 1891, the West Belfast M.P. W. Sexton raised the cases of the Doogan and Rodgers families of Rinnamona, Annagry, in the Rosses. Rodgers had eight children, the eldest of whom was ten years. Doogan had nine children, the eldest being eleven years. Sexton said that both families were heavily in debt, had no stock, no credit facilities, no work and no means of procuring food.⁶⁸ In such circumstances, these children had to be sent out

⁶⁵ *DI*, 20 May 1892, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Evicted Tenants Commission 1893, C. 6985, xxvi.

⁶⁷ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 357, evidence of Fr Peter Kelly, P.P., Ardara.

⁶⁸ *Hansard* 3 (Commons) cccliv, 1729 (29 June 1891).

to hire in order to minimize the food bill at home and earn some money for the maintenance of younger siblings.

After a number of years in the hardening process of the Laggan, Scotland provided the next stage for migration from northwest Donegal, when the teenage boys were deemed strong enough to join their fathers for work on the farms of the Lowlands. Large number of men went to obtain general work in Scotland as soon as their own crops had been put in and others went for the harvest only. While employed on these Scottish farms they normally resided in bothies (derived from bó-theach or cow byre) or in the barns attached to the farms, where they slept on straw mattresses with a diet of potatoes or porridge and cold milk, three times a day. Most men were employed on piece-work rates although some had been working on the same farms for so many years that their wages were set out on a weekly basis. Six months was the normal period of work, usually from May until October although the time of return varied a lot – some returned in October, others at the end of the year, and others not until it was time for the spring work to begin on their own holdings in Donegal. Those who went for the harvest brought home about £6 at the end of the season. Some wives were noted for sending a pair of knitted socks or a woollen jersey to their husbands towards season's end as a hint to him that he was not expected home very soon.⁶⁹ A man who worked from May to October could save £20 in a fairly good year although the earner's addiction to alcohol was a major factor that is not often mentioned but is found regularly in oral testimonies when it is stated, 'the father didn't drink' or 'the father drank a lot'.⁷⁰

There was often despair in many a Donegal home when word arrived from Scotland that certain men were together on a particular farm or on adjacent farms for such combinations would ensure steady drinking and

⁶⁹ Susan Ward, Keadue, Burtonport, 10 Oct. 1999.

⁷⁰ Maggie Roarty, Knockastolar Gweedore. 10 Apr. 1999.

little money at season's end.⁷¹ From some families, two, three, or even four men went to Scotland to work.⁷² During the 1890s, about 950 able-bodied men and boys went to Scotland from Gweedore each year and about the same number of men, women and children went to the Laggan.⁷³

So widespread and embedded had this custom become in the northwest that, according to the Quaker philanthropist, James Hack Tuke, almost all the able-bodied men, girls and children in the district were migratory labourers. In Cloughaneely, the numbers who yearly migrated to Scotland or the Laggan, were very large, probably 30 per cent of the population. The clearance during the summer was so complete that only those unfit for work were left behind and the number of those was so small that the chapels, always overcrowded in winter, were said to be almost empty during the summer months. Tuke estimated that the total earnings thus brought home for the Cloughaneely parish could not in ordinary years be less than £8,000.⁷⁴

The fourth link of the migration chain was the long term or permanent, long distance migration to America, Australia, New Zealand and the colonies. Aranmore islanders tended to go to Chicago and around the 'great lakes'. Lower Rosses people went to New Jersey, Gweedore residents favoured New York, and Cloughaneely people went to Pennsylvania. Great numbers of northwest Donegal men worked in Eastern States Standard Oil (ESSO) in New Jersey and in Ingersol Rand in Phillipsburg and in the Bethlehem Steel Works. There were many northwest Donegal emigrants in the Pennsylvanian coalfields and even out in Butte, Montana, where the copper mines flourished at the end of the nineteenth century. The Donegal communities were so strong and centralised in these areas that they spoke mostly Irish, intermarried within

⁷¹ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry, 5 Apr. 1997.

⁷² CDB, Rosses, p. 5.

⁷³ CDB, Gweedore, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Tuke, *The condition of Donegal*, p. 28.

the emigrant group, held their own dances and parties and visited each other's homes as they would have done at home.⁷⁵

Dunfanaghy had less migratory labour because more people could live off the produce of their farms than was possible in other districts. There was also a good deal of hired labour in the district where there were many good farms which gave employment to a man or two and two large landholders in the area gave constant employment to a large number of men.⁷⁶

Considerable earnings were coming into northwest Donegal from these permanent emigrants in America, Australia and the colonies. Fr McFadden of Gweedore said in 1892 that it was surprising how much assistance they got from these distant sources.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that in the church-building programme throughout northwest Donegal in the latter years of the nineteenth century and for the erection of St Eunan's Cathedral in Letterkenny which cost more than £300,000, most of the money was collected from the emigrant communities, especially in America.⁷⁸

The money brought home by the Scottish and Laggan emigrants at season's end in November each year was augmented by the American and Australian remittances and was used to clear the debts in the shops. When the debt was satisfied a new line of credit was opened and ample provisions were negotiated for the winter months and for the spring and summer seasons when the whole cycle of migration would commence anew.⁷⁹

This money from emigration, whether permanent or temporary, helped maintain a household budget that was based mainly on the shops.

In the 'Baseline reports' which were researched during the 1890s by the CDB a study was done in each area of the income and expenditure of an

⁷⁵ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry. See also Ua Cnámhisi, *Idir an dá ghaoth*, pp 195-199.

⁷⁶ CDB, Dunfanaghy, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 376, evidence of Fr McFadden, Gweedore, 31 December 1892.

⁷⁸ Ó Gallchobhair, *History of landlordism in Donegal*, p. 187.

⁷⁹ Ledgers from Duffy's shop, Annagry, 1888.

Fig. 12 Typical household income and expenditure in northwest Donegal, 1890s

| Household income account | | Household expenditure account | |
|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Income | Amount | Outgoing | Amount |
| Sale of cattle | £6 | Flour | £9 2s. |
| Sale of sheep | £2 10s. | Tea | £6 1s. 4d. |
| Sale of pigs | £3 | Indian meal | £3 18s. 9d. |
| Sale of eggs | £6 | Sugar | £2 3s. 4d. |
| Scotch earnings | £10 | Fish and bacon | £2 |
| Laggan earnings | £6 | Salt and soap | 10s. 0d. |
| Knitting | £7 10s. | Oil and candles | 15s. 0d. |
| Miscellaneous | £2 | Clothing | £6 |
| | | Rent | £1 10s. |
| | | County cess (Rates) | £ 5s. |
| | | Church dues | £1 |
| | | Tobacco | £3 |
| | | Furniture, delft, fishing gear | £1 |
| | | Replace/exchange cattle | £2 |
| | | Young pig | 10s. 0d. |
| | | Bran | £1 |
| | | Cart, harness, implements | £1 |
| | | Artificial manures | £1 |
| | | | |
| Total income | £48 | Total outgoings | £42-15s. 5d. |

Source: Congested Districts Board, Rosses Baseline report, 1892, p. 8. Gweedore and Cloughaneely Baseline reports have similar accounts.

ordinary householder during those years. There was little difference in the returns from the various areas in northwest Donegal and the above report (fig. 12) from the Rosses is typical of the other areas.

But there were 130 families in Cloughaneely, eighty-four in the Rosses, fifty-three in Dunfanaghy and about twenty in Gweedore who had no land, no crops and no cattle at all so their income was greatly reduced and they were almost totally dependent on the cash earned by the children or on migratory labour and on the level of goodwill which their shopkeeper

would afford them.⁸⁰ If illness, poor health or alcoholism became a factor for them their plight was often reduced to pauperism. These were the 300 families in the region, containing about 2,000 people, that lived on the margin and they were the first people to feel the pains of hunger when distress or destitution problems were mentioned in northwest Donegal. Most shopkeepers were less than enthusiastic to have these people on their books.⁸¹

The pricing of shop goods was greatly affected by the cost of transport from Derry, Strabane and Letterkenny. Northwest Donegal had no railway system until 1903. There were few piers or developed harbours until the Congested Districts Board set to work after 1891. Therefore, the principal means of conveying goods to the area was by the cartage system. Convoys of carts travelled daily from the Rosses, Gweedore and Cloughaneely to Strabane, Letterkenny and Derry and returned a few days later carrying their loads over an inhospitable terrain. In her autobiography *Róise Rua*, Róise Nic Grianna from Aranmore Island stated that the roads in the northwest were very bad and it was hard to travel on them with a car of any sort. There was nothing on the roads but big stones and holes from end to end. The carman told her that the county road from Dungloe to Ballybofey was not too bad compared to its state during the winter months but, indeed, it would be difficult to get a main county road anywhere in Ireland that was as bad as it.⁸²

A traveller on the county road between Dungloe and Annagry in the Rosses, a distance of seven or eight miles, found that the road was in such bad order owing to ruts and projecting rocks that the horse had to be kept at walking pace. The main road between Annagry and Loughanure, in the Rosses, was even worse and in one place 'where the road stuff and the bog were equally represented on the site of the original highway', the horse had

⁸⁰ CDB, Rosses, p. 1; CDB Gweedore, p. 1; CDB Cloughaneely, p.1.

⁸¹ Grace Sweeney could remember mothers of poor but 'respectable' families having to go out begging even in the 1920s. She had often heard stories of earlier generations having to do the same.

⁸² Ua Cnáimhsi, *Róise rua*, p. 37.

to be taken out of the car and the driver and passenger were obliged 'to drag it axle-deep for about one hundred yards through the grand jury slough'.⁸³

In 1892, Reverend Chapman, incumbent of Gweedore, told the guests at a soiree at Bunbeg that if Mr Gladstone had come there instead of going to Biarritz, and had driven for nine hours on a cold wintry day on an outside car, he would very soon find a remedy for the long wearisome journey before he tried it again and if he had any Irish blood in his veins it would have been frozen before he got half-way through the journey.⁸⁴

But there was no point in looking to the sea for a substitute mode of transport. Without piers and developed harbours it was impossible to have regular sea transport although coasting steamers made strenuous efforts to maintain a service. Alice Hart who was trying to establish her embroidery business in Gweedore mourned the absence of such a pier in the area when she complained that the local trade was crippled and, in many cases, absolutely paralysed. She said that the want of a pier at which steamers could call and deliver goods was cruelly felt. Wool, looms, etc. had often been carried for six weeks by the coasting steamer before they could be safely trans-shipped in open boats to the mainland and heavy goods and machinery had often lain for weeks at Derry and had to be finally transported by road at a cost ranging from 50s. to 60s. per ton.⁸⁵

In 1890, the *Londonderry Sentinel* wrote about this lack of a cheap and efficient means of transport in northwest Donegal which checked the extension of industries and absorbed a good deal of the profits of employers and workers. It caused the people to pay higher prices for what they received in the shops and they got less for what they disposed of and, as there was difficulty in testing the advantage of trade with the outside world, they were kept in the grip of local shopkeepers and gombeen

⁸³ *DJ*, 31 Mar. 1890, p. 7.

⁸⁴ *DI*, 13 Jan. 1893, p. 3.

⁸⁵ *LS*, 21 Oct. 1890, p. 2.

businessmen who imposed on the customers such goods as they pleased on the gombeenmen's own terms. To overcome this problem, many men, when they could afford it, made long journeys to such railway stations as Buncrana, Stranorlar, Letterkenny or Donegal for cartloads of goods but, as they must necessarily trouble the shopkeepers for many trifles, they were coerced to return to the same shopkeepers again for general supplies.⁸⁶

Expensive though they might have been, these shop purchases, together with the produce from the land, ensured that the ordinary diet was simple and almost exclusively vegetarian. Potatoes formed the staple diet food from August until May, and was supplemented with flour bread or bread made from flour and Indian meal mixed. Porridge was generally made from Indian meal though some preferred the oaten meal.⁸⁷

The CDB reports calculated that four meals daily were eaten consisting of breakfast, dinner, tea and supper. The first consisted of stirabout,⁸⁸ tea and bread. Dinner consisted mainly of potatoes, or when they were exhausted, of tea and bread with stirabout. Tea was generally taken between four and five o'clock in the late afternoon and consisted of tea and bread. Supper consisted of stirabout, or if potatoes were plentiful, of potatoes and milk. Cabbage and turnips were occasionally taken as a relish to the potatoes. The better class farmers sometimes had a little bacon for dinner.⁸⁹ But despite the monotony of diet, the health of the people was reported to be excellent and the appearance of physical strength among the young and middle aged men and women was remarkable, according to the findings of the CDB official in 1892.⁹⁰

The Dunfanaghy area was somewhat better off as potatoes were not so much the mainstay of existence as they were in the districts further west

⁸⁶ *LS*, 1 October 1890, p. 3.

⁸⁷ CDB, Gweedore, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Stirabout: a watery porridge.

⁸⁹ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 6.

⁹⁰ CDB Rosses, p. 9.

though they still formed the principal article of food. Many people bought baker's bread, there being three rival bakeries in the district.⁹¹

Like the variations in diet, there were differences from area to area in the quality of housing also. In Gweedore the houses were reported to be generally superior to those in any other district of northwest Donegal. They were kept clean outside and inside and were whitewashed once every year. This was very largely owing to the efforts of Fr James McFadden who insisted on cleanliness among his people from his appointment there as parish priest in 1875.⁹²

It was much the same in the Rosses although the CDB Baseline report stated that there were some very poor houses in which there was only one room without a partition, but many houses had one room, and some had two rooms in addition to the kitchen or day room. Where there were only two rooms in a house the father and mother slept near the fire in the day room and the rest of the family slept in the other room, the males being in one bed and the females in another. Cattle in many instances were housed at night at one end of the day room and the poultry often perched overhead.⁹³

An instance of this arrangement was apparent when fire broke out in a house at Arlands, Burtonport, in the Rosses in 1897. The house was occupied by Dan Boyle, his wife, daughter and three sons. The father who was an aged man and suffering from paralysis slept in the kitchen. The other members of the family occupied the bedroom. In the kitchen there was a cow, calf, a stack of straw piled in the corner, oats, potatoes, provisions, etc. It was here that the fire originated and it was first discovered by the daughter who raised the alarm. One of the sons smashed the window in the bedroom and through this small aperture he forced his mother and sister to safety. He afterwards made his own escape through

⁹¹ CDB, Dunfanaghy, p. 9.

⁹² CDB, Gweedore, p. 5.

⁹³ CDB, Rosses, p. 11.

the roof by tearing a hole in the thatch. Meanwhile, another of the sons, regardless of his peril, made his way to the kitchen where he found his father frantic, lying in the bed unable to move, with the roof over him in flames, and getting him on his back, he carried him through the flames and stifling smoke only to lay him down on the snow. Scarcely had they reached the door when the roof fell in. The son was severely burned and there was little hope for his recovery. The cattle were left to the mercy of the flames and were quickly reduced to cinders.⁹⁴

In the Cloughaneely CDB report, the inspector found that many of the houses were poor for the most part and not well kept. They were not at all so clean or white as those in the Gweedore district. The habit of keeping the manure heap right in front of the door was universal and very objectionable.⁹⁵ However, some of them were good respectable country houses, two storied and slated but, conversely, 'there was then the ordinary thatched cottage and then a large number of those thatched hovels – very wretched hovels'. Some of them had mud walls and some of them mud and stone mixed, the mud being used as mortar; the walls were green outside from the water and the inside walls were black with soot. These hovels made up a large proportion, say one-third, of all houses in the parish.⁹⁶

Dunfanaghy had higher standards. The majority of the houses were slated and most consisted of two rooms and sometimes three, even if their interiors were no better, as a rule, than those of other districts.⁹⁷

But home was home. The CDB inspector found that the Cloughaneely people were generally not early risers. In winter the smokes were often not seen until near eight o'clock. They went to bed about ten in the summer, later in the winter when they sat and gossiped round the fires and listened to the old men's stories. He reported further that the people

⁹⁴ *LS*, 30 January 1897.

⁹⁵ CDB, Cloughaneely, p. 6.

⁹⁶ *Evicted Tenants Commission*, p. 357, Fr Kelly speaking in relation to Cloughaneely.

⁹⁷ CDB, Dunfanaghy, p. 9.

were, when at home, wanting in energy. They would only do as much as was absolutely necessary on their own farms but they were not capable of sustained effort. They had to be helped at every stage and this very helping made them more inert and dependant than before. He found that they were slow to grasp any new idea and were suspicious of all diversity from the old lines along which they and their fathers had moved for generations. Individually, they were amenable but, collectively, they were as unmovable and adverse to change as anything could be and the individuals who would rise above the ordinary were held down by the weight of old custom and prejudice. The people were not so superstitious as those in the west of Ireland. It was thought probable that the mixing with strangers in Scotland and elsewhere was a contributory factor.⁹⁸

On the contrary the inspector who wrote the report on Gweedore found that the people of that parish were industrious and energetic. The amount of labour they expended in rooting up huge boulders and making fences of them and converting what seemed utterly useless land into good tillage, was most praiseworthy. When away from home they had a good character for hard work and sobriety. They were extremely fond of playing soccer football which 'had become quite an institution with them'.⁹⁹ It was said that Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore, hated music and destroyed many instruments during his time in the parish. Breandán Mac Suibhne wrote: 'In its place MacFadden encouraged soccer – a physically draining single sex activity which his parishioners would have encountered in Scotland'.¹⁰⁰

Dunfanaghy people were also partial to playing soccer football. In 1898 it had been the custom for many years for the young men and boys to assemble in the market place in Dunfanaghy in the evening for a game of

⁹⁸ CDB, Cloughaneely, pp 6-7.

⁹⁹ CDB, Gweedore, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Soggarth aroon and gombeen-priest, Canon James Mac Fadden (1848-1917)' in Gerard Moran (ed) *Radical Irish priests 1660 – 1970* (Dublin, 1998), p. 156.

ball, 'a healthy enough pastime'.¹⁰¹ The CDB inspector noted that the Dunfanaghy residents were not strict about personal hygiene. 'They do not, as a rule, wash except on Sundays and fair days and holy days and such occasional festivities as weddings and christenings and when they attend funerals'.¹⁰²

In the Rosses report, the young people were noted for their love of dancing and they preferred the modern 'round' dances to the old country dances. Their dancing assemblies which were held in the winter or early spring were normally of three kinds – 'surrees' (clearly a corruption of soirees), meetings for charitable or other raffles, and parties held after a benevolent or friendly labouring assembly. A 'surree' was a profitable undertaking. It was notified that there would be a 'surree' at a particular house and for each couple (young man and girl) the entrance fee of say, eighteen pence was charged, the fiddler often being paid as much as a shilling by each of the young men. The owner of the house kept the entrance money for himself and the refreshments, if any, were of the lightest and most harmless description. 'Raffles for a sheep or some article were often got up by or for those in need of money'. The proceedings began with a dance and terminated with a draw for a prize. Dancing parties were also given after the gathering of a number of young men for the purpose of digging a friend's land and, in the evening, the girls of the neighbourhood dropped in for a dance. The CDB report for the Rosses written in 1892 stated that 'drinking of intoxicating liquor is now hardly ever known at social gatherings of any kind except, perhaps, occasionally, at farewell parties before emigrants leave'.¹⁰³

This report seems rather dubious in view of much of the oral evidence. However, a strong campaign was waged for the avoidance of intoxicating liquor towards the end of the nineteenth century by Most Rev.

¹⁰¹ *DJ*, 1 Aug. 1898, p. 3.

¹⁰² CDB, Dunfanaghy, p. 9.

¹⁰³ CDB, Rosses, p. 11.

Dr O'Donnell, bishop of Raphoe from 1888 to 1922, who greatly reduced shebeening and the making of poiteen throughout the diocese by enforcing strict ecclesiastical discipline and making it a reserved sin in the Raphoe diocese which could only be forgiven by the bishop himself.¹⁰⁴ Poiteen and illicit distilling had a long history in northwest Donegal. Even before 1838 the inhabitants distilled the bulk of the corn crop into poiteen or illicit whiskey. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century the level of illicit distillation was so high that it could be classed as an industry which was very important to Gweedore's economy.¹⁰⁵ It was said that the landowners appeared to be reluctant to disturb customary practice and they accepted kelp, and even poiteen, as payment for rent.¹⁰⁶

In his autobiography, *Rotha mór an tsaoil*¹⁰⁷ Micí MacGabhann who was born in Cloughaneely in 1865 told of the poiteen culture prevailing in the locality during his childhood. His own relatives were making poiteen as well as the rest of the neighbours and they were driven out of their minds with it. They drank so much of it at times that they were often senseless as a result. They got peace from it neither day nor night and it drove many of them insane.¹⁰⁸

In Ranafast, in the Rosses, one of the cherished storytelling traditions was that of recalling the great poiteen battles between locals and authorities during the nineteenth century. Even the children played their games of distillers versus revenue officers.¹⁰⁹ Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore, waged war on the poiteen makers. The *Londonderry Sentinel* reported in 1890 that, since his advent to that parish in 1873, there had not been a drop of poiteen manufactured within the confines of that extensive and populous district, nor was there a shebeen house in any part of it. The success of the bishop's crusade seemingly had little effect on

¹⁰⁴ CDB, Rosses, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'The Gaoth Dobhair sheep war' in *Donegal History*, p. 549.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 550.

¹⁰⁷ Micí Mac Gabhann, *Rotha mór an tsaoil*, pp 20-23.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp 24-26.

¹⁰⁹ Séamus Ó Grianna, *Nuair a bhí mé óg* (Dublin, 1979), pp 20-25.

Cloughaneely, however, which remained the land of poiteen. It was said of the district in 1890 by one fairly competent to speak on the subject, that 'the poiteen was as plentiful as dishwater'.¹¹⁰

Because of the widespread distilling of poiteen in the parish, the *Londonderry Sentinel* had little sympathy when it reported distress in northwest Donegal in 1890.

What poverty and destitution does exist is due to the habits and social proclivities of the people themselves and to a very large measure, to the baneful effects of poiteen-making and drinking. Within the past three years there have been, it is computed, from 1,600 to 1,800 illicit distillation plants and material in this county, involving a loss to the peasants in fines and destruction of property to the amount of £9,000 or £10,000. We pointed out the other day that in one week, fines to the amount of nearly £100 were imposed and promptly paid by the very class who are represented as the victims of rack-renting and oppression. The frequent seizures made by the police in the poorest districts show that the country is awash with poiteen.¹¹¹

The success of the bishop and clergy's campaign against drink would seem, however, to have achieved only partial success. The cleansing out of the poiteen trade was taking place at a time when public houses were being licensed throughout the region during the last decade of the century. By 1893, Dungloe had eleven pubs for a population of 360. Aranmore Island had one pub for seventy households and Ardara had a pub for every seven adults. Even the stern Fr James McFadden of Gweedore was seriously concerned in 1895 at the spread of the drinking culture when he condemned, in very strong terms, the fighting and drinking propensities of some of his parishioners when there were demands in parliament for relief measures and pleas for aid to ease the distress in the area and McFadden himself was travelling to Dublin and London making submissions on

¹¹⁰ *LS*, 28 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *LS*, 11 Jan. 1890, p. 2, editorial.

behalf of his people. He told them: 'there appears to be no distress in this parish; plenty of money for drink; no need for outside aid for Gweedore; as long as this state of things continues and until there is a reformation, I will not move a peg to get anything for you'.¹¹²

Still, there must have been some success in many areas because the CDB official reported in 1892 that habitual drinking to excess was unknown in the Rosses 'except among a few village loafers' but, on fair days, there were some arrests for drunkenness, principally because the constabulary enforced the law strictly by arresting anybody who was at all under the influence of liquor.¹¹³ The summer's fair of 4 June in Dungloe was always known as 'the fighting fair' and, despite all of the bishop's and clergy's efforts, in 1899 it 'lived up to its name'.¹¹⁴ As late as 1898, the bishop, Dr Patrick O'Donnell, was faltering in his crusade when he stated in his Lenten pastoral, that 'if the fairs held in any of our villages come to have a bad name for rioting and unseemly conduct along the roads, need anyone ask the reason? It is a great pity [that] ... the inhabitants of the district could not make their markets and go home sober'.¹¹⁵ This resort to drink and violence was so common, however, that it was not regarded as being in any way abnormal or disgraceful.

But underneath the surface and, in the accounts of the Congested Districts Board, there was little mention of much of the strife that continued to assail many of the weaker elements among the families of northwest Donegal, especially in Cloughaneely, Gweedore and the Rosses. The great problem was that many aspects of ordinary, everyday living were intertwined and dependent on each other in order that society would function with a degree of normality. A good potato crop in the autumn would ensure food on the table throughout the winter. The older sons in the

¹¹² NAI, CBD-DCCI files - 3/716, northern division, carton 6, January to May 1895, February report.

¹¹³ CDB, Baseline, Rosses, p. 10; In the CICMR for the years after 1892, there is little reference to drinking as a problem or nuisance.

¹¹⁴ *DS*, 7 June 1899.

¹¹⁵ *DJ*, 21 Feb. 1898, p. 8.

family would go to Scotland in March, leaving fewer mouths to feed at home. The children would go to the Laggan hiring in May and would not come back for six months thereby reducing the food bill still more. The husband would depart for Scotland after putting in the crops and his absence would further reduce the food bill with only the wife and younger children to feed. When the potato supply was exhausted a line of credit would be opened with the shopkeeper on the strength of the Laggan and Scottish earnings which would come in during November and settle the outstanding debts. Then the cycle started all over again. The relationship between the client and the shopkeeper was a delicate, finely balanced one as is evident from the samples given in appendix 7 in which the accounts of two customers are selected from the 1888 ledger of Duffy's shop in Annagry, in the Rosses.

The system involving shopkeeper and customer worked well generally, but when something went wrong, many layers of local society often could not cope with the aftermath such as happened when the crops in northwest Donegal seriously failed in 1879 after a few poor seasons, and the earnings in Scotland dropped as well that same year. In the following year, 1880, there was very severe distress in the northwest and public works were opened by the government for the purpose of relieving suffering. £650 was spent in Gweedore by the government and a further £2,500 was allocated from private and charitable works.¹¹⁶ A special fund was set up to relieve suffering in the townland of Glasserchoo in Gweedore. The crop of 1881 was very good because much new seed had been brought into the area. The crops in 1882 failed again though not generally throughout the northwest but Gweedore and Cloughaneely suffered badly. 1883 was an extremely distressful year and Fr McFadden

¹¹⁶ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 377, evidence of Fr James McFadden.

got £3,000 for relief with which many roads were built, especially in the Glasserchoo area of Gweedore.¹¹⁷

One of the worst crises occurred in 1890-91. By January 1891 all the edible potatoes had been consumed owing to poor crops in 1890 which were due to excessive rainfall and extreme cold during the late summer and harvest. The oat crop did not fill or mature fully and consequently, the yield was one-third below normal. Owing to the wet season harvesters in Scotland were unable to make the average wage and some were obliged to borrow money for their passage home. Though the price of stock was fair the majority of the people had no beasts to sell because the ordinary householder in the northwest kept only one cow for milk and calves were normally sold off in the autumn to save on winter feeding.¹¹⁸

As a consequence of this latest crisis the Rosses shopkeepers held a meeting in Dungloe in January 1891 at which it was stated that three times as much meal would be required during the year as had been supplied in former years. An average family would require sixteen bags of meal to maintain them for six months and this, at the prevailing price, would cost them £1 12s. The merchants informed the meeting that, whereas they had been paid only one third of their accounts, the demand for their resources would exceed nine-fold their ability to supply.¹¹⁹ One merchant, James Sweeney, told the meeting that he was owed £14,000 by his customers, with little prospect of retrieving it quickly.¹²⁰

However, the RIC County Inspector had a different view of meetings such as these for his monthly reports show that he believed most of these meetings were held during and after the setting up of the Congested Districts Board in order to publicise the distress so that areas might get preferential treatment. He wrote: 'it is the shopkeepers who are the chief

¹¹⁷ Ibid. evidence of Fr James McFadden, p. 377.

¹¹⁸ *DI*, 17 Jan. 1891, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *DI*, 17 Jan. 1891, p. 3.

¹²⁰ *DI*, 15 May 1891, p. 2.

promoters of the cry of distress'.¹²¹ In the following month, December 1892, he reported that the cry of distress was made 'by the "gombeen" men and grocers and publicans who have given meal to the small farmers and peasants and now fear they have a small chance of being paid'.¹²² He continued:

Another factor in the outcry is that when money for relief is being distributed, as they expect it will be, each district wants to get some share of it and the leaders think that if they do not meet and pass resolutions demanding work (such as piers, railways, reclaiming land and making roads) they will have no claim for getting anything for the district when such distribution of money takes place.¹²³

However, in January 1893 James Sweeney, the same Dungloe merchant, said that in his long experience in business in the Rosses, the coming winter and spring posed the worst outlook. The Scottish harvest was very uneven with few people bringing the usual amounts across to Donegal. At home, the potato crop was a partial failure and the cattle trade was unstable. Under these circumstances the people were unable to meet their liabilities and therefore, could not expect credit from the shopkeepers in the coming season. Even in good years, without meal, destitution would always exist in some parts of the Rosses. 1893 had been the fourteenth year of these intermittent famines.¹²⁴

As a result of this upheaval in the crops and uncertain migrant income, rents tended to be unpaid but the arrears of rent act in 1882¹²⁵ wiped out all the arrears prior to November 1881 if the rent for 1882 was paid.¹²⁶ In the hungry years of 1879 and 1880 scarcely any rent was paid to any of the six landowners in the Rosses. The agents and the persons

¹²¹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Nov. 1892 (CO 904/48).

¹²² CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Dec. 1892 (CO 904/48).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ *DI*, 6 Jan. 1893, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Arrears of Rent (Ireland) Act, 45 & 46 Vict., c. xlvii (18 Aug. 1882).

¹²⁶ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 377, evidence of Fr James McFadden.

concerned met and set up relief committees and collected money for the support of the tenants. Through the intervention and forceful personality of the parish priest of Templecrone, Fr McGlynn, an abatement of 6s. 8d. in the pound was voluntarily given by the marquis of Conyngham, the largest landowner in the Rosses, in 1880.¹²⁷ The other minor landlords in the Rosses followed Conyngham's example. In 1883 the people went into the land courts to get fair rents settled and the abatement offered by Conyngham's agent was 4s. in the pound. Many of the tenants wanted more but there were a great many sub-divisions throughout the Rosses estates and a sub-division was a bar against getting rent fixed. To save the outlay on lawyers and other court expenses most tenants took the 4s. option which was the best that Fr McGlynn could negotiate for them. The same reductions were given in the Rosses each year up to 1888 so that there was no trouble there at all. No eviction campaigns or disturbances occurred and the people were relatively content on their holdings.¹²⁸

So the Rosses enjoyed a reasonably happy number of years in stark contrast to their neighbours in Gweedore and Cloughaneely where every second year, from 1879 onwards to 1887, was a bad one.¹²⁹ This was also a period of depression in Scotland and farming in the Laggan was poor as well and it was estimated that £16,000 of Laggan and Scotch earnings were lost to the income of Gweedore parish alone in one year.¹³⁰ Yet, in reference to those same years, the inspector of the constabulary 'spoke in the highest terms of the conduct of the people in his district. There is little or no crime, very little drunkenness and great chastity among the women'.¹³¹ Such agreements as had been fashioned in the Rosses could not

¹²⁷ Conyngham owned 122,300 acres in County Donegal with a valuation of £15,166; 27,613 acres in Clare with a valuation of £10,808; and 7,060 acres in Meath with a valuation of £6,570.

¹²⁸ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 354, evidence of Fr McGlynn.

¹²⁹ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 382, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹³⁰ Tuke, *Irish Distress and its remedies*, p. 23.

¹³¹ Tuke, *Irish distress sand its remedies*, p. 23.

be reached between the tenants and Olphert¹³² in Cloughaneely, who, although he did not oppose the arrears' act, yet, refused to co-operate with its implementation on his estate until, eventually, relations broke down completely despite the efforts of the priests to negotiate on the tenants' behalf.¹³³ The tenants paid no rent in 1887 and they joined the Plan of Campaign which was led in the area by Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore, where Olphert was the landlord over more than 3,000 acres.¹³⁴ Fr McFadden's frustration with the stagnant state of so many of the population in the northwest is evident from his letter to the Chief Secretary, John Morley¹³⁵ in 1893:

The low diet and wretched house accommodation among these people are predisposing causes for them to become the first prey of this devouring malady [fever]. And the bad care and treatment which their poverty affords make certain that aggravating and fatal dangers will follow. Fever has appeared in the middle of the parish, in the townland of Dore. Charles Gallagher died of it two days ago and his son lies at present in the balance between life and death. Fever, epidemic, destitution and what next? Yet men will stand callously by and watch this experiment and officials who are not in sympathy with the people and who only study by every shift and strategy to give the lie to the representation of the people's mouth-pieces, misled the really benevolent and warm-hearted Chief Secretary, to whom we are to look for a remedy to our sufferings There is not the least notice being taken of the district by the guardians There is no local hospital for patients stricken by fever or other infectious diseases; there is no nurse; there is no conveyance better than a cart to bear a patient to Dunfanaghy, which is twenty statute miles away. No doctor could think of asking a patient in any critical condition to be removed on a cart such a distance. There is no ambulance attached to the workhouse, an anomaly not existing, I

¹³² Olphert owned 18,133 acres in Cloughaneely and Gweedore in northwest Donegal with a valuation of £1,802.

¹³³ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 377, evidence of Fr James McFadden, P.P., Gweedore.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 378.

¹³⁵ John Morley, Liberal M.P. for Newcastle upon Tyne, broke with Chamberlain over home rule in 1886. He was Chief Secretary of Ireland February-July 1886 and 1892-95.

venture to say, in any other union in Ireland. The poor law is useless to Gweedore.¹³⁶

Olphert was determined to fight out the Plan of Campaign which was implemented on his estate in January 1888 and he would not yield in any way.¹³⁷ The Olphert estate was one of eight estates selected by Balfour and the Irish administration where the Plan of Campaign was to be opposed with the full force of the law. No rent was paid in 1888 and, consequently, evictions started in the Ardsmore district of Cloughaneely on 2 January 1889 at which 100 policemen and 120 Kings Royal Rifles were present.¹³⁸ In Glasserchoo, before evictions began, the emergency men¹³⁹ cut down the green oats and carried them away.¹⁴⁰

District Inspector Martin of the RIC was killed outside Derrybeg church in 1889 while attempting to arrest Fr McFadden because of statements he made about the land agitation. This led to uproar throughout the country and Gweedore came under a state of siege. Hundreds of people were questioned and many arrests took place.¹⁴¹

Fr James McFadden, Glena, parish priest of Cloughaneely, no relation of the priest of the same name in Gweedore, made strenuous efforts to broker an agreement between Olphert and the tenants but his efforts eventually failed. Evictions were resumed in April in the Cloughaneely townlands of Ballyness and Drumnatinny when twenty-two families were evicted. Many arrests were made during the April evictions.¹⁴² Twenty-five people were taken to Enniskillen for trial and got prison sentences of

¹³⁶ *DI*, 3 Feb. 1893, p. 3. McFadden's letter is dated 30 January 1893. Olphert had been a guardian of the Dunfanaghy Union for many years.

¹³⁷ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 383, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹³⁸ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 383, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹³⁹ Emergency men: men brought in to enforce the landlord will and do the work which local people would not perform on behalf of the landlord.

¹⁴⁰ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 344, evidence of Dr O'Donnell, bishop of Raphoe.

¹⁴¹ Ó Gallochobhair, *History of landlordism in Donegal*, pp 95-111.

¹⁴² The Olphert estate was one of eight estates selected by Balfour and the Irish administration where the Plan of Campaign was to be opposed with the full force of the law.

between five and nine months.¹⁴³ The bishop of Raphoe estimated that, of the 450 to 500 families on the Olphert estate, about 370 of them had been evicted during 1889-90.¹⁴⁴ Then about thirty tenants who had been evicted in Ardsmore, Ballyness and Drumnatinny¹⁴⁵ re-took possession. The police were drafted into the district again and a cordon was thrown round the houses of those who had resumed possession and sharp measures were taken against them. Nobody was allowed to enter to supply them with food. During one night the women and children were arrested and taken to the police barracks. Then the burning of the first house took place in late May or early June and about thirty houses were burned in all on the Olphert estate. A large number of houses were pulled down by the bailiff and the emergency men. Some of the houses were burned by the agent and left utterly in ruins. In the Cloughaneely parish, 310 families were evicted by the end of November 1890 and a further sixty-three were evicted in Gweedore parish, all of them on the Olphert estate. Fifty-three tenants out of 130 on the adjacent Stewart estate were evicted as well.¹⁴⁶ For the previous five years the roads of the district had been patrolled night and day by a large number of police. Six evicted houses were converted into ordinary barracks by Olphert for the constabulary and let at a high rent.¹⁴⁷

But then the Parnell split happened and the Plan of Campaign began to collapse through lack of funds. A police report on the Olphert estate, drawn up on 10 January 1891 noted that the question of funds 'was vital and pressing'. If the Tenants Defence Fund, which had been launched in the previous October, proved to be a failure, the report concluded, 'the evicted tenants here, as elsewhere, will be at the mercy of the landlord absolutely'.¹⁴⁸ But the fund dried up and the tenants gradually submitted. In March more than one hundred of them accepted Olphert's offer to

¹⁴³ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 384, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹⁴⁴ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 345, evidence of Dr O'Donnell.

¹⁴⁵ Three townlands in the parish of Cloughaneely.

¹⁴⁶ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 384, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 386.

¹⁴⁸ Miscellaneous Notes, 1887-1892 (NAI, CO 903/2, Irish Crime Records, Series XII).

reinstate each of them on payment of three years arrears of rent up to November 1891 and costs of thirty shillings.¹⁴⁹ Many of them were utterly unable to repair their old houses and had to continue living in huts provided for them when they were evicted. Some of them were sheltered by their neighbours who did not go out on strike on neighbouring estates. Fr John Boyle, the local curate who administered the 'pensions' to those evicted, told the Evicted Tenants Commission: 'I look upon them [the evicted tenants] as doomed men. Their condition is extremely bad. I know for a fact that they are sunk in the shops, that the shopkeepers have refused them credit and that they are pressed even now for another year's rent'.¹⁵⁰

Throughout the 1890s the tenants' problems continued to be resolved slowly but bitterly through negotiations between the priests and the landlords' agents and through the courts until most tenants were either back on their own holdings or relocated elsewhere. Though a bitter legacy was left behind in Cloughaneely, the eyes of the outside world were kept focussed on all the occurring events. Reporters, agitators, observers, photographers, politicians, philanthropists and the curious adventured into northwest Donegal and communicated the events, not only of the evictions, but of the system of landholding, landlordism, poverty and the whole way of life in the northwest to the world beyond.¹⁵¹

The outside world was much better acquainted with starvation in the northwest during the late nineteenth century than it had been in any of the earlier decades. This, in large measure, was due to the influence of the clergy who, since Famine times, had adopted the leadership of their flocks in the northwest. In his essay 'The politics of nation-building in post-Famine Donegal' in *Donegal history and society*, Jim McLaughlin states that the local Donegal clergy were of humbler origins than their confreres in the richer heartlands of southern Ireland who tended to come from the

¹⁴⁹ Laurence M. Geary, *The Plan of Campaign 1886-1891* (Cork, 1986), p. 139.

¹⁵⁰ Evicted Tenants Commission, p. 385, evidence of Fr John Boyle.

¹⁵¹ *DI*, 3 Jan. 1891, p. 1, tells about the crowds of visitors in Falcarragh for the evictions and the excitement generated by the events.

farmer and substantial business classes. In Donegal, the clergy came predominantly from the emergent middle class comprising shopkeepers, publicans, grocers, policemen, hoteliers and clerical workers because most of the good land in the east of the county was owned by Protestants. Their humbler social class origins not only reduced the social distance between priests and poorer parishioners in Donegal, it also made it easier for them to act as organic intelligensia who not only represented, but actively articulated, what they considered the best interests of their people.¹⁵²

The northwest was predominantly an Irish-speaking region and the clergy provided the conduit between native communities and the outside world. The spread of the church throughout the region facilitated the growth of the clergy's power. In all of the Rosses in 1790 there was one church to serve all of the people. By 1900 six more churches had been built with resident priests attached to each.¹⁵³ Fr John Doherty had led the Gweedore people in their fight against landlord expansion in the 1850s. 'The big priest', Daniel O'Donnell had been a towering figure in the Rosses from 1848 to 1879 and had been succeeded there as parish priest by the Walker brothers, first by Bernard and later, James, who made their marks on that community up until 1908. Fr Stephens of Falcarragh served six months in Derry gaol alongside Fr McFadden of Gweedore for activities connected with the land agitation.¹⁵⁴ The power and influence of the priests over the people is visible in the fact that McFadden and Stephens were fervent supporters of the Plan of Campaign and consequently led their flocks to follow that path of resistance in Gweedore and Falcarragh, while there were other priests who were opposed to land agitation, such as Canon Walker, parish priest of Lower Templecrone, who kept the Rosses out of the campaign.¹⁵⁵ Canon McFadden of Glena in

¹⁵² Jim MacLaughlin, 'The politics of nation-building in post Famine Donegal' in *Donegal History*, p. 615.

¹⁵³ Ben O'Donnell, *The story of the Rosses* (Lifford, 1999) pp 184 - 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ó Gallchobhair, *Landlordism in Donegal*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁵ Ó Gallchobhair, *Landlordism in Donegal*, p. 186.

Cloughaneely was likewise reticent of the land agitation. But the events of the land agitation and the Plan of Campaign only cast the clergy further into the role of society leaders in the northwest and helped them tighten their hold on their people. But they had many precedents of such a mission.

Fr John Doherty, parish priest of Gweedore, set the markers for those who were to follow him in 1852 when he decided that publicity was a greater weapon than private letters or petitions to parliament or to Dublin Castle.¹⁵⁶ A propaganda campaign replaced the stealing and maiming of sheep as the dominant pathway of action with the clergy and journalists replacing the smallholders as the main activists.¹⁵⁷ In 1861, during the Derryveagh sheep war and evictions, the priests of the diocese met in Letterkenny to discuss the Derryveagh problems. 'Revd Daniel Kair, P.P., Churchill, communicated the substance of the proceedings to the *Dublin Evening Post* and he urged that the other newspapers, regardless of their political persuasions, take up the story in order that speedy and substantial relief be forthcoming for the Derryveagh people'.¹⁵⁸ The negotiations for rent reductions on the Conyngham estate and on five smaller estates in the Rosses were all done by priests. Fr McFadden of Gweedore was a master of the publicity machine. The police described him as a 'red hot nationalist partisan, an ambitious unscrupulous, clever agitator of the most dangerous type'.¹⁵⁹ He had raised the profile of the area through his aggressive work on behalf of the Plan of Campaign.¹⁶⁰ His contacts with the Liberal party and with liberal agitators in England, especially in London and Manchester, gained much publicity for Donegal in parliament and in the growing and influential media. Many of these contacts came over to northwest Donegal to observe the situation for themselves and were not slow to publicize their

¹⁵⁶ Ó Gallchobhair, *Landlordism in Donegal*, pp 37-39.

¹⁵⁷ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'The Gaoth Dobhair sheep war' in *Donegal History*, pp. 562-4.

¹⁵⁸ Liam Dolan, *Land, war and eviction in Derryveagh* (Dundalk, 1980), p. 135.

¹⁵⁹ 'Memorandum on Olphert estate, 17 June 1889 (NAI, CO 903/1, Irish Crime Records, 1885-1892, Intelligence Notes, XII)

¹⁶⁰ Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, pp 29-33, describes McFadden's agitation.

findings especially if it embarrassed the government. The introduction of the camera also brought images of local events more graphically to a wider audience.¹⁶¹ The trial of Fr McFadden and the Gweedore people, charged with the murder of District Inspector Martin, in Maryborough, Queen's County, in 1890 attracted attention throughout Ireland and Britain and led many to question the circumstances under which such an event could occur. The glare of publicity that the evictions on the Olphert estate in Cloughaneely drew during the late 1880s and early '90s led to many people in Britain questioning the structure of landholding, landlordism, and the prevailing crises within many aspects of Irish society.¹⁶²

McFadden was instrumental in having Bishop O'Donnell invite Dr Croke, the controversial archbishop of Cashel who was a supporter of the Plan of Campaign and backed the actions of Smith-Barry's Tipperary tenants,¹⁶³ to become interested in northwest Donegal in 1889 and, true to his form, Croke created the desired controversy when he wrote an open letter to Bishop O'Donnell in January 1889 in 'reference to the doings of Messrs Balfour and company in Donegal' and stating that 'the scenes enacted in Donegal under Tory rule are a shocking violation of the commonest rights of man and merit the condemnation and censure of the civilized world' and he further expressed satisfaction 'at the manly defence of their homes made by the brave peasants of that historic county against the cruel assaults of felonious landlordism'.¹⁶⁴ Balfour was stung by the letter and wrote to his uncle, Lord Salisbury, that he was turning over in his mind the possibility of prosecuting Croke. No prosecution took place and Balfour was forced to try a mediation policy in order to placate the difficult and irritating northwest.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Visitor's book, 27-30 July 1888. Gweedore Hotel, Co. Donegal. Harold Southall had a half plate camera. Alice Balfour carried a camera during the Balfour visit in 1890.

¹⁶² Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, p. 52, 62 and 72. Reportage by *The Times* on Irish events.

¹⁶³ Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 Jan. 1889.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

But an accusation could be made that many of the clergy were party to and manipulators of the politics of destitution in northwest Donegal for their own public relations machine. With every crop failure from 1879 onwards the 'destitution' machine was put into action under the leadership of the clergy. Meetings were organised throughout the area with reportage in the local and national press and many items in the British media as well. Campaigns were organised to raise 'distress' funds and every effort was made to embarrass the government to take positive action in the alleviation of such distress. Distress meetings were held throughout the winter months of 1890-1 when dire warnings were given that there would be many deaths. Yet, despite little government help, there were few deaths. Again in the winter of 1892-3, the distress meetings with the same dire forebodings were taking place. In February of 1893, the *Donegal Independent* reported that 'Rev. James M'Fadden who is one of the Rome pilgrims, found time during his short stay in London, to spend a few hours in the House of Commons. It is stated that even the "law in Gweedore" [Fr McFadden] was unable to get anything from [Chief Secretary] Morley but the workhouse for the people whom he says are starving and dying of disease'. The same evening Mgr M'Fadden was observed in the gallery 'piloted in most obsequiously by Mr Swift M'Neill, M.P. for South Donegal'.¹⁶⁶ Strangely, there was not another word heard about the distress campaign after McFadden's visit, a fact which the *Donegal Independent* felt compelled to comment upon:

It is remarkable that since the visit of Rev. James M'Fadden to the House of Commons we have heard nothing more about the alleged starving condition of the people along the western seaboard. Had his reverence an interview with the G. O. M. or Mr Morley and did they tell him he would 'harass the Government' if he persisted in such talk? It looks as if something of this kind took place.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ *DI*, 10 Feb. 1893, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ *DI*, 24 Mar. 1893, p. 2.

That there was another side to the distress and destitution presented to the outside world as normality in northwest Donegal is very apparent. There was an embedded reluctance to pay either county cess or rents. In 1893 no county cess had been collected in Gweedore or Cloughaneely since that collected under the warrant of the Spring Assizes, 1890 and no cess had been collected in the Dunfanaghy area since that collected under the 1887 warrant. By March 1893, £4,000 was then due out of these parishes. There were frequent advertisements for the appointment of a cess collector but without success.¹⁶⁸ Yet, in that same month, the County Inspector reported that there was no sign of distress in the county.¹⁶⁹ In 1893, Mr Deasley, the landlord of Lettermacaward in the Rosses, had 69 ejectments for non-payment of rents; an average of four years rent was due; abatements of 4s. in the pound had been offered but few took it up.¹⁷⁰ In 1892, on the Arthur estate near Dunfanaghy rents had not been paid for between seven and a half years to nine years and the tenants' best offer was two years' rent plus half of the costs.¹⁷¹ 276 cases appeared for hearing at Bunbeg Petty Sessions in Gweedore in 1890 for non-payment of rent. Most of these cases did not exceed £1 in rent, very few indeed exceeded £2 and only two exceeded £3.¹⁷² Yet, there were many instances of severe poiteen fines being paid immediately and the proliferation of applications for public house licences being made regularly in the courts as well as aggressive church and school building programmes suggest that there was a substantial amount of money within the northwest and that tardiness in payment of official dues had as much to do with principle as with poverty.

In October 1893, the County Inspector reported that there was a considerable amount of money in the county which had been brought home

¹⁶⁸ *LS*, 16 Mar. 1893, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ *CI Monthly Report*, County Donegal, Mar. 1893 (CO 904/48).

¹⁷⁰ *DI*, 7 Apr. 1893, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ *CI Monthly Report*, County Donegal, Dec. 1892 (CO 904/48).

¹⁷² *LS*, 27 Sept. 1890, p. 3.

from Scotland and England. He stated that at Falcarragh fair about fifteen fellows had been arrested for drunkenness and each one of them had between 10s. and 30s. in his possession. The inspector continued that they normally gave all their earnings to father and mother for the keep of the house and that the amount they kept for themselves was trifling in comparison with what was received by parents.¹⁷³

Arthur Balfour was scathing about the northwest Donegal distress lobby when he spoke in parliament in June 1891. He said that, in the parish of Gweedore, over £4,000 worth of seed potatoes had been put on sale by growers, and that £220 had been paid to the people in ready money and another £220 was paid through Fr McFadden. He also observed that since the previous October, the period at which the failure of the potato crop could be ascertained in Gweedore, no less than £112 had been contributed by the people on the occasion of fifteen successive funerals. At the same time, in the parish of Templecrone, a purse of £124 was given by the grateful parishioners to Fr McGlynn. The M.P. for South Donegal, Swift McNeill, protested that this money had been donated by the prosperous shopkeepers but Balfour countered, 'How did the shopkeepers become so prosperous'? Balfour continued that a large trader had lately failed in Burtonport and an investigation of his affairs showed that out of an estate of £9,000, the total liabilities of £2,300 were in respect of deposits made by small farmers in the district, the very class making demands for relief work.¹⁷⁴ He then continued, saying that not one person from the Rosses, where poverty was supposed to be exceptional, had applied for work on the Stranorlar to Glenties railway.¹⁷⁵ The County Inspector reported in September 1895 that even if relief works were opened in the northwest the

¹⁷³ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Oct. 1893 (CO 904/4).

¹⁷⁴ *Hansard 3* (Commons), cccliv, 1090 (22 June 1891), Arthur Balfour's reply to Swift McNeill, M.P. for South Donegal.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

men would not go to work on them because of the low wages paid.¹⁷⁶ It seemed that the politics of destitution had as much to do with the local economy involving the interests of the shopkeepers and clergy as it had to do with the poorest elements in society of whom, however, there were sufficient to warrant immediate and continued aid.

The political-agrarian situation prevailing in northwest Donegal during the late 1880s and '90s was quite divorced from the personality and high moral principles of Arthur Balfour. The damage done to the cause of public morality by clerical involvement in land agitation 'where the resources of the church [were] being exhausted in the cause of socialism and revolution', on top of the prevalence of agrarian crime and the unstructured lifestyle of a peasantry with little or no property was, to Balfour's mind, a sure prescription for social and moral decay.¹⁷⁷ None of the parties in the Westminster parliament found the recurring state of crisis in northwest Donegal to be an acceptable expression of their policies or philosophies. The Westminster cabinet, of which Arthur Balfour was a member, had one serious desire for Ireland and that was that the country would be peaceful and less troublesome.¹⁷⁸ The legacy of the Plan of Campaign, the evictions, the arrests, the murder of District Inspector Martin in Gweedore and the consequent trial and convictions in Maryboro had left a population simmering with resentment of officialdom and the laws under which they were forced to live. Without drastic measures there appeared little hope that the deteriorating society of northwest Donegal could be converted into self-contained, law-abiding, economically independent citizens. It was plain that the repetitive cycles of distress now had the added ingredient of violence. Such potential for future trouble, even rebellion, could not continue in an age when media coverage unveiled dark practices to a questioning public and cast politicians and politics in a

¹⁷⁶ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, April 1895 (CO 904/50), 'Report on Distress in Co. Donegal', 8 Apr. 1895.

¹⁷⁷ Shannon, *Arthur J Balfour*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, (Cork, 1987), pp 88-96.

poor light. Something had to be done to pacify places like northwest Donegal.¹⁷⁹

James Hack Tuke, the Quaker philanthropist from Yorkshire, who had visited Connacht and Donegal regularly since the Famine and was instrumental in granting relief through many severe depressions, had the ear of many important people in England and was not slow to use the most influential organ of the day, *The Times*, to publish his letters and set out the remedies which would relieve the repetitive cycles of distress which continued to assail northwest Donegal society.¹⁸⁰ Tuke had many remedies for the alleviation of this hardship and the betterment of society such as peasant proprietorship and assisted emigration schemes but in 1889, he wrote that the primary measure and that upon which the success of any remedial legislation depended, was the development and extension of the railway system. It was the measure preliminary to all others for opening up the country. He wrote that it was impossible that the fisheries could be extended or increased in districts which were twenty-five to forty or more miles from a railway. He argued that the prices of all agricultural produce would also be increased, especially eggs and poultry which were being sold at ridiculously low prices. A railway would completely open up the most thickly populated districts of the northwest. Tuke also believed that the railway had the advantage of facilitating the exodus of the people in search of work and would benefit them in many other ways.¹⁸¹

Tuke also had close contacts with Arthur Balfour, Irish Chief Secretary, 1886-1891, and, no doubt, made him aware of the diverse elements taking special interest in the land struggle, poverty and evictions on the various estates there. Conscious of the radical, revolutionary elements, such as Maude Gonne, Labouchere, Coneybeare, English Liberals and even French agitators entering into peasant Donegal society,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ See Tuke's letters, no. 1 dated 14 May 1889; no.2 dated 25 May 1889; and no. 3 dated 24 June 1889 in *The Times* of these dates. Combined in *Irish distress and its remedies* (London, 1880).

¹⁸¹ Tuke, *Irish distress and its remedies*, letter number 2,

Balfour was aware of the dangers of such a peasantry being influenced by the dreaded socialist movement of the age.¹⁸² Though it cannot be said that the situation in Gweedore and Cloughaneely alone influenced Balfour, because of the evictions and suffering which happened on various other estates throughout Ireland, there is no doubt but his initiatives in introducing the railway act of 1889¹⁸³, the land act of 1891¹⁸⁴ and the foundation of the Congested Districts Board in 1891¹⁸⁵ were all designed to relieve the recurrent cycles of poverty and violence in such places as northwest Donegal and make Ireland into a peaceful, stable society.¹⁸⁶

The railway act of 1889 broke new ground through the provision of grants and incentives for narrow gauge railways to be built into remote areas of the west. A measure of its success was the fact that, under this act, the government bore £1,554,000 of the £1,850,000 expended on railway development up to 1903.¹⁸⁷ Devised originally as a means of providing employment, the railways built under this act played an important role in opening up the western seaboard as well as providing much employment during periods of distress. It was no wonder then that expectations were high in northwest Donegal that a railway would soon come their way.

The previous efforts of various groups of entrepreneurs to construct railways into the northwest from Letterkenny, in particular, but also from Glenties and other points, had all failed because of a lack of investment capital and because the area was too poor to guarantee any capital raised through increased charges on the rates. As a consequence, the good intentions of many railway builders never came to fruition.

¹⁸² Shannon, *Arthur J. Balfour*, p. 75.

¹⁸³ 52 & 53 Vict., c. 66 (30 Aug. 1889).

¹⁸⁴ 54 & 55 Vict., c. 48 (5 Aug. 1891).

¹⁸⁵ 54 & 55 Vict., c. 48, part ii, (5 Aug. 1891).

¹⁸⁶ Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*. He argues throughout that the Unionist party had no long term policy for Ireland but responded periodically to crises in order to keep the peace.

¹⁸⁷ H. D. Gribbon, 'Economic and social history, 1850 – 1921' in W. E. Vaughan (ed) *A new history of Ireland*, vol. VI (Oxford, 1996) p. 289.

Now, following the incentives of the 1889 act, the people of northwest Donegal hoped to get a railway which would provide employment and help them over the periods of destitution.

CHAPTER 2

THE 1889 ACT AND BALFOUR'S PROMISE OF A RAILWAY, 1890

Apart from remote areas most of Ireland had been well served with railways by 1860 but, to understand the difficulties facing railway development in northwest Donegal after that date, it is necessary to look at railway progress elsewhere in the county which took place under more favourable circumstances. A railway act passed in that same year¹ recognised Ireland's desperate need for rail transport in remote, congested areas where standard gauge metals had so far failed to penetrate. Ireland's plight, in fact, was plain for all to see. Her fishing ports were operating at a grave disadvantage compared to their English and Scottish counterparts, agriculture throughout the country was often in an acute state of depression and, most ominous of all, successive famines and their aftermath, death and emigration, had played havoc with the island's population.²

Government reluctance to involve itself in private railway affairs had little effect on England's railway development because the thrust of the industrial revolution provided enough capital and investment from the private sector to maintain the spread of railways. The *laissez-faire* philosophy of the age demanded that private or individual endeavour should provide the means of conveyance from the source to market but, in Ireland, the investment base was insufficient to carry such railway development or rather, the prospective returns from such involvement were not attractive enough. Though limited in scope, the railway act of 1860 recognized some of these problems but, among many strange restrictions in its composition, there was the baronial guarantee which made it mandatory on local authorities to underwrite the interest to be paid annually on the railway capital to be subscribed, thereby putting the onus on such local

¹ Railway Act (Ireland), 1860, 23 & 24 Vict., c. 99.

² Thomas Middlemass, *Irish narrow gauge railways* (Somerset, 1991), p. 91.

bodies to carry the cost of failure. The fear of being made responsible for such a burden frightened many grand juries which had a reputation for parsimony anyway. It was natural that the tentacles of railway development would spread outwards from Dublin in the east and from industrial Belfast in the northeast where the wealth and population were concentrated. But, the west coast populations had neither fertile, productive land, nor an industrial base nor wealth to enter the railway race until many years after the development had taken place in the remainder of the country.³

Strabane got its first railway in 1847 and before long, a group of landowners were promoting a line westward from the Londonderry & Enniskillen Railway at Strabane to Stranorlar in County Donegal. This project was called the Finn Valley Railway and its principal directors were Lord Lifford and Samuel Hayes, the two largest landowners in East Donegal and they were naturally anxious that railway access would enhance their own properties.⁴ Work on the 5ft. 3 in. line did not start, however, until 9 September 1861 when Lord Abercorn turned the first sod, announcing ambitiously that the railway would be built in nine months. In fact, it took two years and cost much more money than intended, being £5,300 per mile or a total of £70,000. The railway opened on 7 September 1863 but was under-capitalized from the beginning and receipts were poor for a number of years despite the power of its backers, its location in the wealthier part of Donegal and its accessibility to the railways of Ulster and the east of Ireland.⁵

In spite of these restraints it was decided to extend the railway from Stranorlar to Donegal Town and another company, the West Donegal

³ See Kevin O'Connor, *Ironing the land* (Dublin, 1999), for general railway development in Ireland.

⁴ Edward Patterson, *The County Donegal railways*, part 1 (London, 1962), p. 12.

⁵ Patterson, *The County Donegal railways*, p. 18.

Fig. 13 Great Northern Railway system in Ireland



Source: Kevin O'Connor, Ironing the land (Dublin, 1999)

Railway, was formed for that purpose although some of the personnel were common to both companies.⁶

The work eventually began on 1 August 1880 which was late in the year and the harsh winter, when work had to be suspended for seven weeks, and a 'lack of enthusiasm by the people of Donegal Town for the advancing railway', held up the progress.⁷ 800 labourers were employed but, four miles from Donegal Town, the funds ran out and the line ended at Druminin, just clear of Barnesmore Gap. To the ignominy of the promoters, horse-drawn cars had to ferry the passengers into Donegal Town from Druminin. Like the Stranorlar railway this line, theoretically, had all the advantages for success as well but it was found impossible to complete the four miles to Donegal town until September 1889. The Finn Valley Railway and the West Donegal Railway merged on 27 June 1892 under the name the Donegal Railway Company.⁸ As a result of this merger, the logical step of re-gauging the Strabane to Stranorlar Railway from standard gauge (5ft 3in.) to three feet narrow gauge enabled narrow gauge stock to operate from Strabane through to Donegal Town (fig. 6).⁹

Operations had not been easier in the northern half of Donegal where interest in railway development was afoot before the middle of the nineteenth century with schemes of railway set out by the Great County of Donegal Railway and, later, the Great North Western Junction Railway which in turn yielded ground to the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company¹⁰ [L&LSR] which began operations in 1852.¹¹ The L&LSR planned a railway from Derry City to Farland Point, on the shore of Lough Swilly in County Donegal to service its ferry steamers on Lough Swilly. Eight years passed before work began on the 5ft. 3in. line in 1860.

⁶ Construction of Railway from Stranorlar to Donegal, 1880, 42 & 43 Vict. c.179.

⁷ Fergus Mulligan, *One hundred and fifty years of Irish railways* (Belfast, 1983), p. 152.

⁸ Amalgamation with Finn Valley for County Donegal Company 1892, 55 & 56 Vict., c.161.

⁹ Patterson, *The County Donegal Railway*, pp 12 – 32.

¹⁰ The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company (L&LSR) was known locally as the Swilly but I will use the initials L&LSR hereafter, for the sake of convenience in all following text.

¹¹ Letterkenny & Lough Swilly, incorporation of company; power to construct railway, 1852, 16 & 17 Vict., c. 54.

Haggling with the suppliers of stock meant that almost another three years passed before the first train ran on 31 December 1863.¹²

Midway through the construction to Farland Point the L&LSR decided to build a railway extension from Burnfoot near Farland Point to Buncrana. Permission was obtained and, almost unheralded, the 5ft. 3in. line opened quietly in 1864 for there was some doubt whether it had been sanctioned by the Board of Trade or not.¹³ While business on the Derry – Buncrana railway flourished the Farland Point end was a complete failure so, in 1886, the L&LSR abandoned Farland Point completely and concentrated all its services between Buncrana and Derry.¹⁴

The problems thrown up by the extension of the railway system to Letterkenny town were indicative of the difficulties facing railway developers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Letterkenny appeared to have all the necessary advantages for railway development, it being the second largest town in the county and a thriving wholesale and retail centre, with a population over 2,000, being a hub for west Donegal and having many centralized services as well as a strong Protestant population which had money and influence.

A group of Letterkenny landowners and businessmen combined to sponsor a line which would link up with the Londonderry & Enniskillen Railway. This Letterkenny Railway, as it became known, was incorporated in 1860 with an authorised capital of £57,000.¹⁵ Then came second thoughts and the original scheme was abandoned and it was decided to link up with the L&LSR railway at Burt. Work commenced but the contractor went bankrupt after building a few bridges. The project came to a standstill for several years. Various efforts were made to revive the Letterkenny project again and, in fact, acts of parliament were passed for railway

¹² Steve Flanders, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway* (Midland, Leicester, 1997), p. 2.

¹³ Extension to Buncrana, 22 & 23 Vict., c. 50.; 24 & 25 Vict., c. 161; 27 & 28 Vict., c. 228.

¹⁴ Flanders, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Letterkenny Railway, arrangements with Letterkenny Company, 29 & 30 Vict., c.60; 43 & 44 Vict., c. 33.

extension to Letterkenny in 1871, 1874, 1876 and 1878 without any success.¹⁶

Eventually, the L&LSR suggested that the shareholders form a company and that they induce a number of Derry merchants to assist them in completing the unfinished Letterkenny railway.¹⁷ The city of Derry and several County Donegal baronies, well aware of narrow gauge developments elsewhere in Ireland, especially throughout the northern counties, offered their joint support, provided that the gauge would be three feet for the 18½ miles of railway. The remaining members of the Letterkenny Railway joined with them and they sought and were granted the necessary permission to proceed on 29 June 1880, almost seventeen years since the initial attempt to bring a line to Letterkenny.¹⁸ Westminster, however, had inserted strict clauses in connection with the Letterkenny line and also granted permission to re-gauge the L&LSR's own lines from Derry to Buncrana to narrow gauge.¹⁹

But the Letterkenny Railway still had to raise the capital which proved difficult. Despite its many advantages, an attempt to do so by normal subscription proved less than successful. Local authorities were reluctant to shoulder the total burden of guarantee and there were objections from the areas which were far removed from Letterkenny because they perceived that they would receive little benefit from the railway. Despite all of Letterkenny's advantages the proposers had to look to the government for state aid. No doubt, the problems encountered by extension to Letterkenny dampened the enthusiasm of many railway advocates, especially in the much poorer northwest of Donegal.²⁰

¹⁶ Letterkenny Railway Act 1871, 34 & 35 Vict., c. 148; Letterkenny Railway (Extension of Time) Act 1874, 7 & 38 Vict., c. 148; Letterkenny Railway Act 1876, 39 & 40 Vict., c. 110; Letterkenny Railway Act 1878, 41 & 42 Vict., c. 192.

¹⁷ Irish Railway Commission, 1907, Cd. 3632.3633, xxxvii. 45, p. 60. (Hereafter IRC).

¹⁸ Letterkenny Railway Act 1880, 43 & 44 Vict., c. 23.

¹⁹ Letterkenny Railway, alteration of gauge, 43 & 44 Vict., c. 13.

²⁰ Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, chapter 2.

During 1882, the government was considering the problems of railway development in Ireland, many of them similar to the Letterkenny situation, with a view of bringing in a new act. In 1907, Robert Todd, a Derry solicitor who had acted for the Letterkenny promoters, told the Irish Railway Commission about the attitudes of the time:

A committee was formed of Donegal landowners and traders and Derry merchants. The duke of Abercorn was chairman and I [Robert Todd] was secretary of the committee that was formed for the purposes of supplying the government with information as to the necessities of the district and taking such steps as might be thought desirable to promote railway construction in Donegal The committee I speak of, was of opinion that tramways would be impossible in Donegal owing to the fact that the country was hilly and the roads so light they could not bear tramways I was sent to London and I saw Sir George Trevelyan, Chief Secretary, and Sir Andrew Porter, then Attorney-General and afterwards Master of the Rolls. He drafted some clauses to carry out the recommendations of our committee and those clauses were embodied in the Act.²¹

The resultant Tramways and Public Companies (Ireland) Act 1883²² seemed to solve the financial problems but the terms were tough. The government was still reluctant to become too deeply involved in railway development in case such action would diminish the financial input of the businessmen and private investors who might renege on their responsibilities and cast the burden on to the state when problems arose. Under the provisions of the act the Treasury undertook to relieve baronies of half the amount paid by them under guarantee provided that the new line was maintained in working order and continued to carry traffic; not more than two per cent of the capital of any one railway was so paid; total state liability in respect of baronial guarantees did not exceed £40,000 per annum and that railways which persisted in yielding deficits over a period

²¹ IRC, p. 58, evidence of Robert Todd, solicitor, Derry.

²² Tramways and Public Companies (Ireland) Act 1883, 46 & 47 Vict., c. 43.

of two years should be handed over to the appropriate grand jury to become its property and responsibility.

When the act came to be promulgated in Ireland, a condition was inserted by the lord lieutenant which stated that relief in respect of broad gauge lines would only be allowed if narrow gauge lines were not suitable for a particular development. The changes brought about by the act opened the way for a proliferation of smaller companies to enter into railway-construction with most of them concentrating on the narrow gauge system. More than 220 miles of narrow gauge railway and seventy-six miles of standard gauge railway were built under the provisions of this act between 1887 and 1891.²³

The committee spoken of by Todd was a fairly powerful body with the big landowners and traders of east Donegal joining with Derry Chamber of Commerce and some of its powerful business members in an exclusive Protestant alliance under the influential chairmanship of the duke of Abercorn. Robert Todd outlined the group's ambition. It was

suggesting a group of light railways, having Derry as a centre, being the port of the district and the natural distributing centre. The scheme I suggested was to have the whole of this light railway system converging on Derry.²⁴

Through the Board of Works, the Treasury advanced £85,000 of which £50,000 at an interest rate of 4 per cent, was secured directly by mortgage on the Letterkenny Railway assets.²⁵ The balance of £35,000 was charged as a second mortgage which was carefully protected by local authorities' joint guarantee. Mortgage and loan attracted interest at 5 per cent and the lot was to be refunded from railway revenue in forty annual

²³ The narrow gauge railways built under the Tramways Act 1883 were the West Donegal (Druminin to Donegal town), 4 miles, opened 1889; Schull & Skibbereen, 14 ½ miles, 1886; Clogher Valley tramway, 37 miles, 1887; West Clare, 27 miles, 1887; South Clare, 26 miles, 1892; Cork & Muskerry, 26 ½ miles, 1888; Cavan & Leitrim, 48 ½ miles, 1887; Tralee & Dingle, 37 ½ miles, 1891. About 76 miles of broad gauge railway were built also.

²⁴ IRC, p. 58, evidence of Robert Todd.

²⁵ Letterkenny Railway, additional capital, 45 & 46 Vict., c. 74.

instalments. The annual instalments on that second mortgage, amounting to £1,750 a year, were charged not only on the railway but also on the rates of the city of Derry and on the baronies of the northern half of County Donegal.²⁶ To reduce costs the members decided to construct the cheaper three feet narrow gauge system and to utilise the abandoned Burnfoot to Farland Point railway belonging to the L&LSR.²⁷

The Letterkenny Railway which was operated by the L&LSR opened on 30 June 1883, twenty years after it was first proposed but the ridiculous spectacle stood out of a narrow gauge railway from Letterkenny to Tooban Junction at Burnfoot linking with a 5ft. 3in. standard gauge line to Derry and Buncrana. Locomotives or stock were not interchangeable and passengers and freight had to transfer at Tooban on every journey (fig. 7). This situation was brought to an end in April 1885 when the Derry to Buncrana railway switched to narrow gauge. This unified the thirty-one miles of network consisting of two lines linking Letterkenny, Buncrana and Derry.²⁸

But, four years later, the Letterkenny Railway's debts had grown so large that it could not pay the interest on its state loans. Consequently, the company was wound up and the Board of Works took possession of the railway in 1887 under a thirty-year agreement. Thereafter, the Board of Works assumed ownership of the line and it entered an agreement that the L&LSR would operate it, in a joint venture suitable to both.²⁹ So began what was to be a stormy relationship between the two bodies. Of course, the ratepayers of the city of Derry and of the baronies of Donegal which had guaranteed the venture now had to continue paying the interest in forty annual instalments from the date of the opening of the line. This, naturally, left a very bitter taste in the northern half of County Donegal and

²⁶ IRC, p. 60.

²⁷ Flanders, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 2.

²⁸ Flanders, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 2.

²⁹ Middlemass, *Encyclopaedia of narrow gauge railways*, pp 134-5.

dampened the enthusiasm for further railway development unless there were major changes in the rules governing the building of railways.³⁰

There were problems with the 1883 act, the most severe being the burden which the baronies had to bear and which increased as a particular railway incurred working losses.³¹ Further, there were many indications that railway contractors were engaged in sharp practices and even neglect on many of the schemes because of lack of control from the authorities which later led to large maintenance costs and many difficulties during the working of railways. Thus, in 1886 the Royal Commission on Irish Public Works under Lord Allport³² was set up to examine, among other briefs, the situation regarding Irish railways, especially in relation to the baronial guarantees. The second Report³³ which appeared on 4 January 1888 was divided into three sections:

1. Deep sea fisheries and their development generally.
2. Railway extension, both for the benefit of the fisheries and for the general development of those parts of Ireland in want of such communication.
3. The organisation and management of the existing Irish railway system.

Allport criticized the 1883 Act and placed three very solid proposals before the government.

1. State guarantee should be made directly available to those who supplied capital rather than await a primary guarantee from the barony through which the line was to pass.
2. Local contributions should be limited in amount and should bear some proportion to the districts concerned and their ability to undertake such funding.

³⁰ IRC, pp 60-1.

³¹ The railways built under the 1883 act in Ireland cost £1,261,980 in construction costs. The baronies had to guarantee interest at 5 per cent amounting to £63,100.

³² Royal Commission on Irish Public Works, *First Report* HC 1887 (C. 5638), xxv; *Second Report*, HC, 1888, (C. 5624) xlii.

³³ *Second Report of the Royal Commission on Irish Public Works 1888*, PP 1888, vol. 48, p. 10.

3. Strict governmental scrutiny should be exercised over the engineering and general merits of any scheme proposed.³⁴

In his regional proposals Allport proposed that a railway should be built from Letterkenny to the Falcarragh region in northwest Donegal via Kilmacrenan, Creeslough and Dunfanaghy. There had been previous plans to built railways along this route but none had succeeded because of lack of capital, fear by the grand jury that such a venture would become a burden on the rates if it failed, and the recurring cycles of poverty in the region which led investors to believe that no profit could be attained from such an area.³⁵

As a result of the Allport report, Arthur Balfour, Chief Secretary of Ireland, was instrumental in having the Light Railways (Ireland) Act 1889³⁶ become law because it fitted in with his resolutions for the improvement of the congested western areas in Ireland to achieve peace so that normal politics could be pursued in England. The land purchase acts, light railway schemes and the creation of the Congested Districts Board were the principal measures to alleviate poverty and rejuvenate the rural economy in the west of Ireland.³⁷ Anyway, Balfour was a keen railway enthusiast who believed that the railways could solve many of the recurring distress problems if only they could be freed from the financial burdens which prevented their construction.

Under the terms of the 1889 act state finance was made much more readily available in the form of free grants, under strict precaution and supervision, and firmly under the three control prongs of the Lord Lieutenant, the Treasury and the Board of Works. In fact, the Board of Works were given much enhanced powers under the act than it had enjoyed under the Tramway Legislation. Under the 1889 act the Board was

³⁴ *Second Report of the Royal Commission on Irish Public Works, 1888*, PP 1888, vol. 48, pp 37, 38.

³⁵ Royal Commission on Irish Public Works, *Second report*, C 5264, 'Mulroy Bay and Sheephaven Railway', p. 39. See NAI, Board of Trade (Green Series) for details of previous railway plans.

³⁶ Light Railways (Ireland) Act 1889, 52 & 53 Vict., c. 66.

³⁷ Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, p. 3.

authorised to report on the propriety of the amount fixed as nominal capital and on the amount of paid-up capital which it thought would be necessary and on the amount which it thought necessary for working capital. It was further empowered to report on the merits of the proposed light railway from all points of view as compared with other possible lines in a particular district. One severe problem resulted from this increased power however. These enquiries could not be conducted until after the deposit of parliamentary plans and this involved useless expense because every plan had to be submitted and considered, even the most outrageous and impractical.³⁸

The act also stated that profits, after all outgoings had been met, were to be divided equally between the promoters of a railway and the state. If necessary the Treasury could loan all or part of £600,000 which was the maximum amount made available to railway companies in Ireland unable to raise funds from private sources. These funds would now be loaned at 3 per cent rather than at the previous rate of 5 per cent. One very important feature was that the congested districts would not be made liable for any of the construction costs although a rate of 6*d.* in the pound was authorized by the act to make up the deficit if, during the running of the railway, expenditure exceeded receipts.³⁹

In many ways this act was the most advanced measure to signal the government's acceptance of state intervention in its attempts to solve agrarian upheaval and economic crises in the remote regions along the west coast. It was the measure which made the inclusion of the most congested areas along the west of Ireland in railway development possible for the first time without the fear of crippling debts and high taxes.⁴⁰ Expert railwayman, Joseph Tatlow, wrote in his biography in 1920: 'It [1889 act]

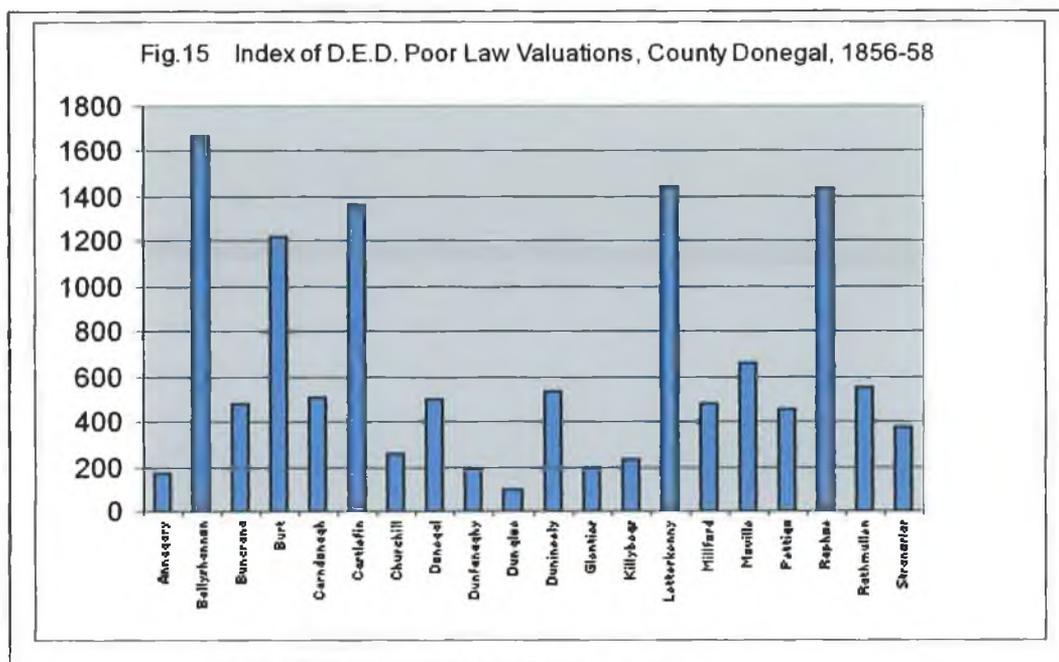
³⁸ *Final Report of the Viceregal Commission on Irish Railways, 1910*, pp 1910, vol. 37, p. 51.

³⁹ See Joseph C. Conroy, *A history of railways in Ireland* (London, 1928), chapter iv.

⁴⁰ Light Railways (Ireland) Act 1889, 52 & 53 Vict., c. 66.

was the first introduction of the principle of state aid by free money grants'.⁴¹

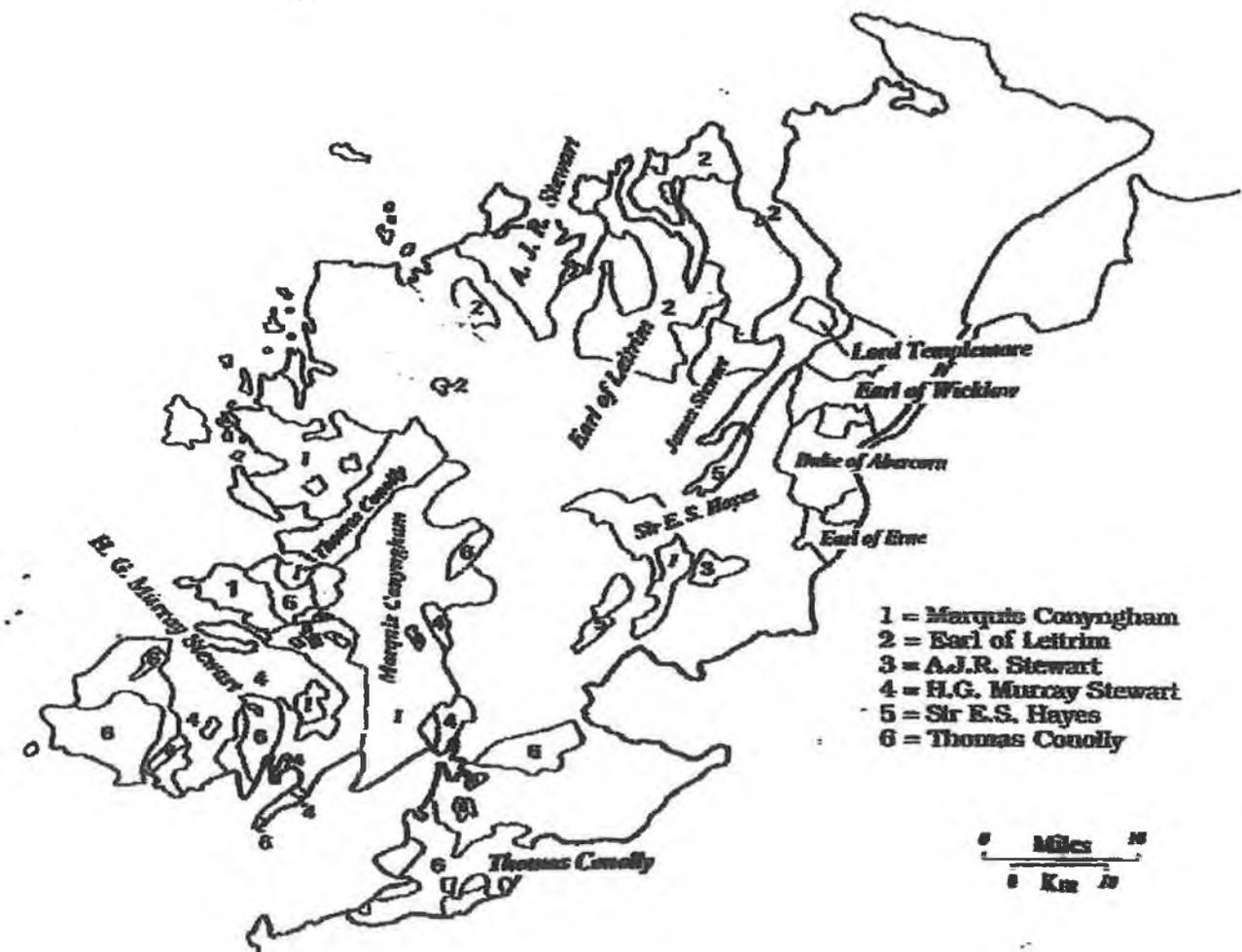
A number of factors had combined to bring this change about. The continuous fall in agricultural prices between 1881 and 1887 due to increasing cheap food imports into Britain from Argentina, Russia and America had a devastating effect on Ireland. The severity of the winter of 1886-87 limited food supplies to the tenantry and made many evictions likely. The inclusion of the Liberal Unionists united with the Conservatives in government ensured that their 'liberal' provisions in the legislative programme, especially those driven by Chamberlain who wanted the promotion of Irish industry, technical education and transport development, especially railways, found a ready ear in Arthur Balfour who



1 Source: General Valuation, Co. Donegal, 1856-58.

⁴¹ Joseph Tatlow, *Fifty years of railway life in Scotland and Ireland* (Westminster, 1920), p. 107.

Fig. 16 Immediate lessors in county Donegal with land valuations above £4000, c. 1850.



Source: General Valuation, County Donegal, 1856, Townland index, sheets 1 - 11, 1856

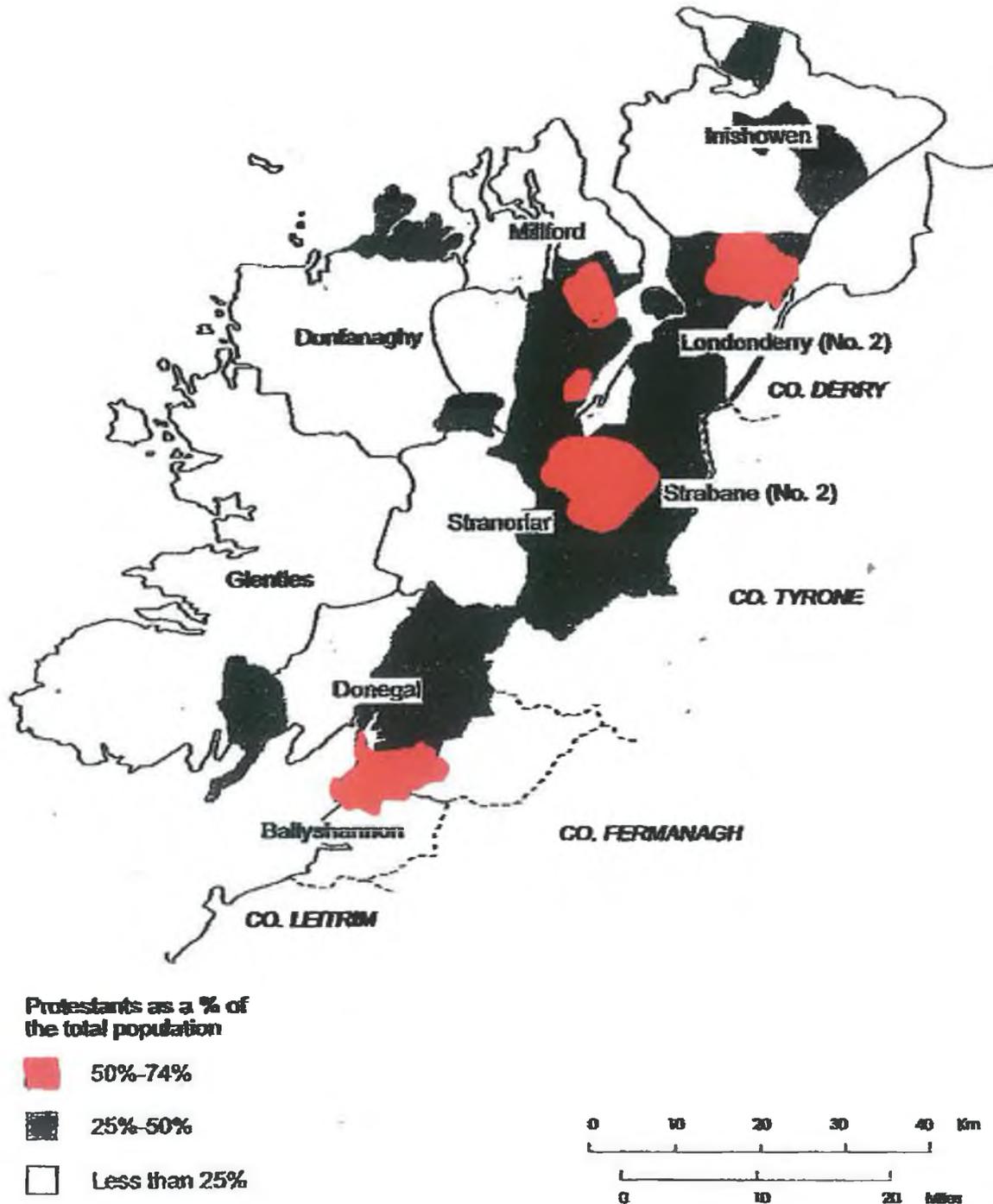
had the drive and ability to initiate these changes of policy in what is commonly called 'constructive Unionism' and which found its most lasting expression in Ireland in the land acts and the establishment of the Congested Districts Board which was a recognition that the poverty of stricken regions of Ireland could not engage in constructive economic development without government intervention.⁴² No doubt, the reports from Balfour's officials and the likes of James Hack Tuke as outlined in chapter 1, must have strongly influenced these initiatives. As a result of this loosening of traditional economic theory, it is significant that thirteen Irish standard gauge railways were built and two narrow gauge lines were constructed in County Donegal.⁴³

The railway development in the east and south of County Donegal had many advantages that northwest Donegal did not possess. Most of east Donegal had valuations more than four times in excess of any place in the northwest of the county and these could carry the burden of the guarantees demanded under the railway development schemes (Fig. 15). The clearances following the Famine in east Donegal had decimated the labouring classes there and left substantial farms containing some of the most fertile land in Ireland. The abundance of cheap labour available from northwest Donegal which could be enlarged or decreased as the markets demanded, enabled the landowners of the east to make fine profits without having to carry the burden of a large peasantry or landless classes nor was the area subject to the destitution or repeated famines which marked life on the western side of the Donegal hills. Even as late as the 1890s, East Donegal was held by a group of well-connected and influential landowners, whether absent or resident, who could be regarded as 'Protestant ascendancy' who enjoyed 'a power, privilege and wealth monopoly vested in one religious denomination under

⁴² See 'Conciliation' in L. P. Curtis, Jr, *Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland 1880-1892* (London, 1963), pp 331-374.

⁴³ Thomas Middlemass, *Encyclopaedia of narrow gauge railways of Great Britain and Ireland* (Somerset, 1991) p. 92. The Donegal lines mentioned were those to Glenties and Killybegs.

Fig. 17 Protestants as a percentage of total population by rural district in County Donegal, 1911



Source: Donegal history and society, p. 684

the constitutional framework and underpinning all social relations'.⁴⁴ Many were members of the Church of Ireland and owned large estates.⁴⁵ There were no limits under law as to whom the high sheriff might select as grand jurors so it was not surprising therefore, that the grand jury was a bulwark of Protestant, or more specifically, Church of Ireland privilege, comprised of the petty aristocracy, the gentry and retired militia.⁴⁶ A look at Figures 15, 16 and 17 will show that the foundation of Protestant power, structure of land, status and religion was firmly based in east Donegal which region had traditionally held the reins of power and influence in the county since the Plantation of Ulster. While government policies and economic circumstances were diluting this power structure somewhat by the 1890s it was still a very vibrant influence within Donegal society.

Allied to this land based structure in the east of the county was the urban network of developing towns. In 1891, Ballyshannon had a population of 2,840; Letterkenny, 2,188; Donegal, 1,416; Ballybofey, 1,009; Raphoe, 986 and Lifford, 514.⁴⁷ Many of these eastern towns had shirt-making and other industries as a spin-off from Derry and, with rich farmland surrounding them, these provided a balanced economy and the requisites for industrial development. Their proximity to the larger trading centres of Strabane, Sligo and Derry, these latter with their ports, helped expand their trading base and provided for easy export and import. And yet, despite all these advantages, railway development in the eastern half of Donegal proved an uncertain business, demanding substantial private investment and initiative together with generous government support.

What then of northwest Donegal? If compared with east Donegal it had little to recommend it. The land was so much inferior that only subsistence farming could be practised. Its landlords and landowners

⁴⁴ John Tunney, 'Protestant politics in Donegal:1863-1933' in *Donegal History*, p. 675.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 675.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

⁴⁷ *Census of population, County Donegal, 1891.*

lacked the influence, connections and power that the Abercorns and their kin could command. Conyngham who owned the Rosses was an absent landlord who left the management of his estate to an agent. With the exception of the Olphert family⁴⁸ many of the landowners in Cloughaneely and Gweedore had been purchasers around the Famine period with the objective of making immediate profits from their investments. But their purchases were not large enough nor the land quality good enough to enable them to climb the social ladder and they were neither inclined nor competent to indulge in the social interaction which would lead to the establishment of long-term kinship and family ties and influence.⁴⁹ In 1892, with the exception of clergy and doctors, there was only one resident gentleman in the large district of the Rosses and not one family of landowners or gentry were residing there.⁵⁰ Dungloe and Dunfanaghy were the only towns in the region and were of much less importance than similar centres of population in the east. The spread of population was rural and throughout the whole region there was not one important industry that could be identified with the place except that of the provision of human labour.

The residents of east Donegal had long become accustomed to seeing the hordes of scantily dressed children from the 'back country' behind the hills, walking to the hiring fairs with bundles on their backs to be examined, priced and hired as cheap labour on Laggan farms and watching seasonal migrants going to or coming from the Scottish farms annually.

In the northwest there were small pockets of Protestants. The chief concentration was at Dunfanaghy and the landlords were adherents of the Church of Ireland but they were vastly outnumbered by the Catholic population. While their spheres of influence were much greater than that of the Catholic community these landowners did not have the wealth or

⁴⁸ The Olphert family had come to Cloughaneely in the seventeenth century. In 1891-2 Wybrants Olphert and his son John were the only two deputy-lieutenants from the northwest.

⁴⁹ Gerry McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely*, chapter 7.

⁵⁰ CDB, Baseline, the Rosses, p. 10.

connections behind them which could draw major investment such as railway development into the area.⁵¹

But railway development was on the minds of many people within the northwest especially after the passing of the 1889 act. Promoters and private investors could now avail of substantial free grants in the congested districts, loans would be set at 3 per cent rather than the previous rate of 5 per cent and the promoters would now have the state as a partner with the profits divided equally between them. In the event of a loss occurring during operations the deficit could be made up by a small charge on the rates. With all of these securities there was the attraction for investors to achieve good returns on investments without being afraid of suffering much downside. As a consequence, County Donegal witnessed the largest interest ever in railway development.

The first day of January 1890 was set as the closing day for lodgement of schemes and plans for light railways under the 1889 railway act.⁵² The Donegal county surveyor's office located in Derry City was kept open until 8 p.m. to receive such plans.⁵³ By closing time the following railway proposals had been lodged:

1. Buncrana to Carndonagh. – 18½ miles long. [1 in fig. 18.]
2. Glenties to Killybegs, 16 miles long. [2 in fig. 18]
3. Letterkenny to Gweedore: – Section 1: Letterkenny to Falcarragh, 35½ miles long. Section 2: Kilmacrenan to Mulroy Bay (branch) 7½ miles long. Section 3: Falcarragh to Gweedore 10 miles long. [I in fig. Total 52 miles 5 furlongs 1 chain 11 yards; [3 in fig.14]. This railway was promoted by Wybrants Olphert and a group of investors from northwest Donegal under the title the 'Letterkenny and Gweedore Railway Company'.

⁵¹ Census of population, 1901, County Donegal.

⁵² 52 & 53 Vict., c. 66.

⁵³ *LS*, 2 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

4. Opposing this route was a consortium led by the earl of Leitrim which proposed that the railway into the northwest would go from Letterkenny via Ramelton, Milford, Creeslough to Dunfanaghy [4 in fig. 18].
5. Broad gauge, Stranorlar to Glenties and Gweedore. Section 1. Stranorlar to near Fintown = 14½ miles long. Section 2 from near Fintown to Glenties = 9¾ miles long. Section 3 from near Fintown to Bunbeg, Gweedore = 24¾ miles long Total 49 miles. [5 in fig. 18]
6. Stranorlar to Glenties Light Railway = 24½ miles long. [6 in fig. 18]
7. Donegal Town to Killybegs [7 in Fig. 18].
8. Glenties railway from (probably Fintown via the Rosses to a terminus near Bunbeg Harbour (8 in fig 18)

This was a total of more than 200 miles. At the current rate of construction of £5,500 per mile the cost of these schemes would amount to more than £1,100,000 although Balfour was limited by the act to a ceiling of £600,000 for railway development in all of Ireland.⁵⁴ It was clear from the beginning that not all of these lines could be built with state help but the level of interest does indicate that the 1889 railway act provided a massive inducement for various parties to look on railway development as a worthwhile investment.⁵⁵

There was general unanimity among the public, press and administrative bodies regarding the courses of the Buncrana to Carndonagh and the Donegal Town to Killybegs railways. The Stranorlar to Glenties line was also well-supported without much opposition and the only question was whether it would be broad gauge or narrow gauge. Carndonagh would serve the vast and thickly populated area of Inishowen, the growing importance of Killybegs as a fishing port was recognised and

⁵⁴ *LS*, 2 Jan. 1890, p. 2. The prevailing estimate of railway construction was £5,000 per mile. If all of these lines were built the cost would be over £1,100,000 approximately.

⁵⁵ *LS*, 2 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

Glenties had a thriving knitwear industry. Only the railways into the back country of the northwest caused controversy and brought forth opposing factions because of the poverty of the area, lack of industries and, with the exception of Dunfanaghy, the inability to determine a recognisable and deserving terminus, whether it be Dunfanaghy, Falcarragh, Bunbeg or somewhere else.⁵⁶

Indeed, in an editorial, the *Londonderry Sentinel* was scathing about the prevailing negativity regarding the new railways. 'When Mr Balfour introduced and carried the bill for £600,000, he was charged with offering a bribe. The promoters of the different schemes under the act are not apparently to fare any better. Instead of being looked upon as men who are doing a public service they are being treated as schemers and interlopers who are promoting their own ends'. A Mr Porter wrote in the same issue that the railway to Buncrana had destroyed the town and complained that farmers were not being adequately compensated for the land taken.⁵⁷

Letterkenny Town Commissioners met in January 1890 to consider the proposed railway lines. They were afraid of having to guarantee a portion of the new lines having already committed 4*d.* in the pound to the Letterkenny Railway. They were fearful of the railway into the northwest stating that: 'from the congested character of this district and the poverty prevailing, we think that this line should be made without any guarantee from the district'.⁵⁸ But they conceded that the advantage of building a railway was that it placed the congested districts in connection with the Quarter Sessions town of Letterkenny, the geographical and commercial capital of the northern half of the county of Donegal where were situated the county lunatic asylum, the headquarters for the Royal Irish Constabulary for the county, the staff and camp for the 3rd. Brigade, North Irish Division, Royal Artillery, the courthouse where quarter sessions for

⁵⁶ *LS*, 2 Jan. 1890, editorial.

⁵⁷ *LS*, 18 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

the division of Lifford were held as well as Revision and Land Commission sessions as well as a port where, in the year 1889, 4,271 tons of coal, salt and manure were landed. Three large banks testified to the commercial activity of the town and district.⁵⁹

The Board of Works instituted a commission of inquiry⁶⁰ which was sent to the region to investigate all aspects of railway development and, in theory, took evidence from a broad spectrum of people and then, presented a full report of their findings to the Board of Works in Dublin, which information would form the analytical base by which grants and finances would be calculated. However, these enquiries normally produced many layers of interested parties pushing various agendas from the landlord who saw the opportunity of improving his lands, the business community who saw enhanced trade and commerce as a result, and the clergy who usually entered the debate from a philanthropic viewpoint though many hoped to relieve themselves of the burden of organising and managing distress relief which had been a feature of life in the area almost annually for many years.

General Hutchinson (president), and Messrs Price, Liller and Micks were the light railway commissioners who sat in various centres throughout the county in January 1890. They sat for eleven days and travelled hundreds of miles and heard the statements and opinions of between one hundred and two hundred residents in the county. The expense of the enquiry was estimated at £1,000 beside the fees to engineering and legal gentlemen engaged by the different promoters. The commissioners began at Carndonagh, then Derry, Letterkenny, Dunfanaghy, Bunbeg, Glenties, Stranorlar, Donegal town and Killybegs.⁶¹ They would discover that Donegal was no different from other parts of the country insofar as vested interests were concerned. There were many competing factions favouring different routes of railway to northwest Donegal and all were prepared to

⁵⁹ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *LS*, 21 Jan.; 25 Jan.; 28 Jan and 3 Feb. 1890 for a full report of the commission's sittings.

⁶¹ *LS*, 3 Feb. 1890.

fight for the railway which would benefit their own interests best.⁶²

There was little controversy regarding the railway proposals for lines to Killybegs, Carndonagh and Glenties. The question of whether the Stranorlar to Glenties railway should be narrow gauge or standard gauge took up some argument. The commissioners spent most of the time hearing submissions of minor natures or concerns from various ratepayers afraid of being further loaded with increased payments.⁶³

In northwest Donegal in 1890 the interests of the landlords were very prominent in the areas where the proposed railway was to run. The earl of Leitrim held extensive lands from Sheephaven Bay around Mulroy Bay to Lough Swilly. Stewart held the Ards Peninsula. Another Stewart held the lands around Dunfanaghy. Olphert reigned over much of Tullaghobegley which included the Catholic parish of Cloughaneely and part of Gweedore and Lord Hill had his base in Gweedore (Fig. 8 and 16). Olphert was keen to have the railway line to his own territory at Falcarragh and Hill pushed for Gweedore. Significantly, the railway into the northwest brought the two major landlords, Olphert and Leitrim, into head-to-head contention. The Rosses which was the most congested area of all had no resident landlord and no gentry and consequently, got no mention in proceedings at all.⁶⁴

Wybrants Olphert led the promoters of the Letterkenny to Dunfanaghy/Falcarragh railway, commonly called the 'inland' line (3 in Fig. 18). These promoters were all substantial citizens from west of Letterkenny who operated under the title 'The Letterkenny & Gweedore Railway'. Olphert was a very extensive landowner and prominent landlord in the district of Cloughaneely who was at this time fighting the Plan of Campaign on his estate with the help of government backing as has been outlined in chapter 1. Mr Hewitson was an extensive landowner from the Gartan area. Two prominent landowners and businessmen, Mr Fleming and

⁶² *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890.

⁶³ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890.

⁶⁴ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890.

Mr Ingram together with Mr Manus Mc Fadden, a very extensive merchant in the Letterkenny and Churchill areas, and Mr John Wilkinson, clerk of Falcarragh Petty Sessions, general agent and substantial businessman made up the rest of the promoting company. It was substantially a Protestant alliance, it was heavily land based and representative of the wealth and influence of the area.⁶⁵

The earl of Leitrim led the opposing consortium with its proposals for a route of railway from Letterkenny along the shores of Lough Swilly, Mulroy Bay and Sheephaven Bay into Creeslough and then to Dunfanaghy (4 in fig. 18). He had gathered around him smaller landlords and business interests similar to Olphert. Both sides utilised the Catholic clergy as witnesses to bolster their cases.⁶⁶

But this was the first time that promoters from the region west of Letterkenny had come forth to promote railway lines and this development was a sign that government policy, especially the 1889 act, was reasonably conducive for smaller landlords, lesser gentry and ordinary business people to become involved. It also signalled that a business class was rising in northwest Donegal which was now sufficiently influential to take its position alongside the landlords and landowners.⁶⁷ But the involvement of all members could be seen as purely for personal gain because a new railway would enhance their properties and increase their business potential.

However, when the railway commissioners sat in the boardroom of the workhouse in Letterkenny on 23 January 1890 to hear submissions regarding the best route and terminus for a railway into northwest Donegal, there were major disagreements between the promoters of the two competing lines from Letterkenny to Gweedore via Dunfanaghy. Not alone were the inland and coastal railways proposed but a third proposal was

⁶⁵ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890.

⁶⁶ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

offered for a spur from the Glenties line through the Rosses to Gweedore (8 in fig. 18). Olphert's inland land was proposed first and evidence on its behalf was called.⁶⁸

Mr Dane, Q.C., represented Olphert and the Letterkenny and Gweedore Railway Company and described the 'inland' line from Letterkenny via Churchill, Kilmacrenan, Barnes Gap, Creeslough, Dunfanaghy and possibly to Crossroads⁶⁹ with spurs to Mulroy Bay and another to Gweedore at Bunbeg. The estimate for the line to Dunfanaghy was £149,919 with the Mulroy spur costing £37,728 and the extension from Falcarragh to Gweedore would cost £54,085, a total of £242,132.⁷⁰

Mr Doyle, an engineer who had long experience in studying and planning lines to the northwest, said that he believed in the inland route. If a line went by the sea, traffic could only be got from one side although he agreed that there were five times more people by the seaboard. The line from Letterkenny to Doe Castle, near Creeslough, would be easy but the country was rough from there onwards. Between Creeslough and Kilmacrenan was wretched country. He said that the Mulroy detour would be a ruinous line for the ratepayers to have a penny in.⁷¹

The mention of ratepayers was always guaranteed to raise tensions when railways were being discussed. Some portion of the funding for a new railway would have to be guaranteed by the ratepayers of a district, normally the barony. This created resentment among the people who lived long distances from the railway being developed because they did not see what benefits such a line would be to them. Such was the case with the Letterkenny Railway which drew levees as far as Gweedore, and the Glenties line drew rates from the Rosses even though both areas had no direct connection with these railways. The fear of failure added further worry to ratepayers for they would have to guarantee the interest payments

⁶⁸ *LS*, 3 Feb. 1890.

⁶⁹ Crossroads was the town of Falcarragh. Both names were commonly used in the nineteenth century.

⁷⁰ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

on loans borrowed for the construction for a long number of years as had happened with the Letterkenny Railway. The 1889 act had a clause authorising 6*d.* on the rates to make up any deficit between income and expenditure during the working of a railway.⁷²

Mr Robert Worthington, a Dublin contractor who spoke on behalf of Olphert's line, held out an attractive prospect when he dealt with the employment which the construction of a railway would bring. He had built 114 miles of railway in Ireland at an expenditure of over £500,000. He would be prepared to finance the line by taking shares at par and a guarantee at par in payment. He would employ 1,000 men during the construction if he could get them and his rate of pay would be 1*s.* or 2*s.* per week over the local rate, whatever that was.⁷³

At the Dunfanaghy sitting, the Falcarragh landlord, Wybrants Olphert, declared himself the oldest magistrate and grand juror in Ireland. He was seventy-nine years of age and had always resided on his estate for the last sixty years. The inland line, in which he was the main investor, would go through his estates. The railway was a noble gift and they had no other way of getting it. He was the largest cesspayer in the district and he would gladly pay a small guarantee. If the guarantee amounted only to the dog tax it would be very small. He believed the Board of Works and Mr Balfour would not overtax them. He was anxious to have the railway extended to his own Falcarragh estate and argued that if the line were kept about half a mile from Creeslough and about a mile higher up than Dunfanaghy, the line could be made to Falcarragh nearly as cheaply as to Dunfanaghy and it would greatly relieve the district of Gweedore beyond.⁷⁴

This inland line would go through his estate which would enhance property values. But it is possible that Olphert saw further uses for such a line. At this time, his estate was under siege from the Plan of Campaign.

⁷² Terms of the 1889 railway act.

⁷³ *LS*, 21 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

He was very dependent on troops and police coming to his aid from Derry and Letterkenny when crises arose. The new railway would make his long-term tenure a safer one.⁷⁵

Fr J. C. Cannon, Administrator, Gartan, then gave evidence. He was one of a number of priests brought forward by the promoters of the inland railway to give evidence. All were anxious that the railway would be built to relieve distress through the provision of work and the development of industry. Each priest was enthusiastic for the building of a railway as long as it came close to his own parish and benefited the community. The clergy acted as individuals with each being principally concerned with the welfare of their own parishioners.⁷⁶

Fr Cannon presented a forceful, altruistic argument for the inland line and the immense benefits which it would bring to his parish of Gartan which was one and a half miles from the proposed line. His only concern was the betterment of his parishioners. He believed Gartan was one of the poorest parishes in Donegal and one of the most congested. The district in which he lived was only half of the parish. It contained 200 families of which 170 were Catholic. The railway would give employment during construction. It would promote shirtmaking and the stocking industry. Fr Cannon then referred to 'the marble prairies' which were situated on the Glenveagh mountains and the valuable timber on Mr Hewetson's property at Gartan which could not be profitably shipped owing to the high rates charged for carting it to Letterkenny. The development of these industries which would result from the railway would create vast employment in the areas.⁷⁷

Fr Peter Kelly P.P., Dunfanaghy said that, with regard to the tourist traffic for the past year, there was a great influx of people into the district but they could not be called tourists in the ordinary acceptance of the term.

⁷⁵ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

They were rather officials in connection with the evictions or persons coming to witness the evictions in Gweedore and Cloughaneely. He thought the owners of the quarries, rather than the ratepayers, should pay the guarantees for the railway as they would be the beneficiaries when the line was in operation. He thought the ordinary cesspayers could rise to one shilling in the pound. Fr Kelly was there to press the case for Dunfanaghy. His presence gave balance to the number of Protestants who were making a case for the inland line. All of them would benefit substantially from land enhancement, tourism, business and general trade.⁷⁸

Dunfanaghy residents were certain that the railway would go through their town, whether it was the inland or seaboard route. They presented a wide array of important residents from the town and its surroundings that set out the advantages which railway transport would bring, such as industry, tourism, fishing and development of local resources. A large landowner, Charles F. Stewart of Horn Head, near Dunfanaghy, spoke about the benefits which railway transport would bestow on Dunfanaghy Town but he did not specify which line was preferred as long as Dunfanaghy was serviced. He spoke of the quicker access to English, Scottish and local markets. He sent his fish by cart to Letterkenny and they were railed to Derry. The fish left Dunfanaghy late at night and arrived at Letterkenny in time for the first train. They reached London on the second morning in time for the market. The cartage was 10s. a cart. A cart could take five boxes of salmon with each box containing 150 lbs of fish. He also spoke of the tourist traffic to Dunfanaghy and to Gweedore which would ensue.⁷⁹ James A. Sterritt, hotel proprietor of Dunfanaghy, spoke of the tourist and goods traffic, the Muckish Mountain sand for glassmaking and the excellent marble of the district. Mr T. A. Ingram, Lloyds' agent in Dunfanaghy, said the flax buyers who originally came to Dunfanaghy had

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

ceased to come owing to the cost of cartage and now the majority of the farmers carted direct into Letterkenny.⁸⁰ The Dunfanaghy representatives appeared to have little interest in either the coastal route or the inland route as long as the town got its railway.

Fr James M'Fadden, P.P., Glena, in the parish of Cloughaneely, (no relation of the priest of the same name in Gweedore), was interested in helping the poor people through work and development. He supported the inland line. He said he remembered the time when the Letterkenny line was being built to Derry and it was commonly said that the labourers going to the harvest would not use it but would still walk to Derry. Now that was found out not to be true. He had been in discussion with one of the shirt factors in Derry who would be willing to establish a shirt depot in the northwest if the line were built. Mrs Hart of Gweedore had told him she would open a knitwear depot in Falcarragh. The average valuation in his district was under £3 and if they were asked to give a guarantee of 3*d.* in the pound that would be 9*d.* for each of the 1,100 families and surely it would be worth any man's while in the whole district to pay that amount.⁸¹

The earl of Leitrim and the proponents of the 'seaboard' route then presented their case. The earl's estates lay along the coastline through which their proposed railway would run (4 in fig. 18). They were interested in the business which a coastal railway would bring to the earl's steamers and they used the poverty of the area west of Creeslough to scare the ratepayers. Their presentation argued that the areas between Dunfanaghy and Letterkenny, including the coastal towns, were worthy of a railway and would have the trade to support it. The region west of Dunfanaghy was too poor to either provide the traffic or give any sort of guarantee through the rates. The earl already had an extensive steamer service operating along the north Donegal coast and, if a railway could be

⁸⁰ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁸¹ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

constructed from Letterkenny along the seaboard, his steamers would probably capture the traffic of the whole area. The earl and his supporters contended that the remote areas of the northwest could be served by a spur from the Glenties railway perhaps at Doochary Bridge which would capture the traffic of the Rosses. They presented the advantages of linking rail with shipping through reduced charges and costs which would benefit both the business community and the ordinary people. Freights from Dunfanaghy to Glasgow in winter were 8*s.* per ton and to Derry 7*s.* 6*d.* and in summer 5*s.* and 4*s.* 6*d.* Leitrim's steamer got 5*s.* per ton from Derry to Creeslough and no railway could compete with that.⁸² They often repeated the point that Olphert's proposed inland line could not get a guarantee west of Creeslough because of the poverty of the area. They estimated that the proposed deficit per mile from Letterkenny to Falcarragh would be £1 5*s.* without the Milford branch and, in the tradition of railways, such losses would become a charge on the rates which would be enough to scare the populace. Their ploy seemed to be working well when Fr Cannon, Churchill, took up this point and said that the people were afraid that the guarantee would become a second rent through being unlimited. He said the average rents in the district were £3-£4. Mr Price countered that a tax of 6*d.* would only be 2*s.* a household. A dog licence cost 2*s.* 6*d.* and he saw as many dogs as would pay for the line.⁸³

William Harkin, a prominent Creeslough businessman and an important contributor, tried to inject further fear when he outlined how the annual deficit in working Olphert's line would be over £1,000. He then listed the benefits of the seaboard line from Letterkenny via Ramelton, Milford, Mulroy Bay and along the coast to Dunfanaghy (4 in fig. 18).⁸⁴

The established connections between Derry city and Dunfanaghy and the earl of Leitrim then emerged when Mr John Cooke, chairman of Derry

⁸² *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁸³ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

⁸⁴ *LS*, 25 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

Harbour Commissioners, spoke at length of the excellent outlets from Derry and warned of handing the traffic over to the Great Northern Railway (GNR) line at Strabane which would take it to Greenore and therefore exclude Derry. His only interest was the city of Derry but he strongly supported the earl of Leitrim's 'seaboard' railway.⁸⁵

The earl and his backers offered a well-coordinated presentation covering a wide spectrum of the population of the northwest with the views of the city of Derry business community, the landowners of the area, businessmen and a number of Catholic clergy. And they had created fears that the northwest by itself would be unable to sustain a railway, either by traffic or through the rates.

The commissioners sat at Bunbeg in the parish of Gweedore on Monday 27 January 1890 where the question was not about the competing seaboard or inland railways but the totally different proposal that a spur would be built from the Glenties railway to Gweedore (8 in fig. 18). Mr John H Swiney, engineer of the proposed broad gauge line from the Glenties Railway to Bunbeg, gave evidence that the railway was promoted by a local company of which J. H. Weir, Convoy and Mr J. Johnston, Stranorlar, were directors. He said the people preferred this line to the Falcarragh line which would throw them at the mercy of the Derry merchants but the link with the Glenties line would take them to Stranorlar and Strabane and would give them choice between Derry, Belfast, Dublin and Greenore.⁸⁶

At this point the influential 'Gweedore patriot priest', Fr James McFadden, objected saying that he [Mr Swiney] took no steps to determine the feelings of the Gweedore people on that subject. Fr McFadden said he did not think the spur from the Glenties line of railway met the requirements of Gweedore at all. He discounted it completely as being

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *LS*, 28 Jan. 1890, p. 3.

useless to the district. He was in favour of Olphert's inland line but then he firmly put it to the commissioners that there would be no advantage at all to the parish of Gweedore if the line were made from Dunfanaghy to Lord Hill's Gweedore Hotel only which was situated on the outer periphery of the parish.⁸⁷ The line should come through Gweedore right along the seaboard where the people were. He didn't think the district should be asked to give a guarantee as it was an exceedingly poor area and it already had to pay 4*d.* in the pound for the Letterkenny line. If the guarantee was limited and the line made in the direction he indicated, along the seaboard where there was a big population, he would advise the people to pay a small guarantee.⁸⁸ McFadden's contribution was reasoned, persuasive and forceful. Like the other priests, he was looking after his own flock.⁸⁹

This railway into northwest Donegal brought forth one of the great ironies of the time. The principal proposer of the railway was Wybrants Olphert who had been the main target of the Plan of Campaign in Cloughaneely which began in January 1888 because of his refusal to negotiate a reduction in rents. Since Balfour could not hope to deal with the Plan of Campaign on all estates throughout the country, he decided to choose some half-dozen where the landlords had been 'reasonable' about abatements in the past and where the Plan was deeply entrenched. On these so called 'test estates' the Castle would commit all its resources to defeat the combination.⁹⁰ The 18,133 acres Olphert estate was one of the chosen test estates where the tenants' demands for 25 per cent reduction on judicial rents and 40 per cent reduction on non-judicial rents were to be resisted.⁹¹

⁸⁷ The Gweedore Hotel was built by Lord George Hill in the late 1840s and was now owned by his son, Arthur.

⁸⁸ *LS*, 28 Jan. 1890, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, p. 240. The test estates were, Olphert estate, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal; Lansdowne estate, Luggacurren, Queen's County; Brooke estate, Coolgraney, Co. Wexford; Vandelaeur estate, Kilrush, Co. Clare; Tottenham estate, Ashford, Co. Wicklow and Talbot Ponsonby estate, Youghal, Co. Cork.

⁹¹ Plan of Campaign on the Olphert estate (NAI, CO 903/1, Irish Crime Records, II).

Evictions were taking place on the Olphert estate with the help of the Scots Greys, the RIC and emergency men. Olphert's name was known nationally and internationally from the press reports regarding the evictions and suffering on his estate. The leader of the Plan of Campaign in the northwest was Fr James McFadden of Gweedore who had spent six months in Derry gaol along with Fr Stephens for their activities against Olphert, Swiney and Captain Hill. Fr McFadden of Glena, parish priest of Cloughaneely, opponent of Fr James McFadden, rebel priest of Gweedore, was the chief negotiator for the ordinary tenants in their dealings with Olphert but, eventually, he had to admit defeat in his efforts at a conciliatory settlement.⁹²

Yet, here before the commissioners were the same two Fathers McFadden together with a number of other priests supporting the enemy Olphert in his quest to have his railway built through their localities. In reality, the philosophical and principled positions and attitude of the Catholic clergy and the Tory Government and party and especially that of landowners such as Olphert were not far apart in that all were totally opposed to the granting of free relief to the starving peasantry except in the most exceptional circumstances. During Balfour's visit to Donegal in 1890 a local parish priest, echoing Balfour's own words, decried the principle of eleemosynary aid and uttered his abhorrence of such practice.⁹³ The clergy's background tended to ally them to the shopkeepers and the business and profit ethic rather than to that of charitable donation which, in the prevailing philosophy, would lead to human deterioration. The recurring distress since 1879 had placed priests, shopocracy and gombeenmen together in an alliance. It was estimated that 10,000 people needed relief in that year but the relief committees were controlled by the

⁹² Gerry McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely* (Dublin, 2002), chapter 10.

⁹³ *LS*, 18 Nov. 1890, p. 3.

clergy and shopkeepers. But the *Londonderry Sentinel* believed that the clergy had allied themselves to the shopkeepers and exploited the poor:

The clergy were better informed but were swayed by the shopkeepers, who were in the ascendancy. The latter made their position on the committees a means of extending their influence and their business. They were generous only to those whose patronage was worth retaining or gaining.⁹⁴

This alliance was natural enough in a society where poverty was repetitive. The Plan of Campaign, the evictions and resultant dislocation led to the breakdown of normality and, as a result, the shopkeeper lost his normal trade and incurred debt. The hierarchy feared that 'social evils of the gravest character' would result.⁹⁵ The role of the priest was becoming pressurized and their bond of unity was becoming fragmented. Law and order often broke down. In Gweedore and Cloughaneely, the Plan of Campaign and land agitation led to order and morality suffering. When a tenant was evicted he and his family lost their credit rating in the shops. With more than 400 families having been evicted it was easy to see that the fabric of traditional society was being severely rent. The sooner the old order could be restored the better for clergy and shopkeepers.⁹⁶

The building of the railway was viewed by many of the clergy as a relief measure which would provide immediate employment and earned income for the poor, rather than as a long-term plan for development of resources or general betterment of society. This was also the age of growing socialism with all its attendant fears for Catholicism and Toryism and the clergy of Raphoe diocese were every bit as opposed to the new philosophy as the Tory party in England. The land war was a type of class war with the peasantry in the revolutionary van. Hints of nationalisation,

⁹⁴ *LS*, 11 Oct. 1890, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ See Gerry McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely*, chapters 10 and 11 for details of the Cloughaneely and Gweedore evictions.

peasant ownership, the dissolution of property rights, disrespect for the law and the abandonment of the tenets of decency were as much inimical to the clergy in Ireland as they were to the Conservatives in England or their loyal subjects in Ireland. It was little wonder then that the Fathers McFadden and the priests supported the hated Wybrants Olphert in this railway venture.

In an editorial in February 1890, the *Londonderry Sentinel* stated that it was glad that the enquiries had tended largely to dissipate the guarantee 'bogey' which had hitherto been used to frighten the cess payers when railways had been proposed. They felt that it had been proved that the average Donegal peasant would clear the amount of the guarantee on the enhanced price of one pig owing to the opening up of the county to competition. Instead of having to sell his pig to some travelling jobber who might give just what he pleased, the owner would have the chance of taking the animal to a market or fair where buyers from Derry or elsewhere would give the full price.⁹⁷

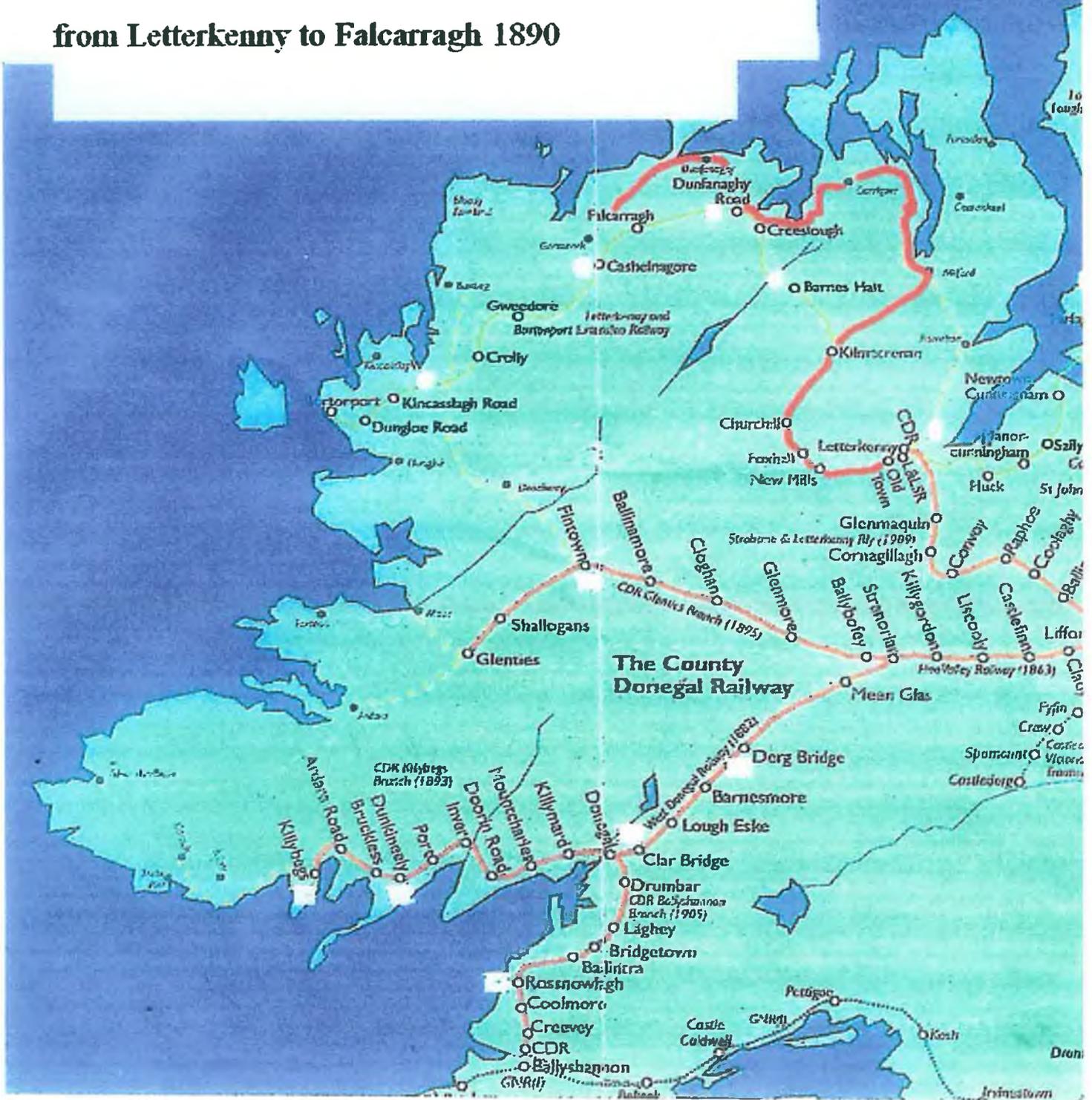
In March 1890, the findings of the railway commissioners reached Donegal. The Board of Works were supporting four of the proposed schemes as a result of the commissioners' report.⁹⁸ These were the Buncrana to Carndonagh railway (1 in fig. 18), the Letterkenny to Dunfanaghy/Falcarragh railway, the Donegal to Killybegs Railway (7 in fig. 18) and the Stranorlar to Glenties Light (narrow gauge) railway (5 in fig. 18). The aggregate total cost of these would total £506,837 or almost within £100,000 of the total grant of £600,000 made available to all of Ireland under Balfour's bill. In the case of the Letterkenny to Falcarragh line, the commissioners proposed that the government should bear the total cost of construction, less only £1,000, on which the baronies would be required to guarantee interest. This clearly would only involve an annual

⁹⁷ *LS*, 4 Feb. 1890, p. 2. (editorial).

⁹⁸ *LS*, 11 Mar. 1890, p. 2.

County Donegal Railway
 Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway

Fig. 19 Board of Works proposal for a railway from Letterkenny to Falcarragh 1890



Board of Works proposed line to Falcarragh: ———

payment by the cesspayers of a sum of about £50 but there was also the assumption implied that the contributory baronies would be responsible for any deficit that might take place in the working the line because of the clause in the 1889 act allowing a rate of 6*d.* in the pound to be levied in such circumstances.⁹⁹

However, when the full extent of the scheme was unveiled in March 1890, the Board of Works stunned everyone in the northwest with its recommendation that neither the direct inland line nor the coastal route was to be approved but a hybrid route between Letterkenny and Falcarragh which would go via Foxhall to Kilmacrenan, and then divert to Mulroy Bay via Milford and Carrigart, then turn back to Creeslough and proceed to Dunfanaghy and Falcarragh which plan would add a further ten miles in length and cost £50,000 extra, thereby making the total cost of this line £240,000 out of the total Irish grant of £600,000 (fig. 19). An editorial in the *Londonderry Sentinel* was succinct in its condemnation of the proposal. 'This recommendation virtually knocks the scheme on the head. This wonderful roundabout route has very little prospect of ever getting beyond the stage of recommendation'.¹⁰⁰

This senseless detour was seen by the public as the outcome of the devious influence of the earl of Leitrim who was able to manipulate the Dublin authorities for his own benefit. There was panic in Letterkenny at the prospect that Leitrim's influence had won over the commissioners for they feared that he would draw the bulk of the traffic in the whole northwest region to his steamers which controlled the shipping between Sheephaven Bay and Lough Swilly and plied between the ports of that region and Derry and Belfast and Glasgow. A meeting of the town's business interests condemned the Falcarragh/Dunfanaghy line because it would serve a country, 'which already has a seaboard and is perfectly in

⁹⁹ *LS*, 11 Mar. 1890.

¹⁰⁰ *LS*, 11 Mar. 1890, p. 2, (editorial).

communication with Scotland by steamer. Creeslough would send all its traffic by road or train to Milford with the result that Letterkenny would be left out in the cold. It would involve 2s. 3d. in the pound perpetual tax as far as Cloughaneely'.¹⁰¹ The question of how or when a railway might be made to Gweedore was left unanswered and the Rosses was not contemplated in these proposals at all. The county surveyor then went out to examine the proposals on behalf of the grand jury, which body he pleasantly surprised with his report:

I estimate that a saving of say, 15 to 20 per cent in the cost of maintenance of the roads most immediately affected would ensue from the construction of these railways.¹⁰²

With the grand jury's parsimony in investment in road upkeep this was indeed welcome news and a good reason why they should support railway development.

At the Spring Assizes of 1890, the Donegal Grand Jury met to consider the four lines in contention before them. It was their task to decide whether the lines projected were the best lines for opening up the county of Donegal and, secondly, whether they were likely to be productive of an adequate and proportionate return. Conditions would attach to the grant for each railway and each grand jury was very conscious of these because failure of the railway would leave them responsible for the debt incurred. In this matter the baronial guarantee question was really the most important item to demand the attention of the grand jury. According to the Railway (Ireland) Act 1889, where an existing railway company undertook to work a new line, no application would be made to the county or grand jury to guarantee any portion of the capital because any deficit that might arise would be the responsibility of the existing operating railway company. The

¹⁰¹ *LS*, 13 Mar. 1890, p. 3.

¹⁰² *LS*, 8 Mar. 1890, p. 2.

existing railway would carry the deficit burden of the new extension if failure occurred and the county grand jury and barony would be free of charge. Other clauses in the 1889 act stated that any railway extension would be promoted by an existing railway company and further, that any new railway must be an extension of an existing railway.¹⁰³

The Carndonagh Extension complied with these two essential requirements of the act, in that, it was promoted by an existing railway company, the L&LSR which undertook to work it 'in perpetuity' whether it paid its way or not and, secondly, it was an extension of an existing railway. The L&LSR had not only agreed to work the line but further, agreed to supply it with rolling stock and, for that purpose, proceeded to raise £25,000 in capital. The Killybegs' scheme also fulfilled the two above stated conditions. However, neither the Falcarragh nor the Glenties schemes were promoted by existing railway companies although the Glenties scheme was backed by the Finn Valley Railway. But, if adopted, they would both be liable to unlimited guarantee which left the grand jury very vulnerable in the event of their failure. The *Londonderry Sentinel* described the route to Falcarragh which was recommended by the commissioners as 'a mere fancy line' and was said to be 'merely the fad of one of the commissioners'.¹⁰⁴

Olphert and his fellow investors in the 'Letterkenny and Gweedore Railway Company' argued strongly before the grand jurors for their 'inland' line to Falcarragh and possibly to Bunbeg. They pointed out that the Board of Works seemed to favour the inland¹⁰⁵ line in general despite its detour aberration and it was foolish to think that a penny of money would be given by the government for the 'seaboard' line which was condemned by the commissioners. They said that, in a few years, the inland railway would pay its way, for no man could tell how far the fishing

¹⁰³ *LS*, 13 Mar. 1890, p. 2, (editorial).

¹⁰⁴ *LS*, 13 Mar. 1890, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ This inland line ran from Letterkenny to Foxhall, Kilmacrenan and then detoured to Mulroy Bay and Carrigart before returning to Creeslough and proceeding to Dunfanaghy and Falcarragh.

industry would be developed by railway communication. Fred Dawson, manager of the L&LSR, which company would probably work the line for the proposers, was called as a witness by the 'inland' group. He said that the terminus would be at Bunbeg pier where steamers of 200 tons could come alongside. The working expenses of two trains daily in each direction would be £3 2s. 6d. per mile per week. He further ascertained that the railway would pay its way.¹⁰⁶

Fr James McFadden of Gweedore who had performed so well before the commissioners at Gweedore said the new line would be a necessary preliminary to developing the fishing industry. The knitwear and sewing industry established by Mrs Alice Hart in Gweedore and the shirtmaking industry would likely be enlarged consequent to the railway being made and a large trade might be done with oxide iron and kelp. He argued that in seven years the railway would be self-supporting. He even believed that the people would be willing to pay an addition of one shilling in the pound rates to get the railway.¹⁰⁷

At this suggestion, the earl of Leitrim, however, was not of like mind. He deposed that he was a promoter of the 'seaboard' line¹⁰⁸ and he had considered the merits of the two lines. He warned that there would be revolution in some parts of the guaranteeing areas of Donegal if the inland line were chosen. 'The man would never live in certain districts who would attempt to collect the tax'. He considered the proposal to tax the Meevagh district [the Carrigart and Downings peninsula] as 'the most cruel, vindictive and malicious proposal that could be made'.¹⁰⁹

Following consideration the grand jury passed the lines from Buncrana to Carndonagh, Donegal Town to Killybegs and Stranorlar to Glenties. Even though this last line was not strictly in accordance with the

¹⁰⁶ *LS*, 18 Mar. 1890, pp 2-4.

¹⁰⁷ *DI*, 20 Mar. 1890, p. 3

¹⁰⁸ The coast line would run north from Letterkenny to Ramelton, Rathmullen and round Mulroy Bay to Carrigart before proceeding to Dunfanaghy.

¹⁰⁹ *DI*, 20 Mar. 1890, p. 3.

conditions of being promoted by a railway company, Glenties had a strong business base, with substantial knitwear and hosiery trade and it had enough well-connected merchants who could be relied upon to support the railway. The marquis of Conyngham also had a residence in the town and it was the place where Balfour had received his most rousing welcome and there had been no Plan of Campaign activities in the area. But the grand jury rejected the Falcarragh/Dunfanaghy line though they stated that they did not lay down any hard and fast route as long as it was tolerably direct. They knew that the government were determined to run a line to Falcarragh and probably on to Gweedore but they did not think the people would thank the Board of Works for suggesting a detour by way of Mulroy Bay and thus delaying the carrying out of the works.¹¹⁰

However, the grand jury did send a recommendation to the government urging that the Board of Works adopt the direct inland route from Letterkenny to Gweedore through Barnes Gap and avoid Mulroy Bay and its detours altogether (3 in fig. 18). The grand jury also unanimously recommended that the money already offered for the railway into the northwest should be retained by the Treasury 'for this much congested district of Gweedore by the shortest practicable route via Dunfanaghy and Crossroads' [Falcarragh], and they requested that a new railway scheme should be drawn up and approved by the Board of Works and brought forward at the Summer Assizes 1890. The strong recommendation of the grand jury was that the detour to Mulroy Bay should be dropped altogether.¹¹¹

After receiving the recommendations from Donegal Grand Jury that a direct railway be built into the northwest, the Board of Works reconsidered the scheme and agreed to review the proposal. However, for the ordinary people, their great hopes of employment on the new railway

¹¹⁰ *LS*, 20 Mar. 1890, p. 2, (editorial).

¹¹¹ *LS*, 20 Mar. 1890, p. 4.

had been lost. Together with the evictions and turmoil in Cloughaneely and Gweedore it seemed that nothing was in their favour.

However, on top of these disappointments, the rains of the summer and harvest 1890 destroyed most of the potato crop along the western seaboard with Donegal being severely hit.¹¹² This catastrophe moved Balfour to expedite the railway programme in order to provide relief in the west of Ireland. Work started on the Galway to Clifden and Collooney to Claremorris railways thereby giving employment to vast numbers of men. It was expected in northwest Donegal, where the destitution was severe, that relief would soon be provided by railway extension.

As a result of the continuous reports coming into the government offices in Dublin about potato failure and destitution Balfour himself decided to visit the congested areas, including Donegal, in the winter of 1890 to see the state of the people and the conditions in which they lived. For Balfour this was more than a visit by a government official inspecting aspects of his brief. He was a person of high moral principles that were firmly held. During his visit he saw the appalling state of many people throughout the west. However, he decided that the government should keep a tight grip over all relief measures. Where public works were initiated NCOs were put in charge and RIC officers acted as timekeepers. The workers were sometimes paid in seed potatoes. The government considered that to 'pay a tenant in a year of distress for doing what he might have done to his own great advantage during his leisure time in past winters would be to teach him the worst of all possible lessons'.¹¹³ Principle would clearly have to satisfy many of the destitute in Balfour's world.

¹¹² *LS*, 21 Aug. 1890, p. 2, editorial.

¹¹³ R. B. McDowell, 'Administration and public services 1870-1921' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland*, vi (Oxford, 1996) p.583. Quote taken from 'Relief of distress (Ireland) 1890-91'; draft report (B.L., Add MS 49823, ff 180 - 236).

He travelled through south Donegal meeting clergy, businessmen, local dignitaries and landowners.¹¹⁴ He got a rousing reception everywhere from priests and people until he came to Dungloe where Swift McNeill, M.P. for South Donegal, interrupted Balfour's meeting where he then insulted him and accused him of being a 'spiteful tyrant'.¹¹⁵ This outburst, no doubt, resulted from the many grievances among the people of the northwest at their treatment by the government at the time. Arrests were taking place throughout under the 1887 coercion act,¹¹⁶ evictions were occurring on a daily basis on the estates in Cloughaneely and Gweedore, there was a deep residual bitterness resulting from the aftermath of the murder of Inspector Martin in Gweedore and the potato crop had failed. But there was little sign of the expected relief schemes that were apparent elsewhere in the country.

Perhaps it was the insulting goading of McNeill that created the moment, but Balfour seized it and, in one great gesture, he seemed to sweep away all the difficulties that stood in the way of building a railway by making a promise to northwest Donegal by declaring that he was giving the railway from Letterkenny into the northwest totally free of charge. As one of Balfour's travelling companions, George Wyndham, said, 'the spiteful tyrant [Balfour] held a crowded meeting in the schoolhouse, spoke for twenty minutes amid loud and prolonged cheers which fairly blew the roof off when he announced the railway was given for nothing'.¹¹⁷

Balfour had been a committed railway enthusiast since his childhood¹¹⁸ and through the passing of 'his very liberal scheme for the extension of light railways in the West of Ireland'¹¹⁹ he ensured that these

¹¹⁴ Balfour arrived by train at Strabane and then travelled by train to Donegal town. From there he used a sidecar to visit Killybegs, Carrick, Kilcar and Glenties. Because there was no bridge over the Gweebarra estuary at the time he had to make a detour through Doochary village to reach Dungloe.

¹¹⁵ *LS*, 8 Nov. 1890, p. 2, editorial; *LS*, 20 Nov. 1890, editorial.

¹¹⁶ Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act, 50 & 51 Vict., c. 50 (19 July 1887).

¹¹⁷ Max Egremont, *Balfour – a life of Arthur James Balfour* (London, 1980), p. 95.

¹¹⁸ Balfour's father was a large investor in Scottish railways.

¹¹⁹ Tuke, letter no. 2, p. 21.

regions would be opened up. Now it appeared certain that northwest Donegal was to be included.

But Balfour's reason for granting a railway was probably founded on much different reasoning than that of the clergy and local people of Donegal who had been demanding a railway for many years. He had been Scottish Secretary when the no-rent campaign of 1886 had taken place in Scotland. He sent for the marines to deal with the Scottish campaigners but he also investigated the emigration schemes proposed by the landowners as a resolution for the problem of overcrowding. He concluded that overpopulation was to blame for poverty and distress and emigration was the answer. Balfour's crucial influence was that of his uncle, Salisbury who asserted in a speech in May 1886, that it made good economic sense to encourage emigration from congested areas of Ireland to parts of the empire where labour was needed.¹²⁰ The trains running to the heart of congested areas would take the people out to start new lives elsewhere. The people left behind would become owners of their properties and would consequently become law-abiding citizens. The railways would also expose the congested districts to Anglo Saxon values and traditions, the superiority of which Balfour assumed would bring sustained permanent improvement in the economic state of the people there.¹²¹

During his visits to Donegal and Connacht, Balfour became more convinced than ever that a dose of state intervention was necessary to effect improvement in congested districts. The promise of a free railway to northwest Donegal was one step in this journey.¹²² Further, there was the prevalent idea that railway transport would facilitate the movement of troops and consequent control of difficult areas such as the northwest.

With the urging of the Donegal Grand Jury and the promise of A. J. Balfour behind them, the Board of Works carried out its review and sent

¹²⁰ Ruddock F. Mackay, *Balfour – Intellectual statesman* (Oxford, 1985), p. 37.

¹²¹ Shannon, *Arthur J. Balfour*, p. 51.

¹²² Max Egremont, *Balfour*, pp 95-98.

the Light Railway Commissioners back to northwest Donegal again in February 1891 to investigate further railway proposals between Letterkenny and Gweedore. They sat at Letterkenny, Dunfanaghy and Bunbeg in Gweedore. Once more the competition was between the earl of Leitrim's 'seaboard' route via Ramelton, Rathmullan, Mulroy Bay and Carrigart, Creeslough to Dunfanaghy versus Olphert's inland route via Foxhall, Kilmacrenan, Creeslough to Dunfanaghy/Falcarragh which would cost £163,604 to Falcarragh and a further £59,539 to Gweedore. This time however, the commissioners, in their report, recommended that Olphert's direct inland line be built without the deviation to the coast (3 in fig. 18).¹²³

At the Spring assizes of 1891, the Donegal Grand Jury met to consider three proposals for lines into the northwest only. These were the inland line, the coastal line and a third line promoted by Mr Todd, solicitor from Derry who proposed an extension from the Glenties line at Fintown through the Rosses to Bunbeg in Gweedore (8 in fig. 18). After consideration the grand jury recommended only one line, Olphert's direct inland line as suggested by the Board of Works with the terminus at Bunbeg Harbour in Gweedore.¹²⁴

But when this new railway came before the government for funding it seemed that Balfour had had a change of mind about northwest Donegal. He explained that all the government money for the building of railways had been exhausted. Without a substantial grant from the government there was no possibility of raising the capital elsewhere. In an effort to move the government to grant the funding, a deputation on behalf of the Letterkenny and Gweedore Railway consisting of W. H. Boyd, J.P., John Olphert, son of Wybrants Olphert of Falcarragh, the leading promoter of the group, Alex Black J.P., and Fred Dawson on behalf of the L&LSR was introduced by Lord Ernest Hamilton to Arthur Balfour in London on 22 April 1891.

¹²³ *LS*, 7 Feb. 1891, p. 3; 12 Feb 1891, p. 3; 19 Feb. 1891, p. 2.

¹²⁴ *DI*, 20 Mar. 1891, p. 3.

Balfour informed them that there were no funds available at that particular time but that he held to the statement he made when he was in Donegal and considered that it was a line that should be made. He further informed them that 'it was a scheme eminently worthy of the attention of the British exchequer' but one that he hoped would be carried out if the government at the Irish office were allowed to remain in power. 'The deputation was very favourably impressed by the manner in which they were received and of the thorough grasp Mr Balfour showed of the question in discussion and the desire he expressed to further the interests of the city of Derry'.¹²⁵ When Swift McNeill followed up this query in parliament, Balfour confirmed that the grant was exhausted.¹²⁶

When the matter was again raised in July 1891 there was further disappointment when Balfour again told parliament that 'Donegal had already got its full share of money which had been voted for the construction of these lines'. But although no money was now available for the purpose, he hoped that it would be possible to construct a line in north Donegal at no distant date.¹²⁷ It later transpired that the Carndonagh railway would not be built either because there was no money remaining.

This news was devastating to the northwest, coming as it did in the middle of severe evictions in Cloughaneely and Gweedore and widespread distress owing to the failure of the potato crops. Bishop Patrick O'Donnell and his clergy were deeply involved in the evictions. The bishop himself had gone to Cloughaneely to try and negotiate a settlement with Olphert but he had no success. The parish priest of Cloughaneely, Fr James McFadden, Glena, made valiant efforts over a long period to bring about reconciliation between landlord and tenants but his efforts also failed.¹²⁸

But priests were also leading the revolt of the tenants. Fr James McFadden of Gweedore spent six months in Derry gaol for his involvement

¹²⁵ *DI*, 24 Apr. 1891, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Hansard* 3 (Commons), cccliv, 1079, 22 June 1891, Balfour reply to McNeill.

¹²⁷ *Hansard* 3 (Commons), ccclxv, 1967, 21 July 1891, Balfour statement; *DI*, 24 July 1891, p.3.

¹²⁸ *LS*, 13 Nov. 1890, p. 3.

in the Plan of Campaign and Fr Stephens of Dunfanaghy served a three-month term for similar involvement.¹²⁹ Such double-sided involvement held many dangers for the Catholic church as was evident when an attempt was made to murder Fr Stephens in Falcarragh in 1890. The conspirators were believed to be local tenants who were opposed to the implementation of the Plan of Campaign.¹³⁰ Many further incidents, some of an unsavoury nature, were happening in the region as a result of the evictions and the distress. In October 1890 the *Londonderry Sentinel's* editorial reported that

the parish priest of Cloughaneely condemned the lawlessness that had been indulged in and the sacrilegious sets perpetrated. Two girls, daughters of obnoxious persons, had their dresses mutilated while kneeling at devotions in the chapel and they and their friends are groaned and grunted at - a new way of manifesting Irish hostility.¹³¹

No doubt, the Catholic clergy feared that their control over the people would become severely threatened if such incidents continued to grow. In these circumstances, it was little wonder that Bishop O'Donnell was highly annoyed at the news of the rejection of the railway which might have relieved the suffering through its provision of employment alone and created a diversion from the troubles.¹³²

This annoyance, no doubt, found further justification when Balfour admitted to parliament on 21 July 1891 that the Mulranny to Achill Sound extension railway in Mayo and the Coolooney to Claremorris railway were 'constructed without parliamentary powers, that is to say, independently of the act of last year'. Balfour then admitted that he had made a special provision of £100,000 over and above the £600,000 grant to build these two extensions to Achill and Coolooney. When questioned about the Carndonagh and Gweedore railways he just said that it was 'not possible to

¹²⁹ McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely*, pp 144 - 145.

¹³⁰ McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely*, p. 148.

¹³¹ *LS*, 23 Oct. 1890, p. 2.

¹³² *DI*, 5 June 1891, p. 1.

complete the system now'.¹³³ Swift McNeill said that Balfour had 'changed in spirit' since his visit to Donegal and indeed all his actions with regard to distress were very negative despite continuous questions in parliament about suffering and distress in the county. He accused Balfour of having given no relief works to northwest Donegal.¹³⁴

Dr O'Donnell undertook a press campaign.¹³⁵ He asked:

Why are the congested districts of Donegal so cruelly abandoned while in other parts of this county, somewhat better able to take care of themselves, railway works are pushed on with commendable energy? Is it that Gweedore and Falcarragh have been troublesome to the Executive? Or is it because Mr Balfour's reception in Dungloe was of a mixed kind? Is it to punish evicted tenants or evicting landlords or to pay back unfriendly demonstrations? These are the means locally assigned. If a disinterested person knowing the wants of this country were asked when the Light Railways Act was passed, to name the districts in Donegal that should be opened up under its provisions, he would not fail to select Gweedore and the Rosses and place them at the head of the list. But neither railway nor pier nor road is being constructed in these districts in consequence of that or any other act The treatment by the Executive of north west Donegal is a disgrace.¹³⁶

The distress continued but Balfour rejected all pleas for relief schemes or railway extension in northwest Donegal.¹³⁷ In January 1892 Fr James McFadden of Gweedore gave further expression to the resentment at the rejection.

On the Olphert estate there are about 350 evicted families; on the Mrs Stewart estate there are over 40; on the Swiney estate 15; and on the Joule estate 10; in all over 400 evicted families Balfour gave no relief works from Gweebarra to Lough Swilly last Summer. He gave light railways to south and mid Donegal

¹³³ *Hansard 3* (Commons), ccclxv, 1968, 21 July 1891, Balfour reply.

¹³⁴ *Hansard 3* (Commons), ccclxiii, 1622; cccliv, 1077-1079, 4 June 1891.

¹³⁵ *Hansard 3* (Commons), ccclxiii, 1622, 4 June 1891.

¹³⁶ *DI*, 5 June 1891, p.1.

¹³⁷ *Hansard 3* (Commons), ccclxv, 1072 (4 July 1891) Balfour reply to Art O'Connor, M.P., East Donegal.

because he was received satisfactorily there on his tour in November 1890 but he boycotted with vengeance the Rosses and Gweedore because he met there a pronouncedly hostile reception. This is the more notorious as all the preliminaries of engineering and surveying and mapping had been already done by government and county officials in view of public works being started forthwith ... the whole scheme was abandoned and not a sod of such work was turned.¹³⁸

There might have been more than a grain of truth in the statements of Bishop O'Donnell and Fr McFadden. In an analysis of railway development in Ireland in the book, *Coercion and conciliation*, L. P. Curtis, states:

Whether by accident or design, the new [railway] lines did not run across any property invested by the Plan of Campaign; and Balfour rejoiced at this fact. In principle he was opposed to the hiring of any Plan tenants, evicted or otherwise, because he believed that the combination as well as the grants supplied by the Tenants' Defence League precluded any Government aid.¹³⁹

This was the bitter conclusion to the great hopes built up since the act of 1889 and Balfour's visit. In November 1891 Balfour ended his term as Irish Chief Secretary to be replaced by W. L. Jackson who lasted less than one year before the fall of the Conservative government. Gladstone and his Liberals came into office in 1892 with John Morley as Chief Secretary for Ireland. His first year and a half was occupied by the abortive Home Rule bill of 1893. He spent much of the rest of his time 'attempting a typically Liberal balancing act, trying to retain at least the nominal support of nationalists without giving unionists too many excuses for attacking the government'.¹⁴⁰

Morley left two long memories behind him to the people of Donegal. He was instrumental in the release of the Gweedore prisoners

¹³⁸ *DI*, 8 Jan. 1892, p. 4. Fr James McFadden to Manchester Liberal Party.

¹³⁹ Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation*, p. 367.

¹⁴⁰ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, law and order in 19th century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 185

convicted for being implicated in the murder of District Inspector Martin in 1889. His less favourable memory is of being bombarded by clergy and politicians for aid to relieve distress during his term but while 'his heart was touched by the suffering of the poor' he continued to spend his time 'still carefully watching the situation in Donegal'. However, no aid ever came. And he was definitely not the man to construct the abandoned railway to the northwest of Donegal.¹⁴¹

In December 1892, Olphert and his fellow promoters announced the dissolution of the Letterkenny & Gweedore Railway Company, thereby ending all hope of that railway project coming to relieve the distress in the northwest or to open up the 'back country'.¹⁴²

On 18 August 1893 the Donegal to Killybegs line was opened but the construction of the Glenties line suffered from many problems. Because of a strike, 200 men working on the eight-mile stretch between Stranorlar and Brockagh were thrown idle. They wanted a rise from 2½*d.* to 3*d.* per hour in wages and they would allow no one else to work for less than they demanded themselves. They patrolled the line to ensure nobody broke the strike. John McFarland, one of the contractors, offered the men a farthing per hour more but this was not acceptable. Then McFarland met with two priests, Fr McGlynn and Fr McDevitt who, as representatives of the strikers, said nothing less than 3*d.* per hour would be acceptable. Then McFarland intimated that he was willing to pay the men from the town of Stranorlar the 3*d.* but the rest of the men who came mainly from the Glenfin mountain areas would get no rise. He intimated that he would do this in the interests of peace and to preserve the contractor's property from wreck.¹⁴³

The response of the 'hill-men' showed that they could fight for their principles and rights even in the midst of 'distress'. Some weeks later the

¹⁴¹ *DI*, 20 Jan. 1893, p. 2.

¹⁴² *DI*, 2 Dec. 1892, p. 2.

¹⁴³ *LS*, 22 Feb. 1893, p. 2.

Londonderry Sentinel, astonished at the behaviour of such peasantry, reported that the settlement was 3*d.* per hour for workers living within the parish of Stranorlar and 2¾ *d.* for those living west of that but the workers were now at enmity with each other making violence hourly imminent. The fear of the mountain men coming down on those still willing to work kept matters at a standstill. Twenty police arrived and their presence cooled the ardour of the Glenfinmen. In all, there were about forty policemen on the ground along the line.¹⁴⁴ An item in the same paper some days later told that there was a strong impression on the minds of the uncultured country folk that the contractors must complete the line within twelve months of the date they were last before the privy council and, that to do so, they would be compelled to pay any rate of wages asked for.¹⁴⁵

The Glenties line opened on 3 June 1895 despite all its problems. Inclement weather, wet summers, workmen's strikes, and the provision by the Board of Works which obliged the line to be begun at the wrong end at Glenties in order to give employment meant that the plant had to be carried over twenty-four miles of mountain road. There was a rumour that McCrea & McFarland slowed the work by seeking three time extensions so as to help their own Londonderry & Lough Swilly line. Another rumour of the contractors putting in a claim of £20,000 for extra works which had been done but were not in the contract could not be confirmed.¹⁴⁶

Northwest Donegal, with its teeming population and continued distress, was still without a railway in 1895 when the Glenties line opened. The newspapers and the politicians made spasmodic utterances about a railway to the congested districts. But it seemed as if the project had been abandoned. The act of 1889 and the high hopes that Balfour had raised in 1890 seemed to have come to nothing. Those who had believed that the railway would save the northwest were close to admitting defeat.

¹⁴⁴ *LS*, 2 Mar. 1893, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *LS*, 7 Mar. 1893, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ *DI*, 29 Mar. 1895, p. 4.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIGHT FOR A RAILWAY UNDER THE 1896 ACT

On 25 June 1895 Salisbury was again appointed Conservative Prime Minister. He won the subsequent election in July and appointed his nephew, Gerald Balfour, younger brother of Arthur, as Chief Secretary for Ireland on 4 July 1895. 'Like his brother before him, Gerald Balfour, on taking up office, embarked on a tour of the west of Ireland to witness first-hand the crippling and unrelenting poverty that, according to unionist orthodoxy, lay at the heart of the Irish problem'.¹ The younger Balfour enunciated the idea of 'killing Home Rule with kindness' in his first major policy declaration at Leeds in October.² Balfour was determined that his Irish policy would show the two faces of amelioration and coercion as his brother had done and grants were made for light railways and the Congested Districts Board almost immediately.³ But there was a further connection with his brother's time as Chief Secretary. Horace Plunkett had been singled out by Arthur Balfour in 1891 to be a founder member of the Congested Districts Board. In 1892 Plunkett entered parliament and he was re-elected in 1895. He was familiar with the problems of northwest Donegal during the older Balfour's reign and he was close to Gerald Balfour following his appointment in 1895 as Chief Secretary.⁴ With such a combination there was hope that the unfinished business of railway development in northwest Donegal would soon be settled. And the wait was not a long one.

In 1896 the government introduced the Light Railways (Ireland) Act⁵ in an attempt to stimulate further development of railways, piers and steamboats despite the objections of the Treasury when 'after much

¹ Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, p. 50.

² Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule 1867 - 1921* (Manchester and New York, 1998), p. 182.

³ Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, p. 51.

⁴ O'Day, *Irish Home rule*, pp 178-180.

⁵ Light Railways (Ireland) Act 1896, 59 - 60 Vict., c. xxxiv (14 Aug. 1896).

procrastination and compromise the chancellor sanctioned the expenditure'.⁶ However, the Treasury retained the power to override any adverse decision of the lord lieutenant, should it think fit. The act empowered that a free grant be given to any scheme it deemed worthy of such help. In addition, the Board of Works was given the power to institute an official enquiry should the working or maintenance of any railway arouse public concern.⁷

This act was different to all previous acts by virtue of section 1, subsection (i) which stated that where it was certified to the Treasury by the lord lieutenant that the making of a railway under this act was necessary for the development of the resources of a district, but that owing to the exceptional circumstances of the district, state aid was necessary, and if the Treasury were satisfied that an existing railway company would construct, maintain and work the line in consideration of a free grant, the Treasury might make an agreement with such a company and might make an advance of public money to them. The Treasury had also to be satisfied that landowners, local authorities and other persons locally interested would facilitate the construction of the railway by the free grant of land or otherwise. The Board of Works was given power to appoint some fit person to enquire into the condition, working, and maintenance of any railway constructed under this act or under any of the previous acts. If the inspector thought that a line was not being efficiently worked and maintained, he was under an obligation to report the matter to the lord lieutenant who held an enquiry into the matter and if he thought that the report was correct, he might issue an order in council appointing a manager to the undertaking.⁸ These conditions would have far-reaching implications in northwest Donegal at a later time.

⁶ Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, p. 88.

⁷ Middlemass, *Narrow gauge railways*, p. 93.

⁸ Conroy, *A history of railways in Ireland*, pp 278-9.

Mindful of the weaknesses which were shown up during the previous attempt to get funding for the railways to Gweedore and Carndonagh in 1891, the L&LSR, under the forceful guidance of its chairman, John McFarland, spotted possibilities which the new act would open in the northwest Donegal situation to their advantage. McFarland started collecting and assembling the plans for the railway schemes in northwest Donegal that had, hitherto, failed or been abandoned. With all this information the L&LSR proceeded to avoid the mistakes of previous applications and formulated new plans based on the drawings of previous engineers, especially those drawn by Mr Doyle in 1889 and 1890.⁹

McFarland then employed a civil engineer, Edward Radcliffe from the neighbouring County Donegal Railways to draw up new plans for a railway 'from Letterkenny to Burtonport via Churchill, Creeslough, Fiddler's Bridge [near Falcarragh] and Gweedore'.¹⁰ This was almost a copy of Olphert's inland line of 1890. As a consequence, two new schemes were proposed with the L&LSR acting as promoters for both lines and undertaking to work both lines as well which were features missing in the submission of the Dunfanaghy/Falcarragh line in 1891. One scheme was for the Buncrana to Carndonagh extension based on the old plans of 1890-91 but, in the other case, however, the extension into northwest Donegal was no longer to cease at Dunfanaghy or Falcarragh or even at Bunbeg harbour in Gweedore but was planned to travel through the Rosses to the harbour at Burtonport. This latter railway plan was formulated under the title, 'The Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway' (L&BER). This title is ambiguous for it was never registered as a company. In his book *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, Steve Flanders writes: 'The Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway was not an independent company, its actual status, other than as a vehicle to build the line, is

⁹ IRC, p. 244, q.19435. Evidence of John McFarland.

¹⁰ IRC, p. 242, q.19425. The agreement between Radcliffe and L&LSR is included. It was signed on 10 March 1898. Presented by Thomas Batchen, Board of Works. It is significant that the town of Dunfanaghy was not mentioned in the agreement at this stage.

imprecise'.¹¹ My own belief, from a perusal of the documentation available, is that the L&BER name was one of convenience used by the L&LSR and the Board of Works when both bodies had entered into a joint alliance to construct the railway from Letterkenny to Burtonport. All the subsequent events add credence to this theory. I believe that the Board of Works and the L&LSR jointly drew up the scheme, engaged the engineers and did the surveying of the proposed line, planned the details of the route, did the costing for the project and entered into negotiations with the Treasury before any details were released to the public. In this they must have had the blessing of Gerald Balfour and his officials.

It was Fr James McFadden of Gweedore who made the first recorded mention in 1892 that it was well worth considering whether this railway extension should be continued along the coast as far as Burtonport 'for the permanent benefit and development of the congested and poverty-stricken region of the Rosses'.¹² Burtonport had had little to recommend it in earlier years for it had neither town status nor a large population. However, change had taken place in a few years. Probably mindful of the great success of Burtonport and Rutland fisheries a century earlier,¹³ the parish priest of Lower Templecrone in the Rosses, Bernard Walker, tried to re-introduce commercial fishing in the 1880s with a fair measure of success. From its foundation in 1891 the Congested Districts Board had identified Burtonport as a location which could be profitably developed for fishing and it soon introduced boats and nets and brought in Scottish experts who taught the people how to fish, cure and prepare the product for market. When the success of the venture became apparent private enterprise was not lacking in exploiting the success of the Congested Districts Board in the Burtonport area, as was stated in 1898 when a new Catholic church was

¹¹ Flanders, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 2.

¹² *DI*, 9 Dec. 1892, p. 3, during a meeting in Gweedore of the Irish National Federation.

¹³ James Kelly, 'William Burton Conyngham and the north-west fishery of the eighteenth century' in *JRSAI*, 115 (1985), pp 64 - 85.

planned for the area, which would 'in every respect be in keeping with the growing importance and prosperity of the village of Burtonport'.¹⁴

An article in the *Derry Journal* in September 1898 told of the progress of Burtonport:

At this great fishing ground, probably the most important on the west coast of Ireland, each succeeding year marks an improvement both in the class of craft and for the capture of the herrings and in the enterprising efforts of local and other buyers to cope with the supplies offered for sale. This season, large boats that cost about £80, or six times the price of an ordinary fishing yawl, have been purchased in Scotland by promoters of the fishing industry at Burtonport and Aranmore. Buyers from London, Cork and elsewhere as well as local gentlemen in the anticipation of a good fishing, are making suitable preparations. The Donegal Fishery Company which was established a short time ago, is expending upwards of £2,000 in erecting salt stores, curing houses, lobster and winkle curing ponds, etc. on Edernish Island, the property of James F. O'Donnell, P.L.G., Burtonport In 1896 the duke of Abercorn, as the guest of Mr Herdman, Carricklee, Strabane, visited the Rosses when the herring fishing was fairly good and he saw the difficulties the poor fishermen had to contend with as regards a market for their fish. He very kindly indeed, communicated with a very large fish merchant in London, John L. Sayer – the senior member of the new company – who visited the place and appointed Mr James F. O'Donnell as his agent on the recommendation of Mr Herdman The new company, in addition to herrings, buys lobsters, winkles, salmon, and all other sorts of saleable fish Mr Herdman will supply a steamer to sail twice in the week from Edernish to Fleetwood. With such ample arrangements as have just been described, the Rosses fishermen are almost certain to have no difficulty in getting rid of their 'takes' no matter how great, at a decent price.¹⁵

In such circumstances, it made good sense to take the railway to the most productive centre of the fishing industry on the northwest Donegal coast.

¹⁴ *DJ*, 22 Apr. 1898. p. 3.

¹⁵ *DJ*, 5 Sept. 1898, p. 8.

That was not just the extent of the change that had happened in northwest Donegal since the railway commissioners' enquiry of 1890. The railway station at Fintown had opened in 1895. It was only twelve miles from Dungloe in the Rosses and it obviated the necessity for carters from the Dungloe and south Rosses regions to travel the long routes to Ballybofey and Strabane any more. Burtonport fish were, generally, being carted to Fintown and sent via Strabane to Greenore or on to Dublin and there was general satisfaction with such arrangements.

The roads' programme, which had received a substantial boost during the relief programmes of 1890-91, had latterly also increased substantially with the advent of the Congested Districts Board. New roads were constructed and existing roads were repaired which made communication easier. Ninety miles of roadway were built in the barony of Boyleagh in the 1890s, among them a road from Maas Bridge to Russell's Ferry at Gweebarra in 1894, a new bridge across the Gweebarra estuary in 1895 and then a road continuing from there to Dungloe. This opened up the Rosses to the railway terminus at Glenties and to the steamers arriving at the sheltered Portnoo harbour.¹⁶

Following the rejection of the railway to Falcarragh in 1890-91 there was an immediate reaction throughout the northwest and the need for new modes of transport and communication became immediately apparent. From 1891 the Congested Districts Board started the construction of new piers and harbours throughout the northwest that made safer landings possible for small and medium sized vessels. The CDB commissioned a vessel, *Granuaile*, in 1895 which brought local exports out from the northwest and carried cargo back into these harbours from Scotland, Derry and other northern ports.¹⁷ The steamships *Elagh Hall* and the *Vulkan* had

¹⁶ *DI*, 24 Feb. 1892, p. 2; 16 Mar. 1894, p. 3; Ben O'Donnell, *The story of the Rosses*, p. 173. See also CDB annual reports 1893-1903 for expenditure on roads and bridges.

¹⁷ *DI*, 22 Feb 1895, p. 3. The *Granuaile* was launched at Troon, Scotland. It was 150 feet long, 24 feet wide and 10 feet draught. *DJ*, 18 Aug. 1898, p. 5. After one trip in August 1898 the *Granuaile* discharged 28 ½ tons of cod and ling at Derry from the Donegal coast.

established regular deliveries to Bunbeg which was 'the distributing port for the Rosses'.¹⁸ Lord Leitrim responded to the railway's rejection in 1890 by purchasing the steamer *Melmore* in 1892 which 'would ply between Derry, Portrush, Mulroy and Glasgow' and he added further vessels throughout the decade.¹⁹ Messrs Hammond and Herdman purchased the steamer *Tyrconnell* which plied along the northwest shores as a major carrier of cargo connecting with the ports in the north and east of Ireland as well as Glasgow.²⁰ Another regular service had lately been provided by steamers on the Sligo to Glasgow route anchoring off various ports in the northwest. All of these steamers might be subjected to bad weather and difficult passages but, by 1897, many businessmen in the northwest, such as Sweeney of Dungloe, were chartering steamers to bring cargo to the area and the telegraph installation facilitated such operations. Despite the absence of a railway there was a great growth in trade throughout the northwest of Donegal during the years since 1891.²¹

But a heavy price was paid for the sea transport. The *Enterprise* was lost off Aranmore Island in January 1890.²² On 16 March 1891 the schooner *Westward* was wrecked off Malin Head but the crew was saved.²³ On 16 August 1893 four men were lost off Tory island. On 17 November 1893 the American ship *A. C. Bean* went down near Malin Head with the loss of eight lives.²⁴ On 18 February 1902 the schooner *Rothsay* was wrecked off Tory island with the loss of one life. The steamship *Cloughmore* was lost near Tory on 14 June 1902 with the loss of nine lives.²⁵ The *Harold* was wrecked off Burtonport in January 1895 and the *Edel Catherine* sank near Ards on 30 January 1898.²⁶ This account does

¹⁸ *DI*, 20 Mar. 1891, p. 3.

¹⁹ *DI*, 3 June 1892, p. 4.

²⁰ *DI*, 23 June 1893, p. 2.

²¹ *DI*, 20 Mar. 1891, p. 3; 3 June 1892, p. 4; 14 July 1893, p. 2. Public enquiry, p. 48.

²² Pat Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen* (Killybegs, 2003), p. 25.

²³ Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen*, p. 26.

²⁴ Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen*, p. 28.

²⁵ Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen*, p. 115.

²⁶ Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen*, p. 81.

not include many brave rescue attempts along the northwest coast during the last decade of the century. However, there was regular loss of life at sea.

On 6 January 1896 heads of agreement were reached between the Treasury, the Board of Works and the L&LSR for the building of a new railway from Letterkenny to Burtonport with the support of a free grant to be called the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway.²⁷ Under the agreement the L&LSR took upon themselves the obligation of acting in the capacity of promoters and further agreed that the company [L&LSR] would complete and finish the line to the satisfaction of the Board of Works and the Board of Trade and open the same for public traffic within the time limited by the order in council. The agreement also provided that, if the free grant should, from any action or omission not approved by the Board of Works, prove insufficient for the full and complete construction of the railway, the L&LSR would raise and expend all such further sums of money as might be necessary for that purpose and complete and open the railway for traffic.²⁸

One of the astonishing revelations to emerge from the new railway plans was the total exclusion of Dunfanaghy from railway connection. The proposed line would come no nearer than four miles to the most important centre in the northwest which was the location of the workhouse, the poor law guardians, the divisional constabulary headquarters, hotels, banks, the most important fair in the whole region, the centre of the tourist industry in the northwest and the home of the area's strongest Protestant community. In earlier years, the proposed railway schemes were all intended to service Dunfanaghy in particular, if not exclusively, but now in 1896, the claims of such a vital centre of commerce were totally ignored. The reason was simply a financial decision by government. The original plans had fifty

²⁷ IRC, p. 93, evidence of Thomas Batchen, Board of Works.

²⁸ IRC, appendix no. 8, pp 561-562, Includes a copy of the original agreement.

miles of railway terminating at Bunbeg but the new plans still adhered as closely as possible to the original length and costing so, in order that it should reach Burtonport, it avoided Dunfanaghy by four miles.²⁹ (Fig. 20). Following on the land acts which were seen as depriving the landholding classes of their influence, wealth and security, this exclusion of the Dunfanaghy Protestant population was seen as another telling blow at the Protestant, unionist community by a government supposed to be their protectors. Dunfanaghy's most vocal advocate, the *Londonderry Sentinel*, echoed the pain of the town's rejection at every opportunity for years afterwards.³⁰

Every bit as strange was the proposed railway's avoidance of every town and centre of population between Letterkenny and Burtonport with the exception of Creeslough. Indeed, a stretch of seven miles between Creeslough and Falcarragh was said to have no house within sight of the railway. The thickly populated areas around the coast from Falcarragh via Gortahork, Bloody Foreland, Derrybeg, Bunbeg, Annagry and Kincasslagh were long distances away from the planned railway which was to run through the mountain regions which had little or no population (fig 20).

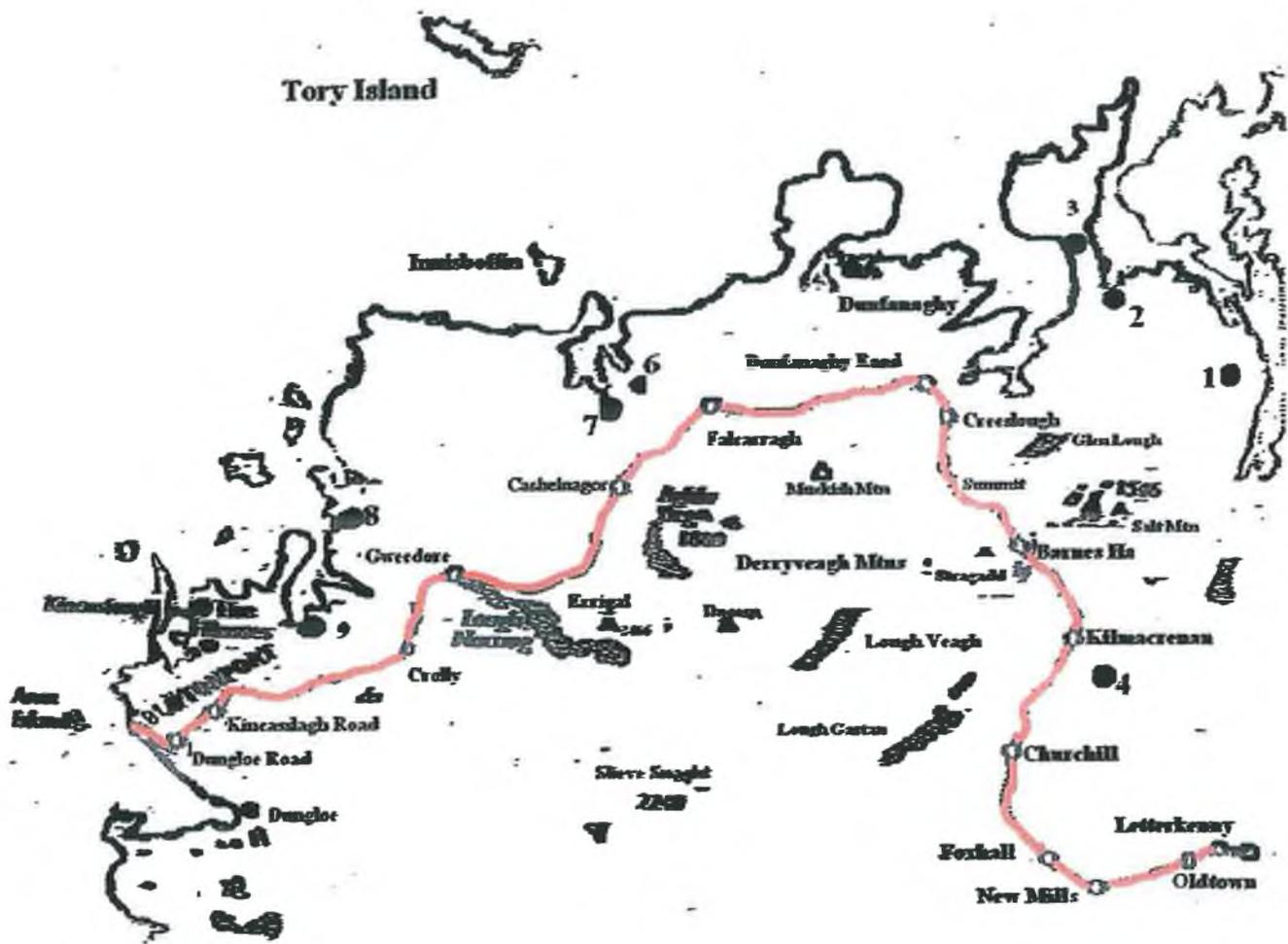
When Dunfanaghy residents became aware of the town's exclusion from the railway they organised a large delegation to travel to the House of Commons to meet Chief Secretary, Gerald Balfour, in a final plea to have the railway made through the town. But Balfour conceded nothing. He told them that it would cost £40,000 extra to extend the railway into Dunfanaghy and would add a further 8½ miles to its length. He then lectured them that the Donegal Grand Jury would probably refuse to pass the line if it were proposed to alter its intended route. The delegation returned having achieved nothing from Balfour.³¹

²⁹ Public enquiry, p. 30, evidence of Fr McFadden, quoting Gerald Balfour in regard to costs of the railway and the avoidance of Dunfanaghy. See page 155 and evidence of Robert Todd re same.

³⁰ *LS*, 14 Dec. 1897, editorial.

³¹ *DJ*, 21 May 1897, p. 3.

Fig. 20 Planned route of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway. The principal towns and centres of population are numbered or underlined.



- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Milford | 7. Gortahork |
| 2. Carrigart | 8. Bunbeg |
| 3. Rosapenna | 9. Annagry |
| 4. Kilmacrenan | 10. Kincasslagh |
| 5. Dunfanaghy | 11. Dungloe |
| 6. Falcarragh | |

Proposed L&BER

The Board of Works once again instituted a railway commission which was the arm of government charged with the responsibility of investigating railway projects in Ireland as had been specified under the 1896 act. The chairman of the Board of Works at that time was Tom Robertson, a Scotsman, who had spent the greater part of his life in railway management, and had come to Ireland from the Highland Railway in Scotland to take charge of the Great Northern Railway in June 1890 when that line was criticised severely after a serious accident in Armagh.³² Robertson appointed two experienced and capable commissioners to go to Donegal and investigate every facet of constructing railway lines there, especially the Burtonport Extension. These men were Joseph Tatlow and William Roberts. Tatlow was born in Sheffield in 1851 and worked for the Midland Railway in England, and later, with the Glasgow and South Western Railway before coming to Ireland as general manager of the Belfast & County Down Railway. By 1890 he had moved to Dublin when he was appointed manager of the Midland Great Western Railway. Tatlow described the task as follows:

In 1897, Robertson thought that Joseph Tatlow of Dublin and William Roberts of Inverness were fit and proper persons for conducting the necessary inquiry concerning a proposed light railway in North West Donegal, from Letterkenny to Burtonport, a distance of 50 miles. William Roberts was an engineer of the Highland Railway of Scotland, a capable, energetic, practical man, and a canny Scot. This line was promoted by the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway Company. Roberts and I gladly undertook the work. We held public meetings which were largely attended (for it was an event in Donegal) in Letterkenny, Falcarragh and Burtonport, examined nearly fifty witnesses, and heard a great variety of evidence.

³² On 12 June 1889, close to Hamiltonbawn, a large excursion train from Armagh to Warrenpoint ran out of steam. The train was divided by the crew whereupon the ten rear carriages ran back and crashed into another passenger train going from Armagh to Newry. Eighty people died and 260 were injured. As a result of this accident the automatic vacuum brake and the block telegraph system were made compulsory on all railways.

But the hearing of evidence was by no means all we did. It was our duty to examine the route, and determine if it were the best practicable route (keeping steadily in view that the available funds were limited in amount), scrutinize and criticize the estimates, consider the stations to be provided, inquire as to the probable traffic and working expenses, and inform ourselves thoroughly on all the aspects and merits of the case. We drove some 240 miles, not of course by motor car (motors were not common then), but with stout Irish horses and inspected the country well.³³

The inquiry opened before a large gathering in the courthouse in Letterkenny on Friday, 4 June 1897 and sat at Falcarragh on Monday, 7 June and at Burtonport on Tuesday 8 June with Mr Tatlow taking over the role of chairman with Roberts as his assistant.³⁴ Tatlow first read the terms of reference of the inquiry which were

the merits in every respect as regards engineering, finance, construction, the degree of favour or objection with which it is regarded by landowners, occupiers and others in the neighbourhood, the amount of paid-up capital necessary for the undertaking, the reasonable assistance that will be given by landowners, local authorities and others towards its construction and its merits in all points of view as compared with any other railways that might be constructed, opening up communication through the same district.³⁵

The list of witnesses at this enquiry represented the changing influences within Donegal society towards the latter years of the nineteenth century. The landlords and old gentry who had dominated previous investigations were conspicuously absent in 1897. Wybrants Olphert and the earl of Leitrim had both died in 1892. Of the twenty-seven principal witnesses who testified at the three venues, only one major landlord, John

³³ Joseph Tatlow, *Fifty years of railway life* (Dublin, 1920), p. 152.

³⁴ Letterkenny – Burtonport Railway, Irish Railway Commission Inquiry 1897. (NAI, Privy Council Papers, vi B – 3 – 16, no. 30). Brown parcel, variety of documents but the report is typed and bound. (Hereafter called Public enquiry) The public enquiries which took place were held under the Tramways (Ireland) Acts 1860 to 1896 and the Railways (Ireland) Order 1896.

³⁵ Public enquiry, p. 3.

Olphert of Falcarragh, one minor landlord, Major Doyne of Letterkenny, and three landlord's agents testified and all of their testimony was of a minor nature compared to that of the business community and the clergy. In place of the old order were fourteen businessmen who gave long and detailed evidence and their interests ran like a thread throughout the three days with costs, pricing, sales and markets dominating.

The role of the clergy had also changed. It was obvious that they had been engaged in much preliminary work before the enquiry in order that a coordinated approach dealing with a broad range of issues would be presented. Fr Sweeney had prepared an extensive analysis of all the benefits which would follow from railway development relative to herring, ling, cod, sole, haddock, cockles, carrageen moss and many more products of the sea.³⁶ A further list detailed the benefits which would result throughout the parishes with the development of lime, turf, peat-moss litter, hosiery, stockings, jerseys, gloves, shirts, eggs, fish, and 'sweet shore sheep'.³⁷ The priests who spoke represented the parishes throughout the length of the line from Letterkenny to Burtonport, and put forward a range of issues, economic, social, human or otherwise which would impress the commissioners. The levelling of society in northwest Donegal was also evident in the appearance of a farmer, fisherman, doctor, notice-server and clerk of petty sessions who was also a businessman. The various interests were well co-ordinated at each venue by those in favour or those against the line depending on the benefits or otherwise which would flow from its construction.³⁸

Fr James Dunlevy from Annagry, in the Rosses, detailed the peasant predicament and hoped-for solution. He had little difficulty in doing this for few of his parish congregation could be classed as other than peasant. He said that his district was the most congested in all of Ireland and was the

³⁶ Public enquiry. P 48, q. 1615. quoted by Mr McGrory, solicitor for County Donegal Railways.

³⁷ Public enquiry, p. 49, q. 1618 – 1621, evidence of Fr Sweeney.

³⁸ Ibid.

only district where the population increased over the last few years. There were 541 families there containing 2,806 persons. They were a migratory population with the young people going to the Laggan and elsewhere and the men going to Scotland. About 1,500 of the 2,806 parishioners emigrated annually. Most of them walked to Letterkenny but some got the steamer from Gola. Annagry was the distribution centre for this area and most of the goods came in to Annagry by sea with the balance from Derry and Letterkenny because there was a cart service between Annagry and Letterkenny that cost 2s. a hundred weight or £2 per ton. Much of the goods came by steamer from Derry to Bunbeg at a cost of 10s. per ton. He pointed out the advantages that the new railway would bring to all of these aspects of life. The shirt industry would be brought to his parish for the people were very anxious to get work, because sometimes they went four or five miles to get knitting. He thought the proposed line (fig. 20) was the best line for opening up the district of West Donegal and the Rosses.³⁹

William Tillie, a shirt manufacturer from Derry, was brought forth to confirm the shirt making possibilities. He told how part of the shirt making was done in the factory and about two-thirds were carried out in the homes. His own factory employed about 1,500 workers in the factory and twice or three times that number worked in their own homes. They had thirty or forty depots established throughout Donegal, Derry and Tyrone. In all, they paid about £300,000 a year in wages. He thought that 30,000 to 40,000, approximately, were employed in shirt making by all the firms. Since the railway line to Glenties had opened, they had depots all the way along that line and he anticipated that a large number of people along the course of this proposed line would also be employed in shirt manufacture when the line was finished.⁴⁰

³⁹ Public enquiry, pp 45 - 6, evidence of Fr Sweeney.

⁴⁰ Public enquiry, p. 42, evidence of William Tilley.

Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Cloughaneely,⁴¹ appeared. His contribution was directed at the alleviation of distress and suffering among the Catholic population of his parish which had undergone such dire upheaval as a consequence of the Plan of Campaign and the evictions on the Olphert estate. His principal objective was to acquire employment for the suffering poor. He had laboured for many years trying to get employment for his parishioners. He told the inquiry that he had lived in the parish for forty-five years and had negotiations with shirt-making firms in Derry. They had assured him that they would be very glad to have depots in the area but for the price of cartage. If the railway came they would gladly follow. When he had met the Chief Secretary, Mr Gerald Balfour, he had pressed him on the necessity for a railway. Balfour replied, 'stop, sir, there is nothing that you are able to advance in favour of the line that we do not know already'. And when Fr McFadden spoke of taking the line by way of Dunfanaghy to Gweedore, Balfour said: 'we would be most anxious to do that but the Treasury will not supplement what we have got already for the extension of light railways in Ireland and it would entirely depend on the amount of money, how far they would go with the line'.⁴² He had not heard a single person in Cloughaneely who said that they were perfectly satisfied with the course of the proposed line, but the main consideration was that there were over 2,000 families between the Cloughaneely and Gweedore parishes. He estimated that between the two parishes £24,000 was earned by the men in Scotland and the children in the Laggan each year. He suggested that all of these people would use the line to go to the hiring fairs and to the Derry boats and again on their return home if it were built. He remembered the lead mines being worked and he thought the Muckish sand was the best in the world. He knew more about the flagstone quarries. About sixteen years previously, he was asked by a

⁴¹ This Fr McFadden is not to be confused with the Plan of Campaign advocate, Fr James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore.

⁴² See Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness*, pp 80 - 81 and p. 88 which deal with the Treasury's reluctance regarding these railway developments.

company in Glasgow to approach the owner of these flagstone quarries – the landlord was Colonel Kellett, the celebrated Indian engineer. He did so but the venture never developed. He accepted that, if it was the view of the Treasury that no extra money would be provided to extend the line to Dunfanaghy and other centres of population, then he thought it would be wrong to do anything which might jeopardise this proposed line.⁴³ Clearly Fr McFadden was the spokesman for a peasant people needing help from any source which would provide it. The other clergy who gave evidence detailed the conditions in their communities and advocated that the railway should go into Dunfanaghy Town but they made it clear to the commissioners that, if there was any danger that the line would be lost because of the Dunfanaghy problem, they would gladly accept the proposed line.

Fr Henry Gallagher, P.P., Upper Templecrone (Dungloe) then took the stand and broke ranks with his fellow clergymen from Annagry, Gweedore, Kincasslagh, Cloughaneely, Creeslough, Gartan and Churchill. It had been well known that the townspeople of Dungloe were highly annoyed at being denied a railway through their town. If the Fintown line were extended to Burtonport it was expected that it would go through Dungloe whereas the proposed railway would pass about three miles from the town. Anyway, many of the Dungloe merchant community had been doing very well from the Fintown Railway by controlling the cartage, the mails, the fish business and the export trade. A new railway might pose more difficulties than was worthwhile for them.

Unlike the clerical representatives from the other parishes, Fr Gallagher was intent on putting the views of his most important parishioners, the shopocracy, among whom he was resident. The clergy were normally seen as acting in unison, directing their flocks in unified masses for a centralized cause. But, as the controversy unfolded before the

⁴³ Public enquiry, p. 30.

commissioners, it soon became apparent that the clergy would lead the people only where the important people wanted to go. Despite the appearance of power, influence and dominance of the clergy, Fr Gallagher represented more Catholic businessmen in the Dungloe area than many of the other clergy of other parishes where the principal business communities were dominated by Protestants. Fr Gallagher would have depended on these businessmen for the financial support of his church. As Liam Kennedy stated in the essay 'Catholic clergy and the co-operative movement' the church depended on traders, shopkeepers and publicans.⁴⁴ Gallagher would have been a very brave man to oppose the Dungloe merchant community who were nearly all Catholics. That he did not should not have astonished anyone. He was as strident as any of the town's shopocracy in defending the interests of the town and those of his own church with little or no regard to the general well being of the northwest community.⁴⁵

He set out the facts as he saw them. Between Catholics and Protestants, they had 700 families in the Dungloe area and the whole population was against this line. The line they all wanted was direct communication with Fintown. That was the line they required and he didn't see how they could be expected to favour any other route, if it was necessary to make them travel fifty miles extra if they wanted to go to Derry and forty miles more if they wanted to go to Dublin which would be the result of this new line. If the investigations were held in Dungloe every one of these people would say that the proposed line was absolutely useless to them. The new line would be of little benefit to the migratory population. They would still have to walk to Fintown to get the train. The people of his district would like to get into the world by the shortest route, by a direct line from Dungloe to Fintown. If the construction of the

⁴⁴ Liam Kennedy, 'Catholic church and the co-operative movement' in *Reactions to Irish nationalism 1865 - 1914* (Dublin, 1987), p. 176.

⁴⁵ Public enquiry, pp 53 - 54, evidence of Fr Gallagher.

Letterkenny line to Burtonport was going to prevent Dungloe getting a line of its own, then they did not want it. He did not want Mr Tatlow and Mr Roberts going away with the impression that they were in favour of this proposed railway.⁴⁶

Fr Gallagher's performance would have delighted the merchants and shopkeepers beside his Templecrone chapel but his fellow clergymen in the needy hardship regions would have received little solace from his performance.⁴⁷

The evidence of James Sweeney from the Rosses was the most illuminating because of the manner in which it depicted how a prominent local merchant had a stake in almost every activity in the region. As well as being a successful businessman, he was also a member of the Glenties Board of Guardians. Sweeney had been doing well from the existing practices in the area. His family held a large stake in the steamers and cartage systems operating in the Rosses and had grown wealthy from the prevailing system. He carried on business in Dungloe, Burtonport and Falcarragh and traded in all of the districts through which the proposed line was to pass from Falcarragh to the Rosses.⁴⁸

He told the commissioners that he and his brother imported seventy-five tons of goods each week. Seventy-four tons were brought in by sea and one ton by rail to Fintown and then by cart to the various centres. Sweeney was protecting his own interests and was reluctant to press for any changes which might not be beneficial to himself. He thought the main value of the proposed railway would be to open up the interior of the countryside by taking seaweed and coral sand there which would improve the inland cultivation and do away with the fabulous prices paid along the seaboard for land where there was serious congestion.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Public enquiry, pp 53 - 54, evidence of Fr Gallagher.

⁴⁷ Public enquiry, pp 53 - 54.

⁴⁸ Public enquiry, pp 47 - 48, evidence of James Sweeney.

⁴⁹ Public enquiry, p. 48, evidence of James Sweeney.

He then spoke about the fishing business. Over £10,000 worth of herrings were taken and sold at Burtonport the previous year and 2,000 tons of these were taken by steamer to Glasgow. But when the salt was scarce there were no means of curing and more than £5,000 worth of herring were lost. If it were practical to put fish on the London fish-market on the following morning it would be a great advantage but he himself had failed to get even a cart away from Burtonport before 10 o'clock in the morning. He explained that all the fishing done at that time was shore fishing, for the locals had never gone out to the deep sea as the Scottish fishermen did. When questioned, he agreed that this fishing might quadruple with a new railway line. The previous September he saw large quantities of fish being thrown out on Rutland strand because there was no salt to cure them and no way of sending them out to markets in fresh condition. The steamer collecting the fish once a week was not sufficient to develop the industry.⁵⁰

When questioned about the potential of the Cruickamore quarries⁵¹ he said that he did not expect that the railway would be of much use for their development. He mentioned that the quarry operators were constructing a private railway to bring the material from the quarry to the port.⁵²

When the list of the industries drawn up by Fr Sweeney about the development of sea products was read to him, James Sweeney replied that carrageen moss was a big industry. He bought large quantities of it and sent it to Liverpool and to Scotland. He did not think that any soapstone⁵³ would be sent away by train. When questioned on other aspects of Fr Sweeney's list he said that he had sent £300 per week worth of eggs and large quantities of fish by steamer to Blackburn and Liverpool and other markets but they were very much deteriorated by having to wait for the

⁵⁰ Public enquiry, p. 48, evidence of James Sweeney.

⁵¹ The Cruickamore quarries were situated about two miles north of the town of Dungloe. Some granite had been taken out of them during the 1880s but it was found too difficult to send it out by sea.

⁵² Public enquiry, p. 48, evidence of James Sweeney.

⁵³ A soapstone quarry had operated for some years previous to this time at Crohy Head, about five miles west of Dungloe town.

steamer. The price of eggs would be half as much again if they could be sent off in small quantities. Since the new Gweebarra Bridge was opened in 1895 Glenties had replaced Dungloe as the distribution centre for the area of the south Rosses as far as Ardara. He himself sent four or five carts of eggs each day to Fintown station but the expense of carting was prohibitive.

When questioned by Mr McCrory, solicitor for the County Donegal Railway which operated the Stranorlar to Glenties railway, Sweeney said that he was quite satisfied with the railway from Fintown. He sent his fish to Belfast, Dublin, Liverpool and Manchester and to all the principal North Lancashire towns. They all arrived in good condition and it was only the fluctuations in the markets and the cost of cartage that induced him to stop but Fintown and the County Donegal Railway gave a most satisfactory service.⁵⁴

Dr Robert Todd, solicitor for the promoting company, the L&LSR, took the dominant part in proceedings, inasmuch as he made the statements on behalf of the promoters, led his own witnesses through their evidence in favour of the line and conducted a crusty cross-examination of witnesses called to oppose the new railway. When Todd questioned him about the kelp industry Sweeney said that about 600 to 700 tons of kelp had been got in the district the previous year. He himself had sent out 325 tons for which he paid out more than £3,000 as agricultural labourers were paid 2s. per day.⁵⁵

All in all, Sweeney was reluctant to commit himself to any innovation that might affect his own business and lower his profitability and influence in the existing situation. At best he was reluctant to promote the new line. At worst, he favoured the *status quo*. The principle of self-preservation was dominant with Sweeney.

⁵⁴ Public enquiry, p. 49, q.1659, evidence of James Sweeney.

⁵⁵ Public enquiry, p. 50, q.1687. Sweeney's reply to Todd.

Some of the retail merchants of the area were then introduced. Their evidence was often contradictory. They favoured a new railway and did not want to be seen as its opponents. Yet, their main focus was on preserving their own well being. William Keon, who operated large stores at Bunbeg, told the commissioners that all his heavy goods, such as meal and flour, were brought in by sea. 240 tons of goods might be brought in by chartered steamer at a time, while the lighter goods were carted by road from Letterkenny at 2s. per cwt. He thought the railway would be a great help to employment especially the shirt industry and would open up the country but he envisaged that he would still bring in his heavy goods by sea because it would be the cheaper. He wanted a railway as long as it would not affect his own business.⁵⁶

Daniel Keown, a Burtonport merchant, told how all the goods he purchased came by the *Tyrconnell* steamer. He believed it was not possible to develop the fishing industry in the bay without the support of a railway for he himself had tried to send some lots of fish out to the markets and, between carting fifteen miles to Fintown which cost 10s. a cart and transshipping it at Strabane, he had lost money on it. Because of the bad roads the carts could only take about fourteen hundredweight instead of a ton.⁵⁷

The many problems associated with sea carriage and road transport were echoed time and time again before the enquiry. John Kelso, manager of Ramsay's stores, Dunfanaghy, told the commissioners that, for the six months up to 31 May 1897 Mr Ramsay had received 633 tons 14 cwt. of goods from Londonderry. Some of these came by ship, some by Lord Leitrim's steamer and some by road. The carriage by road cost 30s. per ton for heavy stuff, 35s. for lighter parcels and 40s. per ton for the lightest parcels. The carriage by sea was only 14s. per ton but the problem was that the steamers could not get in to Dunfanaghy for want of water. However,

⁵⁶ Public enquiry, p. 46.

⁵⁷ Public enquiry, p. 47.

if the railway line only came to Creeslough they would still have the problem of carting it at a cost of 4s. per ton. At the end of February Mr Ramsay had chartered a schooner from Dublin. She arrived in Sheephaven Bay in time for the April springs but could not get in. She went to Ards for shelter but went aground there. The cargo was lost and the schooner was partly lost.⁵⁸

Unlike previous enquiries the development of the fishing industry remained a major key issue throughout this commissioners' enquiry. This was probably due to the strategy designed by Robert Todd, solicitor for the L&LSR. At every sitting he dealt with facts, figures, problems, aspirations, and beneficial expectations connected with the fishing industry in a tightly managed sequence and, at all times, he received the full support of the chairman, Joseph Tatlow. By careful management Todd succeeded in having the various contributors focus on the wealth which a railway would bring to the fishing industry.

He elicited from the witnesses that between the previous August and January over 86 tons of herrings were sold at Dunfanaghy for 1s. 6d. a hundred. They were principally bought by Derry people and carted there. With proper railway accommodation they would have sold for 2s. 6d. or 3s. During the previous month of May, three boxes of lobster were sent to Liverpool but they were almost dead when they arrived. That was a common occurrence. The fishing industry around Dunfanaghy was suffering greatly because of communications problems.⁵⁹ A steamer took lobsters and shellfish away from Bunbeg once each week. For the year 1896 the total value of crabs and lobsters sent out from Burtonport to Glasgow amounted to £949. The value of those sent from Bunbeg would be about £207. The value of herrings landed at Bunbeg was £910 for the year and the Burtonport landings of the same year came to £2,670. Most of

⁵⁸ Public enquiry, pp 39 - 40.

⁵⁹ Public enquiry, pp 39 - 40.

these were distributed and sold locally by merchants but some were cured by the Congested Districts Board and then sent to Fintown by cart and sent out by train from there.⁶⁰ There had been a substantial increase in fish catches over the three years since 1894 but the problem was that there was no market for them except by local people and what the Sligo steamer and the Congested Districts Board steamer and a few other irregular steamers took away. A railway would increase the fishing very substantially.⁶¹

One of the most fluent witnesses called by Todd was Alexander Robinson, manager of the Gweedore Hotel for twelve years, who told how he looked after the salmon fishing at Bunbeg. They were kept in ice until the steamer called each Saturday and took them to Liverpool. The catch amounted to about 2,000 fish in the previous season at an average weight of 7 lbs. If he could get them away immediately he would get a much better price. With the new railway he could send them away every day.⁶²

Robinson was lucid in describing the plight of the workingman and the migrant children who were then introduced into the presentation. He told about the men going to Scotland each year and how they walked the whole way to Letterkenny and the children walked to the hiring fairs of Letterkenny and Strabane. Between men and children he estimated that about 3,000 went from the Gweedore area each year.⁶³

Robinson then discussed the tourist industry and its possibilities. The tourist season lasted between four and five months at the Gweedore Hotel. Some were English tourists; some fishermen and some came to shoot. He kept about 1,000 in all each season. If there was a railway he thought this business would increase fivefold and he would greatly increase the size of his hotel for he had already added seven bedrooms in 1896.⁶⁴ A

⁶⁰ Public enquiry, p. 43, evidence of William Veryard who was in charge of the coastguard station in Bunbeg.

⁶¹ Public enquiry, p. 43.

⁶² Public enquiry, pp 44 - 5, evidence of Alexander Robertson.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Gweedore Hotel, visitors' book. One of the positive outcomes of the evictions in Gweedore and Cloughaneely during the first years of the decade was that vast numbers of tourists came to the area in

single cart from Bunbeg to Letterkenny cost £1 and, if two horses were needed, it cost 35 shillings.⁶⁵

Other topics had to be discussed also, none more important than the crucial issue of the avoidance of Dunfanaghy, for many years the expected principal hub of railway development in the northwest but now, astonishingly, not getting a railway at all. Todd knew that this would be the most contentious issue of the hearing and he determined that he would control the course of the invective that was bound to emerge. Consequently, he grasped the avoidance of Dunfanaghy firmly and tried to justify its exclusion from the railway, as he told the commissioners that this new line combined all the advantages of past lines and avoided all the serious difficulties that arose in regard to nearly all of them.

Todd told the commissioners that the line would run through an area, which would beneficially affect 269,208 acres with a valuation of £27,864, and a population of about 42,709. Practically, all of the district from Letterkenny to Burtonport was congested. The policy for the giving of the grants for the line was the opening up of the congested districts, the development of industries and the relief of chronic distress and discontent in those areas. He argued that it was never intended that the benefit of the act should be given to fully developed districts where the traffic to be derived would be productive of a fair dividend.⁶⁶

He stated that the L&LSR would naturally prefer if the line went through Dunfanaghy for that would increase traffic and income and they were advised that there would be very good passenger traffic there as well. But they were under contract to work the line in perpetuity as designed by the Board of Works and the representatives of the Treasury. The line was to be built, not to develop the town of Dunfanaghy which was a prosperous town itself and had established communications by sea, but to develop

later years. Many had come to witness the evictions and returned later with friends for holidays in the area.

⁶⁵ Public enquiry, pp 44 - 5.

⁶⁶ Public enquiry, p. 3, opening statement of Robert Todd, solicitor.

Gweedore and the Rosses and that being so, he were willing to admit that the shortest line was the best line. Besides the money available for the building of the line was limited. If the line was to go into Dunfanaghy and Falcarragh the cost would increase by £30,000 and the time to travel to Gweedore and the Rosses would rise by half an hour. The Treasury did not have the money available to go the Dunfanaghy route so they proposed doing the best they could with the money at their disposal. The government was giving a free grant of £300,000 for the opening up of the district. This was the seventh effort to have a railway built into the northwest and it would probably be the last time that such an opportunity would arise.

Todd advised that the wise thing to do was to accept this grant and, in future, take such other steps as would supplement the advantages that it would confer. The people of Dunfanaghy could construct a tramway to link up with Creeslough at a cost of £8,000 or £10,000 and have all the advantages of a station of their own. He appealed to the people in the district that the money was now available to open up the area and asked them not to act in a selfish spirit but accept this generous offer. He warned them:

It may never come to you again for there are at least thirty-one schemes for railways all over the country under the provisions of this act and their promoters are all clamouring for the money. And if this money goes away from this district the chances are that we will all see grey hairs before the work proposed is now carried out.⁶⁷

John Swiney, joint engineer, who surveyed and laid out the more remote part of the line from Creeslough to Burtonport was brought in to support the line.⁶⁸ He stated that Fiddlers Bridge station would serve the

⁶⁷ Public enquiry, p. 5, evidence of Robert Todd.

⁶⁸ Public enquiry, p. 7, evidence of John H. H. Swiney, joint engineer of the line.

town of Falcarragh, Cashelnagor would provide for the thickly populated valley of Beltony in Gortahork, a station at the Gweedore Hotel would serve the tourist traffic and another station at Crolly would accommodate a thickly populated area.⁶⁹

This soft presentation soon brought the ire of the Dunfanaghy residents to the fore for it was obvious that Tatlow and Todd were both operating as a team and selecting the easier options. Mr Ramsay, an important Dunfanaghy businessman, interrupted to ask Swiney if he had got any instructions to avoid Dunfanaghy and Swiney conceded that he had. Ramsay then continued to question Swiney closely on his choice of route, pointing out that much of his chosen line was through a 'dreary waste with not many of a population and, for a distance of four or five miles, there is not a soul to be seen'. Ramsay continued his harangue asking where the traffic on this route was to come from and why the line did not go through Falcarragh and Dunfanaghy, where the population and the traffic would be, claiming 'it is dodging away from the district where there is a population'. Swiney struggled to justify his choice and Todd thought it better to call Cooke, the other joint engineer, in order presumably, that Ramsay might be quiet. Once again, Tatlow conceded to Todd's request and refused to deal further with the Dunfanaghy problem. Cooke was led through the minute details of the building of the line and the costs, the amounts of rock, clay and bog to be removed, and the itemizing of all the materials to construct the line.⁷⁰

Mr Ramsay again entered the fray calling on Revd William Kane, the Presbyterian clergyman for that district. Kane gave a long account of the virtues of the Dunfanaghy area and pleaded for a deviation to the town. Todd gave no quarter with short sharp bursts accusing the clergyman and his friends – 'the two or three who are with you' – of trying to wreck the

⁶⁹ Public enquiry, p. 7 evidence of John H. H. Swiney,

⁷⁰ Public enquiry, pp 7 - 11.

line. Finally, Todd browbeat him into admitting he would accept the proposed line if nothing better was forthcoming. Tatlow tried to calm matters by saying that he understood Kane's wish to have the line to Dunfanaghy but, if that could not come about, he presumed that there would be great satisfaction at the proposed line being made. Kane countered that there would not be from Dunfanaghy. They felt it would destroy their trade. Creeslough and Falcarragh would have a line at their doors and Dunfanaghy would be unable to cope with that.⁷¹ Local envy and parish politics might be the deadliest curse of all!

Edmond Murphy, agent to Mr Stewart of Ards, said Mr Stewart was going to give his land free and consequently, he would wish that the railway would be made to Dunfanaghy Town. The line would take up a length of fifteen miles of Mr Stewart's land and about 120 acres in all, but 'the estate would be benefited by the line'. He wished also to state that he had not seen anyone more anxious than Mr Robertson, the chairman of the Board of Works, to get as close to Dunfanaghy as he could but he had only a certain amount of money and might not be able to do it.

Murphy then presented a drawing of the changes that he and his landlord preferred. He had sketched out a line that was a mile and a half north of Creeslough but much closer to Dunfanaghy and said that, if that could be done, they would be satisfied. He would be sorry to oppose the line but he deeply regretted that Dunfanaghy should be left out. Tons of fish were going to loss. He was engaged at Achill before the railway came there and he saw old men carrying creels of fish on their backs a distance of fifteen miles to Newport. But as soon as the railway came there was truck after truck of fish and it would be the same here. He hoped they would consider his deviation into Dunfanaghy. Mr Stewart, his landlord, had spent £10,000 on Dunfanaghy and the property. There were good banks in the town. The landlord was giving his 120 acres free of charge so he hoped

⁷¹ Public enquiry, pp 22 - 3.

some consideration would be given to his estate. After all, Dunfanaghy had 640 families and there were 2,000 families in the district. When interest was apparent in Mr Murphy's proposed deviations, Tatlow cut the conversation short by ruling that they had gone into all that already and then he used his normal tactic to switch the conversation to fish and other topics and refused further discussion on Dunfanaghy.⁷²

Frederick Dawson, manager of the promoting company [L&LSR], was intent on exploiting the vast possibilities which the railway would offer the northwest population. He said that most of these people were small class farmers and people who would engage in the shirt manufacture, kelp burning and other industries.

With regard to the fishing industry, he proposed to put on a train about half past six or seven each morning at Burtonport, calling at the several stations en route and arriving in Derry about 3½ hours later which would enable the fish to be in the London market the next morning. The train would bring out the Muckish sand and the minerals for 4s. 6d. a ton and carry meal and flour to Bunbeg for 5s. or 6s. a ton. 4,780 pigs were sold during the twelve Creeslough fairs of 1896 and most of these had to be carted or walked to Letterkenny. If the railway came through Creeslough the train would carry them.⁷³

John Wilkinson, Protestant, unionist, businessman and clerk of the petty sessions was the first witness called at Falcarragh on Monday, 7 June 1897. He was spokesman for a significant Protestant community of influence in the Falcarragh/Dunfanaghy region. He said that he had been engaged in the shipment of bog ore, or oxide of iron, for twenty years during which time he had shipped 30,000 tons out from Ballyness Bay. Like others engaged in the business he had to abandon the industry because all the bog ore near the sea was exhausted and the cost of carting it, which

⁷² Public enquiry, pp 31 - 32.

⁷³ Public enquiry, pp 35 - 37.

was 4s., 5s. or 6s. a ton, and then the shipping freight which averaged about 6s. a ton, made it unprofitable. The line would run alongside deposits of bog ore that he had no hesitation in saying would produce tens of thousands of tons. He would then re-engage in the business again for he believed the freight to Derry would be 2s. 6d. per ton, thereby saving him 4s. compared to shipping it from Ballyness.⁷⁴

According to Wilkinson the soapstone quarry at Muckish Mountain had to be abandoned years before due to the hilly road and the cost of cartage. The same problem applied to the sand at Muckish which was the best for making fine glass. A gentleman in London had been very interested in re-opening it but the cost of cartage to Ballyness Bay was too high. With the railway it could be landed on Merseyside for 6s. 6d. per ton. The supply was practically inexhaustible and the glass making companies were prepared to buy any amount of it.⁷⁵

He believed that the flagstone quarry at Cashelnagor was the equal of the Caithness flags. A large quantity had been sent away but the cartage to Ballyness Bay was 7s. per ton which was prohibitive. The railway would sort out that problem. About 500 or 600 tons of kelp were harvested in the area. Boats had to be used to bring the kelp ashore at 1s. a ton and then boats had to be paid 2s. 6d. a ton to bring it out to the vessel in Ballyness Bay and the vessel had to be paid 6s. per ton for freight. Once he had commenced to load a schooner with 130 tons but it took twenty-five days, as it had to run for shelter with every cloud that passed. If he had the selection of the route he could not think of better to develop the resources of the district and the shirt-making industries that would come would employ the female labour of the district. The twenty boats in Magheraroarty and the fourteen in Inishboffin Island would increase their fishing and the silver and lead mines which were in operation in the 1860s

⁷⁴ Public enquiry, p. 28.

⁷⁵ Public enquiry, p. 28.

at Keeldrum had to be closed when cartage cost 5s. a ton and freight cost 6s. However with the new railway the mines would only be a mile from the line and he expected them to re-open again.⁷⁶

The operators of the Stranorlar to Glenties railway, the County Donegal Railways, then set out their objections to the proposed line. They were defending their own hinterland and, as they had been receiving the bulk of the trade from the Rosses, they did not want any opposition which would damage their growing income. Their solicitor outlined the history of the line to Glenties and pointed out that the area of taxation for that line included Templecrone and the Rosses. After the grant for the Glenties line had been awarded, the County Donegal Railway Company had reservations about operating the railway because another proposal had been submitted for a railway to Bunbeg in 1890 and they were afraid that much of the Rosses traffic might be taken from the Glenties line as a result. Now, their solicitor made one of the most telling statements which came before the commission when he stated that the County Donegal Railways had only agreed to operate the Glenties line in 1895 after Mr Jackson, the then Secretary of the Treasury, had given them a firm commitment that they would have the traffic of the whole Rosses area as a security if they undertook and worked the Glenties line. That was the reason why they had taken on the task. This was a completely new piece of information to the interested parties before the commission. If the Glenties line had such a commitment, then there was no hope for a line further than Falcarragh if indeed a line was deemed necessary at all. The information devastated the listeners. When the County Donegal Railways' representative informed the commission that since the Glenties line opened on 3 June 1895 more than a quarter of the Stranorlar–Glenties traffic came from the Rosses area it seemed that such a vast amount of trade being guaranteed elsewhere would make the projected Letterkenny to Burtonport line impossible as a viable

⁷⁶ Public enquiry, p. 28.

entity. The solicitor stated that the Glenties Railway had no objection to an extension being made from their own railway at Fintown station to Burtonport via the town of Dungloe because it would serve all of the Rosses. Indeed, they would welcome it as a natural development of the Glenties line. The proposed line under consideration, however, should terminate at Falcarragh. He concluded by restating how they had taken on the Glenties railway on the strength of the Treasury Secretary's guarantee. Balfour's railway seemed lost once again.⁷⁷

When Mr McCrory then tried to produce a letter from Lord Conyngham, landlord of most of the Rosses, Mr Todd objected vigorously and conflict resumed between the two solicitors as to who had the right to represent Lord Conyngham. Fearing the worst might be yet to come Tatlow and Roberts terminated the inquiry.

Many were dissatisfied with the performance of the railway commissioners, especially that of Joseph Tatlow as chairman, for it was felt that they were only dressing up an already formulated plan put together by the Treasury, the Board of Works and the L&LSR and had no real interest in discovering the wishes of the people. The *Londonderry Sentinel* was in little doubt about the enquiry when it reported:

The enquiry held in January of the present year was not independent. The investigators were appointed by the Board of Works and they merely reported to the Board of Works. In other words, their function was that of formally endorsing the scheme of which, it is generally understood, the Board of Works' authorities are the authors. Dr Todd mentioned at the enquiry that Mr A. J. Balfour declared he 'would never consider the railway system of Donegal complete until a line such as was now designed was made to Dunfanaghy and the district of Gweedore'. Dr Todd also stated that the present is the seventh

⁷⁷ Public enquiry, pp 52 - 3, evidence of R. H. Livesey, general manager of the County Donegal Railways.

attempt to open up northwest Donegal. We venture to say it is the first proposing to isolate Dunfanaghy.⁷⁸

A perusal of the commission's hearings leaves the reader with little doubt but that the Board of Works and the L&LSR were operating to a pre-planned strategy during the whole investigation. At no stage throughout all of the evidence was one concession made from the proposed railway as at first presented. Not one suggestion or idea was entertained by Tatlow. At the end the original plan stood in full.

At the County Donegal Railways' annual general meeting in June 1897, the chairman's address was indicative of the sense of injustice and the strength of feeling held by that company against the Burtonport line. They felt they had been induced by the government to undertake the working of the Glenties line in 1895 under somewhat onerous conditions and they felt further that the proposed extension from Letterkenny to Burtonport was a breach of faith, introducing into their district a line to tap their traffic. The very populous district of the Rosses was a considerable source of income to them and a considerable safeguard against any loss of income on the Glenties line. They felt that it was exceedingly unfair that the Burtonport line which was to be built with government money would deprive them of a considerable portion of their gross earnings. The County Donegal Railways had offered to make a line from Fintown to Dungloe, Burtonport and Gweedore under conditions of working it at their own risk but Tatlow and the Board of Works did not seem interested.⁷⁹

One possible explanation for the Board of Work's enthusiasm for the Burtonport line above all others was the fact that it was now the actual owner of the Letterkenny Railway since that line's financial problems. If the railway from Burtonport linked up with the Letterkenny Railway then

⁷⁸ *LS*, 14 Dec. 1897, p. 5, editorial.

⁷⁹ *LS*, 1 July 1897, p. 7.

the traffic on the latter would increase greatly and the Board of Works would be assured of increased income.

The evidence provided at the enquiry sittings gives much information on the various aspects of life in northwest Donegal in 1897. However, it is well to remember that there were many personal agendas at work within that community as well. Not all of the community wanted a railway. Many of the bigger business people had cartage monopolies in their areas and acted both as wholesalers to lesser businesses and retailers to the general public. Mr Hammond, Conyngham's agent, and Mr Herdman, County Tyrone landholder and Sion Mills businessman, both had a steamer business working along the coast and were doing quite well and satisfying many businessmen with the service which connected directly with Scotland, England and Derry. The earl of Leitrim had his own steamers operating along the coast connecting with the same places. The lucrative mails and postal services were in the hands of certain families also and the coming of the railway was expected to put an end to their operation. The many men engaged in the carting trade were fearful of losing their livelihood if the railway came, thus depriving them of the weekly journeys to Derry and Letterkenny.⁸⁰ Towns such as Dungloe and Dunfanaghy were peeved about their exclusion from the railway and were reluctant to support a measure which did not benefit them but could possibly enhance business in competing areas. There was also the further fear of innovation which could threaten already established businesses. This was particularly true of the knitting business which was fundamental to the hold that many shopkeepers had on their customers but could be taken away by Derry shirt manufacturers, thus destabilising the balance of the local economy. Only the clergy, generally, provided the unity and leadership that prodded and cajoled the populace to fight for the line which was seen as a relief measure for the poorer classes who were the first to

⁸⁰ Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsí, *Glór Ghaoth Dobhair*, 1985, p. 19.

suffer the hunger and privations following a poor harvest or a disappointing Scottish season.

On Thursday 15 July 1897 the Donegal Grand Jury under the chairmanship of Major James Hamilton sat to consider the proposed Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway.⁸¹ There were sustained and severe objections from Dunfanaghy residents against the railway and demands that the scheme be looked at again and revised so that the route would accommodate the town of Dunfanaghy. Eventually, the chairman ruled that the grand jury did not have power to alter the proposal before them but could only accept or reject it without amendment. Then the County Donegal Railway mounted a stern challenge against the imposition of the line into its territory, especially the Rosses which they calculated would entail an annual loss of £1,400 to them. Eventually, after much bitter argument, the grand jury voted unanimously for the construction of the railway though nine jurors abstained. The opponents from Dunfanaghy and the County Donegal Railways threatened, however, to have their final say before the privy council in Dublin when the railway came before that body. They made no secret of the fact that they intended to wreck the railway proposal.⁸²

There was public consternation at these outbursts and threats and much correspondence in the press about the line going 'through barren bogland, mountains, ravines and dreary wastes'.⁸³ The editor of the *Londonderry Sentinel*, which paper was vehemently against the route chosen and the exclusion of Dunfanaghy, added a footnote to the letter: 'the correspondent completely gives away his case. Kilmacrenan is a village and, as he must be aware, the official intention is that the line to Gweedore shall carefully avoid all villages and run as far as possible through an

⁸¹ *LS*, 17 July 1897, p. 7.

⁸² *LS*, 17 July 1897, p. 7.

⁸³ *LS*, 21 Oct. 1897, p. 5, letter from Pro Bono Publico.

unproductive district'.⁸⁴ 'Scrutator', in a letter, had no doubts about the correctness of the chosen route stating that, 'the line will run through the districts and places where the mineral wealth of the County Donegal lies embedded beneath the surface of the ground'.⁸⁵ 'Pro Bono Publico' was not to be appeased however.

Will those who are responsible for the present route kindly explain the cause that prompted them in ignoring the villages of Kilmacrenan, Dunfanaghy and Falcarragh and running it through bogs, mountains and moorland There is time yet ... that so egregious a blunder will not be allowed to be carried out to remain for all time a monument of ignorance and stupidity to be hurled in the face of anyone connected with a strong Unionist Government who has a Balfour for its Irish Chief Secretary.⁸⁶

In reply to a letter from a Dunfanaghy resident, 'Scrutator' vented his fury on the residents of that town,

'We of Dunfanaghy' moreover are an altogether superior people to the inhabitants of Cloughaneely, Gweedore and the Rosses. 'We' are their superiors socially, racially, politically, morally and intellectually. 'We' are rich in this world's goods; they are poor and despised. 'We' are large farmers; they are only squatters. 'We' have golf links to entertain tourists; they have none. What are all the mines and minerals compared with 'our' golf links? I will tell you the principal reason you will not get a railway. It is because you are rich and affluent Poverty has ceased to be a crime and our poverty has been our only qualification for a railway.⁸⁷

Mindful of the press campaigns against the railway and the possibility of the project being sabotaged by the Dunfanaghy residents and the County Donegal Railways, the Catholic clergy took control of the

⁸⁴ *LS*, 21 Oct. 1897, p. 5.

⁸⁵ *LS*, 11 Dec. 1897, p. 8.

⁸⁶ *LS*, 11 Dec. 1897, p. 8.

⁸⁷ *LS*, 28 Dec. 1897, p. 5.

campaign to have the railway built. Large public meetings in favour of the railway were organized throughout the region from Letterkenny to the Rosses with the exceptions of Dunfanaghy and Dungloe. The clergy occupied the chair at most of these gatherings and made rousing speeches condemning the opponents of the line as 'frivolous and vexatious'⁸⁸ and setting out resolutions in favour of the Burtonport railway. That these gatherings were highly coordinated is evident from the timing of the meetings and the similarity of the motions passed.⁸⁹

The perception and reality of the political power structures were very evident in Donegal by the minor roles played by the M.P.s of the county, the Irish Parliamentary Party, or the AOH in the whole railway controversy. This is not surprising because the politics practised in Donegal during the 1890s were little more than theatrical street presentations on special occasions. The County Inspector often reported during the middle and late 1890s that there was 'nothing about politics in the county except what appears in the newspapers and that does not affect Donegal'.⁹⁰ With regard to the general election in July 1895 he reported that 'I never saw such little interest during election times'.⁹¹ While questions might be asked in parliament or discussions held in the council chamber, all of the serious business involving the ordinary people was in the hands of the clergy. They arranged the meetings, coordinated the motions to be passed, occupied the chairs and acted as chairmen, called on the speakers and ensured that the 'right' message was sent out to the right people. The lay political structures took little part in the agitation.

⁸⁸ *LS*, 13 Nov. 1897, p. 5. Words delivered by Fr James McFadden, P.P., Glena, at a large meeting in Falcarragh on Wednesday, 10 Nov. Similar meetings were held at Burtonport, Kincasslagh, Annagry, Gartan and Glenswilly.

⁸⁹ *LS*, 13 Nov. 1897, p. 5.

⁹⁰ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Mar. 1895 (CO 904/50).

⁹¹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, July 1895 (CO 904/50).

While all this was happening and while preparations were being made for the hearing before the privy council⁹² in Dublin in January 1898, the fragility of relations between the L&LSR and the Board of Works was exposed when the *Londonderry Sentinel* announced that the clause of finishing the line out of the L&LSR's own money had still not been agreed to by the L&LSR and that there was a danger that the proposed line might be abandonment. The L&LSR contended that this liability which appeared in recent documents was at variance with the original contract entered into with the Board of Works whereby they simply undertook to work and maintain the railway, when made. Peace seemed restored when it was reported in the *Londonderry Sentinel* that 'after long correspondence the Board of Works have agreed to withdraw the objectionable clause ... there would appear to be nothing now to interfere with the progress of the work'.⁹³

However, two other smaller matters of contention then appeared. One was the question of where the rolling stock belonging to the new line would run. The Board of Works insisted that stock for the Letterkenny to Burtonport railway could only run between those two termini while the L&LSR were horrified at this proposal arguing that such a policy would mean that all passengers and freight would have to be changed at Letterkenny on every journey which would make the running of the railway impossible. The second difficulty was a disagreement about the location of a running shed to service the Letterkenny to Burtonport line. The L&LSR insisted that the only sensible place for the new shed was in Derry where the machinery, spares, fitters and experts were located but the Board of

⁹² The privy council was a legal body appointed by the Governor General which examined government expenditure. All railway schemes had to be evaluated and sanctioned without amendment by the Irish privy council under the presidency of the lord lieutenant before being presented for government sanction at Westminster.

⁹³ *LS*, 9 Dec. 1897, p. 5.

Works insisted that the shed must be located on the new line between Letterkenny and Burtonport.⁹⁴

In December 1897, John McFarland, chairman of the L&LSR, disclosed some of the duplicity and machinations which characterized the dealings between the L&LSR and the Board of Works when he told the half-year meeting that ‘on 11 March 1897 the Company [L&LSR] entered into agreement with the Board of Works to work and maintain the Carndonagh railway and also agreed to contribute a sum of £10,000 to the equipment of the railway when made, to provide the line with suitable rolling stock’.⁹⁵ But when the Board of Works drew up the final agreement for the Burtonport railway, they had altered the clause so that the L&LSR could become responsible for whatever money was necessary to complete and operate the Burtonport line.⁹⁶ The L&LSR contended that they could become liable for anything between £20,000 and £50,000 by the implementation of this clause which could possibly ruin the company.⁹⁷

Dr Todd, solicitor, then told the meeting of the problem about the rolling stock with the words ‘Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway’ [L&BER] or some other appropriate designation or mark to distinguish it as belonging to the Burtonport undertaking for the benefit of which they would be exclusively used. The time lost, the cost, the labour required, as well as the double provision of stock needed for such a division of railways would make it almost impossible for the L&LSR to operate the scheme.⁹⁸

Todd, as solicitor for the L&LSR, had written that the word ‘exclusively’ be omitted but the Board of Works refused. Todd then added a clause of his own stating, ‘nothing in this clause shall preclude the use of the said rolling stock for through traffic between the several stations on the

⁹⁴ *LS*, 9 Dec. 1897.

⁹⁵ Earlier statements said that £25,000 was being provided. £10,000 seems the more correct.

⁹⁶ *LS*, 18 Dec. 1897, p. 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *LS*, 18 Dec. 1897, p. 7.

[Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension] railway and those on the lines worked and owned by the company' [Derry to Letterkenny railway, Buncrana railway and Carndonagh railway]. With the Board of Works' clause still intact and the new contrary clause inserted by Todd, plus a verbal assurance by the Board of Works that the two clauses about the rolling stock were not contradictory the L&LSR eventually signed and sealed the agreement.⁹⁹ The *Londonderry Sentinel* was relieved that 'it is sufficient to know they [Board of Works] have given assurances the document does not mean what it says and that, in these circumstances, they have conceded the contentions of the railway company'.¹⁰⁰

In this uncertain atmosphere the privy council sat in Dublin in January 1898 to consider the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway.¹⁰¹ Mr Campbell, Q.C., on behalf of the Dunfanaghy residents, mounted his expected opposition, demanding a review and changes which would bring the railway into the town of Dunfanaghy and he then threatened to have the project abandoned if such changes were not made. After a long presentation on the Dunfanaghy issue, the lord chancellor said that the privy council never did such a thing because they could only accept or reject the proposal before them and had no power of amendment.¹⁰²

Then the County Donegal Railway attacked the whole project listing their expected annual losses of £1,400 as a result of lost trade from the Rosses when the Burtonport line opened. They reviewed the history of the Glenties line and the promises made when it was built. Finally, they introduced their telling blow when they stated that Mr Jackson¹⁰³ of the Treasury had put his hand on a map of the Rosses and assured the County Donegal Railway Company that they would have the traffic of the Rosses

⁹⁹ *LS*, 18 Dec. 1897, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ *LS*, 15 Jan. 1898, p. 5, editorial.

¹⁰¹ 'Letterkenny – Burtonport Extension Railway' (NAI, Privy Council Papers, vi B – 3 – 16, no. 30), (hereafter Privy Council hearing).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ William Jackson, financial secretary to the Treasury with long experience of English railways, came to Ireland in August 1890 to complete arrangements for the new railway lines. Ridgeway called him a 'slow, overcautious, and unimaginative negotiator'.

at their back and there was no need to fear making losses. Therefore, the Treasury should recoup them for any losses or else the extension railway from Letterkenny should stop at some point short of Burtonport, Falcarragh perhaps. On hearing this evidence, the privy council decided that it was serious enough to adjourn proceedings for a fortnight in order that Mr Jackson and the Treasury should confirm the agreement made with the board of the Glenties line.¹⁰⁴

There was consternation throughout northwest Donegal at the news that the railway was on the point of being lost once again. Michael Doogan, a rate collector and aspiring county councillor from Gweedore, put his thoughts on paper in a letter to the *Derry Journal* in January 1898:

Not since the relief years of '79 and '80 were the people in more need of employment, as the potato crop in these parishes was far short of the average and the prices of agricultural produce and stock has been the worst on record. If this railway is much further delayed and not begun immediately, the people will soon be face to face with the hardest spring that has been experienced for the last twenty years. As a cess collector and local trader I have a right to know as I have been traveling through the district known as Tullaghobegley for the last month and I can fairly say that it is the worst year on poor people that I remember; and, be it remembered, that the above district contains 1,600 householders from Fiddlers Bridge [Falcarragh] on the one side to Crolly Bridge on the other.¹⁰⁵ The people of these districts should arouse themselves at once and put forward their claims and their shoulders to the wheel and cry out and say, 'The railway extension has been granted by the Chief Secretary and passed by the Donegal Grand Jury and neither the Dunfanaghy people nor the West Donegal Railway company will deprive us of our just rights'.¹⁰⁶

The Catholic clergy who were looked to and depended upon traditionally by the poor to solicit and provide the relief necessary for their

¹⁰⁴ *LS*, 20 Jan. 1898, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ The borders mentioned would include the parishes of Gweedore and Cloughaneely.

¹⁰⁶ *DJ*, 26 Jan. 1898.

survival in difficult times, saw this rejection as a massive blow to their hopes of having substantial employment provided locally. The breakdown in law in the parishes of Cloughaneely and Gweedore during the last years of the 1880s and early 1890s as a result of the Plan of Campaign and subsequent evictions on the Olphert, Swiney, Stewart and Hill estates, had as its consequence the rejection of officialdom and authority and ‘the growing police dependence on the clergy to perform routine duties’.¹⁰⁷

The power of the clergy over the people and in their relations with government, politicians and press, was greatly enhanced as a result and their leadership came to be the primary control feature of local society. They had been building this base since the 1884 Electoral Act¹⁰⁸ when the Donegal clergy displayed the efficiency of their power by registering the new voters which led to all four Donegal constituencies returning nationalist candidates with West Donegal not even being contested. Thus ended the political domination of the Tory/Liberal population in Donegal through clerical efficiency though their efforts were not appreciated in all quarters as the *Donegal Independent* reported in 1892:

The most illiterate division is that of the West [Donegal], Mr Dalton’s constituency. More than one half of the population of that division can neither read nor write. The total is 47,346 of whom 18,281, can read and write, 4453 can read only. Mr Maguire’s North Donegal stands next in point of popular ignorance with 15,962 illiterates out of a total of 46,248 while that staunch out and out Protestant, Swift McNeill, represents a deadweight of ignorance in the shape of 15, 846 illiterates out of a total of 46,624 in South Donegal. It must be gratifying for Mr Arthur O’Connor to find that he represents the most highly educated division of County Donegal there being only 13,972 illiterates in the constituency of East Donegal of whom 10,600 are Roman Catholics. Of course these totals of illiteracy include children less than seven years of age, of whom there are roughly speaking, about 7000 in each of the four constituencies.

¹⁰⁷ Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and modern Ulster*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁸ Representation of the People 1884, 48 & 49 Vict., c. 3.

Templecrone is the most illiterate parish in numbers but second in percentage, only 4100 out of 10,719 being able to read and write and 615 to read only. Tullaghobegley is second in number with 6052 illiterates out of 9204 population but its percentage is the highest.¹⁰⁹

After the fall of Parnell who was said by Fr McFadden to have 'betrayed their confidence, broken the forces of nationality and degraded himself in the face of the world',¹¹⁰ the clergy in Raphoe diocese had presented a powerful alliance of influence by associating in the public's mind that the Parnellites had abandoned the evicted tenants of the northwest and made off with the £40,000 in their coffers.¹¹¹ Announcing that

the people would be done with one man power and that the disclosure regarding Mr Parnell in the divorce court, his abandonment of the evicted tenants by refusing to release the Paris fund, his appropriation of public moneys intended to promote the national cause, his efforts to divide and distract the country since he cannot rule it and his conduct generally during the present crisis prove him to be unscrupulous and dishonest morally and politically and deserves the reprobation of every just man.¹¹²

Henceforth, with the ending of 'one man power,' the clergy dominated Donegal politics with monster meetings, presenting full platforms of priests who selected and adopted the candidates for election and imposed their own conditions upon them.¹¹³ These theatrical presentations with loud and colourful ceremonial, led by bands, lit by torches and bonfires and fired by rousing speeches, whipped the people into frenetic excitement. When T. D. Sullivan visited Dungloe in 1892 following his election as M. P. for West Donegal

¹⁰⁹ *DI*, 13 May 1892, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *DI*, 3 July 1891, p. 3, speech by Monsignor McFadden at Donegal Town.

¹¹¹ *DI*, 15 Jan. 1892, p. 2.

¹¹² *DI*, 3 July 1891, p. 3, Monsignor McFadden.

¹¹³ *DI*, 17 June 1892, p. 3.

he was met by the brass band and a large concourse of people who welcomed him enthusiastically. Immediately after last mass an impromptu meeting was held in the chapel yard, which was attended by a very large congregation. Fr H. A. Gallagher, P.P., chaired the meeting In the evening, by direction, each house was illuminated and the band paraded the streets. The crowd separated after singing 'God save Ireland'.¹¹⁴

After the fall of Parnell, it was the clergy who dictated policy and tactics to the political representatives of the county whom they regarded as their subservients.¹¹⁵ By the mid 1890s the clergy of Donegal were in charge of most elements of people's lives there from churches and schools, evictions and landlord relations, rent negotiations, politics and elections,¹¹⁶ relief and poverty measures, press and publicity with outside bodies as well as behaviour and conduct generally. Secure in their own power, perhaps reflecting on Fr McFadden's words that 'did he yet know of anybody coming in hostile contact with the church that was not shattered',¹¹⁷ the clerical dominance in Donegal was extensive and powerful. Consequently, it was only natural for them to adopt the leadership on behalf of the Burtonport Railway when crisis threatened its premature demise.

Their task was made easier in that the enemies of the railway were identifiable in the public mind as the same Protestant/Unionist class that had been successfully routed from the political platform. Dunfanaghy was predominantly a Protestant town and its principal proponents were identifiably Unionist. The board of the County Donegal Railways was exclusively Unionist and was drawn from the wealthy classes from the east of the county. Thus the Letterkenny and Burtonport Railway Extension became a Catholic versus Protestant and a Unionist versus Nationalist issue in the northwest with the clergy leading the Catholic nationalist side.

¹¹⁴ *DI*, 16 Sept. 1892, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *DI*, 20 Jan. 1893, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ In 1895, all the candidates for the Irish Parliamentary Party in Donegal were proposed by priests.

¹¹⁷ *DI*, 13 Mar. 1891, p. 3.

Following the privy council deferral they orchestrated a massive campaign throughout the whole area with a series of 'monster' meetings addressed by the priests in the main. The principal targets at these meetings were the Dunfanaghy residents and the board members of the County Donegal Railway.

At the Falcarragh meeting Fr Maguire, parish priest of Gweedore,¹¹⁸ emotionally addressed the massive crowd as follows:

The first cup of comfort that had been given them for centuries in the great gift of a free railway was just in the act of being reached to them when their neighbours and those who ought to be their friends and supporters ruthlessly attempted to spill the cup before it reached their hands. The cup was not yet spilled. The cup was a great gift to 30,000 people. They were there to claim that cup, to thank the donors and to use every legitimate means to obtain it. Cloughaneely and Gweedore were joined hand in hand with the Rosses on this great – this vital question. (Great applause)¹¹⁹

Businessman William Harkin roused the throng with a stinging attack on the gentry responsible for the opposition to the railway:

But now his Grace, the duke of Abercorn, has led the opposition and with the assistance of a chosen band of minor satellites, radiating in the orbit of the ducal planet, a most unholy attempt is made to thwart the intentions of the Government in West Donegal I should hope his Grace, the Duke, regrets the course he took; I have no doubt in my mind that he will live to regret his action. But the people of this district repudiate his right to interfere altogether, for the very simple reason that he has not as much land in the locality as would sod the proverbial lark. What has Sir James Musgrave and his co-directors¹²⁰ - all Unionists I have no doubt - to say regarding these pious ejaculations As a Donegal landed proprietor with a fair record in the past, I should sincerely hope

¹¹⁸ Rev. Dr Maguire replaced Fr James McFadden in Gweedore when McFadden went to the United States to raise funds for St Eunan's Cathedral in Letterkenny in 1897. Maguire took permanent charge of Gweedore in 1901 when McFadden was transferred to Glenties as Parish Priest. Maguire later wrote the history of the diocese of Raphoe.

¹¹⁹ *LS*, 29 Jan. 1898, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Sir James Musgrave, a large Donegal landholder, was chairman of the Donegal Railway Company.

Sir James Musgrave would be the first to repudiate the desire of this official with regard to the wrecking of our line.¹²¹

A similar meeting was held at Burtonport on Wednesday 26 January where Anthony Gallagher, a fisherman, declared that

it now behoved them as fishermen to stand for their own rights and brush aside those impertinent intermeddlers. Did they think their children were going to remain barbarous in order that the directors of the Donegal Railway might get an extra pound of a dividend ... in order to pay their rents and demands They must be a free people and not slaves to the Donegal [Company] directors?¹²²

At Temple Douglas near Letterkenny, a meeting held on Tuesday 25 January condemned 'unreasonable opposition from parties who have their own personal interest rather than the public good at heart and who have no connection with these districts'¹²³ but, at Gartan on the following evening, Fr John Kennedy was more sanguine when he told the audience that 'Mr Balfour who was practically the father of the scheme, would see it to a successful issue'.¹²⁴ Annagry and Termon held similar gatherings during the same week. At each of these meetings, a selection of motions was taken from a slate of thirteen resolutions organized by the clergy and were passed at each meeting and sent to Dublin Castle. All the meetings further agreed to send delegates, mainly the Catholic clergy, to the adjourned privy council meeting in Dublin and they further agreed to have legal representation to ensure that the railway was not lost.¹²⁵

But there were still some recalcitrant antagonists to the railway as a letter in the *Londonderry Sentinel* illustrated.

¹²¹ *DJ*, 28 Jan. 1898.

¹²² *DJ*, 28 Jan. 1898.

¹²³ *DJ*, 28 Jan. 1898.

¹²⁴ *DJ*, 28 Jan. 1898.

¹²⁵ *DJ*, 28 Jan. 1898.

Why then squander public money in building what is called ‘a monument of folly or making what is now known as ‘the mad railway by Fiddler’s Bridge’? It is to be hoped that wisdom will at last prevail and that the Privy Council will be able to see through the machinations of men.¹²⁶

In February 1898 the privy council sat in Dublin with legal representatives present from almost all parts of northwest Donegal. At the beginning of the hearing, counsel for the Dunfanaghy residents conceded defeat rather than have the railway lost to the area entirely. The eagerly awaited County Donegal Railway’s accusation that Mr Jackson, on behalf of the Treasury, had guaranteed them the traffic of the Rosses then became the issue. A letter was presented from Mr Jackson denying that such an agreement ever existed and stating that the purported facts as represented by the County Donegal Railways were wrong. The privy council then gave sanction to the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway. It seemed that, after so many years and continuous disappointments, the railway which was to relieve and transform the northwest would now go ahead.¹²⁷

The *Derry Journal* was ecstatic in its editorial comment:

We rejoice at the news. It means advantages to the county and its excellent people that for the present can hardly be estimated. The way is now open for progress, and prosperity in a short time is sure to take the place of isolation and hopelessness. There are great days in store for Inishowen and Donegal, and Derry extends its congratulations to both.¹²⁸

The *Londonderry Sentinel* commented wryly:

Nationalism may be so thoroughly ingrained in the majority of the inhabitants that they will feel no gratitude towards the two Unionist Governments through whose remedial policy they have been granted the boon of four important

¹²⁶ LS, 28 Jan. 1898, letter from ‘Justice’.

¹²⁷ DJ, 9 Feb. 1898.

¹²⁸ DJ, 9 Feb. 1898, editorial.

railways. But the plain fact remains that no help was given by the party composing the present opposition either when in or out of office, but rather the opposite.¹²⁹

‘Ramelton’ wrote to the *Londonderry Sentinel*:

If not too late, I would venture to make a suggestion as to the propriety of changing the terminus of the above proposed Great Wilderness Railway. Instead of going to Burtonport it should terminate at Bedlam.¹³⁰ A terminus with any other name will not do full justice to the promoters of such a scheme when their names are handed down to posterity, Bedlam is, at any rate, suggestive of a reason for the selection of such a route and would explain much that would otherwise be very mysterious to McCauley’s *New Zealander* or any other individual of an enquiring mind in ages to come.¹³¹

Soon afterwards the confirmation of the Letterkenny to Burtonport railway was confirmed in parliament.¹³² Regardless of all the criticism, it only remained for the L&LSR and the Board of Works to proceed at haste and build the railway with the gift of the government’s money. Balfour’s promise would be fulfilled at last.

¹²⁹ *LS*, 3 Feb. 1898, p. 4, editorial.

¹³⁰ Bedlam was the name of a townland outside Falcarragh.

¹³¹ *LS*, 28 Dec. 1897.

¹³² Tramways Order in Council (Ireland) Londonderry & Lough Swilly (Letterkenny to Burtonport Extension) Railway, Confirmation Act 1898, 45 & 46 Vict., c. 156.

CHAPTER 4

THE PLANNING AND BUILDING OF THE RAILWAY

1898 - 1903

John McFarland, chairman of the L&LSR had bought in the plans and specifications for previous railway schemes during 1890 - 91 from Mr Doyle, the engineer who drew them up but who was then entering old age.¹ McFarland stated that he had bought the plans on his own behalf and on behalf of his then contracting partner, Basil McCrea.² When the application was being prepared for the promotion of the railway to Burtonport as a result of the Light Railways Act 1896³ these plans were taken as a basis and upgraded by John Swiney, a Derry engineer who together with other engineers prepared the parliamentary plans and submissions. The actual money paid by McFarland for the preparation of these plans was between £1,900 to £2,000.⁴ When the promoters of the railway became the L&LSR, of which McFarland was chairman, Mr Radcliffe, an engineer with the County Donegal Railways, was taken on to further promote the plans but McFarland insisted that the L&LSR would have to purchase the plans from McCrea and himself before he would hand them over to Radcliffe. Matters stalled for some time but, eventually, a private agreement was drawn up between McFarland and Radcliffe by which Radcliffe would pay McFarland 10 per cent of any money he received from the Board of Works for his labours.⁵ This private arrangement was to have a bearing on further relations between the parties just as the agreement drawn up between the

¹ IRC, p. 244, q. 19435, evidence of John McFarland.

² The contracting firm of McCrea & McFarland constructed the Stranorlar to Glenties railway which opened in 1895. A serious dispute arose between McCrea & McFarland and the Board of Works towards the end of the construction work. The contractors were dismissed and legal proceedings were entered into which reached the courts in Dublin in 1902. When dealing with the disputes between the two parties it is important to remember that legal proceedings between them were taking place in the background.

³ Light Railways Act 1896, 59 & 60 Vict., c. 48 (14 Aug. 1896).

⁴ IRC, p. 244, q. 19435-37, Evidence of John McFarland.

⁵ IRC, p. 244, questions 19433-19438. Evidence of John McFarland.

L&LSR and the Board of Works in relation to the Carndonagh railway had a bearing on the Burtonport railway later on.

A clause had been inserted in the preamble to the Carndonagh Railway agreement in reference to the Burtonport railway stating:

whereas the Treasury are satisfied that the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company being an existing railway company, will, if an advance is made by the Treasury under section 1 of the Act of 1896, construct, work, and maintain the [Burtonport] railway.⁶

The whole understanding between the Treasury, through its agent, the Board of Works, and the L&LSR was that the latter was to construct, run and maintain the Burtonport line. This agreement between the L&LSR and the Treasury was signed on 6 January 1898 and the order in council was given on 18 May 1898⁷ but there was a significant clause 11 inserted in the agreement by the Board of Works which stated that, in the event of the promoting company not taking up the contract within six months of the order in council being granted, then the Board of Works could operate as the promoters and build the railway independently of the original promoters.⁸

The L&LSR lost no time following the granting of the order for construction by the privy council and, by March 1898, the engineering of the line was being pushed on rapidly. Several parties of engineers went working in the field, the operations being carried on simultaneously from both ends of the planned line until the several parties met midway. The engineer in chief, Mr E. Radcliffe, was personally superintending the Letterkenny staff and the engineer in charge of the Burtonport staff was Mr J. J. Barnhill, Derry.⁹

⁶ IRC, p. 229, q.19047, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁷ IRC, p. 230, questions 19060-19076, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁸ IRC, p. 229, q.19049, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁹ LS, 19 Mar. 1898, p. 5.

During the first months of 1898, the L&LSR sent bills to the Board of Works for expenses incurred during these initial stages for the engineering, planning, advertising and promotional outlay regarding the Burtonport Extension which amounted to £6,000. The Board of Works insisted that vouchers or receipts should accompany all expenses claimed and consequently, an amount of £2,600 was disputed and not paid. A meeting was arranged in Dublin on 12 May 1898 where Fred Dawson, manager of the L&LSR and Robert Todd, solicitor for the L&LSR, attended at the invitation of the Board of Works to work out the problems between the sides. After an exhaustive discussion all matters of principle were settled.¹⁰

At three o'clock that afternoon Robert Todd attended at the privy council and applied for an extension of time for the completion of the Burtonport railway. Counsel for the Board of Works also appeared and agreed with all aspects of the L&LSR case. The two bodies cooperated fully and were successful in achieving the time extension.¹¹

Fred Dawson had the contract for the construction of the line in his bag and, as he had not time that evening to complete the vouching of the expenses, it was agreed that he and Todd would meet with the Board of Works officials at their offices the next morning when the sealed contract for the construction of the Burtonport line would be signed and the receipts for the accounts would be settled.¹²

When Todd and Dawson arrived next morning at the offices of the Board of Works they got a very frosty reception. Mr Robertson, chairman of the Board of Works, met them at the entrance and said that the Secretary of the Treasury had forwarded him a letter, written a few days earlier by the L&LSR, complaining of the action of the Board of Works in refusing to fix the actual amount of the 'free grant'. Mr Robertson was very much

¹⁰ IRC, p. 246, q.19488, evidence of Mr Spence.

¹¹ IRC, p. 571, written statement from Robert Todd, solicitor.

¹² Ibid.

annoyed that the L&LSR should write to the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of the Treasury complaining of the Board of Works' action and he then declared that the Board would have nothing more to do with the L&LSR but would take the construction of the line into its own hands.¹³ Todd and Dawson expressed their astonishment and pointed out that the scheme could not have proceeded had the 'order for extension of time' not been obtained the previous day and they further observed that there was no dispute at that particular time between the Board of Works and the L&LSR and suggested that, having regard to the circumstances, the L&LSR was entitled to proceed with the construction of the line pursuant to the terms of the Treasury agreement.¹⁴

However, the Board of Works refused to negotiate further and intimated that it would proceed without the L&LSR which body promptly issued a writ and took proceedings by petition of right to compel the Board of Works to allow them to construct the railway. But after the date of the trial had been fixed the L&LSR took counsel's opinion which advised them that, because of a clause in the agreement, they could not succeed in the courts of law and consequently, the proceedings were dropped.¹⁵

John McFarland, chairman of L&LSR, later stated that they were never averse to carrying out their contract. The dispute arose entirely through not fixing the amount to be paid to his company for promotion.¹⁶ Promotion in this case meant the preparation of plans, the drawing up of legal documents, advertisements and notices in various journals and the submission of all the documentation to the various bodies such as rural district councils, grand jury and privy council, to receive permission and funding for the building of the railway.

¹³ IRC, p. 571, appendix x, statement submitted by Robert Todd, solicitor.

¹⁴ IRC, p. 571, appendix x, statement submitted by Robert Todd, solicitor.

¹⁵ IRC, p. 220, q. 19056 and p. 234, q. 19171-6. Acceptance of the agreement debarred the L&LSR from any legal remedy when the contract was taken out of their hands.

¹⁶ IRC, p. 241, q. 19418. Evidence of John McFarland.

Time passed without any resolution over the impasse of the expenses. By February 1899, the six-month limit set down in the contract for the application for tenders had expired without action having been taken by the L&LSR. At this point the Board of Works decided to act unilaterally. It placed notices in the appropriate journals on 6 February 1899 inviting tenders for the construction of the Burtonport railway. The L&LSR claimed that the Board of Works had delayed any resolution of their conflict intentionally until the time lapse period of six months had expired in order to bring clause 11 into being which gave the Board of Works power to act as promoters in place of the L&LSR.¹⁷

It was part of the original agreement between the Treasury, the Board of Works and the L&LSR that the tenders for constructing the railway would be opened in the offices of the Board of Works in the presence of officials from the L&LSR and representatives of the Board of Works.¹⁸ But John McFarland believed 'faith was broken'.¹⁹ When the tenders were to be opened on 11 March 1899, the L&LSR representatives refused to attend at Dublin because their disputed accounts were still not paid and they insisted that they could not go on incurring expenses when the Board of Works had ceased to pay.²⁰

The opening of the tenders was an important procedure because, as well as the selection of the contractor from the competing parties that tendered, the fixing of the free grant was based on the lowest tender received minus the amount guaranteed locally which, in this case, was £5,000.²¹ Based on the lowest tender the free grant amounted to £315,000 approximately of which five per cent or £15,000 would have been allowed for promotional expenses which was the normal practice at that time.²²

¹⁷ IRC, p. 230, q. 19063. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

¹⁸ IRC, p. 94, q. 14954. Evidence of Thomas Shanahan, Board of Works.

¹⁹ IRC, p. 237, q. 19247. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

²⁰ IRC, p. 237, q. 19248. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

²¹ IRC, p. 93, q. 14944. Evidence of Thomas Shanahan, Board of Works.

²² IRC, p. 230, q. 19078. Andrew Spence, secretary of L&LSR.

The Board of Works opened the tenders of which there were five or six and 'the lowest tender was accepted' by them which was that of Pauling & Company, Victoria Street, London, which company was also engaged in building the Carndonagh line at this time. The Board of Works informed the L&LSR of the lowest tender that had been received and stated that the Treasury was satisfied as to the solvency of the contractor and his capability of doing the work and they asked the L&LSR which was still legally the promoting company to now proceed with the construction of the railway using Pauling as contractor. The L&LSR refused to do so and the Board of Works served them with a notice insisting upon their taking part in the contract and signing the contract deed to promote and oversee the construction of the railway or else, the Board would have to proceed further under clause 11 of the agreement and take upon itself the construction of the railway. Again the L&LSR refused.²³

On 12 April 1899 the Board of Works served notice, once more, on the L&LSR to execute the contract deeds but received no response. The Board of Works then sought and obtained the sanction of the Treasury to construct and equip the railway themselves under the powers conferred under clause 11 of the agreement 'so as to prevent the scheme being entirely abandoned'.²⁴ The Board of Works justified its stance and reminded the L&LSR that

your company have been fourteen times called on by the Board during the last eighteen months under clause 4 (2) of the agreement to vouch certain items included in the accounts forwarded by your company for promotion expenses, but up to the present, the required information has not been received.²⁵

With the L&LSR firmly out in the cold at this stage the Board of Works then proceeded aggressively with the plans for the railway. First of

²³ IRC, p. 94, questions 14959 - 14967. Thomas Batchen, engineer, Board of Works.

²⁴ IRC, p. 564, appendix ix, correspondence between Board of Works and L&LSR.

²⁵ IRC, p. 564, appendix ix, correspondence between Board of Works and L&LSR.

all, they took over the chief-engineer, Edward Radcliffe, who had been employed by the L&LSR in preparing the plans and shortly afterwards, they took over his staff of five engineers, and the works were thereafter superintended by Radcliffe exactly as he would have done if acting directly for the L&LSR as originally intended. In the same way, the Board of Works then took over the solicitors, including Robert Todd, who had already prepared much of the legal groundwork in connection with the line and had conducted contract negotiations on behalf of the L&LSR.²⁶

But very soon, the deviousness of the Board of Works was once more exposed when it then became clear that it had not adhered strictly to its own rules and contract restrictions in regard to the acceptance of the 'lowest' tender which was supposed to be all inclusive. It emerged that Pauling, perhaps chastened by the local politics experienced during the construction of the Carndonagh line, refused in its tender submission to have anything to do with the purchase of land, the supply of the permanent way material, the purchase of engines or rolling stock or the cost of the engineering and promotional expenses. This refusal forced the Board of Works, as the substitute promoters, to enter into separate agreements for the purchase of land, for the permanent way material and for the engines and rolling stock but they declined to enter any agreement for the engineering or promotional expenses which had been incurred by the L&LSR and which led to the contention between them.²⁷

It appears that John McFarland was beginning to have second thoughts about this time about the whole involvement of the L&LSR in the Letterkenny and Burtonport Extension Railway. It was not expected that the Burtonport line would ever be profitable nor indeed be able to pay its way for, under a section of the 'Carndonagh Railway agreement', it was provided that, if there was any deficit on the Burtonport line, the L&LSR

²⁶ IRC, p. 94, questions 14970- 14988. Evidence of Thomas Batchen, Board of Works.

²⁷ IRC, p. 230, q. 19073-6. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

was to make good the deficit and provide for its maintenance out of the surplus gained on the Carndonagh line which 'was contemplated to be a good paying line' and the Burtonport line was 'to be a foster child of the other'.²⁸

In 1907, McFarland told the Irish Railways Commission about his reservations at the time of the promotion in 1896-97:

If my advice had been followed we would never have promoted the line; it was just the greed of my co-directors and the pressure of the public to have this money that we were being threatened every day that, if we would not enter into this unreasonable and onerous agreement with the Board of Works, the money would go to the south of Ireland. I would have let it go to the devil if I had not been out-voted by my directors knowing that no railway could be maintained for £3 10s. per mile per week.²⁹

We yielded to the persuasion of the public, chiefly to that of Mr Vesey Knox, who was then the Member of Parliament for the City of Londonderry and sealed the agreement rather than let this money go to another part of Ireland which the Board of Works continually threatened they would do, if we did not submit to their terms.³⁰

With the Board of Works now acting as promoter and Pauling's engineers working alongside the Board's engineers the exact route of the line was set down and pegged out and the estimated construction costs of the 49 miles 56 chains from Letterkenny to Burtonport were calculated at £316,181 6s. 3d.³¹ £5,000 would be guaranteed by local ratepayers so the total amount of the free grant from government for the construction of the railway amounted to £311,181 6s. 3d.³² Pauling only took responsibility for about £219,500, leaving the Board of Works responsible for the remainder, a situation probably unique in the history of the Board of Works

²⁸ IRC, p. 232, q.19129-30. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

²⁹ IRC, p. 245, q. 19453. Evidence of John McFarland.

³⁰ IRC, p. 234, q. 19168. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

³¹ Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway (NAI, Privy Council Papers, , vii B – 3 – 16, no. 30)

³² £5,000 was to be guaranteed locally and was, therefore, deductible from the total cost.

in Ireland.³³ (See appendix 6 for itemised estimates and costing of the whole project).

With the appearance of the various engineers and planners in their midst along the route of the line, the local men who expected to get employment were anxious to get started. Many rumours had been circulating in the localities adjacent to the proposed railway that low wages would be paid by the L&LSR which body was seen locally as being the contractors for the line. Mindful of the stories that had been coming their way for a few years previously in regard to the wages paid on the Glenties line and the difficulties experienced by the men from the hill districts in getting fair play and decent wages from John McFarland, they organised a meeting at Crolly on Thursday evening, 19 May 1898. 2,000 men attended and Fr Dunlevy of Annagry was voted to the chair. After stirring speeches demanding equal wages with those paid in Scotland and a motion to that effect was passed and sent to the Board of Works in Dublin.³⁴

However, in August 1898, John McFarland had mixed news for his shareholders when he told them of his frustration with the Board of Works with regard to the Carndonagh Railway. Almost half his time was taken up in correspondence, meetings and in negotiations with them. Engineers had been over the ground, again and again, and yet, matters still remained in a very uncertain position. The incessant cheeseparing and cutting down of the money supposed to be applicable for the construction of the line had become almost a by-word and, so far as he was concerned, he did not intend to spend very much more time in connection with the negotiations. The authorities would either have to proceed with the construction of the Carndonagh line or they might do the other thing and leave it alone so far as he was concerned because his heart was broken in correspondence and negotiation over it. With regard to the Burtonport extension, very

³³ IRC, p. 230, q. 19073-6, evidence of Andrew Spence.

³⁴ LS, 24 May 1898, p. 7.

considerable progress had been made. The engineers had entered into the preparation of the construction plans and working drawings with a will and he had never seen such great work done in so short a time. So far as their duties in connection with the line were concerned, they were quite clear and it now rested with the Board of Works and the Treasury to provide the money if they intended doing so at all.³⁵

After having gone through the plans for the railway and having surveyed the route of the line, Pauling's engineers came up with some suggestions for change which involved a series of deviations from the original route set out, especially in the area of the Owencarrow River at Barnes Gap and at Meenbanad in the Rosses. Having discussed these deviations with the Board of Works which approved of them, the next problem was in the legality of having them authorised.³⁶

The legal position, as laid down in the 1896 act, required each deviation to be treated as a new project which would have to be investigated and sanctioned at district, grand jury and privy council level and be granted an order in council for it be fully authorised and entitled to receive grants. The Board of Works now had a problem with the Burtonport line because, legally, and according to the written contract, the L&LSR were still the promoters of the Burtonport railway and the Board had only exercised an option contained in the agreement in order to construct the originally planned line. Further, according to the 1889 act, an existing railway company had to promote a new line or part thereof, to receive sanction and avail of the free grant. By not being an existing railway company, the Board of Works could not act in regard to these deviations except when the original promoters had defaulted. There was stalemate at that point.³⁷

³⁵ *LS*, 28 Aug. 1898, p. 5.

³⁶ *IRC*, pp 94 - 95 , 14990 - 8, evidence of T. M. Batchen.

³⁷ *IRC*, pp 94 - 100 , 14990 -15008, evidence of T. M. Batchen.

The Board of Works wrote to the L&LSR on 25 July 1899 informing them of the proposed deviations and again, on the 29 July they wrote:

am now sending you, herewith, the plans of the deviations proposed by the contractor I would point out that the arbitrator begins his hearings on Monday 1 [August] and, to prevent a double purchase of land, it is desirable to get the opinion of the directors as soon as possible. I shall remain in my rooms all afternoon and, if you send a messenger for me at any time, I will be glad to attend on your directors.³⁸

But the L&LSR did not hurry. They placed the plans in the hands of their resident engineer who was at the time in a transition stage between the L&LSR and the Board of Works.³⁹ He replied on 1 August saying that the details were not sufficient to enable him to give an initial report. On 16 August 1899 he reported fully on the proposals saying that there were eight deviations proposed. He did not recommend four of them, two were 'unobjectionable' and two were 'recommended'.⁴⁰

The L&LSR believed that the deviations would enormously reduce the cost of constructing the line which would be of financial advantage to both the Board of Works and to Pauling but would result in a worse line with steeper gradients, sharper curves, and greater length, all of which would incur increased running expenses on the L&LSR when they came to operate the line. The L&LSR wrote to the Board of Works on 2 August 1899 stating that 'taking into consideration that the contract plans have been approved and tenders taken thereon, my directors consider the alterations proposed would open the door to an infinite amount of trouble'.⁴¹ It was obvious that the L&LSR would not be easily persuaded having at last cornered the Board of Works in its corral.

³⁸ IRC, p. 231, q. 19092. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

³⁹ IRC, p. 231, q. 19093. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁴⁰ IRC, p. 231, q. 19092. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁴¹ IRC, p. 231, q. 19097. Evidence of Andrew Spence.

Whatever went on behind the scenes is not evident but Pauling sent an emissary to the Gresham Hotel, Dublin in February 1898 for a private meeting with the L&LSR to open negotiations which were carried out with the express purpose of getting the L&LSR to act once again as proposer for the deviations. He offered money for the participation of the L&LSR in the application for the deviations. The L&LSR wanted to get as much as they could and sent their legal advisor, Dr Robert Todd, to represent them. The contractors explained that any money given to the L&LSR had to come out of Pauling's half of the savings as the Board of Works could not be seen as participating in this underhand operation.⁴² The legality of accepting any portion of the money offered was raised by the L&LSR directors and the emissary persuaded them that they were perfectly justified in accepting it which was tantamount to confirming that the Board of Works or the Treasury would not initiate proceedings or make the payment a public issue. With such guarantees in place the sum of £5,900 was given by Pauling's emissary and was then distributed. £1,500 went to Robert Todd, the solicitor, for the legal expenses because, of course, he had to do all the legal work to get the 'presentment' from the grand jury and the order from the privy council, the same as a new railway project would incur. £400 was paid for engineering drawings and preparation of parliamentary plans for the deviations which were prepared by Mr Cooke and Mr Hall and lodged by them.⁴³ £4,000 was given to John McFarland, whether to him personally or as chairman of the L&LSR was unclear. McFarland said it was to recoup the L&LSR for the extra expenses involved in working the line in later years due to these deviations and he rejected strongly any attempts to present the money as a bribe.⁴⁴ He stated firmly that 'the

⁴² IRC, p. 238, q. 19286. Evidence of John McFarland.

⁴³ IRC, p. 231, questions 19098 – 19100, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁴⁴ IRC, p. 238, q.19291, evidence of John McFarland.

£4,000 which the contractor paid to us, the validity of which we discussed at the time, was to come out of the contractor's share of the savings'.⁴⁵

With this money safely secured, the directors of the L&LSR agreed to the deviations and signed all the necessary forms and began the legal process to have them sanctioned. The role of the Board of Works in this act of collusion is unclear but Andrew Spence, secretary of the L&LSR, was able to produce evidence at the IRC in 1907 that the Board of works were informed of the private deal on 31 December 1899.⁴⁶ It does appear that the Board of Works indulged in much deviousness in order to process the application but, of course, none of their deeds appeared on paper. With all the legalities finalised, Pauling now began to build the railway.

When the route for the line had been generally fixed the task of acquiring the land then took precedence. The Board of Works appointed two civil engineers, Edward McNeilage and J. J. Barnhill as arbitrators in December 1898.⁴⁷ They spent almost six months surveying the lands. They produced an extensive file describing each piece of property, whether field, house, garden, right of way, stream, lane, public road, byre, barn, school, plantation, shrubbery, office, lake, lime kiln, cart track, pasture, water closet, or other description. They then set down 'the owners or reputed owners, 'lessees or reputed lessees', 'occupiers', and left a column for 'observations. In all, 2,229 individual pieces of property were surveyed between the L&LSR station in Letterkenny and the pier at Burtonport. Commonages provided a special difficulty for the arbitrators because of their prevalence in the northwest but they also had to deal with six cases in the townlands of Cruickamore and Lackenagh in the Rosses where the rundale system was still being practised. Lands where occupiers had been evicted or where prescriptive rights were claimed also provided difficulty.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ IRC, p. 238, q. 19286, evidence of John McFarland.

⁴⁶ IRC, P. 231, q. 19101, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁴⁷ *LS*, 24 Dec. 1898, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway, Book of Reference, part II and part III, Rail 19 (Donegal County Council Archives, Lifford).

Having accumulated all this information they started hearing claims at Letterkenny courthouse on 31 July 1899.⁴⁹ Armed with the Compulsory Purchase Act 1896⁵⁰ they then proceeded along the route of the line sitting in the national schools on appointed days throughout the month of August, meeting the people and their advisors and settling the amounts of land to be taken for the line and agreeing the moneys to be paid.⁵¹ £50 per acre was the estimated value in general but some people got less and some got more depending on the proximity of the acquired land to the home, whether it was being tilled, grazed, used for turf cutting or wasteland. Settlements were made for houses, barns, byres and outhouses which were compulsorily acquired for the railway. A further task performed by the arbitrators was payment to homeowners along the railway who had to replace their thatched roofs with slates or corrugated iron in order to avoid the danger of fire from the engines. Loughanure National School in the Rosses was one such building that had its roof replaced.⁵²

Pauling was a vastly experienced railway constructor having completed major projects throughout England, Africa and in many parts of the world. It was hoped that work would start within a year and that the line would be open for traffic within three years. The Board of Works were the paymasters and they drew up a detailed contract with Pauling which specified that payment would be made at set stages dependant on recorded progress; a fine would be imposed for each day that the construction ran beyond the finishing date; Pauling would maintain the line for one full year after completion and £10,000 would be held until the full completion of all works. All aspects of the work were carefully laid out in minute detail and very little was left to chance or debate. If the finished product fitted the plan then the line would be a good one.⁵³

⁴⁹ *LS*, 24 June 1899, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Compulsory Purchase Act 1896, 59 & 60 Vict., c. 48, subsections 11(a), 12(1), 28.

⁵¹ *LS*, 1 Aug. 1899, p. 5; 8 Aug. 1899, p. 7.

⁵² Pádraig Mac Gairbhith, Loughanure.

⁵³ IRC, 'Terms of contract', questions 19468 – 19483, John McFarland's evidence.

Mr George W. Holmes who had lately become chairman of the Board of Works, 'showed the liveliest interest in the work'. Mr Percy Firbank was the chief representative of the contractors on the works which were carried out under the direction of the Board of Work's engineer, Thomas M. Batcham. Pauling had brought in a number of engineers, foremen and navvies who had experience in building English and African railways and the Highland railways of Scotland and these men were put in charge of the working gangs.⁵⁴

Pauling's system of construction was based on the traditional method used for long and many decades since the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal and the Liverpool Canal and the railways of Britain. Hundreds of men were employed in gangs. Each man was calculated to move twenty tons of earth or stone each working day.⁵⁵ Their method was to divide the line into sections to which gangs were allocated. Each group worked a particular area until all the various sections could be joined up. Similar to the practice adopted with the Glenties railway, the Board of Works insisted that the work should begin from both ends, simultaneously, in order to spread employment opportunities between Letterkenny and Burtonport as soon as possible. No other system would have worked in Donegal anyway for there was no mode of transport to convey workers except by foot. Therefore, it was logical that work was set out and given to local men in particular areas. It was estimated that it took a year on the railway to make a labourer into a navvy who could work a full day shifting the heavy loads of clay and stone.⁵⁶

Recruiting agents went around the various parishes adjacent to the route of the line and selected the men for the task. Particular notice was paid to local men who had experience with explosives in the mines of Lowland Scotland or on the big building projects in England and there

⁵⁴ *LS*, 5 June 1890, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Kevin O'Connor, *Ironing the land* (Dublin, 1999), p. 14.

⁵⁶ O'Connor, p. 14.

were quite a number of those available.⁵⁷ The building of the Glenties line between 1891-1895 had taught railway contractors another important lesson. Timekeeping had been so bad there due to the lack of clocks that shifts were disrupted morning after morning. Along the northwest coast time was approximate depending mainly on the tides and the elements or the few residents who had clocks or watches. Pauling resolved to eliminate this problem on the Burtonport railway. Men who had clocks or watches were appointed in each area and it was their task to travel with a lantern from house to house each morning and awaken the men and lead them to work for an 8 a.m. start. For this they received an extra sixpence per week.⁵⁸

Pauling's workers often arrived on site in the early days to find that the line of pegs where the track was to run had been moved during the night. There was particular difficulty in Cruckakeehan in the Rosses where one family moved the pegs to the other side of a hill, away from their own property, having already received payment for the land.⁵⁹ Horses, donkeys and mules were employed at much the same rates as the men, and boys earned between one shilling and one shilling and sixpence. The contractors tended to employ younger men and few elderly men got work on the line.⁶⁰ Local blacksmiths set up forges along the line and boys were employed to carry the jumpers and feathers to and fro.⁶¹

The Irish speakers in the northwest had many misunderstandings with their English-speaking counterparts whose terminology was often incomprehensible to the natives.⁶² But there was much joy in the homes of

⁵⁷ Bernard J. Byrne, Annagry.

⁵⁸ Colm Gillespie, Loughnandearan. His grandfather, William Mhánuis Gallagher held such a position.

⁵⁹ Bernard J Byrne, Annagry.

⁶⁰ Census of population for Rosses, Gweedore and Cloughaneely, 1901. I found that sons were generally employed and few heads of households or married men listed themselves as railway workers. With the exception of railway 'blacksmith' almost all the rest of the men were listed as 'railway labourer'.

⁶¹ James McBride, Meendernasloe.

⁶² Pádraig Mac Gairbhith, Loughanure. One story is told of a supervisor telling a native to make an 'old man' [a pivotal point] of a particular peg. The local man went and got the oldest man in the party to stand at that point for a number of days until the mistake was discovered.

the chosen workers because the pay of half-a-crown per day was good money in northwest Donegal in 1899 when very little else was available. In later times, older people used to talk about the strange sight of gangs of twenty or thirty men walking towards the site of labour each morning and back again in the evening.⁶³

Rails, sleepers, dynamite, water tanks and machinery were brought in to the harbours of Burtonport and Bunbeg and carted by local men to the working sites along the line.⁶⁴ Stone quarries were opened at various places along the route and gangs of men were put to work there quarrying and dressing stone for the viaducts, culverts and bridges. Stonemasons, such as the three Coll brothers in Gweedore and the McBrides of Drimaraw near Creeslough dressed and prepared the stones which were used to build the various bridges. The work was done with the most basic of tools. Sledgehammers, drills and feathers were the principal implements used to drill the thousands of holes in the vast cuttings that had to be made at many locations throughout the line. One man usually held the drill while two strikers applied alternative blows with heavy sledgehammers. After blasting, crowbars, picks and shovels were then employed to lever and move the stone which was then carried from the sites by means of handbarrows with a man at either end, both facing the same way. Rail tracks were set down from the cuttings to the hollows and bogeys were laid on these lines, drawn by gangs of men or by horses or ponies. Steam shovels and steam drills were brought in to Burtonport harbour and were used for the first time at Poll Gorm, Cruckakeehan, Annagry.⁶⁵ The working day was ten hours long and the working week was Monday to Saturday. Workers were liable to be sacked for missing a day's work even for the

⁶³ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry.

⁶⁴ Londonderry & Lough Swilly papers, Sept. 1901 (P.R.O.N.I., D 2683, Ck 1).

⁶⁵ Dan McGarvey, Kincasslagh.

death of a close relative and the traditional attendance at funerals was not tolerated by the contractors.⁶⁶

By 1900 the RIC County Inspector was reporting that there was plenty of money in circulation and that shops and pubs were doing well.⁶⁷ In March 1901 he reported that the work was progressing at great speed but that strikes had taken place with 'a demand for shorter hours at the same wages'. However, peace was soon restored and work began shortly again only for a new problem to arise. The pillars and columns carrying the viaduct over the Owencarrow River had started to subside. Not alone would this cause serious delay but such an event was totally unforeseen by the contractors.⁶⁸ The problems continued for many months. Even by December 1901, nine months after the columns had started to sink there was still no resolution found. However, there continued to be good incomes and 'the people were comfortable'.⁶⁹

In her book, *Stairsheannchas Ghaoth Dobhair*, Cáit Nic Giolla Bhríde tells how the marble from the Dunlewey quarries was used for the track-bed and was then covered with the sand from Muckish mountain and this combination under the line kept the tracks free from weeds or growth. She also relates how special long root grass was brought in from abroad and planted along the sidings to strengthen them and avoid slippage or rock-fall. This proved very successful.⁷⁰

The difficulty of locating sand in such a boggy and rock-strewn terrain proved a continuous difficulty. Teams of men spent long days wading into the lakes to fill wet sand into bags which they then carried on their backs for long distances across the bogs, with the water draining from their bags and soaking their clothes and boots.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Edward Boyle, *Bunaman*.

⁶⁷ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Dec. 1900 (CO 904/72).

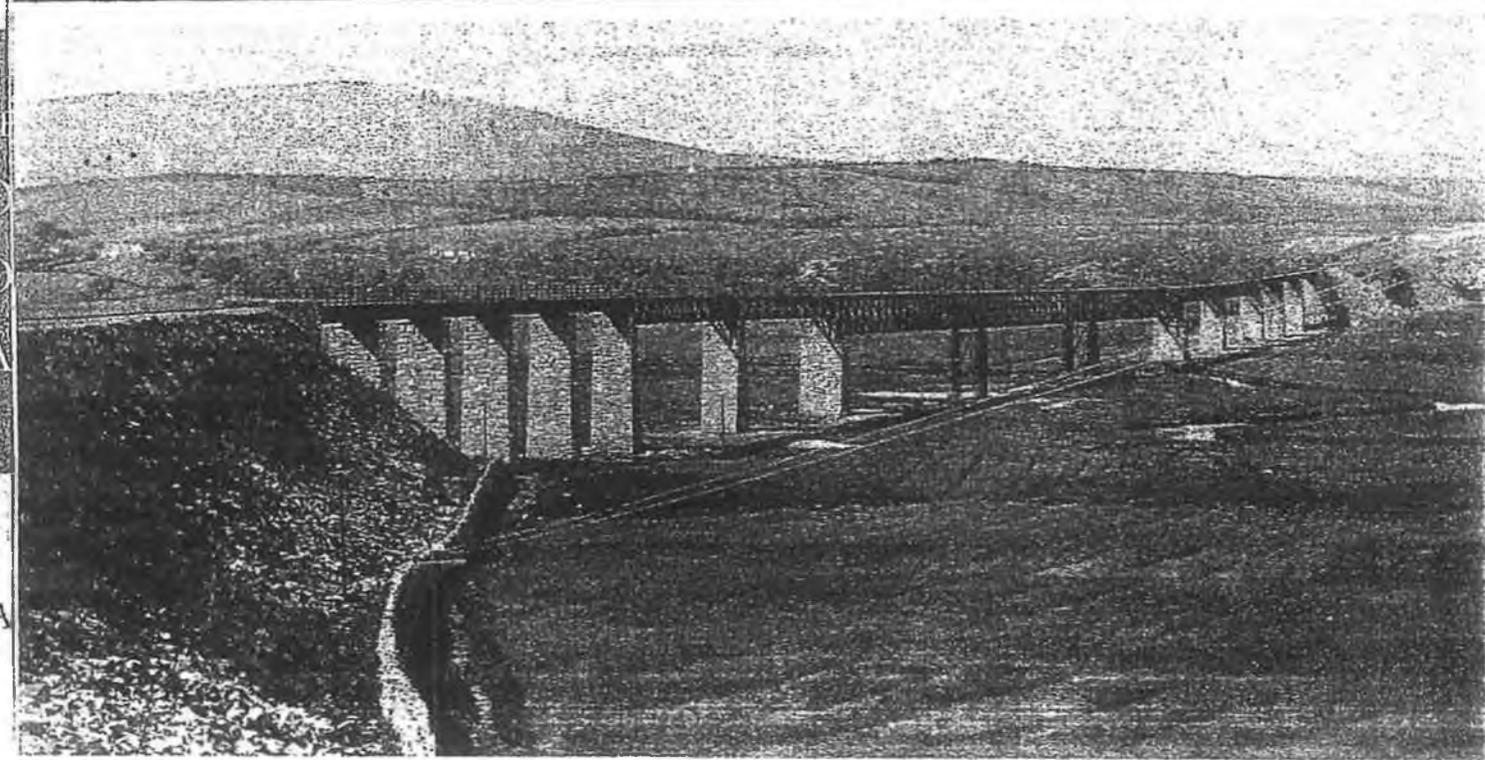
⁶⁸ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Mar. 1901 (CO 904/72).

⁶⁹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Dec. 1901 (CO 904/73).

⁷⁰ Cáit Nic Giolla Bhríde, *Stairsheannchas Ghaoth Dobhair* (Baile Atha Cliath, 1996), p. 103.

⁷¹ Michael McGeady, Baltony, Gortahork. (Tape in custody of David McNally, Dublin); James McBride, Meenderrynasloe. Both men were relating the stories of their fathers on the railway.

Fig. 21 Owencarrow Viaduct



Source: J. I. C. Boyd, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 12

Fig. 22 Barnes Viaduct



Source: J. I. C. Boyd, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 14

However, the railway workers were astonished in January 1901 when they were given a day off work with full pay as a tribute to the death of Queen Victoria, an event which was spoken of for many years afterwards.⁷²

The area around Owencarrow River, situated between Kilmacrenan and Creeslough, proved almost impossible for the contractors. An article in the *IRS Bulletin* in 1936 told of the problems experienced.

The greatest trouble experienced by the contractors was in the construction of the viaduct over the Owencarrow valley and in laying the track over the vast fields of bog between Falcarragh and Burtonport. The Owencarrow viaduct would have broken the heart and emptied the pocket of a less wealthy firm but Messrs Pauling, who have done engineering works on the biggest scale in nearly every country in the world were not likely to allow even an almost bottomless Donegal bog to beat them. The viaduct, which stands as one of the engineering feats of the country, is 50 feet high and 1,140 feet long. The length is made up as follows: three spans of 140 feet each; four spans of 80 feet each; eight spans of 40 feet each and a couple of arches of 40 feet each.

The contractors had to go no less than 80 feet below the surface before they got a solid foundation. At times it seemed as if the end of the sinking would never come. But the contractors were determined to do the work creditably and so, the massive structure was completed at, it is said, a loss to this enterprising firm. Nor did Messrs Pauling reckon with the depth of bog beyond Falcarragh. The subsidence of the bog necessitated considerable works which were not contemplated at the outset.⁷³

During the building of the railway, the Redemptorist Order arrived in the Rosses to conduct a mission in the parish of Lower Templecrone from 17 November to 22 December 1901 which to this present day, is remembered as 'an missiún mór'.⁷⁴ It was common practice for the men working on the building of the railway between Gweedore and Burtonport

⁷² Edward Boyle, Bunaman.

⁷³ A. J. Chisholm, *IRS Bulletin*, 34.15, April 1936 - November 1937.

⁷⁴ Esker Domestic Archives, Redemptorist Order, Athenry, Co. Galway, mission chronicle, vol. I, 1899-1909. The mission was held in Aranmore from 17 - 24 November 1901; Kincasslagh 17 November - 8 December 1901; Annagry 8 - 22 December 1901; Burtonport 8 - 22 December 1901. (Hereafter Esker Domestic Archives)

to wash themselves in the rivers and lakes at the end of their day's labour and then walk to the churches where the priests conducted the mission. About 5,000 of the parish population of 8,000 attended at Kincasslagh. The priests noted some deterioration in moral values among local society due to the railway:

They were fishermen or small cottiers living on granite rocks or wild moors and procuring a livelihood, chiefly in Scotland. Their spiritual state is good. There is some intemperance owing to the making of the new railway and the introduction of Scotch customs, especially drinking on Saturday nights. A sign of the success of the mission was the large congregation in the morning, almost equal to that of the night. About 1,200 joined the Total Abstinence Society of St Patrick.⁷⁵

During their mission in Burtonport they found poor standards:

Their spiritual state is very low. – company-keeping of a gross kind; also night dancing of the worst kind; girls dressed in male attire and running about the roads; bad sleeping arrangements ... wakes. All promised to renounce the abuses already mentioned.⁷⁶

This mission is still remembered in the local folklore. It is reputed in the local oral tradition to have been so terrifying and scared the people so much that it led to some parishioners having to be taken to the mental hospital in Letterkenny as they feared that redemption was beyond them.⁷⁷

Dynamite was the principal explosive used in the making of the line but local sources suggest that, when necessity demanded, the local explosive called black powder or 'an púdar dubh' was also used. This was a mixture of saltpetre and sulphur with glycerine. Dry leaves were commonly used as a base to give it bulk. When it was well mixed, it was

⁷⁵ Esker Domestic Archives, pp 78-80.

⁷⁶ Esker Domestic Archives, pp 81-82.

⁷⁷ Pádraig Mac Gairbhith, Loughanure.

then rammed into the drilled holes. It was an unsteady explosive and was the cause of accidents.⁷⁸ Paddy Sharkey from Bunaman was in charge of blasting on a section of line near Kerrytown, in the Rosses. After filling the holes one day, he retreated and joined his fellow workers while they lit the fuse. Nothing happened and, after a very long delay, Paddy moved forward carefully to check the problem. When he was within a few yards of the target, the rock-face exploded. He lost an eye as a result but all his fellow workers averred for years afterwards that he was very lucky to be alive.⁷⁹

A stonemason named Neil Gallagher from Lackenagh, Burtonport, had his leg severely injured one day when a large stone fell on it while working in the railway quarry at Cruickamore, two miles from Burtonport. It was about midday on a Saturday. A man travelled to Burtonport for Dr Smyth only to discover that the doctor was about ten miles away in Gweedore. Word was sent to Gweedore for the doctor to come as soon as possible. The patient had to remain where he was until the doctor arrived. Fr Walker came and gave spiritual relief but nothing else could be done. Neil was losing blood and there was no knowledge of tourniquet or first aid in those times. Dr Smyth arrived about eleven o'clock that night and amputated Neil's leg on the spot. The doctor fought hard to save the man's life but without success. Gallagher left a wife and large family who were then without their father's income. Pauling agreed to employ Neil's eldest son, a thirteen-year-old boy, as a servant for the duration of the work in that locality.⁸⁰

James Boyle was working for Pauling in a quarry at Letterleague near Letterkenny. On 5 February 1900, Mr Ross left him in charge of the quarry. When he was putting in a charge with a wooden stemmer supplied by the company, an explosion occurred and, as a result, he spent three

⁷⁸ Pádraig Mac Gairbhith, Loughanure, Annagry.

⁷⁹ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry. Aged 94 years.

⁸⁰ Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsí, *Iidir an dá ghaoith*, p. 251.

months in hospital. He lost the sight of an eye and one wrist was so injured that his arm was practically useless. In a subsequent court case Dr Boyle pointed out that Pauling had paid Boyle nine shillings a week for six months following his accident. The judge said he must take into account the man's position in life. 'If the Prince of Wales had his eye shot out that would be a very different thing to a man earning only nine shillings a week'. Consequently, he awarded Boyle £25 compensation.⁸¹

Five men were injured, one seriously, during a blast at Barnes Gap in March 1901. The *Londonderry Sentinel* reported as follows:

Extensive blasting operations were being carried out at the Gap. So difficult and hazardous is the work that a steam borer is used but, up to Thursday afternoon, no serious accident occurred. About four in the afternoon of Thursday 28 February 1901, a charge of gelignite had been placed in a hole, the work being carried out by Doyle of Rosemount Derry who acted as ganger. Four others were named Rodden, Rodden, Sheridan, and McGrenary. The charge, however, failed to ignite and Doyle, it is stated, was tamping when a terrific explosion took place. The unfortunate ganger got the full effect of it, being picked up in a terribly mutilated condition. Dr Tabateau of Dunfanaghy was immediately sent for and, on his arrival, it was found that both of Doyle's eyes were injured, the sight of one being entirely destroyed, his left arm and right leg were fractured while he was severely cut and bruised to the face and other parts of the body. His removal to Londonderry infirmary was immediately ordered but, as the night turned out so severe, it was deemed inadvisable to undertake the journey until yesterday. Sheridan was taken to Dunfanaghy workhouse while the others were being treated in their homes.⁸²

Doyle, the ganger, was cleaning out the hole when the explosion occurred. Mr Martin, the manager of the Barnes Gap section, was close by when the accident occurred and he telegraphed to Derry and Doyle's brother and sister arrived and accompanied him to the city. It is the first such accident to occur in the district. George Doyle died on Sunday, 3 March 1901 as a result of his injuries. Before the city coroner, Mr O'Hagan cross-examined Martin on two notices which were

⁸¹ *LS*, 22 Jan. 1901, p. 8.

⁸² *LS*, 2 Mar. 1901, p. 5.

being put up, a schedule of instructions issued by the manufacturers of the gelignite, and the other, a notice to gangers by the contractors to the effect that any man found using gelignite which had not been warmed in the pans provided for the purpose would be immediately dismissed.

Witness, in reply, attributed the explosion to the fact that the deceased used a steel or iron rammer instead of the wooden ones specially provided for the purpose. John Doyle, his brother, said the deceased could not read or write. The jury added a rider that the employers should not employ illiterate persons in the capacity in which the deceased had been engaged.⁸³

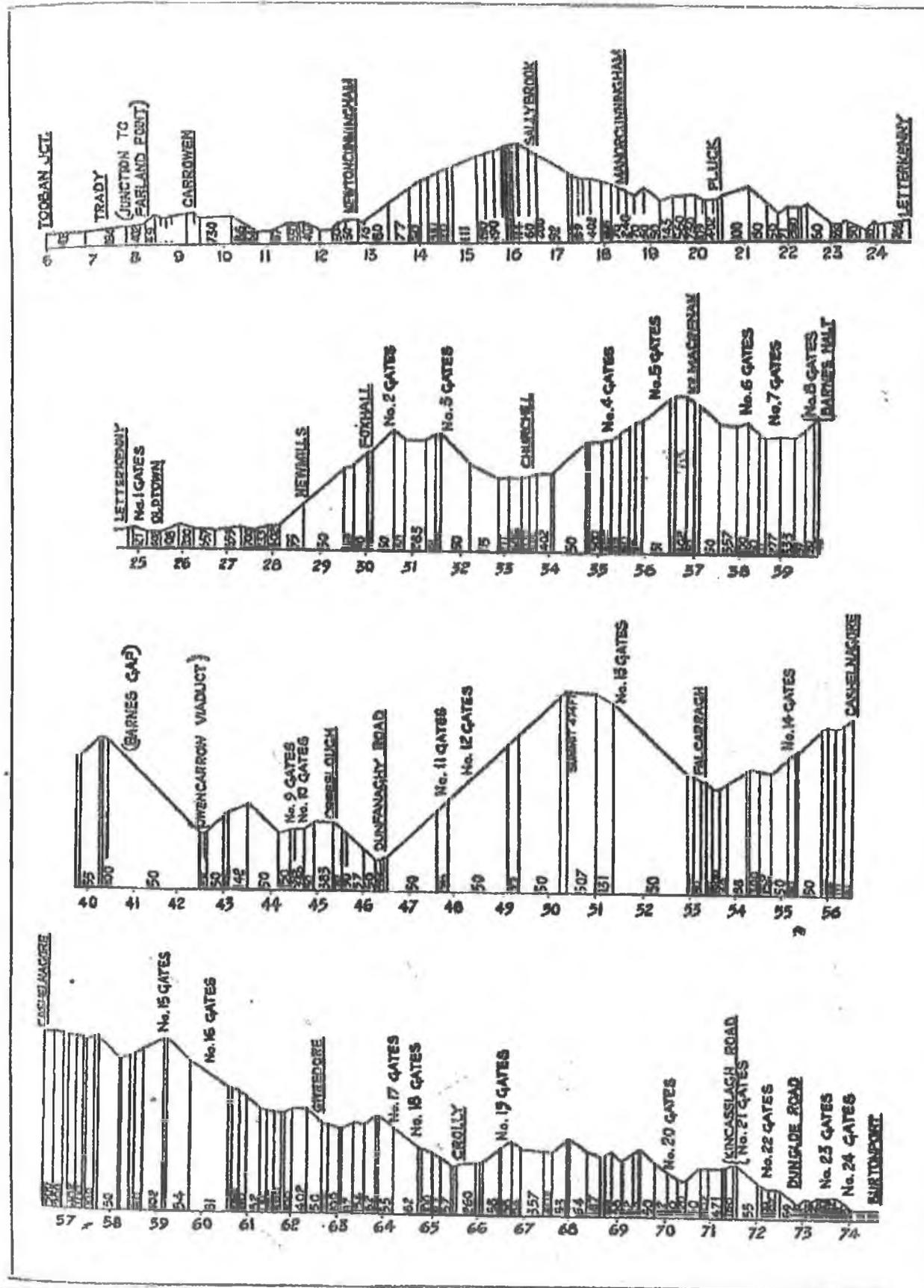
Despite these incidents, the work progressed at a breath-taking speed. The gangers and foremen were blamed in later years for abusing the pride of the men by telling each gang, especially within the parish boundaries, that the workers from neighbouring townlands or parishes were making greater progress and were the best workmen on the railway. This spurred many a group of workers to frenetic effort, unaware that the same exhortation was being used on their neighbours in different parts.⁸⁴

There were many disagreements between the Board of Works and the contractor about the quality of the work. Railway building in Ireland had been a haphazard business for many years with little attention being paid to the quality of the track-bed which would have to carry locomotives of more than fifty tons weight. This line was no different for the essential requirement seemed to be speed in getting it finished on a tight budget as soon as possible. This furious rate of construction did nothing, however, to abate the storms between the Board of Works and L&LSR when the purchase of locomotives for the new railway brought relations between them to a new nadir in 1901. Being the operating company, the L&LSR had expected to decide on the make and type of locomotives required for the railway. However, the Board of Works adopted a strict and severe

⁸³ *LS*, 7 Mar. 1901, p. 5.

⁸⁴ *Ua Cnámhisi, Glór Ghaoth Dobhair*, p. 19.

Fig. 23 Gradient profile from Tooban Junction to Burtonport



Source: E. M. Patterson, The Londonderry & Burtonport Extension Railway, p. 119

interpretation with regard to clause 11 of the agreement and consequently, antagonised the L&LSR in the most bitter way possible by appointing Mr Livesey, general manager of the enemy County Donegal Railways, to advise and help them with the design of the locomotives with the technical staff of the L&LSR firmly excluded.⁸⁵ The L&LSR insisted on having engines with tenders for the line but the Board of Works insisted that tank engines of the type used on the Glenties line should be purchased even though the Glenties line was only twenty-four miles in length compared to the fifty miles of the Burtonport railway and there was only a quarter mile of 1 in 50 gradient on the Glenties line compared to ten miles of 1 in 50 on the Burtonport line, with the longest such gradient being four miles long.⁸⁶

On 29 March 1901, the L&LSR was astounded to read an advertisement from the Board of Works in the *Contract Journal* seeking tenders for new locomotives.⁸⁷ The Board of Works refused to listen to the L&LSR and only agreed to an interview 'in response to sixteen or seventeen letters of protest ... but after the order for the engines had been placed'.⁸⁸ John McFarland told the Irish Railway Commission in 1907 that they were informed that the Board of Works had placed an order with Messrs Barclay & Sons, Kilmarnock, Scotland. McFarland stated that this was a firm which had never before built a passenger locomotive, 'and if that were possible, our efforts to prevail upon them to reconsider their advice were redoubled. Mr Livesey himself protested, he told me [McFarland], against the order being given to an inexperienced firm'.⁸⁹ The L&LSR argued that the small tank engines ordered by the Board of Works would not be suitable for the Burtonport line because of their lack of water and limited coal capacity which would give rise to frequent delays. They further argued that the tank engines were too light to carry heavy loads of

⁸⁵ IRC, p. 224, q. 18921, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁸⁶ IRC, p. 224, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁸⁷ IRC, p. 223, q. 18897, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁸⁸ IRC, p. 223, q. 18887, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁸⁹ IRC, p. 61, evidence of Robert Todd.

fish and stated that 'there should be a continuous system from Derry to Burtonport, a run of seventy-five miles and, if the line were to be worked economically, it should be worked without change of engines'.⁹⁰ The Board refused to move and insult was added to injury when only four engines were ordered when a minimum of nine had been specified by the L&LSR. Only twelve carriages and sixty-two wagons were supplied when the L&LSR had estimated that twenty-four carriages, seven vans and 169 wagons should have been provided for a railway of its length.⁹¹

It seems that the L&LSR's intention to run the full length between Derry and Burtonport was the principal cause of the Board of Work's refusal to purchase tender engines. It could not countenance the L&LSR running the new engines over the whole of the L&LSR operated lines rather than on the Letterkenny to Burtonport railway which the Board of Works now regarded as its own exclusive entity. It was also the reason that the locomotives and carriages were to be distinctly marked L&BER [Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway]. An engineer advised that 'tender engines would be very suitable for working the line from Londonderry to Burtonport but he said that the shorter distance from Letterkenny to Burtonport could be very well worked by tank engines'.⁹² And so the stalemate remained.⁹³

A further dispute then arose over inspection of the work in progress on the line from 1900 onwards. The L&LSR accused the Board of Works of warning their engineer off the line stating that it was a breach of etiquette to go there although the conveyance was in their [L&LSR] name. Andrew Spence of the L&LSR told the IRC in 1907:

Our engineer only visited the works twice during the three years when the construction was going on On the two occasions that he visited it, he

⁹⁰ IRC, p. 61, q. 13960, evidence of Robert Todd.

⁹¹ IRC, p. 107, q. 15429 – 31 and p. 227, q. 18990-93.

⁹² IRC, p. 90, q. 15185, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

⁹³ IRC, p. 90, q. 15182, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

observed serious departures from the specifications which he reported to the Board of Works and this was very much resented. They [Board of Works] wrote to the press complaining that our engineer had had the audacity to go on to the line without asking their permission.⁹⁴

The Board of Works replied that the L&LSR's engineer came on to the line, made periodical visits and inspected it and so also did the chairman of the company, John McFarland who was a contractor himself and, during the construction, both he and the L&LSR had regularly complained to the Board of Works that certain things were not being done properly. The Board sent down an independent engineer to examine the complaints received from the L&LSR but he had reported that the works were being carried out quite properly and in accordance with the specifications.⁹⁵

In May 1902, James F. O'Donnell, the Burtonport merchant, carried out his own personal, extensive survey of the whole railway from Letterkenny to Burtonport. O'Donnell was a county councillor and was probably very much aware of the many accusations and rumours circulating about improper use of materials and poor workmanship. He was later to be nominated a baronial director of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension and it was probably with this role in mind that he carried out his own inspection with a further objective of justifying the £5,000 which was guaranteed locally.⁹⁶

He found 304 men dispersed in groups at various points throughout the construction.⁹⁷ Their tasks were manifold from quarrying for ballast, fencing, laying rails, constructing bridges, concreting platforms, building stone walls, plastering gatehouses, laying sleepers and rails, driving

⁹⁴ IRC, p. 231, q. 19104, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁹⁵ IRC, p. 45, questions 15006 –15012, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

⁹⁶ James F. O'Donnell's report 1902, (P.R.O.N.I., Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway papers, D/2683/BB/B/1).

⁹⁷ Local estimates put the number at work on the railway at 650 men at its peak.

locomotives and wagons, operating steam shovels and a multitude of other tasks. Nearly all of the twenty-four gatehouses on the line were occupied but he was astonished to find that farmers in the various localities had put their cattle and horses into the stations which they used as stables and byres.

O'Donnell had reason to complain about many inefficiencies and malpractices in the course of his survey. Proper drainage had not been constructed in many places with the result that the permanent way contained a high level of water which would cause serious damage to the sleepers. No water courses had been cut through many of the cuttings which left them waterlogged and would continue to damage both the permanent way and the sleepers. Two and a half miles from Oldtown Station he found a river which locals told him was prone to serious flooding on at least one occasion annually. However, the retaining walls and precautions were of a flimsy character and would not sustain the permanent way against such flooding. Much of the ballasting on the line was poor. Many of the stones were much greater than the regulation five inches and in other places, clay and similar materials which could be easily washed away were in evidence. The level of the permanent way was rough and uneven throughout and poor compacting would leave many places liable to sinkage at a later date.

He discovered that a works' train ran from Letterkenny to the Owencarrow Viaduct each morning with the workers and carried machinery, rails and sleepers throughout the day. Many of the sleepers and rails used for this operation belonged to the railway proper and should not have been used in the course of construction. In consequence of this practice, much damage was being done to the material for the railway. A further practice was that of using hundreds of the new permanent way sleepers for scaffolding purposes and as piers situated in rivers, lakes and

bogs to build and uphold the structures which would seriously damage their useful lifetime.

Many of the gatehouses were badly constructed. Some were situated in the bog and because of poor foundations they were already sinking. In many cases rendering was poor and some of it had fallen off the walls and many cracks were apparent. All in all, O'Donnell's report presented a picture of many careless practices, shoddy workmanship, poor treatment of the material which was to be the integral core of the new railway and much poor organization of labour.⁹⁸

Instead of providing their own rails, sleepers and materials during the construction phase of the railway, Pauling drew on the supplies provided for the new railway. This practice greatly angered the L&LSR and was the cause of another intense dispute between them and the Board of Works to whom they wrote in 1900, informing them of the fact that the permanent rails and sleepers were being used on the Burtonport railway for temporary purposes during the construction of the line and for the transport of earth works and materials contrary to the terms of the specification. As the line would not be opened for public traffic for three or four years to come, the life of the railway and sleepers would necessarily be shortened to that extent. They also complained that when the chairman and engineer representing the L&LSR were inspecting the route of the authorised deviations on 17, 18, 19 of the month they saw no engineer or inspector representing the Board of Works on any portion of the railway between Letterkenny and Gweedore.⁹⁹ Thomas Batchen, engineer for the Board of Works, replied on 25 October 1900:

The contractors are using permanent sleepers for temporary purposes at the Owencarrow viaduct. The sleepers are stacked thus and form piers to support

⁹⁸ O'Donnell's report 1902 (P.R.O.N.I., Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway papers, D/2683/BB/B/1).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

longitudinal beams carrying a travelling crane, a common enough practice in railway construction and no injury will be done to them. No sleepers are being used in temporary roads nor are any permanent rails used at Owencarrow In placing their contract for permanent way material the contractors arranged for a delivery of 10 per cent more than actual requirements so that we have a large margin to work on. If Mr McFarland had informed me of his proposal to visit the works I would have offered to accompany him or send an assistant who would have explained everything on the ground.¹⁰⁰

On 2 May 1901 the L&LSR replied that the Carndonagh Railway was being constructed under the supervision of the L&LSR's engineer and, on that line, the practice of using sleepers and rails for construction work was not allowed. But the Board of Works refused to concede any ground, stating in a letter to John McFarland:

I am directed by the Commissioners of Public Works to inform you that the contractors have laid new rails and sleepers, which are to form the permanent way for a distance of over ten miles from Letterkenny but that these, however, are not being used for the contractor's purposes. The only traffic on the line is the conveyance of permanent way material and ballast. Workmen, also, are taken out from Letterkenny in the morning and home again in the evening. There will be less traffic on the Burtonport line, before it is opened, than there was on the Carndonagh line, owing to the fact that a great part of the material is sent by sea from Londonderry to Bunbeg and Burtonport.¹⁰¹

John McFarland objected strongly to the whole practice stating that the contracts prohibited the use of such materials but Pauling was allowed by the Board of Works to use them to the profit of £3,000 or £5,000. The contractors were not to use them on the railway until the banks had consolidated when they could be laid down for the exclusive use of the railway when it was commissioned. McFarland accused Pauling, stating:

¹⁰⁰ O'Donnell's report, 1902 (P.R.O.N.I., Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway papers, D/2683/BB/B/1).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

'they rushed them into the cuttings and ran their own material over them for years'.¹⁰²

Despite these problems the line took gradual shape. The Burtonport railway began at Letterkenny about ten feet above sea level and finished at Burtonport about the same level. The highest point reached was alongside Lough Agher between Kilmacrenan and Creeslough which was almost 900 feet above sea level (fig. 20). The sharpest curve was twelve chains and the steepest gradient was 1 in 50 which lasted for a distance of four to five miles between Dunfanaghy Road and Falcarragh. Twenty-four gate houses and thirteen stations were built along the route.¹⁰³ The speed over the Owencarrow Viaduct was limited to ten miles per hour and the maximum average speed between stations could not exceed twenty-five miles per hour.¹⁰⁴

As the building of the line neared completion there was great hope and enthusiasm for the benefits which would flow from it. All the local natural resources would provide wealth. The railway would prove to be the great salvation. The *Derry People* reporter was enthusiastic when he reported in December 1902 that he had been informed that there were two engineering experts at work preparing the way for opening up on a large scale the Cruickamore Granite Quarries in the Rosses. The plant was in place and soon the stone would be on its way to Britain.¹⁰⁵

Some entrepreneurs wasted no time when confirmation of the railway arrived. James F. O'Donnell, J.P. of Burtonport, set to work immediately in planning a fine hotel at the terminus of the line beside the harbour in Burtonport. The newspaper report was glowing:

¹⁰² IRC, p. 246, q. 19498-19505, evidence of John McFarland.

¹⁰³ *Railway magazine*, vol. 13, p. 120. Meenbanad Station, later named Kincasslagh Road, was not opened until 1913.

¹⁰⁴ Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway (N.A.I, OPW 'Railways', 1946/15).

¹⁰⁵ *DP*, 6 Dec. 1902.

The beautiful and commodious hotel built by Mr O'Donnell, J.P., Burtonport and referred to in these notes before, is now almost completed. It is a singular and picturesque building, both in its design and the site it occupies. Approaching it either from the quay or the opposite direction, it looks like a Fairy Mansion, peeping out from the precipice, which is up to forty feet high in the vicinity, and of which it seems to form a part. It is built according to plan and is provided with all the modern improvements for buildings of this kind. It will be lighted with acetylene gas throughout and will be a valuable as well as a necessary addition to the rapidly rising village of Burtonport. All honour to Mr O'Donnell for his enterprise! I wish his venture the success it deserves.¹⁰⁶

Close to this new hotel John Sweeney was busy converting his private home into a hotel to cater for the railway commuters when they reached the railway terminus.¹⁰⁷

And the *Derry People* was enthused by the prospects of a better world about to dawn with the new line.

The opening of the Letterkenny – Burtonport Railway Extension is looked forward to as the beginning of an era of industrial progress in the North West. It is now a generally received opinion that a country without railway accommodation to a large extent remains an undeveloped country. That the natural resources of N.W. Donegal will gradually be developed as time rolls on is not too sanguine an expectation. Sea and land are teeming of possibilities in that direction. The fishing industry and kelp industry are, to a certain extent, undeveloped factors of the former. The writer would develop attention to Muckish and its mass of undeveloped wealth. At the Cork Exhibition, a lecturer referred most favourably to the Muckish sand and, still more recently, at the Cork Industrial Conference, Mr Powell, in his paper, devoted extended attention to it. Muckish sand seems to have stood his test to satisfaction. It had all the conditions requisite for the establishment of glass works, and the most important – raw material – is here in inviting prominence and the new railway, when

¹⁰⁶ *DP*, 22 Nov. 1902.

¹⁰⁷ Eileen Sweeney, Rathfarnham, Dublin, originally from Sweeney's Hotel, Burtonport.

opened, will fulfil another desirable condition of success. The enterprising capitalist could easily supply the rest.¹⁰⁸

Hope continued to rise. This time it was the development of lime as the *Derry People* reported:

Since the closure of the Crickamore granite quarries no pecuniary benefit is derived by Rosses people from the mineral kingdom except what is made out of the limestone formation at Loughanure and Meenderrynasloe [in the Rosses] ... The opening of the new railway may provide an extended market and an even greater demand for Rosses lime.¹⁰⁹

As the summer of 1902 ended, the gangs of workmen grew smaller and smaller. The heavy work was all done. The line was sleepered and railed from Letterkenny to Burtonport.

As the gangs of men began to withdraw throughout the various regions, talk around many firesides changed from the great excitement of the railway back to the old necessities, emigration to the harvest in Scotland the following spring and the question of whether the long walks to catch the trains in Letterkenny or at Fintown would be replaced by a trip on the new train from a local station next time.

But the railway was a great bonus to many families whose breadwinners found permanent employment at home for the first time. They were recruited for the many and various positions needed to run a railway. One engineer, one inspector, thirteen stationmasters, eight head porters, fifteen porters, twelve gangers, thirty-six milesmen, two ordinary workmen and two boys, as well as drivers, firemen and guards had to be appointed to service the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension. Some of the milesmen whose wives acted as gatekeepers would have the added benefit of the newly built two-bedroom gatehouse at each of the twenty-four gate

¹⁰⁸ *DP*, 13 Dec. 1902.

¹⁰⁹ *DP*, 3 Jan. 1903.

crossings interspersed between Letterkenny and Burtonport at a rent of one penny per week.¹¹⁰ Stationmasters were expected to keep their stations in good order and deal with any emergency which might arise. In times of difficulty they would have to bear the brunt of the public's odium though they themselves would have little control over events.¹¹¹ The responsibilities of the stationmaster would be many and varied, though it is doubtful if any member of the L&LSR staff could emulate the excellence of the man appointed to the Dungloe Road Station, near Burtonport, as the *Derry People* stated:

Mr Patrick Duggan of Belcruit has been appointed to the post of stationmaster at Lough Meela on the Letterkenny – Burtonport railway. Since his advent to the district, some two and a half years ago, Mr Duggan 'has won golden opinions from all sort of people' for his cheerful breezy manner, his unfailing good humour, his inexhaustible fund of joke, anecdote, and witty repartee and his interesting and instructive conversation ranging from 'grave to gay, from lively to severe'. His knowledge of the vernacular will now stand him in good stead.¹¹²

On 19 December 1902, two carriages ran through for the first time on the new railway line from Letterkenny to Burtonport, returning shortly after. The *Derry People* prayed: 'May the opening of the line be the opening of an era of progress and prosperity for the districts through which it runs'.¹¹³

More and more trial runs were conducted over the following weeks and the reporter of the Rosses notes in the *Derry People* of 21 February 1903 was becoming more and more excited:

¹¹⁰ Bernard J Byrne, Annagry.

¹¹¹ Bernard J. Byrne, Annagry. His father worked on the railway and Bernard was reared in a gatehouse.

¹¹² *DP*, 25 Oct. 1902.

¹¹³ *DP*, 3 Jan. 1903.

And now to crown it all comes the new railway, with the iron steed puffing and panting along and among the Rosses hills, and snorting as if in supreme contempt of all slow and old fashioned methods of transit and locomotion.¹¹⁴

The gangs of men disappeared from the line leaving only the skeleton staff. The regular income of the previous few years ended for many families who returned to the old days and the old ways. The *Derry People* reported that

the inhabitants of mountain townlands of the Rosses are obliged at this time of year to sit around in enforced idleness For several years past during the construction of the new railway here, mountain dwellers in its vicinity had some little employment and earning at it; but now that the railway is completed there is nothing for them to turn their willing hands to.¹¹⁵

Builders then must have been as unreliable as now for, despite all his efforts, James F. O'Donnell did not have his luxurious hotel ready for opening day. He would carry his disappointment for another few months.

Pauling, the contractor who built the Burtonport line, was glad to see his efforts in Donegal coming to an end. Between fighting with the L&LSR company, attempting to make alterations to plans but being rebuffed by the Board of Works at every effort and dealing with petty local litigation as well as the impossibility of fulfilling the task allotted to them, put an immense burden on the company. The building of the Owencarrow Viaduct almost became too much even for such an experienced contractor as Pauling for it seemed as if no foundation could be found. Eventually after reaching a depth of eighty feet the company lined their excavations with bags of tightly packed sheep's wool and it was on this that the caissons filled with concrete were constructed.¹¹⁶ They also found much

¹¹⁴ *DP*, 21 Feb. 1903.

¹¹⁵ *DP*, 17 Jan. 1903.

¹¹⁶ Edward Boyle, Bunaman, Annagry.

local resistance from people who did not want to lose any of their precious little fields taken from them or from others filled with fear that their homes would be burned by the trains.¹¹⁷

At Letterkenny Quarter Sessions in January 1903, Patrick Gallagher, merchant, Crollybridge, sued Pauling and Company for £50 damages because they had erected a bridge on or adjacent to Gallagher's lands at Killeendarragh causing the land to be flooded. Pauling was also accused of diverting the Crolly River which flooded Gallagher's meadow. Gallagher called a number of local men, Neil Duggan, Michael Ferry, Anthony O'Donnell, Michael O'Donnell and John Campbell as witnesses while Pauling called on Barnwell, a qualified engineer from Derry, who was involved in the railway and was at that time, a Board of Works official. After having listened to witnesses from both sides, the judge said that he felt 'it would be perfectly idle for him to take the evidence of the peasantry of the country as to river or flood levels'. He favoured the expert's evidence and dismissed the case. He awarded £5 costs against Gallagher.¹¹⁸

But there was the excitement for many. Those who had never seen a train waited anxiously, though unsure what to expect. The fishing industry expected a windfall from the new markets which would be opened to them. The smaller shopkeepers would be able to get their products quickly and cheaply from the ports of Derry or Belfast. Eggs would rise in price for now they could be delivered in foreign cities within a few days. Knitters were enthused that at last they would be rewarded by buyers from afar who would pay a good and just price for the fruits of their labours. The peasant 'farmers' expected to deal with cattle dealers from the east of the county for they could come by train and bring their purchases back with them in the evening. And the proponents of the Cruickamore granite, Crohey soapstone, Loughanure lime, Dunlewey marble, Keeldrum silver,

¹¹⁷ Rory Delap, Letterkenny.

¹¹⁸ *LS*, 2 Jan. 1903, p. 7.

Cloughaneely bog ore, Gartan timber and Muckish sand must have expected that their day was surely coming soon now.

The work was not fully complete in March 1903 but it was sufficiently advanced to be opened to traffic and it was arranged with the contractors that any defects would be made good within the year during which they were to maintain the line.¹¹⁹ Despite the wide spectrum of ill-feeling between the parties, compromise seemed to have been reached when the L&LSR took over the line for the running of traffic. On 1 February 1903 a number of officials connected with Pauling joined a train to thoroughly test the permanent way, bridges, and all aspects of the railway. This was the preliminary to the government inspection.¹²⁰ Some weeks later, Major Pringle inspected the line on behalf of the Board of Works and pronounced himself well satisfied with the work.¹²¹

Perhaps its opening, in 1903, came too late to deliver the impact which it would have had a decade earlier. Northwest Donegal had substantially changed in the last years of the nineteenth century. There were no longer lengthy press reports about destitution nor were there monster meetings concerning distress. In his Lenten pastoral of 1903, Bishop O'Donnell made no mention of destitution or poverty but instead, could afford the luxury of devoting his words to the regulations governing fast and abstinence.¹²² Year after year, the Congested District Board's annual reports set out the achievements in the building of roads and quays, the introduction of new poultry, cattle, bulls and donkeys, the initiation of drainage schemes which produced more land and improved existing soil, the division of large farms to tenants such as happened at Carrowcannon in Cloughaneely and most significantly, the development of the fishing

¹¹⁹ IRC, p. 61, q. 13959.

¹²⁰ *DJ*, 2 Feb. 1903, p. 2.

¹²¹ IRC, p. 95, q. 15028-30, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

¹²² *DJ*, 23 Feb. 1903, p. 7.

industry at Burtonport, Aranmore, Cruit Bay, Bunbeg, Port Arthur, Magheraroarty, Dunfanaghy and Downings.¹²³

Regarding the fishing industry in Burtonport Stephen Gwynn wrote that, in 1898, £12,000 was paid for the take of fish to almost a hundred boats. Then a cooperage was built to make barrels to store the fish. When the boats berthed, horses and carts took the fish up the road from the pier. On the left side buyers had little plots rented and here the fish were deposited in large boxes called farlins. Beside them girls stood at tables with knives at the ready to lance the little gut out of each single fish and pack it in a barrel. Even in winter these plots were not covered over. What was the speed of gutting? Difficult to imagine but sixty per minute was possible. In 1899 when agricultural workers were being paid nine shillings a week, these girls could earn fourteen shillings.¹²⁴ Nine young men from the district were apprenticed to the cooper's trade and the barrels produced there found a ready market in the local fish-curing markets at the time.¹²⁵ The same operations, though on a lesser scale, were happening at the other venues along the coast. The *Freeman's Journal* reported in 1898:

The herring fishing along the Donegal coast is advancing and the dried fish industry, having escaped the hard fate dreaded from the American Protectionists, is finding a strictly commercial position. The purchases of the Board are becoming less and less and the ordinary merchant is taking the place of the Board as distributor The earnings of the Donegal fishermen which amounted to more than £13,000 mean to them that some hundreds of families are now living in comfort instead of in poverty, or even in destitution in many cases.¹²⁶

The *Derry Journal* was laudatory in respect of the Congested Districts Board.

¹²³ CDB, annual reports 1892-1903.

¹²⁴ Stephen Gwynn, *Highways and byways of Donegal and Antrim* (New York, 1899), p. 83.

¹²⁵ Vincent Mulligan (co-ordinator), *A mini guide to the Rosses* (Ballyshannon, 1992), pp 32-33.

¹²⁶ *DJ*, 26 Jan. 1898, extract taken from *Freeman's Journal*.

Certainly, the technical education imparted to the Rosses people by the Congested [Districts] Board is bearing fruit in the Rosses this season as the profitable results of our fisheries are alone the great reason why we are not in as poor a state as our western neighbours. To Mr Micks and his worthy assistant Mr Duthie, the credit of this successful industry is due.¹²⁷

By 1903, the innovation of the new railway was just another further indication that the era of misery and distress which had characterised much of northwest society was finally over. CDB schemes, improved fishing and road works together with the absence of poor harvests and the continuation of steady Scottish and Laggan income, ensured that the pressure of former years was not so intense. Consequently, the clergy were freed from the burden of distress management to devote their energies to an event, which signalled the culmination of a century of church expansion and influence in the diocese of Raphoe as well as the termination of many aspects of the destitution era. This event was Aenach Thir Chonail which was first held in Letterkenny on 27 November 1898. The *Derry Journal* reported:

Considering as a whole this unique Irish enterprise, it seems to possess a four-fold aspect. It is religious. It is patriotic. It is social. It is utilitarian Primarily, the Aenach is held to raise funds for a grand religious object ... a beautiful new cathedral is now nearing completion in Letterkenny...¹²⁸

The crowds were massive and the proceedings lasted for a whole week. All this was conceived, organised and executed by the clergy in celebratory triumph at the building of the first cathedral in the diocese. It was a manifestation of their control, power and vision in the new Ireland. There were no reports of distress or poverty, no mention of evictions or battering rams, no recollections of older unpleasant memories. Year after year, from 1898 onwards the Aenach grew bigger and bigger with concerts

¹²⁷ *DJ*, 5 Jan. 1898, p. 8.

¹²⁸ *DJ*, 18 Nov. 1898, p. 8.

and celebratory events taking place in each parish throughout the diocese. The Burtonport train would add many more thousands to the event after March 1903.

The Congested Districts Board had set up committees in each parish to urge the parishioners towards 'improvements of dwellings by boarding or concreting floors and of putting in one window at least of the specific size and shape' and further, that prizes be awarded towards the 'draining and gravelling of streets and to making and repairing of the road from the main road to the dwelling house'. People were encouraged to erect byres, piggeries and fowl houses and white wash their houses both inside and out.¹²⁹ The new train service would provide the materials for these improvements.

The northwest agricultural show had been running at Carrigart since 1898 with tremendous success.¹³⁰ The annual Burtonport regatta drew all strata of local society to compete for local honour.¹³¹ The Gaelic League, generally in the hold of the national teachers, travelled the county organising concerts and feiseanna to instil the richness and dignity of the new Gaelic world into the local population.¹³² In many places however, they faced a changing people, more intent on adopting the ways of their betters, than retrenching into Gaelic lore. Aspects of old Ireland tended to be forgotten. The concerts held in Dungloe from 1898 onward excluded most Gaelic material and the Irish speaking town of Falcarragh, scene of evictions, boycotts and destitution seven or eight years previously, could now only include one 'racy old Irish song', 'Cailín deas crúite na mbó' during a whole evening, whereas 'My Mary of the curling hair', 'Silver bells', 'Friends of my youthful days', 'Sweetheart Mary', 'Once more in the dear old land', 'The girl from sweet Wicklow', 'Who's that calling', 'Loch Lomond' and 'Killarney' intermingled with 'Putet's delightful little

¹²⁹ *DJ*, 14 Jan. 1903, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *DJ*, 23 Sept. 1898, p. 3.

¹³¹ *DJ*, 2 Sept. 1898, p. 3.

¹³² *DJ*, 14 Sept. 1898, p. 3.

song, “tit for tat”, Perpont’s rousing chorus and the instrumental piece, ‘Violetta’.¹³³

The building of the Burtonport Extension has often been cited as the originator of soccer football and the transplantation of the band tradition from the north of Ireland into west Donegal. However, both of these pastimes were well established by the time the railway workers came among the people as Dr Paddy Ferry illustrated:

In Keadue [in the Rosses] 1902 represented a new dawn for the [fife and drum marching] band. It was a time when bands and football teams tended to become a symbol of a community’s identity and a powerful bond therein. Keadue Rovers [soccer] football team [in the Rosses] was formed in 1896, one of the earliest soccer clubs to be formed in the whole country. [The last two decades of the century] became a definite growth period, in general, in our band tradition with the Upper and Lower Rosses able to boast of an incredible 23 bands....¹³⁴

Into this new improving ‘Gaelic’ world came the ‘Catholic orphan’, the Letterkenny and Burtonport Extension Railway. It possessed the power and potential to be the greatest agent of change and advancement in the back country behind the mountains. Would it, at last, take its place in ‘opening up’ the northwest of ‘dark and distant Donegal’?¹³⁵

¹³³ *DJ*, 28 Oct. 1898, p. 8.

¹³⁴ Paddy Ferry, *The story of the Keadue band 1888 – 1988* (Ballyshannon, 1988), pp 4 -5.

¹³⁵ Revd Alexander G. Lecky, *In the days of the Laggan presbytery* (Belfast, 1908), p. 1.

Fig. 2A Locomotive and rolling stock bearing the L&BER lettering.

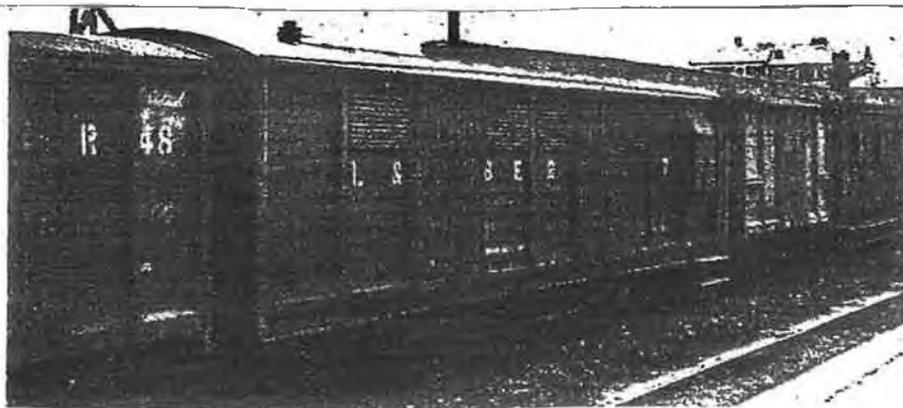
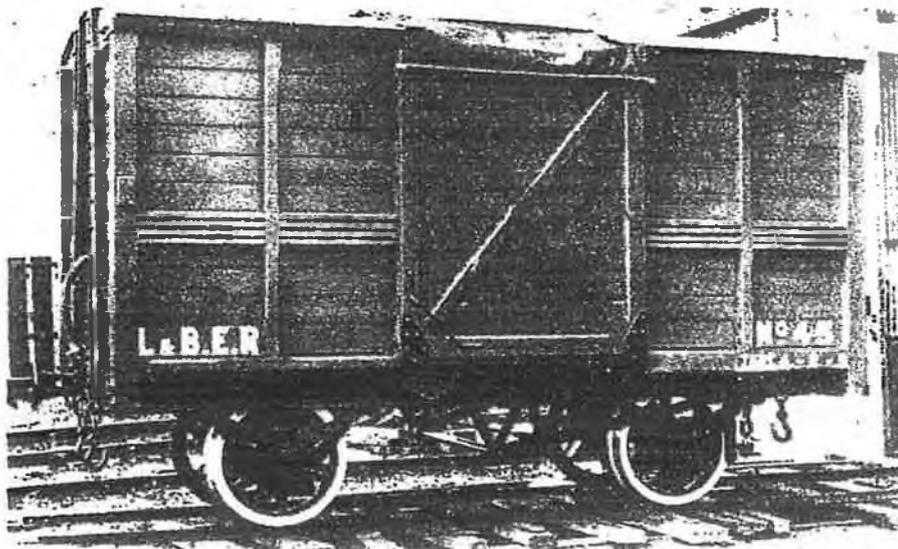
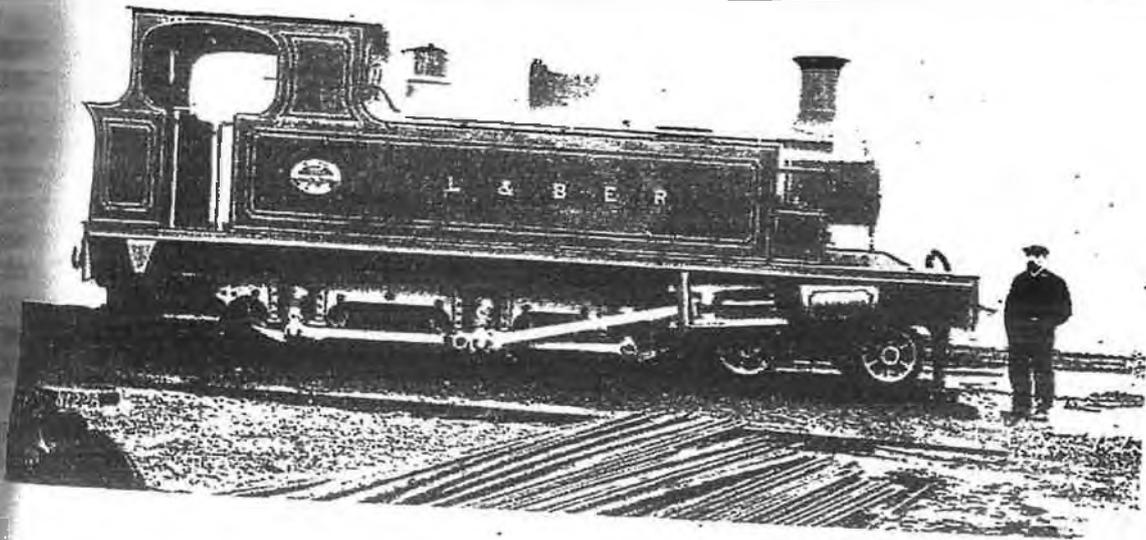
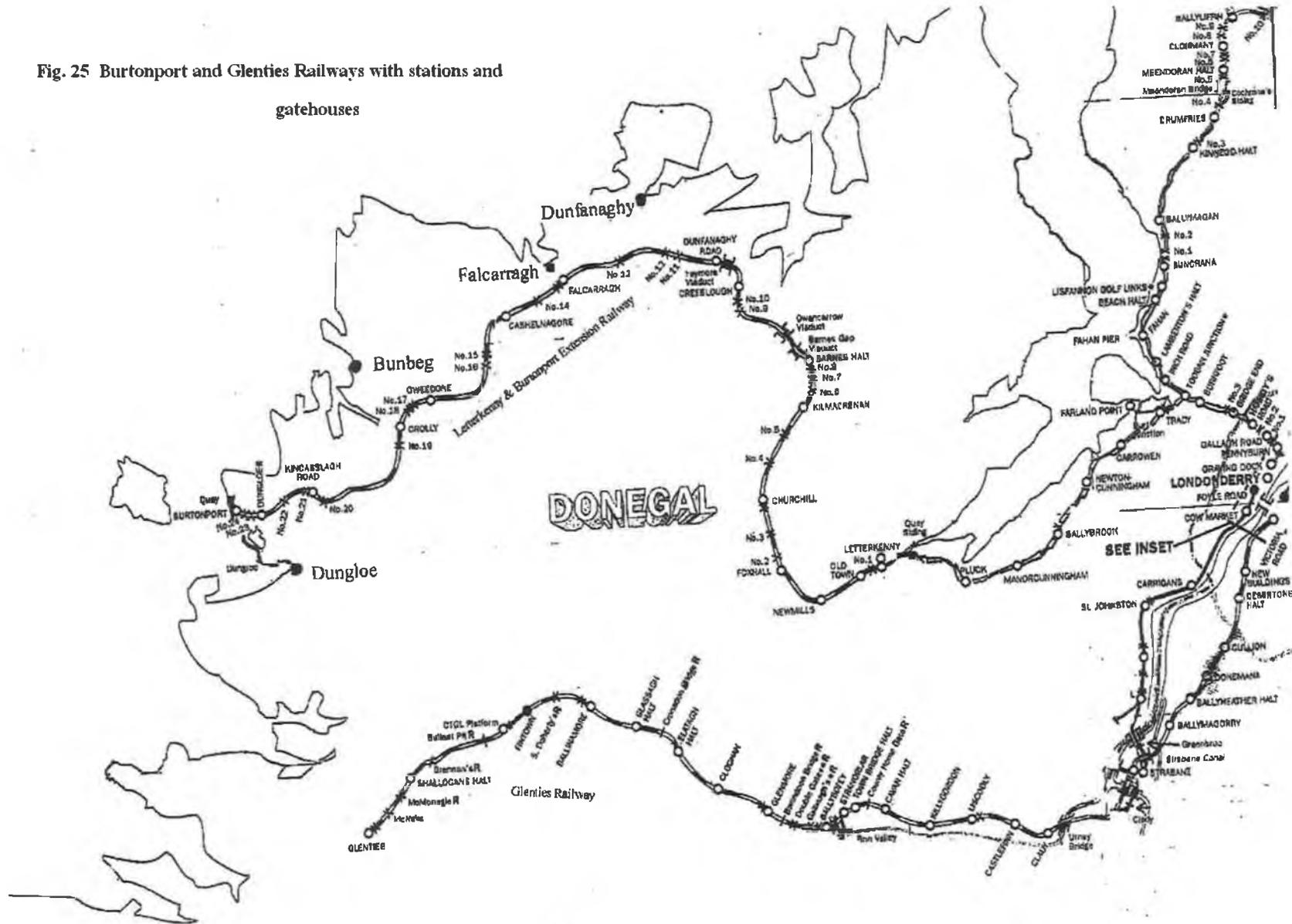


Fig. 25 Burtonport and Glenties Railways with stations and gatehouses



Source: Johnson's Atlas and Gazette

Fig 26

A typical gatehouse of the Burtonport Extension



CHAPTER 5

THE EARLY YEARS OF OPERATION AFTER 1903

During the first months of 1903 there was much pressure to have the railway finished and operational within the allotted time-span agreed with the government. Finally, all was reasonably in order, though not fully complete, to facilitate the arrival of the long-awaited train service in northwest Donegal. A preliminary press run over the line, organised by Mr Moore, manager of L&LSR, took place on Saturday, 28 February 1903. The invited guests travelled in the handsome chocolate and cream coloured carriages intended for the new line. At Letterkenny, Mr Firbank, Pauling's chief agent and general manager, joined the party. Soon, the short train of two carriages and a brake van was on its way to Burtonport with the party. By this time all the stations were connected by telegraph and 'the stationmasters were quite proficient in its working' so there was a welcome at each station along the route. Luncheon was held at Lord Hill's Gweedore Hotel. On reaching Burtonport, where John McFarland provided for bands and entertainment on the occasion of the opening, there were 'only two topics of conversation – the new railway and what it would do for the fishing and for the new hotels and secondly, the recent gale which had tumbled part of the harbour into the sea'.¹

On the return journey that evening the train stopped at the steps of the Gweedore Hotel and the travelling guests were offered 'a delicious supply of tea which was consumed on the journey to Letterkenny'.² However, even at this late stage, the *Londonderry Sentinel* could not resist the temptation of opening old sores about the route of the railway, stating:

The real author of the route has never been identified. The Kilmacrenan station is two miles from Kilmacrenan. Churchill station is two miles from Churchill,

¹ *LS*, 24 Feb. 1903, p. 3.

² *LS*, 3 Mar. 1903, p. 5.

Falcarragh is two miles from Falcarragh station, Dunfanaghy Road is no less than four miles from Dunfanaghy while Cashelnagor is two and a half miles from Gortahork and Gweedore is four miles from Bunbeg.³

The Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway [L&BER] officially began operations on 9 March 1903 when the first commercial train travelled from Letterkenny to Burtonport to a rather mute response devoid of ceremony or celebration. The local press gave the auspicious event only a few lines within the middle pages. The *Londonderry Sentinel*, having lost its enthusiasm following the Dunfanaghy exclusion, showed its usual restraint:

The opening of the new line from Letterkenny to Burtonport took place yesterday and a most encouraging day's business was got through. Mr R. S. Moore, Traffic Manager of the Lough Swilly Railway Company; Mr May, Audit Superintendent and Mr Fisher, Locomotive Superintendent, travelled to Burtonport on the first train and superintended the arrangements in all departments which were found to work with complete smoothness.⁴

The *Derry Journal* was also reserved with two column inches on page 8:

At 8.15 a.m. the train steamed out of Letterkenny station en route for Burtonport which was reached about 11.30 a.m. Large numbers of passengers got aboard at the intermediate stations while groups of district residents were seen at intervals along the line curious to view the locomotive speeding on its way The return passenger train left Burtonport at three p.m. and was largely availed of by travellers. An excellent run was made, Letterkenny being reached only a few minutes after the scheduled time.⁵

Two trains ran daily between Derry and Burtonport in each direction and one each way on Sundays which was the level of service that had been

³ *LS*, 3 Mar. 1903, p. 5.

⁴ *LS*, 10 Mar. 1903.

⁵ *DJ*, 11 Mar. 1903, p. 8.

agreed between the L&LSR and the Board of Works as sufficient for the traffic of the area. The gleaming new stock marked in the individual L&BER lettering was a strange and unusual sight as it puffed its way through the northwest Donegal valleys under the excited gaze of groups of men, women and children who congregated on hillsides to witness the new phenomenon in their midst.⁶ The upper half of each carriage was painted cream with crimson-lake lower halves and red oxide ends.⁷ The first class carriage seats were upholstered and spacious but each third class compartment contained two long benches of lath seating without upholstery in 'four persons facing four' formation. The windows were capable of being lowered and raised by strong leather straps which were soon to be hacked off to make strops for sharpening open razors. The carriages were lit with colza oil lamps affixed in metal containers but all carriages were without any form of heating.⁸ For the provision of this service the L&LSR, as the operating company, were to be paid £3 10s. per mile per week and any surplus was to be divided equally between the Treasury and the L&LSR.⁹

Almost immediately the local vocabulary was expanded with railway terminology. The 'Railway Bar', the 'Station Bar', the 'Station Road', the 'Railway Road', 'out the line' 'the gatehouse' became part of the local terminology. Landmarks such as 'Paddy Ghráinne's cutting', 'Eoin Sheáin's Cutting', 'Cutting Míin a Leagh' 'Teach gheaftha an Troisc', 'Donnchadh's crossing' identified new locations and the gatehouses, named after their occupants in most cases, created further geographical context. In a region which had not yet adapted to the use of surnames, the railway provided identifiable appellations for the humans associated with it, such as 'Mary the gatehouse', 'Paddy the station,' or 'Francie the bridge'. The goods being delivered to the various railway stations enabled

⁶ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry. Ua Cháimhsi, *Idir an dá ghaoith*, p. 219.

⁷ J. I. C. Boyd, *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway* (Truro, Cornwall, 1981), p. 39.

⁸ Boyd, *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 35.

⁹ IRC, p. 101, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

shopkeepers to use a new vocabulary by putting the blame firmly on the railway when customers complained about the absence of produce by telling them it was 'at the station,' 'out the line,' 'in the depot' or it was 'on the line' somewhere. A rhyme doing the rounds in the Rosses during those early days wondered,

'Can anybody tell me where did Sharkey's flour go?

It may be round the Rosses or it may be in Dungloe...'¹⁰

The language of the line was mainly English because the train drivers, firemen and guards who were employed on the railway when it opened were nearly all outsiders. Many of the stationmasters had come from the Letterkenny Railway, the L&LSR system, railways in Derry or other lines with the opening and they spoke English almost exclusively. Local employees had to adapt their own limited spoken English to that of their superiors and communications at stations tended to be predominantly in English.¹¹

One of the immediate unforeseen advantages provided by the railway especially before the trains ran on the tracks was its use as a pedestrian way for the people. It was level and straight and afforded the most direct route for the women to carry their knitting from various parts of the Rosses and Cloughaneely to the Gweedore Hotel or to the shops at Burtonport. Men and women used the railway as a pedestrian route to the monthly fairs at Dungloe, Meenaleck, Gortahork, Falcarragh, Dunfanaghy and Creeslough. When the trains began to run it was difficult to get the people to break the habit. The authorities were unhappy about this form of trespass but the people were not to be denied.¹²

However, the long walks of thirty or forty miles to Letterkenny by the men going to Scotland or the children going to the hiring fairs could now end. The train would carry them on the first stage of their migration

¹⁰ Pádraig Mac Gairbhith, Loughanure.

¹¹ Bernard J. Byrne, Loughanure and Seán Delap, Gweedore.

¹² Bernard J. Byrne, Annagry.

and bring them back again, sheltered from the Atlantic rains, at season's end and the bundle,¹³ famed during the decades of emigration, could now give way to the suitcase in which clothing, tools, implements and household utensils could be brought home from the bargain stalls and Sunday markets of Derry, Edinburgh and Glasgow.¹⁴

The new railway immediately created a number of freedom outlets from this traditionally enclosed society which had prevailed until then especially in the lives of women who did not emigrate and whose only social occasions outside the home were Sunday masses, weddings, wakes, funerals and fair days. The young people could hardly wait for the day's work to finish so that they could dress up in their finery and walk in groups to congregate at the nearest station in the evenings to watch the arrival and departure of the last train before paying a few pennies to a musician and then dancing the night away on the railway platform or in the waiting rooms, if the stationmaster was accommodating, away from the prying eyes of supervising clergymen who controlled the dancing venues of the northwest at this time. Because the stations were reasonable distances apart, the spread of social interaction from the various townlands was much greater than previously, which fact helped the more widespread selection of marriage partners.¹⁵ Many married women also walked in groups to the stations in the evenings to watch the excitement of the travellers and the revellers.¹⁶

The train provided a further unexpected development in the widening of boundaries for the women living in the parish of Cloughaneely who were frequently the victims of their local priest's condemnations in the confessional box. They soon learned that taking the train to the clergy of

¹³ Bundle: square piece of cloth with opposite corners tied to contain the owner's belongings.

¹⁴ John Boyle (Dan), Cruckakeehan, Annagry.

¹⁵ Proinsias Ó Maonaigh, Coshclady, Bunbeg. His father worked at Gweedore station and often played the fiddle for the dancers. Grace Sweeney, Bunaman normally went from her work in Burtonport with a crowd of girls to Dungloe Road station. Cashelnagor and Crolly were likewise mentioned as centres for evening jollity. Dances were held regularly in Churchill Station.

¹⁶ Cáit Nic Giolla Bhríde, *Stairsheanchas Ghaoth Dobhair*, p. 104.

Falcarragh or Creeslough provided for more gentle forgiveness and easier repentance, thereby loosening the grip of clerical domination on their daily lives.¹⁷

The train further facilitated secret or rushed marriages when partners quietly slipped away to Letterkenny or Derry and got married there. The railway initiated a practice which became common in northwest Donegal in the interests of maintaining respectability without the gaze of prying neighbours. This was the 'half-way wedding' when girls who became pregnant before marriage travelled to Derry where they met their boyfriends who had crossed from Scotland or had come in from one of the Laggan farms. A cheap ring was purchased and a few hours after getting married, they each returned to their respective homes again in the guise of respectable citizens.¹⁸

The hospital in Letterkenny now became a medical option which could provide second opinions, x-rays, and operations for patients from the railway hinterland along the northwest coast. The fear of dying from a burst appendicitis was common in the northwest but the railway provided new hope when such an emergency arose. For the first time, most people could avail of reasonably immediate dental treatment in Letterkenny or Derry rather than waiting until the travelling dentist visited on the next fair day.¹⁹ For many women their first sighting of a black person in Derry city was a tale of wonder on their return home.²⁰

The railway could now carry household goods and materials considered too delicate or dangerous for carriage by the carters of the previous years. Among these were the oil lamps and the paraffin oil to furnish them, large earthenware vats of porter and whiskey, McDougall

¹⁷ Séamus Mac Aodh, Bealtaine, Gort a Choirce.

¹⁸ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, named several couples that she knew who had 'half-way weddings'.

¹⁹ Susan Ward, Keadue, Burtonport. Her brother, Patrick, was the first person from Kerrytown, in the Rosses, to travel to Derry city on the morning train, have his tooth extracted and return home on the evening train.

²⁰ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman.

cakes from Derry, Cooper's yellow powder for dipping sheep and the lengths of leather for shoemaking and repairs.²¹

The railway also brought the need for accurate timekeeping to the region and it was not long until mechanical timepieces became a general feature of society for the first time in northwest Donegal. From the train's first journeys, a Derry merchant named Faller travelled through the townlands adjacent to the line each day with two Waterberry clocks under his arms which he sold for eighteen shillings cash or two shillings per month for ten months. These 'railway clocks' became features in almost every house in the northwest and those who opted for the deferred payment scheme fared best when the merchant suddenly died and no demand was ever made for payment thereafter.²²

The whistles and smoke from the train on its various journeys gave a new shape to the day in the northwest. The morning train defined the time for the day's work to start. The midday train defined dinnertime. The evening train indicated the end of the working day and the night train signalled the hour to go visiting neighbours.²³ It was the custom during the turf-cutting season around Cashelnagor to go to the bog with the first train in the morning and stay there until the last train at night passed. That was considered a good day's turfcutting.²⁴ Between the Waterberry clocks and the whistles from the train a new discipline imposed itself on life in the northwest so that appointments could now be organized, not by the tide or the sun but by the clock or train, though in the case of the Burtonport Extension this latter assertion was never as reliable as the railway timetables supposed.²⁵

The long distance cartage system which had survived for many years now became obsolete. No longer would long convoys of carts travel on

²¹ Cáit Nic Giolla Bhríde, *Stairsheanchas Ghaoth Dobhair*, p. 105.

²² Edward Boyle, Bunaman, Annagry.

²³ Bernard J. Byrne, Annagry.

²⁴ Miley Gallagher, Beltony, Gortahork.

²⁵ Edward Boyle, Bunaman, Annagry.

two, three or five-day journeys to Derry and Letterkenny and other centres and return in the late evenings with stacked loads which were often the prey of mountain bandits in the hidden glens behind Errigle and Muckish mountains or in the valleys between Doochary and Fintown.²⁶ These carters had opposed the construction of the railway through fear of losing their jobs but the train could carry more in one trip than the whole cartage system could carry in weeks. However, as the below figure 27 shows, their fears were not realized for in the ten years between 1901 and 1911 the

Fig. 27. Number of horses in northwest Donegal, 1901 & 1911.

| Area | Stables in 1901 | Stables in 1911 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gweedore | 95 | 97 |
| Rosses | 189 | 238 |
| Cloughaneely | 298 | 414 |
| Total | 582 | 749 |
| Source: Census of population 1901 and 1911, Donegal. | | |

number of horses increased in the Rosses, Gweedore and Cloughaneely. The increased bulk of goods being transported to and from the stations and the introduction of travelling shops as a result of the growth in merchandise, together with the involvement of the cartage system in the developing fish trade, house building and improvement schemes, explains the rise in the number of horses.

Another of the immediate innovations brought by the railway was the widespread provision of white bread. Although a limited supply had been available since the 1880s it was often stale due to the amount of time it spent on the road. A horsebox was attached to the train and horses were brought from Letterkenny and Derry and hitched to carts located at various

²⁶ Dom McDevitt, Annagry.

stations. The driver and horse then travelled around the grocery shops of the locality delivering loaves of white bread which were greatly appreciated by the people. It was not long before some ambitious merchants dispensed with the horse deliveries and the intervention of the middlemen. They negotiated with the bakeries to have large baskets of loaves dropped off at the various stations for collection directly by themselves. Local stories are told of how the cats soon discovered the harvest of mice which scampered from these baskets when dropped off at the shops.²⁷

The decade after the coming of the railway was a time when the Congested Districts Board²⁸ was conducting many classes in the northwest where young girls were trained in cooking, laundry and housekeeping. This resulted in different methods of cooking fish, the diversity of the potato to boiled, mashed and innovative chips and the introduction of boiled, scrambled, fried and poached eggs with toast for which the white loaf bread was a necessity and became then more readily available through the new railway to Burtonport. The priests conducting station masses throughout the parishes had reason to appreciate the improvement from the traditional brown bread and boiled egg breakfasts.²⁹

The first years of the twentieth century was a period when progress was propelled by a number of factors affecting the northwest. First, despite some uncertainty after the Boer war, the Scottish economy was reasonably buoyant during the first decade of the new century and this enabled the emigrants and seasonal migrants to earn steady money while working there. Despite the widespread availability of farm machinery, the older seasonal migrants tended to have regular employment on particular farms, year after year, especially thinning turnips and other vegetable crops. Many families

²⁷ Morgan Dunleavy, Calhame, Annagry and Rory Delap, Letterkenny.

²⁸ The Congested Districts Board was set up in 1891 as part of the Land Act of that same year. Its objective was to relieve distress along the western seaboard where land was so poor that the provisions of the various land acts could make no appreciable difference to the way of life there.

²⁹ National Commission on Congestion in Ireland 1906, *Second Report*, p. 92, evidence of Canon James McFadden.

and kin groups from northwest Donegal specialized in drainage, ditch building or reclamation work and spent their whole working lives, moving from farm to farm, carrying out contracts at piecework rates, irrespective of the prevailing economic climate. There was also a movement to urban work especially in Glasgow during these years where house building, water and sewerage schemes, the shipyards and the gas works attracted many of the Scottish labourers and younger northwest Donegal men.³⁰ Remittances from America contributed a steady flow of income during these years as well. The heavy emigration since the 1880s, particularly of those aged fifteen years and upwards, resulted in most homes in northwest Donegal having family members in various parts of the United States. Great numbers from the Rosses worked in ESSO³¹. Gweedore and Cloughaneely natives tended to congregate in New York or around Bethlehem, PA. where they worked in Ingersoll Rand in Phillipsburg or in the Bethlehem Steel Works. They sent money home for upwards of fifteen years after their emigration until they married and started their own homes.³² Migration to the Laggan continued as before during these first years of the new century and reward for labour was higher than during the 1890s. At the Dungiven hiring fair of 1911 the *Derry People* reported that the

attendance of servants was the smallest in years. The tide of emigration in this area as well as many other reasons has removed many young men and women of the servant class, many of whom left for Canada and other parts during the last few months Hiring was not at all brisk although what business was done was at the high wages prevailing during recent years.³³

³⁰ John Boyle (Dan), Cruckakeehan. His family usually worked in Glasgow city and his father suffered an accident in the gas works in Glasgow. He told me that a group of local men worked on the construction of Parkhead stadium, home of Glasgow Celtic football club. When John first emigrated in 1916 he joined local men and family members in the city where they were well-established.

³¹ ESSO: Eastern States Standard Oil based in New Jersey.

³² Kate Roarty of Bunaman Annagry, born 1876, had one brother and five sisters living around Bethlehem, PA. They had emigrated during the 1880s and early 1890s while in their teens and all of them married spouses from the Rosses or Gweedore while in America. None of them married under thirty years of age.

³³ *DP*, 20 May 1911, p. 3.

The remitted earnings from all of these sources eased the burdens of debt at home in the northwest and contributed to the betterment of life there especially when the fishing industry began to take off with the coming of the railway.³⁴

The Congested Districts Board contributed strongly to this local advancement during the first twenty years of its existence by devoting much energy to the development of fishing through the introduction of grants and schemes for the purchase of boats and nets, the building of slips and quays, the importation of fishing instructors to teach the locals the methods of deep-sea fishing, the expansion into mackerel, salmon and white fish which were not traditional in the northwest, and the curing and marketing of all these varieties of fish.³⁵ In most of the monthly reports from the County Inspector during the 1890s there is mention of the excellent work being done by the CDB through its provision of employment and the circulation of money.³⁶ When the railway came in 1903, Burtonport was particularly well prepared for progress by the standards of the time. In 1904 the *Derry People* reported:

Every cottier in Burtonport and Aranmore is a fisherman. They keep their homes and their holdings but the poor harvest which they reap from the soil has become, in their minds, entirely subsidiary to the harvest of the sea.³⁷

The involvement in fishing was so great that in 1905, £26,000 was paid out in seven weeks in the Burtonport area alone.³⁸

³⁴ The scale of remitted earnings is evident when the church building programme around the turn of the century in Raphoe diocese is examined. St Eunan's Cathedral which was opened in 1901 in Letterkenny cost £300,000 to build (about €29 million at 2004 values) about the same amount as did the Letterkenny to Burtonport Railway. Many new churches were opened during those years, even in very poor areas and their debts were quickly discharged due to emigrant remittances.

³⁵ CDB, annual reports. These list the projects carried out and investments made annually.

³⁶ CI Monthly Reports, Co. Donegal, Jan. 1892 - Dec. 1902 (CO 904 /48 - CO 904/76).

³⁷ *DP*, 8 Oct. 1904, p.8.

Fig. 28

Fish carried on L&BER from various stations 1903 to 1907

| Year | From station | Salmon and trout | Prime fish excluding salmon and trout | Fresh mackerel | Fresh herrings | Salted or kippered herrings | Lobsters | Other shell fish | Total carried for year |
|--|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------|
| | | Tons | Tons | Tons | Tons | Tons | Tons | Tons | Tons |
| 1903 | Burtonport | 99 | | | 70 | 65 | 12 | 8 | |
| | Gweedore | 20 | | | 19 | 32 | 4 | 5 | |
| | Cashelnagor | | | | | | | | |
| | Falcarragh | 1 | | | | | | 1 | |
| | Dunfanaghy Ro | 2 | 2 | | 6 | 39 | | | |
| | Creeslough | 1 | | | 2 | | 1 | | |
| | Totals | 123 | 2 | | 97 | 136 | 17 | 14 | 389 |
| 1904 | Burtonport | 22 | | | 332 | 395 | 29 | 13 | |
| | Gweedore | 15 | | | 89 | 13 | 5 | 4 | |
| | Cashelnagor | 12 | | | | 5 | | | |
| | Falcarragh | 0.5 | | | | | | | |
| | Dunfanaghy Ro | 23 | 1 | | | | | | |
| | Creeslough | 4 | | | | 68 | 2 | | |
| | Totals | 78.5 | 1 | | 421 | 481 | 36 | 17 | 1032.5 |
| 1905 | Burtonport | 28 | | | 956 | 1164 | 23 | 34 | |
| | Gweedore | 8 | | | 93 | 137 | 8 | 6 | |
| | Cashelnagor | 13 | | | 147 | 200 | 5 | 3 | |
| | Falcarragh | 1 | | | 130 | 158 | | | |
| | Dunfanaghy Ro | 10 | 1 | | 4 | | 1 | 14 | |
| | Creeslough | 8 | 6 | | 5 | | 1 | | |
| | Totals | 66 | 7 | | 1335 | 1659 | 38 | 57 | 3162 |
| 1906 | Burtonport | 32 | | 11 | 99 | 323 | 16 | 34 | |
| | Gweedore | 23 | | | 54 | 140 | 8 | 4 | |
| | Cashelnagor | 16 | | | 101 | 189 | 3 | 0.5 | |
| | Falcarragh | 4 | | | 47 | 139 | | | |
| | Dunfanaghy Ro | 9 | | | 12 | 8.5 | 1.5 | | |
| | Creeslough | 23 | | | 9 | | 1 | | |
| | Totals | 107 | | 11 | 322 | 799.5 | 29.5 | 38.5 | 1307.5 |
| 1907 | Burtonport | 15 | | 10 | 130 | 284 | 15 | 33 | |
| | Gweedore | 12 | | | 15 | 27 | 5 | 4 | |
| | Cashelnagor | 10 | | | 7 | 110 | 6 | | |
| | Falcarragh | 2 | | | | 3 | | | |
| | Dunfanaghy Ro | 6 | | | 1 | 27 | 1 | | |
| | Creeslough | 22 | 8 | 5 | 1 | | | | |
| | Totals | 67 | 8 | 15 | 154 | 451 | 27 | 37 | 759 |
| Source: Report of the Commissioners (Fisheries Ireland): 1903 Cd. 1577, vol. xii; 1903 Cd. 1712, vol. Xii; 1904, Cd. 2154, vol. xi; 1905, Cd. 2535, vol. xii; 1906 Cd. 2733, vol. Xvi; 1907, Cd. 3304, vol. xi; 1908, Cd 4405, vol. xiv. | | | | | | | | | |

Fig. 29 Herring purchases by buyers other than CDB during autumn and winter 1906

| District of curing station | Sent to market-kipped boxes | Sent to market-fresh boxes | Sent to market cured in barrels | Amount paid to fishermen | Estimated sum paid in wages for curing and marketing fish | Number of large boats fishing | Number of small boats fishing | Men and boys engaged in fishing | Local persons engaged in curing and marketing | Number of buyers |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Downings | 0 | 15,063 | 45,505 | £45,503 | £4,443 | 116 | 20 | 800 | 120 | 12 |
| Rosses | 91,534 | 95,746+8,000 cart loads | 274,149 | £107,838 | £19,394 | 10 | 220 | 1,160 | 378 | 19 |
| Gweedore | 0 | 5,920 | 8,380 | £11,169 | £1,385 | None | 20 | 80 | 50 | 3 |

Source: Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland.

In 1906, three local merchants sold fish at Burtonport for amounts of £10,000, £8,000 and £9,000. The total amount paid in the Rosses by John L. Sayer & Co., the London fish buyer and merchant, between 28 February 1904 and 31 August 1906 for fish, wages and incidental expenses amounted to £27,360. Figures 28 and 29 show the tremendous impact that fishing had on local society and the large numbers it employed. It was calculated that there were 400 boats on the Rosses' coast and similar numbers on the Gweedore and Cloughaneely coasts.³⁹

However, the fishermen did not have easy lives. The slips and piers were so limited that most of these boats had to be hauled up on land each night and pulled back to sea in the morning. It was much the same along the coast from Dunfanaghy to the south of the Rosses. Even though Burtonport had a very poor pier and the harbour needed dredging, the village did well from the first years of fishing and the abundance of fish, especially the herring and the new fish, the mackerel, provided a substitute during periods of potato scarcity along the coast, and because the fishermen were all local with extended kin, during a poor potato crop in 1907, no scarcity was felt.⁴⁰

The new railway converted Burtonport into a centre of industry and trade. Buyers from various parts of Ireland, Scotland and England came and set up the chain by which the fish could be got to market. Teams of gutters lined the roadsides coming up from Burtonport quay and filleted the fish before the packers, loaders and carters put them on the train to Derry where they would be shipped to foreign markets, thereby bringing employment and earnings to locals, especially girls, and made considerable income for the local merchants who were not slow to exploit the opportunities placed before them. The transport of the fish was entrusted completely to the Burtonport railway which picked up the boxes of fish at

³⁹ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 57. Evidence of Monsignor Walker, P.P., Lower Templecrone.

⁴⁰ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, pp 67 - 68. Evidence of James F. O'Donnell.

the various stations along the route of the line and carried them to Derry for trans-shipment to Britain. For the first time fresh fish from northwest Donegal could reach the British markets the following morning at prices much greater than had ever been achieved before (see fig. 28, 29).⁴¹

The spin-off industries from the fishing were equally important. Forges and smithies, boat repairers, net menders, basket makers, sail menders, horse, pony and donkey owners, men, women and young boys and girls all found remunerative employment in the fishing industry. In a further effort to exploit the employment opportunities afforded by fishing the Congested Districts Board established a cooperage in Burtonport and set up an apprenticeship scheme. By 1906 the cooperage was capable of producing 7,000 barrels annually but the fish market in Burtonport alone demanded 18,000 per annum. A cooperage founded by the Congested Districts Board at Downings had similar production and demand. However, rather than rising to this target of production the CDB, lacking long-term vision and reluctant to allocate sizeable amounts of money to primary projects to the exclusion of minor local demands, forced the barrel industry to engage in a policy of importation of materials from Scotland and later, the importation of barrels. As a consequence, the local manufacture fell away gradually and employment as well as the expertise and apprenticeships being created in the industry were greatly diminished. The Burtonport railway had to carry wagon loads of empty barrels from Derry which proved expensive and cumbersome. The railway took much blame for prices and service but, in truth, the whole of the fishing industry depended on them and they were often scapegoats for lack of investment and long-term planning elsewhere.⁴²

The fishing industry generated a cash economy which was not just confined to the merchants and dealers but was also enjoyed by the

⁴¹ *LS*, 6 Sept. 1906, p. 5.

⁴² *LS*, 6 Sept. 1906, p. 5. IRC, pp 91 - 92, questions 14904 - 14931. Evidence of James Sweeney.

fishermen in the boats, the carters, the gutting teams, the hawkers and all those servicing the industry. This is evident from the improvements in living conditions during the first years of the new century.

A combination of the Congested Districts Board, the medical profession, the clergy and both rural district and county councillors plus the new cash economy were the generators of new standards of respectability in the northwest through the promotion of privacy, cleanliness and improved housing. The initiative of the Congested Districts Board and the support of the above named bodies led to the institution of parish committees throughout the northwest from 1902 onwards with the express purpose of house improvement, the separation of sleeping arrangements for males and females within the home, the construction of byres and outhouses for cattle and fowl, the removal of manure middens from the doorsteps, the replacement of clay floors by cement floors, the enlargement of windows and the whitewashing of houses, both inside and outside.⁴³ Places such as Burtonport and Dungloe received so much negative publicity in the press because of their unsanitary conditions that improvements with the aid of water systems and proper treatment of sewage were demanded repeatedly.⁴⁴

Monsignor Walker of Lower Templecrone told the Royal Commission on Congestion in 1906 that there were far fewer one-room houses in 1906 than there had been in 1901. He said: 'The parish committees have done wonders in that way The principal improvement has taken place since the establishment of the parish committee'.⁴⁵

Grants were made available from the County Donegal Committee of Agriculture, the Congested Districts Board and rural district councils for the construction of cowsheds and a determined effort was made by the parish committees, through the leadership of the parish priests and the

⁴³ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 54, Monsignor Walker's evidence.

⁴⁴ *DP*, 10 June 1905, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 54, evidence of Monsignor Walker.

Fig. 30 Housing comparisons in northwest Donegal 1901 and 1911.

| Number | Area | No. of townlands in area | No. of houses in 1901 | No. of houses in 1911 | One room houses in 1901 | One room houses in 1911 | 2,3,4 room houses in 1901 | 2,3,4 room houses in 1911 | 8,9,10 room houses in 1901 | 8,9, 10 room houses in 1911 |
|--------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Gweedore | 33 | 824 | 862 | 149 | 159 | 650 | 642 | 8 | 14 |
| 2 | Rosses | 149 | 1340 | 1426 | 485 | 270 | 775 | 1059 | 17 | 23 |
| 3 | Cloughaneely | 35 | 943 | 929 | 224 | 190 | 667 | 676 | 17 | 18 |
| Totals | | 217 | 3,107 | 3,217 | 858 | 619 | 2,092 | 2,377 | 84 | 131 |

Source: Census of population, County Donegal, 1901 and 1911.

Fig.31 Comparison of houses between 1901 and 1911 according to class in northwest Donegal.

| Number | Area | Class 1 houses 1901 | Class 1 houses 1902 | Class 2 houses 1901 | Class 2 houses 1911 | Class 3 houses 1901 | Class 3 houses 1911 | Class 4 houses 1901 | Class 4 houses 1911 |
|--------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Gweedore | 18 | 20 | 176 | 216 | 646 | 613 | 13 | 11 |
| 2 | Rosses | 25 | 24 | 236 | 588 | 1075 | 827 | 16 | 0 |
| 3 | Cloughaneely | 17 | 25 | 250 | 305 | 639 | 581 | 37 | 19 |
| | Totals | 60 | 69 | 662 | 1,109 | 2360 | 2,021 | 66 | 30 |
| | Change % | | (+) 15% | | (+) 67% | | (-) 14% | | (-) 54% |

Source: Census of population, county Donegal 1901 and 1911.

Fig.32 Comparison between thatched and slated houses in northwest Donegal 1901 and 1911.

| Area | Thatched houses in 1901 | Thatched houses in 1911 | Slated houses in 1901 | Slated houses in 1911 |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Gweedore | 722 | 640 | 117 | 227 |
| Rosses | 1148 | 876 | 193 | 559 |
| Cloughaneely | 639 | 562 | 306 | 367 |
| Totals | 2,509 | 2,078 | 616 | 1,153 |
| Percentage change | | (-) 17.1% | | (+) 87.2% |

Source: Census of population, County Donegal, 1901 and 1911.

newly appointed public nurses, to force the people to adjust to cleaner surroundings. Regarding the keeping of animals within the house, Nurse Brady of Annagry told the IRC: 'I tell them it is very bad for their health and that they should try to put up other places for the cattle'.⁴⁶ Figures 30 – 32 give an indication of the improvements which took place between the census of 1901 and that of 1911. When one analyses these tables it becomes apparent that the most improved region was that of the Rosses which was in the immediate vicinity of Burtonport where the fishing was best. The areas where fishing was poorest or least developed, or most remote from the chief fishing centres, show the poorest improvement in house standards. The tables show the changes that took place between 1901 and 1911 in the classes of houses in the northwest and shows that the mud cabin or class 4 abode was being eliminated from the landscape. This table also indicates that the new houses being built were of a much better standard than those of earlier times and fitted into class 2 more easily while a slow but steady improvement was effected to older residences. Figure 32 shows the improvement that took place in the roofing of houses between 1901 and 1911. The Rosses areas where fishing was best showed the most progress. Similarly, areas near Bunbeg in Gweedore and Ballyness in Falcarragh where fishing was strong showed the most development.⁴⁷

This growth in construction and improvement would not have been possible without the railway which carried large quantities of building materials, especially timber, slates, corrugated iron and cement into the northwest.⁴⁸ By 1910, the County Donegal Committee of Agriculture heard that the dwellings were mostly neat and clean and, in nearly every case, showed evidence of recent improvement. In a good many instances

⁴⁶ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 119, evidence of Nurse Brady, Annagry.

⁴⁷ Census of population 1901 and 1911, County Donegal.

⁴⁸ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman. Her father, Hugh Sharkey, built the first slated house in Bunaman, Annagry in 1906. He bought the cement, roof timbers, slates and timber ceiling from McBride's shop in Annagry. Many thatched houses in the townland were slated in the following years.

the committee was pleased to see that alterations and improvements suggested by the judges in previous years had been carried out, sometimes by the money received in prizes but often, by the competitors themselves without any help in prizes or otherwise. There were comparatively few cases where the value of fresh air and sunlight were not appreciated.⁴⁹

As well as the local initiatives there was pressure for improvement from the family members living in America. Many of these had emigrated in the 1880s and had later married in America and they now had the money to pay a visit to the old home in later years. It was customary for these visitors, especially if their spouses were not from the area, to write home before their visit asking that certain protocols be observed during their holidays. Boxes of seed potatoes were to be removed from under the beds. Sick cows or calves were not to be brought into the house. Chickens were to be kept out of the house and away from the door. The chimney was to be cleaned in case soot fell into the pots during cooking. Cups, plates and cutlery were to be presented at mealtimes instead of the traditional bowl and spoon. Oil cloths were to cover the usually bare tables. The collections of fish hanging from the rafters were to be put out of sight. The problem of spitting was always a bone of contention because the locals saw nothing wrong with it but the returning 'Yanks' found it repulsive. Likewise, the provision of toilet facilities caused major problems. The natives saw little wrong with the facilities available in teach an asail (donkey house) or in teach na mbó (cow byre). Such demands often caused severe tension among the reception party at home.⁵⁰

In 1907, Robert Todd, solicitor to the L&LSR, told the IRC that 'the housing of the people and the condition of the people altogether has been

⁴⁹ *DP*, 17 Sept. 1910, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman. She had one uncle and three aunts in America and they came on holidays to her mother's house, an event that caused no little tension during each visit.

changed. The effect of these light railways has been of enormous advantage'.⁵¹

Urged on, no doubt, by this fresh spirit of innovation which the railway brought, the Gweedore people endeavoured to initiate local enterprise by establishing a new fair close to Gweedore Station. The *Londonderry Sentinel* reported:

The new fair of Gweedore was held on Wednesday and was successful in every respect. The day was the finest of the past two months. From an early hour the people could be seen coming in every direction with their cattle to be present to make a bold effort to start what is expected to be the most convenient fair in the surrounding district, being in the centre of Gweedore, midway between Falcarragh and Dungloe, having the best roads in the county and is beside the railway station.

When the morning train, which is due at 10.30 a.m., came in there emerged from the train about forty buyers and a rush was made to where the fair was held and in less than two hours about 100 cattle were sold, and brought prices the best on record this season.⁵²

Jobbers arrived on the morning train at this fair and at the fairs at Aonach Bhriney in Gweedore, at Jack's Fair in Meenaleck, at the fairs in Gortahork, Falcarragh and Dungloe and availed of the special trains laid on for the carriage of the purchased animals out of the place. For the first time the inhabitants of the northwest could benefit from the prices offered by these outsiders who broadened the market from the traditional local trade. With the programmes introduced by the Congested Districts Board for the improvement of cattle, these new marketing conditions were advantageous to the local people and rewarded efforts for better breeding.⁵³

It took a couple of years for the Dungloe fair to adjust to the new conditions but, eventually, in July 1905, a meeting was held in the town at

⁵¹ IRC, p. 58, evidence of Robert Todd, solicitor to L&LSR, 1907.

⁵² *LS*, 17 Mar. 1903, p. 5. The fair was held at Michael Doogan's Hotel, Gweedore.

⁵³ CI Month Report, County Donegal, June 1893 (CO 904/48).

which it was decided to start the fair at 10 a.m. instead of noon as had been traditional. This new time was set to facilitate the buyers by allowing them to arrive on the early morning train and get the cattle away on the 3.35 p.m. train from Dungloe Road station.⁵⁴ The L&LSR further granted reduced fares for cattle dealers plus cheaper rates for the conveyance of cattle on the Burtonport Railway.⁵⁵

The success of the cattle trade encouraged the Dungloe Agricultural and General Improvement Committee to set up an egg, poultry and general market in the town to be held on the second Wednesday of each month and to invite merchants and dealers from outside the locality to attend and avail of the railway facilities as the cattle jobbers had done.⁵⁶

Another feature of the early years of the railway was the vast amount of fertilizer it carried into the northwest.⁵⁷ Because of the scarcity of fodder and hay, due to the unyielding nature of the soil, it was the local practice to sell animals in the autumn to save on winter-feeding. With the animals roaming on the hills from May to September according to the booleying custom of the time, this practice had always resulted in a severe shortage of cow manure for the crops over many long years. With the opening of the Burtonport railway, Paul & Vincent, fertilizer manufacturers, placed advertisements in all the papers serving the northwest and, before long, wagon loads of its products were on the railway.⁵⁸ It was this fertilizer that replaced the natural manure and accounted for successful potato crops in the northwest in later years rather than the sprays for blight which were seldom used in coastal areas because of the belief that blight never affected such regions.⁵⁹ The train could bring potatoes from the fertile Laggan fields of east Donegal for local sale in the

⁵⁴ *DP*, 20 July 1905, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *DP*, 9 Sept. 1905, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *DP*, 9 Sept. 1905, p. 5.

⁵⁷ An examination of accidents on the Burtonport railway during the early years indicates that most derailments taking place involved heavy wagons of fertilizer.

⁵⁸ *LS*, 14 Mar. 1913, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland, *Second Report*, p. 97. Evidence of Colonel Irvine.

northwest and it is significant that nothing further is heard of potato famine or distress in the area during the years following the advent of the railway.⁶⁰

The train also brought many new stallholders, dealers and peddlers to local fairs where they set up temporary accommodations along the streets and produced cheap, bright and fashionable wares for very low prices. Rolls of cloth, shoes, shawls, dresses, underwear, ready to fit clothing, household goods and farm tools all made appearances at these local markets at prices much cheaper than could be found locally, much to the discomfort of the local shopocracy. 'Fear na Scillinge' [the Shilling Man] was a popular trader at Dungloe Fair and Jack's Fair in Meenaleck. A 'black doctor' offered cure-all medicines with boundless possibilities. Tricksters and gamesmen, fortune-tellers and magicians added to the colour and variety of life.⁶¹ These peddlers gave some little sense of freedom to those who were in debt to local shops and provided women with the independence to bargain with the strangers on cash terms, a practice denied them by the hold of the merchants in whose grasp they generally wallowed because of the 'truck system' which was the payment in shop goods for work done in lieu of cash. However, the downside of these imports was the fall in local produce for, by 1910, the *Derry People* was lamenting that 'the Rosses homespuns have declined too and are now almost extinct as they have yielded to the modern facilities'.⁶²

The new railway also beckoned the modern world of tourism, which could now be facilitated in the remote areas. To coincide with the first trains Paddy Gallagher of Crolly, James Watson of Cloone House, Dunfanaghy Road, James F. O'Donnell and John Sweeney, Burtonport and many others placed advertisements in the Derry papers presenting their establishments to the outside world, inviting guests to enjoy the fishing,

⁶¹ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman, Annagry.

⁶² *DP*, 25 June 1910, p. 7.

shooting and scenery. Lord Hill's Gweedore Hotel was an instant beneficiary of the railway with tourist numbers increasing substantially year after year. The earl of Leitrim had his cars meeting each train at Creeslough station to bring the visitors to his Rosapenna Hotel and golf links near Downings and Dunfanaghy with its hotels and golf course benefited similarly. This new departure, with its many spin-off asides, created extensive employment in the northwest and contributed further to the cash economy.⁶³

In 1906, Daniel Doherty, a local teacher, told the Royal Commission on Congestion that the fishing industry had been of inestimable benefit to the Rosses. It would take too long to simply enumerate the manifold advantages that the people had derived from the fishing. Its effects were observable in many ways all over the face of the country and in the aspect and social condition of the people, in new houses and improvements to old ones, in a more varied and generous diet, in better dress materials, in a general air of comfort and independence, to which, unfortunately, the people had long been strangers. He said that there was a universal chorus of approval and commendation for the work of the Congested Districts Board in regard to these improvements.⁶⁴ The Burtonport railway played a very significant part in this betterment of society by facilitating the export of fish and the import of materials and food which improved and diversified the lives of the people.

All of this activity produced much better receipts on the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway than had been anticipated when the railway was being planned. In 1897 the expected income per mile per week was calculated at £2 14s. with expenses per mile per week calculated at £3 2s. 6d. However, the cost of working turned out much better with the half year ending 31 December 1905 being £2 14s. 6d.; 30 June 1906

⁶³ LS, 12 Mar. 1903, p.1 and 14 Mar 1903, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland, *Second Report*, p. 100. Evidence of Daniel Doherty.

Fig. 33 Comparison of running railway costs in Ireland 1903-07.

| Railway | Maintenance of way, works, etc. (per mile per year) |
|---|--|
| Cavan and Leitrim Railway | £55 7s. 3d. |
| Clogher Valley Railway | £53 4s. 4d. |
| Donegal and Killybegs Railway | £56 11s. 7d. |
| West Clare Railway | £124 1s. 6d. |
| South Clare Railway | £70 6s. 6d. |
| Schull & Skibbereen Railway | £88 12s. 8d. |
| Carndonagh Railway | £39 0s. 0d. |
| Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway | £42 9s. 5d. |

Source: IRC, appendix xi, p. 574. Figures based on the four half years up to 30 June 1907.

being £2 6s. 10d.; 31 December 1906 being £2 9s 7d and 30 June 1907 coming to £2 5s. 5d.⁶⁵ Despite the pessimistic forecasts that the railway would never be profitable and the accusations of poor gradients, shoddy workmanship, and cheeseparings during the construction stage, the early years proved that the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension was cheaper to run than many other narrow gauge railways as is indicated in fig. 33. Perhaps these figures indicate the thrifty manner of John McFarland and his L&LSR board or maybe, they indicate the beginnings of a parsimonious management and neglect as appears in a later chapter.

However, despite the growing confidence and improving standards of northwest society, all was not so smooth behind the scenes because, once again, the L&LSR and the Board of Works deepened their conflict. Nine days after the opening of the Burtonport Railway in 1903, the L&LSR

⁶⁵ IRC, appendix xi, p. 574.

referred in a memorandum to a number of items that Major Pringle of the Board of Works had asked to be done during his inspection of the line in 1903 and they stated that, over and above those items, they considered the equipment of the line deficient in some respects and that there were discrepancies between the specifications and the works executed.⁶⁶ On 18 March 1903, the Board of Works received a list of these deficiencies from the L&LSR. The Board of Works considered that about half the items complained of were being dealt with by Pauling and 'others related to unfinished works which the contractors had undertaken to complete before they handed over the line at the end of the twelve month maintenance period'. The Board of Works suggested that their engineers and L&LSR should meet and whatever differences remaining unsolved should be submitted to arbitration. Both sides met and many problems were disposed of immediately and the arbitration process was agreed so that peace was, once more, restored.⁶⁷

On the railway itself, the numbers using the trains from the very first day far exceeded the expectations of either the Board of Works or the L&LSR which bodies had looked on the Burtonport line as being the 'orphan of the Carndonagh railway' which would support its losses.⁶⁸ Receipts from the very beginning were surprisingly good. For the first nine months and twenty-one days (until the financial year end of 1903) receipts were £8,023. For the year 1904 they were £9,215.⁶⁹ In these same years the L&LSR's own long established line from Derry to Bunrana was taking receipts of approximately £16,000 annually while the Carndonagh Railway was taking less than £4,000 annually. Gross earnings per mile on the Burtonport railway were £3 14s. 10d. for the six months ending 31 December 1903 and £3 18s. per mile for the six months ending 30 June 1904. After ten months of running there was a surplus of £3,530 to be

⁶⁶ IRC, p. 95, evidence of Thomas Batchen, engineer, Board of Works.

⁶⁷ IRC, p. 95, Batchen's evidence.

⁶⁸ IRC, p. 232, question 19128, evidence of Andrew Spence.

⁶⁹ IRC, p. 235, q. 19212, evidence of Andrew Spence.

divided but, because of tensions between the L&LSR and the Board of Works, 'it had not yet been apportioned'.⁷⁰ By 1907 the Board of Works stated that all the information they possessed showed that the traffic on the Burtonport Extension had increased beyond all anticipation and that, in fact, it was the most paying section of the whole L&LSR operated system.⁷¹ They stated further: 'Nobody would have imagined for a moment that the Burtonport line would have paid; yet it does pay. Of course it has the sea fisheries'.⁷²

The amounts of fish going out from the various ports on the trains and the large quantities of fertilizer, building materials, household goods and foodstuffs coming into the northwest accounted for much of the business. But large numbers of people took to rail travel also. The men going from the northwest to the Scottish farms during the months of March, April and May together with the crowds going to the various hiring fairs four times annually, and the return of these again during November and December, the annual pilgrimages during the summer months to Doon Well,⁷³ the days out for Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and United Irish League (UIL), Gaelic League and Temperance gatherings together with their bands, as well as visits to hospitals and dentists, missions and the many church sponsored occasions ensured heavy numbers taking to railway conveyance. A new phenomenon in the northwest was the migration of many girls who had learned the 'gutting' trade around the northwest ports but who were now lured to the ports of Lerwick, Berwick, Wick and Peterhead by Scottish employers for better wages than could be earned at home.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Hansard 4* (Commons) cxxxvii, 175, (30 June 1904).

⁷¹ IRC, p. 124, q. 30186, evidence of Edward Thompson, Omagh, ex M.P. for North Monaghan who had a special interest in railways.

⁷² IRC, p. 125, q. 30203, evidence of Edward Thompson.

⁷³ Doon Well: a holy well and place of pilgrimage situated less than one mile from Kilmacrenan station.

⁷⁴ Grace Sweeney and Maggie Roarty tell of their many neighbours going to these places 'away to the gutting'.

Because of the training received during the courses conducted by the Congested Districts Board in household management, laundry, cooking as well as waitressing and serving, many young women now went by train to work in the hotels at Portrush, Portstewart, Derry and other seaside resorts during the summer months. In the following years these women were generally noted for the cleanliness of their houses and they initiated new standards of housekeeping and respectability in their neighbourhoods.⁷⁵

This passenger requirement plus the demand for the carriage of fish from the coastal ports and the increasing carriage of goods from Derry and Letterkenny resulted in an extra train each way being demanded between Burtonport and Derry by the Board of Works to service the traffic requirements which, of course, led to disagreement between the two bodies, with the L&LSR stating that the number of locomotives at its disposal was insufficient for the purpose and that the stock had not been purchased to run the extra trains. The stalemate lasted for some time but the L&LSR, under the astute chairmanship and guidance of John McFarland, was never tardy in accumulating new business and despite the lack of rolling stock, the extra train each way was in operation by January 1904.⁷⁶

But the new line was only working for about ten weeks when the first serious hint of difficulty became public. On 18 May 1903, a meeting of Letterkenny Urban Council was held and a motion was passed convening a public meeting to consider the L&LSR's freight charges in general and the freights of the Burtonport Extension in particular. The L&LSR was accused of bias toward Derry at Letterkenny's expense and it was admitted during the meeting that little was expected from the L&LSR

⁷⁵ Duffy's shop ledger 1888 (in the possession of the author) gives details of these courses. Grace Sweeney told of neighbours Hannah O'Donnell and Kate Green going to Portrush to work in hotels for a number of years.

⁷⁶ IRC, p. 190, Qs 15225-34, evidence of Thomas Batchen and p. 195, qs. 18099-104, evidence of George Shanahan.

because the townspeople had gained little in their dealings with them over many years.⁷⁷

On Monday, 25 May 1903, an open meeting was held in Letterkenny at which many grievances were discussed vigorously. The fares charged caused heated debate with Mr Patterson, cattle dealer, stating that he had been charged 8s. to send a pig from Letterkenny to Derry. It was said that the charges on the Burtonport Extension were far higher than those on the Derry to Letterkenny section. The meeting demanded that a train from Burtonport should arrive in Letterkenny about 10 a.m. each morning. An accusation was made that excursion tickets were being issued at Burtonport direct to Derry but none to Letterkenny, thereby enticing people to head straight for Derry rather than stop at Letterkenny. It was alleged that it was cheaper to cart goods between Letterkenny and Burtonport than send them by rail.⁷⁸ Mr Hugh McClafferty told the meeting of the insufficient accommodation made on the line to cope with the heavy traffic such as on hiring fair days, and he said that he had seen during the previous week, passengers crowded into passenger and goods wagons while every compartment held from twenty to thirty passengers when there was scarcely room for ten.⁷⁹

Edward McFadden, M.P. for Donegal East, spoke in parliament on 18 June about the May Hiring Fair in Letterkenny on 15 May 1903. He accused the L&LSR of failing to provide sufficient carriages on the Burtonport train. A number of passengers were put into goods wagons and cattle trucks and charged the same fares as third class passengers. The train was an hour late arriving at Letterkenny and an hour and a half late departing from Letterkenny. George Wyndham replied that the L&LSR stated that no passengers had travelled in cattle trucks.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *LS*, 19 May 1903.

⁷⁸ *LS*, 19 May 1903.

⁷⁹ *LS*, 26 May 1903.

⁸⁰ *Hansard 4* (Commons), vol. cxxiii, 1319 – 1321 (18 June 1903).

McFadden then raised the events of 22 June 1903 when the train due at Letterkenny from Burtonport at 10.05 a.m. did not arrive until 7.30 p.m. As a consequence, 200 labourers from the Rosses and Gweedore missed the steamboats at Derry and were compelled to remain in Derry all night. Wyndham replied that the train had broken down at Creeslough but, because the telegraph was out of order, there was delay in preparing a relief train.⁸¹

McFadden again spoke in parliament on 6 July 1903 stating that over 100 passengers were carried in open trucks or timber wagons, without any protection on the sides, on the Burtonport Railway on 15 June and on the same occasion, passengers were carried in the guard's van and in the luggage van. George Wyndham replied that the facts 'appear to be correctly stated'. The Board of Works would write to the L&LSR.⁸²

During these same weeks, the Board of Works had been receiving serious complaints about the unsatisfactory working of the Burtonport line, involving late trains and serious delays to traffic, consequent to frequent engine failures and, from the evidence before them in the summer of 1903, the Board were satisfied that the real cause of the unsatisfactory working of the Burtonport engines was that 'they were seriously damaged by incompetent management and severe maltreatment at almost the very commencement of their working'. The Board of Works accused the L&LSR of entrusting the engines to a series of drivers and firemen, 'many of whom were grossly incompetent and several of whom had been dismissed from other railways for inefficiency and misconduct'.⁸³

In August McFadden again spoke in parliament about the occasion of the King's visit to Derry on 28 August 1903 when twenty people were packed into carriages designed to accommodate eight and coal wagons

⁸¹ *Hansard 4* (Commons), vol. cxxiv, 1385 (6 July 1903).

⁸² *Hansard 4* (Commons), vol. cxxiv, 1403, (6 July 1903).

⁸³ IRC, p. 185, evidence of George Shanahan, Board of Works.

were full of passengers on the trip between Letterkenny and Derry. Wyndham replied that 'the company deny it'.⁸⁴

Many, or all, of these problems might have been resolved quietly behind the scenes away from the prying eyes of publicity but for the publication of a letter from the respected Revd S. H. Orr, Rector, Templecrone, Dungloe which appeared in the *Londonderry Sentinel* on 30 June 1903 and created a furore that was to shatter any illusion that the new Burtonport Extension was operating successfully. The Revd Orr wrote:

The [Burtonport] line passes through some of the most picturesque scenery in West Donegal and the company are taking great pains that passengers have sufficient time along the route to view both the line and the scenery. To illustrate this I will relate my experience from Derry to Dungloe Road Station on Friday last.

On this particular day (last Friday) I, with my wife and family and some friends, duly reached the [Derry] station in time to catch the 5 p.m. train. We reached Letterkenny without any undue excitement. As this part of the line is uninteresting from the tourist point of view, the company makes no unnecessary delay. But when we leave Letterkenny their consideration for the sightseeing tourist is manifest by the slowness of the progress and the frequent stoppages at the most remote places. About five miles from Letterkenny the engine was puffing and blowing and giving out signals of distress. Our progress was becoming slower and slower, till at last we came to a standstill. I put my head out of the window and inquired the cause of the delay. At the same time I saw the engine driver carrying up in his hands to the engine huge lumps of coal. It was explained to me that the fuel had run short but, fortunately, there was a wagon of coal attached to the hinder part of the train, from which a supply could be carried to the engine. In about an hour's time, after several visits to the coal truck, we got up steam and proceeded at a slow movement along the line, occasionally stopping to replenish the fuel from the coal truck. This mode of progression continued and the passengers were facilitated in their view of Muckish. Coming near to the Muckish Gap I looked out and saw the engine

⁸⁴ *Hansard 4* (Commons), vol. cxxvii, 1006 (12 Aug. 1903).

detached from the train in the distance, a quarter of a mile away, the guard making frantic efforts to signal him, but in vain. We were on a steep incline but the guard applied the brakes and stopped the carriages. No explanation was forthcoming as to this extraordinary proceeding on the part of Jehu. Here we waited for fully an hour at eleven o'clock at night. At last we heard the hoarse whistle of the engine returning. He [driver] explained that he had gone for water. After some further delay in carrying up fuel, we got under way again and reached Creeslough without further mishap. There is an official delay of fifteen minutes at Creeslough. This having elapsed an abortive effort was made to light the lamps. Then more fuel had to be carried and a procession of ten men, each with a lump of coal in his hand, passed to and from the engine to the coal truck. It recalled to my recollection Jerome's description in 'Three men in a Boat', each contributing to the Irish stew and the dog, 'Montmorency', adding his quota by fetching a dead rat. I played the part of 'Montmorency' and offered a box of matches as my quota. I also suggested that my wife had in the carriage an earthenware crock which we would let them have to fill with water and keep near the engine as a cistern.

Just as we were ready to start someone suggested to detach some of the empty carriages and make the load lighter. No sooner said than done. The engine was detached from the front and run back behind, half a dozen carriages detached, but, unfortunately, the brake on the remaining portion of the train became also detached and away we started on our own account. Had we been allowed to proceed we would probably have reached our destination, Dungloe Road, much sooner but the bystanders interfered and hung on to the buffers behind and stopped our progress. This was really the only time during our journey that we got up any speed. Soon again, the engine being attached, moderated our speed, and by frequent stoppages for fuel and water, we reached, at last, Dungloe Road Station at two o'clock on Saturday morning, four hours late.

It was a most exciting and interesting journey. The guard was thoroughly polite and attentive and did all he could to make us comfortable. It was the most unique experience I have ever had....

The Lough Swilly Railway Company are still doing their utmost for the comfort of travellers as the train leaving Derry at twelve o'clock on Monday reached Burtonport at five o'clock on Tuesday morning in company with the train that

left Derry at 5 p.m. Perhaps one of the passengers who got out of the train and took lodgings would write his experience of that eventful journey.⁸⁵

This letter created massive publicity and set forth the Burtonport Extension as an object of mirth and ridicule. In a long, wounded reply in the *Londonderry Sentinel*, the L&LSR officials showed their hurt and sense of grievance. They did not disagree with the account of the journey presented by the Revd Orr but they felt that the cause of the accusations were, fairly and squarely, the fault of the Board of Works which would not listen to solid advice about the tender engines and rolling stock in the first place and which then foisted totally unsuitable locomotives on the railway. While conceding the truth contained in Revd Orr's letter they asked:

Is it any wonder that this company have (sic) frequently to run a wagon of locomotive coal on the trains to replenish the engines en route and that the disgraceful scenes described in the press of carrying this coal to the engines and bucketing water from streams adjoining the railway have taken place on the Burtonport line?⁸⁶

However, both the Board of Works and the L&LSR were coming from different viewpoints on this particular issue. In the Board's view the trains ran from Letterkenny to Burtonport and back to Letterkenny only within the confines of the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway. In the L&LSR's analysis, and in reality, the trains ran from Derry to Burtonport and back to Derry again. The smaller tank engines might have served the Letterkenny – Burtonport trip adequately but they could not have serviced the seventy miles journey between Derry and Burtonport because of the distance, acute curves and difficult gradients especially when heavy wagon loads of fish or fertilizer had to be carried. But these

⁸⁵ *LS*, 30 June 1903.

⁸⁶ *LS*, 15 July 1903.

different interpretations were incapable of reconciliation between the parties.

An 'investigation' by the Board of Works began in 1904 and confirmed the deficiencies on the railway in the northwest but was careful to divert any blame away from itself as a body finding the L&LSR blameworthy, particularly in relation to the drivers they employed.⁸⁷

Driver A was formerly employed as a fireman on the Great Northern Railway and was dismissed for drunkenness on 25 June 1898. He was subsequently engaged as driver on the Burtonport line but was dismissed in June 1903 for hooking off his engine and running to Creeslough for water, leaving a passenger train standing on an incline. He was afterwards re-employed in June 1904 as a fireman on the Burtonport Railway and retained despite the protests of the Board of Works. He was reported for drunkenness and bad conduct in November 1904 and transferred to the Derry – Buncrana line. He afterwards left the service.

Driver B had been dismissed by the Cavan & Leitrim Railway Company on 28 January 1903 for carelessness in the management of his engine and for other offences. Yet, he was engaged by the L&LSR for the Burtonport Extension. He was subsequently dismissed for burning Burtonport engine no. 3. He was afterwards re-engaged at the time of a strike in November 1903. On 14 December 1903, he derailed Burtonport engine no. 1 at Burtonport. He was supposed to be under the influence of drink on this occasion. He had frequently been cautioned for intemperance and furious driving but was retained by the [L&LSR] company. Subsequently, in May 1904, he was dismissed for serious irregularities on the Letterkenny line.

Driver C was taken on during the strike in 1903. He 'had graduated with the Swilly Company'. He was dismissed for leaving his train at Letterkenny and going up town for drink. He was subsequently re-engaged

⁸⁷ IRC, p. 86, evidence of G. E. Shanahan.

to drive on the Burtonport line but, shortly afterwards, he went out on strike.

Driver D was taken on in November 1903 but various irregularities occurred during his employment. He was dismissed on 27 January 1904 for drunkenness and the theft of whiskey from the goods store at Burtonport.

Driver E was taken on in November 1903 but was dismissed for incompetence and neglect on 23 December 1903.⁸⁸

With facts such as these the Board of Works found it easy to blame the drivers for the deficiencies in the engines and further, accuse the L&LSR of bad management.

On top of all these internal problems the public bodies in the northwest were adding their voices in condemnation of the new line. Dunfanaghy Rural District Council became agitated in August 1905 by the new railway's performance and passed a motion calling the Board of Works and the L&LSR's attention to the continued irregularity and lack of punctuality in the arrival and departure of trains at the various stations on the Letterkenny & Burtonport Extension Railway which caused great expense and inconvenience to business people and the travelling public.⁸⁹

John Hanna, a member of Donegal County Council, told the IRC in 1907 of his experiences on the Burtonport railway.

I myself was personally on the line in the autumn of 1903 and in going up the grade at Gweedore, there was an ordinary passenger train on the engine – five or six carriages of people going to a fair in Letterkenny and there was only one freight wagon. The engine stopped three times and I came into Letterkenny an hour and three quarters late.⁹⁰

His next journey was more exciting though.

⁸⁸ IRC, p. 186, evidence of Mr G. E. Shanahan, Assistant Secretary, Board of Works.

⁸⁹ *DP*, 26 Aug. 1905, p. 1.

⁹⁰ IRC, p. 72, evidence of W. J. Hanna, J.P., representing Donegal County Council.

The next experience I had was on 3 August 1904. I left Letterkenny at 8 o'clock in the morning to transact business at Falcarragh. The country was dry in the morning when going down but, about 12 o'clock, it commenced to rain, gradually increasing until near four o'clock. I was judging at a cattle show and I was out in it all the time. At a quarter past four I got into the train to go home. At a place near Foxhall, three or four miles from Letterkenny, the country people were out shouting and throwing up their hats and the train stopped at the brink of a one-span bridge. I got out of the train The bridge gave way. It was completely swept away. I had to walk into Letterkenny to catch the train home I got four months suffering from it for I had neuritis and suffered martyrdom for four months.⁹¹

Despite these misgivings the local people along the new railway adapted to the train very quickly and indeed, as the court case below shows, it did not take them too long to refine their usage of the new railway travel system and exploit its weaknesses. At Falcarragh Petty Sessions before Sir John Olphert⁹² (presiding), William. Griffin, J.P., and Captain Johnston, R.M.,

the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company were complainants in a case against a girl named Ellen McNulty of Derryconner, Gortahork, for having travelled without a ticket from Falcarragh to Cashelnagor on the 8th. August last...

Mr John Tracy represented the [L&LSR] company.

On the date in question the defendant had been in Letterkenny. She purchased a half-ticket at the Oldtown station for Falcarragh, although she really then intended travelling, and did in fact afterwards travel, to Cashelnagor and handed the stationmaster there the Falcarragh ticket, and endeavoured to rush past him. It was possible that she might have succeeded had this been the first occasion upon which a similar trick had been attempted, but the dodge of taking a ticket to Falcarragh and travelling afterwards to Cashelnagor was a common one, so

⁹¹ IRC, p. 72, evidence of W. J. Hanna.

⁹² Sir John Olphert was the son and heir of Wybrants Olphert.

common that eight others had been caught that evening. They had paid, however, when detected but, as the defendant had refused to pay, the company had to proceed with the case. In addition to having defrauded the company in the manner he mentioned, and for which she was summoned, the defendant had also defrauded them by travelling to Falcarragh on a half or child's ticket although she was a girl of over twenty years of age. For this offence she was not summoned but he only mentioned it for the purposes of showing the difficulties the company had to deal with. It was quite a common practice for grown up people to either get children to buy half tickets themselves, stating that they were for children, and then travel on those tickets. He surmised that it was in this way the defendant got the ticket.

John Boyle, stationmaster at Cashelnagor, gave evidence of the facts as stated by Mr Tracy. On the date in question he had taken excess fares from eight other passengers but he had no doubt there were others, but owing to the rush that was made over the platform they had escaped. He asked defendant to pay her fare from Falcarragh but she refused.

Captain Johnston: If conduct of this sort be allowed to go on it will be impossible for the company to carry on their business at all.

Their worships inflicted a fine which, including costs, amounted to £1 – 2s.

Mr Tracy: If she had paid the fare when asked it would only have cost her 4d.⁹³

In other ways, too, the locals adapted the railway to their own needs, though in a more unorthodox manner. The lack of toilet accommodation became a severe problem on the long line and the stations were poorly equipped for the train passengers. As a consequence, the secluded mountain area around Cashelnagor, in Cloughaneely, soon became a relieving post for many hard-pressed passengers.⁹⁴

The initial enthusiasm of March 1903 for the new railway, continued to give way in many quarters to mounting frustration and disagreement. The trains were not running on time and the merchants were complaining bitterly about lost or delayed goods. The Board of Works were receiving

⁹³ DP, 29 Apr. 1904.

⁹⁴ Bernard J. Byrne, Annagry.

reports from its agent, Allely, that its treasured stock with its distinctive 'L&BER' markings was to be seen most often between Letterkenny, Carndonagh and Derry, but not often enough where it was supposed to be – on the Burtonport Extension.⁹⁵

The maintenance of the line was poor and every report condemned the manner by which the L&LSR was running the railway. The Board of Works was dealing with a difficult entity in the L&LSR and a headstrong and arrogant individual in the person of its chairman, John McFarland who had many business interests and treated the undertaking of the Burtonport line as another opportunity to make money without any investment from himself or from the L&LSR. He had little interest in the well being of the railway, as such, or of its people. He treated the Board of Works' concerns with a certain disdain and refused to take seriously any of the complaints coming to him. He was a powerful commercial figure in the northwest of Ireland and wielded great influence in the Derry business world in which he lived. But the Burtonport Extension Railway came a long way down his list of priorities as a public facility and this attitude percolated down among his managers and some of his staff. The oral history still extant about him relates that many of the problems arose from McFarland's own personal frugality. He was reputed to ask at every board meeting for ways to cut costs, and queried everything in minute detail. He kept the staff wages well below those paid by other railways though the hours worked were longer. To save on oil, the lamps were not lit on trains. He scanned the accounts every weekend and was ready to admonish his staff on Monday mornings about any expenditure which was not deemed absolutely necessary. No item, no matter how insignificant was overlooked. Indeed, McFarland got out and drove an engine throughout the railway strike in 1903.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Allely, 'Carriage of freight between Burtonport and Derry' (NAI, OPW 'Railways', Burtonport Extension Railway – 2835 – 20).

⁹⁶ Rory Delap, retired stationmaster of L&LSR, Letterkenny and James McDaid, Termon.

Nothing showed McFarland's determination and personality as much as the strike which occurred in November 1903 which was the first major labour problem the L&LSR had encountered. A demand for higher wages and better working conditions by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), which body had become established in and around Derry about this time, was rejected. The ASRS claimed that the wages paid by the L&LSR and the hours worked by the men were in contravention of the Railway Regulations Amendment Act 1899.⁹⁷ The L&LSR published the 'facts' in the papers. Six drivers were being paid 5s. 6d. daily and three were paid 5s. daily. Four of these normally worked seven days a week at twelve hours each day. They got overtime after twelve hours. Labourers, many of whom could 'neither read nor write', were paid 12s. weekly, gangers got 15s. weekly and an extra 1s. 3d. if they walked their section of the line on Sunday. Porters got from 15s. to 18s., signalmen got 18s. to 19s. and many cottages on the lines were occupied free of charge by these men.⁹⁸ The L&LSR refused any negotiations with the ASRS or the men so a strike was called.

John McFarland gave his version to the shareholders at the a.g.m. in March 1904:

In September 1903, a deputation of men approached the company and, as a result, hours were shortened which increased the wage bill. While the men had agreed to the changes, a fortnight later they sent in notices giving 14 days notice of terminating employment. On 6 November the vast majority of the men left employment and, indeed, it was only in the last few days of February that they had finally returned to their work on the same conditions as existed before they went out. The most unpleasant part of the strike was that the company was compelled to take possession of the cottages at the level crossings which were occupied by the surfacemen. These men left the company's employment and refused to open or close the gates. The company placed other men in them. The

⁹⁷ *LS*, 3 Nov. 1903, p. 5.

⁹⁸ *LS*, 5 Nov. 1903, p. 5. Letter from Andrew Spence, L&LSR secretary.

company spoke to the men and their wives before this was done but the men elected to go out. Fortunately, the directors had made well and carefully-studied arrangements with a view of replacing all on strike and had at considerable trouble erected quarters in which the new men were to reside and otherwise conduct the working of the line. The loyalty of the heads of departments and stationmasters towards the line kept it going.⁹⁹

124 men elected to go on strike although few men on the newly opened Burtonport railway went out. The Carndonagh line, in particular, and the people of the Inishowen peninsula became very deeply involved. To replace the striking employees, John McFarland brought in between thirty and forty non-union men from Scotland who had been dismissed by the Caledonian Railway for want of work. To house them, McFarland built substantial wooden sheds at Pennyburn in the city.¹⁰⁰ Later, gangs of men were brought in from England and Scotland to replace the strikers. As suffering grew worse the parish priests of Clonmany, Buncrana and Carndonagh made strenuous efforts to broker an agreement between the parties. They told the strikers: 'Don't be Irish fools in the hands of this English society'.¹⁰¹ They then visited all the men individually but without success. When the general public in the hinterland of the Carndonagh railway decided to boycott the line altogether there was no turning back.¹⁰² McFarland declared that he was happy with the men he had brought in and would only bring back the strikers if vacancies arose in the future. The strikers were cleared from the cottages and the strike faded away. The strike and McFarland's action led to great suffering and, eventually, some of the men were willing to return on McFarland's conditions. They went

⁹⁹ *LS*, 1 Mar. 1904, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ *LS*, 7 Nov. 1903, p.5.

¹⁰¹ *LS*, 19 Nov. 1903, p. 5.

¹⁰² *LS*, 24 Nov. 1903, p. 5.

back to beg for their jobs but most were rejected. A severe lesson had been taught and learned.¹⁰³

The most common complaint about the Burtonport Extension was its timekeeping. The trains were erratic and undependable and the ire of the public became almost as great as that of the Board of Works which placed the blame firmly on McFarland and his staff. Trains were usually late, sometimes by as much as a number of hours. But this problem only created further difficulties when drivers tried to make up the lost hours or minutes by furious speeds on the line, often exceeding the 25 m.p.h. average limit between stations or 10 m.p.h. over the viaducts. John Allely, the Board of Works' agent in Letterkenny, sent many reports to his Dublin masters about the working of the Burtonport railway. He reported that on 28 January 1904 the 6.30 p.m. train to Burtonport was worked at a speed of 20 m.p.h. over the Owencarrow viaduct and the same train was worked over other parts of the line at rates of 35 m.p.h.¹⁰⁴ The L&LSR replied that all the drivers, and especially those of the Burtonport line, 'strongly dispute the accuracy of the timing by your employees The driver states that his speed over the viaduct was 8 m.p.h. and not 20 as alleged and that your inspector, Campbell, complimented the engine men at Creeslough on what he described as "good steady passage made"'.¹⁰⁵ On 4 February Allely complained that 'the 6.30 a.m. train was worked at a speed of 18 m.p.h. over Owencarrow viaduct and on 1 March the same train was worked at a speed of 31 m.p.h. over the same section of the line'. Yet the L&LSR retorted: 'the matter has been investigated and I have before me the driver's denial of the speed over the viaduct. This is a most careful man and I shall be glad to know by what means the speed was tested'? Allely reported that 'the speeds were measured when the train was driven from the speed board

¹⁰³ *LS*, 26 Nov. 1903, p. 4; *LS*, 1 Mar. 1904, p. 7; Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁴ Allely, 'Excessive speeds over Owencarrow Viaduct and other bridges', Burtonport Extension Railway, 1904 - 1915 (NAI, OPW 'Railways' 1946-15).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

to the centre of the viaduct in one minute and thirty seconds which is exactly half a mile and the speed was not reduced when the train was approaching or crossing the viaduct'.¹⁰⁶ On 20 March, Allely alleged that the Burtonport train was driven at a dangerous speed of 36 m.p.h. from Cashelnagor to Falcarragh. It was also driven at speeds of 30 and 31 m.p.h. on other parts of the line. He recommended that this practice should be discontinued at once because the permanent way was not in such good condition in places as it had been when maintained by the contractors who had an agreement to maintain the railway for one full year from the date of opening on 9 March 1903.¹⁰⁷ The L&LSR replied to this criticism:

As regards the speed crossing the viaduct, the men all say that they never under any circumstances exceed the limit of 10 m.p.h. when actually on the viaduct. The men deny that, in any case, they have broken the rule on the subject which is that the maximum average speed between stations must not exceed 25 miles per hour.¹⁰⁸

Allely's complaints about the state of the permanent way had some foundation. After Pauling's departure in March 1904, McFarland had to put his own surfacemen on the line and, indeed, many of those appointed had previously been Pauling's employees. But McFarland's first actions after Pauling's departure were to reduce the number of surfacemen employed, then reduce the surfacemen's wages and lastly, have no permanent way inspectors over the line which action left the permanent way in a deteriorating condition.¹⁰⁹

Allely's fears about careless driving and high speeds on the railway, especially on the viaducts, were justified in February 1908. The morning train left Burtonport at the height of a storm and between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

it reached the viaduct at Owencarrow. The train was crossing slowly, practically at walking pace, when, suddenly, the driver felt a great strain on the engine. He instantly brought the train to a standstill and, on looking back, he was horrified to find part of the train overhanging the river, more than eighty feet beneath him. A carriage had been blown off the rails and was only stopped from going over the viaduct by the exceptionally strong railings forming the parapet. 'The passengers were terrified and it was only with the greatest difficulty they could be rescued although there were only six of them in the train'.¹¹⁰ Ever afterwards, there was general panic among the passengers about the crossing of Owencarrow viaduct and it became customary to utter a prayer before and during the crossing.¹¹¹

Although Allely had many more similar complaints which were generally acted upon by the Board of Works but disregarded by the L&LSR, nothing much improved or changed until the northwest business community and influential people such as the earl of Leitrim, owner of the Rosapenna Hotel in Downings, and members of Letterkenny Urban Council as well as ratepayers among the general public, complained bitterly about the problems on the Burtonport Railway. But the constant reply from the L&LSR to all the complaints and accusations never varied. They blamed the poor construction of the railway and the lack of power in the engines for all the problems.¹¹²

McFarland told his shareholders in 1905 that the public were up in arms against them as the company working the Burtonport line; it was assumed they were to blame. He reported that the L&LSR officials were straining every nerve. Night and day men were working on these inefficient and insufficiently powerful engines. This involved the company in serious expense which they bore in the interests of the public in the hope that, in

¹¹⁰ LS, 22 Feb. 1908, p. 5. See also IRC, p. 166, q. 43812-5, evidence of James F. O'Donnell.

¹¹¹ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman.

¹¹² LS, 28 Feb. 1905, p. 5.

time, they would be face to face with the gentlemen who had treated them so badly.¹¹³

The result of this publicity was that the Derry Chamber of Commerce took fright fearing that the proposed new railway to be built between Strabane and Letterkenny would become the dominant railway at Letterkenny and would, thereby, deprive the city of Derry of much of its trade by routing the merchandise via Strabane to Greenore, Belfast and Dublin. A possibly worse consequence would be the handing over of the management of the Burtonport line to the enemy, the County Donegal Railway (CDR) as was being sought by the earl of Leitrim and many others in Donegal. This scenario envisaged the CDR running the Burtonport train directly from Burtonport to Strabane via Letterkenny thereby creating Strabane as the supply point for northwest Donegal. With such a threat hanging over the city, the Derry Chamber of Commerce demanded action in February 1908, stating:

In view of the allegations of the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway that this unsatisfactory working is due to the defective construction and inadequate and unsuitable equipment of the line, we hereby urge upon the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury, the Chief Secretary for Ireland and the Board of Trade, the necessity for an immediate enquiry into the manner in which the Burtonport line was constructed and equipped by the Board of Works and worked by the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Company.¹¹⁴

These reports led to questions in the House of Commons by two Donegal M.P.s, Charles M'Veigh and Hugh Law who asked the Secretary to the Board of Trade in early 1905 whether complaints had been made by the working company [L&LSR] as to defective construction and inefficient equipment and whether he was aware that many passengers travelling by

¹¹³ *LS*, 29 Aug. 1905, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ 'Inquiry by Derry into the construction and working of the line', Burtonport Extension Railway, 1905 (NAI, OPW 'Railways', 15583 – 05); Also *LS*, 29 Aug. 1905, p. 5.

the line were in a state of trepidation until they got off it; and would he say when he would cause an inspection and report to be made that would allay those fears or cause the defects to be made good.¹¹⁵

The Secretary, Mr Kearley, responded cautiously while ensuring that no odium would fall upon any government department or agency.

The Board of Trade are aware that complaints have been made by the working company respecting alleged defects in the construction and equipment of the line by the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland but we have no knowledge of any special risk to passengers on this railway. The Board has no power to enquire into the condition of the line except on representations made to them by the [Donegal] County Council or by twenty or more ratepayers of the guaranteeing area as provided by section 24 of the authorising Order in Council 1898. No application under this section is at present before the Department.¹¹⁶

And so the matter rested without resolution.

In March 1904 Pauling, the contractor, had finished his maintenance contract of one year and left Donegal with few cherished memories, complaining bitterly on his departure:

If we had been fairly treated and allowed to make deviations without the severe conditions imposed on us [it] would have improved the railway without increasing the cost Half a mile of railway disappeared into an underground lake It was a much more difficult matter to arrange a deviation in Ireland than in Africa All our united experience and advice was of no avail owing to the exacting terms of the contract. Both jobs [Carndonagh and Burtonport Extensions] resulted in considerable loss to the firm.¹¹⁷

Even John McFarland, chairman of the L&LSR, admitted to some of the construction difficulties at the L&LSR annual general meeting in February 1903.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard 4 (Commons) 1905*, vol. cli, 610 (11 Aug. 1905). See also *LS*, 9 Mar. 1907, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Also *LS*, 9 Mar. 1907, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ J. I. C. Boyd, *Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway* (Truro, Cornwall, 1981), p. 112.

The work of construction had been of an extremely difficult nature. Contractors of less determination would have abandoned the undertaking, and inasmuch as it was stated, the completion of the railway had been a serious loss to them, he trusted that if it was within the power of the Board of Works or Treasury in consideration of the difficulties unexpectedly arising during construction, means would be found to make the loss as little as possible.¹¹⁸

However, Pauling did not depart from his Donegal travails without causing Board of Works' members some anxiety. The contractors rendered a claim against the Board for about £100,000 for 'work alleged to be done extra to the specified contract'. There was a great deal of correspondence and discussion over the Pauling claim but Thomas Batchen for the Board of Works summarized the prevailing attitude of the Board at the time when he told the I.R.C. in 1907 that 'it amounted eventually to this, that under the inclusive contract, the contractors had to bear their loss No part of it was paid. They had a lump-sum contract'. So Pauling departed from Donegal a poorer but wiser contractor and was never to receive a penny of the £100,000 he claimed to have been owed.¹¹⁹

Having dealt with the shock of Pauling's claim and having eventually discarded it, the Board of Works got a much greater jolt in May 1905 when it received an itemized claim of more than 300 double foolscap sheets from the L&LSR demanding that extra work and changes amounting to £77,900 be carried out on the Burtonport Extension. Thomas Batchen, the Board of Works engineer, told the Irish Railway Commission in 1907 that the L&LSR practically asked the Board of Works to demolish the viaducts and re-construct them at a cost of £13,356 or, in the alternative, that the annual estimated cost of maintenance and renewal charges on the

¹¹⁸ *LS*, 28 Feb. 1903. Report of L&LSR annual general meeting.

¹¹⁹ IRC, p. 97, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

Fig. 34: Changes demanded by L&LSR to Burtonport Extension

| Description | Cost | Total |
|--|---------|-------|
| Viaducts demolition | £13,000 | |
| Viaduct construction | £13,356 | |
| Fencing | £17,513 | |
| Loss on posts not galvanized | £2,500 | |
| Earthworks | £6,824 | |
| Increase embankment height | £3,370 | |
| 5 extra cottages and crossing gates | £1,438 | |
| Additional telegraph instruments | £44 | |
| Signal cabins at stations | £457 | |
| Additional siding and improvements at Letterkenny station | £1,100 | |
| Extensions to platforms at New Mills, Foxhall and Churchill stations | £446 | |
| Two new passing places at Falcarragh and Kilmacrenan | £1,800 | |
| New engine water supply at Churchill | £300 | |
| Extra cattle pens and footbridge at Creeslough | £637 | |
| Entire reconstruction of Dunfanaghy Road station | £2,650 | |
| Siding, loading bank, cattle pens, cranes, cart weighbridge, etc. at Cashelnagor | £358 | |
| New station, overhead footbridge, three ton weighbridge, bigger yard at Gweedore | £1,522 | |
| New works at Crolly Bridge | £300 | |
| Additional works at Dungloe Road station | £147 | |
| New station building and goods store at | £1,000 | |

| | | |
|---|--------|---------|
| Burtonport | | |
| Removal of corrugated iron and replacement by slates on all waiting cabins | £176 | |
| More lighting at existing stations | £600 | |
| Hand bells, lamp barrows, luggage barrows, tail ropes and hand lamps for stationmasters | £1000 | |
| Miscellaneous | £7,372 | £77,900 |

Source: Irish Railways Commission, pp 97 - 8.

steel work should be capitalized and handed over to the them.¹²⁰ Fig. 34 gives some idea of the L&LSR's opinion of the Burtonport Railway's deficiencies and the required solutions.¹²¹

This L&LSR claim shocked the Board of Works and, after much deliberation, it decided to withdraw from its previous agreement with the L&LSR to appoint an arbitrator to consider the differences between the parties, and it then proceeded through the legal route against the L&LSR reasoning that, in the words of Thomas Batchen 'if you appoint an arbitrator, the arbitrator gets a big claim before him; he feels there must be something in it. If there is a consent to the arbitration, he feels bound to give something; and, I say, if they [L&LSR] get anything at all, they get too much'.¹²²

While this financial dispute continued, questions had again been asked in parliament and memorials containing lists of ratepayers' signatures calling for an enquiry had been sent to the Board of Trade on 15 August 1905, 'complaining of the unsatisfactory working of the Burtonport Railway and of the inconvenience caused to the public by the incessant train delays, and asking that the Board of Works should hold an enquiry

¹²⁰ IRC, p. 97, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

¹²¹ IRC, pp. 97 - 98, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

¹²² IRC, p. 103, evidence of Thomas Batchen.

thereto'.¹²³ The Board of Works' reluctance in conceding to these demands was very evident for it feared that it could be left responsible for the running, maintenance, working and control of the railway if the L&LSR were dismissed or pulled out. Not alone that, but they further feared that a public enquiry would find their own officials negligent and guilty in their official functions, or, further still, be accused of doing nothing. In order to pacify officialdom on one side and the public on the other and be seen to operate in the people's interest they, once again, turned to their old, trusted friend, Joseph Tatlow and sent him to Donegal on 8 October 1905 to 'inquire into the working of the Burtonport Extension'.¹²⁴

Tatlow set to work in Donegal at once and reported in November 1905 that, since the line was opened in March 1903, no less than thirteen drivers had been employed, ten having left the service and, of those ten, seven had been dismissed.¹²⁵ The working of the locomotive department had not been in a satisfactory condition for some time past. In September 1903, the then locomotive superintendent was demoted to foreman at Letterkenny and he later resigned. A new locomotive superintendent was appointed in September 1904 and he resigned in August 1905. From that date a foreman has been in charge of the locomotive department.¹²⁶ A very serious condition existed in regard to the running of the trains. Owing to the frequent failures of the engines, most extraordinary delays were constantly occurring. Complaints were made to Tatlow that this state of things commenced soon after the opening of the line and had gradually grown worse. For the six weeks ending 30 September 1904 he documented the following summary of the late arrival of each of the trains at their destinations during the period. No delays under thirty minutes were included.

¹²³ IRC, p. 189, Shanahan's evidence.

¹²⁴ IRC, p. 189-190, evidence of G. E. Shanahan.

¹²⁵ Tatlow's report has not been published.

¹²⁶ IRC, p. 187. Evidence of G. E. Shanahan.

| Over 30 minutes late | Over 1 hour late | Over 2 hours late | Over 3 hours late | Over 4 hours late | Over 5 hours late | Over 6 hours late | Over 8 hours late | Over 13 hours late |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 25 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

The amount of public inconvenience caused by these delays and their prejudicial effect on the development of the railway could scarcely be overstated. He concluded that it was clear from these facts that the line was not efficiently worked and was not effectively developed, nor could it be, so long as the locomotives failed in their work and the trains were subject to such excessive delays.¹²⁷

When Tatlow looked over the line itself he found many problems. Floods were destroying parts of the permanent way where unwashed gravel had been used instead of cut stone. Water facilities were lacking along the course of the line. The opportunities for trains to pass were too limited with the only passing places being at Gweedore and Creeslough stations which led to long delays and caused many of the late arrivals. Merchants in Kincasslagh and Mullaghduff in the Rosses' area were very unhappy about the distance they had to travel to collect goods and traders could not easily get their fish from the pier in Kincasslagh to the train.¹²⁸ Railway prices were too high and the delivery of goods was unreliable. And there was much more. Tatlow reported adversely but, being a faithful servant to his masters, he found no blame attaching to the Board of Works.¹²⁹

Despite this damning report the Board of Works were careful to tread warily in case it would be left responsible for the Burtonport railway problem as had happened during its construction. The L&LSR was instructed to mend its ways. More talks were held and agreements were

¹²⁷ IRC, p. 189, Tatlow's report quoted by G. E. Shanahan.

¹²⁸ Though a station had been promised at Meenbanad in 1903 to service the Kincasslagh fishing it was not built until 1913.

¹²⁹ IRC, pp 189-191, G. E. Shanahan.

drawn up and promises were made that all would be well in the future.¹³⁰ Shanahan, the Board's representative, felt able to justify this stance to the IRC later when he stated that whilst the report was under consideration, a marked improvement took place in the working of the Burtonport Railway which continued for some months and the Board of Works, in the hope that the improved working would continue, thought it better not to take the further steps which might have led to the appointment of a receiver and the exclusion of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Company from the management of the undertaking. Unfortunately, it did not continue beyond the early months of 1906.¹³¹

The fear expressed by Shanahan of entering into a full inquiry or of taking stern action was calculated on the basis that, if the L&LSR were removed from the Burtonport line, it [L&LSR] would still be in control of the Letterkenny Railway to Tooban Junction and of the L&LSR's own line from Tooban to the city of Derry where many of the passengers and freight originated or terminated. No matter who took over the Burtonport line, the L&LSR would be there in Letterkenny to make life difficult. Therefore, expediency was exercised by the Board of Works in doing as little as possible when the cracking of one nut might destroy the whole tree. In many ways this whole exercise only showed how much each party was the prisoner of the other.

However, in case of such a situation arising again, the new branch railway from Letterkenny to Strabane under the control of the rival County Donegal Railway Joint Committee (CDRJC) would be there to alleviate the difficulty. John McFarland said that the new line was

a wildcat speculative railway promoted by local men to the disadvantage of local industries which were at a low enough ebb. The L&LSR had fought it in parliament for two years but were beaten by the overpowering influence of the

¹³⁰ IRC, pp 187-191, Tatlow's report quoted by Shanahan.

¹³¹ IRC, p. 190, Shanahan.

duke of Abercorn, the Chief Secretary for Ireland and their old friends, the Board of Works, all of whom gave evidence in its favour before a committee of parliament to whom the bill was referred.¹³²

No doubt, this action would antagonise the L&LSR but might be the Board of Works' trump card in future years if relations with the L&LSR became impossible.

Following Tatlow's report, the L&LSR, obviously feeling that it had suffered enough odium as far as the engines were concerned, acted without informing the Board of Works of its intentions and went across to Hudswell Clarke in Leeds and ordered two tender locomotives. The L&LSR had wanted tender engines since the beginning while the Board had held firmly with the smaller tank engines.¹³³ Eventually the two 4 – 8 – 0¹³⁴ tender engines arrived in 1906. They were the only tender engines ever to run on Irish narrow gauge railways and were the first engines in Ireland to have eight coupled wheels. They cost £2,750 each and were numbered 11 and 12. With a water capacity of 1,500 gallons and a coal capacity of five tons they could travel the whole length of the line from Derry to Burtonport without any difficulty. But their massive weight was to severely test the quality of the permanent way during the coming years. Number 12 lasted to the end of the Burtonport railway's lifetime though after the closure of the line to Burtonport [1940] there was little work for it.¹³⁵ The L&LSR withdrew three of the original Barclay tank engines purchased by the Board of Works from the line and employed them on their other lines which effort greatly displeased the Board which believed these engines to be the exclusive property of the Burtonport line. The two new engines now ran the whole length of the line between Derry and

¹³² *LS*, 25 Aug. 1908, p. 5.

¹³³ Tank engines carry the water and coal on board the engine. Tender engines have a tender of coal and water directly after the locomotive and this greatly increases the travelling capacity.

¹³⁴ A 4 – 8 – 0 engine means it has four leading wheels, eight driving wheels and no trailing wheels.

¹³⁵ Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 151.

Burtonport, a distance of seventy miles, just as the L&LSR had envisaged at the beginning. The Board of Works took unkindly to the L&LSR arrogance but only slapped its wrist ever so gently in the hope that the improved running of the line would give some relief to all sides.¹³⁶ To add insult to injury, the new engines carried the livery and lettering of the L&LSR and not that of the Board of Works' L&BER.¹³⁷

But the new engines were soon under critical scrutiny after a serious accident in Crolley in 1906. Michael Scarlett, one of the most efficient and popular drivers on the L&LSR, lost his life on Tuesday 20 March 1906 as a result of an accident of a most unusual character. Accompanied by John M'Gilloway as fireman, he was taking the midday train from Derry to Burtonport. When rounding a curve at Crolley the drawbar holding the engine to the tender suddenly snapped. The engine went forward with a bound and the jerk threw the driver on to the track. Three carriages of the oncoming train passed over his body before the vacuum brake which went on when the train parted, took effect. The fireman was able to keep his position on the footplate. On bringing the engine to a standstill he went back and extricated the body of his colleague. There were no passengers on the train, the last having left at Gweedore and the fireman and the guard were on their own at the sorrowful task. The remains were brought to Gweedore for inquest and M'Gilloway, having managed to make a temporary coupling, took the train to Burtonport. The *Londonderry Sentinel* reported: 'The engine responsible for the fatality was one of the new ones which have only been a couple of months on the line'.¹³⁸

By 1906, significant advancement was apparent in the fishing industry but no progress had taken place in the development of granite, sand, soapstone, iron ore or any of the other promising potentiality within the area. There were many opportunists like a certain Mr Wilson who

¹³⁶ IRC, p. 188, Shanahan's evidence.

¹³⁷ Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, pp 147 – 151.

¹³⁸ *LS*, 22 Mar. 1906, p. 5.

thought that the CDB might be a soft target for easy funding and applied for a loan of £250 and a grant of £250 for the purpose of developing Cashelnagor quarries. The CDB decided to obtain examples of the paving stones proposed to be cut in order to get the opinion of experts as to their suitability and as to whether they were better than those already in use. They also instructed their solicitor to examine Mr Wilson's title to the quarry and the value of his interest.¹³⁹ As a result of this examination, the CDB had to disallow Mr Wilson's request because of the 'unfavourable opinion expressed by Mr Spenser Harty in his letter of 9th instant'.¹⁴⁰

However, the railway enabled the CDB to succeed with Messrs Morton of Darvel, Scotland. This firm had established carpet factories in Killybegs and in Kilcar in the south of the county in 1901 and 1902 with generous help from the CDB. In 1903, negotiations concentrated on their developing further factories in the northwest. Annagry and Crolly, in the Rosses, were selected as sites because of their proximity to the railway station at Crolly and because of the dense population which needed employment for girls because of the clergy's growing concern at the numbers of young women going to the Laggan and to Scotland's fishing ports, 'where it was somewhat dangerous for them, moral and otherwise'.¹⁴¹ After an interview with Mr Morton in reference to the proposed extension of the carpet industry, the CDB agreed to contribute £700 towards the cost of land and buildings for starting each of two factories in the Rosses district, on condition that Messrs Morton undertook to carry on the industry for a period of, at least, five years. The premises would be the property of the CDB and would be rented by Messrs Morton at the nominal rent of one shilling a year with a low ground rent and any improvements effected by them as tenants of the Board would be allowed

¹³⁹ CDB, annual reports, vol. 4. 12 Feb. 1904.

¹⁴⁰ CDB, annual reports, vol. 4. 11 Mar. 1904.

¹⁴¹ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 59, evidence of Mons. Walker.

for. Messrs Morton would provide the machinery and equipment for the employment of about 80 workers in each factory.¹⁴²

After the establishment of the two factories in 1905 and 1906 they paid out between £1,200 and £1,300 respectively each year although there were complaints about the low wages paid to the employees which ranged from 3s. 6d. for a beginner to an average of 5s. or 6s. weekly in 1906. As orders fluctuated the numbers employed rose and fell so that employment was uncertain. The main problem with the carpet factories was that all the raw materials had to be imported.¹⁴³ The Burtonport railway fulfilled this part adequately but, had the Congested Districts Board embarked on a greater long-term policy, some effort might have been made to procure the raw material from the abundance of local sheep which would have developed a chain of local industries at much lower costs and wages than the imported materials.

However, just as the Burtonport and Downings' cooerage problems had indicated, the Board's *ad hoc* policies never did embrace such total development, and this eventually led to the failure of industries like the carpet factories because of the vagaries of the external markets and the vulnerability of local industry to the prices prevailing in the British markets for raw materials. However, the carpet factories were a powerful boost to the local economy for a number of years and despite the low level of wages, local girls cherished their jobs there.¹⁴⁴ They provided a further impetus to the development of the cash economy in the northwest and, like all factories, the spin-off from each enhanced the area.

By 1906 society in northwest Donegal had taken a turn for the better. Gone were the monster meetings about rack rents and landlords. Outside the churches on Sundays the people listened to the Gaelic League organisers speak about the sanctity of their native language as they

¹⁴² CDB, annual reports, 1900-05, vol. 4. 11 Sept. 1903.

¹⁴³ Royal Commission on Congestion, *Second Report*, p. 59, evidence of Mons. Walker.

¹⁴⁴ Grace Sweeney, Bunaman. Her sister, Hannah, had a job in the Annagry carpet factory for a number of years and the 5s. she brought home were eagerly awaited each week.

advocated that everyone should support it. Fishing had improved so much that many of the local people could participate in the wealth from the sea. Many people had money in their pockets from the fruits of the work at home. The carpet factories were the first indication that new wealth was coming to them through industrialisation. Their homes were improving and new standards of privacy were afforded to many of the younger generation. Wider selections of food and clothing were more easily and readily available. And there could be days out on the train to the hiring fairs at Letterkenny or Derry or on the pilgrimages to Doon Well or following the AOH or Temperance bands on their celebratory days. It was only a few years since the railway had come but the Burtonport Extension had been a primary participant in the climate of change and development that was apparent in many aspects of life. It seemed reasonable to believe that the future would continue to be bright.

CHAPTER 6

THE YEARS OF CALM BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

With its new powerful tender engines up and running in 1906, it might be reasonable to anticipate that the L&LSR and the travelling public on the Burtonport line would also expect efficient running and punctual trains. But just like the long-standing general grievances that were not capable of being settled by Tatlow in 1905 because they were too imbedded in the depths of antagonism that the L&LSR and Board of Works held for one another, the running of an efficient service seemed beyond the capability of the L&LSR also.

After six week's of smooth running, the new engines started giving trouble again. Allely recorded a list of repeated problems by starting with 24 February 1906: 'the 12.30 p.m. down train hauled by tender engine, no. 11, arrived at Creeslough 48 minutes late, and had to be detained for 1 hour and 12 minutes waiting to cross the 3.20 p.m. up train from Burtonport. It eventually arrived at Burtonport 2 hours and 19 minutes late. On 26 February, 'the 6 a.m. down train was delayed at Foxhall for one hour through the breaking of a drawbar in tender engine no. 11. The train arrived at Burtonport 1 hour and 25 minutes late and the 7 a.m. up train from Burtonport, in consequence, arrived at Letterkenny 1 hour and 40 minutes late'. On the same day the 12.30 p.m. down train was delayed for 41 minutes waiting on engine *Richmond* to be got ready. It was further delayed 1 hour and 40 minutes at Creeslough waiting to cross the 3.20 p.m. up train. It arrived at Burtonport 2 hours and 9 minutes late'. On 27 February the 5 p.m. down train arrived at Burtonport 5 hours and 16 minutes late. The bursting of a tube in Burtonport engine no. 3 caused the delay.¹

¹ 'Complaints re. the working of the railway, 1907-1919', The Burtonport Railway (NAI, OPW, 'Railways' 5873 - 19); Also IRC, p. 188, questions 17940-17942, evidence of George Shanahan, assistant secretary, Board of Works.

In addition to this confusion, Mr Edward Thompson, ex-M.P. for North Monaghan, who had a special interest in railways gave evidence to the Irish Railway Commission in 1907. He stated:

It is the worst railway in the whole world without any exception. I have travelled on it and suffered great inconvenience and discomfort upon it. In fact it is a perfect anachronism. It is a proprietary railway and every inconvenience that can be caused to the public, both in the conveyance of goods and of passengers, is caused by that railway – dirty carriages, not lighted, bad stations, underpaid officials, especially engine-drivers, the worst sort of coal burned, the sanitary arrangements at stations abominable, no sanitary accommodation in the railway carriages while the railway station in Derry is simply like an ordinary rough cowshed. I have experienced myself no end of breakdowns, stuck in a bog for hours with no chance of catching trains.²

On 15 March 1907, John Sweeney, a prominent Burtonport merchant, voiced many criticisms to the Irish Railways Commission in blaming the Burtonport Extension for the failures of many aspects of life in northwest Donegal.

We have large quantities of herring, salmon and other fish and shellfish and we consider that we are not fairly treated by the Irish railways in getting through rates by sea to London. The rate from Wick (in Scotland) to London, twice the distance of Burtonport to London is three pence less per cwt. for small lots and six pence less for lots over 3 cwt. than the Burtonport rate The fish workers are a poor class of people. The principal people who migrate are the female population who become experts in the way of packing and curing and they go as far as Shetland in Scotland from Burtonport and as far as Berwick and Wick in the north of Scotland and to all the fishing ports. They take them in preference to the Scotch girls for the purpose of curing The fish curers should be encouraged to employ these girls by giving them cheap rates on the railway. The Lough Swilly Company has refused to give this concession. They make a slight concession if about half a dozen or ten harvesters go together. Singly,

² IRC, pp 121-125, evidence of Edward Thompson.

they give them no concession. In the case of the girls, three is the smallest number and sometimes they go as many as fifty.³ ... Their (L&LSR) inefficient and bad service deters English people from travelling on the line. They have got such a name all over England that people are deterred from travelling by it. English people come here for a holiday but not to be left on the road or in the middle of a bog.⁴ We have the best granite in the world, red granite and grey, and all colours and it is an industry that requires to be fostered. We have made an application to get the railway to take stone from the quarries, which are about a stone's throw from the Dungloe railway station to the sea at Burtonport, a distance of two miles and the charge is sixpence a ton and to make our own siding and supply our own wagons. That was not very encouraging.⁵

C. McVeigh, M.P. for Donegal East stated in parliament on 6 March 1907 that 'passengers travelling on the line are in a state of trepidation until they get off it'. He asked for an enquiry but got little satisfaction.⁶

However, such stagnation was not the case on the line itself for it continued its wayward progress getting its passengers shifted in whichever way was necessary, much to Allely's chagrin, as he informed his masters that the 9.15 up train from Burtonport arrived in Letterkenny on 23 July 1907 with all the compartments in the carriages overcrowded to suffocation. Owing to no extra carriages being available at Letterkenny two goods wagons were attached to the train in which passengers were compelled to travel to Derry without even being provided with seating accommodation. Scottish visitors returning after the holidays were blamed for causing the overcrowding.⁷ When confronted with this accusation the L&LSR manager was 'unable to find that any overcrowding occurred'. On 26 August 1906 William Harkin of Creeslough wrote to the Board of Works:

³ IRC, p. 89, evidence of John Sweeney.

⁴ IRC, p. 90, evidence of John Sweeney.

⁵ IRC, p. 91, evidence of John Sweeney.

⁶ *Hansard 4* (Commons) 1907, clxx, 768 (6 March 1907).

⁷ 'Complaints re. the working of the railway 1907-19', (NAI, OPW 'Railways', The Burtonport Railway, 5873-190).

I was expecting four gentlemen from Oldham here yesterday by midday. They did not arrive in Derry until after the departure of the midday train and were obliged to wait for the last train due here at 8 o'clock p.m. The engine broke down at Kilmacrenan station; they were detained 4½ hours in the midst of the bleak bog and did not arrive until 12.30 last night or rather this morning. They were cold and hungry and in very bad humour with the Burtonport extension.⁸

In addition to the usual flow of complaints about transport on the Burtonport Extension, James F. O'Donnell, J.P., hotel proprietor and prominent businessman from Burtonport and a member of Glenties Rural District Council, added to the condemnation when he said that he considered the railway was most unsatisfactory in the years since its opening in 1903 until 1907.

We have many reasons of complaint. The first year that the railway opened the receipts at my hotel exceeded what I have received for the last four years. We had tourist traffic, excursion tourists and all those have turned their backs by reason of the bad reports they have heard of the railway. The first year they travelled by that line they had ample time to get out at some stations and kill a salmon or two while the engine was being got ready to go on again...⁹

Though O'Donnell was speaking about his own personal problems in the above quotation, the number of complaints which were made to the Irish Railway Commission (IRC) in 1907 and the ongoing press coverage of dissatisfaction with the railway illustrate that he was not alone in his unhappiness. The same gentleman brought up a very sore point among the fishing community in Donegal when he told the IRC that fish coming from England or Scotland could reach Letterkenny almost as cheaply as fish coming from Burtonport although Burtonport was only forty-nine miles away. There were further complaints about the cost of railway tickets for

⁸ *DP*, 16 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

⁹ IRC, p. 166. Evidence of James F. O'Donnell.

migrant workers. A father and son could travel from Burtonport to Derry by rail on their way to earn a livelihood in Scotland for 3s. 3d. but his daughter going to the gutting in Scotland had to pay 5s. 8d. for the same journey.¹⁰

O'Donnell's disappointment with the railway was further expressed when he told the IRC that he thought the only party that has derived any benefit from the railway was the railway company. He had lived all his life in Donegal and the only benefit that the Donegal man has derived from it was the fact that he was in out of the rain.¹¹

On 15 January 1908, the Falcarragh traders sent in a petition 'to draw the attention of the 'Commission on Irish Railways' to the many and frequent irregularities in the working of the Burtonport and Letterkenny Railway'. The traders of Dungloe, Dunfanaghy and Creeslough forwarded similar petitions.¹² Despite this barrage of criticism, nothing seemed to move officialdom to act and the normal service prevailed with the L&LSR management seemingly oblivious to all the criticism. Indeed Robert Todd, solicitor for the L&LSR, presented the completely opposite opinion of the railway when he told the IRC that the railway had been of enormous benefit to the people. He had been going to Donegal for the last thirty years, practically every year, and the hovels that appeared to be a disgrace to the whole countryside had now practically disappeared from the seaboard areas. The life of the people had enormously improved as well. Fisheries were developing to a very great extent and agricultural industry had also been developed and improved. The housing of the people and the condition of the people altogether had been changed. Todd continued: 'I think it is the only part of Ireland where there is an increase [in population]

¹⁰ IRC, p. 165, evidence of James F. O'Donnell.

¹¹ IRC, p. 167, evidence of James F. O'Donnell.

¹² IRC, appendix no. 15, p. 423.

and it is largely owing, in my opinion, to the construction of these lines of railway'.¹³

By 1909 the situation was getting worse. Hugh Law, M.P. for West Donegal stated in parliament that

boxes of fresh herring for Belfast, Manchester, Glasgow, and other places, were left behind at Cashelnagor Station owing to want of wagons; that these boxes remained there for two days and were consequently unsaleable when they reached their different markets; that on the [23 November] a load of dead pigs intended for the first train to Derry was refused transport and had to be taken away; that on the night of [22 November] the last train to Burtonport broke down and the passengers were forced to remain in the carriages which [were] without any heating arrangements, till next morning; that on [23 November] a number of men - several of them were on their way from Scotland - were unable to travel on the 11.30 a.m. train and were informed that they must wait until the 5 p.m. train, there not being sufficient accommodation in the carriages.¹⁴

On top of the problems on the railway itself there was little development of the natural resources which had promised much. The attempts to produce granite products or initiate other local industries had been a failure but the railway was hardly to blame. James Sweeney, a local businessman, lost £1,000 by investing in a company which intended to develop granite products and make the district the envy of Aberdeen but it all came to nothing. A load was shipped out from time to time by sea but lack of investment capital and the reluctance or inability of the Congested Districts Board to invest the vast sums required for initial development left the granite in the ground.¹⁵ The Burtonport railway and the L&LSR were both blamed for not co-operating with the proposed development and were further blamed for not quoting much lower prices for carriage but, in reality, without substantial funds to open up the quarries, there was never

¹³ IRC, pp 58 - 59, evidence of Robert H. Todd, solicitor, representing the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce.

¹⁴ *Hansard 5* (Commons), xiii, 603 (3 December 1909), Hugh Law's statement.

¹⁵ Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland, *Second Report*, pp 113-116, evidence of James Sweeney.

much chance of their success and the railway became an easy target of blame. The Muckish sand, Dunlewey marble, Falmore soapstone, Keeldrum silver, Falcarragh bog ore and the Gartan woods all remained untouched. Only the Churchill soapstone was in production by 1910.¹⁶

On 9 November 1909 Allely reported to the Board of Works:

The Lough Swilly Company's signalman at Letterkenny Station has gone over to the [CDR] Joint Committee on 7th instant to a similar position at their Letterkenny Station. He has been replaced in the signal cabin by a local boy named Thos. Gallagher who is only about 17 years of age and who had been knocking about the station for some time picking up a knowledge of the clerical duties, so that he would be qualified if a vacancy arose, but had left a short time ago as the prospect of a situation was bad.

When the signalman tendered his resignation Gallagher was sent for and put into the cabin to learn his duties, so that he could take over charge from the signalman. He is a fairly intelligent boy and at present giving satisfaction, but owing to his youth and short experience for such an important position, I consider it advisable to bring the matter under the notice of the Board, not with the view of having the boy removed but in case of an accident.

I understand that the new signalman's wages have been fixed at 12s. per week, although his predecessors were paid from 15s. to 20s. per week, presumably, this is owing to the present signalman's youth, and they may be increased as the boy matures.¹⁷

The Board of Works objected strongly to the L&LSR which replied:

This man is a promising learner and works under the supervision of the head porter. It is obviously impractical to get a ready-made signalman at a place like Letterkenny.

But Gallagher did not remain 'promising' for very long. On 25 June 1912 the *Londonderry Sentinel* reported:

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'Complaints re. the working of the railway, 1907-19', (NAI, OPW 'Railways', The Burtonport Railway, 5873-19).

RAILWAY SIGNALMAN CHARGED

At a special court in Letterkenny on Saturday evening, a youth named Thomas Gallagher, signalman at the Lough Swilly railway station, Letterkenny, was charged before Dr Thomas Patterson, J.P. with having broken in to the waiting hall and Messrs Eason and Sons, bookstall, and stealing a sum of money, Messrs Eason's property.

Miss Patterson, who has charge of the bookstall at the Lough Swilly Railway Station deposed to missing a sum of 2*s.* 7*d.* on Friday morning.

[Miss Patterson] had a conversation with the defendant and Mr Bell, stationmaster, in the office of the latter, about the missing money during which she said, 'Tommy, I know this has been going on for twelve months'. Gallagher replied, 'No, only for three weeks when I found the key on the platform'. Accused said if nothing was said about it the money would be paid back. She had lost in all during the year about £23....

He was remanded on bail.¹⁸

Allely reported on 26 June 1912 that Thomas Gallagher was arrested in Derry while absconding to Glasgow. He was tried at Lifford. 'He pleaded guilty on 12 July 1912 and was sentenced to nine months imprisonment with hard labour. A man named McConnell who was formerly a porter replaced him'.¹⁹

Despite all the condemnations, the Burtonport Extension brought the people on their pilgrimages to Doon Well, to Féis Thír Chonaill, to the band parades, to AOH celebrations, to the hiring fairs and on excursions to Burtonport, Letterkenny and Buncrana on Sundays with their bands and music.²⁰

And the railway brought new inventions to the northwest in the form of slot machines located at the stations along the line which, however, led young boys astray as the *Derry People* reported in 1910.

¹⁸ *LS*, 12 June 1912.

¹⁹ 'Complaints re. the railway, 1907-1919', (NAI, OPW 'Railways', The Burtonport Railway, 5873-19).

²⁰ *DP*, 16 July 1910.

At Dunfanaghy Petty Sessions on Saturday before G. B. Butler, R.M. and other magistrates Sergeant Keenan summoned two young lads named Francis Kelly and Manus M'Laughlin for attempting to steal from the automatic sweetmeat machine at Creeslough Railway station, sweetmeats the property of the Automatic Delivery Company Ltd., Dublin. The fathers of the boys were also summoned in connection with the offences.

John M'Clintock, stationmaster at Creeslough stated that a sweetmeat machine was opened on 18 January (1910). When the collector for the company inspected the machine on 16 February he found a loss of £1 5s. This was accounted for by the fact that bad coins and lead had been put in. From 16 February till 8 March, 119 lead pieces made to the shape of pennies were put in the slot.

Manus M'Laughlin, examined, said he was at the station with other boys on 12 March. He saw the defendant, Francis Kelly put three coins in the automatic machine and getting out three bars of butterscotch.

Constable M'Dermott stated that he was at the station on 12 March in plain clothes. He went into the ladies waiting room and watched the automatic machine. He saw Kelly and M'Laughlin there. Kelly went out and asked if there were 'any of the black boys about,' meaning the police. He then came back to the machine. [His father] Charles M'Laughlin said that no one belonging to him was ever accused of theft and he did not think the taking of butterscotch could be called stealing.

Mr Ingram, J.P., said he thought the facts disclosed were a disgrace to Creeslough.

The chairman said the magistrates thought the fathers of the boys did not look after them properly. The parents would have to pay a fine of 10s. each and they would also have to pay the value of all the sweetmeats taken. He hoped it would be a lesson to the parents to look after their children and he further reminded them that the statute authorized the whipping of boys for the offences for which the defendants were convicted and this course would be taken into consideration in any similar cases brought forward.²¹

In northwest Donegal soccer was too deeply embedded to concede much to the Gaelic Athletic Association [GAA] in the early years of the

²¹ DP, 2 April 1910.

century. Strenuous efforts were made in 1905 to establish the GAA organization in the county but, by 1909, the effort had petered out in the northwest without having achieved any success.²² In northwest Donegal the people preferred to congregate in large crowds to watch local sides like Keadue Rovers or see Dark Roseleen from Gweedore beat Dunlewey 3 - 0 at soccer on Middletown Strand before about 500 spectators.²³ While other counties were organized in Gaelic football by 1905, it was a source of shame for Gaelic enthusiasts in Donegal that the 'association game flourished without a hint of interference from the native version'.²⁴ It was in the much-changed national circumstances of 1919 before the Gaelic game started to become established on a firmer footing in Donegal and, even then, it always faced an uphill struggle to survive in the Irish speaking regions of the northwest, to which the seasonal migrants had brought home the soccer culture from watching Hibernians of Edinburgh, Glasgow Celtic and Dundee, the Catholic, 'Irish' clubs in Scotland.

Of more positive significance, however, was the railway's contribution to the development of the Irish language in the area which was being continuously integrated into an ever-changing Ireland where Gaelic language and games were being heavily promoted. The Gaelic literary enthusiasts found the fountain of their spirit in the remote, isolated areas such as northwest Donegal. Dáil Uladh was founded in 1905 to drive the Irish language movement in the northern counties and, a year later, its members opened a new Irish college in Gortahork, about one mile from Cashelnagor railway station, a factor that played no little part in its location there.²⁵ Adult students, mainly national teachers, could now travel by train from all parts of Ulster to Gortahork to learn the 'pure tongue' from the 'professors' who taught there. Many of the teaching staff, such as Carl

²² The GAA received little mention in CICMR reports between 1905 and 1918. By 1919 only seven clubs with 189 members were recorded for the whole county (CI Monthly Report, Co. Donegal, Oct. 1919 (CO 904/110).

²³ *DP*, 14 May 1910, p. 7.

²⁴ *DP*, 4 Mar. 1905, p.1. Article by Séamus McManus.

²⁵ *DP*, 2 July 1910.

Hardebeck, Séamus Ó Searcaigh, Eoin Mac Néill, Professor O'Nowlan and Úna Ni Fhearghailigh were indeed employed as lecturers in various universities and their involvement with the Irish language movement conferred a dignity and respect on it which would have been difficult to obtain otherwise. Storytelling, sean nós singing, local accent, idioms, phrases and sayings gained a whole new and deferential audience and the seanchaí achieved elevated status never previously bestowed on him. After all, great men and women from the universities and the institutes of learning came to listen attentively to his every word. As well as the financial gain which accrued to the area, the adult students mixed with the local population, in particular the local teachers and exchanged ideas with them about many aspects of Irish life and especially the Irish Ireland which would soon come.

Roger Casement, Sean McDermott and Pádraig Pearse were deeply involved in the Gortahork College and enthusiastically joined in the promotion of the language locally.²⁶ In 1910 Roger Casement had given £11 towards the best bilingual schools in the parishes of Cloughaneely and Gweedore as he had done in previous years.²⁷ Pearse spent part of the summers of 1906, 1907 and 1914 in northwest Donegal and visited many of the national schools of Cloughaneely, the Rosses and Gweedore and spoke to the pupils but, more especially, to the teachers and then held organized public meetings at night to present his vision of the new independent Irish Ireland of the future.²⁸ It is probable that it was from these meetings that Joe Sweeney, later to become a key member of the independence struggle in Donegal, became a pupil of Pearse at St Enda's School in Rathfarnham. It is significant that the bilingual policy in local schools advanced so rapidly during these years that school reports indicated in 1910 that 80 of 130 schools in northwest Donegal 'give [Gaelic]

²⁶ Gerry McLaughlin, *Cloughaneely*, pp 203 - 207.

²⁷ *DP*, 16 July 1910, p. 7.

²⁸ P. J. McGill, 'Patrick Pearse in Donegal' in *Donegal Annual*, vol. 3, 1966, p. 67.

language instruction because the teachers have adopted the gospel of the revival and believe that such teaching devolves on them as a duty to their country'. The schools' inspector, Mr Little, added to this statement, 'mark these last words, "duty to country"'.²⁹ Year after year, the Burtonport train brought the language enthusiasts to Cashelnagor for the summer months to imbibe the language and culture from the pure and untainted source which would nourish the Gaelic Ireland when it came.

A decision of the senate of the National University to make Irish compulsory for matriculation from 1913 onward rendered it practically certain that, henceforth, Irish would be taught in most secondary schools throughout the country, thereby further enhancing the Gaeltacht's position.³⁰ The national cultural movement was afoot and Cloughaneely was close to its core. The students there were exposed to a broad spectrum of political and cultural ideals and even had the unique privilege and pleasure in September 1911 in listening to 'the eloquent, spirited and splendidly delivered address of Emily Pankhurst, the undaunted and indomitable advocate of women's rights', which 'was a eulogium of the Irish Ireland movement and of the unflinching fight which had been and is still being waged by the Gaelic League for the securing of its ideals'.³¹

But it was not just Pankhurst, Pearse or Casement that travelled on the Burtonport railway to the remote regions with new ideas. George Russell (AE) came to Dungloe to help form a branch of the Co-operative Agricultural Bank in 1904. In 1905 the borrowing power of the society was increased from £200 to £400 and it was agreed that all cheques would be written in Irish 'if the IAOS agreed'. The bank functioned much the same as a modern day credit union. The savings of the members, augmented by limited bank borrowings, were given at a reasonable rate to members'

²⁹ *DP*, 9 July 1910, p. 1.

³⁰ *DP*, 2 July 1910, p. 2.

³¹ *DP*, 23 Sept. 1911, p. 1.

projects deemed worthwhile. It operated according to the strict rules of the IAOS.³²

Mr Shaw from the IAOS later came in 1906 to help Paddy the Cope Gallagher establish the Templecrone Co-operative and Agricultural Society.³³ Patrick Bolger wrote of its beginning as follows:

The Templecrone Co-operative Agricultural Society had its beginning with fourteen farmers, each contributing half a crown. By the time the society was registered, the membership had risen to sixty-five with a total share capital of £10 Somewhat illegally he [Gallagher] contrived to have a tiny cargo of super phosphate from the IAWS shipped to Burtonport, a few cwt. for himself and some neighbours for their small patches of potatoes and oats. The price attracted them to buy twice as much as they had bought previously, 7s. 5d. per cwt. compared to the merchants' price of 12s. 6d.³⁴

The (Templecrone) society later affiliated with the Cooperative Union in Manchester. This affiliation legitimized the society's trading in groceries putting it on a similar footing as all Rochdale-style retail shops in Britain. The arrangement saved the IAOS some embarrassment since Gallagher continued to claim IAOS support and guidance for the 'agricultural' side of his business.³⁵

The Cope³⁶ progressed to become one of the most successful in the country and played a major part in the destruction of organized gombeenism and merchant monopolies in northwest Donegal by forming a co-operative 1906 to buy fertilizer and manures much cheaper from co-operative sources than from the established shopocracy and expanded further by taking control of the eggs, butter and knitting businesses by which the trading community had controlled the household budgets of the poorer classes in the locality for many years.³⁷ Horace Plunkett and Fr

³² DP, 15 Apr. 1905, p. 8.

³³ Paddy the Cope was its president and driving force for many years.

³⁴ Patrick Bolger, *The Irish cooperative movement – its history and development* (Dublin, 1977), p. 241.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

³⁶ Members could not pronounce co-operative so the word 'cope' was accepted. The name is still used.

³⁷ Patrick Gallagher, *My story, Paddy the Cope* (reprint, Tralee, 1979), pp.78-118.

Tom Finlay, S.J., both occupying major positions in the IAOS³⁸ and in the co-operative movement, visited the northwest and played an active part in establishing the co-operatives there. Very soon the Templecrone Cope was engaged in the full range of grocery, hardware, feeding stuffs, manures, fertilizers, furniture and farm implements as well as the egg and knitting trade. They later set up sub-branches throughout the Rosses and developed into a major business in the northwest. Sales for the year 1909 were over £8,219 and 75 per cent of these sales were to non-members. Net profit for the year was £330 15s. 10d. and the dividend paid was two shillings in the pound.³⁹ By 1917, the humble co-op in the Rosses was the third biggest agricultural society in Ireland. Its turnover of £56,000 was exceeded only by Lisburn and Enniscorthy.⁴⁰

The success of the 'Cope' would hardly have been possible in those early years without the Burtonport Extension which carried its orders to the local stations and brought its exports away. In the days before the railway the prominent merchants held control of all the steamers entering Burtonport or Bunbeg as well as the cartage system operating on the roads and it would have been very difficult for the new co-operative to receive any favours from such an embittered opposition which often included the clergy among its most fervent members.⁴¹ The Burtonport Extension suffered many threats from these established businesses in the Rosses during these early years because it refused to abandon the carrying of goods for the Templecrone Co-operative. Paddy the Cope's bold co-operative initiatives which ran contrary to established practices threatened to destabilise the existing balance of economy, influence and power held by the business elements in the northwest.⁴² When the railway was in trouble

³⁸ IAOS: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society.

³⁹ *DJ*, 11 May 1910, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Bolger, *The Irish co-operative movement*, p. 242.

⁴¹ Gallagher, *My story*, p. 101.

⁴² Gallagher, *My story*, pp 101-102.

in later years, many of these same businessmen were willing and enthusiastic in bringing about its downfall.⁴³

This was a period when the clergy were still increasing their activity and influence in the management of politics in the northwest between 1900 and 1915. Their vehicles of political control were the United Irish League [UIL] and the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) which was, by far, the dominant organisation in Donegal especially after it was set free from a church ban in 1904⁴⁴ which action allowed many of the clergy to join its ranks despite the reservations of Cardinal Logue that it was 'an organized system of blackguardism'.⁴⁵ The more moderate Board of Erin AOH dominated throughout Donegal from that date onward though a few branches of the Irish American Alliance (IAA) continued to exist though the County Inspector of the RIC listed the IAA as a secret society from 1904 onwards.⁴⁶ But the two branches were very antagonistic towards each other. At Killybegs, in September 1910, a pitched battle was fought through the streets between the two factions with the priests and police trying to make peace between them.⁴⁷

In northwest Donegal the UIL and AOH were closely bound up with each other and with the clergy who still managed to retain control of both organizations and determine the spheres of influence within the communities through the parish committees, the Congested Districts Board, of which the bishop of Raphoe, Dr O'Donnell, was a member and further, through their strong alliances with the prominent merchant classes and shopocracy which enabled them to regulate the magistracy, the local economy, the positions on rural district and county council, the boards of guardians, the selection of political candidates for Westminster and the

⁴³ *DJ*, 26 May 1911, p.8.

⁴⁴ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Jan. 1892 (CO 904/48).

⁴⁵ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988) p. 433.

⁴⁶ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Jan. 1909 (CO 904/77).

⁴⁷ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Sept. 1910 (CO 904/82).

thought-processes of local society.⁴⁸ Canon James McFadden who had left Gweedore and became parish priest of Glenties, was the district chairman, treasurer and national delegate for the UIL and was also an AOH member of considerable standing. At a meeting in Glenties in 1905 he praised the AOH for their stand in backing the UIL as the permanent authority on national politics in Ireland.⁴⁹

But it would be wrong to see the vast AOH or the smaller UIL as powerful political movements for the truth was that there was little public interest in actual politics in Donegal during the 1890s or in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ The AOH was a populist movement for the ordinary people. Colour, music, street-theatre and rousing oratory were still the magnets to hold the throngs which were facilitated in their travel arrangements by the railway network throughout the county. On Lady's Day, 15 August 1910, Letterkenny was the gathering point for 16,000 nationalists and Hibernians from all over Donegal.⁵¹ Representatives, many accompanied by their fife and drum bands, from Burtonport, Aranmore, Annagry, Gweedore, Falcarragh, Dunfanaghy, Gartan, Lettermacaward and Creeslough were carried on the Burtonport Extension to be present at the magnificent theatrical spectacle in front of the prominent clerical figures of the diocese.⁵² The clergy could congratulate themselves on the progress achieved during recent years as when Canon McFadden addressed a monster UIL meeting in Glenties in June 1910 and told the audience,

when they remembered the conditions under which they lived thirty years ago and contrasted them with the condition of things today, they knew the advantage of the IPP. [Irish Parliamentary Party]. Today, most of the people were masters

⁴⁸ Gallagher, *My story*, chapters 8 and 9.

⁴⁹ *DP*, 26 Aug. 1905, p. 8.

⁵⁰ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Sept. 1909 (CO 904/79).

⁵¹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Aug. 1910 (CO 904/81).

⁵² *DP*, 20 Aug. 1910, p. 5.

of their own land and power was there to acquire the land of unreasonable landlords who would not sell voluntarily (cheers).⁵³

Hugh Law M.P. for West Donegal said the land act of 1909 with its compulsory powers in congested counties was worth fifty of Mr Wyndhams 1903 land act. Then he asked: 'And what have we on the other side? Old age pensions, workmen's insurance against sickness, unemployment benefits, and labour exchanges'.⁵⁴ While the stage party congratulated themselves on their achievements, it is only fair to admit that all of these concessions, especially the old age pension, made a telling impact on society in northwest Donegal which had been generally short of money and 'has been an immense boon to many poor, feeble old people'.⁵⁵ To the people in the minor positions their betters were achieving great advances for them.

Though Bishop O'Donnell was the leading figure of Donegal politics through his position on the Congested Districts Board,⁵⁶ his close association with John Dillon, and his high position in the UIL at national level where he was often quoted in the press and was recognised as a national figure in Irish politics, the driving force of Irish nationalism in the northwest was Canon James McFadden, the 'patriot priest of Gweedore' but since 1901, parish priest of Glenties. His astute linkage of landlordism, - 'There is no place in Ireland where landlordism was clinging so hard to its ill-gotten property as in West Donegal'⁵⁷ - evictions, fair rents, estate sales and the dream of Home Rule, together with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the various land acts made him an inspiring and charismatic leader, easily straddling the worlds of religion and politics in instilling the vision of the new Irish Ireland which lay ahead within certain grasp. He

⁵³ *DP*, 4 June 1910, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *DP*, 4 June 1910, p. 2.

⁵⁵ CI Monthly Reports, County Donegal, Jan. 1909 (CO 904/77).

⁵⁶ Significantly Bishop O'Donnell never attended a CDB meeting held in Dublin Castle during all his years as a member.

⁵⁷ *DP*, 4 Jan. 1910, p. 8.

had able support from many other strong priests of the diocese who linked local and national aspirations in their pursuit of the new vision. At a UIL meeting in Termon in 1911, resolutions passed expressed confidence in the Irish National Party under John Redmond, backing for Donegal M.P. Hugh Law's re-election and support for the constitutional struggle 'not forgetting the evicted tenants'. The House of Lords was condemned as the hereditary foe, home rule was said to 'be well to the front', but 'home rule alone would not create opulence'. McFadden told his people that, 'this can only be achieved by the merchant, the farmer, and all the professions and classes going to work with renewed courage'.⁵⁸ Such were the admonishments to the better elements of local society who were seen as the protagonists and eventual upholders of the nationalist Ireland and the new independence which would soon be won from the British government. Having been sanctified in his earlier days as the 'patriot priest of Gweedore' and the saviour of the evicted and downtrodden tenants, McFadden had the added bonus that he never transgressed upon the aspirations or practices of the merchant community or the emerging middle classes in Donegal society and it was the members of this latter community who, allied with the clergy, formed the backbone of the AOH and UIL in Donegal and produced the public representatives for rural district councils, local guardians and county council elections.⁵⁹ The County Inspector wrote in his September report 1909:

There is reason to fear that, in this county, Hibernianism is making its influence felt in the various constitutional institutions such as trial by jury, the granting and withholding of contracts, etc., etc'.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *DP*, 7 Jan. 1911, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Soggarth aroon and gombeen priest: Canon James McFadden (1842-1917)' in Gerard Moran (ed.) *Radical Irish priests 1660-1970* (Dublin, 2002).

⁶⁰ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Sept. 1909 (CO 904/79).

The lower orders paraded with their bands, carried the banners and provided the street theatre for the great occasions but their influence was kept firmly under the control of their betters.⁶¹

But despite great political ambition and religious advancement, ordinary people still had to travel and reach their destinations in the course of ordinary business. But many discovered that all the old problems were still extant on the Burtonport Extension in 1910 and passengers still had to spend nights in the mountains. Before Lord Chief Baron at Derry Assizes the L&LSR appealed against an award of £20 granted to James Reynolds, commercial traveller, Derry, for personal injuries sustained on 22 November 1909. Reynold's case was that, while on a journey to Burtonport, the train broke down between Kilmacrenan and Creeslough and a relief engine brought it back to the former station. Plaintiff and another traveller remained in the carriage and the train was shunted to a siding until the morning. On leaving the compartment during the night Reynolds stepped out in the dark in the belief that the siding was level with the platform and fell into a hole, injuring an ankle as a result of which he was laid up for three weeks. It was contended that the L&LSR was negligent in not having a light in the place in addition to the light in the compartment. The Lord Chief Baron said that, as there was no lavatory accommodation in the carriage, he thought it must be presumed that there would be a need for the occupants to alight during the night and he considered that there was an obligation on the railway company to have a light there. He affirmed the decree for £20.⁶²

The rows between the L&LSR and the Board of Works continued to simmer for more years until eventually, the Vice-Regal Commission on Irish Railways which sat from 1906 until 1910 took the matter in hand. Its chairman, Sir Charles Scotter, after hearing the evidence of both sides in

⁶¹ Mac Suibhne, 'Soggarth aroon, p. 183.

⁶² *DP*, 2 April 1910.

the continuous dispute, offered himself as mediator to each party and after secret negotiations, an agreement was reached on 3 June 1909. The main terms of the agreement, called the 'Scotter Settlement' were that the Board of Works would pay the L&LSR the total amount of the outstanding balance of the expenses properly and necessarily incurred in respect of promotion, engineering and land valuation which had been incurred by the L&LSR in connection with the Burtonport and Carndonagh Railways more than a decade previously. The Board of Works would contribute £2,000 towards the cost of erecting a running shed at Derry in respect of the purposes of the Burtonport Extension, instead of on lands belonging to that Extension, 'the company to give an undertaking that the amount so contributed shall be refunded to the Board if, at any time, the Burtonport line should pass out of the hands of the Company'. The Board of Works would also pay £7,000 for additional rolling stock for the Burtonport line. Provision was made for an extra crossing place for trains and water supply at Kilmacrenan, with the costs, not exceeding £1,500, to be met out of the surplus receipts of the Burtonport railway to which the Treasury and the L&LSR were each entitled to half. Sanitation and heating at all stations on the Burtonport Railway were to be upgraded, the money for these to come out of surplus receipts. Five gate lodges for the protection of accommodation crossings were to be erected from the surplus receipts. A new station would be erected at Meenbanad, to be named Kincasslagh Road, midway between Crolly and Dungloe Road stations, previously asked for by the L&LSR, in connection with the fishing industry at Gortnasade in Kincasslagh. All surplus lands on the Burtonport and Carndonagh Railways were to be sold and used to effect improvements or purchase equipment on the Burtonport Extension, when required.⁶³

After the disagreements of so many years the L&LSR were happy with the 'Scotter Settlement' for they felt that many of their grievances had,

⁶³ Patterson, *The Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 66.

Fig. 35 Kincasslagh and Downings ports



Source: Flaunders, The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway

at last, been justly upheld. They spent part of the £7,000 on two new Hawthorn Leslie engines, 4 – 6 – 2T,⁶⁴ designed by the L&LSR engineers to suit the specific requirements of the Burtonport Extension, at a cost of £4,100. These were numbered 13 and 14 and were equipped with increased water capacity to overcome the problem of water scarcity on the line. However, this water capacity made them top heavy with a high centre of gravity which caused them to roll on the line at high speed giving the crew an uncomfortable run. They also proved to be poor steamers and were very heavy on coal. Two fish vans and twenty-seven wagons were purchased for £2,705. The remaining £195 was spent on the provision of acetylene lighting in carriages. The additional rolling stock was put on the line during March and April 1910. It was anticipated that the new rolling stock would facilitate the summer fishing season and that the merchants involved in the fishing industry would, at last, have no grounds for complaint.⁶⁵

But the fishing industry of the northwest coast was beginning to suffer from greater problems by 1910 than from poor service from the railway. Once more, the lack of co-ordinated, long-term policy by the Congested Districts Board was central to the problem. Since the Board's inception in 1891 the dispersal of small grants over wide areas to keep local communities happy remained the general policy. Many slipways and piers had been built around the coast and small boats were made available to the fishing communities through grants and loans.⁶⁶ The great shoals of herring and mackerel that entered the Donegal coastal waters during the years around the turn of the century made fishing available to the cottiers along the shore.

⁶⁴ These 4 – 6 – 2 T engines had 4 leading bogey wheels, six driving wheels and two trailing wheels and were tank engines e.g. the water was contained in the tank of the engine and not in a tender following the engine.

⁶⁵ Patterson, *The Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ CDB, annual reports 1892 - 1923. These detail the investments made.

However, by 1905 the industry was changing and bigger boats were coming from Scotland and England to the fishing grounds and lifting large takes of herring. As a consequence, the CDB built and developed two deep-sea ports at Gortnasade,⁶⁷ Kincasslagh in the Rosses and at Downings on the Rossguill Peninsula in 1906-7(fig. 37). Astonishingly, both ports were far removed from the Burtonport Extension, the only conveyance to the markets which omission added greatly to the inconvenience and cost of fish exports. Within a short time the availability of these deep-sea ports and the plentiful shoals of herring attracted the massive steam drifters from the Scottish and English fleets to the Donegal coast where they scooped up the shoals of herring in the deep water and brought them into the newly built deep-sea ports where their own organised buyers were waiting. This had the effect of diminishing the markets for smaller catches being landed at other ports along the shore and even the established Burtonport which a few years earlier had 400 boats fishing there, now had to give way to Gortnasade, a few miles further north.⁶⁸

The *Derry People* reported in May 1910 that there were seven fish-curers then operating at Gortnasade and several others were expected during the week. Carters and gutters were again busy, the former carting

Fig. 36 Growth of herring fishing in Downings.⁶⁹

| Year | Cran taken | Value |
|------|------------|---------|
| 1911 | 20,104 | £17,822 |
| 1910 | 17,949 | £16,581 |
| 1909 | 8,957 | £11,196 |
| 1908 | 5,721 | £9,226. |

Source: *DJ*, 27 Feb. 1911, p. 2.

⁶⁷ The fishing port at Gortnasade is commonly named Kincasslagh. It is one mile from the village of Kincasslagh.

⁶⁸ Pat Conaghan, *The Zulu fishermen* (Killybegs, 2003) p. 230. This book provides a year by year account from 1890 to 1913 of the fishing industry on the Donegal coast.

⁶⁹ *DJ*, 27 Feb. 1911, p. 2.

the fish to be cured and gutted by the latter. On the previous Saturday six steam-drifters arrived and it was a beautiful scene to witness the fishing fleet steam in with their long line of smoke disappearing behind them. 'Scenes of activity were visible as the fleet arrived at the pier with their catches of silver-coloured herring sparkling in the summer sun'.⁷⁰

Before long the Scottish and English fleets were in control of the fishing industry around the Donegal coast because the early arrival of the herring in Donegal filled an important gap in their timetable before they returned home to enjoy the later herring season in the North Sea. The international buyers came with these fleets and departed with them when fishing switched to Scotland and the North Sea again. The implications of such a takeover were not lost on some as was reported in the *Derry People* in 1910.

The benefits of the herring fishing, so prosperous and remunerative in late years, have been reaped by the owners of Scotch and English steam-drifters who have the advantage of more modern machinery. Foreign trawlers have invaded our coasts and have done their work of destruction remarkably well. They [local men] must eventually join the number of the migratory harvestmen who have gone to Scotland during the past fortnight from this part of Donegal as there is no prospect of a livelihood on shore.⁷¹

The Congested Districts Board was also aware of the Scottish and English manipulation in the Donegal waters but they felt powerless to do much about it as their secretary, William Micks, admitted.

The arrival of British steam drifters in fleets to the Donegal herring fishing a few years before the European war broke out made it impossible for the local motor boats and sailing boats to compete with the large, fast steam-drifters, over 200 of which visited Donegal at the same time. The Board was therefore urged

⁷⁰ *DP*, 21 May 1910, p. 5.

⁷¹ *DP*, 25 June 1910, p. 7.

to purchase and to hand over to local crews steam-drifters with herring nets. Even if it had been good policy to take the risk of such an adventurous plunge the funds of the Board were not sufficient for such an exceedingly heavy outlay. It was a question which affected the Donegal fishermen only, as the herrings of Mayo, Galway, Kerry and Cork were not, as a rule, of such attractive quality for curing The bitter disappointment of the Donegal fishermen at having to compete with steam vessels is not too difficult to realize. After some years of prosperous fishing in their sailing boats they found, after repeated trials, that it was useless for the sailing boats to continue to fish. At night the lights of the British steam-drifters looked like a twinkling town at sea, while, in the morning, the price of cran upon cran of Irish coast herrings went exclusively into the pockets of the British fishermen. The Irish fishermen could only grin and bear it. I suppose it is to their credit that they did bear it.⁷²

While they could do little but tolerate such power of commercial enterprise, the feelings engendered created a further indication that the only source of wealth developed locally was once again being snapped from their grasp by the British.

The first Irish steam drifter purchased by the CDB arrived at Downings in 1911 but it was too late for operations during that fishing season. The entire Scotch fleet had sailed for home to take part in the Shetland and east coast fishing. By June 1911 there were widespread reports that the summer fishing in Downings had been a 'complete failure' for the local people.⁷³ Similar reports came from the Rosses and Gweedore.

There was little resolution except, once more, to revert to the traditional escape valve of migration to Scotland which had ever in times of trouble been the refuge of the uncertain along the Donegal coast. The migrant workers were on the move as normal and providing the greatest spectacle in the locality. The *Derry People* reported:

⁷² William L Micks, *History of the Congested Districts Board* (Dublin, 1925), pp 60-61. Micks was secretary of the Congested Districts Board for many years.

⁷³ *DP*, 17 June 1911, p. 5.

Last Sunday week was the initial call of the Laird Line steamer, *Fern* conveying the Rosses migratory labourers to Scotland. Many of the labourers intending to go across avail of the opportunity to embark on one or other of the three successive Sundays in June which the boat calls in to Gortnasade Pier. For a number of years past the SS. *Fern* commanded by Captain Browne calls at Aranmore, Gortnasade and Gola Island and, from thence, conveys the passengers bound for Scotland. This year the *Fern* calls in at the above named places on Sunday, 12, 19 and 26 June at Aranmore at noon and calling at Gortnasade and Gola each an hour later. From all parts of the Rosses visitors arrive at Gortnasade Pier before the vessel steams in. Many of the visitors come to see their friends aboard while others arrive to see and admire the vessel. Those about to embark can be easily distinguished with their spotless white [flour] bags containing their necessaries abroad. Having paid the fare (which was this year raised to five shillings against four shillings in former years) the passengers take their places on deck and when all have embarked and any goods consigned to Glasgow have been received the steamer recedes to her destination and as she moves out the passengers wave vividly a long farewell and all the spectators then disperse.⁷⁴

Economic progress had also been affected in the northwest because the other traditional industries in the area went into decline. The partial failure of the herring fishing induced a number of people to pay more attention to kelp-making once again amid reports that high prices would be given for good kelp. In June 1910 the *Derry People* reported:

Another of the local industries that has fallen through the want of a fair remuneration in return was kelp making – the calcined (sic) ashes of dry seaweed for the manufacture of glass and soap. Upwards of twenty years ago kelpmaking was extensively carried on, though the return was very low for all the time and work wasted in the manufacture. It was sold at the rate of 4s per cwt. and that sum was only received for the very superior standard. The Rosses homespuns have declined too and are now almost extinct as they have yielded to

⁷⁴ *DP*, 25 June 1907, p. 7.

the modern facilities. Thus, it is easily understood why this forced migration of Donegal harvestmen [continues] to seek a livelihood in Scotland from June to mid-winter for their upkeep during the remainder of the year. It will also be easily understood why 200 blithe and robust young men boarded the Laird line *SS. Fern* at Gortnasade on Sunday week and 400 from the other three ports and 150 again boarded at Gortnasade on last Sunday.⁷⁵

Much of the progress of the previous years now seemed uncertain for the departing migrants. However, the changing world of northwest Donegal during the last decade neither enlightened nor inspired one nostalgic emigrant who returned and found that Creeslough was in the midst of change.

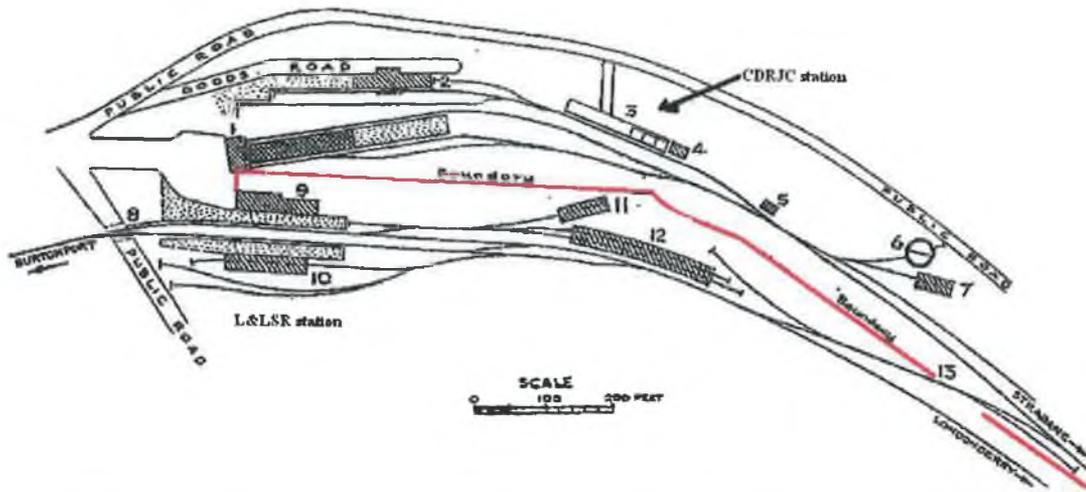
The sweet and gentle air of the village gives way to an atmosphere saturated with fumes of petrol; the horns of motors and the bells of as many cycles replace the usual quietude with a discordant sonata...to all the admirers of the picturesque in village architecture, the gradual disappearance of the homely thatched cottage furnishes matter for regret. Corrugated iron and slate are appearing as useful but inappropriate substitutes and the thatcher is losing his knack. It may be incidentally mentioned that Creeslough is one of the best licensed villages in the country having one place of refreshment, within the meaning of the act, for ever sixty-two of the population. When the women and children and teetotallers are deducted from the 62 it becomes apparent that the others must rise to their opportunities if the businesses are to show a profit...In evil-smelling belching motor cars that speed at rates perilously near the limit and on swift-circling cycles, travellers fly past you at intervals; the sharp ring of a bell, the toot-toot of a horn, a cloud of dust and, once more, you are left in possession of the quiet country road. What are fifty, nay, a hundred miles to these?⁷⁶

As for the Burtonport railway, it faced into the future with its new rolling stock and powerful engines. It had lost one of its great battles when the Board of Works pushed through the opening of the Letterkenny to

⁷⁵ *DP*, 25 June 1910, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *DP*, 26 Aug. 1911, p. 8.

Fig. 37 Strabane & Letterkenny Railway and CDRJC and L&LSR railway stations at Letterkenny



LETTERKENNY. 1, S & LR passenger station; 2, goods store; 3, cattle pens; 4, signal cabin; 5, water tank; 6, turntable (42); 7, engine shed; 8, road level crossing (L. & LSR); 9, L & LSR passenger station (originally Letterkenny Rly.); 10, L & LSR goods store; 11, L & LSR engine shed (turntable later sited in front); 12, L & LSR carriage shed; 13, connecting spur between S & LR and L & LSR



Source: Patterson, The County Donegal Railways

Strabane Light Railway in 1908 which would compete directly with the L&LSR's own lines at Letterkenny and divert much of the traffic away from Derry. As if to permanently annoy the L&LSR the new station was located directly alongside the L&LSR station at Letterkenny (fig. 39). McFarland called it 'a wildcat speculative railway promoted by local men to the disadvantage of local industries which were at a low enough ebb'.⁷⁷ It was to prove a thorn in the side for the L&LSR for many years to come.

And there were other problems. The first six months of 1908 had been a 'disastrous one for railway companies in Britain and Ireland because of the high price of coal and steep increases in wages of 13 per cent and dividends were reduced almost everywhere though not on any of the L&LSR's railways.'⁷⁸ In 1909 coal had risen again by half a crown a ton due to the action of the miners' unions in Britain and the Irish cattle market had also gone very sluggish. The number of passengers carried on the L&LSR's lines fell by 12,000 third class passengers between June and December 1908, an indication of the depression in trade in the northwest in common with the rest of Britain.⁷⁹ Luckily for the northwest the fishing trade of the late winter of 1908 and 1909 was one of the best for some time and consequently the Burtonport railway performed well.⁸⁰

So, at the close of the first decade of the twentieth century, despite all its problems and the many criticisms, the Burtonport Extension had been central to much of the development along the Donegal coast in its first years of service, and it confounded all the official forecasts by making a profit each year since its inception. The L&BER could now look forward to a future free of the debilitating relationship with the Board of Works, thanks to Sir Charles Scotter, but the question was, would the communities served by the Burtonport Extension be satisfied with its performance.

⁷⁷ *LS*, 25 Aug. 1908, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *LS*, 25 Aug. 1908, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *LS*, 27 Feb. 1909.

⁸⁰ *LS*, 28 Aug. 1909, p. 5.

The peaceful situation in Donegal from 1910 onwards until the war of 1914 was declared was quite remarkable in its reflection of the ending of old animosities and grievances.⁸¹ There were no articles in the newspapers about evicted tenants any more. Landlords were seldom mentioned except in relation to the carving up of estates. The Swiney estate in Cloughaneely had been vested in the tenants in 1901. The Charley estate of Aranmore and the surrounding islands in the Rosses had been vested in the tenants between 1903 and 1905. The Joule estate in Gweedore and Cloughaneely had been vested in 1906.⁸² By 1911 documents were being prepared for the Congested Districts Board to take over the Olphert, Stewart, Nixon and Leitrim estates.⁸³ It was common knowledge that the Olphert estate was being negotiated although it took the years from 1917-20 to finally bring this to a closure. The press carried information in January 1914 that the Conyngham estate of the Rosses had been valued and offers would be made by the Congested Districts Board shortly.⁸⁴ It had been a calmer and more progressive estate than the others and did not cause the same antipathy or dissention as its neighbouring estates. Between 1903 and March 1910 ninety estates in Donegal, comprising 67,166 acres and 3,071 holdings had been vested in the purchasing tenants and, in 1910, proceedings were pending before the Estates Commissioners for the sale of 168 estates comprising 8,084 holdings and an area of 322,734 acres.⁸⁵ Throughout the county evictions, dispossessions, hunger or destitution were words seldom read in any of the newspapers anymore. Since the passing of the Irish Land Act 1903 seventy evicted tenants or their descendents had been reinstated in County Donegal, most of which were

⁸¹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Nov. 1909 - Feb. 1915 (CO 904/79 - CO 904/96), all state that the county was 'peaceable'.

⁸² Martina O'Donnell, 'The role of the Congested Districts Board in estate purchase and improvement in Donegal, 1891-1923', in *Donegal Annual*, 1998, pp 113-125.

⁸³ *DP*, 20 May 1911, p. 2. Birrell's reply in parliament to Hugh Law, M. P.

⁸⁴ *DJ*, 18 Jan. 1915, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *DJ*, 22 Apr. 1910, p. 7.

from the Cloughaneely and Gweedore regions.⁸⁶ A reporter from the Anglican church publication, *The Holy Cross Magazine* visited Donegal in the autumn of 1911 and wrote that ‘the cry was back to the land – the land that at last they hope to call their own, with no tyrant landlord, native or foreign, to evict for a whim the industrious tenant’.⁸⁷

Meetings to secure tenant rights and purchases took place on the remaining estates, an activity which bonded the people together and created a new sense of independence.⁸⁸ The lancing of these two traditional boils of landlord oppression and evictions released the clergy and people to pursue more pleasing aspects of life in a more serene climate. At the Donegal Assizes, in March 1914, the state of the county was ‘perfectly peaceful’. Serious crime was ‘greatly decreased’. There was no agrarian agitation or trouble, no illegal combination, no intimidation or boycotting and no one in need of any form of police protection.⁸⁹

Fishing had been steady during 1910, 1911 and 1912 with rising prices due to better marketing and increased trains.⁹⁰ Salmon fishing had been developed in the Rosses, Gweedore, Cloughaneely, Dunfanaghy, Portnablagh and Downings areas during these years and produced added earnings of over £40 to each of the small boats which were particularly successful for the salmon capture.⁹¹ American earnings augmented the local economy through steady remittances to such an extent that one report in the *Derry People* stated that the admiration of the local clergy ‘for and dependence on America is both gratifying and touching. It is their Canaan – their land of hope and promise and has been a city of refuge in their great need’.⁹² The summer of 1913 was one of the finest for many years with resultant good crops, reasonable fishing, a fine influx of tourists and good

⁸⁶ *DJ*, 22 Apr. 1910, p. 7.

⁸⁷ *DP*, 14 Nov. 1911, p.7. Article copied from *Holy Cross Magazine* [Anglican publication]

⁸⁸ *DJ*, 27 Apr. 1910, p. 8; 6 May 1910, p. 6.

⁸⁹ *DJ*, 16 Mar. 1914, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *DJ*, 23 May 1910, p. 8.

⁹¹ *DJ*, 25 Aug. 1913, p. 6.

⁹² *DP*, 14 Nov. 1911, p. 7.

employment at home and abroad. Horse racing fixtures, regattas, sport events and various religious ceremonies dominated the local press reports from the northwest.⁹³ And the steady weekly income of five shillings for old age pensioners from January 1909 onwards created cash flow in many homes which had never experienced such generosity before.⁹⁴

This peaceful situation and relative prosperity enabled northwest Donegal to participate in a whirlwind of cultural and religious fervour that appeared to pervade all aspects of life. Since the turn of the century and during the years up to 1915 the Irish language and Gaelic cultural movement in the diocese of Raphoe had been almost completely usurped by the clergy. An analysis of the Gaelic League in Donegal shows that the parish clergy attended the meetings of the Gaelic League regularly and took a very active part in the organization.⁹⁵ But the founding of the Irish college in Cloughaneely by Dáil Uladh in 1906 seemed to irritate Bishop O'Donnell. It appears that he feared the control which was being exerted on it from outside the diocese would be detrimental to the Catholic well being. Consequently, he lost no time in establishing his own Irish college in Letterkenny under diocesan control in the following year which provided the same courses as Cloughaneely.⁹⁶ Control of the Gaelic League came from outside the Raphoe diocese and the involvement of Pearse, McDermott, Casement, Eoin Mc Neill, Miss Pankhurst and various other strangers, as well as Sinn Fein, appears to be the reason for O'Donnell's suspicion that the Gaelic League could spiral out of control in his diocese and he probably deemed that such leadership might pose problems for the teaching profession within his see.

⁹³ *DJ*, 15 Oct. 1913, p. 3 and 21 Oct. 1913, p. 8.

⁹⁴ *CI Monthly Report*, County Donegal, Jan. 1909 (CO 904/77). Old age pensions were introduced in Jan. 1909. Those over the age of seventy whose income did not exceed £31 – 10s. per year were entitled to five shillings a week. It was administered by the Local Government Board.

⁹⁵ *DP*, 14 Jan. 1911, p.2.

⁹⁶ This was the Four Masters College. Courses were held throughout each summer for teachers learning Gaelic. It recruited most of the teachers from within the diocese of Raphoe.

O'Donnell was not the only one to suspect the Irish College in Gortahork. The County Inspector was beginning to take note of its personnel also and he noted in September 1916 that there was a good number at Gortahork Irish college. 'Some of these visitors are, no doubt, harmless but I feel that amongst them a good deal of sedition extends into their curriculum. I do not think the political atmosphere of the place is healthy'.⁹⁷

With his usual circumspection Bishop O'Donnell let the Gaelic League remain as a minor, elitist organization in Donegal but took steps to ensure that the church and clerical influence over teachers and the ordinary people, in regard to the promotion of Irish, was firmly placed under diocesan control. As well as the Four Master's College in Letterkenny, his further initiative was the Crann Eithne organization, branches of which had been founded in each parish in the Raphoe diocese from 1912 onwards, with the simple singular rule that members, and especially families, must speak Irish for one hour each day.⁹⁸ Bishop O'Donnell appointed Fr McAteer as overall organizer and he had the enthusiastic backing of many of the teachers who provided the backbone of the organization. Large meetings were held in parish after parish where 'Gaelic was spoken in whole or in part', songs and poems were recited, and speeches made, defining the new Irish Ireland of the future to fire the enthusiasm of the crowds of schoolchildren, parents, teachers and general public.⁹⁹ Such was the spread of the movement and its penetration into normal life that, between September 1914 and 1 June 1915, 192 of these great gatherings had been held in the diocese of Raphoe.¹⁰⁰

Allied to this cultural organization was Feis Thír Chonaill which was inaugurated in 1907¹⁰¹ under the auspices of the Gaelic League and took

⁹⁷ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Sept. 1916 (CO 904/101).

⁹⁸ *DJ*, 30 June 1915, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *DJ*, 25 Jan. 1915, p. 4; 1 Feb. 1915, p. 7; 26 Feb. 1915, p. 3; 8 Mar. 1915, p. 2; 19 Mar. 1915, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *DJ*, 30 July 1915, p. 5. Crann Eithne was confined to the Raphoe diocese.

¹⁰¹ *DP*, 4 Feb. 1914, p. 2.

place in June annually at different venues in the county. However, Bishop O'Donnell and the clergy soon took control of it with the assistance of the teachers. It was the public expression of Gaelic Ireland in the diocese of Raphoe and, like Crann Eithne, it utilized the trappings of street theatre to bring colour and ceremony to such occasions. Bands, banners, processions, oratory, prayer and culture, through the conduit of competition and display, mingled together in powerful presentation, leaving no doubt in the public mind that the church and its clergy were in the van of this new progressive movement. It drew hundreds of competitors who enjoyed widespread newspaper publicity and the praise of clergy, teachers and community and was seen as the dominant cultural event in Donegal.¹⁰² 3,000 attended the Feis at Doe Castle on 29 June 1910 and, as always, Bishop O'Donnell presided.¹⁰³ It also provided the railways in Donegal with massive cash injections because of the throngs which travelled from each parish to the venue.¹⁰⁴

Another element of this religious theatre was the Temperance Movement. Bishop O'Donnell was a dogged and unflinching opponent of the prevalent drinking culture throughout his bishopric in Raphoe and was widely credited with the abolition of the poiteen trade there which had diminished by the turn of the century to be replaced by licensed pubs.¹⁰⁵ He introduced the confirmation pledge in the 1890s. In 1896 the St Patrick's Day celebrations were described as peaceful because of the 'sobriety and good conduct of the people'.¹⁰⁶ His promotion of the Temperance Movement reached into each parish in the diocese with huge attendances involved in the theatrical promotions of retreats, public meetings, processions, band parades, sports days, and excursions. The Temperance Movement's participants always carried their banners with the

¹⁰² *DJ*, 30 June 1915, p. 5.

¹⁰³ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, June 1910 (CO 904/81).

¹⁰⁴ Rory Delap, Letterkenny. He told me that the L&LSR carried upwards of 3,200 passengers during the years around 1930 on the Burtonport train to Féis Thír Chonail.

¹⁰⁵ CI Monthly Reports frequently mention Bishop O'Donnell's promotion of temperance.

¹⁰⁶ Helen Meehan, 'The temperance movement in south Donegal' in *Donegal Annual*, 1999, p. 113.

temperance motto printed in large lettering, 'FOR HAPPY HOMES, FOR IRELAND AND FOR GOD'. Eloquent orations were delivered by the clergy at the beginning and at the end of all such events and, if temperance dances were held at night, the clergy organized and supervised these too.¹⁰⁷

Every Lenten letter issued by Dr O'Donnell during his years in Raphoe diocese laid heavy stress on temperance as a way of life and his priests throughout the diocese were expected to inculcate the sobriety of temperance in the mentality of their flocks. By 1915 this temperance movement was a massive force in the diocese of Raphoe where the drink culture was despised by the church and its adherent laity.

However, as in all walks of life, there were recusants. The *Derry Journal* had to report bad habits during January 1915, stating that there was 'a wave of intemperance in Gweedore parish for the last few months'. It could not be stated that this was due to the influence of British soldiers in the area because 'in morals and sobriety they [soldiers] are far above the general conception'. Yet Gweedore had 'three of the most zealous and energetic temperance advocates in Ireland in the person of the parish priest and his two curates'. However, the bands and followers of the Temperance Movement and the AOH provided good business each summer for the Burtonport railway as they celebrated their big occasions, particularly on 15 August each year.¹⁰⁸

But there were some irritations appearing on this positive picture of life, however. There was an outbreak of 'foot and mouth' disease in County Kildare in February 1914 which resulted in an immediate ban on the export of cattle to Britain but this was not seen immediately as an impediment to the progress of local life.¹⁰⁹ The railway aided the emigrants' flight from the homes as 'Rosses Man' wrote to the *Derry Journal*, 'Over one thousand of our young men and women have emigrated

¹⁰⁷ *DJ*, 22 Mar. 1915, p. 8; 26 May 1915, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *DJ*, 8 January 1915, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *DJ*, 25 Feb 1914, p. 3.

from the coast of the county within the past eighteen months' [March 1911].¹¹⁰ But of much more concern to the local population, was the growing menace of vehicular traffic on the Donegal roads.

In 1903, only nine cars were registered by Donegal County Council but each succeeding year saw the numbers rise until in 1914, a total of 212 motor vehicles had been registered.

| Year | Number of vehicles register in each year in County Donegal |
|------|--|
| 1909 | 10 |
| 1910 | 13 |
| 1911 | 14 |
| 1912 | 19 |
| 1913 | 42 |
| 1914 | 89 ¹¹¹ |

Nearly all of these were private motor cars although some of these vehicles were being used for hackney purposes. However, most of the buses and commercial vehicles coming into Donegal during these years were from Derry. Letterkenny Rural District Council heard that this 'abnormal motor traffic was destroying Letterkenny roads. Mr Roberts of Derry had his motors daily on the roads. He should be sued for damages to the roads'.¹¹² Donegal County Council listened to proposals for limiting the numbers of passengers that could be carried in such vehicles.¹¹³

However, the roads of the northwest were exempt from such measures for they were of such poor quality that only the intrepid tourists and government officials dared to venture to the Rosses, Gweedore or Cloughaneely. Manus McFadden from Gortahork vented his anger in the letters' column of the *Derry Journal* when he wrote that 'our public roads, instead of being rolled as they are in other parts, are covered by sharp and

¹¹⁰ *DJ*, 1 Mar. 1911, p. 8.

¹¹¹ 'Register of motors', 1903 (Donegal County Council Archives, Lifford).

¹¹² *DJ*, 9 Mar. 1914, p. 2.

¹¹³ *DJ*, 25 Feb. 1914, p. 3.

pointed stones, well suited to cut up valuable tyres and wear away the shoes of horses, the shoeing of carts and cars and the destruction in a few months of vehicles which, on "civilized" roads, would last for years'.¹¹⁴

Of course people were still complaining about the quality of service on the Burtonport Railway. Trains often 'had an extraordinary amount of delay' and passengers often suffered the fate of 'Pro Bono Publico' at Creeslough station in 1910 when 'they were well-nigh perished as it was unusually cold and when they asked for footwarmers none could be had'.¹¹⁵

And as ever, there were fatalities on the railway. Mrs Gallagher, an old woman and mother of the gatekeeper's wife, Mrs Glackin, was killed at a level crossing at Falcarragh in August 1913. She closed the gates for the train to pass through but a turf cart arrived and, not wishing to delay the cart, she opened the gates to let it pass through. Suddenly the train appeared. She ran forward to swing the gates clear of the track but the engine dashed against her. She was knocked down and cut to pieces. Bob McGuinness, the driver, stopped the train immediately. An inquest was held in the gate Lodge. Mrs Glackin, daughter of deceased, said she had shouted to her mother to leave the gates but the mother ignored her.¹¹⁶

Despite tragedies such as this the general feeling of goodwill in the northwest was further extended to the L&LSR when the New Year honour's list of 1914 brought joyful tidings for John McFarland, the man most closely associated with the railway. His years of involvement in the commercial, public and political life of Derry City, together with his chairmanship of the L&LSR, were rewarded by his being conferred with a baronetcy which was seen as fitting reward for this entrepreneurial innovator and appeared as an official admission that his years of travail with the Board of Works were being acknowledged.¹¹⁷ He was presented with a silver tea and coffee service by the railway shareholders at the

¹¹⁴ *DJ*, 12 Apr. 1915, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *DJ*, 2 Feb. 1910, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ *DJ*, 8 Aug. 1913, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ *DJ*, 2 Jan. 1914, p. 5.

February meeting in 1914 where he was able to announce one of the company's best results to date with increasing traffic on all lines and the Burtonport railway continued to show 'small but continuous growth' year after year. Once more he could announce a dividend of 7 per cent to the great satisfaction of the shareholders.¹¹⁸ Despite the continuous complaints and the rumblings of discontent attached to the railway since 1903, the forceful personality of McFarland and his board managed to keep the malcontents under control. The Burtonport Railway might have been less than efficient but it continued to run the trains and carry the freights and passengers to an approximate timetable, whatever the disaffections of the locals, and it was the 'principal channel by which Donegal traffic was carried ... with 42,000 people being served by it'.¹¹⁹ Despite its many deficiencies it delivered profits of approximately £2,800, year after year, since the day it opened.¹²⁰

In 1909, Charles Scotter had recommended to the Board of Works that Kilmacrenan station be enlarged to provide for a crossing place for trains so that the incessant delays in train times might be eradicated and he further proposed that a new station should be built at Meenbanad to service the fishing industry at the deep-sea pier in Gortnasade, Kincasslagh and to quell the anger of merchants in the Lower Rosses. In many ways the Gortnasade development showed up the weaknesses between the various agencies trying to develop northwest Donegal. While the Congested Districts Board built a fine deep-water pier at Gortnasade to service the deep-sea fleet, there was no convenient railway station where the Gortnasade fish could be put on the train. Their only options were to load at Crolly Station, seven miles north of Gortnasade or at Dungloe Road, seven miles south of the port and severe climbing over hilly roads made

¹¹⁸ *DJ*, 2 Mar. 1914, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *DJ*, 16 Apr. 1915, p. 5.

¹²⁰ *DJ*, 1 June 1917, p. 4: Report of the judicial committee. Separate accounts were never produced by the L&LSR for the Burtonport railway. Only the figures gleaned from court cases, commissions etc. give glances of its profitability.

both options difficult, expensive and unattractive. Scotter recognised the ire of the Gortnasade fishing industry and recommended that a station be built at Meenbanad to satisfy their needs. The building of Downings deep-water pier was similarly removed from the railway, being more than ten miles from Creeslough station. The planning for the development of Meenbanad station and Kilmacrenan station was initiated immediately after Scotter's settlement in 1909 but it had to go through all the legal processes which would have been required for a new railway.¹²¹

Meenbanad station was designed and, after much legal work, Martin and Co., contractors, of Drogheda, County Louth, signed a three-party agreement with the L&LSR and the Board of Works to build Meenbanad station and upgrade Kilmacrenan. Martin & Co. showed a certain wariness in coming to Donegal because they wanted a clause inserted in the agreement that, if the work was not finished due to a strike or lock-out 'the time of completion be correspondingly lengthened'. They also wanted a *force majeure* clause inserted that would cover them in the event of some great or unusual disaster. The thinking of the Board of Works is interesting for a senior official noted, 'there was a strike clause in the original Burtonport Line contract and should be in these also – a strike is sure to occur soon after commencement of work no matter what wage is paid'.¹²²

It was agreed that the works would begin not later than 1 January 1913 and the workmen would be paid at least once a fortnight. When the works were nearing completion the L&LSR arranged for two excursion trains to cross at Kilmacrenan on 27 July 1913 to test the new crossing being built there though only one train had an electric staff for the section.¹²³ The Board of Works were not happy with this sloppy practice when they got Allely's report of the incident. Progress was steady and,

¹²¹ 'New works at Kilmacrenan and Meenbanad' (NAI, OPW 'Railways', Burtonport Extension railway 1912-15, 5223 – 15).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. The electric train staff was the safety device carried by train drivers which gave them exclusive travel on any section of the railway and prevented any other train from entering on that space.

despite the grim forebodings of the contractors at the beginning, an advertisement appeared in the *Derry Standard* on 27 August 1913, announcing that the 'new station at Kincasslagh Road will be opened for traffic on 1st. September 1913'. Allely was still keeping an eagle eye on proceedings and reported that a supply of handbills and posters had been sent to the stations but he thought that the location of the station should have been shown as he had heard people asking where Kincasslagh Road was located.¹²⁴

A special train was run from Burtonport following the 4 p.m. train on 11 September 1913 and the new works were inspected by Major Pringle for the Board of Works. All was well and both stations were commissioned. Meenbanad station (Kincasslagh Road) cost £845 17s. 5d. and the Kilmacrenan upgrade cost £1,332 15s. – 7d. However, as was almost to be expected, a dispute immediately arose between the contractor, Martin and the L&LSR over the settling of the bill. Martin claimed he was owed £130 16s. 6d. The L&LSR said he was owed £8 15s. 6d. On 23 December 1913, the contractors appealed to the Board of Works to assist them in getting payment of the balance due under the contract. In June 1914, Martin was paid £40 in settlement and the matter ended.¹²⁵ Like Pauling and Company before them they left Donegal having been bitterly taught that railway building in County Donegal was more than slightly unconventional.

The residents of the Rosguill Peninsula were sorely smarting that they had failed to get a railway in 1903 so they started their campaign to have a line made to Downings. They had good reason for their demand because Downings was one of the premier fishing ports in the county by 1910 with large numbers of Scottish and English steam drifters arriving for each fishing season. In 1910, more herrings had been landed than ever

¹²⁴ 'New works at Kilmacrenan and Meenbanad' (NAI, OPW 'Railways', Burtonport Extension railway 1912-15, 5223 – 15).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

before, 17,949 cran at a value of £16,581 compared to the previous year's 8,957 cran at a value of £10,995. 1911 was better again with the take up to 20,104 cran valued at £17,822.¹²⁶ The Scottish steam drifters landed twice as much fish as the entire Irish fleet in the area. However, the ten miles cartage to Creeslough station was a serious drawback to the export of fresh fish with the consequent loss of income.¹²⁷

The first meeting at Carrigart in January 1910 demanded a railway but was adamant that the L&LSR would not be involved in any capacity. Instead, a line from Letterkenny via Ramelton, Milford, Carrigart to Downings, reminiscent of Lord Leitrim's old seaboard proposal, was the requirement of the meeting which had Canon Gavigan, P.P. in the chair. Hugh Law, M.P. for West Donegal, suggested to the meeting that they approach the Midland and Great Northern Railway [M&GNR] as the best body to build and run this connection.¹²⁸

After meetings with the M&GNR, which body had probably been well acquainted with the tribulations of Pauling and Martin in the Donegal wilderness, the disappointing news arrived in April that the M&GNR were not interested in the Downings' extension. The Downings' committee was then forced to beg the L&LSR for railway extension to the port but they got no support from that body.¹²⁹

Despite this setback, fishing at both Kincasslagh and Downings was good in May 1910 with sixty boats out around Tory Island. The drifters were landing 60-120 cran of herring each but the problem of railway transport at Downings was apparent when the entire catch had to be cured on a number of occasions and later sent to the continent at much reduced prices than could be got for fresh fish.¹³⁰ In January 1911 more than 130 steam drifters had taken over the port of Downings and landed extremely

¹²⁶ *DJ*, 27 Feb. 1911, p. 2.

¹²⁷ *DJ*, 4 Mar. 1910, p. 8.

¹²⁸ *DJ*, 4 Feb. 1910, p. 5.

¹²⁹ *DJ*, 30 Mar. 1910, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *DJ*, 20 May 1910, p. 8.

heavy catches of more than 2,000 cran each day.¹³¹ The *Derry Journal* reported that there was 'a great deal of money circulating in the area and considerable work for boys and girls and even fishermen in the district, even though prices dropped as the catches got heavier'.¹³² So good were the landings that there was rejoicing in Kincasslagh when one local lugger¹³³ landed 100 cran which realized £150 for the boat.¹³⁴

The Scottish and English companies had taken over the fishing in Donegal by then and their rewards were better than many other investments on the market. The lowest dividend paid by any of these companies was 7.5 per cent. Two companies paid 10 per cent, one paid 11.5 per cent and one paid 12.5 per cent.¹³⁵ Some English and Scottish companies were earning up to 20 per cent on invested capital while Irish enterprise 'preferred to invest in the securities abroad' rather than put their money into fishing at home.¹³⁶

Local enterprise, however, could not solve some of the problems faced by the fishermen. Though the railway terminus at Burtonport had been finished for eight years by 1911, the planned new pier was still at the proposal stage and the fishermen still had to wade through the mud and slime carrying their baskets of fish from the boats to the shore. The Burtonport harbour needed immediate dredging in order to accommodate the large steam drifters, especially when laden with fish. Hundreds of crans of herring were caught within four to eight miles of Burtonport but, instead of marketing these locally, the steam drifters were often obliged to go to Downings or Buncrana. Glenties Rural District Council, Donegal County Council and the Congested Districts Board all made efforts to secure grants but by 1914 there was still no improvement. Year after year passed after the railway was built and Burtonport pier and harbour were

¹³¹ *DJ*, 9 Jan. 1911, p. 2.

¹³² *DJ*, 9 Jan. 1911, p. 2.

¹³³ Lugger: a boat defined by its sail rig. In Donegal the Zulu boats were called luggers or Scotties.

¹³⁴ *DJ*, 9 Jan. 1911, p. 6.

¹³⁵ *DJ*, 11 Jan. 1911, p. 3.

¹³⁶ *DJ*, 11 Jan. 1911, p. 3.

| Fig. 38 Receipts for L&LSR and Burtonport Railway | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Financial year End | Income for all L&LSR lines | Burtonport Extension Railway | Burtonport Railway receipts as % of total receipts | Derry - Buncrana line | Carndonagh Railway |
| 31 Dec. 1903 | £17168 | £8023 (for 270 days) | | | |
| 31 Dec. 1904 | £24004 | £9219 | 38.4% | | |
| 31 Dec. 1905 | £33849 | £10616 | 31.4% | | |
| 31 Dec 1906 | £34075 | £10132 | 29.7% | | |
| 31 Dec. 1907 | £31884 | £10097 | 31.7% | £17575 | £4212 |
| 31 Dec. 1908 | £31444 | £10203 | 32.4% | £17211 | £4030 |
| 31 Dec. 1909 | £33572 | £10743 (E) | | | |
| 31 Dec. 1910 | £35716 | £11429 (E) | | | |

Source: this table is constructed from *Irish Railway Commission*, p. 235, Q. 19292 which supplied the actual receipts for the Burtonport Railway for 1903 -07 and the *Londonderry Sentinel* on 1 March and 1 September annually. E indicates estimated receipts calculated at 32 per cent of total.

still at the planning stage. In other locations along the northwest coast the locals with the small boats in Gweedore and Cloughaneely had to suffer the same inconveniences due to lack of landing facilities while the steam drifters could head for Downings or the port of their choice with their catches.¹³⁷ Despite promises that the new station at Kincasslagh would be built quickly to facilitate the Gortnasade fishermen the wheels of railway progress ground too slowly for enthusiastic and ambitious traders depending on the Burtonport railway and government action to expect development and change.¹³⁸

But change was happening rather quickly in the life of railway chairmen. From the very first day of operations the Burtonport railway had produced good receipts with steady and improving income (fig. 40). From 1910 onwards until the war John McFarland could be happy with the

¹³⁷ *DJ*, 1 Mar. 1911, p. 8.

¹³⁸ *DJ*, 13 Mar. 1911, p. 7.

railway's profits which increased annually bringing more income into the company. From 1910 to 1914 all years had been good. 1912 had been a very good year and passenger traffic had increased greatly in numbers and in cash receipts during 1913. This was mainly due to a good summer in 1913 which produced heavy tourist traffic and many excursions as well as the many organised church events which drew such large attendances that only the railways could accommodate.¹³⁹

One per cent of passengers were first class; 6 per cent were second-class and 93 per cent were third class. Yet 40 per cent of trains were designed for first and second-class use though only 7 per cent of these were carried as passengers which led McFarland to suggest that first class travel should be abolished because of the small numbers availing of it.¹⁴⁰ 'Traffic on the Burtonport section continued to show continuous increases'.¹⁴¹ In 1913 they had added two new powerful locomotives at a cost just under £6,000 which might silence the public in its protests and give better service on the line.¹⁴²

But McFarland found himself during these years in a changing world that he did not much appreciate and found difficult to comprehend. 1911 had seen a national railway strike which led to disturbances in Dublin and other centres and created severe tension among the railway fraternity in Derry. In September of that same year when McFarland dismissed a railway clerk named P. J. Dufficy 'because he communicated with the stationmasters on the line inviting them to become members of the [Railway Clerks] Association in order that they might endeavour to improve their conditions, particularly in regard to superannuation', he found himself under threat of strike from the Association.¹⁴³ That same

¹³⁹ *DJ*, 2 Mar. 1914.

¹⁴⁰ *DJ*, 23 Aug. 1912, p. 8.

¹⁴¹ *DJ*, 2 Mar. 1914, p. 2.

¹⁴² Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*, p. 150. These engines were Hudswell Clarke, 4 – 8 – 4T. They were the most powerful engines ever put on Irish narrow-gauge railways. They were numbered 5 and 6.

¹⁴³ *DJ*, 6 Sept. 1911, p. 8.

year, the Society of Railway Servants in Derry were demanding union recognition for all railway servants which position was anathema to McFarland.¹⁴⁴ The national coal strike in 1912 had raised the price of coal and led to the curtailment of services on all Irish railways.¹⁴⁵ For an old independent capitalist like McFarland, it must have been hurtful to witness the workers of two of Derry's established, respected businesses create their own history in 1913 when Brewster's Biscuits' workers went out on strike accusing the firm of 'trying to crush trade unionism' and the shirt-makers, Tilley and Henderson, locked their workers out over the same issue.¹⁴⁶

The intrusions of this outside world clearly annoyed McFarland, a self-made man who believed in his right to pursue the creation of wealth in his own manner. He displayed his feelings at each annual general meeting. The National Insurance Act infuriated him because it would add £250 extra to costs. 'It was not satisfactory to employers or employees', he told the meeting and 'will certainly impose a great drag on railway companies'. He felt strongly that all other businesses could charge customers for increased expenses but railway charges were fixed centrally and were outside the powers of the individual companies.¹⁴⁷ Not only the National Insurance Act but the growing portfolio of legislation had him depressed. He vented his feelings at the 1913 annual general meeting, stating that

there was insurance against accidents to workmen, insurance against unemployment and insurance against sickness. They tell a tale and run concurrently with Imperial taxes -- income, land and borough taxes -- at seven shillings and one penny in the pound. Then there are donations to all sorts and conditions of men from football clubs to the dependants of heroes of Antarctic expeditions. A mania seems to exist for incurring responsibilities to be discharged by the industrious and hard-working active citizens while the country

¹⁴⁴ *DJ*, 27 Sept. 1911, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ *DJ*, 11 Mar. 1912, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ *DJ*, 7 Mar. 1913, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *DJ*, 23 Aug. 1912, p. 8.

is flooded by highly paid and pensioned officials – a semi-Territorial Army - who levy tribute from their slaves.¹⁴⁸

As if these problems were not enough for McFarland, Hugh Law, M.P. for West Donegal, had started asking questions in parliament on a regular basis about the Burtonport Railway. What were the rules about the fares charged to migratory labourers and fish workers between Burtonport and other stations and Derry? Why had the [L&LSR] company raised the rates on certain classes of goods from 10s. 10*d.* to 15s. per ton? Was the electric train staff in working order to protect the safety of passengers? Why were traders making many complaints about the delays in the delivery of goods?¹⁴⁹ Were any complaints received about the hardship occasioned to the travelling public from the absence of any heating arrangements in the carriages?¹⁵⁰ And there were many more.

As if ignorant of all these allegations, McFarland happily declared dividends of 7 per cent, year after year, despite the objections of county councillor Doherty who demanded that rates be imposed on all the L&LSR lines and who fumed about McFarland's one-man operation accusing him of being 'auditor of the line', 'Chief Managing Director', 'Supreme Boss', and even that he was 'the company clerk'.¹⁵¹ Clearly the old ways were being questioned.

In 1912, change of a different sort took the attention of McFarland and his board. Messrs Roberts & Sons began to operate a new daily motor service between Derry City and Claudy, Feeny and Park. Each bus was capable of carrying thirty-five passengers at fifteen miles per hour. Some weeks later, they ventured into Donegal by running a service from Derry to Moville and Greencastle.¹⁵² That same year the L&LSR territory was

¹⁴⁸ *DJ*, 28 Feb. 1913, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ *DJ*, 9 Aug. 1912, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ *DJ*, 21 Mar. 1913, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ *DJ*, 28 Feb. 1913, p. 8.

¹⁵² *DJ*, 9 Sept. 1912, p. 5.

further invaded when a Ferguson steam lorry started carrying an estimated thirty tons of goods each week between Derry City and Buncrana. In the following May, Mr Gallagher of Newtowncunningham bought 'a road motor engine' and began to compete with the L&LSR in the Manorcunningham and Newtowncunningham districts.¹⁵³ The roads were so bad in the environment of the Burtonport Extension further west that neither lorries nor buses could travel on them yet but the future development of transport was becoming ominous.

1914 also witnessed a bizarre incident in the northwest. The Revd Orr who had written the letter in 1903 about his trip from Derry to Burtonport and which had brought much shame upon the railway faked his own death when he discarded his fishing rods and some clothing by a lake near Dungloe and vanished. However, it seems that his faith had never been restored in the Burtonport Extension for he chose to walk the longer distance to Glenties station where he took the CDR railway to carry him into oblivion.¹⁵⁴

By 1914 there were other straws in the wind that change was in the air throughout the northwest. John E. Boyle, county councillor and prominent Dungloe businessman, invited Patrick Pearse to the town on 2 February 1914 to set a company of Volunteers.¹⁵⁵ James Boyle, solicitor, presided at the meeting which also had three of the Rosses' most prominent businessmen on the platform in the form of John Sweeney Burtonport, Murray Sweeney, hotelier, Dungloe and John E. Boyle. In the audience were a group of shop assistants who were working for John Sweeney in Dungloe. Among them was Patrick Breslin who continued to be very involved in organising northwest Donegal for the Volunteers and Sinn Fein for many years.¹⁵⁶ The strange conversion of these prominent traders,

¹⁵³ Patterson, *The Londonderry & Lough Swilly railway*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁴ *DJ*, 6 Mar. 1914, p. 4. The story of the disappearance is told in Paddy Gallagher, *My story*, pp 150 – 153.

¹⁵⁵ The Irish Volunteers were set up on 25 November 1913 in Dublin.

¹⁵⁶ NAI, Bureau Military History 1913-21, WS 1448, p. 1, Patrick Breslin. (Hereafter BMH)

Boyle and the Sweeneys, had been formulated when they had, a few years earlier, with others from the area, been imprisoned in Derry gaol for anti-government activities under the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act 1887.¹⁵⁷ They were members of the AOH with Sweeney being the local president and their status, respectability and spheres of influence enabled the Volunteers to gain a position which would never have issued from others of ordinary backgrounds.¹⁵⁸

Soon afterwards a review of Volunteers at Letterkenny showed four hundred men on parade. It was estimated that by June 1914 there were 5,500 Volunteers in the county although the RIC estimate in January 1915 was 7,909 men.¹⁵⁹

But these volunteers were no revolutionaries. The organisation was dominated by the AOH and, while young men might feel certain sympathies with the new movement, families in general had no wish to antagonize the economic or political patronage of the AOH.¹⁶⁰ But it was a transient phase. Most of the Donegal Volunteers took Redmond's side after September 1914 and this weakened the whole movement in the county.¹⁶¹ War in Europe dominated the attentions of many young men in the northwest. Following the split in the Volunteers the organisation in Donegal disintegrated and many of its members started thinking of going to war on the British side in foreign fields.¹⁶²

There is no hint in any of the L&LSR documents that John McFarland or his board of directors were worried about the war declared in August 1914. Like many others they probably believed that it would be over by Christmas. Regular receipts, severe control of expenditure, exclusion of unions, long hours and low pay would ensure that satisfactory dividend payments would continue unchanged for many years to come

¹⁵⁷ 50 & 51 Vict., c. 50 (19 July 1887).

¹⁵⁸ Sweeney, *Capuchin Annual* 1970, p. 426.

¹⁵⁹ CI Monthly Report, County Donegal, Jan. 1915 (CO 904/96).

¹⁶⁰ Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and modern Ulster*, p. 246.

¹⁶¹ NAI, BMH, WS 1448. Patrick Breslin.

¹⁶² Sweeney, *Capuchin Annual* 1970, p. 427.

because such a system had proved successful in the past. Surely there was no reason to think otherwise!

Fig.39 Herring landed at northwest ports and cured for export.

| Year | Herring season | Fishing port | Total cwt. | Value £ | Cured for Barrels |
|-----------|----------------|------------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------|
| 1909 | Summer | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 4286 | £1037 | 1100 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 10290 | £2432 | 3500 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 47116 | £12602 | 17871 |
| 1909/1910 | Autumn/winter | Bunbeg | 595 | £185 | 180 |
| | | Burtonport | 10331 | £3535 | 2960 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 7589 | £1918 | 2612 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | 15239 | £3661 | 3654 |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | 651 | £181 | 125 |
| | | Downings | 47336 | £12743 | 16052 |
| 1910 | Spring/Summer | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 1800 | £455 | 478 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 5351 | £1473 | 1759 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 30303 | £8860 | 10233 |
| 1910/11 | Autumn/winter | Bunbeg | 777 | £177 | 211 |
| | | Burtonport | 3867 | £898 | 204 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 28105 | £11880 | 10230 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | 1554 | £508 | 100 |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | 1200 | £346 | 12 |
| | | Downings | 56835 | £15014 | 20177 |
| 1911 | Spring/summer | Bunbeg | 1264 | £174 | 420 |
| | | Burtonport | 1228 | £224 | 423 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 6776 | £1247 | 2300 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 24116 | £7842 | 9137 |
| 1911/12 | Winter | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 5253 | £1157 | 1200 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 4235 | £727 | 1320 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---------|---------------|------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | | Downings | 39862 | £7741 | 13448 |
| 1912 | Spring/summer | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 945 | £414 | 264 |
| | | Kincasslagh | | | |
| | | Innisboffin Island | 5606 | £1752 | 1600 |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 9269 | £5707 | 3248 |
| 1912/13 | Winter | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 5683 | £1962 | 1150 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 1943 | £527 | 373 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 30689 | £10841 | 11504 |
| 1913 | Summer | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 570 | £291 | 108 |
| | | Kincasslagh | | | |
| | | Innisboffin Island | 2345 | £840 | 400 |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 6677 | £3824 | 2472 |
| 1913/14 | Winter | Bunbeg | | | |
| | | Burtonport | 1617 | £546 | 240 |
| | | Kincasslagh | 343 | £97 | 16 |
| | | Innisboffin Island | | | |
| | | Dunfanaghy/Portnablagh | | | |
| | | Downings | 6827 | £1610 | 1898 |

Source: Fisheries (Ireland): 1910, Cd 5350, vol. xxx, 527;

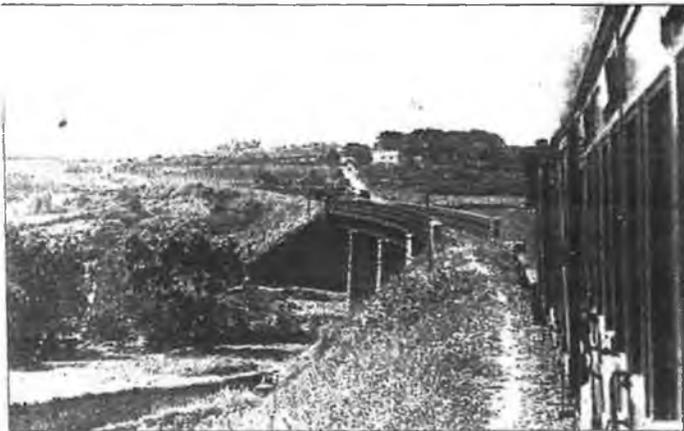
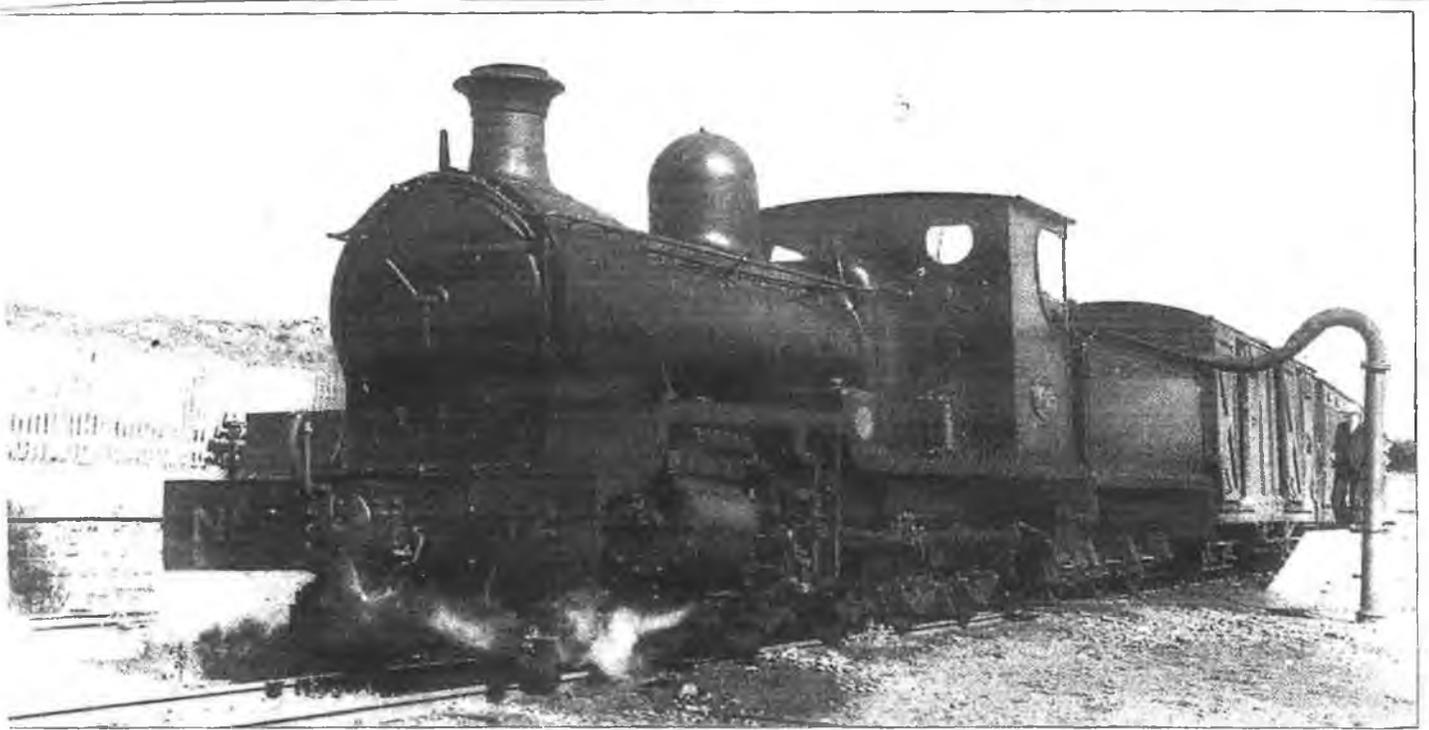
1911, vol. xxiv

1912-13, Cd 6473, vol. xxvii, 1

1914, Cd 7146, vol. Xxxi,

1914-16, Cd 8102, vol. Xxii.

Fig. 40 New Hudswell Clarke engine no. 12



1. Hudswell Clarke tender engine no. 12
2. The Feymore Viaduct near Creeslough.
3. Through the moors to Dunfanaghy Road.

Source: Steve Flanders, *Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway*.